

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November-December 2013

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Newly Consecrated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir
Nagpur, 7 October 2013



Shri Radha-Krishna Dev



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Shri Lakshmi-Narayan Dev



Shri Shiv-Parvati



Shri Sita-Ram



Shri Shrinathji



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Tirupati-Balaji



Shri Ganapatiji



Shri Hanumanji

Inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the newly consecrated *murtis* at the
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nagpur



Newly consecrated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nagpur

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.

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiwarupdas

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FIRST WORD

India is a land of holy festivals and celebrations that rejuvenate and relieve its people from the monotony of daily life and its burdens. The social and predominantly spiritual content of festivals makes people vibrant and religious. For devout Hindus festivals provide a mystical connection with God and their own atman. Festivals also lighten the burden of bad karma and help integrate devotion and knowledge in their lives. They provide a beautiful and joyful mosaic of colour, pageantry, beauty, music, dance and rituals.

The spiritual fervour inspired through festivals convinces one that life is worthwhile, and that it is possible to live happily, religiously and righteously in the midst of an increasingly materialistic and indulgent society.

The five-day spectacular Deepawali (Diwali) festival is popularly known as the festival of lights. It is variously associated with Bhagwan Rama, Krishna, goddesses Lakshmi and Sarasvati and Hanumanji. Deepawali is the grand finale to the annual festivals of India. It is one of the most festive and auspicious of all celebrations in the Hindu calendar and celebrated by all Hindus throughout the world. Deepawali is celebrated on the last day of the final Hindu calendar month of Ashwin (October/November). The traditional rituals of worship and prayer in the five-day Deepawali festival comprise of Ekadashi, Vagh Baras, Lakshmi Pujan on the thirteenth day (Dhanatrayodashi or Dhan Teras) of the dark half of Ashwin month, when everyone performs puja of wealth in the form of gold and silver coins to purify them and pray for their benevolent use. On the fourteenth day (Krishnachaturdashi or Kali Chaudasha) Hanumanji is worshipped to protect one from evil spirits. And on the next day, on Deepawali, the last day of the year, businessmen sanctify their new account books (Sharda or Chopda Pujan) with the ritual *mahapuja*.

Deepawali or Deepa Utsava is celebrated by placing *deepas* (lighted wicks) on windows and doors of homes and in mandirs. Sometimes they are floated on rivers. Colourful designs, portraits or scenes (*rangolis*) are created with different coloured powders to decorate the entrance to homes and buildings (*rangolis*). A display of fireworks celebrates Shri Rama's return to Ayodhya after his 14-year exile and victory over the evil Ravana. The day also marks the birth of Lakshmi as she emerged from the ocean during the Samudra Manthana or churning of the ocean.

New Year's Day or Nutan Varsh is the day after Diwali in the Vikram calendar.¹ It falls on the first day of Kartik – the first month of the New Year. It is celebrated in a spirit of bonhomie with personal visits to homes of relatives and friends. Family bonds are renewed and forgiveness is asked for to remedy any hurts or bitterness during the previous year.

New Year's Day is also marked with an offering of a grand feast or *annakut* to God with devotion and in appreciation of his abundant generosity for the new harvest.

We wish our readers a happy Diwali and an enlightening New Year. ◆

1. In some states of India New Year's Day falls on different months of the year. Chaitra *sud* 1 – New Year's Day in north India, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Vishu – New Year's Day in Kerala. Nutan Varsh – Kartik *sud* 1, New Year's Day in Gujarat and Rajasthan.



SHRI HARI'S SADNESS

The paramhansas realize the cause of Shri Hari's sadness and the illness he has taken upon himself in Panchala. They reason with him and pray to him not to give up his stay on earth...



ONE WHO ABIDES BY NIYAMS IS A TRUE DESCENDANT OF DHARMA

Rampratapbhai had returned to Panchala from his pilgrimage to Dwarika. Some devotees from Gwalior, Ujjain and Rajasthan had come to Panchala for Maharaj's darshan and to offer gifts to him. Rampratapbhai saw the reverence of these devotees towards Maharaj. Whenever he was reminded of his past times with his brother, he became emotional, cried and regretted, "I was unable to recognize the glory of Ghanshyam." But after meeting him in Gujarat, Rampratapbhai started adoring his brother. He sometimes cooked tasty food and served him. And whenever he was overwhelmed with regrets for his past failures in recognizing Maharaj's greatness, Muktanand Swami explained, "If

you do satsang, all your miseries will dissolve." These words appealed to Rampratapbhai. He pledged before Maharaj to follow the *niyams* of satsang. Shri Hari blessed him, "Now all your afflictions are gone. Since you have vowed to follow the *niyams*, you have truly become a descendant of Dharma. People will not believe one to be related to Dharma if one does not follow the *niyams* of satsang."

Rampratapbhai's devotion to Shri Hari became apparent when he fervently sang bhajans while playing the *dukkad* (*tablas*) before him.

ONE WHO HAS DIVYABHAV FOR GOD IS A TRUE STHITPRAGNA

Anandji Sanghediya of Mangrol came to Shri Hari in Panchala. He had made wooden eating bowls for sadhus and offered them to Maharaj. Shri Hari was pleased and gave the eating bowls to sadhus who didn't have them. He gave the remaining bowls to Jhinabhai Darbar, saying, "You keep them for now. I'll give them to other sadhus whenever they come to me."

Nishkulanand Swami had prepared a dais for Maharaj to sit on during satsang assemblies. Each day, Nishkulanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, Govindanand Swami and others would sing bhajans to the accompaniment of musical instruments before Shri Hari. After the assembly, *prasad* of dates, shredded coconut, popcorn or *patasas* would be distributed to all.

Jhinabhai Darbar, the chief of Panchala, rejoiced daily during the assembly, feeling that Maharaj had fulfilled all his wishes. By listening to the bhajans and discourses he realized that

Maharaj's human and divine *lilas* were blissful and elevating.

RAMPRATAPBHAI'S DEPARTURE

After his brief stay in Panchala, Rampratapbhai decided to return to Chhapaiya and come back with his relatives. He wished to give them the benefit of Shri Hari's darshan and an experience of satsang. He talked to Maharaj about his desire and also requested to take Nirgunmuni Swami and other ascetics with him. At the time of departure, Rampratapbhai's eyes turned moist. Maharaj consoled him, "The separation is only for a few months. Be calm and patient." Shri Hari embraced the sadhus and *parshads* who were accompanying his brother. Maharaj did not stop the sadhus who had wilfully decided to join the group.

SHRI HARI TURNS SAD

After Rampratapbhai left there was a sudden twist in Maharaj's mood – he became very sad. It was difficult to gauge the reason for his melancholy. Some thought that Rampratapbhai's departure was the cause. When someone asked Muktanand Swami about Maharaj's unhappiness, he replied, "Once, Ramanand Swami had revealed to me, 'Shri Hari is an ascetic by nature. The day his relatives meet him, he will turn sad and become disinterested with satsang. Prior to that he will bless all abundantly and happily. However, after receiving the news of his relatives arrival, he will superficially relate with all and nourish thoughts of giving up his body.' His true relatives are those who have genuine devotion and dharma in their lives."

The sadhus and devotees became poignant at Muktanand Swami's words. They all pondered about what to do next. They knew Maharaj's relatives would return soon, and if Maharaj gave up his body, the edifice of Satsang would collapse. They all decided to pray to Maharaj and ask him how to remove his misery.

Shri Hari was staying in a tent behind the house of Jinabhai Darbar. After Rampratapbhai's arrival with his relatives in Panchala, Maharaj only came out of his tent during satsang discourses. Once, when Shri Hari was asleep in his tent, the senior *paramhansas* – Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami – entered the tent. Shri Hari's body was shivering. Muktanand Swami touched Maharaj's hand and realized that he had a severe fever. On checking his pulse, Maharaj's illness brought tears to Muktanand Swami's eyes. When a teardrop fell on Maharaj's cheek he was startled. Maharaj asked, "Why are you crying?"

Muktanand Swami wiped his tears and explained, "Maharaj, who would not be unhappy on seeing your sadness and illness! They break our hearts." Shri Hari gave a sigh. Muktanand Swami continued, "Maharaj, you are the supreme Purushottam who has come on earth. You have destroyed *adharma* and established *ekantik* dharma. You have initiated 500 *paramhansas* wedded to celibacy and abstinence from money and wealth – the likes of which the world has never seen. These are all your works and much more. When you turn sad and decide to leave us, the entire region will forget your works and the path to *moksha* will forever be closed to spiritual aspirants." Shri Hari was listening intently and then asked softly, "Swami, what should be done?"

Muktanand Swami replied, "Any leading sanynasi of our country establishes an ashram or monastery in his own memory, whereas you have not established any legacy of your divine form and pure *upasana*. This will not only be a loss to Satsang but to the world too. People may not fully realize your work today, but 200 years later your legacy will enable them to understand that the supreme Purushottam came on earth and established the Bhagvat dharma. A few days earlier you had revealed your *tilak* and said, 'There is no Bhagwan like me.' Don't you want to leave a trace of your godliness for the liberation of

future aspirants?”

Shri Hari was listening silently and calmly. He looked at Muktanand Swami and said, “I ask you all, the senior sadhus, to discuss and tell me what I should do.” Thereafter, the senior sadhus discussed for the next four days.

MUKTANAND SWAMI MAKES THREE REQUESTS

On the fifth day, the senior sadhus came to Maharaj. Shri Hari asked, “What decisions have you made? Have you thought of the constitution for the Sampradaya?”

Muktanand Swami explained, “Maharaj, for the Sampradaya to forever prevail on earth we need to establish large *shikharbaddh* mandirs. Then we need to appoint an *acharya* to run them. And finally, to nourish the principles, we need to have shastras.” Then all the senior sadhus looked at Maharaj in anticipation of a reply. Shri Hari

spoke in a weak tone, “What you have all collectively resolved, I shall follow and establish a tradition in the Sampradaya. But you must all realize that I do not have attachment for my relatives. I do not believe in those who are physically related to me to be my relatives. Ramanand Swami had told me to promise him by touching his feet, ‘Do what is always good and auspicious for the sadhus.’ The Sampradaya’s glory rests upon the saintliness of the senior sadhus. And our devotees take cue from their exemplary lives. Since I am bound to your wishes, I will do whatever is in the interest of your happiness.” Then Muktanand Swami prayed, “Maharaj, we all pray to you to give up your sadness and illness and make us all happy and peaceful.”

Shri Hari agreed, and the Satsang community heaved a sigh of relief and joy. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

Swami-Shriji

New Year's Blessings

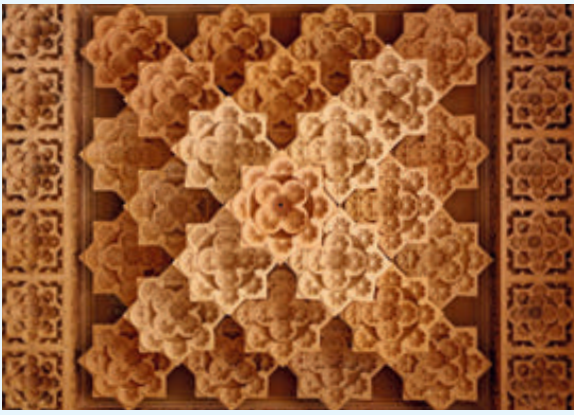
Blessings for the New Year. May the New Year be filled with abundant happiness by the grace and blessings of Swami-Maharaj. May all consolidate *katha*, bhajan and bhakti in their lives. May there be physical, mental, financial and spiritual peace in life, and may unity, friendship and harmony prevail in one's home and satsang.

Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami has said that one requires faith (*shraddha*), keenness (*khap*) and spiritual association (*samagam*) to progress in satsang, whereas stubbornness (*hath*), ego (*maan*) and jealousy (*irsha*) lead to one's downfall. With such consciousness one should do satsang, *samagam* and *seva* so that Maharaj-Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj are pleased and one experiences happiness and peace.

With Blessings

Jai Swaminarayan

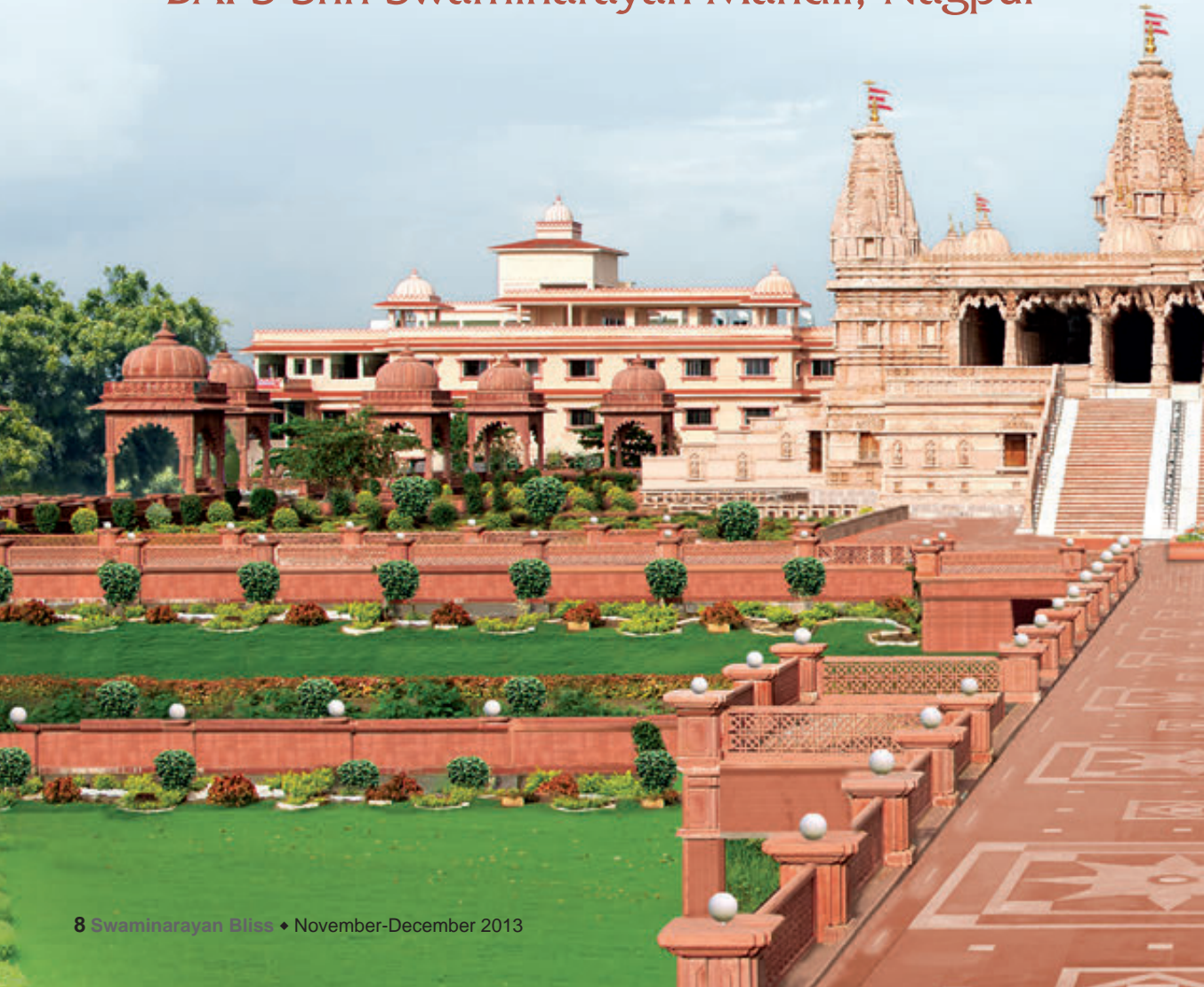
Shastri Narayanswarupdas
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

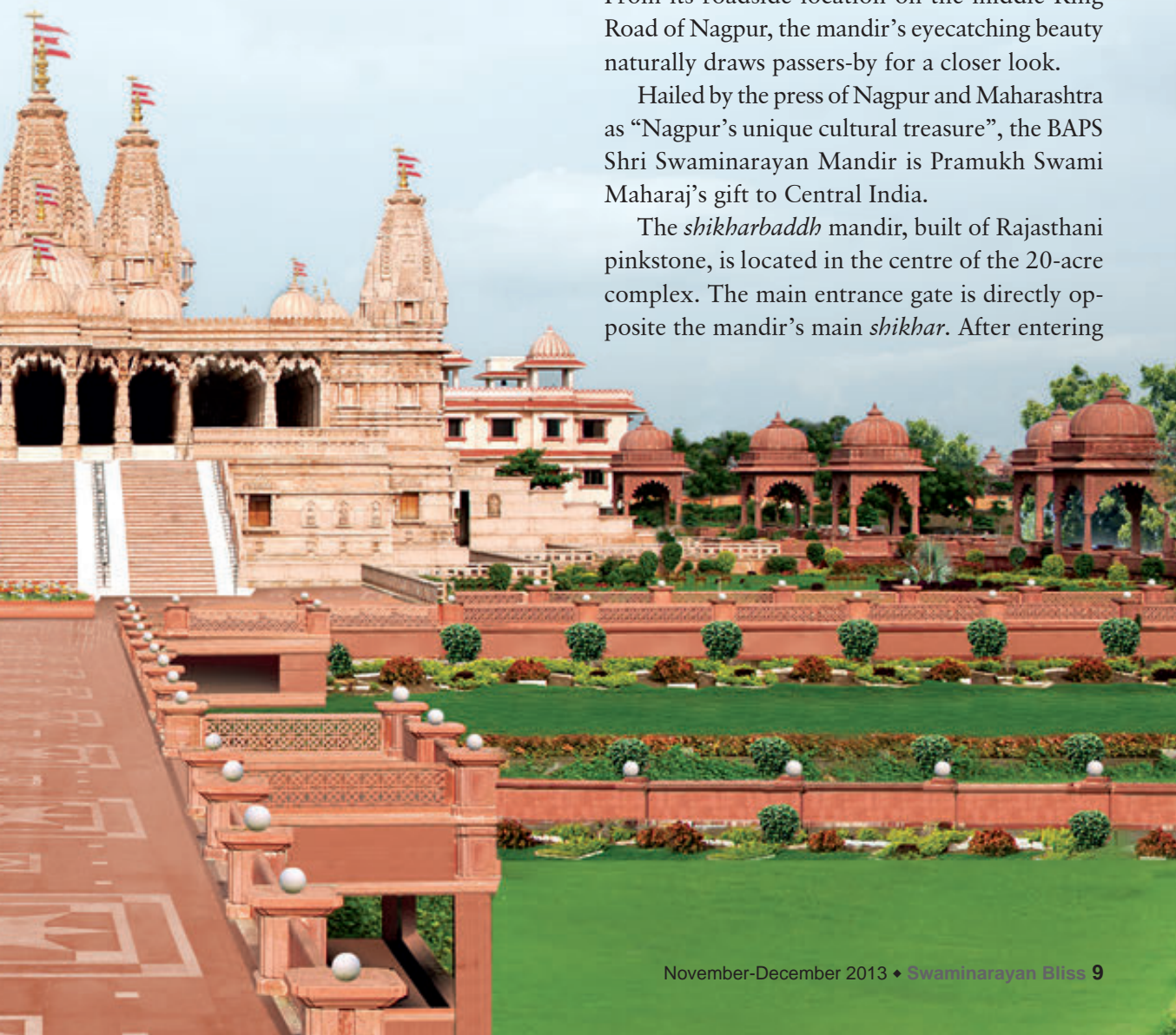


Intricately carved ceiling and *torans* of mandir

MANDIR

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nagpur





The flags of the newly built BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Nagpur, Maharashtra, flutter high in the sky. From its roadside location on the middle Ring Road of Nagpur, the mandir's eye-catching beauty naturally draws passers-by for a closer look.

Hailed by the press of Nagpur and Maharashtra as "Nagpur's unique cultural treasure", the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir is Pramukh Swami Maharaj's gift to Central India.

The *shikharbaddh* mandir, built of Rajasthani pinkstone, is located in the centre of the 20-acre complex. The main entrance gate is directly opposite the mandir's main *shikhar*. After entering



Ornately carved pillars and decorative floor inside the main mandir

the main gate, visitors climb a few stairs to arrive on the pinkstone-laden central walkway, which is flanked on both sides by beautiful landscaping. From the main footpath, the pinkstone walkway encircles the mandir, enabling a closer view of the gardens. At 10-foot intervals, the walkways are lined by pinkstone light-*vedikas*. A total of such 212 light stands illuminate the 1,500-foot circumambulatory path. The stone light stands are separated by 342 sculpted stone grills, each 10 feet long. Throughout the complex, there are 23 sculpted *ghummat-chhatris*.

Near the base of the main mandir stairs is a large replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's footprints where devotees offer their respects. Directly in front is the mandir, which rests on a 13-foot high decorated *jagati*. From here, devotees climb 31 steps of the 37-foot wide central stairway to reach the large front podium. To the left and right are the shrines of Ganapatiji and Hanumanji.

Climbing another five steps, devotees enter the main darshan *mandap*. Including the *pradakshina*, this large *mandap* is divided into 14 vertical and

13 horizontal sections and has a beautiful marble floor of various colours and designs. Above is the large, equally decorative main dome. The pillars are also intricately carved with various designs and statues. The intricately carved *torans* embellish the pillars.

On traversing the main *mandap*, devotees arrive at the marble-clad *garbhagruha*. In the central shrine are the *murtis* of Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, seated on an intricately designed golden *sinhasan*.

To the right of the central shrine is the beautiful *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and to its left is the Sukh Shaiya. After darshan of the white marble *murtis*, devotees enter the enclosed *pradakshina*, from where the excellent craftsmanship of the *mandovar* is seen. Built of pinkstone, the *mandovar* comprises deep-sculpted designs, elegant statuettes of the 24 avatars, *dikpalas* (guardian deities) and Ganapatji in a multitude of poses. The *mandovar* also features carvings of elephants, swans, flowers, birds, trees and foliage.



Shri Nilkanth *abhishek mandap*

The *jagati* encircling the mandir has 35 *jharukhas* (balconies) and 68 statues of *gandharvas* (divine beings). A total of 960 statues of avatars, devas, rishis and devotees adorn the mandir from base of *shikhhar*.

The five-pinnacled mandir is 231 feet long and 129 feet wide. The height of the central *shikhhar* is 85 feet. The mandir also has 20 *gavakshas* (ornate windows), 16 *ghummatias* (small domes), 225 decorative *torans* and 2 transepts extending to the side from the main *mandap*.

Descending from the 8-feet wide side stairs, visitors approach the *abhishek mandap* in the basement, which has 78 sculpted pillars. The floor is decorated with a pleasant array of coloured marble designs.

Immediately drawing the devotees' attention is the beautiful *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni seated on an open lotus-shaped *sinhasan*. Behind are the shrines of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Prगत Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Opposite are the *murtis* of Shri Lakshmi-Narayan, Shri Shiva-Parvati, Shri Shrinathji and Shri Tirupati-Balaji. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



Ornately carved inside of mandir dome



In 2004, Swamishri performs the *bhumi puja* rituals for the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Nagpur

HISTORY

of BAPS Swaminarayan Satsang, Nagpur

Behind all great events and monumental creations there lie profound and interesting histories. Stories of human grit, Herculean efforts, failures, successes and divine grace; all add up to produce grand, epic achievements.

The history of the recently inaugurated BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nagpur, Maharashtra, is an inspiring story of colossal sacrifice and devotion.

In 1968, with the blessings of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Nagpur for the first time. Thereafter, Swamishri

sanctified the city several times. After Yogiji Maharaj gave up his mortal existence in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj instructed the sadhus at Dadar mandir in Mumbai to travel to the Vidarbha region, of which Nagpur is the principal city. Satsang *vicharan* in this region began with Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, who was accompanied by Ghanshyamprasad Swami, Narayanprasad Swami and Yagnaswarup Swami. They travelled for six months in the regions of south and central India, sowing and nourishing the seeds of satsang. Their *vicharan* marked the beginning of satsang in that region. This was subsequently



Swamishri views the mandir plan and makes suggestions on site

followed by satsang visits by sadhus studying Sanskrit at the Dadar mandir under the guidance of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami.

During the satsang *vicharans* in Nagpur the BAPS sadhus were hosted by Shantilal Kamdar, a Jain well-wisher. At his place, hardly anyone turned up when the sadhus delivered discourses. Moreover, there were no requests for *padhramanis* to anyone's homes. Manibhai Patel, a disabled and poor devotee, originally from Amod village, was the only *satsangi* who came to see the sadhus whenever they visited Nagpur. After the lacklustre response, the visiting sadhus felt it to be pointless to visit Nagpur and the Vidarbha region again. But Pujya Kothari Swami of Mumbai reassured, "Despite the absence of people during your stay, you at least get lodging and boarding. Moreover, no one is persecuting you or throwing

you out like what the *paramhansas* had experienced. Thus, continue the satsang *vicharan* in this region."

Soon, Hiteshbhai, the son of *satsangi* Harshadbhai of Navagam Loliyana, came to settle and start a business in Nagpur with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri told him, "Satsang will develop by your efforts in Nagpur." Soon thereafter, Subhashbhai Shah, a native of Div and a Vaishnav devotee, settled in Nagpur and became a *satsangi*. Dipakbhai Joshi became a *satsangi* through his *satsangi* wife. Thus, the satsang in Nagpur started to grow gradually. The weekly satsang assembly was held at the Shiva mandir in Mahan Nagar or Sitabardi every Sunday.

Whenever sadhus arrived for satsang in Nagpur, the assemblies were held at the Jagat restaurant belonging to the nephew of Ramnikbhai Thakkar of Mumbai. Premprakash Swami travelled twice a year to the Vidarbha region for satsang. Gradually, satsang activities mushroomed in the towns of Akola, Amaravati, Chandrapur, Raipur, Bilaspur, Jabalpur, Bhopal, Sihor, Indore, Ujjain and others. In the mid-80s Swamishri instructed Premprakash Swami to travel for satsang activities in the Vidarbha region. Swamishri, too, visited Nagpur and other towns on several occasions to nourish satsang among the devotees and well-wishers.

On 8 December 1976, Swamishri visited Nagpur. He was hosted by Shantilal Kamdar, who hailed from Gadhada. Shantilal and his family members were touched by Swamishri's saintliness and they became *satsangis*. Thereafter, Swamishri visited Gondiya at the invitation of Manharbhai Patel and blessed many well-wishers.

On 30 March 1979, Swamishri visited Nagpur again. He also travelled to Raipur in Ratibhai Patel's car and blessed the local devotees: Pramodbhai Gadhia, Chhaganbhai Bavaniya and others.

In 1990, Swamishri visited Nagpur and stayed at Jashwantbhai Kothari's house. During



Swamishri during his home visits in Nagpur



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir in the BAPS School, Nagpur



Swamishri inaugurates the new BAPS school and observes the school grounds



In 1990, Swamishri performs *bhumi puja* of BAPS hari mandir, Chandrapur

a public satsang assembly at the Deshpande Hall, the proprietor of the popular local paper, *Hitvad*, Banvarilal Purohit, and renowned scholar and leader Shrikant Jichkar praised Swamishri as a living divine personality. During his stay, Swamishri was invited to sanctify a plot of land opposite the host's house. The members of the housing society had installed a *murti* of Hanumanji on that plot. They requested Swamishri to build a mandir. Swamishri blessed all and addressed Vilasbhai Doshi, "A mandir will be built, but you'll have to work hard for it." Thereafter, despite a lot of efforts, the devotees were unable to acquire that land.

In 1992, the BAPS bought 37,000 sq. ft. of land from the city municipality through the efforts of Sharadbhai Gandhi, Tulsidas Khandvani, Hasmukhbhai Suchak, Ramnikbhai Thakkar and the guidance of Arunbhai Gujarati. A tin shed of 58 ft by 28 ft was constructed to set up a make-shift mandir. Thereafter all the satsang activities were held there.

In 1993, Swamishri arrived in Nagpur and stayed at Yogeshbhai Patel's house. Premprakash Swami showed to Swamishri the mandir plans designed by Shri Prem Barvad. Swamishri asked, "Do you want to have a *shikharbaddh* mandir here?" Premprakash Swami replied, "You have to decide upon that." Swamishri added, "The mandir plan is good, and it would be nice to have such a mandir here." Soon thereafter, Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the *hari* mandir.

In 1993, Mahant Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in the *hari* mandir. Prior to the Vedic installation ceremony, the *murtis* were paraded in a procession on the streets of Nagpur.

In 1994, a biscuit factory was closing down in the vicinity of the *hari* mandir. Swamishri called a meeting of the Sanstha's trustees and unanimously decided to purchase the factory. In addition, a decision to build a school on the same



In 1997, Swamishri performs the *khat muhurt* of BAPS hari mandir, Raipur



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* of BAPS hari mandir, Raipur

premises was taken in 1995. Swamishri's foresight was apparent from his decision to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir. Swamishri blessed that the BAPS school would become ideal and attract a large number of students and excellent teachers. Today, Swamishri's words have become a reality. Ever since the school was launched, Swamishri has read its annual report and praised the services of all. With Swamishri's blessings the school is currently ranked as one of the best CBSE schools in Nagpur.

On 22 June 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the newly built school in Nagpur and declared it open to all. Rohitbhai J. Patel of Mumbai was one of the main donors. On this same day the canvas *murtis* in the *hari* mandir were replaced by marble *murtis* of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj. After departing from Nagpur, Swamishri travelled to Jaam and stayed there for three days at Ravjibhai Patel's home. Thereafter, Swamishri visited Chandrapur and stayed for two days at Ghanshyamsinh's home and delivered satsang discourses. Then Swamishri visited Raipur and stayed at Ratibhai Patel's home for two days.

The handful of enthusiastic devotees of Raipur were eager to have a *hari* mandir in their town. Ratibhai purchased two 5,000 sq. ft. plots and donated them to the BAPS for building a *hari* mandir. At that time Swamishri performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the mandir.

Later, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals in 1997.

Swamishri visited Gondiya and stayed at the home of Shri Praful Patel, central Minister of Industries. Here, Swamishri and his sadhus addressed a public satsang assembly and blessed all. The local devotees, Jayantbhai Dave, Harsukhbhai Vyas (descendant of Krishnaji Ada), Mehta family, Sheth family, Sureshbhai Makwana, and others, collaborated in arranging the satsang programmes.

Besides Swamishri's *vicharan*, Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Kothari Swami and other senior sadhus' visits to the Vidarbha region has also inspired satsang in the lives of many.

In 2001, Swamishri presided over a *shibir* (spiritual camp) for devotees at Panchmadhi. Thereafter, Swamishri stayed for six days in Nagpur. He stayed at Dhavalbhai Patel's house. From here Swamishri travelled to Sihor. Here, Narendrabhai Vadhvana and his family had built and donated a *hari* mandir to the Sanstha. Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir. Presently, Narendrabhai Patel and Indubhai Parikh run the mandir and satsang centre in Sihor. Devotees from different centres flocked to avail of Swamishri's presence. The mandir pujaris, Rameshbhai Trivedi, Jesangbhai, Dakshesh Patel, and others render significant *seva*. Thereafter, Swamishri travelled to Indore.

The BAPS Swaminarayan School in Nagpur



Swamishri sanctifies the site for the new *shikharbaddh* mandir in Nagpur

gradually gained popularity. With more and more students wanting to join the school, the need to expand the complex arose. The adjacent land to the school, which was originally purchased for building a mandir, was utilized to develop the school complex. Through the patronage of well-wishers in Mumbai and other cities a new BAPS school complex was built. Thereafter, 10 acres of land was bought for constructing a mandir on the outskirts of Nagpur.

On 11 June 2004, Swamishri arrived in Nagpur and inaugurated the new school complex. The chief guest of the function was Jadavjibhai Anchorwala, the principal sponsor of the school. During his stay, Swamishri sanctified the new plot for the mandir. He saw the entire plot and the plans. Then he asked members of the Sanstha's Planning Cell, Akshaymuni Swami and Bhadrayubhai, "Now, where shall we perform the *khat muhurt*?" Since no prior decision or arrangement had been made, everyone was surprised. Swamishri replied, "Since we have come here, let us perform the ground-breaking ceremony (*bhumi puja*), and later we shall perform the foundation-stone laying rituals." Swamishri performed

the *bhumi puja* rituals amidst Vedic chantings and *puja* of the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. The remaining rituals of mantra *pushpanjali*, showering of rice grains on the land and splitting coconuts were also performed. It was a memorable moment for the residing sadhus and devotees of Nagpur.

When Swamishri was asked to sit in a car to sanctify the entire plot, he instead, started walking and showering flower petals. He told Premprakash Swami to try and acquire the adjacent land. Later, the land was purchased, and more land surrounding the mandir plot was also acquired. In all, the mandir plot is 20 acres.

Swamishri gave the green signal for the mandir plans to be drawn and the construction work to begin thereafter. The Sanstha's Planning Cell assigned Devdutt Sompura to draw the plans under the guidance of Akshaymuni Swami. Swamishri suggested that the mandir should be designed with pillars and its sides open to the surroundings. The grand, divine mandir in Nagpur today is a reflection of Swamishri's vision. The stone-work for the mandir was assigned to the Sanstha's experienced volunteer, Harshadbhai Chavda, in

Pindvada, Rajasthan. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami entrusted the task of accomplishing quality stonework and designs to Shrijiwarup Swami and Bhaktinandan Swami. Harshadbhai made minor changes to the mandir plans during the stone work and sculptings. The principal dome (*ghummat*), main entrance portico (*rup chowki*) and mandir walls (*mandovar*) are similar to Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.

The *murtis* for the mandir sanctums were sculpted under the expertise of Bhaktinandan Swami and with the help of Kothari Vishwavihari Swami (Gandhinagar) and Kothari Satsangijivan Swami (Ahmedabad).

In 2008, the stones were quarried from *satsangi* Dilipsingh Rathod's quarry. The large stones were cut and later carved in workshops in the neighbouring villages of Bansipahadhpur. The ornate stone work was carried out at Harshadbhai Chavda's workshop in Pindvada.

The ground level of the mandir site in Nagpur was much too low for the mandir construction. Subsequently, it was raised by filling it with mud obtained from construction sites in the vicinity. More than 10,000 truck loads of mud was used to fill the low lying mandir site. The soil on site was tested by the renowned geologist of Nagpur, Shri Amol Shingar. On his instructions, the mandir foundation pit was dug up to 17 ft below ground level. The excavation for the foundation was done honorarily by *satsangi*, Shri Jigneshbhai Patel, and his partner, Rameshbhai Dabhi. The foundation pit was prepared under the supervision of *satsangi* engineers Shri Dhanjibhai Ghelani, Shri Pravinbhai Patel, Shri Devendrabhai Gor and Jigneshbhai Patel.

The *shilanyas* rituals, comprising the *pujan* of the *shilas*, were performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Dadar mandir, Mumbai, on 21 October 2007. Over 125 devotees from the Vidarbha region participated in the rituals and received Swamishri's blessings. Soon thereafter, the *shilanyas* rituals were carried out by

Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Puja Ghanshyamcharan Swami. Subsequently, the foundation work commenced with the efforts and supervision of Jigneshbhai Patel and Rameshbhai Dabhi. In the meantime, the sculpting of stones began at Byana village near Bansipahadhpur. When the stones started arriving at the mandir site, construction work commenced. A giant crane for the construction project was provided by Shri Atulbhai Ajmera of Mumbai. Gradually, the mandir started taking shape, and the ritual ceremonies for every layer and milestone work were performed: laying of first stone, beginning of *kanapith*, placement of first pillar, laying of *barsakh*, construction of *mandovar*, beginning of *shikhar peti*, placement of *kalashas*, etc. These rituals were carried out over a period of few years by senior sadhus: Puja Mahant Swami, Puja Dr Swami, Puja Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Puja Ishwarcharan Swami. Shri Harshadbhai Chavda, with the guidance of Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, personally supervised and accomplished the massive stone work and carvings in only five years. The suggestions for the mandir steps and *pradakshina* by Shrijiwarup Swami and Bhaktinandan Swami were invaluable. The mandir gardens and landscaping were done by Dr Kikani.

Despite Swamishri's ailing condition, he periodically asked Premprakash Swami about the mandir construction and also gave his guidance and blessings. With Swamishri's blessings the mandir was completed in 2013. When a video of the constructed mandir was shown to Swamishri, he appreciated the efforts of all and praised, "The mandir has been done very well." The *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nagpur, was performed by senior sadhus on 7 October 2013. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* on 5 July 2012.



Translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas



Murti-Pratishtha Celebrations

5-7 October 2013, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nagpur,
Madhya Pradesh, India



On 5 July 2012, Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* of the *murtis* for BAPS mandir, Nagpur, in Ahmedabad

*Nagpur, popularly known as the 'Orange City'
for its excellent quality of oranges, marks the centre point of India.
For many years, BAPS satsang activities have been taking place in the city,
culminating in the construction of a grand shikharbaddh mandir.
The celebrations to mark the inauguration of the mandir were
held from 5 to 7 October 2013.*

5-7 OCTOBER 2013

**BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nagpur,
Madhya Pradesh, India**

Decades of patient efforts by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, senior sadhus and devotees in inspiring and developing satsang in Nagpur and Vidarbha region have borne fruit with the culmination of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Nagpur.

5 OCTOBER 2013

Vastu Puja

At 4.30 p.m., the auspicious *vastu* puja rituals were performed in the mandir *garbhagruha*. These are a prelude to the main *murti-pratishtha* rituals in which the deities are invited to the *murti-pratishtha*, and prayers are offered that all who come here for darshan and all the life-forms that live here are liberated.

The Vedic rituals were performed by the *sadguru* sadhus: Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

Women's Assembly

At 2.45 p.m., a special Women's Assembly was held in the giant marquee behind the mandir, in which over 5,000 women devotees from Nagpur, Raipur, Chandrapur, Akola, Bhandra, Gondyia, Vadi, Sadar and other towns and regions of Madhya Pradesh were present. Through entertaining speeches, dances, dramas and bhajans inspiring messages were conveyed (for details, see *Premvati*, November-December 2013).

Cultural Programme

In the evening, at 8.15 p.m., a grand cultural programme was presented in the marquee. The stage backdrop was beautifully decorated and the *sadguru* sadhus were seated on stage.

The highlights of the programme included: a speech by Premprakash Swami, *kothari* of Nagpur

mandir, detailing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *vi-charan* and efforts in the region; felicitation of the devotees who had contributed their time and resources to the mandir project; an excellent dance by children depicting the glory of mandirs; a drama showing how to inspire noble values in children; a video of the achievements of the BAPS Swaminarayan School in Nagpur since it was started 17 years ago; and skits demonstrating how mandirs nurture faith in God, observance of moral codes, ideal citizenship and a value-based society. The three-hour programme was highly appreciated by all.

6 OCTOBER 2013

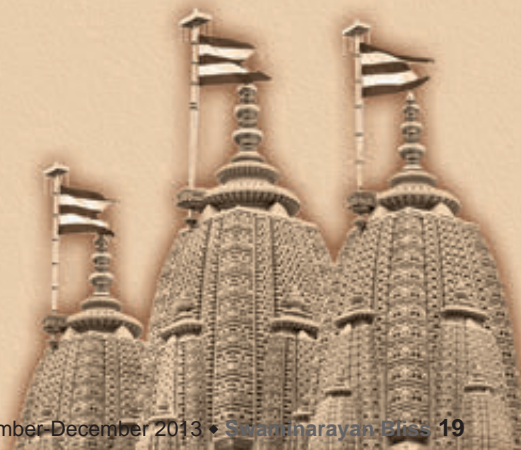
Yagna for World Peace

At 7.45 a.m., Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Dr Swami and other *sadguru* sadhus began the Vedic *yagna*, and performed the initial rituals and *arti*. Thereafter, Mahant Swami addressed the devotees participating in the *yagna*. After the *sadguru* sadhus departed, the 1,902 *yajmans* seated around 117 *yagna kunds* (including 9 main *kunds*) continued with the Vedic *yagna* rituals as guided by expert Brahmins.

Also, in the morning, a blood donation camp was held yielding 247 bottles of blood, and an organ donation registration camp was organized.

Grand Nagar Yatra

At 3.30 p.m. a grand *nagar yatra* (procession) of all the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new





Youths present a traditional dance



Senior sadhus perform the initial rituals of the *yagna*



Over 1,900 *yajmans* participated in the *yagna* for World Peace



Devotees of Khandesh during the *nagar yatra*

mandir was held through the streets of Nagpur. After the traditional Vedic *pujan*, the *nagar yatra* was flagged off from the Telephone Exchange Office on Ambedkar Chowk. The *nagar yatra* comprised of decorative floats carrying the *murtis*, *balaks* dressed in traditional costumes, local BAPS youths on motorbikes carrying the *murti-pratishtha* banners and BAPS flags, tribal youths dancing in traditional dress and style, *balaks* waving BAPS flags, senior devotees in traditional *safo*, youths mounted on horses, youths of Badalpur singing and playing their traditional musical instruments, sadhus singing bhajans, marching musical band, *balikas* in traditional dress, women carrying traditionally decorated clay water pitchers, *kalash*-coconut and shastras wrapped in red cloth on their heads, *yuvatis* carrying large leaves with the Swaminarayan mantra written on them and women devotees singing bhajans.

As the spectacular sight passed through the streets, onlookers watched excitedly from nearby balconies, windows and terraces, and captured photos and videos of the procession. Some honoured the *nagar yatra* by performing *arti*, while others showed their support by distributing sweets, snacks, ice-cream, buttermilk, fruit juices and water to the participants.

The 5-km long *nagar yatra* concluded at 7.00 p.m. at the mandir.

7 OCTOBER 2013 (Aso sud 3, V.S. 2069)

Murti-Pratishtha Ceremony

In the early morning, the *sadguru* sadhus performed *pujan* of the mandir's main entrance gate and entered the mandir compound carrying the *murti* of Thakorji. They performed *pujan* of the large *charnarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the mandir compound. They then arrived under the mandir's main dome, where the devotees participating in the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony were seated. Thereafter, the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals commenced, with the *sadgurus* and other sadhus performing the rituals simultaneously before

the different *murtis*: Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (central shrine) – Mahant Swami, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj – Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Shri Nilkanth Varni – Dr Swami, Shri Bhagatji Maharaj – Tyagvallabh Swami, Shri Shastriji Maharaj – Bhagvatpriya Swami, Shri Yogiji Maharaj – Ishwarcharan Swami and Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj – Anandswarup Swami. Other sadhus performed the rituals for the *murtis* of Shri Hanumanji, Shri Ganapatiji, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Lakshmi-Narayan Dev, Shri Shrinathji, Shri Tirupati-Balaji and the Sukh Shaiya.

After the rituals were completed, the traditional *annakut* was arranged before all the *murtis* and then the *murti-pratishtha arti* was performed.

Thus, the *murtis* consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad on 5 July 2012 (Ashadh *vad* 2, V.S. 2068) were installed amidst Vedic rituals in the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Nagpur.

Murti-Pratishtha Assembly

The *murti-pratishtha* assembly featured speeches by the senior sadhus and guests.

First, Anandswarup Swami explained the glory of mandirs. Then, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami addressed the assembly, “God eternally resides in the eight types of *murtis*. But when the Satpurush in whom God fully resides performs the *murti-pratishtha*, the *murtis* become the form of God. Param Pujya Swamishri has performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* here, so their darshan will definitely bring peace and they will fulfil the wishes of all.”

Thereafter, Ishwarcharan Swami said, “We should take the benefit of this grand mandir by coming for darshan, performing *pradakshinas* and offering prayers. God certainly listens to our prayers. God takes note of whether or not we come for darshan. So we should come daily for darshan and also attend the satsang assembly. Also, mandirs impart values to children.”



Senior sadhus singing *dhun* during the *nagar yatra*



Sadhus pull the chariot carrying the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the *nagar yatra*



Murti of Shri Nilkanth Varni on the Muktinath chariot



Shri Lakshmi-Narayan on the Sheshnag chariot



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on the Hans chariot



Shri Shrinathji on the Vrundavan chariot

Dr Swami, in his speech, explained, “Yogiji Maharaj used to say that a mandir is a college for *brahmavidya*. There are many types of *vidya* (knowledge), but the highest is *brahmavidya*. This *vidya* is attained here [in the mandir]. In *brahma-vidya*, the three main subjects are *swarupnishtha*, *swadharmanishtha* and *sanghnishtha*. Respect all, see the good in all, wish good for all and do not wish ill of others.”

After speeches by invited guests, Premprakash Swami delivered a vote of thanks to all who had contributed to the successful completion of the mandir project.

At the conclusion of the assembly, Mahant Swami addressed the gathering, “Donations reap fruits according to the recipient. For example, if grains are placed on this stage, birds will eat them. If grains are sowed in sand, they will dry up and die, since sand will not nourish them. But if grains are planted in fertile soil, they will sprout and reap a bountiful harvest. Similarly, donating to others earns merits, but donating to a sadhu like Pramukh Swami earns infinite merits. You have all contributed to this mandir inspired by Pramukh Swami, so you will reap countless benefits.”

During the three-day *murti-pratishtha*

Mahant Swami performs the Vedic *sthapan* rituals for the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj



celebrations, BAPS volunteers from Nagpur, Mumbai and centres in Gujarat served selflessly to ensure the grand success of the occasion.

Akhand Satsang Kutir

From 1 to 5 October 2013, to mark the inauguration of the new BAPS Swaminarayan *shikhARBaddh* mandir in Nagpur, an ‘Akhand Satsang Kutir’ – a special marquee in which the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara

were placed – was set up in the mandir campus to enable everyone to offer special devotion and prayers. Throughout the day, male and female devotees, young and old, spent time there devoutly singing the *dhun*, chanting and writing the ‘Swaminarayan’ mantra, performing *pradakshinas* and *dandvats*, and reciting shastras. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



Media Coverage of Nagpur Mandir Mahotsav

News of grand *murti-pratishtha* celebrations was extensively covered by newspapers and TV channels throughout Madhya Pradesh. Some excerpts:

Nagpur Today hailed the mandir as, ‘The beauty of Nagpur.’

The Hitvada proclaimed, ‘India’s Largest Mandir in Nagpur.’

Dainik Bhaskar stated, ‘Swaminarayan incarnates in city.’

Lokmat Times praised the grand *nagar yatra*.

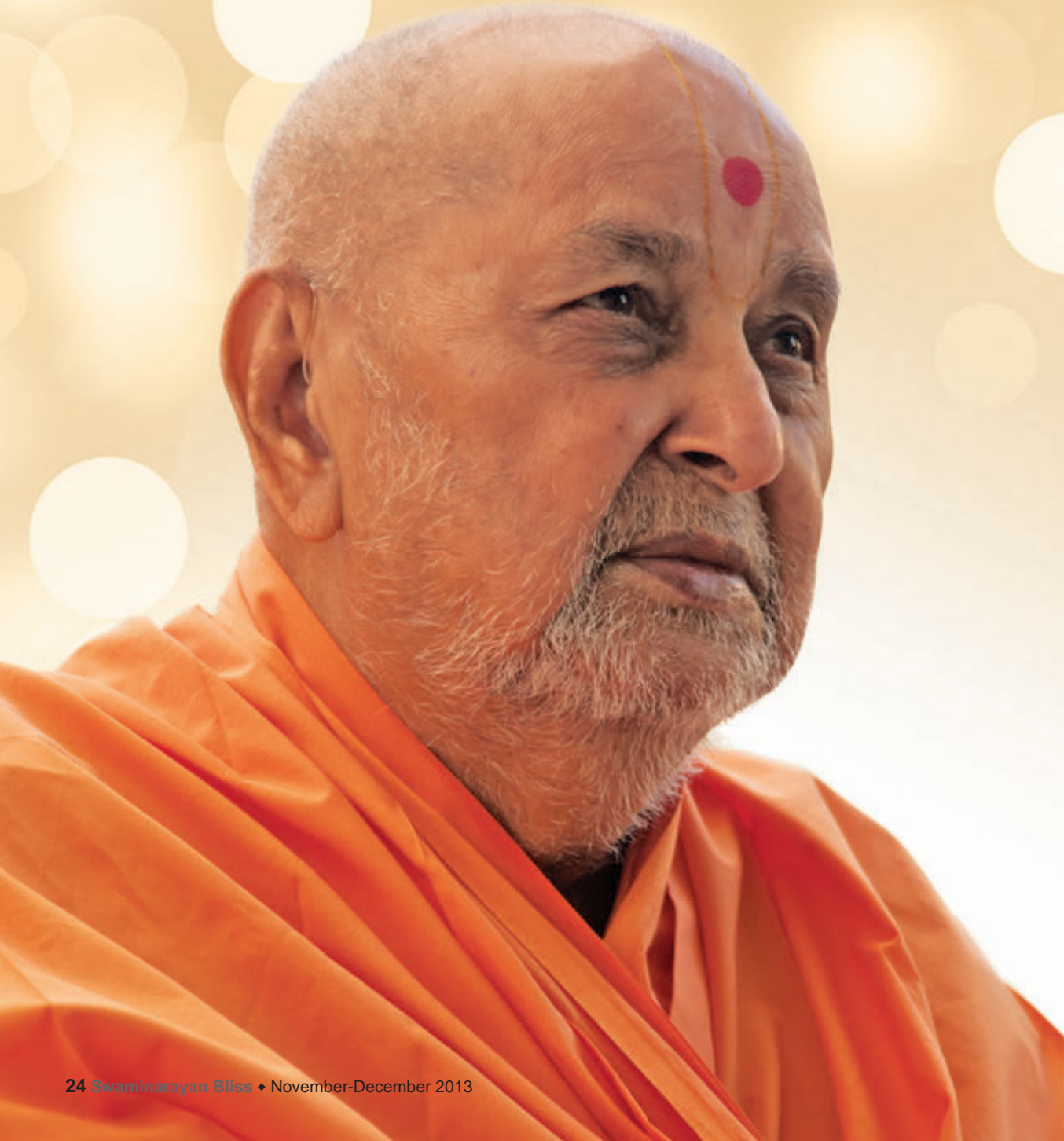
Tarun Bharat described the beautiful mandir architecture, and the views of devotees and visitors regarding the mandir. Among them Bhushan Pardhi opined, “The mandir is extremely attractive. It is full of excellent intricate carvings. The entire mandir campus is captivating.”

Pushpa Lalvani commented, “The new Swaminarayan Mandir will become the best of all the sights to see here. The beauty and grandeur of the mandir truly draws everyone.” Rajesh Jagtap said, “In and around Nagpur, Dikshabhumi, Tajbaug, Sitabari Fort and many other historic places are worth seeing. They have up to now been regarded as the wealth of Nagpur. However, this architecturally rich Swaminarayan Mandir is a step above them all.” Mukesh Mahamani said, “This mandir generates great joy in the heart. We should repeatedly come here.”

Coverage was also given in the *Maharashtra Times*, *New Bharat*, *Tarun Bharat*, *Lokmat Times*, *Vidarbha Ki Bat*, *Lokmat Samachar* and other newspapers, as well as, USN and other TV channels.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

Experiences and Reflections of Senior Sadhus



If you are curious to know the height of Mount Everest, a good geography student (or anyone with a data plan) would tell you it is 29,029 feet. But what if you wanted to understand the height of Mount Everest? Now, that's a different matter altogether. Knowing that Everest towers 29,000 feet above sea level is something that virtually anyone can do. However, to understand what 29,000 feet feels like, how thin air at that level feels in your lungs, how sunlight in those peaks parch your lips, how the wind feels as mighty as the hand of God pushing you around that mountainscape – to understand 29,029 feet, you have to do more than speak to a geography student; you have to speak to a person who has made that climb.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a spiritual Everest. He is the tallest peak in a spiritual scape not limited to this world, but one that traverses the galaxies. The only existence greater than him in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya is Purna Purushottam Narayan Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Like geography students or Google and Wikipedia search enthusiasts, we know his spiritual height in words. We can speak of his traits in the same way that we can list the parts of a cell, name the planets of our solar system, or say 29,029 feet. But to understand his height, to get a greater idea of his greatness, we have to turn to those who faithfully follow his path and scale his height with duty, discipline, and determination. To understand Pramukh Swami Maharaj best, we have to listen to those who understand him best and so we give our eager attention to the sadgurus (senior sadhus) of the BAPS. Revisiting their writings (translation excerpts of Gujarati in Brahmopanishad) on Swamishri from the early 1990s, we see how they have experienced and appreciated Swamishri's spiritual height.

PEACE IS ONLY AT THE LOTUS FEET OF NARAYAN



Mahant Swami (Sadhu Keshavjivandas)

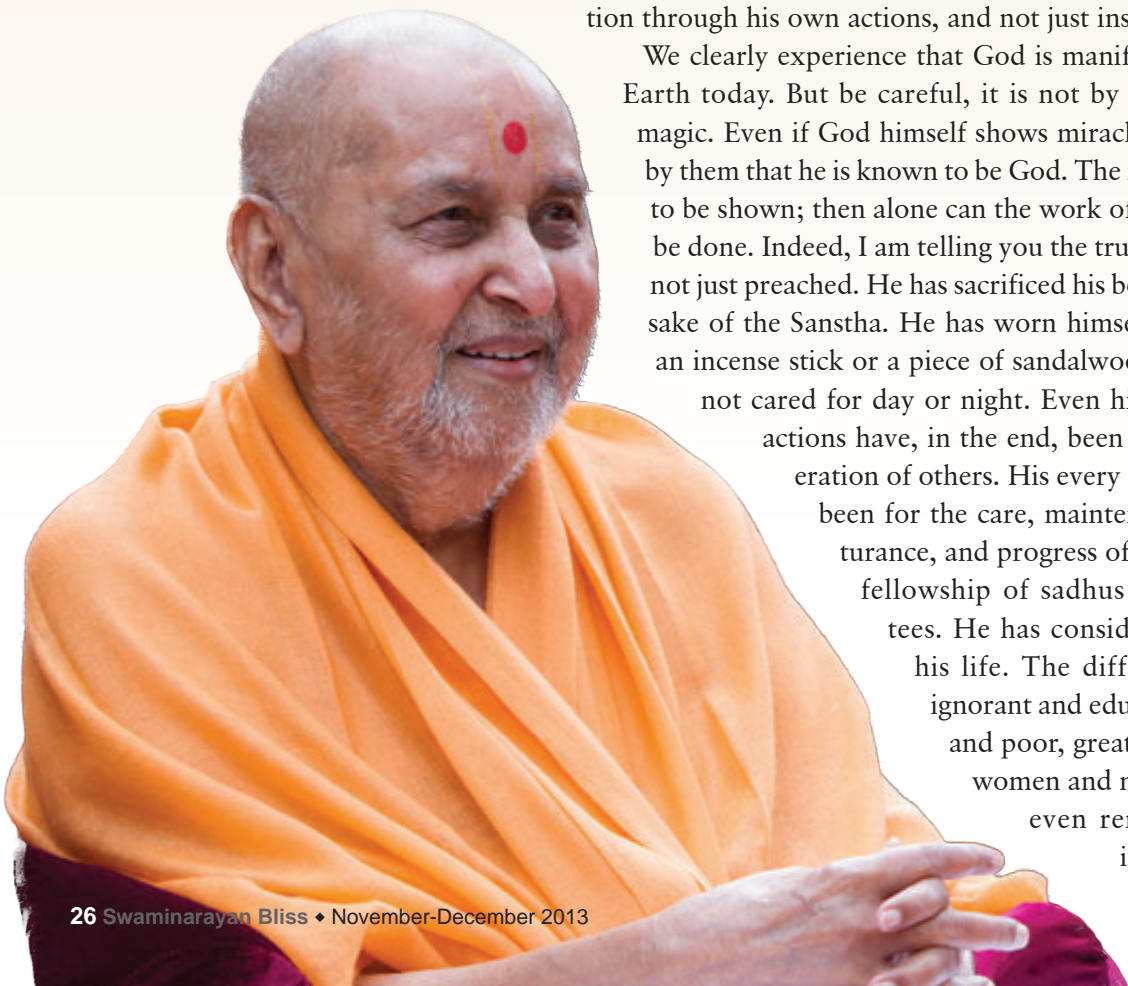


Pragat Guruhari has won the hearts of sadhus and devotees to such an extent that they never hesitate to renounce wealth, home, family and other relations for him; they experience no conflict in their minds. On the contrary, they consider making such sacrifices as their good fortune and a fulfilment of their desires. The disciples having deep devotion and spiritual knowledge, even though they have human forms, enjoy the divine happiness of Akshardham. And even after doing so much, a sense of indebtedness to the Guruhari never disappears from the minds of the sadhus and devotees; that humbling weight of debt is always on them. What can it be that Guruhari has given them?

He has given them conduct. Conduct is action. How can one gift it? He has given guidance; he has given love; he has given devotion; and he has given the inspiration to keep the faith, determination and patience to do countless good deeds. But it is important to remember that he has given inspiration through his own actions, and not just instruction.

We clearly experience that God is manifest on this Earth today. But be careful, it is not by miracle or magic. Even if God himself shows miracles it is not by them that he is known to be God. The real act has to be shown; then alone can the work of liberation be done. Indeed, I am telling you the truth – he has not just preached. He has sacrificed his body for the sake of the Sanstha. He has worn himself out like an incense stick or a piece of sandalwood. He has

not cared for day or night. Even his personal actions have, in the end, been for the liberation of others. His every second has been for the care, maintenance, nurturing, and progress of the whole fellowship of sadhus and devotees. He has considered them his life. The differences of ignorant and educated, rich and poor, great and small, women and men do not even remotely exist for him.



Those benevolent differences which are necessary to show, to make those bound by this body rise above body-consciousness and join him in his state, he shows naturally.

People believe that we can preach morality and justice with the help of written articles and lectures. Nobody reads the articles, nor hears the advice or lectures. If they read or listen, they do not remember them. Moreover, they cannot understand them. And all of that is fine, but where will one get the motivation to act righteously? It is absolutely impossible without the association of a person who puts those words in action. In the company of such a person everything is realized instantly, really instantly. Swamishri is such a person. Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj corroborate this with their affirmation. Because of their words I have full faith in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. When I look at his life, I feel great joy. My head bows in humility. I become overwhelmed. I say to myself, "Wonderful, Swami! Wonderful! You are really our life and soul." I did not realize what I wanted from Swamishri, and yet I did not realize that I got it... In my heart, I feel full satisfaction and peace.

No matter how much one may strive, but if there is nobody before one who lives the right life, in no way one receives any motivation – that is a true and experienced fact. Moulded lives mould maxims; maxims do not mould lives. Lectures are not needed, books are not needed, no tools are needed for propagating Satsang; only pure conduct is necessary – everything else comes later.

A great mistake is often made in that many people live a righteous life for the sake of making others live a righteous life. Righteous living for one's own sake is the conduct which brings the full results, otherwise others will copy us to no effect. The essence, that is the happiness and joy brought by righteous living and devotion to God, will be missed. The difference between living

righteously for oneself and living righteously for others is slight, but the difference in the fruits of those lives is great. All of this has been understood from Swamishri's simple yet deep and complex living. And now I am inspired to do just that.

In the most difficult of circumstances, how completely unburdened he remains! I am amazed by him. He is not weighed down by anything; he remains as light as a flower.

Once, we – meaning Swamishri, Hakabhai Khachar and I – were returning from Delhi. We had not succeeded in the work for which we had gone. We were on the train. It was a journey of 24 hours during which we hardly exchanged a few words. Swamishri had not taken up anything for writing or reading, but without a word I received instruction, great encouragement and was overjoyed. His life and work started turning in my mind like a film reel. Inspirations filled my heart. Overpowering enthusiasm moved my core to do more and more for Satsang. A pure feeling to please Yogi Bapa with true love began to crystallize in me. A *mala* was turning in Swamishri's hand; even that was telling me many, many things. Work while constantly worshipping, not worship while constantly working. Even when not doing anything and sitting idle, one is not able to worship. But Swamishri was telling the beads with an easy and pleased mind. His mind was as still as a divine ocean. He is anchored to something firm. There is a great refuge, a great attainment. I saw great freedom from worry. I have experienced such ease in Swamishri from the very beginning.

Once, I had darshan of Swamishri at the Surendranagar railway station. It was a tour of my college's students. People were running here and there to catch the train. Many were standing, but their minds were running all over the place. But Swamishri, though walking, appeared completely still. Swamishri is always engaged. Yet even while he is active, he is as at ease as a person in deep slumber. His ease, though, is different from the

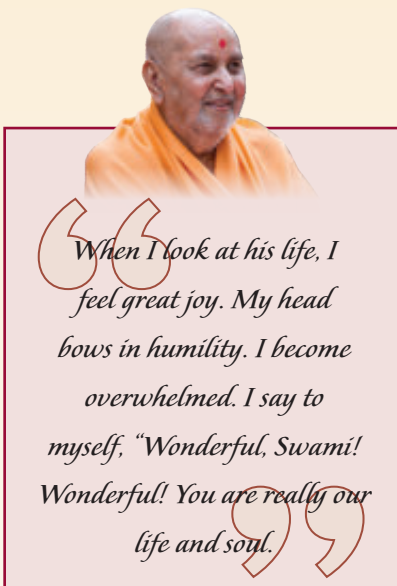
ease experienced by other people. This is not idleness, rest, freedom from responsibility, irresponsibility, or a feeling that he has nothing to do while others work for him. It is not like people sitting idling, passing time either. Even his jokes are with a purpose. So his is not an ease like any of these.

In 1974, Swamishri and some sadhus were going to Nairobi. A grand send-off was held. However, they had to come back without stepping foot in the Nairobi airport. Sadhus in-

quired, "Why did this happen?" It will be clear from his answer how at ease he was. Swamishri said, "We have not done anything wrong. We do all this to please Maharaj. His wish prevails." A similar incident happened with regards to building a mandir in Harrow, London. The youths and devotees tried very hard. The youths were saying confidently, "We will get permission to build the mandir. We will win in court." However, we lost. A wave of disappointment crashed over everyone; only Swamishri could sleep soundly. And he just said, "We have not done anything wrong. We have done our part as our devotion to Maharaj. He is the all-doer, and whatever he does is for the best." It is evident from this that in any task, he has no wish other than pleasing Maharaj and Swami.

No pillow is as soft as a clear conscience. His is a pure heart.

Whether he is writing letters, or reading them, he seems completely at ease. The handwriting in the letters he receives may be illegible and their contents useless; the same thing may be written ten times over by devotees, and the same devotee may be writing time and time again, still, with compassion, to vanquish their sorrows and understanding it to be his service, he reads the



letters. A sadhu once said to Swamishri who was attending to letters from devotees, "Stop now. How long will you go on? Don't you feel tired? Don't you get exhausted?" Swamishri said, "This is a service which cannot be treated with disrespect." The cause of his being at ease and having a contented soul is that he sees his service to devotees as devotion to God.

Even in times of honour or insult, he is at ease. He was not overwhelmed by the Suvarna Tula celebration. When some-

one came and berated him the next day, he was at ease, forever at ease.

At London airport, we came to the VIP lounge. With Swamishri were Narayancharan Swami, myself, Keith Vaz and other local officials. Swamishri started taking a walk in the lounge. He was not worried about who was around. He was comfortable there as if he were walking in Sarangpur. One experiences that without breaking his relations with us, he is above this mundane world. In such cases, only one is possible. But in his case, he achieves both. His steps are uniform wherever he may be walking. He experiences no inferiority or superiority complex; as light as a flower, he gets along with everyone. Whoever he may be with, he is at ease.

He is at ease in his every act. This shows clearly that he is above physical existence and that Paramatma, Parabrahman stays forever in him. Peace and happiness envelope all those who come near him. Since ultimately, peace is only at the feet of Narayan. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Aksharatitdas



SWAMISHRI'S EGOLESS PERSONALITY



Sadhu Swayamprakashdas (Doctor Swami)

When Swamishri returned from abroad in 1977, a large assembly was held in Atladra. There, Swamiji himself was reading ‘Swami ni Vato’ and delivering a discourse. Many eminent guests were seated before him. At that time, a very ordinary, poor, illiterate, and seemingly mentally handicapped devotee came there and stood with his hands folded before Swamiji. But Swamiji did not become upset and very respectfully and peacefully spoke to him. This incident touched my heart. Because, in such circumstances, any other *kathakar* might have become angry and forced the man to sit down. Maybe he would have even looked at him with an annoyed glare. But nothing like that is seen in Swamiji’s life, since he has such equal respect for everyone.

Egolessness is evident in Swamiji’s life. That arrogance of having so many people obey him

is never seen in his life. And like this, grand receptions are held for him everywhere, yet he behaves like a servant. Muktanand Swami has written, “*Hu tale Hari dhukadā*” – that God is forever with one whose ego has dissolved. By Muktanand Swami’s words, it is evident that God truly resides in Swamishri.

One gets inspiration for one’s life from Swamishri. His life is dedicated to selfless service which is seen in very few people. Everyone mostly works with selfish motives. However, here, whatever Swamiji does is done with a sense of selflessness.

It is only by associating with Swamishri that one gets the strength to serve selflessly, and the power to bring the thoughts of acting in that way into fruition in one’s life. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Aksharatitdas



SWAMISHRI'S LOVE AND SAINTLINESS



Kothari Swami (Bhaktipriya Swami)



When I was with Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, I had the firm belief that only he could attract the attention of youths by befriending them and influencing them to follow the path of religion, good conduct and devotion. This was a role which no one else could play in the world.

Prior to Yogiji Maharaj's return to Dham, he had often stated that Pramukh Swami was the form of Shastriji Maharaj and that he was his all. And because of these words of Yogiji Maharaj I had attached my mind with him. But still my feeling in the beginning (after Pramukh Swami Maharaj succeeded as the guru) was that Yogiji

Maharaj was unique and that Pramukh Swami Maharaj could not captivate the minds of all like him. However, within a short time Pramukh Swami Maharaj cleared my delusion.

Swamishri took deep interest, showered his love and mercy on youths and attracted whoever came into contact with him: some of whom fervently became engaged in satsang activities, some dedicated themselves for lifetime service in mandirs, and some accepted *diksha* as sadhus and engrossed themselves in Satsang activities.

Then I realized that there is only a difference in the outer form (of the guru), otherwise the essence is the same. The same Bhagwan

Swaminarayan who was working through Yogiji Maharaj is now working through Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri).

When I was travelling with Swamishri during his *vicharan* in South India in 1989-90, I witnessed jam-packed public satsang assemblies in spite of there being only a handful of local devotees. Aspirants thronged to the public satsang assemblies; some of whom even joined the satsang fold, some were deeply impressed by Swamishri's divinity, some felt that Bhagwan Swaminarayan had come in person, some pledged to give up addictions, many devotees' wishes were fulfilled, many became committed towards *seva* and *bhakti* and thousands got guidance towards nobler living.

In spite of the successful mammoth celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's and Gunatitanand Swami's birth bicentenaries Swamishri's demeanour and sentiments were as if he was the non-doer – this is indeed a great achievement. During the Cultural Festival of India (CFI) celebration and the Suvarna Tula in London in 1985, he stated that Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj are the all-doers. Even though he has endeavoured enormously for the growth of Satsang in India and abroad he always says that he has done nothing.

Swamishri patiently reads and replies to letters from devotees and others seeking answers for and solace from their frustrations and hardships. He has replied to them while travelling, in the dim light of a torch, at a station platform, during satsang assemblies – all to relieve the miseries and problems of devotees.

Once, Swamishri was standing by the door of a train that was about to depart. At that time a little boy came running

up to him asking him to sign his name on a piece of paper. Swamishri obliged, and the boy beamed with joy. Everyone saw that Swamishri did not reject even a small boy's request.

Once, we went to Akola station at 12.30 a.m. to catch a train. But the train arrived one hour and fifteen minutes late. After embarking, we all went to sleep at 2.30 a.m. At 5.45 a.m. we arrived at Amalner station. Swamishri got up and went to the door to satisfy the hundreds of devotees who had come to have his darshan and garland him. Swamishri accepted their garlands and blessed them. He did not care for his own sleep or comfort while pleasing the devotees.

In 1973, the celebration of Yogi Jayanti was held in Swamishri's presence in Gondal. I had gone there for some research for my PhD thesis. On the morning of the celebration, Swamishri went for darshan of the sacred room of Shastriji Maharaj. I prayed to Swamishri, "Yogiji Maharaj had promised me that he would bless me with the realization of *ekantik* dharma, but he left this world soon after. Now how will it happen?" Swamishri took a sanctified rose from the bed of Shastriji Maharaj and gave it to me, saying, "What Yogiji Maharaj had promised, I shall fulfil. Do not

worry." Because of Swamishri's blessings I am able to offer *bhakti*, observe *niyams*, do satsang and experience peace within.

So many have experienced Swamishri's divine power to completely transform souls. I pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's health remains fine and he forever stays with us. ♦

Translated by Sadhu
Vivekjiandas



I realized that there is only a difference in the outer form (of the guru), otherwise the essence is the same. The same Bhagwan Swaminarayan who was working through Yogiji Maharaj is now working through Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri).



Tyagvallabh Swami

HEARTFELT LOVE



My true understanding of Satsang began in 1952 when I landed in East Africa. Later, during my college vacations in Mumbai, I started touring with Yogiji Maharaj in the villages. At that time I rarely came in contact with Swamishri (Pramukh Swami Maharaj). I was initiated into renunciation in 1960 by Yogiji Maharaj. Thereafter, I stayed in Mumbai. Whenever Yogiji Maharaj came to Mumbai Swamishri often came for a few days. But till 1970 I had not been in close association with Swamishri.

In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj embarked on a satsang tour to East Africa and London. I was also with him. Swamishri, too, was in that tour. I used to go for home visits with Swamishri, but I had not developed any closeness with him. At that time Yogiji Maharaj was the focus. However, two incidents with Swamishri (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) in London made me gravitate towards him.

During his visit to London, Yogiji Maharaj and his attendant sadhus resided at Arvindbhai Patel's house in Dollis Hill. Swamishri and the rest of the sadhus were staying at Chitranjanbhai Patel's

house in Wembley Park. Each day, Viveksagar Swami and I would reach Yogiji Maharaj's residence at 6.00 a.m. But on the day of shaving our head (*mundan*) we were late in getting ready. We rang up Arvindbhai at Dollis Hill to send a car to pick us up from Chitranjanbhai's house. At that time Yogiji Maharaj came onto the phone and asked, "What is Pramukh Swami doing?" I said he was taking his bath. After the conversation was over, I started thinking why Yogiji Maharaj had remembered Swamishri alone when there were other sadhus too. I realized then that one remembers someone first when he is dearest of all. Yogiji Maharaj's bond with Swamishri was very profound. I merely got a glimpse of it from that incident.

Another revealing incident happened at a devotee's house in London where Yogiji Maharaj and his sadhus were invited for lunch. On Yogiji Maharaj's arrival, I was still preparing lunch and also engaged in making the dining arrangements. Seeing that I was unable to cope singlehandedly, Swamishri told me to take care of the cooking while he started making the dining arrangements himself. He could have asked another sadhu to make the arrangements, but he began doing it himself. On seeing this I was touched.

Yogiji Maharaj passed away in 1971 and thereafter I was told by Swamishri to tour the villages for satsang. During my travels, whenever I got the opportunity of serving Swamishri I did so. This increased my love for him.

When I was the *kothari* of Atladra mandir, I had to arrange Swamishri's home visits (*padhramanis*) and other satsang programmes. Once, Swamishri was scheduled to arrive in Vadodara in the evening. Before coming to the mandir Swamishri was scheduled to

have dinner at a devotee's home in Vadodara. As soon as other devotees came to know, they came to me to request for Swamishri's visit to their homes. I arranged a few home visits. When Swamishri arrived, he was late because of unscheduled home visits on the way. After he had dinner I did not have the courage to tell him about the *padhramanis*. I was worried for the devotees because they had made arrangements for Swamishri's *padhramanis*. Swamishri and everyone got up to leave for Atladra. He looked at me and asked, "What other schedule have you made?" I informed, "There are three *padhramanis* to make in this area and then we will head towards Atladra mandir." Swamishri said, "Let's go." There was not the slightest expression of boredom, fatigue or unwillingness on his face. I was moved. My reverence for him increased.

Once, during Swamishri's *vicharan* to the villages in the Kanam district (near Atladra) he visited three to four villages daily. As a result his lunch would be delayed to late afternoon. This obviously curtailed his afternoon rest. But despite this, he always got up in time to attend to the evening's scheduled programmes. Swamishri's life, his spirit to please others, to become conducive and helpful to others and his utter disregard for his body – all these drew me closer to him.

Once, Swamishri was travelling from Bochasan to Atladra to celebrate the Vasant Panchmi festival. I was with him. We first arrived in Jitodiya village to give darshan to Ishwarbhai, who was counting his last days. Ishwarbhai was lying supine on his bed, Swamishri sat on a specially prepared seat with a chair for Thakorji next to him.



Swamishri's life, his spirit to please others, to become conducive and helpful to others and his utter disregard for his body – all these drew me closer to him.

A *divo* on a metal saucer was lit. Swamishri blessed Ishwarbhai by caressing his body and said a few encouraging words. Then his sons performed *pujan* and *arti* of Thakorji. Thereafter, Swamishri told me to offer *prasad* to Thakorji and then pass the plate of *prasad* to someone for distribution to the devotees. I offered the *prasad* to Thakorji and was about to give the plate to someone who was across Swamishri. But to make things easier for me, Swamishri took hold of the plate to pass it on to the person. The part of the plate he was holding was extremely hot, because it had been placed above the *divo* before Thakorji. No one knew of it. Swamishri bore the brunt of the heat on the index finger of his right hand. His tolerance was amazing because he did not let go of the hot plate. Any other person would have dropped it instantly. While giving the plate to a youth, Swamishri warned him not to touch the side he was holding because it was hot. After Swamishri got into his car, he quietly applied an anti-burn medicine on his thumb and index finger. By then a large boil had developed, revealing the severity of the heat, his suffering and tolerance. Later, I asked for Swamishri's forgiveness and told him that I was pained on seeing his finger with the boil. In reply, Swamishri simply smiled and put the incident to rest. Whenever I remember (*smruti*) this incident I am pained, but I am also reminded of Swamishri's tolerance and calmness.

In 1989, Swamishri had instructed me and a group of eight sadhus to travel abroad on a satsang tour. Towards the end of the tour I became weak and ill. After reaching Mumbai, I



I realized how much Swamishri cares; and he remembers me more than I remember him, he loves me infinitely more than the love I have for him. With these realizations I am very happy from within and feel fulfilled.

was diagnosed with chronic diabetes and was admitted to Dr Kiranbhai Doshi's hospital. Swamishri blessed me on the phone saying that all would be well. Within a week I was recovering rapidly and returned to the Dadar mandir for rest. A few days later, Swamishri came to Mumbai. On meeting him in the mandir before Thakorji he embraced me and asked me about how I was. Later, when Dr Kiranbhai Doshi met Swamishri, Swamishri told him that he should make me well so that there would be no need for insulin injections. At that time, I was taking insulin injections three times a day. So, Kiranbhai said that my diabetes was chronic and I had to take injections. But Swamishri emphatically stated, "I don't want him to take injections for his whole life." Thereafter my recovery was rapid. The dosages of insulin were gradually decreased and I was on only half a tablet of medication daily. When I told Swamishri about it, he added that you would not have to take even that much. And so due to Swamishri's blessings I was redeemed from taking the daily half tablet. From this I realized how much Swamishri cares; and he remembers me more than I remember him, he loves me infinitely more than the love I have for him. With these realizations I am very happy from within and feel fulfilled. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Vivekji vandas



KAVI KALIDASA

*Kalidasa is acclaimed as Kavikula Shiromani
(crest jewel among the family of poets).*

*This eminent poet and dramatist has been
a source of inspiration for centuries.*

*His compositions are as fresh today as
when they first appeared.*

It is said that the truly great stand upon no middle ledge; they are either famous or unknown. Kalidasa, the distinguished poet of ancient India, has turned out to be both. He has achieved international fame through his works like *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, but we know very little about his life. A lot of folklore has grown around his persona.

The date or place of his birth are not known. Scholars have to laboriously piece together conjectural evidence provided by his works and historical inscriptions. This is more guesswork than actual facts. We are equally ignorant about what name his parents had given him. Kalidasa appears to be a later name which the poet got after winning the grace of the goddess. According to Narayana Pisharoty, a modern scholar who collected various references about the poet's life, Kalidasa's original name was Nilakantha and he was a Brahmin by birth; Priya was his wife, and he was a householder before coming to Ujjain (ancient Ujjayini), in today's Madhya Pradesh.

Several places in the country claim the honour of being the place of his birth like, Mandasor near Ujjain and Damodarapura in the Madhubani district of Bihar, according to a Mithila tradition.

This is because Kalidasa's birthplace has also been identified with Mithila. The village of Gaddasingaru in Bengal, too, lays claim to the honour. According to a widely prevalent tradition, Varanasi could have been the poet's birthplace. He is supposed to have married Vasanti, daughter of King Bhimasukala of Varanasi. Kalidasa's wife was also known as Vidyottama. According to another version, the poet never married.

As Kalidasa's works contain references to rishis with ashrams in the Himalayan region of Kashmir, some scholars have claimed that Kalidasa belonged to Kashmir. This claim is far-fetched for the simple reason that as a premier nature poet he was merely describing the grandeur of the lofty mountains. To reinforce the argument they also say that the poet originally belonged to Kashmir, but migrated to Vidarbha to escape the devastation caused by the Hunas. This again is improbable as the foreign invaders came several centuries after the great poet.

Like Panini, centuries before him, Kalidasa is purported to have been a dunce to begin with. He was married to an erudite princess, Vasanti, through trickery. She took a vow that she would only marry one who could overcome her in a

scholarly disputation. It did not take long for her to realize that she had been tricked into marrying a fool by Vararuchi, a noted poet, who had scores to settle with her. She had spurned Vararuchi's proposals as she was afraid that he was superior to her intellectually. The princess had rejected several suitors as less accomplished than herself. Then one day, Vararuchi witnessed a handsome fellow engaged in a really stupid task. He was trying to cut the branch of a tree on which he was perched. The rejected suitor thought that the fellow would be an "ideal" life partner for the haughty princess. Vararuchi and his accomplices presented the woodcutter before her after dressing him in gorgeous clothes. She was taken in by his handsome appearance and supposed scholarship.

On seeing a portrait of the king of Lanka, the dunce pronounced Ravana as Rabhana; this made the princess burst into peals of laughter. Vararuchi and his accomplices ably defended the stupid fellow through an improvised *shloka*. The purport of the *shloka* is – the names of the Lanka monarch's brothers are Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, therefore Ravana, born in the *rakshas* family, has to be Rabhana and not Ravana. The learned princess was impressed by the logic and agreed to the marriage. After the marriage, she realized that the fellow was actually a fool. She was faced with a dicey situation – a learned person was married to an idiot. There are two versions of how she handled the situation. According to one story, the idiot was summarily turned out of the palace. Stung to the quick, he reportedly locked himself up in a Kali mandir while the goddess was away on her nocturnal rounds, and refused to open the door till she agreed to transform him into a learned man. When he opened the door, following repeated requests of the deity, she asked him to stretch out his tongue. Kali then wrote some consecrated word on it; he thus became a scholar. From then onwards he came to be known as Kalidasa (the servant of Kali). The Bengalis rest their claim on this episode. But Dr K.C. Jain in his book, *Kalidasa and His Times*, maintains that

it was highly unlikely as Kalidasa had mentioned Kali only once in *Kumarasambhavam*.

According to another version, it was Vasanti who had advised him to seek divine blessings. After becoming a scholar the former dunce presented himself before the princess. She asked a question, "*Asti kaschit vagardhau?*" – "Is there anything special in your speech?" She set a *samasya* with these words to test him. (*Samasya* is part of a stanza to be completed and only a scholar could do it.) After becoming a scholar, he met her again and completed the *samasya* by beginning his three works – *Kumarasambhavam*, *Meghadutam* and *Raghuvamsham* with the words the princess had set in the *samasya*:

*Astyutarasyām disi devatatmā,
himalayo nama nagadhirājā.*

"There exists in the northern region the divine-souled Himalaya, the king of mountains."

*Kaschit kāntā viraha gurunā svādhi kārāt-
mapramattamāha Sarpenastamagamitā
mahimavarshabhogyena bhartruhu,
Yakshachakre janakatanayāsnanu-
punyodakeshu snigdachayatarushu
vastim ramagiryāshrameshu.*

Purport: A *yaksha* (semi-divine being) angered his master by neglecting his duties. The master cursed him to stay separated from his wife for a year. He stayed in the hermitages of Ramagiri (the Vindhya range) covered with shady trees and containing waters purified by Janaka's daughter (Sita) as she used them for her ablutions.

*Vagardhāviva sampruktau vāgardhapratipattaye,
Jagathah pitarau vande pārvati parameshwarau.*

"I bow down to Parvati and the Supreme Lord, the world's parents, who like word and meaning are unified, that I may attain right knowledge of word and sense."

Kalidasa appears to be familiar with ancient Ujjayini. In *Meghadutam*, the cloud messenger is specially asked to look out for the Mahakala (or Shiva) Mandir in Ujjayini. According to a traditional source, the poet died in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in a house of ill-repute owing to Parvati's

curse. The goddess was furious at the way the poet had described her dalliance with Shiva in *Kumarasambhavam* and hence the curse. It may be mentioned here that *Kumarasambhavam* appears to be written by a different author after the eighth canto. Experts of literature have pronounced the latter part to be inferior to the earlier cantos.

As for Kalidasa's time of existence, it ranges from 200 BCE to 600 CE. The Bhitari copper plate found in archaeological excavations yielded the earlier date.

VIKRAMA'S ROLE

Through his writings we understand Kalidasa's patron was a monarch named Vikramaditya. He did not specify the Vikramaditya of his time. Hence, this has led to a lot of confusion about his time. Some Indian scholars like M.R. Kale have identified this Vikramaditya with King Vikramaditya of Ujjayini – founder of the Samvat era (57 BCE). This is yet another date for the poet-laureate of the Sanskrit literature. Un-Paninian expressions and grammatical forms in Kalidasa's writings have led scholars to believe that he wrote at a time when the *Ashtadhyayi* did not have total sway over scholars. Some scholars took this king to be Skanda Gupta (453 to 480 CE). Ashvaghosha (78 CE) has similar passages as Kalidasa.

He called *Buddha Charitam* a *mahakavya*. Scholars who insist on a later date for the poet cite this in support of their argument. But the problem is Ashvaghosha was a philosopher who was not known for his poetic brilliance. If there is any borrowing, then it is likely that Kalidasa was the original. This is the view of Prof. R.N. Apte. Thus, Kalidasa had a long literary career. His writings clearly prove that they were the creation of a peaceful era whereas Skanda Gupta presided over the empire when it had reached its nadir. There is another problem with the Ashvaghosha theory. There have been two or three persons bearing that name.

Most European scholars, however, place

Kalidasa between the 4th and 5th century CE. They identify Vikramaditya with Chandra Gupta II and maintain that Kalidasa's later works were written under Kumara Gupta I (413 to 455 CE) and the poet continued to write even during Skanda Gupta's reign (455 to 480 CE). The poet was conversant with court life, which is evident from his writings. Though he was supposed to be a fool in his youth, he later displayed great knowledge of the Vedas, Epics, Puranas, Bhagavat, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, the systems of Samkhya, Yoga, Ayurveda and Vedanta as propounded by Badarayana Vyasa.

Kalidasa appears to be a Brahmin. This theory is further reinforced by the fact that the poet shows partiality to Brahminism. This, according to Pandit Suryanarayana Vyas, who did a lot of research on Kalidasa, makes Kalidasa a poet belonging to the Sunga period when Buddhists were suppressed and Vedic religion was re-established. It is worth recalling that *Malavikagnimitram* is the only historical play written by the bard. The rest of the works are based on the Puranas.

HIS WORKS

It would be wrong to assume that he was a libertine; his writings conform to the accepted social norms of the day. This is clearly proved from the way he describes Shiva and Parvati as the ideal couple, inseparable as the word and its meaning. In *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, the heroine berates the king for betraying her. She tells him that his conduct was fit for a man in the street and not worthy of a monarch belonging to the family of Raghu.

We have referred to legends surrounding Kalidasa. The Sanskrit *Bhojaprabandha*, a popular work in several Indian languages, is their source. But we cannot rely upon these stories. Seven works of Kalidasa have come down to us. Of these, three are plays: *Vikramoryasiam*, *Malavikagnimitra* and *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. Two are epics: *Raghuvamsham* and *Kumarasambhavam*. The first is Vaishnavite in nature, dealing with the

genealogy of the kings of the Raghu dynasty to which Rama belongs. The second is Shaivite as it deals with Shiva and Parvati and the birth of their son, Kartikeya, also called Kumaraswami, Murugan, etc.

Kalidasa thus showed perfect impartiality in tackling the various sectarian factions of his day. This drew Ryder's admiration, "Kalidasa moved among the jarring sects with sympathy for all, fanaticism for none." According to C.R. Devdhar and N.G. Suru, the epics and *Meghadutam* were written when Kalidasa's genius was in full flow. His works show the poet to be eclectic in his approach to matters spiritual.

In *Raghuvamsham*, Kalidasa begins the work by reverentially hailing Mahadev and Parvati as unified as the word and its meaning. Then he describes the lineage of Raghu and the exploits of some of the kings.

Kalidasa's best known work is *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*, a play based on an episode from the Mahabharata. Kalidasa has modified it by introducing Rishi Durvasa. The short-tempered sage curses Shakuntala that when she goes to meet her husband King Dushyanta, he will fail to recognize her. This curse is because the heroine was too absorbed in thinking of Dushyanta to pay proper attention to Durvasa when he visited Kanva's ashram. When Shakuntala's friend intercedes on her behalf, the sage relents and modifies the curse – Dushyanta will recognize her and recall the promise to make her the queen and their son the crown prince when she shows him the signet-ring. In the original story in the Mahabharata, a voice from heaven tells Dushyanta that what Bharata's mother is saying is true and he should welcome them. In Kalidasa's play, Shakuntala loses the ring when she visits Dushyanta due to the curse. The king calls her a liar. Shakuntala returns to Kanva's ashram in distress because of the king's rude behaviour. Miraculously, a fisherman finds the signet ring in the mouth of a fish. He is arrested while trying to sell it. The royal guards drag him before the king. Dushyanta recalls the episode

involving Shakuntala on seeing the signet ring, and the fisherman is released. He also touches the amulet tied around Bharata's neck without any harm to himself. It was made of the Aparajita herb and was given by Sage Maricha. Anyone, except the parent of the boy, will come to harm on touching it. Dushyanta handles it without any harm. Ultimately the family is reunited. As the union is made possible through a token, the signet ring, the play is titled *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (Of Shakuntala recognized by a token).

The play has been widely acclaimed, both in India and abroad. The distinguished German scholar, Goethe, declared, "*Shakuntalam* blends together the fruits of young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline; it combines heaven and earth in one." The play has been staged in many theatres the world over. When you mention Kalidasa, Shakuntala automatically comes to mind.

PERMANENT PLACE

It appears as if Kalidasa has reserved for himself a place in our literature as one of the greatest poets of all time. There are few poets and dramatists in world literature who have such a reputation. Several men of letters have tried to imitate Kalidasa's style, but with little success. While some called themselves Kalidasa, others have tried to fob off their works on the original poet. The poet has turned out to be like a mountain peak which many have attempted to reach but have to contend themselves with merely looking at it from the base. Kalidasa continues to provide inspiration to litterateurs in the West. Dramatists continue to write using Kalidasa as a model. Even to this day poets writing in various Indian languages are inspired by the great poet. *Ashadh ka Din* by Mohan Rakesh is considered the first modern Hindi play. It is based on *Meghadutam*. This way not only Hindi but several Indian languages have adapted Kalidasa's works. ♦

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.



Upholding Bhāgvat Dharma; The Gateway to Liberation Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā I 54

On Mahā vadi 11, Samvat 1876 [10 February 1820], Swāmi Shri Sahajānandji Mahārāj was sitting on a cushion with a cylindrical pillow which had been placed on a large, decorated cot on the veranda outside the west-facing rooms in front of the mandir of Shri Vāsudev-Nārāyan in Dādā Khāchar's darbār in Gadhadā. He was wearing a white khes and had covered himself with an orange reto that had a border of interlaced golden and silver threads. He had also tied a feto around his head using a sky-blue, silk cloth that was similarly rich. At that time, an assembly of munis as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him.

Thereupon Muktnānand Swāmi asked, “Mahārāj, through the dialogue between King Janak and the nine Yogeshwars, the 11th canto of the Shrimad Bhāgavat describes the nature of bhāgvat dharma. How is that bhāgvat dharma upheld? Also, how can the gateway to liberation be opened?”

Shriji Mahārāj replied, “Bhāgvat dharma is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the Ekāntik Sant of God, who possesses the attributes of swadharma, jnān, vairāgya, and bhakti coupled with knowledge of God's glory. Maintaining profound love towards such a Sant also opens the gateway to liberation. Thus, Kapildev Bhagwān has said to Devhuti:

Prasangam-ajaram pāsham-ātmanaha kavayo viduhu,¹

Sa eva sadhushu kruto moksha-dvāram-apāvrutam.

‘If a person maintains profound love towards the Ekāntik Sant of God just as resolutely as he maintains profound love towards his own relatives, then the gateway to liberation opens for him.’

1. Shrimad Bhāgavat 3.25.20

DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF THIS VACHANAMRUT

■ This Vachanamrut shows us an infallible remedy for attaining liberation from the shackles of our material world. It is like a ‘Master Key’ that opens all the doors on the pathway to *moksha*.

■ Gunatitanand Swami said after reading this Vachanamrut four times, “In this Vachanamrut, Maharaj has shown the ‘Gateway to Liberation’. Those who are unable to understand this Vachanamrut have unfortunate karmas.”

HOW CAN ‘THE GATEWAY TO LIBERATION’ BE OPENED?

■ In this Vachanamrut, a discussion about the attributes of ‘Bhagvat Dharma’, between King Janak and nine Yogeshwars is quoted from Shrimad Bhagvat.

King Janak was no ordinary king. Though he lived in the midst of royal pleasures and managed the affairs of a vast kingdom, he was free from all shackles of the material world. He remained absolutely aloof. Though he was married, he was the guru of Shukdev – a celibate. The nine Yogeshwars were among the hundred sons of King Rishabhdev. Obeying their father’s advice, they had willingly renounced all the royal pleasures to worship God.

■ After referring to the aforesaid discussion between King Janak and the nine Yogeshwars, Muktanand Swami asks a question of fundamental importance for every one of us, because we all wish to attain freedom from the bondage of worldly desires and experience everlasting happiness.

Muktanand Swami asked about how to foster Bhagvat Dharma in oneself and the means to open the gateway to *moksha*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan replied that profound love for the Ekantik Sant of God enables one to develop Bhagvat Dharma in one’s life and it also opens the gateway to *moksha*.

THE NEED OF AN EKANTIK SANT FOR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

■ However expensive the medical equipment and hospital buildings may be, but what good are they if there is no doctor? However sprawling the university campus may be, but of what good is it if there is no professor?

Similarly, however magnificent the mandirs and *murtis* may be, and however enlightening the shastras may be, but of what good are they if there is no Ekantik Sant?

Gunatitanand Swami says: “Even if the shastras, *murtis*, and mandirs come together, they cannot gift a single Ekantik Sant to the society. On the contrary, an Ekantik Sant can gift all the aforesaid three things.”

An Ekantik Sant inspires as well as guides the society towards virtuous and spiritual living. He even motivates detractors and those who are debauched to overcome their weaknesses and live a righteous life.

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan says: “The true meaning of the shastras can only be understood when one hears it from the Satpurush. They cannot be understood by one’s intellect alone” (Gadhada II 13).

One may be an owner of a pharmacy, and one may be familiar with all the drugs, their contents, and their places on the racks. However, one cannot determine which drug is suitable for one’s own ailing condition. For that, one will have to consult a doctor.

Similarly, the spiritual facts mentioned in shastras cannot be understood on our own. For that, one needs to go to an Ekantik Sant or the God-realized Sadhu.

■ In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 60, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “Ekantik Dharma can be attained only from someone who has already attained the state of Ekantik Dharma.” Thus, only the one who is eternally free from the bondage of *maya* can liberate others.

LIBERATION CAN BE ATTAINED SOLELY BY THE GRACE OF A 'LIVING GURU'

■ Can a photograph of a river quench our thirst? Can one bathe in it? Can a scene of a beautiful sunrise printed on a greeting card dispel darkness? Will God or the guru's photograph stop us from lighting a cigarette? No! Only their natural, living form will serve the purpose.

■ God and guru are indeed present in their images or photographs. Their photographs or images definitely inspire us with divinity. Genuine worship offered to them certainly purifies our mind and washes away our sins. But liberation cannot be attained merely through a *murti* of God or a photograph of a guru.

In fact, one who possesses pure devotion towards an image of God or guru is blessed with wisdom to recognize a 'Living Guru'. A 'Living Guru' then helps one to attain liberation.

■ Girdharbhai, who lived in Thasra, was the nephew of Gordhanbhai Kothari of Vartal Swaminarayan Mandir. Girdharbhai had understood from his study of the Vachanamrut that *ekantik* dharma cannot be accomplished without the association of a 'Living Ekantik Guru'.

And so, with a quest to meet a 'Living Ekantik Sant', he visited all Swaminarayan mandirs, but could not find a virtuous guru he was searching for. Then, he began performing austerities by standing on one leg and turning his rosary before the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Vartal mandir. After six months, Shriji Maharaj himself appeared before him in a divine form and said, "Pragji Bhakta who lives in Mahuva is the Ekantik Sant. Today, I manifest in Satsang through him."

Girdharbhai could not believe Maharaj's words because Pragji Bhakta belonged to a low caste and he was a householder. He resumed his austerities and once again Maharaj appeared before him and said the same thing. Thus, a *murti* too directs a devotee to its manifest form, i.e. the Ekantik Guru.

■ A devotee named Khushalbhai of Ahmedabad

used to go on a pilgrimage by foot to Dakor on every full-moon day for the darshan of Shri Ranchhodrai (Krishna). Once, pleased with his devotion, Shri Ranchhodrai appeared before him and said, "If you wish for *moksha*, go to Yogiji Maharaj."

Thus, Ekantik Dharma or ultimate liberation can only be attained through the profound association with an Ekantik Guru.

ASCERTAINING THE EKANTIK SANT OR GURU

■ One cannot board any flight at random from India to go to New York. Before boarding, one has to ascertain the flight number and the terminal of departure.

Likewise, *moksha* too cannot be attained by associating oneself with any saffron-clad sadhu. Before associating, one should ascertain whether or not the virtues of saintliness as described in the shastras are present in the sadhu. One should seek those qualities to identify an Ekantik Sant/Guru or else fake gurus can ruin one's life and *moksha*.

ATTRIBUTES OF AN EKANTIK SANT OR GURU

■ Usually, we consider any saffron-clad person delivering spiritual discourses fluently or having the capability to show miracles to be a Sant. But they are not the right measures of an ideal guru. Such qualities are merely expertise attained by practice or through other sadhanas. There is a wide gap between these and the attributes of the Ekantik Sant.

■ Bhagwan Swaminarayan has shown four principal attributes of a person who has attained the *ekantik* state. They are:

1. Dharma
2. *Jnan*
3. *Vairagya*
4. Bhakti.

DHARMA

■ To possess the attribute of dharma means to strictly follow the five vows of non-lust (*nishkam*), non-avarice (*nirlobh*), non-taste (*nisswad*), non-attachment (*nissneh*) and non-egotism (*nirman*). These vows remain effortlessly woven

in all actions performed by the Ekantik Sant.

■ Once, Haridasji, the Diwan of Junagadh, decided to go on a pilgrimage to Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri and Yamunotri. Before leaving he came to seek Gunatitanand Swami's blessings and asked him whether he wished for anything. Swami said, "If you find two sadhus who have absolutely renounced women and wealth then bring them back with you to Junagadh." Haribhai toured the whole of north India, but he could not find even one such sadhu. After returning, he met Gunatitanand Swami and declared, "O Swami, it is only your disciple sadhus who follow such a strict code."

JNAN

■ Only one who possesses applied spiritual knowledge of *atma* and Parmatma can maintain equipoise in trying circumstances of insult, pain and hardships as well as in delightful circumstances of recognition, happiness and comforts.

■ Once in Bhavnagar, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was engaged in writing a letter. All of a sudden a hot light bulb above him slipped from its socket and fell onto Swamishri's uncovered back. But Swamishri continued writing the letter, remaining absolutely unruffled.

In 1974, the devotees of Mumbai gave a memorable send-off to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his entourage of sadhus for his satsang tour to East Africa. Later, on the same day, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was sent back to India from Nairobi airport because of some misunderstanding on the part of the government of Kenya. Despite the insult Swamishri was not at all perturbed. He took it to be the wish of Shriji Maharaj and remained happy.

VAIRAGYA

■ *Vairagya* means to remain detached from the most alluring of the *panchvishays* – sights,

sounds, smells, tastes and touch of worldly things. Though a person possessing *vairagya* may travel to other regions of the world, he would not develop even a little liking for anything other than God.

BHAKTI

Pramukh Swami Maharaj cannot stay without doing bhakti of God for even a moment. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (God) is his very soul. Swamishri lives his life as a servant of God. He believes Thakorji to be the all-doer. He never accepts anything without offering it to God.

■ We are fortunate to be acquainted and associated with such a Gunatit Sadhu. We now have to develop a profound attachment with him.

■ There is a vast difference between acquaintance (ordinary association) and profound association. For instance, salt dissolved in water can be regained when boiled, but sugar dissolved in milk cannot be retrieved. Even when boiled, the mixture turns into a sweet like *penda* but it can never be regained.

Similarly, to know about Swamishri's life, to meet him, to seek guidance from him, even to physically be with him always, is merely an ordinary association.

'Profound association' involves understanding his glory, meditating upon his form and contemplating upon his virtues. Furthermore, profound association involves always thinking about him, in every word we speak, and in all the actions we perform. It involves having profound affection for and attachment with him.

■ In the same way as a coir-twine never untwines even when burnt, the affection of a devotee who has developed profound association with the Satpurush never dies.

To develop such profound affection and attachment one first needs to have firm allegiance with the Ekantik Sant of God. This means, surrendering

*'Profound association'
with the Gunatit Sant
involves understanding his
glory, meditating upon his
form and contemplating
upon his virtues.'*

oneself to the guru and being absolutely loyal to him.

How can one gauge whether one has developed ‘profound association’ with the Ekantik Sant?

■ The devotee who has developed profound association with the Ekantik Sant experiences the following characteristics:

- Discerns divinity even in human-like actions of the Ekantik Sant
- Has deep affection for the Ekantik Sant
- Obeys all commands of the Ekantik Sant.

a. Discerning divinity in human-like actions

■ Whether one possesses profound association with the Ekantik Sant can be known when he resorts to human-like actions.

For example, if one can discern divinity even in instances when the Ekantik Sant disdainfully scolds and insults oneself, then one is said to possess profound association.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say, “Profound association means not giving up one’s refuge even if the Ekantik Sant insults and condemns us.”

■ Anandji Sanghedia once disobeyed Maharaj’s orders. So Maharaj instructed all the devotees and sadhus that whenever Anandji arrives in the Satsang assembly, abuse him verbally by calling him ‘*Had-Kutri*’ meaning, ‘You dog! Go away!’ This continued for many weeks. Despite facing such intolerable insults Anandji’s attachment towards Maharaj and satsang never faded.

■ Because of his profound association with Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj had to endure innumerable difficulties and insults. Amidst such objections, Shastriji Maharaj once arrived in the village of Bhadrod near Mahuva to have Bhagatji Maharaj’s darshan. At that time, Bhagatji Maharaj sternly rebuked him and told Shastriji Maharaj to never come back again. In spite of this incident, Shastriji Maharaj’s perception of

If one can discern divinity even in instances when the Ekantik Sant disdainfully scolds and insults oneself, then one is said to possess profound association.

divinity in Bhagatji Maharaj never declined.

b. Experiencing deep affection for the Ekantik Sant

■ Deep, genuine affection for someone means being absolutely unmindful of their faults. A childless couple, if blessed with a son in their old age, will

never perceive any fault in their son even if he plays mischief and harasses others. This is because of their deep affection towards him.

Similarly, a devotee who has profound association experiences such a deep affection that he does not see any fault in the Satpurush.

c. Obeying all commands of the Ekantik Sant

■ Yogiji Maharaj once said: “If Shastriji Maharaj summons me, I would instantly put aside a morsel that I am about to eat; I would immediately leave aside a pen while writing.”

■ Such passion to act in accordance with the wish of the Ekantik Sant is a mark of profound association with him.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gopalanand Swami once advised Pragji Bhakta: “If you wish to master worldly affairs, go to Punja Sheth, a merchant of Sundariyana. And if you want to master both – business administration as well as the way to liberation – then go to Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh.

In our present times, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the Gunatit Guru – the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Hence, to foster ‘Bhagvat Dharma’ within oneself and to open the gateway to one’s liberation, one needs to develop such profound association, as mentioned in this Vachanamrut, with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



FAQs On Hinduism

From *Hinduism, An Introduction*

by Sadhu Vivekjivandas and Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave,

published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith

1. What are the *chakras* and the *Kundalini shakti*?

The Shakta Agamas, sometimes also known as the Tantras, say that the human body is like a micro-universe. The cosmic elements or *tattvas* also constitute the human body. Each of the main *tattvas* in the body has a centre of activity from where it radiates energy. These centres are called *chakras* and are likened to lotuses. They are subtle seats of consciousness or *shakti* (divine power).

Yoga describes fourteen principal *nadis* or subtle channels for the flow of *pranic* energy in the body, out of which the *sushumna*, the *ida* and the *pingala* are most important. The *sushumna* is found inside the spinal column and the *ida* and *pingla* entwine it. All three begin at the base of the spinal column and terminate near the centre of the head.

The six *chakras* are situated along the *sushumna*:

i. The Muladhara Chakra lies at the base of the *sushumna* in the space between the anus and the genitals. It is a crimson lotus of four petals and represents the centre of the earth element (*pruthvi-tattva*). Lord Brahma along with his *shakti*, Savitri, is the presiding deity of this *chakra*.

ii. The Swadhishtana Chakra lies at the root of the genitals and resembles a lotus of vermilion colour with six petals. It represents the centre of the water element (*jala-tattva*). Lord Vishnu and his *shakti*,

Rakini, is the presiding deity of this centre.

iii. The Manipura Chakra lies in the navel region. It is like a ten-petalled lotus having a black hue. It represents the centre of the fire element (*agni-tattva*) with Rudra and his *shakti*, Lakhini, as the presiding deity.

iv. The Anahata Chakra lies in the heart and has twelve petals of red colour. It represents the centre of the element of air (*vayu-tattva*), with Isha and his *shakti*, Kakini, as the presiding deity.

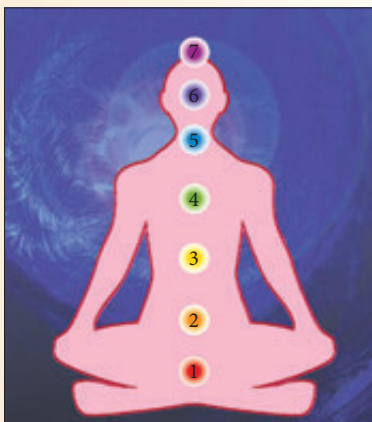
v. The Vishuddha Chakra lies at the base of the throat. It has sixteen petals of purple colour. It represents the centre of the element of ether (*akasha-tattva*) with Sadashiva and his *shakti*, Shakini, as the presiding deity.

vi. The Ajna Chakra lies in the middle of the eyebrows. It resembles a white lotus of two petals and represents the centre of the element of the mind, with Shambhu and his *shakti*, Hakini, as the presiding deity.

Beyond this lies the seventh *chakra* called

the Sahasrara Chakra, that lies at the *brahmarandhra* or top of the skull. It is like a white lotus with 1,000 petals and presided over by Paramatma or Paramshiva himself.

The Kundalini *shakti* is believed to be the essential power in a human, that is likened to a coiled serpent, lying dormant at the *muladhara chakra*. When it is activated through appropriate yogic sadhanas it rises and pierces each of the *chakras* and finally unites with Paramshiva. The yogi then experiences samadhi – a



The chakras or seats of consciousness: 1. Muladhara, 2. Swadhishtana, 3. Manipura, 4. Anahata, 5. Vishuddha, 6. Ajna and 7. Sahasrara



Om is repeated as a mantra or meditated upon



Turning the beads of a mala while chanting a holy mantra

other deities. Mantras having five letters are called *panchakshari*, like Namah Shivaya; six letters are called *shadakshari*, like Om Namah Shivaya or Swaminarayan; eight letters are called *ashtakshari*, like Om Namo Narayanaya and those having twelve letters are called *dvadashkshari*, like Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.

state of indescribable divine bliss.

2. What is a mantra?

The word mantra has its origin in Vedic Hinduism. It has two syllables: *man* means “mind” and *tra* means “deliverance or mental utterance with an esoteric or *rahasya* meaning”. A mantra is a pure, sacred sound of syllables intended to deliver the mind from *maya* and material desires. It embodies God or a deity in the form of a sound. It is a sacred word or words chanted and contemplated upon during worship or independently.

Another meaning of the word mantra is “*Mananāt trayate iti mantraha*”, i.e. “That (word) which protects when reflected upon is called a mantra”. The guru says the mantra into the ear of a disciple at the time of initiating him into a *sampradaya*. Very often it is meant to be kept secret. A mantra can also be a spell, charm, powerful formula or word. It is used in religious ceremonies to appease the devas, acquire wealth, avoid danger or death, etc.

Chanting of a mantra can be practised in three ways. When it is chanted loudly it is called *vachika* or *vaikhari*, when whispered, but inaudible, it is known as *upamshu* and when chanted mentally it is called *manasika*. Devotees chant or sing the holy names of Rama, Krishna, Sita-Rama, Radhe-Krishna, Swaminarayan and

3. Why chant Om or Aum?

Om or Pranava is the universal name of God and the symbol ॐ represents God.¹ Om is also referred to as Aksharbrahman.² It is used as a universal symbol of Hinduism.

Om is repeated as a mantra or meditated upon.

It is the primordial sound from which all sounds emerged, and it includes all the mantras. It is believed that God chanted Om and creation evolved from it.³

The mantra Om consists of three sounds: A, U and M. The three letters symbolize the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep), the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), the three deities (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), three of the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur and Sama), the three worlds *bhur* or *bhuloka* (earth), *bhuvaha* or *bhuvarloka* (intervening space) and *svaha* or *svarloka* (*swarga*). The entire essence of the Vedas is enshrined in the Om mantra. The Mandukya Upanishad describes the glory of Om.

Regular chanting of Om improves breathing, calms the mind and elevates one spiritually. ♦

1. “Om *krato smara*,” which means “O Paramatma, remember me.” – Ishavasya Upanishad 17.

2. “Om *iti* Brahman (Aksharbrahman), Om *itidam sarvam*,” which means, “Om is Brahman (Aksharbrahman), and Om is the world.” – Taittiriya Upanishad 1.8.

3. Bhagavad Gita 17.23 & 24.

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

July-August 2013, Sarangpur

Swamishri's daily routine in Sarangpur comprised of Thakorji's darshan in the mandir and at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir in the morning. Swamishri also gave daily darshan to the devotees in the morning, afternoon and late evening. He also performed the pratishtha rituals of murtis for newly built shikharbaddh and hari mandirs.

JULY

4, Thursday

At 7.30 p.m. Swamishri visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir (school) and sanctified it.

At 9.30 p.m. Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the newly built *hari* mandirs of Upleta (Junagadh), Dhoraji (Junagadh), Dhudkot (Bhadra), Boriya (Gondal), Lunavada (Godhra) and Ratanpur (Surendranagar). Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for formerly consecrated *hari* mandirs at Shekhpatt (Bhadra), Raipur-Khadiya (Ahmedabad), Meghaninagar (Ahmedabad), and canvas *murtis* of the guru

parampara for Moviya (Gondal). Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying (*khat muhurt*) rituals for the *hari* mandirs of Vadhwan (Surendranagar), College Road (Surendranagar), Gitanagar (Surendranagar), Bajrangpura (Surendranagar) and Limadiya (Godhra).

In all, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for 10 *hari* mandirs and *khat muhurt* of five *hari* mandirs. Swamishri touched all the *murtis* with a special rod (*anjanshalaka*) amidst Vedic chantings, and performed the rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali*. Swamishri also blessed all the devotees who had come for the *pratishtha* rituals from their respective towns and villages.

9, Tuesday

Swamishri blessed the sadhus studying Sanskrit at the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya in Sarangpur Mandir. The student-sadhus were seated on the floor with a small traditional study desk before them, while Swamishri was seated in his wheelchair before them. The Sarangpur Sanskrit school received its affiliation

Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* rituals



Performs *arti* of the *utsav murti* during the Rath Yatra celebration



with Somnath Sanskrit University in Somnath.

Swamishri conducted a lesson by reciting “Athāto Brahmajñānāsā” and “Nijātmānam brahmarupam...” The student-sadhus chorused the two *shlokas*. Swamishri blessed all the students and sanctified their textbooks.

Swamishri blessed the BAPS children assembled for the ‘Be Ekantik’ convention in Atlanta through a live internet relay.

10, Wednesday; Rath Yatra

From 8.30 a.m. the Rath Yatra celebration assembly had commenced with *dhun* and prayer and thereafter with discourses and bhajans. Thousands of devotees were seated in a large makeshift assembly hall, Yogi Mandapam, by the main mandir, and the Narayan Mandapam behind the mandir. When Swamishri arrived on the assembly stage in Narayan Mandapam, the Rath Yatra celebration was heralded with the blowing of conch shells. Thereafter, youths waving BAPS flags marched by, drummers and 24 tribals of Sabarkantha played traditional drums, school children of BAPS Vidyamandir danced in traditional dresses, BAPS sadhus played the *kartals*, Shri Madhavsingh Diwan, head of Bilada State, Rajasthan, ritually swept the pathway of Thakorji who was installed in a decorated chariot. The chariot of Thakorji was brought before the main

stage where Swamishri performed *pujan*, *arti* and offered *thal*. Viveksagar Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands and a decorated shawl.

Thereafter, Swamishri proceeded for Thakorji’s darshan in the main mandir and then to the Smruti Mandir. The devotees felt blessed by Swamishri’s darshan.

In the late evening, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Himmatnagar. More than 2,800 devotees from the Sabarkantha region had assembled for the function. Swamishri touched the *murtis* with a special rod, performed the rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* amidst chanting of Vedic mantras. The *murtis* sanctified by Swamishri were: Shri Dham, Dhami and Mukta, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (*panch dhatu*), Shri Guru Parampara, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji. Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the *hari* mandir of Ranibari village in Poshina region.

Finally, Swamishri inaugurated a DVD of the 60th Celebration of BAPS Youth Activities, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

13, Saturday

Swamishri blessed 2,000 BAPS youths

Swamishri blesses all during the Guru Purnima celebration





Swamishri rocks Thakorji on the day of Rakshabandhan

attending the Youth Convention, ‘Be Ekantik’, in Atlanta through a live internet relay.

22, Monday, Guru Purnima Celebration

At 11.05 a.m. Swamishri arrived for Thakorji’s darshan in the mandir and performed the *rajbhog arti*. Thereafter, Swamishri came on the stage of Yogi Mandapam, where 12,000 devotees were seated for darshan and discourses for the Guru Punam celebration. Swamishri also gave darshan to the 45,000 devotees assembled in Bochasan for the Guru Punam celebration through a live transmission. Swamishri folded his hands and conveyed ‘Jai Swaminarayan’ to all in Bochasan. Thereafter senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands. Then the devotees offered their obeisances to Swamishri by offering rice grains and flower petals amidst the chanting of “Guru Brahma...” Then Swamishri proceeded towards the Smruti Mandir, blessing the devotees seated in the assembly hall. On his way back Swamishri blessed all from far.

At 9.55 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees in the rear part of his quarters during the Guru Purnima satsang assembly. Several skits to celebrate Guru Punam were enacted by youths, portraying incidents from the life of Gunatitanand Swami and the guru *parampara*. Then, Viveksagar Swami briefly addressed the audience about the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In conclusion, everyone performed *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the



Swamishri rocks Thakorji during Janmashtami celebration

guru *parampara*.

AUGUST

20, Tuesday; Rakshabandhan

In the morning, senior sadhus addressed the Rakshabandhan festival assembly.

Swamishri went for Thakorji’s darshan in the mandir sanctum and thereafter to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. He blessed the devotees gathered for the Rakshabandhan celebration from far.

Swamishri inaugurated a print publication, *Brahmasannidhi*, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith and authored by Narayancharan Swami and Adarshjivan Swami.

23, Friday

Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to Jayendrabhai Patel of London and placed a *kanthi* around his neck. He was named Tyagswarup Bhagat. Thereafter, Swamishri gave darshan to all sadhus.

28, Wednesday; Janmashtami Celebration

Swamishri came for Thakorji’s darshan in the mandir. On the occasion of Janmashtami, an *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji. Swamishri performed *arti* in all the shrines. Then Swamishri gave darshan to all the devotees in the Narayan Mandapam behind the mandir.

The Janmashtami celebration assembly was held in the presence of senior sadhus from 8.30 p.m. to 12.00 midnight. ♦

Living with Swamishri

July-August 2013, Sarangpur



ALL-DOERSHIP OF GOD

10 July

Today Swamishri's blood pressure and pulse rate were normal. Yogvivek Swami asked Swamishri, "Do you feel well, Bapa?" Swamishri did not reply. So, Yogvivek Swami stated, "It is in your hands to keep yourself well or unwell."

Swamishri explained, "That is not so. It is all in the hands of God, sadhus and devotees."

Yogvivek Swami reiterated, "It is in your hands."

Swamishri replied, "No. It is in the hands of God. It is not under my control."

In spite of the glory and divine powers described by Bhagwan Swaminarayan of the Gunatit

Sadhu, the latter always remains subservient to God and speaks of his glory. Swamishri's faith in the all-doership of God is unwavering and resolute.

SWAMISHRI CARES FOR SADHUS AND DEVOTEES

14 July

Swamishri gives daily darshan to the devotees in the morning, afternoon and late evening. After his afternoon darshan routine at 1.55 p.m., Swamishri returned to his room. His blood pressure was low, so he was given *amla* juice to drink. Then Swamishri asked, "Has everyone had their meal?" An attendant sadhu replied "Yes, everyone



had lunch at 12 noon.”

Swamishri asked, “Did we serve lunch to everyone?”

The attendant sadhus explained about the dining arrangements for the devotees, and that 3,000 devotees were served lunch. Then Swamishri enquired about the dining arrangements for sadhus and *parshads*. On hearing the details Swamishri was satisfied.

A little while later, Swamishri asked the sadhus before him, “Have you all had lunch?” Everyone nodded saying, “We all had *puranpoli* and Viveksagar Swami served us all today.”

Swamishri felt happy and praised, “The sadhus are all very good. They make proper arrangements and are meticulous in all *seva*.”

Despite his old age and fluctuating health Swamishri cares for devotees and sadhus.

SWAMISHRI’S SAINTLINESS AND DEVOTION 20 July

Swamishri had not taken dinner this evening. It was 12.30 a.m. by the time he got ready after his bath. When he was asked about dinner, Swamishri refused. On pressing further he replied, “I’ll eat tomorrow after doing puja and Thakorji’s darshan.”

Yogvivek Swami replied, “As you wish. But tomorrow what will you have to eat?”

Swamishri casually replied, “I’ll have whatever is in Thakorji’s *thal*.”

Hariprakash Swami asked, “Say something, so we know what to prepare.”

Swamishri responded, “What is there to say! Whatever is there (in the *thal*) is to be eaten as *prasadi*.”

Swamishri’s saintliness and devotion to God remain untarnished at all times and in all situations.

SWAMISHRI SEES GOD EVERYWHERE

24 July

Prior to Swamishri’s bedtime he gives darshan to sadhus. Thereafter he reclines on his bed and an attendant sadhu removes his contact lens.

Today, after his contact lenses were removed, Swamishri folded his hands together and looked towards the ceiling.

An attendant sadhu asked Swamishri, “To whom are you folding your hands?”

Swamishri replied, “God.”

The attendant asked, “Where is he?”

Swamishri stated, “He is everywhere. Tell me, who is the all-doer?”

The attendant argued, “But we can’t see him.”

Swamishri asserted, “Who says he cannot be seen! Look properly, and you’ll see him.”

The attendant prayed, “Swami, your vision is such that you see God. We are unable to see him. Bless us with that vision so that we can see God.”

Swamishri assured, “You’ll see.”

The attendant explained, “Swami, you have realized God’s glory, and that is why you see God everywhere.”

Swamishri blessed, “Understand his glory and you’ll see him too.” ♦

Translation of excerpts from Swamishri’s daily report in Gujarati



Swamishri (centre) during the grand *annakut* offering at Narayan Mandapam

Swamishri Celebrates Diwali and Annakut

3-4 November 2013, Sarangpur



Swamishri performs *arti* of grand *annakut* on New Year's Day at Narayan Mandapam



Swamishri showers rice grains on the account books and sanctifies them during Chopda Pujan at the Smruti Mandir

Devotees from India and abroad celebrated Diwali and Annakut in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur.

On 3 November, in the late afternoon of Diwali day, Swamishri went for darshan at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, where he showered sanctified flower petals and rice grains on the devotees' accounts books as part of the Chopda Pujan rituals. Thereafter, he presided over the satsang assembly and greeted all the sadhus and devotees present.

On 4 November, New Year's Day was celebrated with multiple *annakut* offerings to Thakorji. First, Swamishri arrived for darshan of the grand *annakut* arranged on the stage of Narayan Mandapam. After performing *arti* here, Swamishri went for darshan of Thakorji in the main mandir. There, also, Swamishri performed the *annakut arti*. Then, Swamishri performed the *annakut arti* at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. En route, Swamishri greeted and blessed the sadhus and devotees.

In the evening a special, smaller *annakut* was arranged inside and outside the viewing glass of Swamishri's room. ♦

HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duchess of Cornwall Visit Swaminarayan Akshardham

8 November 2013, New Delhi, India



HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duchess of Cornwall visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi on the afternoon of 8 November 2013.

The Chairman of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in London, Jitu Patel, Trustees of Swaminarayan Akshardham and other leading volunteers of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha welcomed the royal couple upon arrival.

Prince Charles was greeted with a garland of flowers, a *chandlo* and the tying of the sacred kalva (thread) by Atmaswarup Swami on behalf of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, was also greeted in a traditional manner by senior volunteers of the BAPS Women's Wing.

After admiring the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), the royal couple made their way to the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir where they admired the world's 'Largest Comprehensive Hindu Temple'. Captivated by the intricate hand carvings, Prince Charles said, "I am amazed at your outstanding achievement. I don't remember seeing anything like this in the world! I promote revival of art and heritage and this [Swaminarayan

Akshardham] is perhaps one of the most exceptional examples." The Duchess of Cornwall also said, "This is an architectural marvel. I cannot believe how intricate the carvings are. How did you create all of this in five years?"

After offering respects by placing flowers at the sacred shrine of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and viewing the mandir's architecture, the royal couple visited the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth) that comprises of 148 life-sized carved stone elephants depicting the messages of social harmony, peace and spirituality. Moved by its messages, the Prince said, "The effort you have put into immortalizing them in stone is incredible. What adds value to this place is that you also provide moral, social and spiritual counselling to all the pilgrims and visitors who come here."

Before departing, Prince Charles commented on the 11,000 volunteers who had helped to create Akshardham, "Where can you get such dedication? His Holiness's [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] purity and goodness and the selfless spirit of the organization can truly inspire such creations of inspiration. I missed His Holiness today. He is truly a deeply spiritual soul, a great leader." ♦

British Prime Minister David Cameron Celebrates Hindu New Year at London Mandir

4 November 2013, London, UK



Viewing the grand *annakut* in the assembly hall



Mr and Mrs Cameron perform *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni

On 4 November 2013, British Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP, and his wife, Samantha Cameron, joined thousands of devotees and visitors at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London to celebrate the Hindu New Year.

This was Mr Cameron's second visit to the Mandir to celebrate this auspicious occasion, following his previous visit as Leader of the Opposition in October 2008.

Mr Cameron was welcomed in traditional Indian manner at the ceremonial gate by Jitu Patel, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Satyavrat Swami (Head Sadhu). Mrs Cameron was similarly welcomed by senior volunteers of the BAPS Women's Wing.

Mr and Mrs Cameron then performed a ritual bathing of the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, after which they proceeded to the sanctum sanctorum where they spent several minutes absorbing the peace and intricate architecture of the Mandir.

Thereafter, the Prime Minister and his wife made their way into the prayer hall where they were greeted with rapturous applause.

In his address, Mr Cameron expressed that

both he and his wife "were delighted to be here with you today". Expressing his awe at the "truly spectacular celebrations" and the *annakut* offering, he said, "No matter what you have heard about the *annakut* – seeing it is really something. I don't think I have ever seen such a magnificent display of different foods."

After expressing his two wishes for the New Year – that the British Indian community "help strengthen our relationship with India" and "becomes ever more involved in shaping the life of our country" – the Prime Minister went on to congratulate the British Indian community, "Your contribution throughout our country shines out."

He concluded by wishing everyone present as well all Hindus throughout Britain "a very happy Diwali and prosperous New Year".

In a digital message posted on screens throughout the complex by the 'Share a Prayer' app, Mr Cameron wrote, "Heartiest New Year wishes to all those celebrating today at Neasden Temple. Jai Swaminarayan from David Cameron."

Before departing, the Prime Minister was presented with a special memento sent from India by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦

US Congressman Honours Indian Scriptures in Capitol Hill Ceremony

18 September 2013, Washington DC, USA



House Minority Whip and Senior United States Congressman, Steny Hoyer, honoured renowned Indian scholar of Sanskrit and Hindu Philosophy, Bhadreshdas Swami, in a special ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington DC and decreed that his ground-breaking five-volume Sanskrit text, the *Shri Swaminarayan Bhashyam: Commentary on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahmasutras* be preserved in the United States Library of Congress. Established in 1800, the United States Library of Congress is the national library of the US and the research library of the US Congress.

The *Shri Swaminarayan Bhashyam*, written by Bhadreshdas Swami, is a classical-style Sanskrit commentary on some of the most prominent scriptures of Hinduism which are revered by almost one billion Hindus worldwide. Throughout the history of Hinduism, great Acharyas such as Adi Shankaracharya and Madhvacharya have established and continued a tradition of writing commentaries on the Prasthantrayi – the ten principal Upanishads, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and the Brahmasutras – to propound their spiritual insights by establishing various schools of Hindu philosophy. Continuing this ancient tradition, Bhadreshdas Swami has written a classical commentary on the Prasthantrayi expounding

the scriptural insights revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who established a school of Hindu thought known as Swaminarayan Darshan. Many modern scholars have lauded the *Shri Swaminarayan Bhashyam* as one of the greatest contributions to Hinduism and Indian philosophy in the past several centuries. Mahamahopadhyaya Dr Krishnamurti Shastri says that this “poetic commentary presents new insights into the secrets of Vedanta in comparison to any previous views on the subject”.

After the ceremonial presentation of the *Shri Swaminarayan Bhashyam*, Congressman Hoyer presented the texts in a separate ceremony to an officer of the Library of Congress. She was very pleased to receive texts of such intellectual and spiritual value and welcomed the texts of ancient Indian wisdom as an important addition to the cultural and intellectual wealth of the national library. These volumes address the modern needs of religious and social pluralism and harmony, and explain universal ethical and spiritual values. As Bhadreshdas Swami explained to Congressman Hoyer, “When the *rajarshis* (sages of government) and the *Brahmarshis* (sages of spirituality) come together, the result is the spread of peace in the world.” ♦



Youths perform *mahapuja* (inset) by the banks of Manasarovar

Bhakti Yatra to Muktinath, Manasarovar and Mt. Kailash by UK Youths

5-22 September 2013

A HOMAGE TO NILKANTH VARNI, A 'BHAKTI YATRA'

From 5 to 22 September 2013 a group of ten UK Yuvak Mandal *karyakars* retraced Nilkanth Varni's footsteps by embarking on a pilgrimage through the eastern region of the Himalayas.

Guided by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and other senior sadhus the youths pilgrimaged to Muktinath, Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar.

The primary purpose of the *yatra* was to pray for the continued good health of *guruhari* Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Throughout the pilgrimage and especially at the main pilgrim sites, the youths engaged in *dhun*, *arti*, *mahapuja*, bathing while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and prayers, to truly making this a 'bhakti yatra'.

MUKTINATH – MANDIR OF SPIRITUAL VIBRATIONS

Muktinath Mandir lies in the beautiful setting

of the Annapurna Mountain range. It was the first destination. The ten *yuvaks* travelled the 250km to Jomsom by car, negotiating through very rough and dangerous terrain, following the Kali Gandki river. The *yuvaks* spent much of the 11.5-hour journey in devotion – singing the *arti*, *ashtak* and *cheshta*.

From Jomsom (altitude: 2682m), they took a further two-hour drive to reach Muktinath (altitude: 3710m).

First, while chanting the Swaminarayan *ma-ghanamantra* the *yuvaks* bathed under the near freezing water issuing from the 108 *gaumukhs* which are located in the outer courtyard of the mandir. This sacred water symbolizes all the sacred Pushkarini waters from all 108 Sri Vaishnava Divya Desams, including Srirangam, Tirumala, Vaikunth, and others. Then they bathed in the two *kunds* directly in front of the mandir, which were equally cold!



Muktinath Mandir, Nepal



The youths of UK Yuvak Mandal

Thereafter, the youths had darshan of Bhagwan Vishnu's *murti* in the Muktinath Mandir, which is the highest mandir in the world. They placed the *murtis* of Nilkanth Varni and Guru Parampara on the lap of Vishnu Bhagwan. Then they all sang the *arti* and the Swaminarayan *dhun*, performed *tapani mala* and then 51 *pradikshinas* of the central shrine of the mandir.

After darshan in the mandir, they took the short walk to Pulhashram to the shrine commemorating the spot where Nilkanth Varni Maharaj had meditated, standing on one leg for about two-and-a-half months. The group experienced the divinity resonating there.

From Muktinath, the *yuvaks* returned to

Jomson and then to Pokhara. On 11 September the *yuvaks* headed from Nepal into neighbouring Chinese-controlled Tibet towards Lake Mansarovar and Mount Kailash.

MANSAROVAR – SOURCE OF HOLINESS

It took four days from Kathmandu to reach Mansarovar by road. This also allowed them to acclimatize to the higher altitude conditions, since Mansarovar is a fresh water lake situated approximately 4,700 metres above sea level.

On 14 September, at 5.00 p.m., the *yuvaks* reached Mansarovar. To the immediate west of the lake, over the mountain pass is Lake Rakshastal, where Ravan performed austerities, and to the north is Mount Kailash, considered to



The pure waters of the holy Mansarovar, on whose banks Nilkanth Varni had spent five days



The youths completed the *pradikshna* of Mount Kailash in 2½ days

be the most holy mountain in the world.

With sunset approaching, the youths quickly prepared their tents and other essentials whilst they still had some daylight for aid. That night, after singing *cheshta*, the *yuvaks* spoke to Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, who reminded them that 11-year-old Nilkanth Varni had travelled there by foot, all alone. He had stayed there for five days without anything to eat and in temperatures that froze the lake.

In the fresh morning wind chill, the *yuvaks* brushed their teeth and sponge bathed. As this was the first day in such conditions, even the slightest drop of cold water on the skin felt deadly and painful.

Later that morning, the *yuvaks* conducted a 90-minute *mahapuja* on the banks of Mansarovar praying for the continued good health of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Following the *mahapuja*, the *yuvaks* also performed *arti*, sang *fagwa* and bhajans, and also read the Vachanamrut and some Swami ni Vato.

Then, in pairs, the *yuvaks* took a full body dip in the deep blue, freezing waters of Mansarovar, whilst calling the *jaynaad*, and offered *abhishek* to the *murtis* of Nilkanth Varni and Guru Parampara. The youths were charged with enthusiasm because Nilkanth Varni Maharaj himself had bathed in the sacred lake.

MOUNT KAILASH – AXIS OF THE WORLD

Next, the youths set off on a complete *pradikshna* of Mount Kailash, which would take 2½ days. Mt. Kailesh is also renowned as ‘the axis of the world’, since the four faces of the mountain almost perfectly align towards the four points of a compass.

While turning the rosary and chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* to pray for the good health of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, five *yuvaks* completed the *parikrama* by foot and five rode on local ponies.

At every side of Kailash, the *yuvaks* took rest, absorbed the scenery and paused to reflect upon their lives and satsang.

The first night was spent before the North face of Kailash. They conducted the evening *arti*, and sang the *dhun* and bhajans. Due to the thin air, the *yuvaks* became breathless and struggled to sing.

The following day was very cold. When they reached the Drölma Pass at 5,600m, once again the *yuvaks* sang the *arti* and *dhun*, praying for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s health.

The difficulty of the steep descent from 5,600m on the narrow winding mountainous, rocky and cliff edge route was overshadowed by the beauty of the views, especially the incredibly stunning emerald lake Gaurikund.

(Contd. on pg. 62)



India

**BAL SEVAK SABHA KARYAKAR SHIBIR,
GADHADA & SARANGPUR, INDIA
8-11 September 2013**



Around 950 Bal Sevak Sabha *karyakars* who conduct more than 340 Bal/Balika Sevak Sabhas throughout India, gathered for a convention in Gadhada and Sarangpur. Themed ‘Live for BAPS’, the 3½-day event tested the volunteers’ presentation skills, enhanced their ability to conduct effective *sabhas* and promoted personal creativity.

In the first part of the convention, in Gadhada, the volunteers took part in competitions that tested their presentation skills. They also attended expert seminars giving guidance on how they may best conduct their BSS *sabhas*.

The second part of the convention, in Sarangpur, featured motivational speeches from the *sadgurus* and other experienced *sadhus*, as well as inspiring panel discussions that gave guidance on how to develop their skills. The highlight of the *shibir* was the darshan of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The volunteers offered their reverence and then a *thal* of items that each had brought from home.

The convention motivated the volunteers to better serve the thousands of children who attend

the special *sabhas* in their centres every week.

**ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA – PERSONAL
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN, INDIA
9-13 September 2013**



In groups of four each, 24 groups of youths currently enrolled in the BAPS Yuvak Talim Kendra (YTK) in Sarangpur participated in the annual ‘Antar Jagruti Parva’ (Personal Awareness Campaign). During their one-day visits to 121 villages in 24 districts throughout Gujarat, the 96 youths interacted with young and old villagers and inspired them to strengthen their practice of satsang traditions. In turn, the youths were also motivated by the villagers’ commitment, dedication for satsang and observance of *niyams*.

In each village, the youths spent three hours every morning visiting devotees’ homes to reinforce the messages of satsang and encourage personal spiritual development.

In the afternoon, the youths held an assembly for children in which they taught them basic Hindu values through stories and games.

The youths also visited public places to encourage the locals to give up addictions to tobacco, alcohol, gambling and other harmful habits.

In the early evening, the youths led a ‘Sandhya

Feri' (a small procession through the village) in which the devotees, young and old, men and women, enthusiastically participated.

Finally, the youths conducted an evening satsang assembly, presenting bhajans and speeches to motivate the villagers to successfully practice satsang.

SATSANG KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION

8 & 22 September 2013, Mumbai & Gujarat, India



Based on a specially compiled booklet, 'Satsang Jnanamrut', BAPS volunteers who run the weekly satsang assemblies participated in the 'Satsang Jnan Spardha' – Satsang Knowledge Competition. The competition was held in two stages: regional on 8 September and inter-regional on 22 September. The regional competitions comprised of 100 multiple-choice questions based on the booklet, in which around 9,550 men and 9,411 women volunteers participated at 222 and 221 venues respectively. Top performers from each venue took part in the inter-regional competitions.

The inter-regional competitions were comprised of three sections: 100 objective-type questions test, group discussion assessment and an oral test.

A total of 2,100 male and 2,226 female volunteers competed at 36 and 37 venues respectively in the inter-regional phase. The volunteers with the best combined scores from the three sections were awarded prizes.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS ADHIVESHAN

6 & 20 October 2013, Gujarat, India



To encourage the development of necessary skills to conduct youth satsang assemblies, an *adhiveshan* for BAPS youth activity volunteers was held in two stages: regional and inter-regional.

Both stages involved six separate components: (i) Satsang Knowledge Questionnaire (ii) Speech Preparation Notes (iii) Speech or Story Telling and Reading (iv) Compering Skills (v) Musical Aptitude and (vi) Memorization.

The regional stage was held at 24 venues for male volunteers and 37 venues for female volunteers. Top-performing volunteers proceeded to the inter-regional stage, which was held at Bochasan and Sankari for male volunteers, and at Ahmedabad and Navsari for female volunteers. The volunteers with the best combined scores from the six sections were awarded prizes.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA

11-13 October 2013, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Indore, India



As part of the three-day *murti-pratishtha* celebrations, a special Women's Assembly was

held on 11 October in which BAPS women devotees presented cultural performances and spiritual discourses. Over 450 women attended the programme.

On 12 October, the Yagna for World Peace commenced in the morning, in which over 650 devotees and well-wishers participated.

In the afternoon, a grand *nagar yatra* (procession) of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir took place through the streets of Indore. Hundreds of devotees took part and passers-by were delighted by the colourful spectacle.

On 13 October, in the presence of over 2,000 devotees, the *murtis*, which had previously been consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, were installed with Vedic rites in the mandir by Pujya Mahant Swami.

UK & Europe

NATIONAL SANYUKTA MANDAL SHIBIR

1 & 8 September 2013, UK & Europe



More than 1,800 delegates attended the 2013 National Sanyukta Mandal Shibir, held in London on 1 September and in Leicester on 8 September, in the presence of Ghanshyamcharan and other sadhus visiting from India and America.

Focusing on the Hindu concept of peace ('shanti'), the *shibirs* provided philosophical teachings as well as practical tools for leading a peaceful, fulfilling life.

The *shibir* began with a thought-provoking video illustrating the unrest that pervades everyday life and asking the principle question:

Where does peace really lie? The sadhus provided answers through speeches and question-and-answer sessions.

They highlighted how detachment from material objects, the power of tolerance, *ghar-sabha* and attachment to the Satpurush foster lasting personal and family peace and harmony. Videos and skits further emphasized the *shibir* messages.

'OPEN HOUSE LONDON'

21-22 September 2013, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, UK



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, participated once again in the annual Open House London celebration – the British capital's principal architectural festival.

The event aims to promote public awareness and appreciation of the capital's building designs and architectures.

The Mandir was among more than 700 participating buildings throughout London.

Over the two days, hundreds of visitors were offered guided tours of the Mandir complex, learning how it was made and the significance of its religious architecture. Guests were also able to explore the 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition.

Some of the experiences of the visitors are as follows:

"Staff and volunteers are all very welcoming and happy to talk to us and explain. Exhibition and film excellent and very informative. A very spiritual and uplifting visit. Thank you."

"Fascinating + very interesting. Gives more understanding of Hinduism. Very inclusive."

“I enjoyed this even more than expected. The information panels were concise and just the right amount of info for a beginner to the religion. I loved it all. Beautiful building.”

“Amazing building. The attention to detail was like nothing we have seen before. Thank you for allowing this visit!”

“Thank you for bringing something so beautiful to England. God bless.”

“This is a place of great spiritual power. I belong to an altogether different religious confession but I’m definitely coming back to experience again this incredible feeling.”

“Beautiful, well explained exhibition and informative, fantastic stone carvings and a feeling of a ‘higher power’ being involved in its construction.”

NATIONAL YUVAK-YUVATI MANDAL SHIBIR 6 & 12 October 2013, UK & Europe



Two one-day National Yuvak-Yuvati Mandal Shibirs were held in the presence of Ghanshyam-charan Swami in London on 6 October 2013 and in Leicester on 12 October.

Entitled ‘Sakhi Samjan ma Ghanu Sukh Chhe’ (Great Happiness Lies in Spiritual Understanding), the *shibirs* provided over 800 *yuvaks-yuvatis* with spiritual understanding as well as practical tools to help them manage their daily challenges and find peace and meaning in life. Three concepts were emphasized: ‘Sankhya Vichar’ (realizing the temporary nature of all material things), ‘Atma Vichar’ (realizing one’s true identity as the soul), and ‘Paramatma Vichar’ (realizing the supreme

glory of God).

The key messages were conveyed through speeches, skits, audio-visual presentations, interactive group sessions and other practical activities.

Both *shibirs* imparted to the *yuvaks-yuvatis* a deeper understanding of the key components of spirituality and greater motivation to imbibe them in their spiritual journey through everyday life.

USA

INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 6-7 September 2013, Greensboro, NC, USA



Two days of festivities, attended by devotees from throughout the region, marked the inauguration of the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Greensboro, North Carolina.

On the evening of 6 September a kirtan *aradhana* was held. The next morning, a colourful *nagar yatra* was held in which the sacred *murtis* were paraded in five beautiful floats. The procession featured children and youths in traditional Indian dress dancing and singing, as well as 70 women devotees carrying auspicious *kalashes* and 101 women carrying sacred shastras on their heads in traditional style.

After the *nagar yatra*, over 400 devotees took part in the Vedic *murti-sthapan mahapuja* rituals. These *murtis* had previously been consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad, India, on 4 March 2013.

Asia-Pacific

BAL PARAYAN CULTURAL PROGRAMME

6 October 2013, Perth, Australia



Around 25 *balaks* and *shishus* of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Perth, performed the drama *Safaltanu Fal* (Fruits of Success) as part of a Bal Parayan Cultural Programme which also included bhajans. The children had prepared really hard for a few weeks under the guidance of *bal karyakars*. Through their participation the children learnt the value of working together, and Yogiji Maharaj's mantra of 'samp, suhradaybhav, ekta'.

(Contd. from pg. 57)

En route to their final camp, the *yuvaks* witnessed other pilgrims performing full body prostrations (*dandvats*) around the whole mountain, a feat which takes approximately 27 days. The *yuvaks* were touched and inspired by the devotion of these pilgrims.

The youths completed the final leg of the *pradikshana* the following day, then headed back to Mansarovar to spend their final night in the tent.

THE GREATEST ALTITUDE – BLESSING FROM SWAMISHRI

On the last night, the ten *yuvaks* sat on the banks of Mansarovar and spoke to Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj via telephone, who said,

Africa

PRAYERS FOR TERRORIST ATTACK VICTIMS

21 September 2013, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi, Kenya



Following the terrorist attack at Westside Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, BAPS volunteers assisted in the rescue efforts and also served in the hospitals treating injured victims by providing essential items of daily living.

In addition, a special prayer assembly was held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi, in which prayers were offered for the recovery of the injured, peace of departed souls and inner strength to their families to bear their sad loss. BAPS devotees and other leading Gujaratis gathered for the prayer assembly. ♦

“Jai Swaminarayan, amara vati darshan karjo.” (“Jai Swaminarayan, do darshan on my behalf.”) The *yuvaks* were overwhelmed to learn that Swamishri had been updated regularly of their *yatra*.

To conclude their *yatra* at the feet of *guru-hari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, some of the *yuvaks* reached Sarangpur on the evening of 23 September. When Swamishri came out to give darshan, the *yuvaks* performed a *tapa ni mala* directly in front of Swamishri. Swamishri was extremely pleased and instantly began clapping when the *yuvaks* were introduced to him with a brief description of their Bhakti Yatra.

Thus, the youths completed this devotion- and prayer-filled pilgrimage, experiencing the spiritual vibrations of Hinduism's sacred pilgrim sites. ♦



1. Swamishri consecrates the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Gujarat (18 October 2013, Sarangpur).
2. Sadhus and devotees engrossed in Swamishri's darshan, Sarangpur (18 Oct.)
3. HRH Prince Charles with BAPS sadhus in front of the Swaminarayan Akshardham mandir, New Delhi (8 November 2013).
4. British PM, The Rt. Hon. David Cameron, addresses the assembly during his visit to the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in London on the Hindu New Year's Day (4 November 2013).



1. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratistha arti* of Yogiji Maharaj and Guru *parampara* at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Sarangpur (16 October 2013).
2. Senior sadhus perform *arti* during the consecration ceremony of the Guru *parampara* shrines, Sarangpur.
3. Grand open-air *annakut* offered to Thakorji in the Narayan Sabhagruh, Sarangpur (4 November 2013).
4. New Year's Day *annakut* offered to Thakorji in the main mandir, Sarangpur (4 Nov.).