

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2015

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"My Guru Shastriji Maharaj..."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Memories of Shastriji Maharaj



**99TH PATOTSAV OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR,
Sarangpur, 24 April 2015**

Thousands of devotees gathered in Sarangpur to celebrate the 99th *patotsav* of the BAPS mandir in Sarangpur built by Shastriji Maharaj and to launch the mandir's centenary celebrations in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

1. Annakut offered to the *murtis*, adorned with sandalwood paste and decorative designs, in the central shrine.
2. Swamishri blesses all during the celebration assembly.
3. Devotees engrossed in the celebrations.



"My Guru Shastriji Maharaj..."

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Front Title: Pujya Shastriji Maharaj with Shastri Narayanswarupdas (right) and Pujya Yogiji Maharaj in Atladra.

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

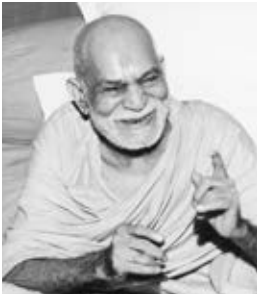
In April 1978, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru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

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FIRST WORD

The lives of great spiritual masters are far more profound than what we see, read, hear or write about them. It is beyond us mortals to wholly fathom their spiritual purity, love, humility, austerity, detachment, compassion and selflessness. And whatever joy we feel in perceiving and speaking about them is a consequence of their compassionate revelation. In addition, the bliss or peace we experience, despite it being only a fraction of their infinite joy, wholly fills our minds and hearts, leaving us feeling that we have grasped them totally.

Yogiji Maharaj was one such spiritual giant. Many spiritual leaders, writers, social reformers, advocates and others were deeply touched by his transparent and natural spirituality. They have reminisced with elation about their encounters with him.

To commemorate Yogiji Maharaj's 123rd birthday and the beginning of his 124th year, which falls on 15 May 2015, we share a few of the experiences by renowned sages and personalities.

Swami Chinmayanand, the founder of Chinmaya Mission and an eminent scholar and exponent of the Gita and Upanishads, says, "The experience I had in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj cannot be expressed in language. He is a living mass of what is to be experienced in the Upanishads. The bliss of the self-supreme exploding out of his aged body, wafting a steady fragrance of pure love, gushed into those who came near him, to fill up the hearts of others – even when they are not pure enough to receive and retain it. Hence none wants to leave him and his presence. To such a master we can only prostrate and not write about."

Peter Brent, a renowned British author, describes in his book, *Godmen of India*, about his meeting with Yogiji Maharaj in London in 1971, "Smiling, round faced, his cheeks covered in a stubbly white beard, Yogiji Maharaj came in, helped by the arm of an attendant. He beamed all round, his wide mouth gaping with genuine joy. At the bedside he leaned forward, then put his knees on the counterpane. Rolling over on his back, he looked for a moment like some round, enormous baby about to gurgle out its pleasure at being in the world."

Shri Jhinabhai Snehrashmi, an eminent Gujarati poet, critic and principal of C.N. Vidyavihar School in Ahmedabad, writes about his single, brief meeting with Yogiji Maharaj, "Yogiji Maharaj's childlike compliance, mesmeric personality, and even more fascinating than that, his compassion-filled look that I saw for the first time left a deep impression on my mind. On seeing him, I could not remember anything about observing any one aspect of his personality and then looking at its other side in order to measure him. My mind was overwhelmed with reverence and I felt honoured in experiencing the absorption in his highest love-filled holy waters of humanism.

"The selfless beauty of his talks can be understood only in his presence. His talks had the magical power of transforming tempestuous emotions into soft, calm waves. In his presence the base instincts and cycles of attachment and aversion were reformed to blossom forth into the exquisite beauty of love. I cannot put my experience into words; thus I only pray that others, too, experience what I have, and may it be bestowed upon myself again and again."

How fortunate we are to have the Divine in human flesh and blood to bless us with transcendence that lingers all through our mortal lives and beyond. May Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj bless us and make us the recipients of their divine joy. ♦

Shri Hari Accepts Illness

*The grand feast (chorasi) for Brahmins
was held at Lake Kankariya. Thereafter, Maharaj
proceeded to Jetalpur and then to the village of Koth...*

THE GRAND FEAST

The next day, 26 February 1822 (Samvat 1878, Fagun sud 5), at 12 noon Lake Kankariya was bustling with Brahmins dressed in traditional *pitambaras* and upper cloths. They had come for the grand feast. Every dining area was filled with Brahmins of different clans. They were loudly hailing the names of deities, Har Har Mahadev and Nar-Narayan Dev, before eating. The Brahmin devotees served ghee in leaf-bowls instead of the usual *dal*. The invited Brahmins dipped their ladoos in ghee before relishing them. They all felt they had never attended such a wonderful feast (*chorasi*) before. They respectfully hailed the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan for introducing the precedent of serving warm ghee in leaf-bowls. Shri Hari perceived well the reason behind their utterance of his name.

Maharaj had instructed all his devotees to serve the Brahmins generously. The Brahmins were absorbed in eating ladoos. Maharaj came riding on his mare, Manki, to have darshan of the Brahmins eating. On seeing him the Brahmins praised, "This is Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Oh, how glorious he looks!" Maharaj circumambulated all the Brahmins eating in the dining areas



five times. Thereafter he sat by the lake on a seat arranged for him beneath a tamarind tree. Once the Brahmins had finished eating Mukund Brahmachari called Maharaj to have lunch.

Shriji Maharaj declared, "Since there's no Brahmin left to eat take stock of how much food provisions are left." Then Maharaj went to all the dining areas where the Brahmins had taken lunch. He noticed an excess of ladoos lying in every dining area. Shri Hari remarked, "The Brahmins made more ladoos than were required. Give them to the devotees who have come

with us. If some still remain thereafter, distribute them to the devotees who have come from other villages."

The sadhus collected the remaining food provisions and returned them to the food merchants as per the deal. Thereafter, Maharaj retired to his tent for rest. For three days Maharaj had exerted himself for the *chorasi*, so he slept soundly.

The next day, Bhaichandbhai Sheth of Surat and Laldas Gora came to Shri Hari at the Swaminarayan Mandir. Maharaj requested them to pay for the expenses of the *murti-pratishtha* and the *chorasi*. Instantly they both gave cash donations. Maharaj called Anand Swami and

told him, “Bring my seat here in the mandir grounds and make an announcement to the devotees to perform my *pujan*. Women devotees, too, can join in the *pujan* later.” Soon, the devotees started flocking in large numbers to offer *pujan* and donations to Maharaj. The ritual continued till late afternoon.

Once the *pujan* was over Shriji Maharaj called the main volunteer and told him, “Count the money. It will just about suffice to pay for the dues to the food merchants.” Maharaj looked at Anand Swami and said, “Swami, now the daily cost of running the mandir rests upon the deities. There is no need for you to worry about the expenses for the *pratishtha* and *chorasi*.” Anand Swami felt relieved.

Ladha Thakkar had been listening to Shri Hari’s words about the amount of donations received, and with no money left he suggested, “Maharaj, you should have at least spared a thought for our food expenses on our return journey to Gadhada.” Maharaj smiled and retorted, “I’m going to be with you and yet you worry about your food!” Ladha Thakkar realized that Maharaj did not wish to hoard anything. After all, he was God, and he always took care of everything at the right time.

Shri Hari gave the cloth-prints of Nar-Narayan Dev and Radha-Krishna Dev to all the devotees for daily worship. There were also cloth-prints of Maharaj’s *murti* made from a painting by Adharanand Swami. These, too, were given to all for worship. Shri Hari was pleased with Narayanji Suthar (for preparing the prints), and thus gifted him with gold bangles and expensive clothes.

MAHARAJ ACCEPTS ILLNESS

Shri Hari left Shrinagar on 1 March 1822 (Fagan *sud* 8, A.S. 1878). He was given a festive send off till Lake Kankariya, in a manner akin to his welcoming ceremony. The devotees of Ahmedabad returned to their homes after being blessed by Maharaj. Shri Hari took the road to

Jetalpur via Lake Chandola with his small group of sadhus and *parshads*.

Shri Hari was riding in front, followed by the Kathi devotees, *parshads* and others. Suddenly, a cheetah sprang from a bush and launched itself towards Dada Khachar, who was riding on his horse. The sudden attack startled Dada’s horse, and it bolted into the air. This saved Dada from the cheetah’s assault. Instantly the *parshads* and Kathi devotees unsheathed their swords and hotly pursued the cheetah. But the cheetah had darted off into the wayside forest. Shri Hari claimed tersely, “I saved Dada from imminent death.”

In appreciation Dada Khachar resolved to serve Shri Hari intensely till his last breath.

Shriji Maharaj arrived in Jetalpur. Here, he felt fatigued and ill. Everyone believed it was due to the exertion that Maharaj had made during the *pratishtha* and *chorasi* in Ahmedabad. When Maharaj was asked about the reason for his fever, he replied, “I was engaged in a lot of activity for many days in Shrinagar. Thousands of people had come. All this has cluttered my mind. I have thus resolved to forget it all and erase it altogether from my mind. It is this overwhelming resolve that seems to be the cause of my illness.” The discerning *paramhansas* and devotees knew that whatever human traits Maharaj was showing were all a part of his *lila* (divine play).

The next day Maharaj sat in a palanquin to depart from Jetalpur. He arrived at a *rayan* grove in Ganesh Dholka near the village of Koth. Here, his illness increased. So he went to the Ganapati mandir and lay down to sleep. But here a hot wind was blowing through the dilapidated mandir. Furthermore, the constant cooing and fluttering of pigeons disturbed his sleep. In the evening the sadhus set up a makeshift tent with a bed beneath the shade of *rayan* trees, far away from the Ganapati mandir. The local devotees brought *goras* (milk, curd and buttermilk), ghee, gur and *rotla* for Maharaj and the sadhus to eat. Shri Hari did not eat anything but instructed that

everyone else should have dinner.

After sunset the temperature dropped, creating a pleasant coolness. Shri Hari slept well and subsequently his fever subsided altogether. Late at night Maharaj awoke, took a bath and ate a little *khichdi*. Then Maharaj addressed his sadhus and *parshads*, “Following the completion of the installation of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev, and after thousands of Brahmins from Ahmedabad had been fed, I began to think, ‘I want to forget all memories of all those people and all the activities that I saw.’ In doing this, my heart felt intense grief, and as a result, I became ill. While thinking, I forgot all the activities, and dispelled all those thoughts in such a manner that it was as if I had not even stayed at Lake Kankaria, and as if there had been no festival – no thoughts remained at all. After those worldly thoughts had subsided, I began to look within. In my heart, however, I did not like anything except God. Moreover, just as the *panchvishays* here appear to be insignificant to me – with my mind never being tempted – in the same way, my mind was not tempted anywhere from Devlok all the way to Brahmaloak.”

Shri Hari thus addressed all and expressed that he was well. Then Maharaj ordered, “Bring the palanquin and let’s go to Gadhada.” Shri Hari travelled through Balol, Adval, Rojka and arrived at Gadhada. Only a few days were left for the Fuldol festival. This time Maharaj had not permitted the sadhus and devotees to attend the festival. Only those who were with Maharaj were to get the benefit of the celebration.

On the day of Hutashani, the day prior to Fuldol, Purnanand Swami and Krupanand Swami arrived in Gadhada. Maharaj was pleased to see them. He told his attendant, Mulji Brahmachari, “I wish to offer a meal to both the sadhus. Bring all the food items to Akshar Ordi. Then Shri Hari told the two sadhus to sit down facing the east. Maharaj sat on a low seat before them. He then told Brahmachari, “You serve *kansar* and I will

serve ghee.” Mulji Brahmachari served *kansar* in their wooden bowls and Maharaj served ghee to the brim. Both the sadhus looked at their bowls with surprise and resignation. Shri Hari prodded them, “The Kanbis of Jhalavad drink a bowlful of ghee like water. So, this is nothing compared to that. Therefore mix and eat it.” Then he added, “The devotees are eager to sponsor meals because they wish to feed all. Thus, eat the *kansar* by believing that you are not the body.”

Krupanand Swami followed an austere diet. His body was emaciated. So he was still looking at Maharaj for some concession. Shri Hari consoled, “Swami, eat what you can and leave the rest in your bowl. The devas are eager to have your *prasadi*.” And so both the sadhus ate what they could and felt blessed with Maharaj’s grace.

GLORY OF MANIFEST GOD

On that day Maharaj sat on a seat arranged before the mandir of Vasudev Narayan in Dada’s *darbar*. Maharaj had donned white clothes. Premanand Swami and other sadhus were singing bhajans. Shortly thereafter Shri Hari talked about the scriptures written by Veda Vyasji. He said, “In all his scriptures one finds the divine *lila* of God, his Sadhu and devotees. When a person realizes the glory of manifest God and his Bhakta-Sant in exactly the same way as he realizes the glory of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc. as well as the glory of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanuman, Uddhav, etc. – then nothing remains to be understood on the path of liberation. Whether this principle is understood after being told once, or after being told a thousand times; whether it is understood today or after a thousand years, there is no option but to understand it. A person who has such a firm conviction has grasped all the fundamental principles.”¹

(Contd. in next issue)

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

1. Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 21.



AT PEACE WITH HIMSELF

S*eva* was inseparable from Yogiji Maharaj's life. It was this lofty virtue of his with which he immensely pleased Swami Krishnacharandas in Junagadh. His services for Shastriji Maharaj in the construction of the mandirs at Sarangpur and Gondal were indeed matchless.

Yogiji Maharaj believed that *seva* was a

sure-fire way to *moksha* and the best form of worship. He liberally laced his discourses with the significance of *seva*. His dialogues with the devotees were also sprinkled with the glory of *seva*. Samples of such wisdom are as follows:

“We should readily engage in *seva* of all, no matter how young or old. Maharaj has largely focused on *seva*. One should make *seva* a way of life, just as Uka Khachar did. Unless one treats *seva* as an addiction, one would not like doing *seva*. If thoughts cross your mind which go against offering of *seva*, do not get dictated by them. Raise *seva* to this level. *Seva* is not to be done half-heartedly. An obsession with *seva* pleases God immensely.”

“Do not show off your *seva*. One should feel restless without doing *seva* even for as long as a wink of the eyes. Do *seva* in all humility, and don't use tricks to avoid it. One should do *seva* of one's own accord and should not have to be reminded of it time after time.”

“If you do *seva* of the devotees and sadhus, taking them as your spiritual fraternity, appreciating their stature as devotees and treating them as nothing short of divine, it amounts to worship. It is a mere action if you do *seva* with resignation. With faith, it turns into *seva*.”

“One conquers one's mind by doing *seva* of the Satpurush.”

“*Seva* done earnestly for a devotee is as good as a pilgrimage.”

“One who cleanses utensils, washes clothes and serves poor devotees, pursues the humblest form of worship which is highly valued. If one desires to attain *moksha*, one should shake off one's pride absolutely.”

“*Seva* is *jnan*, and *seva* is *bhakti*.”

“There is no other means like *seva* to please God. Offer your *seva* to each sadhu well, treating them as divine beings. Bear all the censure. If you bear a hundred dressing-downs, you will be rewarded with an equal number of virtues. One becomes virtuous if one cares for the devotees through thick and thin.”

“Pleased with the virtue of *seva*, the Satpurush rewards one with enlightenment.”

“According to Vachanamruts Gadhada II 7 and Gadhada II 59 one can rise spiritually only through *seva*.”

“Only the highly meritorious are blessed with chances of doing *seva* of the Sadhu in communion with God, the less meritorious are not that fortunate.”

“Greatness attaches to the humble, not to the commanding. Do *seva* for everyone.”

For Yogiji Maharaj *seva* was the best manifestation of dharma. The following incident testifies to this.

Yogiji Maharaj was travelling by train from Bochasan to Gondal in July 1956. Scores of devotees jostled with one another for his darshan at Vankaner, Than, Surendranagar, Viramgam and Anand railway stations. The scene impressed a youth travelling in the first class compartment. He came to Yogiji Maharaj for darshan.

Yogiji Maharaj enquired, “Who are you?”

The youth replied, “I am a native of Palanpur and live in Calcutta. We are tea merchants. I am going to London for higher studies.” After the introduction the youth asked Yogiji Maharaj, “I saw a lot of people come for your darshan at each station. I would like to know how you have achieved such glory?”

Yogiji Maharaj replied briefly, “It is by way of



cleaning utensils. It's all thanks to the grace of my guru Shastriji Maharaj.”

The reply left the youth wondering how washing dishes could ever make a mahatma of a man.

Often, Yogiji Maharaj put simple *seva* before everything else as the secret of spiritual growth.

Yogiji Maharaj always guided himself by the precedents of *seva* set by Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and other sadhus and devotees. He often narrated those episodes before the devotees:

“Parvatbhai agreed to work as Dada Kha-char's servant. Rajabhai ploughed the land for Parvatbhai. Muktanand Swami ploughed the land for Mulubha. How caringly and highly they thought of the devotees.

“Gunatitanand Swami was on his way to the Bhal region. There were thirty sadhus with him. It rained so heavily that everyone's shoes became heavy with mud stuck to them and they began to stick to the ground. Gunatitanand Swami tied the shoes of all the sadhus in a bundle and walked about 16 km, carrying 40 kg. Shastriji Maharaj walked about 200 km wading through four feet of water from Dholera to Navda in the rains to reach Gadhada to make *mesur*, a sweet food item, for Bhagatji Maharaj. A confectioner could well have been sent for to make it.” This is called faith. If one is faithful and loyal, one can face all odds.

“Shriji Maharaj himself washed the *kaupins* of sadhus. Muktanand Swami also did *seva* and collected food provisions from the villages around



Loj. Maharaj also made *rotla* for the sadhus.

“Once the Mahant of Tarnetar went to Junagadh for darshan of Gunatitanand Swami. Swami was then sweeping the grounds with a broom. He asked Swami where he could meet the Mahant. Swami said, “Go to the assembly hall. He will soon be there.”

On finishing his *seva*, Swami washed his hands and feet and went to the hall. On seeing him, the Mahant was surprised. He said, “You were just now sweeping the grounds!”

Then Swami explained, “Here, one who does a lowly job is great.”

“Once a devotee asked Gunatitanand Swami, “How did you achieve greatness?”

Swami replied, “By scrubbing clean the vessels of devotees, the tips of my nails have worn out. That is the way to greatness.”

When Akshar Mandir was under construction in Gondal, the Diwan of Gondal (the then Prime Minister of a princely state) came for darshan of Shastriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj was then delivering a discourse in Akshar Deri. He told Diwanji, “Shall I call Swami here?” But Diwanji said, “Swami is a great sadhu. Don’t call him here. I will go wherever he is.”

Diwanji went to where Shastriji Maharaj was. Shastriji Maharaj was preparing materials for plastering. When Diwanji saw this, he was overwhelmed by Swami’s humility. His respect for Swami grew.

Yogiji Maharaj narrated such episodes of *seva*

to the devotees. He himself practised it.

It was midnight in Sarangpur. All the sadhus were fast asleep. Shastriji Maharaj was stirred from his sleep. Waking up, he saw that a group of about seventy-five devotees had arrived.

Shastriji Maharaj welcomed them and enquired, “How come you’ve arrived at this hour?”

One of the devotees explained, “The bus broke down on our way to Kariyani. We have come to stay overnight.”

“You can stay here. This mandir is yours. Have you had dinner?” Shastriji Maharaj enquired.

“No, it’s half past one. We would not like to trouble you,” the devotees replied.

“Oh, it is no trouble at all! This is a timely *seva*.” Shastriji Maharaj said smilingly. He thought that since everyone was tired nobody would be willing to cook for so many at this hour. Then, Jogi readily came to mind. While the devotees were waiting, Shastriji Maharaj went to wake up Yogiji Maharaj. Hearing the footsteps, Bhagwatswarupdas Swami woke up, “Who is it?” he asked.

“I’m looking for Jogi. The devotees have just arrived. We have to arrange for their dinner,” Shastriji Maharaj said.

Bhagwatswarupdas Swami recognized Shastriji Maharaj’s voice. He said, “He has gone to bed at 1 o’clock after doing the rosary. As usual, he will wake up at 3 o’clock. He does not sleep in the afternoon. It would be better if he gets rest now.”

“But Bhagwatswarupdas, who else can help me at this hour. Only Jogi can do it, so, let’s wake him up,” Shastriji Maharaj argued. Pity was palpable in his voice.

“How about treating them with food in the morning?” Bhagwatswarupdas Swami suggested.

The dialogues stirred Yogiji Maharaj out of his slumber as he was a light sleeper. He stood up before Shastriji Maharaj with folded hands. Shastriji Maharaj was very pleased. He said, “Oh, Jogi! We have to cook dinner for the devotees.”

And Yogiji Maharaj got ready for *seva* even at that late hour. The clock struck three when the devotees finished eating. Even at this odd hour, having done tiring kitchen chores, Jogi looked as fresh as ever and his fervour for service did not look faded even one bit.

Seva clung to Jogi's persona like his better nature. Even when the guru had not instructed him to do *seva*, he felt as enthusiastic to do it. He spoke to the youths on his love for *seva* on 3 June 1959:

"I cared for and offered *seva* to as many as 40 *sadgurus*. Also, in Sarangpur, I used to pack lunch for the devotees of Navagam, Mojidad and others who were to leave early the next morning. I would wake up at 2.30 at night and make about 150 *rotla*. I would get jaggery and pickles from the sadhu in charge of the kitchen store at night, so that I didn't have to wake him up in the morning. By 4 o'clock in the morning, I would get the lunch ready for the departing groups of devotees, with *rotla* and jaggery tied neatly in a saffron cloth.

"Even if I were to die right now, it would be with peace in the heart of my heart. It is because I have served great sadhus and have pleased them all. That is the reason I feel peace.

"If I were asked to cook today, I could cook food for fifty persons and serve them all and still I wouldn't get tired."

Yogiji Maharaj was 70 when he shared this account of his zeal for *seva* with the youths. On another occasion he again expressed his zeal for service, saying, "Do *seva* well. Only the fortunate get such chances. I have served for 40 years. I have never had my meal first. I would make do with whatever was left and then would have dinner at night. Serving earns one great merit."

Yogiji Maharaj always felt keen and excited about doing *seva*. Once, he went to the bathroom of a mandir in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. There, he found a pile of laundry left by the youths. He



locked the door from inside and washed all the clothes. It was a pleasure for him. Only when he emerged from the bathroom did everyone realize that he had washed all the clothes.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj visited Narayan Ghat, a holy riverbank in Ahmedabad, with some sadhus and devotees. There, Kothari Babubhai was changing clothes after his bath. Yogiji Maharaj picked up his wet dhoti, saying, "Let me wring it for you." Hearing this, Babubhai felt dazed. He tightened his grip and snatched the dhoti from him, saying, "Why should you do that?"

Yogiji Maharaj humbly said, "It is my great fortune to help devotees like you on whom Shastriji Maharaj has showered his grace."

On the occasion of Shastriji Maharaj's 85th birthday in Atladra, C.T. Patel came from Mombasa, Kenya. It was 11.00 p.m. C.T. Patel was trying to find space to sleep, but to no avail. It was 12 midnight by the time he reached the kitchen, still trying to find a place to sleep. He found Yogiji Maharaj sitting awake with a rosary in hand. Yogiji Maharaj asked him, "Have you not gone to sleep yet?"

C.T. Patel enquired, "I will do that but how about you? Why do you remain awake after a tiring day?"

Yogiji Maharaj replied with a smile, "Some devotees arrive late at night for the festival. They should be looked after as well." Then he found a place for C.T. Patel to sleep.



Once, Yogiji Maharaj arrived at Ramod at the invitation of the local devotee. He called this village a *gokuliyu* (homely) village. There were many devotees. So, Matam Swami started preparing for lunch while Yogiji Maharaj was discoursing to the devotees.

The kitchen was not airy and the firewood was fresh. When the firewood was lit, it produced lots of smoke. Subsequently, Matam Swami's eyes started burning. He left the cooking and went upstairs to sleep. When Yogiji Maharaj went to the kitchen after the discourse, Matam Swami was not there. He went upstairs and found Matam Swami sleeping with his face covered with a quilt. When Yogiji Maharaj enquired, he replied brazenly, "I won't cook. It's very smoky." Yogiji Maharaj told him lovingly, "We have to offer food to Thakorji on time." But Matam Swami got irritated. He said, "You may cook if you want to offer *thal*. I won't go there."

Then Yogiji Maharaj started cooking himself. Soon, it was all ready. Mohanbhai, a devotee,

enquired about Matam Swami on finding Yogiji Maharaj cooking.

Yogiji Maharaj's eyes were red with smoke. He said with a smile, "After a long time I have had the opportunity to prepare *thal* for Thakorji. Matam Swami is very kind that he offered me this *seva*."

Yogiji Maharaj felt keen to do *seva* even in his old age. The following event took place in Gondal when he was 76 years old.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, Swamishri was lying awake in bed. The attendant sadhus in his service were asleep. He left the bed without any help, put his slippers on and walked to the back of the room to go to the bathroom. Looking out of the window, he saw garbage in the garden. Then he went to the kitchen to go to the garden. He covered some food bowls lying uncovered. He also covered an earthen pitcher and closed a dripping tap of water. Then descending the steps, he went to the garden and picked up a broom. He walked carefully, since there was no one to support him. He gathered mango skin and leaves lying scattered under an almond tree. On hearing the rustle of leaves, the attendant sadhus were awakened. They did not find Swamishri in bed. They rushed out to find Yogiji Maharaj sweeping with a broom. They took it from him and prayed, "Bapa, please don't do this again."

But Yogiji Maharaj reacted with his fond desire, "I very much feel like doing *seva*, but no one allows me to do so."

Yogiji Maharaj had a constant longing for *seva*. He didn't get an opportunity for it because of his old age. He often expressed his uneasiness about this. Once, while wearing his dhoti after his bath, he said, "It was I who made Ada's shrine. I was then a disciple. Now, I have a higher degree. I have become a guru. What shall I become in the time to come?" Then he replied himself, "Now, I would like to be a disciple; so that I can wash the dishes. There is no joy in becoming a guru."

On yet another occasion, 28 January 1964, he awoke from sleep all of a sudden and told the attendant sadhu, “I want to go to wash the dishes.”

The attendant sadhu informed, “Others are doing that.” Then he slept for some time and then woke up again suddenly, saying, “I feel like washing dishes. Take me there. How fortunate it is to wash the dishes of the devotees. I strongly feel like offering my *seva* to the devotees.”

Yogiji Maharaj was 74 then and suffering from several ailments.

Considering his age and deteriorating health, the sadhus and devotees would not allow him to do any *seva*. The urge to serve began to appear in his dreams. While having his meal on 1 October 1969, he said, “I had a dream last night. I went to the kitchen. There was nobody. It was 10 a.m. I wondered why lunch was not ready yet. Then I made chapatis out of 10 kg of flour on two pans in just half an hour. Balmukund Swami was helping. Then I woke up.”

One afternoon, after having rest, he shared his dream, “Today I was thinking of my days in Junagadh. I went to Jaga Bhagat’s room for darshan. Then I had darshan of the place where Krishnaji Ada used to give discourses. Then I came to Gondal. There, I went to the cowshed with Daji Bapu and Jayanti junior. Three to four days’ dung had collected. I suggested to Daji Bapu, ‘Let’s clean the place.’ But Daji Bapu said, ‘We will get it done by a servant.’

“So I suggested, ‘I am that servant. Why should we find someone else to do it?’ Then I and Jayanti took two baskets, collected the dung and emptied it on a pile of garbage. Then we cleaned the cowshed and spread thrashed stalks of wheat there so that it didn’t feel wet. Then the cows came and sat on it. The devotees also came and finding it spick and span, enquired, ‘Who did it?’

“I told them, ‘The gods came to do it – Indra and Brahma did it.’”

“Once, Daji Bapu was going to throw away a basketful of dry, unused babul sticks. But I advised, ‘Don’t throw them away.’ Then I explained that once I went on a *padhramani* (house visit) to an apartment on the fifth floor in Mumbai on the day of a fast and received just one rupee and twenty-five paise as donation. That is how we get money. So we can’t afford to throw away babul sticks. Buy fresh ones for Thakorji, but for us we have to keep the ones that remain and soak them in water to last for at least three days.”

On 1 January 1970, he shared his dream, “Shastriji Maharaj offered me his darshan today. I went to a village. I don’t recollect its name. Shastriji Maharaj was with me. There were some devotees also. Shastriji Maharaj asked me to serve a glassful of water to all. Then I began to give filtered water to all from a small earthen pot. It was already filtered, but I again filtered it myself. Shastriji Maharaj was seated on a chair wearing a *pagh*. He was very pleased to see me. Then you (Swami Ishwarcharandas) came and my eyes opened.”

Yogiji Maharaj shared another dream. It was early morning on 9 January 1970. He recollected, “I had a dream. In Chansad, Mota Swami kneaded about 10 kg of wheat flour into a dough. Then he went to sleep. When I went to the kitchen, the dough was lying there. I asked Mota Swami about it but he said, ‘I am down with fever.’ Then I told him, ‘You should have informed me earlier.’ Then I rolled and baked all the chapatis and cooked 10 kg of vegetables.”

Whoever comes to know of Yogiji Maharaj’s lofty virtue of *seva*, would find the following words echoing in mind, “With thousands of followers, if one still acts as a meek servant of them, take it for granted that either God has entered his person or he is God himself.” ◆

(Translated from Gujarati text
written by Mohanlal Patel)

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ AND MY STUDIES



Motibhai Prabhudas Patel had moved to farm from Chansad to Rajnagar. His son, Shantilal, who also moved there with other family members, did not begin studying till the age of nine. Today, that Shantilal, now known as Pramukh Swami Maharaj, helps thousands of students to gain a better education. Swamishri's narration of his studies brings to life a bygone era. The following is a collated account of Swamishri's narrations about his studies on different occasions.

First we lived in Rajnagar for nine years. It is a small village, so there were no schools there. If anyone wished to study, they would have to go to Savli. But I did not go there. Savli was regarded as part of the '6½ villages' group. Some Desai families from Bhausahbni Khadki in Nadiad had gone to live there. Some had gone to Vaso. A few families from Sojitra had also come to Rajnagar.

There was no studying to do in Rajnagar. So, what did I do all day? Walk around and play. When we young children got together, we played.

Then, when I was nine we moved back [to Chansad]. So, when I was nine I began studies. In my class, there were one or two who were nine years old. The others were 6, 7 or 8 years of age.

Despite the two-three year age gap, we all got on well. They had fun and we also had fun. We never felt that 'they are younger' and 'we are older'. The teacher also taught everyone well. He didn't distinguish between young and old.

Children are naturally mischievous, but I was not like that. I mixed with all and was friendly to all. With the young or old, from the beginning I was never mischievous. I played with them, but nobody troubled me. Sometimes I did according to their wishes, and sometimes they did according to my wishes. By mixing like this, there was never a problem.

The school headmaster [in Chansad] was Chhaganbhai. He was a relative of Dr Devendra Jani of Khambholaj. The other teacher was a Muslim named Haribhai. He taught very well. Other teachers came and left. There were no Khoja residents in the village. There was a Muslim area. Haribhai lived there.

We had to climb up to the school classroom. We sat in the lobby. On the left was the headmaster's (room) and to the right were the (classrooms of) teachers of standards 3 and 4. The rest were in the lobby. We called it a *dharmashala* (guest-house), since when people from other villages came for a wedding, they would lodge in our school. The lobby was covered. There was a compound in the middle and buildings on either side.

In maths, we were taught multiplication tables. At that time I memorized *paya*, *adadha*, *dodha*, *savaya*, *adiya* and *utha*. 'Jetlā rupiye man etlā āne adhisher.'¹ Chunilal of Bamangam and I memorized this. The two of us were always together. In the exams, we were the toppers – either he was first or I was. From the beginning, I was near the top. He had come from Bamangam to study, since his mother's family lived here [in

Chansad]. I got good marks in all subjects, but more in maths and history.

The school timing was from 11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. On Saturdays we finished at four o'clock. In school we were taught the poem 'O *Ishwar bhajie tane...*' ('O God, we worship you...'). Since then, till today, I remember those words. In those days, in studies, God's name, God's virtues were taught, so that left an impression. Nowadays, you cannot even mention it. We studied such poems by Dalpatram.

From the rear of the school, we could go to the lake on the outskirts to bathe, if we wanted to. When we went there, we bathed on the Bhathiji Chotaro side. In front of the Hanumanji Mandir, we went to the hollow tamarind tree and jumped from the ghat there to bathe. By plunging into the lake, you learn to swim. We didn't go daily to the lake to bathe, only sometimes.

In the monsoon, when the lake filled up, the village head (*mukhi*) would go to honour it and perform *pujan*. He would throw a coconut into the lake. The children would compete to see who could retrieve that coconut first from the water. A boy called Chhotiyo Bhil would always win. Though, once or twice I found it first!

At that time, the main activities were studying, going to the mandirs, bathing [in the lake] and playing. I did not go much to the farm. At home, we had a bullock-cart, but I did not ride it much. I rode it occasionally to learn. He [father] would be seated next to me and would give it to me to ride if the road was good. At the time when I was studying, Akshar Swami, Ghanshyam Swami and Balmukund Swami would come [to Chansad] for discourses and to collect *dharmado*. I would listen to their *katha*, sit with them and serve them.

In Samvat 1992 (1936 CE), I passed the fifth standard (Gujarati medium) of the Gaekwad system taught in the village. They used to teach the sixth standard there also, but stopped the year

1. Rhymes which teach mathematical calculations in a practical way useful to little-educated villagefolk.



I cleared the fifth! During that year's [summer] vacation, Akshar Swami and other sadhus came [to Chansad]. He told me to travel with them since I had holidays and that they will arrange for me to study in Bochasan. So, I left to travel with them.

Vicharan with Akshar Swami was good. Akshar Swami would discourse and take care of me. Balmukund Swami would also look after me. All three did *katha*.

We travelled to Sarsa, Navli, Sankarda and then reached Bochasan. He had told me that I would be able to study in the sixth standard in Bochasan. When we enquired there, we learnt that the school taught the British system and I had studied in the Gaekwad system. They said that if I wanted to study, they would put me in the fourth standard. So, I decided not to join.

At that time, I had Shastriji Maharaj's darshan for the first time in Bochasan. I would sit near Shastriji Maharaj and listen to his talks. Then he told me, "Since you want to study, we will teach you Sanskrit." That day, Shastriji Maharaj gave me a lesson from the *Shabdharupavali* to memorize: '*Ramaha, Ramau, Ramāhā*'. He even gave that

lesson to Hariswarupdas of Chuda. We both sat down in the *dharmashala* to memorize it. In 1½ hours I memorized the lesson and went to Swami. He said, "Recite it." So, I recited it. Swami was very pleased and said, "You are capable of studying well. You are capable of becoming a scholar and a *shastri*. You are truly intelligent." That day I got Swami's blessings and pleasure (*rajipo*), and darshan for the first time. I was 14 years old.

At the time, Harivallabh Swami, or some other sadhu, was to study in Petlad and somebody was to be assigned to stay with him. A *shastri* or teacher lived there. So Swami decided, "Let us send him [me] there also to study. He will study there and get trained." So, I didn't start the sixth standard.

But, in Petlad, the *shastri* was out of town and it was not known when he would return. We would have to stay in the *pathshala* to study. Swami said, "It's not convenient to stay in the *pathshala*. We will send you for studies when we make arrangements to stay at Purushottamdas's place." With this, Swami took me to Sunav. From there, we travelled to a few places and then reached Bochasan. We stayed there for the *samaiyo*. There, they [the family] came and said that arrangements had been made for me to study in the school. They spoke about it all to Swami as well. They said to Swami, "Let us take him for now. We will educate him and send him." Swami said, "Good. No problem."

It had been about five months since I had left with Akshar Swami for *vicharan*. I had left with him after the exams in March. I returned in Shravan after celebrating Guru Punam.

I had gone with them to study (in Bochasan). But when I reached there, the arrangements fell through. So I went back (to Chansad).

My admission into the sixth standard didn't happen, so Shankarlal said, "Come to Padra to study English." Mulji Umed and Umed of Goriyad were also studying in the fourth there. In this way, Shankarlal took me to Padra and I

began to study there.

When I began studying in Padra, I did not have a bicycle, but went on Shankarlal's cycle. When it was not possible to go with him, I walked. Then after a few months we bought a cycle. At the time, a new Hercules cycle cost 30-35 rupees and a second-hand cycle cost 15-20 rupees. We bought a second-hand one for about 15-17 rupees.

Several of us cycled to school together. Usually, it was with Mulji and Shankarlal. Sometimes, I would seat someone at the back if required.

In Padra, we did not keep our cycles in the school. Opposite the school was the home of Rambhai Pithavala of Vaso. He was connected to our village and we knew him, so we left our cycles there. Also, we left our lunchboxes there for safekeeping. In the lunchbox I would have *dhebra*, *vada* and *athanu* (pickles). Sometimes, there would be sweet *puris*.

In Padra, the teacher was Mohanbhai Kotia. He was from the South. He liked me because I studied well. I had more interest in maths and history.

After returning home from school, I would do my homework. I went to Chunilal's house. The two of us would sit together to read and study. If it got late at night, I would sleep there and return home in the morning.

I did homework myself. To write, we had a pen and slate, as well as books and notebooks. We bought the books from the school. They were also available in Padra and Vadodara.

At school, I didn't engage with others too much except for studies. In Padra, if there was a quarrel between two students, I never took sides.

Even at home, from the beginning, my habit was to keep everything neat and clean. From a young age, I kept everything tidy. So, at school, if someone's bag was haphazardly kept, I would tell him to put it properly.

There was no annual day celebration at school, but when allowed, the students played. There



were no competitions with other schools either.

For entertainment, the main thing was devotion to God. There was no radio then, but we played the gramophone. Shopkeepers would play the gramophone, so we listened while passing by. Sometimes, the film box came to the village. It cost one, two or three paise to look. There were three separate boxes and a film was placed in each one. They would say aloud, "See Mumbai, see Delhi," so the children would go to see. I also went to see.

India's Freedom Movement had begun, but at that time it had not reached the small villages. It was more active in the cities and larger towns. In the villages, little was known about it. We knew that Gandhiji was active in the movement. No leaders would come and speak in the villages.

In my mind, from the beginning, I wanted to become a sadhu. Shantilal and I talked about going to Rishikesh and the Himalayas to meet the great mahatmas and stay with them. And, because of satsang, the family would also tell me to become a sadhu and please Shastriji Maharaj. So, the thoughts of going to Haridwar and all this were together.

Then (in V.S. 1995, Aso), Shastriji Maharaj came [to Chansad]. At the time, it was my second year of studying in the British system. Swami asked [my father], "Give your son to us." He said, "Very well."

When he asked me, I said that I wanted to



study English and I had taken admission for it. At the time, Aksharjivan Swami of Pij was with him. Swamishri said, “You want to study English, don’t you? Well, Aksharjivandas also wants to study English. In Ahmedabad there is Vinayak Rao Saheb’s school and Khengarji is a teacher (there). We will get him to teach you.”

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

I said, “I will go with Swami after the exams.”

Then Swami said, “I am staying here. Your exams will finish in a few days. So, we will go together.” Then he placed his hands on my head, stroked his hands on my cheeks, blessed me and said, “You will study well and become a good scholar.” (However, Shastriji Maharaj had to leave Chansad on some urgent matter.)

Later, I got Swami’s letter instructing me to leave home. That was on Aso *vad ekadashi*, Samvat 1995. I went from Bhaili, Sankarda to Bochasan and from there with Nirgundas Swami to Nadiad and then Ahmedabad.

Swami used to come to Babubhai’s home for the *ekadashi* celebration. That day, I had a high

fever and was sleeping in the corner. I couldn’t even speak. Babubhai told Swami, “Shanti has come and he has a fever.” Swami got up and came to me. He stroked his hand on my head for a few minutes and the fever went. In the morning I was well and strong.

Then Swami said, “Today is *ekadashi* and I want to give you *diksha* and make you a *parshad*.”

I asked, “What about the studies? You had talked about studying English at Khengarjibhai’s school?” Swami said, “We will talk about all that later. After all this is done, we will talk to Khengarjibhai about all the arrangements.”

I said, “Fine.” Then he sat me opposite and said to Babubhai, “Bring some kumkum, rice and sugar crystals.” I was wearing a shirt and trousers. Swami gave me some cloths and said, “From now on wear a *dhotiyu* and this cloth as an upper garment.”

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

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

Then Swami said, “Shastri Vitthalram of Bhadran is ready and we have a mandir there. Aksharjivandas, Brahmachari, Harishankar and him [me] – these four can go there to study.” Then we went there to study.

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

Previously, Swami had told me to study English from Khengarjibhai at Vinayakbhai's School. So, when we went to Ahmedabad, I thought that I would be studying English.

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

I said, "I haven't seen either Gondal or Sarangpur." Swami said, "Come on, I will take you everywhere."

So we reached Gondal. Before we reached Gondal, there were no plans to give me *bhagvati diksha*. I was not decided about taking *diksha* and Shastriji Maharaj had not decided about giving *diksha*. But then he told Harijivandas to explain to me about becoming a sadhu. So, Harijivandas and I sat at the riverside next to the old dining area till late in the night. I said, "But Shastriji Maharaj has told me to study English." Then I said, "However, if Swami says so I will become a sadhu." So, at night, Harijivandas entered Swami's room and told him that I had agreed to become a sadhu. Swami sat up and asked me, "You want to become a sadhu?" I said yes. He was pleased and patted me. Then he got up and embraced me and Harijivandas. Swami told him, "Tell Yogiji Maharaj not to do the *mahapuja* early, but to start it when I come after my bath."

In the morning, he gave me *diksha*. Then Swami said, "There is a good pandit here who will teach you."

Shastriji Maharaj was very keen for me to study. So, the next day, he called that pandit and my Sanskrit studies in Gondal began.

Swami instructed me to study Sanskrit instead of English. If I had insisted on the (English) language, then Swami would not have been pleased, and I would not feel at peace. When the matter was discussed at night, I felt that I should drop my insistence and do what Swami says.

Swami instructed me to study Sanskrit in Gondal and left after two-three days for *vicharan*. I stayed in Gondal, studied Sanskrit and



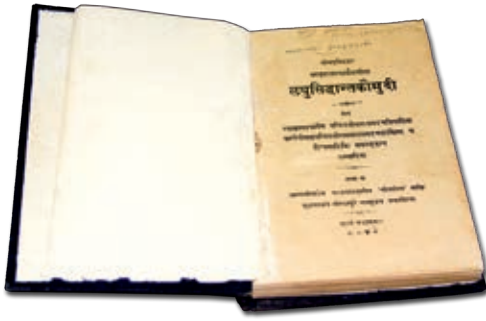
did *seva*. I also learnt the kritans and Swamini Vato as guided by Yogiji Maharaj. This was his inclination from the beginning. He insisted on waking up early. I always went to *mangala arti*.

In Gondal, the *shastri* came at about ten o'clock to teach us. He taught us for about 1-1½ hours. Then I would go to the *arti*. After lunch, I would rest a little. Then I performed *pradakshinas*, read, studied Sanskrit, sang bhajans and attended *sandhya arti*.

When I was in Gondal, there was electricity. But, usually, at night we worked under lantern light. First, there were *divos*, then *fanas* (oil lamp) and then petromax (kerosene lamp). In the big *samaiyas*, we hung petromaxes.

After a few weeks, Shastriji Maharaj returned to Gondal and we went with him to Sarangpur. The *shastri* in Gondal taught well, but I had a wish to travel with Swami. So Swami said, "OK. He's new and instead of getting him depressed, better to take him along." So, the studies in Gondal stopped and I went with Swami to Sarangpur.

We didn't stay long in Sarangpur. We did *vicharan* mainly in Gujarat for about 5-6 months.



Memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's student days: *Laghu-siddhant kaumudi* book with Swamishri's names and notes in his own handwriting.

Then, when we came to Bochasan, he told me to study in Bhadran (1940 CE). Hariswarup Swami of Chuda was with me there.

After arranging for our studies, Shastriji Maharaj travelled in Charotar. He went to Kanam, Ahmedabad, everywhere. He travelled a lot. He would stay 2-3 days in the mandir and then set off again.

In Bhadran, Harivallabh Swami and Gopinath Swami had studied before us. Kashidas, the son of Parsottambhai of Anand who had become a sadhu, also studied in Bhadran. Vitthalram Shastri was there from the beginning. The *path-shala* was in Bhadrakali, built for Brahmin boys to study Sanskrit.

In Bhadran, we studied mainly the *Margop-deshika* and 2nd-3rd *sargs* of the *Raghuvansh*. In Bhadran, there were no worries about paying the tuition fees. The devotees were well off, so they paid him. We stayed in Bhadran mandir and arranged for our own food. We begged for alms in the village on *sud* 12 and *vad* 12 and that was enough for us.

When we went for alms Gunvant and Ghanshyam, the young sons of Joshibhai, would come with us. Ishwarbhai – father of Jaykrishna, and Madhubhai and his brother would also come. Usually, we went to the homes of *satsangis* to beg for alms. We went to the alleys where the devotees lived. Also, to where Dahyakaka lived and to the station where Somabhai lived. Wherever the devotees lived, we went there. But others also

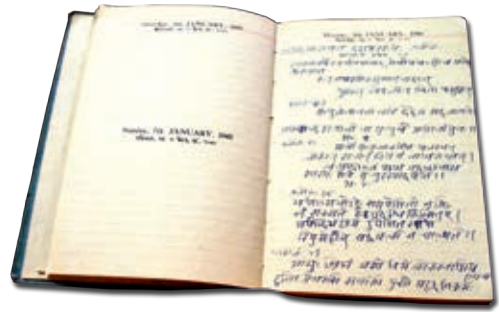
gave alms.

We would stand in the alley and hail, “*Narayan hare... Sachchidanand Prabhu!*” People would realize that sadhus have come for alms. So, the boys with us would go and bring back whatever was given. We had separate *jholis* (cloth bags) on our shoulders and would put things in them.

Mostly, Aksharjivandas came with me to beg for alms. Purushottamanand Brahmachari would also come often. In Khambhat, Aksharjivandas and I would go. Ambaram Bhagat lived in Bhadran mandir all the time. As a *parshad*, he performed *seva* and puja there. He was old, but was very devout and did good *katha*. He was firm in observing *niyam*-dharma. He was not arrogant, but his *nishtha* was staunch.

At the time, a Brahmin named Jamnadas was studying from a *shastri* at Bhadrakali. Once, I thought that if he had other shastras or texts, I could read them. So, he got me a text from the village. I was reading it and Ambaram Bhagat saw me. He asked, “Who brought it?” Then he called Jamnadas and told him off, “Why did you bring another shastra to the sadhu? Gunatitanand Swami has said that one should not believe anything except the Vachanamrut to be of value.”

Ambaram Bhagat sang old bhajans very well. His *raag* and rhythm were good. He was a Nayak from Kadi. He was stationed in Nagasar mandir for *seva*-puja. There, through Bhudharbhai, he accepted our *nishtha*. From there, he was posted to Bhadran. He spread satsang to many.



Swamishri himself covered the *Chanakya Sutra* book with brown paper (left) and a Shrimad Bhagvat *shlok* written by Shastriji Maharaj in his diary

The *shastri* who taught us in Bhadran was the best. Very jolly. He would humorously teach us the *shloks*. He would say it and we memorized it. “*Ekātapatram jagataha prabhutvam...*” King Dilip was told to worship a cow to beget a son. The king was serving the cow when, in the jungle, a lion attacked the cow. This *shlok* was spoken then. We were taught this in Bhadran. The *shastri* taught us for about 1½ hours each lesson. Sometimes, two hours.

In Bhadran, there were four of us studying: Purushottamanand Brahmachari, Aksharjivandas, Hariswarupdas and me.

I was the youngest. We cooperated to do the work and so disputes were resolved. When we were studying in Khambhat, the Brahmachari and Vartal sadhu would not go outside to fetch water. So, Aksharjivan and I would bring it. In the same way, we would wash the utensils. He was totally unwilling, so instead of prolonging the argument, we just did the work. Hariswarupdas of Chuda was aged and he was the *acharya* of Chuda. I would say, “I will do the work on your behalf.” This would resolve the situation.

In Bhadran, he (Hariswarupdas) lived on the balcony. When the *shastri* came he would sit there to teach. Hariswarupdas would tell us that none of us should come there. After all, he was an *acharya*. We did as he said, so there were no quarrels. The other sadhus would say, “Let us go up there to read. Why should he say no?” I would explain to them, “What’s the need to go there if

he doesn’t like it? We are studying down here. If by going up there causes him distress, then he will be disturbed and we will be disturbed also. So, let us stay down here and study.”

We studied in Bhadran for about 6-7 months. After studying in Bhadran, Swami instructed us to study in Khambhat. He sent us three sadhus to Khambhat to study (in 1942 CE). In Khambhat, there was a sadhu from Vartal studying with us as well. When Shastriji Maharaj told us to study in Khambhat, he said that he would arrange to pay for the *shastri*, but that we would have to manage the rest. Shastriji Maharaj would just send the money for the pandit’s fees. We would go to Tarapur, Nar and other places as well to beg for alms. The sadhu from Vartal was very embarrassed to beg for alms. He would not come with us to beg for alms. One day he had to come, but he would not say “*Narayan hare... Sachchidanand prabhu*”. He even placed his *jholis* on the shoulders of the boys. I would hail “*Narayan hare...*” but he would never say it. He just stood there, so I would speak the rest.

Our teacher in Khambhat, Bhainarayan Shastri was very temperamental. We could not ask him any questions. If we had any queries and asked him, he would say, “You must not ask me anything.” He told us, “I spend 1½ hours at home preparing and if you ask questions, my link will break and cause problems. So, if you want to study, you must not ask questions. Just study what I teach you.” If we asked questions, he would

instantly get angry and say, “Why do you doubt? Why do you ask questions?”

Angrily, he would stop teaching and stand up. But then we would bow at his feet and request him to sit down again. Once, the sadhu from Vartal, who had studied some Sanskrit, questioned him and the *shastri* was upset. He suddenly got up and said, “You are not going to study. You will not learn anything. You should keep respect when the guruji is teaching.” Angrily, he began to leave. We bowed down to him, did *dandvats* and begged for forgiveness. It took half-an-hour to persuade him to come back up. He taught well, but was very arrogant.

After studying for a while here, Swami instructed us to study in Ahmedabad (December 1942). So, we lived at Amblivali Pol and studied – Purushottamanand Brahmachari, Aksharjivandas and me. Here, Girijashankar Shastri taught us. He was also very good. We begged for alms in Amblivali Pol. We studied here for about 1½ years.

While studying in Ahmedabad, we had to give one exam (in 1943) at the Petlad *pathshala*. We went from Ahmedabad to give the *Laghu-kaumudi* and *Raghuvarsh* exams. We had written a letter to Swami and he had permitted us to go. Swami had written to Narayandas in Petlad and told him to make arrangements for us. So, Aksharjivan and I went. From Anand, Gopinath, brother of Prabhudas Kothari of Vartal, also came. That exam was set from Kashi. Because he joined from Anand, we talked about Shastriji Maharaj. He (Gopinath) was from Gana, so his family had respect for Shastriji Maharaj. His family was originally from Bocharan, but his father Bakorbhai was not well off so he arranged for his boys to study in Vartal. We passed that exam.

Swami insisted greatly on studying well and becoming scholars. If any sadhu studied Sanskrit, Swami would be very pleased. Sadhus were kept in Sarangpur to study. There was a *pathshala*. Previously, in place of the Acharya’s Haveli, there was an old *dharma-shala* with a balcony. On the balcony, eight students – Shrijiwarupdas,

Gopinathdas, Harivallabhdas, Hariswarupdas and others – studied. Sakar Shastri from Botad came to teach. Shastriji Maharaj paid him 25 rupees. So, even amid such financial difficulties, he arranged for the sadhus to study.

Shrijiwarupdas had been sent to Kashi to study, but he liked it there, so he didn’t return. So, Manibhai Naranbhai went to bring him back. Everyone had advised that Shastriji Maharaj be sent to Kashi [to study], but Bhagatji Maharaj said, “It is better that he stays here. He clears inner doubts through his discourses, so I don’t want to send him.” Shastriji Maharaj did not want Shrijiwarupdas (to go to Kashi), but since others insisted, he allowed him to go there. He never talked about sending us to Kashi. He made all the arrangements here (in Gujarat).

I studied as instructed by Swami, but I was not able to study the way he had wished. I studied *Laghu-siddhant kaumudi*, *Rajuvansh* and upto *shatling* in *Siddhant-kaumudi*. Then, I travelled with Swami.

Swami wished for us to learn the Bhagvat. So we studied several *adhyays* from it.

After we had studied this much, Swami wrote a postcard, addressing me as ‘Shastri Narayanswarupdas’.

I said, “I have not become a Shastri and yet why have you written it?”

He said, “Since you’ve started *kaumudi*, you’re a Shastri.”

So, since then after Swami wrote it, I became Shastri Narayanswarupdas. I used to write Sadhu Narayanswarupdas, but Swami changed it.

After serving as Sarangpur *kothari* for three years, Swami instructed me to study again in Ahmedabad (1949 CE).

I didn’t have the wish to study English from the beginning. But, when I didn’t get to study the sixth standard, Shankarlal said, “Let’s study English.” So I had the thought. Then Swami said about studying English at Vinayakbhai’s school.

(Contd. on pg. 57)

OBEYING THE GURU'S AGNA IS THE PATH OF PROGRESS



Whenever Pramukh Swami Maharaj has been asked about his progress, he has always firmly replied: "By observing the guru's agna and by the guru's grace." The commands of guru Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj he followed in his youth are the main reason for his progress. The following is a collection of his memories of obeying guru Shastriji Maharaj's wishes...

Everybody wants to progress, but the path of progress is the guru. If you act and serve according to the guru's *agna*, you earn his blessings. And that is the path of progress.

In Shastriji Maharaj's time, all the devotees served him well with mind, body and wealth and obeyed Swami's *agna*. So, he was pleased with all. God and his Sadhu shower their blessings on all. By always maintaining *divyabhav* towards them and firmly observing their *agnas*, they are naturally pleased.

Shastriji Maharaj's nature was such that he was pleased with all who cooperated. In Shastriji Maharaj's time, Vajeshankar Mistry (Sompura) of Vadhwan was



active in the mandir constructions. He was very intelligent. Any stone he had sculpted and lifted up to the *shikhar* would fit exactly – no adjustments were necessary. Just by looking he could tell, “Your pillar is not aligned or the beam does not fit properly.” He was that good. His calculations were perfect. But if Shastriji Maharaj wanted to make even a slight change, he would refuse, “There can be no change in what I’ve done.”

However, Swami was pleased with Liladhar Mistry (Sompura), since he was cooperative. He also had good knowledge of the *shilpashastras*, but whenever Shastriji Maharaj asked for a change, he would accommodate it.

Basically, the biggest thing is to cooperate with the great Sadhu. If one tries to be overwise and use one’s intelligence, then one suffers. And if one equates the great Sadhu with others, that causes problems. Thinking, ‘He is good’ and ‘The other is also good’ can lead one to fall into *kusang*. So, by giving up all one’s wishes and doing what he says, Swami is pleased. If one enthusiastically and affectionately does as Swami commands, then he will be pleased.

If God and guru are not constantly remembered then everything falls apart. When we have come to please him, we should endeavour to do so in every task. Whether we are with him or far away, keep a constant awareness of how he can be pleased, and how his wishes can be properly practiced in life. With this thought, endeavour to do what he says. Be aware that instead of the task we have come to accomplish something else does not take its place. Why have we come here? Have we come for honour, status or powers? No, we have come to please him. So, do whatever he says at the time. The goal is to please him, so wherever he sends us and whatever he tells us to do, must be done. Swami’s work was such that the awareness naturally remained of what we have come here to do. We have become sadhus for him. So, by doing what he says there will be no problems.

I have enjoyed the company of Shastriji Maharaj. He kept me with him, even in *samaiyas* and I have benefited from and enjoyed his company. Also, wherever he instructed, I went. In my mind, I wished to stay with Swami, but it was not always Swami’s wish. And when other *sevaks* were serving I would not interfere.

I did whatever *seva* Shastriji Maharaj instructed me to do. He assigned me the *seva* of *kothari*. But that did not mean just sitting on a seat. Gunatitanand Swami used to say, “For us, whoever sweeps the floor is mahant.” Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj also used to sweep the floors, and serve in the kitchen, farm, construction and other activities. As a *kothari*, you cannot remain seated, you have to engage in the (assigned) work.

When I became a sadhu, the *dharmashala* of Sarangpur mandir was being built. At that time they made *chuno* by adding water to the lime and then mixing it by pounding. *Chuno* was also used to plaster. Also, the *chuno* would be spread out on the floor and then pounded manually. Swami would engage everyone in *seva*. If Vinayak Rao

sahib had come from Ahmedabad, Swami would also get him to pound the mixture. The more the mixture is pounded, the stronger it becomes. I also got the *seva* of pounding the *chuno*.

Before Swami placed me to serve as *kothari* in Sarangpur, he had kept me for construction *seva* in Atladra for 8-10 months (1945 CE).

In Atladra, Shastriji Maharaj did not employ any labourers. There were many workshops outside Vadodara. So, all the labourers would go there to work and no male labourers would come to our mandir. So, instead of the men, women labourers would come. They would come on the (morning) nine o'clock train from Padra towards the Vishwamitri River. Shastriji Maharaj wanted the work to start at 7.30 a.m. But the labourer women would come late and then after smoking *bidis* would start work. At about 11.30 they would slow down and loiter. For all these reasons, Shastriji Maharaj said, "Never call any labourers." So, the sadhus and devotees served. Purushottambhai of Anand and devotees of Badalpur worked. Keshav Bhagat, Chaturbhujdas, Revandas and others also served. They cut stones and gave them to the stone-masons. They supplied *chuno*. So, there were carpenters, artisans and Sompuras, but the rest were sadhus and devotees. Liladhar Sompura had brought some artisans. I also had to climb the scaffolding and supply stones.

In Sarangpur, at first, the stones were raised using ropes. Later, a chain pulley was used. In those days, my body was robust. I was not stout, so there was no problem in pulling stones. I also did that in Atladra. There we used a chain pulley.

Once, in Atladra, my finger was trapped under a heavy stone. Stones for Atladra mandir came from Porbandar in a (train) container. First, the train went from Porbandar to Bharuch and from there in a small train to Vishwamitri Pratapnagar. At first there was no station there. Then, one officer came and a track was laid to Vishwamitri Pratapnagar, to where the stones then came.



Stones also came from Dhrangadhra. Stones from there came in a big train to Viramgam. From there to Bharuch and then in a small train to Vishwamitri Pratapnagar. And from there to Atladra. Stones from Dhrangadhra were strong.

Once, stones from Dhrangadhra came. Together with Harijivandas and Devprasaddas, I and two others were unloading them from the container using a crowbar. Harijivandas and Devprasaddas lifted one side of the stone and I went to place some support under it so that the stone would not move. They thought that I had placed the packing, and as they quickly began to lift the stone my fingers got squashed against the wagon edge. Two fingers were badly injured. I felt giddy and fell unconscious to the floor. After a while I regained consciousness and was taken to the mandir. A doctor was called and he applied the dressing. The nails of the index and middle fingers of the right hand were damaged and regrew.

Chuno, sand and water in the right proportions were mixed in the trough of the grinding mill and then mixed together, with a bullock pulling the wheel. After 108 rounds, the mixture



would be ready to take out. *Chuno* was taken out from the grind-mill three times a day: early morning, 12 noon and at 4.00 p.m. After removing, it was added to a pile. Water was added as required and mixed before giving it to the stonemasons. These were the methods used in those days. The *chuno* in those days was made so strong that there would be no problems for years.

We worked even in the heat of Chaitra and Vaishakh (April-May). So, in addition to the hot weather, there was the heat of the *chuno*. Once, I was affected by the heat of the *chuno* and red patches developed all over my body and face.

Shastriji Maharaj was in Jhadeshwar at the time. He was also ill. He was staying in the mandir there. Haka Khachar was with him. He sent a message to Atladra that it would be good if Naranda (shortened name by which Shastriji Maharaj called Narayanswarupdasji) came. So I went there. His bed was in front of Thakorji in the mandir. He sat up in bed, embraced me and said, "It's good that you've come. Now I will enjoy your *katha*." Then, he asked, "How are things going?"

Then, he suddenly noticed the red blotches

on my face. Swami asked, "What has happened?" I told him. Shastriji Maharaj said, "O dear! Is that so?" He sat up again and stroked his soothing hand over my face and body while chanting 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...'. He did this about five times over my whole body. Then he said, "It will get better. There will be no problems now."

I stayed there and read the Bhaktachintamani. He was pleased. Every day when I went to bow at his feet he would stroke my face. After about 5-6 days, the patches had mostly gone. Then I returned to Atladra.

Shastriji Maharaj said, "Now, you do not work with the *chuno*." He wrote to Devprasaddas telling him to assign me to other work. So, after Shastriji Maharaj said this, instead of working with the *chuno*, I did other tasks.

Devprasaddas Swami was our leader. In the morning if we had not completed puja and got ready, he would come and tell us to get ready. At the time, the platform for the rear stairs of the mandir was being raised. So, bricks were being laid. Four bricklayers were at work. I and another were helping them.

In this way, I stayed in Atladra for 8-10 months and served until the *pratishtha*. Swami was pleased by this.

During the discussions, the sadhus said to Pramukh Swami Maharaj that in 1945, before Shastriji Maharaj's 80th birthday, at the age of 24 he had been selected as a trustee of the Sanstha. Swamishri responded...

That may be so, but who is a real trustee? This is the Gunatit tradition and one who serves is a trustee. One who serves is regarded as high-ranking; he is called a *bhandari*, a scholar or an *acharya*. There is no significance to the post. In fact, the thing to do is *seva*. Shastriji Maharaj himself served in the stone and other construction work. Yogiji Maharaj also served in this way. So the post is of no significance. From the beginning,

I was prepared to serve. I just did the *seva* I was directed to do.

In a 1945 issue of 'Swaminarayan Prakaksh', details of guru Shastriji Maharaj's 80th birthday celebrations has been recorded. The names of the sadhus involved in the preparations for the celebration have been noted. From the report, it seems that Swamishri performed notable seva. It was only a few years after Swamishri's diksha, yet his name is listed ahead of the sadhus who used to take him to the villages and train him. When asked what this seva was, Swamishri replied...

The senior sadhus went to the villages for discourses, while Harijivandas, I and other sadhus did the housekeeping and lodging arrangements.

As a result, the other names may have been listed after mine, but they were all seniors. They went to the villages to discourse, raise funds and spread awareness. We youngsters did the cleaning, water, electric and other such *seva*.

There was an old shed made of corrugated metal sheets behind the mandir. There was a lot of rubbish piled up in there since some people liked to keep everything thinking that it will be useful someday. The *kothari* also was of the opinion that if you keep something it will come in use someday. In Atladra, Kothari Aksharswarupdas would keep the old bullock-carts, horse carriages and long carts, even if they had rotted.

When the birthday celebration (of Shastriji Maharaj) was to take place in Bochasan, Swami instructed me to clean the shed there.

In Bochasan, there were some toilets after the water tank at the corner of the old *dhar-mashala*. In the open space next to them, there was a grind-mill to prepare the *chuno*. After the grind-mill was relocated, a lot of unused things were kept there. Something was to be done there – I don't remember what – but Shastriji Maharaj told me, "Empty this and clean it up." Swami sat there, so the sadhus and devotees began to clean up the area. After a while Swami left and

slowly most people also went away. Only I and two others stayed till the end. Later, Swami returned and was pleased that we had continued and blessed us.

The sadhus said to Swamishri that the reports suggest that he was at the forefront of the arrangements. In reply Swamishri said...

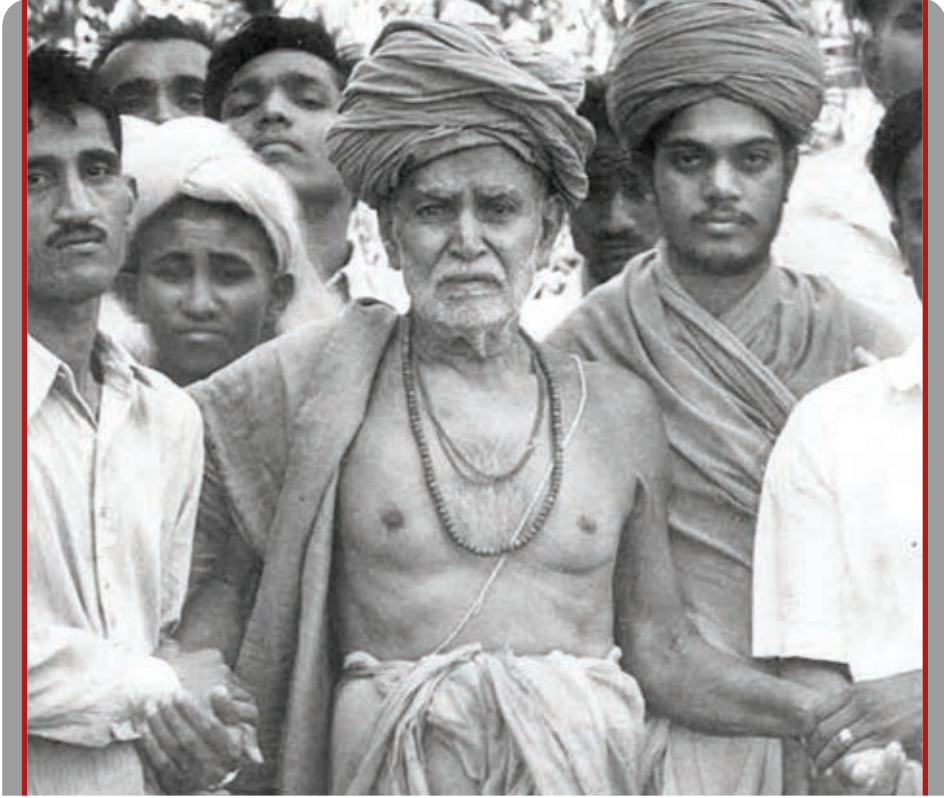
Everyone used to serve in the preparations for the festivals and celebrations. But since I cooperated with everyone, young and old, they all had affection for me. I was the youngest. I served all the sadhus and *sadgurus*. I liked doing such *seva*. And so, the *sadgurus* were pleased with me. Those of similar age worked together to complete the tasks. In this way, everyone had affection for me and I had affection for all. And I worked while keeping everyone happy.

You are eternally accomplished (anadi siddh), yet, from a worldly perspective, what is the secret of your progress? Swamishri replied...

The only reason for progress is due to having such a true guru. I did according to his *agna* and he was pleased. By doing this, progress happens naturally. Whoever has progressed has kept the guru at the forefront and strived. Progress results from doing according to the guru's wishes and *agna*. Then, with his oversight and blessings progress is achieved. And if he is not pleased, there will be no progress. Without his blessings and oversight, no matter how educated, intelligent or talented one may be, progress is not possible. So, the root cause of progress is the guru's blessings and *drashti*. And one receives the guru's blessings by living according to his *agna*. ♦

*(Collated from Swamishri's interviews:
5 March 1987, 21 December 1996,
24 August 2005, December 2006 and
January-February 2007.)*

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S RELENTLESS VICHARAN



“Vrudh chhatā pan dinrāt vichare, bhaktonā kalyān kāje...”

*Meaning: “Despite old age [Shastriji Maharaj] travelled
relentlessly for the moksha of devotees...”*

*This verse was written for Shastriji Maharaj and has been
sung ever since his time. Till the age of 86 Shastriji Maharaj
performed vicharan, regardless of discomforts and physical ailments like
chronic arthritis and heart problems. Pramukh Swami Maharaj
is a witness to Swami’s last 12 years of vicharan.
He shares many fond memories of those days.*

Pujya Shastriji Maharaj had performed intense *vicharan*, regardless of day or night, for the sake of pleasing devotees.

In those times there were not many facilities and vehicles for transportation. So he mostly travelled by oxen cart and, in case of long distances, by train.

Whenever he travelled by train he never allowed anyone to purchase a first class or second class ticket. If anyone offered to he refused firmly, saying, "Third class is fine with me." It was only on special occasions and in his final year that he travelled by first class. In his final illness, a special saloon car was hired, though much against his wishes, to take him from Atladra [to Sarangpur].

Travelling by train meant tolerating the congestion of passengers. If there was a devotee accompanying Swami then he would make the seating arrangements. Haribhai of Gondal had a catering contract with all the railway lines. Hence, whenever there was any problem about the seating arrangements, Swami would sit in Haribhai's canteen section.

There used to be a heavy rush at the Ahmedabad railway station, too. Whenever Gulzarilal Nanda came to see Swami off at the Ahmedabad-Gandhigram station he always climbed through the carriage window to reserve a seat for Swami by placing Swami's bedding and pillow. Swami would always enter from the carriage door. Despite such hassles Swami never wished to travel by [first or second class]. Furthermore, he never thought of using a motor car. And whenever someone suggested about making such arrangements, Swami refrained him from doing so.

Prior to Shastriji Maharaj's earthly departure (in 1951), Nirgundas Swami once wrote a letter to Nandaji saying that travelling by bullock cart (for Shastriji Maharaj) was not convenient and that he should make arrangements for a car. When Swami came to know of it, he refused strongly about buying a car.

But Nirgun Swami and Mota Swami had

decided to get one. Then Swami emphatically stated, "There is no need for it." At that time there were less cars on the road and only a few rich people had them. Then Swami refused and voiced, "Our Satsang is small therefore others would keep asking for it [car]. So there's nothing better than a bullock cart for transport. A bullock cart is appropriate for travelling from one village to another. We normally don't have long distances to travel."

During *vicharan* Shastriji Maharaj either left (for another village or town) at any time in the morning or evening. He did not care much for his time of departure. But I did. Whenever I used to leave, I did so after taking lunch. While travelling by bus I always sat next to the driver's seat. Sometimes I had to observe a fast while travelling. Thereafter I'd take a bath once we reached our destination. Sometimes I had to fast for the whole day, and sometimes after lunchtime, for the rest of the day. That was how difficult travelling was.

I remember two incidents of Shastriji Maharaj during my train journeys with him. Once, we were travelling by train. At that time there used to be a custom's checking at Viramgam station prior to catching the connecting train. The police and custom's staff checked all baggages. We would help Shastriji Maharaj to his seat before getting our baggages checked. Then we had to be careful and patient while our baggages were being checked because of our discipline of celibacy. By the time the custom's procedures were over the connecting train was packed full. Then, somehow we managed to get our baggages into the carriage. All the seats around Shastriji Maharaj were occupied. I couldn't even squeeze through the carriage door to get inside. So, I proceeded to the other carriages, but they too were jam packed. No one allowed me to enter. At that time I became fed up and felt it was too big a hassle to travel by train. Eventually I did manage to get inside. When Shastriji Maharaj saw me, he asked, "Where were you?" I explained, "This was what happened. So I've decided to never travel in such oppressive conditions." Swami



replied, “You’ll have to travel [in this manner]. I have travelled in such difficult conditions and you, too, will have to bear such hardships.”

On another occasion Swami left for Anand railway station, carrying his *potla*. Swami thought that he’d find someone to buy him the train tickets. But he found no one. So he and his companion sadhu returned to the town centre, but again he saw no one (to help him get the tickets). So he proceeded towards the station again. He went to and fro three times. Finally, he found someone to buy their tickets.

Swami had thus tolerated severe hardships while doing *vicharan*. For short distances he travelled by bullock cart. During old age, whenever Shastriji Maharaj travelled by bullock cart, he used to have his bedding roll (a mattress) and a pillow. He used the latter to sit on or to rest his head while sleeping, and the thin mattress to cover himself up.

Whenever I travelled (with him) I’d get a bed sheet (to sleep on). Sometimes, if there were mattresses, then I’d get one. This was so when we travelled in villages and during large celebrations. The senior sadhus got mattresses.

When Swami did *vicharan* he did not keep much luggage. The only things belonging to him

were his *jholi* and puja. Swami also kept a pillow with him. Whenever he travelled by bullock cart he sat cross-legged with the pillow in his lap. He tucked his thin mattress between the yoke and the cart, and he sat behind the cart driver. While travelling by train Swami rolled the mattress and leaned on it for support and also to sleep on.

Whenever Shastriji Maharaj travelled by bullock cart whoever was old sat with him. Youths like myself mostly walked all the way. Sometimes he made me sit with him, otherwise I had to mostly walk, leaving the *potla* in the cart. If the journey was two to three miles long we walked the path taken by the cart.

Shastriji Maharaj kept a small container of *magas* (sweet item) with him while travelling. Nirgun Swami, Ghanshyam Swami and other sadhus also kept a container of *magas* each. When they travelled to villages to collect tithes, they gave *magas* as *prasad* to the devotees. Shastriji Maharaj also gave *magas* as *prasad* to senior devotees during his visits to the villages. The *magas* was made mostly in the mandirs. However, when it ran out the sadhus made *magas* during their stay in a village. But they mostly replenished their stock at the mandir. Nirgundas Swami gave *prasad* to police officers as well as to children. Yogiji Maharaj, too, had the habit of giving *prasad* from his earlier days. So, in this way the sadhus travelling to villages kept a container of *prasad*.

I was given the [saffron] *diksha* in Gondal and shortly thereafter I went to Sarangpur with Shastriji Maharaj. I did not stay for long in Sarangpur because Swami told me to travel with him on his *vicharan* to Gujarat. Swami travelled to Charotar, Kanam and Ahmedabad. His *vicharan* was very intense. He stayed for only two to three days in a mandir before resuming his *vicharan*. I must have travelled with him for about five to six months. While we were in the villages our daily routine started from early morning.

In the villages, we took our daily bath at a well, river or lake, regardless of winter, summer

or monsoon. After his bath Swami would do his daily puja. His attendant arranged the puja. During his puja there would be two to three sadhus seated around him. Many times Swami did puja in his room. In those times the devotees did not sit for darshan of his puja. This all started in Yogiji Maharaj's time, and that too in the later part of his life.

Shastriji Maharaj suffered from arthritis, but despite that he always sat on the floor to do his puja. Yogi Maharaj, too, never sat on a raised platform to do puja. Till his last breath he did his puja sitting on the floor.

Shastriji Maharaj ate baked puffed rice (*mamra*) for breakfast. In those times there was no breakfast for the sadhus. However, those who worked for the mandir construction ate *rotla* and buttermilk.

Since long, Shastriji Maharaj's evening routine comprised of doing *katha* till late night. Even during his stay in villages he talked till late if the devotees were present. Not all devotees were present during the day. When they came at night the sadhus also talked to them. Whenever the devotees were busy with their work they never came, thus the *katha* lasted till only 11.00 p.m., but not till late night. After finishing *katha* Swami took his routine bath and went to sleep. In the mandirs the sadhus stayed up till late night talking to the devotees.

While travelling to the villages with Swami I came to know the devotees. I became acquainted with the senior devotees of the villages of Sarsa, Napad, Gana, Ashi and others and remembered them. At that time I sat very little with the devotees. Whenever Swami told me to sing a bhajan, I would do so. Then Swami, Jogi Maharaj, Nirgun Swami and Akshar Swami would do *katha*.

While I was with Shastriji Maharaj he made me memorize kirtans and Swamini Vato. The first time I travelled with him, Swami wrote down four pads of "*Sukhdāyak re...*" for me to memorize.

At that time I did not know how to cook. So, I helped by slicing vegetables and cleaning (utensils). Shastriji Maharaj knew how to



cook everything. Sometimes he made food for everyone.

Once, we arrived at Karamsad. Nirgun Swami had a severe cold. Shastriji Maharaj told him to make *puri* while he prepared the rest of the food items. There were no gas stoves in those times. When the firewood was lit for cooking it produced a lot of smoke. Nirgun Swami, because of his cold, got fed up and rebuked Swami, "Why do you go through such hassle? What is wrong in calling the (Brahmin) cooks to prepare the meal?" Shastriji Maharaj replied calmly, "If you are fed up go and sit down. I'll prepare everything." And so Shastriji Maharaj prepared the meal all by himself.

Shastriji Maharaj was brisk in preparing meals and so, too, was Yogiji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj used to make *puranpoli* by himself. Only one who is clever and skillful can make it by himself. He would make the *puran* and also fill it into the dough, all alone. Today we need so many (to make it).

Once, Swamishri cooked a meal in Limbasi all by himself. There was 10 kg of wheat flour to use and he had to catch a train at 12 noon. Mukhi and I were with him. Swami told me, "You prepare the *dal* and cook the vegetables while I make the *ladus*." Then Swami fried the *ladu's muthiyas* (small



pieces of wheat flour dough) and made them into *ladus*. I cooked the *dal*, rice and vegetables. Swami knew how to cook a delicious meal.

Formerly, our financial condition in the mandirs was such that we could hardly afford making chapatis (for all). In Gondal, Sarangpur and other mandirs only *rotla* and a few chapatis were made. Whoever got ready early in the morning ate the chapatis. Soma Bhagat would take millet flour and add gur and ghee, mix them and eat it. Soma Bhagat had a very strong appetite and digestive system. When we were in Jalila he ate food made for 15 people in one go. Oh, he was extremely strong and a great person. He never flinched from lifting stones (during the mandir construction work).

Akshar Swami, who took me with him during his village *vicharan*, was also physically very strong. Whenever a heavy stone had to be lifted he would chant the *jai* and do it easily. Yogi Bapa once said that when he was sent to Botad to unload the mandir stones it seemed as if Hanumanji had done it all.

Soma Bhagat was not too fat, and he had a good physique. He had strong bones. Swami found apt people for the variety of works at hand. There were only four to five sadhus who lived in Sarangpur and persevered in the mandir construction work in spite of the opposition. But someone

like Soma Bhagat restrained the opponents and won their hearts.

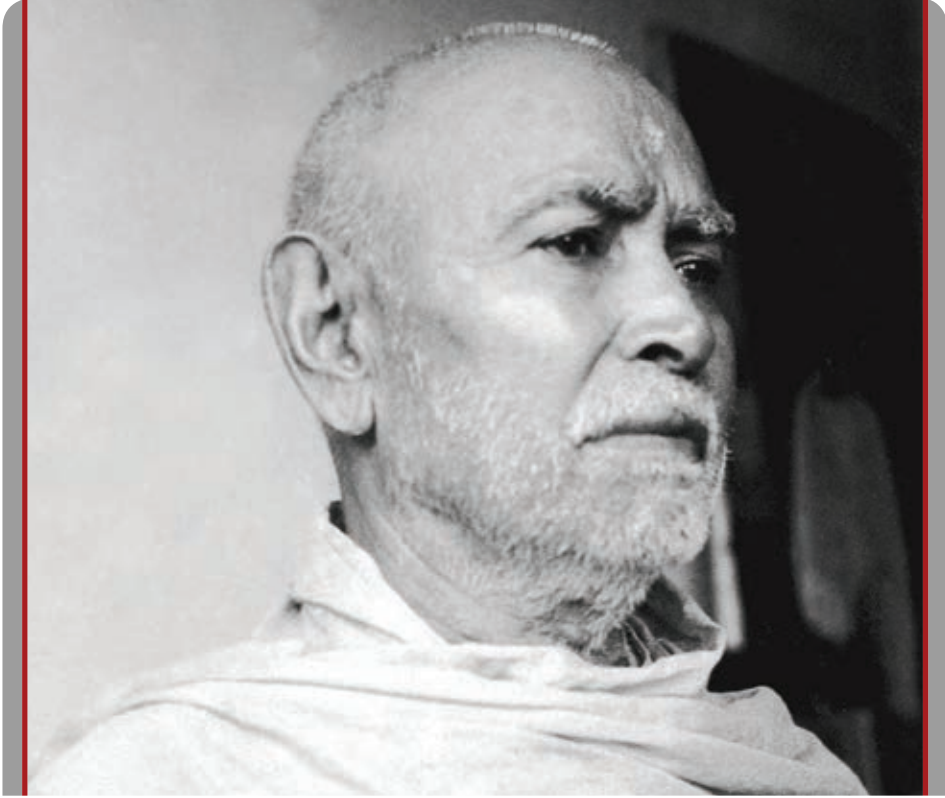
Shastriji Maharaj, during his visits to the villages, asked for grains in charity for the mandirs. He told some devotees to donate grains and instructed others to give cash donations. He asked according to the means of each devotee. He knew all the devotees, and he also enquired about their state of affairs in detail: asking them about their salaries, the type of harvest they were reaping and other things. Thereafter, he asked them to make pledges for donations. Sometimes Swami also asked for donations for the celebration of a festival or for a *parayan*. He would mostly beg for the Uttarayan *jholi* in Ahmedabad. Yogi Maharaj asked for *jholi* in Gondal. The donations received for the *jholi* in Ahmedabad were sent to Sarangpur. Even the annual tithes (*dharmado*) given by the devotees of Ahmedabad were sent to Sarangpur.

Formerly, Swami went to beg for *jholi* from *pol* (lane) to *pol* in Ahmedabad. Later on the devotees said, "Rather than Swami having to beg from every *pol* let us donate the total amount of rice grains he gets." About 100-500 kg of rice grains were sent to Sarangpur. This would last them for the whole year. During Swami's visit to Ahmedabad on Kartak *sud* 11 he inspired all to pledge their *dharmado*.

Sometimes during Swami's visits to the villages some odd incidents occurred. Once, after celebrating the Guru Punam festival in Bochasan we went towards Badalpur. Nirgun Swami and I were also with Swami. Badalpur is a village on the banks of River Mahi. Our destination was Nahar, a village that was on the opposite bank. But first we had to wade through the shallow waters to catch a boat. Ranchhodbhai of Badalpur village carried Shastriji Maharaj on his shoulders to the boat. Thereafter, we were rowed to the opposite bank. As we approached the opposite bank, our boat got caught in the low tide. The receding waters pulled the boat away from the spot

(Contd. on pg. 36)

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ A UNIQUE GURU



*Whenever Pramukh Swami Maharaj extols about
the divine personality of his guru, Shastriji Maharaj,
his profound faith in and love for him are evident.*

How great was Shastriji Maharaj?

Let us read about it in Swamishri's own words.

Pujya Shastriji Maharaj was not ordinary. He was great and powerful. He was a profound scholar. He had deep knowledge about the shastras. He had also delved deeply into the texts of the Sampradaya. He had served and associated with the Sampradaya's great *acharyas*, *kotharis* and *sadhus* and personally consolidated the knowledge (of Akshar and Purushottam).

Shastriji Maharaj was great from his childhood. He was blessed by Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami. Shukanand Swami, the right hand of Shriji Maharaj, had also blessed him and prophesied that he would become a great sadhu and inspire thousands to worship God. So, during his childhood he had received the blessings

of two great sadhus. They said he had come to do God's work, and the supreme mission of God's work would be realized.

We can see (God) in his life from his childhood years. During the rainy seasons the soil got wet, and so he made mandirs out of it and placed a flag atop its *shikhar*. Then he would install Thakorji inside the mandir and perform *arti*. He was firm about the truth of the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. He faced many obstacles, challenges and even attempts on his life, but he always wished that God do good to all. He never retaliated in any way. Whenever anyone came to tell him, "Someone says that so and so did something bad to you." Shastriji Maharaj simply replied, "Whatever God does it must be for our good." Shastriji Maharaj never filed a court case against anyone and neither did he react against his opponents. He maintained his *sadhuta* (saintliness).

When Swami renounced Vartal he had no means, sadhus and money, and there were only a few devotees with him. Despite this he raised an incredible organization. O how great he was! To inspire the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam in others is not any ordinary task. Shastriji Maharaj had the power to create something from nothing. So from the effect one can gauge its cause.

Physically, he (Swami) appeared to be diminutive. Many even scorned that Shastriji was only a fistful of bones, so what could he do? But he performed such a colossal task that even his detractors praised him! The whole world saw what he did.

Shastriji Maharaj was like an iron man. He single-handedly established the Bochasanwasi Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha. He did it with God's inspiration and strength. No matter what others said about him, he kept his eye on his goal and accomplished it.

Shastriji Maharaj was born to spread the pure doctrine taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and to enable countless souls attain the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was a divine person. His influence and charisma was immense. To

accomplish such a great task cannot be the doing of an ordinary person. Today, it is difficult to start any work in spite of having money, people and everything. He possessed nothing, yet he built a three-storey lofty mandir (in Sarangpur). To think of such a thing at that time is indeed a great thing.

He made an impressive mandir in a small village like Sarangpur. No one could ever imagine building a mandir there. But it was the wish of Shriji Maharaj. Thus he made a grand mandir there. In this way Swami developed the village (of Sarangpur). Presently, we find people migrating from their villages to settle in the cities. But Swami built a three-storey mandir in a village. Shastriji Maharaj's vision and work were very broad and insightful. One could never think of them under those conditions, but he was God-realized. Then only could such a task be fulfilled.

The uniqueness of Shastriji Maharaj was his courage. When something seemed impossible to do he would say it will be done. The marble stone mandir in Gadhada that we see today was accomplished by Shastriji Maharaj. No one welcomed him in Gadhada. When the state official of Bhavnagar refused to grant land to the BAPS, Swami stated determinedly, "I want to build a mandir on this hill [since it was Shriji Maharaj's wish]." I was in Swami's *seva* as an attendant. I had gone with him to Gadhada 10 to 15 times. Whenever we bathed in the river Ghela he would say, "I want to build a mandir on this hill." Then there was a change in government and Swami got the land, which did not seem possible. Shastriji Maharaj created everything from scratch. One is overwhelmed by thinking about his work. He progressed despite the difficulties (that came his way). He never thought of becoming God nor had any expectations of being worshipped (by his disciples). Whatever he did was for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam.

He never tired in talking to anyone about the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine. Even when someone did not understand it, he would still continue to talk to him. He persisted in repeating

it umpteen times. Sometimes he spent the whole night to explain about it to one person.

He had encountered many obstacles while propagating the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine. Despite of them all he continued his task with patience and equanimity. He never harboured any prejudice for anyone who spoke scornful words. He tolerated pain and insults so that all could understand the path (of *moksha*) – such were his sentiments behind accomplishing his great work. If even only one person was eager to understand, Swami would go miles to explain to him. He perceived any devotee of Akshar-Purushottam in the highest glory.

Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have not done anything for the happiness and comfort of their bodies for their entire lives. They built mandirs, *dharmashalas* and other things, but never did they enjoy any comforts for themselves. They travelled to and begged in villages to set up all facilities for us. They have tolerated hardships.

I have seen Shastriji Maharaj do housekeeping, smear cow dung on the floor and clean the kitchen floor. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj carried stones on their head. They ground limestone (for construction work). They slept in a dingy room in front of the banyan tree in Gondal. There were two rooms in Gondal; one was used as a kitchen and the other as a storeroom. During winter, summer and monsoon they often slept out beneath the tree. There were no fans at that time. They persevered to please God.

Shastriji Maharaj's life was very simple. Despite him being the liberator of countless he wore old repaired *dhotiyas*. He wound his *pagh* in a haphazard way. He never harboured any motive to project himself and become great.

Some used to say that Shastriji Maharaj wanted to be Bhagwan, but he always gave prominence to Thakorji. If someone gave importance to him he chided him and said how could he exclude Shriji Maharaj. If anyone criticized the Vartal Sanstha he would rebuke him and advise him not say such

things. He would not allow anyone to speak ill of the mandirs built by Shriji Maharaj, the *acharyas* and sadhus of those mandirs. He never wished ill of them despite being expelled by them. In fact he told many devotees to give their annual tithes to the Vartal mandir, and offer prayers to and make pledges for the fulfilment of their wishes before the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Vartal. Thus, after leaving Vartal, he never did, spoke about or fomented any activity that would blemish the glory of Vartal mandir. He firmly believed that one should never be disrespectful, critical and loathesome about the work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and the devas and mandirs he had consecrated.

When a sadhu practices saintliness then everyone will revere him. When Shastriji Maharaj left (Vartal) he was firm in *agna*, *upasana* and saintliness. He wholly practiced the vows of renouncing money and women. He never lapsed in the *panchvartmans* of *nishkam*, *nirlobh* and others. He never uttered a word in retaliation amid the flurry of opposition. And neither had he written a word in reply or filed a case against his opponents. He tolerated everything. On leaving Vartal he prayed to Harikrishna Maharaj to be with him. Because of his faith in God and his obedience to the instructions of Shriji Maharaj the names of Akshar-Purushottam have spread and are being celebrated throughout the world.

When you degrade someone, you get relegated. By throwing sand towards the sun, it comes back to you. Swami never hurled sand on anyone. Yogiji Maharaj never found fault in even a foolish person. So, the reasons behind the progress of this Sanstha lies in saintliness and conviction of the knowledge (of Akshar-Purushottam).

Shastriji Maharaj built mandirs with its foundations grounded in the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam as taught by Shriji Maharaj in the Vachanamrut. Shriji Maharaj has revealed that he had come from Akshardham with Akshar and the *muktas*, and that one should understand this and share it with others. It was a command of Bhagwan,

and Shastriji Maharaj obeyed it absolutely. He did not manipulate that, nor did he have the motive to misguide anyone. Shriji Maharaj has explained that of what good would it be to him if he were to drown someone in a well and place a stone over it. He adds that by leading others on the wrong path, of what benefit would it be to him? Shastriji Maharaj continued with that style and tradition (of Shriji Maharaj). He had only one aim – to spread the principle that Shriji Maharaj had taught.

Whatever Shastriji Maharaj had accomplished, it was done with great thought and understanding, and for our liberation. In fact he accomplished the work for which Shriji Maharaj had taken birth on earth.

Shastriji Maharaj used to say that the bells toll in a true and functioning mandir. A mandir without the *murti* of Thakorji is abandoned and isolated, hence there are no rituals of *arti* and *puja*. Shastriji Maharaj used to say the bells of victory shall toll throughout the world because our spiritual knowledge and principles are true.

(Contd. from pg. 32)

where we were supposed to land. So, to reach the shore we had to wade through the waters again. Swami had trouble walking, so he struggled with the aid of two people to reach the shore.

On reaching Nahar, a person sent by Bhakti-vallabh Swami from Bochasan informed us that due to the food rationing law by the state an enquiry had been made about the meals we provided to the devotees during the Guru Punam celebration in Bochasan. At that time we had purchased food materials for the celebration on behalf of the devotees of Bochasan. Someone, however, had complained about it and two officials had arrived to make the enquiry. Since Nirgun Swami was with us, we had to return immediately to Bochasan to resolve the matter. So, we came back (from Nahar) and sat in the boat. At that time it was high tide. Because of huge waves our boat was buffeted and drawn into deeper waters. After

It is like one hears the sounds of *arti*, bells and *puja* rituals in a true mandir.

This is the work of Bhagwan and his Sadhu. Shastriji Maharaj, a powerful person, accomplished such a monumental task 100 years ago. In doing it he had thought not only of 100 years, but of 1,000 years into the future. Since he was a God-realized Sadhu he was omniscient. In mundane terms he was very intelligent. He did every work with profound intelligence and insight.

We have to preserve this (Satsang) tradition. When we do so, Satsang will grow to greater proportions in the next 100 years. We have to strive so that Satsang will flourish for the next 100 years. Because Swami gave momentum to Satsang for the next 100 years we are revelling today in the knowledge he gave. Thus, we should live such a life that many thousands more would be inspired to follow. ♦

*Collated from Swamishri's interviews:
8 February 1986, 2 May 1987, 30 October 1992,
4 February 1995, 18 January 1999, 10 October 2006
and 22-27 November 2006.*

much effort we managed to row the boat to the opposite shore. Finally, we arrived in Bochasan.

Sometimes when no boat was available to cross the Mahi or other rivers Shastriji Maharaj would be carried in a basket by two persons wading through the river waters. Swami had tolerated many such hardships during his *vicharan*. He never tired from doing *vicharan* in spite of arthritis.

Swami lived a very simple life. In Sarangpur he lived in a mud house. It was like a poor man's hut. On the one hand Shastriji Maharaj built towering mandirs (for God) and on the other he made do with simple living arrangements (for himself). He never thought of any comforts for himself. He did everything for us. What can we do to repay him? He did so much for us whereas we are unable to do anything for him! ♦

*Collated from Swamishri's interviews:
July 1990, December 2006 and January-February 2007*

Bhadrachal Ramadas

*Bhadrachal Ramdas or Ramadasu was a great devotee of
Bhagwan Shri Ramchandra. He got into trouble by mixing politics with
religion. As a revenue collector he had a lot of state funds at his disposal.
He utilized the funds to build the Ram mandir at Bhadrachalam
in the state of Telangana, and to adore the murtis of
Ram, Sita and Lakshman.*

Kancharla Gopanna (1630-1687), better known as Bhadrachal Ramadas or Ramadasu, was immersed in chanting Bhagwan Ram's name from his childhood. He inherited such spirituality from his father Linganna and mother Kadamba. Linganna died while Ramadas was still a child. It is said that a *sant* visited his house and initiated him into chanting Ram's name. He gave away all his wealth and began to rely solely on Ram's help. He suffered much privation due to his renunciation, but he never looked back. The great saint, Tyagaraj, mentions the name of Ramadas in one of his compositions. It becomes clear from this that the saint-composer of Bhadrachalam was quite well-known in bhakti circles.

Ramadas never bothered about himself; he was worried that he had no money to perform reverential service to Shri Ram. Once he arranged a feast after completing Ramkoti (writing of Ram's name one crore times). During the feast, his son Ram fell into a boiling cauldron and died. His wife did not like the idea of disturbing the guests and kept the news of the tragedy to herself. After the feast was over, when Ramadas came to know of his child's death, at first he felt greatly distressed. Then he realized Ram was there to help him. He started to sing his praises and soon the dead child was miraculously revived.

Ramadas belonged to Telangana state. During his day, Bhadrachalam was a part of the Qutb Shahi Sultanate of Tanisha. Madanna, Ramadas's uncle, was a minister at the Qutb Shahi Durbar. Akkanna, and his brother Madanna, played a key role in the affairs of Deccan Sultanates. They wanted to forge a grand alliance against the declining Mughal empire of Aurangzeb with the help of Shivaji. The Maratha ruler was invited to Golconda and he received a red-carpet welcome from the people of Hyderabad. It was the same Madanna who got his nephew the post of a *tehsildar* (collector) in the Bhadrachalam area on the banks of the Godavari. It is a hilly area with thick forests. According to tradition, a poor devotee, Pokala Dammakka, found the *murtis* of Ram, Lakshman and Sita from an ant-hill. She was so poor that she was hardly in a position to maintain herself, let alone providing a proper place for the *murtis*. She approached the collector with a request that he do something about it. It was like preaching to the converted. Ramadas was a great devotee of Ram himself; he did not need any persuasion. He took charge of the *murtis* and decided to build a mandir. He had some money. But that was not enough. So he began to collect donations. However, the mandir he had in mind could not be built even with the donations he had received. He needed more funds and the

mandir could not wait. Then he thought of a plan. As revenue collector, he always had cash with him. Why not spend that money? Unfortunately the money was not his, but the Nawab's. When Tanisha came to know of the affair, he was furious. Here was a collector who was utilizing state funds for mandir construction. The great devotee treated the amount as a 'loan', but the Nawab considered it embezzlement, pure and simple. Ramadas was imprisoned immediately and had to spend 12 years in the Golconda Fort prison before the divine forms of Ram and Lakshman interceded on his behalf and got him released.

Ramadas wrote all his compositions in the dungeon at Golconda Fort. The kirtans, mostly in Telugu and a few in Sanskrit, were essentially the outpourings of an anguished heart. The dungeon is still there, as a monument to his unfailing faith. Thousands visit it even to this day.

Tanisha's soldiers tortured Ramadas in the jail. After each session he would complain to Shri Ram as to why he was being tortured despite his devotion to him. Ramadas's complaints to Shri Ram have vastly enriched the bhakti literature in Telugu and added to the corpus of Ram lore.

At one stage, the torture became unbearable. In righteous indignation, the *bhakta* in Ramadas cries out complaining at Shri Ram's inaction in saving him. The devotee provides a list of everything he had done for the construction of the Bhadrachalam mandir. In a moving kirtan, Ramadas gives details of how he had spent the Nawab's money; ten thousand *mohurs* had been spent on the outer wall; he got the *gopuram mandapas* fashioned nicely. He spent 10,000 *mohurs* each on jewellery for the *murtis* of Bharat, Shatrughna, Lakshman and Sita. He also provided the Ikshvaku royal family with suitable carriages, besides a resplendent head ornament for Ram. He 'chides' Ram that he had no hesitation in parading himself in jewellery that Ramadas got made for him. Did he ever care to inquire with whose money all these had been made. Was it

his father Dasarath's money or his father-in-law Janak's wealth? Here he uses the word *abba* to describe his father Dasarath, an expression which is frowned upon in polite circles. Then the poet checks himself and explains, "Ram don't take offence at the term. I used the term as I could not bear the beatings." Ramadas wrote 16,000 kirtans, but only a few are available now. There is a *dhyan mandap* in the Golconda Fort with a big statue of Ramadas in official attire at the entrance and a smaller one inside. His compositions are inscribed on wooden boards. Ramadas himself had etched on the rocky wall of the prison the sketches of Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman, whom he used to worship.

Finally, Ram and Lakshman come as Ramoji and Laxmoji, liveried servants of Ramadas, and pay up the money due to Tanisha. It is said the coins presented by them bore the mark of the Ayodhya Royal Mint! The receipt was thrown into Ramadas's dungeon. Tanisha realized that he had tortured a great devotee of Ram. He made amends by immediately releasing him from prison. Even to this day, on Ram Navami day, the descendants of the Nizam of Hyderabad present a gold *mohur* as *nazrana* (gift) to the *murti* of Shri Ram. The chief minister of the present state of Telangana continues an official tradition by carrying offerings on his head on Ram Navami day; previously it was done by the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

The Bhadrachalam mandir is one of the important Ram mandirs in the country that is visited by countless devotees. ♦

Sources

1. *Ramdasu Kirtanalu* in Telugu.
2. *Indian Sages and Saints*, Prof. Y. Krishna Murthy, Sura Books (Pvt) Ltd.

KUSANG: Inner and Outer

In the evening assembly on 24 December 19 in Surat, following a debate on the pros and cons of TV, Pramukh Swami Maharaj blesses the assembly, talking about the perils of TV and other forms of kusang...



People present such convincing arguments that we become confused about what is right and wrong. But, we should refer to the words of God, the shastras and great sadhus, and observe their lives and work.

Shriji Maharaj has said, “Never engage in *kusang*.” This includes everything. Science has given us much, but without any moral direction. So, it is true that the bad in man is the first to exploit these things. Maharaj has said that both satsang and *kusang* reside within. Satsang is dharma, *jnan*, spiritual discourses, kirtans, devotion and other such things. *Kusang* is lust, anger, greed, attachment, desires and other such flaws. So, whatever type of outer company one keeps, the inner thoughts develop in that way and then one acts in that way.

Only if the company of satsang is kept externally do good thoughts develop. So, just as we would avoid snakes, scorpions, lions and tigers, stay clear of *kusang*. We would not go up to them and say ‘welcome’ or sit next to them, since we know that it will be our death. The effect of bad things is greater than that of good things.

To raise a good, useful tree takes much time and care, whereas weeds and other troublesome bushes grow without any nurturing. *Kusang* has the same effect within us. To prevent its effects, we must continuously remind ourselves that it is wrong and harmful.

It is a great service to give noble values. Noble people experience peace in their lives and help sustain peace in their neighbourhood, community

and country. Those without values cause quarrels and fights.

TV shows much violence, drinking, adultery and other negative things, so such thoughts are nurtured within. The *kusang* within is aroused and people begin to act in that way. It causes disturbance to the individual, families, communities and countries. It is like a cancer and will eventually destroy.

Even a little exposure can cause problems. If there are just a few bad mangoes in a crate of 200, they will spoil the good ones. Hence, even a little *kusang* can destroy all the good that has been carefully cultivated. So, we should promote the good since it will bring peace and joy.

Today, young children know about everything on TV, since the atmosphere at home, school or wherever they go is like that. It may seem pleasant at present, but care must be taken since it will quickly ruin the home atmosphere. If it promoted only the good that would be fine. But, the *kusang* within is easily drawn to the bad on TV. This then erodes away the good in people.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 18, Maharaj has warned that such *kusang* is like a disease. Just as one cuts off a gangrenous finger to prevent further spread, one must avoid such *kusang*.

But if one becomes complacent or overconfident thinking that “I will not be affected,

since I am wise,” it will eventually cause trouble. Maharaj says that even the most resolute can become affected and tempted.

In Vachanamrut Gadhda I 18, Maharaj talks about this. He describes a 7-floor mansion with provocative mirrors and decor in which lustful people are gathered drinking alcohol and where women are dancing. In such a situation even one with a resolute mind will be enticed to indulge. The stories of Saubhari and Parashar Rishis illustrate this. They were of resolute mind and of extraordinary capability. Yet they were tempted and indulged.

Also recall the story of Ekalshringi Rishi. He was raised by his father, Vibhandak Rishi, such that he did not know about women. Once, in the neighbouring kingdom of King Lompad, there was a drought and the kingdom’s Brahmins told the king that only if someone pious like Ekalshringi sanctified the kingdom would there be rain. But who could lure him out of his ashram, away from the strict watch of his father? A courtesan took up the challenge. While Vibhandak Rishi was out of the ashram, she dressed as a rishi and entered. Ekalshringi had never seen a woman before and he merely thought her to be person like him. He welcomed her and she fed him food that aroused him. At sunset she left under the pretext of having to return to her ashram for evening rituals. But the desire in Ekalshringi had been triggered. His uncharacteristic behaviour alerted his father, who realized that some woman must have come to influence his son. Vibhandak Rishi warned Ekalshringi that the person who came should be avoided and all thoughts about what had happened should be removed from his mind. Vibhandak tried to find out who it could have been, but without success. Then, when he had to go out for several days, the courtesan returned, and Ekalshringi’s desires were aroused. He asked her to take him to her ashram until his father returned. So she took him to the palace of King Lompad where they stayed. They married and

soon had children. The presence of Ekalshringi in the kingdom brought the rains.

Meanwhile, on returning, Vibhandak Rishi searched for Ekalshringi and eventually discovered his location. He was furious and went to bring him back. But when he arrived at the palace, he saw his grandchildren and his anger subsided.

So, exposure to outer objects of pleasure overpowers even the most resolute. Despite this, we think that “What harm is there in merely looking?” By going to places where men and women dance together, alcohol is drunk and gambling takes place one’s mind is corrupted and improper actions result. So, such vulgar places and vices should be avoided.

Even watching TV has its effects. There are countless times more bad things than good on TV. The slightest contact of such bad things can pollute even those of resolute mind.

Some think that “We are *satsangis* so we won’t be affected.” But if a *satsangi* drinks poison, even he will perish, no matter how pious he is.

So, if one is firm then such *kusang* can be shunned. The reason people offer alcohol, drugs and other such things is to make money. So, if you want to remain unaffected, first you must resolve firmly. You must decide that you do not want to drink alcohol, smoke, eat tobacco, keep improper relations or engage in any such activities.

In the home, TVs are like demons. Young children, parents and elders watch TV together and as a result all barriers are broken, respect for each other is lost and tension is created.

Only if you decide to avoid can there be improvement. Teach your children these values, otherwise even if you prevent them at home, they will just go somewhere else and indulge in these things. This will result in misery and trouble.

So, all should observe the disciplines stated in our shastras, and given by God and the great sadhus. By doing so, you will certainly become happy. ♦



HEALTH: Kaushik Joshi

Fitness at Work

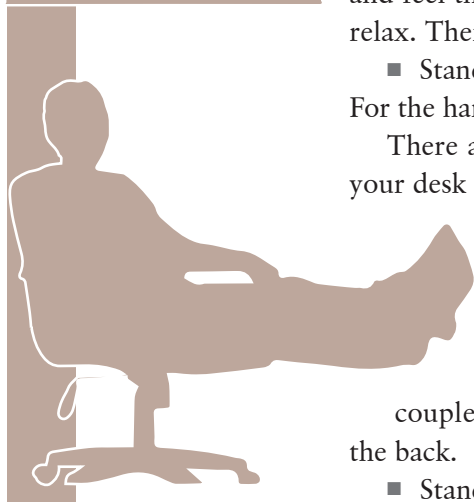
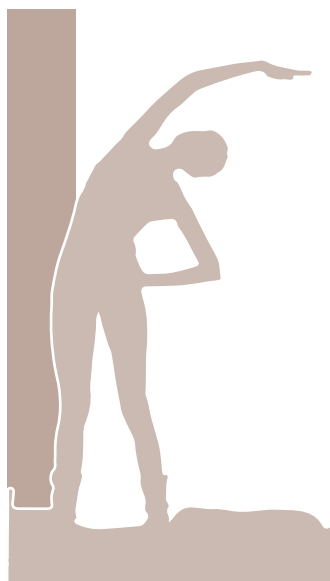
Simple Keys to Good Health

*Do you face burnouts due
to long hours, pressing deadlines and
difficult tasks at work?*

*Try some simple exercises
in your office and feel relieved.*

*An ant on the move does more than a
dozing ox. - Lao-tzu.*

Look, I don't want to wax philosophical, but let me say that if you're alive, you've got to flap your arms and move your legs; you've got to go jogging, for life is the very



opposite of death.

Some exercising or workout could prove more beneficial than your cuppa. Exercises keep you fit and increase your immunity.

And you need not be a gym enthusiast for that. If long hours at the office keep you from doing it, walk out and don't bother about your work.

There are, however, some exercises you can do while in the office or at work. And it won't take more than 20 to 30 minutes. And you need not do them at a stretch. You can do them anytime when you feel stressed out or feel like it. And these are only gentle exercises which, if done on a regular basis, can keep at bay diseases due to a sedentary lifestyle like diabetes, insomnia, hypertension and other physical problems.

A sedentary lifestyle is the villain of the piece. So, try the following gentle workouts and yogic exercises on a daily basis:

- Stand up, interlock your fingers and stretch both arms above your head. Then stand on your toes for a while to feel a healthy stretch in the whole of your body.
- Turn your face gently to the left and then towards the right. Do it at least three to five times without jerks.
- Stand upright and lift your knees towards the chest one at a time. Inhale and exhale deeply while doing it.
- Stand with your legs shoulder width apart, bend forward from the hip and place your palms on your thighs. Relax your spine thus and repeat it a few times.
- Move your face up to look at the ceiling and then bring your chin down towards the chest slowly, five times.
- Rotate your shoulders from front to back five times and then from back to front.
- Stand with your feet together and arms by your side. Take your right arm upward and bend it sideways to your left for a few seconds and feel the stretch on your right side. Return to normal position and relax. Then repeat it with your left arm. Do it for 3-5 times.
- Stand with your feet together, point and flex the feet several times. For the hands, just flex and extend the wrist and rotate it both ways.

There are some other gentle exercises you can do while you are at your desk or in the chair. Try them for strengthening your muscles.

- While you are seated, contract your abdominal wall to pull your navel towards the spine and hold it tight without holding your breath for 15-20 seconds. You can do it as often as you can. It strengthens your spine.
- Sit away from the backrest of your chair for at least a couple of hours in a day. It strengthens your postural muscles in the back.
- Stand from a sitting position as often as you can without taking

the support of your arms. It's like squats which strengthen all the muscles of your lower body.

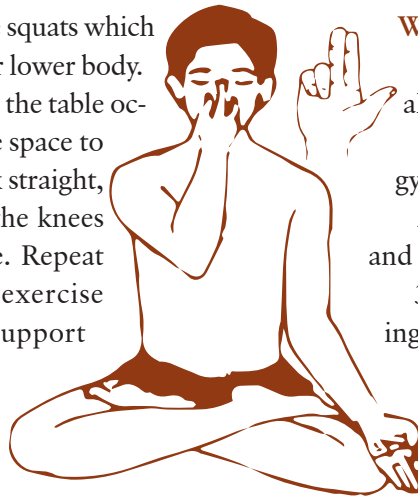
■ Push your chair away from the table occasionally to give yourself ample space to stretch your legs. With your back straight, extend both the lower legs till the knees are locked for at least a minute. Repeat it three to four times. This exercise strengthens the muscles that support the knee joint.

PRANAYAMA – PANACEA FOR HEALTHY BODY & MIND

Prana distinguishes the living from the dead. It is the life source. We get prana from food, rest, breath and a happy frame of mind, but the most important source is breath. We can throw out 90 per cent of the toxins from our body by breathing correctly. It is the key to both healthy and happy living.

BREATHE RIGHT

Most of us breathe upto the chest and sometimes even less than that. This is called shallow breathing which sends a signal to the brain that all is not well; that we are stressed. Breathing upto the abdomen, on the other hand, boosts respiration and ensures a rich supply of oxygen to the brain.



Why Pranayama?

Pranayama helps in several ways:

1. It clears blocked energy channels.
2. It harmonizes the body, mind and spirit.
3. It slows down the ageing process.
4. It boosts the immune system.
5. It improves blood circulation as freshly oxygenated blood (during inhalation) travels from lungs to the heart.

6. More oxygen in the blood means more oxygen to the muscles of the heart. Thus the heart gets healthy.

7. Pranayama is useful in ailments like obesity, diabetes, cholesterol, constipation, flatulence, acidity, respiratory problems, allergy, migraine, high blood pressure and kidney diseases.

8. It improves the quality of life in old age. In middle age, lung tissues tend to grow less elastic and lung capacity decreases. Pranayama can reduce the effects of the following in old age:

■ Backaches, headaches, rheumatism, stiffening of muscles and joints.

■ Accumulation of uric acid in the blood stream, often leading to joint pains.

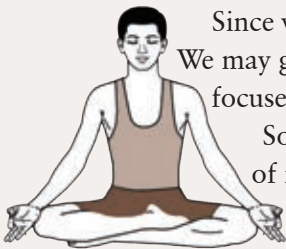
PUTTING MIND BEFORE BODY

Since we live in a digital world, our minds are often crammed with information. We may get caught up in negative thoughts and find it increasingly difficult to stay focused on what is worthwhile.

So, why not practice some mindfulness on a daily basis. No, it's not the sister of meditation, for you have to do it with your eyes and ears open.

It's an effective mental exercise that develops the capacity to stay focused on what you are doing as you are doing it. It works as an antidote to the distractible nature of the mind. Practising it regularly can bring more calmness and effectiveness into your everyday life, reducing stress. It can also get you out of negative thought patterns. What is more, it makes you more aware of your mind as it enables you to notice unhelpful patterns of thought.

It is a Buddhist contemplative practice adapted to suit non-religious contexts, including schools, hospitals, boardrooms and sports teams.



- Hardening of arteries without proper circulation of blood.

Some Tips on Pranayama

- An airy and peaceful place would be better for pranayama.
- The right time would be morning, before dawn.
- Freshen up before sitting for pranayama.
- Increase duration gradually.
- Pranayama should not be done immediately after meals.
- Pregnant women and those having a fever should not do pranayama.
- If you feel fatigued during pranayama, rest for a few minutes.
- Chant Aum aloud before pranayama.
- Sit in an erect position.

FORMS OF PRANAYAMA

Learn from a trained yoga instructor the following pranayamas:

1. Bhastrika Pranayama

Sit in *sukh* asana and take a deep breath so that your lungs are filled with fresh air. Hold the air for a few seconds and release it through your nose slowly. Do it for 5 to 10 minutes daily.

2. Baghi Pranayama

Sit in *sukh* asana, exhale air as much as you can and try to move your stomach towards your spine. After a few seconds, inhale fresh air. Then exhale the air. Do it 5 to 10 times.

3. Kapal Bhati

Sit in *sukh* asana. Take a deep breath. Then exhale the air in one go by pushing the stomach inside. Again inhale fresh air. This pranayama should be done gently at least 200 times or for 15 minutes.

Kapal Bhati is helpful in curbing indigestion, acidity, flatulence, obesity and other

- Late nights are a no-no. They add to your girth and cause acidity.
- Instead of taking the lift climb stairs.
- Have breakfast on a regular basis.
- Smoking, even occasionally, affects your health.

abdominal diseases.

4. Anulom Vilom

This is the easiest form of pranayama. Sit in *sukh* asana, breathe deeply with one nostril open and the other closed with your finger. Now remove your finger from the other nostril and

gently release the air. Do this repeatedly for about 10-15 minutes.

This pranayama is useful in cases of hypertension or high blood pressure, diabetes, migraine, asthma and bronchitis.

5. Bhramari Pranayama

Sit in *sukh* asana or dhyana asana. Close your eyes and cover them with your first two fingers. Use your thumbs to plug your ears. Now breathe deeply through both the nostrils and make a humming sound similar to the humming of bees. Repeat it for about 5-10 minutes.

This form of pranayama is useful for ailments of the ears, nose, throat, eyes and nervous system.

BEWARE

There are some ifs and buts you should consider in case of yoga exercises. Doing them the wrong way may cause acute pain or some health problems.

Yoga related injuries develop slowly, over a period of time, if one practices yoga exercises in excess or in the wrong way.

If your muscles in the midsection are not strong enough, yoga can cause back injuries. If one has a history of back problems, one should not practice certain asanas. It would be better to seek the guidance of a yoga expert. The yoga in-

structor knows which exercises would suit you best since the effects of each asana could vary from individual to individual. ♦

Sources: Spice Route (Inflight Magazine of Spice Jet, September 2013) and Internet

EVERYDAY MANTRA

1. Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water.
2. Eat more nuts, dry fruits and fresh fruits.
3. Stretch your limbs as often as you can while at work.

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

February-March 2015, Sarangpur



Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* rituals



Swamishri releases the newly published animation DVD,
Swaminarayan Charitam, Part 3

FEBRUARY

2, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Dothan (Alabama, USA) and Melbourne (Florida, USA). Swamishri also blessed the devotees from USA.

6, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Milwaukee and Louisville (USA). Thereafter he blessed the devotees from USA.

16, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and the canvas *murti* of Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Vavdi village (Bochasan region). Thereafter Swamishri blessed the village devotees.

17, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni to be installed at the BAPS *hari* mandir in Adelaide (Australia).

MARCH

5, Thursday,

Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta Jayanti

From 8.00 to 9.30 a.m. an assembly was held at the Narayan Mandapam to celebrate Bhagatji Maharaj's birthday. Senior sadhus, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the assembly of mandir devotees and sadhus. Due to the Swine Flu epidemic in Gujarat a prohibition to celebrate the occasion on a large scale had been introduced. Those who entered the assembly were screened with a medical checkup.

At 12.40 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus from his cabin in Pramukh Udyan.

6, Friday; Pushpadolotsav

This year a prohibition had been announced for the mega celebration of Pushpadolotsav in Sarangpur due to the Swine Flu epidemic in Gujarat.

After the *shangar arti* the residing sadhus were blessed with the showering of flower petals by senior sadhus. Thereafter all the sadhus performed the *abhishek* of the small *chal murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Then a small celebration assembly was held at the Narayan Mandapam in which senior sadhus extolled the glory of the Fuldol festival.

At 11.33 a.m. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus from his glass cabin in Pramukh Udyan.

At 9.09 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to sadhus from his glass cabin in Pramukh Udyan. Swami sprayed coloured water on Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Thereafter each sadhu, *parshad* and *sadhak* were graced by Swamishri as they filed past outside his cabin.

17, Tuesday

After 19 days the prohibition of Swamishri's darshan for the devotees, due to the Swine Flu epidemic, was lifted today. A large gathering of devotees were in raptures at Swamishri's darshan.

By Swamishri's grace 11 BAPS sadhus have so far attained PhDs in Sanskrit. Today, marked yet another addition – Paramtattva Swami had acquired a PhD in philosophy from M.S. University, Vadodara. Swamishri sanctified the provisional PhD certificate and Mahant Swami honoured Paramtattva Swami with a garland.

22, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated a new animation DVD production, *Swaminarayan Charitam*, Part 3, by Swaminarayan Aksharpith. The animation DVD was prepared by an inhouse team of *satsangi* and well-wisher youths. Swamishri blessed from far the team of youths, team leader – Parth Gajjar – and music producer – Parag Shastri.



Swamishri during the celebration of Shri Hari Jayanti

28, Saturday; 234th Birth Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

At 10.30 a.m. Swamishri came out of his room in a wheelchair and proceeded for Thakorji's darshan. A beautiful *annakut* had been arranged before Thakorji in all the shrines. Swamishri performed *arti*. Thereafter Swamishri went for darshan to the Smruti Mandir. At 12 noon Swamishri arrived at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika to give darshan to the assembly of devotees. Swamishri also inaugurated the newly built cabin, Pramukh Mandiram.

The evening celebration assembly was held at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika. It commenced at 7.30 p.m. with *dhun* and a prayer sung by sadhus. Thereafter sadhus spoke on the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. At 9.30 p.m. Swamishri arrived and graced all. Thereafter, a drama on Ghanshyam Maharaj's incidents was enacted by children and youths. Then Swamishri inaugurated a Gujarati publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *Jivan Parimal*, authored by Aksharvatsal Swami, and also sanctified a book on satsang recitations for the 2015 *adhivshan* in USA. At 10.00 p.m. Swamishri and senior sadhus performed the celebration *arti*. Finally, Swamishri devotionally rocked Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a decorated cradle amidst the festive singing of bhajans extolling the birth and glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The assembly concluded with the distribution of *prasad* to all. ♦

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



Inauguration of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

Adelaide, Australia, 9-12 April 2015

Four days of ritual ceremonies marked the inauguration of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Adelaide, Australia, in the presence of Pujya Keshavjivan Swami (Mahant Swami).

9 April: Welcome Assembly

Pujya Mahant Swami and other sadhus were welcomed in the evening assembly, which included a traditional dance by children and discourses by the sadhus.

10 April: Mahila Sanskrutik Din

Over 800 female devotees and well-wishers attended the cultural programme, which recognized the role of women in satsang and in the wider society. It also featured a panel discussion on the significance of mandirs, along with traditional dances and other presentations.

11 April: Vishwashanti Mahayagna and Nagar-Yatra

Over a thousand *yajmans* participated in the grand Vishwa Shanti Mahayagna in the morning. Pujya Mahant Swami performed the main Vedic rituals while offering prayers for world peace and the well-being of all. In the afternoon, thousands of devotees and well-wishers participated in the *nagar-yatra* in which the *murtis* were taken in a procession on elaborately decorated floats. Devotees rejoiced at the

darshan of the *murtis* in colourful chariots and offered their devotion in the form of traditional dances and by singing devotional songs. The *nagar-yatra* culminated at the mandir in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami where he blessed the devotees.

12 April: Murti-Pratishtha

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* had been performed previously by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 24 November 2014 in Sarangpur. On the morning of 12 April, the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* was performed in which devotees and well-wishers offered prayers for world peace and prosperity. The *murtis* were ritually consecrated in their respective shrines by Pujya Mahant Swami to the accompaniment of Vedic verses. The *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj was also consecrated. Hon. Jay Wetherill MP, Premier of South Australia, attended this event to offer his best wishes. Hon. Tony Abbott MP, Prime Minister of Australia, also extended his wishes through a written message. In the evening, a cultural programme was presented by BAPS youths which portrayed the tireless efforts of all devotees in the making of this mandir – a seven-year journey of selfless service, devotion, sacrifice and dedication. ♦

New BAPS Mandirs



Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performs the *pratishtha arti*, Rajpardi



Pujya Mahant Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals, Chitrakut, Surat

RAJPARDI

(District: Bharuch)

26-27 December 2014

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited Rajpardi in 1981 and 1985 and inspired the devotees. Thereafter, regular visits by BAPS sadhus resulted in the steady growth of satsang.

The celebrations for the new BAPS *hari* mandir inauguration included a *yagna* for world peace in which 450 devotees participated and a colourful *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* through the main streets.

On 27 December, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) ritually consecrated the *murti* in the new mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 19 February 2014 in Sarangpur.

CHITRAKUT

(Katargam, Surat)

11-12 January 2015

Two days of ritual ceremonies marked the inauguration of the new BAPS *hari* mandir in the Chitrakut area of the Katargam suburb in Surat.

On the morning of 11 January, over 500 *yajmans* participated in the *yagna* for world peace. In the afternoon, a colourful *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* was organized through the streets of Katargam and in the evening over 8,000 devotees attended the inspiring public assembly.

On 12 January, Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals on 7 January 2015 in Sarangpur.

SUNSAR

(District: Patan)

5-7 February 2015

In the 18th century, Sunsar was renowned for the bravery, tolerance and good character of its residents. But from the mid-19th century, the Thakor-Darbars of the village took to addictions and so drinking, meat feasts and stealing became commonplace. The village became notorious and the mere mention of its name filled people with fear. Many social reformers and government initiatives attempted unsuccessfully to remove the scourge of addictions and lawlessness in Sunsar.

Then in 2000, the spark of satsang ignited the path of reform.

Dr Pathubhai Desai, a staunch BAPS devotee, began a medical practice in Sunsar. He began a regular satsang *sabha* and, at first, Sarvadarshan Swami from Mahesana mandir visited frequently. With the support of *sayojak* Kailaspuri Goswami and *nirdeshak* Kantibhai Patel, satsang was firmly established. Slowly, the strong-headed addicts were attracted to satsang and its pure, addiction-free life.

In 2005, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj was at Mahesana mandir, 300 Darbars from Sunsar went there for his darshan and pledged to give up their addictions.

As satsang spread, the need for a mandir arose. So, with the guidance and support of Karunamurti Swami, *kothari* of Mahesana mandir, Uttampriya Swami and Nityaseva Swami a mandir was built.

A three-day celebration was held to mark its inauguration. The ceremonies and celebrations included a special cultural programme, a *yagna* for world peace, in which about 750 *yajmans* participated, and a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis*.

On 7 February, the *murtis* were ritually consecrated in the new *hari* mandir by Pujya Doctor Swami. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 3 May 2014 in Sarangpur.

Thereafter, in the special *pratishtha* assembly

Pratishtha assembly, Sunsar



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Chitrakut, Surat



Pujya Dr Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals, Sunsar, Mahesana



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sunsar



The main *hari* mandir shrine, Nagalpur, Kutch



Puja Mahant Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha arti*, Nagalpur, Kutch



Devotees engaged in the *pratishtha yagna*, Saijpur, Borsad district



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Dahemi, Borsad district

afterwards, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shrimati Anandiben Patel said, “In Sunsar and its surrounding villages, through the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the *vicharan* of his sadhus, the villages have adopted satsang, and so their education level and living standards have improved.

“This mandir, built by the combined efforts of the villagers will help to instil noble values in children and youths and give them inspiration to progress in life. I congratulate the BAPS for the success of its de-addiction campaigns conducted by the children, youths and women in this region.”

Other dignitaries present in the *pratishtha* assembly of over 15,000 people included Shri Rajnibhai Patel, Gujarat State Home Minister, Dilipsinh Thakar, Gujarat State Minister for Labour and Employment, and other government officials.

NAGALPUR

(Mandvi, Kutch)

5-7 February 2015

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified the region of Kutch when he travelled by boat from the port of Jodiya to the port of Mandvi in Kutch. In Mandvi, Shriji Maharaj convinced Khaiya Khatri of his divine form.

Nagalpur is located 3 km from Mandvi. Ramjibhai Patel, a devotee settled in Kampala, Uganda, is a native of Nagalpur. During his visits home he inspired satsang among the village folks.

The mandir was built through the efforts of Ramjibhai Patel, Kanjibhai Rabadia and Kantibhai Chhabadia (Muscat, Oman).

To celebrate the inauguration of the new BAPS *hari* mandir, a cultural programme was presented on 5 February. On 6 February, many devotees participated in the *yagna* for world peace and the ensuing *nagar-yatra*.

In Sarangpur, on 27 January 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis*, and on 7 February Puja



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kakadkuva, Valsad



Puja Kothari Swami performing *padhramanis* in Kakadkuva, Valsad

Mahant Swami ritually consecrated them in the new *hari* mandir.

SAIJPUR

(District: Borsad)

6-7 February 2015

Since the visit of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1990 to this town satsang has gradually increased, nourished by the regular visits of Puja Tyagvallabh Swami and other sadhus.

To celebrate the inauguration of the new mandir, over 1200 *yajmans* participated in the 150-*kund yagna* for world peace on 6 February.

On 7 February, Puja Tyagvallabh Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new BAPS *hari* mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals in Sarangpur on 28 April 2014.

KAKADKUVA

(District: Dharampur-Kaprada, Valsad)

18-20 February 2015

In 2000, a *kutir* mandir was established in this tribal village. This facilitated the growth of satsang in the surrounding villages. The three-day ceremonies for the inauguration of the new BAPS *hari* mandir included a special women's assembly, a kirtan *aradhana* by sadhus, a *yagna* for world peace in which 600 couples participated and a *nagar-yatra*. The celebrations climaxed with the ritual consecration of the *murtis* in

the new *hari* mandir on 20 February by Puja Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami). Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals in Sarangpur on 21 July 2014.

After the inauguration, Puja Kothari Swami visited and sanctified the huts and homes of the villagers.

DAHEMI

(District: Borsad)

22-23 February 2014

Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj had sanctified this village in 1968 and blessed the villagers. Thereafter, regular visits by Puja Tyagvallabh Swami and other BAPS sadhus nourished the growth of satsang. The combined efforts of the devotees resulted in the building of the new BAPS *hari* mandir.

To commemorate its inauguration, 1,100 couples participated in the 140-*kund yagna* for world peace. This was followed by a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis*.

On 23 February, Puja Mahant Swami ritually consecrated the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals in Sarangpur on 28 April 2014. ♦



India

SHILANYAS CEREMONY FOR NEW YOGI SMRUTI MANDIR

Gondal, Gujarat, 9 March 2015



After planting trees in the compound of Akshar-Mandir, Pujya Keshavjivan Swami (Mahant Swami), Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami), Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami), Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami performed the Vedic *shilanyas* ceremony for the new Yogi Smruti Mandir in honour of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, at the sanctified place where he was cremated in Gondal.

The *shilanyas* ceremony in the foundation pit was followed by an assembly, with discourses and blessings by the senior sadhus.

KARYAKAR SHIBIR

New Delhi, 21-22 March 2015

Over 300 BAPS *karyakars* from New Delhi, Jaipur and other BAPS centres in Rajasthan and North India attended the Annual Karyakar Shibir based on the theme 'Yagnapurush



Sukhkari' at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, New Delhi. Through the exemplary life and work of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the *shibir* guided the *karyakars* on how best to perform their satsang duties. The *shibir* featured inspiring speeches by senior and experienced sadhus, discussions, question-answer sessions, theme-based activities and audio-visual presentations.

SANSKRUTI SHIBIR

New Delhi, 28 March 2015



About 600 *balaks* and *balikas* from Delhi and Jaipur participated in the three-day Sanskruti Shibir at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in New Delhi. During the *shibir* the children were taught about the festivals of Hinduism. They also celebrated them and experienced at first hand the Hindu traditions. Through an array of activities, workshops, skits

and motivational speeches, BAPS volunteers explained the origins, sentiments and rituals of over 30 Hindu festivals. They emphasized values such as sacrifice, guru bhakti, family unity, discipline and many others which help to lead a purer and more prosperous life.

The *shibir* provided an informative and divine experience for the children and enhanced their understanding about Hindu culture.

BAPS CLEANLINESS DRIVE

Gujarat, April 2015



In support of the national Clean India campaign, BAPS devotees have taken personal pledges to help keep their homes and neighbourhoods clean and hygienic.

During April 2015, as part of the BAPS Cleanliness Drive, devotees from BAPS centres throughout Gujarat selected a variety of public places to clean. Separate teams of men and women devotees spent many hours cleaning these places.

A total of 44,800 male devotees from 2,100 BAPS centres cleaned 2,580 places – 825 mandirs, 500 schools and colleges, 80 hospitals, 815 public roads and 370 other public places, such as bus stands, police stations, riverbanks, etc.

In addition, a total of 43,400 women devotees from 2,780 centres cleaned 2,641 places – 1,430 mandirs, 133 hospitals, 825 schools, 30 old-age homes and 639 other public places.

SHILANYAS MAHOTSAV

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, 10 April 2015

The foundation stone-laying ceremony



(Shilanyas Vidhi) for a BAPS *hari* mandir in Shimla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh in northern India, was performed in the presence of Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami), Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and other sadhus. Hundreds of devotees participated in the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony conducted by sadhus, during which the consecrated stones and bricks were laid in the foundation by the sadhus and devotees. After the ceremony, a celebration assembly was held.

YUVA TALIM KENDRA REUNION

Sarangpur, Gujarat, 25-26 April 2015



Inaugurated in 2007, the BAPS Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) – Youth Training Centre – is a six-month residential course for selected youths conducted in Sarangpur. The course provides training in personality development, satsang knowledge, health and other talents to enhance the personal, professional and social skills of BAPS youths. The youths receive guidance from *sadguru* sadhus, senior and experienced sadhus, and from other experts.

On 25 and 26 April, a special reunion – *snehmilan* – of all the youths who have been trained

at the YTK since 2007 was held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A special photographic exhibition was held, reviving memories of the previous YTK batches. The theme of the reunion was ‘Ya Hom Thay Jaie’ – ‘Let Us Dedicate Totally’. The *snehmilan* began with Swamishri’s darshan and blessings, during which the youths were all dressed as a modern-day Hira Mukhi – the dedicated devotee from the time of Shastriji Maharaj who boldly helped to spread the message of satsang. The youths presented a skit in which they pledged to dedicate themselves for satsang.

During the two-day reunion, the youths were further guided through speeches by senior sadhus, skits and other inspiring presentations.

UK

ANNUAL PRAYERS FOR WORLD PEACE AND HARMONY

Wellingborough, England, 5 April 2015



Annually, since 1984, with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Hindus from around the UK have flocked to the holy ‘Akshar Deri’ shrine at the BAPS *hari* mandir in Wellingborough to participate in 12 hours of continuous prayers and chanting for world peace and harmony.

Traditionally, till recently, this auspicious occasion was held on the first day of the New Year. However, from this year, the annual event has been rescheduled to take place over the Easter weekend to take advantage of the milder weather and so enable more visitors of all ages and from

the furthest parts of the country to attend.

The *dhun* and prayers were offered continuously from 7.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m.

Mahesh Patel, lead volunteer at the mandir, shared, “This annual event is well known as a time for us to come together and pray for peace and well-being throughout the world. Special thanks go to everyone in the community for their kind support in making this event such a success.”

CHILDREN’S EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY CAMP

Kingswood Grosvenor Hall, Kent, England

3-5 April 2015



More than 190 children from The Swaminarayan Sunday School in London enjoyed a three-day educational activity camp which was designed to develop the children’s personal and interpersonal skills.

Over the three days, the children challenged themselves through a variety of tasks specially designed to harness a number of skills and abilities. Some tasks tested and developed teamwork and communication, while others strengthened physical fitness, control, coordination and balance. These activities helped to develop mutual trust, support and communication.

In the evenings there were lighter activities, including talent performances by the children and lively, enjoyable discussions around the camp fire.

Overall, this fun educational camp enabled the children to grow in confidence, strategic thinking and social interaction, and provided them valuable learning experiences as part of their holistic development.

BAPS Worldwide

EARTH HOUR CELEBRATION

28 March 2015



Along with Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, BAPS mandirs in London, Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto, Atlanta, Dallas and other locations participated in the annual Earth Hour awareness event by switching off their lights for 60 minutes starting at 8.30 p.m. local time.

Beyond Earth Hour, BAPS is committed to continuously supporting environmentally sustainable efforts through harnessing innovative, energy-efficient designs, materials, and technologies in its mandirs and activities. Currently, many facilities utilize solar power, LED lighting, power-saving fibre optics and management practices to ensure energy consumption is both optimal and efficient.

Asia-Pacific

NSW PREMIER HON. MIKE BAIRD VISITS

BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR,
Sydney, Australia, 15 March 2015



The New South Wales Premier, Hon. Mike Baird, visited the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sydney, to take part in a special blessing ritual in the presence of hundreds of devotees and visitors. Mr. Baird offered prayers for world peace and harmony by offering *abhishek*. Other dignitaries present included Liberal State MPs, Dr Geoff Lee, Member for Paramatta, and Tony Issa, Member for Granville. In his address to the assembly Mr. Baird praised the positive impact of the Indian community in NSW and reflected on his recent visit to Gujarat on the invitation of the Indian Prime Minister.

He said, "I have had much opportunity to reflect on the Hindu faith and I know of the journey that Hindus have taken from India and East Africa to Sydney. One of the great things about the faith is its focus on unity and harmony."

Mr. Baird also praised the spirit of volunteerism and selfless service cultivated by the BAPS.

BAPS Charities

ANNUAL CHARITY CHALLENGE IN SUPPORT OF BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION AND ROSA UK, 12 April 2015

A total of over 3,000 participants in about 20 towns and cities across the UK walked or ran 10 km as part of the BAPS Charities Annual 10k



Challenge. The annual event brings together people of all ages and backgrounds around the country to do something healthy and enjoyable to raise valuable funds for a variety of worthy causes.

The official partner for BAPS Charities this year is the British Heart Foundation, the largest independent funder of cardiovascular research. The Challenge will also raise funds for Rosa, a charitable fund set up to support initiatives that benefit women and girls in the UK.

Previous national partners have included Barnardo's, Breast Cancer Care, Diabetes UK, Age UK, KIDS, The Anthony Nolan Trust, Macmillan Cancer Support as well as the British Heart Foundation.

The event in London kicked off from the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir shortly after 10.00 a.m. in the presence of Dr Virander Paul, Deputy High Commissioner for India in London, The Mayor of Brent Cllr Kana Naheerathan, Lord Popat and Lord Ahmad as well as various local councillors. Sarah Lennon, Regional Head of Community Fundraising at the British Heart Foundation, and Samantha Rennie, Executive Director of Rosa, were also present.

Ms Rennie praised the integral role of women within BAPS after witnessing the recent International Women's Day celebrations at the mandir. She added, "We're delighted with the support this event has provided for our work.... which will help raise more funds for vital work and help spread the message that investing in women makes a big difference to the whole community."

The Challenge also took place at the BAPS centres in Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Havant, Leeds, Leicester, Nottingham, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Preston, South East London, South London, Southend-on-Sea, Wellingborough and others.

ANNUAL WALK 2015

Auckland, New Zealand, 18 April 2015



BAPS Charities New Zealand organized a walkathon to raise funds in support of the KidsCan NZ, which provides food, clothing and basic health care in schools, to enable all disadvantaged NZ children to reach their potential. Despite the rainy weather, around 300 participants took part in the event which was held at Auckland's greenest spot – Cornwall Park.

RENOVATION OF MAKTABA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 3 February 2015



Over a period of six months, 18 classrooms, 20 toilets and the staffroom of Maktaba Primary School were reconstructed by BAPS Charities. BAPS Charities representatives joined the

Deputy Minister of State Prime Minister's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government, Mr. Kassim Majaliwa along with various community leaders to inaugurate the renovated school.

The day's festivities included cultural programmes and dances by the students of the school along with speeches by the assembled dignitaries. Each of the 700 students were provided gift packs by BAPS Charities including essential school supplies and stationery.

BAPS CHARITIES FOOD DRIVE

**Yatima Group Chamazi Orphanage, Tanzania,
22 February 2015**



BAPS Charities volunteers organized a food drive and a medical camp at the Yatima Group Chamazi Orphanage, which is a home for young, orphaned children. The home was founded on 7 March 2001 by the then president of Tanzania, Ali Hassan Mwinyi. At present, the home is sustained by various charity groups. There are a total of 140 orphans in the orphanage with 6 caretakers, who manage 4 dormitories, housing 66 girls

and 74 boys whose age groups range from a few months old to 18 years.

BAPS volunteers also handed out gift packs containing snacks, chocolates, candies and personal hygiene products to each of the children

EYE SCREENING CAMP IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LIONS INTERNATIONAL

**BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi,
15 March 2015**



BAPS Charities in conjunction with Lions International organized a free eye screening camp at the BAPS Swaminarayan Haveli, Nairobi.

A total of 630 patients (aged 3 to 90 years) were checked for long and short sightedness, eye pressure, cataracts, allergies and infections and general health. With the assistance of doctors and medical auxiliaries from the Lion's team the patients were examined, diagnosed and provided the necessary medication free of cost.

Also, a total of 131 donors also registered as future eye donors. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 22)

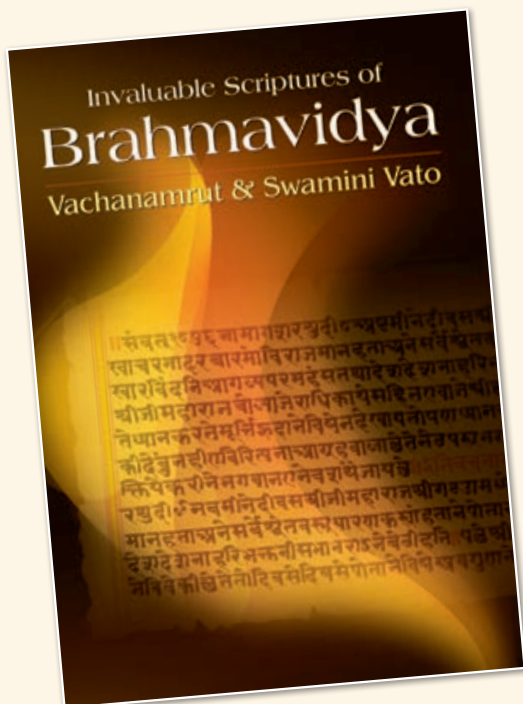
But, I hadn't resolved from the beginning to study English. If I had started then I would have studied without any problems. But then Swami instructed otherwise and I dropped the wish to study English. I didn't feel in my mind that he had made me drop English and study Sanskrit. I have never had such a thought. No wish to study English remained since then.

For us, whatever is God's will is fine. God is the all-doer. If we keep him at the forefront, we will remain at peace. Nobody can do anything without him. God is before us, and we follow him. ♦

*(Collated from Swamishri's interviews:
1 March 1990, 23 June 1989, 8 July 1989,
11 April 1986, December 1991, December 2006
and January 2007.)*

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH

New Publications



Translation by
Sejal Patel and Nita Patel (UK)

Invaluable Scriptures of Brahmaavidya

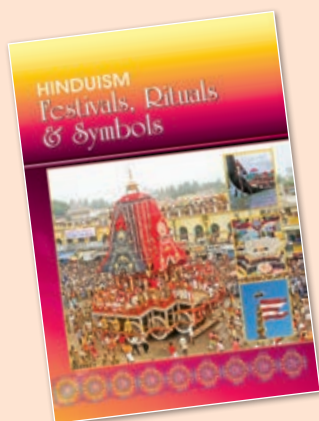
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- Aum
- Swastika
- Deepa (Lamp)
- Conch
- Lotus...

Coming Soon to All BAPS Bookstores



**SHILANYAS CEREMONY FOR NEW YOGI SMRUTI MANDIR,
Gondal, 9 March 2015**

Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Kothari Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami worship and prepare the *nidhi kumbh* (auspicious waterpot) before ritually placing it in the foundation pit. **Inset:** Illustration depicting the design of the new mandir.



Senior sadhus preside over the *shilanyas* assembly for the new Yogi Smruti Mandir, Gondal



**SHILANYAS CEREMONY, BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR
Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, 10 April 2015**

Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami perform the *shilanyas* ceremony for *hari mandir* in Shimla, H.P.



Ahmedabad



Vadodara



Surat



Mumbai



Gondal



Bhavnagar

BAPS CLEANLINESS DRIVE

March-April 2015, Gujarat

Over 88,000 BAPS devotees, men and women, participated in the BAPS Cleanliness Drive in Gujarat and Mumbai to clean public places and spread the message of keeping India clean and hygienic.