

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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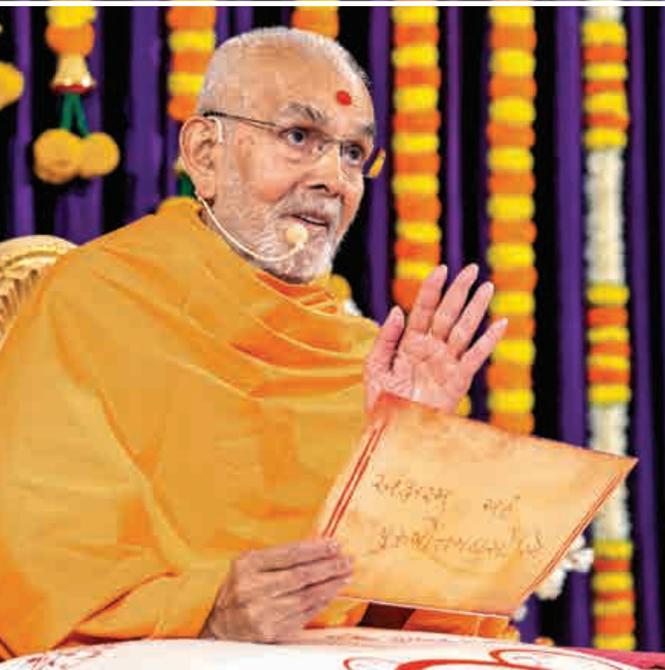
अक्षरपुरुषोत्तम संहिता अंतर्गत

॥ सत्संगदीक्षा ॥



Mahant Swami Maharaj Presides Over the
Satsang Diksha Mukhpath Felicitation Assembly

18 February 2021, Nenpur



**VISHWASHANTI MAHAYAGNA TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF SATSANG DIKSHA
16 February 2021 (Vasant Panchami), Nenpur**

Mahant Swami Maharaj commenced writing of the Satsang Diksha on Vasant Panchami last year. To mark the first anniversary of this historic occasion, Swamishri offered prayers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and the Gunatit gurus by performing *homa* and *yagna* in Nenpur while the Satsang Diksha was recited.



Mahant Swami Maharaj presides over the Satsang Diksha Mukhpath Felicitation Ceremony, 18–20 February 2021



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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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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Grand Welcome in Surat

Shri Hari arrives in Surat for the first time at the invitation of his devotees and Ardeshar Sheth, the administrator of Surat...

SERVING THE SANT REDEEMS ONE FROM THE CYCLES OF LIFE AND DEATH

Shri Hari departed from Amod and travelled to Buva. Here, the Patidar devotees, Kandas and Gulabdas, were the regional leaders of Satsang. They insisted upon Maharaj to stay.

Shri Hari stayed at their homes. After performing his routine ablutions, Maharaj went to the courtyard of a nearby Shiv mandir, where a small satsang assembly was arranged. Soon, Dinanath Bhatt and Kumardas of Amod came to Maharaj with a few government officials. Perceiving them to be spiritual aspirants Shri Hari explained, “By coming here you have benefitted in having the darshan of the Satpurush. You may not see the benefits immediately, but the Satpurush always showers his eternal happiness upon all. He is in connection with Bhagwan. Thus, one who serves the Satpurush becomes redeemed from the disease of the cycles of birth and death.” Then, Maharaj got up to have his meal and thereafter the entire retinue travelled to Bharuch. Here, they stayed in a farm, bathed and had some snacks. At that time, Tuiram, a disciple of Muni Bawa, who lived in

Delhi, arrived for Maharaj’s darshan. He insisted that all should have their meals before proceeding ahead. However, Shri Hari replied, “We will take our meals after reaching Ankleshwar. You arrange for a boat so that we can cross the River Reva.” Tuiram was happy to render any service he could offer.

MAHARAJ GIVES HIS STOLE TO A BOATMAN

Tuiram immediately went to the local British office to get official permission to row the boats across the River Reva. The British officials were appreciative and approved of Shriji Maharaj and his social work. Thus, they gave written permission for four boats to cross the river. Maharaj’s sadhus sat in two boats. Shri Hari sat with his attendant *parshads* and Tuiram in the third boat. And Maharaj’s chariot, horse and canopied cart were loaded into the fourth boat. As the boat was being rowed Shri Hari observed the beauty of the river. Soon, Shri Hari’s boat arrived and stopped a little away from the riverbank. Mokha Khachar then carried Maharaj on his shoulders to solid ground. Then, Maharaj gave his expensive

stole (*shelu*) to the senior boatman and expressed his *rajipo*.

Shri Hari bathed in the River Reva with his disciples and Tuiram. The entourage then proceeded on foot to enter Ankleshwar. After walking through the bazaar they came across a clean and open ground outside the town. Here, they made arrangements for their stay. Nearby, was a stepwell. Gopalji and Nandram cooked *khichdi* for Maharaj. Snacks and *barfi* were served to all the accompanying devotees. Then Maharaj declared, “We shall all leave together early tomorrow morning in the dark.” Thereafter, Shri Hari retired for the night.

Early next morning, the group departed. At around 7.00 a.m. they arrived at the shallow River Chokini. Shri Hari crossed the river on his horse. Thereafter, everyone bathed in the river along with Maharaj. Shri Hari donned white clothes and sat on a seat arranged on the riverbank. Mokha Khachar sat before Shri Hari, covered his face with a cloth and started meditating. At that time Sura Khachar smiled and mocked, “Look at Shri Hari when he is sitting before you, because you’ll see nothing with your eyes closed!” Mokha Khachar realized the right manner and importance of associating with the manifest form of God.

After taking lunch the entourage journeyed ahead. They arrived at a security post guarded by a group of soldiers. On showing the official permit to travel the soldiers bowed to Shri Hari and his sadhus and respectfully allowed them to proceed. Shri Hari told his group to go straight to Surat and said, “I will stay at Kosaad village for the night. Thereafter, at the break of dawn, we will cross the River Tapi near Chhota Vadasa village. The *sadgurus* will stay with me. The rest

of you go to Surat and inform the devotees that we are coming.”

The other sadhus and devotees soon reached Surat. They informed the local devotees that Shri Hari would arrive there in a day’s time. The devotees of Surat were elated. Maharaj had never visited the city of Surat before, but he had once passed through its outskirts while he was on his way to Dharampur. So, the local devotees felt fortunate at Shri Hari’s arrival.

Maharaj came to Kosaad village and stayed at a farm. Previously, he had stayed here when he was on his way to Dharampur. So, the owner of the farm knew Shri Hari. He came for Maharaj’s darshan, bringing with him a large piece of *suran* (elephant yam). He offered the vegetable to Shri Hari and said, “Maharaj, let me also bring some fresh brinjals from my farm.” Shri Hari was pleased with his hospitality and love.

When the owner brought the brinjals Maharaj asked for ghee and cooked them himself. Meanwhile, Shri Hari’s family members from Ayodhya prepared roasted wheat balls (*bati*). Thereafter, Maharaj ate first and then served the sadhus. The sadhus then lovingly served the devotees with cooked brinjals, *bati*, dal and rice.

The leading devotees in Surat were planning and preparing for Shri Hari’s home visits (*padhramanis*). Several sadhus had come to Surat much in advance to make all the arrangements for Shri Hari. The leading devotees took three sadhus with them to meet Ardeshar Sheth.¹ The latter was informed that Shri Hari would arrive in Surat in a day’s time. Ardeshar Sheth was very happy to hear this and said, “I will make all the arrangements to honour him on his arrival in Surat. I will go to receive him with my entourage. Initially, Maharaj’s residence will be arranged at

1. Ardeshar Dhanji Shah Baheremandkhan was born on 27 June 1797. When he was about 14 years old he lost his father, Dhanji Shah. Thereafter, Mr Cross, an English officer, recognized his potential and helped him to study well. Ardeshar learnt seven languages. Then, under the tutelage of Mr Revisan, he studied law. At 23 years, he was appointed as a clerk at the East India Company office. Because of his intelligence he got several promotions: *amin*, principal, *sadar amin*, judge, *diwan*, special commissioner and finally *kotwal*. Muni Bawa was Ardeshar’s guru. And Muni Bawa had met Shriji Maharaj through Brahmanand Swami and realized his greatness.

the two bungalows in Rustam Baug. Thereafter, I'll arrange for a better residence in the middle of the town.”

Ardeshar's words reflected his admiration and respect for Shri Hari. He was eager to see and have darshan of Maharaj. Earlier, he had sent repeated invitations through Muni Bawa and the local devotees to Maharaj to come to Surat.

Today, Shri Hari was going to arrive in Surat and Ardeshar was extremely happy.

ARDESHAR SHETH IS A VERY PIOUS ASPIRANT

The devotees of Surat took Ardeshar's permission to go to Kosaad village to meet Shri Hari. Ardeshar Sheth sent two of his guards with them and gave them oil torches, lamps and six oxen carts. They all departed and left through the Red Gate, crossed the River Tapi and reached Kosaad village on Kartik *vad* 5.

On seeing Shriji Maharaj the devotees started prostrating to him. Then the devotees, Govindbhai, Lakshmidhand, Girdharbhai, Bhagwandas, Bhagubhai and others, offered pots full of *barfi* to Shri Hari. Maharaj expressed his pleasure on seeing them and asked, “Did you inform Ardeshar Sheth of our arrival?”

The devotees replied, “Maharaj, we have come here after meeting him. He has sent these oxen carts, guards, lamps and oil torches in your service. He has conveyed his apologies for being unable to come because he is making arrangements for your grand welcome. At present, he has all the official powers and is in charge of all the government's material stocks and other resources in Surat.”

Shriji Maharaj opined, “Due to your association and the discourses of Muni Bawa Ardeshar Sheth has been touched by satsang. He is a very pious aspirant.”

Shri Hari asked about Ardeshar's health and then retired to sleep. Maharaj had instructed that

he wished to proceed towards Surat after sunrise the next day. Accordingly, Maharaj and his entourage left Kosaad early next morning. On the other hand, Maharaj's sadhus and devotees and the citizens of Surat were on their way in large numbers towards the River Tapi to receive Shri Hari. It was as if the whole town of Surat was going to gather by the riverbank. Some said, “Muni Bawa's guru is coming.” While others stated, “He is also the guru of Ardeshar Kotwal Saheb's guru. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, popularly known as Jivan Mukta, has also highly impressed the English officers. He has countless disciples.”

In this way, thousands of citizens, some carrying garlands and some carrying pots of *barfi*, were proceeding towards the River Tapi. They were chanting the name of Swaminarayan and wondered what Bhagwan Swaminarayan looked like. When they saw Shri Hari on the opposite bank of the Tapi, some offered namaskars and others offered prostrations to him. All were overwhelmed with devotion on seeing Shri Hari.

SHRI HARI RESIDES AT RUSTAM BAUG

Shri Hari and his entourage arrived and bathed in the waters of Tapi. Everyone who had come to welcome him felt fulfilled at Shri Hari's darshan. Then, Maharaj performed his worship rituals and gave close darshan to all by riding on his horse along the riverbank.

Maharaj then left to go to Rustam Baug. On the way he performed puja at a Shiv mandir and gave donations to the pujari. On arriving at Rustam Baug, a seat had been arranged for Shri Hari in the middle of a large open ground between two bungalows. Soon, the sadhus came after placing their meagre belongings at their accommodations, and sat before Shri Hari. A satsang assembly commenced with the singing of kirtans by sadhus.

Soon enough, Muni Bawa arrived and he prostrated to Shri Hari. Maharaj asked, “What arrangements have you made for lunch today?”

Muni Bawa replied, “Maharaj, the meals have been sponsored by the devotees of Salatpara and will be cooked here. From tomorrow, Ardeshar Sheth will arrange your stay in the town at Lala Karsan’s guesthouse. Tomorrow, he will come here with a grand procession to welcome you and take you there.”

Shri Hari was satisfied with the arrangements.

UNIQUE MEAL TO BE FOUND NOWHERE IN THIS UNIVERSE

Anand Swami wished to have a meal collectively sponsored by Kuberbhai and about twelve devotees of Salatpara. Then he explained to them, “Maharaj will stay here for about ten days at the most. Many devotees will want to sponsor a meal during Maharaj’s stay. Thus, by clubbing some devotees to sponsor each meal daily, everyone will get the opportunity to serve.” The devotees were also pleased with the idea.

Brahmin cooks made *kansar* and chapattis for all. Nandram and Gopalji cooked Shri Hari’s meal. Once it was ready, Maharaj took lunch and thereafter he served the sadhus. Shri Hari happily served ghee in the *kansar* and said, “Swamis, eat well. You will not find such a meal of Surat anywhere in the universe.”

CONCOURSE OF DEVOTEES ON THE BANKS OF RIVER TAPI

The next morning, Shri Hari accompanied his sadhus to take a bath in the River Tapi. Thereafter, he performed his daily worship rituals on the riverbank. Countless devotees and aspirants had gathered on the riverbank and in the town, leaving no space to walk on the road. Some had come with garlands, some with pots of *barfi* and many had brought fresh fruits to offer to Maharaj. All wished to come near to him. Shri Hari told his *parshads*, “Make arrangements for each devotee to come to me. Make sure that no one falls down and gets hurt.”

The *parshads* did as Maharaj bid. The devotees

came one after the other and performed Shri Hari’s *pujan* and offered gifts.

Shri Hari returned to the town, where lunch was ready earlier than usual. The meal was sponsored by Dayaram and his friends of Salatpara. Shri Hari took lunch and then lovingly served ladus to the sadhus. Thereafter, Maharaj instructed his sadhus, “Now, you serve the devotees so that they will bond well with you and experience a feeling of attachment with Satsang. Subsequently, satsang will be consolidated in their hearts.”

Shriji Maharaj never kept his sadhus away from his devotees and society. The sadhus, too, had developed such an inclination, and through their efforts society was getting purged of corrupt beliefs and practices. In this way, Satsang gradually spread in Gujarat.

By Ardeshar Sheth’s wish, Gopalji, a carpenter, had devotionally prepared a closed cart studded with glass mirrors. Kalyanji and Kuberji Soni had used silver foil to cover the surface of the wooden decorations on the cart. Atmaram Darji had prepared a decorative mattress with gold threads.

Ardeshar was pleased and satisfied to see the decorative cart. He had ordered all government offices to be shut that day. The citizens of Surat also closed their shops and businesses to have Shri Hari’s darshan and offer whatever services they could. Ardeshar Kotwal had a good relationship and goodwill with the English officers. So, he acquired a music band, palanquins, horses, chariots, carts, soldiers and other things from the English officers and the Nawab. He was joined by his brother, Pirusha, government officers and the citizens of Surat.

On Saturday, Kartak *vad* 7, innumerable citizens of Surat and devotees came to Rustam Baug to welcome Shri Hari. At that time, Shri Hari, who was seated on a cushion and was talking with his sadhus, heard the music band. ◆

To be continued in next issue.

Translated from the Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan authored by Shri H.T. Dave



SATSANG DIKSHA MUKHPATH FELICITATION CEREMONY

18–20 February 2021, Nenpur

A special and memorable online felicitation celebration in the presence of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj; this was the reward for months of exhaustive effort to memorize the entire Satsang Diksha¹ shastra. Over 3,100 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from throughout India reaped this exclusive reward for their persistent endeavour over several months.

On 16 October 2020, during the felicitation assembly for the initial cohort of around 300 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* who had memorized the entire Satsang Diksha shastra in Sanskrit, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “At present you are 300, but many will follow you and there will be 1,000, 2,000...”

Seizing upon Swamishri’s wish, the Satsang Pravrutti and Bal Pravrutti Central Offices based in Ahmedabad announced, on 26 November 2020, the second such national competition to memorize the Satsang Diksha shastra.

The timeline was tight, yet 5,181 *yuvaks* and 3,664 *yuvatis* (including *bal karyakars*, satsang activities *karyakars*, and men and women devotees aged between 14 and 40) registered to memorize the entire Satsang Diksha shastra in Sanskrit before Vasant Panchami (16 February 2021). In an age where youths depend on electronic gadgets to calculate even simple arithmetic this was indeed an impressive commitment.

At centres throughout Gujarat, Mumbai and other parts of India, the *mukhpath* buzz caught on. Everyone’s focus was on earning *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj’s *rajipo* and securing a place in ‘the 2,000’.

Hailing from a wide range of academic and family backgrounds, students, professionals – doctors, engineers, pharmacists, accountants, lawyers, etc. – factory workers, entrepreneurs, housewives and many others all focused on the

1. The ‘Satsang Diksha’ is a shastra written in Gujarati by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. It presents the principles of *agna* and *upasana* taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and promoted by the guru *parampara*. That is, it concisely describes the philosophical principles to be understood and the daily personal practices of devotion to be undertaken by all BAPS devotees.

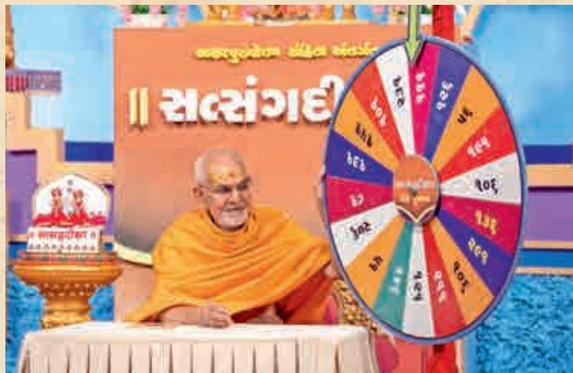
task in hand. Using snippets of time in between their regular daily commitments, they all endeavoured to reach the target.

Many were plagued by illness – COVID-19, operations and other health issues – family deaths and difficulties, important exams and many other challenges. Yet none were deterred. They persisted. For the vast majority, Sanskrit was a totally new language. Without knowledge of its grammar and verse construction idiosyncrasies, their persistence was a real victory.

To qualify for the national *adhiveshan*, each participant had to clear the zonal phase in which they were tested locally via online video calls to ensure that they had indeed successfully memorized the entire text. This phase was held on 24 and 31 January and 7 February 2021. A total of 1,385 *yuvaks* and 1,723 *yuvatis* cleared this stage, and were eligible for the final, national phase held between 31 January and 15 February. In the national phase, 40 swamis from various mandirs tested the eligible *yuvaks* online and 36 experienced women volunteers tested the *yuvatis*.

Of these participants, 1,082 *yuvaks* and 1,254 *yuvatis* were judged to have memorized all 315 verses of the shastra. A further 24 *yuvaks* and 17 *yuvatis* were judged to have memorized 300 *shloks*, while 12 *yuvaks* and 21 *yuvatis* were judged to have memorized 285 *shloks*. These were the 2,410 prize winners.

However, in recognition of the sheer effort they had put in, all national phase participants



Swamishri spins a number wheel to select a *shlok* number

were invited to attend the two exclusive online felicitation assemblies in Swamishri's presence to be relayed from Nenpur.

On 18 February, the first assembly began with a speech by Atmaswarup Swami describing Swamishri's efforts in writing the Satsang Diksha shastra and how keen he is that it be memorized. Then, after a rapturous welcome for Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Gunatitanand Swami and Mahant Swami Maharaj, the participating 1,300 *yuvaks* devoutly sang selected verses of the Satsang Diksha in unison before Swamishri.

Then, videos were shown highlighting the testing circumstances amid which participants had achieved this feat and the methods they had used to memorize the verses through firsthand accounts by the participants. Swamishri listened intently to their inspiring stories of devotion and dedication and congratulated each with a wave of his hand.

Thereafter, the sadhus who had tested the *yuvaks* in the final phase narrated their experiences of the proficiency with which the *yuvaks* had performed.

Then, six youths participated in an interactive activity with Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri selected a youth and spun a wheel to select a random number. The youth was required to recite that verse and the following four. Swamishri tested all six youths in this way. Swamishri judged each of their presentations as outstanding by signalling three ticks with his right hand.

At the end, Swamishri blessed all the youths and



A youth recites *shloks* based on the selected number



Swamishri threads a garland to offer to the youths



Swamishri honours the youths with the garland he made

profusely appreciated their persistence and faith.

In the second assembly on 20 February, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami congratulated the youths on their achievement and spoke about the wish of the *gumatit* gurus that youths memorize scriptural texts. He also urged them all to regularly revise what they had memorized so that it is not forgotten.

Previously, in a letter, Swamishri had expressed that the youths ‘should recite the verses fluently.’ In fulfilment of this wish, videos were shown of the *yuvaks* smoothly and speedily reciting the *shlok*s in various styles.

Then, through videos, the youths narrated the benefits they had experienced by memorizing Satsang Diksha and how it had affected their satsang and personal lives.

Delighted by the sincere efforts of the youths, Swamishri wished to honour the youths in a distinctive way. So, earlier in the day, he had

personally plucked roses from the Shantivun garden and threaded them into a beautiful garland. After offering it to Thakorji, he offered this garland to all the youths. It was truly a unique and unexpected gesture by Swamishri, reflecting the deep inner respect he had for all the youths.

Then, Swamishri was requested to select one *shlok* from the Satsang Diksha which he felt was specially important and present it graphically. He selected and drew the message presented in *shlok* 11.

Thereafter, Swamishri sanctified the trophies, certificates, *prasad* and other mementoes to be given to all the youths. He also passed his hand over the list of all prize winners to bless them and then passed a trophy over each name to symbolically present the trophy to them.

It was announced that the youths had responded to Swamishri’s wish of 2,000 and surpassed



Swamishri’s displays his drawing summarizing *shlok* 11



Lighting a *divo* using the flame from the Akshar Deri, Gondal



Swamishri sanctifies all the trophies and mementoes to be presented to the youths

it by almost 25%. And then the youths at home laid out their *jholis* and requested Swamishri to give something in return. Swamishri said, “I am a sadhu. I have God. I give you God.”

Then, with the assembly hall lights dimmed, the youths observed a minute’s silence to offer their personal prayers to Swamishri. Afterwards, Yagnapriya Swami prayed to Swamishri to bless all the youths that all their difficulties be eradicated and they experience peace and bliss.

Then, in his blessings to the youths Swamishri revealed, “In that one minute, I also prayed that you all be always blessed with resolute inner strength.”

Thereafter, the continuously burning *divo* of the Akshar Deri was brought before Swamishri. Using its flame, Swamishri lit the *divo* to initiate the undertaking that all should use the *brahma-vidya* learnt by memorizing the Satsang Diksha to

further reveal the glory of Akshar-Purushottam.

After the *arti*, as the *jai naad* echoed everywhere, Swamishri and the sadhus in Nenpur all waved large BAPS flags in celebration. Simultaneously, all the youths joined in the celebration by waving small BAPS flags at their homes.

Before departing from the assembly, Swamishri made an impromptu announcement, instructing all the sadhus, *parshads* and *sadhaks* watching from their respective mandirs to offer *dandvats* to all the youths as a mark of honour for their outstanding achievement.

Thus, with hearts full of joy and divine memories etched for a lifetime, the youths revelled in the knowledge that Swamishri was truly pleased by their devout efforts. ◆

*Text by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
from information provided by the
Satsang Activities Central Office, Ahmedabad*



Swamishri and sadhus joyously wave BAPS flags

SUCCESS DESPITE STRUGGLES

Achieving anything worthwhile is always challenging and the path throws up unexpected obstacles that test even the most capable. At such junctures, sincere determination and a steady focus on the goal provide the inner drive to persist. The following brief accounts highlight the difficulties many overcame in memorizing the Satsang Diksha to please guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj.

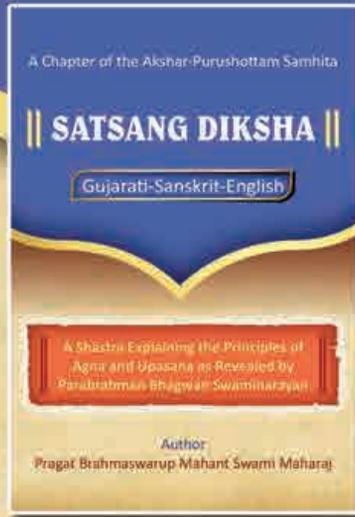
From the moment the second National Satsang Diksha Mukhpath Adhiveshan was announced, many *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* decided to register to participate with the sole purpose of pleasing *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri had expressed his wish and faith in the capabilities of the youths when he said that 2,000 youths would memorize the Satsang Diksha in Sanskrit.

Over 8,700 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* aged between 14 and 40 registered for the *adhiveshan* from throughout Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal and New Delhi. In about two months they had to memorize the 315 *shloks*. Some had participated in the first *adhiveshan* in October 2020, and so had some experience and base to build on. For the majority, however, this was a new challenge. Some also had little formal education, barely having completed secondary school.

To reach any demanding target, regular, persistent and disciplined action is required for success.

The short timeframe meant that in about 60 days, 315 *shloks* had to be memorized – an average



of five new *shloks* per day, while also revising all previously memorized *shloks*. Obviously, the task becomes more challenging over time.

However, the youths had in their hearts the overpowering desire to please Mahant Swami Maharaj and become one of 'the 2,000'.

For two months, this mission to memorize took top priority. But, as with all good endeavours, there are always obstacles and unforeseen challenges.

The youths still had their routine lives of study, work, business, family and other responsibilities.

Having started to memorize, participants faced a multitude of challenges: job pressures, exams, ill health, family deaths and many others.

To reach the target, participants organized their time to maximize their output. They reduced their sleep, took *niyams* to restrict favourite foods, minimized use of social media, stopped watching TV, stopped reading newspapers and other measures to create more time for *mukhpath*. They used short snippets of time in between other tasks to memorize and revise. Some took leave from their jobs to focus on memorizing.

They adopted a variety of methods and techniques to memorize and revise. Some would write each *shlok* dozens of times, some would listen to each *shlok* scores of times, and some used combinations of both. They would repeatedly subject themselves to be tested by *karyakars*, family members and others to assess how well they had memorized.

Overwhelmed by the task, some would decide to stop. But motivated again by family members, friends, *karyakars*, swamis and Mahant Swami Maharaj himself, they would be rejuvenated and proceed to complete the memorization.

SOME INSPIRING STORIES

Rutvik Patel of Ahmedabad had self-confessed about his poor memory. In fact, many told him not to enter. However, he wished deeply to please Mahant Swami Maharaj, so he registered. He would write each *shlok* up to 70 times and listen to its audio about 250 times. With such persistence and determination, he memorized 150 *shloks*. Then, he hit a wall of negative thoughts, since he still found it difficult to remember what he had memorized. He wrote to Swamishri explaining his problem. Swamishri replied, encouraging him to continue and blessing him that he would be able to remember. With renewed confidence, Rutvik continued and memorized all 315 *shloks*.

* * *

Harikrishna Patel of Bhadrans suffers from a muscle-wasting disease since a young age. He struggles with his daily care, for which his family assists him. He resolved to memorize the Satsang Diksha. His entire education has been in the English medium, and so he did not know Sanskrit. He would spend several hours listening and memorizing till late night. Despite his physical disabilities, his determination enabled him to memorize the complete shastra.

* * *

Parthiv Mehta and his wife were recently

married. He works in Mumbai in marketing, while his wife is a nurse in Bhuj. During the day, they worked and memorized and at night they tested each other by phone.

* * *

Vishal Pambhar and his wife of Rajkot have a 3-year-old daughter, but they both wanted to memorize. So, first his wife memorized the Satsang Diksha, while he took full responsibility of taking care of their daughter. On 8 January, she finished, and so took over the care duties while Vishal began to memorize. But on 14 January his father-in-law was hospitalized due to a stroke, and upto 21 January he was busy in serving him. Thereafter, Vishal spent up to 16 hours daily and finished memorizing the *shloks* on 28 January.

* * *

Mihir Jivrajani of Anand had only memorized 50 *shloks* incompletely by 12 January. So, he decided to quit. That night, he had a dream in which Swamishri was blessing all the youths. When his turn came, he felt that Swamishri was not pleased with him because he had decided to stop memorizing. So, from the following morning, he spent up to 16 hours a day and completed memorizing the Satsang Diksha.

* * *

Vinay Kumar of Secunderabad had a dream on 8 December in which he had darshan of Swamishri doing puja. Swamishri applied the *tilak-chandlo*, then Vinay gave him a tissue to wipe his hand. Swamishri returned the tissue to Vinay and gave him some sanctified flowers, saying, "Always keep these flowers with you." This inspired Vinay to memorize the Satsang Diksha, which he completed in 10 days.

* * *

Maheshbhai Jethwa of Mumbai lives with his family of six in a small flat. He is a tailor and had to spend many hours every day working to make ends meet. So, to complete the *mukhpath*, he spent 1½ hours in the early morning and short intervals of time during the day. At night he would go to his

nearby *hari* mandir for a few hours to memorize. In this way, he organized his schedule to create the required time and complete the *mukhpath*.

* * *

Nilkanth Shukla of Bharuch began to memorize, but found Sanskrit difficult. So, he decided to quit. But, during Dhanurmas (16 December 2020 to 14 January 2021), Swamishri frequently proclaimed the glory and benefits of Satsang Diksha through his daily messages: ‘Memorizing Satsang Diksha = Akshardham’; ‘Reading Satsang Diksha leads to progress on the path of *moksha*’; ‘One who memorizes the Satsang Diksha in Sanskrit is a scholar of Akshar-Purushottam’ and other motivating messages. Boosted by these messages, Nilkanth finished memorizing all 315 *shloks*.

* * *

Dhanraj Prajapati of Vadodara revealed that since the beginning of the pandemic, he had spent more time playing video games and using social media. But, to memorize the Satsang Diksha he stopped playing games and using social media.

* * *

Hardik Solanki of Moviya also deleted the social media apps from his phone to allow him to focus on memorizing.

* * *

Digant Desai of Mumbai works for a leading advertising company, which requires him to watch and study movies, TV and social media. However, after learning that Pujya Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami was memorizing the Satsang Diksha, he was also inspired to start memorizing Satsang Diksha. After a busy working day, he would start *mukhpath* at 11 p.m. and continue until 4 a.m. In this way he memorized the whole shastra.

* * *

Krunal Thakkar of Matar is a *yuva nirdeshak* responsible for all of that zone’s youth activities. He quickly memorized 150 *shloks*, but then the death of his uncle impelled him to stop *mukhpath* for 15 days. Four days after re-starting, his grandfather passed away, which meant he was occupied

for another six days. Thereafter, he revised the initial 150 *shloks* and completed memorizing the remainder.

* * *

Dr Harivadan Solanki of Ahmedabad is a physician working in a government hospital. He was posted to a coronavirus ward, so had a heavy workload. At home, his 3-year-old son occupied a lot of his time. So, to complete memorizing the *shloks*, Harivadan would wake up early and use free time on the ward.

* * *

Khantil Desai of Vadodara has a young daughter and his wife was pregnant with their second child. Daily, Khantil stayed at the office after hours to memorize some *shloks*. At home, his wife would test him, so that the unborn child would also be exposed to the words of the Satsang Diksha. On 11 January, they were blessed with a healthy son. So, afterwards, Khantil would recite the *shloks* he had memorized in his presence. In this way, he finished memorizing all 315 *shloks*.

* * *

Akshay Chauhan of Ahmedabad completed memorizing all the *shloks*. However, the day before the zonal *adhiveshan*, he fell ill with intense kidney stone pain and had to have an emergency operation. Yet, from his hospital bed, he still participated in the zonal phase and qualified for the national *adhiveshan*. After several days, he had to undergo further surgery and was required to stay in the hospital. He appeared for the national *adhiveshan* from his hospital bed and passed.

* * *

Utsav Solanki of Mumbai. Due to the pandemic his father had to shut down his tailoring business. So, for income he started selling masks. Utsav also had to help from morning to late night, with a little rest in the afternoon. To memorize the *shloks*, Utsav would stay awake till 3 a.m., which he would then revise the following day in between his duties.

* * *

Lakshman Kuchhadiya is a physiotherapist in Mumbai. Daily, he had to make home visits to his patients from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. So, while travelling in between visits, he would memorize *shloks*. At night, he would revise them and then listen to and read several times the *shloks* to be memorized the following day.

* * *

Parin Bhavsar of Mumbai lost his job during the pandemic. So, he and his wife began cooking for and supplying tiffins to a hospital – three times a day. He also had to care for his cancer-stricken bed-bound mother. Thus, he would be busy till 11 p.m. He would use free time during the day and stayed up till 3 a.m. to memorize.

* * *

Vipul Patel of Vadodara contracted COVID-19 and was quarantined for 15 days. He suffered only mild symptoms and so used this time to memorize the Satsang Diksha.

* * *

Kunal Trivedi of Vadodara has a 1½ -year-old son. His wife is a gynaecologist. Much of his free time was taken up in caring for his son. At night, he would have to get up several times to put his son back to sleep. So, he would recite the *shloks* he had memorized to his son until he went back to sleep.

* * *

Krishna Modi's, a *yuvati* of Ahmedabad, was expecting her first child. She gave birth to a daughter on 21 December. Thereafter, the demands of caring for the newborn were exhausting, yet Krishna daily memorized 10 *shloks* and finished memorizing the entire Satsang Diksha.

* * *

Meshwa Patel of Himmatnagar had to undergo neck surgery just six days before the *adhiveshan*. She was unable to speak without pain. Yet she continued revising and bravely bore the discomfort and successfully participated in the *adhiveshan*.

* * *

(Cont. on p. 23)

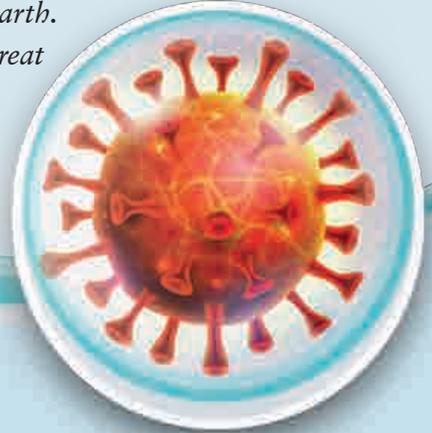
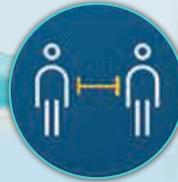
Benefits Experienced

Through their hard work and desire to please Mahant Swami Maharaj, the participants experienced many personal benefits. The following are some of their experiences:

- Developed a habit to introspect in any situation to decide how to act.
- Consolidated the understanding that God is the all-doer.
- Resolved to read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato daily.
- Realized the great fortune in having the opportunity to serve the satsang.
- Inspired not sleep on *ekadashi*.
- Gained the inner strength to cope with family and other situations.
- Developed the confidence to attempt and achieve difficult tasks.
- Learned how to interact with others in a more mutually beneficial way.
- Developed greater patience.
- Reduced expectations of being praised and egoistic feelings.
- Realized the power of Sanskrit to increase memory power.
- Developed ability to remain calm in stressful situations.
- Better able to focus during meditation and puja.
- Realized that whatever God does is ultimately for our benefit.
- Experienced the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj in my life.
- Feeling of great joy for having fulfilled Swamishri's wish.
- Learnt how to effectively use time to be more productive.
- Developed a clearer and deeper understanding of Satsang Principles.

CORONAVIRUS AND KUSANG: A CORRELATION

*March 2020 was a watershed moment for the world.
The coronavirus pandemic exploded onto the global scene and
intruded into the life of every person on earth.
Since then, everyone has experienced a great
upheaval in their way of living.*



The COVID-19 pandemic has upended many plans and caused costly disruptions. The pandemic has paralyzed the world, freezing previously taken-for-granted free movement and causing unprecedented disruption in personal, community, national and international plans. And there is still uncertainty about the future course of this pandemic.

In many ways, the pandemic has jolted humanity out of its complacency, overconfidence and flawed habits. Our feelings of invincibility have been shattered by an invisible adversary which has rendered us largely helpless, defenceless and clueless. But we humans are resilient, resolute and resourceful. Even amid the enforced overnight changes, we have adapted to a ‘new normal’.

NEW WORDS AND PRACTICES

Since the onset of the pandemic, many new words and ideas have entered the public vocabulary: flattening the curve, social distancing, frontline workers, R0 (R nought), herd immunity, cytokine storm, spike protein, antigen, antibody, lockdown, superspreaders, contact tracing, mutations, mRNA and many others. Also, many new behaviours and social norms have become

widespread: wearing masks, queuing while maintaining a distance, frequent handwashing and many more. People have become more hygiene conscious and expect others to consider the health of others when coughing, sneezing and even talking. Work from home, online schooling and video conferencing have become essential.

But despite the grim situation, there are methods that can help us conquer the scourge.

THREE-PRONGED POLICY

A single exposure to the virus for a short time may not be a problem for the majority, but repeated exposure increases the viral load beyond even a healthy body’s threshold to contain it – thus resulting in overt infection.

The troubling aspect of SARS-CoV-2 is that even asymptomatic people may be infected and can be contagious – spreading the virus to susceptible people without knowing. Only in hindsight is a link established between exposure and infection.

So, as the pandemic spread, authorities

everywhere advised three main measures to limit one's chances of infection: proper mask wearing, social (physical) distancing and frequent hand-washing. And places where these guidelines were strictly followed did reap benefits, flattened the curve and reduced the burden on limited medical resources. These common sense safeguards saved many lives.

CORONAVIRUS AND KUSANG

In spiritual terms, the coronavirus represents a form of *kusang* – which is company in various forms that endangers one's spiritual health. Just as the company of (exposure to) the SARS-CoV-2 virus jeopardizes one's physical health.

Infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus can lead to a wide spectrum of effects, from mild, barely noticed illness to death. Recovery may result in a return to normal health (for most people) or leave one with chronic debilitating problems.

Hindu shastras state that indulging in *kusang*, just like infection with SARS-CoV-2, can lead to a wide range of spiritual consequences – from fleeting to fatal. It all depends on the potency of and duration for which the particular form of *kusang* one is exposed to; just like exposure to the virus.

CONTAGIOUS

Among the more technical terms is 'R0' – R nought – a mathematical term indicating how contagious an infection is. It represents how many people may become infected from one infected person. The higher the number, the more contagious the disease. Measles has an R0 of 18, while R0 for SARS-CoV-2 is estimated at between 2 and 3. The objective is to reduce R0 to less than 1 to flatten the curve and control the spread of disease.

So, what does all this have to do with spirituality? Well, the safeguards to protect against COVID-19 (and many other airborne infections) have parallels in protecting one's spiritual health.

You will be familiar with the adage 'prevention

is better than cure' – because if one contracts an illness, then, despite being cured, lingering debilitation (morbidity) may remain.

The three main measures to prevent spread of the coronavirus advocate for avoidance of exposure to the virus. This is the same advice that shastras have stipulated for *kusang* – avoid it. Obviously, it is not always possible to avoid exposure to the virus or *kusang*. In that case, protection is required.

So, social distancing can be regarded as avoiding, whereas wearing masks and washing hands are forms of protection.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 18, Shriji Maharaj states that by exposing oneself to *kusang* in the form of sense pleasures one risks spiritual decline. Different types of materialistic pleasures can be said to have different R numbers. Some lead to speedy spiritual decline because they have a rapid effect, while some cause a gradual regress. In the spiritual domain, the only safe R number is zero.

PROTECTION FROM KUSANG

We have a number of tools to fight off *kusang*. When a virus enters the body, the first line of defence is the innate, non-specific immune response and then later the adaptive, specific or targeted, response takes over. Similarly, when confronted with *kusang*, there is the need for an immediate response – to exit the situation, or if that is not possible, vigilance and courage to control the circumstances.

The other, longterm, antidote to *kusang* is to surround and immerse oneself in satsang. As Mahant Swami Maharaj has stated in Satsang Diksha, verse 8: associate with the *atma*, Paramatma, guru and shastras, since this results in divine joy.

Satsang is further bolstered by the community of devotees and the multitude of spiritual activities that enable one to reinforce the satsang ideals. This is somewhat akin to herd immunity.

Sometimes, exposure to *kusang* can lead to

the equivalence of a cytokine storm – wherein the mind whirls, churns and spins in a frenzy, destabilizing and disorienting a person and driving them to damaging consequences. Aggressive treatment is required to control a cytokine storm in the body, similarly swift, decisive action in response to the *kusang* antigen will limit the damage it does.

Whereas, treatments for virus infections are predominantly physical – drugs, medical accessories, etc. – treatment for *kusang* is mostly intangible, using techniques that target the mind to calm it and enable it to think rationally.

VARIETIES OF KUSANG

Gunatitanand Swami, in his talks, describes three forms of *kusang* – variations of a problem that have the same harmful impact. Much like mutant or variant forms of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The first is external *kusang*: the company of overtly decadent people and indulgence in material pleasures without restriction.

The second is internal *kusang*: one’s inner demons, base natures, that deflect one from spirituality.

The third is *kusang* within satsang: this refers to the negative, discouraging talks that stifle one’s spiritual progress despite being immersed in satsang. People who indulge in such talks can be likened to asymptomatic spreaders. That is, just like some who are infected with SARS-CoV-2 do not show obvious symptoms and can spread the disease, these ‘satsangis’ outwardly show no signs, but inwardly are a source of *kusang*. One must learn to recognize such people and steer clear from them.

To further the analogy, there may be superspreaders – some who are infected with the coronavirus are more contagious and spread the disease to a larger number of people. Similarly, some forms of *kusang* are highly transmissible and are easily contracted. They readily affect people and harm them spiritually.

MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

During this pandemic, some people have willfully ignored the health and safety guidelines issued by government and medical authorities, endangering both themselves and others, in the false belief that they will not be infected or affected by the virus. However, subsequently, they and others fall ill, often with dire consequences.

Spiritually also, overconfidence that *kusang* will not cause one harm is misplaced. Shriji Maharaj states in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 18, “None have been able to indulge in pleasures of the senses and yet remain uninfluenced by them; none will be able to do so in the future; nor is there anyone like that presently. Even one who has endeavoured for countless millions of years is incapable of remaining uninfluenced amidst temptations. Therefore, if you behave as I have described, you will benefit.”

One may feel that engaging in *kusang* is not harmful and leaves no lasting effects. But remember even those who have seemingly fully recovered from the virus have suffered sudden fatal outcomes that have baffled even the best doctors. Similarly, the virus of *kusang* festers in the mind and can suddenly unleash lethal attacks in the form of thoughts and actions that lead to spiritual demise.

To reinforce this point, in Vachanamrut Vartal 20, Shriji Maharaj says, “Even if one has such understanding [like King Janak], one should under no circumstances associate with any type of evil influence. This is a universal principle.”

So, just as even those in robust health are strongly advised, encouraged and often forced (through lockdowns) to adhere to health and safety measures, even those who may be spiritually advanced should steer clear of *kusang*.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

The pandemic spurred an outpouring of help for those more severely affected by the strict measures. Frontline workers and other essential

workers took great personal risk to shoulder the task of helping the ill and needy. At the same time, volunteers served vulnerable people to fulfil their essential needs. People rallied to help each other and minimize the suffering.

Similarly, frontline spiritual workers willingly undertake many responsibilities to help and facilitate the spiritual growth of others. They frequently volunteer their time, energy and other resources for the benefit of others.

However, even the best planning can only yield productive outcomes when the society acts as a collective in pursuit of controlling the pandemic. Since, only then can swift responses be implemented to counter changing circumstances.

In the same way, the most effective way to counter *kusang* is to be a part of the society of satsang. This will enable rapid and effective responses to challenging situations.

FROM RIDICULOUS TO REASONABLE

Some ridiculed the measures enforced by government and medical authorities. However, drastic circumstances call for drastic measures and even extreme or draconian steps. Warning against resisting and wilful complacency in implementing these protective measures, Erin Bromage, associate professor of Biology at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, writes, “Actions that look ridiculous today will look most reasonable in three weeks.”

Sometimes, people also ridicule others’ practice and observance of spiritual disciplines and codes; they consider them to be over the top, unnecessary and futile. However, when such ‘ridiculous’ practices are sustained in one’s life, the negative effects of *kusang* are avoided and one reaps the benefit of longterm experience of inner peace and happiness, contentment, and the blessings of God and guru.

In hindsight, one realizes, that foregoing the material pleasures in the short term leads to greater, more lasting and beneficial outcomes and

experiences. Ultimately, the adherence to spiritual discipline is justified.

The lesson: it is better to appear ridiculous in the short term than to leave oneself vulnerable to dangerous consequences later.

IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

It has been said that every disaster movie begins with the government ignoring the scientists, leading to disastrous outcomes. Despite warnings and guidance from experienced professionals, inappropriate decisions and actions take place to the detriment of all.

In spiritual terms, the shastras and the living guru are the scientists. They have highlighted the pitfalls of *kusang* and how to protect oneself from them. Yet people do not heed their warnings and refuse to follow their advice, only to suffer avoidable pain and misery.

FINAL MESSAGE

Now, one year on, in March 2021, the future looks brighter with the prospect of vaccines bringing an end to the pandemic. Though the vaccines do not provide 100% protection against infection, they are very effective in preventing serious illness and death. So, taking a vaccine at the earliest opportunity is the wise course of action.

Vaccines and other measures will dilute the effect of SARS-COV-2 over time, but we still need to remain wary of a possible resurgence. Continued protection against the virus will still be required through vaccine boosters and other preventive actions.

As for *kusang*, it is an ever-present threat. It continues to present in ever-changing and increasingly potent forms. We cannot let down our guard and must sincerely implement the protective measures to prevent infection. Only daily practice of satsang as guided by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our Gunatit gurus can inoculate us against becoming infected by *kusang*. ♦



A tableau at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi depicting Bhagwan Swaminarayan's visit to Sagram's hut

TRANSFORMING PEOPLE TO CHANGE SOCIETY

*Bhagwan Swaminarayan reformed countless from their
wayward and sinful ways*

Bhagwan Swaminarayan believed that if the fabric that held society together was to be strengthened, first, each individual thread must be reinforced. Every citizen must lead a pure life; they must rid themselves of all inner flaws. This article examines Bhagwan Swaminarayan's historic work in freeing his disciples of their physical, mental and spiritual flaws – the work for which he has been bestowed the title of 'Bhakta Dosh Nivarak' in the Sahajanand Namavali. His methods were unprecedented and revolutionary.

After seeing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's profound impact on the simplest folk of Gujarat, renowned writer, Yashwant Shukla, notes, "When Kathis, Kshatriyas and bandits all took the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, their lives were

transformed. Transformation at such a level that society was not forced to lower its social and moral standards, but instead the lowest members of society were uplifted and society's standards, as a whole, were raised."

Sagram Bhakta's life reveals the radical transformation that Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired in his disciples. When the King of Bhavnagar, Thakur Vajesinh, invited Sagram to his palace, he asked him, "Is it true that Swaminarayan transforms donkeys [the downtrodden] into cows [pious people]?" Sagram explained, "I used to commit theft and adultery as well as consume meat and alcohol. I did not understand anything about dharma. I was just like a donkey; however, Swaminarayan gave us codes of conduct.

Therefore, I do not commit theft, adultery, or consume meat or alcohol. I don't even hurt small insects. I follow strict celibacy, and besides my wife, I don't even come into contact with any other women. After waking up in the morning, I now regularly bathe. In this way, I follow dharma like a Brahmin. Truly, Swaminarayan has turned a donkey into a cow."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan not only inspired purity of action, but infused purity of thought in his disciples. Due to an ongoing famine in Saurashtra, Sagram was forced to move to Surat so that he could earn for his survival. On his journey, he spotted a silver anklet lying on the road. He quickly threw dirt on top of it to hide his finding, but his actions were spotted by his wife, straggling behind him. When she questioned what he had done, he explained that during these tough times he was afraid that her mind would be tempted to take the anklet. His wife explained, "You have only thrown dirt on top of dirt; another person's possessions are as good as dirt to me."

Considering the time period and Sagram's background, it is inconceivable to fathom such a reaction from Sagram's wife. In the first quarter of the 19th century, Gujarat experienced three famines, a major epidemic and an earthquake. Given the consecutive disasters, no one's standard of living and state of mind remained stable. The lowest members of society struggled to put food on the table. With such a find, Sagram could have provided for his family for the tough months ahead. However, after coming into Bhagwan Swaminarayan's association, not even a thought, let alone any action, arising from greed crossed Sagram's or his wife's mind.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also eliminated damaging natures, such as ego and anger, from his disciples.

Hothiyo Patgar of Kundal was a hot-tempered, yet sincere aspirant. One late night, Hothiyo felt the sudden need to answer nature's call. As he exited his house, half asleep, he stumbled into a

bullock cart. Knocking himself out of sleep and pushing himself into a state of rage, he furiously bit the wooden cart. His rage-driven actions lead him to losing his two front teeth. A few years later, Hothiyo was ordained as Nirmananand Swami. Whenever Nirmananand Swami would go begging for alms, the villagers tried to stoke his temper by mocking him, "Swamiji, Swamiji... How did you lose your two front teeth?" However, Nirmananand Swami would react beyond everyone's expectations. He would explain calmly, "Hothiyo Patgar is long dead; I am now Nirmananand. I do not become angry."

Once, a sadhu claimed out of spite that Nirmananand Swami was not abiding by the moral code of conduct for sadhus. In a public assembly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan asked him to reveal his belongings to the audience. He innocently laid out his few possessions and proved that he did not have anything prohibited. Throughout the entire ordeal, not once did Nirmananand Swami get angry at the other sadhu for lying, nor did he retort at Bhagwan Swaminarayan for publicly shaming him. Bhagwan Swaminarayan refers to this level of purity of the mind in Vachanamrut Jetalpur 2, saying, "One whose *antahkaran* remains pure despite being faced by vicious influences is called a 'yati'."

Another such *yati* was Sura Khachar, the village chief of Loya. When spending a night in Jasdan, a prostitute came to his lodgings trying to seduce her way into his room. Sura Khachar immediately whisked out his sword and forced her to leave. Sura Khachar was in a private setting; anything that happened, would likely never have been known. However, such a thought did not even cross Sura Khachar's mind.

This is why Bhagwan Swaminarayan's methods were truly novel. Tulsidas says in the Ramcharitmanas, "Whoever engrosses themselves in God, experiences the fruits immediately. An obnoxious crow becomes a melodious songbird. An ugly duck becomes a majestic swan. That is

the power of associating with God.”

From the very beginning, Bhagwan Swaminarayan constantly sought to free his disciples of all their worldly desires. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 45, he states, “As you are devotees of God, I do not wish to leave any form of improper *swabhavs* within your hearts.” Furthermore in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 50, he states, “I do not wish to leave any trace of the world in the hearts of whosoever keeps my company.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan wanted to go beyond merely purity of the mind. He wanted his disciples to become *nirvasanik*, free of all ingrained worldly desires. Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Vachanamrut Ahmedabad 3, “Even if all the roots of a banyan tree, except for a few minor roots, are uprooted, the banyan tree will still remain green. In the same way, one may have outwardly renounced the *panchvishays*, but if thoughts of them are entertained, then those thoughts become a cause of births and deaths.” To attain the level of purity that Bhagwan Swaminarayan expected of his devotees, it is imperative to eliminate one’s *vasana*.

The question is how does one eliminate *vasana*? To eliminate *vasana*, Bhagwan Swaminarayan highlights the influence of *tamogun*, *rajogun* and *sattavgun* in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 58. These three *gunas* are influenced by three factors: the body, bad company and past *sanskars*. To overcome *gunas* arising due to the body, one must distinguish between the *atma* and the non-*atma*. *Gunas* due to bad company are eradicated by the influence of good company. However, to eradicate *gunas* arising from unfavourable past *sanskars*, which are the very root of *vasana*, there is only one option – one must please God!

Mancha Bhakta’s transformation illustrates this principle. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 38, Bhagwan Swaminarayan praises Mancha Bhakta of Kariyani as a true devotee of God. Yet, throughout his life, he experienced many difficulties due to his *swabhavs* and *vasana*. Mancha Bhakta’s niece

was married to Vasta Khachar; however, when Vasta Khachar considered remarrying, Mancha pulled his sword on Vasta in an attempt to kill him. Vasta barely escaped and went into hiding; he secretly contacted Bhagwan Swaminarayan to save him. Only when Bhagwan Swaminarayan arrived, did Mancha’s temper subside. Not only was Mancha a slave to anger, but he was controlled by his ego. On the day of Makar Sankranti, after having fed the Brahmins, Mancha candidly told Bhagwan Swaminarayan, “Due to my *swabhavs*, I am very egotistical. If I am not praised, I would leave satsang; I am that ungrateful. If you praise me all morning and then insult me once, I would not be able to stay in satsang. Please continue to tolerate and forgive me!”

Mancha’s anger and ego had no limits, yet Bhagwan Swaminarayan uplifted and freed him of his *swabhavs*. As time went on, Mancha was initiated as a sadhu and was named Achintyanand Swami. During the inauguration of Ahmedabad Mandir, Bhagwan Swaminarayan called Achintyanand Swami on stage and publicly praised him. Bhagwan Swaminarayan said, “Mancha came into my association, listened to my commands and became a sadhu on my word. Now, all of his sins and *swabhavs* have been eliminated.”

Achintyanand Swami rejoiced, “Due to Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s grace, I experience absolute peace. I no longer have any infatuation or attraction towards the *panchvishays*.” In this way, Bhagwan Swaminarayan produced thousands of *nirvasnik ekantik* devotees.

On 26 March 2020, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “Through Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s association, the *swabhavs* and *vasanas* of countless aspirants were dissolved and became as insignificant as a blade of grass.” This near impossible feat is achieved only by God’s grace; that is why, Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 18 that only through the association of God or the Satpurush is one’s *vasana* uprooted.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan destroyed the *vasana*

of those who associated with him, sculpted their *brahmarup* state, and bestowed them with ultimate *moksha*. By encouraging physical purity, he was able to create pious devotees like Sagram Bhakta and models of self-control like Sura Kachar, who maintained purity of the mind. That is why Bhagwan Swaminarayan is truly *Bhakta Dosh Nivarak*.

It was this confluence of physical chastity, mental purity and spiritual perfection that epitomized

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's satsang. Those who immersed themselves in that confluence, emerged spotless. The very same satsang flourishes today, under *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. Just like the *vadvanal* fire transforms everything, no matter how 'tainted and salty' one's life is, through the mere association of Mahant Swami Maharaj, it becomes 'pure and sweet'. ♦

(Cont. from p. 15)

Nidhi Dobariya of Ahmedabad is a dentist, who only began to practice satsang after her marriage. She has a 10-month-old daughter. Her in-laws encouraged her to participate and assisted her in caring for her daughter to allow her time to prepare. Thus, with such support, Nidhi memorized all the *shloks*.

* * *

Yogita Kambad of Bhavnagar had memorized 250 *shloks* when she suffered fractures in both arms in an accident. She was in a lot of pain and dependent on help for daily needs. Despite this setback, she continued to memorize all the *shloks*.

* * *

Vidhi Kotadia of Jamnagar married into a *satsangi* family. Slowly, she began to practice satsang. She decided to memorize the Satsang Diksha. She has a 3-year-old daughter, house duties and was unfamiliar with Sanskrit. In addition, her husband and father-in-law were both hospitalized for COVID-19. Yet Vidhi used whatever free time she got to write each *shlok* 10 times and listen to the audio. In this way, she completed the *mukhpath*.

* * *

Dipika Patel of Sarol, suffered a significant injury to her left knee which required surgery. However, on being tested COVID-19 positive, her operation had to be delayed by 15 days. In the meantime, she continued memorizing. Then,

after two operations on her knee, while recuperating she completed the *mukhpath*.

* * *

Bhartiben Bhanderi of Bhadra has had heart valve problems since childhood that have required seven operations. After she had memorized 100 *shloks*, her health deteriorated due to an infection. She was hospitalized for 10 days and needed a further week to recover fully. However, she persisted even amid this situation and completed the *mukhpath*.

* * *

Komal Modi of Ahmedabad studied only up to Standard 8 before dropping out to work to support the family. She sews blouses with her mother. From their family of six, Komal's elder sister and younger brother had completed the *mukhpath* in the first national *adhiveshan* in October 2020. As Komal had little formal education, she struggled to correctly pronounce the Sanskrit verses. However she endeavoured, spurred by the desire to please Swamishri, and did memorize all 315 *shloks*.

These stories represent the many struggles all the participants had encountered, but their deep desire to please Mahant Swami Maharaj helped them to overcome all difficulties and reach their goal. ♦

Text by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
from information provided by the
Satsang Activities Central Office, Ahmedabad

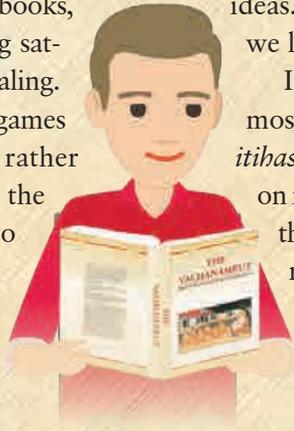
Align Your Interests with Satsang Reading

After a long day of studying textbooks, notes and lecture slides, doing satsang reading can seem unappealing. There are TV shows, movies, sports games and other online videos that we'd rather watch when tired. We'd rather read the latest fiction book and travel away to spend times with elves, dragons, hobbits, wizards and aliens. When our lives are so busy, doing satsang reading can feel like a chore. Who has the time and energy to read long books and articles (this article notwithstanding, of course)?

What if we can change that? What if reading was more akin to a treasure hunt? What if reading was about being an explorer, where you are an anthropologist uncovering scrolls and learning about the secret history of someone you admire? What if reading could be an escape or adventure from studying and de-stressing with worthy characters and beautiful ideas?

If we change our perspective, doing satsang reading regularly while in college is not only possible, but enjoyable. It begins by questioning our assumptions, and then building new habits. Learning these new skills will not only help us build and maintain a great satsang reading routine, but it can transform how we study for all our other courses.

The **first question** to ask is: What do you love? Different people have different inclinations. Some people like cricket... others like basketball. Some people love Chinese food... others lean towards Italian food. Some watch TV shows... others watch TED Talks. In the same way, some like to read stories, while others like to read abstract



ideas. We have to find what kind of reading we love to do.

If you like to read stories, then you will most likely love to read *jivan charitras* or *itihās* shastras. If you like to watch TED talks on ideas, then reading our satsang books on theology will interest you. And if you're really pressed for time and just like to read short articles, then there's always a new *vicharan* report to read. Look at the satsang books you have on your shelf, and pick one that you can genuinely be excited to read every day. And if you cannot find it, pledge to go to the mandir bookstore or online bookstore (baps.store – for India only) and pick one up. When we align our satsang reading with something we already love, it's easy to start and maintain this daily habit.

The **second question** to ask is: When are you most energized? For decades, experts have talked about time management as a key success skill. It turns out that what matters more than time management is energy management.¹ There are natural waves of energy we feel throughout the day. If we know when we use our energy, and when we refresh and renew our energy, we can have a better time enjoying our reading. We should thus pick a time when satsang reading complements our energy cycle. If it expends energy for us, then we should pick a time to read when energy is greatest. This might be right after doing our puja when we are fully awake. If satsang reading renews our energy after worldly work, then a short 10–15 minute break in the afternoon or evening might be a better time to read. No matter what it is like for you, pick a time when you are most energized, and satsang

1. For more on this topic, look at Loehr, J., & Schwartz, T. (2004). *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. New York: Free Press.

reading will become easier and more enjoyable.

Now, we get into the realm of excitement, discovery, and growth. We must **engage our imaginations** as we read. For hundreds of years, humans primarily excited their imagination through the stories they read, listened to or saw performed. Only over the last few decades has our imagination become limited as a result of countless shows, movies and web clips. However, we can re-activate our imagination when we read to become more engaged in satsang reading. For instance, when reading stories about Shastriji Maharaj and his childhood, we can imagine the streets of Mahelav. Smell the different aromas of his kitchen. We can picture ourselves walking in the narrow alleyways along with him as he went to school or as he visited Vadtal mandir. Imagine all the seats where *katha* would have been happening from different sadhus and imagine standing next to Dungar Bhakta during a visit to do darshan. Picture him standing before the *murtis* and doing darshan. Imagine the excitement on his face as he would go from seat to seat meeting the sadhus and listening to their *katha*. Picture the stacks of discarded Vachanamrut pages that he would collect and sit to read himself. Better yet, join him in collecting those scribed pages!

When we engage our imagination, we can do this. We start developing a richer understanding of their stories, and become closer to them. Even though we may never have visited Mahelav, we, too, can participate in his story. In this way, satsang reading can transport us to another time and another world, and strengthen our understanding of who he was and what he did.

Finally, we must **ask questions**. This is the last element of active reading and a key skill to to enhance the enjoyment of satsang reading.² Our imagination may fall short. There may be portions of the stories we read and ideas we explore that

we may not understand. At the end of each section, we can ask ourselves questions such as: What happens next? Why did they do this? I wonder what happened in between these events. These questions make us explorers and archaeologists, digging into the past and putting together a mystery or puzzle. We can seek answers to these questions in more books. Once we start asking these questions while we read, we will find answers to them throughout satsang; be it a carving in the mandir, a *katha*, a *goshthi*, another essay or book, an *ashirvad*, a piece of music or even a casual conversation.

Slowly and surely, the process of active reading described above will help us see the underlying unity of all ideas within our satsang. It will excite our imagination and open up a universe of endless fascination. Our books are part of an open library where we get to use our inclinations, our interests, and find a treasure chest of lessons to enrich the story of our lives.

The ideas above are not just meant to make satsang reading more exciting and interesting, but they are meant to help us better learn whatever we are studying. Learning is meant to be a journey of exploration, not through mindless memorization but through conscious engagement. Through this process, we must become lifelong learners.

In the university of life, satsang is the main subject. While we will eventually graduate from school or college, we will continue to be students in satsang. Learning how to learn in satsang will serve us

for the rest of our lives. Our education in engineering, medicine, law, commerce, arts, etc. will give us the knowledge we need to grow in our jobs and businesses. However, it will be our satsang lessons that will serve us more faithfully in the day to day adventures of life. The above is will help to develop a spirit of child-like curiosity and an inclination of lifelong learning in satsang. ♦



2. Read more on how to do this from Robinson, A. (1993). *What Smart Students Know: Maximum Grades. Optimum Learning. Minimum Time*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.



Club fest in Barton Hall, Cornell University

Simplifying Satsang

Listening to Katha or Reading the Vachanamrut Daily

My heart was pounding against my chest like a jackhammer as I peered into Barton Hall for the very first time. This was the day where I would begin setting the foundation for my future at Cornell University. For all new students, club fest was the most important moment of their lives. It was a rebirth, arguably more important than the first time they were born. In this three hour slot, they would choose which extracurricular clubs and activities they wanted to participate in. These few hours would determine who a lot of their friends would be in college and what their identities would be sculpted into.

I was one of those first-year students, trying to decide what activities I wanted to participate in. While it should have been fun and exciting, I knew everything that was at stake. On the one hand, my school career counsellors were telling me that I should participate in enough serious, ‘career-related’ clubs so I could later show them off on my resume. On another hand, my peers were pushing me to sign up for various social activities so I could make the most of my limited time on a university campus.

To make matters more maddening, there were over 1,000 different clubs for me to explore. How was I supposed to decide which few I was most interested in? There were 4,000 students running frantically around Barton Hall, struggling with the same dilemma as I was. This place was a never-ending labyrinth of chaos. It was such a big hall that 100 years ago, the national army found it fit to use it as an airplane hangar.

Each club had set up an extravagant booth to showcase what they did. I made my way through the first few, keeping in mind I had to choose meaningful career-related and social activities.

Astronomical society. *No.*

Marching band. *No.*

Global Health Student Council. *No, I rejected.*

As I got to the fourth booth, I was bombarded by at least five people.

“HEY! You’re Indian, we’re a *raas* team! Do you like dancing?” they questioned.

That made me realize – another consideration I had to take into account when choosing clubs I wanted to participate in was my satsang life. In fact, it was not just limited to clubs. This was

something I had to consider when it came to my entire university life!

You may be wondering why I put so much pressure on myself to participate in so many different clubs and activities anyway. Well, in America, employers value students who excel in academics, as well as additional areas, such as professional clubs or social organizations. It proves that those students have mastered multiple facets of their lives, rather than just one area. Therefore, by committing to participate and excel in several clubs, I was only brightening the prospects of my future after college (even though I had no idea what that future was).

I quickly realized, however, how hectic my life would become. Many of you in college may be experiencing a similar workload. Trying to balance professional clubs, social organizations, academics, and satsang is a lot to ask for... especially if you want to shine in all of them. And of course, I wanted to go above and beyond in every one of them.

Coming from high school where I had minimal responsibility, to being in an environment where I was suddenly trying to balance many different activities was quite a change. I had to experiment with how to make it all work. This is how I ultimately learned to simplify satsang to its roots. What do I mean by 'simplifying' satsang? I mean taking just 15 minutes, even in the midst of your busy schedule, to perform some satsang-related activity. There is nothing easier than this. Whether this activity is satsang reading, listening to *katha* or reflecting upon a satsang-related topic with a *karyakar* over the phone, the most important factor is to remain consistent in this 15-minute daily dedication.

College is the time where our satsang fades the most. I witnessed it in myself and many of my friends. We usually do not intend for this to happen, but it just



does. Due to all our studies, commitments, and busy schedules, satsang just vanishes into thin air like some sort of magic trick. This is why we have to hold on tight to it.

Remembering to perform some daily satsang-related activity was difficult for me at first, but as I actively continued pushing myself, it quickly became part of my routine. I personally either read the Vachanamrut or listened to a portion of a *katha* every day. And, if you take a step back to think about it, 15 minutes is only 1% of our entire day. Surely we can dedicate merely 1% of each day to satsang-related activities, no matter how hectic our schedules become. After all, we have dedicated a majority of our lives to satsang by this point.

In today's world, listening to *katha* or reading the Vachanamrut has become extremely accessible. You can listen to *katha* on your phone while walking to class in the morning. You can even download the Vachanamrut app on your phone and read it while eating lunch. The goal is to just hit 15 minutes every single day. On certain days, you might even find yourself able to dedicate more than 15 minutes. When I simplified my satsang in college, I had certain relaxed days where I was able to read for over an hour. If you also have days like this, you should definitely take advantage of them.

There is of course no maximum time limit – but remember, the minimum limit should always be 15 minutes.

I think about how lucky I am to have had satsang in my life for so long. I also think about how lucky I am to have a Satpurush who dedicates his every breath to satsang. It's not something I ever want to lose. It's not something a few time constraints should be able to destroy. I was able to simplify my satsang experience during the most hectic university days – I know you can do the same. ◆



Vachanamrut app available from baps.org



Making Dross into Gold

The first conquest of the air by the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk in 1903 and the subsequent leaps in aviation technology ushered a revolution that has shrunk our earth into a global village. The rapid pace of travel and communication through the telephone, radio and television has changed the face of life. But with this shrinking and closeness, we find a shrivelling of values. Despite the boons of rapid travel and communication media we witness a decadence that ravages the human psyche. Acts of human insanity in all its gaudy and lurid colours splash our TV screens, magazines and the video world. We have indubitably become richer, more comfortable, and more intelligent and sophisticated, but we have also become poorer, corrupt and ostentatious in our morals and religiosity.

Imagine a normal growing adolescent suddenly finding his right eye developing slower than his left. This incongruity will leave him looking odd and ugly. For that matter any non-uniform growth in a young growing boy will make him either clumsy or grotesque. Such oddities are similarly manifested when a man's spiritual and moral growth is absent in his life. The correction of these is no easy task.

No ordinary man can shape a piece of wood into something beautiful, meaningful and useful. And the task of sculpting a block of stone is a lot more difficult. With these two analogies in mind you can imagine how demanding it must be to sculpt the character of a person.

Will Durant says in the 'Story of Civilisation', "What we are up against is the simple fact that man is still an animal. That is the deepest thing in his nature – the survival instinct and the hunting instinct. These were necessary at one time, when self-preservation was the rule rather

than the pressures of society. So morality has an uphill battle against these two inheritances. You have to realize the enormous difficulty in making an animal and hunter into a citizen, a civilized man.”

The story of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s (Swamishri) crusade in making an ‘animal’ and a ‘hunter’ into a citizen, a civilized man, reflects his patience, love, effort and zeal. His untiring spirit eclipsed all boundaries of time or personal physical exhaustion.

In December 1986, Swamishri was in Mumbai. After the evening assembly at our mandir in Dadar, a devotee brought an industrialist for Swamiji’s darshan. Swami enquired what sort of business he had. He replied, “I have a factory in Selvas, manufacturing aluminium utensils and dishes.”

“We, too, have a factory in Selvas,” Swamishri said. And before the drone of surprise and curiosity around peaked, Swamishri revealed, “One that transforms and moralises the tribal people in Selvas.”

Swamishri’s success in civilizing the tribal areas was evident through his work of redeeming 36 out of the 69 villages from the addictions of tobacco and liquor.

During the crippling drought of 1988 the BAPS Cattle Camp in Bochasan saw not only an influx of famished cattle, but also their owners, who were addicted to smoking and drinking. By the grace and effort of Swamishri and his sadhus many gave up their costly and deathly habits.

75-year-old Bhurabhai Prajapati from the village of Khambda Gir, district Amreli, was one of them. He had 442 acres (700 *vighas*) of land. His father died when he was only fifteen, thus making him the heir to the entire land and all his possessions. But Bhurabhai had not known then that he would lose all his land because of his addiction to opium. For sixty years Bhurabhai and his mates rubbed, tapped and consumed opium. He got the money for his addiction by

selling his land piece by piece. Some time later, a point arrived where Bhurabhai had less than 10.5 acres (15 *vighas*) of land left, which he mortgaged and used the money he received to buy opium.

The drought brought Bhurabhai to the BAPS Cattle Camp in Bochasan. He brought with him a companion worth Rs. 200 – opium! During the next few days the sadhus found out about his chronic addiction. They exhorted him to give it up. But Bhurabhai refused. He was adamant. His affinity for opium was rock hard. But the impossible was made possible. The tables turned with the arrival of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to the camp. An assembly was held. Swamishri talked emphatically about the dangers and futility of addictions. When he finished blessing the assembly, several farmers came forward and held out their hands to take pledges of non-addiction.

Bhurabhai was one of them! Swamishri’s words had penetrated his inner core. He realized how slavish he had become to his addictions. He bowed at Swamishri’s feet and broke down in a torrent of tears. Swamishri placed his hand lovingly on his head and sympathized with him. Bhurabhai gave up his addictions and resolved never to take them again. He took the remaining opium and buried it deep in the ground.

At the age of 75, Bhurabhai was inspired to steer his boat towards a new horizon. Swamishri blessed Bhurabhai and reinforced his resolve with loving words. For the next three days, Bhurabhai went through the painful withdrawal symptoms. His entire body screamed with aches and pain. He was restless all day and night. The doctors advised him to give it up gradually. But Bhurabhai was firm. He fought it off with a soldier’s spirit. He boldly said, “I shall not defile my mouth with opium after having promised Pramukh Swami Maharaj. If I die, then Swamiji will take me to Akshardham, but I’ll never take a grain of opium!” Thereafter, on the fourth

day, Bhurabhai emerged victorious. At the age of 75, Bhurabhai was redeemed from his misery through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings.

Changing a person's vicious nature, forging a compromise between two stubborn parties or dissolving years of hatred and bad blood between warring individuals is indeed a challenge in our times. Swamiji, through his incessant travels, ironed out many disputes and transformed many for the better. Like the fishes in a lake that keep it clean, free of contamination and well-oxygenated Swamishri purified our society from such elements. Many changed their errant ways and adopted the path of satsang.

In the village of Ghelpur lived a man who was a stigma to his family and village. His name generated fear and hate in the neighbouring villages. Many of the domineering tribal people who lived in these villages lead their cattle to graze in other peoples' farms, and no one would dare resist them. On the other hand, they never allowed their cattle to graze in the fields belonging to the people of Ghelpur because of one man – the formidable Manudada! His name spelled fear and terror. If he roared that the road to Koshindra was closed, then no pedestrian or driver or the law would dare use that road. People were afraid of him because he never hesitated in killing or maiming anyone who resisted or defied him.

While everyone went to their farms during the day, Manudada went to his in the night. There, he hunted rabbits and birds and feasted upon them. His father Vikramsinh was a pure Hindu and whenever his son cooked meat at home he fasted. Once, Manudada cooked meat for three consecutive days and his father fasted for three days. Since then, Manudada moved and lived in another home.

In 1987, a change of breeze in his life was ushered in when he went for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan in the neighbouring village of Koshindra. He was struck by Swamishri's lustre

and purity. In his own words he says, "From then on I felt life was worth living." Like him, his two sons agreed to be initiated into the Satsang-fold there and then. Manudada then pledged, "The day Swamishri sanctifies my house, I shall give up my addictions and hostile ways."

The day finally arrived on 2 February 1988. Swamishri came to his village and sat on a little platform beneath the shade of a neem tree outside his home. Manudada welcomed Swamishri with a garland and a small assembly was held. Swamishri said, "Our lives are soiled by the colours of sin, but if we are coloured by God's colour we become blessed and pure. Through satsang we eventually experience a sweet happiness in our life. I pray that peace and purity prevail in Manudada's life and he be redeemed from all his miseries."

Swamiji then initiated Manudada into satsang, and the latter vowed to abstain from all vices and addictions. And with this taming of the lion the entire village vowed to practise non-addiction and moral purity.

Another case that reflected Swamiji's spirit to do good was that of a circle inspector in the Khambhat area. His occupation was very lucrative because he had the power to sanction any planning or construction in the villages or towns under his control. Invariably, people offered him fat bribes to approve their projects. He writes: "Before I came into Satsang I used to accept a lot of bribes. To tell you the truth I had a very strong affinity for taking bribes. It was an addiction! I could not resist the opportunity no matter how firm I tried to be. There have been days when I'd get upset or didn't enjoy lunch because I didn't get any bribes. You probably think this a bit too silly or far-fetched, but it's true! However, all this disappeared when I met Swamishri in 1981. He put the *kanthi* around my neck and told me to live a pure, moral life. That first meeting with him transformed my life. I've remained faithful to his word ever

since. It's been nine years and in spite of threats from people I've refused and remained resolute. My transformation surprises my colleagues. But personally I'm very happy and glad for the change Swamiji brought in my life."

There's a teacher who had a volatile nature. The slightest disturbance inflamed him. His anger was like the bursting of a hydrogen balloon. He describes what he was like before: "One afternoon I retired for a short nap. A little while later my daughter switched on the radio. I gently told her to switch it off because I couldn't sleep. And she did. Then several minutes later, thinking that I was asleep, she switched it on again keeping the volume low. But I was still awake. And in a flash of anger I got up and smashed the radio. I didn't realize then that I had destroyed my own radio. When I went to the repair shop I was told the radio is beyond repair. I then realized the extent of my fury.

"On another occasion my son's exam was coming up. Instead of preparing for the exam he was riding his bicycle. I told him to get off and start studying. He took it in a light vein and kept on riding. This blew my kettle. Without uttering another word I went up to him, snatched his cycle away, turned it upside down to rest it on its seat. Then, I started battering the wheels with a club. After five minutes, I hanged the cycle on the wall and went inside, all red and fuming!

"But everything changed when I met Swamishri in Bochasan. I confessed to him about my nature and asked for his blessings. Swamishri said, 'Chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan whenever you feel angry.' It's been four years now and by Swamiji's grace my anger has nearly vanished. I'm grateful to Swamishri for the change he brought into my life."

Another story that portrayed Swamishri's mission to transform and redeem the worst of people was that of Himatsinh. He was notorious for his criminal acts. He himself said that even ten Joban Pagis could not be compared to him

in violence and viciousness. Himatsinh indulged in all the worldly sins and was the bully of the town. No one dared confront him on any matter. He never hesitated in wielding a knife or a gun to settle even petty matters. All day long he smoked and drank. But for the last three years Himatsinh is a new man. In 1987, his first meeting with Swamishri changed his life. He shed his old cruel ways, accepted the *kanthi* and became a practising devotee. Now he is active in correcting and mending others from their sinful ways. He often says that if Swamiji had not saved him he would have been either murdered or put behind bars for life.

Years of enmity and bad blood between two people, two families or two villages are difficult and sometimes impossible to defuse. Kukud and Odarka are two villages in the Bhavnagar district. 200 years ago blood was shed because of a debatable strip of land between the outskirts of both the villages. The incident described in 'Saurashtra ni Ras Dhaar' describes how the feud erupted, "The people of Odarka were roused by the call that the debatable land was being tilled by the *darbars* [people belonging to the warrior class] of Kukud. They took whatever they found in their hands and hurriedly went to challenge them, 'Why do you till our land, they bristled with anger?'

"In reply a *darbar* from Kukud squeezed the trigger of his rifle. Once, twice, thrice. Three men from Odarka fell down, dead. Another three more met the same fate. News of their death reached Odarka. A small army of *darbars* rushed to the scene of death, but by then the *darbars* of Kukud had fled to their village. In retaliation, they killed an innocent pariah of Kukud who was returning home after a day's begging.

"Tombstones were erected in memory of the six who died and another for the pariah.

"Since that bloody day the people of Odarka stopped drinking water from the village of

Kukud. All trade and friendship were severed. For 200 years, the same bitterness prevailed in the hearts of both sides. The people of Odarka have since multiplied and now live in 32 villages. The *darbars* of Kukud are spread in 12 villages.

“Many made efforts to forge amicable relations between the two factions, but all failed. A British officer tried to bridge the bitter gap through legislative means but the *darbars* did not cooperate. Then the Home Minister of State, Mr Kiritsinh Gohil, and the president of the *taluka* law, Mr Jorubha, also tried, but the *darbars* did not yield.”

A few years later, Ramsang Bapu was transformed by Swamishri and he became a devotee. He asked Swamishri to solve the 200-year-old feud. Swamishri personally took interest in this matter and appointed Ramsang Bapu’s son, Janaksinh, to convince the two sides for a peaceful solution. In spite of a few village folks who disagreed, Swamishri told Janaksinh to pursue the matter. And eventually both sides came to Swamishri, who was in Bhavnagar, and agreed to forget all bitterness between them. They invited Swamishri to come and redeem their dead ancestors and end their bitterness.

On 12 April 1990, Swamishri travelled to the outskirts of the disputed strip of land between Kukud and Odarka. Amidst Vedic chantings, Swamishri bathed the tombstones of the dead with milk, honey, curd, sugar and ghee and redeemed their souls. The *darbars* from both sides exchanged glasses of water, hugged each other and brought an end to their 200 years of enmity and bitterness. On that occasion, an 80-year-old Jijibha, a descendant of one of those killed in the feud 200 years ago, said, “Peace has been restored because of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. There was no way this could have been resolved. Swamishri took a lot of interest and made persistent efforts to see this happen. He has redeemed our forefathers. There had always been a breakdown in talks to resolve this issue,

but this time there was none. The glory goes to Pramukh Swami.”

By the dint of Swamishri’s holiness many were inspired with faith in God. In 1985, Mr Davis, an accountant, who lived in London, came to see the Cultural Festival of India at the Alexandra Palace grounds. He found the exhibition and the mini-cultural township interesting and beautiful. After a brief conversation with one of our sadhus he was told to come and meet the inspirer of the festival. He was reluctant and said, “I’ve just come to see and I’d like to leave it to that. I don’t believe in God or spiritual matters.” In spite of his bluntness, he eventually agreed to come. He told the saint that he would not bow down to the guru he had been talking of. Both came to Swamishri. After a 10 minute conversation they came out. Mr Davis was touched by Swamishri’s purity. His atheism mellowed and in his own words avowed, “If there happens to be a God and if he wished to come on this earth, then I think he wouldn’t find a purer person than your Swamiji to manifest in!”

Stories of such transformations could run into many reams of paper. But how did Swamishri effect these drastic changes? Was it through some magic mantras or some form of hypnotism? The answer is not sophisticated. In fact, it may appear a little naive, but it is the truth. Pramukh Swami’s unbroken communion with God and his absolute divinity never failed to leave their mark on any individual who came to him. Sometimes the change was tangible and sometimes it was not. If Emerson could derive inspiration by merely sitting opposite Carlyle then the proximity of a holy saint can enrich us with a treasure of inspirations. It was Swamishri’s purity and divinity that impressed and transformed us and rid the animal and hunting instincts in us. ◆

(A Gujarati translation of the text was printed in ‘Brahmopanishad’)



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.

The way that you have continuously influenced me throughout my life is immense, and the number of times I looked at you for inspiration or guidance is immeasurable.

Just remembering a *smruti* from *guruhari* darshan videos, or from Mandir Mahotsav 2014, fills me with tremendous peace and happiness. Your thoughts and ideas that are shared through your touching *kathas* fill me with joy and knowledge. They have motivated me to become a better *balika* and to keep the main goal of *moksha* in my mind at all times.

The divinity that shined through you captivated so many people. With no worry about your physical condition, you did *seva* with no hesitation to please your gurus. This helps me understand the true value of doing *seva* and how we should always make time to do it.

You have always been there to help and guide me when I needed it the most. No matter what problem I was faced with you were always there with me, holding my hand and leading me every step of the way.

- Khushi Thaker, 13, Harleysville, USA, Student

How can I begin to thank you? Words fall short for what you have done for me and how you have loved and supported me throughout my life. My family joined satsang in 2000. Even though I was only 11 years old, I began to learn the value and necessity of a spiritually centric life.

The more I came to learn about Shriji Maharaj, our guru *parampara* and you, the more I couldn't help but be drawn to earning *rajipo* and always making sure that I'm anchored to you. There were crossroads in my life where I had difficult decisions to make, and I faced a lot of stress and felt defeated. But not once did I feel alone. It was all because I knew that no matter what the situation, you would always be by my side. You'd always be in my heart; you'd always be holding my hand.

- Arpita Patel, 30, Detroit, USA, HRIS Analyst

Thank you for always providing me with opportunity to grow in all aspects of my life, having confidence and trust in me to contribute to your cause, and patience with me as I learn from the mistakes that you have continually cautioned me against.

Throughout the various milestones in my life, you have provided me with guidance and advice that have led to opportunities which I could have never fathomed.

One of the first *agnas* you gave me was to bow down to my parents each morning. This helped me to cultivate respect for them, appreciate the sacrifices they have made me for, and have gratitude for the generations of elders who have come before me.

Through these opportunities, you have shown your confidence and trust in me. It is one thing to give me the courage to go out into the world to develop my skills, but it is another to include me in your *karya* and provide me with the chance to contribute to your cause. I have made mistakes. I have fallen. I have unfortunately burnt bridges. However, you never held those against me.

I have viewed each one of these not only as a way to offer my bhakti to you and not only as a way to contribute to your goals, but as a way to say thank you. Your confidence and trust in me were the driving forces in me developing confidence and trust within myself.

Your guidance was felt through letters, *kathas* and interactions. After my repeated failings, it would be easy for a teacher to lose interest; however, that was never the case with you. Your patience was never-ending and is still something I am reminded and grateful of on a daily basis. Thank you Bapa.

- Manish Parmar, 32, Rockaway, USA, Data Scientist

I came to New Zealand in 2012, to study. With no regular mandir and no regular *sabha*, I felt myself being carried away from satsang. After a couple of years, there were days I would skip my morning puja and days I would feel its okay to eat onion/garlic, since 'I'm far away and no one can see me.'

On 13 August 2016, I received the heartbreaking news that, Bapa, you had returned to Akshardham and that numbed me completely. At that point I felt so ashamed of myself because I realized what kind of guru I had. Tens of thousands of people went to India for your darshan. You were continuing to inspire people even when you were not around. That was an eye-opener for me. That was the turning point for me. It's hard to put into words what I felt that completely changed me again, but it was something like 'He gave his whole life for us, and what am I doing in return?'

What you gave us Bapa, was selfless love – never expected anything in return. You had a big heart, always forgave us for our mistakes.

Bapa, you inspired everyone to lead a pure and pious life. You formed a bond with the young and old, poor and rich. You had space and time for everyone. You saw God in everyone.

Bapa, you were and will always be a source of infinite and eternal happiness. Your life is a blessing, a boon for us, and no words can ever thank you for it.

- Disha Patel, 25, Hamilton, New Zealand

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 and 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, Nairobi, Kenya, Student

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'.

On this centenary celebration, may you 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, Johannesburg (Mayfair), South Africa, Accountant

In 1979–80, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Nairobi, it was my first darshan of Bapa. During his stay in Nairobi, I had to travel for some official work duties for about 2–3 days. On returning from my official duties, I went to the temple in the evening for darshan of Bapa.

After the *sabha*, Bapa was walking to his chambers with other sadhus and in between hundreds of other devotees Bapa stopped, called me forward and asked me where I was during the past few days. Then, he patted me on the back saying that 'I will never have any problems in my life.' What is so astonishing is that among hundreds of people, Bapa recognized me (someone who had met him only for the first time).

Bapa's blessings and guidance have always been with me.

- Babu R. Bharadva, Kenya

On my down days I seek you,
On my good days I thank you,
On my great days I praise you,
But every day I need you.
So, Thank You Bapa for always holding
my hand.

In your divine presence, my future is al-
ways bright.
I pray that you remain in my heart always
and forever.

- Manisha Parekh, Ashton, UK

Satsang has become my life ever since you showed me the path. If it wasn't for the loving care that you took to ensure that I was on the right path I can't imagine what a waste this beautiful human birth would've been for me.

I've always felt that you are there for me and showering love over me despite being a girl.

You guided me to become strong in my *niyam*-dharma; to stop eating onion, garlic and eggs in cakes. You surrounded me with the perfect grandparents, parents and siblings that made Satsang a way of life for me. You made the words of the Vachanamrut become super clear so that I could understand the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. You took me under your wings and trusted me to do London Balika Mandal *seva* since 2002.

The Mandir has always been my home ever since it was built. Thank you for giving me all the chances to do *seva* in London Mandir.

Although I was not always very good with hardships, or with having the right friends, I felt your hand alongside me in every challenge, every friendship keeping me aware of the *kusang* so that I would never do wrong. Every day I feel stronger as you guide me through everything. You love me more than I love you and daily I can feel this as things unfold.

Today, I enjoy being part of London satsang thanks to you and there is nothing more that I actually need in my life. Through Mahant Swami Maharaj I am learning to fine tune my understanding and cleanse myself further to see everyone as divine and working on my *brahmavidya* consistently.

All I want to do is be the best daughter, wife, mother and devotee as I continue to do whatever Maharaj needs in your Sanstha via my *seva*.

- Nimisha Patel, 40, London, UK, Global Management Consultant

My Guru

Leading the way, you become the light that guides;
the flame that drives out darkness,
never the fire that destroys the forest.
Hand in hand, you walked at my pace;
the hands that carried me when I struggled to walk,
never the hands that let go when I walked too slow.
Walking right behind, you ensured I wouldn't fall back
always there to support me every time I stumbled,
never forcefully pushing me forward.
Ever-present today through Mahant Swami,
the only constant in the changing world,
the one that never left my side.

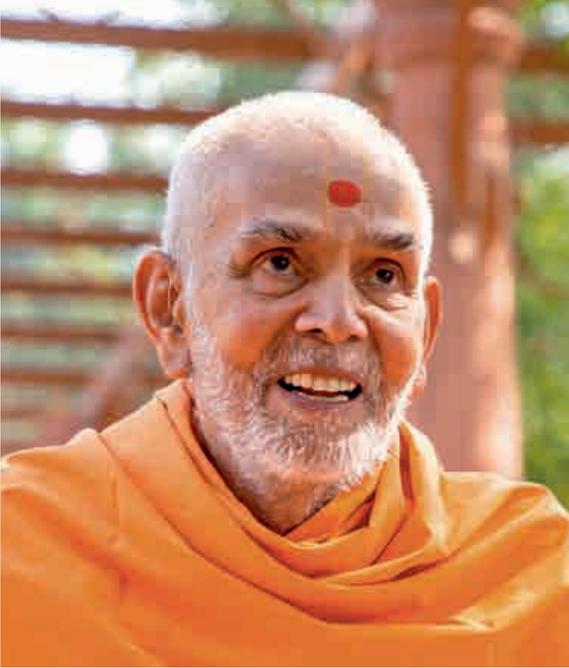
- Suhani Patel, 22, Kingston, USA, PA Student

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

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

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

November–December 2020 and January 2021, Nenpur



For the past 12 months, during the coronavirus pandemic, HDH Mahant Swami Maharaj has been residing at Shantivun, Nenpur. Shantivun comprises of a few buildings ensconced in pastoral surroundings, used for hosting *shibirs* and special satsang assemblies and gatherings. Nenpur is a small village, 32 km from Ahmedabad, sanctified by Gunatitanand Swami and the *paramhansas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj had performed the *pratishta* rituals of a *hari* mandir in Nenpur and the latter was also further sanctified by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj on many occasions. In addition, Mahant Swami Maharaj, prior to becoming guru, had often stayed and addressed satsang volunteers during *shibirs* held in Nenpur.

For the past one year Mahant Swami Maharaj has been spiritually nourishing the worldwide

BAPS Satsang through digital technology. Devotees avail of his online puja darshan, in which swamis and sometimes youths sing bhajans via Zoom from their respective centres. During the day, Swamishri remains engaged in devotion, reading spiritual texts and revealing profound spiritual principles and truths through his discourses. He also provides guidance and blessings for the many BAPS projects and resolves problems expressed by devotees through letters, emails, phone calls, video calls and virtual meetings. Throughout the year he has also celebrated many festivals. Thus, enabling swamis and devotees to experience Swamishri's proximity and divine joy.

Daily, Swamishri prays to Shri Akshar–Purushottam Maharaj for the wellbeing of all in these difficult times. He also follows his routine of daily walks and exercises and listens to the audiobooks of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography.

In the November–December 2020 digital version of *Swaminarayan Bliss* we had carried highlights of Swamishri's news. A brief update of his news is as follows.

NOVEMBER 2020

■ **19:** The local Brent Council of London named the eastern section of Meadow Garth Road, before the BAPS Mandir in London, as 'Pramukh Swami Road' in honour of its inspirer, HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. (For details see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, January–February 2021, p. 85.) Swamishri performed *pujan* of a replica of the name plate in Nenpur.

● Swamishri inaugurated translations of Satsang Diksha in seven European languages:



Swamishri inaugurates translations of 'Satsang Diksha' in seven European languages: French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian and Polish
 French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Polish and Russian.

■ 24: In Nenpur, Swamishri performed the *pujan* of the first stone pillar for the under-construction BAPS Mandir in Una.

■ 30: Swamishri inaugurated a new web portal, www.research.org, of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's academic research wing. This portal is part of the Sanstha's main website, baps.org. The research website will be updated with new research papers and information regarding BAPS Swaminarayan studies.

DECEMBER 2020

■ 3: Swamishri inaugurated a Braille version of Satsang Diksha prepared in Canada and Australia. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, January–February 2021 issue, pp. 81–82.)

■ 7: According to the English calendar, today marked Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday. From Mahant Swami Maharaj's morning puja to the evening celebration assembly, various online programmes portrayed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtues, glory and works.

Also, from today till



Swamishri inaugurates a website portal of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Studies

Maghshar *sud* 8 (22 December), 'Pramukh Parva' or discourses about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine virtues were held on alternate days. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed each of these special assemblies relayed on baps.org and GTPL.

■ 11: The BAPS North America Satsang had organized virtual home visits (*padhramanis*) of Mahant Swami Maharaj with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Two *satsangi* children of North America virtually welcomed Swamishri, performed *pujan* and *arti*. The two children also asked questions to Swamishri, as per the routine in actual *padhramanis*. Swamishri provided wonderful guidance and blessings.

● Today, BAPS volunteers of North India were blessed online by Swamishri. He also blessed and invigorated the satsang of volunteers residing in Shimla and Jalandhar.

■ 14: Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shriji Maharaj's marble footprints to be installed by a giant tree at the BAPS Mandir, Bhavnagar, in memory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who had sanctified the place.



Swamishri performs *pujan* of the first pillar for the BAPS Mandir in Una



બ્રહ્મવિદ્યાનો પાઠ - ૧

At BAPS Center, Mumbai on 22nd Dec 2020



સત્સંગડીક્ષા એવ જે વાંચશે,

મુખપાઠ કરશે તેની

મોક્ષમર્ગે ગતિ કરશે.

૨૫/૧૨/૨૦

૬૫૫૫૧૨



Swamishri performs *annakut arti* on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th Birthday Celebration, 22 December

Swamishri's first Brahavidya lesson: "*Satsang Diksha granth je vanchshe, mukhpath karshe teni moksha marge gati thashe.*"

■ **15:** An online memorial assembly was held to pay tributes to Subhashbhai Patel's (Dar-es-Salaam) passing away to Akshardham. Mahant Swami Maharaj and the *sadguru* swamis offered their eulogies and respects to him.

■ **16:** Today, with the beginning of the holy month of Dhanurmas, Swamishri wrote the first lesson of Brahavidya (see above).

■ **18:** Swamishri digitally blessed four devotees who had pilgrimaged 952 km by foot from Bochasan to Jabalpur. In the past, these devotees had also pilgrimaged by foot from Bochasan to Chhapaiya, Bochasan to Bhadra and other birth-places of the Gunatit gurus.

■ **21:** Swamishri held an online prayer assembly to pay tributes to Shri Harishbhai Dave, former general secretary of BAPS, who passed away today after midnight.

● Swamishri sat with Thakorji in his lap in the middle of a beautiful *rangoli* of flowers prepared by swamis and youths to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday. The divine darshan enthused all.

■ **22:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday was celebrated virtually and in a spectacular way.

● Today, Swamishri inaugurated 'Vachanamrut Brahmasutra Swaminarayan Bhashya' and 'Sarang Stuti'.

● A savoury *annakut* was offered to Thakorji on the occasion of the 99th birthday

celebration. Swamishri performed the *annakut arti*. Furthermore, Swamishri offered a garland via video-conference to the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the sacred pilgrim place of Chansad.

■ **24:** After his morning puja, Swamishri inaugurated a Bengali translation of Satsang Diksha shastra. In addition, he also blessed the swamis, youths and devotees who had unitedly persevered in preparing the spectacular virtual assembly of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday celebration.

■ **28:** A few months before, Swamishri had consecrated 700 *panchdhatu* pairs of Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* that have now been installed in the *ghar* mandirs of devotees in Australia and New Zealand.

Today, another 650 *panchdhatu* pairs of Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* were placed in the assembly hall of Melbourne BAPS Mandir. The swamis there had performed the *mahapuja* rituals of the *murtis*. Finally, in Nenpur, Swamishri performed the Vedic *pujan* and *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and 2,100 printed *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Subsequently, the consecrated printed *murtis* would be installed and displayed on the walls of devotees' homes. Thereafter, Swamishri addressed and blessed all.

● Swamishri also sanctified some bricks to be used for the reconstruction of the Ramji Mandir in Chansad, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited



Swamishri offers *mantra-pushpanjali* to the *panchdhatu murtis* at Melbourne Mandir from Nenpur



Swamishri sanctified the *kalashes* of Bhagatji Maharaj's Smruti Mandir

daily for darshan during his childhood years.

■ 29: In Nenpur, Swamishri consecrated a pair out of the 125 *panchdhatu* pairs of Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* to be installed in the homes of devotees in New Zealand and Fiji.

■ 31: Today, Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Birmingham and Manchester, UK.

● Swamishri also performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of the *kalashes* and flagstuffs for the newly built Smruti Mandir of Bhagatji Maharaj in Mahuva.

● Swamishri performed the *patotsav artis* of the *murtis* of several mandirs shown online. Thereafter, he pressed a remote button to perform *abhishek* of the *murtis*.

● Swamishri heartfully blessed and showered his joy on children, youths and leading devotees who had memorized the entire Satsang Diksha in Sanskrit or Gujarati.



Swamishri during the *mahapuja* rituals, London

JANUARY 2021

■ 1: Over 5,000 families in London participated in a family *mahapuja* from their homes to herald the New Year, 'Akshar-Purushottam na Vadhamana, Shatabdi Family Mahapuja.' Mahant Swami Maharaj presided over the *mahapuja* via a video link. The *mahapuja* was performed by swamis residing in the London mandir. (For details see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, January–February 2021, p. 86.)

■ 3: Swamishri lit the inaugural lamp in Nenpur to inaugurate an online *karyakar shibir* organized by the Children's Activities Central Office, Ahmedabad. Swamishri blessed, "You have been blessed with *seva* as a result of merits (*punya*) earned from countless births. Since you are doing *seva* by tolerating *bhido* Shriji Maharaj is very happy. Do *seva* according to the ways of the Gunatit gurus, wherein lies our benefit. You will attain intense happiness by jettisoning the resolves of your mind and obeying the words of Shriji Maharaj."

■ 10: Today, according to the English calendar, it was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *bhagvati diksha* day. A special online celebration assembly was arranged in which videos of renowned spiritual and other leaders extolling the greatness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was shown. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, "Outsiders spoke glowingly of Swami Bapa. All were drawn to and impressed by him. Swami Bapa did not do works to impress or to show others. In fact, he



Swamishri proclaims the *jholi* call, 'Swaminarayan Hare, Sachchidanand Prabho...'

lived very ordinarily. He believed God to be the all-doer. God resided in him, thus He did everything through him. He held God to be foremost in his life, similarly we, too, should keep God in the forefront. Believe strongly that we are behind God, then everything else will follow.”

■ **14:** Today, marked the Uttarayan and *jholi* festivals. Also, in consonance with the Indian calendar, it was Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 81st *bhagvati diksha* day. In the online festival assembly, a video of BAPS’s worldwide services in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic was shown. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “All have performed selfless services according to their capacities during the coronavirus pandemic. There is no end to the sacrifices rendered by countless people. May those who have offered such services be happy in mind, body and wealth, and also realize *ekantik* dharma.”

Finally, Swamishri placed a *jholi* on either side of his shoulders and hailed the *jholi* mantra, thus providing a unique memory to all.

■ **15:** Swamishri digitally inaugurated the annual *bal-balika karyakar* national *shibir*.

■ **22:** A memorial assembly to pay tributes to the departed soul of Shri Rohitbhai Patel, a leading devotee of Dubai, was held online. Swamishri and senior swamis offered glowing eulogies to his spiritual and satsang services.

■ **25:** Under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations, BAPS introduced a ‘Family Harmony Project’ in India. Today,

the project was also launched in Australia and New Zealand with Swamishri’s blessings. Swamishri performed *pujan* of all the articles to be given to each house visited. Swamishri also prayed for the wellbeing, happiness and consolidation of spiritual faith in all the families involved.

■ **26:** In Nenpur, Swamishri hoisted the Indian flag on India’s 72nd Republic Day celebration. He also prayed for the good and progress of India.

■ **28:** Poshni Punam is Gunatitanand Swami’s *bhagvati diksha* day. Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave *diksha* to Mulji Sharma in Dabhan and declared the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma and his divine abode. Today, marked the 211th anniversary of this historic occasion. During Swamishri’s morning puja, swamis from Sarangpur sang exquisite bhajans about Gunatitanand Swami’s glory.

● Swamishri also inaugurated three Swaminarayan Aksharpith publications translated into Bengali: *Concepts of Swaminarayan Sampradaya*, *Pragji Bhakta* (exam book) and *Sucharitam*.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the occasion, “In whichever *brahmand* Shriji Maharaj goes he always takes Gunatitanand Swami, *muktas* and divine powers with him. The duo of Brahma and Parabrahma are eternal. Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar, who supports countless *muktas*. How powerful he is ! Because of his powers and greatness he blessed countless devotees with *ekantik* dharma.”

● According to BAPS tradition, ‘Brahmotsav’, name given by Swamishri, is celebrated annually amidst a gathering of swamis and devotees, in which an interesting and light satsang assembly is held in a natural venue. Thereafter, every family sits together for a picnic lunch. Today, Swamishri, swamis, *sadhaks* and youths residing in Shantivun took lunch together.

In this way, Swamishri keeps inspiring the BAPS Satsang with satsang and celebrations. ♦

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

South Indian Scholars Recognize the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a Distinct Vedic Sanatan Darshan

5 February 2021, Tirupati



Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan gifted the eternal, Vedic, and distinct Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. By Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes, Mahamahopadhyay Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami presented a scholarly substantiation of this Darshan by authoring the Prasthanatrayi-bhashya.

Shri Murlidhar Sharma, vice-chancellor of the National Sanskrit University, Tirupati, together with other scholars wished to ceremoniously welcome and introduce this Darshan to the National Sanskrit University. Their aim was to offer an opportunity to interested leading scholars of South India to engage in the scholarly study and instruction of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. They invited Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami to the National Sanskrit University to present a detailed introduction to this Darshan. They expressed, "Presently, we have the opportunity to engage in a discussion on the Darshans and other topics with Swami Bhadreshdasji, the

sole *bhashyakar* of the entire Prasthanatrayi who is present before us."

At Tirupati, the scheduled events included over a week of scholarly discussions between distinguished scholars and *bhashyakar* Bhadreshdas Swami. Hosted at the vice-chancellor's residence, these discussions continued for eight days. During this time, Bhadreshdas Swami engaged in scholarly discussions on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan from different perspectives with scholars learned in the Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Dvaita Darshans and in Nyaya and Vyakarana texts. These scholars participated in an in-depth study of the Prasthanatrayi-Swaminarayanbhashya, the *vadagranth* Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha, the 'Satsanga-diksha' section of the Akshar-Purushottam-samhita text, and other works. Bhadreshdas Swami logically and satisfactorily answered all the questions and curiosities raised during these discussions with evidence and according to the Sampradaya's principles.



Consequently, every scholar was convinced that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan was also a principal school of Vedanta and a distinct Vedic Sanatan Darshan, just like the Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita Darshans.

Thereafter, a scholarly symposium was organized on 4 February 2021 at the National Sanskrit University. Eminent scholars from Tirupati, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kanchipuram, Sringeri and other locations gathered for the occasion.

The symposium commenced with a procession organized to honour Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the sacred texts of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. The procession proceeded from the vice-chancellor's residence to the assembly hall. Surrounded by traditional tunes of the *nadasvaram*, scholars joined the festivities, while reciting Vedic mantras and reverently carrying the Prasthanatrayi-bhashya and other sacred texts in their hands.

In the inaugural session, a professor from the University extolled the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and its author by reciting self-written Sanskrit verses. Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami introduced the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan to all present. Thereafter, a scholarly question and answer session was conducted. Bhadreshdas Swami then presented an introduction of the *Satsanga-diksha shastra*, written by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. Scholars were enthralled on examining the work, a contemporary smṛuti scripture. After the vice-chancellor's concluding address, Bhadreshdas

Swami gifted the *bhashyas* to the vice-chancellor. All scholars present were then honoured. The symposium concluded with all scholars presenting Bhadreshdas Swami with a written proclamation recognizing the *bhashyas*: "We collectively proclaim that..."

The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Parabrahma Swaminarayan is a Vedic Sanatan Darshan. It is also unique, original, and distinct from all other Darshans. It is an indisputable fact that by the creation of the Prasthanatrayi Swaminarayan-bhashya, the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan will persist as long as the Sun and the Moon. Swami Bhadreshdasji has authored a unique, historic, and siddhanta-propagating work. Like Adi-Shankaracharya, his methods for composing scripture are comprehensible, lucid, deep in meaning, poetic, void of enmity and other defects, and proficient in advocating his principles. This was experienced by all scholars who examined this work.

Mahamahopadhyay Swami Bhadreshdas, the author of a commentary on the entire Prasthanatrayi, is thoroughly qualified to join the echelons of Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, and other acharyas. For this reason, all scholars wholeheartedly believe him to be decorated by the title: 'Bhashyakar Mahacharya.'

In this way, South India's prominent scholars collectively welcomed and affirmed the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan at the National Sanskrit University. It was a truly historic and notable event in the world of darshanic thought. ♦



First Academic Conference on the Satsang Diksha

16 February 2021, Pune

Mahant Swami Maharaj gifted the Satsang Diksha shastra on Guru Purnima 2020 for all devotees. However, its appeal has extended beyond the BAPS Satsang community. Reflecting the widespread appreciation for this modern-day shastra, the first ever academic conference on the Satsang Diksha was organized jointly by the Sanskrit Department of Savitribai Phule Pune University and the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Centre at Akshardham, New Delhi.

The one-day conference, titled ‘Satsang Diksha: A Complete Shastra for Life’, featured a series of research papers on various aspects of the Satsang Diksha presented by distinguished scholars from throughout Maharashtra. The conference, held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Pune, was chaired by Mahamahopadyay Bhadreshdas Swami.

While presenting their papers, the scholars

offered the following thoughts: Dr Ganesh Thile described the Satsang Diksha as a modern-day Gita. Dr Ravindra Moole said that in addition to it being a guide to daily spirituality, it is also a guide for public life. Dr Dattopasak narrated how the Satsang Diksha is a guide for contemporary social harmony and joy. Dr Javedkar said that it is an outstanding treatise on devotion. Dr Diwakar Mohanty elaborated on how this shastra is a guide to ideally conduct one’s life. Dr Neel Kulkarni explained that the shastra is an excellent guide for sustaining mental and inner health. Dr Dinesh Rasal expressed that the Satsang Diksha is applicable to not only one *sampradaya*, but is relevant for the entire world.

In his address to the conference, Bhadreshdas Swami narrated the profound and widespread spiritual impact that Mahant Swami Maharaj has had throughout the world. ◆



BAPS Donates for the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir

13 February 2021, Ahmedabad



Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani addresses the assembly. Also on the stage are Puja Govinddev Giriji Maharaj (2nd from right side) and Puja Ishwarcharandas Swami (1 st right)

Inspired by HDH Mahant Swami Maharaj, a special ceremonial donation assembly for the Ram Mandir was held at the BAPS Mandir in Ahmedabad in the presence of the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, and Shri Govinddev Giriji Maharaj, a trustee and treasurer of Ram Janmabhumi Tirthkshetra, Ayodhya.

Govinddev Giriji Maharaj said, “Today, we are once again gathered at the very place from where the *pujan* of the Ram Shila for the mandir began at the hands of Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The sacred journey for the Ram Mandir started from Somnath Mandir and can be regarded as the Gangotri of the Ram Mandir journey and that inspiration flows from the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. This Sanstha embodies this nation’s necessity for sincere effort, renunciation, individual commitment and service to India. People ask ‘What can sadhus do?’ But when they see the work these sadhus have done, they will be amazed. And their work of mandir-building is

outstanding. Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj had an intense inner wish that a majestic Ram Mandir be built over his birthplace.

“There are many mandirs dedicated to Bhagwan Ram. But only one mandir is possible over his birthplace. After a long struggle its construction is under way.

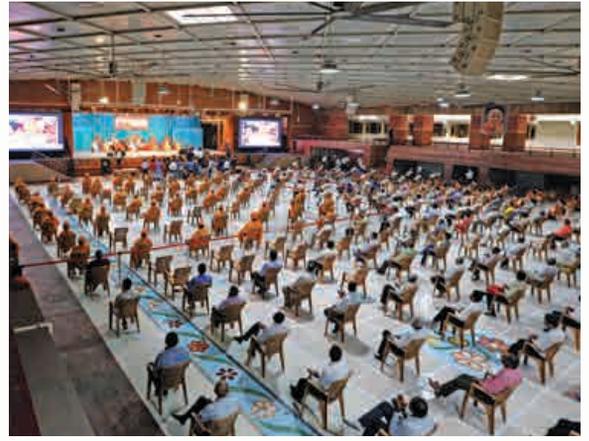
“Bhagwan Shri Ram was the embodiment of morality. He was a national hero. The Valmiki Ramayan states that a nation without Shri Ram does not exist. And we have no use for where there is no Shri Ram. We will create a new Ayodhya wherever Ram goes.

“Bhagwan Shri Ramchandraji was self-sufficient (*atma-nirbhar*). He was the embodiment of all virtues. By establishing this mandir, his divine qualities will pervade the entire country.

“All works that begin at the hands of sadhus are great. Even in other Asian countries, the spirit of Ram will be revived. We will generate faith among Hindus there that Ram is also yours. They



Shri Vijaybhai Rupani presents the cheque to Pujya Govinddev Giri



Devotees and swamis during the ceremonial assembly

will proudly pilgrimage to Ayodhya. By building this mandir, Ayodhya will be the cultural capital of the world and will awaken the sentiment of ‘Vasudhaiva kutumbakan’ – the world is one family.

“India is a capable nation and will use its strengths not to trouble the world but to make it a better place.”

Chief Minister Vijaybhai Rupani said, “Many years ago, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* of the Ram Shila and gave his blessings. He and, now, Mahant Swami Maharaj, have continued to support and contribute to this mandir. They have created magnificent mandirs throughout the world. The Ram Mandir will benefit from their vast experience. From the beginning, Gujarat has supported the building of the Ram Mandir. The *yatra*, in fact, began from Somnath. Also, the Ram Rath began from Somnath. And the Ram Shila Pujan was performed at the hands of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We all wish for a speedy completion of the mandir. That we are witnesses to this is our privilege and joy.”

Thereafter, a ceremonial donation of Rs. 2,11,11,111 (Rs 2 crore 11 lakh 11 thousand one hundred and eleven) was presented on behalf of BAPS and Mahant Swami Maharaj by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami to Pujya Shri Govinddev Giri and Chief Minister Shri Vijaybhai Rupani.

Addressing the assembly, Pujya Ishwarcharan

Swami said, “In 1968, with Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, we went to the Ram Janmabhumi and chanted the *dhun* before the *murti* of Ram Lalla. Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj pilgrimaged many times to the Ram Janmabhumi to pray. He also put in much effort for this mandir. The prayers and sacrifices of hundreds of thousands of devotees is now taking shape. With the building of this mandir, the nation’s pride and heritage will be revived and echo for countless generations to come.”

The assembly was held in the presence of 150 invited guests and saints while observing all Covid-19 precautions.

Special verses singing the glory of Shri Ram were recited. On stage were the Gujarat Head of Shri Ram Mandir Nidhi Samarpan Samiti, Shri Govindbhai Dholakia, and Gujarat Head of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Shri Dilipbhai Trivedi.

During the assembly, videos of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s support for the Ram Mandir and the Ram Shila *pujan* performed by him were shown.

For the Ram Mandir Bhumipujan, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed *pujan* of the Shri Ram Yantra on 3 August 2020 and prayed for the speedy completion of this magnificent mandir. Today, he also conveyed his blessings that the mandir be devoutly built with unity, friendship and harmony. ◆

INDIA

CONSUL GENERAL OF SWEDEN TO INDIA VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

4 February 2021, Gandhinagar



Sweden’s Consul General to India, Ms Anna Lekvall, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar where she was traditionally welcomed by senior volunteers.

During her visit, Consul General Lekvall offered respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and prayed for world peace and harmony. She was moved by the beauty and profound message of Akshardham.

Sharing her sentiments at Akshardham, Consul General Anna Lekvall wrote, “Thank you for a very special tour and visit. It’s truly a magical place.”

UK’S HIGH COMMISSIONER VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

21 February 2021, New Delhi

The UK High Commissioner to India, Alex Ellis, and his family visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. High Commissioner Ellis, appointed to this position earlier this month,



was traditionally welcomed by Jnanmuidas Swami on behalf of BAPS.

High Commissioner Ellis said, “I have come here today with my family to perform the rituals — puja, *arti*, *abhishek* and darshan — to give thanks for our arrival and to hope for the best for our time here in India. I cannot think of a more auspicious place than this temple.” He also noted the important role London’s Neasden BAPS Mandir plays in the UK and throughout Europe.

He spoke highly of the role Indian nationals in the United Kingdom are playing in “protecting us all from Covid-19,” and said he is looking forward to the continued partnership between India and the UK.

High Commissioner Ellis offered his respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek* on the *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni.

Along with his family, he viewed the Gajendra Peeth, the Sanskruti Vihar exhibition and the Sahaj Anand multimedia water show.

High Commissioner Ellis expressed appreciation for the opportunity to visit Swaminarayan Akshardham, “This is a new beginning for me, and seems an auspicious day and auspicious

moment to give thanks, and to think ahead and look ahead.”

Before departing, he added, “[Swaminarayan Akshardham] is a great introduction to the Hindu faith.”

UK & EUROPE

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SATSANG IN EUROPE

24 & 31 January 2021, UK & Europe



On 7 July 1970, during a flight stopover in Paris, France, Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj requested Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami to step onto the land of Europe on his behalf, historically marking the first European visit of the *satpurush*. He expressed, ‘Europe rangvu chhe.’

In the 50 years since, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled tirelessly in several European countries, in the face of untold hardships and challenges, for the sole purpose of fulfilling Yogiji Maharaj’s vision and bestowing paramount happiness upon the devotees. Mahant Swami Maharaj continues that very same tradition today.

A special documentary was produced to mark the 50th anniversary of that historic occasion, which was enjoyed by thousands across the UK and Europe. The fascinating four-hour film incorporated never-before-seen footage and photographs as well as eye-witness accounts from devotees, senior swamis and reflections by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Cherished moments of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s historic and insightful interactions

with the people of various European countries, including devotees, dignitaries and religious leaders, were among the many captivating highlights, along with Mahant Swami Maharaj’s first visit to Europe as guru in 2017.

To mark this occasion families decorated their respective *ghar* mandirs with flags of European countries where Satsang has flourished. A special map was provided to participants allowing them to colourfully mark and date the places where the *satpurush* has visited – similar to the map that Mahant Swami Maharaj had also decoratively coloured.

The programme concluded with blessings from Mahant Swami Maharaj who reflected on the vision of Yogiji Maharaj and the tireless endeavours of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He also blessed for Satsang to continue to flourish throughout Europe in the coming years.

SATSANG PRASAR & MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE 2021

6 February 2021, UK & Europe



Over 2,000 lead volunteers attended the online 2021 Satsang Prasar & Management Conference for UK and Europe.

This annual gathering allows senior volunteers to share and receive important guidance on how to improve serving their respective mandirs, local communities and fellow devotees.

The conference began with reflections from 2020, a year in which volunteers delivered the 25th anniversary celebrations of BAPS Shri

Swaminarayan Mandir, London. Senior *karyakars* also thanked volunteers for their significant contributions to support local communities across the UK and Europe to keep families as well as the elderly and vulnerable safe, informed and connected during the challenging year.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami had sent a video message especially for this occasion in which he provided a contextual summary of BAPS's global priorities, including the forthcoming centennial birth anniversary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Swamis and trustees shared further details on the numerous projects and initiatives planned across the UK and Europe to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centennial. More specific feedback from various departments outlined the important role of every volunteer in delivering this vision.

In his concluding address, Yogvivek Swami reflected upon 2020 and motivated the *karyakars* for the year ahead.

YUVAK-YUVATI VASANT SHIBIR 2021 21 February 2021, UK & Europe



Over 3,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of UK & Europe attended the special online *shibir* themed 'Satsang: The True Lens'. The day-long programme explored how to clear one's *mayik* vision and focus on the true understanding of Satsang, the Satpurush, ourselves and the world around us to attain eternal spiritual bliss.

The day began with the webcast darshan of

Mahant Swami Maharaj's puja from Nenpur, India. After his puja, Swamishri performed the *deep pragatya* to auspiciously commence the *shibir*.

The *shibir* provided practical guidance from *sadguru* swamis, thought-provoking presentations by learned swamis from around the world, introspective videos, specially recorded kirtans, and blessings from *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The delegates were guided on how to identify and overcome one's *swabhavs* as well as cultivating *vivek* (discretion) in one's words and ways, for example, in the use of social media.

The final session focused on the most important tools to help clear one's lens – cultivating a true understanding of the Gunatit Satpurush's *mahima*, developing *dradh priti* for him, and striving to earn his *rajipo*.

Between the sessions, delegates were provided with activity packs to perform with their families to reinforce the messages from the various presentations. Children of the delegates also had fun activities to keep them engaged while parents participated in the *shibir*.

Participants found the *shibir* highly inspiring, with some describing it as 'life-changing', 'eye-opening', and 'the perfect spiritual recharge'.

ASIA PACIFIC

YUVAK-YUVATI SATSANG DIKSHA ADHIVESHAN

1 September 2020 to 31 December 2020



A total of 297 *yuvaks* and 375 *yuvatis* from

across Australia and New Zealand participated in the Satsang Diksha Adhiveshan which involved memorizing verses from the Satsang Diksha shastra.

Starting in September 2020, this competition was conducted in four monthly phases, concluding in December 2020 on the occasion of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday celebration. In each phase, the youths were tested remotely via video conferencing platforms on what they had memorized.

AFRICA

SATSANG SHIBIR: 'GHARNE BANAVIYE MANDIR'

9–10 January 2021



More than 2,450 families across Africa participated in the online Satsang Shibir based on the theme 'Gharne Banaviye Mandir' organized by the Satsang Pravrutti Madhyasta Karyalaya, Africa.

Based on the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Satsang Diksha scripture concisely describes the philosophical principles and daily personal practices of devotion to be followed by all devotees. The *shibir* presented the daily routine of devotees as directed in the Satsang Diksha by highlighting the relevant verses.

To better understand the meaning, methods and benefits of these daily devotional practices, the *shibir* provided guidance on performing personal daily puja and *mansi*, the devotional practices of a *ghar* mandir, offering *thal* and *arti*, and engaging in *katha*, *ghar sabha* and virtual

satsang. The history and glory of the *chesta* was also described. The various topics were presented through a series of video presentations, enlightening discourses by senior and learned swamis, demonstrations and interactive exercises.

The attendees learnt the importance of regularity in observing one's personal *abnik* (daily routine of worship). The families also performed *arti* and offered *thal* at their respective *ghar* mandirs. They also participated in family *samuh* puja and *chesta* singing.

Devotees decorated their homes with posters based on various verses from the Satsang Diksha and created a *shibir*-like atmosphere at home. At the beginning of the *shibir* Mahant Swami Maharaj had blessed, "Maharaj-Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj *badha divya dehe padharshe* – Maharaj-Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj will all attend in divine form."

The *shibir* inspired devotees and families to strengthen their personal and collective devotion to God.

PILING FOR THE NEW MANDIR BEGINS

5 February 2021, Johannesburg, South Africa

In the presence, via video conference, of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and saints from East Africa, piling work for the BAPS mandir commenced. The first pile was dug directly under where Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj will be installed. Foundation work for the mandir will commence in the coming months. Over the last three months, piling work has progressed for the haveli.

Piling is the pouring of concrete columns deep in the ground (below the foundations) to support the actual foundation work that follows.

BAPS CHARITIES

WINTER FOOD COLLECTION FOR THE NEEDY

December 2020, UK

Volunteers from BAPS Charities in 12 centres



around the UK collected food for the needy and homeless as part of its on-going commitment to serve the local communities. The collections at each centre were given to local charities to distribute to the needy during this particularly difficult time.

This year's collective effort did not include clothing due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. However, tinned food, microwavable meals, snacks, soups, milk, fruits, vegetables and other food provisions were donated to Tameside South & Longdendale Foodbank, Manchester (Ashton-under-Lyne); Emmaus Preston; Sutton Night Watch, South London; Brent Foodbank (Russell Trust), London; Sufra NW London; Kettering Community Unit, Wellingborough; NOAH Enterprise, Luton; Loughborough Area Foodbank; Action Homeless, Leicester; Saint George's Crypt, Leeds; Waterlooville Food Bank (Helping Hands), Havant; and The Sparkhill Foodbank, Birmingham.

SCHOOL BOOKS DONATION TO SUPPORT NYATHUNA PRIMARY SCHOOL

29 December 2020, Nairobi, Kenya

BAPS Charities, Nairobi, donated school books to Nyathuna Primary School, which is in Kabete sub-county of Kiambu County and caters for mostly low-income earners who rely on small scale farming for a living.

The school educates over 400 boys and girls from Grade 1 to 8. BAPS Charities donated the full curriculum of books to cater for all students from Grade 1 to 8. During the presentation, the



Principal of the School Mr. Robert Karugo highly appreciated the donation saying the books will go a long way in uplifting education levels of the school, which will in turn uplift the livelihood of the community through education of their children.

BUSHFIRE DISASTER RELIEF EFFORTS

6 February 2021, Perth



During the months of January and February 2021, major bushfires in Western Australia burned over 11,000 hectares, and completely destroyed over 71 houses and properties.

Emergency services personnel from the Fire and Emergency Service (DFES), Department of Parks and Wildlife, and State Emergency Service and Salvation Army Emergency Service (SAES) bravely endeavoured to control the bushfires.

BAPS Charities and its volunteers provided food and transportation to displaced community members, and served over 1,000 hot vegetarian meals to the fire fighters, frontline workers and supporting volunteers. ◆

TRIBUTES



SHRI ROHITBHAJ PURUSHOTTAMBHAJ PATEL, (Dubai)

Passed Away: 21 January 2021; (76 years)

Shri Rohitbhai was one of the pioneers of satsang in the UAE and Middle East countries and his outstanding contributions facilitated the growth of satsang in the region. He served for many years as the chairman of UAE satsang and had respect for all young and old devotees. Due to Rohitbhai's devotion and service, BAPS satsang in the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia flourished.

His grandfather, Shri Dahyabhai Patel, was a staunch devotee of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. With Shastriji Maharaj's blessings, Rohitbhai's father, Shri Purushottambhai (P.D. Patel) started and expanded a lucrative business overseas.

Rohitbhai was born in Bajwa and raised in Mumbai. Then, under his father's guidance, Rohitbhai moved to Dubai to set up a business, which through his sincere hard work grew successfully. He was respected as a businessman of high integrity.

Shri P.D. Patel had a lot of affection for Pramukh Swami Maharaj and served the Sanstha in numerous ways as per Swamishri's wishes. Rohitbhai also had great affection and attachment for Swamishri. During Swamishri's visits to the UAE in 1982, 1985 and 1997, he stayed at the home of Rohitbhai and Purushottambhai. Despite their vast business, they served Swamishri full time during his stays. Swamishri's divine company firmly instilled the values of satsang in Rohitbhai. And he dedicated his entire wealth, home and family in Swamishri's service. Rohitbhai enthusiastically served with the sadhus for every event and activity in the UAE.

In 1997, Pramukh Swami Maharaj envisioned a grand mandir in the UAE. Rohitbhai made this vision his own and, together with Brahmavihari

Swami, endeavoured tirelessly to fulfil it. His support was instrumental and he was involved in the mandir design, foundations and other work.

For over 25 years, his residence has been used by visiting sadhus from India, USA, UK and Africa. Despite the burden this must have caused, he and his family openly and wholeheartedly welcomed the sadhus and served them lovingly.

Due to his special affection for Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Rohitbhai frequently visited India for darshan and to attend the celebrations. He devoutly visited the holy pilgrim places, without concern for any discomforts that may arise.

He was a highly respected and successful businessman, yet he was a loving family man and a very humble servant of gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj and the Sanstha. This attachment for satsang is also evident in his children.

He always eagerly and generously helped even the smallest of devotees. He made significant monetary contributions to many BAPS mandirs, schools, hospitals, festivals, disaster relief works and many other projects. He also contributed financially to many other social causes in the community.

Paying tribute to his exemplary life, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "Rohitbhai truly had the heart of a generous and caring king. That is, he never talked ill about anyone. In fact, he always helped others. He himself had become a mandir. His entire family, Rohitbhai, Manubhai [elder brother], Purushottambhai and all the others have lived only for satsang. His sons, Chiragbhai and Chirayubhai have also developed staunch satsang."

Rohitbhai's passing away to Akshardham is a great loss for BAPS. We offer our humble and wholehearted tributes to such a stalwart devotee, a pillar of dedication, *seva* and devotion. ♦

TRIBUTES



SHRI CHUNIBHAI SHANTILAL CHATURVEDI (Rajkot)

Passed Away to Akshardham: 9 May 2020; Age: 95 years

Shri Chunibhai's father, Shantilalbai, lived in Botad and was drawn into satsang by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. His surname was Upadhyay, but as he was a *chaturvedi* Brahmin, Shastriji Maharaj used to address him as 'Chaturvedi'.

Shastriji Maharaj frequently visited their home in Botad and the family, also served him by providing refreshments whenever Shastriji Maharaj was at Botad train station.

Chunibhai was always a sincere *sevak* who served with great devotion.

When Chunibhai was studying for his Metric exam, Yogiji Maharaj blessed him that he would become a 'double graduate' and pass with 'first class'. However Chunibhai failed. But Yogiji Maharaj blessed him again in the same way. Again, he failed. This happened a total of seven times and on the eight attempt, Chunibhai cleared his Metric exam. Each time, Chunibhai enthusiastically prepared for and gave the exam, without entertaining any doubts. Thereafter, he attained a postgraduate degree and got a job. However, his only wish was to serve and please Yogiji Maharaj.

Yogiji Maharaj first assigned him to serve all at the Rajkot *hari* mandir, then situated in Kadiya Line. Then, he was stationed and offered his *seva* at the Rajputpara *hari* mandir. Whenever Yogiji Maharaj visited Rajkot, Chunibhai would arrange

for Yogiji Maharaj's *padhramanis* by cycling to the devotees' homes.

When Yogiji Maharaj was in Gondal, Chunibhai would serve in the kitchen to cater for the devotees. Having a strong voice he would hail the meal call of 'Vasudev Hare' to invite the devotees for lunch and dinner. Every night before Yogiji Maharaj retired to rest, Chunibhai would report to him about the dining details.

Pleased by his dedicated service, Yogiji Maharaj took him on his 1970 overseas *vicharan* to Africa.

Chunibhai also pleased Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the same way. At Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish, Chunibhai served as pujari for 14 years in the *hari* mandir in Los Angeles, USA.

Chunibhai never missed a Sunday assembly *sabha*, even during his failing health. Also, even as his vision deteriorated, he always performed his personal puja and went for Thakorji's darshan.

His faith and dedication were exemplary. Pramukh Swami Maharaj often remembered him and called him for *labh*. He and his wife donated their home in Rajkot for a *hari* mandir.

Mahant Swami Maharaj paid tributes to his sincere life and satsang, "Chunikaka was an *ekantik* devotee. He is seated in Akshardham."

Till his last breath, Chunibhai's life brimmed with devotion, service and a true understanding of *upasana*. We offer our heartfelt tributes to him. ♦

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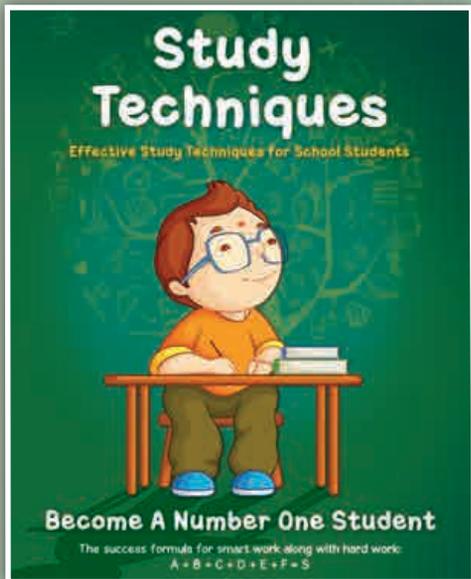
I, Sadhu Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

(Signed) Sadhu Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2021

New
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Study Techniques

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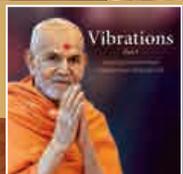
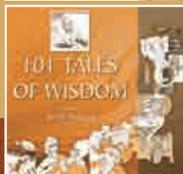
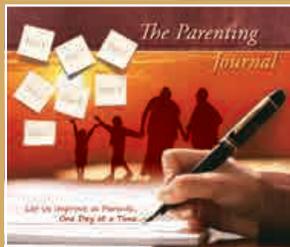
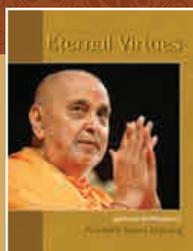
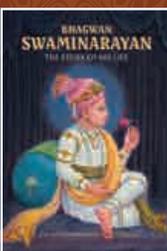
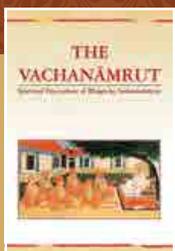


Available at all BAPS bookstores and online at baps.store

 Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad ♦ Inspirer: HDH Mahant Swami Maharaj

BAPS English Publications

Swaminarayan Aksharpath publishes a wide range of satsang books for devotees of BAPS and also inspirational books for an international audience. Books on Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Hinduism, parenting and values have gained popularity in the BAPS and beyond. The publications enable readers to learn about Indian culture, Hinduism, satsang and how to live a holistic life.



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SWAMISHRI IN NENPUR, 21 February 2021

Above: Swamishri participates online in the ritual placing of the first carved Pillar of the under-construction *shikharbaddh* BAPS mandir in Nasik. Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) performed the rituals on site.

Below: Swamishri inaugurates the one-day online Vasant Shibir for the *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of UK and Europe.





**SPECIAL TULA CEREMONY IN HONOUR OF THE SATSANG DIKSHA AND SWAMISHRI
16 February 2021 (Vasant Panchami), Nempur**

On Vasant Panchami 2020, HDH Mahant Swami Maharaj commenced writing the Satsang Diksha shastra in Navsari. To celebrate its first anniversary, Swamishri was honoured, with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in his lap, by weighing him with handwritten copies of Satsang Diksha in an ornate *tula* in Nempur.