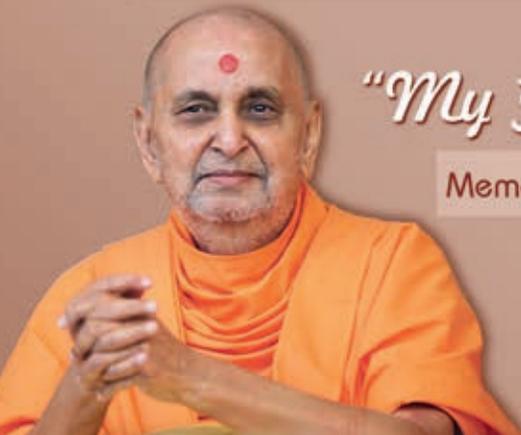


# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2015

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



*"My Guru Shastriji Maharaj..."*

Memories of Shastriji Maharaj in Swamishri's Own Words

150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Shastriji Maharaj

1865-2015

# Invitation



Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj founded the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha to propagate the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Shastriji Maharaj's exemplary and saintly life of detachment, renunciation, dharma, bhakti, service, humility and countless other virtues inspired many to progress on the spiritual path of becoming *aksharrup* and worshipping Purushottam, and thus attaining *moksha*. He courageously persisted in his tireless efforts despite untold difficulties for the ultimate benefit of all. In tribute to his selfless life and endeavours, and with the blessings and inspiration of Pragat Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a grand celebration will be held to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. We cordially invite you, with family and friends, to join us in our homage to Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.

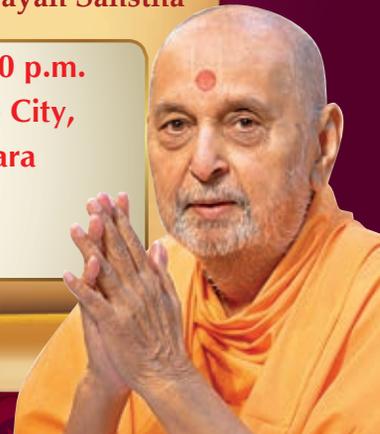
- BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

**Date:** Saturday, 24 January 2015, Time: 5.00 to 8.00 p.m.

**Venue:** Yagnapurush Nagar, Opp. L & T Knowledge City,  
National Highway 8, near Ajwa Crossroads, Vadodara

**Organizers:** BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

**Inspirer:** Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj





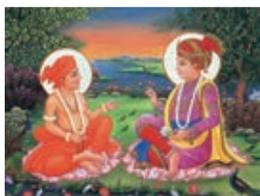
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## SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2015 Vol. 38 No. 1

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.



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

### SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

# FIRST WORD

“Thousands of salutations to my guru Shastriji Maharaj, who accepted me. It is only because of his grace and blessings that I am here before you today. Without him, I would not be here...”

These were the emotion-laden words of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav at the QPR Stadium in London on 20 July 1985, in recognition of the role of his guru Shastriji Maharaj in his life.

From his first meeting, as the shy Shantilal, till today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has always highlighted and reiterated his immense debt and gratitude to guru Shastriji Maharaj.

Chosen by Shastriji Maharaj, the young Shantilal, a farmer's son, had little formal education and even less worldly experience. Yet Shastriji Maharaj had spotted his profound inner spirituality and selected him. Shastriji Maharaj initiated him into the sadhu-fold and personally guided him in all matters – spiritual and administrative.

A unique bond was forged between the disciple and guru. A bond which Pramukh Swami Maharaj continues to maintain even today. Any mention of guru Shastriji Maharaj and his eyes sparkle, his lips smile, and words of praise and gratitude flow relentlessly from his mouth.

In Shastriji Maharaj, he saw not only his guru, but the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

In 2002, in Tithal, a youth approached Pramukh Swami Maharaj and requested him to write a brief introduction of Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri wrote, “Shastriji Maharaj beholds Bhagwan Swaminarayan and is his manifest form. Through him countless attain ultimate liberation. If this is firmly understood, only then will one experience the bliss of Shriji Maharaj.”

Whatever the occasion, whatever the location, whatever the audience, Pramukh Swami Maharaj never tires in talking about his guru Shastriji Maharaj.

In this issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* we present Pramukh Swami Maharaj's memories of his guru Shastriji Maharaj in his own words. They are a translation of conversations and discussions recorded in Gujarati over the years in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj recounts his experiences.

These stories reveal the role Shastriji Maharaj played in the development of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the deep reverence and immense gratitude which Pramukh Swami Maharaj has towards his guru Shastriji Maharaj. ◆

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The memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj published in this issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* were translated from *Swaminarayan Prakash*, December 2014, by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas.

# Pratishtha of Nar-Narayan Dev in Ahmedabad

*Shri Hari consecrates the first shikharbaddh mandir he built in Ahmedabad...*



## BLESSES THOSE ENGAGED IN MANDIR SEVA

Shri Hari observed the nearly completed mandir construction work in Ahmedabad. He saw the three mandir *shikhars* and *sinhasans* that were ready. He was satisfied and happy with the work. Maharaj praised the mandir construction before Anandanand Swami, “The construction is well done. It has been accomplished in accordance to the stipulations of our ancient *shilpa* shastras. Call all those who have laboured here. I’d like to meet them now and bless them.” Then Maharaj removed all the garlands offered to him from around his neck and garlanded Anandanand Swami (Anand Swami) as a token of his appreciation and joy.

Shri Hari met and blessed all those who were involved in the mandir construction. The main masons, Kuber and Ambaram, felt honoured for the *seva* they had received. They had toiled day and night. Shri Hari blessed them both by tying a *pagh* on their head, and rewarded each with a gold chain and apparels. Both the devotees were overwhelmed by Maharaj’s compassion.

Anand Swami asked Maharaj to come and see the *murtis*. Maharaj took Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and Shukanand Swami with him. He was very pleased on seeing the *murtis*, and ran his hand all over them to sanctify them. Then he suggested to Anandanand Swami, “Briskly finish off the remaining work of the pedestals in the mandir sanctums. I wish to install all the *murtis* together in the three shrines at the decided auspicious hour.”

Shri Hari observed all the arrangements and final construction work of the mandir and gave instructions for the changes he’d like to have.

Then Maharaj retired to his living quarters.

Today’s meal of *dudhpak* and *puri* was sponsored by the Choksi devotees. Shri Hari had a bath, put on a *pitambar* and sat on a raised platform to have his meal. Then the Choksi devotees, Ranchhodbhai, Trikambhai, Gokulbhai and others, performed *pujan* and *arti* of Maharaj. Thereafter they offered various gifts at Shri Hari’s feet. Maharaj then dipped his feet in a vessel of sandalwood paste, tinged with saffron (*kesar*), and pressed them on the chest of each devotee as a mark of his blessings. All the devotees were overjoyed at Shri Hari’s grace.

## MR DUNLOP’S RESPECT FOR MAHARAJ

Mr Dunlop had seen the lodging arrangements for the devotees by the banks of Lake Kankariya. He had observed that the noon temperature was hot, and anyone who stayed away from the shade of trees would feel very uncomfortable, and in the mornings they would feel cold. With this in mind Mr Dunlop made the arrangements for

more tents to be set up by the lake.

Shri Hari was satisfied with the lodging arrangements. He told Mahanubhavanand Swami, “Make sure the wealthy devotees are allotted to stay at the centre of the accommodation area and the remaining devotees in the subsequent rows of tents. Those who are armed with weapons should stay on the periphery of the entire lodging area. Finally, instruct everyone to be vigilant.”

Mr Dunlop sent an invitation to Shri Hari on 5 February 1822 (A.S. 1878, Maha *vad* 14) to come to his residence at the Bhadra Fort in Ahmedabad. Maharaj went with a small retinue of sadhus and devotees. Mr Dunlop welcomed Maharaj at the entrance, and he had arranged for a Brahmin to perform the royal *pujan* of Shri Hari. Then he led Maharaj inside and offered gifts of fruits and sweets. Mr Dunlop was impressed by the discipline and spirit of fraternity among the group of devotees with Maharaj. Shri Hari explained, “Like gems bound by a thread they remain united out of their sole refuge in God and understanding of God’s form. They understand God to be manifest and as the indweller, which thus binds them in a spirit of mutual friendship to please God.”

Mr Dunlop was touched by what Maharaj spoke in Hindi. He experienced the charisma in Shri Hari’s words. Maharaj’s speech could calm a restless soul. No not only that, but it could transform a soul.

Mr Dunlop asked Shri Hari about the details of his birthplace. Maharaj replied, “Near Ayodhya, and 14 km beyond the river Saryu, lies the village of Chhapaiya. It belongs to King Adbhutsinh. I was born there in a Sarvariya Brahmin family. I am known there as Pande of Itar region. In our clan the sub-divisions of three, thirteen and sixteen are considered to be the best. I belong to the thirteenth sub-division. I am the middle son of my father, Hariprasad Pande. My brothers reside there.”

Shri Hari spoke with ease and fluency. There was no ring of arrogance in his words, but merely an expression of the facts. Maharaj got up to leave.

Mr Dunlop accompanied him all the way down to bid him farewell.

### SHRI HARI ARRIVES IN THE YAGNASHALA

Every evening a spiritual assembly was held by Lake Kankariya. In the mornings, Maharaj would go to see the final preparations of the mandir and also visit the homes of devotees. The devotees sponsored a variety of meals daily. Soon, the day for the *murti-pratishtha*, 24 February 1822 (A.S. 1878, Fagan *sud* 3), arrived.

The entire *yagnashala* was beautifully decorated with festoons. The *yagna* was to be performed by 108 learned Brahmins. The principal Brahmins were Himmatram Shastri, Ranchhod Shastri, Narayan Shastri, Mahadev Shastri and learned experts like Ganpatram, Nathu Bhatt, Harishankar and others. Along with them were Pragji Purani, Dinanath Bhatt and Shobharam Shastri of Vadodara. Shri Hari performed *pujan* of all the learned Brahmins, garlanded them and tied a sacred thread on their wrists.

It was a red-letter day for the Sampradaya, because Shri Hari was going to consecrate the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan in the mandir sanctum and promote the principle of Bhakta-Bhagwan for the liberation of countless aspirants. After presiding over the initial *yagna* rituals Maharaj went to the mandir. He observed the three main shrines and sat on the three *sinhasans* in the shrines. Thereafter, he returned to the *yagnashala* and performed the sixteen forms of worship of all the *murtis* amidst the chanting of mantras. The *murtis* of Nar-Narayan were then installed in the middle shrine and Maharaj performed the final *pratishtha* rituals.<sup>1</sup> The occasion was welcomed with the victory cries of Nar-Narayan Dev. Shri Hari gave a cryptic smile.

1. According to recorded history after consecrating the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan in the central shrine, Maharaj also consecrated the *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Dharma-Bhakti in the first shrine and the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna in the last shrine (*Ahmedabadma Bhagwan Swaminarayan* by Mahant Shastri Ghanshyamswarupdasji, 1978, pp. 213-256).

## THE MURTI OF NAR IS A PART OF AKSHAR AND THE MURTI OF NARAYAN IS A PART OF PURUSHOTTAM

Maharaj performed the *pratishta arti* and then looked single-mindedly at the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan. The *murtis* appeared illustrious. Then Maharaj stood on the threshold of the sanctum and looked at the *murtis* again. A divine light emanated from both the *murtis*. Everyone witnessed this divine phenomena. At that time a 100-canon salute was ordered by Mr Dunlop to commemorate the consecration of the *murtis*.

After the *pratishta* rituals Shri Hari addressed the senior sadhus, “Nar and Narayan are the kings of the Bharat region (greater India). I have installed them here for the good of countless souls. But do not be confused. Nar and Narayan meditate upon me in their abode called Badrikashram.” Then a devotee brought a *murti* of Nar to have it sanctified at the hands of Maharaj. Shri Hari got up and, pointing a finger to himself, said, “The *muktas* of Badrikashram meditate upon me.”

Shri Hari again went to the *yagnashala* to conclude the final rituals by offering a coconut in the *yagna* fire. At that time Kashidas Mota of Bochasan offered *pujan*, expensive clothes and decorations to Shri Hari. Again there was a loud chorus of Nar-Narayan Dev’s *jai*. Kashidas gave a telling look to Maharaj. Shri Hari replied, “Kashidas, do not be troubled or confused. The *murti* of Nar is a part of Akshar and the *murti* of Narayan is a part of me – Purushottam.” Kashidas understood the essence of Maharaj’s words.

## MAHARAJ EXPLAINS HIS FORM TO ANANDANAND SWAMI

Shri Hari held the hand of Anandanand Swami and proceeded to the open ground before the mandir. On seeing Maharaj the devotees again exuberantly proclaimed the *jai* of Nar-Narayan. Maharaj looked at Anand Swami and walked towards the mandir gate. Then he asked, “Swami, did you understand?”

Anandanand Swami gave a blank look and waited for Maharaj to reveal the answer. Shri Hari declared, “Countless Nar-Narayans, Krishna Narayans, Lakshmi-Narayans and Vasudev Narayans are worshipping this manifest form of Swaminarayan. Presently, the devotees have forgotten the glory of my form. All are naturally inclined towards faith in the former avatars of God. But they (Nar-Narayan) are the devas of Bharatkhand (greater India). On being cursed by sage Durvasa they meditated upon me. I thus told them ‘I myself shall manifest in human form on earth and reinstate Bhagvat Dharma’. This I have stated on many occasions, but for one reason or another the devotees have forgotten the root cause and are impressed with and attached to the effect.”

Anandanand Swami discerned a ring of melancholy in Shri Hari’s words. Subsequently, Anand Swami’s joy and enthusiasm ebbed. Shri Hari blessed him by placing his hands on his head and said, “Swami, do not worry. For the ultimate *moksha* of souls the supreme glory of my own form will spread.” Thereafter, Anandanand Swami felt inner peace.

On that day everyone was served *shiro* and *puri* for *prasad*. Maharaj asked, “Have the food items for lunch been offered to Nar-Narayan Dev?” Brahmachari went to make the arrangements of *thal* and returned to Maharaj, saying, “The *thal* has been sent. Now it’s time for you to take lunch.” After having lunch Maharaj came to the mandir grounds and sat on a high seat. At that time everyone was having lunch. The devotees living near the mandir, Purushottambhai, Rajibhai, Hirabhai and others, performed *pujan* and *arti* of Maharaj. They also garlanded him and offered donations. Maharaj instructed, “Deposit the donations in the mandir office. From now onwards whatever donations you wish to make, do so for the mandir deity. When everyone finished having lunch Shri Hari returned to his quarters.

◆  
(Contd. in next issue)

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

# GURU SMRUTI

## Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Memories of Guru Shastriji Maharaj



Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur

**B**hagatji Maharaj had visited there (Chansad, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthplace) 30-35 times and so we [our family] had conviction in Akshar-Purushottam from the start. Mansukhbhai Vaidya treated Bhagatji Maharaj with a sugarcane and milk regimen. Next to the bungalow (which no longer stands today), there was a small mandir where Bhagatji came and discoursed. From the time of Bhagatji Maharaj we had firm faith in Akshar-Purushottam. Shastriji Maharaj had also come many times to the village. Yogiji Maharaj used to stay for a month at a time and discourse. This was all before my birth. I had heard about all these things.

When sadhus came from Bochasan we all went for darshan. We even went to Bochasan at times. In this way, due to the values of Satsang, I used to go to the mandir, perform puja, offer *dandvats* and serve the sadhus when they came.

At that time, I was also studying. Up to Standard 5 I studied there [in Chansad]. But, because there were not enough students, the government did not arrange for Standard 6 there.

So, there was a question of where I should study in Standard 6. Thus, I went to Dharapara. The teacher there said, "If you get ten children together then I will teach." We set to get ten children together. Two from Dharapara, two from Chansad and some from other nearby place. We got 10-12 together. Then the teacher said, "If we put in the effort to start a class here and there are only a few from my village it is not proper. There should be more from my village." But there were no more children from the village and so the class was cancelled, and my whole year was wasted.

Then everyone said, "Send him to Bochasan to study."

At that time, Mota Akshar Swami had come

there [Chansad] from Bochasan and the topic was discussed with him. He said, “He will get a good education in Bochasan.” In Bochasan, the British government education system was being used, while we had studied under the Gaekwad system. If someone from the Gaekwad system wanted to study in the British system, they had to drop down one standard.

When we went there, they said, “Place him in the fourth. We cannot take him in the sixth.” So, having completed the fifth, I was to do the fourth. So, again, everything fell through.

In this way, two years were wasted. I returned to the village. In the village was a boy called Shankarlal and one other. They studied at the school in Padra. I asked them, “If I want to come there what can be done?” They said, “We will get you in. For those who have completed Standard 4, they allow entry into English.” So, I thought let me go there. Then I talked to everyone and they said, “Good.”

Now, what about getting to and from Padra? I did not have a bicycle, so I would have to walk. However, Shankarlal said, “I will give you a ride.” Muljibhai added, “I will also give you a ride.” In this way, I went there to study. (Daily went to and from Padra by bicycle.)

There, I gave the English 1 exam. I was studying for the second when Shastriji Maharaj came to our village for some work. He called me and said, “Come on, you have to come to become a sadhu. I want to make you a sadhu.”

Actually, I had previously visited Bochasan, so I knew Shastriji Maharaj. During the fifth standard vacation, I had gone with Akshar Swami. At the time, the *mandals* of Mota Akshar Swami, Ghanshyam Swami and Balmukund Swami, all three, travelled together from Sejakuva, Sarsavni and other villages. Mota Akshar Swami took me to Bochasan, Sarsa and Anand.

[In Anand,] we stayed at the home of Motibhai Bhagwandas and bathed in the well opposite. In the afternoon, the mandir precincts were cool, so Akshar Swami told me, “You sleep there.” So, in the afternoons, I slept there. In the evening we

would bathe, drawing water from the well with a canvas bucket. I had difficulty in pulling the bucket, so Ghanshyam Swami said, “This boy does not even know how to pull the bucket, so what will he do?” Ghanshyam Swami would become upset. Balmukund Swami would slowly draw the water and patiently teach me everything. He taught me to wash the utensils, clean up, sing bhajans and cook.

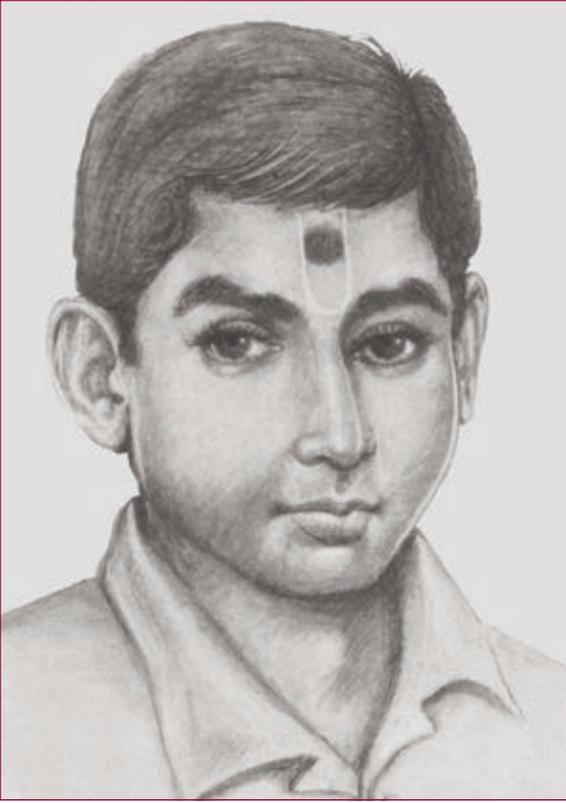
Once, Ghanshyam Swami fell ill and came to our village [Chansad]. He was taking black raisins, which he told me to bring. I was not very competent in these things since I had not often gone to the bazaar. I had never even gone to buy anything. Since I was going to Vadodara, he told me to bring the raisins. So, I brought back fresh grapes. Ghanshyam Swami became upset and said, “What did I ask for and what have you brought?” I replied, “I don’t know.” In later years, Ghanshyam Swami often remembered this incident and said, “He did not know much about the worldly ways. When he spoke, he would say “Ou...ou...ou...”. From the beginning I spoke little. When called two-three times, I would reply “Ha... Ha...”. Ghanshyam Swami knew this and would say so. But, with Swami’s grace, everything worked out.

When I was travelling with Akshar Swami, he told me, “You stay here. We will make you a white-robed sadhu [*parshad*].” Then, when Shastriji Maharaj came for the Guru Purnima festival in Bochasan, he took me to him and said, “He is a very good boy and worthy of becoming a sadhu.” And then he gave my name, village and other details. Shastriji Maharaj said, “Let us teach him.” With this, he gave me a Sanskrit lesson to memorize:

“*Rāmaha, Rāmau, Ramāhā...*” He said, “Memorize the word forms before eating.”

At that time, the Mahant of Dholka, Hariswarupdas, had also come. Everyone said, “He is a senior mahant from an important place.” Swami said, “Let us teach both of them Sanskrit.” So, even he was given the lesson to memorize.

I sat in the *dharmashala* there to memorize. I memorized the lesson in 1½ hours. Then, Swami



An artist's impression of Shantilal

said, "Speak," and I recited the lesson. Swamishri was very pleased and said, "You are capable of becoming a scholar, a *shastri*. You are truly clever." That day, Swami cast his pleasure, gaze and blessings on me.

Then he told Hariswaupdas to recite the lesson. He found it difficult, so Swamishri said, "Memorize it again."

Harivallabh Swami or some other sadhu were due to go to Petlad to study under a *shastri*. Someone was to be assigned to go with him. It was decided for me to go there to study. So, my standard 6 studies were disrupted.

But, in Petlad there was no *shastri* to teach us. We were told he had gone out and there was no certainty of when he would return. Also, we would have to stay in the *pathshala* to study, but Swami said, "It is not possible to stay in the *pathshala*. We will send you for studies when we make arrangements to stay at Purushottamdas's place." With this, Swami took me to Sunav.

Dadabhai of Bhadran, *vevai*<sup>1</sup> of Ishwarbhai Daji, lived in Bangalore, and was with us. Swami said to him, "You go and take him with the sadhus. Take them to Vartal for darshan. Adeshwarprasad (grandson of former Vartal *acharya* Lakshmiprasadji Maharaj) has come there. Bring him here; we want to take him to Bochasan and educate and train him."

After this conversation, Dadabhai and I left by bullock-cart. It was the rainy season. We reached Vartal; it was my first visit. Dadabhai took me for darshan and we met Adeshwarprasad. We told him what Shastriji Maharaj had said. Then we sat in the bullock-cart and returned to Sunav. After spending the night there, we went to Bochasan. It was the month of Shravan, so we stayed some time for the *samaiyo*. There, they [the family] came and said that arrangements had been made for me to study in the school there. They spoke about it all to Swami as well. They said to Swami, "Let us take him for now. We will educate him and send him." Swami said, "Good. No problem."

This all happened in Samvat 1992 (1935-6 CE). Then in Aso, Samvat 1995 (September-October 1938), Shastriji Maharaj came there [to Chansad]. When Ghanshyam Swami's *mandal* came there I was studying in English year two. Swami said (to father), "Give your son to us." He said, "Fine. Ok."

I told Swami that I wished to study English and had taken admission in English.

At that time Aksharjivan Swami (of Pij) was with Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri said, "You want to study English, don't you? Well, Aksharjivandas also wants to study. In Ahmedabad there is Vinayak Rao Saheb's school and Khengarji is a teacher (there). We will get him to teach you."

I said, "Good." Then he asked the family and they all said yes. They said to me, "Do whatever pleases Swami."

I said, "I will go with Swami after the exams." Then, Swami said, "I am staying here. Your exams

1. A *vevai* is the fathar-in-law of a person's son or daughter.

will finish in a few days. So, we will go together.” Then he placed his hands on my head, stroked his hands on my cheeks, blessed me and said, “You will study well and become a good scholar.”

That day I had my second exam paper. Raojibhai of Gana had suddenly become unconscious. His father, Naranbhai, sent an urgent letter via a courier to Shastriji Maharaj. He had written that Raojibhai had become unconscious and urged him to come there on receiving the letter. On reading the letter, Swamishri immediately left for Gana. When I returned home after the exam I learnt that Swami had gone. But I met Ghanshyam Swami, and he said, “Shastriji Maharaj has left, but has instructed for you to go to Bochasan after your exams finish.”

Nilkanth Swami was with Ghanshyam Swami at the time. He had to go to Bhaili, so they went there. Meanwhile, Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter to Ghanshyam Swami saying, “I have discussed everything and you bring him with you to Bochasan. When you receive this letter, go there [to Chansad] to collect him.”

Ghanshyam Swami sent this letter from Bhaili and said that Swami had said for me to be sent to Bhaili. So, the arrangements were made. Chhotabhai’s nephew, Ravji, came on a bicycle with this letter.

At that time, we friends were playing cricket [in Chansad]. A man named Kalal had come to live in the village and he was a cricket enthusiast. He got a group of five-seven kids daily and taught us to play cricket. We played in the open ground. All the boys became very interested in cricket. They said that all this (equipment) is Kalal’s. So, it is better that we get our own. We should get stumps and everything else for ourselves. But where will we get the money for it. Everyone got together and decided to collect a fund by asking the main villagers to contribute. Shankarlal and I asked a few people and got some funds, about 4-500 rupees. In the morning we were sitting on the outskirts near the school. It was Aso *sud ekadashi*. Everyone was thinking about who should go to Vadodara

to buy the cricket equipment. I was selected, but I didn’t know much, so I told Shankarlal that we both go to get it. This discussion was taking place and a message came from home that a letter from Shastriji Maharaj has come and that Ravjibhai has come to take you. So, our discussion stopped and I went home. That day was Aso *vad ekadashi*, and whether a major or minor one, we always observed a fast on *ekadashi*. I was served some *ukalo* and told, “Go, Swami will be pleased. You have our blessings.” Because it was *ekadashi*, some snacks were packed, because we were going by bicycle and just in case we were delayed. Some *chana-mamra* were packed if needed in the following days. We took the snacks and left for Bhaili.

Let me tell you something else first.

In the village [Chansad] I had a friend named Shantilal. We had the same name. We were very close friends, and had similar likings. I would go to his house to eat and he would come to ours. We ate together, played together and studied together. After school we would do our homework and go to sleep, but on Sundays we played. We played on the outskirts and would swim in the lake. After a few years, he moved to Vadodara for studies since his father lived there, and I stayed there [in Chansad]. But, he (Shanti) came there [to Chansad] during every vacation. Every month also, he would come several times to meet me. We both had planned that after finishing studies we would go to Haridwar and Rishikesh to worship God. The reason for this? Well, there [in Chansad] we went to the Hanuman Mandir, where the priest, Haridasji, would tell us stories from the Ramayan. We went every 2-3 days to the Hanuman Mandir. Also, the *pujari* in the Swaminarayan Mandir was a *bawa* named Sitaram. We went there in the mornings or evenings to sit. The *bawaji* talked a lot about the Ramayan as well as about the glory of Haridwar, Rishikesh and Ayodhya. He told us that there were many rishis and *mahatmas* there, many nice *ashrams* and that the river Ganga flowed and many other things. After listening to all this,

we thought that after finishing studies we would go there and stay with the *mahatmas*. But, in between, Shastriji Maharaj came and I came here. In my mind, from the beginning, I had decided to become a sadhu, and due to Shastriji Maharaj's wish everyone in the family had also decided. So, they agreed that I become a sadhu.

Before I left they [mother and father] blessed me and said, "Become a good sadhu. Do as Swami says. Please Swami. Do not think of coming back home. Do not leave Shastriji Maharaj and please only Shastriji Maharaj. If there are difficulties, tolerate them, but do not return."

Then, I sat on Ravjibhai's bicycle and left for Bhaili (Aso *vad* 11, Samvat 1995; 7 November 1939, Tuesday)

When I reached Bhaili, Ghanshyam Swami was sitting in the mandir. He was delighted to see me. We were to leave from there on the next day. We went to Sankarda, where we stayed for a few days in the mandir. Diwali was approaching, and Ghanshyam Swami and Nilkanth Swami were going to Bochasan for the Annakut celebration. But the villagers strongly insisted that they celebrate Annakut in their village this time. So they stayed. They thought that while there they could also collect the *dharmado* (tithes), and that they could send someone to bring the Annakut *prasad* from Bochasan. At that time, a staunch devotee of the village, Shankar Bhagat, was there. They sent him to Bochasan to bring the Annakut *prasad* (for distribution to the devotees) and at the same time take me to Bochasan.

Ghanshyam Swami told me to go with Shankar Bhagat and said, "Shastriji Maharaj will come there for Punam and you will get darshan. Do as Swami says."

I thought that I would get darshan of Bochasan mandir and Swami.

When we got there, we met Nirgundas Swami. Shankar Bhagat told him about me, and Nirgundas Swami said, "Let him stay with me." Nirgundas Swami was going to Ahmedabad and would meet Shastriji Maharaj there.

The day after the Annakut festival, Shankar Bhagat left. He asked me, "What is your wish?" I said, "I will stay here."

Nirgundas Swami left for Ahmedabad after a few days. Harivallabh Swami was with him. The Isnav Mandir Court case was in progress at the time. Nirgundas Swami was to meet Jashbhai Makandas (main administrator of the Vartal Sanstha and father of former Chief Minister of Gujarat, Babubhai J. Patel) in Bhadran for some discussion regarding the case. He lived in Nadiad, but was coming to Bhadran that day to a relative's house. Nirgundas Swami called a bullock-cart early and took Girdharbhai Mathurdas with him. Harivallabh Swami and I were also with him. We also took a container of *prasad*.

When we reached the outskirts of Bhadran, Nirgundas Swami said to Girdharbhai, "You stay here, since there are two roads which lead to the village. We are taking this road. If he exits by the other road we will miss him. So you look out for him."

We left the bullock-cart there, and with Nirgundas Swami we walked to the village. Meanwhile, Jashbhai left the village by car using the other road. When we reached the village, Nirgun Swami enquired. Everyone said that he had just left. When we returned to the outskirts, his car had gone. Girdharbhai hadn't even realized. So, Nirgundas Swami was a little annoyed. We returned to Bochasan. Again he called a bullock-cart and we went to Kavitha, and then Borsad for some work. From there, we went by train to Nadiad.

In Nadiad, we stayed at Ramchandrakaka's home. There, I fell ill with a fever. In Nadiad, Nirgundas Swami had some work with Jashbhai. Due to the fever I could not go anywhere, so Nirgundas Swami and Harivallabh Swami went. On enquiring, people said that Jashbhai had gone to Vartal and would return in the evening. So, Nirgun Swami went around Nadiad all day doing his work. Back at our lodgings, nobody asked me if I was ill or well. I had a high fever for 2-3 days and had not eaten or drunk anything. At night,

Harivallabh Swami would return and make some *ukalo* for me.

The Kartik *sud ekadashi* was approaching. This is Ahmedabad's *ekadashi*. I still had a fever. So, Nirgundas Swami said, "Let's go to Ahmedabad. We'll get you treated there and you'll get well."

On Kartik *sud* 10, we took the train to Ahmedabad. We stayed on the first floor of Babubhai Kothari's house in Amblivali Pol. Babubhai lived on the ground floor and the upper level was an open balcony. Swami and the other sadhus stayed there when they came. It was a small area, so there was room only for Swami's bed and a few devotees to sit for discourses.

That night, Shastriji Maharaj came from Sarangpur with *annakut prasad* and the devotees also came for darshan. I was ill and resting in a corner, when Swami asked, "You have come. Very good."

I said, "I've had a fever for a few days." Swamishri said, "You have a fever, but will get better." Then he stroked his hand on my head and then I went to sleep. There was no separate room at that time, so I slept in the corner.

Late at night, before he went to sleep, Swami came over to me and said, "Now your fever will go." My mouth was bitter and so I did not like to eat. So, Swami gave me some *ukalo* which someone had brought. Then again he stroked his hand over my whole body. This was Swamishri's way, that if someone was ill he would stroke the whole body and bless him. While chanting, "Swaminarayan... Swaminarayan..." for about ten minutes he stroked with his hand over my body and blessed me. Then he said, "You will get better and nothing will happen. I want to give you *parshad diksha* in the morning," and he went to sleep.

In the morning, my fever had suddenly gone. Swami had hot water prepared for me to bathe. After bathing and puja, he called me and said, "Today is *ekadashi*, so I will give you the *parshad diksha*." I said, "Fine, whatever you wish."

I asked, "What about the studies? You had said about studying at Khengarjibhai's school."

Swami said, "We will talk about all that later. After this is done, we will talk to Khengarjibhai about the arrangements." I said, "Fine." Then he sat me opposite and said to Babubhai, "Bring some kumkum, rice and sugar crystals." I was wearing a shirt and trousers. Swami gave me some cloths and said, "From now on wear a *dhotiyu* and this cloth as an upper garment."

With this, Swami gave me *diksha* and said, "Today is *ekadashi*, so do a *nirjala* (waterless) fast. Do not eat or drink anything. Today is a major *ekadashi*, so you cannot eat even *faral*." I said yes and observed the fast (Kartik *sud* 11, Samvat 1996; 22 November 1939, Wednesday).

Before, in Samvat 1992, when I stayed with Swami, he made me observe fasts. When we went from Sunav to Vaso, he told me to observe a fast. The next day I vomited. Swami knew this, but because it was a major *ekadashi*, he made me observe a *nirjala* fast.

We left on Kartik *sud* 13 to go to Bochasan. There, Swami said, "I want you and Aksharjivandas to study; but Sanskrit instead of English. Now you are a sadhu. What is the need for English? We will not be doing a job or business. By studying Sanskrit, you can read our shastras. You can discourse on the Satsangjivan and our shastras." As he spoke, I gave up the wish to study English from my mind.

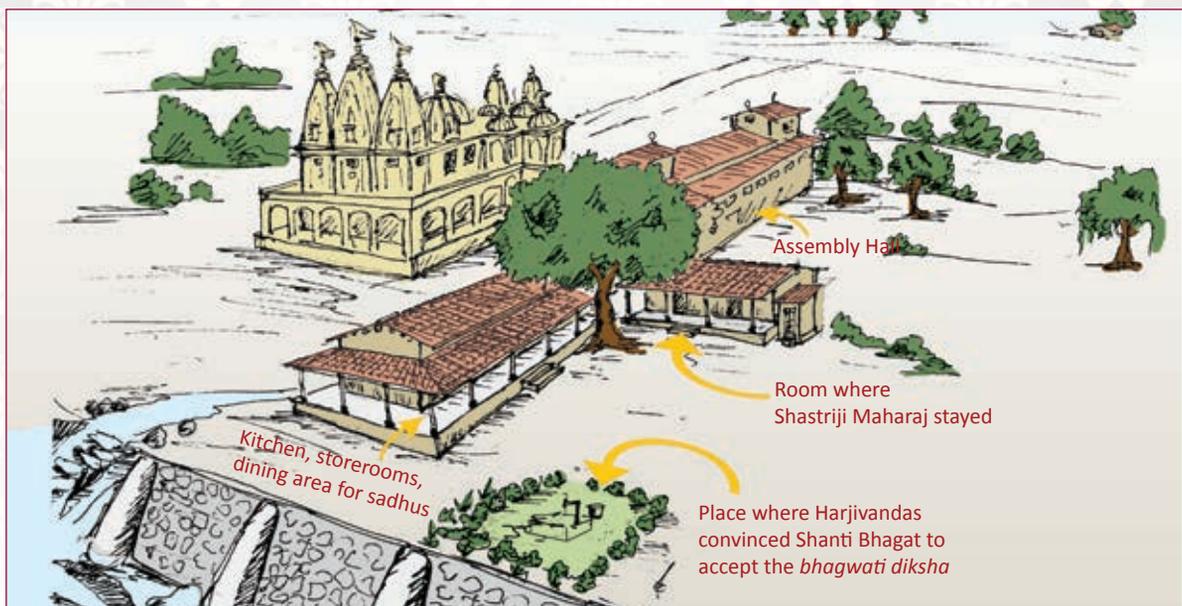
Swami said to the devotees, "Shastri Vitthalram of Bhadran is ready and the mandir is there. Aksharjivandas, Brahmachari, Harishankar and him – these four can go there to study." Then we went there to study.

\* \* \*

After taking *parshad diksha*, I stayed about 2-3 months in Bhadran. Here, I studied basic level Sanskrit under Vitthalram Shastri. Then there was a *parayan* in Ahmedabad. So Shastriji Maharaj called us there. So we went.

There, Shastriji Maharaj said to me, "I want to go from here to Gondal. Have you had darshan of Gondal?"

I said, "I haven't seen either Gondal or



An artist's impression of the Gondal mandir precincts in 1940, based on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's description

Sarangpur.” Swami said, “Come on, I will take you there.”

In Bhadran, I was placed with Hariswarupdas, so I thought since I was with him I should at least tell him. So, I casually told Hariswarupdas that since Swami has told me, I am going to Gondal and will return to Bhadran afterwards.

Hariswarupdas became annoyed and said, “Go if you want, but I won't take you back. You won't be able to stay for studies...” He spoke sternly, so I thought that if he did not take me back, my studies will stop.

So, I went to tell Swami. He immediately called him and scolded him, “What are you thinking? Is it proper to speak like this to youngsters who have come? He would be discouraged and worried. I want to take him for darshan so I will take him. And I will send him there on his return.” Swami spoke so forcefully that Hariswarupdas could not say anything.

Then Swami took me to Sarangpur for darshan and then to Gondal. It was Swami's wish to give me *bhagwati diksha* here in the first half of Posh. Swami told Harjivandas (Kothari) to talk to me about taking *diksha*.

From the beginning, Harjivandas was close to

me. I had first met him in Bochasan. As instructed by Swami, Harjivandas spoke encouragingly to me that night till about 2.00 a.m. In Gondal, Shastriji Maharaj's room, which had a small roof with foreign tiles, was where the *limbdo* (neem tree) stands in the square behind the kitchen. Opposite this was a square where, at present, we have made a dining area. We sat there.

First, Swami told me, “We will keep you in Ahmedabad and teach you English in school.” So, I had a small wish to study English, but Harjivandas explained, “It is Shastriji Maharaj's wish for you to study Sanskrit, so you should study Sanskrit. There is no need to insist on studying English. Study what Swami says. Why study anything else? And Sanskrit will be of more use than English?”

I said, “Okay, since it is Swami's wish, let me become a sadhu and study.”

Shastriji Maharaj was sleeping in his room. Later, this room was where the pujari stayed.

At the time, the roof of the room had tiles from abroad. There were only two rooms and an open verandah. The floor had *lippan* (mixture of earth and cow dung used to coat the floor).

When I agreed to take the sadhu *diksha*, Harjivandas woke Shastriji Maharaj up late at

night, at 2.00 a.m. As we entered, Swamishri heard some noise and immediately awoke, asking, “Who is it?”

He sat up and was delighted to hear the news. Swami said, “Good. We will give you *diksha* in the morning.” Then he placed his hands on my head, and embraced me. He also blessed Harjivandas. Swami expressed great pleasure.

Swami told him, “Tell Yogi Maharaj not to do the *mahapuja* early. Tomorrow is Wednesday, so the first two *choghadias* are auspicious. We will perform the rituals in the second *choghadiya*. That’s when we want to give him *diksha*, so don’t do the *mahapuja* early.”

The next morning (Wednesday, 10 January 1940), Yogi Bapa did not do the *mahapuja* early. Shastriji Maharaj finished his bath and puja and then came to the Akshar Deri. It was 8.00 a.m. and the *amrut choghadiya*. Swami was seated where the *mahapuja* takes place at present, between the two pillars. Yogi Swami sat towards the Deri and I sat on this side. Then after the *diksha mahapuja* rituals, Swami gave me *diksha* and placed a saffron upper cloth around me.

Then the naming was discussed. Harjivandas said, “Narandas was a great sadhu of Junagadh, so name him Narandas.” When Yogi Bapa was asked, he said, “Whatever Shastriji Maharaj decides is fine.”

Shastriji Maharaj said, “Let us name him Narayanswarupdas. That is a good name. We want to educate him, make him a scholar, make him great and powerful...” He spoke for a while and then said to Yogi Bapa, “You bless him and give him a *dhabho* (a big pat on the back) that he truly becomes a great scholar and does great service for the satsang.”

Yogi Bapa gave me a *dhabho*. This was his way from the beginning. He blessed, “He will be special. He has your blessings and grace, so he will become great.” We stayed in Gondal for a few days. So Yogi Maharaj would sit with me daily and talk about *sadhuta*, “We have become sadhus. So, to please Swami it is necessary to

develop saintliness.” He spoke in his special style. Sometimes half-an-hour, sometimes an hour, depending on the time available. In the end, we stayed in Gondal for a month.

I wanted to travel with Swami, but he said, “No, I want you to study Sanskrit.” He spoke to Harjivandas and Yogi Bapa, “Do whatever you have to and get a good *shastri* to teach him. He will become a good scholar.” With this, he kept Aksharjivandas and me in Gondal to study. Swami spoke encouragingly, “This Akshar Deri is a sacred place, it is supreme. Study here. It is a great place and Yogi Bapa is also here.”

In the beginning everything was new. So, it felt strange and it was natural to want to go with Swami. But Yogi Bapa insisted, “Stay here. Swami will be very pleased and this is a supreme place.” Harjivandas also said, “There is a *shastri* here and I will get him here to meet you.” Realizing Swami’s wish, I stayed there to study. A *shastri* came there to teach us. Together with studies, we had to do *seva* as well. Yogi Bapa would send us to do all types of *seva*: sweeping everywhere and serving in the kitchen. He taught me to serve the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj in the mandir and other *seva* related to Thakorji. We also helped in the mandir construction. At that time, Aksharswarupdas was the *kothari*. In addition to all the *seva*, we did *arti* in the morning and evening and filled the lamps. We served and studied. Yogi Maharaj sent us everywhere. He would take us in the kitchen to help in the cooking. We made the small flour balls for making chapattis. At first I could not roll them into round, flat shapes. Yogi Bapa would be the first in the kitchen. Aksharjivandas would also come.

I had a wish to become a sadhu from the beginning and Shastriji Maharaj nurtured it and made me a sadhu, gave the honour of this *seva* and granted happiness. ◆

(Collated from conversations with Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 24 November 1988, 11 April 1996, 11 July 2004, 20 December 2006, in January 2007 and on other days)



## DIVINE EXPERIENCE OF THE GURU



Yogiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami, Harijivan Swami and newly initiated Pramukh Swami Maharaj

**S**hastriji Maharaj gave me *diksha* in Gondal. Yogiji Maharaj was performing the *mahapuja* in the Akshar Deri. Shastriji Maharaj sat opposite me and gave *diksha* in the Akshar Deri.

After *diksha*, I ended up staying in Gondal. There, I and another sadhu, Aksharjivandas, studied Sanskrit under a *shastri*, as instructed by Shastriji Maharaj. Having stayed for studies, I naturally went with Kothari Aksharwarupdas to help in doing Thakorji's *seva* and puja. I prepared the *arti* and [filled the] *shankh* (conch shell) [with water], as well as washed the utensils. I did not know how to dress the *murtis*. I learnt it and daily served Ghanshyam Maharaj.

After about a month, rumours started that Shastriji Maharaj was coming. I was newly initiated and was naturally drawn towards Shastriji Maharaj, wishing for Swami's darshan and

company.

I used to go to serve Ghanshyam Maharaj and perform *mangala arti*. So I would wake up early, bathe, do my puja and go. Sometimes I would bathe and go, and do puja later. One day, I woke up and bathed, and someone said that Shastriji Maharaj had come. So, to have his darshan I ran towards his room. When I got there, nobody was around. So, I thought that Swami may have gone up to the mandir for darshan. Hence, I went there for darshan.

In the mandir, I saw Ghanshyam Maharaj lying on a bed! He was awake and instantly sat upon the bed. I spontaneously asked, "Shastriji Maharaj has come here. Where is he?" He replied, "He's gone downstairs." So, I went down, but I did not see Swami anywhere. I thought that since it is time for *mangala arti* he may have gone up. So, again I went upstairs. There,

Ghanshyam Maharaj was sitting on the edge of the bed with his legs dangling. I also had darshan of Shastriji Maharaj there. I touched his feet. Ghanshyam Maharaj placed his hand on my head and blessed me. Shastriji Maharaj blessed me and then suddenly he merged into the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj. The two forms became one.

I wondered, “Where has Swami gone?” Because Swami had disappeared I went downstairs again. I asked everyone, “Shastriji Maharaj has come, but where is he?”

Everyone said, “Shastriji Maharaj has not come here. Who says he has come here?”

I said, “I had his darshan. He has come. I met him upstairs with Ghanshyam Maharaj.”

Everyone said, “He certainly has not come.” So, I had had Ghanshyam Maharaj’s darshan.

The sadhus said to me, “Because you have such affection for Swami, you had darshan of both Swami and Ghanshyam Maharaj.”

**Question:** When you had darshan of Ghanshyam Maharaj in Gondal, why did you not stay to talk to him longer?

**Pramukh Swami Maharaj:** At the root, I had affection for Shastriji Maharaj and a keen desire to meet him since he had come. I wanted to speak to him and was focused on that so I wanted to know where he was. I had great feelings for Swami so I was drawn to him. Just as Gunatitanand Swami had said to Bhagatji Maharaj. “You’ve seen the sadhu form, so you’ll see God.”

Essentially, everything resides in the guru. And it is natural to have joy and affection for him. Hearing of his arrival, it is natural to rush to see him. There was no reason to talk more. So, I just asked about Swami and left. ◆

*(Collated from conversations on  
15 September 1996 and 8 February 1986)*



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Gondal



## THE GURU'S DIVINE AFFECTION



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Shastriji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami in a buggy, Surat, 1944

**W**hen I came to become a sadhu due to Shastriji Maharaj's wish, I got the opportunity to serve him. I was 17-18 years old at the time and he looked after me so much.

During festival celebrations, there was naturally a shortage of blankets, but he would ask for and keep a blanket. At night, when my *seva* was completed, he would say to me, "I have kept that [blanket] for you. Take it and sleep." He used to look after me in this way.

This especially happened when the celebration was in Bochasan. Many sadhus and devotees would come and Nirgundas Swami managed the distribution of blankets to all. In a cupboard in the guesthouse there were about 300 blankets. Some people would claim to have others with them and take several blankets to sleep. Thus, there would not be enough for everyone. So,

at night at about 11-12 o'clock, Nirgun Swami would go around. If he saw anyone using one blanket spread on the floor, one as a pillow and one for cover, he would take the extras. Then he would redistribute whatever he collected to those who did not have any.

In Shastriji Maharaj's room in Bochasan, there was a wooden stand. If there were extra blankets there, sometimes others would come and take them. So, Shastriji Maharaj would take a blanket, roll it into a pillow and keep it aside for me. Nobody would take it from Swami's bed. At night, when I came he would give it to me. I would spread a mat or bed sheet on the floor and sleep.

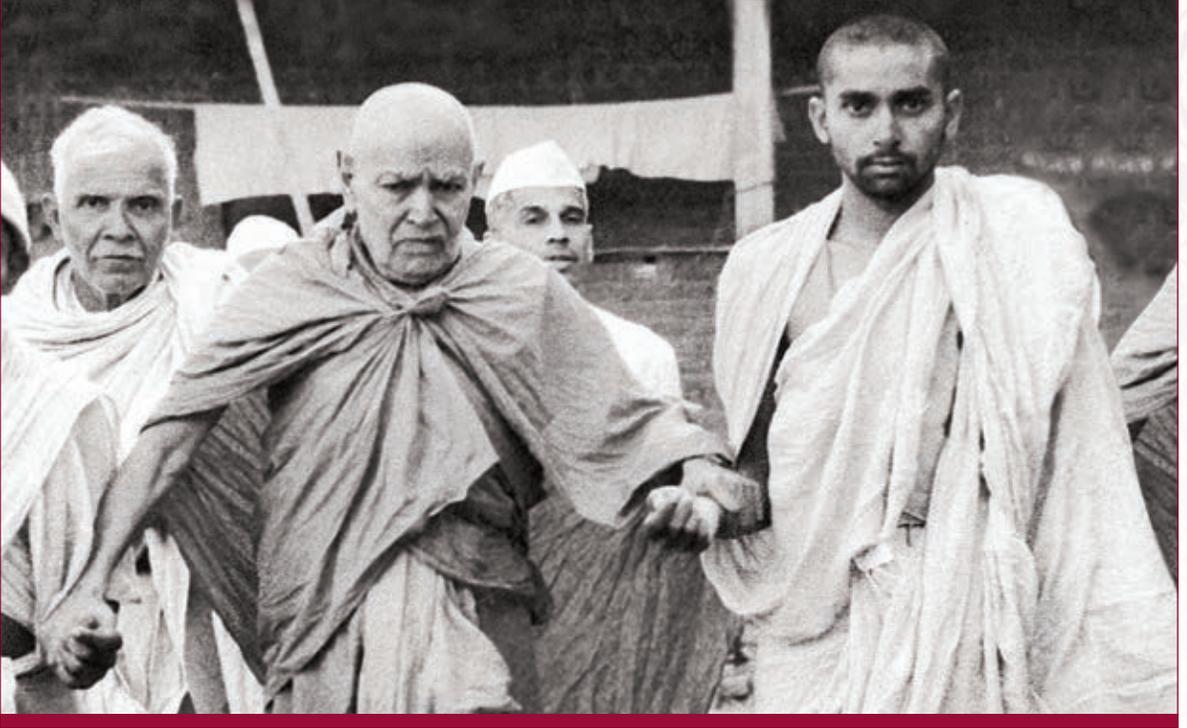
In the winter, I would sleep there and make do with whatever was available.

From a young age, my body was thin and I

*(Contd. on pg. 24)*



## SWAMI'S DIVINE SERVICE AND LILA



Pramukh Swami Maharaj serving guru Shastriji Maharaj, Atladra, 1949

**B**y Shastriji Maharaj's grace, I had the chance to study, serve in the mandirs and serve him personally. When I travelled with Swami in those days, I would help to bathe him, cook, serve food and in other ways. We all slept in one room. In the summer, there was little electricity and few fans, so, when Shastriji Maharaj was resting, we fanned him by hand all afternoon.

We all slept in the room, but I slept the nearest. Swami did not normally awake in the night to use the bathroom. Even when he sometimes did, he would not wake me.

He would call me 'Naranda' or 'Narayanmuni'. I spoke little from the beginning, so he called me 'Muni'. When he wrote letters to me, he would address me as 'Shastri Narayanswarupdas'.

When serving him, I would get ready before him. I would awake at 5.30 a.m. Go to *mangala* and get ready. By then, Swami would wake up. In

his later years, we arranged for his bath. Swami's room was here and we had to go all the way to the kitchen to get hot water. Sometimes I had to kindle the stove. Often it happened that somebody else would take the water heated for Swami.

When Swami performed puja, we sat for darshan. At that time, there was no tradition of singing bhajans in puja. We cooked for Swami in the kitchen, where all the other cooking was also done. In his later years, we made *dal*, rice, *shak* and *rotli* separately for him. He rarely ate sweet items. If there was *mesub*, *jalebi* or *puranpoli*, he would take a little. He ate only a little food. He would take a little from Thakorji's *prasad* at 4.00 p.m.

When he fell ill, he preferred the treatment of traditional *vaidyas*. Only towards the end did he take other medicines.

Truly, all of Swami's actions were divine. ♦  
(From *Swamishri's conversation on 12 February 1988*)



## GURU'S ADMIN LESSONS



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with guru Shastriji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami

**S**hastriji Maharaj used to patiently teach me everything. I had little education and had also not engaged in social duties, since I had become a sadhu at a young age. I was a farmer's son, so we did not have many social connections. I had no idea of how things happened, but Shastriji Maharaj showered his gaze and blessings on me.

He arranged for me to study and involved me in the mandir affairs. I also got to travel with Swami for several months at a time. Then, he gave me the responsibility for Sarangpur (as the mandir *kothari*). In the beginning, there was an error of 4 *anas* in the accounts and I thought in financial matters there should be no mistakes. So, when Shastriji Maharaj came I told him that I would not be able to manage the money affairs. Swamishri said that such mistakes happen in the beginning and told me to travel with him. For about six-eight months I travelled with Swami,

and Harjivandas then convinced me, so I was appointed as *kothari*. Swami said, "This Bhaichand will be your assistant." By God's grace, everything ran well. And by doing the work, I learnt it.

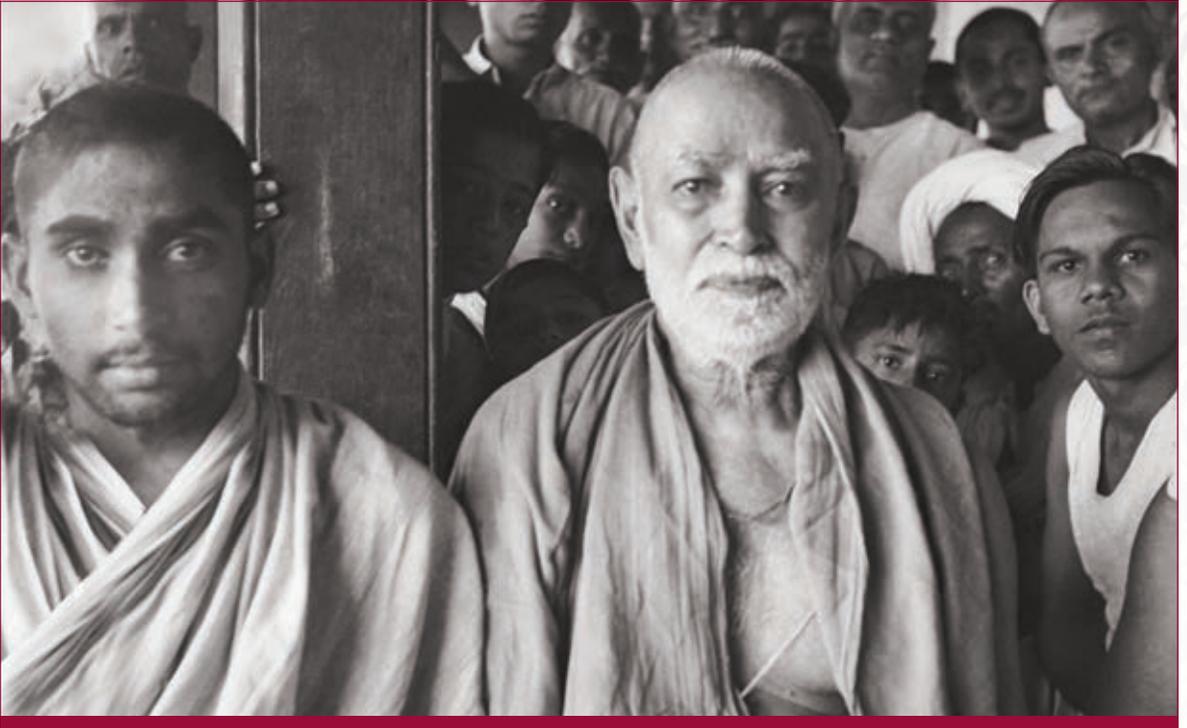
Prabhudas and Ramji Bhagat served there. They said, "As you are *kothari*, you have to go to the farm for security." So, at night they would take me to the mandir's farm to check it. We went to Ambli Vadi, Shankar Vadi and elsewhere. We would leave at 12 midnight and return at 4.00 a.m.

Devo Babar, of Sarangpur village, told the *kothari* of Hanumanji Mandir, Virsang Bhagat, that Prabhudas takes Narayan Swami to make the rounds. So, Virsang Bhagat called them both and told them not to take me, "If you need someone, my man will come and if none of you go, he will still make the rounds." Such was his affection.

Thus, gradually, I learnt everything, because of Swami's blessings. ◆



## SUCH UNPARALLELED COURAGE



Young Kothari Narayanswarup Swami with guru Shastriji Maharaj, Sarangpur, 1949

When Shastriji Maharaj began to build the Bochasan Mandir, there were many difficulties in finishing it. So the ceiling of Thakorji's *garbhagruha* was done, but there were no *shikhars*, *ghummats* or *ghummatis*. Amid such difficulties, the work for Sarangpur Mandir started. Shastriji Maharaj was of such firm mind and said that it will be supreme. And in Sarangpur, he built a three-storey mandir.

Amid so many difficulties and a weak financial position, nobody would have the courage to lay even the foundations of such grand mandirs.

At that time, a senior and scholarly officer of the Gaekwad government came to Sarangpur. He said to Swami, "If the Gaekwad granted me a boon, I would ask for only a village, but would not be able to ask for more. But the work you have done, despite your financial difficulties and your devotees not being wealthy, of building

three-storey mandirs, is amazing."

Shastriji Maharaj said, "I am not doing this. It is all happening by the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

In their homes, people struggle to renovate even their bathrooms. But, such was Shriji Maharaj's power, and Shastriji Maharaj's courage and working style. He placed everything on the shoulders of God and did the work.

At the time, Shankar Bhagat was *kothari* of Sarangpur. He was a great devotee. Very saintly and also worldly wise. Three *kotharis* from Vartal joined Shastriji Maharaj in his work: Shankar Bhagat, Jibhai Ranchhod and Prabhudas Devji. In Vartal, the *kothari* had many powers and comforts. But here, he had to lift stones, serve in the kitchen, go to the farm and do everything. In those days labour was relatively cheap. Labourers were paid 4 paisas per day. A good carpenter

got 4 *anas* daily. The wages had to be paid, but there was a shortage of money. So Shankar Bhagat would write to Shastriji Maharaj.

When Shastriji Maharaj went on *padhramanis*, donations would be given – a rupee or two. Sometimes, if five were given, it was counted as a lot.

So, with the masons, carpenters and others to be paid Rs. 8-10, Shankar Bhagat would explain to them and convince them to wait till the next month for payment. This was the situation, yet the mandir work continued. Even the sadhus had to help in the construction site by carrying stones and bricks and doing other work.

I was young when appointed as the *kothari* of Sarangpur. I had come straight from school [to become a sadhu] and so I was not adept at social dealings. Bhaichand Sheth was there at the time. Swami said, “He will be your assistant and write the accounts. You take care and make sure things are done.”

In those days, we issued receipt for donations of 4 *anas*, 8 *anas* or a rupee. The wealthier gave 2-3 rupees. Monthly donations totalled 25-30 rupees. Shastriji Maharaj would tour in Gujarat (Charotar), conduct *padhramanis* and *parayans*, and would send the donations received to Sarangpur.

In Sarangpur, the local people would not give us even buttermilk. There was a lot of opposition and this work was done amid that opposition. We went to Lathidad for *chhash* (buttermilk) and Botad for *jholi* (alms). In Botad, an old woman would go ahead of us shouting, “They are *bandias*, so don’t give them anything.” Still, the sadhus begged for alms and from whatever we got, meals for the sadhus and labourers were cooked.

When Sarangpur Mandir was being built, Yogiji Maharaj went around a lot to beg for alms. He would beg the whole day and bring *juwar* flour, millet flour, *magdal*, about 20-30 kg, and then food could be cooked. That was the situation in Sarangpur. The food came from begging alms and money donations were used for the construction.

Swami delegated me the responsibility for Sarangpur, but I did not know anything. Bhaichand Sheth would teach me. Once, I became overwhelmed. The accounts books didn’t tally – a difference of 2-3 *anas*. I thought that this was not right. If there are errors then what would happen? So, I didn’t want to continue. Then Shastriji Maharaj came and explained, and things worked out.

Slowly, the mandir work got done. Thakorji was consecrated, but the stone arches and other work continued slowly.

After the golden jubilee celebration (Shastriji Maharaj’s 85<sup>th</sup> birthday) in Atladra, Shastriji Maharaj stayed at Nandaji’s bungalow in Mumbai and discoursed.

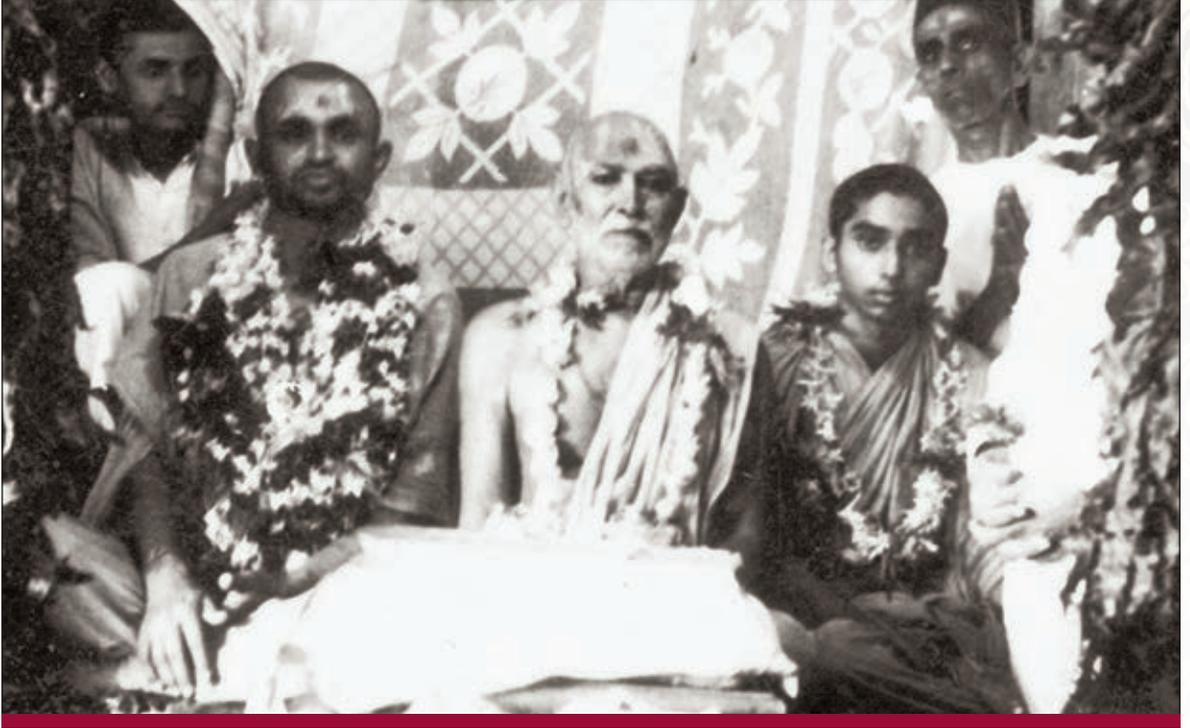
He had begun the work for Gadhada at the time. In Sarangpur, he began construction of the *haveli* and the main gate. The foundations were dug and filled by sadhus and devotees, then the masons began to work – this was his method. The labourers had to be paid, and building materials, cement, steel had to be bought. In Botad was Rajab Alibhai, a Muslim. Even today his descendants are there. We bought materials from him on credit. Another, named Jasani, supplied wood on credit. On the one hand we had no money to pay the labourers’ wages and also no money to pay for the materials. And the work for Gadhada was also started by Swami. All these difficulties piled up, but Shastriji Maharaj had great courage.

When you have money, you can do it with great fanfare, but with no money or income, the Bochasan Mandir incomplete and Sarangpur Mandir in progress, he started a third. Shastriji Maharaj sent the donations to Gadhada. Meanwhile, in Sarangpur, I ran up a hefty debt. The payment for stones, cement and wood was left. I wrote to Swami about the debt and that all the money was going to Gadhada. I was overwhelmed with worry. My worries increased. I stalled the suppliers and even after a year there was no money. So my worries increased.

(Contd. on pg. 24)



## SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ - A DIVINE SPEAKER



Shastriji Maharaj with young Narayanswarupdas Swami during a *parayan* in Surat

After my study on the *Raghuvamsh* was completed in Bhadran, Hirabhai Chaturbhai wished to have a *parayan*.

Shastriji Maharaj asked, "On what scripture?"

He replied, "On the *Satsangijivan*."

Swami (Shastriji Maharaj) informed him, "Two new sadhus have studied it – Narayanswarupdas and Aksharjivandas. Let us have them read it."

Thus, at his behest it turned out to be my first *parayan* in Bhadran. I read two chapters of the *Satsangijivan*. Once I finished reading, Shastriji Maharaj would explain. Thereafter I'd read for one hour. I would prepare and then read. Aksharjivandas would also read one chapter. That was how I started doing *katha*. I would read the Sanskrit *shlokas* and explain their meanings. There were no long speeches, only reading of *shlokas* and explaining them in Gujarati.

(2 January 2007. Sourced from his conversation.)

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I got a similar benefit of being with Shastriji Maharaj in Surat. Swami did the *parayan*. We stayed at the home of Maganbhai (Secretary of BAPS) in Kachhiya Lane. The *parayan* was accomplished wonderfully. Swami had at that time invited all the members of Satsang. There were a large number of devotees present. The local devotees were eager and enthusiastic.

Swami arrived by train. The welcoming ceremony and felicitation commenced at the railway station. The station premises was teeming with people. A procession was taken out through the main street. Simultaneously, there was opposition, too. Pamphlets (full of slander) were being distributed at the same time. In spite of this, people's sympathy (towards Swamishri) was aroused all the more.

Swami himself read during the *parayan*. He

created an ambience of divinity. His work was not ordinary, and the ordinary could not understand it. People who thought, “What will Shastriji Maharaj do?” were left behind, whereas, his (Shastriji Maharaj’s) work soared day by day.

(Contd. from pg. 18)

did not eat much. But Shastriji Maharaj would eat a little and give the rest to me, saying, “You should eat a little more, so that you can do more *seva* in the future.”

Seeing my thin body, Shastriji Maharaj would hold my hand and say, “Your body should be like a full pea pod, so that you can work properly.” Then he would say, “In a well-to-do family, the children would be fed extra in the winter, so that they would remain healthy. You should eat in this way.”

If devotees had brought some *pak* laddus, he would keep them in a tin and give me one every morning. If I couldn’t eat it all, he would tell me to eat a half.

He used to take care for my food and other things. He also sent me to make sure that food and lodgings for the devotees was adequate and taught me how to do *seva*.

At the *parayan* in Karachi, Swami held my wrist and said, “Your wrist should be like a full pea pod.” With great affection he always used to feed me.

My appetite increased after going on the Special Train Yatra with Yogiji Maharaj in 1953.

(Contd. from pg. 22)

I was troubled that we could not pay the suppliers, and still had to go to them to get more materials. It was embarrassing even to go. So I thought, let me go to Gondal. From there I went to Dwarika. There at the Gomti and everywhere, people asked for money. We said we were sadhus, so let us bathe free of cost. Then we went to Bet Dwarika and Bhadra. We had darshan at Gunatitanand Swami’s birthplace and bathed in the Und. Then we went to Rajkot and returned

Shastriji Maharaj seemed ordinary, and many were deluded by it and thus strayed. But his divinity was extraordinary. Swami had self-confidence and immense faith in Shriji Maharaj.

(23 January 1988. Sourced from his conversation.)

Before that, I didn’t eat much. I was thin from the start, but by Swami’s blessings, I gained weight.

**Q:** Did Shastriji Maharaj seat you with him to eat?

**Pramukh Swami Maharaj:** When Swami ate, I would be serving. That was not the time to sit and eat.

**Q:** Kashikaka of Bhadran used to say that just like a king who gets a son at the age of 60 shows great love on him, he had personally seen that Shastriji Maharaj showered such affection on Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Did Shastriji Maharaj ever call you specially to give you *prasad*?

**Pramukh Swami Maharaj:** He would call me whenever he was giving to all. If *halvo* from Mumbai had come, he would give it to all the sadhus. He would give *gharis* from Surat to all.

**Q:** When you talked about becoming a sadhu, and (much later) when you reached Sarangpur (in the rain), Shastriji Maharaj embraced you. Did he embrace you on any other occasions?

**Pramukh Swami Maharaj:** Many times – whenever we went to him while studying or we came from somewhere. ◆

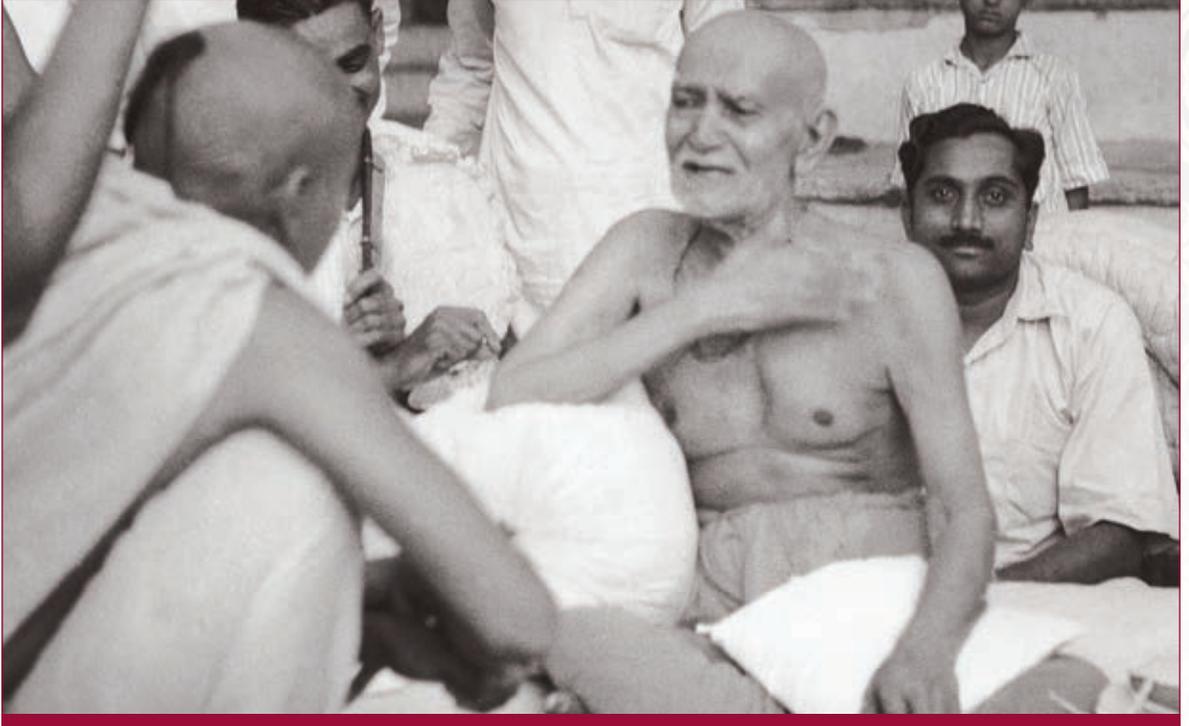
(From conversations on 14 February 2005, 25 June 2005 and 4 January 2007)

to Gondal. In this way about 15-20 days passed. Swami’s letter arrived. I told him, “Because of this I went on a *yatra*.” That was the situation then, but because of Shastriji Maharaj’s work, everyone was motivated. He gave encouragement in even the smallest things and also regarding money. His birth was for spreading the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine. So, no matter what the opposition did, he continued his work. ◆

(From conversation with Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 10 October 2006)



## FULFILLING THE GURU'S CALL



Shastriji Maharaj showers his love and compassion on Narayanswarupdas in Sarangpur, 1951

**S**hastriji Maharaj was constructing a mandir in Atladra (Vadodara). Excavation for the foundation and masonry work were going on at the same time. I was in *seva* with Kothari Aksharswarupdas. At that time everyone had to work very hard: digging the earth for the foundation, supplying bricks, crushing lime and supplying it to masons, and lifting stones and conveying them to the masons. At that time the labour work was done by sadhus and devotees. I, too, was present at that time and was engaged in doing *seva*.

Once, Swami Shastriji Maharaj was sick in Sarangpur. Tulsibhai, the son of Daji Ishwarbhai (brother of Mota Swami), had naturally gone to Sarangpur for Swami's darshan. At that time Swami remembered me two-three times, saying that if Narayanda came here he would read *katha*.

Whenever I had the Bhaktachintamani with

me Swami made me sing from it. Tulsibhai heard Swami say that if Narayanda came I'd like him to read the Bhaktachintamani. After Tulsibhai heard Swami remembering me several times, he departed and went to his village, Purushottampura. From there he came to Atladra. During the night *sabha* he spoke about Shastriji Maharaj's illness. He also narrated some other incidents (of Swami). Then he told me, "Swami Shastriji Maharaj remembers you a lot."

I felt that since Swami has remembered me two to three times, and that he wishes that I come, I should go.

At that time I had not booked my train ticket. There were no other arrangements, but I was ready to go. My clothes and *jholi* were ready. Inside the *jholi* were my puja and eating bowl (*pattar*). I tied up my belongings. Then I did the

evening *katha*. I and a sadhu left the mandir in Atladra at 11.30 p.m. I was resolute about reaching Sarangpur by whatever train was available.

It was the monsoon season. When we left from Atladra (mandir) it was drizzling. However, on reaching the railway station the rain had increased. Vadodara is a very big junction station. Fast and local trains come and go. The Saurashtra Mail arrives and heads towards Kathiawad. I decided to take it and go to Ahmedabad, and from there take another train to Dhandhuka.

It was raining heavily when the Saurashtra Mail arrived in Vadodara at three in the morning. The passengers were sleeping. The windows were closed and there were lots of passengers inside. I climbed the carriage steps and tried to open the (carriage) door, but to no avail. No one opened it. The people inside had locked it and were sleeping. The train started. We held on to the iron rods of the door to stay put. The rain was lashing and the winds were howling, but we remained standing on the carriage steps. The train was going to stop at two places: Nadiad and Mahemdavad, before it would reach Ahmedabad. No one opened the door along the journey, so we remained standing all the way to Ahmedabad. Since it was raining we were drenched when we reached there.

On arriving at Ahmedabad station we had to change to another train. The small metre gauge train to Dhandhuka came via Botad. The entire region was buffeted by rains. It was the same in Saurashtra. On alighting at Ahmedabad, we headed for the other train. But we got news that the train had been cancelled, because the torrential rains had displaced the tracks in the middle of the route. Thus the train could not go. With the train cancelled I thought about how should we proceed? Then I thought we should get back onto the Saurashtra Mail. The train was going to proceed to Viramgam and from there we could catch the small metre gauge train to Botad.

We thus got back onto the Saurashtra Mail. Many passengers had got off at Ahmedabad station so we got a good place to sit. It was still

raining. As we passed by two to three stations the T.C. arrived. T.C. means one who checks the passengers' tickets – a ticket collector. Everyone had to show their tickets to him. We had our tickets, but they were for the Dhandhuka train and not for the present one. So, he told us, "Your tickets are not valid for this train. You'll have to pay for the journey."

"We don't have any money. We were going to travel by the other train but because the railway tracks were displaced we came back onto this one."

"But you'll have to pay for it."

I replied, "We are sadhus. There's no one with us, and we don't keep any money. Because of what has happened we had to catch this train. When we come across a devotee of ours we will tell him to pay you. However, right now we don't have any money at all."

By God's grace he understood our plight and agreed. He felt that we were sadhus and that whatever we said was true. Thereafter, he did not press us further.

Then we got off the train at Viramgam and got onto another train, which covered a longer route via Surendranagar to Botad. [Finally] we got off at Botad station. It was raining heavily. Water had inundated the roads and surrounding lands. We could not find a buggy to take us to Sarangpur, which is 10-12 km away. There were no means to reach Sarangpur. A man from the old mandir had come with a bullock cart. He said, "Put your baggage in here. I'll take it for you." We placed our *potlas* in the cart and started walking. There was water all around. At some places the water level touched our abdomen, in some areas it was neck-deep, and at other spots it was more than neck-deep. The river had swollen because of the water that was flowing in from rivulets. We felt that if we entered it we would get carried away or drown. So, we remained standing where we were.

(Contd. on pg. 29)



## RESOLVE TO PLEASE THE GURU



Shastriji Maharaj with Narayanswarupdas Swami in Mumbai, 1949

When I met Shastriji Maharaj, he asked me to become a sadhu; and I did. From the day I left home, I had resolved to only do what pleased Shastriji Maharaj. I had wished to study English, but Swami said study Sanskrit – and that’s what I did.

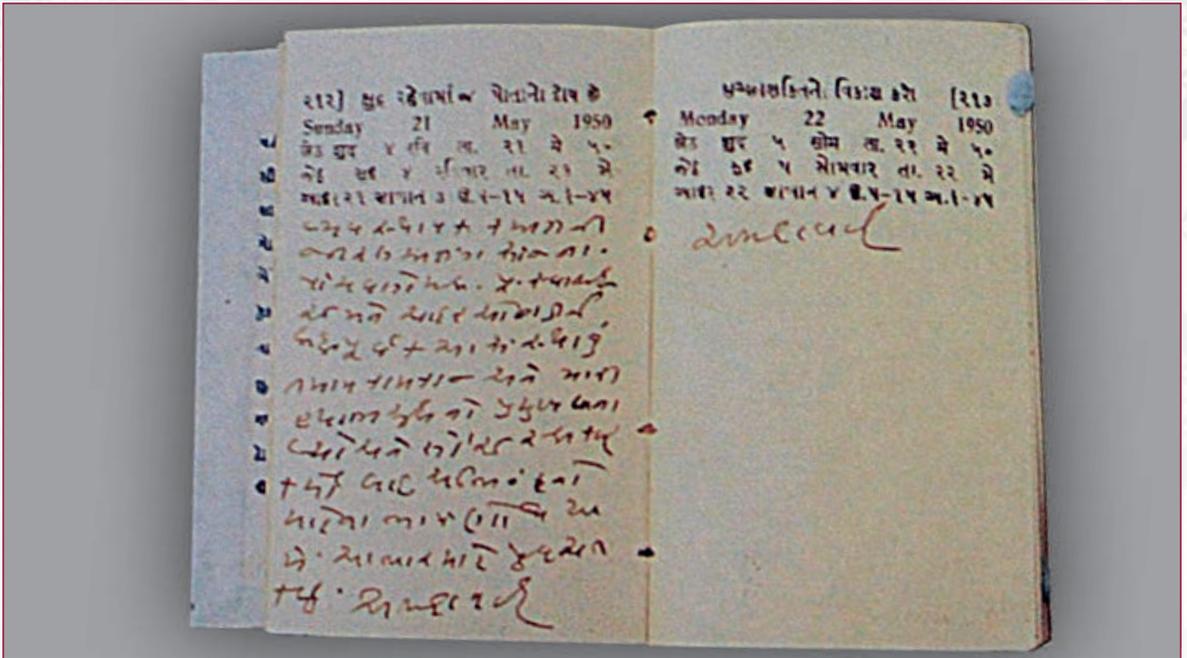
My only aim is to discharge the *seva* he has given me in the best possible way. Like the 500 *paramhansas* who had understood the glory of Shriji Maharaj and thus sacrificed themselves, so too I have had the single aim of pleasing Shastriji Maharaj.

He appointed me as the *kothari* of Sarangpur mandir. I was young when I became a sadhu. So, I did not know how to carry out the administrative affairs. Being a *kothari* means knowing about the mandir accounts. But I came from an ordinary family, and we didn’t have a big business from which I could have learnt. However, Swami told

me, “You have to do it.” By his grace I discharged that duty. In fact he (Shastriji Maharaj) was doing it.

Thereafter, I was told to undertake a very big responsibility – to become the president of the Sanstha. I was 17 years when I became a sadhu. When I was 28 years Shastriji Maharaj thought of this (duty for me). For me it was too big a task. The reason being I was not that educated, so I didn’t have the knowledge and capacity either. Furthermore, there were senior sadhus who had sacrificed their all for Shastriji Maharaj, and before them I was a mere child. So, to be given such a big responsibility, I wondered how I would be able to do it?

Shastriji Maharaj, however, wished that because of old age he wanted to entrust the administrative responsibility of the Sanstha to Narayanda. Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter to



A page from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personal diary in which he wrote briefly of the event on the day he was appointed as president of BAPS by Shastriji Maharaj (21 May 1950)

me (in this regard) from Mumbai. So, I wrote back, “I am not eligible for this because I have very little education. I am also a new sadhu. It is beyond my capacity. It would be better to appoint a senior sadhu.”

So, Shastriji Maharaj wrote again, saying, “I know everything.” In spite of receiving the second letter I reiterated my words. But Swami said that he wanted to appoint me as the president. Then he conveyed his wish to Champakbhai Banker. I said to him, “I do not have any such capacity, but if it is the wish of Shastriji Maharaj I will take up the *seva*. He will have to inspire me. If it is his command, I will do it, otherwise, I do not have such strength. Only on his strength will I be able to do it.”

Then Shastriji Maharaj arranged everything at a home in Amblivali Pol, Ahmedabad. It was there that renowned businessmen came for Shastriji Maharaj's darshan. A committee meeting was called there. Earlier, the constitution of the Sanstha had been drafted there in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. So, the members of the committee were called. Shastriji Maharaj's

health was poor.

On waking up after his afternoon rest Shastriji Maharaj sent for me. He was very happy and placed his hands on my head and said, “Since you have agreed to become the president I feel very peaceful.”

I said, “Swami, it is impossible to carry out such a work.”

Swami said, “You won't have to do it. Shriji Maharaj will do it and I'll do it. There is no need for you to worry. You don't have to take that burden on yourself.”

Then he called Yogiji Maharaj and said, “From now onwards I am appointing him as the president.” And so saying, he placed a shawl (*chadar*) on me. He told Yogiji Maharaj to place his hands on my head and said, “Bless him so that he gains the virtues you have, he attains *sadhuta* (saintliness) and he is able to accomplish good works.” Then Yogiji Maharaj blessed me.

Thereafter, Shastriji Maharaj stated, “You please Yogiji Maharaj and do what he says.” Then Swami called a meeting. Many felt that I was too young and the Sanstha's work was too big.

They thus told Shastriji Maharaj, “Think before what you are going to do.” They had all thought of Yogiji Maharaj for the responsibility. In reply, Shastriji Maharaj said, “I know. Yogi is a great, illustrious person, but I wish to make this young sadhu the president, and he will do well.”

Shastriji Maharaj said, “Through all these years I have established the Sanstha and I have not had any troubles. All that I have done so far I have done with due thought. And this too I am doing after due thought. He is young, but I’m sure he will do it well. There is no need for you to worry.” Thereafter everyone was pleased.

Then during the committee meeting an appointment letter was read and thereafter Shastriji Maharaj placed a shawl around me. Thus I firmly believe that everything is run today because of his wish, power and inspiration.

When I was appointed as president and when I was given the sadhu *diksha* Shastriji Maharaj had instructed me to please Yogi Maharaj. After Shastriji Maharaj went to Dham I did not have any other thought (other than pleasing Yogi Maharaj). While engaged in administration (of

the Sanstha) problems did arise. But I had firmly decided to please the devotees and fulfil Yogiji Maharaj’s words.

On the spiritual path there is nothing other than focusing oneself on God and guru. What does he (guru) wish? What does he like? One should remain passionate about these thoughts. If one thinks otherwise, one can never progress. God is the doer. Whatever he does is for one’s good. In spite of making efforts, when the work does not get done one gets disturbed and depressed. But I have only one thought – this is Shastriji Maharaj’s Sanstha and I have Yogiji Maharaj’s blessings – thus I’ve never had weak thoughts and never felt tired. As a result he was happy (with me). All the works (in the Sanstha) are being done because of his inspiration.

On the spiritual path *moksha* is attained only through Bhagwan and his Sant. Without the grace of Bhagwan and the blessings of the guru nothing becomes possible; and along with their blessings one should make efforts. ◆

*(Sourced from Swamishri’s talks on 1 July 2004 and 29 November 2004)*

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*(Contd. from pg. 26)*

Soon, a shepherd came from the direction of Botad. He asked us, “Where do you want to go?”  
“Sarangpur.”

“Come, I will accompany you.”

I felt good about having his company. We began to walk along with him. Where there was more water, he would hold our hands and help us wade through. That’s how we reached Sarangpur. The shepherd went his way when we reached the outskirts of Sarangpur.

We went for Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan. He was lying awake on a cot in his room. I had his darshan and prostrated before him. Swami was very pleased to see us. He asked about how we came from Atladra. I explained everything. On hearing about our circumstances he became

pleased with us. He sat up on his cot and embraced me. I was hesitant because my clothes were wet and so Swami’s clothes would get wet, but still he embraced me. He happily placed both his hands and blessed me. He said, “You have undertaken so much trouble to come here, thus Maharaj will be pleased.” Then I took a bath and did my puja.

At night I sang the Bhaktachintamani. Swami was very pleased on that occasion. I was able to offer my bhakti towards him. Though I had to bear and tolerate the little pain and discomforts, I felt satisfied because Swami was pleased with me and I was able to be of little service to him. ◆

*(Sourced from Swamishri’s conversation on 28 September 1996)*



## SWAMIJI IS ALL-POWERFUL



Shastriji Maharaj in Gadhada after acquiring the land on the hilltop

**W**hen Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal he did not have the means, sadhus, money and devotees. Nevertheless he established such a big organization. This reflects his strength. To enshrine the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam in thousands of souls is by no means an ordinary feat. He had the power to create from nothing. From the effects one can understand the cause. Swami was always determined in whatever work he undertook. He believed that the work will be accomplished. He had inner faith and courage! He believed the task he had taken up was absolutely right. With such faith he persevered and built such big mandirs. He appeared to be small. People said that Shastriji was just a fistful of bones, so what could he do? But he accomplished a Herculean task which his opponents also praised. The whole world saw what great works he accomplished.

He built a mandir of marble in Gadhada. When a householder builds his house he does the first floor well, but as he builds the top floors his mindset becomes confined and short. Shastriji Maharaj built all the mandirs, but his last in Gadhada he made out of marble! As he proceeded ahead (in building one mandir after another) he exerted all the more.

I had to go to Makrana quite often for (acquiring stones for) the Gadhada mandir. It was very difficult to build a mandir of marble because the stones and labour costs were very high. Whereas the stones from Porbandar cost two to three rupees per cubic foot. Everyone said that making a mandir out of marble would be costly. But Shastriji Maharaj said, "Let it be so, but I want to make it of marble." At that time Shastriji Maharaj said, "There will be a change in political governance, and during the construction of the Gadhada mandir we will get

someone to donate Rs.100,000.”

At that time there was stiff opposition, and Mohanbhai Motichand, a leading light of Gadhada, was the main opponent. He had told the Maharaja, “Do not give land for building a mandir to Shastri Yagnapurushas.” The official order was thus made and it could not be changed.

The *pratishtha* of Sarangpur mandir was done in V.S. 1972 (1916 CE). Ever since then efforts for acquiring land in Gadhada were going on. Many years had elapsed. Whenever I went with Swami to Gadhada for darshan we would take a dip in the river Ghela. Then Shastriji Maharaj would sit there and say that he would like to build a mandir on the hilltop. He would point it out to everyone and say that to all. For years no one ever welcomed and offered us any hospitality. Only Keshav Maharaj of the Ramji Mandir offered us lodgings, and no one in the village welcomed us. There was only one *satsangi* called

Haribhai Mistry. But he was poor. He had a very small house, so he could not host us, thus Bawaji (Keshav Maharaj) gave us accommodation. In such circumstances Shastriji Maharaj would say, “I want to build a mandir in Gadhada.” Initially Shriji Maharaj had wished to build a mandir on the hilltop, but it did not become possible then. So, Maharaj built a mandir at Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. Maharaj said it would be done in future.

Shastriji Maharaj had resolved to build a mandir on the very place that Maharaj desired. Mohanbhai Sheth said, “You will have to spend lakhs of rupees to make the hillock conducive for construction. Instead build a mandir on the holy grounds of either Lakshmi Vadi or Radhavav.” But Shastriji Maharaj replied, “The whole of Gadhada was sanctified by Maharaj, but he had wished to build a mandir on the hilltop; that is why I wish to build it there.”

(Contd. on pg. 36)



Shastriji Maharaj seated in the centre while devotees play *ras* in Sarangpur

A child once asked Swamishri, “Can you narrate an incident of Shastriji Maharaj that you like most?”

Swamishri: “Shastriji Maharaj was a divine person. (Establishing) God’s *upasana* was his work and his *vicharan* was for that purpose. During festivals and celebrations he rejoiced and pleased the devotees.

“Once in Sarangpur, the devotees arrived in large numbers to celebrate a festival. Everyone said that Shriji Maharaj had played *ras* here in Sarangpur. The devotees told Shastriji Maharaj to sit in the middle since they wished to play *ras* around him. Swamishri agreed.

Thereafter, the sadhus and devotees joined in playing and singing *ras*. Swami sat in the middle solely for their remembrance. Swami expressed his joy on seeing the devotion of all. And among them, Prabhudas Lalaji started singing, ‘*Āj māre gher thāy lilā laher...*’ and danced before Swami. In this way Shastriji Maharaj gave such memories to all and pleased them. By remembering such incidents we, too, experience happiness.”

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“Once, in Gondal, everyone sang *dhun* till 2.00 a.m. during the festival of Sharad Punam. Shastriji Maharaj was seated on a platform behind the mandir. Yogi Maharaj and others were also seated there. Ramchandra Thakar and his brother, Bhailal, started singing the *dhun*. Vignananand Swami knew about music and Shastriji Maharaj had learnt a little music from him. So, Swami started playing the *dilruba* while the *dhun* was being sung. Since he played well, the devotees became elated and started singing kirtans. Some even stood up and started singing. This went on for 15-20 minutes. For the remembrance of all Shastriji Maharaj gave divine happiness to all.”

(From Swamishri’s conversation on 10 July 2004)



## ALWAYS ABSORBED IN HIS GURU



Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami and Swami Narayanswarupdas (far left) in Jaipur, 1947

**Q:** Do you meditate on Shastriji Maharaj as being the form of Shriji Maharaj?

**Swamishri:** Having seen the guru in person and associated with him, I meditate upon the guru, with the belief that he is the form of Shriji Maharaj.

**Q:** While doing darshan of the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj do you think of him as a *murti* or do you think about his actions?

**Swamishri:** I think about his actions. Like he is sitting on a bed, talking, sitting in a particular manner, meeting him on a particular occasion – thus I think and remember him in many ways. I also remember Yogi Maharaj in the same way: he is seated in Bochasan, in Sarangpur, and he is talking in such a manner. I don't remember him in any particular sequence, but I remember him spontaneously and naturally. Sometimes I remember the same occasion ten times. But it's new all the time and I recall what I remember the most.

**Q:** Is it so that when you are in Gadhada you remember the pastimes of your gurus in Gadhada and when in Sarangpur that of Sarangpur? Or do you recall any *lila* at any time?

**Swamishri:** Whichever place I'm in I recall the incidents of that place. When I am in Bochasan I remember them and the same with Sarangpur and Gondal.

**Q:** What special remembrances do you have?

**Swamishri:** The Suvarna Jayanti celebration of Shastriji Maharaj (in Atladra). Then, when I had gone with him to Jaipur and other important occasions. Other than that I recall those that I have in my memory.

**Q:** When you are in Sarangpur what do you recall?

**Swamishri:** I recall where Shastriji Maharaj used to sit and discourse, how he listened to discourses while sleeping and while I was reading. I also remember his call 'Hare, hare' while listening

to *katha*.

Sometimes, Shastriji Maharaj would sit in a chair while supervising the construction of a wall, and also while we were working on the construction of the main gate. Once, while the stone seats (*bethak*) were being hoisted to the mandir, Harikrishna Swami called Swamishri for lunch. Swami replied, "Once the seats reach their place I'll come." By the time the work was done it was about 1.30-2.00 p.m. Such incidents come to mind.

**Q:** When you are in Gadhada what incidents do you remember?

**Swamishri:** Swami stayed very little in Gadhada. I came with him only two to three times: once when he came to perform the *bhumi pujan* of the mandir. At that time he sat down and described that he wanted to build a mandir here, the main gate facing the village, the sadhus' living quarters behind, and the steps leading from the mandir down to the river Ghela and others. I also recall when sadhus sang kirtans. Many times I remember when Swami came for darshan here and he would point his hand and say with determination, "The mandir will be built here. I see a mandir on this hill." At that time one could not imagine that we would acquire the hilltop in Gadhada and

a mandir would be built. Similarly, I also recall the times when I had gone with Shastriji Maharaj for darshan at the 'old' mandir.

**Q:** Sometimes when you are thinking of Shastriji Maharaj have you experienced that he is talking to you in person?

**Swamishri:** When I recall an incident about him it is like him talking to me. I feel that when he is talking, I am listening. When he is saying, "I see the mandir on the hill," at that time one can obviously see (him in one's mind).

**Q:** Do you see him in person at that time?

**Swamishri:** Yes, I do. When I recall an incident I can see the way he is sitting, talking and speaking.

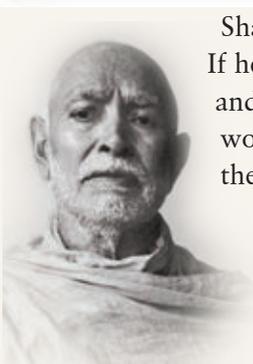
**Q:** Does Shastriji Maharaj talk to you that the land for the London mandir or Delhi Akshardham will be obtained. And does Shastriji Maharaj bless you and say, "Go, it will be done."?

**Swamishri:** No, it is not like that. However, praying to him for that is alright.

**Q:** What wishes of Shastriji Maharaj do you always remember or have in mind?

**Swamishri:** The main gate to be made here in Gadhada and others. ◆

(From Swamishri's conversation on 12 April 1986)



Shastriji Maharaj possessed all virtues. He possessed diverse talents and skills. If he had to cook and prepare ten types of vegetables he would be able to cope, and not allow them to get burnt. Since Swami had stayed in Surat he could make wonderful *dudhpak*. In that, once the rice grains get cooked, he would crush them to make them homogenous with the milk.

Shastriji Maharaj's skill to serve food was also wonderful. There are food-servers who, not wishing to go and serve the second time, serve everything at one go.

But Swami would not do that. He served according to the needs of the diners.

Furthermore, rice did not grow in the stony soil of Kathiawad, but Shastriji Maharaj grew rice in that soil. First the saplings were grown, then he himself would re-plant them. He would do it himself to teach others.

He also knew about and played music. The father of Dhirubhai Inamdar, Ishwarbhai, was a great devotee. When Shastriji Maharaj played the *dilruba*, Ishwarbhai would say, "The Lord's *murti* is dear..."

Swami was adept at all the 64 skills and arts. He would make the mandir plans for the Sompura. He had knowledge about constellations and the types of stone pillars. Though he had not studied, he was divine. Shastriji Maharaj himself was divinity incarnate. That is why he was an expert in all the arts.

(From Swamishri's conversation on 27 May 2007)

# SWAMI RAMANANDA

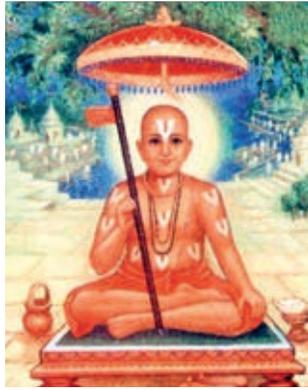
*Swami Ramananda (1299-1410 CE) changed the spiritual landscape of northern India.*

*He propagated the worship of Rama and Sita among the masses.*

*Raidas, Tulsidas, Kabir and Mirabai were among his numerous followers.*

The Medieval Age witnessed a change in the political and spiritual life of India. Turko-Afghans had acquired political control over northern India and the Sufis of the Chisthi Silsilah like Moinuddin Chisthi, Nizamuddin Aulia, Qutbuddin Bhakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid and others established themselves in the Ajmer-Delhi region. They spearheaded the Islamic movement to convert northern India to their faith. By proclaiming the universality of Islam, these Sufi clerics sought to present an alternative to the deprived sections of the Hindu society. They could not, however, make much headway because of the hauteur of the Muslim ruling class. The divisions among the Muslim elites were in no way different from the caste system which they boasted did not exist in the Muslim society. At the lowest rung of the Muslim society were the Hindu converts to Islam; some like Malik Kafur rose in the hierarchy by dint of sheer merit. They were the exceptions. Hindu converts were mostly slaves, as the Sultans used to enslave Hindus to increase the population of Muslims.

The Islamic thrust led to a counter-movement from the Hindus, which provided hope to the masses. It came in the form of the Bhakti movement and Swami Ramananda was its leading light in northern India; it had its origin in the South pioneered by Ramanujacharya. According to one version, Ramananda originally belonged to the South, and he migrated to the North and propagated Ram-bhakti; previously the people were worshippers of Krishna only. Thus the Bhakti *sampradaya* came on the scene at an opportune time in the North. The teachings of Ramananda



and his numerous followers in subsequent days provided the Hindu masses, who were denied the privileges by the upper castes even in matters of faith, an opening on the religious front. Ramananda had a galaxy of disciples that included Brahmins like Anantananda and Sukhananda, despite the fact he turned his face against Brahmin orthodoxy. More about this later.

The political events provided an ideal atmosphere for Ramananda's ministry. Muslim atrocities were at their height at that time. It is said he succeeded in curbing their severity through his mystical powers. He was suited for the task from his birth.

It is generally accepted that Ramananda (1299-1410 CE) was born at Prayaga (present-day Allahabad) in an orthodox Kanyakubja Brahmin family. His father was Punyasadana, Bhurikarma or Devala, and mother was Sushila. He had a unique childhood. The family Purohit, Varanasi Awasthi, advised the parents to pay special attention to the child. They were cautioned not to take him out of the house till he was three years old. He should always be given milk and should never be allowed to see his image in a mirror. All these precautions were taken and when Ramadatta (Ramananda's childhood name), was four, the *annaprasana* ceremony was held, in which he was given solid food. The child took a liking for *payas* (rice porridge) compared to the other dishes placed before him and that continued to be his food for the rest of his life.

Ramananda had the usual training of a boy born in an orthodox Brahmin family. When he was eight, he was invested with the sacred thread. By

that time he had acquired considerable knowledge through listening to his scholarly father reciting the Vedas, other shastras and the epics. The boy had remarkable grasping and retentive power, which his proud father noticed. So, even at such a young age, he showed promise of his future brilliance. In no time, he became such a master that few could match him in discussions and debates.

After receiving initial training at home, he went to Varanasi for higher studies. There he first learnt under a Smarta teacher. The search for a guru led him to Raghavananda, a Vaishnava teacher of the Ramanuja *sampradaya*, who administered *diksha* and named him Ramananda. By age 12, Ramananda became a profound scholar. As was the practice in those days, his parents thought of marriage. The boy had decided on *brahmacharya* and he spurned the idea of marriage. After taking *diksha*, he settled down for *tapasya* in a hut in Panchaganga Ghat, Varanasi, following popular demand. He began to attract large crowds and his fame spread far and wide. Not only ordinary devotees, but scholars belonging to different faiths, like Buddhism, Jainism and Islam, would flock to him to have their doubts cleared. He had been equipped for a mystic role from his childhood.

After initiation, Ramananda served his guru for a number of years. Then he decided to go on *tirth-yatra*. Till then, Ramananda led the life of an orthodox Vaishnava. That pilgrimage proved to be a turning point in his life and he rebelled against prevailing customs. Differences arose between Ramananda and his guru over food. It was the custom at that time for anyone going on pilgrimage to be particular from whom one was accepting food; it was one way of ensuring the food was prepared by a Brahmin. But sometimes it became a little difficult. Ramananda could not satisfy his guru on that score. After discussing the matter, it was decided that the disciple should atone for any lapse through *prayaschitta*. This was galling to a man who began his career under a guru who thought highly of him; Ramananda would have none of it. He was expelled from the sect. It did

not take long for him to cross the Rubicon.

Ramananda says: "Let no one ask a man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man is devoted to Hari, he becomes Hari's own."

The conditions in those days were far from happy. Complaints of Muslim atrocities began to reach the young sadhu. Taimur was carrying out genocide against the Hindus. Only the Divine could help in the circumstances. As a result of Ramananda's powers, the Muslims began to experience difficulties in carrying out their religious activities. The *maulvis* were finding it hard to summon the faithful to namaz. On enquiry, it was found that a *siddhapurush* could be the cause; he was stifling the activities of the mullahs. That was the reason why they found it difficult to even summon people for prayers in several parts of the north. They traced the source of their difficulty to Ramananda. So, Muslim elders waited in deputation on him in Varanasi; Kabir was a part of the delegation. When they were meeting him, Ramananda blew the conch and some of the members of the delegation fell down unconscious. They then realized their mistake and Ramananda delivered a discourse asking the Muslims to maintain the common good. They were counselled not to interfere with the religious practices of the Hindus, and they were specially told not to humiliate the Hindus.

Following the break with his guru, Ramananda democratized religion by propagating devotion to Ram and Sita. His philosophy was very simple. He did not believe in the supremacy of Brahmins and encouraged free dining among his followers irrespective of their previous caste labels. Ramanujacharya too, had great concern for the downtrodden; but he would not let them read the Vedas. He left other methods to them for their *moksha*. Ramananda on the other hand made no such distinction. He raised the vernacular tongue to the status of Sanskrit and promoted the growth of language.

Ramananda evolved a sect that subordinated the importance of rites and ceremonies and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation,

to the higher excellence of worship by means of unalloyed faith. He preached no esoteric doctrine reserved only for the privileged few. The list of his prominent followers testifies to this. The most important twelve followers of the saint were Ravidas, the cobbler; Kabir, the weaver; Dhanna, the Jat peasant; Sena, the barber and Pipa, the Rajput, as well as Bhavanand, Sukhananda, Asananda, Surasuranada, Paramananda, Mahananda and Sri Ananda. Ramananda had a wider vision of spiritual life. He made no distinction of caste and creed, and even accepted Muslim devotees as his disciples. He also did not make any distinction or discrimination even between males and female. It is recorded that “Ramananda is the teacher who placed the sexes on equality by calling two women to be his disciples”. Among his top disciples were Padmavati and Surasari, who attained high spiritual powers. His disciples, too, initiated women, among whom were members of royal families like Jhali, the Queen of Chitor, and the famous Mirabai.

Ramananda exhorted his disciples to acquire

(Contd. from pg. 31)

Shastriji Maharaj had said that because (the *murtis* of) Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj wanted to be consecrated at that place there would be a change of political power, and we would get the land and Maharaj would be enshrined there. He said with immense power and confidence that we would find a person who would donate Rs. 1 lakh. One man would give a lakh rupees and the mandir would be built. And the mandir was indeed built! When the auspicious *kalashes* were established, (51) youths were given the sadhu *diksha*.

Thus the task that Swami so wished indeed happened. There were thousands of hitches, but when Swami lay down to rest he would sleep instantly. He had no worries because he left everything on Maharaj. Thus today, we are reaping the benefits of his works. The drums of victory sounded at the gate of Yagnapurush, and so mandirs were established joyfully in Africa, London and Europe. In

only realized knowledge, as bookish knowledge was useless. “The way of faith is higher than the way of knowledge,” he declared. This is stated in the holy scriptures. What is new was that it came from one who was versed in bookish knowledge, but had given it up as a matter of principle.

One of what is said to be the saint’s composition is included in the *Granth Sahib*, the sacred book of the Sikhs, but it is missing from the collection brought out by his disciples.

The saint’s exit from the world was as mystical as it could be. On the eve of Ramnavami he gathered his disciples around him and told them he was going to Ayodhya, and ordered them not to accompany him. Then he entered his hut and that was the last time the world saw him.

Sources: *Kalyan Bhakta Charitank (Code 40)*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur.

Mahipat’s *Bhaktavijaya* (translated from Marathi into English by Prof. N.R.Godbole).

*The Spirit of Indian Culture* by Vivek Bhattacharya, Metropolitan Book Co., New Delhi. ◆

Delhi, too, there was the sound of joy and victory.

We, too, must rely on this (divine) strength. Today we are happy in every respect. I congratulate you on having joined in such a work. When you hear such talks about our past, and the hard times in which this work was done, you gain inner strength.

Such works can only be accomplished by God alone. Only God’s powers can fulfil such works. And with God’s powers working through Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj they accomplished such wonderful works. What the great (divine persons) will, happens. But they do it in accordance to the ways of our world, bearing financial and other difficulties. Such great people have taught us that in the midst of difficulties if we keep God in the forefront of our works then they will be successfully accomplished. ◆

(Sourced from Swamishri’s conversation on 10 October 2006)



## Inauguration of Sahaj Anand **WATER SHOW**

6-7 November 2014, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi

The inauguration of the new Sahaj Anand Water Show was a fitting way to usher in the tenth year since the opening of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. Since its inauguration on 6 November 2005, Swaminarayan Akshardham has hosted hundreds of thousands of visitors from over 190 countries of the world. Its inspiring attractions include audio-animatronic dioramas on the life, work and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, a large-format film on the travels of teenage-yogi Nilkanth Varni and an indoor boat ride exhibition through 10,000 years of Indian history. At the open air Yagnapurush Kund, a 300ft x 300 ft step well, countless visitors have been enchanted over the past nine years by the ethereal musical fountain show depicting the story of creation.

In year 2012, it was decided to enhance the fountain show with a new story. The team of sadhus and volunteers led by Pujya Ishwarcharan

Swami and world renowned creative director Yves Pepin, worked very closely and chose a story from the Kena Upanishad. This story illustrates an essential message through an engaging story of the devas and how they are defeated despite their tremendous powers. This essential yet subtle truth, when understood, leads to a subtle bliss – ‘Sahaj Anand’. Once the story was finalized, Yves Pepin and a team of volunteers then identified various technologies which could be used to present this story effectively. The fountain was redesigned for the new show and the construction team started the necessary modifications of the Yagnapurush Kund to accommodate the new design. After almost a year of dedicated, devoted and collaborative efforts of all involved, the site was ready for the final programming of the show. In just two weeks, Yves and his fellow team members from France and BAPS’ technical team programmed this highly



complicated water show to creatively blend the water jets, lights, moving nozzles, laser projections, video projections, surround sound, special effects and live actors to effectively convey the message.

### **Inauguration**

On 6 November 2014, at 3.00 p.m., the Yagnapurush World Peace Yagna was held at the newly renovated and refurbished Yagnapurush Kund, at the feet of the imposing, yet benevolent 27-ft *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami performed the main *yagna* rituals. Also participating in the *yagna* were Yves Pepin and his team, Vipul Vaghela, Ritesh Gadhia, Parag Shastri and other leading BAPS volunteers, as well as devotees from India and abroad.

At the conclusion of the rituals, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami addressed the gathering.

The next day, Friday, 7 November, was the inauguration assembly which commenced at 6.00 p.m. with the recital of Vedic verses.

On the stage were Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami,

Pujya Atmaswarup Swami, former Deputy Prime Minister of India Shri Lalkrishna Advani, former Lt. Governor of Delhi Shri Vijay Kapoor, Yves Pepin and Indian tourism minister Shripad Nayak. After the traditional lighting of the auspicious lamp and welcoming rituals, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly, “This water show is a devotional effort using modern technology to reveal to the young generation of India the wisdom and knowledge of ancient India. It conveys the spiritual messages that God is the all-doer and that we should all shed our ego. The ancient rishis of India teach us these values.”

Thereafter, Atmaswarup Swami addressed the assembly, adding that this show, made by BAPS sadhus and volunteers, is truly a gift to the nation and the world. He also stressed that this Indian marvel has been made possible by the voluntary efforts of so many dedicated individuals combining together to make this show and convey the message.

Then Shri L.K. Advani congratulated BAPS and Pramukh Swami Maharaj on performing such inspiring endeavours for the uplift of society.

Addressing the inauguration assembly Yves Pepin stated that he was privileged to have got the

opportunity to help with making this Upanishadic show. Mr. Pepin said it was a pleasure and a matter of pride for him to have been able to work with the sadhus and volunteers of Akshardham.

Then declaring the water show open for all, Pujya Mahant Swami said, “Since ancient times, India has had a storehouse of spiritual and scientific knowledge. This water show is a splendid example of this. This spiritual water show inspires us to become free of ego. Today, one of the most troublesome problems in the world is that of mental stress. Our ancient spiritual wisdom teaches us that by understanding God as the all-doer, we can become free of ego and experience the spontaneous bliss of God. Heartfelt congratulations to all the BAPS sadhus and volunteers who have served in this project.”

Finally, Pujya Mahant Swami performed *pujan* of a manuscript of the Kena Upanishad, the ancient scripture on which this water show’s storyline is based.

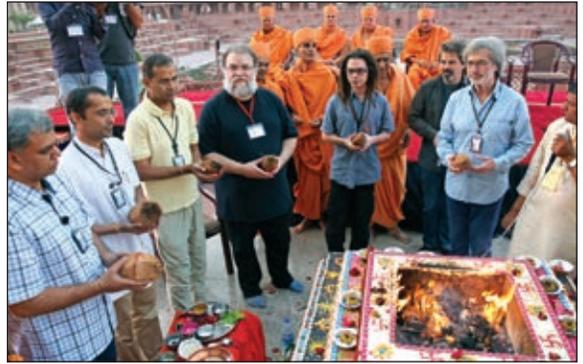
Then, the show began: a mesmerizing 24-minute spectacle which seamlessly blends live acting, lasers, fire effects, water fountains, melodious music, projections and many other features.

The invited guests were left spellbound and spiritually enriched by the show.

Now, with the Sahaj Anand Water Show open to all, countless more will be inspired by the ancient spiritual wisdom of India which is still relevant and practical in today’s modern age.

Sahaj Anand Water show team:

- Inspirer: Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- Project Leader: Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami
- Creative Director: Yves Pepin
- Graphic Design: Shrijiswarup Swami
- Story Research and Script: Aksharvatsal Swami, Kamlesh Pandey
- On-site Logistics: Atmoswarup Swami, Dharmavatsal Swami, Jnanmuni Swami
- Technical Director: Vipul Vaghela
- Project Coordination: Ritesh Gadhia
- Music Composition and Sound Production:



Parag Shastri

- Laser Programming: Claude Lifante
- Video Projection Mapping and Setup: Alexis Gabirot, Viral Patel (London)
- Technical Services: Amarish Munjani
- Show Programming: Baiju Gadhia, Greg McLenahnan
- Civil work: Kirtisagar Swami, Ashwinbhai Patel, Sureshbhai Sompura
- Electronics, Electrical and Mechanical Installation: Manovijay Swami, Shubhchintan Swami
- Special Effects: Nishkampurush Swami, Dhyeynishtha Swami
- Cabling: Rushipurush Swami, Nirmalpurush Swami
- Creative Design Assistant & Cast Training: Smit Thacker
- Other volunteers: Dr Hitesh Patel (Anand), Nilkanth Patel (Vadodara) , Kiran Patel, Mitesh Patel (California), BAPS youths from East Africa, UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and India (especially, devotee youths from Ahmedabad, Bharuch, Bhadra and Silvassa).◆



# OPINIONS

The capacity to enlighten and the centre for spirituality are in India. Today, Swamiji is doing this. Outstanding. Worthy of praise. Even today, India can remove the darkness and unrighteousness of the world through its spirituality.

- **L.K. Advani**

Former Deputy Prime Minister of India

The world's best show! It will attract tourists from all over the world. The main reason for tourists will be to see this show in Akshardham.

- **Justice R.C. Lahoti**

Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of India

Through the Sahaj Anand Water Show, India became alive before our eyes. It is a live representation of our eternal values.

- **Tarun Vijay**

(Renowned Author and MP, India)

I have reached the heavens. It was an entirely new experience. I felt so much mental peace. Everyone should resolve to come here repeatedly. There will be peace throughout the world.

- **Prakash Hinduja**

Renowned Entrepreneur

This will change the world. The message is amazing, touching to the heart. 'Take off ego, you will have happiness.'

It is world's great creation. Message brings joy and happiness to all of us. I will bring my Apollo Family here again and again.

It has happened by coming together.

I don't think there would be anyone who

would not be elated by seeing this.

Children are superb because they have the power of joy.

Very gratifying, amazing, wonderful and joyous.

- **Dr P. C. Reddy**

Chairman, Apollo Hospitals

It is an incredible synthesis of science and spirituality. Stunning experience.

This is great innovation I was looking for. This is a spiritual experience, great service to humanity.

Great message makes India proud.

I could not image that this could be delivered in this fashion.

- **Dr Vijay Bhatkar**

Scientist, India's First Super Computer Innovator

By far the most amazing light show in the world. On par with marvellous, historical creations!

We were laughing, dancing and singing with the music and it was absolutely fantastic.

- **Dr Alex Hanky**

Scientist, Theoretical Physics & Vedic Science

You get a soothing feeling at the beginning of the evening.

In this world, the message is very critical and so important – doing away with one's *ahamkar* (ego), and how can you be helpful to others.

Hope everyone who watches gets influenced and carries the message to the whole world.

- **Dr Rajat Goyal**

Country Head, Bill Gates Foundation for HIV & AIDS Research

Brilliant spiritual experience, one of the best in the world. Spirituality emerges out of it, so much for all to learn.

A profound message is communicated in a lucid manner. It will benefit whole of India and the world.

- **Aman Sinha**

Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India  
It was amazing, outstanding event. Culture has been put in an extraordinary manner.

- **Lagan Shastri**  
Vice President, Coco Cola India

It is amazing, most impressive.

It is a show with a meaning. Message is in every aspect of life – perform our duties in harmony, do good for the world.

Previously, I used to send people to see Akshardham. Now, it is a must-see Akshardham.

Only Swaminarayan devotees can make such a show happen. It is because of devotion and dedication of everyone here.

I have not seen total dedication anywhere else.

I salute Akshardham, Pramukh Swamiji, all sadhus and volunteers.

- **D.R. Karthikeyan**  
Former Director of CBI

The show will make India proud. Millions of people will be so happy with this show.

- **Ramoji Rao**  
Chairman, Ramoji Rao Film City, Hyderabad

Witnessed an amazing show.

Akshardham has emerged as the most important creation of spirituality. A place for everyone to understand about Indian culture and heritage. I have not seen this type of phenomenon.

Message is told in a simple way – don't use your powers, use them for the good of mankind.

This will be a showcase for India and Hinduism.

Giving the message in a contemporary method is important. And nobody does it better than BAPS!

Visuals that strike you are how laser lights have been used. Audio experience is phenomenal. Larger than life images amaze you. Control of water and curving of lights not seen before. Fire over water is mind-boggling. Technical wizardry is impressive.

However, you may have many technicalities but production may not be an orchestra. It may be a cacophony. Here it merges well and for me more

important is the message which is phenomenal.

From here everyone, from a child of 5 to a 95 year old, will take something which they will never forget.

- **Ashish Chouhan**  
Managing Director, Bombay Stock Exchange

The message of humility and staying without ego was heart touching. Exhilarating show with a deep meaningful message conveyed effortlessly.

- **Rashmi Binani**  
CEO, Consultant, Faridabad, Haryana

The water show is very well conceived, divine presentation.

- **Divya Kush**  
Director, School of Architecture, Noida, UP

I live in a place which has one of the best shows (Burj Khalifa, Dubai). But this literally blew me away. The message in the end took the entire show to another level.

- **Dr Anila Bakshi**  
Sharjah, UAE

I can simply say in one word that this is the best day in my life.

- **Mukesh Bhansali**  
Businessman, Kolkata

I would love to take back the freshness and cleanliness back home. It is spirituality and serenity which has mesmerized me. Also I am very impressed with Swamiji preaching about shunning ego.

- **Amit Sharma**  
General Manager (Ops.), Harper Collins  
Publishers India, New Delhi

I was spell bound. It seemed that I am in some other world other than Earth.

- **Rakesh Bhushan**  
Ex-Deputy Director of Income Tax  
Ghaziabad UP

# Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

August-November 2014

Sarangpur, Gandhinagar, Robbinsville (NJ, USA),

Ahmedabad, Sarangpur

## AUGUST

### 1, Friday, Sarangpur, Gandhinagar

In the evening, Swamishri left Sarangpur and arrived at Dr Tejas Patel's Apex Heart Institute in Ahmedabad at 8.50 p.m. for a routine check-up. At 11.10 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the BAPS mandir in Gandhinagar and gave darshan to the devotees. He was honoured with a garland of *rakhdis*.

### 4, Monday, Gandhinagar

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the newly built BAPS *hari* mandir in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Swamishri inaugurated an English publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpath, *Yagnapurush Upanishad*, translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas.

At 6.50 p.m. Swamishri visited the Akshardham complex for darshan. Swamishri also performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of Shri Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*. Thereafter Swamishri saw the Satchidanand Water Show.

### 5, Tuesday, Gandhinagar, Robbinsville

At 12.52 p.m. (IST) Swamishri's plane departed from Ahmedabad and travelled via Brussels to Newark airport, landing at 10.30 p.m. (EST). Swamishri's visit to Robbinsville, New Jersey, was to perform the *pratishtha* rituals of the newly built BAPS *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir and sanctify the land of Swaminarayan Akshardham. (For full report of *yagna*, *nagar-yatra* and *murti-pratishtha* refer to *Swaminarayan*

*Bliss*, September-October 2014.)

### 18-19, Monday-Tuesday, Robbinsville, Ahmedabad

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the small *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Milwaukee, Pittsburg, Kansas City, Sterling Heights, Bloomington, Munster, Cincinnati and Keelhon. Once the marble *murtis* arrive at each centre the divinity in the consecrated small *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj will be ritually transferred into them.

At 2.47 p.m. Swamishri departed from Robbinsville for Newark airport. Thereafter Swamishri resumed his journey to Ahmedabad via Paris. Swamishri landed at Ahmedabad airport at 7.50 p.m. and travelled to the mandir in Shahibaug. Swamishri was festively welcomed and honoured with garlands by Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

For the next five days, till 24 August, Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees every morning and evening.

### 25, Monday, Ahmedabad, Sarangpur

Swamishri inaugurated a publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpath, *Mandir: Faith, Form, Function*, written by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas.

At 6.40 p.m. Swamishri travelled by road to Sarangpur. At 9.55 p.m. Swamishri arrived in Sarangpur amidst the welcome tunes played by *satsangi* youths of the Bhavnagar Satsang Band. Children dressed in colourful costumes waved

flags to welcome and honour Swamishri while he was on his way to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. After Thakorji's darshan Swamishri was welcomed with traditional dances performed by members of the youth training centre (YTK) and the schoolchildren of BAPS Vidyamandir. A firework display was held and thereafter everyone offered *mantra-pushpanjali* to honour Swamishri.

## 26, Tuesday

This afternoon Swamishri asked three times whether spiritual discourses were held in the mandir daily. The sadhus said yes. Swamishri added that everyone should develop an inclination to listening to *katha*.

Prior to retiring to bed at night Swamishri spoke, "Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have truly decorated our Satsang. They built mandirs therefore they have to be run. If we have saintliness then that will be possible. Everyone should serve with unity. Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Nirgun Swami and other sadhus did *seva*. We should follow that and embellish our Satsang."

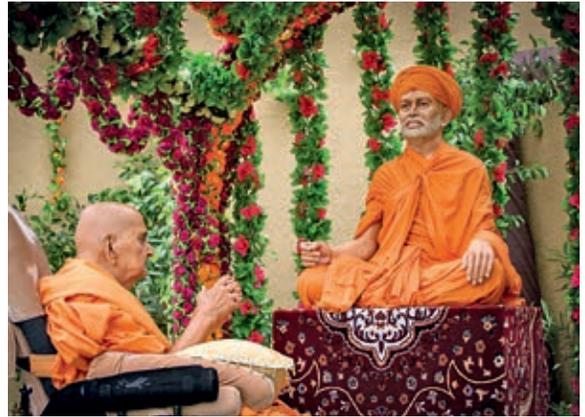
## 27, Wednesday

At 1.40 p.m. Swamishri went to the sadhus' dining hall in his wheelchair. It was lunchtime and Swamishri graced all the sadhus. Thereafter, Swamishri went to the rooms of Yogiji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj for darshan. Then he was taken to the assembly hall where the afternoon *katha* was in progress. Thereafter, Swamishri returned to his quarters.

## SEPTEMBER

### 5, Friday; Jal Jhilani Festival

Swamishri performed his morning puja in the garden adjacent to his quarters – Pramukh Udyan. Thereafter, Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan at 8.30 a.m. The mandir sanctum was decorated in accordance with today's festival – a cutout of a boat with waves was arranged before the *murtis* of Dham, Dhama and Mukta in the central shrine. Swamishri performed *arti* before



Swamishri engrossed in darshan of Shastriji Maharaj

all the three shrines. Then Swamishri went for darshan to the Smruti Mandir and guru *shikhars*.

On his way back Swamishri came to the Narayan Sabha Mandap to preside over the Jal Jhilani festival assembly. Senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with flower garlands. Then Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was customarily taken for a boat ride in an artificial pool arranged in the assembly. Swamishri blessed all the devotees for the occasion and retired to his quarters.

### 12, Friday; Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva

At 9.00 a.m. Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir. Swamishri was wearing his *pagh* tied in the traditional style that Shastriji Maharaj used to wear. After pressing a remote control switch, *dudhpak* flowed from a vessel attached to the hand of Maharaj's *murti*. Then Swamishri proceeded for darshan to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, where Shastriji Maharaj's *murti* was embellished with flowers.

On returning to his quarters Swamishri performed his morning puja.

At 10.10 a.m. Swamishri came to Pramukh Udyan. Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with a beautiful garland. Swamishri then offered *dudhpak* to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Thereafter, Viveksagar Swami offered a small bowl of *dudhpak* to Swamishri, and Swamishri drank the sanctified *dudhpak*. Then Swamishri served *dudhpak* to all the sadhus.

At 11.45 a.m. Swamishri arrived at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika to give darshan to the devotees. The Smruti Parva assembly had commenced at 8.15 a.m. The glory of Shastriji Maharaj and his works were explained by Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Puja Viveksagar Swami and Puja Dr Swami. In Swamishri's presence, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami narrated the incident of Shriji Maharaj giving *dudhpak* to Jodha Bharwad. Then Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami offered a bowl of *dudhpak* to Swamishri, who drank a little, thus accepting the devotion of all. After blessing everyone from the stage Swamishri retired to his quarters.

In the evening at 9.25 p.m. Swamishri came to Pramukh Darshan Vatika to give darshan to all. A skit on 'Hira Mukhi' was enacted by youths from Ahmedabad. Thereafter the senior sadhus brought some memorabilia of Shastriji Maharaj to Swamishri for darshan: Puja Dr Swami brought a pillow, Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami brought a hand-fan, Puja Viveksagar Swami brought an upper cloth, eating bowl (*pattar*), a gourd (*tumbdi*), a pair of shoes and a *tilakyu*. Finally, Swamishri was garlanded and honoured on behalf of all by Puja Dr Swami.

#### 14, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated a VCD publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, "*Karu Vandana Pragji Sadgurune...*". The VCD features a drama presentation on the life and work of Pragji Bhakta performed during the inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahuva. The drama was written by Adarshjivan Swami.

#### 21, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the canvas *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and guru *parampara* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Bhestan, Surat.

#### 23, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*

rituals of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Sita-Ram Dev, Shri Shiv-Parvatiji and Shri Hanumanji-Ganapatiji for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Columbia, North Carolina. Swamishri performed the *arti* and *pujan* rituals and blessed the devotees from far. Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the guru *parampara murtis* two days later on 25 September.

#### 25, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Ghanshyam Maharaj and the canvas *murtis* of the guru *parampara* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Savarkundla. Swamishri also blessed the devotees from far.

As part of the annual Navratri festival celebration Swamishri has inspired 'Bhakti Parva' to be held at all the BAPS centres for teenagers and youths. The daily evening programmes comprise of bhajans, speeches, discourses and games. From today onwards, for nine evenings, youths from different satsang centres of Gujarat performed traditional dances, skits and speeches before Swamishri.

#### 30, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Sita-Ram Dev, Shri Shiv-Parvati and Shri Hanumanji-Ganapatiji and the guru *parampara* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Greenville, South Carolina. Swamishri performed the *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* rituals.

#### OCTOBER

#### 7, Tuesday; Sharad Purnima Festival

Swamishri performed his morning puja at the Pramukh Udyan. Thereafter Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan in the mandir and blessed the devotees from far at the Narayan Mandapam.

In the evening at 4.45 p.m. the assembly for



Swamishri performs the evening *arti* in Pramukh Darshan Vatika

the birthday celebration of Gunatitanand Swami commenced at Pramukh Darshan Vatika. The assembly programme included speeches by senior sadhus on the life and work of Gunatitanand Swami. The speeches were interspersed with *arti* and bhajans. Swamishri arrived at 6.12 p.m., welcomed by the auspicious sounds of drums, *jhalar* and conch shells. Thereafter five *satsangi* boys anchored the rest of the programme. Children and youths also performed traditional dances. The children narrated incidents revealed by Shriji Maharaj about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as his abode, Akshardham.

At 9.48 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the Pramukh Udyan. Then the senior sadhus played *ras* with Swamishri while the rest of the sadhus played *ras* around Swamishri. Swamishri blessed all with divine memories.

#### 9, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti*, *pujan* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Atul Society (Vapi), Moti Tambadi (Selvas), Chala (Vapi) and Vaghchhipa.

The day marked Swamishri's 500th-day stay in Sarangpur. During this time Swamishri had performed the *murti-pratishtha* of over 80 BAPS *hari* mandirs.

#### 10, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for five BAPS *hari* mandirs in Selvas: Aapti, Surangi, Ohmkacch, Falandi and Tedhara.

Swamishri also inaugurated the Akshar Diary, 2015, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

#### 14, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti*, *pujan* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Koyli (Vadodara rural), Nandesari (Vadodara rural), Maganad (Jambusar) and Lilotari Bazaar (*satsang bhavan* in Jambusar).

#### 18, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti*, *pujan* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Sidhsar

(Limbdi) and Lilongwe (Malawi).

### 19, Sunday; Swamishri's 75<sup>th</sup> Renunciation Day Anniversary

The day marked Swamishri's 75 years since renouncing home. A festive ambience was set up before Thakorji, the Smruti Mandir and in the assembly halls.

At 10.10 a.m. Swamishri was honoured with a garland by Pujya Viveksagar Swami at the Narayan Mandapam. At 7.40 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika. The youths of Yuva Talim Kendra enacted the scene of Shantilal's renunciation. Swamishri gave darshan and blessings to all.

### 20, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti*, *pujan* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji, and the canvas *murtis* of guru *parampara* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Khijadiya (Gadhada region), Kalatalav (Gadhada region) and Vanch (Ahmedabad rural).

### 23 (Diwali) and 24 (Annakut, New Year's Day), Thursday & Friday

On Diwali, the Sharda Pujan rituals were performed at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. More than 4,000 accounts books of devotees were arranged there. Swamishri sanctified rice grains and flower petals, which the senior sadhus showered on all the accounts books.

On New Year's Day, a grand *annakut* of 1,270 vegetarian food items was offered to Thakorji outside the Yagnapurush Assembly Hall. (For brief details and photos see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November-December 2014 p. 50.)

From 27 to 31 October Swamishri did not give darshan to the devotees because of cold and cough.

## NOVEMBER

### 1, Saturday

From 30 October to 2 November a *shibir* for volunteers of BAPS children's wing was held. In all, 800 *bal karyakars* were present. In the evening a wonderful 90-minute light and sound show on the history of Sarangpur mandir was held on the mandir grounds. The show was titled 'Yagnapurushno Dwar'.

### 3, Monday (Kartak *sud* 11)

According to the Indian calendar the day marked 75 years of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *parshad diksha*. Shastriji Maharaj had given Swamishri the *diksha* at Ambliwali Pol in Ahmedabad.

As part of the special *ekadashi* celebration fresh vegetables were displayed before Thakorji. Swamishri held and showed different vegetables from his room to the sadhus doing darshan.

Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to Hemanshubhai and named him as Achyut Bhagat.

### 10, Monday

As part of the year-long Shastriji Maharaj's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations 27 sadhus from 18 BAPS mandirs and 300 selected male youths and devotees accomplished a pilgrimage by foot from Mahelav to Sarangpur, covering 150 km in five days. The pilgrimage was inaugurated on 5 November by Pujya Mahant Swami in Mahelav and concluded on 10 November in Sarangpur in the presence of Swamishri and amidst a festive welcome. Swamishri appreciated their efforts and blessed them all.

### 11, Tuesday

Swamishri inaugurated a new DVD publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith called 'Samasya ek Samadhan Anek'.

### 15, Saturday

As part of the year-long celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary 185

sadhus, *parshads* and *sadhaks* pilgrimaged by foot from Gadhada to Sarangpur. Out of them 13 sadhus had commenced the pilgrimage at 3.00 a.m. and arrived in Sarangpur mandir at 10.45 a.m. Swamishri blessed the sadhus from far.

### 16, Sunday

Fourteen sadhus started a *dandvat yatra* at 8.00 a.m. from Gadhada to Sarangpur. Along the way 48 sadhus, *parshads* and *sadhaks* joined in the *dandvat yatra*, some of who joined from Ningala and Lathidad. In all, 62 sadhus performed the *dandvat yatra*, covering a distance of 36 km, and arrived at 8.30 p.m. All the pilgrims were given a warm welcome as they entered the precincts of Sarangpur mandir and headed towards the Smruti Mandir and then to Swamishri's quarters. They had performed a total of 23,800 *dandvats* for Swamishri's health, with six sadhus observing a liquid fast and six sadhus walking barefoot. They braved the hot sun during the day and sporadic rain along the way. Swamishri blessed all the sadhus.

### 20, Thursday

Two sadhus from the BAPS Chhatralaya in

Dhuliya, Maharashtra, Harshvardhan Swami and Akhandmuni Swami, pilgrimaged by foot from Dhuliya to Sarangpur in 15 days, covering a distance of 565 km. Two more sadhus, Devprayag Swami and Devvallabh Swami, and three youths joined the pilgrimage during the final 70 km.

Nine male and seven female devotees of Dhuliya walked the last 10 km to Sarangpur. They all accomplished the pilgrimage for Swamishri's health and blessings.

### 23, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated an audio CD published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith called 'Sant Vyakhyan Mala, Part 7'.

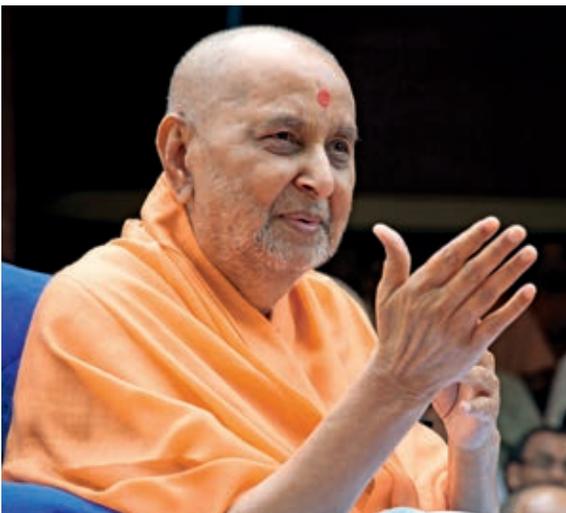
### 24, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Adelaide, Vaghai (Navsari), Kamboi (Godhra) and Ariyana (Surat rural). Swamishri blessed the devotees from far. ♦

*(Translation of excerpts from Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati)*

## LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

August-November 2013



### THE KEY TO BECOMING BRAHMARUP

#### 11, September, Sarangpur

Viveksagar Swami said to Swamishri, "Our principle is Akshar-Purushottam, the mantra is Swaminarayan and our aim is to become *brahmarup*."

Swamishri confirmed, "That is true. Everyone has to become *brahmarup*. We have to realize our aim and mantra."

Viveksagar Swami asked, "How can we become *brahmarup*?"

Swamishri replied, "Only when the guru is pleased."

Viveksagar Swami enquired, "How can one

please the guru?”

Swamishri replied briefly, “By doing what he says.”

#### GOD ACCEPTS HIS DEVOTEES’ BHAV

17, September, Sarangpur

Swamishri eats only a few small morsels in a day, and sometimes he does not eat anything for two to three days.

Krishnavallabh Swami asked Swamishri, “What would you like to eat today?” Swamishri remained silent. Then the attendant sadhus asked, “Would you like Thakorji to have something?”

Swamishri replied, “Yes, offer it to Thakorji.”

Narayancharandas Swami explained, “Thakorji has already been offered *thal*. But what will Thakorji who resides in you eat?”

Swamishri replied, “He accepts the inner feelings [*bhavna*] of all.”

#### SOURCE OF STRENGTH

20, September, Sarangpur

Swamishri was engaged in his daily exercise session. During one exercise Swamishri raised his hand and applied some strength. Seeing him do this Yogvivek Swami praised, “Wonderful. You did the exercise well. But Swami you do not eat, so where do you get the strength from?”

Swamishri replied, “It is God’s strength and the blessings of the gurus.”

Yogvivek Swami asked, “Which guru?”

Swamishri said, “Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.”

The attendant Swami asked, “Two?”

Swamishri stated, “Yes. Shastriji Maharaj gave (me the sadhu) *diksha* and Yogiji Maharaj gave me knowledge.”

Viveksagar Swami enquired, “Which knowledge?”

Swamishri replied, “Akshar-Purushottam.”

Swamishri’s source of inner strength lies in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus. Throughout his entire life he has believed God and his gurus’ blessings to be the source of

strength in all that he does.

#### CONVICTION IN THE DOERSHIP OF GOD AND GURU

5 October, Sarangpur

Swamishri was listening to talks related to the Amrut Mahotsav celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj in 1967. Hariprakash Swami asked Swamishri, “Swami, everyone had made different personal suggestions about the venue of the celebration but you suggested Gondal. Why did you suggest Gondal?”

Swamishri replied, “Because it was Yogiji Maharaj’s wish.”

The sadhus asked further, “But Mota Swami and others got angry on you. What about that?”

Swamishri said, “Oh that’s okay, but Yogiji Maharaj was pleased.”

Viveksagar Swami asked, “How did he (Yogiji Maharaj) express his joy on you?”

Swamishri raised both his hands and started blessing in the manner that Yogiji Maharaj did.

Yogvivek Swami explained, “All the *seva* departments were handled by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Hariprakash Swami asked, “Swami, how were you able to cope singlehandedly?”

Swamishri revealed, “Yogiji Maharaj was the doer.”

An attendant asked, “Did Yogiji Maharaj come in person to do it himself?”

Swamishri said, “I prayed to him, and so he did all the work.”

Hariprakash Swami asked further, “Swami, did you not think then that in spite of being the president why you had to do so much?”

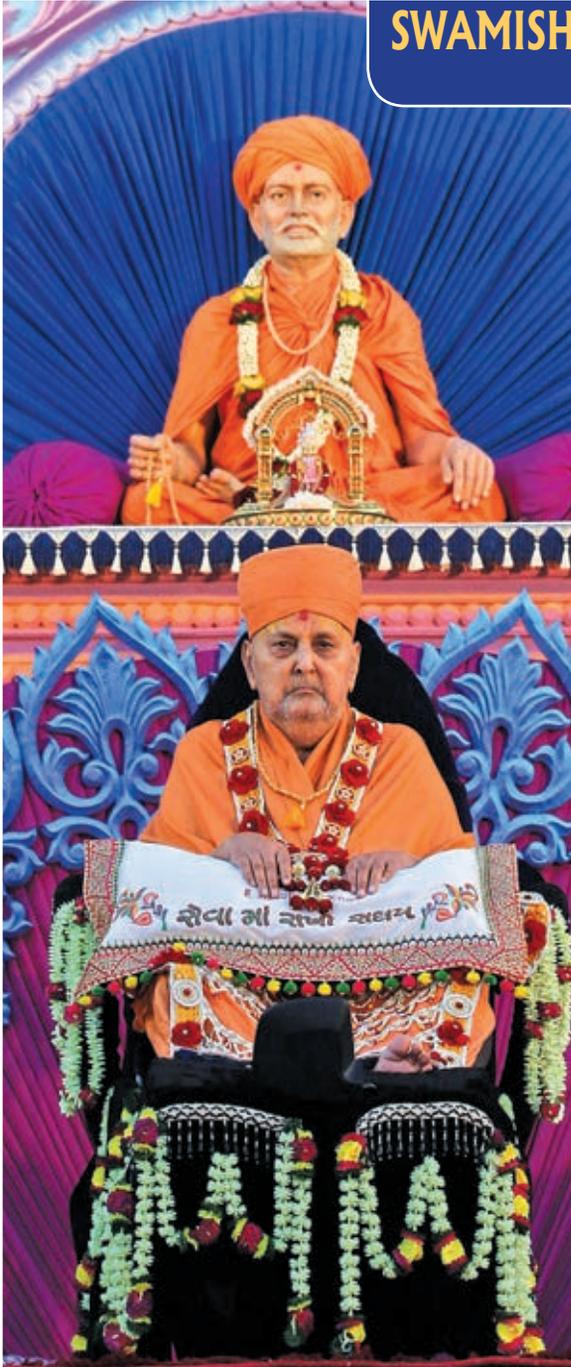
Swamishri answered, “I was not doing it! It was Maharaj, Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj who were doing it, and still are.”

Someone questioned, “They are doing it?”

Swamishri revealed, “Yes, they are doing it. If we take it upon our head that we are doing it, we will feel the burden. They are the doers of everything.” ◆

# SWAMISHRI'S 94<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

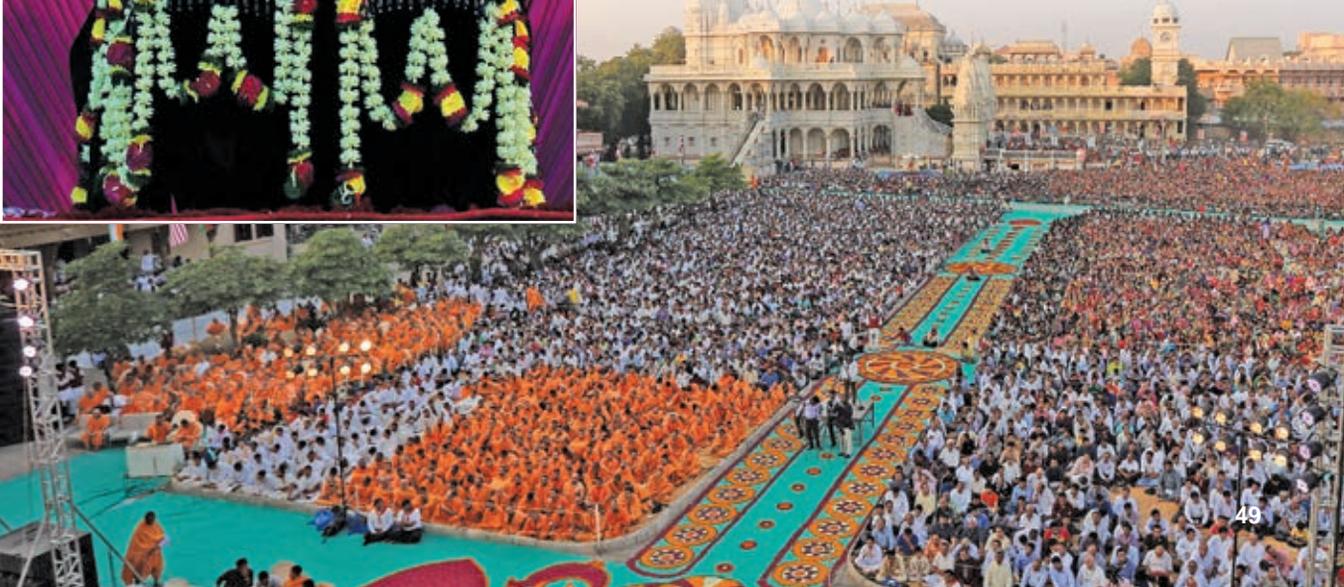
29 November 2015, Sarangpur



Prior to Swamishri's darshan in the morning, senior sadhus addressed the audience about Swamishri's divinity and works. At 9.50 a.m. Swamishri performed his morning puja in the large glass cabin to the view of sadhus and devotees seated in Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Thereafter, at 10.22 a.m., Swamishri came out of his quarters and travelled by golf cart for darshan to the Smruti Mandir. Thereafter, Swamishri had Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir. At 11.10 a.m. Swamishri arrived at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika stage to bless the sadhus and devotees. Swamishri then retired to his quarters.

At about 3.30 p.m. the main celebration assembly commenced with *dhun* and a prayer outside the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh. The assembly was themed on 'Aj Pamyā Alaukik Saath'. The entire celebration programme comprised of speeches by sadhus and senior sadhus interlaced with videos and dances. At 5.45 p.m. Swamishri arrived on the festive stage. More than 12,000 devotees had gathered for the celebration. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami prayed on behalf of everyone to Swamishri. Then everyone performed *mantra-pushpanjali* to honour Swamishri. Then the senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands and shawls while the congratulatory bhajan of "Abhivandan..." was being relayed.

In conclusion, everyone performed *arti* of Thakorji and Swamishri. Then Swamishri travelled in a golf cart towards his living quarters, giving darshan to all along the way. ♦



# Guru Parampara Murti-Pratishtha and Pramukh Swami Maharaj Janma Jayanti Celebrations

3-7 December 2014, Atladra (Vadodara), India



This year's celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Janma Jayanti was an occasion of added joy for the devotees in Vadodara, as new *murtis* of the Guru Parampara were installed at the Atladra mandir.

A large open space in the Samata suburb of central Vadodara was specially prepared for the celebrations in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. The celebration grounds featured a variety of devotional activities which took place for 108 hours inside traditional huts. These devotional activities included *dhun yagna*, *jap yagna*, *lekhan yagna*, *shravan yagna* and *vanchan yagna*. Also on the celebration grounds were four exhibitions: Sanskruti Darshan, Sahajanand Darshan, Mandir Darshan and Sant Mahima Darshan.

The festival had many humanitarian activities running in parallel. For instance, a blood donation camp was kept running throughout the celebration period, with a total of 65,000cc of blood being donated by devotees and well-wishers. From 3 to 5 December, a Yagnapurush World Peace Mahayagna was held. A total of 19,150 couples (38,300 *yajmans*) sat around 623 *yagna kund*s to participate in separate *yagnas* over the

three days. In the presence of *sadguru* sadhus, the participating couples performed Vedic *yagna* rituals while praying for world peace and for the long life and good health of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In all, the participating devotees offered 1,200,000 *mahamrutyunjay* mantra chants, while, in the main *yagna kund*, the senior sadhus offered 125,000 *mahamrutyunjay* mantra chants. On the afternoon of 6 December, a grand *nagar yatra* took place in which the forthcoming 150th birth anniversary celebration of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj was highlighted.

Commencing from the well-known Polo Ground, the procession passed through Dandiya Bazaar, Sursagar, Lal Court, the main bazaar and returned to the Polo Ground. The *nagar yatra* stretched for 2 km and included the following items: Mayur Rath and Hansa Rath carrying the Guru Parampara *murtis* to be installed, decorated floats depicting *upasana*, mandirs and Satpurush through various mediums, young children in various costumes, youths displaying a variety of skills, dance groups and bhajan groups. Throughout the four kilometre route thousands of onlookers witnessed the colourful procession.

On the morning of 7 December, the new guru *parampara murtis* were installed in Atladra Mandir

(Vadodara) with full Vedic rites by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Kothari Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami. The mandir's newly built stone main gate – Yagnapurush Dwar – was inaugurated and marble footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were consecrated in the mandir campus. Thereafter, an assembly was held in which leading city dignitaries and others were felicitated.

In the evening, thousands of devotees attended the grand 94th birthday celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at Yagnapurush Nagar. Based on the theme 'Ame runi guruji tamara chhie...' ('Guruji, we are indebted to you...') the assembly featured inspiring skits, energetic dances, captivating videos and speeches by the *sadguru* sadhus and others. The celebrations concluded with everyone participating in the *samuh arti*. ♦

## Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 94th Birthday Celebrations

23 November 2014, Ahmedabad

In the vast Pramukh Vatika grounds opposite the BAPS mandir in Ahmedabad, over 21,000 devotees gathered to celebrate Swamishri's birthday, in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami.

The evening assembly theme, '*Esha Brahmi Sthiti*', was based on the spiritual qualities of the Gunatit Satpurush described in the Bhagavad Gita.

The assembly featured speeches by sadhus, each describing a specific quality portraying Swamishri's divinity, skits and videos depicting Swamishri's divine virtues, and traditional dances by children, teenagers and youths. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Mahant Swami also addressed the assembly. The celebration assembly concluded with *samuh arti*.

The grand finale assembly was part of the week-long 'Pramukh Parva' celebrations from 23

to 29 November. During the week, devotees from all the suburbs of Ahmedabad pilgrimaged by foot from their areas to Amblivali (Yagnaprush) Pol in the early morning. Also, at their homes, devotees prepared *rangolis*, lit *divos*, read and discussed Swamishri's incidents from *Yugvibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj*, recited the *janmangal namavali* and offered extra *malas*, *dandvats* and *pradaksh-ninas* to Thakorji.

In this way, devotees of all ages devoutly celebrated Swamishri's birthday.

Grand celebrations to commemorate Swamishri's birthday were also held in Surat, Rajkot, Anand and Sankari.

In addition, BAPS centres worldwide held celebration assemblies in honour of Swamishri's birthday. ♦



# Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham

18 December 2014, New Delhi



United States House of Representatives Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu member of the United States Congress, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi on 18 December 2014 to experience India's ageless beauty, borderless culture and timeless values.

Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard was welcomed in a traditional Indian manner with a garland of flowers, a *chandlo* and the tying of the sacred *kalva* (sacred thread) by trustees and senior volunteers on behalf of Swaminarayan Akshardham and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

Congresswoman Gabbard's delegation included Sunil Khemany, Manav Lalwani and MEA Undersecretary Nabanita Chakrabarti.

After admiring the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), the delegation made their way to the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir where they witnessed the world's 'Largest Comprehensive Hindu Temple'.

After offering respects and viewing the mandir's architecture, the delegation visited the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth) that includes 148 life-sized carved stone elephants depicting the message of social harmony, peace and spirituality.

The delegation experienced the educational exhibition – Sanskruti Vihar – a cultural voyage

that sails through 10,000 years of India's glorious heritage, highlighting India's contributions to humanity through the ages. Thereafter they witnessed the Sahaj Anand Water Show, a theatrical presentation about an ancient Upanishad story with modern fountains, projections, lasers and pyrotechnics.

Sharing her experience of Akshardham, Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard wrote, "Many thanks for a warm welcome and a beautiful tour of Akshardham on my first-ever trip to India. The temple itself is intricately designed, with an incredible story on how it was built. The Sanskruti Vihar boat ride and Sahaj Anand water show were impressive both because of the content and hi-tech engineering. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to visit! I look forward to visiting more Swaminarayan Mandirs around the US and the world." ◆

# Ambassador Kathleen Stephens Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham

3 January 2015, New Delhi



Former United States Chargé d’Affairs in India, Ambassador Kathleen Stephens, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi on 3 January 2015, and was welcomed in a traditional Indian manner with a garland of flowers, a *chandlo* and the tying of the sacred *kalva* (sacred thread) by trustees and senior volunteers on behalf of Swaminarayan Akshardham and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

Ambassador Kathleen Stephens’ delegation included Ambassador Skand Tayal (Indian Foreign Service, Retd), Mrs Kusum Tayal and Anil Aggarwal (Chairman at Solwin Energy India Pvt. Ltd & Visual Interactive Dynamics Inc.).

After admiring the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), the delegation made their way to the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir. After offering respects and viewing the mandir’s architecture, the delegation visited the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth) that includes 148 life-like stone-carved elephants depicting messages of social harmony, peace and spirituality.

Ambassador Kathleen Stephens offered prayers for world peace and harmony by offering *abhishek* to the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni

The delegation saw the large format film,

*Neelkanth Yatra*, and thereafter, they experienced the Sanskruti Vihar boat ride. Finally, they witnessed the recently opened Sahaj Anand Water Show, a theatrical presentation depicting an ancient Upanishadic story using a creative blend of modern fountains, projections, lasers and pyrotechnics.

Sharing her experience of Akshardham, Ambassador Kathleen Stephens wrote, “Thank you so much for sharing not only this beautiful place but the spirit of service and volunteerism that inspires and infuses it. Let us all work for peace and unity in the New Year.” ◆



## India

### BAL SEVAK SABHA (BSS) KARYAKAR SHIBIR 30 October-2 November 2014, Sarangpur



From 30 October to 2 November, a BSS Karyakar Shibir was held in Sarangpur. The Bal Sevak Sabhas (BSS) are weekly meetings of the Sanstha's dedicated children who serve as volunteers for children's activities and other social uplift and cultural activities. Around 800 BSS *karyakars*, who are responsible for training the 6,000 BSS children, attended this special four-day *shibir*.

The theme of the *shibir*, organized as part of the year-long celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj's 150th Anniversary or Sardha Shatabdi, was "Yagnapurushne Dwar". Accordingly, the *shibir* included captivating videos, quizzes and discussions based on Shastriji Maharaj's life and works. The volunteers also enjoyed lectures from BAPS's learned sadhus and took part in workshops based on those lectures. Dining hall programmes, unique event introductions, interactive theme presentations and a variety of such creative elements of the *shibir* helped the volunteers grow as *satsangis* and educators.

A special attraction of this *shibir* was a grand

light and sound show which took place on the Sarangpur mandir and at its footsteps. The 90-minute presentation used lights, music, live action, dance and video shows to bring to life Shastriji Maharaj's divine characteristics and his time on earth. The unique presentation amazed its spectators and also inspired a deep sense of pride towards Shastriji Maharaj and BAPS.

Pujya Mahant Swami graced the *shibir* and gave motivating lectures to the volunteers. Swamishri's presence in Sarangpur was also a great inspiring force during the *shibir*.

### MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV, BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 27-28 November 2014, Ariyana, India



The village of Ariyana is located on the outskirts of Surat city. Satsang began here in 1982 and was blessed with a visit by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 21 January 1985. The dedicated efforts of BAPS sadhus and volunteers resulted in the growth of satsang here, so Ariyana's devotees were able to make the efforts to build a local *hari* mandir to further strengthen their satsang. The groundbreaking ceremony for a mandir was performed on 18 October 2013 by Pujya

Narendraprasad (Acharya) Swami.

The *murtis* to be installed were consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur on 24 November 2014. On the morning of 27 November, a Vishwashanti Mahayagna was held in which over 200 devotees participated. In the afternoon, a colourful *nagar yatra* of the *murtis* to be installed was held through the main streets of Ariyana. On 28 November, the *murtis* were ritually installed in the new mandir by Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami.

### BAPS ANNUAL KARYAKAR SHIBIRS 10 December 2014-11 January 2015, Gujarat



During December 2014 and January 2015, over 13,000 BAPS volunteers involved in the Satsang, Yuva and Mahila activities of the Sanstha attended the 21 Annual Karyakar Shibirs organized by the BAPS Satsang Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad.

In commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the *shibirs* were based on the theme 'Yagnapurush Sukhakari'. Each two-day *shibir* portrayed Shastriji Maharaj's divine life and work through speeches by *sadguru* and other learned sadhus, video shows, workshops, theme-centred activities and excerpts from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiring discourses.

The *shibirs*, held at BAPS mandirs in Gondal, Gadhada, Bochasan, Ahmedabad, Atladra, Bharuch, Sankari and Tithal, inspired the *karyakars* to further strengthen their services for the Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant, Sanstha and Satpurush.

### BAPS ANNUAL CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES VOLUNTEER SHIBIRS 12 December 2014 to 4 January 2015



More than 80 sadhus and 7,500 volunteers participated in this year's annual training conventions for children's activities volunteers in India. Based on the theme 'Aaje Yagnapurushne Dwar Nobat Baje Re', 12 one-and-a-half-day conventions were held at six locations. The conventions helped increase the volunteers' *satsang* depth and furthered their *bal sabha* presentation skills.

Seniors sadhus inspired the volunteers to live dedicated and devoted lives with lectures on topics such as 'What is Yagnapurushne Dwar?', 'The Purpose of Shastriji Maharaj's Birth?', and 'Let Us Be Like Yagnapurush'. These enlightening lectures were supported by group activities and video presentations.

The *shibirs* also served as an annual regional meeting to discuss the new aspects of the Bal-Balika Mandal syllabus in India as well as the upcoming year's children's activities.

## UK

### WORSHIPPERS JOIN MEMBERS OF VARIOUS FAITHS TO DONATE FOOD TO THE HOMELESS

16 November 2014, London

Inter Faith Week is an annual event that takes place across the UK in November with the aim of fostering good relationships and working partnerships between people and organizations of different faiths and beliefs.



This year, representatives of five different faiths – Christians, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and Zoroastrians – gathered at The Swaminarayan School on 16 November 2014 to offer prayers and support for the local community.

Children of The Swaminarayan Sunday School from BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, collected more than 150 cans of food for Sufra – a community food bank and kitchen based in nearby Brent which supports disadvantaged families in the local area. Young members of other faiths also supported the initiative by organizing similar collections of their own.

Following the prayer meeting, children and adults from the various faiths visited Sufra together to formally donate the food for the homeless.

Mohammed Mamdani, Director of Sufra, thanked everyone for their combined efforts, “We are very proud to have the support of the Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Zoroastrian communities during Interfaith Week.... This partnership sends out a strong message of unity, and demonstrates the contribution of faith groups in alleviating poverty in our community.”

Kirit Wadia, interfaith volunteer for BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK, commented, “It was heart-warming working with people of different faiths for such a worthy cause, and very encouraging to see so many young people getting involved. The event demonstrated the common core of goodwill that exists between all faiths and reinforced the spirit of harmony which Pramukh Swami Maharaj has always promoted.”

## NATIONAL WINTER TRAINING CAMP 19-21 December 2014, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



Based on the theme ‘Satsang Karo ne Karavo’, 55 children from across the country participated in the Winter Training Camp organized by the UK Bal-Balika Mandal.

The three-day camp featured indoor and outdoor team-building activities, fostering an ethos of unity and solidarity, and presentations by sadhus on the importance and purpose of *seva*, explaining how the guru *parampara* have continued to serve tirelessly. They highlighted that the aim of *seva* is to please guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and to establish a personal connection with him by practising daily satsang to strengthen this bond. They also recognized devotees who had sacrificed their time for *seva* and also achieved academic success, while senior volunteers shared their experiences during interactive sessions.

The camp was enjoyable and educational, providing the youngsters with useful information and training to strengthen their own spirituality and equipping them with skills that will help when serving at their respective mandirs and centres.

## USA & Canada

### OPENING OF NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

24-26 October 2014, Sacramento, CA

Three days of celebrations marked the opening of the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Sacramento, the state capital of California, in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami.



In the special welcome assembly on 24 October, youths presented a skit titled '*Bhakti ki Shakti*', inspiring tradition, faith and sacrifice, and Tyagvallabh Swami spoke on the importance of *samp*, *seva* and *mahima*.

On 25 October, many devotees participated with their family and friends in a grand Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon the Women's Wing presented a cultural programme and in the evening an appreciation assembly was held.

On 26 October, following the traditional Vedic *mahapuja* rituals, the auspicious *murti-sthapan* ceremony was performed by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami. These *murtis* had been consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad, India, on 29 October 2012.

### MANDIR MAHOTSAV, BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

31 October-2 November 2014, Phoenix, AZ

The old BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Mesa, Arizona, was inaugurated in 2000, but due to the growth of Satsang, the necessity for a new *hari* mandir arose.

The celebrations, in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, started on 31 October with the grand procession of the sacred *murtis*, in which young and old alike, dressed in colourful traditional Indian attire, participated.

On 1 November, a grand Vishwashanti Mahayagna was held in the morning. Led by senior Swamis, participants performed Vedic rituals to pray for world peace on the occasion of the opening of the Mandir. In the evening a melodious kirtan *aradhana* was presented.



On 2 November, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the *murtis* previously sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in India.

## Africa

MURTI-PRATISHTHA AND 15TH PATOTSAV,  
BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR  
1-3 December 2014, Nakuru, Kenya



Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Nakuru, Kenya, in 1999. Three days of celebrations were held in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami to mark the 15th anniversary, during which new marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara were installed, in new ornate *sinhasans* (decorative shrines).

On 1 December, in the evening welcome assembly, children performed a colourful, traditional dance. Local Hindu leaders were in attendance amongst the gathering of over 1,000 people.

On 2 December, over 300 devotees participated in the Vedic Mahayagna for World Peace in the morning. In the afternoon, the *murtis* to be consecrated were taken in a grand, colourful

*nagar yatra* through the major streets of Nakuru. Hundreds of devotees in colourful costumes celebrated with folk dances and bhajans. Thousands lined the streets throughout the 4 km route to view this traditional display of faith and culture.

In the evening, sadhus and devotees presented a kirtan *aradhana* of melodious bhajans. On 3 December, following the Vedic *mahapuja*, Pujya Doctor Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* previously sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur, India, on 30 June 2014. The ceremony was followed by the *murti-pratishtha* assembly. Invited guests included the Governor of Nakuru County, Mr Kinuthia Mbugua and Secretary Mr Joseph Motari. Youths performed a colourful, traditional dance. A multimedia presentation recounted the history and activities of the mandir. Pujya Doctor Swami spoke of the values that a mandir fosters. A video of Swamishri's blessings during the 1999 *murti-pratishtha* ceremony was shown. In the afternoon, a Women's Convention was held on the theme 'Chaitanya Mandir Sarjan' – 'Creating Divine Mandirs', in which young girls presented colourful dances and skits.

## Asia-Pacific

**HEALTH EXPO HOSTED BY BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR**  
**15 November 2014, Sydney, Australia**



Over 250 people participated in the Health Expo jointly organized by BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir and Wentwest, the Medicare local in Western Sydney. The Expo took place at the

Mandir and comprised multiple simultaneous activities: talks on topical health issues by medical professionals, a health care mini-market where various health organizations had set up information booths, diabetes risk screening and others. Among the speech topics were cardiac health, risk factors and identification of stroke symptoms, arthritis and osteoporosis, healthy lifestyles, diabetes prevention and management, and others.

The Heart Foundation, Diabetes NSW, Go4Fun, Osteoporosis and Arthritis NSW, National Stroke Foundation, Get Healthy NSW, Wentwest, NSW Health Local Health District and others set up booths.

With an emphasis on education and preventive care, such expos help to promote healthy living.

## BAPS Charities

**BAPS CHARITIES FOOD & HEALTH DRIVES**  
**November-December 2014, Tanzania**



During November and December 2014, BAPS Charities volunteers in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, conducted food and health drives at various charitable organizations donating over a half a metric ton of food and supplies to the underprivileged:

**New Life Orphans Home:** On 2 November 2014, BAPS Charities volunteers from Dar-es-Salaam conducted a health and food drive for the 105 children, aged 1 to 18 years, who currently reside in the home. BAPS Charities volunteers and medical team conducted the medical check-ups. All the children and caretakers received a general body checkup, were tested for malaria, had a dental checkup and other tests. Appropriate

treatments were given.

**Children's Retention Home:** Started in 1962 in response to rising crime rates among the youth, it is run by the Tanzanian government. The Home offers a chance for rehabilitation and re-entry into society as productive individuals for the residents.

**Salvation Army Matumaini:** Is a home and school for physically disabled children. At present, there are 200 children, aged between 3 and 17. They are taught Mathematics, English and other subjects, providing them a foundation from which to progress in their lives, despite their disabilities.

**Buguruni School for the Deaf & Dumb:** Is a home and school for young disabled children. The home was founded in 1974 by the Government of Tanzania. The school is sustained by the Government, the Society for the Deaf and other well-wishers. Currently, of the over 270 students, who come from throughout Tanzania, 120 live there permanently.

**Hisani Orphan Centre Trust:** On 10 December, BAPS Charities volunteers from Dar-es-Salaam, met and spent time with the children. Currently, it is home to 40 orphans (21 boys and 19 girls), aged from 2 to 18 years. After a brief assembly, each child was given a gift.

## HEALTH FAIRS 2014, USA



With a focus on preventative care, BAPS Charities organized its annual Health Fairs throughout North America as part of its global health and wellness initiatives. With the voluntary help of over 330 physicians and healthcare professionals, over 2,000 attendees from the local communities were able to benefit from various

medical care and awareness guidance. The Health Fairs were held at Austin, TX, Charlotte, NC, Columbus, Ohio, Lansdale, PA, Minneapolis, MN, Robbinsville, NJ, San Antonio, TX, San Jose, CA, Virginia Beach, VA, Warrington, PA and Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The specialties for which screening and guidance were provided included: internal medicine, family practice, orthopaedics, women's health, ophthalmology, dermatology, dentistry, physical therapy (physiotherapy), nutrition/diet, chiropractic, pain management, cardiology, gastroenterology, nephrology, paediatrics, optometry, dermatology, podiatry, homeopathy, yoga & pranayam, allergy & asthma, alzheimer's health, cancer reconstructive surgery, prostate cancer, geriatrics, psychiatry, pulmonology, obstetrics and gynaecology, oncology, rheumatology, ENT, surgical, endocrinology, orthodontics.

Lab tests conducted included: complete blood count, basic metabolic panel, lipid panel, liver function tests, thyroid function tests, prostate-specific antigen (PSA), renal function, haemoglobin A1c, chem panel, anaemia panel, liver function tests.

Screening and Diagnostic Tests included: blood pressure, eye exam, dental exam, dental screening, hearing screening, obesity, diabetic/glucose screening, bone density screening/DEXA, glaucoma screening, body fat test, flu shot.

Health Lectures: Senior Care, Diabetes: Risk Factors, Staying Fit & Healthy, Managing Stress & Depression, Diabetes and Food habits.

## Opinions

It takes a great deal of logistical coordination. [BAPS Charities] seems to have it down to a science. It's very well organized and the community will benefit greatly from it.

- **Bob Mensch,**  
Senator, Pennsylvania (at Lansdale, PA)

It's truly an amazing event that one can experience. It is a good venue for people to understand

how important it is to maintain good health and prevent diseases. Not only am I going to support BAPS Charities but I am going to encourage other doctors to come. We (doctors) all want to try and help the people and may not know how, this a great opportunity to do so.

- **Dr. Christine Tang**  
Surgeon, Cancer Reconstructive Surgery,  
William Osler Health System, Etobicoke  
General Hospital (at Toronto)

People are busy, live busy lives and like myself, I may not get out to see the doctor as often as I should. This event makes it possible to have community members, support the community and to keep our community healthy, our children healthy and families healthy. I am so honored to be part of this event, every single year.

- **Councillor Vincent Crisanti**  
Etobicoke North (at Toronto)

This is the first time I am attending, BAPS Charities Health Fair. I came here with my wife not knowing what to expect but I am very glad I came. I could see an internist, podiatrist, optometrist and a dentist — all under a single roof in just one hour. I am so happy with the one-on-one consultations I had today. This would take a lot of time and money if I had done it at a private facility.

- **Harshvardhan Patel**  
Health Fair Participant, Robbinsville

Prevention is key for a healthier community. If any disease is diagnosed and treated early we can have a completely different outcome. This is where health fairs like the one we have today can play a very important role.

- **Dr Gopi Mukkavilli**  
Robbinsville

Everyone addresses physical health but mental health is generally ignored. I am happy BAPS Charities has taken the initiative not only to organize this health fair but to have mental health

awareness and screening here. This will help promote mental wellness so people don't have to suffer in silence. I thank BAPS Charities for inviting SAMHIN to be a part of this health fair.

- **Dr Vasudev Makhija**  
President, South Asian Mental Health Initiative  
and Network (SAMHIN), Robbinsville

## BLOOD DONATION DRIVES 2014



Whether it's an accident, surgery or disaster, every minute of every day, someone needs blood to survive. BAPS Charities assists by actively organizing blood donation drives for the benefit of all. One pint of blood can save up to three lives.

On 20 September, a BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive organized in San Jose, CA helped to collect 39 pints of blood.

On 5 October, a BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive organized in Atlanta, GA, helped to collect 60 pints of blood.

On 24 October, a BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive organized in Kansas City, KS helped to collect 35 pints of blood.

On 2 November, a BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive in Mayfair-West, Johannesburg, helped to collect 38 pints of blood to support the South African National Blood Service (SANBS).

On 2 December, a BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive in Auckland, New Zealand, helped to collect 74 pints of blood.

## £20,000 CHEQUE PRESENTATION TO DIABETES UK 22 November 2014

BAPS Charities presented a cheque for £20,000

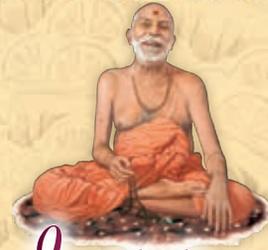


to Diabetes UK at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London. The funds had been raised by thousands of people of all ages – from young children through to senior individuals in their nineties – who participated in the BAPS Charities Annual 10K Challenge organized earlier in 2014.

Richard Lane (Chairman), Juliet O'Brien (Diverse Communities Officer) and Benjamin

Eydmann (Philanthropy Manager) received the donation on behalf of Diabetes UK – the leading charity that cares for, connects with and campaigns on behalf of every person affected by or at risk of diabetes, including the 3.8 million people in the UK that are currently diagnosed with the disease.

Following the presentation, Mr Lane addressed the assembly, appreciated the donation and emphasized the importance of raising awareness about diabetes in the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. He announced that the money would go towards training 'Community Champions' by Diabetes UK and providing dietician support for screening clinics organized by BAPS Charities in London, Leicester and Birmingham. ♦



## Invitation INAUGURATION

**New BAPS Shikharbaddh  
Mandir at Dhari,  
Birthplace of  
Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj**

**Maha vad 6, 10 February 2015, Tuesday**

8.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon: Mahayagna

2.30-5.30 p.m.: Shobhayatra

8.30-10.30 p.m.: Yogiji Maharaj's Life Story (Dance-Drama)

**Maha vad 7, 11 February 2015, Wednesday**

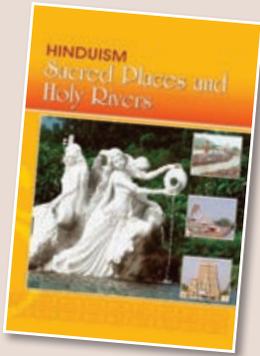
8.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon: Murti-Pratishtha + Celebration Assembly.

**Venue: Yogiji Maharaj Nagar, Dhari, Dist.: Amreli, Gujarat**



NEW

# SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH PUBLICATIONS



## HINDUISM

### Sacred Places and Holy Rivers

Pocket-size Books on Hinduism

For millennia the Hindu tradition of pilgrimage to holy places and rivers (*tirthas*) of India embraces the aspirations for inner purification, strengthening of faith and encountering the divine for liberation. India's countless sacred places and rivers owe their sanctity to the births or visits of avatars of Paramātmā and enlightened spiritual masters. Pilgrims make great efforts to visit them and also celebrate their faith.

**Author:** Sadhu Vivekjiandas, **Editorial Consultant:** Dr Janakbhai Dave

ISBN: 978-81-7526-681-0

## IMPRESSIONS, Part 2

Incidents from the Life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

A selection of enlightening stories from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan during his stay in Gujarat. Each story leaves an abiding impression about his divine personality.

**Author:** Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

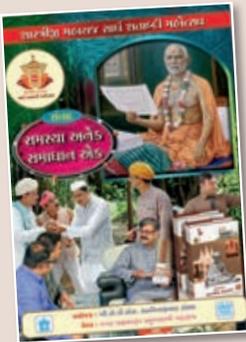
ISBN: 978-81-7526-683-4



## SAMASYA ANEK, SAMADHAN EK (Video)

The saintly life of Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, serves as a beacon for all to follow. This drama, scripted by Adarshjivan Swami, beautifully presents the solutions to some of life's recurring problems through actual incidents from the life of Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. It is witty, insightful and relevant to people of all ages.

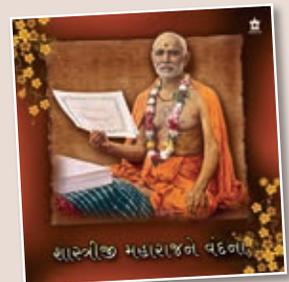
This DVD also includes the speeches of senior BAPS sadhus on the four founding principles of BAPS – *agna*, *upasana*, *sadbhav* and *paksha* – delivered in the grand assembly to launch the 150th anniversary year of Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj on 4 February 2013 in Mahelav.



## SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ NE VANDANA (Audio)

To commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, this audio CD features a compilation of bhajans composed by his contemporary sadhus and devotees. Composed on the basis of their firsthand observations, the bhajans devoutly describe the exemplary life and extraordinary work of guru Shastriji Maharaj.

The CD also includes a bhajan and Sanskrit verses composed by Shastriji Maharaj describing the glory of God and guru. The bhajans and Sanskrit verses are melodiously sung by BAPS sadhus.





### PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

1. Grand entrance gate to the specially prepared Yagnapurush Nagar in Atladra, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 94th birthday was celebrated as part of the five-day festival commemorating Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birth anniversary from 3-7 December 2014.
2. Devotees during Swamishri's birthday celebration assembly, 7 December, Atladra.
3. Children perform a traditional dance during Swamishri's birthday celebration in Ahmedabad, 23 November 2014.



**SWAMISHRI'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION**  
**29 November 2014, Sarangpur**

Thousands of devotees from throughout the world attended Swamishri's 94th birthday celebration in Sarangpur.