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# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS



*Swamishri's Love and Sainthood*



**SWAMISHRI IN AHMEDABAD**  
**August-September 2012**

**Top:** Swamishri with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the dais during India's Independence Day celebration (15 August 2012). **Bottom:** Swamishri presides over the Jal Jhilani celebration. **Inset:** Swamishri operates the remote-controlled boat on which Shri Harikrishna Maharaj is placed in the pond specially prepared for the Jal Jhilani celebration (26 September 2012).

*(Photos: BAPS youths)*



Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

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

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# First Word

An Extract from *Jeva Me Nirakhya*, Pt. 4,  
by Pujya Mahant Swami (Gujarati text); English translation by  
Sadhu Chaitanyamurtidas published as *Divine Memories*, Pt. 4

Whenever I look at Pramukh Swami Maharaj I always recall how he has completely worn down his own body in serving others. His sacrifice has been matchless. I always seem to feel that we have done absolutely nothing for him in return. Absolutely nothing! I have travelled with him visiting devotees' houses, both in India and abroad. Everyone wants to meet Swamishri. Everyone throws the burden of their problems, complaints and inconveniences on him. All responsibilities are flung onto his shoulders. This means he is forced to endure both physical and mental hardships. So many strange people, thoughtless people as well – they all come to Swamishri. Many come to claim their rights; but none to exercise their duties. If we were to label these hardships, we would call them 'a nuisance'. Responsibilities of looking after his sadhus, as well as his householder devotees. Responsibilities of managing the Sanstha as a whole. Responsibilities of keeping everyone happy and satisfied. Day and night, well or ill, winter or summer – no matter what the situation – he is forced to continue with his busy activities. No holidays! No vacations! Just thinking about the burdens sends a chill down our spine. His ability to manage has never ceased to amaze.

If we examine the last four decades of his life and consider the hardships he has endured under extremely difficult circumstances, we won't be able to find a single person who has tolerated more – both in Satsang and outside!

I can still recall the travelling Swamishri did in Bamangam. The hot summer month of Vaishakh (May). A typical, scorching hot Indian summer's day. Swamishri was sanctifying the devotees' houses at the time of day when the heat is at its peak – three o'clock in the afternoon. I was accompanying him to the various houses. The hilly terrain of the village didn't help make *padhramanis* any easier. The climb up was physically taxing to say the least.

I can still remember that in one instance when Swamishri was climbing a hill, the physical strain he was enduring was made apparent by the sound of his heavy breathing. It also seemed that the soles of his feet were paining him. I felt such pity for him. 'Why does he tolerate so much of his own accord? Now he should rest,' I thought. Suddenly Swamishri looked at me and gave a soft smile. My mind immediately questioned, 'Is this a laughing matter? Your physical body is being consumed and exhausted and you can laugh about it?' The question had not completely formed in my mind when Swamishri revealed his secret, "Did you know Yogi Bapa has visited every corner of this village!"

What could I reply? How could I reply? His sights were constantly fixed upon his guru. His only desire was and is to use all his energies to please his guru. As a result, he has kept absolutely no pity on his body. He has continued working as a man without any personal desires. My own personal experiences with him tell me that he has always and will always continue to serve every single person in Satsang without a single thought of bodily comfort.

He has tolerated verbal abuse in order to receive a mere 2 kg of *dal* in donation. In Vasad, on the day of Ekadashi, Swamishri visited the homes of over 122 devotees, despite having a fever and while observing a waterless fast. My presence with him on that day bears witness to the hardships he has tolerated. ♦

# A Memorable Reunion

*In the last issue, Shri Hari pleased the devotees of Loya by celebrating a Shakotsav. Thereafter he continued his stay in Loya, where an interesting tryst occurs...*

**S**hri Hari stayed for a while in Nagadka and returned to Loya later. Bhavanand Swami and Sagunanand Swami informed Shri Hari, “Maharaj, your youngest brother, Ichchharam, is about to arrive here. He joined us from Vadodara. His face and manner matches with yours.” Shri Hari did not say a word or express a flicker of joy, but the senior sadhus and devotees showed ebullience with the news of Ichchharam’s arrival.

## ICHCHHARAMBHAII IN LOYA

Ichchharam arrived in Loya. He had a placid face. He was a little shorter and thinner than Maharaj, but his voice and demeanour were similar to Maharaj’s. The sadhus and devotees started prostrating to him. Ichchharam found it to be inappropriate, and thus retreated a few steps.

Shri Hari did not come out of Sangha Patel’s house to welcome his youngest brother. So, Muktanand Swami took Ichchharam to Maharaj. On seeing Shri Hari, Ichchharam became emotional. He momentarily asked himself, “Is this the same Ghanshyam, my brother! One who was dearest to my mother, Bhakti, and who carried me when I was a baby.” He uttered, “Brother!” and then ran towards Maharaj and fell at his feet. “Ghanshyam, my brother, my brother!” and Ichchharam’s eyes overflowed with tears.



Shri Hari took his feet away from the clasp of Ichchharam and asked tersely, “Who is he?”

Ichchharam, however, was lost in the past, and uttering, “Brother Ghanshyam, you left our company and forgot us totally.”

Muktanand Swami and Nityanand Swami raised Ichchharambhai. Everyone who witnessed this union was filled with tears of joy. Muktanand Swami replied, “Maharaj, he is your youngest brother, Ichchharam. Come and sit before him on the cot arranged in the verandah.”

Shri Hari was silent and still. Muktanand Swami and Nityanand Swami took Maharaj’s hand to make him sit on the cot. They also led Ichchharam there, who was still crying. Maharaj quizzed, “Why is he crying?”

Nityanand Swami explained, “Maharaj, why shouldn’t he! You are God and, out of intense detachment, you left him and your family. He is crying because he has missed you all these years. It signifies his deep affection for you. Now at least break your silence and talk to him. You are not a renunciant (*tyagi*). You are God!”

“But my nature is that of a *tyagi*. I never remember those whom I have renounced,” Shri Hari answered with a solemn tone.

Nityanand Swami retaliated sweetly, “It is the way of God since ages. He renounced Sita without any fault of hers. God also left the *gopis* of Vrundavan. And this time, he gave up those who lovingly raised him. So, the question is how will the devotees ever trust his ways in future?”

Maharaj replied pointedly, “Those who are eager for *moksha* will trust him.” Brahmanand Swami could not take this one-sided answer and he thus spoke his mind, “God, too, is eager to liberate his devotees, and that is why he comes on earth! You were once travelling alone in the forests whereas now you have gathered all of us.”

Shri Hari smiled and replied, “It seems that Brahmanand Swami is manifesting his true colour!”

“No Maharaj. I have not shown the true nature of my clan. Otherwise I would have spoken something else.”

Shri Hari broke out laughing and replied, “After all you are a bard – a celestial son (*devi-putra*)!”

“No Maharaj. Now I’m a divine son (*brahma-putra*). That’s why I have forgotten the nature of my clan. Otherwise I would not have allowed things to have gone this far.”

To express his joy, Shri Hari stood up and embraced Brahmanand Swami. In response Brahmanand Swami said, “Maharaj embrace Ichchharam. He is meeting you after 28 years! Embrace him and make him happy. You have blessed us for many years.”

Shriji Maharaj embraced his brother, Ichchharam. The latter felt relieved of his sadness of separation after all these years. Then Maharaj said, “By his looks he seems to be my youngest brother. But I will believe so when he narrates the details of our family. Who gave him my news? And where has he come from?”

Ichchharambhai explained, “Rampratapbhai [eldest brother] and I were informed about you by Mayajitanand Swami. Thereafter, we all left

to come here from the village of Lohganjri, near Chhapaiya. The two of us were riding on mules and Mayajitanand Swami was on foot.

“Rampratapbhai stays at Lohganjri and I at Ambaliya village. We had shifted from Chhapaiya because of the frequent troubles there.

“Now, to continue with how we came here. From Lohganjri we went to Ayodhya. There, Kartaram Vipra joined us. We stayed for five days in Ayodhya. Then on our journey to Lucknow Rampratapbhai and Kartaram sang bhajans. In Lucknow, we met the two brothers of Jnananand Swami. A bania devotee called Veniramcharan also lives there. He made our arrangements to travel to Gwalior. Sukhanand Swami had inspired satsang in the surrounding villages of Gwalior. Hence, the local devotees took good care of us. From there we went to Dhuva, Barai and Ujjain. Rampratapbhai stayed there whereas I headed hurriedly here.”

Shri Hari intervened, saying, “We shall continue your talk after dinner.”

Ichchharam was the guest of Liladhar Soni. The latter gave him rations of ghee, sugar, wheat flour, rice grains, brinjals, milk and spices to cook his meal. Ichchharam prepared his food and ate. A short while later Maharaj came to Liladhar’s house along with his sadhus and devotees.

Maharaj told Ichchharam to resume his talk. He added, “We came to Vadodara and then to Bocharan. From there we travelled to Dhandhuka, Ranpur and finally to Loya. In having your darshan my grief has dissolved.” With these words Ichchharam broke down. He got hold of Maharaj’s feet again and praised, “God was born in our family. We are indeed very fortunate and honoured! But I pray that I never be separated from you.” Shri Hari replied with a faint smile.

That evening Maharaj sat on a high seat. The *arti* and *dhun* were sung. Khengarjibhai of Kholadiyad, the son of Jiva Sindhav, arrived. He told Maharaj, “I have brought 180 kg of ghee

and I wish to sponsor a meal tomorrow.” Shri Hari said, “No, not tomorrow, but four-five days later. Till then stay here and do darshan, and listen to the discourses.” Shri Hari garlanded him and his brothers.

Five days later, news of Rampratapbhai’s imminent arrival came. Everyone was excited. Maharaj instructed, “Sadhus and devotees go towards him and give him a grand reception. I will be seated here. When Rampratapbhai arrives I’ll come forward to meet him.” The devotees proceeded to receive Rampratapbhai with musical instruments and garlands. Ichchharam remained with Maharaj.

When Rampratapbhai saw the village of Loya he dismounted from his horse and started walking the rest of the way. With him were many devotees who had joined him along the way. When Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and other sadhus saw Rampratapbhai, they started prostrating to him. Rampratapbhai stopped them, saying, “It is not appropriate for sadhus to prostrate to a householder.”

But Muktanand Swami praised, “You are the eldest brother of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and that is why we were prostrating to you.”

Rampratapbhai realized the glory of his brother, Ghanshyam. He remembered his father’s words that Ghanshyam was a divine child, and also, in contrast, his own harsh behaviour towards him. Those memories filled his eyes with tears of remorse. He thought, “God was born in our house and we were unable to recognize him, whereas the devotees of Gujarat have understood his glory and divinity.”

Rampratapbhai headed towards Loya with the group of sadhus and devotees singing rapturously. Sura Khachar and the other Kathi devotees were also celebrating the advent of Maharaj’s brother. Soon, everyone arrived in Loya where Maharaj was. Shri Hari got down from the stage and came briskly towards

Rampratapbhai. Maharaj bowed to him and touched his feet. The latter embraced Maharaj. Rampratapbhai was overwhelmed with emotion. Years of yearning was evident from his moist eyes. Rampratapbhai did not relax his embrace. He spoke passionately, “Brother Ghanshyam, you spurned the love of your family and left us. You never remembered anyone? Can God be so dispassionate?”

Maharaj listened silently.

“Did you never remember your sister-in-law [Suvasini Bhabhi]? I believe not! Because, you are God! Does God ever have a brother and sister-in-law!” Rampratapbhai continued his emotional utterings. To pacify him Maharaj led him onto the stage and made him sit on his own seat. The entire assembly was stunned by the historic reunion. Then, after the honour accorded to him, Rampratapbhai calmed down. He wiped his eyes and face with a handkerchief and rattled off the names of his relatives. “Ghanshyam, everyone remembers and dotes upon you. They have been waiting and yearning to meet you. On hearing your news your sister-in-law became ecstatic. She was saying, ‘Take me along. Take me to my Ghanshyam.’”

Shri Hari was still quiet and unruffled. He was aloof from all worldly ties, but he was aware of Rampratapbhai’s nature. So, he softly replied, “Brother, I will definitely call Suvasini Bhabhi and everyone.” Maharaj’s words eased Rampratapbhai’s anxiety. Then Shri Hari enquired about Vashram Uncle and the other relatives. He also asked about the places he used to visit and the people he was acquainted with in Chhapaiya and Ayodhya. ◆

*(Contd. in next issue)*

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



## ADHYĀY 2

# BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA: EVER FREE OF DESIRES

### Part 14

**Recap:** We all crave for supreme happiness, and continuously strive for it too. But without true direction, proper effort and correct understanding everything goes in vain. The *sthitapragna* state explained in the Gita gives us true direction, it shows us the proper method of endeavour, and makes us come to understand the true eternal principles. As a result, life overflows with supreme happiness.

The Gita revealed by Shri Krishna was not just for the benefit of Arjuna; it has, in fact, come into existence to make us all eligible for supreme peace, supreme happiness, and supreme bliss. The true wealth of this treasure trove comes into full light in the description of the *sthitapragna* state.

The previous *shloka* told us that ‘*Veetarāga-bhayakrodhaha sthitadheermuniruchyate*’, i.e., ‘A person who is free of attachment, fear and anger is called a steady-minded *muni*.’ This was discussed in the last article. Now we will take a look at the words thereafter.

#### FREE OF DESIRES

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says,

यः सर्वत्रानभिस्नेहस्तत्तत् प्राप्य शुभाशुभम् ।  
नाभिनन्दति न द्वेष्टि तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठिता ॥

‘*Yaha sarvatrānabhisnehastattat prāpya shubhāshubham, nābhinandati na dveshti tasya pragnā pratishthitā.*’

‘One who is free of all desires, and on

attaining good or bad things does not become elated or miserable, such a person is steady-minded (Gita 2.57).’

The *shloka* commences with the words, ‘*Yaha sarvatra anabhisnehaha...*’. To understand the true meaning of the term *anabhisneha*, we must understand the connotations of the two words *sneha* and *abhisneha*.

*Sneha* means love. It is a pure emotion, a source of happiness and a force that provides motivation to fulfil one’s duty. It inspires one to accomplish even one’s difficult and risky responsibilities. It gives one the momentum to continue with and carry out tedious tasks. It leaves no room for sadness or dejection. It is a source of energy.

*Abhisneha* means desire. When love is contaminated with desire, smeared with mundane selfishness, and tainted with domination, demands, inappropriate expectations or obstinacy, then love loses its purity and is transformed into mere enjoyment of sensual pleasures. *Abhisneha* refers to this desire for sensual pleasures. On the spiritual path such desires result in mental disturbance. These desires turn a person away from one’s duty, they make a person weak, and they make a person do what should not be done.

*Anabhisneha* means one who is free of the *abhisneha* described above. By using this word, the Gita presents us with the state of

desirelessness; it reveals the state of desirelessness ornamented with sincere love.

Arjuna is a loving person; that is a good thing, but he does not realize that it has currently taken the form of desire and family affection. Thus, Shri Krishna is teaching him about *anabhisneha*, i.e., being free of desires. Being free of desires is a barometer for steady-mindedness. One whose mind has settled on the form of Paramātmā naturally has no mundane desires. Thus, Shri Krishna is telling Arjuna to drop these desires in the form of family affection and attain the true *sthitapragna* state.

The words, '*sarvatra anabhisnehaha*' mean 'Free of all desires'. The adjective '*sarvatra*' extends the meaning of being detached. Thus, '*sarvatra anabhisnehaha*' means to have no attachment to anyone, no desire for anything, no expectation for any place and to have attachment only for Paramātmā. To truly love Paramātmā one must rid oneself of all desires. If we understand the true meaning of '*sarvatra anabhisnehaha*' we will be able to easily tell the difference between love and desire.

The true essence of '*sarvatra anabhisnehaha*' can be seen in the life of the *satpurush*.

Once, while Pramukh Swami Maharaj was taking lunch in Jamnagar, Bhagvatcharan Swami told Swamishri, "I have inspected the whole building, everything is satisfactory, splendid in fact. How do you like it?"

"Everything is the same for us. What is a mansion and what is a hut? Whatever we get by Paramātmā's wish is well and good," Swamishri replied, reflecting his *sthitapragna* state.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Atlanta, America. The volunteers helping in the kitchen department brought a dish full of food items, that were to be served to the devotees at lunch, before Swamishri. One volunteer asked Swamishri, "Bapa, which of these items do you like?" Swamishri immediately answered, "Whatever Paramātmā eats; we should accept

whatever is offered to Paramātmā."

Once, in London, Swamishri went to consecrate a shop. The owner of the shop asked Swamishri, "Did you like the shop?" Swamishri replied, "What is there to like? Everything will one day become dust. How much we worship Paramātmā is what counts."

Once, in Bochasan, the sadhus were sitting around Swamishri, engaged in a light discussion. It was the last day of Swamishri's stay there. Janmangal Swami asked, "You have stayed here this long, therefore you must have become settled. Do you feel like going elsewhere?"

"Why not? We are settled wherever we go! There is no question of 'getting' settled." Swamishri replied. He then said softly, "Wherever we go we worship and speak about Paramātmā. As long we are settled in that, we are settled. What need is there to be settled with regards to accommodation and other things? We should never believe that we will only be comfortable in certain places. However much we serve and speak about Paramātmā is how happy we are; that is true comfort."

Truly, the *satpurush* is content within due to his state of being free of material desires.

Thus, being free of desire is a mark of being *sthitapragna*. The Gita then reveals a further quality.

## EQUALITY IN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Success and Failure – two things that disturb the mind. Generally, if things happen as we like, we consider it success, and if not, we count it as failure.

For those who have not understood spiritual matters, success is intoxicating. On attaining it, their ego soars to great heights. The ecstasy caused by having their way makes them lose their composure and the emotions of '*abhinandati*' are aroused. That is, they take the credit of success for themselves. They are overjoyed and become bewildered in the excess

of joy. They begin to arrange parties and declare themselves as great. Thus, in times of success, a person's intellect is overwhelmed by ecstasy, making success hard to digest.

The same applies to failure. On the occasion of failure, one's intellect falls victim to turmoil. One's behaviour is subject to the influence of '*dveshti*' (spite). On such occasions, a rush of vile thoughts seizes a person and unnerves him from within. The person becomes hasty. To attain success, his intellect races to plot jealous, deceitful or spiteful conspiracies. If this rush of evil thoughts is prolonged, then it is likely that he will lose the ability to discriminate between right and wrong. As a result, the person may become violent or even suicidal. In this manner, failure also influences a person's intellect, and it, too, is hard to digest.

Thus, whether it be success or failure, both can generate tremors of disruptive thoughts in the mind. The difference is only superficial. In success, ecstasy disturbs the mind; and in failure, feelings such as misery, rage, uneasiness, anger and spite disrupt the mind. In both situations, the supreme bliss of life remains distant. There is no glimpse of eternal peace. One feels unfulfilled, empty and lonely. Everything seems desolate, and despair and unrest cause turmoil within a person.

At such times, the *sthitapragna* state of the Gita protects us. The *sthitapragna* state teaches us how to handle success and tolerate failure. With the words '*tat tat shubhāshubham prāpya nābhinandati na dveshti tasya pragnā pratishthitā*', the Gita reveals the secret to preventing any mundane situation that causes us instability. The *sthitapragna* state is full of such magic.

Good or bad, success or failure – all occur according to the wish of Paramātmā: 'It is only when Paramātmā gives me the ability that I can even wish to do something. Only when Paramātmā gives me the strength, can I do anything at all. The outcome that comes thereafter, which I call success or failure, is attained only by the wish of Paramātmā.' A person who has affirmed such

faith in the form of Paramātmā has been called *sthitapragna*. Such a person remains completely focused on Paramātmā, like a candle flame in a serene windless location. There is no incident in the world that can disturb them.

In 1983, BAPS had purchased a piece of land in the borough of Harrow in London in order to build a mandir. In 1985, the Department of Environment denied permission to build a mandir. The Sanstha hired a lawyer and filed a case in court. Approximately twenty thousand Indians living in the area had signed a petition in favour of the mandir. There was a strong case for the mandir, but the court ruled against building the mandir. The devotees were deeply disappointed. At the time, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Atladra, Vadodara. At 11.00 p.m., C.M. Patel and Jashbhai Patel, president and a trustee of the UK Satsang Mandal respectively, phoned Swamishri and informed him of the court decision with a heavy heart. He was also worried about how Swamishri would feel. Swamishri heard everything in detail and ended the conversation calmly. Thereafter, Swamishri called Viveksagar Swami and other sadhus near and informed them of the decision. He ended the conversation with the words, 'As Paramātmā wishes,' and immediately went to sleep at his usual time. Viveksagar Swami could not sleep at all. The next day Swamishri wrote a letter to the London Satsang Mandal, "We should be pleased with whatever pleases Maharaj. Whatever he does is beneficent."

Those who observed this incident experienced the *sthitapragna* state in Swamishri's life.

On 13 September 2005, Swamishri was at the Swaminarayan Akshardham complex in New Delhi. Swamishri was conversing with the sadhus, explaining the principle that Paramātmā is the all-doer. He said, "Everything happens by the grace of Maharaj (Bhagwan Swaminarayan). It is his strength by which everything takes place. He is the all-doer. That is our principle."

(Contd. on pg. 13)



# Simple Living, Sublime Spirituality

*Gunatitanand Swami's innate detachment towards worldly pleasures was evident from his childhood years. His simple dress and even simpler diet reflected his inner conviction that the main focus of life should be devotion to God and not indulgence in worldly pleasures.*

## CHILDHOOD DEVOTION

Gunatitanand Swami was born into a Brahmin farming family of average means. His childhood name was Mulji. From a young age his preference for devotion was apparent.

Once, in an attempt to ignite Mulji's interest in worldly matters, his father told him that at this young age he should engage in play and other worldly enjoyments and reserve devotion till he was old.

Mulji respectfully listened to his father and then left to go to the village square. There, he observed the elderly villagers for some time. Then, Mulji returned home to present the evidence to his father. He reported that the elders engaged only in worldly gossip and not discussions about God since this was their life-long habit. Hence, he concluded, the habits one develops at a young age remain until old age.

## SIMPLE DIET

Likewise, Gunatitanand Swami's preference for simplicity in diet, dress and lifestyle was reflected from his young age.

Once, during his stay in Bhadra, Bhagwan Swaminarayan paid an impromptu visit to Mulji's home. Shriji Maharaj asked, "Mulji, what are you doing?" He replied, "Eating yogurt and boiled millet grains."

For Gunatitanand Swami, throughout his 82 years of life, millet, *dal*, yogurt and buttermilk were the mainstay of his diet. Rarely, he would take *shak* made of green vegetables. He ate only one such simple meal a day. Even when sumptuous meals were sponsored by devotees and offered to Thakorji, Gunatitanand Swami's menu remained unchanged.

## SIMPLE LIFESTYLE

As a child living in a remote village in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, he naturally had a simple lifestyle. However, this simplicity was sustained throughout his life. In 1828, Bhagwan Swami-

narayan appointed Gunatitanand as the mahant of the Swaminarayan Mandir in Junagadh. For over 40 years Gunatitanand served as mahant, and was revered by hundreds of sadhus and thousands of devotees. Despite his high-ranking post, he never demanded special arrangements and continued his simple lifestyle.

As a newly initiated sadhu, Gunatitanand Swami was once travelling with Muktanand Swami. One night, Gunatitanand Swami saw Muktanand Swami about to sleep on the bare ground. So, he too, prepared to sleep likewise. Muktanand Swami told him to spread his bedding in order to sleep comfortably. When Gunatitanand Swami asked him why he had not done so, Muktanand Swami answered that he was following Shriji Maharaj's command. In reply, Gunatitanand Swami said that Maharaj's command applied to all, so he too would sleep on the bare ground. This demonstrates his simple lifestyle.

Once, the mahant of Tarnetar Mandir arrived at the Junagadh Mandir. At the time, Gunatitanand Swami was sweeping the mandir compound. The mahant asked him, "Who is the mahant of this mandir?" Gunatitanand Swami directed him to wait in the assembly hall. He then finished sweeping, washed his hands and feet and took his place on the mahant's seat in the assembly hall. The mahant of Tarnetar was astonished to learn that Gunatitanand Swami was, in fact, the mahant. He expressed surprise that the mahant of such a prominent mandir would engage in such menial housekeeping tasks, "Just now



Memorial at birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami, Bhadra

you were sweeping the grounds. Are you the mahant?"

Gunatitanand Swami replied with a smile, "In our organization, one who serves is a mahant." He then opened his cloth-bag of belongings and showed it to the mahant. It contained the coarse cloths he wore as dhoti and *gatariya* (upper garment) and his wooden puja items and

eating bowl. There was nothing made of metal. The mahant of Tarnetar was astounded to see such simplicity in the life of the mahant of such a big mandir. He was even more amazed to learn that Gunatitanand Swami had been the mahant for almost 40 years. Gunatitanand Swami explained to him, "We have renounced women and wealth and so our mahantship has been sustained."

The visiting mahant from Tarnetar revealed that he always had to be wary of his disciples since, tempted by the wealth and powers, they would do anything to usurp him and become mahant.

### SUBLIME SPIRITUALITY

Seeing Gunatitanand Swami's simple, yet, spiritually sublime life, countless sadhus and householders were also inspired to live similarly. Gunatitanand Swami's forthright, practical and insightful talks further motivated the sadhus and devotees. Thus, through his teachings and life, he established the 'Junagadh Way', in accordance with the traditions established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

During their travels in the villages, Gunatitanand Swami's



Memorial shrine at birthplace

sadhus, too, adopted this simple lifestyle. Even when the devotees insisted that they accept rich meals they would politely refuse.

After over 40 years as mahant of the popular Junagadh mandir, when Gunatitanand Swami left to spend his final days in Gondal, he took only his *dhoti* of coarse cloths, puja items and wooden eating bowl.

The simple habits he had developed in childhood remained with him till the end. Also, his priority for devotion to God pervaded each of his activities and talks.

In Jungadh, he had established a tradition of continuous scriptural narrations and discourses. He arranged a rota for reading the shastras day and night. Despite his mandir administrative duties, he also daily spent time reading and listening to the narrations.

## LASTING LEGACY

Many years later, Yogiji Maharaj, as a newly initiated young sadhu, lived in the Junagadh mandir. Such was the legacy of simplicity and spirituality that Gunatitanand Swami had left that Yogiji Maharaj was instinctively drawn towards it. His life revolved around the principles Gunatitanand Swami had taught and practiced. Yogiji Maharaj often said, '*Jyā tyā, jem-tem, jevu-tevu,*' meaning that one should learn to live according to the situation, without complaints and expectations, tolerating any physical discomforts and hardships. He also urged everyone, "*Bhagwan bhaji levā...*" In this way, the simple life of sublime spirituality encouraged by Gunatitanand Swami was continued by Yogiji Maharaj.

Such a life is possible in any era and is the true way to peace, happiness and *moksha*. ♦

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(Contd. from pg. 10)

One sadhu said, "It is hard to believe that in times of failure."

Swamishri replied, "Maharaj is the all-doer; that is our principle. Be it success or failure, it applies everywhere. In fact, Maharaj never lets us fail. We may feel it is a failure, but it is really success. The work is not accomplished if there is going to be a calamity ahead. Paramātmā safeguards us." After saying this much, he smiled and said, "It is indeed very hard to believe success in failure. We feel insecure. 'What will people say? What about my reputation?' We become perplexed and give up. But Paramātmā is the all-doer." He then remembered the incident of the land for the mandir in London and said, "When we didn't get the permission for the land in London, C.M. Patel had phoned me and said that our reputation had been ruined, that they had tried so hard, and how would they show their faces in society? But in reality, although it seemed as though we had failed at the time, now it seems as though we have succeeded (referring to the current mandir in London). Therefore, the earlier

failure was indeed success. Maharaj always does what is best for us."

On 2 November 2004, Swamishri was at the Swaminarayan Akshardham complex in New Delhi. At 1.40 p.m., he was seated on his bed about to recline for rest. In a casual dialogue, one sadhu asked, "Do you feel you are old now?"

"Yes, I feel old because I have to be supported when I walk," Swamishri replied. He then continued, "Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj used to say that the horse may be weak but the rider is still strong, therefore my body may be weak, but the rider (*ātmā*) inside is fine. It is the power of Paramātmā that is in the *ātmā*."

No matter what the situation, great spiritual masters never falter in their composure. Their *ātmā* always remains strong by the strength of Paramātmā. This is a living expression of the *sthitapragna* state.

We can also accomplish this *sthitapragna* state, which is the pinnacle of spirituality, if we contemplate on the words of the Gita and the life of the *satpurush* and imbibe them in our lives. ♦



Magshar (December), the second month of the Vikram Samvat year, adds a golden page to Indian spiritual history. On the eighth of the bright half of Magshar, Samvat 2069 (20 December 2012), Pragat Brahmaswarup Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj will complete 91 years of his life. For over nine decades, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has lived a blemish-free life wedded to the principles of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, boundless saintliness and service to society. He has dedicated his life for the spiritual uplift of the whole of mankind.

Simplicity, naturalness and saintliness are the qualities Pramukh Swami Maharaj epitomizes. His distinct characteristics are to think straightforwardly, speak straightforwardly, act straightforwardly, easily attach the devotees to Paramatma and himself remain engrossed in Parabrahman. His unassuming and simple personality is like a sweet melody which draws countless people desiring moksha towards him to take the path of spirituality. His divine touch and soft, tender voice, his sweet reminiscences and divine glance, or a casual meeting with him have moved the hearts of countless and filled their hearts with spiritual inspiration. There are many unrecorded incidents of how, where and in what circumstances Swamishri has moved the hearts of the devotees living in India and abroad.

Here, some of our sadhus have captured in words such divine experiences to which they were witnesses.

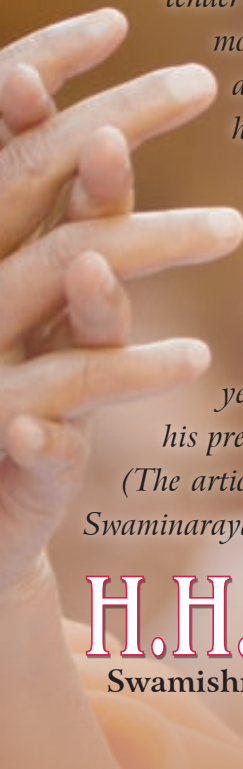
From these experiences emerges the image of Swamishri having selfless-love, saintliness and a life full of devotion to Paramatma.

On the occasion of Swamishri's 91<sup>st</sup> birth anniversary and entry into his 92<sup>nd</sup> year, let us wholeheartedly celebrate the divine symphony that his whole life is and feel his presence in our hearts.

(The articles that follow were written in Gujarati by the authors mentioned and printed in Swaminarayan Prakash in December 2011. The English translations are by Kaushik Joshi.)

# H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Swamishri's Extraordinary Personality Through the Experiences of Sadhus





# An Embodiment of Humility

Sadhu Narayanmunidas, Sarangpur



**T**he humility, simplicity, saintliness and selfless-love of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the great significance that he accords to the devotees have left an indelible impression on my mind, and that impression has grown and strengthened on many occasions over the years.

In 1994, Pramukh Swami's 74<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary was to be celebrated in Mehsana. I went to see Swamishri the previous night to explain to him the arrangements for individual darshan on the day. Formerly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to give darshan to all the devotees after the birth anniversary assembly. This usually took more than three hours. So, to reduce the time an arrangement of two queues for darshan had been introduced recently so that two devotees could have darshan at a time. This time arrangements to make four queues had been planned to further save Swamishri's time and give him rest. When I explained this arrangement to Swamishri, he at once asked, "How can four persons come at a time?" I told him, "Just as two would come there would be four." Swamishri didn't like this arrangement as he wanted to please devotees coming from far-flung villages and cities. He remained silent on hearing my reply. Seeing him speechless, I was dazed.

I talked about this to the other sadhus and we all went to see Swamishri to tell him that we would do according to his will. Before we finished speaking to him, he began to say, "Shriji Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut that it is best to do as the sadhu asks you to do, while it is worst to do as your mind commands you to do. So what you have planned is alright."

I told him, "Please be pleased with me."

Swamishri told me, "I remain pleased always.

God dwells in you all. So what you have planned is alright."

We were all stunned to hear the humble words of Swamishri. And we planned two queues according to his wish, changing the arrangement overnight.

The next morning, after the puja on his birthday celebration, Swami was looking around for someone.

When the sadhus in his personal care asked who he wanted to see, he said he wanted to see me. When I went to him, he gave me a flower from his puja and said, "I thought the whole night that it is not fair to change what you have planned after much deliberation. So stick to what you had planned."

Tears welled up in my eyes thinking that this great guru was speaking to a lesser mortal like me so humbly on the day of his birthday celebration.

I requested him, saying, "Now, don't say anything more. We have made an arrangement according to your will."

That day the birthday anniversary assembly ended at 11.45 a.m. After that, Swamishri sat with folded hands for 1 hour and 45 minutes, giving individual darshan to 35,000 devotees.

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Prior to the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentenary Celebrations in 1981, Swamishri went on a satsang tour abroad. As part of the Bicentenary Celebrations, a special assembly was organized at the Kenyata Conference Hall in Nairobi in East Africa. I was engaged in decorating the hall the previous night. So, I had not slept at all. I could not find time to sleep till the assembly began in the evening. Subsequently,

I began to feel sleepy when the assembly commenced. But where could I go to rest? So I rested my head on the back of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's decorated seat and began to sleep sitting there. As a result I was unaware of what was going on in the assembly.

After the assembly, Swamishri bent a little from his seat and woke me up, calling me. He lovingly told me, "See, tomorrow is a day of fast. I have instructed to keep your meal covered for you in the kitchen at our residence. The car is also ready for you. Now, leave immediately."

Rubbing my eyes, I left to have my meal, thinking of Swamishri's affectionate care.

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In 1983, Swamishri suffered a heart attack. So, there was no arrangement for individual darshan that year on the occasion of Guru Punam. A kirtan was being sung before Swamishri's blessings. At that time, I told Swamishri, "You are to give your blessings after this kirtan. After that you are to leave to go to your accommodation."

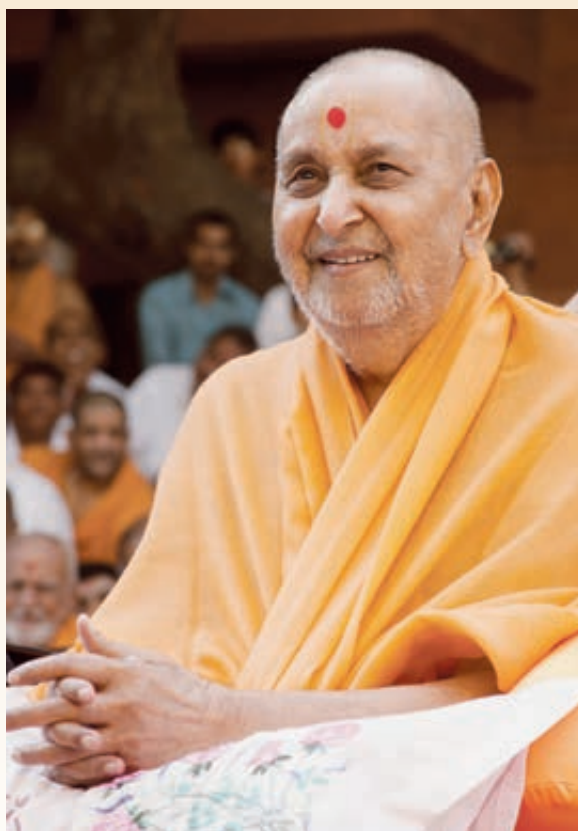
Swamishri expressed his desire to give darshan to all the devotees. I told him about his delicate health. But he insisted on staying. So, I told him the reality, saying, "Bapa! We have not made an arrangement for individual darshan and your speech will begin in a while. So, it is not possible to make any arrangement now."

Hearing this, Swamishri said, "Why can't it be done? See, one volunteer will take care of 50 devotees. But he should be very careful. He should keep an eye on all. If someone stands up in the middle, he will have to tell him to sit down."

I said, "Bapa! The volunteers you talk about cannot be found at this late hour. The assembly hall is packed to capacity. So it is not possible to make an arrangement."

Then, Swamishri said encouragingly, "You get afraid without any reason. If you will it, you can do everything."

I said, "That is alright, but how is it possible



at this hour?"

Swamishri said, "Try it at least."

I said, "I will try since you want me to, but it is not likely to succeed."

As this talk ended, the kirtan was also over. After making an announcement of Swamishri's blessings, I went at the back of the assembly hall. Arunbhai was in charge of the assembly arrangements, so I told him what was on Swamishri's mind. He said, "It will be done."

He at once called some selected volunteers and instructed them about the arrangement. After Swamishri's blessings, the volunteers positioned themselves in the middle of the assembly hall. The arrangement for individual darshan was made without the need for pushing or hurrying the devotees as they passed before Swamishri. For years, we had been searching for a solution to avoid pushing the devotees for individual darshan; Swamishri gave the solution during a casual talk. At last, when Swamishri was

descending from the stage, he told me, “Your planning was good. Thank you.”

Whose planning and whom to thank! Dazed, I simply kept looking at Swamishri.

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In 1999, Swamishri’s birthday celebration was held in Tithal. Swamishri called me while the assembly was in progress. When I went to him, he began to express his worry about some requirements of one sadhu’s *mandal*. Evading the point, I requested him, saying, “That will be taken care of later. How did it occur to you during this birthday celebration?”

Of course, Swamishri was detached from his grand birthday celebration and found real joy from taking care of every devotee, whether a sadhu or a householder.

Prior to the celebration of Swamishri’s Amrut Mahotsav in 1995 in Mumbai, an *annakut* was held on New Year’s Day at the BAPS Mandir in Dadar in the presence of Swamishri. At that time, sadhus serving at Swaminarayan Nagar, the venue of the Amrut Mahotsav, a few kilometres from Dadar mandir, went for darshan at the mandir. All the sadhus were to get the opportunity of touching Swamishri’s feet on New Year’s Day. Swamishri was very busy. Even though he was so busy, he gave me the name of a sadhu and instructed me, saying, “Ask him to see

me when he comes. There is a letter from him.”

Swamishri is always earnest in replying to and solving a person’s problem even in the midst of grand celebrations.

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Swamishri celebrated Poshi Punam in Sarangpur in 1986. A makeshift assembly hall was raised between the *borsalli* and neem trees behind Shastriji Maharaj’s Smruti Mandir. The number of devotees attending was more than the hall could accommodate. So, some devotees were sitting outside the canopied hall. Subsequently, they were facing the harsh heat and light of the sun.

Before addressing the congregation, Swamishri called me and told me, “At the time of individual darshan, take the devotees sitting in the sunlight first.”

I made an announcement according to Swamishri’s instruction. During his speech, Swamishri mentioned my name and said, “Sadhus are very kind. They worry about even those sitting in the sunlight.”

It was Swamishri who was concerned about the devotees sitting in the hot sunshine. And it was he who made the suggestion to take them first. Yet, he was singing the praise of the sadhus. Such is his profound humility and glory for others. ♦



## HE KNOWS THE ESSENCE OF YOUTHS' HEARTS

Sadhu Yagnapriyadas, Ahmedabad



In the BAPS Swaminarayan hostel at Vallabh Vidyanagar, about 150 to 200 youths observe various fasts like *dharna-parna*, liquid fasts and *khatras* for 15 days every year during Chaturmas. The youths who were not associated with the BAPS and who did not observe even *ekadashi* fast with special food for the day also

enthusiastically observe some rigorous fasts during that period. If Swamishri’s stay is near Vidyanagar, the youths end their fasts in his presence. One year, at the time of ending the fasts, Swamishri was in Bochasan. So, all the youths who had observed fasts were taken to Bochasan. After they had Thakorji’s darshan,



Tyagvallabh Swami gave lemon water to them to break their fasts. After Swamishri's darshan during his morning walk and puja, all the youths sat in the lobby of the first floor of the Sant Nivas. During his breakfast, Swamishri was informed that the youths had broken their fasts and were waiting for his darshan in the lobby.

After having breakfast and meeting the devotees, Swamishri came to the rostrum placed in the lobby. Swamishri gave his blessings with great joy. Then Swamishri wanted to give *prasad* to each youth. So, *mesub* was brought. To spare Swamishri any further exertion, the sadhu in Swamishri's personal care wanted the *prasad* to be distributed by other sadhus. So the *prasad* was kept at some distance. One-by-one the youths started coming for darshan. Swamishri was waiting for the *prasad* to be placed before him. He said, "Bring the *prasad*." The attendant sadhu said, "We will distribute it." Swamishri became emphatic and said, "I would like to conclude their fast. Bring the *prasad* here." So, *prasad* was brought near Swamishri and he gave it to every youth with his own hand.

The youths felt that they had not done anything extraordinary. But Swamishri thought their austerity was of great significance when they lived in an atmosphere of material indulgence in their schools and colleges. So, he expressed his pleasure by celebrating their efforts. There are many occasions on which Swamishri has showered his grace upon the Chhatralaya youths.

Another incident dates back to 1987-88. Swamishri arrived at the Akshar Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar. Swamishri's lodgings were in the old mandir in the hostel premises. Swamishri was taking his daily walk in the lobby of the A Block. The youths, seated on both sides of the lobby, were having darshan. At that time, the couplets penned by a Chhatralaya student, Mukesh Thanki, were quoted. Translated, they read as follows:

"The kind look of Pramukh Swami is upon us,

And we have been influenced by satsang,  
The boat may swim or sink, we don't care,  
We have been influenced by satsang."

Jitu Patel (Malawi), one of the students of the Chhatralaya, was quoting the lines. Hearing these lines, Swamishri brimmed with love and affection for him. He held Jitu's hand and said, "Hold my hand like this. I will not let the boat sink." Swamishri continued walking, holding Jitu's hand. Jitu felt blessed by the sudden showering of Swamishri's grace on him. At this, Mukesh Thanki, who wrote the poem, became restless. He thought that it was he who had written the poem while the gain was bagged by Jitu. So, he got up and walking alongside Swamishri, said, "Bapa! It was I who wrote this kirtan." Swamishri made a joyful gesture with his hand and blessed him. Then he held his hand and kept walking. This sparked off a tide of affection among the youths and they started dancing behind Swamishri. It was as if the sea was dancing on a full moon night! Rejoicing and cracking jokes, Swamishri took two more rounds and finished his routine walk. The youths dispersed with these memorable moments forever etched in their hearts.

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Once in 1977, Swamishri arrived at the Akshar Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar. At that time, Ganesh Sindhav of Kankaravadi was studying in Standard 10. Devoted and imbued with the spirit of service, this youth was highly drawn towards Swamishri. He requested Swamishri to visit his village. Swamishri said, "We will definitely come when our programme is scheduled near your village."

Swamishri arrived at Sarangpur to celebrate the festivals of Holi and Fuldol. There, Swamishri's travelling schedule for the next month was planned. Ganesh also came to Sarangpur for Holi. He reminded Swamishri about visiting his village. Swamishri's travelling itinerary had some other places, but Swamishri called Viveksagar Swami and asked him to make a little change and include Kankaravadi.

Swamishri arrived at Kankaravadi on 1 May 1977. On Ganesh's request, Arvindbhai

Swaminarayan and I had reached there earlier. Swamishri entered the village in the midst of a cloud of dust due to the dusty, uneven road. Swamishri was to reside at Nanjibhai's simple house (Ganesh's father). It was a small village in which there was only one concrete building. Nanjibhai's house did not have electricity, a toilet or bathroom.

That evening Swamishri held a satsang assembly under the light of a paraffin lamp. The summer heat was stifling. At night mattresses were spread on the terrace of a neighbour's house. Swamishri slept without uttering a single word. The next morning, after completing his daily routine, Swamishri made several home visits (*padhramanis*). Then Swamishri addressed a satsang assembly, took lunch and lay down for his afternoon rest in a mud hut. The sun was hot. Swamishri slept peacefully in spite of no ventilation. We fanned Swamishri in turns with a hand fan. Despite the lack of facilities, Swamishri looked as cheerful as ever.

Swamishri visited Ganesh's village lovingly, though there was no other *satsangi* and not even basic facilities in his house. He came and stayed as if he had come to attend a festival and gifted Ganesh and others with a priceless memory of a lifetime. I have seen that Swamishri has never cared for the lack of facilities for him when it comes to pleasing the youths.

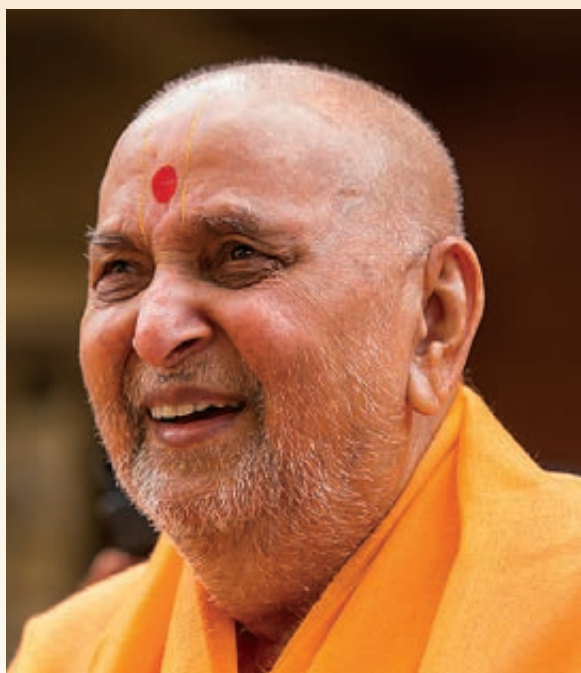
Years ago, an occasion left a deep imprint on my mind of Swamishri's humility and simplicity. It is as fresh as ever. The incident dates back to 1967. At that time, an Akshar-Purushottam mandir had come up in the village of Kantharia near Limbdi, and the devotees of the village had gone to Gondal to invite Yogiji Maharaj for the *murti-pratishtha* rituals. Yogiji Maharaj directed, "Take Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami to Kantharia." Thus, Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami came to Kantharia. A three-day *parayan* was also organized before the *murti-pratishtha*. Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami used to give discourses in the morning and evening.

One afternoon, after the morning discourses were over, Pramukh Swami visited the kitchen. Devcharan Swami was rolling *puris* but there was no one to fry them. Pramukh Swami saw this and he inverted a large tin container and sat upon it to fry the *puris*. One who was to consecrate the *murti* the next day was frying *puris* for the devotees. One could see that he had no ego as the President of the Sanstha or as one giving religious discourses. Thus, I saw Swamishri as a servant. I was a youth at that time, but his way of life left an indelible imprint on my mind which has remained as strong as ever even many decades later.

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In 1995 Swamishri's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday (Amrut Mahotsav) was to be celebrated in Mumbai in two phases. The first phase was from 27 to 29 November and the second phase from 2 to 4 December. The first phase was to be attended by some devotees of India and all the devotees from abroad. Also, with Swamishri's consent, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vidyanagar Chhatralaya was to be celebrated on 30 November at the Amrut Mahotsav venue in Mumbai. The first phase of the Mahotsav ended on 29 November at 11 p.m. Thousands of devotees had attended the three-day celebration. Due to his busy schedule during this period, Swamishri could not meet all the devotees individually. Swamishri felt sorry for this. He also expressed his regret about this during his blessings on the last day of the celebration, "I desire to meet all the devotees but I have not been able to do so. So please forgive me for that. We are always together." While uttering these words his voice became choked with emotion.

After attending the Mahotsav, the devotees were to depart from Mumbai the next morning. It was quite natural that the devotees who had come from abroad would wish to see Swamishri. On the other hand, Swamishri was scheduled to come to the Mahotsav venue at 10 a.m. the next morning for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Vidyanagar Chhatralaya. We were waiting for



Swamishri, but a message came that Swamishri would not be able to come. We were flummoxed momentarily. Then we took solace that since many devotees who were to leave Mumbai desired to meet Swamishri, what could Swamishri do? But surprisingly, another message came about 10 minutes later that Swamishri was coming. All the youths became ecstatic. Swamishri arrived. Swamishri asked, "What's the agenda?" Swamishri was informed that he was to speak first and then the youths would come for his darshan. Though he was very busy, Swamishri said, "I will sit, even if there is another stage presentation." We told Swamishri, "It would be enough if you remain for two presentations." Swamishri addressed the youth assembly then met all of them personally. He also met some of the youths individually. We were touched and left humbled by Swamishri's abundant grace.

It has always been witnessed that Swamishri's relationship with the students of BAPS Chhatralaya, Vidyanagar, has all along been that of a kin. Thinking of the immense love Swamishri has given, thousands of youths are moved to tears and serve him with dedication. ♦



# HE SEES YOGI MAHARAJ IN ALL

Sadhu Yogiswarupdas, Rajkot



**H**is Holiness Yogiji Maharaj came to Gadhada in 1967 after the Holi festival. I went there for his darshan with a friend. One day he went to the Sahasra Dhara (a holy pool of water) for a bath. At that time, he sprinkled some sanctified water on our heads and told me, “You have to become a sadhu. Say that you will.” I said, “I will.” Getting very pleased, he blessed me by tapping his hand on my back.

The time to obey his wish arrived in 1968 in Nadiad, on the occasion of Yogiji Maharaj’s 77<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. I went there for my *diksha* (initiation). I saw Pramukh Swami Maharaj after his puja at Ishwarbhai’s bungalow. A sadhu introduced me to him. I offered prostrations to him and touched his feet. I sat near him and gave him details about my studies and family. Then, he began to instruct me lovingly, “You have to become a sadhu to please Yogi Bapa.

All this is for *moksha*. Our goal is only one – Yogi Bapa. Attach yourself to him only. Act only according to his directions. Do *seva* and study Sanskrit to please Yogi Maharaj. Furthermore, giving and hearing discourses and reading our shastras should also be done to please Yogi Bapa and also stick to saintliness.” He instructed me for about 25 minutes and that was the first *diksha* of my life. His selfless love for me and his faith and devotion towards Yogiji Maharaj touched me.

Three days after that, Yogiji Maharaj initiated five youths as *parshads*, including me. After his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration the next day, he left to consecrate the *murtis* of a *hari* mandir in a neighbouring village. I was also there. The next day we were all scheduled to leave for Mumbai by bus. The bus came at 5 p.m. to pick up Swamishri and the sadhus. Yogiji Maharaj called out loudly at the sadhus, “Board the bus”, and then sat on the seat besides the driver. Then he would hold the hand of the sadhu boarding the bus, ask his name and bless him. He held my hand also. He asked me my name. I said, “Narayan Bhagat.” He broke into laughter at that and told me, “Since you are going to Mumbai, obey the instructions of Pramukh Swami. Do as he asks you. Dedicate yourself in listening to *katha*, and in doing *seva* and studies. It’s good that you came and have become a renunciate. You will be happy if you obey Pramukh Swami’s instructions. Now you may go.” So saying he blessed me thrice on the back. Thereafter, he gave me the sadhu *diksha* in 1968 at Gondal on the occasion of Sharad Purnima. At the time of giving me a new name, he asked me, “Have you pleased Pramukh Swami?” I said, “Yes, Bapa.”

Then, giving me the name of “Yogiswarupdas”, he began to smile. I was just joining as a sadhu of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and Yogiji Maharaj consolidated my direction and goal as a sadhu – to please Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

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In January 1971, Yogiji Maharaj was being treated for his last illness at the Bhatia Hospital in Mumbai. We, the young sadhus, were curious to know about the health of Yogiji Maharaj and about what type of treatment he was undergoing. So, Pramukh Swami used to inform us every night what happened at the hospital, who gave the medicine and which medicine was given and that Yogi Bapa was feeling well.

Once, Swamishri said, “Everybody turn one more *mala* daily so that Yogi Bapa gets well soon.” I also started doing it. Then Yogi Bapa

left for Akshardham. But I continued with the *mala*.

In December 1972 we were on the special train pilgrimage with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. One day, Swamishri held an assembly on the platform at Delhi railway station. I gave my *mala* to Swamishri so that it would be sanctified by him. Swamishri turned the *mala*. The assembly concluded after half an hour and I went to Swamishri to collect my *mala*. Placing the *mala* in my hands, he asked, “Do you turn one *mala* more everyday?”

I was astonished to hear that. I told him, “Yes, Swami. After Yogi Bapa left for Akshardham, I have continued to turn one *mala* more.” I had not told anyone about it. Yet, Swamishri knew it from his divine power and expressed his great pleasure at it. ♦



## SWAMISHRI IS ABOVE DEHBHAV

Sadhu Yagnavallabhdas, Edison, New Jersey, USA



In 1998, Swamishri felt slightly indisposed. Then he recovered and it seemed that there was nothing wrong with his health. Yet, there was some doubt about a malfunction in his heart. Doctors in Mumbai examined his heart, but they did not find anything serious about it.

Swamishri was to come to the USA around that time for a satsang tour. So, Swamishri’s medical examination reports were dispatched to New York. It was decided that further medical examination would be done when Swamishri came to the USA. Swamishri arrived in New York on 5 July by a non-stop flight from Mumbai. Despite a 20-hour flight, Swamishri looked quite at ease.

The next day I asked Swamishri, “We have scheduled your travelling after your medical examination. What shall we do about it?”

Swamishri said quite casually, “The *vicharan* should be scheduled as planned. I have no problems, but the doctors have a doubt. So let there be a medical examination for their satisfaction.”

The following day, on 7 July, Swamishri’s angiogram was taken at the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York. Dr Moses was alarmed on receiving the report and said, “Four coronary arteries are blocked and it is as if Swamishri is sleeping on a volcano. Anything could happen at any moment. If my father were in his place, I would not take him out of this angiography lab and get a bypass surgery done right now.”

So, as advised by the doctors, the decision for a bypass surgery was taken immediately. Dr Subramaniam, an internationally acclaimed cardiac surgeon, operated upon Swamishri.

I had to remain at the New York mandir to take care of the local inquiries and messages received from all over.

After the surgery on 7 July, we got an opportunity on 9 July to have Swamishri's darshan at the hospital. Swamishri was sleeping when we went in the evening to the ICU room at the hospital. We could see clearly that a long, vertical incision on his chest was stitched with staples. There were electrodes and wires on his chest to monitor his heart function and medicines were being administered intravenously in his left hand.

We got nervous on seeing Swamishri in such a condition. Swamishri was being looked after by three male nurses. On seeing us, Dr Kiranbhai Doshi from Mumbai, standing nearby, told Swamishri, "Sadhus have come to see you."

Swamishri asked for his glasses and began to lovingly inquire about our health, looking at us as if we were very important. He looked at me and said, "Yagnavallabh has come." Then, on seeing Haridarshan Swami, he tried to lift his hand with intravenous tubes to bless him. On seeing Vivekmurti Swami, he said, "Bakul, you too have come?" Thus, Swamishri greeted us all, addressing us by our names.

Then he began to ask me, "Where have you come from?" I said, "Bapa! From New York mandir."

"What's going on there?" he asked.

I replied, "Bapa! Today is Guru Purnima. So, Viveksagar Swami is delivering a discourse."

Bapa said, "Are all the devotees well and happy?"

"Yes, Bapa," I said.

Today was the second day after the bypass surgery. A patient's lungs become weak due to bypass surgery and he can barely speak. Yet, Swamishri was speaking. So, we said, "Bapa! Now, don't speak. Take rest."

Then we came out and went to Thakorji's room. Some sadhus had tears in their eyes. All

the sadhus became emotional.

Any patient in this condition would feel drowsy because of the medicine. He would not think of anything except his pain, while we found that Swamishri had transcended bodily pain and discomfort. Not only that, he was lovingly inquiring about the health of his sadhus and devotees.

This was not the only such experience. He remained lighthearted even in his uncomfortable condition. He would crack jokes with the sadhus, doctors and male nurses and took care of them. So, the American doctors and medical staff were surprised and felt that they had never come across such a patient.

Thereafter, Swamishri stayed for two months at the house of Dr Mahendrabhai in Rye Town. During this period, we witnessed Swamishri's qualities of patience, tolerance, faith in God and love for the young and old.

I had heard many times in the *katha* that Swamishri is a Gunatit sadhu with steadfast intellect. I could see this daily during his stay here. Witnessing this virtue in him, I could realize that he is constantly beyond all feelings and attributes of *maya*. He is always God-centric. Yet, by his sheer grace, he accepts whatever we offer to him, out of our human feelings, to make us happy. And without caring for himself, he remains with us in our good and bad times, showering us with divine joy.

We would not experience joy in his company if he were to remain serious and not express feelings of joy and humour due to his highest spiritual state.

We simply cannot put in words what Swamishri has done for us.

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Time and again, I have been introduced to the divine virtues and personality of Swamishri either through hearing the divine episodes of Swamishri's life from the senior sadhus or reading such episodes myself.



Personally speaking, it is not my practice to find the divine virtues in Swamishri, but Swamishri has on many occasions made me experience them. I could see his divine personality in them which I have described here.

There is an Upanishadic story about one guru who gave fruits to three of his disciples and instructed them to eat them where no one could see them. In the evening, two disciples went to see the guru and told him that they had eaten the fruit in a cave and in privacy where no one could see them. One disciple, however, had not eaten the fruit. He replied, “God is omnipresent and so he can see everywhere. I could not eat the fruit because God could see me wherever I went.”

Like God, Aksharbrahman or the Gunatit sadhu’s influence is also all-pervading.

Gunatitanand Swami has also said that there are three kinds of birds: the first hatches an egg with the warmth of its body, the second hatches it with its sight and the third hatches it by mere thought, though it is far from the egg.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a Gunatit sadhu who can also nurture his disciples with mere thought, guiding them and uplifting them spiritually. Our life is controlled by him. Some of the many experiences I have had are described below.

\* \* \*

In 1976, Swamishri celebrated Shri Hari Jayanti in Ahmedabad. It had been hardly six months since I had joined the BAPS as a youth. The next morning, Swamishri was performing his puja in the mandir hall in the presence of about 150 devotees.

After the puja, Swamishri was throwing the sanctified flowers offered in his puja to the devotees. They felt blessed on receiving the flowers. I was sitting at the back that day. A thought arose in my mind, expecting a flower from Swamishri. But Swamishri did not even look at me.

I consoled myself that I was still new to the Satsang and Swamishri doesn’t even know me. May be, I would get that opportunity in future.



After puja, Swamishri was going for *shangar arti*. On the way, three youths, including myself, were standing. As Swamishri came nearer to us, he suddenly held my hand and gave me three rose flowers he had kept in his hand. Before I could realize that, he walked ahead.

I was quite new to the Satsang then. So, I had not even heard of an inner spiritual power known as *antaryami* (all-knowing), but I was happy that my wish had been fulfilled. And I could at least understand that Swamishri is great.

I had several such experiences when I went to the USA in 1977. It was as if Swamishri remained present on every occasion of my life, though he was far away in India.

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In 1991, a month-long Cultural Festival of India was held in New Jersey, USA, in the presence of Swamishri. I was in charge of the volunteers force during this festival. About 3,400 volunteers offered their services at this

festival.

We used to join in our *seva* in the morning, after having darshan of Swamishri's puja. Then we didn't go for his darshan during the day. After 10 days, it was decided to take group photos of volunteers with Swamishri. So, I went to Swamishri for his permission.

Swamishri was having lunch in a trailer on the festival site called Swaminarayan Nagar. After his meal, Swamishri asked me, "Have you come for some work?"

I said, "Yes Bapa! We wish to take group photos of volunteers from each department. After your puja in the morning, there will be one group ready for it. Once you come, one group photo will be taken. Then there will be two more groups. All this will delay your breakfast by 15 minutes. Will this be convenient to you?"

Swamishri at once said, "Yes, it is convenient."

Then he gave a memorable look at me and asked, "You talk of taking photographs, but have you taken the photo in your heart?"

I said, "Bapa! I have not yet captured one in my heart."

Swamishri said, "Why do you say such weak words? If the photo is not there, can you do *seva* like this?"

I said, "Bapa! I am not competent to take your photo. It is your sheer grace that you remain in my heart and inspire me to do *seva*."

Bapa said, "That's right. He is there in your heart, so you could do the *seva*. Otherwise, can you do *seva* like this without him?"

I said, "Bapa, that's right."

Thus Swamishri clearly stated that he is behind whatever happens in our lives and we are mere puppets.

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In the year 2000, BAPS sadhus based in the USA came to India for satsang with Swamishri.

Swamishri was on a pilgrimage in south India. We also joined him. Swamishri spent New Year's Day (1 January) in Chennai and thereafter

he arrived in Bangalore.

The sadhus went to the ISKCON mandir there for darshan with Swamishri. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (Thakorji) was also with us. After a few minutes, Swamishri told the attendant sadhu, "Now, you may take Thakorji to our lodgings and offer *thal* to him. I will come after some time."

At that time I was a little mentally preoccupied with the administrative set-up of the BAPS Sanstha in America, which was under consideration. There were some spiritual points also on which I had doubts. I was feeling confused about asking Swamishri about them. And there was no possibility of asking him privately. Then I thought how would it feel if I asked? Would it be fair? After this mental struggle, I decided not to ask anything. On second thoughts, I decided that I would ask only if Swamishri asked me on his own and if there was privacy. But I felt that this would not be possible since Swamishri would have lunch and take rest after coming back from the ISKCON mandir.

When we reached our lodgings, we learnt that Thakorji had not yet arrived. Actually, the attendant sadhu had left with Thakorji 30 minutes before we had. The driver had forgotten the way to our lodgings.

So, we were waiting for Thakorji to arrive.

Viveksagar Swami was reading something in Swamishri's room. And I was collecting the fax message from the room facing Swamishri's room. Suddenly, Swamishri entered the room.

He asked me, "What are you doing?"

"Bapa, there is a fax message from the USA," I replied.

"What does it say?" Swamishri asked.

I replied, "I am collecting the pages. I will let you know after reading them."

Swamishri said, "No, you come to my room."

Saying that, he went to his room and sat on the sofa. I sat at his feet and gave him the details of the fax message. Viveksagar Swami also left

Swamishri's room. After finishing with the fax message, I stopped. Swamishri looked at me suggestively.

He asked me, "Why have you stopped at that? You wish to ask me about something! You may ask now."

I was quite astonished by this, and relieved also. I asked him everything that I had to. Swamishri guided me. It was a great relief. His divine grace that day became a memory of a lifetime for me.

Thus, Swamishri is *antaryami* (all-knowing). I have experienced a number of times that he is always with me giving me warmth and guidance, and showing me the way.

I have also experienced several times how simple he is, even though he is *antaryami*.

It has happened several times that while thinking Swamishri already knows about administrative matters they were not presented before him completely. At that time he would ask for details, pass a remark and teach us the practical way of making a clear and complete presentation.

He takes care of every disciple this way and nurtures him. It is our great fortune to have such a guru and that he has accepted us.

\* \* \*

In 1999, Swamishri's 79<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary was being celebrated at Tithal. I was enjoying the wonderful programme with the other sadhus.

Suddenly, my name was announced with the names of other *kothari* sadhus calling them on stage to offer various garlands to Swamishri. These garlands were made by different Satsang *mandals* with devotion.

For me there was a weighty garland of pearls to offer. On seeing it, I felt hesitant, thinking that it would be too heavy for Swamishri. I thought of getting another one. Then I thought that if not me, it would go to somebody else. So, what I had got, thanks to God's will, was okay.

When Swamishri saw the garland in my hand

he smiled and said, “Yes, here is a garland of diamonds and pearls from America.”

I said, “Bapa! These are artificial pearls. Kindly, look at them so that we may get real pearls of wisdom and the project of Akshardham in New Delhi gets completed early.” Saying that, I garlanded Swamishri and he began to utter words of blessings.

At this time I experienced that Swamishri was talking to me so attentively and with closeness, as if an assembly of thousands of devotees was not there! It was as if only the two of us were there. It seemed as if Swamishri was untouched by the majestic celebration of his birthday. Only a totally self-effacing person can act like this.

Besides, I saw that Swamishri was speaking to all the other sadhus who came to garland him. On inquiry, I learnt that Anadswarup Swami

offered a *pavitra* garland. Speaking to him, Swamishri said, “You are light in weight and the garland is also lightweight.”

Mumbai’s Premprakash Swami (P.P. Swami) was incidentally given a garland made of chocolates to offer to Swamishri. On seeing him, Swamishri cracked a joke, saying, “P.P. would bring only a garland of PP (chocolates).”

Bhagvatpriya Swami from Kolkata brought a garland made of white material by Bengali artists. On seeing it, Swamishri began to ask details about it.

Thus, Swamishri gave blissful memories to many sadhus and each of them experienced that in Swamishri’s eyes there was neither a mammoth gathering of devotees nor the grandeur of the festival. Each one felt that there were only the two of them. ♦



## PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S DIVINE NECTARINE LOOK

Sadhu Brahmaviharidas, Ahmedabad



**S**ometimes Swamishri’s divine outlook is evident even in short dialogues with him, which really are deeply moving. Some incidents that come to mind are as follows:

### LETTERS OF LOVE

23 April 2010, Ahmedabad

That night I had to leave for a satsang tour abroad. So, at 6.30 p.m. I went to Swamishri’s living quarters to take his leave. It was all quiet there. The corridors were almost dark. Only Swamishri’s room was illuminated. Dharmacharan Swami was sitting in front of Swamishri, who was reading a letter. I was very surprised to see Swamishri absorbed in reading a letter. I went nearer to Swamishri and could not resist saying, “Bapa! You have a constant pile of letters to read. Don’t you ever get tired!”

Swamishri didn’t say anything and continued reading.

I again said, “Swamishri! You read so many letters which, I think, are more than any government officer would read.” Before I finished saying, Swamishri looked at me and said, “These are not letters from an office. These are letters of love from the devotees. Reading them is not work, it is *seva*.” In Swamishri’s mind, reading letters and solving the problems of devotees tantamount to service and devotion. They are not a burden to him.

### MOKSHA IN KALIYUG

24 September 2009, Ahmedabad

A meeting with Swamishri was going on about the construction of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Kolkata. At that time Swamishri asked

whether the small road in front of the mandir would be broadened into a large one.

I said it had been almost decided to make it bigger, but the people in the neighbouring area were not unanimous in supporting it. That was why it had not been finalized.

Viveksagar Swami taking cue from that, vividly described our contemporary society (one of disorder, anarchy, murder, distrust, divorce, addictions and disputes) in such a way that the atmosphere became gloomy. Then he himself said, “What can be done? This is Kaliyug at its worst. So, it will remain so.” At that time I told Swamishri with sadness, “Bapa! I feel that I should not have been born in Kaliyug. It would have been better if I were born in Satyug.”

Swamishri at once said, “Then you would not have got *moksha*.”

I was dazed on hearing that. Then, Swamishri added, “Then *moksha* would never have been possible.” Then he said, smiling, “Because of the chaos in Kaliyug one remembers God time and again and if one obeys the instruction of the Satpurush, *moksha* is attained. Otherwise *moksha* is not possible.”

We have an illusion that worship, devotion and *moksha* are due to the era, atmosphere and prevalent situation. But as a matter of fact, we can have *moksha* only with the help of Bhagwan and his God-realized Sadhu. If the two are with us, even Kaliyug means more than Satyug.

#### MILLIMETRE BY MILLIMETRE

17 January 2011, Mumbai

Mr. Ravichandran, Director of the prestigious IIM (Indore), came for Swamishri’s puja darshan. When Swamishri came on the assembly hall’s stage to perform his morning puja Nirbhayswarup Swami placed the platform on which the puja was laid out along with Thakorji in front of Swamishri. Then Swamishri, with the gesture of his right hand, indicated to move the platform a little. Then with the gesture of his



left hand, he indicated to further adjust the platform. On seeing Swamishri’s subtle indications to adjust the puja platform, Ravichandran said, “If he has the stamina to align his daily duties millimetre by millimetre, I am sure he will not allow your institution to deviate even by an inch.”

That is his stamina at the age of 90.

Mr. Ravichandran’s sentence was still in mind when I went to take Swamishri’s leave. Swamishri said, “So, we will meet on Vasant Panchmi.”

I said, “When? Around Vasant Panchmi?”

Swamishri said, “Don’t say it ambiguously.”

Then he said, “Before Vasant Panchmi.”

I said, “Bapa! In Gujarati we use the word *aaspas* (meaning around).”

Swamishri said, “Your Gujarati is faulty. Around Vasant Panchmi means both, before and after. My thoughts and speech are clear. Not both before and after. Before means before, not after.”

Not only work, but Swamishri's speech and conduct are perfect, millimetre by millimetre. Thus we find perfection in the Sanstha and satsang.

#### NOTHING AT THE COST OF GURU BHAKTI

Some time ago, Swamishri held an urgent meeting in Ahmedabad. At the appointed time, all the member sadhus came, but for some reason, only Narayanmuni Swami could not come. We were waiting for him. When he came, flashing a smile and gesturing a cross mark with his right finger, Swamishri said, "Muni! Fail."

Since we were a little late, I shortened the *jai* (acclamation) of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru *parampara* to "Swaminarayan Bhagwan *ni jai*, Akshar Purushottam Maharaj *ni jai* and Pramukh Swami Maharaj *ni jai*." Swamishri looked at me smiling and gestured a cross mark with his right finger, "Brahmavihari, fail." The meeting started only after we said the complete *jais*, including those of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. We got a clear indication that Swamishri likes to do everything on time, but not at the cost of the Sampradaya's tradition, guru bhakti and worship.

#### FOUND AN ANSWER

1 September 2011, Mumbai

On 31 August 2011, the *shila* puja ceremony for the Akshardham to be built in America was held. On the next day, at 10.30 a.m., Swamishri, Ishwarcharan Swami and myself were together.

I said, "Bapa! I have been feeling very joyous for the last two days."

Swamishri asked, "Why?"

"Because, I have found an answer to the question we have been asking you for many years," I replied.

"Which one?" Swamishri asked.

I said, "You ascribe every work of yours to the *sankalp* (wish) of Yogiji Maharaj. That is your guru bhakti. The London Mandir, Akshardham

in Gandhinagar and Akshardham on the banks of Yamuna River in New Delhi can well be understood as Yogiji Maharaj's resolutions. But the Akshardham to be built in America is truly your own resolution. That is not Yogi Bapa's resolution."

Swamishri crossed his hands and said with a soft smile, "Why not? Have you seen Yogiji Maharaj making resolutions? Ishwarcharan Swami has seen him. Isn't it so Ishwar Swami?"

Ishwarcharan Swami said, "Yes, Bapa."

Then Swamishri said, "Yogi Bapa made resolutions every day. He used to chant the Swaminarayan mantra *dhun* so that the number of sadhus and mandirs increase and also for satsang to grow."

Then narrowing his eyes at me, Swamishri asked me, "What does that mean? His resolution that mandirs increase includes all mandirs in India as well as abroad. All the mandirs are a part of this one resolution which means that all the new BAPS mandirs made in India, the UK and those that may be raised even on the moon are due to Yogi Bapa's resolution. His words that 'number of mandirs increase' includes all the mandirs that stand today and that are raised in future."

Ishwarcharan Swami said while addressing me, "All the three *swarups* (forms) are one. Whether it is the resolution of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj or Pramukh Swami, they belong to the same Gunatit *swarup*."

Swamishri said, "That's alright, Ishwar Swami. But the way I put it is also correct."

I was quite astonished. Swamishri's guru bhakti is profound. Often, Swamishri tells us or writes to us, "You have become sadhus thanks to the resolution of Yogi Bapa!" Though we have not met Yogiji Maharaj, we are included in Yogiji Maharaj's resolution that the number of sadhus increase. This understanding is based on Swamishri's faith, devotion and logic.

Swamishri has dedicated all his projects to the wish of Yogiji Maharaj. ♦



# PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S PARABHAKTI

Sadhu Shrutiprakashdas, Gandhinagar



Veda Vyas says:

“Ālodiya sarva shāstrāni vichārya cha punaha  
punaha; Idam ekam sunishpannam dheyayo  
Nārāyano Harihi.”

It means that after deeply studying all the shastras and thinking over and over again, the truth was realized that one should by all means worship Narayan.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachanamrut Jetalpur 5, “There is nothing greater than worshipping God.”

These words can be experienced in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Though he manages all the activities of the BAPS, his priorities are God, and devotion to God and guru.

There was a *yagna* on 5 February 2003 on the occasion of the consecration of the *murtis* in the newly built BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir adjacent to the Akshardham complex in New Delhi. I inspected all the arrangements in the *yagnashala* till 2 a.m. the previous night and then went to sleep. Then the other sadhus placed the *murtis* on the altar of the *yagnashala*. Usually Swamishri arrives for the *yagna* after 9 o'clock, but he told us the previous day that he would come at 7.30 a.m. So, we started making the final arrangements at 6 a.m.

Swamishri arrived at the appointed time. Before he took his seat, he looked all around. He has a knack of inspecting the arrangements in one look. Because of the odd size of the *mandap*, the main *kund* on the stage and the centre point of the *yagna mandap* were not in place. The *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were placed with reference to the stage as the centre point. There were four *kunds* on the stage, but because of the odd

size of the *mandap*, the main *kund* was not in the centre. As a result, the principal *murtis* were a little away from the main *yagna kund*. Somehow, those who placed the *murtis* made such a mistake that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *murti* was placed facing the main *kund*. I had failed to notice this because I was busy making the final arrangements.

When Swamishri came near the main *kund*, he immediately told me, “Look there. Don't you know how to place the *murtis*?”

I looked and noticed the blunder. There was no way I could defend myself. The *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami were placed away from the main *kund*. So I confessed my mistake. Swamishri insisted strongly that we remove his *murti* and place the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj instead. I spoke to Bhaktijivan Swami about it. He said, “The *murtis* have been fitted with iron angles. So it will take time.” But Swamishri went on insisting to replace his *murti*.

The sadhus immediately placed Ghanshyam Maharaj's *murti* in place of Swamishri's *murti*. Only thereafter did Swamishri perform the rituals peacefully and happily.

Later, at noon, when Swamishri was having his meal, I apologized to Swamishri about my mistake and asked him to forgive me.

Swamishri replied seriously and firmly, “This type of mistake should not happen again. You must understand that the more you distance God away, the more distanced you will become.”

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God does take pride of place in Swamishri's life, but that God is not only present in



Akshardham, but also resides in the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj who travels along with him and offers an opportunity to serve him. I experienced his divine attachment to Harikrishna Maharaj on one occasion. There was a *yagna* on 27 March 2004 on the occasion of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in a new BAPS mandir built in Nadiad where Shriji Maharaj had met Bishop Heber.

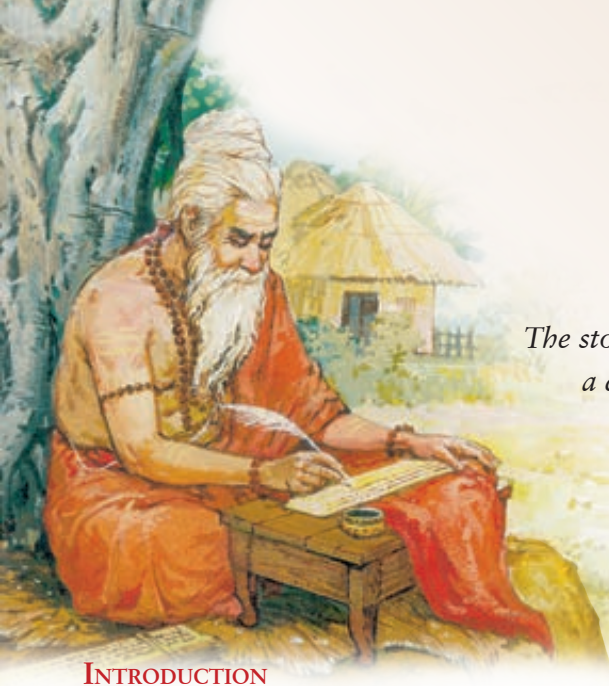
Swamishri arrived half an hour earlier at the *yagnashala*. After applying the *tilak* and tying the auspicious thread on Swamishri's wrist, the *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj began. Harikrishna Maharaj was to be bathed with *panchamrut* (mixture of milk, curds, ghee, honey and sugar). A deep bowl was obtained and the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was installed on a basil leaf inside it. I held the pedestal under Harikrishna Maharaj's feet with two fingers so that it remained in place during the bathing ritual. After the *panchamrut* bath, I thought of lifting the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj a little by bringing my fingers under

the arms of Harikrishna Maharaj so that it would be easier for Swamishri to bathe the *murti*. But while doing so, I lost the balance of the *murti* on my fingers and Thakorji fell flat in the bowl of *panchamrut*. Swamishri saw this and he at once lifted Thakorji. He was pained and the corners of his eyes turned red. It would have been alright if he had rebuked me for the mistake. But he didn't. On the contrary, he turned very sentimental. He turned the *murti* towards me and said, "Touch his feet. Touch them (and ask for forgiveness)." I folded my hands and apologized. But I can never forget his deep devotion towards Harikrishna Maharaj. ♦

# Valmiki

## The First Poet

*The story of Valmiki is one of radical transformation – from a criminal to a great rishi who wrote the epic Ramayan...*



### INTRODUCTION

‘Valmika’ means an anthill in Sanskrit. The sage, who composed the great epic, Ramayan, under the inspiration of Lord Brahma and Brahmarshi Narad, got the name after intense austerities. During his austerities termites built a mound around him. Before he became a sage, Valmiki led a life of crime as a robber called Ratnakar. Originally he belonged to the family of Bhrigu Rishi. But as a boy, he got separated from his parents in a forest and they could not trace him despite vigorous search. Finally, they gave up the futile search thinking their son may have fallen prey to wild animals. Actually, the missing child fell into the hands of a childless robber couple. They took kindly to him and brought him up as their own son. That is how Ratnakar began his career as a robber. (*Adhyatma Ramayan*).

Ratnakar married a *shudra* woman and had children by her.

One day he had an encounter with the seven rishis in a forest and that changed his life for the better and turned him into a great sage and a premier saint-poet. Ratnakar tried to rob the sages of their clothes. They tried to convince the robber that his activities were very sinful. It was for the first time that somebody was speaking to him

in such gentle language. Initially, their words did not seem to have any effect on Ratnakar, who thought what he was doing was in the best interests of his aged parents and other members of his family. After reasoning with the robber, the sages noticed a change in his gruff behaviour. The robber said he was supporting his family by looting wayfarers and that he was about to return empty-handed when he saw the munis. They at once drove home the advantage. They explained to him that his justification did not absolve him of the resultant sin. Then followed a long dialogue where they dinned into Ratnakar’s ears the enormity of his criminal activities. In the end, the rishis suggested a way out to the robber. He should go to his family and find out whether they would be willing to share the sin.

### SAGES’ ASSURANCE

After getting an assurance from the sages that they would be there awaiting the reply, Ratnakar went home to consult them. Their replies came as an eye-opener to him. His family said they would not share the burden of his sins. The crestfallen robber reported the failure of his mission to the sages.

Then he fell at the feet of the sages. They assured him that Ram would certainly save him.

According to another version, it was Devarshi Narad who reformed the robber. The other details are more or less the same. In the case of Narad, it was his *vina* that Ratnakar wanted to rob. The robber was reluctant to go home as he thought that the sage would run away if

he went home to consult his family. Sensing the hesitation, Narad volunteered to allow himself to be tied to a tree to facilitate the consultation.

According to the Uttara Kanda of Valmiki Ramayan, Valmiki was the tenth son of Prachetas and a friend of Emperor Dasarath. The Mahabharat and Purans describe Valmiki as a Bhargav. Such was the lineage of the personage who is acclaimed as the Adikavi (original poet). Macdonnell, an indologist and Boden professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, says, “Perhaps no work of world literature, secular in its origin, has ever produced so profound an influence on a people as the Ramayan.” According to Swami Vivekanand, “Ramayan and Mahabharat are two encyclopaedias of the ancient Aryan life and wisdom, portraying an ideal civilization, which humanity has yet to aspire after.” Even in our own day, Mahatma Gandhi, who is known as the architect of India’s independence from British rule, asked his followers to aim at Ramrajya. That has remained an ideal ever since.

Now coming to the main story, the sages then administered Ratnakar the Ram mantra. The robber, however, pronounced it as ‘Mara’ after changing the order of letters. And, after repeating it constantly for one thousand years, he got it right. But by then the termites had built the mound around his body. The sinner was thus saved after a long lapse of time through Ram’s grace and thanks to the guidance provided by the sages. Finally, the sages came on the scene once again and opened the termite hill. The penitent sinner came out of the anthill. The sages say, “You have a rebirth, you shall hereafter be known as Valmiki” (Adyatmya Ramayan). This episode is also mentioned in the Skand Puran. But there Ratnakar’s name before becoming a rishi is mentioned as Agnisarman.

### SIGNIFICANT VISIT

According to another version Narad paid a second visit to see how Valmiki was faring in

his new role as *acharya*. By then Valmiki had disciples, chief among them being Bharadwaj, who was to become a distinguished rishi. Valmiki has been called a *kulapati* (chancellor). That title signifies an *acharya* who has 10,000 disciples under him. A visit by a luminary like Narad was always treated as a special event. After paying due obeisance to him, Valmiki asked a question, “O venerable Devarshi! You move around a great deal. I would like you to enlighten me about one thing, ‘Is there anywhere a man who is valorous and, versed in the Vedas and Vedangas, of pleasing countenance, and other such virtues?’”

The list was a long one. In other words Valmiki wanted to know a person endowed with noble qualities, a veritable paragon of virtue. Narad had already met such a noble soul in the course of his wanderings. He also knew why Valmiki was asking the question. He was destined to write about such a high-souled person. Without hesitation the great sage replied, “Yes, I have met such a paragon of virtue. He is Shri Ramchandra, the king of Ayodhya.”

### BRIEF OUTLINE

Then Narad gave a brief account of Ram’s career: his near-accession to the throne; his 14-year exile due to the devious machinations of Manthara, the personal attendant of Kaikeyi; the death of his father on hearing of Ram’s departure to the forest, accompanied by his wife, Sita, and faithful half-brother Lakshman; Bharat’s trip to Ram’s forest exile, Ram’s reluctance to cut short his exile; Bharat’s insistence on ruling as a regent after placing Ram’s wooden sandals on the throne of Ayodhya; Ram’s meeting with rishis like Bharadwaj, Gautam, etc.; killing of *rakshas*; kidnapping of Sita by Ravan; discovery of Sita by Hanuman after crossing the ocean; the invasion of Lanka and the killing of Ravan; the yeoman services rendered by Hanuman, before and during the war with Ravan; installation of Vibhishan on the throne of Lanka; and the liberation of Sita. The

brief account ends with Ram's coronation as king of Ayodhya. The narrative as intended succeeds in kindling Valmiki's interest in the hero who forms the central theme of the great epic.

### A DESPICABLE ACT

After taking leave of Narad, the sage went to the banks of river Tamasa and witnessed a hunter's cruel deed in killing a male crane. He had gone to the Tamasa for afternoon ablutions. As he was coming out of the river after bathing, the sage witnessed the ghastly scene. He was greatly moved by the piteous cries of its mate. He lost self-restraint and cursed the hunter in the following verse:

*No fame is thine for endless time,  
Because, base outcast, of thy crime,  
Whose cruel hand was fain to slay,  
One of this gentle pair at play!*

The Sanskrit original is in the famed *anusthup chand*, the metre in which the entire Ramayan has been composed. It is for the first time that the metre makes its appearance in this form in the Sanskrit literature. The metre is to be found initially in Vedic prosody. After the crane incident the metre has become part of ornate poetry in Sanskrit.

The ghastly scene and its aftermath was a bitter experience for a gentle sage like Valmiki. The sage then plunged into a despondent mood. He, however, pronounced, "Let this utterance made by me while I was stricken with grief, set in four metrical verses, each containing an equal number of letters (eight) and possessing the rhythm of a song that can be sung to a lute, be accepted as (real) poetry and not otherwise."

Valmiki's talented pupil Bharadwaj, who followed his master like a shadow, committed to memory the couplet spontaneously uttered by the sage while in grief.

### BRAHMA'S ASSURANCE

The sage continued to brood over the incident

till one day Brahma appeared before the sage and inspired him to compose the epic in the metre in which he had expressed his grief, after Valmiki had recited the couplet before Brahma. That is how the story of Ram came to be composed in verse by the sage. Ramayan is regarded as *adi kavya* – the oldest epic. Pitamah Brahma assured the sage that he would get details of Ram's story and nothing of what he was going to write would be false. Armed with this assurance he began to compose the great epic. After the epic was composed it had to be broadcast. For this, the sage chose his disciples, Lav and Kush. They were none other than Sita's twin sons born while she was in exile forced upon her by Ram, to ward off gossip by an arrogant washerman. The boys were born at Valmiki's ashram where the sage gave shelter to their mother while she was carrying them. At the time of Ram's Ashvamedha *yagna*, Lav and Kush went to Ram's palace in Ayodhya and narrated the story of Ram in a melodious voice. Bhagwan Ram recognized them as his sons.

The place where the sage composed the Ramayan is believed to be at Bithur, near Kanpur.

Of the seven *kandas* it is believed that Valmiki himself wrote Ayodhya, Aranya, Kishkindha, Sundara and Yuddha kandas, (second to five). The other two *kands*, first and seventh, Bal and Uttarakands, are not in the Adi Ramayan written by Valmiki; it is believed that they were written subsequently as Valmiki has been described as a Puranic personage in them.

Ramayan or Ram's story is not a myth, but believed to be true by Hindus. Ram is not a fictitious character but worshipped as an incarnation of Bhagwan Vishnu. The story of the Ramayan has spread far and wide from Mongolia in far north to Indonesia in the south. Not all these are in Sanskrit. They are in the local dialects. Ram's life has been narrated in almost all Indian languages. This shows the hold the epic hero has on the minds of the people. ♦

# Heart Health

## Heart Disease

### Part 2



#### INTRODUCTION

Cardiovascular disease, also known as ‘heart disease’, is the number one cause of death globally. An estimated 17 million people die from it every year, which makes up 30% of all worldwide deaths. It has been projected that cardiovascular disease will remain the single leading cause of death even until the year 2030.

#### WHAT IS IT?

In cardiovascular disease, fatty material accumulates within the wall of arteries supplying oxygen to the heart muscle. This causes a narrowing of the blood vessels and leads to angina (chest pain). A heart attack occurs when these arteries become completely blocked, thus cutting off the oxygen supply to the heart muscle and causing permanent damage. A similar process occurs within the arteries supplying the brain, and can lead to stroke. Other arteries such as those in the abdomen or legs may also be affected.

#### SYMPTOMS OF HEART DISEASE

The most common symptoms include a feeling of heaviness or tightness in the chest, or breathlessness while doing light activity, such as, walking, or even at rest.

#### WHAT CAUSES HEART DISEASE?

There are many risk factors, some of which can be modified and others which cannot as shown below.

#### Risk Factors for Heart Disease

Modifiable	Non-modifiable
High blood pressure	Advancing age
Abnormal blood lipids	Family history
Diabetes	Gender
Physical inactivity	Ethnicity (e.g.,
Being overweight	being of Indian
Unhealthy diets	origin)
How you deal with stress	

Through simple lifestyle changes it is possible to reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Below is advice on how to manage the modifiable risk factors.

#### CONTROLLING BLOOD PRESSURE, CHOLESTEROL AND DIABETES

First and foremost, it is vital that these conditions are controlled, as they are shown to be very strong risk factors for developing heart disease. Firstly, a healthy diet and doing regular exercise helps control blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. One should also take any prescribed medication and have regular reviews with one’s doctor.

#### CHANGING THE WAY YOU EAT

- ◆ Reduce your total daily calorie intake by eating smaller portion sizes.
- ◆ Cut down on the total amount of fat you eat. For example, when using spreads on bread, use only a thin layer.
- ◆ Try to use less ghee or oil when cooking.

## Various Types of Fats and Examples of Foods They Occur In

Trans Fats	Saturated Fats	Monounsaturated Fats	Polyunsaturated Fats
Bad for health, avoid completely	Cut down or replace with better options	Better for health	Better for health
Pastries Cakes Biscuits Crackers Microwave popcorn Packaged snacks Hard margarines Foods containing 'hydrogenated oils/fats'	Ghee Coconut/palm oil Butter Cheese Biscuits Cakes Cream Whole-fat milk Ice cream	Olive/rapeseed oil Avocado Nuts and seeds - Almonds - Cashews - Hazelnuts - Peanuts - Pistachios Some margarines	Sunflower oil Corn oil Soya oil Nuts and seeds - Walnuts - Pine nuts - Sesame seeds - Sunflower seeds Some margarines

For example use a tablespoon to measure oil rather than pouring straight from the container, and gradually reduce the number of tablespoons used.

- ◆ Use semi-skimmed or skimmed milk instead of full-fat/whole milk.
- ◆ Reduce the amount of sweet food, including *mithai*, in your diet as these can contain hidden fats.
- ◆ Replace saturated and trans fats with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Try to completely avoid foods containing trans fats, which are formed when vegetable oils are hydrogenated, and used to make hard margarines and processed foods. See the table above for examples of foods with different types of fats.
- ◆ Read food labels which give information about the breakdown of fat types within the product: saturated, monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. There are also colour codes for the total amount of salt, sugar and fat in the product: red, amber and green. Red indicating higher amounts that are unhealthier foods.
- ◆ Reduce the amount of sugar you eat. If you add sugar to hot drinks try adding

less.

- ◆ Reduce the amount of salt used in cooking – add pepper, spices and lemon juice instead for flavour.
- ◆ Avoid adding extra salt to foods at the table. For adults no more than 6 grams a day of salt (about one teaspoonful) is recommended. Three-quarters of this is hidden in processed/packaged foods.
- ◆ Cut down on *samosas* and chips and other fried foods.
- ◆ Instead of frying, you could cook your food by oven-baking, grilling or steaming.
- ◆ Cut down on unhealthy snacks such as crisps, biscuits, *chevdo*, *sev* or *ganthiya* and try replacing them with fruit.
- ◆ Eat more fruits and vegetables – at least 5 different portions every day. Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried and juiced fruits and vegetables all count. One portion is equal to one hand-sized serving or:
  - One apple or pear
  - Two apricots or plums
  - Three heaped tablespoons of vegetables
  - A bowl of salad
  - A glass of fruit juice.
- ◆ Eat food high in fibre, such as lentils, *dal*, pulses, nuts, porridge, beans, fruits

and vegetables. These can help lower cholesterol and keep you full for longer, meaning you snack less.

- ◆ When hungry, eat starchy foods such as *rotli*, bread, rice – especially the wholegrain type.

### DO MORE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- ◆ Aim to regularly engage in physical activity for 30 minutes a day on at least 5 days of the week; for example, brisk walking, gardening, climbing stairs, cycling, swimming.
- ◆ This can be done all in one go, or at least 10 minutes at a time 3 times throughout the day. Gradually build up the amount of activity you do and try and fit it into your daily routine.
- ◆ You could walk rather than using a car.
- ◆ Get off the bus or the train one stop early and walk the rest of the way to your destination.
- ◆ Climb the stairs rather than using the lift.
- ◆ You need to make sure you feel warm and

slightly out of breath, but are still able to have a conversation.

### RECOGNIZE AND DEAL WITH STRESS

- ◆ It's important to learn how to relax and deal with stress effectively, so identify situations that make you feel stressed and avoid them if you can.
- ◆ Be realistic about your capabilities and learn to say 'no' to unnecessary demands.
- ◆ Going for a walk or practising relaxation exercises can help you reduce stress.
- ◆ Talk to a family member, friend or your doctor for advice if you feel overwhelmed.

### CONCLUSION

Heart disease is a very serious condition and is the number one cause of death worldwide. Fortunately, simple lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of developing the condition and prevent complications. It can be useful to have a medical check-up with your doctor or attend a medical screening session for an assessment and further advice. ◆

## PILGRIMAGE TO THE SACRED TIRTHS OF BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

# TIRTH JYOTI



*Tirth Jyoti* is a new series of DVDs by Swaminarayan Aksharpath featuring the places sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan throughout Gujarat. They contain specially captured footage of the villages, homes, artifacts and other places sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The first two DVDs are of the sanctified places in

the **Sorath** and **Dandhavya** (Uttar Gujarat) regions.

Pilgrimage to these holy places through these well-researched and beautifully edited DVDs, and enjoy the memories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine incidents.

**Commentary is available in Gujarati, Hindi and English.**

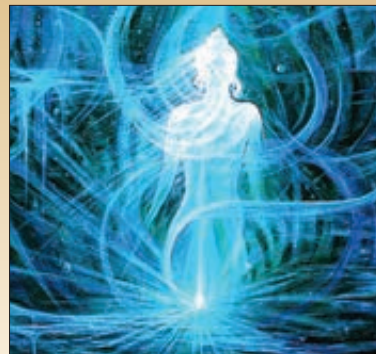
**Available from all BAPS bookstores**



Souls reincarnate in various bodies according to their karmas



Murti of Bhagwan Shri Krishna



Creation: God is the ultimate creator of everything

## FAQs On Hinduism

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

### 1. What is the Hindu concept of life after death or rebirth?

The principle of rebirth is called *punarjanma*. The law of karma is responsible for the apparent disparities in humans, namely, size, colour, varna (class), beauty, intelligence, social conditions and moral and spiritual inclinations. Our past karmas are responsible for our present existence and our present actions will shape our future existence.

There are many instances of people remembering details of their previous lives. Extraordinary talent or intelligence, too, exhibited at a very young age, like singing *ragas* of music perfectly without any formal training, remembering an entire book, solving difficult mathematical problems, etc. can only be attributed to the person's legacy of past births. Every individual is responsible for his or her action, and to reap the fruits of one's karmas one has to be born again and again.

Rebirth is necessary for the soul's spiritual elevation. Perfection or self-realization may not be achieved in one birth.

### 2. Why do Hindus worship sacred images or murtis?

*Murti-puja* is a valid method of worship

practised for millennia among most Hindu traditions or *sampradayas*.

*Murti-puja* provides a focus for worship and a reminder of God's virtues as described in the shastras. When a *murti* is consecrated in accordance with Vedic and Agamic rituals in mandirs that *murti* is believed to be the manifestation of the Divine. Thereafter, worship of the *murti* is believed to tantamount to direct worship of the deity. The devotee can then express and develop his or her devotional attachment to God in various ways. Because of God's *murti* the devotee is inspired and develops feelings of love, faith, humility, introspection, repentance, glory and indebtedness. He or she also experiences divinity and peace of mind by doing darshan of and meditating upon the sacred image. The devotee also prays and makes resolutions for self-improvement due to the physical presence of the sacred image.

### 3. What is the Hindu concept of creation?

With the cyclical concept of time, Hinduism propounds that the material world is not created once but it is a continuous process of creation and dissolution. Furthermore, our universe is considered to be one of countless universes.



Brahmins – the priests and teachers



Kshatriyas – the rulers and protectors

God creates and destroys them at different times. Creation proceeds progressively from subtle to gross, and dissolution from gross to subtle.

#### 4. How do Hindus view other religions?

Hinduism itself is a mosaic of different *sampradayas* practising different belief systems and worshipping various deities, yet still there is unity and harmony. Debates between different *sampradayas* have remained mostly verbal and have rarely resulted in violent conflicts. This same attitude is applied in the interaction of Hinduism with other religions. Throughout India's history communities of Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, Christians and Muslims have settled in India and been given the respect and freedom to worship and practise their faith. Hinduism respects all faiths and believes in interfaith harmony through the celebration of common principles.

#### 5. Who can become a Hindu?

Hinduism is a mosaic of different beliefs and practices. It has always welcomed noble thoughts from all directions. Therefore it has the capacity to appeal to and satisfy people of different spiritual inclinations, attitudes and practices.

Hinduism does not have an agenda of conversion. If, however, anyone desires to become a Hindu then he or she can do so. The person has to select and go through a formal initiation ritual from a spiritual guru into the Hindu *sampradaya* of his choice and practise its moral and spiritual disciplines.

#### 6. What is the caste system?

The Hindus had a varna (class) arrangement from the Vedic period up to that of the Bhagavad Gita. Varna was a social classification system determined on the aptitudes (*gunas*) and occupations (karmas) of people. It was not man-made or based on birth, but devised by God as mentioned

in the Gita. The four classes consisted of the Brahmins (the priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (rulers and protectors), Vaishyas (merchants, businessmen and farmers) and Shudras (artisans and labourers). Over time, the varna system became hereditary and a person's birth dictated his or her class, which was popularly termed as caste. Soon a caste hierarchy developed. The system became rigid and the issue of untouchability developed, with the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya considering themselves superior to the Shudras. Today, however, modern attitude and legislation are reducing the rigidity and issue of untouchability in the caste system.

According to the *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, 1976, p.348, the word caste originates from the Portuguese and Spanish word 'casta, which means 'purity of race'. The corresponding word for 'caste', in Sanskrit is *jati* which means 'birth caste' – caste by birth. Varna (class) and *jati* (caste) are not identical. Varna was based upon personal qualities or *gunas* and occupation or karmas, hence there is social mobility – anyone can qualify to become a Brahmin, Kshatriya, etc. Whereas in the caste system there is no scope for moving from one class to another because it is birth-based. Caste is not a fundamental religious aspect of Hinduism as it is so often understood to be and criticized in educational textbooks and media. ♦

60th Anniversary Celebrations Year of BAPS Swaminarayan Yuvak Mandal

# DOWN MEMORY LANE

1952-2012

## Brief History of BAPS Swaminarayan Yuvak Mandal, Vadodara

*To commemorate the year-long 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations of BAPS Swaminarayan Youth Activities (1952-2012), the milestone events of the birth and development of Vadodara Yuvak Mandal have been presented here. In forthcoming issues, the accounts of other mandals will also be similarly presented. BAPS Youth Activities began in Vadodara and surrounding villages in 1954.*

Since the Middle Ages, Vadodara has been famous throughout India as a city with a rich heritage. Vadodara is known by various names: Vatpatrak, Vatprad, Vatpattan, Vadodar and Baroda. In 1766, the Gaekwad dynasty established rule here and the city's history turned a new leaf.

Thursday, Fagan *sud* 8, Samvat 1855 (14 March 1799) is a historic day in the association of Vadodara with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It was on this day, around dusk, that Nilkanth Varni sat facing east under the second pillar in the second row of the 16 pillars of Mandvi Gate in the centre of the town. Here, he accepted the food offered by Amichand Sheth. Yogiji

Maharaj ritually installed a plaque on this pillar to highlight its importance. (Later, in the Vartal Mandir, Bhagwan Swaminarayan consecrated the *murtis* of Shri Lakshmi-Narayan kept by Amichand in the basement of his house.)

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad invited Bhagwan Swaminarayan to Vadodara and honoured him in a grand procession through the town. Vadodara is also renowned as Chhoti Kashi due to its abundance of scriptural scholars. Here, Muktanand Swami won a scriptural debate held at the Vitthal Mandir in the presence of the Vedanti scholar Harihar Acharya.

In Vadodara, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami miraculously



Vadodara Yuvak Mandal honour Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in a grand procession on an elephant (1968)



Yuvaks perform a traditional ras (stick) dance in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj

postponed an eclipse and through the association of such saintly sadhus Diwan Narupant Nana, Nath Bhakta, Narandas, Teja Bhakta – a Vankar devotee from Chhani – and many others became devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

From Bhagwan Swaminarayan to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj, all have visited and sanctified the terrain of Vadodara. Bhagatji Maharaj held spiritual discussions with the devotees on many occasions, strengthening their faith in and understanding of the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Sitaba, the wife of the Rao Saheb of Vadodara, had the continuous darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Bhagatji Maharaj for five days and also received *prasad* from them.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj studied Siddhant Kaumudi (Advanced Sanskrit Grammar) under Rangacharya, a renowned Madhva Sampradaya scholar, in Vadodara.

At the Swaminarayan Mandir built by Gopalanand Swami in the Vadi area of Vadodara, the historic all-night discussion between Shastriji Maharaj and Jethabhai of Pij (later, Nirgundas Swami) took place.

In 1921, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in Chansad, a mere 10km from Vadodara. Today, Chansad is popularly regarded as a satellite village of Vadodara.

In 1945, Shastriji Maharaj consecrated the

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Atladra. The mandir is situated on the farm of Mulu Metar, where Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *pagh* had become trapped in a berry tree. The young Pramukh Swami Maharaj had diligently served in preparing the limestone mixture for the construction of this mandir.

Over the years, the youths of Vadodara Yuvak Mandal had honoured Shastriji Maharaj in a grand procession on an elephant in Koyli and Salad (organized by Manibhai of Salad) villages, celebrated Shastriji Maharaj's 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday and Suvarna Tula (organized by Mathurbhai) and organized many other such occasions.

On the foundations laid by Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj formally established the Vadodara Yuvak Mandal in 1954 in the Vadi suburb. Since then, Satsang has increased. Presently, there are 108 *sanyukta* and *mahila mandals*, 52 *yuvak* and *yuvati mandals*, 197 *balak* and *balika mandals* and 576 registered *karyakars* who coordinate these activities. Thousands of families attend these various satsang assemblies.

Through their involvement in satsang, many youths have progressed in their spiritual and personal lives. Some of these youths have migrated to different states and countries, where they continue to actively participate in satsang activities.



Yuvaks perform a drama before Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1973)



Pramukh Swami Maharaj and guests preside over the Regional Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan in Vadodara (1977)

## 1952-1965

- ❖ In 1952, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, established the first *yuvak mandal* in Mumbai. In 1953, he came to Vadodara and expressed his wish to Natha Bhagat (Yogina), “We too should start a *yuvak mandal* in Vadodara.” Devotees in the Vadi suburb enthusiastically agreed and rented a house to hold the *yuvak mandal* assembly. At 10.15 a.m. on 13 January 1954, Yogiji Maharaj consecrated painted *murtis* of the guru *parampara* in that house. The house was named ‘Jnan Mandir’ and Vadodara’s first *yuvak mandal* assembly was held there.
- ❖ On 28 January 1955, the first National Akshar-Purushottam Yuvak Mahamandal Adhiveshan (Convention) was held in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj in Atladra. The principal objective of the convention was to consolidate the pure, supreme *upasana* and strengthen *niyam*, *nischay* and *paksh* among youths. The first *shram shibir* was also held with these objectives.
- ❖ In 1953 and 1956, the ‘Shastriji Maharaj Swaminarayan Special Train Yatras’ were organized from Vadodara in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj. Dhulabhai and other youths offered tremendous services to ensure their success.
- ❖ On 25 October 1955, Yogiji Maharaj came

to Vadodara after his overseas satsang visit to Africa. Youths and devotees welcomed and honoured Yogiji Maharaj in a grand procession on an elephant from Anandpura to Jnan Mandir.

- ❖ On 5 February 1965, Shastriji Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations were held on a grand scale. Appealing to the youths to serve in these celebrations, Yogiji Maharaj wrote, “May all youths perform immense *seva*. By this, Swami-Shriji and Shastriji Maharaj will be greatly pleased.” The youths wholeheartedly served in a variety of ways.

At this time, Yogiji Maharaj initiated Natha Bhagat, who had until then been serving in the Jnan Mandir, into the ascetic order. The house was thus returned to its owner. By the diligent efforts of Himabhai Patel, Prahladbhai, Bhupatbhai, Becharbhai, Ghanshyambhai Rao, Vishnubhai and others, more youths were drawn to the satsang. Thus, the weekly *yuvak mandal* assembly venue was changed from Dandia Bazaar to Vajubhai’s house. Later, for sometime, the weekly assembly was also held at Shri Rasikbhai’s house in the Vadi suburb.

## 1966-1970

- ❖ On Tuesday, 20 December 1966, Manibhai of Salad, held a grand celebration in Salad to



Youths sing bhajans during the assembly in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj organized by the Maharaja Gaekwad and the citizens of Vadodara (1989)



Youths organized torch and cycle *yatras* to commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Amrut Mahotsav (1995)

commemorate the 46<sup>th</sup> birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. A grand welcome featuring 46 *sarpanches* (village leaders), 46 Brahmins and 46 bullock carts was organized.

- ❖ From 5 to 11 February 1968, a grand *parayan* was held in the centre of Vadodara at the Pradarshan Medan in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj. On this occasion, Yogiji Maharaj was honoured in a grand procession on an elephant from the Najarbaug Palace of the Gaekwads to the *parayan* venue.
- ❖ Around this time, the weekly *yuvak* assembly venue moved from Dandia Bazaar to Dhulakaka's house in Shiyabaug.
- ❖ From 8 to 11 May 1969, in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj, over 350 youths from throughout Gujarat participated in a variety of competitions in the first Yuvak Adhiveshan.
- ❖ On 12 and 13 May 1969, Yogiji Maharaj's 78<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated at the Kala Bhavan grounds. On this occasion, for the first time, *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj made of ghee were installed on the stage. Also, the holy waters of 78 sacred rivers were brought and the *arti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj was performed using 100,000 *divas*.
- ❖ In 1970, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 49<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated in his presence during the *yuvak* assembly at Dhulakaka's house in Shiyabaug.

### 1971-1975

- ❖ After Yogiji Maharaj's return to Akshardham, his ashes were sprinkled in the holy Narmada River on 24 February 1971.
- ❖ Around this time, some devotees from East Africa returned to settle in the Sardarnagar area. A *yuvak mandal* was established here and they pleased Swamishri by playing the band, and performing cultural programmes and traditional dances. The youths of Vadodara also participated in the *adhiveshan* in Gondal.

### 1976-1980

- ❖ In 1976, youths from Vadodara enthusiastically participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan in Vidyanagar and the Public Awareness Programmes organized by the Sanstha.
- ❖ On 25 January 1977 (Maha *sud* 6), Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* in the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Sardarnagar prepared by the efforts of devotees and youths. For 14 years, Swamishri returned annually to celebrate the *patotsav* there.

As the number of youths increased, a separate *yuvak mandal* was started in the east of the city. The late Raojibhai, who served for many years in the Sanstha's Satsang Examinations department, would come every weekend and motivate the youths to attend the weekly assembly, with the enthusiastic help of *nirdeshak* Shri Lakshmikantbhai Brahmabhatt. Due to their efforts and the support of the sadhus, another *yuvak mandal* was started in the Ellora Park area at the home of Bharatbhai Barot.

- ❖ Gradually, as the number of youths increased, *bal mandals* were started in places like Remand Hall, Jail, Certified School and Blind Schools.

In 1979, when the Machhu Dam in Morbi burst, a large number of BAPS youths went to help in the relief work.

In 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated with great pomp at the Pradarshan Medan and Polo Ground in the heart of the city. On this occasion, the youths served wholeheartedly.

The youths of Vadodara enthusiastically participated in the various activities and programmes organized in the buildup to the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1981. For example, a pilgrimage by foot from Sarangpur to

Chansad led by Puja Mahant Swami, publicity campaigns and public assemblies. The youths helped in the film made by the Sanstha on Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

### 1981-1985

- ❖ After Swamishri's heart attack on 5 February 1983, he convalesced at the home of Shri Ashokbhai of Aims Oxygen until 15 May 1983. During this period, Fuldol and Shri Hari Jayanti were celebrated in Swamishri's presence and Swamishri inaugurated the BAPS Chhatralaya in Atladra.
- ❖ In 1983, the youths of Vadodara initiated the celebrations of Navratri as 'Bhakti Parva'. Also, more *yuvak mandals* were started in Chhani Jagatnaka, Manjalpur, Danteshwar and other areas of Vadodara. Through the efforts of Shri Babukaka of Gorva and Shri Chandrakantbhai Trivedi, a weekly Sunday assembly for devotees of Vadodara was started at Atladra Mandir.
- ❖ In 1983, on the occasion of the *murti-pratishtha* in Mumbai youths organized a Cycle Yatra from Vadodara.
- ❖ In 1985, under the auspices of the Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Bicentenary Celebrations, a grand kirtan *aradhana* was organized in the Darbar Hall at Lakshmi Vilas Palace.
- ❖ During the 59-day Gunatitanand Swami Bicentenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad, the youths of Vadodara served in the Water Department.

### 1986-1990

- ❖ In 1986, the first *kishore mandal* in Vadodara was established in Sardarnagar through the efforts of Shri Amitbhai Trivedi. During the holy month of Shravan, youths conducted *parayans* in various areas of the city. Later, these *parayans* were judged on various parameters and prizes were awarded.

In 1987, more *kishore mandals* were established.

- ❖ During the severe drought and famine in 1987, the youths of Vadodara rendered great services to the Sanstha's famine relief efforts. Educated youths even left their jobs to serve in the Sanstha's Cattle Camp set up at Aims Oxygen.
- ❖ In January 1989, following Swamishri's 9-month overseas satsang tour, Shri Maharaja Ranjitsinh Gaekwad presided over a grand welcome assembly at the Gaekwad Palace to honour Swamishri. The youths served to prepare and decorate the stage and also helped in other arrangements.
- ❖ In 1990, many youths participated in the Yuva Mahotsav in Vidyanagar, in the buildup to the Centenary Celebrations of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. On this occasion, Shri Nilesh Patel of the Racecourse suburb memorized 1,330 Swamini Vatos and the youths of Vadodara performed the Mashal Nrutya (dance using fire torches).
- ❖ In December 1990, in support of the Narmada Dam Project, Baba Amte visited Ferkuva village near Chhota Udepur. Over 45,000 food packets were prepared at Atladra Mandir for the well-wishers attending the assembly. BAPS youths of Vadodara helped in the assembly arrangements.

### 1991-1999

- ❖ 1991: Yogiji Maharaj's 99<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated in Vadodara.
- ❖ 1992: As a prelude to the Yogiji Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, youths visited the villages and conducted home visits, de-addiction campaigns and childrens assemblies to promote the message: 'Our Village – A Haven of Values'.
- ❖ During the Yogiji Maharaj Centenary Celebrations in Gandhinagar, 1,200 youths from Vadodara managed the 42 foodstalls for

the 33-day festival.

- ❖ 1993: Youths from Vadodara completed a *yatra* by scooter to Kolkata on the occasion of Swamishri's 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday celebration there. The route incorporated the birthplaces of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and all the gurus. In memory of Yogiji Maharaj's centenary, the *karyakars* of Vadodara were the first to start regular *jnan goshtis* (spiritual discussions), an activity very dear to Yogiji Maharaj.
- ❖ 1994: In the International Karyakar Adhiveshan held in Vidyanagar, 20 *karyakars* won prizes in the various competitions.
- ❖ 1996-7: Groups of five *karyakar* families began regular monthly *ghar sabhas*. *Karyakars* also visited the villages to conduct satsang assemblies. Shri Mahendrabhai Patel, the late Sureshbhai, Ashwinbhai, Bhupendrabhai Patel, Bharatbhai, Hasmukhbhai and other youths were appointed as *nirdeshaks* to coordinate satsang activities in the rural areas of Vadodara. They are still active in the satsang activities in rural Vadodara today. In 1996 and 1997, *shibirs* for students were organized in Bharuch.
- ❖ 1997: Over 100,000 devotees attended Swamishri's 77<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in Vadodara. On this occasion, new golden *sinhasans* were installed in the *garbhagruha* of the main mandir. Youths contributed their services in many ways.
- ❖ 1999: Under the auspices of the Swaminarayan Mahamantra Bicentenary Celebrations, youths of Vadodara offered collective *anusththans* at Chhapaiya, Faneni, Gadhada, Gondal and Chansad.

## 2000-2011

- ❖ 2000: The *kishore mandals* became more involved in various activities. Over 250 *kishores* daily attended the Bhakti Parva during Navratri.
- ❖ 2001: Over 275 *kishores* attended the 5-day *shibir* in Sarangpur on the theme 'Satpurushma Atmabuddhi'.
- ❖ 2002: A Kishore Karyakar Shibir was held in Swamishri's presence on the theme 'Karie Raji Ghanshyam'. *Karyakars* from Anand, Nadiad and Bhavnagar also attended. Students studying in standards 10 and 12 participated in a *samuh mahapuja* to pray for their academic success. Since then, around 750 students participate annually in this *mahapuja*.
- ❖ 2003: To commemorate the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in New Delhi, 16 youths completed a 4,007km scooter *yatra* to Delhi, incorporating the birthplaces of all the gurus. From this year, in Chansad, Swamishri's birthday has been celebrated with great pomp and devotion on 7 December.
- ❖ 2004: Youths serve in various ways as work began to build the guru *shikhars* in the rear *pradakshina* of Atladra Mandir.
- ❖ 2005: *Kishores* and *kishoris* attended a special Winter Shibir held in Gadhada in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami.
- ❖ *Karyakars* performed commendably in the Inter-Regional Adhiveshan in Rajkot.
- ❖ Youths of Vadodara served in the darshan arrangements during the month-long opening celebrations of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.
- ❖ 2006: Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni and gurus in the guru *shikhars* at the Atladra mandir. Youths helped in the decoration arrangements, presented cultural performances and served in other ways.
- ❖ 2007: On 7 December 2007, a grand celebration was held at the newly renovated birthplace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Chansad. Also, *sadguru* sadhus performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the new BAPS Swamina-

rayan Mandir built in place of the old mandir sanctified by Bhagatji Maharaj.

- ❖ Many youths from Vadodara served in the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad, helping in the assembly arrangements.
- ❖ 2008: Present and past *karyakars* of satsang activities in Vadodara attended a special *karyakar* convention in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.
- ❖ 2009: On 15 August, an annual convention for youths to strengthen values, studies and satsang was begun. Around 3,345 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* attended this first convention titled 'Real Freedom'. Swamishri guided in writing, "For true freedom one requires: a disciplined life, courage to observe *niyams*, pride for the Sanstha, Principles and Satpurush."
- ❖ 2010: Over 3,200 youths attended a special assembly held in Swamishri's presence, on the theme 'Pride for Shastras, Satpurush and Swadharma'.
- ❖ Over 900 youths attended a youth convention on the theme 'Amrutasya Putraha Vyam' – 'We Are the Children of God'.
- ❖ 2011: Around 1,425 youths participated

in the Youth Convention themed 'Jivan Ghadtar', in which guidance was given on personal and character development.

Over 3,000 youths attended the Youth Day assembly in Swamishri's presence based on the message of serving parents.

- ❖ Around 1,000 youths attended a special *shibir* held in Sarangpur in Swamishri's presence based on the theme 'Yuvano Jago' in which guidance was given on discipline in life, pure character and heritage.
- ❖ Youths enthusiastically serve every year during the Diwali, Annakut and Uttarayan celebrations.
- ❖ As part of the BAPS Youth Activities 60<sup>th</sup> Year Celebrations, 538 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* pilgrimaged by foot from Atladra to Chansad. Thus, over the past six decades, many youths have been inspired spiritually by the BAPS youth activities in Vadodara. The regular visits of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have continued to inspire the youths.

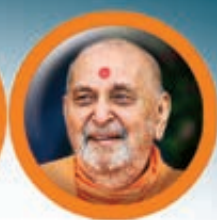
◆ Gujarati Text: Shri Sanjaybhai,  
Sadhu Harikrishoredas, Sadhu Harivandandas.

Organized by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

# 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF BAPS INTERNATIONAL YOUTH ACTIVITIES 1952-2012



**Coming Soon!**  
**A Grand Celebration of  
the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
BAPS Youth Activities**



- Celebrating the wonderful story of 60 years of BAPS youth activities.
- Colourful and inspiring cultural presentations by BAPS youths.
- Entry for BAPS youth members only.
- Celebration in Ahmedabad on Sunday, 6 January 2013, from 5.00 to 9.30 p.m.



**Date: 6 January 2013 at Sardar Patel Stadium, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad**

# Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

14 July to 30 September 2012, Ahmedabad

## INTRODUCTION

Swamishri's daily morning routine at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad includes daily darshan of Thakorji and blessing the devotees in the mandir compound. Youths also present impressive skits before Swamishri.

Prior to Swamishri's arrival a spiritual discourse is delivered by sadhus. Each day devotees throng with unflagging devotion for Swamishri's morning darshan. Some observe fasts, perform *padyatras* or *malas* for Swamishri's health and to receive his divine blessings.

## JULY: AHMEDABAD

### 15, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated the English translation of *Satsang Vihar*, Pt. 1 and *Gunatitanand Swami's Talks* in Marathi.

Swamishri graced the Sunday satsang assembly in the evening and explained a Swamini Vat. He said, "Swami explains the type of zeal one must have to attain *moksha*. He describes how the famine-stricken people pleaded for alms at Bhimnath mandir in 1823. They remained resolute in begging in spite of being pushed away for their impatience and rowdiness. That type of steadfastness is required to seek *moksha*. The bonafide guru inspires zeal for *moksha* and enlightens us with true knowledge."

### 22, Sunday; Murti-Pratishtha Rituals of BAPS Maha-Mandir, Robbinsville, New Jersey

Swamishri and senior sadhus performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS Maha-Mandir being built in Robbinsville, New Jersey, USA. (Details and photos in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, August-September 2012.)

### 29, Sunday

In the evening satsang assembly Swamishri gave Tejas Thakor of Navsari the *parshad diksha* and named him Valmiki Bhagat. Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. Thereafter youths enacted the incident of Hira Mukhi's courage in the time of Shastriji Maharaj on the assembly stage.

## AUGUST

### 2, Thursday; Raksha Bandhan

The entire grounds of the Swaminarayan Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, was saturated with devotees. Each one of them was given sanctified *rakhdhis* before Swamishri arrived. On Swamishri's arrival all the devotees held their *rakhdhis* up to be blessed by him. Many Brahmins ritually put on their new *janois* before Swamishri. Swamishri was honoured with beautiful garlands by senior sadhus. Thereafter everyone chorused, the *shloka* "Tvameva mātā cha pitā tvameva..." and "Shobho sādhubugune sadā..." Pujya Ishwar-charan Swami prayed on the occasion, saying, "May Maharaj and Swami Bapa protect us from the *maya* of I-ness and Mine-ness and may we forever perceive them to be pure and divine."

Swamishri inaugurated the digital epub and mobi format versions of the Satsang Exam books for free download from the Sanstha's website. He blessed all the devotees with his darshan on this festive occasion.

### 5, Sunday

Swamishri arrived in the evening satsang assembly. The children's programme was themed on the joys of attending *bal sabha*. They presented a prayer through a traditional dance,

## Swamishri and Devotees, Ahmedabad



recited Swamini Vatos and dialogues. Some children also demonstrated the various games they play in the *bal mandal*. In conclusion, children danced to the bhajan, “*Mārā Swāmini thāye vāh vāh...*” Swamishri expressed his joy and blessings on the children.

### 10, Friday, Janmashtami

This morning Swamishri came for Thakorji’s darshan and to bless devotees assembled in the mandir premises. In the evening the festival of Janmashtami was celebrated with a cultural programme and discourses by senior sadhus.

### 12, Sunday

In the evening satsang assembly youths performed a traditional dance on the bhajan, “*Govind ālā re ālā...*” Then Swamishri was garlanded by senior sadhus. Thereafter BAPS youths of the Youth Training Camp performed an impressive skit on ego.

Swamishri blessed the assembly with his darshan.

### 15, Wednesday; Independence Day Celebration

The Independence Day Celebration was marked by the presence of a multitude of devotees and well-wishers. When Swamishri came out of his quarters he was led by children marching to the song, “*Sāre jahāse acchā Hindosatā hamārā...*” As Swamishri proceeded to the festival stage in the mandir compound devotees waved the Indian flag. Youths in the mandir precincts and terraces also waved the national and BAPS flags. Once Swamishri arrived on the open stage the national song “*Vande Mātaram...*” was sung. Swamishri waved the Indian flag. Then Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and also of Swamishri. Then Ishwarcharan Swami spoke a few words on independence. Thereafter Swamishri unfurled the Indian flag amidst the singing of the national anthem by everyone. Then Swamishri saluted the Indian flag, generating a wave of rapture among

the thousands of devotees and well-wishers. The senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands accompanied by spirited tunes played by the youth band of Nadiad. Swamishri gave darshan to all by waving the Indian flag.

### 19, Sunday

On Swamishri’s arrival in the satsang assembly a cultural dance by youths commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BAPS Yuvak Mandal commenced. The feisty youths in the audience waved BAPS flags, thus charging the atmosphere with devotion and pride. Then a drama depicting pride for BAPS was enacted by youths. The three messages included: 1. Cultivating *samp*, *suhridaybhav* and *ekta*, 2. Consolidating *agna* and *upasana*, and 3. Fortifying one’s faith and sharing it with others. Swamishri was pleased by the presentation.

Senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated two Aksharpith Publications – an album of creative paintings on Nilkanth Varni and *Bhagwan Swaminarayan Nariratno*, parts 4, 5 and 6.

### 26, Sunday

On Swamishri’s arrival to the satsang assembly a drama “Angad places his foot in the assembly of Ravan” depicted the power of devotion. Swamishri was pleased with the youths who enacted the spirited theme of the drama. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands. Swamishri inaugurated a newly published Satsang Darshan DVD by the Sanstha’s Audio-Visual Department.

### SEPTEMBER

### 26, Wednesday; Jal Jhilani Festival

The precinct of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir was decked for the celebration of Jal Jhilani. Devotees from Ahmedabad, other cities and states, and abroad had thronged to celebrate in the presence of Swamishri.

(Contd. on pg. 58)

# LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

July-September 2012, Ahmedabad

## GURU BHAKTI

15 July 2012

Brahmavihari Swami amusingly asked, “Swami, out of the many names you have which one do you like?”

Swamishri replied, “I don’t have many names. God has many names.”

Brahmavihari Swami spelled out Swamishri’s various names and asked, “Shantilal, Narayanda, Narayanswarupdas, Pramukh Swami, Swami Bapa, Swamishri, Bapa, Aksharbrahman and Maha Pramukhji – out of them which one do you like?”

Swamishri spontaneously answered, “The one Shastriji Maharaj gave.”

Whatever the occasion Swamishri’s guru bhakti always comes to the fore.

## MAHARAJ RESIDES IN SWAMISHRI

24 July 2012

Swamishri’s appetite for food has decreased due to old age. On several occasions he has been entreated by all to increase his food intake while taking lunch and dinner. Today, during dinner the attendant sadhus urged him to eat more.

Krishnavallabh Swami commented, “You do not eat well. If you do so you would be able to walk without anyone’s support.”

Swamishri replied, “You can see that I am eating now.”

Narayancharan Swami pitched in, “Maharaj used to eat everything in his plate.”

Swamishri uttered, “He was God so he ate everything [offered to him].”

Narayancharan Swami added, “God resides in you.”

Swamishri explained with a smile, “Yes, it’s true that he resides, but at present he eats less.”

Swamishri’s answer reveals his profound rapport with Shriji Maharaj.

## DEVOTION PLEASES GOD

10 August 2012

Swamishri was having *farar* because it was *ekadashi* today. There were two types of *shiro* (a sweet item): one made of potatoes and the other of *moraiyo*.

Ramswarup Swami asked, “Out of the two *shiros* which one do you like better?”

Swamishri replied, “Both are good.”

Ramswarup Swami explained further, “Tell us so that we can know which one to make for God [Thakorji].”

Swamishri tellingly answered, “God likes everything; he likes bhakti (devotion).”

Ramswarup Swami reframed his question, “The *murti* of God does not say so. That is why we are asking you so that we can know God’s preference.”

Swamishri replied succinctly, “He likes it when it is made with bhakti.”

A little while later Vishwavihari Swami asked, “Is the *shiro* good?”

Swamishri said, “I am eating it because it is *prasad*. It has been offered to God so it is good.”

Ramswarup Swami enquired, “Does it please God when he eats it?”

Swamishri replied, “Yes.”

## SWAMISHRI’S MESSAGE

16 August 2012

A *satsangi* youth described in his letter to Swamishri that he had given darshan twice to him in a dream, but Swami did not say anything to him. The youth wrote that if he wished to say anything in that reference he would be happy to know.

Swamishri replied, “Keep satsang firm in your life.” ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas  
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas

# SWAMISHRI'S INSPIRING WORDS

*After Swamishri has Thakorji's darshan in the morning a brief presentation is often made and thereafter a question is asked to him. Swamishri's answers are inspiring and revealing.*

## AHMEDABAD

1 July

**Q.** What are the benefits of giving Satsang exams?

**A.** We get satsang knowledge, knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam and knowledge about Shastriji Maharaj. We come to know what is true knowledge. Till one does not get this knowledge one remains raw.

16 July

**Q.** How can one maintain zeal for attaining *moksha*?

**A.** By doing God's bhajan and earning the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

20 July

**Q.** How can we attain humility in life?

**A.** By understanding everyone (i.e., devotees) to be pure (*nirdosh*) and as devotees of God. Understanding their glory enables one to achieve humility. I pray that you all become humble. We have the association of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, therefore, be humble and do *katha-varta* and bhajan – one will gradually attain humility.

30 July

**Q.** Tell us how we can please you?

**A.** By obeying God's commands (*agna*), doing bhajan of Maharaj and Swami and giving up one's desires for worldly pleasures.

## AUGUST

4 August

**Q.** How can we be protected from *maya*?

**A.** Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj and Shastriji

Maharaj are here to protect you. But if you stray (from the spiritual path) how can you be protected!

7 August

**Q.** Bapa, what is your skill?

**A.** What other skill do I have! God's wish, Shastriji Maharaj's and Yogiji Maharaj's wish is my wish and goal. To please all sadhus and devotees and to serve with mind and body in the work that Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have come to do.

11 August

**Q.** We want to obey all the commands of God and his Sadhu, but for that what should we do?

**A.** We are blessed by God and Yogiji Maharaj. By doing bhajan one becomes totally happy. (Swamishri prescribed bhajan to be the means to obeying all the commands).

15 August

**Q.** True independence is when one becomes free of one's inner faults (*swabhavs*). When will one attain that?

**A.** We have the association of Shriji Maharaj as God, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj as our gurus. So, there is no question of any postponement or delay. (Swamishri implied that by truly realizing the *prapti* (association of God and guru) one becomes truly 'independent'.)

16 August

**Q.** How can we attain the heights of those who are realized (*siddhas*)?

**A.** By earning the *rajipo* (pleasure) of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and obeying their

commands.

### 18 August

Q. Wherein lies true courage?

A. True courage lies in sharing the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam and informing others about the glory of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

### 19 August

Q. What thought should we have to save ourselves from getting swept away by the flood of *maya*?

A. Have firm refuge in Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj; do not get entangled in addictions and keep resolute faith in one's guru.

### 20 August

Q. Bapa, whom do you belong to?

A. To those who worship God.

### 21 August

Q. What type of sadhana (spiritual efforts) should we do?

A. Do bhajan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and keep the association of sadhus (*sant samagam*).

### 25 August

Q. What should we do in Satsang?

A. Do bhajan of God and please him. Also do *katha* and kirtan and do not talk about worldly things.

## SEPTEMBER

### 12 September

Q. What is it in you that makes everyone gravitate to you?

A. It happens because I have Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

### 15 September

Q. How can one have *nirdosh buddhi* (pure vision) for the guru?

A. By understanding the glory and greatness of Bhagwan and his Sant.

### 16 September

Q. Swami, show us the way to get rid of the inner thorns of taste, ego, greed, etc?

A. One should give up the callings of one's mind. Obey the commands and words of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and one will experience inner peace and happiness.

### 18 September

Q. What should one do to prevent laxity in observing *niyams*?

A. Profoundly serve God and the Satpurush. By serving God, he will purify all and one will thus remain steadfast in one's *niyams* and abide by his commands.

### 21 September

Q. How can we always engage our mind in you?

A. Because your attention is in other things, your mind wanders, otherwise it can remain engaged constantly.

### 27 September

Q. What should we do to liberate ourselves from the ocean of birth and death?

A. When one develops true faith in God and realizes the knowledge of God, then God, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj become happy and shower their grace – which enables one to overcome the cycles of birth and death.♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas



# SATSANG ACTIVITY CENTRE INAUGURATION AND MURTI STHAPAN VIDHI

19-21 October 2012, Robbinsville, NJ, USA



In the presence of Pujya Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami, devotees and community members from across North America gathered to celebrate the opening of the Satsang Activity Centre (SAC) and Murti Sthapan Vidhi in Robbinsville, NJ. The SAC is a new home for cultural, social, and religious activities for the Hindu American community and has helped to revive the social and cultural landscape of the community.

The three-day celebration culminated with the placement of the divine *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Hindu deities and the Guru Parampara in the newly opened Satsang Activity Centre. These *murtis* had been consecrated by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad, India, on 22 July 2012. Several families also took part in the special *janoi* and engagement ceremonies.

The enthusiasm of the devotees, volunteers, community officials and guests was palpable. Robbinsville council person Sheree McGowan

commented, “I’ve known about the project since it first came to planning, and to watch it grow has been amazing. And the workmanship is incredible. I am also impressed with your sense of volunteerism and community service, and wish you could give lessons to the rest of the world.”

The new assembly hall will provide a location for many spiritual, cultural, educational and recreational activities for children, families and community members.

The SAC has been constructed with a variety of eco-friendly and cost-effective features, including, natural lighting techniques, radiant floor heating and LED lights, to help reduce its carbon footprint. The building includes classrooms for youths, a gymnasium and an assembly hall.

The completion of SAC marks the end of the first phase of the Hindu American Religious Centre. ♦

## UK & Europe

### NATIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI MANDAL VIDY- ARTHI SHIBIR

21-23 September 2012, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Leicester



Following the Vidyarthi Shibir held earlier this year for GCSE and A Level students, a three-day education seminar was organized for university students based on the theme ‘Vidya Vinayena Shobhate’ [Knowledge is adorned by humility].

The students were guided through speeches by sadhus on the teachings of the Vachanamrut particularly beneficial to students, attachment to the guru, challenges that students face today and other topics. The *shibir* also featured group activities, interviews of academically successful students, discussions based on real-life scenarios, structured workshops, basic cooking classes, group projects to develop problem-solving and presentation skills, team-building activities, and advice on study techniques, exam preparation, work experience, career planning and financial budgeting.

The seminar motivated the students to excel at university while leading a value-based, disciplined lifestyle to help maximize their learning potential and contribution to society.

### ‘OPEN HOUSE’ AT BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, LONDON, UK

22-23 September 2012

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, participated once again in Open House London,

the capital’s annual festival of architecture, by welcoming hundreds of visitors over the weekend of 22-23 September 2012.

The Mandir joined over 700 buildings, including private homes, commercial and government offices, historical sites, places of worship, educational establishments, and many others in “a celebration of all that is best about the capital’s buildings”.

Guided tours were on offer throughout the day where visitors learned about the making of the Mandir and the significance of its religious architecture. Guests were also able to explore the ‘Understanding Hinduism’ exhibition as a part of their visit.

Many visitors also shared their impressions of the Mandir and the volunteers:

“An incredibly beautiful building, which is spiritually uplifting and fills me with humility to think it was built by volunteers who carved and laid every piece of stone with love. Thank you for allowing me to experience.” – *Teacher*

“It was a wonderful experience, with lots to learn. We experienced great peace during our visit. I will definitely be coming back. Thank you.” – *Bookseller*

### KUC FINAL CHALLENGE

29-30 September 2012, UK

The UK Bal-Balika Mandal’s multi-event Kidz Ultimate Challenge (KUC), launched in January 2012, culminated on the last weekend of September with the final Memory Challenge (*purna mukhpath*) and Skills Challenge (talent contest). The events took place at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs in London and Leicester on 29 and 30 September, respectively.

More than 800 children aged 3 to 14, divided into four age groups, participated in a variety of competitions over the weekend. The event began with a vibrant opening ceremony including a procession of children playing the *dhhol* and waving flags. This climaxed

with the video blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The Memory Challenge, more than just a test of recollection, was an opportunity for the children to learn and recite passages from Hindu shastras, while also learning the traditional styles of reading and intonation.

Many children had learned far beyond the basic entry requirements. One 13-year-old boy in London was able to recite any of 273 Vachanamruts correctly, read any of the 164 chapters from the Bhaktachintamani, and also sing several devotional songs, verses and sections from a number of shastras. Even the youngest category of participants (3- to 5-year-olds) performed exceptionally well.

The Skills Challenge provided an opportunity for the children to develop their talents in storytelling, speechmaking, essay writing, mono-acting, art, dance, singing, and instrument playing. Again, the outstanding talent displayed by the children far exceeded expectations.

## Africa

### STREET CLEANING PROGRAMME 7 October 2012, Mombasa, Kenya



To commemorate the International Day of Non-Violence, a Mombasa Street Cleaning Programme was jointly organized by the Assistant High Commission of India, the Hindu Council of Kenya and the Indian Expatriate and Diaspora Organization.

BAPS children, youths and elders, together with volunteers from other Hindu organizations cleaned Haile Selassie Road, from 8.00 a.m. till noon.

### BAPS DONATES FOODSTUFF AND GOODS TO ORPHANAGE, DAR-ES-SALAAM, TANZANIA

26 September 2012

BAPS volunteers from Dar-es-Salaam donated food and other items to the children of Malaika Orphanage Foundation Centre, Kuranaga.

The volunteers also entertained the children with a musical performance, a poem recital and played the Tanzanian national anthem.

One of the children was ill and had been admitted to the local hospital. The volunteers visited him at the hospital, personally handed him his gift bag, prayed for his speedy recovery and spent some time with him.

## Asia Pacific

### YUVA ADHIVESHAN

19 August 2012, Adelaide, Australia



On 19 August 2012, 22 *kishores* and *kishoris* from Adelaide participated in the first of a series of regional *adhiveshans* that will take place throughout Australia. The youngsters had dedicated months to prepare for the various competitions by memorizing the basic concepts of satsang, *shlokas*, *sakhis*, Vachanamrut quotations, Swamini Vatos and the fundamental principles of Hinduism.

The *adhiveshan* was divided into two components which included an oral test on most of the syllabus and a written test on certain frequently asked questions. Even though some of the youths were participating for the first time the judges were impressed by the high standard of presentations. The youths gained considerable knowledge through their efforts and found the whole experience extremely enriching.

### INAUGURATION OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, ROTORUA, NEW ZEALAND 8 September 2012



Devotees and well-wishers from Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton, Taupo, Tauranga and other surrounding towns joined local families to take part in a *mahapuja* ceremony and assembly in the presence of BAPS sadhus to commemorate the opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, which is the first Hindu Mandir in Rotorua and the fourth BAPS Mandir in New Zealand.

One of the community leaders in attendance, Dr Guna Magesan from the Hindu Council of New Zealand said, "This new mandir will help the whole community to come together and partake in religious activities which is so important to all of us."

President of the Indian Association of Rotorua, Mr Shashi Patel, also addressed the assembly saying, "I warmly welcome the new Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir by BAPS because it teaches our younger generation about our roots."

The Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony will

take place at the mandir at a later date.

## India

### YOUTHS VISIT VILLAGES

1-30 September 2012, India

As part of the year-long BAPS Youth Activities 60th Anniversary Celebrations, 800 selected youths in 200 groups visited 200 villages throughout Gujarat to strengthen the values of satsang among the resident devotees and villagers.

Each group of four youths was designated a village to travel to, where they carried out home visits and encouraged people to shed addictions. They also conducted children's and public assemblies in which they presented speeches and bhajans to convey satsang messages.

Each youth had received training for his role prior to the visit. The visits helped to build public-speaking and teamwork skills among the youths. The youths were well received by the villagers and they also learnt about the rural lifestyle and the villagers' dedication to Satsang.

### YOUTHS ORGANIZE GRAND PARADES

September-October 2012, Gujarat

As part of the BAPS Youth Wing's 60th Anniversary Celebrations, over 35,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* at 45 BAPS centres in towns and cities of Gujarat and Mumbai organized Bhakti Yatras (Devotional Processions).

The colourful, vibrant parades showcased inspiring messages for youths, such as, serving society, avoiding addictions, excelling in studies, cultivating good character, faith in God, health and others. The grand processions featured beautifully decorated floats, youths performing traditional dances and singing bhajans, musical bands and other entertaining items. Each float projected a particular inspiring message through the use of live demonstrations, photographic displays and 3D dioramas. Throughout the procession, youths also briefly explained

the messages of each float for the benefit of onlookers.

Each parade was planned, organized and managed by the youths in local centres. Also, the designs and construction of the floats were carried out by the youths at each centre.

The processions helped the youths to realize the importance of developing these inspiring principles in their lives.

### SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM LIGHTS UP IN PINK FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

20 October 2012, New Delhi

A brilliant pink illumination of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi kicked off Breast Cancer Awareness Day in India. The pink lighting of the Mandir was seen by thousands of supporters and visitors.

Commemorating Breast Cancer Awareness Month and supporting the global campaign

for Breast Cancer Awareness to raise funds for



research into its cause, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and cure, other monuments and buildings across New Delhi were also illuminated in pink, including, Qutub Minar, Safdarjung Tomb, Shah Burj and hospitals of Max Healthcare. The campaign also offers information and support to those affected by breast cancer. ♦

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(Contd. from pg. 50)

The festival stage had been set upon the mandir grounds with a large backdrop painting of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his *paramhansas* celebrating in the waters of river Sabarmati. In front of it was a large makeshift water body with the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni installed on a fountain along with the *murti* of Shri Ganapati on a lotus-shaped pedestal.

The Jal Jhilani celebration commenced after *shangar arti* of Thakorji in the mandir. The *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was circumambulated in a decorative palanquin in the mandir *pradakshina*. Thereafter a *mahapuja* was performed by Dr Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami and other leading sadhus. Four *artis* were performed and Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was taken for a boat-ride after each *arti* in the makeshift pond. During the divine darshan of Thakorji sadhus sang festive bhajans. The festival celebration was also interspersed with speeches by Viveksagar

Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Dr Swami.

At 9.25 a.m. Swamishri arrived in the mandir compound from his living quarters. As he proceeded for Thakorji's darshan Swamishri blessed the devotees from far. After coming onto the festival stage Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and performed the fifth and final *arti*. With Swamishri's presence the festive occasion was charged with joy and devotion. When Swamishri steered the remote-controlled boat in which Harikrishna Maharaj was installed everyone became ecstatic. Meanwhile, a group of sadhus sang bhajans related to the festive occasion. Thereafter senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with a variety of garlands. In conclusion, the *murti* of Ganapatiji was ritually immersed in the pond of water. With Swamishri's departure devotees dispersed with devotion and inner joy. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas  
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas



As part of the 60<sup>th</sup> Year Celebrations of BAPS Youth Activities, over 35,000 youths in over 45 BAPS centres in Gujarat and other states participated in the Bhakti Yatras to promote spiritual and cultural values.



**Below:** 800 trained BAPS youths visited over 350 villages in Gujarat and other states, encouraging people to lead a value-based and addiction-free life.





Grand opening of the BAPS Satsang Activity Centre, Robbinsville, NJ, USA.