

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2014

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Newly Consecrated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Himmatnagar
12 December 2013



SWAMISHRI'S 93RD BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Thousands of devotees devoutly offer their reverence during Swamishri's 93rd birthday celebration,
10 December 2013, Sarangpur



Newly consecrated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Himmatnagar

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas
Contributors: Sadhu Vivekshivandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
Designer: Sadhu Shrijiwarupdas
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Correction: Nagpur city is part of Maharashtra state and not Madhya Pradesh, as was mistakenly written on pages 18, 19 and 23 in the November-December 2013 issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss*.

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First Word

Every nation, institution or religious faith had or has a new fundamental purpose or principle called a central idea. This central idea or set of principles sustain the nation or institution and allow it to thrive and overcome the crises it faces. When the central idea ceases to exist, the nation, culture or faith declines and dies.

Greece's ancient greatness lay in its principle of all-round efficiency. Ancient Rome's glory was based on the central idea of law and order. France's inner strength lay in its central idea of political independence. For the British, a just and reasonable distribution of wealth was of essential interest. For India, religious freedom was its central idea.

Hinduism is the main religion of India, and with its various denominations and sects, each faithfully worships its own deity and abides by its central principles. The Swaminarayan Sampradaya is part of the Vaishnav denomination in Hinduism. The principle understanding of Bhagwan Swaminarayan varies mostly from one Swaminarayan organization to another.

The BAPS, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj in 1907 is one of the many organizations in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Its central idea comprises the Akshar-Purushottam principle or philosophy propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut¹. Bhagatiji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj propagated the importance of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar and the supreme glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam. Shastriji Maharaj enshrined their *murtis* in the central shrine of Akshar-Purushottam mandirs.

Shastriji Maharaj remained undeterred by the challenges and hardships in establishing and enshrining the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. Once, Shastriji Maharaj was pulling a cartload of lime during the construction work of Sarangpur mandir. Several sadhus and devotees tried to stop him from exerting in this way. But Shastriji Maharaj replied with pride, "Such *seva* of Akshar-Purushottam is attained by one who has immense spiritual merits (*punya*), but not to one who has less merits." With this spirit he toiled all day in the mandir construction work. On other occasions he used to say, "I am an ox of Akshar Purushottam." Like an ox that labours all day in a field Shastriji Maharaj did intense *seva* for the cause of Akshar-Purushottam with a spirit of inner glory and pride.

Once, Thakor Saheb of Limdi, who had given the land for the Sarangpur mandir, asked Shastriji Maharaj why he was not going to consecrate the *murtis* of their Lord, Radha-Krishna? He insisted that they be installed in the central shrine of the mandir. Shastriji Maharaj replied assertively, "Thakor Saheb, whatever pains this body has tolerated have been done so for the supreme God, Sahajanand Swami, and Gunatitanand Swami. I have tonsured my head for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam. Thus, Bapu, my *ishtadev* is Sahajanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami. And I shall install their *murtis* in the main, central shrine." Thakor Saheb humbly bowed at Swamishri's feet, "Swamiji, do what you think is appropriate, and do not take heed to whatever I have said."

Shastriji Maharaj never left any stone unturned for the cause of enshrining the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. His Herculean efforts, saintliness, audacity and love for all, even for those who opposed him, saw the birth of BAPS. In addition, he gave Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj to the satsang community for the perpetuation of the Akshar-Purushottam principle.

The BAPS is greatly blessed to honour Shastriji Maharaj's epic work by celebrating his 150th birth anniversary for one year from Vasant Panchami, Tuesday, 4 February 2014. ♦

1. His teachings have references to Akshar in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 21 & 71, among others.



SHRI HARI'S Grace upon Kashidas Mota

*Shri Hari relinquishes his sadness and ill health in Panchala
and promises to reestablish Vedic dharma through the
establishment of mandirs...*

Maharaj with five platefuls of laddus. Shri Hari gave two laddus each to all the sadhus and happily blessed everyone.

SHRI HARI ARRIVES IN GADHADA

In April 1822, Shriji Maharaj celebrated Hari Jayanti in Panchala. Jhinabhai was happy to have served Maharaj, his sadhus and devotees. Maharaj left Panchala on the day following the celebration, Chaitra *sud* 10, and travelled to Manavadar. He stayed for a day at Mayaram Bhatt's house. Thereafter, Maharaj went to Ganod and then to Jaliya. Here, he was welcomed by Hirabhai Thakkar. Seven years before, Maharaj had stayed at Hirabhai's house when he was ill. During that time Maharaj had showed human traits (*manushyabhav*) in his behaviour, but Hirabhai perceived them to be divine. Subsequently, Maharaj became immensely pleased upon Hirabhai.

From Jaliya Shri Hari passed through Upleta, Jhanjhmer, Dudhivadar, Bandhiya, Navagam, Pipaliya, Raipur, Vankiya, Khambhala and Mandavdhar. The families of Jiva Khachar, Dada Khachar and others came to Mandavdhar to welcome Shri Hari and lead him to Gadhpur.

ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER DHARMA

Shri Hari arrived in Gadhadra after a gap of eight months. With Shri Hari's recovery from a serious illness, Jiva Khachar celebrated by bringing a dishful of large sugar crystals before Maharaj. Shri Hari happily gave handfuls of sugar crystals to everyone. Then Maharaj went to Dada Khachar's *darbar*. He presided over a satsang

A TRUE ASCETIC

Shri Hari renounced his illness at the prayers of Muktanand Swami and other *sadguru* sadhus. He then declared his programme in Panchala, "We shall celebrate Ram Navmi here and leave for Gadhadra the following day."

Shriji Maharaj's illness and sadness, which he had accepted to reflect his disinterest for his relatives, gave the devotees and sadhus a glimpse of his profound renunciation towards his relatives. One who renounces the feelings of ego and attachment for his relatives is a true ascetic. One who is firm in observing his five moral vows¹ is a true ascetic. One who gives up ego of his caste and class is a genuine ascetic. And one who attains the state of *brahmarup* and offers *upasana* to Parabrahman is a bona fide ascetic. These attributes of a true sadhu are necessary for any aspirant to understand before associating with him for his own *moksha*.

Everyone was relieved to learn that Shri Hari had willed to give up his chronic illness. To celebrate the good news Jhinabhai Darbar of Panchala sponsored a meal of laddus for all. He came to

1. Five vows prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan for his sadhus are: 1. *Nishkam* (celibacy), 2. *Nirlobh* (non-greed), *Nisswad* (non-taste), 3. *Nissneh* (non-attachment) and *Nirman* (non-ego).

assembly in the courtyard and informed all about his illness and recovery. Then he explained, “I had become ill out of my own will, but because of the wishes of the senior sadhus I gave it up for the sake of nurturing Vedic dharma. The mandirs are centres for fostering dharma as prescribed in our Vedas and Purans. As long as there are mandirs, bona fide sadhus and spiritual discourses, dharma taught by the Vedas and Purans will be preserved and flourish. Otherwise, dharma will remain confined to the scriptures only. Thus, we must also start activities to foster dharma.”

KASHIDAS OF BOCHASAN COMES TO SEE MAHARAJ

Devotees flocked from far and wide to Gadhada on learning that Maharaj was well. Kashidas of Bochasan was one of them. Maharaj asked him, “How did you come here?”

Kashidas replied humbly, “Maharaj, it is all due to your grace. Last year I was unable to pay the taxes because of a drought. So, the local authorities threw me into jail in Kheda.”

Shri Hari smiled and commented, “Even a village chief like you was not spared by the authorities?”

“No, Maharaj! At present there is no law and order. If they had summoned me to ask why I had not paid the taxes I could have filed for bail and promised my house in assurance. But they simply put me into jail.”

“Then what happened?” Maharaj enquired. The whole assembly was eager to hear his story.

“Morning came and I told the jailors, ‘I have a pledge to eat only after my bath and daily puja. If you take me to River Vatrak to have a bath only then will I be able to fulfil my vow.’ By your grace, they agreed and took me to the river. I entered the waters and took a dip. When I surfaced, I realized that I was no longer in Kheda. So, on asking someone I realized that I was not far from Gadhada. I don’t know how I came here. On having your darshan my worries have dissolved

and my mind is at peace.”

Shri Hari blessed, “When you return your problem will have been resolved. The British will be reigning and law and order shall prevail. You will be let off scot-free.” Kashidas Mota felt blessed with Maharaj’s prophetic words.

Shri Hari was still suffering from a few symptoms of his illness in Panchala. Thus he was unable to sit for too long in an assembly. While he was resting in his room, Akshar Ordi, no one was allowed to enter and meet him without his permission. Devotees who had come to Gadhada for his darshan would have to sit in the courtyard of Dada Khachar’s *darbar* or at the living quarters of the sadhus and listen to or discuss spiritual matters.

LET AMBA COME IN

Amba Sheth of Jhinhuda village came to Gadhada for Maharaj’s darshan. On reaching Akshar Ordi a *parshad* stopped him from entering. Amba Sheth stated, “I merely want to have a glimpse of Maharaj. Why don’t you ask Maharaj whether I can see him briefly.”

The *parshad* went inside and asked Shri Hari. Maharaj assented, saying, “Let Amba come in.” When Amba Sheth entered, Maharaj told him, “Amba Sheth, a mere glimpse of my form will not suffice to impress it in your soul. For that you will have to keenly and profoundly do darshan. I have never come to this universe and shall never return. Since you have come from afar stay here for five days and take the benefit of doing darshan.” Then Shri Hari placed his hands on Amba Sheth’s head and the latter experienced a cascade of inner peace.

DOUSING THE FIRE AT KASHIDAS’ HOME

One evening Shri Hari was sitting in a sat-sang assembly. Suddenly, he called his attendant, Mukund Brahmachari. When he arrived, Maharaj asked him urgently, “Bring some oil to apply to my burnt hands.” Brahmachari was a little surprised at Maharaj’s words. So, Maharaj showed

(Contd. on pg. 52)

BRIEF HISTORY OF SATSANG IN SABARKANTHA GUJARAT



First BAPS *hari* mandir consecrated by Swamishri in Himmatnagar.
(Inset) *Murtis* of Dham, Dhami and Mukta

It's a tough terrain. Stony grounds, scarce annual rains and a dearth of natural resources define the district of Sabarkantha, located in north Gujarat. Even today the name of Sabarkantha conjures an image of a laid-back district with few lucrative opportunities. In these difficult circumstances the history and growth of BAPS have seen a gradual upward curve. The story of satsang begins from the period of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He and his *paramhansas* travelled on this land to encourage or sow the seeds of Satsang. Ramanand Swami, Bhagwan

Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara* have travelled to and sanctified the district of Sabarkantha.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited the house of Bhukhan Bhavsar, a devotee of Prantij village. The Swaminarayan Mandir in Kalupur, Ahmedabad, was constructed of stones quarried in Palanpur, Sabarkantha district. On one occasion when Gunatitanand Swami and Nishkulanand Swami were on their way to preach about satsang in Dungarpur (in Rajasthan) they had passed through Himmatnagar. The village of Torda (also Todla) in Sabarkantha district takes pride in being the

birthplace of Gopalanand Swami, one of the senior-most *paramhansas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His miracles during childhood brought him widespread fame in and around Torda. His frolics with the *murti* of Bhagwan Shyamlaji, which came from the mandir of Shyamlaji to Torda, are chronicled in the temple records.

Shastriji Maharaj had visited the town of Idar in Sabarkantha and discoursed on several occasions at the home of Khengaribhai. He had also stayed at Himmatnagar several times whenever he came to acquire stones for the mandir construction work. During his stays Swami also enlightened many through his spiritual discourses. Through the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj BAPS satsang in Sabarkantha was first launched in the village of Vadali. In 1935, Chunibhai Soni, a staunch devotee, migrated from Ahmedabad with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj and settled in Himmatnagar. He was an employee at the royal palace in Himmatnagar. In 1946, he established the first BAPS satsang *mandal* in Himmatnagar with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj had also sanctified Sabarkantha district on several occasions: 1952, 1955, 1960, 1965. Guljharilal Nanda, the Home Minister of India, had also visited the Sabarkantha district with Yogiji Maharaj. Swamishri's travels were full of hardships and challenges due to lack of accommodation and dusty roads. He travelled by jeep, with no doors, thus making him vulnerable to the extreme climates. Several devotees of that region actively inspired satsang in others: Panachandbhai Soni and Dahyabhai Soni of Vadali; Dayabhai of Khedbrahma; Shantibhai Shah of Prantij; Chunikaka of Talod; Chunibhai Patel (Khandli) and Madhubhai Thakor of Himmatnagar; Dr Mohanbhai Modi, Narayanbhai Modi, Prabhudas Modi and Vithalbhai Modi of Elol; Kalidas Modi of Torda; Dr A.B. Patel, Mangalbhai, Narayanbhai and others of Modasa. In addition, the tailor-devotees of Chapalpur and neighbouring settlements avidly practiced satsang. Shankarlal Thakar,

Mahendrabhai Thakar, Prabhashankarbhai Pandya, Arjunkaka, Nilkanth Mehta and others from Ahmedabad regularly visited Sabarkantha district to foster satsang.

As the BAPS satsang in Sabarkantha flourished through the efforts of devotees and the *vicharan* of sadhus the need for a mandir arose. Maharaja Daljitsinhji of Himmatnagar, the presiding royal, also aspired during his visit to the BAPS mandir in Gondal that a mandir be built in Himmatnagar. He requested Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal, "Build a similar mandir in Himmatnagar with the same two flights of front stairs." Yogiji Maharaj blessed him and said, "Your wish will be fulfilled." The Maharaja replied, "I shall donate some land for the mandir." Soon thereafter, the Maharaja donated an 1800 sq. ft. plot in the centre of Himmatnagar, adjacent to a railway track.

In 1982, eleven years after Yogiji Maharaj's earthly departure, Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the BAPS *hari* mandir. Subsequently, the growth of Satsang in Himmatnagar increased. The *vicharans* of Swamishri and his sadhus in Sabarkantha district gave fillip to satsang and effected radical transformations in the lives of thousands of tribals. Today, thousands of tribal families have been redeemed of their vices and lead morally and spiritually sound lives. Swamishri's untiring *vicharan* in the Sabarkantha district involved home visits, blessing public assemblies and counselling devotees. Swamishri ignored the hardships of travel and limited accommodations in the villages.

In 1977, Manibhai, a volunteer devotee of Modasa, scheduled a three-week jam-packed *vicharan* programme of 87 villages for Swamishri during his visit in May to the Sabarkantha district. The summer heat at that time was 45°C. In the scorching climate Swamishri visited 91 villages instead of the scheduled 87. In every village Swamishri sanctified many homes and pleased the devotees and well-wishers. During this *vicharan* Swamishri discounted his fluctuating health and



travelled by tractor, bullock cart and car.

From 1976 onwards, sadhus from Ahmedabad mandir travelled annually to Sabarkantha for discourses and satsang. They also visited the huts of tribals who were steeped in addictions and other vices. Their radical transformations brought peace, faith and prosperity in their community. They started performing daily puja and eschewed addictions and looting. Soon, *kutir* mandirs came up in which they started doing satsang, bhajans and discourses. Swamishri consecrated a *hari* mandir in Khedbrahma. Then Swamishri inspired annual free distribution programmes of clothes, *sukhdi*, medicines and other life-sustaining items to the tribals. On learning that the tribals living in the interior villages did not have access to medical care, Swamishri launched a BAPS mobile clinic.

Amrutcharandas Swami, Mangalpurushdas Swami and Kaushalmunidas Swami have also made efforts and are still actively engaged in sat-sang activities in the Sabarkantha district.

Translated from *Swaminarayan Prakash*
by Sadhu Vivekjivandas

Home to the Aravali range of mountains, the Sabarkantha region of North Gujarat has a rich architectural legacy of medieval mandirs and places of pilgrimage. The region has a 200-year link with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

The population comprises of urban dwellers, and mountain- and jungle-dwelling *adivasis* (tribals). Due to superstitions, blind faith, ignorance, illiteracy, addictions and other vices these tribals have been steeped in poverty and suffered many problems.

When Yogiji Maharaj visited this region in 1955, he blessed Shri Nandubhai Ambalalbai, a social worker in the tribal areas, “There will be much progress in this region and satsang will grow tremendously.”

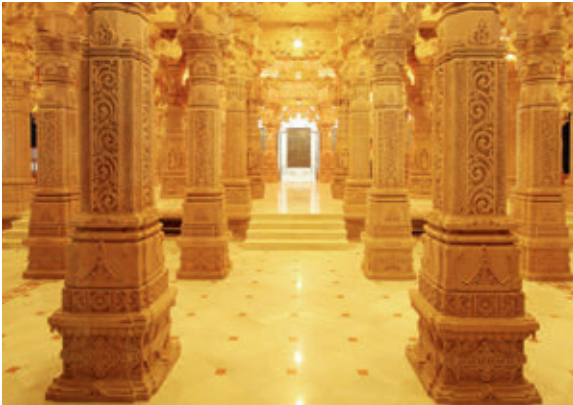
Pramukh Swami Maharaj has also endured many hardships and guided the growth of satsang in this region. Through frequent visits to the urban and tribal areas, he has provided social uplift and satsang values. His efforts have made a widespread impact.

It is due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s blessings that a grand, traditional, intricately carved *shikharbaddh* BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir has been completed and consecrated in Himmatnagar which will continue to contribute to the social and spiritual uplift of society.



Pink-stone BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Himmatnagar,
SABARKANTHA





The mandir is built with 70,000 cu. ft. of Rajasthani pink-stone; it is embellished with 108 sculpted pillars and 138 *torans*

kund in which a large replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *charanavind* (footprints) are placed.

Moving on, the visitor reaches the main steps, which are divided into two, with a central passage leading to the Shri Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Mandapam and the Guru Parampara *murtis* on the ground floor.

At the top of the steps, to the left and right, are the shrines of Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapatji and Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji.

In front is the main darshan *mandap*, which is preceded by an exquisitely designed marble floor. In the centre of the *mandap* is the large embellished dome. Intricately sculpted pillars add to the beauty of the *mandap*. Gorgeous *torans* (arches) link the pillars. At the front of the *mandap* is the *garbhagruha*, which is divided into five shrines, each with a separate front entrance. The entrances have sculpted marble doorframes.

In the central shrine are the marble *murtis* of Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan,

National Highway 8 is the major road linking the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan. Travelling along this road, as one passes the village of Kankol near Himmatnagar, the lofty and impressive new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir is a beautiful landmark.

Built on 16 acres of land adjacent to NH8, visitors are drawn by the marvellous pink-stone mandir. It is surrounded by beautiful green landscaping, with decorative light posts to illuminate the footpaths.

The central footpath leads visitors to the *abhishek*



Central shrine (L to R): Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gopalanand Swami



Northern shrine: Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and *mahamukta* Gopalanand Swami. The southern shrine houses the marble *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj. In the northern shrine are the *panchdhatu murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and marble *murtis* of Shri Radha-Krishna Dev. Surrounding the *garbhagruha* is a covered *parikrama* (circumambulatory path).

The mandir has 74 intricately carved ceilings, 138 hanging *torans* (arches) and 108 embellished pillars. On the *mandovar* (outer rear wall of the *garbhagruha*) are sculpted statues of avatars, devotees of the past and devas. The *mandovars* of the Hanuman and Ganapati shrines have 42 sculpted characters selected from the Mahabharat.

The mandir has been built from 70,000 cu. ft. of pink-stone from Rajasthan. It is 84 ft. high (from base of steps to flag post), 175 ft. wide (north-south) and 195 ft. long (east-west). It has 5 *shikhars*, 20 *gavakshas* (balconied windows), 2 *prasad putras* (mini-*shikhars*), 1 large central *ghummat*

(dome) and 11 *ghummat*is (small domes).

Descending the mandir steps, the visitor arrives on the open, ground floor *parikrama*. At this level, the mandir has 33 *jharukhas* (windows) and sculpted statues of dancing *gandharvas* (celestial beings). On the north and south sides also, steps lead up to the mandir.

There are 4 domed *chhatris* (mini-domes) on the footpath surrounding the entire mandir.

The *abhishek mandap*, which is below the main shrines, has 102 sculpted pillars. The *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni is placed on a beautifully decorated saucer-shaped *sinhasan*. Visitors can offer *abhishek* here and pray for the fulfilment of their wishes. Behind the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni are the seated marble *murtis* of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

On 10 February 2010, Pramukh Swami



Southern shrine: Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Murtis of the Gunatit Guru Parampara in the *abhishek mandap*

Maharaj had performed the *shilanyas* ceremony of the mandir. At the time, he blessed, “A mandir will be built here. Thousands of people will benefit from it and attain happiness. We thank all who have helped in this work. Using one’s body, mind and wealth for such causes is their true use.

“Those who come here will be inspired, have the company of sadhus and will attain inner peace. God will grant happiness to all. Placing a brick or stone here is an outer act, but the pure intentions behind the act will result in peace. God will be pleased with all. The merits resulting from the growth of satsang will also be credited to you. We pray that satsang flourishes in Sabarkantha and among the *adivasis*, and that all become happy physically, mentally and financially.

“Ultimately, our goal is to become *aksharrup* and offer bhakti to Purushottam. We must firmly realize that this body is not our real identity. Misery is due to attachment to the body and its associations. However, by believing oneself as the



Shri Nilkanth Varni, *abhishek murti*

atma, then whether or not one has worldly luxuries, one will still experience peace. Such wisdom will be consolidated by this mandir.” ♦

Translated from *Swaminarayan Prakash*
by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



Swamishri performs Vedic murti-pratishtha rituals of the murtis for the new mandir, 10 July 2013, Sarangpur

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

**BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Himmatnagar, Gujarat
9-12 December 2013**

Himmatnagar is home to the government administrative headquarters of the Sabarkantha region of Gujarat state. The new shikharbaddh BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir is located near the highway on the outskirts of the city. Vedic rituals and other celebratory programmes were held to mark its opening.



Sadguru sadhus on stage during Swamishri's 93rd birthday celebration assembly in Himmatnagar

9 December

WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

Over 10,000 women devotees, young and old, from cities, towns and villages throughout the Sabarkantha district attended the special celebration assembly. Amid the devotion-filled atmosphere, BAPS women devotees presented inspiring skits, dances and speeches (for detailed information see *Premvati*, January-February 2014).

10 December

PRASAD PRAVESH

In the morning, Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed the Vedic *prasad pravesha* rituals in the presence of sadhus and devotee-*yajmans*.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY

As part of the mandir *murti-pratishtha* celebrations, a grand assembly was held to commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 93rd birth anniversary (completion of 92 years). Over 15,000 devotees from throughout north Gujarat gathered to pay tribute to Swamishri on this occasion. Based on the theme of Swamishri's selfless assistance to all, the assembly was held on a

specially built stage in front of the mandir steps, with the splendidly lit pink-stone mandir in the backdrop. In the centre of the stage were the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Large LED screens on both sides of the stage provided close-up views of the stage presentations.

The assembly began at 5.15 p.m. with the singing of *dhun* and *prarthana* by BAPS children from Poshina (Poahina). Then Shrirang Swami narrated how the *vicharan* undertaken by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the *gunatit* gurus has nurtured the growth of satsang in this region.

The assembly highlighted five aspects of Swamishri's selfless life: life transformations he has inspired, his unconditional affection for all devotees, the peace he has established in society, the faith in God he has instilled and the belief in guaranteed liberation generated in devotees. Each of these topics was elaborated upon through speeches by Tyagvallabh Swami, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami, Brahmavihari Swami and Dharmavinay Swami. In addition, short, specially prepared videos were shown on each aspect.

The story of the life transformation of Valabhai of Paliyabiya village inspired by Swamishri was



Devotees from all over north Gujarat during Swamishri's birthday celebration assembly

narrated by Shri Anilbhai.

Youths of the Kalol *yuvak mandal* enacted a drama depicting the transformation of Samera village in the Meghraj area of Sabarkantha.

Children of Himmatnagar *bal mandal* performed two spectacular traditional dances.

The senior sadhus presented various decorative garlands to the *murti* of Swamishri to honour him on this occasion.

Among the invited guests were Shri Banchhanidhi Pani (Collector, Sabarkantha), Shri B.N. Karia (District Judge, Himmatnagar), Shri Arunbhai Chaudhari (District Forest Officer) and others.

Addressing the assembly, Shri Banchhanidhi Pani said, "This mandir will continue to provide spiritual and social uplift to the *adivasis*. It will also promote our cultural traditions."

Finally, Pujya Mahant Swami spoke on how to repay guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj for his selfless endeavours, "Living one's life according to Swamishri's wishes and becoming a sincere devotee is true repayment to Swamishri."

The entire assembly was fluently compered by Adarshswarup Swami.

The assembly concluded with everyone performing *arti* and a fireworks display.

11 December

YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE

The Yagna for World Peace began at the designated auspicious time of 8.07 a.m. On the south-facing main stage were the main *yagna kunds*, the marble *murtis* for the new mandir in Himmatnagar and *murtis* for the new BAPS *kutir* mandir in Rani Umbari village of Poshina district.

After the *yagna* flame was lit, Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and other sadhus performed the initial rituals under the guidance of the experienced Brahmins on the main *yagna* stage.

They then performed *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandirs. Thereafter, Mahant Swami addressed the devotees seated in the *yagna*.

After completing the introductory rituals, the senior sadhus departed from the *yagna* stage and the *yajman* couples then continued the *yagna* rituals as directed by the Brahmins.

Over 3,770 couples were seated in groups around 491 *yagna kunds*, specially set up in the canopied *yagna* arena which was 400 ft. wide, 430 ft. long and 40 ft. high. Devotees of all backgrounds, from professionals to *adivasis* participated together in the *yagna* rituals.



Birthday celebration assembly in front of the mandir



Yagna offerings during Prasad Pravesh rituals



Devotees throng to the celebrations



Initial rituals of the Yagna for World Peace

In addition to the participating devotees, thousands more came for darshan of the *yagna*.

The *yagna* arrangements were smoothly coordinated by Shrutiprakash Swami, Kamalnayan Swami, Vairagyanidhi Swami and Prayagmuni Swami. The team of Brahmins guiding the *yajmans* in performing the *yagna* was led by Shri Ghanshyambhai Shukla and Mukeshbhai Shukla.

The auspicious atmosphere of the Vedic *yagna* brought peace and joy to all.

11 December

GRAND NAGAR YATRA

At 5.00 p.m. the grand *nagar yatra* of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir began from Himmat High School.

First, Mayor of Himmatnagar Shri Shankarbhai Kahar and other guests, together with Satsangijivan Swami (Kothari of BAPS Mandir, Ahmedabad), Shrihari Swami, Narendraprasad Swami and Dharmavinay Swami (Kothari of BAPS Mandir, Himmatnagar) performed *pujan* and *arti* of Thakorji. Then the *nagar yatra* was flagged off.

At the front of the procession, a small portable canon was used to shower flowers at regular intervals. The other components of the *nagar yatra* included:

- Thakorji in a *palkhi* carried by youths.
- Various decorative floats carrying the *murtis* to be consecrated: Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami on the Mayur Rath, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj on the Shrihari Rath, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the Garud Rath, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev on the Jagannath Rath, Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapatiji on the Avatar Rath, Shri Sita-Rama-Hanumanji on a splendidly decorated *rath*, Shri Bhagatiji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj on the Hansa Rath, and Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the Surya Rath.
- Youths carrying the *murti-pratishtha* banner.
- Traditionally dressed youths carrying

lit torches.

- Motorbike rider with giant pile of waterpots on head.
- Children on horses.
- Youths on motorcycles carrying flags.
- *Sandhani* – youth dressed as a playful camel.
- Children, youths and devotees carrying banners promoting messages of anti-addiction and Hindu culture.
- Sadhus seated on decorated chariots and open vehicles.
- BAPS youths of Badalpur playing traditional blow-pipes and singing bhajans.
- Marching bands.
- Groups of children and youths dancing.
- Groups of *adivasi* devotees from Poshina, Tuver, Tithal and Dahod-Limkheda dancing, while carrying traditional instruments and demonstrating acrobatic skills.
- Women devotees carrying the celebration banners.
- *Yuvatis* carrying flags.
- Women devotees carrying auspicious *kalash-shrifal-jawara* and cloth-wrapped manuscripts.
- *Yuvatis* performing traditional dances.
- *Balikas* dressed as great women devotees of the past.
- *Yuvatis* carrying large leafs imprinted with the Swaminarayan mantra.
- Women and female youths singing bhajans.

The entire *nagar yatra* stretched for 1.5 km from start to finish. Along the 5 km route thousands of local residents crowded the streets, balconies, roofs and other vantage points to view the colourful and spectacular procession. The *nagar yatra* concluded at 7.00 p.m.

Thereafter, at 8.00 p.m., a felicitation assembly was held, in which all who had helped in the mandir project were honoured by Mahant Swami, Dr Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami. In conclusion, Kothari Dharmavinay Swami, delivered a vote of thanks to all.



Sadhus and dignitaries during the *nagar yatra*



Over 250 sadhus participated in the *nagar yatra*



Youths devoutly pull the Mayur Rath



Tribal devotees play their traditional drums and dance

12 December

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY

On 10 July 2013 (Ashadh *sud* 2, V.S. 2069) in Sarangpur, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the *murtis* of the new *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Himmatnagar.

On 12 December 2013 (Magshar *sud* 10, V.S. 2070) the *murtis* were to be ritually installed in the mandir. In the early morning at 6.15, the senior sadhus performed the *abhishek* rituals of the *murtis*. At 7.00 a.m., Pujya Mahant Swami and other senior sadhus performed the Vedic inauguration rituals of the main entrance to the mandir. They also performed *pujan* of the large marble replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints and released balloons attached to a cut-out of the Akshar Deri to mark the occasion.

Then, the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals commenced at 7.25 a.m. The rituals began with the *mahapuja*. At 8.08 a.m. the doors of the *garbhagruh* were opened and the senior sadhus entered to perform the Vedic consecration rituals of all the *murtis*: Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami – Mahant Swami; Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj – Tyagvallabh Swami; Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev – Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami; Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj – Dr Swami; Gunatit Gurus – Ishwarcharan Swami. Shrihari Swami, Satsangijivan Swami, Anandswarup Swami, Atmaswarup Swami and Bhaktavatsal Swami performed the consecration rituals before the *murtis* of the remaining deities.

After the consecration rituals, Mahant Swami performed *pujan* of all the *murtis* in their respective shrines. Thereafter, an *annakut* of sweet and savoury delicacies was arranged in all the shrines. After singing of *thal*, the first *arti* was performed. Mahant Swami and the senior sadhus also performed *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Then, all went to the assembly hall for the *murti-pratishtha* assembly.



Auspicious opening of the mandir complex



Devotees participate in the consecration rituals



Sadguru sadhus perform the consecration rituals



Murti-pratishtha of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj

12 December

MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

Thousands of devotees witnessed the consecration rituals shown live on large LED screens in the large canopied assembly hall on the mandir precincts.

On the assembly stage, the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj had been arranged beneath a large decorative *deri* (shrine). Adjacent to them, in smaller shrines, were the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. The senior sadhus and invited guests were seated on both sides of the stage.

The assembly began with *dhun* and singing of the kirtan “*Āj Himmatnagarmā nutan mandiriyē suvarna kalash khubh shobhatā...*”, which had been written by Shrirang Swami.

After speeches by Brahmadarshan Swami and Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, a video highlighting the efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the growth of satsang in this region was shown.

Ishwarcharan Swami then spoke about Yogiji Maharaj’s efforts in promoting satsang in the Sabarkantha region.

Thereafter, Dr Swami described how mandirs inspire countless towards a purer, nobler and pious life.

Then, children and youths of Himmatnagar *bal* and *yuvak mandals* performed a dance depicting the glory and purpose of mandirs.

Among the invited guests were: Shri Ramanlal Vora (Minister, Youth Cultural Division), Shri Mahendrasinhji Chauhan (MP), Shri Prafulbhai Patel (former Home Minister), and MLAs Shri Ashwinbhai Kotarla, Shri Rajendrasinhji Chavda, Shri Manilalbhai Vaghela, Shri Mahendrasinhji Bavariya, Shri Rajendrasinhji Thakar and Dr Anilbhai Joshipara.

On behalf of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the senior sadhus welcomed and honoured all the guests.

Ramanlal Vora addressed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj has built over 1,000 mandirs and sent a message of purity throughout



Murti-pratishtha rituals in central shrine



Murti-pratishtha of Shri Nilkanth Varni



Murti-pratishtha of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s murti



Children and youths present a dance glorifying mandirs

the world. The mandir is not merely a pile of stones, but it is home to many uplifting activities.”

Shri Mahendrasinhji Chauhan said, “Going to a mandir relieves one’s mental stress and quashes one’s ego. BAPS mandirs in India and abroad help to sustain our culture and traditions among youths.”

Shri Prafulbhai Patel said, “Through the dedicated efforts of BAPS, the lives of tribals in Sabarkantha have been totally transformed. BAPS has promoted morality and spirituality in the lives of all.”

Then Dharmavinay Swami delivered a vote of thanks to all who had contributed to the mandir project.

To express their gratitude to Pramukh Swami Maharaj for gifting this superb mandir to Sabarkantha, the sadhus and *karyakars* presented garlands to the *murti* of Swamishri.

Finally, Mahant Swami addressed the gathering, “It is not easy to build a mandir. It is possible only due to the generous support of many people. This mandir is not only grand, but is also divine. Such divinity is due to the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This mandir is the fruit of many years of effort by the sadhus and devotees.

“Everyone has virtues and faults. We were all ordinary previously. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj

has extracted the virtues latent in us all. He has dedicated his life for us. He has no selfish motives. With a pure heart, he sees divinity in us all. He sees the good in us all and has served us. Thus, his feelings towards us have nurtured our virtues. That is why we willingly contribute to these projects. We participate with great pleasure and a feeling of great privilege. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s pure life and divine spiritual personality has inspired this work.

“The shastras say ‘A *satpurush* creates mandirs, *tirths* (places of pilgrimage) and shastras. But these three cannot combine to make a *satpurush*’. We have the company of such a *satpurush*. The divinity we experience in satsang and the sacrifice we see is due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In fact, it is Swamishri who has pleased us; only then have we tried to please him. This mandir is the result of Swamishri’s selfless efforts. Now we must endeavour to transform our heart into a mandir. This, too, is possible by the blessings of Swamishri.”

Over 30,000 devotees from over 450 surrounding villages attended the celebrations, in addition to the many who had come from throughout India and abroad. ♦

Translated from *Swaminarayan Prakash*
by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

NEW BOOK

INSPIRATIONS

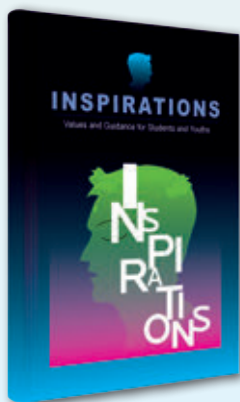
Values and Guidance for Students and Youths

By Nilesh Manani

Inspirations deals with golden values and much needed guidance for students and youths. Each page deals with a single message.

Some of the 51 topics dealt with in the book are:

- ♦ Your Mother and Father
- ♦ True Friendship
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- ♦ The Value of Respect
- ♦ Learn to Forgive
- ♦ Keep Good Company
- ♦ Developing Good Character
- ♦ Preparing for Examinations
- ♦ Learn to Think Logically
- ♦ Dealing with Problems
- ♦ Tackle Bullying
- ♦ Faith in God
- ♦ The Value of Play



Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad. **Inspirer:** His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj

SADGURU SADHUS SPEAK...

During the Murti-Pratishtha Assembly on 12 December 2013

Mahant Swami



The shastras say ‘A *satpurush* creates mandirs, *tirths* and shastras. But these three cannot combine to make a *satpurush*’. We have the company of such a *satpurush*. The divinity we experience in satsang and the sacrifice we see is due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In fact, it is Swamishri who has pleased us; only then have we tried to please him.

Dr Swami



Yogiji Maharaj used to say that the mandir is a college for *brahmavidya*. The Gita describes *brahmavidya* as *adhyatma vidya*. Of all types of knowledge, *adhyatma vidya* is the best. It is said that ‘The soul of education is the education of the soul’. There are three subjects of study in *brahmavidya*: *swarupnishtha*, *sanghnishtha* and *swadharmanishtha*. To consolidate these, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has built this mandir.

Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami

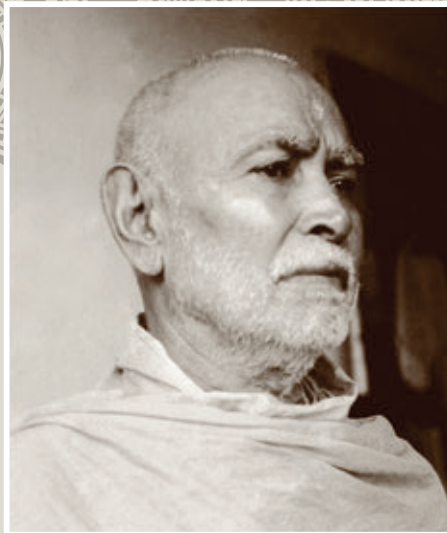


Mandirs are not merely buildings of bricks and concrete. They are places of worship and also centres of our traditions and values. Lives are moulded here. A rough stone has no value, but a *murti* carved by a sculptor has more value. Similarly, the lives of those who come to the mandirs are moulded and become more valuable. Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspires such divine work.

Ishwarcharan Swami



Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have tolerated many hardships and have exhaustively done *vicharan* in this region. Only with his blessings and the dedicated efforts and devotion of sadhus and devotees has this mandir been possible. Now our duty is to make full and proper use of it. Only through the mandir will the traditions of satsang, customs of Hindu dharma and our values be sustained.



SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, founder of BAPS, was born in 1865 CE and so 2015 marks his 150th birth anniversary. For one year, from February 2014, a variety of celebrations and activities will be held to commemorate this historic occasion. As a prelude, the following is an extract translated from ‘Yagnapurush Upanishad’ briefly describing how Shastriji Maharaj came to understand the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and endeavoured to enshrine it in majestic mandirs. It reveals his absolute determination and profound courage to ensure that the true upasana of Akshar-Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan is preserved and promoted.

GURU PRAGJI BHAKTA

Swami Yagnapurushdasji was stirred from within by the divine energy of Pragji Bhakta’s words as they reverberated in the assembly hall. His gaze was fixed attentively on the apparently ordinary tailor, Pragji Bhakta. A devout householder from the remote village of Mahuva on the west coast of Gujarat, Pragji Bhakta was not a scholar but even distinguished pundits could not match the clarity of his thoughts. His discourses echoed the conviction and faith that results from true perfect spiritual enlightenment. It was this that captivated the wise and learned young sadhu Swami Yagnapurushdasji.

This was the first time Swami Yagnapurushdasji

had seen Pragji Bhakta. It was February 1883 (Fagan, V.S. 1939). Swami Yagnapurushdasji was instantly and irreversibly drawn to the simple Pragji Bhakta.

But Swami Yagnapurushdasji was himself no ordinary sadhu. Even at this young age he was a reputed scholar, and renowned for his saintliness.

He was a man of integrity and keen to learn the real principles revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. For this he initially served Vignananand Swami, a senior *paramhansa* who had been initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and had served him for 12 years.

Reflecting on these initial years under Vignananand Swami, Swami Yagnapurushdasji

notes, “Vignananand Swami had stayed with Shriji Maharaj and seen and experienced Maharaj’s limitless glory first hand. I have realized Shriji Maharaj as supreme God from him.”

Swami Yagnapurushdasji observed that Pragji Bhakta’s talks were full of deep truths and personal experience, but more importantly, were based entirely on the irrefutable words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan from the Vachanamrut. Even Vignananand Swami reinforced his observation, “Pragji Bhakta is a *satpurush* who constantly experiences God. He has learnt the true meanings of all 262 Vachanamruts from Gunatitanand Swami. So, the principles he teaches are without any doubt true and complete. You have developed a bond with him, so develop it fully and associate with him.”

Thus, Swami Yagnapurushdasji kept the company of Pragji Bhakta and learnt the principles of Akshar-Purushottam.

Having acquired this knowledge, Swami Yagnapurushdasji had set his goal, “To explain to others the true principles revealed by Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami.”

For him, to help others experience this true bliss of God was his life’s work. The result of this was the birth of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

EARLY LIFE

Born as Dungar Bhakta in Mahelav – a village in the Charotar region of Gujarat – on 31 January 1865 (Maha *sud* 5, V.S. 1921) to parents Dhoribhai and Hetba, it was as if his birth was specifically for this purpose.

When he was about 15 months old, Dungar Bhakta was blessed by Gunatitanand Swami, “This child will become a sadhu and spread the supreme faith in Shriji Maharaj. Through spiritual discourses he will inspire the Sampradaya.”

From the age of three, while other children played typical childhood games, Dungar Bhakta built mandirs from the soil, placed the *murti* of Thakorji within and performed *arti*.

On his visits to Vartal with his father, Dungar Bhakta would collect manuscript pages of the Vachanamrut discarded by the scribes and keenly read them.

When Dungar Bhakta was 19 years old, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj initiated him into the sadhu order and named him Swami Yagnapurushdas. Then, within six months, Swami Yagnapurushdas sought the divine spiritual company and guidance of Pragji Bhakta.

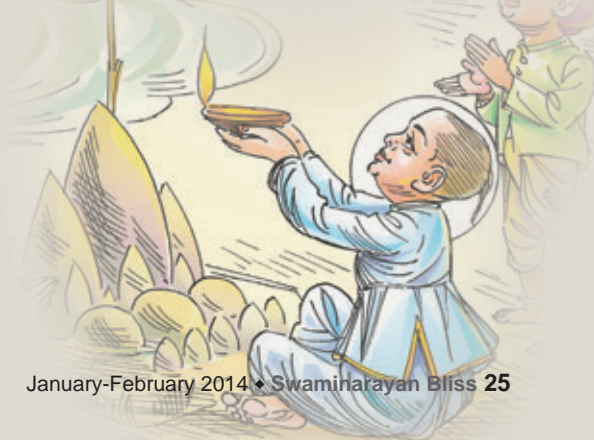
Many of those in administrative power of the Satsang at the time did not realize Pragji Bhakta’s glory. Hence, many tried to restrict the devotees and sadhus from Pragji Bhakta’s spiritual company and discourses.

Swami Yagnapurushdas was targeted and harassed by many. Yet, not only did he excel in his study of Sanskrit, but he also fearlessly sought the company of Pragji Bhakta. He truly pleased Pragji Bhakta, whom he accepted now as his guru, with his devotion and service. Perceiving the divine spark in the young, courageous Swami Yagnapurushdas, Pragji Bhakta once said, “I will give him the maker of the holy footprints, Shriji Maharaj himself.”

So when Pragji Bhakta passed away to Akshardham at the age of 69, Swami Yagnapurushdas assumed the responsibility of consolidating the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

RESOLUTE FAITH

Due to his academic prowess, Swami Yagnapurushdas was known as ‘Shastri’. Devotees



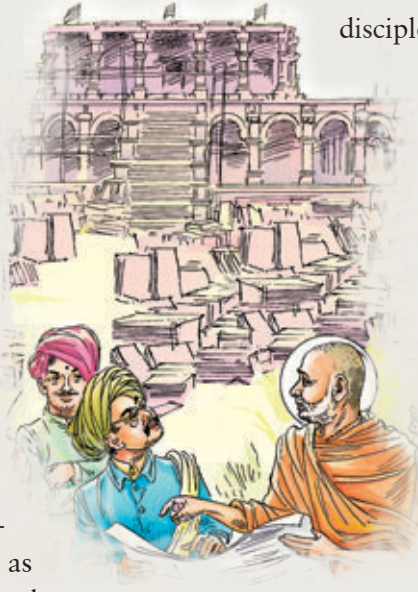
also fondly referred to him as Shastriji Maharaj or Swamishri. His saintly, scholarly and principled life drew many. But, Shastriji Maharaj's efforts to teach the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy met fierce resistance from many within the Vartal Sanstha.

Requested by the veteran *kothari* of Vartal, Gordhanbhai, to desist from giving talks on Akshar-Purushottam, Shastriji Maharaj replied, "While describing the glory of Shriji Maharaj as per his commands, one should not be afraid of any troubles."

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj continued his talks on the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. In the meantime, Shastriji Maharaj supported Kunjivihari Swami to build a mandir in Vadhwan and had the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam installed there. This caused a great uproar among many in Vartal.

Other envious sadhus could not tolerate Swamishri's growing popularity and influence. As a result, their opposition took an increasingly violent form. Observing this, Dr Bhailalbhai Dayabhai Patel, a very respected and prominent leader of India's independence movement and founder of the city of Vallabh Vidyanagar, commented, "Pujya Shastriji Maharaj came to Sojitra in 1903 for a *parayan*. His style of discoursing was so pleasing that not only devotees but others also came to listen. At that time I was 14-15 years old. I became very interested in his talks.

"Pujya Shastriji Maharaj was a *brahmachari* from birth. He glowed with the lustre of *brahmacharya*. The reason behind this (strict discipline) was the spiritual lineage he had inherited. Shriji Maharaj had 500 *paramhansas*. But only Gunatitanand Swami's line of disciples has remained. Pujya Gunatitanand Swami's foremost



disciple was Pragji Bhakta. In this way Pujya Shastriji Maharaj inherited this spiritual legacy of renunciation, detachment and austerity. Also, the *upasana* that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar was also consolidated. This was also one reason why other sadhus of the Sampradaya caused harassment.

"In 1906, there was a festival in Vartal. I went there with a group of student friends. In the sadhus' ashram, at around 10 a.m., while Shastriji Maharaj was discoursing to devotees, a sadhu lit a fire and added chilies to it, causing everyone to cough (due to the irritant smoke). At that time, Shastriji Maharaj also received death threats. So, all the *satsangis* strongly insisted that he leave Vartal."

DOCTRINAL CLARITY

The inimical circumstances forced Shastriji Maharaj's hand. The only way for him to further Bhagwan Swaminarayan's true philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam was to leave Vartal. Thus, in November 1906, with just five sadhus and a handful of devotees, Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal and began the task of openly spreading the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the *Vachanamrut*.

Many felt that Shastriji Maharaj's departure was a great loss for Vartal, but they could do nothing about it because personal prejudice had taken over from common sense.

The renowned Gujarati author, scholar of Sanskrit and member of the Vartal Temple Committee, Shri Dolatram Krupashankar Pandya, was sad that such a saintly, and scholarly sadhu like Shastriji Maharaj should have to leave Vartal. But he knew that Shastriji Maharaj would never do anything contrary to Bhagwan

Swaminarayan's principles. Once, he met Swamishri in Nadiad and requested, "Swamiji, I know that you would not leave without a true reason. So please explain to me this principle."

Accordingly, Swamishri explained, "In the mandirs Shriji Maharaj built he consecrated the *murtis* of Gopinathji, Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan, Radha-Krishna and others. Maharaj himself was supreme God and the cause of all avatars, yet to appease others, he consecrated his own *murti* only in Vartal. However, in

Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 21, Shriji Maharaj has revealed the essential principle to be understood by all spiritual aspirants to attain ultimate *moksha*. In it he says, 'If a person realizes the greatness of manifest God and his holy Sadhu in exactly the same way as he realizes the greatness of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc., as well as the greatness of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanuman, Uddhav, etc. – then nothing remains to be understood on the path of liberation.'"

Shastriji Maharaj continued, "On the basis of this Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj is himself the manifest form of God and Gunatitanand Swami is the manifest form of his holy Sadhu. So, only if one understands their true glory and consecrates mandirs with their *murtis* in the central shrine has the fundamental principle been understood fully.

"Also, God and his ideal devotee are worshipped together. For example, Radha and Krishna, Nar and Narayan, Lakshmi and Narayan, Sita and Ram, similarly, Swami (Akshar) with Narayan (Purushottam) is Swaminarayan (Akshar-Purushottam). This is the true *upasana*. Swami is



is

Gunatitanand Swami and Narayan Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is to teach this true principle that we have left Vartal."

Delighted by Shastriji Maharaj's true interpretation of Shriji Maharaj's words in the Vachanamrut, Dolatram Pandya bowed to him and remarked, "Swami, you are doing the work for which Shriji Maharaj would have had to incarnate again. Your greatness is immeasurable, since you have explained the true and pure philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam on the basis of the shastras."

MANDIRS FOR AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM

Shortly after separating from Vartal, Shastriji Maharaj began to build a mandir in Bochasan. Six months later, in June 1907, the *murti-pratishtha* was to be performed.

Many still persecuted Swamishri and attempted to stifle his activities. Yet Swamishri bore no grudge against anyone – he tolerated, forgave and forgot. Swamishri's pure inner sentiments are conveyed in a letter to Bhaktivallabh Swami, the *kothari* of Bochasan Mandir, "We should always act and think for the good of all in all ways. Pray for those who persecute, but do not retaliate, do not become a rogue against a rogue, since that is not the path of saintliness. If some criticize us, still be happy. The truth will prevail." Thus, by applying the principles of *agna*, *upasana*, *sadbhav* and *paksh*, Shastriji Maharaj furthered the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine.

Living by these principles brought much progress. Yet, Swamishri attributed all the praise for everything to Maharaj and Swami. In another letter, Swamishri's humility is reflected, "Nothing

happens due to our strength. Things happen only because of Shriji-Swami's grace and wish. I try my best, but when I get stuck, I bow to them (Maharaj and Swami) and they do the work. These are their mandirs, this is their property, so they will take care of everything. Knowing this I derive much strength."

It was such deep faith, despite the lack of resources, that enabled him to build magnificent mandirs in Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara and Gadhada.

Amid enormous difficulties, Swamishri's enthusiasm and efforts never faltered. He himself physically helped in the construction work, despite his advanced age and delicate health. The example he set inspired the sadhus and devotees. He further encouraged them with his motivating words, "At present, Maharaj's profound blessings can be earned by consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrine and building mandirs which represent our true *upasana*. So, whoever digs the foundations, lifts tubs of soil or stones, or even donates one penny and contributes in this work, Maharaj will purify them, make them *brahmarup* and take them to Akshardham. Of this there is no doubt."

GURU OF GIANTS

Day and night, Swamishri relentlessly talked about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. The size of the audience was irrelevant. He spent hours at a time talking to individuals and groups – small and large. When requested to rest, Swamishri would smile and reply, "For me, these spiritual discourses are the only form of rest."

Soon, Swamishri's continuous teaching that 'Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar and Sahajanand Swami is Parameshwar' crossed the Indian Ocean to Africa. There, too, old misconceptions were replaced with the true message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam doctrine.

Also, Guljharilal Nanda, who served as India's home minister and prime minister, became a staunch disciple of Shastriji Maharaj. Narrating his experience, Nandaji commented, "From the moment I first entered Satsang, I have been increasingly drawn towards Swamishri's darshan. As my association with him slowly grew, I realized the highest truth – that Swamishri was the manifest form of God. Initially, I wondered why Akshar-Purushottam? Why mandirs? But, on Swamishri's instructions, as I read the Vachanamrut I understood that Sahajanand Swami was Purushottam Narayan – supreme God – and that he had incarnated on earth with his abode – Akshardham. And that one has to become like Akshar – Gunatitanand Swami – to worship him.

"Thus the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam revealed by Maharaj has its basis in the shastras. And to spread this philosophy, it is necessary to build mandirs in which the *murtis* of Swami and Narayan are consecrated. Only then will this doctrine be preserved on earth for thousands of years and be understood by all. The worship of God and his ideal Devotee is the true principle. If this is not fully understood then deficiencies will remain. Shastriji Maharaj taught this principle. This work is only possible with the strength and eternal communion of God."

In reality, Swamishri possessed divine energy and virtues. He was detached like Rishabhdev, but showered his love and grace upon all; he had a sharp intellect and was a distinguished scholar, yet he was innocent like a child; he had shouldered the responsibility of building mandirs, but was ever ready to offer devotion and conduct discourses; he had infinite influence and powers, yet was always humble and forgiving. His personality was so appealing that countless were drawn towards him, like metal to a magnet. This was Swamishri, a confluence of such unique qualities.

(Contd. on pg. 31)



Surdas

Surdas, like Homer, was born blind. He was chief among the eight poets, who were considered reprints of their master – Vallabhacharya. Hence the name *ashtachhapa kavis* of the Vallabha Sampradaya. The *padas* composed by the eight poets are sung during darshan of Shrinathji, a form of Krishna, at Nathdvara in modern-day Rajasthan. Krishna is always shown as a seven-year-old boy. Surdas was specially commissioned by Vallabhacharya to celebrate Krishna's *lila* in song. It was a Herculean task and Surdas carried out the assignment in all humility. Before starting, Surdas submitted to the *acharya* that he was not aware of Krishna's *lila*, so how was he to carry out his command. Surdas was already versed in the Bhagavata Puran and other *shastras*. Vallabhacharya enlightened him on Hindu philosophy and God's *lila* through discourses. Vallabhacharya administered *diksha* to Surdas and made him his disciple. The Vallabha Sampradaya, also called Pushti Marga, believes in a personal God and the need to win his grace (*pushti*). The *gopis* of Vrindavan are held as an

example of this grace. They looked upon Krishna as everything and saw everything in him; whereas *jnanis* (men of knowledge) see everything in Brahman. The *gopis* loved Krishna more than anyone else. They left their homes on hearing the melody of his flute; setting aside everything else. This type of devotion is called *madhurya bhakti*. This is considered to be the highest form of bhakti. One need not be learned in the Vedic lore to acquire this form of devotion. Devotion is everything if one wants to attain the Divine. Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita, "If one offers me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water with devotion, I will accept it."

The Vallabha Sampradaya does not subscribe to the theory that the *jivas* and the world are illusory. Its door is open to all, irrespective of caste, creed and gender.

Surdas had a melodious voice. After composing a bhajan each day he would sing it before the *murti* of Krishna at a mandir in Vrindavan. He is reputed to have composed many thousands of bhajans; only 8,000 of them have come down to us. He wrote the *Sur Sagar* (the Ocean of Melody), which depicts the childhood pranks and exploits of Krishna. Surdas's standing among the poets of the Vallabha Sampradaya was such that the founding *acharya* called him the 'Ocean of Devotion' and his son, Vithalnathji, named

him the 'Ship of Pushti Marga'. Before meeting the *acharya*, Surdas used to sing devotional songs on Gau Ghat. He had also spent some time in the company of sadhus in Runakta but found it distracting as it was interfering with his devotion.

Surdas means 'Humble Servant of Melody'. He was born in Sihi, near Delhi, in 1479 in a poor Brahmin family in modern-day Haryana and spent most of his life in Braj *bhoomi* (Mathura-Vrindavan). Because of his blindness, the saint was neglected from childhood by his father and other members of the family. This attitude had sown in his mind a feeling of detachment. One day, he left home and began to live under a pipal tree outside his village Sihi. Surdas was six years old when he left home.

UNIQUE FACULTY

The boy was gifted with a unique faculty. He could interpret omens and also help people in recovering things they had lost. His father, who used to act as a priest, was given two gold coins for performing a ritual, which some rats carried away at night. When his father was searching for them, Surdas led him to the place where the rats had hidden them. Similarly, he once helped a rich landlord find his missing cow. Out of gratitude, the landlord got a hut built for him. Surdas felt disturbed as his services were much in demand and people would crowd around him. He left the village to be away from such consultation as he felt it was coming in the way of his devotions. He also spent some time in Runakta. These uncertain activities continued till he ran into Vallabhacharya at Gau Ghat. After this meeting a transformation came about in Surdas's life. He became a follower of the Vallabha Sampradaya and a fulltime poet-composer to highlight Krishna's exploits. The *acharya* appointed him as musician of the Srinath Mandir in Gokul, where the poet started spending a major portion of his life. Several stories are current about the poet's

devotion to Krishna. Once, Surdas fell into a well. He earnestly prayed to Krishna for help, and he got him out. At that time Radha was also by Krishna's side. Surdas grasped her anklets. She declared she was Radha and requested him to let go of her anklets. The poet-saint said that he being blind could not ascertain the truth of her identity. So, Krishna blessed him with vision and he had the darshan of both of them. After that Krishna asked Surdas to seek a boon. Surdas reportedly told Krishna that he would prefer to remain blind as he did not wish to see anything else with those eyes that had had the darshan of Krishna.

Another famous episode narrated about the blind saint-poet was about his ability to describe the *murti* of Krishna as it was. Vithalnathji, the son of Vallabhacharya, wanted to test him. He asked his son, Giridharlalji to dress Krishna only in a garland of pearls. The saint-poet burst out laughing on 'seeing' the *murti* of Krishna bereft of clothing. He started singing. The purport of the bhajan is as follows:

*See the Lord (Hari) is stark naked,
He looks beautiful in every limb,
Clothed in pearls,
His nakedness adds to the beauty in every limb,
Surdas joins the maidens of Vraj in the laughter.*

After this incident, everybody was convinced of his unique ability to see his beloved Lord even without eyesight.

The *ashtachhapa* poets were supposed to be the companions of Krishna in their past existence. Akrura, who was reborn as Surdas, had incurred the wrath of Krishna for impersonating him. He had done it to help Satyabhama who felt neglected, as Krishna was showing more attention to Rukmini. She threatened suicide if her Lord did not come to her and then she became unconscious. Akrura was distressed at the turn of events and wanted to save Satyabhama at any cost. He took Krishna's form and announced to Satyabhama that Krishna had come. On hearing

his name she regained consciousness. But Krishna was not amused. As a result of Krishna's curse, Akrura had to take birth as the blind poet. Satyabhama was also cursed and was born as a servant maid.

Surdas's meeting with Akbar, the Mughal emperor, came about in a fortuitous manner. The emperor praised Tansen for his skill as a musician. He wondered if there was anyone who surpassed him at singing. Tansen mentioned Surdas's name. A meeting was arranged and Surdas became a favourite of Akbar. It is worth noting here that Akbar did not pester Surdas to sing his praises. Only once he issued that command and

Surdas sang in praise of Krishna. The song impressed Akbar.

Surdas suffered a serious illness at the age of 103, and two years later he passed away in 1584 CE to attain the divine abode of Shri Krishna.

Surdas raised the status of Hindi by writing a religious book in Hindi. Before this, most of the books on religious topics used to be written in Sanskrit. His *Sur Sagar* is the Bhagvat Puran in Braj language. It celebrates the exploits of Bal Krishna and highlights his *lila*.

Besides *Sur Sagar*, the poet wrote *Sur Saravali*, *Sahitya Lahiri* and *Nala Damayanti*. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 28)

Among the many influential people touched by Shastriji Maharaj's saintliness were Mahatma Gandhiji, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan, Kanaivalal Munshi, and others.

When Gandhiji halted at Navagam-Nayka during his Dandi March, he met Shastriji Maharaj and asked for his blessings, "I believe that our work will succeed only with the blessings of great saints like you."

Swamishri blessed him, "You are doing work for the benefit of the country and the people. Keep God at the forefront, and he will lead you to success."

When Jhaverbhai Patel came with his two young sons, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Vitthalbhai Patel, Swamishri blessed them, "These two are gems of India. They will become prominent leaders of India. And this Vallabhbhai will become the uncrowned prince of India." History has shown the truth of Shastriji Maharaj's words.

Thus, from illiterate villagers to learned scholars and national leaders, Shastriji Maharaj's spirituality attracted all. And through his contact, people overcame base instincts, attained inner purity and experienced the bliss of God.

Finally, on 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4, V.S. 2007), Shastriji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham. He had nurtured the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) from its inception into a widely respected organization.

He identified Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the torchbearers who would continue to raise the awareness of the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine and enhance the work of BAPS.

Describing Yogiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj said, "There is no sadhu like Yogi in the infinite *brahmands*... In the Bhagvat, Vyasji has stated the qualities of a true Sadhu, but if he has omitted any you will find them in Yogiji Maharaj; he is such a Sadhu."

Shastriji Maharaj also appointed the young, saintly 28-year-old Shastri Narayanswarupdasji (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) as the President of the Sanstha in his place.

As a result, today, the BAPS is respected throughout the world for the spirituality it inspires. For, at the root and heart of BAPS are the selfless, saintly lives of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦



DEPRESSION

*"I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would be not one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better it appears to me."*¹

- Abraham Lincoln

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a medical condition characterized by feelings of extreme sadness and dejection. Depression is not just the feeling of sadness we all experience at times. It is normal for most people to feel sad at times, particularly when faced with losses, or feelings of grief.

Depression, however, is more than a low mood or a feeling of sadness. It is a serious medical condition which causes both physical and psychological symptoms. It is important to note that when detected, depression can be treated using a range of effective and safe treatment approaches. Some facts about depression are as follows.

- Nearly 5-10% of persons in a community at a given time are in need of help for depression.
- Between 8-20% of persons carry a risk of developing depression during their lifetime.
- The average age of the onset of major depression is between 20 and 40 years.
- Women have higher rates of depression

than men.

- Depression occurs in persons of all genders, ages and backgrounds.
- It affects people of all cultures across the world.
- Race or ethnicity does not influence the prevalence of depression.

Many religious texts contain descriptions which fit very well into the current understanding of depression. References to depression have been made in the great epics of India – Ramayan and Mahabharat, wherein some characters have developed depressive features akin to current descriptions. In the Ramayan, King Dashrath, father of Bhagwan Ram, developed clearly identifiable depression at different stages of his life. The last episode was precipitated when Prince Ram, accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Lakshman, left for the forest, abdicating the throne in fulfilment of the vow made by his father to his stepmother. Dashrath was overwhelmed by a state of depression in which he renounced all his duties as king and all worldly pleasures and shortly thereafter died

1. Source: http://my.webmd.com/content/dmk/dmk_article_1460967, 28 Jan 2001

in such a state.

Despite the seriousness of depression as a disease and the availability of effective treatment, only 30% of cases worldwide receive appropriate care.

Depression can mask itself as physical illness, such as chronic pain, sleeplessness or fatigue.

Therefore, many people who suffer from depression are not treated and may unnecessarily suffer for years from what is a treatable condition. In spite of depression being a common illness, the stigma attached to depression prejudices the public against people with depression. For this reason, a large number of persons suffering from depression do not seek help for treatment.

According to the World Health Organisation, by 2020, depression will become the second largest cause of suffering, second only to heart disease.

DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS CHECKLIST

Depression is a common mental disorder, characterized by:

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest and pleasure
- Low energy and decreased activity
- Poor concentration
- Reduced self-esteem and confidence
- Ideas of guilt and unworthiness
- Pessimistic thoughts
- Ideas of self-harm
- Disturbed sleep
- Diminished appetite.

OR

Have you or a loved one experienced any of the following for at least two weeks:

- Felt sad or depressed
- Lost interest in most things
- Lost pleasure in your normal activities

- Lost your appetite or weight
- Unable to get to sleep, or waking early
- Felt tired all the time
- Had trouble concentrating
- Felt slowed down
- Felt restless or agitated
- Felt worthless
- Felt guilty
- Felt life is not worth living.

If “Yes”, you may be suffering from depression and you should see your doctor to discuss the issue.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan describes in Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 18 that a person who is depressed either sleeps, cries, takes out his frustrations on someone else, or he may even fast to overcome his depression. In addition, he adds that when a person becomes severely depressed, he may even resort to committing suicide.

The symptoms of depression are intense, prolonged and interfere with the person's daily activities. These features differentiate depression from normal sadness.

These problems can become chronic or recurrent, substantially impairing an individual's ability to cope with daily life. At its most severe, depression can lead to suicide, a tragic fatality associated with the loss of about 850,000 lives every year.

Though depression is primarily a psychological illness, bodily symptoms are very common in depressed persons. Very often, these symptoms may be more prominent than the depressed mood itself. Headaches, generalized aches and pains, and symptoms affecting multiple organs

are common complaints. Persistence of these symptoms may make the patients move from one medical facility to another at the cost of their time, energy and resources. Usually,



patients do not admit to feeling depressed even on direct questioning and will blame the failure of modern medicine to detect the underlying 'lurking' illness.

Bodily symptoms presenting as main complaints in a depressed person are found more commonly in some cultures. In the Indian concept, the body and the mind are not dichotomized but are closely associated, and believed to influence each other.

A vast majority of patients complain of disturbed sleep, dreams, nightmares and lack of freshness in the morning. Paradoxically, some patients may sleep excessively. Loss of appetite and associated loss of weight are experienced by a large number of patients. Women may complain of irregularities of the menstrual cycle. Bowel irregularity, especially constipation, may be a distressing symptom in those cultures where daily movement of the bowel is regarded as a mark of health. Slowness of thought and action is a very common disturbance manifested by paucity of spontaneous movements, slumped posture, downcast gaze, excessive fatigue, reduced speech and taking more time to respond.

Depression may, at times, be masked behind an alcohol or drug problem. A person may take refuge in alcohol, tobacco or drugs because of a feeling that this would help to fight the sinking mood.

Most cases of depression can be treated with medication or psychotherapy.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

Depression results from a combination of physical and psychological factors, causing chemical changes in the brain.

Physical factors may include:

- medical illness and treatment
- inherited traits
- chemical changes
- drug/alcohol use.

Psychological factors may include:

- life stressors (e.g. bereavement, divorce, etc.)
- negative experiences
- high anxiety.

Who is at risk for getting depression?

- Women are at greater risk than men.
- Separated and divorced people.
- A person having a close family member with depression.
- Early parental loss.
- Negative stressful events and chronic stress.
- Lack of social support.
- Family type and those living in urban areas compared to rural areas.

It is important that diagnosis and an assessment of the causes in any particular case be carried out by a medical practitioner.

COMMON TYPES OF DEPRESSION

Postpartum Depression

The postpartum period, that is, soon after childbirth, gives an increased risk for depression in women. About 10% of women develop postpartum depression. This condition is distinct from the transient 'baby blues' that 50% of women experience for a few days immediately after giving birth. Mothers may feel especially guilty about not being able to respond fully to the needs of the newborn infant.

Depression in Children

The risk of occurrence of major depression among children and adolescents is between 15 and 20%. Complicating the picture, however, is the fact that a large number of children and adolescents suffering from depression have other associated psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety, disruptive behaviour and drug abuse. Most of the manifestations due to the illness pertain to adjustment with peers and friends, problems in school, and indifferent or deteriorating scholastic performance. Children also appear sad, cry easily, manifest loss of interest and withdrawal, complain of bodily symptoms, and express pessimistic



ideas. However, suicide among children has remained infrequent, yet a disturbing rising trend has been observed in the last decade, and suicide is reported to be the third leading cause of death among adolescents in the western world.

Depression in the Elderly

Depression occurs frequently among the medically ill elderly population where nearly 30% have associated depression. Depression is very common among residents of old age homes also.

Elderly people have a much higher risk of suicide than the general population, which is much lower in countries practicing the joint family system. With social values changing rapidly in the developing countries, elderly people are likely to face increasing stress and strain.

Risk of Suicide

Nearly 15-20% of patients with affective disorders eventually commit suicide. Suicidal behaviour is the most lethal complication of depression. A depressed person may think of suicide to end the pain of depression, or to convey this pain to others. Many patients would not contemplate suicide actively, but would welcome death by a sudden heart attack or accident. Some would make impulsive suicidal gestures to convey their despair to others without a definite plan to die.

The most important thing family members can do for depressed persons is to help them get an appropriate diagnosis and treatment. Patients may not recognize the illness themselves; may blame a physical illness for their bodily symptoms; may consider the entire situation arising out of a sad mood as totally hopeless, and may refuse any treatment; may hide their illness fearing rejection because of social stigma, or may contemplate suicide.

The risk of suicide has to be appreciated from the patient's behaviour and body language. Remarks about death or suicide should not be ignored.

TREATMENTS OF DEPRESSION

Three Types of Therapies

In every case there is a need for careful medical and psychological assessment, as people feel their depression in a variety of ways and the effects of the condition will also vary from person to person.

In cases of depression there is a need for a range of interventions, including:

- specific drug therapy
- education
- psychological therapy.

The most common drug therapy is a prescription for an antidepressant, which impacts on chemical message systems in the brain. These help improve sleep, concentration, energy and contribute to a better mood and less anxiety.

Antidepressants are not addictive and are relatively safe and effective.

Generally, taking medication for three to six months is considered essential for relief from symptoms. Depending on the nature and severity of their illness, patients may be advised to continue the medication for a longer period.

There are a range of psychological therapies for depression, aimed at helping the person:

- decrease anxiety
- stop drug/alcohol use

- resolve life stresses
- promote better coping skills.

Education and counselling help the person:

- reduce stress
- resolve conflicts
- manage his or her life more effectively
- develop new ways of thinking about himself and the world
- develop new ways of enjoying activities.

Treatment may involve helping the person avoid family conflicts and develop ways of using their family as a means of support and encouragement. Yoga, meditation and naturopathy may also be used as supportive measures.

Your medical practitioner can help develop the most appropriate treatment approach for any individual, possibly also drawing upon the expertise of other health professionals. Adequate treatment often leads to complete resolution of the symptoms and the person can return to a normal state of activity and health.

SPIRITUAL FAITH

In addition to medical treatment, increasing scientific evidence from studies on patients shows the efficacy of spiritual faith and practices in enabling depressed or ill people to recover from or help ward off stress and ailments. Meditation has proved to be a stress-buster and make life more meaningful and productive. Besides providing peace and joy it helps to augment the immune system.

Gunatitanand Swami, the foremost disciple and successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has revealed in his discourses, “There are two means for inner peace and freedom from agitation: one is to do bhajan and the other is to believe God as the all-doer. And when happiness comes one’s way then accept it and when misery and pain come one’s way accept them as well” (Swamini Vato 1.148). In brief, chanting God’s holy name, listening to his life story or worshipping him brings inner peace and joy.

In the Ramayan we find that Ravan had kidnapped Sita and confined her for many months in the Ashok Vatika in Sri Lanka. He tried to make her disown Ram and marry him instead. Ravan’s guards, too, harassed her and pressurised her to marry Ravan. But Sita was staunch in her fidelity to Ram and did not succumb to the mental tortures. However, because of her separation from Ram she was intensely sad. When Hanumanji, the messenger of Ram, found her he started singing verses about Ram’s life and adventures before appearing to her. Sita felt her frustration and agitation dissolve. The story of Ram brought inner peace and joy to her.

Once, Muktanand Swami, a leading *param-hansa* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was unhappy and lost his inner peace. He asked Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Maharaj) as to how he could regain peace. The latter started narrating his birth and childhood stories. Muktanand Swami felt that Maharaj had misunderstood his question. So, he asked again. But Bhagwan Swaminarayan continued with his life’s narration. Muktanand Swami expressed that he wanted peace of mind. Maharaj felt that Muktanand Swami had been unable to grasp that his own life’s narration was the panacea to his problem. So, Maharaj told him to go on a satsang tour to the villages. When Muktanand Swami left he met Nityanand Swami, who explained to him that the cure for his lack of inner peace was listening to Maharaj’s divine stories. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 38 about remembering the divine stories of God. Yogiji Maharaj used to often say, “Remembering (the divine episodes of God or his realized Sadhu) dissolves all misery.”

Thus remembering or listening to God’s divine exploits relieves one of depression, frustration or misery. ♦

YOGAHA KARMASU KAUSHALAM

Yoga means to do your actions with skill and expertise



Sadhu Ishwarcharandas

Proficiency in planning is difficult; however in proficient planning, keeping equanimity is much more difficult than just skilful planning. In the Gita, God has called equanimity itself ‘yoga’¹. Only he who can keep equanimity in his actions is truly skilled, truly proficient. In every act, Swamishri’s stability is a trait that flies out and impresses you. Planning exceptionally and remaining stable in any situation is natural for Swamishri – because he lives his every moment immersed in Paramatma.

When the unity of word, thought and action, so rare in society, is so effortlessly achieved in the life of a great sadhu-leader, it is only natural that the fragrance of countless good works begins to radiate from him. His life, woven from the strands of devotion for God, shows perfection in countless strengths – including management and organization. Though, a Gunatit Sadhu is not aware of this. He only joyously offers selfless actions at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is God who spreads the glory of his good works; he is the one who validates his deeds to the inner witness of countless humans.

When we consider Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life, though he, from early on, continuously received the divine love and grace of Shastriji Maharaj, he stayed behind the curtain and later in the shadow of Yogiji Maharaj. There was no show of exceptional devotion or great accomplishment. He gave primacy to duty and always stayed afar from prominence – keeping it tightly secured under the lid of his true saintliness. It remained difficult to recognize him. Even today, living and acting so simply and commonly, it is

1. Shrimad Bhagvad Gita 2.48

difficult to truly recognize him from the outside. Of course there is not the slightest inkling of showiness or pretention, but neither is there much ado about keeping a silent personality. Because of this, his identity becomes even more difficult to capture. However, when one lives with him and experiences his depth, his transparent saintliness and honesty, which put the high pinnacles of the Himalayas to shame, takes us to the limits of our comprehension and we are left whispering like the Vedas – “*Neti, neti*”². Despite remaining active in numerous and diverse activities, the height of his egolessness leaves a shade which constantly comforts all those around him. Even though his very existence is mingled with God’s form, Swamishri remains immersed in God’s bliss as a servant. And, forever in that state, Swamishri continually practices a profound desireless karma yoga – one in which he performs service without separating himself from God for even a blink of an eye.

After visiting the exhibition and other parts of the Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Bicentennial Celebrations in 1985, Swami Chinmayanandji arrived at the meeting room. There, as soon as he saw Swamishri, he asked, “Who has made all this?”

“God has,” Swamishri replied with ease, surety and patience. At that time Chinmayanandji thought that while that may be, surely the unlimited divine power of Vasudev is working through this *sant*. Otherwise, managing such a grand festival would be impossible. While Swamishri always protects his true identity with his humility, in his small and large works, despite his will, his truth shines out with sparkling saintliness. And in those moments, everyone’s minds testify that another, greater being is working through him. He has taken his existence and dissolved it in his Lord, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and his gurus – Shastriji

Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj; we say this because he offers all the honour and credit of his works lovingly at the feet of God and his gurus. He constantly reminds everyone that it is by their wish and grace that we get success.

In any event, large or small, one finds Swamishri himself making the rounds managing and serving wherever it is needed. In 1961, during Gadhada’s Golden Kalash festival, the summer winds were blowing destructively. However, Swamishri remained undeterred. The issues with water and accommodations along with the cloth pavilions tattered or broken by the wind were enough to unnerve anyone. Yet, Swamishri resolved each problem with equanimity; never did his mind waver. Due to this, thousands of others remained motivated in their duties. It was in those times that we saw his ability to dispel the clouds of hopelessness with his own mountain of determination.

In 1965 again, it was Swamishri who was overlooking the management of Shastriji Maharaj’s centennial celebrations. He never thought of food or water and never worried about rest or sleep. Yogiji Maharaj would ask, “Has Pramukh Swami eaten?” But he would be found roaming the festival ground in the hot sun. Mota Swami would also ask him to come to eat and would wait for him. No matter how late Swamishri came, they ate together because Mota Swami would always fear that if he didn’t sit with him, Pramukh Swami would surely eat in a rush and remain hungry. One could see enthusiasm for *seva* and bhakti in every pore of Pramukh Swami. You couldn’t find an iota of body-consciousness (*dehbhav*) even if you were searching for it. The night before the celebration, the main stage was being prepared; he sat there the whole night. Everyone tried convincing him that they would only leave once the work was done but, he only left in the morning after the back wall was built and all the decorations were done. Then he finished his morning routine and was ready for the main assembly.

2. In the Vedas when a person tries to enumerate the characteristics of Brahman, the reply is “*neti*” or “not this” – hinting that Brahman is beyond our full comprehension.

For the Amrut Mahotsav as well, in 1967, by Yogiji Maharaj's wish Swamishri took it upon himself to secure water for the festival. He endeavoured with firm faith in Yogiji Maharaj's word. Of course, he had all the other responsibilities of the festival on his shoulders as well. Still he was never overwhelmed or weary. No matter what problems came up he solved them with great ease, giving solutions that would not have even occurred to someone else. There were countless issues with accommodations. It's always difficult to provide accommodation according to everyone's wishes. Even then, he was able to keep everyone happy. He has the ability to take decisions instantly and with such confidence that he never has to change them. He would ask everyone, take everyone's advice, but when everyone else was confused, remembering Maharaj, he would give the answer that such and such must be done. He would give everyone's heart the support that Maharaj will do what's best and so no doubts or worries would remain.

In 1967, there was also great scarcity of water for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the mandir in Bhadra, Gunatitanand Swami's birthplace. By Yogiji Maharaj's blessings water remained in just one well on the opposite bank of the River Und. A pipeline was to be laid from there. In the middle, it had to be buried in the riverbed and then finally laid to the mandir and the visitors' accommodations – easily more than 5000 ft. All of this had to be done in a very short amount of time. In the middle of the day under a scorching summer sun and even late at night, Swamishri stood by the labourers and accomplished the task – not a bit of weariness or sluggishness. You could see in his work ethic that he believed each second of *seva* to be devotional service in the work of Maharaj and Swami. And you never saw the weight of the task or his responsibility – no stress or worry. He was always patiently and sincerely active. There was no useless expression, no outward bustle that would show his importance or the gravity of his

work. And yet, just from seeing that image of him, people continually gained inspiration.

In 1981, before the opening of the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentennial Celebrations, protests against the college reservation system³ started in Ahmedabad. The protests were getting more and more aggressive each day. The situation had become explosive and there was intense unrest in the city of Ahmedabad. In this volatile situation the question of how the festival would take place was troubling everyone. Preparations had already begun. However, there were signs that if there was trouble while the festival was going on a very serious situation would be created. Everyone went running to Swamishri. Everyone was of the mind that the festival should be cancelled. The situation was presented before Swamishri. Feeling great despair and helplessness everyone was looking to him for a solution. In such times, Swamishri never immediately shares an answer. He first asks everyone and gets everyone's opinion. When everyone said with one voice that there seemed to be no choice but to cancel the celebrations, Swamishri, extremely calmly and coolly informed us that the festival would be celebrated exactly as had been planned. Maharaj would make everything better and would blow away the environment of unrest. And truly, to everyone's surprise, by the time the festival started the situation had come under control. The festival was completed successfully without any obstacles. At times like this, his firm faith in Shri Hari confirms in our heart that Swamishri has a unique spiritual bond with Maharaj.

Prior to Gunatitanand Swami's Bicentennial Celebrations in 1985, there was a severe water shortage, and students' unrest and agitation. Many social leaders were of the opinion that the festival should not take place. However, Swamishri was firm that the festival should happen; and he said that Maharaj and Swami would help. Right before

3. The reservation system means that a certain number of seats at public and private colleges are reserved for students of certain castes and minorities in India.



the festival started there was heavy rain and the drought situation eased. Everyone was relieved.

In the same way in 1987 during the dire famine, Swamishri enjoined sadhus and youths to serve helpless animals. “This is the service of Thakorji,” he said. With this message and inspiration he started cattle camps with the concept of self-supervision⁴. He made sure the cattle were well taken care of so that they could be useful in farming once the drought passed.

Of the thousands of youths who have remained awed by Swamishri’s power of management and organization, Canada’s Nareshbhai Patel asked Swamishri the secret behind this strength. Swamishri answered, “From the beginning I had an eye towards the activities in mandirs and I had a natural inclination in talking to and taking care of devotees. During festivals, I would make arrangements for the devotees’s accommodation, to feed them and take care of them. Shastriji Maharaj really liked that. In Yogiji Maharaj’s time, that happened more. When festivals were organized, I always had a tendency of finding how to solve the problems that cropped up. I would definitely never fall back from a task. Having taken up something to do I would only free myself from it after it was completed. Due to Shastriji Maharaj’s grace and Yogiji Maharaj’s blessings things turned out well.”

Maybe someone can achieve such great tasks or have great tasks achieved. However, to carry

out such work while caring for hundreds of thousands of people’s sentiments, while keeping so many happy, without so much as saying the word “I” is another, greater achievement all together. To have so many people follow you through only love, to find common ground amongst so many, to take up such difficult work with mutual respect and then to complete it – that is something unique. Swamishri is that unique helmsman.

After visiting all the parts of the 1985 Swaminarayan Nagar in Ahmedabad, India’s President Zail Singh met Swamishri in the meeting room and could not help but praise what he saw as outstanding management.

“Our sadhus and youths have come together and done all this!” Swamishri poured the compliments onto his disciples. In response Giani Zail Singh, a true student of spirituality and a person who could recognize a gem of a *sant*, instantly replied, “Whoever may have done it, their energy, the current, was surely yours otherwise this is impossible.”

In this way, even those who have only a fleeting moment with Swamishri can recognize such a deep significance.

Having once witnessed all of this, closing one’s eyes and witnessing and experiencing him as a divine being, an entity of God, so many oceans of virtues can be seen inside him. And forever finding his reward in the joy of attaining God’s pleasure, Swamishri seems forever at peace and content.

No worldly storms shake him. Love and hate, praise and insult – no such troubles touch him. Bearing hardships with equanimity, his mind and entire person sparkle with divinity. That is why, the aspirant following him, with true faith in his divinity, continually can see forward on the path of “*Yogaha karmasu kaushalam*”.

Translated by Sadhu Aksharatitdas

⁴ Farmers whose cattle were taken into the camp assisted in looking after the cattle at the camp.

VACHANAMRUT NIRUPAN

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of the spiritual discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is read daily by countless devotees and is also elaborated upon by sadhus and volunteers during the daily katha in BAPS mandirs and assemblies.

An elaboration on an excerpt of a Vachanamrut has been given here. It has been translated from 'Satsang Saurabh' in Gujarati.



Hollow Stone Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā I 56

On the evening of Maha vadi 12, Samvat 1876 [11 February 1820], Shriji Maharaj was sitting on a large, decorated cot on the veranda outside the west-facing rooms in front of the mandir of Shri Vasudev-Narayan in Dada Khachar's darbar in Gadhadra. He was wearing a white khes and had covered himself with an orange reto interlaced with golden and silver threads. He had also tied a reto with a deep orange border around his head. At that time, an assembly of munis as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him. After singing the 'Narayan' dhunya, some munis were singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of a jhānjh and mrudang.

...Thereafter Muktanand Swami asked another question: "The jiva is distinct from the indriyas, antahkaran and prans; it is also distinct from the three states – waking, dream and deep sleep – and the three bodies – sthul, sukshma and karan. After hearing this in Satsang, a firm conviction regarding this fact has been cultivated. Why, then, does the blissful jivatma still associate with the indriyas, antahkaran, etc. while engaged in the worship and remembrance of Paramatma and thereby become miserable due to the influence of disturbing thoughts?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "Many people become realized yogis, many become omniscient, many become devas, and thus attain countless types of greatness, including the highest state of enlightenment. All this is achieved through the force of the upasana of God. Without upasana, though, nothing can be accomplished. Therefore, the distinction between atma and non-atma cannot be realized by merely understanding the distinction as given in the scriptures; nor can it be realized by listening to discourses from a senior sadhu and deciding in one's mind, 'I shall now distinguish between atma and non-atma.' Rather, it is the extent of a person's faith in his Ishtadev – God – that determines how much distinction between atma and non-atma he cultivates. In fact, without using the strength of his Ishtadev, no spiritual endeavours can be fulfilled..."

DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF THIS VACHANAMRUT

■ In this Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan teaches us the rudiments of spiritual endeavour. Nishkulanad Swami has said:

Jem so so shunya sārā kare, pan ek na kare jo āgale,

To sarvālo shāno māndshe, te kare chhe kālap kāgale.

“Writing 100 nice zeros without 1 in the beginning,

“Is nothing but a worthless exercise of spoiling a piece of paper.”

■ Zeros without number 1 in the beginning have no value.

Likewise, *upasana* is of primary importance on the spiritual path. *Upasana* is like the number 1, while other spiritual endeavours like fasting, going on pilgrimage, doing *mala*, etc. are like zeros – having no value without *upasana*.

GREATNESS OF MUKTANAND SWAMI – THE QUESTIONER IN THIS VACHANAMRUT

■ Muktanand Swami was an ideal spiritual aspirant. He has asked 92 different questions in the entire Vachanamrut. These questions haven’t been asked to show off his intellect and knowledge or merely to collect information. These questions, in fact, mirror the hurdles that he had faced on his spiritual journey.

Once, Maharaj asked Sura Khachar, “Do disturbing thoughts arise in your mind?” Sura Khachar replied, “How can they arise after attaining your divine company?” When Maharaj asked the same question to Muktanand Swami, Swami grabbed a handful of sand. Then, while slowly releasing the sand grains, he said, “I encounter as many disturbing thoughts as the number of sand grains falling from my fist.”

Does this mean that Sura Khachar was superior to Muktanand Swami? No. Sura Khachar, in fact, was completely oblivious of the disturbing thoughts arising in his mind; he was like a

student who celebrates even if he barely scrapes a pass class in his examination. On the other hand, Muktanand Swami belonged to the top class of students who feel sorrowful even if one mark is lost.

■ In competitive swimming, swimmers shave off their entire body to reduce friction. This is because they pay minute attention to even the most subtle dynamics – every millisecond counts.

Similarly, Muktanand Swami could discern even the most subtle of worldly thoughts springing in his mind; he constantly endeavoured to prevent such worldly thoughts from infiltrating his heart. Such a great sadhu in his own right is asking here, “I have a firm conviction that I am *atma*, yet, why do thoughts related to worldly pleasures arise in my mind? Why am I not able to experience the bliss of God?”

In reply, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “Nothing can be accomplished without *upasana*. No spiritual endeavour can be fulfilled without the strength of faith in one’s God.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF UPASANA

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan has suggested two means or ways on the spiritual path:

Means to please God: dharma (discipline), *jnan* (spiritual knowledge), *tapa* (austerities), *seva* (selfless service), ahimsa (non-violence), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), etc.

Means to destroy the causal body (*karan sharir*): *upasana* (words synonymous to *upasana* are *ashro*, *nishtha*, *nishchay*).

■ Thus, to destroy *karan sharir* (or causal body) there is only one means – *upasana*. Only the strength or power of *upasana* can help one to cross the *bhavsagar* (ocean of *maya*, and cycle of births and deaths).

One can easily swim across a pond, river or channel, but to cross the Atlantic Ocean one needs a ship. Likewise, the time of death is also like an ocean. At the time of death, any person – whether *atma*-realized or not – requires

the help of a ship in the form of *upasana*. Only firm refuge in God is helpful at that time. *Atma*-realization alone is not useful (Gadhada I 61 and Gadhada II 35).

■ Gunatitanand Swami has said, “The power of *maya* is such that it devours even the virtue of detachment and the knowledge of *atma*” (Swamini Vato 6.6).

In the past, rishis like Ekalshrungi, Parashar, Vishwamitra, Saubhari, Brahma, Shiv and others had understood the notion of *atma-nishtha* (i.e. to behave as *atma*). Yet, ego, lust, etc. had overwhelmed these rishis.

One is doomed to fall if one tries to ride a horse merely on the basis of reading books on horse riding in a library. Similarly, one cannot attain *atma*-realization merely by reading scriptures or by listening to spiritual discourses about *atma*.

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan states categorically in Gadhada III 36 that *atma* and Brahman cannot be realized without *upasana*. Just as no sour, sweet or salty taste can be felt by licking the sky even for hundreds of years, though Sankhya and Yoga mention about realization of *atma* and Brahman without cultivating *upasana*, without *upasana* such realization cannot be attained.

Can a lowly person ever become a king if he keeps on merely saying, “I am the king, I am the king...”? No. But what if the same lowly person is adopted by a king or is born as a prince in his next birth? Likewise, *atma*-realization cannot be attained merely by saying, “I am *atma*, I am *atma*...” For realization of *atma* and Brahman one needs to seek refuge in God, one needs to cultivate firm *upasana* of God.

■ In Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 9, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says only one who has derived strength from one’s conviction in God (i.e. *upasana*) is a staunch *satsangi*.

Further, he says in Gadhada I 56 that the distinction one develops between *atma* and non-*atma* commensurates with one’s conviction or



upasana or faith in his Ishtadev.

FOUR STEPS TOWARDS DEVELOPING FIRM UPASANA OF GOD

■ Developing Firm Conviction in the Manifest Form of God

This means developing a doubtless conviction in the manifest form of God.

Just as after recognizing a neem tree once, one never feels skeptical about its identity even if one is overcome by lust, anger or avarice, similarly, developing doubtless conviction means regardless of whether one experiences *samadhi* or not (or even if one is overcome by lust, anger or avarice) one’s conviction in the manifest form of God never wavers.

■ Accepting Firm Refuge in God

After developing conviction one has to seek refuge in God.

Just as after finding a neem tree, one must sit in its shade to avoid the scorching heat of the sun. Similarly, after developing the conviction of God, to attain peace amid the turmoil of this world, one must seek refuge in God.

■ Cultivating Firm Upasana of God

Cultivating firm *upasana* means to serve God by thought, mind and deed, and by obeying his commands.

After sitting below a neem tree, to cure one’s diseased condition, one needs to consume neem leaves. Similarly, to become *nirvasanik*, i.e. free of worldly desires, one needs to strictly obey the commands of God.

■ Acquiring the Virtues of God

This means acquiring the attributes of remaining unbound from the shackles of *maya*.

Even the sweat of a person who consumes neem leaves begins to smell of *neem*. Similarly, a devotee who imbibes the aforesaid three steps begins to acquire virtues similar to God.

THE ESSENTIALS OF UPASANA

■ Swaminarayan Is God

- He is supreme (*sarvopari*)
- He is the all-doer (*karta*)
- He eternally possesses a definite form (*sakar*)
- He manifests eternally on earth (*pragat*).

■ Gunatitanand Swami Is Mul Aksharbrahman

■ Gunatit Satpurush Is the Gateway to Liberation

At present, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the Gunatit Satpurush.

■ Intense love for the living Gunatit Satpurush is the only means for attaining *atma*-realization, realization of God's glory and realization of God.

ELABORATION OF THE ESSENTIALS OF UPASANA

1. Bhagwan Swaminarayan Is Supreme God

This point will be explained in detail in future explanations on Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 9.

2. God Is the All-Doer

■ In Vachanamrut, Kariyani 10, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that understanding only God to be the all-doer is the greatest means to liberation.

■ Describing the glory of God in 'Orda na pad', Premanand Swami says:

*Aganit vishva ni re, utpatti, pālan, pralay thāy;
Māri marji vinā re, koi thi tarnu nav todāy.*

"A mere wish of God may evolve, blossom or annihilate infinite realms;

"However, without my wish, nobody can even pluck a small blade of grass."

■ Muktanand Swami was once travelling with Brahmanand Swami in Gujarat. A malicious

mendicant caught them and began to sharpen his knife to chop off their nose and ears. When Brahmanand Swami saw this, he got worried. On the other hand, Muktanand Swami was absolutely unruffled. He calmly said, "Whatever will happen, will only be due to God's wish." And truly – confirming Muktanand Swami's certitude about God being the all-doer – Raghav Jat, a stranger, intervened and set free the swamis from the clutches of the mendicant.

■ In 1995, in Mumbai, Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami of the Ramanuja faith came to offer his heartfelt wishes to Swamishri on his 75th Birthday Celebrations (Amrut Mahotsav).

After having glimpses of the Swaminarayan Nagar (festive township), he came to meet Swamishri. He observed that Swamishri seemed soft and gentle like a flower. He remarked, "You appear to be at ease and absolutely tranquil in spite of such a mega celebration and other responsibilities."

Swamishri replied, "During the Mahabharat war, Arjun remained carefree and slept peacefully at night because Krishna was there to take care and worry. Similarly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan takes care of all my worries, and so, I do not feel worried at all." This response of Swamishri mirrors his conviction in God as the all-doer.

3. God Eternally Possesses a Divine, Human-like Form

■ According to Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 40, *upasana* means having a firm conviction that God eternally possesses a form. One who has such firm understanding is considered to have *upasana*.

Maharaj was once listening to the scriptures of the *shushka-vedant* philosophy to know its beliefs. In those scriptures God is described as formless. Upon listening to the description, Maharaj became deeply distressed. Tears rolled down his eyes. His *pagh* loosened, yet he took no heed of it. He became so upset that he refused to talk or even look at anyone.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that one who believes God to be formless is a sinner greater than one who has committed the five grave sins (Gadhada II 39).

- Just as the Sun possesses a definite form (spherical), while its light has no definite form, similarly, God always possesses a definite (human) form, while the glow of God is formless.

- We perform *murti* puja because God forever resides in the eight types of *murtis* and in the Sant – the Gunatit Satpurush – who is the manifest form of God.

4. God Manifests Eternally

- At no time does Mother Earth remain barren without God, i.e. God or the God-realized Sadhu takes birth and remains present in human form at all times on earth.

- After Bhagwan Swaminarayan's departure to Akshardham, Gunatitanand Swami was passing through a field in Lakshmi Vadi. Upon seeing the grass by a stream of water, he thought sadly, "The life of this grass is water. Likewise, my life is Maharaj. But now, he is no more." Thus, out of his grief of separation, he fainted. Maharaj quickly appeared in a divine form and said, "Swami! What is this? I have gone nowhere. I am forever with you; present within you."

Thus, Bhagwan Swaminarayan forever remains present on this earth through a succession of the Gunatit Satpurush. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the present Gunatit Satpurush.

5. Gunatitanand Swami Is Mul Aksharbrahman

This point will be explained in detail in elaborations on Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71.

6. Gunatit Satpurush Is the Gateway to Liberation

The *upasana* of God comes to fruition only through profound love for the Gunatit Satpurush. Thus, to bring *upasana* to fruition one ought to have deep and abiding love for the Gunatit Satpurush (Vartal 11).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A DEVOTEE HAVING AFFECTION FOR GOD

- One who has genuine affection for one's beloved never disobeys the wishes of the beloved. For example, when Akrurji came with a chariot to take Shri Krishna to Mathura, the *gopis* decided to lie down in front of the chariot, and not allow Krishna to leave. However, when Krishna was about to leave, the *gopis* saw in Krishna's eyes his desire to leave. Consequently, none of the *gopis* took even a step forward to stop Krishna. All of them remained far away. They feared, "If we do not act according to Krishna's liking, his affection for us will diminish."

In spite of having immense love for Krishna, out of their grief of separation from Krishna, the *gopis* yearned for him in Gokul. Though Mathura is just nearby, they never went there to see him. Such is the character of genuine love.

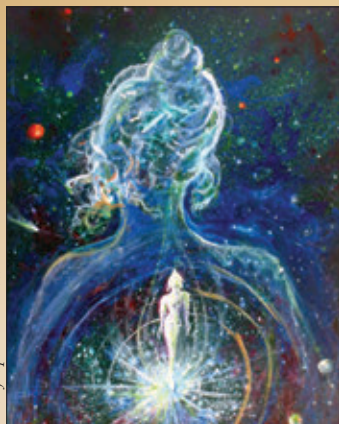
- In Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 51, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, "One who follows the commands of the Satpurush is behaving as the *atma*."

To behave as *atma* means to maintain one's *atma*'s sovereignty over the senses and the inner faculties of mind, intellect, brooding and ego. In simple words, to behave as *atma* means not allowing the senses and inner faculties to dominate one's life.

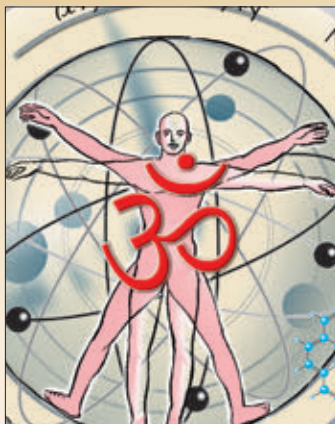
ESSENCE

One behaves as the *atma* by obeying all commands of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Also, steadfastly obeying all his commands invokes deep and abiding love for him. Eventually, such deep love brings the *upasana* to fruition and leads to *atma*-realization and the realization of God.





The ultimate aim of yoga is to attain God-realization



There is no conflict between science and spirituality in Hinduism



Om Shantihi, Shantihi, Shantihi

FAQs On Hinduism

From *Hinduism, An Introduction*

by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave,

published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath

1. After saying prayers why is *shanti* chanted thrice?

Shanti means peace. Generally after saying prayers one says *Om Shantihi, Shantihi, Shantihi*. *Shanti* is said thrice to express an intense desire for peace and to be liberated from misery and obstacles. All sorrows and pain come from three sources: *adhidaivika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhyatmika*.

- i. *Adhidaivika* means the operation of natural forces by devas which are responsible for earthquakes, floods, famines, volcanic eruptions and other natural calamities. They are all due to displeasure of the devas (nature gods) towards mankind.
- ii. *Adhibhautika* is due to animals and man. The latter creates war and pollution, and performs crime and other painful and cruel acts.
- iii. *Adhyatmika* is created because of the mental state and attitudes like anger, frustration, etc.

The devout pray to God to free them from

such problems or obstacles in their daily work or special tasks. Therefore the word *Shantihi* is chanted thrice. The first addresses the unseen forces of devas, the second *Shantihi* is chanted softer and directed towards man and the surrounding circumstances and the final *Shantihi* is chanted the softest because it is addressed directly to one's own mind.

2. What is Yoga?

Yoga literally means 'union' or 'to join'. The ultimate aim prescribed in the *Yoga Sutras* by Maharshi Patanjali is to attain rapport with God or realization of God. He further describes that yoga also deals with the holistic development of an individual: physical, mental and spiritual. Gradually the person's actions and thoughts attain harmony with the ultimate Divine personality.

There are several types of yoga, some of which are Karma Yoga or yoga of action which is for people who are active; Bhakti Yoga for emotional aspirants inclined towards devotion to God; Raja Yoga for persons of mystical temperament; Jnana



Lakshmi: Goddess of wealth is worshipped by Hindus



Durga: Goddess of divine power

Yoga for people of rational and philosophical temperaments; Hatha Yoga deals with breathing and body postures to purify the inner body systems; Laya or Kundalini Yoga deals with awakening the Kundalini power from the base of the spine; and Mantra Yoga deals with recitation of mantras for self-elevation and protection.

Yoga may either mean a set of physical exercises (Hatha Yoga) or a system of meditation and concentration (Raja Yoga). The latter is also often called Patanjala Yoga which gives less importance to physical exercises (asanas) but insists on ethical preparation (*yama-niyama*) and a process of internalization (*sanyama*) in order to elevate the soul to attain God-realization.

Maharshi Patanjali gives details about Ashtanga Yoga, which includes physical and mental exercises for self-control, in his *Yoga Sutras*. The eight steps are *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

The *Yoga Sutras* state that prolonged practice of yoga generates certain extraordinary powers (*siddhis*), which one should not aspire for because they hinder spiritual advancement.

3. Is there a conflict between Hinduism and Science?

Hinduism has never been in conflict with science. The Mundaka Upanishad classifies knowledge into two groups: *para* (spiritual) and *apara*

(temporal)¹ and the Katha Upanishad describes the paths of *shreya* (spiritual progress) and *preya* (material). Science caters to the material needs and religion serves the spiritual needs of man. Both belong to two different domains; one based on reason and the other on faith. They are complementary to each other in Hinduism, yet spiritual knowledge is considered to be superior. The great rishi-scientists of India were wedded to spirituality and made extraordinary scientific discoveries and inventions.

4. What is the status of women?

Hinduism regards all of creation to be pervaded by the Divine. All are equal. No man or woman is high or low. However, for the purpose of spiritual elevation and happiness the Hindu shastras have prescribed a code of moral conduct for both men and women. The segregation of men and women in places of worship and in spiritual sadhana does not mean discrimination or marginalization of women. It is a discipline that facilitates one's focus on the Divine and provides impetus to spiritual endeavours.

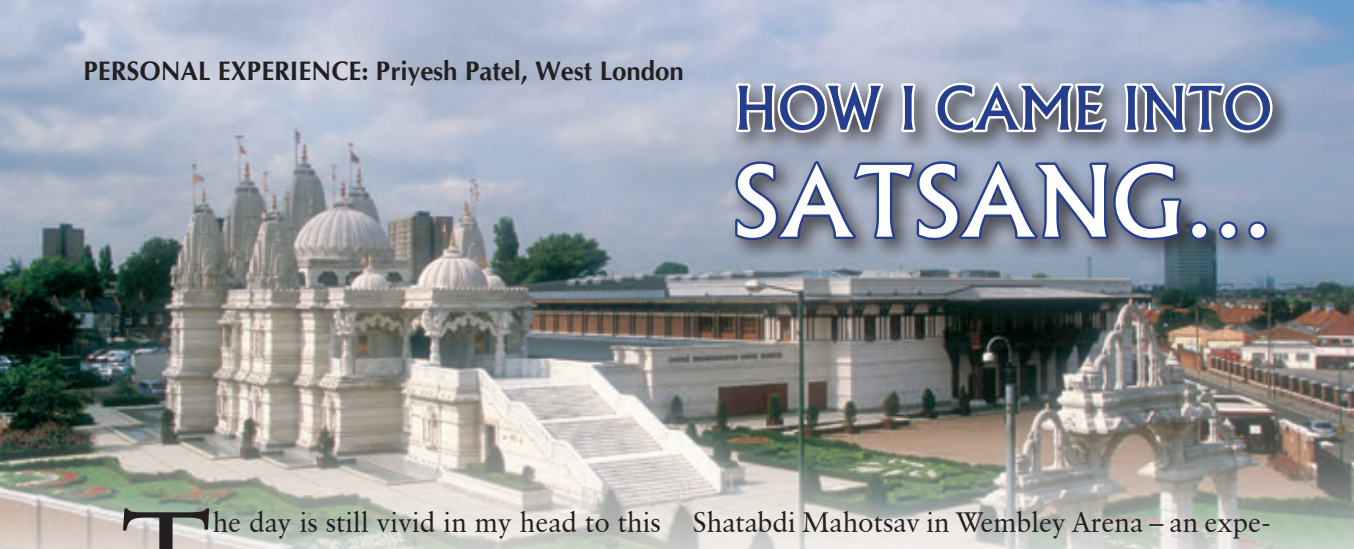
The Hindus revere femininity in the forms of rivers, land, etc. They worship Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, Sita, an ideal devotee, and Durga, a form of *shakti* or power.

In Vedic times Gargi was a great female scholar, and Maitreyi shunned material wealth to attain self-realization. Andal, Mirabai and others form the repertoire of female spiritual icons in Hinduism.

In Hinduism the husband and wife complement each other, but are not meant to compete with one another. The wife is also called a *sahad-harmacharini* or companion in the observance of dharma. ♦

1. Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.4 & 5.

HOW I CAME INTO SATSANG...



The day is still vivid in my head to this day – the day I revealed the intention of becoming the Mayor of London in a National Bal-Balika Shibir in 2008. I still recollect the somewhat surprised faces of those around me, some laughing, others genuinely impressed. At the time, I did not really introspect and think about whether I really wanted to go into politics. I never read the news. I wasn't big in anything – just the odd cricket game in the garden and life passed by just fine for me.

Before I came into Satsang, I was still a practicing Hindu and the transformation into satsang was not as difficult as it could have been. Having no idea about philosophical differences or the history of Swaminarayanism, I learnt the basics of Satsang such as the guru *parampara*, *shlokas* and *dhun*.

When it came to *niyams*, I did not eat meat, eggs or fish even before entering satsang. However, I was already acquainted to the idea of *arti*, *thal*, shastras, avatars, festivals and traditions. But little did I know what was to unfold as I was going to change from a casually practicing Hindu into a *satsangi*.

In 2004, I briefly recall having the darshan of Swamishri when he visited but I did not really know who he really was. In 2007, I was fortunate to have the darshan of Swamishri again at the London mandir. In 2007, I also had the darshan of Swamishri eating, doing exercise and generally interacting with devotees as well as doing *sabha*. My family was graced enough to attend the BAPS

Shatabdi Mahotsav in Wembley Arena – an experience that I was never to forget.

In August 2011, in Mumbai, I finally had darshan of Swamishri face-to-face after realizing his full *mahima*. It was a unique experience for me as I would finally get his darshan after four long years of waiting. It was well worth it because I sat in a good place and was only a metre away from his wheelchair whilst he was interacting with devotees. Also, a sadhu pointed me out to Swami Bapa, explaining my ambitions. Swami Bapa waved his hand at me twice and he had a warm, radiant smile on his divine face. On 31 August, due to Swamishri's boundless grace, I attended the New Jersey Akshardham Shilanyas Mahotsav at the Mumbai mandir, where I had the constant darshan of Swamishri for two hours. He performed his puja in the central *mandap* of the mandir and the atmosphere was full of infinite bliss. I felt as if I had just entered a haven full of experts in all fields, from medicine, law and banking to accountancy, economics and English.

Initially, the change in me was slow as I was just settling in. But in 2008, I attended the National Bal Summer Camp and from then on, I felt I had to make some real changes in my life.

I now do daily puja, observe fast on *ekadashi*, attend weekly *sabhas*, read satsang books and follow many other *niyams* as well. I have also passed my GCSE in Hinduism with A* grade and am very proud of it. I am also a *bal karyakar* and so help

(Contd. on pg. 58)

93RD BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj

10 December 2013, Sarangpur, India



For the first time in 23 years Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *janmajayanti* (birthday celebration) was held in his physical presence in Sarangpur. On 10 December, thousands of devotees from all over the world had gathered, full of anticipation and excitement.

At about 6.00 p.m., Swamishri arrived at the mandir for darshan. An *annakut* prepared by sadhus had been arranged before all the *mur-tis*. Swamishri then graced the main assembly with his divine presence. The atmosphere rang with the applause of thousands of devotees as they welcomed Swamishri on stage. The theme of the assembly was 'Swamishri's Upkar' – what Swamishri has done for the devotees, society and ultimately for the betterment of the world. He has

inspired thousands of people to lead an addiction-free and God-centred life, he has spread peace throughout society even in difficult times, he has showered selfless love upon thousands, he has instilled immeasurable faith in the hearts of devotees and he has established the strong conviction of ultimate liberation within the minds of even young children. These aspects of Swamishri's life and work were depicted in the assembly through speeches and short videos, as well as a skit that described real life examples of devotees who were present in the assembly.

The assembly concluded with *mantra push-panjali* and *samuh arti*. After being garlanded by senior sadhus, Swamishri went to the Shastriji Maharaj Smruti Mandir for darshan. ♦



Pujya Kothari Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Jantral



Pujya Mahant Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Saring

New BAPS Hari Mandirs

JINDVA, DEHGAM DISTRICT

Jindva is located in the Dehgam district of Ahmedabad. Satsang was established here following the visit of Dr Swami in 2000. Thereafter, regular visits by sadhus nurtured its growth.

In Sarangpur, on 27 May 2013, Swamishri performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.

On 22 October, 251 *yajman* couples participated in the Yagna for World Peace. Then, a grand *nagar yatra* was held.

On 23 October, Tyagvallabh Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

AMBLI-BOPAL, AHMEDABAD

The western outskirts of Ahmedabad city have witnessed tremendous growth over the past two decades.

As a result, the villages in that area have been incorporated into the city limits. These include the villages of Ambli, Bopal and Ghuma. Satsang, too, was nurtured in this area by the regular visits of BAPS sadhus.

In 2002, a *hari* mandir was consecrated on the border of Ghuma and Bopal. With the continued growth of satsang, the need for a bigger *hari* mandir was realized.

Land for the new mandir was acquired in Ambli-Bopal and on 29 June 2012, Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *khat vidhi* for the mandir.

In Sarangpur, on 18 October 2013, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new mandir.

On 26 October 2013, over 200 *yajman* couples participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a grand *nagar yatra* was held through the streets of Ambli-Bopal.

On 27 October 2013, the *murtis* were ritually consecrated in the new mandir by Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami.

JANTRAL, KAALOL DISTRICT, PANCHMAHAL REGION

In 1975, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami had planted the seeds of satsang. In 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Jantral during his *vicharan* in the Panchmahal and Dahod regions. Thereafter, through the efforts of the *sadguru* sadhus, and Divyaswarup Swami and Mahapurush Swami Satsang was nurtured. In 1993, Dr Swami established the regular weekly satsang *sabha*. Through the dedicated efforts of locally residing devotees and those abroad, a *hari* mandir was built.

In Sarangpur on 7 November 2013, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.

On 14 November a Yagna for World Peace was held at the Jantral Primary School.

Then, on 15 November 2013, Pujya Kothari



Devotees during the *pratishtha* assembly, Saring



Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Kanjeta

Bhaktipriya Swami performed the consecration rituals of the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Jantral.

SARING, KARJAN DISTRICT, VADODARA REGION

Saring is the birthplace of Bhairamdas Swami, who, like, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was initiated into the sadhu order by Ramanand Swami. It is also the birthplace of Manubhai Thakar, a dedicated devotee of Shastriji Maharaj. Satsang in Saring began by the efforts of Manibhai of Salad village.

On Posh *sud* 9, V.S. 2006, Manubhai hosted a *parayan* in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. Manubhai served the satsang with great devotion and earned the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Regular visits by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj continued to nurture satsang.

Through the efforts of local devotees, a *hari* mandir was built.

In Ahmedabad, on 2 November 2012, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis*.

On 26 November 2013, a Yagna for World Peace was held in which 375 *yajman* couples participated. And on 27 November 2013, the *murtis* were ritually consecrated in the *hari* mandir by Mahant Swami.

KANJETA, DHAANPUR DISTRICT, DAHOD REGION

Kanjeta is a tribal village at the base of the splendid Ratanmahal Hill. The area is renowned

for its natural beauty and is also inhabited by bears.

Satsang began here in 1980 by the efforts of Divyaswarup Swami. From 1993, Mahapurush Swami nurtured the satsang here. The tribals became *satsangis* and shed their dependence of addictions and superstitions.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for this *hari* mandir on 9 April 2012 in Sarangpur.

On 26 November 2013, 200 *yajman* couples participated in the *yagna*. Then, in the afternoon, a grand *nagar yatra* was held throughout the village.

On 27 November, Ghanshyamcharan Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

ARAD, HALOL DISTRICT, PANCHMAHAL REGION

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Divyaswarup Swami established satsang in Arad in 1984. Thereafter, Mahapurush Swami nurtured the satsang here.

In 1985, Swamishri visited Arad and blessed, "Satsang will flourish in the village and everyone will attain great happiness."

On 7 November 2013, Swamishri performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur.

On 27 November 2013, 360 *yajman* couples participated in the Yagna for World Peace. Thereafter, a grand *nagar yatra* was held. At



Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Arad night, BAPS youths of Borsad presented a kirtan bhakti programme.

On 28 November, Ghanshyamcharan Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

KALIKUNDNAGAR, ANAND

Satsang began in Kalikundnagar, a suburb of Anand city, in 1995.



BAPS *hari* mandir, Kalikundnagar, Anand

Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* for the new mandir on 18 October 2013 in Sarangpur.

On 29 November 2013, 710 *yajman* couples participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a grand *nagar yatra* was held.

On 30 November, Mahant Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir. ♦

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both his hands to him. Everyone was shocked to see his scalded skin with angry boils. A distressed Muktanand Swami asked, “Maharaj, what has happened? How did you get your hands burnt when there is no fire here?”

“First apply oil to my hands,” Maharaj told Brahmachari. Mukund Brahmachari gently applied oil to soothe the burning sensation. Then he placed a pillow in Maharaj’s lap so that Maharaj could rest his hands on it. Shri Hari was pleased with his attendant’s meticulous services. Maharaj then addressed all, “Kashidas Mota of Bochasan is seated here before me. He has come for my darshan. His house in Bochasan caught fire. To extinguish the flames I had to go there in a divine form. While dousing the fire my hands got burnt.”

Shri Hari’s revelation astonished the sadhus and devotees. Kashidas’ eyes began raining tears and he spoke emotionally, “My Lord, how much you care for me! I am unable to do anything for you.” Kashidas fell at Maharaj’s feet and broke down further.

Shri Hari soothed him, “Kashidas, it is my promise to save others. Since you remember me by doing bhajan, I, too, remember you. This is the type of bond that God has for his devotees. So, I have not done anything new by dousing the flames in your house.” Then Maharaj instructed Kashidas, “Go to Bochasan tomorrow and discard whatever is charred. I sat by your window so it has not been destroyed even though it may appear to be so. Keep that window as it is.”²

The next day Kashidas took Maharaj’s blessings and left for Bochasan. A few days later Maharaj celebrated Bhim Ekadashi in Gadhada and discoursed to the assembly.

SHRI HARI’S UNIQUE ASSOCIATION

The new year of 1822 (A.S. 1878) dawned in Gadhada. On that day the rains blessed the earth. By now, Shri Hari had recuperated totally from

2. At that time Maharaj was seated by the window and was dousing the fire. Many devotees in Bochasan had darshan of Maharaj putting out the flames. Kashidas’ house still stands today in Bochasan and the burnt window is still as it was.

his illness. Often when Maharaj was seated in his room, Akshar Ordi, Jivuba, Laduba, Panchuba, Naniba and other women devotees would sit before him for his darshan. Both sisters, Laduba and Jivuba, believed themselves to be intensely fortunate and blessed for having Shri Hari's association and darshan. Shri Hari reaffirmed their faith, saying, "You have the association of the supreme God in flesh and blood. From him have emanated the avatars of Ram, Krishna and others and thereafter merged into his form."

This revelation from Shriji Maharaj himself inspired joy in the hearts of the two sisters. They often shared their faith with others, "Only we and the *akshar muktas* of Akshardham have been blessed with this divine association. No other *muktas* of other abodes have Maharaj's company."

JIVA KHACHAR'S COMPLAINT ABOUT DADA KHACHAR

Daily Shri Hari attended the morning and evening spiritual discourses and also spoke to the assembly. He celebrated the festival of Janmashtmi in Gadhada.

One day, Jiva Khachar entered into an altercation with Dada Khachar on a social matter. Subsequently, Jiva Khachar became intensely resentful towards Dada Khachar. He decided to lodge a complaint to the King of Bhavnagar. Shri Hari perceived his malicious resolution and called him, "Bapu, Dada Khachar is like your son. So, you must have an open mind." Jiva Khachar, however, remained silent. Then Shri Hari explicitly commented, "Bapu, you have decided to complain against Dada to the King of Bhavnagar, but you will not succeed. Therefore, you must give up your resolve."

Shri Hari's words inflamed his thoughts all the more. He replied in a huff, "Maharaj, I wish to go to Bhavnagar for some other work. There's no way that I can cancel it." Maharaj replied gently, "You may do as you wish, but you'll not succeed." In response Jiva Khachar walked away, pretending

that he had not heard Shriji Maharaj's words.

Jiva Khachar went home and got ready to leave for Bhavnagar. His daughter, Amulaba, asked "Bapu, are you going to Bhavnagar?" Her father answered, "Yes daughter, I'm going to put an end to the arrogance of Dada. Amulaba remained quiet. She was fed up with her father's enmity for Dada Khachar. She knew about her father's jealous and stubborn nature. She breathed a heavy sigh out of her disapproval for his action. When Jiva Khachar heard her sigh while saddling his horse, he asserted, "Amula, whether you like it or not but I want to take Dada to task! Maharaj always favours him more than me. Now, I'd like to see what Maharaj can do about it!" Then Jiva Khachar put the soles of his feet into the stirrups and dug them into the horse's sides. The horse took off rapidly from the *darbar*.

JIVA KHACHAR FALLS FROM HIS HORSE

Shri Hari smiled when he got news at Dada's *darbar* that Jiva Khachar had left for Bhavnagar. He said, "He'll have to return soon!" In that instant Jiva Khachar's horse tripped and fell over on the way to Mandavdhar, not far from Gadhada. Jiva Khachar's foot got stuck in the stirrup and he was dragged along with the horse. He started bleeding profusely and was badly hurt. As news reached his home, his men came and took Jiva Khachar carefully back home.

When Shri Hari learnt of the accident he went to see him with Muktanand Swami. Jiva Khachar was lying on his bed, crestfallen. Jiva Khachar folded his hands when Maharaj arrived. Shri Hari gently spread his hands over his body to soothe him and bless him for a quick recovery. Maharaj said, "Bapu, I had told you not to go, but you did not heed my words. Now, try to retract from your worldly affairs. Curtail your anger, lust and jealousy; only then will you enjoy the bliss of satsang." ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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



India

Satsang Shibirs

1 September to 1 November 2013, India

Between September and November 2013 over 54,000 devotees participated in the one-day Satsang Shibirs held at BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai. Based on the theme 'Jivan Mangal Banavie' – 'Let Us make Our Life Pious', the devotees received spiritual guidance from *sadguru* sadhus, and other experienced and learned sadhus. Five main topics were addressed in each *shibir* on how to lead a pious life: observance of *dharma-niyams*, devotion to God, Satsang knowledge, shedding of *swabhavs* and profound attachment to the Aksharbrahman Satpurush. At the conclusion of the *shibirs*, devotees undertook resolutions to observe daily in their quest for spiritual progress.

SURAT YOUTH SHIBIR

6-10 November 2013, Sarangpur, India



Over 3,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of Surat attended the annual Youth Shibir held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur. The criteria for selection of youths to the *shibir* included having at least 80% attendance to the weekly youth assemblies in Surat and passing three tests based on the *Jnanamrut* booklet.

Based on the theme 'Lyo Rajipo' – 'Receive the Blessings', the *shibir* began with darshan of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, during which Swamishri was honoured with garlands and shawls lovingly prepared by the youths. Also, 125 youths combined to perform a spectacular welcome dance. During the *shibir*, the youths were inspired by speeches of *sadguru* sadhus, and other experienced and learned sadhus. The *shibir* also featured motivational and theme-oriented skits, debates, video shows and dances on topics such as family unity, celibacy in youth, necessity of *upasana* for liberation, attachment to the eternal Gunatit Satpurush, satsang reading and satsang exams. In the evenings, the youths presented two dramas: 'Turning Point', which depicted the problems arising from indiscriminate use of e-media, and 'Dilrubano Taar', which demonstrated the importance of attachment to the *satpurush*. The highlight of the *shibir* was the daily darshan of Swamishri. The youths departed from the *shibir*, re-energized to sincerely practice satsang in their daily lives.

BHAVNAGAR YOUTH SHIBIR

9-13 November 2013, Sankari, India



Around 850 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of Bhavnagar participated in the annual *shibir* which was held at the BAPS Mandir in Sankari, Gujarat, in the

presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami.

This year's *shibir* was based on the theme 'Youths! Become Prepared – Shastri Narayanswarupdas'. Over the past several decades, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has written hundreds of thousands of letters to devotees all over the world to inspire observance of *agna* and *niyams* and strengthen *upasana* and *nishtha*.

The *shibir* focused on these messages through speeches and question-answer sessions with Kothari Swami and other learned and experienced sadhus. The theme was further re-inforced through discussions, audio-video presentations, message-oriented activities and cultural performances.

The youths also went for darshan to the BAPS Mandirs in Bharuch, Navsari, Tithal and Silvassa. On 13 November 2013, the youths were blessed by the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur, during which they presented a traditional dance, skit and offered their prayers. The entire *shibir* experience motivated the youths to practice satsang more sincerely in their daily lives.

30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, 1-3 December 2013, Mumbai, India



The 30th anniversary of the consecration of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, was celebrated with devotion and fond recollections of satsang in Mumbai. The 'Mumbai Mandir Tridashabdi Mahotsav' comprised assemblies and puja ceremonies.

Over 18,000 devotees and well-wishers attended the first day's public assembly held at Bhakti Park in Vadala, Mumbai. Based on the five topics of Prarambha, Pratishtha, Purusharth, Pravrutti and Prerak, the history, activities and contributions of the mandir were depicted through thrilling dramas, energetic dances, creative video shows and other presentations.

On the second day, around 3,000 devotees participated in a grand Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony held at Bhakti Park.

On the third day, a Vedic *maha-abhishek* ritual was offered to the consecrated *murtis* at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Dadar using 32 different worship items.

The celebrations were graced by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

UK & Europe

FAITH LEADERS GATHER FOR PRAYER MEETING ON 'SERVICE TO HUMANITY' 19 November 2013, London, UK



Local leaders from six faiths gathered at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, to share readings on the theme of 'Service to Humanity'.

The event was part of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's observance of National Inter Faith Week to strengthen good interfaith relations at all levels, and to increase awareness of and understanding between people of different faith

communities in the UK.

Each faith leader presented readings and reflections from their respective sacred texts and traditions on the theme of serving humanity. After each five-minute reading, a minute was spent in silent prayer and contemplation.

The respected presenters were: Rabbi Yehuda Black – Kenton Synagogue, Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala – Head Priest of the London Buddhist Vihara and the current Chief Sangha Nayaka of Great Britain, Imam Abdullah Salloo – Islamic Cultural Centre, Wembley, Dr Harshad Sanghrajka – Institute of Jainology, Father Andrew Hammond – Church of England, Willesden, Satyavratdas Swami – BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden

After the meeting, the guests took time to appreciate a series of banners expressing Hindu wisdom related to interfaith harmony and highlighting the work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in reaching out in dialogue to world religious leaders and also welcoming them to the Mandir.

BECOME ADARSH: PERSONAL SATSANG DEVELOPMENT (PHASE THREE) **30 November & 1 December 2013, UK**



The third and final phase of the ‘Become Adarsh’ project – a spiritual development programme designed for youths in the UK – was held on 30 November and 1 December 2013 in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandirs in Leicester and London, respectively.

Both days began with a special *sabha* in the

morning to welcome more than 400 candidates. Following the ritual inauguration with the lighting of *divas*, Satyavrat Swami addressed the audience, explaining the spiritually balanced life that is fostered through the project.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami provided further encouragement, speaking of the improved understanding of shastras that can be acquired. He also underlined that becoming ‘adarsh’ – ideal – is a continual, day by day process of spiritual improvement.

Thereafter, the morning assessments began with candidates reciting passages from Hindu texts, while also presenting their learning of the traditional styles of scriptural reading.

Later in the day, participants had the opportunity to demonstrate their various skills across a variety of disciplines, including public speaking – with short speeches, *nirupans*, *akhyans* and *sankirtans* – mono-acting, singing, and also playing musical instruments.

Group competitions included dramas, kirtans and presentations, underlining the spirit of teamwork that had been developed during the project.

The outstanding talent displayed on both days by the youths far exceeded expectations.

Above all, the Become Adarsh project has helped youths to strengthen their spirituality through knowledge as well as values, practices and the drive to make continuous personal improvement. The aim was always to help young adults lead a value-based, God-centric life guided by the *adarsh* (ideal) of Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself.

ACHIEVEMENTS

On 1 October 2013, Dr Jayendra Patel of Leicester, England, was appointed to the Board of Governors of the UK General Dental Council. At age 32, he is the youngest ever member of this body, which regulates all dental professionals within the UK. Jayendra’s other notable achievements include: Best Young Dentist Award 2010 (North East Region), Best New Dental Practice



in the UK 2010, Best Specialist Referral Practice 2011 and 2nd Most Attractive Practice UK 2011. He is also an examiner for the MFDS examinations at the Royal College of

Surgeons & Physicians of Glasgow. In addition, Jayendra has a keen interest in dental education and has published research as primary author in the prestigious British Dental Journal (BDJ), Orthodontic Update and The Faculty Dental Journal (FDJ).

For many years he has been an active member of Leicester Yuvak *mandal* and attributes his success to the blessings of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the support of his parents.

USA

AKSHARDHAM JAGATIPITH SHILA PUJAN CEREMONY,

22-24 November 2013, Robbinsville, NJ, USA



Devotees from across North America gathered to participate in the first stone-laying ceremony of the Akshardham Mahamandir in Robbinsville, NJ. At this event, the first stone of the *jagatipith* was laid at the base of the *mahamandir*. The *jagatipith* is the symbolic throne on which the mandir will eventually reside; it provides strength and support to the *mahamandir* and serves as an integral platform. The three-day celebrations consisted of five sessions of sacred ceremonies filled with prayers and Vedic rituals. Devotees were allocated to attend one of the sessions.

The devotees were first given a detailed tour of the site with updates of the construction over the past few months before participating in the *pujan* ceremony. Each session consisted of Vedic rituals, bhajans, a special dance performance, and blessings from *sadguru* Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. Everyone's spirit of enthusiasm and eagerness to fulfil Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision was evident.

At the conclusion of the ceremonial session, devotees offered their prayers for the speedy and successful completion of the project by chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Several dignitaries, including David Fried, Mayor of Robbinsville, graced this occasion with their presence and expressed their appreciation of the project as well as to the dedicated volunteer force.

BAPS CHARITIES PARTNERS WITH UNICEF FOR PHILIPPINES TYPHOON HAIYAN RELIEF EFFORTS

November 2013, New York

On 8 November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan ripped through the central Philippines causing enormous destruction. With thousands of homes demolished, more than 3 million people were displaced. According to news sources, the death toll has reached 4,000 and continues to rise as crews sift through the debris and collect bodies.

Recognizing the need for an urgent response, BAPS Charities donated \$11,000 to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support the relief efforts in the Philippines.

BAPS Charities representatives presented the donation to the UNICEF on 21 November 2013 at their New York headquarters. Lacey Stone, UNICEF representative and Manager of Civil Society of Partnerships, was very appreciative of BAPS Charities' contribution. "The current situation in the Philippines is devastating, and UNICEF is working around the clock to help children and families affected by Typhoon Haiyan," said Leslie Goldman, Vice President of Programme and Community Engagement for

the US Fund for UNICEF. “Donations from our partners are critical in supporting our efforts to provide relief in the Philippines, as well as to save children’s lives around the world.”

Africa

MATRU SAMMELAN

30 Nov 2013, Nairobi, Kenya

The Nairobi Mahila Mandal organized a special mothers’ conference entitled ‘Saachi Maa’ – ‘A True Mother’. Guidance was given on how mothers can successfully develop their children spiritually, educationally, intellectually and culturally through speeches and videos. The mothers were motivated to actively engage their children in *ghar sabha* and encourage their children to take part in the activities at the mandir.

The conference concluded with a dance by *ba-likas* and *kishoris*, offering their respects at the feet of their parents.

Asia-Pacific

CULTURAL PROGRAMMES PRESENTED BY CHILDREN AND YOUTH

16 November to 1 December 2013, Australia

During November and December 2013, BAPS children and youths in Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide presented three separate cultural programmes to promote spiritual and cultural awareness about India. Based on popular stories from the Hindu shastras, the youngsters performed



splendid dance-dramas conveying ancient teachings of Hinduism.

In Melbourne the programmes were held on 16 and 17 November, during which the children and youth performed ‘Bhakta Prahlad’, a dance-drama about Prahlad’s unshakeable faith in God, and how his devotion was ultimately rewarded with the darshan and blessings of God.

The cultural programmes in Brisbane were held on 23 and 24 November, during which the children and youth performed a dance-drama about the Child-Heroes of India, titled ‘Sanskritik Virasat’.

In Adelaide, on 1 December, the children and youths performed ‘Bhakta Prahlad’.

Many guests attended these performances and were touched by the messages expressed through the dance-dramas. At each venue a small exhibition was displayed, highlighting the many facets of Indian culture, values and wisdom. The *Mystic India* film, produced by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, which gives a concise and stunning visual overview of Hindu traditions, was also shown during each programme. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 48)

out in events and *sabhas* too. My two brothers and mother have also excelled in Satsang greatly due to the care, support and attention of the sadhus and *karyakars*. Thanks to the support from the sadhus I have also excelled in my ambition and have achieved the Young Youth Chancellor award as well.

My skills and abilities greatly expanded through the nourishment of the Mandir and I have

a stable platform to succeed in my education and later life. I really want to do something inspiring for the Sanstha and inspire others to do so and be part of Bapa’s divine words when he was asked about the future of BAPS: “The future is bright”.

The Mandir has improved my life and my family’s life tremendously, and I pray that we keep excelling until we attain Akshardham. ♦



CELEBRATIONS IN MUMBAI AND OLDPAD

30th anniversary celebrations of BAPS Mandir, Dadar, Mumbai, held at Bhakti Park in Vadala from 1-3 December 2013. 1. Devotees in the celebration assembly. 2. Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performs *mahapuja* rituals. 3. Mumbai youths present a drama. 4. Youths perform a traditional dance during Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 93rd Birthday Celebration at Oldpad in the Surat district and 5. Carry out a grand celebration parade.



MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, HIMMATNAGAR

1. On 11 December 2013, senior sadhus perform yagna rituals. Over 3,770 couples were seated in groups around 491 yagna kunds.
2. Senior sadhus and invited guests during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, 12 December 2013.
3. Thousands of devotees in the *murti-pratishtha* assembly.

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