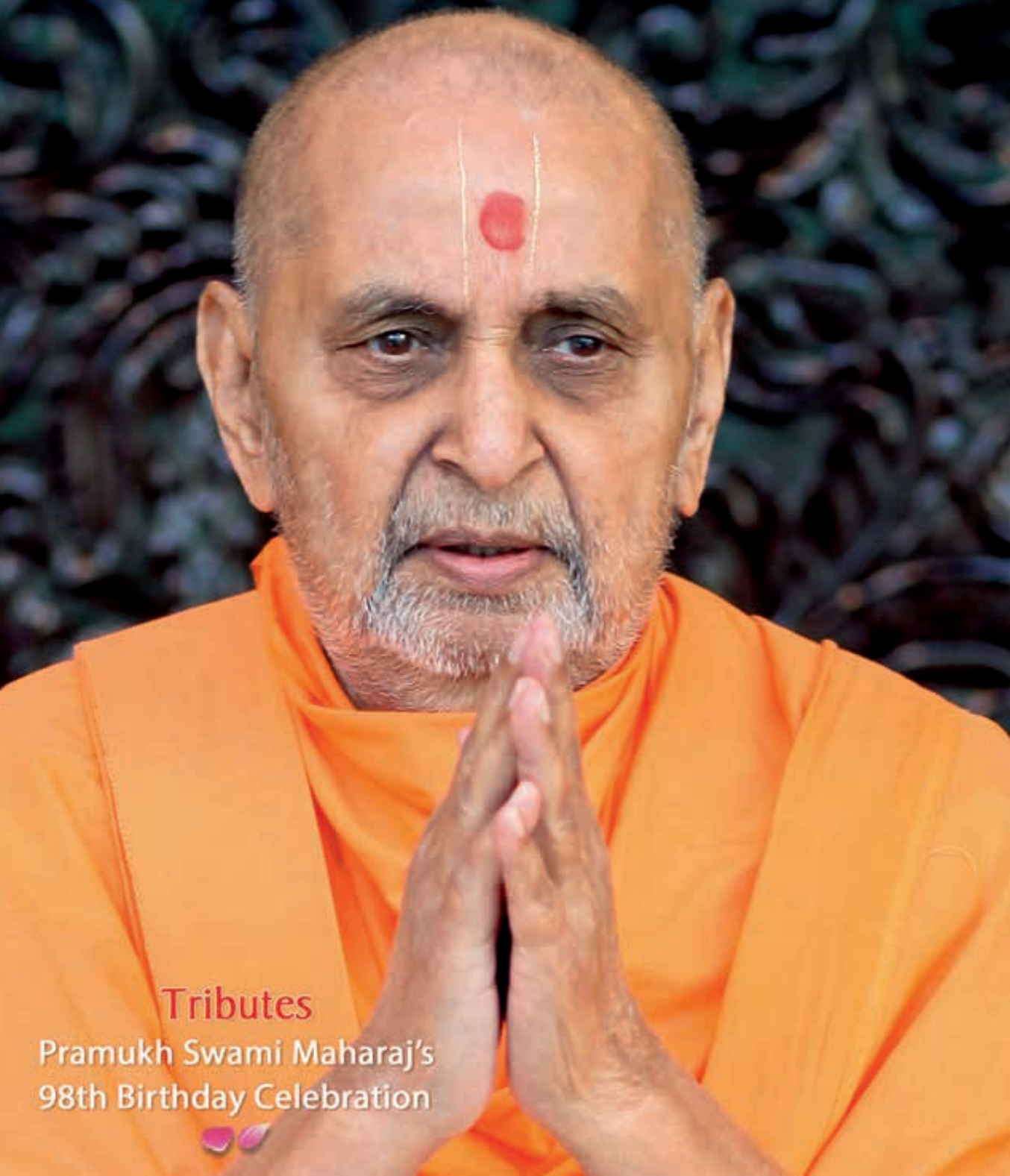


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November–December 2018

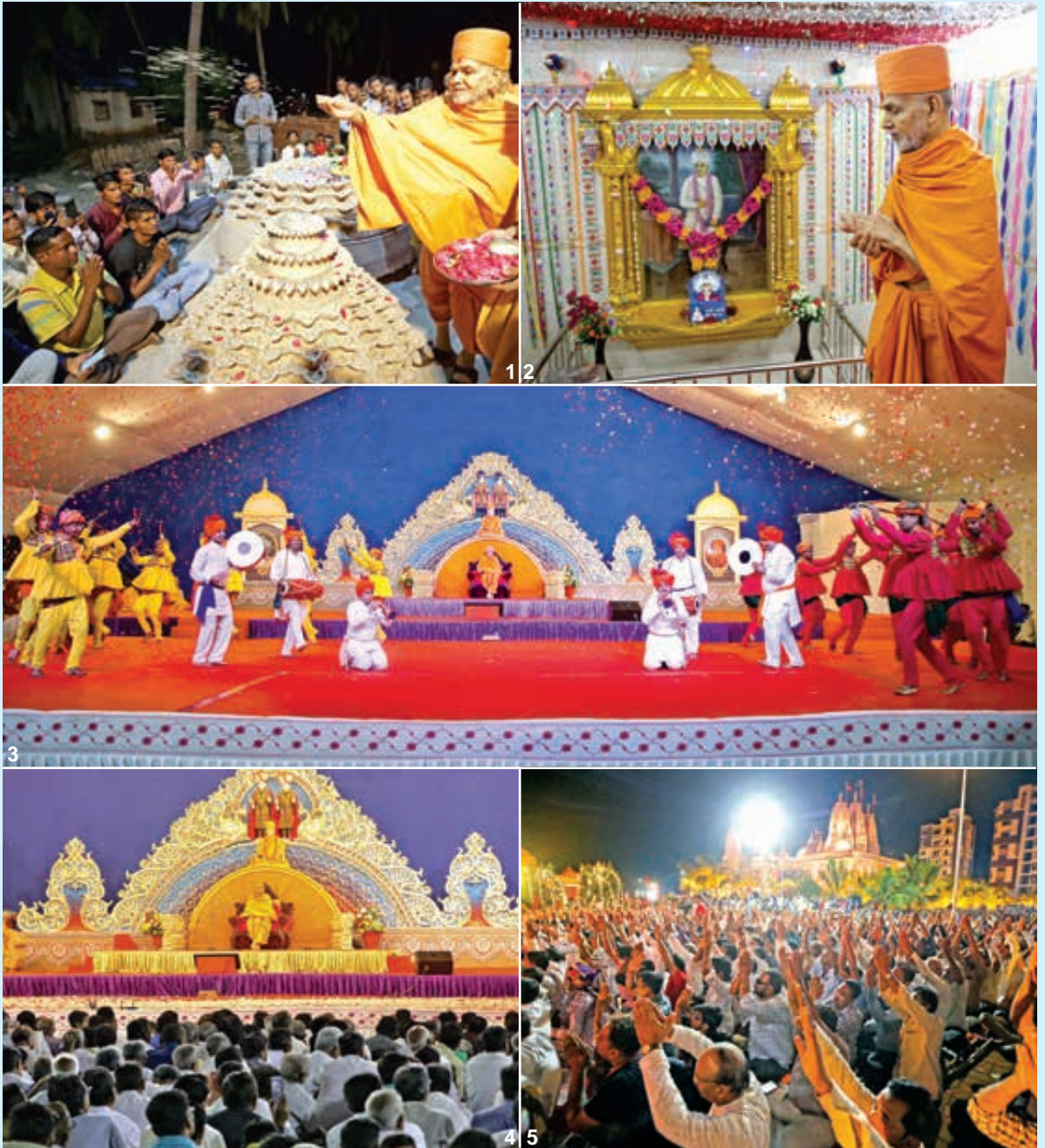
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Tributes

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
98th Birthday Celebration

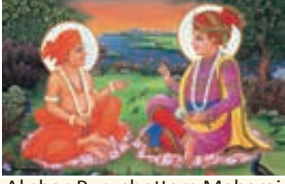




MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN 10–14 October 2018, Mahuva

In Mahuva, the birthplace of Brahaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, devotees enjoyed the divine spiritual association of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

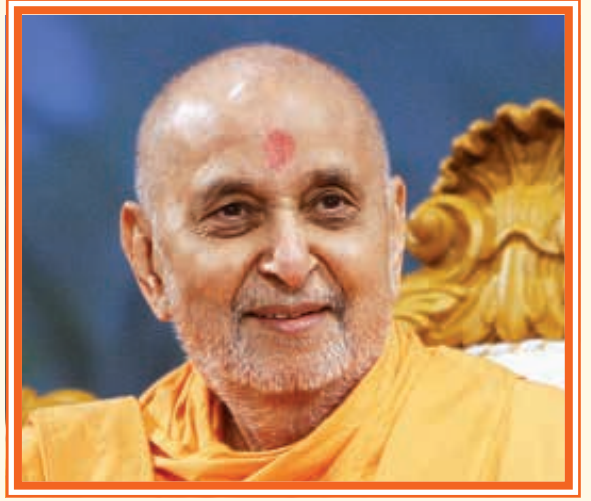
1. Swamishri performs *pujan* of the keystone for the mandir being built over Bhagatji Maharaj's cremation spot on the banks of River Malan, 10 October.
2. Swamishri offers prayers at the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj, 10 October.
3. Devotees and youths perform a traditional dance during an evening satsang assembly, 11 October.
4. Swamishri blesses an evening assembly, 12 October.
5. Devotees seated during an evening assembly, 10 October.



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November–December 2018, Vol. 41, No. 6



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

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

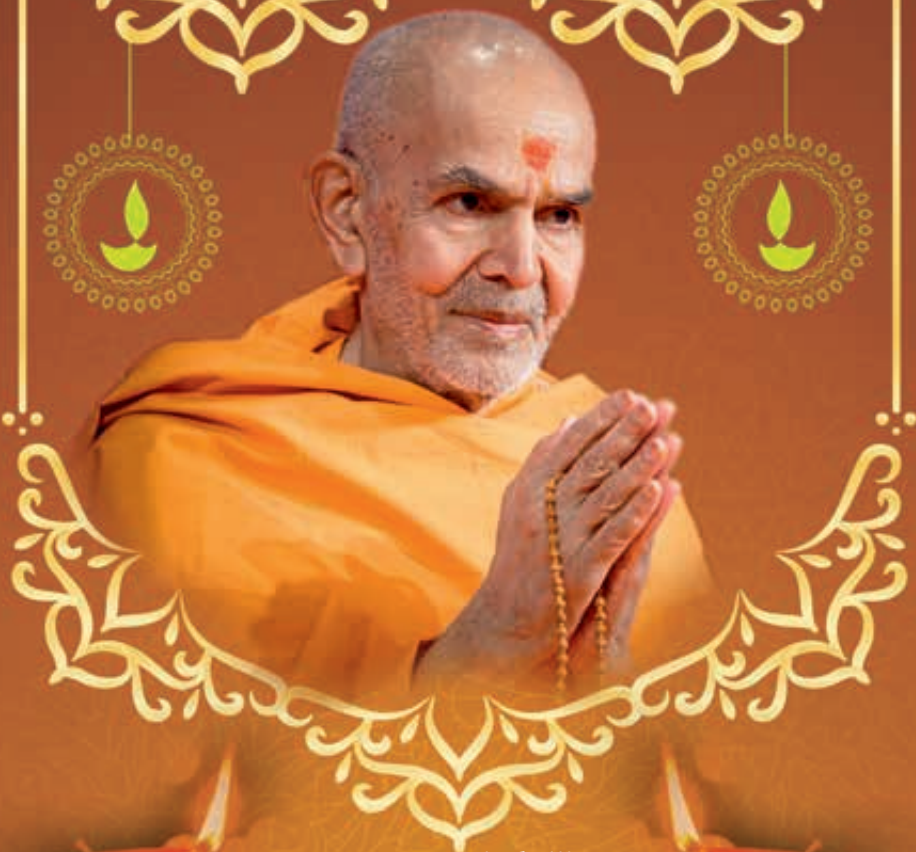
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Swami-Shriji
Param Pujya Pramukh Swami

Bhavnagar
30.9.2018, Sunday

To,
All of Swami Bapa's Very Dearest Devotees,

Jai Swaminarayan for the New Year with great affection from Sadhu Keshavjivandas.

"All devotees worshipping God are divine. Whoever understands, beholds and contemplates on these important words becomes blissful and conquers the world. His joy is not diminished, day or night." These are the words of Shriji Maharaj himself. Seeing everything, what remains? Today, nobody throughout the world has peace. So, how can one have it day and night?

According to Maharaj's words, the only condition is to believe all devotees to be divine. Based on these words, Akshardham is experienced here. As per Maharaj's words, everyone must always observe the simple *niyams*. And from the time of Maharaj to all the gurus of our *parampara*, thousands have become *ekantik*. So, why should we not do like this and why not receive the blessings of Maharaj, Swami and the Gunatit gurus?

Still, blessings for the New Year that all experience joy in body, mind and wealth.

Jai Shri Swaminarayan



Construction of Mandir in Vartal

*Rajuba of Muli prepares a meal and serves it to Shri Hari.
At night she has her bed chopped to fuel the fire and
provide warmth to Maharaj...*

TREASURE OF DIVINE GRACE

Shriji Maharaj looked at her and exclaimed, “Rajuba, you chopped so much wood as fuel for me!”

Rajuba’s eyes were still wet with tears. She replied emotionally, “Maharaj, if you speak in this manner then I won’t be able to live. You are my life and everything. You have given me everything in abundance, which is way beyond my eligibility. And in return, I have done nothing for you. Please bless me so that I can treasure your divine grace forever in my heart.”

I, TOO, HAVE BORNE MANY HARDSHIPS

Shri Hari was listening to Rajuba’s effusions. Then he revealed, “Rajuba, today, I have put you through a lot of hardships [*bhido*], but I, too, have borne many burdens and hardships.”

Rajuba was eager to know about Maharaj’s hardships. She asked, “Prabhu, what type of *bhido* have you gone through?”

Maharaj replied with a worried expression, “At present, Brahmanand Swami is building a mandir in Vartal. He is in dire need of money for the project. The wages for the artisans are long overdue. He has written a letter to me about this. But from where can I bring money to give to him?”

Rajuba was touched by Shriji Maharaj’s words. She immediately took a gold necklace she was wearing and told Maharaj, “Here Maharaj, take it and this ₹ 200.”

“But, what is the value of this necklace?” asked Shri Hari.

Rajuba closed her eyes and remained mute. Sura Khachar saw the necklace and guessed, “Maharaj, you can get around ₹ 500 cash.” Shri Hari accepted the necklace and told Sura Khachar, “Sura, take this necklace and go to Botad. Leave it in the custody of Bhaga Doshi and take the amount he gives and come straight to Vartal.” Then, Shri Hari talked to Rajuba, “Forgive me for having taken so much from you.”

Rajuba bowed her head at Shri Hari’s feet. The torrent of joyful tears from her eyes washed Maharaj’s feet. She declared, “Maharaj, I have enshrined your *murti* in my heart. No one can take you away from me!”

This was the ultimate purpose of Shri Hari’s birth. Now that the lady had established him in her heart Shri Hari stood up. He told Rajuba, “I shall depart now, because the devotees are waiting for me to join them.”

“Goodbye Maharaj. You have blessed me abundantly. I shall always remain indebted to you. May I truly become a vessel of your divine grace.”

Shri Hari shot a glance at her while he mounted Manki, his mare. The mare galloped off at a brisk pace. On the way to Vartal, the devotees waiting on the outskirts of their villages beseeched him to stay, but Maharaj replied, “I am in a hurry to reach Vartal. All of you come to Vartal once you have completed your work.”

SHRI HARI IN VARTAL

Shri Hari arrived in Vartal and immediately went to see the work on the mandir foundation. He also observed the entire site. Maharaj was satisfied with the progress of work, which amply reflected Brahmanand Swami's intelligence and innate capacities. Shri Hari praised Brahmanand Swami. Nityanand Swami commended, "Only because of Brahmanand Swami's vision and insight can such work be possible. He is unparalleled."

Shri Hari smiled at Nityanand Swami's words and endorsed, "Because he is unique, that is why I have assigned him with this colossal task."

Earlier, Nityanand Swami had praised Brahmanand Swami's towering intelligence. Thereafter, Shri Hari told Brahmanand Swami to study Nyaya philosophy. So, daily he would read two pages, contemplate on them once and then recite them with utter ease. He composed kirtans extempore, and while he was discoursing to an assembly he could write anything simultaneously.

In accordance to Nityanand Swami's suggestion, Brahmanand Swami started the excavation of the foundation for the mandir dome. Shri Hari would sit daily on the site. Consequently, the sadhus and devotees who were labouring were inspired and enthused. Maharaj told them, "The *seva* you are doing is for Purushottam Narayan incarnate. Your labour is converted into bhakti for God. Only those who are supremely fortunate can get this opportunity to serve."

THE DOCUMENTS FOR DHAARU POND

When Shri Hari was in Gadhada he used to often write to Brahmanand Swami about getting the title deed done for the mandir site. Till his arrival in Vartal the task had not been done. Then the local devotees and well-wishers donated the Dhaaru Pond in Vartal and gave the title deed to Shriji Maharaj.

Shri Hari celebrated the Fuldol festival in Vartal. Subsequently, the devotees who had

attended the festival stayed a few more days to do the *seva* of filling up the foundation site.

SHRI HARI CARRIES BRICKS

Shri Hari went to the site and kilns where the bricks were being made. He picked up two bricks, placed them on his *pagh* and started carrying them towards the foundation pit. The sadhus and devotees tried to persuade him not to do so, but Maharaj smiled and added, "I, too, want to take this opportunity of doing *seva* and bhakti. By doing so, the glory of *seva* and bhakti will increase and you all shall be inspired to do more *seva* with bhakti and glory for God."

Shri Hari made three rounds, carrying two bricks on his head each time. Brahmanand Swami thought that the bricks Maharaj had carried should not be thrown into the foundation pit. Instead, he decided to use them to make the small pedestal on which the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev would be installed.

Daily, Maharaj personally made rounds to see the work on the mandir site. As a result the sadhus worked with heightened zest and pace. Bhaktipriyanand Swami stomped the mud required for the construction work. Thereafter, the sadhus supplied the mushy mud in containers to the masons. When Maharaj showed the masons where to lay the bricks layer after layer they were impressed and appreciated Shri Hari's knowledge.

THIS IS NOT MUD BUT CHANDAN

In the evening, Shri Hari decided to embrace all the sadhus supplying mud. The sadhus hesitated because their bodies were smeared with mud. They cautioned Maharaj, "The mud will stick to your body."

Shri Hari replied, "This is not mud but *chandana*!" And he embraced them one by one, thus giving dignity and value to their *seva*. On seeing this, other sadhus, who had not participated in the *seva*, smeared mud on their clothes with the

intention that Maharaj would also embrace them. But the all-knowing Shri Hari spoke forthrightly, “You have smeared mud on your clothes, so I’ll get dirty. Therefore, I shall not embrace you.” The sadhus turned away sheepishly.

I’M INCLINED TOWARDS MEETING YOU

At that time, Gunatitanand Swami was standing a short distance away. Shri Hari called out to him, “Come Nirgunanand!¹ Why are you standing far away?”

Swami replied, “You had stated that you’d like to embrace those whose clothes are soiled with mud. So, how could I disobey your words?”

Maharaj said, “Swami, the other sadhus tried to deceive me, whereas you always follow my words. So, I always feel inclined to meet you. Come, let me embrace you.”

Shri Hari embraced Gunatitanand Swami and declared, “Swami, we are not separate from each other. Like a *jiva* that has become one with the body, such oneness lies between us.”

Shri Hari decided to perform the *murti-pratishtha* of Vartal mandir in one year’s time. Thus, he inspired all to increase the pace of work. Brahmanand Swami was happy with Maharaj’s stay.

THE ESSENCE OF A RENUNCIATE’S DHARMA

The next day, Shri Hari went to Dhaaru Pond and bathed in its cool, pure water with his *paramhansas*. Then, Shri Hari sat down on a cot placed by the bank. The *paramhansas* gathered around him and sat down. Shri Hari started talking about *vairagya*. In no time, a group of naked *bawas* arrived there. They all bowed to Maharaj, and Shri Hari told them to sit down a little distance away. Then, Shri Hari resumed his discourse to his sadhus, “Keep your eyes under control. Do not look at the *bawas*.” But no one could resist stealing glances at them. Only Gunatitanand Swami was

sitting calmly and looking unwaveringly at Shri Hari’s countenance.

Suddenly, one of the *bawas* stood up and blurted out, “Maharaj, we have come here after hearing your name. Give us food rations so that we can cook food for ourselves.”

Shri Hari smiled at the uncouth manner of the *bawa* and instructed all of them, “You have all renounced the world, but you have not contemplated upon the essence of dharma. One who is a *tyagi* should refrain from associating with females in any way. He should also not touch money nor eat tasty foods. One who abides these disciplines is a true *tyagi*. Remember, merely by remaining unclothed does not qualify you as a *tyagi*, because dogs and donkeys roam about naked too. As they bark and bray, you too, under the influence of bhang and marijuana, utter expletives and freely associate with women and make them serve you. Your apparent renunciation is stained with immorality and indecorum. Thus, listen to the shastras and contemplate on them.”

At that time, Ratna Bhakta of Bhadra village experienced *samadhi*. The *bawas* were amazed at what they saw. The mahant of the *bawas* came forward to check Ratna Bhakta’s pulse, but he failed to locate it. Then, Ratna Bhakta started gesturing while doing darshan of Maharaj during the *samadhi*. The mahant was amazed by Ratna Bhakta’s actions, and he thus realized Shri Hari’s glory. The mahant realized the truth in Maharaj’s sermon and he urged, “Maharaj, give me the sadhu *diksha*.”

Shri Hari gave *diksha* to the mahant and offered him an *alfi* (a single saffron gown) to wear. Among the other *bawas*, those who were pious also took *diksha* at Shri Hari’s hands. However, those who were evil-minded vented their anger and vehemently demanded food grains. Once they got the grains they departed. ♦

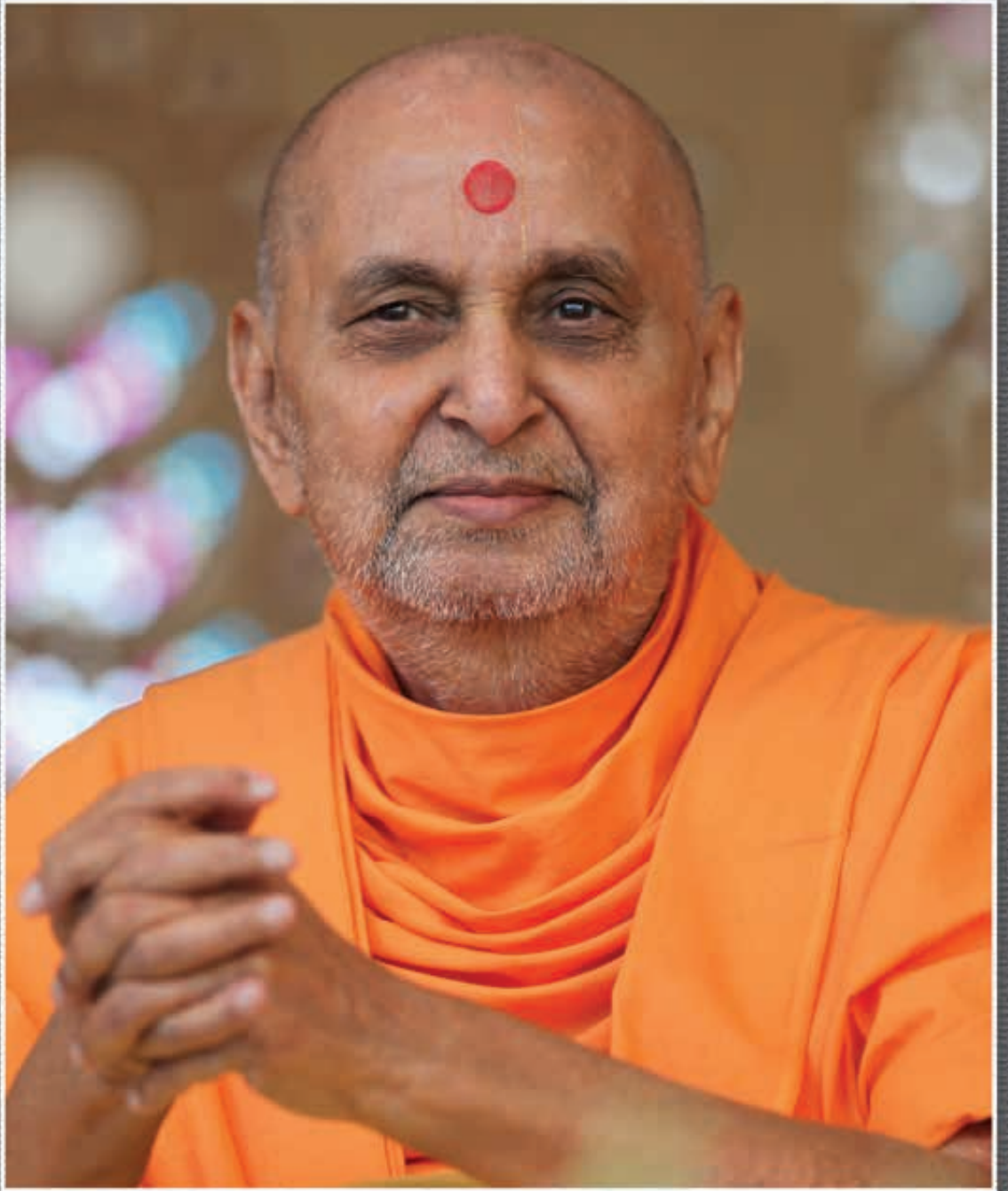
(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from the Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan authored by Shri H.T. Dave

1. A name by which Shriji Maharaj addressed Gunatitanand Swami.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th Birth Anniversary Celebrations



From 5 to 15 December 2018, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th Birth Anniversary Celebrations will be held in Rajkot.

To commemorate this auspicious occasion, we pay tribute to the virtuous life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj with a series of articles that reveal his matchless divine personality...

‘Shobo Sādhū Gune Sadā Saral ne’

Profundity in Simplicity



The game Temple Run does not require any instructions. A three-year-old can pick up a smartphone and start playing it. A 70-year-old can spend hours trying to master it. It is intuitive, simple, and thus, in a sense, beautiful. The premise of the game is that you are an explorer who, while running away from a yeti-like creature, must collect coins and rewards. All these resources are used to simply keep running. Through a variety of swipes on the screen and tilts of the device, players run through a virtual obstacle course through a virtual jungle, avoiding virtual death and striving to achieve objectives based on things like how far they run, how many coins are collected in a single run and how far they run without tripping. The

simplicity of Temple Run is a large part of the popularity of the game. There are no instructions, you just play. However, what is not so apparent is that this initial simplicity gives way to a deep level of game play. There are subtle variations in the obstacles you face. You have choices in the power ups you use. This phenomena of profundity within simplicity makes the game popular to play and also brings joy. People can play this game for hours even though there is no apparent end to the game. This has the potential to be a very frustrating condition – to play with no way of winning. Yet Temple Run turns this situation into an advantage as players continue to outdo their last greatest run. Simplicity draws people to play Temple Run, depth keeps them playing.

Profundity within simplicity is a powerful force, which if we observe carefully, can be found in many things in our environment.

Similarly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's never-ending profundity within timeless simplicity was part of his saintliness. Many people had witnessed it in his always simple, accommodating manner.

When we sing, "*Shobho sādhu gune sadā saral ne...*" (You are resplendent with the virtues of saintliness, always unassuming and accommodating) we pay homage to the profundity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj embodied simplicity and the joy and depth of character that simplicity bestows. Simplicity breaks the barriers of age and language and enabled Pramukh Swami Maharaj to interact with any age group or any culture.

A young boy named Vikesh experienced this simplicity first hand in 2001 when Pramukh Swami Maharaj was visiting Bochasan. Drawn by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's open nature, Vikesh pointed to the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj and said to Bapa, "This is your reflection." Pramukh Swami Maharaj corrected him and stated, "God is not our reflection, but we are his reflection. Because of him we are great and glorious. Our powers have been given by him. Everything is his. Remember, God is the greatest and we should never forget him." Within moments, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was able to lucidly explain the supremacy of Maharaj to a small child – age has no bound for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity.

During the Cultural Festival of India in Edison, NJ, in 1991, a visiting politician noticed that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's upper garment had slid off his shoulder and yet he remained undisturbed. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity melted any barrier of language and culture and the politician commented to him, "You look very comfortable." Pramukh Swami Maharaj playfully took hold of his tie and joked, "You have to wear this around your neck. Whereas

for us [in English] 'all season, one dress'." The politician was greatly amused. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity had engendered lasting joy. Such moments with Pramukh Swami Maharaj remain firmly etched in our memory many years later.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was resplendent in his simplicity. His simplicity was effortless – a part of his innate saintliness. One aspect of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity was his ability to say a great deal with very few words. We saw already how his few words to the politician at the CFI had enabled him to cross great cultural boundaries. But just a few words from Pramukh Swami Maharaj also bridged vast spiritual boundaries, taking the *jiva* to Paramatma.

One morning, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was performing *pradakshina* at Atladra Mandir. As he finished and was walking away, a sadhu casually asked him what he was praying for while doing *pradakshina*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's brief reply speaks volumes about his saintliness. He stated, "I prayed for the happiness of saints and devotees; that everyone may worship God and attain peace." Pramukh Swami Maharaj's prayer was simple, but in its purity and depth, in his yearning for everyone to experience the same indescribable bliss of God that he enjoyed, lay his profound saintliness.

Once, in Boston, a curious child approached Pramukh Swami Maharaj and asked if he had ever spoken to God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj replied, "Of course, we talk every day." This reply gives us a window to the profundity that underlay Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity. A simple reply to a simple question by a child revealed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unbroken communion with God. If we stop and think about this our minds cannot even comprehend it. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simplicity makes it easier for us to find him and once we find him it becomes easy to get lost in his profundity. ♦

‘Jakte Anāsakta’
Out of This World



In 1969, three men embark on a mission that would change the world. They take the helm of the largest spaceship ever built and look to the moon. They travel hundreds of thousands of miles through space, the most unforgiving void they know, and become the first men to explore a world other than their own. They return to earth rich with celestial jewels, rock samples from the surface of the moon, and inspire generations of young scientists and decades of future space research. While Neil Armstrong and the crew of the Apollo 11 space mission were the first to physically leave our world and explore another, many before them left it spiritually. They traded the worldly attachments that bring temporary gratification for a simple lifestyle. In doing so, they found peace, meaning and transcendence.

In an age where ‘Thanksgiving’ is unsarcastically called ‘Thanksgetting’ and the search for peace is superseded by the hunt for the next new gadget, you would be hard-pressed to find someone like Henry David Thoreau. An American

author from the 1800s, Thoreau was an advocate of simple living. Inspired partly by the Gita, whose teachings he called “stupendous and cosmogonical,” Thoreau wanted to strip off the unnecessary indulgences of his life, leaving behind a richer and truer experience. So, he spent two years in the remote forests of Massachusetts, living alone in his self-made cabin on the shores of Walden Pond. He began with an open mind, knowing full well that his romantic experiment of embracing nature may reveal her to be cruel and merciless: “If it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.”

Living in a cabin that cost him a mere \$28 to build (less than \$900 in today’s money), Thoreau relied on civilization for only the basics, such as clothing and fuel. He even planted a bean field to grow his own food. After over two years, he ended his experiment with the conclusion that

“most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.”

Thoreau’s less-is-more experience agrees with that of many others who have similarly escaped today’s consumerist society. Indeed, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has preached again and again of the dangers of *maya*, and the reasons for overcoming its temptations. His teachings were embodied by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the life he lived was completely unattached to the mundane world.

On 23 January 2009, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was travelling from Bharuch to Atladra and, due to traffic and road construction, his car passed by the outskirts of his birthplace of Chansad. The sadhus accompanying him began to enthusiastically point out the new mandir, hospital, school, and other BAPS projects in the village. Meanwhile, a large crowd gathered along the road, celebrating and shouting as Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed by. Pramukh Swami Maharaj ignored it all. He took no interest in the village projects and did not even acknowledge the people of Chansad. For Pramukh Swami Maharaj, his birthplace was less interesting than a desolate desert, and his childhood memories as forsaken as a sunken ship lost to the abyss.

The very next day, Yogicharan Swami joked to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “Shastriji Maharaj used to say that your wrists were too thin. Now that you have reduced your portions, it seems we need Shastriji Maharaj to come and tell you the same thing again.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj replied, “When Swami used to grab [my arms], he would say ‘Your wrists are too skinny...’ He would take great care that I ate properly... and due to Swami’s blessings, I developed a healthy appetite and I was able to put on some weight. However, I don’t have much of an appetite anymore.” For Pramukh Swami Maharaj, eating was never to satisfy the senses, but one more way he could fulfil the command of his guru and offer his devotion to him.

Every day of his life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj reminded us of the definition of detachment from

the world. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj transcended mere physical detachment. On 11 January 2009, Prayagmuni Swami asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “Yogiji Maharaj wanted satsang to spread through countless universes. He wanted it to spread to Japan, China and Russia. Do you have any such wishes?” Pramukh Swami Maharaj answered, “If we can fulfil the wishes made by Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, that in itself, is more than enough. When Yogi Bapa has declared his wishes, what is the need for us to come up with more?” Dr Kiranbhai pressed him, “At least tell us one of your wishes,” but Pramukh Swami Maharaj maintained, “My only thought is to fulfil each of Yogi Bapa’s wishes. That is the thought which constantly stays with me.” Evidently, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was so self-effacing that he simply considered himself as a vessel for his guru and Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and his body as a physical means to carry out their wishes.

Thoreau experimented with detachment for two years, and the sadhus of BAPS surpass his feat by vowing to a life of detachment, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj transcended them all: he was ‘*jakte anāsakta*’ – detached from this world, even while he lived within it. As we look to him for inspiration, we might despair: how can we possibly reach his level of detachment, or even that of the sadhus he has inspired? Indeed, as we live in this world, we are bound to engage with it. Fortunately, we can take a lesson out of the *New York Times* article ‘Abundance Without Attachment’, where author Arthur Brooks reflects on the guidance he received during a discussion with Jnanmuni Swami. As the title suggests, he concludes that “if we are lucky enough to achieve abundance, we should be thankful for it... The real trick is the second part of the formula: avoiding attachment”. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life gave us the strength to realize that even though we are enmeshed in the modern, material world, we can resolve to be detached from it and seek happiness from a purer source: by pleasing Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our guru. ♦

‘Krupātanu Pātra’

Worthy Vessel of the Guru’s Grace



For a fictional character in a children’s fantasy book, Dumbledore is remarkably insightful when he warns Harry Potter that he would soon face a critical choice: a choice not between what is right and what is wrong, but between what is right and what is easy. We do not face such choices in our lives often, but when we do, they cause hopeless confusion and sleepless nights. These choices are difficult not because it is unclear what is right, but because this right choice asks too much of us. It would require too much sacrifice and cause too much pain. In these times of indecision, we may draw inspiration from those who had the courage to

do what was difficult because it was right.

In *Profiles of Courage*, President John F. Kennedy catalogues the story of Senator Edmund G. Ross who had a singular encounter with Dumbledore’s difficult choice. Senator Ross joined the United States Congress as a Republican during the aftermath of the Civil War, a time of great tension and turmoil. President Andrew Johnson and Congress were clashing over how to treat the Southern states, which had tried and failed to secede from the United States. The heart of the congressional opposition to the President was the Republican Party, which plotted to impeach the President and dismiss him from office.



The Republicans needed a two-thirds majority of the Senate for impeachment, and the ultimate swing vote that would decide whether they cleared this high bar was Senator Ross. He was expected to support the vote. More precisely, he was “warned in the party press, harangued by [his] constituents, and sent dire warnings threatening political ostracism and even assassination” if he didn’t convict the President. Ross opposed his own party and opposed the vote to convict President Johnson.

The ensuing backlash against Senator Ross was swift and certain. Kennedy writes, “When he [Senator Ross] returned to Kansas in 1871 [following his controversial vote], he and his family suffered social ostracism, physical attack, and near poverty.” Senator Ross was never elected to public office again. His vote cost him his political dreams and ambitions. Why did Senator Ross protect a President with whom he disagreed on almost every major issue and knowingly prompt his own political demise? As Kennedy explains, historians and commentators have since agreed that Ross’ vote upheld the dignity of the office of the President and “preserved for ourselves and posterity constitutional government in the United States.” The United States government was established with intricate checks and balances between its different branches. Senator Ross protected its integrity. His allegiance to his country eclipsed his loyalty to his party and enabled him to make the difficult, right choice.

Motivated by the love for his country, Senator

Ross sacrificed his political career in one fateful decision. What would motivate someone to make such sacrifices persistently? Love for guru. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had, throughout his life, repeatedly sacrificed his personal wishes to please his guru, Shastriji Maharaj. From a very young age, Shantilal (Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s childhood name) was drawn towards Shastriji Maharaj and the path of spirituality. But as a student, he also had a keen interest in learning English. Shastriji Maharaj suggested that he should first become a *parshad*, a renunciate in training, and learn English later from Khengarjibhai. So, Shantilal became a *parshad* and accompanied Shastriji Maharaj in his travels. A few years later, when discussing the life of a sadhu, they revisited the topic of learning English. Shastriji Maharaj offered, “You’re going to become a sadhu, how would English be useful to you now? You should learn Sanskrit instead so that you can study our scriptures.” Imagine how crushing it must have been for Shanti Bhagat when, after having sacrificed all worldly attachments, he was denied his one remaining wish. Shastriji Maharaj, it seemed, had given Shanti Bhagat a version of Dumbledore’s challenge. It would have been easy for young Shanti Bhagat to remind his guru of their agreement. But Shanti Bhagat did not argue: even at this young age, his respect for his guru and desire to obey his every command outweighed any personal ambition.

Shastriji Maharaj was pleased by Shanti Bhagat’s deference, but again tested Shanti Bhagat with the same decision. This time, he enlisted the help of Harijivandas Swami. One night in Gondal, Harijivandas Swami sat with Shanti Bhagat and talked with him until 1:30 in the morning. When he was finally satisfied that Shanti Bhagat had abandoned his desire to learn English, he took him to Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj was ecstatic. He organized the ceremony for Shanti Bhagat’s initiation as a sadhu the very next day and said “Let’s name him Narayanswarupdas. I

want him to study and make him a scholar.” He told Yogiji Maharaj, “Bless him and pat his back so that he becomes a great scholar, and does great service in Satsang.” Shanti Bhagat’s decision to sacrifice his personal ambition is reminiscent of Senator Ross’s decision to sacrifice his political career. But what made Shanti Bhagat’s decision even more admirable is that learning English was his last remaining personal wish, and he gave it up to please his guru.

Obeying commands at the cost of personal gratification is difficult and passes Dumbledore’s challenge, but inferring the guru’s wishes with no direct instruction and striving to fulfil them at personal cost goes above and beyond. While planning Yogiji Maharaj’s Amrut Mahotsav (75th birthday celebrations), the senior sadhus and devotees were deliberating the best location to hold such a grand and crowded event. Since Gujarat was suffering a drought at the time, they had to be very careful in making their decision. Some reasoned that Atladra was the best choice, given the mandir’s sound infrastructure and availability of water. Others argued that Bochasan would be better. Despite their differences, the devotees unanimously ruled out Gondal as a possible location due to lack of sufficient water. Stuck in a deadlock, the devotees turned to Yogiji Maharaj for advice. To everyone’s surprise, Yogiji Maharaj pointed to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and said, “Do whatever Pramukh Swami commands!” and left the meeting. Even more surprisingly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj ordered the celebrations to be held in Gondal, despite the vehement opposition of the rest of the senior sadhus and devotees.

Before Yogiji Maharaj asked for his opinion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had been neutral and silent, deferring to the seniority of the sadhus and devotees present. Why, then, did he choose the one place that was decidedly ruled out by them? Pramukh Swami Maharaj knew that out of all the mandirs and cities, Yogiji Maharaj was most fond

of Gondal, and wished to hold the celebration there. But, he also knew that Yogiji Maharaj was too humble to speak his mind and oppose the devotees. So, Pramukh Swami Maharaj spoke on Yogiji Maharaj’s behalf and shielded him from the inevitable arguments. As in the case of Senator Ross, the backlash was swift. The devotees were baffled by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s decision and quick to object, “You understand nothing; where will we get the water from?” But Pramukh Swami Maharaj was adamant, “We can build a water pipe from the dam. One way or another, we will find a way.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj would not budge, and everyone eventually agreed to hold the Amrut Mahotsav in Gondal. After all the devotees left, Yogiji Maharaj came to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and, bursting with joy, said, “You have done a great job! You have my blessings, and the *rajipo* of Shastriji Maharaj and the Akshar Deri.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj bowed and Yogiji Maharaj heartily patted him on the back. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had the courage to endure certain opposition and hardships in pursuit of what was right.

Senator Ross rose to the challenge of choosing right over easy, and was rewarded with the admiration of scholars and politicians such as John F. Kennedy. Pramukh Swami Maharaj surpassed the challenge, and was rewarded with the love and *rajipo* of his gurus. The verse “*Shastriji guru Yogiji ubhayani, krupātanu pātro chho,*” celebrates this achievement: “You [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] are a worthy vessel of the grace of both of your gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not receive this honour easily, but earned it by repeatedly making the difficult choices that would please his guru. In the process, he not only earned his gurus’ grace, but also left us with countless examples to draw inspiration from so that we, too, may have the courage to make the difficult choices and earn our guru’s grace. ♦

‘*Samudra Sarkhā Gambhir Jnān*’

A Profound Ocean of Equanimity



The oceans are truly an utter mystery. We have mapped the surface of the moon and Mars, but only explored five percent of the ocean floor. Over five hundred humans have ascended to space, but only three have descended into the Mariana Trench, the deepest natural point in the world. Scientists have identified about 230,000 oceanic species, from the elusive giant squid to the terrifying goblin shark, but estimate that there are upwards of two million undiscovered others. The oceans are familiar to us since we visit them and see them regularly, but beneath the surface there is an immense depth that we cannot even begin to fathom. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *jnān* possessed a similar unintelligible depth shrouded in familiarity. In particular, his *atmagnan* (knowledge of the self as the *atma*) was unparalleled and cannot be fully described with words, even though many had witnessed it for many years.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s intense, constant *vi-charan* (travels) were a testament to his deep-rooted *atmagnan*. On 28 September 1978, after travelling for days through several villages and visiting several hundred homes, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Kapura, a village in southern Gujarat. Sumanbhai Bhakta, a longtime devotee, was overjoyed at his arrival. Viveksagar Swami was delivering discourses, as Pramukh Swami Maharaj was turning his *mala*. Viveksagar Swami noticed Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s face changing colour. He reached over and grabbed Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s wrist, to find that it was boiling hot. He immediately ended the assembly and helped take Pramukh Swami Maharaj to Jitubhai Shah’s home.

Upon arrival, Pramukh Swami Maharaj collapsed onto the bed. While a doctor administered some medicine, Pramukh Swami Maharaj used his few remaining

ounces of strength to whisper to the sadhus, “I hope Sumanbhai’s father is not offended. I wanted to stay for the whole assembly. I didn’t want to finish it early. We didn’t get to go to Mahendrabhai’s house. He has come all the way from Madhi.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj was totally spent, unable to even turn in bed. Despite this, at around 11:30 a.m., Pramukh Swami Maharaj made sure to ask about Thakorji’s *thal*. Further examination of Pramukh Swami Maharaj revealed that he had developed jaundice and a gum abscess. Labhshankarbhai, a dentist from Rajkot who had come for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan, examined Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s condition and exclaimed, “Only Pramukh Swami Maharaj can tolerate so much pain.” After days of traveling from village to village and home to home, Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not express even a slight desire for rest. Only after his body completely gave out did Pramukh Swami Maharaj agree to rest. His resilience was unmatched: after physically taxing travels, Pramukh Swami Maharaj decided to endure an illness that eventually made him take mandatory bed rest. Had he expressed even the slightest discomfort before, the sadhus and devotees would have altered his schedule. But who could stop Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the guru who looked after others, from neglecting his own health for the sake of others?

Once, in 1984, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Yogi Nagar, Nadiad, to perform the groundbreaking ceremony of a plot of land on which a mandir would be constructed, a large thorn pierced the sole of his foot. Janmangal Swami wiped the blood and wrapped Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s foot, so that Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s attendant sadhus and other devotees would not notice. However he could not help but express his ire at the organizers of the event, deeming them irresponsible for not properly cleaning the grounds. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, noticing Janmangal Swami’s frustration, called him close before his afternoon nap, and said,

“Don’t get angry at anyone for what happened this morning. If one is destined to get hurt, then it doesn’t make a difference if he’s in a field or a room in a house; he’ll still get hurt.” Despite the physical pain he had experienced, Pramukh Swami Maharaj not only opted to remain silent, but also refused to rebuke the organizers responsible for not cleaning the grounds. To put aside one’s concern for one’s bodily well-being is one thing, but to, then, attribute no blame to those responsible for one’s suffering was the unique trait that Pramukh Swami Maharaj possessed. His unperturbed response to physical pain was a natural, effortless expression of his *atmagnan*.

Not once, even casually, had Pramukh Swami Maharaj mentioned his physical discomforts. While those with a superficial understanding of oneself as the *atma* may at least react in some way to such discomforts, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s demeanour in such situations made it appear as if nothing has occurred. In all situations, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had naturally and effortlessly exhibited his *atmagnan*, the state in which one behaves as the *atma*, experiencing the bliss of God, remaining unaffected by the ups and downs of the world. Identification with the body, which is a superficial understanding of one’s self, is the cause for the fluctuating emotions in response to the challenges one faces. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was himself Aksharbrahman. His realized state, *atmagnan*, was intrinsic. In his entire life, regardless of the obstacle, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had never become dejected. Moreover, in positive events, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had never over-rejoiced. He had always remained equipoised. The line, “*Samudra sarkhā gambhir gnāne ja chho...*” compares Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s deep and timeless *atmagnan* to the profundity and steadiness of an ocean. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s understanding that the happenings of this world and body are temporary, and that the *atma* is eternal and blissful, undergirded his constant equanimity in all situations. ♦

‘Sneheja Vandu’

Our Heads Bow with Love



“I read once that the ancient Egyptians had fifty words for sand and the Eskimos had a hundred words for snow. I wish I had a thousand words for love,” wrote Brian Andreas. As a matter of fact, we humans have coined many words in our exploration of love, from ‘adoration’ and ‘ardor’ to ‘zeal’ and ‘zest’. Of all these words, which best describes the sacred love between the disciple and his guru? Is it playful, like the way we treat our friends, or reverential, like the way we respect our elders? Should it be dynamic, with surges of passion, or a constant, with restrained emotions? The relationship between the disciple and guru is unique, and no single word could do it justice. Fortunately for us, Shriji Maharaj elucidates this relationship in the Vachnamrut, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj exemplified it.

The handsome knight slayed the evil dragon, rescued the princess, *and they lived happily ever after*. Or, at least, they do according to most children’s fairy tales. But the loose ends in life rarely tie up so neatly. Take, for example, the epic Ramayan. Bhagwan Ram, his wife Sita, and his

brother Lakshman were journeying through a forest during their exile, when Ravan, the king of Lanka, deceived and abducted Sita. With the aid of Hanuman and his army of monkeys, Ram and Lakshman overwhelmed Lanka’s superior defences, defeated Ravan, and rescued Sita. After the epic battle, the trio returned to their kingdom of Ayodhya and were welcomed by joyful citizens, who lit candles to celebrate the victory of good over evil, of knowledge over ignorance, and started what

we now call Diwali. Here, the story could have ended, with Ram and Sita living happily ever after, except that there was a problem. Some of the citizens of Ayodhya were suspicious of Sita’s long captivity in Ravan’s kingdom and thought Ram should reject her for having stayed with another man. To prove her fidelity, Sita passed the ‘fire test’, stepping into a raging fire and emerging unharmed. Still, some citizens refused to accept her as their queen. Ram’s love for and trust in Sita was absolute, but facing disrespect from his citizens, he was unjustly forced to exile Sita. Sita was sent away from Ayodhya, never to return again.

Sita had many reasons to be upset: she was robbed of the comforts of her palace, forced to leave her beloved Ram, and condemned to struggle in the wilderness. But these reasons, however reasonable, belie the depth of Sita’s love for Ram. In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 11, Shriji Maharaj reveals the real reason she was upset: “When Sita was exiled to the forest by Ram, she began to lament. Lakshman was very sorrowful at that time as well. But then Sita explained to Lakshman, ‘I am

not crying because of my own grief; I am crying for the grief of Ramchandraj. Because Raghunathji is extremely compassionate, and since he has exiled me to the forest out of fear of public accusation, he must be thinking, 'I have sent Sita to the forest without any fault of her own.' Knowing this and being compassionate, he must be experiencing severe grief in his mind. So please tell Ramchandraj, "Sita is not distressed; she will go to Valmiki Rishi's hermitage and happily engage in your worship there. So do not feel any remorse on account of Sita's distress." Sita sent this message with Lakshman, but in no way did she perceive faults in Ram." Such is the love, Shriji Maharaj instructs, one should have for one's guru and God. Furthermore, Shriji Maharaj asks: Who is a better devotee, one who has such love but faltering *vairagya* and dharma, or one who has intense *vairagya* and dharma, but lacks the love? Surprisingly, it is love that triumphs. The love between a devotee and his guru and God is so critical that Maharaj revisits it again and again, in Vachanamruts Karyani 11, Gadhada I 44, and Sarangpur 2, and others.

Like Sitaji, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the epitome of the love one should have for guru and God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was also the epitome of the love a guru has for his devotees. "I love you all," he said at the 1996 National Kishore Convention in Catskill, New York State, words that still echo in the minds of those who were there. Then again, who doesn't love children? What distinguishes Pramukh Swami Maharaj's love for us? For one, his love was constant and present even when we let him down.

In October 1980, some youths in London succumbed to peer pressure and attended the last day of a local Navratri festival. At that time Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in America. However, a few weeks later, Swamishri arrived in London. Coincidentally, the Observer newspaper of 23 November 1980, carried a story of the Navratri celebrations organized by various Hindu communities the previous month. And, by chance, one

of the photos they printed was of the youths who had attended due to the insistence of their friends. The youths were shocked that their transgression had been captured and documented for all to see. So, they decided to meet Swamishri, admit their mistake, seek forgiveness and atone for their lapse as per Swamishri's wish.

Remorseful, they confessed to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and asked for his forgiveness. Pramukh Swami Maharaj heard their plea, and simply asked, "Why did you go out in the first place?" The *yuvaks* answered, "We didn't really want to go, but our friends insisted." Pramukh Swami Maharaj simply asked, "So, they are your friends, but I am not? When they pull you away from our *niyams*, you give in, but when I try to bring you closer, you hold back?" The *yuvaks* were speechless. Seeing their surrender, Pramukh Swami Maharaj forgave them and asked that they exercise stronger discipline in the future. Many years later, these *yuvaks* who had become older, wiser and staunch devotees, reflected on their mistake, saying, "Our *garba* friends have long since abandoned us; we have no idea where they are or what they are doing. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj has never once left our side." Even when most would resort to anger, Pramukh Swami Maharaj showed us love and compassion, and in doing so, won our hearts.

In the verse "*Narayanswarupdas gunine, sneheja vandu aho*", we acknowledge the virtuosity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and bow down to him with *sneha*, or love. However, we must examine the love we offer him. Can it be reduced to one of the numerous words we have coined to describe love? Or is it more complex, with the depth and quality of Sita's love for Ram or Pramukh Swami Maharaj's love for us? There are certain aspects of our religion that are difficult, but loving Pramukh Swami Maharaj is not one of them. By appreciating his virtues and awakening to his love for us, we can develop a deep love for Pramukh Swami Maharaj, one that will carry us through thick and thin, and eventually to Akshardham. ♦

Understand Mahima to Experience the True Joy of Puja



“Swami! I perform puja daily, but do not get enjoyment. When I sit to perform *dhyān*, *mānsi* puja and introspection, my mind wanders off in so many directions...”

This is a common complaint by many. They experience it daily. That’s why, sometimes, people feel that their puja is merely a show. And that instead of pretending, it is better not to do it.

However, if the mind is not focused during puja, prayer or introspection there is no need to give up. Instead, analyze why the mind is not focused. How can it be focused? Understand and sincerely endeavour to improve.

The main reason that one’s mind is not focused during puja, *dhyān*, *arti* and other rituals is that one lacks *mahima* and does not manage time properly. It is obvious that when you sit down to perform puja, you are not able to do house chores or office work. So, why then think about such

tasks and spoil one’s puja? When you sit down to do puja, then actually ‘doing puja’ is the best and proper use of time. Otherwise, puja is not performed and other duties are also not done. This is how one does not make proper use of time.

Also, due to lack of *mahima*, the mind does not remain focused. Think, whose puja are you doing? By whose command? There is so much benefit gained by performing puja with a focused mind (Vachanamrut Sarangpur 3). Thinking about all this will help to focus the mind. Do you ever fall asleep counting your money? No, because you understand the *mahima* of money. So, why does one fall asleep when turning the *mala*? Is God not more important compared to money? By such systematic introspection, one will experience joy in performing puja and will naturally be able to concentrate. ♦

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Developing a Child's Mind Through Meditation

In today's modern scientific age, one of India's great contributions to global civilization is coming to the forefront – the practice of dhyān and mansi puja, or meditation. In fact, recent research has revealed that teaching children meditation and encouraging its daily practice provides them with the mental stability to cope with the rigours of today's fast-paced lifestyle...



Modern life has provided a wide variety of amenities that make life more comfortable. At the same time, the widespread use of technology has impacted children in unforeseen ways. The effects are compounded by academic and peer pressure, resulting in rising numbers of children suffering from anxiety, stress and depression.

Thus, just as the physical development of children is considered important, their appropriate mental development is also essential. For, without mental fortitude, children will succumb to external pressures.

WHAT TO DO

By teaching meditation practices from a young age, the minds of children can be developed. Meditation is exercise for the brain, and can promote development of positive traits, like concentration, decision-making, compassion and others, and reduce negative traits like anxiety, stress, fear, etc.

Children of all ages can benefit from meditation. Many forms of meditation are



practiced, of which *mansi* puja or visualization is an effective type.

By adopting a habit of meditation from an early age, it guides their behaviour and response to life situations as they grow older.

One reason why meditation is effective in children is due to the way the brain develops. In particular, the neuronal connections in the pre-frontal cortex develop fastest during childhood. Meditation influences the skills controlled by the prefrontal cortex and helps children to develop self-control, judgement and patience.

In modern society, the challenges facing children are amplified by social media, increasing violence and other factors. Thus, serious mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, are affecting millions of children worldwide. Hence, it is the responsibility of parents, educators and society as a whole to equip children with the appropriate tools to remain mentally and physically healthy.

Schools which have begun to incorporate meditation in their schedule report many benefits: better behaviour by children, rise in attendance, improved academic performance, more focus, less stress and depression, and improved psychological well-being. Some schools in America have introduced 'mindfulness meditation' and over a period of three years, over 150,000 pupils have experienced its benefits.

Meditation also helps to strengthen the children's rapport with their parents, improves

self-control, builds self-esteem, reduces exam tension and makes them more emotionally mature and robust.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

The best way for parents to teach meditation is to do it themselves with their children.

Due to the naturally fidgety nature of kids, it may be prudent to begin with short sessions of a few minutes and gradually increase the duration as children become more accustomed to the technique.

VISUALIZATION MEDITATION (MANSI PUJA)

Children have creative imaginations and by guiding them, such innate skills can be enhanced. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has outlined a framework for *mansi* puja (visualization meditation) in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 23. After familiarizing children with this concept and method, let their imagination take control and they will certainly enjoy and revel in their personal connection with God and guru.

Meditation accompanied by mantra chanting and *pranayam* (breathing control) is also of tremendous benefit.

BRAIN CHANGES DUE TO MEDITATION

During most conscious activities, beta waves (13–30 Hz) are produced in the brain, whereas complex activities such as memory storage and

intense concentration generate gamma waves (30–90 Hz).

Neuroscientist Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin, USA, recorded the electroencephalograms (EEGs) of ten Buddhist monks with extensive meditation experience and of a control group of eight college students with only basic meditation training. During meditation, the monks produced extremely high amplitude gamma waves throughout the brain for long periods, while the students' gamma waves were of much weaker strength and shorter duration.¹

Research by scientists at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, found that by engaging in 20 minutes of meditation daily the benefits can be experienced.²

Interestingly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has advocated daily five-time *mansi* puja. So, five, five-minute meditation sessions daily will provide immense benefit.

The question then arises that how does the experience of such meditative practices result in benefits during normal daily life.

A study by scientists from the Department of Psychology at Emory University in Atlanta, concluded that “repeated engagement of relevant brain networks over time induces neuroplasticity changes that mediate positive cognitive, emotional and behavioural outcomes... [there is] growing evidence that the amount of time an individual spends practicing meditation is associated with activity and connectivity changes in the brain, particularly in attentional areas.”³

A recent internationally reported incident demonstrated the life-saving role meditation can play. In June 2018, a group of 12 boys, aged 11 to 16, and their soccer coach were trapped in a cave in Thailand for 18 days in the Chiang Rai province, northern Thailand.

When found, after nine days trapped amid

flood waters deep inside a cave complex with no light and very limited food, the boys seemed to be as healthy as could be expected, in remarkably good spirits, and surprisingly calm.

The reason for their upbeat and calm demeanour: they apparently spent much of their time meditating under the direction of Ekapol Chanthawong, the 25-year-old assistant coach of their team, named the Wild Boars, who was with them. In fact, they were sitting in meditation when a British diver's team first found them after nine days.

Chanthawong taught meditation and other methods for conserving energy to the boys, which probably helped to keep them alive. The oxygen supply where they were trapped was reportedly down to 15 percent, compared with a normal level of 21 percent. Without meditation, which helps to slow respiration and reduces oxygen intake, oxygen levels would be even lower and the boys might not have survived. Especially, if, without the calming influence of their coach, some of the boys had become agitated and begun breathing rapidly.

CONCLUSION

So, although modern science has only relatively recently begun to advocate the practice of meditation, Sanatan Dharma and other Eastern traditions have promoted meditation for many millennia.

Realizing its essential role in human life, Bhagwan Swaminarayan actively promoted meditation in the form of *dhyan* and *mansi* puja. To facilitate such meditative practices in our daily lives he has insisted on all devotees to perform *nitya* puja (personal daily puja) and also five-time *mansi* puja. Thus, by engaging in such meditation everyone can reap its wide-ranging benefits. ♦

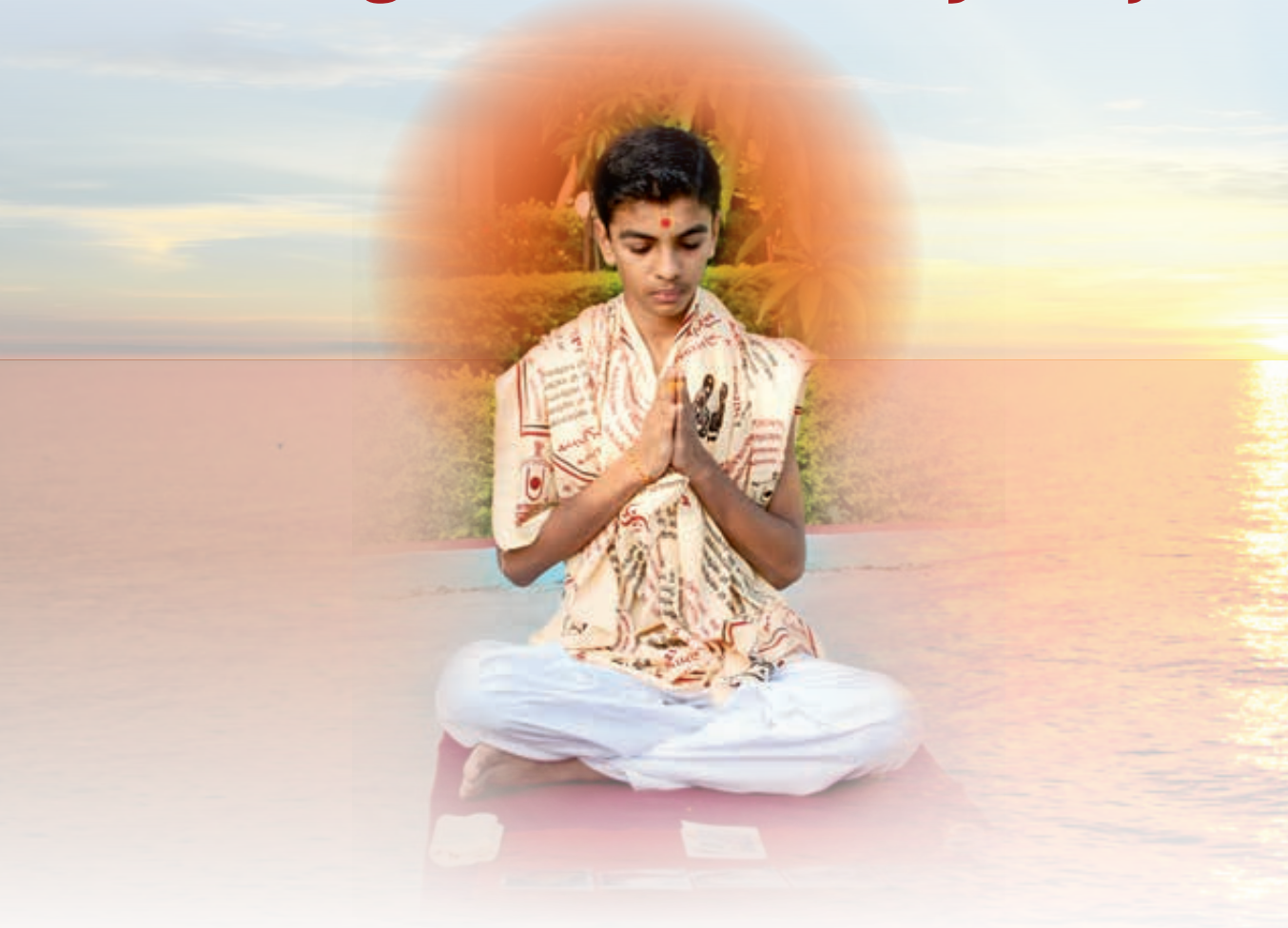
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September 2018: Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas
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Shining Stars of Daily Puja



India is a land of spiritual wisdom and devotion. Through the mantra-prayers to Paramatma from Vedic times to the vast array of rituals performed in the bhakti tradition, India possesses an admirable and a rich spiritual heritage.

Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan propagated the bhakti tradition by introducing the devotional rituals of daily puja, *mansi* (mental) puja, *arti* and *thal* among his devotees. He prescribed to them not take a drop of water or eat anything without first doing the morning puja.

Thereafter, his succession of Gunatit gurus promoted and consolidated these daily bhakti rituals among the devotees through personal practice and discourses.

Devotees who have exemplified this practice of daily puja since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan have become beacons of inspiration for all.

We present some inspiring stories of model devotees from the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan till today.

HIMALAYAN RESOLUTENESS

Bhagwan Swaminarayan drastically reformed Joban Pagi from a feared, hard core dacoit into an ardent devotee. Thereafter, Joban Pagi became a staunch practitioner of daily puja. He never compromised upon his adherence to not taking a grain of food or a drop of water without first performing his daily puja.



Joban Pagi

Once, Joban Pagi had to go to Petlad for business. Since he could not finish his work that day he stayed the night in Petlad. He had not brought his puja with him. So, the next day, he did not drink a drop of water. He strived for several hours in Petlad to get his work done, but it remained unfinished. So, Joban Pagi travelled to Bochasan to get his work done. He stayed the night at Kashidas Mota's house. Kashidas offered him food, but Joban Pagi refused because he had not done his puja. Thus, he did not even drink water on the second day. Here, too, he was unable to get his work accomplished, so he proceeded to Anand on the third day. He stayed at his relative's home, and they also insisted that he take food and water, but Joban Pagi refused. On the following day, the fourth day, Joban Pagi returned to Vartal, took his bath and performed puja. Thereafter, he took food and water.

For more than two days Joban Pagi's steadfastness in refraining from eating and drinking till he had done his puja did not go unregistered with the all-knowing Shriji Maharaj. Because of his unremitting devotion Maharaj was drawn all the way to Vartal to meet him. Maharaj's sudden arrival surprised Joban Pagi. On enquiring why he had come unexpectedly, Maharaj replied, "Because you did not give up your *niyam* I am pleased with you and have come to give you darshan."

A FIRM PLEDGE

Abhaysinh Darbar, the feudal king of Ganod, was a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. His citizens respected him dearly because of his piety and modesty. However, Kalabhai, a resident of Ganod, was envious of him due to his virtuous personality. Once, a British officer came on an official visit to Ganod. At that time Abhaysinhji was ab-

sorbed in doing his morning puja. He strictly adhered to his discipline of not attending to his worldly duties prior to completing his daily puja. Kalabhai took this opportunity of sullyng Abhaysinh's name and told the British officer, "Saheb, Abhaysinh is wilful and disrespectful towards you. If you call him here now, he will not obey your order."

The officer sent one of his men to call Abhaysinh, but the latter was absorbed in puja. So, Abhaysinhji's attendant told the officer's servant that he would not be able to come now.

Kalabhai told the British officer, "I was right in saying that he would not come. See, he has not heeded to your order!"

The British officer sent his servant again to call Abhaysinhji, but the latter was yet to finish his puja. When the servant returned without Abhaysinhji the British officer became livid and impatient.

Shortly thereafter, Abhaysinhji completed his puja and, on learning about the British officer's order, he immediately hurried to him without having a drop of water. The British officer asked irritatingly, "Why didn't you come when I ordered you to do so?" Abhaysinhji explained, "Saheb, I perform the Swaminarayan puja every morning. I have pledged not to attend to any work till I finish it. When your servant came to call me the first time I was doing my puja. When he came the second time, I was about to finish.

And shortly thereafter, I came to you without even drinking a drop of water.”

The British officer was pleased with Abhaysinji’s sincere devotion and faith. He praised Abhaysinhji, “It was proper of you to not have come while doing your puja.” Then the officer reprimanded Kalabhai, “Out of jealousy and malice for Abhaysinh you distorted the matter and told me that he would not obey my command. But that was not true. In reality, Abhaysinh was absorbed in doing Bhagwan’s puja and bhakti.” Kalabhai cowered at the British officer’s rebuke.

By Gunatitand Swami’s grace Abhaysinh’s faith and unflinching bhakti inspired many.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

By the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Gulzarilal Nanda served as the acting Prime Minister of India twice. As a disciple of Shastriji Maharaj he was staunch in his practice of daily puja. He turned 100 *malas* in his daily puja, chanting the name of Swaminarayan. Thereafter, he would read the Shikshapatri, Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato.

Once, 150 prestigious and influential textile mill owners and dignitaries had assembled at Ambalal Sarabhai’s home – a leading industrialist of Ahmedabad. They were waiting for Gulzarilal Nanda to arrive. Nandaji took a little more time in completing his puja that day. Thereafter, he hurried off to the function, without having read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. After the function was over he was invited to have something to eat. But Nandaji refused. After repeated requests to join them Gulzarilal Nanda agreed on one condition, that he would go home to read the scriptures and then return to join them for lunch. All the guests agreed and waited till Nandaji arrived. Everyone was impressed by his steadfast observance of *niyams*.



Shri Gulzarilal Nanda

A DAY’S FAST

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have inspired countless devotees to perform daily puja.

Jasbir Singh of Bahrain became a *satsangi* through the association of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On 23 August 2000, he took a flight from Bahrain to New York for business.

Since it was Janmashtmi on the day he left, he observed a waterless fast. On reaching New York, he came to know that Pramukh Swami Maharaj was at the New York mandir. Jasbirji went straight for Swamishri’s darshan. So, Swamishri blessed him and told him to take lunch. Jasbir Singh replied, “I can’t, because I have not yet done my puja.” Swamishri blessed him again and appreciated his resolve in fasting for more than one day.

IN HIS FINAL DAYS

Ravi, a member of the BAPS *bal mandal* in Surat, was hospitalized because of cancer. The doctor instructed him not to take his bath the next morning. Nevertheless, Ravi took his bath, performed puja and offered *panchang* pranam to his parents. Thereafter, he did *mala* all day long. At night, he told his father, Arunbhai, “Dad, now there’s no need to worry about me anymore. Shriji Maharaj is standing besides me and he is dressed in *chandan* clothes. He is caressing my hair and blessing me.” Shortly thereafter, Ravi passed away.

In spite of impending death, Ravi’s resolve to do his puja daily inspired all.

PUJA FIRST

Dhaval Patel, a *satsangi* youth, had studied hotel management and got a job at a five-star hotel. Once, due to torrential rains, the streets were flooded. Dhaval was left with no choice but to spend the night in the hotel. He did not take dinner because of his *niyam*. The following day, he did not drink

water because he did not have his puja with him. The hotel manager insisted that he have something to drink and eat. But Dhaval refused and replied, “My puja is at home and when the water subsides I’ll go home, do my puja and then drink water.” After two-and-a-half days the water level receded and Dhaval waded through the waterlogged streets to reach home. After completing his puja, he took water and food.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj showered his blessings on Dhaval for his resoluteness.

ARMY TRAINING

Harivadan Prakashbhai Mehta, a *satsangi* youth of New York, enrolled himself for the US army training programme. One part of his rigorous training required him to go through a three-day stint in the jungles. Harivadan refrained from eating any food on the first day because there was no vegetarian food available. The second day, since there was no water for his routine morning bath, Harivadan was unable to do his puja. So, he fasted the whole day. He was unable to do puja for three days, and so Harivadan observed fasts. In spite of the punishing jungle training, Harivadan did not drink a drop of water! When he reached home on the fourth day he bathed, did his puja and drank water.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed his *rajipo* on Harivadan for his firmness in observing the *niyams*.

TILAK-CHANDLO

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have inspired countless devotees to apply *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads. They have remained unremitting in doing *tilak-chandlo* in spite of difficulties or lost opportunities in their jobs. A few stories of these heroes are as follows.

TILAK-CHANDLO FIRST

Ganesh Chalodiya of Surat was selected in an



interview for a lucrative job. But the company boss expressed his discontent about Ganesh’s *tilak-chandlo*. He told him to abstain from doing the *tilak-chandlo* if he wished to work for him. In response, Ganesh replied boldly, “I don’t want even five paisas if you’ll not allow me to do the *tilak-chandlo*!” Then Ganesh walked out.

Later, the boss contacted Ganesh and made a better offer, “If you stop doing the *tilak-chandlo*, I’ll pay you more than the proposed salary.” Again, Ganesh refused outrightly. Then a week later, the boss called Ganesh and told him that he was hired regardless of his *tilak-chandlo*. Ganesh worked in that company for many years with a *tilak-chandlo* shining on his forehead.

UNCOMPROMISING FAITH

Rameshbhai Roy lived in Texas. Through his association with Pramukh Swami Maharaj Rameshbhai’s life changed for the better. When he started applying the *tilak-chandlo* daily in his puja, his company head did not approve of it. The latter warned him, “I will sack you if you continue doing the *tilak-chandlo*.” Rameshbhai replied categorically, “I don’t mind being sacked, but I shall not stop doing the *tilak-chandlo*.” The boss tried ways to pressurize Rameshbhai, but to no avail. He even tried to search for another person to replace Rameshbhai, but no one could match his abilities and sacrifice. So the boss had to retain him in the company.

Later, when Rameshbhai was scheduled to

take an oath for his American citizenship, many of his friends advised him to rub off the *tilak-chandlo*. Rameshbhai replied spiritedly, “It is okay if I don’t get the citizenship, but I will not stop doing the *tilak-chandlo*.” Subsequently, he got his citizenship without any hassle.

SPIRITUAL REVIVAL

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj asked a *satsangi* youth, who was a police officer, “Do you go to the mandir for darshan?” The youth replied, “Not much.”

“Do you regularly do your morning puja?”

“Swami, the truth is I don’t.”

“Then of what use was the satsang your father and grandfather passed on to you?” Swamishri struck an emotional chord in the youth’s heart and continued, “No matter what happens, you should do five *malas* every morning in your puja. Then, pray that you can do your duties in the best possible way and be happy and live a peaceful life. Because you were lax in doing puja, see what has happened. Your inner self has become dry and remorseless. Of what use is your brisk visit here and the momentary respect you offer [to me] whenever I come here! Take a pledge from today that you will do puja regularly, come to the mandir for darshan and attend the Sunday satsang *sabha*.”

Swamishri’s words rejuvenated the youth’s satsang.

CORRECTING A WRONG UNDERSTANDING

A *satsangi* youth from America had come for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan. Swamishri came to know that he had stopped doing puja for some time and now wished to start again.

Swamishri asked the youth, “Why did you give up doing puja?”

“Because I did not get good results in my studies.”

Swamishri smiled and replied, “The first thing to get axed at such times is daily puja!” Then he added, “There are some people who look for reasons to give up doing puja. Whenever one’s

physical health is affected, one gives up doing puja. When one’s exam results do not turn out well, one gives up doing puja. Whenever things do not work out the way one wants, one stops doing puja. However, one never thinks that by cutting off doing puja one gets cut off. There are many other things in life that one should disconnect oneself from. The reasons for your miserable performance could be the habit of roaming around with others, not having read the textbooks properly, wasting time in watching television and not paying attention during class time. If you want to get good results do puja daily. Take your puja with you whenever you travel away from home. Do *tilak-chandlo* daily. There is no need to feel shy because they are our spiritual symbols.”

Swamishri’s loving and incisive words inspired the youth to restart his puja.

DISSOLVED A YOUTH’S SHYNESS

In 2006, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in London. A *satsangi* from Belgium came with his son for Swamishri’s darshan. The father pointed to his son’s forehead and said, “Swami, he does puja, but does not do the *tilak-chandlo*.”

Swamishri asked him, “Is there any problem?”

“I feel shy,” the youth confessed.

“Look at your dad. See how bold his *tilak-chandlo* is. He does not feel shy, then why should you? If you do anything wrong you will feel embarrassed, but there is nothing wrong in doing the *tilak-chandlo*. By doing it you are not causing harm or damage to anyone. You may feel shy for a few days, but then you’ll get used to it. Hence, start doing it from tomorrow.” Swamishri blessed him and gave him a sanctified rose.

REINFORCING THE NIYAMS OF A YOUTH

Sandeep, a *satsangi* student residing at the BAPS Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar, did his puja daily, but he was hesitant in doing the *tilak-chandlo*.

(Cont. on p. 33)



Daily Meeting with God

NITYA PUJA

A DIVINE EXPERIENCE

The shastras say, “Bhaktipriyo Mādhava...” God cherishes devotion. However, amid life’s busy schedule, how is daily devotion possible? That is why, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has outlined a daily routine (ahnik) for satsangis that enable them to incorporate devotion amid their other duties. The most important devotional ritual is personal puja (nitya puja). Nitya puja is a personal daily meeting with God and the Gunatit gurus. The following is an overview of the various components of nitya puja and their significance...

In the Shikshapatri, Bhagwan Swaminarayan outlined a daily devotional routine for his devotees. He has instructed that all should rise before sunrise, bathe and then perform *nitya puja*. So, performing daily personal puja is a necessary quality of a true devotee.

Countless devotees throughout the world begin their day with *nitya puja* as per the tradition of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is regarded by the devotees as a divine meeting with God.

Many years ago in Bhavnagar, during an evening assembly in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a debate on the question of whether outward devotional rituals were



Nitya Puja

necessary if one's inner thoughts were pure. Concluding the debate, Swamishri said, "Yogiji Maharaj was God-realized. Hence, he had no need to perform puja and other worship rituals. Yet, he still performed daily puja, applied *tilak-chandlo* and many other worship rituals. He had constant communion with God and still he did all this. Whereas, we don't have such constant association, so how is it possible for us to progress without performing puja and other devotional rituals."

Thus, even though Yogiji Maharaj was spiritually enlightened, he engaged in daily worship rituals – demonstrating their necessity for spiritual progress.

It is important to understand the necessity of *nitya* puja in one's life. Performing *nitya* puja without understanding its *mahima* deprives one of its real joy, robs one of enthusiasm and prevents one from focusing the mind on God during puja. Without *mahima*, doubts arise questioning its necessity. Then, gradually, one stops performing puja.

When performing puja, do so with the following thoughts: Doing puja will strengthen my association with God. God will be pleased with me. I will experience God's divine and eternal bliss. I will experience the bliss that Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj enjoyed and which Mahant Swami Maharaj enjoys.

Understanding the *mahima* of puja in this way will help to focus one's mind. However, this is not achieved in a day; it requires daily persistent



Tilak-Chandlo

and patient practice.

Now let us consider the main components of *nitya* puja.

TILAK-CHANDLO

Today, many youths are embarrassed to apply the *tilak-chandlo* on their forehead. But applying the *tilak-chandlo* gives one inner courage, empowers one to overcome one's reservations and gives one strength to tolerate taunts.

When Dr Swami was studying in Nair Medical College in Mumbai, he received a letter from Yogiji Maharaj instructing him to apply the *tilak-chandlo* daily. Dr Swami replied, "If you wish I'll do two extra fasts, but do not insist on me doing the *tilak-chandlo*." However, Yogiji Maharaj insisted, "I do not want you to observe more fasts, but to daily apply the *tilak-chandlo*." So, Dr Swami obeyed his command and was the only student in the college who applied a *tilak-chandlo*. He tolerated all the taunts. Reflecting, Dr Swami says that if he had not obeyed Yogiji Maharaj's wish, he would have missed a great opportunity.

The *tilak-chandlo* teaches us to hold our head high and be fearless. It prevents us from doing wrong. If we do something improper, someone will question us.

Apart from these outward benefits, the *tilak-chandlo* has a positive effect on our mind.

MANSI PUJA

Mansi Puja is a tonic for the mind. It involves



Mansi Puja



Ahvan Mantra



Mantra Japa

mentally offering puja to God and the Gunatit gurus as if one is personally serving them. One awakens them, bathes them, adorns them with garments and ornaments, preform their *arti*, offers *thal* and so on. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has described in detail how to perform *mansi* puja in Vachanamurt Gadhada III 23.

Mansi puja attaches the mind to God and so helps to calm the mind. A stable mind enables one to concentrate on one's duties, such as, studies, work, business, etc.

Scientific experiments show that remembering pleasurable experiences pacifies and focuses the mind. That is what *mansi* puja is – joyful thoughts of God and guru.

Shivlal Sheth of Botad became so engrossed when he daily performed *mansi* puja that God came in person to accept his puja. And those nearby would also have darshan of this.

Parvatbhai of Agatrai would perform *mansi* puja at lunchtime. Once, when one of his labourers saw him doing *mansi* puja while tilling the land, he shook him to awaken him. Parvatbhai's meditation was so genuine that from his apparently empty hands, *rotlo* and yogurt fell out.

Mansi puja provides an opportunity to offer devotion in many different ways.

It transcends one beyond the limitations of time, place, ability and wealth.

MANTRA JAPA

Turning the *mala* while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra has a very powerful effect. Scientists have demonstrated that mantra chanting is the best way to pacify the mind.

Dr Hebert Benson of Harvard University investigated the effect of chanting mantra on the mind. He concluded that 20 minutes of chanting mantra in the morning and evening revitalized and stabilized the mind like eight hours of sound sleep. Chanting mantra also reduces one's blood pressure, regularizes one's pulse and revitalizes the entire body.

Yogiji Maharaj used to invoke mantra chanting at every opportunity – praying for people's health, relief from difficult circumstances and in other situations.



Tapni Mala



Pradakshina

PRADAKSHINA

Pradakshina is circumambulation of the *murtis* laid out in one's puja, while turning the rosary and chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. It symbolizes that by keeping God at the centre and focal point of one's life all problems are resolved. Every step symbolizes that we should



Sashtang Dandvat

remember God in every activity.

In the Mahabharat, the main message is that whenever God was kept at the centre of any situation success was attained. For example, when the Pandavs participated in the gambling without Shri Krishna's consent, they suffered. While in the war, they kept Shri Krishna at the forefront, and succeeded.

While performing *pradakshina*, one must strengthen one's resolve to keep God and guru at the centre of one's life.

SASHTANG DANDVATS

Dandvats, or prostrations, symbolize the total surrenderance of oneself to God and guru. It reflects our servitude to them.

Scientists have also shown that when a person becomes angry, body physiology and chemistry becomes imbalanced. Prostrations help to restore this imbalance. That is why, Bhagwan Swaminarayan instructs in the Vachanamrut, "If anger arises, perform prostrations and seek forgiveness as atonement." Thus, prostrations reflect humility and help to control anger.

While performing *dandvats*, one can also express one's prayers to God.

READING THE SHIKSHAPATRI

Shikshapatri is our moral



Praying



Panchang Pranam to Parents

codebook of life. Every gadget has an instruction manual. If one ignores it and uses the gadget inappropriately, then it leads to problems.

Rules control every aspect of human life. For example, if traffic rules are not observed, accidents occur.

Similarly, to ensure our life is free from mishaps, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has specified *niyams* – codes of conduct – that must be observed. These *niyams* are contained in the Shikshapatri, which one should read daily. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has instructed in the Vachanamrut that "a day on which one does not read the Shikshapatri, one should fast." Thus, he has emphasized its importance.

Analyzing the lives of great sadhus and devotees reveals that they do not lapse in observing the *niyams* specified by God.

CONCLUSION

Pramukh Swami Maharaj re-inforced the importance of *nitya* puja, "If it is possible to live without air, then it is possible to live without performing *nitya* puja. *Nitya* puja is food for our *atma*. By worshipping and remembering God and guru in the morning, then they will certainly remember us throughout the day. They will steer our life."

Even amid a busy



Reading the Shikshapatri

schedule, Pramukh Swami Maharaj daily performed *nitya* puja. And today, Mahant Swami Maharaj devoutly performs *nitya* puja in the early morning. It shows how much importance they place on *nitya* puja.

Some people say that they do not have time to perform puja. To them, Pramukh Swami Maharaj questions, “How do you get time to eat? If you cannot spare 15–20 minutes for God, who has generously granted you 24 hours, there is nobody

more ungrateful than you.”

So, by overcoming one’s laziness and performing *nitya* puja, one can experience the divine bliss of daily meeting God and guru.

After performing *nitya* puja one should offer respect to one’s parents by offering *panchang pranam*. ◆

*Gujarati text in Swaminarayan Prakash,
September 2018: Sadhu Anandswarupdas
Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas*

(Cont. from p. 28)

He confided about this with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri smiled gently and stated, “Why should you be hesitant? If someone has told you not to do so then you should try to explain to him.”

“No, that is not the case. But I feel I should do it after I strictly follow my *niyam-dharma*,” argued Sandeep.

“Once you start doing the *tilak-chandlo*, your life will improve gradually. It is like when you start studying for an MBA, you progress gradually. So, start doing the *tilak-chandlo* and your inner strength will increase. Let others say whatever they want.”

Sandeep then explained the problems he faces, “Whenever I have to go on a study tour from college the cook adds onions and garlic powder in the meals. Then, I’m left with no alternative other than to eat the food. So, I feel it would not be proper to apply the *tilak-chandlo*.”

Swamishri replied, “Instead of thinking in this manner why don’t you contemplate that onions and garlic are not worth eating! And whenever such things are added then fast for the day. You must be resolute. Whether the food contains onions or not do not eat outside food. You can survive on milk [and fruits] for one whole month.”

“But, I get tempted to eat when the food is placed before me,” Sandeep spoke frankly.

Swamishri inspired him, “You must exercise

self-control over your mind. You can live without onions and garlic. If your mind is strong, God will help you, and things will work out well wherever you go.”

Swamishri’s passionate discourse fortified Sandeep, and he promised that he would do the *tilak-chandlo* and give up eating onions and garlic.

A LIFETIME PLEDGE

In 2006, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Bochasan. He came to know that some youths from London had come to attend a marriage ceremony. All of them had done *tilak-chandlo*. Swamishri asked, “Do you all do *tilak-chandlo* daily?” All, except one, replied affirmatively. The youth confessed, “When I’m in London I don’t do the *tilak-chandlo*.”

Swamishri explained, “You have all come to attend a marriage ceremony. When you’ll go there a *chandlo* will be applied by the mother-in-law. Likewise, you have come here to Bhagwan’s marriage. Therefore, I am applying a *chandlo* on your forehead. Henceforth, you should do it daily.” Then Swamishri pressed the thumb of his right hand on the youth’s forehead, as if he was doing the *chandlo*. The youth felt blessed and pledged to do it daily. ◆

*Gujarati text in Swaminarayan Prakash,
September 2018: Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas*

Thanking God Through NITYA PUJA



Nitya puja is a loving gift from Bhagwan Swaminarayan, which, amid the hustle of daily life, helps everyone to connect with God. Performing nitya puja is an expression of our gratitude for everything that God has given us to sustain life...



Puja Doctor Swami

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given his devotees the Shikshapatri. In it, he instructs his male devotees to apply a *tilak-chandlo* and female devotees to apply a *chandlo* and perform *nitya puja*. Many devotees do puja and apply *tilak-chandlo*, but many are also reluctant to apply *tilak-chandlo*.

There are many devotees in India and abroad who hold senior posts and, without feeling embarrassed, boldly apply the *tilak-chandlo*. This is done due to their *mahima* towards Bhagwan Swaminarayan. By following this wish of Bhagwan

Swaminarayan, God remains with us.

To become eligible for God's *seva*, we have to firmly obey his commands. One of them is to perform *nitya puja*.

In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said that by following God's commands, his *murti* is attained. So, by obeying his command to perform *nitya puja*, his *murti* remains with us.

Whether at home or elsewhere, one must daily perform *nitya puja*. Wherever you are in the world, performing daily puja is a must. Yes, sometimes your timing may vary, but without performing puja, do not eat or drink anything. There are such staunch devotees who fast for the whole day if they are unable to perform puja. Derive motivation from devotees who perform daily puja and apply *tilak-chandlo* even amid difficulties.

The military specifies a certain strict dress

code. Some companies also insist on a uniform. Similarly, as devotees of God, the *tilak-chandlo* is our identity. Applying the *tilak-chandlo* is, in fact, a tribute to God; it is a gesture of support for his work. On seeing your *tilak-chandlo* someone may ask you and learn about Bhagwan Swaminarayan and hear his name.

So, do not be embarrassed or afraid to follow Bhagwan Swaminarayan's command of applying a *tilak-chandlo*. There is no loss in applying it.

When I was studying at Nair Medical College [Mumbai], I used to apply the *tilak-chandlo*. Once, a Muslim professor of ours asked me, "What is this sign on your forehead?" I told him, "It is our religious symbol." He was happy to hear this. Sometimes, our fears are unfounded. Throughout the world, it is evident that those who are staunch in their faith boldly observe the *niyams* of their faith.

Many high-ranking government officials and judges in South India boldly apply symbols of their faith on their forehead. So, we too, should not be reluctant to apply the *tilak-chandlo*.

Children should be taught and encouraged to apply the *tilak-chandlo* from an early age.

If someone offered you ₹ 20,000 every month to daily apply the *tilak-chandlo*, what would you do? So, by obeying this command of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, you will gain more peace, joy and satisfaction than that. Money is seen, but inner rewards are not seen; they are experienced. And by pleasing God, inner rewards are received.

When one first starts to apply *tilak-chandlo* in public there may be some apprehension. Let me tell you about myself. When I came into Yogiji Maharaj's contact, I started doing *tilak-chandlo* as per his wish. For one year, while I was studying in Vidyanagar, I applied *tilak-chandlo* daily. Then, I went to Mumbai to study medicine, but due to the atmosphere there I stopped doing *tilak-chandlo*. However, Yogiji Maharaj encouraged me. Whenever he wrote to me, he always insisted on me doing the *tilak-chandlo*.

So, apprehensively, I started applying the *tilak-chandlo*, wondering what others would say. For a while people enquired and I replied, "This is a symbol of my religious faith." Once, a professor asked me during class and I politely replied, "I will explain it to you after the lecture."

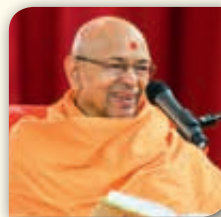
Once, during an oral exam, an examiner asked me, "The *chandlo* on your forehead makes your skin red. What is that called." I replied, "Urticaria." I don't know whether he was making fun of me, but I did not face any difficulties.

So, the *tilak-chandlo* is our identity. It will automatically give you awareness of how to behave. It serves as a brake, preventing you from lapsing in the observance of other *niyams* and doing wrong.

Most of all, applying the *tilak-chandlo* earns the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our gurus. I have personally seen that devotees of other faiths, boldly apply their religious symbols and observe the *niyams* of their faith.

I have seen educated and well-to-do people perform namaaz on railway platforms and in airports. Even Sikhs firmly observe their *niyams*. In Bahrain, I have met Dr Shafeen and Dr Faizal Zeerah, who both perform namaaz daily despite their busy schedules.

So, we too should resolutely and boldly apply *tilak-chandlo* and perform *nitya* puja. Nobody should feel shy or be reluctant about this. And we should encourage each other to ensure that everyone does this.



Pujiya Tyagvallabh Swami

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has, out of great compassion, given the Shikshapatri to his devotees so that they may be happy in this world and the hereafter. In it, he has instructed all devotees

to arise early, bathe, wear clean clothes and perform *nitya* puja. He has even described how this puja should be performed. He has said that we should sit facing east or north and first perform *mansi* puja. Then, we should apply a *tilak* of sandalwood paste on the forehead and a *kumkum chandlo* at the centre.

Then, we should apply *tilak-chandlo* of sandalwood paste on both upper arms and on the chest. Then, after laying out the *murtis* on a clean cloth, turn the *mala* while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. Then, we should perform *pradakshina* and *dandvats*, and read the Shikshapatri. In this way, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has systematically described how to do puja. There are great noble sentiments behind this. God has granted us so many things, so puja is a symbol of our appreciation towards him. This human birth is a gift from God. No amount of money can buy life. It is God's gift to us. He has also given us air, water, light and other requirements to sustain life. A patient in hospital has to pay for the oxygen he receives, but God has given it to us free of charge. He has given us water and light that enable food to be grown to eat. God has arranged all this for us.

So, it is our duty to thank him for all that he has given. *Nitya* puja is our way of showing our heartfelt gratitude. By doing this, he is pleased and blesses us.

Also, God is the all-doer and is all powerful. The more we have his support in life, the happier and more peaceful our lives will become. God will protect us in times of difficulties. When we perform puja, God inspires us with good thoughts and actions.

In puja, we should pray to God, "I am yours and you are mine."

As a devotee, our main objective is to develop attachment to God. This ensures our *moksha*. By performing *nitya* puja, this attachment is developed.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say that God is

personally present during puja, *arti*, *thal* and *cheshta* to accept our devotion. And that is why at the start of puja we pray to God to come and accept our devotion.

Even though we perform puja for a relatively short time, the important thing is to focus our mind and attach it to God. *Nitya* puja is an ideal opportunity to concentrate on God.

If you have a connection with the electric grid you can get power in your house. Similarly, God is the biggest source of power in infinite *brahmands* and performing *nitya* puja is the ideal way to connect with him.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say that performing puja is our personal meeting with God and gurus. It helps to nurture our connection with them and grants us wisdom, strength and inspiration.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also instructed us to apply the *tilak-chandlo* on our forehead. The *tilak-chandlo* symbolizes *atma* and Paramatma, and it generates pride in us that we are devotees of God.

The *tilak-chandlo* gives us awareness and inner strength to observe our *niyams* and to not do, see, listen to or speak wrong.

As devotees to God, the *tilak-chandlo* is an ornament for us and portrays a positive message to others of our identity. There are many occasions in which our youths have been selected for prestigious jobs because they apply the *tilak-chandlo*.

Thus, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given us a complete guide on how to perform *nitya* puja. By obeying this command of his, we will earn his blessings and truly benefit. So, perform personal puja daily with *mahima* and devotion. ♦

Gujarati text in
Swaminarayan Prakash, September 2018.
Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

June–August 2018

Rajkot, Gondal, Limbdi, Rajkot, Bhuj, Nagalpar (Mandvi), Bhuj,
Bhavnagar, Sarangpur, Anand, Bochasan, Godhra, Bodeli, Atladra



On Seva Din, Swamishri blesses the housekeeping volunteers in the mandir *pradakshina*, Rajkot



On Sar Din, Swamishri waves a BAPS flag in the evening assembly, Rajkot



Swamishri engrossed in darshan at Yogi Smruti Mandir, Gondal

JUNE

RAJKOT: 1–3

During Swamishri's stay the evening satsang assemblies were themed as Seva Din (1) and Sar Din (2).

2, Saturday

At 6.54 p.m., Swamishri departed from Rajkot and arrived in Gondal at 7.37 p.m. The mandir complex thronged with devotees eager to welcome Swamishri. Swamishri was welcomed with fireworks and a parade by boys.

Swamishri did darshan of Akshar Deri and performed *arti* and *pradakshinas*. Thereafter, he did darshan of Thakorji and the Guru Parampara. He was welcomed with garlands. Then, Swamishri went for darshan of Yogi Smruti Mandir.

At night, Swamishri returned to Rajkot.

LIMBDI: 3–9

During Swamishri's stay the evening satsang assemblies were themed as Welcome Day (4), Children's Day (5), Youth Day (6) and Samarpan Din (7).

3, Sunday, Rajkot, Limbdi

At 5.41 p.m., Swamishri departed from Rajkot and arrived in Limbdi one hour later.

4, Monday; Welcome Day

The evening satsang assembly was held to welcome and honour Swamishri to Limbdi. A cavalcade of horsemen with flags escorted Swamishri's car to the assembly stage. A welcome dance was performed by youths. Then, Swamishri was honoured with garlands and a decorative shawl.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly,

“Maharaj and Swami graced us all immensely by taking birth on earth. Now the essence is to become *brahmarup* and offer *upasana* to him. *Agna* and *upasana* are the two wings to ascend to Akshardham. A big no for taking *abhav-avgun* of others. If you do so, you will go astray and get lost. Maharaj’s *rajipo* lies in perceiving the sadhus and devotees to be *nirdosh* and in talking about them to others. The second point worth knowing is that Shriji Maharaj says that despite one not being able to do his [Maharaj] *seva*, if one speaks about the virtues of devotees then it is equivalent to having served him intensely. And the third point that Maharaj says is that in spite of a devotee having gained the immense grace of Bhagwan and Sant if he talks ill of other devotees then he will not attain Akshardham. Thus, give up one’s interference and do what pleases Shriji Maharaj in this birth. Adopt the virtues of *nirdosh buddhi* and *divyabhav* and sail through satsang.”

5, Tuesday; Children’s Day

In the evening Children’s Day assembly, an interesting drama, ‘Who has got more *labh* of the Satpurush?’, was enacted by children and devotees. Thereafter, children performed a traditional dance. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “Maharaj and Swami incarnated on earth and liberated countless aspirants. Their work is being continued and it will remain so in the future. The same *kalyan* that occurred in the times of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj continues to take place even today. There is no change in that. One may find it to be different on the surface, but the essence is the same. The task of giving *moksha* will remain so. We have to gain this understanding. By understanding this, one’s goal will be achieved, otherwise one will stray onto the wrong path.”

BHUJ: 6–15

During Swamishri’s stay various programmes were held in the evening satsang assemblies:



Youths with Swamishri on Youth Day, Limbdi

Children’s Day (10), Youth Day and Samp Din (11), Samarpan Din (12), Gramya Din (13) and Seva Din (14).

9, Saturday, Limbdi, Rajkot, Bhuj

Swamishri performed his morning puja in Limbdi. After having breakfast he retired for his morning nap. On awakening, Swamishri departed by car from Limbdi and arrived in Rajkot at 11.45 a.m. After Thakorji’s darshan Swamishri took lunch and rest. He left Rajkot mandir at 6.00 p.m. and departed by flight to Bhuj. Swamishri arrived in Bhuj at about 7.00 p.m. He was given a warm welcome at the BAPS mandir.

11, Monday; Youth Day and Samp Din

The evening Youth Day assembly was themed, ‘To Live for Swami.’ The central theme of the stage presentations were *milan* (fraternity), *mahima* (understanding the glory of others), *madad* (helping others) and *mafi* (forgiving others). The entire programme included a traditional unity dance and short dramas.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “By having the association of Bhagwan and Sant we should offer true bhakti. Treading the wrong path tantamounts to creating problems and miseries. Be a true *satsangi*. This means we should have nothing else but Bhagwan in our hearts. Be firm in observing the *niyams* and one will be victorious. Bhagwan never forgets such a devotee.”



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis*, Sarangpur



Swamishri blesses the assembly on Pramukh Varni Din, Sarangpur

The Mayor of Bhuj, Shri Ashokbhai Hathi, honoured Swamishri with a garland and Swamishri blessed him with a garland.

13, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the new *murtis* for the reconstructed *hari* mandir in Pandhro that was damaged by the earthquake in 2001.

SARANGPUR

15 June to 15 July

During Swamishri's one month stay in Sarangpur the special evening satsang assemblies held were 68th Pramukh Varni Din (17 June), Children's Day (1 July), Youth Day (8), Vidyamandir Day (12) and Rath Yatra (14).

15, Friday, Bhuj, Bhavnagar, Sarangpur

During late afternoon Swamishri departed from Bhuj by flight and landed at Bhavnagar airport at 6.00 p.m. Thereafter, Swamishri attended the satsang assembly organized nearby, in which 6,000 devotees were seated. He was honoured with a beautiful garland of tulsi leaves. Swamishri also blessed the newly elected Mayor of Bhavnagar, Shri Manbha Mori. After blessing the assembly Swamishri departed towards Sarangpur by road.

On reaching the outskirts of Sarangpur, Swamishri inaugurated a grand stone gate built by

BAPS. Swamishri was accorded a warm welcome by sadhus and devotees in Sarangpur mandir.

16, Saturday

After performing his morning puja Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the *hari* mandir in Pipartoda village in the Jamnagar region.

In the evening, a welcome assembly was held to honour Swamishri.

17, Sunday; 68th Pramukh Varni Din

In the festive evening assembly, students of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Vidyalaya enacted the historic occasion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's appointment as the President of BAPS by Shastriji Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri was asked questions about how he perceived Pramukh Swami Maharaj. A summary of his answers are as follows, "I had firm faith and trust that Pramukh Swami Maharaj will steer the organization. He did whatever Yogiji Maharaj had said. So, both were unique divinely.

"Swami Bapa had totally exhausted his body through his tireless *vicharan*. He sincerely did *seva*. If there was no genuineness then rendering such *seva* would not have been possible. He was guileless and unpretentious. He fulfilled the pledge he had made before Shastriji Maharaj, because he was fully connected with him.

“Swami Bapa had lots of love for me. It was genuine. One could not see it externally.”

Then, Swamishri was asked what thoughts came to him when he was given the responsibility of becoming the new guru. Swamishri replied, “I have left it all upon Maharaj and Swami. Whatever they do is acceptable to me. I have to serve them with utter humility. I have firm faith that Maharaj and Swami are the all-doers, are doing everything and will continue to do so.”

23, Saturday

Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to Bhaveshbhai *sadhak* and named him Ambrish Bhagat.

Swamishri inaugurated an English translation of the Gujarati version of *Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, An Introduction*, rendered by Dharma-setu Swami and Sushilmuni Swami.

25, Monday

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for two new *hari* mandirs in the Sarangpur region (Godhavata and Mul Dharai) and the re-*pratishtha* of new *murtis* for four renovated *hari* mandirs in the Gadhada region (Surka, Lakhanka, Ningala and Rohishala).

JULY

3, Tuesday, Sarangpur

Today, marked the historic occasion when Yogiji Maharaj gave *diksha* to the nine Yogeshwars (3 July 1960) in Mumbai. In Swamishri’s morning puja, four out of the nine Yogeshwars present sang bhajans and recited shlokas: Viveksagar Swami, Bhagvatpriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Dr Swami. They offered a garland to Mahant Swami Maharaj and honoured him.

Swamishri blessed the assembly, “At that time the atmosphere was wonderful. All present on that occasion were full of joy and enthusiasm. Yogi Bapa gave me the first *parshad diksha* [in 1957] and thereafter kept me with him as a



In Sarangpur, Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the renovated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bhowanipore, Kolkata

parshad for four years. I learnt a lot during that time.” Thereafter, Swamishri elaborated upon not seeing the faults of others and to instead sing everyone’s glory.

4, Wednesday

After his morning puja, Swamishri inaugurated a Swaminarayan Aksharpith publication in English, *Sucharitam*, Part 3.

6, Friday

Swamishri performed the re-*pratishtha* rituals of the new *murtis* for the renovated BAPS *hari* mandir in Bhowanipore, Kolkata, and the *pratishtha* rituals of the painted *murtis* for the newly built *hari* mandir in Rander (Surat region).

In the evening, Swamishri blessed the National Convention for *kishores* and *kishoris* (NC 18) being held in Atlanta, USA, via a video link. He had also blessed the children’s NC 18 *shibir* on 2 July.

8, Sunday; Youth Day

In the evening Youth Day assembly, youths performed three skits themed on *kusang*, social media and why people refrain from attending satsang *sabha*. After each presentation, Swamishri was asked to provide guidance.

12, Thursday; Vidyamandir Day

In the evening satsang assembly, Swamishri



Swamishri steers the decorative chariot of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj during the celebration of Rath Yatra, Sarangpur



Swamishri waves off the 'Leaf Chariot' for the 69th Van Mahotsav campaign, Vidyanagar

inaugurated 'Gujarati Geetmala', a print and audio publication about learning Gujarati in a simple and fun way. It was prepared by Manoharmurti Swami and volunteers of London mandir.

Thereafter, students of the BAPS Vidyamandir, Sarangpur, enacted a drama about Jivakaka (soul) and Manjikaka (mind), which portrayed how the mind leads the soul astray in matters related to daily puja, copying in exams and stoking conflicts with friends. After each scene, Swamishri gave guidance and blessings.

14, Saturday; Rath Yatra Celebration

As part of the evening Rath Yatra celebration, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri were seated in a decorative peacock chariot pulled by sadhus in the mandir precincts. The festive procession included youths playing drums and waving the BAPS flags, children dressed in cultural costumes and sadhus singing *dhun*. The chariot passed through the central pathway of the open assembly ground. On reaching the main stage Swamishri performed *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri operated a remote controlled console and steered the small decorative chariot of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the main stage. The entire assembly rejoiced at the divine darshan. In his blessings, Swamishri said, "To control one's senses is very difficult, but God is with us and he takes the responsibility of

doing so. When one practices *agna* and *upasana* nothing obstructs one towards Akshardham. If one has *nishchay* but lapses in observing *agna*, then it is not proper. Likewise, if one observes *niyams* but lacks in *nishchay*, it is also improper. However, by having both, only then will one's life's chariot proceed swiftly. By observing *agna* one becomes secure. *Nishchay* means to believe 'God exists'."

ANAND: 15-21

During Swamishri's stay in Anand (Akshar Farm) the various evening assemblies held were themed as Welcome Assembly (16), Children's and Youth Day (17) and Chhatralaya Day (19).

16, Monday

Prior to the evening welcome assembly, Swamishri participated in a tree-planting programme to launch the Government of Gujarat's 69th Van Mahotsav. Swamishri, Collector of Anand district Shri Dilipsinh Rana, District Forest Officer Shri Gadhvi and Vice-chancellor of Anand Agriculture College planted a sandalwood sapling in Akshar Farm. Thereafter, Swamishri waved off the 'Leaf Chariot' for the campaign.

In the welcome assembly at Akshar Farm, Swamishri was welcomed by a traditional dance by children and youths. After the ritual garlanding, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Trees are

the beauty of earth. One's mind becomes joyous amidst trees and that was why our rishis resided in the forests. One is inspired with many benevolent feelings while sitting under trees. Trees provide all types of development and elevation. One tree produces many trees. When the compound wall of Sarangpur mandir was being built Shastriji Maharaj saved a tree by bypassing it. Yogiji Maharaj felt pained when a tree was cut. And Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave importance to trees by encouraging all to plant and preserve trees. So, we must also participate in this campaign."

19, Thursday; Chhatralaya Day

The Chhatralaya students performed a drama, 'Iti Vachanamrutam', depicting four issues faced by them while living in the hostel: unable to wake up early in the morning, drawn by attractions like eating out, finding reading time to be troublesome and the disadvantages of improper usage of mobile phones. Finally, Swamishri blessed, "Four problems were presented, but if one so wills one can overcome them. The reason behind all these problems lies in not having true glory [*mahima*] for God. There are other youths in the Chhatralaya who are not like the ones [shown in the drama]. They study because they understand the value of education and are also determined to study. There are those who come here half-heartedly, thinking they will enjoy themselves and have fun. So, they lapse in their studies due to bad company."

BOCHASAN: 21-28

21, Saturday

Swamishri departed from Anand after having dinner and arrived in Bochasan amidst a warm welcome by children waving BAPS flags.

22, Sunday

Today, according to the Indian calendar – Ashadh *sud* 10 – 226 years ago, Ghanshyam Maharaj renounced his home in Ayodhya.



Swamishri performed *arti* of the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni and performed *abhishek* with saffron-scented water.

After his puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for four BAPS *hari* mandirs: Khadodhi, Bajipura and Kanbha (Bochasan region), and Khatraj (Nadiad region).

25, Wednesday

In the evening assembly, Swamishri inaugurated the Yuvak Sevak Sabha (YSS) by lighting the lamp. Thereafter, youths presented skits related to issues faced by *satsangi* youths. The issues were about not doing *tilak-chandlo* due to teasing by college friends, not attending the youth *sabha* for the sake of attending a friend's social occasion to please him and getting mired in using mobile phones. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "The goal of life should be to follow a good path. When we become good, then good things will keep happening in our lives. There are three types of youths: 1. They improve no matter what the situation, 2. They remain spoilt in all situations and 3. They change according to the types of company they get. Eighty percent fall into the latter category. Thus, keep good company outside and also in satsang. Have a target that you want to improve yourself. Then, no matter how spoilt one may be one will gradually improve and become good."



Swamishri and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami perform the *pratishtha arti*, Bochasan



During the Guru Punam festival, Swamishri blesses Shri Nitinbhai Patel, Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat, Bochasan

27, Friday; Guru Punam Festival

At 10.10 a.m., Swamishri arrived in the Guru Purnima Celebration assembly. The assembly programme included speeches, a traditional dance and a garlanding ceremony.

- Atmaswarup Swami spoke about Mahant Swami Maharaj's glory as the present Gunatit Guru.
- Viveksagar Swami elaborated upon the Gunatit Sant to be eternal and unique.
- Tyagvallabh Swami explained about serving the guru through one's mind with *nirdoshbhav*.
- Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami talked about serving the guru through one's physical self by obeying his wishes and instructions.
- And Dr Swami threw light on serving the guru by singing his glory.

On this occasion, the Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Nitinbhai Patel, President of Congress for Gujarat Shri Amitbhai Chavda, the Speaker of Gujarat Legislative Assembly Shri Pankajbhai Desai and the Collector of Anand Shri Dilipsinh Rana honoured Swamishri and received his blessings.

Swamishri inaugurated the following audio-video and print publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpath:

1. Akshar Deri Shardh Shatabdi Mahotsav, Gondal (MP 4 video pendrive).

2. Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrut Vani, Part 19 (MP 3 audio CD).
3. Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj's Divya Vani, Part 1 (MP 3 audio CD and video pendrive).
4. *Shakahar* (Hindi translation).
5. *An Ideal Child* (English).
6. *Introduction to Mandirs* (English).

After Mahant Swami Maharaj became guru of BAPS in 2016, it was the first Guru Purnima celebration in India. Swamishri blessed the mammoth assembly, "May all *satsangis* and everyone in India and abroad become happy in body, mind and wealth. My sincere prayers for this on the holy occasion of Guru Purnima.

"Shastriji Maharaj pioneered our organization. Maharaj and Swami are the roots. All our gurus have preached about utter humility [*das na das*]. Whatever progress and development we see are due to this virtue. Shastriji Maharaj had said, 'My work will keep progressing.' His work was to inform the world about Brahman and Parabrahman. Only when one becomes rooted in Brahman and Parabrahman will all our troubles and problems not afflict us.

"Our gurus were immersed in activities, yet they remained detached and did bhajan. They remained totally absorbed in Bhagwan. They were flawless."

Thereafter, the entire assembly offered their respects to *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj by offering flower petals. In conclusion, Swamishri stood up from his seat, spread his hands outwards and brought them to his heart to signify that he was embracing and blessing all.

During the night, from 11.55p.m. to 3.50a.m., Swamishri presided over the lunar eclipse assembly.

GODHRA: 28–31

During Swamishri's stay in Godhra the evening satsang assemblies were themed as symbolic Guru Purnima Celebration (28), Samarpan Din (29), Smruti Din (30) and Swa-parivartan Din (31)

28, Saturday; Symbolic Guru Purnima Celebration

At 5.30 p.m., Swamishri departed from Bochasan and arrived in Godhra at 7.50 p.m. A symbolic Guru Purnima celebration was held at the venue. Children and youths performed a traditional dance to welcome *guruhari*. During that time sadhus performed *pujan* of and offered garlands to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, everyone offered flower petals as part of the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the large gathering, "You have Swami Bapa's blessings and my prayers on the occasion of Guru Purnima that you all be happy in mind, body and wealth and offer bhakti through mind, action and speech."

Then, Swamishri arrived at the BAPS mandir, did darshan of and performed *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and thereafter did darshan of Thakorji in the main mandir.

30, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kanbi-palli village in the Ghoghamba region.



Youths and children with Swamishri after performing the welcome dance, Godhra

31, Tuesday; Swa-parivartan Din

The evening satsang assembly was themed on transformations of tribal devotees. The main stage had been transformed into a tribal hut. Prior to Swamishri's arrival a tribal dance was performed. Thereafter, a dramatic presentation was made of how a witch-doctor behaves when a tribal comes to him with a problem. Then, Virsangbhai Nayka, an elderly tribal devotee, recited excerpts from the *Yogi Gita*. Though Virsangbhai was illiterate, his recitation impressed and overwhelmed everyone.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "What wonderful works Swami Bapa had done. There was much superstition in this region and sadly no one to guide. Those who guided were the *bhuvas* [exorcists]. Formerly, some of you lived cruel lives, uttered expletives, had no compassion, were violent and had criminal habits. But when Pramukh Swami Maharaj came here things changed drastically. He brought about a miracle. By his mere darshan, people's hearts were transformed. No matter how much we sing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's glory, it will not be enough!"

AUGUST

GODHRA: 1–4

During Swamishri's stay, the evening satsang assemblies were themed on Samp Din (1), Glory of Ghar Sabha (2), and Samjan Din and Flower Holi Celebration (3).



Chhatralaya students perform the Timli tribal dance, Bodeli

1, Wednesday

In the evening satsang assembly, Swamishri elaborated upon the need for harmony (*samp*) in one's life, "Yogi Bapa used to say, 'We do not need money, but *samp*.' Due to discord (*kusamp*) big companies and kingdoms have fallen. The progress we see in the world is due to *samp*. As long as there is *samp* there will be peace. And when *kusamp* arises Kaliyug (dark age) enters."

BODELI: 4-11

The evening satsang assemblies were themed on Samarpan Din (5), Chhatralaya Din (6), Parprant (Other State) Din (7), Murti-Pratishta Din (8) and Bal Din (9).

4, Godhra, Bodeli

At 6.00 p.m., Swamishri departed from Godhra by car and reached Bodeli mandir at 7.34 p.m. Swamishri was accorded a devotional welcome by children playing a musical band, youths waving BAPS flags and flower petals being showered as Swamishri held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj while walking on a decorative path towards the mandir. After Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri sat on the mandir podium to give darshan and blessings to the packed audience of devotees. Swamishri was honoured with a garland made of *kanthis*. Then, he blessed the assembly, saying, "You have all offered a welcome to Maharaj and Swami. We are very fortunate to have their association. Maharaj

and Swami are present through the Satpurush. So, the welcome you have offered is to Maharaj and Swami. Do not doubt that." Then, Swamishri folded his palms and humbly offered namaskars to all.

6, Monday; Chhatralaya Din

In the evening Chhatralaya Din assembly, students performed a drama to portray the transformations ushered in their lives as a result of their stay in the Chhatralaya. Thereafter, they performed a traditional dance, a demonstration of tae kwon do, a tribal dance (Timli) and formed a human pyramid. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

8, Wednesday

In the evening assembly, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for eight *hari* mandirs: Bhatpur, Kanalva, Khajuriya, Nasvadi, Kol, Dhiyana and Chhota Udepur in the Bodeli region and Bootvada in the Sankari region. Swamishri performed the *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of a total of 71 *murtis*. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees who had come for the *pratishtha* rituals from their respective villages.

10, Friday

In the evening satsang assembly, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals, Dabhoi



Swamishri during the evening Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Din assembly, Atladra

for six *hari* mandirs in the Bodeli region: Bamroli, Pratapnagar, Ghodiyala, Vachli Bhint, Bangapura and Jhoj; three *hari* mandirs in the Sankari region: Kachhal, Dolvan and Mandvi, and one *hari* mandir in the Navsari region: Bhaktinagar.

11, Saturday, Bodeli, Dabhoi, Atladra

At 5.40 p.m., Swamishri departed from Bodeli and arrived at Pramukh Swami Hospital in Dabhoi at 6.20 p.m. Swamishri performed the *pujan* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri visited the beautiful newly built two-floored *hari* mandir situated on the hospital grounds. Here, he performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals along with Ishwarcharan Swami and senior sadhus. Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Guru Parampara, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev and Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji.

Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for four *hari* mandirs of the Bodeli region: Mota Fofaliya, Bhilapur, Mota Karala and Sathod. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Maharaj and Swami came to this universe in a human form and made thousands of *ekantik* devotees. There are many *ekantik* devotees present today, but we are unable to recognize them. You have all donated here, thus your heart will be transformed into gold.”

After having dinner, Swamishri departed for Vadodara and arrived in the mandir precincts amidst a warm, festive welcome. Swamishri was welcomed with a *rangoli* made of flowers and leaves, *divas*, fireworks, youths holding lighted oil torches and waving flags and by 890 young and old devotees who had performed various austerities.

ATLADRA: 11–31

During Swamishri’s stay, the evening assemblies were themed on Welcome Day (12), Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 2nd Memorial Assembly (13), Vidyamandir Din (14), Pure Diet Day (15), Nitya Puja Din (16), Youth Day (17), Satsang Sabha Din (18), Upasana Din & Shishu Din (19), Samjan Din (21), Chhatralaya Din (23), Bal Din (24), Raksha Bandhan (26), Satsang Din (27), Sayam Din (28), Ghar Sabha Din (29) and Dasatva Din (31).

13, Monday; Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 2nd Memorial Annual Assembly

Youths sang bhajans to commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s earthly departure on this day two years ago. In his morning blessings, Swamishri said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s memories will never be forgotten. Swami did *vi-charan* extensively, day and night, in India and abroad. He wrote 700,000 letters, counselled and blessed countless by phone and met innumerable



Students of Swaminarayan Vidyamandir present before Swamishri, Atladra

people personally. He did not sit idly for one second. He always had devotees on his mind. He nourished Satsang and infused strength.

“Swami looked after the minds of young and old. During his initial 15 years he travelled immensely and tolerated intense hardships. He never said no to anyone. No one can tolerate such hardships and none will be able to do so in the future. We have all witnessed this. Once, he had postponed his meal at 2.45 p.m. in Anand to sanctify a devotee’s home. He never displeased anyone. Such strains would have made anyone else mad. Swami Bapa took care of everyone’s mind, which is difficult.

“To look at Swami’s life in all aspects we find that he came on earth and served countless devotees. By looking at all the aspects of his life one comes to realize who he was.”

In the evening memorial assembly, Jnanvatsal Swami and Atmaswarup Swami recalled incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. After a video on Swami Bapa’s love Mahant Swami Maharaj spoke about Swami Bapa.

14, Tuesday; Vidyamandir Din
Swaminarayan Vidyamandir in Atladra is a primary

and secondary school run by the BAPS. The evening satsang assembly was dedicated as Vidyamandir Din, in which students made various presentations.

The assembly commenced with Swamishri ringing the school bell. Thereafter, Swamishri was asked to write a message for the students. Swamishri wrote, “*Vidya* is a *yagna*.” Then, children performed yoga *asans* and played a game of musical chairs. Finally, they performed a traditional dance. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “You’ll have to become good in order to become acquainted with good friends. Values should be internalized instead of merely displaying superficial etiquette. And, ultimately, you should have the goal of becoming *akshar-rup* in order to offer bhakti to Purushottam. Do not lapse in your studies. You should strive for all-round development: body, mind and soul.”



Swamishri inaugurates BAPS Amrut Herbal Care spices, Atladra

15, Wednesday

Swamishri inaugurated pure cooking spices manufactured by BAPS Amrut Herbal Care. Swamishri spoke glowingly about the purity and quality of the spices and the need to have a proper diet for good health in order to do *seva* in satsang.



Swamishri and youths on Yuva Din, Atladra



Swamishri ties a *rakhadi* to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj during the celebration assembly, Atladra

16, Thursday

At 5.00 p.m., Swamishri came to know of the earthly departure of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In the evening satsang assembly, senior sadhus and Swamishri paid tributes to the former Prime Minister. Thereafter, the Swaminarayan *dhun* was chanted and prayers offered for the peace of his soul.

17, Friday; Youth Day

In the evening Youth Day assembly, Swamishri stepped onto the stage with a lighted oil torch in hand followed by a group of youths holding lighted torches. Then, the youths danced on the bhajan, “*Yogi āvo te rang mane shid lagādyo...*” while Swamishri sprayed coloured water on them.

A youth delivered a speech in English about the glory of Bhagwan and his Sadhu. Thereafter, Swamishri gestured to the youths to do *tilak-chandlo* daily. Then, he drew an illustration portraying the message to nourish *samp* in life. Thereafter, Swamishri instructed in English, “Do satsang daily.”

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “During a flood, a river can cause devastation. However, when a dam is built on it the water is controlled [*sayam*] and its powers harnessed. Similarly, the mind needs to be restrained through self-control. To not cross the bounds of *agna* is *sayam*. Bhagwan controls us through his moral

commands. Maharaj has instructed not to associate with *kusang*.”

23, Thursday

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for 14 *hari* mandirs: Chorvad, Ukai and Songadh (Ukai region); Amanpur and Bhodar (Nahaar region); Rampur (Karmad region); Virjai (Karjan region); Itola (Por region); Padamla and Sokhda (Ranoli region); Kuraal and Mobhaa (Gavasad region); Ninam (Amod region); Chapad (Vadodara 1) and Amlaa (Goriyad region).

26 Sunday; Raksha Bandhan

Today, two years had elapsed since Swamishri had been declared as the guru of BAPS.

Swamishri tied a decorative thread (*raksha sutra*) to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the occasion of the Raksha Bandhan festival. Thereafter, on behalf of all sadhus and devotees Atmaswarup Swami and Kothari Bhagyasetu Swami tied a *raksha sutra* on Swamishri’s wrist. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Prahlaad had so much faith in God when he embraced a hot, fiery pillar! However, for us, to see our own faults is similar to embracing fire. By introspecting and seeing our inner faults we will be able to improve ourselves. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had written, ‘Give up ego and attachment and worship Bhagwan.’ All

conflicts are due to ego and attachment. Shriji Maharaj said they are *maya*. As long as we do not become *brahmarup*, ego and attachment will remain with us.”

28, Tuesday; Sayam Din

In the evening satsang assembly, a drama on Shivaji’s self-restraint was enacted. Thereafter, a debate was presented on ‘Social Media – A Blessing or Curse?’ In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “What Swami Bapa said, ‘If you use it with *vivek* [discrimination] it is a blessing, otherwise it is a curse!’ is absolutely true. In short, if even a *satsangi* or one who is like an *ekantik* does not exercise *vivek* then he will fall. Thus, use it as less as possible. Because of our modern times one has to use it, otherwise one will be disadvantaged. In satsang terminology it is called *kusang*. One has to use it with a lot of alertness. If there is a need to use a mobile then do so with *vivek*. For this one has to do satsang resolutely.”

30, Thursday

At 6.45 p.m., Swamishri arrived in Chansad from Atladra. He was welcomed by children and youths playing drums and waving BAPS flags. Swamishri went to Swami Bapa’s birthplace for darshan and to offer prayers. Shri Narhari Amin, vice president of the Planning Commission of the Government of Gujarat, honoured Swamishri with a garland. Swamishri and the guests performed *arti*. Shri Narharibhai declared that the



Swamishri and Shri Narhari Amin perform *arti* at Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birthplace, Chansad

Gujarat government would donate a hefty sum to make Chansad a developed village and a place of pilgrimage.

Thereafter, Swamishri visited the *hari* mandir and performed *arti* and blessed the satsang assembly, “Through the government’s aid this village will become a wonderful place. Thereafter, the people of this village will have to welcome an unending stream of devotees and visitors from India and abroad. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an abode of peace. This place will become a divine place; not an ordinary one. Whoever comes here will experience peace.”

Swamishri departed from Chansad and visited the Swaminarayan Vidyamandir school in Atladra. ◆

*From Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahnavatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas*

Swamishri blesses the satsang assembly, Chansad



LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

June–August 2018



JUNE

VIRTUE OF NON-TASTE

9, Limbdi

While having breakfast Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) described Yogiji Maharaj's cooking skills, "Once, he made *magas* out of 4.5 kg of gram flour. It was very good, and he made it with great joy. And thereafter, he served others with great joy and enthusiasm."

Mahant Swami Maharaj's attendant commented that like Yogiji Maharaj he (Swamishri) was also not inclined towards eating.

Swamishri said, "I like *jadaryu* [sweet item made of millet or wheat flour] and *magas*. I thought what should I do [with them in my dish]? Then I felt I would eat it through the sadhus." Swamishri had already distributed those sweet items from his dish to the sadhus seated before him. The attendant sadhus suggested in bringing the extra *jadariyu* offered to Thakorji for him to eat. But Swamishri calmly replied, "No."

Swamishri's inclination to joyously serve others and his indifference towards food and taste reflected his profound desirelessness.

HE REMEMBERS BECAUSE OF HIS DEEP BONDS

25, Sarangpur

Janak Jaday, a *satsangi* youth of Mumbai, asked Swamishri, "You had come to my house

in Mumbai." Swamishri spontaneously replied, "At 11 o'clock."

The attendant sadhus were astonished and asked, "At night?" Swamishri gestured with a no. This meant that Swamishri had visited Janak's home at 11.00 a.m. On enquiring about it from Janak, Swamishri had visited his house in 2004.

Swamishri amazingly remembers not only the person's house but also the time of day of his visit and sometimes he also mentions the prevailing weather. Such incidents not only reflect Swamishri's extraordinary memory power but also his deep bonds with the devotees.

* * *

MAHARAJ AND SWAMI ARE EVER-PRESENT

26, Tuesday

Adbhutanand Swami recalled an incident of Pramukh Swami Maharaj before Mahant Swami Maharaj, "Once, Swamishri was being wheeled into his bedroom. Swamishri touched his bed with his big toe. At that time I asked, "Is this the same toe that Shriji Maharaj reveals in Vachanamrut Ahmedabad 7, 'If I were to shake the earth with the toe of my foot, the worlds of countless *brahmands* would begin to shake.' Swami Bapa revealed, 'If one understands so then it is the same.'"

Then, pointing at Swamishri's toe Adbhutanand Swami asked, "Likewise, is it the same toe?"

Mahant Swami Maharaj smiled and replied, “The same [Gunanit] tradition continues.”

JULY

SINGING THE GLORY OF THE GURU’S EFFORTS

15, Sunday

Swamishri departed from Sarangpur at about 5.00 p.m. to head towards Bochasan by road. Along the way, Swamishri guided and blessed devotees by phone with regards to their problems and requests. Swamishri also insisted upon slowing the car when devotees had gathered on the village outskirts for darshan. In this way, after slowing down at the outskirts of 20 villages, Swamishri reached Anand at 8.15 p.m. After having Thakorji’s darshan, Swamishri attended the welcome assembly and gave darshan to all. By the time Swamishri sat down for dinner it was 9.00 p.m., one hour later than routine. While having dinner, Swamishri said, “Whatever honours and welcomes I get, I offer them at the feet of Maharaj and Swami. Thus, I’m free [and unburdened of all honours].”

Swamishri’s striking bhakti and humility touched all.

After dinner, an attendant sadhu spoke about today’s delayed arrival in Anand, “Swami, it took us over three hours to get here!” Instantly, Swamishri remembered Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled from Badalpur to Anand. The route was only one hour long, but he left in the morning and reached Anand at night-time. So, in comparison [to that] it was nothing for us!”

Swamishri dismissed the delay and fatigue of his journey and instead praised his guru’s endeavours.

REGARDLESS OF FEVER

17, Anand

Jnanvatsal Swami narrated an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj when he was a *sadguru*. He said, “In 1989, a picnic was arranged for the

Vidyanagar Chhatralaya students to visit the Kabir Vad (a famous banyan tree), near Bharuch. You [Mahant Swami Maharaj] were also with us, but we were unaware you had a fever. On reaching the banks of the River Narmada we told you to join us in taking a dip in the cool waters. We also poured water on you. Though you were shivering because of the fever and cold water, all fifty of us were oblivious of your condition. We only came to know about it after returning to the Chhatralaya. However Swami, you did not utter a single word.”

OFFERING RESPECTS

21, Anand

After completing his morning puja, Swamishri was walking through a corridor towards his residence. On the way, several youths were holding photos, printed on a large flex sheet, of the *hari* mandirs in the rural towns or villages near Anand. The maps of these rural places were printed with their names on a flex sheet and spread along Swamishri’s pathway. Yogipurush Swami pointed them out and said, “Swami, look at them as you proceed ahead and we will believe that you have done *padhramanis* there.” Instantly, Swamishri started removing his slippers.

Yogipurush Swami urged, “Swami, they are only maps of the places where our *hari* mandirs exist.” But Swamishri removed his slippers and started walking on the printed maps.

Later, Swamishri was asked why he had removed his slippers. Swamishri replied, “Because the names of the mandir places were written on the maps.”

Swamishri’s subtle *mahima* for the names of the towns or villages where the *hari* mandirs exist is amazing and noteworthy.

FAVOURITE TIME OF DAY

25, Bochasan

Swamishri’s attendant, Uttamyogi Swami, asked, “Which is your favourite time during the day?”

Swamishri gave an unexpected answer, “Meeting the devotees [*mulakat*].”

All were surprised by the answer and enquired, “Why *mulakat*?”

Swamishri replied, “Because I get to meet the dedicated devotees of Akshar-Purushottam, who are *muktas*.”

SWAMISHRI ACCEPTS THE DEVOTION OF A DISABLED DEVOTEE

30, Godhra

Swamishri was returning by car from the puja venue back to the mandir in Godhra. Many devotees had lined up for darshan. While Swamishri was blessing them by looking at them, he saw a disabled devotee with flowers in his hands. Swamishri wished to meet the devotee, but by then the car had reached the mandir gate. Thus, Swamishri told the driver to stop and he gestured to call the disabled devotee. It took (a little) time to find the devotee. So, the attendant sadhus, who were not aware that the devotee was disabled, suggested to Swamishri that they move ahead and wait inside the mandir compound. But Swamishri insisted upon having the car reversed towards the disabled devotee. By that time the devotee arrived. Swamishri lovingly accepted his flowers and thus fulfilled his devotion. The devotee was touched because he had not anticipated such a close encounter and blessings of Swamishri.

BHAKTI TOWARDS THE LORD AND GURU

31, Godhra

Swamishri arrived for the evening satsang assembly. The stage backdrop had a traditional tribal straw hut. In the middle was a beautiful sofa for Mahant Swami Maharaj, flanked by raised *asans* for the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. As soon as Swamishri saw his seat he frowned and uttered, “Maharaj’s *asan* is ordinary, Swami Bapa’s *asan* is also ordinary and mine is royal!” Swamishri expressed his displeasure for the inappropriate

arrangement. Instantly, the attendants brought an ordinary sofa for Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri was pleased and felt comfortable.

Swamishri’s bhakti and humility towards Shriji Maharaj and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj are exemplary.

AUGUST 2018

DEEP RESPECT FOR SHRIJI MAHARAJ

5, Bodeli

Swamishri was singing the *chesta* at night. In front of him was a painting (*murti*) of Shriji Maharaj in a standing position. While he was singing the *chesta* Swamishri unwaveringly looked at the *murti*. After saying the first three *pads* of the *chesta*, Swamishri gestured to his attendant sadhus to move his sofa to one side. In fact, the sofa had been positioned on one side, but a reflection of a small part of his outstretched feet appeared on the glass of the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. Swamishri felt it to be inappropriate and disrespectful to Shriji Maharaj.

The sofa was moved and Swamishri felt at ease. Swamishri’s respect to Shriji Maharaj is unique.

SWAMISHRI FULFILS A WELL-WISHER’S REQUEST

13, Atladra

Haresh Moradiya, a devotee of Surat, recalled an experience of Mahant Swami Maharaj before him, “In 1998, you were on a satsang visit to Hong Kong. My friend, Bhupen Surani, was a business magnate. I invited him several times to come for your darshan and satsang. But somehow he could not spare the time. Finally, he turned up on the last day of your stay. After listening to your discourse he was profoundly touched and wished that you sanctify his home. I asked the organizers to schedule your visit, but it was not possible because you had to catch a flight at 7.00 a.m. the next day. However, when you came to know of my friend’s wish, you said you would come. And, you came to Bhupenbhai’s house at

4.00 a.m. You sat and talked about satsang, asked him about his life, blessed him and even pleased him by drinking a little milk he offered. Then, you left straight for the airport. Bhupenbhai was highly pleased and happy.”

Swamishri disregarded the odd time and discomfort to please a well-wisher.

AMAZING HUMILITY

14, Atladra

In the evening assembly, swamis came to honour Swamishri with a shawl that had passport-sized photos of 1,340 Vidyamandir students attached to it. The shawl was first shown to Swamishri and then it was draped around him. While it was being taken away Swamishri started touching each of the photos and placing his fingers on his own head as a mark of respect. He took three minutes to touch all the photos respectfully.

The entire congregation was overwhelmed by

Swamishri’s humility and respect for the students.

SHARING AND CARING

25, Atladra

While Swamishri was having breakfast he started serving snacks to several sadhus seated before him. Today, he called Bhaktavatsal Swami and gave him blueberries. Bhaktavatsal Swami said, “Today, you ate some more blueberries than usual.”

Atmaswarup Swami added, “Swamishri can eat all of them if he so wishes.”

Bhaktavatsal Swami asked, “Then why don’t you eat them all? They are good for your health.”

Swamishri smiled, “One should share what one likes with others.”

Everyone admired Swamishri’s generous and broad sentiments. ◆

*From Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmapatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekshivandas*

ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

June–August 2018

JUNE

■ About 15 youths, who daily perform the housekeeping of the Rajkot mandir, were standing with buckets and brooms in the mandir *pradakshina*. One of them asked Swamishri, “Which thought should we maintain to please you while doing *seva*?”

Swamishri replied, “See all as divine.” (1, Rajkot)



The essence of that includes cultivating the virtues of *samp*, *suhrudbhav*, *ekta*, *dasbhav* and *mahima*. To attain the state of inner purity (*nirvasnikpanu*) and offer bhakti coupled with dharma, *jnan* and *vairagya* is the quintessence. That is *ekantikpanu*.”

(2, Rajkot)

■ One who does not follow *niyams*, his faith is weak.

■ Following *niyams* seem to be like punishment, but it is not. It is an investment and a means to progress. Shriji Maharaj is pleased when one abides by *niyams*. (6, Limbdi)

■ Firm faith means Shriji Maharaj is Bhagwan and we have to offer bhakti to him with humility and by becoming *aksharrup*. (11, Bhuj)

Q. A *satsangi* child asked Swamishri while he was having lunch, “Swami, of which Akshardham

Q. The emcee asked Swamishri in the assembly, “We celebrated various days in your presence and you blessed us accordingly. Today, we request you to give us the essence of what you had discoursed during your long stay here in Rajkot.”

A. Swamishri replied, “The essence of all the shastras is Brahman and Parabrahman. To have Shriji Maharaj in our hearts is the quintessence.

are you from – Gandhinagar or Delhi?”

A. Swamishri replied, “The one that is above.” Then, Swamishri added, “All three are one and same.” (13, Bhuj)

■ One who perceives all as divine is brave, whereas one who doesn’t is a coward. (14, Bhuj)

Q. Five-year-old Dhyani Jani asked Swamishri out of curiosity, “Swami, do you see Bhagwan?”

A. Swamishri smiled and replied, “Yes. I see him in you.” (24, Sarangpur)

■ By merely wishing, ‘I want to be a servant of servants [*das na das*]’ one’s attitude becomes positive. And then one starts receiving all virtues. (27, Sarangpur)

■ Swamishri was asked to write a few inspiring words to always provide soul-strength. Swamishri wrote, “*Darek ma nirdosh buddhi rakhvi. Divya samajva.* [Perceive all to be faultless and understand them to be divine.]” (30, Sarangpur)

JULY

Q. A volunteer asked, “How can we please you?”

A. Swamishri replied, “Abide by *dharma-niyams* and perceive all as *muktas*. All are divine and none are ordinary.” (2, Sarangpur)

Q. A youth at the National Convention 2018 in Atlanta asked, “What do you think of while doing the *mala* in your puja?”

A. Swamishri replied, “I think of Yogi Bapa. Firstly, he is sitting in a calm and composed manner. Then he starts meditating. Then, I think of his and Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s incidents.

Q. In what way are you with us?

A. Swamishri replied, “When you think of me I am with you.” Then, Swamishri gestured with his fingers to form an outline of a heart and revealed, “I will always be in your heart.”

Q. Swamishri’s attendant asked, “How do we know that one is not doing something wilfully [*man nu dharyu*]?”

A. Swamishri said briefly, “One experiences

inner peace, fulfilment and soul-satisfaction.” (8, Sarangpur)

Q. In what lies your *rajipo*?

A. When you tread the path prescribed by Bhagwan. (11, Sarangpur)

■ The worldly path is different from the path of *moksha*. *Moksha* is associated with one’s *atma*, whereas the worldly path is related to one’s body. (14, Sarangpur)

■ One who has the association of Bhagwan will attain everything. One has to have patience and follow Maharaj’s *agna* (instructions). By so doing one will gradually attain the *brahmarup* state. (18, Anand)

■ For countless births we have been living body-conscious (*dehbhav*) lives. But due to the Satpurush’s (Guru’s) way of life we realize that we are different (i.e. our true self is *atma*). (21, Anand)

■ One who falls into the habit of seeing others faults (*abhav-avgun*) will get destroyed, whereas one who experiences peace on seeing the sadhus and devotees is forgiven for his countless sins.

■ One who has two things: *dharma-niyam* and firm faith in Bhagwan, will be victorious. (22, Bochasan)

Q. A child asked, “Swami, you are my best friend, but how can I become your best friend?”

A. Swamishri replied, “By observing *niyams*.”

■ One can solidly observe *niyams* by having staunch faith in God, gaining Bhagwan’s *rajipo* and believing that Bhagwan sees whatever one does and wherever one goes. (24, Bochasan)

Q. On Guru Purnima day, a *satsangi* youth from Houston, Yash Bhatt, brought a lustrous lotus flower and offered it to Swamishri. He prayed, “Swami, there is darkness everywhere and you are our guru. Will you liberate us from darkness?”

A. Swamishri frankly and emphatically revealed, “I have come to do that only.” (27, Bochasan)

■ Humility is God’s virtue. When one attains God’s virtue one experiences joy and joy.

■ Humility is a key. It is an expressway to Akshardham.

■ Pride cannot be conquered by any means. However, Shriji Maharaj says, “Be humble and win over pride.” (31 Godhra)

AUGUST

■ Do not behave adversely when we do not get along with someone in satsang. If we remain stubborn like a hard nut then it will cause resentment within. (1, Godhra)

■ As long as there is *samp* (concord) there will be peace. But when *kusamp* (discord) begins, Kaliyug enters. (1, Godhra)

■ *Moksha* means to give up ego (*aham*) and attachment (*mamatva*) and do bhajan and bhakti. Ego and attachment are poison. (2, Godhra)

Q. A devotee asked Swamishri, “What is Shriji Maharaj doing now in Akshardham?”

A. Swamishri replied with ease, “He is present here through the Satpurush.” (10, Bodeli)

■ To tolerate is an investment. Bhagwan gives his joy to one who tolerates. To tolerate means to have faith (*vishwas*) in God. (21, Atladra)

Q. Gurumanan Swami asked Swamishri, “What is the principal means to please Bhagwan and the Satpurush?”

A. Swamishri answered, “To have resolute faith [*dhradh vishwas*].” (22, Atladra)

Q. Swamishri was asked, “Write a sentence that will guide us in making our spiritual sadhanas easy and simple.”

A. Swamishri wrote, “Have immense, resolute faith (*ati, dradh vishwas*) in Maharaj and Swami.” (23, Atladra)

■ Humbleness is a safety zone. No questions or problems remain.

* * *

One who serves the guru with total servitude (*das na das*) pleases Bhagwan more than by any other means. (24, Atladra)

■ Atmaswarup Swami asked Mahant Swami Maharaj, “We often quote Pramukh Swami

Maharaj’s credo, ‘In the joy of others lies our own.’ Likewise what is your credo?”

Swamishri started pondering. Then, Atmaswarup Swami tried to prod him, “We always hear you talk about becoming a servant of servants [*das na das*] and cultivating *divyabhav* [seeing all as divine] or *samp* [harmony.] Is it any one of them?”

Swamishri replied, “Bhagwan *ma dradh vishwas*.” Then, Swamishri said in English, “Unflinching faith in God.” (25 Atladra)

Q. Swamishri was asked, “When our problems are solved by doing *abhishek* or through your blessings, then where is the need to do *ghar sabha*?”

A. Swamishri replied, “They provide temporary solutions, whereas *ghar sabha* gives permanent solutions.”

Q. Is it not enough if we attend the Sunday *sabha* and the weekly suburb *sabha*? Where is the need to do *ghar sabha*?

A. No, it is not enough. By doing *ghar sabha* the members of the family attain spiritual understanding and a wealth of values. Since Swami Bapa was an apostle of peace so his words are worth billions of rupees. And he donates that sum to those who do *ghar sabha*. A problem will arise anytime in your life. Through *ghar sabha* all attain such an understanding that it protects them. (29, Atladra)

■ If one wants to reproach someone then do so with four criteria in mind. Rebuke him with

1. Politeness (*vivek*).
2. Humility (*namrata*).
3. The belief that he is yours (*potana mani ne*).
4. The thought that his *jiva* is not spoilt (*ena jivanu bagde nahi*).

(31, Atladra)



From Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahnavatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekshivandas



85th Birthday Celebration of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj

3 October 2018, Bhavnagar

On 3 October, over 30,000 devotees and well-wishers, along with more than 600 sadhus, gathered at the BAPS Mandir in Bhavnagar, Gujarat, to celebrate His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj's 85th birthday. An evening programme was organized to celebrate Mahant Swami Maharaj's life and work, yet he insisted that the greatness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj remain the focus of the programme.

Thus, the celebration programme focused on a selection of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spiritual qualities, such as dharma, bhakti, compassion for devotees, humility and divine influence, and how these qualities are still experienced through the life of Mahant Swami Maharaj. The assembly included enlightening speeches from senior and experienced sadhus, heartfelt bhajans, inspiring video presentations and colourful traditional dances. Each speech was preceded by a video illustrating the divine and spiritual qualities of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The celebration assembly began with the traditional singing of *dhun* and *prarthana*. Thereafter, Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about the continuity of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Gunatit Guru succession and that Pramukh Swami Maharaj lives on today through our present guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj.

At 5:20 p.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj entered the assembly upon a beautifully decorated chariot pulled by the sadhus who offer their services in the Bhavnagar mandir. Mahant Swami Maharaj held Shri Harikrishna Maharaj's *murti* in his lap as the procession proceeded from the entrance of the hall to the main stage.

After Mahant Swami Maharaj had taken his seat on the main stage, the series of speeches revealing the similarity in virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj began with Narayanmuni Swami's speech on their staunch observance of the commands of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.



Children perform a traditional dance

Thereafter, Aksharvatsal Swami spoke on their pure devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Then, Atmatrupta Swami described Pramukh Swami Maharaj's tireless travels to villages, towns and cities in India and abroad to meet and fulfil the wishes of devotees, and how Mahant Swami Maharaj has continued that tradition.

Next, Anandswarup Swami, narrated incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's remarkable humility.

Then, Atmoswarup Swami spoke about the divine impact of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj upon devotees and others in India and around the world.

Jitubhai Vaghani, MLA and President of Gujarat State BJP, addressed the assembly, saying, "BAPS is a factory for morally shaping society." He also expressed that Mahant Swami Maharaj's

commands can be confidently followed without question.

Subsequently, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and Pujya Swayamprakash (Doctor) Swami recalled their experiences with Mahant Swami Maharaj from their youth.

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, "*Moksha* is attainable. However, we must live according to Bhagwan's principles and understand him to be the all-doer." He also stated, "Unity is the cause of peace in homes and the force behind achieving great works for society."

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus and invited guests.

At the conclusion of the celebration assembly, *arti* was collectively performed by over 30,000 devotees and well-wishers. ♦



Memorial to HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj at Lake Manasarovar

22-27 September 2018



Brahmanavihari Swami and Buddhist monks perform the *mahapuja* rituals, Manasarovar

On 13 June 2017, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and sadhus dispersed the sacred ashes of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the holy waters of Lake Manasarovar, where, at the age of eleven, Bhagwan Swaminarayan had meditated in the freezing winter of 1793.

On 27 September 2018, a memorial to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, bearing the holy footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was ritually consecrated on the shores of Lake Manasarovar. The ceremony was performed by Brahmanavihari Swami in the presence of local Buddhist monks, Chinese well-wishers and Tibetan pilgrims.

Earlier, on 22 September, the Head of The Buddhist Association of China who oversees 300 million followers, Venerable Master Yanjue, welcomed the swamis at the renowned Guangji Temple in Beijing. In the presence of senior monks, dignitaries and government and embassy officials a special discussion highlighting the long historical cultural and spiritual ties between India and China took place. After dwelling upon Lord Buddha's birth in India and Bhagwan Swaminarayan's meditation at Manasarovar, prayers for universal peace were offered. ♦



New BAPS Mandir Inauguration

13 October 2018, Dausa, Rajasthan



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals, Dausa



BAPS hari mandir, Dausa

BAPS satsang in Rajasthan state began from Dausa. In 1928, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj first visited Dausa. At that time, Shri Harisahayji Chaudhari and others joined the satsang. Then, in 1947, Shastriji Maharaj visited again with Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami.

Subsequently, through the *vicharan* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and other sadhus, the satsang in Rajasthan grew, leading to a beautiful *shikharbaddha* mandir in Jaipur in 2005.

In 2001, the grandson of Shri Harisahayji, Shri Satyanarayan Chaudhari, donated land for a mandir in Dausa and, in 2003, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Dausa and blessed the project. In 2015, Atmaswarup Swami performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the mandir. Thereafter, a three-pinnacled *hari* mandir of pink stone from Bansipahadpur and marble from Makrana was built by the dedicated efforts of young and old men and women devotees.

Prior to the mandir *murti-pratishtha* celebrations, processions were conducted in 111 surrounding villages to invite all.

On the morning of 12 October, a grand *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir was held through the streets of Dausa. The colourful *nagar-yatra* featured decorated chariots bearing the *murtis* and women devotees walking while carrying scriptures and *kalashes*

on their heads in traditional style. Over 3,000 devotees and well-wishers participated in the 7-km procession route.

In the afternoon, the Shri Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Mahayagna took place, in which 1,100 devotees participated seated around 111 *yagna kunds*. The inauguration of the Swaminarayan Nagar also took place at this time.

On 13 October 2018, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir. Previously, on 3 December 2017, in Jaipur, Pragat Brahmswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.

From 13 to 19 October, the Swaminarayan Nagar provided an array of inspiring displays, events and activities, such as, an artistic main gate, five exhibitions, free medical diagnostic camp and others. Daily, from 1 to 5 p.m., Yogiprem Swami presented eloquent discourses on the Shrimad Bhagvat, which were attended by over 1,500 devotees and well-wishers every day.

Permission to use the land for the *nagar* was generously granted by Shri Babulalji Goshi.

In this way, with the support of devotees and well-wishers of Dausa and surrounding villages, the Mandir Mahotsav was joyously and successfully celebrated. ♦



INDIA

YUVAK ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA 2018 12–19 September 2018



197 youths in the 2018 second batch of the Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) in Sarangpur participated in the one-week Antar Jagruti Parva in which the youths, in teams of four, visited a total of 373 villages in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra.

The youths made over 4,980 home visits, inspiring *satsangi* children, teenagers, youths and adults to strengthen their personal satsang practices, such as, daily puja, mandir darshan, reading of satsang texts, fasting on *ekadashi*, *ghar sabha*, weekly satsang *sabha* and others.

They also conducted 223 public assemblies for adults, attended by over 24,360 people; and 170 *bal* and 202 school assemblies, attended by over 41,840 children. In addition, they carried out daily evening bhakti parades through the villages, in which over 6,250 devotees participated to help spread the message of addiction-free living.

STUDENTS' MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE 2018

21–23 September, Sarangpur

Around 750 students of medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy and other allied health professions from throughout Gujarat and other major cities of India attended the three-day Medico-Spiritual



Conference based on the theme 'BAPS: Be A Perfect Student'. The students were guided on the conference theme by experienced and learned swamis and senior volunteers through speeches, discussions, workshops, question-answer sessions and audio-visual presentations.

UK

SUMMER SHIBIRS: AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN 17 August to 3 September 2018, UK & Europe



A series of *shibirs* on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan were held in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Anandswarup Swami and Bhadreswami, attended by more than 3,300 delegates – young children from the age of six to seniors aged over 80 – to deepen their *samjan* (understanding), strengthen their sadhana (spiritual endeavours), and enhance their *samarpan* (dedication) for the eternal truth of Akshar-Purushottam. The key messages were delivered through a variety of innovative and interactive mediums, tailored

specifically for the diverse age groups.

The Bal-Balika Shibir was held from 17 to 19 August at Warwick Conference Park, UK. Children embarked on a fascinating journey with a young aspirant named Tilak who witnessed first-hand a series of defining events charting the history of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* through his interaction with a mystical book.

The learning was supported by various classroom sessions and outdoor activities. The children also offered their personal devotion to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj by performing rituals including *arti*, *thal* and *mansi*, and noted their experiences in a thematic 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan' notebook.

The Yuvak-Yuvati Shibir ran in parallel and delivered the concepts through a montage of enlightening presentations, videos, interviews, monologues and dramas. The audience participated through various live interactive polls which provided an opportunity for personal reflection. Interactive discussions with fellow youths helped to enhance and consolidate the teachings and provided valuable lessons on developing family unity.

The Kishore-Kishori Shibir was held from 25 to 27 August, also at Warwick Conference Park. A series of taskmasters asked searching questions to a panel of swamis on the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato in their quest to discover the essential concepts of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. This explorative quest continued at the 'Brahmavidya School for Mumukshus', which ingeniously examined various artefacts that reinforced the principles of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Classroom sessions, a panel discussion, an interview with Bhadreswami, a quiz show, and various formats of multimedia presentations helped to explain the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan to the youths in a fun and engaging way.

The Sanyukta Shibir was also held during this long holiday weekend.

In addition to the *shibirs* in the UK, the first ever Yuvak-Yuvati Shibir was held in

Europe from 31 August to 2 September at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Lisbon, Portugal. More than 100 youths from Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland gathered to enhance their understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

These memorable and inspiring *shibirs* all concluded with a special video message from Mahant Swami Maharaj: "I love you with all my heart. I will be right next to you holding your hand."

LIVING ORGAN DONATION CONFERENCE, ROBIN HOOD ACADEMY

16 September 2018, Birmingham



Over 130 delegates attended a conference, organized by BAPS, in partnership with NHS Blood & Transplant (NHSBT), to promote awareness among the Hindu community to provide living organ donations for transplantation. Presentations by kidney transplant patients and their families, medical experts, local transplant teams and Hindu religious leaders addressed the anxiety and hesitation that exists, and raised awareness and provided practical guidance on improving living organ donation rates in the Hindu community.

Bipin Shingadia, a lead volunteer from BAPS, referred to Hindu scriptures to highlight that organ donation is a form of 'daan' and 'seva' (selfless charity and service), and should be considered by all Hindus.

The conference raised the confidence of the attendees to talk about the topic of living organ donation with friends and family.

BAPS has been campaigning to raise awareness

about organ donation through a series of events since 2011.

AFRICA

SANT VICHARAN IN AFRICA

28 June to 10 September 2018

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited the African continent on many occasions, inspiring and guiding countless devotees and spiritual aspirants to progress on the spiritual path. Following in his footsteps, to strengthen the satsang of devotees residing in Africa, 38 swamis conducted *padhramanis* and *parayans* in a total of 119 cities

and towns in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Congo, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa and Madagascar.

The swamis visited 10,293 families, inspiring and guiding devotees, young and old, to perform puja, *arti*, *thal*, scriptural reading and other daily devotional rituals.

Also, the swamis conducted 52 *parayans*, providing practical spiritual guidance to devotees through discourses based on the Vachanamrut, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan, Shrimad Bhagvat and other scriptures. ♦

TRIBUTES

PUJYA SANTPRASAD SWAMI

Passed Away: 21 August 2018, aged 78



A native of Rajula, Pujya Santprasad Swami was drawn towards Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj on having his first darshan in Mumbai. In 1966, Yogiji Maharaj initiated him into the *parshad*-fold in

Gondal. Thereafter, he was assigned to serve in Akshar Mandir, Gondal. Through his diligent *seva*, he earned the blessings of both Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In 1981, Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated him into the sadhu-fold during the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He continued his *seva* in Gondal, particularly ensuring the cleanliness of the mandir, lovingly serving meals to the mandir staff and other devotees and taking care of ill sadhus. He also served in many of the Sanstha's festivals. Along with such *seva*, he regularly offered devotion to Thakorji and performed *pradakshinas* in the Akshar Deri. Despite ill health, he constantly rejoiced in devotion and continued his saintly lifestyle.

We offer humble tributes to Pujya Santprasad Swami for his services and devotion.

PUJYA MADHURDARSHAN SWAMI

Passed Away: 5 October 2018, aged 45



Pujya Madhurdarshan Swami was a resident of Wellingborough, England, prior to taking *diksha* at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Tithal in 1999.

At the behest of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he served as the pujari of the BAPS mandir in Chicago since 2004. He was very adept and creative in offering devotion to Thakorji. Despite no prior training, with Swamishri's blessings, he also expertly served in the building of new mandirs, and restoration and maintenance of existing mandirs in the Midwest region. His affectionate and friendly nature endeared him to children, teenagers, youths and elder devotees.

In 2017, he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Even amid the painful treatments for the rapidly spreading cancer, his *atmanishtha*, devotion to God and guru and spiritual exuberance touched all. Despite the debilitating and painful illness and being confined to a wheelchair, he daily attended the *mangala*, *shangar* and *sandhya artis* and joyfully offered his devotion to Thakorji.

We offer humble tributes to Pujya Madhurdarshan Swami for his services and devotion.



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN 14-23 October 2018, Dhari & Gadhada

1. Swamishri performs *pradakshina* at the birthplace of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj (Dhari), 14 October.
2. Swamishri welcomes Puja Valku Bapu, Mahant of Chalala Mandir, and Puja Vijay Bapu, Mahant of Satadhar Mandir (Dhari), 14 October.
3. Swamishri discourses to the devotees in a morning assembly (Dhari), 17 October.
4. Swamishri performs *pradakshina* of the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Gadhada), 21 October.
5. Devotees seated during an evening satsang assembly (Gadhada), 21 October.



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 85TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

3 October 2018, Bhavnagar

1. Swamishri and *sadguru* sadhus on stage during the celebration assembly.
2. Youths perform a celebratory dance.
3. Over 30,000 devotees attended the birthday celebration assembly.

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