

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2018

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Humble Prostrations to Mahant Swami Maharaj
on His 85th Birthday Celebration



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BAPS NORTH AMERICAN YOUTH CONVENTION

1 to 10 July 2018, Atlanta, Georgia

Over 10,000 children, teenagers and youths attended three separate conventions, based on the theme 'Moksha'.

1. Youth Convention, 6 July 2. Pujya Anandswarup Swami addresses the Bal-Balika Convention, 3 July 3. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj interacts with the delegates via a live video conference, 9 July 4. Kishores perform arti, 6 July. 5. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami observes a creative model of the 'moksha pipalo', 7 July.

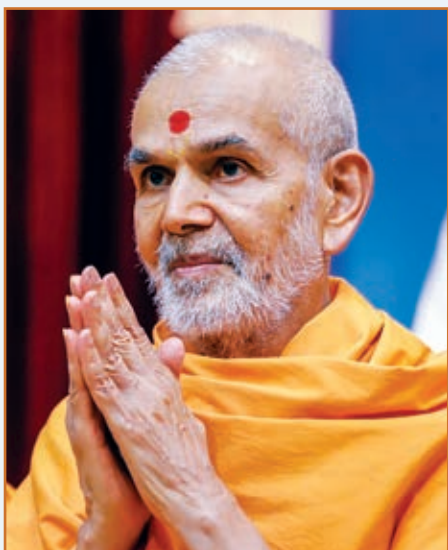
Cover page: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj's birthday falls on 3 October 2018 in accordance with the Indian calendar (Bhadarva vad 9). His birthday was also celebrated on 13 September in Ahmedabad as per the Gregorian calendar.



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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



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STRINGS OF DEVOTION

Brahmanand Swami was intent upon building a large three-shikhar mandir in Vartal. When Shri Hari's efforts to stop him failed after sending Nityanand Swami, he decided to go himself...

WITH LAKSHMIJI HAVING SPOKEN, BRAHMANAND SWAMI'S WISH WILL COME TRUE

Shri Hari received the letter and read it. He responded, "I had sent Nityanand Swami to stop Brahmanand Swami from going ahead with the construction, but he has instead sided with him. I'll have to go to Vartal to resolve the matter myself."

Shuk Muni asked, "Maharaj, what about the verse Brahmanand Swami has written in the letter?" Shri Hari replied, "He has written it out of his profound faith in me."

"Then, won't his faith prove to be true?" Shuk Muni asked with a smile.

"His faith will bear fruit," Maharaj replied.

"Then why are you in a hurry to go to Vartal?" asked Shuk Muni gently.

"Okay, let God's wish prevail," Maharaj replied.

Then, Jivuba, who was standing at a distance, stated, "Maharaj, allow Brahmanand Swami's wish to be fulfilled."

One hearing Jivuba's words, Maharaj told Shuk Muni, "Now that Lakshmiji¹ has spoken Brahmanand Swami's wish will be fulfilled."

* * *

In Vartal, Nityanand Swami told Brahmanand Swami, "The mandir plans have only two *shikhars*. Since the mandir will be lotus-shaped the two *shikhars* will not look appropriate proportionately. So, have the foundation dug for the third *shikhar*. Also, have a large dome in the middle and smaller domes around it. They will add

beauty and symmetry to the mandir."

Brahmanand Swami had earlier contemplated in having the third *shikhar*, but he had given up the idea. However, now, with Nityanand Swami's support, he felt all the more convinced and agreed to do so. In all, 900,000 bricks had been used for the mandir foundation.

* * *

The Fuldol festival was not far off and Shri Hari decided to celebrate it in Vartal. So, he set out from Gadhada with a following of sadhus and devotees towards Vartal. Maharaj told everyone, I do not want to halt anywhere along the journey. A Kathi devotee suggested, "Then Maharaj, let us test the horsemen on their riding skills."

MAY THE TEST DECIDE

On hearing this the other Kathi devotees replied, "Oh, we are powerful and skilful riders, but if we overtake Maharaj and ride ahead of him then we will not be able to avail of his company." So, all the Darbars calmed down and gave up the idea.

Shri Hari smiled while listening to their conversation. Maharaj replied, "Darbars, let us go ahead with the test and see whose horse and which rider is the most powerful."

All the Darbars smiled at Shri Hari's challenge. On reaching the outskirts of Gadhada all the horsemen stopped. Maharaj told his sadhus who were on foot, "Santos, now you start walking hastily while chanting the *dhun*. Today, I wish to test these Darbars and their riding skills." Then,

1. Jivaba was the incarnation of Lakshmiji.

Shri Hari gently pulled the reins of Manki and she shot off like an arrow released from a bow. The Kathi horsemen watched with amazement, and before they could think of anything Manki had disappeared from sight, kicking dust along her path.

The Kathis then sped their horses, but there was no sign of Shri Hari and Manki. Soon, their saddles became loose and some failed to see ahead due to their dust-choked eyes. They realized that though Maharaj was a Brahmin from North India he was also God, possessing an array of skills. The riders then adjusted their saddles, removed the dust from their eyes and body and proceeded ahead.

I AM BHAGWAN'S ABODE

Soon, they saw Manki huffing and puffing, standing under a tree. The profuse sweat from her body was trickling down and wetting the ground. When the Kathis came near they saw Maharaj sleeping on a saffron cloth spread on the ground. Nearby, Gunatitanand Swami was fanning him with a fan made of mango leaves. The Kathis were surprised to see Gunatitanand Swami and asked, "Swami, you were with the other sadhus when we galloped away. How did you get here before us?"

Swami smiled cryptically and replied, "Just as Manki is Maharaj's vehicle, I am his divine abode where he resides. He and I never stay apart. When Manki accelerated, I too increased my speed to get here. I reached here before Manki arrived and cleaned this spot and spread this saffron cloth. When Maharaj arrived, he got off Manki and lay down to sleep on this cloth."

The Kathi horsemen were listening to Swami's words and wondered how Swami could have reached here so swiftly. Swami smiled on seeing their perplexed faces.

Shortly thereafter, Maharaj woke up. On seeing the Kathi devotees he smiled and said, "I lay down to sleep because I was tired. I thought you must have gone ahead of me."

The Kathi devotees smiled and spoke with

resignation, "Maharaj, Bhagwan possesses all skills. Our pride in our riding skills has been dissolved."

Shri Hari got up and said, "I'm in a hurry to go, so I will ride swiftly. All of you come comfortably behind so that you can have darshan of the devotees along the way and tell them to come to Vartal early." Then, Maharaj galloped away on Manki.

I HAVE TO FULFIL MY VIRTUE

Shri Hari arrived in Loya. Sura Khachar and his wife, Shantiba, were surprised and happy to see Maharaj. Sura Khachar humbly uttered, "Maharaj, you have graced us with your divine presence."

Shri Hari smiled and replied, "You keep addressing me as 'The Lord of grace', so I have come to fulfil that epithet." Then, Maharaj added, "Quickly, prepare a dish, I am in a hurry to leave. If you wish to come to the Fuldol festival in Vartal then come early."

Sura Khachar replied, "Maharaj, if anyone else wants to come then he can come later, but I shall come along with you." Shri Hari was pleased with his love towards him.

Maharaj took lunch and left Loya along with Sura Khachar and travelled non-stop to Muli. Here, too, his sudden arrival brought joy to Patalbhai. He hurriedly went home and told his sister, Rajuba, "Maharaj has arrived. You were pining for his darshan and shedding tears, thus Maharaj has arrived to fulfil your wish." On hearing this, Rajuba ran for Maharaj's darshan. At that time, Shri Hari was handing over the reins of Manki to Sura Khachar. The latter tied them to a stake and Patalbhai's servant served fodder to Manki.

YOUR THOUGHTS PULLED ME HERE

Patalbhai bowed at Maharaj's feet while Rajuba did darshan of Maharaj from far. Tears of joy rolled down from Rajuba's eyes. Shri Hari

told Patalbhai, “Call Rajuba here.” When she came near, Maharaj said, “Rajuba, do darshan. You were distressed without my darshan! Your thoughts and feelings have pulled me here. I left my group of sadhus and Kathis to come here.”

Suddenly, Sura Khachar realized why Maharaj had been in a hurry. He felt that Shri Hari was bound to the strings of love of devotees like Rajuba. Then, Maharaj expressed, “Rajuba, today I wish to have a meal prepared by you. I will give you *prasadi* and bring an end to your fasts.”

Rajuba was overwhelmed with joy and emotions at Maharaj’s wish. She simply sat down on the ground and exclaimed, “Oh Prabhu, so much compassion upon me!” Then the floodgates of her eyes broke loose to unleash a stream of tears.

Sura Khachar tried to understand what was going on. Then, Patalbhai told Shri Hari, “Maharaj, Rajuba had been restless without your darshan for the last six months. Ever since, she totally gave up eating food.”

Maharaj replied, “That was why I did not stay at any place in order to reach here at the earliest. Sura Khachar had tried hard to make me stay in Loya, but nothing could stop me from resisting Rajuba’s bhakti.”

Slowly, Rajuba regained her composure. She returned home and made *kansar* and chapattis. Maharaj came to have lunch, bringing Sura Khachar with him. Rajuba placed the food dish on a small stool. Shri Hari said, “Rajuba, pour ghee into the *kansar*.”

Rajuba’s heart danced with joy at Shri Hari’s words. She came with a vessel full of ghee despite the fact that the *kansar* served to Maharaj contained ghee. Yet, Maharaj asked for more. Rajuba started pouring ghee in the *kansar* till Maharaj uttered, “Stop!”

THE JIVA IS NOURISHED THROUGH MY ASSOCIATION

Shri Hari ate a little *kansar* and said, “Rajuba, the remaining *kansar* is for you only. You have to

eat it all.”

Rajuba realized why Maharaj had told her to pour so much ghee. It was the height of his divine love. She uttered in her mind, “Oh Prabhu, you have blessed my life today.”

Maharaj said, “Rajuba, the body is nourished through food, whereas the soul is nourished through my association. You are connected to me through your thoughts, and that is why I am bound to your thoughts. Thus, whenever you think of me, I will instantly come to give darshan to you.”

Maharaj washed his hands and drank a little water. Rajuba gave *mukhvas* to Maharaj. Since it was night-time a bed was prepared on the verandah for Maharaj. The unseasonal wind was a little harsh, so Maharaj asked, “Rajuba, I’m feeling cold, so light a small fire.”

Rajuba set up a fire. Shri Hari warmed himself, but added, “Rajuba, it seems to be more cold today than usual. Bring more fuel to increase the heat.” Rajuba added cow dung and wood. But Maharaj still shivered. There was no more wood in the house, thus Rajuba sacrificed a small wooden seat by putting it into the fire. Thereafter, a wooden cart wheel was thrown in as fuel for the fire. But Maharaj uttered, “Rajuba, I cannot bear the severe cold. It is consuming the heat in your fire. Bring more wood to feed the fire.”

Rajuba was now worried about what to do. Soon, a thought struck her. She told her servant to break her wooden bed to pieces. The servant brought an axe and was on his way to Rajuba’s room. On seeing him Maharaj asked, “Where are you taking this axe?” He replied, “Rajuba has told me to chop up her bed.”

Instantly, Shri Hari told Rajuba, “Now my shivers have subsided, so put out the fire.” Rajuba was overwhelmed by the divine *lila* of Shri Hari. Her heart basked in Maharaj’s divine joy. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

ADHYĀY 5

Experiencing Liberation Whilst Alive

Part 24



one should do as few karmas as possible and then await death to attain liberation. However, the Gitā's stance on this is very clear: It is true that liberation is the purpose of life, and it is also just as true that liberation can be experienced whilst alive. There is no need to forsake karmas, but one needs to learn the art of doing karmas. The Gitā has emphasized this repeatedly. Krishna wishes that Arjuna understands the importance of this art and imbibes it in his life. Therefore, in the fifth *adhyay* of the Gitā, Krishna clearly, and in detail, explains the technique of doing karmas without being bound by them.

DOING KARMAS WITHOUT BEING BOUND

Shri Krishna says, 'योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः । सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते ॥' – '*Yogayukto vishuddhātmā vijitātmā jitendriyaha; Sarvabhootātmabhootātmā kurvannapi na lipyate.*' – Meaning: 'A *brahmarup* devotee who has control over his body and mind, has a pure atman and is endowed with yoga does karmas without being smeared/stained by them' (Gitā 5.4).

These are the qualities of those who are liberated whilst alive. The *shloka* says that if karmas are performed with certain principles imbibed in one's life, then karmas do not cause attachment. '*Yogayukto*' means one who has attained the manifest form of Paramatma and has complete

It is true that *jivas* have been bound by their karmas since time immemorial. However, it is also true that those ties can be eradicated, liberation can be attained and a lifestyle can be adopted in which karmas can be performed without them causing bondage. This principle has been clearly described in our shastras. The Gitā is an example of this.

Many believe that life and liberation cannot coexist. They believe that ultimate liberation cannot be attained whilst alive because life is full of karmas and karmas bind, and thus life is also a form of bondage. As a result, some believe that

conviction in him. ‘*Vishuddhātmā*’ refers to a pure atman. ‘*Vijitātmā*’ describes one who has won over his mind. ‘*Jitendriyaha*’ denotes one who has control of his sense organs – such as the eyes, ears and nose, as well as the organs of action – such as his hands and feet. ‘*Sarvabhootātmabhootātmā*’ implies becoming *brahmarup*. This is because Aksharbrahman is the atman of all beings (*sarva-bhoot-ātmā*), so ‘*sarvabhootātmabhootātmā*’ literally means to be *aksharrup*. ‘*Kurvannapi*’ refers to the karmas done during life. ‘*Na lipyate*’ shows the result.

Here, the Gitā tells us to incorporate yoga – that is, attainment and knowledge of the importance of the form of Paramatma, self-control of the mind and senses, and *brahmabhav* – into our karmas. As long as the atman is engulfed by the swamp of *maya*, it cannot attain complete conviction in the form of Paramatma. Therefore, the Gitā tells us to make the atman clean and pure. That cleansing requires self-control of the mind and senses. All of this is obtained by becoming *brahmarup*. Thus, the Gitā teaches us to become *brahmarup*.

One who has the above virtues is not bound by karmas. ‘*Kurvannapi*’ means ‘even though doing karmas’, hence we can understand that the precept is how to remain aloof from the ties of karmas whilst still continuing to do them.

The next three *shlokas* explain the understanding necessary to remain aloof from the binds of karmas, even whilst doing them. Shri Krishna says,

‘नैव किञ्चित्करोमीति युक्तो मन्येत तत्त्ववित्। पश्यन्शृण्वन्स्पृशन्जिघ्रन्
नशनान्छन्स्वपन्श्चसन् ॥

प्रलपन् विसृजन् गृह्णन्नुन्मिषन् निमिषन्नपि। इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थेषु वर्तन्त
इति धारयन् ॥

ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः। लिप्यते न स पापेन
पद्मपत्रमिवा भसा ॥’

‘*Naiva kinchitkaromeeti yukto manye-
ta tattvavit;*

*Pashyan-shrunvan-sprushan-jighrannashnan-
gachchhan-svapanshvasan.*

*Pralapan visrujan gruhnannunimishan
nimishannapi;*

Indriyāneendriyārtheshu vartanta iti dhārayan.

*Brahmanyādhāya karmāni sangam tyaktvā
karoti yaha;*

Lipyate na sa pāpena padmapatramivāmbhasā.’

Meaning: ‘Even though a knowledgeable yogi looks, hears, touches, does, smells, eats, walks, sleeps, breathes, speaks, forsakes, partakes, and opens and closes his eyes, he believes that it is merely the senses doing their tasks, and that he himself is doing absolutely nothing at all. With this in mind, he offers his karmas to Aksharbrahman and does karmas without any attachment to them. Like a lotus in water, he is not smeared by the sins of karmas’ (Gitā 5.8-10).

Here, the words, ‘*Naiva kinchitkaromeeti*’ – ‘I do absolutely nothing at all’, speak of shedding one’s ego. The words, ‘*indriyāneendriyārtheshu vartanta*’ – ‘the senses do their tasks’, reveal to one to realize that the atman is distinct from the body, the senses and their objects. The words, ‘*sangam tyaktvā*’ indicate that attachment should be shed. The words, ‘*brahmanyādhāya karmāni*’ speak of dedicating all karmas to Aksharbrahman.

This message of dedicating all karmas to Aksharbrahman comprises a special principle. In order to ensure that karmas do not cause bondage and to make karmas a form of devotion, sentences like, ‘मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्य’ – ‘*mayi sarvāni karmāni samnyasya*’ (Gitā 3.30) – in the third *adhyay* of the Gitā speak of dedicating karmas to Paramatma; whereas here it mentions, ‘*brahmanyādhāya karmāni*’ – ‘dedicating karmas to Aksharbrahman’ (Gitā 5.10). Thus, the Gitā speaks of dedicating karmas to either Akshar or Purushottam. The word ‘*brahman*’ in the phrase ‘*brahmanyādhāya karmāni*’, indeed refers to Aksharbrahman. The Gitā itself reveals this to us through Krishna’s words in the eighth *adhyay*. At the onset of the eighth *adhyay*, Arjuna asks, ‘किं तद् ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Kim tad brahma*’ – ‘What is that Brahman?’ (Gitā 8.1). To this, Shri Krishna

replies, ‘अक्षरं ब्रह्म’ – ‘Aksharam brahma’ – ‘Akshar is [that] Brahman’ (Gitā 8.3).

Thus, the Gita describes how to elevate ordinary karmas to karma-yoga by associating them with the divine Akshar-Purushottam.

If one does not do karmas in the above-mentioned manner, then those karmas result in bondage. Even if those karmas are done with due care – that is to say, are done well, at the right time, in the right manner and without apathy – and even if people may think the job to have been done well and may even like it, and one may even be satisfied and happy with one’s work, but, such karmas still bind. A deed well done with worldly talent still binds, if it is not associated with the spiritual. Association with the spiritual means association with Akshar-Purushottam.

In this manner, Shri Krishna informs Arjuna how one can do karmas and not be bound by them.

In the next few *shlokas*, Shri Krishna explains how one who does karmas in the above mentioned manner experiences liberation whilst alive and, upon death, attains Akshardham. Before we look at that, let us take a look at some facts about liberation.

LIBERATION

Generally, liberation (*mukti*) is taken to mean ‘to be freed’. On the spiritual path, liberation has a special meaning: liberation is not just to be freed from the misery of imprisonment, but is about being freed from the misery of imprisonment as well as experiencing a bliss that has never been experienced before and attaining the divine. Indeed, there is happiness associated with release from imprisonment, but that is not enough. Bliss was being prohibited by that imprisonment, so upon release from that imprisonment, that bliss is attained. Thus, liberation has two aspects, being freed and attainment of bliss.

One who aspires for liberation is called an aspirant. In the Gitā, Arjuna is an aspirant. Shri

Krishna tells him the principle of liberation in various ways.

THE DEFINITION OF LIBERATION

The technical definition of liberation is to rise above the three *gunas* of *māyā* and become *brahmarup* by the association of the *brahmaswarup* guru, and to offer devotion (*upāsana*) with *dāsabhāv* (the sentiment of willing and unpretentious service that originates from love, respect, adoration, humility, gratitude, etc.) to Parabrahman. This definition is affirmed well in the Gitā.

THE TWO TYPES OF LIBERATION

There are two types of liberation (*mukti*): *Jivanmukti* and *Videhamukti*. The above definition applies to both types of liberation, and the Gitā also clearly describes them both.

JIVANMUKTI

Jivanmukti means to experience liberation whilst alive. Spirituality is not about promises of the future, but concrete experience. Although every religion has accepted the principle of liberation, the acceptance of *jivanmukti* is unique to Hinduism. The shastras of India, based on the Vedas, clearly proclaim *jivanmukti*. One of these is the Gitā. In his teachings, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also repeatedly emphasized about the experience of liberation whilst alive.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF JIVANMUKTI

Describing the characteristics of a person who experiences the state of liberation whilst in this world, Shri Krishna says, ‘यतेन्द्रियमनोबुद्धिर्मुनिर्मोक्षपरायणः । विगतेच्छाभयक्रोधो यः सदा मुक्त एव सः ॥’ – ‘Yatendriyamanobuddhir munirmokshaparāyana-ha; Vigatechchhābhayakrodho yaha sadā mukta eva saha.’ – Meaning: ‘A person who is in control of his mind and senses, who solely aspires for liberation, who has no desires, fear or anger and is reflective, such a person is invariably a *mukta*’ (Gitā 5.28).

The words ‘*sadā mukta eva saha*’ – ‘such a

person is invariably a *mukta* – show that it is not necessary to attain the abode of Parabrahman after death to be called a *mukta*; such a person is indeed a *mukta* even whilst in this world.

The same principle is explained again with the words, ‘इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो येषां सा ये स्थितं मनः । निर्दोषं हि समं ब्रह्म तस्माद् ब्रह्मणि ते स्थिताः ॥’ – ‘*Ihaiva tairjitaha sargo yeshām sāmye sthitam manaha; Nirdosham hi samam brahma tasmād brahmani te sthitāhā.*’ – Meaning: ‘One whose mind is fixed on tranquillity has won the world whilst here; because Aksharbrahman is faultless and tranquil, therefore, such a person is fixed on Aksharbrahman’ (Gitā 5.19).

Again, with ‘*ihaiva*’ – ‘here indeed’ – Shri Krishna speaks of being rid of the bonds of the world whilst alive.

Explaining that winning the battle whilst alive is to have fulfilled the purpose of life, Shri Krishna says, ‘शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक्शरीरविमोक्षणात् । कामक्रोधोदभवं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥’ – ‘*Shaknoteehaiva yaha sodhum prākshareeravimokshanāt; Kāmakrodhodbhavam vegam sa yuktaha sa sukhee naraha.*’ – Meaning: ‘A person who is able to endure the outbreaks of lust and anger, etc. here, before departing the body, is a yogi and is happy’ (Gitā 5.23).

The words, ‘*ihaiva*’ – ‘here indeed’ – and ‘*prākshareeravimokshanāt*’ – ‘before departing the body’ – show that true yogis rise above the instincts of lust, anger, etc. and experience the ultimate bliss during this life.

The Gitā then describes the state of one who has conquered the instincts of lust, anger, etc., saying, ‘कामक्रोधवियुक्तानां यतीनां यतचेतसाम् । अभितो ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं वर्तते विदितात्मनाम् ॥’ – ‘*Kāmakrodhaviyuktānām yateenām yatachetasām; Abhito brahmanirvānam vartate veditātmanām.*’ – Meaning: ‘For those devotees who have no lust or anger, have conquered their minds, are in control of their senses and know Paramatma, Brahmanirvan is all around them’ (Gitā 5.26).

To attain Brahmanirvan means to go to Akshardham. Brahmanirvan is attained only after

leaving the body. Nevertheless, those who have the above virtues experience Akshardham in this world and in this body.

The notion of experiencing liberation whilst alive also is stated in Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s teachings. For example, he says, “If one performs a karma by which God and his Bhakta are pleased, then, in this very body, one will enjoy bliss similar to that of attaining the highest state of enlightenment” (Vachanamrut Gadhadā II 45); “When the devotee has kept his mind at the holy feet of God in this manner, he does not have to die to attain the abode of God – he has attained it while still alive” (Vachanamrut Gadhadā III 7); “Such a sadhu also believes that his *jivātmā* is distinct from the three bodies – *sthul*, *sukshma* and *kāran* – and that that God forever resides within his *ātmā*. Indeed, God and the abode of God are not even an atom’s distance away from such a sadhu” (Vachanamrut Sārangpur 10).

Thus, from shastras like the Gitā and the Vachanamrut, we understand that although liberation is indeed to be attained, one does not have to wait for the body to pass away to experience it.

THE MEANS TO JIVANMUKTI – ASSOCIATION WITH BRAHMAN

The Gitā says that when conviction in Paramatma, control of the mind and senses, humility, realizing the atman and the body to be distinct, and the *brahmic* state all combine, then one experiences the ultimate bliss whilst alive. But, the Gitā does not stop there; it also shows us the means to attaining all of the above.

Shri Krishna says, ‘ज्ञानेन तु तदज्ञानं येषां नाशितमात्मनः । तेषामादित्यवज्ज्ञानं प्रकाशयति तत्परम् ॥’ – ‘*Gnānena tu tadagnānam yeshām nāshitamātmanaha; Teshāmādityavaj-gnānam prakāshayati tatparam*’ – Meaning: ‘One who has destroyed the ignorance of the atman with knowledge, for him that knowledge, like the sun, reveals Paramatma (Gita 5.16).

Here, ‘knowledge’ is used with Aksharbrahman

in mind. Many *shrutis* have used the word ‘knowledge’ for Aksharbrahman. For example, ‘सत्यं ज्ञानम् अनन्तं ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Satyam gnānam anantam brahma*’ – ‘Aksharbrahman is eternal, the form of knowledge and limitless’ (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1). ‘प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Pragnānam brahma*’ – ‘Aksharbrahman is the form of knowledge’ (Aitareya Upanishad 3.3).

The essence of the above *shloka* is that the Aksharbrahman guru is the means to rid ourselves of ignorance and realize Paramatma.

In the Vachanamrut, too, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says the same. “I shall explain how an elevated spiritual state can be attained by *jnān*. What is that *jnān* like? Well, it transcends Prakruti-Purush. When an elevated spiritual state is attained by this *jnān*, Prakruti-Purush and the entities evolved from them do not come into view” (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 24). Here, an elevated spiritual state attained by *jnān* means an elevated spiritual state similar to the Aksharbrahman guru, who is the form of knowledge. This means that, by the grace of the Aksharbrahman guru, the spiritual aspirant also becomes *brahmarup* and attains the *brahmic* state.

Also, Shri Krishna further clarifies this point, saying, ‘स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षय्यमश्नुते’ – ‘*Sa brahmayogayuktātma sukhamakshayyamashnute*’ – ‘One who attains the association of Brahman achieves eternal bliss’ (Gitā 5.22). The association of Brahman means association of the Aksharbrahmaswarup guru. One who associates with the Aksharbrahman guru by thought, word and deed can be called an atman that has imbibed yoga. Another term used for the association of Brahman is ‘satsang’ or ‘association of the Sant’. One who strives to attain yoga in this manner, i.e. does satsang, attains the virtues of conviction in the form of Paramatma, ultimate devotion, willing servitude, etc. within their atman and becomes *brahmarup*. Such a ‘brahmayogi’ atman continuously experiences the everlasting bliss of Paramatma.

Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan affirms

this point time and time again in the Vachanamrut. For example, he says, “If one practises satsang with absolute sincerity, then no fault will remain in one’s heart, and one will become *brahmarup* in this very lifetime” (Vachanamrut Sarangpur 9); “When one attains the company of such a Sant, he has, while still alive, attained that which was to be attained after death. That is to say, he has attained that which is called the highest state of enlightenment, or liberation, while being alive” (Vachanamrut Gadhada III 2). To sincerely do satsang, that is, associate with the Sant, means to associate with the *brahmaswarup* guru with sincerity. The Gitā makes this point using the word, ‘*brahmayogayuktātma*’.

THE LIFESTYLE OF A BRAHMAYOGI

Describing the lifestyle of one who has truly found knowledge by true association with the Aksharbrahman guru as aforementioned, Shri Krishna says, ‘विद्याविनयस पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि। शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः॥’ – ‘*Vidyāvinayasampanne brāhmane gavi hastini; Shuni chaiva shvapāke cha panditāhā samadarshinaha.*’ – Meaning: ‘The wise perceive a learned and polite Brahmin, cow, elephant, dog and the uncultured as equal’ (Gitā 5.18).

This is how a *jivanmukta* regards society. ‘*Samadarshinaha*’ means one who sees all with equality. Paramatma resides in all. Even though the vessels vary, the Paramatma that resides in them all is the same. The wise always look to Paramatma, therefore he does not discriminate by mundane notions of lesser or greater, good or bad.

Shri Krishna explains this same view of equality in a different manner, too, saying, ‘न प्रहृष्येत्प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत्प्राप्य चाप्रियम्। स्थिरबुद्धिरसंमूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः॥’ – ‘*Na prahrushyetpriyam prāpya nodvijetprāpya chāpriyam; Sthirabuddhirasammoodho brahma-vid brahmani sthitaha.*’ – Meaning: ‘A person who is steadfast in Brahman, knows Brahman, has a tranquil intellect and has no infatuation, does not become excited on attaining something pleasing,

nor is he disappointed when he attains something that is displeasing' (Gitā 5.20).

This equity arises from the understanding that whatever one attains, whether pleasant or unpleasant, is all according to the wish of Paramatma. The essence of this *shloka* is that such equity is natural to one who is steadfast in Brahman, i.e. for one who is *brahmarup*.

Thereafter, having described the experiences of those who are liberated whilst alive, the Gitā goes on to explain the other type of liberation.

VIDEHAMUKTI

Videhamukti means liberation that is attained after leaving the body.

Those who attain this type of liberation become *brahmarup* and when they leave their bodies, via the *archimārg*, they attain Akshardham. There, they attain a *brahmic* body and, remaining engrossed in the devotion of Parabrahman, they continually experience the ultimate bliss of that Parabrahman.

The Bhagavad Gitā uses the word 'brahmanirvāna' for *videhamukti*. To attain *brahmanirvāna* means to leave the body and attain the abode of Paramatma.

In the fifth *adhyay*, the Gitā describes repeatedly this *videhamukti* using the word 'brahmanirvāna'. For example, 'योऽन्तःसुखोऽन्तरारामस्तथान्तर् योतिरेव यः । स योगी ब्रह्मनिर्वाणं ब्रह्मभूतोऽधिगच्छति ॥' – 'Yo'ntahsukho'ntarārāmastathāntarjyotireva yaha; sa yogee brahmanirvānam brahmabhūto'dhigachchhati.' – Meaning: 'One who experiences the bliss of Paramatma residing within oneself, rests in the Paramatma within oneself and is enlightened by the realization of Paramatma within one's atman, such a *brahmarup* yogi attains Brahmadham' (Gitā 5.24). 'लभन्ते ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृषयः क्षीणकल्मषाः । छिन्नद्वैधा यतात्मानः सर्वभूतहिते रताः ॥' – 'Labhante brahmanirvānam-rushayaha ksheenakalmashāhā; Chinnadvaidhā yatātmānaha sarvabhootahite ratāhā.' – Meaning: 'One whose doubts have dissolved, who is steadfast in Paramatma, who is engrossed in the good

of all *jivas*, such a rishi, becoming free of sins and attains Brahmadham' (Gitā 5.25).

In the second *adhyay* of the Gita, too, summarizing the characteristics of a *sthitpragna* person, Shri Krishna mentions *brahmanirvāna*, i.e. *videhamukti*. He says, 'एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः पार्थ नैनां प्राप्य विमुह्यति । स्थित्वाऽस्यामन्तकालेऽपि ब्रह्मनिर्वाणमृच्छति ॥' – 'Eshā brāhmi sthitihi Pārtha nainām prāpya vimuhyati; Sthitvā'syāmantakāle'pi brahmanirvānam-ruchchhati.' – Meaning: 'O Arjuna, this (the characteristics I have mentioned) is the *brahmic* state. Having once attained this state, a person is never again subject to infatuation. If this state is attained even at one's last breath, one attains Brahmadham' (Gitā 2.72).

Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also described *videhamukti* many times. For example, he says, "After such an *ekāntik bhakta* leaves his body and becomes free of all influences of *māyā*, he attains Akshardhām via the *archimārg*" (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 21).

CONCLUSION

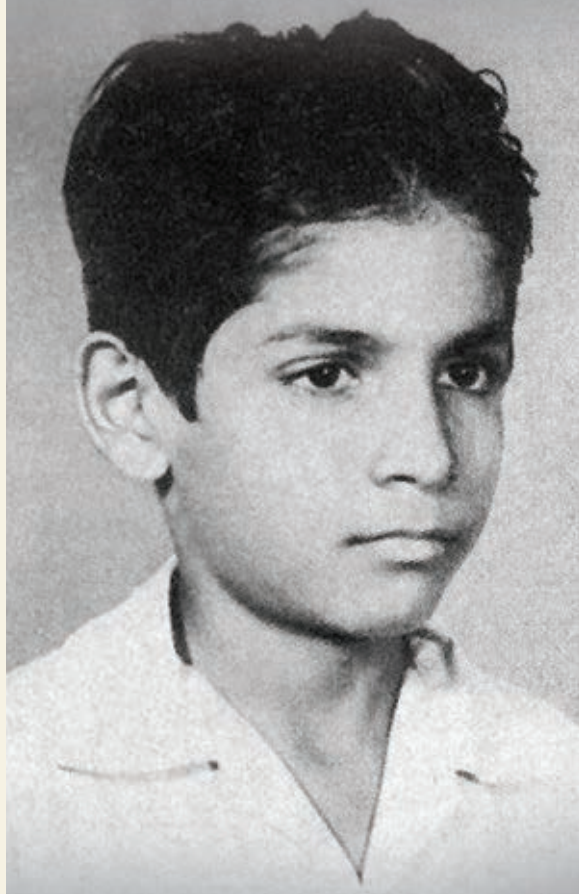
Thus, in this manner, the fifth *adhyay* of the Gita teaches us about extremely important aspects of the spiritual path such as the art of doing karmas, *jivanmukti* and *videhamukti*.

We are all fortunate that the Brahman whose association the Gita has instructed us to keep in order to imbibe the above-mentioned spiritual qualities is the same Brahman we have attained as our guru. We have come into the association of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thus, the words '*brahmayogayuktātmā*' of the Gitā are of true value for us; for us, these words have come to life.

Let us affirm our conviction in the form of Paramatma by the true association of manifest Aksharbrahman – Mahant Swami Maharaj. Let us attain the boon of not being bound by karmas even while doing them. Let us experience liberation whilst alive and, after leaving the body, attain the divine abode of Akshardham. ♦

THE EARLY YEARS

*To commemorate
Mahant Swami Maharaj's
85th birthday (13 September 2018;
Bhadarva vad 9, VS 2074), we present a
brief account of his birth, education, and
experiences with Yogiji Maharaj and
Pramukh Swami Maharaj*



BIRTH

In 1907, Shastriji Maharaj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, fulfilled the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan by consecrating a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Bochasan. The devotees of Anand and the Charotar region played a pivotal role in the making of the mandir. Among them, Manibhai Narayanbhai Patel of Anand was a prominent devotee. Shastriji Maharaj mostly stayed at Manibhai's house during his visits to Anand between 1907 and 1929. Manibhai served him with profound devotion and care.

In 1929, Manibhai went to Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj for the purpose of doing business. There, he found many *patidar* settlers from the Charotar region in the tobacco businesses. Manibhai, however, entered into the dairy business.

Here, on 13 September 1933 (Bhadarva vad 9, V.S. 1989), his wife, Dahiba, gave birth to a divine child.

What name should the child be given? Manibhai decided to wait for Shastriji Maharaj to come and name the child. But prior to that, everyone started affectionately calling the child Vinu. And this name was written on his birth certificate.

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S BLESSINGS AND PROPHECY

Vinubhai was six months old. In March 1934, Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Jabalpur after his pilgrimage to Chhapaiya. With him were Ashabhai and Ishwarbhai of Purushottampura and other devotees and sadhus. Ashabhai brought the six-month-old child, Vinubhai, and placed him on Shastriji Maharaj's lap. Shastriji Maharaj looked at the baby and smiled. He cheerfully initiated the child into Satsang and named him 'Keshav'. Then, placing his hand on his head, he blessed, "Manibhai, your son will grow up to become a sadhu and will render great service to the Sampradaya."

In spite of Shastriji Maharaj having named the child Keshav, the family members called him Vinu because they had become habituated to it.

Manibhai's neighbours were from different Indian states. One of them was a South Indian named Shyamrao. Another was a pious Punjabi. The room where Shastriji Maharaj had stayed was later rented to a Christian. So, Vinubhai, reticent by nature but very sharp and agile, was raised amidst neighbours of various language and cultural backgrounds. Vinubhai thus conversed with them in English and Hindi. The neighbours loved Vinubhai and the latter respected them.

BRILLIANT SCHOOL YEARS

During his childhood years Vinubhai had a few close friends. But, he was more inclined towards reading books. He used to read in a nearby garden, sometimes in the evening and sometimes in the moonlight.

He studied till 2nd grade at the renowned Christ Church School in Jabalpur. Thereafter, from 3rd grade to Senior Cambridge (11th grade) he studied at the Christ Church Boys School. Daily, he walked to school. On the way, he used to confidently cross a stream by himself, whereas other students were helped by their parents.

Vinubhai was exceptionally brilliant at studies. He excelled in all the subjects. He studied with unwavering attention and interest in class. He remembered whatever was taught in class, and thus had no need to refer to his textbooks thereafter. On returning home from school he would diligently do his homework. He always stood first or second in the class, which surprised everyone.

From childhood, Vinubhai had a very sharp memory. He still remembers incidents and events from the age of four. Even today, over 75 years later, he can fluently recite the poems he had been taught in grades three and four.

Vinubhai, however, was disinclined towards reading the newspapers. Every morning, the



Vinubhai studied at Christ Church Boys' Senior Secondary School, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

Mumbai Samachar was delivered at his house, but he never even glanced at it. He preferred to read good magazines and always skimmed through the *Swaminarayan Prakash*. Though he did not know Gujarati properly, he made an effort to read it.

Vinubhai's artistic sense and skill were well developed. He made excellent drawings in school. Though he ranked first in the art class he never aspired to take special classes and become an artist. He once revealed, "I drew pictures but was never obsessed with them. After drawing them I never thought about them later."

Football was his favourite sport. He played as left full back.

In school, he was liked by all. He was quiet, thoughtful and ever-smiling, and the entire class admired him.

Mr Robinson, the principal of Christ Church School, was impressed with Vinubhai's radiant personality, intelligence and innate virtues. He once told Vinubhai, "In future, you'll become a priest."

After completing his Senior Cambridge studies in 1951, he left Jabalpur with his father. Manibhai and his family returned to Anand for business.

A NEW CHAPTER IN GUJARAT

Vinubhai was fluent in English and Hindi,

whereas his communication in Gujarati was weak and patchy. He did not know how to read or write Gujarati. Thus, initially, the ambience in Anand was not conducive to him. However, Vinubhai's arrival in Anand in 1951 turned out to be a turning point in his life.

Our whole house and even people from our neighbourhood were leaving. Thus, I, too, left with everyone. When I reached [Sarangpur] Shastriji Maharaj's cremation was over. I was naturally downhearted. From there, we all went to Gadhada. A few days later, the *pratishta* [of the mandir] in Gadhada was going to take place.

On the day before the Gadhada *pratishta* I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I was still in a melancholy mood. At that time, he was 29 years old and I was 17. I met him when my life [in Satsang] was beginning.

"Motikaka [Motibhai Bhagwandas] introduced me to Pramukh Swami. He had a flourish of jet black hair before the [monthly] *mundan*. His eyes were active and blinked rapidly. He was gentle and mild, had a round face, was thin and thus looked tall. I can still remember his form. He had a slightly dark complexion. One could see the faint red speckle on the tip of his nose. I looked at him as Motikaka was introducing us to each other. Yes, I was definitely moved by him. My thoughts seemed to have stopped. Pramukh Swami was talking to me in Hindi. I do not remember what he had asked me and the answers I had given. However, I felt as if he knew me. I, too, felt that I knew him!

"Within a few moments of his contact I had a wonderful and divine experience. I felt transported from the sultry summer heat of Vaishakh [May-June] to the pleasant [icy] coolness of the Himalayas. Then a leading devotee came [to him] and Pramukh Swami had to attend to him. So, he briskly left, smiling. I was left dazed as if someone had snatched away an expensive thing from me. Though there were thousands of people around me, I felt alone and lonely.

"Today, I realize what his personality was like at that time. He never wished to impress or overwhelm anyone. He was honest, simple, straightforward and frank. I felt, 'Oh! He is a true sadhu!'"

ABSORBED IN YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S DIVINE LOVE

In 1951, another historic and memorable incident took place which changed Vinubhai's life.

Yogiji Maharaj arrived in Anand. During his stay there, he always visited Manibhai's house. Yogiji Maharaj's thick, coarse *dhotiyas* and rustic behaviour and speech did not interest Vinubhai. The moment Yogiji Maharaj stepped into his house Vinubhai would rush out through another flight of stairs. Many felt that due to Vinubhai's youthful whims his father's satsang had failed to appeal to him. Despite having a mandir at home, Vinubhai kept himself aloof from the daily rituals of puja, *katha*, kirtans and celebration of festivals. Sometimes, due to his rational mind, he would often ignore and make fun of devotional practices.

Once, while Vinubhai was leaving his house, Yogiji Maharaj came climbing the same stairs. Yogiji Maharaj lovingly held his hand and spoke affectionately, "Guru, where are you going? Come back upstairs." Vinubhai returned in a vexed mood with Yogiji Maharaj. Then Yogiji Maharaj talked to him casually and softly, "Here, put on this *kanthi*." And Yogi Maharaj placed a *kanthi* around his neck. But Vinubhai, because of his prejudice for sadhus in Jabalpur, broke it instantly. In response, Yogiji Maharaj smiled sweetly, gave him a pat on his shoulder and said, "Oh, you are very strong!"

Vinubhai's dislike for certain aspects of Satsang was such that anyone would have got angry and chastised him. But not Yogiji Maharaj.

A couple of days later, Yogiji Maharaj was departing from Anand. While he was walking towards the railway station, he saw Vinubhai

sitting on the parapet of the village pond with his friends. Yogiji Maharaj hailed him affectionately, “O Vinubhai, come here!” Vinubhai reluctantly came to Yogiji Maharaj, wondering what would he say now! However, to his surprise, Yogiji Maharaj humbly joined his palms and smilingly said, “Now I am going. Forgive me for my mistakes.” And so saying, Yogiji Maharaj blessed Vinubhai with his signature pat and walked away hurriedly.

Vinubhai stood astonished, not knowing what to do or say. Instantaneously, his prejudice dissolved and he was overwhelmed by a wave of remorse. He became lost in thought. He mused about how Yogiji Maharaj was a unique sadhu. He also realized that his personality overflowed with pure love and his smile was ethereal. He was suddenly overwhelmed by a deep desire to be with him. He simply stood there transfixed, with his eyes thirsting for Yogiji Maharaj’s darshan.

Soon, another soul-stirring incident took place when Yogiji Maharaj was travelling by train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai. The train halted for 10 minutes at Anand Station. Many devotees had come to the railway station for Swamishri’s darshan. The shy and reticent Vinubhai had also come to the station for his darshan. Yogiji Maharaj started meeting the devotees. Then someone informed him that Vinubhai had come.

Yogiji Maharaj scanned the platform and enquired, “Where is Vinubhai?” After seeing him standing at a distance against the wall of a hotel, Yogiji Maharaj alighted from his carriage and went up to him. Again, Swami showered his infinite love upon him and blessed him with pats. Vinubhai was overwhelmed by Swami’s compassionate eyes and saintly virtues. Then, moments later, the train whistle blew and it was time for Swami to leave. Vinubhai did not feel like parting from Yogiji Maharaj. Swami flashed a smile and hurriedly headed towards his carriage. As soon as he put his foot on the footboard, the train started moving. Vinubhai



Platform of Anand railway station where Vinubhai had a unique experience of Yogiji Maharaj

kept his eyes focused on Swami till he was out of sight. Thereafter, he remained standing on the platform, savouring thoughts of the divine encounter. The devotees and others dispersed. Only Vinubhai stood there, totally absorbed in remembering every frame of the divine occasion. His boundless joy was like *samadhi*. Vinubhai became oblivious to time and the surroundings. The experience of Yogiji Maharaj was so profound that his *murti* pervaded his being. He realized that Swami was not an ordinary sadhu, but God-realized!

Thereafter, for the next fifteen days, Vinubhai returned daily to the railway station, sat on a bench at the same spot and joyfully reminisced about his experience with Yogiji Maharaj. Despite the routine hullabaloo and jostling of passengers on the platform Vinubhai remained unperturbed while recalling the occasion for 45 minutes.

While remembering that experience he states, “On meeting Yogiji Maharaj, I instantly bonded with him. It was as if I was in search of him, but unaware of it. On meeting him I became fulfilled. Everything else became subordinate. Yogiji Maharaj became the centre of my life.”

FIRST INSPIRATION TO BECOME A SADHU

Thus, Vinubhai became passionate about Yogiji Maharaj. He started to spare time to be

with Yogiji Maharaj during his *vicharan* and take the benefit of his spiritual association.

“After celebrating the festival of Krishna Janmashtami in Atladra some of us youths departed [a few days later] to go home. We came to the railway station to catch the morning train. It was Shravan *vad* 11. Pramukh Swami and his companion sadhu were on their way to Ahmedabad by train. All the youths got into the carriages where there were empty seats. I ran and joined Pramukh Swami in a third class carriage. I was the only youth with Swami and his companion sadhu. Pramukh Swami was happy to see me. The train started and he began asking me about my studies. Suddenly, he enquired, ‘Do you have a *kanthi* around your neck?’ I said, ‘No.’

“Pramukh Swami tenderly explained and said, ‘Get it from Yogi Bapa.’ By that time the companion sadhu had placed a *kanthi* in Pramukh Swami’s hand. So, he placed it around my neck. Then our conversation continued. He spoke continuously in broken Hindi. While speaking he said, ‘Become a sadhu. You will serve immensely...’ And thereafter he talked spiritedly. There was no trace of force or command in his words. He talked confidently about the miseries of *sansar* and described the happiness of God and guru. He was speaking in such a way that the choice was entirely left to me.

“I found a new direction in Pramukh Swami’s sweet, humble and loving talks. I felt very peaceful. From that moment onwards I was awakened with the desire to live a sadhu’s life.

“After a while, Pramukh Swami began talking about the glory of Yogi Bapa. At that time I felt so peaceful that it seemed as if he had accepted me in his lap. In this way, he instilled [Yogi Bapa’s] glory in my soul.

“In spite of the passengers’ movements, shouts of loaders and unloaders, clacking sounds of the carriages, smell of flying ash and other disturbances [Swami’s] talks were so interesting that I was unaffected by the surrounding bustle. We

soon reached Anand. The other youths came running from their carriages [to Swami]. Pramukh Swami met them all. He had to travel ahead to Ahmedabad. Saying goodbye to the youths he smiled and said, ‘Today is *ekadashi*. Don’t have anything to eat.’ The youths agreed to follow his instruction, and the train proceeded ahead.

“For me, it was Pramukh Swami who inspired me to observe my first fast! Then he gave the fasting-flag in Yogi Bapa’s hands [to wave to others]. That was how I felt both were one. I repeatedly experienced Pramukh Swami to be a unique and genuine sadhu.

Pramukh Swami’s inspiring words left a deep impact on Vinubhai. In fact, they kindled his heart. Then, one day, Yogiji Maharaj consolidated the idea of becoming a sadhu to Vinubhai.

In 1952, Vinubhai went to Gondal for Yogiji Maharaj’s spiritual association. There, in Akshar Deri, Yogiji Maharaj instructed Vinubhai to become a sadhu. Vinubhai beamed with joy. He decided there and then to dedicate himself totally to the guru.

From then onwards, his life’s goal was clear and fixed. He was eager to become a sadhu at the earliest, but Yogiji Maharaj insisted that he graduate in his studies first. So, Vinubhai tried to put his mind in his studies.

EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE AND BRAHMAVIDYA

Vinubhai decided to study science at the V.P. Science College in Vallabh Vidyanagar. There were two classes in the first year. One was a special class, which comprised of thirty brilliant students. Vinubhai studied in this special class. While attending Professor R.A. Dave’s lecture, Vinubhai became acquainted with a brilliant student named Ramanbhai Patel.¹ They became

1. Later, Ramanbhai Patel went to Mumbai and studied medicine. He, too, earned the grace and blessings of Yogiji Maharaj and took *diksha* from him in 1961. He was named Swayamprakashdas Swami and is fondly known as Dr Swami.



Vitthalbhai Patel Science College, Anand, Gujarat



Vinubhai during his college years



very good friends. After the first year, Ramanbhai went to Mumbai to study medicine and Vinubhai enrolled for a bachelor's degree in agriculture in Anand.

After completing his first year at college, Vinubhai had many other academic options to pursue due to his brilliance. But he chose to do a bachelor's degree in agriculture. The main reason for this was so that he could easily go and stay periodically with Yogiji Maharaj and avail of his spiritual company. In addition, the Bansilal Amrutlal College of Agriculture did not have co-education, which facilitated his future plans of becoming a sadhu. His aim of becoming a sadhu was very clear and strong. He was disinterested in worldly matters. So, during the four years in college he studied agriculture and also took lessons in *brahmavidya* from Yogiji Maharaj.

TRIALS ON THE PATH OF SAINTLINESS

As news percolated in Anand that Vinubhai was going to become a sadhu, a wave of discontent and agitation rose among his relatives. Among them was his seniormost relative, Motibhai Bhagwandas Patel, who was also a dedicated and mature devotee. But, Vinubhai's father, Manibhai, wished that his son become a sadhu.

One day, Vinubhai was pouring water while Yogiji Maharaj washed his hands by a coconut

tree in the compound of Sokhada mandir. At that time, Yogiji Maharaj surprisingly declared, "I will not initiate you into a sadhu because Motikaka has refused. So, get married and go to Africa. You will earn lots of money and fame there."

On hearing this Vinubhai missed a heartbeat. He humbly beseeched, "Bapa, I want to be a sadhu and please you!"

At home, there were offers for Vinubhai's marriage and a generous dowry from seventeen families. But Vinubhai was resolute in his goal to never lead a householder's life. Once, he told Yogiji Maharaj while he was bathing, "Bapa, I want to become a sadhu and please you." On seeing his determination Yogiji Maharaj was immensely pleased and replied, "Oh, you are very firm and determined." Then, Yogiji Maharaj stalled his bathing ritual by placing the small pot (*loto*) of water aside and embraced Vinubhai, saying, "I, too, am of the same resolve, but I have to side with Motikaka. However, you should tell him explicitly." With these words, Vinubhai felt calmness and joy pervading his entire being.

Soon thereafter, Motikaka came up to Yogiji Maharaj and spoke vociferously, "In our family, four youths took initiation as sadhus, but none of them have remained so. Whereas he [Vinubhai] is from a distant place [Jabalpur] and nor does



Bansilal Amrutlal College of Agriculture, Anand, Gujarat

he have any satsang knowledge – how long will he remain a sadhu after becoming one? Tell me Swami, am I not his well-wisher?” And then Motikaka took hold of Vinubhai’s arm and spoke sternly, “Come home. A girl and all other comforts of a married life are ready for you.”

However, Vinubhai politely wrested his arm from Motikaka’s grip and boldly replied, “I do not want to get married. I want to become a sadhu!” Motibhai was infuriated by the terse reply and so he struck Vinubhai with his hand, and shouted, “I give you three more days to think about it.”

The taciturn Vinubhai spoke calmly and with a steely resolve, “I don’t need to think any further. My final decision is to become a sadhu.”

Yogiji Maharaj blissfully looked at Vinubhai and confidently said, “Motibhai, he wants to become a sadhu. Therefore, allow him to be one, and bless him.”

Motibhai reluctantly agreed after hearing Yogiji Maharaj’s words and uttered, “Okay, whatever he wishes.” Then he blessed Vinubhai, “If it is your wish, then become a sadhu. I am happy about it.” Then, Motibhai walked away quietly.

Yogiji Maharaj exclaimed, “Vinubhai! Motibhai had pleased Shastriji Maharaj immensely. On having received his blessings, you will be

victorious.”

Vinubhai hurdled over one trial, but there was another major one. His mother, Dahiba, was not happy and willing to allow her beloved son to become a sadhu. But Vinubhai discoursed to her about *vairagya* and the evanescent nature of the world. Soon, she realized that her son was destined to worship God and inspire others to do likewise. Finally, she happily agreed to allow her son to fulfil his ardent desire.

RENOUNCING HOME

In 1956, Vinubhai completed his last year at college. He graduated with a B.Sc. degree in Agriculture. Prof. R.M. Patel took his last practical. As soon as the exams were over, instead of going home, Vinubhai rushed off to Gondal to be with Yogiji Maharaj. That was his moment of renunciation. Thereafter, he never went home again. And surprisingly, he did not even go to receive his graduation certificate. It was indeed the climax of Vinubhai’s renunciation. Vinubhai gave up his mundane life with great ease.

After renouncing home, Vinubhai travelled as a youth with Yogiji Maharaj and served him for one year.

THE FIRST DIKSHA

Yogiji Maharaj’s task of initiating 51 youths into the sadhu-fold began with Vinubhai. That glorious day arrived in Gondal. On the early morning of 2 February 1957 (Maha *sud* 2) Yogiji Maharaj applied the *tilak* on Vinubhai, spoke the guru mantra in his ear and gave him the *parshad diksha* in Akshar Deri, and named him Vinu Bhagat. The event took place unannounced. ♦

*Excerpts from ‘Mahant Swami Maharaj,
An Epitome of Saintliness’*

WITH YOGIJI MAHARAJ AND PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

Mahant Swami Maharaj's dikshas in 1957, 1960 and 1961 and thereafter as the mahant of Dadar Mandir...



YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S BLESSED SEVAK

Yogiji Maharaj kept Vinu Bhagat in his service for three-and-a-half years, from 1957 to 1960. At Yogiji Maharaj's behest, Vinu Bhagat washed utensils, attended to correspondences and other things.

Yogiji Maharaj's style of moulding was distinct. After Vinu Bhagat took the *parshad diksha*, the following three months were very testing times for him. He describes that period in his

own words, "Yogiji Maharaj showered a lot of love. We would feel as if he was wholly ours. So, I thought after taking *diksha* I would be with him – and how joyful that would be. But, for the next three months after *diksha* he behaved as if he did not know me at all.

"In Mojidad, I lost a utensil while washing dishes at the 'old' mandir. So, a sadhu from the 'old' mandir scolded me and also complained about me to Yogiji Maharaj. Then Yogiji Maharaj sided with him and told me off, 'Bhagat, you should not have done that.' At that time, I felt I was on my own.

"Three months later we went to Bhavnagar. There, I and Yogiji Maharaj observed a waterless fast on Hari Jayanti. As a result, I could not sleep that night. Yogiji Maharaj told me to get up and said, 'Since we both are unable to sleep let us have a discussion.' Then he lovingly talked to me about many things. At the end, he declared, 'You have passed the test!' And then he expressed his immense *rajipo* on me.

"Yogiji Maharaj profusely showered his grace, saying, 'I give you the *punya* [spiritual merit] of having turned 178,000 *malas*.' At that time, we had celebrated Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 178th birthday. Thus, he must have said that figure and blessed me with so much *punya*. From then onwards, he started calling me and talking to me as before. And, I started experiencing the true happiness and joy of his august presence."

Yogiji Maharaj took personal care of Vinu Bhagat. During lunchtime, while Yogiji Maharaj took his meal Vinu Bhagat had to sit some distance away to eat because he was a *parshad*. But

Yogiji Maharaj unfailingly served food to him many times. He had lovingly served Vinu Bhagat more than fifty times.

VINU BHAGAT AS THE LEADER OF NINE YOGESHWARS

3 July 1960 (Ashadh *sud* 9) was the auspicious day of *diksha*. For Yogiji Maharaj it was a day of great joy and happiness. For years he had been relentlessly striving to inspire youths to take *diksha*. Amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras and *pujan* rituals in the morning, Swami gave the first *parshad diksha* to Vinu Bhagat. He placed a new *kanthi*, an upper cloth and a *pagh*. Then he applied the *tilak*, uttered the guru mantra and declared the new name. Though Yogiji Maharaj gave the *parshad diksha* to Vinu Bhagat for the second time, his joy knew no bounds. Then, he also gave the *parshad diksha* to Ranchhod Bhagat, Mahendra Bhagat, Arun Bhagat, Narayan Bhagat, Anupam Bhagat, Niranjana Bhagat, Madhu Bhagat and Suryakant Bhagat. Yogiji Maharaj addressed them as the nine Yogeshwars, and explained their glory to all.

Yogiji Maharaj instructed the nine newly initiated *parshads* to stay at the mandir-cum-*pathshala* in Ghatkopar and study Sanskrit. He told Vinu Bhagat and Harshadbhai Dave, “I am placing them in your care. Discourse to them and instil spiritual strength in them.”

Due to Yogiji Maharaj’s divine love, one year passed away rapidly for Vinu Bhagat and the



Nine Yogeshwars (Vinu Bhagat, standing-centre)

parshads. Soon, May 1961 arrived. A historic event was organized in accordance with Yogiji Maharaj’s wish. It was the *diksha* ceremony of 51 educated youths into the saffron order.

The momentous day was 11 May 1961. It was Yogiji Maharaj’s 70th birthday celebration and the ceremonial instalment of the golden *kalashes* on top of the *shikhars* of Gadhada mandir. The day was also going to mark the saffron *diksha* of 51 educated youths at the hands of Yogiji Maharaj. Vinu Bhagat was the first to be given the *diksha*. Yogiji Maharaj applied *chandan* on Vinu Bhagat’s forehead and arms, gave him the guru mantra and blessed him. After draping him with a saffron upper cloth he named him Keshavjivandas Swami. Loud cheers and hails of *jais* resounded in the canopied hall. Yogiji Maharaj blessed him with a pat and raised his right arm in fervent



Mahant Swami (first, far right) and newly initiated sadhus with Yogiji Maharaj, 1961, Gadhada

joy. Surprisingly, the name ‘Keshav’ that Shastriji Maharaj had blessed him with when he was six month’s old was given to him during his saffron *diksha*. Pramukh Swami garlanded each of the new sadhus and congratulated them.

POPULARLY KNOWN AS MAHANT SWAMI

Yogiji Maharaj deeply desired that the 51 newly initiated sadhus study Sanskrit and become erudite scholars. For this, he chose Mumbai as their place of study. He assigned Harshadbhai Dave to arrange for a renowned Sanskrit scholar to teach them. Furthermore, Yogiji Maharaj appointed Keshavjivandas Swami to be their head and from thenceforth he addressed him as ‘Mahant Swami’.

In 1962, when Yogiji Maharaj consecrated a *hari* mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, he appointed Mahant Swami as its head and Bhaktipriyadas Swami as the *kothari*. From time to time, Yogiji Maharaj revealed the glory of Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami to the sadhus, and also told them to obey their instructions. He also conveyed their glory through letters, discourses and personal conversations.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj addressed the student sadhus, “Listen, I wish to talk to you all. Our Acharya Maharaj is Pramukh Swami. I have dug the foundations and now the edifice will be built by Pramukh Swami. Mahant Swami will give everyone’s report to Pramukh Swami. Our Acharya Pramukh Swami will come here once every month or two months. Shastriji Maharaj used to visit Khambhat and Bhadran once every week or ten days. Mahant Swami is the head here. He will take care of you all.

“Pramukh Swami is the greatest among all. He is the head of all. Whatever he says, everyone should follow. By obeying his instructions you will progress. Also, follow whatever Mahant Swami says. Whenever a sadhu is worried or bewildered he should reveal it to Mahant Swami. He will resolve your distress. The happiness of Akshardham lies here.

“If you worship God and abide by the

instructions of Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami you will become like gold. Like what? Gold!

“If you wish to go to Akshardham you will require a [visa] stamp. When will you get Shriji Maharaj’s stamp? Only when the Sant is pleased with you. Otherwise, you cannot get the stamp. When Mahant Swami gives you the stamp, then nothing can obstruct you till Prakruti-Purush.

“Our Mahant Swami’s [spiritual] state is like that of Bhagatji Maharaj. He is the mahant of Mumbai. His [spiritual] state is such that if one has not had his darshan then one has to go to Mumbai to do so. He will not take it to mind whether anyone respects him or insults him.

“By [spiritually] associating with Pujya Narayan Swami [Pramukh Swami] and Pujya Mahant Shri Keshavjivandasji one has associated with [Shriji] Maharaj.

“Our Swaminarayan Bhagwan is humble, Gunatit is humble, Shastriji Maharaj is humble; similarly we have seen the humility of our Mahant Swami – Keshavjivandas Swami. He is greatly devout and eternally God-realized.”

MAHANT SWAMI – AN IDEAL FOR THE YOUNG SADHUS

Mahant Swami’s bhakti was unique. He prepared different, decorative garlands for Thakorji. He also offered and sang *thals* with devotion to Thakorji. He made ornate *hindola* and rocked Thakorji, and meticulously arranged *annakut* before Thakorji. He always remained engrossed in different kinds of *seva* and involved others too.

YOGIJI MAHARAJ’S DEPARTURE

On 23 January 1971, the sudden passing away of Yogiji Maharaj to Akshardham plunged Pramukh Swami, Mahant Swami and the entire satsang fraternity in deep grief and sadness. In his final days, Yogiji Maharaj had frequently remembered Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami and revealed to his grieving devotees, “After me, Pramukh Swami is present. He will give you much



Mahant Swami prepares a decorative *hindolo*, BAPS Mandir, Dadar, Mumbai



Swamishri garlands and blesses Mahant Swami

more joy than me.” And then added, “Pramukh Swami is my all.” After a few moments, Yogiji Maharaj said, “Where is Pramukh Swami? Where is Mahant Swami? Call Harshadbhai with a pen and paper. Write down these wishes.”

Thus, revealing Pramukh Swami as his spiritual successor, Yogiji Maharaj left his physical body.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S AFFECTIONATE SHELTER

The departure of Yogiji Maharaj was a great loss to the sadhus and devotees who were attached to him with great love. It was especially difficult for Mahant Swami, because his youthful, logic-centric, intellectual way of thinking had been nested in the garden of faith by the selfless love of Yogiji Maharaj. But the affectionate support and shelter of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj lifted his gloom. Describing this, Mahant Swami says, “Yogiji Maharaj showered such love that I was naturally drawn and attached to him. That bond gave much joy and comfort. But, after Yogi Bapa returned to Dham, a difficult question arose. The bond with Yogiji Maharaj was due to affection. So, the mind did not think of anyone except Bapa. Then, after Bapa went to Dham, I thought that now everything is over. But, Pramukh Swami gradually made such an impact, that soon I became attached to him. Since, ultimately, they are

both one. It was only the outer form that had changed! For me, in particular, I was touched by his virtues. I have come into contact with many leaders in society, but in all there is some element of deception or manipulation. However, there was none of that at all in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The things that drew me to Yogi Bapa I saw in Pramukh Swami Maharaj as well.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s simplicity and honesty are the same. There was no hypocrisy in Yogiji Maharaj, and there is none in Pramukh Swami Maharaj either. There is an innate simplicity in his life. In all his work, he is totally natural. He has many other virtues. These became more evident over time and I developed affection for him like I had for Yogi Bapa.

“Today, Pramukh Swami does not act in the way of a guru-*shishya* with me, but his affection for me is like that of Yogi Bapa’s. Through the association of Pramukh Swami, I have developed the firm belief that I have nothing more left to do. The only thing that remains to be done is to dedicate myself to whatever his wishes and commands are.”

And with such conviction, just as he had served Yogiji Maharaj, Mahant Swami served Pramukh Swami Maharaj. With such elevated spiritual understanding, Mahant Swami served under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and made significant contributions to the many activities and projects of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

HISTORIC LETTER ESTABLISHING FUTURE LEADERSHIP

On 20 July 2012, in Ahmedabad, in the presence of Dr Swami, Kothari Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj revealed and established Mahant Swami as the future guru and president of BAPS.

To confirm this, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote a letter in his own hand addressed to all BAPS sadhus and devotees.

“Swami Shriji

Shri Akshar Purushottam Mandir

Shahibaug, Ahmedabad

20-7-2012, Friday

Shravan *sud* 1, 2068

I would like to inform all the sadhus and household-er devotees of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri Yagnapurushdasji, that I appoint with happiness and joy, and in my fullest conscious state, Pujya Mahant Swami, Sadhu Keshavjivandas (Guru Jnanjivandas), as the President of BAPS, that is, as the guru, after my physical departure.

Jai Swaminarayan from
Shastri Narayanswarupdas
Guru Yagnapurushdasji.”

This was the clear wish and instruction of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Yet, Mahant Swami humbly requested Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the other senior sadhus, “As long as Pramukh Swami Maharaj is present on this earth, this decision should not be publicly declared. I am a mere *sevak*, and wish to remain a *sevak*. The gateway to *moksha* and the guru of all is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. At any one time, *moksha* is attained through only one. That is a fact. So, please all accept this prayer of mine.”

So, even though he was not declared as the guru, Mahant Swami assumed the leadership of all the Sanstha’s activities by the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj from 2012.

*Excerpts from ‘Mahant Swami Maharaj,
An Epitome of Saintliness’*

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

On 3 May 2018, during the Youth Day assembly in Secunderabad, the youths asked questions to Swamishri. The question-answer session is as follows...



Q 1. Swami, we feel ashamed to apply the *tilak-chandlo* and abide by other satsang *niyams* when we attend college and go out. How did you remain steadfast in observing the *niyams* during your college life?

A. Yogiji Maharaj had instructed me to do so. Hence, there was no other thought after that. One has to follow *agnas*. I obeyed his *agna*. Let others say what they want. When we realize who are guru is, then his instructions should be obeyed immediately. Firstly, follow his *agna*, then spiritual knowledge will dawn. No matter what happens, obey his word. O, how great Maharaj and Swami are! On the one hand if one is offered ₹1 crore for a job and on the other if one is offered ₹5 to ₹25 in another job, would you not take the job offer with the salary of ₹1 crore? Similarly, one's social affairs will come to an end in 25 years and you'll have nothing left. Do the *tilak-chandlo*

with these thoughts in mind.”

Q 2. Today, our satsang has increased incredibly, so it is not possible for all to experience the four types of happiness of the guru: darshan, *prasadi*, discourses and to hug him. How can one attain those four types of happiness?

A. Spiritual understanding (*samjan*) is the root answer. Then, all questions will be solved. What are the wishes of Shriji Maharaj, Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj? Know them and follow them. Then, even though you may be thousands of kilometres away and whether he is able to meet you or not, he is with you. Spiritual understanding is a big thing. Doing things out of understanding will sustain your spirituality, whereas, other (worldly) things will come and go, stay or disappear. After understanding his wish and inclination, no matter how far away you may be, you are near him. Devotees live far away in America,

Africa, but due to *samjan* they experience the four types of spiritual happiness.

Q 3. What is your opinion and wish about using a mobile phone. What type of discrimination (*vivek*) should we exercise ?

A. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish is my wish and opinion. Swami Bapa believed it to be poison; but there is a need to use it. So, it must be used with proper discretion. It should be used appropriately with regards to time duration and frequency of calling. Even one who is spiritually knowledgeable (*jnani*) and steeped in meditation (*dhyani*) lapses by using it. It contains *moha* (attractions and delusions), which makes one forget (right and wrong). Therefore, be alert and careful. One will remain happy to the extent one exercises *vivek*.

Q 4. What should one do to spiritually benefit from the Satpurush so that one can always remember him?

A. Swamishri jokingly replied, "You'd have to travel with him." Then he added, "But that is not possible. Having a spiritual understanding is a very big thing. Once one gets it, all physical, mental and other problems will get solved.

"The total time Shastriji Maharaj had spent with Bhagatji Maharaj was three years. But he remained happy due to *samjan*. He had to wear white clothes for three years, but he still remained happy due to *samjan*. Thus, spiritual understanding or *samjan* is useful."

Q 5. Instead of wasting time by coming to

the Sunday satsang assembly what is wrong in spending time studying, playing sports and doing other things?

A. Swamishri said emphatically, "Everything else is hollow and temporary. Satsang is very wonderful. How can one kick away satsang like a football when it has been attained after performing infinite endeavours! Satsang is very pure and pious. It solves all problems. By doing satsang one's mind becomes focused, and applying it thereafter gives success. So many children and youths who do satsang properly attain top grades in their studies.

"Doing satsang is like sharpening [the axe]. By spending more time in satsang one will be able to 'chop' more. Swaminarayan Bhagwan has said, 'In spite of having done satsang for 100 years when one doesn't do it for one day, one regresses, and slowly one's satsang erodes to a point where one wonders whether one is a *satsangi* or not!' Therefore, do not sacrifice satsang for the sake of doing other things."

Q 6. Youths succumb to the lures of Facebook and the internet. Bless us so that we can overcome them.

A. Swamishri wrote, "To defeat *maya* without the aid of the Satpurush is impossible. One has to associate with the Satpurush through one's mind (*man*), karma (action) and *vachan* (speech). Then surely one will not become entrapped by *maya*."

◆
*Translation of excerpts from
Swamishri's Vicharan report*

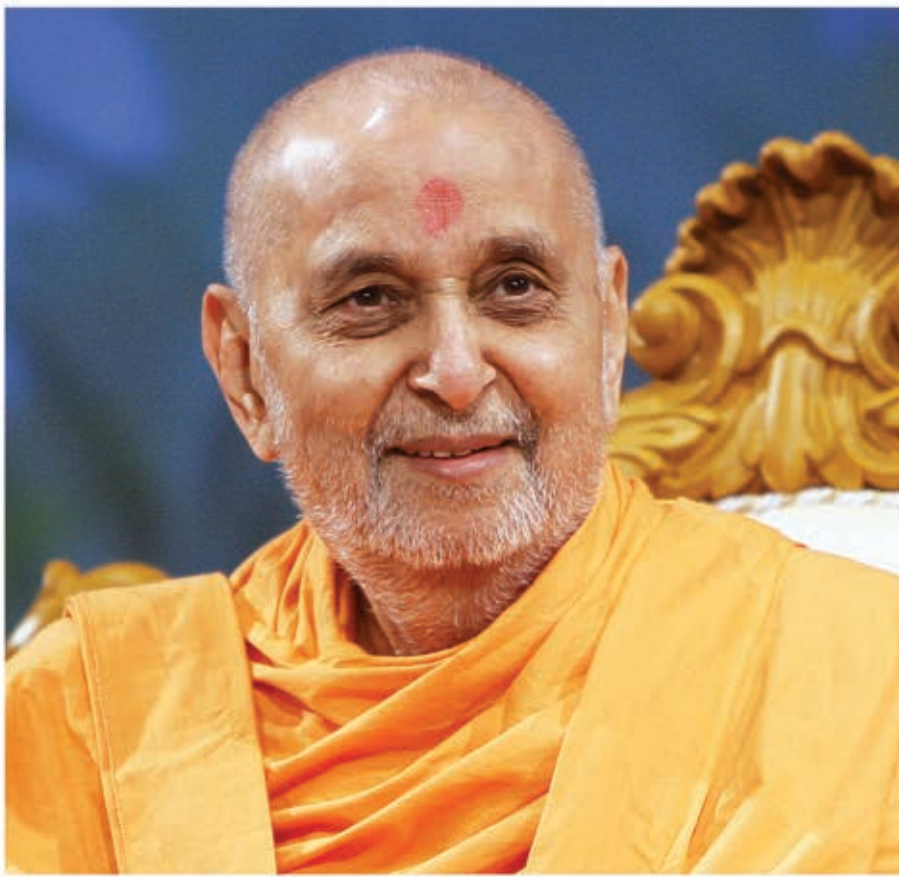


Question-answer session with Swamishri during a satsang assembly in Secunderabad, 3 May 2018



GHAR SABHA

MAKE YOUR HOME IDEAL



Revealing the formula of home assembly (ghar sabha), Pramukh Swami Maharaj provided an extraordinary solution to repairing fractured families, solving individual problems and defusing societal unrest. Here are his thoughts and blessings regarding the importance of doing ghar sabha

A devotee's home and family should be ideal. Having furniture in the house is not the only way to make a home beautiful. In fact, having dharma, values and peace are the true reasons that make a home beautiful. A home should be such that by entering it one experiences peace. But how can that happen? The answer lies in bringing back our foundational values in life.

Today, in the West, we find homes bereft of family feelings. Everyone is independent in their own way. When a son turns sixteen his father cannot tell him

anything. And when the father falls ill the son does not go to see him. Whereas our culture is emotionally oriented. If something happens to someone in the family, the other members feel the pain too. However, recently, the Western influence has affected innumerable families in India. Divorces have increased manifold in India.

Today's age is one of materialism. Science has progressed a lot and it is required and necessary. We have street lights and roads. Science has sent man to the moon. It has given us the television and internet. Because of TV, email, internet and other things there are 'fires' in homes. All are burning in that fire. Today, televisions are found in all homes, and all enjoy by watching various programmes. Parents, sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, little children – all sit before the TV and watch things that they should not. Then, how can children learn to respect their elders? All family members should respect elders and conversely all elders should behave in such a way that all are inspired to respect them. But, by watching TV (indiscriminately) how can our children learn our values and exercise discrimination?

How many learn good things from television? In fact, people learn to become violent, stoke commotion, steal, commit adultery, drink liquor and gamble. Because of these vices, they lose their pride, wealth, self-worth and everything. We have forgotten our values. Formerly, when people used to wake up in the morning they would immediately perform their ablutions and daily puja. Today, instead of (giving importance to) a home mandir the television has become prominent.

If we wish to have peace then we'll need to go back to our fundamental values. An increase in materialism and wealth often results in more vices in people's lives. Subsequently, everyone's mind in the house will split from each other. Only if there

is spirituality in the home will the members be saved. For that, everyone should sit in the *ghar sabha* every night and read the scriptures or good books and engage in spiritual talks. Also, by sitting together during meals everyone's minds come together. By doing satsang and reading the scriptures one is able to cultivate *vivek*. So, our scriptures teach us to accept good things and give up bad things. Our hearts become pure by reading or listening to our spiritual books and the biographies of ideal persons. Children, too, imbibe good values. We make arrangements for our children's education, but miss out in teaching them values. If they do not receive good values at home, they are not going to get them from outside. Do you want to make your children good? Then hold *ghar sabhas*. Read our scriptures to them. When they read, listen or learn all this from a young age they will be instilled with good *sanskars* and feel proud about being Indian. Instilling such pride will be a great service to society.

By reading our scriptures one is inspired to introspect and is awakened with sentiments of respect towards one's parents, teachers and guests. Because children are not taught such values from early childhood problems arise in the home. Many parents believe that their children know a lot of things. But what do they know? They know only about worldly things! And parents believe this to be important, but (the reality is) that children lack *sanskars*. So, it's important to do *ghar sabha*.

People do not have time because all their time is utilized in earning money. Because one leads a householder's life, money is required. In addition to going to work or

doing business, you must also take time out to sit with your children for half-an-hour daily. If you want to bond with them, you must sit, talk and have fun with them and teach them good





Ghar sabha (family assembly)



Family performs *arti* at the *ghar mandir*

things. Then, as they grow up they will obey your wishes. Make your young children sit with you when you do your daily puja and also eat together as a family. At night, during *ghar sabha*, you can ask them what they have learnt in school. Tell them small incidents and a few inspiring words so that they receive *sanskars*.

One must always reserve a little time for children. The reason why *kusang* takes over lies in us not giving quality time to our children and, as a result, no mutual bonds develop. The lack of bonding leads to conflicts and unrest in the house. Never scold your children. Similarly, a husband should never rebuke his wife and vice versa. Talk to each other with love. By so doing, the other person will accept what you say. Talk gently with your children and with love. By becoming angry on your children nothing is accomplished. Talk and listen to them with love. Try to understand what they say and they will understand you. The more loving your bonds are with them the more peace and happiness will prevail. To develop such bonds do *ghar sabha*.

During former times, after the evening meal was over, all the family members would gather together and talk about satsang. One can talk about incidents that impact us from the Ramayan and Mahabharat – who was Ram and what was Ram *rajya* like. However, today, one finds the sovereignty of Ravan in most homes – in other words there are conflicts and commotion.

Bhagwan Ram was *maryada* Purushottam. When you have Ram in your heart you'll know how to conduct your social affairs and behave in society. But if you have Ravan in your heart then there will be explosions around. Till one does not remove him one will not experience peace in one's heart and family.

Today, people do not spare time to listen to such talks because they keep roaming outside and thus never come home in time. Subsequently, one thinks that by doing this one has advanced and become a better person. But, in fact, one has become spoilt. There are no prohibitions in earning money but one must observe moral disciplines (*maryada*).

If one wants to keep a wholesome ambience at home then adjust your time and have dinner together. Then, sit together and read the scriptures. But we never think about sitting together, and therefore conflicts arise. We have to understand our own self. By so doing, our family will be happy and you will also be happy. If you introduce the tradition of sitting together, observing a little silence and singing a prayer and *dhun* then your life will get better.

Keep a mandir in your house and install whichever deity you believe in. Do daily *arti*, offer *thal* and sing bhajans and prayers. When your children see this they will know about the *murti* of Bhagwan. Otherwise, there are children who do not know this. In fact, parents should take the initiative and care in such matters. One must also

take care in doing *ghar sabha*.

There is no end to our logical arguments against spiritual matters. However, by having faith in God's words, scriptural words and the words of great spiritual masters, and accepting that whatever they say is true and there is not an iota of falsehood, then one becomes spiritually liberated. However, we doubt whether anything can happen by practising spirituality. But it can, providing we offer bhakti with resolute trust and faith.

When one member of the family sits down to do *ghar sabha* with faith then the entire family will experience peace. Gandhiji had faith in truth. Subsequently, many joined him on his word and made India independent (from British rule). Likewise, what cannot be achieved by having faith in Yogiji Maharaj's words? Do *ghar sabha* with such faith. Even when no one listens, do it alone with resoluteness. Contemplate about it. Gradually, all the members will join.

Today, brothers and sisters have become independent in their homes. So, they don't listen to each other. Though they belong to one family, they file suits against each other. The reason for such conflicts lies in the erosion of our culture and *sanskars*. Without *sanskars*, patriotism, family feelings and societal feelings break down. Then, there will be conflicts. In addition, corrupt *sanskars* lead to disrespect among family members. A husband and wife fail to respect each other. They thus quarrel and fight. I have heard of many such cases. Children cry and say that their parents fight with each other. Give up your fights so that your children do not fight. Fights erupt because of minor differences. But what is the benefit of fighting?

To avoid this, all members should assemble together to do *ghar sabha* and share their thoughts, pray to God, do bhajan and remember Shriji Maharaj. Try to understand each other. Tolerate a little and

learn to let go. This will definitely bring peace in your home. That is why it is necessary to do *ghar sabha*. It ushers in spirituality. The reason for pain and discord in all homes is due to lack of *sanskars*. However, if there is spirituality at home then the family members will forgive each other and dignity will be restored.

By sitting together our minds coalesce. In other words, thoughts become one and life becomes straightforward. Because we do not sit together to talk, our thoughts get disturbed, we become angry and break moral rules.

When you marry off your son then believe his wife to be your daughter. And when you marry off your daughter then believe your son-in-law to be your son. Additionally, believe his relatives to be yours too. Believe your spouse's relatives to be yours as well. However, after marriage, the spouse blurts out, "I don't want your parents in my home!" Such behaviour leads to conflicts and eventually results in divorce. But you must understand that this is not our culture. We should consolidate cultural values in our lives to such an extent that others are touched by them and derive inspiration.

There should be no clashes in a *satsangi's* home. Everyone should live with love, talk with love, do bhajan out of love and work together lovingly. When this happens, we have truly come to understand what satsang is.

The highest of all things is love. No matter how bad a person may be, but he can be transformed through love. So, when a person improves, the family improves; when a family improves, society improves; when society improves, the country improves; and when a country improves, the world improves. But the family improves through the practice of *ghar sabha*. Therefore, do *ghar sabha* and make your house sacred and ideal like a mandir. ♦

Translation: Sadhu Vivekji vandas





ધરને અક્ષરધામ તુલ્ય કરવા

ધરસભા

આજ્ઞા માનીને ધરસભા કરીએ
તો બધા કનિયા મરી જાય ને
સંપેલું વાત્તાવરણ રહે. ધરસભાથી
બધા એકબીજાને સમજી શકે,
એકબીજાને આદર આપે અને
અંતરમાં શાંતિ રહે, તોજ
ભગવાન ભજવાનું સુખ આવે.

સુધુ કરી અંગનવાહ ના
જગતી સ્વામિનારાયણ

GHAR SABHA BLESSINGS

To make one's home equivalent to Akshardhām:

GHAR SABHĀ

If we conduct Ghar Sabhā believing it to be the āgnā [of the guru], then all [family] disputes will be resolved, and an atmosphere of unity will prevail.

Through Ghar Sabhā, all [family members] will understand one another, respect each other, and peace will prevail in one's heart.

Only then will the bliss of worshipping God be experienced.

Jai Swāminārāyan

Sādhu Keshavjivandās [Mahant

Swāmi Mahārāj]





GHAR SABHA

TWO IMPORTANT VIRTUES



*Pramukh Swami Maharaj
gifted two wonderful ways
to defuse family conflicts
and other issues through the
practice of satsang and ghar
sabha: understanding others
and being broad-minded*

Pramukh Swami Maharaj introduced the efficacious practices of satsang and *ghar sabha* (home assembly) for all in overcoming discontent, enmity, spats, fights and a wide range of other problems. Through these two means Swamishri stated that one would be able to understand others and also develop a broad, generous outlook. Let us try to fathom the importance of understanding others and having a broad-minded outlook through the medium of *ghar sabha*.

GHAR SABHA FOR DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING

Every person has a deep desire to be understood by others. Whenever you experience that someone understands your perspective or your

feelings you feel happy and relaxed. Hence, your relation with that person becomes cordial and robust. Other than that your relationship remains dry and formal.

Parents often have a common complaint that their teenage child speaks less with them. Whenever parents ask a question to their child he or she replies briefly, and often coldly, whereas with friends their child talks enthusiastically for hours. The child reluctantly bonds or deals with parents, whereas with friends he or she bonds naturally and fluidly. What is the reason behind this? How come teenage children relegate their relations with their parents, who have taken care of them for years, and instead bond more with their friends? The reason behind this seems to

be that a teenager experiences that his friends understand him. Whereas, with his parents, he experiences a yawning generation gap.

So, understanding one another is an indispensable aspect of healthy and flourishing relationships. *Ghar sabha* provides a conducive environment in developing mutual understanding. In homes where family members talk to each other only when some work is to be done or something is required, then *ghar sabha* facilitates conversations and dissolves the generation gap.

Diptesh Patel, a *satsangi* youth in New Jersey, narrates his experience, “My retired parents live with me. Often, one finds gaps and bitterness in relationships between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and between a son and his father. The case between my parents and us was similar. My parents were adamant about certain things, whereas my wife and I thought differently. My parents insisted that we raise our children the way they had raised us. But in America our situation was completely different. Additionally, there were small communication gaps between us and them. For example, I never informed them that I had planned to visit my friend’s home the next day. On the contrary, my parents had planned something else for all of us. My wife would often cook something and my mother wished to eat something else. Gradually, through *ghar sabha*, we were able to solve our problems due to lack of communication. After completing the *ghar sabha* we would discuss our schedules for the next two to three days and what meals to cook. Subsequently, the problems between my mother and wife and my father and myself were defused.”

Another issue that arises in a family is mostly related to retired parents or seniors in the house. They complain that they are never informed or consulted about the social affairs of the family. As a result they feel they are not valued or considered as members of their own home. On the other hand, the youth who has the responsibility of running the home feels there’s no need to inform

or consult their parents about every matter. When the youth is told to at least inform whatever is possible or important, then the youth answers that he or she does not purposefully abstain from informing them but that there’s simply no time or opportunity to do so. Here, *ghar sabha* provides the opportunity and time to share whatever it may be with one’s seniors or parents.

Hareshbhai Patel of Houston shares his experience in this matter, “By doing *ghar sabha* the distance between me and my parents was bridged. Mostly, I never talked to them about my business and social matters. Consequently, there was a distance between us. But now, during *ghar sabha*, such matters are shared, discussed and answered. By talking candidly during *ghar sabha* our distance disappeared.”

One of the reasons for family discord is doubts or suspicions. Many times, due to lack of frank talks with the family, doubts arise and grow to disproportionate levels, eventually leading to quarrels, fights or divorce. Casual conversations during *ghar sabha* resolve suspicions and dissolve prejudices. Quite often a family on the verge of a break-up is salvaged due to such conversations during *ghar sabha*.

Shaileshbhai Dhanani of Rajkot relates his experience, “Some time after my marriage troubles started between me and my wife. I worked in a factory. Sometimes, due to an overload of work, I used to come home late. As a result my wife became suspicious of me and this led to heated arguments and increasing conflicts. My parents become fed up with her bickerings, hollow suspicions and unfounded accusations. I found my life hellish and our relationship came to the point of breaking up. One day, the conflict climaxed to such a point that my exasperated wife attempted suicide. But she was saved because of Vinubhai, our landlord, who came and calmed her.” Thereafter, Shaileshbhai witnessed the *ghar sabha* carried out at Vinubhai’s house next door and the resulting joy and ease in their family. He

was inspired and started *ghar sabha* in his home. Shaileshbhai adds, “In the beginning, I used to do *ghar sabha* on my own. But, gradually, all the members joined me. Slowly, my wife became interested in satsang. Our differences started to dissolve and our problems were solved. Finally, there was peace and joy between us.”

In this way, *ghar sabha* mended a broken family with trust and love.

GHAR SABHA INSPIRES BROAD-MINDEDNESS

It is not incumbent that members of a family should live in a large house, however, it is necessary that they should have a broad-minded outlook. A family is not a commercial outfit or a government system where its members have to abide by disciplines out of fear or compulsion. There is a need for rules and regulations in the house, but they should be followed with ease and love, and be practised out of respect rather than out of pressure. This can only happen when members accept each other with broad-mindedness and generosity.

When a person gets angry for a minor mistake made by someone, the consequences are far greater and more destructive than the loss or effect due to that small mistake. By doing *ghar sabha* the members gradually become attuned to positive understanding, which enables them to tolerate and forgive another’s mistake, cultivate patience, take care of that person and rein in their own anger. Countless families have been liberated from anger and other personal faults due to *ghar sabha*.

Divyangbhai Master of Vadodara elaborates, “My wife’s nature was very volatile. Daily, she had differences and friction with my mother. When we started doing *ghar sabha* she did not sit with us for one-and-a-half years. But when she started attending a gradual change occurred in her nature. Her relationship with my mother improved. Now, whenever someone in the house misplaces something she does not get angry.”

Miteshbhai Bhatiya of Jamnagar writes, “I was

very hot-headed. I used to simply burst out with anger on trifle matters, which caused anguish and conflicts in the house. Sometimes, there used to be friction between me and my customers and as a result my business declined. But by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s inspiration I commenced doing *ghar sabha*, and in five years I became calm and quiet. Today, there is peace at home and due to my friendly relations with the customers I have benefited monetarily.”

Pankajbhai of New Jersey writes, “Due to my furious nature I used to get mad at my children for small things. As a result my wife became averse to me and my parents didn’t like my edgy nature either. Because of this, friction started between me and them. Thereafter, with Swamishri’s *agna* we started *ghar sabha* and read the book *Swabhav Vash Sansar*. We got answers in the *ghar sabha* to the problems arising out of our *swabhavs*. Slowly, we became tolerant and broad-minded and things took a turn for the better in our lives. We started understanding each others’ greatness and realized that each one of us was right in his or her own way. We thus came closer to each other and our bitterness vanished.”

Janaksinh of Odarka describes the efficacy of practising *ghar sabha*, “Because of *ghar sabha* internal unity, camaraderie and love has increased in our family. When our land and property were divided among us three brothers we did not require the presence and help of a committee of five neutral persons from the village. We discussed among ourselves and decided upon three parts and received the title deeds of each share at Doctor Swami’s hands. When we divided the property as part of our social arrangement all the female members of our house were sad and expressed that they did not want to be separated from each other. The reason behind these sentiments was the observance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s instruction to hold *ghar sabha*.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s instruction to do *ghar sabha* has worked wonders in countless

families by solving internal frictions, personal problems and blessing all with inner peace and enlightenment. *Ghar sabha* has empowered innumerable individuals and families to become flexible and broad-minded in their inter-personal relations. *Ghar shabha* has also resolved issues related to land and property entitlements after the death of parents and curbed conflicts that were on the verge of resulting in murders or legal proceedings.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's contribution in

providing *ghar sabha* as a master key to unlocking and resolving a wide spectrum of problems and conflicts will forever be appreciated and remembered, and leave countless more families indebted to him. May we regularly practice in order to experience a happy ambience and divinity in our homes and also inspire others to do *ghar sabha*. ♦

Gujarati Text: Atmatrupt Swami
Translation: Sadhu Vivekivandas

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S BLESSINGS

*On 18 May 2018, during an evening satsang assembly in Chennai,
Mahant Swami Maharaj spoke in Gujarati about the need to do ghar sabha.*

When a mother-in-law believes her son's wife to be her daughter then all conflicts between them will end. However, when a mother-in-law remains suspicious of her daughter-in-law then things will get out of hand. Pramukh Swami Maharaj revealed a solution to this, 'To be mutually accommodative [*anukul thavu*].' Only by understanding others can one become accommodative.



Suspicion is a terrible thing; it ruins a home. No one in the house can live with peace and happiness. And mostly, there's no solid reason behind one's suspicion. One makes a mountain out of a molehill. One who is suspicious of someone believes his suspicion to be true. Everyone believes what they say [or think] is right; they never understand. They feel, 'I am right and the house should run the way I say.' To solve this, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had shown a wonderful means – *ghar sabha*.

Through *ghar sabha* the family members come to trust each another, and, thereafter, all problems get solved. One's son or daughter will not ask for something unnecessarily, because they understand. And parents should try to help

them as much as possible. Subsequently, even if there is little in the house there will be peace because all conflicts have been solved. On the other hand, if a billionaire suspects of something [wrong in his house] he will not be happy and peaceful. The reason for *samp* [harmony] lies in *samjan* [understanding]. One who becomes accommodative [*anukul*] and gives up his wilful resolves [*man dharya muke*] then he becomes happy. However, if he believes that he is right then he will never ever be happy. *Ghar sabha* enables one to understand others and accept what they say.

In the beginning, you may not get success [in doing *ghar sabha*], but, gradually, you'll get the hang of it. When one [person in the family] understands then the second person will also understand and then everyone will understand. The effects of [*ghar sabha*] will take place slowly and then solidly. It takes time for everyone in the family to adjust with each other, and then peace and happiness will prevail. Today, countless families experience such peace. If you want to experience the miracle of *ghar sabha* then start doing it. ♦



GHAR SABHA

JUST DON'T FORGET THIS!



Why is a mango seed planted? To benefit from the shade of a fully blossomed mango tree? To use its leaves as festoons? Well actually, the main reason is to enjoy the delicious, juicy mangos that it produces.

Yes, shade, leaves and wood are also obtained, but they are side benefits. However, the main benefit is the mango fruit.

In the same way, why is *ghar sabha* (family assembly) held? For *kalyan*. It is the command of the Gunatit Satpurush, and the true and ultimate benefit of obeying his wishes is *kalyan*. Thus, by observing this inner wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, *kalyan* is readily attained. At the same time, the benefits of family unity and harmony, values, spiritual understanding and others are also experienced.

If the core understanding that regularly conducting a *ghar sabha* is Swamishri's wish is attained, then whether or not the side benefits are experienced in one's family, one will remain motivated to continue conducting *ghar sabha* regularly with one's family.

How far can one throw an arrow by hand? But if one uses a bow, it can be sent much

further. In the same way, conducting *ghar sabha* for its side benefits is like the former, while holding a regular *ghar sabha* with the sole sentiment of obeying Swamishri takes one's family further.

In one's spiritual journey, to experience peace and happiness in life, observing the commands of the Satpurush is of paramount importance. The Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Shrimad Bhagvat, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vachanamrut and other shastras all indicate observance of the Satpurush's commands as the master key.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has even declared, "One who follows commands of the Satpurush is behaving as the *atma*."

India's late former president Dr APJ Abdul Kalam had a heartfelt reverence for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Dr Kalam was a distinguished, internationally respected scientist and intellectual. Yet, he also attached great importance to fulfilling Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes.

On 30 June 2001, Dr Kalam presented to Swamishri the five key areas which 500 of India's leading thinkers had identified to transform India. After listening to him, Swamishri suggested, "In addition to your five areas to transform India, add a sixth – developing faith in God and spirituality in the people of India."

On hearing this proposal, Dr Kalam remarked, "I was taken aback by the clarity, precision and force of his words." In an instant, Swamishri had identified an idea which had eluded so many great thinkers. This was Swamishri's divine intelligence in action and Dr Kalam endeavoured to fulfil Swamishri's idea.

That same divine mind of Swamishri has insisted that all should conduct *ghar sabha* to experience peace, harmony and happiness in life. Swamishri's insistence is based on his extensive experience of the problems that face families and society in general. And this is his solution to these manifold problems.

Swamishri counselled – in person, by letter and by phone – lakhs of people. He truly understood

the pains of people and their causes. *Ghar sabha* was the solution he advocated, borne of the pure, genuine concern he had for the welfare of all.

So, even if one does not understand the reason or logic behind Swamishri's guidance, it is still wise and beneficial to obey him. Such faith in his words will certainly bear fruit.

On 3 October 1998, in London, Swamishri said, "*Ghar sabha* is an important sadhana. When you start *ghar sabha*, do not stop, even if it takes some time to 'set'. When you move homes, it takes time to settle into the new home. The same happens for *ghar sabha*. Even if others don't come, you must continue your efforts. One day, everyone will become set with it."

On 11 June 2006, Swamishri said, "If you conduct *ghar sabha* with faith, trust and patience, all problems will be resolved."

Mahant Swami Maharaj has also re-inforced this message on many occasions.

On 13 July 2017, in Chicago, during the Bal Din assembly, the children asked Swamishri to draw them a picture. So, Swamishri drew a house and wrote 'Ghar Sabha' next to it. What was in Swamishri's heart, he drew by hand.

On 15 July 2017, a youth driving Swamishri's car said to him, "Swami! I got married recently." Instantly, Swamishri guided, "Before any problems arise, start *ghar sabha*."

So, just as performing daily personal puja and observing *ekadashi* are the Satpurush's commands, similarly, conducting *ghar sabha* is also his command.

On 3 October 1998, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "I thank you for faithfully conducting *ghar sabha*. So, just don't forget this!"

This is Swamishri's gift to all – accept it and welcome it with open arms and minds. Give it pride of place in your homes and revel in the pleasant atmosphere it generates. It is our duty to uphold Swamishri's wish. So, just don't forget this!♦

Gujarati Text: Sadhu Adarshjivandas
Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



GHAR SABHA NURTURES FAMILY LOVE, UNDERSTANDING AND HARMONY



Jayendra Dhirendrabhai Vinchhi
Surat

BLESSINGS FOR AN IDEAL FAMILY

In 1987, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Mumbai. While he was writing letters, my father, Dhirendrabhai, saw the large pile of letters still left to be answered and asked, “What is written in all these letters?” Swamishri replied, “The troubles and miseries of this world are written.” My father asked, “Is there a solution so that we do not ever have to write to you about such difficulties?” Then, Swamishri said, “If all the family

members got together and held a *ghar sabha*, then there would be no need to write such letters.”

Swamishri’s reply reflected his experience and foresight. It contained the answer to all family disputes. So, as per Swamishri’s wish, we started *ghar sabha*, which continues even today.

The *ghar sabha* has deepened our knowledge of the Sampradaya, enabled us to understand each other better, and spread peace and joy in our home. The prosperity and reputation of our family is due to what we have learnt from the *ghar sabha*.

I have been married for 25 years. My wife was not a *satsangi*, but on experiencing our home atmosphere, and seeing that by holding a daily

ghar sabha all our problems were resolved she was delighted. Slowly, she accepted satsang.

The *ghar sabha* has enabled the three generations in our home to live in harmony. There is no generation gap between us. There are no disputes between any of us.

In the *ghar sabha*, we openly discuss any questions, and arrive at a collective solution. As a result of this collective leadership, there is openness between all and no fear.

Usually, the problems between father and son, and mother and daughter-in-law are due to perceived, non-existent fears. Such a situation does not exist in our home due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's guidance to hold a *ghar sabha*.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had said that the family of Dharendra Vinchhi is an ideal family. We were humbled by his words, but everything is due to his blessings and the path of *ghar sabha* he directed us to follow.



**Ganeshbhai Rameshbhai Patel
Jhari Kundi, Selvas**

OUR UNITED FAMILY

We have been in Satsang for about 15 years, but for many years we did not hold a *ghar sabha*.

One day, BAPS youths visited our village, as part of the 'Swamina Pagle Pagle' ('In the footsteps of Swami') outreach programme.

I had then recently got married and there were stereotyped problems between my mother and wife. As time passed, their disputes increased and I was unable to resolve their differences. So, we had decided to live separately from my parents.

At that time the youths visited our home and asked if we held a *ghar sabha*. They explained its benefits, citing several examples. They said that it was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish and that it would resolve any family problem.

So, we decided to begin holding a *ghar sabha*.

At first, only my brother and I would sit in the *ghar sabha*. Then, over time, my wife and parents also joined. And this led to a positive change.

Through the texts we read we learnt how to lead a proper family life and this triggered peace in our home.

However, once, my mother and wife had a dispute which led to a heated exchange of words. Still, we continued our *ghar sabha*. One day, we read how Pramukh Swami Maharaj tolerated so many insults, even though he was not at fault, and so we should learn to tolerate. Hearing this, my wife introspected and thought when elders rebuke, one should accept and adjust accordingly. So, she apologized to my mother and their dispute was fully resolved.

Today, *ghar sabha* has kept our family united and we all experience peace at heart.



**Jayantibhai Gamar
Tuver (Poshina)**

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

We have been *satsangis* for many years, but did not conduct *ghar sabha*. However, since we have started, the unity in my family and between my brother and I has increased.

Ghar Sabha has taught us to understand each other's views; it has facilitated the resolution of daily tasks. In the *ghar sabha*, my brother and I distribute the tasks, and the unity between my wife and my brother's wife has also increased. *Ghar sabha* has inspired my father to quit his addiction, which was a big concern for us. It has taught my son noble values; he regularly attends the *bal sabha* and, in the morning and evening, only eats after performing *arti* and offering *thal* to Thakorji in the *ghar* mandir. It has instilled good character in my children and they have progressed.

Thus, *ghar sabha* has given our family a new lease of life.



Manshukhbhai Sorathiya Jamnagar

OUR PEACEFUL HOME

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we began *ghar sabha* in our family in 2008 and it has inspired us all in many ways. It has taught us to dine together, so we take our morning and evening meals together as a family. Before we started *ghar sabha*, there were daily complaints about the food.

But, learning about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtue of *nisswad* everyone naturally developed an understanding such that now there are no complaints about the meals. Everyone happily eats the food, regarding it as *prasad* from God.

The *ghar sabha* has also inspired our children to read the shastras. They now also take the satsang exams. The children also present stories in the *ghar sabha*, which makes it more interesting and builds their oratory skills and self-confidence. They can now even speak fearlessly in public. In this way, *ghar sabha* has brought peace and joy to our home.



Pinkalbhai Mohanbhai Patel Tithal

RE-UNITED

I had been involved in BAPS satsang for a long time, but lacked proper understanding. Then, in 2011, I was fortunate to be accepted for the six-month Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) course in Sarangpur. When I returned home after the training, I resolved to start *ghar sabha*. Initially, only my mother and I participated. My other family members showed no interest. Gradually, however, they also began attending.

After my eldest brother's marriage, his wife sat in the *ghar sabha*. The following year, my middle brother got married and his wife also sat in the *ghar sabha*. Then, my father and brothers began to sit, even though they did not have much

interest. In the *ghar sabha* we discussed upcoming family events and resolved any disputes.

In our village, it is a tradition to live separately after marriage, but after my marriage, I proposed that we all live and eat together as one family for as long as possible. My father and brothers agreed. To ease the financial burden on my father, we three brothers decided to pay a certain amount every month.

However, in June 2016, my eldest brother faced some financial difficulties and was unable to pay his share for a few months. My father told him that he was free to go and live separately. This caused tension in our home that day. Everyone was at a loss about what to do.

However, during the *ghar sabha* in the evening, my brother's wife said that they would pay the arrears as soon as possible, but that they did not want to move out. My parents and everyone else were happy that, instead of breaking up, our family was re-united – all because of *ghar sabha*.

Even today, we continue to live together without any problems.

Ghar sabha has ensured that our family remains united.



Ketanbhai Jani Vadodara

GREAT BENEFIT OF GHAR SABHA

We did hold a *ghar sabha* in our home, but not regularly. Then, we thought that if we truly want to please Swamishri, we should hold a regular *ghar sabha*. So, we decided that to motivate us if we did not hold a *ghar sabha*, then the next day we would fast. And this proved to be a turning point. In the past 21 years, we have had to fast only about five to seven times due to not holding a *ghar sabha*. There were occasions when we were out-of-town, travelled for 24 hours or visited other mandirs, yet we still held our *ghar sabha*.

Once, we had gone to Allahabad. Due to fatigue

we all went to sleep. At 1.00 a.m., I suddenly awoke and remembered that we had forgotten to do *ghar sabha*. So, I woke up my family members and we held our *ghar sabha* on the hotel roof.

Due to *ghar sabha*, our family is united and our satsang understanding has deepened. But the greatest benefit we have experienced is that Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj are pleased.



**Hireshbhai Patel
Anand**

SABHA EVEN IN THE ICU

After receiving six months training in the YTK in 2015, I returned home and started *ghar sabha*. Initially, my mother joined me, but my father was not interested. However, we continued and soon my father also joined. The wisdom we received through the *ghar sabha* developed our understanding and inner fortitude.

After a while, my father was diagnosed with TB, and due to its seriousness was admitted to the ICU. However, even there, we conducted *ghar sabha* in my father's presence. Others were surprised and spoke glowingly about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's efforts for family and societal harmony. During his seven-day stay, we daily held *ghar sabha*, and friends and relatives who came to visit him also joined in. As a result, quite a few of them have also started their own *ghar sabhas*. This strengthened our resolve to continue *ghar sabha*. No matter what the circumstances, we conduct *ghar sabha* to please the Satpurush.



**Mahendrabhai Prajapati
Ahmedabad**

GHAR SABHA BEFORE WEDDINGS

With the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, when we started *ghar sabha* in 2004, we did not

imagine the benefits it would bring. All my family members were resolute in their desire to observe Swamishri's wish. Such conviction remains even today. Whatever the occasion, whether relatives are visiting us or we have gone to attend a marriage, we still conduct a *ghar sabha*.

My daughter's and sons' weddings were at 3.00 p.m., so on those days, we held our *ghar sabha* at midday. Even during family outings, we hold a *ghar sabha* in the hotel. During our Char Dham Yatra, we also held a regular *ghar sabha*.

The *ghar sabha* has resulted in family peace, harmony and spirituality. We feel the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.



**Govindbhai Vegad
Jamnagar**

NO TV, BUT GHAR SABHA

We joined the satsang in 1992, but only started *ghar sabha* in 2007. We have two shops, which close at 10.00 p.m. So, our *ghar sabha* takes place around 10.30 p.m. I was not happy that due to the shops, we had to hold the *ghar sabha* so late, and sometimes even could not attend the weekly satsang *sabha*.

So, last year, we closed one shop. Yet, still our finances remain good, and now we can hold *ghar sabha* and attend the weekly satsang *sabha*.

After starting *ghar sabha*, my son and two daughters have voluntarily stopped watching TV. For the last eight years, we haven't had a TV in the home.

After my son's wedding, his wife, even though she had no satsang background beforehand, began to sit in the *ghar sabha*. Once, in the *ghar sabha* we told her, "If you wish to watch TV, we don't mind. We will buy one." However, she declined and has never asked for a TV.

In our home, the TV has been replaced by our *ghar sabha*. As a result, we enjoy great peace and harmony in the home. ♦

Gujarati Text: Swaminarayan Prakash, June 2018

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



GHAR SABHA NURTURES THE NECTAR OF VALUES AND WISDOM



Dr Hemantbhai Patel
Modasa

EXPERIENCE OF GREAT FORTUNE

A few ago, when we started *ghar sabha*, our children complained that they did not have enough time to study or do their homework and so they would not sit in the *ghar sabha*.

However, by attending their weekly *bal sabhas*, they were inspired to sit in our *ghar sabha*.

And this helped to consolidate good values and character in their lives.

The *ghar sabha* motivated them to perform austerities. My 14-year-old daughter observes a *nirjala* (waterless) fast on every *ekadashi*, while my 9-year-old son also observes a fast on *ekadashi*.

At first, my son used to apply a small *chandlo*, but now, on seeing Mahant Swami Maharaj's big *chandlo* he also applies a big *chandlo* on his forehead.

The children study in an English-medium school, but by reading the BAPS Gujarati publications in the *ghar sabha*, they have gained a good command of the Gujarati language. They also decided to play *dhol*, *manjira*, and tambourine for the *dhun* and bhajans in the *ghar sabha*, so we acquired these instruments. For the past two years, they have been playing these instruments, adding to the divine atmosphere.

Ghar sabha has strengthened the unity of our family. From the *ghar sabha*, our children have been inspired to bow down to parents and grandparents daily. At the end of the *ghar sabha*, if they have any questions, we elders answer them. This satisfies their curiosity and adds to their knowledge and understanding. They have also developed attachment for and devotion to Mahant Swami Maharaj.

As siblings, there are sometimes disputes between them, which are satisfactorily resolved during the *ghar sabha*. From the life of Yogiji Maharaj, they have learnt how much he tolerated, and so they realize that it is not proper to fight over small matters and their quarrel is resolved.

The *ghar sabha* has taught them introspection and so now they have developed a habit of deeply thinking about things.

Throughout the day, they frequently remember Maharaj and Swami. They often act after considering what Mahant Swami Maharaj would do in such situations. Even we are inspired by their ways.

Thus, *ghar sabha* has generated a divine, joyful atmosphere in our home. We feel that Swamishri has blessed us with great fortune.



Rahulbhai Dambhoya
Ahmedabad

NOW I UNDERSTAND MY MISTAKES

There is a vast difference between the atmosphere in our home before we started *ghar sabha* and after. Above all, the biggest change I have

experienced is in myself.

Before, I did not care to understand our family circumstances. Without any concern, I would pester my father to provide me with a mobile and motorbike – like my friends had. But from the *ghar sabha*, I gained insight. One day, our family's financial situation was discussed in the *ghar sabha*. This led me to introspect deeply. I realized that my father dearly wanted to fulfil my demands, but the lack of finances prevented him from doing so. I, too, understood his situation and stopped my insistence.

My brother and I often make mistakes, which through the *ghar sabha*, we began to understand. As a result, we have corrected our improper behaviour. I have full faith that *ghar sabha* will continue to help us to improve and correct our mistakes.



Rajeshbhai Patel
Selvas

CULTIVATION OF VALUES

Even the passing discussion of values in the *ghar sabha* leave a lasting impact on the minds of our children.

One day, in our *ghar sabha*, the topic of not telling lies was discussed: If one lies, Swamishri does not like it and he is not pleased. A few days later, my son had not done his school homework. So, to test his resolve, my wife told him to go to school and tell his teacher that he had forgotten his book at home. Don't tell him that you have not done the homework. My son told her that if he lied in school, then Swamishri would not be pleased.

So, again, my wife told him that if he was not able to tell the teacher, then she would come to the school and tell the teacher that he had forgotten his notebook at home. Instantly, my son said to her that if she lied, then Swami Bapa would be displeased with her. With this, my son

tearfully told her to tell the teacher that he had not done the homework. Only when my wife told the teacher the truth did my son feel at ease.

This incident revealed to me the lasting impression that our *ghar sabha* discussions have on the life of our son. Today, the *ghar sabha* continues to inspire us with values.



**Damjibhai Dhameliya
Vadodara**

DIVINE PADHRAMANI

I joined the BAPS satsang in 1987. At that time, Pramukh Swami Maharaj instructed that all should conduct a *ghar sabha*.

As I was a regular attender of the weekly satsang *sabha*, I thought that I should not delay in observing this wish of such a great saint like Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

From the next day, we started the *ghar sabha*. But, my wife was not a *satsangi* and so was not interested in joining the *ghar sabha*. However, I had decided that no matter what, I wanted to follow Swami Bapa's wish. So, I daily held the *ghar sabha* and when I did not, I observed a *nirjala* fast on the next day.

After some time, my wife also began to sit in the *ghar sabha*. Later, my two children also joined in. I bought a *dholak* (drum) for my elder son, which he played when the *dhun-prarthana* were sung in the *ghar sabha*. This gave everyone much joy.

Once, we all gathered for the *ghar sabha*, but as we were all tired, we didn't conduct it properly. Then, we went to sleep. At 11:30 p.m., my eldest son woke up and woke me up, too. He said, "Daddy, we have not held our *ghar sabha*." So, we all woke up and completed the *ghar sabha*.

Once, we were travelling by train. At the usual time, my wife and children started the *ghar sabha*. Next to us was a Muslim gentleman. He

was surprised and asked, "What are you doing?" I explained, "Just us you offer namaz, our guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj has instructed us to do *ghar sabha*. So, this is what we are doing." He was touched.

Today, despite the negative impact of certain aspects of society, those negative influences have not entered our home. My entire family feels this way. All this is solely due to following Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish of holding a *ghar sabha*. It has shielded and protected us. We have never had any major conflicts within our family.

Initially, my wife and eldest son were not *satsangis*, but they are now staunch in satsang. Since 1987, I have missed *ghar sabha* only three times, and so have had to fast only three times for these lapses.

Even when travelling or attending weddings, we conduct *ghar sabha*.

Once, we went to Surat for the wedding of my brother-in-law (wife's brother). At night, my wife and two sons started the *ghar sabha*. The other guests were intrigued and asked, "What are you doing?" We explained that as per the wish of our guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we were conducting our *ghar sabha*. They were all very inspired.

My wife was preparing to sit for the Pragna 3 satsang exam, so she was reading one night. And I was reading the *Swaminarayan Prakash*. While reading, we both fell asleep. At about 2.30 a.m., I had a dream in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj, with several sadhus and a few *yuvaks* had come to our home. Pramukh Swami Maharaj said to me, "Bring the Vachanamrut. Then, he began to read. The sadhus and youths sat down and I sat down behind them. Pramukh Swami Maharaj said to me, "You come to the front." He sat me right in front of him and read a whole Vachanamrut and explained it. And just then, my eyes opened. I thought that as we had not done our *ghar sabha*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave me darshan and reminded me in my dream that

I should do *ghar sabha*.

This divine *padhramani* by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in my dream, strengthened our resolve to hold the *ghar sabha*.

Now, even my eldest son's two children enthusiastically sit in the *ghar sabha*. They also perform daily puja, sing the *dhun-prarthana* and recite Swamini Vatos by heart. All this is the result of *ghar sabha*.



Bipinbhai Soneji
Rajkot

ELIXIR OF HAPPINESS

We joined the BAPS satsang about four years ago. Around that time, my wife and I stayed for about a week at the home of my brother-in-law, Shri Harikrishna Dhandha in Bharuch. He was a BAPS *karyakar* and every evening at 9.00 p.m. held a *ghar sabha*, at the end of which they listened to an audio track of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings. We also sat in their *ghar sabha* and then decided to start our own when we returned home.

So, I, my wife, mother and three children all started the *ghar sabha*. After some time, my grandmother fell ill and came from Surendranagar to stay with us. One night, when we started our *ghar sabha*, she criticized satsang, but we continued our routine. She left the room and prevented my wife and mother from sitting as well. This happened for a couple of days, but we continued to hold the *ghar sabha*.

From a distance, she would hear about the history, *upasana* and traditions of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. This reduced her objections, but she was still somewhat critical.

So, I decided to take her to the Akshar Deri in Gondal for darshan and set about making the arrangements. Meanwhile, she observed our children perform daily puja, read shastras and engage in devotional rituals. This pleased her. She was



also surprised to learn that my son conducted a *bal sabha*.

When I suggested to her that we go to Gondal for darshan, she readily agreed. There, the divine atmosphere of the Akshar Deri and mandir deeply touched her. On our return, she began to sit in the *ghar sabha*.

We keep a record of our *ghar sabha*, which our children maintain daily. This nurtures their discipline and regularity.

The *ghar sabha* has strengthened our family harmony. We all understand each other. After the *ghar sabha*, we discuss studies, family and other topics with our children and resolve all their questions. This ensures there is no generation gap in our family.

Truly, for us, *ghar sabha* is an elixir of peace.



Subodhbhai Patel
Bharuch

HOME BECOMES HEAVENLY

By the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we have been conducting *ghar sabha* since 1990.

When we started, our sons were young. So, we would narrate stories from the satsang exam books. This helped to instil good traits in them. The *ghar sabha* also strengthened and deepened my wife's understanding of satsang.

My elder brother lives in our ancestral village



puja and apply *tilak-chandlo*. They also sit in the daily *ghar sabha* we hold after the evening *arti*.

By the grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, our home radiates with divine peace. This is the fruit of *ghar sabha* – it has turned our home into heaven.



**Jitubhai Gadhvi
Modasa**

DAILY NEW INSPIRATION

In our home, my wife, three sons and eldest son's wife all sit in the *ghar sabha*. Initially, my eldest son was not interested in satsang. But, attending the *ghar sabha* has transformed him. He has a very logical mind and always seeks reasons for everything. By listening to the incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and other satsang stories he began to perform daily personal puja, and now does not even drink water without performing it.

At first, he questioned why we had to fast on *ekadashi*, but on learning that it was Bhagwan Swaminarayan's direct command and the benefits it results in, he began to fast – taking only *faral* on *ekadashi* and observing *nirjala* on the main five fasts specified by Shastriji Maharaj. He has also started to attend the weekly satsang assembly.

My daughter-in-law has also been similarly inspired. She also now performs puja and attends the weekly satsang assembly.

Through *ghar sabha*, all our family members derive new daily inspiration to improve their lives. ♦

Gujarati Text: Swaminarayan Prakash, June 2018

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

and his financial situation is very ordinary. We are slightly better off financially. When his daughter's wedding was to take place, he did not have enough money. So, I decided to help him by giving him money from my savings, even though both my sons' weddings were still pending.

When I discussed this with my wife, she readily agreed, saying, "His daughter is our daughter. So, we should help. Swami Bapa is the all-doer and God will take care of us in the future. So, do not worry and give him help."

I was surprised and pleased by the depth of my wife's understanding. This was the result of our *ghar sabha*.

Also, due to the talks in the *ghar sabha* by my wife about the temporary and perishable nature of life, my youngest son was inspired to become a sadhu and he took *diksha* at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to the delight of all the family.

My elder son is also staunch in satsang. We live together and sustain ourselves by combining my pension and his income. There are no problems and my wife and daughter-in-law live as real mother and daughter. There is never a need to raise our voice in the home, such is our harmony.

At first, my daughter-in-law was not a *satsangi*, but she enjoyed sitting in the *ghar sabha*. This developed her satsang and she inspired her side of the family to join the satsang as well.

My two grandsons daily perform personal



GHAR SABHA

Practical Problems & Their Solutions

Ghar Sabha is a unique spiritual family endeavour. It is a family forum that provides solutions to many domestic problems. However, for a variety of reasons, many families find it difficult to start and sustain the *ghar sabha*. Below are a selection of such situations, for which Pujya Dr Swami has provided suitable solutions based on his vast experience.

Q. We do not get time to do *ghar sabha*. What should we do?

A. If you understand its *mahima* time can be scheduled for it. If you were told, “By holding a daily *ghar sabha*, you would get Rs. 100 per person,” then you would instantly start! So, if you realize that *ghar sabha* provides all-round benefit, you will be able to create time for it. You may not immediately experience the benefits, but persist with faith and you will.

Q. How do we decide on a time that is convenient for all family members?

A. Explain the *mahima* of *ghar sabha* to all family members. Then, discuss with them the options. You can start with a weekly *ghar sabha* and gradually increase the frequency.

Q. Our *balaks* and *kishores* are not interested in the *ghar sabha*. What should we do?

A. By explaining to them the intellectual and spiritual benefits, and by incorporating stories and activities that will interest them. For example, discuss concepts such as good company, studies and other practical life topics. Also highlighting the harmful, negative consequences of improper habits and company will be helpful to them. In addition, you may provide appropriate books for them to read.

Q. Everyone sits in the *ghar sabha*, but how

can we make them participate with enthusiasm?

A. By gradually understanding the *mahima* of *ghar sabha*, they will participate. Initially, do not talk too much about philosophy, but talk about practical day-to-day issues that will help in daily life.

Q. Some devotees hold a *ghar sabha*, yet there are still quarrels and problems in their family. Why are they not benefiting?

A. The benefits of any good venture are not reaped immediately. This has to be explained and understood. For example, after planting a mango seed, it takes many years to get juicy mangos from that tree. By patient persistence, benefits will definitely be experienced.

Q. We do not have any conflicts in our family. So, why do we need to do *ghar sabha*?

A. So, that in the future no problems arise. And also, it is the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Q. Our family issues have been resolved by offering *abhishek* and receiving blessings, so why do we need to do *ghar sabha*?

A. Certainly, *abhishek* and blessings are beneficial. But *ghar sabha* will help to purify your hearts and ensure that no problems arise again.

Q. We attend the weekly satsang assembly and regularly listen to discourses. Is that not enough? Why the need for *ghar sabha*?

A. Indeed, the weekly satsang *sabha* and reading shastras bring benefit. However, *ghar sabha* will increase family unity and harmony, and will strengthen and deepen one’s understanding of and attachment to satsang. ♦

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

A True Test of Satsang

Twentieth century American basketball player and coach John Wooden once said, “The true test of a man’s character is what he does when no one is watching.” A true test of our satsang occurs when there is nobody else around physically to watch over us. When we are alone, we see how much satsang we actually put into practice without any spectators. London’s



Kirtan Patel is a *yuvak* whose ideal example can be a source of inspiration for many.

In 2016, Kirtan went far away to Logan, Utah, to study for an MA in History at Utah State University. On his campus, there were no other *satsangis* and the nearest satsang centre was Salt Lake City, over two hours away by public transport. During his undergraduate studies at Oxford, he had maintained his dietary *niyams* by taking ready-cooked food from home every weekend. Knowing that he would not have this privilege in Utah, Kirtan spent part of his summer vacation learning to cook various dishes from his mother. Subsequently, during his studies, Kirtan would cook every evening and offer *thal* to Maharaj and Swami before eating. He developed an interest in cooking and learned how to make dishes of many world cuisines and bake cakes, pies and other sweet treats. Kirtan decided to offer this newly-acquired talent as bhakti and thus, on New Year’s Day, he offered an *annakut* of around fifteen dishes, including *rotli*, *shaks*, *khichdi*, *kadhi*, *mithai*, *cakes*, etc., to Maharaj and Swami at his *ghar* mandir in his dormitory.

Offering *thal* is part of our *ahanik*, daily devotional practices that combine to become a constant force that nourishes us with satsang. However, the force only remains constant if we are diligent and regular in our *ahanik*. In fact, they are perfect

intervals where we can connect with Maharaj and Swami through bhakti, moments where we realize that we truly aren’t alone. Kirtan maintained regularity in puja, *arti*, *thal*, *cheshta*, and satsang reading while he was far away from home. Rather than seeing them as chores, he looked forward to these occasions where he could put aside his work and focus on his connection

with God. His day would be structured around these *ahanik* practices and he would adjust his many other tasks to ensure he was never lax in his observance of them.

Kirtan has always been a talented singer. Some evenings, after doing the *arti*, Kirtan would sit and sing bhajans at his *ghar* mandir. He made sure to keep up to date with the Hindu calendar and would sing bhajans according to the festivals that fell on various dates throughout the year, including on every *sud* 8, when he would sing bhajans in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Once, he even sang bhajans with his professor’s family at their home. Similarly, he would enthusiastically follow the assorted rituals associated with the dates such as fasting on *ekadashi*.

Throughout the two years he was in Utah, Kirtan balanced his studies with satsang very well. He achieved exceptional marks and reviews for his written and language work, yet never allowed his other tasks to take over his bhakti to God. His example shows us that if we are genuine in following our *niyams* and devotional practices, Bhagwan and guru won’t let us feel alone. In fact, they’ll be right there to accept our bhakti. ♦

- Sadhu Paramtattvadas

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

April–May 2018

Perth (Australia), Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Shimla,
New Delhi, Secunderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Rajkot



Swamishri blesses the Youth Day assembly, Perth

APRIL

PERTH: 1–4

During Swamishri's stay, a 1-day *shibir*, '*Bhāgya jāgyā re...*', and Youth Day assembly were held in the evening (2, Monday). Also, Guru Smruti Din (3) was celebrated.

3, Tuesday; Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthi Visarjan Ceremony

At 11.00 a.m., Swamishri arrived at Whitfords Nodes Park to perform the *asthi visarjan* ceremony. Amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras Swamishri performed the rituals on five *asthi kumbhs*. Thereafter, he performed *arti*. Then, Swamishri, sadhus and devotees travelled by boat to ritually pour the sacred *asthi* into the Indian Ocean.

In the afternoon, Swamishri wrote a wonderful letter about *samp* addressed to children (see next page).

SINGAPORE: 4–8

4, Wednesday, Perth, Singapore

At 2.15 p.m., Swamishri and sadhus took a flight from Perth and landed at Changi International Airport, Singapore, at 7.00 p.m.

5, Thursday

A welcome assembly for Swamishri was



Swamishri pours the *asthipushpa* of
HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the Indian Ocean, Perth

Swami Bapa's dearest
Bal-muktes,

Heartiest Tri Shree Swaminarayan from
Sadhur Keshavjivandas

Let us go for SAMP, the topic

most loved by Yogiji Maharaj. Every moment of HIS life was spent in devoting Hari-Krishna Maharaj with Samp, Suhratbav and Ekta. HE joined haribhaktas together with Samp. Samp meant everything for Yogi Bapa and lots more. Yogi Bapa played and enjoyed with Samp and lived totally blissful life.

Let us consider good boy and bad boy
for samp and kusamp.

Well SAMP is good boy and Kusamp
the other guy.

SAMP, the good boy has qualities of goodness in all that it enters, while kussamp spoils, pollutes and messes up all that it enters.

Kusamp, the bad, nasty naughty boy

slanders, abuses and makes fun of good boy. He always thinks negatively. He takes everything - the wrong way. He is confused and cannot think straight but still thinks that he is clever than good boy and is proud of himself for no good reason. Do you ever want to follow him?

In comparison good boy is far more better and goes on and on to better himself because Shreeji Maharaj has said, SAMP is God's power. Wherever Samp is present God resides there.

All people good or evil do trust good boy. If people trust you, you're well off and fetches much credit. Samp, the good boy is hailed everywhere. All the progress in the world over is due to Samp (the good boy). Kusamp, the nasty boy is cause of downfall in the world. It's a shame upon us that we do not understand the quint essence, that is Samp.

Sam the good boy understands the right things and joins people together and brings them

closer and closer, while Kuramp, the terrible
guy, sends people asunder.

Wise boy understands every situation and does not demand people to understand him, but on the contrary he extends his ever helping hand out to people. He always thinks and goes on thinking that how will he help people to live a meaningful life. How can he act, what he has in mind to increase samp. Samp he acts so, his readiness for samp is marvellous, amazing, wonderful. He very well knows, that Charity begins at home and he gives out everything for samp. He does not demand at for samp but is very glad to serve samp in all its forms.

But, Shreeji Maharaj expects much more for samp, the purest form for samp that can only be supplied by satrang and samp. It transforms jiva to brahmurep, the highest degree that is achieved. No degree is higher than brahmurep. It is eternal. Other degrees

come and go.

We are in midway. Though we know quite a lot about samp. But we still fell short. Pramuk Swami Maharaj expects much more about samp. He gave everything about samp in a nutshell. One

201-202 230g. 203g 21g. 201 32g 201
220g. Gumatianand Swami clearly states
that jivas have done things according to
there own thinking since billions of
years. If this is done one easily gives
ways to others for working together and
much more. Then one can tolerate.

Tolerance power increases much. One can understand much about satrang and about the world. This done one is comfortably ready to mix with others about satrang matters and does not demand people a satrangis to mix with one. One hails the superb divine values and earns God's and saints Rajipo to the full extent.

Tai Shree Swaminarayan.



Swamishri blesses in the welcome assembly, Singapore

organized in the evening at the Hokkien Hall. A wonderful drama was performed by youths and devotees. It featured devotees in the time of Shriji Maharaj, with each narrating their transformations. The devotees were Dosabhai (of Bandhiya), Dinanath Bhatt, Jalamsinh Bapu, Sagram Vaghri and Dosatai. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Whenever you incline your mind towards your body you’ll get bad results. However, when you incline your mind towards your *atma* you will get the best result. For countless births we have been inclining our minds towards our body and that is why we experience miseries. Scientists have discovered and understood many things related to the human body. But, we are still miserable. Only when we go to a true guru will we come to realize our own *atma* and attain eternal happiness.”

7, Saturday

In the evening, a public assembly for invited dignitaries and guests was held in the Garnet auditorium at the Max Atria building. Jnaneshwar Swami gave a speech in Hindi about the true meaning of values and Atmaswarup Swami spoke in English about a value-based family. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed in Hindi, “Thousands of years ago humans lived in caves and so did lions. However, today, we live in 110-floor high-rise buildings whereas lions live as they did then. This means we have progressed, but if we limit ourselves in matters related to the physical body we cannot progress further. There are many things beyond the body. Those who enter the spiritual realm progress further because they focus on their *atma*. The realm of spirituality is vast, but all aspirants have one aim – to purify their selves and attach themselves with God.”

Shri Ninad Deshpande, the Deputy High Commissioner for India, honoured Swamishri with a garland and Swamishri also blessed him and honoured him with a garland.

BANGKOK: 8–11

During Swamishri’s stay in Bangkok a welcome assembly (9, Monday) and Fuldol celebration with flowers (10) were held.



Devotees and well-wishers in the assembly held at the Garnet auditorium, Singapore



Devotees shower flower petals at Swamishri's feet, Bangkok

8, Sunday

At 7.00 p.m., Swamishri flew from Singapore and arrived in Bangkok at 8.00 p.m. (9.00 p.m. Singapore time).

10, Tuesday

In the evening satsang assembly, Swamishri blessed, "If one wants to attain *rajipo* in all of one's activities then one must exercise *samp* (harmony). *Rajipo* can be attained in many ways – by spreading faith for God, by doing *seva*, etc. – but, if there is no *samp* then one will fall from satsang with a single push. *Samp* is like a cementing factor. If it is lacking then one's *seva* is like a weak wall [that will collapse]. Therefore, one must have *samp* in all of one's activities. It is necessary to have *samp* in one's faith (*nishtha*) and also while doing bhakti."

Thereafter, Swamishri showered flower petals on Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and senior sadhus showered petals on Swamishri and vice versa. Then, the devotees approached Swamishri for *samip* darshan and showered petals at his feet. Everyone left feeling blessed with great, divine joy.

HONG KONG: 11-16

During Swamishri's stay Children's Day (13) and Fuldol Festival (15) were celebrated.

11, Wednesday, Bangkok, Hong Kong

At 4.15 p.m., Swamishri and his entourage departed by flight from Singapore and landed at



Swamishri blesses the satsang assembly held in the auditorium in Laguna Mall, Hong Kong

Hong Kong International Airport at 6.30 p.m. (7.30 p.m. Hong Kong time).

12, Thursday

In the evening, a welcome assembly was held at the auditorium in Laguna Mall. Two expert Chinese dancers welcomed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri with a wonderful traditional Lion Dance at the entrance. Both the dancers, dressed as lions, led Swamishri onto the main stage of the auditorium. Thereafter, children also performed a welcome dance and sadhus and devotees honoured Swamishri with garlands and decorative shawls. Then, children performed a drama on '*Diyavbhav*, No *Abhav*, No *Abhav*'. Finally, Swamishri blessed, "Where is the need to find faults in others? This satsang is attained after performing all spiritual endeavours. So, one should not give up satsang. It is a great thing that we have attained Bhagwan and the Sant, so never give them up. When one realizes their glory one experiences Akshardham here on earth."

15, Sunday; Fuldol Festival

In the evening, Swamishri blessed the festive assembly, "The more devoutness one gains the stronger one's bond with God becomes. Like a father who loves the son who obeys him the most, similarly, God loves the devotee who obeys him the most. And the devotee who disobeys God's



Swamishri performs the *pratishta arti*, Shimla

commands, even though he may be sitting in God's lap, there is no guarantee that God loves him. Though he may be near him, yet he is so far away."

Thereafter, Swamishri showered flower petals on Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then Ishwarcharan Swami and senior sadhus showered petals on Swamishri and vice versa. Finally, the devotees approached Swamishri for *samip* darshan and showered flowers petals at Swamishri's feet, and the senior sadhus showered petals on the devotees.

NEW DELHI & SHIMLA: 16-20

At 3 p.m., Swamishri landed at the international airport in New Delhi. At 5.00 p.m., Swamishri arrived in Akshardham to a warm, traditional welcome.

20, Friday, New Delhi, Shimla

At 8 a.m., Swamishri departed by flight from New Delhi and arrived an hour later at Shimla airport. On arriving at his residence in Kufri, which is an hour's drive away from the Shimla mandir, Swamishri was welcomed by the local devotees with a traditional dance and musicians playing traditional instruments.

21 & 22, Saturday and Sunday

On 21st Saturday, the *mahapuja* rituals were held prior to the *murti-pratishta* scheduled for the following day. Thereafter, a satsang assembly

was held in which the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Shri Jairam Thakur, and Swamishri addressed the assembly.

On 22nd morning, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishta* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev and Shri Guru Parampara. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2018, pgs 38–39.)

NEW DELHI: 22-30

During Swamishri's stay Children's Day (27), Youth Day (28), a one-day *shibir* and Samarpan Din (29) and Sevak Din (30) assemblies were held every evening.

27, Friday; Children's Day

After his morning puja in the mandir hall, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishta arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Kurukshetra, Eldoret (Kenya), Evansville (USA), Cambridge (Canada) and Calgary (of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj).

In the evening satsang assembly, children performed a short musical presentation on Nachiketa. Then, a child asked Swamishri, "Like Nachiketa, we, too, want to be obedient to our parents. What should we do to achieve this?"

Swamishri answered, "Do satsang."

Then, several children presented a game and performed a drama about doing puja daily. Thereafter, a child asked Swamishri, "How can



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha arti* of murtis for five BAPS hari mandirs, New Delhi

we perform our daily puja on a regular basis?”

Swamishri replied, “Have trust in Bhagwan. Believe that he is present even though we cannot see him; like we cannot see air, yet it is there. Our guru can see Bhagwan, so we must trust him and obey his words.”

The third presentation was themed on studying hard. Then, a child asked Swamishri, “Because of laziness we are unable to study properly. Guide us about studying well.”

Swamishri replied, “Firstly, keep good company and associate with those who study intensely. You will be inspired. Secondly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had stated that studying intensely is a form of bhakti.”

28, Saturday, Youth Day

In the evening assembly, youths performed a drama, ‘Inner Fight’, based on Vachanamrut Gadhada 1 70. The drama featured two youths studying, but their physical senses were pulling them towards their respective sense objects. The good mind in the form of a youth (Suman) resisted, whereas the bad mind in the form of another youth (Kuman) dragged him to enjoy the sense pleasures. Consequently, there was a fight between Suman and Kuman. The latter always won. Finally, Suman appealed to Mahant Swami Maharaj to guide and help him.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Satsang is the only answer. When one indulges in

and enjoys the material pleasures, the experience will be momentary. Even while doing satsang the internal war of whether to indulge in or abstain from enjoying the material pleasures will take place, but by doing intense satsang all your doubts will get dissolved. Then, you will be able to bond with God and do good works. One whose goal is clear while studying, then his mind will become engaged and he will achieve his goal. By doing satsang one will attain God – which is a very big thing.”

MAY 2018

During Swamishri’s week-long stay in Secunderabad special programmes were held in the evening satsang assemblies: Bal Din (2) Yuva Din (3), Samp Din (4), Guru Bhakti Din (5) and Fuldol Festival (6).

SECUNDERABAD: 1–7

1, Tuesday

At 5.30 p.m., Swamishri departed by flight from Delhi and landed in Secunderabad at 7.25 p.m. On arriving at the mandir, Swamishri was welcomed by a music band and devotees waving the BAPS flags. After 14 years the Gunatit guru had sanctified the soil of Secunderabad. During the brief satsang assembly children performed a welcome dance.

2, Wednesday

Dr G. Krishnamurti, Director of Apollo



Devotees doing *samip* darshan of Swamishri, Secunderabad



Youths perform 'Antar Khoj' in the evening satsang assembly, Secunderabad

Hospitals, came to meet Swamishri at the mandir. He deeply respected Pramukh Swami Maharaj and expressed, "Swamishri was a walking God on earth." He added that he deeply wished to have his (Mahant Swami Maharaj's) blessings as well. Then, he said to Swamishri, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a great man. You are also the same. There is so much *tej* [lustre] and *jnan* [knowledge] in your eyes. Your presence on earth is a great blessing. I am purified." While leaving the mandir Shri Krishnamurti said, "He [Swamishri] is a real saint."

5, Saturday

This morning, Pujya Shri Chinna Jeeyar Swami of the Ramanuja Sampradaya and spiritual guru came to meet Swamishri at the mandir. He praised Pramukh Swami Maharaj's works and added that youths supported him well. Jeeyar Swami appreciated that Mahant Swami Maharaj travels extensively, like a youth, in spite of his old age. Before leaving, Chinna Jeeyar Swami invited Swamishri to visit and bless his ashram and complex.

In the evening Guru Bhakti Din assembly, youths performed a drama on how a guru tests and moulds his disciple. In his blessings, Swamishri elaborated on the sadhanas done by Bhagatji Maharaj to please his guru Gunatitanand Swami.

6, Sunday

In the morning, the Governor of Telangana,

H.E. Shri Narsinhan, came to meet Swamishri at the mandir.

In the evening assembly, a drama, 'Antar Khoj', was performed by youths. In conclusion, the Fuldol festival was celebrated in Swamishri's presence. The senior sadhus showered flower petals on the devotees as they filed passed offering petals at Swamishri's feet.

7, Monday

In the morning, Swamishri travelled to Pujya Chinna Jeeyar Swami's ashram in Samshabad. Jeeyar Swami felt honoured by Swamishri's arrival and took him to the site of the under-construction 216-ft-high *murti* of Shri Ramanujacharya, known as the Statue of Equality. To see the *murti* from close quarters Swamishri climbed the flight of stairs with Jeeyar Swami.



Swamishri in discussion with Pujya Shri Chinna Jeeyar Swamiji during his visit to the Statue of Equality Project at the JIVA Campus, Samshabad

Despite the hot sun and construction materials of sand, gravel, cement, steel rods and water lying on the stairs Swamishri disregarded all the discomforts. After coming down, Swamishri visited the *garbha gruha* to do darshan of a small golden *murti* of Ramanujacharya. Swamishri and sadhus chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* for the early completion of the entire complex. Thereafter, at 12 noon, Swamishri departed from the ashram.

At 6.00 p.m., Swamishri departed by flight from Secunderabad and landed at 7.00 p.m. at the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru. On arriving at the mandir, Swamishri was traditionally welcomed with the sound of *dhhol* and chanting of Vedic mantras.

BENGALURU: 7-14

During Swamishri's stay special programmes were held in the evening satsang assemblies: Welcome Day (8), Children's Day (9), Youth Day (10), Swamishri's 58th Diksha Celebration (11), Yogi Jayanti (12) and Samarpan Din (13),

8, Tuesday

The president of ISKCON, Bangalore, Pujya Shri Madhupanditdas, came to meet Swamishri in the morning at the mandir. After the preliminary introductions, Madhupanditdas spoke glowingly about Pramukh Swami Maharaj and how Swami Bapa had visited the under-construction ISKCON mandir at his request. He praised Mahant Swami Maharaj's travels, saying, "To keep travelling at this age to spread the noble message of our culture is a big thing. People will gain strength by merely seeing you during your visits. By meeting a Sant like you there is a transfer of pure feelings. One can receive pure feelings only from one who has them."

10, Thursday

Pujya Nirmalanand Swami, guru of the Adi Chunchanagiri Math, came to meet Swamishri at the mandir. Both gurus honoured each other



Swamishri and Pujya Nirmalanand Swami, Bengaluru

with garlands and shawls.

In the evening, Dr Y.S. Rajan, scientist and friend of the late Dr Abdul Kalam, came to meet Swamishri. Thereafter, Mahant Pujya Pejaware Swamiji of Udippi Math met Swamishri. He said, "I feel very satisfied in seeing you. I had met Pramukh Swamiji many times. Your Swaminarayan Santha has made extraordinary efforts in spreading the Vaishnav principles and traditions throughout the world. That is why I am proud of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. So, I have special love for your organization. The mandirs you have built are beyond imagination."

Thereafter, Swamishri attended the Youth Day evening assembly. The youths performed a traditional dance and a drama. Shri A.S. Kirankumar, former chairman of ISRO, was honoured. Finally, Swamishri spoke about cultivating humility in satsang and offering devotion to God.

11, Friday; Swamishri's 58th Diksha Celebration

During his morning discourse Swamishri extolled the glory of Yogiji Maharaj, "Yogi Bapa was a wonderful sadhu. His divine personality was such that a depressed person would be rejuvenated. He was blissful 24 hours a day. Once in Gondal, a youth came to the mandir after watching a film. Yogi Bapa forgave him. He never found fault in anyone. He was totally divine."

At 5.45 p.m., H.E. Shri Vajubhai Vala, Governor of Karnataka, came to meet Swamishri. Vajubhai reminisced about his meetings with



Swamishri and H.E. Shri Vajubhai Vala, Governor of Karnataka, India, Bengaluru



Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Swamishri with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Bengaluru

Yogiji Maharaj during his visits to Rajkot.

Thereafter, Swamishri attended the evening satsang assembly.

12, Saturday, Yogi Jayanti Celebration

In the morning, Swamishri arrived at Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's ashram. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar welcomed Swamishri with a garland and Swamishri also garlanded him. Thereafter, he was welcomed with the auspicious sound of a shehnai, beats of a *dhhol* and chanting of Vedic mantras by the ashramites. Both leaders, sadhus and students of the ashram assembled in a *kutir*. Swamishri did *pujan* of the *murtis* of Shri Ganeshji and Shri Lakshminarayan Dev. Atmaswarup Swami recalled about the occasions on which Sri Sri Ravi Shankar had met Pramukh Swami Maharaj and also his visit to Akshardham in New Delhi in 2005. Then Sri Sri Ravi Shankar spoke in Hindi, "It seems that today Narayan has wholly descended here. I am elated that Mahant Swamiji accepted my invitation and has come here. He has graced us by his presence.

"I have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj many times. He had a lot of love for me. I felt he was like my grandfather. He was the greatest Mahatma or Mahapurush for our satsang family. You have come here as his representative. What greater blessing can there be than this! Mahant Swamiji, your coming here is a blessing for us. Wherever BAPS has built mandirs it has infused life. They

are of great pride for India and the followers of Sanatan Dharma. Such wonderful mandirs! Our culture has survived because of mandirs.

"I speak with my heart that because of your spiritual faith dharma is alive in our country. The contributions of sadhus in fostering Sanatan Dharma is immense. In that regard, your work is very praiseworthy. You have come to your home. The *annakuts* you make are not to be seen anywhere in the world. A lot of devotion, love and compassion goes into creating them."

Thereafter, Swamishri addressed the small gathering, "Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is selflessly doing great works and is also spreading our culture, which is a great thing. The whole world is engaged in and overwhelmed by their physical body. One has to take care of the body, but there is no need to be overwhelmed by it. Thereafter, one will realize the real element – *atma*. Then, one will become happy. This body is for attaining *moksha*, and the *atma* within is the true wealth."

Swamishri took lunch and also retired for the afternoon at the ashram. At 4.20 p.m., Swamishri visited the *gaushala* and the hospital on the campus. Finally, Swamishri returned to the BAPS Mandir for the evening Yogi Jayanti celebration assembly. He blessed, "Yogiji Maharaj was a great saint. He always smiled and laughed. Even at 2.00 a.m. he used to relish the bliss of God. He discoursed so spiritedly that even a lifeless person would come to life. We have attained a spiritually great

opportunity. By thinking about it you will become disinterested in worldly things. Love God. One who has faith in God is one who has firm love for God. You will forget your body when you attach yourself to a God-realized Sadhu like Pramukh Swami Maharaj. You will experience Akshardham here on earth. True satsang is to perceive all to be divine. By having love for the devotees one will attain love for God.”

Then, Swamishri inaugurated English ebooks published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith on Amazon.com: *Shastriji Maharaj: Life and Work, Images of Eternal Joy – Moments with Yogiji Maharaj* and *Yogi Gita*.

13, Sunday

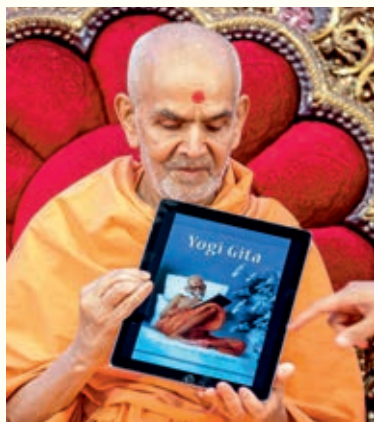
Shri Mohandas Pai, Director of Manipal Global Institute, an educational institute, came to meet Swamishri at the mandir. On meeting Swamishri he shared, “I had met Pramukh Swami Maharaj and derived immense inspiration from him. We have a dream to make our country where every child gets education, and every citizen gets a house and meals. You are doing all this, so I am grateful to you. You, too, are a university in which you teach about our culture.”

CHENNAI: 14–21

During Swamishri’s stay in Chennai devotees from three states, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry, came for darshan and *labh*. The special evening programmes organized were Welcome Day (15), Samjan Din (18), Samp Din (19) and Samarpan Din (20).

14, Monday, Bengaluru, Chennai

At 11.30 a.m., Swamishri visited the Jalaram Mandir next door to our mandir. He sanctified the office and did darshan of the deities,



Swamishri inaugurates new ebooks for Amazon Kindle, Bengaluru

offered a garland to the *murti* of Jalaram Bapa and performed *arti*. Thereafter, a small assembly was held in the mandir.

At 6.20 p.m., Swamishri and his entourage of sadhus and devotees departed by flight and landed at 7.15 p.m. in Chennai. After reaching the mandir, Swamishri was traditionally welcomed with the auspicious sounds of a shehnai, *dhhol* and Vedic chantings.

15, Tuesday

In the evening welcome assembly, Swamishri said, “The welcome and honours offered now were to Maharaj and Swami. I do not take it upon myself. Who am I to do so? I am a servant. In honouring Maharaj and Swami everyone is included.

“Do we want good friends? Then we must become good. For that one must do good to others. Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘May God do good to all’, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said, ‘In the good of others lies our own.’ To walk the path of goodness means to perceive everyone and everything with a positive mindset. By perceiving positivity in negative occasions one will experience joy in life. Then, doing bhajan, bhakti and *seva* will be worthwhile.”

16, Wednesday

In the evening, H.E. Banvarilalji Purohit, Governor of Tamil Nadu, came to meet Swamishri at the mandir. In the satsang assembly he spoke, “Outside, there is utter Kaliyug, whereas here, we have Mahant Swami Maharaj, sadhus and devotees, so I believe I am in Satyug. Our culture is still alive in spite of all the attacks of the past, because it is founded on dharma. [Pointing to Swamishri], he is travelling for the *moksha* of all humanity, to introduce God to all. I have come to receive his blessings. I have had the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and today I have had



H.E. Banwarilal Purohit and Swamishri perform the evening *arti*, Chennai



Swamishri performs the evening *arti* during the Uttarayan festival, Chennai

the opportunity of Swamiji's darshan."

Finally, Swamishri praised and blessed the Governor in his address.

20, Sunday

As part of *adhik mas* (intercalary month), the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the mandir were decorated in accordance with the Uttarayan festival. After performing *arti*, Swamishri was given a *jholi* in his hand and he hailed the *jholi* mantra.

RAJKOT: 21-31

During Swamishri's stay in Rajkot special programmes were presented in the evening satsang assemblies: Swadharma Din (22), Yuva Talim Convocation (23), Satsang Din (25), Iti Vachanamrutam (26), Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th Birthday Celebration Kick-off Ceremony (27), Samp Din (28), Siddhant Din (30) and Satpurush Din (31).

21, Monday, Chennai, Rajkot

At 5.45 p.m., Swamishri and his entourage of sadhus departed by flight from Chennai and landed at 7.50 p.m. in Rajkot. Swamishri was welcomed enthusiastically by the sadhus and devotees of Rajkot. Since it was Pramukh Varni Din, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami applied *chandana* on Thakorji's forehead and thereafter on

Swamishri's forehead. Then, sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands and decorative shawls.

26, Saturday

In the evening assembly, a programme, 'Iti Vachanamrutam', was presented by children, youths, devotees and sadhus. Three questions about overcoming *dehabhiman*, and internalizing the beliefs of *sankhya* and God as the all-doer in our lives were asked to Swamishri. Swamishri elaborated by emphasizing on having refuge in God, understanding *sankhya* and keeping in mind the ideal devotees of the past who had tolerated pain and problems by believing God to be the all-doer.

27, Sunday; Kick-off Assembly of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Year-long 98th Birthday Celebrations

In the evening, the grand kick-off assembly was held on the Race Course grounds of Rajkot. Swamishri and Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat, and other political officials were honoured with garlands on the main stage. The theme of the kick-off assembly was 'Appreciations to Pramukh Swami Maharaj'. The programme highlighted four contributions by Pramukh Swami Maharaj: 1. Building mandirs worldwide, 2. Establishing children and youth activities worldwide, 3. Initiating a unique legion



Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performs *pujan* of Swamishri, Rajkot



Swamishri, senior sadhus and guests during the kick-off celebration assembly, Rajkot

of youths into sadhus and 4. Declaring Mahant Swami Maharaj as his successor.

The entire programme was interlaced with traditional dances, videos, a parade and speeches.

- Atmaswarup Swami spoke about Mahant Swami Maharaj's global impact.

- Apurvamuni Swami described the various projects and programmes that would be carried out for the remaining of the year. A parade depicted the various projects.

Shri Vijaybhai Rupani addressed the mammoth assembly, "It is of great fortune for us all and for the people of Rajkot to be blessed with the 98th Birthday Celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. As a son of Rajkot, I feel elated and proud. My request is that no stone be left unturned in celebrating this occasion. I often say this is Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Gujarat because we are greatly indebted to him for all the works he had done. Today, under the leadership of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj his sadhus are giving guidance and showing the spiritual way. Hence, the future of our society is bright."

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the occasion, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a God-realized Sadhu. He wished day and night for the good and spiritual liberation of all. He was aloof from honour and insult. We will never be able to repay our debts to him even if we celebrate countless centenary celebrations. He never lived

for himself for even a second. Even his physical actions spiritually liberated so many."

Finally, *arti* was performed by Swamishri, guests and the mammoth gathering.

29, Tuesday

After his morning puja, Swamishri inaugurated an English publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *Yogiji Maharaj: An Unforgettable Guru*, translated by Kaushikbhai Joshi.

30, Wednesday

In the evening satsang assembly, small children presented a scriptural debate as part of the Siddhant Din programme. On one side, children were dressed as Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Nimbarkacharya and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. On the other side, children were dressed as pandits from the BAPS Sanskrit Pathshala. The former explained their beliefs and thereafter the latter expounded upon the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy by giving reference from the shastras. Thereafter, children performed a traditional dance. Finally, Swamishri addressed the assembly, "Shastriji Maharaj immensely blessed us by giving us the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. The shastras are inscrutable and no one can truly fathom them. But Shastriji Maharaj gave the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy in a lucid form. He installed the *murtis* of



Devotees during the kick-off celebration assembly, Rajkot

Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Today, this knowledge is enshrined in thousands of mandirs. Look at Maharaj and Swami's lives – how wonderful they are. Anyone would bow in respect on knowing about them. This knowledge should be internalized in our lives and we should become *ekantik bhaktas* and do bhajan of Maharaj.”

31, Thursday

After Swamishri's morning puja, Pujya Viveksagar Swami inaugurated an English publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *Mahant Swami Maharaj: An Epitome of Saintliness*, translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas.

The evening satsang assembly was themed as Satpurush Din. A drama, called 'Dr Aksharbrahman' was enacted by youths. The plot was based on a world conference themed

on global diseases. Two *satsangi* doctors from India presented case histories before the assembly of global doctors saying that ego, jealousy, anger, lust and other base instincts cause serious diseases. Finally, they described the Satpurush as the doctor who can cure all illnesses and also revealed the greatness of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “Maharaj and Swami are above everything. They came on earth out of their grace upon us. Oh, how fortunate we all are. Maharaj is present on earth through the God-realized Sant. The only way to liberate ourselves from the cycles of life and death is Bhagwan or Sant. No one else can liberate us from this cycle.” ♦

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



Children present a scriptural debate in the evening satsang assembly, Rajkot

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

April–May 2018

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

APRIL

Q. Swamishri was asked, “You think a lot; what do you think of?”

A. Swamishri replied, “About *prapti* (spiritual attainment). How great the Bhagwan we have attained!”
(12, Hongkong)

Q. Write the essence of all the shastras.

A. To have firm refuge [or faith] in Bhagwan. There should be no lapses in that.

Q. What should we do to remain strongly connected with you?

A. Abide by dharma and *niyams*.

Q. What is the reason for good health?

A. Having a pure mind and pure heart.
(30, New Delhi)

MAY

■ God’s grace does not mean acquiring a home and a car, but in realizing one’s own faults.

After having the association of Bhagwan and the Gunatit Sant one’s mental inclinations [or thoughts] should be transformed like the way in which one’s thoughts change after marrying a king.
(1, New Delhi)

■ The fruits of doing satsang are purity of mind and heart. If that is not attained then one’s efforts are useless. When purity of mind and heart increases know that to be a sign of growing satsang in life. One who becomes intensely pure is an *ekantik bhakta*.
(5, Secunderabad)

■ Be strong and brave. Never utter loose talks. Do not criticize or find faults in others. See all as divine. Whoever perceives others as divine is most fortunate.
(11, Bengaluru)

■ Keep performing the daily rituals and observing dharma-*niyams*. One will gain inner strength. Though one may not perceive Bhagwan, but he is with you. Thus, practise [rituals and dharma-*niyams*] with faith and trust.
(19, Chennai)

■ To see one’s own faults and others’ virtues are a great [spiritual] security. Such a person has attained *moksha* and thus Akshardham is here on earth for him.
(24, Rajkot)

Q. How can one increasingly remain upbeat in Satsang?

A. Swamishri wrote, “By having *divyabhav*.”
(26, Rajkot)

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

April 2018

APRIL

TENSIONLESS AND GURU BHAKTI

23, New Delhi

Swamishri was asked, “Being engaged in so many works and activities of the BAPS Sanstha do you experience tension?”

Swamishri replied, “I leave the tension on Bhagwan.” Then Swamishri smiled and added,

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done everything. He has left nothing undone.”

Swamishri’s words reveal his profound faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and devotion to his guru (guru bhakti). ♦

*From Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmapatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekchand*

Mahant Swami Maharaj's Tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj

13 August 2018, Atladra (Vadodara)

To commemorate the second anniversary of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's return to Akshardham, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj offers a heartfelt tribute in Atladra...



Swami Bapa,

God resides in all living forms, but, within you,
there is only God, and nothing else.

God is an ocean of compassion, and you are
also that vast ocean of compassion!

Thus, your presence on this earth and
our presence here is not a mere coincidence.

But, it is all due to your infinite grace.

You are beyond the body, beyond *maya*,
forever absorbed in God, and here,
we all are ordinary mortals.

However, you have benevolently accepted all as
your own – to make everyone great like you.

To show us the true path, you personally
walked on this earth, tolerating many hardships.

In you, Paramatma himself walked. Hence,
through your footsteps on the sands of time,
sacred *tirths* and landmarks were created that
will never be erased.

They will be the exemplary path for all
future generations.

Swami!

What you did for us, nobody could have done.
When will we be able to repay our vast ocean
of debt to you?

Sincerely, we pray that by walking in your
footsteps, by following you, we can,
in the true sense, justify your divine grace.

You are *amrut* – the immortalizing
spiritual nectar.

We pray that you forever reside in our hearts
and immerse us in your eternal bliss.

Jai Swaminarayan Bapa!

With humble *sashtang* prostrations from

Sadhu Keshavjivandas
(Mahant Swami Maharaj)



OVERVIEW

Over 8,550 children, teenagers and young adults attended the three separate North American Youth Conventions (NC18): Bal-Balika Convention for children studying in grades 3 to 7, Kishore-Kishori Convention 1 for teenagers studying in grades 8 to 11 and Kishore-Kishori Convention 2 for young adults studying in grade 12 to college undergraduate level. The three conventions, held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta, were supported by the behind-the-scenes services of over 800 volunteers who contributed their time and skills to ensure the smooth execution and grand success of the conventions.

All three conventions were based on the central theme of 'Moksha' (Ultimate Liberation) and the content was designed to appeal to the specific attendees for each convention. The main feature of each convention was the live performance of the specially scripted drama presented in seven episodes. Following each episode, the messages it conveyed were further reinforced through audio-visual presentations, speeches by senior swamis,

group discussions led by older mentors and other interactive sessions. The conventions enabled the delegates to understand and imbibe the concept of the four *purusharths* (endeavours). They were guided on how to pursue *arth* and *kaam* under the umbrella of dharma with the intent of attaining *moksha*.

PREPARATIONS

To ensure that the conventions would have a lasting positive impact on the youths of today, hundreds of *balaks*, *balikas*, *kishores* and *kishoris*



Children arrive at the venue for registration



Children engaged in a group discussion

from across North America were surveyed to identify their most pressing issues. These insights resulted in over 600 pages of content for the conventions, including scripts for two live dramas. In addition, nearly 200 volunteers, ranging from teenagers to young professionals to retirees, dedicated over 20,000 hours of their time to meet and plan the conventions.

In addition to a life-size model of Gajendra the elephant with a lotus flower, the main symbol of all three conventions, in the hall entrance, the décor of the convention venue incorporated elements that consolidated the central theme and provided an enriching, educational and enlightening experience. Even the dining arrangements and menus were designed to encourage healthy eating habits and environment-friendly lifestyle choices.

BAL-BALIKA CONVENTION: 1 TO 4 JULY

The Bal-Balika Convention was attended by 1,285 *balaks* and 1,135 *balikas*.



Children during a session in the Convention



A drama episode during the children's convention

The seven episodes of the drama serial helped the delegates understand their roles, desires and interests; develop confidence and pride in their identity as a *balak* or *balika*, student, son or daughter, a friend and a disciple of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj; learn the necessity of sincere effort in their work and shun laziness and procrastination if they want to achieve their goals; understand the importance of prayer combined with effort and the messages of developing pride and confidence in their spiritual and cultural identity.

Thus, the convention gave the delegates the understanding that life is full of difficulties, and equipped them with the toolkit to effectively deal with the challenges they will face.

KISHORE-KISHORI CONVENTIONS

1 & 2: 4-7 & 7-10 JULY

The first Kishore-Kishori Convention was attended by 1,111 high school *kishores* and 976 high school *kishoris* aged 14 to 17. The second was attended by 1,011 college *kishores*, and 885 college *kishoris* aged between 18 and 21. Both conventions featured the same content.

Prior to the conventions, delegates were briefed about dharma, *arth*, *kaam* and *moksha* in weekly assemblies, and that their daily lives and practice of satsang are determined by their priorities and decisions. The conventions further elaborated on these ideas, relating them to their



Kishores arrive at the venue for registration



Kishores during a session in the Convention



Kishores engaged in a group discussion



A drama episode for kishores

lives in very specific, practical ways.

Before the first session of each convention, the delegates participated in an activity which made them think about their personal goals. The convention taught them that their lives are a blend of the four *purusharths*, and that everyone has many roles, responsibilities, goals and desires in their life. All of these forces sway their decisions regarding which actions to perform.

During the group discussions, the *kishores* and *kishoris* learnt about dharma *sankats* (adversities in observing dharma), which are situations that require decisions to be made between conflicting *purusharths*, often necessitating sacrifices to be made.

The seven-part drama was performed in both conventions. The delegates learnt the importance of basing their thoughts and actions on sturdy values, instead of simply going with the flow. They learned the importance of enjoying the process, instead of just focusing on the results, and to endeavour to please Swamishri in everything

they do, thereby turning everything they do into bhakti. Live every moment with genuine, unconditional happiness knowing that the Satpurush is by one's side every step of the way and strive always to please him.

CONCLUSION

Through the immense support, guidance and blessings of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Anandswarup Swami, and other swamis, *karyakars* and volunteers, the conventions were a grand success.

The messages of the meticulously planned and executed programmes effectively conveyed the core concepts of the conventions and fully equipped all the delegates with practical guidance on how to apply them in their daily lives at home, school and college. They also acquired the knowledge and mindset to always strive for Maharaj and Swami's blessings, and thereby experience the fruits of *moksha* now. ◆

WORLD SANSKRIT CONFERENCE RECOGNIZES AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN AS A DISTINCT VEDANTA TRADITION

9–10 July 2018, Vancouver, BC, Canada



Swaminarayan Bhashyam and Swaminarayan Siddhanta-Sudha being launched at the World Sanskrit Conference by (from left to right V. Kutumba Shastry (President, International Association of Sanskrit Studies. Head of Organizing Committee of World Sanskrit Conference), Pujiya Ishwarcharan Swami, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami, Prof. Ashok Aklujkar (Member of World Sanskrit Conference Secretariat), Prof. George Cardona (University of Pennsylvania)

The 17th World Sanskrit Conference, the premier international forum for Sanskrit scholars, recognized Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as the first new independent school of Vedanta since the 16th century. The recently authored ground-breaking Sanskrit works on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, the *Swaminarayan Bhashyam* and the *Swaminarayan Siddhanta-Sudha* by Sadhu Bhadreshdas of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, were also launched in the conference's inaugural session on 9 July 2018 in Vancouver, Canada.

More than 600 eminent Sanskrit scholars and educators had gathered from over 40 countries for this historic event. The triennial World Sanskrit Conference, which for the last half-century has been bringing the finest minds in the world of Sanskrit together to advance understanding of Sanskrit language and literature, was held for the first time in Canada, at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. World Sanskrit Conference organizing committee

member and senior Sanskrit scholar from the University of British Columbia, Professor Ashok Aklujkar said, "Bhadreshdas Swami's scholarly genius is jaw-dropping, and his commentaries on the Prasthantrayi are a truly great achievement. I think all of us at the World Sanskrit Conference are fortunate to have a *bhashyakar* in our midst. Just as Sri Krishna Vidvat Parisad acknowledged Swaminarayan Bhagwan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a distinct darshan in the Vedanta tradition, we are honoured to do the same from the platform of the World Sanskrit Conference."

With the blessings and guidance of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami completed the *Swaminarayan Bhashyam*, a five-volume comprehensive Sanskrit commentary on Hinduism's three Vedic canonical texts (Prasthanatrayi) – the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras – and the *Swaminarayana-Siddhanta-Sudha*, a classical Sanskrit dialectic

treatise that offers an exposition, justification, and defense of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's theological and philosophical principles.

Highlighting the significance of these texts, Professor Deven Patel of the University of Pennsylvania said, "The World Sanskrit Conference is proud to honour this new and truly historic achievement in the world of Sanskrit philosophical culture. It is the first Sanskrit commentary on the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita in nearly 200 years and the first commentary on the complete set by a single *acharya* in over 1,200 years. This five-volume commentary, known as the Swaminarayan Bhashyam, interprets the Prasthantrayi through the lens of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. We are fortunate to have present before us today, in Bhadreshdas Swami, the *acharya* who, in the tradition of Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha, and others, has composed these commentaries."

World-renowned Sanskrit scholar from the University of Pennsylvania, Professor George Cardona aptly detailed the importance of these works in establishing Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, saying, "This is a very important classical Sanskrit commentary that very clearly and effectively explains that Akshar is distinct from Purushottam."

In the conference's inaugural address, Bhadreswami explained the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, the classical name of this distinct school of Vedanta. This darshan was revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the 19th century and propounded by His Holiness Shastriji Maharaj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. Bhadreswami further explained, "The essence of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is to offer devotion to Purushottam, the supreme being, with loving servitude having qualitatively realized oneself as Akshar, who takes the form of the exemplary living guru."

This was followed by the blessings of Pujya

Ishwarcharan Swami, the International Convener of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, who appreciated the great work of the World Sanskrit Conference and encouraged Sanskrit research and learning.

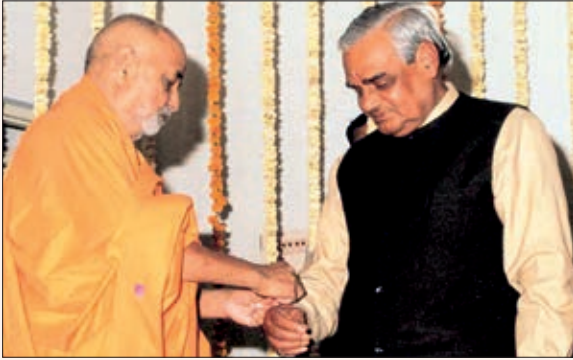
The World Sanskrit Conference's inaugural session concluded with all the assembled scholars collectively recognizing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a distinct school of philosophy in the Vedanta tradition.

On the morning of 10 July, a special *darshan* scholarly session was held on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in which professors and learned Swamis presented papers. Bhadreswami spoke on "Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar Purushottam Darshan: Ontology, Soteriology, and Identity"; Paramtattva Swami presented a paper on "Deconstructing 'brahmajignasa' in the Brahmasutra-Swaminarayan-Bhashya: A Study of Grammar, Hermeneutics, and Theology"; Aksharanand Swami presented a paper on "The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and the Gita Verse: 'Brahmabhutah Prasannatma...'"; Prof. Deven Patel of the University of Pennsylvania presented a paper on "The Role of the Guru Within the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan"; and Aksharvatsal Swami presented a paper on "The Tradition of the Shikhara Within Mandir Architecture: A Study Based on Ancient Treatises and the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan."

In the evening Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Vidvat Goshti, a scholarly forum in Sanskrit and English was held on the significance of the Swaminarayan Siddhant Sudha, composed by Bhadreswami. Several of the world's foremost experts on Sanskrit, including Prof. George Cardona (University of Pennsylvania), Prof. Sadananda Das (University of Leipzig), C. Rajendran (University of Calicut), Staneshwar Timalsina (San Diego State University), Shrikant Bahulkar (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute), and Bhadreswami discussed the impact of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. ♦

Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj's Tribute to Former Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee

16 August 2018, Atladra (Vadodara)



Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a great protagonist of India, had great affection for Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Amid many difficulties and political ups and downs, Shri Vajpayee derived great inner strength from the blessings of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In 1999, when Shri Vajpayee was re-elected as the Prime Minister of India, he visited Gandhinagar to receive Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessings. Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed, “You are endeavouring with a true heart and patriotism, therefore your fame will be eternal.”

Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj also said, “You are a dedicated son of the country. In your heart there is a true desire for the development of the country. So, just as, even amid many obstacles, the faith of the Pandavas enabled their chariot to progress, similarly, your desire for the development of the country will drive your chariot to victory.”

After the sad passing away of Shri Vajpayee in New Delhi on 16 August 2018, Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spiritual successor, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, recalled the great respectful rapport between Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Shri Vajpayee. In the presence of thousands of devotees in Vadodara, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj offered sincere prayers and said,

“Respected Shri Vajpayee dedicated his whole life to the service of the nation and the people. He was, in the true sense, a great jewel of India who had a new vision for the progress of the country. Shri Vajpayee was a great man, selfless and principled; he was very sentimental, sympathetic and compassionate. He considered the pain of all Indians as his own pain. He was an outstanding thinker, poet, orator, national leader, visionary and public servant. Words cannot describe him fully. His perseverance over many decades has given India a long term legacy. The seeds he planted for the development of the country are bearing fruit today. His perceptive ideas will continue to guide not only India, but also other world leaders. As a friend to all and keeping everyone united, he shouldered the leadership. His great openheartedness will never be forgotten. With his passing, India has lost a distinguished son. On behalf of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I pay my heartfelt tribute to him.”

On 17 August, on behalf of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, BAPS sadhus went to Shri Vajpayee's residence in New Delhi to offer prayers and pay their final respects by adorning his mortal remains with a sanctified garland. ♦



INDIA

FLOOD RELIEF SERVICES 15–19 July 2018, Gir Gadhada



The torrential rains in the Gir Gadhada, Una and Gir Jungle areas between 15 and 19 July 2018 resulted in extensive flooding which stranded many villagers. During this period, BAPS volunteers provided over 13,300 nutritious and tasty vegetarian sweet and savoury food dishes and packets containing *sukhdi*, *puri*, spiced vegetables, chillis, chapattis, rice, mung, *shiro* and other items freshly cooked at nearby BAPS mandirs.

Around 100 BAPS men and women volunteers, assisted by local villagers provided food to the affected in 11 villages: Harmadia, Alidar, Panderi, Akolvadi, Abhalvad, Kanekiya, Kareni, Lerka, Shiloj, Manekpara and Khatrivada.

YUVA SEVAK SABHA LAUNCH ASSEMBLIES 22–29 July 2018, Gujarat & Mumbai

From August 2018, separate new monthly *sabhas* for *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* will be held throughout Gujarat and Mumbai. Once a month, selected *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* will participate in the Yuva Sevak Sabha (YSS) in which they will receive focused guidance on various aspects of satsang based on a schedule and content prepared by the Satsang Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad.



At present, a total of 3,100 *yuvaks* in 115 *mandals* and 1,900 *yuvatis* in 77 *mandals* will participate in this new venture. As a prelude, the youths who will be participating and their parents attended the launch assemblies held at BAPS centres in Gujarat and Mumbai.

UK

NATIONAL KARYAKAR SHIBIR 10 June 2018, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



More than 1,300 *karyakars* from across the UK attended the National Karyakar Shibir titled 'Aksharam Aham Purushottamadāso'smi' held in the presence of Pujya Anandswarup Swami.

After a collective recitation of the mantra, Anandswarup Swami and Bhadrash Swami explored the history and spiritual significance of this mantra through their insightful spiritual discourses. Further discourses from swamis explained how

the fundamentals of this mantra can be applied in one's daily life. These spiritual concepts were reinforced through various interactive activities and an enlightening panel discussion with swamis.

The exemplary practice of this mantra in the lives of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj was highlighted through video presentations.

NATIONAL SHISHU MANDAL SHIBIR

23 June 2018, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

More than 350 children aged up to 8 from across the UK attended the National Shishu Mandal Shibir, themed 'Destination Akshardham'.

The children were introduced to the concept and identity of Akshar, and participated in various interactive games that explained *samp*, *upasana*, *rajipo*, the concept of 'my mandir, my home' and other topics.

Four themed areas were set up to provide detailed knowledge of Akshar, Mahant Swami Maharaj, that Purushottam forever resides in Mahant Swami Maharaj and how the true Guru protects aspirants from anything that hinders their path to liberation through a variety of interactive activities.

In a special video recorded message, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the children.

Simultaneously, 440 parents participated in a parenting seminar which guided them on how to develop the spiritual and holistic talents of their children.

BAL-BALIKA MANDAL SUMMER TRAINING CAMP

21–28 July 2018, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

More than 120 selected children and young volunteers from the UK participated in a 7-day residential summer camp.

The programme included interactive and informative sessions delivered by swamis and

senior volunteers which strengthened the spiritual knowledge and life skills of the young delegates.

Morning discourses included valuable life lessons from the teachings of the guru *parampara*, emphasizing the importance of serving God and others.

The delegates were also guided on the traditions, rites and rituals of Hinduism, and the Swaminarayan faith in particular, and the nine types of spiritual devotion outlined in the Shrimad Bhagwat Puran.

Children offered their personal devotion to the sacred *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj by performing *arti*, *thal* and devotional singing.

Contemporary issues were addressed through interactive presentations.

LONDON MANDIR FEATURED ON BBC'S GARDENERS' WORLD

17 August 2018, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, was featured in a special edition of the BBC's *Gardeners' World* programme on 17 August 2018.

Gardeners' World is a TV show providing ideas, tips and advice from experts on how to get the most out of your garden. It is one of the UK's longest-running and best-loved gardening programmes, first broadcast in 1968 and watched by over two million every week.

This special edition explored the fusion of British and Indian cultures that are represented by the flowers, plants and walkways housed in the gardens of the mandir. Monty Don OBE, with the help of Sunita Patel, a mandir volunteer, experienced the profound sense of calm that the gardens

provide to visitors as well as the fascinating blend of eastern and western horticultural styles that are interwoven into the garden's classical design.

The programme also highlighted the floral motifs in the stone and wooden carvings of the mandir and the offering of flowers to the deities as part of the daily devotional rituals at the Mandir.

The mandir gardens have previously received first prizes and an 'Outstanding Achievement' award in the 'Brent in Bloom' garden competitions, which have recognized the Mandir's contribution to the attractiveness of the local borough and the environment.

NORTH AMERICA

SATSANG CHHAVNIS

21 June to 11 August 2018, North America



Initiated by Gunatitanand Swami, a *chhavni* is a spiritual camp comprising discourses on the shastras.

This year, the annual Satsang Shibir was organized under the title of 'Akshar Purushottam Darshan Chhavni,' a two-and-a-half-day spiritual camp of discourses on the fundamental principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The Satsang Chhavnis took place in six regions across North America at Robbinsville, Houston, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago and Toronto. Thousands of devotees of all ages benefitted from the clear descriptions of the profound philosophical concepts of Akshar and Purushottam and practical guidance provided by Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami

and Bhadresh Swami in all the six *chhavnis*.

Primarily based on scholarly texts written by Bhadresh Swami, Ph.D., D.Litt., and which have been recognized by numerous scholars and pandits throughout the world as well as by senior representatives of 27 prestigious universities from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and other states, the *chhavnis* deepened the understanding of all devotees about the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine, the core philosophy which lies at the foundation of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

The devotees also developed a greater appreciation of Shastriji Maharaj's courageous efforts in establishing the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and in founding the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. They also learned of why and how to apply these philosophical concepts in their everyday lives.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S ASTHIPUSHPA VISARJAN IN THE PACIFIC OCEAN

22 July 2018, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Ca



The Asthipushpa Pujan rituals, attended by devotees and well-wishers, began with Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami and Bhadresh Swami recalling moments with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, the Vedic Asthipushpa Pujan rituals were performed, during which prayers were offered for world peace and inner peace for all. Each devotee was given the opportunity to place flowers before the *kalash* in tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, swamis, devotees, and well-wishers boarded a boat and dispersed the sacred ashes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the Pacific Ocean.

AFRICA

MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

28 June to 1 July 2018, Eldoret, Kenya

The Eldoret Mandir Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) and 53 swamis.

On 30 June, a grand Yagna for World Peace was performed in which over 500 devotees participated, seated around 60 *yagna kunds*. More than 1,500 devotees from all across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania were present to witness the rituals.

At 3.00 p.m., a grand procession of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir took place throughout the city of Eldoret. Around 3,000 people participated in the 5-km procession.

On 1 July 2018, at 8.00 a.m., Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir to the chanting of Vedic verses. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Delhi on 27 April 2018. Among the dignitaries present for this special occasion was the Governor of Eldoret, Shri Mandago. Thereafter, a celebratory assembly was held in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami and BAPS swamis.

In the afternoon, a separate women's assembly was held in which they devotionally honoured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

The entire mandir project was completed by the dedicated support, efforts and services of the devotees, women devotees, Bal-Balika Mandals, Kishore-Kishori Mandals, and others.

'ALMAST' CONVENTION: ENJOYMENT THROUGH DETACHMENT

5–8 July 2018, Nairobi, Kenya

Over 700 youth delegates from South Africa, Zimbabwe and East Africa attended the 'Almast' Convention in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriyadas (Kothari) Swami and other swamis from India. The convention focused on the means to become 'Almast' – the state of complete bliss, no matter



the environment, the situation or the atmosphere. A state free of stress, anger, anxiety, frustration and depression that can be attained by learning to detach oneself from whatever weighs down one's happiness. By highlighting the tendencies of today's youths that hinder their experience of happiness, the swamis guided the delegates on using social media with discretion, keeping the company of youths who reinforce positive values, introspection, academic priorities, attachment to the Satpurush and other relevant topics. The convention inspired the youths to strive for a balance in life that will enable them to become 'Almast'.

ASIA-PACIFIC

Ghar Sabha Shibirs: 'GRUH SHANTI NO RAJMARG'

2 June to 1 July 2018, Australia & New Zealand

A total of 3,000 devotees attended the *shibirs* held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland and other centres throughout Australia and New Zealand.



Based on the theme, 'Gruh Shanti no Rajmarg – Ghar Sabha' (Royal Path to Family Harmony – Family Assembly), the one-day *shibirs* focused on how a regular Ghar Sabha (Family Assembly)

can lead to peace, harmony and happiness within families.

The *shibirs* featured informative and insightful presentations by swamis, videos, skits, testimonials, video blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj and other activities that explained the essential role of conducting a regular *ghar gabha* in developing family unity, sustaining traditional values and fostering mutual understanding between individuals. The presentations also included practical guidance on how to incorporate *ghar gabha* into one's family schedule to get all family members involved.

TREE PLANTATION DRIVE

June–July 2018, Australia

As a part of Australia's National Tree Day, BAPS centres in Adelaide (15 June), Brisbane (20 July), Melbourne (29 July) and Sydney (29 July) participated in Tree Plantation Drives in their local communities.

Enthusiastic BAPS volunteers of all ages participated, despite the chilly winter weather, and planted more than 1,400 trees. The volunteers joined with local government departments and other charitable and non-profit organizations to dig the pits and plant trees at the various sites selected by the local authorities in each city for the tree-planting campaigns. A variety of Australian native plants were chosen for plantation, such as, ferns, wattles and banksias.

BAPS CHARITIES

DONATIONS TO HOLY FAMILY CHILDREN'S HOME

12 August 2018, Nakuru, Kenya

BAPS Charities conducted a charity event donating food and clothing items to the Holy Family Children's Home, which hosts approximately 110 children and is located in Barut village, Nakuru. It is an affiliation of the Foundress of the Helpers of Mary (headquartered in Mumbai, India).

SUPPORT FOR THE IMANI REHAB CENTRE

14 August 2018, Nairobi, Kenya



The women's wing of BAPS Charities in Nairobi donated a variety of food items to the Imani Rehabilitation Agency, who have seven centres throughout Kenya.

The centres care for children up to the age of 18 years, providing health care, parental care and guidance, education, community outreach, adoption services, foster care services and reintegration support.

BAPS CHARITIES

PROVIDES 300,000 TREES TO TNC

24 August 2018, Chino Hills, California, USA



BAPS Charities celebrated its three-year partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) by donating \$166,000 to TNC in Chino Hills, California. The funds, raised over three years through the BAPS Charities' Walk Green series of walkathons, in which 23,000 BAPS Charities volunteers from 76 cities across the North America participated, will provide for 300,000 trees in support of TNC's Plant a Billion Trees initiative. ♦



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1. The 'Sahaj Anand Water Show' at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, was selected as one of the top ten water shows in the world by the *USA Today*, 3 August 2018.
2. BAPS Yogi Marching Band during the grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations for the new BAPS Mandir in Eldoret, Kenya, 30 June.
3. Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami performs the Vedic consecration rituals, 1 July.
4. Pujya Kothari Swami on stage during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly in the presence of devotees and well-wishers , 1 July.



WORLD SANSKRIT CONFERENCE 9–13 July 2018, Vancouver, Canada

Globally reputed scholars based in North America and Europe declared the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan as an authentic new philosophical doctrine.

1. Bhadrash Swami addresses the inaugural session.
2. Ishwarcharan Swami and other scholars inaugurate the *Prasthantrayi Swaminarayan Bhashya*.
3. Aksharanand Swami presents an academic paper during the interactive seminar on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.
4. The WSC was held at the University of British Colombia in Vancouver, Canada.