

September–October 2019 Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

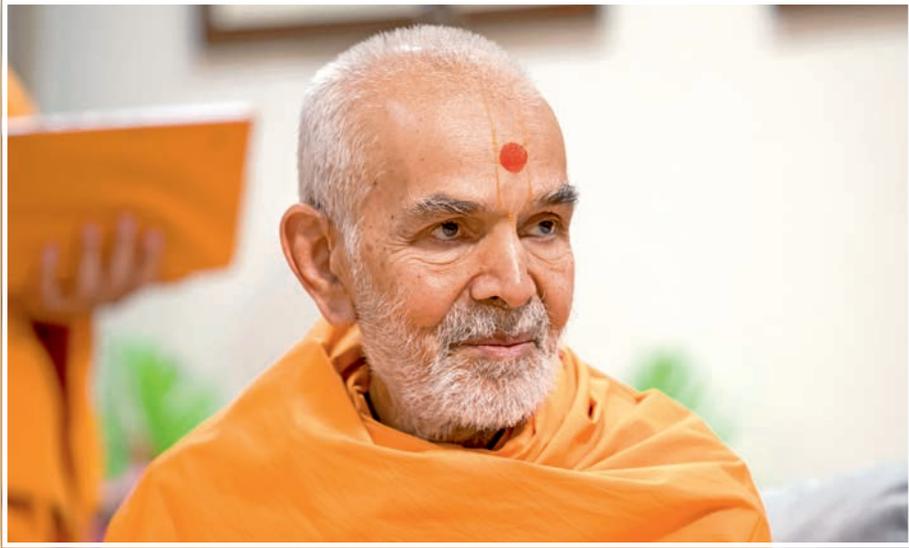


Heartfelt Prostrations To HH Mahant Swami Maharaj
On His 86th Birthday Celebration



**JANMASHTAMI CELEBRATION IN THE PRESENCE OF MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ
24 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania**

1. In Swamishri's presence, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami (right) addresses the assembly.
2. Swamishri performs *arti* in the BAPS Mandir, Dar-es-Salaam.
3. Swamishri rocks Thakorji on a swing during the Janmashtami assembly.
4. Devotees during the celebration assembly.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2019, Vol. 42, No. 5



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug,
Ahmedabad - 380004, India

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)			India
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	80
2 Years	1300	18	28	150
3 Years	1900	27	42	220

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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Shri Hari Journeys to Vartal

Shri Hari departs from Gadhada and heads towards Vartal with a large retinue of paramhansas and devotees...



WE HAVE LEFT THE MURTIS IN BOCHASAN

Muktanand Swami and Nityanand Swami arrived in Gadhpur and met Shri Hari. Maharaj asked with a smile, “Have the *murtis* been transported to Vartal?” The swamis hesitated and looked down momentarily. They confessed, “Maharaj, on seeing the beautiful *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan we decided to bring them to Gadhpur and have them installed once the mandir was built here. But your wish always prevails. Because of the unanticipated rains we had to leave the *murtis* at Kashidas Mota’s home and return here empty-handed.”

Shri Hari smiled and commented, “Because the *murtis* desire to have the sweet mango juice of Gujarat why would they come here to have dal and *rotla*!”

SHRI HARI DEPARTS FOR VARTAL

After celebrating the *annakut* festival of 1824

in Gadhpur Shri Hari instructed all the *paramhansas* and devotees to come with him to Vartal for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. He wished that no devotees should stay at home on the occasion of the *pratishtha*.

Everyone was happy and excited to be with Shri Hari for the *pratishtha* ceremony. All wished to witness the grand *pratishtha* and offer their services in whatever capacity they could. Thus, the devotees of Saurashtra locked their homes and joined the group accompanying Shriji Maharaj towards Vartal.

On the other hand, in Vartal, Aksharanand Swami arrived with Shri Hari’s letter. In accordance with Maharaj’s instructions, Brahmanand Swami and Anandanand Swami prepared the invitations for all the devotees. Thereafter, swamis sent several devotees in all directions to deliver them.

SHRI HARI EXPLAINS TO MUKTANAND SWAMI NOT TO COME TO VARTAL

Prior to leaving for Vartal from Gadhpur Shri Hari called Muktanand Swami. He said, “Swami, your health is not good and there will be a large gathering in Vartal. You will face a lot of discomfort, so it would be better if you desist from coming to Vartal.

On hearing this, Muktanand Swami became absorbed in deep thought. He was aware that Maharaj was also going to consecrate his own *murti* in the mandir. He believed Maharaj was the supreme Bhagwan, Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan, but he was in a human form. Thus, all adore him as a human, and when he consecrates his own *murti* in Vartal it will have an adverse impact on the devotees, many of whom may fall from satsang. There were several *paramhansas* and devotees who agreed with his way of thinking. They believed that Shri Hari should not consecrate his own *murti*.

So, Muktanand Swami mused that if he didn't go with Maharaj, then he would consecrate his own *murti*. So, he resolved to go despite his malaise. He thus folded his hands and humbly replied, “Maharaj, it does not seem proper for me to stay behind when a celebration of such importance will take place in Vartal. I wish to come there.”

Shri Hari understood the state of his mind and agreed, “You may come. Get ready to leave now.”

Shri Hari departed from Gadhpur with a large retinue of *paramhansas* and devotees. The resplendent retinue comprised of drummers on camels, decorated elephants, horses, chariots, palanquins and bullock carts. People watched in awe as the retinue passed by the outskirts of their villages.

Maharaj arrived in Botad and resided at Daha Khachar's *darbar*. Since it was dusk *arti* was performed and prayer verses were sung. When the evening meal was ready Shri Hari himself served *khichadi* and ghee to the *paramhansas*. Thereafter, he had dinner.

The next morning, Maharaj left Botad and travelled to Khas, Bagad and Jadila. Here, he stayed on the outskirts under a shade of trees. Many members of his entourage bathed by the wells in surrounding farms and offered their daily oblations. Soon thereafter, Pujasha and Vanasha arrived and told Maharaj, “The food rations are ready in Sundariyana. Please come and have your meals and then depart.”

Shri Hari fulfilled their wish and thereafter departed immediately. The group travelled to Vagad, Aniyali, Dhandhuka and Jaska. Here, Jibhai came for Maharaj's darshan and Shri Hari told him to join the group and come to Vartal. Jibhai complied.

MUKTANAND SWAMI FRACTURES HIS ARM

Shri Hari arrived in Rochka and told Kakabhai to join him. The entire group was travelling briskly. Muktanand Swami was walking while he talked to some devotees about Shriji Maharaj's glory. Hima Soni of Ganf told Muktanand Swami to sit on his mare. Muktanand Swami said, “I prefer walking because I am not habituated to riding a horse.” But Himabhai insisted. Finally, Muktanand Swami sat on his mare. Sometime later, the mare stepped onto a pothole and Muktanand Swami fell down. Several devotees came running to Swami and helped him to stand up. His right hand was fractured. He was brought in a hammock to Kamiyala and taken to a mandir.

When Maharaj came to know what had happened he hurriedly came to see Muktanand Swami. Shri Hari was saddened by what had happened. He called for a *vaidya* to treat him. Then Maharaj told Muktanand Swami, “Now you stay here till you get well. Do not think of coming to Vartal for the *pratishtha* .” Muktanand Swami understood Shri's Hari wish.

Shri Hari took his meal and departed for Vartal. He passed through Boru, Galiyana and finally reached Vartal. Devotees from far and

wide had arrived for the great festive occasion. Many came to receive Shri Hari before he entered Vartal. Brahmanand Swami had come to receive him on his mare. Along the way he informed Maharaj about the mandir construction activity. Then, Shri Hari asked, "Have you brought the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan from Bochasan?" Brahmanand Swami was startled by the question and replied, "That most important task has not been accomplished. Kashidas Mota has arrived in Vartal but he has not brought the *murtis*!"

Shri Hari replied, "Don't worry, I'll tell him about it." Maharaj slowly arrived at the mandir site. He eagerly saw the mandir work, observed the main dome and was pleased to see the lotus-shaped base of the mandir. Aksharanand Muni and Anand Muni came to the site. Narayan Giriji also arrived before Maharaj. Brahmanand Swami informed Maharaj, "Narayan Giriji takes care of the finances from time to time and he does not allow us to be hard-pressed."

Shri Hari replied, "It is Bhagwan's work. Initially, difficulties arise, but they soon get resolved. Bhagwan accepts our heartfelt devotion and fulfils our prayers and wishes."

SPIRITUAL REVIVAL IN GUJARAT

Thousands of devotees had gathered in Vartal. Shri Hari witnessed the spiritual enthusiasm of the devotees. Twenty-five years before, devotion had withered in Gujarat. The bonds of dharma had loosened. People perceived renunciation in those who donned saffron clothes. However, with the entry and efforts of Shri Hari and his *paramhansas* a drastic change had occurred. Shri Hari was happy to see people adopt the spiritual path for realizing the true purpose of human birth.

At that time, Shriji Maharaj saw Kashidas Mota standing quite a distance away. The latter also saw Maharaj. Kashidas Mota made his way through the crowd to Maharaj. He offered

prostrations to Shri Hari. Maharaj asked him about his wellbeing. Then he enquired, "Mota, have you brought the *murtis*?"

Kashidas surprisingly questioned, "Which *murtis*?" Shri Hari smiled and reminded him, "The *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan in your house. They have to be enshrined here."

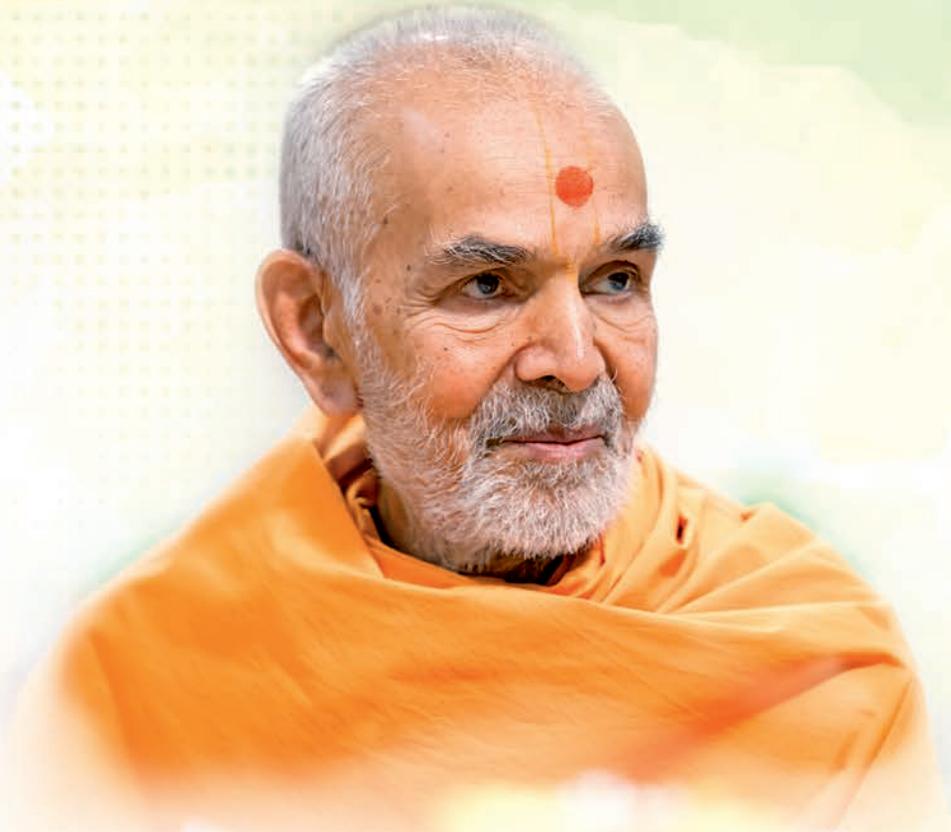
On hearing this, Kashidas became crestfallen and humbly replied, "Maharaj, you will install the *murtis* that we have been serving for the last eight months in my home? It is my wish that you install these *murtis* in a mandir in Bochasan. Ask, and I shall give you any amount of land you require to build a mandir."

I WILL SIT IN BOCHASAN WITH MY DHAM

Maharaj looked at Kashidas for a while. Then he placed his hand on Kashidas' shoulder and asked, "When I had installed the *murtis* of Narayan in Ahmedabad do you remember what I had told you?"

Kashidas had forgotten and looked blankly at Maharaj. Shri Hari prodded him, "Kashidas, remove the layer of ignorance that has covered your memory and try to recall what I had said." Instantly, Kashidas recalled. Shriji Maharaj said, "Will you not be happy if I install the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in Bochasan? Lakshmi-Narayan are the deities of Vaikunth abode. I am the supreme cause of all the deities. I will sit with my Dham, Akshar, and establish the pure and supreme *upasana* [way of worship]. And its beginning will take place in Bochasan. Now tell me what is your wish?" ◆

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



“Haji Bhalā Sadhu...”

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Nairobi, Kenya. He began his lecture series on the Yogi Gita there by quoting the Bible, saying, “Know thyself.” He then asked the audience, “How would you introduce yourself?” The typical answer to Swami’s question would be for a person to state his or her name, place of birth, profession and so forth. But Mahant Swami Maharaj offered an intriguing answer. He said that our true identity is that we are those who have attained God on earth.

Indeed, our guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, is the Aksharbrahman Satpurush – the manifest form in whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan resides. Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut Loya 6 that thoughts regarding *nishchay*, or conviction, should be repeatedly reinforced.

This article is an attempt to do precisely this. Muktanand Swami has described the Satpurush’s qualities in many of his kirtans. Yogiji Maharaj was particularly fond of one such kirtan, “Hāji Bhalā Sādhu...”. Gently swaying as he sung the kirtan in his melodious voice, Yogiji Maharaj often claimed ownership over it, meaning that he exemplified the qualities it describes. Here, we will consider Yogiji Maharaj’s beloved kirtan and examine how it applies to the life of Yogiji Maharaj’s beloved disciple and our dear guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj.

■ Hāji bhalā sādhu, hariki sādhu...

A true sadhu is always engrossed in God's devotion...

From the time of his youth, Mahant Swami Maharaj's bhakti was unique. As a young sadhu in Mumbai, he often prepared decorative garlands and ornate *hindola* for Thakorji. He also meticulously arranged *annakut* before Thakorji every year. He always remained engrossed in different kinds of *seva* and also involved others.

To commemorate Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birth celebration in 1969, Swamishri stayed up late into the night to prepare a plush, six-foot-long garland to be sent to Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal. Once the garland reached Gondal, Yogiji Maharaj offered it to Ghanshyam Maharaj and remarked, "Mahant Swami's bhakti is remarkable! Justice would not be done to his devotion even if I were to offer five *dandvats* to each flower of this garland!"

Swamishri's steadfast bhakti is also reflected in his enthusiasm for Thakorji's *arti* and darshan. Swamishri had come to Selvas in 2013. Local organizers had forgotten to inform him that the *mangala arti* in Selvas occurred every day at 5.45 a.m., as opposed to 6.00 a.m. So, on his first day there, Swamishri thus made his way to the mandir at 5.57 a.m., thinking that he would be just in time for the *arti*. However, as he climbed the steps, he saw people descending the mandir.

"Is the *mangala [arti]* over?" he asked.

"Yes," someone replied.

Disheartened, Swamishri decided to atone for missing the *arti* by fasting for the day. Breakfast had been served to him, but he refused to eat. Local organizers apologized for not communicating the time to him and their eyes welled up with tears as they requested him not to fast. To please them, he took a morsel of food in his hand; just then, however, a devotee arrived. As everyone's attention turned to the devotee, Swamishri nonchalantly put the morsel down. In this way, he resolutely refused to eat breakfast.

Yet, as the organizers lovingly pressed for him to eat, Swamishri said, "I wanted to fast all day but because all of you are insisting, I will eat in the afternoon. However, I do not wish to eat right now." This incident illustrates the profundity of Mahant Swami Maharaj's devotion. No *mangala*, no food. This, too, at the age of 80!

A similar instance of Swamishri's resolute devotion occurred on 25 August 2016, the day of Janmashtami. Swamishri had observed a waterless fast and had a day full of travelling ahead of him. Yet, Swamishri did not falter in his bhakti. Starting his day off in Bochasan, he offered fifteen *dandvats* during *mangala arti*, five thereafter in the *abhishek mandap*, five during *shangar arti*, five at Purushottam Swami's memorial shrine and six during puja. He then travelled to Chansad, where he offered ten *dandvats* at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthplace and five more at the village mandir. He then came to Atladara, where he offered five *dandvats* at the mandir, five in the *abhishek mandap*, five in Shastriji Maharaj's room and five in Yogiji Maharaj's room. In this way, at the age of 83, he performed 71 *dandvats* on the day of a waterless fast! As if this were not enough, after the Janmashtami celebration assembly, he turned towards the mandir for darshan. Due to rains, puddles of water covered the dark pathway. Yet still, with the aid of his attendant, Swamishri made his way to the mandir.

Swamishri's devotion to Thakorji can clearly be seen through such incidents.

■ Tanaki upādhi taje so hi sādhu...

One who forsakes caring for his body is a true sadhu.

Swamishri has also never cared for comforts. More so, amid incessant fasts and unimaginable physical adversities, Swamishri has done incomparable physical *seva*.

As a youth in Gondal, he once helped clean a garbage disposal area for two hours despite having a 103°F fever. As a young sadhu in Mumbai,

he regularly washed dishes. It was the convention at the time to clean the utensils with ash. However, rubbing ash would become painful after a while. This never stopped Swamishri, though. Sometimes, he would clean dishes for so long that his hands would become rough and often bleed. At other times, Swamishri would work tirelessly for nights for festival preparations or travel exhaustively for projects like Akshardham in Gandhinagar.

One such incident exemplifies particularly well the extent to which Swamishri is above comforts. Mahant Swami was going to Bansipahadpur, Rajasthan in 1983, where *murtis* for the upcoming mandir in Mumbai were being made. The devotees of Jaipur had rented a jeep to take Swamishri and other sadhus. However, the road was dangerous, as travellers were often waylaid by bandits. Ten kilometres from the town of Bharatpur and well into the night, the jeep suddenly broke down. For twenty minutes, Swamishri and the other sadhus waited to see if they could flag anyone down. However, the road was deserted.

Hence, they decided to push the jeep to the nearest village. After pushing for about five kilometres, they came across someone driving a tractor who assisted them by towing the jeep to a petrol station on the outskirts of Bharatpur.

By now, it was midnight. They parked at the petrol station and Swamishri and Ishwarcharan Swami slept inside the jeep, while the other two sadhus slept on the ledge of a nearby fuelling pump. Ravaging mosquitos made the situation all the more unbearable.

The next morning, they bathed at a water pump outside the petrol station's garage. Thereafter, they did their pujas on the garage's terrace. It took about three hours to repair the jeep, after which they travelled to Bansipahadpur. Despite these difficulties, Mahant Swami carried no expression of frustration or exasperation. On the contrary, he remained remarkably cheerful.

Only one who is detached from physical comforts could behave in such a way.

■ **Mān apmānme ektā, sukh-dukh me sambhāv; ahi ke sukh alpa hai, nahi swarg luchāv.**

He possesses equanimity in honour and insult, and in joy and misery; he understands that the pleasures of this world are insignificant, and even those of paradise cannot entice him.

Swamishri has always remained equipoised amidst both insults and honours. During his travels in the early years, telephones were often unavailable, and so organizers from Mumbai would post Swamishri's itinerary to the towns and villages he was going to visit. Once, Swamishri arrived at the Patna train station late at night. A local devotee had received notice of Swamishri's visit, but he was angry due to a misunderstanding and thus chose not to pick him up.

With nowhere else to go, Swamishri slept on a bench at the railway platform; the two sadhus who were with him slept on the ground. The station, however, was infested with rats and one rat even bit Swamishri during the night. Nevertheless, Swamishri remained unfazed.

In the morning, Mahant Swami and the other sadhus went to the devotee's home and stayed with him for two days. Despite having been insulted in such a way, Swamishri held no ill feelings towards the devotee; rather, he interacted with him freely. Upon witnessing Mahant Swami's saintliness and unassuming nature, the devotee's misunderstanding was resolved and he gained a deep respect for Swamishri.

Even more difficult than staying calm amidst insult is doing the same amidst honour. However, Swamishri has been unaffected by the many tributes that have come his way. In this way, he exemplifies the quality of equanimity that Muktanand Swami describes in this kirtan.

■ **Lālach lobh harām hai, grahe na gānthe dām...**

He has shunned greed and enticements. He does not harbour wealth. And he practises absolute celibacy. Moreover, he continuously chants God's name.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is a worldwide organization with around 4,200 satsang centres, over 1,000 sadhus, and a volunteer force of 55,000. Moreover, it has world-renowned cultural and spiritual complexes like Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi and Gandhinagar, and exquisite stone mandirs in London, Nairobi, Houston, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto, Los Angeles, and Robbinsville, amongst other locations. Yet, the organization's president, Mahant Swami Maharaj, does not have a penny to his name, nor does he have any rights to the Sanstha's property. All he has in his possessions are his two sets of clothes, puja and a wooden bowl for eating meals. Indeed, Mahant Swami

Maharaj personifies simplicity.

Before becoming a sadhu, Swamishri studied physics at the V.P. Science College in Vidyanagar. After spending a year there, he had various options for further studies. As an intelligent student, he could have moved on to some of the best academic programmes. However, he chose to pursue agricultural science. The main reason for this was that the agricultural college in Anand was not a co-educational facility. Other promising options, including the course in which he was presently enrolled, required students to partner up, sometimes with members of the opposite gender. Having decided to walk on the path of *brahmacharya*, Vinubhai chose to forgo the opportunity to facilitate his *niyams*.

Swamishri thus exemplifies the two values presented in this verse – the renunciation of wealth and the practice of celibacy – which represent two crucial qualities that characterize a Swaminarayan sadhu. ◆

GURU: Sadhu Vatsalmurtidas & Sadhu Naishtikpurushdas

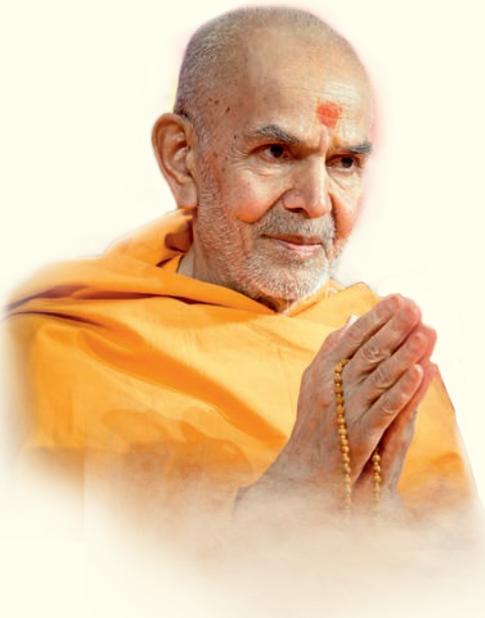
“Haji Bhala Sadhu...”

Part 2

- **Math na bāndhe mamatā kari, shathatā kini tyāg...**
He doesn't build a dwelling for himself. He never practises deceit.

By saying that a true sadhu does not create a dwelling for himself, Muktanand Swami implies that such a person is not attached to any particular place, position, person or activity. Instead, such a person is attached only to God and remains a humble servant.

Let us consider how Swamishri epitomizes this virtue. Yogiji Maharaj had appointed Swamishri as the mahant of the Akshar Bhuvan mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, in 1961. However, in 1977, he joined Pramukh Swami Maharaj in his *vicharan* abroad and thereafter Swamishri asked him to begin doing *vicharan* across the country. For Mahant Swami, leaving Mumbai meant renouncing the comforts of the mandir to embrace the hardships of itinerancy.



However, detached as he was, Swamishri never questioned his guru's wish; in fact, he continues to do *vicharan* to this day.

Despite being a senior sadhu then, Mahant Swami always shied away from amassing a following of his own. Some attempted to make him the guru shortly after Yogiji Maharaj's passing, yet he remained faithful to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, saying, "I am Pramukh Swami's *shishya*, and I will remain Pramukh Swami's only. I have become a sadhu for *moksha*, and only Pramukh Swami can give me *moksha*." Even after being formally appointed as Pramukh Swami Maharaj's successor amidst a gathering of senior sadhus in 2012, he insisted that the decision not be publicised so long as Pramukh Swami Maharaj was with us. He further asserted, "I am just a *sevak*, and I want to continue to be *sevak*. The gateway to *moksha* and everyone's guru is only Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It is a matter of principle that *moksha* can be granted by only one at any given time. Please accept this request of mine."

Even after Pramukh Swami Maharaj's passing, Swamishri has always tried to keep the spotlight on his gurus, rather than trying to fill their shoes himself. In his speeches he often mentions, "With all that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has accomplished, all I have left to do is accept garlands of honour and praises." Furthermore, he stops people abruptly when they call out his 'jai' without first calling out Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 'jai'. He said once, in fact, "I am his servant. When you call out everything else without saying his 'jai' first, it feels as if my arms have been cut off!" On another occasion, he said, "Everything seems empty without Bapa's 'jai'. It becomes scary at times."

The second part of this verse says that the true Sadhu never practises deceit. This virtue, too, can be seen in Swamishri. Despite becoming the guru in 2016, Swamishri has never tried to convince people of his oneness with Pramukh Swami Maharaj by copying his guru's ways. People often give him a *chhadi* (a small, decorative staff),

hoping that he will wave it like Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to. Nonetheless, without fail, he appreciates its beauty, touches it to his eyes, and respectfully hands it back.

Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Sarangpur when the North American Youth Convention was being held in Atlanta in 2018. Nonetheless, Swamishri graced the event through a live telecast. The organizers asked Swamishri about his current location, hoping that he would please the crowd by saying that he was in Atlanta. Many people cued Swamishri to reply accordingly. However, Swamishri answered immediately and honestly and with just one word, "Sarangpur." Indeed, deceit has no place in Swamishri's heart.

■ **Kabahu krodh na upje, so sāchā vairagya.**
In one who is truly detached, anger never arises.

Swamishri is also free of anger. Even in trying circumstances, he never succumbs to rage. Swamishri was once serving tea to devotees in Ahmedabad. The devotees were seated in a line. As he made his way through, he ran out of tea and went for a refill. Instead of resuming from where he had left off, Swamishri began serving from the other end of the line. Losing his patience, one devotee got up and stormed towards Swamishri. He grabbed the vessel from Swamishri's hands and, in a fit of anger, poured the boiling tea over Swamishri's bare feet. The tea blistered Swamishri's delicate skin; yet, Swamishri did not utter a word of complaint. This incident, along with countless others, shows Swamishri calm and composed personality, according to Muktanand Swami's description.

■ **Tyāge tikhā tamtamā, rasnā bhogvilās...**
He renounces tasty foods and other sensory pleasures.

Maharaj says in a scripture known as the *Dharmamrut* that one who conquers the sense of taste has found victory over everything.

Let us understand Mahant Swami Maharaj's disinterest in taste in two ways. The first is Swamishri's dedication towards fasting. As a *yuvak* and young sadhu, he fasted regularly according to Yogiji Maharaj's wish. During such times, he would not eat or drink anything for the entire day. Often, Yogiji Maharaj would even have him fast for days in a row. Once, he even fasted for five days at once.

Even at an elderly age, Swamishri continued fasting regularly. In 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Robbinsville, USA. The heat was intense, and the workload was substantial. As a result, senior sadhus had asked Swamishri to permit volunteers to take fruits and juices on Janmashtami, rather than observe a waterless fast as was the norm. Swamishri agreed to their request, but he himself decided to fast without water for the day. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami beseeched him to at least drink some juice; however, Swamishri refused, saying that he would be okay fasting, as he was not involved physically in any of the preparations. Countless such instances testify to Swamishri's indifference towards taste.

A second factor that shows Mahant Swami Maharaj to be above taste is the type of food that he eats daily. For years, Mahant Swami Maharaj has had his food prepared without salt or savoury spices; as a result, it is bland and without taste.

Several years ago, some children and teens from North America had travelled to India to visit several of the Sanstha's mandirs. They had Swamishri's darshan while he was eating lunch in Bochasan.

Out of curiosity, one child asked, "What are you having for lunch?"

Swamishri smiled and asked, "Would you like to try some?"

The child nodded in delight. Mahant Swami took a spoonful of *parvarnu shak* and gave it to the child. The child eagerly put the *parvarnu shak* in his mouth; and instantly, his delight changed to disgust. The food was so bland that the child struggled to eat it.

"How can you eat food that is so flavourless?" he asked Swamishri.

"I experience the joy of having attained Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj," Swamishri replied. "Consequently, I have no need for any other taste."

On another occasion, Swamishri sat for lunch while in a flight from Ahmedabad to Nairobi. After offering his prayers, Swamishri began to eat.

"The same menu every day?" one of Swamishri's attendants asked. "How can you possibly enjoy this?"

"I am enjoying the flavour of Bhagwan," Swamishri answered.

Swamishri's dedication to fasting and his penchant for bland foods show him to be above the sense of taste.

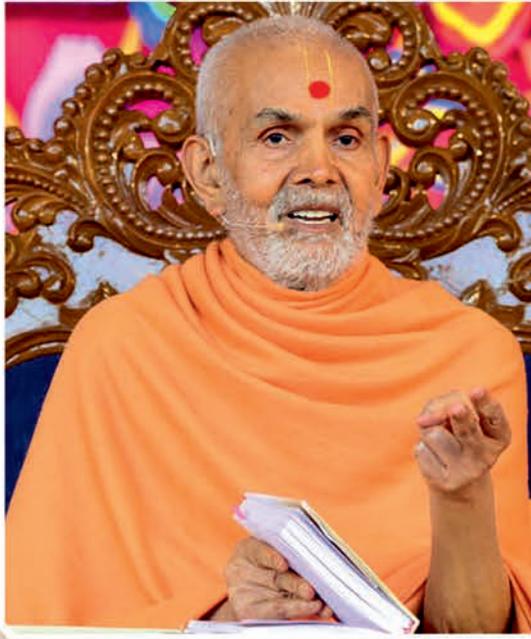
■ **Muktānand so santke, sadā rahat Hari pās.**
God forever resides within such a Sant, says Muktanand.

Muktanand Swami concludes his kirtan by saying that God forever stays with such a Sadhu. Mahant Swami Maharaj fully embodies the virtues Muktanand Swami has extolled in this kirtan. And thus, Swamishri has God within him at all times.

Yogiji Maharaj confirmed this fact when he once exclaimed, "One who has done the *samagam* of Pujya Narayan Swami (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) and Pujya Mahant Shri Keshavjivandas (Mahant Swami Maharaj) has done the *samagam* of Maharaj himself!"

Indeed, this is the secret behind the bliss we experience in Mahant Swami Maharaj's presence – just as being in his company is like being in Maharaj's company, his darshan is also Maharaj's darshan, his loving words are Maharaj's loving words, and his uplifting blessings are Maharaj's uplifting blessings. We are truly fortunate to have attained such a pure, divine guru – the Aksharbrahman Satpuruṣ – who is the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. ◆

(Edited by Sadhu Brahmasētudas)



Two Types of Vivek

Mahant Swami Maharaj elaborated upon Vachanamrut Gadhada I 16 in a satsang assembly in Morbi on 16 June 2019

There are two types of *vivek* (etiquette or wisdom). One refers to discipline and social decorum. This means that when one bows the other person also bows. However, they may not always be heartfelt bows. The second is Shriji Maharaj's explanation about bowing heartfully. He explains about spiritual *vivek*, which is way above the social decorum aspect of it that we understand in our minds.

'A wise devotee [*viveki*] of God who can discern between *sat* and *asat* identifies the flaws

within himself and thoughtfully eradicates them' (reference from the Vachanamrut). *Sat* means one's *atma*. *Asat* means one's body. One does not find such explanations in the worldly context, in which one sees the faults of others. However, in satsang, if one looks at others' faults it amounts to being worldly minded. But when one enshrines the *vivek* [prescribed by Maharaj] the devotee starts looking at his own faults.

Even while doing satsang one does not focus on one's own faults. And if one [genuinely] does, one congratulates oneself, 'I have seen my faults', thus believing it to be a great achievement. Thereafter, one thinks, 'This fault of mine is not good because it will take me on the wrong path, on the path of destruction.' After discerning in this true way one then renounces one's faults.

One who relates the spiritual discourses one hears to someone else is worthless. One should take them upon oneself, 'The fault described lies in me.' One who is really spiritually inclined (has *khap*) will see his own fault. Otherwise, in spite of attending daily satsang for years, one will remain flawed.

Maharaj says here, '[He] identifies the flaws within himself and thoughtfully eradicates them.' But he does not accumulate them. We do not amass garbage and say, 'Oh, the garbage is so nice.' Similarly, finding faults in others is garbage.

'Any apparent flaws he perceives in the Sant or a *satsangi*' (from Vachanamrut) – in fact there aren't any flaws. But when one who is [*viveki*] apparently sees them, he renounces them and imbibes the virtues. Of what use is garbage? Why not collect pearls! Shriji Maharaj and the Gunatit Sants teach us to root out and discard [the habit of] fault-finding [towards others] altogether. Those who are (spiritually) courageous truly perceive the virtues (of others). But most perceive the

virtues of others in a superficial way – this means one perceives another’s virtues and then also his faults. However, by perceiving only the virtues of others one becomes enriched and wealthy.

‘Moreover, he never perceives any faults whatsoever in God’ (from Vachanamrut). And he believes that whatever faults and shortcomings there are lie in himself. In fact, such a person believes that whatever faults he sees in another person are a reflection of his own faults. When one imbibes such an attitude only then can one understand Bhagwan. If there is garbage in one’s mind how can one understand Bhagwan. By believing Bhagwan and his Sadhu to be pure only then can one understand (and realize) both of them.

‘When the Sant tells him, “You are distinct from the mind, body, *indriyas* and *pran*, you are *satya*; you are the knower of the body, *indriyas* and *prans*, which are all *asatya* – he accepts this to be the truth. He then behaves as the *atma* – distinct from them all – but never follows the instincts of his own mind’ (from Vachanamrut). If one perceives this, which is a very big thing, then all else (that is bad within oneself) will disappear. Side with and pay a little attention towards satsang. Maharaj has said one should ponder a little, (about satsang). Here, Maharaj says, ‘Never follow the [worldly] instincts of one’s mind.’ The mind causes all problems. A little idleness of mind creates problems. The mind takes you on the wrong road. It generates wrong thoughts. In spite of years of sadhana, no matter who you may be, (the mind) spoils you. But by repeatedly thinking about not following the mind’s instincts and imbibing satsang one’s work (of liberation) will be accomplished. But we do not have a strong inclination to imbibe it. And so the mind takes you on the wrong path.

Gunatitanand Swami has said, ‘For millions of lifetimes we have done the bidding of our mind. In this birth, we have the association of Bhagwan, so we should do what he says. We should give up our mind’s likings, restrain it and pulverize

it into pieces and do whatever Bhagwan and the Sant says. But because we are steeped in worldly activities we perform our spiritual and satsang activities superficially. So, our thoughts should be aligned with Bhagwan and the Sant’s (thoughts). We should have spiritual leanings.

This satsang is such that if you contemplate a little and put in some effort, you will start doing satsang and will feel good about it. But, because we never ever think about satsang our life veers off in the wrong direction. At that time, we should apply brakes and avoid going in the wrong direction. The reason behind this is that we have the association of (a great) Bhagwan. If we make even little efforts, with a little spiritual inclination, then we will attain a lot. We should make efforts with sincere feelings and with a strong spiritual inclination.

‘Such a person identifies those objects and evil company that may cause bondage or raise deficiencies in his *ekantik* dharma and shuns them, but he does not become bound by them’ (from Vachanamrut). One has to think about what causes mundane bondage. Instead, we hold on to that which causes bondage and give up something else (that which liberates us).

We never engage in social dealings that incur losses for us. In fact, we instantly refrain from doing something (that causes losses), and think about it. This we should also apply while doing satsang. The attainment (*prapti*) of the (Divine) is similar to having attained *amrut* (immortalizing nectar). By listening to satsang discourses and pondering upon them one becomes immortal. Having attained such a (great) Bhagwan and Sant we should not disrespect and insult them. We should align our thoughts with their thoughts and likings. Only then will we enjoy this satsang and reap great benefits. ◆

Sourced from Mahant Swami Maharaj’s Vicharan report by Brahmavatsal Swami

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN'S

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE VACHANAMRUT



Part 4

In this fourth article of the series, we shall discuss Bhagwan Swaminarayan's personal experience of the knowledge that he imparted. In the Vachanamrut, his method of imparting spiritual knowledge is unique.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was Parabrahman, the ultimate reality, he was omniscient and also had a personal experience of spiritual sadhana. Therefore, he could make statements as final judgements instantly, without doubts and hesitation, with supreme confidence. In the Gujarati Vachanamrut, the proper convention for emphasis that Maharaj uses is '૪' at the end of such statements, meaning, "This is indeed the truth, a fact." Hence, one may also state that he was the manifest form of knowledge. Space limits us to consider only a few examples here.

In Gadhada I 7, Shriji Maharaj says that in the shastras whenever one encounters philosophical principles, one does not understand them and becomes confused. Hence, I will explain upon them as they are.

In Panchala 2, he expounds upon the Yoga and Sankhya shastras, clearly citing their viability and limitations. Then, he says, "In this manner, we have described the eternal principles of the Sankhya shastras and the Yoga shastras having thoroughly pondered over them."

In Gadhada I 64, he discusses the concept of *sharir-shariri*. In conclusion, he says, "We have delivered this discourse having experienced it directly. Therefore there is not a trace of doubt about it."

DHARMA

In Gadhada II 35, he refutes the idiom, 'Man hoi changa to kathrotma Ganga,' which means

that if the mind is pure then a vessel of [plain] water is as good as [sacred] Ganga water. Then he elaborates on the dharma of male and female devotees. He then confidently states, "Regardless of how much a person may have mastered *sama-dhi*... if he begins to stay in the close company of women, there is no way in which he can maintain his dharma. Similarly, regardless of how staunch a woman may be in observing dharma, if she stays in the close company of men, then she will also in no way be able to maintain her dharma... This fact is true and no one should doubt it."

In Gadhada III 32, he elaborates on the meaning of *shlok* 2.59 from the Gita, about controlling diet gradually in order to attain mastery over the *indriyas*. After achieving this, if an aspirant then lovingly engages his mind in *navdha bhakti*, he will remain in satsang till the end of his life. If he fails to behave in this manner, he will surely succumb to his *indriyas* and sooner or later, fall from satsang. After giving another example, he emphasizes, "This is a fact."

SENSE PLEASURES (PANCH VISHAYS)

In Gadhada III 33, Shriji Maharaj elaborates on avoiding the four factors of women, wealth, *dehabhiman* – body consciousness – and *swabhav*, in order to become an *ekantik bhakta*. An aspirant who succumbs to any one of these factors will not be able to develop steadfast bhakti. Then, Maharaj boldly states, "What I have just said is absolutely true, there is no doubt in it whatsoever."

In Gadhada II 47, Shriji Maharaj describes the futility of indulging in the *panchvishays*. Only one who is a *drashta* – realized with the ability to

foresee the future of *jivas* – can create such a picturesque imagery. He says, “*Jivas* have previously indulged in the *panchvishays* through countless bodies, as *devas*, humans, etc... Now that we are devotees of Bhagwan, indulging in the *vishays* for a further year, or two, even five years will still not fulfil us. It is as if the earth has split down to *Patal*... and if we pour water in it, it can never be filled. Similarly, the *indriyas* have never become satiated by the *vishays* and they never will be.”

OMNISCIENCE

In Gadhada I 18, Shriji Maharaj indirectly reveals his omniscience and his knowledge of the past, future and present regarding sadhana. He urges devotees to maintain purity of their *indriyas* by observing *niyams*. At one point he says, “Countless have become *muktas* and countless more will become so. Amongst them, none have been able to indulge in pleasures of the senses and yet remain uninfluenced by them; none will be able to do so in the future; nor is there anyone like that at present. And even after performing sadhana for millions of years, nobody will be capable of attaining such a state.”

IMPORTANCE OF UPASANA

On the path of sadhana, *upasana* – the mode of worshipping Paramatma – is vital. Without *upasana* an aspirant cannot attain any *siddhi* or power. In Gadhada I 56, Shriji Maharaj emphasizes its importance, “Many become *siddhas*, some become omniscient, some become *devas* and attain countless types of greatness, including *parampada* (*moksha*). All these are attained through the strength of Bhagwan’s *upasana*. Without *upasana*, nothing can be accomplished.”

In Gadhada III 36, Maharaj emphasizes the importance of *upasana* even to attain *atma*-realization and cites his experience of meeting many realized yogis, especially Gopal Yogi whom he met in Nepal and from whom he mastered ashtang yoga. He states, “I believe that it is impossible to

see the *atma* and Brahman without the *upasana* and meditation of Bhagwan’s form. Only through *upasana* can the *atma* and Brahman be seen...”

The shastras mention the possibility of *atma*-realization through *nirbij* Sankhya and Yoga. But he emphatically adds, “I have not seen anyone do so, nor is the claim in accordance with my experience. Therefore the claim is false.”

JIVANMUKTI

Obviously, being Parabrahman, Shriji Maharaj is above *maya*. Yet for us *jivas* he gives his own example as if he was a *sadhak* (aspirant) and describes his experience and gives a guarantee.

In Gadhada II 13, he says, “Whoever realizes this form [Bhagwan’s form] will, like me, never be drawn towards the pleasures of the *panchvishays*...”

Similarly in Gadhada III 39, he gives the reason for his realization of *atma* and Paramatma, “I have thoroughly realized the two aforementioned factors. In fact, whoever realizes them would also behave accordingly if ever he were somehow put in similar circumstances. Therefore these two factors should be understood by all means.”

Finally, in the final paragraph of the final Vachanamrut delivered on 25 July 1829, Shriji Maharaj makes a heart revealing statement about himself, “I deliver these discourses to you not from any imagination of my mind, nor to display any sort of aptitude. I have experienced all that I have spoken about. In fact, I speak in accordance to what I practise.”

Such a truthful statement immersed in humility and soaked with personal experience renders Bhagwan Swaminarayan an unparalleled status in the firmament of all *acharyas* and mystics of Sanatan Dharma who have expounded on spiritual sadhana. Hence, it also places the Vachanamrut on an equal orbital plane. ◆



VACHANAMRUT

A GUIDE FOR EVERYONE

Everyone faces problems in life – be it failing an exam, losing a job, or having to endure a difficult spouse, disobedient children, or poor health. Most of us try to solve these problems by relying on external solutions. However, in the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj encourages us to look internally for solutions. The solutions that Maharaj imparts through the Vachanamrut, moreover, can help any person in any phase of life. Whether you're a struggling freshman trying to gain your footing in college, a parent or child trying to learn how best to deal with your loved ones, or a *satsangi* with a burning desire to progress in satsang, the Vachanamrut has life lessons for all.

ACADEMIC LIFE

Many of us start our educational pursuits with high hopes for the future. As children, some of us dream of being politicians, business entrepreneurs, law-enforcement officers, or medical professionals. As adolescence sets in, however, entertainment, social media and peer groups often cause our energies to dissipate, leading us to lose the focus and drive we once had towards achieving our academic and professional goals.

The Vachanamrut presents a simple solution for reinvigorating our drive to achieve. In Gadhada I 25, Maharaj encourages us to reign in our diverse energies and develop absolute concentration on a singular goal. He argues that such

focus can lead to unprecedented inner strength.

Keeping in mind his largely agrarian audience, Maharaj explains his point using a farming analogy. Specifically, he describes an irrigation apparatus that employs oxen to draw water out of a well. Each pair of oxen yoked to the apparatus draws water using one large pail of water, known as a *kosh*. As the pair walks back and forth, the *kosh* is lowered into the well, filled with water, and then raised to the well's edge to be emptied into a water channel. An average farmer will employ either one or two pairs of oxen in this task, sending an intermittent flow of water through the field. Maharaj, however, analogizes a giant apparatus through



which twenty pairs of oxen pull twenty pails, respectively. He explains, “If twenty pails of water are drawn from a well and the flow of water from each pail is allowed to flow in a separate direction, there would be little force in each flow. However, if the flow of all twenty pails of water is combined, the resultant flow would become extremely powerful – almost like that of a river – and would not be able to be diverted by any means whatsoever.” In the same way, Maharaj concludes, consolidating our energies and channelling them in a common direction can lead to renewed vigour, helping us achieve our goals. For the student, this means that cutting out distractions and developing singular focus on education can lead to better results.

Cutting down on leisure and studying more intently may seem like a difficult task; nonetheless, Maharaj puts forth that we can achieve anything that we set our minds to – all it requires, he says, is eagerness and regular practice. In Kariyani 10, for instance, he says, “A person who has great zeal in any endeavour would never be hindered even if he were to face thousands of obstacles.” In Gadhada II 33, on the other hand, he states, “After all, what is impossible to achieve with this human body? That which is practised regularly can definitely be achieved.” Maharaj then illustrates his point using another irrigation analogy, saying, “For example, due to the daily drawing of water from a well, the constant rubbing of even a soft rope can cause a groove in the very hard piece of rock that lies on the edge of that well.” In this way, Maharaj presents passion as the key to being unaffected by obstacles and habitual practice as a means of achieving that which may otherwise seem undoable. For the student, this means that dedication and constant endeavour can help one engender concentration and improved results.



FAMILY LIFE

Steven Covey writes in the introduction to *The Seven Habits for Highly Effective Families* that strong families with healthy relationships do not just happen to be or occur due to luck. Instead, he writes, engendering strong bonds amongst the family requires energy, talent, desire, vision, and determination. Just as other milestones we strive to achieve in life, he adds, building a healthy family requires time, thought, planning, and prioritization. Moreover, it demands hard work and sacrifice. If you want it, he concludes, you must pay the price.

Throughout the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj offers valuable advice regarding what it is, precisely, that needs to be thought through, sacrificed, and prioritized in order to create a successful family. This advice is particularly valuable coming from Shriji Maharaj since he himself was the extraordinarily successful convener of a grand ‘family’ of 3,000 sadhus and two million devotees that made up the nascent satsang fellowship.

One key point that we can glean from the Vachanamrut on the topic of family unity concerns mutual respect. A common complaint from parents is that today’s youth do not respect their elders. In light of the Vachanamrut, though, we may ask ourselves as complaining parents whether or not we offer our children the respect that we demand for ourselves. Indeed, enduring appreciation can never be a one-way exchange. Maharaj expresses such sentiments in Gadhada II 47, wherein he says, “If a person has a group of sadhus staying with him, and if he can look after them sincerely and respectfully, those sadhus will happily stay with him. However, if he does not know how to look after them, they will not stay with him.” Although Maharaj’s words here seem directed to sadhus, they reflect a far-reaching social dynamic – one who wishes to

be loved must first love others, one who wants care must first care for others, and one who desires respect must first respect others.

While advising the leaders of his groups of sadhus on how to take care of their juniors, though, Maharaj also advises subordinates on how to deal with difficult leaders. In particular, he says that they should learn to tolerate; further, he says, rather than focusing on their caretakers' methods, they should concentrate on the direction in which their caretakers are guiding them. Applied to family life, Maharaj's advice tells youths to endure insistent or seemingly patronising parental guidance and focus instead on the positive change such behaviour hopes to engender.

A common cause of strife in the household is divergent viewpoints on issues that are sometimes of great importance – such as finances, matrimony and career planning – but at other times are ordinary – such as planning family outings and the implementation of house rules. The Vachanamrut offers a solution to such conflicts by arguing that mutual respect should include regard for each other's thoughts, desires, and decisions. In the context of family life, this respect entails setting aside stubbornness and being willing to compromise.

In this light, in Kariyani 11, Maharaj puts forth that such compromise is a defining characteristic of true love. In Gadhada III 16, he similarly defines fidelity, saying that a loyal wife acts according to her husband's wishes. This example, though it describes a faithful wife, is one that Maharaj and the Gunatit guru *parampara* have expanded to say that all members of the family should be willing to set aside their desires and compromise according to their loved one's wishes.

Another key factor contributing to family unity is chastity. People consecrate wedding ceremonies with vows of fidelity and hopes of living happily ever after. Yet, unchecked desires often shatter such pledges and lead to split families. In

fact, in many developed countries, about half of marriages end up in divorce or separation, with many such rifts occurring due to adultery.

In the Vachanamrut, Maharaj offers several solutions to this burning problem. One such solution, presented in Gadhada I 72, suggests that people should never take advantage of unbalanced power dynamics. This sociological phenomenon has been at the crux of many of the violations that have come to light under the Me Too movement. Certainly, people who are party to such relationships often fall into relationships that lead to breaches in their marital vows. In this Vachanamrut, Maharaj explains that it is a grave sin to capitalize on such situations. In this way, he guides us away from indulgence and encourages us to remain faithful to our vows.

A second way in which Maharaj promotes chastity appears in Gadhada III 16, wherein he advises women to respect their vows by harbouring singular devotion towards their husbands. In Gadhada II 3, he advises men to do the same, saying that they should regard women other than their wives as mothers, sisters and daughters. The same advice can be extended to women, who can be advised to see men other than their husbands as fathers, brothers and sons. Maharaj thus offers a solution that neutralizes interactions with members of the opposite gender and thus protects the sanctity of both marital vows and relationships with others.

A third remedy to preserving chastity is a physical practice that Maharaj describes in Gadhada II 35. Indeed, people are most susceptible to infidelity when they are in solitude. Therefore, Maharaj advises both men and women to avoid staying in isolation with people of the opposite gender who are not their spouses. In this manner, Maharaj exhorts us to stay away from situations that may lead to us faltering in our vows.

The Vachanamrut thus offers a great deal of guidance for families, ranging from issues such as mutual respect and tolerance to compromise, fidelity and chastity.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Along with helping us improve our academic and family lives, the Vachanamrut also guides us ahead on the spiritual path. In this respect, the Vachanamrut is like a beacon for those lost at sea.

From the time we join satsang, we have a burning desire to progress. Often, though, we are unclear about what it means to progress in satsang; we thus often wrongly equate worldly progress with spiritual progress. Namely, we rely on external signs such as our *seva* roles to gauge our development, believing that receiving duties that are administratively significant are reflective of spiritual growth.

Maharaj, however, defines spiritual progress quite differently in Gadhada I 28, wherein he says, “When a person is likely to progress in satsang, pure desires steadily flourish within him. Day by day, he sees only virtues in all *satsangis*. He views all devotees as superior to himself and considers himself to be insignificant. Moreover, he experiences the bliss of satsang in his heart 24 hours a day. Such characteristics indicate that pure desires have flourished. The more such a person practises satsang, the more he benefits; and eventually, he attains profound greatness.” Maharaj thus defines advancement in satsang as a cognitive process focused on developing humility and purity and experiencing inner joy. By offering such a clear definition of progress, he helps us refine our perspectives and come to focus on the fundamentals of satsang.

No matter how focused a person is on satsang’s core values, though, a formidable obstacle for all is *kusang*. Accordingly, Maharaj helps us safeguard our spiritual progress first by helping us identify *kusang* and then describing what happens to us if we are not careful to veer away from its influence. Maharaj defines *kusang* in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 48 as company that causes us to falter in our *niyams*, *upasana*, and faith in God.

Maharaj further explains that, along with avoiding *kusang*, fostering spiritual progress

requires profound association with the Satpurush. Association, he says in Gadhada II 31, involves contemplating the Satpurush’s divine virtues, which leads to the development of redemptive qualities in one’s life. Maharaj explains, “If one associates with Brahman through continuous contemplation in this manner, the *jiva* acquires the virtues of that Brahman.” Maharaj elaborates on the process of contemplation in several Vachanamruts, one of which is Gadhada I 67. In this Vachanamrut, he says we should compare ourselves to the Satpurush by reflecting on his innate divine qualities and setting them against our worldly dispositions. In this way, while comparing ourselves to the Satpurush, the pain that we experience for being *satsangis* with such drawbacks will lead us to strive to develop qualities like those of the Satpurush.

The Vachanamrut thus helps us secure progress in satsang by advising us to focus on satsang’s fundamentals, stay away from *kusang* and associate with the Satpurush.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding sections, we understood how the Vachanamrut offers solutions to problems that we face in school, at home, and in our spiritual lives. Nonetheless, our considerations here have been reflected merely in words. One may ask, though, “Is it possible to live by the teachings of the Vachanamrut in today’s world?”

Gratefully, we have with us the *satpurush*, who is the manifest form of both Shrii Maharaj and the Vachanamrut itself, and who lives the Vachanamrut every second of his life. Maharaj has said that the essence of the shastras can only be understood and imbibed from such a person. With this in mind, let us endeavour to comprehend the wisdom of the Vachanamrut and live by the principles therein. ◆

(Edited by Sadhu Brahmasetudas)



VACHANAMRUT

A GUIDE FOR YOUTHS

There was once a young teen from Rajkot who was quite talented and was known as an ideal student. His friends and family had much hope for him. However, things took a turn when he acquired a mobile phone. His grades started decreasing and the hours spent on using the mobile started increasing – both exponentially. The teen’s father, realizing what was happening, took the instrument away and asked his son to refocus his attention on his studies. The teen, however, quite literally, could not live without his phone; he ended his life soon thereafter.

Another such case involved a young adult from Delhi who was obsessed with video games. To avoid his nagging parents, he secretly rented a room and equipped it with accessories to enhance his gaming experience. Pretending to go to school, he and his friends would lock themselves in the room and play for hours at a time. His father soon found out about the room and scolded him for it. Unable to bear the insult, the youngster murdered his father, mother and sister the same night. Upon being arrested, he showed no remorse.

Both these examples are extreme, yet their

underlying causes are common factors that negatively influence the lives of many adolescents and young adults. This article considers two such factors – a lack of self-control and emotional instability – and examines solutions that the Vachanamrut offers to these hurtful phenomena.

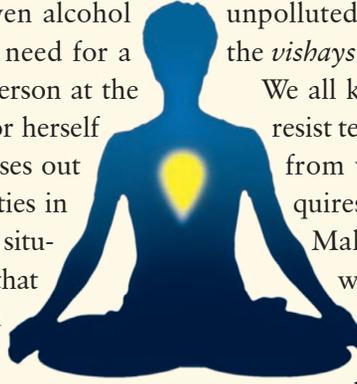
LACK OF SELF-CONTROL

Both youngsters in the scenarios presented above lacked self-control. Both started with electronic devices in their hands, but they soon had surrendered themselves to their devices without even knowing it. Parents often warn young adults about such dangers; youngsters, though, many times respond as follows:

- ‘Don’t tell me what I have to do. I know all that.’
- ‘Why do you keep nagging me about such small things? I am not a baby anymore.’
- ‘Don’t interfere with my life. Let me be independent.’

Ironically, while trying to be independent of their parents, such adolescents and young adults become dependent or even addicted to mobiles, computers, games, social media, fashion, clubs,

parties, friends and sometimes even alcohol or drugs. Addiction is a constant need for a substance in increasing doses. A person at the mercy of addictions loses himself or herself in an imaginary world and thus loses out on academic and social opportunities in the real world. A person in such a situation needs to learn self-control – that is, where he or she should draw a line and say no.



Maharaj teaches the art of self-control in the Vachanamrut. He first advises us to discriminate between right and wrong and then act accordingly. In Gadhada I 8, for instance, he says, “One should indulge in the *vishays*¹ only as prescribed in the shastras; but one should never indulge in them by transgressing the regulations that are described in the shastras.” Maharaj justifies the need for such discrimination in Gadadha I 18, wherein he states, “If one gives liberty to the five senses without applying the discrimination of what is suitable or unsuitable, one’s *antahkaran*² becomes polluted. On the other hand, if one indulges only in pure *vishays* through the five senses, then one’s *antahkaran* becomes pure.” He emphasizes this vital concept in Gadhada II 2 with an example, saying, “If, through the five senses, one firmly abstains from (inappropriate) *vishays*... then the ‘flow’ of such objects cannot enter within from outside. For example, a well can be cleaned only when the small streamlets of water that flow into the well are clogged with cloth rags. In the same way, by keeping control over the outer senses, the external *vishays* cannot enter the *antahkaran*.” Maharaj thus stresses the importance of discernment. Indeed, just as polluted water cannot be used to quench thirst, a polluted mind is useless in achieving the constructive life goals we harbour during our youth. And to keep the mind

unpolluted, there is a strong need to control the *vishays* we indulge in.

We all know, though, that it is not easy to resist temptation even when we know right from wrong. Implementing wisdom requires tremendous willpower. However, Maharaj advises us that, as the *atma*, we hold the upper hand in this struggle with the mind and senses. In Gadhada II 12, he compares the body to a kingdom within which the *atma* is the king, and the senses and mind are the king’s people. He further says that we must remain vigilant in this struggle, for the mind and senses will not act according to the *atma*’s wishes if the *atma* relaxes its authority.

Similarly, in Panchala 3, Maharaj says to treat the senses and the mind as foes; this involves treating them just as a king would treat an enemy, never trusting them and keeping them chained in close watch while extracting work or information from them.

In Gadhada II 22, Maharaj further explains the process of fighting the mind by citing his own, successful example. He says, “I then told my *man*, ‘I know your true form. So, look! If you harbour a thought about any object other than God, I will crush you to pieces.’ In the same way, I told my *buddhi*, ‘If you harbour any form of resolve other than that of God, you will be in trouble.’ Similarly, I told my *chitta*, ‘If you contemplate on anything other than God, I will also crush you to pieces.’ In the same way, I told my *ahamkar*, ‘If you harbour any form of pride except that of servitude towards God, I will destroy you.’”

Maharaj thus teaches us that, to achieve self-control, we must be cruel and relentless, not toward others, but towards our own senses and mind.

An uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction



1. Objects of the senses.
2. The mind.

destroys. The same chain reaction, if controlled, can generate electricity. Similarly, youths are gigantic pools of energy. Without self-control, this energy can become destructive. Through the Vachanamrut, though, youths can and have been able to channel their energies constructively.

Let us consider an example. A youth by the name of Raj Vora shares such an experience: “I joined satsang in 2008. In *katha*, I used to hear about self-restraint, focus and *niyams*. Yet, my habit of watching TV and films continued, even just months before my final exams in 2016. One day, my eyes fell upon Vachanamrut Gadhada II 2. I was taken aback. It wasn’t the first time I was reading that Vachanamrut. However, today, the Vachanamrut started impacting me. If I control my eyes according to Gadhada I 18, I thought, my mind will become pure, and I will be able to better concentrate on my studies. I decided to put my mobile aside and also to stay away from movies. I continued attending *ravi sabhas* and reading the Vachanamrut daily. As a result, I did very well in my exams and made my way to the world-renowned IIT (Indian Institute of Technology), Indore. I am thankful to Shriji Maharaj and his words in the Vachanamrut.”

Maharaj thus advises us through the Vachanamrut on how to learn the art of self-control. He tells us first to learn to discriminate between right and wrong and then garner the strength to act accordingly. Acting on that which is right, of course, requires courage, a quality that arises from knowing that, as the *atma*, we are in charge of our decisions. Lastly, by providing his own example, Maharaj suggests that we should learn the art of self-control from none other than the best.

EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY

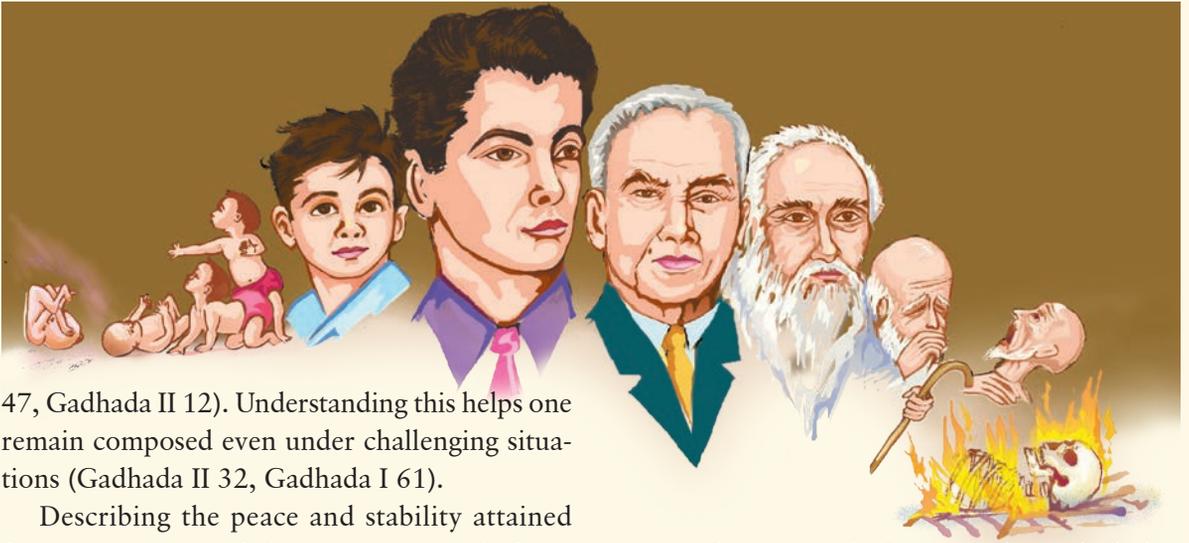
In the two scenarios mentioned earlier, a lack of physical self-control was accompanied by a lack of emotional self-control. The parents’ actions were in their children’s best interests, but immaturity

prevented the children from realizing this. Maharaj describes a similar scenario in Gadhada II 23, wherein he says, “If a child attempts to grasp a snake, touch a flame or hold an unsheathed sword, it becomes upset when it is not allowed to do so; yet if it is allowed to do so, it will hurt itself.”

We are at risk of emotional instability when either people or circumstances prevent us from fulfilling our desires. Such unsteadiness often results in stress, depression, anxiety and, sometimes, even self-harm. Statistics attest to the prominence of this phenomenon. One in every eight Americans experiences a major depression episode during their youth; moreover, among youths, suicide is the second leading cause of death, with 25 youths committing suicide every hour worldwide.

Understanding that difficulty is inevitable is the first step to defeating harmful thoughts. The second step is to cultivate understanding. In this light, Gunatitanand Swami says that it would be challenging to cover the entire earth to prevent ourselves from stepping on stones and thorns; it is easier, he says, to avoid injury by merely wearing shoes. Here, “wearing shoes” implies being wise. Maharaj discusses what being wise entails in Gadhada II 60. Therein, Muktanand Swami asks, “Maharaj, life is full of difficulties. Amidst all these difficulties, what understanding should a devotee of God cultivate to remain happy at heart?” Maharaj answers by citing three forms of awareness that devotees should develop: 1) awareness of the *atma*, 2) understanding of the world’s transiency, and 3) awareness of God’s greatness.

Being aware of the *atma* helps us to overcome physical and emotional limitations. Indeed, the body’s and *atma*’s particular characteristics are dissimilar from each other (Sarangpur 4). Hence, none of the body’s flaws – which include physical disabilities and negative traits such as lust, anger and avarice – are present in the *atma* (Gadhada II 12). Also, as discussed above, the *atma* transcends the body and is its controller (Gadhada I



47, Gadhada II 12). Understanding this helps one remain composed even under challenging situations (Gadhada II 32, Gadhada I 61).

Describing the peace and stability attained from awareness of the *atma*, a youth from Mehsana explains, “At school, people used to tease me due to my physical disabilities... At such times, Maharaj’s words regarding *atma*-realization supported me and kept me calm to the extent that I would no longer feel upset when teased.”

In this way, being conscious of our identity as the *atma* helps us to remain stable by allowing us to rise above negativity and control over our emotions.

Awareness of the world’s futility and transiency, also known as *sankhya*, is a second factor Maharaj shows to help us remain equipoised. *Sankhya* helps us to realize that nothing in our lives is permanent, not even that which we most cherish. Maharaj teaches us the steps of practising *sankhya* as follows:

1. Understand that worldly pleasures never ultimately satisfy, no matter how much we indulge them (Gadhada II 47).
2. Consider the misery attached to worldly objects (Gadhada II 24).
3. Contemplate the extreme insignificance of material objects in comparison to God’s bliss (Sarangpur 1).
4. Look beyond time and realize that everything is perishable, other than Akshardham, God’s *murti*, and the released souls (Gadhada II 24). Mahant Swami Maharaj elaborates on this last

point with an example: Imagine a large clock that covers not 12 hours but 100 years. Its enormous time span would mean that it would appear not to be moving at all. On this time scale, hours, days, and even months would pass without even notice. Similarly, everyday joys and sorrows become negligent when looked at from the perspective of one life and even more so when looked at from the perspective of the infinite births we have all taken.

Worldly joys and sorrows often leave us either inflated with ecstasy or drowned in grief. *Sankhya*, though, helps us stay stable despite such circumstances.

A recent survey of 5,000 *satsangi* adolescents and young adults revealed how the Vachanamrut impacts youths. One question, “How has the Vachanamrut helped you in difficult times?” yielded two remarkable experiences that narrate the strength of *sankhya*:

- “Everything is perishable – these words have freed my worries many times.”
- “When my father passed away, I was shattered. However, my mother read a Vachanamrut around this time that stated that we should not be excessively attached to our relatives. These words helped me regain my footing.”

In this way, Maharaj teaches us that understanding the world and its realities as temporary can help us to remain calm amidst turmoil.



A third factor that Maharaj says can help us remain stable is awareness of God's greatness. In Gadhada I 78, Maharaj describes God as "he without whose wish not even a blade of grass is able to flutter; he who is responsible for creating, sustaining and destroying countless millions of *brahmands*³; he who administers pain and pleasure to the beings residing therein; and he who is the sole doer of all that happens". With this understanding, one realizes that pain and pleasure are not caused by people or events but are given to us by God. One also understands that such incidents come to us as gifts, as God never wishes ill for his devotees (Jetalpur 5). Even challenges are seen as concessions, as Maharaj explains in Gadhada I 70, "It is as if one who is to be executed on a *shuli*⁴ gets away with the suffering of a mere pinprick."

Maharaj summarizes these thoughts in Gadhada I 74: "We are God's servants; so we should be pleased with whatever pleases him... If God seats us on an elephant, we should be happy with sitting on an elephant; and if he seats us on a donkey, we should be happy with sitting on a donkey... but in no way should we harbour any joy or grief in our minds, as everything happens by God's will. So, just as a dry leaf is blown in the air according to the wind's direction, we should also remain dependent on God and joyfully worship him, not allowing any frustration to enter our minds."

One *satsangi* youth named Mukesh Vaja

applied this type of awareness to stay composed amidst difficulty. He was not well off financially, and several members of his family had fallen gravely ill. His situation was dire. However, a *bal mandal sanchalak* named Kishore Kansagara once made him read Gadhada I 61, wherein Maharaj says, "We should become increasingly pleased as God puts us through more severe hardships, bearing in mind, 'The more misery God inflicts upon me, the more bound he will become to me; thereby, he will not be away from me for even a moment.'" Maharaj's advice here about not becoming disheartened in the face of misery gave Mukesh a new perspective on life. Externally, his circumstances had not changed; yet, the understanding he gained from the Vachanamrut's explanation of God's greatness infused him with strength that allowed him to remain joyful as he continued his struggle to support his family.

Maharaj thus advises us to maintain our emotional stability by developing an awareness of the *atma's* resilience, the world's impermanence and God's benevolence.

CONCLUSION

By helping us understand our true identity, realize God's glory and put into practice values such as tolerance and acceptance, the Vachanamrut acts as a beacon to guide youths through the sometimes terrifying, stormy ocean to the firm, stable shores of calmness and tranquillity.

Maharaj's advice on how to gain control over oneself and one's emotions are solutions to two of the many difficulties facing today's adolescents and young adults. Yet, the Vachanamrut addresses many more issues than just these two. Diving into the ocean of wisdom that forms the Vachanamrut, we find countless pearls of wisdom – some small, some large, but all priceless. ◆

(Edited by Sadhu Brahmasvetudas and
Sadhu Adhyatmachintandas)

3. A *brahmand* is an individual unit of creation.

4. A device used for capital punishment.

AT 90 YEARS OF AGE...

Bavajibhai's Inspiring Satsang Practices

Bavajibhai Patel is 90 years old and a *satsangi* who lives in Anand, Gujarat. His father, Ranchhodbhai, had served Shastriji Maharaj. Bavajibhai and his father often seated Shastriji Maharaj on their hands locked together and carried him on an overbridge at the Anand railway station. Nirgundas Swami passed away in his farm in Anand.

In spite of being a nonagenarian Bavaji rigorously practises satsang. Since long he has been observing waterless fasts on the two *ekadashis* every month. However, since the last three years Bavajibhai has been observing seven waterless fasts every month: Shastriji Maharaj's birthday (*sud* 5), Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthday (*sud* 8), Shriji Maharaj's birthday (*sud* 9) – Bavajibhai thus observes two consecutive fasts (*sud* 8 and *sud* 9) – *sud ekadashi*, Gunatitanand's birthday (Punam), *vad ekadashi* and Yogi Maharaj's birthday (*vad* 12) – again he observes two consecutive fasts (*vad* 11 and *vad* 12).

When Bavajibhai was asked why he observes so many fasts he replied joyfully, "To please Bhagwan."

"Don't you feel hungry?" someone asked.

"If it doesn't come to my mind, then no."

"Don't you feel weak?"

"Yes, but I simply remain lying down [during fasts] in bed."

Besides his monthly fasts, Bavajibhai's daily routine includes self-discipline and

doing bhajan. On asking him about his daily routine he answered, "I wake up at 12 midnight. After taking bath I do puja, in which I do 70 *malas*. Then, I perform *arti*, sing the *ashtaks* and pray. Since my legs don't work I remain in bed and exercise in a sitting position for half-an-hour."

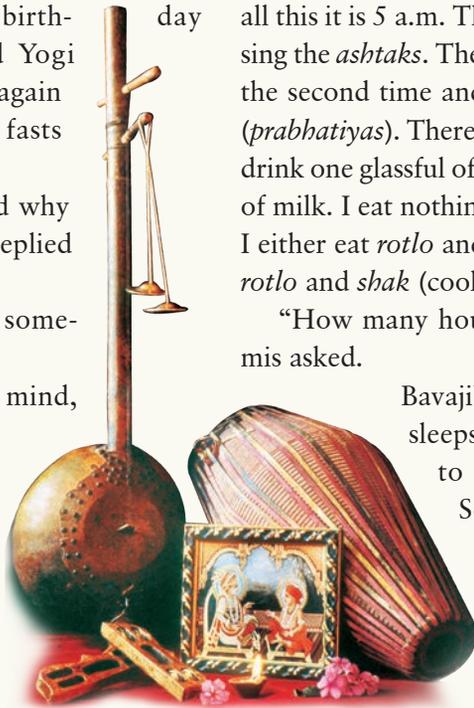
Bavajibhai is blind due to his diabetic condition. In addition, the lower half of his body has decreased blood circulation and thus he is unable to walk. In spite of his disabilities Bavajibhai remains in good spirits. He takes his condition in a positive stride, "Everything else is fine in spite of my blindness and immobility."

Bavajibhai further narrated about his daily schedule, "After my half-hour exercise I do yoga asans and pranayam. Daily, I perform 2,000 *kapalbhatas* and 2,000 *anulom-vilom* pranayams. Then, I sing the *cheshta*. By the time I complete all this it is 5 a.m. Then, I again perform *arti* and sing the *ashtaks*. Thereafter, I sing the *cheshta* for the second time and I sing 20 morning bhajans (*prabhatiyas*). Thereafter, I do 150 *malas*. Then, I drink one glassful of mung water and one glassful of milk. I eat nothing in the afternoon. At night, I either eat *rotlo* and drink a glass of milk or eat *rotlo* and *shak* (cooked vegetables)."

"How many hours do you sleep?" the swamis asked.

Bavajibhai's relatives replied, "He sleeps one hour at night and one to two hours during the day. So, it amounts to two to three hours daily."

"What is the reason you can't sleep?"



(Cont. on p. 37)

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

April–July 2019

Sarangpur, Gandhinagar, Dubai, Anand, Surat, Nadiad, Sarangpur, Ahmedabad



During the Hari Jayanti celebration Swamishri rocks Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a *hindolo*, Sarangpur

APRIL

SARANGPUR: 1–15

During Swamishri's stay in Sarangpur he visited the BAPS *hari* mandir in Botad to celebrate its 29th *patotsav* (7) and thereafter he blessed a large satsang assembly.

9, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Visavadar (Junagadh) and Umedpura (Himmatnagar).

11, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Shirohi (Rajasthan) and Nirbhay Mandal (Bhavnagar).

14, Sunday; 238th Birthday Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

In the morning, Swamishri joyfully performed *pujan* of the 'Swaminarayan Ashray Dikshamantra' inscribed on a metal plate before the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj at the Yagnapurush Smurti Mandir. Swamishri declared the mantra, inspired by him and written by Bhadreshdas Swami, in the morning puja assembly. (For details see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June 2019 and the Sanstha's website: baps.org)

During the evening Hari Jayanti celebration an exquisite *annakut* was displayed before Thakorji in the mandir sanctums. The celebration assembly was themed 'Swaminarayan Ashray Dikshamantra'. Swamis who spoke about the *diksha mantra* are as follows:

- Dhanyosmi: Shriji Maharaj and the Guru Parampara have blessed all – Madhurvadan Swami.
- Purnakāmosmi: They (Maharaj and Guru Parampara) have blessed all with fulfillment – Atmatrupa Swami.
- Nishpāpaha: Made countless pure and sinless – Adarshjivan Swami.
- Nirbhayaha: Made us fearless – Bhaktisagar Swami
- Sukhi: Made us blissful – Narayanmuni Swami.
- Akshar Guru Yogena: Bhadrash Swami. Pujya Dr Swami inspired all with his speech.
- Swamishri inaugurated the Satsang exam books in Bengali. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the gathering, “Shriji Maharaj graced us immensely by taking a human birth. We have attained satsang, thus we have to retain it and foster it in our lives. Don’t leave it amidst the miseries of life. Maharaj congratulates one who does satsang in spite of facing pain and misery. We have attained nothing after taking infinite births. One who has attained satsang is most fortunate.”

Finally, Swamishri performed the celebration *arti* and rocked Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a decorated *hindolo*.

GANDHINAGAR: 15–18

18, Thursday, Gandhinagar, Dubai

At 10.53 a.m., Swamishri and several swamis departed from Ahmedabad International Airport and arrived in Dubai at 1.47 p.m. (For detailed report of Swamishri’s stay in Dubai (18 to 29) refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss, May–June 2019*.)

APRIL & MAY

ANAND: 29 APRIL–6 MAY

At 6.25 p.m., Swamishri and swamis departed from Dubai airport and landed at the



Swamishri performs *puja* of a plaque engraved with the new ‘Swaminarayan Ashray Dikshamantra’, Sarangpur

Ahmedabad International Airport at 9.25 p.m. (10.55 p.m. IST), Thereafter, Swamishri travelled to Madhubhan Resort in Anand and retired to sleep at 1.05 a.m.

SURAT: 6–16

7, Tuesday (Akha Trij); Shilanyas Ceremony of Shikharbaddha Mandir

The decision of building a new *shikharbaddha* mandir in Surat was made by Mahant Swami Maharaj. Through his blessings a large area of land was acquired in Kanad village, on the outskirts of Surat.

The *shilanyas* rituals were carried out in a large pit (*gart*) and simultaneously 25,000 devotees witnessed the rituals while seated in a giant marquee on the grounds. From 8.30 a.m. Puja Tyagvallabh Swami, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Puja Kothari Uttamprakash Swami commenced the initial *shilanyas* rituals.

On Swamishri’s arrival, children and youths festively welcomed him by showering flower petals, playing the band, blowing conch shells and waving BAPS flags. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the final *shilanyas* rituals and placed the *nidhikumbh* in the main *gart*. He also put the holy soil of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s birthplace in Chhapaiya, the soils of the birthplaces of the Gunatit Parampara and poured the holy waters of all the sacred rivers of India and main rivers



Swamishri places a *kalash* in the foundation, Surat



Swamishri inaugurated the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Sarangpur

worldwide into the *gart*. Thereafter, at 10.37 a.m., Swamishri placed the first *shila* on the main *gart* amidst loud *jais* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Swamishri and the participants performed *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the *shilas*.

In his blessings Swamishri said, “Shriji Maharaj came on earth out of his great compassion upon us. We can never forget our gratitude towards him. The Gunatit Parampara have also done great works and they had nothing but Bhagwan in their hearts. The land here was acquired, the *shilanyas* ceremony has been concluded and within no time a mandir will be ready here. A path of bhakti will be opened here, devotees will worship Maharaj and Swami and all will attain inner peace.” Thereafter, Swamishri apologized to all the devotees for having had to tolerate the oppressive heat.

After Swamishri’s departure, all the devotees got the opportunity of placing a brick inside the large *gart*.

NADIAD: 16–24

During Swamishri’s stay some of the evening assemblies were themed on Chhatralaya Din (18), Samip Darshan (20 to 22) and Samarpan Din (23). Swamishri visited the Santram Mandir for darshan (19) and toured the under-construction BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir (24).

23, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for three BAPS *hari* mandirs in Pansora (Nadiad), Melbourne (South Zone, Australia) and Sokhda (Sankarda).

SARANGPUR: 24–31

26, Sunday

After his morning puja, Swamishri inaugurated the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya. Thereafter, he sanctified the entire building by showering flower petals.

28 May to 1 June; Bal Adhiveshan

More than 2,000 *bal-balikas* participated in the National Bal Adhiveshan in Sarangpur. In all, there were nine competitions. The *adhiveshan* also included a one-day *shibir*. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2019, pp. 8–24).

31, Friday; Yogi Jayanti

In his blessings after his morning puja, Swamishri said, “Yogi Bapa was like a child with children, youth with youths and senior with seniors. He was accessible to all. All gravitated with love towards him in whatever he did. There was no pretense or show in him. He was totally straightforward.”



Swamishri, Pujya Kothari Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami light the inaugural lamp for the 20th batch of the Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK), Sarangpur



Swamishri, Pujya Kothari Swami and H.E. Vajubhai Vala perform the *shilanyas mahapuja* rituals, Morbi

JUNE

SARANGPUR: 1–11

3–5 & 6–8; Yuva Adhiveshans

The All India Yuva Adhiveshans were held in two parts – the city division and *chhatralaya* and rural divisions. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2019, pp. 25–35.)

4, Sarangpur

Swamishri inaugurated three Swaminarayan Aksharpath publications: 1. *Story Time*, 2. *Sutev-Kutev* and 3. *Satsang Vihar* (in Bengali).

9, Sarangpur; Symbolic Pramukh Varni Din Celebration & Inauguration of 20th Yuva Talim Kendra Batch

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Palitana (Bhavnagar region) and Muli (Surendranagar region).

The evening assembly was celebrated as symbolic Pramukh Varni Din – the day on which Shastriji Maharaj appointed Pramukh Swami as the President of BAPS. The celebration programme included:

- Drama: ‘Āvā te kevā Pramukh?’
- Audio recording of Swami Bapa’s voice of his pledge.
- Incidents of Swami Bapa: *Seva* in Makrana,

washing utensils on the very day of his appointment as Pramukh, *seva* of pounding lime in Atladara, relentless *vicharan*,...

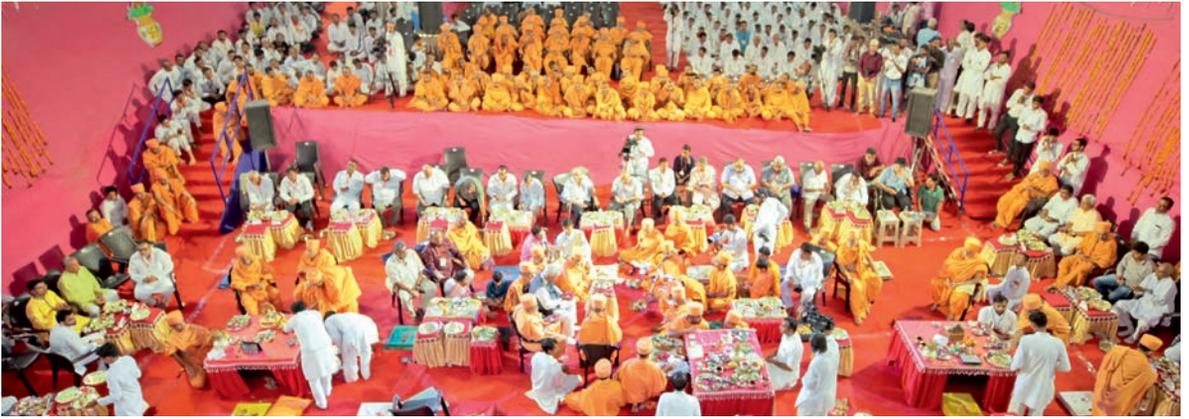
- Traditional dance by youths.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Our swamis and youths put in intense efforts to do *vicharan* and perform whatever *seva* that is assigned to them. The reason behind this is Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s pledge on the day of his appointment as president of BAPS. We are all joyous and happy because of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s pledge. Swami Bapa was named ‘Pramukh’, but he lived as a *sevak* [servant] all his life.

“You [youths of Yuva Talim Kendra] have come here as unhewn stones, but you will return as fragrant roses. No matter what you are but the training will mould you. The [moulding] work of 60 years will be accomplished in six months [i.e. the period of training]. Always remain a *sevak*. No matter what your status and position may be, have the sentiments that ‘I am a *sevak*’.”

MORBI: 11–17

The daily satsang assemblies held were themed on Shilanyas Mahotsav for a *shikarbaddha* mandir (12), Samp Din (14), Samarpan Din (15) and Shradhha Din (16).



Swamishri, swamis and devotees during the *shilanyas* rituals, Morbi

12, Wednesday; Shilanyas Mahotsav

The *shilanyas* rituals for the new *shikharbad-dha* BAPS Mandir in Morbi commenced in the presence of Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, H.E. Vajubhai Vala (Governor of Karnataka), swamis and thousands of devotees.

Around 10.30 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the final rituals of pouring cement in the *gart* and placing the first *shila* in the *gart*.

Immediately thereafter, the *shilanyas* assembly commenced. Children and youths of Morbi satsang *mandal* performed a traditional dance. The *sadguru* swamis addressed the assembly. H.E. Vajubhai Vala said, “The Swaminarayan Sampradaya is performing the great task of character-building in society. It desires for the good of all.”

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “How can we forget the veteran devotees who wanted a mandir to be built [in Morbi]. Sadhus and devotees are making untiring efforts in instilling values in society. Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘One should behave so that the guru’s integrity is not lost.’ The sadhus and devotees are striving in this manner. I bless all that you be happy in body, mind and wealth.”

AHMEDABAD: 17–30

During Swamishri’s stay, the evening satsang assemblies were themed on Yuva Din & Samjan Din (19), World Yoga Day (21), Prapti Din (22), Satsang Tradition in Ahmedabad (23), Rajipana Amrut (25), All-Doer Din (26), Gramya Din (27), Nilkanth Varni Smruti Din (28), Symbolic Guru Purnima Celebration (30).

23, Sunday

The evening assembly was themed on ‘Satsang Tradition in Ahmedabad’, which included a drama, video and speeches by senior sadhus:

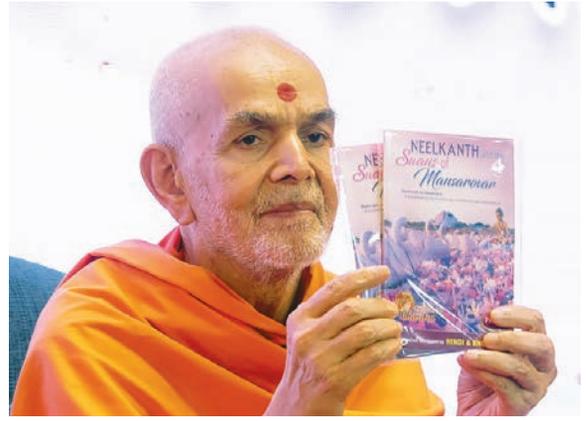
- Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about interesting incidents of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj in Ahmedabad.
- Video of *murti-pratishtha* festival of Ahmedabad mandir.
- Atmaswarup Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s memorable incidents in Ahmedabad.
- In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj spoke about his reminiscences of Ahmedabad mandir.

27, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Chalala (Dhari region) and Keliya Vasna (Dholka).



In the giant marquee, devotees perform the *shilanyas* rituals, Morbi



Swamishri inaugurates the DVD, 'Neelkanth and the Swans of Manasarovar', Ahmedabad

28, Friday; Nilkanth Varni Smruti Din

In the evening assembly, Swamishri inaugurated a DVD of the fifth part of the 'Swaminarayan Charitra' animation series – 'Neelkanth and the Swans of Manasarovar' – produced by an inhouse team of youths and published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith. Swamishri praised the life of Nilkanth Varni and the efforts made by youths in producing the animation DVD.

30, Sunday; Symbolic Guru Purnima Celebration

The evening symbolic Guru Purnima celebration assembly was themed on 'Guru as Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer'. The programme included videos, traditional dances and speeches:

- Guru as Creator: Speech by Brahmavihari Swami.



Puja Ishwarcharan Swami performs *puja* of Swamishri during the symbolic Guru Purnima Celebration, Ahmedabad

- Sustainer: Speech by Atmaswarup Swami.
- Destroyer: Speech by Aksharvatsal Swami.
- Guru is Parabrahman Incarnate: Speech by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.
- Traditional Dance: Children and youths. (*Guru runa adā...*)

When Swamishri arrived on the assembly stage Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with a variety of garlands offered by swamis. Then, several devotees offered baskets of fruits and sweet items before him.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the large gathering of devotees seated in the auditoriums and mandir precincts, "Believe all to be divine [*divya*] – this is where satsang concludes. By consolidating this one will immensely enjoy satsang. By perceiving all to be humans there will be conflicts, violence and other things. Whereas by perceiving all to be divine one will experience bliss and bliss."

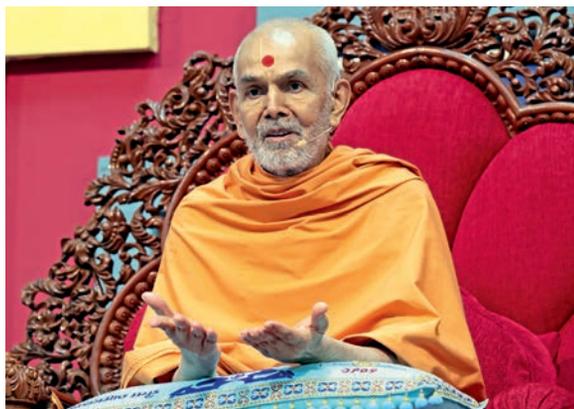
Thereafter, flower petals [*mantra-pushpanjali*] were ritually offered as a mark of respect to Swamishri. In conclusion, Swamishri and the *sadguru* swamis and senior devotees performed *arti*. ◆

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

April–June 2019

Inspiring incidents from the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj



APRIL

JOY OF PONDERING UPON BHAGWAN'S PRAPTI

4, Sarangpur

Swamishri woke up at 3.53 a.m. and revealed, "I could not sleep all night."

Swamishri's attendant, Uttamyogi Swami, asked, "What did you do all night?"

"I pondered about *prapti* [attainment of Bhagwan]."

After puja and breakfast Swamishri lay down to sleep. But he got up after 45 minutes and said, "I haven't slept one bit."

"What were you doing lying down!" Uttamyogi Swami enquired.

"Oh, it was wonderful," Swamishri replied with joy.

"But what did you do?"

"I thought about our *prapti* [of Maharaj]," Swamishri replied.

* * *

THE GUNATIT GURU'S OMNIPRESENCE

A swami from Bodeli asked, "Do you want to come to Bodeli mandir?"

Swamishri remained quiet. Then another swami stated, "You are in Bodeli, aren't you?"

Swamishri looked at both the swamis and replied, "I'm everywhere!"

NEVER GIVE UP HOLDING MY HAND 13, Sarangpur

An attendant Swami asked Swamishri, "Swami, whenever you hold someone's hand for support the person invariably prays, 'Hold my hand till Akshardham, and never give it up?' And you respond, 'You don't leave it!' What does this mean?"

Swamishri replied, "Giving up [my hand] means not following the commands [*agna*]."

"Does it include following the minor rules and commands?" the attendant queried.

Swamishri clarified, "Observing celibacy is the principal *agna*. The other *agnas* support the observance [of celibacy]."

ALWAYS AT PEACE 25, Dubai

While Swamishri was reclining on the bed for his afternoon siesta a swami, alluding to the hectic morning routine, said, "Sleep peacefully!"

Swamishri responded spiritedly, "I experience peace even amidst commotion and unrest. I have entrusted everything to Maharaj and Swami. They are the doers of everything, thus I am at peace."

An attendant Swami pointing to Swamishri added, "From here peace is exported everywhere!" Swamishri responded, "Of course. Maharaj and Swami are supreme, so peace spreads from them."

MAY

GURU'S RESOLVE TO ALWAYS PLEASE ALL 24, Nadiad

In whichever town or city Swamishri stays his daily schedule of puja, personally meeting with

devotees, and evening assembly programmes are always hectic and demanding. The same was the case during his 10-day stay in Nadiad.

While Swamishri was about to take his afternoon rest on the last day of his stay, Kothari Sarvamangal Swami said, “Swami, forgive us for any difficulties and physical strain you had to go through during your stay here.”

Swamishri replied fervently, “I have decided to please everyone. So, there is no question of getting displeased with you. I always have in mind to please you, please, please please the devotees and *santos*.”

JUNE

SWAMISHRI'S REVELATION AND INCLINATION

17, Ahmedabad

During the late evening Swamishri was

welcomed on his arrival in Ahmedabad. In the *abhishek mandap*, Brahmaaprakash Swami humorously asked Swamishri, “Do you know me! I am Brahmaaprakash.”

Swamishri smiled and nodded his head.

Brahmaaprakash Swami asked, “What is your name? Is it Mahant Swami, Keshavjivandas or Pramukh Swami?”

Swamishri broke into a smile and replied, “Pramukh Swami.”

On proceeding ahead a few children who had welcomed Swamishri asked, “Swami, we children just welcomed you. Now, what should we do so that you would feel like welcoming us?”

Swamishri replied, “[Follow] *dharma-niyam*.”♦

From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.

Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjivandas

ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

April–June 2019

When questions were posed to Mahant Swami Maharaj he revealed his spiritual understanding, perspective and, sometimes, his own spiritual state.

Let us learn from some of his fascinating answers and revelations

APRIL

Q. How can one forge love for Bhagwan?

A. Associating with the Sant (*sant samagam*) with resolute trust (*vishwas*).

Q. Guide us about how to best study the Vachanamrut?

A. Have *divyabhav* (divinity) for all. This is the master key. (10, Sarangpur)

Q. An attendant Swami asked, “What is the easiest way to become *ekantik*?”

A. Swamishri revealed, “Faith in Bhagwan.” (15, Sarangpur)

■ How much efforts are required to cure [a disease like] cancer or something similar to it. Likewise, ego and jealousy are diseases.

(15, Sarangpur)

Q. How can one know that one has complete faith in Bhagwan and guru?

A. One experiences inner joy. One remains stable no matter how much turbulence arises outwardly. (16, Gandhinagar)

■ The more one delves deeper into satsang one gets more out of it. However, by being inclined outwardly one gets nothing. By bowing to someone, one's own and the other person's feelings change, one's heart becomes soft and one's attention on Bhagwan is sustained. The inner inclinations (*vruttis*) of one who bows to others changes a lot.

(19, Dubai)

Q. Out of the two thoughts about Bhagwan which one is the main: *prapti* or *karta-harta*?

A. *Prapti*. By absorbing oneself in thoughts of *prapti* one becomes blissful.

Q. How can one remain stable in honour and insult?

A. By having true glory for Bhagwan.
(20, Abu Dhabi)

Three Types of Mind

1. An ordinary mind thinks and may not think. It does everything that comes its way.
2. A divine mind [inspires] all good actions.
3. An evil mind never ever thinks of good thoughts. It thinks of spoiling things.
(30, Anand)

MAY

■ *Das* is one who does *seva* by looking at his own faults and understanding the glory (*mahima*) of others.
(15, Surat)

Q. An attendant Swami asked Swamishri, “What is the relation between *ekantik* dharma and Akshar-Purushottam Darshan?”

A. Swamishri replied, “Both are one and the same. *Ekantik* dharma includes dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. Out of them bhakti is main. Dharma, *jnan* and *vairagya* support it [bhakti]. This means that one’s senses remain focused on Bhagwan but do not get distracted. Thus in *ekantik* dharma only Bhagwan remains. And Akshar-Purushottam Darshan means the same, i.e. become *aksharrup* to attach oneself with Purushottam. And in that also Bhagwan remains one. So, in both, Bhagwan is one and common.”
(17, Nadiad)

Q. What should we do in satsang to become happy householders?

A. Follow the *dharma-niyams* prescribed by Shriji Maharaj and have resolute refuge (*ashro*) in Bhagwan.

Q. The youths of Nadiad asked Swamishri a question by singing, the following kirtan, “The

sun and moon ask who are Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami?”

A. Swamishri replied, “I am *das* [servant] of Swaminarayan Bhagwan and I am the servant of servants [*das no das*] of all *santos*, devotees and youths.”
(18, Nadiad)

JUNE

■ Do not apply your intellect (*buddhi*) in obeying the spiritual commands (*agna*), because it will plunge you in a pit. However, apply your heart; which means follow it with bhakti.
(4, Sarangpur)

Q. An attendant swami asked, “Swami, which thought occurs in your mind 24 hours?”

A. Swamishri replied, “I always think about meeting the devotees, blessing them, wishing them well and granting them *moksha*. I think about the welfare of all.”
(13, Morbi)

■ When the mind becomes pure and does not waver in misery and joy then you are happy. Happiness does not lie in external wealth.
(20, Ahmedabad)

Q. How can we intensely please Bhagwan and the guru?

A. By perceiving them to be totally pure (*nirdosh*).

Q. What is the main means to purify one’s heart?

A. To please Bhagwan and the Sant.
(24, Ahmedabad)

Q. Yogi Bapa’s motto was ‘May Bhagwan do good to all and ‘Worship Bhagwan’. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s credo was ‘In the joy of others lies our own’. What is your motto?

A. Swamishri instantly replied, ‘*Divyabhav*.’
(30, Ahmedabad)

Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith

Established by BAPS in Kashi

28 June 2019, Varanasi



For centuries Kashi has been renowned as a pilgrimage place and as a city of learned pandits. It is a centre of academic excellence and home to expert and authoritative scholars on the Vedas, Vedant, Jyotish, Ayurveda, Shilpa Shastras, Sahitya, Nyaya, Vyakaran and numerous other subjects based on the Hindu Shastras.

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadrash Swami has written *bhashyas* on the Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras and a *vadagranth* named 'Swaminarayan Siddhanta Sudha' expounding the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in a simple, lucid and concise manner using accepted traditional academic standards.

These unique texts have been highly acclaimed by the renowned scholars of the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad, whose authority in shastra-related academia is accepted throughout India, and by over 350 scholars in India, America, England and Europe.

Officially endorsing the 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan' as a Sanatan Vedic 'Darshan', the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad supported the establishment

by the BAPS of the 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith' in Kashi in recognition of its status as an original and unique Darshan among the philosophical traditions of India.

CELEBRATION & FELICITATION ASSEMBLY

To celebrate the official declaration of the founding of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith by the BAPS, and to felicitate Bhadrash Swami for his landmark texts, the Kashi Vidvat Parishad organized a special assembly in the esteemed presence of Pujya Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami and over 125 distinguished scholars at the Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya.

The assembly began with all the scholars and attendees participating in a procession in honour of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Previously, Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the *pujan* of these *murtis* to be placed in the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith.

In the assembly, ten leading senior scholars sat on the stage with Pujya Kothari Swami and Bhadrash Swami.

First, Bhadrash Swami was felicitated and honoured with the title 'Darshanshastra-Sarvabhauma'.



Then, the formation of the 'Akshar-Purushottam Pith' was announced as Pujya Kothari Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and sadhus sang Vedic verses.

Addressing the celebration assembly, Pandit Shri Jayshankarlal Tripathi, President of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidvat Parishad, said, "The Kashi Vidvat Parishad supports the founding of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith." Then, he read the official proclamation declaring the formation of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith.

Then, acknowledging the declaration, Bhadrash Swami recited Sanskrit verses welcoming Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to Kashi.

Thereafter, Shri Kamleshdatt Tripathiji (World-renowned scholar on Natyashastras and Vyakaran), Mahamahopadhyaya Shri Shivji Upadhyaya (General Secretary, Kashi Vidvat Parishad) and other distinguished scholars also addressed the assembly.

(Cont. from p. 26)

"I can't sleep on an empty stomach," Bavajibhai replied.

"Then, why don't you eat?"

"If I eat more I would have to go to the wash-room again. For that I'd have to go through the hassle of getting up and taking the support of a pipe arranged in my room."

Bavajibhai's family members praised him, "All day long he spends doing bhajan and practises

Thereafter, on behalf of the BAPS Pujya Kothari Swami felicitated over 40 leading scholars for their outstanding contributions to the study of shastras.

Afterwards, Pujya Kothari Swami, himself an excellent scholar of Sanskrit and Philosophy, addressed the assembly of scholars, briefly elaborating on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and welcoming the founding of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Pith in Kashi.

In Kashi, over two centuries ago, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, at the age of 10, had explained the principle of Akshar-Purushottam to scholars. Thus, it is fitting that today the unique Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan has been accorded its deserved place of honour in Kashi, the ancient city of traditional spiritual wisdom. ♦

self-restraint. He does everything by himself and never gives any suggestions or advice to anyone. He remains absorbed in Bhagwan all day."

Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed his joy and pleasure upon hearing Bavajibhai narrate his daily routine and stated, "What one is supposed to do after going to Akshardham he is doing it now. There's so much effulgence on his face."

Translated from Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan report, 20 May 2019, Nadiad



INDIA

YUVA PARAYANS
August 2019, Gujarat & Mumbai



Over 800 *yuvak* and 480 *yuvati mandals* held the annual Yuva Parayans during the holy month of Shravan. This year’s theme, as part of the ongoing Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations, was ‘Sukhni Sanjivani: Vachanamrut’ (‘Elixir of Bliss: Vachanamrut’). These three-day *parayans* were presented by the youths at each *yuvak* and *yuvati* BAPS centre and included discourses on the Vachanamrut, skits, videos and special activities that reinforced the theme.

Youths at various centres set up creative displays that also highlighted the glory and modern-day relevance of the Vachanamrut as a scripture of practical use in daily life for people of all ages.

Through these *parayans*, the *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* demonstrated their elocution, artistic and organizational skills and pledged to read and study the Vachanamrut daily to help them progress in their personal, family, academic, professional and spiritual lives.

FOCUS: AN AUDIO-VISUAL CONCLAVE
17–18 August 2019, Ahmedabad

A total of over 150 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from BAPS centres throughout Gujarat attended this



special 2-day training seminar in Ahmedabad. The youths who attended had participated in the Short Film competition in the recently completed National Yuva Adhiveshan in Sarangpur.

The youths received expert guidance from renowned director Shri Arvindbhai Babbal and his associate Shri Anilkumar Chaudhary, as well as from acclaimed cinematographer Shri Aniket Khandagale.

The experts guided the youths on film direction, camera types, lighting techniques, shooting techniques, equipment and other topics. The experts also answered the varied questions asked by the youths.

As part of the seminar the youths enthusiastically participated in the ‘24 Frames a Story’ activity in which they demonstrated their own skills.

The seminar provided the youths valuable insights into the world of film-making.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV OF NEW BAPS MANDIR
18–20 August 2019, Jabalpur

Three days of celebrations marked the *mur-ti-pratishtha* of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, built over the birthplace of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

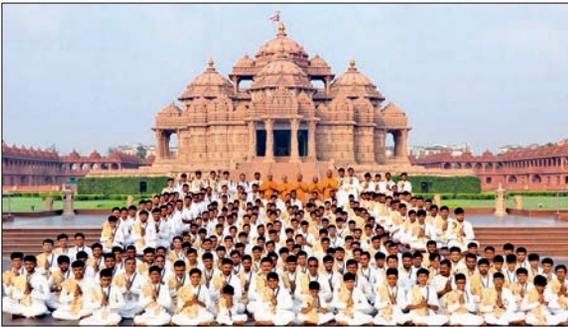
On the evening of 18 August, BAPS sadhus



performed a programme of devotional bhajans. On 19 August, a special assembly took place in which the lives and works of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj were depicted through various presentations.

On the morning of 20 August, Puja Viveksagar Swami performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the new *hari* mandir in the presence of revered mahatmas, dignitaries and over 1,000 devotees from throughout Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and other places.

RAJKOT YUVA SHIBIR 2019 20–23 August 2019, New Delhi



A selected group of 500 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Rajkot flew to New Delhi for a special visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Prior to their departure, Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the youths while he was in Gandhinagar by lighting the inaugural lamp and sanctifying their mementos.

On 20 August, the youths had darshan of Swaminarayan Akshardham and the various exhibitions.

On 21 and 22 August, the youths participated in the two-day *shibir* on the theme ‘Ek Nishan Akshardham’ (‘One Aim – Akshardham’). Through speeches by learned sadhus, videos, skits, workshops and other activities, the *shibir* theme was effectively conveyed to the youths.

The youths also participated in performing *samuh* puja on the Akshardham grounds, and devoutly recited the Sahajanand Namavali and offered prayers in the main mandir.

On the final day, the youths had a sightseeing tour of New Delhi. At the landmark Red Fort, they sang the national anthem, saluted the Indian flag and prayed for peace, prosperity and progress of the nation and all its citizens.

ASSEMBLY AT CENTRAL JAIL 27 August 2019, Surat



Under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, a special assembly was held for inmates of the Central Jail in Surat.

Around 500 men and women prisoners attended the assembly titled ‘Antar Khoj’ – ‘Inner Search’. The main message of the assembly was that everyone can, with the guidance of a God-realized guru, introspect and improve to overcome one’s drawbacks.

A speech by a *balak* highlighted Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s selfless efforts for de-addicting people from damaging habits and promoting a value-based life.

Munivandan Swami elaborated on how by seeking the refuge of a true guru one can identify one’s drawbacks and correct them.

The assembly was arranged with the assistance of Shri K.S. Panodia (Deputy Head, Central Jail, Surat) and senior jailers Shri R.D. Shrimali and Shri J.R. Ahir. The attendees appreciated and were inspired by the positive and encouraging messages given in the assembly.

UK & EUROPE

BAL-BALIKA SUMMER CAMP 29–30 June 2019, Leicester



More than 50 children, accompanied with trained volunteers from Leicester, participated in the weekend summer camp at Beaumanor Hall in Woodhouse, Leicestershire.

The trip, titled ‘Samp Camp’, enabled the children to strengthen their unity and learn about leadership, cooperation, communication, creativity and embracing diversity in order to make a successful team through various interactive activities.

Sadhus reinforced the learnings through practical and relevant discourses, and also reinforced the spiritual benefits of serving and developing attachment for the Satpurush.

The children also participated in and learnt more about a variety of Hindu traditions, such as puja, *arti* and *thal*.

The camp proved both extremely formative and enjoyable for the children.

ORGAN DONATION AWARENESS CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN BRITISH PARLIAMENT 10 July 2019, London

Representatives from BAPS Swaminarayan



Sanstha (BAPS) joined various Hindu and Jain groups in Parliament to launch an awareness campaign about the upcoming law change regarding organ donation in England.

The new law will change the landscape of organ donation in the UK, providing a greater chance of obtaining a life-saving organ transplant.

The meeting at Parliament was chaired by Lord Jitesh Gadhia with chief guest the Rt Hon. Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and Bob Blackman MP also in attendance. BAPS volunteers have taken a lead role in producing an informative leaflet and educational video that draws upon patient testimonies and opinions from Hindu faith leaders, medical professionals and community leaders. Dr Neil Soneji, a BAPS volunteer, introduced the video to the esteemed audience.

Mahant Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader of BAPS, has inspired and guided BAPS volunteers to actively raise the importance of organ donation in the community through various initiatives. A living organ donation campaign was launched during his visit to London in 2017. Since then, BAPS has held numerous organ donation awareness conferences, seminars and recruitment drives throughout the country.

Mr Hancock added, “This campaign is a brilliant example of the community-based work that is vital to raising awareness and understanding around organ donation. It was inspiring to see so many supporters from the Hindu and Jain communities come together for this new campaign, stimulating conversation on this important topic.”

HISTORIC BAPS SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

27 July 2019, Moscow, Russia



A historic spiritual assembly was held at the Indian National Cultural Centre ‘SITA’ in Moscow in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and other senior swamis from India and the UK.

The Indian National Culture Centre ‘SITA’ is a non-profit organization whose mission is to inform local Russians, foreigners and Indians in Russia about the culture and heritage of India.

The assembly, attended by over 100 devotees and guests, was themed ‘In the Joy of Others’ – the motto His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj embodied throughout his life.

Pujya Aksharvatsal Swami, speaking in Hindi, discoursed on the rich cultural heritage of Hinduism that was epitomised by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Next, Pujya Brahmavihari Swami elaborated in English upon the values and wisdom of both Russian and Indian cultures while focusing upon Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s profound teachings and selfless life. Video presentations further enhanced these themes before Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami blessed the gathering with his wisdom on devotion to God and the power of Satsang.

Mr Mikhail Davydov, a senior government advisor and international affairs analyst, presided over the event as the Chief Guest. Impressed by the exemplary life and universal values of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mr Davydov, among others, pledged to become a vegetarian.

Everyone was touched by the way these universal values had been promoted by Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

INDIAN AMBASSADOR TO RUSSIA

WELCOMES BAPS DELEGATION

31 July 2019, Moscow, Russia



A delegation of swamis and volunteers from BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha was received by the Ambassador of India, His Excellency Shri D.B. Venkatesh Varma, at the Indian Embassy in Moscow, Russia.

The Ambassador warmly greeted Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, senior swamis and volunteers from India, the UK and the USA and personally ushered them to the meeting hall for an enlightening discussion on Hindu culture, values and spirituality.

The meeting began with brief introductions of the swamis present and the socio-spiritual works of BAPS. His Excellency said, “It is not often that we get spiritual visitors like you. We consider it a big blessing.”

The meeting lasted for over an hour and was also attended by the Deputy Chief of Mission Mr Binaya Pradhan, Dr Aseem Vohra, Mr Vivek Singh, and other senior officials. The swamis gifted His Excellency a *mala* and a copy of *Transcendence*, an autobiographical account by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, of his spiritual encounters with His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Earlier during the visit, the swamis had met with Mr Deepak Miglani, Consul General at the Consulate in Saint Petersburg, on 22 July, and the Deputy Chief of Mission, Mr Binaya Pradhan, at his residence in Moscow on 30 July.

The meetings and dialogues were constructive and inspiring for everyone present.

USA

BAL-BALIKA & KISHORE-KISHORI NORTH AMERICAN SUMMER CAMP 8–15 July 2019, Orlando, FL

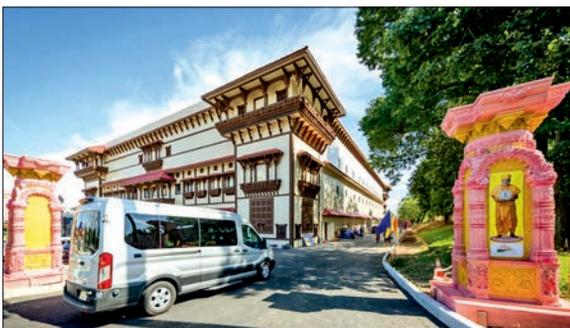


Over 400 selected children and teenagers from throughout North America attended the Summer Camp which focused on the concept of *Dradh Priti* – profound love between Bhagwan and *bhakta*.

Experienced swamis and volunteers conducted workshops, seminars and group discussions on the topics of Shashtra, Siddhant, Sanstha and Satpurush to guide the delegates on how to develop a deep spiritual bond with Bhagwan and guru and the applicability of Hindu concepts in daily life. They also learnt how to enhance their leadership acumen and spiritual foundations through a variety of indoor and outdoor team activities.

This Summer Camp equipped the delegates to effectively navigate the changing circumstances in their daily lives.

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 10–18 August 2019, Edison, NJ



The Mandir Mahotsav, in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and other swamis, to mark the inauguration of the reconstructed BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Edison, began with the grand Vishwashanti Maha Yagna. On 10 and 11 August, devotees participated in one of the four *yagna* sessions to pray for world peace on the occasion of the opening of the mandir.

The festivities continued on 16 August with a Nagar Yatra in honour of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir in six beautifully crafted floats. The procession started at Middlesex County College, the historic grounds that hosted the Cultural Festival of India in 1991, and took a route that led to the mandir. Young and old alike were dressed in traditional Indian attire and lined up to walk or dance in the procession. Later that evening, a kirtan *aradhana* was presented by BAPS swamis.

On 17 and 18 August, Pujya Doctor Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the consecration ceremony in accordance with Hindu Vedic rituals in the presence of devotees and well-wishers from across North America.

On the evening of 17 August, a cultural programme titled '*Mandiram: The Musical*' showcased traditional Hindu culture and heritage through an intricate light and sound show, and various dramatic, oratory and dance performances.

On the afternoon of 18 August, in the special Women's Assembly, young girls and women presented '*Divya Mandirne Vandana*', a cultural programme of folk dances and dramas. Women of all ages from throughout the community attended.

The inauguration of the mandir marked the climax of the three-year reconstruction project blessed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

SATSANG VICHARAN 24–27 August 2019, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Building on last year's visit, Priyaseva Swami and Santpurush Swami, embarked upon satsang *vicharan* in Brazil to strengthen satsang among



devotees residing in Sao Paulo and the surrounding areas.

On 25 August, a satsang assembly was held at the Indian Cultural Centre in the presence of His Excellency Amit Kumar Mishra (Consul General of India in Sao Paulo), Mr. Tushar Parikh (Brazil Country head, and Latin America BFSI (Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance) practice head for Tata Consultancy Services), Mr. Shobhan Saxena (Brazil correspondent of The Hindu), leading community members as well as Brazilian community members and 150 devotees and well-wishers.

During their stay the swamis visited the homes and offices of devotees and attended the Janmashtami celebration organized by devotees in Campinas, 100 km northwest of Sao Paulo.

AFRICA

'DIVYAM' SHIBIRS

11–19 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania



A total of over 1,600 delegates and supporting volunteers from BAPS centres throughout Africa attended one of the three *shibirs* based on the theme 'Divyam – Mahant Swami na Sange,

Divyata na Range', in the divine presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The conventions, which focused on how to see all with *divyabhav* by learning from the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj, were conducted as below:

11–13 August: 1st Karyakar Shibir

14–16 August: Kishore-Kishori Shibir

17–19 August: 2nd Karyakar Shibir

Divyabhav is a virtue that Mahant Swami Maharaj holds very close to his heart. Through skits and practical activities, delegates were guided on how to cultivate the values of *dasbhav* and *divyabhav* in their daily lives. Group discussions based on the experiences of devotees who have lived by these principles helped to clarify the concepts. Also, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Atmaswarup Swami, and other learned swamis provided inspiring guidance to the delegates on how they can align their lives with the Satpurush's wishes.

During the *shibirs*, the delegates experienced at first hand the divine bliss of associating with Mahant Swami Maharaj through his 'divya darshan', 'amrutvani' and 'gunatit jnan'.

ASIA PACIFIC

TREE PLANTATION DRIVES 2019

17–28 July 2019, Australia



As a part of Australia's National Tree Day, BAPS centres in Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth participated in tree plantation drives to make a positive difference to the environment.

A total of over 200 volunteers and their families joined with local government departments

and other charitable and non-profit organizations at the various sites selected by the local authorities in each city to dig pits and plant trees.

Despite the very cold winter weather, young and old participants helped to plant over 5,700 native trees and shrubs all together and felt a sense of ownership and contribution to building a sustainable society.

BAL-KISHORE KARYAKAR CONVENTION 18–21 July 2019, Adelaide, Australia



A total of 272 Bal-Balika and Kishore-Kishori *karyakars* from BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand attended the four-day ANZ Bal-Kishore Karyakar Convention (KarCon). The theme of this inspiring KarCon, based on the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj to *karyakars* during his Asia Pacific *vicharan* in 2018, was: ‘The Future Is Bright: Samjan. Samp. Samarpan.’

Held every three years at a regional level, KarCon is an opportunity for youth leaders from ANZ to come together and learn effective ways of carrying out their duties at their respective centres, while further developing their own spirituality.

The theme of the KarCon was presented to the *karyakars* through video guidance from *sad-guru* sadhus, inspiring speeches by experienced swamis, interactive skits, engaging video presentations, focused discussions and other activities.

The highlight of the KarCon was the live video blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj from India, in which he encouraged all *karyakars* to do better *seva* by courageously serving as ‘Bravehearts of Akshar Purushottam’.

The four-day convention provided the *karyakars* with a better understanding of how to serve more effectively in their local centres and also advance their personal spirituality.

BAPS WALKATHON 20 July 2019, Canberra, Australia



For the first time, the BAPS centre in Canberra organized a walkathon based on the theme ‘Building a Better Community, One Step at a Time’.

More than 95 people, aged between 2 and 75 years, participated in the 4km walk around the scenic Yerrabi Pond Circuit. The walk raised \$7,800 to support the Canberra Hospital Foundation.

Mr. Deepak Raj Gupta, member of the ACT Parliament, Ms. Judy Ford, Donor Programme Manager of Canberra Hospital foundation (CHF) and Ms. Sunita Dinsha, Secretary of Fair Canberra, supported, appreciated and encouraged all participants by congratulating them on their service and desire to give back to the community.

BAPS CHARITIES

WINTER WARMER 13 July 2019, Mayfair, South Africa

This year, the beneficiary of BAPS Charities’ annual winter warmer project was Christway Religious and Social Services, which is an NPO that provides community shelters, outreach and feeding schemes, creche and day-care facilities for the under-privileged.

The organization provides free meals to approximately 400 people daily and takes care of



kids after their school, assisting them with their homework and stimulating them with educational games.

BAPS Charities South Africa, sponsored a day's worth of meals, donated 100 blankets along with old clothes and non-perishable foods. The BAPS volunteers also spent time serving food to approximately 300 people who came to the home for support on that day.

BAPS CHARITIES YOUTH SEMINAR 29 July 2019, Toronto, ON, Canada

More than 700 international students from numerous colleges and universities in Toronto, Windsor, Ottawa and across Ontario, attended

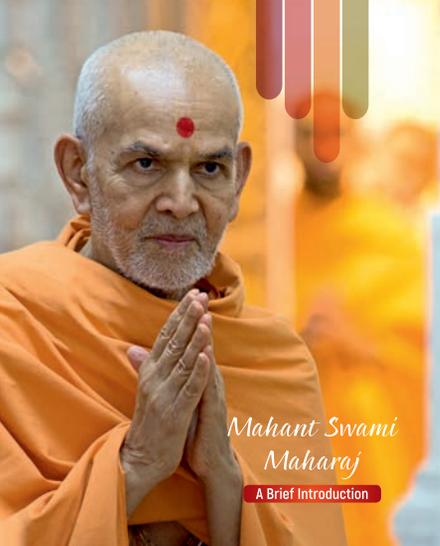
the 8th annual BAPS Charities Youth Seminar, 'Let's Go One Step Ahead.'

The seminar was held in the presence of community leaders and professionals from the fields of business, accounting, IT and other special guests who gave inspiring presentations related to their fields of work. The seminar was organized to introduce the delegates to career planning and financial planning, balancing wants with needs, the importance of good character and integrity and to provide them an opportunity to network with each other. The delegates enjoyed the student-focused presentations from the guest speakers on a wide variety of topics to help them be successful in both their careers and personal life. ♦

ENGLISH PUBLICATION

Mahant Swami Maharaj

A Brief Introduction



Mahant Swami Maharaj

A Brief Introduction






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

◆ **Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad**
◆ **Available at all BAPS bookstores in India and abroad**

SHANTIBHAI BHOGILAL SHAH

Passed Away: 3 September 2019, Aged 95



Shantibhai B. Shah, fondly known as Shantikaka, and a native of Prantij village was a stalwart BAPS devotee in Ahmedabad.

Born into a family of Swaminarayan devotees, Shantikaka first had the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj in 1948, when he began to work at the Jupiter Mill in Ahmedabad. Shantikaka was drawn by Shastriji Maharaj's profound saintliness. Subsequently, he settled in Ahmedabad with his family.

He served during Shastriji Maharaj's Suvarna Tula celebrations in Atladara in 1949.

After Shastriji Maharaj, he devoutly served Yogiji Maharaj in many ways and often accompanied him during his *vicharan*.

Thereafter, he resolutely lived as per Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes. In 1971, he was selected by his employers as part of a business delegation to Europe for a month-long trip. As instructed by Swamishri, Shantikaka remained firm in the observance of *niyams* throughout, despite pressure from his colleagues. This was a hallmark of his entire life.

He served in the Sanstha's festivals in 1981 and 1985. After retirement, Shantikaka served in the accounts department in the BAPS mandir in Shahibaug. He was diligent and focused in fulfilling his assigned duties. His softly spoken

nature and *divyabhav* for all endeared him to all devotees and saints.

Over the years, whenever Pramukh Swami Maharaj departed for and returned after his overseas satsang visits, Shantikaka would go to Mumbai for his darshan. On several occasions, he accompanied Swamishri overseas – to Africa, UK, USA and Dubai.

In his retired life, he would come to the mandir in the morning for darshan of the *arti* and to listen to the morning *katha*. He would then stay to carry out his *seva* till lunchtime. In the afternoon, he would return to continue his *seva*, and return home only after attending the evening *arti*. He maintained this routine for many years.

Over the past few years, due to advancing age, he was unable to continue his *seva*, but still came to the mandir to attend the morning and evening *artis* and the morning *katha* – till his final day.

Despite limited mobility and deafness, he never lapsed in this routine. When requested by family members, saints and other devotees to rest, he always said that although he could not hear much, it was his duty to attend the *sabha* as it was Swamishri's wish.

Shantikaka was also blessed by Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thus, he was privileged to have had the darshan and blessings of four *gunatit* gurus.

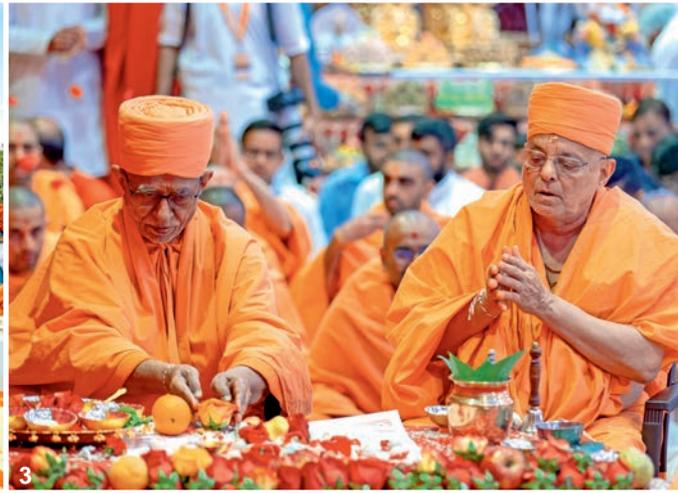
Shantikaka also passed on the traditions of satsang to his children, grandchildren and extended family such that they, too, are dedicated *satsangis*. His inspiring life is a lesson for all on how to remain resolute in one's observance of *niyams* and dharma and offer devotion to God and guru with *divyabhav* for all. ♦



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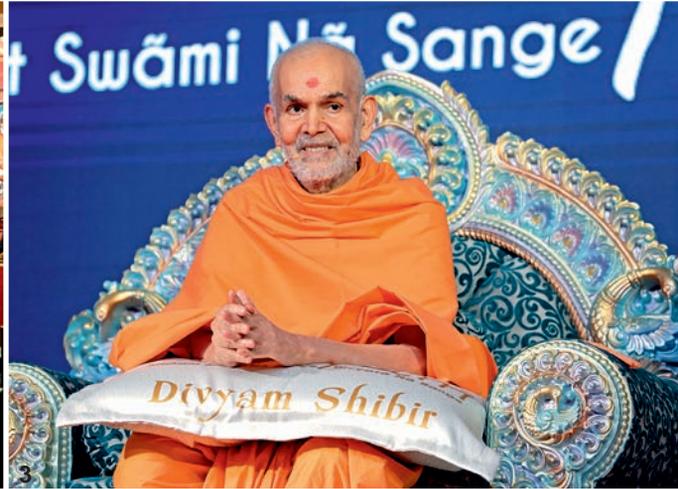


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INAUGURATION OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, EDISON, NJ, USA 17-18 August 2019

In 1991, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Edison. Following the recent reconstruction of the mandir, Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the re-consecration of the mandir. The Mandir Mahotsav celebrations were held from 16 to 18 August 2019.

1. *Annakut* offered to Thakorji.
2. Youths in traditional costumes during the *nagar-yatra*.
3. Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami perform the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals.
4. Youths present a cultural programme to celebrate the mandir opening.



**‘DIVYAM’ SHIBIRS IN THE PRESENCE OF MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ
11–19 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania**

Three *shibirs* were held for *karyakars*, *kishores* and *kishoris* from throughout Africa. Swamishri blessed the delegates with his darshan and divine wisdom.

1. Swamishri blesses *karyakars*. 2. *Karyakars* during a *shibir* session. 3. Swamishri blesses a *shibir* session. 4. Youths during a *shibir* session.

Printed and Published by Sadhu Swayamprakashdas on behalf of Swaminarayan Aksharpath and Printed at Swaminarayan Mudran Mandir, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004 and Published from Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004. Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas.