

SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

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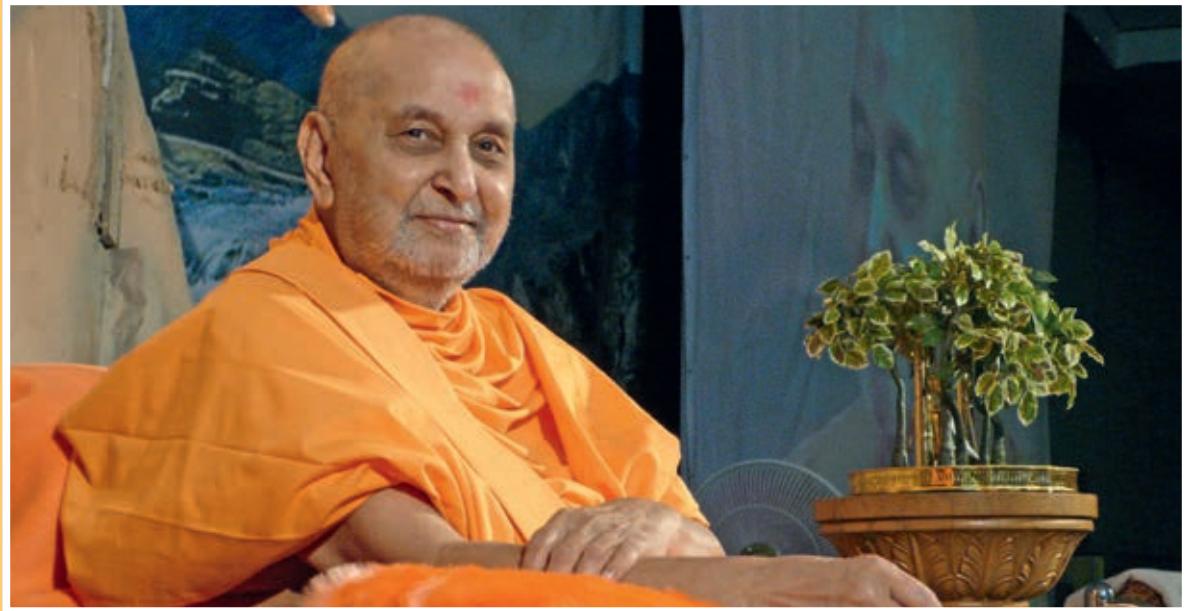
Anxiety Disorders



SWAMISHRI IN SARANGPUR

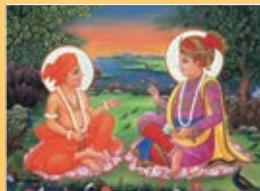
1-2. The 98th patotsav of Sarangpur mandir was celebrated on 5 May 2014. The day also marked the one-year anniversary of Swamishri's stay in Sarangpur. All the major festivals celebrated throughout the year were joyfully re-enacted to commemorate the occasion.

3-4. Swamishri performs puja in the Pramukh Udyani, with sadhus attending the Sant Shibir engrossed in darshan (12 May 2014).



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

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Prostrations to Swamishri on Guru Purnima, 12 July 2014

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FIRST WORD



The guru-shishya tradition is a unique aspect of Hinduism. In Upanishadic times, the guru-shishya relationship between Haridrumata Gautam and Satyakam Jabali, Uddalaka and Shvetketu, Dhaumya and Aruni and others were iconic examples of obedience, servitude and faith. The attainment of *atma*-realization and God-realization is not possible without the association of a God-realized guru – this is the time-honoured tradition of Hindus. Peter Brent, who had travelled widely in India and met many gurus, writes, “The skeleton of Hinduism is the Guru. The continuous presence of self-realized persons gives Hindus access to a constant inspirational source. In a confusion of ideas, philosophies and sectarian beliefs, faith in the Guru as intermediary resolves all problems of doctrine.”¹

The Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) has a legacy of the Gunatit guru *parampara*, through whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifests. Each successor exemplified the dharma of discipleship with his guru. Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of BAPS, had an ideal disciplic bond with his guru Bhagatji Maharaj. It is reflected through his staunch obedience and devotion to him. At the word of Bhagatji Maharaj he gave up a prized pair of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s footprints to his companion sadhu, Ramratandas. At the revelation of Bhagatji Maharaj and guru Swami Vignananand, he developed a conviction that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar. Thereafter, to uphold the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine and enshrine their *murtis*, Shastriji Maharaj bore the brunt of fierce opposition.

Once, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj of Vartal had come to Junagadh. Jaga Swami, a disciple of Gunatitanand Swami, asked Jibhai Kothari (administrator of Junagadh mandir) to tell the Acharya to consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in Vartal. If he did so, Shriji Maharaj would bless him with an illustrious son.² When Jibhai conveyed the words to the Acharya privately, the latter replied with regret, “Gunatitanand Swami had initiated me into Satsang, but as long as Gordhandas (Kothari of Vartal Sanstha) and Bhimji (Kothari of Gadhada) are alive they will not allow me to do so, and they will not obey me.”

When Jaga Swami heard of this, he became numb with sadness. Then, after a while Jaga Swami spoke in a resounding tone to Shastriji Maharaj, “Won’t you do it!” Instantly Shastriji Maharaj explained, “If I were to ask for a one paise postcard to write on, the Kothari would mock me, ‘Do you want to

(Contd. on pg. 47)

1. Brent, Peter. *Godmen of India*. England: Penguin Books, 1973, p.1.

2. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj was childless and he thus had no heir to his spiritual seat.

Raghunathdas Lifts His Head Again

On many occasions Jiva Khachar of Gadhada had complained about Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Dada Khachar to the King and Diwan of Bhavnagar.

When the Diwan came to Gadhada he found Jiva Khachar's criticisms to be untrue...

Later, Raghunathdas, a fierce opponent of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, creates a serious problem during the mandir construction in Ahmedabad...



JIVA KHACHAR SPONSORS MEALS

Jiva Khachar came to Dada's *darbar* for Maharaj's darshan. He bowed before Shri Hari and sat in front of him. On seeing the Diwan of Bhavnagar Jiva Khachar became a bit ruffled. When the Diwan looked at him bitterly Jiva Khachar turned his eyes away and spoke to Maharaj, "For the next two weeks (till Kartik Punam) tell all the sadhus and devotees to stay here because I wish to sponsor lunch for all. Until now Dada had insisted that lunch be sponsored by him, so, I had remained patient and there was no point in refuting him. But now I feel I should get the benefit of service in this way."

Shri Hari perceived his strained sentiments and agreed instantly, "From tomorrow, lunch will be served to all on your behalf. I shall tell all the sadhus to stay till Punam, whereas the devotees will stay according to their suitability." Jiva Khachar felt happy with Shri Hari for allowing his wish to prevail. The Diwanji, watching all the while, noticed the ring of arrogance in Jiva Khachar's words.

After celebrating the *annakut* festival in Gadhada, Dada Khachar and his family's

unstinting devotion became apparent to all. Many felt, on seeing the love Shriji Maharaj had for Dada Khachar, that Shri Hari had come on earth specifically for Dada Khachar and his family.

Eleven days after the festival of *annakut*, Shri Hari celebrated Prabhodini Ekadashi and the festival of Punam (Dev Diwali) thereafter. Till then the sadhus and devotees had stayed in Gadhada.

SHRIMAD BHAGVAT DISCOURSE IN GADHPUR

The following day Shri Hari said, "The month of Maghshar (November-December) is believed to be a divine form of God, thus it is the best of all months. To read the Purans in this month accrues great merits. My devotees, and people of the four varnas and ashrams should listen to the Purans. All have the right to listen to the Purans and the Hindu shastras. By reading or listening to the Purans one attains all things and also the knowledge of God's form. Thus one should read the Purans written by Veda Vyasa, together with the Mahabharat and Ramayan."

Shri Hari observed the joy and eagerness on

the devotees' faces to listen to the Bhagvat Puran in his presence. Shri Hari continued, "The Purans have been classified into two parts: the great (Maha) Purans and the subsidiary (Upa) Purans. There are 18 Maha Purans, written by Veda Vyās, and 18 Upa Purans written by several other rishis. When Brahma created earth he also created the Vedas for the liberation of souls. During Satyug there was only one Veda; it was read along with its meanings. In Dwaparyug, Veda Vyās classified the single Veda into four parts in an ashram by the riverbank of River Saraswati. Despite his epic work Veda Vyās was neither happy or peaceful from within. So, Narayan sent Narad Muni to meet him. On seeing Veda Vyās in a melancholy mood, Naradji instructed, 'You have been born to liberate many souls. You will experience inner peace only when you write about the glory of God and his devotees.' And thereafter Veda Vyās wrote the Shrimad Bhagvat Puran, in which he included the essence of Hindu spiritual history." Then Shri Hari signalled Pragi to start reading the Bhagvat Puran.

MURTI IS THE SEED OF SATSANG

Earlier, at the behest of Shriji Maharaj, Narayanji Suthar, a *satsangi* carpenter, had prepared a print of Nar-Narayan Dev from a carved wooden block. When Narayanji came to Gadhada for the *annakut* festival, Maharaj told him to prepare a set of wooden block moulds of Nar-Narayan Dev, saying, "At the feet of Nar-Narayan carve Garudji and show the sun and moon to the right and left."

Narayanji prepared the block as instructed by Maharaj. Shri Hari approved it and also showed it to Muktanand Swami, explaining, "A *murti* is the seed of satsang. If there is a *murti* then *upasana* (principle of worship) will remain and the satsang fellowship will flourish. The *murti* of God provides spiritual support for aspirants. If there is no *murti*, people will seek for other support or means and will eventually fall from the path

of God-realization."

Muktanand Swami was pleased with Shri Hari's words. He fervently wished that Maharaj build mandirs for the perpetuation of *upasana*.

Shri Hari then showed the mould of Nar-Narayan Dev to his other sadhus and they too were pleased. Maharaj told Narayanji to print more impressions of Nar-Narayan Dev from the new mould because he wished to give one each to all the *paramhansas*.

GRAPHIC PRINTS OF DHARMADEV AND BHAKTIMATA

Narayanji Suthar was happy with Maharaj's order. He felt blessed to be given the service, believing it to be Maharaj's grace. He performed *pujan* of Maharaj. In return, Shri Hari blessed him and gifted him the beautiful clothes he was wearing. Narayanji felt honoured and indebted, praying, "Maharaj, be forever pleased upon me in this way and grace me by enshrining your divine form in my heart." Shri Hari replied, "My form shall forever be in your heart and its divinity shall pervade in your works. Thousands of devotees will benefit from them."

Narayanji Suthar humbly replied, "Maharaj, you came on earth and through your association hundreds of thousands of aspirants have been inspired on the path of *moksha*. You have initiated sadhus who, like Shukji, Narad and Sanakadik, are of lofty calibre. You have redeemed people from the mire of superstitions and addictions. Thus people have come to recognize you as Purushottam, but they do not know your parents. If we make their *murtis*, people will be able to worship them too."

Shri Hari was pleased with Narayanji's sentiments. Maharaj instructed, "My parents were Dharmadev and Bhaktimata. You carve a wooden mould of their forms, placing my image in the centre. Thus, the devotees, while worshipping me, will also offer their veneration to Dharmadev and Bhaktimata."

Thereafter, Siddhanand Swami, Vaishnavanand Swami and Nirgunanand Swami performed *pujan* of Maharaj with various means.

RAGHUNATHDAS OBSTRUCTS THE CONSTRUCTION OF MANDIR IN SHRINAGAR

Every morning the Shrimad Bhagvat was being read in the presence of Shri Hari, *param-hansas* and devotees. Maharaj often revealed the purport of the Shrimad Bhagvat to Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and others. Each evening, Maharaj sat beneath the neem tree at Dada Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada and listened to bhajans sung by sadhus, and thereafter he discoursed to the assembly. Maharaj would underscore the importance of faith and morality in life.

Many devotees were deeply enjoying the darshan and discourses of Maharaj and were thus unwilling to return home to attend to their domestic responsibilities. One day, Kubersinh of Ahmedabad arrived in Gadhada. He informed Shri Hari, "Maharaj, Raghunathdas has talked badly about us before Maharaja Gambhirsinh of Idar. Since we are sourcing stones from the Maharaja's mines for the mandir construction in Ahmedabad, he told the Maharaja, 'Swaminarayan is building a very big mandir in Ahmedabad. If you continue to allow him to quarry stones from your mine, your mine will be reduced to half its size. So, you should either stop the quarrying of stones or impose a tax on the stones sourced – this will definitely dampen his enthusiasm.' Subsequently, the Maharaja issued a mandate prohibiting any further quarrying of stones for the mandir."

Shri Hari became pensive. Earlier, Raghunathdas had failed and was exposed in his efforts to obstruct satsang in Ahmedabad. In spite of that, his jealousy and hostile inclinations had not abated. Maharaj felt that no one could thwart God's work. Shriji Maharaj called a *parshad* and said, "Call Gurucharanratanand Swami." The latter was believed to be the guru of the Kshatriyas.

On arriving, Shri Hari instructed him, "Go directly from here to Idar. Meet the Maharaja of Idar and talk to him about satsang. Convince him that we are doing charitable work, and the stones procured from his mine will accrue great spiritual merits to him and will also make his citizens happy."

Gurucharanratanand Swami was in doubt as to how well the Maharaja would accept his words. He quizzed, "Maharaj, will the Maharaja believe me and do what I say?" Shri Hari retorted, "Why will he not accept what you say! Go with God in your heart, speak to him while remembering God, and his heart will surely melt. Hold his hand and God will pervade him. Then initiate him into satsang before discoursing to him."

MAHARAJA OF IDAR LIFTS THE BAN

Shri Hari gave a sanctified garland to Gurucharanratanand Swami and told Kubersinh to accompany him to Idar. When Gurucharanratanand Swami reached the Maharaja's palace in Idar he asked the sentinel to inform the king about the arrival of two Swaminarayan sadhus. The king called them in immediately and received them with honours. When Swami held the hands of Maharaja Gambhirsinh the latter experienced divine vibrations. He felt a flood of inner joy in his heart. Swami simply looked into his eyes. A while later Gambhirsinhji asked, "Swami, have you come to acquire stones?" Swami replied, "No. I have come to talk to you about satsang. Shri Hari commanded me by saying that the Maharaja is loving towards us, and while permitting us to acquire stones from his quarry we must give something to him."

Maharaja Gambhirsinhji smiled and asked, "Well, what gift have you brought for me?" Swami was still holding both the king's hands. Then Swami explained, "Maharaja, we have renounced wealth and women. We have flushed our hearts of worldly desires and enshrined God, so what can we give you other than God's *murti*."

(Contd. on pg. 13)

PROFESSOR JETHALAL SWAMINARAYAN

Part 2



Professor Jethalal would be overjoyed at seeing this large number of devotees congregating to get a glimpse of Shastriji Maharaj. He wrote an incident in one of his reports: "When revered Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj Yagnapurushdasji started building large, towering mandirs, some people started questioning. Why is it necessary to build such large mandirs? At that time, Shastriji Maharaj used to respond in his firm tone that he was absolutely certain that many devotees would come to these mandirs, that as big as they are, there would not be enough standing room to accommodate them. This has been proven right as predicted.

DIVINITY SUPERCEDES INTELLIGENCE

"It was Sunday, the day of Kartik *sud* Purnima in Vikram Samvat 1996 (26 November 1939 CE).

The translator, Dhruvkumar S. Patel, is the grandson-in-law of Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan.

- A Dedicated Worshipper of Akshar-Purushottam
- A Visionary and Great Scholar
- An Ardent Patriot

"This was a sweet combination, like sugar in milk. It was very convenient for people like us who have to toil to make a living. As per Shastriji Maharaj's wish, we went to Bochasan mandir from Ahmedabad on that Purnima day. We witnessed that the whole mandir complex was jam packed. Everyone's gaze was unblinkingly concentrated on Shastriji Maharaj. The large meeting hall proved to be too small to accommodate all the devotees.

"The devotees who had congregated in this festival formed a queue after the announcement for lunch. Twenty-eight maunds (560 kg) of rice were consumed as *prasad* during lunch and 10 maunds (200 kg) of *khichdi* were consumed during the evening meal! Thousands of devotees increasingly experienced the divine grace of Shastriji Maharaj, day by day. He is indeed the heart of Shriji Maharaj and the means to attain *moksha*" (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, December 1939, p. 58).

Professor Jethalal, who at one time always weighed everything only on the scale of intelligence, now experienced that such valuations were utterly trivial in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. Here is someone who is divine and above everything, who is not fathomable by our senses, and

who can only be attained by complete submission to the divine. Jethalal, while writing about his experience of the primacy of divinity over intelligence, noted in one of his letters: “When Shriji Maharaj left his human form to return to his eternal abode, Akshardham, Dada Khachar and other devotees were extremely bereaved and despondent. At that time, Shriji Maharaj appeared in his divine form to his devotees, consoled them and told them not to mourn the departure of his physical form. I will always remain present in Satsang through the Gunatit Sant. These divine words of Shriji Maharaj will remain true forever. We are seeing the proof of these divine words. The same divine power that Shriji Maharaj deployed to establish Satsang during his time, he is expending right now through Shastri Yagnapurushdasji; and we can see it ourselves. People like me who had become atheists under the influence of western education, have now learned the true glory of Shriji Maharaj through Shastriji Maharaj. Only a true sadhu like Shastriji Maharaj can achieve the extremely difficult task to inspire someone to change from atheism to theism.”

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF MIRACLES

“I feel like narrating here a few of the numerous miracles that Shriji Maharaj is currently performing through Shastriji Maharaj; I like to mention here only the miracles that I have witnessed with my own eyes.”

Thus saying, Jethalal started writing about the series of divine episodes that he himself had personally witnessed. While narrating these episodes, Jethalal repeatedly certifies their authenticity: “This I have witnessed with my own eyes. There is no stronger assurance than what is witnessed with one’s own eyes. I only pray that the devotees from Africa definitely come to see him and benefit from his divine blessings. I humbly request anyone presently desiring to realize Shriji Maharaj to certainly meet Shastriji Maharaj and experience his divine presence. This will prove

unequivocally that Shriji Maharaj is the *avatari* of all other avatars. This is undoubtedly realized from all the divine episodes currently transpiring in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. There is no other path for *atyantik kalyan* without dedicating to him” (*Letter to Africa Satsang Community*, Date: 12 July 1937).

BIRTH OF ‘SWAMINARAYAN PRAKASH’

The erudite Jethalal was a reformist, a true patriot and an intellectual. Now his aim in life had changed. He started thinking more and more about how to organize and mobilize the satsang activities inspired by Shastriji Maharaj for the spiritual well-being of the average person. The moment he entered the Satsang fraternity, he began realizing that there was an urgent need of a periodic magazine to inform and educate devotees about the faith. Through a periodical, devotees could be reached and informed of Shastriji Maharaj’s news, the unprecedented philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam and the divine experiences of devotees in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. Therefore, he requested Shastriji Maharaj on many occasions about such a publication. He also enlisted the help of other prominent devotees, such as, Vinayakrao Trivedi, Champakbhai Banker, Nandulal Manchharam, Khengarjibhai Chauhan and others. Shastriji Maharaj eventually consented and gave his blessings and in the month of October 1938 CE the monthly *Swaminarayan Prakash* was born.

At this time no one could even fathom the scope of this farsighted undertaking. However, each issue of *Swaminarayan Prakash* has helped to advance the fundamental tenets and values of the Swaminarayan faith. Presently, with its circulation in thousands, the start of this publication was truly miraculous and Jethalal was the driving force behind its inception.

It was imperative for the Satsang fellowship to have its own publication to propagate the principals enunciated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and

the worship of Akshar-Purushottam. For that, it was also necessary to have their own printing press. Jethalal had conceived such constructive ideas decades before in the early stages of BAPS. With the successful beginning of *Swaminarayan Prakash*, Jethalal openly appealed to the Satsang family: “This is the tenth issue of the publication. This means that this monthly publication will be soon completing the first year with the good wishes and blessings of the entire Satsang community. Only one who has experienced such an undertaking, can understand how serious it is to start a new monthly publication from scratch and run it successfully, since it involves considerable expense and requires the unceasing contribution of knowledgeable ideas. Nevertheless, we are happy to report that we have received wholehearted encouragement from our *satsangis*, supporting beyond our imagination the work of regularly publishing this monthly. The primary reason for this is that the policy of this monthly has been only to propagate pure knowledge and to stay away from all kinds of quarrels, malice and controversies. To make the work of this endeavour well organized and to put it on a sound footing, it is imperative to have our own printing press. To address this, I humbly request all *satsangis*, where it is possible, to become lifetime subscribers of this monthly by paying 51 rupees in advance. If we get a hundred such ‘lifetime subscribers’, we can procure a good working press for this monthly. It would be acknowledged as a very noble service by our *satsangis* who become lifetime subscribers.

“Moreover, it is our sincere ambition to make available literature of such high standards at a very reasonable cost. Lending your hand in this noble endeavour will help in propagating the pure, supreme *upasana* of Shriji-Swami. And this is also the duty of true devotees” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, June-July 1939, p. 222).

Today, these wishes of Jethalal have come to fruition with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj.

Swaminarayan Aksharpith is the BAPS publishing house with its own modern printing press.

DISCOVERS THE BIRTHPLACE OF GUNATITANAND SWAMI

Jethalal rendered many other services using his creative and investigative skills. A noteworthy example: he researched and personally went to Bhadra village, the birthplace of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and discovered the sacred home where he was born. For this, he went to the locale of Brahmins in this village in 1935 CE and researched old historical records and located with the help of provable and incontrovertible facts the exact place and the home where Gunatitanand Swami was born as Mulji Sharma.

Jethalal was a prominent personality in society. Even though he was a staunch disciple of Shastriji Maharaj, he was also selected as a member of the Narnarayan Dev Mandir committee at Kalupur in Ahmedabad.

MATHEMATICAL AND MUSICAL MIND

Jethalal was fully dedicated to the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. He used to say: “I am a mathematician. I have a habit to see and measure things in the light of mathematical reasoning. There is no value attached to zeroes. No matter how many zeroes are grouped together, they have no value. In the same vein, to understand and accept that Shriji Maharaj is the supreme God is like the figure ‘one’ (‘one’ in front of zeroes lends them real value). Some people believe that Shriji Maharaj is a great personality. Some believe him to be a prominent devotee of God. Some believe him to be an incarnation of Ram or Krishna. But believe and accept his real form as the cause of all the other avatars and the supreme ruler of all the countless universes.

“Gunatitanand Swami, the avatar of Aksharbrahman, convinced devotees that Shriji Maharaj is the one and only supreme God. Also, Bhagwan Ramchandra and Hanumanji are

worshipped together and Bhagwan Krishna and Radha are worshipped together. Likewise, to worship Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami together with Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the ‘one’ of *brahmavidya*.

“Shastriji Maharaj, the current incarnation of Gunatitanand Swami, one who gave the true introduction of Shriji Maharaj as Purna Purushottam Bhagwan, has done a great service by fearlessly propagating the worship of Akshar-Purushottam and by establishing mandirs with their *murtis* in the central shrine to nourish this worship” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, April 1939, p. 164).

Professor Jethalal Swaminarayan used to write very good kirtans (devotional songs) and he would unabashedly sing them in public. Whether at Premabhai Hall in Ahmedabad or Laxmibaug in Mumbai; whether in a large assembly of devotees or a gathering of dignitaries, Jethalal would sing and dance beating the drum in his hands to the tune of his favourite kirtan: “*Bol manavā Swāminārāyan, kahun chhu dhol pitine...*” (“Chant Swaminarayan O mind, Say I while beating my drum...”). Continuing, he would emphatically sing, “*Yagnapurushmā pragat birāje, kahu chhu pitine dhol...*” (“He is currently manifesting in Yagnapurush, Say I beating my drum...”). With this, his heart would overflow with divine bliss.

REVEALING SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ TO ALL

Jethalal constantly talked to and encouraged leaders and prominent personalities of society to experience the divine satsang of Shastriji Maharaj and realize the true spiritual essence of life.

As a result well known Congress leader Shri Shankarlal Bunker, prominent writer Shri Kishorelal Mashruwala, Secretary of the Labour Union Shri Gulzarilal Nanda, industrialists Sheth Ambalal Sarabhai, Sheth Mangaldas Girdhardas and his son, Madanmohanbhai, and Babubhai the son of Sheth Chimanlal Girdhardas, Polish-born humanitarian Maurice Frydman (a.k.a.

Swami Bharatanand), Labour Commissioner Shri Ayengar, Principal Shri Hiralal Kaji, Professor Dawar, Professor S.M. Shah, Shri V.T. Dehjiya (I.C.S.), Shri Vasantrao Pandya, Shri Asarpota (engineer) and other prominent personalities all came in contact with Shastriji Maharaj through the efforts of Professor Jethalal.

Shri Khengarbhai Chauhan notes: “Professor Jethalal had taken it upon himself to bring intellectuals from India and abroad, spiritual aspirants and anyone with miseries to Swamishri to receive his blessings, show them *samadhi*, take them to the mandir for darshan, and offer sincere prayers for their well-being. He would bring all kinds of aggrieved persons to Swamishri to receive Shastriji Maharaj’s blessings and relieve them of their miseries. Many times Shastriji Maharaj would express with divine humour, “Professor, it seems that Shriji Maharaj is currently acting according to your wishes!” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, July 1941, p. 232).

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ INSPIRES RAINS

Jethalal would become very disturbed if someone showed even an iota of suspicion in the divinity of Shastriji Maharaj. “Who is Shastriji Maharaj, the one I am so fortunate to have realized? Do you know of his divinity? Hear it now, if you have not heard it yet and witness it if you have not witnessed it.” He would present his own experiences in his thunderous voice. Jethalal writes, while presenting such experiences: “*Param Yogi* (Most Accomplished) *Brahmanishtha* (one who is in union with divine) *Sadguru* (pious teacher) Swamishri Shastriji Maharaj Yagnapurushdas is a *mahapurush* (great person) and there is no reason whatsoever for doubt in this assertion. Once, there was a terrible famine looming in the region of Kathiawad, Gujarat. Cows, buffaloes and other animals were distressed due to the acute shortage of fodder and water. There was not a drop of rain during the monsoon season. All the devotees, before going to Sarangpur on the day of

Shravan *sud* 2, had come to Ellis Bridge station (Ahmedabad) to bid farewell to Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj was seated under a tree resting on his *potlu*. At that time, in response to questions from devotees about the famine, he said that there would be plenty of rain after Shravan *sud* 5. True to his words and blessings, there was plenty of rain for fifteen days and the affliction of these helpless animals was relieved. This is the hallmark of a *vachan siddh* person” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, October 1939, p. 7).

SWAMINARAYAN ASHTAK

Jethalal’s single most unforgettable contribution is the Swaminarayan *ashtak* (poem with eight stanzas) in Sanskrit. Shastriji Maharaj was extremely elated when Jethalal sang this *ashtak* in his sonorous tone for the first time: “*Anant kotindu ravi prakāshe...*” (“Light of billions of suns...”). He thanked Jethalal and praised his *ashtaks* before the devotees: “From these verses we come to know the real identity of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and also the true identity of Shriji Maharaj. This is why we have consecrated the *murtis* of Dham, Dhami and Mukta here, according to the principle enunciated by Shriji Maharaj. Therefore, this sacred village of Sarangpur is equivalent to the real visible Akshardham on earth. Professor Jethalal, with the inspiration of Shriji Maharaj, has written in this *ashtak*, ‘*Sadaiv Sārangpurasya ramye, sumandire hyakshardhām tulye...*’ (The mandir which is always present here in Sarangpur, is equivalent to Akshardham...). Therefore all sadhus and devotees should memorize these verses and sing them every day after the evening *arti*.” Thus, Shastriji Maharaj immortalized Jethalal.

In a mere few years, Jethalal pleased Shastriji Maharaj with his endless devotion, despite his seemingly brief association with him. He constantly experienced the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj. Writing about this, he says: “After having come to know Shastriji Maharaj, I have

experienced extraordinary love for Bhagwan Swaminarayan in my heart and that everything in the world except Bhagwan is temporary for me. I have written a kirtan narrating this state of mine and I sincerely wish that this kirtan would inspire devotees to increase their love for Bhagwan. I sincerely believe that by constantly reciting and meditating on this kirtan, a devotee would be able to detach himself from worldly possessions and attach himself to God with abundant love, and he will experience true *vairagya* and will be truly entitled to *moksha*.

“*Vahālā lāge chhe mane Swāminārāyan, Akshardhāmnā vāsi re;*

“*Anya padārtho kidhā mhen khotā, tārā darshan no hu pyāsi re...*”

“Swaminarayan is dear to me, one who resides in Akshardham;

“I renounced all worldly objects, only desirous to see you...” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, July 1940, p. 232).

LAST DARSHAN

Jethalal had commenced writing the epic *Akshar-Purushottam Charitam* on 3 September 1935 and continued writing until he wrote the 278th chapter and completed 10,786 *shloks* by 1941. He became ill after this. He told his sons on 16 May 1941, “Now I do not want to live in this world.” He told everyone on 21 June, “The desire to surround our pure divine soul by body made of bones and skin is sheer ignorance (*agnan*).”

When Shastriji Maharaj came to Ahmedabad unannounced, everyone was surprised. However, upon his arrival to Ahmedabad, he went straight to Kadva Pol, the residence of Jethalal. It seemed that he was wrapping up Jethalal’s work in Satsang, and readying him for the eternal. Jethalal was deeply moved upon seeing Shastriji Maharaj and by his showering of love on him. He thoroughly cherished these last moments of his life in the presence of Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj lauded his services and returned to Amlı

Vali Pol heavy-hearted. Everyone realized that this was the last meeting between the Professor and Swamishri.

Thereafter, the next day, 24 June 1941, Professor Jethalal passed away to Akshardham, while still speaking to his family.

Editor of the Gujarati daily, *Sandesh*, eulogized: "Professor Jethalal Swaminarayan holds a definite place among those few famous, intelligent personalities that Gujarat produced. Gujarat has lost a very eminent person by the passing away of Professor Swaminarayan" (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, July 1941, p. 241).

Ahmedabad Municipality passed a special proclamation to close all schools and government

offices in the city on 1 July 1941 to pay their homage to the professor.

Jethalal, the first president of Ahmedabad Satsang Association, inspirer of many satsang activities, ardent campaigner of *samadhi*, and one who always empathized with the miseries of others and helped alleviate them, was a true living example of dedication to his guru and Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His only mantra in life was, unswerving devotion to Akshar and Purushottam, and the Gunatit Satpurush. This great personality will be an ideal role model for future generations of intellectuals who live only by *apara vidya* and will inspire them to follow the path of spirituality. ◆

(Contd. from pg. 7)

"Well, if you are ready to gift me God's *murti*, I am ready to receive it," the Maharaja eagerly responded.

Swami released his grip to free the king's hands and explained, "Maharaja, it is not so easy to acquire the *murti* of God. However, by pledging to follow the moral instructions prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and shaping one's life accordingly, only then will the *murti* of God reveal itself within and talk to you."

The Maharaja thought for a while before declaring, "I promise to do so. Initiate me." The king held out his right palm before Swami, who then poured a little water into it and said, "Maharaja, from today onwards abstain from drinking liquor, meat, stealing and adultery and remain steadfast in attending to your social duties."

The king pondered for a while about the moral commands and then he almost confirmed, "Swami, I shall observe the four commands, but I will not be able to give up meat. If you are ready for that you may initiate me."

Swami complied, "It's okay. Garudji is said to be the vehicle and devotee of Bhagwan [Vishnu]

despite it eating unacceptable things. Thus we shall consider you in that rank."

Then Maharaja Gambhirsinhji confessed, "Swami, I have stopped the availability of stones for your mandir construction. But now that I have become a *satsangi*, I rescind my order."

Kubersinh was simply awed at what the Maharaja said. Thereafter, Gurucharanratanand Swami stayed in Idar and discoursed to the Maharaja daily. Gradually the king realized the glory and divinity of satsang. Kubersinhji departed the next day for Ahmedabad. He described to Anandanand Swami about what had happened. The good news was also sent to Shri Hari in Gadhada.

Shri Hari had assigned the mandir construction in Ahmedabad to Anandanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami. The construction work commenced with a donation of Rs. 10,000 by Bhaga Doshi. Subsequently, the devotees of Ahmedabad donated for the mandir construction. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)
Translated from Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ



*Agna and upasana are
the two wings of Satsang which are essential for
a devotee to reach Akshardham. They are exemplified by the life of the
Gunatit Satpurush so that devotees can realize the path they have to pursue.
Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj was resolute in his
observance of the agnas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
The following incidents demonstrate his adherence to his dharma,
no matter what the situation...*

UNMATCHABLE OBSERVER OF DHARMA

Shastriji Maharaj's life was so perfectly in tune with the wishes of Shriji Maharaj that everyone naturally commented, "He is the personified form of the Shikshapatri." His focus was continuously on the commands of the Shikshapatri and Dharmamrut. *Nishkam*,

nirlobb, nisswad, nissneh and *nirman* are the five vows specified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan for all Swaminarayan sadhus, and Shastriji Maharaj observed them to perfection. Shastriji Maharaj was the guru of BAPS, yet he did not have a penny in his name.

Once, Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Anand.

But, many of the devotees had gone out of town to attend a marriage. So, Shastriji Maharaj decided to go to Sarangpur. He placed his *potlu* on his head and went to the railway station, but he had no ticket and no money! He looked around the station, but did not find anyone he knew who would purchase the tickets. So, carrying his *potlu*, he returned to the town. Here, also, he could not find anyone. So again, he went to the station. In this way, he went from the town to the station and back three times. Finally, he met Gordhanlal Keshavlal Patel who purchased the train tickets to Botad.

Occasions like this were not uncommon. Yet, Swamishri never kept money with him and tolerated many such difficulties. He was totally detached and had completely renounced wealth and women.

The joy of living in obedience with the wish of Shriji Maharaj continuously illumined his face. That is why, on meeting Swamishri, the renowned Gujarati poet, Nahanalal, commented, "Shastriji Maharaj is a unique sadhu in the spiritual field. Rarely does one see the purity of character, saintliness and divinity that he has."

A CELIBATE IS THE FORM OF GOD

"Among the 2000 sadhus (of Vartal) I have not yet seen anyone who has fully renounced wealth and women like Shastri Yagnapurushdas..."

"If he lapses in his vows regarding wealth and women, then I will stake my life; such is my total assurance and firm belief."

These are the reflections of the eminent Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal mandir, who served four generations of *acharyas*.

Gordhanbhai was respected more than even the senior sadhus of Vartal, so his endorsement of Shastriji Maharaj is highly noteworthy. In addition to Gordhanbhai, everyone who came into Shastriji Maharaj's contact experienced his pure life and unwavering determination.

One day, in Ahmedabad, Shastriji Maharaj visited the home of a devotee. Suddenly, a little girl crossed the rug which Shastriji Maharaj and the sadhus were seated on. As a result, Shastriji Maharaj observed a fast, refusing to accept even a drop of water.

Senior sadhus and devotees earnestly requested Swamishri not to fast because of his advanced age and frail health. But Swamishri was firm in his decision. When everyone's insistence became forceful, Swamishri responded, "Should I break my vows at the age of 80? Whatever happens, I will not break Maharaj's command."

Nobody could say anything further before Swamishri's rock-like determination.

A PILLAR OF DHARMA

Once, in Bharuch, Shastriji Maharaj fell ill with typhoid, which caused diarrhoea. Considering Swamishri's age, weakness and serious illness, the doctors recommended total bedrest. They even advised that Swamishri answers nature's call and have his bath without getting off his bed. But, would Swamishri accept that? He held Shriji Maharaj's commands in greater importance than the doctors' advice. Despite much weakness, Swamishri would get up to go to the toilet and take his bath thereafter. The devotees tried to explain, but for Swamishri, who had lived his entire life strictly observing inner and outer purity, abiding by Shriji Maharaj's commands was his only focus.

During an illness in Ahmedabad, when Narayanbhai from Ambli Vali Pol requested Swamishri not to bathe after each bout of diarrhoea, Swamishri replied, "Narayanbhai! If you have built a house and someone knocks it down, how much will you be pained? Similarly, the great Satpurushes are the pillars of dharma and lead *jivas* on the path of dharma and bhakti. So, when someone criticizes dharma, how much will he be pained?"

Narayanbhai was speechless.

SAVOURING MAHARAJ'S MURTI

Thakor Harisinhji, the ruler of Bilada in Rajasthan, invited Shastriji Maharaj to a *parayan*. Harisinhji was a devout follower of Devi and did not bow before anyone. Yet, Swamishri's divine personality made a deep impression on him. So, at the conclusion of the *parayan*, he personally came to serve a sweet to Swamishri as he was having lunch.

As per Bhagwan Swaminarayan's command, Swamishri had mixed all the food in his wooden bowl and was eating. At the end of his meal, Swamishri poured some buttermilk in his bowl. Just then, Harisinhji urged Swamishri to eat a piece of *mohanthal*. Swamishri refused. But Harisinhji insisted, so Swamishri said, "Put it in the bowl." Harisinhji was taken aback, realizing that the *mohanthal* would be soaked in the buttermilk. So, he offered, "Let me bring another dish to put it in." But Swamishri said, "We do not use a dish. We eat whatever we get in this bowl and enjoy the taste of Maharaj's *murti*." Reluctantly, Harisinhji placed the *mohanthal* piece in Swamishri's bowl. Swamishri then mixed it with the buttermilk and drank it.

Harisinhji bowed to Swamishri's virtue of non-taste with the utmost respect.

OCEAN OF FORGIVENESS

Swamishri was at Ambli Vali Pol in Ahmedabad, engrossed in performing his morning puja. Just then a devotee frantically entered, extremely upset and angry. He unloaded his grievances with a salvo of arrogant words. The reason: at Swamishri's request, this devotee had lent some money to another devotee. However, due to difficult financial circumstances, the other devotee had not repaid the money. Thus, the lender devotee vented his anger on Swamishri. In response to this ferocious tirade, Swamishri remained calm, continually chanting, "Swaminarayan... Swaminarayan...", with the expression on his serene face unchanged.

Some time later, this raging devotee realized his mistake and felt deep remorse. He approached Swamishri and tearfully asked for forgiveness. Swamishri smiled and said, "Do not be at all upset. I only take note of your virtues and services and not your drawbacks and mistakes. I swear on this assembly that today I have the same feelings towards you that I had when you first came to me."

Everyone realized that Swamishri had upheld Bhagwan Swaminarayan's words in the Shikshapatri (verse 201): "*Gālidānam tādanam cha krutam kumatibhirjanaihi; Kshantavyam eva sarveshām chintaniyam hitam cha taihi.*" ("If one is hit or sworn at by an evil-minded person, one should forgive but not retaliate; one should wish for his benefit in one's mind, but not wish him to suffer.")

STOREHOUSE OF HUMILITY AND TOLERANCE

Once, Shastriji Maharaj went for darshan to a mandir in Atladra. After darshan, as Swamishri sat on a bench, a senior sadhu of the mandir returned after completing some outside duties. This sadhu disliked Swamishri, since one of his disciple-sadhus, Premvatidas, had left him because he was attracted by Swamishri's divine personality. So, on seeing Swamishri, the other sadhu became furious. Out of his intense rage, the sadhu insulted Swamishri and hit him so hard with his wooden stick that the stick broke into two pieces. Without the slightest agitation, Swamishri bent down, picked up the pieces and returned them to the sadhu. The sadhu stormed off, unable to tolerate Swamishri's gesture of humility. Yet, Swamishri remained equated and retained his respect for the sadhu. ◆



Anxiety Disorders

In the first chapter and discourse of the Bhagavad Gita we find a classic example of anxiety when Arjun flinches on seeing his kinsmen arrayed for the epic battle.

Arjun said: "Seeing these, my kinsmen, O Krishna, arrayed, eager to fight, my limbs fail and my mouth is parched, my body quivers and my hairs stand on end!"

The Gandiva (bow) slips from my hand, and my skin burns all over; I am unable even to stand, and my mind is reeling." Having spoken with such despondency in the midst of the battlefield, Arjun cast aside his bow and arrow, and sat down on the seat of the chariot, his mind overwhelmed with sorrow.

WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

The term ‘anxiety disorders’ describe a number of common mental health conditions. Anxiety disorders differ from what is regarded as developmentally normal fear or anxiety, by being excessive or persistent beyond developmentally appropriate ages. The symptoms are often

persistent across various situations impacting on all aspects of an individual’s life. Many of these disorders start in early childhood and tend to persist if not treated.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety as a word is derived from the Greek

word, meaning ‘to press tight’ or ‘to strangle’. The word anxiety may be described as a continual and often irrational feeling of arousal, discomfort and tension, usually without any justifiable cause. Anxiety is a response to a threat that is generally unknown, internal, vague, or conflicted; whereas fear is defined as a response to a known, external, definite, or non-conflictual threat.

Mark Twain said, “*I'm an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.*”

The feeling of anxiety is a normal human emotion that everyone experiences. Many people feel anxious or nervous when faced with a work problem or before an exam. In some situations, anxiety can even be essential to your survival. For example, if you were standing on a footpath and a car swerved towards you, you would immediately sense danger, feel alarmed and jump back to avoid the car. This normal anxiety response, called the “fight or flight” response, is what prompts you to either fight or flee from danger. In most cases of normal anxiety we can identify a cause of stress and the reaction is reasonable and appropriate.

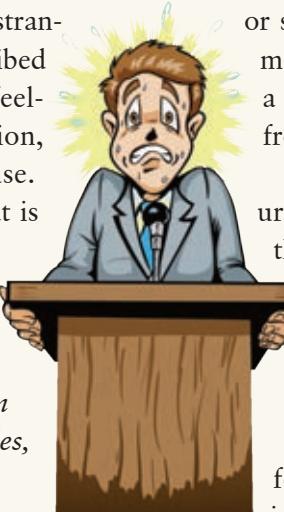
Anxiety disorders are different, however. They can cause such distress that they interfere with a person’s ability to lead a normal life.

CLASSIFICATION OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

About one in four people have an anxiety disorder that needs treatment at some time in their life.

Anxiety disorders take a variety of forms. Recent American psychiatric classification of anxiety disorders have listed the following clinical disorders:

1. Separation Anxiety Disorder: Where the individual is fearful of separation from an attached person to the degree that is developmentally inappropriate. He or she has constant fear that harm



or separation from the significant attachment figure would occur. For example, a child persistently refusing to separate from his mother and go to school.

2. Selective Mutism: Consistent failure to speak in social settings in which there is an expectation to speak (e.g. at school), even though the individual speaks in other situations. This behaviour tends to affect various aspects of the individual’s life.

3. Specific Phobia: Individuals are fearful, anxious or avoidant of an object or situation. This includes fear of animals, heights, seeing blood and injections, confined spaces and many others. The word phobia is derived from the Greek word ‘phobos’, the name of the Greek god who provoked panic and flight in his enemies.

4. Social Anxiety Disorder: Individuals are fearful, anxious or avoidant of social interactions and situations that will involve possibility of scrutiny or humiliation. Examples include having a conversation, meeting unfamiliar people, eating and public speaking.

5. Panic Disorder: Individuals experience recurrent panic attacks and are persistently concerned of having another panic attack or develop maladaptive behaviour to prevent further panic attacks. A panic attack is a sudden feeling of intense terror which may occur in certain situations or for no apparent reason. Symptoms include shortness of breath, dizziness, rapid heartbeat, choking and nausea. The person may feel they are going crazy, about to have a heart attack or die. The word panic is derived from the Greek word ‘Pan’. Pan is the Greek god who is the originator of sudden and unexplainable terror.

6. Agoraphobia: Individuals develop fear or anxiety of certain environmental situations for fear of not being able to escape or help not being available in the event of having a panic attack. They may avoid using public transport, being in

crowds, malls, or even leaving home.

7. Generalized Anxiety Disorder: This is excessive anxiety and worry about almost everything including work, finances and school. An individual finds it difficult to control the worry and it is often accompanied with physical symptoms such as headaches, neck spasms, mind going blank and insomnia.

Thus, there are a range of anxiety disorders, characterized by persistent, unreasonable fears about general or specific events. Anxiety disorders which are untreated can lead to depression and other long term physical and psychological problems.

It is also important to note that many medical diseases, alcohol and other substances can cause anxiety-like symptoms. These underlying causes need to be treated first to relieve the individual of anxiety. If the anxiety does not subside, then the anxiety needs to be treated as well.

Conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were previously also incorporated into the anxiety disorder classification. Since 2013, they are considered in different categories.

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

Some reasons include:

- A learnt response over time – such as learning to fear something after having seen others being fearful of it
- Personality types – some people are naturally more anxious than others
- Stressful or traumatic life events
- A family history of anxiety disorders
- Childhood development issues
- Alcohol, medications or illicit substances
- And other medical or psychiatric problems.

Equally important may be the person's general level of anxiety, beliefs and attitudes

the individual may hold about himself and how the world should be.

Problems often begin as a young adult and may be triggered by one or more major events in a person's life. More women are affected than men.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Anxiety comes in many forms and the symptoms can vary greatly from person to person.

A person may experience:

- Fearful anticipation and muscle tension
- Irritability and sleep disturbances
- Noise sensitiveness and restlessness
- Worrying thoughts and difficulty concentrating.

The fear may be accompanied by tightness of the chest, palpitations, tingling and 'butterflies' in the stomach.

As symptoms intensify they can include feelings of breathlessness, dizziness, sweating and trembling, racing heart, dry mouth, chills or hot flushes, choking, nausea, stomach upset, and pins and needles in the hands.

Some people feel like they are going to lose control or die and may feel as if they are having



a heart attack, among other medical disorders.

There may also be general symptoms of tiredness, headaches, loss of appetite, constipation or even diarrhoea.

The person will avoid the situation that is predisposing to the stress. An extreme case is where the person is terrified of all forms of social contact, even to the point of being unable to leave home. The person is aware of the irrational and excessive nature of his or her fears. When he or she comes for treatment, he or she says, "I know my fears are unreasonable, but I just can't seem to stop them."

As described in the opening paragraph to the article, upon Arjun asking Bhagwan Krishna to drive his chariot into the midst of the two armies, he is faced with the brutal reality of having to go into battle with his kinsman, elders and guru. The enormity of the sinful task that he has to undertake overwhelms him. Thus, Arjun experiences the physical symptoms, mental anguish and emotional turmoil in keeping with a person unable to function due to the severity of his anxiety.

In reply, Bhagwan Krishna explains to Arjun the futility of his anxiety and the epic poem, the Bhagavad Gita, is revealed to us all. Krishna tells him it is not sinful for him to do his duty as a Kshatriya – it is a war between dharma and *adharma*. The Bhagavad Gita contains probably the first literary description of the symptoms of anxiety and more significantly, Bhagwan Krishna's oration on the Kurukshetra battlefield, describes its holistic treatment.

TREATMENT

In every case, there is a need for careful medical assessment, as it is important to exclude an underlying medical cause to the anxiety. Once an anxiety disorder is diagnosed, medication together with psychological treatments may be prescribed. Psychological treatment such as relaxation training, meditation, biofeedback and stress management can help. One of the most effective forms of treatment is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY

• Specific Drug Therapy

People suffering from panic attacks as part of an anxiety disorder may be helped with tranquilizers, anti-depressants and other classes of drugs.

Tranquilizers are usually only prescribed in specific cases, to control such unpleasant side effects of anxiety as panic attacks or high levels of anxiety or arousal.

Education and Psychological Therapy

There are a range of psychological therapies for anxiety, aimed at helping the person control their arousal levels and manage their panic attacks.

Education, therapy and counselling can help them understand their thoughts, emotions and behaviour and give them new ways to deal with their anxiety.

Counselling can also assist the person to stop drug or alcohol use, resolve life stresses, and develop overall better coping skills. Education and counselling help the person reduce stress, resolve conflicts, manage their life more effectively, develop new ways of thinking about themselves and the world, and develop new ways of enjoying activities.

Part of the treatment may involve helping the person avoid family conflicts and developing ways of using their family as a means of support and encouragement.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is established as the first-choice psychological treatment for anxiety disorders. CBT helps patients identify, question and correct their tendencies to overestimate danger and their perceived inability to cope with danger. Patients recognize that their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs can generate and maintain anxious states. Common distortions in thinking are identified and restructured. This leads to modifications in behaviour, thus alleviating anxiety.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan through the

Vachanamrut sets forth a philosophy that shifts the reader's thinking, attitudes and belief systems. Distorted perceptions are set straight, thus a cognitive shift is achieved in the study of the Vachanamrut. This is further reinforced by Gunatitanand Swami's Swamini Vato which reveals further eternal truths. Both treatises, although written over 200 years ago, are only now being understood by Western thinking.

What is interesting in the BAPS Sanstha is that through Pramukh Swami Maharaj we see a living embodiment of anxiety-free behaviour. These are captured in his responses to the challenging experiences he has had:

- Being turned back at Nairobi airport (1974)
- Being falsely set up to be arrested (1977)
- Upon experiencing a heart attack (1983)
- Awaiting a cardiac procedure (1998)
- Gandhinagar Akshardham attack (2002).

Pramukh Swami Maharaj demonstrates the optimal cognitive mindset of a person who in spite of facing high anxiety situations and circumstances maintains a calm, collected and balanced state. This is further reflected in his exemplary behaviour amidst the many worldly stressors that Swami is surrounded by. Swami additionally teaches how to proactively deal with stress through his words and deeds. He has advised those individuals who have asked, in thousands of letters, how to deal with specific stressors and problems they were facing.

Other simple techniques to cope with anxiety:

- Meditation, mindfulness, muscle relaxation, yoga and spiritual reading of God or guru's divine stories
- Exercise daily – this releases 'feel good' and naturally uplifting hormones called endorphins
- Talk about your worries with someone you trust
- Find balance between work, hobbies, family and social life, and try to remove factors that cause stress

- Learn deep-breathing techniques to help deal with a panic attack
- Eat a vegetarian diet
- No alcohol, cigarettes and drugs
- Reduce tea and coffee intake and stop if possible
- Develop a good sleep pattern
- Build your self-esteem and keep a positive outlook on life.

CASE STUDIES

Mr. S has had recurrent, unexpected panic attacks for the past three years:

"They started one Monday morning when I was caught in the traffic on my way to work. I began to shake, feel dizzy, and could not concentrate on the road. I became short of breath and had to open the car windows. My chest was pounding and I felt that I was going to pass out. I thought I was having a heart attack. I thought I was going to faint or worse, die! I started to sweat and shake all over. I managed to stop on the side and called my son. He insisted that we go to a hospital, but I refused as I felt fine. However, I began to experience these attacks in shopping malls, and even on the train. I spent most of my day worrying and waiting for the next attack. I avoided going out as I would not be sure if I would have an attack. I eventually agreed to see a doctor, who ruled out any medical cause to the symptoms. That was a great relief as I really felt that there was something wrong with my heart. He referred me to a psychiatrist who initiated medication and also referred me for psychotherapy. I have since improved and these attacks are very infrequent, if any."

* * *

Mr. J, a businessman, who commuted to his workplace in South Mumbai daily by train for years, came to the clinic accompanied by his wife. He reported that the company he had worked for diligently for the last 22 years had retrenched numerous staff early this year. Although he had not been retrenched, there was nervous anticipation

that there were going to be future retrenchments and this had created more uncertainty in his workplace.

For the last three months he noticed a tightness in his chest and felt like he was being smothered by a pillow while he was travelling on the over-crowded peak morning Western Line to work. These attacks had gradually got worse and he had had to get off the train on many occasions prior to reaching his final destination at Churchgate Station. He had begun to take the very early train to work or the very late train from work to avoid the crowds and also would stand near the exit of the train so that he could escape from the crowds if he felt the need.

However, his anxiety became worse and he had begun to feel anxious even when he ventured out into the overcrowded Mumbai streets and bazaars making him eventually housebound. Family functions like weddings, where there were large crowds, also became challenging. He constantly needed a family member or friend to accompany him outside.

Mr. J was initiated on medication and psychotherapy. He also learnt breathing techniques and started the practice of meditation and yoga to assist in relaxing. He showed gradual improvement

and is now able to leave his home alone and journey to work relatively incident free.

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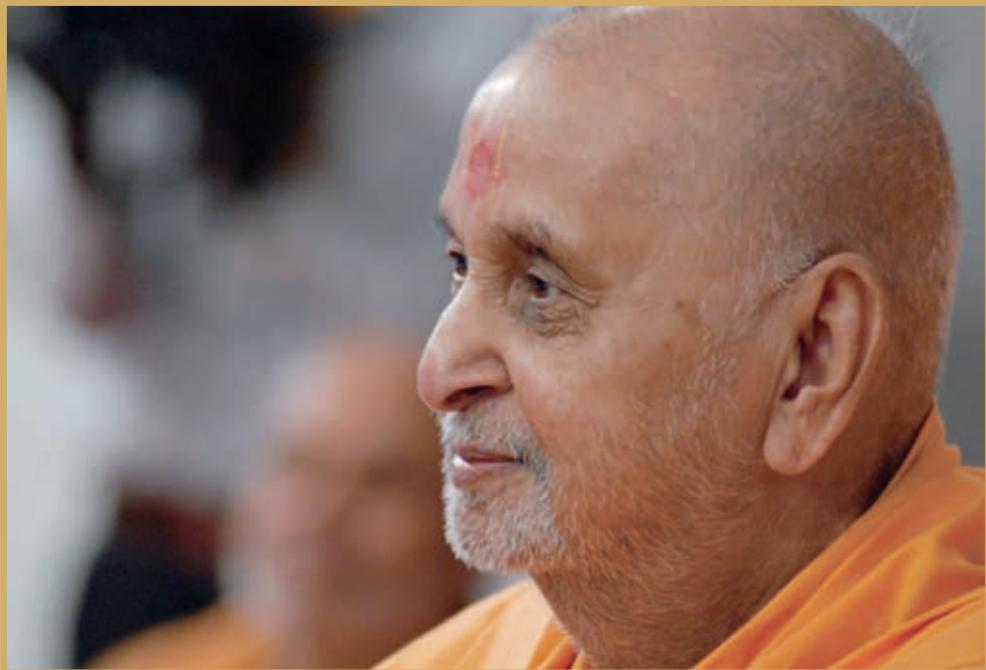
CHATURMAS NIYAMS

9 July to 3 November 2014

Swamini Vato.

4. Read *Shastriji Maharaj's Biography*, Parts 1 & 2, *Inanamrut* and *Parabhakti*.
5. In accordance with the wish of senior sadhus listen to 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrutvani', Samput 1 or 2.
6. Inspire five people to give up addictions, attend satsang *sabha* and conduct a daily *ghar sabha*.

Note: During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals, white and red radish, sugarcane and *mogri*.



SWAMISHRI'S HUMILITY

To pay respects to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of Guru Purnima on 12 July 2014 let us understand his virtue of humility and take a leaf from his saintly life...

In this world, it is all too often a case of, “Me and the others.” Our actions are frequently prompted to inflate our egos and this inevitably leads to doing things to show and impress others. In turn, life becomes one long arduous struggle striving to please others, worrying about what they will think and about what impression we will leave on others. Reputation preservation assumes number one priority. The moment it comes under threat, one’s mind naturally becomes disturbed.

But in Swamishri’s case, he does not need to (nor does he wish to) impress upon others, neither does he worry about what the rest may say. For him, it is not a matter of “Me and others” but of “Hu ane Maaro Thakor” – “Me and my Lord”.

This single article was combined from two articles first printed in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, February and March 1995.

NO SHOW

La Rouchefoucauld, the famous 17th century French author, once remarked, “The height of cleverness is to conceal one’s cleverness.”

Remarkably similar to this, Gunatitanand Swami mentions 3 types of devotees in his talks:

- Those of an inferior category make obvious their virtues by revealing them to others
- Those of the middle category neither hide their virtues nor make them known
- And those of the superior category manage to keep their virtues hidden.

Those who have come into contact with Swamishri will have no qualms or misgivings about placing him in the final category. For, in his worship, there appears to be no trace of hypocrisy or deceit. His sincere devotion to Bhagwan

Swaminarayan is not to show others, but serves merely one purpose – that of pleasing God and his gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

* * *

In the summer of 1990, Swamishri was in London. Back home in India, Gujarat was facing a major drought. The farmer devotees were worried as to what would happen if the crops failed again that year.

At about 3 a.m., Swamishri's personal attendant awoke to discover Swamishri sitting up on his bed. His curiosity took the better of him as he watched Swamishri silently praying for 30 minutes. When questioned in the morning, Swamishri replied, "I was praying to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, asking for the rains to fall in Gujarat and relieve the apprehensions of our farmer devotees." When asked, "For how many nights?" Swamishri chose to remain silent.

* * *

Following an operation to remove a benign tumour from his right thigh in April 1986, Swamishri was wheeled into his room in a hospital in Mumbai. To allow Swamishri the much-needed rest, one by one, the attendant sadhus moved away from his bed and stood against the wall. Watching from a distance, the sadhus noticed that every so often, Swamishri would fold his hands together and then utter a few words. This continued for some 15 to 20 minutes. Later when the sadhus asked Swamishri about what he had been doing, Swamishri replied, "I was having 'darshan' of Maharaj's *murtis* in our mandirs."

Whether in public or in private, Swamishri remains in constant humble devotion to God. Such is his sincerity.

Since Swamishri is the spiritual guru, it is but natural that he comes in the limelight, but in the time of Yogiji Maharaj, although Swamishri was the President of the Sanstha, he worked tirelessly in the background, mixing with the ordinary devotees, with no aspirations for name or fame. Who would have thought then that this young sadhu

would some day become the guru of countless devotees? No wonder it is said that it is difficult to recognize great people.

WHAT WILL OTHERS THINK?

Often we worry excessively (and unnecessarily) about what others may think of us. The higher one climbs up the ladder in any field, the more determined one becomes in safeguarding one's reputation. But in Swamishri's case, there is absolutely no question of this. Why not, you may ask? Because for one whose character is spotless, what difference does it make as to how he is perceived by others?

* * *

The Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1981, Ahmedabad, was a great success and played a major role in drawing the attention of hundreds of thousands to the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A few months following the festival, Swamishri was touring around Jetpur. Due to flood-ridden roads, Swamishri's car broke down. The accompanying sadhus got out to push the car. Swamishri not only got out of the car to make their task easier, but he also proceeded to help them push the car whilst passers-by watched in amazement and uttered, "It's the same person who was the inspirational backbone behind the mammoth Swaminarayan festival!"

* * *

One day, the town of Anand saw a colourful procession where Swamishri was taken out on a decorated elephant through the city. On the very next day, in the same city, in the same streets, Pramukh Swami Maharaj walked from shop to shop, personally requesting for grains for our mandirs!

* * *

Following his 59th birthday celebration in 1979, Rajkot, Swamishri was gracing the houses of well-wishers and devotees in Rajkot.

Unexpectedly Swamishri's car came to a sudden halt. The driver requested Swamishri to remain in the car while he went to fetch some petrol.

But Swamishri told him, "If we wait around we'll be late in reaching Bhadra."

No sooner had Swamishri uttered these words, he alighted from the car with his accompanying sadhu and finished off the home visits in a three-wheeler rickshaw.

There are those who insist on travelling by 1st class flight or in a specially designated vehicle, as anything less would be considered detrimental to their reputation. Swamishri, however, has no second thought about travelling by rickshaw or in a jeep or even on the back of a tractor.

* * *

During a Medical Camp inauguration assembly, a dignitary came forward to garland Swamishri. While placing the garland around Swamishri's neck, his spectacles fell onto the floor. In an instant, Swamishri bent down, picked them up and handed them over as if nothing had happened. This, too, in front of a large audience.

When it comes to speaking in Hindi, Swamishri often makes mistakes, both grammatical and in pronunciation, as his command of the language is not as polished as one would like it to be. Yet Swamishri never thinks twice about speaking in Hindi in a public assembly – that too in the presence of important dignitaries and professionals. Where others would worry about their command of the language, Swamishri is unperturbed by what impression others may take home with them. Here we are reminded of Yogiji Maharaj's typical rural language – not elegant but somehow penetrating the hearts of its listeners.

While the professionals seek advice on sales techniques or busy themselves attending courses in public speaking trying to figure out how best to convince their audience or target their customers, Swamishri somehow manages to inspire the inner hearts of hundreds and thousands – without resorting to any of the above means.

His magic formula?

Not a mastery over the language he speaks, nor some clever gimmick to mesmerize his audience, but only his sincerity, his frankness and his humility.

SWAMISHRI'S HUMILITY

At times, if some sadhu or devotee has committed a slip-up, Swamishri takes it upon his own shoulders to accept the burden of fault. Once a cultural programme was arranged where due to lack of forethought by the organizers, some visitors had to be turned away owing to a full house. Those who missed out were naturally upset. Swamishri personally came to them to apologize and begged for forgiveness, promising to arrange another programme for them in the near future.

* * *

In 1987, Swamishri undertook a pilgrimage of Northern India with a retinue of over 400 sadhus and devotees, covering all the important places sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan during his travels as a teenage yogi.

A few weeks following this *yatra*, Swamishri received this letter from one Mr. Parmar residing in England:

"You shouldn't have come with such a big party. We came to visit the holy places, but your schedule clashed with ours, so we couldn't find any decent accommodation. You spoilt our holiday and made our family miserable."

Now judge for yourselves. In your eyes, who would you consider to be at fault? Our sadhus, who had taken care of the arrangements for this pilgrimage, booking accommodation up to three months in advance or Mr Parmar who decided to go for a spot booking?

Yet ponder over Swamishri's reply:

"Sorry for the inconvenience that we may have caused. It was not our intention to cause you distress. If you had told us whilst you were there, we would certainly have arranged facilities for you and your family to stay. Please accept our apologies."

Swamishri not only apologised for something that was most certainly not his fault, but in his letter there was no mention, not even a slight hint, of the other person being in the wrong.

NO PRIDE OF HUMILITY

Indeed, humility is a strange thing – the minute you think you've got it, you've lost it! It goes without saying that if you think you're humble, you're not. And if you have to tell people that you're humble, you obviously aren't!

But Swamishri's humility shines out from miles away. His life is such that it automatically speaks for itself. In his kirtan, “*Sant jan soi sadā mohe bhāve*”, Muktanand Swami extols the glory of a true sadhu. He says that such a sadhu possesses all saintly virtues yet, “*Gunako mān na āvē*” – “He has no pride of even his virtues”. His spiritual state is so advanced that he manages to stay aloof from all bodily instincts, remaining totally unconscious of his humble status at all times.

* * *

Once, in Limbdi, during a public reception, a letter of honour was read out in recognition of Swamishri's philanthropic services. Following this announcement, the organizers went up to Swamishri to present the letter. At this point, bespectacled Swamishri was on his seat absorbed in reading letters as if totally oblivious of who had just been honoured. It required a word of awareness by a sadhu sitting nearby before Swamishri realized what was going on.

Mark Twain once claimed, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” William Shakespeare said, “Praises are our wages.” It is often quoted that the deepest desire in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.

We all come into this Satsang to dissolve our ego yet who does not inwardly nourish feelings for praise, compliments or appreciation? However, if we ponder over Shriji Maharaj's and Swamishri's humility, then we too can check our pride.

Nishkulananand Swami has written in the

Bhaktachintamani: “*Jenā nirmāni Bhagwan, tenā jan ne joiyē kema mān?*”

“If our Lord is ever humble, how can we ever think of harbouring pride?”

A sadhu once asked Swamishri to write blessings in English. Swamishri, who normally only writes in Gujarati, put pen to paper and wrote “i BLESS YOU”.

The sadhu commented, “In English, the word ‘I’ is always written with a capital ‘I’, not a small ‘i’.”

Quick-witted Swamishri instantly replied, “If one wants to progress in satsang, one must always learn to keep the ‘i’ small.” One can perceive and appreciate the depth of Swamishri's humility and awareness.

SWAMISHRI'S SECRET

But in Swamishri's case, it is not merely a case of keeping the ‘I’ small, because in his life, there is no sense of ‘I’ at all.

What is the reason behind his unfathomable humility?

* * *

In 1988 in Houston, a devotee asked Swamishri, “The sadhus talk about your greatness and unceasingly praise you even in your presence, yet how do you manage to remain so humble?”

Swamishri replied, “Whatever happens, whatever good there may be in us is due to God and God only. On the other hand, if we feel that we are doing something, this only inflates our ego. But there's no question of this as by ourselves we are capable of doing absolutely nothing.” Thus Swamishri's belief and faith in the all-doership of God and his understanding of the greatness of God makes him naturally humble.

The devotee then asked, “When does this thought enter your mind?”

Swamishri revealed, “This thought never leaves my mind.”

Finally, let us also strive to realize and internalize in our lives the *mahima* (glory) of God and his God-realized Sadhu.

Sant Jnaneshvar

Sant Jnaneshvar, born in an orthodox Brahmin family, was persecuted by the community for no fault of his. He founded the Varkari sect in Maharashtra. This resulted in loosening the stranglehold of Brahmin orthodoxy



Jnaneshvar or Jnandev (1225-1297 CE), the founder of the Varkari sect,¹ belonged to a persecuted Brahmin family of Apregaon in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. He, his two brothers, Nivruttinath and Sopandev, and sister, Muktabai, had to suffer a lot because of their father, Vitthalpant or Vithoba, who first renounced the world and then returned to family life, which infuriated the Brahmin orthodoxy. The inoffensive children became the victims; all four faced the hardships bravely and renounced the world.

Vitthalpant went to Kashi to become a sannyasi and sought refuge in Swami Ramanand, a saint of the Bhakti Sampradaya. Vitthalpant told his guru Swami Ramanand that he was unmarried. But Jnaneshvar's mother, Rukamabai, (also Rukmanibai) was a resourceful lady. She reached Varanasi and succeeded in reclaiming her husband. Subsequently, Vitthalpant and his family came to be treated as renegades by orthodox circles who felt a *sannyasi* should not

1. The literal meaning of 'Varkari' is a timekeeper. The members of the sect, which was originally concentrated around the Pandharpur region, are particular about visiting the temple for worship. They carry a *mala* and are strict vegetarians. Panduranga (Krishna) is their deity.

have reverted to *grihasthashrama*. The children were reviled by everyone. "One should not even look at them. Those children have been born among the low caste and brought a stain on their Brahminhood." This was the refrain among conservative circles.

The parents became anxious regarding the future of their children. They were growing up without the usual samskaras that ordinary Brahmin children receive. One day their agitated mother said to her husband, "We must ask permission of the Brahmins, and invest our sons with the sacred thread." So, Vitthalpant arranged an assembly of Brahmins and pleaded with them: "Revered sirs, forgive me my transgression. Listen to the pleading of a humble person. Consult the shastras and prescribe a penance for us." Then, Vitthalpant prostrated himself before the Brahmins. The eldest son, Nivruttinath, then said to them, "Merely

by seeing you, we have become free. Prescribe at once penance for us six persons.” The pundits were unrelenting and pronounced, “Barring death there is no other penance for you.” They went on, “Put yourselves under a saw, or burn yourselves to death with repentance.” The parents were ready to undergo any punishment, if only their children were spared. The caste elders decided that Vitthalpant and Rukamabai should go to Prayaga and undertake *prayaschit* (atonement). In order to attain peace, they set out to the holy city and took *jalsamadhi* (death by drowning). This did not help matters. The heartless people hounded the children with redoubled vigour. Jnaneshvar and his siblings were quite young when their parents took *jalsamadhi*; Muktabai, who was the youngest, was three years while Sopandev was four. The supreme sacrifice of their parents did not help them in any way. Meanwhile, the children put up with life as best they could.

After the death of their parents, the children once again approached the Brahmins of their village, Apregaon. Nivruttinath then said to them, “Tell us what we are to do, what penalty do the shastras prescribe for us?” The Brahmins said to him, “Go now to Pratishthan (Paithan)² and bring from there a letter declaring you to be pure.” Nivruttinath said, “What shall we tell them? We have no authority to tell them regarding our caste or family.” Jnandev replied, “The man who acts contrary to scriptural commands is worthy of blame, such is the teaching of the shastras. Although the man who has knowledge becomes a *jivanmukta* (God-realized while alive), he should not leave the rules that are prescribed for him. Moreover, those who are sadhus should show others the right way by their own righteous conduct. To act contrary to what is prescribed in the scriptures should be recognized as the supreme fault. Whatever one’s special duties are, they should be performed. So have spoken the

Brahmins learned in the Vedas.” Jnandev then added, “Nivruttinath, this is what the shastras have to say regarding one’s duties. I have therefore replied to you because of our close friendship.” There was a further discussion among the children. Sopan then spoke, “Of what value is caste or family? Without bhakti, the holy feet of Shri Hari can never be reached.”

The orphaned children did as advised by the elders. After reaching the banks of the holy Godavari at Paithan, they performed all the duties devolving upon the pilgrims. Thereafter, they entered into Paithan and bowed to the Brahmins. The children told them what had happened. The Brahmins of the highest rank, after listening to them, said, “It is evident that you have fallen from your high state.” They remarked further, “You can never be made pure by sacred waters or religious observances or by any number of penalties.” Such was the decision of the whole assembly of Brahmins. Then they added, “According to the opinion of the shastras there is only one remedy. You should go as supplicants to Shri Hari (God) and worship every existing thing: donkeys, dogs, elephants and the like should be worshipped as if they were the same. You should bow with the same reverence to a hog and an out-caste with the thought that God is in them all; you should bow to them in love.” After listening to this reply, Nivruttinath, Jnandev and Sopan felt happy. Then the Brahmins set the test for Jnandev.

“A young male buffalo with a leather water-skin on his back is coming towards us. His name also is Jnan.” Listening to this remark of the Brahmins, Jnandev said with joined palms, “Listen to my words. I cannot see the least difference between this male buffalo and myself. The *atma* (soul) that pervades every body is alike in every creature.”

A Brahmin hearing him remarked, “You are needlessly talking too much.” Then he angrily struck the buffalo with a lash. That made Jnaneshvar violently tremble, and the welt

2. Paithan was then the seat of Brahmin orthodoxy.

appeared on his own back. When the Brahmins saw this, they exclaimed, "If there is no difference between you and the buffalo, then let it recite the Vedas." Hearing these words of the Brahmins, Jnaneshvar, who knew no differences, went up to the buffalo, placed his hand upon its head and said, "Recite at once the Rig Veda, and satisfy these Brahmins." The buffalo instantly began to recite all four Vedas with proper intonation and gave pleasure to the Brahmins. They exclaimed, "No one has ever seen so wonderful a thing in this world of mortals.

"Blessed are his mother and father. Both of them must have performed good deeds in their former births to give birth to such a noble son." With these expressions of astonishment the Brahmins remained silent. But Jnandev said to them, "O revered Brahmins, what I have done is through your powers. I am truly an ignorant person. It is your feat that manifest this power." All the people of Paithan were moved with much love and reverence. They explained, "Blessed are these *bhaktas* of Vishnu, who in this earthly existence are entirely indifferent to earthly things." They now began daily to bathe in the Godavari, to listen to the explanations of Jnandev on the Vedanta, and the stories in the Purans.

This established Jnaneshvar's popularity. People began to flock to him and he began to explain the essence of the Gita. From that time onwards Jnaneshvar's preaching began. Besides his commentary on the Gita, Sant Jnaneshvar wrote *Amrutanubhava* which contains one thousands *Abhangas* and *Changdeva Prashasti*. Sant Jnaneshvar has greatly influenced Namadev, Tukaram and Eknath. Eknath edited the final version of the *Jnaneshvari Gita*.

It may be mentioned here the entire family was highly talented and the saint accepted his eldest brother Nivruttinath as his guru. He took him to be an incarnation of Vithala. After staying in Paithan for sometime they left for their hometown. Jnaneshvar composed the *Jnaneshvari*

Gita, also called the *Bhavarthadipika*, his celebrated commentary in Marathi on the Bhagavad Gita at Nevase, a small town on the banks of Prawara, in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. He was 15 at that time. The *Jnaneshvari* is an important scripture of the Varkari sect, written in simple language and contains the essence of the saint's philosophy. The work has captivated the hearts of Marathis because of its directness and simplicity. He says, "I am building the temple of bliss for the world." After writing the commentary, he started on a *tirthyatra* that took him to Ujjain, Prayag, Kashi, Gaya, Ayodhya, Gokul, Vrundavan, Dwarika, Girnar and then returned to Pandharpur. He was accompanied by Namadev, another prominent figure in the Varkari *sampradaya*.

Jnaneshvar writes about his classic, "I want to fill the whole world with divine joy. I have selected the simplest of metres, the *ovi* metre, because it is easy to comprehend for all, even to children and youths."

The saint laid stress on devotion and treated caste, status or creed with scant regard. It was a challenge to the Brahminical rituals and the orthodox method of sacrificial fire or *yajna* performances. Jnaneshvar insists on a perfect celibate and ethical life; and gives a great place to austerities. But by far the path of realization which he emphasizes over and over is bhakti and service to the enlightened guru.

When he was 21, Sant Jnaneshvar attained *samadhi* at Alandi, where he was born. Within a year, his sister and brothers too passed away. ♦



SIMPLE WAY TO GOOD HEALTH

BENEFITS

Whether you stroll, saunter, amble, stride or powerwalk, walking is great for you. This simple activity can transform your life. Let's share a few good reasons why walking is so good for you.

1. It Promotes Good Health

From a health perspective, walking is the key to managing weight, controlling blood pressure, reducing the risk of a stroke, cancer and diabetes. It also lowers total cholesterol and increases high density lipoproteins (HDL) or the 'good cholesterol'. In women, walking helps combat osteoporosis (loss of bone mass) and in men it reduces the risk of sarcopenia (loss of muscle mass). It is said a brisk daily walk lengthens your lifespan.

2. It Keeps You Mentally Refreshed

From a psychological perspective, walking offers an opportunity to clarify your thoughts, to crystalize and solve your problems and to reduce your stress levels. Walking elevates your mood and sense of wellbeing and decreases your risk of depression. Affirmations and positive reinforcements can be easily performed while walking. Your walking time can also effectively be utilized for listening to motivational speeches, satsang discourses or good music.

3. It Allows for Social Bonding

Walking regularly with someone else allows a friendship to blossom as the pair of you exercise. You could also schedule regular walks with your

CORRECT WALKING TECHNIQUE



Note the heel-and-toe contact during the widest spread of the stride,
and the straight leg as the heel contacts the ground

spouse or associates and use the time to discuss any issues without any distractions.

4. It Allows You to See the World Around You

The best way to explore some of the world's great cities is on foot. As a young man, I can fondly remember exploring the holy city of Varanasi, walking from one ghat to the next. Walking enables one to keep life simple. With an abundance of technology in our lives, the simple beauty of life is often forgotten. Appreciate simplicity... Walk... Breathe... Live!

THE BASICS

Walk at a pace that has you breathing heavily, but still leaving you able to talk freely. Your goal, eventually, is to walk five days a week, 30 minutes a walk. Do that and you are getting the base-level amount of exercise that research says should maintain your health and vigour. Start slowly, within your limits and do not increase by more than 10% weekly. A few minutes of warm up and stretching exercises will go a long way in preventing injuries.

1. Find a Shoe that Fits

Walking is one of the most economical sports one can participate in. The only equipment you really need is a decent pair of walking or

running shoes.

2. When You Are Shopping for Running Shoes

- ❖ Avoid fancy branded commercial sneakers. Look for a running shoe. What matters most is comfort and support.
- ❖ Wear your socks you plan to exercise in. That way, you will get the best possible fit. Try on both shoes. Most people's feet are not exactly the same size.
- ❖ Allow a little extra room in your shoes. Feet swell when you walk, so buy a pair with about a thumb's width between your longest toe and the end of your shoe. Make sure the heel does not slip through, or you could end up with painful blisters.
- ❖ If you have flat feet, high arches, are a heavy pronator or supinator, consult a podiatrist first before investing in expensive running shoes.

Your feet are the foundation of your body. You have one pair for life, use them well.

3. Check Your Form

Sure, walking comes naturally, and it is wise to go with the technique that you have developed since you were a toddler. These tips will help you stay comfortable and get the most out of walking:

- ❖ A key element to fitness walking is proper

posture. Some people slump over when they walk, which over time can lead to problems. As you walk, point your chest straight ahead, tuck in your belly, relax your shoulders, keep your neck straight and your head held high. All this should already make you feel confident and better.

- ❖ Move your arms. Bend your elbows and let your arms swing naturally at your sides. You will burn up to 15% more calories by keeping your arms moving.
- ❖ Lengthening your stride in order to walk more quickly, known as over-striding, is a mistake. It puts you off balance without speeding up your pace. Speed up by taking short, quick strides, concentrating on pushing off your toes with every step. Pumping your arms quickly will automatically make your feet move faster.
- ❖ Breathe deeply and as naturally as possible. Do not try and hold your breath while walking. Oxygen is invigorating – our muscles, brain and every cell needs oxygen. So inhale deeply without stressing yourself.

4. Stay Safe

Walking is one of the safest activities you can perform. Still, it is prudent to take a few precautions:

- ❖ If you are walking at night or when visibility is low, wear a piece of reflective clothing or a band. Do not forget to have a good flashlight. Always walk in the opposite

direction of moving traffic so that you can see what is approaching.

- ❖ In countries where crime is rife, walk with a partner and walk in protected, closed environments.
- ❖ Keep yourself well hydrated by drinking sufficient water.
- ❖ If your path is rugged or bumpy, protect your ankles, particularly if you have a history of twists or sprains.
- ❖ Listen to your body. Your body will tell you exactly when you need to slow down, rest or heal. Recover from any injuries completely before resuming walking, otherwise injuries will recur frequently.

KEEP IT UP

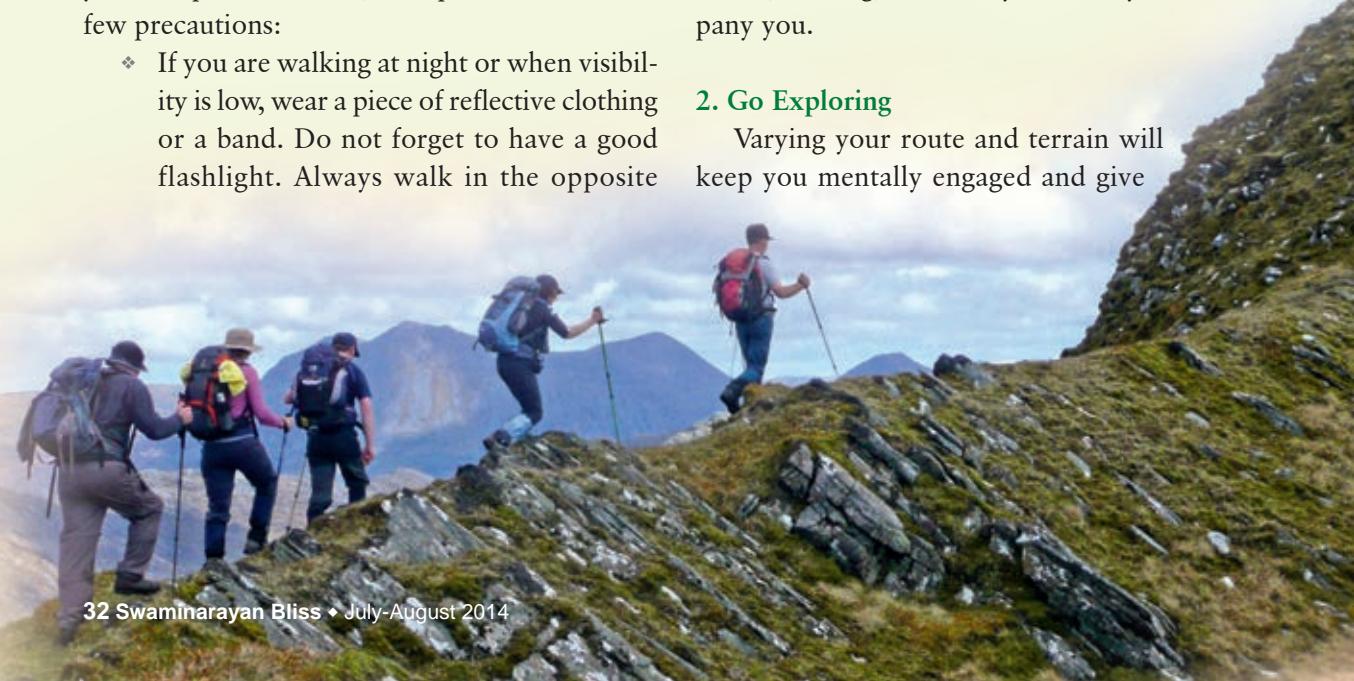
If you think walking is hard work or you become irregular in your walking, the following ideas may help sustain your activity:

1. Walk with a Friend

If you've got a friend waiting for you, you're more likely to get out of bed or drag yourself away from the TV or phone. Better still; take your entire family out on a walk occasionally and especially on holidays. If all else fails, man's best friend, his dog, will always be ready to accompany you.

2. Go Exploring

Varying your route and terrain will keep you mentally engaged and give



different leg muscles a workout. Once a week, complete your errands on foot.

3. Step Out for Charity

Pledging a small sum of money for every kilometre or mile you walk for your favourite charity or the mandir can be a good motivator. Participating in a sponsored walk will bring back that 'I feel great' factor.

NICE TO HAVES

1. Use a Pedometer

These nifty gadgets measure how far you've walked in steps and kilometres. They provide motivation by spurring you to meet a particular goal and showing you if you've met it. Often pedometers hook onto your belt and are small and easy to use – great birthday or Father's Day gifts! Alternatively, download a walking app on your cell phone to monitor your progress.

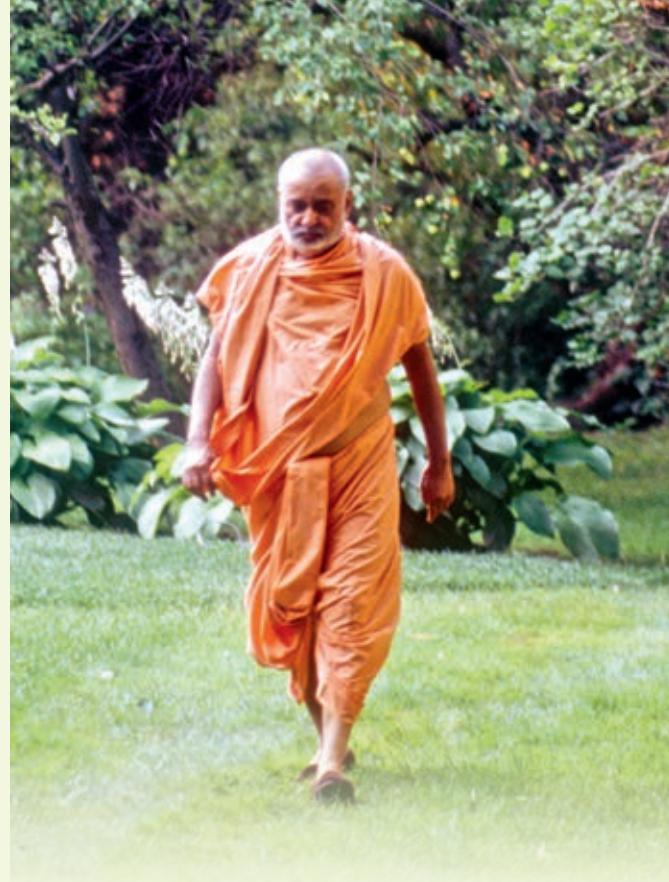
2. Treadmill

For those who hate the sun or cannot walk outdoors for some reason, you can walk in the comfort of your home on a treadmill. Not for me though, I love the fresh, green, outdoors.

SPIRITUALITY AND WALKING

Until recently Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to walk on a regular basis, mostly twice a day. Now, Swamishri does not walk outside due to health and age constraints. Swamishri used his walking time as exercise, more so as a means to give darshan to devotees and to meet and greet them – moments they cherish forever. Today many senior and junior BAPS sadhus have taken to walking as exercise.

Whatever your preference – doing *pradakshinas* in the Akshar Deri or at your local mandir; or chanting the Janmangal Namavali while walking, remembering darshans of Swamishri – walking is in and here to stay! Walking is the premier exercise for all.



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TURNING POINT OF MY LIFE

By Roshen Gopal

He has a friendly and generous demeanour and lives in Rustenburg, South Africa. His unremitting spiritual sadhana continued for 25 years. Then, in 1998, a new chapter unfolded in his life as a consequence of his sincerity and devotion...

For 25 years I had been chanting the holy name of Ram – 108 *malas* daily. I also recited one Hanuman Chalisa daily with the exception of performing 11 Chalisas on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Despite the fact that my grandparents, parents and myself were born in Rustenburg, South Africa, my Hindu moorings were robust. Once every year I used to drive 130 kms to the Sanatan Mandir in Lenasia and chant 108 Hanuman Chalisa. In 1998, as part of my annual Chalisa ritual, I drove to Lenasia. That day I was overwhelmed with a special feeling of joy. I could not understand why this was so. While chanting the Chalisa at the Sanatan Mandir tears of joy rolled down my cheeks. I could not comprehend what was happening and why. On reaching home a thought struck me; I wished to have a bona fide guru. Since it was the holiday season at that time my relatives came one after another to visit and stay with me. With each having their allegiance to Hindu or Jain *sampradayas*, they insisted upon me to join their faith. I blatantly told them not to force me and that I would align only if I felt so from within. When my aunt came from Durban, she told me that she

would send me a *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the gurus and one *mala*. She added that if I felt so, I should do one *mala* daily while chanting the name of Swaminarayan. I liked her liberal request – there was no force or rubbing in of her faith. So, I started doing one *mala*, chanting the name of Swaminarayan daily. I had no inkling as to who Bhagwan Swaminarayan or the gurus were. On the eighth day after completing my daily *mala* I was driving to work. Suddenly, next to my seat I saw a saffron clad sadhu – Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His appearance was not an illusion, but a real experience. I could not understand the strange phenomena. He was seated alone and was quiet. I was scared at first, but he disappeared ten minutes later. Then for the next 10 days I would find him occasionally sitting opposite me in my office and also at home while I was having dinner. Swami would never say a word, but he would cast his divine eyes upon me.

In 1999, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Johannesburg. I was invited to come for his darshan. That day I gave up eating chicken, because I felt it was inappropriate of me to go for his darshan

with such a habit. I was a teetotaller and had no other addictions or vices. When I met Swamishri at Mukeshbhai's house, the host revealed to Swamishri that I had four 'Chicken-Licken' shops – selling fried chicken. Pramukh Swami Maharaj reassured me and said I should not worry but sell the shops gradually and start another business. Swami's voice was gentle and he was serene. I felt immensely relieved at Swamishri's darshan and his open approach appealed to me. I became a *satsangi* at Swamishri's hands on that very day. It was a turning point in my life.

Thereafter, on Swamishri's instruction, I started attending the Sunday satsang assembly at Johannesburg. I used to drive 130 km by car every Sunday from Rustenburg to Johannesburg Mandir; and it took me one-and-a-half hours. I'd leave home at 3:00 p.m. and reach the BAPS mandir in Mayfair, Johannesburg, at 4:30 p.m. After darshan I'd sit in the satsang assembly from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. After the satsang assembly was over I would have dinner at the mandir, then leave at 8:00 p.m. to reach home by 9:30 p.m. I followed this Sunday routine for 13 years, without a single lapse.

At 45 years, I learnt to read Gujarati by myself, spending one whole year behind it. I've been reading one Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vatos and singing the *cheshta* daily for the last 15 years.

* * *

In 2011, BAPS sadhus consecrated the small

marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and photos of Guru Parampara at the Seva Samaj Mandir in Rustenburg. Thereafter, the sadhus told Roshenbhai to perform the morning and evening *artis* daily and conduct the weekly Sunday satsang assembly in the mandir. Ever since the last three years,¹ Roshenbhai has been unfailingly performing the morning *arti* at 7.00 a.m. and the evening *arti* at 7.15 p.m. He schedules his work as such that he does not miss doing the morning and evening *artis*. He has made it a point to prioritize satsang by arranging his social appointments either before or after the daily evening *artis* and Sunday satsang assembly. Roshenbhai has appeared for the Satsang exams in English upto Pravin (Fourth Year). His enthusiasm for doing satsang is born out of his faith and love for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His commitment to attending the Sunday satsang assembly for years and performing two *artis* daily is a shining example of a sincere and devoted *satsangi*. Such regular and diligent devotion surely merits a devotee with the grace of God and guru. The Gujaratis of Rustenburg respect the humble and unassuming Roshenbhai for his philanthropic spirit and appreciation for all. ◆

1 Roshenbhai has been performing *artis* of the all-in-one *murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Guru Parampara since 2005 at the Seva Samaj Mandir in Rustenburg.

NEW SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH PUBLICATION

EXPRESSIONS

by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



The *paramhansas* had a special bond with Bhagwan Swaminarayan, which they expressed in a multitude of exceptional ways.

Of these, their poetry is a living testimony of their spiritual affinity for Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

At times, when instructed, but often spontaneously, the *paramhansas* burst into song to capture their thoughts, observations and emotions. They have left a rich legacy of divine, spiritual poetry that continues to inspire and guide spiritual aspirants to the present day.

Expressions: Poems by Paramhansas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is a selection of such bhajans and the story of the events preceding each.

VACHANAMRUT NIRUPAN

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of the spiritual discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is read daily by countless devotees and is also elaborated upon by sadhus and volunteers during the daily katha in BAPS mandirs and assemblies.

An elaboration on an excerpt of a Vachanamrut has been given here. It has been translated from 'Satsang Saurabh' in Gujarati.



God Manifests with His Akshardham

Vachanāmrut, Gadhādā I 71

On the evening of Chaitra vadi 4, Samvat 1876 [2 April 1820], Shriji Maharaj was sitting on a large, decorated cot which had been placed on the platform in front of the west-facing medi in Dādā Khāchar's darbār in Gadhādā. He was wearing a white khes and had covered himself with a white cotton cloth. He had also tied a white feto around his head. At that time, Muktānand Swāmī and some sadhus were singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of musical instruments, while other sadhus as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him in an assembly.

Thereupon Shriji Maharaj explained, "When God incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the jivas, he is always accompanied by his Akshardhām, his attendants – who are formed of chaitanya – and all of his divine powers; but they are not perceived by others. Nevertheless, when some devotee acquires a divine vision during samadhi, he does see divine light equivalent to countless millions of suns in the form of God. Together with that form, he also sees countless millions of muktas and also Akshardhām itself. Therefore, all of these do accompany God. Despite all of this, though, God only accepts the service of his own, earthly devotees. He stays in his devotees' houses made of mud, clay and stone. He lovingly accepts whatever those devotees offer him, be it incense, an oil lamp, food, clothes, or anything else. He does so for the purpose of elevating those earthly attendants to the ranks of divine attendants. All of those objects that a devotee offers to God assume a divine form in the abode of God. Moreover, that devotee also attains a divine form and attains those divine objects there. In this way, God accepts all of the offerings offered by his earthly devotees in order to allow them to experience everlasting bliss. Therefore, a devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardhām is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others."

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THIS VACHANAMRUT

■ This Vachanamrut is of paramount importance for understanding the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

■ The philosophy behind the mandirs built by Shastriji Maharaj and BAPS is rooted in this Vachanamrut.

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan emphasizes two main points:

■ God manifests along with Akshardham

■ God manifests with all his divine powers and also brings his divine *muktas*.

GOD MANIFESTS ALONG WITH AKSHARDHAM

■ At the very outset of this discourse Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that God himself assumes human form to unshackle the *jivas* from the bonds of *maya*. And at that time his divine abode Akshardham, his attendants (*muktas*), and all his divine powers accompany him. Thus, God himself takes birth on earth to liberate his devotees.

■ Once, King Akbar asked his advisor, Birbal, “Hindus believe that God himself takes birth on earth. I don’t believe this to be true.” Birbal did not say anything in reply, but on the next day he took Akbar on an outing to a nearby lake.

While they were sailing in a boat, Akbar’s eyes fell on a maid servant who was cradling his little prince in her arms in another boat nearby. Suddenly, Akbar saw the little prince slipping from the maid’s hands into the waters of the lake. Akbar was shocked; he dived immediately into the lake to rescue his little prince. In fact, Birbal had arranged for a wax statue of the prince which the maid was holding in her hands.

When Akbar came out of the lake with the wax model of his prince, Birbal explained, “O King! Just as you yourself dived into the lake to rescue your son, so too does God himself take birth on earth to fulfil the wishes of his beloved devotees and to liberate them.”

■ Secondly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that God brings his abode, Akshardham, in human form along with him. Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami was Akshardham in human form.

But why does God need to bring Aksharbrahman along with him? Two reasons:

a. To make the devotees *brahmarup*

Why is it necessary to become *brahmarup*?

■ After the evening *arti*, we daily pray: “*Nirvikalp uttam ati, nishchay tav Ghanshyām...*” In this prayer we ask God to bless us with ‘*Nirvikalp uttam nischay*.’ What does this mean?

In Vachanamrut, Loya 12, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that one who worships Purushottam realizing one’s self to be *aksharrup* (*brahmarup*) can be said to possess the highest level of *nirvikalp* faith.

■ Also, in Shikshapatri, Verse 116, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that one should realize one’s atman (soul) to be *brahmarup* and offer worship to God.

■ In Vachanamrut, Loya 7, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that only one who is *brahmarup* has the right to offer bhakti to Purushottam. It’s not possible to put a quart (two pints) into a pint pot; likewise, one who has not become *brahmarup* cannot embrace God.

■ God may, of his own free will, shower divine bliss, yet a person who is not *brahmarup* cannot fully appreciate it. Maharaj had expressed his affection for Jiva and Allaiya Khachar innumerable times, yet they could not appreciate it, because they had not become *brahmarup*.

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachanamrut, Aslali 1, that even the Prajapatis and other creators of the cosmos do not attain ultimate liberation (*moksha*), since they do not realize that becoming *aksharrup* (*brahmarup*) and serving Shri Purushottam Narayan gives liberation.

■ Thus, to appreciate the bliss of God, to enjoy that bliss eternally, and to worship God eternally it is essential to become *brahmarup*.

So, how can one become *brahma**rup*?

In Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 31, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that if one associates with Brahman through continuous contemplation then one acquires the virtues of Brahman. Thus, one attains the *brahma**rup* state.

However, only if Brahman is manifest in a discernible physical form on earth can one associate and contemplate upon Brahman. It is for this purpose that God brings Brahman (Aksharbrahman) along with him on earth.

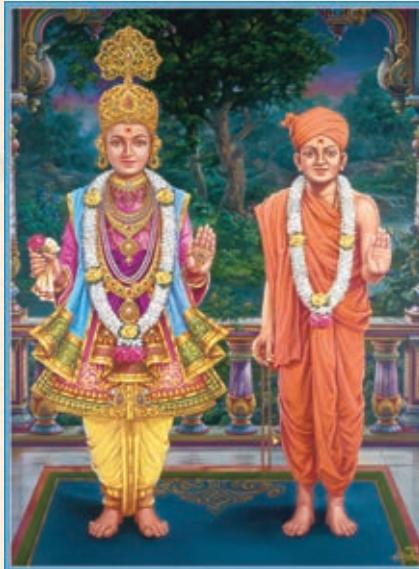
b. To help the devotees fully understand the glory of God

- *Jivas* are bound by *maya*, while God transcends *maya*. How can the *jivas* with their *maya*-imbued senses perceive God, who transcends *maya*?

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan answers the above-said question in Vachanamrut, Panchala 7. He says that when one develops faith in the words of the Ekantik Sadhu and worships God guilelessly, one transcends *maya*. Thereafter, one realizes the incarnate form of God as being supreme, and characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss.

Further, in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 51, he says that one realizes the glory of Purushottam Bhagwan only by profound association with Sant. After realizing such glory one's *indriyas* and *antahkarans* become divine. Then, through such divinized *indriyas* and *antahkarans* one becomes capable of fully understanding God.

Again, in Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 31, he says that only when the Satpurush manifests on earth and one hears the nature and glory of God being



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

narrated by him, does one understand it.

- This Ekantik Satpurush is none other than Aksharbrahman himself, because only Aksharbrahman fully understands the glory of Parabrahman. Thus, to help the *jivas* understand his glory, God brings Aksharbrahman to earth.

- Who is that Aksharbrahman? Gunatitanand Swami is the incarnation of Aksharbrahman on earth. He was born in the village of Bhadra in

Gujarat. His childhood name was Mulji Sharma.

- In 1808 CE (Samvat 1864), when Bhagwan Swaminarayan arrived in Bhadra, he informed Mulji's mother, Sakarba, "Your son, Mulji, is the incarnation of my eternal divine abode, Akshardham."

- When Maharaj made Gunatitanand Swami the *mahant* (chief) of Junagadh mandir, he called Kurji Dave and said, "Today I present you and the other devotees of Junagadh my divine abode, Akshardham."

- Gopalanand Swami, during the last few days before his ascension to Akshardham, had said to the devotees from Vadodara, "This is not the moment to set ones eyes towards Vadodara. At this moment, one should see either towards Maharaj in Akshardham or towards Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh."

- Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj mentions in *Kirtan Kaustubhmala*:

"Aksharmurti Gunātitānand Swami, Tene
āpyā vartmān,

Pote pāline pachhi palāvyā, Jatane daine
ghanu gnān..."

Meaning, "Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami initiated me into Satsang.

"He enabled me to follow the satsang codes

through his own exemplary life and spiritual understanding.”

■ Embossed and printed *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami have been consecrated in numerous mandirs that fall under the jurisdiction of the Vartal Sanstha. The inscriptions below the *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami clearly reads ‘Anadi Mul Akshar’.

For instance, in Jetpur mandir, which belongs to the Vartal Sanstha, the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami embossed on a silver sheet have been installed in the *Sukh-Shaiya*. Here, below the *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami it is written: ‘Mul Aksharmurti’.

Sadguru Balmukund Swami of Junagadh mandir, under the jurisdiction of the Vartal Sanstha had installed canvas-painted *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the *hari* mandirs of Rajkot, Gondal, Piplana, Vanthali, Panchala, Dhoraji and other places. In these places, below the images of Gunatitanand Swami, ‘Mul Akshar’ is written.

Famous throughout the Swaminarayan Sampradaaya, the memorial shrine built over the site where Gunatitanand Swami’s cremation rites were performed is well known as ‘Akshar Deri’.

■ Thus, the empirical evidence that Gunatitanand Swami is ‘Mul Akshar’ was available even much before Shastriji Maharaj began to install the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with Gunatitanand Swami.

■ Bhagatji Maharaj endured countless miseries and insults as he publicly expounded the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam and described Gunatitanand Swami as ‘Mul Akshar’. Yet, without giving up, Bhagatji Maharaj continued to avow the doctrine.

Later, Shastriji Maharaj understood this doctrine from Bhagatji Maharaj and corroborated it with the firsthand testimony of many aged sadhus and devotees from the times of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami.

■ In a detailed letter to the devotees of Africa,

Shastriji Maharaj writes to explain the basis on which he understood Gunatitanand Swami as ‘Mul Akshar’. Some excerpts:

“ I had privately asked Kothari Gordhandas whether he and others were opposed to the talk that Swami is Akshar. And didn’t Raghuvirji Maharaj, who used to spiritually associate with Swami, believe that (Swami is Akshar)? The Kothari emphatically said, ‘When he used to go initially he did not say it. But when he went in Samvat 1917 (1861 CE) he had become one with Swami and realized that Swami was Akshar; this I say with an oath before you.’”

In his concluding remarks in the letter, Shastriji Maharaj writes:

“ I do not know how to arrange a false talk and explain it to others for a selfish purpose. There is a lot of sin in untruth.... Therefore, if you trust me and believe me to be a speaker of truth, an honest person, then believe the above talk to be true, and with a pure heart develop the faith that Swami is *anadi* (eternal) Akshar. And truly believe that Shriji Maharaj is Purna Purushottam Bhagwan.”

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan had installed the twin forms of Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan, Radha-Raman, and others in the different mandirs he built. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had thus posited the *upasana* of God along with an ideal devotee. Likewise, Gunatitanand Swami is the ideal devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

■ After Ramanand Swami’s ascension to Akshardham, Shriji Maharaj asked the devotees to chant the ‘Swaminarayan’ mantra, in which, ‘Swami’ refers to Gunatitanand Swami, and ‘Narayan’ refers to Maharaj himself. Thus, this mantra conveys the *upasana* of God along with his ideal devotee.

■ It is essential to practice the *upasana* of God along with his ideal devotee to attain ultimate *moksha*.

■ In Vachanamrut, Vartal 5, Bhagwan Swaminarayan shows a shortcut to becoming a

devotee of the highest standard. He says that one who is destined to become pure after two, four, ten or hundred births can become a devotee of the highest standard in this life if one offers equal devotion to God's ideal devotee as one offers to God.

- Once, Maharaj said, "Consider one huge ship filled with ten million boats. We want to fill 1,000 million such huge ships. To that many *jivas* we want to grant *moksha*" (Swamini Vato 1.72).

Thus, Maharaj wishes to grant *moksha* to countless *jivas*. This is possible only if the *jivas* properly understand and practice the *upasana*. Gunatitanand Swami is 'Mul Akshar'; Shriji Maharaj is 'Purna Purushottam' is the basic tenet of *upasana*. Without the clarity of such basic tenets of *upasana* the *jivas* cannot attain final *moksha*.

Hence, as per Maharaj's wish, it is necessary to understand and explicate this basic tenet to as many people as possible, so that they become eligible for ultimate *moksha*.

- Gunatitanand Swami incessantly expounded the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as supreme God or Purna Purushottam Narayan. Later, Bhagatji Maharaj enthusiastically explained that Gunatitanand Swami is 'Mul Akshar'.

- Thereafter, Shastriji Maharaj took great pains to disseminate the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam – Gunatitanand is 'Mul Akshar';

Sahajanand is 'Purna Purushottam'.

The extent to which Shastriji Maharaj was prepared to embrace hardships can be understood from his own words: "Even if I have to sell myself off (as a slave) to a low caste for spreading the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam it would not be good enough."

Shastriji Maharaj marched upstream against treacherous opposition and amidst insurmountable difficulties to spread and establish the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam in India and Africa.

Shastriji Maharaj was unmatched in the way he audaciously proclaimed and expounded the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine. To consolidate this, he built five towering mandirs enshrining the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam.

- After him, Yogiji Maharaj and, presently, Pramukh Swami Maharaj have spread the doctrine all over the world by building over 1,100 mandirs dedicated to the worship of Akshar-Purushottam.

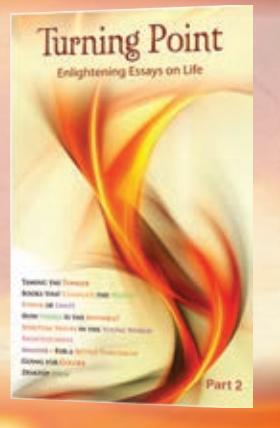
- What should we do? Enable aspirants who come in our contact to develop affection for Satsang and help them to understand the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine. So, one should continuously listen to and expound the glory of God, the manifest Satpurush and the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine. ◆

NEW SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH PUBLICATION

Turning Point, Part 2

Enlightening Essays on Life

Turning Point, Part 2, enriches and inspires youths to attain lofty heights of knowledge, wisdom and spirituality through an eclectic approach. In all, the book contains 46 interesting essays classified into seven categories: social, culture, morality, spirituality, philosophy, inspiring personalities and health. All the essays in the book, written by BAPS sadhus and devotees, are brief, lucid and interesting. Some of the topics include: Stress Management, Time-Wasters, Teamwork Triumphs, Respect Parents, Indian Calendar System, The Sixteen Samskaras, Righteousness and Unrighteousness, Religion and Secularism, Remaking Ourselves, The Wizard of Menlo Park,...



FAQs on Hinduism

From *Hinduism, An Introduction* by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave,
published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith

1. What are the meanings of Hindu Dharma and Hindutva?

Hindu Dharma is a religion of many Hindu traditions or *sampradayas*.

The term Hindutva, for the majority of practicing Hindus, means the essence of Hindu Dharma. It includes the principles and practices of its Vedic, Upanishadic, Pauranic, bhakti and other traditions.

Some, however, distinguish Hindutva from Hindu Dharma. Hindutva for them is a socio-political force to unite all Hindus by promoting pride for India and its glorious heritage.

2. Other than Hinduism which other religions originated from India?

Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were born from Hinduism.

i. The salient features of Buddhism

Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, means the enlightened one. He is also known as Gautama Buddha and Shakya Muni. He was born and lived in India, circa 557 BCE to 477 BCE. After witnessing another's suffering and death he renounced his princely comforts at twenty-nine to seek the path of nirvana or freedom from sorrow and suffering. He performed austerities and meditation and attained enlightenment at 35. For the next 45 years he spread his wisdom and established a religious order of monks.

He taught the four noble truths: (1) *dukha* or the existence of suffering; (2) *dukha samudaya* or cause of suffering; (3) *dukhanirodha* or that it is possible to stop suffering and (4) *dukhanirodhamarga* or that there is a way out of all suffering. He prescribed an eight-fold noble path for

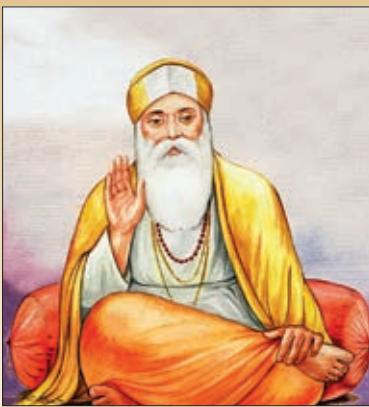
attaining the last truth, namely, right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The four noble truths and eight-fold noble path form the core of Buddhism.

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism and is regarded as a cleansing or reformation of Hinduism in Buddha's time. Ahimsa or non-violence is its primary ethical principle. Buddha de-emphasized caste and ritual and taught liberation through an ethical life and meditation. He did not recognize the authority of the Vedas, therefore Buddhism is considered to be a *nastika* (heterodox) system in Indian philosophy.

In 380 BCE, which is about 100 years after Buddha passed away, there was a schism in Buddhism. The conservatives came to be called the Theravadis. The rest came to be known as Mahasanghikas. These two groups evolved into the Hinayana and Mahayana schools. The Hinayana sect, which developed from the Theravada branch, is inclined towards the spiritual knowledge of Buddha, i.e. they are *jnana-margis*. They believe that Buddha came on earth for his own liberation. The Mahayana sect is a reformist movement and believes Buddha to be God and that he came to liberate countless souls. This sect is mainly inclined towards the path of devotion or *bhakti-marga*. The Mahayana spread to and flourished in China, Japan and Tibet, whereas Hinayana spread to Sri Lanka, Myanmar and some Southeast Asian countries.

ii. The salient features of Jainism

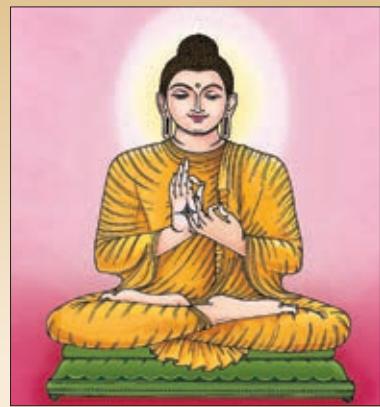
Jainism is a world religion that has its origin in India. The Jains claim that it originated from their first leader, Sage Rishabhdeva (an avatar of



Guru Nānak



Lord Mahavira



Lord Buddha

Bhagwan Vishnu), and acknowledge Mahavira (599-527 BCE) to be the founder. They believe in 24 Tirthankars. A Tirthankar is one who achieves enlightenment (perfect knowledge) through asceticism and then becomes a guru and role model for those seeking spiritual guidance.

Jain philosophy believes in two fundamental principles – the *jivatattva* (living beings) and the *ajivatattva* (non-living objects). Various experiences of birth, life and death arise due to the actions and relations of these two principles. Liberation is prescribed through a five-fold ethical code: *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy) and *aparigraha* (non-possession).

Jainism developed into a mass religion with lay followers. Kings and nobles were also attracted to the religion. Chandragupta Maurya (340 BCE-298 BCE) of the Magadha empire and King Naresh Kharvela (circa 1 BCE or 2 BCE) of Kalinga (Bengal) are said to have converted to Jainism. In the first century CE the Jain order split into two groups: Digambara ('heaven-clad', i.e. naked ascetics, following the orthodox, stricter tradition) and Shvetambara ('white-clad', whose ascetics wear white clothes and follow a liberal path of renunciation).

The Digambara sect have their own separate places of worship and images. The Shvetambara sect is sub-divided into the Sthanakavasi, Deravasi and Terapanthi. The Sthanakavasi do not build

temples but have *upashrayas* or halls where the ascetics stay and deliver discourses. The Deravasi have temples and worship the images of Mahavira and the Tirthankaras. And the Terapanthi believe in the guru tradition.

Today the Jains are a small minority in India working mainly as businessmen and professionals.

iii. The salient features of Sikhism

After Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, Sikhism is the fourth religion born in India. It is the youngest of the world religions. Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) was the founder of Sikhism. He was succeeded by nine gurus who developed and nourished Sikhism. The last guru was the illustrious Guru Govind Singh (1666-1708 CE). He ended the guru tradition with himself and declared the Granth Sahib, the main scripture of Sikhs, to be venerated as the guru. The Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth was compiled by Guru Arjun Dev (1563-1606 CE), the fifth guru, in 1604. The holy book comprises 6,000 devotional songs written by five of the gurus. Furthermore, songs by Namdev, Raidas and Kabir have also been included. The crux of the teachings in Guru Granth Sahib is that God is one and that his name is Truth or Tat. He is also known by the names of Satnama (Holy name), Kartar (Creator), Akal (Creator), Waheguru, Allah, Khuda and Paravardigar (Cherisher). Repeating his name and remembering him are the

(Contd. on pg. 51)

BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics

A Lifeline for the Poor in Gujarat



In the last 15 years, since 1999, over 4 million patients in countless remote villages have benefitted from the free medical treatment provided by BAPS Medical Clinics – a service initiated and guided by Pramukh Swami Maharaj

“For 15 years I had suffered from ill health, but treatment at the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic has cured me. I tell everyone I meet to benefit from the free medical care given here. Around 40 of us from Ghadkuva village regularly use this service.”

These are the words of Khimjibhai Gamit, a tribal villager who was delighted with the care he received from a BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic.

Shri Manilal Chaudhary of Piplvada village comments, “For many years now, the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic has been coming to our village every Tuesday and Friday. They began coming even when there were no proper roads in

our village. The government clinic in Dharampur is far from our village and it is expensive for our tribal villagers to travel there. Since the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic has started coming to our village, the villagers have benefitted in terms of time, money and health.”

These are just two voices from the thousands of appreciative villagers who have benefitted from the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics. For the poor tribals these mobile medical clinics have been a godsend.

Having travelled for decades to the villages of Gujarat, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has observed at firsthand the difficult circumstances poor villagers have to bear. He has seen the vicious cycle of poverty leading to addictions and addictions leading to poverty, and the ill health that resulted.

As a first step, Pramukh Swami Maharaj endeavoured to free the villagers of their addictions and taught them to lead a healthier lifestyle.



He also resolved to provide medical aid in their remote locations. This resulted in the establishment of BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics. As a result of his initiative, for the past 15 years mobile medical vans have been regularly visiting remote tribal villages to provide basic medical care to the villagers.

Supported by the Suvasini Charitable Trust, BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics regularly visit around villages in the districts of Khedbrahma, Himmatnagar, Rajpipla, Godhra, Bodeli, Dharampur, Dang, Vansda, Ukai, Sankari and others in Gujarat.

In these villages, the poor and socially underprivileged residents have benefitted from these mobile clinics, which visit the villages according to a pre-planned schedule.

It is also worthy to note that in addition to serving in the above districts, BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics also served in the earthquake-affected villages of Kutch and Saurashtra from 2001 to 2003.

Each mobile medical clinic comprises of an experienced paid doctor, an assistant or pharmacist and other support staff so that proper diagnosis and treatment can be provided. The entire service is provided totally free to the villagers.

The mobile clinics even reach remote, interior villages lacking in approach roads and no transportation facilities, providing free services to all the villagers.

Dr Purushottambhai Patil, who has been serving for 13 years in the Sankari district, comments,

“In the 10 centres around Sankari, villagers from around 250 remote tribal villages come for treatment. Each centre is visited twice a week. Since this service provided by BAPS is given free of charge, the tribals are able to save money.”

The majority of patients are children, women and elderly. Each centre is visited on the specified day. Together with this medical care, the villagers are also informed about preventive care. They receive guidance on de-addiction, hygiene, mental health and other relevant topics to help them lead a healthier, nobler life.

Dr Atulbhai Pandya, who serves in the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics in the Dang district, comments, “The education level in this region is very low and so people have no idea about diseases. Hence, we assemble the villagers to inform them about hygiene and common illnesses, and encourage them to give up addictions for a healthier life.”



Dr Kiranbhai Patel, who has been serving for 14 years in the Bodeli district, comments, "Due to the excellent care they receive, the villagers prefer to come to our clinic rather than go elsewhere for treatment. Such mobile medical clinics are necessary for the tribal villagers. They receive free medicines for common illnesses and for more serious illnesses, arrangements are made for treatment in government or other hospitals."

In this way, BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics have helped to improve the health of tribal villagers.

Details of the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics in each region are as follows.

Khedbrahma: On 1 August 1999, Pramukh Swami Maharaj launched the first BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic to serve in the Khedbrahma district of North Gujarat. Mobile medical clinics reach out to about 168 villages, up to 115 km from Khedbrahma. These include Rani Umbari, Kesharpura, Kajavas, Davitral, Pipaliya, Poshina,

Kheroj, Danmahudi, Pipalsari, Lambadiya, Vinchhi, Matvada, Kotada, Tuver, Dholi Unchidhanal, Hingatiya, Kodariya, Sebaliya, Chinkhala, Bharmiya, Chitrodi, Makanchampa and others.

Himmatnagar: Launched on 1 July 2003, BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic now serves villages upto 85 km from Himmatnagar, including: Prempur, Rangpur, Dalad, Umiyanagar, Chitrodi, Shinga, Kadoli, Khedavada, Dedhrota, Lolasan, Moti Vadol, Jadar, Dhudhardi, Rudardi, Mahadevnagar, Likhi, Rajpur, Purushottamnagar, Dalpur, Nanapur, Sonasan, Pallachar and others.

Pavi Jetpur (Bodeli): BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic began in 1 October 1999 and serves about 40 villages, up to 100 km from Pavi Jetpur, located in mid-Gujarat. Villages include: Panvad, Khatiyavad, Sadli, Kalarani, Vardhi, Bhilpur, Maldhi, Jhojh, Chuli, Nani Bejh, Moti Bejh, Sithol and others.

Godhra (Devgadh Baria): The BAPS Medical Mobile Clinic commenced here on 6 September 2000 and serves villages around Devgadh Baria in the Godhra-Panchmahal district. Daily covering up to 125 km, the Mobile Medical Clinic visits Godhra, Jaradka, Salavada, Dhesia, Damavav, Arad, Ranipura, Rabod, Mokal, Kaalol, Jaradka and other centres. Villagers living up to 15 km from each centre use this service.

Rajpipla: At Rajpipla in the Narmada district, the BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic began on 12 June 2000. Scheduled visits to Koliyapada,



Mahudi-Khancha, Vali, Khalak, Vala, Pratapnagar, Juna Ghata, Kankadva, Baman Faliya and other centres take place, serving villagers within 15 km of each centre.

Sankari: The BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic in the Sankari area began on 11 March 2002. This unit covers up to 90 km daily, serving the villages of Godavadi, Jamankuva, Ghata, Kelkui, Beda, Valvada, Galkuva, Tichakiya, Sankari, Khushalpura and others.

Ukai: The BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic in the Ukai area of Tapi district started on 1 October 2009. Travelling up to 60 km a day, this unit serves Chimkuva, Dona, Jharali, Khanjar Kharsi, Dosvada, Tokarva, Medhsingi, Hiravadi, Gopalpura, Dardi, Vadibhensrot, Singpur, Vaghnera, Vekur and other villages.

Vansda (Navsari): The BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic began in Vansda in South Gujarat on 12 August 2000. This unit travels up to 90 km daily to serve in Dhakmal, Vangan, Mankuniya, Choravani, Dhodmal, Jamaliya, Holipada, Kureliya, Charanvada, Kevdi, Dharampuri, Charvi and other villages.

Dharampur 1: The first BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic in Dharampur, Valsad district, south Gujarat, was launched on 5 November 1999. This unit travels up to 135 km daily serving in Ugta, Bhensdhara, Jhariya, Makadban, Narvi Korvan,

Pendha, Kurgam, Jagiri-Bhavada, Sutharpada, Amba Jungle, Sahuda, Nalimadhni, Lakadmal, Nani Vahiyal, Kharedi Kakadkuva 1 and 2, Kosamkuva and other villages.

Dharampur 2: The second unit in the Dharampur area commenced service on 8 August 2002. It travels up to 90 km daily to the villages of Avdha, Kosambari, Tutarkhed, Kesarpindi, Nadagdhari, Chasmandva, Hanmatmal, Pipalpada, Kangvi, Bhavada, Khanda, Ambatlat, Miyajhari and other villages.

Dang (Ahva): The BAPS Mobile Medical Clinic began in the Dang-Ahva area on 1 August 2009. This unit travels up to 150 km per day to serve in Jamlapada, Isdar, Chikatiya, Bori-Gavtha, Gotiya Mal, Murambi, Darapada, Nana Pada, Dagdi Amba, Borpada, Sarvar and other villages.

In addition to these mobile medical clinics which provide free service to all patients, there are permanent medical clinics at Gadhada and Dhari in Gujarat. Together they serve thousands of patients every year.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's motto is 'In the joy of others lies our own'. And through these BAPS Mobile Medical Clinics, hundreds of thousands of patients have benefitted. With the blessings and guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, many BAPS sadhus, doctors and volunteers serve selflessly in this valuable service to society.

BAPS MOBILE MEDICAL CLINICS

Statistics upto March 2014

Total Treated: 4,010,189 Tribal Villagers, Gujarat

KHEDBRAHMA	HIMMATNAGAR	PAVI JETPUR	DEVGADH BARIA	RAJPIPLA	SANKARI
Started 1999	Started 2003	Started 1999	Started 2000	Started 2000	Started 2002
Total Patients	Total Patients				
Treated: 507,185	Treated: 266,840	Treated: 377,868	Treated: 692,358	Treated: 409,073	Treated: 355,343
					
UKAI	VANSDA (NAVSARI)	DHARAMPUR 1	DHARAMPUR 2	DANG (AHVA)	KUTCH- SAURASHTRA
Started 2009	Started 2000	Started 1999	Started 2002	Started 2009	From 2001 to 2005 Total
Total Patients	Patients				
Treated: 76,412	Treated: 303,342	Treated: 395,827	Treated: 276,161	Treated: 80,444	Treated: 267,035
					

(Contd. from pg. 4)

get married or write a letter to your in-laws!' While the Kothari ridiculed me I would simply close my eyes and remain seated quietly. Finally, he would throw a postcard at me. This was my condition in getting even a postcard. So, such a task (of installing Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj) can be accomplished by a king or the Acharya."

In reply, Jaga Swami uttered, "I shall fulfil any number of resolutions you make. Thus, you so resolve that you want to do it. You have the association of Bhagatji Maharaj and his blessings, and therefore it will be done." Shastriji Maharaj agreed to do so. From this point onwards Shastri Yagnapurushdas committed himself to the mission of consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. In 1907, he consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine of a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bochasan, and thereafter in Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladra and Gadhada.

Yogiji Maharaj also obediently served guru Shastriji Maharaj for forty years and thereafter he continued his mission of enshrining the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Pramukh Swami Maharaj admirably served both gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and he too has fulfilled his promise of furthering the Akshar-Purushottam principle and the consolidation of *ekantik* dharma revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Only an ideal disciple can be an ideal guru. The guru-*shishya* tradition is a perennial phenomenon in Hinduism through which the traditions and doctrines of various *sampradayas* are perpetuated and the pathway of *moksha* is forever accessible to countless souls.

Our prostrations and prayers to gurus Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pragat BrahmaSwarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj on Guru Purnima (12 July 2014) for blessing us with the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

April-May 2014, Sarangpur

APRIL

9, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Om Nagar, a suburb of Surat.

Swamishri blessed from far 12th grade students of Vidyamandir (Sarangpur) who were going to participate in a 3-day *shibir* in Sarangpur.

10, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Morvad, Limbdi region.

18, Friday

Swamishri blessed 1,500 youths from Vadodara and Bharuch assembled for the satsang *shibir* themed on "Yagnapurush chhe Sathe" from Akshar Jharukho.

24, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandir in Vanakbori (Thermal), South Boston (USA) and Lisbon (Portugal).

27, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Antwerp, Belgium.

Swamishri also blessed from far 600 youths who had assembled for the satsang *shibir*.

28, Monday

Swamishri performed his morning puja at 'Pramukh Udyan' amidst bhajans sung by sadhus.

Later, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Dehmi, Tarapur and Saijpur villages.

29, Tuesday

Swamishri performed his morning puja at 'Pramukh Udyan'. Thereafter he performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir rebuilt in Nar.

MAY

2, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Sita-Ram Dev, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Hanumanji-Ganapatiji and Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Patan.

3, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishttha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Bhersam (Bharuch district) and Sunsar (Mahesana district).

5, Monday

Swamishri and senior sadhus performed the 98th *patotsav arti* of Thakorji at Sarangpur Mandir. An *annakut* of sweet items was arranged before Thakorji.

The day also marked Swamishri's one year stay in Sarangpur, from 5 May 2013 to 4 May

SHRI HARI JAYANTI

8 April 2014, Sarangpur

The 234th celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday was festively held in Swamishri's presence in Sarangpur.

At 9.20 a.m. Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan. Before Thakorji, an *annakut* of sweet and fried items was offered. Swamishri performed *arti* of Thakorji in the central shrine. Thereafter, he rocked Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a decorated cot amidst the singing of "Sonānā bor jhule Dharmakishor". On his way back, Swamishri initiated a *satsangi* youth, Amit K Maru, into the *parshad* rank and named him Akshar Bhagat.

In the evening, behind Swamishri's quarters, at Pramukh Darshan Vatika, the 234th celebration of Shri Hari Jayanti was held. The assembly was based on the theme of Muktanand Swami's *arti*. Sadhus spoke on each verse of the *arti* and the assembly was intermingled with bhajans and videos. A beautiful backdrop of Chhapaiya village was created for the celebration. An *annakut* was arranged before the *utsav murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Ten minutes prior to Shri Hari's birthday at 10.10 p.m. the Swaminarayan *dhun* was sung by sadhus and followed by performance of *arti* by all.

Finally, the celebratory bhajans of "Dharma gher ānand bhayo... and Sonānā bor jhule..." were sung while children in colourful costumes danced with joy. The devotees were given *prasad* of *panchajiri* while they departed after Thakorji's darshan.

Swamishri was unable to preside over the festive assembly because of cold and cough.

2014. A wonderful presentation of all the festivals celebrated during the year was made in Swamishri's presence.

The festivals celebrated were Pramukh Varni Din, Rath Yatra, Jal Jhilani, Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva, Sharad Punam, Annakut, Dev Diwali, Guru Jayanti, Swamishri's Bhagvati Diksha Din, Launching of the year-long 150th Birthday Celebration of Shastriji Maharaj, Uttarayan, Fuldol and Shri Hari Jayanti. The presentations included colourful processions, traditional dances, spraying of colours and speeches. Swamishri presided over the devotional programme for one hour and twenty minutes and blessed the sadhus and devotees.

During Swamishri's one year stay in Sarangpur, he had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for five BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs and 50 *hari* mandirs, 11 foundation-laying rituals and given *diksha* to 60 youths.

6, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Chhani village (Vadodara).

7, Wednesday

Swamishri inaugurated two print publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Parabhakti* and *Expressions*.

12-15, Monday to Thursday

A four-day *shibir* for sadhus commenced with Swamishri's darshan and blessings. On Thursday, 15 May Swamishri inaugurated a video CD 'Phulo Ke Aasu' produced by BAPS Bal Pravrutti Central Office.

19, Monday

Swamishri inaugurated a new audio CD, 'Nitya Gaan', published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

Swamishri also blessed the sadhus who had come to attend the second *sant shibir* till Thursday, 22nd.

21, Wednesday

Swamishri sanctified the bricks and performed pujan of the *nidhi kumbh* to be placed in the foundation of the new Gurukul (School and hostel) to be built in Gondal.

Swamishri's 64th Pramukh Varni Din (according to the Gregorian calendar) was celebrated.

25, Sunday, Yogi Jayanti Celebration

The Yogi Jayanti celebration was held in

Swamishri's presence in the morning at Pramukh Darshan Vatika. The *utsav murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were arranged outside Swamishri's residence. The celebration programme included a video of Yogiji Maharaj's daily routine, his singing of *saloka* and skits by youths portraying incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's guru bhakti towards Yogiji Maharaj. An *annakut* was arranged before the *utsav murtis*.

Swamishri inaugurated two print publications published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: *Krupa* and *Turning Point*, Part 2. ◆

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

April-May 2014, Sarangpur

RAPPORT WITH SHRIJI MAHARAJ

16, April

Swamishri has rarely eaten anything for the last two years. This afternoon, at the insistence and love of sadhus, Swamishri took six small pieces of *badampuri* for lunch. Thereafter, an attendant sadhu praised Swamishri, "Swami, everyone was pleased to see you eat *badampuri* today."

Swamishri surprisingly said, "I have not eaten."

The attendant added, "We know that you do not have any sensation of hunger at all. You ate today so that we could be blessed by your darshan."

Swamishri again replied, "But I have not eaten!"

The attendant stated, "A few minutes ago you had *badampuri*. Was it not nice?"

Finally, Swamishri declared, "It was Thakorji who ate and not I."

Swamishri revealed his rapport with Shriji Maharaj. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said whatever a Gunatit or God-realized Sadhu does, it is God who pervades in all his actions.

SWAMISHRI'S ONENESS WITH THAKORJI

2, May

An attendant sadhu asked Swamishri, "We have all had lunch but did you have anything to eat?"

Swamishri replied, "I have eaten."

"But when did you eat?" the attendant queried.

"Oh, it's been some time now," Swamishri replied.

Swamishri has not been eating anything for a long time. So, the attendant added, "Yes, that's true because when Harikrishna Maharaj (Thakorji) eats, you too eat with him."

"Yes, I have eaten along with Thakorji," Swamishri confirmed.

PURE SAINTLINESS

3 May

Swamishri was seated in his wheelchair and was about to leave his quarters to give darshan to all. An attendant sadhu commented, "Swami, you look royal like a king."

Swamishri replied succinctly, "I'm a sadhu."

The attendant agreed but added, “That’s true, but your personality is like a great king.”

Swamishri denied pointedly, “No, not at all. I am a sadhu.”

Swamishri’s humility and saintliness is unerring in spite of accomplishing grand works and offering services to all. There is not an iota of ego in his saintly personality.

DOING BHAJAN

4 MAY

“How are you?” Swamishri was asked.

“I’m well.”

“What would you like to do?” an attendant sadhu asked.

“Nothing for now,” Swamishri replied briefly.

“Swamiji, you are the president of BAPS. Your time is invaluable, what would you like to do now?” the attendant pressed again.

“I’d like to do bhajan,” Swamishri replied.

“But, you are always doing that, what else would you like to do?”

“I want to do bhajan only,” Swamishri reiterated.

For decades, even while Swamishri was engaged in all the activities of BAPS, he has always been doing bhajan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Bhajan is the essence of Swamishri’s life.

(Contd. from pg. 42)

main spiritual means to attain him. The scripture also states that without the guru’s grace one cannot attain *moksha*.

According to Sikhism God does not incarnate on earth. It accepts the principles of karma, rebirth, samsara (transmigration) and attainment of *mukti* through spiritual knowledge and bhakti to God. A person can realize God only through the help of a guru. Constant utterance of God’s name (*nama-smarana*) and total surrender to him are the important spiritual disciplines. Sikhism rejects the Vedic traditions of *yajnas* and rituals, caste system and image worship.

Sikhism has many things in common with

ALL-DOERSHIP OF GOD AND HIS GURUS

5 May

Today, Swamishri completed his one year stay in Sarangpur. During this period he had performed the *murti-pratishthas* of five *shikharbaddh* mandirs and 50 *hari* mandirs, 11 foundation-stone laying rituals for 11 mandirs and gave *parshad* and sadhu *dikshas* to 60 youths. With reference to these works an attendant sadhu asked Swamishri, “How are these works accomplished?” Swamishri at first remained silent. Then Swamishri spoke softly, “Maharaj.”

Another attendant sadhu placed a small all-in-one *murti* (having pictures of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Guru Parampara) on Swamishri’s lap and asked, “Place your finger to show who out of them is accomplishing all these works.” Swamishri, excluding his own *murti*, placed his finger on the *murtis* of Yogiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj to show that they were the all-doers of all that was being achieved.

In spite of Swamishri’s colossal efforts all through these years he has always believed that Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus are the all-doers of the achievements in the BAPS. ◆

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

Hinduism. It is a historical fact that the Sikhs fought for and even sacrificed their lives in defence of Hinduism.

The five K’s are the symbols of Sikhism. They are Kesha (hair), Kanga (comb), Kutch (underwear), Kirpana (small dagger) and Kada (wristlet). Every Sikh is supposed to have unshorn hair which he should tie into a knot at the top and sport the other symbols of the faith. The Sikhs were the sword arm of Hinduism, who fought against the invaders of India. The Golden Temple of Amritsar is the holiest of the holies in Sikhism. There the devout perform menial service called *kar seva*, irrespective of birth, status, etc. ◆



India

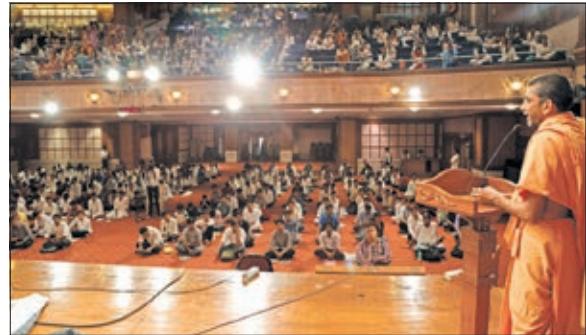
YOUTH SHIBIRS, 'YAGNAPURUSH CHHE SATHE'

1 April to 31 May 2014, India



As part of the year-long celebration of Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birth anniversary (2014-2015), this year's summer *shibirs* for *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* were based on the theme 'Yagnapurush Chhe Sathe' – 'Yagnapurush Is With Us'. A total of 25 day-long *shibirs* were held during April and May 2014 at BAPS centres in Mumbai and throughout Gujarat. Over 26,000 youths participated in these *shibirs*. Each *shibir* conveyed the central message through speeches by learned sadhus, workshops, interviews, skits, quizzes and video presentations. In addition, 1,550 youths of Vadodara and Bharuch attended the *shibir* held in Sarangpur, from 18 to 20 April, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In addition to the interviews and presentations, the *shibir* featured speeches by Pujya Keshavjivan Swami (Pujya Mahant Swami) and Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other learned sadhus on topics related to the central theme. Through these *shibirs*, the youths learnt about the life, work and message of BrahmaSwarup Shastriji Maharaj.

SATSANG KARYAKAR ADHIVESHAN, May 2014, Gujarat and Mumbai



Satsang activities *karyakars* throughout Gujarat and Mumbai participated in an *adhiveshan* comprising of a written test based on the *Satsang Mukhpath* book and a speech.

The *adhiveshan* was held in two phases: regional on 11 May 2014, in which 6,099 men volunteers participated at 226 venues. Selected *karyakars* from this phase competed in the inter-regional phase, in which 1,211 *karyakars* participated at 35 venues.

Separate competitions were held for women *karyakars*. In the regional phase, 7,411 women *karyakars* participated at 225 centres and in the inter-regional phase, 1,510 women *karyakars* took part at 35 venues.

BAPS SADHUS MEET PM NARENDRA MODI 24 June 2014, New Delhi, India



BAPS sadhus visited the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, to convey His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings and prayers. Swamishri had conveyed his prayers for the nation, and for the PM to lead with success. His blessings were conveyed to the PM on this courtesy call by Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, Atmaswarup Swami, Brahmavihari Swami and Gnanmuni Swami.

YOUTH ADHIVESHANS

June 2014, Gujarat and Mumbai

To help youths understand the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and enshrined in mandirs by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, an *adhiveshan* based on the *Satsang Jnanamrut* booklet was held for youths. Separate competitions were held for *yuvaks* and *yuvatis*.

In the first, regional, phase on 1 June 2014, 4,603 *yuvaks* and 5,113 *yuvatis* at 157 centres took the written test. Those who performed well were selected to participate in the second, inter-regional, phase on 8 June, in which 1,986 *yuvaks* and 2,679 *yuvatis* competed at 26 venues.

This phase consisted of three stages: First, a written test for all. From this, youths were selected to proceed to the second, group discussion stage, based on their written test score. Finally, the outstanding performers from the group discussions were selected for the individual oral *mukhpath* test.

Overall, the youths had prepared very well for the *adhiveshan*. In particular, the judges in group discussion stage were impressed by the clarity and fluency with which the youths were able to express philosophical ideas.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES,

May-June 2014, Gujarat and Mumbai

As part of the year-long celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birth anniversary (1865-2015), BAPS youths throughout Gujarat and Mumbai participated in three events during May and June 2014.

Youth Kirtan Aradhanas

Youths from various BAPS centres presented 57 kirtan *aradhana* programmes, which were attended by over 21,820 people.

Cultural Programmes

Youths presented an effective drama, titled 'Samasya Anek, Samadhan Ek' – 'Many Problems, One Solution', demonstrating how the problems people face in their daily personal, family and professional lives can be easily resolved by adopting the principles by which Shastriji Maharaj lived.

Youths from various BAPS centres presented 67 such cultural programmes, which were enjoyed by over 54,400 people.

Blood Donation Camps

Commencing on World Blood Donor Day, 14 June-30 June 2014, BAPS youths organized 13 blood donation camps in which over 1,335 BAPS *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* donated blood for local hospitals.

Note: BAPS youth centres will continue these three programmes throughout July also.

UK & Europe

FAMILY SATSANG SHIBIR

4 May 2014, Edinburgh, Scotland

Over 80 adults and children attended the one-day Satsang Shibir held at Stoneyhill Community Centre, in Edinburgh, Scotland, with the central theme of 'My Family, My Sanskriti'.

The *shibir* featured speeches by sadhus on the importance of Hindu values and how they also contribute to British society; how these values are inspired and upheld by mandirs, shastras and the guru; and practical aspects of how a family can lead a more harmonious and fulfilling life together by upholding Hindu values.

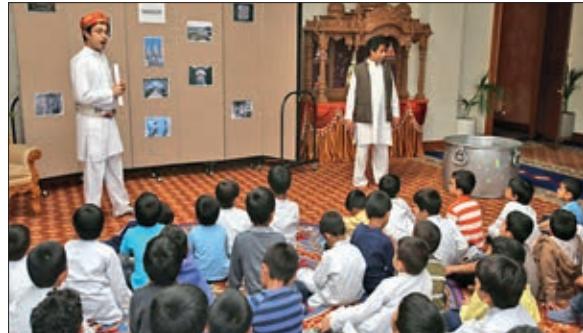
The afternoon session included a team-building activity and a group discussion among the delegates.

The *shibir* concluded with an interesting question-and-answer session with the sadhus.

Throughout the day, children enjoyed their own games and activities in a dedicated crèche area.

The participants thoroughly enjoyed the *shibir* and learnt about applying family and Hindu values in their daily lives.

NATIONAL SHISHU MANDAL SHIBIR 24 May 2014, London, UK



More than 370 children aged up to 8 years from across the country attended the fun-filled one-day National Shishu Mandal Shibir, entitled 'BAPS na Baag ma', at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London. They were joined by more than 340 parents.

The programme was based around the upcoming 150th birth anniversary of BrahmaSwarup Shastriji Maharaj. Through various sights, sounds and sensory experiences, the children learnt about the work of Shastriji Maharaj and the rich heritage of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

The opening ceremony introduced the theme of a garden. Two 'gardeners' welcomed and entertained the children, exploring the history and meaning of BAPS through each of its four letters. Through the first letter 'B', they explained the Sanstha's humble beginnings in Bochasan.

After the opening ceremony, parents attended a special parenting seminar where they learned about nutrition, education, parenting skills, and essential factors to help enrich values and principles in their children. The children continued their exploration of BAPS, moving to 'A' for Akshar. They learnt about the glory of

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself, and the unbreakable connection between the two.

Thereafter, 'P' for Purushottam was presented through the concepts of Sarvopari, Sakar, Karta and Pragat.

The final session elaborated on 'S' for Sanstha, highlighting the efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in advancing BAPS through his worldwide spiritual travels, selfless charity work and the building of mandirs.

All the children thoroughly enjoyed themselves and amidst all the fun and games were able to understand the history and deeper spiritual meaning behind BAPS.

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL PEACE AND HINDU TEACHINGS 24 to 26 June 2014, London



A three-day international academic conference on the theme of 'Realising Global Peace: The Role and Impact of Hindu Teachings' was hosted at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London from 24 to 26 June 2014.

The conference aimed to elucidate the role of peace within Hinduism and how Hindu teachings can positively contribute to not just academic scholarship but to humanity at large.

It was jointly organised by the All-India Philosophy Association, BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, and the Indo-Hellenic Society for Culture and Development, Greece.

Over 80 delegates and guests attended the conference. They included eminent scholars and

students from India, England, Ireland, America, Canada, and Australia, as well as local civic leaders and representatives of Hindu and other faiths.

The keynote address in the inaugural session was delivered by Prof. Jatashankar, esteemed professor of philosophy at Allahabad University, India, and President of the All-India Philosophy Association. The closing session had special addresses by Dr Brian Black, Lecturer of Hinduism and Indian Philosophy at Lancaster University, and Dr Rembert Lutjeharms of Oxford's Faculty of Theology and Religion and the Oxford Centre of Hindu Studies.

The final day featured a plenary session chaired by Dr Ankur Barua of Cambridge University in which five scholar-sadhus and a scholar-devotee from India, America and England – modern-day ‘bhashyakar’ Bhadreshdas Swami (PhD, DLitt, Mahamahopadhyaya), Paramtattvadas Swami, Mangalnidhidas Swami, Snehmunidas Swami, Vedantpriyadas Swami and Dr Janak Dave – presented papers on principles and practices within the Swaminarayan Hindu tradition conducive to global peace. This session was especially well received, as Dr Black noted: “I was particularly impressed by these papers; how one can draw upon spirituality and a particular tradition yet be so well grounded in rigorous scholarship.”

Parallel panels on the previous days covered such topics as religious identity, cultural harmony, epistemology, ethics, social philosophy, metaphysics and Indo-Greek thought.

Dr Ramesh Chandra Sinha, secretary for the All-India Philosophy Association, praised the arrangements and warm hospitality of the hosts, calling the conference “a gift from Pramukh Swami Maharaj”.

Kirit Wadia, local secretary of the event, shared: “Hindu teachings have a lot to contribute to the quest for peace, especially as modern technology increases human connectivity and decreases distances between peoples and nations, making the need for peace even more

pronounced for individuals and societies. We are very grateful to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj for providing this theme and to all the delegates for contributing such rich discussions over the three days.”

Africa

TREE PLANTING CAMPAIGN

27 April 2014, Nairobi, Kenya



Over 130 volunteers from BAPS Charities Nairobi teamed up with KENVO (Kijabe Environment Volunteers) to plant 4,000 trees at the Lari Forest, Matimbei, about 60km from Nairobi. Lari Forest forms the southern-most end of the Aberdare forest range and consists of a rich biodiversity, which is home to an indigenous ecosystem of fodder crop, medicinal plants, birds and even elephants living in close vicinity to the city of Nairobi. But the essential fact is that the Aberdare range is the 3rd largest water tower in Kenya and is the source of drinking water for 30% of the population.

Through such bi-annual tree planting projects, BAPS Charities continually strives for and ensures the preservation and sustenance of the environment.

BLOOD DONATION DRIVE

22 June 2014, Lenasia, South Africa

BAPS Charities held its quarterly Blood Donation Drive in Lenasia, Johannesburg, to support the efforts of the South African National Blood Service (SANBS). In total, 34 pints of blood

were collected.

BAPS CHARITIES FOOD DRIVES

May-June 2014, Dar-es-Salaam & Arusha, Tanzania



On 7 April BAPS Charities volunteers from Arusha visited the GOHECHI Children's Centre, which promotes development in the community through education for orphans, street children and young widows.

BAPS Charities gave gift packets containing much needed food items and stationary items for the children and donated food and other items to the Centre, including rice, maize flour, sugar, salt, pencils, erasers, exercise books, rulers, bottles of juice and packets of biscuits.

On 24 May, volunteers from BAPS Charities visited the Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Tanzania (CCBRT) Hospital to donate bed sheets, mosquito nets, adult diapers, bath soap, washing soap, petroleum jelly, biscuits, wafers, juice, water and toothbrushes.

On 15 June 2014, BAPS Charities volunteers visited the Al Furqan Islamic Centre, a home and school for young disabled orphaned children. Located, approximately 30 km from Dar-es-Salaam, 50 children aged 3 to 12 reside in the home.

The BAPS volunteers presented a gift pack to every child and foodstuffs including wafers, chocolates, biscuits, candies, sugar, rice, salt, beans, cooking oil and maize flour to the caretakers.

WINTER WARMER DRIVE 2014

May-June 2014, Johannesburg & Lenasia, South Africa

Every winter, BAPS Charities in South Africa



run its annual Winter Warmer Drive across major cities in the country, donating clothes, blankets, hot meals and non-perishable food and household items to underprivileged and impoverished communities in preparation for the winter season.

On Saturday, 31 May 2014, BAPS Charities volunteers from Mayfair, Johannesburg, donated 400 food hampers and served hot meals to approximately 400 people at the Barcelona informal settlement in Etwatwa, Daveyton. The residents are also recipients of BAPS Charities' monthly food donation and weekly medical services.

On 7 June 2014, BAPS Charities volunteers visited the Johannesburg Institute of Social Services (JISS) and Sparrow Rainbow Village. JISS is a child and family welfare institution that provides care and support to families and children in need of social services. The volunteers donated blankets, clothes for men and women and food hampers to the families present.

Sparrow Rainbow Village is a hospice that provides full time residence to abused, orphaned and neglected children. They also look after children and young adults suffering with the HIV/AIDS virus. BAPS Charities donated blankets and clothes to the children.

Also, on 31 May, BAPS Charities volunteers from Lenasia, south of Johannesburg, donated blankets and non-perishable food to two local beneficiaries: the Ebenezer Hannah Home and *Phuthamahae* Community Care Givers. Approximately 450 men, women and children from both centres were recipients of

the donated items.

Asia-Pacific

MANDIR MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV 29 June 2014, Hong Kong, China



BAPS Swaminarayan satsang activities have been continuing for the past 25 years in Hong Kong. Regular *sabhas* by the devotees and visits by sadhus have helped satsang grow, and the need was felt for a mandir where devotees could gather to express and strengthen their bhakti. The combined efforts of devotees have now culminated in this mandir.

The celebrations included a *mahapuja* for world peace in which many devotees and well-wishers participated and a *nagar yatra* by the *mahila mandal*, in which women devotees carried Thakorji on the streets to bless the city with His gaze.

Then, on the auspicious day of Rathyatra, the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in the Kowloon peninsula of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, People's Republic of China, was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the Hong Kong mandir in Sarangpur on 28 January 2014.

The devotees of Hong Kong were joined on this joyous occasion by many from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Middle East and other nations from across the world.

BAPS Charities

BLOOD DONATION DRIVES, USA



On 27 April 2014 a BAPS Charities Blood Donation Drive in Atlanta, GA, helped to collect 60 pints of blood.

On 1 June 2014 BAPS Charities organized a Blood Donation Drive in Parsippany, NJ, which resulted in a collection of 32 pints of blood.

BAPS Charities Walkathon 2014

May-June, USA



During May and June 2014, BAPS Charities organized Walkathons throughout North America in support of a wide range of community, health, educational and humanitarian activities. These Walkathons provided inspiration for individuals to come together and build a better community, one step at a time. This year, over 8,535 people of all ages participated at centres throughout America, each walking, on average, 5km. Each centre selected a local charity for which it raised funds. Walkathons were held in the following BAPS centres (selected charity in parentheses):

San Jose, CA (Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and Santa Clara Office of Education), Houston, TX (American Diabetes Association and the Stafford MSD Education Foundation), Jersey City, NJ (American Cancer Society), Clifton, NJ (American Diabetes Association), Dallas, TX (American Diabetes Association), New York, NY, (Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City), Bakersfield, CA (The Boys and Girls Club of Kern County), Edison, NJ (JFK Medical Center and American Cancer Society), Lansdale, PA (Mitzvah Circle Foundation), Parsippany, NJ (Carol G. Simon Cancer Center at Morristown Memorial Hospital), Robbinsville, NJ (The Boys & Girls Club of Mercer County and Robbinsville Education Foundation), Chino Hills, CA (Susan G. Komen), Warrington PA (American Cancer Society), San Antonio, TX (The San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind), Orlando, Florida (Florida School for the Blind and Deaf), Atlanta, GA (Children's Healthcare of Atlanta), Charlotte, North Carolina (Novant Health Foundation), Raleigh, NC (Duke Children's Hospital and Health Center of Durham).

BAPS CHARITIES ANNUAL 10K CHALLENGE

27 April to 25 May 2014, UK



Between 27 April and 25 May 2014, BAPS Charities organized a fun and healthy charity event for individuals to unite as a community to support a worthy cause. At several towns and cities around the UK, around 4,000 enthusiastic men, women and children of all ages – ranging

from toddlers through to senior citizens in their nineties – walked, jogged or ran a distance of 10 kilometres to raise funds and awareness for a variety of good causes.

This year's event partnered nationally with Diabetes UK, the leading charity that cares for, connects with and campaigns on behalf of every person affected by or at risk of diabetes.

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

Also, each centre selects a local charity to support with the funds raised.

In London, on 27 April, the event began at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in the presence of Baroness Barbara Young, CEO of Diabetes UK, The Worshipful Mayor of the London Borough of Brent Cllr Bobby Thomas and other dignitaries.

Addressing the gathering, Barbara Young reiterated that Diabetes UK is “incredibly pleased to be associated with the Challenge”. Noting that diabetes particularly affects the South Asian community, she added that Diabetes UK was pleased to join BAPS Charities in helping people become aware of and deal with the condition.

On subsequent weekends similar events to support Diabetes UK and a selected local charity (indicated in parentheses) were held at Preston, Glasgow, Leicester (Heart Link), Coventry (Asian Blind Association), Edinburgh, (Edinburgh Headway Group), Milton Keynes (Thames Valley & Chiltern Air Ambulance Trust), Leeds, Birmingham (Birmingham St Mary's Hospice), Wellingborough (Cransley Hospice), Cardiff, Loughborough (Loughborough Sea Cadets), Nottingham, (Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire Air Ambulance), Havant, (Mayor's charity, Stroke Association), Luton, South East London and Southend-on-Sea. ◆



1-3. Thousands of devotees have been inspired through the Satsang Shibirs held throughout North America in the presence of Puja Tyagvallabh Swami. A total of 46 such *shibirs* will be held to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of BrahmaSwarup Shastriji Maharaj.

4-5. During April and May 2014, 26 Youth Shibirs were held at BAPS centres throughout India based on the theme 'Yagnapurush Chhe Sathe...'.¹²



1-2. BAPS sadhus meet Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi at his residence in New Delhi to convey Pramukh Swami Maharaj's best wishes and blessings (24 June 2014).

3-4. International Academic Conference on Global Peace and Hindu Teachings at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London (24-26 June 2014).

5-6. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Hong Kong (29 June 2014).