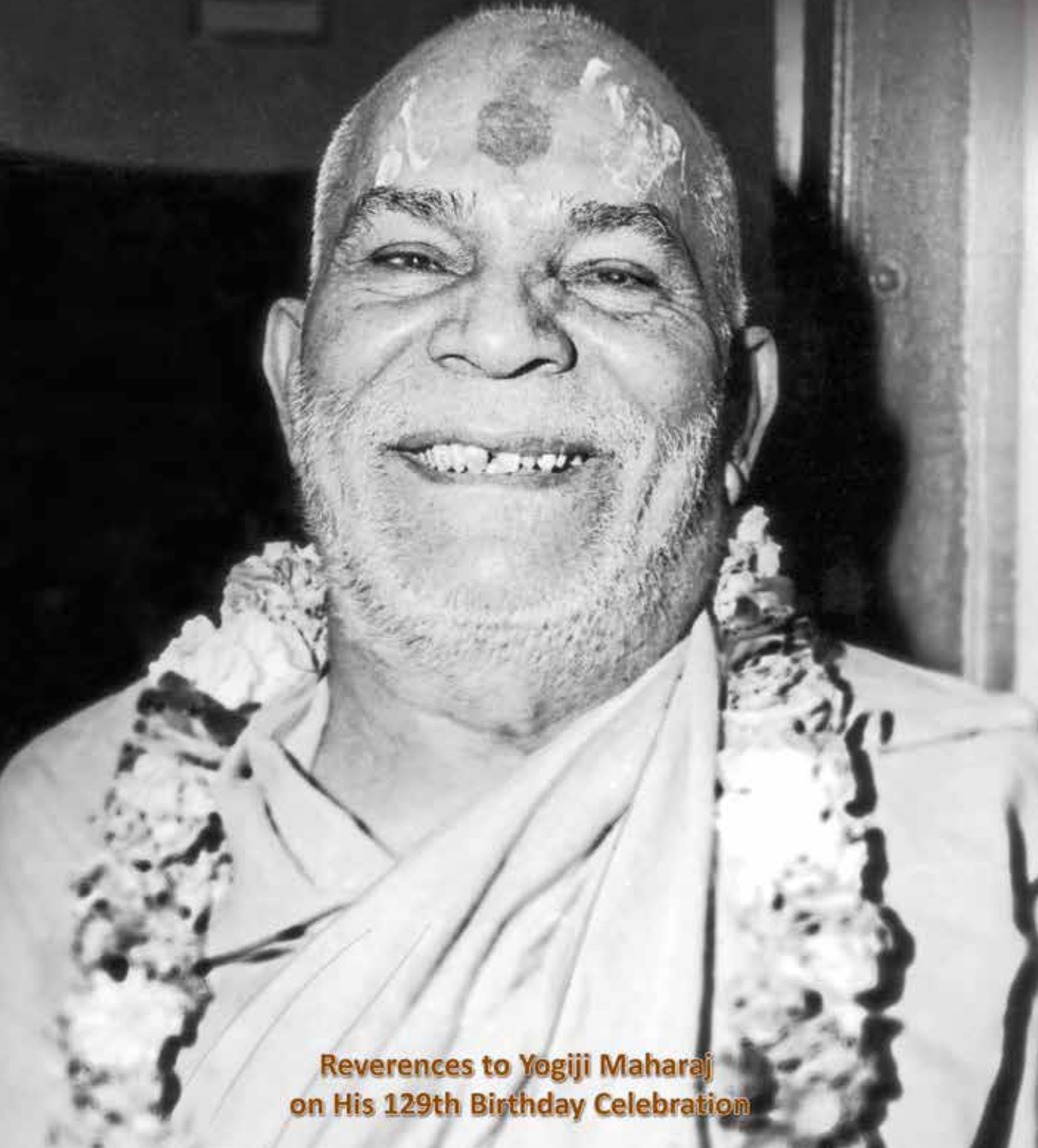


Digital Edition

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2021

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



Reverences to Yogiji Maharaj  
on His 129th Birthday Celebration



## EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPLIES FROM BAPS HINDU MANDIR, UAE, TO GUJARAT

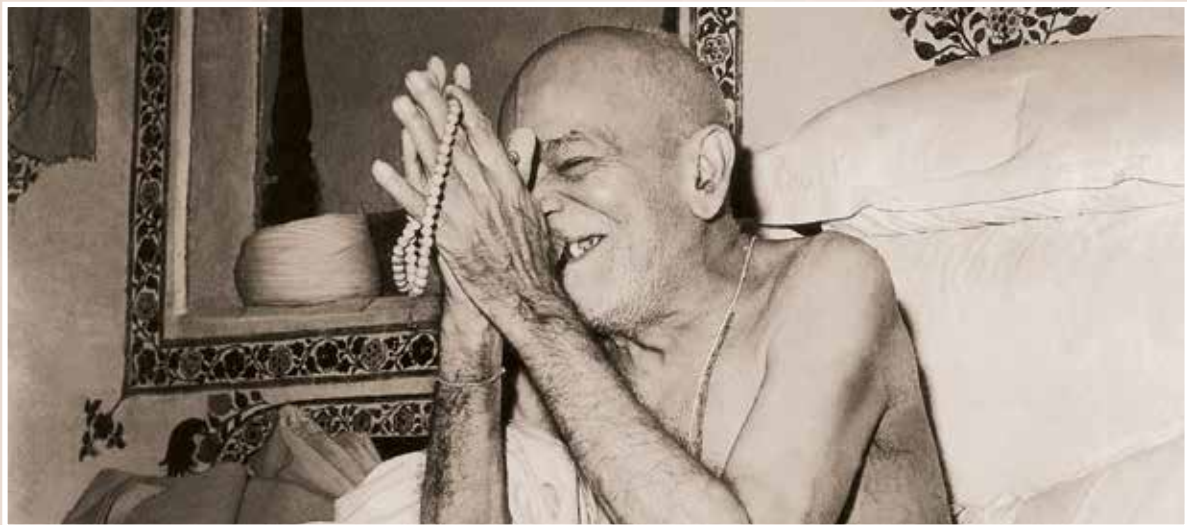
April – May 2021

The initial shipment of 44MT of liquid oxygen from the UAE was donated to local government hospitals:

1. Guru Gobind Singh Hospital, Jamnagar; 2–3. Civil Hospital, Palanpur; 4. GMERS Hospital, Patan and 5. District Civil Hospital, Morbi.

**Note:** Due to the coronavirus pandemic restrictions still in place, Swaminarayan Aksharpith's printing press and offices are not yet fully functional. Hence, *Swaminarayan Bliss* cannot currently be printed. This digital edition of *Swaminarayan Bliss* is being released for the period from May–June 2021. A bimonthly digital edition of *Swaminarayan Bliss* will continue to be published until full functionality is restored.





Yogiji Maharaj's humility and divine joy touched and transformed the hearts of countless devotees and well-wishers



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

Digital Edition

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2021, Vol. 44, No. 3



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

*With Shri Hari's entry into Surat  
the devotees and well-wishers give  
him a devotional and celebratory welcome...*



## GRAND PROCESSION FROM ASHWINI KUMAR TO SURAT TOWN CENTRE

Shri Hari got up and sat in a decorated palanquin. He was wearing white clothes and a rose garland around his neck. He also had some roses tucked above his ears and a bouquet of roses in his hand. The fragrance of roses pervaded around him.

The procession had two army horsemen at the front, followed by more army horsemen, a music band, devotees, sadhus singing kirtans, Maharaj's decorated palanquin, Rampratap and his family, senior *sadgurus* seated in chariots, and *parshads* and Kathi Darbars on horseback.

The procession started moving with excitement and joy. The women devotees, following at the end, were singing auspicious songs. All through the

procession the army horsemen were managing the procession by riding back and forth. The citizens of Surat were doing Shri Hari's darshan for the first time. Each of them rejoiced out of their devotion and faith. Those who did Shri Hari's darshan with the sentiment that he is Parabrahma, Purushottam experienced the bliss of Akshardham. People offered garlands to Shri Hari; some welcomed him with flowers made of gold or silver and many offered him pots containing *barfi*. To accept all this Shri Hari's palanquin stopped frequently along the way. Muni Bawa, Adharanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami walked along with Maharaj's palanquin, and also carried it on their shoulders often.

Shri Hari told Muni Bawa, "I wish to do darshan of Lalji.<sup>1</sup> After that I would like to do

1. To avoid the persecutions of Lolangar Bawa of Khokhra, Ahmedabad, Shri Hari told Muktanand Swami, Ramdas Swami, Swarupanand Swami, Vyapkanand Swami, Paramchaitanyanand Swami and Mahanubhavanand Swami to go to Surat. All the swamis were pained to leave Maharaj and be relocated to a far off place. To remedy their problem Maharaj gave them a *murti* of Lalji and declared, "Through Lalji I will always protect you. Whenever you think of me I shall manifest myself and give darshan to you."

The swamis felt at ease with Shri Hari's blessings. Thereafter, they all travelled to Surat. There, with the help of the main devotees, Bhaichandbhai, Lakshmichand Sheth and others, and Ichchhaba and other women devotees, a place in Saiyadpara was arranged for some sadhus to stay. The stay for the rest of the sadhus was arranged by the Veni stepwell and in a guesthouse. A few days later, a carpenter's house, where there were ghosts, was acquired to install the *murti* of Lalji and for the stay of Adbhutanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami and other senior sadhus along with other sadhus.

No one lived in the ghost-house and no one was ready to buy it either. So, the devotees of Surat bought it for a pittance and made a few changes. Then, a small *sinhasan* was made to install the *murti* of Lalji. In this way, the pillars for the growth of satsang in Surat were established.

When the harassment of the *vairagis* in Gujarat ebbed, the sadhus in Surat would go to Gujarat and then return here. Subsequently, the devotees of Surat got the proximity and spiritual association of sadhus, which reinforced their faith in and devotion to Shriji Maharaj.

- Translated from *Suratwasi Shri Narayanmuni Dev no Shatvarshik Utsav*  
Author: Shastri Harijivandas, p.14

darshan of Nilkanth Mahadev and then proceed to our residence.”

Muni Bawa agreed, “Yes Maharaj, I will give the instruction immediately.”

The divine procession proceeded on all the main avenues of Surat. The people of Surat along with the devotees, hailed the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and welcomed him.

Shri Hari’s grand, celebratory entry into Surat gave the people of Surat a glimpse of his divinity and glory.

### DARSHAN OF THE SACRED LALJI

The procession arrived at the house where the *murti* of Lalji was installed. Shri Hari alighted from his palanquin and entered the house with Muni Bawa and Mukund Brahmachari. Shri Hari did darshan and then took Lalji in his hands and caressed it, asking him, “Are you being served well? And are you eating the sweet foods of Surat?” All smiled at Shri Hari’s words. Again Maharaj spoke to Lalji, “Inspire all to do lots of *seva*.” Then, Shri Hari told Muni Bawa, “I will come here again with all the sadhus and hold an assembly. I will also perform the *arti* of Lalji.” Maharaj then left.

The procession proceeded ahead. After doing darshan of Nilkanth Mahadev the procession terminated at the place of his residence, Lala Karsan Vadi. Here, there were two bungalows. Maharaj’s residence was arranged on the first floor of one of them. Shri Hari went to his first floor residence.

The leading organizers of the procession announced to the devotees, “It is nighttime and Maharaj has gone through a lot of physical strain, so he will retire to bed for now.” Subsequently, the devotees dispersed and the leading local devotees started making preparations for the next day’s meal.

### SHRIJI MAHARAJ HONOURS ARDESHAR SHETH

The next morning, Shri Hari took his bath

in the River Tapi and returned to his residence. Soon thereafter, news arrived that Ardeshar Sheth was on his way for Maharaj’s darshan. Shri Hari called Govindbhai, Lakshmichand, Girdharbhai and Ambaram Vipra and said, “Ardeshar Sheth is dear to the British officers. They have trust in him and vested him with many powers. So, we should honour him accordingly. Tell me what is the tradition here.”

Govindbhai explained, “Maharaj, since it is your wish to honour Ardeshar Sheth we will make the preparations. Sheth is devout and has immense love for you, so he has no wish to be honoured.”

Shriji Maharaj added, “But we should not lapse in our courtesy to honour him.” Soon enough, the leading devotees brought gifts to be given to Ardeshar Sheth: *paan*, a perfume bottle, flower vase, garland, dish of dry fruits, basketful of fruits, potful of *barfi* and other things. Then, several chairs were arranged before Maharaj’s seat for Ardeshar Sheth, his officers and the leading lights of Surat town.

Ardesharji came in a buggy accompanied by pandits Anandrao, Lala Shambhuram, Adityaram and others. Then a few leading citizens alighted from another horse-drawn carriage. As soon as Shri Hari came to know of it he sent Kubersinh Chopdar, Dada Khachar, Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar, Jhinabhai Darbar and about ten leading businessmen of Surat to receive him.

Shri Hari told his sadhus, “When Sheth arrives all of you remain seated. I will get up and honour him. It will not be proper for sadhus to stand up because it is not in consonance with the instructions in the shastras.”

### ONE WHO IS GOD HAS COURTESY AND HUMILITY

When Ardeshar Sheth entered the bungalow Shri Hari got up and walked towards him. On seeing Maharaj, Sheth spoke, “O Maharaj, it is not appropriate for you to come to me.” And so

saying, Ardeshar Sheth bowed his head at Shri Hari's feet.

Shri Hari helped him stand up. Sheth became emotional and his eyes turned moist on seeing Maharaj's respectful love for him. He sat down on the floor before Shri Hari's seat. The citizens of Surat accompanying him were amazed by the scene. They knew the Sheth's mind, nature and power. All were aware of his powers when he punished thieves and plunderers. They thought with surprise, "Today, Ardesharji Kotwal has sat down before Bhagwan Swaminarayan!"

The leading lights of Surat who had come got a glimpse of Shri Hari's greatness and glory. Maharaj took Ardesharji's hand and ushered him to sit on a chair. The citizens of Surat were also offered chairs. Shri Hari asked Sheth about his wellbeing and then got up to garland him. Ardesharji instantly stood up and grasped Shri Hari's hands and said, "Prabhu, you are Bhagwan. There is no need for you to be so polite and respectful towards me."

Then, Muni Bawa spoke, "Sheth, one who is Bhagwan has politeness, courtesy and humility. Others remain stiff and arrogant, believe themselves to be great and impose their orders on their disciples."

Sheth replied, "Guruji, what you say is very true. From the moment I had Maharaj's darshan his attractive form has penetrated my heart. His love is divine. He has attributes to please all people."

Muni Bawa was aware of Ardeshar Sheth's love and at the same time he was aware of his temperament. So, he was surprised by the Sheth's words.

Ardesharji placed five gold coins at Shri Hari's feet. Then, the *parshads* offered Ardesharji dishes of sweets and *paan*. He took a little of the consecrated offerings and thereafter rose water and perfume were sprayed on him. Ardeshar was thus honoured according to his status. The accompanying citizens of the town were also honoured.

They too, were very impressed and experienced good feelings for Shri Hari. They had seen many spiritual heads, of whom some were bloated with pride and many were arrogant about their knowledge. In such cases how could their teachings touch the hearts of their audience?

Ardeshar was aware that some such people were fearful of the name of Swaminarayan and thus opposed Shriji Maharaj. Subsequently, he had placed armed guards outside the Lala Karsan Vadi with the strict instruction that if anyone spoke ill of Maharaj and his swamis they should be arrested and brought to court for punishment.

Shri Hari was scheduled to stay in Surat till 22 November 1824 (Magshar *sud* 2, A.S. 1881). The local devotees had sponsored the daily meals till Maharaj's stay. The citizens of Surat rejoiced with celebratory flair at Maharaj's arrival. They decorated their homes and ignited lamps in glass pots at night. The entire town was illuminated more than the annual Diwali celebrations. The town's people went for Maharaj's darshan in palanquins, horse-drawn carriages and by other means. Lala Karsan Vadi became a unique pilgrim centre for all.

On the day of *ashthmi* Maharaj went to bathe in the River Tapi. After he completed his morning worship rituals he sat on a *hindolo*, made by Dalpatram, a carpenter. The *hindolo* was placed in a makeshift canopied hall, which was situated between the two bungalows. The sadhus and devotees were seated inside the canopied hall, rocking Shri Hari and singing the *hindola* bhajans. Bhanabhai worshipped Shri Hari and offered a garland to him. Shri Hari blessed him with a potful of *barfi*. ♦

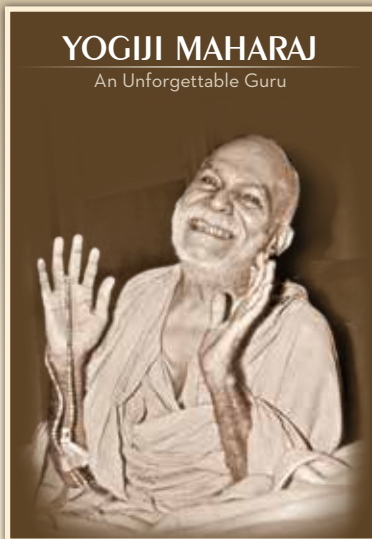
To be continued in next issue.

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



# Enlivening and Enlightening Speeches

*In honour of Yogiji Maharaj's 129th birthday celebration on 7 June 2021 we present this article describing the natural style, content and impact of his discourses. They ignited a great interest in spirituality and awakened the dormant faith in countless souls.*



Translation: Kaushik Joshi  
(Available online: [baps.store](http://baps.store))

Yogiji Maharaj's fluent speeches were not rhetoric. Rather, they were words of profound and practical spiritual wisdom. They sprang from his association with Shriji Maharaj and guru Shastriji Maharaj. The words were penetrating and soothing. Whoever paid heed to them realized the ephemeral nature of worldly pleasures.

Who could utter words such as, "A God-realized Sadhu liberates one from the cycles of birth and death. He equips you to qualify for Akshardham. Believe that you are *brahmarup* and *gunatit*. Develop intense dislike for the worldly pleasures." Such words issued straight from his heart and had the power to appeal to the hearts of the listeners. His words awakened and enlightened people about their own *atma* and inspired them on the path of God-realization.

Yogiji Maharaj did not need a forum to make speeches. He spoke in the early morning, afternoon, evening, night or midnight, during casual conversations and daily chores, while travelling and in assemblies. His words ignited interest in spirituality. No pretensions. The words were meant to be cherished. Words of Vedic wisdom. Words to mould one into an *ekantik devotee*.

His topics included the history of Satsang, glory of Shriji Maharaj, divinity of Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj, the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, and others.

It was characteristic of him to establish a rapport with his audience while speaking. He spoke on a personal plane. He had a natural sense of humour, perfused with wisdom. The value tales he narrated in his speeches were often laced with humour. Humour, that could dispel any doubts.

The devotees were transported to the divine realm during Swami's speeches. They thus felt that Shriji Maharaj was speaking through him. His divine words dissolved the base instincts in all. When Swami concluded his speech, people felt as if they had landed back on earth. They again became aware of their name and physical identity. But the ethereal experience endured to make them follow Swami wherever he went to listen to him and experience the divinity and joy of his words.

\* \* \*

Yogiji Maharaj's words and speeches were heartening and full of life. They could inspire even those who lacked spiritual determination and will.

Swami often told tales with profound meanings. And he never tired of repeating them.

He relied heavily on Swamini Vato, Gunatitanand Swami's words of wisdom. He had committed many of them to memory and explained them with buoyancy. He would explain them lucidly to the audience. Words flowed spontaneously from him. And they would clear the doubts of both the literate and the illiterate. The interesting aspect of his discourses was that he never prepared them beforehand. He sprinkled his speeches with bhajans and anecdotes.

He did not employ much logic or scriptural arguments to drive home the point. He talked about *seva*, affection, attachment and awareness in simple language. Yet it influenced the devotees.

Swami spoke variously on *seva*, greatness of the devotees and the guru, worldly passions and so on. And as he spoke, the air carried the fragrance of the Upanishadic age.

Swami spoke of Shastriji Maharaj often in the course of his speeches. Swami's speeches were interspersed with broken Sanskrit verses, serious philosophical ideas explained in the simplest terms and short dialogues in lighter vein.

With all this, Swami could hold the audience spellbound. And it was great to have the darshan of the divine frame of Yogiji Maharaj – clapping his hands, clearing his throat and laughing spiritedly.

\* \* \*

Swami often observed the satsang assembly while discoursing. If he found a devotee dozing, he would ask him to be attentive.

Once, he saw Shambhusinh, a devotee, napping. Swami at once said, "A nap has no price tag. However, if you were paid ten thousand rupees for not napping, would you do it?"

Swami never missed anyone dozing in the assembly. Sometimes he caught someone on the verge of dozing or yawning. More often, this happened in the early morning discourse or in the post-lunch discourse or at night. Because the

devotees got up early in the morning to attend Swami's puja and discourses, some would feel sleepy and keep dozing during his talks. So, to keep them attentive, Swami used to address the devotees by their names, or by clapping loudly or narrating humorous anecdotes. The devotees loved these wake-up calls and felt good the whole day. Swami's words of love and care touched their hearts to the core and forever remained etched as fond memories.

In the course of the discourse, he would suddenly question some devotees on the topic of discourse at that moment. The devotees whom Swami addressed or looked at were overjoyed. It left a lasting impression on their minds.

\* \* \*

Sometimes Swami chose humorous tales to make the audience laugh heartily.

Once, he asked Ambalalbhai, a devotee of Ahmedabad, "Has your son arrived? Did you meet him? Has Bhalu arrived? The *yagna* is over." Laughing, Swami narrated the story of Bhalu, "Listen! There was a *bawa*. His wife's name was Bhalu. She ran away. To find her, he performed a *yagna*. There were many invitees. Then, the *bawa* inquired, 'Has Bhalu arrived?'

"Somebody replied, 'Yes, she has come.'

"Then the *bawa* said, 'Then the *yagna* is over!'"

The anecdote had the entire assembly in fits of laughter.

\* \* \*

Sometimes, Swami narrated some hilarious events of the past like the following, "Dada Khachar hosted 500 *paramhansas*. It should have caused him great inconvenience. How challenging it would be if we were to accommodate 500 guests at a time? Dada Khachar had food cooked for all of them.

"Once, a sadhu complained to Maharaj, 'Maharaj, the flour has small stones in it.'

"Maharaj issued an order, 'Since Dada Khachar's flour mill grinds flour with tiny stones, all the sadhus shall now grind the grains



themselves.’ All the sadhus were surprised by the order. They thought it would be troublesome to grind the grains and wondered who had complained to Maharaj? Then the sadhus started grinding as Maharaj had ordered, and while grinding they used to sing kirtans, remembering Maharaj, ‘Welcome to the grinding stones to grind.’ Maharaj heard this. He said to himself, ‘They want me also to grind!’ Then Maharaj revoked his order and told the sadhus, ‘Now there’s no need of grinding. Do what you had been doing before.’”

Swami drew his own inference from this episode, “Maharaj used to hold such endurance tests. But the sadhus did not find it embarrassing in anyway, whatever.” And he further said, “One who observes the five vows religiously, shall not ever find it irksome if I make scathing remarks about him or make him give up his habits to do only that which pleases me most. One who shows such mettle is a true *satsangi*.”

\* \* \*

Swami’s words were indeed stirring; they appealed to the devotees. He commented on Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 1 in the following words:

“We have heard the first Vachanamrut. The last question is that of Harji Thakkar. How come we can’t love the *brahmanized* Sadhu intensely despite our long stay in the Satsang? To love intensely is to love greatly. Anybody can love superficially. Why can’t we intensely love the Sadhu? Maharaj replies, ‘It is because we find faults in the Sadhu. The Sadhu speaks to us to help us get rid of base passions. If one believes the Sadhu to be divine, one can love him intensely.’

“We should deeply love Maharaj and Swami forever. How much do you love your sons?

“Mulubha Darbar used to live in the Bhal region. His son’s hand got crushed in the hinge of the door. So, the Darbar shouted, ‘Oh! My God.’

“The boy did not cry, though. Somebody asked the Darbar, ‘Darbar, you are not hurt. Yet why did you shout?’ This is what is called intense love.

“We can earn *moksha* only if we love Maharaj and the *brahmanized* Sadhu to such an extent. Let me cite another incident:

“Maharaj wrote letters from Bhadra addressed to 18 devotees, ‘Reach Jetalpur from wherever you are, leaving all your work aside, to be initiated by Ramdas Swami and then come to Bhuj to meet me.’

“The letter reached Sura, Allaiya, Mamaiya, the Darbars, and the wealthy like Bandhiya’s Dosabhai. All of them left. Out of them, one was Methan’s Aja Patel’s nephew, Kalyandas. He was getting married. He received the news of the letter in the midst of the wedding rituals. On reading it, he thought over the words ‘and others’ after the names of the 18 devotees. He thought, ‘I am one of ‘the others’.’ He asked the Brahmin to wait as ‘he had to go to answer the call of nature’. He had finished three rounds of the wedding ritual and the last one remained, but then he ran away, scaling the fence of samsara.

“This was an unprecedented event in the history of Hindustan. All of them went to Bhuj after initiation. Maharaj himself went to receive them, ‘O! All of you have obeyed my order.’ Maharaj was three kilometres away from the group of new sadhus. He came to receive them, prostrating. Sura, Allaiya, Virdas and other *paramhansas* were approaching, prostrating from their end. Maharaj hugged them and tears welled up in his eyes out of exultation. Kalyandas had performed an extraordinary feat. So, Maharaj named him Adbhutanand.

“Two Darbars of Allaiya village also received the letter. They also got ready. Their mother said, ‘We have grown cotton in 200 *vighas* of land. You may go after picking it.’ The Darbars thought, ‘It will take a long time.’ Maharaj has ordered us to start at once. So, they called a cowherd and asked him to bring 200 of his cows and let them eat the standing crop on their land. Thus, they disposed of the crop and then informed their mother, ‘Mother, the cotton has been stocked in the room.’ Their

mother then permitted them to go.

“One took off his *kediyu* (traditional upper cloth) while the other tore it off thinking he won’t need it ever again and left. This is what we call intense love.”

“Think whether you can love Maharaj and Swami so intensely. If you can, you rank first. If you can’t, try to love so deeply.

“If you can love Maharaj and Swami so intensely and ardently, you have achieved the ultimate. It does not matter whether you are highly educated or not, whether you are skilled or not and whether you earn big or small amounts. God and his Sadhu will nevertheless provide food for you.”

\* \* \*

Swami’s speeches were relaxing, free from ego and touched the hearts of devotees. He once said, “I was very timid by nature. But like a suckling child clings to his mother, I came along with them [sadhus who joined Shastriji Maharaj from Junagadh]. I was not very intelligent and was a stranger to the Charotar region. There were two persons who tried to prevent me from coming. I was very meek and simple. But I felt emboldened. One would not like to leave the company of *sadgurus*, but I was very keen to please Shastriji Maharaj.”

His speeches were not mere words. They were essentially *brahmic* utterances.

Mahamandaleshwar and learned sannyasi Swami Kashikanandji of Ahmedabad aptly said, “I have read a lot on the glory of words in the shastras, but today I’ve felt its influence. The shastras speak of the glory of spiritual words (*shabda-brahma*), but I could feel their impact while listening to Yogiji Maharaj. His words are blissful and their impact is strong. His speech may contain grammatical errors, but it greatly appeals to both the mind and heart. I cannot comprehend fully what he says but his speech is full of wonderful brilliance.”

Many dignitaries came close to Swami and began to revere him, influenced by his speeches.

In Zambia, Veljibhai Patel introduced Yogiji

Maharaj to Mr Irane, who came for darshan daily while Swami was in Zambia and sat in the satsang assembly till the end. Once, Veljibhai asked him, “You don’t speak Gujarati and Swami doesn’t speak English. So, why do you sit through the whole assembly?”

Mr Irane at once replied, “I cannot make out anything, but ever since I started coming here, my problems are being resolved. I feel at peace within by having his darshan and listening to him. Such a holy man does not need the medium of a language to communicate with. He knows how I feel about him. Such a sadhu is a rarity.”

In Mombasa also, a native African used to attend the two-hour long satsang assemblies though he could not understand English, Gujarati or Hindi.

In Nyasaland, a European had darshan of Swami in a dream. When Swami went to Nyasaland, he went to see Swami and expressed his wish to talk to him. The sadhus told him, “Swami does not speak English.”

Yet, he insisted on meeting Swami. He sat with Swami for 15 minutes and after coming out, said, “Swami talked with me on the topics which I wanted him to speak.”

Swamishri spoke spontaneously, without any effort, from his heart.

\* \* \*

Swamishri had this to say about speeches, “We hear many spiritual talks, but only when they appeal to you, are they worthwhile. Talks can indeed work miracles. Only when they are stirring is one awakened to lead a spiritual life. Mohanbhai often says the couplet, ‘The Sadhu is all munificence and large-hearted.’ This verse is a fitting tribute to the Gunatit Sadhu such as Shastriji Maharaj. Only after realizing such glory can one say that one has hit the target.”

Swami’s words always found their target. Those who were touched by his words became staunch devotees. ♦

Translation: Kaushik Joshi

# My Experience of Yogiji Maharaj

*Shri K.N. Rao visited Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, in 2007.*

*Thereafter, on 20 October 2011, he wrote about his experience of  
Yogiji Maharaj, whom he had first met in 1970, Gondal.*



**A**t the end of December 1969, I was posted as a senior Deputy Accountant General in Rajkot, Gujarat. Rajkot then had a population of just about three lakhs, a small quiet, relatively prosperous city with a throbbing atmosphere of spirituality. The residence allotted to me was near the Panchanath temple where I attended bhajans every night. Slowly I heard about the Rokadiya Hanuman Baba, where I went every evening to do recitation of the Tulsikrit Ramacharit Manas and Hanuman Chalisa. The office staff seemed to have reacted well to me and found me to be an unusual head of office, who instead of joining a club as my predecessors had done was spending time in bhajans in

the evening. They told me of other spiritual figures in and around Rajkot. One such office member, perhaps by the surname of Joshi, told me of Yogiji Maharaj, who was in Gondal near Rajkot, and the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. He asked me whether I would be interested in having his darshan. I said that I would be very happy. I had no such advantage of reading or knowing much about the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and Yogiji in 1970 before meeting him. The small bits I could pick up were: 1. The Sampradaya was founded by a saint of northern India, perhaps of Ayodhya. 2. Yogiji was fourth in the line of succession. 3. It was Yogiji who spread the (BAPS) Swaminarayan Sampradaya all over the world. 4. The initiated swamis in this Sampradaya strictly avoid money (*kanchan*) and women (*kamini*), which Ramakrishna Paramhansa had also asked his *sadhaks* to avoid totally. I have not seen this instruction being followed so strictly, sincerely and to the letter in India or abroad, as I saw during my tours of USA (1993–95) when I visited the BAPS Swaminarayan temples in both Houston and New York. I also learnt that if these vows were violated, the initiated disciples (only swamis) had to do penance, *nirjala upvas*, or fasting even without water for a day or more. 5. The followers of the Swaminarayan faith read the Gita and mostly the eighth (Aksharbrahma Yoga) and fifteenth chapters (Purushottam Yoga). Mentally, I was prepared to see all this before visiting Gondal and having the darshan of Yogiji. I went to Gondal at the earliest, sometime in early 1970. Gondal was described as a progressive, princely state during British rule, with lots of people interested in spiritual life and Ayurveda. I was told Gondal had



many palaces worth seeing, but I told my friend that I was interested in having the darshan of Yogiji and not in sightseeing. I was taken straight to what was like an ashram with a temple. There, in a room, slightly spacious with carpets spread all over the floor, in the middle sat Yogiji on an asana with his disciples and also some visitors, I presume. I was introduced to him and he called me straight to him and I sat near him for many hours. He was talking in Gujarati, not Hindi, but it was easy for me to understand. His face, radiant, his smile so broad and never leaving him, his protruding teeth, slightly shriveled body, upper part of the body totally uncovered is what I vaguely recollect now after four decades. He patted me on the back, as he did to everyone, with his hand, with a thud but palms soft like a cushion. That I learnt later was his way of greeting people. I have met many saints all over India, many fakirs, but never anyone so cheerful, always smiling, so childlike and shaking his head while talking and lisping also. Sometime after, I started falling into meditation. I had, therefore, no questions to ask. His presence inspired divine silence inside me and outside. I do not remember how long that lasted, but after sometime he told me and others to take *prasad* (meals). Sometime after the meals we came again, sat with him and the experience of meditation and bliss flowing from it repeated. That was the most ecstatic memory

I had of my first meeting with Yogiji. Somedays after, I was taken to him again. This time I noticed what I may have missed during my first visit. His cheerfulness was most infectious – child-like simplicity, yet so divine. No one could remain in any type of depression as what many had told me and experienced. One of his devotees told me that any person in utter depression had only to go and sit near him to experience it, without his even uttering anything or even talking about his problem it vanished. His cheerfulness was so infectious, all pervading. It was during the time of Yogiji that the Swaminarayan movement spread globally; in Africa and UK I was told. Soon Yogiji was to visit Africa, I learnt. Sometime later, after I had been transferred to Ahmedabad, I lost touch with Yogiji but I remember seeing his photo appear in the Times, London, a photo of Yogiji getting into an airplane.

The Swaminarayan gurus never displayed their *siddhis* which danced round them. Sometime in 1971, I heard that Yogiji had taken *samadhi*. It was like a stab in my heart. On such occasions I remember a couplet of Tulsidas, “*Bandau sant asajjan charnā, dukhprad ubhay beech kachhu barnā; Bichhurat ek prān hari lehi, milat ek dukh dārun dehi.*”

Meaning, “There is no difference between a villain and a *sant* because both cause pain – one while meeting and the other while parting.” ♦

- I am not a leader! I am a servant. My importance lies as a dishwasher – in doing menial *seva*.
- The faults of even the most junior of devotees never arise in my mind. I do not see such things! I do not allow myself to see such faults. I see them all as *murtis* of Brahman. Never do I feel they are worldly. I believe them to be divine.
- I prefer doing *seva* and I am greatly pleased if the names of Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami gain popularity.
- I have always acted according to the wishes of Shastriji Maharaj, but not according to the calling of my own mind. So, Swamishri has become extremely pleased. And today he gives darshan and I experience bliss.

## JIVAN BHAVNA

Yogiji Maharaj's  
Life-Feelings



# TWO HANDS

His were special,  
His were sublime,  
Yogiji Maharaj's two hands were simply divine.  
A spiritual reservoir, unique and fathomless,  
His two hands – gentle and rejuvenating.

Complete and capable,  
to soothe all problems.  
Primed to inspire and cure,  
With boons that truly endure.

Freely blessing everyone,  
With love and compassion.  
Two gentle hands, always in motion,  
Patting and clapping and raised in joy;  
Blessing, applauding and approving.

The boom of his pat,  
The rhythm of his clap,  
And the joy of his wave –  
Sights which even the devas  
Rushed to behold.

His smile and grace synergized,  
Comforting, calming and caressing;  
Praying, pacifying and purifying.

After the *sabha* all lined up  
To receive his legendary pat.

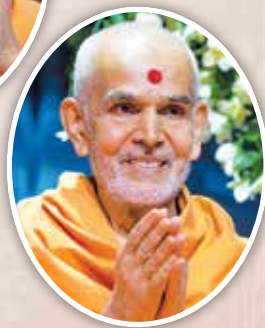
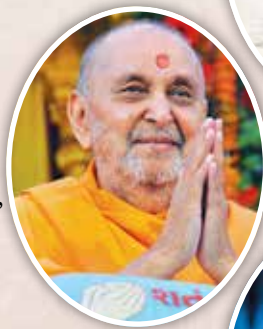
Sometimes with two, sometimes with one  
The boom of his hands on the back – His 'dhabho'

Unique and memorable,  
Received with pleasure,  
Felt with affection,

An ecstasy to cherish forever and ever.  
Then, the same two hands continued to bless  
through Pramukh Swami.

And, now they perennially bless through the hands  
of Mahant Swami.

Yogi Bapa's two hands will live forever.



# Let Us Learn This Much from Pramukh Swami Maharaj



*Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote an article in Gujarati about Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthday celebration. It was printed in Swaminarayan Prakash, December 2019*

**B**hagwan Swaminarayan says, “Sant [Satpurush] is the basis or support of the world.” One cannot imagine a culture without the Sant. He is the life-breath of culture.

Three astronauts travelled to the moon and returned to earth before the stock of oxygen they took was used up. One can live without food for one month, a week without water, but one cannot live without air for even a minute. Such is the importance and indispensability of air, yet it is free of charge. Oh, how compassionate the creator is! One may probably not find water in the desert, but one will definitely get air. Both, a king and a pauper, require air. Similarly, the need for the true Sant is required by all the inhabitants of earth.

In England, a research was carried out to study the ancestors of prisoners in one jail. The result showed that 1,200 prisoners in that jail were the descendants of a couple who had married and lived 400 years ago. Imagine, if the couple had not met and married in the first place there would not have been 1,200 criminals.

In a similar context, if Ram, Krishna, other avatars and rishis had not come on earth then our earth would have been overwhelmed with evil people today. The great work the divine avatars

and sadhus did was to establish virtues in society. And through time these virtues spread and multiplied. Through the good conduct of people they consolidated faith in others towards Bhagwan and the shastras, dharma and service to others. Today, after conducting scientific studies and evaluations on true values, scientists and psychologists have started firmly believing that by re-establishing them in society one will get the best and concrete results.

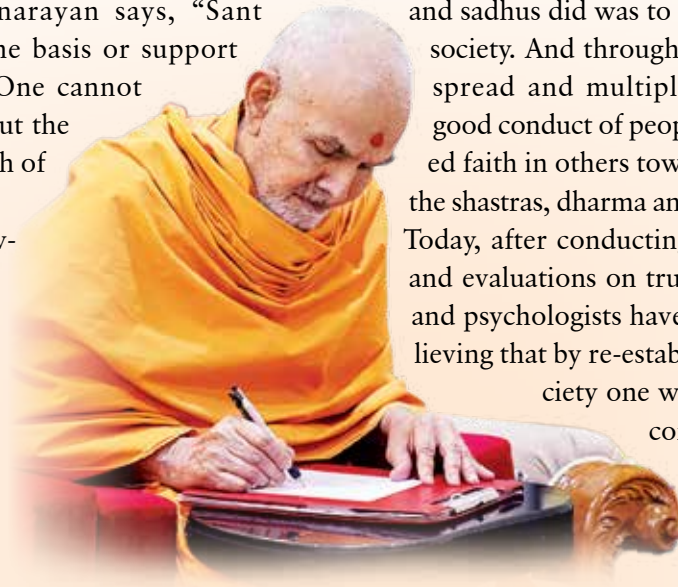
If the sadhus had not made such contributions, our human

society would have lost etiquette and culture and become chaotic. For the support and nourishment of the earth the Sant is present at all times.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a unique Sant. Dr Radhakrishnan said that we are able to live today not because of scientific inventions, but because of the *sants* who travel in society and elevate it.

Vashishtha, Valmiki, Shukji, Naradji and other sages have kept India alive. In all eras, some Sant, be it in the West or East, has the same message of elevating life.

The Sant is like rain, dousing the fires of worldly desires, sense pleasures, hatred and pain. One's sufferings are dissolved by the Sant's darshan, words and touch. The reason being, the Sant is always in communion with Bhagwan. The mere darshan of the Sant purifies people. There





are many examples in world history of hardcore sinners being purified by the mere darshan of the Sant.

An association with the Sant dissolves all types of ego and creates a divine atmosphere. Many strata of people: royals and politicians, wealthy, scholars, intellectuals, great persons, children, youths, teachers – have met and received Swamishri's blessings and attained personal life-transformations. Swamishri provided the moral warmth and faith of living life to scores of people.

What a yawning gap there was between Swamishri and youths and Swamishri and children! Swamishri was perfectly spiritual, whereas youths were utterly worldly! Swamishri had not achieved educational degrees, whereas youths were educated! The youths were infatuated with material things, whereas Swamishri was absolutely detached! In spite of all this, Swamishri blessed the youths and made them fortunate by inspiring them to perform puja, *mala*, *seva*, and practice the virtues of *jnan*, *vivek* and humility. If that is not a miracle then what is?

All easily bonded and fell in love with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They trusted him naturally. To please him they observed *niyam*-dharma, self-control, justice and morals.

Swamishri was a Sant who did good for others. He unravelled the social problems of devotees in such a way that thousands of families refrained from going to court. He became the custodian of their happiness and problems by virtue of his wonderful and sure-fire solutions and inner feelings. He inspired countless to jettison their cunning and revengeful natures, and their propensity to take or grab what belonged to others. He repaired splits between innumerable families by instructing them to "let go", "give up your resolve" or "strike a compromise". He had restored relations between fathers and sons that had gone haywire or sour. He solved land issues between family members by inspiring harmony and love between them. He resolved with ease stubborn

issues related to land, property, money or things that had been lingering for years. Swamishri had instilled in the devotees the attitudes of true justice, honesty, sacrifice and service to others. These are all the cures of illnesses that afflict the mind.

John F. Kennedy said, "The greatest, the noblest, the highest benefit a man can give to the world is his pure and spotless character."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's greatest contribution to society was his efforts to build character. His message for youths was, "Strengthen character [in oneself] and prepare a society having character." To achieve this Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself was a role model, the pathway and the goal. There are no schools that teach character. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was like a living, mobile university. What books and teachings on character could not give, one could acquire through his mere company.

If you look at his work on anti-addiction alone, countless came to him or visited his anti-addiction camps during festivals to take pledges to refrain from their habits altogether. Subsequently, the millions of rupees saved by those who gave up addictions, and then used the money for the benefit of their family, were in fact hefty donations to society. If one were to think of Swamishri's donation to society in this context it would come to a staggering figure!

Whether it was Swamishri's famine, earthquake or flood relief works, each were always ideals and hallmarks of service to society. For many social workers Swamishri's works are like landmarks. All derive inspiration from them to do something for society. In this way, Swamishri easily taught the lessons of service, morality and faith in people.

Devotion to God and faith in God were his forte. All are inspired to imbibe them, and as a consequence the task of character-building of our nation is taking place.

Muktanand Swami's bhajan, "*Rājā bhi dukh-iyā, rank bhi dukhiyā...*" is also relevant today.

People are restless and lacking in peace, even though their reasons may be different. Everyone is running after material objects and comforts out of their desires and infatuations. One who has excess food to eat cannot digest it; and those who can digest food cannot get it. The rich are entangled in desires. Swamishri provided a remedy to lack of peace and restlessness.

Thinkers say, “You are your mind.” So many feel vanquished and experience despair because they have been defeated by their minds. The mind is thrashed, suffers fractures, is blown to pieces and thrown into a gutter because of the rise in immoral reading, thoughts, eating and drinking habits. In such conditions how can one erase one’s ignorance, infatuation, desires and *maya*?

Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, “When one’s mind is stable and calm one experiences peace.” To conquer the mind, Swamishri made available to us so many spiritual discourses, services and activities during festival celebrations, purity of thoughts and moral codes (*niyams*), practical teachings in daily life, and sentiments that God is all-knowing.

Swamishri yoked the minds of countless people with God and blessed them with bliss. His calm face, compassionate eyes, sweet and truthful words, and divinity – were all so easily perceivable that by coming to him everyone’s mind became calm and stable, free of spiritual ignorance and illumined.

They also gained a positive understanding and became liberated from chronic bad habits and base instincts; and finally their lives became absorbed in God.

These are Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s contributions! Truly wonderful! Effective! Eternal! All facilitate in realizing the ultimate goal.

## WHAT WILL WE LEARN FROM SWAMISHRI?

His birthday celebrations will give us *amrut* (immortalizing nectar) to drink. So, what drops of *amrut* will we drink from his life? What shall we

learn from Swamishri? Let us have a look at what he liked and the principles he innately possessed, which will throw light like the sun to purge our darkness of infinite births.

■ Do your sadhanas with intense honesty and truthfulness. No matter how much you polish, decorate or put brass to the test, it will always remain as brass. It will never become gold. And on the other hand, gold will always remain gold no matter what its shape or how old it may be. Likewise, one will not be able to offer true bhakti when one has a tendency to pretend, show off or impress others. Bhagwan or the Sant will not be happy with this and neither will one experience inner peace. Only when one offers bhakti with heartfelt feelings, love, faith and in abidance with *niyams* will one’s devotion attain the height of Swamishri’s bhakti.

■ Make efforts to attain and please Bhagwan, but not to gain worldly things.

■ Imbibe saintliness and goodness in yourself so that you can instil their fragrance in all your works.

■ Do not waste a second. Use your time to always do good to others and in serving God.

■ Have intense trust in the guru’s words and always be humble.

■ Do not cry about your miseries in times of difficulty and hardship. Believe Bhagwan to be the all-doer, so that you can tolerate easily.

■ *Agna* and *upasana* means anchoring to morality and in God’s form respectively. Never lapse morally and live a spotless life.

■ Have robust faith in Bhagwan and not in sadhanas or karmas.

After writing this much I feel I have expressed nothing. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the Meru of virtues. To know him is not an ordinary feat. However, to know this much will be useful to you.

Finally, I pray to him, “O Swami, may you help us realize your [divine] form and transport us to sit near to Purushottam [Bhagwan].” ♦

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

# Perceiving All to Be Equal

## (Samdrashta)

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

The sun shines for all. The clouds shower rain upon everyone. The moon's coolness gives calmness to all. This is yours and this is mine – such thinking is parochial or narrow-minded. Having a perception of equality towards all is attained when one believes that one is for all and everyone else is equal to oneself. Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) was friendly to all living beings. In fact, he was an embodiment of non-discrimination. In other words, he perceived all with an equal eye; harbouring no discrimination or distinctions of high or low, educated or illiterate. He was endowed with *brahmadrashti* (divine vision).

In 1986, Swamishri met President Giani Zail Singh at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. After a dialogue of 25 minutes Swamishri wished him well and gave him a *mala*. Thereafter, the president broke his protocol and walked with

Swamishri to his car and paid his respects and bid him farewell. Only once before had the president broken his protocol – when he walked with the prime minister to the elevator. When Swamishri was about to exit the main gate of the Rashtrapati Bhavan he told the driver to stop for a while. Swamishri then met the gatekeeper cordially and appreciated his service of showing them the president's quarters.

Swamishri respected and appreciated all regardless of their social status and distinctions.

The Mayor of Nairobi, Mr Nathan Kahara, felicitated Swamishri with a 'crest'. He was deeply impressed by Swamishri's simple and humble personality that he had sent his car to bring him to the Nairobi City Council Hall where a satsang assembly had been organized. Thereafter, he also sent his car to drop Swamishri back to the mandir. On the way Swamishri struck a conversation with the mayor's driver with the help of an interpreter. Swamishri asked about his family and wellbeing. The driver was touched and opined, "What a great guest he is! He became so cordial with me in such a short time." For years he had been driving





Swamishri holds a mirror for Svetanshu to see his *tilak-chandlo*

the car for the mayor and many dignitaries, but no one had shown such interest in him. He was overjoyed and responded, “Swamiji, do you have some spare time? I would like to show you the whole of Nairobi city.” Swamishri not only forged a bond with the mayor but also with his driver with equal ease and joy.

In 1988, Swamishri was honoured by the British Parliament and by officials of many cities and towns in innumerable countries. They were noted in many records, but it was difficult to chronicle the countless heartfelt welcomes to Swamishri by ordinary devotees. Even if it were possible to do so, how could their sentiments be described?

Swamishri met one and all, whether they were rich or poor, old or young, urbanite or ruralite. No human borders or distinctions circumscribed Swamishri.

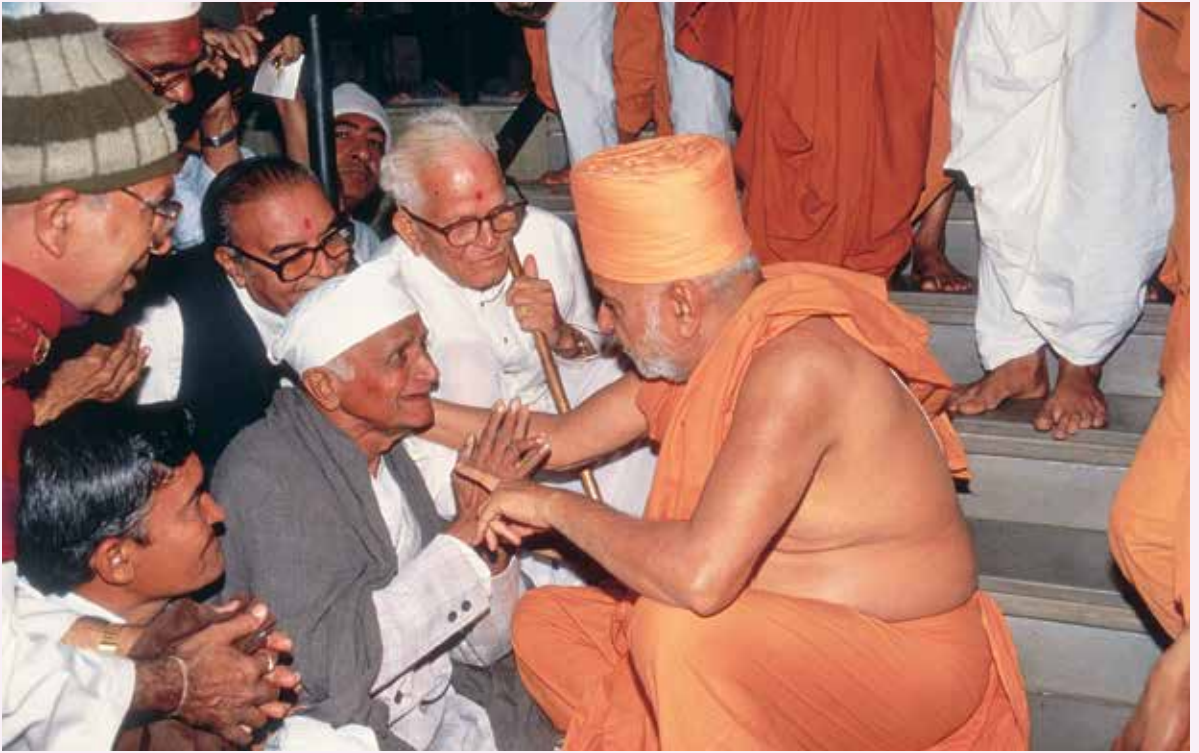
Once, in his morning puja in Vadodara, Swamishri applied the *tilak-chandlo* on his forehead. Then, Swamishri applied the *tilak-chandlo*

on Svetanshu, an infant, and held a mirror before him so that he could see how it looked. Svetanshu’s eyes brightened and his lips broke into a smile. Everyone doing darshan of Swamishri was amazed how Swamishri had understood the thoughts and feelings of an infant.

Once, Swamishri was descending the stairs outside his living quarters to depart from Ahmedabad mandir. A huge crowd of devotees had gathered in the mandir compound for his darshan. But as soon as Swamishri saw the aged Narayanbhai Mistry sitting on the steps, he instantly sat down beside him. For years, Narayanbhai has performed *seva* as an accomplished carpenter-artist. Swamishri enquired about his health and consoled him. Narayanbhai experienced peace and inner joy.

Swamishri could seamlessly attend to a child and a senior citizen, interacting and caring for them with the same love and equality.

While meeting any individual in private or in a large crowd Swamishri’s sharp hearing, smile



Swamishri enquires about Narayanbhai Mistry's health, Ahmedabad

on his lips and kindness emanating from his eyes reflected his heartfelt love and care.

Once, at the BAPS mandir in Vadodara, Swamishri attended a meeting with some important persons for over two hours. Thereafter, he started his evening walk. On remembering something he stopped and asked Dharmacharandas Swami, "Did you make arrangements of snacks for their drivers?"

"Yes."

"Were they served sweets?"

"Yes."

"Were they given one piece of sweet or more?"

"They were served sufficient pieces."

Swamishri was satisfied with the answers and resumed his walk.

Thomas Carlyle, a British historian, philosopher, writer and mathematician, said, "A great man shows his greatness by the way he treats little men."

Six newly elected ministers of the Gujarat government came for Swamishri's blessings at the

BAPS mandir in Ahmedabad. Swamishri honoured them in an evening satsang assembly with garlands and mementos. Swamishri also gave *prasad* to their secretaries, security guards and drivers. Thereafter, the ministers were led to the dining room for dinner. Mohansinh Rathwa, Minister for Panchayat, was in a hurry to leave to attend a pre-arranged programme, but his driver was not present. After enquiring about him he learnt that Swamishri had also made dinner arrangements for his driver and the guards. Mohansinh Rathwa was impressed and expressed, "I have learnt today that an ordinary person should be taken care of first."

Swamishri took great care of any driver or ordinary devotee. He not only cared for their food, but also for their lodging, bathing and washing arrangements. Swamishri himself took care and also asked others to take care too. Whenever Swamishri went on *padhramanis* and there was fresh fruit juice or *prasad* to offer to Thakorji he would always remember to send it to the driver

sitting outside in the car. Many times he himself would bring some *prasad* for the driver.

Swamishri often assessed the surroundings by scanning his eyes while walking, writing letters or eating food. He could discern the arrangements made for ordinary and senior devotees, and dignitaries.

A festival was arranged at the Sarangpur mandir on Posh *sud* Punam. The *mandap* built for the festive assembly was not big enough to accommodate everyone. So, there were many devotees sitting outside in the open, hot sun. When the assembly concluded, arrangements were made so that every devotee could get to meet and receive Swamishri's blessings. But Swamishri called the principal volunteer and instructed him to first call all those who were sitting in the sun for his darshan, in spite of the many guests and leading devotees seated before him. Swamishri perceived the difficulties and discomforts of even ordinary devotees and resolved them.

A similar situation arose in Bhavnagar. After Swamishri's birthday celebration assembly was over many senior devotees started meeting Swamishri one after the other. However, thousands of other devotees were yet to have Swamishri's personal darshan. The volunteers had arranged them in a long queue outside the *mandap*. Swamishri kept looking at them often. Finally, Swamishri sent a volunteer and arranged for them to stand in the shade.

Whenever the devotees came for Swamishri's darshan, Swamishri always glanced at them to see whether their expressions reflected ease and comfort or not.

Swamishri always took the minutest care of devotees regarding their lodging, boarding, washing and other facilities. In a major festival, the volunteer leaders running the kitchen department had thought of providing *amrutpak*, a sweet delicacy, to all the devotees for lunch. They also felt that it would be economical to serve *amrutpak*. When Swamishri was informed he categorically

refused and told them to prepare another sweet with condiments. He added that the sweet should be tasty and enjoyable for all.

Swamishri always insisted upon serving food and taking care of others in a proper, convenient and likable manner. Once, at the conclusion of a *parayan* on the Bhaktachintamani in Sarangpur it was decided to serve *shiro* as *prasad* to all. The quantity of paper cups for serving *shiro* were enough only for the sadhus and some leading devotees. So, for the rest, it was decided to serve *shiro* in plastic bags. When Swamishri came to know of this, he immediately remarked, "How will it be convenient for anyone to eat from a plastic bag? If there are less cups then make a convenient alternate arrangement."

Devotees who come to the mandir or for satsang are of different natures and lifestyles. Swamishri was of the opinion that the type of arrangements, which may sometimes be less than the devotees' standards and expectations, should at least be satisfactory to them. This was why Swamishri, whenever possible, visited the kitchen and asked, "How much food has been cooked, what amount will be served, how will it be served, how many times will sweet be served and whether chapattis or puris will be served?" He would also enquire about minor things. In spite of his old age and engagement in other important activities, Swamishri would sometimes personally come to make the arrangements. Once, on the day of Bhai Bij, Swamishri visited the kitchen storehouse in Gondal. He said to Kothari Jnani Swami, "I have come specially to tell you that many devotees are likely to leave soon, therefore serve lunch to them by 11:00 a.m. What arrangements have you made for lunch?"

Once, Swamishri was in Sarangpur. On the day of *ekadashi* a large number of devotees had arrived for darshan. Swamishri immediately thought, "How much *faral* has been made for them?" Instantly, he went to the kitchen and saw that there was enough food prepared





Swamishri inspires a tribal to give up his addictions

for all. Swamishri expressed his *rajipo* upon Aksharviharidas Swami (who looked after the cooking and kitchen arrangements).

In the same way, Swamishri also took keen interest in the lodging arrangements for the devotees. He would ensure that no devotee would have reasons to complain about it.

Swamishri believed that he belonged to everyone and never perceived anyone as a stranger. He welcomed and cared for all. Swamishri treated his sadhus and devotees equally.

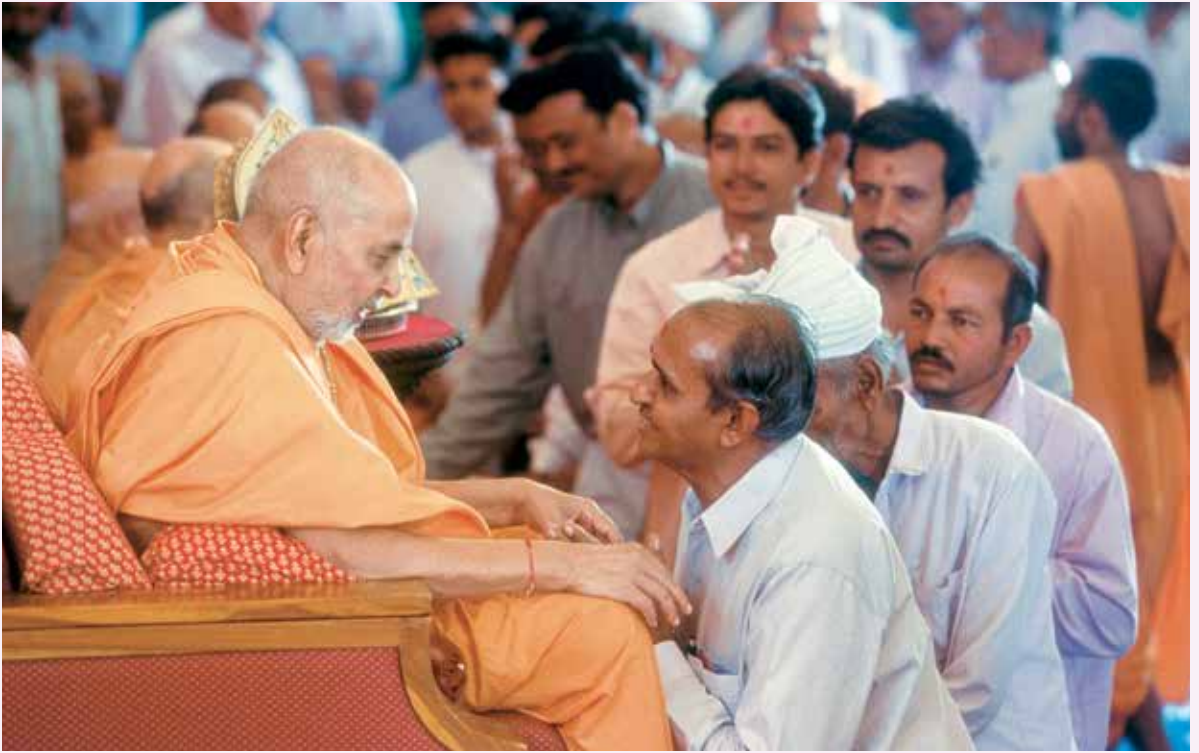
Once, after having lunch in Nadiad, Swamishri was travelling by car to his accommodation. The driver slowed the car to take a turn. At that time, a shepherd was leisurely walking on the road smoking a bidi. Swamishri recognized him and said, “He is our Popat Bharwad of Manjipura!” Swamishri told the driver to stop and he called out aloud to him. Popat was surprised to hear someone calling out his name from the middle of a road. He came running and saw it was Swamishri. Swamishri explained, “You are a

devotee, therefore you should not smoke.” Popat was moved by Swamishri’s care and concern and pledged there and then never to smoke again. Whenever Swamishri met anyone he would never talk down to them, but deal with them as their benefactor. Otherwise, it would not be possible to meet and talk to a cowherd in this way on a public road.

Once, Swamishri saw a tribal standing in a disorderly fashion near a well in Atladara mandir. Swamishri called out to him, “Kidiya, I am seeing you after many years.” Swamishri introduced him to the swamis around him, “He had done exemplary *seva* in the time of Kothari Aksharswarupdas Swami. He was very hard working.” Then, Swamishri made arrangements for his stay in the mandir.

Swamishri addressed Bakul, the son of V.V. Mehta, by his name on seeing him in Sarangpur. Bakul was astonished that Swamishri had remembered his name. Swamishri invariably recognized and called the devotees by name even after seeing





Swamishri guides and blesses the devotees while meeting them

them many years later. Swamishri's memory was phenomenal. His recollection of people's names, villages and family history mirrored his deep love for them. Two examples of this are about Swamishri recognizing Bhagwatsinh, the son of Inamdar – an elderly devotee in the time of Yogiji Maharaj, while travelling on a road in Mumbai; and Harshadbhai, who served as a cook for 40 years in the time of Harjivandas Swami in Sarangpur.

It is astonishing and inspiring to know how Swamishri remembered even ordinary individuals. Once, Swamishri made a phone call to Ahmedabad mandir from America. He talked with all the swamis and devotees serving in the mandir. Swamishri also remembered and talked to Raichand Rabari, who was offering *seva* in the mandir cowshed. Raichand was over the moon after Swamishri talked to him.

Once, Swamishri arrived in Sankari. Someone informed him that Lallu, the servant of Somakaka, was seriously ill. Swamishri immediately said,

"I'd like to bless him now," and so proceeded to meet him. Lallu was lying on a wooden bed with quilts wrapped around him. Swamishri sat on his wooden bed, placed his hand on Lallu's body and blessed him, saying, "Lallu you have done a lot of selfless *seva* of swamis, the mandir and Thakorji. Maharaj will take you to Akshardham. Do not worry about other things." Then Swamishri garlanded the infirm Lallu, who could barely fold his hands. In response, he could only utter, "Bapa." Then, Swamishri instructed Kothari Prabhuswarupdas Swami, "Take proper care of Lallu. Enquire about him daily and provide him whatever he needs."

When Swamishri never forgot ordinary people, how could they forget Swamishri! In 1972, Swamishri visited the holy place of Prayag with a group of 800 devotees. In 1986, Swamishri visited Prayag for the second time. At that time, Chhedilal, a boatman, recognized Swamishri and enquired, "Are you the same *sant* who visited here with 800 devotees?" Then, he

reverently invited Swamishri to sit in his boat. It was amazing how, 14 years before, Swamishri had left a deep impression on an illiterate and simple Chhedilal.

Once, Khushalkaka's brother had come to Ahmedabad mandir for Swamishri's darshan. He was aged and infirm. He deeply wished to meet Swamishri, who was seated on the main stage of the assembly hall. However, because of weak health he could not climb it. Swamishri perceived his feelings in a flash and got down from his seat, approached him and sat down at the edge of the stage and started enquiring about his wellbeing. On seeing Swamishri come down from his own seat it seemed as if the snow on the Himalayan mountains had descended in the form of River Ganga to meet the valley region at the foot of the mountain.

How many people can climb the high mountain peaks? Similarly, how many people could scale the pinnacle of Swamishri's God-realized state. The answer is only a few. As a result, Swamishri descended like the River Ganga to liberate countless souls.

Karsanbhai Patel, the founder and owner of Nirma Company and Nirma University, wished that Swamishri inaugurate his newly manufactured bath soap. So, he sent some bars to Swamishri in Mumbai. Swamishri signed a soap bar and also conveyed his blessings in a letter. Swamishri's doors were open for all. He met and welcomed all, including Arvindbhai of Mafatlal Group or Bangad Sheth of Kolkata. Everyone could get access to Swamishri for even minor guidance and advice.

Once, in Sarangpur, Swamishri was about to retire for his afternoon siesta. At that time a farmer devotee from the small village of Dedadara wanted to briefly meet Swamishri. However, with Swamishri's meeting hours over the volunteer was trying to make him understand. During that time, Swamishri saw him and welcomed him, and enquired whether he wanted to ask anything. The

farmer unfolded a small map (plan) of his farm and asked, "Where should I dig for a well?"

"Have you consulted a water specialist?"

The farmer indicated a point on his map and said, "He has advised to dig here." Swamishri asked further, "But where lies the slope on your land?"

"The slope is on this side," he replied.

Swamishri took keen interest and resolved his problem. Thereafter, he retired to bed.

In 1988, prior to his satsang tour abroad, Swamishri stayed in Mumbai for nine days. He had many tasks to attend to and accomplish during his brief stay. The devotees wished to seek guidance and blessings from him. Swamishri had also arranged meetings about the Sanstha's famine relief activities. The nine days passed in a twinkling of an eye. His flight to London was scheduled on 7 April at 3:00 a.m. On the night before his departure Swamishri personally met the devotees till 11:30 p.m. Then, while going to bed, he asked for his letter pad to write a letter to Trigunbhai Bhatt. The latter was a poor devotee of Mumbai whose both kidneys had failed. Trigunbhai was in a critical condition in hospital. Swamishri had been unable to visit him because of an unending trail of work. Swamishri felt uneasy about it and expressed in a letter at 11:40 p.m., "Trigunbhai, excuse me for being unable to come and meet you in the hospital." ♦

*Gujarati text from Brahmopaniṣad:*

Sadhu Narayanmuniḍas

*Translation:* Sadhu Vivekjiḍandas

Part 2 in Next Issue

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT



*A tribute to guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a matchless leader, on the 71st anniversary of his appointment by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj as President of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha on 21 May 1950.*



**G**ood leaders lead from the front; especially in a crisis. They jump into the cauldron, take the heat and calm the storm. They shield their juniors from the external and internal pressures. In business, the reputation and future of a company depends on the CEO's response to an emergency.

## TYLENOL TRAGEDY

Consider the case of James Burke, CEO of Johnson & Johnson when the Tylenol tragedy struck in 1982. At the time, Tylenol's share of the analgesic market was 35%. Burke's expert response to the seven deaths caused by cyanide-laced Tylenol tablets saved the company's reputation and the Tylenol brand. He boldly spent \$100m to recall 31 million bottles of Tylenol and two months later re-launched the product in tamper-proof bottles. His actions restored the public's trust and by the end of 1983 Tylenol's market share had again reached 35%. Burke's response is still studied in business schools and management books as an outstanding example of crisis management.

## BP'S BIG PROBLEMS

In contrast, following the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in April 2010, which led to the deaths of 11 people and extensive environmental damage, CEO Tony Hayward's clumsy statements and actions were widely condemned, causing British

Petroleum's share price to plunge 35% and ultimately Hayward's replacement. It was not good crisis management since he did not assume responsibility or accountability for the situation. Many qualities are necessary to become a good leader, but the mettle of a good leader is tested in such crisis situations.

Although leadership is most often studied in business schools, leadership qualities are not dependent on one's education.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj studied only up to Standard 6 in a village school. So, he had very little formal education. Yet, from 1950, for over 75 years as the administrative president and 45 years (1971–2016) as the spiritual guru of BAPS, his leadership skills were outstanding. He faced many make-or-break and crisis situations and his responses are inspiring. The following stories illustrate his exemplary approach to critical situations.

## ENTRY PASS FIASCO

On 4 February 1978, Pramukh Swami Maharaj returned to Mumbai, India, after a hectic and physically draining eight-month overseas spiritual tour to the UK, North America and Africa. In the evening, a grand welcome assembly had been arranged at the Vishwasaraiya Smarak Bhavan in the Matunga suburb. To meet the expenses of the event, the local youths had produced a souvenir titled 'Sarvamangalam'.





The extent of the devastating earthquake, Gujarat 2001



Extensive and widespread destruction

They issued special entry passes to the sponsors of the souvenir to attend the occasion. However, before the scheduled time, many without entry passes had somehow entered the hall and occupied the seats. The hall was full to capacity and still a sizeable number of pass holders were stranded outside the main auditorium, resulting in a noisy commotion that could be heard inside. Swamishri had taken his seat and was intently watching the drama the youths were presenting. But the ruckus outside was getting out of control.

When Swamishri was informed of the situation he immediately went outside. The pass holders had a valid claim to be upset, but Swamishri knew that the devotees and youths had put in much effort to organize the event.

Addressing the aggrieved pass holders, Swamishri raised his hands to get their attention. Even though he was not directly involved in the planning or execution of the occasion, Swamishri assumed responsibility for the situation. He humbly and repeatedly apologized for the mismanagement that had caused the situation. He assured them that the performance would be repeated for them. Realizing that Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself, in whose honour this assembly had been organized, was apologizing, the upset crowd was

placated and the situation was amicably resolved. The youths repeated the programme a few days later for the pass holders.

## EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

The tragic events of 26 January 2001 will live long in the memory of the people of Gujarat. The devastating 7.7 Richter scale earthquake, with its epicentre in the Bhachau district of Kutch, caused enormous and widespread damage and loss of life throughout Gujarat.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Bochasan and was having breakfast when the tremors were felt



Swamishri comforts a displaced victim at the BAPS-built tin tent emergency shelter





Swamishri blesses the relatives of a deceased pilgrim

at 8.46 a.m. After the initial safety precautions, news started reaching Swamishri about the scale and spread of the disaster. He immediately began contacting the senior sadhus at BAPS centres throughout Gujarat, instructing them to initiate emergency relief efforts. Swamishri especially guided the sadhus in Bhuj in the ways they should help the affected.

Swamishri, as a socially responsible leader took the initiative to direct all his available resources in the service of the needy. His continued attention to detail amid the larger picture revealed an extraordinary degree of not just empathy, but compassion. He swiftly and for a prolonged period provided emotional, material and spiritual support to people of all ages and backgrounds.

His leadership in the aftermath of this natural disaster was decisive and proactive.

### THE AKSHARDHAM RESPONSE

Gandhinagar, 24 September 2002. At 4.45 p.m., on a pleasant autumn afternoon, the unimaginable happened: out of the blue, a totally unprovoked attack on the sacred Swaminarayan Akshardham complex by two terrorists. They raided the holy site armed with automatic rifles and deadly grenades, killing 34 innocent pilgrims and wounding many others. A team of highly trained



Swamishri blesses a wounded commando

National Security Guards, an elite counter-terrorism unit under India's Ministry of Home Affairs, led by Brigadier Raj Seethapathy were rushed to Gandhinagar from New Delhi. After an all-night siege, and the sad loss of two heroic commandos, the terrorists were neutralized by the NSG.

Swamishri was 170 km away in Sarangpur when news of the attack broke. He was busy in a series of crucial meetings with senior sadhus.

His initial response was a natural reaction to any difficulty he faced – sincere prayer. After some moments of deep contemplation, he calmly took command of the situation and marshalled his resources, while responding serenely to the flurry of phone calls from government officials, political leaders, social leaders, concerned devotees and well-wishers from India and abroad. Everyone was in uproar and demanded a powerful retaliation to this unprovoked attack.

Yet, Swamishri was a leader of different dimensions. Never ruffled, never rushed, but always resilient and reposed. He had his own way of doing things. And this crisis revealed just how much of an out-of-the-box leader he was. He personally issued a nationwide appeal for everyone to remain calm and banish all thoughts of retaliation.

This one emphatic step prevented further social unrest and unnecessary bloodshed. Thereafter,

while continuing prayers, he remained constantly in touch with the sadhus and security officials as the events unfolded in Gandhinagar. He urged all devotees to pray for a rapid end to this attack.

At daybreak on 25 September, Swamishri received news that the terrorists had been defeated. He lauded the brave NSG team and told the sadhus to prepare fresh, hot puri and *shak* to feed them before they left, as they had not had anything to eat for over 12 hours. The NSG commandos were touched by this gesture and realized that even amid this tense situation Swamishri was aware of their human needs.

Subsequently, in the following days, Swamishri repeatedly emphasized the need for calm. He also visited, comforted and prayed for the injured who were being treated at the Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad and met the relatives of the deceased pilgrims to help them cope with their tragic losses. He continued to meet community leaders to emphasize that peace and forgiveness is the best, most effective course of action.

Swamishri's mature, strong and focused leadership in this volatile situation, that potentially could have led to nationwide violence, saved the country from such disruption. His exemplary response was later lauded by all and became a case study as an effective and responsible handling of such a crisis. It became known as 'The Akshardham Response'. Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, President of India from 2002–2007, writes in his book, *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji*, "Pramukh Swamiji showed magnanimity by not indulging in any blame game or imputing motives... The attack was meant to stir communal riots and tear apart the fabric of society. But the *sthitaprajna* [a spiritually enlightened person who possesses perfect equilibrium and total control over the mind and senses] Pramukh Swamiji defeated those nefarious designs of the terrorists by not reacting to the provocation designed to elicit a backlash.... Swamiji encouraged his followers to

pray, not punish."

Swamishri had shown that forgiveness and non-violence is indeed the path to achieve world harmony.

## EXEMPLARY LEADER

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an extraordinary leader of unimaginable calibre. He was able to handle every situation in his unflappable and effective way.

He had the ability to rapidly identify the key concerns of any situation, and formulate and implement a robust and effective response. With emotions in check and a cool head he always rose to the occasion to find suitable solutions. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was frequently thrown into the cauldron of leadership, but he always extinguished the heat of the situation and emerged smiling – and also restored the smiles of others.

Swamishri's innate ability to handle adversity naturally inspired confidence, loyalty and dedication in others.

During his period as the spiritual guru of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (1971–2016), Pramukh Swami Maharaj spearheaded its global growth, building over 1,000 mandirs on five continents, and guiding the social, spiritual, cultural and other activities conducted from over 4,500 BAPS centres worldwide. He was also a mentor in the day-to-day lives of 1,100 sadhus and innumerable devotees of all ages. Thus, over the decades, he faced countless emergencies, and tricky and sensitive situations, which he expertly navigated with an unprecedented presence of mind, compassion and in the best interests of all concerned – reflecting his innate and profound spirituality.

He was a hands-on guru, ever ready to participate in menial and manual work – but he also had the vision to encourage everyone to develop their own decision-making skills. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a spiritually enlightened saint who was a resilient, committed leader and exceptionally wise in the ways of this world. ♦



## 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.*

As a *non-satsangi*, being married in a *satsangi* family initially was a huge challenge as my in-laws were very staunch followers and I found it very difficult to adjust spiritually. There was no force or pressure from them regarding following the *niyams* and *agnas* and as time went, I started understanding the importance of satsang and having a guru in my life.

I started confiding in Bapa and wrote many letters to Bapa for guidance. Every response from Bapa made my faith grow stronger and stronger. Bapa guided me and gave me strength and he assured me that by praying it will all come right.

Bapa has always said that pray sincerely and ensure that your *upasana* is strong. My success and my progress is all due to Bapa. Bapa always stood by my side giving me the strength to be a better person and *satsangi*.

I miss Bapa dearly and promise that I will never let him down and will strive on the spiritual path.

- Krushika Lalloobhai, 49, Bank Official, Johannesburg, South Africa

There are no words to describe how a *divya* soul and great person you are. You have always been a loving mother and father. Your name says it all: Bapa=Ba, meaning mother, and Pa, meaning father.

You are on earth through *pragat guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. And this is the proof that the Satpurush always resides on earth.

- Misha Patel, 13, Student, Johannesburg, South Africa

It was in 1999 I first had the darshan and *mulakat* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. If I hadn't met Pramukh Swami Maharaj, my life would be very different and filled with *vyasan*. I am thankful to Bapa for giving us everything and accepting me as his *bhakta*.

Since then, my life changed and I started following *niyams* such as doing daily puja. Because of satsang my life became smooth.

- Nareshbhai J. Patel, Kampala, Uganda

I feel so small and sad that I took you for granted in my life. Always knowing that you were there for me every step of my life. Hearing your melodious voice, always inspiring and full of conviction, gave me utmost faith in you and the ability to live my life successfully by overcoming daily issues.

My mother's faith in you as *karta-harta* during her year-long illness and her daily positivity made me realize your greatness.

I always admired your ability to manage people without upsetting anyone and achieving a successful outcome. Your dynamism as a guru fills me with heartache that I did not think about your greatness in my younger years.

I am forever indebted to you for giving me Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. His smile and gentleness gives me strength and peace of mind.

- Mukesh Patel

You have affected many peoples' lives seamlessly just by darshan and just by thought. Similarly, you also affected my own father's life by just darshan. My dad had many *vyasans*, used to eat meat and never used to believe in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. But in the early 2000s when my dad first saw you, he felt he saw Bhagwan *sakshat* and became a *satsangi*. Today, he is a *karyakar*, we do *ghar sabha* as a family and we are all *satsangis*.

Personally, you have affected my life a lot. The first time we met in Botswana, you gave me a *kanthi* and gave me many blessings.

When I heard that you left your earthly body, I couldn't believe my ears. I had so many mixed feelings and never knew what to do, but just sob. Gladly, I realized you are still with us through Pujya Mahant Swami.

- Nishant Naman, 18, Student, Lusaka, Zambia

I firstly want to thank you so much for always being with me from the beginning and giving us satsang and helping us grow further. I really thank you from the bottom of my heart for all that you've done for me.

Bapa, I don't remember the years exactly, however, I remember my experience during *mulakats* with you, especially Surat and Nadiad. I used to feel so much excitement when we would be on our way to see you. It was those moments that kept drawing me towards you to experience that feeling more and more.

- Samit Sharma, 25, Melbourne, Australia

I have never seen Pramukh Swami Maharaj in real life but I get peace after seeing him in *guruhari* darshan videos, when I hear and read *prasangs* of him. I am so inspired by his life.

He is a celebrity and is famous, but he always lived simple. He is selfless and humble. Also by his simplicity and transparency, he is just different. He is the best, my role model. I look up to him. What surprises me the most is his ability to motivate and inspire so many people.

- Urvi Patel



If I tell you about a gift that keeps giving, would you believe me?

A gift that cleanses the soul

A gift that helps you achieve goals

A gift that liberates the mind

A gift that makes all the important parts of your life bind

A gift that loves unconditionally

A gift that reminds to give wholeheartedly

A gift that surrounds your entire life with a breath of fresh air

A gift that floods your mind with cherished memories to share

A gift that forgives the repeated mistakes

A gift that forgets and immediately embraces

A gift that teaches you to give the best version of yourself to the world

A gift that teaches 'in the joys of others lies our own'

That gift is you – my guru.

Thank you Swami for gracing us with your presence, and giving us way more than our fickle minds deserve. May we live the way you envisioned us to live and become worthy to attain Akshardham.

- Nidhi Patel

Years ago, a great task was placed on your shoulders, which you mastered without a single mistake. Your disciplined and strategic approach to every action and the always smiling face warmed our hearts.

How you influenced and inspired so many people all over the world. You always treated us with respect.

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

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

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

When the sun rises,  
There is shine everywhere,  
But when the sun sets  
There is no shine.

But you are my Sun  
So, there is no sunset in my life.

You are always beside me,  
You come wherever I go  
You make me comfortable when I am alone.

- Riya Brahmabhatt, 8,  
Student, London, England

The values you have taught me since the day I was born into satsang are still within me today. Knowing your principles and life teachings has always given me the courage to firmly walk in your footsteps by following your *agna*. You gave immense *labh* when I was a *balika* during your various visits to Leicester and London, but I was unable to understand your true and divine glory.

No matter how much I do or give, it will not be enough to repay what you have given and done for me. I pray to the holiest feet of Param Pujya Mahant Swami that may I become an ideal *yuvati* that you would like me to become.

- Jalpa Parekh, 29, Pharmacist, Leicester, England

I came into satsang in 2007, when I came to the UK after my marriage.

I started coming to the mandir as family were coming, but never knew why I am coming or what is the purpose of life.

Then, when Bapa came, I went to do his darshan. I still remember that moment when Bapa's eyes told me, "I am here for you..." Just that one moment and that divine experience is still with me. Since then, in my life Bapa has been at the forefront for me. I have never needed to ask for anything; he has given me everything...

I am in his debt for ever... I am so very thankful for everything in my life.

- Ekta Depala, London, England

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

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

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

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

- Dr Nirav Amin, 30, Physician, London, England

I really love the way you are always in a really good mood, as you are always laughing and smiling! I didn't know a thing about Swaminarayan, but then one day I came to the mandir and went upstairs to *bal sabha*. After that, every Sunday I come to *bal sabha* with my parents because it's really fun and you can learn about Bhagwan. Every day now, I do my daily puja.

Thank you for the amazing mandirs you have built all over the planet Earth.

- Neev Patel, 11, Student, Winnipeg, Canada

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

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

# CHILDREN'S NATIONAL SATSANG DIKSHA MUKHPATH ADHIVESHAN

**G**uruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj gifted the Satsang Diksha shastra to all BAPS followers on Guru Punam 2020. Thereafter, he expressed his wish that devotees memorize the text.

Hence, initially, *balaks* and *balikas* were encouraged to memorize the Gujarati text. Thousands of children throughout India endeavoured to memorize the text. After clearing the local phase, they participated online in the zonal phase in September 2020. Of these participants, 744 *balaks* and 455 *balikas* were judged to have fully and fluently memorized the Gujarati text of Satsang Diksha.

Thereafter, Swamishri expressed his wish that youngsters also memorize the Sanskrit text. So, the Bal Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad launched a national *adhiveshan* in December 2020. Again, many *balaks* and *balikas* from BAPS centres throughout India took up the challenge to fulfil Swamishri's wish. They were tested via video calls at local, zonal and national levels in January and February 2021.

Of the 458 *balaks* and 234 *balikas* who reached the national phase 226 *balaks* 125 *balikas* were judged to have properly memorized the Sanskrit text.

From all these successful children, 167 *balaks* and 75 *balikas* had memorized the Satsang Diksha in both Gujarati and Sanskrit.

## PERSONAL AUDIENCE WITH SWAMISHRI

The outstanding efforts of the 351 children who had memorized the shastra in Sanskrit were rewarded in a special way. Between 8 and 17 March, the 226 *balaks* and the fathers of the 125 *balikas* were personally blessed via video conference by *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In these sessions, the *balaks* were introduced and their efforts highlighted. After the *balaks*, the fathers of the *balikas* received Swamishri's blessings on their daughter's behalf. The *balaks* and *balikas* had devoutly prepared galds, cards, *chhadis*, bouquets and other items to offer to Swamishri. At the end of each session, the children collectively offered the various delicacies they had prepared to Swamishri.

During the introductions, Swamishri delightfully responded to each, accepted their prayers and blessed everyone.

During these personal darshan sessions, Swamishri animatedly responded to the children. He also expressed his deep appreciation for their efforts through many statements to the sadhus.

The following are a selection.

### 8 March 2021

- They are our future. Now we know the power that 'rajipo' generates.
- I have never had so much fun... divine fun!



They were all so innocent. Listening to them brought such divine joy. It was great fun.

### 12 March 2021

- This is beyond imagination. Something that has never been heard of or seen before.

### 16 March 2021

- This will still continue to give them many benefits... their faith will increase... concentration will increase.

### 17 March 2021

- From each participant, there is something new. They memorize by listening. And also recite in their sleep!
- Atmaswarup Swami asked Swamishri, "You bow down twice to each *balak*. When they offer a garland and when they are introduced." Swamishri said, "It happens naturally. They are such *muktas*."
- Swamishri performed a *pradakshina* of the large LED screen displaying the *balaks* and said "I have done a *pradakshina* of the *balaks*."
- Even those who do not know how to read or write recite the verses so fluently in Sanskrit. Just as if they are accomplished pandits.

### 19 March 2021

- Today's programme was incomparable. Not even a 100,000 blockbuster films can match it. It was live, practical, inspiring and real. In films, much is fantasy. But this was actual. Incomparable.

## CHILDREN COMPLETE MUKHPATH AMID CHALLENGES

In the past 12 months the coronavirus pandemic has disrupted everyone's lives. Especially those of children. They have had to rapidly adapt to new norms and restrictions which limit their natural urge to play and learn.

Yet many responded with keen interest and determination to Mahant Swami Maharaj's wish that even children memorize the Satsang Diksha.

But, as is natural with so many noble endeavours, many children faced unexpected challenges. However, their desire to please *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj, earn his *rajipo* and be a part of the 'Mission 2000' spurred them to adapt and succeed.

## SOME NOTABLE STORIES

■ Devarsh Harikrishnabhai Patel, age 8, Sojitra. Devarsh's father's work colleague was frustrated by many problems and told Harikrishnabhai that he wanted to commit suicide. Devarsh found out the intentions of the frustrated colleague, whom he knew, and phoned to counsel him. Devarsh gave him a positive outlook and sent him a copy of the Satsang Diksha and requested him to read verse 41, in which suicide is firmly forbidden. Devarsh said, "I believe these words will help him." And, indeed, the words impacted the colleague and he has developed a positive outlook on life.

■ Vinit N. Dodia, age 7, Surat. From birth, Vinit has been plagued with severe health problems. He has had to undergo 10 major operations till now.

In August 2020, Vinit developed a bladder problem and was advised total bedrest at home. Despite the discomfort and difficulties, Vinit continued memorizing the Satsang Diksha.

Bravely enduring the pain and the limitations of his severe health problems, Vinit said, "I feel pain, but never cry, because, as stated in the Satsang Diksha, whatever God does is for our good. So, with that thought, I remain happy."

■ Manan V. Nakum, age 8, Pune. Manan memorized the Satsang Diksha in both Sanskrit and Gujarati. He daily offers *panchang pranams* to his parents and the family regularly holds a *ghar sabha*. On his birthday, Manan gifted the Satsang Diksha to 45 people.

Once, when Manan and his father went shopping, his *mama* (mother's brother) asked him to buy a bottle of Bournvita for him. So they did. With the bottle, they received a free mug. His father told Manan to keep it, but Manan recited verse 32 and



said, “The mug really belongs to *mama*, since it is given with the Bournvita. So, I cannot keep it.”

■ Jignasu A. Kargathra, age 12, Vadodara. Jignasu’s mother met with an accident and was confined to bedrest. Jignasu took up to household responsibilities of cooking, laundry, cleaning and washing utensils. As well as caring for his mother, his 1½-year-old brother and other duties, he also attended his online school classes. Amid all these tiring, demanding and time-consuming tasks, he still found time to memorize the Satsang Diksha.

Jignasu revealed, “I made use of the short periods of free time throughout the day to memorize. My goal was to please Swami Bapa, so I did not find this difficult.”

■ Vandan M. Thakkar, age 12, Mumbai. Vandan suffers from thalassaemia and so requires a blood transfusion once or twice a month in the hospital. He regularly attended the online Satsang Diksha classes even when he was in hospital undergoing treatment. He also contracted the coronavirus, but continued memorizing the Satsang Diksha.

■ Varni P. Darji, age 12, Gandhinagar. Varni completed the *mukhpath* in Sanskrit and Gujarati. Then, he resolved to memorize the text in all published languages by the time of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations. He has already memorized the English and Hindi texts and is memorizing it in other languages.

■ Hitakshi Sakhia, age 12, Kolkata. Hitakshi and her family developed fevers and were quarantined. Despite feeling unwell, she remembered verse 48, which encourages everyone to remain strong and joyous amid difficult circumstances. So, she continued memorizing the entire text.

■ Nishtha A. Maheshwari, age: 11, Udaipur (Rajasthan). Nishtha memorized the Satsang Diksha in both Sanskrit and Gujarati. She stopped watching TV to create time to memorize. She also gave a copy of the Satsang Diksha to her school teacher and inspired her to read it daily.

Due to the pandemic, her father lost his job. This caused her mother to worry. To help her



Reciting and memorizing *shloks*



Memorizing *shloks* while engaged in household duties

remain positive, Nishtha encouraged her to daily recite verses 147 and 148 which explain that everything happens by God’s wish and is for our benefit. Such deep understanding for a young girl was amazing!

■ Pushti H. Patel, age 8, Sojitra. Pushti memorized the Satsang Diksha in Gujarati and Sanskrit. When memorizing the Sanskrit, she endeavoured for upto 12 hours daily and completed the *mukhpath* in 15 days. Then she motivated the rest of her family to memorize the Satsang Diksha.

Her brother, Devansh, completed the *mukhpath*, but due to her home responsibilities, her mother struggled to find time to memorize. So, Pushti took up the household tasks and responsibility of caring for her grandmother. Thereafter, her mother did complete the *mukhpath*.

■ Jagruti S. Gujar, age 12 & Devyani A. Gujar,





Repeatedly writing *shloks* to help memorization



Memorized *shloks* even after a serious injury

age 9, Japi (Maharashtra). Due to the pandemic, both *balikas* moved with their families from Dhuliya to their home village of Japi. At night, when Jagruti's father returned from their farm, she would listen to and note down the verses. The next day, the two *balikas* would sit in the mandir to memorize the *shloks*. They would return home only after they had memorized the daily quota.

They said that previously they were irregular in observing *ekadashi*. Now, having learnt of Swamishri's wish, we always observe *ekadashi*.

## MANAGING TIME

Many *balaks* and *balikas* undertook self-imposed restrictions from their favourite things to create time for and increase their focus on memorizing the Satsang Diksha. These included:

- Not using mobile phones

- Not playing video games
- Not watching TV
- Not eating chocolates, ice cream, cakes and other favourite foods
- Reducing play time
- Reducing sleep time
- Staying up late to memorize
- Waking up early

Some contracted serious illnesses, sustained injuries that required operating or a hospital stay and experienced other setbacks. However, the children's deep desire to please Mahant Swami Maharaj enabled them to bravely overcome all challenges and complete their *mukhpath*.

## SHISHUS SHOW THEIR METTLE

'Shishus' are *balaks* and *balikas* between the ages of 4 to 9 years. Many *shishus* were encouraged by their parents, siblings and *karyakars* to memorize the Satsang Diksha. Some of the younger *shishus* had barely started school and could not fluently read or write. Yet, by repeatedly listening to the audio of the *shloks* they memorized the entire Satsang Diksha.

The efforts of the parents and *karyakars* played a big role in this. They often spent many hours with the *shishus* reciting the verses and helping them to pronounce the words appropriately.

These *shishus* persevered for many hours despite their natural tendency to fidget and move around. They could be forgiven for being easily distracted or frustrated by this difficult task, but they had their focus on pleasing Swamishri and so were able to memorize the text.

In total, around 80 *shishus* memorized the Satsang Diksha.

## SOME INSPIRING STORIES

■ Shashvat S. Patel (5) and his cousin sister, Vani S. Patel (7) of Anand both began to memorize the Satsang Diksha. With their encouragement, Shasvat's 3½-year-old brother also started and both sets of parents were also inspired to





A father tests his son



A *balak* being tested online during the National Adhiveshan



A family inspired to conduct regular *ghar sabha*



Two *balaks* help each other to memorize *shloks*

memorize. Eventually all seven of them memorized the entire Satsang Diksha.

■ Yogi A. Adeshara (5) of Ahmedabad, memorized the Satsang Diksha by listening to the audio. Once, while playing he fell and fractured his right elbow. He required surgery to fix it. Still, he was not deterred and persisted to complete the *mukhpath* in Sanskrit.

■ Charmi M. Movalia, a 7-year-old *balika* from Pune memorized the Satsang Diksha in both Gujarati and Sanskrit. During this time, her birthday came. She told her family that as a gift to her they memorize the Satsang Diksha. In this way, she inspired her grandmother, cousin sister and other family members to memorize the text.

### LESSONS LEARNT THROUGH MUKHPATH

■ Dhruv V. Patel, age: 6, Gandhinagar. As Dhruv was unable to read, his grandfather would recite the *shloks* and Dhruv would repeat and memorize them. After memorizing verse 56, in which, Swamishri instructs every family to hold a regular *ghar sabha*, Dhruv would ensure that all family members got together for the *sabha*.

■ Prayag H. Vaghela, age 7, Ahmedabad. Prayag's maternal grandmother passed away. Naturally, his mother was deeply saddened. So, Prayag wrote *shlok* number 152, which states that everything happens by Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish and is for our ultimate benefit and gave it to his mother. She was surprised by the deep understanding that memorizing the Satsang Diksha had generated in him.

■ Palak B. Patel, age 9, Bengaluru. Palak gave her teachers copies of the Satsang Diksha and explained its glory to them, "This shastra by Mahant Swami Maharaj will provide answers to all your questions in life." One teacher asked her which *shloks* he should observe. Palak knew that he ate meat, so she told him to recite *shloks* 26, 27 and 29 with her and encouraged him not to eat meat. The teachers were inspired by her message and resolved to read the Satsang Diksha. ◆





## CHILDREN'S NATIONAL SATSANG DIKSHA MUKHPATH FELICITATION ASSEMBLY

19 March 2021, Nenpur, Gujarat



This was a train ride with a difference. A special, memorable virtual 2-hour journey with *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. The price of a ticket? Memorize the 315 *shloks* of the Satsang Diksha to book your place. And the sole vendor was the Children's Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad. Around 23,800 *balaks* and *balikas* from throughout India participated in the Satsang Diksha National Adhiveshan for Children, having memorized the *shloks* in Sanskrit or Gujarati. And 1,550 *balaks* and *balikas* passed the stringent tests to earn their priceless ticket to ride with Swamishri. Of these, 242 had memorized the Satsang Diksha in both languages. This was indeed a fitting reward for their exemplary determination and willpower.

The children had endeavoured for many months, with the enthusiastic support of their parents and *karyakars*, to reserve their place on

this *yatra*, titled 'Mission Rajipo'. Ranging in age from 4 years to 13, these children had persisted day and night, through illness and adversity, and while curbing their natural tendency to play and eat their favourite foods to fluently memorize the Satsang Diksha text in Sanskrit or Gujarati. In fact, their desire to fulfil 'Mission Rajipo', that is, please Swamishri, and secure their seat on this historic journey, overrode all distractions they encountered and it is a testament to their determination that they were not derailed from achieving this challenging objective. And Mahant Swami Maharaj, too, was brimming with joy to welcome them on board and reward them for their outstanding efforts.

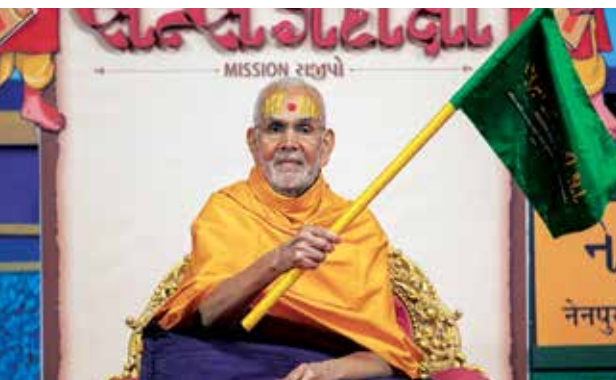
This virtual train journey represented the felicitation assembly for these young 'Akshar-Purushottam Scholars' – a befitting title conferred by Mahant Swami Maharaj on all who memorize the Satsang Diksha.



Mahant Swami Maharaj during the Felicitation Assembly, Nenpur



Two young *balaks* comper the assembly from Sarangpur



Swamishri flags off the 'Mission Rajipo' train *yatra*



Swamishri pops balloons to determine *shloks* for *balaks* to recite

With Swamishri in Nenpur, the award-winning children joined online from their homes and some joined from the mandirs where Swamishri journeyed to virtually during the assembly.

The online evening assembly was coordinated from the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur, where two *balaks* confidently and competently hosted the proceedings. It began with Swamishri, holding Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami in his lap, concealed within a giant gift-wrapped box. The young *balaks* welcomed Swamishri as the gift box was opened.

In Nenpur, a small train on tracks had been set up to symbolize Swamishri's journey to the various centres to meet the *balaks*. As Swamishri travelled to each destination, the train would move along the tracks before coming to a halt at each station.

During the course of the evening, Swamishri virtually visited Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Mumbai. At each location, *balaks* performed live welcome dances and interacted online with Swamishri in various fun and creative ways as he tested them to spontaneously recite the Satsang Diksha *shloks* they had memorized. Videos were shown depicting the efforts the children had put in and how they had benefited in their daily lives through their participation. Before departing from each venue, Swamishri selected a sweet dish to be sent to the children.

Then, at the end of the *yatra*, Swamishri's train returned to Nenpur, where he unveiled the trophies and other mementoes to be presented to the award-winning *balaks* and *balikas*.





Balaks from Surat welcome Swamishri and recite *shloks*

The highlight of the evening was yet to come. It was revealed that over the previous two days Swamishri had expressed his heartfelt delight at the remarkable achievements of these children by personally threading beads in a special *mala* and preparing chocolate to be sent to the children. The extra-long *mala* of 351 beads was first offered to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami by Swamishri and then Swamishri was garlanded with it. Each *balak* and *balika* will receive a bead from the sanctified *mala*. In addition, Swamishri also spent several hours writing a thoughtful four-page letter addressed to all the children in which he inspired and blessed them for their continued progress.

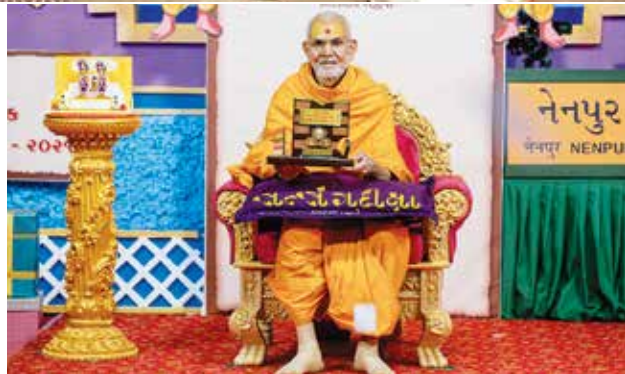
Then, Swamishri blessed the children by narrating a wonderful story about a rabbit, tortoise and lion and teaching the youngsters the necessity of regular daily effort to achieve success.

The two young hosts next introduced a video showing that thousands of children in India and abroad were still memorizing the Satsang Diksha in a variety of languages to earn Swamishri's *rajipo*.

Swamishri was then honoured with a beautiful shawl weaved with *nadachhadis*, from which each winner would receive a *nadachhadi*.

Thereafter, before the assembly concluded, all the swamis watching from their respective mandirs performed *dandvats* to the young children in honour of their exceptional achievements.

Throughout the evening, the young privileged passengers who travelled on this unique journey with Swamishri absorbed every moment with relish. ♦



Swamishri sanctifies a trophy to be given to the *balaks*



Swamishri with the 351-bead *mala*



Swamishri narrates a meaningful story





## PERSPECTIVE

Look at the image above. Can you see the dot? No. Look again, but this time look closer. Still, no. Well, that's the point. Sometimes you hear people say that our earth is merely a dot relative to the universe. Those people are being generous. We become so absorbed in our own lives that we forget the bigger picture. Few people ever stop for a moment and ponder the magnitude of this universe. Our ego blocks this thought process.

Fundamentally, as humans we require three things: food, shelter and clothing. However, I would like to posit the idea that we also need perspective.

When we fail, we feel sad and try to blame someone or something else. When we succeed, we experience happiness and a sense of pride. Failure at that moment can feel like the worst thing has happened. We become victims of *dvesh* (spite). We may blame God; we may blame ourselves.

However, in the midst of all this blaming, do we ever stop to think how insignificant our problem is? There is a difference between acceptance of failure due to Shriji Maharaj's wish and blaming Maharaj.

In 1983, the permission to build a mandir in the borough of Harrow in London was denied. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was notified, but remained calm. His tranquillity inundated the hearts of many. His only words in response to this were, "As Bhagwan wishes" and "We should be pleased with whatever pleases Maharaj. Whatever he does is beneficent". That was it. He knew that there would be other opportunities. Swamishri had perspective. He had faith. If, and only if, we accept our problem then will we be able to live happily.

Success is dangerous. That's not to say we shouldn't strive to succeed, but with success comes pride and with pride comes arrogance. If

there was something to stop this pride from ruining our mind, success would not be so damaging. Gunatitanand Swami once said that lack of ego, or humility, is attained through God's proximity. When you succeed, it is natural to feel elation and a sense of pride, but do not let that pride and elation turn into something you'll struggle to fight back from.

There is a famous quotation, "Just because you don't see something doesn't mean it isn't there." This is sometimes a difficult concept to accept, let alone integrate into our lives. Nonetheless, this does not render its validity to be debatable. This is important. Part of our ego is fuelled by the fact that we haven't seen other life forms outside this Earth. If we enlarge our perspective and take a step back, we can see, figuratively, that it is, at the very least, unlikely that Earth is the only planet containing life forms.

Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut, said, "From out there on the Moon, international politics look so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say, 'Look at that'." We bicker and quarrel and it is so unnecessary. Why

do we do it then? We lack perspective. This is our planet and we destroy it with our *swabhavs* or ignorance. The only way back from this is to gain perspective and spirituality. If you gain perspective on just how ineffable the creation of this universe is, spirituality will come because no other force aside from God could have created this infinite space. We are inferior to the universe.

Arrogance can chew you up and spit you out, which is why it is necessary to have perspective. Having the right perspective strips us of our ego and fuels our humility instead. Gunatitanand Swami has described three types of devotees. Those who show their virtues, those who somewhat hide them, and those who lock them away and throw away the key. We should strive to be the latter. With perspective, the latter can be more attainable.

Perspective will only enter our mind if we refrain from becoming self-absorbed. Some may argue that one must be arrogant to defeat the arrogant. Those who believe this are wrong. It takes hard work. Just because someone else doesn't have a perspective, it does not mean that you shouldn't have one either. ♦



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# WHAT READING CAN DO

Launch Yourself from the Shoulders of Giants...



*Competency in the 3 Rs – Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic – lays the foundation for a productive life.*

*Of these three essential life skills, reading is used most often. Hence, a good level of proficiency and genuine interest in reading provide a platform for continued learning and personal development in all aspects of one's life*

## ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

In 1675, acknowledging that the insights of Rene Descartes and Robert Hooke had helped him in his formulations about optics, Sir Isaac Newton stated, “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Newton thus recognized that by reading about the work of Descartes and Hooke, he was able to build on their knowledge.

Reading represents the ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’, since it gives access to the thoughts of others which can motivate and help us to progress in whichever sphere of life we wish to pursue.

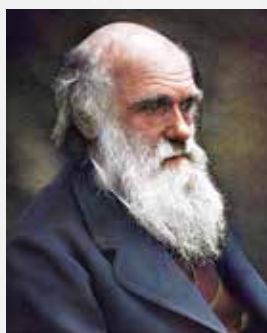
Anne Lamott, a distinguished American novelist, writes, “Books are paper ships, to all the worlds, to ancient Egypt, outer space, eternity, into the childhood of your favourite musician, and – the most precious stunning journey of all – into your own heart, your own family, your own history and future and body.

“Out of these flat almost two-dimensional boxes of paper will spring mountains, lions, concerts, galaxies, heroes. You will meet people who have been all but destroyed, who have risen up and

will bring you with them. Books and stories are medicine, plaster casts for broken lives and hearts, slings for weakened spirits. And in reading, you will laugh harder than you ever imagined laughing, and this will be magic, heaven, and salvation.”

The following stories illustrate just how significant a role reading has played in individual and human progress.

## FROM POPULATION TO EVOLUTION



Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin is renowned for his *On the Origins of Species*. But, although he had formulated the theory that all life forms had evolved from a common ancestor in 1835, it was not until 1858 that he published his theory. This was only after

a young British naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, sent Darwin a draft paper in which he proposed a similar theory. This pushed Darwin to rapidly prepare his own paper for publication. Subsequently,





they both presented their findings on the same day at an important scientific gathering.

But the ability of both to independently formulate their theories was rooted in 'An Essay on the Principle of Population' written by the English economist Thomas Malthus. Both Darwin and Wallace independently read this paper. Together with their extensive reading of a broad variety of topics, and their far-reaching travels they were both able to connect common aspects of different disciplines.

In his autobiography, Charles Darwin writes, "In October 1838,... I happened to read for amusement Malthus on *Population*, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed" (*The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, p. 120).



Alfred Russel Wallace

In a 1959 essay on creativity, Isaac Asimov noted about Darwin and Wallace, "There is a great deal in common there. Both travelled to far places, observing strange species of plants and animals and the manner in which they varied from place to

place. Both were keenly interested in finding an explanation for this, and both failed until each happened to read Malthus' *Essay on Population*.

"Both then saw how the notion of overpopulation and weeding out (which Malthus had applied to human beings) would fit into the doctrine of evolution by natural selection (if applied to species generally)."

Thus, reading opened the doors to more ideas.

However, despite their success in formulating the theory of natural selection, neither Darwin nor Wallace were able to determine the

mechanism by which this occurred, even though the answer was in plain sight.

In fact, Darwin had in his personal library a copy of a paper written by Gregor Mendel in 1866 in which he described that physical traits were inherited from parents by their offspring. Yet Darwin never read that paper, and so missed the opportunity to gain that insight. So, not reading also has consequences.

## FROM BOOKBINDING TO THE ROYAL INSTITUTION



Michael Faraday

Michael Faraday is well known for his incredible contributions to the fields electromagnetism and electrochemistry. He hailed from a staunch religious family that struggled financially due to his blacksmith father's ill health. Faraday attended

school, where he learnt the rudiments of reading, writing and counting. However, at the age of 13, he had to leave formal study to help support the family and began to work in a book shop, selling and binding. Over the course of about seven years, he read many books and developed a deep interest in science. He attended many lectures on science and compiled extensive notes. His bound notes were his passport into science and a post at the prestigious Royal Institution.

Mostly self-taught, Faraday made outstanding discoveries to further the understanding and use of electricity and magnetism. All his achievements stemmed from his passion for reading.

## FROM BIRD-WATCHING TO DNA

James Watson adored bird-watching as a youngster and spent many early morning hours spotting rare birds at Jackson Park in Chicago. He had planned to become an ornithologist, but after





James Watson

reading a book review of Erwin Schrodinger's *What Is Life?* Watson became interested in and focused on biology. His life course changed, culminating in his co-discovery, with Francis Crick, of the double helical structure of the DNA molecule, the

code of life. This ultimately led to him winning the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1962. Thus, reading had sparked a deep curiosity within Watson to explore the basis of life.

### FROM DOUBLE HELIX TO CRISPR

The inspiration for Jennifer Doudna to pursue science was triggered when, as a sixth-grade student, she read the *The Double Helix*, by James Watson, the Nobel Prize-winning co-discoverer of the DNA structure. She was particularly inspired by the role of Rosalind Franklin, a distinguished English chemist and X-ray crystallographer whose work was central to deciphering the helical structure of DNA. Doudna recalls, "Reading the book was the first time I really thought about it, and it was an eye-opener. Women could be scientists." This initiated her pursuit of science which has led to her receiving the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for her pioneering work in CRISPR gene editing. From such small starts are giants created.

### FROM CLASS DUMMY TO PIONEERING NEUROSURGEON



Dr Ben Carson

Dr Ben Carson's parents divorced when he was 8 years old. He lived with his mother, who struggled to make ends meet. At school, Ben was ridiculed by others for his poor academic performance and was labelled a

'dummy'. In an attempt to raise his academic standards, Ben's mother, Sonya Carson, made him and his brother Curtis, aged 10, read and write reports on two books every week, even though she was illiterate and had studied only up to third grade. Thus, curbing their TV viewing, she nurtured their curiosity. Ben read books on a wide range of subjects borrowed from a local library. He excelled academically, studied medicine and became a distinguished neurosurgeon. Thus, the root of his rise was the habit of regular reading instilled by his mother. This is what regular reading can achieve.

### GENERAL BENEFITS

All these stories demonstrate that reading is a superpower; it empowers people to attain unimagined heights. In addition to enhancing one's knowledge, reading also provides other benefits. Reading helps to reduce stress, increases one's ability to concentrate, expand's vocabulary, improves memory, develops thinking and analytical skills, nurtures writing skills, helps visualization and many more.

Just as physical exercise is necessary to keep the body toned and healthy, reading is a workout for the brain and protects against Alzheimer's and other brain ailments. Reading transports one to different eras and enables encounters with people whom one would otherwise never be able to meet. It provides an opportunity to download the best and brightest ideas from the past and present and also learn about the future.

### EARNING POTENTIAL

It has been said that 'the more you learn, the more you earn.' Even without a complete formal education, many have excelled due to their reading habit. And as Louis Pasteur is noted to have said, "Chance favours the prepared mind." So, it is imperative for one's continued development to invest in reading. Just as people set aside funds for enjoyment and entertainment, one should

allocate an education (reading) budget in terms of time and money. It will be productive and give handsome returns in the long run.

## HOW TO READ

Now we know that reading is beneficial. But the skill of reading needs to be nurtured. Reading is not merely a physical process in which one identifies the words on a page, reads them and moves on.

For maximum benefit, one must add value to this mechanical process. Whatever type of book one is reading, value is added by:

1. Focused reading – avoid all distractions and concentrate.
2. Active questioning of the main ideas or story.
3. Analysis of the content to discover what the book is about.

Naturally, one's approach will depend on whether one is reading fiction or non-fiction.

In Vachanamrut Sarangpur 3, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given a framework by which any knowledge can be learnt, retained and experienced: “To listen to a talk through one's ears is known as *shravan*. Then, having heard the talk, to mentally ponder over the talk, and to discard that part of the talk which is fit to be discarded and to retain that part of the talk which is fit to be retained is known as *manan*. Then, having mentally retained the talk with conviction, the practice of continuously recalling the talk day and night is known as *nididhyas*. Finally, when one can recall that talk exactly as it was – as if it were manifest before one – with absolute clarity and spontaneity, that is known as *sakshatkar*.” Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained the process for listening, but the same technique can be used for reading.

Gunatitanand Swami has also outlined a useful way to ensure maximum benefit from reading: “If one does not read what is written; then it is as good as not having been written; and if it is read but if no concentration is kept, then it is as good as not having been read. And if concentration is

kept but not acted upon, then so what? Therefore, ...become steady and with a focused mind read and contemplate in the mind, then it will give satisfaction. For contemplating in the mind, it is said, ‘Behold all the words separately in one's heart and analyze’” (Swamini Vato, 4.90).

So, merely skimming through and superficially reading a book will not facilitate longterm retention of information. That is why, it is necessary to invest in time for reading.

The ability to read is indeed of great benefit. Many lack proficiency in this skill and suffer the consequences in various ways in their daily life and work. Those who have this ability, yet do not use it to full advantage are, in a sense, illiterate, and liable to suffer similar consequences. As Mark Twain said, “The man who does not read good books is no better than the man who can't.”

So, literacy should not be taken for granted. Purposeful reading has the potential to open up so many vistas, but not using this opportunity is wasteful.

## READING ARRANGEMENTS

To benefit from any pursuit, regular daily practice is essential: athletes, sports stars, musicians, artists and many others from all walks of life have daily routines to sustain and enhance their skills. Similarly, a daily dose of reading must be incorporated into one's schedule. To achieve this, make reading easily accessible. Carry a printed book or digital books wherever you go, leave books by the bedside, on the coffee table or other handy spots in the home, and set aside daily time to read at least 10–15 minutes.

Reading widely will enable one to find connections between seemingly separate ideas and establish relationships between previously unrelated areas of knowledge.

## SPIRITUAL READING

For spiritual growth, spiritual reading is a necessity. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 58, Bhagwan



Swaminarayan states that a *sampradaya*'s growth is fostered by the shastras describing the life and teachings of the founder. In essence, he is revealing that such reading strengthens the spiritual understanding and daily devotional practices of the devotees as individuals and consequently nurtures the growth of the *sampradaya*.

In addition, the tradition of Gunatit gurus Bhagwan Swaminarayan established represent his manifest form and so reading about their life and teachings is also an indispensable resource for spiritual growth.



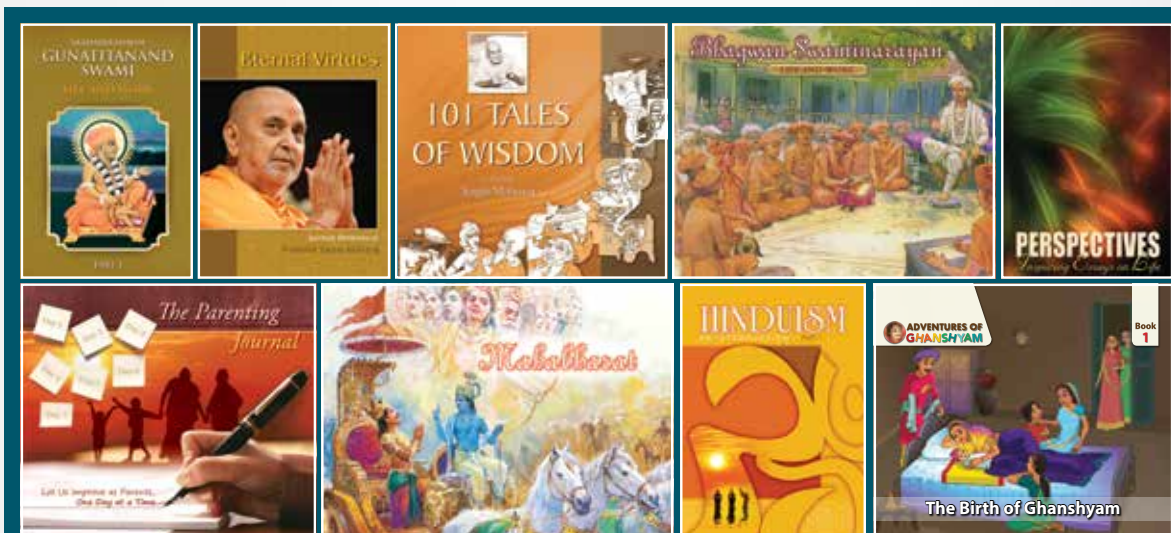
Puja Santvallabh Swami

Puja Santvallabh Swami was initiated as a sadhu by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. Fondly called 'Sant Swami' by all, he was revered as a spiritually enlightened sadhu who had earned the innermost blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He passed away in January 1993. Such was the impact of his saintliness and spiritual wisdom in the Sant Training Centre that Pramukh Swami

Maharaj described him as 'the beating heart of Sarangpur'. Sant Swami often said that, in addition to the three gurus he had served, he had kept the company of Bhagwan Swaminarayan through the Vachanamrut, Gunatitanand Swami through the Swamini Vato and Nishkulanand Swami through the Nishkulanand Kavya. Thus, his daily reading and detailed study of these three shastras had enabled him to glean their core messages and practice them perfectly in his exemplary life.

We are fortunate that there is bountiful literature on the life and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus. Swaminarayan Aksharpith has made available an extensive library of books – print, digital and audio – in Gujarati, English and Hindi that will interest, inform and inspire keen readers of all ages and levels of spiritual experience.

So, just as in secular fields people have benefited by reading and learning from their predecessors, we, too, as spiritual seekers can benefit and nurture our spiritual growth by reading about and emulating our spiritual guides. Let us resolve to stand on the shoulders of these spiritual giants and enhance our own lives. ♦



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# INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting  
information and wisdom*



## ART OF SELF-MAKING

Make a mind which never minds,  
Make a heart which never hurts,  
Make a touch which never pains,  
Make a relationship which never ends.

## MILK ANALYSIS

The true nature of an object can be learnt only by a proper study. Hindu scriptures describe the nature of God, but no one scripture is comprehensive.



Thus, only by study of all the major Hindu scriptures does a complete picture of God become clear. Shriji Maharaj explains this in Vachanamrut Vartal 2, “Only one who realizes God through these four scriptures can be said to possess total *jnan*. For example, only when one sees with one’s eyes does one come to know that milk is white; only when one smells with one’s nose does one come to know its smell; only when one touches it with one’s finger does one come to know whether it is hot or cold; and only when one tastes it with one’s tongue does one come to know its taste. In this manner, only when milk is tested through all of the *indriyas* can one totally know its nature; it cannot be totally known through one *indriya* alone. Similarly, one realizes God’s nature totally when one realizes it through the four scriptures, i.e., the Vedas, etc. To have such knowledge is called total *jnan*.”

*- Analogy from The Vachanamrut*

## BY GIVING SELFLESSLY YOU GAIN

An elderly man had three sons. He called them when he was on his deathbed. He told his eldest son that when he dies he should take half his property, the middle son should take one-third of his property and the youngest son should have one-ninth of his property. When the man died the sons found that their father had left behind 17 camels in property. With the percentage that their father had told them it was not possible to divide from

his property. They quarrelled with each other for their share. Not knowing how to resolve the issue they approached their father’s friend, who was a poor man with only one camel. To solve their problem he said, “I’ll donate my camel to your father’s herd.” So the eldest son got 9 camels as his half share. The second son got 6 camels as his one-third share. And the youngest got 2



camels as his one-ninth share. The boys left happily. Then when the elderly man turned around he saw his camel was left. He thanked God, “O God, your wisdom surpasses all understandings.” When you give you don’t lose. The friend gave his only possession for the dignity of his deceased friend and the harmony of his sons. His camel helped in dividing the possessions properly. One gets God’s blessings by sacrificing.



### CHARACTER OF HINDUS

Sir John Malcolm (1769–1833 CE), the Governor of Bombay Presidency (which included much of Western and Central India) in the early 19th century, described the character of the Hindus, “The Hindoo inhabitants are a race of men, generally speaking, not more distinguished by their lofty stature, which rather exceeds that of Europeans, and their robust frame of body, than they are for some of the finest qualities of the mind; they are brave, generous, and humane, and their truth is as remarkable as their courage. I have known innumerable instances of its [honour] being carried to a pitch that would be considered in England, more fit for the page of a romance than a history: with regard to their fidelity, I think, as far as my knowledge extends, there are, generally speaking, no race of men more to be trusted.”



### 7 SECRETS OF SUCCESS

I found the answers in my room:

The **Roof** said: Aim high.

**Fan** said: Be cool.

**Clock** said: Every minute is precious.

**Mirror** said: Reflect before you act.

**Window** said: See positive things in the world.

**Calendar** said: Be up-to-date.

**Door** said: Push hard to achieve your goals.

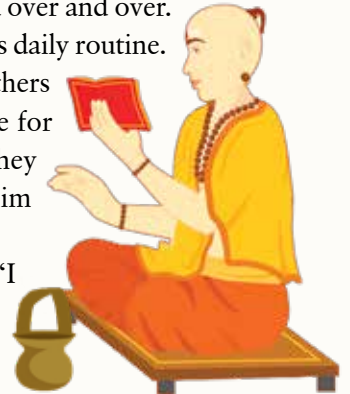
### HARD WORK PAYS

There was once a Brahmin. He began to study Sanskrit. But he didn’t have a very good memory. He could never memorize anything. He would try, but then he would quickly forget.

One day he filled a large bowl with sesame seeds. Next to this he placed a gourd. Then he said a Sanskrit word and put a sesame seed in the gourd. He repeated the word and placed another seed in the gourd. In this way he filled the gourd repeating the same Sanskrit word over and over. He then emptied the gourd and began repeating another word. This was his daily routine.

After some time he became a great Sanskrit scholar. He would defeat others in debates on the shastras. Whenever a scholar from another place came for a debate the people always selected the Brahmin to speak for them. They knew he would win the debate. He was very learned. Everyone called him the *tal-tumbadiya shastri* – the sesame scholar.

We should also study with courage and determination. Never say, “I can never learn this. I can’t remember anything.” Always look to the *tal-tumbadiya shastri* for inspiration.

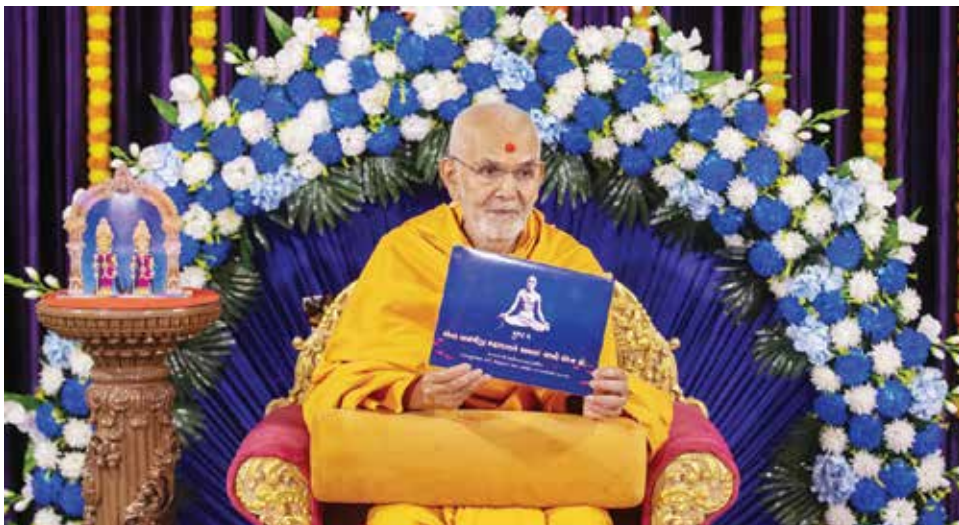


- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj



# MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

February 2021, Nenpur



Swamishri inaugurates the fifth video episode of an illustrated version of Shastriji Maharaj's life, 'Evā Shastriji Maharaj ne Lākho Vandan ho.' (Download from baps.org)

## FEBRUARY

■ **8:** According to the Indian calendar, today marked the 50th year of Yogiji Maharaj's departure from earth to Akshardham. So, in Swamishri's morning puja, the *sadguru* swamis sang bhajans about Yogiji Maharaj's glory via Zoom from their respective mandirs. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj sang in his sweet, soft tone, "Yogi dyo darshan amane...", and gave special *smruti* to all.

■ **12:** Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the new *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj of the already consecrated BAPS *hari* mandir of Vadola village in the Khambhat region.

■ **13:** According to the Indian calendar, today marked HDH Mahant Swami Maharaj's 64th *parshad diksha* anniversary. Swamishri narrated the occasion when Yogiji Maharaj gave him *diksha* in Akshar Deri, Gondal.

■ **16:** Last year, 16 February 2020 (Vasant Panchami), Swamishri performed the

*murti-pratishtha* rituals of the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir in Navsari. Also, on this day, Swamishri commenced writing the Satsang Diksha shastra in Navsari. In commemoration to this historic event the 315 *shloks* of Satsang Diksha engraved on stone were installed on top of the Gaj-pithika surrounding the Navsari mandir.

In Nenpur, on 14 February, Swamishri had performed the *pujan* and inaugural rituals of the first *shlok* of Satsang Diksha inscribed on stone to be installed in Navsari mandir.

Today, a ritual *tula* of Satsang Diksha shastra was arranged in Navsari mandir to mark the first day of writing by Swamishri. Prior to this, Swamishri performed a *tula* of Satsang Diksha by placing a copy of the shastra in one pan and special things in the other. During the *tula* the chanting of Satsang Diksha *shloks* imbued the occasion with divinity.

■ **18:** Swamishri inaugurated the fifth video episode of an illustrated version of Shastriji

Maharaj's life, 'Eva Shastriji Maharaj ne Lakho Vandan ho.'

■ **18 & 20:** Two exclusive online felicitation assemblies were held in Swamishri's presence for over 2,000 youths who had memorized the 315 *shloks* of Satsang Diksha. For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, March–April 2021, pp. 8 to 15.

■ **19:** Swamishri inaugurated online the 22nd batch of youths enrolled for the Yuva Talim Kendra in Sarangpur. Swamishri lit the inaugural lamp and blessed the youths online.

■ **21:** Swamishri kindled the inaugural lamp to launch the one-day virtual Vasant Shibir for participants in UK and Europe. Swamishri blessed them by showering flower petals on all the participant's names.

■ Over several days Swamishri individually blessed, via Zoom, 1,300 *yuvaks* who had



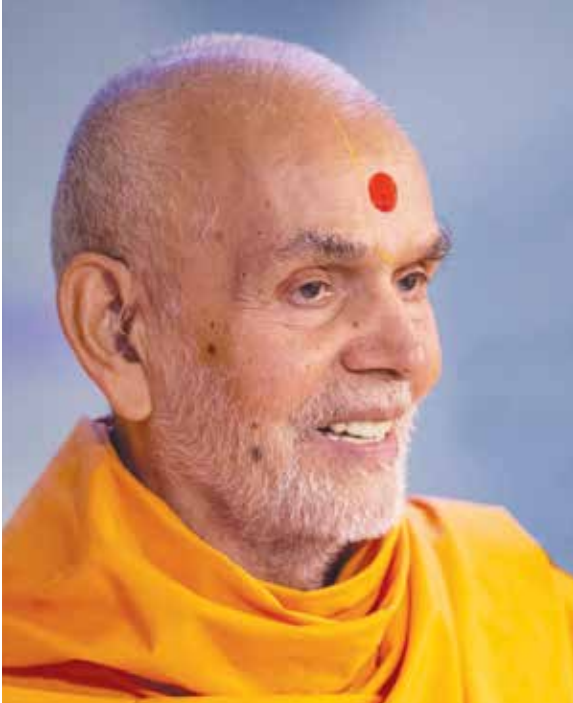
A total of 415 handwritten manuscripts of Satsang Diksha placed in the *tula*

successfully accomplished memorizing the 315 *shloks* of the Satsang Diksha shastra. The youths were excited and honoured by Swamishri's personal blessings. ♦

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

## LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

February 2021, Nenpur



JANUARY

OBEYING SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S AGNA

4, Monday

A devotee's letter was read before Swamishri, "Jai Swaminarayan. My son is 22 years old and he has nearly completed his bachelor's studies in computer science. He is a *karyakar* in the *kishore mandal*. He enthusiastically participates in various *seva*. However, he eats onions and garlic. My wife and I had given up eating onions and garlic 10 years ago. My son never eats onions and garlic at home, but he eats at our relatives' or his friends' homes. Sometimes he eats them in restaurants and other places. I have tried to explain to him not to do so, but he is unable to restrain himself. Can you have a word with him?"

Swamishri instructed the *kishore* in a phone call, "Obey Shriji Maharaj's commands. He is above all things and that is why one must

definitely obey his instructions. To abide by Shriji Maharaj's word is equal to billions of rupees and to eat by disobeying his commands amounts to minus five rupees. Shriji Maharaj likes one who obeys his moral and spiritual commands. So, you must follow his commands very well."

Swamishri's message to the youth applies to all *satsangi* youths and devotees.

## VIRTUE OF FRUGALITY

### 7, Thursday

The swamis serving Mahant Swami Maharaj held a discussion (*goshthi*) on Swamishri's inclination for being sparing and un wasteful in all his actions. Some incidents are as follows.

- Whenever Swamishri gargles he always turns the tap off while gargling to avoid unnecessary wastage of water.

- While brushing his teeth he keeps a small pot (*loto*) of water in order to use less water.

- Swamishri makes sure that all the faucets are closed properly. If the attendant Swami is lax about this Swamishri reminds him to be conscientious.

- Swamishri has a paper tissue divided into four pieces and uses each one as required. If the attendant gives him more he returns the extra piece.

- When Swamishri is sitting in a room where there is enough sunlight, he will not allow the electric lights to be switched on. When any unnecessary lights are on he immediately instructs the *sevak* to turn them off.

- While writing a letter if Swamishri has only two to three lines left to write, he will not ask for another paper but write on the side margins of the paper.

In spite of being the spiritual head and managing the worldwide BAPS and its various megaservices to society, Swamishri is sparing or frugal

in his personal requirements and daily activities.

## DO CONCENTRATED BHAJAN

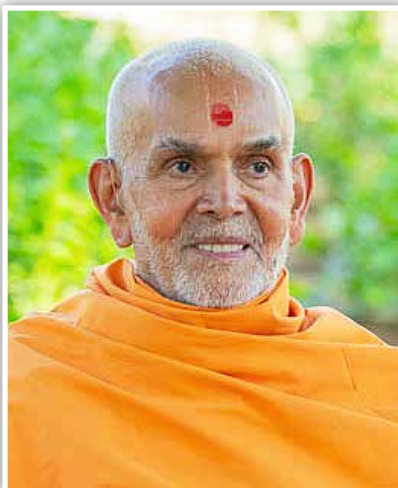
### 16, Saturday

Daily, Swamishri gives counsel to the enquiries or problems of devotees in the form of letters or phone calls. On one occasion, Atmaswarupdas Swami presented a devotee's question, "The devotee is 65 years old and wishes to start a new business. He has asked whether he should do it?"

Swamishri personally knew the devotee well. He understood and guided categorically, "Now do bhajan. The reason is the purpose of this human birth is to do bhajan and to develop *nishtha*

(faith in God). You are doing other *seva*, which is fine. But from now on do concentrated bhajan."

Swamishri clearly spelled out the true purpose of the human birth and to fully engage oneself in doing bhajan to attain *moksha*.



## SAMP IS EQUAL TO RAJIPO

### 18, Monday

According to Swamishri's instruction an attendant made a phone call to the leading male member of a staunch *satsangi* family. For quiet some time the members of the family were going through some internal differences and conflict. Consequently, their minds had turned sour. Today, they had solved their differences and reestablished harmony and unity in the family. Swamishri was happy to hear this and blessed them, "You have done a good thing. Maharaj, Swami and the Gunatit Parampara are very pleased upon you. I, too, am happy with you."

On hearing this the devotee became emotional. He thankfully said, "Everything is well now."

Swamishri replied, "Yes, with God everything turns out well. God has pervaded in all of you to



make things well instantly. Now sustain this *samp* (harmony) in future. All of you remain strong [spiritually]. Maharaj and Swami are on your side (*paksh*), and you should keep them on your side as well. When such good intellect (*buddhi*) prevails, he remains on our side. I am very happy. May you all stay harmoniously and all your works will be accomplished through *samp*.”

Swamishri’s blessed words were a testament to how much Shriji Maharaj and the whole guru *parampara* are happy upon those who adopt *samp* in their families and in all situations.

## DURING FREE MOMENTS

### 19, Tuesday

Daily, before just finishing his lunch, Swamishri routinely takes his medicines with buttermilk. Vednayandas Swami, a medical doctor, takes care of dispensing the medicines to Swamishri. Today, he was not present. Vinaypriyadas Swami, who serves meals to Swamishri, went to ask Vednayandas Swami. In the meantime, Swamishri interlocked his fingers, closed his eyes and became lost in meditation. A couple of minutes later

it became known that the medicine to be given was in a box inside a bag that was nearby.

Swamishri opened his eyes and took the medicine and the remaining morsels of food. The attendant swami asked, “Were you meditating?” Swamishri replied, “Yes, on Yogi Bapa.”

During his free moments Swamishri loves to reminisce or meditate on his guru.

## DISSOLVING FEAR

### 25, Monday

A student rang Atmaswarupdas Swami to seek Swamishri’s blessings. Atmaswarupdas Swami

informed Swamishri, “Swami, the student is brilliant but he is afraid of taking his final annual exams. Bless him so that his fear goes away.”

Swamishri advised him, “Believe that you are *akshar*, then where will be the issue of being fearful? Instead of merely saying [one is *akshar*], one should believe ‘I am *akshar*’. Then, all your fears will go away.”

Swamishri gave an ultimate solution to dissolve all fears.

## MEANING AND GLORY OF ‘DAS’

### 31, Nenpur

Swamishri suddenly uttered, “I am Akshar and the *das* [servant] of Purushottam. And [I] am *das no das no das*.” (I am the servant of the servants of servants.)

“Why?” asked Swamishri’s attendant, Uttamyogidas Swami.

Swamishri replied, “There is so much worth and joy in becoming *das*. By being arrogant one loses everything.” Swamishri uttered the word ‘*das*’ with great joy and glory.

“What does it mean to be *das*?” Uttamyogidas Swami asked.

“That everyone is above me,” Swamishri replied.

“Then one would become valueless or worthless,” stated Uttamyogidas Swami.

“Oh, Bhagwan values [you],” Swamishri spoke in a spirited voice. Then he added, “Bhagwan says, ‘One who has pride, I do not bow and touch his feet. Whereas, one who becomes *das* is supreme.’ Now, what else remains to be attained?”

Swamishri explained the meaning and value of humility (*das*), however, he himself always bows to all and believes that he is the *das* of everyone. ♦

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



# Global Efforts by BAPS to Supply Emergency Medical Aid to India

April–May 2021



*Pujan of liquid oxygen cryogenic tank before dispatch from Abu Dhabi*

The current unprecedented surge in COVID-19 cases throughout India has overwhelmed the health infrastructure and resources of the entire country. The enormous number of patients requiring treatment has led to a previously unheard of shortage of ICU beds, ventilators, beds with oxygen support, medical oxygen and other supplies. It has stretched the doctors, nurses, paramedical personnel and other frontline workers beyond capacity. These covid warriors are courageously and professionally dealing with this crisis that has left the entire nation in a state of unease. The worldwide Indian diaspora and many countries have initiated efforts to help India with much-needed medical oxygen, medical equipment and other emergency supplies.

By the inspiration of Mahant Swami Maharaj, BAPS centres worldwide have contributed to the efforts by supplying liquid oxygen, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders and other essential supplies. Also, in Gujarat, BAPS hospitals have been providing treatment to COVID-19 patients.

The following is brief overview of recent COVID-19 relief by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.





Visit to liquid oxygen plant, UAE



Oxygen cylinders ready for transport to India, UAE



Supplies ready for departure from the UK



Relief aid from the UK arrives in India

## OXYGEN AND EQUIPMENT

With the support of the UAE government and Indian community, BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, under the guidance and inspiration of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, has created a supply chain of oxygen tanks and cylinders which will provide over 440 metric tons of liquid oxygen per month – enough to fill more than 50,000 cylinders of medical oxygen. Each oxygen source will be technically audited to ensure that India's standards for medical oxygen are met or exceeded. This oxygen will be provided to the needy through the government, BAPS's own network of COVID hospitals and special village clinics. Under the guidance of the Gujarat government, BAPS is distributing the oxygen free of charge to designated hospitals and treatment facilities.

The efforts in the UAE are being coordinated by Brahmavihari Swami, along with Shri Deepak Mehta, CEO of Global Gases Group, and Shri Ramesh Ramakrishnan, Chairman of the Transworld Group and other donors and supporters. They have meticulously planned the logistics to send aid to the patients in India as soon as possible.

On 1 May 2021, two cryogenic tanks filled with a total of 44 metric tons (MT) of liquid oxygen (LOX) were dispatched from Abu Dhabi. These special vacuum insulated tanks, custom-built to safely carry liquid oxygen at  $-185^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-300^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in accordance with international safety standards, arrived at Kandla Port on 6 May. Each tank will provide sufficient oxygen to fill 5,300 cylinders that will help to save many lives. From





Oxygen concentrators from the USA



Oxygen concentrators from Kenya



Oxygen cylinders arrive in Atladara



Oxygen concentrators arrive in Ahmedabad

Kandla, the special vacuum insulated tanks were taken by road to their supply destinations.

On 8 and 9 May, the first shipment of liquid oxygen was supplied to the District Civil Hospital in Morbi, Guru Gobindsinh General Hospital in Jamnagar, Civil Hospital in Palanpur, GMERS Hospital in Patan and Yogiji Maharaj Hospital in Ahmedabad and will help to treat thousands of patients.

Also, arrangements have been made to send more than 1,600 cylinders of medical oxygen from the UAE, of which 600 cylinders have already been received.

In addition, around 1,000 oxygen concentrators will be sent by BAPS centres in the UAE, UK, USA, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa. The support of donors and authorities in the various

countries has facilitated the rapid transport of essential supplies.

An initial consignment of oxygen concentrators reached Ahmedabad on 30 April. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of the equipment with prayers that these instruments be as helpful as possible to as many patients as possible. These concentrators will distributed to hospitals and healthcare centres in different cities.

To support BAPS's COVID-19 relief work in India, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in UK & Europe began a 'Cycle to Save Lives in India' campaign on 28 April 2021 – a 48-hour, non-stop static relay cycle challenge. It aimed to cover 7,600 kilometres – the distance between London and Delhi – but ended up almost tripling that by cycling 20,127 kilometres!



Patients receiving treatment at the field hospital on the BAPS Yagnapurush Grounds in Atladara

As part of a relay, 787 participants cycled during the day and throughout the night from Saturday 1 to Monday 3 May at BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs in London, Chigwell and Leicester. Through their efforts, substantial emergency supplies were sent to India.

The cycles were arranged outside the respective mandirs, following strict social distancing guidelines. They were also thoroughly sanitized after every use.

### BAPS COVID-19 MEDICAL SERVICES

In Gujarat, a total of 395 beds at BAPS hospitals have been allocated to treat coronavirus patients: Pramukh Swami Maharaj Hospital in Surat, Shastriji Maharaj Hospital in Vadodara, Yogiji Maharaj Hospital in Ahmedabad and the BAPS Hospital in Botad. To date, around 3,500 patients have been treated.

In Atladara, near Vadodara, the BAPS Shastriji Maharaj Hospital is providing full medical, nursing and other infrastructure support at remote

two units: BAPS Niramaya Hospital – 35 beds with oxygen support – and BAPS Chhatralaya – 100 beds.

In addition, on the BAPS Yagnapurush Grounds opposite the BAPS Mandir in Atladara, a 500-bed field hospital with oxygen support has been set up. The entire non-medical infrastructure – electrical, plumbing and civil work – for the field hospital is being provided by the BAPS Mandir in Atladara under the guidance of Kothari



Sponsored Cycle Challenge, BAPS Mandir, London





Patient at BAPS Niramaya Hospital, Atladara



Patient at BAPS Hospital, Botad



An admin console at the field hospital, Atladara



Meals for patients and staff at the field hospital, Atladara

Bhagyasetu Swami, Jnanvatsal Swami and other swamis, as well as, Shri Siddarthbhai Patel, Dr Samirbhai Brahmabhatt, Shri Narayansinh Jadeja, Shri Bharatbhai Desai and other devotees. They have also provided a 13,000 litre liquid oxygen storage tank on the premises. The admissions and medical treatment at this field hospital, is being managed by the government-run GMERS Hospital, Gotri.

The BAPS Mandir in Atladara is also providing

free meals three times a day to all patients, doctors, nurses, paramedics and other staff in the field hospital.

In addition, BAPS centres in Valsad, Rajkot, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and elsewhere are also providing food and rations to the needy.

## VACCINATION DRIVES

In India, BAPS has conducted vaccination camps at centres in Surat, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Rajkot and Nadiad.

Also, at over 30 BAPS centres in the USA and Canada have held vaccination camps to vaccinate thousands of local residents.

## VOLUNTEER NETWORK

To ensure smooth and efficient delivery of the supplies experienced BAPS swamis and a network of volunteers have selflessly dedicated their services.



BAPS Yogiji Maharaj Hospital, Ahmedabad





## Pushpadolotsav Celebration with Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj

29 March 2021, Nenpur

**T**housands of devotees in India and abroad joined the online celebration of Pushpadolotsav in the presence of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The early morning celebration assembly began at 6:00 a.m. with Mahant Swami Maharaj's puja darshan. Swamishri was seated on a small dais under a sprawling banyan tree in the grounds of Shantivan in Nenpur. To his right was a 12-door *hindolo*, similar to that used for Bhagwan Swaminarayan during the historic Fuldol festival in Vartal. At the centre of the *hindolo* were the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj surrounded by ornate bowls of colourful powders. The serene rustic settings added to the devotional atmosphere.

During Swamishri's puja, in between bhajans sung by swamis in Sarangpur, Narayanmuni Swami concisely narrated the glory and traditions of the Fuldol festival celebrations since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

After Swamishri's puja, a video reliving the past Pushpadolotsav celebrations in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj was shown.

Thereafter, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami,

in Ahmedabad, and Puja Doctor Swami, in Sarangpur, spoke on the spiritual significance of the Fuldol celebration.

Then, Swamishri, now seated inside the sanctified 12-door *hindolo*, was honoured with a garland. Celebratory bhajans were sung while Swamishri was gently rocked in the *hindolo*.

Afterwards, Swamishri blessed the assembly, emphasizing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's insistence in the observance of dharma even while joyously celebrating festivals.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami, and devoutly sprayed them with saffron-scented water. At the same time, Swamishri, too, was sprayed with sanctified water from small sprays by Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami.

Finally, Swamishri took a large spray in hand and virtually sprayed all the devotees at their homes with sanctified saffron-scented water.

In this way, the Pushpadolotsav celebration assembly, which had commenced under the backdrop of the bright full moon, concluded amid the cool morning sunlight. ♦



# Groundbreaking Ceremony to Launch Phase One Construction, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

25 April 2021, Sydney, Australia

The construction of Australia's biggest traditional Hindu mandir and community hub has begun in Sydney's west.

The Groundbreaking Ceremony (*khat vidhi*) for phase one of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir was first performed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj via webcast from Nenpur, India, on Tuesday, 6 April 2021, with the resident regional swamis participating on-line from Australia and New Zealand. Swamishri sanctified the bricks that would be ritually placed in the foundation of the construction.

Subsequently, the groundbreaking ceremony to initiate the construction of a traditional Haveli at the new mandir site in Kemps Creek, Sydney, was performed on Sunday, 25 April 2021, by the resident swamis in the presence of the trustees

of BAPS Australia and project consultants from Sydney. The auspicious Vedic ceremony began at 10:00 a.m. and concluded at 1:00 p.m.

In the preceding weeks, over 3,000 bricks and *pujan* kits had been distributed to households across Sydney, thus enabling devotees to participate in the Vedic ceremony to perform worship of the bricks from home and in small groups via a live webcast.

The on site and remote events were well planned and managed by the men and women volunteers of BAPS Sydney.

After conclusion of the ceremony at the site, throughout the week until Saturday, 1 May 2021, over 9,000 devotees, well-wishers, and representatives of numerous spiritual and social organizations visited the mandir site to lay their worshipped bricks in the foundations. ♦







## INDIA

### UNION CABINET MINISTER SMRITI IRANI VISITS BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

21 March 2021, Kolkata



Union Minister of Textiles and Minister of Women & Child Development, Smt. Smriti Irani, visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Kolkata.

Senior mandir volunteers guided her around the campus. During her stay she offered salutations and prayers for world peace in the main sanctum of the temple. Thereafter, she visited the Neelkanth Mandapam where she offered *abhishek* and prayers for the well-being, peace and prosperity of the entire nation.

She was inspired by the activities of the mandir and wrote in the visitors' book: "It is a blessing to set foot on a haven blessed by the Divine. My salutations to all who give service at the feet of Bhagwan. You are truly blessed to receive this opportunity. May you continue to serve humanity and bring glory to the teachings of Swaminarayan Bhagwan. Jai Swaminarayan!"

## UK & EUROPE

### YUVAK-YUVATI VASANT SHIBIR

21 February 2021, UK & Europe

A special one-day online *shibir* themed 'Satsang:



The True Lens' for *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* 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 programme began with Mahant Swami Maharaj's puja darshan via webcast from Nenpur, India. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the traditional *deep pragatya* to commence the *shibir*.

Throughout the day, more than 3,000 devices logged on to the webcast stream to enjoy practical guidance from *sadguru* swamis, thought-provoking presentations by learned swamis from around the world, introspective videos, specially recorded kirtans, and special blessings from *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Topics relevant to the current times, including how to identify and overcome one's *swabhavs*; cultivating *vivek* (discretion) in one's words and ways, for example, in use of social media; developing a true understanding of the Gunatit Satpurush's *mahima*, developing *draddha priti* for him and striving to earn his *rajipo*.

Delegates were provided with activity packs to perform with their families to enhance the learnings from the various presentations. Fun activities for children kept them engaged while parents participated in the *shibir*.

Participants found the *shibir* highly inspiring,



describing it as ‘life-changing’, ‘eye-opening’ and ‘the perfect spiritual recharge’.

## ASIA PACIFIC

### SHRI NILKANTH VARNI MURTI- PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

2 April 2021, Melbourne, Australia



On the occasion of the 9th *patotsav* of the mandir, the Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj and the opening of the Abhishek Mandapam was organized via a live webcast in the presence of the resident sadhus of the Asia Pacific region. Following the Vedic *mahapuja*, the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj were performed by the resident swamis. Then, a grand *annakut* of savoury and sweet vegetarian delicacies was offered to Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj.

The first *abhishek* and *arti* of the *murti* was performed by Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj from Nenpur, India.

Hundreds of families throughout Melbourne participated in the *mahapuja* and *abhishek* rituals virtually from their homes to comply with the local government COVID-19 guidelines.

### BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR, ASIA PACIFIC

18 April 2021

More than 1,200 *balaks* and *balikas* from throughout Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan participated in the online Bal-Balika Shibir based on the theme ‘Atmabuddhi – Jivanni Siddhi’. The



*shibir* elaborated upon the proper way to perform the essential daily devotional rituals of *puja*, *arti* and *thal* by learning Mahant Swami Maharaj’s way of doing them.

The three *shibir* sessions were presented in the form of a day in the life of a child named Akshar. The children learnt about and experienced the importance of these daily devotional rituals through dramas, animated skits, presentations by swamis, activities, Zoom breakout discussions led by local *karyakars*, and special guidance by senior swamis and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Relevant verses from the Satsang Diksha were used as a guide for how to perform these rituals. The participants learnt about the proper ways of doing *mala* and *mansi*, the glory of *arti* and the correct way of offering food to God. They were also guided on how to perform these rituals with devotion.

The children pledged to strive to improve their regularity and quality of daily devotion by learning from Mahant Swami Maharaj’s bhakti.

## BAPS CHARITIES

### HOW TO STAY HEALTHY DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND, UK

The coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly challenged all and made everyone aware of the vital need to ensure we retain good health.

It is evident that people who are overweight and/or have diabetes or high blood pressure have also fared much worse. BAPS Charities, UK, has produced an informative and useful 12-part

series of short video presentations (<https://www.bapscharities.org/uk/news/covid-19-risk-factors-how-to-stay-healthy-during-covid-19-and-beyond-uk/>) to educate and encourage practical lifestyle changes to help overcome these risk factors and develop physical and mental well-being.

## BUSHFIRE DISASTER RELIEF EFFORTS

January–February 2021, Perth, Australia



During January and February 2021, major

bushfires in Western Australia burnt over 11,000 hectares, and completely destroyed over 71 houses and properties.

Hundreds of residents from over approximately 48,000 hectares had to be evacuated to emergency shelters, as the fires surged.

Efforts were hampered by strong winds and COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Perth.

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 coordinated food and transportation for displaced community members, as well as serving over 1,000 hot vegetarian meals to the fire fighters, frontline workers and supporting volunteers. ♦

## TRIBUTE



**PUJYA YOGISWARUP SWAMI, JUNAGADH**

**Aksharvas: 8 March 2021; (72 years)**

A native of Jhamrala, near Sarangpur, Yogiswarup Swami was of a devout nature from a young age. He was initiated into the sadhufold by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj in 1968. Initially, Yogiswarup Swami resided in Mumbai and studied Sanskrit up to *acharya* level.

In 1975, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj appointed him as the *kothari* of the mandir in Rajkot, where he oversaw the tremendous growth of the Satsang for 38 years. From the *hari* mandir in Rajputpara to the present grand *shikharbaddha* mandir on Kalavad Road, he dedicated his efforts amid many difficulties and hardships. He remained unflappable amid many challenges. Yogiswarup Swami's simple and disciplined life, saintliness, understanding of satsang and everyone's *mahima*, friendly and cooperative nature, and heartfelt devotion touched everyone

in his contact. His daily practice of *katha*, *arti*, *darshan*, *chesta* and other daily devotion was a hallmark of his devout life.

He also enthusiastically engaged in discourses and discussions with devotees to strengthen and deepen their understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He had a strong rapport with the devotees and supported them through their ups and downs as a true family member.

In 2013, by the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Yogiswarup Swami moved to Junagadh, where he continued to serve by assisting the resident sadhus in every way. He accompanied them to *sabhas* and *padhramanis* and always strengthened everyone's *mahima* for the satsang.

We pray humble tributes to Yogiswarup Swami and his devout and dedicated life in serving gurus Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦





### **BAPS COVID-19 MEDICAL SERVICES, GUJARAT** **Atladara, April – May 2021**

The BAPS Mandir in Atladara is providing full non-medical infrastructure support at the government's field hospital set up on the BAPS Yagnapurush Grounds.

**1–2.** Patients receiving treatment for COVID-19 at the field hospital.

**3.** BAPS provides free meals for all the patients and medical staff at the field hospital.

**4.** A patient receiving medical care at BAPS Niramaya, a COVID-19 treatment centre operated by BAPS Shastriji Maharaj Hospital, Atladara.

**5.** Medical staff workstation at BAPS Niramaya.





### GLOBAL EFFORTS BY BAPS TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPLIES TO GUJARAT, April – May 2021

1. BAPS centres in the UAE, UK, USA, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa have sent hundreds of oxygen concentrators to Gujarat. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami blesses an initial consignment in Ahmedabad.
2. Brahnaviharidas Swami and donors with the first two tanks of liquid oxygen in Abu Dhabi, ready to ship for hospitals in Gujarat, India. A regular supply network has been set up.
3. Over 750 people participated in the sponsored 'Cycle of Save Lives in India' from 1 to 3 May.