

SPECIAL ISSUE

SWAMINARAYAN  
**BLISS**

September-October 2016  
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Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj:  
Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan,  
Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami



The historic sacred *murti* worshipped  
by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj  
in his daily puja



Photo: Vanguard Studio, Mumbai, 1945

#### **SPIRITUAL SUCCESSORS OF BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN**

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (R), Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj (L),  
Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Centre)



*In truly knowing Aksharbrahman (guru)  
one attains Parabrahman.*

*The guru is worthy of being served on par with God,  
because God sees, walks and works through him.*

*One who contemplates in this way  
becomes brahmarup and attains God.*

*- Bhagwan Swaminarayan*

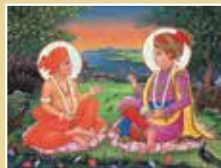
*I am eternal...*

*- Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami*



**SWAMINARAYAN  
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# Dedication

O Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj,

You lived amidst us,  
Never making distinctions that you were the  
guru and we your disciples.

You gave us your valuable time and love,  
But, we failed to fully grasp the priceless  
heritage you were bestowing upon us.

You generously guided and addressed us,  
Silently empowering us for a higher ascent.

You often came from your gruelling *vicharan*,  
But we were too naive to fully appreciate  
your tireless efforts.

Such was your monumental grace,  
That we can never repay our debt to you.

Thank you, Swami Bapa,  
For your legacy of Humility, Love,  
Soulful Education, Endeavour and more.

Finally, bless us, O Bapa,  
That we may forever follow in your  
footsteps.

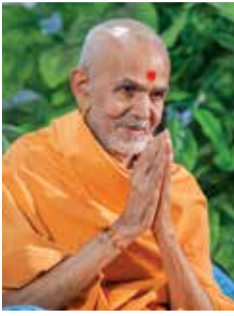






*‘For me, there is no coming and going,  
It is all a divine play.  
In fact, I am here and also there.  
I am always present.’*

*- Pramukh Swami Maharaj*



## HH MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

॥ श्रीस्वामिनारायणो विवस्वते ॥

Swami-Shreeji  
P. Pramukh Swami

Sarangpur  
28.9.16

This commemorative issue of 'Swaminarayan Bliss' is about the great life and legacy of H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj. When He passed away on 13 Aug. 2016, hundreds of thousands rushed from all corners of India and the globe to Sarangpur for his final darshan and to pay their respects. Many distinguished people from India and abroad spontaneously paid glowing tributes to him. The overwhelming response reflected Swamishri's divine personality and monumental services to humanity.

I had known and experienced Swamishri at close quarters for over six decades. He was truly an embodiment of divinity and idol of compassion, simplicity, tolerance and humility. No words can describe his selfless Himalayan efforts in



પ્રગટ બ્રહ્મસ્વરૂપ  
મહંતસ્વામી મહારાજ  
(સ્વામીશ્રી કેશવજીવનદાસજી)

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sanctifying the homes of innumerable devotees, and personally meeting, writing letters and attending phone calls to guide, comfort, and provide spiritual succour to countless souls.

He touched and transformed millions of hearts to do good to others. He left a legacy of hundreds of temples and a vibrant satsang community. He inspired countless to live an addiction free, morally upright and spiritually enlightened life. He motivated all to serve with the spirit of selfless service, and to live in harmony with humanity and in tune with God.

His devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj was unparalleled. The Akshar-Purushottam mandirs he built inspire bhakti, upasana, morality, seva and the universal values of Sanatan Dharma.





પ્રગટ શ્રદ્ધસ્વરૂપ  
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In the whirlpool of activities, his inner self was always anchored to God.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message, "In the joy of others lies our own," urges all to serve humbly and selflessly and contribute towards a happier, harmonious and peaceful humanity. He used to see God in all. He was one of the rarest souls that our country and the world have been blessed with. I pray that He forever showers his inspirations, blessings and spiritual guidance and wisdom upon us all. May His life credo, "To be last of the least," be the guiding light for all devotees. And may all devotees consolidate samp, subhodaybhav and ekta in their lives and strive to advance his noble works to gain blessings of Bhagwan



પ્રગટ બ્રહ્મસ્વરૂપ

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Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

I deeply thank all the dignitaries, devotees and well-wishers who visited Sarangpur to offer their tributes to Swamishri and to all the BAPS volunteers who served day and night. My sincere gratitude to the spiritual leaders, Prime Ministers, Presidents, royalty, government ministers and officials, business barons, community leaders and other distinguished people for offering their tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. And finally, my profound acknowledgements to the print and electronic media for their generous coverage and tributes to H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Tai Swaminarayan  
Sadhu Keshavjivandas  
(Mahant Swami)





# Divinity in Human Form

**T**o speak of one who is beyond words,  
To think of him who surpasses  
the mind,

And to lay claim upon someone who transcends the bonds of *maya*.

All such efforts in human perception and articulation of a transcendental personality like Pramukh Swami Maharaj would apparently prove futile and fruitless.

Yet, thousands speak about him, think of him and claim him to be theirs. So, how can we resolve this paradox? The answer lies in divine grace! Only through God's grace can we perceive and associate with Him or the God-realized Sadhu.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE) showered his divine grace upon aspirants by taking birth in a human form to guide and liberate innumerable souls. Among his many legacies – mandirs, sadhus, *niyams*, social services, bhakti and others – he importantly promised to remain manifest through a succession of Gunatit gurus – of whom Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921-2016) was the fifth successor.

Swamishri ideally loved and selflessly served humanity in a myriad ways because of his absolute divinity. This is why, today, hundreds of thousands count themselves fortunate to have met him, and feel honoured in celebrating his life and work.

During the many decades that Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived amidst us, he tirelessly strove to serve Satsang and society in multiple ways. So, it is difficult to define him by a few attributes or works.

Can we say that he was only a builder of mandirs, an establisher of health and educational institutions, an idol of youths or a crusader for tribal upliftment, dowry-free marriages and anti-addiction? In fact he was a lot more.

A columnist of a Gujarati newspaper highlighted another interesting aspect of Swamishri: “The most striking facet of his personality was that though he was the head of the BAPS, he had always remained a humble servant of God and mankind; he respected all religions, never criticizing others or claiming his organization to be the best.”

Let us try to understand some more dimensions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vast and lofty life.

Once, Shastriji Maharaj pointed to Motibhai Patel (Pramukh Swami's father) while talking to Prabhashankarbhai Pandya, “He has given me his son attributed with 36 virtues.”

Prabhashankarbhai, a devotee of Ahmedabad, failed to grasp what Shastriji Maharaj meant. “Swami, what do you mean by that?” he asked.

Shastriji Maharaj quizzed, “You do know that a [true] sadhu has 30 virtues?”

“Yes, Swami.”

“Narayanda (Pramukh Swami) possesses the 30 saintly virtues, and will [in future] be honoured like a royal.” Prabhashankarbhai realized that in saying “36 virtues” Shastriji Maharaj was alluding to Pramukh Swami's unique divinity.

Fascinated by Shastriji Maharaj's revelation, Prabhashankarbhai requested, “Do show me those times.”

Shastriji Maharaj blessed him, “You will witness them.”

The above dialogue between Shastriji Maharaj and Prabhashankarbhai took place around 1950. Then, in 2004, 54 years later, Prabhashankarbhai Pandya passionately recalled those words of Shastriji Maharaj and disclosed, “Today, I am witnessing with my own eyes the truth of Shastriji Maharaj's prophecy...”

Many of us, too, have seen and heard

firsthand of the unstinting praises and felicitations accorded to Swamishri. But in spite of all the honours Swamishri received, he had always remained humble and unassuming.

Once in Gondal, a sadhu was giving detailed information about the Nobel Peace Prize to Swamishri. Thereafter, everyone unanimously said that Swamishri deserved the peace prize. Instantly, Swamishri replied, “I have already got it – Akshar Deri, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.”

All his life, Swamishri’s sole focus and attractions were God and his gurus.

After the departure of Yogiji Maharaj in 1971, he was declared as the guru. Thereafter, he was honoured and praised profusely. But his life-mantra was, “I am a *sevak*.”

Then, for the next 45 years, he selflessly served the devotees and society. He unflaggingly visited thousands of villages and homes of devotees and well-wishers in a spirit of servitude and compassion. During his *vicharan* he never asked for comforts nor paid any attention to the discomforts and adversities. Even amidst the flurry of daily activities, Swamishri exuded immense patience and love for all. He was born solely to give, but not to seek and attain anything.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s simplicity and straightforwardness in all his activities were exemplary. The Governor of Gujarat HE Omprakash Kohli commented, “There was no pretence, only sheer straightforwardness. This virtue could be perceived on his face, in his speech, in his actions and in his works.”

His soft voice and a peaceful demeanour reflected his profound inner divinity. Harish Salve, a renowned constitutional lawyer in the Supreme Court of India, opined, “To be in his presence was in itself a blessing – a feeling of calm would pervade the world around him. God sends us his chosen few to show the path of love and peace to humanity.”

Furthermore, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s

seamless management of the BAPS has impressed many magnates, political leaders and professionals. Shri Arun Jaitley, the Finance Minister of India, said, “I think his personality was in tune with the kind of institution he headed. I think spirituality, organizational skill and inspirational abilities would sum up [Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s personality].”

Shri Anil Naik, the Chairman of Larsen and Toubro, candidly stated, “He was a leader par excellence without wanting to be shown as a leader. That was his unassuming nature. His biggest leadership quality was that he didn’t consider himself a leader, but promoted everybody else as leaders.”

Swamishri served indefatigably till the age of 90 years. Thereafter, due to old age and other ailments, he resided at the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur, still giving darshan and blessings to all. On 13 August 2016, he breathed his last, at the age of 95 years. According to media reports 2.1 million devotees and well-wishers came to offer respects to him during his four-day darshan in Sarangpur.

To sum up, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence is now felt through his successor, HH Mahant Swami Maharaj. The divine grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan continues to remain manifest for the liberation of his devotees and uplift of society.

This special commemorative issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* celebrates the life and legacy of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We humbly pay homage at the holy feet of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, seeking his blessings that we may all live up to his ideals and truly perceive him. ♦

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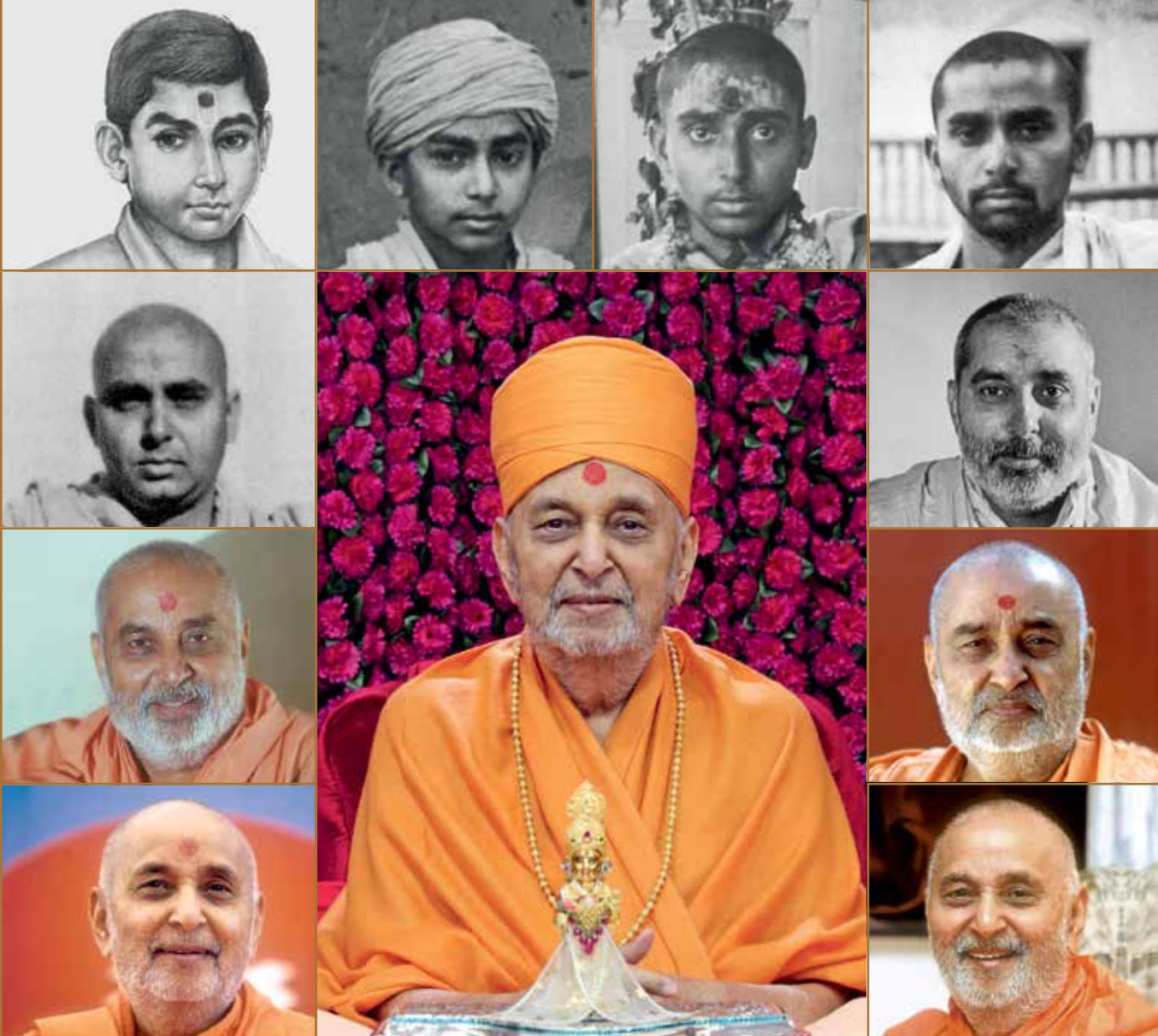
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Pramukh Swami Maharaj's  
**1921 DIVINE LIFE 2016**  
A Brief Timeline

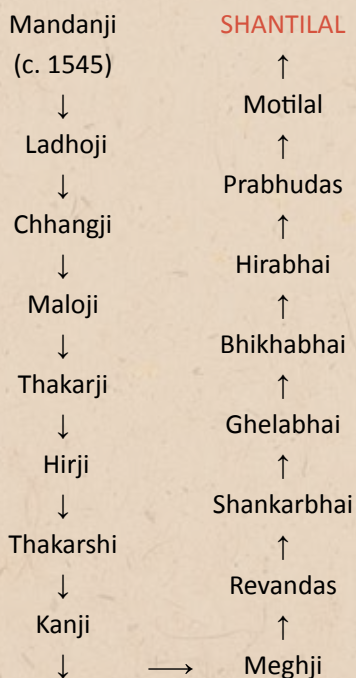




**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj was the fifth successor in the illustrious spiritual tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Out of his compassion for humanity, Swamishri made over 17,000 village, town and city visits and sanctified over 250,000 homes in India and abroad. He read and replied to over 700,000 letters, and personally counselled over 810,000 people. He established over 1,100 mandirs and built grand cultural complexes like Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi and Gandhinagar. His profound experience and realization of God was the essence of his success and divine lustre.

The following is a brief outline of his life, beginning below with his family lineage.



Father: Motibhai Patel



Mother: Diwaliben Patel



**1921**

7 December (Magshar *sud* 8, VS 1978). He was born in the village of Chansad, near Vadodara, Gujarat, to Motibhai and Diwaliben Patel. His childhood name was Shantilal.



**1940**

10 January (Posh *sud* 1, VS 1996). Shastriji Maharaj initiated him into the sadhu order at Akshar Deri, Gondal, and renamed him Narayanswarupdas Swami.

**1939**

7 November (Aso *vad* 11, VS 1995). Shantilal left home to become a sadhu.

22 November (Kartik *sud* 11, VS 1996). Shastriji Maharaj Initiated him into the *parshad* order at Ambli Vali Pol, Ahmedabad.



**1940-50**

Studied Sanskrit, did *vicharan* with Shastriji Maharaj and performed services in BAPS mandirs. Served as *kothari* of Sarangpur Mandir.





## 1950

21 May (Jeth *sud* 4, VS 2006). Shastriji Maharaj appointed Shastri Narayanswarupdas as Pramukh (President) of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) at Ambli Vali Pol, Ahmedabad.



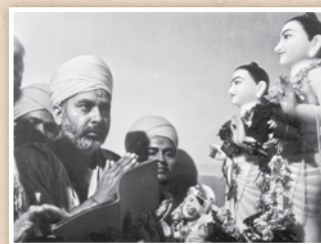
## 1951

10 May (Vaishakh *sud* 4, VS 2007). In Sarangpur, Shastriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham. Yogiji Maharaj became spiritual guru of BAPS. Pramukh Swami served the BAPS under the guidance and blessings of Yogiji Maharaj.



## 1959-60

24 October to 3 July 1960. Pramukh Swami went with Yogiji Maharaj on an overseas Satsang Tour to East Africa.



## 1971

4 June. In Sankari, *murti-pratishtha* of the first BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir built by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



## 1968

27 November. Pramukh Swami's 48th birthday was celebrated in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj in Mumbai. Yogiji Maharaj said that Pramukh Swami was the form of Shastriji Maharaj and instructed all devotees to celebrate his birthday gloriously every year.



## 1971

23 January (Posh *vad* 11, VS 2027). In Mumbai, Yogiji Maharaj returned to Akshardham; cremation rites were held in Gondal. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was declared spiritual guru of BAPS.



## 1973

3 December. Kalash Mahotsav, Ahmedabad; Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated 56 youths into the *parshad* (monastic) order.





## 1974

First overseas satang tour as guru. Received many 'Key to the City' honours. Consecrated first BAPS mandir in USA in New York. Over the next 40 years he consecrated 6 *shikharbaddha* mandirs and over 70 *hari* mandirs in North America.



## 1981

7 March to 13 April. A 37-day festival was organized in Ahmedabad to celebrate Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Birth Bicentenary. Swamishri initiated 207 youths into the *sadhu* and *parshad* orders. Around 8 million people visited the celebrations.



## 1983

5 February. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, aged 62, suffered a heart attack in Sundalpura. Even afterwards, for over 30 years, he continued to serve tirelessly day and night.



## 1984

7 April 1984. Met Pope John Paul II in Vatican City.



## 1985

16 July to 18 August. Grand 33-day Cultural Festival of India celebrated at Alexandra Park, London. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was honoured in a *Suvarna Tula* ceremony at QPR football stadium, London. All donations received were gifted to Karamsad Medical College.



## 1985

22 October to 19 December. 59-day Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Birth Bicentenary Celebrations were held in Ahmedabad. Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated 200 youths into the *sadhu* and *parshad* orders. Over 8 million people visited the celebrations.



## 1987-88

Inspired cattle camps and famine relief activities in Gujarat.





## 1988

Twelfth overseas Satsang Tour. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was honoured in the British and Canadian parliaments.



## 1989-90

In 1989, 15,000 children participated at the International Children's Convention (Adhiveshan), Vidyanagar. In 1990, 21,000 youths participated at the International Youth Convention (Adhiveshan), Vidyanagar.



## 1991

12 July to 11 August. 31-day Cultural Festival of India was held in Edison, New Jersey, USA; over 1 million visitors.



## 1992

30 October to 2 December. A grand 33-day celebration of Yogiji Maharaj's Centenary was held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. On 30 October, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar.



## 1993

BAPS Relief and rehabilitation activities done in the aftermath of the earthquake in Latur, Maharashtra.



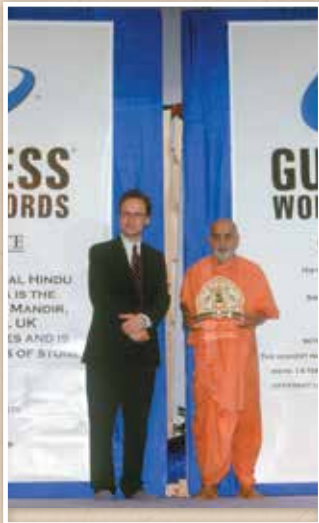
## 1995

20 August. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS shikharbaddha mandir in Neasden, London.

From 25 Nov. to 31 Dec.

Swamishri's 37-day Amrut Mahotsav (75th Birthday) was celebrated in Mumbai, during which he publicly dedicated an eye hospital. In the next two decades, he established 7 hospitals and 11 mobile medical vans to provide quality healthcare to countless people. BAPS was granted affiliation to the United Nations as an 'NGO in Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council of the UN'.





## 1996

8 July. *Guinness World Records* recognized the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, as the 'Largest Stone Hindu Mandir Outside India'. BAPS volunteers served after cyclone in Andhra Pradesh.



## 1999

Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi. Visited Israel, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj prayed at holy sites for Christians and Jews. Met Rabbi Lau and Rabbi Bakshi-Doron in Israel.



## 1997

On 10 November, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was received at St. James' Palace by HRH Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales. On 14 April, HH Amir Shaikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa of Bahrain welcomed Swamishri at his royal palace. BAPS volunteers served during the floods in Gujarat.



## 2000

On 29 August, Pramukh Swami Maharaj addressed the Millennium World Peace Summit of Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations, New York. Also, met Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan.



## 1998

On 7 July, Swamishri underwent heart bypass surgery at the Lenox Hill Hospital, New York, USA.



## 2000

4 October. In Miami, Swamishri met US President Bill Clinton. Organized cattle camps and provided relief aid for victims of drought in Saurashtra. Inaugurated BAPS Swaminarayan Vidya Mandir for Girls, Karamsad. In Dabhoi, opened a general hospital for the underprivileged. De-addiction campaign held by BAPS children; over 400,000 were de-addicted.





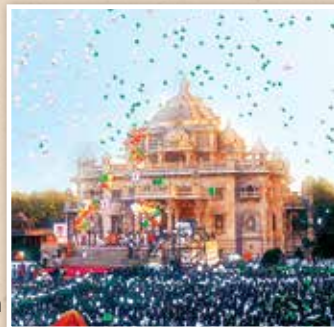
## 2001

BAPS served after earthquake in Gujarat: Emergency aid to 409 villages, houses and infrastructure constructed in

15 villages and colonies; 49 schools built. *Guinness World Records* recognized Pramukh Swami Maharaj as one of the 20 most influential people of the world.

## 2004

On 8 February, the 50th anniversary of BAPS Bal Mandal was celebrated at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and HE APJ Abdul Kalam, President of India. 20,000 children attended. Pramukh Swami Maharaj received Lifetime Achievement Award from the USA government.



## 2005

6 November (Kartik *sud* 5, VS 2062). Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, HE President Dr APJ Abdul

Kalam, Prime Minister Shri Manmohan Singh and other dignitaries. BAPS volunteers served after tsunami affected Andaman, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry: Emergency aid to 51 villages. 'Mystic India', a large format film about the historic travels of Nilkanth Varni, was released.



## 2006

BAPS served during floods in Surat and other parts of Gujarat. Public dedication of two reconstructed tsunami-affected villages: Pattipulamkuppam and Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu.

## 2007

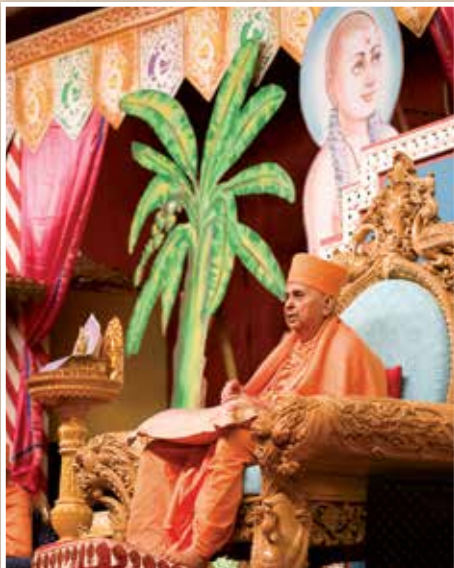
De-addiction Campaign by BAPS children: 630,000 people pledged to give up addictions. A Youth Training Centre was inaugurated in Sarangpur. Grand 4-day BAPS Centenary Celebrations (13-17 Dec.) were held in Ahmedabad. On 17 December *Guinness World Records* honoured Pramukh Swami Maharaj for having consecrated the most mandirs and declared BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham temple in New Delhi as the largest Hindu temple in the world.



## 2008

BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London, won UK government's 'Pride of Place' Award. Assistance provided to flood victims in Bihar and Hurricane Ike in USA.





## 2009

Relief aid provided to flood-affected in South Gujarat.

BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London, won UK government's 'The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service'.

On 31 December, celebrated Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Diksha Bicentenary in Dabhan.



## 2010

Swamishri inaugurated the 'BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute' in New Delhi.



## 2011

Swamishri performed in Mumbai the Shilapujan Ceremony for Akshardham in New Jersey, USA.

*Reader's Digest* selected

Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi as one of 'The Seven Wonders of the 21st Century'.

BAPS assisted victims of ammunitions blast in Tanzania and tsunami-earthquake in Japan.



## 2012

Swamishri had pacemaker implant, Ahmedabad.

On behalf of Swamishri, senior sadhus inaugurated BAPS Yogiji Maharaj Hospital in Ahmedabad.



## 2013

Over 60,000 youths attended the BAPS Youth Activities Diamond Jubilee celebrated in Ahmedabad.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the BAPS Shastriji Maharaj Hospital in Vadodara.





## 2014

10 August (Shravan  
*sud* 15, VS 2070).  
Pramukh Swami  
Maharaj performed  
*murti-pratishtha* of  
the new *shikhar-  
baddha* BAPS Shri  
Swaminarayan

Mandir, Robbinsville, New Jersey. On 15 August, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the Bhumital Pujan ceremony of Swaminarayan Akshardham Mahamandir in Robbinsville, NJ. During the year-long celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj's 150th Birth Anniversary, 23,000 trees were planted and over 572,000cc of blood donated by BAPS volunteers.



## 2015

20 June, Sarangpur.  
Former President of India, Dr  
APJ Abdul Kalam, presented  
his book 'Transcendence:  
My Spiritual Experiences  
with Pramukh Swamiji'  
to Swamishri.



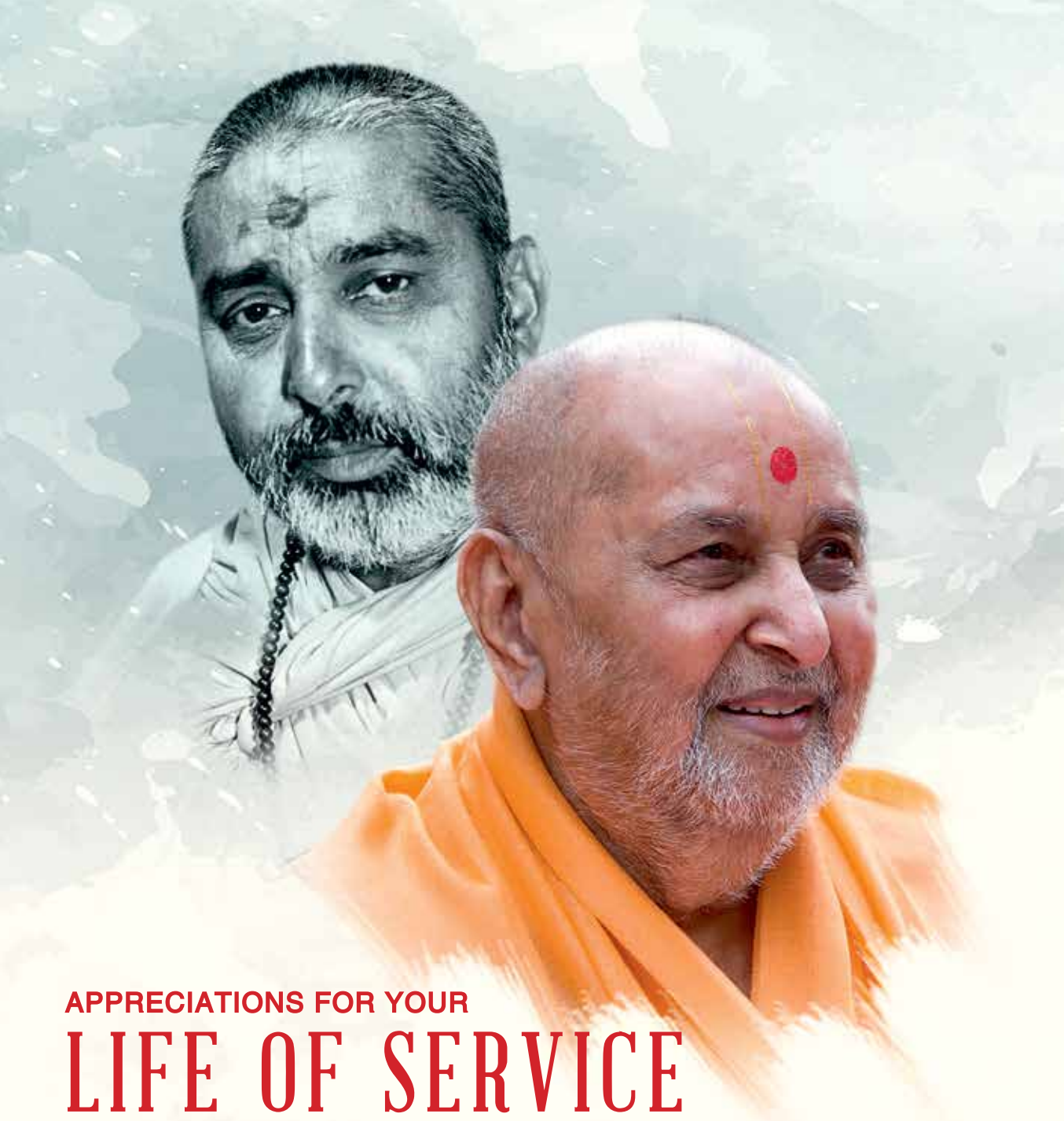
## 2016

3 to 13 May 2016  
The Centenary Celebrations  
of BAPS Swaminarayan  
Mandir, Sarangpur, were  
celebrated in Pramukh  
Swami Maharaj's presence.  
On 12 May,  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj  
performed the *maha-  
abhishek* and 100th  
*patotsav arti* of the *murtis*  
in the main mandir.  
On 13 May, Pramukh  
Swami Maharaj blessed  
the centenary celebrations  
assembly in Sarangpur.



## 2016

In spite of treating Swamishri for a chest infection and age-related illnesses, he unexpectedly passed away at 95 years on 13 August 2016 (Shravan *sud* 10, Samvat 2072) at 6.00 p.m. in Sarangpur. As news of his departure spread, there was an outpouring of intense grief and sympathy worldwide. For four days (13 to 17 August) devotees and well-wishers rushed to Sarangpur for Swamishri's last darshan. On 14 August, HH Mahant Swami was declared as the spiritual successor of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri's final rites were performed on 17 August.



## APPRECIATIONS FOR YOUR LIFE OF SERVICE

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*Throughout his entire life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had untiringly remained in the service of society. In times of adversity he assisted society, and in times of peace he had strengthened society. His every moment was lived for others, without distinctions of caste, nationality or faith. Distinguished spiritual and world leaders and dignitaries have praised Swamishri's outstanding contributions. The following is a brief overview of some of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spiritual and social works.*





## EDUCATION

Pramukh Swami Maharaj established educational institutions to help bolster the fusion of values and education. Through student hostels, schools and colleges in India and the first Hindu Independent Day School in England, these educational facilities enable students to excel in their academic careers and instill in them values that will help them to progress personally and professionally.

Swamishri encouraged scholarships, seminars and study circles to provide support and guidance to students. He also rebuilt schools in places affected by natural disasters.

## HEALTH

Pramukh Swami Maharaj established a variety of medical services and activities for the benefit of society, including, hospitals, mobile dispensaries, health fairs, blood donation camps, Ayurvedic and herbal care. Each year, BAPS mobile clinics treat hundreds of thousands of people free of charge in tribal and rural areas.

He inspired regular medico-spiritual conferences for doctors and other healthcare professionals to help them achieve balance in their personal and professional lives. Also, through health awareness lectures, he ensured that the public were educated on important topics.



## ENVIRONMENT

Pramukh Swami Maharaj took great interest in harvesting rain-water by constructing check dams, ponds and lakes and building underground water reservoirs, and conserving water by using drip irrigation. He cared for the environment by planting trees. His efforts led to the construction of 5,500 wells in the villages of Saurashtra and the planting of over two million trees worldwide.

He advocated the use of solar and biogas energy and construction of energy-efficient buildings. He encouraged projects for

collecting and recycling aluminium cans and paper in India and abroad.

## DISASTER RELIEF

Whether it was a drought or a flood, a tsunami or an earthquake, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's compassion and selfless services reached out to those afflicted. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's helping hands provided relief to victims of 46 natural disasters in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Nepal, Africa, Japan, USA and many other places. His empathy for the victims was revealed by his personal suggestions to provide hot meals and items of daily use. His commitment to fully rehabilitate the victims was reflected by the reconstruction of 25 villages and 55 schools, and providing vocational assistance in the form of equipment and training.





## TRIBALS

Pramukh Swami Maharaj kept alive the illustrious tradition of supporting and serving the underprivileged. He frequently visited the huts of tribal villagers and inspired them to quit their addictions and superstitions. He encouraged and facilitated their education, enabling them to raise their standard of living and hold their heads up high with pride. He also arranged mobile medical dispensaries, ambulances, medical camps and other services to cater for their health needs. He inspired them to integrate spirituality into their daily lives.

## COMMUNITY

Pramukh Swami Maharaj transformed many lives and strived to establish harmony in society. He personally inspired thousands to quit their harmful addictions and through large de-addiction campaigns spread the message of an addiction-free life.

He restored peace between communities which had harboured animosity towards one another for generations. And he exemplified forgiveness and peace during the attack on Gandhinagar Akshardham by inspiring peace within society.

He supported local community projects and institutions by raising funds and awareness through sponsored walks, and organized food drives to provide assistance to the needy.



## CHILDREN & YOUTH

Established by Yogiji Maharaj, the BAPS Children's (1954) and Youth Activities (1952) were enthusiastically nurtured by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Every week, in India and abroad, trained volunteers conduct more than 9,300 children's and youth assemblies and activities promoting culture, education, health, skill development and spirituality – the five areas that Pramukh Swami Maharaj primarily focused on for child and youth development.

Through his selfless love and compassion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj developed strong bonds with children and youth in India and abroad. He also promoted character, enabling youngsters to become noble citizens and contribute back to their communities.

He nurtured them through weekly assemblies, seminars, conventions, summer camps and other activities, and provided them opportunities to channel their talents in productive ways.

## EMPOWERING WOMEN

Bhagwan Swaminarayan endeavoured for the progress of women by promoting their educational, social and spiritual development. Through weekly assemblies, seminars and conventions, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired many spiritual, cultural, educational and professional activities for girls and women of all ages and backgrounds in India and abroad.







### FAMILY UNITY

Pramukh Swami Maharaj viewed the family as the bedrock of society and so dedicated countless hours to promote family unity. To facilitate this, he initiated the practice of *ghar sabha* – the daily gathering of all family members. *Ghar sabha* provides a platform for all family members to read or discuss spiritual ideas and family issues. He also encouraged families to eat and pray together. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's insistence on *ghar sabha* has resolved many problems, establishing peace, harmony and happiness in

countless families.

Also, when required he personally mediated to resolve conflicts and reinstate harmony in many families.

### SATSANG & SPIRITUALITY

At each of the 4,300 BAPS centres across the world, separate weekly satsang assemblies take place for children, youths and adults. In today's fast-paced age of modern technology and busy schedules, these satsang assemblies provide much needed spiritual guidance and help to reduce stress.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj strongly and regularly insisted that all devotees, old and young, men and women, attend the weekly assembly, since it is the source of much inspiration and enlightenment.

Through satsang, people develop patience, positivity, tolerance, cooperation, respect for all, and many other virtues that are useful in daily life.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired countless to incorporate spirituality in their daily lives, in the form of personal puja, *ghar* mandir worship, local mandir darshan, scriptural reading and other spiritual pursuits.



### FESTIVALS & CULTURE

Experienced managers and administrators were awed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's calm, effective and proficient management of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's wide range of socio-spiritual activities. Through large and small festivals and events, he enabled one and all to learn and practise spirituality and management skills. These festivals primarily inspired people to lead addiction-free, pious and productive lives that benefit themselves, their families and society.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj promoted traditional dance, music, art, drama and other cultural activities. Through robotic shows, a cultural boat ride, water shows, laser shows, the 'Mystic India' Giant Screen Film and others, Pramukh Swami Maharaj adopted modern technology to portray the eternal spiritual messages of Sanatan Dharma and Indian culture in an entertaining and enlightening way to people of all ages and backgrounds.





## VOLUNTEERS

Through his selfless love, sacrifice and purity, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired thousands of youths to serve as dedicated volunteers and use their energy and skills for constructive purposes. These youths execute various humanitarian and social projects. These programmes also provide opportunities to youths around the world to develop new skills and engage in effecting positive change in their communities.

## SADHUS & SPIRITUAL STUDIES

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired around 1,000 youths to renounce the world and gifted the world with a pious cadre of dedicated sadhus who humbly and selflessly serve society. Most of the sadhus are graduates, yet they all perform even the most menial services.

He established a unique training centre in Sarangpur for the sadhus to provide them a solid spiritual foundation.

To enable them to provide spiritual, moral and cultural guidance he actively encouraged them to study Sanskrit, the Hindu shastras, philosophy, art and music, and to develop other skills. He established academic centres such as AARSH in Gandhinagar and BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute in New Delhi to facilitate such study. Hence, many have earned graduate and postgraduate degrees in Sanskrit, philosophy and literature.

The sadhus serve in the mandirs by performing worship of the consecrated deities, cooking, discoursing, counselling and engaging in other duties. They travel to the villages and cities to inspire people to lead pure and pious lives free from all addictions.



## MANDIRS

Mandirs are the focal point of all BAPS activities, where spirituality, social services and culture flourish. These traditional mandirs have revived ancient Indian art and architecture. Throughout the world, from tribal villages to metropolitan cities, Pramukh Swami Maharaj built 1,100 mandirs, which will continue to motivate countless individuals in a multitude of ways.

The Swaminarayan Akshardham complexes in New Delhi, Gandhinagar and Robbinsville, created by Pramukh Swami

Maharaj, are dedicated to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and portray the glorious heritage of India. Every year, these monuments inspire millions of visitors from over 200 countries with the messages of purity and harmony.

Mandirs in India: 1,000 Mandirs abroad: 125



# A JEWEL AMONG SAGES



## THE DALAI LAMA

“Your sadhus are setting an example of content, co-existence and selfless service. There is an ideal for all of mankind. His name is Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

## PUJYA RAMSWARUP SHASTRI

*Former President of the Bharat Sadhu Samaj*

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s lifestyle, actions and words set an ideal example for his followers. I bow my head in reverence to his dedication and selfless service.”



## HH SWAMI CHIDANAND SARASVATIJI

*Divine Life Society, Rishikesh*

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj is Narayan incarnate; he is a jewel among sages. His lustrous persona and exemplary moral life spread a divine aura. It lights the way for all people to lead morally pure and God-centred lives. I can see the aura of saintliness, brotherhood and world harmony radiating around him.”



## JAIN ACHARYA MUNI SUSHILKUMARJI

*International Mahavir Jain Mission*

“If we want to unite India, it will be possible under the leadership of Pramukh Swami. He is not the leader of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya only; he is the leader of Hindu Dharma. Not only Hindu Dharma, but he is the leader of Indian society.”



## PUJYA ACHARYA MAHAPRAGNAJI

*Jain Acharya, Terapanth*

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life is an extraordinary example of love and harmony. If the entire nation were to take a cue from him and live by those standards, it would solve all of our problems.”



## HH SWAMI CHINMAYANANDJI

*Chinmaya Mission*

“Spiritual progress and liberation can only be attained in the company of a God-realized sadhu. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a God-realized sadhu. His presence rids people of their materialistic desires.”



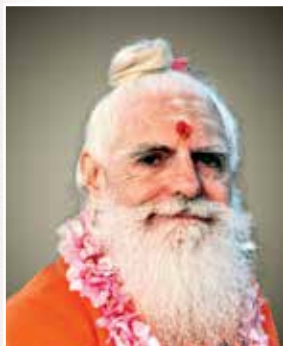




**PUJYA  
SWAMI ATMANANDA**

*President, Ramakrishna  
Mission, Raipur*

“Oh! What a humble man,  
what a divine man! I’m  
yet to see such people in  
abundance. One of the  
very rare souls that our  
country has. One of the  
most impressive men I have  
met in my life. Pramukh  
Swami is very dedicated,  
very spiritually high.”



**HH SATGURU SIVAYA  
SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI**

*Himalayan Academy,  
Hawaii, USA*

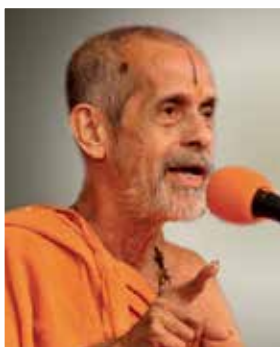
“God speaks through  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj.  
He is leading countless to  
progress on the path to  
spirituality. Based on the  
authority of the shastras,  
worshipping him is  
like worshipping God.”



**SRI VARADA YATHIRAJA  
JEEVAR SWAMI**

*Head, Ramanuj  
Sampradaya, Sriperambudur*

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj  
is the unparalleled  
spiritual crown jewel  
of this nation. Such a  
divine person is not easy  
to attain. He does not  
manifest everywhere.  
When such a sadhu  
manifests, the whole of  
humanity is uplifted.”



**SWAMI VISHVESHTIRTHJI  
MAHARAJ**

*Madhvacharya, Pejavar  
Math, Karnataka*

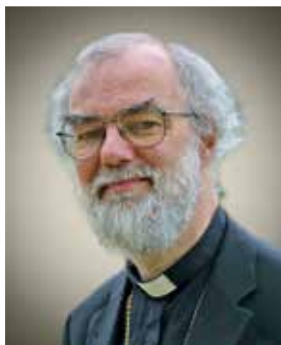
“Bhagwan Swaminarayan  
is working through  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj.  
Indian culture will live  
for generations to come  
– thanks to Pramukh  
Swami Maharaj.”



**DR ROWAN WILLIAMS**

*Archbishop of Canterbury*

“Pramukh Swami  
Maharaj’s life is an  
example of spiritual  
beauty. That beauty shines  
throughout India and the  
world as he continues to  
guide mankind on the  
path to spirituality. He  
loves unconditionally and  
forgives. Revenge and  
vengeance are never to be  
seen in his life.”



**SWAMI DAYANAND  
SARASWATIJI**

*Founder, Arsh Vidyalaya  
Gurukulam*

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj  
is a great inspiration.  
He is calm and serene,  
yet is able to motivate  
thousands. Both the young  
and old are inspired by his  
practical wisdom.”

**HRH PRINCE CHARLES***The Prince of Wales*

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s humility and selfless love have touched my heart.”

**DR APJ ABDUL KALAM***Late President of India*

“I met Pramukh Swamiji, my ultimate teacher, unwittingly. I felt that I was in the Divine presence. Pramukh Swamiji has put me in a God-synchronous orbit.”

**TONY BLAIR***Former Prime Minister, United Kingdom*

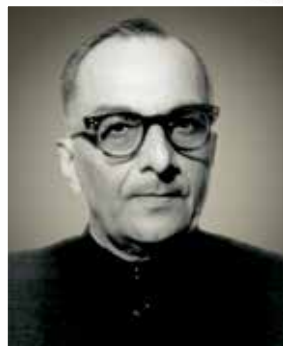
“I had the fortune to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I experienced spirituality like never before. It is unique. Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s spirit of social reform is living through Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

**NANI PALKHIVALA***Prominent Indian Jurist and Economist*

“He is working to build a society with strong values and a pure character. He is doing an extraordinary job of instilling those values in children and youths. I call that developing the nation. Moulding the character of one youth is equivalent to shaping a nation.”

**RAMAKRISHNA BAJAJ***Industrialist, Bajaj Group of Industries*

“Along with his spiritual activities, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has contributed a lot to society through his social initiatives. His work is immeasurable.”

**JUSTICE B.J. DIWAN***Chief Justice, Gujarat High Court*

“Despite being the President of BAPS, I have seen Swamishri perform menial *seva* in Sarangpur. He doesn’t have the slightest trace of ego. He sees God in all.”





# SWAMISHRI'S FINAL ILLNESS

Sarangpur, 2016



From 3 to 13 May 2016, ten days of celebrations were held to commemorate the Centenary of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's health was quite stable when the festival began and he had been giving daily darshan to the sadhus and devotees every morning and evening in the Pramukh Mandiram (cabin). He was his usual self in high spirits, often smiling and laughing.

On 6 May, Swamishri developed the symptoms of a minor throat infection. So, some adjustments were made to the planned programmes.

The second of three *diksha* ceremonies was held on Saturday 7 May 2016, during which Swamishri gave memorable interactions to the 23 new *parshads* through gestures and recitation of the *diksha* mantra over the microphone to each of the new initiates in turn, despite them not being able to enter the cabin.

The following day, Sunday 8 May, which happened to be the 100th anniversary of Sarangpur Mandir according to the Western calendar, Swamishri was in a light and humorous mood throughout the day, also speaking much more than usual. During the evening darshan, he played *raas* and spontaneously did a wonderful hand gesture of his own accord, promising Akshardham to all the devotees. Inside, he even ate a little bit of *shiro* and distributed *prasad* to the sadhus and doctors who were present.

Two days later, on 10 May, he enthusiastically gave *bhagwati diksha* to 25 *parshads*.

On the morning of Thursday 12 May (Vaishakh *sud* 6) Swamishri offered *abhishek* to the *murtis* in the main mandir as part of the rituals for the 100<sup>th</sup> *patotsav* celebrations

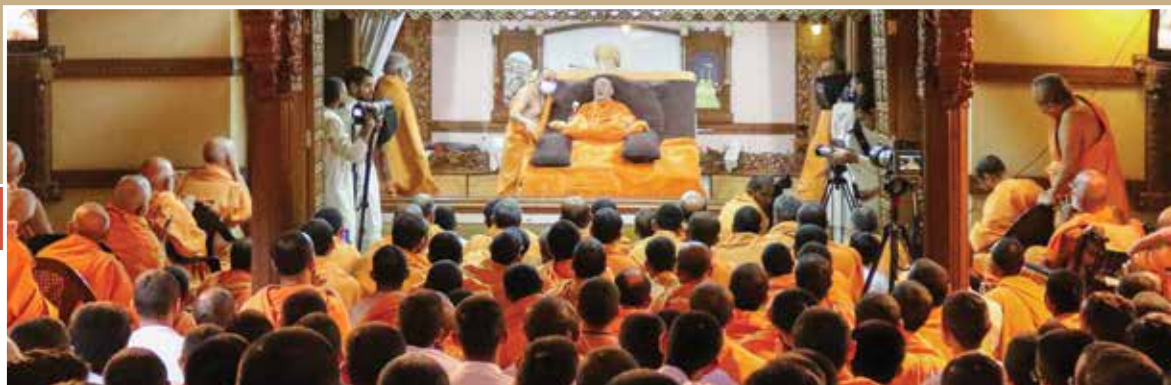
of Sarangpur mandir. He also inaugurated the grand bronze *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan seated on his *Rojho* horse while performing the *shilanyas* ceremony of Sarangpur mandir in 1809. Swamishri also performed the *arti* of the mandir and the grand Annakut offered in front.

The grand finale of the celebrations was held on the evening of 13 May in the presence of thousands of devotees. Swamishri expressed his happiness during the assembly and also backstage following its conclusion. The *shayan* darshan given to the sadhus that night was poignantly memorable.

The following few days were much the same and the infection seemed to be well under control. Darshan, albeit short, continued in the morning and evening until Thursday 19 May 2016.

His health took an adverse turn in the early hours of Friday 20 May when he developed a fever, had low blood pressure along with signs of a lung infection. He was treated with intravenous fluids and antibiotics.

For the following four weeks, treatment continued and recovery was slow compared to previous occasions when he had suffered from similar infections. Occasional room darshan restarted for



Sadhus and devotees engaged in Swamishri's last public darshan, 12 August 2016

the sadhus from 24 June 2016. His improvement seemed to be satisfactory during the first week of July, but his health suffered another setback around 7 July, with increasing temperature, worsening infection and low blood pressure.

Response to ongoing treatment seemed better until another setback in mid-July. Further reviews by pulmonologists were arranged and they were hopeful that recovery would continue with the current treatment. By Wednesday 27 July, Swamishri had recovered enough to start giving room darshan and it was decided that darshan would be arranged every two or three days, health permitting. Recovery seemed good and after what had seemed like a long time, Swamishri was able to give room darshan on 27 and 30 July as well as 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12 August.

Once during darshan, when Swamishri was asked how his health was, he spontaneously replied, "*Tabyat sari chhe*" (My health is good). During the first ten days of August, on various occasions, senior sadhus came to visit Swamishri and personally conveyed their heartfelt prayers for his health, including Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

Swamishri gave his final public darshan on the morning of Friday 12 August. He was ready slightly earlier than usual and from 9.40 to 10.15 a.m., he gave darshan three times to sadhus and devotees. He gave memorable two nods of 'no' when asked if he wanted to eat *shiro*. As some

sadhus and devotees had arrived late and missed the earlier darshan, he gave another short two-minute darshan from 11.43 to 11.45 a.m. from his room. Unknown to all, it was to be his final public darshan. Post darshan, he seemed relatively well and as per his daily routine, he was transferred to a smaller bed and taken to the room overlooking the garden. As his monthly *mundan* was overdue by almost two months, it was performed around 1 p.m. that afternoon. The rest of the day was uneventful and Swamishri returned to his bedroom by 8 p.m. to rest for the night.

On the early morning of Saturday 13 August at 2.15 a.m., his health again took a turn for the worse with decrease in blood pressure and an increase in temperature. He was treated with IV fluids and medications, his condition stabilizing over the next few hours. It was also announced that morning that there would be no more darshan in order to allow for recovery.

Swamishri slept well that morning. He seemed settled and a routine ultrasound scan performed at 2 p.m. also showed signs of improvement. There were no signs that anything serious was to come.

The attendants were contemplating to routinely turn Swamishri onto his right side when, soon after 4 p.m., his blood pressure dropped again quite dramatically. Fluids and medications were administered; however, despite treatment, his blood pressure and pulse remained erratic. Swamishri remained quiet during this time, but uttered the words 'Jai Swaminarayan' at one point.



## A Brief Medical History of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

13 February 1979	1st Dentures, Kadipani, Gujarat.
September 1980	Cataract Operations – left eye (6th), right eye (23rd), Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Boston, by Dr B. Thomas Hutchinson.
8 September 1981	Cholecystectomy operation: Gall bladder removed due to gallstones, Cumballa Hill Hospital, Mumbai, by Dr A.R. Patel.
5 February 1983	Inferior wall myocardial infarction (heart attack), Sundalpura; treatment in Vadodara by Dr Chitranjanbhai and Dr B.R. Patel.
11 April 1986	Removal of a small benign lump on right thigh under general anaesthesia, Cumballa Hill Hospital, Mumbai, by Dr Patel.
11 September 1996	Coronary Angiogram, St. Lukes Hospital, Houston, TX, USA, by Dr Virendra Mathur. Ischaemic heart disease. Continue medical treatment.
7 July 1998	Coronary angiogram followed by a successful coronary artery bypass graft (CABG); total 5 grafts (4 venous and 1 LIMA), Lenox Hill Hospital, New York, USA, by Dr Valavanur Subramanian.
2 January 2008	Coronary angiogram, Jaslok Hospital, Mumbai, by Dr Ashwin Mehta. Ischaemic heart disease. Continue medical treatment.
4 July 2011	Episode of angina, Bharuch.
2011 to 2013	Occasional episodes of low blood pressure.
15 June 2012	Dual Chamber Permanent Pacemaker Implant, SAL Hospital, Ahmedabad, by Dr Tejas Patel.
2012 to 2016	Recurrent respiratory tract infections
13 August 2016	Passed away due to cardiorespiratory failure, 6.00 p.m., BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur.

Despite the treatment, he peacefully breathed his last at exactly 6.00 p.m. Thakorji, the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, so dear to Swamishri, was present during the final hour and was held on his chest minutes before he left for his divine abode in the presence of attendant sadhus and doctors who had been caring for Swamishri over the years.

And so ended a lifetime of divine *vicharan*.

Ever since his health took a turn in Bharuch on the night of 4 July 2011, his travelling to various places had more or less stopped. He remained for long periods in Mumbai, then Sarangpur for Fuldol in March 2012, followed by Ahmedabad for his pacemaker implant in June 2012. After 10½ months in Ahmedabad, he returned to Sarangpur on 5 May 2013. Apart from a brief stint of around 25 days when he visited Gandhinagar, Robbinsville in USA and Ahmedabad in August 2014, he remained in

Sarangpur until 13 August 2016 – a period of almost 1,200 days – to fulfil his final wish.

He lived his 95 years as per the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

Despite being bedridden, his work continued unabated day and night around the world.

He remained optimistic under the most trying of circumstances.

He defied us with his resilience and astounded all with his ability to recover from any illness.

No expectations and no complaints, he gave hope and continued to give darshan and bless countless sadhus and devotees.

His characteristic smile and laughter will continue to inspire us.

His legacy will remain forever... ◆

Sadhu Yogvivekdas

# IN SWAMISHRI'S SERVICE

After 2011, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's ailing health limited his *vicharan* and public darshan. However, the diligent and dedicated services of his attendant sadhus and doctors played a major role in preserving his health, thus enabling us all to benefit from Swamishri's presence.

These unsung servants sacrificed their own comforts to serve Swamishri in every way required, day and night. The entire BAPS family is deeply indebted to them and wholeheartedly appreciates their unwavering commitment in the service of Swamishri.

**Sevaks 1:** Room *seva* and daily medical and personal care.

**Sevaks 2:** Staff sadhus involved in letter writing, report writing and kitchen *seva*.

**Sevaks 3:** Sadhus involved in room and other arrangements.

## Sevaks 1

Sadhu Narayancharandas  
Sadhu Yogicharandas  
Sadhu Yogvivekdas  
Sadhu Hariprakashdas  
Sadhu Anandananddas  
Sadhu Adbhutananddas

## Sevaks 2

Sadhu Viveksagardas  
Sadhu Dharmacharandas  
Sadhu Krishnavallabhdas  
Sadhu Paramananddas  
Sadhu Akhanddarshandas  
Sadhu Gunvatsaldas  
Sadhu Amrutyogidas

## Sevaks 3

Sadhu Bhadreshdas  
Sadhu Aksharananddas  
Sadhu Yagnaprakashdas  
Sadhu Gunkirtandas  
Sadhu Yagnananddas  
Sadhu Gurupremdas  
Sadhu Vinamradarshandas

## Doctors 1:

**Long term care over the last 4 years with *seva* on a regular basis.**

Dr Vrajlal Patel  
Dr Vismay Naik  
Dr Mahesh Parmar  
Dr Purvesh Umarania  
Dr Mehul Solanki  
Dr Mitul Chavda  
Dr Nilesh Solanki  
Dr Madhavji Bajadia  
Dr Balmukund Jha  
Dr Mahendra Patel  
Dr Pankaj Mamtara  
Dr Rajmayur Brahmabhatt

## Doctors 2:

**Doctors consulted on a need basis.**

Dr Tejas Patel  
Dr Sanjay Shah  
Dr Yash Lokhandwala  
Dr Ashwin Mehta  
Dr Kiran Doshi  
Dr Nikul Panchal  
Dr R K Mani  
Dr Jitendra Kotadiya  
Dr Sanjay Rajput  
Dr Rahul Bhargami  
Dr Dinesh Patel  
Dr Keyur Buch

Dr Vinit Suri  
Dr Malav Gadani  
Dr Upasana Patel  
Dr Tushar Soni  
Dr Ashvin Sardhara  
Dr Bhavin Mehtalia  
Dr Niraj Patel  
Dr Madhav Jodhani  
Dr Vatsal Patel  
Dr Divyang Gandhi  
Dr Sachin Patel  
Dr Rajni Patel  
Dr Nirav Modi  
Dr Pankaj Patel  
Dr Harshad Thakkar  
Dr Darshan Majmundar  
Dr Nayan Sadhu  
Dr Hetal Modi  
Dr Bhaskar Vyas  
Dr Hiren Modi  
Dr Aniruddh Vyas  
Dr Kanubhai Dhanani  
Dr Chaitanya Shroff  
Dr Anoop Amarnath  
Dr Dilip Trivedi  
Dr Rajeev Mehta  
Dr Atul Patel  
Dr Jay Kothari  
Dr Pratik Patel

Navneet Patel

**Doctors 3: Doctors consulted on a need basis from UK/USA**

Dr Rohit Patel  
Dr Dipak Patel  
Dr Bharat Patel  
Dr Sanjay Popat  
Dr Kalpesh Besherdas  
Dr Mayank Shah  
Mark Collier  
Dr Valavanur Subramanian  
Dr Nilesh Patel  
Dr Vivek Reddy  
Dr Ashish B Patel  
Dr Alexander Morden  
Dr Ranjit Suri  
Dr Dayananda Naik  
Dr Virendra Mathur  
Dr Jitendra Tolia  
Dr T S Dharmarajan  
Dr Gautam Reddy  
Dr Devendra Brahmabhatt  
Dr Sunil Kharode  
Dr Pandu Tadoori  
Dr Kristjan Ragnarsson  
Dr Navin Mehta  
Dr Chirag G Patel  
Dr Srikanth Jaikumar  
Dr Bhupendra Tolia







# SWAMISHRI'S Departure

13 to 17 August 2016, Sarangpur

*On 13 August, Swamishri had departed,  
yet he was still present.*

*His soul had reverted to Akshardham,  
but his physical form was still with us on Earth.*

*For four days, Swamishri gave darshan to  
countless thousands of devotees and  
well-wishers, believers and non-believers.*

*His mere darshan evoked awe and  
inspired inner change.*

*Finally, even after the funeral fire had faded,  
the divine experiences continued...*

*A report of Swamishri's palkhi yatra,  
darshan, prayer assembly and final rites  
are as follows...*





# Pujan and Darshan

Saturday, 13 August 2016 (Shravan *sud* 10, Samvat 2072), Sarangpur



After his departure, Param Pujya Mahant Swami smears sandalwood paste and worships Swamishri

As the sun rose on this day, nobody could have foreseen that it would become etched in history as the last of Swamishri's 1,200-day stay in Sarangpur.

At 6.00 p.m., as the heartbreaking news broke that Swamishri had passed away to Akshardham, a deep sadness spread throughout Sarangpur, and also throughout the world.

Nobody had thought that Swamishri's divine departure from this earth would happen so suddenly. In fact, to those present at Swamishri's bedside, it seemed that Swamishri was merely in deep sleep. Yet, the reality was unavoidable: Swamishri had indeed breathed his last.

While the *sadgurus*, sadhus and devotees made their way to Sarangpur, the attendant sadhus bathed Swamishri. Just prior to this, the *bhashya* (commentary) about the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine, written by Bhadresh Swami based on the mantras in the four Vedas was placed in Swamishri's hands. It was Swamishri's personal wish that such a work be done.

As the attendants bathed Swamishri, they noticed the suppleness of Swamishri's physical form. Meanwhile, Bhadresh Swami recited mantras from the Upanishads



Sadhus carry Swamishri's *palkhi* from 'Sarvasva' (residence) to Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir

describing the glory of Aksharbrahman.

After the ritual bath, Param Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other senior sadhus performed Swamishri's *pujan* with a mixture of saffron and sandalwood paste. They then performed *pujan* of Swamishri's feet. Throughout, the recital of Upanishadic mantras hailing the glory of Aksharbrahman were continually recited and also the *shlok* "Shobho sādhubugune..." was sung.

Thereafter Swamishri was brought to the glass cabin at the rear of Sarvasva, where a decorative wooden *palkhi* designed by Brahmacharan Swami under the guidance of Narayanmuni Swami had been brought. Swamishri was seated with his legs extended in the *palkhi*. A fresh, fragrant flower garland was placed around his neck.

Here, in the garden, sadhus were blessed with the opportunity to pay homage at Swamishri's feet.

By this time, thousands of men and women devotees had gathered in the mandir precincts,

all patiently waiting for darshan of Swamishri's *palkhi yatra*.

At 10.45 p.m., the *sadguru* sadhus emerged from Sarvasva lifting Swamishri's *palkhi* as the Swaminarayan *mahamantra dhun* was sung. Subsequently, many other sadhus present also took turns to lift Swamishri's *palkhi*. After performing *pradakshina* of the main mandir, Swamishri was taken to Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. The *palkhi* was placed at the steps of the inner sanctum facing guru Shastriji Maharaj. As Swamishri had done, whenever he came here for darshan, the sacred silver rod kept by the marble footprints of Shriji Maharaj in front of the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj was taken and touched to Swamishri's eyes.

After darshan at the shrines of the gurus, Swamishri's *palkhi* was placed in a decorated *rath*, which was pulled by sadhus to the grounds of the BAPS Vidyamandir (school). There, the Murti Mandap, which had been built two years previously had now been turned into the Guru Darshan Mandapam. It had been enclosed on





Swamishri has final darshan of guru Shastriji Maharaj at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir

all four sides to maintain the temperature at the required level. For four days, Swamishri would preside in a temperature controlled glass cabin to grant darshan to hundreds of thousands of devotees.

The Guru Darshan Mandapam was 60 feet wide, 105 long, 22 feet high and lay in the north-south direction. Adjacent to it on both sides, two marquees measuring 234 feet long by 60 feet wide and two other marquees measuring 156 feet long by 90 feet wide had been erected for a celebration held several weeks previously. These were used as waiting areas for devotees prior to their entry into the Guru Darshan Mandapam. Large LED screens were set up inside these semi-circular domes on which video memories of Swamishri were continually relayed. Before entering the Guru Darshan Mandapam, devotees also had to pass through a 190-foot long and 60-feet wide passage-*mandap*.

Soon after receiving news of Swamishri's earthly departure, the BAPS Sanstha's Satsang

Pravrutti Central Office (SPCO) in Ahmedabad sent text (SMS) messages to all sadhus and *karyakars* in India and worldwide. Also, the Sanstha's Media Department issued press releases to the print and electronic media. TV channels immediately began to broadcast the news and paid tribute to Swamishri's life and work.

The Sanstha's website was also regularly updated with news and further information. A special website dedicated to the divine life and work of Swamishri was also launched ([www.pramukhswami.org](http://www.pramukhswami.org)).

On hearing this sad news of the passing away to Akshardham of their beloved guru, devotees everywhere only had one thought – to reach Sarangpur for Swamishri's final darshan. To allow enough time for the devotees – men and women of all ages – to reach Sarangpur, the senior sadhus decided that Swamishri would lay in repose in the Guru Darshan Mandapam until 17 August and that the final rites would be performed on that afternoon.



After Swamishri was placed in the Guru Darshan Mandapam sadhus perform *arti*

To further facilitate the smooth flow of devotees, the SPCO issued a timetable for when devotees from the various regions should arrive for darshan. The more distant regions were naturally allocated later dates, giving them sufficient time to arrange for their travels.

However, such were the emotions that a steady stream of devotees passed through the Guru Darshan Mandapam from midnight onwards. And by the morning, several thousand volunteers were serving in the various departments.

With heavy hearts and teary eyes, many entered the Guru Darshan Mandapam. But the atmosphere inside was peaceful and on having the darshan of Swamishri, people experienced divinity. Everyone felt that Swamishri was merely silently seated and would at any moment open his eyes and touch their outstretched hands!

At the foot of the stage, a large replica of Bhagwan Swaminayan's *charanarvind* had been placed, where devotees offered flowers and garlands to Swamishri.



Swamishri grants darshan to all in the Guru Darshan Mandapam

In the background, an audio track of Swamishri reciting 'Om Swaminarayan Namaha...' was continually relayed.

This darshan of Swamishri was indeed a divine experience. ♦



# PRAYER ASSEMBLY

14 August 2014

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur

*In the Sunday assembly on the day after*

*Pramukh Swami Maharaj*

*returned to Akshardham,*

*the sadguru sadhus offered prayers and*

*paid tributes to Swamishri.*

*Pujya Dr Swami also read Swamishri's*

*letter declaring HH Mahant Swami*

*Maharaj as the new successor.*



**F**rom early morning on Sunday, 14 August an uninterrupted flow of people arrived for Swamishri's darshan.

At 7.30 a.m., the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Vijay Rupani, rescheduled all his appointments and reached Sarangpur for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan. He paid tributes to Swamishri.

In the evening, a special prayer assembly was held to pay homage to Swamishri. Senior sadhus addressed the occasion.

## PUJYA DR SWAMI

**B**hagwan Swaminarayan manifested on earth with the resolve to liberate all. For 49 years he undertook extensive *vicharan*. When God or his holy Sadhu manifest on earth, they adopt the ways of this world and finally shed their human form. Shri Krishna incarnated and then departed.

Ramchandrajji manifested and then departed. In the same way, Bhagwan Swaminarayan also left his physical form. But, he had not gone in spirit. Through Gunatitanand Swami his work continued. When Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham, some thought that the Sanstha would collapse and come to an end. But Yogiji Maharaj gave it such impetus that it flourished. When Yogiji Maharaj went to Dham, some questioned what would happen. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj undertook the work. And we are all witnesses to the colossal work he accomplished, which was beyond everyone's imagination: so many mandirs, sadhus, devotees, grand festivals, all types of publications and many other activities. And yesterday at 6.00 p.m., he departed from his physical form on this earth. But for such great saints, there is no coming or going. It only seems that way to



Sadhus and devotees during the prayer assembly  
us because of our physical viewpoint.

Such *mahapurushes* are present at all times, everywhere and with everyone, just like the broadcast from a radio station can be heard in all places.

At times like this, we wonder what will happen to us. But, God is with us and Pramukh Swami Maharaj is also with us. To resolve our question, Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself wrote a letter in his own hand (see box on next page).

So, as per the instructions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, just as all sadhus, *parshads*, *sadhaks* and devotees followed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wishes and revered him, in the same way we must all keep Mahant Swami at the forefront and proceed.

Yogiji Maharaj repeatedly talked about unity. When does unity remain? Only when our guru is kept as the focus. If other ideas are entertained,



Puja Dr Swami displays Swamishri's letter declaring  
Param Puja Mahant Swami as his successor

then this cannot be achieved.

Just like we need air continuously, what thought should we keep 24 hours a day? It is that we must remain pure at heart. This is at the core of all the works Swamishri had accomplished – his purity of heart.

There may be equipment to clean the house, car, teeth, etc. But is there anything that can purify the heart? Pramukh Swami Maharaj achieved this. That is what we must do also.

Many who don't believe in God, said, "Although I do not believe in God, I do believe





The historic letter in Swamishri's own handwriting and its translation



Swami Shriji

Shri Akshar Purushottam Mandir

Shahibaug, Ahmedabad

20-7-2012, Friday

Shravan *sud* 1, 2068

I would like to inform all the sadhus and householder devotees of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri Yagnapurushdasji, that I appoint with happiness and joy, and in my fullest conscious state, Pujya Mahant Swami, Sadhu Keshavjivandas (Guru Jnanjivandas), as the President of BAPS, that is, as the guru, after my physical departure.

Jai Swaminarayan from

Shastri Narayanswarupdas

Guru Yagnapurushdasji

in Pramukh Swami Maharaj.” What is the reason for this? His pure heart. If one remembers this, then Pramukh Swami Maharaj will not feel distant.

Also, we must sincerely observe our *niyams*. There is much scope for improvement in this. The most important of all *niyams* is observing *nishkam* dharma. The scriptures of all faiths teach this.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has not gone. We must unite and with one voice live according to Mahant Swami Maharaj’s wishes and strengthen *nishkam* dharma in our life.

## PUJYA ISHWARCHARAN SWAMI

**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj’s divine personality was well-known throughout the world. He was respected as an ideal saint.

When Pramukh Swami Maharaj was 28 years old, Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as the Pramukh (President) of BAPS. Some questioned the choice of such a young sadhu as president, but Shastriji Maharaj clearly stated that he had never regretted any of his decisions, and this,

too, would turn out to be fine.

In the last 50 years, Pramukh Swami Maharaj proclaimed the glory of Akshar-Purushottam, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj throughout the world. He said that they are at the root of everything and he was merely an instrument.

During the Suvarna Mahotsav in London, Swamishri said, “I first thank Shriji Maharaj for giving me this human body. And I also thank my gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj who gave me this *seva*.” So, he constantly remembered God and his gurus, and believed them to be the cause of all.

When Delhi Akshardham was opened, Swami Bapa said that it was Yogiji Maharaj’s wish and that is the reason Akshardham is divine. We are not in competition with anyone and it has not been done to show off to the world. It is only to please Shriji Maharaj.

For the past 50 years Pramukh Swami Maharaj toiled away for such noble causes, totally disregarding his body. He visited many villages, performed many *padhramanis*, wrote many letters and counselled hundreds of thousands of

people. This is all very difficult to do. He daily performed about 125 *padhramanis*, read and replied to letters and personally met about 500 devotees to bless them. One may tolerate such mental and physical strain for a few years, but he faithfully and sincerely did so for 50 years to please Shastriji Maharaj.

Today, the whole world feels that we have lost a great divine personality from this earth. But our principles are eternal. Gunatitanand Swami says that he is eternal and remains forever. That is, the Gunatit *parampara* continues unbroken.

In this tradition, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has selected and blessed Mahant Swami to shoulder the responsibility of Satsang. He wrote this letter four years ago in 2012. Bapa often spoke about Mahant Swami's glory. Param Pujya Mahant Swami has also immensely pleased Yogiji Maharaj. In 1957, on Vasant Panchmi in Atladra, Yogiji Maharaj initiated Pujya Mahant Swami. It was an ice-breaking occasion in that a graduate had become a sadhu. So, Mahant Swami broke the barrier. Since then many educated youths have become sadhus.

For the initial few years, Yogiji Maharaj kept Mahant Swami with him and gave him much *seva* and trained him as a leader. I have been with him since 1952.

In Dadar, about 50 sadhus stayed under Mahant Swami's leadership. Yogiji Maharaj appointed him as the leader (*mahant*) to train all the others in spiritual discourses, devotion, meditation, service, and other satsang activities.

Despite being the leader, Mahant Swami washed the utensils with everyone else. Ash was used in those days to wash the utensils and that was very abrasive for the skin. Yet he did this. He daily made garlands and delivered discourses in the morning, afternoon and night.

His life was totally pious and simple. His tolerance and patience inspired all.

To please Yogiji Maharaj, Mahant Swami would make beautiful garlands up to six feet

long. That required much patience. He was very particular, precise and strived for perfection. It would take many hours to make them. Yogiji Maharaj was pleased and often praised him. He also made decorative *hindolos*.

Once, Mahant Swami thought that since Yogiji Maharaj was a great sadhu he was merely praising him to keep him happy. For seven days he had daily made garlands of different designs for the reclining *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj recalled all the different designs and Mahant Swami realized then that Yogiji Maharaj had truly accepted his devotion.

Yogiji Maharaj trusted him so much that he kept the new sadhus under him for training for many years. So, Mahant Swami has inspired many sadhus. Through his life he has inspired.

Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has instructed that Mahant Swami is our guru, he will grant us *moksha*, he is a saint of that succession and that all should seek his refuge and practise Satsang while observing his commands.

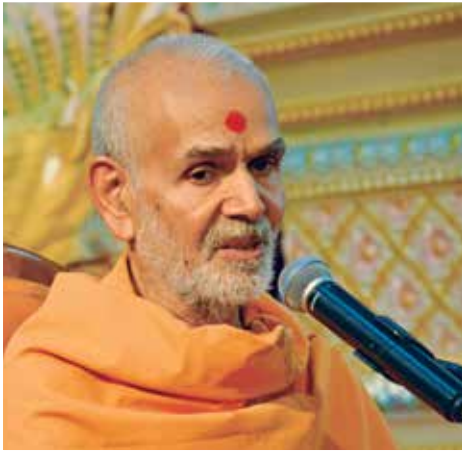
Just as Yogiji Maharaj said that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is Shastriji Maharaj's form, similarly, Bapa's message to us is that Mahant Swami is the form of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. So, by observing his commands and practising satsang, all will experience inner peace in life.

So, as Bapa used to say, if we are united in thought, inclination and faith towards Mahant Swami, then Satsang will grow infinitely because this is Shastriji Maharaj's *sampradaya*. Thus, Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given us the gift of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and identified him as the guru. Let us all pledge to serve and please Mahant Swami Maharaj through mind, speech and deeds.

#### PUJYA VIVEKSAGAR SWAMI

Everybody was touched by Swamishri's divinity. Today, his body is with us, but he has returned to Dham. When Yogiji Maharaj left his





Param Pujya Mahant Swami and the *sadguru* sadhus address the prayer assembly, paying rich tributes to Swamishri and clearly revealing the future course of BAPS as directed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

body, Krishnashankar Shastri said, “Yogiji Maharaj has not gone, but has merged into Pramukh Swami Maharaj.” In the same way, today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has not gone, but has merged into Mahant Swami Maharaj. Today, we have the darshan of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in a new form. This is the special feature of Gunatit *jnan – moksha* through the manifest form: the *pragat* Satpurush, who is Gunatit, Aksharbrahman. Through him one can become *brahmarup* and offer bhakti to Parabrahman. Without the manifest form, *moksha* is not possible. So, the Satpurush never departs from earth. He is eternal. So, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is manifest in Mahant Swami Maharaj and through him Shriji Maharaj is giving darshan.

I spent many years with Mahant Swami in Mumbai, where he gave us much joy and encouragement. He gave us a lot of guidance through spiritual discourses. I used to wash the utensils with him and he easily blended with us all. We stayed together in Ghatkopar [suburb of Mumbai]. There were nine of us. A small group. Bhaktipriya Swami was our *kothari* and Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami) was our *mahant*. He truly pleased Yogiji Maharaj.

I distinctly recall that on 15.5.1978, Pramukh Swami was suffering from a high fever here in Sarangpur. He was covered with many blankets, but Swamishri still felt cold. At that time, he said, “Call Narayan Bhagat and all of you go

out.” Then, Swami told me, “Now I feel that my body will not remain.” I was disheartened on hearing such talk from him. Then he said, “Appoint Mahant Swami in my place.”

Again, at 11.00 a.m. on 5.2.1999, in Vidyanagar, he said to me, “Now appoint Mahant Swami in my place.” He also said the same thing on 2.7.1999 in Vidyanagar.

On 10.7.2012, when he repeated this, Ishwarcharan Swami was also present.

During 2011-12, we were in Mumbai, where Swamishri said, “Now my health does not remain good. So, we have to think of the future.” And at that time he also said the same thing.

Then on 10.7.2012 and 13.7.2012, Swamishri called both of us and clearly told us, “Now in my place we must appoint Mahant Swami.” And Dr Swami has just read the letter of 20.7.2012.

So, from the beginning Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s eyes have been on Mahant Swami. And he has selected Mahant Swami for us, through whom we will attain *ekantik dharma*.

#### PUJYA TYAGVALLABH SWAMI

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had greatly expanded the Satsang, but at the same time he strictly observed the five *vartmans – nishkam, nirlobh, nisswad, nissneh* and *nirman* – specified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan for sadhus.

Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 27 that the Sadhu who fully observes the five

*vartmans* has the direct association of God and we should develop faith in God only through his words. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a saint. The special feature of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life was that it was totally public and as a result we got to experience his divinity.

This human body is perishable. But just as an incense stick burns and leaves behind its fragrance, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and works have left a fragrance that will forever inspire us and strengthen us.

Now he has departed from his body. But the framework is in place so that Shriji Maharaj's work continues forever. He has given us Mahant Swami, who will now take care of everything. Such is Swamishri's grace and compassion, since he knew that in his last years he would not be able to speak. So, he wrote a letter in his own handwriting. He stated that after him Mahant Swami would take care of everything.

Just as he worked through Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhagwan Swaminarayan is now manifest in and will work through Mahant Swami Maharaj. Our *upasana* is based on the manifest.

Shriji Maharaj has compassionately remained present on earth through the Gunatit *sant*.

Since 1960, I have been with Mahant Swami. His life is sincere to Maharaj's principles. He speaks very little and is of a very quiet nature. But that itself reveals a lot to us. His darshan truly brings us peace.

Today, we have gathered to offer *shrad-dhanjali* to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But the true *shraddhanjali* to him is to abolish all other thoughts, accept Mahant Swami as our guru, and to obey his wishes and continue our spiritual efforts.

Prayers to Maharaj that Mahant Swami's health remains good and that just as Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave us much joy, may Mahant Swami Maharaj grant us even more joy.

## PUJYA MAHANT SWAMI

Swamishri has given me an extremely big responsibility. He has taught that we should place all burdens on God. This is how Swamishri worked. He never believed that he was doing anything. If such understanding is strengthened, our work becomes simple. Place the burden on Swamishri's head, then endeavour in the way required.

Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 74 that satsang grows or declines as per God's wish. This is the understanding we saw in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life.

If we have unity, not a single hair will be harmed. Without unity, everything will be lost. So, we have to maintain unity.

The more sincerely we observe *nishkam* dharma, the stronger the unity. Strictly observe *niyams* and dharma. Our *upasana* unites us.

See the virtues in all and not the faults. This is an eternal principle. Yogiji Maharaj said, "Have one focus – to get to Akshardham; then one must take virtues and shun talks about [others'] faults." If this is kept in mind, unity remains.

We have to continue Bapa's work. Shastriji Maharaj used to say, "My work will continue...." We should not relax. Now double your efforts. Recall the efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He increased satsang 100-fold, built mandirs, initiated sadhus – all in a short time.

Yogiji Maharaj's motto was, "*Samp, suhradbhav, ekta*." He had proclaimed this vigorously. In 20 years, not one day passed without him saying this.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has left nothing undone. He has fulfilled all of Yogiji Maharaj's wishes. Now, we need to worship God and encourage others to worship also.

When the mandirs in Kolkata and Nagpur were built, many questioned their necessity. But now many devotees and well-wishers come [for darshan]. All this is beyond our understanding.

If we keep *samp, suhradbhav* and *ekta*, then all works will be achieved. ♦



# Homage by Prime Minister Narendrabhai Modi

15 August 2016, Sarangpur



Shri Narendrabhai Modi offers respects and prayers to Pramukh Swami Maharaj

**1** 5 August 2016, India's Independence Day, dawned with patriotic sentiments in the hearts of millions throughout India. However, with the departure of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur, a steady stream of thousands of devotees and well-wishers were plaintively engaged in darshan of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj's mortal body at the Guru Darshan Mandapam, and countless more were making their way to pay their final respects.

Prime Minister Shri Narendrabhai Modi had decided to pay his tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj by coming to Sarangpur after concluding the Independence Day celebrations in New Delhi. After the ceremonial hoisting of the Indian flag and acknowledgement of salutes from military personnel the Prime Minister flew from New Delhi to Bhavnagar. Thereafter, he came to Sarangpur by helicopter, landing at 11.55 a.m. On having darshan of Swamishri, who was seated upright in a glass cabin kept at -10°C, the Prime Minister became emotional. He offered *panchang pranam* and sat for a few minutes with folded hands and misty eyes, reminiscing about Swamishri. Then Shri Narendrabhai offered flowers and placed a wreath before the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Pramukh Swami



Prays before Swamishri and performs *pradakshina* to offer respects

Maharaj. Thereafter, he and Mahant Swami performed *pradakshinas* and *arti* of the small *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri.

Shri Narendrabhai Modi addressed the audience of sadhus and media persons in the Guru Darshan Mandapam while thousands of devotees and well-wishers listened to him in the several marquees outside the Mandapam.

To start with the Prime Minister remained silent and emotional for a while before beginning his passionate eulogy, “Many of you have lost a guru, but I have lost a father! I had been associated [with Swamishri] for so many years. My acquaintance with him goes back to when I was unknown in public life. In fact, I was ranked after the devotees – that was how ordinary I was – till the fatherly association I had with him, when he cared for me, fostered and moulded me like a father does his own child. I have many reminiscences about him.

“For centuries in the sadhu tradition, the guru has been playing the role of initiating disciples only. But Pramukh Swamiji had not limited himself to initiating disciples. He had, in tune with modern India, accomplished the great task of institutionalizing the sadhu *parampara* and our cultural heritage. He also made efforts in introducing reforms not only in the Swaminarayan

Sampradaya but in the whole realm of sadhus. Here in Sarangpur, there are educational classes for sadhus. It has become an abode of education for sadhus. Formerly it was in Shahibaug [Ahmedabad], and I used to be surprised when Pramukh Swamiji sent me a message to come and talk on a certain subject. I wondered of what relevance it was to the sadhus? A sadhu is detached, but if he wants to lead society in the right direction, he needs to have complete knowledge about the condition of society. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s idea was to lead them in this direction.

“After Pujya Yogiji Maharaj departed [in 1971] we then saw Pramukh Swamiji as the guru. In him we experienced a true guru. However, in context to Yogiji Maharaj we come to think about what a disciple should be like; and that was exemplified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. For us, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, as a guru, was the best guide; and as a disciple he proved to be the best disciple.

“You can imagine Yogiji Maharaj going to the banks of river Yamuna and speaking casually that he would like to do something there. Then years later Yogiji Maharaj passed away. Thereafter, many years elapsed, but as an ideal disciple he fulfilled the wish of his guru Yogiji Maharaj by constructing Akshardham on the banks of the Yamuna. I had seen Pramukh Swamiji as an ideal disciple.



“Many of you today may be astonished to know that Pramukh Swami used to ask me to send my video speeches whenever I spoke [earlier] as a public figure and later as the Chief Minister. I thought that maybe he wanted to know what I spoke about. But then two or three days later he would ring me and say, ‘You should not have said these words. You still have a lot of work to do in future. How can you make such mistakes!’ Swamiji thus drew my attention numerous times. This showed how much rapport he had to mould a person’s life. This was what I had experienced.

“In 2000, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the foundation-stone laying (*shilanyas*) ceremony of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. At that time I felt how would Swamiji know about my presence while being totally engaged in a flurry of activities. There were many distinguished people present in the *shilanyas* ritual. I was there too because Pramukh Swami had said that I should participate in the rituals. Then someone came hurriedly to me and gave me a few currency coins. He told me that Pramukh Swami had told him to give them to you because you would not have any coins to offer during the rituals. And in reality my pockets were empty. So, Pramukh Swami knew about it. Such was his care for me.

“On another occasion I was told to tell Pramukh Swami to have his meals because he had abstained from taking food altogether. Since I was out, travelling far, I rang Swamiji and urged him, “Bapa, a son is telling you to start having your meals.” Without any argument he said, “Okay then, may you be pleased.” An hour later, I rang to check up and I heard that Bapa had taken his meal. Such close bonds I had experienced with him.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj made no compromises with regards to grandness in his works. He would not allow any poor arrangements for others despite him being a selfless karma yogi. Though he was totally detached and dedicated to the Divine he made grand arrangements [for others]. The combination of divinity and grandeur gives one

a wonderfully divine life experience. I had seen all this very closely and as a companion.

“Today, Bapa is not amidst us, but he had institutionalized a great tradition. He gave us the best *sant* tradition, educated *sant* tradition, totally dedicated *sant* tradition and a tradition of obedience. In all these traditions Pramukh Swami Maharaj had re-established many values. Abdul Kalam wrote that in his vision 2020 that there was a profound influence of one person – Pramukh Swami. Thus in the vision India 2020 one experiences the influence of Pramukh Swami in instilling lustre and vitality to Abdul Kalam’s thoughts.

“Pramukh Swami was not only a *sant*, but also the best philanthropist. He was a *sant* as well as highly insightful. Pramukh Swami never adopted the path of conflict. He provided a conducive atmosphere for the blossoming of saintly *shakti*. His group of sadhus have today become guides in the whole world. Such a Yug Purush (epoch-maker), the head of the ideal *sant* tradition, and whose personality will have its effects for centuries to come, has left us today.

“Whether we have his physical body present with us or not, and whether he will talk or not talk to us personally, I do not believe that anyone of us will ever experience his absence. We will never experience his absence. No matter how many doors and windows we shut up, the experience of air will always be there. Similarly, despite that Pramukh Swami is in God’s abode, his thoughts and actions, renunciation, austerity, self-restraint, morality and everything will remain in our breath every second. And to take this tradition forward is everyone’s responsibility.

“Today, 15 August is a very auspicious day. I am honoured and blessed that I have been able to come here amidst you and do Bapa’s final darshan, and also spend time in the presence of all sadhus. I bow with deep faith at the holy feet of Pujya Bapa. May his soul forever guide us and bestow strength upon us.”

Thereafter, Narendrabhai Modi sat with



Pujya Mahant Swami and Shri Narendrabhai perform *arti* of Swamishri

HH Mahant Swami and senior sadhus to share some more heartfelt incidents about Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Then Pujya Mahant Swami blessed Shri Narendrabhai by tying an auspicious *nada-chhadi*.

During his visit Shri Narendrabhai, other than drinking water, accepted no refreshments as a mark of respect for Swamishri's demise. After spending over one hour the Prime Minister departed for New Delhi.

\* \* \*

Today, being a public holiday, the *heavy* flow of devotees for Swamishri's final darshan was unceasing. Even for the past two nights (Saturday and Sunday) the stream of devotees and well-wishers coming for darshan was unrelenting. This not only mirrored their deep love and respect for Swamishri, but also Swamishri's colossal love and endeavours for their welfare.

On 16 August there was an influx of devotees from abroad. On hearing about Swamishri's demise the devotees residing abroad urgently booked their flights to India. The sudden demand in tickets spurred the airlines to hike their fares three to four times the normal rates. In spite of this, thousands of devotees booked their tickets and arrived in Sarangpur, some in the early morning on the final day, the 17th. They

had rushed from UK, Europe, USA, Canada, East Africa, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and other countries. All of them had hurriedly taken leave from their jobs and put their businesses on hold to come for Swamishri's final darshan and rites. Those who could not come to Sarangpur, due to the unavailability of tickets or financial restraints, prayed before their home shrines and saw the ceremony live on Indian TV channels.

During the four days of Swamishri's darshan, spiritual leaders or representatives from various Swaminarayan sects came to offer their respects and tributes: Vartal, Ahmedabad, Maninagar, Sokhda, Vasna, Rajkot, Junagadh and others. Many of these sects had also held memorial assemblies in their centres. Leaders of other Hindu sects as well as representatives of the Jain, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim religions had also come for the final darshan and to offer tributes.

Swamishri's darshan at the Guru Darshan Mandapam remained open till Wednesday, 17 August. Thereafter, he was taken in a *palkhi* (palanquin) for the last rites to his residence and then to the mandir grounds. ♦



# Last Journey

**Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Final Rites**

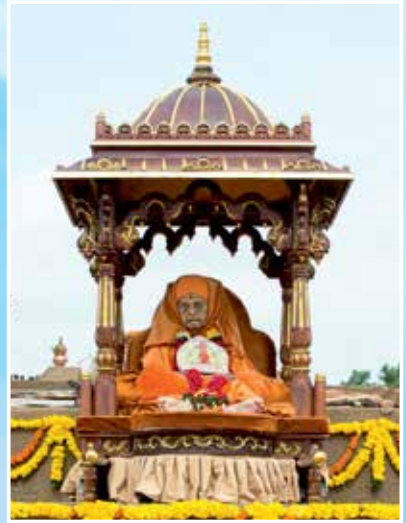
17 August 2016, Sarangpur

*'Pramukh Swami āvjo re, punaha padhārjo re,  
Vasmi guru ni vidāy...'*





Swamishri's last journey  
was witnessed in  
melancholic silence by a  
concourse of sadhus and  
devotees.  
As the *palkhi* passed by, the  
entire congregation became  
teary-eyed and finally wept  
inconsolably as his mortal  
body was consigned  
to the flames ...



Swamishri's *palkhi* placed before  
the funeral pyre







Pujya Morari Babu pays homage



Prominent political leaders offer their respects



Senior sadhus pull Swamishri's chariot towards his residence

17 August 2016 dawned with an air of solemnity and melancholy. For the last four days devotees and well-wishers had been doing darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's mortal body and experiencing his physical presence. Today, however, he was going to be cremated. Thereafter, all would depart treasuring his vivid memories, teachings and works.

All through the night of 16 August many sadhus and devotees sat before Swamishri praying, doing *mala* and meditating upon him. The flow of devotees for darshan remained unbroken on that final night. The darshan for all closed at 8.30 a.m. that day. Pujya Mahant and senior sadhus performed Swamishri's *arti* and offered *pushpanjali*. At 9.00 a.m. a renowned exponent of the Ramayan, Pujya Morari Babu, came to offer his respects and condolences. He performed *arti* with Pujya Mahant Swami and then addressed the congregation, "I have never before known such overwhelming respect and reverence offered by hundreds of thousands of people to a departed religious leader of a *sampradaya*. This is proof of his austerity, renunciation and straightforwardness."

Soon thereafter, the BJP President Shri Amitbhai Shah, Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley, Railway Minister Shri Suresh Prabhu and Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Nitinbhai Patel landed in Sarangpur to offer their respects to Swamishri at the Guru Darshan Mandapam.

At 10.00 a.m. all BAPS sadhus offered prayers to Swamishri in the Guru Darshan Mandapam and touched his feet to offer their final respects. At 11.00 a.m. Swamishri's sacred body was placed in a chariot and drawn by sadhus singing *dhun* and bhajans. His mortal body was taken to Swamishri's residence, 'Sarvasva', in the mandir. Senior sadhus, Pujya Mahant Swami, Dr Swami,

Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami performed the pre-crematory rituals of *mangalacharan*, *achaman*, *shanti paath*, *devabhivandanam*, *guru pujan*, *swasti vachan*, *kan-kan sutra*, *panchamrut snan*, *mantra pushpanjali* and final *sankalps*. Swamishri was offered a new *kanthi*, *janoi* and draped in a new saffron cloth. Thereafter, the senior sadhus placed garlands and performed *pujan* with sandalwood paste.

At 3.40 p.m. Swamishri was placed in a *palkhi*. He had a *pagh* on his head, a cloth draped over his head and a beautiful garland around his neck. The *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, which Swamishri dearly worshipped and loved, was placed on his lap. Swamishri, with his feet outstretched and eyes closed, seemed to be absorbed in deep meditation. Then the palanquin was placed on an open chariot and pulled by sadhus towards the cremation site on the mandir precincts. The whole mandir campus was teeming with devotees, some of whom had taken their seats from 6.00 a.m. Every terrace and lobby in the mandir complex and outside it was packed with devotees and well-wishers. Swamishri's chariot was slowly pulled by sadhus on the main pathway towards the cremation spot while the 'Swaminarayan' *dhun* in Swamishri's voice was being relayed through the public address system. Devotees glimpsed Swamishri as he passed by with teary eyes and sobs. Some prayed while others bid him tearfully, 'Bapa, Jai Swaminarayan.'

The final rites were being webcast live on baps.org and Aastha channel. Other television channels, including, Door Darshan, India TV, Zee News, ETV, TV9, VTV, GSTV, Sandesh TV, GTPL, ANI and others were also broadcasting the ceremony live in Gujarat,



Shri L.K. Advani emotionally offers respects to Swamishri



Puja Shri Ramdevji Maharaj bows and offers obeisance



Sadhus solemnly carry Swamishri's *palkhi* on the mandir grounds





Swamishri's *palkhi* proceeds towards the statue of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on Rojho horse

India and throughout the world. On the mandir grounds thousands of devotees witnessed the cortège and final rites on large LED screens.

The afternoon atmosphere often turned from overcast to harsh sunlight and vice versa. The devotees silently endured the vagaries of the weather. To assuage their thirst and provide relief from the heat, volunteers supplied mineral water bottles from time to time.

Swamishri's chariot arrived by the front steps of Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. The *palkhi* in which Swamishri's divine body was placed was lifted from the chariot and placed on the ground by the neem tree to the left side of the Smruti Mandir. Exactly to the right of the Smruti Mandir is a small shrine where 65 years ago Shastriji Maharaj's *palkhi* was placed prior to his crematory rites. Here, the renowned Yogacharya Pujya Ramdevji Maharaj, and former Deputy Prime Minister Shri Lalkrishna Advani bowed and touched Swamishri's feet and offered respects with teary eyes. From here eight sadhus

shouldered the *palkhi* as pallbearers and turned it towards the Smruti Mandir, facing the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj. With the final darshan of guru Shastriji Maharaj, the cortege proceeded on the pathway flanked by countless devotees. The *palkhi* was carried to the front mandir steps and the bronze statue of Shriji Maharaj saddled on Rojho horse. The statue was installed at Swamishri's behest and inaugurated by him three months before. After circling the Rojho horse the *palkhi* was brought onto the main pathway leading towards the cremation site. In its final leg, Pujya Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami joined the procession.

A red carpet had been laid for the final journey. On either side dignitaries and prominent devotees of India and abroad offered their final reverences as the *palkhi* proceeded towards the cremation platform. At 4.00 p.m. the *palkhi* was placed on a secondary platform in front of the



Senior sadhus lead the palanquin during the final part of the funeral procession

main crematory stage. On the front left side facing the stage were seated Shri Lalkrishna Advani, Shri Amitbhai Shah, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, Shri Jitubhai Vaghani, Shri Siddharthbhai Patel and other dignitaries. To the right were seated Pujya Mahant Swami, senior sadhus, Pujya Ramdevji Maharaj and representatives from the Christian, Buddhist and Muslim orders.

The cremation site had been chosen by Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself with the sole purpose of being forever showered with the grace of guru Shastriji Maharaj from the Smruti Mandir (on the left side) and in having the darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the main mandir. Swamishri's choice exemplified his pristine devotion to both God and guru. Thus, on that spot a 30 feet wide and 52 inches high octagonal brick and mortar platform was constructed. At the front of the platform, facing the mandir, a 10 ft by 10 ft rectangular makeshift platform was set up, where the *palkhi* was first placed. After a little while Swamishri's *palkhi*

was raised onto the main crematorial platform. Thereafter, a white cloth cabin was set up beneath which the funeral pyre was prepared. During this time sadhus recited the Janmangal *stotra*, as well as Sanskrit mantras and Brahmamananam, composed by Bhadrash Swami. The mantras described the glory of Aksharbrahman as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and exemplified by the divine life of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Narayanmuni Swami explained the meaning of each of the mantras in Gujarati and cited the corresponding references of the Vachanamrut. This ritual chanting continued for 45 minutes, infusing divinity in the solemn air. Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, the convenor of BAPS, delivered a eulogy, "Great divine souls manifest themselves in our midst and their birthplace acquires great importance. That spot is very fortunate. Similarly, the spot where they are cremated is also replete with divinity.

"The pilgrim place of Sarangpur is like Akshardham. It was very dear to Shastriji





A white cabin was set up beneath which the funeral pyre was prepared



HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, Pujya Ramdevji Maharaj and senior sadhus



Pujya Ramdevji Maharaj, Shri Amitbhai Shah, Shri L.K. Advani also perform the final *arti*

Maharaj. He built this mandir in accordance with Shriji Maharaj's wish. In fact, he even prepared the design himself. He also designed the magnificent entrance gate behind the mandir. To offer devotion to God, Shastriji Maharaj meticulously built this mandir of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and made this place as divine as Akshardham. This place was equally dear to HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He became the *kothari* of Sarangpur Mandir at the behest of Shastriji Maharaj. He rendered immense service to this mandir. He often read the Bhaktachintamani in the presence and to the joy of Shastriji Maharaj in Sarangpur. A thousand reverences to Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj and may we abide by his words."

Thereafter, Pujya Ramdevji Maharaj offered his tributes, "In our *sannyas* or guru tradition, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the pride [of all] and a God-realized person. He was Brahman and a perfect yogi as mentioned in the Vedic and Upanishadic scriptures. Pramukh Swamiji's religious grooming, and his ideals and life, point to the fact that he was a great soul. His silence, too, spoke about everything. His mere presence itself proclaimed the ultimate. Such great souls are born once in a thousand years to carry out God's work as per His will. Such a manifest perfect soul as Pramukh Swami Maharaj belonged not only to the BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya, but to the entire rishi *parampara*. He was indeed an honourable soul."

The Swaminarayan *mahamantra* was again relayed on the public address system, followed by recitations of the Janmangal *namaivali*. At 5.10 p.m. the white cloth cabin was dismantled to reveal the funeral pyre. Jnanprasad Swami and Krishnavallabh Swami had arranged the logs to create the funeral pyre. A sandalwood garland was

placed on the pyre where Swamishri's feet were visible, facing towards the main mandir, and a flower garland was placed on the pyre from where his face was open to the skies. Sandalwood garlands were also placed on all sides of the pyre. Then Mahant Swami, Dr Swami (seated), Bhaktipriya Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami stood before the funeral pyre to perform the final rites. After *manglacharan*, the Vedic *shanti paath* was sung by sadhus. Simultaneously a prayer was said, "O Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj! Throughout your life you have given peace to us, the society and the whole world. The world has witnessed this. O Guruhari, the world still abundantly needs your blessings for global peace. Thus, we are engaging ourselves in saying the peace prayer."

Then, Bhadresh Swami chanted *shlokas* for engaging Mahant Swami and all senior sadhus in making the *sankalp* for touching the sacred fire (*agni sparsh*) to Swamishri's mortal body. Thereafter, on behalf of all the sadhus, devotees and people of the world, Mahant Swami performed the final *pujan* by smearing ghee on the soles of Swamishri's feet and sandalwood paste on his forehead. Thereafter, he placed auspicious rice grains on his forehead. This was followed by *arti* performed by senior sadhus and Pujya Ramdevji Maharaj, Shri Advaniji, Shri Amitbhai Shah, Shri Vijaybhai Rupani, Shri Siddharthbhai and all present in the mandir complex. Then followed the *pushpanjali* ritual where flowers and rice grains were offered at Swamishri's feet.

The flame to be used for the *agni sparsh* ritual was brought from the *divo* burning perennially in the Akshar Deri at Gondal. Mahant Swami performed the ritual *pujan* of the holy flame. The holy flame was then used to ignite the torch (*agni shalaka*) made of



Senior BAPS sadhus perform Swamishri's final *arti* from the funeral platform



HH Mahant Swami performs *pujan* with *chandan* and rice grains



Holding the ritual torch HH Mahant Swami performs *pradakshina* of Swamishri





An outburst of sobbing followed the lighting of the funeral pyre

grass straws. Thereafter, the senior sadhus, one after another, along with each of Swamishri's personal attendants circumambulated the funeral pyre. During this ritual, scholarly Brahmins chanted mantras from the four Vedas in accordance to Swamishri's wish. Finally, Mahant Swami was given the burning ritual torch and at 5.40 p.m. he applied the torch below Swamishri's feet and then below Swamishri's head. Within minutes the funeral pyre was ablaze. The scene was distressing to behold and everyone on the mandir precincts broke down in a torrent of tears and wails. Even the security personnel of the dignitaries and many reporters turned emotional in these final moments.

As daylight slowly dimmed into dusk, a cool breeze raced through the mandir grounds. Yogicharan Swami, a personal attendant of Swamishri and who had for years pleased him by singing bhajans, came onto the funeral platform and soulfully sang, "*Pramukh Swami āvjo re, punaha padhārjo re, vasmi guruni vidāy*"

("Pramukh Swami goodbye, pray come again, because your departure is painful"). The bhajan stirred the emotions of all.

As the flames intensified, the pyre was being reduced into ash. Soon thereafter, the dignitaries bowed and took leave with heavy hearts. Sadhus and devotees advanced towards the funeral pyre for a closer darshan. The chant of the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* in Swamishri's soft voice was still pervading the grounds. Many remained seated, engrossed in darshan of the burning pyre. As the flames subsided, sadhus paid their last respects by circumambulating the funeral platform and performing *dandvats*. Soon, everyone dispersed with treasured memories of Swamishri in their hearts. The solemn occasion evoked feelings of intense grief and distress on the one hand and on the other the deep conviction that Swamishri lives on forever through his words, messages, and his appointed successor – HH Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦

# SWAMISHRI'S FUNERAL PYRE

## Materials used in preparing the funeral pyre

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the personified form of divinity. He was Aksharbrahman, the ideal devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and ideal guru through whom one attains liberation and the abode of God. The cremation rites were organized after deep thought to befit his divine stature.

The logs used for his cremation were from the sanctified neem tree that once stood by the old powerhouse in the mandir precincts of Sarangpur. The tree had been sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and was dear to Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Additionally, wood from tulsi plants was also used. It was obtained from a small garden of tulsi plants located opposite the mandir kitchen, which was also blessed by Swamishri. Sandalwood was placed beneath Swamishri's head and neck, and on his chest. Furthermore, in consonance with scriptural instructions, ten types of wood used for performing a *yagna* were also used, such as, *kher*, *khakhro*, peepal and others.

Other materials used in the funeral pyre were products derived from the cows of the mandir *gaushala*, since they were extremely dear to Swamishri. The pure ghee was produced from the milk of the cows. Dry cow dung cakes, and the cow dung paste containing sanctified rice grains, sesame seeds and straws of grass (*darbh*) used to smear the crematory platform were also from the *gaushala*.

All the above materials used for the crematory rituals were sanctified with Vedic mantras and sprinkled with the sacred waters of 108 holy places and rivers. The axe and other tools used for cutting logs for the final rites were also ritually worshipped.

The crematory platform was 32 feet in diameter and octagonally shaped. At its centre was located the 10 ft by 10 ft main crematory area, which had provisions for air to circulate once the funeral pyre was ignited. An iron grate was placed on its surface.

The materials used for the cremation were ritually worshipped and placed. The heavy sacred logs of neem, sanctified by Shriji Maharaj, were placed on the iron grate. Above them was arranged a layer of grass straws (*darbh*), followed by a layer of tulsi wood. Then again another layer of grass straws was arranged on top. This was followed by a layer of *chandan* sticks prepared by sadhus and *parshads* while chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*. On top of that was placed a shawl of *nadachhadis* devotionally made by sadhus and *parshads*. Thereafter, saffron coloured bags containing camphor were placed in the recesses of the pyre. Then Swamishri's divine body was placed on top of the shawl.

The torch (*agni shalaka*) was ritually made of grass straws and coconut fibre containing camphor, cotton oil and ghee, which would allow the torch to ignite and burn easily. The torch was ignited from the sacred lamp burning perennially in the holy shrine of Akshar Deri in Gondal; a place cherished by Swamishri.

The entire preparations for the funeral pyre and cremation rites were done with devotion to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, which was amply manifest during the final rites. ♦







# *Doctors Experience Swamishri's Divinity*

**P**aram Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj was beyond restrictions of the physical body. For decades, he totally disregarded his body to serve the cause of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. Many experienced and were astonished by his ability to tolerate extreme physical hardships and mental pressures, but the expert doctors who treated him for various ailments experienced his divinity at close quarters – both during his life and after.

## **DIVINITY IN THE OPERATING THEATRE**

On 7 July 1998, Dr V.A. Subramanian, a distinguished and highly acclaimed cardiothoracic surgeon, performed Swamishri's heart bypass surgery at the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York.

On 20 November 2000, during an interview on Zee TV, he was asked, "You have performed over 20,000 heart operations. Have you ever had any special experiences?"

He thought for a second and first said, "Nothing out of the ordinary." Then, he remarked, "Yes, actually there was one such experience. I was operating on Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader of BAPS, at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Usually, I feel

a sense of pity and sorrow for the patient, but when I took Pramukh Swami Maharaj's heart in my hand, I felt a sense of divinity around. It felt as if some divine being had entered the operating theatre. I had never experienced this during any other operations."

## **DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BODY AND ATMA**

Dr Tejas Patel, a world renowned interventional cardiologist, served Swamishri for the last four years as his cardiologist.

During Swamishri's birthday celebration in Sarangpur on 19 December 2015, he described his experiences, "Ever since I was young, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has blessed me and showered his grace upon me. However, I got the opportunity to really know him when I was given the responsibility of taking care of his heart. About four years back [in 2012] my partner, Dr Sanjay, and I went to Sarangpur to check Swamishri's health. He was 91 years old at the time and with a little hesitation we told Swami that there was a need to place a pacemaker for his heart. We said there would be a minor difficulty in doing it, but it could be done.

"Swami replied, 'There won't be any difficulty because you'll be there. You will do well.'



“Thereafter, on 14 June 2012, Swami came to the Shahibaug mandir (Ahmedabad) from Sarangpur. That night we came to check him. We explained that it was not possible to give him general anaesthesia for the operation, because there was a risk. So, we would have to administer local anaesthesia to desensitize the skin for the two-hour operation. The surgery could be very painful, but there is no other alternative.

“Swami replied, ‘I am not in pain now and there will be no pain, so you do your work.’

“The next morning, Swami came to the hospital. We took him straight to the cath lab. Dr Yash, Dr Sanjay and I started our work. We administered the local anaesthesia on the upper left side of his chest and then made an incision. We penetrated Swami’s skin, tissues and muscles and placed the pacemaker inside. Thereafter, we stitched his skin together. I noticed Swami had moved his feet a little. I asked Swami, ‘Is there any difficulty or pain?’ He replied that there was none.

“With the operation over, the next challenge for us was to not keep Swami in the hospital to avoid the probability of him getting a cross-infection. He was immediately taken by car to the mandir. When we arrived at the mandir, thousands of devotees had gathered for his darshan. Despite the fact that not even an hour had passed after his surgery, Swami patiently gave darshan to all. Later on, I came to know that some devotees wondered whether Swami had really undergone an operation or had returned after just a routine check-up! There was not the slightest trace of pain on his face or any expression of that sort.

“While we were returning from the hospital to the mandir and then later in his room, I repeatedly asked Swami, ‘Do you experience any pain or discomfort?’ He simply replied in the negative.

“Three months later, Dr Sanjay and I went

to see Swami. After the check-up we asked him whether he had any problems. Again he gave the same reply, saying that there was no problem.

“In my 25-year career as a cardiologist I have never seen a patient like Swami. He, at 91 years, did not utter a single sound in pain during the two-hour surgery performed under local anaesthesia. He never expressed pain before, during or after the surgery, and even till today. As a result I have understood the difference between the body and *atma*, which I had been trying to understand for the last 15 years. Witnessing Pramukh Swami Maharaj remain equipoised in pain and difficulty taught me what I would not have been able to understand in even ten births.”

#### CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Dr Vrajlal P. Patel served as Swamishri’s personal physician for the last four years, during which he experienced Swamishri’s divinity numerous times. He narrates, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a divine patient. He never complained of any difficulties. Sometimes, it would be necessary to perform painful, uncomfortable procedures, such as endoscopy. Because of his age, anaesthesia was best avoided, yet he never uttered even one word of complaint. On the contrary, on such occasions he calmed us with his compassionate smile.

“Some time ago, for about 18 months, I suffered from unbearable arthritis, for which I was taking many powerful medications. Once, the attendant sadhus told Swamishri of my problems and requested his blessings. At that time, Swamishri held my hands and looked compassionately into my eyes. I was deeply moved and emotional. His eyes also became moist. Such was his compassion and concern for an ordinary servant like me.”

#### DEFYING BODY SCIENCE

After Swamishri passed away, Dr Pratik Patel,

a forensic medicine specialist from Ahmedabad, was responsible for monitoring Swamishri's physical condition during the four days of darshan from 13 to 17 August.

On 15 August, about 40 hours after Swamishri had passed away, Dr Pratik observed Swamishri's face and other parts of his body, but to his great surprise, there was no sign of any of the expected bodily changes.

During his examination, Dr Pratik noticed that Swamishri's face was slightly bowed. So, he requested the attendant sadhus to raise Swamishri's face. Despite having been in the cabin at -10°C for such a long time, there was no bodily stiffness or rigidity and the position of the face was easily adjusted.

Dr Pratik further commented that, due to gravity, blood normally pools into the lower parts of the body and causes skin discolouration. But, again, he noticed that the skin in the dependent parts of Swamishri's body was not discoloured.

Another expected body change is that at -10°C, the body would become extremely dry and the skin could crack or split open. But, remarkably, even after almost 80 hours in the freezing cabin, there were no cracks or splits on Swamishri's body. In addition to this, no chemicals or cosmetics were used and Swamishri's skin remained exceptionally natural right until the end.

On 17 August, when Swamishri was initially transferred from the cabin in the Guru Darshan Mandapam and taken towards Sarvasva, the outside temperature was 28°C, an increase of 38°C. In such circumstances, it would be expected that the outer skin would heat up more rapidly than the body interior, thus causing the skin to separate from the underlying tissues. However,

"I have understood the difference between the body and *atma*, which I had been trying to understand for the last 15 years. Witnessing Pramukh Swami Maharaj remain equipoised in pain and difficulty taught me what I would not have been able to understand in even ten births."

- Dr Tejas Patel

in Swamishri's case no such changes occurred.

In Sarvasva, Swamishri's position was changed from sitting to lying prior to the *sadguru* sadhus bathing Swamishri with *panchamrut*.

After the long time spent at sub-zero temperatures, body stiffness was expected. However, Swamishri's body was noted to be supple and not only was it easy to change his position, but his arms and legs were also unusually flex-

ible without any trace of stiffness.

Dr Pratik found this to be extraordinary and commented that only the divine could account for this. Further astonishment was experienced when Swamishri was again placed from a lying position to a sitting position in the *palkhi*. Again, no body rigidity or resistance was noticed.

Again, after the final *palkhi yatra*, when Swamishri was taken from his sitting pose in the *palkhi* and laid to rest flat on the funeral pyre, there was no stiffness. Also, such was the suppleness of his fingers that his hands were easily joined together in the prayer gesture for the final rites.

One final divine experience awaited all. Normally, among the first body changes to occur is the stiffening of face, neck and jaw muscles. However, just before the final rites began, Swamishri's dentures were easily removed, without any resistance or use of force.

Summarizing his experience of the four days, Dr Pratik Patel said, "I have never seen or heard of such absence of body changes. Without the use of formalin or embalming, and despite such harsh conditions, the absence of changes can only be due to the divinity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj." ♦





# TRIBUTES

*by World Leaders, Royalty and Spiritual Masters*

*The spontaneous and overwhelming tributes offered to Pramukh Swami Maharaj from all over the world reflected his deep impact on spiritual masters, political and civic leaders, statesmen, distinguished professionals and entrepreneurs, artistes and ordinary citizens alike. They conveyed their homages through tweets, letters, emails, speeches and interviews. We present here a selection from the vast number of tributes expressed in various forms.*

*(For more tributes and details refer to [www.baps.org](http://www.baps.org))*



**PRANAB MUKHERJEE** President, Republic of India



Swamiji was a pious soul, always concerned about the welfare of humanity. A constant crusader for spiritual values, Swamiji's teachings of service to mankind have great relevance in the present world. Swamiji's words and wisdom will remain a source of inspiration to all his followers and people at large, guiding them on the path of love and compassion. (Letter)

**NARENDRA MODI** Prime Minister, Republic of India



🐦 HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a mentor to me. I will never forget my interactions with him. Will miss his presence.

🐦 Touching memories, unforgettable anecdotes...fortunate to have received HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings.

**BARACK OBAMA** President of the United States of America



I join in mourning the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Blessed with the kind of wisdom and faith that transcended boundaries, Pramukh Swami Maharaj spent his life using the power of his inner goodness to lift others up. He was a trusted ear and revered voice for countless people, and the lessons of his humility stirred not only the hearts of his followers, but also of men and women across the globe who were fortunate enough to have crossed his path. By paying tribute to a man who believed in the worth of all people and dedicated himself to serving those in need, we are reminded of the ways our common humanity will always bind us together – and of the enduring obligation we have to love and care for one another in the world we share. May the memory of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj continue to guide you, and may his legacy give us the courage to be our best selves. (Letter, 16 September)

**PRINCE CHARLES** His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, United Kingdom



I learnt with immense sadness of the demise of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I have especially fond memories of his visit to St. James's Palace in 1997, and our conversation about interfaith harmony and world peace. The Temple continues to be a place that preserves traditions, culture and promotes the spirit of volunteerism. I was particularly impressed by the astonishing efforts that had been made to build Akshardham.

His Holiness's inspiration has not only created these two wonderful landmarks, but has also inspired a vibrant community to lead pious and virtuous lives, following his own life ethos, "In the joy of others lies our own." (Letter, 15 August)





15<sup>th</sup> August, 2016

*Your Holiness,*

I learnt with immense sadness of the demise of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I have especially fond memories of his visit to St. James's Palace in 1997, and our conversation about interfaith harmony and world peace.

I have been a great admirer of His Holiness's remarkable gift to London in the form of the Neasden Temple – an exquisite and traditional Hindu Mandir. The Temple continues to be a place that preserves traditions, culture and promotes the spirit of volunteerism. It has become a landmark within London which is open to all; a place where visitors can learn about the principles and philosophy of the Hindu faith. My wife and I have been frequent guests at various celebrations at the Temple, which we have both enjoyed enormously.

We have also visited the magnificent Swaminarayan Akshardham, in New Delhi, on our last trip to India. I was particularly impressed by the astonishing efforts that had been made to build Akshardham, whilst at the same time preserving the Vedic architectural principles and traditions.

His Holiness's inspiration has not only created these two wonderful landmarks, but has also inspired a vibrant community to lead pious and virtuous lives, following his own life ethos, "In the joy of others lies our own."

In special remembrance of His Holiness, I send you my most heartfelt sympathy and the assurance of my prayers.

*Yours most sincerely*  
*Charles*

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सर्वोच्च  
राष्ट्रपति  
भारत गणराज्य  
PRESIDENT  
REPUBLIC OF INDIA

August 14, 2016

Dear Mahant Swamiji,

I am sad to learn about the demise of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, spiritual guru and head of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sansthan (BAPS) of Swaminarayan sect.

Swamiji was a pious soul, always concerned about the welfare of humanity. A constant crusader for spiritual values, Swamiji's teachings of service to mankind have great relevance in the present world. Swamiji's words and wisdom will remain a source of inspiration to all his followers and people at large, guiding them on the path of love and compassion.

Please accept my heartfelt condolences and convey them to the countless followers of Swamiji in India and abroad.

Yours sincerely,  
*Pranab*  
(Pranab Mukherjee)

Mahant Swamiji,  
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir,  
Shahibaug Road,  
Ahmedabad – 380 004,  
GUJARAT.



(CABLE)

No 1257  
17<sup>th</sup> August 2016

**BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha**  
Shahibaug, Ahmedabad  
Gujarat, India

Dear Baps Shri Swaminarayan Mandhir,

I join the world today, to offer my heartfelt condolences on the demise of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj to the countless of his inspirational disciples and devotees around the world.

To all his followers that were touched by his dedication to spread love, peace and equality, be sure that it will grace our world for centuries and you all shall continue to live by the profound principles that he represented to honor him.

We will always remember him for his wisdom and vision for humanity, and I pay my heartfelt homage to the departed soul.

Yours sincerely,

**Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa**  
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain



Premier of New South Wales  
Australia

Reference: A1775720  
17 AUG 2016

BAPS Australia  
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir  
40 Eleanor Street  
ROSEHILL NSW 2142

Dear

I wish to express my deepest condolences following the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, spiritual head of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

As the guru of all devotees of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj has provided advice, comfort and support to millions around the world and the BAPS organisation grew greatly under his leadership. He led campaigns against addiction, for disaster relief, youth development and many humanitarian and social projects. His legacy of selflessness and service will continue to live on through the millions he inspired.

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired his followers in New South Wales, in Australia and all around the world. We are grateful to BAPS in Sydney for actively contributing to local communities through volunteering, litter and tree planting campaigns and relief and development work.

The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir stands as a centre of community, culture and spirituality. I was privileged in March 2015 to attend and speak at the Ravi Sabha as a senior guest and to receive blessings from the senior Sadhus.

On behalf of the people and the Government of New South Wales, I extend my deepest condolences to the BAPS community on the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Yours sincerely  
*Mike Baird*  
**MIKE BAIRD MP**  
Premier



Theresa May

**THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, Prime Minister of Great Britain**

H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired millions with his powerful motto: “in the good of others lies our own”. This legacy of selfless service will continue to benefit humanity for a long time to come.

I also had the opportunity to see the fantastic work that BAPS does across the world to improve the lives of others, and people giving up their time generously to do it. H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj exemplified the values of British Hindus whose contribution helps make the United Kingdom one of the world’s most successful multi-cultural, multi-faith democracies. (Message)



Justin Trudeau

**THE RT HON. JUSTIN TRUDEAU, Prime Minister of Canada**

🐦 My condolences to all mourning the passing of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. My thoughts are with our friends from @BAPS.



Malcolm Turnbull

**THE RT HON. MALCOLM TURNBULL, Prime Minister of Australia**

My condolences to the Hindu community for the passing of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His spiritual leadership, charity and support for interfaith harmony will leave an enduring legacy.



John Key

**THE RT HON. JOHN KEY, Prime Minister of New Zealand**

My sincere condolences are with the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha community after the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Through the BAPS temples in New Zealand, His Holiness promoted interfaith dialogue and values of service and charity that are important to so many in New Zealand. This example and his legacy of spiritual leadership will live on in his followers.



Dr Ruhakana Rugunda

**THE RT HON. DR RUHAKANA RUGUNDA, Prime Minister, Uganda**

I deeply value the moments that we together spent with him both in India and in Uganda.

We join you and so many other friends in the world in paying our respects and mourning this spiritual giant.



Bin Salman Al Khalifa

**HRH PRINCE KHALIFA BIN SALMAN AL KHALIFA, Prime Minister, Bahrain**

To all his followers that were touched by his dedication to spread love, peace and equality, be sure that it will grace our world for centuries.

We will always remember him for his wisdom and vision for humanity. (Letter, 17 August)



Anerood Jugnauth

**THE RT HON. SIR ANEROOD JUGNAUTH, Prime Minister, Mauritius**

He will be remembered not only for his wisdom but also for his humility, selfless services to society and profound devotion to God. His message of compassion and service will remain an inspiration to all of us.





**Puja Shri Mahamandaleshwar  
Swami Satyamitranand Giri  
Maharaj**

Former Shankaracharya, Haridwar

I had the great privilege of meeting Pramukh Swami Maharaj on many occasions. I am such a fortunate sadhu that Pramukh Swamiji – one who is remembered by all – remembered me.

In Pramukh Swami Maharaj I had the darshan of a Jagadguru (World Guru). He was the manifest form of God. He possessed all the virtues of God described in the shastras.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had such Himalayan spirituality, but without the harshness. He bathed everyone in the streams of righteousness, devotion and affection. After Buddha, Mahavir and Adi Shankaracharya, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has received the most reverence, worldwide.

That is why I believe that he is a Yugpurush, Yugavatar and the best saint in the world.

I have reverence for him on par with Adi Shankaracharya. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 9 September 2016, New Delhi)



**Puja Shri Swami  
Harinarayanandji Maharaj**

Secretary Akhil Bharat Sadhu Samaj

For many years I had a close bond with Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I have seen very few mahatmas like Pramukh Swamiji who are not hypocritical, arrogant or deceitful. I have never seen any deceit or boasting in Swamiji.

He had total strength of *atma* and spirituality. I am not speaking about something which someone has written and I have read. But I have observed Pramukh Swamiji's life closely and am describing my personal experiences.

Such a *mahapurush* is unparalleled. He was

totally devoid of greed, temptations, jealousy, bitterness and other such feelings. Such a saint is the manifest form of God. Today, we are deeply saddened that he is no longer with us. On behalf of all the *sampradayas* of India I offer tributes at his holy feet. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 9 September 2016, New Delhi)



**Sri Sri Ravi Shankar**

Founder, The Art of Living, Bengaluru

Param Puja Pramukh Swamiji has been one the greatest saints of the present times. His unassuming way of life hid a treasure of worthy ideals. He was a sincere follower, a leader par excellence and a loving guide. He was showered with respect by the young and old, across all in society. (Letter)

🐦 Pramukh Swamiji's yeoman service to mankind will be remembered for posterity.

Pramukh Swamiji has been one the greatest saints of the present times. He will continue to inspire the Swami Narayan movement.



**Swami Ramdev**

Founder, Patanjali Yogpeeth

🐦 In last 2 decades, I always enjoyed blessings & love from Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Such souls descend for great missions.



**Swami Tejomayananda**

Central Chinmaya Mission Trust

We all in Chinmaya Mission pay our respectful

homage to most revered Shri Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. In the attainment of his Mahasamadhi, the entire spiritual world has lost a great luminary. However, the light of his teachings will ever illumine the path of all spiritual seekers and his memory will ever be a source of inspiration.

(Message)



**Puja Swami Shri Chidanandji Maharaj**

Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a saint like an ocean, who lived, not for himself but for others. He embraced the whole world. Such a saint never leaves us. He remains forever present amidst us through his ideas, divine actions, teachings and commands. He was a confluence of grandeur and divinity.

In Gujarati, there is a saying, “Wherever there lives a Gujarati, there is forever Gujarat.” I believe that wherever there was Pramukh Swamiji, there was Hindusthan. He displayed our entire tradition to all.

India is great not because it has the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, increasing material wealth, the Himalayas or the Ganga, but India is great because it has saints like Pramukh Swami Maharaj who are tall like the Himalayas and pure like Ganga. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 11 September 2016, Mumbai)



**Puja Tridandi Chinna Srimannarayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swamy**

Andhra Pradesh

Virtuous, wise and selfless, most revered Pramukh Swami Maharaj took his message of service to the whole world. He developed an educated, humble and talented community of devotees. Pramukh Swamiji created a virtuous and industrious cadre of sadhus.

By his grace, due to your faith, humility, brotherhood and other qualities, you continually experience joy. (Letter)



**Puja Laxmi Prapanna Jeeyar Swami**

Tridandi Sannyasi of Sri Ramanuja Sampradaya & Chairman, All India Sri Vaishnava Community

Vedic Sanatan Dharma lost a great spiritual Guru, HH Sri Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj, who built a global faith and community founded on Vedic Sanatan values. His Holiness was highly respected for his personal piety and dedication, as well as his commitment to promoting Vedic values around the world. A great soul like HH Sri Swamiji Maharaj rarely visits this planet. We are very lucky to have had him for 95 years. On behalf of all Sri Vaishnavas and followers of Sri Ramanujacharya, the Sri Ramanuja Sampradaya will be forever grateful for HH Sri Swamiji Maharaj’s works and contributions for Vedic Sanatan Dharma. (Message)



**Sri Sri Nirmalanandanatha**

Head, Adichunchangiri Mahasamsthana Math, Bengaluru

Recently, a year ago, I had come here to Sarangpur for Swamiji’s darshan.

His encompassing compassion was a virtue I could see. He had splendid and profound wisdom. He was soft spoken, had a radiant face and a splendid personality.

When I came here (during final darshan) and stood in front of Puja Swamiji I didn’t feel that he had given up his physical abode. I felt as if he is in a deep contemplative state, in *nirvikalp* samadhi. Even after four days his face is radiant and glittering. That effulgence we can see and experience it.

He had influenced millions and millions of



people. He had guided society as a whole, irrespective of their faith. (Interview, Sarangpur)



**Muditavadanananda Swami**

Arsha Vidya Aranyam Trust

I pay my pranams to that great mahatma, Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. Humanity has lost a great soul. The amount of work done by His Holiness will be always remembered. His mahasamadhi will always inspire all of us. (Message)



**Sri Sri Shivakumara Swamigalu**

Sree Siddaganga Math, Karnataka

I express my deep condolences on this occasion. The efforts of Swamiji in establishing such unique institutions to foster Indian Culture, Traditions and Mythology, will remain green in our memory. (Message)



**Puja Morari Bapu**

Renowned exponent of Ramayan, Mahuva

The confluence of simplicity, straightforwardness and sadhana was travelling on this earth. These three combinations are very rare. Such a confluence I saw in Puja Bapa whenever I came for his darshan.

When such a sadhu has departed I would like to state that he has not departed; he has merged himself in everyone. When an *atma* cannot perish then how could a mahatma die! So with his departure he has spread in every grain and particle. I have never known about the [magnitude of] respect and reverence offered by hundreds of thousands of people to a departed

religious leader of a *sampradaya*. This is proof of his austerity, renunciation and straightforwardness. (Address, 17 August, Sarangpur)



**Puja Shri Dr Pranav Pandya**

President, Gayatri Parivar, Haridwar

The worldly departure of Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a loss for the whole world. He personally showered much affection on me. Whenever I met him, we had deep discussions on how to uplift society, remove miseries and nurture our tradition globally. He was a powerful proponent of raising virtuous children.

The Akshardhams and mandirs he inaugurated in Delhi, Gandhinagar, London, Toronto and other places will forever remind us of him. He always believed the work of the Gayatri Parivar as his own.

For seven decades he spread the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in India and abroad. He was a true yogi, a true saint, pure-hearted and a reflection of Paramatma. We have lost such a *mahapurush*.

On behalf of all members of the Gayatri Parivar throughout the world, I offer tributes to him.

Such a *mahapurush*, a liberated personality, never dies, but lives forever. From beyond the physical realm, he will continue to guide, inspire and bless. (Letter)



**Puja Acharya**

**Shri Dharmendraji Maharaj**

Panchkhand Pithadhish, Jaipur

It is impossible for me to forget the unparalleled grace and affection revered Pramukh Swami Maharaj showered upon me.

The over 1,000 divine, grand and matchless

mandirs Pramukh Swamiji has established throughout the world will continue to inspire, energize and strengthen countless for centuries to come.

Due to ill health, I was unable to have the final darshan of my extremely dear Pramukh Swami Maharaj, but his divine image is firmly in my heart and will remain so.

I pray to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan to grace us by again sending our supremely dear Pramukh Swami Maharaj back to Mother India. Since, in this age of Kaliyug, to guide humanity back onto the right path, his incarnation is truly necessary.

Our beloved Pramukh Swami Maharaj! Please come again to this earth and decorate our dear Mother India. (Letter)



**Bhaishri Ramesh Oza**

Exponent of Shrimad Bhagavat,  
Sandipani Ashram

🐦 The passing of Pujya Pramukh Swamiji marks the end of a proud chapter in Indian spirituality of a life of renunciation and service.



**Pujya Acharya Shri Vatsa  
Goswamiji**

Dharmacharya, Vrundavan

One of the forces of cosmic strength in the Indian tradition is the unique entity of Aksharbrahman, whom we recognize in the form of the guru. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an Aksharbrahman guru, who was definitely the form of Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the manifest form of compassion and grace for all *jivas*.

I travel around the world and have seen that the synonym for Indianness is the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. The reason for this is Pramukh

Swami Maharaj. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 9 September 2016, New Delhi)



**Pujya Swami Shri Ramdasji**

Shri Santram Mandir, Nadiad

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's name will forever be remembered among the greatest saints of India. Throughout the world, by establishing the most mandirs and cultural centres, he performed great spiritual and cultural works.

He gave everyone an experience of affection and brotherhood.

Throughout his life, he tirelessly endeavoured and constantly showered his love upon all. (Letter)



**Shri Shambhudas Maharaj**

Jhanjharka

I deeply grieve the departure of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. When such a unique personality is born he comes as a form of God. Such great personalities usher in religious, social and other transformations in India.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had established hundreds of mandirs, providing entry to the lowest class of people ranked on the fringes of Hindu society. He not only allowed them entry into his mandirs, but allowed them entry into his own heart.

Though Pramukh Swami is no longer with us here physically, his divinity and teachings are with us. I would like to say that Pramukh Swami Bapa's footprints in Jhanjharka, and the fact that he gave Dalits a place in his own heart, we believe that God himself had sanctified our village. And in so doing Pujya Bapa made the Dalit community of India proud. My



heartfelt tributes to Pujya Bapa. (Interview, 16 August, Sarangpur)



**Pujya Acharya Shri Mahashramanji**

Terapanth Jain Achaya, Anuvrat Samiti

We are deeply saddened by the passing away of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who was an ocean of compassion, beyond time and full of countless virtues.

He had a very close spiritual association with Acharya Shri Tulsi, Acharya Shri Mahapraganji, Acharya Mahashramanji and Muni Rakeshkumarji. Muniji was particularly touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's respect for all faiths.

The Anuvrat family offers tributes to Swamiji, who dedicated his life for humanity. (Letter)



**Pujya Gurudev Shree Rakeshbhai**

Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, Mumbai

His passing away is a loss not only for one *sampradaya*, community or region, but for all humanity.

The world has lost a great visionary and an eminent spiritual luminary. (Letter)



**G.S. Dhillon**

Radha Soami Satsang, Beas

The departure of Swamiji from this mortal world is a great loss to the spiritual world. The spiritual values of equality and simplicity perpetuated by Revered Swamiji Maharaj will forever remain a guiding light for all of us. (Message)



**Archbishop Thomas Macwan**

Archdiocese of Gandhinagar

On behalf of all the Christians of Gujarat, we express our deep condolences on the passing away of Pramukh Swamiji who has contributed significantly both in the religious and social fields. (Message)



**Rev. Dr Jose**

Bishop of Saurashtra & Kutch, Rajkot

After hearing about the sad demise of Pramukh Swami, lakhs of people in Kutch and Saurashtra are very sad because they considered him as a Saint and as a man of God. He was a person who considered everybody as God's own people, loved them and also served them.

He was always aiming for the good of all people. He was, in one way, a person of religion, but at the same time he was a man of humanity. He was the Pramukh for so many years, and he had done hundreds of thousands of things, but never did he show that he was a great man. He was very humble in front of God and in front of people. His simplicity [was amazing], even though he could have had everything he lived as a person who had nothing. That is the greatness which we feel in him. A person of complete humility, a person of complete detachment from worldly things.

During interfaith gatherings, he used to give the message that we all are God's, we all are one humanity, we are to live as brothers and sisters. Whatever the religion, he always respected other religions. That is a thing which we have to do. It's not only my religion I am concerned about, but I also have to give other religions respect. That is because when anything good comes, it is

coming from God; because His spirit is inspiring all. So all the good, whether it is in this religion or that religion, should be respected. He was respectful and that was the message of interfaith peace he gave to people.

He was a man of God who lived for mankind and showed mankind the way to God. (Interview, 16 August, Sarangpur)



**L.K. Advani**

Former Deputy PM of India, Delhi

He was a guide for humanity. Swamiji was a teacher, a scholar, a sage, a companion of the needy. He was a pleasant, soft spoken individual and had a magnanimous personality. His message of compassion and service will remain an inspiration. We will always remember him for his wisdom and vision for humanity. (Message)



**Shri Amitbhai Shah**

National President of BJP, Delhi

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had done a lot of work, making multi-dimensional efforts to uplift society. He, through his actions, the Sanstha's discipline and his sadhus' activities, elevated society.

In my view, the greatest work that Bapa had done was deaddicting people, instilling values and character and inspiring the values of Sanatan Dharma in countless persons.

I believe it is impossible to keep so many people together and yet not allow any conflicts to occur. Other than Bapa's personality such a feat is not possible. However, the BAPS, from the time of Shastriji Maharaj to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, has unceasingly progressed on one path and with one aim, without any disputes or

controversies. This is the biggest message from Pramukh Swami's working style. (17 August 2016, Sarangpur)



**Sonia Gandhi**

President, Indian National Congress

Pramukh Swamiji will always be remembered as a crusader of humanity, religion and spirituality. His death is a huge loss and he leaves behind a rich legacy. (Message)



**Rahul Gandhi**

Vice President, Indian National Congress

🐦 Deeply saddened by the passing away of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His message of compassion & service will remain an inspiration.



**Manmohan Singh**

Former Prime Minister of India

Pramukh Swamiji was a noble soul deeply committed to spiritual and cultural values which are a part of India's ancient heritage. In his death, India has lost a great spiritual guide whose life and work will continue to inspire future generations for a long time to come. (Message)



**Arun Jaitley**

Finance Minister of India

I think his personality was in tune with the kind of institution that he headed. It was the power of his own spirituality, and it was the



power of his inspirational personality that the Swaminarayan sect grew and grew and grew.

His greatest legacy I think [is in having provided] a very stable institution; an institution which was always on its feet for anything good.

I think spirituality, organizational skill and inspirational abilities would sum up [Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personality]. (Interview, 17 August, Sarangpur)



**Manohar Parrikar**  
Defence Minister, India

I am grieved to learn of the sad demise of Param Pujaniya Pramukh Swami Maharajji. It is an irreparable loss to the spiritual society. (Letter)



**Sushma Swaraj**  
Minister of External Affairs, India

As per his name, he was truly the Pramukh (President) of the Spiritual World. His creation of Akshardham has established a unique spiritual identity throughout the world. At Akshardham, India's architecture, culture, history and traditions are all displayed in one place.

I offer my tributes at the holy feet of the great saint Pramukh Swami Maharaj. (Translated from Hindi letter)



**Suresh Prabhu**  
Railway Minister of India

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a spiritual head of a giant structured organization which inspired millions and millions of people worldwide. He was one of the great persons who could visualize

things which even the best of architects could not do so. So in one way, his heart, his mind inspired people.

India was very fortunate that he was born on this soil. (Interview, 17 August, Sarangpur)



**Nitin Gadkari**  
Minister of Road Transport, Highways and Shipping, India

I pay my tributes to this harbinger of peace and harmony who had created colossal works in India and also abroad. (Message)



**Smriti Irani**  
Minister of Textiles, India

🐦 HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's demise is an irreparable loss. He will always be remembered for his humility and vision for humanity.



**Harsimrat Kaur Badal**  
Minister of Food Processing, India

🐦 Deeply saddened by the demise of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We will always remember him for his wisdom & vision for humanity.



**HE Omprakash Kohli**  
Governor of Gujarat

Swamiji had a straightforward personality. There was no pretence, only sheer straightforwardness. This virtue could be perceived on his face, in his speech, in his actions and in his

works. He was a monument of straightforwardness. And if we desire to learn something from his life then we should discard all types of deception and become a straightforward person. This is what I have learnt from the book [by Dr Abdul Kalam]. (Interview, 14 August, Sarangpur)



**Vijay Rupani**

Chief Minister, Gujarat

In my first address after becoming the Chief Minister I said this is Gandhiji's Gujarat, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Gujarat, Indu Chacha's Gujarat, Narmad's [poet] Gujarat and also Pramukh Swami's Gujarat. The reason I said this was that Pramukh Swamiji is the supreme jewel among Swamis. He was always in the vanguard, serving Gujarat during calamities and adversities, and for decades he had been concerned about Gujarat. That is why it is rightful to say it is Pramukh Swami's Gujarat.

Today, we can see peace and lustre on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's face. My infinite prostrations at the lotus feet of Swamiji. (Interview, 14 August, Sarangpur)



**Arvind Kejriwal**

Chief Minister, Delhi

He was not only a great teacher, but also a leading light who inspired many to follow the path of righteousness. His spiritual teachings and unconditional love touched many human hearts.

His demise is a great loss not only to the BAPS community but also to mankind. Nothing can replace the loss of such a great seer, but his teachings will always remain in our hearts and make his presence felt. (Letter, 20 August)



**Devendra Fadnavis**

Chief Minister, Maharashtra

🐦 HH #Pramukh Swami Maharaj united millions of people for spiritual & social causes. He'll be an inspiration for generations to come. Humble tributes.



**Mamata Banerjee**

Chief Minister, West Bengal

Deeply mourn the departure of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, spiritual head and president of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. (Message)



**Vasundhara Raje**

Chief Minister, Rajasthan

Late Swamiji was not only a spiritual leader of note, his contributions in the service of humanity are renowned world over. It was under his guidance that the BAPS organisation flourished and expanded. (Letter)



**Nitish Kumar**

Chief Minister, Bihar

🐦 I am deeply saddened by the loss of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj who worked tirelessly for the upliftment of humanity.

Swamiji guided us with his divine wisdom. His exemplary life will always remind us to serve mankind. I pay respect to his memory.





**Ahmed Patel**

Member of Parliament, New Delhi

Since long, my family and I have had very close associations with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. All his life Swamiji lived a very simple life. In spite of him having so many admirers and disciples throughout the world he had always remained egoless. He served society, but he had also served the nation and world. Swamiji was the world's best person and a paragon of humaneness. In fact, God had filled him with humanitarianism to the brim. (Interview, 16 August, Sarangpur)



**Mohan Bhagvat**

Head, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Nagpur

During Pramukh Swami's long spiritual leadership, the Swaminarayan Sampradaya spread widely throughout India and abroad. Hundreds of thousands of devotees have been spiritually inspired and through his social works the underprivileged sections of society have been uplifted.

He contributed greatly to spreading the spiritual and cultural glory of India throughout the world, especially among youths. (Message)



**Tarun Vijay**

MP, Rajya Sabha

*Shraddhanjali* to a legendary sage of our time, Pujya Pramukh Swami. A great guiding force for all Hindus the world over, an inspiration to humanity. He created a new paradigm for modern spiritual Hindus, focusing on youth for social

reforms. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the most modern, progressive face of Hindus – creating a new language of hope and pride and brilliance globally. (Message)



**Anil Ambani**

Chairman, Reliance Group

Pramukh Swamiji was a great guide, a great philosopher, a great leader, a great visionary and a great mentor to my late father Dhirubhai Ambani. What struck me the most, when I went down to pay my last respects, was the calmness on his face, and I thought that at any moment if I approached him we would start a conversation. It was a sight that I have never ever experienced, a calmness I have never ever seen.

I have had the good fortune of seeing him on many occasions at our home, at our hospital, in various temples, etc. And what always struck me was his insightfulness, his ability to read a person's mind.

I would say that he was a man of few words, but those few words were like books. Swamiji was a man of great simplicity and was always direct. (Interview, 17 August, Sarangpur)



**Parimal Nathwani**

President, Reliance Industries Ltd.

We remember Shri Krishna and Shri Ram as God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a unique personality, and today, though we perceive him to be a Sant, our future generations will see him as God. I have no doubt about this. The reason being, no one has contributed to society like he had done. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 3 September, Ahmedabad)



**Ramoji Rao**

RAMOJI Group

Shri Pramukh Swamiji was a mountain of light whose radiance illuminated the inner selves of his innumerable disciples. For him, spirituality and social service remained inseparable. The Sainly Swamiji was a solace to millions of hearts as he gave solutions to all those that poured out their woes before him.

His towering personality, embodying goodness, purity, humility and spirituality, will keep on inspiring people till eternity. (Letter, 18 August)



**K.V. Kamath**

Chairman, BRICS Bank

We will miss his tranquil divinity, his affection, his vision and his ability to build religious, cultural and spiritual bridges. He leaves a vacuum and a void in the spiritual world. At this difficult moment we need to draw solace and comfort from all his teachings and the *marg darshan* that he has given us. (Message)



**Anil Naik**

Chairman, Larsen and Toubro

Swamiji as a person himself was an inspiration. He was a leader par excellence without wanting to be shown as a leader. That was his unassuming nature. His biggest leadership quality was that he didn't consider himself as a leader, but promoted everybody else as leaders. If somebody wants to know what the quality of a leader should be, it is to behave like him by considering everybody a leader and not oneself. (Interview, 16 August, Sarangpur)



**Ashish Chauhan**

CEO & MD, Bombay Stock Exchange

He was a true social reformer who took every caste and strata of Hindu society together. His lifetime work is exemplified by the BAPS Sanstha which has stood the test of time and grown today into a giant public service organization. Despite his long record of service to humanity in India and across the world, not a single controversy ever besotted him. He created an army of volunteers who seek to serve humanity together without ever making publicity out of it.

He was a humble, visionary leader who inspired his followers to achieve the best for themselves and society. I will miss him forever and continue on the path shown by him. (Message)



**T. Krishnakumar**

CEO, Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages Pvt. Ltd.

It was difficult for me to imagine how God would look like, but by the grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I saw God on earth. His holiness was one who strengthened my belief in the goodness of mankind. In spite of his powerful divinity and spirituality, his constant tirelessness in making his devotees happy and tread the right path, made him a god who walked the earth. I offer my humble salutations to this god with a prayer that he will continue to guide me and bless us all. (Message)



**Amitabh Bachchan**

Padma Vibhushan, Actor, Mumbai

HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj a



spiritual leader humanitarian, condolences on his passing ... a generous simple human, his aura remains.



**Padma Vibhushan Pandit  
Jasrajji**

Sangeet Martand, Mumbai

Since I heard of the passing of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, my mind has been disturbed. But, I heard a voice within telling me, “I am still here. I have not gone anywhere.”

I have total faith that Pramukh Swami Maharaj will continue to show us the way through his teachings. (Message)



**Padma Vibhushan Dr R.  
Chidambaram**

Principal Scientific Advisor to Govt of India

I have had the good fortune to meet him and get his blessings several times since 1992. There are some spiritual leaders in whose presence you have great peace of mind. His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one such spiritual leader. (Message)



**Dr Vijay Bhatkar**

Padma Bhushan, Eminent Computer Scientist, Pune

His love, his silence, his blessings, his mingling with the people across villages and towns, and giving comfort and peace to everybody and anybody from all religions – that is India’s Vedic philosophy. He impressed the entire world. So, I really miss him. (Interview, 15 August, Sarangpur)



**Dr Tejas Patel**

Padma Shri, Renowned Cardiologist, Ahmedabad

The thing which touched me the most was that he was such a revered saint in the world on one hand, but he still maintained the innocence of a child. It is not all that easy.

The most revered saint. The most simple-hearted human being. The best patient any doctor can have on this earth.



**Harish Salve**

Eminent Constitutional Lawyer, Delhi

I am one of the many who has had the honour, privilege and joy of being personally blessed by him. To be in his presence was in itself a blessing – a feeling of calm would pervade the world around him. God sends us his chosen few to show the path of love and peace to humanity. Swamiji’s message after the attack on the temple was a message of peace and sanity to a world that seems to be losing its way in the maze of hate and violence.

Humanity will miss him, his followers will miss him, and those who were blessed by him will miss him. But he will ever live in our consciousness, reminding us that we are souls in a human body connected to the Almighty and are here to serve one another – as he and his followers ceaselessly served humanity. (Message)



**Rajat Sharma**

Chairman and Chief Editor, India TV, Delhi

No one will ever be able to fill the vacuum created by the loss of the creator of

Akshardham. But the teachings of Pramukh Swamiji will always show us the path of peace and brotherhood. I have had the occasion of meeting Swamiji and will always remember the time spent with him. May God give us the strength to bear the loss of Pramukh Swamiji.

(Letter, 16 Aug.)



**Chetan Bhagat**

Eminent Author, Mumbai

What can I say? Am shocked and sad. He blessed my books and scripts before release and I had a special bond with him for that. He spread

happiness and peace in a world full of strife.

(Message)



**Paresh Raval**

Actor and MP, Mumbai

Pramukh Swami perceived everyone to be equal, and had no bitterness for anyone. He believed all religions and humans to be equal.

I have been touched by his love and the compassion I saw in his eyes. Even now his face is so divine. This is due to his inner light. (Interview, 15 August, Sarangpur)

## USA



**Hillary Clinton**

Former Secretary of State, Democratic Nominee for President of the United States

Bill and I offer our sincerest condolences to the devotees of his Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha worldwide. Pramukh Swami didn't just teach virtues – he lived them every day. That's what made him a Guru to millions of devotees around the world. From the Akshardham Mandir in New Jersey to the countless temples that he blessed in the United States, Pramukh Swami built a global faith and community founded on Vedic values. Bill was fortunate enough to visit with his Holiness, both here in the United States and at the Akshardham Mandir in Gujarat. In meeting many of his followers, I've been touched by his wisdom as well. Pramukh Swami's deep sense of devotion led him to spend his life revitalizing communities in need. His worship of karma inspired him to promote peace and justice in

India, America, and all around the world. His example helped his followers find more harmony – both with others, and within themselves. And we hope that humanity will build upon his legacy for generations to come. (Message)



**Richard Verma**

United States Ambassador to India

We salute the lifetime of commitment by His Holiness to interfaith harmony and tolerance which made him a close partner of countless political, civic, and spiritual leaders around the world.

We also stand in admiration of his service to his fellow human beings including promoting inclusive economic development and providing assistance to humanitarian disaster relief efforts.

The memory of His Holiness will be long cherished for his seven decades of selfless service to humanity. (Letter, 7 September)





**John R. Kasich**

Governor, State of Ohio

The respect and admiration Pramukh Swami Maharaj earned from his devotees and dignitaries are a testament to the impact he made, and we are grateful for the positive difference he had on all those who had the opportunity to know him and learn from him. (Letter, 24 August)



**Jack A. Markell**

Governor, State of Delaware

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was known for his “untiring efforts in uplifting the tribals, liberating thousands from vices and addictions, providing relief and rehabilitation to innumerable people in times of calamity and catastrophe, and inspiring character and faith in hundreds of thousands of children and youths”. These were some of his many outstanding services to society. (Letter, 16 August)



**Bruce Rauner**

Governor, State of Illinois

Our state has lost an exceptional community figure. He was a leader and a significant voice for the Indian American community in Illinois.

His unwavering commitment to his faith and his steadfast dedication the BAPS community has undoubtedly served as an inspiration to many in the Land of Lincoln. I know this must be a difficult time for you and all his followers, but I hope that you can find some comfort in the fond memories and legacy that he leaves behind.

(Letter, 18 August)



**Pat McCrory**

Governor, State of North Carolina

His Holiness lived a life of dedication and unparalleled service to his faith and particularly as a significant voice for the flourishing BAPS community. He provided hope and guidance during the most difficult of times for all who came to him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj enriched the lives of countless North Carolinians through his profound faith, leadership, and passionate work in the BAPS community and extending beyond. (Letter, 19 August)



**John Cornyn**

United States Senator, Texas

He will be remembered as a spiritual leader who represented the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha with dedication and integrity for over five decades.

May your sadness be consoled by the knowledge that Pramukh Swami’s service and contributions positively affected the lives of so many people. (Letter, 17 August)



**Cory Booker**

United States Senator, New Jersey

I was saddened to hear of the passing of the spiritual head of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. As someone who has come to know the BAPS community very well in New Jersey, I know Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s commitment and dedication to his religion and to humanity. I am guided by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s words that religion does not grow by the quantity of followers, but by the depth of spirituality... Pramukh Swami Maharaj leaves a

legacy that we can all aspire to and a thriving BAPS community that will not be the same without him. His selfless services to society, impeccable commitment to the community, and profound devotion to faith earned him the respect and reverence of countless worldwide. (Message)



**Nancy Pelosi**

Democratic Leader, United States House of Representatives

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a source of hope to millions as he traveled the world promoting peace and justice.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj will long be remembered for his spiritual wisdom and vision in guiding his dedicated and compassionate devotees in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as throughout the United States, India and the world at large. His lifetime of devoted leadership and service was a gift to humanity. (Letter, 30 August)



**Steny Hoyer**

United States Representative;  
Democratic Party Whip

I had the honor of meeting His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj during a visit to New Jersey in 2014. I was struck by his humility, his powerful spiritual presence, and his commitment to all humanity. His passing is not only a tremendous loss for the Swaminarayan community, but also for the many lives he touched throughout the world. (Message)



**Ed Royce**

United States Congressman, California

HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj touched

countless lives, providing hope and guidance during his tireless travels across India and around the world. As a spiritual leader, he will indeed be sorely missed, and my prayers are with the millions around the world who mourn his passing and celebrate his remarkable life. I have had the privilege of visiting the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills, CA, and have seen firsthand the charitable work done by BAPS to increase access to critical healthcare service. The work of BAPS in California and across the country will help carry on the legacy of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who dedicated himself to helping others. (Message)



**Joe Crowley**

United States Representative, New York

I'm deeply saddened by the passing of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the founder of many Hindu temples across our country, including his first U.S. temple in Flushing, Queens. Pramukh Swamiji will forever be remembered for his dedication to service, his compassion, his leadership, and his commitment to building a better world for future generations. He will be greatly missed and I join the community in mourning his passing. (Message)



**Pete Sessions**

United States Representative, Texas

His Holiness dedicated over 50 years of his life to interfaith tolerance and acceptance. His position and demeanor allowed him to engage with political and civic leaders as well as the numerous devotees that have followed his teachings. He will be remembered as a spiritual beacon that represented the needs of his fellow



humans by supporting economic development, healthcare reform, education initiatives, and environmental improvements. (Letter, 22 August)



**Tulsi Gabbard**

United States Representative, Hawaii

I offer my heartfelt condolences to the countless inspirational disciples of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and devotees of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha who I have been blessed to meet during my travels throughout the U.S. as well as in India when I visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi in December 2014. In his passing and throughout his life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj reminded us that a life dedicated to the service of God and the spiritual upliftment of humanity is a life that can be considered truly successful and forever remembered. (Message)



**Hank Johnson**

United States Representative, Georgia

In 2007, I had the distinct privilege of meeting His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the opening of the Mandir in Lilburn, Georgia, which is located in the 4th Congressional District that I represent. I was honored to meet the creator of Akshardham and Spiritual Head of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. We developed an instant bond with each other, as he and I spoke of peace and blessings. His humility, saintliness and noble works left a lasting impression in my life. I am saddened to hear of his passing but cherish the memories of the time I spent with him. His legacy will live on through the numerous mandirs he has built around the world that will inspire millions on the path of righteousness, honesty

and integrity filled with spirituality. The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Lilburn will always be a remembrance for me of the days when I stood with HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj as he consecrated this tireless labor of love for our community. (Letter, 17 August)



**Rob Woodall**

United States Representative, Georgia

Selfless, humble, and tireless: those are the words that describe Pramukh Swami Maharaj during his long life here on Earth. Even more important than the words that define him, however, are the actions he took to earn these powerful words. Pramukh Swami Maharaj dedicated his life to the betterment of others, providing strength and courage to those overcoming life's many hurdles, inspiring countless individuals to lead better lives, and providing a helping hand to those around him in need. The vast expanse of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's impact here on Earth is truly difficult to quantify.

While his positive impact has been felt in nearly every corner of the world, one prominent example of the many blessings that he left behind to us is located right in the community that I have the honor of serving. The beautiful and grand BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Lilburn, Georgia, is one of the largest of its kind outside of India, and our community was fortunate to have Pramukh Swami Maharaj journey all the way from India to bless the foundation stones and the land on which this mandir was constructed.

While the world recently lost a truly great individual, there is no question in my mind that the positive imprint he left on the world continues to live and will continue to be felt for many years into the future. (Letter, 17 August)



**Mike Fitzpatrick**

United States Representative, Pennsylvania

Our thoughts of peace and courage are with the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha as they mourn the passing of their spiritual leader. HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a man of character and commitment. He led campaigns against addictions, inspiring many to seek an addiction-free life. His spiritual personality and humanitarian services profoundly touched society. (Message)



**Peter J. Roskam**

United States Representative, Illinois

I had the privilege to visit with Pramukh Swami and know his leadership and compassion will be missed by many.

Leading the BAPS community for over 60 years, Pramukh Swami touched the lives of millions around the world. His cross-continental efforts to provide relief and hope to people facing hardships are a model of his selfless service to society. Pramukh Swami's efforts will be remembered and continued for years to come through the hundreds of mandirs he created and numerous charitable colleges and hospitals he built. (Letter, 25 August)



**Grace Meng**

United States Representative, New York

Pramukh Swami Maharaj provided comfort, acted as an advisor, and was an inspiration to millions of people around the world. His lifelong dedication to service impacted generations of devotees, and I know that Pramukh

Swami Maharaj is an irreplaceable part of the BAPS legacy.

We will be forever grateful for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's contributions and his commitment to helping all people, not just those in the BAPS community. (Letter, 15 August)



**Donald Norcross**

House of Representatives, New Jersey

In the many times he came to my district I saw Pramukh Swami Maharaj give the people of New Jersey a better understanding of Hindu traditions and spiritual living.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a great spiritual leader and a global influence for good. I join with all of New Jersey in honoring the selfless actions and the memory of this man. (Message)



**Randy Hultgren**

United States Representative, Illinois

His Holiness was an exceptional man and a wise leader. Every facet of his life was driven by dedication to his faith and to the spiritual well-being of the BAPS community. He inaugurated hundreds of temples around the world, including the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir of Chicago in 2004. Countless people from countless backgrounds benefited from his spiritual guidance and pastoral counseling. (Letter, 22 August)



**Bill Pascrell, Jr.**

United States Representative, New Jersey

I had the honor to meet him personally when I attended the grand opening of the BAPS Temple



in Clifton and I know that his is a presence that cannot be replaced.

He was a wonderful man strengthened by his faith and he lived his life as he preached, calling for peace and tranquility for all. (Letter, 17 August)



**David Fried**

Mayor, Robbinsville, NJ

On behalf of Robbinsville Township, allow me to express my deepest condolences and homage to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His life and his work have inspired millions across the world to dedicate themselves to humanitarian causes, which is so evident in the Robbinsville community where BAPS plays such an enormous role in many of our outreach and charitable efforts. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a true source of inspiration, and his global legacy of selfless service remains a blessing for us all. (Message)



**Bill DeBlasio**

Mayor, New York City

🐦 New Yorkers extend our deepest sympathies to followers of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a legendary builder who worked in stone & lived to serve.



**Sam Liccardo**

Mayor, San Jose, CA

On behalf of the City of San Jose, please allow me to offer my sincerest condolences for the loss of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We have benefitted from His Holiness' leadership

of BAPS, and the numerous contributions that the organization made during his stewardship. While he will be missed, his service for others will live on through his inspiration of the BAPS community. May we all keep him in our thoughts and prayers as we work to manifest the betterment of humanity. (Message)



**Niraj J. Antani**

Ohio State Representative

I grew up attending BAPS events and temples in Ohio and know the incredible contributions BAPS makes to our community and the world. It was through the inspiration derived from Pramukh Swami Maharaj that the BAPS community made these contributions, and his legacy will live on forever. (Letter, 16 August)



**Kesha Ram**

Vermont State Representative

We can all learn from his example as we strive to serve all of humanity with compassion and equality. As a community leader in Vermont seeking to build our first Hindu temple here, I will use his life and legacy as an example for my work. (Message)



**Elder M. Russell Ballard**

Quorum of the Twelve, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

He was a man of great faith and vision whose commitment to humanity brought relief to the suffering and the underprivileged, especially in times of natural disaster. He championed education, family unity, and addiction recovery, and

inspired generations to live lives of compassion, integrity, and service. Through word and deed, His Holiness made our world a better place.

(Letter, 25 August)



**Sadasivanatha Palaniswami**

Kauai's Hindu Monastery, Hawaii

We are speechless this morning, profoundly moved by the news of the Mahasamadhi of one of Hinduism's greatest lights.

We reach out to you from our remote island not because Pramukh Swami was our Hindu of the Year, and not because you need our paltry voice among the powerful chorus of gratitude and love that will flood Sarangpur today from every corner of the Earth. We reach out because we saw in Guruhari a rare spirituality. We reach out because you inspire us with your avid devotion to him, your rigorous striving, your teamwork, your unremitting will to be and become all that he saw in you. We reach out because we share a longing to touch the Guru's gracious feet one more time. (Letter, 13 August)



**Sesa Dasa**

Chairman, Governing  
Body Commission, ISKCON

Pramukh Maharaj was highly respected for his personal piety and dedication, as well as his commitment to promoting Vedic/Hindu values around the world.

Maharaj's community is well known for the beautiful temples that BAPS has constructed, for the strong sadhana of their sannyasis, and for the enthusiasm of their community members. All of this is due to the inspiration, leadership, and example of Pramukh Swami.

(Letter, 18 August)



**Dr V.A. Subramanian**

Renowned Cardiologist

He touched my heart when I touched and held his heart more than a decade and a half ago, during his bypass surgery in New York and transformed my life to do good to others everyday. I will always have him in my heart. He has blessed all of us in some form or fashion. My deep devotion to him forever. (Message)



**H.R. Shah**

Chairman and CEO, TV Asia

Pujya Pramukh Swami's deep sense of devotion led him to spend his life revitalizing communities in need in America, and all around the world. His life is a great example to others to inspire at every level. And we hope that humanity will build upon his legacy for generations to come. (Letter)



**Dr David Frawley  
(Vamdev Shastri)**

Director, American Institute for Vedic  
Studies, Sante Fe, Mexico

He was one of the greatest gurus and visionaries of modern India and of the entire world. His Swaminarayan order is famous for devotion to the Divine, service to humanity and building the largest and most beautiful modern Hindu temples from India to Britain, Africa, and North America. His gentle guidance and steady inspiration of the most sublime Bhakti will be missed by devotees from the entire world. We must now seek his grace from within.





**Reed Smoot**

Cinematographer

Most sincere condolences at this time of the passing of HH Pramuhkh Swami. I have only the fondest memories of the time that I was able to witness his greatness and spirituality. (Message)



**Sam Cardon**

Distinguished Composer

I loved him. He was so very kind to me. My association with him was far too short but he left an indelible imprint on me and my family. I also received his personal blessings, something that I feel has protected and guided me. He is

the kind of leader that is so needed in the world today. Kind-hearted, warm, and approachable. Empowering and validating of others. Never calling attention to himself but to the contributions of others. He was a brilliant thinker (he solved a riddle that had plagued me for 20 years in about 2 minutes) who never flaunted his intellect but instead used it to illuminate, motivate and inspire. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity I had to know him personally. My life is richer because of it and I have been forever changed. My heart is with you all. (Message)



**Keith Melton**

Director

What an amazing human being. The world is better for him having been a part of it. (Message)

## UK & EUROPE



**The Rt Hon. Tony Blair**

Former Prime Minister

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a truly exceptional spiritual leader and humanitarian.

His tireless devotion to promoting peace, interfaith dialogue and helping communities around the world will leave a lasting legacy.

It was an honour to have met him. (Letter, August)



**Mr Sadiq Khan**

Mayor of London

death has just reached me. My condolences to all at the BAPS. (Message)

It is with deep sadness that I learnt of the passing away of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His Holiness has given to London a priceless gift by building the Neasden Temple in our great city. The Temple stands as a testament not only to His Holiness's vision and foresight but most importantly to the thousands of volunteers he inspired. The Temple plays a vital role in promoting interfaith harmony and also provides a significant contribution to the wider community through its outreach activities. (Message)



**Rt Hon. Jeremy Corbyn MP**

Leader of the Opposition

The sad news of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's



**Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP**

Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

I would like to express my sincere condolences at the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His Holiness was an inspiration to many people across the world and my thoughts are with the community at this sad time. (Letter, 28 August)



**Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP**

Secretary of State for International  
Development

🐦 Saddened by the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj @BAPS.

His humility, wisdom and spirituality have touched many world religious and national leaders, and inspired millions to lead a life guided by spiritual principles. (Message)



**Rt Hon. Alok Sharma MP**

UK Minister for Asia and the Pacific

I would like to express my sincere condolences at the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His Holiness was an inspiration to many people across the world and my thoughts are with the community at this sad time. (Message)



**Rt Hon. Barry Gardiner MP**

Shadow Secretary of State for  
International Trade, Energy & Climate  
Change

🐦 Although today he passes from us, his spirit and wisdom lives on in our hearts.



**Rt Hon. Bob Blackman MP**

Member of Parliament

I have had the honour of meeting him and receiving his blessings in person on several occasions over the past 28 years. His simplicity, humility and compassion have encouraged me to follow the path he laid out for the progress of humanity. My deep gratitude to you [Pramukh Swamiji] for leaving behind a legacy of love, compassion, service and humanity. (Letter, 14 August)



**Rt Hon. Dawn Butler MP**

Member of Parliament

I have visited the wonderful and inspirational Mandir in Delhi and am most fortunate that the wonderful Neasden Mandir is in my constituency of Brent Central. The Mandir has become not just a place for the Hindu community but a place for the wider community to learn of the universal values of Hinduism. His Holiness has given a gift to generations of such a wonderful place for which we will all remain truly grateful. (Letter, 16 August)



**The Hon. Sir Dominic Asquith,  
KCMG**

The British High Commissioner to India

Condolences on the passing away of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His selfless service was inspiration to so many. Jay Swaminarayan. (Message)





**HE Tomasz Kozlowski**

E.U. Ambassador to India

Please accept my heartfelt condolences on the passing of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual head of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and creator of Swaminarayan Akshardham. I did not have the good fortune of meeting him but cherish memories of my visit to the Akshardham Temple. (Letter, 29 August)



**HE Hon. Jan Luykx**

Belgian Ambassador to India

He was a spiritual guide to countless individuals. The efforts of his foundation, BAPS, in the upliftment of the poor and needy as well as the relief and rehabilitation work carried out in times of natural calamities are indeed laudable. (Letter, 19 August)



**Gauri Das**

Managing Director, ISKCON  
Bhaktivedanta Manor, London

I have just received news that Sripad Pramukh Swami has departed for the Lord's abode. The world is now bereft of a Saint of enormous magnitude and compassion. As you always called him 'the inspirer' he led his Gurudev's mission to tremendous heights but never above a single and humble human being. He walked among the poor and simple, and engaged every resource he could reach in the service of humanity without discrimination. My father met Pramukh Swami and proudly said 'I met the Pope of Hinduism'. My daughter studied successfully over many years by his

blessing. I myself learned so much on how to better manage ISKCON from his example and the friendship I have shared with his intimate followers. His departure is such a loss for all of us. (Message)



**Professor Gavin Flood, FBA**

Professor of Comparative Religious  
Studies, Yale-NUS, Singapore; Senior  
Research Fellow, Oxford University

He was an extraordinary person...a man of great learning and deep humility who always put the community first. He will be greatly missed. (Message)



**Shaunaka Rishi Das**

Director, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies

His decades of leadership of the community of Swaminarayan devotees was an inspiration to us all and a reminder of the power of pure devotion to one's Lord and teachers.

I was always struck by this exemplary humility, and his personal qualities. The first time we met, in Leicester in 1984, he bowed to touch my feet. I was a very young Krishna devotee, dressed simply in dhoti and kurta yet, in passing me in the hallway he offered this wonderful example of Vaishnava etiquette. He touched my heart on that day, as he did to so many hundreds of thousands of devotees for years during his service in this world.

Maharaja's blessings for our endeavours in education will always remain important to us.

Maharaja leaves a strong and wise community of devotees who will be an honour to his memory.

(Letter, 15 August)



**Kim Knott**

Professor of Religious and Secular  
Studies, Lancaster University

Seen from my perspective as a scholar of contemporary Hindu movements, Pramukh Swami was one of the most important and influential Hindu leaders of recent decades, and an inspiration to many within the Indian diaspora, including in Britain.

It is as a personal guru that he will be remembered by his many followers, young and old. I know how important his blessings were to them. He will be truly missed. But his legacy will continue to be appreciated through the organization he led and the many beautiful mandirs he built all over the world. They are a remarkable testament not only to Pramukh Swami himself, but to the love and dedication of those who committed themselves to bringing about his vision. (Message)

## CANADA



**Stephen Harper**

Former Prime Minister of Canada

Pramukh Swami was a man of great achievement who held a deep and abiding pride for the beauty and strength of BAPS.

Under his leadership and vision, BAPS became a symbol of Tolerance, Knowledge and Community that serves not only its spiritual congregation and the wider Toronto community, but our great country, Canada, as well.

I had the privilege of visiting your congregation on three occasions during my time as Prime Minister, including the ceremony to open your beautiful Mandir in 2007.

Over the years, the warmth of your hospitality, the strength of your enduring support and the bonds of our friendship were a great inspiration to me as Prime Minister. I could always count on the BAPS community.

Today, though I am absent from this service, I continue to stand with you, shoulder to shoulder, as you celebrate the life and legacy of Pramukh Swami. His loss is significant, and there is simply no consoling the loss of such a man. But I am comforted, as I hope you are, in the knowledge that his peace enduring legacy will

live on in the spirit and strength of his congregation and community. (Message)



**Nadir Patel**

Canadian High Commissioner to India

🐦 Saddened to hear of passing of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, creator of Akshardham, spiritual head of BAPS, inspired many with his selfless service.



**Kathleen Wynne**

Premier of Ontario, Canada

On behalf of the Government of Ontario, please accept my heartfelt condolences on the passing of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Having had the honour of visiting the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto and in Delhi, I fully recognize the great reverence in which he was held and the extent to which his loss will be felt by his followers. I also want to take this opportunity to underscore the tremendous leadership he brought to BAPS, his tireless dedication to raising awareness of the richness of Hindu



culture and religion and the pastoral counselling he dispensed with care, compassion and humility to devotees of BAPS throughout the world. (Message)



**Raj Grewal**

Member of Parliament

🐦 My heartfelt condolences to @BAPS on the passing of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His compassionate service to all will not be forgotten.



**Sven Spengemann**

Member of Parliament

🐦 Visited the @BAPS #Mandir to express condolences to the community on the passing of HH #Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



**Ramesh Sangha**

Member of Parliament

Swamiji had been a beacon light and spiritual

guide to millions of his followers across the world. He has been a source of inspiration to millions of people for getting involved in pursuing noble causes like opening charitable hospitals, *gurukuls* and shelters in tribal areas.

I have been not only a witness to the impact of his spiritual motivation to many in North America but personally also been deeply motivated by his teachings.

I have no doubts that his teachings will continue to inspire many more millions in future all across the world. (Message)



**John Tory**

Mayor of Toronto

At the BAPS in Toronto, I have had the privilege of being in the presence of His Holiness. I understand the admiration and respect he held among his followers, and I know his loss will be felt deeply among them. Through his leadership, BAPS has an impressive, wide spectrum of spiritual, cultural and humanitarian activities especially for young people who are the future of our city. BAPS has added to the multicultural mosaic of not just our city but our entire country. (Letter)

## AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST



**Daniel Carmon**

Israeli Ambassador to India and Sri Lanka

Swamiji inspired millions of people from all walks of life to dedicate their lives to a higher purpose. It was under his leadership and guidance that the grandeur, glory and beauty of Hinduism was spread throughout all corners of the world. (Letter, 22 August)



**Gholamreza Ansari**

Iranian Ambassador to India

I share the grief like millions of Indians who believe that he devoted his entire life for spreading moral values and humanity both in India and abroad. I am sure his legacy and message of love and compassion will remain as an inspiration for all of us. (Letter, 31 August)



**Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi MP**

President, Inkatha Freedom Party,  
South Africa

I consider myself fortunate to have met Pramukh Swami in November 2005 when I visited New Delhi. Accompanied by the Hon. Mr Narend Singh MP, I visited the Swaminarayan Akshardham Ashram.

During our visit, Pramukh Swami honoured me with his darshan. It is a moment I will never forget.

I appreciate the wisdom His Holiness offered to so many people who sought his advice and guidance. I know that he often told young devotees to focus on their education. This resonates with me, for I have spent more than six decades as a leader of my people, encouraging them to value and pursue education.

Pramukh Swami leaves a rich legacy. Through his leadership, the influence of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha has grown and been strengthened. His name will be remembered across the world with respect and affection. (Letter, 19 Aug.)



**Omie Singh MP**

Member of Parliament, South Africa

His Holiness has played an important role in uplifting South Africans and he will always be remembered for that.

His teachings have made a great difference and inspired all those who came into contact with him. (Letter, 7 September)



**Shri Satyanandji**

Divine Life Society of South Africa

Param Pujya Sri Pramukh Swami's divine

virtues, personality and saintliness have touched the lives of millions in all parts of the world. Swamiji's divine leadership of BAPS has resulted in many spiritual and humanitarian service activities for the needy in India and abroad. Through his spiritual leadership, he has transformed the lives of millions and helped them to go towards God and lead God-centred lives. (Message)



**Dr Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete**

Former President, United Republic of  
Tanzania

I had a rare opportunity and privilege to meet His Holiness twice. First, when I was the Foreign Minister in 2004, and second, as the President of my dear country, the United Republic of Tanzania in 2007. I thanked him for his blessings and wise counsel and guidance which helped and inspired me when I was in office and will continue to do so even now when I am retired.

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj has departed, but he leaves behind a great and memorable legacy in Tanzania and the world. Through his guidance and inspiration, the BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Dar es Salaam, for example, has been doing wonderful outreach work which has been of great assistance to the needy, sick, poor, weak and vulnerable in society. It has won the hearts and appreciation of the Tanzanian people. (Letter, 18 August)



**Mr Joseph Muturia**

Former Minister, Kenya

I was invited to attend the 200th year birth celebration of Gunatitanand Swami in 1985 at Ahmedabad, India, by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

I attended this function and met His Holiness

Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the first time. I was very impressed by his divine face and simplicity.

His Holiness was counselling about drinking alcohol and the bad effect it causes to the body. I was very impressed that I decided to stop my drinking habit. I asked Swamiji that I want to take a vow that I will never again take alcohol.

His Holiness was so pleased and immediately declared that this function was successful as one person had vowed not to take alcohol.

Since 1985 I came in contact with His Holiness. He was my guru, philosopher and a friend.

I feel I have lost my family member and guide. (Letter, 1 September)



**Mr Nazem Al Kudsi**

CEO, Abu Dhabi Investment Bank

I'm a non-Indian, I'm an Arab. In 2012, which was a very, very auspicious year for me, I went from Arabia to India.

I was very honoured to meet Swamiji there. I was not expecting to meet him. It was a very, very interesting time because he gazed at me. I was sitting in the audience and I shall never ever forget that gaze. It was the most powerful *agni* entering my eyes. [On meeting him personally] I kneeled at his feet. He put his hand on my head and for the very first time I felt like a little baby who's longing for his mother. I can still feel that feeling. It's still in my head. I've never felt

it again. I'm a very independent man and I can do a lot of things with myself. But I never forget that. (Shraddhanjali Sabha, 8 September, Dubai)



**Dr B.R. Shetty**

Chairman, BRS Ventures, Dubai

Swamiji's leadership has always reflected his teachings of love, peace and righteousness which are the most important values sought in today's world. In his humble discipleship, I have learnt that the true meaning of success lies in helping and supporting those who are in need. (Letter, 25 August)



**Dr Faysal Zeerah**

President, International Hospital of Bahrain

There are no words to express my feelings for the loss of HDH our great Pramukh Swami. He left a part of him in our hearts which will always remain there forever. My deepest condolences to you all for his being not present with us; for me, he is and will always be engraved in the depths of my heart and soul. I have not lost him, will never lose him, and I cling with all my might to his wondrous, inspiring, loving spirit which is indestructible and untouchable by what is called death. (Message)

## ASIA PACIFIC



**Harinder Sidhu**

Australian High Commissioner to India

He had a profound impact during his

seventy years of service to humanity through his commitment to community service, charity and interfaith dialogue and through the building of over 1,100 places of worship throughout the world. (Message)





**Liu Jinsong**

Charge d'Affairs of China Embassy in New Delhi

I sadly learnt the news of the demise of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to His Holiness, a spiritual leader of Hinduism who embodied compassion and humility. (Letter, 22 September)



**Amritlal Shah (Amu Shah)**

Honorary Consul for Kenya (Perth, Australia)

The departure of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami left me with a feeling of great sadness for the loss of his saintly grace, his insightful advice and his generous works.

I had the honour of hosting him in Eldoret, Kenya, in 1991. Bapa visited, together with his team of sadhus, to conduct the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony for the Eldoret mandir. It was then that I was exposed to the magnitude of his vision and his meticulous attention to details.

Despite his eminent position as the head of BAPS, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami still managed to maintain a personal relationship with so many people on an individual basis.

It amazes me to think of just how much humility and perseverance he had in demonstrating the higher principles of *seva* and *dharma*. (Letter)



**Amit Kumar Mishra**

Consulate General of India in Perth

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj was

one of the most revered spiritual leaders of India who will not only be remembered for his work in India but across the world for showing the way of selfless service to mankind.

The Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha in Western Australia has played an important role in the Western Australian Hindu community.

I am confident that values and teachings of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj will continue to guide the BAPS. (Letter)



**Sanjiv Kohli**

Indian High Commissioner to New Zealand

We have been deeply saddened by the passing away of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I am confident that the teachings of Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj will continue to enlighten the way forward for humanity in these troubled times. His life, work and values remain a huge source of inspiration. (Message)



**Mike Baird**

Premier, New South Wales, Australia

As the guru of all devotees of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, has provided advice, comfort and support to millions around the world and the BAPS organization grew greatly under his leadership. He led campaigns against addiction, and for disaster relief, youth development and many humanitarian and social projects.

His legacy of selflessness and service will continue to live on through the millions he inspired. (Letter, 17 August) ◆



**Rob Mitchell**

Member of Parliament, Australia

The tenets of his teaching are ones that speak to us all. World peace, selflessness, and building a life on the cornerstones of character and morality are admirable maxims. They speak across all creeds, nationalities, and faiths. Pramukh Swami Maharaj spoke of the things and the actions that could bring us together, regardless of caste or background. And in doing so, drew the lives of all who heard him a little closer to a place of peace. (Letter)



**Hon. Matthew Guy MP**

Leader of the Opposition, Liberal Party, Victoria, Australia

His work in interfaith dialogue and charity, has shaped the lives of millions of people and his work will endure for years to come.

Victoria's BAPS community is a shining example of the legacy and work of His Holiness. Known for their discipline, and commitment to so many good causes, their humanitarian and social work activities help to improve the lives of communities all over the world, including Australia. (Letter, 17 August)

### OTHER TRIBUTES & MESSAGES

*In addition to the above, many more paid tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj in writing or through speeches. The following is a partial list of names of dignitaries and organizations.*

#### POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LEADERS, INDIA

Mohammad Hamid Ansari (Vice President)

HE Vajubhai Vala (Governor, Karnataka)

Dr Harsh Vardhan (Central Union Minister for Science, Technology and Earth Sciences)

Prakash Javadar (Central Union Minister for Human Resource Development)

Piyush Goyal (Central Union Minister of Energy)

Dr Mahesh Sharma (Minister of Tourism and Culture)

Dr Subhash Bhamre (Minister of State, Defence)

Purshottam Rupala (Central Union Minister of Agriculture, Farmers welfare & Panchayati Raj)

Rajeev Shukla MP

Rabindra Kumar Jena MP (Orissa)

Rajiv Shukla MP (Maharashtra)

Vallabhbhai Kathiriyi MP

Amar Singh (MP, Rajya Sabha)

Subramanian Swamy (MP, Rajya Sabha)

Anil Desai MP (MP, Rajya Sabha)

Arunbhai Gujarati (Leader, NCP)

Gurudas Kamath (Gen. Secretary, Congress)

Shankar Chaudhary (Minister, Gujarat)

Ganpatsinh Vasava (Minister, Gujarat)

Ramanlal Vora (Minister, Gujarat)

Pradeepsinh Jadeja (Minister, Gujarat)

Subhasji Desai (Minister, Maharashtra)

Saurabh Patel (MLA, Gujarat)

R.C. Faldu (MLA, Gujarat)

Bhushan Bhatt (MLA, Gujarat)

P Manikyal Rao (MLA, Andhra Pradesh)

Ameet Satam (MLA, Maharashtra)

Keshubhai Patel (Former CM, Gujarat)

Anandiben Patel (Former CM, Gujarat)

B.S. Yediurappa (Former CM, Karnataka)

Nitin Patel (Deputy CM, Gujarat)

Bhupendrasinh Chudasama (Minister, Gujarat)

Mansukhbhai Mandaviya (Minister, Gujarat)

Keshaji Chauhan (Minister, Gujarat)

Jashubhai Barad (Minister, Gujarat)

Atmarambhai Parmar (Minister, Gujarat)

Shaktisinh Gohil (MLA, Gujarat)

Siddharth Chimanbhai Patel (MLA, Gujarat)

I.K. Jadeja (MLA, Gujarat)

Arjunbhai Modhwadia (MLA, Gujarat)

Prafulbhai Patel (MLA, Gujarat)

Jitendra Vaghani (MLA, Gujarat)

Jayanti Patel (MLA, Gujarat)

Ameet Satam (MLA, Maharashtra)

Siddharth Bhattacharya (MLA, Assam)  
 P. Manikyala Rao (Minister, Andhra Pradesh)  
 Bharatsinh Solanki (President, Gujarat Congress)  
 Narhari Amin (Gujarat Planning Commission)  
 Muzzaffar Hussain (Maharashtra)  
 Pankaj Ramanuj (Gujarat)  
 Gautambhai Shah (Mayor, Ahmedabad)  
 Ashok Gehlot (Former CM, Rajasthan)  
 Vijay Kapoor (Former Lt Governor, Delhi)  
 Kuvarjibhai Bavaliya (Former MP)

## **POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LEADERS, USA**

Phil Bryant (Governor, Mississippi)  
 Tim Griffin (Lt. Governor, Arkansas)  
 Gary R. Herbert (Governor, Utah)  
 Nikki Haley (Governor, South Carolina)  
 Evelyn Sanguinetti (Lt Governor, Illinois)  
 Tim Griffin (Lt Governor, Arkansas)  
 Marco Rubio (US Senator)  
 Orrin Hatch (US Senator)  
 Thomas Carper (US Senator)  
 Mark Kirk (US Senator)  
 Christopher Coons (US Senator)  
 Bob Menendez (US Senator)  
 Thom Tillis (US Senator)  
 John Boozman (US Senator)  
 Chris Van Hollen (US Representative)  
 Peter Olson (US Representative)  
 Frank Pallone, Jr. (US Representative)  
 George Holding (US Representative)  
 Mike Fitzpatrick (US Representative)  
 John Carney (US Representative)  
 French Hill (US Representative)  
 Jeff Mullis (Georgia State Senator)  
 Pramila Jayapal (Washington State Senator)  
 Matt Rinaldi (Texas State Representative)  
 Fred Costello (Florida State Representative)  
 Nily Rozic (New York Assemblywoman)  
 Brian Fitzpatrick (Cong. Candidate)  
 Raja Krishnamoorthi (Cong. Candidate)  
 Ro Khanna (Congressional Candidate)  
 Ash Kalra (San Jose City Councilman)  
 Eric Garcetti, (Mayor, City of Los Angeles)  
 Beth Van Duyne, (Mayor, Irving, TX)  
 Michael Mignogna (Mayor, Voorhees, NJ)  
 Mark Stohlman (Mayor, Morrisville, NC)

Art Bennett (Mayor, Chino Hills, CA)  
 Buddy Dyer (Mayor of Orlando, FL)  
 Janice Mironov (Mayor, East Windsor, NJ)  
 Jose S. Esteves (Mayor, Milpitas, CA)  
 Cynthia Moran (Cllr, Chino Hills, CA)  
 Karen Koslowitz (City Council, NY)  
 I. Daneek Miller (City Council, NY)  
 Timothy Schneider (Commissioner)  
 Kevin Wallace (President, Bartlett, IL)  
 Scott Stringer (New York City Comptroller)  
 George Maragos (Nassau Comptroller)  
 John Bartlett (Dep. Dir., Freeholders, Passaic)  
 John J. Millner (Former State Senator)  
 Randy Ramey (Former State Representative)  
 Chris Carr (Commissioner, Georgia)

## **UK**

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Parliamentary Under Secretary)  
 Lord Navnit Dholakia (House of Lords)  
 Lord Loomba (House of Lords)  
 Lord Bhikhu Parekh (House of Lords)  
 Lord Swraj Paul (House of Lords)  
 Lord Dolar Popat (House of Lords)  
 Lord Paul Boateng (House of Lords)  
 Baroness Sandip Verma (House of Lords)  
 Lord Karan Bilimoria (House of Lords)

## **Canada**

Kirsty Duncan MP (Minister of Science)  
 Patrick Brown MP  
 Tony Clement MP  
 Jason Kenney MP  
 Mitzie Hunter MP (Ontario)  
 Bonnie Crombie (Mayor of Mississauga)  
 Eric Jolliffe (Chief of Police, York)

## **Australia**

Michelle Rowland MP  
 Colin Brooks MP (Victoria)  
 Michael Nahan (MLA, Western Australia)  
 Lily Ambrosia (Minister, Victoria, Australia)  
 Craig Ondarchie (MLC, Victoria)  
 Mark Taylor (MLA, New South Wales)  
 Ian Stewart (Police Commissioner, Queensland)



## **POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LEADERS FROM AFRICA AND MIDDLE EAST**

Jacob Zuma (President of South Africa)  
Ali Hassan Mwinyi (Former President, Tanzania)  
Benjamin Mkapa (Former President, Tanzania)  
Khalid Bin Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al-Khalifa (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bahrain)  
Dr Ebrahim Al Dossary (Assistant Undersecretary for Information, Bahrain)  
Abdulhameed Zaman (Former Undersecretary, Ministry of Finance, Bahrain)  
Tshediso Matona (Sec., National Planning, South Africa)  
Dr Xolani Mkhwanazi (Chairman, CEF, South Africa)

## **AMBASSADORS AND OTHER DIPLOMATS**

Indra Mani Pandey (Ambassador of India to Muscat)  
Dr Ausaf Sayeed (Consul General of India, Chicago)  
Anurag Bhushan (Consul General of India to Dubai)  
Cho Hyun (Korean Ambassador to India)  
Krishna Prasad Dhakal (Ambassador of Nepal to India)  
Chalit Manityakul (Thai Ambassador to India)  
Geoff Wain (British Deputy High Commissioner, Ahmedabad)  
Vijay Nambiar (Special Adviser to the Sec. General, UN)  
Phil Murphy (Former US Ambassador to Germany)  
Ashok Kumar Attri (Retired Ambassador)

## **CORPORATE LEADERS AND INDUSTRIALISTS**

Sanjay Lalbhai (Lalbhai Group)  
Rajkumar Dhoot (Owner, Videocon Group)  
T. Krishnakumar (CEO, CocaCola, India)  
Harris Rosen (President, Rosan Hotels & Resorts, US)  
Kinjal Shah (CEO, Crossword Bookstores)  
Mohandas Pai (Chairman, Manipal Global Education)  
Anil Verma (Exec. Dir. & Pres., Godrej & Boyce)  
Dr Prathap Reddy (Chairman, Apollo Hospitals)  
Samir Somaiya (Businessman & Philanthropist)  
Dhanraj Nathwani (Sr. Vice Pres., Reliance Industries Ltd.)  
Sandeep Singh (MD, Tata Hitachi)  
Ananth Padmanabhan (CEO, HarperCollins, India)  
R.S. Goenka (Director, Emami)  
S.K. Birla (Industrialist & Philanthropist)  
Sajjan Bhajanka (MD, Century Plywood)  
Gopichand Hinduja (Hinduja Group Limited, UK)  
Zeenat Noon & Arun Harnal (Family of Late Lord Noon)

Pierre Racz (Genetec CEO, Canada)  
Ali Abdul Jabbar Al Sawad (GM, National Oil and Gas Authority, Bahrain)  
Kamlesh Madhvani (Madhvani Group Limited)  
Bharat Bullah (Prominent Businessman)  
Ashwin Dhawakieram (MD, PH Marketing)  
Michael Whitty (Guinness World Records)  
Nitin Mehta MBE (Businessman, UK)

## **DISTINGUISHED ARTISTES AND PROFESSIONALS**

Pt. Ajoy Chakrabarty (Classical Singer, India)  
Anuradha Paudwal (Famous Singer, India)  
Dilip Joshi (Popular TV Actor, India)  
Lata Mangeshkar (Eminent Vocalist, India)  
Nigel Lane (Architect, UK)  
Professor Sir Magdi Yacoub (Eminent Cardiothoracic Surgeon, UK)  
Dr Prakash Heda (Renowned Orthopedic Surgeon, Kenya)  
Dr Amol Kelshiker (Chairman, Clinical Commissioning Group, Harrow, UK)  
V.V.S. Laxman (Cricketer, India)

## **AUTHORS, JOURNALISTS**

Raghu Rai (Renowned Photojournalist, India)  
Bhagyesh Jha (President, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad)  
Raghuvir Chaudhari (Gujarati Sahitya Parishad)  
Gunvant Shah (Distinguished Author, Gujarat)  
Shantanu Chaudhari (Chief Editor, HarperCollins, India)  
Ajay Umat (Editor, Nav Gujarat Samay, Gujarat)  
Maulik Kotak (Chairman, Chitralekha, India)  
Bharat Ghelani (Editor, Chitralekha, India) Mahesh Mhatre (Deputy Managing Editor, IBN Lokmat)  
Yashik Singh (South African Broadcasting Corporation)  
Deborah Minors (Journalist, South Africa)  
Fakir Hassen (Journalist, South Africa)  
S. Gurumurthy (Journalist, India)

## **OTHER DIGNITARIES**

Bhagwati Prasad (Chief Justice, Jharkhand High Court)  
Sureshbhai Shelat (Former Advocate General, Gujarat)  
Y.S. Rajan (Leading Scientist, Bangalore)  
H.L. Trivedi (Kidney Institute, Ahmedabad)  
Shivkumar (President, Cardiology Society, India)  
P.K. Laheri (Former Chief Secretary, Gujarat)

B.V. Doshi (Eminent Architect)  
Sunil Talati (Distinguished Chartered Accountant)  
Chamu Krishna Shastri (Ministry of Human Resources, India)  
Dr E. Sreedharan (Former MD, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation)  
D.R. Kaarthikeyan (Former Director, CBI, India)  
Ramkumar Shah (Former Chief Justice, Nepal)

## RELIGIOUS, EDUCATIONAL, SO-CIAL LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Jagadguru Shankaracharya Maharaj Shri Vidhyanarsinh Bharti Swami  
Pujya Dilipdasji Maharaj, (Jagannath Mandir, Ahmedabad)  
Pujya Shri Vaishnavacharya Goswami 108 Dwarkeshlalji  
Shri Jyotir Nathji (Nath Sampradaya, Vadodara)  
Atharvana Chaitanya (Chinmaya Mission, Ahmedabad)  
Jagadguru Shri Vishnukant Goswami (Nimbarkacharya Pith, Prayag)  
Jagadguru Shri Shivratri Deshikendra Mahaswamigalu (Mysore)  
Munishri Hansbodhivijayji (Upnagar Jain Sangh, Mahesana)  
Ramanujacharya Shri Lakshmi Prapanna Jeer Swami (Bihar)  
Shri Mahant Lalitkishore Maharaj (Nimbark Peeth, Limbdi)  
Shri Yugacharya Swami Pranavanand Kelavani Trust (Visnagar)  
Gurudevshri Iqbalsinghji (Badusaheb Shikh Sansthan, Punjab)  
Dhyanyogi Omdasji Madhusudandasji (Gadipati, Shree Madhusudan Dhyanyog Niketan)  
Swami Nirliptanandaji (Sevashram Sangha, UK)  
Jayshri Didi Talwarkar (Swadhyay Pariwar)  
Bhaiyyaji Joshi (Gen. Sec., RSS)  
Dr Pravin Togadia (President, VHP)  
Champat Rai (General Secretary, VHP)  
Bawa Jain (World Council of Religious Leaders, USA)  
Seth Lewis (Community Leader, USA)  
Dakor Temple Committee  
Shri Umiya Mataji Sansthan (Unjha)  
Shri Anandpur Trust (Madhya Pradesh)  
Shri Vardhman Gnan Aradhana Trust (Ahmedabad)  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,

(Chino Hills, USA)  
Ismaili Council (Ontario, Canada)  
Dawoodi Bohra Jamaat (Leicester, UK)  
Jain Social Groups Federation (India)  
Inter Faith Network for the UK  
Institute of Jainology (UK)  
Jain Network (UK)  
Namdhari Sikh Community (UK)  
Shri Rajchandra Mission Dharampur (UK)  
Hindu Religious Society, Manchester (UK)  
Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe  
Charotar University (Anand)  
Sardar Patel University (Vidyanagar)  
Ganpat University of Technology (Kherva)  
Charutar Arogya Mandal (Vidyanagar)  
Shree Somnath Sanskrit University (Gujarat)  
Kalidas Sanskrit University (India)  
Hindu America Foundation (USA)  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (USA)  
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (USA)  
Asian American Hotel Owners Association (USA)  
Silicon Valley Interreligious Council (USA)  
Dallas-Forth Worth Hindu Temple Society (USA)  
Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (USA)  
Federation of India Associations (USA)  
Shree Lohana Mahajan Samaj (UK)  
Vishwa Hindu Parishad (UK)  
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK)  
Shri Adivasi Rathwa Mahajan Sewa Trust (Vadodara)  
Mahila Uthan Senior Citizen Club (Nadiad)  
Gujarat Chamber of Commerce (Ahmedabad)  
Vishwa Gujarati Samaj (Ahmedabad)  
Diabetes UK  
The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation (UK)  
Shree Visa Oshwal Community (Nairobi, Kenya)  
Hindu Council of Kenya  
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (South Africa)  
Hindu Council of Australia  
ISKCON (Melbourne, Australia)  
Vishva Hindu Parishad (Melbourne, Australia)  
Pushti Marg Seva Trust (Australia)  
Sankat Mochan Samiti (Australia)  
Singapore Jain Religious Society  
Gujarati Association of Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia)  
Sir Jayantilal Chande (Eminent Tanzanian Businessman and Philanthropist)

# Government of Gujarat Pays Tributes to HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj



*On 22 August 2016, the Gujarat Legislative Assembly (Gujarat Vidhan Sabha) held a special session to pay homage to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. A translation of some extracts from the Gujarati report is as follows.*



The Honourable Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani addressed the speaker and members of the House, “Today, in my first session as the leader of the Legislative Assembly I have come with a very painful and sad resolution of condolence.

“He was truly an apostle of global peace who enlightened society. His name ignited divine energy in every pore, gave birth to hope from despair and spread light in the darkness of ignorance. Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj returned to Akshardham at 95 years on 13 August 2016.” Thereafter the Chief Minister continued with his heartfelt eulogy by describing the life, work and message of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He added, “When we look at more than seven decades of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life as a sadhu his divinity is impressive and clearly evident. Whoever came to him never failed to experience his unique love. His Holiness was polite, farsighted,

soft-natured and egoless, and he instilled positive thoughts in countless people. He had become a synonym for forbearance and empathy.

“The world will always experience a void because Swamishri had kept the light of spirituality aflame and sacrificed his whole life for the liberation of mankind. The whole world has lost a person who was head and shoulders above others, and who was also a great guide and pride of Indian culture.”

Thereafter, the Chief Minister also offered tributes to a few government officials.



The Opposition Leader, Shri Shankarsinh Vaghela, offered his condolences by describing Swamishri’s life in brief and emphasizing that Swamishri had spread the Sampradaya throughout the world without any disputes and being partial to anyone; he had showered his love on everyone.





Honourable MLA Shri Gyasuddin Shaikh expressed, “We were very impressed by Bapa’s appeal for peace after the cowardly attack on Akshardham [in 2002]. I went with

a group of Muslim representatives to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur. There, I saw what saintliness was in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I did not see bitterness in him when he saw a Muslim group. The terrorist attack had happened only two days before, however he told his volunteers, ‘Do not allow the Muslim brothers to leave without having lunch.’ We had lunch there and Swamiji blessed us.

“A few days later we were invited to a condolence assembly for those who had died in the Akshardham attack. So, we started thinking that if we went there would anything odd happen to us? But when we reached there we were welcomed. We also participated in the mass *arti*. The way he responded to bitterness with love was the biggest message for all. There is no greater tribute to him than to imbibe his life message.”



MLA Shri Prafulbhai Pansheriya offered tributes on behalf of the youths of Gujarat, “In 1987-88, Gujarat was facing a devastating drought. At that time Pramukh

Swamiji had instructed farmers who had enough water supply to grow extra grass and supply it to those who had none. Thus, the farmers of Vali in Tarapur region cultivated fodder and supplied it to those who had none. Pujya Swami Bapa was very happy about it and later visited that village. He honoured the farmers who had cultivated the fodder. But, at that time, two Dalit farmers, Bhagwanbhai and Ratnabhai, who had grown very little fodder, were not present. Bapa remembered them. After calling them in the evening and blessing them Swamishri felt satisfied. He took care of poor people living in huts and kindled their inner light. Even when he visited

the Rashtrapati Bhavan he lovingly met the watchman and the ordinary staff members.”



Honourable MLA Shri Mohansinhji Rathva praised Swamishri’s work of uplifting the tribals of Gujarat, “There are many tribal villages in Gujarat where if anyone interfered

with them would be killed. In the similar region of Chhota Udepur Swamishri built beautiful mandirs. In 1992, he consecrated a big mandir in Chuli. During that time Swamishri stayed at my house for three days. Thousands came for the mandir opening. A drastic change came over them and they quit drinking, gambling, addictions and meat-eating. On behalf of the tribal community I offer my tributes to Pramukh Swami Bapa.”



After several more members of the House had offered their tributes the Speaker, Shri Ramanbhai Vora, concluded, “We have a tradition to pay tributes to only a member of the House and thereafter adjourn the session. However, for the first time condolences have been offered to Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj by the Honourable Chief Minister and other members. Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a transcendental person. Words fail in truly describing such great people.

“I offer my tributes to revered Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the seven late members of the Legislative House. I request you all to rise and observe silence to honour them.”

For the first time in the history of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly tributes were offered by 183 members to a renowned *sant* like Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The day was recorded as a red-letter day in the chronicles of the Government of Gujarat. ♦

# Tributes by the Parliaments of Victoria and New South Wales

August 2016, Australia



## PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA, MELBOURNE

On 18 August 2016, tributes were offered to HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Parliament of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia.\* After various discussions and debates Honourable Member of the Legislative Assembly Mr Ondarchie (Northern Metropolitan) offered his condolences and tributes, saying, “It is with great sadness that I report to the Victorian Parliament and offer my condolences on the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual head and president of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, known as BAPS. His Holiness was the light of spirituality in many lives and elevated society through a spectrum of humanitarian services – educational, medical, disaster relief, tribal uplift and others – as well as empowering children, youth and adults by inspiring character and love for God and country.

I have visited the Melbourne mandir on many occasions, and also the Akshardham in Delhi and the Neasden Temple in London. I joined with my family at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir to

\* For detailed report: [http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/daily-hansard/Council\\_2016/Council\\_Daily\\_Extract\\_Thursday\\_18\\_August\\_2016\\_from\\_Book\\_11.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/daily-hansard/Council_2016/Council_Daily_Extract_Thursday_18_August_2016_from_Book_11.pdf)

deeply mourn the departure of the revered guruji. Our thoughts, prayers and love are with you all.”

## PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES, SYDNEY

On 24 August 2016, members of the Legislative Assembly at the Parliament of New South Wales in Sydney, paid tributes to HH Pramukh Swami. The session commenced at 5.39 p.m. and concluded at 6.00 p.m. The Members of Parliament offered their eulogies by describing the brief life and socio-spiritual works of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



**Dr Geoff Lee**, Liberal Party Member of the Legislative Assembly for Paramatta and Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, said, “I offer my condolences on

the passing of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I acknowledge the outstanding contribution of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir at Rosehill, whose members have flourished under the spiritual guidance of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His Holiness was a well-respected, much-loved and world-renowned spiritual leader.



Parliament of New South Wales, Sydney



**Mr Luke Foley**, Labour Party Leader of the Opposition, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Auburn, and Shadow Minister for Western Sydney, eulogized, “I pay tribute to

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who passed away on 13 August at the age of 94. It was my great privilege last year to visit the astonishingly beautiful Swaminarayan Akshardham in the Indian capital of New Delhi. There were 40,000 people present on the day that the Hon. Daniel Mookhey and I visited. We were welcomed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, who has now been installed by BAPS as the successor to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In paying tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, known as Swamiji, I note that he was revered throughout the world. Swami Maharaj lived a humble, simple and transparent life. He had no desire for self-importance or self-gratification. He always preached from the heart.”



**Ms Julia Finn**, Labour Party Member of the Legislative Assembly, Granville, offered her tributes, saying, “I have been associated with the Bochasanvasi

Akshar Purushottam Sansthan [BAPS] Mandir at Rosehill for many years. I greatly admire its work and the leadership of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I offer my deepest condolences to the entire BAPS community in Sydney and around the world for the recent passing of His Holiness on 13 August.

“I have also had the tremendous privilege

of being their guest at the Akshardhams at both Delhi and Gandhinagar when I have visited India, which are incredibly beautiful buildings constructed by volunteers that are keeping traditional stone masonry skills alive too. While Pramukh Swami Maharaj is no longer with us, his legacy will live on through the selfless devotion and service of the BAPS community throughout the world. Jai Swaminarayan.”

Finally, in concluding the parliamentary session, Dr Geoff said, “I thank the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Granville and the member for Seven Hills for paying tribute to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his life’s work.

“Together with the member for Seven Hills and the Hon. Barry O’Farrell I had the privilege of attending the opening of the temple. It was a joyous day. After many years of renovation the temple is now the centre of the community. I have known the BAPS community for five years. It offers great leadership focusing on the importance of education, family values and spirituality. It also encourages their members to participate in the world and make it a better place. On behalf of the Government and everybody in this Chamber I pay tribute to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His life and his legacy will be known for generations to come.”

Thereafter the House was adjourned at 6.00 p.m.

For detailed report: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Hansard/Pages/HansardResult.aspx#/docid/HAN-SARD-1323879322-91829>





# MEDIA COVERAGE

*An extensive coverage of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's departure appeared in the newspapers, television channels, news agencies and online media in various languages in India and abroad*

From Saturday evening, 13 August 2016, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed away, till Wednesday evening, 17 August, when the last rites concluded, reporters from the print and electronic media gave extensive coverage in various languages in India and abroad. The Gujarati reporters and camerapersons stayed in Sarangpur for the four days. Many regional and national TV channels gave live coverage of tributes offered by various gurus, dignitaries and political leaders who visited Sarangpur during the four days. English language papers published from England, America and other nations also covered the news. Given below is a synopsis of the names of newspapers and TV channels.

The BAPS acknowledges the efforts of the media and its entire staff for covering the occasion.

## INDIA

### Gujarati Dailies

Gujarat Samachar  
Divya Bhaskar  
Sandesh  
Nav Gujarat Samay  
Mumbai Samachar  
Janmabhoomi Pravasi  
Mid-day  
Phulchhab  
Jai Hind  
Kutch Mitra  
Gujarat Mitra

Prabhat

Western Times and others.

### Hindi Daily

Rajasthan Patrika

### English Dailies

The Times of India  
The Indian Express  
DNA  
Ahmedabad Mirror



## TV Channels

Door Darshan

India TV

TV 9

ABP (Ananda Bazar Patrika)

ETV

Sandesh TV

GSTV (Gujarat Samachar)

VTV.

## Magazines

Chitralekha (29 August)

Abhiyan (27 August)

Garvi Gujarat, UK (20-26 August)

Nakshatra (supplement of Sandesh, 1 September)

## USA

The New York Times (19 August, Print)

Calhoun Times (24 August, Print)

Yahoo News (Aug 25., Web)

Chicago Tribune (17 August, Web)

Savannah Morning (19 August, News)

Central Jersey News (22 August, Web)

Hinduism Today, (13 August, Web)

Daily Record (13 September, Print)

TV Asia (13 August, TV)

Newsday (15 September, Print)

Akila News (USA, Web)

Atlanta Dunia (15 August, Web)

Dallas EkNazar (Web)

Desh Videsh (13 August, Web)

Desi Talk (19 August, Print)

Radio Zindagi (Radio)

Divya Bhaskar (19 August, Print)

Radio Asia (Radio)

Garvi Gujarat (26 August, Print)

Hindi Samachar (30 August, Print)

Gujarat Samachar (21 Aug, Print)

Gujarat Times (26 August, Print)

Gujarat Abroad (25 August, Print)

Gujarat Weekly (19 August, Print)

Gujarat Express (19 August, Print)

Gujarat Newslane (19 August, Print)

Hindi Abroad (19 August, Print)

hi INDia (19 August, Print)

India Blooms (26 August, Print)

India Business Times (20 August, Print)

India New England (12 September, Web)

India Abroad (2 September, Print)

India Post (23 August, Web)

India Tribune (26 August, Print)

India West (19 August, Print)

Indo-American News (19 August, Print)

Market Wired (Newswire) (25 August, Web)

Khabar (14 August, Web)

News Bharati (14 August, Web)

News India Times (14 August, Print)

Sandesh (Print)





Sathee Magazine (15 August, Print)  
 The American Bazaar (18 August, 30, Web)  
 The Indian Express (The Indian Eye) (19, 26 August, 23 September, Print Web)  
 The Indian Panorama (19 August, 22 September, Print)  
 The Republican Herald (21 August, Print)  
 The South Asian Times (20 August, Print)  
 IANS Live (19 August, Web)  
 Hillaryclinton.com (19 August, Web)  
 Voice of Asia (19 August, Print)

## UK

The Daily Telegraph (18 August, Print)  
 The Guardian (25 August, Web; 10 Oct., Print)  
 Garavi Gujarat (20 August, Print & Web)  
 Asian Voice (20 August, Print & Web)  
 EasternEye (19 August, Print & Web)  
 Gujarat Samachar (20 August, Print & Web)  
 getwestlondon (29 Aug, Web)  
 Brent & Kilburn Times (15 August, Web)  
 Asian Image (14 August, Web)  
 Asian Image (16 August, Web).

## ASIA-PACIFIC

Indian Link, Sydney (August 2016, Print)

DAY India, Melbourne (September 2016, Print & Web)  
 The Divya Gujarat, Brisbane (September 2016, Print)  
 The Indian Sun, Melbourne (September 2016, Print & Web)  
 Indus Age, Melbourne (September 2016, Print & Web)  
 Indianz Outlook, New Zealand (August 2016, Print)  
 Beyond India, Melbourne (September 2016, Print)  
 India At Melbourne, Melbourne (September 2016, Print)  
 Avenewz, Perth (September 2016, Print & Web)  
 Namaskar Gujarat, Brisbane (September 2016, Print)  
 Fiji Times, Fiji (September 2016, Print)  
 The Japan News, Japan (September 2016, Print)  
 Satya Times, Melbourne (October 2016, Print)

## AFRICA

The Standard, Kenya (16 August, Print)  
 The Asian Weekly, East Africa (19-25 August, Print)  
 Daily Nation (16 August, Print) ◆





# Obituaries and Essays

Leading dailies of India and abroad carried editorials, obituaries and column articles about HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. With due appreciation to media houses we present some extracts from *The New York Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, and translations from *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh* (Gujarat editions). Also condolence articles by scholars and journalists have also been included.

*The New York Times*

## Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Whose Hindu Sect Became Largest in U.S., Dies at 94



By Ayesha Venkataraman

19 August 2016

**M**UMBAI, India — Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader who engineered the global expansion of a socially conservative Hindu sect that grew to be the largest in the United States, died on Aug. 13 in Sarangpur,

a village in the state of Gujarat in western India. He was 94.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi flew to the village to deliver an emotional eulogy. Mr. Modi built his political career in Gujarat.

Under the guru's leadership, the sect, which practices a relatively modern form of Vaishnava Hinduism, established more than a thousand temples worldwide. He made numerous trips to East Africa, to Britain, to Canada and later to the United States after American immigration laws were loosened in 1965, attracting a tide of educated Indians.

The BAPS philosophy helped moor those immigrants, especially those from Gujarat, to their homeland.

"Immigrants of all backgrounds experience nostalgia, homesickness, a desire for companionship," Hanna Kim, an associate professor of anthropology at Adelphi University, said in a phone interview. "It's absolutely reasonable to say that BAPS provides a very welcoming place for the newcomer."

In 2007, he was honored for setting a Guinness World Record for the largest number of temples consecrated by a single individual — 713. A prominent one, in Edison, N.J., first opened its giant carved mahogany doors in 1996.

His followers described him as plain-spoken and unassuming.

As news of the death spread, more than two million devotees made the journey to Sarangpur, where his body was draped in garlands and placed in a glass chamber, Indian news outlets reported.

The guru was born Shantilal Patel on Dec. 7, 1921, in the village of Chansad in Gujarat. His parents were followers of the founder of BAPS, Shastriji Maharaj, who was believed to have blessed the guru as a child, seeing in him the potential for greatness.

In childhood, the guru received the name Pramukh Swami, which means president saint. Maharaj means king. He was formally ordained a saint at 18, renouncing worldly pursuits, and became president of the sect in 1950.

He met with many world leaders, including President Bill Clinton; Prince Charles; Kofi Annan, the former secretary-general of the United Nations; the Dalai Lama; and Pope John Paul II. In a statement after the death, Hillary Clinton, the former secretary of state now running for president, said, “Pramukh Swami didn’t just teach virtues — he lived them every day.”

Among the changes he introduced were youth programs and translations of the sect’s literature, allowing the sect to expand beyond its base of Gujaratis.

He is succeeded by Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current guru of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. ♦

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*The Daily Telegraph*

## **Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Hindu spiritual leader who founded more than 1,100 temples, including the Neasden Mandir**

18 August 2016 (Print Edition)

**P**RAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ, who has died aged 94, was the spiritual head of the Hindu Swami Narayan sect and founder, among other things, of the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, also known as the Neasden Temple, in the London borough of Brent – which was, when it was built, the largest traditional Hindu temple outside India. The Swaminarayan sect (known since a doctrinal split in 1907 as the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan branch of Hinduism, or BAPS) is the off-shoot of a Hindu sampradaya, or tradition, that traces its roots to the Indian state of Gujarat in the first half of the 19th century, and the life and teachings of its founding guru, Swaminarayan, an ascetic opponent of lax religion.

While members of the movement, firmly

within main stream Hinduism, pay homage to popular Hindu gods such as Lord Krishna, what distinguishes BAPS Hinduism from other forms is the worship of its founder and subsequent gurus and its focus on helping the poor and addressing the erosion of moral and spiritual values in society.

One journalist has described its million or so followers around the world as the “Methodists of Hinduism, practical, puritanical, evangelical”, who actively engage in projects aimed at spirituality, character building and human welfare. As of 2009, the BAPS Swaminarayan movement in Britain was said to number around “5,000 families”.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj became the fifth spiritual guru of BAPS in 1971 and spent much of his time travelling to Hindu communities

## Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Hindu spiritual leader who founded more than 1,100 temples, including the Neasden Mandir

around the world, promoting the organization's spiritual and social agenda and working for interfaith dialogue. As well as addressing the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit in 2000 at the UN General Assembly in New York and meeting political and religious leaders around the world, he is estimated to have visited more than 17,000 towns and villages in India and further afield.

In 2000 he qualified for two entries in the Guinness Book of World Records – for building and inspiring the largest traditional temple outside India in Neasden (since 2007 that honour has gone to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Atlanta, Georgia – another Pramukh Swami project), and for presiding over a record 335 temple consecration ceremonies between 1971 and 2000.

Altogether he created more than 1,100 temples around the world, including the Swaminarayan Akshardham temple complexes in New Delhi and at Gandhinagar, in the Indian state of Gujarat.

The story of the Neasden mandir goes back to the early 1970s when, consecrating London's first Hindu temple in Elmore Street, Islington, in 1970, Yogiji Maharaj, the then spiritual leader of BAPS, prophesied that the building would soon be too small to accommodate devotees.

Two years later, thousands of Asians fled to London from Uganda and the movement's new leader, Pramukh Swami, expressed his wish to see a marble temple built in the capital.

His followers took up the challenge and work began in 1992 on an old used car lot just off the North Circular Road. Over the next three years more than 1,500 skilled village stone masons in Rajasthan and Gujarat worked round the clock

**P**RAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ, who has died aged 85, was the spiritual head of the BAPS Swaminarayan sect and founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, also known as the Neasden Temple, in the London borough of Islington. It was, when it was built, the largest traditional Hindu temple outside India.

The Swaminarayan sect (known since a doctrinal split in 1897 as the Swaminarayan sect) is a branch of the Pushtimarg Swaminarayan branch of Hinduism, or BAPS, in the offshoot of a Hindu sect, or tradition, that traces its roots to the Indian state of Gujarat in the first half of the 19th century, and the life and teachings of its founding guru, Swaminarayan, an ascetic opponent of Jain religion.

While members of the movement, who follow the teachings of Swaminarayan, pay homage to popular Hindu gods such as Lord Krishna, who distinguishes BAPS Hinduism from other forms of Hinduism, the founder and subsequent gurus as manifestations of God and his focus on helping the poor and addressing the erosion of moral and spiritual values in society.

One journalist has described the sect as the "Methodists of Hinduism, practical, puritanical, evangelical". The sect's activity began in Gujarat, and its spiritual character-building and social welfare work. As of 2005, the BAPS Swaminarayan movement in Britain was said to number around 1,000 families.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj became the 45th spiritual guru of BAPS in 1971 and spent much of his time travelling to Hindu communities around the world, promoting the organization's spiritual and social agenda and working for interfaith dialogue. As well as addressing the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit in 2000 at the UN General Assembly in New York and meeting political and religious leaders around the world, he is estimated to have visited more than 17,000 towns and villages in India and further afield.

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Designed and constructed in the northern Indian (Nagara) style on the lines prescribed in the Vedic Shilpa Shastras that require Hindu architecture to "metaphorically represent the different attributes of God" with no structural steel, the mandir was completed in 1995 and inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in August that year.

The temple went on to win several awards, including the "Most Enterprising Building" award of the Royal Fine Art Commission and BSKyB. It was described as a "modern building of major importance in our multicultural society" by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, and came top in a 2007 nationwide "Pride of Place" poll conducted by local authorities across England.

The son of a small farmer, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in the village of Channai, near Vadodra in Gujarat. His parents, Motilal and Devilal, were devotees of Shri Swaminarayan, the third spiritual successor of Swaminarayan and founder of BAPS. In 1938, at the age of 18, Shri Swaminarayan's son became a devotee as a religious ascetic or holy man and was initiated by Shri Swaminarayan as a devotee of Shri Swaminarayan.

On completing studies in London, he was appointed head teacher of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, Gujarat. Then, in the early 1970s, he was appointed by Shri Swaminarayan to serve as the organization's administrative head under Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth spiritual successor to Swaminarayan who took over when Shri Swaminarayan died in 1950.

When Yogiji Maharaj, too, died in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj became the fifth spiritual guru of BAPS.

During his tenure as spiritual head of the temple, Pramukh Swami Maharaj founded, in 1993, the Swaminarayan School in Neasden, an independent educational school for children aged from 3½ to 18 years. The school aims to provide education along the lines of Hindu culture and values, while also respecting Hindu culture and traditions.

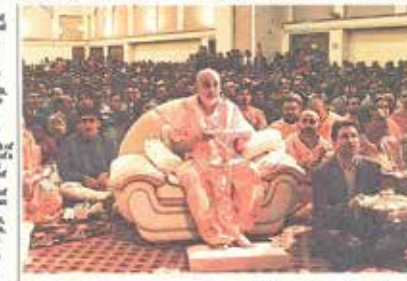
For the last couple of years of his life, due to his declining health, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was living in the mandir at Sarangpur.

Following his death, the Prime Minister Theresa May was one of many political leaders to convey their condolences to the Hindu community.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired millions of devotees around the world. In the words of others who knew him, he was a great leader who was able to lead a community of millions of devotees. He was a great leader who was able to lead a community of millions of devotees.

He was succeeded as sixth spiritual leader of BAPS by Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current head of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj born December 7 1920, died August 18 2006



Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1998 during a ceremony in the Prager House of the House of Commons in London to mark the 10th anniversary of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, Gujarat.



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In 1939, at the age of 18, Shantilal renounced his home to become a sadhu (a religious ascetic or holy man) and was initiated by Shastriji Maharaj as Sadhu Narayanswarupdas.

On completing studies in Sanskrit, in 1946 he was appointed head sadhu of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, Gujarat. Then, in the early 1950s, he was appointed by Shastriji Maharaj to serve as the organization's administrative head under Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth spiritual successor to Swaminarayan who took over when Shastriji Maharaj died in 1951.

When Yogiji Maharaj, too, died in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj succeeded him in turn as the fifth spiritual guru of BAPS.

In Britain, as well as the temple, Pramukh Swami Maharaj founded, in 1992, the Swaminarayan School in Neasden, an

independent coeducational school for children aged from 2½ to 18 years. The school aims to provide education along the lines of British independent schools, while also reinforcing Hindu culture and tradition.

For the last couple of years of his life, due to declining health, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had been living in the mandir at Sarangpur.

Following his death, the Prime Minister Theresa May was one of many political leaders to convey their condolences to the Hindu community.

"Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired millions with his powerful motto: 'in the good of others lies our own'," she said in a statement, adding that he "exemplified the values of British Hindus whose contribution helps make the United Kingdom one of the world's most successful multicultural, multi faith democracies."

He is succeeded as sixth spiritual leader of BAPS by Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current head of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, born December 7 1921, died August 13 2016. ◆

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*The Guardian*

## **Pramukh Swami Maharaj Obituary**

### **Leader of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu sect for 45 years who expanded it internationally**

Mark Tully

29 August 2016 (Web Edition)

**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj, who has died aged 94, was the fifth spiritual guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu sect, which claims to have more than a million devotees. He led the sect steadfastly for 45 years and expanded it internationally and in India. He was responsible for the construction of hundreds of temples around the world, including the Hindu temple in Neasden,

north-west London.

The BAPS sect is an off-shoot of the original sect named after its founder, Swaminarayan. He established it in the early 19th century to spread a strict form of Hinduism promoting asceticism and social service. A schism in the sect in the early 20th century resulted in the formation of BAPS. All Swaminarayans believe that their founder was an incarnation of God, which differentiates

them from other Hindus. The BAPS sect differs again in believing that all the gurus who have followed, including Pramukh Swami Maharaj, have been Akshars, ideal devotees of God, through whom God can be seen and liberation achieved.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born Shantilal Patel in the Gujarati village of Chansad, youngest of 10 children of Motilal and Diwaliba Patel. His father was a farmer and both his parents were devotees of Shastriji Maharaj, founder of the Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (or BAPS Swaminarayan) sect and its then guru.

When he was 18 he was initiated as a sadhu, a celibate monk, and given the name Narayanswarupdas, servant of God. Seven years later he was appointed to be a temple administrator. At the age of 28, he became president of the BAPS Swaminarayan. From then onwards he was honoured by being known as “Pramukh” or presiding Swami. He became guru of the sect in 1971 on the death of his predecessor.

As guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled widely and met world leaders. In 2000 he spoke at the United Nations millennium world peace summit of religious leaders, saying that: “True religion is that which inspires love for one another.” He was a staunch advocate of religious pluralism and the Hindu belief that there are different ways to God. In India it is not uncommon for Hindu religious leaders to be involved in politics, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj played no public political role.

He lived a simple life in the tradition of the Swaminarayan sect. He observed its strict vegetarian code, which also bans onions, garlic and other foods thought to promote debilitating moods. He was keen for more men to take a vow of celibacy. During his life he initiated 950 young men as sadhus and established a training centre for them.

In addition to his concern for the religious life

## Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Steadfast leader of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu sect for 45 years

**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj, who has died aged 94, was the fifth spiritual guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu sect, which claims to have more than a million devotees, but the sect itself has only 45 years and expanded internationally only in India. He was responsible for the construction of hundreds of temples around the world, including the Hindu temple in Neasden, north-west London.

The BAPS sect is an offshoot of the original sect named after his founder, Swaminarayan. He established it in the early 19th century to spread a strict form of Hinduism promoting asceticism and social service. At times in the early 20th century, it was a small sect of about 100 members in the village of Chansad, Gujarat.

Swaminarayan believed that God resides in an incarnation of God, who differentiates them from other Hindus. The BAPS sect all devotees in believing that all the gurus have been incarnations of God.

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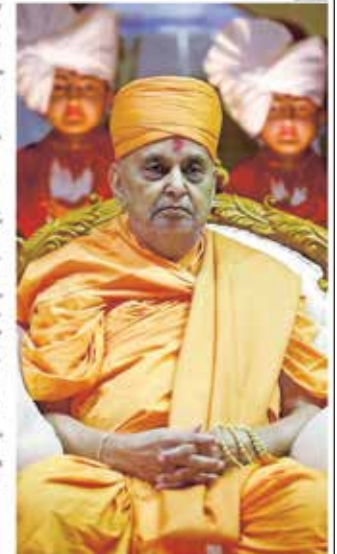
religion after him and the Hindu belief that there are different ways to God. In India it is not uncommon for Hindu religious leaders to be involved in politics, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj played no public political role.

After the first Hindu-Muslim riots in Gujarat, in which more than 1,000 people were killed, a newspaper reported that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had criticised the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader, Narendra Modi, for the violence. He was then in India. Later in the same year, through, when he was in India, he was attacked by a group of Hindu extremists in a temple in Gujarat, the capital of Gujarat, killing 21 people. Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not leave a statement calling for peace and calm.

He lived a simple life in the tradition of the Swaminarayan sect. He observed its strict vegetarian code, which also bans onions, garlic and other foods thought to promote debilitating moods. He was keen for more men to take a vow of celibacy. During his life he initiated 950 young men as sadhus and established a training centre for them.

In addition to his concern for the religious life of the sect, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was engaged in social work. He campaigned against tobacco, alcohol and drugs. He made sure Swaminarayan volunteers were active in relief and rehabilitation after two big earthquakes in India. He instituted a woman's wing of the Swaminarayan BAPS temple in the Gujarat village of Sarangpur, his body, sitting upright, was displayed in a refrigerated cabin for his followers to have their final sight of their guru. Modi flew straight from delivering his Independence Day address to the nation on 15 August to Sarangpur. He told devotees: “You have lost a guru. I have lost a father.”

Before he died, Pramukh Swami Maharaj nominated Mahant Swami Maharaj as his successor. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, religious leader, born 7 December 1921; died 13 August 2016.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the driving force behind the construction of the largest Hindu temple outside India. In Neasden, north-west London (Photograph: Rex)

of the sect, Pramukh Swami Maharaj encouraged its social work. He campaigned against tobacco, alcohol and drugs. He made sure Swaminarayan volunteers were active in relief and rehabilitation after two big earthquakes in India. He instituted a woman's wing of the Swaminarayan BAPS institute. He was responsible for the construction of 1,000 temples in India and 125 in other countries. When it was built the temple in Neasden was the largest Hindu place of worship outside India. All the marble and limestone was carved in India before being assembled in London.

The day after Pramukh Swami Maharaj's death, in the Swaminarayan BAPS temple in the Gujarat village of Sarangpur, his body, sitting upright, was displayed in a refrigerated cabin for his followers to have their final sight of their guru. Modi flew straight from delivering his Independence Day address to the nation on 15 August to Sarangpur. He told devotees: “You have lost a guru. I have lost a father.”

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Pramukh Swami Maharaj, religious leader, born 7 December 1921; died 13 August 2016. ♦

## Immortal Gurus

### Selfless Love as Spiritual Relevance

**Yogi Trivedi**

22 August 2016

Ivory-tower religiosity is often mistaken for spiritual excellence. In actuality, the guru is venerated in Indic traditions because she or he bridges social, economic, cultural, geographic, linguistic, and political archipelagos. The guru's relevance can be gauged by the selflessness, consistency, and equality of his love not just for the divine but for all of its creation. The recent loss of one such guru, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, gave me a chance to reflect on the spiritual relevance and excellence of gurus in the context of my own experiences as a scholar, journalist, and believer. My reflections matured via a journey through time and space while observing Pramukh Swami's final rites ceremony on 17 August 2016.

Sitting under the unforgiving sun in Sarangpur, Gujarat, my mind traveled back to a dimly-lit hall in Atlanta, Georgia, where a five-year-old boy doted on Pramukh Swami. The guru was having his breakfast hours before consecrating one of the first Hindu temples in Atlanta. He smiled at the impatient child and resumed tending to the dietary needs of the senior monks and devotees. The boy was restless; he wanted his guru's attention. Just as the guru was about to stand up, the boy entered the room with a disposable dish and glass. His hunger had overpowered his etiquette. He could feel the stern gaze of some of the sadhus and



devotees. Before anyone could scold or usher the boy off, the guru called him near and asked him what he was craving. The child shamelessly poked and prodded at the guru's dish and hand-picked his meal. The guru poured the boy saffron milk. "Swamiji, is it warm?" The guru smiled at the boy and lowered his pinky finger into the glass of milk. "Yes, son. The milk is just right. Now, take your time and enjoy; I am not going anywhere until you finish." The guru gave to the boy without desiring to gain. He simply loved. Pramukh Swami's ability to bow and speak to a five-year-old boy's mind and heart illustrates the heights of a guru's spiritual relevance.

The most difficult test of spiritual relevance is time. It is a test of one's ability to remain stable and equipoised (stithaprajna) despite the dynamic nature of one's object of love and attention. My mind wandered again from Sarangpur, this time to a small mud hut in a tribal village in eastern Gujarat that I had travelled to in 2010 for ethnographic research. The generous hospitality of a hand-to-mouth, but content, family overwhelmed me. I questioned them about the source of



My observations of Pramukh Swami's life are from seemingly distinct vantage points—as a scholar, a pedagogue, and one who has basked in his warmth and love. These lessons in spirituality manifest through the his ability to acknowledge

# Divine Departure of a Global Banyan Tree

Translated extracts of Editorial, Gujarat Samachar, 18 August 2016.

ગુજરાત સમાચાર

## વિશ્વવડલાનું મહાપ્રયાણ

**B**hagwan Swaminarayan's fifth spiritual successor, a great savant of religion and an instiller of innumerable virtues in humankind, HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's physical body was consigned to flames. Indian spirituality, society and culture have rarely seen such a great soul on whose countenance there was no desire for honour and expression of arrogance. Pramukh Swami Maharaj never believed he was the doer of things but always spoke sweetly about Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the all-doer. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the embodiment of the highest virtues described for sadhus and devotees by Gunatitanand Swami in the famous holy scripture of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya – 'Swamini Vato'. Pramukh Swami Maharaj spread his compassion for humanity throughout the world through his wonderfully brisk capacity to evaluate, strong determination and astonishingly swift decision-making. He created mandirs which provide inner peace and panacea to mankind amidst all troubles; and these mandirs will continue to enlighten the earth for eternity.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj shaped the BAPS into an institution cast in the mould of India's unique tradition and values. He infused profound devotion into the daily rituals of singing *cheshta* and prayers.

Whenever he came to know of new trails or highways leading to God, he believed in sharing them with society. This he did by providing audio cassettes and CDs through which thousands of devotees started singing God's name and glory. In addition, he launched a

ધુરંધર ધર્મવેત્તા અને મનુષ્યના ચારિત્ર્યમાં એક સાથે અનેક સદગુણોનું સિંચન કરનારા તથા ભગવાન સ્વામિનારાયણના નંદ સંતાની પરંપરામાં પાંચમા ઉત્તરાધિકારી સરીખા પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજ દેહભાવે ગઈકાલે પંચતત્ત્વમાં વિલીન થયા અને આત્મભાવે અમરપદને પામ્યા. ભારતીય ધર્મ, સમાજ અને સંસ્કૃતિમાં એવા મહાપુરુષો ભાગ્યે જ જોવા મળે છે જેમના ચહેરા પર સન્માનની ઝંખના અને અભિમાનની અભિવ્યક્તિ ન હોય. પોતાના કર્તાપણાને શૂન્ય પર રાખીને પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજે હંમેશા હોઠ પર એ જ મધુર ઉદગાર રાખ્યા કે કર્તાહતાં તો ભગવાન સ્વામિનારાયણ છે. સ્વામિનારાયણ સંપ્રદાયમાં વિખ્યાત 'સ્વામીની વાતો'માં સંત અને હરિભક્તના સર્વોચ્ચ ચરિત્ર વિશે ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામીએ જે કંઈ વાતો કરી છે તે સર્વની સાક્ષાત દ્રશાન્તરૂપ મૂર્તિ પ્રમુખસ્વામી મહારાજ હતા. અત્યંત ઝડપી મૂલ્યાંકન ક્ષમતા, તીવ્ર સંકલ્પ અને વિદ્યુતવેગી નિર્ણય લેવાની અજાયબ ચમત્કૃતિને કારણે પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજે પોતાની કરુણાની છાયા વિશ્વભરમાં પ્રસરાવી. હૈયાને ટાકક આપે એવા પરબ સરીખા તેમના મંદિરો આજે પૃથ્વી પરના વિવિધ દેશોના વિરાટ માનવ સમુદાયો માટે સર્વ સંતાપ વચ્ચેનું પરમારૂપ આશ્વાસન છે, જે યુગો સુધી વસુંપરાને મળતું રહેશે.

સંપ્રદાયને એક અદ્ભુત ભારતીય પ્રણાલિકામાં ઢાળવાનું બાપાએ કામ ક્રમ, નિયમચેષ્ટા વગેરે પ્રાર્થના પરંપરામાં સુદૃઢ બંધિતના સ્વર ઉમેર્યાં. સંપ્રદાયના આગવા રાગ-રાગિણીનું વર્ગીકરણ કરાવ્યું અને સંતાને સંગીતનું અપ્રતિમ શિલ્પ આપ્યું. ભગવાન સુધી પહોંચવાની જે જે નવી કેડી કે રાજમાર્ગની ભાળ મળે તે આપણે સહુને બતાવવા એવી માન્યતા સાથે રાગના શિલાણની સીડી અને કેસેટો પણ સમાજમાં વહેતા ક્યાં, એનાથી લાખો હરિભક્તોના કેક હરિનામે ટહુકતા થયા. આ ઉપરાંત સત્સંસ્કારોનું પુનઃ સંપાદન અને પ્રકાશનનો પણ મહાયશ આરંભ્યો. ગુજરાતી મુદ્રણાલયોમાં અનોખી ભાત પાડે તેવા ઉચ્ચ ગુણવત્તાયુક્ત અને હાઈરિઝોલ્યુશન યંત્રો તેમણે શાહીબાગ મંદિરમાં વસાવ્યા. સંપૂર્ણ નિર્મળ દ્રષ્ટિ અને સાવ સાદગીપૂર્ણ સત્સંગચર્યા. તેમના વિખ્યાત શાનસૂત્રો-બીજના ભલામાં આપણું ભલું અને પરસ્પર પ્રીતિ પ્રગટાવે તે ધર્મ-યાદગાર બની ગયા.

પ્રમુખસ્વામી મહારાજનું એક વિશેષ પ્રદાન તે સંપ્રદાયમાં લાખો બહેનો-માતાઓને સત્સંગયુક્ત જીવનની દીશા આપવાનું. આજે ગુજરાતમાં લાખો પરિવારો તો એવા છે જ્યાં ગૃહસ્થ કરતાં ગૃહિણીનો સત્સંગ અને ભક્તિ અધિક છે. પરિવારની આધારશિલા સરીખી લાખો ગૃહિણીઓને બાપાએ દીકરીઓની જેમ વાતસલ્ય આપ્યું છે. એમની આંખો હજુ ય અશ્રુભીની છે. પોતાને સદાય સેવક માનતા બાપાએ જિંદગીભર કઠી ધર્મગુરુના અંચળાં ઓઢ્યો ન હતા. એને કારણે તેમના વિશાળ સત્સંગમાં અહંકાર નિવૃત્તિનો ગુણવિશેષ જોવા મળે છે. બાપાએ પૃથ્વી પર દેવો અને ગુરુજનોની જે અપાર મૂર્તિઓનું નિર્માણ કર્યું એનાથી ક્યાંય અધિકતમ તો તેમણે સ્વયં ધત્તર કરીને હજારો સંતાને લાખા હરિભક્તોની જીવંત માનવમૂર્તિઓનું નિર્માણ કર્યું છે. બીએપીએસ સંસ્થામાં યુવાનોનું એક સમાજવ્યાપી નૃંદ તેમણે એવી કુશળતાથી તેમને કમળ કમળે જોડી બીએપીએસ આપણા યુવાનો માટે એક બ્રહ્મવિદ્યાની કોલેજ બની ગઈ.

સ્વામિનારાયણ સંપ્રદાયમાં વિવિધ સમયાંતરે-ઉત્સવોની ઉજવણીને બાપાએ પોતાની વિરલ આધ્યાત્મિક દ્રષ્ટિથી સામાજિક આકાર આપ્યા. ધર્મચેતના અને સામાજિક ચેતનાનું તેઓ પોતે જ એક સમન્વયતીર્થ બની ગયા. દરેક સંકટમાં બાપાના સેવકો દોટ મુકતા અને અનેક સ્થળે સ્વયં સહુની સાથે રહેતા. નેતૃત્વના એક અવિસ્મરણીય પાઠ તેમણે ભારતીય ધર્મજીવન અને સમાજ જીવનને આપ્યો. ઉપરાંત પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજનું એક અતિતીવ્ર પ્રદાન તે ઘરસભાની વિભાવના છે. તેઓ સત્સંગમાં અનંકવાર કહેતા કે પરિવારમાં સખાહમ એક વાર ઘરસભા યોજવી જોઈએ જેમાં કુટુંબના બધા જ સભ્યો હાજર હોય અને સહિયારું હરિકીર્તન-કથાવાંત થાય અને પછી પરસ્પર નિખાલસ વ્યાવહારિક અંતરંગ વાતો પણ થાય. સંયુક્ત કુટુંબને ટકાવવાની આ ગુરુવાચી છે.

ભારતને ધર્મશીલ ધર્મપુરુષો તો હજુ મળશે, પરંતુ આવા કર્મશીલ ધર્મપુરુષો તો ક્યવિત જ મળે. પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજના સત્કર્મોની સુવાસ જે વિશ્વભરમાં પ્રસરીલી છે તે તેમના નશ્તો જે સંયમકતા સંતંડળ અને છુટ્ટા તારવિધ્યા જેવા લાખો-કડો હરિભક્તો દ્વારા આગળ વધશે, કારણ કે બાપા માત્ર વિદ્યાપુરુષ ન હતા, વ્યવસ્થાપુરુષ પણ હતા. તેમણે બ્રહ્મવિદ્યા સાથે આધુનિક મેનેજમેન્ટ કળાનો પણ પુરસ્કાર કર્યો છે.

ન્યૂઝીલેન્ડના ક્રેબિન્ટ મિનિસ્ટર એલન હાઇટે ઈ.સ. ૧૯૭૭માં ત્યાંની નેશનલ કોન્ફરન્સમાં 'થિંક બિગ' એવા દિશાબંધીય જગખ્યાત સુગનો પ્રથમ ઉદ્ઘોષ કર્યો, એના વર્ષો પહેલાથી જ પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજે 'થિંક બિગ' સૂત્રને સ્વયંસ્ફુરણથી આત્મસાત કર્યું હતું. વિરાટ આધ્યાત્મિક સપનાઓ જોવા અને એને સાકાર કરવાની નખશિબ અદ્ભુત પ્રણાલિકા-સંરચના ગોઠવવામાં તેઓ સર્વોચ્ચ કોડિના મેનેજમેન્ટ ગુરુ પણ હતા. તેઓ પોતે જ કહેતા હતા કે જેમનો આ જગત વિશે અને જેમના વિશે આ જગતનો એક જ અભિપ્રાય હોય તે સાધુ. સહુને શીતળ છાંયો આપનારા વિશ્વ વડલાના મહાપ્રયાણથી આપણા સમાજ અને રાષ્ટ્રથી શોકસંતપ્ત છે.

*mahayagna* of printing scriptures and publications. For this, he setup high quality printing equipment in Shahibaug, earning great repute among the publishers of Gujarat.

He was pure and lived a simple satsang life. His popular sayings, “In the joy of others, lies our own” and “Dharma is that which promotes mutual love” have become memorable.

One of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s special contributions was to instill satsang values in millions of women devotees. Today, there are thousands of families where satsang and bhakti are more predominant in householder women compared to males. Pramukh Swami Maharaj bestowed his divine grace upon countless such women devotees, who are the cornerstones of families, and whose eyes are still wet with tears (after his departure).

Pramukh Swami Maharaj always believed himself to be a humble servant of God. That is why one sees the virtue of egolessness among his legion of sadhus. More than the number of *murtis* of devas and gurus he had consecrated, he sculpted the lives of a thousand sadhus and countless devotees into living *murtis* of virtues. He so skillfully trained youths in the BAPS that the institution has become a university for all youths to attain spiritual wisdom (*brahmavidya*).

Swamishri celebrated various festivals of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya with his unique spiritual insight, making them relevant to society. He had also become a pilgrim place himself, and a synthesis of spiritual and social vitality. In calamities, Bapa’s volunteers rushed to help, and he would be with them in sundry places. He gave an unforgettable lesson about leadership to India’s religious and social life.



**“Pramukh Swami Maharaj shaped the BAPS into an institution cast in the mould of India’s unique tradition and values.”**

Furthermore, ‘Ghar sabha’ was his unique contribution. He had addressed many times to satsang *sabhas* that a family should hold a *ghar sabha* once a week, in which all members of the family should be present and engage in singing kirtan and listening to *katha*. Thereafter they should candidly talk about their social affairs. This is the principal key to sustain family bonds.

India will still get religious leaders with integrity, but seldom will it also find such an active religious leader. The fragrance of Pramukh Swami

Maharaj’s noble works has spread throughout the world. His work will be carried forward by his sadhus and hundreds of thousands of devotees, who are akin to constellations and stars in the sky. The reason being that Swamishri was not only a person of spiritual knowledge but also an organizer. He had fostered *brahmavidya* as well as the art of modern management.

In 1977, the cabinet minister of New Zealand, Allan Hyatt, declared the maxim ‘Think Big’ during a national conference. But years before him Pramukh Swami Maharaj had internalized the maxim of ‘Think Big’. He was the supreme management guru who dreamt spiritually big, and also established a wonderful tradition to realize it.

Our society is in deep grief at the departure of a global banyan tree that had provided its cool shade to all. ♦



# Pramukh Swami Maharaj

## A True Messenger of Peace Who Elevated the Understanding of Society



Translated extracts of Editorial by Manilal M. Patel in Sandesh, 18 August 2016.

After four days of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's last darshan [in Sarangpur], his mortal body merged with the five elements, but he will live forever through his thoughts and deeds amongst his large number of doting devotees and admirers. During the four-day darshan a multitude of people thronged and the media gave profuse coverage: Was it merely because he was the head of a large Hindu *sampradaya*? Did he receive honour and praise just because he built over a thousand mandirs and established a world record? Did he receive such tributes for spreading his organization worldwide or because he had lakhs of followers across the globe? Did he earn such regards because he built grand tourist attractions such as Akshardham in Gandhinagar and Delhi?

All the above, to a greater or lesser extent, are reasons for the respect accorded to him, but the most striking aspect was that though he was the head of a *sampradaya*, he respected all religions and never criticized or downgraded others, and neither did he enter into matters of claiming his *sampradaya* to be the best. Without degrading other religions or *sampradayas* he believed it appropriate to flourish his *sampradaya*, and he did so.

Gujarat has given Bhikshu Akhandanand, Pujya Mota and Muni Sant Balji and many other sadhus who went beyond religion or *sampradaya* to spread the dharma of humanitarian service or service to humanity. Pramukh Swami Maharaj too, rather than being sectarian, was a humanist sadhu; hence he was entitled to receive equal respect

from all religions. We don't have scarcity of people becoming sadhus out of their personal frustrations and miseries in worldly life, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj was special because he became a sadhu at the age of 18 with mature understanding and also sustained his saintliness till the age of 95. Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated highly learned youths into the sadhufold and educated them about *manav* dharma (humanitarian duties). He gave *diksha* to educated youths and channeled their energies towards a constructive path.

The aftermath of the Godhra episode in 2002 was a very sensitive period. Thereafter, there was a terrorist attack on Akshardham in Gandhinagar. Thirty-three people were killed and many injured. Pramukh Swami Maharaj directly went from Sarangpur to the hospital [in Ahmedabad] first, instead of going to Akshardham, and consoled those who were injured. This attack was an incident that could have evoked anger in any ordinary person; but Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who had a large following of devotees worldwide, sincerely appealed to all to maintain peace and to engage in prayer. He did not display any bitterness or anger. He instructed [the volunteers in Akshardham] to quickly repair the bullet holes from the temple walls so that nobody would get angry on seeing them. In this way, he saved Gujarat from the

situation of fierce communal violence. His one harsh word at that time could have set the state of Gujarat ablaze with communal mayhem. He prayed for peace to prevail in all, wishing that nobody ever has such heinous thoughts of terrorism in future. Thus he was a Gujarati Indian global ambassador of peace. He often instructed many Muslim youths, who came to meet him, to have faith in Allah and to fully observe Roza. Though he was a religious leader of a certain *sampradaya*, he remained beyond sectarian borders. And in 2000, at the UN Millennium World Peace Summit of Spiritual Leaders, he gave a clarion call of interfaith harmony like Swami Vivekanand.

“In the joy of others, lies our own” and “In the peace of others, lies our own” were the essence of his teachings throughout his life. He became a global ambassador of Indian culture not by miracles, but by fusing science and spirituality to showcase 10,000 years of Indian culture through a 15-minute boat ride in Delhi Akshardham.

We have many religious leaders who are concerned more about afterlife than this life, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one who cared more about our present life than life after death. There is no dearth of people who escalate misunderstandings in society, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj made efforts to enhance the understanding of society. He used religion to steer society on the right path instead of using it to lead it on the wrong path. That is why instead of just having sadhu disciples, he transformed them into volunteers who have de-addicted thousands through instilling true faith in religion. This is by no means a trifle achievement. He used to say to all that without having values it would not take



**“There is no dearth of people who escalate misunderstandings in society, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj made efforts to enhance the understanding of society.”**

long to destroy one’s wealth.

On the night before meeting the Pope [John Paul II, 1984], a reporter from Reuters asked Pramukh Swami that the Pope was a religious leader, yet he lived a lavish lifestyle, while he was quite different and simple. To this Pramukh Swami said that the Pope lives according to his tradition while he was following his own tradition. [Swamiji did not enter into any criticism or comments to rake up a controversy].

Once, while welcoming Harijans, Pramukh Swami said, “I am also a hari-jan and everybody has to become a hari-jan, thus you give up your addictions.” Irrespective of caste or creed, Pramukh Swami Maharaj

reached out [to perform relief work] in the aftermath of natural disasters in Kutch, Maharashtra, America, Orissa and elsewhere. He ran kitchens after the devastating earthquake in Kutch for 24 hours and 45 consecutive days. He adopted and reconstructed 15 villages [destroyed during the earthquake]. He instilled true religion in hundreds of his sadhus and lakhs of devotees. He provided relief and aid by transcending all borders. He never brought in differences of colour, caste and religion while serving. He created innumerable institutions for health and education. He encouraged dowry-free mass marriages. He often said that Satyuga is right here if we stay away from drinks, theft and corruption, otherwise it is the Kaliyuga. With the development of mutual tolerance we can establish world peace. Religion teaches humaneness and rightful living. Conflicts between religions are due to ego and mine-ness. Religion never teaches to divide. ♦



# A Remarkable Religious Leader

*Raymond Brady Williams*

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Presidents, princes, prime ministers, and the rich and famous provide tributes for Pramukh Swami. It is humbling as an academic researcher to compose a tribute. Even more humbling when realizing that the lives of many BAPS followers are the deeper, more important and lasting tribute to his wisdom, piety and guidance. All else is a faint shadow in comparison. Perhaps a few memories from years of research and interaction will kindle salutary memories from those for whom he was the supreme spiritual guide and guru.

Pramukh Swami was leading an International Youth Festival in 1976 at Sardar Patel University [Vidyanagar]. Because of my academic research on guru-disciple relations, a friend recommended that I travel to Gujarat to become acquainted with the BAPS and its guru and spiritual leader. Pramukh Swami welcomed me at the festival to begin forty years of academic study. This tribute from personal memories and associations highlights accomplishments that marked him as one of the most significant religious leaders of his generation.

When asked for reasons of the growth of BAPS, the first response is always, 'Pramukh Swami's ability to attract and inspire talented, competent and committed men to become BAPS sadhus.' In 1950, when he was named 'Pramukh Swami' as president under Yogiji Maharaj, BAPS had only fifty sadhus—only fifty. In 1981 at the Bicentenary Celebration of the birth of Swaminarayan, he initiated more than 200 sadhus in one ceremony. He initiated over one thousand sadhus who now provide the religious and administrative leadership behind the amazing

BAPS growth. They gathered in Sarangpur in April 2016 to honor him. Those sadhus and the *satsangis* who follow his teachings and example are his greatest legacy and the highest tribute for this spiritual guru.

He founded a special educational program at Sarangpur to prepare young men for their various responsibilities as sadhus through a sophisticated multi-year curriculum. The traditional method of preparation had been an apprenticeship of traveling with the guru to learn by watching and assisting. When asked why he founded a sadhu training center at Sarangpur, he responded, 'So many men wish to become sadhus, I cannot take them with me in buses to visit homes and temples. It would overwhelm the villagers.' In creating a school for sadhus, as through many other initiatives, Pramukh Swami renewed ancient traditions through creative adaptation to meet contemporary needs.

He inspired rigorous religious education programs for followers of all ages. The training of sadhus is the capstone, but graded instructional programs for children, youths, and adults are conducted in all BAPS centers around the world. These are accompanied by annual examinations systematically graded. Moreover, an extensive publication program creates graded materials to prepare all students for the examinations. It is the most extensive centralized international religious education system of any religious community.

That religious education is accompanied by support of education in schools, colleges and universities. He inspired and founded hostels,



schools and professional schools. More important, however, might be the encouragement support of students in all their school studies. Many BAPS temples have programs in which youths study for their Cambridge exams, O Levels and A Levels, and their SAT and ACT exams in classes taught by students who received highest marks on previous exams. Computers, books, resources, and tutoring in languages, maths, sciences and the humanities are available in many temples and centers.

Traveling with Pramukh Swami or watching him over the years revealed his intimate knowledge of and advice to his followers. He was constantly on the move except while stopping to meet with his followers. He visited and blessed their homes and their businesses. He initiated their children. He instructed them in temples and meeting halls. They wrote or called to get his advice about all sorts of pressing decisions about family and marriage, raising children, occupational and business opportunities, life and death, and spiritual development. He responded by writing letters and engaging in private counseling conversations with rich and poor, old and young, wise and foolish. His instructions for followers were based on deep knowledge of sacred texts and wisdom, and also on intimate knowledge of their challenges and opportunities.

Under his leadership BAPS Swaminarayan institutions expanded at an astounding rate in India and abroad. Others can recount the numbers, but observation of his involvement over the years makes it possible to affirm that Pramukh Swami was intimately involved in all the decisions about when, where and how temples, hospitals, schools and other institutions would be built. In 1971, when he followed Yogiji Maharaj as spiritual leader, the only temple in Britain was a small renovated chapel building in Islington. Only five members were known to be in the United States,

and Pramukh Swami gave the list to Dr K.C. Patel, a professor at Brooklyn College, with the challenge to organize them. Dr Patel renovated a hall for the first BAPS temple in Flushing, NY. Thereafter, Pramukh Swami personally [consecrated it], and inspired and directed the building of an elaborate infrastructure in many countries for his followers. An outsider can affirm that work as an astounding example of adaptive leadership across many decades and several continents.

Pramukh Swami welcomed a Christian scholar from a western academic institution to engage in research on BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism. For more than forty years he was always gracious, patient, kind and caring. It was a remarkable gift that is a testimony to his generosity of spirit and gracious hospitality, also evidenced in his many and diverse relationships. That generosity of spirit and tolerance is much at risk, in academic and religious organizations as elsewhere.

As the saying goes, ‘Fools and scholars rush in where angels fear to tread.’ Some years ago, I asked him about his personal experience of Akshar, and then asked how the decision would be made about his successor and who that person was—questions his followers would not presume to ask. Nevertheless, he carefully explained his experience as spiritual guru and the process of succession. Of course, he did not reveal to me who that person was. However, he did conclude the conversation by saying, ‘When that person was initiated, I knew that to be the person.’ It did not surprise me, then, when it was revealed that Pramukh Swami had designated Mahant Swami to be the current spiritual guru for his followers.

What happens next will be the true and lasting tribute to Pramukh Swami—a gentle and gracious person and a remarkable religious leader. ♦



## VOLUNTEERS

At 6.00 p.m., Saturday, 13 August 2016, a sudden sombre silence spread throughout Sarangpur. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had breathed his last.

The news spread from his inner chambers to devotees worldwide in minutes – by the power of modern technology.

Amid disbelief and despondency thousands dashed towards Sarangpur for final darshan of beloved *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri's body was to lie in repose until 17 August in a specially prepared glass cabin maintained at -10°C.

The volunteer response for *seva* was itself a tribute to Swamishri – a legacy of the many large-scale festivals he had inspired over the preceding 35 years.

On hearing the sad news, volunteers immediately left whatever they were doing and rushed off to Sarangpur. They took whatever means they could find with the aim of serving in whatever capacity required to handle the inevitable inflow of people expected. Some left their businesses, some took holiday leave from their jobs and some even quit their jobs on being denied leave. Such was their deep desire to offer their final tribute

and service to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The sudden event in Sarangpur had the potential to result in uncontrollable chaos, but the experience and training gained by sadhus and volunteers by serving in many previous festivals prevented this.

Within the first few hours sadhus and volunteers from nearby villages, towns and cities reached Sarangpur. On the way, the lead sadhus arranged for initial equipment, supplies and experts to be sent to Sarangpur.

A central volunteers department was set up in the offices behind the main mandir. A total of 26 volunteer departments sprung into action. These included the kitchen, electric, water, security, transport and parking, construction, accommodation, decoration, housekeeping, press, guest reception, audio-video, communications, enquiries, darshan arrangements and others.

From around 7.00 p.m. on 13 August until the morning of 18 August, around 8,730 men and 1,200 women volunteers served round-the-clock in these various departments.

In general, volunteers served in 12-hour shifts. Many were also observing *ek tana* (eating only one meal a day) and *dharna-parna* (eating

only on alternate days), since it was the holy month of Shravan.

The volunteers admirably adjusted to the basic accommodation and other facilities that were possible at such short notice. Their only focus was to offer their last service to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

It was a monumental and united effort by the sadhus and volunteers of all departments. Government support, both state and local, was instrumental in ensuring the rapid deployment of necessary facilities.

The following is a brief overview of the services provided by some of the main departments.

### DARSHAN ARRANGEMENTS

Lead Sadhu: Apurvamuni Swami

From 11.30 p.m. on 13 August till 6.00 a.m. on 17 August, Swamishri lay in repose in the special temperature-controlled glass cabin in the Guru Darshan Mandapam.

During this time, around 1,000 volunteers from Rajkot, Vadodara and Ahmedabad served to ensure the smooth flow of the hundreds of thousands of devotees and well-wishers who came for Swamishri's darshan.

On both sides of the Guru Darshan Mandapam were buffer areas, one for men and one for women. From here, the devotees, who patiently waited for about two hours for their turn, were ushered into the Guru Darshan Mandapam.

The volunteers served day and night, without regard for food or rest, since even throughout the nights there was a steady flow of devotees arriving for Swamishri's darshan.

From 6.30 a.m. on 17 August, these volunteers helped in the darshan arrangements for Swamishri's final cremation rites in the mandir precincts. Despite the intensely hot weather, they diligently served until the end, even ensuring that after all the devotees had departed all the chairs had been collected and accounted for.

### CONSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT

Lead Sadhus: Jnaneshwar Swami, Nikhilesh Swami

To cater for the vast inflow of people, various structures and facilities were erected.

Amenities were set up in the mandir grounds, *gurukul* and the various parking areas.

Dozens of marquees of varying sizes, tents, traditional *mandaps*, toilets and bathrooms were rapidly fitted due to the prompt support of suppliers from Rajkot, Ahmedabad and other places. In particular, Shri Hemubhai Gandhi (Gandhi Corporation), Shri Madhubhai Parmar (Parmar Kishore Mandap Service), Lalji and Sons, and Atulbhai Parekh (Parekh Mandap Service) generously provided the required materials. They also sent experts to help the sadhus and volunteers swiftly set up the structures. The immediately required facilities were set up overnight. Then, other facilities were set up.

In addition, the department volunteers assisted in preparing helipads for the dignitaries who would be arriving by helicopter for Swamishri's darshan.

Also, 500,000 sq.ft. of green floor netting were laid to reduce the floating dust as lakhs of people walked through the mandir and *gurukul* grounds.

The department was also responsible for leveling 1.2 million sq. ft. of uneven grounds used for parking in five separate locations.

### ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT

Lead Sadhus: Divyapurush Swami, Shilbhushan Swami, Vivekdarshan Swami and Shvetprakash Swami.

For the sadhus and volunteers of the electric department, there were two urgent tasks: first, they had to ensure that the route of Swamishri's *palkhi yatra* from his room in Sarvasva to the Guru Darshan Mandapam was adequately lit; and second, they had to set up the cooling arrangements in the special glass cabin where



Swamishri was to be placed and maintain the temperature at -10°C. This was achieved with the help of cold storage expert Shri B.M. Gohil from Ahmedabad.

By morning, the department had also fitted lights in the parking and reception areas.

Contractors were contacted to send lights of various types, air-conditioning units of varying sizes, fans (ceiling and standing), cables, generators and other necessary equipment. By early morning, contractors from Rajkot and Ahmedabad had sent the required materials and staff to install them.

As the relentless flow of devotees increased, requirements increased. So, more supplies were ordered, which were again promptly delivered and installed where required for parking, kitchen, walking paths and other areas.

The sadhus and volunteers briskly served to fulfil all the requirements, ignoring fatigue and hunger.

The contractors, among whom were devotees and well-wishers, provided all their equipment and staff free of charge, taking great honour in being able to serve Swamishri and pay tribute to him in this way.

## ACCOMMODATIONS DEPARTMENTS

Lead Sadhus: Aksharcharan Swami, Atmatrupta Swami.

Limited resources were available on site to accommodate the thousands of devotees and well-wishers from abroad and distant places in India. Hence, announcements were made to inform everyone about the shortage of accommodations. Initially, the only available accommodation options were the various guest quarters at the BAPS Mandirs in Sarangpur and Gadhada and the hostel rooms in the Swaminarayan Vidyamandir in Sarangpur.

However, more accommodation facilities were possible due to the wholehearted and generous support of the Hanuman Mandir in Sarangpur. In addition support was also given by the villagers of Sarangpur and other nearby towns and villages, such as, Botad, Barwala, Navda, Senthli, Samadhiyala, Dhikvadi, Lathidad, Ayodhyapuram, Vallabhipur, Mahendrapuram, Paliyad and others.

At all of these locations, the hosts provided accommodations and food at minimal costs. However, the demand for accommodation outstripped the supply and, in most of the rooms double or triple the original capacity had to be accommodated. Many slept on the bare floor, some slept in the open, some would rest wherever they found a space to lay down. Despite the hardships faced due to the limitation of resources, devotees cheerfully cooperated and tolerated the inconveniences.



Around 375 volunteers served round-the-clock to ensure the minimum of discomfort to all.

### KITCHEN DEPARTMENT

Lead Sadhus: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Brahmatirth Swami, Ghanshyamprasad Swami.

With the generous cooperation of various suppliers from Botad, Barwala, Ahmedabad, Mahesana, Sankari and other places, vegetables, grains, flour, pulses, milk, juice and water were quickly delivered in adequate quantities to Sarangpur.

Due to the extended hours the volunteers of all departments were serving, the dining area provided breakfast from 5.00 to 10.00 a.m., lunch from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. and dinner from 5.00 p.m. to 2.30 a.m.

On 17 August, pre-packed *prasad* packets were given to all the devotees who came for the final rites.

Around 30 sadhus and over 1,000 volunteers served for the four days.

### WATER DEPARTMENT

Lead Sadhus: Vedagna Swami, Bhakti-jivan Swami.

Before Swamishri's *palkhi yatra* took place, manned drinking water counters and some toilet blocks were set up. Then, by working throughout the night, more drinking water spots and

toilet blocks were arranged and clean water for use in the kitchen was arranged.

A total of 18 drinking water spots, located in the parking areas, mandir campus, *gurukul* campus, darshan waiting areas and dining area, were in operation day and night.

On 17 August, devotees took their place in the mandir grounds from early morning, so water was provided to everyone where they were seated.

Due to the rapid and generous support of devotees from Ahmedabad, Botad and Vidyanagar, the requirements for drinking water pouches and bottles, water jugs and ice were fulfilled.

In addition, a large mobile RO plant was set up by the Research Institute from Bhavnagar to provide drinking water.

From Mahesana, a large refrigerated tanker was provided to store cold drinking water, and to transport drinking water, tankers were sent from Vadodara and Vallabhipur.

The water department volunteers also sprayed water on the grounds to help reduce the floating dust caused by the hot, dry weather.

### TRANSPORT DEPARTMENT

Lead Sadhus: Rushiraj Swami, Tyagraj Swami, Munivandan Swami.

Parking arrangements were quickly made in several locations near the mandir. Throughout the four days, there was a continuous flow of vehicles from all directions leading to Sarangpur. Volunteers were on duty day and night to ensure the smooth flow of traffic and that the parking spaces available were optimally used.

Over 100,000 private vehicles (cars, buses, jeeps, motorbikes, scooters, etc.) were catered for over the four days.

On the final day, all the departments efficiently wound up whatever they had set up.

Thus, with tremendous devotion and dedication, the sadhus and volunteers served wholeheartedly as their final tribute to *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦



# Memorial Assemblies



New Delhi



Mumbai



Ahmedabad



Surat

**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj made a deep impact in the lives of countless devotees and well-wishers everywhere. All had been inspired and blessed by him. That is why, after Swamishri had passed away and his final rites had concluded, memorial assemblies in his honour were held in thousands of towns and cities in India and abroad.

At all 4,300 BAPS centres worldwide, devotees in large numbers paid their tributes and reminisced about their time with him in the weekly assemblies.

In addition, between August and November many large centres held public tribute assemblies in which local dignitaries, representatives of local spiritual and community organizations and other eminent personalities were invited.

Such widespread outpouring of tributes from people of all backgrounds and strata of society is a testament to the heartfelt respect and reverence everyone has for Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

When the Tribute Assembly on 22 September was held in London, the iconic Wembley Stadium arch was lit in orange in tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In addition to the assemblies, the American flag was flown at the Capitol building in Washington on 17 August in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Also, days and certificates of honour were declared at several places in America.

The following is a list of public memorial assemblies held worldwide.





BAPS Mandir, Los Angeles



BAPS Mandir, London

City	State	Date	City	State	Date	City	State	Date
<b>INDIA</b>			Charlotte	NC	18 Sept.	Toronto	Ontario	10 Sept.
Ahmedabad	Gujarat	3 Sept.	Chicago	Illinois	18 Sept.	Vancouver	British	
Amreli	Gujarat	28 Aug.	Dallas	Texas	11 Sept.		Columbia	7 Sept.
Atladara	Gujarat	27 Aug.	Delaware	Delaware	11 Sept.	Winnipeg	Manitoba	4 Sept.
Bangalore	Karnataka	10 Sept.	Detroit	Michigan	25 Sept.	<b>UK</b>		
Bhadra	Gujarat	1 Sept.	Edison	NJ	10-11 Sept.	Aberdeen		18 Sept.
Bharuch	Gujarat	2 Sept.	Hartford	Connecticut	18 Sept.	Alpertown		16 Sept.
Bhavnagar	Gujarat	26 Aug.	Houston	Texas	2 Oct.	Amersham		15 Sept.
Chennai	Tamil Nadu	17 Sept.	Indianapolis	Indiana	18 Sept.	Birmingham		14 Oct.
Dhari	Gujarat	28 Aug.	Jackson	Mississippi	18 Sept.	Bolton		14 Oct.
Dhule	Maharashtra	14 Sept.	Jacksonville	Florida	18 Sept.	Cambridge		15 Sept.
Gadhada	Gujarat	23 Aug.	Jersey City	New Jersey	18 Sept.	Coventry		16 Oct.
Gandhinagar	Gujarat	6 Sept.	Knoxville	Tennessee	11 Sept.	Crawley		14 Sept.
Gondal	Gujarat	31 Aug.	Little Rock	Arkansas	10 Sept.	East London		20 Sept.
Indore	Madhya Pradesh	5 Sept.	Los Angeles	California	18 Sept.	Edinburgh		17 Sept.
Jaipur	Rajasthan	3 Sept.	Miami	Florida	18 Sept.	Finchley		5 Sept.
Junagadh	Gujarat	4 Sept.	Minneapolis	Minnesota	25 Sept.	Glasgow		17 Sept.
Kalol	Gujarat	14 Sept.	Nashville	Tennessee	17 Sept.	Harrow		7 Sept.
Kolkata	West Bengal	3 Sept.	New York	New York	11 Sept.	Leeds		October
Lathi	Gujarat	13 Sept.	Orlando	Florida	7 Sept.	Leicester		28 Sept.
Mahuva	Gujarat	4 Sept.	Parsippany	New Jersey	10 Sept.	London (Devotees)		25 Sept.
Mumbai	Maharashtra	11 Sept.	Phoenix	Arizona	18 Sept.	London (Dignitaries)		22 Sept.
Nadiad	Gujarat	27 Aug.	Portland	Oregon	11 Sept.	Loughborough		18 Sept.
Nagpur	Maharashtra	1 Sept.	Robbinsville	New Jersey	17 Sept.	Luton		18 Sept.
New Delhi	New Delhi	9 Sept.	San Antonio	Texas	18 Sept.	Manchester		8 Oct.
Pune	Maharashtra	28 Aug.	San Jose	California	17 Sept.	Newcastle		15 Sept.
Rajkot	Gujarat	30 Aug.	Savannah	Georgia	3 Sept.	Norwich		11 Sept.
Sankari	Gujarat	4 Sept.	Seattle	Washington	4 Sept.	Nottingham		18 Sept.
Silvassa	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	28 Aug.	St. Louis	Missouri	18 Sept.	Preston		8 Oct.
Surat	Gujarat	4 Sept.	Tampa	Florida	4 Sept.	Reading		20 Sept.
			Washington	DC	18 Sept.	South East London		23 Sept.
			Westborough	Mass.	18 Sept.	South Harrow		9 Sept.
<b>USA</b>			<b>CANADA</b>			South London		23 Sept.
Atlanta	Georgia	3 Sept.	Calgary	Alberta	3 Sept.	Southampton		23 Aug.
Austin	Texas	25 Sept.	Edmonton	Alberta	4 Sept.	Southend-on-Sea		16 Oct.
Bloomington	Indiana	18 Sept.	Fort McMurray	Alberta	4 Sept.	Watford		30 Sept.
Boston	Mass.	10 Sept.	Ottawa	Ontario	17 Sept.	Welhat		October
Brandon	Manitoba	5 Sept.	Regina	Saskatchewan	1 Sept.	Wellingborough		October
			Saskatoon	Saskatchewan	2 Sept.	West London		11 Oct.



BAPS Mandir, Nairobi



Dar-es-Salaam



Wembley Stadium arch, London, lit in orange to pay tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj

City	Country	Date	City	Country	Date	City	Country	Date
<b>EUROPE</b>			Johannesburg	South Africa	24 Sept.	Adelaide	Australia	22 Sept.
Aachen	Germany	5 Nov.	Kampala	Uganda	1 Oct.	Bangkok	Thailand	20 Aug.
Antwerp,	Belgium	30 Oct.	Kisumu	Kenya	7 Oct.	Brisbane	Australia	9 Oct
Lisbon	Portugal	20 Nov.	Mombasa	Kenya	8 Oct.	Auckland		
Milan	Italy	29 Oct.	Mwanza	Tanzania	12 Oct.	Canberra	Australia	17 Sept.
Paris	France	18 Oct.	Nairobi	Kenya	17 Sept.	Christchurch	New Zealand	17 Sept.
Vienna	Austria	22 Oct.	Nakuru	Kenya	6 Oct.	Hong Kong		1 Oct.
Warsaw	Poland	19 Nov.	Pretoria	South Africa	27 Sept.	Jakarta	Indonesia	24 Sept.
Zurich	Switzerland	6 Nov.				Perth	Australia	2 Oct.
			<b>MIDDLE EAST</b>			Singapore		21 Aug.
<b>AFRICA</b>			Bahrain	Bahrain	2 Oct	Sydney	Australia	18 Sept.
Arusha	Tanzania	11 Oct.	Dubai	UAE	8 Sept.	Wellington	New Zealand	11 Sept.
Dar-Es-Salaam	Tanzania	19 Sept.	Kuwait	Kuwait	30 Sept.			
Durban	South Africa	28 Sept.	Muscat	Oman	22 Sept.			
Eldoret	Kenya	5 Oct.						
Gaborone	Botswana	25 Sept.	<b>ASIA PACIFIC</b>					
Jinja	Uganda	4 Oct.	Melbourne	Australia	11 Sept.			

# Places Named in Honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

*As a long-term tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, many authorities decided and declared, of their own accord, to name public roads, bridges and venues under their jurisdiction in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The following are some of the places named in the memory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.*



‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg’, Riverfront, Ahmedabad

**Ahmedabad:** The 11-km stretch of road from Dadhichi Bridge (Chandrabhaga) to Vasana Barrage along the riverfront of Sabarmati River was declared as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg’.

**Surat:** The newly constructed international cricket stadium in the suburb of Pal was named ‘Pramukh Swami Cricket Stadium’.

**Vadodara:** The longest flyover in the city, located in the Fatehganj area, was named ‘Pramukh Swami Flyover Bridge’.

**Rajkot:** 800-seat auditorium newly built by Rajkot Municipal Corporation named ‘Pramukh Swami Auditorium’.

**Hyderabad-Secunderabad:** The president of the Gujarat Seva Mandal named the tower located in their society ‘Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj Tower’.

**Bardoli:** 14-km road from Bardoli to Khej was named ‘Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Marg’. The Bardoli local council named the renovated grounds by the lake as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Stadium’.

**Gondal:** The under-construction Science Centre and adjoining playground declared as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Science Centre and Playground’.

**Gadhada:** The riverfront road adjacent to the BAPS Mandir named as ‘Yagnapurush Marg’, and the bridge below Akshar Ghat named as ‘Gunatit Setu’.

**Borsad:** New garden being created by the Borsad Local Council to be named ‘Pramukh Swami Baug’.

**Himmatnagar:** The Engineer Circle renamed as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Circle’. Mahakali Road to be named ‘Pramukh Swami Marg’.

**Dehgam:** The local council offices have been renamed ‘Pramukh Swami Seva Sadan’. Also, the road leading up to the BAPS Mandir named as ‘Pramukh Swami Marg’.

**Ranpur:** Road from the Police Station to the





Inauguration of 'Pramukh Swami Auditorium', Rajkot



Inauguration of 'Pramukh Swami Flyover Bridge', Vadodara

railway station named 'Pramukh Swami Marg'. Also, the towns Water Tower named 'Pramukh Swami Jaldhara'.

**Bareja:** Road from Ravi Chambers to the Nagar Palika named 'Pramukh Swami Marg'. Also, the tubewell and water tank near Ravalvas named 'Param Puja Pramukh Swami Vari Gruh'.

**Malpara:** New town garden named as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Udyan'.

**Tajpur:** Main town Square named as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Chowk'.

**Navda:** Main town square named as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Chowk'.

**Moti Vavdi:** Main retail area of the town named 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Market'.

**Vaghai:** Area opposite local school renamed 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar' and the RTO (Road Transport Office) checkpost named 'Pramukh Swami Circle'.

**Chokdi:** The large town lake, named 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Sarovar'.

**Gavasad:** Main entrance gate to town named 'Pramukh Swami Pravesh Dwar'.

**Botad:** Botad School No. 2 renamed as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Prathmik Shala' (Primary School).

**Padra:** Modern, 700-seat capacity hall built by Padra Nagar Palika named as 'Pramukh Swami Nagar Hall'.

**Khambhda:** New approach road to the village named 'Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Marg'. Road towards the old village (towards the sheperds' residences) named as 'Yagnapurush Marg'. Road from the library to Yoginagar name 'Yogiji Maharaj Marg'. To the left of the highway the *darbar* was renamed 'Pramukh Swami Marg' and the Patel area, was renamed 'Yogi Nagar'.

**Godhavara:** Road which passes through the entire town named 'Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg'. Also, the Navapura area renamed as 'Pramukh Swami Nagar' and the area opposite the primary school named as 'Shastriji Maharaj Sheri'.

**In the places below, roads were named as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg' or 'Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg':**

**Anand:** Road from Anand Town Hall to the statue of Bhai Kaka.

**Junagadh:** Road from the Collector's Office to Akshar Mandir.

**Bharuch:** Road from Jhadeshvar Crossroads to Bharuch Railway Station.

**Anjar:** Road from Balram Nagar to image of Chhagan Bapa.

**Nadiad:** The ring road under construction to be named 'Pramukh Swami Marg'.

**Morbi:** Roads from Natraj Crossroads to Shobeshwar and from Bapa Sitaram Crossroads to the district government offices.

**Amreli:** Road from Centrepont (Circuit House)



Road named in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Anand

to Maninagar.

**Manavadar:** Road from Cinema Square to Junagadh Road.

**Barwala:** Main road from Khamidana Gate to State Bank of India.

**Devgadh Baria:** The Station Road has been renamed as 'Pramukh Swami Marg'.

**Khedbrahma:** Road from Lakshmipura Road to Khedbrahma.

**Dhandhuka:** Main road at entry of town named 'Pramukh Swami Marg'.

**Amalsad:** Main road through the village.

**Dholka:** Road from Kharkuva to Ambica Crossroads.

**Bavla:** Road from GED Archi Farm to Pramukh Swami Garden.

**Patadi:** Jin Road renamed as 'Pramukh Swami Marg'.

**Modasa:** Botesar Talav renamed as 'Pramukh Swami Sarovar'.

**Maliya (Hatina):** Road from the large flyover at Mengal River towards Sasan.

**Sarangpur:** Main road through the village.

**Talala (Gir):** Road from Gundaran Crossroads to the railway station.

**Dhrol:** Main road of town (Jodiya Road).

**Dhankaniya:** Road from the bird feeder to the Village Square.

**Jadila:** Road from Ranpur-Barwala Road to the Swaminarayan Mandir named 'Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg'. Main lake of town



Road named in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Junagadh

named 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Sarovar' and name of 'Vadiyavali Nagar' changed to 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar'.

**Panvi:** Road from main entrance gate of the village up to the school.

**Lundharai:** Road from Main Square to Patel Street.

**Khas:** Road from bus stand to Sarangpur railway station.

**Kundal:** The under-construction new main road leading into the village.

**Muldharai:** Main road of the village.

**Dhikvali:** Road from Ramji Mandir to the old school.

**Damnagar:** Main road of town.

**Lathi:** Main road of town.

**Dharsa:** Main road of town.

**Navi Chovisi:** Road from National Highway 8 to Swaminarayan Vadi.

**Vijalpur:** Road from Navsari Cotton Mill to the agriculture college.

**Bilimora:** Road to the east of the city.

**Adalaj:** Road leading from the Adalaj Stepwell to the Ahmedabad highway.

**Chaloda:** Road from bus station to Charbaug.

**Kutianna:** Main town square named 'Pramukh Swami Chok'. Main road of town named.

**Mendarda:** Main road of the town.

**Dhoraji:** Main road of the town.

**Upleta:** Main road of the town.

**Keshod:** Main roads of the town.



# GOLDEN MEMORIES

You were born as Shantilal. Renamed Sadhu Narayanswarupdas.  
Appointed as Pramukh. And hailed as guru Pramukh  
Swami Maharaj.

From a farmer's boy to a world renowned guru,  
your great life and work were profound expressions of  
devotion, love, humility, service and integrity.

You brought to us the Infinite in its vast array of finite forms.  
Simple, amazing and elevating.  
You celebrated, guided and provided all your life.

For decades you impacted every aspect of our lives.  
Your every action, word and gesture was for the good and  
progress of all.

Such are the lofty standards you have set, that...

...your goodness will fascinate and inspire generations to come.

...your beacon of hope will redeem us from the tempestuous  
ocean of life.

...your boundless generosity will help us transcend  
the selfishness that governs our world.

Finally, on your departure,  
you have made us heirs to a priceless treasure of memories,  
mandirs and services.

But sadly, it has been said that with the passage of  
time human memory and emotions fade.

But, Swami Bapa, you are different!

You are Aksharbrahman, beyond all measures of time and space.  
Eternal!

Thus, your memories will never wane,  
remaining ever fresh in our minds and hearts.

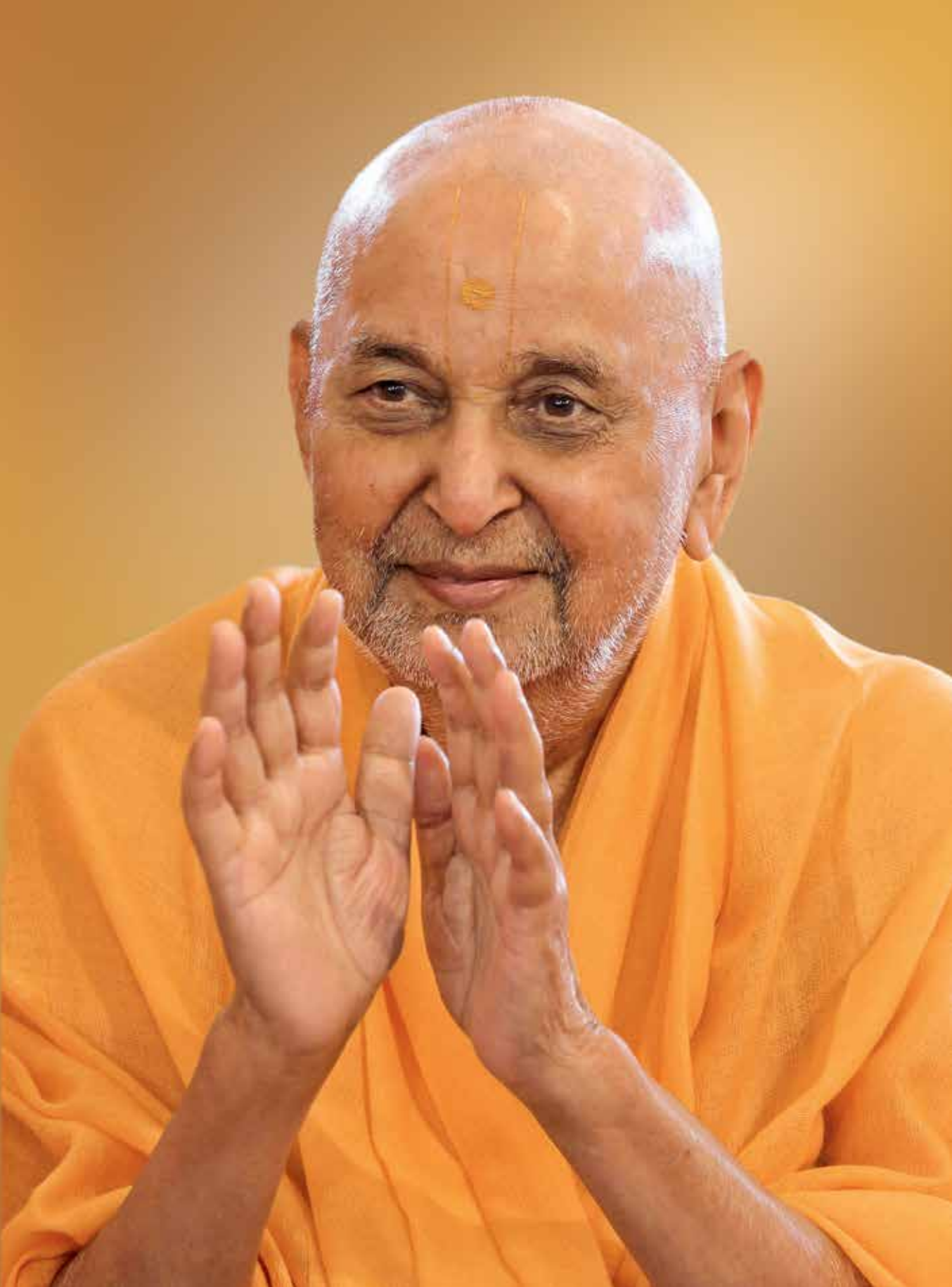
Your eternal virtues, work without borders and transcendent  
wisdom will continue to enlighten, encourage and emancipate  
people of all eras.

Our soulful thanks for being with us and gifting us a timeless  
legacy of

Golden Memories,

*Forever...*





# DEVOTION TO GOD AND GURU

“Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan... Shastriji Maharaj... Yogiji Maharaj...”

Their names always played in your heart, and on your mind and lips. They were the cornerstones of your life. You revered and served them, sung their glory; giving all credit to them for whatever you accomplished. Your servitude and devotion were unparalleled.

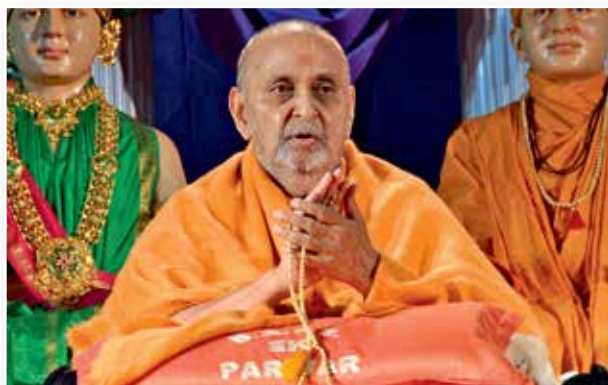
You always had Harikrishna Maharaj (Thakorji) with you; keeping him in the forefront in everything you did. In times of honour, inaugurations, celebrations and introductions – it was Him first and then you followed. Swamishri, He was your soul, and you were His soul.

Your absolute devotion to Thakorji and the gurus trickled into countless lives; inspiring bhakti and servitude in them.

*May our devotion to you and Maharaj remain as strong, forever...*









# FOR THE GOOD OF ALL

Yours is a story of Herculean effort and unconditional compassion.

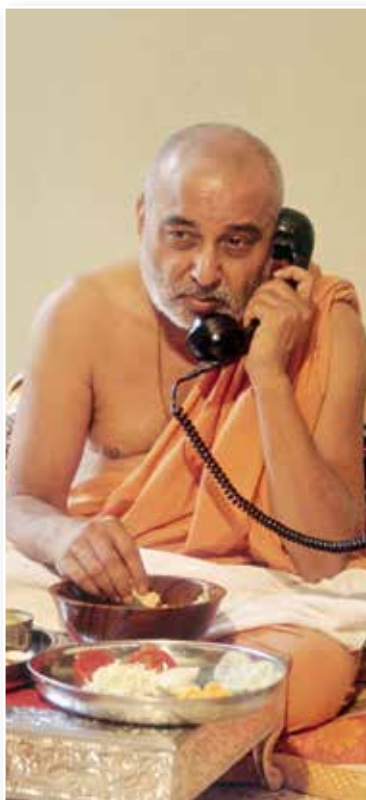
You travelled untiringly to serve and uplift humanity. You visited the huts and homes of countless in India and abroad.

The modes of transport, diversity of locations and places, varieties of occasions and celebrations and the range of audiences and seasons – all encompassed and also stretched beyond the spectrum of human endurance and service.

Yet, Swamishri, you were always at ease, unruffled and willing to go the extra mile to please, sanctify and edify all.

Swamishri, may your *vicharan* inspire us to exert ourselves for the good of all, *forever...*







# DIVINE LOVE

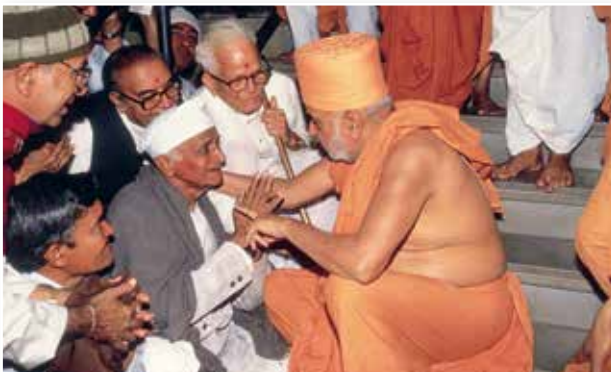
Your divine love cut across barriers of young and old, poor and rich, lettered and unlettered, and mine and others.

Swamishri, you always perceived the soul and not the body. You saw the Divine in all. That was why you so naturally struck an instant connection with children, bonhomie with teenagers and youths, and instilled hope for the ailing and old.

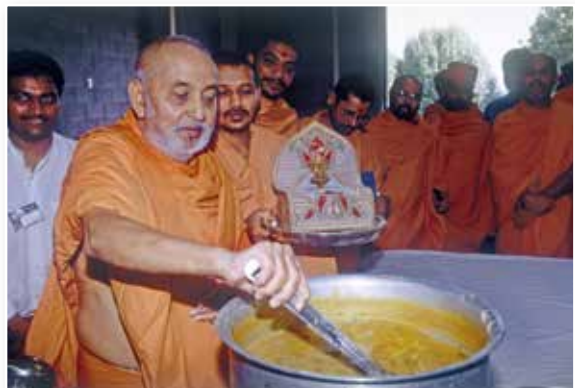
Children loved to play with you, teenagers celebrated in your presence, and the old felt relieved and strong, bursting with smiles before you.

You gave support, evoked humour, instilled dignity and nourished both the body and soul. This was the divine love you shared with humanity: pure, selfless and liberating.

*May we share your divine love with others, forever...*







# SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Swamishri, spiritual unity was your forte, warmly welcoming and eagerly engaging with spiritual masters of all faiths.

You, yourself, defined and practised, 'Dharma is that which spreads mutual love'.

You believed that unity of faiths would make our future universally strong, serene and successful. Thus, by building bridges of friendship and trust, you promoted a common platform of values for all of mankind to stand on.

You taught us Yogiji Maharaj's view to accept the best in others to help strengthen our own faith. But most of all, it was your respect for all faiths and desire for peaceful co-existence that endeared you to all.

*May our spiritual friendship flourish with all, forever...*



Chief Rabbi Baksi Doron



The Dalai Lama



Pope John Paul II

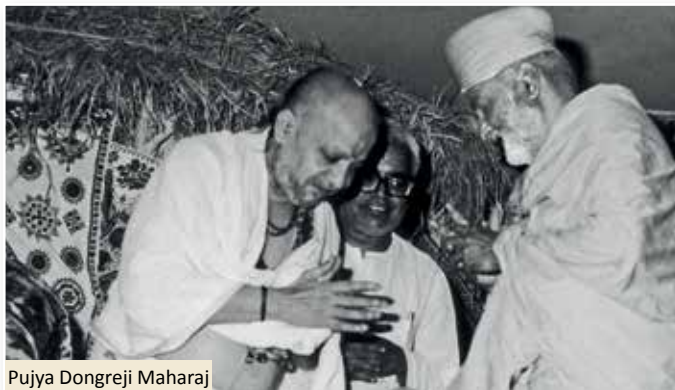


Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji



Pujya Pandurang Shastriji

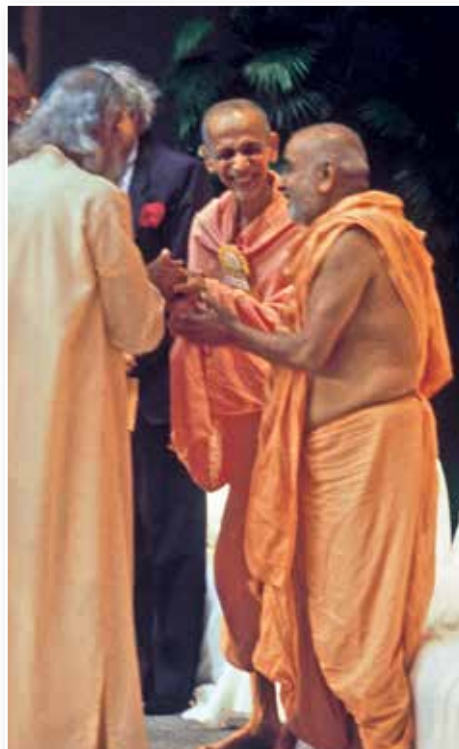




Pujya Dongreji Maharaj



Pujya Baldevdasji at the Dalit Mahasammelan



Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji and  
Pujya Swami Shri Sachchidanandiji



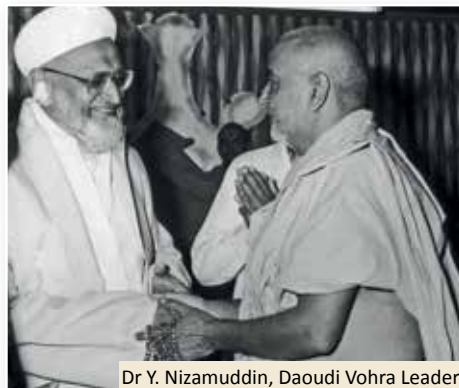
Pujya Dayanand Saraswatiji



Jain Acharya Pujya Muni Shri Shushilkumarji



Shri Jagjitsinghji, Namdhari Sikh Sampradaya



Dr Y. Nizamuddin, Daoudi Vohra Leader



# DIALOGUE WITH LEADERS

It is said that the true measure of a person is how he handles the limelight.

Wherever you went, you were feted and celebrated.

But, for you, Swamishri, such honours were tributes to your beloved Harikrishna Maharaj.

You travelled the globe, greeting and receiving many eminent personalities.

Yet, untouched by the fanfare, you gifted them rosaries, and calmly nurtured their inner spirituality.

You encouraged them to meditate and pray, and left them with a parting message.

For, you truly believed that by rising beyond 'I and mine' one can sincerely serve society.

**Bless us, Bapa, so that we may overcome our innate selfishness to serve selflessly, *forever*...**



Giani Zail Singh, Former President of India



Jomo Kenyatta, founding Father and President of Kenya



Julius Nyerere, Former President of Tanzania



Pujya Ravishankar Maharaj, renowned social worker



Shri A.B. Vajpayee, Former PM of India



Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the UN



HH Sheikh Isa Bin Salaam al Khalifa, Bahrain



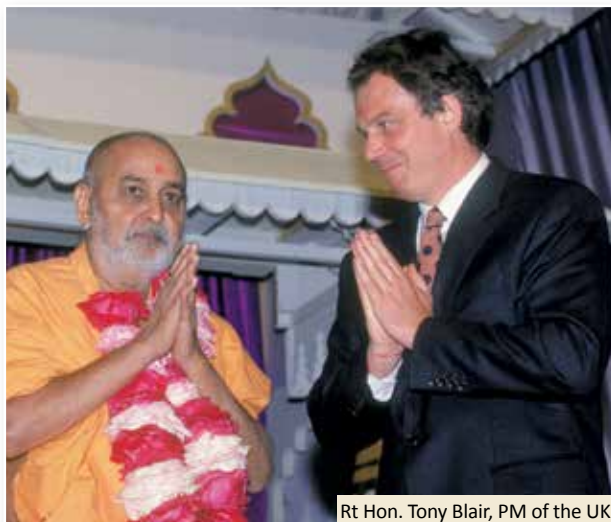
Bill Clinton, Former US President



The Rt Hon. Stephen Harper, PM of Canada



Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda



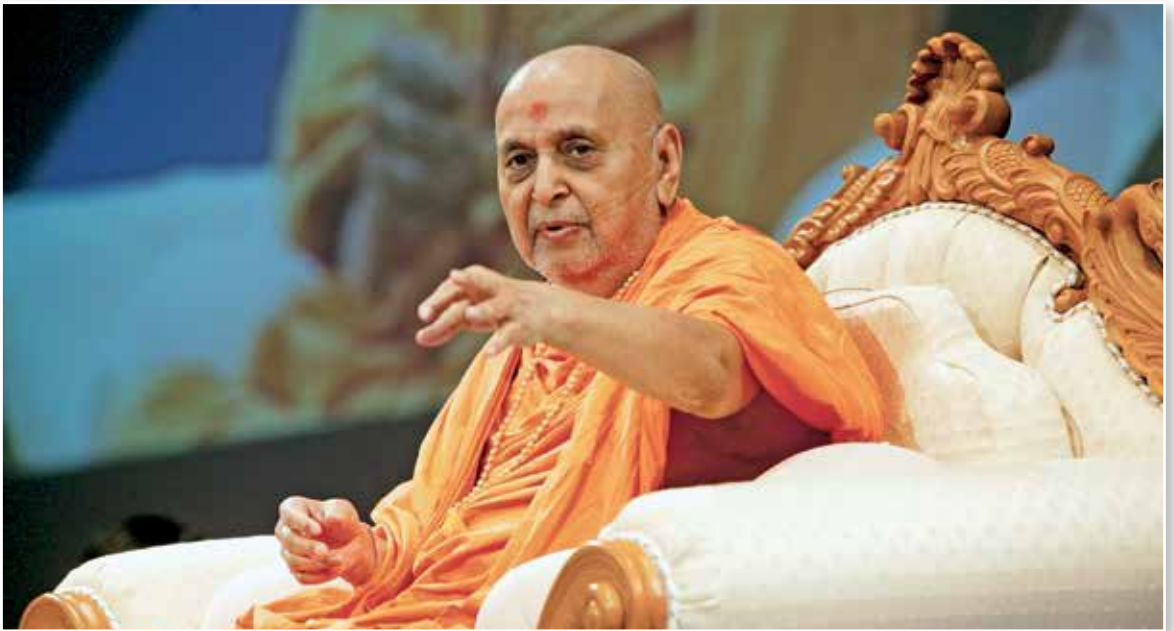
Rt Hon. Tony Blair, PM of the UK



# PEARLS OF WISDOM

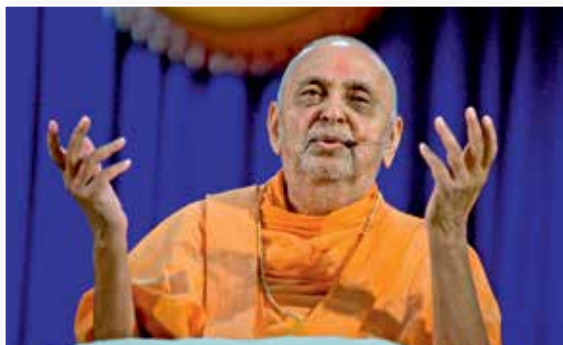
Your advice and blessings were sought by hundreds of thousands worldwide.  
Your simple and lucid words, above any self-interest or bias, appealed to audiences of all ages.  
Your sweet and soft voice conveyed deep spiritual wisdom – the wisdom of God.  
Your teachings resonated with profound philosophical insights and practical guidance.  
Just listening to you brought feelings of profound inner peace and joy.  
But the main reason why your words are still received with so much trust is that you lived what you preached. Every single piece of advice you gave was an integral part of your life.

*That is why, Bapa, your wise words will continue to guide our lives, forever...*





- ♦ Life will be good when you become good.
- ♦ To believe the Truth to be false and the false to be the Truth is delusion. To overcome this delusion is *moksha*.
- ♦ Unless one is charged with genuine drive, one cannot reach great heights.
- ♦ A person who pleases God and guru in this human life is truly intelligent.
- ♦ When you understand the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma, your material desires dissolve and you experience the bliss of God.
- ♦ Keep your life pure and spiritual so that your children can follow and become faithful and good.
- ♦ There is only one way to control and purify the mind: Katha.
- ♦ Peace in one's heart comes with a simple lifestyle and fewer wants.
- ♦ Pray to God before you go to sleep at night and remember him when you wake up in the morning. By praying to God you will have no tension and will experience peace.
- ♦ As soap cleans the body of its dirt, satsang cleans the mind of its impure thoughts.
- ♦ Our life becomes peaceful by reciting the Swaminarayan mantra.
- ♦ Virtue is the only thing that will make us beautiful. Nothing else works effectively.
- ♦ To be *brahmarup* is to understand as the Satpurush understands, to live as the Satpurush lives and to engage in devotion like the Satpurush.
- ♦ Progress is only possible by being true to our core principles.
- ♦ For all householders, fidelity towards one's spouse is true *brahmacharya*.
- ♦ Sincere daily endeavour by engaging in worship, service and discourses leads to true inner peace.





# ETERNALLY PRESENT

Swamishri, physically you have left us, but  
eternally you live on through...

Your countless exemplary virtues, which will illuminate our spiritual path.

Your wonderful work, which will drive our commitment to  
serve humanity.

Your sublime wisdom, which will clear the confusions of  
daily life and enlighten us.

And, your new physical form, Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri, you remain ever-present, for you are Aksharbrahman.

Shriji Maharaj has promised to keep you here on his behalf, forever.

As you often told us, “The thing to understand is that Shriji Maharaj  
has not gone and is never going to go.

He takes a human form in this world and  
leaves it when he wishes. But he is always present.

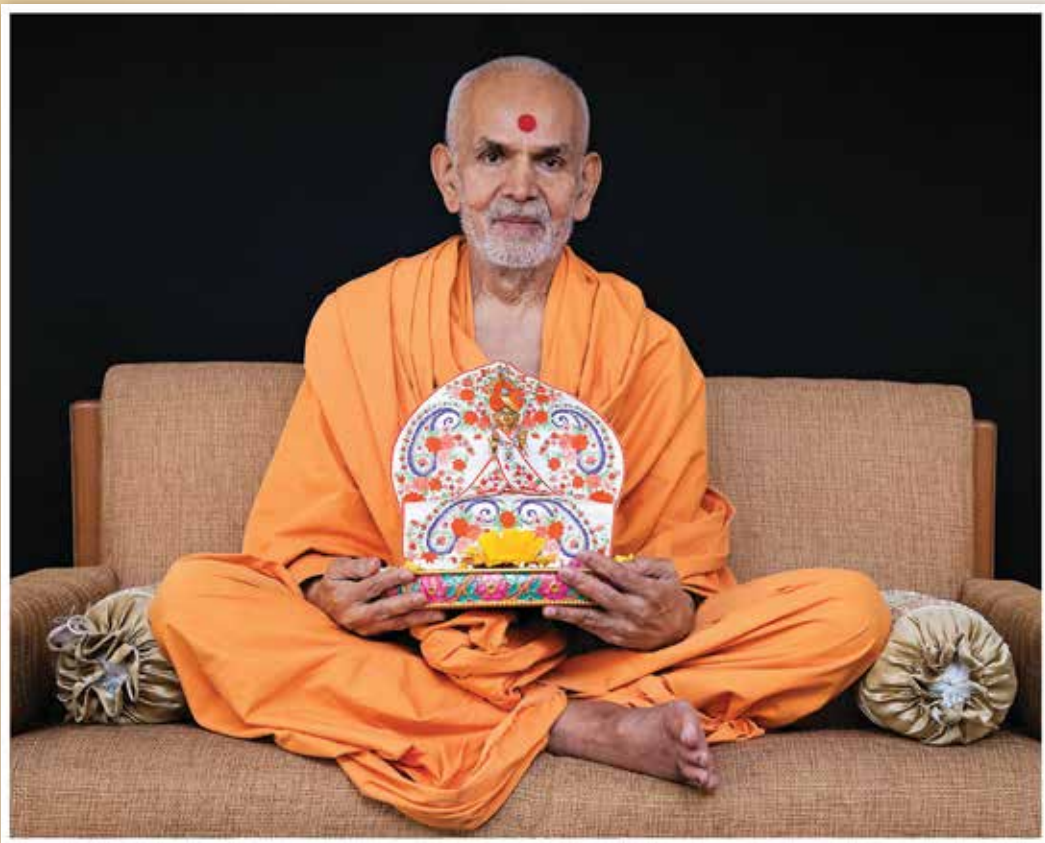
When he comes in another form,  
you will develop that same love again.

But never believe that he is gone. Because he never goes.”

So Swamishri, with your new manifest form  
we will continue to create memories,  
to further reinforce our spirituality and our bonds with you.

And, through these new memories you will be with us, *forever*...





## HIS HOLINESS MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

(Swami Keshavjivandasji)

Sixth and present spiritual guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

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**H**is Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj was born to Dahiben and Manibhai Narayanbhai Patel on 13 September 1933 (Bhadarva *vad* 9, Samvat 1989) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India. A few days later, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of BAPS, visited Jabalpur, blessed the newborn child and named him Keshav. Shastriji Maharaj revealed to Manibhai, “Your child will grow up to serve Satsang in a big way.” His family lovingly called him Vinu.

Manibhai was originally a native of Anand in Gujarat and had settled in Jabalpur for business. Vinubhai spent his formative years in Jabalpur, completing his primary and secondary education in an English-medium school. He was exceptionally brilliant and completed his 12th grade at the Christ Church Boys Senior Secondary School in Jabalpur. Thereafter, he returned with his parents to his native town of Anand, where

he enrolled at the College of Agriculture.

Despite his deep inner spirituality, his sharp intellect was inclined towards rational and logical reasoning. Only a great spiritual master could penetrate his reasoning and awaken the dormant spiritual spark within him. In 1951-52, he came into the contact of His Holiness Yogiji Maharaj, the spiritual successor of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. Impressed by Yogiji Maharaj's spiritual charisma and selfless love, he travelled with Yogiji Maharaj during his summer vacations. Yogiji Maharaj's love drew the young Vinubhai closer towards him.

In 1956, Vinubhai graduated with a bachelor's degree in agriculture, and through his association with Yogiji Maharaj he decided to take the path of renunciation. On 2 February 1957, Yogiji Maharaj joyously gave him the *parshad diksha* and renamed him Vinu Bhagat. Once Yogiji Maharaj, while addressing some youths inclined towards becoming sadhus, said, "Because of Vinubhai 51 youths will take *diksha*. The *punya* [of that] will go to him. He will be the first [to take *diksha*]." Then, Yogiji Maharaj told him to accompany him in his *vicharan* to look after his daily correspondence and other services. For four years he stayed with Yogiji Maharaj and received spiritual training.

On 11 May 1961, on the occasion of the Kalash Mahotsav of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Gadhada, Yogiji Maharaj gave *bhagwati* (saffron) *diksha* to 51 educated youths. Among them, Vinu Bhagat was the first to receive *diksha* and named Swami Keshavjivandas. At that time many observed that the name 'Keshav', given by Shastriji Maharaj when he was a child, had reappeared when renamed as Keshavjivandas by Yogiji Maharaj.

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj instructed the 51 newly initiated sadhus to study Sanskrit



Vinu Bhagat among youths who later took *diksha* at Yogiji Maharaj's hands in 1961



From a young age Vinu Bhagat was deeply impressed with Pramukh Swamiji's saintliness



In the company of Yogiji Maharaj



Travelling together in a buggy





During a procession with Thakorji and  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Dr Swami and Mahant Swami engaged in  
conversation with Swamishri

in Mumbai. Swami Keshavjivandas was appointed as their head (mahant) at Dadar Mandir. Hence, over time, he became respectfully known as Mahant Swami. Yogiji Maharaj used to frequently write to the newly initiated sadhus about the greatness of Mahant Swami, “All should remain under the instructions of Mahant Swami. If anyone feels troubled or worried tell Mahant Swami about it. He will solve it by giving spiritual knowledge.”

His outstanding virtues of austerity, self-control, devotion, humility and service earned him the blessings and joy of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In 1968, Pramukh Swami’s 48th birthday was celebrated in Yogiji Maharaj’s presence at Dadar Mandir, Mumbai. In his address to the satsang assembly, Pramukh Swami spoke about the glory of Yogiji Maharaj and added, “I feel very peaceful about Yogiji Maharaj having prepared these [young] sadhus. My heart experiences peace on having the darshan of Mahant Swami. Just as sadhus and devotees felt peace on having the darshan of Sadguru Purushottamdas Swami, today, one feels peace on seeing Mahant Swami.”

In 1971, after the earthly departure of Yogiji Maharaj, Mahant Swami totally dedicated himself to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the new guru, with the same devotion and allegiance he had for guru Yogiji Maharaj. His exposure to Pramukh

Swami Maharaj’s pure saintliness and spiritual glory had begun in 1951, when he first met him. Since 1971, as per the wishes and instructions of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he has relentlessly travelled throughout India and abroad to inspire and strengthen satsang in countless devotees. He has also offered his services during the Sanstha’s mega-festivals, in children and youth activities, the Akshardham projects, and other satsang activities.

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj’s profound discourses have enlightened countless devotees and well-wishers and motivated them to adopt pious, addiction-free lives. His saintliness and devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have left lasting impressions on innumerable devotees.

On 20 July 2012, in the presence of senior sadhus in Ahmedabad, Pramukh Swami Maharaj revealed Mahant Swami as his spiritual successor. Following the earthly departure of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 13 August 2016, Mahant Swami Maharaj was declared as the sixth guru in the Gunatit Parampara tradition of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. HH Mahant Swami Maharaj now presides as the guru and spiritual guide of countless devotees and helms the worldwide BAPS socio-spiritual activities fostered by HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦





**DIVINE TRINITY OF BRAHMASWARUP GURUS**

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj (Centre), Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj (L),  
Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj (R) Photo: Colorama Studio, Nairobi, 1970



**"Jai Swaminarayan..."**

Beloved *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj affectionately blesses all till his final moments