

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2016

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



Shrivani



Manan



Nididhyas & Sakshatkar

Importance and Benefits of  
Spiritual Discourses (Katha)





### FULDOL CELEBRATION & NEW BAPS GIRLS SCHOOL INAUGURATION March-April 2016

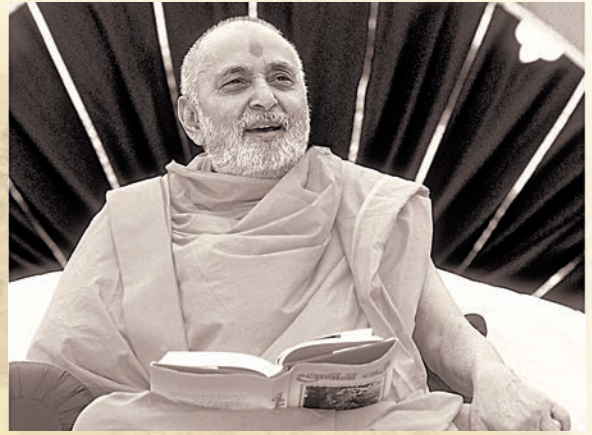
- 1-3. Over 30,000 devotees attended the Pushpadolotsav in Swamishri's presence. Swamishri sprayed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with saffron-scented water and then showered the devotees with the sanctified water (23 March 2016, Sarangpur).
4. Swamishri performs *pujan* of the *murtis* for the prayer hall of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, a girls residential school, in Randesan, near Gandhinagar (3 April 2016, Sarangpur).
5. Sadguru sadhus at the auspicious Prasad Pravesh ceremony of the BAPS Girls Residential School, Randesan (11 March 2016).

Cover Title: Painting of Bhagwan Veda Vyas narrating the Shrimad Bhagvat to his son, Shukdevji.





Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj



Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj



# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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**Founder:** HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

**Editor:** Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

**Contributors:** Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

**Designer:** Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

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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.

## CONTENTS

- 4 First Word
- 5 Maha-Ras in Panchala
- 8 Katha: A Means to Liberation
- 12 An Excerpt from the Sleeper's Guide to Katha
- 17 Sarangpur 3 in the Republic of Congo
- 20 Katha Varta and Everyday Challenges: A Case Study
- 25 Testimonials on the Benefits of Katha
- 27 Yogiji Maharaj's Style of Discoursing
- 29 Take a Needle to Heaven
- 30 Effects of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Discourses
- 33 Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan
- 39 Vice President of India Shri Hamid Ansari Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham
- 40 Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, Randesan, Gujarat
- 41 Celebrating Transcendence, Dubai & India
- 45 BAPS News



# FIRST WORD

A lot of personal growth, happiness, success and inner peace requires an insightful look at ourselves: our values, approaches and behaviours. To penetrate within and reshape our perceptions and actions require the light of knowledge. Our thinking and actions have advanced over thousands of years due to the knowledge we have gained and the ignorance we have overcome. But still a lot remains unknown; and from what little we know a lot of it remains unpracticed. Mere verbal knowledge is only superficial and cosmetic till we have fully realized it. It is with this purpose that the Hindu shastras reveal, “*Rute jānnān na muktihi*” – “Without [spiritual] knowledge there is no liberation.” Here, the scriptures refer to the realized knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma.

The Mundaka Upanishad reveals two types of knowledge: *para* (spiritual) and *apara* (worldly). Both are necessary, but the realization of the former is the ultimate aim of human life. For many millennia, spiritual knowledge or *jnan* in India has been mainly disseminated through an oral tradition. The guru imparted the knowledge of the Hindu shastras to his disciples either through recitation, narration or elaboration. This is commonly known as *katha* (spiritual discourses). The essential content of *katha* encompasses the moral dos and don'ts (dharma), the glory of God and his devotees (*jnan*), the fleeting nature of our world (*vairagya*) and devotion to God (bhakti).

Currently, *katha* on the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan, Shrimad Bhagvat, Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri and other scriptures are widely popular among the devout and *satsangis*. Stories and elaborations related to the life and work of God and his devotees nourish spiritual faith and virtues in aspirants. Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains, “...a *sampradaya* is fostered by the scriptures which narrate its Ishtadev's divine incidents from his birth up until him passing away... Those who worship Ramchandra Bhagwan will be inspired only by the Valmiki Ramayan, and those who worship Shri Krishna will be inspired by only the tenth and eleventh cantos of the Shrimad Bhagvat. Ultimately, then, only the scriptures of one's own *sampradaya* will foster [the faith of devotees of the] *sampradaya*” (Vachanamrut II 58).

Reading or listening to *katha* on a daily basis is therefore essential for spiritual growth and inner happiness. Neglecting this spiritual practice due to mundane desires and activities takes a heavy toll on our life. The benefits of listening to *katha* and contemplating on it are holistic.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami say that *katha* is a form of God and when an aspirant listens to or hears *katha* out of deep faith, trust and love, he or she is liberated from the base instincts of ego, lust, anger and greed. *Katha* also stabilizes and calms the mind. It is a means to inner purity which no amount of austerity can grant; one becomes disinterested in the mundane attractions; a correct spiritual understanding dawns; it keeps an aspirant vigilant and awake like a guard on patrol duty; it purifies one's mind and it is greater than infinite other spiritual sadhanas.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Parampara have zealously practiced and promoted the *katha* tradition. Gunatitanand Swami had appointed eight *puranis* (readers) to read the *katha* day and night at the Junagadh Mandir. Shastriji Maharaj often propagated the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy by discoursing till late night and to even a single aspirant all night. Yogiji Maharaj daily discoursed to the youths at 5.00 a.m. Pramukh Swami Maharaj once said if we miss *katha* then one's *atma* becomes weak.

This issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* is themed on the importance and process of listening to *katha*. We hope our readers will be enlightened and inspired to listen to, hear or read *katha* and practice its principles. Finally, we offer our profound prostrations to Yogiji Maharaj on his 124th birthday celebration, which falls this year on 2 June (Vaishakh *vad* 12). He lovingly listened to and delivered discourses, and also introduced the Sunday satsang *sabha* for the benefit of all. ♦



# MAHA-RAS IN PANCHALA



*Shri Hari arrives in Panchala to fulfil the devotion of Jhinabhai Darbar and his family members...*

## SHRI HARI IN PANCHALA

News of Shri Hari approaching Panchala reached the house of Jhinabhai Darbar. There was a spontaneous outbreak of joy. Preparations to welcome Shriji Maharaj had been made well in advance. The *paramhansas* and devotees, who had arrived earlier, and the household members of Jhinabhai and many of his citizens hurried to the outskirts to welcome Shri Hari. The selected few from the village played musical instruments and fired rifle shots in the air to honour and herald Shri Hari's arrival. Those who had stayed in their homes came out to have Maharaj's darshan as he proceeded on the main street of Panchala. The village was decorated with festoons of *asopalav* leaves and *rangolis* outside each home. Many offered prostrations as Shriji Maharaj trotted on

his Manki. Jhinabhai and Gagabhai, his brother, welcomed Shri Hari with flower garlands. The women folk showered flowers upon Maharaj. The entire village celebrated Shri Hari's arrival.

Jhinabhai and Gagabhai had made all the preparations for the celebration of the Fuldol festival.

## ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ALL

Shri Hari proceeded straight to Jhinabhai's *darbar*, where he was to reside. He sat on a cot arranged on a stone platform outside his room. Then, Maharaj asked Jhinabhai about the accommodations for the *paramhansas* and devotees. Jhinabhai explained, "Several residents of the village have emptied their homes to accommodate Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and



the sadhus of their *mandals*. The living arrangements for the devotees have been made in other homes of the local villagers. Also, on the western outskirts of Panchala many straw huts have been set up for the *paramhansas* to stay. A large tent has been built for Nityanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami and Shuk Muni.”

Shri Hari was satisfied with the arrangements. Jhinabhai had taken into account all the needs and made the best possible arrangements for all.

### KUSANG IN ITS DISGUISED FORM IN SATSANG

Shri Hari visited the cooking and dining areas and expressed his satisfaction. Then, Maharaj returned to his room and sat on the cot outside. The sadhus and devotees assembled in Jhinabhai’s courtyard for Shri Hari’s darshan. Though it was lunchtime, Shri Hari wanted to share an important message with all. He advised, “This Satsang is divine. Those who have understood this will always remain happy. But, those who have no glory for Satsang in their soul or are conceited will fail to experience true happiness. However, by doing satsang, one’s inner flaws will be eradicated and one will become pure.”

Maharaj paused for a while before he continued, “In the Satsang fellowship, *kusang* is present in a veiled form. Even the naïve fall from Satsang when they become prey to *kusang*. Thus, one must be able to recognize *kusang* while doing satsang. A *kusangi* may initially talk glowingly about Satsang, which impresses a *satsangi* and evokes good feelings for him. Then he talks in a covert manner about the faults of God and his Sadhu. Subsequently, as the victim is drawn to him and starts admiring him, the *kusangi* poisons him further with words of *manushyabhav* for God and his

Sadhu. Eventually, the *satsangi* falls from the path of *moksha*. It is sometimes difficult to recognize this type of *kusang* in Satsang. So, it is imperative to stay away from such people.”

As Shri Hari concluded his sermon the call for lunch, “Vasudev Hare”, was hailed. Shri Hari smiled and added, “Just as one eagerly gets up on hearing this call, one should have the same zeal for listening to spiritual talks. The physical body is sustained through eating food, whereas one’s soul is nourished by listening to spiritual discourses.” Then Shri Hari also got up to have lunch.

### FULDOL FESTIVAL PREPARATIONS (1823 CE)

Jhinabhai, the host, was busy preparing for Fuldol – the festival of colours. He had ordered *abir*, *gulal* and saffron from Mangrol. To make squirters (*pichkaris*), Shri Hari told Raiya Bhagat to bring bamboos. He also told Nishkamanand Swami and Adharanand Swami to go with him and help him. Maharaj assigned the responsibility of making arrangements for the entire festival to Prabhashankar, a dedicated Brahmin devotee of Piplav.

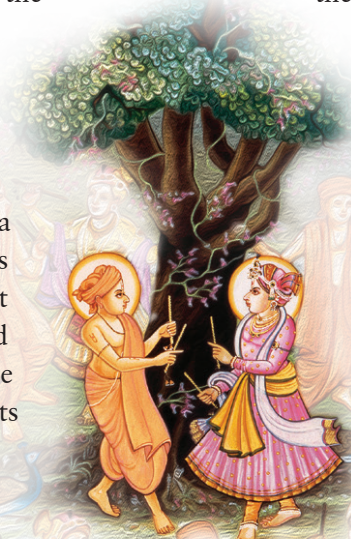
Soon, the materials for the festival arrived in Panchala. The sadhus and devotees started making *pichkaris* from the bamboo stems. Once they were ready, everyone was given one *pichkari* and a small stick of *chandan* and saffron.

### CELEBRATION OF NAR-NARAYAN RISHI’S BIRTH

On the day of Fagan *sud* 15 (25 February), Shri Hari addressed the sadhus and devotees, “Today, is the birthday of Nar-Narayan rishi.

Therefore all should do *pujan* of the *murti* of Nar-Narayan first.”

Shri Hari performed the *pujan* rituals first, followed by the sadhus who had brought with





them a mixture of sandalwood paste and saffron in leaves. Maharaj had invited Brahmins for the occasion and later offered them a feast and donations.

Jhinabhai Darbar and his mother, Gangama, and sister, Adiba, performed *pujan* of Shri Hari and gifted him with beautiful clothes and jewelry. Shortly thereafter, Brahmachariji called Shri Hari for dinner. He added, "Jhinabhai Darbar has made arrangements for a sumptuous meal for all. He has also arranged for a similar meal for you, and therefore you must accept his devotion and hospitality." However, instead of having his dinner first, Shri Hari came and sat on a platform to give darshan to the devotees having lunch.

Since a large number of devotees had come for the occasion, special arrangements were made to serve them. Firstly, the devotees were made to sit in rows. The sadhus then pushed cartloads of laddus and unloaded them at the end of each row. From there another group of sadhus filled baskets of laddus and other items to serve each row of devotees. Shri Hari insisted that the devotees be served generously. Thus, the sadhus served in abundance and also inspired all to sing the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Maharaj was pleased with the arrangements and blessed all. Finally, Maharaj got up to have his meal.

### **"PLAY RAS WITH US"**

While Shri Hari was having his meal Brahmanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami and others were seated before him to have his darshan. At that time Brahmanand Swami told Maharaj, "Just as Bhagwan Krishna played *ras* with the *gopis* on the night of Sharad Punam, we wish that you play *ras* with us today."

Shri Hari smiled and replied, "I will fulfil your wish, but there is one condition. You'll have to compose and sing new bhajans at that time. Only then will everyone enjoy the *maha-ras*."

Brahmanand Swami agreed. Shri Hari said,

"Arrange the *maha-ras* on the open ground by the hill in the westerly direction. The River Sabli flows nearby, and the light of the full moon and the sweet aroma of flowers of the spring season (Vasant) will be ideal. Nature is most conducive for the *maha-ras*."

"And God, too, is conducive," Brahmanand Swami added.

Shri Hari replied, "It is because of God's will that nature has become convenient. Otherwise, *kal* (time) and *prakruti* (nature) will not allow one to engage with and worship God." The sadhus understood that because of Maharaj's grace, auspicious and favourable times prevail in Satsang to experience the joys of bhakti.

### **MAHA-RAS IN PANCHALA**

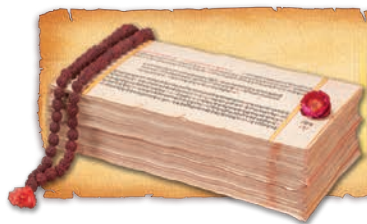
As the golden sun set, devotees and citizens of Panchala started heading towards the banks of River Sabli for the *maha-ras*. By 9.00 p.m. the large flat ground by the river was teeming with sadhus and devotees. Jhinabhai Darbar had made arrangements for the musical instruments for the occasion. A short while later Shri Hari arrived. He was greeted with a loud chorus of "Sahajanand Swami Maharaj *ni jai*". Maharaj sat on a platform prepared for him. He told Brahmanand Swami, "Since there are many sadhus, tell them to group themselves in nine concentric circles. The innermost circle should comprise of senior sadhus followed subsequently by the junior sadhus."

Brahmanand Swami made the arrangements and returned to Shri Hari, saying, "Maharaj, everything is ready for the *maha-ras* to begin. The full moon is effulgent, the trees are swaying under the influence of the cool breeze. Your presence has filled the occasion with divinity. Now we await your signal to start." ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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





# KATHA

## A Means to Liberation

### INTRODUCTION

Hindu scriptures proclaim the necessity of acquiring spiritual knowledge to facilitate one's spiritual journey.

In Vedic times, such divinely revealed knowledge was imparted orally by the guru to his disciples. Disciples would also ask questions to seek clarification on what the guru had said and on other matters.

These divine revelations and oral interactions were the source material on which the foundational Hindu shastras were compiled. And it is these shastras that have been recited and elaborated upon to provide spiritual guidance to all Hindus over millennia.

The shastras are the basis of Hindu doctrines and recount the stories of God, his avatars and devotees.

Among the more well-known and widely accessed shastras are the Mahabharat (which includes the Bhagavad Gita), Ramayan and Shrimad Bhagvat.

Narration and commentaries on these and other shastras is commonly referred to as *katha* – spiritual discourses.

*Katha* takes many forms and lasts for varying durations of time – from a few minutes to many days. However, it is essential for genuine spiritual seekers to listen to *katha* daily so that constant vigilance and progress on the spiritual path is maintained.

*Katha* has the capacity to free one from all material bondage and lead one to liberation. This glory of the effect of *katha* is described in the Shrimad Bhagvat through the true stories of Dhundhukari and King Parikshit.

### THE STORY OF DHUNDHUKARI

A pious and wealthy Brahmin named Atmadev lived on the banks of the River Tungabhadra. His wife, Dhundhuli, however, was full of materialistic desires. Yet, Atmadev was happy in all respects, except that he had no children and desperately craved for a son.

One day, in the forest, he met a rishi and expressed to him his desire for a child.

The rishi revealed to Atmadev that he is destined to have no children in his next seven lives. And that not everyone with children is happy. He told Atmadev that he would be subject to immense suffering if he were to have a son. Accepting the rishi's words, but unable to overcome his deep longing, Atmadev insisted that the rishi bless him.

So, the rishi gave him a special fruit and told him to give it to his wife to eat. Atmadev was delighted and rushed home. However, Dhundhuli was not keen on having children since that would interfere with her carefree enjoyment of life. Pressured by Atmadev, she took the fruit, but did not eat it. She discussed the situation with her sister, who had just become pregnant. Her sister agreed to give her child to Dhundhuli in return for some property. So, Dhundhuli fed the fruit to one of their cows and made a physical show of being pregnant.

In due course, the sister gave birth to a boy, whom she handed over to Dhundhuli, explaining to others that her child had died prematurely. This boy was named Dhundhukari. At the same time, the cow also gave birth to a human with cow-like ears. He was named Gokarna. It was then that Atmadev found out about the plot

between the sisters.

Dhundhukari grew up to be ill-natured, indulgent and impetuous, while Gokarna was pious, polite and prudent.

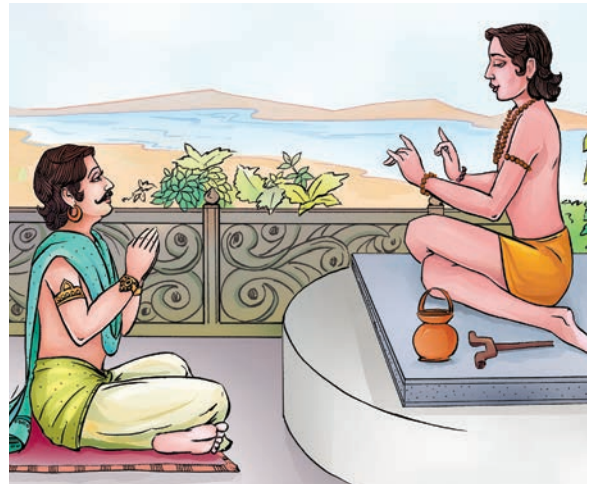
Dhundhukari spent much of his time flirting with women and was constantly under the influence of intoxicants. His behaviour caused Atmadev much despair and distress. And when he scolded him for his indiscipline, Dhundhukari would beat Atmadev. Atmadev pleaded to Gokarna to save him from his son's beatings. But the enlightened Gokarna asked, "Who is who's son?" And then he explained the perishable nature of life and that affection for and attachment to worldly relations are futile. He told Atmadev to focus on God, who would fulfil all his wishes. Atmadev realized his ignorance was the cause of his misery and, detaching from worldly life, he retreated to the forest to worship. There, he soon passed away.

In Atmadev's absence, Dhundhukari killed his mother out of greed to inherit her wealth. He continued his immoral existence and the vulgar women he associated with soon killed him and escaped with all his moveable assets. Due to his sins, Dhundhukari became a ghost.

Prior to his brother's death, Gokarna had left for a pilgrimage. When he reached Gaya he learnt of Dhundhukari's demise and performed *shradha* rituals on his behalf.

However, that night Dhundhukari, in the form of a ghost, approached Gokarna and pleaded for help to secure his liberation from his sins.

Gokarna arranged for a seven-day recital of the Shrimad Bhagvat and invited many people. Dhundhukari's soul entered the hollow of a bamboo shoot, from where he listened to the scriptural recital with great attention and affection. At the conclusion of the recital, messengers from Bhagwan Vishnu came in a celestial chariot to take Dhundhukari to Vaikunth. Gokarna and others questioned why they, too, did not attain liberation since they had also listened to the discourses. The messengers revealed that none had listened



King Parikshit listens to the Shrimad Bhagvat from Shukdevji

with the attention and faith that Dhundhukari had and none had introspected on the content of the discourses like him.

So, this story of the wayward Dhundhukari reveals that listening intently and sincerely to *katha* can relieve one of all sins and lead to liberation.

### THE STORY OF KING PARIKSHIT

King Parikshit was the grandson of Arjun. He was a devout and just king. Once, Parikshit was travelling through the jungle when he became separated from his entourage. Tired and thirsty, he entered the ashram of Shamik Rishi. Parikshit bowed respectfully to the sage several times and requested for water, but the rishi was so engrossed in meditation that he was oblivious of his surroundings. Piqued by the rishi's indifference, Parikshit thought that he should be taught a lesson. So, Parikshit picked up a dead snake and placed it around the rishi's neck. Still, the rishi was unmoved and Parikshit departed.

Later, the rishi's son, Shringi, returned to the ashram and saw the snake around his father's neck. He learnt that King Parikshit had insulted his father in this way. So, Shringi cursed that the king would die of a snake bite in seven days.

King Parikshit heard of the curse and accepted it as his fate. He instated his son, Janmajeya, as the king and spent the next seven days listening





Bhagwan Swaminarayan daily discoursed to a congregation of sadhus and devotees

to the glory of God in the form of the Shrimad Bhagvat from Shukdev. Through these discourses, King Parikshit overcame the fear of death and became enlightened with spiritual wisdom. On the seventh day Takshaka, the snake, bit the king and caused his demise. The king had attained spiritual wisdom and was liberated.

So, listening to *katha* removes all fears and grants enlightenment.

### THE EFFECT OF KATHA

Spiritual discourses provide sublime wisdom which help individuals to understand that mundane life is perishable and the body is a medium for the soul to attain God.

When such knowledge is fully understood and applied in daily life, it is a source of inner peace and joy.

King Janak ruled the kingdom of Mithila with great skill and sincerity. Yet, he personally performed daily worship rituals and was always present for the daily *katha* by his guru, Ashtavakra.

Once, the king had to attend to some urgent duties and was delayed in reaching the *katha*. Everyone else was present on time, yet the guru waited for the king and did not start the *katha*. This ruffled the other sages and mahatmas and

they protested to the rishi to begin. But, he refused to start until Janak arrived. When, finally, Janak did arrive, Ashtavakra Rishi began by questioning all to recount the previous *kathas*. Nobody except King Janak could do so. It was then that the complaining mahatmas realized that out of them all, King Janak was the true listener of the *katha* and waiting for him to arrive was justified.

Not only did King Janak listen attentively, but he imbibed the teachings in his life. He ruled with efficiency, integrity and commitment for the good of his people, but he remained detached from all his possessions.

This is the supreme effect that *katha* can have if one listens with the right intention.

It was for this purpose that King Pruthu asked God to bless him with 10,000 ears! By this, he wished for the ability to tirelessly listen to *katha* and grasp the true meanings of what he hears.

### KATHA CLEANSSES

Often, people say that they do not sit to listen to *katha* since they do not understand much and are able to remember even less. Yet, the following story illustrates the indispensable need to listen to *katha*.

Once, a devotee complained to his guru that he was unable to remember any of his discourses and

stated that he saw no benefit in listening to them.

The guru did not counter his words, but merely gave him a straw basket and told the devotee to fill it with water from the nearby well and bring it to him.

The devotee enthusiastically leapt to his feet and rushed to fetch the water. However, by the time he returned, all the water would drain away from the straw basket. After several futile trips to fetch water, the devotee complained that it was of no use to bring water in such a leaky vessel. Then, the guru told him, "I knew that you would not be able to bring any water to me in this basket, but do you notice any change in it?" The devotee said, "Only that at the start it was coated with cow dung and now it is clean." The guru explained, "This is exactly what *katha* does. Just like the basket is unable to hold water, even if

you are unable to remember discourses, the mere act of listening will cleanse you like the contact with water cleansed the basket."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 24 says, "One develops an aversion for the world in proportion to the attachment one has for listening to the talks and discourses related to God; moreover, vicious natures such as lust, anger, avarice, etc. are also destroyed to that extent. Conversely, if someone is lazy in listening to those talks and discourses, then one should infer that he will not imbibe noble virtues. In fact, out of the nine types of bhakti mentioned in the shastras, the bhakti of listening to spiritual discourses is considered to be the best."

So, the key to attaining true spiritual enlightenment is by listening to *katha*, contemplating on the talks and adjusting one's endeavours accordingly. ♦

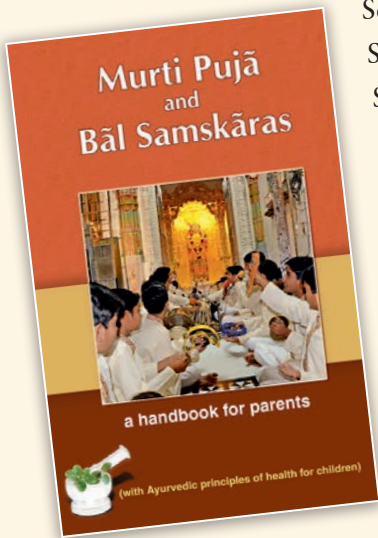
#### NEW PRINT PUBLICATION

## MURTI PUJĀ AND BĀL SAMSKĀRAS

*A Handbook for Parents (With Ayurvedic Principles of Health for Children)*

This book discusses 47 *sadgunas* which can be inspired in children by parents.

For convenience these *sadgunas* are divided into 7 sections:



Section 1 – Devotional Virtues

Section 2 – Artistic Virtues

Section 3 – Virtues of Knowledge and Learning

Section 4 – Virtues of Self-discipline

Section 5 – Virtues of Social & Communication Skills

Section 6 – Virtues of Pride & Love for India

Section 7 – Virtues of Diet & Healthy Living

Section 8 discusses Ayurvedic principles of health for children

Section 9 discusses other health factors such as constipation, water intake, sleep and sugary drinks.

And many other topics...

Besides parents, this handbook will also be useful for *bal sanchalaks* and teachers

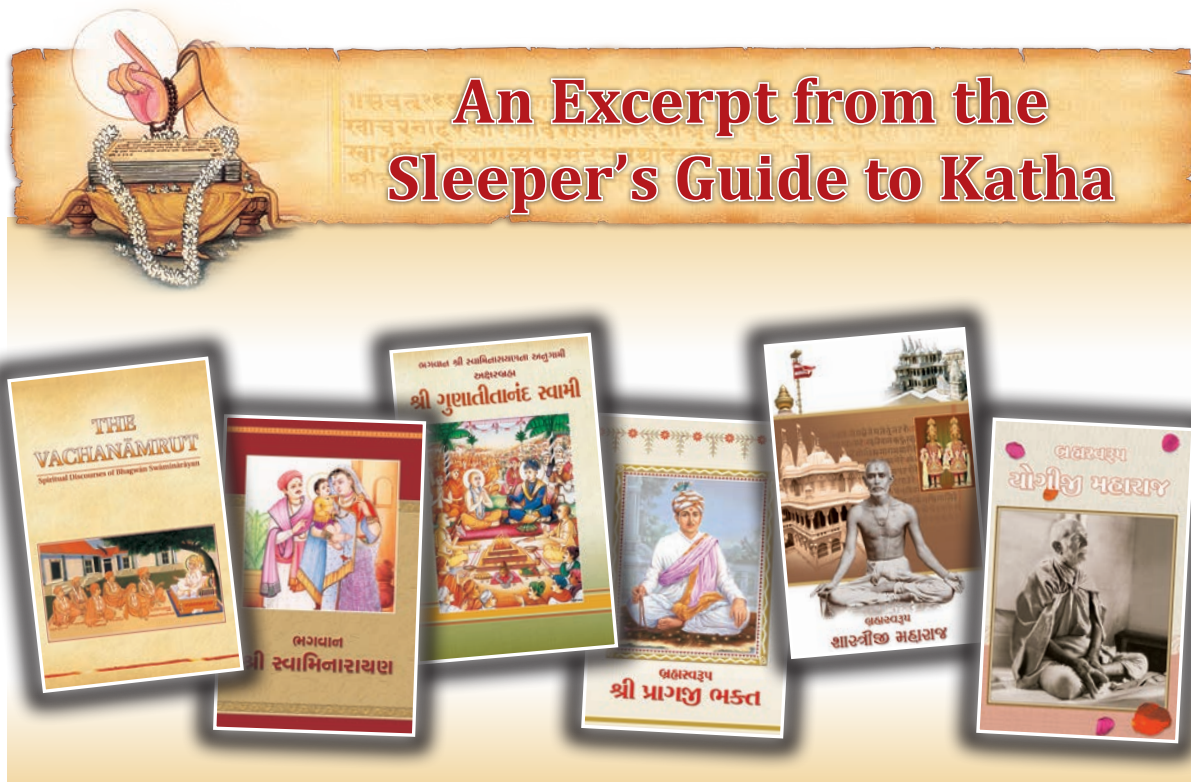
**Author:** Sadhu Mukundcharandas

Available at all BAPS Bookstores



**PUBLISHER:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ■ **INSPIRER:** His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj





## INTRODUCTION: KATHA IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SCHWARZWÄLDER KIRSCHTORTE

Have you ever tried a slice of *Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte*? If you have, you may agree that this mouth-watering German dessert (known the world over as Black Forest cake) is, in fact, quite deliciously important. But, would you believe that a detail as trivial as eating *Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte* played a crucial role in winning World War II?

During the six years of World War II (1939-1945), more than sixty million people perished – a number equal to nearly half the population of Europe at the time. Throughout Europe, the German-led Axis powers battled against the British-led Allied powers time and again, and the casualties steadily increased on both sides with no end to the war in sight.

As the war progressed, both sides became proficient at communicating with their military outposts and secret agents using encrypted

telegraphic messages.<sup>1</sup> The information in the messages was so significant that whoever cracked the enemy code first would secure a notable, strategic advantage. Naturally, the British hired thousands of telegraph operators to intercept and decrypt the German communiqués.

However, the British were confounded. Even with their vast resources allocated to hacking the German's communications, the progress was frustratingly slow. Then, a curious thing happened. By listening to the messages repeatedly, the British operators noticed that the German operators mentioned unique and sometimes personal facts around the important part of a telegraphic transmission. Although the British still could not decipher the information in the message, they quickly learned to analyze the information *surrounding*

<sup>1</sup> Long before texting, email, and telephones, people sent messages using telegraphs. Invented in 1837 by Samuel Morse, the telegraph changed the way people communicated: In lieu of waiting for weeks or months to exchange letters, a person could now send and receive messages “instantaneously”.

the telegraphic transmission – and that proved equally valuable.

To illustrate: A particular German operator might routinely mention the scrumptious slice of *Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte* he had for breakfast. Soon, the British operators could identify that German operator as the “one who always eats Black Forest cake”. Once it was known who was sending the message, it was simple to track where the messages came from, and where they were being sent. Together with their gathered intelligence vis-à-vis enemy movements, the British were able to piece together a winning battle plan for the Allied powers.

Let us now consider a different type of battle. On the path to *moksha*, we are in a perennial battle with *maya*. Shriji Maharaj succinctly says, “*Maya* is anything that obstructs a devotee of God while meditating on God’s form.”<sup>2</sup> In skirmishing with the *maya* within us and the *maya* of the surrounding world, we often face seemingly insurmountable odds. And, although we have a winning spiritual strategy, “*Nijātmānam brahmarūpam deha traya vilakshanam, vibhāvya tena kartavyā bhaktiḥ Krushnasya sarvadā*”,<sup>3</sup> we need the Satpurush, mandirs and scriptures to effectuate our plan.

Unfortunately, a scripture is not always easy to understand or interpret correctly. In the same way that decrypting the Germans’ transmissions was integral to winning the western front, making sense of scripture is important for obtaining Akshardham. Even though at first the British were unable to understand the contents of the Germans’ messages, by constantly listening to the messages they culled important, contextual information that gave them a strategic advantage. Similarly, while doing satsang, we may not immediately understand the significance of every incident, principle, and scriptural passage, but by



A telegraph operator

continuously listening to *katha*, we gain a toehold from which we may build a strong infrastructure for our spiritual knowledge.

In the Swamini Vato, Gunatitanand Swami says that an “individual who studiously engages in spiritual discourses...progresses quickly[,] gains spiritual strength”,<sup>4</sup> gains “firm spiritual knowledge”,<sup>5</sup> and becomes detached from the world.<sup>6</sup> Through *katha*, we become familiar with spiritual knowledge, even when we can’t fully comprehend it. As we engage more in listening to and even in delivering *katha*, we progress spiritually and gain a deeper realization about those crucial messages necessary to attain *moksha*. In this way, *katha* helps us to become pure,<sup>7</sup> *brahmarup*<sup>8</sup> and *ekantik*<sup>9</sup>.

Yet, if “tens of millions of spiritual endeavours may be performed, they are not equal to delivering and listening to” *katha*,<sup>10</sup> then why is it sometimes so difficult to stay awake or sit attentively through *katha*? Despite the importance of *katha*, we constantly encounter roadblocks that prevent us from fully benefiting from and paying attention during *katha*. This guide will discuss three such impediments.

2. Vachanamrut, Gadhadra I 1.

3. Identify yourself as the *atma*, separate from the three bodies, and offer devotion to God.

4. Swamini Vato 2.48.

5. Ibid. 1.231.

6. Ibid. 1.136.

7. Ibid. 2.160.

8. Ibid. 1.33.

9. Ibid. 1.31.

10. Ibid. 1.226.





Yogiji Maharaj discourses to devotees

## CLEANSING THE MIND: THE TRIUMVIRATE OF KATHA, SEVA AND BHAKTI

When we sit in *katha*, our minds wander. For example, instead of listening carefully, we may envisage dinner or hanging out with friends or other thoughts unrelated to the *katha*. To concentrate continuously is a difficult endeavour. Because we spend our time among worldly concerns and endeavours, our minds are clouded with myriad worldly thoughts. And these thoughts impair our ability to reap the rewards of *katha*.

Yogiji Maharaj often told a value tale of two friends, a bee and a worm. One day the bee invited the worm to his garden. “My friend, the worm, spends all his time in dung,” thought the

bee. “It would be nice for him to smell some fragrant flowers and see my beautiful garden for a change.”

However, when the worm was brought to the garden, he told the bee he was not impressed. “You promised me an amazing experience,” said the worm disappointedly. “This garden looks nice, but it smells just like my pile of dung.”

The bee was astounded! After a moment’s thought, the bee took his friend to a nearby pool of water. “I have an idea,” said the bee, and he immediately dunked the worm’s head in the pool. The worm became furious, but, as his head emerged from the water, the worm suddenly inhaled all the wonderful aromas of the garden!

Having spent so much time burrowing in filth, the worm could only smell the dung that had been stuck in his nose. When the bee pushed his friend’s head underwater, muck in the worm’s nose was washed away and it was then able to enjoy the beauty of the garden.

In the same way, our hearts and minds are filled with worldly desires. Like the worm, we spend our time “burrowing” in the muck of worldly pursuits. As a result, our minds become attached to those worldly experiences via the



A bee and a worm

five senses (sight, smell, sound, taste and touch). In order to cleanse the mind and heart, an individual must engage in *seva*, bhakti and *katha*. The triumvirate of *katha*, *seva* and bhakti are like the pool of water. Just as the act of dipping the worm in water cleared the filth from it's nose, that trio works together to clear away our worldly thoughts.

Imagine, for a moment, that a person spends the entire day building a wall. And, when the wall is complete, another person throws a heavy stone and breaks the wall. If this continued every day, eventually the builder would tire. Gunatitanand Swami explains, "If one engages in worldly activities all day and listens to [*katha*, does *seva* or bhakti] for even a short time, then all worldly actions are nullified."<sup>11</sup> Eventually, worldly activities will tire, and spirituality will carry on.

### MARSHMALLOWS AND THE POWER OF SHRAVAN, MANAN, AND NIDIDHYASAN

*Katha* is important because it provides us with the spiritual strength and knowledge to become *brahmarup* and *ekantik*. However, those benefits of *katha* usually accrue over time and are sometimes difficult to perceive. So, when results are expected instantly, it is easy to become discouraged from listening to *katha*. To this end, Gunatitanand Swami apprises, "If you plant a mango sapling today, how can mangoes grow by tomorrow? But ten years later that mango tree will give mangoes."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the benefits of listening to and doing *katha* may not be seen in one or two days. But, over time, listening to *katha* will bear fruits equal to tens of millions of spiritual endeavours.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Walter Mischel conducted an experiment at Stanford University, famously known as the "marshmallow experiment". In the experiment, four-year-old children were offered a choice. The child could choose one



*Manan and nididhyasan – contemplation and repetitive contemplation*

small reward (a marshmallow) provided immediately, or the child could choose two small rewards (a second marshmallow) if he or she waited fifteen minutes. Years later, studies found that the children who waited for the second marshmallow were, among other things, healthier, better educated and more successful.

Like the marshmallow experiment, many spiritual endeavours provide an immediate, tangible reward. When you take a guest on a tour of Swaminarayan Akshardham, Delhi, you may immediately see joy in his or her demeanour. When you clean a bathroom at your mandir, you may instantly feel gratified. But, to see the results of *katha* requires patience. Even a cursory study of Hinduism's age-old tradition of giving discourses demonstrates that *katha* makes the listener and speaker spiritually healthier, better educated, and more successful.

While the gratification from *katha* may be delayed, one way to markedly enjoy the benefits of *katha* is the system of *shravan*, *manan* and *nididhyasan*. When we listen to *katha*, it is called *shravan*. After the *katha*, as we contemplate on the main ideas of the *katha*, it is known as *manan*. As we repeatedly contemplate upon these main ideas, it is called *nididhyasan*. As we follow this process, the *katha* we listen to will become more deeply ingrained within us, allowing us to more easily notice how it is making a positive change in our life.

11. Swamini Vato 2.160.

12. Ibid. 1.33.





After listening to *katha* a discussion on it makes it interesting and relevant

## A FISH OUT OF WATER AND THE META-MORPHOSIS OF KATHA

And yet, a third obstacle exists that is perhaps more common, arduous to overcome, and inconvenient than the aforementioned obstacles: listening to *katha* is typically a solitary experience. Sitting in *katha* feels even more cloistered when the rest of our friends are doing *seva* or hanging out. And, paradoxically, when we are in *sabha* with our friends, out of respect for the speaker, we usually keep to ourselves.

The YMCA<sup>13</sup> faced a similar dilemma at the turn of this century. It needed to stay competitive with other gyms because its membership was gradually falling. So, the YMCA spent millions of dollars on fancy equipment, modern facilities and yoga studios. But, as it turned out, the members weren't looking for new equipment. Although the new equipment was nice, the members wanted a human connection and a comfortable, familiar environment. Smiles and greeting members by name correlated more positively with keeping YMCA members from changing gyms than snazzy equipment and facilities.

As Aristotle wrote, "Man is by nature a social animal."<sup>14</sup> In Satsang, by implication and truism, our progress can be helped by the people around us. According to Shriji Maharaj, if we "keep the company of devotees of God as

well as the company of the [Satpurush]", then our "bhakti for God [will] gain tremendous vigour."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, if listening to *katha* feels out of place and misaligned from our social habits, it is possible that there may be a reason we do not enjoy it.

If this is the case, you may wish to brainstorm routines that make listening to *katha* more social. You can listen to *katha* with others, or after you listen to *katha*, you can have a discussion about it with friends – and even start a *katha* club (like a book club). In the end, the key is to find a way to make listening to *katha* more enjoyable for you.

## FINAL REMARKS: EFFORT IS HALF THE BATTLE

Listening to *katha* purifies the senses, and "as one's inner faculties are purified, the talks are understood and one experiences happiness".<sup>16</sup> This is the purpose of *katha*, so "set aside all work and become free to listen to these spiritual discourses".<sup>17</sup>

We can do so only if we overcome the barriers discussed in this guide, as well as others you may encounter. In order to reap the benefits of *katha*, we must "understand that we are doing tens of millions of tasks.... But we [must] not think we are sitting idly".<sup>18</sup>

This undoubtedly requires our personal effort. Do not become discouraged, but persevere in listening to *katha*. If we do so, then as Maharaj says, we will "never become satiated with spiritual discourses, devotional songs, talks related to God or meditation of God".<sup>19</sup> And that is the crux of achieving spiritual victory. ♦

13. Young Men's Christian Association.

14. Aristotle, *Politics*.

15. Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 29.

16. Swamini Vato (ed. Feb. 2000) 2.109.

17. Ibid. 1.50.

18. Ibid. 1.50.

19. Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 49.



## Sarangpur 3 in the Republic of Congo



*Shravan* (listening)



*Manan* (contemplating)



*Nididhyas* (repetition) and *sakshatkar* (realization)

### INTRODUCTION

Gujarati. Hindi. Marathi. French. German. Mandarin. Spanish.

Pick a language. And learn it in less than four months. Can you?

Joshua Foer, a freelance journalist from Connecticut, learned Lingala, a language indigenous to the northwestern regions of the Republic of Congo, in under four months. While in the Ndoki Forest to report about an interesting population of chimpanzees for the *National Geographic*, Foer and a translator came across Monguosso, a member of the hunter-gatherer society known as the Mbendjele pygmies. Although Foer was curious to learn more about their society, a simple language barrier that prevented him from explaining to Monguosso basic concepts like the ocean made explaining more complicated concepts an elusive dream. To make the

dream a little less elusive, Foer decided to learn Monguosso's language – Lingala.

For some people, learning a language may not be much of a challenge. But what if there existed only one copy of the language's 1,109-word dictionary? And what if the only textbook about the language was a small handbook published in 1963? That's all Foer had at his disposal. Despite these limited resources, Foer was able to learn the language by relying on Memrise, a method of memorization that focuses on creating memes for learning new information. For every word he learned, he created a meme to help him memorize it. For instance, to memorize the word *motele* (meaning, engine, in Lingala), Foer imagined a rusty engine revving in a motel room. He associated the word with a past experience of his – the cheapest room he'd occupied, during a cross-country roadtrip. He then used an online tool





The soul of Devji Bhagat's son departs to Akshardham

to test himself – in essence, repeat – the words and their meanings over the next ten weeks. This continual repetition ultimately led him back to the Ndoki Forest, except this time, without the need for a constant translator.

Although Foer didn't know it at the time, he used the process that Shriji Maharaj described in Vachanamrut Sarangpur 3. In this Vachanamrut, Maharaj discussed a four-step method to achieving realization of any Satsang principle. The first step, *shravan*, is to listen to a talk. The second step, *manan*, is the act of contemplating to retain that part of the talk which is worth retaining, and discarding that part of the talk which is worth discarding. The third step, *nididhyas*, is the practice of continuously recalling the points of the talk that were retained in one's *manan*. If one continues the *nididhyas* long enough, one will attain realization, or *sakshatkar*, of the talk.

## MADE PRACTICAL

To understand Sarangpur 3, how it relates to Foer's story and our own spiritual journeys, we will analyze the following incident, using the approach given therein.

*It was a humid afternoon in Gadhada. Shriji Maharaj was seated on a beautifully decorated seat and surrounded by devotees. Shriji Maharaj, observing a woman approaching from afar, called out, "Jai Swaminarayan! How is Patel?" The devotees in the assembly were surprised by Maharaj's sudden question, and they began looking around. Just then, a woman carrying a large pot arrived before Shriji Maharaj. After bowing, she responded to the question, "Jai Swaminarayan! Maharaj, Patel was happy, and now he is even happier!" Pleased with the woman's response and her offering of a potful of ghee, Shriji Maharaj explained to the baffled devotees: "Recently, Devji's son passed away. Instead of lamenting the loss, he understood it as my wish, and has sent his wife to offer ghee!" Because Devji Bhakta is a farmer, the most valuable item he could offer to Maharaj was the ghee he had made from his cows' milk. This devotional offering earned him Maharaj's blessings. Devji Bhakta's spiritual understanding awed the devotees present. How could it be that the very day following his son's death, Devji Bhakta sent an offering to Shriji Maharaj? Devji Bhakta had said to his village folk when they enquired about whether he had not wished to see his son happily married with a family of his own? Devji Bhakta firmly replied, "No. Instead of having my son deal with the misery of worldly life, my son is sitting with Shriji Maharaj in Akshardham! He was Maharaj's to begin with, and he's in the right place."*

## STEP ONE



The first step in realizing a satsang teaching is *shravan*. In Sarangpur 3, Shriji Maharaj explains that "listening to a talk through one's ears is known as *shravan*". Thus, the simple act of

listening to Devji Bhakta's incident was *shravan*. However, *shravan* is broader than just listening to a satsang teaching; the act of consuming a satsang teaching, whether it be in the form of *katha varta*, satsang reading, *goshti* or informal discussion, is called *shravan*. Foer, the *National Geographic* journalist, when trying to learn Lingala, would do *shravan* by having conversations with the locals of the Ndoki Forest as well as by reading the Lingala handbook.

## STEP TWO



After reading the incident as part of *shravan*, one has to perform *manan*. As Shriji Maharaj explains, "Having heard this talk, to mentally ponder over the talk, and to discard that part of the talk which is fit to be discarded and to retain that part of the talk which is fit to be retained is known as *manan*." To discard and retain the relevant parts is to summarize the *incident* to its essential core. To "mentally ponder over the talk" entails identifying the message of what one has heard, and in effect, asking oneself what the value of the incident is and what relevance it has to one's life. In performing *manan* of the above incident, one could go through the following thought process:

*Shriji Maharaj became pleased with Devji Bhakta's genuine devotion and well-found understanding of Shriji Maharaj's kartapanu (the understanding of God as the doer). Because Devji Bhakta did not lament over the loss of his only son, and sent his wife with a pot of ghee to Gadhada as an indication of joy and contentment, Shriji Maharaj praised Devji. In this way, I must cultivate the understanding of Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the doers. I must also accept the obstacles I face on the path of satsang, maintaining the understanding that whatever happens or occurs is due to the will of God, and that God knows and does what is best.*

However, the process of pondering over the incident does not end with isolating its essence. Later in Sarangpur 3, Shriji Maharaj has described *manan* as "having mentally retained the talk *with conviction*". In effect, Shriji Maharaj explains that the process of *manan* is not to simply understand the message, but to develop conviction in it. Thus, as part of performing *manan* on Devji Bhakta's incident, one critically engages with the concept of Maharaj as the all-doer to develop firm conviction in it.

Foer performed *manan* in his process by creating memes for different words. To make associations with the new vocabulary he was studying, Foer would have to connect the word to some past experience or memory. Then, he would make a card with an image on it that would remind him of the memory or experience that the vocabulary word triggers. Foer's *manan* was isolating the essence of these words by stripping down their layers of meanings to a simple meme.

## STEP THREE



*Manan* is an essential step in the method to attaining *sakshatkar*, because the results of *manan* are helpful in performing the third step, *nididhyas*. To practice *nididhyas*, you must continually engage your mind in the essence of the incident you have read. For instance, it is much easier to contemplate continuously on the paragraph above, a mere summary of the longer incident above, than memorizing the entire incident, word for word. *Nididhyas*, for Foer, is the constant repetition of viewing the cards he has created. By perusing, repeatedly, the cards, Foer was strengthening the connection his mind made with the experience or memory attached to the Lingala word he was studying.

(Contd. on pg. 24)





## Katha Varta and Everyday Challenges: A Case Study



*Scriptural reading and the listening to the exposition of scriptures in katha is an integral part of our spiritual endeavour. Yet, we harbour doubts about whether scriptural reading or katha can really help us in our everyday challenges. We explore this issue in the case study below of the role katha can play in the everyday lives of three ordinary teenagers.*

“Can I take your order?” says the woman at the register.

“Yeah, can I get three ice-coffees, no whip cream? Thanks,” says Rushi.

His good friends Kush and Anish are waiting for him at the corner table by the window. Rushi, Kush and Anish grew up together. Although Rushi is three years older than Kush and Anish, they are very close. Before Rushi left for college, they spent almost every weekend with each other, whether they were hanging out or doing *seva* at the mandir.

“Good to see you man. It’s been too long!” says Anish when Rushi joins them.

“Yeah, definitely...we were beginning to wonder if the big college-grad was ever going to make a trip back home,” chuckles Kush.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. You guys didn’t even miss me. You are just glad someone is here to pick up the tab!” says Rushi with a smile.

“Order 37,” announces the barista.

Kush scoots out of the booth to go grab the drinks, and comes back with the coffee and enough sugar and milk for the three of them.

“So, how is the job search going, Rushi?” says Anish as he stirs the coffee in his cup.

“It’s going pretty well. I have already completed a few interviews and have two more lined up for this week; hopefully something works out,” says Rushi.

“Aww come on man, I’ve seen your resume. You’re going to be fine...I’m sure all companies are looking for underperformers,” says Kush jokingly. They all laugh as Rushi punches Kush in the arm.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” says Rushi.

“But, seriously, are you nervous? I know you were saying that one of the interviews is with your dream company,” says Kush.

“Eh, I’m not really sweating it. I have prepared thoroughly for the interviews, and my grade point

average and experience should speak for itself. What's been going on with you guys lately?" inquires Rushi.

"Oh, nothing much man, the same old nonsense. My coach keeps getting on my case. He told me on Friday after practice that if I want to make varsity, I'm going to have to go 'above and beyond,' whatever that means," says Kush as Rushi and Anish nod their heads.

"And I'm like, listen coach. I don't know what more I need to do to prove myself 'worthy' of the varsity team. I mean, I am at all the practices, and my stats are fairly decent for someone at my height. I told him, as far as going above, I can't grow taller between now and the basketball season!" exclaims Kush. Rushi and Anish laugh at this outburst, and Kush joins in realizing how loudly he was speaking.

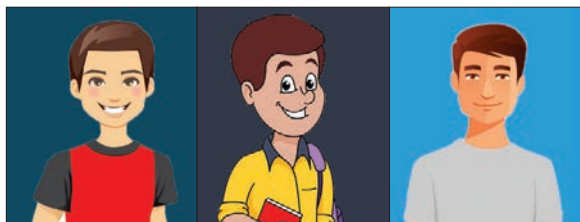
"Yeah, that's how it goes sometimes," says Anish, "Maybe he has some favourites and is trying to push you out."

"I wouldn't mind it if it wasn't my last chance to play varsity before I graduate and go to college!" says Kush, "Ahh, forget it. I don't know what I should do. Maybe I'll read the Vachanamrut. My dad says it has 'ALL' the answers to my questions," he says jokingly. Anish is chuckling too.

"Yeah, my mom and dad give the same spiel in *ghar sabha*. Beta, if we read the Vachanamrut regularly, then we won't be stressed about school," says Anish, "I didn't realize Gadhada Pratham whatever is going to help me get into college, let alone show me how to complete an application. I can't even write my personal statement!"

"No bro, you have to go to the Loya section for the answer to that one," says Kush jokingly.

"I get that reading the Vachanamrut or other satsang books and listening to *katha* is really important for spiritual development, but I don't know how it is going to help me get a job or help you finish your apps, or help you with increasing your scoring percentage," says Rushi, "Ah, forget it, we sound like a bunch of whiners, let's talk



about something else." After a while, Kush, Anish and Rushi leave the café.

"It was good catching up with you guys! See you on Sunday at the mandir!" says Rushi.

"Yup, see you guys Sunday!" say Kush and Anish.

\* \* \*

On the way to his car, Rushi's cell phone begins to buzz in his pocket. He reaches for his phone and looks at the screen only to see the human resource manager from his dream job is on the other line. "Hello?" says Rushi steadily.

"Hi Rushi! How are you? This is Candice from Benton Systems."

"Hey Candice, how are you?" says Rushi. "*Well she sounds chipper. She must be calling to give me some good news,*" he thinks to himself.

"I'm fine, Rushi! Thanks for asking. Listen, I am calling to let you know that the team over here really enjoyed meeting with you yesterday," says Candice.

"*This is it, here it comes,*" thinks Rushi.

"Unfortunately, we have decided to move on with other candidates. We appreciate your time. Thanks for considering Benton Systems. Feel free to apply again in the future...*click.*"

The smile on Rushi's face slowly slid into a puzzled look. "I don't understand," Rushi thinks to himself, "Why didn't I get the job? My resume was perfect, the interview went so smoothly...am I missing something?" he questions as he pounds his fist on to the trunk of his car.

Rushi's mind is a whirlwind as he unlocks his car. He begins to drive away contemplating his 'Plan B'. "This was my dream job with my dream company...what am I going to do now?" he mumbles to himself. Rushi





Dada Khachar never lost faith in Shriji Maharaj amid the hardships he faced

reaches for the power button on his audio system, hoping to drown out his thoughts with some music.

“If a child takes refuge in his parents, his parents will protect him. Similarly, in Satsang, if we take refuge, or *ashro*, in the Satpurush, then we will be under his protection.”

Rushi suddenly remembers that on the way to the coffee shop he was listening to *katha* from a *shibir* that had recently taken place.

“When we seek protection from someone we have faith that he will only take steps that will be in our best interest. When we take *ashro* in the Satpurush, we must have full faith that no matter what happens in our life, good things or bad things, they happen for our best. Take the example of Dada Khachar. Shriji Maharaj lived on his premises for almost 30 years. Dada Khachar served Maharaj to his utmost every day. However, even Dada Khachar went through hardships. His

uncle, Jiva Khachar, fought with him at the court in Bhavnagar to take his land. However, despite not securing a favourable court ruling after more than a dozen tries, Dada Khachar never lost faith in Shriji Maharaj. Dada Khachar’s *ashro* in Maharaj was firm – he knew that Shriji Maharaj would always look out for him and his betterment...”

The words of this *katha* began to sink in as Rushi pulled into his driveway. “Do I have *ashro* in Swami Bapa?” he asks himself, “Even though I didn’t get my dream job, I need to realize that everything happens for the best. No matter what happens, I need to have faith that Swami Bapa will guide my life in a way that will make me a better *satsangi*.” As Rushi walks into his house, his phone begins to buzz again. He looks at his phone and sees that he just received an email from another company asking him to come in for a second round interview tomorrow.

\* \* \*

Kush pushes through his garage door into the kitchen. He opens the fridge and pulls out a sports drink as he wipes the sweat off his face. “Kush! You stink. Hurry up and shower! It will be *arti* time soon,” says his sister. Kush goes to hug his sister and mother as they fend him off by yelling at him and hitting him with the kitchen towel. Kush chuckles as he walks up the stairs to his room and meets his father on the way up.

“Hey how did it go on the court today?” asks Kush’s dad.

“Ah, pretty well. You know how it goes, you’re on some days, you’re off some days,” says Kush.

“Well, don’t forget what your coach said,” says Kush’s dad.

“Yeah, yeah. Go to infinity and beyond!” says Kush, standing with his fists on his waist, like a superhero.

His dad chuckles and says, “Don’t be too smart. He said you need to go above and beyond this year. Don’t you want to make the varsity team?” asks Kush’s dad as he walks into the living room.

After *arti*, *thal* and dinner, the family is sitting and talking. When time for *ghar sabha* comes, Kush's dad pulls out Bhagatji Maharaj's *jivan charitra*. "Let me know if you don't understand some of the tougher Gujarati words so I can pause and explain it to you guys," says Kush's dad to his children. He begins reading:

"Gunatitanand Swami had undertaken the task of constructing a haveli on the mandir premises. Pragji Bhakta laboured hard to help dig the foundations. Then, following Swami's wish, Pragji undertook the difficult work of washing the sand and pouring it into the foundation. He completed the task all alone. As he performed each task Gunatitanand Swami expressed his pleasure, which encouraged Pragji Bhakta to work more and more.

"Then came the most difficult job of preparing the lime mortar. Everyone was afraid that it would cause blisters on their hands and feet and also make them blind. Nobody came forward to undertake this work. As it was Swami's wish Pragji Bhakta volunteered. He willingly accepted the work and started lifting the large sacks of lime on his back. He mixed water and lime in a pit and pounded it into mortar with his bare feet. With a desire to please Swami, Pragji Bhakta enthusiastically absorbed himself in the work maintaining good feelings towards everyone. If anyone warned him, 'Pragji, you will become blind on account of the heat from the lime,' he would simply reply, 'I want to please Swami. I have dedicated my life in the service of Swami.'

"Although Pragji Bhakta worked day and night, Gunatitanand Swami once told him, 'You are working hard physically, but without austerities your senses will not be tamed.' So, on Swami's instructions, he began to fast for two days at a time and eat only once on the third day. He served during the day and in his spare moments he sat near Swami and listened to his spiritual discourses."

Kush's dad looks up from the book, takes off his reading glasses, and then asks his children, "Why was Bhagatji Maharaj so firm to please



On Gunatitanand Swami's instruction, Pragji Bhakta pounds the lime and water with his bare feet

Gunatitanand Swami? And how did he go above and beyond to achieve his goal?" Kush's mind was elsewhere. Bhagatji Maharaj's determination to please Gunatitanand Swami got him thinking about how much more he could push himself for his basketball team.

\* \* \*

Anish looks at the digital clock on his night stand for the fifth time. "Ugh, 45 minutes, and nothing!" Anish says to himself. A blank word document stares back at him.

"I am never going to get these application essays done," says Anish as he puts his face into his hands. Despite his excellent grades and all the extracurricular activities he participated in, Anish was worried that all the best colleges in the country would turn him down if he didn't put together an outstanding essay. Just then, Anish's dad walks into his room.

"Hey Anish, time for dinner soon. It's your mother's *bhinda nu shak*, so don't hurry down," says Anish's dad while laughing at his own joke.

Anish said nothing. "What's wrong?" his





father asked.

“I can’t finish these essays dad!” says Anish, “I just don’t know what to write!” After a few minutes of talking with his dad, Anish calmed down.

“Listen, take it easy, don’t stress about these applications. What’s the worst case scenario? You don’t get into college? Don’t worry about it. Your mother will be happy. She’s been looking for someone to try out her new recipes on,” says Anish’s dad as Anish chuckles. “Try doing what I do when I want to de-stress,” says Anish’s dad as he closes the door behind him.

“It’s worth a try I guess,” mumbles Anish to himself. Anish pulls out his Vachanamrut and opens it to a random page and begins reading:

“Thereupon Muktanand Swami asked,

(Contd. from pg. 19)

#### STEP FOUR



The final stage of Shriji Maharaj’s model is *sakshatkar*. To better understand the fourth and final stage, one must recognize that there are two levels of *sakshatkar*. The first level, intellectual *sakshatkar*, refers to the ability to recall a satsang teaching. For instance, upon reading an incident in a book, if one engages in *manan* and *nididhyas*, then one will be able to recall the incident when retelling it to another person. The second level, applied *sakshatkar*, refers to applying a satsang teaching. For example, if one’s efforts in studying for an exam yield no success, but one maintains the understanding of Devji Bhakta that God is the all-doer and thus is undisturbed by the failure, then one has attained *sakshatkar* of that principle.

‘Maharaj, how can unparalleled love towards God be developed?’ Shriji Maharaj replied, ‘A person should have the following understanding: Firstly, conviction of God; i.e. “He who I have attained is undoubtedly God himself.” He should also have the attributes of an *astik*. Furthermore, he should realize the divine powers of God; i.e. “This God is the master of Brahmanahol, Golok, Shwetsdwp and all the other abodes. He is the master of countless millions of *brahmands* and is the all-doer...”’

Anish reads that last sentence again. “Maharaj and Swami are the all-doers. Stressing out about these applications isn’t helping me at all. I’ve got to try my best on these essays, and then remember that it’s up to Maharaj and Swami whether or not I get admitted to college,” thinks Anish to himself. Feeling relieved, Anish sat up straight and started to type away. He paused for a brief moment, however, to jot the Vachanamrut – Gadhada I 59, to share with Kush. ♦

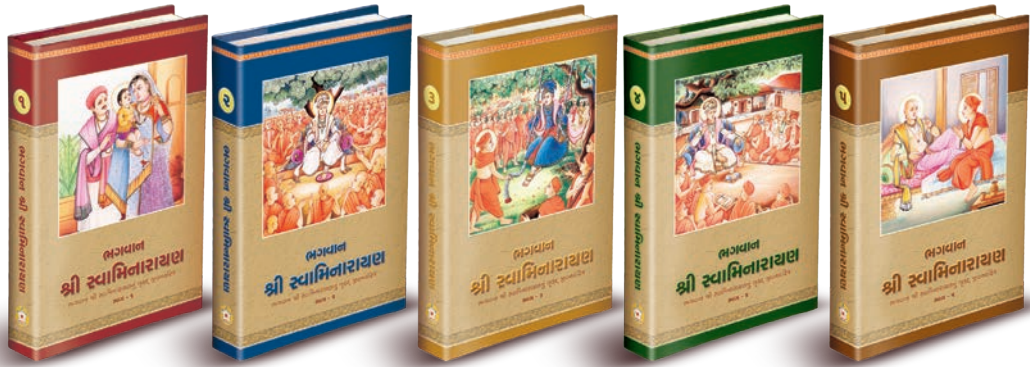
For Foer, *sakshatkar* was his ability to understand Lingala in real-life conversations when he returned to the Ndoki Forest. After hearing, memorizing and repeating Lingala words, he was able to recall the words he learned as they were used in everyday conversations.

#### CONCLUSION

If Foer wanted to learn Lingala, would he simply hear the words whenever he hears them and put in no further effort? Could he really expect to learn Lingala that way? Likewise, if we really want to attain our version of *sakshatkar* and practically apply the teachings of satsang to our lives, can we really just do *shravan*? Just like Foer took the time to do *manan* and *nididhyas*, our spiritual journey requires us to do the same as prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vachanamrut Sarangpur 3. ♦



## Testimonials on Benefits of Katha



Although *katha* and satsang *sabha* are of paramount importance for our spiritual development, it is often difficult to make the time for either. However, there are those inspirational devotees who juggle the same professional and personal obligations that we all do, yet make the time in amazing ways. We wish to share their experiences.

### INTERVIEW WITH DINESHBHAI SHAH FROM CLIFTON, NEW JERSEY

**Q.** We have heard that you have read many of the Sanstha's books and scriptures. Can you tell us which ones you have read?

**A.** I have read the entire life biography of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (five volumes), along with the biographies of the guru *parampara*. I have also read nearly every book that Swaminarayan Aksharpith has published. Additionally, I have read Gunatitanand Swami's *Swamini Vato* 78 times and the *Vachanamrut* 98 times.

**Q.** We have heard that you have also developed a habit of constantly listening to *katha*. Up until now, how much *katha* have you listened to?

**A.** As of right now, I have listened to a lot of *katha*, the majority of which was the *katha* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* sadhus and learned sadhus. In particular, I have listened to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *Ashirvad Samput* from Part 1 onwards. Of all of them, I have enjoyed Swamishri's *ashirvad* and *katha* on the Bhaktachintamani the most.

**Q.** Beyond listening to *katha*, have you developed a habit of writing anything down?

**A.** Yes, I regularly take notes on the *katha* I listen to. From the *katha*, I jot down the main points and essential *prasangs*. I then organize those notes by subject.

**Q.** How many notes do you think you have taken so far?

**A.** I have probably taken 10,000 pages worth of notes so far.

**Q.** How do you manage to find the time to do all of this?

**A.** My commute home takes approximately 1½ hours, so during that time I have at least 1 hour to listen to *katha*. At work, my lunch break is one hour long, so I have a minimum of ten to



fifteen minutes to spare during that time. Even during work, I have often been able to find free time, which I use to listen and think about *katha*. Finally, at night, I usually have about twenty to thirty minutes to listen to *katha*.

**Q.** How have you been able to benefit by listening to *katha* and reading satsang books?

**A.** There are many benefits. One of the main benefits was that when I first entered Satsang, listening to *katha* and reading satsang books slowly helped me to develop the conviction that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the supreme God. Additionally, through listening to *katha*, I also have a greater appreciation for the amount of satsang knowledge and spiritual experience underlying our *sadguru* sadhus and learned sadhu's *katha*. I also now have an increased feeling of joy when sadhus or devotees reference Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos or quote kirtans during their *kathas*, because of my familiarity with these references. Another benefit is that, if need be, I can more easily do *katha* at a moment's notice. Finally, the most important benefit in terms of my life is that when I first entered Satsang, I had many strong *swabhavs*, which I know have decreased as a result of the *katha* and satsang reading that I do.

## INTERVIEW WITH TARUNBHAIR FROM LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

**Q.** We understand you recently suffered a serious injury. How did this happen?

**A.** One morning around 5.15 a.m., I was going to work. I was taking Highway 5, and as I was going to merge onto Highway 55, I saw a man standing at the junction between the freeways, with a gun in his hands. As it was a junction, I was forced to slow down. As my car approached the man, he twice yelled, "Get out of the car!" As I was thinking about whether or not to get out of the car, he fired the gun in my direction. I ducked, and said "Maharaj, Swami!" Luckily, the shot missed. At that moment, I got inspiration from Swami Bapa to speed up quickly. As I

drove by the man, he fired from his gun again. I turned to the side, and the bullet grazed my lips and went through my cheek. I went straight home, because if I had stopped someone might have gotten scared and not been able to call 911 immediately. When I went home, I spoke with my wife, and my daughter called 911.

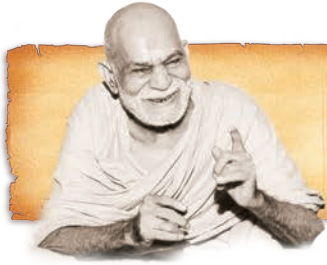
**Q.** Although this incident occurred on a Tuesday, you were present in the *sabha* the following Sunday. Didn't you consider missing *sabha* to recuperate?

**A.** After the incident, I stayed in the hospital for four days. I came home on Friday night, rested on Saturday, but I came to *sabha* on Sunday because it's Swamishri's *agna*. I have been following this *agna* for many years, and I feel that it's important that for the *agnas* I follow, I should follow them as best I can. I come to *sabha* on time, and I record each *sabha* so that I can listen to it throughout the week. From the continuous *katha* throughout the week, I get inspiration about how to live my life, what to do and what not to do.

Even after I was shot, I believe I was able to drive home for two miles because of the strength I had gained from listening to *katha*. I reflected on Shriji Maharaj's discourse about a thorn pricking a person's foot. Meaning, a much worse calamity was meant to befall me, but God protected me and reduced the suffering a hundred-fold, so that it was just a minor pain, like a thorn pricking a person's foot. This gave me inspiration to continue forward and to make it home.

**Q.** For how long have you been regularly attending the Sunday *sabha*?

**A.** I have been regularly attending the Sunday *sabha* since 1988. To this day, because of Swami's grace, I haven't missed a single *sabha*. Although everyone is always busy nowadays, because of Swamishri's grace I have always been able to attend *sabha*. I come to *sabha* five minutes early, and sit in the front row as per Doctor Swami's *agna*. ♦



## Yogiji Maharaj's Style of Discoursing

*On 25 December 1999, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami described during his Gujarati speech at AARSH, Gandhinagar, about Yogiji Maharaj's unique style of discoursing to devotees and aspirants.*

**Y**ogiji Maharaj was an idol of purity, divinity and love. Wherever he went, his love and divinity permeated in abundance. Many years ago Yogiji Maharaj was in Mumbai. He was staying at the Akshar Bhuvan mandir in Dadar. Once, at the invitation from the head of Prem Kutir Ashram in Marine Lines, Yogiji Maharaj went there with sadhus and devotees. The ashram was mainly visited by Sindhi devotees for satsang. A renowned and scholarly sannyasi, Swami Kashikanandji, spoke there daily. So, Yogiji Maharaj sat in his assembly. Finally, when he was told to address the congregation the sadhus and devotees with him felt that how would the Sindhis, who do not know Gujarati, comprehend Yogiji Maharaj's Kathiavadi dialect? In addition, there was a question as to what Yogiji Maharaj would speak on. But when he spoke, everyone was extremely pleased.

There were three things about his speech: he always narrated anecdotes or moral stories, sang kirtans with great spirit and enthusiasm and whatever he said came from his heart. Thus everyone felt as if God was speaking through him.

At that time Yogiji Maharaj sang, "*Mānas no avatār...*" and "*Anubhavi ānand mā...*" and explained them with a few examples. We felt that the audience must have failed to understand what he said. But when Swami Kashikanandji gave the vote of thanks he said he had read and heard about the importance and power of *shabdabrahm* (divine words) in the shastras, but he had never experienced it before. However, for the first time he experienced the power of speech in Yogiji Maharaj's

words. He said that though Yogiji Maharaj spoke in Gujarati, it was heart-touching and immensely blissful. After the assembly was over the Sindhi devotees were very happy; we distinctly saw this on their faces. The reason was Yogiji Maharaj's unique style of doing *katha*. He never thought beforehand about what he would speak. Whereas, when we speak, we think and prepare beforehand to impress others, display our knowledge and nourish our ego. Yogiji Maharaj remained naturally absorbed in God while he spoke.

Whenever Yogiji Maharaj came to Mumbai he used to stay at the Kapol Vadi. He spoke each day from 8.00 to 8.20 p.m. During that time, aspirants from the old mandir, neighbouring mandirs and ashrams and from the Vaishnav, Jain and Marvadi communities would hurriedly gather to listen to him. He would speak for 20 minutes and leave everyone in euphoria. The assembly would be replete with laughter and joy. Everyone would momentarily forget the world and become liberated from *maya*. Such were his extraordinary discourses. At that time, after work, people were always in a hurry to catch a train back home to Malad, Santa Cruz or Borivalli, but they never missed Yogiji Maharaj's daily sessions. When we asked people about how they felt about Swami's *katha* they would say they experienced a lot of joy.

Yogiji Maharaj laced his talks with incidents and tales. In fact, he had hundreds of moral and satsang stories by heart. The satsang stories he narrated included the lives of Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami,



Parvatbhai and others. His style of speaking was simple and candid, and his language was chaste. Even a newcomer would find his talks palatable and touching. Another attribute of Yogiji Maharaj's talks on dharma and satsang was that middle-aged listeners found them very blissful, because they had realized that their life was not far from their twilight years. They felt they had to understand such talks and imbibe them into their lives. On the other hand, youths between 16 and 24 years, who are mostly boisterous, are normally disinclined to such talks. But, they avidly came to listen to Yogiji Maharaj at 5.00 a.m. Swami never talked about esoteric aspects of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita or about hardcore *jnan* in the shastras. He simply narrated stories and incidents during his early morning discourses in Mumbai, Gondal, Sarangpur, Rajkot, Ahmedabad or anywhere else. Even in the biting cold of winter, children and youths would not miss the 5.00 a.m. sessions. They were all eager not to miss Yogiji Maharaj's discourses.

During those days the facilities for audio recording were not of high standards like we find today. The children and youths invariably wrote down the talks of Yogiji Maharaj in their notebooks. The stories told by Swami were also noted for the satsang archives. He included spiritual knowledge and his own experiences while narrating stories, finally summarizing them into adages. Just like the Panchtantra stories contain practical wisdom Yogiji Maharaj's *katha* included short statements or maxims that contained *jnan*. Thus Yogiji Maharaj preached through short, effective statements. The listeners became inclined to note them down and remember them. Such was his extraordinary style of giving discourses that thousands were attracted to him.

Whenever Yogiji Maharaj came to Mumbai, the entire Lohana community would come to hear him. Hiralal Sodha, Jamnadas Kavi and other distinguished members also came. Hiralal Sodha had a thriving Income Tax practice in Mumbai, but

when he came to Yogiji Maharaj he would become absorbed in his talks. People swayed with interest and joy while listening to him. Morarka Sheth, the proprietor of Morarka Mills, also came to listen to Yogiji Maharaj and opined, "Yogiji Maharaj is a great sadhu. I've never seen such a sadhu before." Thousands of people had experienced sublime feelings in his presence and during his discourses.

There are also many who are present here who have witnessed and experienced Yogiji Maharaj's style of discoursing and narrating meaningful stories. Because he spoke while immersed in God, his talks had a tremendous impact on the youths and devotees.

Today, when we listen to his audio recordings, one can also hear him clearing his throat while discoursing. This sound of his awakens the listener and gives a different experience altogether – in fact a divine feeling. Thus, Yogiji Maharaj discoursed profusely to spread the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life and work and also that of his guru Shastriji Maharaj.

He often said that he had delivered talks on spiritual fundamentals and also those worthy of internalizing by devotees to such extents that it pained his intestines. Sometimes he softly rebuked all that despite him having talked repeatedly why was it that they were unable to understand what he said. But he did this for the uplift of youths and the devotees.

So, Yogiji Maharaj made immense efforts by discoursing. The stories he narrated have been published as 'Yogiji Maharaj ni Bodh Kathao' and 'Yogiji Maharaj ni Satsang Kathao'. All devotees should read them personally and also read them aloud before their children. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has instructed all to do *ghar sabha* (home assembly) daily. However, many times one is perplexed about how to go about doing *ghar sabha* simply because one is deficient in satsang knowledge. The answer is to read our satsang books to your children. They will acquire knowledge along with fun. ♦

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiivandas



## Take a Needle to Heaven

Translation of a value story told by Yogiji Maharaj.



**T**here lived a wealthy *sheth*, but he was a scrooge – mean and miserly. He never spent a rupee, never donated a paisa, and always wore worn shoes and tattered clothes. One day, he fell seriously ill and became bedridden. During his whole life, it was said, he had only one friend, his personal tailor. But unfortunately, he had died a few months earlier. Everyone knew the *sheth's* days were numbered. One by one his family and neighbours came to pay their formal respects. When the tailor's son arrived, the *sheth* said, "It seems that I will not last long here. My moment to rise to Swarg has come."

The young boy, though only 15 years old, was very wise. He knew of the *sheth's* craving for wealth and miserliness. He replied, "O *sheth*, my father is already in Swarg. He often told me that he wished to sew rich garments for the Lord. But he forgot to take his needle with him. Will

you please take this needle with you and give it to him."

"Oh, alright, I'll be happy to do that," he agreed.

The *sheth* was happy to do anything as long as it did not involve any giving. He took the needle and gave the boy permission to leave. Alone, in his bed, he began wondering "Where shall I place the needle? Pin it to my shirt? No, that won't do. All my clothes will burn away on my funeral pyre. In my mouth. Yes, I'll place the needle in the bulge of my cheek." Then again, he had second thoughts, "But my whole body will be burnt to ashes. How am I to carry this small needle to swarga?" The more he thought about it the more confused he became. Finally, he called the tailor's boy and said, "Son, here, take your needle back. I won't be able to take it to Swarg."

"But," the boy looked amused, "if you are going to carry all your millions of rupees to Swarg, then why can't you carry one little needle?"

The *sheth's* inner eye was opened. He realized that none of his wealth or property would accompany him after death. He prayed to God to forgive him for all his past wickedness and promised to profusely donate his wealth in charity should he survive the illness. God cured him and he kept his word. He built a grand mandir, fed thousands and comforted the less fortunate people.

Remember that only wealth which is spent in the service of God, his holy Sadhu and the needy is worthwhile. Our good deeds alone accompany us after death and nothing else will join us. ♦

(From '101 Tales of Wisdom')



## Effects of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Discourses



Swamishri discourses on the Bhaktachintamani, Sarangpur

**N**ourishing, enlightening, amiable, gentle, assuring, brief, spontaneous, cheerful, courteous, peaceful, effective, pleasing, to the point, practical, plain...

The aforesaid words are but a few echoes of the indelible impressions left on thousands who have heard Pramukh Swami Maharaj discoursing in plain colloquial Gujarati. They have all had but one feeling, "It's not the tongue, but his heart that speaks."

Narrating his personal experience, Mohanbhai Patel, former Sheriff of Mumbai and a well-known industrialist, once said, "I have been fortunate to have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj a few times. He is the very epitome of simplicity. There is neither any rhetoric nor complexity of ideas in his words. Whatever he speaks, it comes

straight from his heart."

British novelist E.M. Forster says that words are the sweetness of life. Forster's words come true when one listens to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Really, Swamishri's speech is as sweet as honey; his words have calmed bitterness, mellowed malice, and sweetened innumerable lives.

The Cultural Festival of India, organized by the BAPS in London, brought the magnificent sights and sounds of India to Europe in 1985. Thousands gathered on the grounds of Alexandra Palace to witness the 30-day traditional festivities. Shri Manek Dalal, then Chairman of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, decided not to visit the festival despite repeatedly hearing great things about it. Mr. Dalal had a bias against Hindu sadhus. He felt that



they often misused their spiritual authority for fraudulent personal gains.

However, he was soon surprised.

A few weeks after the festival had ended, Swamishri was visiting the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan where a small gathering had also been organized. Mr. Dalal was present in the gathering. After listening to just a few minutes of Swamishri's speech, Mr. Dalal felt that there was something different about this sadhu. Swamishri spoke with his natural sincerity and truthfulness. Mr. Dalal was quick to correct his misperceptions, "I have heard many sadhus and mahatmas speak, but none are so genuine and simple. There is no manipulation in his speech." Swamishri's transparent persona changed Mr. Dalal's outlook towards sadhus.

\* \* \*

On 15 June 1984, a convention was underway in the auditorium of Forest Park Middle School in Cleveland. Addressing the gathering, Dr Shashi Shah, president of the Gujarati Community in Cleveland, said, "Yesterday, I had come to the spiritual assembly of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. For the first time I experienced happiness that was indescribable. Swamiji's speech was absolutely magnetic."

In 1977, Krishnavadan Joshi, the then Mayor of Ahmedabad, had come to a satsang assembly held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad. Reflecting upon his experience he said, "Before I came here to this assembly there were several thoughts crowding my mind, but the moment I came here all my thoughts subsided. In my opinion, this is a real miracle."

While some experience the verse of the Vedas, "Words are a form of God,"<sup>1</sup> in Swamishri's speech, for some others, Swamishri's speech evokes the memory of poet Bhavbhuti's verse: "Worldly people speak about what has already happened; whereas whatever the great rishis say

happens accordingly."<sup>2</sup>

Thousands have experienced that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words never fail.

On 15 August 1982, Swamishri was in Ahmedabad. Ramesh Dalal, a leading devotee, was giving an outline of the day's programme to Swamishri. He said, "Narayanbhai, the son of Becharbhai of Rajpur village, has been admitted to V.S. Hospital. The programme for today includes a visit to the hospital." Swamishri said, "We'll go to the hospital tomorrow."

Insisting upon Swamishri not to postpone the visit, Rameshbhai said, "Bapa, let's visit the hospital today, because I have already given today's date and so Narayanbhai's relatives must have also gathered there." Swamishri humbly submitted to his argument.

When Swamishri reached the hospital, Narayanbhai's relatives requested Swamishri, "Bapa, it would be better if you come again tomorrow because Narayanbhai will be shifted to the special ward tomorrow. Presently, he is in the general ward and, since there are many ladies there, it will be very difficult to make proper arrangements for you to see him."

Rameshbhai, who was listening to this conversation, realized, "Indeed, things happen according to what Swamishri says."

Swamishri's speech dissolves doubts and resolves questions in the minds of countless listeners. Upon listening to him one naturally remembers Gunatitanand Swami's discourse, "When a great sadhu like Muktanand Swami speaks in an assembly of even two thousand people, all the inner questions of listeners get resolved. Maharaj's true sadhu knows the thoughts passing through people's minds and talks accordingly" (Swamini Vato 1.322).

Like dewdrops moistening the leaves, Swamishri's words slowly sink into the subconscious and wash all doubts. Problems dissolve and worries disappear when one listens to his words. Like a

2. *Laukikānām hi sadhunāmartham vāganuvartate, Rushinām punarādhyānām vāchamartho anudhāvati.*  
- Uttar Ramacharitam 1.10.

1. *Nādo hi Brahmano rupam.*

sculptor's chisel, his words chip away our doubts.

Once, in Atladra, Swamishri was discoursing in an assembly of devotees: "One remains unperturbed amidst honours and insults when one worships God with the absolute certitude that one's true form is *atma*. Thereafter, one never becomes estranged from Satsang; neither does one feel disappointed or displeased amidst such testing circumstances. During such awkward moments one who is a *jnani* finds solace in spiritual wisdom and remains forever happy..."

After the assembly was over Swamishri was going towards his residence. A devotee suddenly fell headlong at his feet and with tearful eyes confessed, "Today if you had not discoursed on believing oneself as *atma*, I would have fallen from Satsang. Because of a volunteer's inadvertent mistake, I had begun to develop an aversion towards Satsang. You addressed the core cause of my misery and uprooted it completely."

\* \* \*

On 21 November 1989, Swamishi was speaking fluently to an assembly in Bochasan, "Shriji Maharaj incarnated to dispel ignorance related to I-ness and my-ness. This is my family and that is yours; this is my village and that is yours; this is my country and that is yours – till one has such a mentality one will have disputes and quarrels. Will there be any quarrels if one believes everyone to be his own? Great sages have never discriminated between mine and yours; between caste, creed, village, country, etc. They are above these distinctions – nobody is special, nobody is ordinary. For them the entire world is their family."

As words were flowing from Swamishri's mouth, the agitation in the heart of a distinguished educationist of Gujarat was gradually subsiding. The issue was that he was to run for Member of Parliament for a leading political party, but unexpectedly his name was dropped. This was because of a local religious head who had influenced the party to give the ticket to a coalition-party candidate. Thus, the educationist's

aspiration was shattered and the affront was troubling him. Swamishri's words lifted him above the barriers of I-ness and my-ness and he experienced inner peace.

Like the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati, one finds a blissful trio of divinity, purity and inspiration in Swamishri's calm yet thoughtful words.

Having savoured Swamishri's presence many times, Krishnashankar Shastri, a famous connoisseur and exponent of the Shrimad Bhagvat, once said, "When Pramukh Swami Maharaj speaks, I feel that just as water is required to clean dirty clothes, Swamishri's words are required to cleanse dirty minds."

Once, the sadhus and devotees in Junagadh said to Gunatitanand Swami, "You discourse abundantly. If you continue like this, there will be no miseries [within us]." Then Gunatitanand Swami responded, "I don't ponder while I speak; the words flow forth spontaneously." A sadhu then remarked, "Indeed, God is himself inspiring you." Gunatitanand Swami endorsed his words, "Yes, that is so" (Swamini Vato 6.79).

Truly, it is God himself who speaks through the Gunatit Sant. Today, thousands of devotees experience that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words purely echo the knowledge and divinity of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

\* \* \*

Rishis in the Upanishads compare speech with a cow.<sup>3</sup> Much more than that, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's speech is like the Kamdhenu – the wish-fulfilling divine cow. When people come to Swamishri, some expect happiness while some expect peace; some expect stability while some expect security; some expect spiritual bliss while others expect fulfilment of some worldly wish. Like a wish-yielding tree, Swamishri, through his blessings, has fulfilled everyone's need or blessed them with spiritual understanding to accept the wish of God. ♦

Translation: Prakash Dave

3. *Vācham dhenum upāsīt.*

# Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

February-March 2016, Sarangpur



Launching of 100-day Bhakti Yagna in Swamishri's presence

## FEBRUARY

### 2, Tuesday

Under the auspices of the centenary celebrations of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur, and for Swamishri's good health, a 100-day non-stop Bhakti Yagna was launched by Swamishri from the Pramukh Mandiram (cabin). Prior to Swamishri's arrival in the cabin, *malas*, *kartals*, *sampradayik* scriptures and mantra books were arranged.

Swamishri entered the Pramukh Mandiram with *kartals* in his hands. While giving darshan to all, a pre-recorded audio chanting of the Swaminarayan mantra was relayed in Swamishri's voice. Thereafter, sadhus started singing the Swaminarayan *dhun* while devotees and other sadhus demonstrated the types of devotion in the Bhakti Yagna.

The Bhakti Yagna was arranged in a marquee behind the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. There

the sadhus and devotees would later start singing *dhun* and bhajans, doing *malas*, *dandvats*, *pradakshinas*, *mantra-lekhan* and reading scriptures in their allotted time slots.

### 3, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj installed in the Pramukh Mandiram, and the Guru Parampara (canvas *murtis*) and Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji (marble) installed on the main stage for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Tiskari Talat and Sondhalvada (Tithal region). Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* by touching the ritual rod amidst Vedic chantings. Thereafter, he performed the *pratishtha arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis*. Prior to Swamishri's arrival, the pre-*pratishtha* rituals were performed by senior sadhus.





A demonstration before Swamishri during the opening of 'Niramaya' for the BAPS Shastriji Maharaj Hospital, Atladra



Swamishri blesses devotees during the Vasant Panchmi festival

#### 4, Thursday

Swamishri inaugurated the ayurvedic and naturopathy departments (Niramaya) for BAPS Shastriji Maharaj Hospital in Atladra. Thereafter, the six traditional types of ayurvedic treatments for patients was demonstrated on the main stage. Swamishri blessed all. The ceremonial opening of Niramaya at the hospital was scheduled for 12 February.

From 6.30 p.m. the evening assembly was held to commemorate the departure of Yogiji Maharaj to Akshardham today, on Posh *vad ekadashi*, in 1971. Sadhus initiated by Yogiji Maharaj, namely, Yagneshwar Swami, Bhagvatprasad Swami, Ghanshyamprasad Swami, Dharmacharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami, paid tributes to Yogiji Maharaj. At 7.55 p.m., Swamishri arrived in Pramukh Mandiram to given darshan to all. He was wearing a warm topee and had donned his *gatariya* in Yogiji Maharaj's style with a shawl resting on his left shoulder. The *murti* of Yogiji Maharaj in Swamishri's cabin was also attired similarly. The sadhus and devotees were enthralled by Swamishri's darshan.

#### 8, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Pamol, Jantral and Chuva (Bochasan region). Swamishri

consecrated the *murtis* by touching the ritual rod amidst Vedic chantings by sadhus. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha arti* and *pujan* rituals and blessed the devotees. The pre-*pratishtha* rituals were performed by senior sadhus.

#### 9, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of only Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (marble) for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Ranmalpur and Baisahebgadh (Dhrangadhra region). Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* by touching the ritual rod amidst Vedic chantings. Thereafter, he performed the *pratishtha arti* and *pujan* rituals. The pre-*pratishtha* rituals were performed by senior sadhus.

#### 12, Friday; Vasant Panchmi Festival

At about 10.30 a.m. Swamishri visited the Smruti Mandir to have darshan and offer his respects to the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj. The *murti* was adorned with flowers on the occasion of Shastriji Maharaj's birthday celebration. Swamishri performed the *arti* of Shastriji Maharaj.

After doing darshan of the gurus' shrines Swamishri visited the Bhakti Yagna marquee behind the Smruti Mandir, where devotees were singing the *dhun*. Thereafter, Swamishri

inaugurated Premvati, the Sanstha's snack and foodstore, located opposite the Smruti Mandir.

At about 11.00 a.m. Swamishri reached the main mandir for Thakorji's darshan. Books and quotes were arranged on each of the shrine steps to commemorate the Vasant Panchmi festival – birthday celebrations of Shikshapatri, Brahmanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami and Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri performed the *rajbhog arti* at 11.15 a.m.

At about 12 noon Swamishri gave darshan to all from Pramukh Mandiram. The Vasant Panchmi festival assembly had commenced at 8.30 a.m., interspersed with speeches and bhajans by sadhus. With Swamishri's arrival a drama was performed by youths depicting Shastriji Maharaj's visit to Mohadi in Khandesh and the first celebration of his birthday.

Then a dish full of *puranpoli* (Shastriji Maharaj's favourite sweet) was brought before Swamishri, who sanctified it by showering flower petals. At the heartfelt request of sadhus and devotees Swamishri ate a little piece of *puranpoli*. Then a microphone was placed before Swamishri and an audio recording of Swamishri's blessings on the Shikshapatri was relayed.

In the evening, the youths performed a drama on Hira Mukhi's courage and *paksh* for Shastriji Maharaj.

### 15, Monday

Yogiji Maharaj had inaugurated the Gondal Gurukul in 1966. In the evening, Swamishri launched the year-long Golden Anniversary Celebrations of the BAPS Gurukul in Gondal by lighting a lamp and waving the BAPS flag. Then the students performed a traditional dance and a drama on the history of the Gurukul.

### 17, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (marble) for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in



Students dance before Swamishri during the launching of the Golden Anniversary Celebrations of BAPS Gurukul in Gondal

Gavasad and Karakhadi (Atladra region) by touching the ritual rod on the *murtis* amidst Vedic chantings. The Guru Parampara *murtis* (canvas) were installed on the main stage. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha arti* and *pujan* rituals.

### 28, Sunday

The 42-day Sanskruti Yatra programme, wherein schoolchildren, teachers, dignitaries and others were invited to see an exhibition and have darshan of Sarangpur Mandir and Swamishri, concluded today. The Yatra was organized under the auspices of the year-long centenary celebrations of Sarangpur Mandir. In all, 27,500 schoolchildren 1,450 teachers, 450 doctors, 250 BAPS *karyakars*, 40 dignitaries, 435 BAPS volunteers, 450 BAPS sadhus and 120 devotees visited the exhibition – totally 30,695 people participated.

### 29, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (marble), Shri Radha-Krishna Dev (canvas), Shri Guru Parampara (canvas) and Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapati (marble) for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Dagavadiya (Mahesana region). Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* by touching the ritual rod. Thereafter, he performed the *pratishtha arti* and *pujan* rituals.

# Pushpadolotsav

23 March 2016, Sarangpur



In the morning, Swamishri went for darshan to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir and then went for darshan of Thakorji in the main mandir.

Then he arrived in the Pramukh Darshan Vatika, where the sadhus and devotees were blessed to have his darshan.

Swamishri also performed the *pujan* of the canvas *murtis* for the new Satsang Bhavan in Bajarda village.

At 4.45 p.m. on the large ground behind the BAPS Vidyamandir, the Fuldol celebration assembly commenced in the presence of over 30,000 devotees. At 7.25 p.m. Swamishri arrived in the specially prepared glass cabin on



the festival stage.

Swamishri performed the *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, sprayed the *murti* with saffron-scented water and then performed *arti*. *Sadguru* sadhus then honoured Swamishri with garlands and thereafter Swamishri sprayed everyone with sanctified saffron-scented water.

Before departing, Swamishri blessed everyone by saying “Jai Swaminarayan”.

## MARCH 2016

### 3, Thursday

Today, Pujya Nischaldasji, Mahant of the Satkeval Sanstha in Rajpipla, came for Swamishri's darshan. Senior sadhus honoured him with a sanctified garland.

### 4, Friday

The Mayor of Vadodara Shri Bharatbhai Dangar came for Swamishri's darshan. Viveksagar Swami honoured him with a flower garland and presented him with a *mala* sanctified by Swamishri.

Also, Shri Bhargav Bhatt, grandnephew of Shri Manibhai Salad (a senior and distinguished

devotee who devoutly served Shastriji Maharaj), came for Swamishri's darshan. He is an accomplished cricketer presently playing for the King's Punjab XI in the Indian Premier League cricket tournament and in the Ranji Trophy.

### 5, March

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Singapore and Bajrangpura (Surendranagar). Swamishri then performed *arti* and offered *mantra-pushpanjali* to the *murtis*.

At 6.00 p.m. Swamishri visited the Shayona Art workshop in the mandir premises, where domes, *shikhars*, *kalashes* and *sinhasans* and other



works for BAPS *shikharbaddh* and *hari* mandirs are produced. Swamishri blessed the sadhus and volunteers who serve in the workshop.

Then, Swamishri went for darshan to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir and thereafter visited the *gurukul* before returning to his room.

### 8, March

Revered Sikh guru, Baba Iqbal Singh, arrived at 8.30 p.m. for Swamishri's darshan. He runs the 'Valley of Divine Peace' (Baru Saaib) in Himachal Pradesh and is head of the Kalgidhar Trust, which manages 129 schools, two universities, and numerous engineering and medical colleges. He has also been very helpful in the Swaminarayan Akshardham project in Robbinsville, New Jersey.

Baba Iqbal Singh was deeply touched to have Swamishri's darshan. Later, addressing the sadhus, he said, "One who has *vairagya* develops affection for Paramatma."

### 11, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the canvas *murtis* for the new BAPS *sanskardham* in Kharvarnagar (Surat).

### 15, Tuesday

In the morning, renowned vocalist, Puja Chaitanya Swami, came for Swamishri's darshan. In 1995, during Swamishri's Amrut Mahotsav, he had presented a programme of devotional bhajans. Viveksagar Swami honoured him with a sanctified garland.

### 16, Wednesday

In the morning, Shri Han Kop of Holland had come for Swamishri's darshan. He was honoured on the platform by Viveksagar Swami. Then, Han Kop performed *dandvats* and *tapni mala* before Swamishri. Afterwards, he recalled, "When I held my *mala*, I was looking at his eyes only. He was also looking at me. We didn't speak, but he spoke through his eyes with me."



Swamishri gives darshan during Bhagatji Maharaj's Jayanti

### 17, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Rajula.

### 18, Friday

In the morning, Swamishri blessed the 30 municipal corporators of Vadodara who had come for darshan.

### 21, Monday

In the evening, Swamishri gave darshan from Pramukh Mandiram to the devotees and 1,800 men and women volunteers who had come to do *seva* in the Fuldol festival.

Then Swamishri presided in the Akshar Jarukho and blessed everyone by spraying all with sanctified saffron-scented water.

### 22, Tuesday; Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj Jayanti

During the morning assembly, sadhus spoke about the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj. Then Swamishri arrived to grant darshan to all.

Swamishri inaugurated *Satsang Saurabh* Part 11, prepared by the Satsang Pravrutti Central office in Ahmedabad.

In the evening celebration assembly, following dances and skits, Swamishri inaugurated *Kirtan Ganga*, a collection of 1,139 bhajans on a USB, an audio publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

# Stambh Puja for Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville

26 March 2016, Sarangpur



At 7.00 a.m. the *sadguru* sadhus performed the *mahapuja* at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, where 20-ft. high sculpted marble pillar had been erected for the ceremony.

Devotees and sadhus from USA, Canada and Africa were also present for this auspicious occasion.

At 8.45 a.m. Swamishri arrived. Seated on his wheelchair, he untied the *nadachhadi* wrapped around the pillar. Then he touched the pillar and

showered sanctified flower petals on it.

At the conclusion of the rituals, a group photograph of Swamishri and the *sadgurus* was taken in front of the pillar.

Before leaving, Swamishri blessed Shri Harshadbhai Chavda, Shri Ashwinbhai (chief engineer of the project) and all the volunteers who are tirelessly working in Rajasthan for the NJ Akshardham project.

## 25, Friday

Today, Swamishri gave *parshad diksha* to Shri Bhavikbhai Sadhak of Edison, NJ, and named him Asang Bhagat.

## 28, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Kavitha (Bharuch).

## 29, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Vaghnera (Dist: Mandvi) and Shahpor (Dist. Valord), both near Sankari.

## 30, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Lusaka, Zambia.

In the evening, Swamishri lit the lamp to inaugurate the first Sant Shibir, for which over 550 sadhus had gathered.

## 31, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Manjipura (Nadiad) and the *murtis* of the Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* Mandir in Baisahebgadh (Dhrangadhra). ♦

# Vice President of India Shri Hamid Ansari Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham

4 April 2016, New Delhi



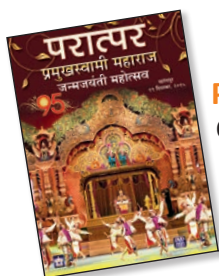
The Vice President of India, H.E. Mohammed Hamid Ansari, was traditionally welcomed by Atmaswarup Swami with a garland of flowers, *chandlo* and the tying of the sacred *kalva*.

After admiring the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), Vice President Ansari went to the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir.

After offering respects and viewing the mandir's architecture, he admired the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth).

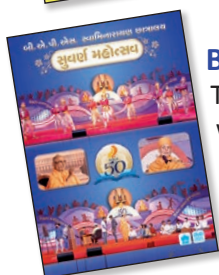
Then, Vice President Ansari offered prayers for world peace and harmony by offering *abhishek* on the sacred *murti* of Sri Neelkanth Varni.

Sharing his experience at Akshardham, H.E. Hamid Ansari wrote, "An architectural marvel reflective of devotional intensity! I thank you for giving the chance to come here and learn the basics of commitment of the devotees." ♦



## PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 95<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

On 19 December 2015, over 175,000 devotees gathered in Sarangpur to celebrate Swamishri's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. Relive the entire celebration, which features Swamishri's darshan, elevating speeches, inspiring videos, energetic traditional dances, meaningful skits and the launch of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations.



## BAPS SWAMINARAYAN CHHATRALAYA SUVARNA MAHOTSAV

To commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralaya, events were held throughout the year. The final celebration, on 27 December 2015, was held in the presence of *sadguru* sadhus, and thousands of past and present students. The entire three-hour programme featuring inspiring and thought-provoking skits, speeches, videos and dances is presented in this DVD.



## VATSALYA

A specially scripted drama in Hindi that depicts the problems of modern families and how to resolve them through the three solutions advocated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Families should eat together, play together, and hold a family assembly to openly discuss issues and to pray.

## New DVD Publications

Available at all BAPS Bookstores



PUBLISHER: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ■ INSPIRER: His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj



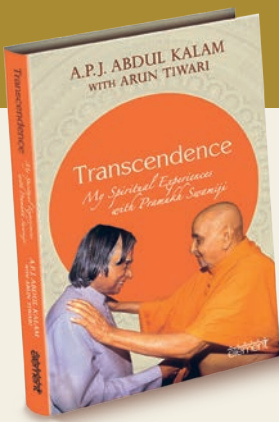
# Inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir

11 March 2016, Randesan, Gujarat



BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, Randesan, is a newly built all-girls residential school, located near Gandhinagar, Gujarat. The school is housed on an 18-acre lush green campus and will cater for over 800 students from the 5th to 8th standards from May 2016. Apart from spacious classrooms, the facilities include a library, an e-library, a computer lab, and maths, science and design laboratories, science activity centres, arts and crafts rooms, and areas for cooking, music and other extra-curricular activities. The auspicious Prasad Pravesh and *mahapuja* ceremonies for the campus were held in the presence of Pujya Keshavjivan Swami (Pujya Mahant Swami), Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Pujya Doctor Swami), Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Pujya Kothari Swami), Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Doctor Swami and Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the assembly. Volunteers, service providers and others who contributed to the school's construction were felicitated with a shawl and a memento. All the *sadguru* sadhus then performed *pujan* of all the 14 blocks and sanctified them by showing flower petals. More than 200 sadhus and 1,000 devotees and well-wishers also attended the ceremony, and everyone was given a guided tour of the entire campus. ◆



# CELEBRATING Transcendence

UAE & India, February to April 2016



L to R: Shri Rohitbhai Patel (Chairman, BAPS UAE), Prof Arun Tiwari, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, H.H. Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Pujya Brahmavihari Swami, H.E. Anurag Bhushan (Consul General of India), Dr B.R. Shetty (CEO, New Medical Center Group)

## CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION, DUBAI 23 March 2016

Over 1,100 distinguished members of the local Emirati and Indian communities were present to celebrate the launch of ‘Transcendence: My Spiritual Journey with Pramukh Swami’, in the royal presence of His Highness Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, the Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development for the UAE.

He was welcomed on arrival by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, along with young children showering flower petals on his pathway. The assembly commenced with the national anthem of the UAE, followed by a brief introduction by Brahmavihari Swami.

Then, Sheikh Nahyan and other stage guests

performed the book launch ceremony. Thereafter, the keynote address to the august gathering was delivered by Sheikh Nahyan. He deeply appreciated the messages of love and harmony promoted by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and expressed, “‘Transcendence’ is indeed a book of both current and historical importance. Dr. Abdul Kalam recounts the spiritual transformation and inspiration he experienced and how that led to his vision for a society in which science, spirituality and leadership can be fused into a coherent, holistic vision for India, and indeed, for the entire world.

“Indeed, his book captures the spiritual essence of all religions and is as much a fountain of inspiration and a treasury of wisdom as it is a tribute to the multi-faith Indian society. It will





Guests seated in the Cultural and Scientific Association auditorium, Dubai

become a guide for all who wish to know more about transcendence and its applications to many aspects of our personal and professional lives. This is a book that all should read as I believe that 'Transcendence' is destined to become a classic in its field."

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami presented Sheikh Nahyan an Amrut Kalash – 'Vessel of Immortality' – and a commemorative plate. The assembly continued with creative videos and speeches elaborating upon the core messages of the book.

Prof. Arun Tiwari, co-author of the book, recounted some of his personal experiences with Dr Kalam and the process of writing the book.

Brahmavihari Swami narrated his experiences as an interpreter between Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the wider messages of inner development and harmony that their unique friendship teaches.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about the messages of global peace as advocated by Dr Kalam, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the leaders of the UAE.

In his Vote of Thanks, His Excellency Anurag Bhushan, Consul General of India in Dubai, revealed his deep respect for Dr Kalam and how he

had been inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS.

Among the guests were the Consul General of Sri Lanka, Dr B.R. Shetty, Maghanmal Pancholia, Vasu Shroff, Bharat Shah, Ram Buxani, Harshad Mehta, Vinod Adani, Pradeep Dhoot, and other distinguished guests and well-wishers.

The celebration assembly concluded with the national anthem of India.

All the guests were deeply touched and spiritually inspired by the sacred, soul-stirring and enlightening programme.

### GUEST EXPERIENCES

I am in the Middle-East since 62 years, but I have never seen such an event, and such blending of Arabs, Hindus and Muslims. I am seeing for the first time, the Ruler himself coming and taking interest in our religion like the way he did today.

- Bharatbhai Shah  
Chairman,

Al Mustaneer Trading and Social Worker

I think I am transformed today. The message for me is: Remove all the negativity in you, become positive, love every human being, do a good



deed and that will make you happy.

- **Surendra Kandhari**  
Owner, Al Dobowi Group

It was a great experience. I think tonight for me was very special because with events like these, I believe the energy goes to the soul. The message and concept I take back from today is of being 'Ajatshatru'.

- **Ram Buxani**  
President, ITL Group

It was an excellent experience tonight. According to me, it is the need of the hour, people should understand the importance of harmony,

why harmony is required, what is peace and how we can get peace. I think the message is very clear, if you want to live in this world, you have to understand each other very well and be harmonious.

- **Harshad Mehta**  
Founder, 7Cs Diamond and Jewellery Group

This evening's message was really conscience-stirring, soul-stirring. What I have learned today is to give unbridled, unconditional love. Unconditional love is seen very well and I am sure that love is responded back with love.

- **Paras Shahdarpuri**  
Former Diplomat and Chairman,  
NIKAI Group of Companies

## TRANSCENDENCE CELEBRATIONS, INDIA

After the publication in June 2015 of *Transcendence : My Spiritual Journey with Pramukh Swamiji* by the late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, this best-selling book has been translated into Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Malayalam. Since then the inaugural events of the book were held at various places in India:

**SHIRPUR ENGINEERING COLLEGE,**  
**Shirpur, Dhuliya, Maharashtra**  
**26 February 2016**

Over 1,500 invited guests attended the event to celebrate the Marathi edition, titled *Unnayan*, in the presence of Pujya Anandjivan Swami, Pujya Brahnavihari Swami and co-author of the book, Prof. Arun Tiwari.

**PRATAP HIGH SCHOOL**  
**Chopda, Maharashtra**  
**27 February 2016**

Around 3,000 invited guests attended a special event to celebrate the Marathi edition, *Unnayan*, in the presence of Pujya Anandjivan Swami, Pujya Brahnavihari Swami, co-author Prof. Arun Tiwari, Shri Arunbhai Gujarati (former speaker



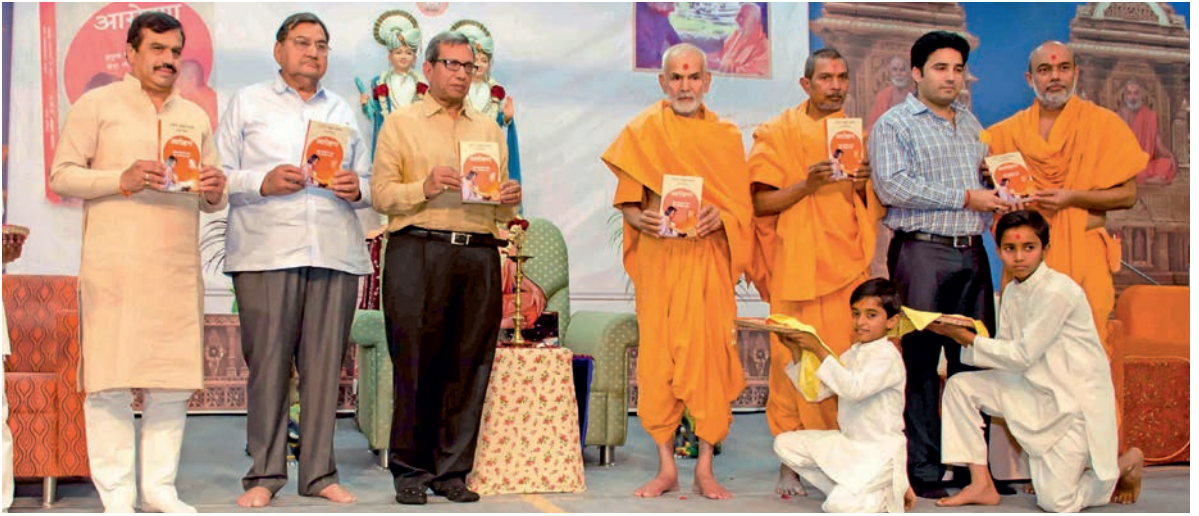
L to R: Deputy Speaker Shri Rajendra Singh, Pujya Mahant Swami, CM of Madhya Pradesh Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and Higher Education Minister Shri Umashankar Gupta

of the Maharashtra State Assembly) and other distinguished guests.

Shri Arunbhai Gujarati said, "Every home should have a copy of this book. It will increase social unity and strengthen universal values."

**RAVINDRA BHAVAN,**  
**Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**  
**15 March 2016**

The Hindi edition, titled *Arohan*, was released in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shri Shivrajsinhji Chauhan, Deputy Speaker of the Madhya



Celebrating 'Arohan', Indore, Madhya Pradesh

Pradesh State Assembly Shri Rajendrasinhji, State Education Minister Shri Umashankar Gupta and other distinguished guests.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said, "On reading this book, I felt that everyone should read this book. Not only that, but we should learn from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and imbibe those virtues in our life."

**BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR,  
INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH  
17 March 2016**

The Hindi edition, *Arohan*, was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Dr S.C.

Garg (Chancellor, Oriental Vishwa Vidyalaya), former minister Shri Rameshwar Patel and other invited guests and well-wishers.

**BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR  
Gondal, Gujarat  
9 April 2016**

The Gujarati edition, titled *Paratpar*, was released in the presence of over 17,000 invited guests, well-wishers and devotees. Dignitaries present included Shri Anupsinh Gehalot (Commissioner, Rajkot), Shri Prakash Dobariya (Deputy Collector, Rajkot) and others. ♦



Celebrating 'Paratpar', Gondal, Gujarat



## India

### SANSKRUTI YATRA

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur

16 January to 28 February 2016



As part of the centenary celebrations of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, a six-week Sanskruti Yatra event was organized, which was attended by more than 27,500 students and 1,450 teachers from all over Gujarat. More than 50 volunteers prepared videos, scripts, posters, booklets and exhibitions. In addition 435 BAPS volunteers from India committed their time to manage the exhibitions during the event period. The theme of the *yatra* was 'Adarsh' (Ideal). Students participated in an interactive exhibition which laid out the principles of becoming an Adarsh Balak (Ideal Child), Adarsh Vidyarthi (Ideal Student), and Adarsh Nagrik (Ideal Citizen). Through presentations, games and dramas students were taught how to become ideal. Also, students were introduced to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's formula for success: Prayer + Hardwork = Success.

The students were also taught how to become responsible and patriotic citizens. After viewing the exhibition, students were taken to the Pramukh Fun Fair where they enjoyed carnival

rides, a magic show and fun-filled science experiments. Before departing, many students undertook pledges to follow the path of becoming ideal.

## NEW BAPS MANDIRS

IDAR, DISTRICT: SABARKANTHA

30 January to 1 February 2016



The new *hari* mandir has been built on land donated by Shri Jethabhai Bhaichandbhai Patel.

On 30 January, a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* took place through the main streets of Idar. In the evening, sadhus presented a *kirtan aradhana*.

On the evening of 31 January, thousands of women devotees attended the special Women's Assembly.

On 1 February, 700 *yajmans* participated in the Yagna for World Peace. Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Sarangpur on 25 January 2016.

POGLU, DISTRICT: SABARKANTHA

9-10 February 2016

On 6 May 2015, the ground-breaking





ceremony for the new *hari* mandir was performed. In a short time, the *hari* mandir was constructed and ready for inauguration.

On the morning of 9 February 2016, a special Women's Assembly was held. In the afternoon a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* was held through the town. In the evening a *kirtan aradhana* was presented by the sadhus.

On the morning of 10 February, a Yagna for World Peace was held and thereafter Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami ritually installed the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 21 January 2016 in Sarangpur.

### MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur 19-21 February 2016



Over 800 doctors from Gujarat and other states attended this conference on the theme 'Antar Khoj' – 'Introspection'. The doctors were guided on how to imbibe spirituality in their daily and professional lives. They were also blessed by the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

### BLOOD DONATION CAMP BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal 10 April 2016



A blood donation camp was held as part of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Akshar Deri, with the support of Astha Blood Bank and Saurashtra Voluntary Bank. Around 9,000 cc of blood was donated by devotees.

### UK & Europe

### LAUNCH OF 'KIDZ ULTIMATE CHALLENGE' BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London 21 February 2016



The UK Bal-Balika Mandal launched the 'Kidz Ultimate Challenge' – a year-long, multifaceted child development programme.

The 'Kidz Ultimate Challenge' (KUC) is a composite set of child development initiatives that will pan out throughout 2016 at BAPS centres throughout the UK and Europe. Through a multitude of exercises and competitions, each tailored to participants of various age groups, it aims to fulfil and advance the potential of every young boy and girl. Key outcomes of the

programme include awareness and appreciation of India's cultural heritage as well as developing individual abilities in oration, music, art and sports. Children will also be equipped with essential life-skills such as responsibility, teamwork and self-belief.

More than 2,000 parents and children from throughout the UK attended the captivating programme. The participants were presented with their information packs and a collection of souvenirs before embarking upon various fun activities designed also to challenge their capacities in multiple intelligences.

The children were then enlightened on the immense ability and power of the human mind and body through innovative displays and interactive examples.

Previous stars also shared practical guidance and inspirational pointers for this year's participants.

Swamishri had sent his written blessings for the KUC in which he expressed his wishes for every participant to strive to 'Be the Best'. A video of him sanctifying the KUC pack was subsequently shown.

Satyavrat Swami explained the importance of pleasing Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swamishri through the KUC and how to understand the essence of 'Rajipo' – the underlying theme of the initiative. He also strongly encouraged parents to become role models for their children.

Kirit Wadia, National Coordinator for the Bal-Balika Mandal, introduced the audience to the young volunteers overseeing all aspects of the project. Manoharmurti Swami conducted an interactive and energetic presentation providing essential background as well as inspirational insights.

Yogesh Patel, 11, from Manchester, then elegantly led the audience of children through a pledge to try their best in the KUC. The programme concluded with a spectacular sequence of a kirtan, lead by young Akash Limbachia, a

finale dance, video and colourful confetti filling the air. The vibrant decorations and audio-visual effects contributed to a memorable and inspiring finale.

## OPENING OF REFURBISHED

### NILKANTH ABHISHEK MANDAP

**BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London**

**15 April 2016**



The refurbished Nilkanth Abhishek Mandap, is a marble chamber on the lower floor of the main mandir housing the sacred *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the *murti* in London on 6 September 2004, praying for the fulfilment of the wishes of those who come to perform *abhishek*.

The two-phased renovation of the *abhishek mandap* began in 2015, with the final work commencing in February 2016. The completion marks the culmination of dedicated efforts by sadhus, volunteers and skilled craftsmen. The Brazilian and Italian marble-clad chamber is now embellished with 4,692 individual pieces of traditional Indian design featuring 24 paintings and 8 relief panels depicting key incidents from the life of Nilkanth Varni.

The reopening was conducted amid Vedic rituals performed by sadhus and in the presence of senior devotees while a larger congregation watched in the assembly hall via a live broadcast link.

## Asia Pacific

### KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

Australia & New Zealand

January to March 2016



Based on the theme ‘Ame aa Yagna Arambhyo’, Karyakar Shibirs were held in Australia (Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney) and New Zealand (Auckland) in the presence of learned sadhus. Many devotees and volunteers were present in each of the centres for the one-day *shibirs*, which introduced the eternal truth of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* through Hindu scriptural passages, captivating video presentations, and speeches based on the life and work of the guru *parampara*.

Practical workshops and brain-storming sessions were also held to highlight the importance of having *samp*, *suhruddbhav* and *ekta* and not indulging in *abhav-avgun*.

The *shibirs* provided the attendees a clearer understanding of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj, the roots of BAPS and the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, and inspired them towards a stronger spiritual grounding in their lives.

### ASIA PACIFIC KARYAKAR CONVENTIONS

Adelaide, Australia & Auckland, New Zealand

24 March to 3 April 2016

To motivate and nurture the youths Karyakar Conventions (KarCon) were held in Adelaide, Australia from 24 to 27 March 2016 and in Auckland, New Zealand from 31 March to 3



April. The convention theme was on ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj – His Life, My Guide’. A total of 282 *bal-balika* and *kishore-kishori karyakars* participated along with over 100 volunteers.

Through inspiring incidents from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the conventions focused on building the satsang foundation for *karyakars* by providing guidance for their personal and satsang journeys. The convention theme was further explained through interactive videos, presentations and skits. The conventions provided immense enthusiasm and optimism to all, that regardless of hardships we have a guide, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whom we can follow. At the end, all *karyakars* left with a better understanding of how to become *adarsh karyakars* and to improve satsang in their personal life.

Both conventions were organized by a team of 30 *karyakars* from the ANZ *bal-balika* and *kishore-kishori* regional teams.

## BAPS Charities

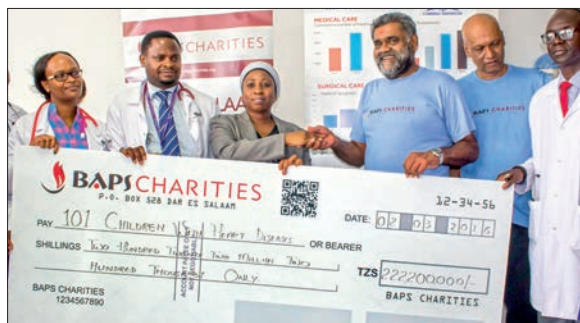
### 101 CHILD HEART SURGERIES SPONSORED

Tanzania, 3 February 2016

BAPS Charities Tanzania donated US\$ 101,000 to enable the operations of 101 children suffering from heart disease. Every month, ten children will be operated upon.

A brief ceremony was held at Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Centre at Muhimbili National Hospital Dar-es-Salaam, which was graced by the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Ms. Ummu Ally





Mwalimu, heart surgeons and the families of children suffering from heart disease.

### **BAPS HEALTH FAIR**

**Mayfair Cultural Centre, Johannesburg,  
South Africa**

**7 February 2016**



Around 300 people benefited from the inaugural BAPS Charities Health Fair in Johannesburg, focusing on the theme of developing a healthy mind, body and spirit. Experienced professionals were invited to deliver presentations, host stalls and provide consultations and medical guidance covering each of those themes.

A total of 16 stalls provided specialist services, such as, pediatrics, optometry, dentistry, chiropractry, audiology and others. Also, to encourage physical activities, demonstrations were held on traditional Indian dance and music, karate and meditation exercises. Expert speakers guided parents on important child development issues, including developing a positive attitude, importance of child immunization, healthy diet and benefits of meditation.

### **FOOD DRIVE**

**Nungwi Leprosy Camp,  
Kigamboni, Dar-es-Salaam**

**21 February 2016**



Established in 1964, the camp currently houses over 400 people. BAPS Charities volunteers presented children with gift packets and provided two weeks of food rations to each family.

### **FOOD DRIVE FOR FONELISCO**

**2 March 2016, Mwanza, Tanzania**



BAPS Charities donated food rations to the Foundation of New Life for Street Children and Orphans (FONELISCO), which presently cares for 65 children of different ages.

### **DISASTER RELIEF AID**

**Ruangwa Village, Tanzania**

**6 March 2016**

Rains and strong winds in southern Tanzania during February 2016 caused heavy floods and damage which affected about 500 families whose house roofs were blown away by strong winds.

BAPS Charities assisted the families by



providing the necessary roofing sheets, nails and other items to repair the damage.

### **EASTER FOOD DRIVES** **Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania** **3 April 2016**



During the Easter season, BAPS Charities conducted food drives at the Salvation Army (for 120 children), Buguruni Deaf & Dumb School (70 children), Help 2 Kids (30 children) and Children Retention Camp (29 children). They donated flour, beans, rice, oil, spaghetti and other food items as well as gifts and school stationery to the youngsters.

### **ANNUAL WALKATHON** **10 April 2016, Sydney, Australia**

Around 500 participants took part in the 3-km BAPS Walkathon 2016 in support of Westmead Medical Research Foundation (WMRF) and LBW Trust. WMRF conducts life-saving medical research while the LBW Trust provides scholarships to economically disadvantaged students in developing cricket-playing countries to help them complete their



tertiary education.

Walkers, young and old, were flagged off by BAPS sadhus and with the chief guests, Hon. Luke Foley (Opposition Leader, NSW), Hon. Daniel Mookhey (State Member, NSW) and others.

## **Worldwide**

### **OBSERVING EARTH HOUR, NORTH AMERICA, ENGLAND & INDIA** **19 March 2016**



BAPS Mandirs in North America, London and New Delhi joined other landmarks and cities worldwide by turning off their lights for one hour in celebration of Earth Hour, the world's largest environmental event.

Worldwide, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha actively supports environmental sustainability efforts throughout the year through recycling projects and environment friendly construction. ♦



## BAPS CHARITIES, March 2016



1. BAPS Charities donates food to Watoto Foundation orphanage centre and Pippi Foundation in Arusha, Tanzania.
2. BAPS Charities provides educational materials to the blind and albino children studying at the Pongwe School in Tanzania.
3. Fun day for underprivileged children, Nairobi.
4. BAPS Charities hosted an awareness lecture in Los Angeles, CA, to discuss the impact global warming has had on the environment.
5. BAPS Charities UK donates £65,000 to Nepal Earthquake Relief Fund.
6. BAPS Charities, Canada donates \$30,000 to UNICEF for Nepal Earthquake Relief.





**STAMBHA PUJA FOR NEW JERSEY AKSHARDHAM**  
26 March 2016, Sarangpur

- 1-3. Sadguru sadhus perform the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony in the presence of sadhus and devotees from USA and India
4. Swamishri unties the *nadachhadhi* and performs *puja* of the first pillar.
5. Swamishri and sadhus, with sanctified pillar behind.

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