

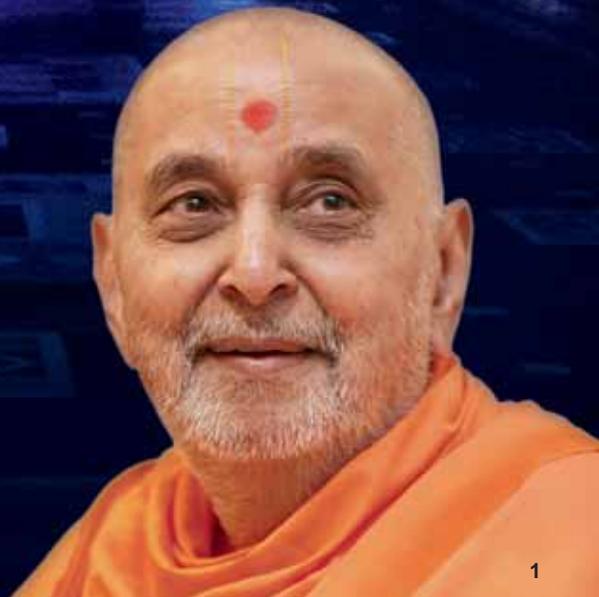
SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

November–December 2017

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Silver Jubilee Celebration of Akshardham

Inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj
on 2 November 1992, Gandhinagar





SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATION, AKSHARDHAM

2 November 2017, Gandhinagar

1. Prime Minister Narendrabhai Modi and Mahant Swami Maharaj offer *abhishek* to the *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni.
2. After offering prayers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the main mandir. *Inset*: PM Modi bows to the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



Silver Jubilee Celebrations, Akshardham, Gandhinagar

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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

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The Reunion of Dharmakul with Shri Hari

More than three decades had elapsed since Shri Hari left Ayodhya. The senior sadhus wished to reunite the members of Dharmakul with Shri Hari. Eventually the historic day arrived in the village of Kariyani...

MAHARAJ THROWS RUPEES IN A WELL

Then Shri Hari instructed, "O sadhus, take this money." The sadhus replied, "Maharaj, for us money is like dust and faeces. What can we do with it?" Instantly, Maharaj replied, "Then what is the need of it to me!" Then, to everyone's amazement, Maharaj took a palm-full of coins and threw them into the nearby well. Then he took the remaining coins and threw them on Pancho Koli's roof nearby.

On hearing the impact on her roof, Pancho Koli's mother, who was sifting grains outside, cried aloud, "Who the heck is throwing stones on my roof?" And then the coins rolled down and fell before the surprised old woman. On seeing the coins Pancho's mother turned ecstatic. She collected the money and thought, "Bhagwan has showered money from the sky."¹

Then Maharaj asked the devotee who had donated the money, "Bhagat, you gave me money and I threw it away into the well. Do you have doubts about my act?" The devotee humbly replied, "It was a great honour and blessing for me that you accepted my donation. Having offered it to you it was no longer mine. Maharaj, you threw away your own money, thus how can a doubt arise in my mind." Shri Hari was pleased with the devotee's understanding and for perceiving divinity in him.

DHARMAKUL ARRIVES IN KARIYANI

Nearly all the members of the Dharmakul (family of Dharmadev) had crossed the River Mahi and were proceeding towards Kariyani. Only Raghuvirji and his maternal uncle, Sufal, were lagging behind. While they were crossing the river, midway, they were suddenly pulled by the ebbing river water. Petrified, Raghuvirji felt they would be unable to have Maharaj's darshan in spite of having travelled all the way from north India. They were on the verge of getting drowned. But, on remembering Maharaj, the force of the ebbing tide decreased. Then, some swimmers from the opposite bank saw their pitiful plight and quickly rowed their boat towards them and rescued them. Raghuvirji felt that Maharaj had saved them. Eventually the two of them reached Bochasan and reunited with Rampratapbhai. Thereafter, the local devotees honoured them with garlands and offered lunch.

The entire group travelled together to Kariyani. When they were about three kilometres away, Muktanand Swami requested Shri Hari to go and receive them. So, Maharaj took a few *parshads* and headed towards the outskirts. Several sadhus, Dada Khachar, Jivuba and other devotees had left much earlier to receive and have darshan of the Dharmakul members. When they saw the chariots and carts approaching them they were excited and filled with joy. The sadhus prostrated

¹ Presently, these coins are displayed on the wooden *sinhasan* of Maharaj's wooden *murti* installed in Akshar Bhavan, Vartal. By virtue of receiving these sacred coins, a short while later, Pancho Koli was blessed with the sum of ₹ 10,000.

to Rampratapbhai and Ichchharambhai. Jivuba, Laduba and other women devotees offered *panchang* pranams and hugged Suvasini Bhabhi. Everyone was overwhelmed with tears of joy. Then the entire group proceeded swiftly towards Kariyani for Maharaj's darshan. Soon, they saw Shri Hari riding on Manki and the *parshads* approaching them. On coming near, Maharaj got off his mare. Suvasini Bhabhi alighted from her chariot and recognized Maharaj. She became emotional, her eyes overflowing with a torrent of tears. She was seeing her dear Ghanshyam after so many years of separation. Her emaciated body quivered, but she remained transfixed. Shri Hari looked at her. Everyone around stood paralysed and amazed by the scene.

BROTHER GHANSHYAM HAS BECOME GOD

Then words slowly trickled forth from Suvasini Bhabhi, "Brother Ghanshyam, brother!" And thereafter she collapsed to the ground unconscious. Jivuba and Laduba went to her aid and sprinkled water on her face. Soon, she came to her senses and became stable. But she was unable to go near Maharaj for the simple reason that Ghanshyam had become Bhagwan and he was no longer the sweet child she once knew. He was not the same Ghanshyam to whom she had once fed with her own hands and played pranks with. He was Bhagwan and supreme, whereas she was unknown and insignificant. She felt a barrier dividing them both.

On seeing her ponder, Maharaj called out, "Bhabhi, I am still the same Ghanshyam for you. Had I not told you I would never abandon anyone who has associated with me."

BHABHI, YOUR LOVE IS NOT WORLDLY BUT DIVINE

For Suvasini Bhabhi, Shri Hari's words evoked several scenes of Ghanshyam's exploits. Then Maharaj appeared as Ghanshyam before Suvasini Bhabhi. Suvasini got up and ran to Maharaj. But

Maharaj took two steps backward and restrained her, "Bhabhi, treasure the joy you had of serving me in your heart. I have to abide by the disciplines I have established."

Suvasini Bhabhi stopped instantly. Shri Hari praised her, "Bhabhi, your love is not worldly but divine. However, I have come on earth in a human form to establish Bhagvat Dharma. To allow this dharma to flourish it is incumbent upon all devotees to practise it. In abiding by it you will be liberated from body-consciousness [*debhav*] and be blessed with divinity [*divyabhav*]. And thereafter, in that divine spiritual state, the moral disciplines will not make you feel restricted."

Suvasini Bhabhi understood the purport of Maharaj's words and felt her Ghanshyam was truly great and so was his mission. She decided to abide by Maharaj's word by not touching him and instead offered him *panchang* pranam. Shri Hari saw Bhabhi's devotional love for him and his eyes turned moist with tears.

All the members of Dharmakul slowly proceeded towards Kariyani. They were all hosted by Vasta Khachar in his large and spacious *darbar*. He had also made arrangements for a traditional meal of *kansar*, chapattis and other items to mark the auspicious arrival of Dharmakul. In fact Vasta Khachar felt honoured that Maharaj's brothers had arrived with their family first to his place. Everyone took their meals and retired to rest.

The next day, Shriji Maharaj left for Gadhada with his group of sadhus, *parshads* and Dharmakul. On the way he stayed the night at Jhinhavadar and reached Gadhpur the following day. To welcome and honour the Dharmakul, Nagmal Jiva Khachar and his family, Sura Khachar of Loya, Daha Khachar from Botad and other Kathi Darbars had also arrived in Gadhada to honour Maharaj's family. They all walked towards the outskirts playing musical instruments to receive Maharaj and the Dharmakul. The two groups met near Radhavav on the outskirts of Gadhada. Everyone was elated to have the darshan of Shri

Hari's family and thus embraced each other. The sound of musical instruments filled the air with joy and celebration.

Shri Hari and the Dharmakul entered Dada Khachar's *darbar*. They all first did darshan of the *murti* of Vasudev Narayan and then Maharaj went to his residence, Akshar Ordi. After freshening up Maharaj called Dada Khachar to his room and said, "Dada, the Dharmakul has arrived, so you'll have to make arrangements for their stay. Give separate rooms to my eldest brother and Ichchharam."

Dada Khachar explained, "Maharaj, I'll take care of their lodgings right now." Then, Dada Khachar touched Maharaj's feet and went to his quarters. After some time he returned to Maharaj and humbly informed, "Maharaj, for the present the Dharmakul have been given a room next to Vasudev Narayan's room. Raghuvirji's mother, Variyaliba, has been given a separate room nearby. And a room for Raghuvirji will be arranged later near the *brahmachari's* kitchen.

DHARMAKUL'S WISHES SHOULD BE FULFILLED

Shri Hari brought Dharmakul to Gadhada and made the appropriate lodging arrangements for them. He also appointed servants to serve them. Thereafter, Maharaj did not wish to stay for long in Gadhpur. After a few days he decided to leave Gadhpur. When Muktanand Swami and Nityanand Swami came to know of this they took Dada Khachar along with them to Maharaj. When Shri Hari saw them approaching he asked, "Why have you come here together?"

Muktanand Swami replied, "We have heard that you were preparing to leave Gadhada."

Shri Hari spoke frankly, "Yes, there are devotees in other villages and towns who are waiting for me. So, I must go to them too."

Nityanand Swami argued, "Maharaj, that is true, but the Dharmakul has arrived here. They too are your devotees. You should fulfil their

wishes and stay with them for at least the same number of days they had spent in sadness after you left them. Celebrate the Vasant festival here so they can avail of your spiritual presence."

DHARMAKUL CAPTIVATES ALL BY NARRATING MAHARAJ'S CHILDHOOD INCIDENTS

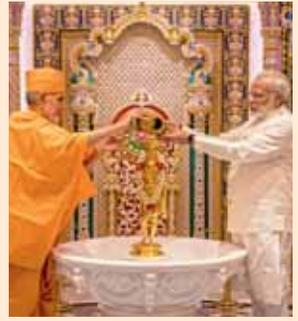
Shri Hari looked at Dada Khachar. The latter instantly expressed humbly, "Maharaj, what swami says is right. For the Dharmakul this region, people and language are new; therefore your presence here will enable them to mix and become familiar with everyone."

Maharaj thought for a while and said, "Now listen, I have forgotten the language of their region. So, too, when Dharmakul will mix with everyone here their foundation in satsang will become strong and stable." Then Nityanand Swami interrupted Maharaj, "Maharaj, everyone wishes that you stay here till the Vasant festival."

Shri Hari agreed, "I will stay here according to everyone's wishes." The devotees and *parshads* always remained close to and engaged with Dharmakul. Jivuba, Laduba and other female devotees sat for hours listening to Suvasini Bhabhi's narrations of Maharaj's childhood incidents. Similarly, Rampratapbhai talked to the sadhus, *parshads* and devotees about Maharaj's childhood stories. No one got tired of listening to Maharaj's divine incidents. In fact, many times there were less sadhus and devotees present in the assemblies presided by Maharaj. Once, Shri Hari asked about why few devotees were present in the assembly. Someone answered, "Maharaj, all are absorbed in hearing about your childhood incidents than the *katha* read by Pragji Purani or Dinanath Bhatt." Shri Hari responded with a soft smile. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

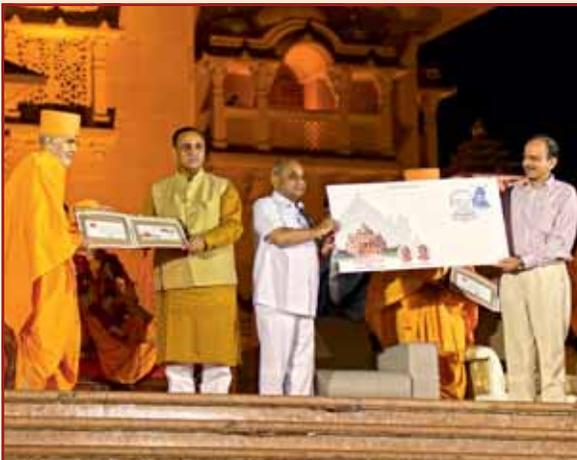
Translated from Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave



Akshardham

Silver Jubilee Celebrations

2 November 2017, Gandhinagar, Gujarat







Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, was the creation of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj and inaugurated by him in 1992. Akshardham means the 'divine abode' of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781–1830). To commemorate Akshardham's 25th anniversary a grand event was held on the premises of the iconic cultural and spiritual complex. More than 25,000 dignitaries, devotees and well-wishers attended the landmark function.

At 6.00 p.m., Pujya Anandswarup Swami, Mahant of Swaminarayan Akshardham, addressed the assembly about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's contributions in the creation of Akshardham. He said that





PM Narendrabhai Modi, Mahant Swami Maharaj, Ishwarcharan Swami at the Peacock Gate



Offering respect and prayers to the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Swamishri had given guidance on the thickness of the *parikrama* pillars, the face of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *murti*, the content of the exhibitions and a sundry things.

Thereafter, youths sang the Swaminarayan *dhun* and bhajans '*Vandu Sahajanand charan raj...*', '*Māiri mene Purushottam var pāyo...*' and '*Mangal chhāi rahyo tribhuvan me...*'

Prime Minister Narendrabhai Modi arrived at 6.30 p.m. in Akshardham and along with HH Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated the ornately carved stone Mayur Dwar (peacock gate). Then they proceeded to perform *abhishek* of the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and offered prayers. He was gifted a shawl and a pen. While walking towards the stage the 25,000 gathering welcomed the Prime Minister, HH Mahant Swami Maharaj,

Youths sing *dhun* and bhajans at the start of the celebration assembly

Chief Minister of Gujarat, Vijay Rupani, and Deputy Chief Minister, Nitinbhai Patel, with cheers and by waving the Indian and BAPS flags.

The Prime Minister and guests took their seats before the Akshardham Mandir and a welcome dance was performed by children to the song '*Vande mātaram, swāgatam*'. Thereafter, the scintillating 15-minute Akshardham Sanatanam show was shown. The captivating lasers, animations and videos projected on the Akshardham Mandir and an impressive commentary evoked an immersive and uplifting experience. The show vividly highlighted the 25-year history, impact and contributions of Swaminarayan Akshardham in inspiring spiritual and humanitarian values in countless people. The unique 15-minute show depicted Akshardham as sturdy and equiposed in the midst





Mahant Swami Maharaj ties the auspicious *nada-ghadi* before the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Mahant Swami Maharaj and PM Modi on the way to the celebration assembly

of all types of extremities, a source of service to society and a means to transforming countless lives. The show also revealed the visible and invisible works of Akshardham and its identity as the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The audience acknowledged the show with thunderous applause.

Then, while climbing the steps towards the Akshardham Mandir, Narendrabhai Modi offered his hand to support Mahant Swami Maharaj. Inside, they paid respects to the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan by offering flowers and peace prayers in the *garbha-gruh*. Mahant Swami Maharaj tied the auspicious *nada-ghadi* on Narendrabhai's wrist. Thereafter, the guests came to the podium outside the mandir. Mahant Swami Maharaj honoured the Prime Minister with a garland. Ishwarcharan Swami garlanded

Chief Minister Vijaybhai Rupani and Deputy Chief Minister Nitinbhai Patel.

Brahmavihari Swami delivered a welcome speech and narrated Narendrabhai's associations with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The Hon. Prime Minister addressed the congregation, reminiscing about Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the humanitarian works of BAPS. He said, "I've been closely associated with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and this movement since the early years of my life. I have always been deeply touched by his simplicity. Pramukh Swami Maharaj blended technology, modern management and timeless spiritual values in Akshardham and the mandirs he built. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had shown utmost care and affection for me on many occasions. He used to be the first person who remembered me

Devotees seated in the main walkway





Mahant Swami Maharaj honours the Prime Minister



Swamishri presents a memento to PM Modi

whenever I faced troubles. I am blessed that after Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj has comforted me.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the Silver Jubilee Celebration, saying, “We thank Shri Narendrabhai for coming here in spite of having many responsibilities. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an apostle of peace. He blessed everyone, and those who imbibed his blessings were elevated. Akshardham has inspired all its visitors towards righteous living and has left a profound impact in people’s lives. Let’s pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj that may all find inspiration to mould their lives by visiting Akshardham.”

The Prime Minister, Mahant Swami Maharaj and the entire congregation performed *arti*. Thereafter, the Prime Minister departed at 8.10 p.m. from the assembly amidst cheers and applause from the audience.

Thereafter, a traditional cultural dance ‘Akshardhām Sanatānam...’ was performed by children. Then, a video on the global impact of Akshardham was shown.

Pujya Dr Swami, Mahant of Ahmedabad Mandir, inspired the assembly in his address, “We should not be content with what we are doing because there is always room for improvement. We should also endeavour to purify our heart through self-introspection and the association of a true guru.”

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, convener of BAPS,



First Day Cover issued by the Post Office to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Akshardham, Gandhinagar

gave the highlights of how Akshardham was created. He said, “In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj had sat beneath the banyan tree, now behind the Akshardham premises, and prayed that a big mandir be built here. Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj fulfilled Yogiji Maharaj’s wish and inaugurated it in 1992. Akshardham inspires countless people to live a pure and peaceful life. I thank the architects, engineers, volunteers and devotees who had contributed during the construction of Akshardham.”

A first day cover to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Akshardham was released by the Post Office of Gujarat. It was inaugurated by Mahant Swami Maharaj and Chief Minister Shri Vijaybhai Rupani and Deputy Chief Minister Shri Nitinbhai Patel and the Postmaster General of Gujarat Shri Ambeshbhai Upmanyu.

The celebration assembly concluded at 9.00 p.m. with the screening of Akshardham Sanatanam show. ◆

Report by Sadhu Vivekjiandas

PM Narendrabhai Modi

2 November 2017, Akshardham, Gandhinagar



Jai Swaminarayan. When sadhus courteously asked me if I would come to this ceremony, I had asked them, "Have I become a guest?" It is my fortune that since I can remember, I have had a close association with this tradition and Pujya

Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In our discussions about religious traditions we are unable to proceed without talking about miracles. Due to our mindset, we just don't enjoy it without invoking miracles. And in great people we attribute miracles from anywhere, anyhow. One of the reasons I experienced closeness with Pramukh Swami Maharaj was that he didn't indulge in miracles. So natural and simple he was, that we would start believing as if he was just a step ahead of us. He never let us feel any distance from him.

It is not a difficult task for any social or spiritual organization to spread, because there is a large body of people in society. Some develop slowly, some



Devotees seated in the lawns during the the celebration assembly

quickly. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj focused on depth rather than on spread.

Brahmavihari Swami was telling me just now that Shastriji Maharaj had built five mandirs, while Bapa built 1,200 mandirs and that, too, in every corner of the world. But, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had not just created mandirs out of stone and sand, but erected centres of social conscience. Many a time, people who live with the burden of a tradition don't possess courage to do something new and hence they start getting suppressed beneath the burden of time. Having witnessed Pramukh Swami Maharaj closely, I can say that he was not bound by the restrictions of time.

When he built the mandir in London, he knew that a sports arena should be provided inside the mandir complex itself for the youths who have grown up there. Such courage can't be shown by those who are stifled by traditions. He made changes relevant to the times. Even in India, he added the human touch to mandir traditions and mandir management with perfection. We have seen mandirs in Gujarat and across the country, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his team created mandirs in the tradition of Akshardham.

Does a mandir have to be unclean? Do shoes have to be lying haphazardly? Is it necessary after eating *prasad* in the mandir for people to throw waste anywhere? He transformed all this. Shoes are systematically arranged. And, when a large number of people are expected, a bag is given to keep your shoes in. Since I was associated with a managerial body, I kept observing all these small things. Once, in a gathering of IAS officers, I invited Brahmavihari Swami and volunteers who contributed in constructing Delhi Akshardham to teach them how to complete projects on time.

I had once requested Pujya Bapa to invite three or four universities from around the world to do a case study on Akshardham to show that even in the spiritual world of India, there is a harmonious blend of modern technology and management. In the same way, Pramukh Swami Maharaj introduced management and used technology in other mandirs.

You go anywhere in Akshardham, and you will feel as if every stone speaks! You will feel like caressing the elephant sculptures since they are so realistic. Bringing such liveliness is not possible without paying attention to the minutest

details. When it was decided to build a theatre in Akshardham, others would think “How can you have a theatre in a mandir?” But, the theatre in Delhi Akshardham imparts a spiritual message using modern technology. When a person comes here, he may not be a devotee, but when he leaves, he goes as a devotee.

See the distinction of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On the one hand, he used modern technology and provided the best facilities; and on other hand, he ensured that his sadhus rigorously observed their spiritual vows given in the 18th century. This is not a small thing. When, in 1981, he initiated many youths into the sadhufold and led them towards this way of life, he was committed to giving them perfect training. And a training centre for sadhus was established in Sarangpur. I can say that in India today, this sadhu tradition is unique in following such difficult vows and offering devotion based on spiritual wisdom sharpened with the axe of logic. Sadhus are taught Sanskrit, even if they have studied in London. Whether a sadhu becomes a yoga-rishi or not, but yoga should become part of his daily life. I went to this training institute to see the syllabus and how the sadhus are trained. Even while utilizing modern technology and management the divinity of the mandir is preserved, ensuring that the mandir is not only grand, but is also divine. Pramukh Swami had developed the human resources here in a way even the government cannot do. Today, there are 1,100 sadhus. After the Ramakrishna Mission, perhaps, only Pramukh Swami Maharaj had attracted so many sadhus. In this 21st century, amidst countless temptations, ambitions and pleasures on which one may slip, it is an extraordinary phenomenon to have 1,100 sadhus.

Usually people try to impress others, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS have a unique trait of accommodating others. Hence, be it Dr. Abdul Kalam or be it Narendra Modi, all would become theirs. After becoming the PM, when I

have met leaders across the world, many of them mention having met Pramukh Swami Maharaj or being familiar with the Swaminarayan tradition. So expansive!

One should live life so that it advances society. Think for the good of others.

I remember quite vividly, that on 26 January 1992, I went to hoist the national flag in Srinagar’s Lal Chowk. We were on a pilgrimage from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, under the leadership of Murli Manohar Joshi. Terrorists had threatened to attack; they had already struck in Punjab and other places. Many people had been martyred. When I was going to Jammu after hoisting the national flag, Pramukh Swamiji had tried to call me half a dozen times! He cared whether I had reached safely. Just like a father would care for his son, Pramukh Swami was concerned about me.

Once, I had expressed my displeasure to Pramukh Swamiji. The reason for this was that he had asked me to send audiotapes of my speeches. I told him, “Bapa, it is I who should listen to your discourses; you don’t need to listen to my speeches.” I didn’t know why he did this. After five to six days, I received a message to meet him. His message was like a command. I went. He had listened to all my speeches. He told me, “You should not speak like this.” It was then that I realized how much he wished for my development. Even today, his guidance directs me.

Just now, when I walked holding Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj’s hand, everybody clapped. I am reminded of an incident. Once, a small girl went out with her father. It was raining heavily. The father instructed, “Dear, hold my hand firmly.” The daughter replied, “No father, you please hold my hand firmly.” Someone may wonder why the girl said this. The girl explained, “In strong winds or rain, I may lose my grip on your hand, but, if you hold my hand, you will never let go. So, when Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj held my hand, what have I to be worried about?”

The Akshardham tradition is based on

the spirit of service. During the Navnirman Movement [1973–74], when Gujarat was subject to curfew, over 103 people were killed. I remember distinctly that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had sent milk from Shahibaug Swaminarayan Mandir for all children, whatever their religious faith, in the curfew-stricken areas.

On 26 January 2001, we had the destructive earthquake in Kutch. We witnessed the widespread damage. At that time sadhus and devotees came and served with intense hard work, wiping away the tears of many. I have seen their renunciation, austerity and service. Whenever there was a flood, we would call either Santram Mandir or the Akshar-Purushottam Mandir; and when we asked for help, BAPS has never questioned ‘how many’ food packets, but have rather asked ‘by when’ the food packets have to be delivered. Not only the sadhus, but the volunteers also exude the same virtues. Whatever the location – New York, Delhi or anywhere else – a volunteer may serve from, you will observe the same discipline in them everywhere.

In this age, when people live under tremendous stress, even a householder can live his life peacefully under the radiance of divinity due to these arrangements.

At a time when freedom fighters were executed and imprisoned in jails on Andaman-Nicobar, the sadhus and bhakti tradition revived India. And, in a way that the British did not understand, this bhakti movement gave strength to the independence movement. In the early 19th century, Bhagwan Swaminarayan ushered in a renaissance in every corner of Gujarat, which became our invaluable legacy. This continued with the guidance and blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and now Mahant Swami Maharaj.

There are very few significant events related to the Narmada Project in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj was not involved. He enquired about the minutest details of the project. Today, Pramukh

Swami Maharaj would be very content to see the completion of the Narmada Project.

Not only me, but all seated here feel that Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed them. Everyone feels that he was theirs only. It was due to his generosity and universality that everyone feels this way. Pramukh Swami was a catalyst who completely transformed the BAPS. It was not as if he merely continued an existing tradition, but he completely transformed it.

After the departure of such a personality, we usually see that the foundations begin to shake. But, we can see that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has laid such robust foundations that for centuries to come there will be no problems. That was his foresight. This has become possible because he delegated. Under his supervision, he made sure that things were done by the appropriate people. He was a great people manager and unifier. That is why we have got management, tradition and sadhus of such a high calibre. On this occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Akshardham, let us look forward to the Golden Jubilee of Akshardham with a firm resolve to do something worthwhile.

In 2022, India will complete 75 years of independence. I would have met Pramukh Swami personally and asked him to please give me these five years of his for this occasion, and I am sure he would have given them. I pray at Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj’s feet to inspire all devotees across the world to make some resolve to achieve something for society and the nation and dedicate it to Mother India in 2022. This is what Pramukh Swami Maharaj had taught us. I again bow down to Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, all sadhus and devotees and bid you all my Jai Swaminarayan. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas & Bansal Bhalja

Mahant Swami Maharaj's Blessings

2 November 2017, Akshardham, Gandhinagar



We have seen today that Prime Minister Modi is very active. He is working day and night for the betterment of the country. I feel that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has drawn him here today. Because, Modiji had such a bond with Bapa. When Bapa passed away to Akshardham, he had also rushed to Sarangpur on Independence Day. Hence, it is quite certain that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has drawn him here. He has had many interactions with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He had such a rapport with Swami Bapa that we may not understand. Outwardly, it would appear as if he had a casual meeting, but he obeyed every injunction of Swami Bapa. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have blessed countless



L to R: Ishwarcharan Swami, Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, Mahant Swami Maharaj, Dr Swami, Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani and Deputy Chief Minister Shri Nitinbhai Patel

people, but Modi ji imbibed their words and made his life according to the blessings received. Based on Swami Bapa's guidance, he corrected his deficiencies and developed. Swami Bapa also cared for him much. Swami Bapa looked on everyone equally and blessed everyone equally, but just as a lotus blossoms, Modi Saheb has shone. Rupani Saheb, Nitinbhai and all have come here due to their affection for Swami Bapa.

Akshardham has completed 25 years. What has Akshardham done in these 25 years? Akshardham has given all peace. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's childhood name was also 'Shantilal' and all his childhood friends loved him. These friends missed him intensely when Swamishri decided to become a sadhu. After having met Shastriji Maharaj, he dedicated all his life to him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had tolerated all his life. He had never retaliated. Even after the Akshardham terrorist attack, Swami Bapa prayed and wished for the good of even the terrorists. Nobody would do this. In such a situation, others would have become furious. But, whatever the situation, Bapa was always at peace, supreme peace, and he made others calm.

What else has Akshardham achieved? We saw [in the Akshardham Sanatanam show] that a milkman resolved not to dilute milk by mixing it with water after visiting Akshardham. He was inspired

with righteous thoughts that would prevent him from wrong conduct. This is what Akshardham has done. It has turned people away from bad thoughts and wrongdoings. Akshardham has inspired millions to introspect. Even those who have come and just casually strolled around in Akshardham have been inspired. Modi Saheb said that anyone who comes here goes back by becoming a devotee. In Delhi Akshardham, an Australian commented that anyone who comes here would go back ego-free. Akshardham has been working subtly and silently. The volunteers in Akshardham are dedicated. Each of them wants only to serve and not to take. The whole BAPS fraternity lives with such ideals and rejoices in them.

Prime Minister Modi has many responsibilities. He is a dedicated, hardworking person. He doesn't rest. He has that desire to keep doing something for the country and its people to ensure progress. This is clearly visible. He is active and keeps everyone alert. Let us pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swami Bapa that may he live long, may he accomplish all the good works that he aspires for. Again, Swami Bapa has blessed everyone. May all continue to receive the blessings of Swami Bapa and mould their lives. ◆

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas & Bansal Bhalja

MEDIA COVERAGE

On Thursday, 2 November, the Silver Jubilee Celebration of Akshardham, Gandhinagar, attracted a large number of media persons. The print and electronic media covered the event profusely

Dham Ma Akshar Ashish

Pramukh Swami was concerned about my language and my progress... He must be satisfied with the accomplishment of the Narmada project.

- Divya Bhaskar

Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Mari Aek Dikra ni Jem Bhad Lidhi Hati

Akshardham Mandir is a unique blend of modern technology, best management, power of art and divine devotion to God.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reminisced about his moments with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had never stressed upon miracles. He eradicated false practices and ushered in a spiritual awakening. He infused life in the stones of Akshardham.

- Gujarat Samachar



Mahant Swami Ae Haath Pakadiyo Chhe...

Prime Minister said that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had not only spread the Swaminarayan Sampradaya but concentrated in giving height to it. Bapa built mandirs which are not mandirs of stone and mortar alone, but also centres of social inspiration. He was never bound by the shackles of time. In fact, he ushered in transformations with respect to the times.

- Sandesh

Emotional Modi Vows Swaminarayan Bhakts

The Prime Minister heaped praises on Pramukh Swami Maharaj, recalling him as a simple saint who never used miracles to attract his followers. Pramukh Swami built one of the largest bodies of 1,100 sadhus who are conversant with modern technology even as they are steeped in 18th century tradition.

- The Times of India

Modi Recalls Association with Pramukh Maharaj

Sharing several incidents and experiences,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his proximity with the late leader of BAPS sect Pramukh Swami at the silver jubilee celebrations of Akshardham Temple in Gandhinagar. He further recalled his long association with the seers of the Swaminarayan sect, especially Pramukh Swami.

"I remember clearly that on January 26, 1992, I had gone to Srinagar's Lal Chowk to hoist our national flag. But till that time Pramukh Swami had called half a dozen times. He was concerned whether I had reached safely or not, like I was his own son."

- The Indian Express

Choose Gods to Defeat Evil: Prime Minister

The Prime Minister said, "Akshardham temples stand out for their magnificence, exceptional management and the way they have used latest technology." He said the Swaminarayan family has distinguished itself through its impeccable service and care for humanity.

- DNA



Narendra Modi @narendramodi
Remembered Pramukh Swami Ji Maharaj, someone who I interacted with closely and whose guidance as well as blessings I always value.

Vijay Rupani @vijayrupani
It was a bliss to attend #SilverJubilee of Akshardham Temple at Gandhinagar in the presence of PM Shri @narendramodi Ji

Dr David Rowley @davidrowleyusd
Akshardham temples have been wonderful representations of India's cultural soft power in US, UK and Canada as well as India.

ANI @ANI
Akshardham Temples are beautiful, ahead of their times. I assure you- you may not enter the Temple as a Bhakt but you will leave as one; PM

TOI Ahmedabad @TOIAhmedabad
Use of #modern #management and technology in #Akshardham is a #CaseStudy for #universities across the country; @narendramodi #PMAtAkshardham

Akshardham

Swamishri's Masterpiece



The main mandir structure was completed in 1985. Thereafter, the exhibitions and the rest of the complex were developed for the grand inauguration in 1992. Throughout the entire project, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's role and blessings were vital. Some of the many contributions of Swamishri are as follows...

The saga of Akshardham's creation is historic and unimaginable. Behind the efforts of thousands lay a source of unearthly power – Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In fact, every part of Akshardham is pervaded by the contributions and inspirations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

All who enter Akshardham experience a divine, peaceful feeling. The root of these experiences is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri was not merely the divine inspirer, but also a champion consultant in all aspects of its creation. Whenever and wherever the project required his attention, Swamishri would postpone his activities and disregard inconvenience of time or place to provide guidance.

The final decisions on all aspects of Akshardham were made by Swamishri. This was so not by mere virtue of Swamishri's position as guru or his prerogative as president, but also

due to his excellent insight and vast experience. Experts, too, agreed to his decisions or suggestions regarding stones, sculpture, construction, paintings, presentation of exhibits, flower colours and a wide of array of other matters.

What had escaped the eyes of others, Swamishri would catch and suggest changes in a casual manner. Besides this, on so many occasions, Swamishri, made suggestions or decisions through letters and phone calls.

During the project there were many difficult questions that seemed to have no answers. In such situations Swamishri's decisions were invaluable.

When discussing the plans for the exhibition halls, a colonnade between the mandir and the halls was suggested. The colonnade was designed to circle the mandir, like a garland, and connect with a 30-ft.-high gate opposite the Akshardham Mandir, at the point where Sahajanand Vun, the



Swamishri and the Akshardham team

cultural garden, began. However, an edifice of substantial height near the mandir would be distracting. So, discussions followed on reducing the height. For seven months this question was debated and analyzed by the experts, but no satisfactory solution could be found.

When Swamishri came to Gandhinagar, this question was raised in a meeting with him at night. Swamishri said, "I will come to the site tomorrow and discuss the matter." The next day he held a meeting on site with the responsible sadhus, architects and engineers. After his observations, Swamishri said, tracing his finger on the plan, "Instead of connecting the two ends of the colonnade here let it be left open. There is no need for an entrance gate opposite the mandir. Near the open ends of the colonnade make a podium with the same elevation as the colonnade pathway. We can have the entrance gate towards the main J road on the outside." Instantly, everybody realized that this was the best solution to the problem.

The pillars in the colonnade were designed to be 18 inches in diameter. However, Swamishri said, "Eighteen-inch pillars will look too thick. They will look like the pillars in the *rang mandap* beneath Sarangpur mandir. Here, we require sleek 10 to 12 inch pillars!" Today, everyone feels that Swamishri's suggestion was perfect.

The main dome of the monument was quadrangular in design. Swamishri suggested it be made octagonal. The smaller domes crowned with golden pots were also his suggestions. Even the beautiful shrine-like structures and the stone screens at the

edge of the colonnade roof were his suggestions.

It was Swamishri who inspired the idea of creating Sahajanand Vun. He also said that a main avenue from Sahajanand Vun should stretch to the steps of the monument. To provide shade for the visitors from the blazing sun, Swamishri suggested a pergola in the cultural garden.

Marble with brass strips between each block of marble was used for the flooring of the main mandir. When a 10 sq. ft. sample was prepared, Swamishri removed his footwear and walked over it to see whether the finishing was smooth. He also made sure that the brass strips were flush with the marble stone and there were no grooves or raised edges that could cause injury to people. He always insisted on the finest quality of workmanship.

Swamishri had chosen marble for the flooring in the main mandir. However what stone should be cladded on the walls? Should they use marble, pink stone or yellow stone of Jesalmer? Swamishri was consulted on this. He came to the main chamber and in a split second decided, "Here the yellow stone of Jesalmer will be most appropriate."

Swamishri suggested to the volunteer in charge of the landscaping, "Among the various flowers you have here, if you include small plants with yellow, purple and pink flowers then the beauty of the gardens will be enhanced."

For the exhibitions, Swamishri stressed that they should also be comprehensible to the common man. During his visit to the Sahajanand exhibition hall, Swamishri was looking at the giant glass etching of the five elements that depict their joy at the Lord's descent to earth. He said, "Though you have a write up here, still it should be improved so that everyone can easily understand the presentation. Explain each of the elements separately."

Even though everyone was willing to accept his decision as final, Swamishri never insisted that his decisions or suggestions be held final. He would very naturally and politely give his suggestion and say, "This is my opinion, however, you

are free to decide. You are all more experienced!"

Whenever he felt it necessary, Swamishri had, in very clear words, emphasized that all the work be completed in time.

The Akshardham team of sadhus devised a month by month time chart for each task and presented it to Swamishri in Rajkot. According to their scheduling, the work would be completed in March 1992. Swamishri took avid interest, expressed his pleasure at the planning and advised, "You have put it nicely on paper, but are you going to do it or will it remain on paper only? Have you taken factors like minor accidents, breakdown of machinery, and other possible delaying factors into consideration? If you haven't, then do so."

Swamishri visited Gandhinagar and saw the feverish pace of work. But Swamishri felt the work still needed to be accelerated further. He told Ishwarcharan Swami, "Tell everyone that for us the inauguration is not 30 October, but 30 September! Make sure everyone has this very clear in their minds!"

Swamishri's words infused spirit and momentum to the pace of work.

With only a couple of months left Swamishri said, "When a train is lagging behind schedule the driver works the engine faster and makes up for the time. Likewise, we have a similar situation before us. The festival inauguration is not very far off. Things are not far from completion, yet to get everything done in time is very important. Utilize the volunteers who have come to serve. By God's grace everything will turn out fine. If you resolve to do it then you will be able to do it. This is Yogiji Maharaj's work and everything lies in God's hand."

In spite of the hectic pace, several experts expressed that it would be impossible to accomplish the work before 30 October. They said it would take another two years to finish everything!

However, those involved in the project were striving at the word of Swamishri. Even Prof. Fric felt that the mammoth task before them was

impossible to finish. But, Prof. Fric, a Christian, kept a pocket calendar with a photo of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri with him. When he met Swamishri he said, "With your blessings I will be able to accomplish my work. Otherwise, I am always worried as to how I will finish this project?" Swamishri's inspirational and central role in the timely completion of Akshardham was invaluable. When the sadhus involved in the project worried at having fallen behind schedule, Swamishri's confidence and calmness reinforced their spirits and efforts.

Swamishri was the key link that united the volunteers and professionals working on this monumental project.

On 3 August 1992, Swamishri was in Gandhinagar. He called an assembly of all the artisans and craftsmen and expressed his pleasure and appreciation for their efforts. He said, "You are all working very hard and in the same spirit as you would do your own work. God's blessings will definitely be upon you. Now the inauguration day is fast approaching, so I request that you endeavour with more love and effort than what you are doing presently. It is my humble request. God will bless you all in abundance." Swamishri's loving words provided a new surge of inspiration and spirit to serve.

In spite of Swamishri's hectic travelling schedule and immense responsibilities, he always spared time and visited Gandhinagar at least three to four times a year. He would take deep interest in all the work and charge all with enthusiasm.

A respected gentleman, after seeing Akshardham, said, "Saying that Pramukh Swami is the inspirer of Akshardham does not convey his true glory and contribution. The word 'inspirer' is not enough."

It seems there is only one way to describe him: the whole of Akshardham is Pramukh Swami Maharaj! In every particle and atom he is the vital force. So, it would be no exaggeration to say that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is Akshardham! ♦



1979



1970

AKSHARDHAM 1970-2017 TIMELINE



1970: 6 August

Chief Minister Shri Hiten-drabhai Desai was blessed by Yogiji Maharaj for the success of Gandhinagar as Gujarat's new state capital.

Minister for Roads and Transport, Shri Babubhai Jashbhai Patel, escorted Yogiji Maharaj around Gandhinagar. Under a banyan tree in Sector 20, Shri Babubhai said to Yogiji Maharaj, "This banyan tree appears to be ancient and sacred. We hope you shall construct a magnificent mandir here."

Yogiji Maharaj said, "Let us pray that a magnificent mandir be built here in the future and that people advance towards a more religious way of life."

1971

During a meeting in Sankari Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed, "We want to build

something significant in the memory of Shriji Maharaj to commemorate the bicentenary of his birth [in 1981]."

1972

3,000 sq. yards of land acquired in Gandhinagar in Sector 20.

1976-78

Proposals to build a *kirti sthambh* (tall column) or an RCC structure in honour of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were put forward. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj decided to build a memorial out of stone.

1978

Memorial to include exhibitions depicting life, work and messages of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

A further 5 acres of land was acquired in Gandhinagar, Sector 20. It was sanctioned by

Chief Minister Shri Madhav-sinh Solanki.

1979: 14 December

Foundation-stone Laying Ceremony performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Chief Minister Shri Babubhai Jashbhai Patel.

1985

Main mandir construction completed.

1986

Overseas research tour made by Mahant Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and sadhus to seek ideas for exhibitions.

Thereafter, Dashrathbhai Patel, a renowned designer, suggested that the exhibitions should be arranged outside the main mandir. Thereafter, it was decided to build the exhibition halls. Dashrathbhai and Kumar Vyas of NID had also



1992



1992



1992

suggested to have a research centre (AARSH).

1992: 30 October

Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of *murtis* inside main mandir performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and *sadguru* sadhus.

1992: 2 November

Public opening of Akshardham by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Shri Babubhai Jashbhai Patel. When Swaminarayan Akshardham was inaugurated, it comprised of the following sections:

1. Main Mandir

- ◆ Built and adorned entirely using 6,000 metric tonnes of pink stone.
- ◆ 108 feet high, 240 feet long, 131 feet wide.
- ◆ 256 statues of Hindu spiritual personalities, 220 stone beams, 97 sculpted pillars, 57 stone screens, 17 domes, 8 balconies, 3 porticos, 1 porch.
- ◆ *Murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami and the guru *parampara*.
- ◆ Prasadi Mandapam: Sacred relics of Bhagwan

Swaminarayan, with documented history of each item.

- ◆ Vibhuti Mandapam: Presentation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's spiritual personality in his own words from the Vachanamrut.

2. Exhibitions

- ◆ Sahajanand: The life, work and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan depicted through life-like and audio-animatronics dioramas.
- ◆ Sat-Chit-Anand: 20-minute, 14-screen multimedia show using integrovision technology conveying the philosophy of *atma* and Paramatma.
- ◆ Nityanand: Universal truths from the Upanishads, Mahabharat, Ramayan and Shrimad Bhagvat conveyed through life-like dioramas.
- ◆ Nijanand: Hall of Harmony – main features of world's major religions.
- ◆ Sant Param Hitkari: 12-minute audio-animatronics show revealing the message of everlasting happiness.

3. Sahajanand Vun

15 acres of gardens with statues representing various

cultural themes.

4. Musical Fountain

A colourful, rhythmic display using water fountains.

5. AARSH

Akshardham Centre for Applied Research in Social Harmony (AARSH).

2001: 5 April

Former US president Bill Clinton visited Akshardham.

2002: 24 September

Terrorist attack on Akshardham; Pramukh Swami Maharaj appealed for peace. Prayer Assembly for the deceased held on Akshardham Mandir grounds and presided by Swamishri on 29 September.

2004: 8 February

BAPS Children's Activities





2015



2015



2017



2007

Golden Jubilee celebration held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam on the Akshardham grounds. Over 20,000 children attended.

2007: 19 April

Large Screen Theatre: *Mythic India* large format film on the 12,000-km pilgrimage of Neelkanth Varni throughout India, in place of the Sat-Chit-Anand multimedia show and musical fountain.

2010: 3 April

Sahaj Anand Water Show: A breathtaking 45-minute open-air

show set up in Sahajanand Vun. It is based on the inspiring Upanishadic story of Nachiketa and presented on an 80-ft. wide by 60-ft. high water screen, using colourful lasers, video and light projections, fireballs and underwater flames, water jets, surround sound symphony, animation and live acting.

2015: 15 December

Abhishek Mandapam: The *abhishek murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni was consecrated by Mahant Swami.

Swaminarayan Darshan Exhibition: The divine life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan depicted through exclusive 49 paintings in place of the Vibhuti Mandapam display was inaugurated by Mahant Swami.

2017: 25 October

Main Mandir: Mahant

Swami Maharaj and *sadguru* sadhus consecrated the *murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Sita-Ram Dev and Hanumanji, Shri Shiv-Parvati Dev and Ganapatiji, and Shri Lakshmi-Narayan Dev.

2017: 2 November

The Silver Jubilee celebrations of Akshardham were held in the Akshardham precincts. HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* sadhus, Prime Minister Narendrabhai Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, Deputy Chief Minister Shri Nitinbhai Patel and 25,000 devotees attended the celebrations. ♦



2010



2017



PINIONS

Akshardham, Gandhinagar

By the grace of beloved Pramukh Swami, I have been very fortunate to have seen Akshardham. I touched the holy feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *murti* and circumambulated Akshardham. I saw the museum of holy relics and I was purified. For two-and-a-half hours I saw everything and it seemed as if I had been to heaven. The ideals of the Upanishads, Ramayan and Mahabharat displayed in the halls can elevate man to heaven and make him pure. The experience is unforgettable. Akshardham is a testimony to the work, perfection and capabilities of saints. And such perfection can only be possible through renunciation and devotion.

- Pujya Chidanand Swamiji

President, Divine Life Society, Rishikesh
22 November 1992

A single visit to Akshardham is worth more than all the teachings and all the knowledge that one would get from countless life-moulding books. Upto now we beheld the famous Jain temples of Abu for their matchless beauty, but Akshardham is in no way inferior. This is the first time that such a project has been attempted in

our day and age. Only Pramukh Swami Maharaj is capable of accomplishing such a feat. The art and beauty in Akshardham is unique and so are the lively messages that it has to offer.

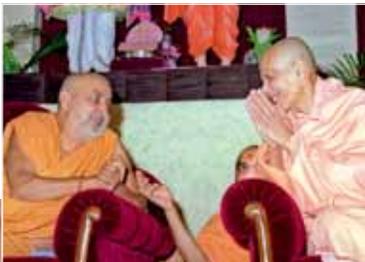
- Pujya Acharya Shushilmuniji

President, Int. Mahavir Jain Mission
1 November 1992

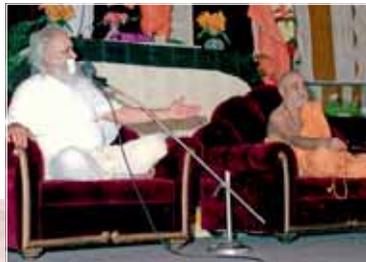
Akshardham is a truly magnificent achievement of our time. When I was here three months ago, there was a lot of work left. I am an industrialist and I know all about construction of industrial estates. So three months back I felt that the project would take at least 6 to 12 months to complete. But I stand here in utter amazement at the completion of this project. And it is done so beautifully. One feels inspired the minute one walks in. I saw the multimedia show and felt a growth of inspirational force in my heart.

I have not seen such a magnificent construction with a 'golden touch' in the present age. These days, you seldom find anything inspirational for the youth in religious places. But here it is different! Everything here is presented in a modern way and of a quality that stands on a

Pujya Chidanand Swamiji



Pujya Acharya Shushilmuniji



Shri S.K. Birla



world-class level. It gives inspiration to all, even the youngsters. Akshardham inspires faith in God and helps to give peace of mind.

- **S.K. Birla**
Businessman
1992

There is so much to learn and so much inspiration from this complex. Now-a-days, our younger generations do not want to know anything about our ancient traditions. In such times a monument like Akshardham is absolutely essential for the revival of cultural ideals. The youth of today can learn a lot from Akshardham.

When people realize that he [Pramukh Swami] is selfless then it will become easier for them to change their thoughts and accept nobler and higher thoughts.

- **Ramkrishna Bajaj**
Industrialist
1 December 1992

A rare monument which is created out of total devotion, dedication and selfless service.

- **Pandit Shivkumar Sharma**
Eminent Santoor Artiste
8 November 1992

Akshardham is timeless, where people can learn about the eternal quest, values, the soul, and about man and his duties. It is not just a temple, it is a place for a cultural quest, and through this it is a quest of the self. This is probably one of the rare temples built in contemporary times where

one can expect thousands of people to come and yet it would not look crowded.

- **Shri B.V. Doshi**
Eminent Architect
21 November 1992

The noblest experience of leaving a long-lasting impact through the combination of light and sound. A project worthy of emulation, which transmits the eternal message of religion right down to the common man. Congratulations!

- **Hon. Atal Behari Vajpayee**
16 May 1993

We don't see such things in this century... I am extremely pleased for this remarkable opportunity of visiting Akshardham. Swamiji is doing great work and may he be supremely successful in achieving his goal of curing conflicts and creating peace in this world.

- **HRH Prince Philip**
Duke of Edinburgh
15 October 1997

Excellent, elevating experience!

Shri R.K. Laxman
Internationally acclaimed cartoonist
17 August 1997

Divine experience it is. God bless the team.

- **Shri APJ Abdul Kalam**
Eminent Nuclear Scientist
15 January 2000

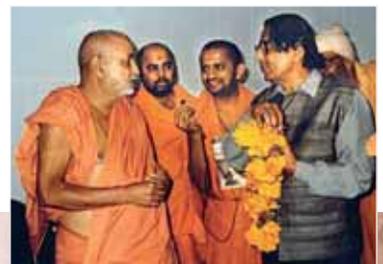
Pandit Shivkumar Sharma



HRH Prince Philip



Shri B.V. Doshi



Thank you. For welcoming me, for making me feel at home, helping the people hurt by the earthquake, working for peace and reconciliation.

- **Bill Clinton**
Former President of USA
5 April 2001

between life and death have a profound message and will continue to have an impact on audiences in the years to come.

- **Dr R. Chidambaram**
Principal Scientific Adviser to the Govt. of India
3 April 2010

Today, in a beautiful fusion of science and spirituality, the world's first spiritual water show is to begin. Here is a great creation which has the power to join all visitors to Akshardham to the millennia-old culture of India.

Through this technology, the message will be conveyed naturally and in an entertaining way. A person's faith will be strengthened by coming to Akshardham. By seeing the exhibitions, a person will be able to experience the vast canopy of wisdom. All who come here will be inspired to live in a different way.

- **Narendra Modi**
Chief Minister of Gujarat
3 April 2010

The combination of Monsieur Yves Pépin's creative genius and the spiritual guidance of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj made for an unforgettable breathtaking laser-waterpyrotechnics show. The unique blend of high technology and spirituality is a characteristic of Akshardham. The choice of the Upanishadic story of young Nachiketa, whose inquisitive questioning of Yamaraj makes him a quintessential scientist though the context is spiritual, is praiseworthy. The comments of Yamaraj on the boundary

The temple is of a most exquisite architecture. There was so much information to absorb. The message of your sect is very useful in today's society.

- **Ingeborg Jack**
Chief Executive, UNICEF

I have come to Akshardham for darshan many times, but in today's experience my mind has experienced peace. And I have understood the truth about *atma* and Paramatma.

- **Amitabh Bachchan**
Distinguished Actor
17 August 2010

The monument is a beautiful piece of work. The interior is again so beautiful with all the carvings and reverential in its view of Lord Swaminarayan. Walking through the land, he warned people of a drought, told them that a famine was coming and much more. Things like that are markings of a superior being.

- **Ronald Patel**
Editor, Philadelphia Enquirer, USA



Shri APJ Abdul Kalam



Mr. Bill Clinton



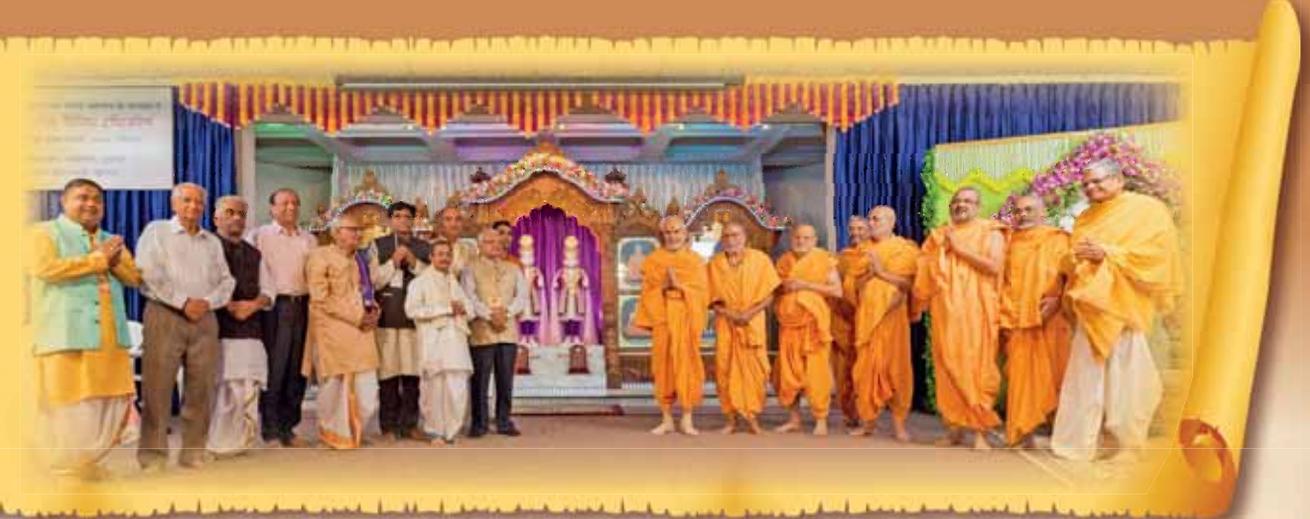
Shri Amitabh Bachchan





Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Conference

29 October 2017, Gandhinagar, Gujarat



Mahant Swami Maharaj, senior sadhus and scholars on stage

Scholars from throughout India took part in a special conference titled 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan: Different Perspectives' on 29 October 2017, under the auspices of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Swaminarayan Akshardham and AARSH in Gandhinagar. The conference was held in the BAPS Mandir auditorium and AARSH centre.

When His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the first Swaminarayan Akshardham in 1992, he also opened the Akshardham Centre for Applied Research in Social Harmony (AARSH). The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan conference was held in commemoration of both these 25-year celebrations. Leading scholars from throughout Gujarat, Delhi, Banaras, Vrundavan, Bengaluru, Chennai, Nagpur, and other places participated in this conference.

Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated the conference by igniting the inaugural lamp after his morning puja. The day-long conference included four sessions, featuring papers by scholars on the

Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in four languages – English, Sanskrit, Gujarati and Hindi.

The first morning session was themed on Akshabrahman as a philosophical entity. It was interlaced with brief speeches by BAPS sadhus and discussions. The second morning session was based on the Aksharbrahman Satpurush. Scholarly BAPS youths addressed this session. The third session took place in the AARSH conference room, where renowned scholars thoroughly discussed and debated with Bhadreswami about his *Bhashya* and *Vada Granth*. Bhadreswami's answers enlightened and satisfied the scholars.

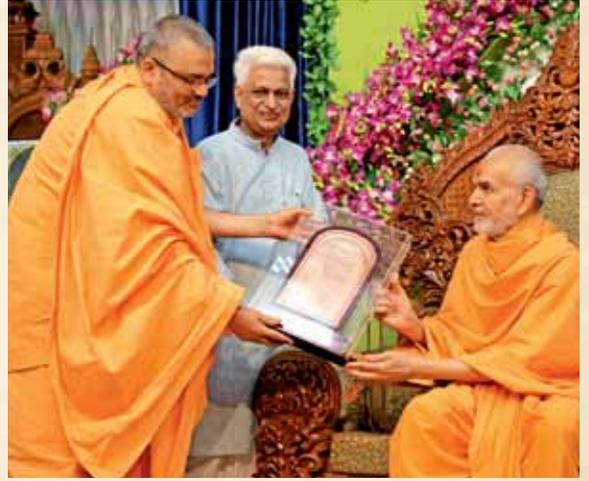
In the final session, in which several thousand devotees were also present, Sanskrit scholar and academic, Pujya Sadhu Bhadreswami, was honoured by the Somnath Sanskrit University with their 'Abhinav Bhashyakar' award, for which he was presented a copper plaque by vice chancellor Shri Ark Nath Chaudhary and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Sadhu Bhadrashdas has revived the ancient tradition of writing commentaries on the principal scriptures of Vedanta by authoring the *Prasthanatrayi Swaminarayan Bhashya* (*Swaminarayan Bhashyam*), the first 'bhashya' (commentary) written after many centuries in the traditional style of renowned scholars like Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya and others. He has also written the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*, a *vada granth* which, alongside the *Bhashya*, traditionally establishes the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

The vice chancellor of Somnath Sanskrit University, Shri Ark Nath Chaudhary, stated, "In the history of Bharatiya Darshan, Bhadrash Swami is the only scholar to compose both a *Prasthanatrayi bhashya* and a *vada granth*. It is a world record. We believe that in honouring him we are honouring a great acharya or rishi."

Addressing the congregation, Bhadrash Swami said, "Today, everything that I have accomplished is credited to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami gave me insight into the difficult meanings of the Upanishads and, accordingly, I was able to write the *Swaminarayan Bhashya* and the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*. I feel honoured that I have been able to serve Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vedic philosophy."

Among the eminent scholars in attendance at this event were Dharmacharya Pujya Shrivatsa Goswami from Vrundavan; vice chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Prof. Ravindra Kumar; vice chancellor of Ambedkar University, Dr Pankaj Jani; vice chancellor of Somnath Sanskrit University, Prof. Shri Ark Nath Chaudhary; former vice chancellor of the Kavi Kulguru Kalidas University in Nagpur, Prof. Shri Pankaj Chande; former vice chancellor of Rajasthan Sanskrit University and current scholar of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Prof. Shri Yugal Kishore Mishra; chairman of the Indian



Vice chancellor of Somnath Sanskrit University presents 'Abhinav Bhashyakar' award to Bhadrash Swami

Council of Philosophical Research, Shri Dr S.R. Bhatt; educator and principal of Purna Pragna Vidyapith in Bengaluru, Prof. Haridas Bhatt; former dean of Madras Sanskrit College and Chennai academic, Krishnamurti Shastri; Prof. of Special Centre for Sanskrit Studies at JNU University in Delhi, Dr Upender Rao; Prof. of philosophy at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Vadodara, Dr Girishkumar; and many others.

The international convener of the BAPS Sanstha, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, also welcomed students who had come from leading universities in England, America and Australia to continue their Sanskrit studies in India. He expressed his wish that in the coming years other universities around the world would promote the study of Sanskrit.

Blessing the assembly of thousands of devotees, scholars and swamis, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "The greatest thing about the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is that it is a living philosophy. Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami came on this earth. They were not merely abstract metaphysical entities. In fact, they walked amongst us. They are still here.

"The writings of Pujya Bhadrash Swami in the fields of Sanskrit and Philosophy will inspire

future generations. To accomplish this much at a young age is not a small achievement. Scholars in India and abroad have said that these feats have never been done before. Therefore, it is very appropriate for Somnath Sanskrit University to honour Bhadrash Swami. I pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that Bhadrash Swami and other learned sadhus continue to research and write on Vedic literature.”

Some translated abstracts of speeches by the national scholars are as follows.



PROF. GAJENDRA PANDA

Professor, L.D. Arts College,
Ahmedabad

“By the divine blessings and grace of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy has been illumined by the *Swaminarayan Prasthantrayi Bhashyam*. It was completed and presented to Pramukh Swami Maharaj during the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in 2007.

Great scholars from all over India have come here. During the day we contemplated on this text. There was a logical and critical exchange of thoughts and many questions were posed. The author [Swami Bhadrashdas] resolved all questions in a convincing manner. The scholars chorused in one voice, the ‘Abhinav Bhashyakar’ [Modern Commentator] has created the *Bhashya* in a beautiful and simple style. The text reveals and illumines the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. This principle is found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and the Brahmasutras and propagated by them. So, this philosophy is Vedic and Upanishadic.

I have done my PhD in Advaita Vedanta. I have contemplated on Shankaracharya’s philosophy, which was established in the 8th century, for 27 years and have been teaching it for the last 25 years. However, when I studied the Prasthantrayi *Bhashya* by Bhadrash Swami I felt that the essence of the Bhashya [by Shankaracharya] are found in

this Bhashya.

I declare today that I have done my PhD on Shankracharya’s philosophy, in fact I am a *jnan margi*, yet I am feeling that the Akshar-Purushottam text is my text. The scholars present here are also feeling that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is theirs. Therefore, today is a very great day because all the scholars have accepted this highly divine text.



DR. C. UPENDER RAO

Professor, Special Centre for
Sanskrit Studies, Jawaharlal
National University (JNU),
New Delhi

We had been discussing about Swamiji’s *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* text. During our discussion I found for the first time the essence and distillation of my talks. In fact, I learnt many other things.

I have read this text and it is unique because since long we have been thinking that Brahman is one. However, Swamiji writes that there is a difference between Brahman and Parabrahman. And this difference has been wonderfully elaborated in this text. The Brahmasutras says, “*Athāto Brahma jignāsā.*” One has to know about two Brahman – one is Aksharbrahman and the other is Parabrahman.

This text says that Swami and Narayan are two different entities, and that Narayan should be offered *upasana*. This means that the *jiva* has to identify itself with Aksharbrahman and offer *upasana* with *sevakbhav* [servitor-master relationship] to Narayan – this is the core essence of this philosophy.

The [Akshar-Purushottam] philosophy is Upanashadic, Vedic and eternal. Arjun asks in the Bhagavad Gita, ‘*Kim tad Brahma, kim adhyātmam, kim karma Purushottama.*’ Then Bhagwan Krishna replies, ‘*Aksharam Brahma paranam.*’ – ‘Akshar is Brahman.’ In this way, on the basis of the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and Vedas the Swaminarayan

Sampradaya is *sanatan* [eternal], and it is very much a scripturally defined *sampradaya*.



**PUJIYA ACHARYA
SHRIVATSA GOSWAMI**

**Head, Chaitanya Prem
Sanstha, Vrundavan**

Who has spread India's culture and spirituality throughout the world today? The BAPS comes first and thereafter an organization that has its inspiration from Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Two centuries after Chaitanya Mahaprabhu a commentary on the Prasthantrayi was written by Baldev Vidya Bhushanji. Similarly, two centuries after Bhagwan Swaminarayan history has repeated itself. Through Sadhu Bhadreshdas a commentary has been written on the Prasthantrayi. The publication is unique and unparalleled.

Every *sampradaya* requires a robust scriptural platform. If one wants to discuss in accordance to the [scriptural] tradition then one will require the Prasthantrayi model. Baldev Vidya Bhushanji and Bhadreshdas did this service.

Every *sampradaya* requires a robust scriptural platform. If one wants to discuss in accordance to the [scriptural] tradition then one will require the Prasthantrayi model. Baldev Vidya Bhushanji and Bhadreshdas did this service.

The publication of *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* is a landmark event in the history of Indian philosophy, and to produce a *vada granth* after writing commentaries on the Prasthantrayi is a wonderful achievement. Through the guru's blessings and when the incarnate form of Aksharbrahman, Mahant Swami Maharaj, is present before us then the impossible becomes possible.



**PROF. ARK NATH
CHAUDHARY**

**Vice Chancellor, Shri Somnath
Sanskrit University, Veraval**

The root forms of our spirituality, philosophy and culture lie in the Sanskrit language. After coming to Gujarat I have seen the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha protect these three aspects and the language.

The number of shastras we have are not merely expressions of imaginations by scholars, but they manifest the totality and all-comprehensiveness of Indianness. This type of work in our era has been achieved by Swami Bhadreshdasji. That is why our citation felicitating [Swamiji] is not merely in writing but we heartfully believe it is an epoch-making commentary (*bhashya*).



DR S.R. BHATT

**President, Indian Council of
Philosophical Research, New
Delhi**

We have qualities in our dharma that have kept it vibrant and alive. That is why it is known as Sanatan Dharma. Our scholars have written commentaries (*bhashyas*) on the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras (Prasthantrayi). From time to time these commentaries have been written in consonance with the eras. In today's times the Prasthantrayi is the distilled word form of the Vedas and other shastras, and it has been presented by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his Vachanamrut. We can say that it [Vachanamrut] is the fourth Prasthan (or shastra, after the Prasthantrayi). In it we find a more sublime form. Propounded in the Vachanamrut are the principles of conduct and thought, which are exemplary for the whole world. Bhadreshdasji has written a commentary on the Prasthantrayi with a new insight, which is a novel, praiseworthy and exemplary contribution.

Another uniqueness about him is that he has written a *vada granth* [that offers an exposition, justification and defense of one's philosophy] on his *bhashyas*. The *vada granth* is written to establish one's own philosophy, in which one can also include reviews of other philosophies and accept their principles to consolidate one's *sampradaya*'s philosophy. Swami Bhadreshdasji has written his [commentaries on the] Prasthantrayi in accordance with the principles of the [Swaminarayan] Sampradaya and also with relevance to our

modern era. We congratulate him for that.

Through the *vada granth* he has established something new. The former acharyas had written *bhashyas* but they had not written *vada granths*. The *vada granth* written by Bhadreshdas Swami fosters the Sampradaya's original and fundamental principles. The purpose of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya is not to merely disseminate its thoughts throughout the world, but to establish correctness of morals and integration in the world. This is of great importance. This organization has continuously strived for the uplift of society.

There are three points with regards to social integration: 1. We should stay united together. 2. Peacefully co-exist with others and 3. Help each other. These three guiding elements are alive in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. And they are worthy of practice by the whole world.

Whatever guiding element that one could get in this troubled world will be from the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. The reason being there is a beautiful amalgamation of action and thought. We expect that the philosophy established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan spreads to all corners of the world and that everyone abides by it.



PROF. HARIDAS BHATT

Head of Department, Shri Purna Pragna Vidyapith, Bengaluru

In the Padma Puran there is a story of Bhakti (devotion). The female form of Bhakti says that she prefers to be born in Dravid region [Kerala], to get old in Karnataka, stay a little in Maharashtra and pass away in Gujarat. But I am satisfied to say that Bhakti was rejuvenated in Gujarat – through the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and Akshardham. The Akshardham organization has done a lot for Indian culture and protection of the Sampradaya.

I am deeply satisfied that so many from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, have assembled here on this occasion of bhakti. Here, Bhakti has taken a

living form and is dancing.

I am Bhadreshdasji's [academic] guru and he is my disciple. I feel shy to reveal this. Because the work the guru could not do the disciple has accomplished. When the raindrops fall on a stone they do not remain on it. However, when raindrops fall into the shell of an oyster they become pearls. Likewise, I have taught the shastras to many disciples – Nyaya [logic], Dvaita, Grammar, but they are all gone – that is, they listened from one ear and discarded it from the other. But like the raindrop that became transformed into a pearl – that is what Bhadreshdasji has accomplished.

What I've been saying is not to praise him. He had given to me his text. When I started reading it I did not feel like putting it aside. In fact, I read it for three days. My opinion about it is that his *vada granth* is the Seventh Darshan [philosophy] after the Shad Darshans.

The principle is from Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vachanamrut. Bhadreshdasji has researched Bhagwan Swaminarayan's principle from the Vachanamrut and established his *vada granth* according to the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita.

What Bhadreshdasji has written in his text is our principle [*siddhanta*], my principle and an Indian principle. And the thoughts of Bhagwan Swaminarayan have been authentically referenced with it.



PROF. YUGAL KISHORE MISHRA

Professor, Bharat Educational Centre, Banaras Hindu University

The Silver Jubilee Celebration [of Akshardham] is wholly a celebration of Indian culture's divinity and grandness. I believe that Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated in Kaliyug to liberate all. In the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha vada granth*, authored by Swami Bhadreshdasji, he has propagated the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

You know that I come from Kashi [Banaras]. Kashi is a challenging town. It does not easily accept any scholar. And, it does not honour anyone before [academically] examining and testing the person. To give this test, from Adi Shankaracharya to all our philosophers [acharyas], all came to Kashi and were subjected to rigorous examination. Thereafter, by the grace of Bhagwan Vishwanath [Shivji] they became acharyas of their *darshans* [philosophies]. Similarly, Swami Bhadreshdasji's *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* text underwent the same process, of which I am a witness. And because of being a witness I am standing here today before all of you devotees.

I want to say that one-and-a-half months ago the scholars of Kashi had critically reviewed the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*. The BHU or Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya had organized a very important assembly at the Bharat Educational Centre in which great Sanskrit scholars were present. Swami Bhadreshdasji had given a talk before them. Then the text was elaborated upon before an assembly of scholars of Kashi. The scholars discussed and debated about it and then an assembly was arranged on Kashi's Assi Ghat, where Bhagwan Ram had given darshan to Tulsidasji. Thereafter, the scholars of Kashi proclaimed and established that the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* is a unique philosophical [darshanik] text.

Passion for Bhagwan is bhakti and this type of bhakti has been established in the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*. Through this text bhakti will gain further youthfulness.



DR R. KRISHNAMURTI SHASTRI

Former Principal, Madras Sanskrit College, Chennai

I saw the wonderful life stories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in [Akshardham] New Delhi. For many years I've been acquainted with Swami Bhadreshdasji. I have critically reviewed his three texts and the

Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha. Bhadreshdasji is a modern commentator [*abhinav bhashyakar*], modern Shankaracharya and a new educational pilgrim place.

It is a wonderful thing that Somnath Vishwavidyalaya has honoured Bhadreshdasji. All the scholars are happy about it. I believe honouring him is like honouring the Darshans [philosophies] and Indian culture.



SHRI PANKAJ CHANDE

Former Vice-chancellor of Kavi Kalidas Sanskrit University, Nagpur

The creation of this text has been inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and blessed by Mahant Swami Maharaj. This is an epoch-making work. When I saw this text I realized it to be a priceless work. Those who have examined this text have remarked that it is extraordinary, excellent and the best text creation.

According to my perspective I shall tell you the importance of this text. Till now, the BAPS has inspired faith in people through its mandirs. However, through this text, spiritual knowledge [*jnan*] will be consolidated and along with it the Swaminarayan Sanstha has received a new face.

Bhadreshdasji has achieved the difficult task of presenting the five entities (*tattvas*) revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan after studying all the scriptural references. The glory of his texts is that for centuries there had been a chasm between the old Vedantic texts written by [past acharyas] and now. Not one text had been created since then. Swami Bhadreshdasji has accomplished a great feat. And that is why I congratulate him from the bottom of my heart.

I have read his texts. The first thing I would like to say about them is that they are incomparable. The reason is that for decades discussions and debates on our shastras had become stagnant. And now this new text has been created,

which is conducive to our times. That is why it is important.

Secondly, the most important point is the uniqueness of the language that Bhadreshdasji has used. He has not criticized any other philosophy. He has respected all other teachings. So, I feel that the Swaminarayan Sampradaya is totally perfect because through its 1,100 mandirs it has given [spiritual] faith and the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* text has provided *jnan* to open our [inner] eyes. The text has been written in verses, which makes it easier to read. One also finds beautiful poetic writings in the text. One cannot imagine the high standard of poetry and the simplicity of Sanskrit language used. While reading this text I was reminded of the Ramayan, because its language is simple, beautiful and meaningful. The same type of language one finds in [Swami's] text.

Another point of joy and importance is the clarity of the subject presented in the text. He has thoroughly studied about what he has written. The reason why I am saying this is because when the writer is not clear about the subject he writes it in difficult words. Subsequently, the readers will find it abstruse and say that the author is a scholar. However, one who has clarity about the subject writes with simplicity. Bhadreshdasji has written the text in a beautiful and simple language.

There are two main points that are beautiful. Firstly, it is all-inclusive. This means that you include all other thoughts and beliefs. Generally, scholars have the habit of believing that whatever they say is authority. But this is not the case in this text. Every subject has been included. The organization [Sanstha] is all-inclusive. The root element of this Sanstha is inclusiveness. This is what you perfectly find in this text.

Through his contribution of the text the Swaminarayan philosophy has attained a new face. A great work has been accomplished.



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

Spiritual Head of BAPS

In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "Today, great scholars have come here from various corners of India; and this is not an ordinary thing. Each and every scholar here has contributed immensely [in his academic field].

"Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Mul Akshar Murti Gunatitanand Swami – Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman – have forms. They are not a figment of the mind. Two hundred years ago Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman incarnated on earth and lived their lives. They gave great joy to all in their presence. A scholar had said [in his address] that the text should be palatable so that ordinary people can avail of it. Thus, Bhagwan himself accomplished this task.

"The scholars in this assembly have expressed their thoughts after deep and subtle thinking. They have thought profoundly and thereafter declared that Bhadreshdasji's text is sublime and pure. Nowhere is there any defect or unwholesomeness. He has passed through all the scriptural texts. The text has passed through the scrutiny of scholars, acharyas and the Upanishads and other shastras. They have all said that this text is very holy."

Then Mahant Swami Maharaj read out a pledge to be repeated by the audience, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophical principle is the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta*. Swaminarayan Vedanta means Akshar-Purushottam Vedanta and Swaminarayan Darshan tantamounts to Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. On the instruction of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj this name will remain forever." ◆

Translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas



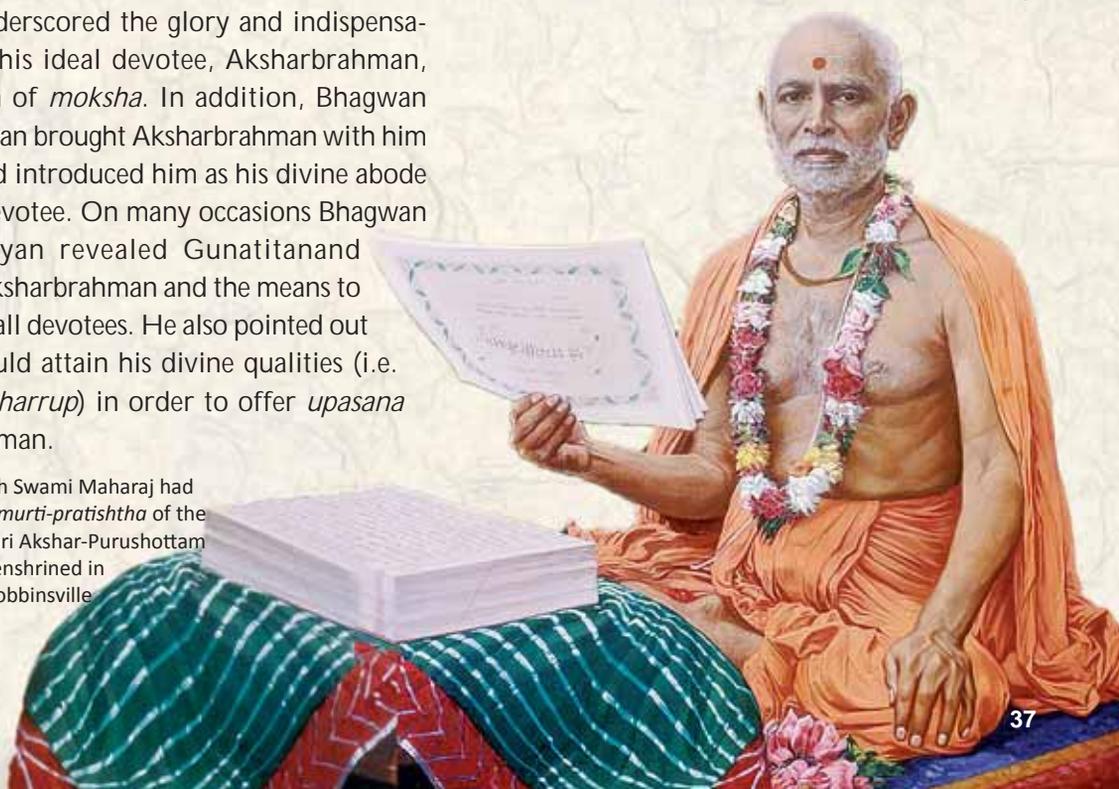
Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Philosophy

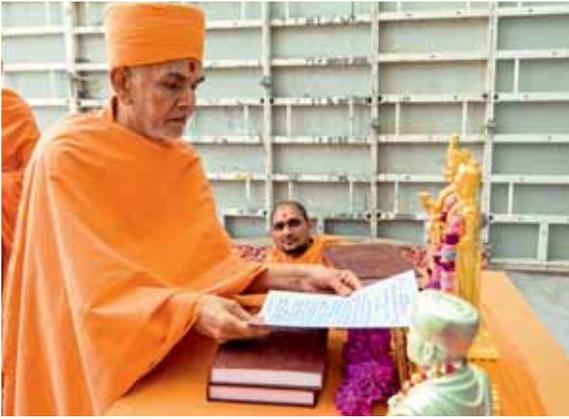
On 17 September 2017, a historic event took place in the Akshardham precincts in Robbinsville, USA. It marked the declaration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy as the 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan'

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's (1781–1830 CE) significant spiritual and humanitarian contributions in Gujarat are legendary. Amongst his many cornerstone contributions is the unique *tatva jnan* or philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam. It is the quintessence of the Vedas and Upanishads, providing a clear pathway to *moksha* for countless aspirants engaged in spiritual sadhanas. The philosophy or 'darshan' he gave is not merely an intellectual exercise but the source and means to attaining eternal *moksha*. The core of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy is to become *akshar-rup* and offer *upasana* and bhakti to Purushottam, which he lucidly mentioned and elucidated in his teachings – the Vachanamrut. In it, he has not only revealed himself to be the supreme Purushottam, but also underscored the glory and indispensable role of his ideal devotee, Aksharbrahman, on the path of *moksha*. In addition, Bhagwan Swaminarayan brought Aksharbrahman with him on earth and introduced him as his divine abode and ideal devotee. On many occasions Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman and the means to *moksha* for all devotees. He also pointed out that all should attain his divine qualities (i.e. become *akshar-rup*) in order to offer *upasana* to Parabrahman.

Above: Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *chal murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to be enshrined in Akshardham, Robbinsville

Bhagwan Swaminarayan perpetuated the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy by establishing the Gunatit guru *parampara* tradition. The first in that tradition was Gunatitanand Swami, who spread the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam. He was succeeded by Bhagatji Maharaj, who spoke glowingly of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman, the ideal abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Thereafter, Shastriji Maharaj enshrined the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam by consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the central shrine of five *shikharbaddha* mandirs. He was succeeded by Yogiji Maharaj who spread the philosophy to East Africa and London. Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated over 1,000 mandirs and relentlessly





Mahant Swami Maharaj offers the letter he had written to Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj



At the under-construction *garbha-gruh* of Akshardham

spread the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine throughout the world.

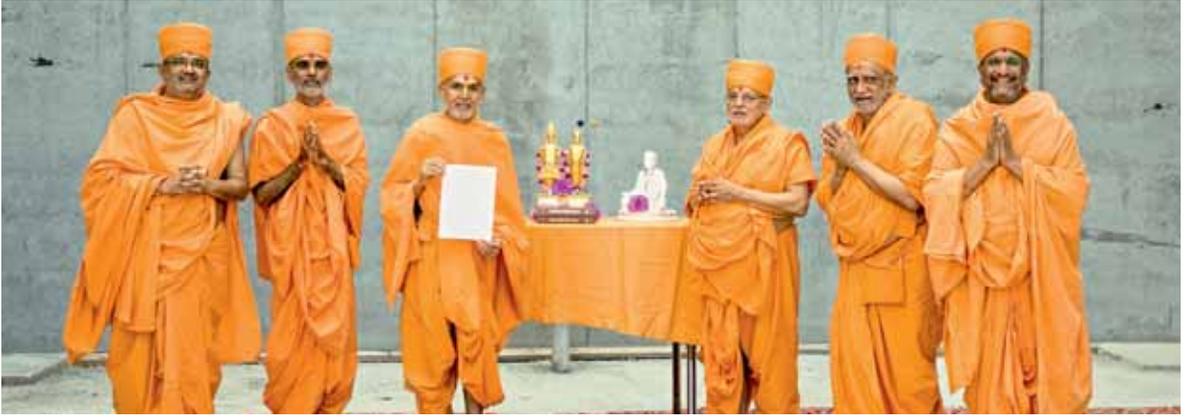
Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and blessed Pujya Bhadrash Swami to write commentaries on the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagavad Gita in context to the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Furthermore, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had also instructed him to write a *vada granth* (a formal exposition, justification, and defense of the philosophical and theological positions of a *darshan*) in consonance with the Indian tradition of arguments. Having fulfilled Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish, the scripture, *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha: Parabrahma Swaminarayan Prabodhit Akshar Purushottam Darshanam*, was inaugurated on 17 September 2017, in the Akshardham precincts in Robbinsville by HH Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj proclaimed the title of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy in a 5-page letter he had written beforehand on 16 September 2017.

The *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* is divided into nine chapters called *dharas*. The text presents a sophisticated treatment of the philosophical principles of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Among other things, it grounds these principles on expositions found within the Prasthanatrayi – a collective designation for the Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and the Brahmasutras.

It also presents a unique epistemological system that is characteristic of the *darshan*. Its comprehensive, critical, yet reverent treatment of alternative *darshans* and their disagreements not only reflects the traditional methods of a *vada granth*, but also emphasizes the robustness of the text.

On 17 September, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived at 4.00 p.m. in the under-construction *garbha-gruh* where Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj will be consecrated in Akshardham. The *chal* (moveable) *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, were installed on a decorated table. A small *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was also placed along with the copies of the *Prasthanatrayi Swaminarayan Bhashya* and *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* texts. The auspicious occasion took place in the presence of HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Anandswarup Swami, Pujya Atmaswarup Swami, Pujya Bhadrash Swami and Pujya Aksharvatsal Swami.

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the ritual *pujan* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On behalf of all, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* of the *Bhashya* and *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* texts and its author, Bhadrash Swami. Then Mahant Swami Maharaj offered the letter



The first declaration ceremony of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan

he had written at the holy feet of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and gave it to Ishwarcharan Swami to read aloud before all.

After the letter was read Mahant Swami Maharaj informed, “Shastriji Maharaj established Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s unique philosophy, principle or vedanta by conjoining two words, Akshar and Purushottam, and gave the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* (principle), Akshar-Purushottam Vedanta or Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. **Thus the two sacred words, Akshar-Purushottam, and the instructions given by Shastriji Maharaj, the philosophical principle of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, tantamounts to the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta*.**

“We should know Swaminarayan Vedanta, Akshar-Purushottam Vedanta or Swaminarayan Darshan as the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. And this name, which resonates with Shastriji Maharaj’s instruction, will remain forever.”

After Mahant Swami Maharaj’s declaration, the sadhus present hailed the *jais* of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Atmaswarup Swami, Anandswarup Swami, Bhadreswami and Aksharvatsal Swami spoke briefly to celebrate the occasion.

A few hours later, before an assembly of thousands of devotees in the Robbinsville mandir auditorium, Mahant Swami Maharaj’s letter was



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami reads Mahant Swami Maharaj’s letter

read by him and Ishwarcharan Swami. The announcement of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan was warmly welcomed by countless devotees in America and throughout the world.

A few weeks earlier, on 31 July 2017, leading Sanskrit and philosophy scholars of India and members of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad in Varanasi declared the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as Vedic and a scripturally accepted principle.

Today’s solemn occasion in Akshardham, Robbinsville, marked a historic day not only in the annals of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya but also in the history of Indian philosophy because the name of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, a unique philosophy, was declared.

(The 5-page letter by Mahant Swami Maharaj declaring Akshar-Purushottam Darshan along with its English translation follows on the subsequent pages.) ◆

*Gujarati Text: Swaminarayan Prakash,
October–November 2017.
Translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas*



પ્રગટ બ્રહ્મસ્વરૂપ
મહંતસ્વામી મહારાજ
(સ્વામીશ્રી કેશવજીવનદાસજી)

સ્વામી-શ્રીભય

પરમ પૂજ્ય પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજ

પરબ્રહ્મ સ્વામિનારાયણ પ્રબોધિત સિદ્ધાંતના નામાભિધાનની
ઓળખ.

પરબ્રહ્મ સ્વામિનારાયણ ભગવાનના આશ્રિતો

પ્રતિ,

જરૂરી સ્વામિનારાયણ.

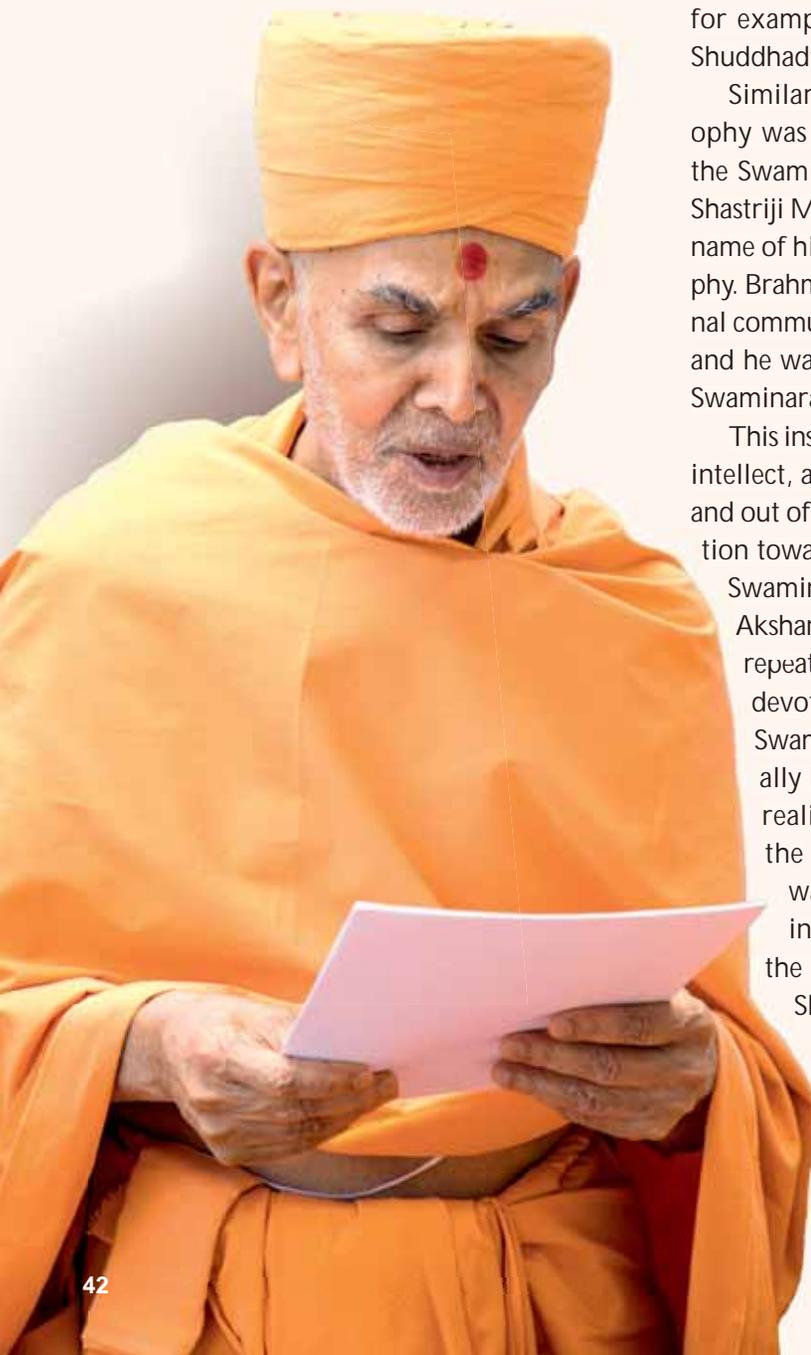
ભગવાનનાં જે અસિદ્ધ વૈદિક સંપ્રદાય છે તેમનાં તત્ત્વ સિદ્ધાંતો, તેમનું વેદાંત અથવા તેમ તેમનું દર્શન, તે તે સંપ્રદાયના વિશિષ્ટ સિદ્ધાંતોના આધારે પ્રસ્થાપિત થયેલું હોય છે. તે સિદ્ધાંતોને, વેદાંતને અથવા તે દર્શનને વિશિષ્ટ નામાભિધાન સાથે ઓળખવામાં આવે છે. જેમ કે અલ્લેખ, વિશિષ્ટાલ્લેખ, વૈળ, શુદ્ધોલ્લેખ ઇત્યાદિ નામોથી તે તે સંપ્રદાયના સિદ્ધાંતોને, વેદાંતોને કે દર્શનોને ઓળખવામાં આવે છે.

આજ રીતે પરબ્રહ્મ સ્વામિનારાયણ પ્રબોધિત જાતિય સિદ્ધાંત પણ અતિ મૌલિક અને અતિ વિશિષ્ટ હતો. તેમના આ સિદ્ધાંતોને કયા નામાભિધાનથી ઓળખવા એ ભાગલાને સ્પષ્ટ આદેશ આપણે સ્વામિનારાયણ સંપ્રદાયમાં પ્રહ્મસ્વરૂપ શાસ્ત્રીય મહારાજ કરી ગયા છે. બ્રહ્મસ્વરૂપ શાસ્ત્રીય મહારાજ પરબ્રહ્મ સ્વામિનારાયણના અખંડચારક અને સ્વામિનારાયણ ભગવાનને તુલ્ય સેવા કરવા શો ગયે હતા.

આ આદેશ તેમણે સ્વામિનારાયણ ભગવાનના વચનો ને આધારે, અકુરબ્રહ્મ ગુણગીતાને સ્વામી મહારાજના વચનોને આધારે, સ્વામિનારાયણ ભગવાનને સાકુશત

P.T.O.

Name of Philosophy Preached by **PARABRAHMA SWAMINARAYAN**



To Devotees of Parabrahma Swaminarayan Bhagwan,

Jai Swaminarayan.

The philosophies, vedanta or *darshan* of renowned Vedic *sampradayas* of India are based and established upon the particular *sampradaya's* unique *siddhanta* [philosophy]. Their philosophies, vedanta or *darshans* are known by their special names. For example, *sampradayas* are known by their own vedanta or *darshans*, for example, Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, Dvaita, Shuddhadvaita and others.

Similarly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy was extraordinarily original and new. In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had clearly instructed about the name of his (Bhagwan Swaminarayan's) philosophy. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj was in eternal communion with Parabrahma Swaminarayan and he was worthy of being served on par with Swaminarayan Bhagwan.

This instruction he gave was out of his unbiased intellect, and to add more, out of his experience and out of a very pure feeling and supreme devotion towards the philosophy given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It was based on the words of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, through repeated listening to the words of sadhus and devotees who had associated with Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and through having personally listened to Bhagatji Maharaj, who had realized Parabrahma and was [a guru] in the *brahmaswarup* guru *parampara* and was like the form of Parabrahma. We are in fact doing nothing except arranging the words that God-realized Param Pujya Shastriji Maharaj had spoken.

Out of his immense compassion, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, declared the highest emancipatory teachings of Parabrahma

Swaminarayan as the Akshar-Purushottam principle to the world. The Akshar-Purushottam principle is the foremost means for an aspirant's *atma* to attain the state of *aksharup* and to offer *upasana* or bhakti with humility to Purushottam.

The Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* is the quintessence of and most significant teaching in all the Vachanamruts preached by Paramatma Sahajanand. The Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* is the quintessence of the Vedas, Vedantic and all other shastras. The Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* is *para vidya*, *adhyatma vidya* and *brahma vidya*.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj himself, through his realization [*sakshatkar*] of Parabrahma Swaminarayan Bhagwan's heartfelt fundamental belief, established the Sanstha out of his own wish, and named it on the basis of the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* to protect and foster the extraordinary divine *siddhanta* given by Parabrahma Swaminarayan Bhagwan. Thus, the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha is wedded to the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* preached by Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

He [Shastriji Maharaj] built towering mandirs and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the central shrine for the sake of this *siddhanta*.

He established Parabrahma Swaminarayan Bhagwan's unique philosophy, unique *siddhanta* or unique vedanta by bringing the two words of Akshar and Purushottam together. He gave them a philosophical or vedantic form, and named it the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta*, Akshar-Purushottam Vedanta or Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj spread the philosophical work of Shastriji Maharaj in a proper way and in its fullest sense throughout the world.

Thus, in consonance with Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj's instruction and revelation

of the sacred words of 'Akshar-Purushottam' **Swaminarayan Bhagwan's philosophical doctrine tantamounts to the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta*.**

Swaminarayan Vedanta is Akshar-Purushottam Vedanta and Swaminarayan Darshan is Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. And so, in accordance to Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj's instruction, this name [or title] will remain for eternity.

The above mentioned Akshar-Purushottam philosophy taught by Parabrahma Swaminarayan has been propagated with clarifications and great authenticity in the *Swaminarayan Bhashya* of the Prasthantrayi and the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* [Parabrahma Swaminarayan Prabodhitam Akshar-Purushottam Darshanam] written by Sadhu Bhadrashdas at the behest of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Therefore, after the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato and the authorized texts on the life and teachings of the guru *parampara*, these shastras will forever remain foundational and authorized texts with regards to the Sampradaya's philosophical *siddhanta*.

The interpretations in the *Bhashyas* and the *Siddhanta-sudha* texts have been written in consonance with Parabrahma Swaminarayan's heartfelt *siddhantas*, based on the Gunatit guru *parampara's* life and teachings and in accordance to the wish, opinion, guidance and instruction of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thus, they will remain as they are for eternity.

Henceforth, discussions, articles, speeches and print publications should be done with the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhanta* in mind and based on these texts. In this way, the devotees of Parabrahma Swaminarayan Bhagwan should understand and explain to other keenly interested spiritual aspirants. ◆

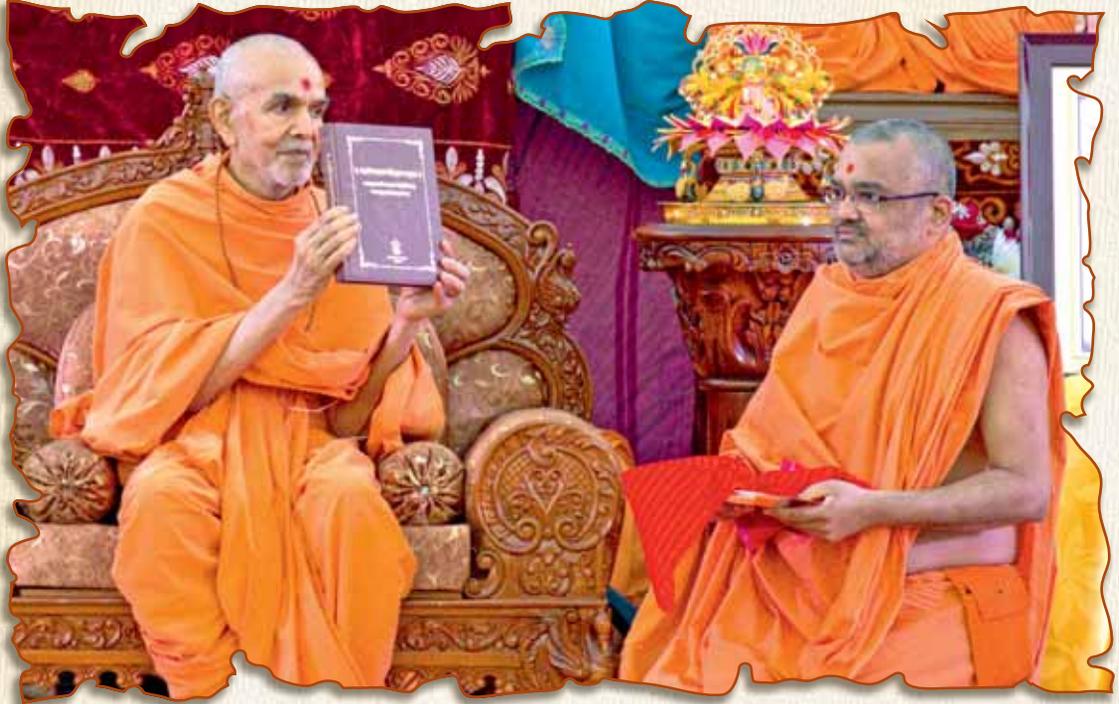
**- Sadhu Keshavjivandas
(Mahant Swami Maharaj)**

16 September 2017

Robbinsville Akshardham, 6.16 p.m.

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj Inaugurates Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha

17 September 2017, Akshardham, Robbinsville



Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurates the *vada granth* authored by Bhadresh Swami

On 17 September 2017, a historic assembly was held on the holy grounds of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ, to celebrate the inauguration of a traditionally composed Sanskrit text, *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*, authored by Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami.

In admiration for the text's intellectual appeal, several dignitaries and renowned academics expressed their thoughts and praise for the text in the assembly. Both the text and its author were honoured by invited guests, including Professor George Cardona – a renowned professor emeritus of Linguistics and South Asian studies at the University of Pennsylvania; Professor Sthaneshwar Timalisina – a distinguished professor at San Diego State University; Professor Graham Schweig – the director of studies in religion at Christopher Newport University; Professor Deven Patel – a professor of South-Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania; Professor Jyotindra Dave – director of BAPS Research Institute at Akshardham, New Delhi; and Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Swami – chief editor of *Hinduism Today*.

The first speaker, Pujya Anandswarup Swami, explained about the importance and

relevance of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in one's life. Thereafter, Professor Janakbhai Dave, Director of BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, New Delhi, elaborated upon the tradition of writing the *vada granth* and its importance.

Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Swami of *Hinduism Today* substantiated how a work of such great prominence is possible only by the divine grace of the guru. He focused on the significance of the guru in sustaining a *darshan's* principles and emphasized the need to follow a guru's commands. He concluded by commending Sadhu Bhadreshdas' commitment towards fulfilling Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes to compose both commentaries on the Prasthanatrayi and a *vada granth* on the Darshan's foundational principles.

Professor Deven Patel explained the significance of a *vada granth* and its distinctive role in establishing the principles of a *darshan*.

Thereafter, the historic *vada granth*, *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*, was brought by Bhadreshdas Swami for the ritual inauguration at the hands of Mahant Swami Maharaj. The audience applauded the release of the *vada granth*.

Professor Sthaneshwar Timalisina then revealed the significance of the text in our modern world. He emphasized that although very few members of the audience could fully comprehend the Sanskrit discussions in the text, let alone read the language, the fact that so many had gathered to celebrate its creation was a testament to the enduring nature of the language and an indicator of its magnificence.

Thereafter, Professor Graham Schweig expressed his admiration for Sadhu Bhadreshdas Swami. He offered reverence to Swamiji for his outstanding work. He emphasized the clarity with which the text was composed and conveyed that it was a great fortune for him and all those who had gathered to have had the opportunity to meet the author of such outstanding works.

Then, the chief guest of the event, Professor

George Cardona, spoke on the distinctive features of Bhadreshdas Swami's commentary on the Prasthanatrayi and the *vada granth*. He began by discussing characteristic features of the commentarial tradition. Thereafter, he highlighted Sadhu Bhadreshdas's exposition of Aksharbrahman as a distinct ontological entity from Parabrahman based on readings of the Prasthanatrayi.

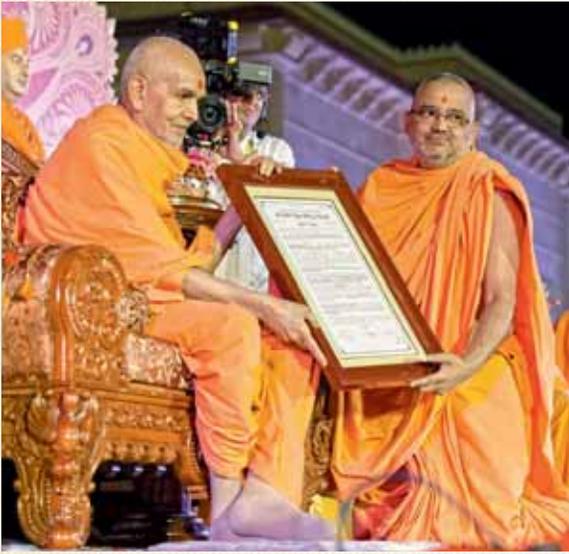
Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami read the letter written by Mahant Swami Maharaj declaring the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy as Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. He also praised and congratulated Bhadreshdas Swami for his outstanding works.

Then the letter by the pandits of Kashi Vidvat Parishad endorsing the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and the copper-plated letter of declaration were offered by Bhadreshdas Swami to guru Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, in a video message, Pujya Viveksagar Swami hailed the occasion as a landmark event in the history of the philosophical tradition in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Speaking on this occasion, Sadhu Bhadreshdas Swami humbly credited his scholarly works to the inspiration he had received from Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the blessings of guru Mahant Swami Maharaj. He added, "The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is not only confined in its text form, but is also practiced as a way of life by thousands of devotees of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha."

The assembly concluded with HH Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, "From Bhagwan Swaminarayan to Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Mahaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, all have endeavoured for the cause of *brahmavidya*. Because of *brahmavidya* there were thousands of *ekantik* devotees in the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. They remained steadfast and calm amidst adversities and problems. This is not imagination. Our gurus have shared this *jnan* and inspired it in others; so it is not imagination. Even today, we see such [enlightened] devotees. For us our knowledge



Mahant Swami Maharaj offers letter by Kashi Vidvat Parishad to Bhadrash Swami

is alive." Then Mahant Swami Maharaj praised Bhadrash Swami, saying, "Bhadrash Swami gives all credit and praise to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He says he is nothing, he is a *sevak*. In spite of achieving such a monumental accomplishment he keeps guru and God foremost in his life.

"Shriji Maharaj had asked, 'What is Brahman, what is Parabrahman?' In the scholarly world many believe Brahman and Parabrahman to be one and the same. But Shriji Maharaj believed both the entities are different and explained that one has to associate with Aksharbrahman to attain his qualities and offer *upasana* to Parabrahman. This is a wonderful principle.

"Shriji Maharaj incarnated on earth and did this work. He took a human birth and became like us. He mingled and played with us. No one realized this. Swaminarayan Bhagwan himself said that you won't understand it today, but will do so in future.

"Whether you understand such philosophical knowledge or not, but all are entitled to it. So, you must be spiritually strong and courageous. Do not lapse in times of joy and misery. Be strong. No matter what the situation do not leave satsang."

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj read excerpts

of the proclamation letter he had composed.

In celebration of this historic event, all of those present in the assembly expressed their deep admiration. Proud to have witnessed such proceedings, all experienced the significance of both the inaugurated text and the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The scholars who attended the inauguration assembly appreciated Bhadrash Swami's works. Excerpts of their speeches are as follows.

PROFESSOR DEVEN PATEL

Chair of the Department of South Asian Studies, University of Pennsylvania



The name of this work is the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*, and as Prof. Dave mentioned in Gujarati, it's a *vada granth*, which is to say a summary of the doctrines, and explains the *tattvas* of a philosophical school.

This work is almost 500 pages of Sanskrit prose and verse, and it teaches us the full philosophy of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan which appeared in history 200 years ago. So, these are the words of Swaminarayan. *Sudha* means the 'immortal nectar', the immortal essence.

The guru's words are immortal and divine. Stories of their lives are also immortal. And the importance of the guru *lekha* is very important for this work because Bhadrash Swami doesn't think of it as his own work. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had written a letter summarizing the entirety of the *darshan*. This is just a commentary of this one letter.

This work is unique in many ways. First, in Sanskrit, in Vedanta, there are three main texts: Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, and Brahmasutras. Pujya Bhadrash Swami has already composed commentaries on all three of these works, and he himself has produced this *vada granth*. Work of this magnitude would normally take hundreds of years. But, he himself has



The inauguration event commences with *arti* on the grounds of Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville

accomplished this. In addition, not only in prose, but he has also composed about approximately 450 *karikas* – verses that summarize what he has composed in the prose.

But, it is very important to mention two things. First, this work has not only been approved but it has been celebrated by the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhvat Parishad. These are the pandits of Banaras, Kashi, who, for centuries, have tested works to see if they are worthy of praise before they approve them. And this work has not only received praise, but admiration of the highest order.

It is important to say that within this 500-page book, the most important doctrine of the Swaminarayan Darshan, which Pramukh Swami Maharaj had summarized in this letter and Bhadrash Swami has expanded upon, involves the five truths – entities or *panch tattvas*: *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman. And it's each one of these that is condensed in this letter.

Parabrahman reveals itself to *jivas* and *ishwars* in perceptible form, out of compassion that is born from a deep love for them. And these *jivas* are the beings who are bound to the illusion of the world or *maya*. They perform both skilful and unskilful actions whilst the *ishwars* are powerful

entities such as *devas* (gods) and mental faculties that fulfil certain roles through the agency of Paramatma. Everything manifests, according to the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, from the invisible love and compassion of the Aksharbrahman Guru that one worships as the human embodiment of that great Purushottam Parabrahman. Now, one can say these things very quickly in English or in translation, but for a full understanding, such great works [as this] give precise details about all of these important doctrines.

PROFESSOR GRAHAM SCHWEIG

Professor of Religion, Christopher Newport University, USA

Distinguished Teaching and Research Fellow, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley



It is an honour and a pleasure to be here today to honour Bhadrash Swamiji's great work. I have never been here before, and I have to say that it has been a wonderful experience. And I have experienced so much affection from all of you, and all of the swamijis, and the *sangha* here. I am reminded of a verse from the Bhagavad-Gita, where Krishna says to Arjun, "*Sarva-guhyatamam*

bhuyaha..." Krishna says to Arjun, "My supreme message, my greatest secret of all, is [that] you are so much loved by me." I really feel this here!

I'm here to honour Bhadreswami's wonderful creation. The *Swaminarayan Bhashyam*, and the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*, written by Bhadreswami, are very clear presentations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *darshan*. It is distinct from other schools of Vaishnav Vedanta, and is to be known as Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. The exegetical analyses and interpretations, specifically of verses found in chapters 8 and 15 of the Bhagavad Gita, are crucial for appreciating the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha's* exposition of Aksharbrahman.

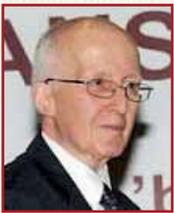
And, I have to say, I have been learning a lot from Bhadreswami, and I look forward to many years further of his tutelage.

The *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* is written in very lucid, not unnecessarily complex, Sanskrit. And the overall style is reminiscent, to me, of the clarity and eloquence of Shankaracharya's *bhashya* writing. This lends Bhadreswami's work a good deal of gravity, authority, and power to those who can read and appreciate Sanskrit.

And lastly, I just would like to say, that my hope is for Bhadreswami and his work to continue to flower – just as the Akshardham Mandir is rising into the sky.

PROFESSOR GEORGE CARDONA

Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and South Asian Studies, University of Pennsylvania



It's a great honour to be here and a great honour to speak about what has the right to be called a great work. I would like to place Swami Bhadreswami's work in a certain context. It's not emphasized enough, but there are two branches of thinking in ancient Indian thought. Every *darshan*, every system of thinking, has a basic text and this text is a *sutra* text. But these *sutras* begin in

different ways. On the one hand we have Panini's grammar that begins '*Atha shabdānushāshanam*', whereby you receive instructions in *shabda*, i.e. *sadhu shabda* – correct speech. Similarly, Patanjali's Yogasutra begins with '*Atha yogānushāshanam*'. These are instructions, *anushāshana*.

On the other hand, we have a series of texts that begin in a different way. There is a tradition called Purva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa. Purva Mimamsa begins with Jaimini's *sutra* that says '*Atha dharmajigyāsā*'. *Jigyasa*, not *anushāshanam*. Badarayan's Brahmasutras begin with '*Athāto brahmajigyāsā*', not *anushāshanam*. Thus we are dealing with two ways of approaching things – one instructs you and one enquires. *Jigyasa* is a synonym for the term *mimamsa*. That is, [something] you want to know. Thus, *jigyasa* is *gyātum ichchhā*, the wish or desire to know.

Now, what do you want to know and what is it based on? The *purva mimamsak* wants to know what dharma is. What is dharma in context? And Jaimini tells us what it is '*chodanalakshano-artho dharmah*' – dharma is that purposeful activity which you learn about through *chodana*, i.e. a Vedic command, sacrifice.

Now in Vedanta, the Uttara Mimamsa system, what are you inquiring about? That is when you say '*Athāto brahmajigyāsā*', what is Brahma? The second *sutra* then says '*Janmādyasya yataha*'. Brahman is that from which there comes or is the cause of this, everything we have here – the world.

Now given this, the text then takes this as a system of enquiries about various ways of approaching things. And this is the *vada* texts or the *sangraha* texts – composites – which deal with things like what is the way of knowing things, *pramana*. Now the *sutra* text has to have accompanying it, what is called a *bhashyam*, which has a very specific definition about what it is. I won't trouble you with that at the moment. But these *bhashyas* can take a certain text and interpret it in different ways on the basis of scriptures. And you



Mahant Swami Maharaj, senior sadhus and invited scholars during the evening inaugural assembly

can see the difference of opinion and difference of interpretation; and this gets me to my point of the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*.

That is, when you say *yataha* in the second *sutra* of the Brahmasutra, what do you mean by that? According to Shankar it refers to one entity, Brahman. According to the Swaminarayan tradition on the other hand it refers to two entities. As Bhadreshdas Swami very clearly says, *yataha* is equivalent not to *yasmat* – from which, but *yabyam* – from which two, i.e. from ‘Akshara’ and ‘Purushottama’.

Now, let me quickly finish by saying something about this work. It fits exactly what a *bhashya* should be. If you permit me, there is a technical definition in the tradition of what a *bhashya* is, ‘*Sutrārtho varnyate yatra padaihi sutrānusaribhihi*’, – that text in which the meaning of the *sutra*, are faithful to it, and clear. You will find in Swami Bhadreshdas’s *bhashya* on the Brahmasutras an absolutely lucid, faithful interpretation of the *sutras* according to a certain tradition.

Now this tradition has to be summarized giving the basic tenets and ways of approaching things and arguments. Now another thing that characterizes Bhadreshdas’s work in contrast to

other comparable works is the lack of animosity. Typically [found] in other works, you’ll find a presentation such that you have what you call a *purva paksha*, then you have to destroy that and show that only your *siddhanta* is acceptable. Now in the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* this is done in a very, very subtle manner. You never realize that he is really arguing against anyone. And in the *bhashyas* he has done the same thing. It’s very very subtle. Unless your ears are tuned to what others have said, you won’t realize that he is undercutting what they have said – and this is one of the beauties of this work. It clearly presents everything you have to know. Instead of calling it a *sangrah* or calling it a *bindu*, as other texts call themselves, this is called a *sudha*, and it deserves that title.

PROFESSOR STHANESHWAR TIMALSINA

Distinguished Professor, Diego State University



Hindu culture has the power and strength to make itself simple and accept new thoughts and beliefs. The proof of this is evident in our ancient Vedas, Upanishads, Bhashyas and Purans. Because of

flexibility Hindu culture has been able to adapt itself and remain alive and relevant. What can be acceptable in Hindu Dharma is known through the dimensions provided in the Vedas. The three shastras, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras, have been referred to by various acharyas for philosophical discussions, to reveal the faults of other *sampradayas* and to oppose them. Shankar, Ramanuj, Vallabh and many other acharyas established their philosophies on the basis that they are Vedic and not against the Vedas.

In consonance with this tradition, Sadhu Bhadreshdas has written *bhashyas* on the above mentioned three shastras. Additionally, after writing *bhashyas* the founders of various *darshans* have written independent texts in which the principles of their philosophies are included. And thus, those who are eager can get an overall view of the particular philosophy in a single text. Sadhu Bhadreshdas, who has written such a text – *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* fulfils this aspect. He has discussed all the philosophical aspects of the Sampradaya in seed form.

The text is written in lucid Sanskrit and can be understood by one who has a basic study of the Sanskrit language. Bhadreshdas Swami has given the *siddhanta* in a profound manner in only a few pages, which would require reading of other *bhashyas* of thousands of pages.

Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha refers to and addresses all the *darshanik* traditions. It discusses on set subjects and expresses its agreement and disagreement with them in a succinct manner. His work follows the style of the *sutra* tradition. Badarayan Vyas has given the essence of the Upanishads in 555 *sutras*. Similarly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan has been capsuled in the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* in 458 *karikas* (verses). The work of Bhadreshdas Swami shows the (Akshar-Purushottam) *siddhanta*, spread over thousands of pages in the Vachanamrut and Vedic texts, in a brief manner [and thus falls in line with the

sutra tradition].

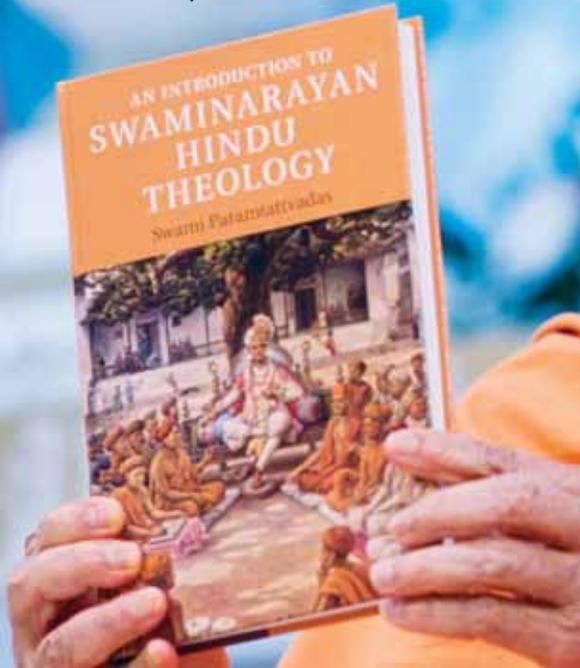
Sadhu Bhadreshdas' *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha* and other works are a Himalayan contribution through which the Swaminarayan Sampradaya will become acceptable to other Hindu traditions. This is a historic creation, of which we are all witnesses, and very few can imagine what will happen by this effort of Bhadreshdas Swami. For centuries to come people will write commentaries and present their own thoughts on the basis of this text. And so, this text will forever remain important. And to say more, through this text people will understand the importance of their life.

AUTHOR

Puja Bhadresh Swami is a renowned Sanskrit scholar ordained by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1981. He holds 7 Masters degrees in almost all the major philosophical *darshans* including the Shaddarshans – Nyay, Vaisheshik, Sankhya, Yoga, Purva Mimansa and Vedanta, as well as Sanskrit Vyakaran. He has one PhD already, and a D.Litt. He will have another PhD soon from Kanchipuram. He has already been awarded the great title of Mahamahopadhyaya, equivalent to a university professor of the highest order. He has composed many works, the first is known as the *Paramatma Pratyaksh Swarup Yog*, which is a comparative analysis of the Vachanamrut and the Bhagavad Gita. He has also composed a comprehensive commentary on the Prasthantrayi, that is to say the 10 principle Upanishads, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahmasutras, according to the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His most recent work is the *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*. His other accomplishment is that he is the head of the BAPS Centre for Applied Research and Social Harmony. He is also a committee member of the Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Ved Vidya Pratishthan in Ujjain, which is a government body that is dedicated for the preservation of Vedic Culture and Literature. ◆

AN INTRODUCTION TO SWAMINARAYAN HINDU THEOLOGY

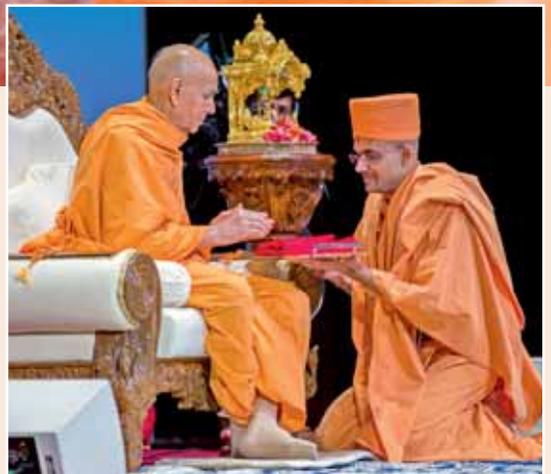
6 September & 25 September 2017, USA & UK



Opening Ceremony in London, UK

Cambridge University Press (CUP), the world's oldest publishing house and one of the most reputed academic publishers in the world, has released *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology*, a 350-page book in English on Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Authored by Paramtattvadas Swami, *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology* provides a comprehensive doctrinal account of the Swaminarayan tradition's belief system, drawing on its rich corpus of theological literature, including the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself and classical commentaries on the three canonical Vedantic texts, the Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras. Part 1 of the book delineates the sources and tools of Swaminarayan Hindu theology, while Part 2 systematically expounds upon its distinctive five eternal entities – Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman, *maya*, *ishwar* and *jiva* – and *mukti* (spiritual liberation). In presenting these key themes theologically and lucidly, Paramtattvadas Swami makes the Swaminarayan Hindu belief system intelligible to scholars, students and serious readers.



Opening ceremony in Robbinsville, USA



Invited scholars during the opening ceremony in Robbinsville, USA: (L to R) Michael Duncan, Senior Global Marketing Manager of CUP; Professor Jyotindra Dave, BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Delhi; Professor Raymond Brady Williams, Wabash College; Professor Francis X. Clooney, Harvard University; Professor Ravi M. Gupta, Utah State University

LAUNCHES

An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology was officially released in the presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in Robbinsville, USA, on 6 September 2017, and again in London, UK, on 25 September 2017. Esteemed members of American and British academia were present, as was Michael Duncan, Senior Global Marketing Manager for CUP, from New York.

Below are a few excerpts from the scholars' addresses at the respective events.

PROFESSOR RAYMOND BRADY WILLIAMS

Wabash College, USA



An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology is a detailed, authoritative analysis of Vedanta philosophy as interpreted within the Swaminarayan tradition, and with the basic fundamental texts with which Paramtattva Swami is so familiar. But it is also written in beautiful English, and it is accessible and compatible with the best of Western scholarship.

PROFESSOR FRANCIS CLOONEY

Harvard University, USA



I am particularly happy to see this wonderful book that Swami Paramtattvadas has brought forth. For what is it, but simply that this man, who is holy, who is simple, who is a great scholar, has written not simply a book about the Swaminarayan tradition, but has spoken from his own heart and woven it together as a living reality. And he has done so in the English language, published by Cambridge University Press, for an academic and Western audience, as well as for the community itself. It is a marvellous book. Each section is a marvellous reflection that is both personal and spiritual, and at the highest academic standard, opening these topics up for scholars in the West, as well as in the tradition.

So if the book is rooted in the past, the long and great tradition of Swaminarayan, if it's facing the issues of the present moment, I think it is also opening up a glorious future for your tradition, it's learning in Gujarat, in Gujarati, but also in English, but now as a global faith, speaking to all



Opening function in Robbinsville, USA

people, and helping us all to think better, to act better, and to love God more deeply.

PROFESSOR RAVI GUPTA

Utah State University, USA



An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology is a singular achievement on many levels.

First, the basics. This is the first scholarly work in English to provide a comprehensive introduction to the ideas that make the Swaminarayan Sampradaya unique among the Hindu traditions. The book is systematic in its approach, proceeding step by step through central ideas about God, human beings, and the relationship between them. Paramtattva Swami’s writing is clear and straightforward, and every term is well-defined, making the book accessible both to lay persons and scholars. Given the Swaminarayan tradition’s immense global presence, this English language introduction provides invaluable insight for both insiders and outsiders into the heart of a major Hindu tradition.

Paramtattva Swami’s book is a landmark achievement in Hindu theology, written by someone who represents the best of both scholarship and devotional practice.

PROFESSOR DR ANKUR BARUA

Cambridge University, UK



I lived in Delhi for almost 10 years and I was aware of the existence of Swaminarayan Hinduism simply because the great Akshardham Temple occupies a prominent base on South Delhi’s skyline. But before I read this book, I was not aware that what we have in Swaminarayan Hinduism is the very vigorous, vibrant, living Hindu tradition which is engaged in the complexities of living in the world both in India and various other locations in the West.

DR JAMES MALLINSON

School of Oriental and African Studies,
London University, UK



I am going to finish just by saying congratulations to Sadhu Paramtattvadas. This book has 120,000 words. I’ve written a few books myself. I know that’s a very long one and for Cambridge University

Press to take it on, I can well appreciate it’s been a big struggle – an act of *tapasya* to get it to final publication, so congratulations.



Opening function in London, UK

PROFESSOR SHAUNAKA RISHI DAS

Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, UK



The publication of this book is historic because it also marks the transition of the Swaminarayan Sanstha into a more modern environment. Scholarship has been going on in the tradition since the very beginning, but now scholarship is translating itself into a different language, a different medium. Cambridge University Press is not a lightweight academic publisher. This is getting it into the heart-blood of scholarly discourse and, as has been said, it means that there is now a book that scholars and students can refer to when they want to learn about the Swaminarayan understanding of the Supreme.

This is the beginning of a larger discourse. Now we can begin to engage with the tradition in a much more fundamental way. And it means that young Swaminarayans can value their own tradition, can follow in the footsteps of Paramtattva Swamiji and begin to study their own tradition, become the experts, and become the people who do the dialogue that Pramukh Swami was talking about in the UN in the year 2000.

REVIEWS & ENDORSEMENTS

Hailed by Cambridge University Press as a “landmark publication”, the book has already received high critical acclaim from leading

international scholars. Below are some of the academic reviews and endorsements received.

In this welcome introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology, Swami Paramtattvadas has succeeded in presenting the fundamental beliefs of his tradition in a lucid, meticulous and methodical exposition.

This book, while standing within Swaminarayan Hinduism, seeks to engage with a broader, rational discourse and to stimulate discussion beyond the bounds of Hindu communities. The writing of this book has been a large scholarly task, aiming to systematise key themes from an extensive network of the tradition’s authoritative texts in Gujarati and Sanskrit. As such it is an important contribution to Theology and Religion and, to my knowledge, is the first Hindu systematic theology written in English. It is also a welcome contribution to Hindu Theology and to the emerging discussion of Comparative Theology. I am sure it will find a wide readership among both the academic and Hindu communities.

- **Gavin Flood FBA**

Senior Research Fellow, University of Oxford, UK
Visiting Professor of Comparative Religious Studies, Yale-NUS, Singapore

This book provides a brilliant introduction to the theology of the Swaminarayan tradition, one of the most dynamic and visible forms of Hinduism in India and abroad. It comprehensively narrates the key doctrines and beliefs of the tradition drawing on canonical Hindu texts, original teachings of the tradition’s founder, and exegetical works of other teachers of the tradition. After delineating the sources for his research, the author intelligibly expounds upon the five central entities of the tradition. It also opens vistas of mutual understanding and comparative studies with other religious traditions. The book stands as an essential tool for understanding the belief

system of this vibrant Hindu tradition.

- **Diwakar Acharya**

Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics,
University of Oxford, UK

In this engagingly written book, Swami Paramtattvadas looks at the complex ways in which the Swaminarayan tradition interpreted the critical and hallowed terminology of Vedanta, thereby developing its own unique system from the early modern period onwards. At the same time, by approaching the thought of the tradition from within, he also raises interesting questions about the relationship between the categories of theology, metaphysics, the philosophy of religion, and the practices of Hindu devotion. This book does an excellent job of bringing the Swaminarayan tradition into conversation not only with English language studies of modern Vedanta, but with comparative theology more generally.

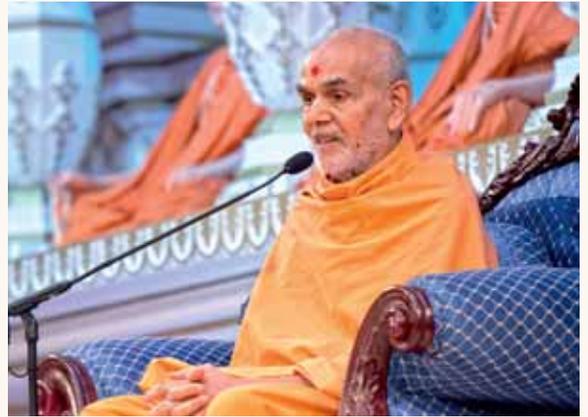
- **Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, FBA**

Professor of Comparative Religion and
Philosophy, Lancaster University, UK

This monograph by Swami Paramtattvadas fills a longstanding need for a detailed and systematic exposition of the theology of the Swaminarayan tradition. It makes accessible the fundamental theological assumptions and claims of the tradition, while contextualizing and discussing these within the rich diversity of Hindu intellectual thought. The author brings to his exposition both the depth of traditional learning and practice as well as the tools of contemporary Western scholarship. This is an excellent contribution to the field of Hindu theology exemplifying the creativity of commitment and critical inquiry. It is a valuable resource for understanding and engaging with one of India's most visible and rapidly growing global religious traditions.

- **Anantanand Rambachan**

Professor of Religion, Saint Olaf College, USA



Mahant Swami Maharaj blesses the opening function, London

AUTHOR

Pujya Paramtattvadas Swami was ordained as a sadhu in 1992 by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

For twelve years at the BAPS seminary in Sarangpur, India, Paramtattvadas Swami studied Sanskrit, Gujarati, world religions, Indian philosophy, Vedanta and, most intensely, the beliefs, practices, texts and history of the Swaminarayan tradition. Within the seminary, his studies culminated in the achievement of the equivalent of two undergraduate degrees, in Sanskrit grammar and Indian logic, and a postgraduate qualification in Vedanta.

In 2004, he completed a Master's in Sanskrit from Karnataka State Open University before returning to England in 2006 to read for a Master's in the Study of Religion at the University of Oxford. After a further year of pre-doctoral studies focussing on Christianity, he went on to complete his PhD in Hindu theology at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India, under the supervision of Gavin Flood, Professor of Hindu Studies and Comparative Religion at the University of Oxford.

Paramtattvadas Swami has written and presented extensively at events around the world on topics related to Hindu studies, in general, and Swaminarayan doctrine, praxis and history, in particular. He is also a scholar at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, a recognized independent centre of Oxford University. ◆

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

July 2017
Atlanta, Chicago, Toronto, San Jose



Grand annakut, Atlanta



Honoured during the Decennial Celebration assembly, Atlanta

ATLANTA: 1-7 1, Saturday

The BAPS Mandir in Atlanta celebrated ten years since its consecration by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2007. A grand *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji.

In the evening assembly, the grand finale of the decennial celebrations was held in the mandir precincts. The mandir podium was transformed into a stage. The celebration programmed included speeches by invited guests and videos, traditional dances and short dramas themed on the word MANDIR, where M represented Magnificence, A stood for Achievements, N for Nurture, D for Dedication, I for the Inspirer and R for Reflection.

Brian Kemp, Secretary of State for Georgia praised, "The Mandir is an asset to our state. It is certainly one of the crown jewels of our state."

Johnny Christ, Mayor of Lilburn, Georgia,

expressed, "The BAPS Mandir over the past decade has served as a centre of spirituality, harmony and service. So, I am very grateful for what goes on in this place." Thereafter, the mayor honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj by presenting him with a Key to the City and declaring 1 July as 'Mahant Swami Maharaj Day'.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the celebration assembly, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj gifted to us a very beautiful mandir. A number of social, health and other services are performed here. Whoever comes here has been satisfied and nourished. The purpose of this mandir is to enhance faith in God. The fruit of this mandir is that of sustaining one's satsang."

2, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated the two-and-a-half-day *shibir*, '*Bhāgya Jāgyā re...*', by kindling the inaugural lamp. Today marked the 57th *diksha*

anniversary (according to the Indian calendar) of Mahant Swami Maharaj and eight other youths. Yogiji Maharaj had given *diksha* to the nine *yogeshwars* at Kapol Vadi on 3 July 1960.

After his morning puja Swamishri gave *diksha* to two youths: Rashmibhai was named Sushil Bhagat and Vrajeshbhai was named Vinamra Bhagat.

3, Monday

In the evening satsang assembly, Mark Stohman, Mayor of Morristown, NC, presented a Key to the City to Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, he said, "I've been watching the live stream ever since you came to the US two weeks ago. I don't understand a lot of Gujarati, but I can tell His Holiness is very compassionate."

5, Wednesday; Volunteers' Day

After performing his morning puja Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Chattanooga. He performed the *pujan* and *arti* rituals of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Radha-Krishna Dev, Sita-Ram and Hanumanji, Shiv-Parvatiji and Ganeshji and the Guru Parampara.

At 7.30 p.m. Swamishri performed the *arti* of Thakorji in the assembly. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated a new Swaminarayan Aksharpith publication, *Mandir: Experience, Understand, Participate*, by Yogi Trivedi. During the Volunteers' Day assembly two skits about 'Problems and Solutions' were enacted.

After the skits Swamishri gave answers on how to eradicate pride while doing *seva* and about offering charity and *dharmado*.

CHICAGO: 7-19

7, Friday

Swamishri departed from Atlanta at 5.30 p.m. and landed at Dupage County Airport in Chicago at 6.50 p.m. Thereafter, Swamishri was welcomed at the BAPS Mandir with a traditional



Guru Purnima Celebration, Chicago

dance by youths and a garland by sadhus. Prior to Thakorji's darshan Swamishri sanctified lemon water for 110 devotees who had fasted for his health and *rajipo* for 84 hours.

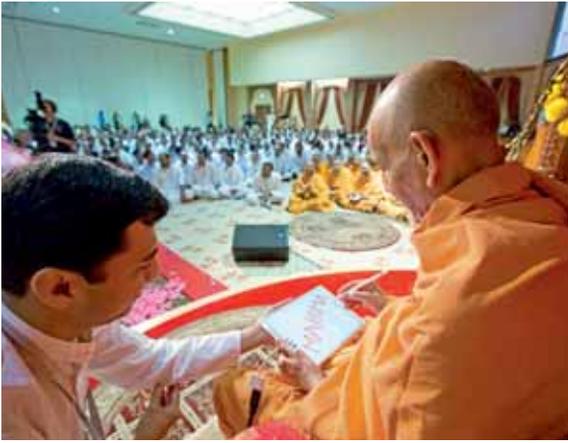
8, Saturday; Infants' Day

The evening satsang assembly was declared as 'Shishu Din' (Infants' Day). A short drama was performed by infants, depicting their search for Ghanshyam Maharaj. The drama was interspersed with dances and skits. Finally, they found Ghanshyam Maharaj to be present in Mahant Swami Maharaj. After asking Swamishri, "Is Ghanshyam Maharaj present in you?" Swamishri said, "Yes." "Is it true that you are Akshar?" Swamishri replied, "Yes, it is true."

9, Sunday; Guru Purnima Celebration

To celebrate Guru Purnima a savoury *annakut* of 500 food items was offered to Thakorji. Women devotees of 14 regions had arranged the *annakut* from 12.00 midnight to 3.00 a.m.

The Guru Purnima celebration was held in the evening assembly in the mandir. Swamishri entered the assembly in a motorized *mayur rath* with Thakorji in his hands. Devotees were absorbed in darshan as the *rath* passed through the assembly. Youths danced on the stage and in front of the *rath* to welcome Thakorji and Swamishri. After reaching the main stage, Swamishri performed



Youth Day, Chicago



Kishore-Kishori Day, Chicago

arti of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Thereafter, he was honoured with a beautiful garland by the senior sadhus. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "May we all live unitedly with our family, in America and the whole world. We should not harbour enmity for anyone. God has made everyone. The spirit of unity and fraternity should be anchored to your souls.

"Everything is marred due to finding faults in others. Maharaj, Swami and the Satpurush are fundamental. Do not doubt them. Have resolute faith in them.

"Observe the moral rules. By following all this, Akshardham is here on earth. Believe the *seva* you do to be of great privilege. Then one's soul will gain strength."

Senior sadhus performed *pujan* of Swamishri by applying *chandan* on his forehead. Thereafter, the devotees offered flowers as they came for Swamishri's *samip* darshan. Swamishri gave darshan to all for 40 minutes.

10, Monday; Youth Day

At 11.15 a.m., Swamishri attended the youth assembly in the mandir hall. The assembly theme was '*Evā santne nāmu hu shish'*. Youths performed three skits, at the end of each they asked a question:

Q. Write the solution to dissolve our base natures (*swabhavs*).

A. Swamishri wrote on an ipad, "MAHIMA."

Q. Write about how we can remain united.

A. "Do each other's work with a spirit of unity (*samp*)."

Q. How can we solve our family problems and usher in peace?

A. "Understand each other."

In the evening, Swamishri attended and blessed the Youth Day assembly. He also inaugurated two eBooks by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *Divine Memories, Part 3* and *Portrait of Inspiration*, which are available on Amazon.com.

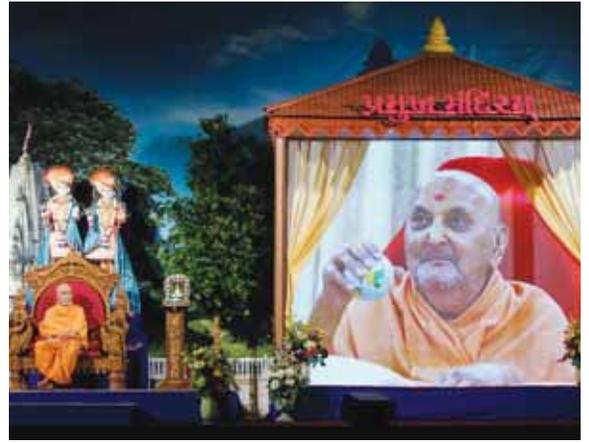
11, Tuesday; Kishore-Kishori Day

Swamishri attended the morning Kishore-Kishori assembly at 11.00 a.m. The assembly was themed '*Je je Harie karyu het'*. Swamishri was welcomed with the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals. The whole assembly sang the prayer '*Mahā balwant māyā tamāri'* in unison. *Kishores* garlanded Swamishri. Thereafter, the youths were showered with flower petals during the Holi festival.

At 7.15 p.m. Swamishri arrived in the Kishore-Kishori Day assembly. Tom Cullerton and Michael Connelly, Illinois State Senators, honoured Swamishri and declared 9 July as 'Mahant Swami Maharaj Day'. Then Swamishri inaugurated a Spanish edition of *Bal Satsang 1*, a print publication translated by Rajubhai Rao. Thereafter, the Kishore-Kishori Day programme



Children's Day, Chicago



'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Day', Chicago

comprised of several activities followed by questions to Swamishri.

13, Thursday; Children's Day

At 11.00 a.m., Swamishri graced the *bal shibir*. The assembly was themed on a *satsangi* child's daily routine. Swamishri applied *tilak* and *chandlo* on the forehead of two children to symbolize the morning puja ritual. Then it was time to go to school. Swamishri held Thakorji in his hands and sat in a school bus. After arriving in school the children asked Swamishri to take a lesson in class. Swamishri wrote, "Unity = Doing each others' activities with unity."

Then it was recess time. So, the kids played a ball game with Swamishri. This was followed by an art class. Swamishri coloured an illustration of a heart. Then, after school, children took Swamishri to their homes. Swamishri performed *arti* and offered *thal* to Thakorji. Thereafter, it was time to do *ghar sabha*, in which Swamishri narrated his incidents with Yogiji Maharaj. And finally Swamishri told a bedtime story about 'Lindiyo the Lion'.

In the evening, Swamishri presided over the Children's Day assembly. Several dignitaries honoured Swamishri. Tim Schnieder, Cook County Commissioner, declared 9 July 2017 as 'Mahant Swami Maharaj Day'.

14, Friday; Satsang Shibir

Swamishri ignited the inaugural lamp to launch the two-and-a-half day satsang *shibir* themed '*Bhāgya Jāgyā re...*'.

16, Sunday

The evening satsang assembly was themed 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Day'.

The chief guests addressed the assembly. Mayor of Bartlett, Kevin Wallace, said, "It's been such a great relationship between the village of Bartlett and BAPS. I can't say enough about what BAPS here in Bartlett has done for our community."

Bruce Rauner, Governor of Illinois, said, "It is a deep privilege, one of the most exciting moments of my life, to meet half-an-hour ago our new spiritual leader, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. We celebrate together the values that we share – the ideals of '*samp*' (unity) and the ideal of '*das no das*'.

"I, Bruce Rauner, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim August 13th 2017 as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Day' in Illinois."

Thereafter, the assembly celebrated the contributions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj through bhajans and traditional dances. Swamishri was garlanded by the regional satsang coordinators. Then, Swamishri performed *pujan* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *asthi-pushpa* (sacred ashes),



Arrives in the welcome assembly, Toronto



Swamishri, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Justin Trudeau and guests at the BAPS Mandir, Toronto

which were going to be ceremoniously immersed into the River Mississippi a few days later. The assembly concluded with Swamishri's blessings.

18, Tuesday; Volunteers' Day

At 7.20 p.m., Swamishri arrived in the Volunteers' Day assembly. Former Illinois State Representative Randey Ramey and former Senator John Millner, addressed the assembly. John Millner said, "I've been coming here for so many years and what makes a difference is that each and every one of you do with a spirit of volunteerism. This is not any empty faith. This is a faith with action. Each and every one of you goes out in your community with others with a commitment to serve others. This is huge, this is life-changing. This changes the world. You're truly making a difference in our community, you're making a difference in our country. You're making a difference to each and every one of us here. I look at you as my BAPS family."

Finally, Swamishri spoke about the tradition of *seva* in our *sampradaya*, mentioning how Nilkanth Varni served Sevakram, Gunatitanand Swami daily swept the compound of Junagadh mandir, Shastriji Maharaj scoured utensils as a child in Vartal mandir, Yogiji Maharaj served all and Pramukh Swami Maharaj washed utensils on the day he was appointed as President of BAPS.

TORONTO: 19-28

19, Wednesday

Swamishri and his entourage of sadhus departed from Chicago mandir at 10.30 a.m. and flew to Toronto, arriving at 12.20 p.m. (Toronto time: 1.20 p.m.). He was welcomed in the mandir precincts by devotees waving BAPS flags. Swamishri sanctified fruit juices for 300 devotees who had fasted for his good health and *rajipo*.

In the evening, Swamishri arrived in the mandir auditorium for the welcome assembly. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri were welcomed with a traditional dance by youths and Vedic rituals. Then the leading heads of the Hindu Samaj of Toronto garlanded Swamishri on behalf of all Hindus. The Trustees of BAPS, Canada, also welcomed Swamishri with a garland. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Maharaj, Swami and the Satpurush are fundamental in our spiritual understanding. One should not wallow in lust, anger, ego and jealousy but resolve to purge them."

20, Thursday; Mahant Swami Pramukh Varni Din and Youth Day

On 20 July 2012, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote a historic letter in Ahmedabad declaring Mahant Swami Maharaj as the guru of BAPS after his earthly departure.

At 11.15 a.m., Swamishri attended the Youth Day assembly. The youths performed a skit and



Swamishri and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau perform *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* for BAPS *hari* mandir in Windsor, Toronto

asked him questions. They also played *raas* with Swamishri to experience the same joy that Shriji Maharaj had given to his *paramhansas*. Then Swamishri also called the sadhus and played *raas* with them.

In the evening, Swamishri attended the Youth Day assembly and blessed all.

21, Friday; Kishore-Kishori Din

At 7.05 p.m. Swamishri came to the Kishore-Kishori Din assembly. The youths presented and narrated their college campus experiences and how satsang had helped them remain unblemished and steadfast in character. Then Swamishri answered their questions about how to attain the happiness he is experiencing and to never get vitiated by *kusang*.

22, Saturday; Mandir Decennial Celebrations

Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to two *sadhaks*, Jayvin and Nilank, and named them Rutvij Bhagat and Dvijendra Bhagat respectively.

At 5.32 p.m. Prime Minister of Canada Hon. Justin Trudeau arrived at the BAPS Mandir in Toronto. For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, September–October 2017, pp. 45–47.

23, Sunday; Volunteers' Day

On the occasion of the Mandir Decennial Celebrations a grand *annakut* was offered to

Thakorji. Swamishri inaugurated ebooks by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *Perspectives* and *Hinduism: Sacred Places and Holy Rivers*.

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Windsor. The evening assembly celebrated Volunteers' Day and a Holi with flowers.

24, Monday

Swamishri kindled the inaugural lamp for the two-and-a-half day *shibir*, '*Bhāgya Jāgyā re ...*' and blessed the assembly.

In the evening session of the *shibir*, a drama on how Karunashankar of Dabhoi revealed that Shriji Maharaj is present in Satsang. Thereafter, through a question-answer session Swamishri talked about the early years of his life and about Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

26, Wednesday; Children's Day

In the evening Children's Day assembly, children participated in moral and satsang activities. The first activity involved a game in which selected children were told to say, 'Oya' if they agreed and say 'No' when they disagreed with the words spoken to them. In the second activity, Swamishri cut the strings of balloons inscribed with various base instincts and thus symbolically redeemed children from their *swabhavs*.

The third activity was a game named 'Hot

Potato'. Finally, Swamishri blessed the special assembly, "You should never have friends who lead you astray. Understand others' greatness [*mahima*]. Bow down to others, your parents and greet your friends with namaskars. Help others in studies and work with a spirit of harmony (*samp*)."
Finally, when Swamishri was asked what gift he would give them, he replied, "Akshardham."

27, Thursday; Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthipushpa Immersion in Niagara Falls

On 27 July 1974, exactly 43 years ago, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited the Niagara Falls. Today, Swami Bapa's *asthi-pushpa* (sacred ashes) were to be ritually immersed in the waters of Niagara Falls by Mahant Swami Maharaj. For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, September–October 2017, pp. 48 & 49.

SAN JOSE: 28–31

28, Friday, Toronto, San Jose

At 12 noon, Swamishri departed from Toronto by flight and landed in San Jose at 4.55 p.m. (1.55 p.m. Toronto Standard Time). Swamishri was welcomed with garlands by sadhus and devotees at the airport. On reaching the BAPS Mandir at 5.30 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to all the devotees and retired for the afternoon.

In the evening assembly, Swamishri was welcomed by a traditional dance by children and teenagers. After a welcome speech, sadhus and veteran devotees offered a garland to Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

29, Saturday; Decennial Celebrations of San Jose BAPS Mandir

The grand finale of the Decennial Celebrations of BAPS Mandir, San Jose, was organized in the evening at the 'Event Centre of San Jose State University'. Swamishri arrived for the event at 6.08 p.m. Children welcomed Thakorji and Swamishri by showering flower petals on their pathway. Youths performed a welcome dance on the performing

stage while Swamishri was approaching the main stage. The exquisitely large stage backdrop of peacocks was prepared by youths. After the welcome dance, children welcomed Swamishri by singing shlokas from the Shikshapatri.

Prior to Swamishri's arrival, speeches, skits and videos on how the mandir benefits individuals, families and society were presented by sadhus and youths. On Swamishri's arrival Atmaswarup Swami was addressing the assembly on how the mandirs consecrated by a guru nourishes everyone. Thereafter, the stage guests addressed the assembly.

For excerpts of speeches by guests, Mr Kansen Chu and Mr Ash Kalra, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, September–October 2017, p. 49.

Mayor Rich Tran, City of Milpitas, said, "To understand Hinduism and the Indian American community, I actually went to India last year and I got to visit the BAPS temple [Akshardham] in New Delhi. And, when I came home to Milpitas, we have the BAPS temple in San Jose. How lucky I am."

Finally, Swamishri blessed the celebrations assembly, "Shriji Maharaj incarnated on earth and revealed the path of *moksha* for countless souls. When a millionaire adopts a child he wills his property in his child's name. It is the same with us. We have come into contact with God and he has adopted us and thus given everything to us. We must wish good for all, even for our enemies.

"We should keep offering *seva* and bhakti with spiritual understanding. There is no question of being near or far. Do *seva* and bhakti from your heart, and with faith and love. That is what Bhagwan likes. He rejects and goes away when someone does *seva* and bhakti out of pretence and deceit."

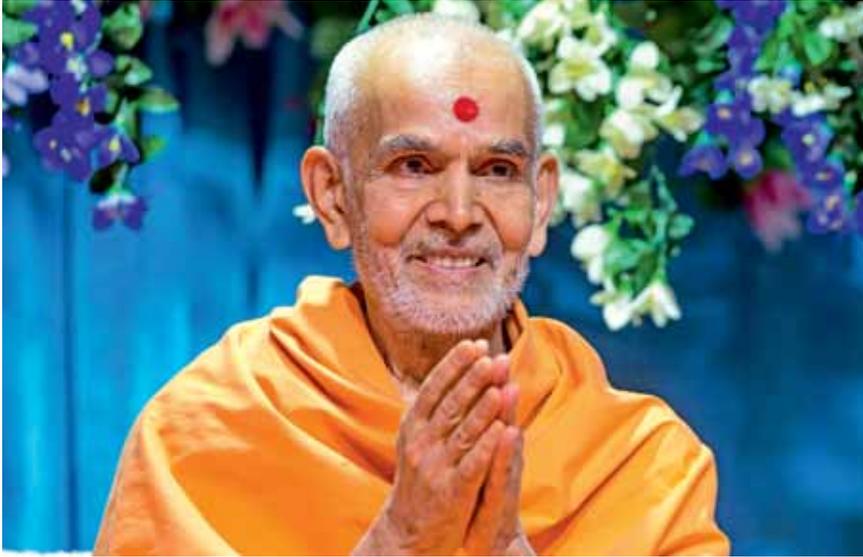
In conclusion, the youths performed a traditional dance on the lyric '*Vande Mandiram...*' while Swamishri waved the BAPS flag, two youths waved the Indian tricolour and the USA flag and the entire audience waved the BAPS flags. ♦

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

July 2017

Inspiring incidents from the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj



PERFORMED MENIAL SEVA

7, Chicago

Uttamshlok Swami recounted an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj he had witnessed during the CFI in Edison, 1991. He said, "After the CFI was over, all the volunteers and sadhus were engaged in the wind-up *seva* of the mini-cultural township. Mahant Swami was carrying a garbage bag and filling it with litter. I saw Swami was also picking up tin cans lying in shrubs and thorny bushes. I tried to stop Swami and told him that I would retrieve them. But Swami wished to do the *seva*. So, I told Swami to pick only soft drink cans whereas we would pick up other garbage items. But Swamishri did not heed to our request and continued doing the menial *seva*."

In spite of being a *sadguru* (senior sadhu), Swamishri had persisted in doing the menial *seva*. His humility and spirit of *seva* was exemplary.

HE VALUES NAMES

10, Chicago

A doormat was placed before Swamishri's feet.

He was informed that teenagers (*kishores*) had written their names and their troublesome base natures (*swabhavs*). They had conveyed a request to Swamishri to place his feet on the doormat to trample and crush their *swabhavs*. Without a moment's hesitation Swamishri refused to place his feet on the doormat. Instead, to everyone's surprise, he touched the doormat with his fingers and placed them briefly on his eyes and head out of respect for it. Swamishri felt how could he trample on the names of the teenage devotees.

While getting up, Swamishri again touched the doormat and placed his fingers on his head as a mark of respect for the teenagers. Everyone was inspired by Swamishri's reverence for those who are associated with God.

INCREDIBLE TOLERANCE

12, Chicago

Swamishri had a medical check-up by a specialist doctor. The doctor prescribed a medicine and added, "By taking this medicine he'll be happy."

Swamishri responded, "I am always happy."

Then he added, "I only expressed my problem because I was asked. Otherwise it would have gone on. In fact I've been having the pain from Kolkata [for the past two months]."

Atmaswarup Swami asked the doctor, "If he does not take your prescribed medicine, then what will happen?"

The doctor replied, "Then there is the possibility of him experiencing severe pain."

Swamishri revealed, "My life is going on due to *atma's* strength."

The doctor praised Swamishri's inner strength, "You are very strong from within. Otherwise anyone else with your kind of ailment would have found it very difficult to tolerate. I've seen people cry due to this illness."

When the renowned doctor was asked about his fee, he replied, "I don't want any fees for my service. All I ask is for Swamiji's blessings."

The dialogue with the doctor revealed Swamishri's tolerance, *atmic* strength and the fact that he is always happy.

SWAMISHRI'S AMAZING MEMORY

14, Chicago

Dipak Amin, a devotee, came for Swamishri's darshan and informed, "You had stayed at my house during the *murti-pratishtha* occasion in my village, Dehgam."

Swamishri revealed, "At that time it was very cold." Everyone was amazed by Swamishri's sharp memory about such a minor detail.

The sadhus then asked Dipak about when the *pratishtha* had taken place. Dipak replied, "It was in 1989-90."

Swamishri clearly remembered the weather conditions in Dehgam 27 years ago. In spite of having met countless people and stayed at innumerable homes thereafter Swamishri's razor-sharp memory not only astounded everyone around him, but also reflected his intense bond and love for a devotee.

* * *

BHAGWAN'S DISCIPLE

Kavish, a child, explicitly asked Swamishri, "Are you God?"

Swamishri smiled and replied, "I am Bhagwan's disciple and servant."

SHARP MEMORY

16, Chicago

"Swami, his name is Sulabh Patel," a sadhu introduced a devotee to Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri asked, "Are you from Nadiad?"

Sulabhbhai replied, "No Swami, I'm from Houston."

Swamishri asked him, "Where did you live before?"

Sulabhbhai recalled, "Yes Swami, I was a student staying at the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya in Nadiad from 1994 to 1998."

Everyone was amazed at Swamishri's memory. He had remembered the devotee after twenty long years in spite of having met so many students thereafter!

Everyone present simply praised Swamishri's phenomenal memory and thought that even Sulabhbhai had forgotten for a few minutes that he had once lived in Nadiad.

GURU TAKES CARE OF OUR INNER SELF

28, Toronto

Dr Rajmayurbhai was looking after Swamishri's health during his stay in Toronto. Today, Swamishri called him and appreciated his efforts, "Formerly he was obese and I had felt how much more weight would he put on. But, he has been able to reduce it."

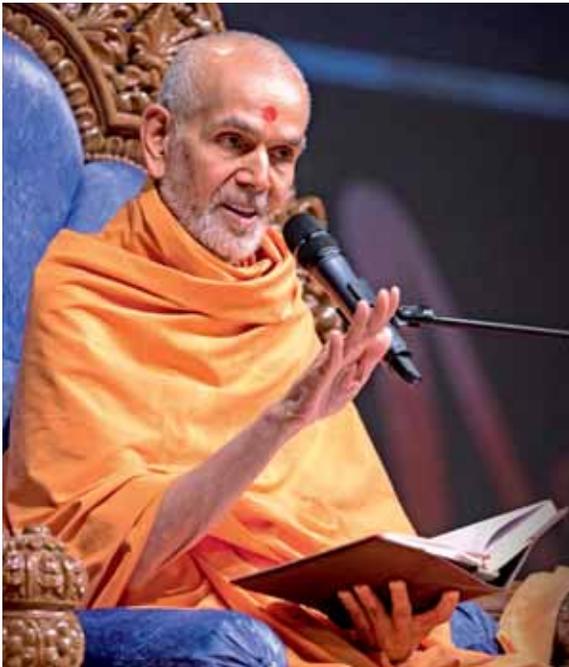
Dr Rajmayurbhai prayed, "Swami, I have improved my outer physical self, however I pray that you improve my inner self."

Swamishri smiled and replied, "You are a doctor of the physical body, whereas I deal with the inner self." ◆

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

ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

July 2017



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

A. Swamishri stated, "To improve and enhance *mahima* towards all and do *seva*."

(5 July, Atlanta)

■ "By believing others to be good-for-nothing and foolish then God makes us like that. We become what we think about others. Thus, we must perceive all to be divine and as God's devotees."

(6 July, Atlanta)

■ A sadhu asked Swamishri on Guru Purnima day, "Today is auspicious, say a sentence that we can remember throughout our lives." Swamishri replied, "*Divyabhav* [perceiving divinity in all]. It is the key to attain Akshardham [God's abode]."

(9 July, Chicago)

Q. Bless us for dissolving our base nature [*swabhavs*].

A. Swamishri wrote one word, "*Mahima* [perceiving glory in all.]"

Q. How can we sustain *samp* [harmony] among ourselves.

A. By doing each others' tasks with *samp*.

Q. Give us an answer to resolve our family problems and experience peace.

A. Try to understand each other.

(10 July, Chicago)

(Contd. on pg. 79)

“**B**ecause we lapse in listening to, contemplating about and repeating talks on *divyabhav* we perceive *manushyabhav* [in God and his Sadhu]. When one perceives *manushyabhav* there is inner darkness and by having *divyabhav* one attains *moksha*.”

(1 July, Atlanta)

■ A sadhu declared to Swamishri, "You are mentally very strong." Swamishri revealed, "I do not have a [material] mind. I always have thoughts about Bhagwan."

(3 July, Atlanta)

Q. Kunj Pandya asked Swamishri, "During your stay here in Atlanta Mandir for two weeks what is it you've liked the most?"

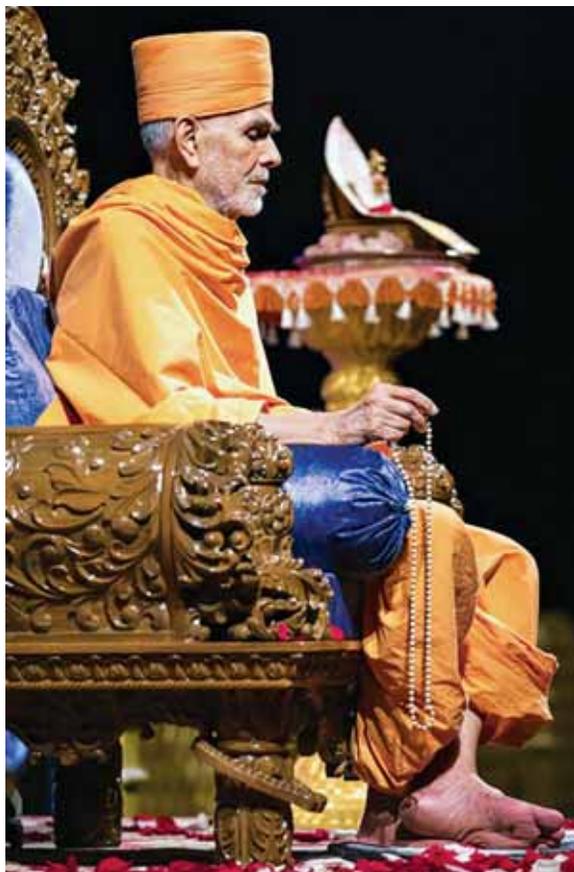
A. Swamishri replied, "Your unity (*samp*) and perceiving the glory (*mahima*) of all."

Q. Sunilbhai enquired, "To progress further in that what should we do?"

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN IN USA

August–September 2017

Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas and Robbinsville



Throughout North America the grand *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs created by Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, continue to inspire countless devotees and well-wishers to strengthen their personal spirituality and offer devotion to God.

During his *vicharan* in North America between June and September 2017, Pragat Brahaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj has consolidated the core values of Satsang among devotees of all ages through his daily discourses and personal interactions. Further, during the daily evening assemblies

he has granted divine bliss and guidance to all. Devotees everywhere have devotedly and enthusiastically responded to his call to the need for greater personal responsibility and introspection in applying the core values of Satsang in their daily lives.

The following pages present some of the highlights of Mahant Swami Maharaj's recent visits to Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas and Robbinsville.

LOS ANGELES: 1–10 AUGUST

1 August

Swamishri flew from San Jose and was devoutly welcomed by sadhus and senior devotees at the airport.

When Swamishri arrived at the mandir, he was joyously received by the devotees. The atmosphere resounded with the lyrics and music of the welcome bhajans and the *jai naad*. Swamishri walked along the raised platform with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in his hands towards the mandir. At the base of the steps, Swamishri sat on a decorated seat. The resident sadhus greeted him by performing his *pujan* and garlanding him. Planning Commissioner of Chino Hills, Adam Eliason, and former mayor of Chino Hill, Gary Larson, also garlanded and welcomed Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri had darshan inside the mandir.

5 August; Guru Bhakti Din & Samp Din

In the morning, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Fresno, California.

In the evening assembly, devotees, well-wishers and senior representatives of many Indian organizations in Los Angeles gathered to



Performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* of Fresno *hari* mandir, LA



Janmashtami celebration, Houston

Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri inaugurated '78: A Measure of Faith', a book documenting the history of Los Angeles mandir.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, "Much can be achieved with unity. Everywhere in the world, where there is unity, there is progress. Americans say, 'United we stand and divided we fall.' With unity the sky is the limit. Our BAPS Sanstha functions on the three pillars of *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*. Nobody is concerned about who gets the credit. As a result, there is more unity than between real brothers. Shastriji Maharaj had said, 'My work shall continue...'. So, prayers that all continue to progress like this."

Swamishri thanked all the guests for attending. In particular, he felicitated and garlanded Councilman Art Bennett, Planning Commissioner Adam Eliason and Councilman Gary Larson for their support during the mandir construction.

Representatives of 20 different organizations together presented a long garland to Swamishri as a symbol of unity.

HOUSTON: 10-20 AUGUST

10 August, Los Angeles, Houston

After his 10-day stay in Los Angeles Swamishri flew to Houston.

At 5.10 p.m., when he reached the mandir, flowers were showered from a helicopter, while

youths welcomed Swamishri with a devotional dance.

After darshan in the *abhishek mandap* and main mandir, Swamishri arrived in the welcome assembly. Children performed a welcome skit and dance, and then sadhus performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri. Also, around 300 devotees had undertaken austerities as a special form of welcome. Swamishri blessed them all. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with a variety of decorative garlands.

15 August; Janmashtami

Today, India's 70th Independence Day and Janmashtami were celebrated.

After his morning puja, Swamishri blessed, "For us, having attained Maharaj and Swami is our greatest independence, since we have been bound by the endless cycle of births and deaths. The *atma* has been trapped in the body for countless births. To be free of this is independence. Since we have attained Maharaj and Swami, we have become independent. To continue to progress on the spiritual path is true independence."

In the evening Janmashtami celebration assembly, youths presented a lively traditional *raas*. At the end of the dance, they formed a high pyramid and captured an earthen pot hanging from the ceiling, just as the child Bhagwan Krishna had done.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, "Since



Symbolic Pushpadolotsav, Houston

the beginning, nobody has understood about the manifest form of God. In the time of Bhagwan Krishna, the Yadavs did not understand him as God, but thought he was merely a ruler. If manifest God is understood, one's goal is accomplished. Shriji Maharaj came to this *brahmand* and tens of thousands of people recognized him. Shriji Maharaj liberated them and they attained Akshardham. Manifest God is not always understood and people mistake his identity. But, if he is understood as he is, then one's faults are overcome and one becomes *ekantik*."

17 August

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Beaumont.

18 August

Today, for the devotees of the Southeast region, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj's *tula* ceremony was held in Swamishri's presence.

19 August; Symbolic Pushpadolotsav

In the morning, Swamishri performed the Vedic *pujan* of the bricks for the second phase of construction of the Houston Mandir masterplan.

The evening assembly was a symbolic celebration of Pushpadolotsav. Swamishri arrived on stage, where a *hindolo* had been beautifully decorated with fresh flowers. Swamishri had the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni placed on the *hindolo* and

then performed the *arti*. Then Swamishri sat on the *hindolo* and showered Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with flowers to begin the Pushpadolotsav celebration. Thereafter, Ishwarcharan Swami and swamis showered flowers upon Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri. And Swamishri also joyfully showered flowers on the swamis.

Afterwards, volunteers serving in the various departments were introduced. As they stood in the assembly, Narayanmuni Swami recited a specific heartfelt prayer for each department. As the volunteers stood, Swamishri cast his divine gaze on them to bless them. Senior members of each department then showered Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri with flowers. Senior sadhus showered flowers on these volunteers. Blessing the celebration assembly, Swamishri said, "Shriji Maharaj celebrated many festivals. He had deep love for all. When God interacts with a *jiva*, it is liberated. This supreme Maharaj manifest in human form and we have attained him. Now, we must live our lives in a way that Maharaj would like, Pramukh Swami Maharaj would like."

At the front of the stage, a replica of the *charanarvind* at the Pramukh Swami Smruti Deri in Sarangpur had been created. After the assembly, all the devotees came forward to offer flowers to Swamishri and the *charanarvind*, to honour Pramukh Swami Maharaj, while the bhajan '*Yogi āvo te rang mane shid lagādyo...*' played in the background.

DALLAS: 20-24 AUGUST

20 August, Houston, Dallas

Swamishri departed from Houston by plane and arrived in Dallas at 11.50 a.m. At the airport, sadhus and devotees, together with Mayor Rick Stofer welcomed Swamishri with garlands. At the mandir, the youths of the Akshar Dhvani Marching Band greeted Swamishri. After darshan in the mandir, Swamishri blessed the mayor and gave *samip* darshan to the devotees.



Welcome assembly, Dallas

The evening welcome assembly was held at the Verizon Theater.

Sadhus spoke on the topics of *seva*, *sanskar*, *shanti* and *shraddha*. The assembly also featured videos, dances and skits.

Then the curtain was raised and Swamishri was seated on stage next to Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj. Youths joyfully performed a welcome dance to the bhajan '*Swāgat karie re, Gurucharan namie re...*' while flower petals were showered from above.

After *arti*, Texas Congressman Pete Sessions addressed the gathering, "What we are witnessing tonight is not just an expression of faith and confidence in each and everyone of us, but it's actually a prayer for our world." Then Representative Matt Reynolds presented a proclamation in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, "I'm here today to welcome Mahant Swami Maharaj to the great state of Texas. Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have inspired hundreds of thousands of volunteers worldwide to promote the values of living a pure life and service to society.

"Your message of 'Samp' and 'Das no Das' can help our state, country and whole world to become a better place." Thereafter, Mayor of Tarving, Rick Stofer, presented a Key to the City to Mahant Swami Maharaj and said, "On behalf of the city of Irving, I want to welcome Mahant Swami Maharaj to our community. I had the



Mayor of Tarving, Rick Stofer, presents a Key to the City to Mahant Swami Maharaj

privilege to present him with a key to our city as well as the proclamation. The key is a representation that he always has a home and is welcome in Irving, TX. The proclamation is something we will put in our archives, so that for many years down the road the residents of Irving will know of this great visit.

"The temple is the place for us to work together to bring community together."

In his blessings to the assembly, Swamishri recalled the unity established by Pramukh Swami Maharaj between the warring villages of Kukad and Odarka and said, "Today, the progress in the world is due to unity. The reason we lost sovereignty [in India] was due to disunity. Shriji Maharaj has talked about *samp* (unity), *suhradbhav* (friendship), *daya* (compassion) and *maryada* (discipline). If you want to keep God within, then maintain unity at home, in the family and in Satsang. This is 100% true. Yogi Bapa talked daily about unity. Pramukh Swami Maharaj did work with such unity that all developed faith in God. Unity is such a virtue that it is useful everywhere, and in spirituality it is the best.

"We have to become pure and offer worship to Parabrahman. What do we have to do? Follow the path shown by Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Keep faith in their words, continue the effort and the outcome will be great. If you endeavour with faith, trust and unity, your work will be the best."



Patotsav and Symbolic Janma Jayanti Celebration, Dallas

21 August; Solar Eclipse Assembly

Since there would be a solar eclipse today, Swamishri was fasting. In the morning, former mayor Herbert Gears honoured Swamishri and said, "The lesson that I learned from my engagements with Swami and BAPS is that to see divinity in all allows us to treat others as we always wanted to be treated. So in that context where we have peace, love and cooperation, to me those ideals keep me attached to BAPS and its devotees."

The solar eclipse assembly began at 11.30 a.m. Swamishri took his seat before the assembly began. During the *dhun* and *prarthana*, Swamishri turned the *mala* with his eyes closed while sitting in a meditative posture.

This special solar eclipse assembly was titled 'Pilgrimage to Akshardham'. Young children conducted the assembly superbly, imparting deep messages.

At intervals, the sadhus gave speeches in which they narrated their experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's devotion, care for others, simplicity and other virtues. The assembly also included bhajans.

The final portion of the assembly was on the topic of 'Divyabhav', which was presented through a school setting featuring *balaks* as child teachers and adults as aged students. In an entertaining, yet enlightening way, the young teachers used the *Purushottam Bolya Prite*, Swamini Vato and the words of the Gunatit gurus to correct the

misunderstanding of the elderly students.

At the end of the eclipse assembly, Swamishri blessed, "Keep trust in whatever Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have said. With trust, if we do as they say, we will benefit. God and his Sadhu do not want anything. They only want to do what is good for us. They do not want to do anything that will harm anyone. If we keep faith in them, we will get passports and tickets to Akshardham. By having *divyabhav* towards all, Shriji Maharaj will take us to Akshardham at rocket speed. Keep trust in him and enjoy bliss; supreme bliss, in which nothing is left to attain. Yogi Bapa used to say, 'No matter what a devotee is like, but regard him as a crown on one's head.' All this is necessary. There is no choice. If one is mentally prepared and has faith, it is achieved. Everybody is doing this, but there is still much to do. By stopping *abhav-avgun* many problems are avoided. By attaching to Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the Satpurush, the gateway to *moksha* is attained. Then there is no coming or going. Akshardham is here."

The *sabha* ended with *dhun* as the solar eclipse was completed.

The devotees prayed to Swamishri, "We are *jivas*, so do liberate us." Swamishri replied, "Having attained Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, *moksha* is guaranteed."

For over three hours Swamishri presided in the solar eclipse assembly, signing 150 letters and turning 170 *malas*.

22 August; Patotsav and Symbolic Janma Jayanti

To commemorate the *patotsav*, the mandir had been decorated and an *annakut* had been offered to Thakorji. Today, Swamishri re-consecrated the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. After the Vedic rituals, Swamishri offered the first *abhishek*.

After his morning puja, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Satsang is great! It is divine! Do not bring *abhav-avgun*, jealousy-envy into it. *Avgun*

is like a spark, but it can destroy *lakhs* of tonnes of cotton. Maharaj embraces those who do not engage in *abhav-avgun*. One who is divine, sees all as divine. This is about using divine spectacles. *Divyabhav* is to see everyone as divine and beyond *maya*.

“To perceive divinity is the correct understanding and is deposited in one’s account for *moksha*. Whatever comes into God’s contact in this world and beyond is all divine. Pray day and night to God that one never maligns another *jiva*. The devotees of God are *brahmarup*. Those who see God’s devotees as divine are also divine.”

Swamishri entered the evening Janmashtami assembly holding Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and walked through the middle of the assembly, while the bhajan ‘*Vālam vadhāmā ho*’ played in the background.

City of Irving Manager, Chris Hillman, honoured Swamishri and then said, “I have learned an important word tonight, it’s called *samp*, which means unity. It emphasizes the importance of being one with ourselves, with our family and with our community.”

At the end of the assembly, Swamishri honoured the guests who had come and blessed the assembly, “In the eras of Krishna and Ramchandraj, the monkeys, eagles, courtesans and others recognized them and they were liberated. However, the people who did not understand were not liberated. When God manifests on earth, if he is recognized, then one is liberated. By supporting and assisting him, he is pleased.

“Talks of the manifest form are difficult to understand. But, those who do understand them are liberated. They experience bliss. They experience the joy of having attained Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, ‘In the joy of others lies our own.’ By giving joy to others, one experiences joy. By serving others, in fact, one benefits. Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived by this motto day and night. Now we must remember



Swamishri with Thakorji in Robbinsville and sustain this motto. Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘There is no alternative to *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*.’ Everything is included in this. Contemplate on this motto and live accordingly.”

ROBBINSVILLE: 24 AUGUST–4 SEPTEMBER 24 August, Dallas, Robbinsville

Swamishri flew from Dallas and arrived at Robbinsville airport at 3.30 p.m. He then proceeded to the 167-acre Akshardham complex where thousands of young and old devotees joyously welcomed him. Children waving flags lined both sides of the road as *jai naads* were heard all around. At the main gate, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj was welcomed in 2014, Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of Swamishri with sandalwood paste. The words of the bhajan ‘*Sampelo parivār, amāro BAPS parivār...*’ echoed throughout the campus. From here, Swamishri sat on a decorated Mayur Rath holding Shri Harikrishna

Maharaj in his hands, and cast his divine gaze on the devotees as the *rath* proceeded towards the mandir. En route, children presented demonstrations of unity, while devotees held placards on which various quotes on unity, friendship, teamwork, avoiding *abhav-avgun* and other topics had been written. Also, flower petals were showered from a helicopter overhead. *Balaks* on roller skates, waving BAPS flags, led Swamishri to the Mayur Dwar where Swamishri alighted from the *rath*, observed the ant and elephant *rangoli*, created by using coloured rice grains, and entered the large hall which houses the BAPS Mandir.

Fulfilling the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhaktinandan Swami had designed and overseen the intricate design of the hall interior. Swamishri inaugurated the hall, aptly named 'Pramukh Mandapam'.

After the Vedic inauguration rituals, Swamishri entered the hall. His path towards the mandir was decorated with flowers and to the sides were *rangoli* designs created from rice grains and *divas*.

In the middle, Ishwarcharan Swami garlanded Swamishri, who then held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and proceeded towards the mandir. After darshan, Swamishri went to the main assembly hall for the welcome assembly.

As Swamishri entered, the hall echoed with *jai naads* and the tune of the bhajan '*Swāgat karie re, guru charane namie re...*' as youths danced joyfully. Swamishri greeted the over 7,000 devotees present with folded hands and cast his divine gaze on all. Everyone felt the same vibrant, divine, joyful atmosphere as when Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited.

Then, Swamishri was greeted with a special presentation based on five virtues that he emphasizes all should develop: friendship (*suhradpanu*), discernment (*vivek*), service (*seva*), virtues of a devotee (*bhakta*) and servant (*das*).

At the end, Swamishri blessed, "By keeping unity, friendship and *divyabhav* everything is attained. Ours is a united family. Shriji Maharaj

has said, 'Understand each other's glory. Bow, reverently and touch each other's feet.' And his message of seeing the good in others is outstanding, 'Even if someone does not serve me, but if they see the good qualities of the devotees, then I believe that they have served me intensely.' Even without moving an inch, intense *seva* is offered! In contrast, he has also said, 'Even if one has performed the intense service of God and his Sadhu, if one sees the *avgun* of devotees, then one does not go to God's Dham.' The merits of countless births are lost. What is the true attainment in Satsang? Shriji Maharaj's *rajipo*. To acquire it, understand each other's glory. This Satsang has been attained due to infinite merits. Thus, no one is ordinary. This Satsang is like the diamond business. Serve, understand the glory and earn merits. But, if one engages in talks denigrating others and highlighting others' faults then the earnings are lost and debt is incurred. If you wanted to receive 10 million dollars, would you not do as the giver says? Well, Maharaj's *rajipo* is worth billions of dollars. And Maharaj says that to get the *rajipo*, do not engage in *abhav-avgun*."

Then Swamishri was honoured with special garlands by the swamis and senior devotees.

Thereafter, Swamishri blessed Bhaktinandan Swami and Shrijiswarup Swami for preparing the exquisite 40,000 sq. ft. Pramukh Mandapam.

Swamishri also blessed the devotees who had undertaken 85-hour waterless fast and other observances to mark Swamishri's visit to Robbinsville.

27 August; Shri Harikrishna Maharaj Tula

The devotees of the Northeast region participated in honouring Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. After Swamishri's morning puja, he performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and placed sugar crystals in the scales to commence the *tula* ceremony. Then, all the sadhus also placed sugar crystals on the scales.

Blessing the morning assembly, Swamishri



Shibir: Bhāgya Jāgyā re Āj Jānvā, Robbinsville

said, “On one side of the scales we place Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and on the other the infinite *brahmands*, still they would not tilt the scales. However, Maharaj is won over by our devotion. In particular, if we have *divyabhav*, he is delighted and is won over. Also, he is won over through the virtues of *dasbhav*, *mahima*, *gun-grahan*. So, develop these qualities. By developing *gun-grahan*, Maharaj is always with us. Wherever you go, he will be there. God is compassionate. He came to liberate us and gave us much bliss.

“Devotees, despite their hardships, have donated. So, God is truly pleased.”

After Swamishri had departed, all the devotees participated in the *tula* ceremony.

At 11.00 a.m., Swamishri attended the *shibir* for devotees titled ‘*Bhāgya Jāgyā re Āj Jānvā...*’. He blessed the devotees, “Shriji Maharaj says that even if you do a little, he believes it to be mountainous and never forgets it. Whatever you do in this world, it is forgotten over time. No matter what you may do for others, it will be forgotten. While Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, ‘I will never forget.’ The rewards for the *seva* you do is fantastic. The fruits of the *seva* is that you become *brahmarup* and attain Akshardham. The *seva* you do here is converted into the currency of Akshardham. If *seva* is performed with *mahima*, *divyabhav* and the desire to become *dasna das*, then the *seva* is multiplied innumerable times and Akshardham is attained here. Then there is no coming or going.



North American Leadership Seminar, Philadelphia

“Remove everything that causes conflict and ego in one’s heart.”

28 August

Swamishri performed the *pujan* of the beautiful *sinhasan* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Washington DC. This was later installed in the *hari* mandir by Ishwarcharan Swami on 19 September 2017.

30 August to 1 September, Philadelphia; North American Leadership Seminar (NALS)

For three days, senior volunteers of all the departments from throughout America gathered for the NALS at the Hotel Sheraton in Philadelphia (see, *Swaminarayan Bliss*, September–October 2017, p.68).

On 31 August, Swamishri blessed, “To work effectively together with each other, understand each other and forego one’s insistence. By bowing to each other and understanding *mahima* the best work is done. Pramukh Swami Maharaj wanted to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Mahesana, but some people said it was not possible. Swamishri did not oppose them. Later, with a pure heart, he explained and they happily accepted and the mandir was built. Keep *samp* as the aim. People embark together on a pilgrimage, and reach their destination. Why? Because of unity. Similarly, this is our pilgrimage of unity.

“Focus on the wishes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Follow his words. If you have half a *rotlo* do not expect others to make it whole, but

share even from what little you have. To give from your half is *samp*. Instead of expecting others to sacrifice for you, sacrifice for others. There is no end to one's expectations from others."

In the evening, following an interview session with Ishwarcharan Swami in which he gave excellent guidance and narrated his own personal experiences with Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri praised Ishwarcharan Swami and said, "Ishwarcharan Swami has immensely pleased all three gurus. He has experienced the all-doership of God. He is very dedicated and composed. He has made the most of his association with Yogiji Maharaj. He was also equally attached to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. That is why he is always blissful."

Then, while answering questions posed by the volunteers, Swamishri said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself used to engage in *seva*. This is our way. In *seva*, we ourselves have to put in effort. And if all the tasks are allocated, then through teamwork, the best *seva* can be performed.

"If done with unity, one will never experience fatigue in doing *seva*. For over 20 years, Yogi Bapa talked about the glory of *samp*. He would say, 'We don't need money, we need *samp*.'

"Truly, the joy of *samp* is special. In one's family, job, nation or Satsang, if this wish of Yogi Bapa is followed then one will truly enjoy."

In the morning session on 1 September 2017, the *karyakars* asked questions in the form of a skit. Swamishri answered, "In *seva*, timing is paramount. One must understand which *seva* needs to be done when. Do the *seva* allocated on time. Otherwise, the opportunity will pass. If even one wish of the Satpurush is observed in a timely way, one becomes fulfilled. Timely *seva* is very important. *Katha* is included in *seva* performed in the kitchen at the required time. God gives the fruit of discourses even to one serving in the corner in the parking area. So, timely *seva* should be offered."

Then, giving inspiration of working together, Swamishri said, "The human body gives us so

much inspiration. The lungs, liver, kidney and other organs each do their job while coordinating with others. They do not indulge in groupism. If they did, then people would be in trouble. They are all together and nourish each other. They help each other. If we make *samp* into a body then there would be no conflict.

"Just like the organs in our body, we should help, support and serve each other. Focus on that always. Work together amicably."

In the day's final session, Swamishri spoke about strengthening *samp*, *divyabhav* and *nishtha*, "I really wish to meet each of you individually. Your sacrifice and service is immensely inspiring.

"Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that the Satsang is divine. The sadhus and devotees are divine. One who understands this will become elated and will conquer the world; his joy never diminishes. So, never see the human traits of sadhus and devotees. By taking their *manushyabhav*, one's efforts are stalled and progress stops.

"Another thing – *dasbhav*. The level of satsang in a person is reflected by the extent of servitude. Just as cloth is measured in metres, water is measured in litres, a person's satsang is measured by their servitude and affection for God. There is much joy in service. Nobody comes in the way. It is the best of virtues. Inner purity is achieved through servitude. If one has servitude, Maharaj will joyfully stay with you.

"Wish for the good of each other. A devotee who wishes for the good of other devotees has no equal. One should adopt such inspiring ideas, not damaging ones. A child wearing new clothes filled his pockets with bottle tops, waste paper and other garbage. Do not do this. Fill yourself with diamonds, pearls and gems. By adopting such noble virtues, one's life shines."

2 September; Murti-Pratishtha of Abhishek Murti Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj

Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Mandir in Robbinsville

in 2014 and had expressed his wish that the *abhishek murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj be consecrated here.

Fulfilling Swamishri's wish, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic consecration rituals of the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.

The enchanting *panchdhatu murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj, the childhood form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, is situated in the Abhishek Mandap. The exquisite, intricate interior of the Abhishek Mandap was designed by Bhaktinandan Swami. In the backdrop of this standing *murti* is the colourful scene of Ghanshyam Maharaj climbing the pipal tree in Chhapaiya. Previously, in Sarangpur, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* and *abhishek* of this beautiful *murti*.

The initial Vedic *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* rituals were performed by Ishwarcharan Swami. At 10.00 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived to perform the main, concluding rituals.

Then, Swamishri performed *abhishek* of the *murti* using the same water with which Pramukh Swami Maharaj had twice offered *abhishek* to this *murti* in Sarangpur.

Also, with Ishwarcharan Swami, Swamishri offered *abhishek* using the water from the River Saryu in Ayodhya, where Ghanshyam Maharaj had bathed innumerable times, and the waters of 108 holy rivers from throughout India.

Swamishri then tied a *nadachhadi* to the wrists of Bhaktinandan Swami and Shrijiswarup Swami, who had both given outstanding service in preparing the Abhishek Mandap.

Thereafter, the Swaminarayan *dhun* was chanted while many noble prayers were offered.

Then, while Swamishri performed *pradakshina*, a prayer was offered, "May the noble wishes of all who perform *abhishek* here be fulfilled and may all who serve with body, mind or wealth in this Akshardham attain happiness." Hearing this, Swamishri immediately gestured with his right arm giving blessings.



Swamishri performs the first *abhishek* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Robbinsville

After the rituals, Swamishri graced the assembly. First, Ishwarcharan Swami explained the reason for consecrating the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, "Today is a historic, heavenly and divine day. As per Swami Bapa's wish this Akshardham is taking shape. And the mandir is also developing. In our mandirs, we have the *abhishek murtis* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Bhagwan Swaminarayan bathed repeatedly in the River Sabarmati in Ahmedabad and River Ghela in Gadhada. So, in both mandirs, we have the *abhishek murtis* of Sahajanand Swami. However, 4-year-old Ghanshyam Maharaj had climbed the pipal tree and looked towards the West, that is, towards the spiritual aspirants in America, Canada, Europe and Africa. With his blessings Satsang has spread. Now, so that, he resides here forever and everyone can get the chance to serve him, as per Swami Bapa's wish Mahant Swami Maharaj has performed the

murti-pratishtha. This mandir has unparalleled carvings. The Pramukh Mandapam is divine. And in it the Ghanshyam Maharaj Abhishek Mandap is also divine. Ghanshyam Maharaj will joyfully fulfil everyone's wishes. This is the first time in our over 200-year history that the *abhishek murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj has been consecrated. Visitors from throughout the world will come here, and they will attain their next birth in Satsang." Swamishri gestured with his hand in agreement with this.

Then, Swamishri blessed the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, "All the rituals were performed while remembering Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Yogi Bapa. While performing *pradakshina*, we prayed that the wishes of all who offer *abhishek* here be fulfilled. May Maharaj and Swami forever reside in the hearts of all our devotees. Nothing else is desired.

"Today is a big *ekadashi* [Jal Jhilani]. In 1956, we were on a *yatra* with Yogi Bapa. We went to Chhapaiya. It was at that time that the *piplo* (pipal tree) had been cut down. Yogi Bapa said, 'Take the trunk of this tree.' And the locals gave it, since its glory was not known at the time. We split it into eight pieces and sent them to eight different mandirs.

"In the future, the great people of the world will come here. The whole *brahmand* will be drawn here. People from over 150 countries have visited Delhi Akshardham. And here also, they will come. Those seated here will see this here, or from Akshardham.

"All the wishes of Yogiji Maharaj are being fulfilled. He used to say that at that time it was difficult to get even a bullock-cart. Yet, his words have come true. His mission was to impart *moksha*. In any way possible, he wanted to lead all towards *moksha*, since nobody else can grant *moksha*. It is Maharaj and Swami's monopoly; only one who is beyond *maya* can take others beyond *maya*."

Then, an *annakut* was offered to the *abhishek murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj. After



Jal Jhilani Celebration, Robbinsville

singing of the *thal*, Swamishri and the senior sadhus performed the *arti* and offered *mantra-phanjali*. Finally, Swamishri, the sadhus and devotees held hands to offer a garland of unity to Ghanshyam Maharaj.

2 September; Jal Jhilani Celebration

At 4.30 p.m. the Jal Jhilani Celebration began in the Brahma Sarovar, the large lake in the mandir campus. Despite the continuous steady drizzle of rain, thousands of devotees sat around the perimeter of the lake for darshan. After the traditional *mahapuja* rituals senior sadhus sat with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and a *murti* of Ganapati in the boat. Then, from the stage, Mahant Swami Maharaj and Ishwarcharan Swami performed the first *arti*, after which *thal* was offered. As festive bhajans were sung, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Ganapati were taken for a ride around the lake. Then, Swamishri performed the second *arti*, also from the stage. Then, Swamishri and Ishwarcharan Swami sat in the boat with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, as the devotees joyfully applauded and hailed the *jai naad*.

They then sailed in the boat around the lake while celebratory bhajans were sung. After each round, *arti* and *thal* were offered. After the fifth *arti*, the *murti* of Ganapati was submerged in the lake, as per the festival tradition.

Finally, still seated in the boat, Swamishri blessed everyone, "This has been a grand celebration. Maharaj and Swami have compassionately



Swamishri performs *mahapuja* rituals for the First Pillar of Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville

blessed everyone and all have traversed the ocean of life and death. Having attained Maharaj and Swami, all have attained liberation.”

3–4 September; Pujan and Placement of First Pillar of Swaminarayan Akshardham

Over the two days, more than 20,000 devotees from all satsang centres throughout North America participated in the four *mahapuja* sessions. In each session, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* and *abhishek* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj in the Abhishek Mandap and, the *pujan* of the first pillar (*sthambh*) for Swaminarayan Akshardham in the main assembly hall.

In the first of the four sessions, on 3 September, during Swamishri’s morning puja, Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *mahapuja* rituals guided by Bhadresh Swami.

Also present for the *mahapuja* were devotees from all continents. Greeting all the devotees Swamishri said, “You are all *muktas* of Akshardham. You are all the soldiers of Akshar-Purushottam.” Adding to this, Aksharvatsal Swami described the dedication of all the devotees and said, “They are all the living pillars of Akshardham. In Kalupur, Ahmedabad, Bhagwan Swaminarayan had embraced a pillar.” Hearing this, Swamishri gestured with his arms as if embracing everyone. All were overjoyed by his divine action.

After the rituals of the first session, Swamishri went to the assembly, where over 4,500 devotees had been watching the proceedings live on

screens. As Swamishri entered, youths presented a devotional dance to the bhajan, ‘*Ghanshyām Prabhune ghani re khammā...’*.

Initially, Swamishri sat off stage opposite the pillar stone and performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals. Behind the closed stage curtains, were four white pillars, on which were beautifully sculpted *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s *paramhansas*. Projected on the background screen were other pillars and the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the New Delhi Akshardham.

After the rituals, the stage curtains opened as Swamishri walked onto the stage. As he approached the pillar adjacent to his seat, the white sculpture of Nishkulanand Swami standing on the pillar suddenly began to move. Swamishri was truly surprised by the unexpected movement of a ‘fixed’ sculpture. It was, in fact, a youth dressed as a marble sculpture.

The audience, too, was surprised and erupted in applause to appreciate the creativity.

The youth, dressed as Nishkulanand Swami, garlanded Swamishri and Swamishri respectfully touched the feet of the youth in the form of Nishkulanand Swami.

Swamishri then went to the next pillar, where another youth was dressed as a white marble statue of Muktanand Swami. Swamishri also reverently touched his feet. Everyone was deeply touched by Swamishri’s humility and immense respect for Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s *paramhansas*.

The assembly programme was titled ‘The

Divine Pillars of Akshardham', in which the following topics were presented through speeches, skits and devotional dances: Siddhanta (Doctrine) Satpurush, Samp (Unity), Seva (Service), Samarpan (Sacrifice) and Shraddha (Faith).

At the end, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "The work of Akshardham is progressing. In the time of Shastriji Maharaj, physical effort was required. The sadhus and devotees moved stones weighing up to 80 maunds. They offered tremendous financial and physical service. Prayers that all are blessed with the strength to serve.

"Shriji Maharaj said, 'If you do even a little service, I consider it to be mountainous. I never forget it.' And you have all done so much *seva*. God gives back infinite times more than what we have done.

"Without *samp* such work cannot be done. Just think about where the stones come from and where they are carved! This is a great accomplishment by Ishwarcharan Swami. 'He has kept everybody together. Great work has been achieved. This work is '*Na bhuto na bhavishyati*' ('Has never happened before and will not happen again').

"People from throughout the world will be drawn here, such is the beautiful work. It has been achieved by everyone's unity, service and sacrifice. Even the children have served through the 'Small Hands, Big Hearts' project. This tradition has continued from the time of Shriji Maharaj; so many have sacrificed. Everybody has worked hard and contributed physically and financially beyond their capacity."

Thereafter, all the 4,500 devotees approached the pillar-stone to perform *pujan*. Then they offered *abhishek* to the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj and participated in the pillar placement ritual on site.

In this way, the three remaining sessions followed the same routine.

The following is a selection of Swamishri's blessings during the remaining three assemblies:



Swamishri ritually lays the First Pillar of Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville

- These pillars will, by Swamishri's (Pramukh Swami Maharaj's) wish, forever remain sturdy and will never move.

- This work on Akshardham will continue for five years, during which you must continue to consolidate *nishtha*. You have all joined to serve Akshardham. If nothing else, do one, two or three *malas* [daily]. This is a great thing. By doing *malas*, your heart will be purified.

- To please Pramukh Swami Maharaj everyone is working with unity. If everyone has different wishes, then even if there is everything else no work will be accomplished. Not even in 50 years will any work be done. But, such work is accomplished with mutual cooperation. Everyone has only one wish, 'To please Bapa.' Everyone is proceeding in one direction, otherwise this is not possible.

- Bapa's centenary will be celebrated and there will be great acclaim. Swami was never concerned about himself. He totally disregarded his body. He was the embodiment of Akshardham. In 2014, the doctors were totally against him travelling [to USA]. Yet, Bapa said, "I want to go to Robbinsville!" And he came. He gave much joy to everyone here. In such circumstances, others would not even think of coming.

We look at things physically. But subtly, this Akshardham and that Akshardham are one and the same.

On 4 September 2017, Bhadarva *sud* 13, V.S.

2073, Mahant Swami Maharaj ritually placed the first pillar of Swaminarayan Akshardham into position.

Previously, in Sarangpur on 26 March 2016, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *sthapan* rituals and *pujan* of this pillar.

On site, Ishwarcharan Swami had performed the initial *mahapuja* rituals. When Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived, he held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and stood in the centre, at the location where the main *garbha-gruh* will be. In 2014, on this spot, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *bhumital pujan*. Here, Swamishri was informed of the maha-mandir details and Swamishri prayed. "May Akshardham be completed at the earliest and may it proclaim the glorious name of Swaminarayan and the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam throughout the world."

Then, Swamishri made his way to where the first pillar was to be ritually placed. This pillar was, in fact, adjacent to where the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj will be consecrated in the *garbha-gruh*.

In the centre of the pillar Swamishri placed the sacred ashes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He also placed a *yantra* sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and performed its *pujan*. Then, using the golden ladle sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Swamishri placed the cement mixture in the middle.

Ishwarcharan Swami and other swamis also placed cement there.

Then Swamishri blessed the devotees and project engineers.

Thereafter, Swamishri placed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the crane control pad and at 1.26 p.m., with the *jai naads* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Akshardham Mahotsav, Swamishri ritually placed the first pillar in position.

With this, another chapter in the story of Akshardham, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, had been written. ◆

Gujarati Text: Swaminarayan Prakash, October–November 2017.

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

(Contd. from pg. 65)

Q. What should we do to increase our love for God and his Sadhu?

A. One must attach oneself with them, have profound trust and believe that they will do the very best for us and are doing so now. One must also follow their instructions with love and understanding.

(21 July, Toronto)

Q. What type of inner sentiments do you have for children?

A. All are *akshar muktas* [divine souls]. There is not an iota of doubt in that. They are all divine. Though they look physically small they have performed infinite sadhanas to attain satsang. Subsequently, though they are small and mischievous, they are *muktas*.

* * *

Q. What should we do to gain your inner blessings?

A. Obey the satsang *niyams*. Do not eat food made in hotels. Never eat non-veg or drink alcohol. Also, maintain mutual harmony, understand each others' glory. Nobody is small, in fact everyone is an *akshar mukta*.

Q. Several *satsangi* boys asked Mahant Swami Maharaj, "What type of gift are you going to give to us?"

A. Swamishri wrote, "Akshardham."

(26 July, Toronto)

■ "When someone errs tell him with politeness (*vivek*), humility (*namrata*), by believing him to be yours (*potana mani ne*) and for the good of his soul (*jiva nu rudu thay*)." ◆

(28 July, Toronto)



INDIA

YUVAK-YUVATI PARAYANS 1–31 August 2017



During the holy month of Shravan, around 700 Yuvak Mandals and 700 Yuvati Mandals held separate three-day *parayans* based on the theme 'Gunatit To Ek – There Is Only One Gunatit'.

Using the three-day *parayan* schedule provided by the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad, the youths conducted *parayans* in their local centres. The topics for the three days were: Gunatit Swarup (The Form of Gunatit), Gunatit Sadhuta (The Saintliness of Gunatit) and Gunatit Samaj (The Community Created by Gunatit). These topics were presented by the youths through discourses on the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, skits, bhajans, videos and other activities.

On the final day, to commemorate the forthcoming 150th anniversary of the Akshar Deri in Gondal, the youths also learnt about its glory and the spiritual impact it has had on the lives of countless devotees.

STUDENTS' MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE 2017

15–17 September 2017, Sarangpur

Over 560 university students from throughout Gujarat studying medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy



and other healthcare courses attended the special medico-spiritual conference for students.

Based on the theme 'Abhaydaan – I Will Always Be With You', the conference took place in the presence of Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami), Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other learned swamis.

The *shibir* focused on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings that the Satpurush is forever present on earth. This understanding was elaborated upon through speeches, workshops, group discussions, videos and other activities.

SHARAD PURNIMA CELEBRATIONS 2017 5 October 2017, Gondal



To commemorate Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami's 233rd birthday, three special celebrations were held in the presence of Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami), Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan

Swami, and other swamis and devotees.

At 5.45 a.m. the Amalsar Sthapan Vidhi of the new Yogi Smruti Mandir being constructed was performed to the accompaniment of Vedic verses.

After the initial rituals, all the *sadguru* sadhus went up to the mandir spire to ritually place the *amalsar* in position atop the *shikhar*.

Thereafter, the *sadguru* sadhus planted trees on the opposite banks of the Akshar Ghat, where the State Tourism Department will be building a riverfront.

The second celebration, at 10.30 a.m., was the first annual ritual bath in the Akshar and Brahma Kunds, where Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had ritually placed the sacred ashes of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj in October 2016.

The day's third celebration was the 233rd Birth Anniversary Celebration which began at 7.30 p.m. The programme featured speeches, bhajans, skits and videos highlighting the glory of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. The celebration assembly concluded with the inspiring video blessings of guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj.

BLOOD DONATION CAMP AT BAPS SWAMINARAYAN VIDYAMANDIR 6-7 October 2017, Mt. Abu



On the occasion of the 15th Annual Day celebrations of the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir in Mt. Abu, Rajasthan, a blood donation camp was organized in collaboration with the Rotary International Global Hospital Blood Bank.

A total of 187 units of blood was collected.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ DWAR INAUGURATION, SHRI SOMNATH SANSKRIT UNIVERSITY 6 October 2017, Veraval



The grand Pramukh Swami Maharaj Dwar built in honour of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, was inaugurated as the main entrance gate to Shri Somnath Sanskrit University in Veraval.

The 51-ft. high, 69-ft. wide and 16-ft. deep gate is decorated with the sculpted *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Ved Vyasji, Valmikiji, Saraswatiji and renowned acharyas.

Following the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals, the gate was inaugurated by Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami), Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Veraval MLA Shri Jashubhai Borad, Veraval-Prabhaspatan Nagarpalika President Shri Jagdishbhai Fofandi and Kulpati of Shri Somnath Sanskrit University Shri Ark Nath Chaudhary and other dignitaries.

Thereafter, the inauguration assembly featured speeches by senior sadhus and guests, a drama and a dance. Finally, HH Mahant Swami Maharaj's video blessings were shown. He blessed, "Everyone who passes through this gate will become internally pure."

This special occasion was attended by over 2,000 principals, scholars and students from 39 Sanskrit Mahavidyalayas located throughout Gujarat.

**CANADIAN MINISTERS VISIT
SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM
12 November 2017**



Canadian Minister of International Trade Honourable François-Philippe Champagne and Canadian Minister of Transport Honourable Marc Garneau and their 12-member delegation were traditionally welcomed by senior sadhus.

The ministers and their delegation admired the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), offered their respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir, where they also admired the Mandir's art and architecture.

They visited the Gajendra Pithika, prayed for world peace and harmony by offering *Abhishek* to the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni and experienced the boat ride exhibition, *Sanskriti Vihar*.

After the visit, Honourable François-Philippe Champagne wrote, "Thank you for taking the time to share the spiritual journey with us. It has been an unforgettable impact on us."

Honourable Marc Garneau wrote, "It has been a great honour to visit the Akshardham Temple. I feel enormously privileged. Thank you for sharing your time with us and speaking of the values that guide the followers – universal values we should all aspire to practice in our daily lives."

15 November 2017

Honourable Navdeep Bains, Canadian Minister of Innovation, Science & Economic Development, and his 10-member delegation were traditionally welcomed by senior sadhus.

They visited the Mayur Dwar, Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir, Gajendra Pithika, and the

boat ride exhibition and offered *abhishek* to the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni.

Sharing his sentiments, Honourable Navdeep Bains wrote, "Peace and love is a powerful message. Thank you for an amazing and inspirational visit!"

UK

**KISHORE-KISHORI MANDAL SUMMER
SHIBIR**

26–28 August 2017, Warwick Conference Park



More than 400 delegates attended the *shibir* titled 'Almast Jogi' which provided a deep insight into the divine personality of Yogiji Maharaj by exploring his life, lessons and legacy. The *shibir* began in the form of a radio show titled 'Dhari 189.2 FM', symbolizing Yogiji Maharaj's birthplace and year of birth.

His divine personality, limitless love, untiring enthusiasm to serve even amid hardships and profound spiritual messages were explored through a series of discourses by sadhus, video presentations, interviews and panel discussions.

Yogiji Maharaj's capacity to give endlessly and selflessly was the focus of the first day. In the evening, sadhus and youths discussed practical solutions for day-to-day challenges faced by *kishores* and *kishoris*, and reinforced the importance of adhering to a spiritual code of conduct.

An experience of Yogiji Maharaj's spiritual wisdom compiled in the 'Yogi Gita' was shared on the second day through a powerful enactment by a young *kishore*. He narrated selected verses addressing many of the challenges that fellow

young aspirants encounter in their spiritual journey. Participants also relived the heartfelt prayer that Yogiji Maharaj made on behalf of all devotees to Shastriji Maharaj in Mahelav.

In the evening of Day 2, Yogvivek Swami shared a montage of cherished memories with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, opening a fascinating window into Swamishri's personality and his love for sadhus and devotees.

The final morning explored the legacy of Yogiji Maharaj, fulfilled by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, through a deep investigation by 'Sherlock and Watson'. Through their various encounters with sadhus, they realized the significance of fulfilling the wishes and the vision of the guru, going on to conclude that attachment to the Gunatit Satpurush is fostered through faith and devotion.

BAL-BALIKA MANDAL SUMMER SHIBIR 26–28 August 2017, Warwick Conference Park



Titled 'Rajipo – Know. Understand. Connect', the *shibir* brought together over 260 *balaks* and *balikas* from across the UK to experience a fascinating journey of a child in search of profound spiritual blessings and happiness.

The *shibir* explored the glory of the Satpurush, encouraged the young participants to reflect upon how their individual actions can please Swamishri, explained the importance of daily rituals of worship (*ahnrik*) and guided the children decision-making through speeches, classroom sessions, audiovisual presentations and other activities.

Each of the children wrote a personal letter to Mahant Swami Maharaj, further strengthening

their connection with the Satpurush and God who listens to their prayers, fulfils their wishes, forgives their mistakes and blesses them with progress, purity and prosperity in life.

A very impressive interactive exhibition was also created by the Balika Mandal volunteers to provide a greater understanding of Swamishri's life and personality.

The *shibir* consolidated children's determination to 'live for the Satpurush and strive to attain his rajipo'.

OBSERVING INTERNATIONAL PEACE DAY 23 September 2017, London



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, observed International Peace Day in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution declaring an International Day of Peace. In 2001, the General Assembly adopted 21 September as the permanent date for this annual event.

Swamishri began the observances with the traditional lighting of lamps, while children and youths sang the *shanti-paath*, a Vedic peace prayer.

Sharad Patel, 15, read out a statement of prayer and reflection, stating: "Today, we, the members of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, observe the International Day of Peace by sharing the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the inspiration of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

"We pray for our fellow human brothers and sisters suffering in war-torn and conflict-stricken zones, for the bereaved and for those who have

lost their lives or have been injured by acts of violence or natural disasters. We also offer our prayers for the orphaned, homeless, displaced, ailing, poor, deprived and disadvantaged and also for those who are tragically fleeing or affected by the spate of recent calamities around the world.”

Swamishri addressed the assembly, drawing upon the work and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in promoting the spiritual values underpinning lasting peace. He further elaborated upon the importance of peace within families, which in turn inspires peace in communities and across the world. He concluded by encouraging everyone to adopt the principles of International Peace Day beyond just a single day or week, to make a continuous commitment to instilling peace in our daily lives.

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN CHHAVANI 24 September 2017, London



Devotees from throughout the UK attended the all-day ‘chhavani’ (spiritual camp of discourses) on the fundamental principles of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan (*upasana*) was held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior swamis.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had expressed his wish for this special programme to be organized and personally encouraged everyone to attend.

Following Thakorji’s *arti* at 5.30 a.m., Swamishri then joined swamis in a ceremonial procession of *Swaminarayan-siddhanta-sudha*, a *vada granth* (classical dialectical treatise) authored by Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadrashdas Swami that

provides a systematic exposition, justification and defence of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, drawing from Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s teachings and the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras. The scripture was sanctified by Harikrishna Maharaj in the inner sanctum of the mandir before being joyously carried by swamis amid chanting and music to the assembly hall, where it was presented to Swamishri for *pujan*.

Swamishri signalled the commencement of learning by ringing a bell in honour of the resounding propagation of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* by Shastriji Maharaj. During his puja, kirtans in praise of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj were sung.

After his puja, Swamishri addressed the morning assembly and elaborated upon the rich history and tireless work of Shastriji Maharaj to enlighten countless aspirants of this knowledge. He addressed the gathering again later in the morning and emphasized the importance of maintaining faith in the knowledge that Shastriji Maharaj had imparted.

Senior, experienced and learned swamis delivered a series of enlightening discourses throughout the day, elaborating upon the principles revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and which are embedded within the Vedic literature of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. Their talks also explained the hardships and challenges that Shastriji Maharaj overcame to impart this spiritual wisdom, and the endeavours of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj in furthering this work.

More than 400 children enjoyed a parallel ‘Bal-Balika Chhavani’ throughout the day to reinforce the same principles in English. Swamis and volunteers explained key messages through a series of presentations and talks to develop the spiritual knowledge of the young children.

Swamishri addressed all attendees again in the evening, paying tribute to Shastriji Maharaj’s tolerance and saintliness. He also acknowledged

the dedication of devotees, particularly young children, for their commitment.

He then read out an uplifting pledge to bring the memorable day to a fitting conclusion.

Such was Swamishri's enthusiasm for Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, he presided over the day's discourses for more than seven hours in total and himself spoke four times.

THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL DAY 29 September 2017, London



The Swaminarayan School is an independent day school founded by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1992 to promote Hindu culture, values and way of life. The first independent Hindu school in the West, it was judged "excellent" in all years by the Independent Schools Inspectorate during a full inspection in October 2014. In 2017, the School achieved its best GCSE results with 88% of the grades at A* & A.

A special programme to celebrate the 25th anniversary of The Swaminarayan School in London was held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.

Children from the School recited uplifting messages of peace and sang Sanskrit verses during Swamishri's puja. Swamishri conveyed his prayers for all the students during his morning blessings. He also drew upon the School's core values of honesty, respect and teamwork, and encouraged parents to consolidate these principles at home through regular arrangement of *ghar sabha*.

The evening programme began with the choral singing of Hindu prayers before the

opening address by Mr Umesh Raja, Head of the Preparatory School. Mr Raja paid tribute to the dedication of the teachers and touched on the life-long and diverse learning skills that are imparted at the School. Mr Manani, Head of the Senior School, reflected on the success of the school in nurturing leaders, many of whom had gone on to work in a diverse range of professions all over the world. Alumni Dhaval Mistry, now an entrepreneur, shared the huge contribution the School had made in moulding him during his most impressionable years, while Parth Patel highlighted the spirit of service the School had stimulated in its students. Other members of staff and parents provided a deeper insight into its academic success as well as the benefits of its value-based education. Their testimonies also paid tribute to the guidance and inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

An enlightening video brought these enriching experiences to life and provided a journey through the School's history from its inception. The presentation also outlined the wider community activities undertaken by the students.

After arriving in the assembly, Swamishri rang the school bell to commence a 'class' with the students and became fully immersed in the pupils' presentations, which included a musical performance by children from both the preparatory and senior schools, recital of Sanskrit verses by Year 6 pupils, students demonstrating various yoga postures, a skit and a traditional dance, highlighting the diverse skillset that the School fosters.

Swamishri concluded the assembly by sharing examples of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's selfless service towards others, a value which is at the heart of the School ethos.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ ASTHI KUMBH STHAPAN

11 October 2017, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Wellingborough

The *asthi* (holy ashes) of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj were ceremoniously embedded



within the Akshar Deri shrine at BAPS Mandir in Wellingborough during a Vedic ceremony performed by Narayanmuni Swami.

The *asthi kumbh* (urn of holy ashes) had earlier been blessed by Mahant Swami Maharaj in London on Thursday 5 October 2017.

The *kumbh* was ceremoniously brought into the assembly hall on a palanquin carried by swamis. The grand procession included Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj, flag-bearing *kishores* and dancing *yuvaks*, all fronted by a traditional Indian drummer.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had also sent his specially recorded blessings for the auspicious occasion.

The devotees paid tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj by placing flowers at the feet of his *murti* and having darshan of the newly placed *asthi*.

Just as the Akshar Deri in Gondal marks the final resting place of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Wellingborough's Akshar Deri, having been consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, now marks a similar place of pilgrimage, with his *asthi* enshrined within.

BAPS PRESENTS AT LANGUAGE SHOW LIVE 14 October 2017, London

Volunteers from BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London presented a 30-minute Gujarati 'taster' session at Language Show Live, held at the Business Design Centre in London on Saturday 14 October 2017.

Language Show Live is Europe's largest event for language learners, teachers and linguists, welcoming over 9,500 delegates annually. The event, which has been running for more than 25 years,

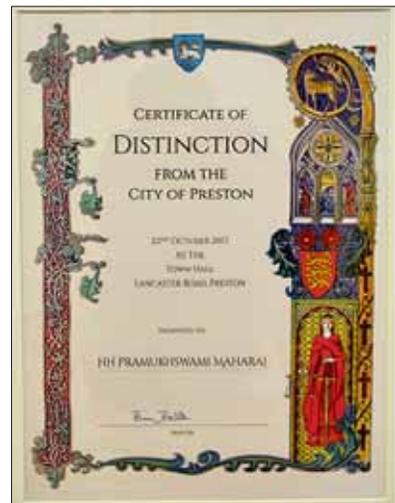
promotes the learning and teaching of languages from around the world.

In 2016, volunteers from BAPS visited the event and introduced visitors to various interactive resources developed by BAPS to help children and adults learn Gujarati.

This year, the team were invited to present a 30-minute 'taster session' on the Gujarati language. The session was led by a small group of experienced Gujarati teachers who introduced the audience to basic elements of the Gujarati language, such as the alphabet, simple words, and everyday conversational phrases.

The interactive and engaging session conveyed the simplicity, elegance and precision of the Gujarati language. The volunteers also distributed resources which summarized the teachings from the session, supported further by various informative displays.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ AWARDED CERTIFICATION OF DISTINCTION 22 October 2017, Preston



The 'Certificate of Distinction' was awarded to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj by His Worshipful Mayor of Preston, Councillor Brian Rollo, during the Hindu New Year Celebrations at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Preston. The award was received by Yogvivek Swami,

Head Swami of BAPS in Europe.

The award was in recognition of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spiritual, humanitarian and charitable contribution to Preston since 1974. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is only the third individual to have received this award in the history of the City. An entry confirming this award will be added into the 'Book of Friendship, Recognition and Distinction', which is kept in the Mayor's parlour as a historical record.

NORTH AMERICA

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 4-5 August 2017, Windsor, ON, Canada



The Mandir Mahotsav celebration started on 4 August with an evening of devotional songs and speeches by learned swamis in the presence of guests and community members.

On the morning of 5 August, the mandir inauguration ceremony took place in the presence of Pujya Narayanmuni Swami, devotees, well-wishers and community leaders. Previously, in Toronto, on 23 July 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*. In the celebration assembly, children and youths presented a colourful cultural programme.

Among the guests was Mr. Brian Masse, Member of Parliament, Windsor.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S ASTHIPUSHPA VISARJAN 7 September 2017, Hudson River, New York

Hundreds of devotees and well-wishers from



across North America gathered on the banks of Hudson River to witness the *asthipushpa visarjan* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited New York 13 times, inaugurating the first BAPS Mandir in North America in New York in 1974. His holy ashes were scattered in the Hudson river, as an expression of gratitude and in commemoration of his longstanding and sacred ties with New Jersey and New York.

The Vedic *pujan* of the sacred ashes were performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj and Ishwarcharan Swami. Devotees also had the opportunity to participate in the *pujan*.

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj dispersed the holy ashes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj into the flowing waters of the Hudson River, offering prayers for world peace. Devotees and well-wishers observed the ritual from a special observation area.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S ASTHIPUSHPA VISARJAN 16 September 2017, Potomac River, Washington DC



Devotees and well-wishers from across

Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia gathered at the Jefferson Memorial on the banks of the Potomac River in Washington, DC, to witness the scattering of the sacred ashes of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited the United States fourteen times between 1974 and 2014, including seven visits to Washington, DC, culminating in the inauguration of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Beltsville, Maryland, on 19 August, 2000.

The *ashthipushpa puja* was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. They offered prayers for world peace and the well-being for all devotees living in North America. Devotees also had the opportunity to participate in the *puja* and offer their own personal tribute to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

BAPS CELEBRATES DIWALI AT THE U.S. CAPITOL

7 November 2017, Washington DC



Selected BAPS members from across the country came to Washington D.C. to meet lawmakers in Congress as part of the organization’s ongoing efforts to bring about greater awareness amongst elected officials of the Hindu American community and its traditions and beliefs, as well as to advocate on issues important to the community. This first-ever ‘Advocacy Day’ ended with a Diwali and Hindu New Year celebration in the famous Kennedy Caucus Room on Capitol Hill.

Joined by six partner organizations – the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), Indiaspora, the Global Indian Jewish Relations Institute

(GIJRI), the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA), The Art of Living Foundation, and the Association of United Hindu & Jain Temples – the Ambassador of India to the United States, His Excellency Navtej Sarna, and 31 members of Congress including Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard (HI-2) all braved a cold and rainy evening to celebrate Diwali, Annakut and the New Year by lighting ceremonial *divas* and interacting with over 450 guests and dignitaries.

Asia Pacific

YUVA SHIBIRS: MANO MALI CHHE MOTI VAAT

29 July to 3 September 2017



A total of 750 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* participated in the Yuva Shibirs held in many centres in Australia in the presence of BAPS swamis. Based on the theme ‘*Māno Mali Chhe Moti Vaat*’ these *shibirs* focused on the foundational pillars of BAPS: Siddhanta, Satsang, Satpurush and Seva. The enlightening and inspiring one-day *shibirs* featured speeches by swamis, panel discussions, group discussions, skits, video presentations and other activities.

The *shibirs* addressed important questions related to Satsang in the life of today’s youths, explored the benefits of satsang and *seva*, and provided a deeper understanding of essential satsang concepts.

At the end, the youths resolved to practice these core values in their daily lives.

Africa

NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR: ASMITA 23–27 August 2017, Jinja, Uganda



More than 200 *balaks* and *balikas* from across Uganda and Eldoret, Kenya, took part in the five-day *shibir* themed ‘Asmita – Pride for Satsang’. The *shibir* helped to develop a deeper understanding of satsang and Indian culture in the children.

The *shibir* featured lectures by BAPS swamis, group discussions, workshops and interactive activities. An exhibition was set up which taught the youngsters about India, Hinduism and BAPS.

Also, many children took part in the talent night, performing for the first time on stage. This was a great confidence booster for the children.

NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR: ASMITA 29 September to 3 October 2017, Lenasia, South Africa

Over 200 *balaks* and *balikas* from more than ten centres in South Africa participated in the National Bal-Balika Shibir held in Lenasia. The five-day *shibir* was based on the theme ‘Asmita –



‘Pride for Satsang’. Each day began with *arti*, *samuh puja* and Nilkanth Varni *abhishek*. The morning sessions included lectures by sadhus, team-building

exercises, and interactive activities. Afternoon sessions involved fun activities, sports, and outings to local places. Evening sessions focused on talent development and other presentations. The *shibir* helped the *balaks* and *balikas* to gain a deeper understanding of Satsang, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the guru *parampara* and Hindu traditions.

BAPS Charities

HURRICANE HARVEY RELIEF WORK 29 August to 9 September 2017, Houston



The Texas gulf coast experienced over 50 inches of rain after Hurricane Harvey made land-fall on 25 August 2017, with wind gusts in excess of 132 mph. Due to record flooding, thousands of residents were forced from their homes to seek safety.

The widespread damage and catastrophic flooding made the relief efforts challenging, as roads and physical infrastructure were largely inaccessible.

BAPS Charities volunteers responded to this call to action in Houston and surrounding areas, where they worked alongside local state officials and first responders to provide assistance.

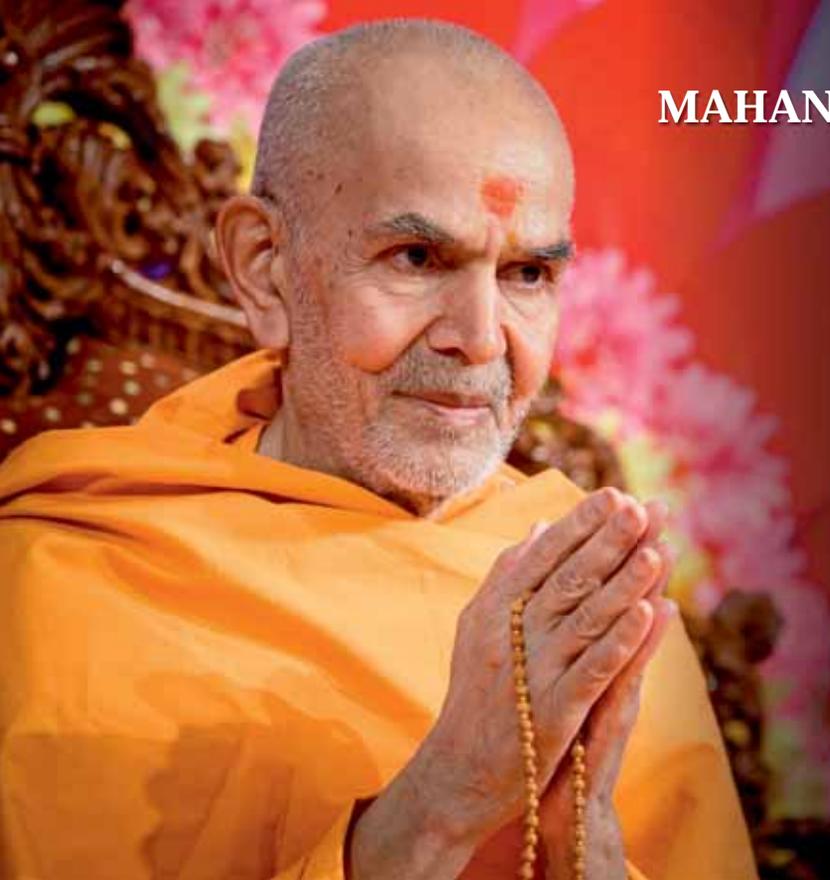
For immediate relief, BAPS Charities provided over 2,200 hot meals, sheltered 75 families, distributed blankets, pillows and essential toiletries, and also helped to clean water-damaged homes.

In November, BAPS Charities also provided 2,500 drywall and floating material to 40 homes in the Canyon Gate area of Houston. ♦

NEW PUBLICATIONS

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

An Introduction



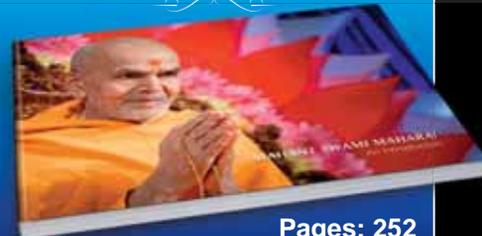
His Life

With His Gurus

His Message

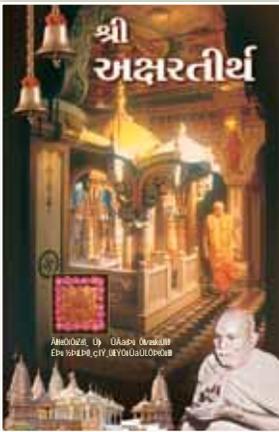
His Virtues

Moments with Him...



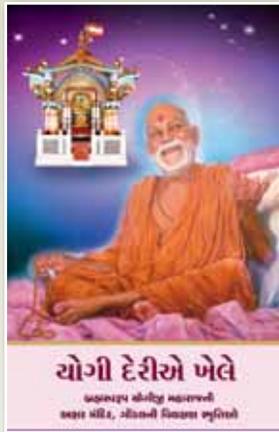
Pages: 252

by BAPS Sadhus and Youths
(North America)



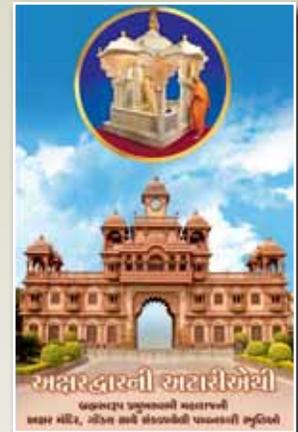
Shri Akshar Tirth

The history of the Akshar Deri written by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj
Pages: 84



Yogi Derie Khele

Divine memories associated with the Akshar Deri and Akshar Mandir in Gondal from the life of Yogiji Maharaj
Pages: 138



Akshar Dwar ni Atariethi

Incidents related to the Akshar Deri and Akshar Mandir in Gondal from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Pages: 56



Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad

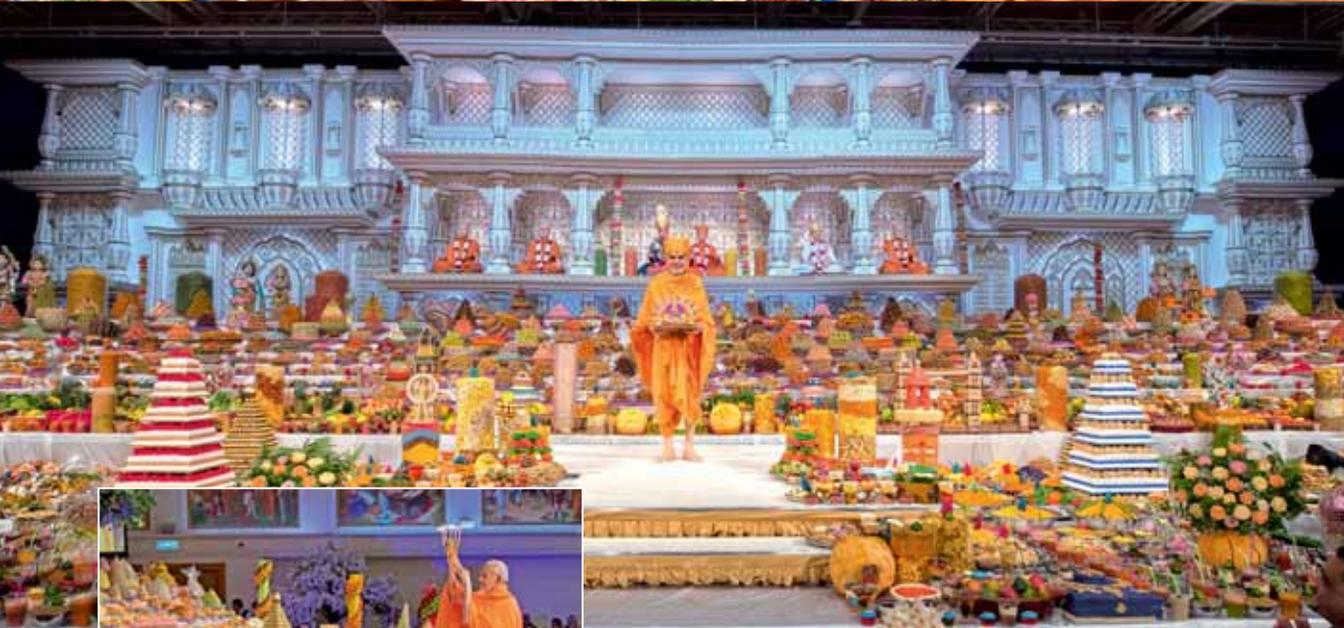
Available at all BAPS bookstores in India and abroad



ANNAKUT CELEBRATIONS WORLDWIDE

October 2017

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj celebrates the Annakut festival in Paris, France.
2. Annakut celebration at the Pennsylvania State Capitol, Harrisburg, PA.
3. Over 450 dignitaries attended the Annakut celebration arranged by BAPS and other Hindu organizations at the US Capitol in Washington DC.
4. Annakut offered to Thakorji at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi, Kenya.
5. Annakut celebration at Parliament House, Canberra, Australia.



ANNAKUT CELEBRATIONS, LONDON

20 October 2017

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the Annakut *arti* in the central shrine of the mandir.
2. Swamishri with Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj amid the grand *annakut* in the Haveli.

Inset: Swamishri performs the Annakut *arti* in the Haveli.

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