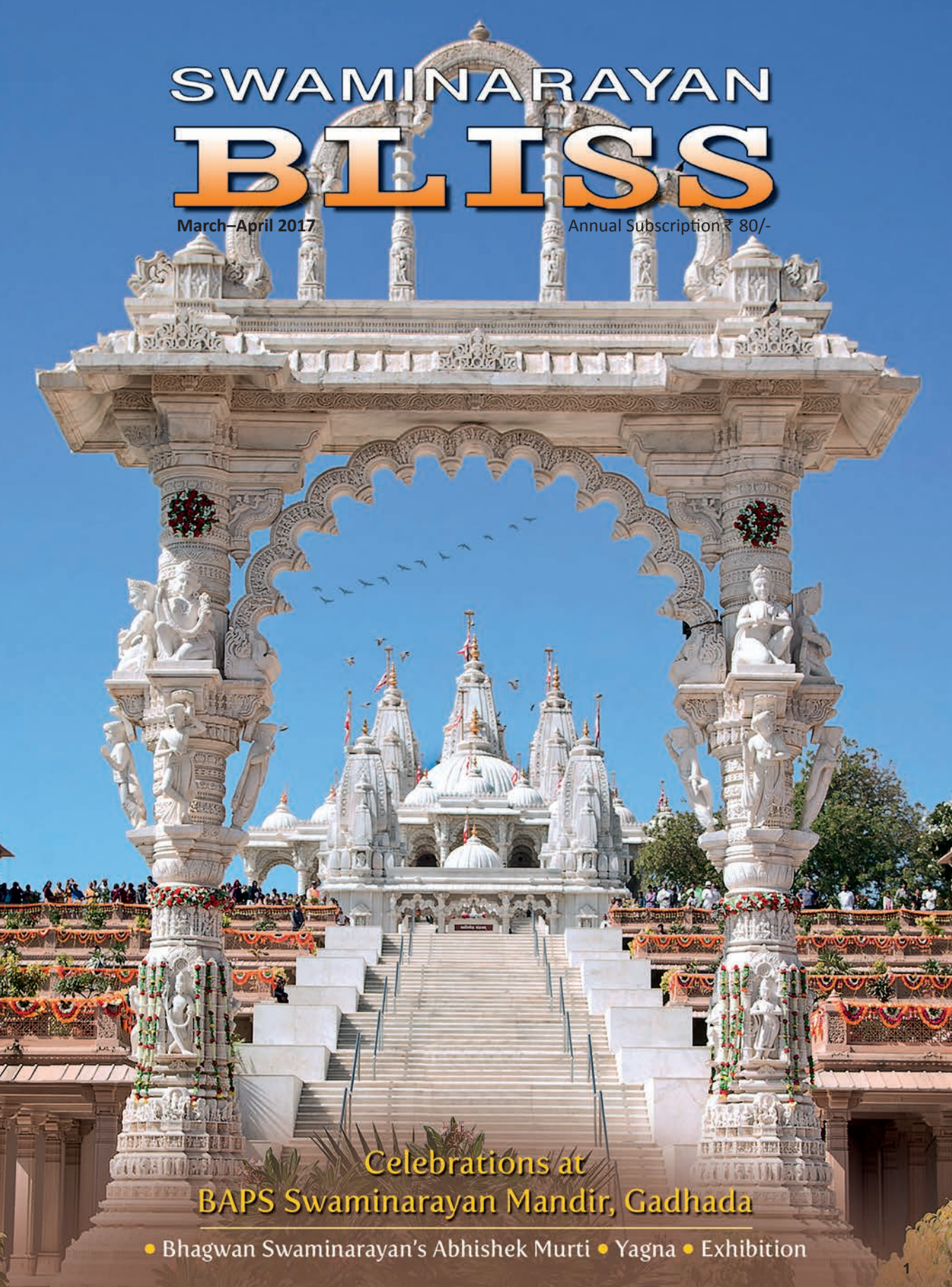


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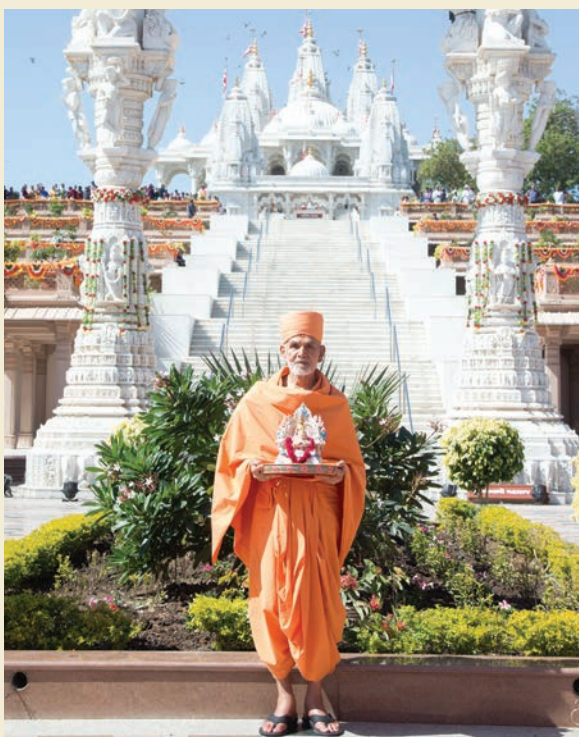
Celebrations at
BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhada

• Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Abhishek Murti • Yagna • Exhibition



BRAHMASWARUP PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ IN GADHADA

For many years, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj tirelessly endeavoured to develop the Gadhada mandir complex as per the wishes of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj at the foot of the mandir, 9 January 2002.



HH Mahant Swami Maharaj with Thakorji
at the BAPS Mandir, Gadhada

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

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SHRI HARI IN PANCHALA

After feeding the villagers of Panchala in appreciation for providing accommodations and hospitality for the devotees, Shri Hari felt that not all the people of Panchala had been fed...



WHY SHOULD SUCH PEOPLE BE FED?

Shri Hari asked the servants of Jhinabhai, “Has anyone been left out for lunch?” They replied, “Maharaj everyone has eaten.” Then Maharaj stood up and saw people loitering on the opposite bank of River Sabli. Maharaj asked the servants, “Have those people over there eaten?”

The servants replied, “Maharaj they are all low-born forest dwellers. They are sinners who kill animals and devour them. Why should such people be fed?” Maharaj looked at the servants and said, “The sun rises daily and shines equally for both the pious and sinful. It provides light to all. Similarly, the rain showers everywhere. Thus, when the devas do not discriminate, how come you are biased?”

Instantly, Jhinabhai intervened, “Servants, Maharaj wishes to feed them too. Go and call them and serve them *shelan*.”

The low born forest dwellers were invited to have their fill. They were told to sit in rows. The

servants then served them with boiled rice and gur, followed by Maharaj serving ghee. The occasion evinced joy and radiance on the faces of the poor forest dwellers.¹

JHINABHAI PERFORMS PUJA OF SHRI HARI

Jhinabhai Darbar was happy and satisfied with the opportunities of darshan and *seva* that Shriji Maharaj had provided to him and his family during his stay in Panchala.

Prior to his departure from Panchala, Shri Hari held a farewell assembly. Jhinabhai and his family wondered about how to express their appreciations to Maharaj. They finally decided to perform *pujan* and offer him clothes that they had got specially made in Junagadh.

Both Jhinabhai and his brother, Gagabhai, first offered *pujan* to Shriji Maharaj in the assembly while the scholarly sadhus chanted Vedic mantras. Thereafter, Jhinabhai offered clothes and decorations to Maharaj, and a plateful of rupees in

1. Sometime later, one of the low-born persons became ill. When he asked for something to eat, a family member gave him a piece of *rotlo* made of millet flour. But he found it distasteful and rejected it. He then recalled the *shelan* he had eaten in Panchala. And with it he remembered Shri Hari serving ghee from a vessel. He became engrossed in the entrancing *murti* of Shri Hari. Maharaj gave darshan to him and said, “Come with me.” He thus told his family, “The one who had served ghee in Panchala has come. He is telling me to go with him, so I am going.” And he thus passed away. Shri Hari, liberated even the sinners.

donation. Then they draped all the sadhus with saffron cloths. Finally, the brothers performed *arti* of Shri Hari.

In conclusion, Shriji Maharaj spoke to the assembly of sadhus and devotees, “Jhinabhai made arrangements for the unique *maha-ras* and Fuldol festival here in Panchala. Everyone here should treasure and meditate daily upon the *lilas* performed here. Remembering the divine acts of God is a great means to please him.”

Then Maharaj extolled the glory of his sadhus, “The contribution of sadhus in the growth of Satsang is substantial. They have performed austerities and tolerated insults, rejections and even thrashings. Yet they have remained unfazed in their allegiance and daily devotions. To mitigate their persecutions I gave them the *paramhansa diksha*, which meant that they were exempted from having to keep a *shikha*, sacred thread, *kanthi* and puja. But now, with the good times having returned again, I have instructed them all to wear the *kanthi* and sacred thread, and perform daily puja with *tilak* and *chandlo*. I also demonstrated to them about how to do the *tilak* and *chandlo* by first applying them on the forehead of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. He is a very great Sadhu. In future, countless people will follow him, and after realizing his glory they will have truly consolidated satsang in their lives.”²

SIX-MONTH-OLD BOYS EXTOL SHRI HARI'S GLORY

Shri Hari paused for a while. A devotee from a distant region got up to humbly describe his experience of Maharaj's greatness, “I have witnessed the wonderful glory of Shri Hari. In my village of Narvarkot [in Kutch], six-month-old babies, lying in cradles in 35 homes, surprisingly spoke, ‘The human manifestation of God is touring in the region of Sorath. His name is Swaminarayan. If you want *moksha* go to him for darshan.’ We all felt that God had spoken through

them, otherwise how could six-month-old babies talk in such a manner! That is why we have come here for Maharaj's darshan. We wouldn't have come here for the Fuldol festival if Maharaj had not spoken through them.”

The devotees in the assembly felt that ever since the day Maharaj arrived in Panchala they had witnessed many miracles. Sometimes, not all the occasions were miraculous, but when they pondered about their glory they realized the all-doership of Shriji Maharaj.

GOPI BHATT'S UNBEPFITTING BEHAVIOUR

One day, Jayanand Varni and Vasudevanand Varni and two sadhus came from Ahmedabad. They prostrated to Maharaj and sat before him. Shri Hari enquired, “Is Gopi Bhatt taking proper care of the sadhus? Are there any issues?” The sadhus remained quiet.

When Maharaj asked again, one of the sadhus spoke with anguish, “Maharaj, Gopi Bhatt spurns the sadhus. He hassles us with regards to food and clothes. So, we simply manage with whatever he provides.

“Gopi Bhatt has employed a cook to prepare meals (*thal*) for Thakorji, but we do not know how hygienically he prepares them. When the cook brings the meals for Thakorji, Anandanand Brahmachari, the pujari, prays to Nar-Narayan Dev, ‘Lord, forgive me for any discrepancies when the *thal* was prepared. Do accept it.’ After saying this the Brahmachari offers *thal* to Thakorji. Once the *thal* is offered to the deities Gopi Bhatt climbs the mandir steps, wearing a *pitambar*, gold bangles on his wrists and *chakhdis* on his feet, to perform the *rajbhog arti*. Anandanand Brahmachari is fed up with his inappropriate behaviour. He has often told the leading devotees, Damodarabhai, Nathu Bhatt and Gokaldas Choksi, ‘I do not want to stay here anymore. I'd like to go to Gadhpur.’ So they had advised him to seek Gopi Bhatt's permission to leave. When he asked, Gopi Bhatt

2. Ratnu, Mavdan (Royal Poet). *Thakor Jhinabhai*.

replied arrogantly, ‘I don’t require anyone here!’”

Shri Hari became distressed on hearing about Gopi Bhatt’s flippant and arrogant behaviour. He asked Jayanand Brahmachari and Vasudevanand Brahmachari, “Where is Anandanand Brahmachari?” They called him and Maharaj personally enquired about Gopi Bhatt’s behaviour. After hearing him Maharaj said, “Tonight, I will discuss this matter with Gopalanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami and decide upon what arrangements to make for the Ahmedabad mandir.”

THE FATE OF GOPI BHATT

That night Maharaj informed the senior sadhus about Gopi Bhatt’s misbehaviour. Then he asked, “What should we do with Gopi Bhatt?”

The senior sadhus asked, “Maharaj, what is your wish?”

Shri Hari replied, “Let us decide together. Each one of you express your opinion. Then we will execute our decision in such a manner that Gopi Bhatt does not feel he has been usurped and disrespected.” All the senior sadhus understood Shri Hari’s wish.

Then Gopalanand Swami suggested, “Maharaj, the mandir in Bhuj is on the verge of completion and the *pratishtha* ritual is near at hand. Additionally, several other devotees are also eager to have mandirs constructed in their towns. We should thus resolve Gopi Bhatt’s problem in such a way that it does not rake up a commotion in the whole organization. I believe that for the time being we should give the leading devotees of Ahmedabad the authority over Gopi Bhatt so that he stops troubling the sadhus. And, Anandanand Brahmachari should continue as the pujari.”

Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami were of the same opinion.

Shriji Maharaj concluded, “You have all wisely expressed your views. I, too, feel it is not worth

relieving him for the present. We already have the issue of Raghunathdas, and if we tell Gopi Bhatt to step down then he will create problems in Satsang. So, let things be as they are for the present with the addition of one change – the leading devotees should exercise a little control over him.” Then Maharaj emphasized, “Gopi Bhatt should not get wind of what we have decided.”

THESE FOUR SADHUS ARE SANAKADIKS

Along with the senior sadhus Shri Hari had kept Vasudevanand Brahmachari, Anandanand Brahmachari, Shvetvaikunthanand Brahmachari and Govindanand Brahmachari with him. Shri Hari declared the four Brahmacharis as Sanakadiks³ and then performed their *arti*. Everyone was happy to know that many great souls had descended on earth to attain ultimate liberation from Shri Hari. All bowed to the four *brahmacharis*. Then Maharaj instructed the sadhus to resume their *vicharan*.

On that same day, two devotees, who were potters from Sutrej, Hamir and Khodabhai, had come to escort Maharaj with them to their village. Shri Hari agreed and travelled with them to Sutrej with his entourage of Kathi devotees and *parshads*. Here, Maharaj stood holding the door frame of the entrance to Hamir’s house. Hamir’s wife, Kankavati, came with a bowl of kumkum and performed Shri Hari’s *pujan* and said, “Maharaj, please sit on the cot placed in the compound.”

Shri Hari sat for a while and then departed. He took a bath by the stepwell on the outskirts of the village and declared, “Whoever drinks the water from this stepwell will attain *moksha*.” Thereafter, Maharaj went to Panchala and then proceeded towards Muli. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

3. Sanak, Sanatkumar, Sanatsujat and Sanandan are the four mind-born sons of Brahma, who are blessed with the state of eternal boyhood.

ADHYĀY 3

True Karmayoga – Associating Karmas with Paramātmā

Part 19

If we do something, problems may occur, but there is no choice. It is impossible to live without doing karmas, thus we must learn how to make use of those karmas. If we join yoga with karmas, they cease to be karmas and become *karmayoga*. To join yoga with karmas means to associate Paramātmā with one's karmas. That is why the Gitā says, “योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि” – “*Yogasthaha kuru karmāni*” – “O Arjuna! Do karmas remaining steadfast in yoga.” To remain steadfast in yoga means to develop conviction in the form of Paramātmā. If we connect Paramātmā with our karmas, then we can be said to have done those karmas with conviction in Paramātmā. One who does karmas in this way is not merely dutiful but is a *karmayogi*. The Gitā teaches the technique of becoming such a *karmayogi*.

Karmas and their fruits; karmas and bondage – fruits and bondage are the two consequences associated with karmas. If we do something, we acquire accordingly; if we do something, we are bound by it. Let us first take a look at the relationship between karmas and their fruits.

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते – You Are Entitled Only to Do Karmas

Shri Krishna says, “कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन। मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥” – “*Karmanyevādhikāraste mā faleshu kadāchana, mā karmafalaheturbhoomā te sango'stvakarmani.*” – “O Arjuna! You are entitled only to do karmas, never to the fruits thereof. Therefore, do not hope for the fruits, yet do not decide to refrain from karmas” (Gitā 2.47).

No karma is without fruits. ‘Fruits’ means its consequences. There is no action without a consequence. If ice is put in water, the water becomes cold, and, at the same time, the ice begins to melt. The consequences of karmas range from the individual to the global. Good actions have good consequences and bad actions have bad consequences. Both the individual that does the bad action and society are subject to the unfavourable consequences. When someone eats, they begin to experience the effects: their hunger is diminished, their body is nourished, blood is made, and flesh increases – these are all the so-called visible effects. There are many other effects that cannot be seen, or are obtained at a later time. All of this is called *punya* (merits) and *pāp* (demerits). One thing that should be noted here is that the system of karmas and the fruits thereof have been given by Paramātmā. The karmas themselves cannot give any results, but it is Paramātmā who looks at the karmas and decides of his own accord what type of results to give. If he so wishes, he can change the system. Therefore, we cannot claim that a certain karma should give certain results, that is all dependent on Paramātmā's will, we are only entitled to do the karma.

By using the word ‘entitled’, Shri Krishna has made an important clarification. ‘Entitled to do karmas’ means we have the freedom to choose what types of karmas we do and we do not do. Paramātmā gives us a body that enables us to do karmas, he gives us the faculty of conation (the desire or will to do), the faculty of volition (the power of will), the faculty of cognition (the ability

to understand), as well as the discretion of which types of karmas to do and not to do. Nevertheless, in the end, he leaves the decision to us. This is the manner in which we are entitled to do karmas. Furthermore, he adds, ‘मा फलेषु कदाचन ।’ – ‘*Mā faleshu kadāchana*’ – we are not entitled to the fruits thereof. Our rights are limited, and whatever rights we have are by Paramātmā’s grace, and still under his control. Thus, the principle explained here is that we do not have complete independence. The only right we have regarding karmas is that we can decide which types of karmas to do. On the other hand, to hold expectations for certain karmas to produce certain results is said to have demanded rights on the fruits of karmas, which is futile and impossible. Furthermore, someone who holds such expectations could drown in an ocean of depression at any time. To decide which karmas give which results is the right of Paramātmā alone, no one can take that away from him, and that is why he is called *karmafalpradātā* – the giver of the fruits of actions.

Indeed, it is hard to accept when someone says that we should do karmas but not desire any results. If we are not to desire results, then how can we do the karma at all. Also, how can one decide between good and bad karmas, that decision is based on the consequences. Then why does the Gitā give us such advice? Shri Krishna has answered this question using the word ‘entitled’. There is nothing wrong in thinking about the fruits of karmas, indeed, that should be taken into consideration. To think of the fruit is to think of the goal, and it is a fact that one must be clear of the goal. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that we are not entitled to those fruits. To think of the fruits and to expect them as an entitlement are different things. Thinking of the fruit helps us to do the karma, it inspires us to do good karmas and refrain from bad karmas. But if we start to put a claim on the fruits, then, perhaps, our expected outcome and the will of Paramātmā may coincide on one or two occasions and there will be no

issue; but that may not always be Paramātmā’s wish. Paramātmā does not make decisions based only on our expectations. Therefore, the truth of the matter is that the outcome may not be as we had expected. Those who cannot accept this reality must be prepared to endure the pain of grief.

This reality is such that it may lead to sinking into an abyss of lethargy. One may think, ‘If I have no claim to the fruits of the karmas, then why should I do them at all’ and become depressed. To rescue us from such a situation, Shri Krishna clarifies, ‘मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥’ – ‘*Mā te sango’stvakarmani*.’ – ‘Nevertheless, do not cease to do karmas.’ One who completely ceases to do karmas is harassed by endless hardships.

Do karmas, do them well, think of the fruits too, but do not claim a right to those fruits. Do not forget that Paramātmā is the giver of the fruits of all karmas. Keeping this in mind, one must continue to do karmas – that is the message of this shloka.

Karmas Combined with Yoga Become Karmayoga

How can karmas that seem ordinary attain the status of *karmayoga*? How can they result in happiness? How can karmas that seem ordinary lead us to liberation? Shri Krishna says to Arjuna on the battlefield,

“मयि सर्वाणि कर्माणि संन्यस्याऽध्यात्मचेतसा । निराशीर्निर्ममो भूत्वा युद्ध्यस्य विगतज्वरः ॥” – “*Mayi sarvāni karmāni samnyasyā’dhyātmachetasā, nirāsheernirmamo bhootvā yuddhyasya vigatajvara*.” – “O Arjuna! Having offered all karmas to me, with a mind that has attained *brahmabhav*, having become free of desires, having become free of the attachment born from desires, and having become free of sorrow and fight.” (Gitā 3.30).

This verse shows us five things.

First, ‘*Mayi sarvāni karmāni samnyasya*’ tells us to surrender our karmas. It is common to surrender on occasions; people often give gifts to one another. Here, karmas are to be surrendered in a similar manner. Of course, karmas are not physical objects that can be given to someone by

hand. Karmas are surrendered by purity of feelings and intentions. To surrender karmas means to shed the arrogance that 'I am the doer' and to do karmas with the thought that 'the manifest form of Paramātmā that I have attained is the all-doer. Will he be pleased by this action?' Thus, actions should be done with the intention to please the manifest Paramātmā. Daily activities such as sitting, standing, walking and working should all be done whilst remembering Paramātmā. In this manner, one can be said to have surrendered one's karmas to Paramātmā if one remembers that Paramātmā is the all-doer, one becomes humble, one does all actions to please Paramātmā and all actions are done whilst worshipping Paramātmā.

Secondly, it says, '*adhyātmachetasā*', which means 'spiritual thought'. Spiritual thought leads in the direction of introspection. Who am I? What am I to do or become? These are questions that spiritual thought clarifies. Clarifying one's goal, thinking, 'I am separate from the body, *indriyas* and *antahkaran*. I am the *ātmā*. I have to become *brahmarup*,' is called spiritual thought. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has called such spiritual thought as the highest level of *ātmā*-realization. One who attains this state, sees their *ātmā* as *brahmarup* and constantly experiences that Paramātmā resides within their *ātmā*. If one attains such a *brahmic* state, they are never bound by karmas.

Thirdly, it says, to become '*nirāsheehi*', which means to become free of desires. If karmas are done with a desire for fame, recognition or any other outcome, then they become chains that bind. Thus, one who does karmas should be free of worldly desires. So, the Gitā tells us to discipline our expectations.

Fourthly, it says to become '*nirmamaha*', which means to abandon the feeling of me and mine. The feeling of me and mine is *māyā*. This feeling soils karmas and makes them impure. If we claim ownership that 'this is mine', it leads to misery, burden and causes attachment.

Fifthly, it says to become '*vigatajvaraha*', which

means to be free of afflictions such as apathy, boredom, dislike and laziness. One who has any of the above four deficiencies is sure to suffer misery. If someone has a fever, they are not able to do anything satisfactorily. They do things, but half-heartedly, and they have to force themselves. Some work may get done, but not with enthusiasm or joy. With the word '*vigatajvaraha*', the Gitā urges us to increase the quality of the things we do.

If we adorn our karmas with the above five features, our karmas cease to be mundane and become *karmayoga*. Then, that which was the cause of attachment, becomes the means to liberation. That which was full of misery, becomes full of happiness. Then, we never get fed up of doing karmas, do not fear karmas or get agitated by them. In fact, we feel inspired to please the guru and Paramātmā. We are ready to do anything. These are the changes that a *karmayogi* experiences.

One thing that should be remembered here is that our karmas should be according to the commands of the shastras and our guru. They should abide by the limits of do's and don'ts set by them. Only by imbibing the above five features in such permitted karmas can one attain *karmayoga*. Therefore, if someone steals, harms others or commits adultery, then, even if they remember Paramātmā while doing such karmas, they are counted as crimes and they still incur *pāp* or sins.

Because Arjuna lacks the *brahmic* state, he is entangled in the web of *māyā*. He has become arrogant, he has forgotten the all-doership of Paramātmā, he has been beaten by ambition and desire, he is troubled by attachment, and finally, anguished by deficiencies such as lack of enthusiasm, weakness and doubt, he is unable to fulfil his duty. This is why, Krishna Bhagwan does not tell him to abandon karmas, but instead teaches him the art of doing karmas. Abiding to *karmayoga* is the very art of doing karmas. Throughout the entire Gitā, it is this art that Krishna repeatedly presents to and teaches Arjuna. ♦

(Continued in next issue)



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and its new complex, Gadhpur

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhpur

The history of how Shastriji Maharaj fulfilled Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish to build a mandir on the hilltop in Gadhpur...

INTRODUCTION

The town of Gadhpur or Gadhada bears witness to 800 years of history of the Chudasama Kshatriya and Kathi Kshatriya clans. The town's genesis lies in the 12th century, when the valiant son of Ra Navgan of the Chudasama dynasty of Junagadh built a protective wall on a hilltop by the banks of the River Ghela in Gadhada. In 1729, Kathi Kshatriyas bearing the surname 'Khachar' established a small township below that hill. They also constructed another defensive wall around the new settlement. Thus, the name 'Gadh' (defensive wall) and 'Pur' (town) was appropriately given. In Sanskrit literature it is known as Durgapur.

During the time of Maharaja Vakhatsinhji of

Bhavnagar the name of Gadhada had a noteworthy presence. Furthermore, British officers and historians, James Burgess, Henry George Briggs, Colonel James Watson and others applauded the town of Gadhada with reference to its association with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN IN GADHADA

In 1803, over 200 years ago, Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to Gadhada and became a guest of Jiva Puja Khachar and Abhel Bava Khachar. For nearly 28 years he lived in the *darbar* of Dada Khachar (Unad Abhel Khachar) in Gadhada, and through his travels in Gujarat he ushered in a phenomenal spiritual renaissance. Gadhada remained his principal hub and



A tableau in the mandir exhibition depicts Bhagwan Swaminarayan having the hilltop measured for the construction of a mandir

subsequently it became a significant pilgrim place of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Every lane and nook and cranny of Gadhpur was sanctified by the holy feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He celebrated festivals, delivered discourses, built a mandir and introduced other works.

WISH TO BUILD A MANDIR ON THE HILLTOP

From the Sampradaya's literature one finds that Bhagwan Swaminarayan had not only desired to build a mandir on top of the hill in Gadhada, but also had other future plans in mind. Let us refer to some of those vivid descriptions.

One day, Bhagwan Swaminarayan went to the hilltop with some *parshads*. At that time there was a defensive wall around it. A description of what he did after entering through the gate of the wall is as follows: “[Bhagwan Swaminarayan] walked past Jiva Khachar's *darbar* to enter the open gate of the wall and came out from the opposite gate leading towards the River Ghela. Then he turned left towards a tower and stood there facing southwards. Maharaj spoke, ‘It would be nice to build a mandir in the middle of this place

[hill]. And from here the hill should be levelled to the mosque situated on the west side. Then, the north side of the hill near Jiva Khachar's *darbar* should be filled with mud and a compound wall be built all around the renovated hill. Thereafter, the new wall should have one entrance gate near Jiva Khachar's *darbar*, another one to the north side of this tower and the third should lead towards the river between where we are standing and the mosque. The mandir should be built in the centre of the hill, within the three entrance gates. And since this land is high, the mandir will be built well and look very beautiful” (*Hari-Charitra-Chintamani*, Part 2, p. 132).

A book about the glory of Gadhada, *Shri Durgapur Mahatmya*, was published by Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. References from this book show that Bhagwan Swaminarayan had visited the hilltop many times. Let us see some of those descriptions.

- “He had thought of constructing a beautiful mandir on top of the hill located on the south side of Jiva Khachar's *darbar*. Then Shri Hari had the area measured by expert stone artisans.

He [Maharaj] had also resolved to build steps leading from the hill down to the Khalkhaliyo in the River Unmatt Ganga [Ghela]" (*Shri Durgapur Mahatmya*, chapter 25, p. 85).

- "Shri Hari often sat happily on the old hill facing the Unmatt Ganga. Once, he took devotees with him and walked all over the hill for the purpose of [building a mandir] and then had the entire land measured" (*Shri Durgapur Mahatmya*, chapter 157, p. 461).

- "Shri Hari had once wished to build a beautiful ghat from the tower on the eastern side to the tower on the western side" (*Shri Durgapur Mahatmya*, chapter 157, p. 461).

To summarize the references mentioned in the texts we can say: 1. Shri Hari had the whole hilltop measured in order to develop it. Also, he wished to: 2. Level the hilltop and the land below it by filling it with mud. 3. Build a beautiful, lofty mandir in the middle of the hilltop. 4. Develop the mandir precincts and build a wall around it. 5. Have three entrance gates in the wall, on the north, east and south sides and 6. Construct steps leading from the mandir on the hilltop to the River Ghela.

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ DECIDES TO FULFIL SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S WISH

But Bhagwan Swaminarayan was unable to fulfil his wish of building a grand mandir on the hilltop during his lifetime of 49 years. He passed away in 1830. Then, Shastriji Maharaj (1865–1951 CE), the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the BAPS, endeavoured intensely for four decades, in the face of great odds, to realize the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

History says that the joint ownership of the hilltop land by Jiva Khachar and Dada Khachar came under the jurisdiction of the kingdom of Gohilwad of Bhavnagar after the demise of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Subsequently, times became adverse and the acquisition of the hilltop from the kingdom of Bhavnagar and to build

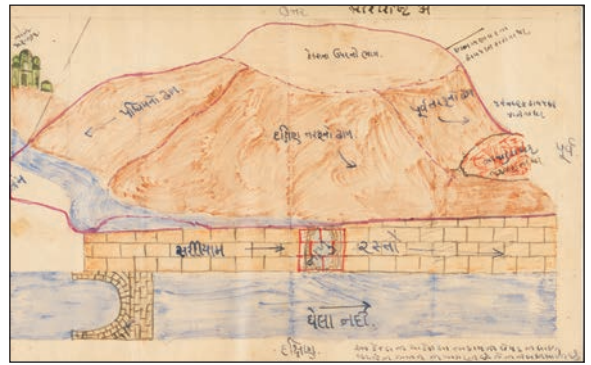
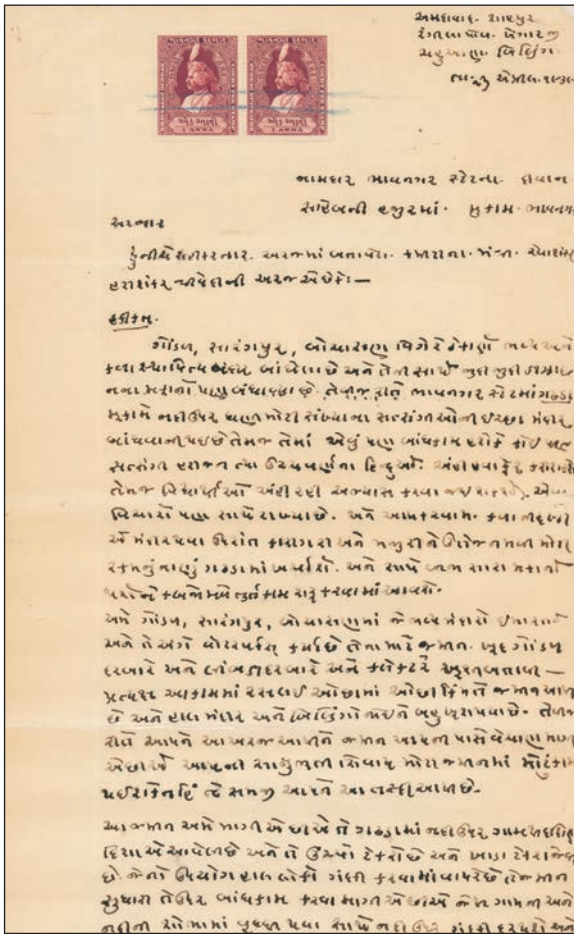
another mandir in Gadhada became a nearly impossible task for the fledgling BAPS. Still, from 1911, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj determinedly declared his intention and initiated efforts to build a mandir.

An interesting incident occurred in Gadhada when the construction of the Bochasan Mandir was still incomplete and the Sarangpur Mandir was still under construction. Shastriji Maharaj was in Gadhada. Shri Manibhai Narayanbhai Patel (father of Mahant Swami Maharaj) was with him. One evening, Shastriji Maharaj answered the call of nature and had decided to take a bath in the River Ghela. When Manibhai was giving him mud to wash his hands Shastriji Maharaj asked, "Do you see this hilltop before you?" And then he added, "Shriji Maharaj had wished to build a mandir on it. We want to build a unique, tall mandir, so that it can be seen from a distance of more than 30 kilometres. And we want to build a ghat on the Ghela like the Manikarnika Ghat in Benaras. Then every pilgrim can bathe by the ghat and come to our mandir for darshan. In addition, just as people come from far off places to cremate the bodies of their relatives, so too will be the case here. Such is the piety of this place" (*Yagnapurush Smruti*, p. 142).

Between 1820 and 1825 Shastriji spoke during a *parayan* in the month of August in Sarangpur, "Maharaj's original wish was to build a mandir on the hilltop [in Gadhada]. But it could not be realized in those times. Now we will have to accomplish it. It is Maharaj's wish. We want to build a beautiful three-*shikhar* mandir" (*Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj*, Part 1, p. 519).

RELENTLESS EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE THE HILLTOP LAND

Prior to building the mandir, which was a difficult task by itself, acquiring the land was far more challenging. After two decades of unrelenting efforts Shastriji Maharaj wrote an official application for acquiring the land. In



Shastriji Maharaj established an official committee and wrote an application addressed to Maharaja Krushnakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar and attached a drawing of the hilltop land

Ba Saheb Vijaykunvarba, and also a relative of a highly influential official of the Bhavnagar kingdom, Samantsinhji Harisinhji. So, Swami felt Samantsinhji would be most helpful in conveying his wish to Maharaja Krushnakumarsinhji. Once this was done, Shastriji Maharaj repeatedly asked Muljibhai about what had happened about the hilltop land in Gadhada.

A *satsangi* named Shival Shamji Contractor was also making efforts to help acquire the hilltop land. On learning about this Shastriji Maharaj wrote letters to him in this regard. In addition, when Shastriji Maharaj came to know that someone had told Mohan Motichand, the leading businessman of Gadhada, not to help in acquiring the land, he himself told Mohan Motichand to help him. Nirgundas Swami wrote a letter to him on behalf of Shastriji Maharaj, “We have full faith in you. So, we are very happy. You have been courageous in taking the first step and launched your efforts so that others may come to know of it. You are shrewd, just and philanthropic, thus you should cooperate in this work. In future, there will be activities where spiritual discourses and a Sanskrit *pathshala* will benefit countless people. May you help us in this matter or else it is your wish. We have left it to Maharaj, and the work will be done whenever he wishes it. We have informed you so that you are encouraged to make efforts. The time has come to please a great person like Shastriji Maharaj.”

1939, he established an official committee under whose name a registered application for the land was made on a stamp paper addressed to Maharaja Krushnakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar. He had also attached a drawing of the hilltop land along with the application. The answer to that official application made by the secretary of BAPS, Shri Revashankar Trivedi of Dholka, was received after one-and-a-half months. The reply was a ‘No’ with the signature of Maharaja Krushnakumarsinhji. Now it seemed there was no way that anyone could acquire that land. But the denial did not dent Shastriji Maharaj’s faith and patience one bit.

Shastriji Maharaj was so determined to acquire the land that he found a source to convey his request. Muljibhai Sarvaiya of Vekri was a personal adviser to the wife of the Maharaja of Bhavnagar,

Mohanbhai Motichand was aware of how challenging it was to acquire the hilltop land. So, to please Shastriji Maharaj he agreed to help him, but on the other hand he also tried to convince Shastriji Maharaj to give up his resolve in acquiring the hilltop. But Shastriji Maharaj told him, “I want to build a mandir on the hilltop because Shriji Maharaj had wished it so.” Mohanbhai said, “But to level the hilltop will cost you lakhs of rupees. Build the mandir on the other outskirts of Gadhada. There are many holy places near Radhavav. There are also other sacred lands.” But Shastriji Maharaj replied categorically, “All the places in Gadhada are holy, but I want to build the mandir on the hilltop because Shriji Maharaj had wished to build it there. Maharaj wants to sit there, thus there will be a change in rulership and the land will be acquired.”

Many people felt that Mohanbhai’s argument about finance was genuine. And Shastriji Maharaj was truly facing a severe financial crises. The poor financial condition of the Sanstha is apparent from a letter by Shastriji Maharaj. It was addressed to Ghanshyam Swami on 25 February 1941, “Work on the *dharmashala* is going on [in Sarangpur], where *katha* and *parayan* will be held [in the future]. There are no stocks of rice grains and lentils at all. We bring mung [to cook] and continue with the work. But we cannot feed mung *khichdi* to the guests. So I am burdening you to show this letter to the devotees and inspire them according to their means to send grains for Thakorji in Sarangpur.”

In spite of the dire monetary situation, Shastriji Maharaj was determined to build a mandir on the hilltop, and that too wholly of marble. Shastriji Maharaj was 80 years old when he made that resolution.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

In 1941, Shastriji Maharaj bought the small house of Harsurbhai Soni near the Ahir’s square

and made it into a *hari* mandir. Since Swami did not have the money to buy that place he held discourses (*parayans*) at various places and collected the donations received from them. After the consecration of the small *hari* mandir some people started making fun of Shastriji Maharaj for his tall talks about making a mandir on the hilltop. But Shastriji Maharaj could see the grand future of the hilltop in stone.

Shastriji Maharaj’s spontaneous forecast, “There will be a change in rule and we will get the land,” came true. In 1947, with India’s independence, all the royal kingdoms were dissolved and the kingdom of Bhavnagar also became integrated with India. Thereafter, Govindsinhji Merubha Chudasama was appointed as the first deputy collector of Palitana in Bhavnagar district. Gadhada came under his administrative jurisdiction. He became an instrument in giving the holy hilltop land to Shastriji Maharaj. He recalls that time and writes, “In 1946, Shastriji Maharaj had personally called me to Gondal and told me that I had to do a task. I asked, ‘What is it Maharaj? Please order.’ Then he said, ‘We want to build a mandir on the hilltop in Gadhpur. It was the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who had the area measured. However, Jiva Khachar did not approve and sign the paper [for donating the land], so Maharaj could not build the mandir there and instead built it in Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. We want to fulfil Maharaj’s wish to build a mandir on the hilltop.

“I said, ‘Maharaj, at present I am the state revenue commissioner at Porbandar, whereas Gadhpur comes under the Bhavnagar district. The Maharaja of Bhavnagar is the son-in-law of the King of Gondal and he is also related to me. But the Maharaja of Bhavnagar has prohibited the building of another mandir in Gadhada. He said, “There is one mandir, so where is the need for another?”’ In addition, I said, ‘I do not understand the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Please explain it to me.’ And then Swami explained it

to me till late night. At that time Pujya Yogiji Maharaj and other sadhus were also seated nearby. Swami graced me immensely and said, ‘You will be appointed in Bhavnagar and this task will be accomplished by you.’

“I replied, ‘Maharaj, you have indeed graced me abundantly but you have put a lot of burden on me.’

“Then Swami blessed, ‘Shriji Maharaj will be with you.’

“And it so happened that [in 1947] all the kingdoms were dissolved and integrated with India, and Saurashtra became a region. I was appointed as the deputy collector and later as the collector of Palitana. I helped acquire the land in Gadhpur and the ground-breaking ceremony (*khat muhurt*) of the mandir was performed at the hands of Shri Krushnakumarsinhji in the presence of Nanda Saheb, leader of Gadhpur Shri Mohanbhai Motichand and others. I believe myself to be most fortunate and honoured to have served Swami in a small way and earned his pleasure (*rajipo*). Whatever progress I have made is all due to Swami’s grace” (*Yagnapurush Smruti*, p. 242).

Once, Govindsinhji Chudasama asked Shastriji Maharaj in Sarangpur to officially write a request letter again for the hilltop land. Surprisingly, Swami did not have a fullscale paper available. So, he tore a page from an ordinary exercise book of Bhupat, who was a student and relative of Hakabhai Khachar, and wrote the request.

THE HILLTOP LAND IS FINALLY SANCTIONED

After 40 years of constant effort, when the final news of getting the hilltop in Gadhada arrived, Shastriji Maharaj nourished a strong desire to go and see it prior to its acquirement. Three days later Shastriji Maharaj visited the hilltop.

A few days later Govindsinhji Chudasama came personally to give the primary documents of the hilltop land to Shastriji Maharaj.

Shastriji Maharaj was extremely happy. It was 23 June 1949.

Years of efforts had at last come to fruition. Thereafter, on 25 June 1949 Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Gadhpur with many sadhus and devotees. Swami’s face beamed with joy and satisfaction.

Everyone else was happy on that day. Yogiji Maharaj wrote a report about it to H.T. Dave on 26 June 1949: “With joy, due to Swamishri’s wish, the land was given to us yesterday by Collector Govindsinhji Chudasama, who has love for us. Swami went there, after climbing the hilltop, and decided upon 4,000 yards of land. Once the money is paid at Ahmedabad we will get possession of it. The people of [Gopinath] mandir and the whole village are happy about it. I have done darshan on your behalf.”

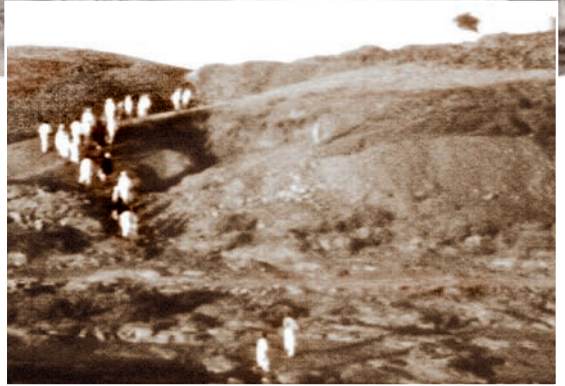
SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ WRITES TO NIRGUNDAS SWAMI

The procedures for the official documentation of the land were yet to be done. Shastriji Maharaj wrote a detailed letter in this regard to Nirgundas Swami. Shastriji Maharaj gave the plans for the hilltop and the municipality’s resolution papers to Haka Bapu and Nagar Sheth Mohan Motichand, telling them to go to Bhavnagar and get them officialized and documented by Govindsinhji Chudasama. Shastriji Maharaj wrote details about this in a letter to Nirgundas Swami. All this reflected Shastriji Maharaj’s passion for acquiring the land. He wrote: “Presently, Haka Bapu and Mohanlal Sheth have gone to Bhavnagar with the plans for the land [in Gadhada] and papers for other reports. There they will meet Govindji and get the plans passed and return here [to Gadhada] tomorrow and then we will go to Sarangpur.

“We will have to come from Sarangpur [to Gadhada] when the final permission [for the land] is given and the municipal body will carry out an auction [for the land]. At that time the members of the [Gopinath] mandir will not participate in the auction, because they do not have



On 25 June 1949, Shastriji Maharaj along with sadhus and devotees arrived at the hilltop (inset) after officially acquiring the land in Gadhada. Shri Govindsinhji Chudasama (bottom left) became instrumental in granting permission for the land



any objection. The hilltop land is exactly 1500 ‘hands’. Another land belonging to a shepherd is 300 ‘hands’. Then in the middle there is land for the elderly, which we will have to acquire and pay for. However, in comparison to the municipal-ity land the village land will cost us – ₹25,000 to 30,000 more. All sections of the people in Gadhada are very pleased. Akshar-Purushottam Swami [Akshar Swami junior], Yogi Maharaj and you had made great efforts for [acquiring the land in] Gondal, and in five years everything worked out to be favourable. Likewise, if you will it, then here, too, things will become favourable, and the Gunatit knowledge will be hailed joyously. Mohanbhai [Motichand] has promised to help generously till the *murti-pratishtha* is done. The presiding administrative head and chairman, Dadabhai, and all the members are happy and will assist us in all ways. If need be request Nanda Saheb and Balwantraai Mehta. The latter is the principal administrator of Bhavnagar.”

SHILA-NYAS RITUALS OF THE MANDIR

A few weeks later, the official work of acquiring the land was completed. The land would be transferred once ₹7,000 was paid to the municipality of Gadhada. But it was difficult to gather the sum immediately. Finally, things worked out. Shastriji Maharaj received the final documents for the land and he first placed them before Thakorji and sanctified them. Thereafter, the ground-breaking ceremony (*bhumi puja*) for the *shikharbaddha* mandir was scheduled for 8 August 1949 (Shravan *sud* 15).

On 7 August 1949, 84-year-old Shastriji Maharaj sat in a bullock cart to travel from Sarangpur to Botad. Because of the rains the road had become waterlogged and muddy. Despite the

harrowing conditions Shastriji Maharaj was happy, and showed no signs of illness. From Botad Swami took a train to Gadhada and he performed the *bhumi puja* rituals the next day.

Three months later, on 16 November 1949 [Kartak *vad* 11], another golden chapter was added to the history of Gadhada. It was the *shila-nyas* (foundation-stone laying) ceremony. Shastriji Maharaj had invited Maharaja Krushnakumarsinhji, who had once refused to grant the hilltop land, to perform the ritual.

Once the *shila-nyas* rituals were over Shastriji Maharaj quickly launched the mandir construction work.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir would be the first ever mandir in the whole Sampradaya to be built of marble from Makrana in Rajasthan. Everyone was intensely elated about this despite the difficult financial conditions. Whenever Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj received news that wagons of marble stones were on their way from Makrana to Gadhada, they would rejoice. On 21 November 1950, Yogiji Maharaj expressed his joy in a letter he wrote from Ahmedabad to the Africa Satsang Mandal, “Oh, a 25-ton railway carriage containing marble from Makrana has been sent to Gadhada. For that, Dajibhai Ishwarbhai has been dispatched to Makrana and the stones will keep coming.” He wrote further in the letter, “Since the last three months I having been doing 15 *malas* daily in the Akshar Deri for the early completion of Gadhada mandir. I also continue doing *malas* when I’m travelling to the villages. I urge with courtesy that all should serve with body, mind and wealth for the Gadhada mandir project. Travel to the villages and send donations so that by June (Vaishakh) Maharaj’s *murti* can be installed [in the mandir]. So, you four will have to do this work. No result will be achieved without touring [the villages]. In brief, strive for the glory of Gadhada and Swami will be very happy.”

SWAMISHRI’S INSTRUCTION TO THE AFRICA SATSANG MANDAL

Swami gave the major *seva* for the accomplishment of Gadhada mandir to the Africa Satsang Mandal. In August 1950, Shivabhai wrote a letter about the enthusiasm of the Africa Satsang Mandal in this regard. This pleased Shastriji Maharaj immensely and on 23 August 1950 he told Rasikbhai Patel to write a letter to him, “Pujya Swamishri read your letter three times. It was also read in the satsang assembly for three days. Pujya Swamishri is very pleased and said that the devotees of Africa have great zeal to do *seva*. He has promised that on their arrival to Akshardham Maharaj and Swami will truly get up from their *sinhasan*, come towards them and embrace them.”

On 14 December 1949 Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter from Ahmedabad to the devotees of Africa, “There is a need to do *seva* for the Gadhada mandir. Be particular in collecting the amount and sending it here.

“Furthermore, the making of the three *murtis* of Swami, Maharaj and Gopalanand Swami has been decided. Maharaj’s *murti* will be 64.25 finger-lengths high, that is 62 inches tall, as written in the Partharo [of the Vachanamrut]. In all, it will amount to about 85 *mans* [1 *man* is 20 kg] in weight. The cost of one *man* will be ₹140. So, you will contribute in the *seva*. Yours sincerely.”

In spite of having acquired the hilltop land about four months back, Shastriji Maharaj had speedily started the task of having the *murtis* made for the mandir’s central shrine. It seemed that Shastriji Maharaj was contemplating about the Gadhada mandir day and night. And he was always ready to generously bless those who were helping out.

On 13 September 1950 Pramukh Swami and Rasikbhai [secretary] came from Gadhada for Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan in Sarangpur. When Shastriji Maharaj learned about the detailed progress of the mandir construction work from them, he became very pleased and said, “Whoever

does the *seva* of Gadhpur with great enthusiasm, Swami and Maharaj will get up, come forward and embrace them.”

In 1950, Shastriji Maharaj was resting at Gulzarilal Nanda’s bungalow in Mumbai. One day he told Nandaji, “Gadhpur is the supreme place of Shriji Maharaj. The opportunity of *seva* is available to us. That itself is our great fortune! Furthermore, the mandir is being done at the spot sanctified by Shriji Maharaj, and according to his wish, in marble. Thus, you, too, contribute in this *seva*” (*Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj*, Part 2, p. 312).

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ IN GADHADA

Only one-and-a-half-years after the *shila-nyas* ceremony Shastriji Maharaj organized the *murti-pratishtha* day. He himself decided upon the auspicious day and time. He also had the invitation prepared in his presence, read it and made corrections and finalized it. He inspired all to make preparations for the consecration day.

A few days prior to the *pratishtha* of Gadhada mandir, which were also Shastriji Maharaj’s final days on earth, he assembled some prominent devotees and said, “We will need ₹50,000 for the *pratishtha* of Gadhpur mandir. You will have to contribute for that” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, June 1951, p. 373).

Shastriji Maharaj’s fervency to get the mandir ready in Gadhada was stupendous. He had only one goal – to fulfil the wish of Shriji Maharaj.

A few days before Shastriji Maharaj departed to Akshardham, he came to Gadhada and keenly did darshan of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Gopalanand Swami. He then asked for the waters of River Ghela to be brought to him and he performed the *abhishek* of the *murtis*, placed a *janoi*, applied a kumkum *chandlo* and lovingly consecrated them with his hands. Finally, he performed the *arti*. Then he returned to Sarangpur.

Once, Ramji Bhagat asked Shastriji Maharaj

about going to Gadhada. Swami snapped his fingers and replied, “I will go to Gadhada like this [i.e. in a flash].” Then he added, “There is no mandir like Gadhpur in the whole of Hindustan” (*Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj*, Part 2, p. 365). His words reflected his satisfaction for the work accomplished.

One evening, Shastriji Maharaj was in a meditative posture, sitting cross-legged on his bed with a pillow in his lap and his elbows resting on it. On seeing him like this *kothari* Babubhai (of Ahmedabad) asked, “Shall I bring water to drink?” Shastriji Maharaj answered, “I don’t want to drink water, however, I feel like going to the hilltop of Gadhada and staying there forever” (*Yagnapurush Smriti*, p. 142).

On 8 September 1951 Yogiji Maharaj wrote a letter about this, “Swami Shastriji Maharaj is always present here [in Gadhada]. Many have experienced his divine darshan and miracles. He also appears in dreams to say something. Swami told those who had still not pledged for their monetary *seva* to do so. And he said that they should go and deposit it in Gadhada” (*Likhitan Shastri Yagnapurushdasji*, Part 2, p. 691).

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ PRAISED SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ’S WORKS

Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj endeavoured under the leadership of Yogiji Maharaj and continued the mandir work in Gadhada. Shastriji Maharaj had instructed the young Pramukh Swami to complete the work of Gadhada mandir. And, till his last breath, at the age of 95, Pramukh Swami Maharaj strived for the development of Gadhada mandir. On 2 May 1987, Pramukh Swami Maharaj praised his guru Shastriji Maharaj’s foresight and divine powers during his blessings in Sarangpur, “Shastriji Maharaj had incarnated on earth for the spread of Shriji Maharaj’s principle and for the liberation of countless *jivas* to Akshardham. He was a divine person. His influence and appearance



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhada.
(Inset) *Murtis* of Dham, Dhama and Mukta



were truly great. It is not possible for an ordinary person to do such a monumental work. Today, it is difficult to start such a work in spite of having money and human resources. And, he had nothing.

“Shastriji Maharaj’s nature was such that once he started a task, he would accomplish it. At that time in Gadhada there was no one who respected or cared for Shastriji Maharaj. He would stay at Haribhai’s small house or *bawa* Keshvadas’ Ramji Mandir. Thus, to look at the hilltop in those tough times and say, ‘Maharaj and Swami will be installed there’; what great courage he had!

“Everybody misunderstood him. But everyone witnessed whatever he accomplished! Even his opponents praised him. He strived till his last breath to solely spread the principle of Maharaj, but never worked to show or compete with anyone. Thus, he raised a marble mandir in his final

years. Shastriji Maharaj got work done from people who were uneducated and gross in nature, but he infused such powers in them that they raised the Sampradaya to great heights.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, too, paid tributes to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Shastriji Maharaj by endeavouring immensely for the development of Gadhada mandir in accordance to Shriji Maharaj’s words. The newly developed mandir complex testifies to the fact that Shriji Maharaj fulfilled his vision through Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The BAPS mandir precincts in Gadhada has indeed become the pride of Gadhada. ◆

From *Swaminarayan Prakash*, March 2017.
Gujarati text by Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas,
Translation by Sadhu Vivekjiandas.





Triple Celebrations in Gadhada

30 January to 1 February 2017

Blessed by the holy feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the town of Gadhada is an important pilgrim place in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had a grand vision for an extended mandir complex on the hill adjacent to the River Ghela and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj tirelessly endeavoured for many years to materialize that vision.

The project, conceptualized by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, commenced by Shastriji Maharaj and continued by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, was recently completed and its momentous inauguration was held in the presence of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Between 30 January and 1 February 2017, three main celebrations were held:

1. Consecration of the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
2. Yagna for World Peace and consecration of guru *par-ampara murtis*.
3. Exhibition inauguration: ‘*Gadhpur Jota Shriji Sambhare...*’

The climax of the celebrations was on the 152nd birth anniversary of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj on Vasant Panchami (Maha *sud* 5, V.S. 2073; 1 February 2017). As per Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s wish, Shastriji Maharaj had built a marble mandir on the hill. Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj furthered the plans of Bhagwan Swaminarayan by expanding and enhancing the mandir campus.

The following pages give a brief account of the three-day inauguration celebrations. ◆

Translation from
Swaminarayan Prakash, March 2017
by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas.



Mahant Swami Maharaj with the descendants of
Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar

Felicitaton of Gadhada Town Residents

30 January 2017

Over a hundred years ago, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had resolved to build a mandir on the hill adjacent to River Ghela, in accordance with the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Since then, the residents of Gadhada have always wholeheartedly given their loving support to the BAPS. For decades the residents saw and assisted in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's tireless endeavours to fulfil Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish. Often, Pramukh Swami Maharaj appreciated their support, and felicitated and blessed them. That is why, it is important to note, that after Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed away to Akshardham in August 2016, the first public memorial assembly in his honour was held in Gadhada by the town's residents.

Continuing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's affectionate links with Gadhada, his spiritual successor, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj held an assembly to felicitate and appreciate the various communities and their leaders, officials

and the residents of Gadhada.

The felicitation assembly took place in the 'Swaminarayan Nagar' set up in the Akshar Vatika on the Gadhpur-Bhadli Road on the outskirts of Gadhada.

Gadhada's elected officials, community leaders, and thousands of townspeople were present. First, Pujya Viveksagar Swami narrated the historic links between Gadhada and Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus. Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami described the glory of Gadhada.

Afterwards, leaders representing the various communities and elected officials of Gadhada spoke one by one. Also, members of the families of Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar and Bhaktaraj Jiva Khachar also addressed the assembly. After the guests had spoken, Brahmavihari Swami briefly described the story of Gadhada's development over the years and thanked everyone who had helped in the project. Thereafter, Adhyatmaswarup Swami, *kothari* of the BAPS



Felicitation assembly

Mandir in Gadhada, delivered the vote of thanks.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “When Yogiji Maharaj was honoured in Gadhada, he said, ‘It is not me, but Dada Khachar, who is being honoured.’ Yogiji Maharaj’s focus was on Shriji Maharaj and Dada Khachar. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj always spoke about the virtues of everyone and lived as the servant of servants. Shastriji Maharaj also had to endure many hardships but he never retaliated against anyone. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were also very forgiving. They wished for the good of all, the happiness of all.

“That is why all who met Swami Bapa felt his divinity. After Swami Bapa went to Dham, people of all faiths expressed their deep respect and reverence for him. Even those who met him many years ago had a high regard for him.

“He had great affection for you all and that is why you have all gathered here today, without any barriers of caste, community or creed. You are all fortunate to be linked with Gadhada and Dada Khachar, whose name appears throughout the Vachanamrut. He had surrendered everything at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. You all have also given us tremendous support.

“The soil of Gadhapur is pure and sacred. You



have all wholeheartedly given assistance and we pray that you continue to do so.”

Before the assembly concluded, Mahant Swami Maharaj presented mementos to the community leaders and town officials to honour and felicitate them.

The following are extracts from some of the speeches by the town’s leaders and officials.

SHRI MOHANBHAI DAV

Ahir Community Leader



Bhagwan Swaminarayan used Gadhada as his base for 25 years and taught the message of dharma to the world. When Shastriji Maharaj first came to Gadhada, he remembered our Ahir community. Since then our mutual affection has grown.

We are very fortunate that these great sadhus sanctified Gadhada. We have seen with our own eyes how hard they have endeavoured.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his sadhus have

built mandirs and kept alight the torch of Hindu dharma throughout the world.

After the earthquake in Bhuj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj adopted and built many villages. His sadhus personally worked to resurrect the villages. They have de-addicted millions of people and brought peace in their families.

By bowing and praying at Swamishri's feet our prayers reach God. By earning his blessings, this human birth is justified.

SHRI KARSANBHAI PARBADIA

Patel Community Leader



This exhibition, 'Gadhpur Jota Shriji Sambhare...' reflects on the high standards of the Sanstha.

Future generations will learn the greatness of Dada Khachar, Jiva Khachar, Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others from this exhibition.

Today, BAPS has put Gadhadra on the world map. Our community is wholeheartedly connected with this Sanstha. When the Leuva Patel community was building the Khodal Mata Mandir in Kagvad, they were discussing which sadhu they should ask to perform the *khat* rituals. Everyone decided that the rituals be performed at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. At the time Swamishri was ill in Mumbai. So, the community leaders went there with the foundation stones, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *khat* rituals. So, at the foundation of the mandir in Kagvad are Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings. We will never be able to forget such a great sadhu like Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

SHRI KALUBHAI LAKHANI

Muslim Community Leader



By the efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS, our Gadhadra has become famous throughout the world.

The exhibition is outstanding.

It is such a productive use of technology. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life was his message. He spoke little, and there was great power in his silence.

I recall that no matter what difficulty we had, but when we went to Swami Bapa, even if he said nothing, an ocean of compassion flowed from his eyes when he looked at us.

I saw the video of Bapa's speech in the United Nations in 2000. There were many respected leaders seated there, and Bapa said, "Our dharma is – rather than mine is best, whatever is good should be mine." And he lived according to this message. After the Morbi floods, BAPS and Bapa even provided milk for our children. And we will never forget that BAPS even served us sweets and dates on our Id festival. Just as perfume spreads its innate fragrance, sadhus spread their innate compassion. If we bow to them with a true heart, our lives will improve.

SHRI PRATAPBHAI KHACHAR

Family of Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar



Bhagwan Swaminarayan blessed Gadhadra for 25 years due to Dada Khachar's affection. The exhibition here has put Gadhadra, and the families of Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar on the world stage, for which we are wholeheartedly grateful. We are also grateful for the efforts of the Sanstha to renovate Jiva Khachar's *darbar*.

Further, the free dispensaries operated by BAPS has helped innumerable patients.

SHRI KIRITBHAI HUMBAL

Chairman, Marketing Yard



The glory of this town sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan is indescribable. The work of the BAPS will draw people here from all over the world. Gadhadra is a holy place, where Bhagwan Swaminarayan built a mandir. And to explain its glory the Sanstha has

created this magnificent exhibition. It is a great gift for all of us.

The BAPS Sanstha does great work abroad as well.

SHRI SANJAYBHAI THAKOR

President, Gadhada Development Committee



The fantastic exhibition here will spread Gadhada's fame throughout the world. Using technology, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life in Gadhada has been beautifully brought to life. This is not a small achievement.

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, only BAPS is capable of doing this. Seeing this exhibition makes me feel that the old Gadhada was even better than today's Gadhada. Words cannot describe the wonderful work Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done in preserving India's heritage. Nobody has done more than BAPS in spreading the glory of Shriji Maharaj worldwide.

Our youths and future generations will benefit greatly from this exhibition.

DR RAMESHBHAI PANDYA

Author and Historian



For taking Gadhada onto the world stage, I credit Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His *vicharan* and vision are beyond our imagination. The mandirs he built, the sadhus he initiated and the direction he gave them are all outstanding.

For all Hindus, Haridwar is sacred, for Buddhists it is Gaya, for Jains it is Palitana and for Muslims it is Mecca. Similarly, for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, it is Gadhada.

The population of Gadhada 200 years ago was only between 2,000–2,500 people. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, his *paramhansas*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and others have walked here and sanctified it.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was readily accessible, so is Mahant Swami Maharaj. We are blessed by their affection and as a result are free of all worries.

SHRI SURESHBHAI GODHANI

President, BJP, Botad District



Through this exhibition, everyone will gain an understanding of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Using modern technology, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's incidents have been thoughtfully presented. The exhibition depicts the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gadhada. This Sanstha has always supported the town's various development projects. Even after the earthquake [in 2001], the Sanstha provided great service.

The Sanstha is a major contributor to the town's riverfront project, and the building of Akshar Ghat and the vegetable market. Whenever requested, the Sanstha has always helped.

DR G.V. KADATHIA

Respected Leading Citizen, Gadhada



In 2003, when I sat with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he told me about his wish to build an exhibition in Gadhada. And today, that vision has taken a tangible form. When I came to Gadhada in 1972, Bhan Bapu told me that when this BAPS mandir was being built, he had personally witnessed Pujya Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj preparing limestone and filling the foundations.

For this great pilgrim place of Gadhada, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has put in much effort. Today, the *limbdo* (neem tree) sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Dada Khachar's *darbar* and Dada Khachar's seventh generation descendants are present. And to keep this history alive, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj and the sadhus have worked day and night. ♦



Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior sadhus during the yagna rituals

Vishwashanti Swaminarayan Mahayaag

31 January 2017; Maha sud 4, V.S. 2073

On 31 January 2017, as part of the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the Bhagwan Swaminarayan *abhishek* and guru *parampara murtis*, the Vedic Yagna for World Peace was held in the morning.

The early morning chill greeted the devotees as they arrived in the mandir assembly hall for darshan of Mahant Swami Maharaj's morning puja.

After puja darshan, the preliminary yagna rituals began in the yagna arena in Swaminarayan Nagar.

On the stage, the *murtis* had been arranged for worship: the seated *panchdhatu murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the *murtis* of the guru *parampara*. The Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *murtis* for the BAPS Mandir in Windsor, Canada, were also placed on stage for worship. Also, the flagposts and *kalashes* to be placed on the *shikhars* of the guru shrines were placed on the stage.

Over 2,145 *yajmans* were seated around 149 yagna *kunds* to participate in the rituals. At 8.00 a.m. Mukeshbhai Shastri and his team of Brahmins began the yagna.

At 10.44 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived to preside over the main yagna *kund* on the stage. Mahant Swami Maharaj and the *sadguru* sadhus performed the yagna rituals as well as *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis*.

Present on this auspicious occasion were mahants and sadhus of various mandirs in Saurashtra. These included: Pujya Shri Vikram Giri Bapu (Mahant, Ghela-Somnath), Pujya Shri Kishanbhartiji Maharaj (Mahant, Beed Hanuman), Pujya Shri Niru Bapu (Danev Ashram, Sanosara), Pujya Shri Ramju Bapu (Leader, Ambika Ashram, Sambhana), Pujya Shri Kanaiya Giri Bapu (Leader, Samadhiyala Ashram) and

others. Mahant Swami Maharaj honoured them all and presented mementos to them.

Blessing the *yagna* participants and other devotees, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “Bhagwan showered his grace on us by incarnating in human form. Bhagwan Swaminarayan stayed here in Gadharpur for 25 years. He performed countless *lilas* and imparted much guidance. We have attained this supreme God. What is our value before him? Yet, he has accepted us. He remains manifest through the Gunatit guru. Only by the grace of God can we get such attainment. It is not possible by our efforts alone. No human endeavours will work. Having attained supreme God, we must shed our base natures, shed our ego and attachments and become engrossed in God.”

Remembering Dada Khachar’s family, Mahant Swami Maharaj added, “Dada Khachar was a great devotee. He gave up his own wishes and pleased God. We have attained that God and guru. And what great blessings Pramukh Swami Maharaj granted us. He did so much for us. It is not possible for us to repay our debt to him and Shriji Maharaj. So now, do what is required to attain *moksha*. Offer such devotion. Everything else will happen, but do not miss this opportunity. We must do anything necessary to please God.”

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj kindled the fire in the main *yagna kund* and then departed for the *kalash yatra*. Guided by the Brahmins, the *yajmans* completed the *yagna* rituals.

Today, all the residents of Gadhada had been invited with their family members to take lunch in Swaminarayan Nagar.

KALASH YATRA OF HOLY WATER FROM RIVER GHELA

The identity of the River Ghela and Gadhada are intertwined. During his 25 years in Gadhada, Bhagwan Swaminarayan bathed countless times in the river. The *paramhansas* and Gunatit gurus have also enhanced the glory of the Ghela. Ghela’s famous ‘Khalkaliyo’ and its banks still



Top: Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the main *yagna* rituals.

Bottom: Devotees participate in the *yagna*

abound with divinity.

As a lasting memory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s *lilas* in the Ghela, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj wished to consecrate an *abhishekh murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the *rang mandap* of the BAPS Mandir on the hill adjacent to the river. The *murti* Pramukh Swami Maharaj had consecrated would be installed by Mahant Swami Maharaj the following day on Vasant Panchami. Over 500 sadhus participated in the *jal-kalash yatra*, carrying the holy waters of the Ghela in *kalashes* (waterpots) to the mandir for use in the following day’s rituals.

At 11.30 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* sadhus and the mahants of the various mandirs



Left: Mahant Swami Maharaj leads the *kavad-kalash yatra* from River Ghela to the BAPS Mandir. Above: Swamishri performs *abhishek* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj

recited, he performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then bathed him with the holy waters of the Unmatt Ganga (River Ghela).

Then Mahant Swami Maharaj and the *sadguru* sadhus all lifted the *kavads* with *kalashes* suspended from both ends. They filled the *kalashes* with water from the holy river and then began to walk towards the mandir. After a while, other sadhus took turns in carrying the *kavad-kalashes*. Thus, while singing bhajans, the *kalash yatra* reached the mandir, where the *kalashes* were placed before Thakorji.

KIRTAN ARADHANA

In the evening, BAPS sadhus performed a melodious concert of bhajans describing the divine *lilas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. ♦

Sadhus participate in the *kavad-kalash yatra*





Murti-Pratishtha of Abhishek and Guru Parampara Murtis

31 January 2017; Maha sud 4, V.S. 2073

On Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj's 152nd birthday (Vasant Panchmi) the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was consecrated in the *rang mandap* of the mandir, and the Guru Parampara *murtis* were consecrated in the guru shrines by Pragat Brahaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The *pratishtha* rituals began after the 5.30 a.m. *mangala arti*. Using the holy waters of Ghela, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed *abhishek* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine, *murtis* in the other shrines in the main mandir, the guru *parampara murtis* and the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then, at 7.30 a.m., the preliminary *murti-pratishtha* rituals began, with the *sadguru* sadhus performing

the rituals in the various shrines: *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan – Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, in the guru shrines – Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, and in Shastriji Maharaj's shrine (adjacent to Ghanshyam Maharaj's shrine in the main mandir) – Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami.

At 8.30 a.m. Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in the *abhishek mandap*, where he performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He offered *thal* to the newly consecrated *murti* and then performed the first *abhishek*, using the holy waters of Ghela. Prayers were offered and the Swaminarayan mantra was chanted. Swamishri



Swamishri performs *pujan* of the *murti* of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj

also prayed that the noble wishes of all who pray here be fulfilled.

The *sadguru* sadhus then performed *abhishek*. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj went up to the guru shrines to perform the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* for the *murtis* of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Then he went into the main mandir and performed *pujan* of the *murti* of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. Following the *pujan* rituals, an *annakut* was offered in all the shrines and, finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha arti*.

INAUGURATION OF YAGNAPURUSH DWAR AND THE EXHIBITION

By the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Yagnapurush Dwar and ‘Gadhpur Jota Shriji Sambhare...’ exhibition had been built.

For their inauguration at 9.30 a.m., the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, ministers Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Atmarambhai Parmar, Gujarat BJP President Shri

Jitubhai Vaghani and other guests were present, along with the descendents of Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar and Bhaktaraj Jiva Khachar.

On one side of the Yagnapurush Dwar is the sculpted figure of Shri Dada Khachar and on the opposite side is that of Shri Jiva Khachar.

For the inauguration of Yagnapurush Dwar, Mahant Swami Maharaj, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani and Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasma were in the centre portion of the gate; on the left side were Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami and Shri Atmarambhai Parmar, and on the right side were Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Shri Jitubhai Vaghani. To the accompaniment of Vedic chants, Thakorji was worshipped, and while remembering Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the *nada-chhadis* fixed across all three sections were untied to inaugurate the grand entrance gate.

After passing by the metallic plaques commemorating this inauguration, Swamishri and the guests stood by the large marble footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan which were continually being showered with water. Here, *mantra-pushpanjali* was offered and then they all proceeded to ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Dwar’, which



Mahant Swami Maharaj, Chief Minister Vijaybhai Rupani, *sadguru* sadhus, ministers and descendants of Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar and Bhaktaraj Jiva Khachar at the Yagnapurush Dwar

Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated. Thereafter, the guests climbed the mandir staircase, on the sides of which stood scores of *balaks* dressed in traditional attire welcoming the dignitaries.

At the top of the stairs, the guests went first to the *abhishek mandap* to perform *abhishek* of the newly consecrated *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then, they arrived to inaugurate the exhibition. Mahant Swami Maharaj and the dignitaries unveiled the main exhibition signboard and, amidst the recitation of Vedic verses, untied the *nada-chhadi* at the entrance of the exhibition.

Then, the guests walked through the exhibition, stopping intermittently to view the displays, videos and audio-animatronics shows. Exiting the exhibition, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani commented, “This is a world-class exhibition and has made Gadhada international in the true sense.”

INAUGURATION ASSEMBLY

The guests then arrived in the assembly held at the Swaminarayan Nagar to commemorate



During the inauguration rituals of the main gate, Yagnapurush Dwar

the *murti-pratishthas* and inauguration of the exhibition.

The devotees in the assembly marquee had witnessed the morning ceremonies on large LED screens via a live transmission.

The stage backdrop decoration was a beautiful replica of Gadhada’s historic fort, with a large door in the centre. Above the door was a *jharukho* (balcony) in which the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were installed. Beneath them was the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In the *jharukhas* flanked on both sides were the *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. In the middle of the stage, on a raised platform,



Mahant Swami Maharaj, the chief minister, other ministers and leaders of the Ahir and other local communities at the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Dwar

Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj was seated. To both sides were the *sadguru* sadhus and stage guests.

After speeches by Viveksagar Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Dr Swami, a video of the Gadhada mandir development by Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj was shown.

Brahmavihari Swami then narrated how the development of the mandir campus took place as per the wishes and guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami revealed the authentic story behind the unique historic letter, bearing Sahajanand Swami's own writing and signature that has been displayed in the exhibition.

The *sadguru* sadhus honoured the stage guests, who then addressed the assembly.

Bhupendrasinh Chudasama said, "After seeing everything here today, I say that the first Akshardham is in Gandhinagar, the second Akshardham is in Delhi and the third Akshardham is here in Gadhada. The entire exhibition has been set up by the Sanstha's dedicated and capable team of sadhus and volunteers. I heartfully congratulate the BAPS Sanstha for its efforts to spread India's culture worldwide.

"In this exhibition, when you see Bhagwan Swaminarayan talking with the sadhus and telling them to sing a bhajan, it feels like God is seated right before you.

"Today, I request the Chief Minister to make a riverfront here like nowhere else in the world."

Having postponed the Gujarat Government's regular Wednesday morning cabinet meeting till the afternoon, Chief Minister Shri Vijaybhai Rupani had graced the occasion. He addressed the assembly, "Vasant Panchami is a very auspicious celebration for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It celebrates the birth of the Shikshapatri, Shastriji Maharaj and other sadhus. Gadhada is where Bhagwan Swaminarayan stayed. It was very dear to him. In fact, the exhibition here begins with the words [of Bhagwan Swaminarayan], 'Gadhada is mine and I am Gadhada's.' This shows that Gadhada was very dear to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

"Gadhada is a very sacred place, and now due to the exhibition will become an international attraction. Everyone who sees the exhibition will understand the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gadhada. By the completion of this exhibition, the wishes of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have been



A replica of the Gadhadra fort as the backdrop on the main stage with Swamishri blessing the assembly in the presence of *sadguru* sadhus and guests on stage

fulfilled. We are fortunate to have witnessed this.

“Through this exhibition, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has enhanced Gujarat internationally. On behalf of the people of Gujarat I thank the BAPS Sanstha for this.

“Visions can be expressed, but without purity and honesty they do not materialize. The historicity of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is established in this exhibition. The letter written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan is clear proof of this. The exhibition will encourage people to become more religious, do more good and be pure. It will continue to inspire future generations.

“Today, I accept that we will endeavour to bring the waters of Narmada to everywhere in Saurashtra. We will fill the Ghela river before the end of the monsoon, so that the water remains all the time and a beautiful environment is created.”

At the conclusion of his speech, the audience rose to applaud his declaration.

Thereafter, the Chief Minister and some of the other guests left to go to Paliyad.

Then, Gujarat BJP president, Shri Jitubhai Vaghani, addressed the gathering, “The exhibition here is world class. A lot of research has gone into making it. There are countless exhibitions throughout the world, but this exhibition will

make people more human and spiritual. Selfish acts do not last for long, while selfless works endure for a long time. The work here is for the benefit of others. It is the result of the sadhus’ efforts, dedication, sacrifice and austerities.”

Thereafter, the sadhus and youths of Gondal mandir entered the assembly carrying flame-torches lit by the divine flame sustained at the Akshar Deri in Gondal. The sadhus gave Mahant Swami Maharaj and the *sadguru* sadhus torches to hold and thus inaugurated the year-long Akshar Deri Shardh Shatabadi Mahotsav (150th anniversary celebrations of the Akshar Deri), which will conclude with a grand celebration on Vasant Panchami next year (2018).

Thereafter, the sadhus of Gondal mandir presented a handwritten scroll invitation to Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “Shriji Maharaj renounced home at the age of 11. As Nilkanth Varni, he travelled by foot for seven years. At the age of 12, without footwear and wearing only a waist-cloth, he stayed in temperatures of -40°C. He went to many regions, forests and jungles, where there were few people. But he did not remain anywhere. He went to big palaces, but did not remain there either. King



Mahant Swami Maharaj on the celebration stage



Mahant Swami Maharaj and the youths of Gondal carry the Akshar Deri flame

Siddhavallabh had such great devotion that he sat Maharaj [Nilkanth Varni] in a golden chariot. He was honoured in many places, but Maharaj came to reside in the stony region of Kathiawad. How much he must have been drawn by the devotees. Then he stayed for 25 years in Gadhada.

“Shastriji Maharaj resolved to [fulfil Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s wish and] build a mandir on the hill. He endeavoured patiently for many years. As soon as permission was granted, he began to build the mandir. Later, further development was done by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His efforts were incredible.

“Our gurus have never confronted others; they have always tolerated. This is our way. That is the reason why such work has been possible. The sadhus and volunteers have put in much effort to prepare the exhibition, regardless of taking rest and meals. That is why everybody is pleased on seeing the exhibition.

“The Chief Minister Vijaybhai said that as per Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s wish, the riverfront will be developed here and the river will remain full of water.

“Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami will bless them from Akshardham for this divine work.”

With this, the assembly concluded, marking the completion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vision for Gadhada.



Exhibition display showing Dada Khachar's darbar

‘Gadhpur Jota Shriji Sambhare...’

Exhibition on the Divine Life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Inspired by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Gadhpur is home to countless divine memories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Even today, 200 years later, the aura of his presence pervades in the town.

Many thousands of pilgrims visit Gadhada every year and to help them understand the true glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and this sacred place, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj wished to establish a permanent exhibition.

But where could this exhibition be set up? The BAPS mandir in Gadhada is situated on a hill next to the River Ghela, and because of the hill's incline and contour, there is no flat land available to build large halls to house an exhibition. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself provided a solution. He recommended that the

hill be excavated in a way that at intervals along the incline suitably sized connected halls for the exhibition can be built.

The plan was practical, but a challenge to implement. With the expert help of renowned architect Kurula Varkey of CEPT University in Ahmedabad, a master plan was prepared. By excavating the hill at different levels, it would be possible to build three large halls, totalling 18,000 sq. ft., that could be used to house the exhibition.

The Sanstha's Planning Cell oversaw the construction of these halls. Meanwhile, Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj instructed Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and his team of sadhus – Anandswarup Swami, Shrijiswarup Swami, Bhaktinandan Swami, Vishwavihari Swami,

Brahmavihari Swami and Aksharvatsal Swami – to decide the content and design the display of the exhibition.

Based on Swamishri’s initial guidelines, from the vast collection of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s divine incidents in Gadhada, a preliminary script was prepared and presented in detail to Swamishri. He listened with rapt attention and gave relevant guidance.

Then, the exhibition content was split into three sections and designed to be displayed in the three halls.

Shrijiwarup Swami designed the layout of the exhibition to maximize the use of the available space, without compromising the structural integrity of the construction. The exhibition displays were set up with the able assistance of Brahmacharan Swami, Divyanandan Swami and Vinamramuni Swami. Kothari Adhyatmaswarup Swami made all the necessary arrangements for the work to be completed.

The exhibition content had been prepared on paper in 2007, but due to certain factors, the implementation had been delayed. Pramukh Swami Maharaj frequently enquired about the progress of the work, and gave guidance and inspiration. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami also provided constant motivation.

Even during his last days, Pramukh Swami Maharaj asked about and gave blessings for the exhibition. As a result, this superb exhibition was completed.

How did this town form 300 years ago? What was Gadhpur like 200 years ago? How was Bhagwan Swaminarayan welcomed to Gadhada? How did the dedicated services of Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar please Bhagwan Swaminarayan? What divine bliss did Bhagwan Swaminarayan give? Which historic events is Gadhada a witness to? What immortal wishes did Bhagwan Swaminarayan make here?

All these questions, and more, are effectively answered by the beautifully designed exhibition.

The title of the exhibition is ‘Gadhpur Jota Shriji Sambhare...’ (Seeing Gadhpur reminds one of Shriji...). The displays bring this theme to life: dialogues of *paramhansas* with Bhagwan Swaminarayan, *paramhansas* singing bhajans while playing musical instruments and other momentous scenes take the pilgrim back 200 years in time.

On 1 February 2017, Vasant Panchami, the exhibition was inaugurated by Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s spiritual successor, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, and the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani. ♦

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Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Historic Handwritten Letter on Display in the Exhibition

Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on this earth in human form to grant ultimate liberation to infinite *jivas*.

As proof of his incarnation on earth, many holy relics by Bhagwan Swaminarayan are on display in many pilgrim places of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. These include his hair, nails, clothes, and many other items he used and sanctified.

However, in this exhibition, a historic letter written and signed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his own handwriting has been put on display.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami had a collection of letters and other items gathered by Nirgundas Swami with the permission of Shastriji Maharaj. In this collection were items sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and received from the family of Bhaktaraj Sheth Shri Muljibhai Shah (1779–1854 CE) of Limli, who was a dedicated devotee in the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Among these items was a historic, original letter written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself to

Muljibhai (letter length: 400 mm, width: 94 mm).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan wrote very few letters himself. Mostly, his *paramhansas* or other scribes wrote them for him. There are numerous such letters which indicate this by the ending ‘Likhavitam Swamishri Sahajanandji Maharaj’ (‘Written on behalf of Swamishri Sahajanandji Maharaj’) and the scribe’s signature.

However, very rarely has Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself written and signed a letter in his own handwriting.

So, finding this letter written and signed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan to Muljibhai was a moment of great joy. To further validate the authenticity of the letter, Muljibhai had himself written a note about the letter.

Shri Muljibhai served as the main administrative assistant to Bhagwan Swaminarayan for many years. This historic letter is, in fact, addressed to Shri Sheth Muljibhai Shah. The content of

(Contd. on pg. 48)

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

October–November 2016

Nadiad, Bhavnagar, Mahuva, Gondal, Dhari, Junagadh, Bhadra, Jamnagar,
Dangra, Gondal, Rajkot, Bochasan, Mahelav, Bharuch, Tithal, Surat

OCTOBER

NADIAD: 1–6

1, Saturday

At 6.53 p.m. Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) arrived at the mandir farm for the special evening assembly to celebrate the BAPS Chhatralaya's silver jubilee. Highlights of the Chhatralaya's 25 years were presented. Thereafter, two skits were performed to portray the moral transformations of students during their residency at the BAPS hostel.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Yogiji Maharaj opened the first *chhatralaya* in Vidyanagar to impart spiritual knowledge [*brahma-jnan*]. The transformation that has occurred in the *chhatralaya* remains permanent because of the blessings of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. Thus values, character, education and other things flourish in the students. Yogiji Maharaj was a great seer. Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave a lot of love to all the students and they thus bonded with satsang. Moral disciplines connect one with God and also consolidate the will to please God. In fact following *niyams* elevate us to state of *brahmarup*. Thus, you should all strictly follow the *niyams*."

4, Tuesday; Children's Day

Swamishri attended the evening Children's Day programme. He was asked to draw what he liked and the children had to recognize the illustrations. Swamishri drew a *tilak-chandlo*, *arti* and *mala*. As the children recognized them the *bal karyakar* described to them about doing daily puja along with *tilak-chandlo*, *arti* in the *ghar* mandir daily and turning the *mala* daily.



Swamishri pours cement prior to the installation of the first pillar

Then Swamishri participated in playing a ball game with the children. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly saying that they all had to become ideal children by cultivating faith in God, performing daily worship rituals and studying well.

5, Wednesday; Youth Day

The evening Youth Day programme was themed on Shashtra, Mandir and Sant and was exquisitely portrayed through a drama. In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "Seniors say that youths have strayed, politicians opine they are spoilt and religious leaders express they have become atheists. These are all depressing utterances. But Yogiji Maharaj used to say, 'Youths are my heart.' There was optimism in his words, and subsequently he accomplished great works. If there is no satsang in one's life then there will be ruin. With satsang the youths gain faith and adopt the right path."

6, Thursday

Swamishri arrived to perform the ritual placing

of the first pillar on the site of the under construction *shikharbaddha* mandir. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed the *mahapuja* rituals prior to Swamishri's arrival. Swamishri performed the ritual *pujan* of the pillar and then poured cement in the open base of the pillar. Thereafter, the pillar was lowered into position with a crane while Swamishri was touching the pillar.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed his morning puja in the farm and discoursed, “*Nishkam* dharma [celibacy] beautifies one's own satsang. All other *niyams* help one to observe and strengthen celibacy... If one has *upasana* [firm faith] then all other means become worthwhile. Without *upasana* all other sadhanas become worthless. All should strengthen faith [*nischay*] and moral disciplines [*niyams*] in their personal lives.”

BHAVNAGAR: 6–12

7, Friday; Children's Day

Swamishri attended the evening Children's Day assembly. Children performed a drama, ‘Bal Raja’, related to studies. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Every child should study three hours daily and attend satsang regularly. To imbibe character one requires to have satsang in life. Through satsang one can mould one's life and gain *moksha*. Thus, do not ever give up doing satsang.”

10, Monday, Bhavnagar, Mahuva, Bhavnagar

Swamishri deeply wished to go to Mahuva for darshan. He left Bhavnagar at about 10 a.m. and arrived at the BAPS Mandir in Mahuva at 12.12 p.m. A beautiful *annakut* had been arranged before Thakorji. Swamishri performed *arti* in all the three shrines.

At 4.51 p.m. Swamishri departed from the mandir and went to Pragji Bhakta's birthplace. After offering prostrations and *dhun* Swamishri went to the shrine where Bhagatji Maharaj was cremated. Then, Swamishri returned to Bhavnagar and attended the evening satsang assembly.



Bhagatji Maharaj's birthplace, Mahuva

12, Wednesday, Bhavnagar, Gondal

After his morning puja Swamishri discoursed, “By being humble in Satsang one will find it to be divine and wonderful. Maharaj is pleased with one who is humble. Just as water is measured in litres, a devotee is gauged by his humbleness.

“Adverse times in life are a test. God purifies you. Thus, remain equipoised. When misery or pain comes let them not affect your satsang one bit. The more the tests, the more should one's enthusiasm for satsang soar.”

At 4.25 p.m. Swamishri departed from Bhavnagar to go to Gondal. On reaching the outskirts of Gondal at 7.00 p.m. he was welcomed by youths on motorcycles and escorted to Akshar Dwar. After having Thakorji's darshan Swamishri addressed the welcome assembly, “The welcome offered was a welcome to Maharaj and Swami. They are at the root. We are all his servants. We have to offer devotion to him with humility. One must definitely have divine feelings (*divyabhav*) for Akshar Deri. One must train oneself to avoid fault-finding. Otherwise, God will not allow us into Akshardham.”

GONDAL: 13–18

14 & 15, Friday & Saturday (Sharad Punam)

For report and photos of immersion and placement of *asthipushpa* (holy ashes) of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the River Gondali, and Akshar and



A skit performed during the Sharad Punam assembly



Birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj, Dhari

Brahma Kunds respectively, see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November–December 2016, pp 84–86.

Two youths were given the *parshad diksha* on Saturday, 15 (Sharad Punam) by Mahant Swami Maharaj. They were named Nilkanth Bhagat and Vyas Bhagat.

Sharad Punam Celebration

The evening celebration of Gunatitanand Swami's 231st birthday was held in the mandir grounds. The assembly was themed on 'Amar Varso Gunatitno' (The Eternal Legacy of Gunatit). On the stage backdrop were the *utsav murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Seated on the main stage were Mahant Swami Maharaj, Dr Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami. The stage guests were Shri Madhavsinh Diwan of Bilada State, Shri Jyoti Bapu of Gondal State, BJP President of Gujarat Shri Jitubhai Vaghani and others.

The festival programme comprised of speeches by senior sadhus, skits and traditional dances. In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "In spite of Gunatitanand Swami being very powerful he served with humility. He carried the shoes of sadhus and devotees... We have to live in the realm of humbleness, unite with Aksharbrahman and offer bhakti to Shriji Maharaj.

"The whole of Satsang is divine. No doubts

will arise when one beholds all to be divine. Because one does not perceive all to be divine one experiences issues and difficulties."

Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated several Aksharpith publications: *Yogiji Derie Khele* (Yogiji Maharaj's Experiences of Gondal Mandir), *Akshar Dwar ni Atariye Thi* (Pramukh Swami Maharaj's reminiscences of Gondal Mandir), three English e-books: *Pragji Bhakta*, *Life and Work*, 200 *Swamini Vatos* and *Essence of Upanishads*, *Brahmi Tika* (commentary on Ghanshyam Gita), *Sant Samagam Samput 10* (Audio CD of Viveksagar Swami's *Bhaktachintamani parayan* held in Sarangpur after Pramukh Swami Maharaj's departure to Akshardham), *Sant Vyakhyanmala 14* (Audio CD of Adarshjivan Swami on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's ideal leadership) and *Pramukh Charitam* (Audio CD of Adarshjivan Swami's lectures).

The festival assembly concluded at 11.00 p.m. and 17,500 devotees and well-wishers were served *prasad* of *dudh-pauva*.

18, Tuesday; Gondal, Dhari, Junagadh

At 10.41 a.m. Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Gondal and arrived in Dhari at 12.23 p.m. After darshan of Yogiji Maharaj's birthplace and Thakorji in the mandir he was honoured with garlands and shawls prepared by devotees. Prior to having lunch Swamishri sat down to sing *thal*



Sanctifying the account books after Chopda Pujan, Gondal

to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Thereafter, he retired for the afternoon. At 4.00 p.m. he took his routine half-hour walk in the mandir compound. Then, Swamishri visited Yogiji Maharaj's school and the Yogi Ghat where Jhina Bhakta bathed and meditated.

At 5.05 p.m. he departed for Junagadh, arriving at the BAPS Mandir at 6.33 p.m.

JUNAGADH: 19-22

19, Wednesday

At 7.15 p.m. Swamishri arrived in the mandir assembly hall and performed *arti*. The youths performed an impressive drama, portraying the meaning of true satsang. A four-and-a-half-year-old boy, Krishivarrajsinh, recited Vachanamrut Gadhada I 76. Swamishri blessed him.

In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "In matters about obeying dharma-*niyams*, one should never doubt or question them. If one employs one's intellect then one will not be able to follow any *niyams* or do any work. But by engaging one's heart one will be able to follow them and accomplish works. We should follow *niyams* because we are disciples of Shriji Maharaj. The principal *niyam* among the five *panch vartmans* is *nishkam* (celibacy). If one does not practice continence then one will not attain Akshardham. One should obey *niyams* to please God."

BHADRA: 22-23

22, Sunday

Swamishri left Bhadra in the afternoon and arrived at Dhrol at 5.19 p.m. Here, he ritually unveiled the plaque 'Pramukh Swami Marg' of the newly named road from Trankhuniya to Latipur crossroads. Thereafter, Swamishri left for Jamnagar.

JAMNAGAR: 23-27

24, Monday

At 10.36 a.m. Mahant Pujya Devprasadj Maharaj of the Anandababa Ashram came to meet Mahant Swami Maharaj at the Junagadh mandir.

In the evening satsang assembly, the youths performed a drama on ego. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Ego spoils everything. We have arguments and conflicts due to pride. Because of ego one fails to understand another's *mahima*, one fails to attain *nirdosh buddhi* and progress. When one looks at another's fault it will obstruct you. If one believes another to be *nirdosh* (pure) then one's intellect will become pure.

"So, one must practice to become humble. The more humble one becomes the more connected one becomes to God."

27, Thursday, Jamnagar, Dangra, Gondal

In the morning satsang assembly, Swamishri ritually unveiled the name of the road from Khambhaliya bypass to Digjam Circle in Jamnagar as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg' in the presence of officials from the Jamnagar Municipal Corporation.

At 4.45 p.m. Swamishri departed from Jamnagar and headed towards Dangra and Gondal to celebrate the Diwali and Annakut festivals.

GONDAL: 27 OCTOBER – 5 NOVEMBER

30, Sunday; Diwali

After his morning puja Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Every day is Diwali [joy] for one who has staunch spiritual faith. And conversely, every day is like *holi* [pain and misery] when one lacks



With Thakorji during *annakut* in Gondal

spiritual faith. Shastriji Maharaj graced us immensely by inspiring firm faith. No other spiritual means can be equated with firm faith. Firm faith is like the number one and the other spiritual endeavours or means are like zeroes. [Without the digit ‘one’] the total of a million zeroes is zero.”

At 6.20 p.m. Swamishri arrived on the mandir podium to perform the *mahapuja* rituals for sanctifying the accounts books of devotees (Chopda Pujan). He offered tulasi leaves to Thakorji while the Janmangal Namavali was being chanted and then he performed the *mahapuja arti* and showered rice grains on the devotees.

Finally, in his blessings, Swamishri said, “May Maharaj and Swami fulfil your wishes and make you all happy in body, mind and wealth.” Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with a garland.

31, Monday; Annakut Festival

In his New Year’s blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj addressed the satsang assembly, “To maintain harmony one has to do everything. By doing so one will experience the highest peace. All inner turmoils will dissolve. If, however, one expects others to maintain harmony then there will be spats and conflicts. So, by believing that you have to initiate harmony you will experience peace and enjoy doing satsang.

“Secondly, prior to the onset of the New Year

you resolve your last year’s accounts, but you keep your hostility and revenge accounts unresolved. So, dissolve them! Satsang is very rare to attain. Don’t ever give it up. God will protect you.”

At 10.35 a.m. Swamishri went for *annakut* darshan in the Akshar Deri. He performed the Govardhan puja and *arti*. Thereafter, Swamishri went for *annakut* darshan in the mandir. Seven hundred vegetarian food items were offered to Thakorji in all the three shrines. Swamishri performed the Govardhan puja and the *annakut arti* of Thakorji.

During the day over 16,300 devotees and well-wishers came for the *annakut* darshan.

1 November; Bhai Bij

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the *hari* mandir in Chada village.

Prior to Swamishri’s arrival in the evening satsang assembly he cooked aubergines with ghee and spices for *prasad*.

5, Saturday; Labh Pancham, Gondal, Rajkot

In his morning blessings, Swamishri said, “Today is Labh Pancham. Yogi Bapa used to say *labh* means having *nirdosh buddhi* (divinity) for the guru and *divyabhav* (divine feelings) for all sadhus and devotees.”

In the evening, at 7.50 p.m., Swamishri attended the golden anniversary celebrations of the BAPS Gurukul in Gondal. The celebration had commenced at 5.00 p.m., comprising of speeches, traditional dance, a drama and videos. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Yogi Bapa graced us by building the gurukul. It was Shastriji Maharaj who had wished to have a *gurukul* here. We had come from Mumbai to dig the foundation. May you staunchly follow the *niyam* you have pledged today. By being firm in following one *niyam* the other *niyams* will also become strong. It will also draw other virtues and you’ll become virtuous.”

Finally the students performed a torch dance in commemoration of the golden jubilee celebration. Swamishri also held aloft a lighted flame torch.

At 9.16 p.m. Swamishri departed for Rajkot and arrived at the mandir at 10.07 p.m. amidst a grand festive welcome.

RAJKOT: 6-11

7, Monday

In the evening assembly the youths presented a debate on whether self-restraint (*sanyam*) or technology is an important means to spread Satsang. Thereafter, Swamishri was told to decide which means was the best. He said, “Both are required. But first one must have *sanyam* and then you can use technology. For one’s personal development one has to consolidate and practise *sanyam* and *niyam*. Without them one cannot achieve anything. By using technology alone one can attain only outward development. Using a mobile without discretion causes ruin. Technology is like a helping hand. The crux of life is to have *sanyam* and *niyam*. Both are required but *sanyam* lies at the root of all things.”

10, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *pratishttha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs on University Road and Airport Road.

BOCHASAN: 11-16

11, Friday, Rajkot, Bochasan; Dev Podhi Ekadashi, Shakotsav

Swamishri performed his morning puja on the assembly stage amidst a vivid backdrop of a vegetable market to celebrate the Shakotsav. Children and youths came on the stage dressed in costumes of different vegetables.

After his puja Swamishri displayed various vegetables one by one and parallelly the master of ceremonies described their virtues. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the audience.

At 4.09 p.m. Swamishri left Rajkot and headed by car towards Bochasan. On the way he gave darshan to sadhus and devotees at the Limbdi Mandir. At 7.27 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the Bochasan Mandir, where he was garlanded and



Shakotsav celebration, Bochasan

welcomed by Tyagvallabh Swami. After doing Thakorji’s darshan Swamishri took his seat on the stage, which was decorated with vegetables. In celebration of the *shakotsav* Swamishri held one vegetable after another before the audience as the announcer described their virtues.

12, Saturday; Children’s Day

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of two BAPS *hari* mandirs in Dholera and Sangasar (Dholera region).

In the evening, Swamishri presided over the Children’s Day celebration assembly. Children performed a dance and drama themed on satsang, *sanskar*, *shikshan*, *swasthya* and *sanskriti*. During his blessings Swamishri said, “By attending educational classes you only study, whereas here you are taught values, study and other things as well.”

13, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Bhumel and Bamangam (Nadiad region).

In the evening assembly, youths performed a drama on unity and peace. In his blessings, Swamishri inspired, “The whole world wants unity, without which nothing can work. Disunity causes destruction. We should thus think what we can do and think of in order to bring about unity. Yogiji Maharaj used to say, ‘be flexible’.”

14, Monday; Kartak Punam Festival

A beautiful *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji. Swamishri attended the morning Kartak Punam festival assembly. The assembly theme was based on the hardships Shastriji Maharaj tolerated for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. A video and dance were presented. Then Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami spoke about Shastriji Maharaj's conviction in God as the all-doer. Pujya Dr Swami discoursed on what we could do for Akshar-Purushottam. This was followed by a garlanding ceremony of Mahant Swami Maharaj. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the festival assembly, "In spite of Shastriji Maharaj having the powers to punish his opponents he never retaliated, but tolerated and observed saintliness. Secondly, he believed Shriji Maharaj to be the all-doer."

Finally, Swamishri gave *samip* darshan to more than 4,000 devotees.

At 7.05 p.m. Swamishri attended and participated in a special BSS (Bal Sevak Sabha) assembly, named 'Utsav Murti'. Swamishri was asked to sit on a *hindolo* decorated with flowers. Various festivals were then celebrated in his presence: Diwali and Annakut., Dhanurmas, Uttarayan, Holi, Hari Jayanti, Pratishtha Utsav, Rath Yatra, Bal Parayan, Hindola Utsav, Raksha Bandhan, Mahant Swami Maharaj's Birthday Celebration, Raas Utsav and Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva.

MAHELAV: 16-19

16, Wednesday, Bochasan, Mahelav

Swamishri departed from Bochasan and arrived in Mahelav at 5.44 p.m. After doing darshan at Shastriji Maharaj's birthplace he arrived at the mandir. At 6.02 p.m. he performed *arti* of Thakorji and at 7.32 p.m. blessed the satsang assembly, "If any part of our body is severed or fractured we seek treatment. But what treatment is there for a broken intellect? The solution to that is found from the shastras and sadhus. We take precautions against snakes and lions, but what precautions do we take against rare types of bacteria and viruses

that we cannot see? Similarly, we should take precautions against invisible elements like lust, anger and other things which cause disturbances and conflicts. We consider satsang to be child's play and worthless, but it is very beneficial."

BHARUCH: 19-22

20, Sunday; Asthi Visarjan

At 4.32 p.m. Swamishri arrived by the banks of River Narmada to perform the ritual immersion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's holy ashes. For details see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, January-February 2017, pp. 65-66.

21, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* for the *murtis* of BAPS *hari* mandirs in Kalimkavana (Raj Pipla region), Kava (Jambusar region) and Tithor (Padra region).

TITHAL: 22-26

26, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for nine BAPS *hari* mandirs: Baroliya, Aachavani, Chobadiya, Ambatalat, Navera, Gorgam, Panchlai, Tidhara and Bigari. The *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Guru Parampara, Hanumanji and Ganapatiji were beautifully adorned and consecrated.

SURAT: 26-30

26, Saturday, Tithal, Surat

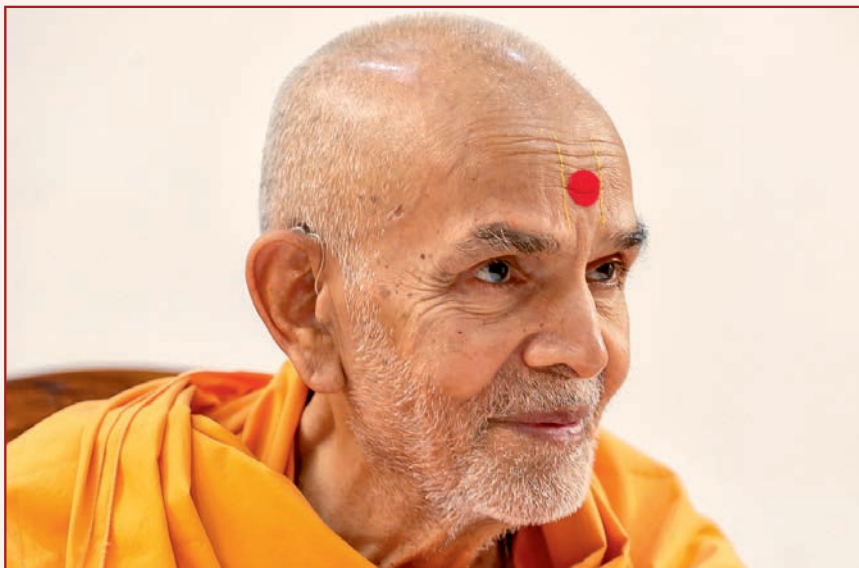
At 11.39 p.m. Swamishri arrived in Surat, where he was given a grand welcome by the Surat satsang *mandal*. During his 13-day stay Swamishri was scheduled to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 86th birthday and the 20th consecration anniversary of Surat BAPS Mandir. For details of the celebrations, refer to the special issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss*, January-February 2017. ♦

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

Inspiring incidents from the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj

October–November 2016



OCTOBER

HE IS HERE!

2, Nadiad

After performing the *shangar arti* in the mandir Mahant Swami Maharaj was coming down the mandir elevator. A youth, standing with a picture of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, asked, “With Pramukh Swami Maharaj gone, now what?”

Mahant Swami Maharaj explicitly revealed, while pointing his finger to his chest, “He has not gone. He is here.”

A SERVANT OF SERVANTS

A student of Nadiad BAPS hostel said to Swamishri, “We would like to repeat history today.” And then all the students chorused the song which had once been sung in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence, “The sun asks, the moon asks, a shining star asks who is Pramukh Swami, who is Mahant Swami?”

The student asked, “After listening to this song Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave a reply and created history. Now introduce yourself to us as to ‘Who

is Mahant Swami?’”

Everyone present was agog to know what Swamishri would reply. Instantly, Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed, “A servant of servants.”

* * *

THE SAME GUNATIT GURU

Someone asked Swamishri, “Will you take us all to Akshardham?”

Swamishri replied, “Through your darshan others will go to Akshardham.”

“Are you the same as Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj?”

Swamishri gestured with his hand and replied, “Yes, the same.”

A GHOST IS LIBERATED

3, Nadiad

A youth, Vrushant Patel, of Vaso narrated the behaviour of a ghost that had recently possessed his wife. The ghost said, “I am Bhulobhai of Manjipura. I will not leave your wife’s body because where is Pramukh Swami now?”

Then Vrushant showed a photo of Mahant Swami Maharaj to his wife. She took the photo and looked at it intently for some time. Then the ghost replied, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan is present in Mahant Swami Maharaj. I’m going.” And the ghost departed.

GURU BHAKTI

5, Nadiad

Jignesh requested, “Swamishri, I have a wish. Kindly say yes to it.” Then he explained, “I am going to build a new home, and I wish to name it ‘Keshav Palace’.

Swamishri said no. Jignesh requested again to allow him to use his name.

Swamishri replied, “The guru’s name [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] should always be first.”

Jignesh argued further, “Uptil now whatever constructions of homes and offices I had done were named after Pramukh Swami Maharaj. However, from now onwards [as you are our guru] allow me to name my new constructions after you.”

Swamishri patiently answered, “In Pramukh Swami’s name all are included.”

Out of his profound devotion to his guru Mahant Swami Maharaj remained unrelenting in his resolve.

NOVEMBER

HUMILITY

2, Gondal

Mahant Swami Maharaj went for his routine morning darshan to Yogiji Maharaj’s room. Here, Harshadbhai Rana, a veteran devotee, described, “After Yogiji Maharaj passed away Pramukh Swami Maharaj did his first puja [as a guru] here in this room. I was sitting besides him.”

Immediately Mahant Swami Maharaj bowed to Harshadbhai with respect and glory for him.

A SERVANT

5, Gondal

Shri Krushnabhai Pandya, a devotee of Gondal, declared his achievements in order to elicit an

answer from Swamishri about his own accomplishments. He said, “I am Shri Krushna Pandya. I was awarded the best national teacher’s award. I was the principal of our school in Gondal. For years I had served as a regional head (*sanyojak*) of satsang activities. These are my achievements. Now, I would like you to declare your accomplishments and who you are.”

Without a moment’s hesitation Swamishri replied, “A *sevak*.”

Shri Krushna Pandya pressed him to elaborate further, but Swamishri gave the same reply, “I am a *sevak*.” Then Swamishri bowed down to him in recognition of his achievements and service.

* * *

ALLEGIANCE TO FAITH

Rajeshbhai Patadiya of Shrinath Gadh asked Swamishri about an issue faced by his son, Sohil. He said, “My son is under training at the National Cadets Corp (NCC) in Vidyanagar. After this he may get an opportunity to join the Indian army. But his NCC Commander categorically told him that he would not be able to apply the *tilak-chandlo* in the army. So, Sohil gave examples of soldiers of other religions who apply their religious symbols. The commander replied, ‘There is no sanction in the army charter for applying the Swaminarayan *tilak-chandlo*.’ So, what should he do?”

Swamishri clearly stated, “Tell him to opt for another career. There’s no need to stop doing the *tilak-chandlo*.”

RESPECT OF AND ONENESS WITH GURU

9, Rajkot

“Switch off the bathroom light,” Swamishri instructed an attendant sadhu.

“The sadhu reminisced, “Your habit of being particular is like that of Swami Bapa’s [Pramukh Swami]. He never liked lights to be unnecessarily kept on, and always instructed his attendants to switch them off.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj replied, “But my [diligence is] not like that of Bapa’s.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj always beholds his guru in the highest esteem.

The attendant sadhu added, “But both of you are spiritually one, so it is natural to find your likes and dislikes to be common with him.”

Swamishri agreed, “Yes, that is true.” ♦

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



ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

October–November 2016

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

Q. After taking only a 10 minute nap after doing *mangla arti*, which was much less than his normal resting time, Mahant Swami Maharaj was asked, “Were you unable to sleep? Don’t you want to rest more?”

A. “[For me,] to remember Maharaj and Swami is rest.”

(8 October, Bhavnagar)

Q. On seeing a large pile of letters from devotees someone asked Swamishri, “Don’t you get bored in signing so many letters?”

A. “No, I don’t get bored one bit.” On another occasion he had answered, “It is devotion to Thakorji.”

(11 October, Bhavnagar)

Q. “In what lies your heartfelt *rajipo*?”

A. “Only one – to have divine feelings for all (*divyabhav*). Without this one will perceive others to be ordinary. Cultivate the habit of understanding all to be divine.”

Later, someone enacted how the inner faults (*swabhavs*) harass an individual. As a remedy to that Swamishri revealed, “Do bhajan.”

(19 October, Junagadh)

Whenever a devotee only hails Mahant Swami Maharaj’s *jai*, he shows his displeasure and politely corrects the person to say Pramukh Swami

Maharaj’s *jai* first. Today he voiced his feelings in this regard, “To say [my] *jai* without hailing Swami Bapa’s *jai* seems blunt and hollow. I experience fear.”

(22 October, Junagadh)

Q. “Answer in one word on how to attain *ekantik* dharma in life?”

A. “Do not perceive others as having human traits (no *manushbhav*).”

(23 October, Bhadra)

Q. “What did Ghanshyam Maharaj say to you?”

A. “Only one thing – *divyabhav* [seeing divinity in all].”

(1 November, Gondal)

Q. Is the meaning of *nirdosh buddhi* and *divyabhav* the same or different?

A. “One and the same. *Nirdosh buddhi* means believing [God and his Sadhu] to be above *maya*, and *divyabhav* also means to believe them to be above *maya*.”

(2 November, Gondal)

Q. What is the means to remain happy forever?”

A. “*Prapti* [experiencing the joy of having attained God].”

(9 November, Rajkot)

Q. On one hand we believe in the principle that God is the all-doer, so what is the purpose of praying to him to fulfil our wishes and grant us happiness?

A. By offering prayers we are beseeching God. If we stop praying to him we will believe God to be formless.

(12 November, Bochasan)

Q. When you close your eyes to sleep what do you see in your dreams?

A. God's *murti*, devotees and sadhus.

(16 November, Mahelav)

Q. Swami, what should we do to liberate ourselves from the disease of the cycles of birth and death?

A. Satsang.

(29 November, Surat) ♦

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

(Contd. from pg. 37)

the letter refers to some financial matter. Shri Muljibhai writes in the accompanying note, "This letter has been written by Shriji Maharaj in his own handwriting and sent to Muljibhai of Limli by Shriji from Mahemdavad-Khokra with Bhakta Ukarda to Limli. Samvat 1866, Vaishakh vad 8. It is totally sacred."

This note by the recipient of the letter, Muljibhai, removes any doubt about the authenticity of the letter.

However, the letter's authenticity was further confirmed, using modern technology, at distinguished scientific research centres. With the joint collaboration of Dr Timothy Jull, Director of Arizona University's Accelerator Mass Spectrometry Laboratory, and Dr R. Ramesh and Dr J.R. Trivedi of the Government of India's Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad, the letter was analyzed using modern methods.

First, the letter was documented and initially

examined by the scientists at the PRL. Then a piece of the letter was sent to Dr Jull in Arizona, USA. Here, Dr Jull's team analyzed the sample in a variety of ways. From these studies, Dr Jull concluded that the letter is from between 1805 and 1825. Using the 2 sigma range analysis, the letter was dated between 1805 and 1895. This demonstrated conclusively that the letter is not of recent origin.

The letter itself includes the *tithi* and *samvat* year on which it was written: Vaishakh vad 8, Samvat 1866.

So, the scientific analysis and letter details are compatible.

Recognizing its historicity and sanctity, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wished that it be displayed in the exhibition in Gadhada, so that future generations would also be able to have its darshan.

Currently, this is the only letter bearing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's signature in his own hand that is on display publicly. ♦

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I, Sadhu Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

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(Signed) Sadhu Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2017



Swamishri, *sadguru* sadhus and guests on stage during the assembly

Sabarmati Riverfront Road: 'Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg'

21 January 2017, Ahmedabad

A special public event was organized by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to commemorate the naming of an 11.5 km stretch of the Western Sabarmati riverfront road in Ahmedabad as 'Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg'.

First, as a tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj a ritual offering of his relics and the holy water of 108 rivers of India into the River Sabarmati took place at 4.30 p.m. at the hands of Mahant Swami Maharaj, Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Nitin Patel, cabinet ministers Shri Bhupendrasinhji Chudasama and Shri Pradipsinhji Jadeja, Ahmedabad Mayor Shri Gautam Shah, invited dignitaries and officials, and devotees.

This was followed by an assembly on the banks of the riverfront. The assembly began with a brief historical account of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's frequent association with Ahmedabad and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings for the riverfront project.

Brahmavihari Swami extolled Swamishri's personality and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's association with the River Sabarmati and the riverfront

project saying, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed Sabarmati River by doing *pujan* of the waters of the Narmada River on 28 August 2002. He blessed the riverfront project in 2004 during its commencement."

Thereafter, a short video was shown featuring the divine memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj performing *pujan* of the Sabarmati River and the holy waters of the River Narmada on 28 August 2002.

Thereafter, Mayor Shri Gautambhai Shah announced, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's monumental life and work has been a great inspiration not only for the city of Ahmedabad, but also for the world. He provided direction to humanity. I am greatly pleased to announce the 11.5 km riverfront road from Vadaj to Vasna as 'Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg'.

This was followed by the ritual worship of the signboard bearing the name 'Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg' amidst Vedic chantings. The announcement and *pujan* was received with thunderous applause and a standing ovation from



the invited dignitaries and 15,000 devotees and well-wishers in the audience.

Then, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami expressed, “This is a divine and an historic ceremony. By this naming, millions will take the holy name of Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj whenever they pass from this road. We congratulate and thank all the citizens of Ahmedabad too.”

Shri Bhupendrasinhji Chudasama reminisced about his meetings with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and said, “I congratulate the corporation and also convey my regards to the entire team. I am fortunate to be a part of this divine ceremony.”

Shri Nitinbhai Patel expressed his regards to

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, saying, “By naming the riverfront road as ‘Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg’, it will forever be associated with not only Ahmedabad, Gujarat or India, but with the entire world because the international kite festival and many fairs that are held on this ground.”

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the gathering, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an apostle and an embodiment of peace. Peace exuded from him, wherever he was. We pray that whoever comes here experiences peace and happiness in their life.” ♦

Above: Swamishri and dignitaries offer *mantra-pushpanjali*
Below: Swamishri, Nitinbhai Patel, sadhus and children offer the holy waters of 108 rivers into the Sabarmati River



Pushpadolotsav Celebrations

13 March 2017, Sarangpur



Over 60,000 devotees and well-wishers from throughout India, USA, Canada, UK, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Bahrain, UAE, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and many other countries gathered in Sarangpur for the first grand Pushpadolotsav (Fuldol) celebration in the presence of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj after the passing away to Akshardham of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj last year.

The beautifully decorated stage captured the attention of all. The stage background depicted the heavenly scene of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, seated on an adorned *hindolo*, together with Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, blessing the village of Sarangpur from their thrones in Akshardham.

At the centre of the stage was Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, with *sad-guru* sadhus and dignitaries seated on both sides.

The assembly, based on the theme ‘Ej Range, Ej Sange’ (‘The same colour, the same association’), revealed that Bhagwan Swaminarayan remains present in the Satsang through the Gunatit Satpurush. The outer appearance of the Satpurush changes, but the divine virtues they exemplify through their inspiring lives remain pristine. The assembly highlighted some of these divine qualities of *mahima*, spiritual charisma and devotion evident in the lives of both Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Through their speeches, Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Kothari Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other learned swamis elaborated upon these qualities to give the inspiring message of living a more meaningful life by

offering devotion to Bhagwan, acquiring spiritual knowledge, and living a moral and spiritual life.

Pujya Kothari Swami: “To understand the glory (*mahima*) of all, we must understand that all devotees are special since they have the association of the supreme Parabrahman and the Gunatit Satpurush, that their true form is *atma* and that they all have virtues.”

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami: “The power of Gunatit is to take the *jiva* beyond *maya*. Shriji Maharaj has said that *ekantik dharma* can only be perfected by keeping the association of the Gunatit Satpurush. For over 50 years Pramukh Swami Maharaj endeavoured tirelessly in nurturing the Satsang.

“Faith in the words of the Satpurush, like Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, is essential. They would never leave us spiritually-orphaned. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have both revealed the glory of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

“So, to become attached to Mahant Swami Maharaj, who is Gunatit, is our devotion and is true satsang.”

Pujya Dr Swami: “We must sincerely endeavour to live by the commands of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara. This will not be achieved in a day, but it is not something that cannot be done. Sometimes, there is laxity in observing the commands. This must be corrected.

“Everybody knows Yogiji Maharaj’s wish that everyone should attend the weekly satsang assembly. You all observe this to some extent, but still there is scope for improvement.”

Interspersed between the speeches were engaging videos showing how these various virtues can be seen in the lives of both Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Among the dignitaries present was Gujarat State Education Minister Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, who addressed the assembly, “Seeing this large gathering of devotees here today proves

that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is still with us.”

On this occasion, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated several Swaminarayan Aksharpith publications: Vachanamrut app, ‘Gunatitanand Swami: Life & Work’ (English translation) and four new ebooks – ‘Prasangam 2009’, ‘Gems from Shikshapatri’, ‘Hindu Festivals’ and ‘Truth from Under a Tree’.

Thereafter, HH Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, “As devotees, you do a lot. But where character is at stake, one needs to remain alert.

“Shriji Maharaj has said, ‘Devotees who want to stay with me must discard the temporary worldly objects.’

“Shriji Maharaj has emphasized the necessity of observing *agna* and understanding *upasana*. They are described as two wings, so both are required to fly [to Akshardham]. Just like birds, if one wing is weak, flight is not possible.

“Like old paint, old habits must be removed. Only then can the true colour of divinity take hold. Remain determined on this path. Maharaj has coloured us with the virtue of devotion.

“Yogiji Maharaj has said that by keeping *suhradbhav* with devotees everything is attained.

“By indulging in talks of *abhav-avgun*, it will cause one misery and spiritual progress is not possible. Such talks negate all of one’s spiritual achievements.”

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and sprayed saffron-scented water on Thakorji.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj sat at the front of the stage to spray the devotees with the sanctified scented water. The devotees joyously departed from Sarangpur drenched by the divine shower of blessings from *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj and with *prasad*.

Approximately 8,000 volunteers served in 30 different departments to ensure the efficient planning, preparation and execution of the celebration.



India

SATSANG AND YUVA PRAVRUTTI KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

16 December 2016 – 10 January 2017



A total of around 15,000 men and women *karyakars* who serve in the satsang, youth and women's wings participated in the 20 Annual Karyakar Shibirs in Gujarat conducted by the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad.

Based on the theme 'Akshar Deri Gunatit Keri', to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the holy Akshar Deri in Gondal, the *shibirs* were held in Sarangpur, Gondal, Bochasan, Ahmedabad, Himmatnagar, Atladara, Sankari and Tithal.

The *karyakars* learnt about the history and glory of the Akshar Deri through speeches by *sadgurus* and other experienced sadhus, as well as through audio-visual presentations, workshops and interactive participation. The *shibirs* also featured the video blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

BAL PRAVRUTTI DIVYA SANNIDHI PARVA 3–5 February 2017, Sarangpur

Around 1,300 men and women volunteer leaders of the BAPS's Children's Activities from across India assembled in Sarangpur for a special



two-and-a-half day convention to help them gain more depth in Satsang and create a greater spiritual bond with *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. The central theme of the gathering was 'Bhagya Jagya Re...' – a select few words from a famous bhajan which proclaims one's great fortune for having attained God, guru and the fellowship.

In India, BAPS's Children's Activities serve more than 100,000 children every week. With more than 8,500 children's activities centres across the country, BAPS manages a volunteer force of more than 9,500 dedicated men and women.

The presentation sessions allowed the selected volunteers to better appreciate the glory of God, guru and the BAPS Sanstha, as well as the importance and value of their own roles and services. In all, five interactive sessions were held with Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the volunteers, encouraging all to live their lives centred around spirituality and service.

SATSANG PRAVRUTTI DIVYA SANNIDHI PARVA 10–12 February 2017, Sarangpur

Over 1,300 senior men and women Satsang and Youth Activities volunteers attended this special *shibir* in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Based on the theme 'Bhagya Jagya Re...', the



shibir conveyed to the dedicated volunteers the messages that manifest God has been attained in the form of the Gunatit guru, a rare opportunity has been attained to serve the Satsang and a divine association of such pure sadhus and devotees has been attained.

In the interactive sessions, the volunteers had question-answer forums, presented skits and engaged in a number of other ways with Mahant Swami Maharaj, receiving valuable guidance, inspiration and blessings from him directly. Other senior and experienced sadhus also provided inspiration to the volunteers throughout the *shibir*.

During the *shibir*, the volunteers experienced Mahant Swami Maharaj's genuine affection towards all.

NATIONAL MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE 24–26 February 2017, Sarangpur



The theme of this year's conference was 'Sadhana: Living a Meaningful Life.' About 650 doctors and their families from throughout India and other countries attended the two-day conference. Among them were Dr Navin Thakkar (President of the Asia-Pacific Paediatric

Association), Konstantin Beltikov (orthopaedic surgeon, Moscow), as well as other renowned neurosurgeons, cardiologists, plastic surgeons, and other super-specialists.

The *shibir* theme was effectively conveyed through speeches by senior BAPS swamis, experienced devotees, enlightening videos, workshops and panel discussions. The delegates learnt how to balance their personal, spiritual and professional lives, the role of *sadhana* (spiritual endeavour) in life and practical ways to apply these ideas in their daily lives.

Topics presented included 'What is Sadhana?', daily worship and daily spiritual reading.

Since 1994, more than 32,000 doctors and their families have benefitted from the annual medico-spiritual conferences organized in various locations by BAPS Pramukh Swami Health Services.

BAPS Charities

QUARTERLY BLOOD DONATION DRIVE 18 December 2016, Johannesburg, South Africa

BAPS Charities hosted its quarterly blood



donation drive to support the efforts of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS) to collect blood from donors to meet medical demand. On this occasion, a total of 31 pints of blood was collected thanks to the community and members of the public who responded to the call to donate.

COLLECTING WINTER CLOTHES FOR THE HOMELESS IN LONDON, UK

Volunteers from BAPS Charities collected

clothes for the homeless during the frigid winter period. This was a part of its on-going commitment to serving the needy in local communities.

A variety of warm pieces of clothing, including jumpers and jackets, were deposited at collection points opposite the Neasden Mandir in London. Devotees and owners of local businesses also contributed to the collection.

More than 1,000 individual garments were

collected and distributed to Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people.

Michael Clout, Corporate Donations Coordinator at Crisis, added, “We are very grateful for the volunteers [at BAPS Charities] for contributing their time to help homeless people. It is one of the largest donations of clothes we have had this year and will help to keep many people warm in the cold weather.” ♦

BAPS CHARITIES 2016: A SUMMARY

(North America)

BLOOD DONATION DRIVES



To help keep up with the constant demand for blood, BAPS Charities organized 39 blood drives throughout North America in the month of June collecting 1,474 pints of blood, which will help to save over 4,400 lives. Over 1,500 participants took part in the drives. In the last 10 years, BAPS Charities blood drives have collected over 10,000 pints of blood saving as many as 30,000 lives.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT REGISTRATION

Since 2010, the goal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has been to provide affordable health insurance coverage to millions of Americans. BAPS Charities partnered with local organizations and state representatives to host ACA registration events at 17 centres throughout USA. Officials and volunteers helped individuals understand the requirements of the law, relative to their particular situation. They also helped navigate state-established health care exchanges and evaluate

health care plans that best fit their personal needs and situation. Over 385 individuals were able to consult with experts and take advantage of the opportunity to obtain health insurance and meet the ACA requirements.

BONE MARROW DRIVES



Approximately every 9 minutes, someone in the United States dies of leukaemia. Using donated bone marrow gives the potential to help treat a myriad of diseases including leukaemia, lymphoma, and inherited immune and metabolic disorders. For which, currently, one of the most effective forms of treatment is through bone marrow transplantation.

Only 30% of patients in need of a bone marrow transplant are able to find a suitable donor within their own family. Patients needing a bone marrow transplant are most likely to find a match with someone from their own ethnic group.

BAPS Charities is determined to help increase

the donor registry nationwide to help any of those that need this potentially lifesaving treatment. BAPS Charities organized 18 Bone Marrow Drives across America, registering 322 individuals. Since 2006, BAPS Charities bone marrow drives have registered over 6,040 potential donors.

This year, donors registered through BAPS Charities were matched to provide lifesaving treatment for two patients in the USA.

FLU VACCINATION DRIVES



On average, 226,000 people are hospitalized every year because of influenza and 36,000 die – mostly elderly (Source: CDC). The Influenza vaccine prevents influenza, hence Flu Vaccination drives was organized by BAPS Charities across North America at 17 centres, benefitting 1,756 participants.

FOOD DRIVES

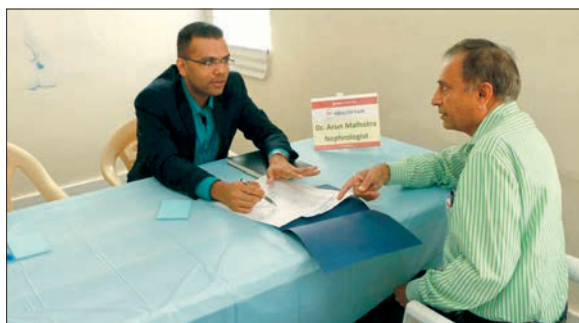
Despite the United States' economic prosperity, nearly 50 million Americans go hungry every day, which includes 33.3 million adults and 15.8 million children. National statistics estimate that 1 in 6 Americans cannot afford a meal on a daily basis. Children in the US are even more vulnerable.

BAPS Charities held its annual food drive at 10 centres across North America in an effort to support the cause of fighting hunger in the community. Volunteers of all ages along with community participants collectively donated hundreds of canned and dried food items. These were donated to local food banks.

HEALTH AWARENESS LECTURES

BAPS Charities health awareness lectures focus on prevention and to enlighten all towards healthier living. Many costly and disabling diseases like cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases can be prevented. In 2016, BAPS Charities organized health lectures at over 60 centres across North America. Over 23,000 participants benefitted from these lectures.

HEALTH FAIRS



The thought of periodic health check-ups is daunting for many, however, early detection and prevention is the key to a healthier life. Recognizing that early detection and prevention are vital for the well-being of communities, BAPS Charities organized 49 health fairs in North America in 2016. Over 9,760 participants benefited from consultations with primary care physicians and specialists, different laboratory services, screening tests and health education sessions. To meet this daunting task, 1,420 healthcare professionals, including, expert physicians, pharmacists, dentists, physical therapist, nutritionists and nurses provided their volunteer services.

BAPS CHARITIES WALK GREEN

In 2016, BAPS Charities Walk Green, organized at 53 cities across USA, supported The Nature Conservancy's efforts to plant and restore over 1.6 million acres of land by planting one billion trees by 2025 through their Plant a Billion Trees initiative. In collaboration with them, BAPS Charities walks across North America,



appropriately named Walk Green, contributed to rejuvenating our dying forests by helping plant over 70,000 trees in 2016.

The walk saw enthusiastic involvement from the local community, involving over 16,500 walkers. In total, nearly 50,000 miles were walked in support of a wide range of local community, health, educational, environmental and humanitarian activities.

In addition to the annual Walkathon, BAPS Charities actively supports environmental sustainability efforts throughout the year through recycling projects and utilizing solar power. BAPS Charities is also involved with tree planting and water conservation efforts as well as promoting effective management practices in activities to ensure optimal and efficient energy consumption.

The BAPS Charities Walk in Canada took place at 7 cities, bringing together over 2,000 participants who eagerly walked to benefit the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

In Canada, BAPS Charities also gave support to local and national organizations including the Stollery Children's Hospital in Alberta, Sick Kids Foundation in Toronto, The Scarborough Hospital Foundation and the Heart & Stroke Foundation.

WILDFIRE RELIEF EFFORTS

Gatlinburg, Tennessee

On 23 November, a deadly fire that began inside the Great Smokey Mountains spread across Tennessee claiming the lives of 14 people, damaging over 2,400 buildings, and leaving many of



Gatlinburg's 4,000 residents homeless. More than 14,000 people were evacuated from Gatlinburg, a popular tourist destination, and the nearby town of Pigeon Forge.

BAPS Charities worked with the TEMA (Tennessee Emergency Management Agency) and the Red Cross to assist in emergency response efforts by providing volunteers at aid locations, contributing snack bars and other emergency supplies at the request of first responders.

FORT McMURRAY WILDFIRE RELIEF EFFORTS

On 2 May 2016, massive wildfires swept through the city of Fort McMurray in Alberta, Canada, leading to the emergency evacuation of nearly 80,000 people. BAPS Charities immediately launched its relief efforts in Edmonton, serving over 300 hot meals daily to evacuees. To ensure the affected families were completely comfortable in such distressful times, volunteers also ensured meals were prepared following the cultural and religious dietary requirements of the evacuees. BAPS Charities also offered immediate shelter to over 100 people.

BAPS Charities also assisted families to find accommodations and set up new places of residence in Edmonton while they wait to find out if they will be able to return to their houses in Fort McMurray. To ensure children's education is not interrupted, volunteers assisted evacuee families to register their children in local schools.

Each family was provided a relief kit of cooking utensils, dinnerware, bedroom sets and toiletries to set up their new home in Edmonton. ♦

BAPS CHARITIES 2016: A SUMMARY

(UK)

NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF



To support victims of Nepal earthquake, over £65,000 were raised by BAPS Charities and donated to UNICEF and Nepalese Embassy in the UK.

HEALTH PROMOTION



A seminar for dental professionals in association with the Dental Directory and AAA Dentalab was organized. It was attended by 90 dental professionals.

A health awareness drive in partnership with the Rotary Club of Edgware & Stanmore was held.

Cardiovascular and general health screening sessions and professional guidance (in London and Bradford) with the support of The Royal Free Hospital was organized.

£15,000 was donated to the Imperial

College Healthcare NHS Trust for prostate cancer research.

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Over 3,000 participants from 22 centres across the UK joined the BAPS Annual 10K Challenge (sponsored walks) to raise funds for multifarious educational, community and spiritual activities serving children, youths, families and the elderly.

Sponsored Sky dive Challenge in support of various charities was conducted.

In support of International Sewa Day, an annual event where “thousands of good-hearted people across the world come together to perform *sewa* and experience the joy of giving in its truest sense”: 1. Collected food for the homeless in London with the support of The Swaminarayan Sunday School. Collections donated to Sufra, a community food bank and kitchen based in the London Borough of Brent serving over 29,000 children. 2. Visits to residential care homes for the elderly to engage with the residents; volunteers also delivered musical performances.

Collected winter clothes for the homeless in London. Collections donated to Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people.

FOSTERING EDUCATION & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Golf Day raised £15,000 for underprivileged schoolchildren.

£500,000 was donated towards a new girls school in India.

ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS

BAPS participated in World Environment Day 2016 and Earth Hour 2016. ♦

Correction: In the January-February 2017 issue, page 54, instead of ‘A Letter Par Excellence’ it should have been ‘A Leader Par Excellence’.



CONSECRATION OF BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN'S ABHISHEK AND GURU PARAMPARA'S MURTIS

1 February 2017, Gadhada

Mahant Swami Maharaj performs *abhishek* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's metallic *murti* as part of the *murti-pratishtha* rituals.



FULDOL CELEBRATION
13 March 2017, Sarangpur

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* sadhus and guests on the decorated stage.
2. Over 60,000 devotees seated in the festive assembly.
3. Mahant Swami Maharaj showers devotees with sanctified saffron-scented water.

(*Insets*) Top: Mahant Swami Maharaj on stage.

Bottom: Swamishri sprays Thakorji with saffron-scented water.