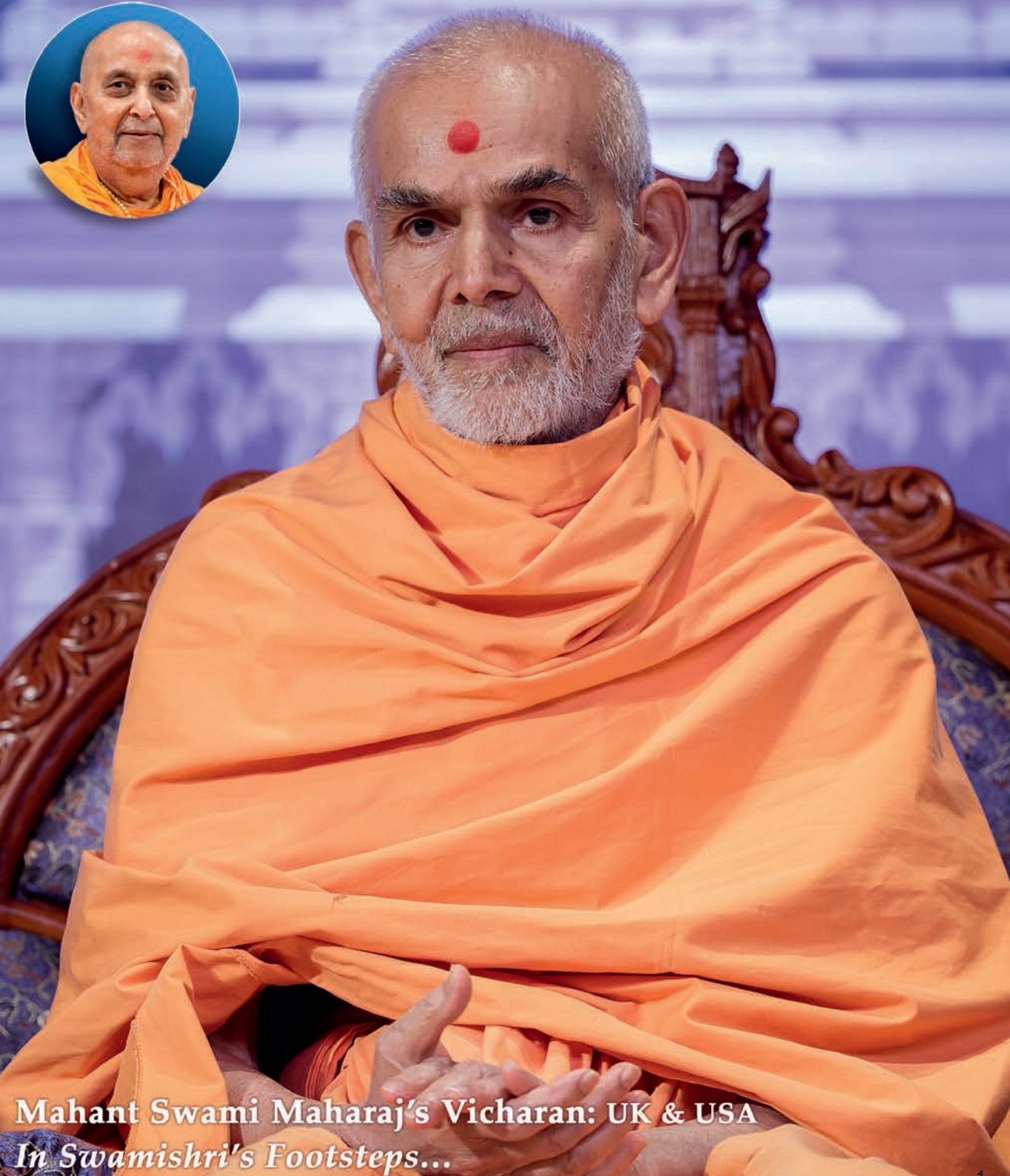


SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

September–October 2017

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan: UK & USA

In Swamishri's Footsteps...



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN HOUSTON & DALLAS, TX, USA

10–20 August 2017

1. A grand public satsang assembly for devotees and wellwishers in the Southwest region held at the Verizon Theater in Dallas (20 August).
 2. Youths present a programme in an evening satsang assembly during Swamishri's stay in Houston between 10 and 20 August.
- Inset: Swamishri on stage during an assembly.*

Title Page: Mahant Swami Maharaj in Robbinsville, NJ (29 August 2017).

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2017, Vol. 40, No. 5



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



CONTENTS

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 4 | A Coarse Shawl | 57 | Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan |
| 7 | Adhyāy 4: Divine Birth and Actions | 61 | Living with Swamishri |
| 13 | Gunatitanand Swami:
A Brief Introduction | 63 | Answers and Revelations |
| 19 | The Transforming Company of
Gunatitanand Swami | 65 | His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj
Meets Former President Barack
Obama |
| 27 | Inspirer of Spiritual Knowledge | 66 | BAPS News |
| 30 | Mahant Swami Maharaj:
UK & USA Vicharan | | |
| 51 | Historic Acclamation of the Akshar-
Purushottam Doctrine in Kashi | | |

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

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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



A Coarse Shawl

*After performing the murti-pratishtha
of the shikharbaddha mandir in
Bhuj, Shri Hari returns to Gadhada.
Here, he performs many lilas...*

In 1824, Shri Hari celebrated Janmashtami in Gadhpur. He had invited devotees and sadhus to attend the celebration.

PUJA OF 'MOKSHA DHARMA' SCRIPTURE

On the day of Dashera Shri Hari went to Lakshmi Vadi to perform the customary *pujan* of the *shami* tree. Here, he also worshipped a new copy of the Moksha Dharma scripture – which was one of his favourite scriptures. Thereafter, Maharaj sat and delivered a discourse and returned to Dada's *darbar* with all the sadhus and *parshads* for lunch.

Each day, Jiva Khachar would send milk and curd for Shri Hari. He wished that Maharaj consumed them daily, but Shri Hari was more inclined towards Dada Khachar's hospitality and *seva*. Subsequently, when Jiva Khachar came to know of this he perceived human traits (*manushy-abhav*) in Maharaj and started criticizing Dada Khachar. But Shri Hari did not allow him to succeed. This fuelled Jiva Khachar's jealousy and rage all the more.

After Shri Hari finished having lunch he came to Dada's courtyard to serve food to the sadhus. While Maharaj was serving *motaiya* laddus Mulji Brahmachari fanned him and Vasudevanand Brahmachari mopped the sweat on his face and arms.

Shri Hari celebrated the festivals of Sharad Punam, *annakut* and Dharmadev's birthday on Prabodhini Ekadashi.

HIS DEVOTION IS NOT COARSE

During the month of Magshar (November–December), in the winter season, Shri Hari gave darshan and discourses either in the Akshar Ordi or the rooms in Dada Khachar's *darbar*. On one occasion while Maharaj was discoursing the shawl draped around his shoulder slipped and fell on the floor. A devotee in the assembly got up and took out a thick shawl from his bag and wrapped it around Maharaj. Shri Hari was momentarily startled at being draped with a weighty shawl. On looking up, he saw the devotee with folded hands. The new woollen shawl was coarse and thick. It was abrasive and would bruise anyone with a soft, thin skin.

Muktanand Swami was quick to perceive the rough and prickly shawl. He got up to take it away, saying, "Here Maharaj, take this soft shawl and wrap it around yourself. This coarse shawl will bruise your skin."

Shri Hari smiled compassionately and opined, "But Swami the devotee's love is not coarse; it is

soft and smooth. So, I find his thick shawl soft and silky. You can keep the soft shawl.” Shri Hari thus returned it to Muktanand Swami.

Nityanand Swami and the other *paramhansas* requested Maharaj to wear the soft shawl, but he declared, “I will now use this thick shawl all my life.” Everyone looked on helplessly. The devotee who had given his coarse shawl felt bad and crestfallen. Shri Hari assuaged him, “Bhagat, you served me at the most opportune moment.”

From then onwards many *paramhansas* requested Maharaj to give them his coarse shawl, but Shri Hari would instead wrap it tightly around himself and remain relentless in his resolve. Whenever a devotee offered him a thin, smooth shawl Maharaj would give it away and again tightly wrap himself with the coarse shawl. Many times, Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Dada Khachar, Sura Khachar and others tried to get the coarse shawl from Maharaj, but he did not succumb to their pleas or efforts.

HERE, TAKE IT MY JADBHARAT

On 17 December 1823 (Magshar *sud* 15, A.S. 1880) a devotee had brought a new shawl and showed it to Muktanand Swami, saying, “Swami, I wish to offer this shawl to Shri Hari.” Muktanand Swami called Gunatitanand Swami and told him, “Maharaj wraps himself with a thick, coarse shawl given to him by a pious devotee. He does not part with it in spite of *sadguru* sadhus having asked him to give it up. Whenever anyone offers him a thin shawl he takes it and gives it away. You go and ask Maharaj to give you his thick shawl.” Gunatitanand Swami agreed and took Muktanand Swami and the devotee who had brought a new shawl with him. Gunatitanand Swami prostrated before Maharaj and humbly requested, “Maharaj, I don’t have a warm shawl to wrap myself with. Please give me your thick shawl.”

Shri Hari replied, “I have kept it for myself so I cannot give it to you. One can’t get a shawl like this again.”

Muktanand Swami added, “Maharaj, Nirgunanandji [Gunatitanand Swami] is like Jad Bharat.¹ If you give your shawl to him he will be happy.” Shri Hari smiled and got up, and then took his thick shawl and draped it around Gunatitanand Swami, saying, “Here, take it my Jad Bharat.” Swami then took it and left. Thereafter, Muktanand Swami told the devotee, “Now you can drape Maharaj with your shawl.” The devotee offered it to Shri Hari.

When the senior *paramhansas* came to know that Maharaj had at last parted with his coarse shawl and given it to Gunatitanand Swami and praised him as Jad Bharat they all realized the love Maharaj had for him. In addition, they also unanimously agreed that Swami was truly indifferent to material comforts and unaffected by adversities.

THOSE WHO ABIDE BY DHARMA AND BHAKTI ARE MY RELATIVES

Once, when Maharaj was discoursing to a satsang assembly in Gadhada, a devotee announced, “The family of Dharmakul has arrived in Gujarat.” Immediately Muktanand Swami asked him, “From where did you get the news?”

“Kashidas of Bochasan informed me that Shri Hari’s brothers and their family have arrived in Bochasan from Bamangam. Thus, I have come here to inform you that they will be here in two to three days’ time.”

Muktanand Swami enquired, “Do you know the names of the family members?”

“Yes Swami. Maharaj’s eldest brother is Rampratapbhai, his wife is Suvasini Bhabhi and their eldest son is Nandram, and Maharaj’s Uncle Vishram’s son is Manchharam. Then Maharaj’s youngest brother, Ichchharam, and his wife, Variyali, have three sons, Gopal, Sitaram, Badrinath, and Sufal is their material uncle.”

1. One who is not interested in physical comforts and pleasures.

Shri Hari was listening nonchalantly when Muktanand Swami asked, “Maharaj, Dharmadev’s family has arrived in Gujarat. Should we and the Kathi Darbars go to receive them?”

Maharaj advised, “It will take two to three days for them to reach here. On the day after, Dada Khachar and Vasta Khachar can proceed ahead to honour them, and once the Dharmakul has arrived on the outskirts of Kariyani then all the sadhus and devotees can go to receive them.”

Muktanand Swami asked Shri Hari, “Will you not come?”

Shri Hari replied, “I believed Dharmadev, my father, to be an embodiment of dharma and honoured him, served him and finally granted him *moksha*. I perceived Bhaktimata as an embodiment of bhakti, served her and also liberated her. Wherever I am, my relatives, Dharma and Bhakti, are with me. And those who possess the virtues of dharma and bhakti are also my relatives.” Then Maharaj became quiet.

Muktanand Swami felt a little strange on seeing Maharaj being apathetic towards his own siblings and family members. So, he asked again, “Maharaj, you are Purushottam Narayan incarnate. Thus, you are not bound to your relatives. But Suvasini Bhabhi had showered her love upon you when you were a child, raised you and then she became heartbroken and distraught when you left Ayodhya. Doesn’t her profound love tantamount to bhakti for you! You should consider her devotion and come to give darshan to her.”

YOU SHOULD GIVE DARSHAN TO BHABHI

Shriji Maharaj understood the quintessence of Muktanand Swami’s words. Swami was compassionate and that was why everyone in the Satsang community believed he was like a mother. Never before had he argued against Maharaj and had always remained strictly respectful to him, but today he spoke emphatically for the sake of the Dharmakul. Maharaj was aware of Muktanand

Swami’s profound devotion and that was why he was able to gauge Suvasini Bhabhi’s feelings for him.

Muktanand Swami urged, “Maharaj, now Suvasini Bhabhi is old. Your darshan will revive her joy which had plummeted after your renunciation. If you go forward to give darshan to her it will definitely add pride to your name and divinity. And if you don’t go then people will speak unfavourably of you.” Shri Hari responded with a calculated smile.

Thereafter, Shriji Maharaj left Gadhada with his entourage and travelled to Kariyani.

YOU SEEM TO BE A VERY WEALTHY PERSON

In Kariyani, there was formerly an open space instead of the *shikharbaddha* mandir that stands today. Here, Shri Hari sat on a specially made seat and started discoursing to an assembly. During that time a devotee arrived and told Shri Hari, “Maharaj, I want to perform your *pujan*.”

Shri Hari agreed, saying, “You may do so.” The devotee then smeared *chandana* paste mixed with a little saffron (*kesar*) on Maharaj’s forehead, applied a *chandlo*, offered a garland and new clothes. Thereafter, he offered a donation of ₹200 at Maharaj’s feet. On seeing the generous amount Shri Hari appreciated him and said, “Bhagat, you seem to be very wealthy.”

The devotee humbly replied, “Maharaj, I’ve been toiling for years to offer you this amount. Today, you have fulfilled my wish.”

Then Shriji Maharaj asked him, “But have you kept some money to sustain yourself?”

The devotee replied, “Maharaj, with your grace I get enough labour work to fend for myself.” Shri Hari was immensely pleased with his profound devotion and sacrifice. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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

ADHYĀY 4

DIVINE BIRTH AND ACTIONS

Part 21

जन्म कर्म दिव्यम् – Divinity of Birth and Actions

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, ‘जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेत्ति तत्त्वतः । त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोर्जुन ॥’ – ‘Janma karma cha me divyamevam yo vetti tattvataha, tyaktvā deham punarjanma naiti māmeti sorjuna.’ – ‘O Arjuna, one who realizes that my birth and actions are completely divine does not attain another birth after departing from his body, but attains me’ (Gitā 4.9).

What does divine mean? Divine means possessing ultimate powers. Divine means ultimately liberating, giving ultimate happiness, above the influences of *māyā* and free from any imperfections.

Divinity: A Fact

Divyabhāv is not a concocted psychological thought process. It is not just a means found to hide mistakes. It is not a trick to keep gullible devotees captivated. It is a reality, a fact, a true principle, and it is a doctrine. This is because Paramātmā is truly divine. It is a weakness of the human mind that it cannot comprehend that which is beyond the senses and beyond this world. Its own conjectures prevent it from reaching the realities of unknown territories. In such circumstances, one who realizes one’s ignorance, surrenders to a capable guru and accepts what he says can experience the bliss of the true, beautiful and auspicious realms. *Divyabhāv* is indeed such a realm. Shri Krishna Bhagwan has shown Arjuna, his devoted disciple who has sought his refuge, the path to this realm.

With the words, ‘*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata, abhyut’thānamadharma-sya tadāt-mānam srujāmyaham. Paritrānāya sādhoonām vināshāya cha dushkrutām, dharmasansthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge*’, the Gitā proclaimed the avatar principle. This we saw in the last article. Now, we will discuss some other aspects mentioned in the fourth *adhyāy*.

The problem of perceiving human traits in Paramātmā (*manushyabhāv*) is associated with the avatar principle. When it is said that Paramātmā assumes an avatar a number of questions arise in the mind, such as: Why did he take birth? Does him taking birth infer that he has worldly desires? Did he experience the pain of taking birth? As he has taken a human form, do human feelings and instincts of pleasure and pain, love and hatred, thirst and longing arise in him. The answer to all such questions is found in the precept given to Arjuna by Shri Krishna: *divyabhāv*.

The Purpose of Precepts on Divinity

To analyze others is a common human tendency. That analysis is based on one's own experiences. One's own experiences are deeply affected by one's nature, feelings, biases, relationships and much more.

For example, if we see someone in misery, we also shudder, because we have experienced such pain. We judge the subject's feelings based on our own feelings and experiences. We, as it were, put ourselves in the subject's spot. This happens in many situations, both good and bad. Alongside our feelings, such judgements are skewed by our nature, biases, relationships, etc. Our weakness is that it is through this skewed perspective that, based on the events around us, we judge people and their intentions of our own accord. Based on these judgments we make categories that we fit people into. These categories sometimes even prove to be useful from a social perspective. Society even acknowledges those who make such categories, regarding them to be experienced and wise.

As long as we use the above method to understand people we come into contact with, it is not too big an issue. But if we use this method to understand avatars of Paramātmā, i.e. *satpuruṣhes*, then the outcome is detrimental. This is because they are not like us, they are different. We cannot judge them based on our feelings and nature. Our intellect, moulded on worldly experiences, is unequipped to fathom their life and work. Considering them, a different type of benchmark needs to be used. To understand worldly things, we use worldly benchmarks; to understand things beyond this world, we need to use benchmarks that are beyond this world. The required otherworldly benchmark is *divyabhāv*.

If one does not understand this benchmark, one will make mistakes in understanding Paramātmā. Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, 'अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम्। परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम्॥' – '*Avajānanti mām moodhā mānuṣheem tanumāśritam, param*

bhāvamajānanto mama bhootamaheshvaram.' Meaning: 'The foolish disregard me, thinking me to be a normal person who is born in a human body, because they do not know of my superiority as the controller of all living creatures' (Gitā 9.11).

Not knowing superiority infers not knowing how to apply the benchmark of *divya-bhāv*. To overlook divinity is in itself ignorance. Referring to this shloka, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has called such ignorance as foolishness as well (Vachanāmṛt Panchālā 7).

For this very reason, upon proclaiming the avatar principle, by giving precepts on *divyabhāv* in this shloka, care has been taken to make sure that the divine acts of the avatars are not looked at from a mundane perspective.

जन्म दिव्यम् – Divine Birth

'जन्म दिव्यम् – *Janma divyam*' means that the birth of Paramātmā is divine. To be born means to attain a human body. The manner in which Paramātmā is born and the manner in which all other living beings are born is different. Generally, a *jiva* obtains a body due to its *vāsanā*. The bonds of *māyā* have caused it to be born time and time again since time eternal. According to the fruits of a *jiva's* karmas, Paramātmā gives it new bodies. Thus, all other living beings are born due to their *vāsanā* bound by their karmas. That is not the case with Paramātmā. Paramātmā is born out of his own wish. If he so wishes, he can liberate countless *jivas* whilst remaining in his divine abode alone. Nevertheless, out of extreme compassion for the *jivas* that are wandering in creation, he takes birth to give them ultimate liberation. He takes birth to give them bliss by his association. He takes birth to give them the bliss of his form. He takes birth to fulfil the wishes of his devotees. He takes birth and becomes like one of us so that people can enjoy his bhakti and feel at ease with him. Karmas are under his control. In this manner, the birth of Paramātmā is divine.

When a *jiva* is born in a body such as that of a human, it undergoes the misery of staying in the womb. But that is not the case for Paramātmā. He indeed enters the mother's womb, but he does not experience the misery of the womb. Whosoever's womb he enters, he enters to give them his divine bliss. In this manner too, his birth is divine.

When a *jiva* is born from a womb, it forgets all previous experiences. That is not the case for Paramātmā. Even as a human, he is all-knowing. He never loses his memory. Even before entering the womb, and thereafter, he always knows about the past, present and future. In this manner too, his birth is divine.

Moreover, when Paramātmā is born, the whole of creation undergoes a change. Upon his coming, godly or pious *jivas* become extremely pleased and demonic *jivas* become perplexed. In this manner, too, his birth is divine.

Thus, so that we do not mistakenly assume Paramātmā to be bound by karmas, have *vāsanā*, experience the misery of the womb, or lose his memory, etc., the Gitā explains the divinity of the birth of avatars.

कर्म दिव्यम् – Divine Actions

Divinity of Ordinary Actions

Life starts at birth. Life is swamped with karmas. We are continually doing something – speaking, walking, sitting, standing, seeing, thinking... one action follows another. Even if we sleep, karmas continue in our dreams.

Generally, when a *jiva* does something, it does so bound by its nature for some self-centred reason. It does karmas to attain something it does not have. It does karmas to prevent someone taking away what it has attained. It does karmas out of fear. It does karmas instigated by its *vāsanā*. It does karmas incited by ego and vanity. Paramātmā's actions are not as such, they are different. His actions are not self-centred, but are performed only out of compassion. His actions

are to liberate us and to please us. Thus, his actions are divine.

Furthermore, the actions of ordinary *jivas* that have received a body are dependent on their senses. Without these senses, they cannot perform any action. For example, they cannot see without eyes, they cannot taste without a tongue, they cannot feel without skin. Thus, a *jiva*'s actions are dependent on other factors. When Paramātmā assumes a body, he does not have these limitations. His actions are not dependent on the senses. Indeed, it is true that he sees through his eyes and hears through his ears, but he is not dependent on them. With him, it is not the case that he can see only if he has eyes and hear only if he has ears. He is all-knowing. Thus, his actions are divine in this manner. A *jiva*'s actions are limited. It cannot do many things at the same time. That is not the case with Paramātmā. He is able to do countless actions simultaneously. Thus, his actions are divine in this manner.

Divinity in Human-like Actions

There is another side to the divinity of Paramātmā's actions. That is, recognizing the divinity of even his human-like actions. When Paramātmā shows human traits, we say he has performed a human-like action. Both good and bad traits can be found in humans. For example, truthfulness, celibacy, tranquillity, forgiveness, etc. are good traits. Whereas lust, anger, greed, jealousy, ego, prejudice, ignorance, etc. are bad traits. When Paramātmā assumes a human form, he takes on these traits. When he shows good traits, we do not feel that he has shown human-like traits, but when he shows traits of lust, anger, greed, etc. *divyabhāv* is left aside and we see him as human. In such circumstances, if we truly believe him to be divine, then we can be said to have understood divinity in all his actions.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains this *divyabhāv* with the analogy of the 'māyā' of a magician. He says that just as the form of Paramātmā

in Akshardhām is resplendent with countless divine powers and divine light, one should realize exactly the same regarding the manifest form of Paramātmā in human form. One who realizes this is said to have known Paramātmā perfectly. The phases of childhood, youth and old age apparent in Paramātmā, as well as his birth and death are all perceived due to his yogic powers of creating an illusion. In reality, Paramātmā remains absolutely unchanged. For example, an adept magician arms himself with weapons and ascends to the sky to fight against the warriors of the demons – the enemies of Indra. Then, having been cut to pieces, he falls to the ground. Thereafter, the magician’s wife gathers those pieces together and burns herself on his funeral pyre. After a short while, the magician appears out of the sky, armed with weapons, exactly as he had appeared before. He then asks the king for a reward and requests, “Please return my wife.” Having seen such an astonishing performance, if one is unable to comprehend the ‘māyā’ of even a magician, how then can the yogic powers of Paramātmā possibly be comprehended? However, one who does comprehend the ‘māyā’ of the magician, realizes, ‘That magician has not died, nor has he been burnt; in reality, he is exactly the same as he was before.’ In a similar manner, one who is said to have realized the form of Paramātmā perfectly understands Paramātmā to be eternal and imperishable – absolutely unchanging (Vachanāmrut Panchālā 7).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has described the *sthitapragna* defined in the second *adhyāya* of the *Gitā* on the basis of *divyabhāv*. For example, he says that a devotee of Paramātmā who, entertaining no doubts at all regarding the nature of Paramātmā, praises Paramātmā’s weaknesses in exactly the same way that he glorifies his strengths; and also praises those actions and incidents of Paramātmā that appear to be inappropriate, in exactly the same way that he glorifies actions and incidents that are appropriate

– without harbouring any doubts about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of those actions and incidents. Such a devotee should be known as being ‘sthitapragna’ with regards to the nature of Purushottam (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā II 17).

Furthermore, quoting the shloka, ‘जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यम्’ Bhagwan Swaminarayan has called *divyabhāv* true bhakti. He says that when God assumes a form like a human for the sake of the liberation of the *jivas* and travels on this earth, many of God’s actions are divine and many appear to be *māyik*. Even a sinner would perceive divinity in the divine actions of God; a true devotee of God, however, would perceive divinity even when God performs human-like actions (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā II 10).

Here, we should understand that when Paramātmā and the *satpurush* show noble virtues, we feel as though we have *divyabhāv* in them. But if those feelings do not incorporate realizing them to be Paramātmā, and just incorporates thinking them to be a good or noble person, then that too is not *divyabhāv*, it is also a type of *manushyabhāv*. The qualities and actions of Paramātmā and the *satpurush* are above the three *gunas*, divine and unmatched to anything mundane. If one has such feelings without any sort of comparison, then one can be said to have found the true direction of *divyabhāv*.

मे दिव्यम् – Divinity in the Manifest Form

The words, ‘my birth and actions are divine’ refer to the form directly before Arjuna’s eyes. The underlying meaning to be understood here is that one must keep *divyabhāv* in the manifest form of Paramātmā. It may be possible to keep *divyabhāv* in the form of Paramātmā that one cannot see, but it is difficult to keep *divyabhāv* in the manifest form in front of oneself. Often, when we hear about the incidents of previous avatars, we are delighted; but if the manifest form of Paramātmā performs similar actions, our thoughts begin to

waver. This is why the Gitā subtly tells us to keep *divyabhāv* in the manifest form of Paramātmā one has attained. Thus, the principle of understanding *divyabhāv* in human traits applies to the form of Paramātmā that is present at that time. For example, when Paramātmā assumes an avatar by specifically pervading another *ātmā*, *divyabhāv* must be understood in that avatar. Paramātmā is divine, therefore it is necessary to understand his avatars as divine. The life stories of the avatars are well-documented in our shastras. For example, in his time Shri Krishna Bhagwan's human-like actions were understood to be divine by the *gopis*, and, by doing so, they pleased their beloved Shri Krishna Bhagwan.

Moreover, when that same Paramātmā assumes a human body himself, without specifically pervading another *ātmā*, *divyabhāv* must be affirmed in that form. For example, when Parabrahman Purushottam Swaminarayan Paramātmā himself assumed a human form in this world, his sadhus and devotees affirmed *divyabhāv* in him. They saw his human-like actions and, in his very presence, were delighted by them, praised them, wrote poems on them and thus attained ultimate liberation.

Furthermore, *divyabhāv* must be kept in the manifest form of the Aksharbrahman guru in whom that same Paramātmā completely resides. Being eternally beyond *māyā*, that *brahmaswarup* guru is indeed eternally divine. But, more importantly, it is through him that Paramātmā gives bliss to his devotees, and thus, for them, he is the manifest form of Paramātmā. In this case, Paramātmā has not specifically pervaded the *brahmaswarup* guru, but eternally resides in all entirety within him. Therefore, the guru is revered as the form of Paramātmā himself. It is necessary for all spiritual aspirants to attain *divyabhāv* in his actions. The reference to the manifest form of Paramātmā with the words 'my birth and actions are divine' refers to such *brahmaswarup* gurus as well. For example, in

the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, there are hundreds of thousands of devotees who attained the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the form of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They understood him to be divine, and on experiencing his divine life and work, became fulfilled. In the same manner, today, that same divinity is showered upon us by Param Pujya Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, and we all experience this.

Thus, the lesson here is to keep *divyabhāv* in Paramātmā when he himself assumes a human body, in the avatars which he has specifically pervaded, and in the *brahmaswarup* gurus in whom he completely resides.

Although the Gitā has briefly mentioned keeping *divyabhāv* in the human form of Paramātmā, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has elaborated on it in great depth in his teachings. He has clarified the various aspects of this principle, and by raising possible questions he has given clear answers in accordance with the shastras.

वेत्ति तत्त्वतः – To Know As Is

The precepts on divinity are not just for the sake of information. Emphasis has been given on imbibing them in our lives. The words '*evam yo vetti tattvataha*' emphasize that the above precepts are not to merely be heard. '*Evam*' means 'in this manner'. This refers to what manner one's conviction in Paramātmā must be, i.e. one's conviction in Paramātmā should be such that one understands his birth and actions to be divine. *Tattvataha* means truly and completely, as it really is, i.e. without prejudicing that knowledge with one's own opinions. *Vetti* means to imbibe in one's life, to truly accept from within, to experience, to not just say – but to believe. One who does not understand *divyabhāv* as described here, does not understand it completely, does not understand it as it is and does not imbibe it, remains aloof from the ultimate attainment, or even obtains an unfavourable attainment. Thus, the

above precept has been given. It also explains that *divyabhāv* is a philosophical principle. It then goes on to explain what one who imbibes this principle of *divyabhāv* attains.

Attainment

पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति – To Be Rid of Rebirth and Attain Paramātmā

Here, it mentions two attainments that those who are wed to *divyabhāv* receive. The first is ‘*tyaktvā deham punarjanma naiti*’ – after they leave this body, they will never have to be born again. They are freed from the chains of *māyā*. They are liberated. Secondly, ‘*māmeti*’ – they attain Paramātmā.

What divine fruits of divinity! All spiritual endeavours are directed at ultimate liberation, and *divyabhāv* is an easy direct means to it. If one does millions of other spiritual endeavours, this still may not be one’s last birth; but if one keeps *divyabhāv*, then nothing remains to be done. Paramātmā is the greatest thing, invaluable. *Divyabhāv* gives us the greatest gift – that is the power of *divyabhāv*.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also said that to keep *divyabhāv* in human-like actions is in itself bhakti. Only one who has such devotion can be called a devotee, and only such a devotee attains the ultimate abode. (Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā II 10). Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj has also attested to this saying that upon understanding the manifest form of Paramātmā to be absolutely flawless, nothing remains to be done (Swamini Vato 5.124).

Becoming What One Believes

Furthering this same topic of divinity, Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, ‘न मां कर्माणि लिम्पन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा। एवं यो मामभिजानाति न स कर्मभिर्बध्यते ॥’ – ‘*Na mām karmāni limpanti na me karmafale spruhā, evam yo māmabhijānāti na sa karmabhirbadhyate.*’ Meaning, ‘Actions do not taint me; moreover, I do not covet the fruits of actions. One who

understands me in this manner is also not bound by karmas’ (Gitā 4.14).

The principle of becoming what one believes has been stated here. No matter what type of actions the manifest form of Paramātmā does, he is never tainted by those actions, he is also not attached to the fruits of actions – one who keeps such *divyabhāv*, himself becomes divine. To rid oneself of the taints of karmas, it is not necessary to wrestle with those karmas; if one keeps *divyabhāv* in the manifest form of Paramātmā, the taints of karmas dissolve by themselves. Thus, the power of *divyabhāv* has been revealed here.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also explained this principle of becoming what one believes. He says that one who believes Paramātmā to be beyond *māyā* himself transcends *māyā* (Vachanāmṛt Panchālā 7), and if a person realizes Paramātmā to be absolutely flawless, then regardless of his own *swabhāvs*, he himself becomes absolutely flawless as well (Vachanāmṛt Gadhadā I 24).

Conclusion

Thus, here, the Gitā has lit the candle of *divyabhāv*. The life of one who takes this light within one’s *ātmā* will also become lustrous. The darkness of *manushyabhāv* will be eradicated.

We are extremely fortunate to have personally experienced the life of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj and today continue to experience the life of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. If we understand everything to do with them to be completely flawless, liberating and divine, then the candle of *divyabhāv* has been lit within us and we have understood the essence of this shloka. ♦



Gunatitanand Swami

A Brief Introduction

To commemorate Gunatitanand Swami's 233th birthday celebration on 5 October 2017 (Sharad Punam) this year we present articles on his life, works and teachings...

INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of the 18th century when George Washington was appointed as the first President of the United States of America, when France lurched and buckled under a devastating revolution, when Darwin's Origin of Species stirred a furious controversy, when Beethoven entertained the halls and courts of Vienna with

his wondrous music and Charles Dickens rose to the pinnacle of literary fame and immortality; the unassuming Gunatitanand Swami was enlightening, pacifying, and immortalising countless souls in Gujarat, India, with the magic of his spiritual wisdom and God-communion life.

His renunciation of home, initiation, vigil in the rain for a glimpse of Maharaj, suffering of persecution at the hands of his detractors without a murmur, routine rounds for *bhiksha* despite insults, steadfastness to truth, service to ailing sadhus and bringing of relief to suffering humanity were a reflection of his character as a sadhu of the first rank.

He demonstrated his conviction for Bhagwan Swaminarayan, courage and desire to help others, genuine love for all people and a steadfastness through his saintliness.

CHILDHOOD YEARS

Gunatitanand Swami was born on 28 September 1784 (Aso *sud* Punam, AS. 1841) in a small village named Bhadra, on the west coast of Gujarat. His father, Bholanath Sharma, and mother, Sakarba, were pious Brahmins. From his childhood, he showed an extraordinary inclination for spirituality. Many times his parents and relatives were perplexed by his mystic utterings and subtle questions.

Once, Mulji, his childhood name, asked a mahant of a group of wandering sadhus, "What is 'cause' and what is 'effect'?" The mahant and the rest of the audience were dumbfounded by his question. Seeing that no one could answer him, Mulji replied, "God is the ultimate cause and this world is God's creation – an effect."

His talent for presenting lofty ideas through simple examples was a hallmark of his spiritual genius. Once, while he was going to his farm with his friends, they all rushed to a nearby well. The water was covered with moss and algae. Mulji dropped a stone and his friends joined in the



A monument on Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace



A shrine dedicated on his birthplace

game. Soon, the layer of algae and moss parted and the children saw their faces. They were excited and happy. Mulji explained, “When the surface was covered it seemed there was no water. Similarly, the layer of ‘bad habits’ prevents us from seeing God. Once that is removed our joy will be multiplied a hundredfold.”

This was not the first time that Mulji's friends had heard him speak about God. Once, one of his friends, out of curiosity asked, “You always talk about God, but tell me have you seen God?”

Mulji replied, “I see God all the time.”

And it was to bless countless with this vision that Mulji left home to become a sadhu. He renounced home at the age of twenty-five and was initiated into the sadhu order by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Dabhan and named Gunatitanand Swami.

HIS LOVE FOR MAHARAJ

Gunatitanand Swami had a deep attachment for Bhagwan Swaminarayan. A love so profound and eternal that he never allowed an opportunity for his darshan slip by. Once, he stood late in the night drenched in rain to catch a glimpse of him. On another occasion he ran backwards all the way from one town to another to have darshan of Maharaj travelling on horseback. Gunatitanand Swami thus never missed an opportunity of having his darshan.

Swami's profound love for Maharaj was once revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Shriji Maharaj) to his sadhus and devotees, “He is my eternal abode, and dearest to me. His supreme love for me is not of this life alone. He is eternally in loving communion with me.” And Maharaj spoke at length on Swami's greatness as Aksharbrahman.

As a mark of Gunatitanand Swami's love for Maharaj, we find many instances where he personally volunteered when no one was ready to fulfil Maharaj's wishes. On one occasion, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, with a large group of sadhus, was on his way to a big festival in Vartal. Midway, nineteen sadhus were taken ill. Shriji Maharaj assembled all the sadhus and asked if anyone was prepared to stay behind and nurse the ailing sadhus. There was silence. Everyone was eager to go with him to the festival. At this point, Gunatitanand Swami stood up and said that he would stay behind. Maharaj was immensely pleased.

Gunatitanand Swami tirelessly nursed the nineteen sadhus with care and patience. Within a few days the sadhus recovered. With no further need of him, Gunatitanand Swami left for the festival. On arriving at the Vartal mandir, Maharaj welcomed him with a warm embrace for his service and obedience.



Gunatitanand Swami waits in the rain past midnight for Maharaj's darshan

HIS SPIRITUAL DISCOURSES

In 1827, Bhagwan Swaminarayan appointed Gunatitanand Swami as the head of the Swaminarayan Mandir in Junagadh. Three years later, when Bhagwan Swaminarayan passed away, Gunatitanand Swami succeeded him and took Shriji Maharaj's mission forward. His life and discourses inspired thousands on the path of spiritual living. People flocked to see him and to hear his wonderful homilies. He used the layman's language, interspersed with simple examples and thought-provoking answers.

On one occasion, a devotee hosted Gunatitanand Swami during a visit to his village. The next day, while Swami was addressing an assembly, about two hundred people from a neighbouring village thronged to the assembly. They had come to the village on business, but having some time to spare, they decided to come and listen to Swami's discourses. "If you want to go and settle in another town," Swami, looking at the newcomers, asked, "would you just pack your belongings and go or would you first

make arrangements for a home and livelihood?" One of the newcomers who had made all the arrangements for a night's stay replied, "I would never set out for even a night without making any prearrangements."

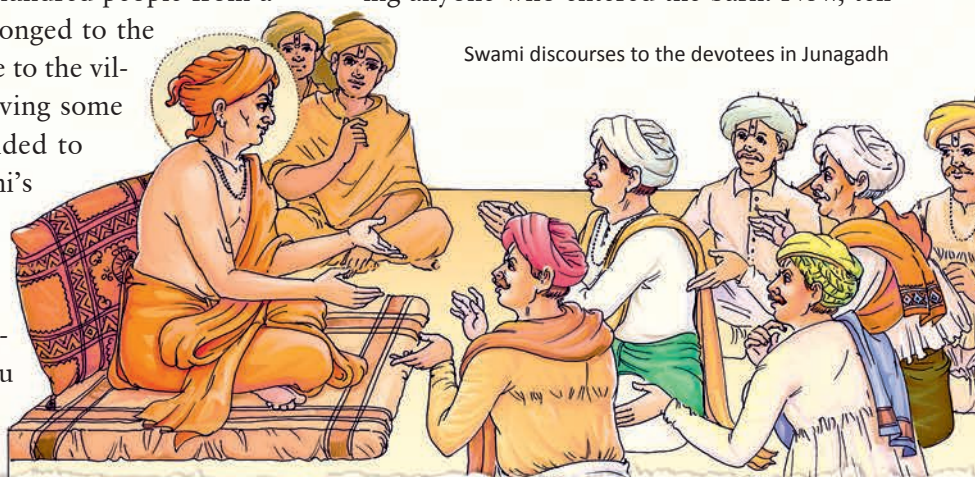
"But when you leave this mortal body, where will you stay? Have you made any preparations?" Swami asked.

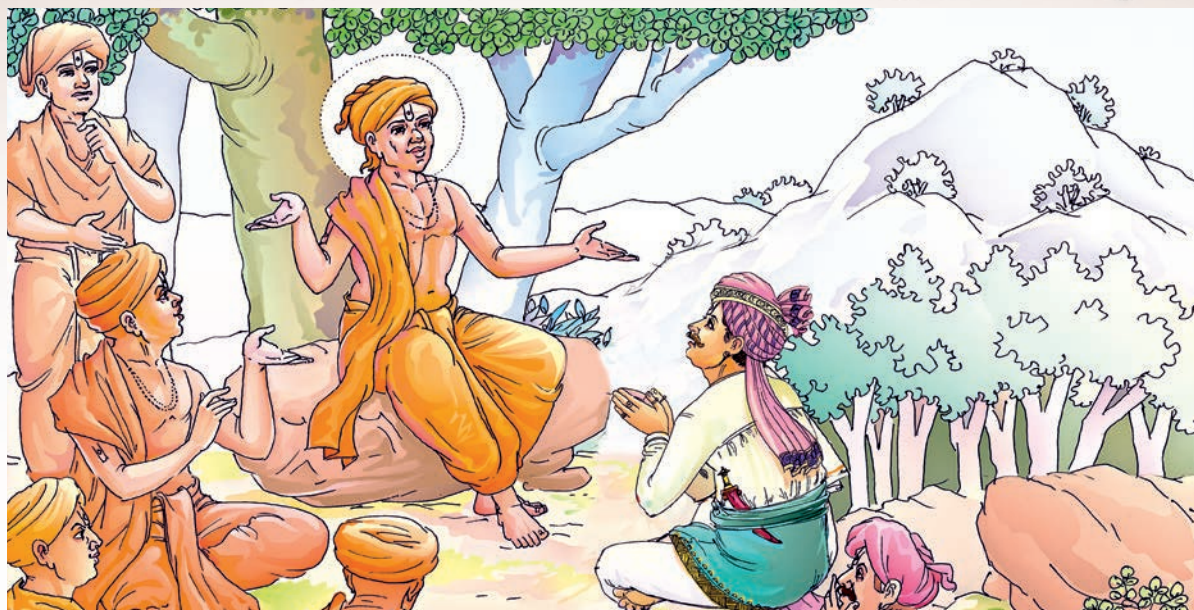
The man and all the newcomers remained silent.

Gunatitanand Swami revealed, "Satsang will strengthen you and prepare you for the eternal home."

During his discourses Swami also emphasized the importance of spiritual association with the holy sadhus (satsang) as a panacea to life's grave problems. Most actions in daily life are not merely a response to physical objects outside us but also a result of our desires that operate from within. Spiritual association with sadhus (satsang) make us aware of this and reinforce our spirit to overcome them. Swami spoke on the significance of this aspect with a simple example. "Once during a rat-infested year," Swami began, "a barn was teeming with rats. The barn became a feasting ground for a snake. Each day he would feed upon the rats. Many months passed in this way and the snake grew in size and strength. But the day arrived when there were no more rats left. Finding no food, he became more ferocious, biting anyone who entered the barn. Now, tell

Swami discourses to the devotees in Junagadh





Swami transforms Munja Suru

me, would any of you enter the barn? Similarly, when one feeds one's desires they fatten and grow in strength. But if they are not satisfied one's craving increases and like the hungry snake pounces upon any available opportunity. If however, one decapitates the snake, which is similar to severing the base desires, one is freed from its tyranny. This, however, is only possible through disciplining oneself under the guidance and blessings of a holy guru."

Tulsibhai, a witness to the good effects of discipline always found his pious son happy and equipoised in all his activities. He believed it was all due to the blessings of his guru, Gunatitanand Swami. When Swami came to his village he took the opportunity of asking him to bless him just as he had blessed his son. Swami told him to attend his discourses. But Tulsibhai had little time for this; he would go to his business every morning and return late in the evening. To sit and listen to Swami's discourses was something he was not used to. On the last day of his stay Gunatitanand Swami called Tulsibhai.

"How old are you?" Swami asked gently.

"Seventy-two," replied Tulsibhai.

"Tell me Tulsibhai, would a few bucketfuls

of water suffice to cool a giant red hot plate?" Swami asked.

"No," replied Tulsibhai.

"Then how can you hope to experience peace when your heart has been boiling with worldly desires for seventy-two years? Tell me, will a few hours of listening to my spiritual discourses fill you with inner tranquillity? Come and stay at Junagadh and I shall bless you with the peace and happiness your son is experiencing."

A couple of weeks later Tulsibhai went to the Junagadh mandir. And in the course of time Tulsibhai, who served in the mandir and listened to the Swami's discourses, was blessed with eternal bliss. Like him many prospered spiritually from Swami's divine company.

TRANSFORMING LIVES

Gunatitanand Swami's entire life was centered on reforming the lives of people he met and moved with. He clothed them with the fabric of moral and human values, thus transforming them into respectable citizens of society.

Munja Suru of Lilakha village near Gondal, was notorious for his drunkenness and criminal habit of looting in broad daylight. The citizens of

Lilakha village abhorred Munja Suru. But no one had the courage to stand up to him and throw him out. This intense repulsion for him prevailed until the day Gunatitanand Swami arrived.

Munja, on hearing of Swami's arrival, immediately went to him. This was rather surprising! What were his intentions in going? Did he want to drive away Gunatitanand Swami and retain the cloud of fear and notoriety hanging over the village? Or did he go in earnest?

When Munja Suru saw Gunatitanand Swami, he felt a wave of guilt overwhelm his conscience. He looked down in shame and regret.

"Munja," Swami spoke with love, "why do you ruin yourself? The more you pursue your evil ways, the more sin and suffering you will incur upon your body and spirit."

In spite of Swami's gentle words Munja felt a sharp pang. His uneasiness turned into a frown. He did not like anyone crossing his path. His blood boiled, and then, he felt another sharp blow.

"You have lost the respect of your family, your friends and of the whole village. Now stop and mend your ways."

He felt he would erupt like a volcano, but all that steam and fury evaporated into a clumsy laughter.

"I am happy," he said, "and not miserable at all. I believe your sermons will be better received by the villagers. Such talks are for those who are meek and gullible!"

He felt some satisfaction after saying something. But it was a poor attempt at brushing off Swami's rebuke from his conscience.

Swami tried again. But it was of no use. It was like talking to a thick wall. So without further thought Swami shot a glance at him. Munja instantaneously fell into a samadhi and experienced the tortures of hell.

Many miracles have been catalogued in Gunatitanand Swami's biography. His touch had revived a dead man, his blessings had saved many from fatal diseases and paupers were blessed with

wealth. But he performed a miracle only when the need arose and that, too, to reconcile people towards righteous and godly living.

A few minutes elapsed before Munja regained consciousness, and like a frightened child that clings to its mother, Munja clasped Swami's feet and pleaded for help. Gunatitanand Swami placed his hands on Munja's back as a gesture of blessings for a nobler and happier life. From that day onwards Munja became a changed person and the village enjoyed peace that had eluded it for many years.

Many more were transformed by this perennial stream, cleansing their hearts and nourishing them with the waters of holy living. Swami's immense sacrifice sprang from his love and spirit to do good.

In spite of physical hardship, he never disappointed the devotees by refusing their invitations to visit their homes. On the very night he passed away, at the age of eighty-two, he honoured the request of a devotee and sanctified his home.

On several occasions he was called to mediate between quarrelling parties and re-establish peace and friendship. He promoted respect for all gods, thus resolving quarrels and enmity that were frequent during his times.

HIS DISCIPLES

When his sadhu-disciples returned from their preaching tours, he would hurriedly step down from his seat, prostrate before them and embrace them with love. And then he would enquire about the places they had been to and the wellbeing of the devotees. If there were news of someone in need of food and help he would make immediate arrangements. "The devotees are a part of our family," he often said to the sadhus. "Their woes and afflictions are ours too. We should offer a helping hand and guide them as much as possible."

In return for Gunatitanand Swami's care and sympathy the devotees became attached to

him. They rushed to him whenever he needed them, offering everything, and even themselves, if Swami so wished. Karsan Bambhaniya was one such disciple. Once, he came to the mandir and offered a box of jewellery to Gunatitanand Swami. Knowing what was in it Swami said he had no need of it. "But, please Swami, it's not much," entreated Karsan.

That year the monsoons had failed and so the harvest was very poor. Food had become scarce and thousands were affected by severe famine. Karsan Bambhaniya was worried about Gunatitanand Swami and his sadhus. He had come to offer whatever riches he possessed to Swami. To him Swami and his sadhus were more precious than his ownself.

"We have no problems. Our granaries are well stocked. Please take back your box and look after your family," Swami refused him a second time. A tear coursed down the weather-beaten cheek of Karsan, only to be followed by another and another.

"Won't you accept a gift from me?" choked Karsan. "The sadhus will go hungry and starve." And so saying he broke down. To pacify him Swami accepted the box from his hands. Lovingly wiping the tears off Karsan's cheeks Gunatitanand Swami told him to go back home and take care of his family.

Karsan had given the precious heirlooms of the Bambhaniya family. Swami kept the box and returned it, unused, to Karsan the following year.

With 300 sadhus under his care Gunatitanand Swami shaped their lives into models of selflessness and a deep sense of sacrifice for God and his people. Through his personal attention and encouragement he produced astute scholars out of them. And above all he raised them to the level of God-consciousness and realization.

Gunatitanand Swami's life was also an eloquent symbol of service. Like the mighty banyan trees that stand unaffected, braving the scorching summers and providing their comforting shade

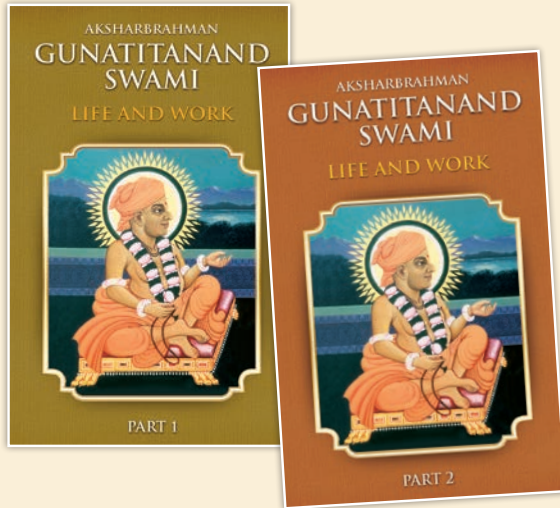
to weary travellers, Swami provided refuge to wearied souls.

Deha Charan was overcome with a void in life. An urge to seek something substantial and permanent sprang from his gloom. He no longer wished to cling to worldly living and so he left his home in Rajasthan to search for a true guru. His sojourn eventually brought him to Mt. Girnar, but even there his search brought him no peace. When he climbed down and reached the foot of the mountain, he saw a man steadfast in meditation. A ray of hope gleamed for him. He went upto the young man and enquired about his guru. The young man talked about the glory and greatness of Gunatitanand Swami. Deha Charan felt at ease. He instinctively felt his pilgrimage would shortly come to a fruitful end. He rushed to the Junagadh Swaminarayan Mandir and his first feeling on seeing Gunatitanand Swami was of immense inner peace. The impact was so penetrating that Deha Charan renounced the mundane life and accepted initiation into the sadhu-fold.

Even the Nawab of Junagadh, a Muslim, experienced a deep solace in the presence of Gunatitanand Swami. Whenever he found time, he unfailingly sought Swami's company. Besides, people of different faiths came to listen to Swami's discourses and seek counsel because he loved everyone and respected all religions. People flocked to him because they were impressed by his humility and asceticism.

Till the age of 82, Gunatitanand Swami served and inspired countless people, liberating them of their base nature. He immortalized them with the nectar of peace, fraternity, morality and exuberant love for God. On several occasions, before he passed away, he had pointed to Bhagatji Maharaj as his spiritual successor. Bhagatji was the greatest gift that Gunatitanand Swami bestowed to the Satsang Fellowship. In the years that followed the devotees felt that the spirit of Gunatitanand Swami was alive in the form of Bhagatji Maharaj. ♦

The Transforming Company of Gunatitanand Swami



Gunatitanand Swami inspired transformation in the lives of countless people of varying backgrounds. His life and teachings were such that the illiterate, the wayward and the devout advanced in their spiritual quest, no matter what their starting point. The following accounts of Valeru Varu, Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj, the Nagar devotee of Junagadh and Dajibhai Darbar of Kamrod demonstrate the tremendous impact Gunatitanand Swami had in their lives and how he customized his efforts to advance each of them spiritually.

The text is reproduced from 'Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami: Life and Work', which is a complete translation into English by Mangalnidhi Swami of the two-part Gujarati jivancharitra written by Harshadbhai T. Dave. The translation has been published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath and is available at BAPS Bookstalls worldwide.

FROM A DACOIT TO A DEVOTEE

In the village of Mansa in the region of Babariyavad, there lived a Kathi Darbar named Mamaiya Varu. He had two sons, Sidi Varu and Valera Varu. Valera's half-brother Sidi had usurped Valera's share of their ancestral land, leaving Valera landless and devoid of a livelihood. Out of frustration, Valera took to a life of banditry.

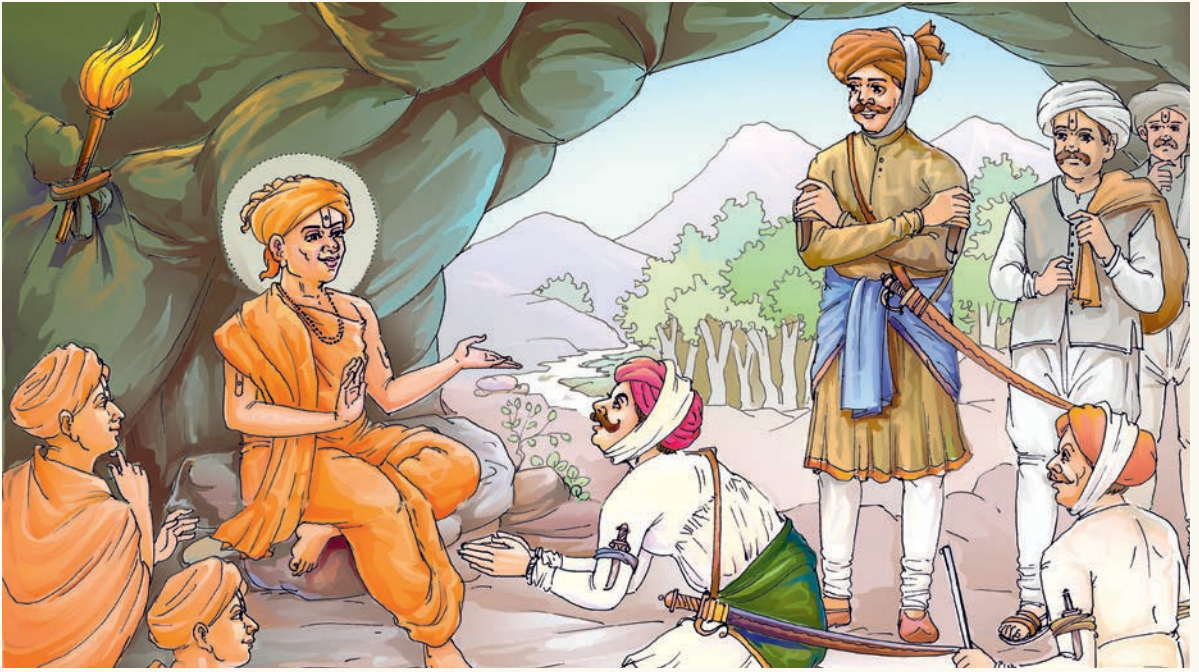
He began raiding surrounding villages, stealing livestock and exacting savage retribution upon anyone who dared to cross him. He would attack random farmers plowing their fields and kill them in cold blood. Terrified by his senseless violence, people began to abandon these villages for safer havens. Valera perpetrated this violence to intimidate his half-brother into returning his rightful share of their father's property. But Sidi Varu was also ruthless and not one to be easily intimidated.

One day, Swamishri was traveling in the Nagher region when his party got lost. They were making their way through the wilderness when eight armed bandits blocked their path. Many in Swamishri's retinue began to tremble at the sight of these cold-blooded killers. Swamishri reassured them, "What are you afraid of? What do we have that they can possibly steal?"

But Swamishri's group was not afraid of theft, but rather death, which seemed to be staring them in the face.

One of the bandits pointed his rifle at the group and barked, "Hey you! Maharajs! Let's go! This way. Valera Varu is waiting for you."

At the mention of Valera's name, everyone except for Swamishri felt their legs go weak. Valera Varu was infamous throughout Babariyavad for



Valera Varu's life is transformed from a bandit to a devotee

his senseless violence. The bullets of his gun had pierced the hearts of countless innocent souls and the stroke of his sword had severed countless heads from their bodies. The group could almost feel their life force draining away. How could they possibly escape from this fiend?

Swamishri told everyone, “Don’t worry, let’s go with them. Maharaj is with us, so what is there to fear?”

The party moved forward with the armed bandits in front and Swamishri calmly following them, a *mala* in his hand and the Swaminarayan mantra on his lips. Behind Swamishri walked all of the sadhus and devotees.

From his jungle hideout, Valera Varu saw the small party being brought in from afar. He raised the barrel of his rifle and looked down the sights to take aim. As the group moved closer, he was able to make out the figure of the saffron-robed Swamishri approaching. Stricken by a feeling he couldn’t understand, he slowly lowered his gun and watched, transfixed, as Swamishri walked straight towards him, gently put his hand on his shoulder and said, “You seem to be Valera Varu.”

As if Swamishri’s presence had cast a spell on him, Valera folded his hands and humbly asked, “Maharaj, which band of wandering sadhus are you a part of?”

Swamishri replied, “We are not a band of wandering sadhus, but rather followers of Swaminarayan Bhagwan. We worship God and inspire others to do the same. We have a mandir in Junagadh and we were on our way to Una when we got lost and your men brought us here.”

The genuine care in Swamishri’s face, the love evident in his words and the compassion in his gaze all combined to bring a transformative effect on Valera’s heart. The cruel thoughts of slaughtering these sadhus that he had been harboring just moments before suddenly vanished and were replaced with feelings of reverence and gratitude. He told Swamishri, “Maharaj, we are privileged by your holy presence. Today, I think my destiny has taken a turn for the better.”

Valera turned to his men and barked, “What are you doing just standing there? Give these sadhus some rice, sugar and pots of milk so they can prepare a meal.”

Then, he told Swamishri, “Maharaj, please prepare some *dudhpak*. We have no shortage of provisions. If you all bless us by eating our food, I feel that fortune will surely smile upon us.”

Detecting a dormant kindness in his heart that belied his cruel occupation, Swamishri gently asked, “Darbar, why have you taken to a life of banditry?”

Valera explained, “Maharaj, my half-brother usurped my share of the family property, and he won’t return it despite all my efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement. Finally, being left with no alternative, I have taken up this way of life.”

Swamishri countered, “Because you have a disagreement with your brother, you are harassing innocent civilians? What kind of justice is this? Will slaughtering these innocent animals and people bring your property back?”

Valera’s evil deeds flashed before his eyes. He recalled the scene of an innocent youth, fresh from his marriage ceremony, who he had shot dead despite the anguished, tearful pleading of his newly married bride. Countless such horrific deeds had failed to stir any feeling in his stony heart, while today, Swamishri’s every word struck him with the force of a body blow. Tears of repentance began to flow down his cheeks. He folded his hands and said, “Mother, Father! I don’t deny that I’ve committed countless terrible sins. But at the same time, I don’t think I can give up this way of life unless my rightful property is returned to me.”

Swamishri blessed him, “Darbar, your property will be returned to you in seven days. Your brother will send you a peace settlement and everything will turn out alright.”

With Swamishri’s blessing, Valera felt a well-spring of joy burst forth from his heart. After a few moments of silence, he asked, “Maharaj, how will I know that seven days have passed?”

Today, Swamishri had decided to shower his grace on this illiterate Darbar who had never learned to count, so he replied, “Bring me a rope.”

Swamishri was immediately presented with a

small piece of rope. Swamishri tied seven knots in the rope and told the Darbar, “Every morning, when the sun rises, untie one knot in this rope. Once all of these knots are untied, you will get your land back.”

Valera was overjoyed. Today, he had the double blessing of being liberated from the sins of his violence and attaining Swamishri’s grace.

With the trust of an innocent child, he asked Swamishri, “Should I start untying the knots from today or tomorrow?”

Swamishri laughed, took the rope from his hand, and untied one knot. Then he said, “Now, untie the next knot tomorrow morning.”

Soon, the sadhus had prepared a meal, and they called Swamishri to eat. Swamishri had the Darbar and his men also sit down to eat. Since Swamishri did not eat *dudhpak*, he had a *rotlo*. But he smiled at everyone in his *mandal* and said, “Although you were all afraid, because Maharaj was with us, didn’t things turn out okay? We even got *dudhpak*!”

After everyone finished their meal, Swamishri prepared to leave. Valera sent his men to show Swamishri the way, and he also came part of the way to see Swamishri off. As they parted ways, he asked Swamishri, “After I get my property back, where can I come to meet you?”

Swamishri said, “Come to the Swaminarayan Mandir in Junagadh.”

Just as Swamishri had said, in seven days, Valera’s half-brother, Sidi Varu, sent a man to Valera with a peace offering. The man greeted Valera with honor and took him to Mansa. Sidi not only returned Valera’s land, but also gave him ₹7,000 in reparations. Valera thought to himself, “It is only by Swamishri’s blessings that I have attained this great fortune.”

He told his companions, “Let’s go right now to Junagadh.”

He filled a bag with ₹2,000, and together with his men, he went to Junagadh and found the mandir.

When Valera Varu entered the mandir, Swamishri was leaning against a pillar in the assembly hall delivering discourses. When Swamishri saw him approaching, he told the assembled sadhus, “The Darbar who had fed us *dudhpak* has come.”

Then, Swamishri himself rose and welcomed the Darbar. He asked a *parshad* to see to their horses.

Valera emptied his bag of rupees in front of Swamishri and humbly said, “In my mind, I had pledged to donate these rupees if I got my property back. By your blessings, my property was returned to me today.”

Swamishri was pleased with his devotion. He kept Valera and his companions in the mandir for four days and attended to their needs while delivering many discourses to them. As they were leaving, Valera did *dandvats* to Swamishri, grasped his hand and said “Swami, please show me your abode.”

Swamishri pointed out to him the various buildings on the mandir campus, but Valera was not satisfied. He said, “Swami, I want to see the abode from which you have come.”

Swamishri was pleased by his spiritual discernment. He placed his hand on Valera’s head, and instantly, Valera attained *samadhi*. He saw Shriji Maharaj in Akshardham being served by countless *muktas*, as well as the divine, radiant form of Swamishri himself. When Valera awoke from *samadhi*, he had tears of joy in his eyes. Swamishri told him, “Valera, that is my abode. After you cast off this body, I want to keep you there with us.”

From this incident, Valera developed a strong conviction that Swamishri was Shriji Maharaj’s divine abode, Akshardham.

Although Valera had technically received his share of the inheritance, he was given rocky, arid land that was hard to farm. Water could be obtained only after digging sixty or seventy-five feet, and even then it was in short supply. Moreover, the other villagers prohibited him from taking

water from the rest of the village. They would not even let his livestock drink water from the public troughs in the village. Valera Varu was dismayed by this new difficulty and he decided to once again seek Swamishri’s blessings. He returned to Junagadh, explained his difficulty to Swamishri, and prayed, “Merciful Swami! Please visit Mansa so that my fortune improves.”

Swamishri immediately agreed and came to Mansa with Valera Varu. As Swamishri was touring Valera’s land, he stopped at one spot, and said, “If you dig twenty to thirty feet down on this spot, you will get an abundant supply of water. So, dig a well here, and on one side of it, build your residence, and on the other side, build a mandir.”

Valera was overjoyed by Swamishri’s blessings. He once again folded his hands and said, “Swamishri, we also have a shortage of water on the other side of my property.”

Swamishri gazed out upon the boundaries of his land and said, “There is a great store of water throughout your property. So, wherever you dig, you’ll find plenty of water after just twenty to thirty feet.”

Valera felt an immense sense of gratitude for all that Swamishri was doing to nurture his satsang. He asked Swamishri, “The Kathis of Babariyavad do not typically become *satsangis*. What merit must I have accumulated in the past that I have been blessed with Satsang?”

Swamishri laughed and said, “Once, Krupanand Swami and twelve other sadhus had come to Mota Mansa. At that time, Masari Koli of Mansa was a *satsangi*. He had insisted, ‘I won’t let you leave without eating.’

“So, according to our custom, we had gone through the village begging for alms. Seeing the sadhus begging for food in his village, your father Mamaiya Varu stopped us and gave us both provisions and utensils to cook our meal. Due to that merit, you have attained Satsang.”

Finally, Swamishri blessed the Darbar, “You will experience great happiness.”

Then, Swamishri left Mansa and returned to Junagadh.

Due to Swamishri's blessings, Valera Varu's village, Nanu Mansa, soon prospered. Due to the abundance of groundwater, the farmers reaped excellent harvests. Before long, Nanu Mansa began to produce more agricultural revenue than Mota Mansa.

* * *

IF I DON'T MAKE YOU GUNATIT, THEN I AM NOT GUNATIT

After the festival, Swamishri traveled to Anand with Raghuvirji Maharaj and set up camp in a mango grove. Every day, Swamishri would sit under a mango tree and deliver extraordinary discourses, which Raghuvirji Maharaj would always attend. Swamishri spoke extensively about *ekantik dharma* and Shriji Maharaj as Purushottam Narayan. Many people from the town, including Jibhai Shelat, came to listen to Swamishri's talks.

While the discourses were extraordinary, Raghuvirji Maharaj was experiencing an intense inner struggle. Soon after the festival in Vartal, his wife had passed away. He did not want to remarry, and he knew that as long as sexual desire remained in his heart, he would be unable to enjoy the true bliss of Swamishri's company or the bliss of Shriji Maharaj's divine form.

After a few days in Anand, Swamishri was preparing to leave when Raghuvirji Maharaj said, "Swami, please sit in my carriage."

Swamishri assented to his request and sat in his carriage.

Then, Raghuvirji Maharaj took some *penda* from a small box and offered one to Swamishri. Swamishri took one in his hand and closed his



Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj

eyes in deep thought. After some time, Swamishri uttered, "The 500 *paramhansas* are clutching my throat and warning me, 'Don't eat it! It is poison! It is poison! It is poison!'"

Raghuvirji Maharaj folded his hands and said, "Swami, if you behave like this, what will become of me? My base instincts have not been eradicated."¹

Swamishri replied, "Entrust the post of *acharya* to Bhagvatprasadi Maharaj and come to Junagadh as a pilgrim and I will eradicate all of your complexes. And if I don't eradicate all of your complexes and make you Gunatit, then I am not Gunatit."

Raghuvirji Maharaj said, "Alright, Swami! If I don't come to Junagadh as a pilgrim, then I am not Raghuvirji."

This incident demonstrated the extent of Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj's reverence for Gunatitanand Swami. Whenever Raghuvirji Maharaj was with Swamishri, he would daily have his attendant prepare a separate dish of food and send it to Swamishri. If no attendant was present, then before he ate his meal, he would fill a dish for Swamishri, put it on the side, and only then would he eat.

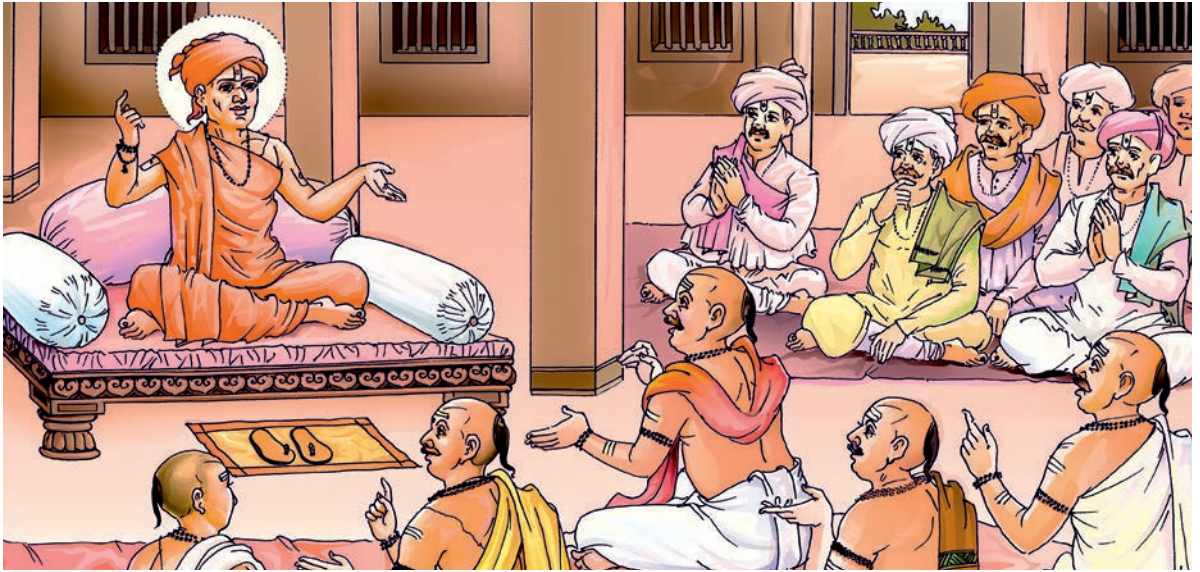
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ERADICATING A NAGAR DEVOTEE'S CRAVINGS FOR TASTY FOOD

While Swamishri's discourses had removed the darkness of ignorance from countless hearts, even his mere darshan and casual actions were enough to dissolve the obstinate perversities of one's ingrained nature.

In Junagadh, one devotee of the Nagar community would come to the mandir every day, do darshan of Thakorji and Swamishri and then go home. Never would he sit in the assembly and

1. Swamishri's utterance indicates his detachment from the pleasures of the senses. Seeing this as a spiritual ideal, Raghuvirji Maharaj expressed his dismay that he was unable to behave in such an elevated manner due to the desires and complexes lodged within his heart. These complexes include superiority complex, inferiority complex, as well as other base natures such as lust, greed, etc.



Swami liberates a Nagar Brahmin of Junagadh from his cravings for tasty food

listen to any spiritual discourses. If Swamishri happened to be delivering discourses when he came, the devotee would do darshan from afar and leave, but he would not allow a single word of Swamishri's divine speech to reach his ears.

This Nagar devotee was a slave to his palate, constantly desiring the finest delicacies to fulfill his intense cravings. If the food he was served did not match his exacting expectations, he would fly into a rage and throw the served dish, casting a terrible shadow on the peace in his home. His mother and wife had become so traumatized by his outbursts that every time he sat down to eat, their hearts would quake with fear. On the rare occasions when he finished his meal silently, judging it to have been prepared perfectly, his mother and wife would breathe a grateful sigh of relief. But those occasions were so few and far between that they had learned to brace themselves for his fury at every mealtime.

One day, out of desperation, his mother conveyed her plight to Swamishri through a male devotee and asked for his help. Swamishri smiled and told the male devotee, "Don't worry, we will resolve the problem today."

That morning, according to his routine, the Nagar devotee came to the mandir for Thakorji's

darshan. Then, he went to the assembly hall to have darshan of Swamishri. After doing darshan of Swamishri from afar, he was just thinking of going home when Swamishri called him near and asked him to sit in the discourse. The devotee sat in the assembly reluctantly, but before long, he was completely enthralled by Swamishri's captivating speech.

When the discourse finished, the sadhus and devotees went for lunch. The Nagar devotee thought, "What rich foods must the powerful mahant of such a large mandir be enjoying? They must be serving everyone a delicious feast of tender sweets and savory fried items. And since Swamishri is the mahant of the mandir, he must be enjoying the very best items."

With this thought, he followed Swamishri to the sadhus' dining hall and looked in from the outside to see the sadhus serving a crumbly item into Swamishri's bowl. The Nagar devotee surmised, "It looks like they have served him *churmu*, the raw material of laddus. Next, they will slather it with ghee and then serve sugar on top!"

The Nagar devotee began salivating at this thought when he saw a white liquid being poured into Swamishri's bowl. He concluded, "Swamishri seems to have taken *dudhpak* with his *churmu*."

That is a novel combination!”

Discerning the devotee’s thought, Swamishri told the *bhandari* sadhu, “Please bring some salt and crushed cumin.”

After Swamishri added salt and crushed cumin to his bowl, he poured some water in it. The Nagar devotee realized that, “Swamishri isn’t having *dudhpak* or even milk; he must be having buttermilk.”

As his curiosity got the better of him, the devotee entered the sadhus’ dining hall, did *dandvats* to Swamishri and sat down near him. Then he respectfully asked, “Swamishri, what are you eating?”

Swamishri replied, “I am having crumbled *rotlo* and buttermilk.”

The Nagar devotee was amazed. Swamishri was the mahant of such a large mandir and yet he was eating such simple fare as crumbled *rotlo* and buttermilk! The Nagar devotee was overwhelmed. In the past, he had seen Swamishri distributing piles of delicacies to sadhus and devotees; and yet, he himself consumed just crumbled *rotlo* and buttermilk. The Nagar devotee’s heart was transformed by Swamishri’s simplicity and absolute indifference to tasty foods.

The Nagar devotee walked home slowly, lost in thoughts of Swamishri’s greatness. His mother and wife awaited his arrival with foreboding. It was well past his normal mealtime and they would have to reheat his food. Thus, they were frightened at his reaction to the subtle change in the food’s flavor because it was reheated.

With bated breath, they served the food in his dish. But the Nagar devotee ate everything that was served to him thinking only about Swamishri’s indifference to tasty foods. He did not say a single word. That day marked a turning point in his life. His violent cravings for tasty food had been uprooted. His mother and wife finally found peace in their home.

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TRANSFORMATION OF DAJIBHAI DARBAR OF KAMROD

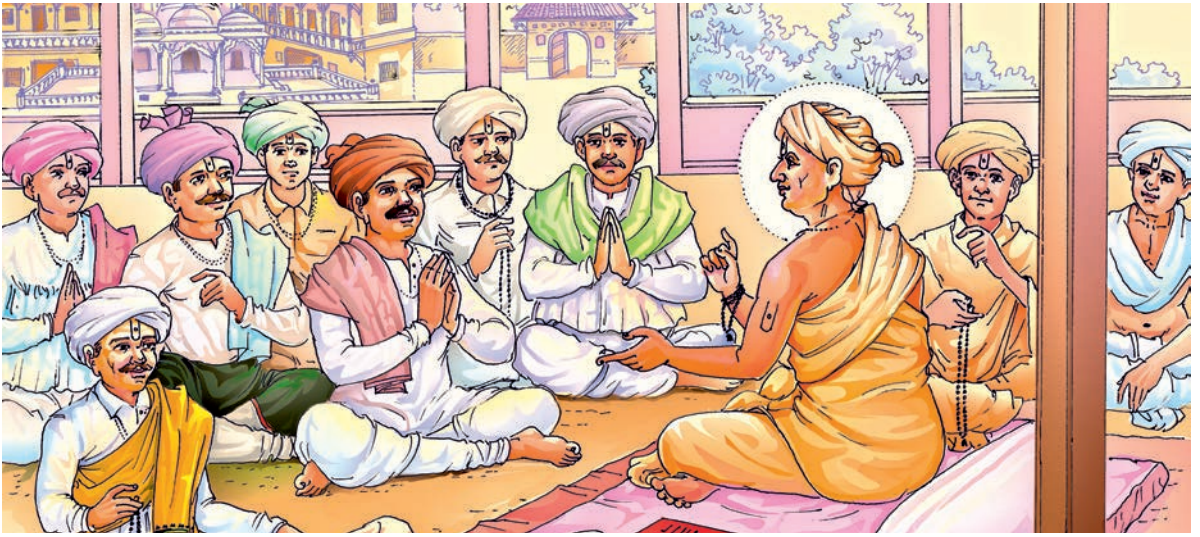
Satsangis would sometimes stay in the mandir as Swamishri’s guests, but non-*satsangis* would do so more often. It is Shriji Maharaj’s command that those who come to the mandir seeking accommodations, bedding and food should be provided according to the mandir’s capability. Thus, Swamishri offered hospitality to all. Swamishri would treat everyone – *satsangis* and non-*satsangis* with the same respect and affection. Whoever experienced Swamishri’s hospitality, could not remain long without becoming a *satsangi*.

Dajibhai, the Darbar of the village of Kamrod in the Valak region, had come to Junagadh for some government work. He came to Swamishri seeking accommodations in the mandir, and Swamishri gave him a room on the hookah loft.

Swamishri had kept the upper storey of one building reserved as a designated hookah-smoking area. He would give non-*satsangi* Darbars and Garasiyas who were addicted to tobacco, opium or other substances, rooms here so they could stay and smoke without being self-conscious of others’ judgment. Moreover, the hookah loft was separate from the rest of the mandir so that *satsangis* would not be troubled by their bad habits. Swamishri understood that sermons alone wouldn’t convince these Darbars to give up their addictions, but by interacting with *satsangis* and observing their lifestyle, they would naturally be inspired to forsake their bad habits.

Swamishri gave Dajibhai’s horse grass and feed. He also had a cot put into the Darbar’s room and invited both the Darbar and his servant to dinner. Based on Swamishri’s welcoming demeanour and attention to all the details of his comfort, the Darbar decided that Swamishri’s hospitality was as good as people said it was.

The next morning, when Swamishri was delivering discourses in the assembly, Dajibhai came and sat before him. Swamishri said, “Darbar, have you accepted anyone as a guru?”



Swami purifies Dajibhai Darbar of Kamrod after he confesses of his sins and base instincts

Dajibhai replied, “I am looking for a guru, but as of yet I have not found one. On one occasion, I had gone to make someone my guru, but in return for accepting me as a disciple he demanded two bottles of liquor and two goats. I realized that he was no better than me, so how could he possibly help me?”

Swamishri laughed and said, “Darbar, this guru will not ask for such things.”

Then, Swamishri said, “Darbar! I inspire people to do bhajan of Swaminarayan and follow the five vows of no alcohol, no meat, no thievery, no adultery and purity of conduct.”

As the Darbar did darshan of Swamishri and heard his words, he felt peace pervade his heart. His mind became still. He felt drawn to Swamishri. He folded his hands and said, “Swami, from today, I give you my word that I will no longer drink alcohol or eat meat. I don’t steal, as it is. Moreover, I will observe purity of conduct.”

The Darbar felt that since this sadhu is very great, he should openly confess to his misdeeds before him. Thus, he continued, “Swami, in my youth, I had taken a lot of copper ash and eaten many sparrow tongues, thus I will not be able to follow the vow of no adultery.”²

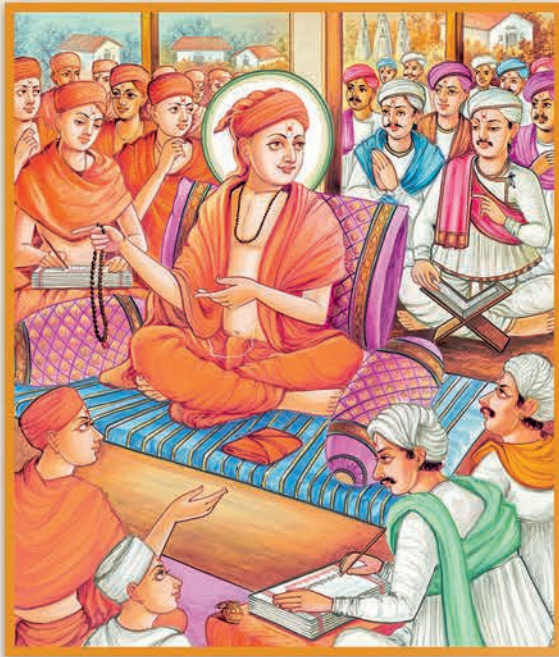
Pleased that the Darbar had told the truth before

the entire assembly, Swamishri said, “Observe the four vows through your own efforts, and I will assist you in observing the vow of non-lust.”

Swamishri offered *vartman* to the Darbar, tied a *kanthi* around his neck and gave him a puja. Then, Swamishri told him to do five *malas* while keeping his gaze focused on him. The Darbar did five *malas* while looking directly at Swamishri. Swamishri looked into Dajibhai’s eyes and destroyed the lust in his heart. Through Swamishri’s grace, the Darbar experienced tranquility in his heart, and all thoughts of lust subsided. The Darbar felt fulfilled. Then, taking Swamishri’s permission, he returned to his room.

The next day, after completing his government work, Dajibhai took Swamishri’s leave and returned home. By Swamishri’s grace, his lust and other desires had disappeared, and he felt a profound serenity in his heart. Freed of inner obstacles, he began to do constant bhajan of Swaminarayan. Every day he would eat two pounds of puris along with 2½ liters of whole milk sweetened with two pounds of *sakar*. Despite his prodigious appetite, not a single lustful thought ever crossed his mind. By openly confessing to Swamishri, the Darbar had become free of that flaw. ◆

2. Ash containing copper and sparrow tongues are considered aphrodisiacs.



Inspirer of Spiritual Knowledge

“If you want to learn worldly wisdom then go to Puja Sheth (of Sundariyana). But if you want to attain both worldly wisdom and *moksha*, then go to Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh.” This was the final advice given by Gopalanand Swami to Shivlal Sheth, Vaghji Amin, Manji Thakkar, Harikrishna Bhatt, Jeebhai Shelat, Jaso Gor and other leading disciples before he passed away to Akshardham.

Gunatitanand Swami was respected in this way throughout the Swaminarayan Sampradaya for his wise, inspiring and forthright talks. He was recognized by all as an excellent orator who presented his message with anecdotes and perfect clarity. His talks boldly described the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as supreme God, the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam as revealed in the Vachanamrut by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and the necessity of perfecting the virtues of dharma,

jnan, *vairagya* and *bhakti*. His discourses carried all the more impact since everything he preached was exemplified in his life and so everyone appreciated the genuineness of his talks.

Such was the impact of Gunatitanand Swami’s talks that Shuk Muni declared in an assembly at Surat, “The same inspiration that used to be attained by Shriji Maharaj’s discourses can be attained today from the talks of Gunatitanand Swami.”

Thus, even scholarly and senior *paramhansas*, who had witnessed the development of the Sampradaya since the time of Shriji Maharaj, praised Gunatitanand Swami’s candid and enlightening discourses. Whenever Nityanand Swami visited Junagadh, he commented, “Swami’s talks are very spirited. I have heard many leading scholars but have never heard such lucid explanations of Maharaj’s true form, dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*. He is certainly the manifest form of Gunatit – just as Maharaj had described.”

Gunatitanand Swami’s relentless preaching was initiated after an assembly in Gadhada. Gunatitanand Swami asked Shriji Maharaj, “Which of these four endeavours is the best – to engage in continuous meditation, to behave as *atmarup*, to serve the ill or to deliver discourses?”

Maharaj advised, “The first three endeavours are for a person’s own liberation. However, engaging in spiritual discourses liberates both the speaker and listener.”

With this in mind, when Gunatitanand Swami was appointed mahant of Junagadh Mandir, he arranged a schedule of 24-hour non-stop discourses. Whenever he was in Junagadh, he too, despite his administrative and other duties, spent much time daily discoursing.

Junagadh was ruled by a Muslim nawab, who was overawed by Gunatitanand Swami’s saintliness. As a result, he helped Gunatitanand Swami in many ways and often listened to Swami’s discourses.

To reach out to the people, Gunatitanand Swami used Junagadh as his hub and toured hundreds of surrounding villages. In this way he engraved the

teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the hearts of thousands of devotees to such an extent that they were willing to sacrifice everything for him.

Gunatitanand Swami did not confine his spiritual travels and teachings to just the Sorath region, but every year he visited Vartal for the annual spiritual camps. Even on route, to and from Vartal, he spent time in the villages preaching to the devotees, individually or in small groups.

Through his discourses Gunatitanand Swami ensured that his devotees were not distracted from their spiritual goal. Whenever necessary he would draw attention to possible hindrances and alert the devotees so that they did not deviate from their focus.

Shivlal Sheth was a wealthy and respected businessman in Botad whose life was deeply spiritual. He frequently visited Junagadh to stay in the company of Gunatitanand Swami and listen to his discourses. During one such stay, after the morning discourses, Shivlal Sheth visited the market and traded some gold, earning a handsome ₹150 profit. With this he sponsored a meal at the mandir. However, when he reported this to Gunatitanand Swami, the latter questioned, “Do you ever think of trading millions of tonnes of husk.” Shivlal Sheth replied, “No, Swami.” Then Swami said, “To the holy sadhu, other than the *murti* of Maharaj, everything upto Prakruti Purush is dirt, there is no value in it. So by forsaking the darshan and talks of the sadhu, what have you earned?”

Once in Junagadh, Abhaysinh, the Darbar of Lodhika, was seated in meditation. Gunatitanand Swami perceived his thoughts and commented, “Bapu! You won’t be able to accomplish the work in Lodhika sitting here. Lodhika is 75 km from here and when you go there the work can be done. So while seated here what is it that distracts you from Maharaj?”

While the work for the new *dharmashala* in Junagadh was in progress, Jaga Bhakta and others were preparing the stones to be used in the construction. Gunatitanand Swami came to where

they were working and asked Jaga Bhakta, “You are preparing stones, but do you remember the *murti* of God?”

“No, Swami,” he replied.

“That is not right. Worship while you work,” commented Swami.

“I am not able to do that,” admitted Jaga Bhakta.

So Swami explained, “At first you did not know how to prepare these stones. But through practice you have learnt. Similarly, if you practice remembering God while you work, you will be able to master it.”

Gunatitanand Swami often said that his talks were like powerful arrows and therefore they were capable of penetrating into the hearts of even the most wicked of people.

Notorious bandits, Munja Suru of Lilakha and Valera Varu of Babariyawad, were transformed by their association with Gunatitanand Swami and they ceased to be a menace to society.

Many devotees, through Swami’s guidance, attained great spiritual heights and conquered troublesome base natures, such as, ego, anger, jealousy, lust, etc.

Even Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj realized the true greatness of Gunatitanand Swami. Shedding the ego of his status, the acharya stayed with Gunatitanand Swami at Junagadh and by listening to his discourses attained the state of *brahmarup*.

Gunatitanand Swami was extremely particular in ensuring that all who came to Junagadh left with greater spiritual awareness.

Once Kashidas had gone to Junagadh. He had originally intended to stay one month, but stayed for two. Before he left, Gunatitanand Swami gave him the essence of the understanding he should take with him. Swami said, “There are four talks which are a lifeline for the *jiva*. First, the supreme *upasana* of Shriji Maharaj; second, *agna*; third, to attach one’s *jiva* with the *ekantik* Sadhu; and fourth, to maintain friendship with the devoted.”

Such clear-cut guidance was a hallmark of

Gunatitanand Swami's way of inspiring and enlightening his devotees.

Through his discourses, Gunatitanand Swami brought peace to many in stressful situations.

Gunatitanand Swami was staying in Gondal mandir. The Darbar of Gondal was in a state of deep depression and grief due to the passing away of his young baby son. Gunatitanand Swami was invited to the palace. There, Swami spoke to the Darbar in such a clear and caring manner that the Darbar felt real peace and all his grief dissolved.

Even to the experienced and senior *parambhan-sas*, Gunatitanand Swami's talks often shed light on matters which they had not fully understood.

Once, in Vartal, Gunatitanand Swami discoursed on Vachanamrut Gadhada II 9 and explained the glory of Shriji Maharaj as supreme God. Hearing this explanation, Shuk Muni revealed, "Swami! Maharaj addressed this Vachanamrut to me and so I am the one who wrote it. But only today have I understood its true meaning."

Gunatitanand Swami arrived in Aniyali where Bhai Atmanand Swami was residing. He was 116 years old and wondered why Maharaj had not yet taken him to Akshardham. Since, ill health prevented him from travelling to Junagadh, Atmanand Swami requested Gunatitanand Swami to talk. Gunatitanand Swami explained the true form and supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj and with this removed the misconceptions Atmanand Swami had in his mind. He now realized that Shriji Maharaj was supreme God. A short while later, Atmanand Swami passed away to Akshardham.

Gunatitanand Swami not only engaged relentlessly in talks, but he also inspired the writing of scriptures which described Shriji Maharaj's supreme form.

Once, in the presence of Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami said that a scripture describing the divine life and glory of Shriji Maharaj should be written. Achintyanand Brahmachari was selected for the task. Achintyanand Brahmachari confessed that the task was beyond his capacity,

but Gunatitanand Swami blessed him and arranged for all the necessary information to write the *Hari-lila-kalpataru* scripture.

Gunatitanand Swami never missed an opportunity to deliver the spiritual message for which he had taken birth. Tirelessly, he would talk to anyone and everyone. Some questioned this approach, suggesting that he should be selective and only preach to those who are suitable. To this Swami replied, "Those who listen and benefit are suitable and those who do not are unsuitable."

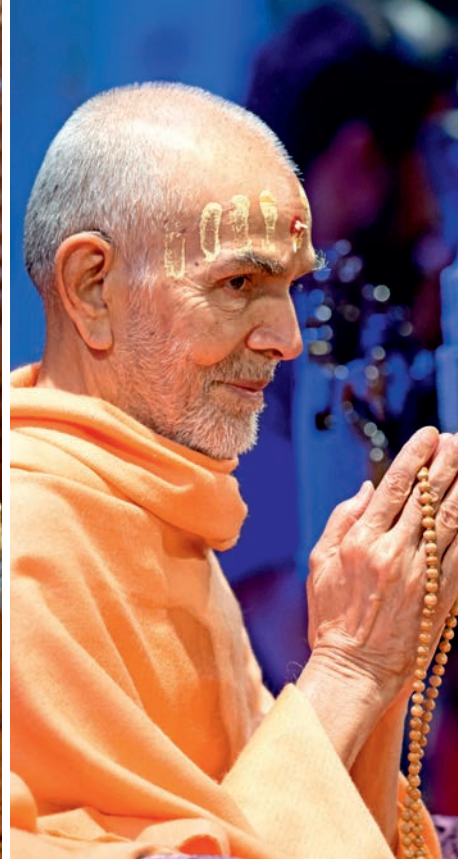
Gunatitanand Swami's fluent and insightful discourses appealed to all – rich or poor, young or old, sadhu or householder. There was always something of interest and value to listeners at all stages of spiritual development.

Gunatitanand Swami's talks were very direct. He elaborated upon many of his principles by the use of appropriate anecdotes and examples based on his experiences and observation of the human psyche. Thus, he was able to convey even the most complicated doctrines to even simple-minded, illiterate villagers.

The knowledge they gained did not just remain as theoretical concepts, but they applied the principles in their daily lives and experienced the true bliss of God.

Gunatitanand Swami left a legacy that has been preserved up to this day. Some of his talks were compiled by his sadhus and devotees into the Swamini Vato scripture. His talks are so universal that even today, whichever country one lives in or whatever one's background and circumstances, they serve as a guiding light to all genuine spiritual seekers. Many have experienced that by reading even a page of the Swamini Vato, there is always some guidance that provides relief and mental calmness from the problems and frustrations of daily life.

The reason they have such a powerful effect is because Gunatitanand Swami spoke with a genuine desire to uplift everyone spiritually. So, by using his teachings with a pure heart one can attain God and experience true, divine bliss. ♦



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

UK & USA VICHARAN

15 June to 30 July 2017

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN LONDON

On 15 June 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from New Delhi for his four-month satsang *vicharan* to UK, Europe, America and Canada.

LONDON: 15–21 JUNE

15 June, New Delhi, London

Swamishri travelled by British Airways flight 256 from New Delhi to London. Before the flight took off at 10.45 a.m. (IST), Swamishri blessed the main pilot, Captain Minesh Patel – a staunch BAPS devotee who also flew Pramukh Swami Maharaj on several occasions – and his co-pilots, Captain Jeremy Palmer and Senior First Officer Simon Lilly.

During the flight, Swamishri blessed Cabin Service Director Simon Lander and his cabin crew. Sadhus and devotees travelling with Swamishri were delighted to have Swamishri's darshan from close up.

The flight landed at Heathrow Airport at 2.55 p.m. GMT (7.25 p.m. IST). After clearing the immigration process at Terminal 5, Swamishri flew by helicopter from Heathrow to the grounds of The Swaminarayan School, opposite the BAPS Mandir in Neasden. Here, resident sadhus of London and hundreds of devotees joyfully welcomed Swamishri. Welcoming Mahant Swami Maharaj to the West, the sadhus first offered a garland to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then



Swamishri being welcomed with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a horse-drawn carriage, London

garlanded Swamishri. They also applied sandalwood paste to Swamishri's forehead. Senior devotees, Shri Vinubhai Bhatessa and Shri Maheshbhai Patel, also garlanded Swamishri. Swamishri met all the sadhus individually.

Thereafter, Swamishri held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in his hands and sat in a traditional British open two-horse drawn carriage. Led by youths dressed as royal guards Swamishri's carriage was escorted in a procession to the school gate. Behind the carriage were the youths of Leicester's Akshar Marching Band playing various tunes and youths beating traditional drums. Lining the route, youths waved large BAPS flags, 25 youths struck gongs and devotees from all BAPS centres throughout the UK and Europe devoutly hailed the *jai naad* and waved BAPS flags. The children of the school also welcomed Swamishri by cheering and waving flags.

From the school gate, Swamishri sat in a golf cart, and as he entered the mandir children showered flower petals along his path and welcomed him with the peacock dance. From the *haveli* balcony, *balaks* in traditional costumes also showered flower petals. With Thakorji in his hands, Swamishri observed the colourful *rangoli* and then went first to offer *abhishek* to the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Thereafter, he went to the

main mandir, where he showered Thakorji with flower petals.

After darshan, at 6.05 p.m., Swamishri arrived to a devout and rapturous welcome in the packed haveli assembly hall.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had last visited London in 2007, so this was the first time in 10



Swamishri arrives in the mandir with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj



Devotees absorbed in the first darshan of Swamishri in the haveli

years that the devotees had been blessed with the presence of the *satpurush*. Blessing the devotees Swamishri said, “Seeing you all brings great delight. Our BAPS is a united family. We are all one; that is the true joy. Shriji Maharaj says, ‘God resides where there is unity, friendship, compassion and discipline.’ Another thing he says, ‘All devotees worshipping God are divine.’ Whoever learns, contemplates and beholds these ideas will become blissful and experience continuous joy. Travel the whole world, but there is no peace, except at the feet of God. Observing God’s commands brings peace. Maharaj has said, ‘Those devotees who want to stay near to me must shed the desire for the temporary worldly pleasures.’ Worldly pleasures and Maharaj are not compatible. To keep God, one must let go of material desires. They are all temporary, so grasp the truth. Satsang is the truth – so keep hold of it. No matter what obstacles or adverse circumstances arise, never leave satsang.”

Then, Swamishri blessed the devotees who had observed fasts as a prelude to his visit. Swamishri had dinner at 6.45 p.m. (11.15 p.m. IST) and retired for the night at 7.32 p.m. (12 midnight IST).

17 June 2017: Satsang Shibir

A special one-day *shibir* was held for all

children, teenagers, youths and seniors.

After *mangala arti*, Swamishri performed his daily puja in the haveli. Afterwards, he inaugurated the unique album of paintings on Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s life *Bhagwan Swaminarayan: A Saga in Paintings*.

The theme of today’s *shibir* was ‘Satpurush: The Gunatit Legacy’. Representatives of all four Satsang wings welcomed Thakorji and Swamishri, after which Swamishri lit the traditional lamp (for brief report, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2017, p. 65).

During the *shibir*, Swamishri was asked, “What should we do so that our enthusiasm for satsang continues to increase?” Swamishri replied, “Think about what you have attained (*prapti*). Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj came on this earth. They became like us. They are not easy to attain, but they became easy for us. Pramukh Swami Maharaj fulfilled our wishes, whether we were deserving or not. And the wishes he may not have fulfilled was for our good. Now what do we have to do? Live according to his wishes and commands, regardless of whether we experience happiness or misery, honour or insult. Only do what he wishes. For 95 years, he disregarded his body and till the last moments he endeavoured to please us. So, it is our duty to keep affection for him and believe him as divine. There is no need to look at others. Only look at Bapa. Offer *ekantik* devotion.”

During the game ‘Change’, Swamishri was asked, “Tell us an incident that will strengthen our unity.” Swamishri described the occasion when Yogiji Maharaj was so pleased by the unity between two non-*satsangi* men that he served them *pendas* and performed *dandvats* to them. Then Swamishri said, “They were not devotees, but Yogiji Maharaj admired their unity. He liked unity even outside Satsang, so why would he not like unity within Satsang? Living with unity means that there will never be any quarrels. In unity, one does not demand. Think what one has to



Delegates present an activity during the Satsang Shibir

do. If one has no expectations from others, then unity is sustained.”

Finally, Swamishri was asked, “We are forgetful and will not be able to remember all this. So, give us one command that we should follow for life.”

Swamishri replied, “Ghar Sabha. It will solve all problems.”

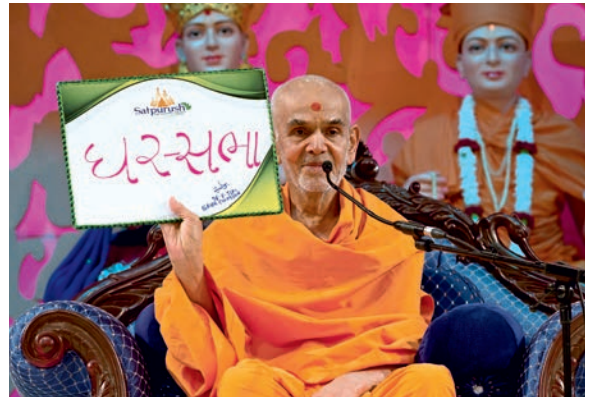
Then Swamishri went to the concurrent *shibir* for *balaks* and *balikas*.

Here, he participated in the game ‘Yes or No’ in which he replied ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the questions asked. The final question asked was, “If someone asks us whether we have seen God, can we say yes?” Swamishri instantly clenched his fist and declared, “Yes.” The children were delighted and applauded joyfully.

Next, Swamishri drew a plane symbolizing that everyone will be taken to Akshardham. On the left wing he wrote ‘Agnā’, and on the right he wrote ‘Upasana’. All the children pledged that they would consolidate *agnā* and *upasana* in their lives.

Welcome Assembly

In the evening, a grand welcome assembly was held. Swamishri entered with Thakorji from the front of the assembly hall, led by youths dancing to the tune of the bhajan ‘*Āvo padhāro re... Mahant Swāmi Mahārāj amārā ānganiye...*’



Swamishri reveals Ghar Sabha as the solution to all problems

On stage, children, youths and seniors welcomed Swamishri with some gifts.

After a welcome speech by Kothari Yogvivek Swami, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by the resident sadhus of London Mandir, the Deputy Mayor of London, Shri Raj Agrawal, and representatives of various organizations.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “Maharaj and Swami manifested on earth for our benefit. That succession continues. Their manifestation has halted our cycle of births and deaths. This is our last birth. Maharaj has granted *moksha*. If one does not malign in satsang, then one attains Dham. Otherwise, there is a delay. We have affection for God and his Sadhu. However, our ego and attachments prevail towards devotees and so questions arise. To control *swabhavs*, one must understand each other’s glory. Serve with



Swamishri arrives at Atlanta mandir



Swamishri engaged in darshan of Thakorji, Atlanta

humility. *Brahmavidya* is when one sees everyone as divine. Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘*Nirdosh buddhi* towards all is *seva*.’ This is an outstanding statement, but we do not practice it in our lives.

“Shriji Maharaj says, ‘Even if someone does not serve me, but if he praises the virtues of devotees then I believe that he is serving me.’ Such grace! God himself is giving us heaps of money, but we are refusing! Observe *niyams* and keep *nishtha*. *Nishtha* includes *divyabhav*, *samp*, *subradbhav*, *ekta*, *mahima*, etc. This will please God and so *moksha* is guaranteed. Satsang teaches a simple principle: if one does not take *avgun*, Akshardham is attained. There is no benefit in negative talks. Keep your focus on Maharaj-Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Then your task will be accomplished. *Moksha* will be attained.”

Over 7,000 devotees had come to welcome Swamishri and have his darshan and blessings.

18 June 2017: Asthi Visarjan

Dispersal of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s sacred ashes in the River Thames. (See report: *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2017, p. 62).

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN NORTH AMERICA

Mahant Swami Maharaj’s first North America satsang *vicharan* after becoming guru began from Atlanta.

ATLANTA: 21 JUNE–7 JULY

21 June 2017, London, Atlanta

Swamishri flew from Heathrow Airport in London to Atlanta. On arriving at Atlanta International Airport Swamishri was devoutly garlanded by Yagnavallabh Swami and Shri Kanubhai Patel.

At 9.35 p.m., Swamishri reached the BAPS Mandir where thousands of devotees were waiting eagerly to welcome him.

With Thakorji in his hands, Swamishri walked along a raised platform with *divas* on both sides towards the mandir. Devotees were seated on both sides, singing the bhajan ‘*Vālam vadhāmanā ho Swāmine harshe vadhāvie...*’ to add to the devout night atmosphere. On the mandir podium, the sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands. Then Swamishri lit a *divo* to inaugurate his satsang *vicharan* in North America, greeted everyone by saying, “Jai Swaminarayan” and then went to the main mandir for darshan.

23 June 2017

A grand welcome assembly was held in the mandir assembly hall in the evening. Swamishri was greeted by *balaks* and *yuvaks* playing the band, showering flower petals and dancing to the bhajan, ‘*Swāgat karie re, guru charane namie re...*’.

Dignitaries and representatives of local organizations were present to welcome Swamishri. Among them were US Congressman Rob Woodall,



US Congressman Rob Woodall presents Swamishri with a proclamation, Atlanta



Swamishri performs the re-consecration rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*, Atlanta

Lilburn City officials and others.

US Congressman Rob Woodall addressed the gathering, “I’ve never seen a welcome like the one I just saw right here... Because of your leadership, and the way it is manifested through all the faces we see here, our community is richer today than we were ten years ago... I can tell you now with conviction that the joy in these faces is truly found in the joy of others in our community, and I’m grateful for that. Welcome Swami, welcome!”

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “All these guests have come and have been touched from within. And why not? Since Maharaj and Swami are here.

“We have attained Maharaj and Swami. That is a great thing and we are fulfilled. Maharaj came on this earth, became like us and gave much joy. We have all jumped the queue, benefitted and experienced the joy. Now, we should not relinquish that joy; keep hold of it. For this, two things are required: *agna* and *upasana*. There is none greater than God. Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar and serves Maharaj. The Satpurush serves them both. Maharaj said, ‘God will forever remain manifest on earth.’ So, we must put in the effort. We have never had such an opportunity. After countless births we now have attained this chance. To keep hold of what we have attained, *agna* and *upasana* are required. Due to Maharaj, Swami and the Satpurush, we will be victorious. *Upasana* gives inner strength. If our *niyams* and

nischay are firm, nothing will hinder our path to Akshardham.”

24 June 2017: Re-Consecration of Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Murti and Rath Yatra Festival

After puja, Swamishri performed the Vedic re-consecration rituals of the Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*. While the *annakut* was set up, Swamishri blessed the devotees, “Prayers that Nilkanth Varni Maharaj fulfills everyone’s wishes and that everyone’s welfare continues to improve. You all serve to please God; that is a great thing. Our countless past births have passed in pleasing bodily relations. But in this birth, God has been attained. He became like us to give great joy and he continues to give bliss. Subtle doubts remain, but if they are removed and Maharaj, Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj are understood as totally divine then the bliss of Akshardham will be experienced here.”

Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha arti*.

In the evening, the Rath Yatra festival was celebrated. Swamishri performed the *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then Thakorji was seated in a beautifully decorated *rath*, which Swamishri manoeuvred by remote control.

On this occasion, Swamishri inaugurated *Expressions, Impressions and Feelings*, a book featuring 750 experiences of visitors to



During the Rath Yatra celebration, Swamishri operates a *rath* with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj seated inside, Atlanta



Atlanta mandir. Also, he inaugurated two new Swaminarayan Aksharpith e-books: *Royal Path of Brahmavidya: Swaminarayan Sadhana* and *Hinduism: Sacred Texts*.

Representatives of various organizations were also present in the celebration assembly.

At the end, Swamishri gave *samip* darshan to all.

25 June 2017: Yuva Din

Based on the theme ‘Evā Sāntne Nāmu Hu Shish’, the one-day *shibir* for youths began with Swamishri’s puja in which the youths sang bhajans extolling the glory of the Gunatit Satpurush.

Later, Swamishri arrived in the morning assembly. Swamishri participated in a question-answer session, and then drew Nilkanth Varni’s face and under it wrote ‘Nilkanth Varni sathe priti’ – ‘Love Towards Nilkanth Varni’. The youths attending

the *shibir* were given a specially prepared book on the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj – the first of its kind. Swamishri blessed the six youths who had contributed to its production.

In the main evening Yuva Din assembly, Swamishri was seated in a beautifully decorated *hindolo*. Youths honoured him with garlands and then Swamishri inaugurated a book highlighting the *seva* performed by *karyakars*.

In the main programme, youths recounted the divine bliss Bhagwan Swaminarayan had given to the devotees of his time. One such occasion was the *raas* (stick dance) in Panchala. The youths presented a vibrant traditional dance and then Swamishri individually played *raas* with the youths on stage and from a distance with the audience. Then, recalling the Fuldol celebration in which Nishkulanand Swami had made a 12-door *hindolo* for Shriji Maharaj, Swamishri first showered flower petals on the dancing youths. Thereafter, youths gently swung Swamishri while he held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in his hands. Everyone in the audience also held the extended string and enjoyed rocking Swamishri on the *hindolo*.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “The Satsang is divine. Nobody needs to authenticate a ₹1000 note. The government stamp on it is



Youths seated in the Yuva Din assembly, Atlanta



Balaks interact with Swamishri during Bal Din, Atlanta

enough. Similarly, Maharaj has stamped all devotees as divine. Now, if you do not accept, it is your loss. There is no place for negativity in Satsang.

“Shriji Maharaj says, ‘Even if a person does not serve me, but if he sings the praises of devotees then he is doing great service.’ There is no authority beyond him. If one does not have faith in his words, then what will one achieve? So, keep faith in his words and see the positive only.”

Then, the youths said, “Just as Pramukh Swami Maharaj held your hand, he held our hands and entrusted them to you.” Hearing this, Swamishri gestured as if placing everyone’s hands in the care of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Then, seeing the youths hold each other’s hands as a mark of unity, Swamishri blessed, “We have come to take you to Akshardham and will do so.”

26 June 2017: Bal Din

In the morning, the *balaks* sang bhajans in Swamishri’s puja.

The main evening Bal Din assembly began at 7.10 p.m. To begin with, *balaks* presented mimes which Swamishri deciphered and revealed the answers.

Then, Swamishri was given a *bodh katha* title and asked to depict it with a drawing. The *balaks* instantly got the answer. Explaining the message, Swamishri said, “Is it ever possible for an ant to

shake hands with an elephant? Maharaj, Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj are like the elephant and we are like the ant. How great they are. Yet they have allowed us to associate with them. That is our great fortune. When an elephant [the great] becomes like an ant [the ordinary], then we can enjoy the bliss of *mukti*. We should thank God that he has given us satsang. Don’t ever let go of satsang. Otherwise there is no one more foolish than us in the whole universe.”

Next, the Ruchi Quiz was held, in which Swamishri answered questions asked by the *balaks*.

Thereafter, Swamishri blew a whistle, promising to take everyone who heard the whistle to Akshardham.

In the last activity, Swamishri blew soap bubbles with the *balaks* and gave everyone great joy.

Finally, blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “You are all firmly attached to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This is the only requirement – if one is attached to God and his Sadhu, then *moksha* is guaranteed. You are all attached to the manifest guru, so do not worry. You will attain *moksha*.”

27 June 2017: Kishore Din

In Swamishri’s puja, one group of *kishores* asked questions and the answer to each question was presented by another group of *kishores* singing an appropriate bhajan.



Swamishri blesses the assembly on Kishore Din, Atlanta

After puja, *kishores* presented Swamishri an invitation to the Kishore Din assembly and asked him to respond and confirm that he would attend in writing. Jokingly, Swamishri wrote ‘May or not’! Everyone burst into laughter at Swamishri’s witty response.

At 11.20 a.m., Swamishri arrived in the morning Kishore Din assembly. First, during a question-answer session, Swamishri was asked, “We know that we should not engage in *abhav-avgun*, but we see the faults in others’ actions. How can we appreciate from within the divinity of all?”

Swamishri replied, “As long as one has a body-centric attitude, one will see the faults of others. But if one has a positive intention that ‘I do not want to take *abhav-avgun*’ then one will be fine. However, if one is complacent one argues ‘We must call a thief as a thief’. Such arguments are not valid in satsang. That we must not take *abhav-avgun* is an absolute requirement. It is to please Maharaj-Swami. If you are unemployed and someone offers a million dollars, would you not do what that person says? Similarly, Maharaj-Swami are giving *moksha*. If you keep your focus on them, you will not engage in *abhav-avgun*.”

Second question, “We enthusiastically undertake *niyams*. But, over time, that enthusiasm wanes due to laziness, peer pressure and other factors. So, we lapse in the observance of the

niyams. How can we observe the *niyams* with unflinching enthusiasm?”

Swamishri replied, “Think of what you have attained. By observing *niyams*, Maharaj and his Sadhu are pleased. There is nothing greater than that. If you don’t observe *niyams* or practice satsang, then others may become pleased. But, what is the benefit of that compared to one’s attainment by pleasing Maharaj. With this understanding, peer pressure and other factors are overcome.”

In the main evening Kishore Din assembly, *kishores* presented *mukhpath*. Then, letters written by *kishores* and *kishoris* to Swamishri were sanctified by him. Thereafter, symbolically, Swamishri placed one of the letters in a *yagna vedi* and blessed all, “Maharaj and Swami forgives everyone for their mistakes.”

Then, Swamishri participated in the Ruchi Quiz. Next, Swamishri was asked, “How can we balance satsang and studies and progress in both?” Swamishri guided, “Both are necessary. Through satsang, the mind becomes focused and we can study better. This period of life is slippery. Kishore means ‘*kis aur?*’ – ‘Left or right?’ Left is worldly desires, right is satsang. Satsang is very necessary. Otherwise, one can end up lost.

“Some say that because they have come to America they have to eat [meat] and drink [alcohol]. But, we are born to practice the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. At any cost, satsang must be sustained. If you are faced with a decision on whether or not to observe satsang *niyams*, then opt to observe. Everything else is not of importance.”

At the end of the assembly, Swamishri was honoured with garlands.

29 June 2017: Shishu Din

At 7.40 p.m., Swamishri graced the evening Shishu Din assembly.

Narayanmuni Swami narrated the story of how the birds escaped from the net in which they were trapped by a bird catcher. Then, the



Swamishri participates in the Shishu Din programme, Atlanta

shishus asked Swamishri, “What should we understand from this?” Swamishri replied, “They all flew unitedly.”

Next, Swamishri played ‘Shriji Says’, instructing the *shishus* to do or not do various tasks. At one point, all the *shishus* failed. However, the compere reasoned, “Nobody has lost, since Shriji Maharaj has spoken through you. Correct?” Swamishri smiled in agreement.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed actions to indicate which *niyams* the *shishus* should observe daily. Through his gestures, Swamishri instructed them to daily do *mala*, apply the *tilak-chandlo* and read satsang books.

Then, three *shishus* recounted the time in London when Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a cake cut and re-offered it to Thakorji. In memory of this, Swamishri cut a decorated cake.

One *shishu* said, “If we daily do puja and *tilak-chandlo*, and bow down to everyone, will you stay near to us?” Swamishri happily replied yes. The *shishu* gradually went closer to Swamishri and asked, “How near will you stay? This near? This near?....” And, finally, he embraced Swamishri. The audience erupted in applause and understood that by observing *niyams*, Swamishri would be close enough to embrace.

Finally, Swamishri was asked, “How do you view *balaks*?”



Swamishri answered, “I see you all as Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj resides in you all. He also resides in all the devotees.”

The *shishu* volunteers then honoured Swamishri with a garland made of teddy bears. While Swamishri was leaving the assembly, he sanctified the gifts to be given to the *shishus* and also showered chocolates on the *shishus* seated on stage and in the audience. Everyone was delighted by this unexpected darshan.

30 June 2017: Karyakar Din

At 7.10 p.m. Swamishri presided over the Karyakar Din assembly.

Swamishri was asked, “These *karyakars* are the pillars of satsang. They bear the load, tolerate the nails and do great service. They sacrifice a lot. But, what do you believe is the ideal way to do *seva*?”

Swamishri guided the *karyakars*, “*Seva* is a



Swamishri with Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj in front of Atlanta Mandir on the occasion of the mandir's 10th Anniversary Celebration

must. If one knows how to do it then no matter how much the workload, one will always be at peace. Shastriji Maharaj could have done everything himself, but he gave everyone a chance to serve. Remember, Swami knows everything and can do everything. But he grants us *seva* so that we develop and our *swabhavs* are overcome.

“Our absence will not prevent the work from being done. From the time of Shastriji Maharaj, the activities of Satsang have grown. So, serve with enthusiasm. Do not be glum or reluctant. Serve, believing it to be a great opportunity. God and his Sadhu create countless *brahmands*. So, what is one mandir [to them]? But, they give us the chance to serve. In this way, our devotion and inner strength increase. Shastriji Maharaj said, ‘My work shall continue...’, whether you assist or not. If you do not help, you will be left out. Serve with the belief that it is our great fortune and it is for our *moksha*.

1 July 2017: Atlanta Mandir 10th Anniversary Celebration

In 2007, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the beautiful traditional *shikharbaddha* mandir in Lilburn, Atlanta.

The mandir's 10th anniversary celebration was held in the vast open mandir grounds in the presence of thousands of devotees from throughout

North America and many dignitaries.

The theme of the celebration assembly was ‘Mandir’. Over the past ten years, this mandir has inspired spiritual, moral, social, family, cultural and national values in countless people of all backgrounds.

The assembly featured videos of the mandir's history, colourful cultural dances, skits, devotional songs and speeches. Devotees recollected their experiences over the past ten years, highlighting the activities and contributions of the mandir.

Among the dignitaries present were Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, Mayor of Lilburn Johnny Christ and Consul General of India in Georgia Nagesh Singh. Addressing the assembly, Secretary Brian Kemp said, “The Mandir is an asset to our state. I am honoured to be here with His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The Mandir has touched the lives of over 2 million people in these short 10 years. It is certainly one of the crown jewels of our state.

“At this time I would like to recognize His Holiness as an honorary Georgian, and say that the doors of our great state are always open to you.”

Mayor Johnny Christ said, “The BAPS Mandir over the past decade has served as a centre of spirituality, harmony and service.

“Therefore, I, Johnny Christ, the mayor

of Lilburn, hereby honour and welcome His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj to this city of Lilburn by presenting him with the Key to the City and proclaiming July 1, 2017 as Mahant Swami Maharaj Day in Lilburn.”

Swamishri was honoured with a variety of garlands and then he blessed the celebration assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj has gifted us this beautiful mandir. His vision to build the mandir facing east was totally appropriate. Over the past 10 years, many have been inspired through the wide variety of activities. The real purpose of the mandir is to increase faith in God and over the past 10 years, the Satsang has grown.

“We have attained the manifest form of God and his Sadhu. That is a big attainment, not possible even through many sadhanas.

“Those who have faith will gain *brahmavidya*. Maharaj came in human form. Over 500 *paramhansas* worshipped him as God. He gave them much bliss. Such bliss continues and that is why we experience joy.

“Without satsang, one may outwardly appear to be happy, but inwardly there is no joy. With satsang, one may appear to be outwardly in difficulty but that is not misery. One must ignore worldly joy and misery and give priority to satsang.”

2 July 2017: Diksha Day

After puja, Swamishri initiated two *sadhaks* into the *parshad*-fold.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “The parents of these two youths deserve great credit, since they are both their parents’ only sons. This is the highest level of sacrifice. The youths have prayed, ‘May we obey the commands, control the mind and earn your blessings.’”

In the evening assembly, Lieutenant Governor of Georgia Casey Cagle was present. He praised Swamishri, “He is an individual with a very large heart, a person who cares deeply about our world, deeply about our country and also deeply about individuals. He has a mission to promote

harmony, love, service and unity... I convey to him my heartfelt appreciation and admiration.”

6 July 2017: Symbolic Guru Punam Celebration

During the celebration assembly, Narayanmuni Swami asked Swamishri, “Today, we are symbolically celebrating Guru Punam. You have written a whole book on your memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. How were you able to do so?” Swamishri answered, “It is because of what Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done that there are so many *satsangis* today. Pramukh Swami Maharaj genuinely cared for everyone in so many ways, every moment of his life and gave everyone so much joy. I saw in his life that whatever he did was sincere. That is why we feel like doing anything for him.”

Swamishri was asked, “What did you see in Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj that you became attached to them with total dedication?”

Swamishri replied, “There was no pretence in Yogiji Maharaj. The same genuineness was evident in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life. In this everything is included.”

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “Yogi Bapa had said, ‘To have *nirdosh buddhi* towards the Satpurush is true guru *pujan*.’ Believe that you have met the same form that is in Akshardham here. Do not attribute any faults to him. To stay together with him and understand his glory is very difficult. But, by keeping *nirdosh buddhi* there will be no problems.” At the end, Swamishri performed *pujan* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *murti*.

CHICAGO: 7-19 JULY

7 July 2017, Atlanta, Chicago

Swamishri departed from Atlanta and was greeted at the Chicago BAPS Mandir by joyfully dancing *balaks* and *kishores*. Swamishri viewed a beautiful *rangoli* designed on the theme ‘The



Devotees joyously welcome Swamishri, Chicago

Satpurush Succession Is Eternal’ and blessed devotees who had observed an 84-hour fast to commemorate his visit.

8 July 2017: Mass Marriage Ceremony

In the morning, while offering *abhishek* to Nilkanth Varni, Swamishri especially prayed for the couples who would be getting married in the *samuh lagna* (mass marriage) ceremony today.

9 July 2017: Guru Purnima

After puja, Swamishri inaugurated the painting album on the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan: A Saga in Paintings*.

Then Swamishri blessed, “Today is Guru Punam. Throughout the world, gurus will be worshipped. The disciple acquires the qualities of the guru. Our guru is Akshar and he will take us to Akshardham. True guru *pujan* is to see everyone as divine. Why should we see the faults in others? Instead, sing the virtues of God and guru. Shun talks of *abhav* and *avagun*. To please the guru is guru *pujan*. To have *nirdosh buddhi* in the guru is guru *pujan*. By doing this, you have performed guru *pujan* from wherever you are seated.”

In the evening, Swamishri held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in his hands and entered the main Guru Punam assembly seated in a Mayur Rath. He was

greeted by children and youths dancing and the devout atmosphere was palpable as Swamishri took his seat on the stage.

At the conclusion of the assembly, Swamishri blessed, “We should live with unity with all; with our family and relatives, with everyone in America and throughout the world. God has made everyone. We should remember this. We are *satsangis* and this is the noble way of *satsang*.

“We have attained Maharaj, Swami and the Satpurush. That is our clear, straightforward understanding. Never doubt this. If you doubt, you will not experience the joy. So, pray to Maharaj and keep *nirdosh buddhi* towards the guru.”

Then, after sadhus had performed *pujan* of Swamishri by applying sandalwood paste on his forehead, the devotees had the opportunity for Swamishri’s *samip* darshan.

15 July 2017

Swamishri performed the *pujan* of bricks for the newly planned BAPS mandirs in Indianapolis and Louisville.

16 July 2017: Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Din

In the evening, in the centre of the stage, a decorative Pramukh Mandiram was arranged, housing a (LED) screen on which various photos



Swamishri seated humbly on stage during the Guru Purnima assembly, Chicago

of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were continually displayed.

During the assembly, some of the dignitaries addressed the audience.

Governor Bruce Rauner said, “It is a deep privilege, one of the most exciting moments of my life, to meet our new spiritual leader, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. We celebrate together the values that we share – the ideal of ‘samp’ – unity – and the ideal of ‘das no das’. We are here on earth to help each other. We celebrate the teaching ‘In the joy of others lies our own.’ Therefore, I, Bruce Rauner, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim August 13th, 2017 as Pramukh Swami Maharaj Day in Illinois.”

Mayor of Bartlett Kevin Wallace, said, “It’s been such a great relationship between the village of Bartlett and BAPS. I can’t say enough about what BAPS here in Bartlett has done for our community.” The mayor also declared 9 July 2017 as ‘Mahant Swami Maharaj Day’ in Bartlett.

Mayor of Schaumburg Al Larson declared 13 August 2017 as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Day’ and presented Swamishri with a Key to the City.

Mayor of Hanover Park Rodney Craig declared 9 July 2017 as ‘Mahant Swami Maharaj Day’.

Mayor of Naperville Steve Chirico, together with leading businessman Krishna Bansal,



Devotees enjoy Swamishri’s *samip* darshan, Chicago

presented the Key to the City to Swamishri.

Children and youths celebrated Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life with a thematic dance, towards the end of which Swamishri waved a large BAPS flag, acknowledging the upcoming centenary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Finally, Swamishri blessed, “Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj came on this earth and worked tirelessly to promote *ekantik* dharma. The shastras contain the concept of *ekantik* dharma, but it had been forgotten. Without the *upasana* of Maharaj and Swami *ekantik* dharma cannot be realized. Only by becoming like Swami can one offer true devotion to Maharaj. We have that opportunity. So, we should become his devotee. If we do not become *ekantik*, we remain incomplete and Maharaj’s goal is not accomplished. Only by becoming



Governor Bruce Rauner presents a proclamation in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Chicago



Mayor John Tory presents the Key to the City of Toronto to Swamishri

an *ekantik* devotee can one repay one's debt to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, the devotees also had the opportunity to perform *pujan* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *asthipushpa*.

17 July 2017

In the morning, Swamishri sanctified the new *sinhasan* of Milwaukee Mandir and the *murtis* for the Sterling Heights Mandir.

TORONTO: 19-28 JULY

19 July 2017, Chicago, Toronto

Swamishri departed from Chicago and took a flight to Toronto. In Toronto Mandir, Swamishri was welcomed by devotees waving the mandir 10th anniversary celebration flags.

To commemorate Swamishri's visit, over 300 devotees had observed austerities. Swamishri blessed them all.

In the evening welcome assembly, representatives of local Hindu organizations honoured Swamishri with garlands.

In his blessings, Swamishri said, "Maharaj, Swami and the Satpurush – that is our clear principle. Do not remain stuck in ego, anger, envy and desires. If the principle is understood, then everything can be accomplished. First, we have to imbibe satsang, then it will spread throughout Canada. It is a delight to see the leaders of the Hindu organizations. Prayers that all progress with unity."

20 July 2017: Mahant Swami Maharaj's Pramukh Varni Din; Yuva Din

In Ahmedabad on 20 July 2012, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote a historic letter in which he established Mahant Swami Maharaj as the guru and president of BAPS.

After puja, Swamishri inaugurated today's Yuva Din by lighting the traditional lamp. He also released a new custom postal stamp honouring Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In the evening assembly, Swamishri blessed, "By not seeing the divinity in others, quarrels arise. The virtue of *divyabhav* is like the sun [constant] while other virtues are like the moon [wax and wane]. By developing *divyabhav*, one's outlook changes. So, keep *divyabhav*. That is Maharaj's command."

22 July 2017: Diksha Din; 10th Anniversary of Toronto Mandir

After his morning puja, Swamishri initiated two *sadhaks* into the *parshad*-fold. Then he blessed the assembly, "Shriji Maharaj has said, 'Only one with infinite merits is able to become a sadhu.' Yogi Bapa used to say, 'We want to make one lakh sadhus.' There is nothing comparable to becoming a sadhu in Maharaj, Swami and Shastriji Maharaj's Sanstha. *Moksha* is 101% guaranteed. The devotees also attain *moksha*."

In the evening, the 10th Anniversary of Toronto Mandir was celebrated in the presence of



Swamishri launches a postal stamp in honour of Toronto Mandir's 10th anniversary

Mahant Swami Maharaj and the Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau. Other dignitaries present included His Worship John Tory, the Mayor of Toronto; His Excellency Mr. Vikas Swarup, High Commissioner of India to Canada; Premier of Ontario, Hon. Kathleen Wynne; Hon. Kirsty Duncan, MP, Etobicoke North, Minister of Science; Dr Shafiq Qaadri, MP, Etobicoke-North; and Deepak Chopra, President & CEO, Canada Post.

When the prime minister arrived, he was welcomed in a traditional manner with a garland.

On the mandir podium, Swamishri and the Prime Minister saluted Canada and India while both national anthems were sung.

Then, Swamishri and the Prime Minister unveiled a plaque to commemorate this historic event.

After darshan and *arti* in the mandir, the entourage arrived on stage.

Some of the dignitaries addressed the assembly.



Mayor John Tory said, "As the mayor of the city of Toronto, I say that on behalf of all of the people of the city of Toronto we are proud to have this magnificent and unique mandir located in our beautiful city. The BAPS mandir is an architectural masterpiece, carved out of faith and love in Canada's largest city, an inspiration for those who pray here and who gather here.

"As I travel around the world representing Toronto, you are always with me because I have here, something that I believe blesses me, something that I believe protects me, but more importantly than that, it reminds me every day of the friendship that I've been privileged to have with you and with the people of faith here at the BAPS mandir. And it also reminds me of the work that you do to promote love and care for others in this community. I applaud and recognize and bow down to your love for humanity, and your commitment to the community which is demonstrated every single day.

"And so to mark this special occasion, of the 10th anniversary of this mandir, I would like to present the Key to the City to His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The inscription reads as follows: "This recognition honours His Holiness as the 6th spiritual guru of BAPS. His Holiness travels the world inspiring people with his insightful spiritual discourses and disciplined conduct. The virtuous lifestyle and ideals to which his Holiness adheres are what many people strive to achieve, and he is an inspiration for all young people. His Holiness is the head of a worldwide spiritual and humanitarian organization that is dedicated to community service, peace, and harmony through Hindu principles. Toronto has been enriched by many contributions from BAPS Charities Canada, and from the individual members of BAPS to health, disaster relief causes, and of the wellbeing of our community. The unique BAPS mandir located in Toronto serves as an architectural masterpiece, and adds to the multicultural mosaic of the city of Toronto and of Canada."



High Commissioner of India Vikas Swarup said, "Today, this mandir is Canada's place of peace. Today we celebrate not just the beauty contained within this combination of stone and marble, we also celebrate the vision



Swamishri and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the mandir podium



Swamishri presents an Amrut Kalash to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

which animated this project and the devotion and dedication of thousands of worshippers and well-wishers from Canada and beyond which lead to its successful completion.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, ‘In the joy of others lies our own, in the progress of others rests our own, in the good of others abides our own.’ It was this emphasis on service to society, on interfaith harmony, and peaceful co-existence that made Pramukh Swami Maharaj one of modern India’s foremost spiritual thinkers.

“I see this temple, not only as a vehicle for community engagement and as a beacon of Canada’s diversity and pluralism, but also, as a symbol of the friendship between India and Canada, two great democracies that value diversity and respect the rights of all citizens.

“In the end, as Pramukh Swami Maharajji

said, ‘It is not how well you arrange your words, but how well you arrange your heart that counts.’ Let us, on this tenth anniversary of this Swaminarayan Mandir, rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of peace, peace in our hearts, in our homes, in our nations and in all the world. Om Shanti, Shanti Shanti.”



And then Prime Minister Trudeau addressed the gathering, “It’s truly a pleasure and an honour to join you in celebrating 10 years of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir as well

as the vibrant community that made this possible. It is without a doubt one of Canada’s architectural wonders with its intricate stone carvings. How fitting it is that when visitors come to Canada through our largest airport, Pearson International, one of the very first Canadian sites people see off Highway 427 is this mandir. I, for one, could not be more proud. Each year visitors are always stunned to learn that no steel was used in its construction and it took only 18 months to build. It was the vision of the late Pramukh Swami Maharaj and your determination and hard work that built this stunning temple for worshippers and visitors alike. But the mandir is more than just an architectural masterpiece, it is also a place of community. This mandir truly embodies the

principles of openness and peace. For the past 10 years the mandir has spearheaded initiatives and helped those in need, both Hindus and non-Hindus. You have touched the lives of countless Torontonians through charity and we thank you for it. Your generosity, kindness and solidarity are shaping Canada into a place we are all even prouder to call home. When I look around here today I see a place that perfectly represents modern diverse Canada that we are all so proud to be part of.

“Your Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, thank you for joining us here in Canada to celebrate the 10th anniversary. I hope you enjoyed your visit because we are so touched and honoured you’ve joined us today. Jai Swaminarayan.”

Blessing the celebration assembly, Swamishri said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj has gifted us this mandir. He lived every moment of his life according to his motto, ‘In the joy of others, lies our own.’ He was always thinking of others – 24-hours-a-day. This mandir is the result of the endeavours of the devotees and sadhus. Everyone has put in tremendous effort. Both human effort and God’s grace are required, and God graces those who endeavour.

“Canada’s 150th anniversary and this mandir’s 10th have both been celebrated today. Both, Canada and the mandir promote peace, love, harmony and understanding. The mandir supports many activities and encourages youths to serve. Canada is a country that believes in diversity. Our Hindu shastras also teach that the whole world is one family. This mandir brings people together and teaches everyone to live with unity.

“As we celebrate Canada’s 150th anniversary and this mandir’s 10th, I pray that Canada continues to progress in every way and everyone lives in harmony. May the Prime Minister strengthen the unity of the country. May the people of Canada enjoy happiness and peace. And may the mandir continue to inspire all. May there be peace throughout Canada and the world.”

Swamishri then presented the Amrut Kalash as a memento to the Prime Minister.

To commemorate the mandir’s 10th anniversary, a new postal stamp of the mandir was presented by Canada Post President and CEO Deepak Chopra to Swamishri to release.

23 July 2017: Amrut Kalash Abhishek

As part of the mandir’s 10th anniversary celebrations, a special *abhishek* ritual was arranged. Swamishri sanctified the *kalashes* placed in the circumambulatory passage by placing rice grains in them. Under the mandir dome, four *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj had been placed. Swamishri offered *abhishek* to all four *murtis* and at the same time, as per the mechanism set up, *abhishek* was offered to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine.

Then, Swamishri went to the haveli where 2,000 *yajmans* were participating in the Amrut Kalash Abhishek ceremony. Here, Swamishri sanctified the *kalashes* with flower petals. Then Swamishri went to the marquee, where he performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Windsor.

In his blessings, Swamishri said, “Offer service and devotion with faith and trust. With complete trust, faith will flourish. Keep affection for Maharaj, Swami and our gurus. All of them have told us that ‘God is manifest’. Shastriji Maharaj has confirmed it, ‘The *satpurush* never leaves from this earth.’ So, now with such conviction, offer devotion with humility.”

In the evening, Swamishi viewed the special exhibition prepared for the mandir’s 10th anniversary. The exhibition depicted the tremendous joy Pramukh Swami Maharaj bestowed on the devotees of Canada during his visits. It also presented the 39 divine virtues described in the shastras and exemplified in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life.

Then Swamishri attended the evening



Swamishri disperses the sacred ashes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the waters of Niagara, Canada

assembly, celebrating Volunteers' Day and 'Holi of Flowers'.

The stage was decorated with a multitude of flowers. Swamishri held Thakorji in his hands and sat on the *hindolo*. Then, he blessed the assembly, "Shriji Maharaj brought the *rangotsav* with him from Chhapaiya. He liked this festival a lot. When Prahlad was victorious, the demons splashed mud, while devotees sprayed colours. Shriji Maharaj has said, 'Those who have God on their side are victorious.' Shri Krishna was with the Pandavas and even though they had a smaller army, they won. So, we should remain on God's side. Keep faith and affection in God. God is forever true."

Then, the Pushpadolotsav was celebrated. First, Swamisri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Thakorji and showered flower petals on all the *murtis* on stage. Then, senior sadhus showered flowers on Swamishri and Swamishri showered flower petals on the sadhus.

Thereafter, the devotees approached in turn for Swamishri's *samip* darshan and to be showered from above with sanctified flower petals.

On this occasion, Swamishri inaugurated a model of Toronto Mandir and two Swaminarayan Aksharpath e-books: *Perspectives* and *Hinduism: Sacred Places and Holy Rivers*.

27 July 2017: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthipushpa Visarjan

Thousands of devotees and well-wishers from across North America and around the world gathered at Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, to witness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthipushpa Visarjan (dispersion of sacred ashes) ceremony.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited Canada 12 times between 1974 and 2007. He visited and sanctified Niagara Falls for the first time on 27 July 1974, followed by multiple visits until 1990. At Niagara Falls, he also visited the Floral Clock Park and prayed there for world peace; and also performed a small ritual at the waters of Niagara.

Today, exactly 43 years later, on 27 July 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Niagara Falls to perform Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthipushpa Visarjan ceremony.

During the ritual, prayers were offered for world peace, for the wellbeing of the people of Canada and all those who visit Niagara.

Devotees and well-wishers observed the ritual from a special observation area.

As a part of the Niagara Parks Memorial Tree Program, Mahant Swami Maharaj planted a memorial tree in honour of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Remembering Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Swamishri blessed the special assembly, "Pramukh

Swami Maharaj did so much for us; nothing is left. Our line continues. Shriji Maharaj willed, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj manifested on earth and gave us so much joy till their last breath. The only thing they would like is for us to become *ekantik*. The fruit of our countless sadhanas is this satsang. Now, we must develop firm conviction in this *upasana*.”

Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the six *asthipushpa kumbhs*, one for each of the satsang regions in North America. At 7.22 p.m., after the rituals and *artis*, Swamishri dispersed the sacred ashes from the first *kumbh* into the waters of Niagara. Then, at the pre-defined locations, Swamishri, together with sadhus and devotees, dispersed the sacred ashes from the remaining *kumbhs*, while Vedic mantras and other verses were recited. The ceremony and holy ash dispersion took place in accordance with local laws and with the help of the Niagara Park authorities.

The forecast was for rain and, indeed clouds had gathered threatening to rain. However, due to Swamishri’s prayers, the rain withheld until all the ceremonies were completed.

SAN JOSE: 28–30 JULY

28 July 2017, Toronto, San Jose

Swamishri departed from Toronto and flew to San Jose. Children and youths welcomed Swamishri with a traditional dance. Swamishri was then honoured with garlands and then he blessed the devotees, “We have attained the company of Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the *gunatit* gurus. Through the Sant we have become associated with God. If we understand this we will be fine. Otherwise we will remain clueless. Nobody can compare to Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Nobody’s actions are as pure as theirs. Not even in the countless *brahmandas* will we find someone like Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But we attained him and he gave us so much bliss.

He disregarded his body and endured immense physical strain for us. The same attainment that people had in Maharaj’s time, we also have at present. So, we must remain in high spirits. Often, we wonder what we need to do. But trust itself is our attainment. If we realize Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj as they really are, then we will experience Akshardham here on earth.”

29 July 2017: 10th Anniversary of San Jose Mandir

The central theme of the main evening 10th anniversary celebration assembly was ‘Mandir’. The occasion was celebrated at the San Jose State University Event Center.

Swamishri was accorded a vibrant and colourful reception as he entered the arena with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and proceeded towards the stage.

Several of the dignitaries present addressed the assembly.



Assemblyman Kansen Chu said, “Thank you very much to the BAPS temple for your community services and your volunteer efforts over the last 10 years. Also, it is a great honour to receive and welcome Swamiji to join all of us this evening.”



Assemblyman Ash Kalra praised, “I know that his presence brings us so much warmth and so much love and really a sense of spiritual connectedness with one another.

“The Hindu faith continues to be a guiding force for me. And there is no doubt that it is spiritual leaders like (Mahant) Swami Maharaj who guide us to live a righteous life so that we do the best that we can to make this world a better place. Guruji, I am so grateful that you are gracing us and honouring us with your presence here,



Swamishri presides over the San Jose Mandir 10th Anniversary Celebration at the San Jose State University Event Center



but more importantly, I am grateful that you are making the world a better place by guiding all of us along the righteous, spiritual path.”

Former Mayor of Milpitas Jose Esteves appreciated, “We are very blessed with the presence of His Holiness who spreads the message of peace, love, and harmony. Ten years ago in Milpitas, we were also very blessed because we had, then, His Holiness the late Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessing Milpitas. Ten years later, this mandir keeps spreading the message of harmony, peace, dedication, sacrifice, good character and non-violence.”

Swamishri then blessed everyone, “Shriji Maharaj manifested on this earth and opened the gateway to liberation for countless people. Whatever devotion and service we offer is miniscule and like child’s play before his greatness. God is greater than we can ever imagine. Maharaj and Swami are both eternally, since time immemorial,

beyond *maya*. We have attained them. God is so compassionate and does not discriminate against anyone. Maharaj has said, ‘Whoever worships me will attain the highest *moksha*.’ We have attained this immense opportunity. Even by our darshan, others attain liberation. Wherever you go, by your pure actions, people attain liberation. If you observe the *niyams* and have *nishtha* then, through you Shriji Maharaj will grant liberation. Shriji Maharaj has said, ‘This satsang is superior to ashtanga yoga.’ Bear this in mind and engage in all sadhanas. Then, God will be pleased. We should wish for the good of all, for the good of the world. With such sentiments, God will accept even our smallest gestures to be grand. God never forgets them. Pleasing God will earn us *moksha* and we will experience Akshardham here. Maharaj has said ‘My words are my form.’ So, offering heartfelt service and devotion with faith, understanding and affection will please God.”

30 July 2017, Patotsav

In the morning, Swamishri performed the *patotsav* rituals and *arti*. An *annakut* of various delicacies was offered. ◆

Translation by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas from report in Swaminarayan Prakash, September 2017

Historic Acclamation of the Akshar-Purushottam Doctrine in Kashi



Distinguished pandits of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad honour the Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha and Pujya Bhadresh Swami at the residence of the president

Brahmaswaup Shastriji Maharaj boldly promoted the true Akshar-Purushottam doctrine as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and enshrined these dual forms in majestic mandirs. Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj continued this work by not only building more mandirs, but inspiring sadhus to undertake detailed studies of the shastras and prepare doctorate theses. In this way, the learned scholar-sadhus of the BAPS who earned PhDs in the early seventies were Viveksagar Swami, Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, Bhagwatpriya Swami and Shrihari Swami. Pramukh Swami Maharaj continued to build mandirs and further encouraged sadhus to engage in comprehensive studies of the shastras. This has resulted in around a dozen sadhus becoming PhDs. Among them, Pramukh Swami Maharaj particularly encouraged Bhadresh Swami to formally document the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine in accordance with accepted academic traditions. Thus, over the past decade, Bhadresh Swami has written numerous landmark texts that have been highly acclaimed by the academic community in India and abroad. The following reports relate to the latest text he has written – Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha: Parabrahman Swaminarayana Prabodhitam Akshara-Purushottama Darshanam.



Distinguished pandits honour and inaugurate the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* at the residence of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad's president



President Ramyatna Shukla presents the acclamation statement to Bhadreshdas Swami

'SWAMINARAYANA-SIDDHANTA-SUDHA' ACCLAMATION BY THE SHRI KASHI VIDVAT PARISHAD

31 July 2017, Varanasi, India

Eminent scholars of the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad in Varanasi – an esteemed scholarly council on Vedic studies council – felicitated Mahamahopadyaya Bhadreshdas Swami, head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, for his recent creation of the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha*, a *vadagrantha* that offers an exposition, justification, and defense of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's philosophical principles.

Prominent committee members of Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad – Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Ramyatna Shukla, Adhyaksha; Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Vashistha Tripathi, Upadhyaksha and Former Vice-Chancellor of Sampurnanand

Sanskrit University; Mahamahopadyaya Pandit Shivji Upadhyay, Mahamantri and Former Vice-Chancellor of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University; Acharya Ramnarayan Dwivedi, Mantri; and other council members – heralded the *Prasthanatrayi-Swaminarayana-bhashya* and the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha: Parabrahman Swaminarayana Prabodhitam Akshara-Purushottama Darshanam* as a new and unique contribution to the field of Vedantic philosophy.

The Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad is a time-honoured council formed for the protection of Vedic dharma. This council is considered authoritative not just in Kashi, but throughout India, and is viewed honourably and with great admiration throughout India on matters regarding Vedic dharma and philosophy. It serves a decisive role in matters concerning Vedic principles and its research. Only exceptional pandits in scholarly disciplines such as those of the Vedas, Vedanta, Smriti texts, *nyaya* and *vyakarana* may participate as members of this council.

Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Ramyatna Shukla, President of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad, arranged this historic event at 9.30 a.m. at his own residence. Commencing this event with *mangalacharan*, members of the Parishad performed *pujan* and *arti* of the sacred *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, guru *parampara* and the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* text. Then, the Parishad members honoured Bhadreshdas Swami



Inauguration of the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* at the Bharat Adhyayan Kendra of Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi

with garlands and puja. Therafter, Bhadreshdas Swami honoured members of the Parishad with garlands and shawls.

On this historical occasion, Mahamahopadyaya Pandit Shivji Upadhyay announced the following declaration:

- The *Prasthanatrayi-Swaminarayanabhashya* and the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* are sacred texts on Parabrahman Swaminarayan's revealed Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. These sacred texts are in every manner the protectors of the eternal Vedic religious tradition.

- Acclaimed by all scholars, respected Mahamahopadyaya Sadhu Bhadreshdas is an acharya and a contemporary commentator in the lineage of commentators on the Prasthanatrayi.

- Within philosophy, just as Shri Shankara's Vedanta is identified as the Advaita Darshan, Shri Ramanuja's Vedanta is identified as the Vishishtadvaita Darshan, Shri Madhva's Vedanta is identified as the Dvaita Darshan, Shri Vallabha's Vedanta is identified as the Shuddhadvaita Darshan, and others are respectively known; it is in every way appropriate to identify Shri Svaminarayana's Vedanta by the title 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan'.

- Therefore, we all collectively endorse that this Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant that has been revealed by Parabrahman Swaminarayan is distinct from Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and all other doctrines and is a Vedic *siddhant*.

Addressing the gathering, President Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Ramyatna Shukla said, "I wish to announce that I have surveyed this text. I speak having reviewed its significant sections. I regard it to be well authored. I have seen the commentary that he has written. It is in every aspect Upanishadic. References have been placed throughout this text. References from the Upanishads have been given. I have seen all of this, bore witness to it, and have spoken of it. Therefore, as the president of the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad and by the consent of you all, I commend this text."

Pandits of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad highlighted that Bhadreshdas Swami is the only Sanskrit scholar to have written both a commentary on the entire Prasthanatrayi and a *vadagrantha* – a text which substantiates the philosophy propounded in the commentary.

Concluding the event, Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Ramyatna Shukla, Mahamahopadyaya Pandit Shivji Upadhyaya and Acharya Ramnarayan Dwivedi signed and presented the declaration to Bhadreshdas Swami.

INAUGURATION OF THE SVAMINARAYANASIDDHANTASUDHA AT BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY 31 July 2017, Varanasi, India

At about 2.30 p.m., distinguished scholars at the Bharat Adhyayan Kendra of Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi inaugurated and



Bhadreshdas Swami delivers the first discourse on the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* on the sacred banks of River Ganga in Varanasi

acclaimed the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha: Parabrahman Swaminarayana Prabodhitam Akshara-Purushottama Darshanam*.

Bhadreshdas Swami delivered a lecture at Bharat Adhyayan Kendra, Banaras Hindu University. Over 150 distinguished scholars including Professor Shri Girish Chandra Tripathiji, Vice-Chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University; Shri Yadunath Prasad Dubeyji, Vice-Chancellor of the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University; Shri Ramesh Kumar Pandeyji, Vice-Chancellor of the Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit University; Shri Kamleshdutt Tripathiji and Shri Yugal Kishor Mishraji were present in the assembly. After the traditional welcome and introductory address, Bhadreshdas Swami delivered an insightful and inspirational speech entitled ‘Sanskrutasya Samrajyam’, highlighting the importance of Sanskrit, the significance of Sanskrit sacred texts and the core values that it serves to instil. Thereafter, the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* was inaugurated with the distinguished scholars participating in the ceremony. Thereafter, Shri Kamleshdutt Tripathiji, introduced the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* to the assembly, commending the philosophical novelties and literary features of the text, and highlighting

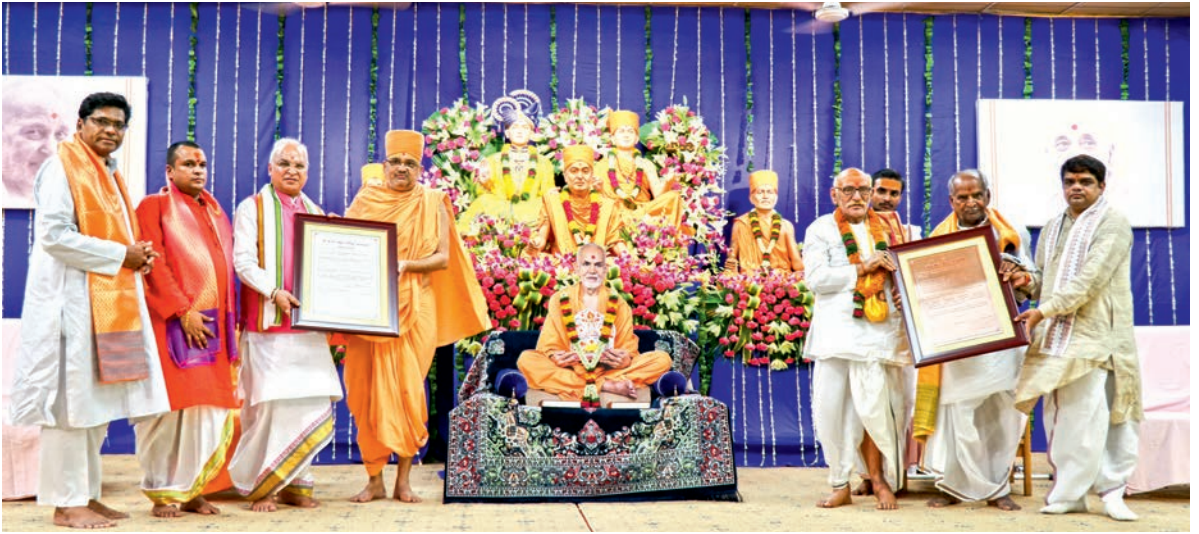
the text’s unique exposition. Other scholars also lauded this monumental text, praising its in-depth, profound, and unique philosophical exposition.

THE FIRST DISCOURSE ON THE SWAMINARAYANA-SIDDHANTA-SUDHA ON THE SACRED BANKS OF GANGA 1 August 2017, Varanasi, India

An assembly was organized by distinguished pandits of Kashi on the sacred banks of the Ganga in Varanasi to honour Mahamahopadyaya Bhadreshdas Swami’s first discourse on the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha*.

The location of the assembly held great significance because, about 216 years ago, on these very banks of the Ganga Bhagwan Swaminarayan, as the young 10-year-old Ghanashyam, revealed a profound yet simple exposition on *brahmavidya* to the astonishment of the gathered assembly of Kashi’s pandits.

Today’s morning assembly was graced by the presence of, among others, Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Reva Prasadji, Vice-Chancellor Acharya Yugal Kishorji, Acharya Bhagavatcharan Shuklaji, Acharya Shivaram Sharmaji, Acharya Sadashiv Dwivediji, Acharya Upendra Tripathiji and Acharya Pandit Upendra Pandeyji.



Pandits of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad present acclamation plaques at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi

In the assembly, Bhadreshdas Swami highlighted the significance of the scriptural tradition and the depth of Indian philosophical thought. He also discussed the importance of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and the exposition of its foundational philosophical principles, citing references from the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, the discourses of the guru *paramapara*, and relevant sections from the *siddhanta patra* – a concise note authored by Pramukh Swami Maharaj that elucidates the philosophical principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. He also expressed the philosophical significance of the term ‘Akshar-Purushottam’ and emphasized how Shastriji Maharaj was the first to precisely express Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s philosophy by using the term.

The distinguished scholars present expressed great admiration for the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* and complimented its expositions as being substantiated on the authority of the Prasthanatrayi – the three foundational sacred texts of Vedanta darshan: the Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and the Brahmasutras. They also acclaimed the text’s literary and scholarly composition and expressed that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is a unique school of philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan that is rooted in the shastras.



Impressed by the depth, novelty, and significance of the text, they conveyed their gratitude for Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj for inspiring such a scholarly work.

RECOGNITION OF THE SWAMINARAYANA-SIDDHANTA-SUDHA BY THE SHRI KASHI VIDVAT PARISHAD

13 August 2017, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, India

Prominent committee members from the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad presented letters of declaration and endorsement for the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha: Parabrahman Swaminarayana Prabodhitam Akshara-Purushottama Darshanam*.

Members of the Kashi Vidvat Parishad, including Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Ramyatna

Shuklaji, Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Vashistha Tripathiji and Acharya Shri Ramnarayan Dwivediji, heralded the *Prasthanatrayi-Swaminarayanabhashya* and the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* as new and unique contributions to the field of Vedanta philosophy. Acharya Shri Ramesh Kumar Pandeyji, Vice-Chancellor of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit University and Acharya Shri Shivshankar Mishra also hailed the works.

After sharing the distinguished history and significance of Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad, Acharya Shri Ramesh Kumar Pandeyji, said, “The renowned scholars of the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad have declared the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha: Parabrahman Swaminarayana Prabodhitam Akshara-Purushottama Darshanam* as a distinct authoritative text and have endorsed the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhant*, which was revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.”

Thereafter, the Vice-Chancellor of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit University, stated, “People misunderstand that the Swaminarayan tradition follows the Vishishtadvaita doctrine. Bhadreshdas Swami has performed admirable work by authoring the first complete epistemological work on the Swaminarayan tradition. Adorned with Vedic references, *pramana mimamsa*, *prameya mimamsa* and *karikas*, this *vadagrantha* spans over 460 pages and is divided into 9 chapters. Reflecting the scholarly style of the *shad darshan* texts and the literary style of Sanskrit, the *vadagrantha* will become the paramount of the Indian scholastic tradition.” He further emphasized, “Within the history of the Indian academic tradition: from the Vedas till the present day, it is the first time that a single person has authored both a commentary on the entire Prasthanatrayi and also a *vadagrantha* of one’s own *sampradaya*. I firmly believe that this *vadagrantha* will achieve great admiration throughout the world.”

After Acharya Shri Ramnarayan Dwivediji had read the letter of endorsement aloud, scholars

of the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad presented it to Bhadreshdas Swami.

Then, Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Vashistha Tripathiji identified the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* as a unique contemporary work. He added, “Inspired by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhadreshdas Swami framed the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhant*, as it was revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the form of a commentary. By doing this, he has substantiated the Swaminarayan Sampradaya among scholarly circles. Without criticizing others, Bhadreshdas Swamiji has expressed the doctrine in a simple, yet thoughtful manner that would appeal to ardent seekers of philosophy. For these reasons, the *Swaminarayana-siddhanta-sudha* is undoubtedly a distinguished *vadagrantha*.”

Regarding the scholarship of the *Swaminarayanabhashya*, Shri Vashisth Tripathi commented, “All of the portions of the text that I have read present evidence of concentrated scholarship. There is no instance of plagiarism; it is truly a newly created work. I hope that future generations may further the Swaminarayan Darshan.”

After Mahamahopadyaya Acharya Shri Vashistha Tripathiji had read a copper-plated plaque of declaration aloud, scholars of the Shri Kashi Vidvat Parishad presented the plaque to Bhadreshdas Swami.

Addressing the assembly, Bhadreshdas Swami expressed his immense gratitude to the scholars of Kashi for being present to pay a special and unique tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and for endorsing Parabrahman Swaminarayan’s Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. He then humbly credited his scholarly works to the inspiration and blessings of gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. ◆

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

May–June 2017

Ahmedabad, Sarangpur, New Delhi, London, Atlanta



Performs *abhishek* of *murtis* on the 55th Patotsav of Ahmedabad mandir



Yogi Jayanti celebration, Ahmedabad

MAY

AHMEDABAD: 1–26

Mahant Swami Maharaj stayed in Ahmedabad to recuperate. He performed his daily puja in his room and gave darshan to the devotees while going for Thakorji's darshan every morning. After his recovery he gave morning and Sunday evening discourses from the *jharukho* (cabin) to the devotees. During the day he attended to letters and phone calls from devotees, read satsang books and attended meetings.

2, Tuesday, 55th Patotsav

To celebrate the mandir's 55th inauguration anniversary (*patotsav*) Mahant Swami Maharaj performed *abhishek* of the *murtis* in the sanctum sanctorum and the *abhishek murti* of Sahajanand Varni with saffron-scented water.

7, Sunday

In spite of physical weakness due to an illness Swamishri discoursed from the *jharukho* to the devotees. He said, "I have one thing to say – have a united family. First, there should

be unity in your family, then the satsang *mandal* and thereafter in the whole world. Where there is unity a lot can be achieved. India was ruled by foreign powers because of internal disunity and differences (*kusamp*). *Kusamp* means a spoilt mind. From it arises odd things. Unity (*samp*) is a positive thing, whereas *kusamp* is negative. *Samp* leads to happiness whereas *kusamp* spoils everything.

"Always be inclined about 'what is right' rather than 'who is right'. Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have taught us to sustain unity and remain happy."

14, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Navera (Marla region), Panchlai (Gorgam region) and Chapaldhara (Donja region).

23, Tuesday; Yogi Jayanti

Yogiji Maharaj's 125th birthday celebration was held in the mandir grounds. Puja Viveksagar Swami narrated inspiring incidents



Performs the *murti-pratishtha arti*

from the life of Yogiji Maharaj. Thereafter, children performed a traditional dance to a bhajan on Yogiji Maharaj. Then youths enacted a drama on how Colonel Bhatia (of the Indian army) was impressed by Yogiji Maharaj. Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Yogiji Maharaj’s calculations were different from those of our world. He prayed, ‘O Shastriji Maharaj, may I be able to face the trials you set and bless me with virtues to remain at your feet.’ One may bear difficulties and tests when one is helpless but Yogiji Maharaj faced them with pride and joy. When we are tested we become disturbed and stray off.

“Our calculations are based on *dehbhav* whereas Yogiji Maharaj’s were based on *atmabhav*. We have to follow the latter.”

25 Thursday

In the evening satsang assembly Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated an animation DVD on Nilkanth Varni’s travels, *Nilkanth and the Snows of the Himalayas* produced by Swaminarayan Aksharpith. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2017, pp. 59–60.)

In his blessings Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “It is indeed difficult to believe how such a work has been accomplished in one corner of this mandir. Everyone involved has put in tremendous efforts. They have not seen day or night in this project. All of them deserve to be congratulated. They did it in only twenty months. I used to go and watch them work. They have worked

intelligently. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the Guru Parampara have inspired them. Whatever that has been shown in the DVD is only a fraction of Nilkanth’s travels and struggles. What he did cannot be fully imagined. No one other than God could have done this. The DVD has been accomplished through the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and it will inspire all.”

SARANGPUR: 26 MAY–10 JUNE

26, Friday

At 5.00 p.m. Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Ahmedabad and reached Sarangpur Mandir at about 7.30 p.m. He was welcomed by sadhus, youths and devotees.

28, Sunday

The Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) in Sarangpur, which organizes two annual six-month satsang training programmes for *satsangi* youths, celebrated ten years since its inception. A grand celebration assembly was held in Sarangpur. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2017, p. 63.)

29, Monday; 67th Pramukh Varni Din

During Swamishri’s morning puja sadhus sang bhajans praising the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri initiated a youth into the *parshad*-fold and named him Devvrat Bhagat.

In his blessings Swamishri said, “Shastriji Maharaj appointed Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the president of BAPS. Swami Bapa did everything possible for each and every devotee. Now, having attained such a guru, what remains to be done is to become like him. He pleased us and also blessed us. He soothed us in times of personal misery and provided support and encouragement.”

30, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*



Bal-Yuva Din, Sarangpur



A festive presentation of the bhajan, 'Ek Samay Amdāvādmā'

rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Dhrangadhra – Shri Guru Parampara; Kosh (Sankari) – Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Guru Parampara, and Shri Hanumanji and Ganapatiji; Buhari (Sankari) – Shri Guru Parampara; Varethpithya (Sankari) – Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

31, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Kharva, Dhutarpur and Bhesdad (Bhadra region).

JUNE

1, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in the Junagadh region: Upleta, Majevari, Moti Maarad and Bhayavadar.

2, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Nahaar (Atladra region), Dora (Atladra), Jhanjhva (Poshina, Himmatnagar) and Jatruda (Amreli).

4, Sunday; Bal-Yuva Din

Swamishri presided over the special evening assembly for *balaks* and *yuvaks* from the Sarangpur region. While Swamishri was approaching the open assembly hall outside Yagnapurush Mandapam he was welcomed with a traditional dance by youths. After *arti*,

a drama, 'Shriji Pragataj Chhe', was enacted by children. Thereafter children played games with Swamishri: catching a ball thrown by Swamishri and passing the ball. Swamishri also fed *rotla* to two children and a ripe mango to another child – all of whom had participated in the drama.

Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question-answer session. Finally, Swamishri was honoured with garlands.

6, Tuesday

Swamishri inaugurated a book extolling the life of Gunatitanand Swami in Gujarati, 'Suno Aksharni Motaai Re', published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

AHMEDABAD: 10-13

11, Sunday

In the evening satsang assembly 160 *balaks* made a wonderful festive presentation on the bhajan 'Ek Samay Amdāvādmā'. Thereafter small skits about studies and satsang, *kusang* and satsang, and satsang activities were performed and thereafter Swamishri gave guidance through his blessings.

In conclusion, Swamishri inaugurated a website for *bal pravrutti karyakars*, an audio CD *Sant Samagam*, Parts 1 to 10, audio CD of Shikshapatri *parayan* by Viveksagar Swami along with Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings, a pen-drive containing 16 inspiring dramas and a DVD about 'Suryapur Kathamangal'.



Performs *arti* in Swaminarayan Akshardham, Delhi

NEW DELHI: 13–15

13, Tuesday

Swamishri departed from Ahmedabad at 6.00 p.m. by flight and arrived at the Delhi Mandir at 8.30 p.m. He was given a traditional welcome by children and Akshardham *sevaks*.

LONDON: 15–21

15, Thursday; Delhi to London

At 10.45 a.m. Swamishri and his entourage of sadhus and devotees departed by British Airways from Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi for his satsang *vicharan* abroad – ‘Swamina Pagle Pagle.’ (For details, refer to pp. 30–50.)

On arriving in London Swamishri took dinner at 6.45 p.m. (11.15 p.m. IST) and retired at 7.32 p.m. (12 midnight IST).

17, Saturday

At the London mandir, Swamishri attended the Bal-Kishore-Yuvak-Sanyukta (BKYS) *shibir* in the morning. Swamishri blessed all through a question-answer session. In the evening Swamishri attended the welcome assembly. (For details, refer to pp. 32–33.)

18, Sunday

After completing his morning puja in the mandir hall Swamishri flagged off the annual sponsored walk. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2017, pp. 65–66.)

At 6.00 p.m. Swamishri ritually performed the immersion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s

asthipushpa in the River Thames, London. More than 3,000 devotees witnessed the ritual. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July–August 2017, p. 62.)

ATLANTA: 21–30

21, Wednesday; London, Atlanta

After his morning puja Swamishri inaugurated an e-book by Swaminarayan Aksharpath: *Invaluable Scriptures of Brahavidya – Vachanamrut and Swami ni Vato*. It is available on Amazon.com.

At 4.50 p.m. Swamishri, sadhus and devotees departed from London Heathrow airport to Atlanta, USA. They landed in Atlanta at 8.23 p.m. (1.23 a.m. GMT) and reached the mandir at 9.34 p.m. (2.34 a.m. GMT) amidst a devotional welcome. Swamishri lit a lamp to inaugurate his satsang *vicharan* in the USA. After doing Thakorji’s darshan Swamishri retired at 10.55 p.m. (3.55 a.m. GMT).

23, Friday

At about 7.00 p.m. Swamishri was welcomed by a marching band and showers of flower petals by children and youths into the welcome assembly. (For details, refer to pp.34–35)

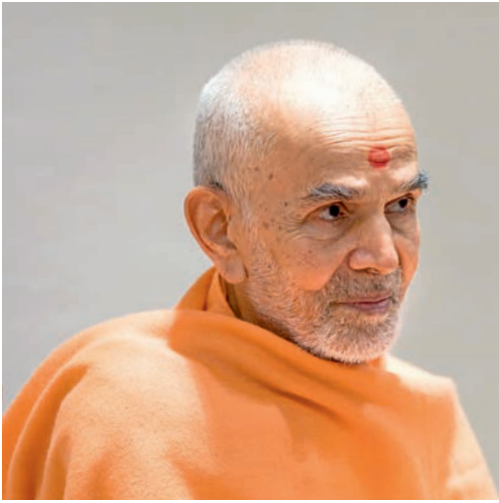
24, Saturday

At 7.00 p.m. Swamishri attended the Rath Yatra festival assembly and operated the *rath* with Thakorji in it. Swamishri inaugurated two e-books by Swaminarayan Aksharpath: *Royal Path of Brahavidya – Swaminarayan Sadhana* and *Hinduism – Sacred Texts*. (For details, refer to pp.35–36.)

25–27, Sunday, Monday & Tuesday

Yuva Din (25), Bal Din (26) and Kishore Din (27) were celebrated in Swamishri’s presence. (For details, refer to pp.36–38.) ◆

(From Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahnavatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas)



LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

June 2017

*Inspiring incidents from the life of
Mahant Swami Maharaj*

JUNE

BLESSES EVERYONE

2, Sarangpur

After doing darshan at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Swamishri sat in a golf car to go to the assembly hall to perform his morning puja. On the way Swamishri was looking at each and every devotee standing for darshan and blessing them. At that time an attendant sadhu started narrating a problem of a devotee to Swamishri, but Swamishri remained engrossed in blessing the devotees. Subsequently, the attendant sadhu paused for a while and then re-commenced, but Swamishri did not divert his attention from the devotees. Again the attendant sadhu stopped speaking and started explaining after some time. Then Swamishri restrained him, saying, “Afterwards.”

Swamishri always desires to attend to each and every devotee and fulfil their wish to be blessed.

* * *

A CANDID DIALOGUE

An extract from an inspiring dialogue between a spiritual aspirant and Swamishri is as follows:

Swamishri: Just as there are royal families in some countries, ours is a divine family. One may witness others’ *swabhavs* but they should be ignored. Everyone is divine. One should not react but tolerate. By retorting to others how can one mould oneself.

Aspirant: How can I become attached to you?

Swamishri: Through interaction and spiritual association.

Aspirant: How can I do that, because it is not possible to be with you all the time?

Swamishri: Through one’s mind (mental association).

Aspirant: Does this mean that through mental association you hear us and are always with us?

Swamishri: Yes.

Aspirant: How do you reply when we mentally ask you?

Swamishri: Once you start doing it you’ll get answers from within.

Aspirant: Who are you?

Swamishri: Satpurush. Our clear understanding is that we have the association of Maharaj, Swami and Satpurush.

KEY TO A RELAXED MIND

4, Sarangpur

A doctor rang Swamishri and asked, “It seems you worry a lot because of the increased responsibility upon your shoulders [after becoming guru]?”

Swamishri replied with ease, “No [worries].”

The doctor asked further, “What do you like to do?”

Swamishri revealed, “Bhajan and meet devotees.”

In spite of mounting responsibilities Swamishri is always at ease because of his rapport with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and practice of unceasing bhajan.

PHENOMENAL MEMORY

6, Sarangpur

Someone stated to Swamishri that two years ago Amolbhai of Sakore, Dhuliya, now a *sadhak* in Sarangpur, had walked 700 km from Dhuliya to Sarangpur alone for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan and good health. The attendant sadhu reminded Swamishri, "At that time we were here in Sarangpur and had met him." Immediately Swamishri replied, "No, we met him in Surat."

Swamishri's memory is truly phenomenal.

ONENESS WITH SWAMI BAPA

13, Ahmedabad to Delhi

Hitesh Patel (Contact) and Dipen Patel informed Swamishri, "Today is the 13th, and ten months to this very day and time Pramukh Swami Maharaj departed for Akshardham. Thereafter, we had prayed to you, 'May we bond with you.' And we have bonded with you in such way that when we meditate on Swami Bapa you naturally appear shortly thereafter in our mind. We experience the same joy now as we did with Swami Bapa. We feel that Bapa has not gone."

Swamishri pointed his finger to his chest and revealed, "Ena ej chhe [He and I are the same]."

PERCEIVING ABSOLUTE DIVINITY IN THAKORJI

15, Delhi to London

Swamishri and sadhus were on a flight to London. As the plane was cruising over Russia Swamishri told the attendant sadhu to take Thakorji by the window so that He could look down and bless the country. Someone stated, "Swamishri, because of the clouds the land cannot be seen anymore."

To everyone's amazement Swamishri replied,

"Thakorji can see through the clouds."

Then an attendant offered a glass of juice to Swamishri. After taking a sip Swamishri gave it back to the attendant sadhu, who unintentionally placed it before Thakorji. On seeing this, Swamishri told the attendant sadhu to take the used glass away because it was inappropriate to have placed it before Thakorji.

Swamishri's supreme devotion to Thakorji is evident from the way he perceives and respects Thakorji.

PRAYING FOR RAINS

25, Atlanta

After having breakfast, Swamishri reclined on his bed for his routine nap at 8.20 a.m. Shortly thereafter he got up earlier than usual and sat on his bed. The attendant sadhus asked, "Swami, are you not well? Is there any difficulty?"

"No."

"Then why are you sitting in this manner? What has happened?"

"I am praying."

"For what?"

"For the rains to shower in India so that all devotees become happy."

"When do you pray?"

"Daily."

Swamishri ignored his own comfort and sleep to pray for the welfare of others.

ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE TO HIS GURU

27, Atlanta

Swamishri was asked why he was inclined towards eating baked puffed rice (*mamra*) for breakfast. He recalled, "I was a *parshad* at that time and was with Yogiji Maharaj in Nadiad. Whenever we had to travel by train there was a great chance of getting a fast due to the crowd touching us. So, I used to take a heavy breakfast or meal. That morning, in Nadiad, there was *patarveli* for breakfast. I decided to eat more of them. However, when someone came to serve

them in my bowl, Yogiji Maharaj stopped him and said, ‘Don’t serve them. He doesn’t like *patarveli*, he likes *mamra*.’ So from then on I’ve been eating *mamra*.”

The attendants asked, “So, you don’t like *patarveli*?”

Swamishri replied, “I do, but I don’t eat them.”

Swamishri had given up his own inclination to abide by the guru’s wish, thus reflecting his total dedication and obedience to his guru. ♦

(From Swamishri’s daily report in

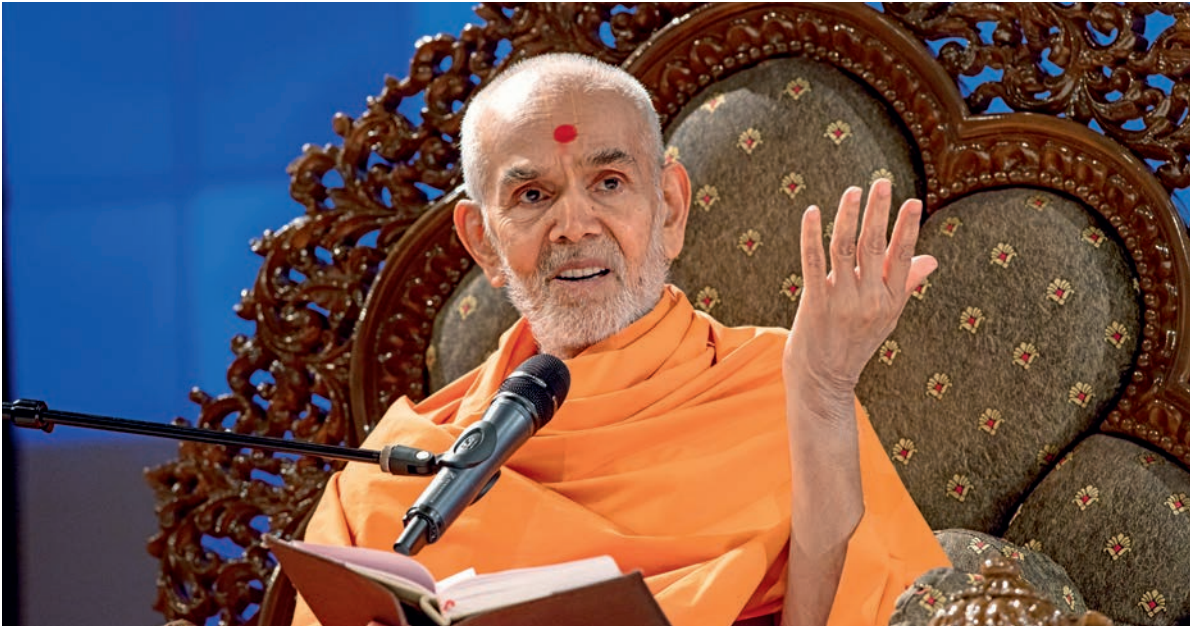
Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.

Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas)

ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

May–June 2017

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



■ The ways to resolve a negative attitude are to cultivate the spirit of ‘In the joy of others lies our own’ and secondly to have *nirdosh buddhi* in all.

(4 May, Ahmedabad)

■ It is very easy to attain God – give up one’s mind’s resolves and obey His words.

(5 May, Ahmedabad)

Q. Roshan Bhagat asked, “What should we do to bond with you and increase our love for you?”

A. Swamishri replied, “*Mahima*.”

(19 May, Ahmedabad)

Q. Rahuldas Swami asked, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj and yourself have shown that the cause of pain and misery in life is ego and attachment. How can we eradicate these two things?”

A. Understanding God’s glory [*mahima*]. Without this it is not possible to erase them.

(24 May, Ahmedabad)

■ To sustain one’s guru’s prestige and

glory [*laaj*] one must abide by moral regulations [*dharma-niyam*] and be a polite speaker [use *vani-vivek*].

(28 May, Sarangpur)

■ One has to divinize one's mind. When one's mind becomes divine then all problems will be solved.

(30 May, Sarangpur)

Q. Roshan Bhagat asked Swamishri, "What should we do to increase your trust and faith in us?"

A. "Loyalty [*vafadari*]."

(13 June, Delhi)

During a quiz in a satsang assembly in London, UK, Swamishri gave answers to a series of questions posed to him.

Q. When you were at home which was your favourite game?

A. Football.

Q. Which is your favourite kirtan?

A. 'Swamiji to Mahāpratāpi Enu Dhāryu Thāy.'

Q. Which sweet item would you offer to Thakorji?

A. *Mesub*.

Q. Which flower would you chose to offer to Thakorji?

A. *Mogro*.

Q. According to you which one virtue was important in the life of Yogiji Maharaj?

A. *Guna grahan* – to see virtues in others.

Q. Which is your favourite Vachanamrut?

A. Gadhada III 5.

Q. Which is your favourite text?

A. *Purushottam Boliya Prite*.

Q. According to you which one aspect was unique in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A. His tolerance.

Q. Which is your favourite place?

A. Gondal mandir.

(17 June, London)

■ Swamishri was requested to fill in the annual sponsored walk registration form. In the column regarding name Swamishri wrote 'Sadhu Keshavjivandas' and against his address he wrote 'Akshardham'.

(17 June, London)

■ Swamishri was told, "Today is Father's Day and the tradition here is that the son gives a gift to his father. We are all your sons, thus what gift can we give to you?" Swamishri replied, "*Mahima*. Understand each others' *mahima*."

(18 June, London)

Q. What do you experience in your life?

A. Peace.

Q. When did you first meet your guru and what was your experience?

A. I first met him when I was 18 years old. Before that I felt something was missing, but on meeting Yogiji Maharaj I experienced fulfilment. I bonded with him instantly and felt as if we had a past connection.

(19 June, London)

Q. Which one out of the three types of contemplation is the best and will give us eternal joy; 1. *Mahima* (glory) 2. *Prapti* (divine attainment) 3. *Rajipo* (to please God and guru)?

A. *Prapti*.

Q. How can we always get happiness from satsang?

A. Swamishri showed a *kesar* mango and said, "Yogiji Bapa used to say that by perceiving virtues in all one will experience sweetness in life like the juice of *kesar* mangoes. By seeing good traits in others, having *mahima* and *divyabhav* one will experience intense joy. But when one finds faults in others then one's life turns sour." ◆

(26 June, Atlanta)

(From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmapatsaldas.)

Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekijivandas)



His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj Meets Former President Barack Obama

5 September 2017, Washington DC, USA

At 11.55 a.m. on 5 September 2017, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj met former President Barack Obama in Washington DC. The meeting was arranged as part of Mahant Swami Maharaj's efforts in North America to share universal Hindu messages and foster public dialogue on service and the importance of unity in communities and in the nation.

Mahant Swami Maharaj honoured President Obama with a garland as part of a traditional Hindu greeting and presented an Amrut Kalash. Mahant Swami Maharaj also gifted President Obama a sanctified *mala* and a copy of *Transcendence*, a book written by former Indian President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam about his spiritual experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The two leaders discussed the role of BAPS mandirs in communities around the United States and the world. President Obama appreciated how BAPS mandirs have served as houses of worship and also as community centres catering to society's diverse social and humanitarian needs. In particular, President Obama took note of the vibrant children and youth programmes that take place in BAPS mandirs.

Mahant Swami Maharaj was also pleased to learn that one of President Obama's priorities in his post-presidency is preparing the next generation of leaders. The two leaders then discussed how they could work collaboratively on this key effort in preparing the next generation of public servants.

With reference to the Indian American community, President Obama spoke about how, like in other immigrant communities, the second generation often engages more fully in civic life, making America theirs. The two leaders agreed that more needed to be done to encourage young South Asians to pursue careers in public service. Mahant Swami Maharaj and President Obama both spoke about how encouraging service requires encouraging individuals to see goodness in one another. Mahant Swami Maharaj specifically explained the Hindu principle that each individual soul is divine, and so service of each individual is a selfless act of devotion.

Mahant Swami Maharaj took time to specifically praise President Obama when he learned

(Contd. on pg. 70)



INDIA

BRAHMASWARUP PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S FIRST PUNYA TITHI 13 August 2017, Sarangpur



Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's First Punya Tithi (the first anniversary of his passing away to Akshardham) was commemorated in Sarangpur in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, sadhus and hundreds of devotees.

In the morning, a special *mahapuja* was held at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti Mandir. The light rain slowly came to a stop during the prayers as Kothari Swami led the *dhun* for guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj's health, for the attainment of *ekantik* dharma by all devotees, for the welfare and wellbeing of all, for the speedy completion of Akshardham in North America, for the construction of a grand Smruti Mandir honouring Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and for Mahant Swami Maharaj to continue Pramukh Swami Maharaj's legacy by himself initiating 1,000 further sadhus.

This was followed by the Pramukh Smruti Sabha in the Pramukh Darshan Vatika, in which divine memories were shared through videos and speeches. Sadhus and devotees took part in a unique Pramukh Darshan Yatra – a walking tour of over 25 sanctified spots across the

Sarangpur Mandir campus, including Pramukh Mandiram, Sarvasva and the Sant Ashram. The day concluded in the evening with the main Smruti Sabha in the mandir grounds, where 12,000 devotees witnessed the emotional programme based on the theme: 'Pramukhji Apnu Roon Chukvu Hu Sha Vade?' (Pramukhji, How Can I Repay My Debt to You?) Mahant Swami Maharaj gave blessings via a pre-recorded video, as well as a surprise live telephone call from Houston, USA. Kothari Swami, sadhus and devotees then performed *arti*. All felt the joy of reviving the old memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and a feeling that he is still with us today through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

BAPS FLOOD RELIEF WORK IN THE VILLAGES OF NORTH GUJARAT 28 July to 1 August 2017



Due to the heavy monsoon rains, many villages in the Banaskantha region of north Gujarat were severely affected by floods.

The BAPS Mandir in Deesa prepared 125,000 food packets, which five teams of sadhus and volunteers distributed to residents in 100 flood-affected villages of the region under the guidance and support of the collector, *mamlatdar* and other officials. Also, the teams distributed 5,000 food ration kits (consisting of grains, flour, salt,

sugar, spices, oil, tea, drinking water and other items) in 7 villages.

In addition, a total of 66,000 food packets prepared at various BAPS mandir in Gujarat were provided to the state government for distribution by government agencies.

ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA 23 August to 1 September 2017 Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan

As part of the six-month BAPS Yuva Talim Kendra course, 184 youths undertook *vicharan* to 460 villages in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

Divided in 46 groups, each of four youths, they visited a total of 4,916 homes, inspiring young and old devotees to perform daily personal puja, visit the local mandir for darshan, attend the weekly satsang assembly, daily read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, conduct a regular *ghar sabha* (family assembly), observe a fast on *ekadashi*, etc.

The youths conducted 460 satsang assemblies, 218 children's assemblies and 229 assemblies in schools – in which 53,940 children participated.

They arranged evening 'bhakti feris' in which over 6,100 devotees participated. In addition, they encouraged around 3,800 people to shed their addictions.

COMMUTERS HELPED DURING TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR 29 August 2017, Mumbai



Due to the unexpected torrential rains in Mumbai, commuters travelling from the Dadar Railway Station opposite the BAPS Swaminarayan

Mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, were left stranded and unable to reach home. Despite the mandir also being flooded, at short notice, the sadhus and volunteers cooked and served hot food till 12.30 a.m. and provided overnight accommodation at the mandir. Over 3,000 commuters were served and provided overnight sanctuary from the heavy, persistent rains.

UK

UK BAL-BALIKA MANDAL SUMMER TRAINING CAMP

21–25 July 2017, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan
Mandir, London



More than 80 selected youngsters from throughout the UK gathered for a residential summer camp in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and visiting sadhus from India.

The five-day programme comprised interactive and informative sessions which strengthened their spiritual knowledge and life skills.

Morning discourses explored valuable life lessons from the Vachanamrut which helped them to understand the importance of serving God and others. They were encouraged to daily read the Vachanamrut and guided on how to apply its lofty teachings in daily life.

The children learnt about Hinduism, the traditions of the Swaminarayan faith and the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, Hindu rites and rituals, the nine types of spiritual devotion, and techniques to cherish one's experiences with the Satpurush and use them to develop an abiding spiritual connection with him.

They also had training in communication skills, public speaking, and essential satsang values, including unity, self-discipline and anger management.

Contemporary issues were addressed through role play and interactive presentations. Challenging group activities tested their intelligence, dexterity and creativity.

The value of a solid education was emphasized, encouraging the children to be industrious in their studies.

The five days built a sound, holistic foundation in an enjoyable environment and ensured that the children utilized their vacation time productively.

NORTH AMERICA

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM STAMBH PUJAN

3–4 September 2017, Robbinsville, NJ



The two-day Swaminarayan Akshardham Stambh Pujan ceremony took place in the divine presence of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

Amidst Vedic chants, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed this *pujan* ceremony over four sessions. Countless volunteer hours of service and many prayers culminated in the installation of the first marble pillar of Swaminarayan Akshardham. In this spiritually charged celebration, which included dances infused with devotion and pillars symbolizing *paramhansas* from Bhagwan Swaminarayan's time, devotees recollected Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision to build the 13-pinnacled Swaminarayan Akshardham

Mahamandir that all Hindus could proudly identify as their own.

Thousands of devotees from throughout USA and Canada attended these special ceremonies.

SHRI GHANSHYAM MAHARAJ ABHISHEK MURTI-PRATISHTHA

2 September 2017, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Robbinsville, NJ



Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the *abhishek murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and inaugurated the artistically mesmeric Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj Abhishek Mandapam. Thereafter, he offered the first *abhishek* to the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj with the waters of 108 holy rivers from India.

In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj prayed that may all who perform darshan and *abhishek* experience infinite peace, spiritual growth and that their wishes be fulfilled.

BAPS NORTH AMERICAN LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

30 August to 1 September 2017, Hotel Sheraton, Philadelphia, PA

Over 1,100 BAPS volunteers convened for the BAPS North American Leadership Seminar in the presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Centred on the theme of '*Samp: Vartan, Vani, Vichar*', seminar delegates gained a deeper understanding of unity and its importance not only in individual spiritual development, but also in working effectively with others in order to perform their roles. They were guided by inspiring speeches by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami,



Anandswarup Swami, Narayanmuni Swami and Atmaswarupdas Swami.

Mahant Swami Maharaj also gave numerous blessings throughout the course of the seminar. In addition to emphasizing the importance of unity, he also offered practical nuggets of wisdom on how to incorporate it into daily life, including maintaining *niyams* and developing unconditional respect for one another.

Overall, volunteers were inspired by the inspirational spiritual messages throughout the seminar and guided towards earnestly doing their best.

Asia Pacific

BAL-BALIKA & KISHORE-KISHORI ADHIVESHANS

10 June to 29 July 2017, Asia Pacific



As a part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Shatabdi Mahotsav celebrations, Bal-Balika & Kishore-Kishori Mandals in Australia and New Zealand held their second regional level *adhiveshans*. The *adhiveshans* took place during June and July 2017 in the presence of BAPS swamis in 11 centres: (in Australia) Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney; (in New Zealand) Auckland, Christchurch,

Hamilton and Wellington.

A total of 266 *balaks* and 264 *balikas*, and 112 *kishores* and 111 *kishoris* participated in the Adhiveshan Day activities. In addition, a total of 448 children and youths participated in the Non-Adhiveshan Day activities. Countless hours were spent in the past six months by all participants to learn and prepare for the *adhiveshans*. The *adhiveshans* were supported by the efforts of 356 judges and 32 admin volunteers who managed and coordinated the *adhiveshans* at their local centres.

The *adhiveshan* challenges were in two different sections:

1. Non-Adhiveshan Day – Participants were given three months to express their talent in different activities by submitting their entries online in any of the six different activities: Graphic Design, PPT Presentation, Research Paper, Photography, Group Sabha and Multimedia Presentation.

2. Adhiveshan Day – Participants had to showcase their abilities in any number of the 16 activities, such as, Solo Singing, Mono Acting, Vachanamrut Nirupan, Rangoli, and others.

In each of the 22 skill challenges participants were assessed by the judges and prizes were awarded to the first three in each event. There were separate categories for *balaks*, *balikas*, *kishores* and *kishoris*.

The *adhiveshans* increased the spiritual knowledge of the children and youths and also fostered their talent in various skills.

Africa

NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIRS July to August 2017, East Africa

Over 650 *balaks* and *balikas* from throughout East Africa attended the three five-day National Shibirs, themed 'Asmita: Pride for Satsang' held in Nairobi, Kenya; Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; and Jinja, Uganda.

Through interactive presentations by BAPS swamis, the children were able to strengthen their



understanding of God, Siddhant, Shastras and Satpurush based on examples from the lives of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara. The *shibir* also featured group discussions, skits, question-answer sessions, workshops, team-building activities, audiovisual presentations, exciting evening programmes and a cultural exhibition, providing insightful and practical guidance for the children to apply in their daily life at home and school.

BAPS Charities

BAPS CHARITIES WALK GREEN 2017

This year, BAPS Charities Walk Green 2017 organized at 70 cities across North America attracted more than 23,000 participants to walk and raise awareness about BAPS Charities and its many community activities. In total, nearly 69,000 miles were walked to support environmental and humanitarian activities of BAPS Charities.

In this year's walkathon participants of all ages came out to support the Nature Conservancy and its Plant a Billion Trees campaign. The Nature Conservancy's efforts focus on protecting habitats

(Contd. from pg. 65)

that President Obama had set aside time, even during his presidency, to have dinner with his family five nights a week. Mahant Swami Maharaj greatly values unity in all of the building blocks of society, especially families. Mahant Swami Maharaj was also touched by President Obama's humility, sharing with the President a verse from a John Bunyan poem, "He that is down, need

and preserving biodiversity across the world. Its current campaign aims to plant one billion trees by 2025 to which BAPS Charities contributed \$100,000 to plant 70,000 trees in 2016.

The walk in Canada supported Tree Canada's national initiative to plant 10,000 trees in Canada and the lifesaving work of the William Osler Health System.

QUARTERLY BLOOD DONATION DRIVE

Mayfair, Johannesburg, South Africa

18 June 2016

BAPS Charities hosted its quarterly blood donation drive in support of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS). On this occasion, a total of 40 pints of blood was collected thanks to the community and members of the public who responded to the call to donate.

WINTER WARMER PROGRAMME

Johannesburg & Durban, South Africa

June 2017

As part of its annual Winter Warmer Programmes across the country, BAPS Charities donated blankets, food and clothing to the Ubhule Bezwe Child Care Centre in Johannesburg, which cares for children who have been abandoned by their families, are orphans or suffer from HIV-AIDS.

In Durban, BAPS Charities volunteers also distributed blankets, food and clothing to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Brooklyn Heights Primary School in Chatsworth and an informal settlement outside of Durban. ♦

fear no fall. He that is low, no pride. He that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide." Mahant Swami Maharaj noted that he saw this humility in President Obama, remarking how it has been noted that the President took the time to look after and care for his staff while in office. As Mahant Swami Maharaj was departing, President Obama respectfully bid him farewell by saying "Jai Swaminarayan". ♦



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN LOS ANGELES, CA, USA

1-10 August 2017

1. Swamishri greets youths and devotees at the mandir.
2. Youths and devotees interact with Swamishri during an evening satsang assembly.
3. Swamishri blesses devotees during a satsang assembly in the mandir grounds.



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN USA, SEPTEMBER 2017

1. On 3–4 September, Robbinsville, NJ, Mahant Swami Maharaj ritually worships the first pillar of Swaminarayan Akshardham in a *mahapuja*, whose *pujan* was performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur. Over the two-day *mahapuja* 20,000 devotees participated. On 4 September Mahant Swami Maharaj ritually placed the stone on its actual location in Akshardham.
2. Swamishri performs the Vedic consecration rituals of the Ghanshyam Maharaj *abhishek murti*, Robbinsville, NJ (2 September).
3. Mahant Swami Maharaj with former President Barak Obama in Washington DC (5 September).

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