

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2016

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



95th Birthday Celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

19 December, Sarangpur



H.H. PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 95TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
19 December 2015, Sarangpur

On 19 December 2015 H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 95th Birthday Celebration was held in Sarangpur. More than 200,000 devotees and well-wishers attended the evening celebration programme, which included speeches by dignitaries and senior sadhus extolling the virtues and works of Swamishri. Cultural dances, video interviews, and speeches portrayed Swamishri's innate nature of being above the dualities of honour and insult, mundane happiness and misery and distinctions of rich and poor.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January-February 2016 Vol. 39 No. 1



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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Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad - 380004, India

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)			India
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	80
2 Years	1300	18	28	150
3 Years	1900	27	42	220

FIRST WORD

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

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

One of the highlights of the many annual festivals celebrated in the BAPS is the birthday celebration of guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj spoke exuberantly about celebrating Pramukh Swami's birthday during the latter's 48th birthday celebration in Mumbai. He said that Pramukh Swami is the form of Shastriji Maharaj and there isn't the slightest difference between him and Shastriji Maharaj. You should all celebrate it every year with a bang and not a whimper.

After a gap of eight years Swamishri's 95th birthday celebration was held on a mammoth scale in Sarangpur on 19 December 2015. The sheer enthusiasm and joy in the run-up to the celebration was palpable. Thousands of young and old, from all parts of India and the globe, were eager to participate and attend the grand celebration.

On the day of the celebration, more than 200,000 devotees and well-wishers had attended. The celebration assembly was themed on Swamishri's transcendental nature, that is, he is above worldly happiness and misery, honour and insult and distinctions between the rich and poor and the literate and illiterate. The spectacular and enlightening celebration assembly comprised of a combination of themed based traditional dances, skits, videos and speeches by dignitaries and senior sadhus. Swamishri's darshan and presence on the main stage capped the entire celebration.

Several speakers and video testimonials revealed unique aspects of Swamishri's life and work. Shri Arun Tiwari, the co-author of *Transcendence*, declared that initially he was unable to start writing the book. But on receiving a large photo of Pramukh Swami Maharaj from Ishwarcharan Swami and his blessings, words, paragraphs and chapters started flowing from his pen. "I acknowledge before you that I have not written the book, someone wrote it through me."

Shri Vyomesh Joshi, former Vice-President of Hewlett Packard's printing section, opined, "When I see Pramukh Swami Maharaj I feel he has no mundane comforts or happiness.... But in his heart he is absolutely peaceful and happy. He smiles candidly because he has inner peace. He has no ego at all."

Dr Tejas Patel, a renowned cardiologist of India, after placing a pacemaker in Swamishri recounted, "He never expressed pain before, during and after the surgery, and even till today. As a result I understood the difference between the body and *atma*, which I had been trying to understand since the last 15 years. On witnessing Pramukh Swami Maharaj remain equipoised in pain and difficulty he taught me what I would not have been able to know for ten births."

Air Marshal Mehra of the Indian defence force spoke about Swamishri's leadership, "He is a genuine inspirer. The compassion brimming on his face shows he has never cared for himself physically. He possesses the unique aspects required in a leader."

The announcement of Pramukh Swami Maharaj Birth Centenary Celebrations was received with thunderous applause. The entire celebration left an indelible impression and feelings of heightened spiritual joy and strength among the devotees and well-wishers. This issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* includes the celebration report. ◆

REMOVING AN IMPOSTOR

After performing the foundation-stone laying rituals of a mandir in Vartal Shri Hari arrives back to Gadhada...



A MOUNTAIN OF MAGNET

While Shri Hari was in Gadhpur devotees flocked in large numbers for his darshan. Despite the fact that they had previously done Maharaj's darshan many times during festivals, his visits to their villages and other places; their thirst for his darshan was insatiable. Shri Hari smiled appreciatingly at their love for him. The devotees knew he was the means to attaining Akshardham – by developing absolute faith in his supremeness and profound love for him.

On seeing this unabated attraction for Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami often remarked, “A mountain of magnet is here, thus the whole nation is drawn to him.” Many were unable to understand Swami's words, so they asked him, “What do you mean?”

Gunatitanand Swami explained, “A small mountain of magnet attracts a little amount of iron, but when a big mountain of magnet falls on earth it pulls the iron of the entire country. Similarly, devotees and aspirants from all parts of the country are drawn to Maharaj today.”

MULO RAJGOR DRESSES AS NAR

During this time a devotee from the port of Diu came to Gadhada for Maharaj's darshan. After offering prostrations he sat before Shri Hari. Maharaj asked him, “Why did you have to come here suddenly?”

The devotee respectfully explained, “Maharaj, an imposter has come to our village. He claims that he is the incarnation of Nar and that Narayan, who is Sahajanand, is my brother. He knows the names of all the sadhus of our *sampradaya*. Furthermore, he rattled off the moral vows followed by our sadhus and devotees. Subsequently, the gullible have fallen for his words. He says that *sankhya-yogi* women and other women should not listen to the discourses of sadhus and neither should they touch them. Then he cunningly added that there was no restriction in listening to his talks and serving him. Thus the *satsangi* women have started serving him. But Maharaj, I know that things will go awry as a result. I recently came to know that he is a Brahmin from Rajula named Mulo Rajgor.”

Shri Hari was intently listening to the devotee. When he finished talking, Maharaj asked, “For how long has he been in your village?”

“Oh, it’s been about a month,” the devotee replied. “Since Diu is under Portuguese rule, no one can enter without official permission. This is why our sadhus do not visit it. As a result, no one knows about the *niyams* of Satsang.”

Shri Hari asked, “Earlier, Mulo Rajgor had duped Premabai, yet none of you recognized him?”

The devotee explained, “Maharaj, he takes on different disguises and speaks in different dialects. That is why we failed to recognize him initially. However, after a while I realized that he was Mulo Rajgor. So, I have come to inform you and to seek your help.”

Maharaj reassured the devotee, “Don’t worry! I’ll send a message to Krupanand Swami and Purnanand Swami, who are travelling in the Valak region. They will go to Una, and from there Hansraj Sheth will take them to Diu. When the charlatan sees them he will take to his heels.”

“But Maharaj, the Portuguese official will not allow Hansraj Sheth to enter Diu.”

“Rest assured. A person called Haribhai Valand, who lives in Diu, is well-known to and trusted by the Portuguese. He had also once served me. Mention my name and tell Haribhai to go to Goghla and bring Hansraj Sheth and the sadhus to Diu. He will acquire the permission for the sadhus to enter Diu.”

The devotee felt peaceful on hearing Shri Hari’s words. He got up and took leave from Maharaj. Maharaj told him, “Before you depart have your meal. When you reach Diu tell the women about the deceptions of the fraudster, or else he will perpetrate immorality.”

Shri Hari sent a messenger on horseback with the instruction to the two sadhus to meet Hansraj Sheth at Una and then proceed to Diu. When the sadhus got the message they met Hansraj Sheth at Una and proceeded towards Diu. When Mulo Rajgor came to know that the Swaminarayan sadhus had arrived in Diu, he ran away without meeting anyone. He hurriedly boarded a passenger boat and left for Mumbai.

THE SINFUL IMPERSONATE GOD TO INDULGE IN SENSE PLEASURES

Krupanand Swami and Purnanand Swami stayed in Diu to address the devotees. They explained about the dos and don’ts of Satsang and the *niyams* to be observed by male and female devotees. They revealed, “Sadhus observe eight-fold celibacy and also abstain from touching and keeping money. Women should remain aloof from them. Additionally, other than their close male relatives, they should not associate by sitting and talking with male devotees. Widows and *sankhya-yogi* women should abstain from touching males. Shri Hari’s brothers, Rampratapbhai and Ichchharam, have recently come into Satsang from Ayodhya. They, too, staunchly follow the discipline prescribed by Shri Hari and thus do not even talk to other women. So, charlatans like Rajgor, under the pretext of doing satsang, dupe the devotees and engage in illicit relations with women disciples, who out of their spiritual reverence fail to recognize a moral transgression.”

The devotees were pacified and got a rightful understanding through the discourses. Many women were enlightened and felt if the sadhus had not explained the moral disciplines for men and women they would probably have become mired in perversions.

Krupanand Swami and Purnanand Swami stayed for a few days in Diu. Thereafter they returned to Goghla with Hansraj Sheth and travelled back to Una. Hansraj Sheth wrote a detailed letter to Shriji Maharaj describing about what had happened. Maharaj had the letter read in the satsang assembly and stated, “People gratify their material desires by even taking on the guise of God. But eventually they have to face the fate of suffering the torments of *narak* for their improprieties. Thus, when God comes and claims he is God, one should check his divine attributes and then accept him. He is known through his redemptory virtues of truth, compassion, dispassion, etc. Through his association and grace one

is redeemed of mundane desires and experiences inner peace. So, while doing satsang one must be sharp-witted and not naive and gullible.”

DHARMA REMAINS FIRM THROUGH DISCIPLES WEDDED TO SELFLESS SERVICE

One evening, behind Akshar Ordi, a Baniya forgot to snuff out the flame of his lamp before closing his shop. Later, the lamp fell and the merchandise of cloth caught fire. Shri Hari was startled awake intuitively in the middle of the night. He awoke the *parshads*, saying, “Quickly douse the fire or else the adjacent shops will catch fire.”

The *parshads* hurriedly filled pots of water, climbed onto a nearby corrugated roof and splashed water onto the burning shop. After a lot of effort they put out the fire, but the Bania’s shop had been reduced nearly to ashes. The Baniya felt thankful for Shri Hari’s alertness and the efforts of his disciples. He realized that Maharaj had instilled the spirit of philanthropy in his disciples. And he thus felt that because of disciples wedded to selfless service and charity religion remains forever.

Whenever storms, droughts and other calamities assailed society Shri Hari and his sadhus always helped out. Maharaj had never encouraged differences of caste and creed in his disciples. They strived to help all and for the liberation of all.

A WELL WAS DUG IN THE DARBAR

The next day, Shri Hari called Dada Khachar and the senior sadhus and *parshads*. Maharaj told them, “The fire that destroyed the Bania’s shop made me think that we should have a perennial source of water for the safety of all. This time we used all the water stored in the *darbar* to douse the fire. However, in future, if such an accident occurs, we will not face difficulties if there is a permanent source of water nearby. Therefore we must dig a well here.” Then Maharaj told the elderly Yoganand Swami, “You are knowledgeable

in this matter. Show us a spot from where we can get sweet water.”

Yoganand Swami immediately revealed a spot. The next day Maharaj initiated the excavation work for the well. After digging ten arms’ length, a spring of sweet water emerged. Maharaj filtered it and drank the water, commenting, “The water is sweet like that of Ganga.”

At that time, Devraj, a mason from Gondal, was living in Gadhada. Maharaj called him and instructed him to consolidate the well by making a stone wall inside it. The stones for the well were transported in a bullock cart driven by Gova Patel, a devotee of Mandavdhar. A few days later the inner part of the well was fully cladded with stones. Then, Shri Hari sat on the edge of the well and took a bath. The subsequent water that trickled down from Maharaj sanctified the well water.

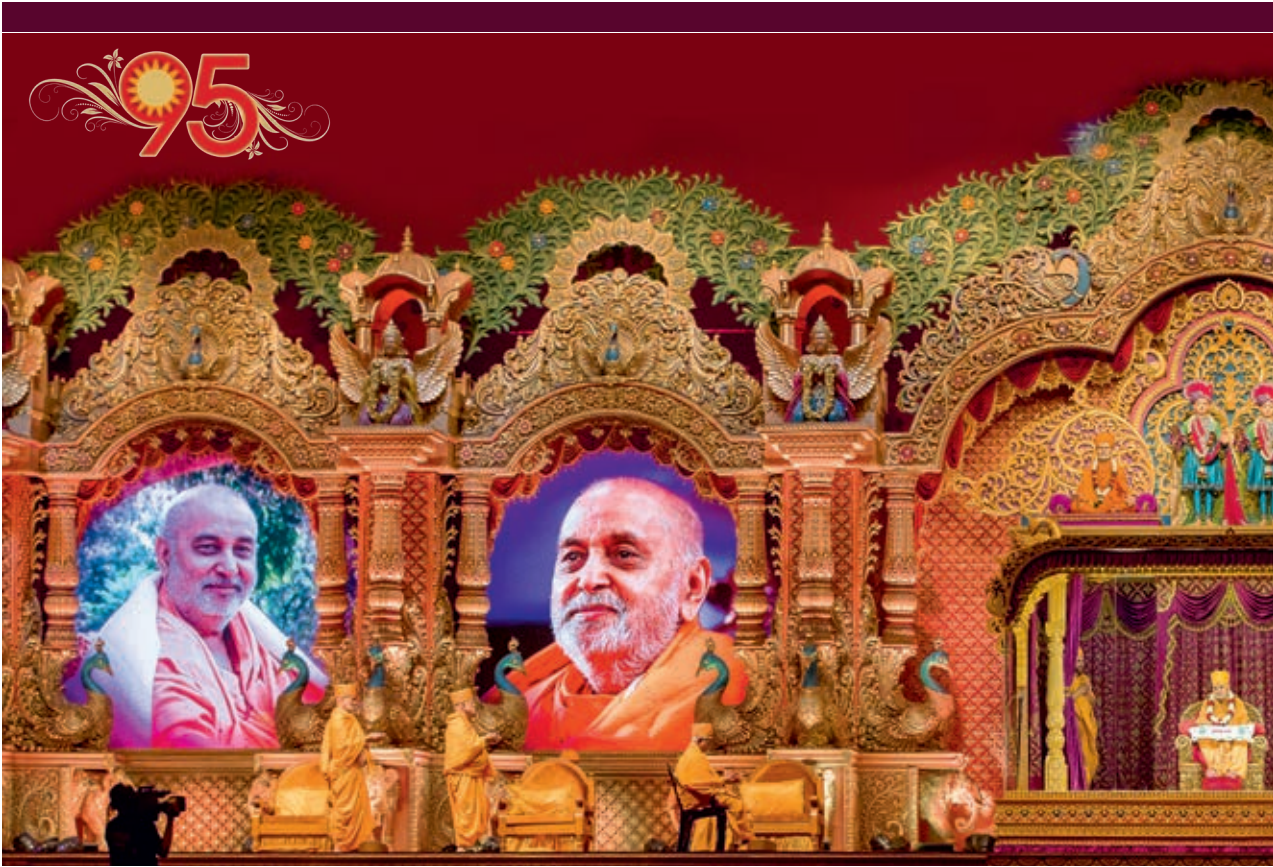
MAHARAJ SAYS ‘HARE’ WHILE EATING

Shri Hari celebrated the Bhim Ekadashi festival of 1822 (A.S. 1878) in Gadhpur. During his stay there he would listen to the *katha* of *Moksha Dharma* read by Pragji Dave. Maharaj loved listening to *katha* and he also inspired others to do so. Whenever the *katha* was being read he always said, ‘Hare, Hare’ to encourage and keep the reader and listeners attentive and awake. Sometimes, out of habit, he also said ‘Hare’ while having lunch or dinner. Mukundanand Brahmachari often laughed and remarked, “Why are you saying ‘Hare’ when no *katha* is being read now!” Shri Hari smiled and said, “Because of the joy from listening to *katha* my mind remains engaged in God. And when the mind is engrossed in God one remembers him even while having lunch and at the same time remains indifferent to the taste of food.”

Shri Hari’s ways were truly unique and transcendental. All his actions were exemplary. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

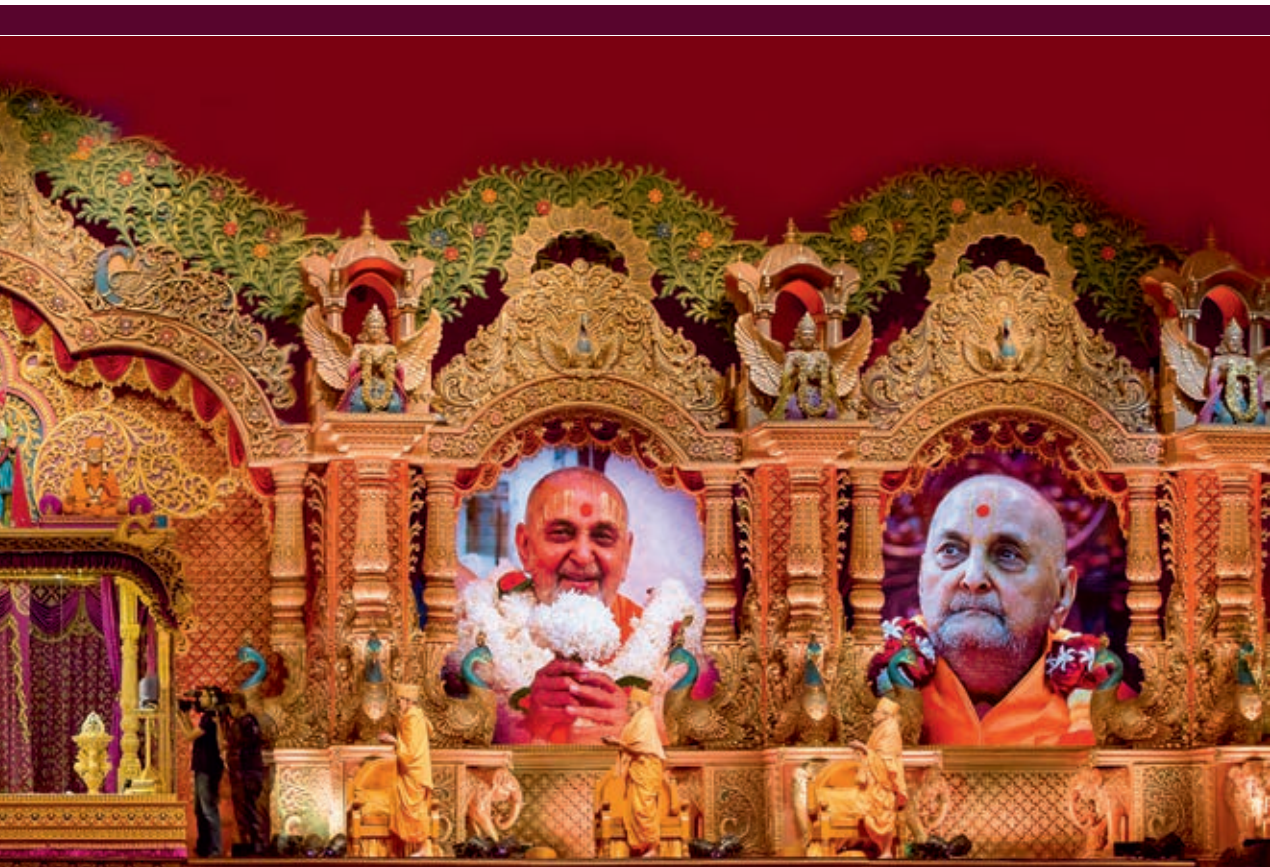


PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 95th Birthday Celebration

19 December 2015, Sarangpur

It was an opportunity not to be missed. For the past eight years devotees have proudly and joyously celebrated *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthday in their local centres. This year, 2015, for the first time since the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in 2007, a central celebration was held, with an open invitation to all devotees to attend Swamishri's 95th birthday celebration in Sarangpur. The devotees were delighted, greeting the opportunity with great excitement and enthusiasm. And over 200,000 devotees from throughout India and abroad flocked to Sarangpur – like bees eager to taste the sweet, juicy nectar of a ripe flower.

Following the announcement, centres around Gujarat began recruiting volunteers to help in the preparations. Ultimately, around 12,500 volunteers served in 33 departments. The departments included: electric, water, kitchen,



Senior sadhus honour Swamishri by performing the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual on the main stage

decoration, assembly arrangements, parking and traffic control, transport, audio, video, lighting, LED screen, security, accounts, medical, cultural presentations, guest reception, press, stage management, programme coordination and others.

With expectations of large numbers of devotees, the only suitable open space for the celebration was in Yagnapurush Vadi, about 2 km from the mandir.

Sadhus from various BAPS mandirs and volunteers from all over Gujarat began preparations about 45 days before the event. Despite the winter chill and freezing winds, they persevered in their tasks to ensure that everything was ready on time for the grand celebration. The volunteers toiled hard day and night. Due to the limited availability of accommodations many stayed in tents, forgoing the comforts they would have at



Swamishri on main stage during the celebration



Entrance gate to the celebration ground

home. Their main motivation was the opportunity to serve for Swamishri's birthday celebration. This overshadowed and nullified any inconveniences they encountered.

Volunteers were assigned to the various departments according to their skill, experience and other general requirements. They were called to serve for periods ranging from one day to 45 days, depending on the needs and duties of their department.

With the support of the local government officials, police, fire brigade and other public bodies, the preparations proceeded smoothly.

After the ground was cleared and levelled, the infrastructure was put in place. Two stages were built: the main stage was 130 ft wide, 30 ft deep and had three height levels – 8 ft, 10 ft and 11 ft. The performing stage was 60 ft wide, 50 ft deep and 6 ft high. Intricately designed pillars, arches, peacocks, elephants, as well as other flower and geometric patterns made of fiberglass and thermocol (polystyrene) formed the exquisite and

aesthetic backdrop to the main stage. Between the four sections demarcated by the pillars and arches there were LED screens, which were initially concealed by curtains, and only revealed after Swamishri had arrived on stage. The screens





The gigantic, ornate celebration stage was set up by sadhus and volunteers

were used to display various pre-selected photos of Swamishri. The decoration department also prepared the beautiful welcome gate at the entrance to the ground.

To enable a good view of the stage, 12 LED

screens measuring 28 by 16 ft were erected at appropriate locations on the vast ground where the devotees would be seated during the celebration assembly.

A total of 110 *balaks*, *kishores* and *yuvaks* from Mumbai, Surat and Tithal performed the main dances presented during the celebration assembly based on three specially composed bhajans: *Shat shat varsh dhāre, guru jivan jyot dhāre; Parātpar Parabrahmanā dhārak, Gunatit karunānā sāgar* and *Aum namo namaha Pramukh Swami*. They had begun practising during their Diwali vacation in November. Each centre was allocated a specific section in each dance so that they could continue practising locally. Then, for the last few days they gathered in Sarangpur to practise the complete dances.

With all the preparations complete, the big day dawned. From early morning, devotees began to arrive from all over. They reveled in Swamishri's morning darshan in the Pramukh Mandiram, main mandir and Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir.





The celebration commenced with the singing of *dhun* and prayer

By midday, thousands of devotees had arrived and the inflow continued to increase. A sea of people had converged on Sarangpur. In fact, over 80,000 devotees were served lunch. The parking department volunteers expertly and efficiently guided the thousands of buses, cars, tractors, rickshaws, motorbikes and other vehicles to their appropriate parking locations ensuing a smooth and safe flow of traffic – both vehicular and pedestrian. And after the assembly, they ensured that the devotees could depart in their vehicles with the minimum of delay.

From around 2.30 p.m. devotees were allowed to enter the ground to take their seat in the assembly. As everyone entered each person was given a Prasad Pack which contained *khichdi*, *chhas*, *mohanthal*, *motichurpak*, *farsi puri*, *samosa*, *kachori*, pickled peppers, *mukhvas*, sauce, water, tissues and spoon, as well as an *arti* to use in the *samuh arti* at the end of the *sabha*.

As the ground filled, the excited buzz of anticipation was visible on the faces of the devotees. Then, at precisely 5.00 p.m. the celebration assembly commenced with *dhun*, *prathana* and *stuti*. The programme theme was ‘Paratpar’, revealing Swamishri’s transcendent nature. It

was split into four sections: Beyond the Need for Personal Comforts, Beyond Pain, Beyond Discrimination, Beyond the Desire for Honour and Recognition. Each section featured an introductory video prepared by a team of sadhus and volunteers, speeches by an invited speaker and a senior sadhu, and a thematic dance. Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Mahant Swami spoke about Swamishri’s saintliness and glory. Thereafter, the Gujarati version of *Transcendence* called *Paratpar* was inaugurated by senior sadhus





Thematic cultural dances performed by youths

and representatives from the publishers. At 7.20 p.m. Swamishri arrived on the assembly stage amidst a tumultuous welcome. He was honoured with flower garlands and thereafter a mass *arti* was profound by all. Many youths from India, UK and USA ensured the smooth and timely running of the programme.

The entire three-hour programme was broadcast live to 160 countries on the Aastha TV channel and streamed as a webcast on the Sanstha's website, which was seen by around 40,000

unique viewers.

This 95th birthday celebration climaxed with the launching of Pramukh Swami Maharaj Birth Centenary Celebrations. ♦



Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Birth Centenary Celebrations

Youths honour Swamishri by performing a thematic cultural dance



SPEECHES BY DIGNITARIES AND SENIOR SADHUS



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ IS A GREAT CREATOR

Shri B.V. Doshi

Renowned architect and Padmashri (Video Interview)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a great creator. I would like to add further, he is the best creator. The reason being that he has altogether given a new concept about the mandir being a home and making a home into a mandir.

There is a difference between *vastu* (a thing) and *vaastu* (architecture). *Vastu* does not grow or flourish whereas *vaastu* does. In *vaastu* one finds growth and creativity. When one sees a thing, for example a home, and one feels that it is a part of nature, it makes one experience joy

from within and one finds a growth in thoughts, values and purity – then that home has become a mandir.

I've never so far seen in my life the making of so many mandirs with noble feelings in all corners of the world, despite there being a disparity in religion, thoughts and behaviour. And surprisingly everyone accepts them and believes that they are a part of their own culture. If there is anyone who could build such mandirs, it is Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



SERVICE TO SOCIETY

Shri Narendrabhai Modi

(Video Interview)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has accepted the duty of serving society. He has strived to uplift the poorest of farmers, served miserable and unhappy people and worried about those affected by emergencies and calamities.

I remember well, and as the Chief Minister I have experienced, that whenever Gujarat has reeled under calamities like floods, famines and earthquakes I first think of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and inform him to make arrangements

for the affected. And within a matter of hours food is cooked and served to the victims. Efforts are made to relieve the sufferings and pains of the afflicted. Those requiring medicines get prompt help. This is how active and vibrant the organization is. It is truly a social and spiritual movement – a great legacy for our society. Once the word reaches Pramukh Swami Maharaj that the hungry are to be fed, I have nothing to worry about.



A TRUE LEADER

Air Marshal P. K. Mehra

India's Defence Force (Video Interview)

I am not a religious or spiritual person. I perform my duty in India's defence force. And that is why I profoundly know what leadership is all about. I am also aware of the importance of sacrifice in one's duty.

In 2002, I visited Kutch during the aftermath of the earthquake. At that time I saw sadhus, *bhaktas* and volunteers in large numbers. They were serving the victims selflessly. I felt different and realized they were doing it out of pure feelings.

In 2007, I got the opportunity of receiving Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings for the first

time. It was then that I came to know that the leadership in his organization was unique, and that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired it in his sadhus and devotees. He is a genuine inspirer. The compassion brimming on his face shows he has never cared for himself physically. He has the power to understand the feelings of others. He possesses the unique aspects required in a leader. Such a religious leader is the guide of the whole of humanity and the world. That is why I believe he is better than all others.



DR KALAM'S ULTIMATE TEACHER

Shri Dr Arun Tiwari

Scientist & Co-author of 'Transcendence'

It is one of the greatest moments for me to be here today before you in this sacred land of Sarangpur. I have the darshan of the senior sadhus and a mammoth congregation of devotees who have come from all parts of India and abroad. Today, I'm reminded of the dialogue between Arjun and Shri Krishna. Arjun asked Shri Krishna to reveal his true form. Bhagwan Shri Krishna gave darshan of his cosmic (*virat*) form. Similarly, on seeing this vast gathering today it seems to be the cosmic form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. And to say a few words before you all is for me a great

moment. In future, I don't think there will be a better moment in my life than this.

Our moon does not have its own light, but when the sun shines on it people say it glows. Likewise, today, I stand here before you because the light of APJ Abdul Kalam shines on me, and you are all able to see me.

In 2001, when Dr Kalam met Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the first time in New Delhi, he had sat on the floor before Swamiji out of his own wish. During that meeting he saw the plans of Akshardham to be built in New Delhi. A few years

later he became the President of India.

In 2005, when Kalam Saheb came for the inauguration of Akshardham in New Delhi he was wonderstruck on seeing the giant Akshardham mandir. At that time he told Pramukh Swamiji, “Swamiji, you have built such a beautiful mandir within a short span of five years, therefore I would like to write a book about it. I want to write about how this miracle took place.” But, it took a long time to write the book.

In 2013, Dr Kalam came for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan in Sarangpur. At that time Kalam Saheb instructed me to write a book on Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Afterwards, I asked Dr Kalam what I should write. He answered, “After the inauguration of Akshardham Mandir I told Pramukh Swami Maharaj that you have built a beautiful mandir in a short time of only five years. Then Pramukh Swami Maharaj replied, ‘I have not done it. It is all due to the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.’ So, such a person, despite building such a big mandir, does not believe it has been accomplished under his leadership. In fact he said it was done by the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Write a book about a person in whom there is no ‘I.’” So, I sat down to write the book.

Many weeks and months passed by pondering about how to start the book. I was befuddled about where to start from. It was like filling the whole ocean of water into a small pot. I knew it was not an ordinary task! Thus, out my frustration I went to Ahmedabad and met Brahmavihari Swami. I talked to him about everything and he took me to Ishwarcharan Swami, who placed his hand on my head and blessed me. Then he gave me a picture of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I placed it before me and from then onwards words, sentences and pages started flowing from my pen. And today, I acknowledge before you that I have not written the book; someone wrote it through me.

Prior to coming to Sarangpur for the dedication ceremony of this book to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we arrived at Ahmedabad. Here, we

told Kalam Saheb that you should travel to Sarangpur by helicopter. He refused, saying, “No. It is a pilgrimage for me, and by spiritual standards I should go on foot. But the least I can do is to go by car.” But the roads were not in good condition because of the monsoon season. In spite of this Kalam Saheb travelled by road to Sarangpur.

He offered the book to Pramukh Swami Maharaj [on 20 June 2015] and said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj, you are my ultimate teacher.”

After the dedication event of the book to Pramukh Swami Maharaj was over, I returned to my home town to meet my mother. I placed the memento and the copy of ‘Transcendence’ I had received in Sarangpur in my mother’s hands. She was extremely happy on seeing the photo of Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the title cover. She happily told me, “Son, you have filled two oceans in one small pot – Abdul Kalam is an ocean of knowledge and Pramukh Swami Maharaj is an ocean of love. So, as a mother I am happy and honoured that such a work has been done through my son. Now you go and get this book translated in the languages that all mothers read.” Thereafter this book has been translated into Hindi, called *Arohan*; into Malayalam, called *Kaalaatheetham*; and into Marathi, called *Unnayan*. And today we have its Gujarati version, called *Paratpar*. In the near future, it is going to be published in Tamil, Telugu and other languages that Indian mothers speak. Just as a mother lovingly calls her child by his or her name, likewise, this book will be known by its names in different languages.

After we had offered *Transcendence* to Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur, I asked Kalam Saheb while we were leaving, “Now, what other book do you want to write?” He replied, “In 2001, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had told me that the progress and development of India will not be possible unless the citizens of India have faith in God and tread the path of righteousness. There are many countries in the world that have

become developed nations, but as long as their citizens do not practice morality, and the families do not adhere to dharma and ethics no true progress is possible. I have an unfulfilled dream which I have come to know about in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj – it is *ekantik* dharma. This dharma has four pillars: dharma *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. As long these four pillars are strong and safe one's home is safe, society is safe and the country is safe." So, he had instructed me to write a book on *ekantik* dharma that can be understood by today's children, youths and everyone.

Bharat (India) has always been the dharma guru. It is Bharat's vision that the whole world is one family. Subsequently, the children of India should grow and lead the world and liberate the whole of humanity. India has blessed that everyone should have compassion for all animals and that our world becomes a better place to live in.

Today, on this holy land, I ask for the blessings of all that I dedicate the rest of my life at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Bless me that I never err in life.



SWAMISHRI'S INNER PEACE AND JOY

Vyomesh Joshi

Former Vice-President of Hewlett Packard and Director of Yahoo.
Director of Wipro Ltd. and Harris Corporation

Because of God's grace I had got great opportunities to scale the heights in the corporate world. Our company (Hewlett-Packard) annually earned 28 billion dollars in the printing business. We sold 60 million printers and 6 million cartridges every year in 127 countries.

Throughout my career I had met and talked with great political leaders like Bill Clinton and business leaders like Bill Gates, Larry Page and Jerry Yang. I wanted to know what these successful people wanted in life. It comes down to three things: 1. Make a contribution, 2. Know the meaning of life, and the most important, 3. To be happy.

I had met Steve Jobs on many occasions because his Apple Company was selling our printers. We became great friends. The contribution of Steve Jobs was phenomenal. He contributed to the music industry, media industry and telecom industry. He invented the ipod, ipad, iphone.

They were all meaningful contributions because they changed our lives. Everybody uses the cell-phone and smartphone now. But I had seen him, and he was not really happy. He had got the first two things, but he never attained happiness.

But when I see Pramukh Swami Maharaj I feel he has no mundane comforts or happiness; and he doesn't have a helicopter to take him anywhere. In fact, he has tolerated great hardships all his life. But in his heart he is absolutely peaceful and happy. When we are around him we feel happy. He smiles candidly. This is possible because he has inner peace and harmony. This is incredible! He has no ego at all. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is above all the comforts and joys of this world. When you see this you realize that in 10 years the technology of iphone, ipod, ipad and many other things will change, but the ancient technology of our mandirs will never change.



HIS RELENTLESS VICHARAN

Pujya Viveksagar Swami

Queen Elizabeth of England and her husband Prince Philip once visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in London. Atmaswarup Swami had told Prince Philip that whenever he happened to be in India he should pay a visit to Akshardham in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. At that time the Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi had not been built. Later, the Queen was invited by the Indian government for the golden anniversary celebration of India's independence. Prince Philip had accompanied the Queen. After the celebration was over he remembered that he had to visit Akshardham in Gandhinagar. On coming there he was under the impression that he would also meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But he was told by Anandswarup Swami that he was always on spiritual travels throughout the year. Prince Philip was surprised to hear of this and remarked that he has built such a beautiful mandir and he doesn't stay here! And despite all the facilities here he travels to the villages!

If someone were to ask me about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's permanent address, I would answer God. He has always remained absorbed in God and performed all his activities and travels while remembering him. Until now he has visited 17,000 towns and villages, made 250,000 home visits, and travelled to more than 50 countries. He travelled incessantly till the age of ninety. The reason being he had pledged before his guru (Shastriji Maharaj) that he would constantly serve the Satsang community without any care for his body.

There are many incidents about his relentless *vicharan* during which he has paid no attention

to his physical needs. In 1973, he had performed 122 *padhramanis* in the scorching heat in Vasad while observing a waterless fast and with a fever of 102°F. At that time he did not take any medicine or water to drink. In fact he had visited three villages that day and retired for the night at 12 midnight.

During his *vicharan* he had often stayed in the huts of tribal people and in the small homes of devotees. He faced difficulties like lack of electricity and toilet and bathing facilities. I have seen him bathe by a well, river and pond. He has sometimes travelled on foot, in a bullock cart and in the third class compartment of a train. Once, a devotee told Swamishri that he would like to buy a helicopter for him to make his *vicharan* easier. But Swamishri refused, "There is no need for it. Whatever facility I have now is okay."

After Yogiji Maharaj passed away Swamishri was declared as guru. Soon, he was scheduled to travel by train to Mumbai. The devotees of Mumbai wished that Swamishri travel in a first class coach, but he came in a third class compartment. Similarly, he has always rejected any comforts and special facilities for himself. These are unique attributes in his pure life.

Once, Swamishri was travelling in the villages of Saurashtra in the scorching heat. I told him it would be better to be in Mumbai in this season. But Swamishri explained, "It is better to travel in the villages during summer because there is no work in the farms, so it is easier for the farmers to attend satsang. And if we come in any other season, they would have to give up their work to attend satsang." Swamishri has always thought

about others and tolerated the discomforts and difficulties in his *vicharan*.

Once in Sabarkantha, Swamishri visited 85 villages in 20 days, and in 1976 he sanctified the homes of devotees and others in 728 villages and towns. He used to travel to five to ten villages a day and perform *padhramanis* to please the devotees. His goal has always been to please the devotees and redeem them from their troubles and miseries.

Once, Swamishri was visiting the homes of devotees in Anand. It so happened that a devotee, who had been told that Swamishri would come and sanctify his home, went in search of Swamishri. In the meantime, Swamishri arrived at his home. Swamishri waited for a while, and then performed *arti* and showered flower petals in his absence and left. After performing many more *padhramanis* Swamishri reached his host's house and sat down for lunch at 2.30 p.m. At that time the devotee who had been looking for Swamishri arrived. He tearfully pleaded, "You came to my house, but I was not present. I wish that you come again now." On seeing him become emotional Swamishri immediately postponed his lunch, went to his house again and pleased him. He returned and took lunch at 3.30 p.m. Swamishri has never thought about his own comforts and schedules in pleasing the devotees.

Once, Swamishri was doing *vicharan* in the villages of Bardoli region. Suddenly, Swamishri had to travel by car to Vallabh Vidyanagar to bless a devotee's social occasion. He attended the occasion and pleased the devotee. Then on the same day Swamishri returned to resume his *vicharan* in the Bardoli region.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled from Dabhan to Piplag for *padhramanis*. He sanctified the homes of devotees till 11.00 p.m. He returned to Dabhan at 11.30 p.m. and was about to retire for the night when the devotees of Piplag told Swamishri, "You have as yet to do *padhramanis*

at our homes." I said, "When we come again we'll definitely come to your homes." But Swamishri did *padhramanis* till late night and fulfilled the devotees' wish. He went to bed at 1.30 a.m.

In the town of Gajera, Swamishri visited 157 homes in one day. He bore the hardships to please the devotees.

Whenever Swamishri travels abroad for *vicharan* some think that it is a lot easier there. But he has never been overwhelmed by the comforts and facilities provided. In Philadelphia, Swamishri did *padhramanis* from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m. In 1977, Swamishri travelled 3,000 miles by car from New York to Los Angeles simply to bless the devotees and well-wishers along the way.

On one occasion Swamishri was doing *padhramanis* in New York and New Jersey. That day he took lunch at 5.30 p.m. In spite of all these difficulties and unscheduled programmes Swamishri always beamed with joy. He never uttered or thought, "Why are there no proper comforts and arrangements."

In 1985, the Cultural Festival of India was organized in London by Swamishri. The devotees insisted that he fly in first class from Mumbai to London. Swamishri replied, "I'll come by economy class."

In Banaras, Swamishri travelled in a rickshaw to do *padhramanis* in the rain. In some places, people were ready to make proper arrangements for him, but Swamishri refused. He rejected all comforts and so his make-do attitude has become a spiritual ideal for all to follow.

Despite many other such difficulties, Swamishri remained relentless in his *vicharan*. Amidst his hectic travels, Swamishri has built 1,200 mandirs, initiated nearly 1,000 sadhus and inspired 1 million devotees.

Swamishri has never demanded for any comforts and neither has he wished for them. He has remained ever joyful in any situation. This is how he has lived.

Mundane happiness and comforts are desired

by all humans. But how does Swamishri naturally transcend all these things? The answer is God, who he believes is the source of all happiness and joy, and who forever resides in him. Subsequently, he has no care for nor is he dependent on worldly pleasures.

Let us pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, “*Yasya jivanena bahavo jivanti...*” – “By whose life the life of all in the world is sustained” – May our beloved guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj live a long life.



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BODY AND ATMA

Dr Tejas Patel

Renowned Cardiologist and Director of Apex Hospital

Ever since I was young Pramukh Swami Maharaj has blessed me and showered his grace upon me. However, I got the opportunity to really know him when I was given the responsibility of taking care of his heart. About four years back my partner, Dr Sanjay, and I went to Sarangpur to check Swamishri's health. He was 91 years old at the time and with a little hesitation we told Swami there was a need to place a pacemaker for his heart. We said there would be a minor difficulty in doing it, but it could be done. Swami replied, “There won't be any difficulty because you'll be there. You will do well.” This is what he said.

Thereafter, on 14 June 2012, Swami came to the Shahibaug mandir (Ahmedabad) from Sarangpur. That night we came to check him up and talked about another problem to him. We explained that it was not possible to give him general anaesthesia for the operation, because there was a risk. Even a little general anaesthesia would pose a problem. So, we would have to administer a local anaesthesia to desensitize the skin for the two-hour operation. The surgery would be very painful, but there is no other alternative. Swami replied, “I am not in pain now and there will be no pain, so you do your work.”

The next morning, Swami came to my hospital.

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

With the operation over, the next challenge for us was to not keep Swami in the hospital. The reason being the probability of him getting cross-infection in the hospital. So, he was immediately taken by car to the mandir. His room had been converted into an ICU.

When we arrived at the mandir thousands of devotees had gathered for his darshan. Despite the fact that an hour had not passed after his surgery, Swami patiently gave darshan to all. Later on I came to know that some devotees were saying whether Swami had really undergone an operation or had he returned after a routine check-up. There was not the slightest trace of pain on his face or any expression of that sort.

While we were returning from the hospital to the mandir and then later in his room I had repeatedly asked Swami, “Is there any pain or

discomfort?” He simply said no.

Then three months later Dr Sanjay and I came to see Swami. After the check-up we asked him whether he had any problems. Again he gave the same reply, saying there was no problem.

We do not immediately believe such answers in medical science. The reason being we practice evidence based medicine. So, such answers do not convince us. We know that in such situations there is bound to be pain.

Thereafter, Swami went to America. He faced no problems in going to and returning from America. In fact, we did not face any problems we had anticipated.

So, in the 25 years of my career as a cardiologist I have never seen a patient like Swami. He, at 91 years, did not utter a single sound in pain during the two-hour surgery performed under local anaesthesia. He never expressed pain before, during and after the surgery, and even till today. As a result I understood the difference between the body and *atma*, which I had been trying to understand since the last 15 years. My father had tried to explain it to me, but I was never convinced. However, on witnessing Pramukh Swami Maharaj remain equipoised in pain and difficulty he taught me what I would not have been able to know for ten births.



ABOVE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SUFFERINGS

Pujya Anandswarup Swami

H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is unaffected by all forms of suffering. There are two types of suffering: one is physical and the other is mental.

Physical suffering results from bodily injury, malaria, typhoid, etc. Fear of death, nightmares, depression, insults are forms of mental suffering.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is untouched by sufferings due to both the body and mind. Throughout his life he has tolerated the physical pain of knee arthritis, gall bladder surgery, cataract operations, tumour excision, heart attacks, coronary artery bypass surgery and other ailments. However, amid all these problems, he has never complained about the obvious pain associated with the conditions. Since, he believes himself to be *atma*, *brahman*, *akshar* [and thus separate from the body]. This understanding is evident in his actions.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj underwent bypass

surgery. Dr Subramaniam performed the operation and Dr Nilesh Patel assisted him. Once, Dr Nilesh Patel was asked in what way he considered Pramukh Swami Maharaj as different compared to other patients. He replied, “At the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, I have treated many VIPs. In my opinion, looking after one VIP is equal to caring for 25 routine patients. But Swamishri made our job easy. He never let us feel that he was the most VIP of VIPs.

“When the operation and the subsequent pain was discussed, Swamisri said, ‘These are all feelings of the body. The *atma* is always blissful.’ But I could not understand how the *atma* and body could be separate.

“On the second day after the operation, I got the answer to my question. Yogicharan Swami was talking to Swamishri while I was performing an arterial puncture. This procedure is very

painful. Even the strongest of patients shout in pain. During the procedure, I carefully observed Swamishri's face and noticed that there was not even the slightest grimace of pain. Then I realized how the *atma* and body can be separated."

This reveals that Swamishri is unaffected by physical pain. But the greatest suffering is due to the mind. That suffering is subtle, long term and more intense. The root of mental suffering is ego. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is an egoless personality. Without any fault of his or valid reason, he has been subject to many insults. He regards insults as ornaments. He does not harbour any thoughts of retaliation or enmity towards anyone. He has even helped those who have maligned him.

After Swamishri's operation to remove a large [benign] tumour from his thigh, he was recuperating at a devotee's house. This devotee brought a friend of his for Swamishri's darshan. However, this person, who was prejudiced against Swamishri, began uttering a string of baseless accusations.

Swamishri did not utter a single word in reply. In fact, he even stopped the nearby sadhus and other devotees from speaking. He allowed the visitor to vent his thoughts. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's innate saintliness was evident. Such humility.

A person who has no ego does not experience any form of mental suffering. What is the reason that Swamishri is egoless? Because he fully understands the glory of God. He believes God to be the all-doer and omnipresent.

So, darkness may be able to enter the sun, but ego, despair or frustration can never enter Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The main reason for this is his realization of Atma and Paramatma, of Akshar and Purushottam and Brahman and Parabrahman.

Swamishri has manifested to impart this knowledge. Prayers at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan that we may walk the path he has shown.



HE ALSO CARES FOR THE POOR

Raichand Rabari

A Cowherd

As a 12-year-old, I had worn shorts and was wandering in the mandir [in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad] when Bapa saw me and asked, "Who are you?" I said, "Bapa, I'm a *rabari* [cowherd]." Bapa asked, "Do you want to stay here?" I answered, "Yes." Then, Bapa kept me in the mandir and frequently enquired about me. Bapa even used to take care of the cleaners and the poor who came to the mandir. He would call them all and enquire about them.

Once, Swami Bapa had gone to America. He phoned the sadhus from there. He remembered

me and called me. I came running. Ishwarcharan Swami and other sadhus were talking to him. Yet, Swami Bapa spoke to me on the phone and asked me about everything – including my cows. I told him everything was fine. In this way, Swami Bapa has frequently asked about me.

I have had two heart attacks and had four blockages. When Bapa heard about this, he sent me by plane for treatment [to South India]. There, I underwent a successful bypass operation. When I returned, people realized that Pramukh Swami even cares for the poor in this way. They came

to my small house to appreciate him. Even the well-to-do residents of my neighbourhood admire Bapa's compassion towards the poor.

Thus, Bapa has showered his grace upon me and blessed me with a new life.



HIS COMPASSION AND GRACE

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami

In Swami Bapa's life we see limitless compassion and grace. Ordinarily, many people possess such qualities. But, Swamishri's compassion and grace serve to remove material attachments, bring the *jiva* closer to God and bestow the bliss of God.

Narayanbhai Mistry, a devotee of Ahmedabad, was an expert carpenter. He made *sinhasans* and beautiful *murtis* of God from wood. He had great artistic sense and performed much *seva*. Towards the end of his life he experienced some difficulties.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Ahmedabad. Narayanbhai Mistry was also there. He was sitting on the steps outside Pramukh Swami Maharaj's room. Pramukh Swami Maharaj came out of his room and on seeing Narayanbhai Mistry he instantly sat next to him on the steps. Swamishri stroked his back and asked, "Narayanbhai, what is troubling you?" After making full enquiries, Swamishri called me and said, "Look after him well. Visit him at home every month. Give him whatever he wants. He is a very dedicated, longstanding devotee. Serve him properly till the end." Swamishri has showered his compassion on even the simplest devotees, so they can be happier and more attached to God.

Ramanbhai Sheth was another devotee of Ahmedabad. For many years he worked as a labourer in a mill and did not earn much. He had a big family and faced many difficulties in his life.

When he retired, he received a good payment. For many years, he had wished to please Bapa and so expressed his wish to donate the entire payment to the Sanstha. Bapa refused him, saying, "You have many problems at home. So, first look after your home needs." Hearing this, Ramanbhai was upset and became very emotional. So, Swamishri respected his wish and accepted his *seva*.

During the famine in 1987, our Sanstha had set up many cattle camps. On hearing about this, Ramanbhai came to donate Rs. 5,000. Bapa refused, "No, you sing daily in my puja. So, your *seva* is to sing a kirtan daily in my puja. But, do not give money." God and his Sadhu always lovingly take care of their devotees, spiritually and materially, strengthening their attachment to God.

In Atladra there was a *sevak* named Mahiji. He was of very ordinary means. He was a painter who painted our old mandir in Atladra. Nobody ever noticed him.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had returned from an overseas visit and a grand assembly was held in the assembly hall. Many prominent people of Atladra were present. At that time, Mahiji suddenly approached Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He was wearing tattered clothes and looked unkempt. Everyone wondered who he was. But, Pramukh Swami Maharaj greeted him lovingly, "Mahiji, come here." Swamishri enquired about

his well-being and blessed him, while everyone in the assembly silently observed. Pramukh Swami Maharaj does not discriminate against anyone. His vision is to attach everyone to God so that they attain fulfilment.

There are many such incidents which reveal the extent of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's compassion and grace. He does not forget even those people who are ignored and uncared for by others. He always remembers the *seva* they have done. He ensures they are looked after well. His only

inner wish is that they sincerely worship God.

This is what we have to learn from Bapa's life. There are hundreds of thousands of devotees in Satsang and we should have such compassion and grace towards all. Shastriji Maharaj has said, "Keep *paksh* within Satsang." Bapa also talks about keeping *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*. To support and help each other is a great *seva*. Understand the *mahima* of the sadhus and devotees, and constantly contemplate on Bapa's virtues. May we all develop such virtues in our lives.



THE SOUL OF INDIA

Tarun Vijay

Renowned Journalist and Member of Parliament

I have come from Uttarakhand in the Himalayas. But today, the Himalayas are also bowing before such a great Himalayan personality. Today, in the presence of this Himalaya I see an ocean of patriotic joy. Hence, my heart is content for the future of India. As long as there are great personalities like Pramukh Swami Maharaj who combine patriotism with spirituality, the future of India is glowing, grand and glorious.

Over 5,000 years ago, on the banks of the Yamuna the melodious tune of Shri Krishna's flute generated waves of devotion everywhere. Today, on that same Yamuna, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has played the flute of Akshardham and once again inspired devotion everywhere.

Pramukh Swami, you are fulfilled and I repeatedly bow to you as you have established India throughout the world. Wherever Pramukh Swami's holy feet have gone, India has been established. Wherever in the world Swaminarayan mandirs have been built, the devotion and discipline of India has been aroused. Everyone visits

them to experience India.

I truly believe that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the future of India. O Pramukh Swami Maharaj! Whether it is Houston, Atlanta, Chicago, Nairobi, London, Toronto or anywhere in the world, you have inspired the true values of India.

But he has no expectations of recognition. He is merely focused on lifting the poor out of poverty, the illiterate from their ignorance, and the addicted from their addictions. Only then will India prosper and reach the pinnacle of the world. You are the soul of India.

Just as a hungry child appeals to his mother, "Mother, I am hungry. Quickly give me food," similarly, I regard Pramukh Swami Maharaj as my life's mother and appeal, "Mother, I am in much difficulty. What should I do?"

Whenever I am in difficulty, facing challenges or despondent, I pray at the feet of Pramukh Swami. And just as Vishnu rushed to protect the elephant from the crocodile, Pramukh Swami has always protected me.

Before I took the pledge as a *sansad* member [M.P.], I sought the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is egoless, humble, virtuous and untouched by materialism, and is the joy in

everyone's heart, the soul of India's devotion and the destiny of India.

I pray that may you forever continue to inspire India for progress.



UNTOUCHED BY PRAISES

Pujya Doctor (Swayamprakash) Swami

Life is full of problems. The only solution to them is God. Apart from God, wherever you go, whatever you become or whatever you attain, there is no solution to the problems. The work of God is like an electric current. Everyone can see the light, but the current cannot be seen. Similarly, God cannot be seen. He resides in everyone's heart. He has to be realized. To realize him, Sadguru Muktanand Swami says, "*Hu tale Hari dhukadā...*" – "Abolishing one's ego brings God near." So we have to remove our ego.

You can get many people to move a stone lying nearby. But how many can remove a kidney stone? Some can do this also, but how many can remove a small tumour from the brain? Some may even be able to do this. But the stone of ego is lodged in our heart. And we are unable to remove it. Only God can remove it.

The Upanishads reveal that by knowing God ego is removed. Einstein said, "It is harder to break prejudice than an atom." The same is true for ego. So, to remove ego, God must be realized.

I have known Pramukh Swami Maharaj for many years and I have observed the way he is honoured. Very few people receive such honour. Yet, he is unaffected by the honours. He does so many matchless works which are praised by experts in those fields. But, he is untouched by it

all. This is not a small thing. This is only possible if one has realized God.

It is difficult to remove our ego from our work. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has talked about the ego of detachment. We have to remove our ego. When is this possible? If a millionaire lives in a village, he feels that he is important. But if he meets or hears about Bill Gates, then his ego is overcome. Similarly, if we think about God's work then our ego is removed. Today, people are advancing in different areas, but look at the work of God. God made the hair on our head; can we make even a single hair? It's a difficult task. God has made the soil. So many things are obtained from the soil. So many different fragrances.

You will have seen that children do not obey their parents. At present there are 945 sadhus, of whom 90 are citizens of America or Canada, and a further 90 are the only sons of their parents. None of the sadhus are given wages. They are given two sets of saffron robes, food and accommodation. No other arrangements. Normally, people work 8 hours daily. The sadhus serve for about 12 to 14 hours daily. There are no Sundays off or holidays, and no retirement. They all work in this way. What is the reason for this? They have seen God in Pramukh Swami Maharaj and so have been inspired. Thus

they serve with humility. The more we tread this path, the more we understand the need to remove ego.

The purpose of celebrating this *jayanti* is

to abolish our ego and purify our heart. If you work with this message, your work will be accomplished. It will feel like a celebration every day.



SWAMISHRI IS 'PARATPAR'

Pujya Mahant Swami

Swamishri is beyond misery and joy, and beyond any discrimination. Not just beyond, but way beyond: He is beyond everything. Not just slightly, but a vast extent beyond. The word 'paratpar' is used only for God. So in what way can Swamishri be described as *paratpar* (transcendent).

These are the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan: God sees through the eyes of such a sadhu, God walks through such a sadhu and God works in each of his senses. To see, listen, bless, work – all this is being done by God. When God is present in every part of Swamishri's body, where is the difference? So, he is also *paratpar*.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also said, "The authority of a queen is the same as that of the king." Nishkulanand Swami has said, "The Sadhu is the manifest form of God." All these talks are based on the shastras. They are also experienced. Today, the guests voiced their experiences. Speaking from experience has a different effect to speaking from one's imagination. Dr Swami just said, "Pramukh Swami is beyond ego." Today, everyone in the whole world is obsessed about their own work. They cannot separate themselves from it. They talk about 'their own activities'. This is their ego.

But, it is possible to become beyond all this. Muktanand Swami has said, "One who has the highest level of *vivek* has all virtues and does not

harbour ego even of his virtues."

This is a great achievement. We all know that Pramukh Swami is egoless and humble, but to cultivate these virtues ourselves is a different task. Everyone is touched by Swamishri's egolessness and that is why all have great affection for him, attach to him and obey him.

What is the indicator of this? Only one who fully realizes God and understands his glory can become egoless. If there is even the slightest weakness, these virtues cannot be attained. That then is the proof. Pramukh Swami fully knows the bliss and glory of God, and he understands everything else to be insignificant. We are fortunate to have attained such a sadhu. Today, everyone has prayed that Swami stays on earth for many more years. Due to Swami people are virtuous. It is not possible to do this on one's own. Only by associating with him, can we also become humble. So, the more one's attachment, affection and *atmabuddhi* towards him, the more one achieves.

May we all understand and accept his message and attach ourselves to him. In this, all is accomplished. ♦



AN INTIMATE LETTER TO Pramukh Swami Maharaj

A letter to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, saying how his simply being there in Sarangpur drives the young and old devotees worldwide to strive for what would really please him...

Dearest Pramukh Swami,

It is truly awe-inspiring to see what Sarangpur is today.

Otherwise a sleepy village of 3,000, it is now a throbbing hub of divinity. What really makes you such a magnet, drawing a multitude of excited devotees to you?

Lush green trees, singing peacocks, a throng of excited devotees, young and old, about 200 blissful sadhus, blessed air and to top it all you.

Your spiritual charisma brings devotees beyond numbers to have a barest glimpse of you. It seems you have opened the doors of your great soul inviting us into your inner sanctuary to share your experience of God. Your mere presence transports us into an atmosphere of spiritual rapture. We feel we are breathing the ozone of a mountain summit.

When the devotees reach Sarangpur for your darshan, neither tomorrow nor yesterday matters.

For, every now turns into eternity as it is full of divinity in your presence.

Holding God endlessly, you have been giving us endlessly which is why worries fade away like ugly clouds in your presence. Your love in all wondrous fervour draws devotees like ducks take to water.

Now, we know what it means to be a God-realized sadhu. Although you are a nonagenarian and do not travel, devotees are found teeming before you. That's something gerontologists cannot fathom.

How much can an individual achieve in a lifetime? Even without words, travel, and any form of communication? We wonder.

Pray, tell us, dear Swamishri, why do the devotees plan a trip to Sarangpur rather than a hill station?

Why do they feel blessed even with a mere glimpse of yours for a few minutes?

ABOUT SARANGPUR

Sarangpur is often pronounced as Salangpur. It lies at the border of Ahmedabad district. It is 153 km away from Ahmedabad. The nearest city is Bhavnagar. 'Sarang' is a Sanskrit word which means 'peacock'. So, we find many peacocks there.

The village has a population of around 3,000 with around 30% literacy.

Sarangpur is well-known for the Hanumanji mandir and the BAPS mandir built in 1916 by Shastriji Maharaj. The BAPS mandir is the second highest pinnacled mandir in Gujarat with a height of 108 feet. This mandir is also a training hub for the newly initiated sadhus.

What brings them to Sarangpur knowing that they can't have the privacy of sitting with you anymore?

A mere thought of your being there in Sarangpur perks up the devotees all over, at home and abroad.

So, although you no longer visit places, Yogiji Maharaj's trademark weekly Sunday *sabhas* are held all over with the same zeal as ever. And *shibirs* for children and youths are organized with new ideas. And the festive gatherings are awaited eagerly.

What is it that doesn't make us miss you?

Things go on like before in all BAPS centres, whether it is an obscure village or a bustling metropolis like Mumbai or New York.

There is a phenomenal increase in the number of *satsangis* as well. There are newer faces joining in.

And what to talk of mandirs? Those havens of peace you continued raising.

In the span of two years since you came to Sarangpur, 116 *hari* mandirs and 8 *shikharbaddha* mandirs have come up, beautifying the skyline and purifying countless souls.

It seems your glory spreads like the sound of a conch shell in the sky.

What is really astounding is that twentysomethings are intent upon having *diksha* from you, leaving greener pastures behind, to lead a life of austerity and strict discipline, the way Yogiji Maharaj would have liked it. And they are from abroad also.

At present, about 100 *sadhaks* are training for *diksha*. Some of them are very brilliant with professional qualifications. Some are the only sons of their parents.

They know fully well that you have fully accepted the toll of old age and you are not going to speak to them, raise your hands to bless them and probably utter the Guru mantra into their ears. But your mere presence and touch makes all the difference.

Even your silence speaks. When Ralph Waldo Emerson, an essayist and once a president of the philosophy club went to see Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish philosopher and historian, to seek his guidance on a philosophical riddle, Thomas Carlyle sat there, in meaningful silence. Even that was rewarding. Emerson came back feeling blessed. And the riddle solved.

While youths of their age are craving for gratification of passions and success in life, these *sadhaks* have decided to go forth with severe bodily discipline and all else with it that would bring on a moment of sublime insight. To crack the secret of the universe and deliverance into bliss. Isn't that heroic?

No more *vicharans* (tours), no more sittings with devotees, no more speeches, no more phone calls, no more letters. Yet things in the Satsang go on as ever. Viveksagar Swami rightly calls it Divine Rays Treatment (DRT).

Devotees and sadhus get those divine vibes in your presence. That distinctive emotional aura experienced instinctively. So they feel like coming



back again to Sarangpur.

Everything else melts away like a mirage. Only ecstasy remains. Devotees cherish those glorious moments of your darshan. For there is no pettiness of unled self. Moment by moment, they explore spiritual planes.

All this comes about since you respond to God as a violin responds to the bow of the master.

And how can we forget those two imposing *maha*-mandirs called Swaminarayan Akshardham you raised with strenuous efforts. One in green Gandhinagar and the other in bustling New Delhi. In actual terms, a new chapter unfolded in New Delhi with the inauguration of Akshardham in 2005.

Standing at the entrance, and looking at Akshardham on the New Delhi skyline, one gets the feeling that God painted his wonderful vision. And why not?

It's the glory of God.

What drives you to such accomplishments? Sterling qualities we know of. But there is more to it. Sometimes you shared that secret with us. Once, a stern security official at the airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, asked you, "Do you have any valuables?"

You at once replied, "Yes. I have God with me."

The security official was really stumped by your answer.

You worked tirelessly down the years to spread God's word and raised these two Akshardhams with your creative ability. Yet, when we showered praises on you for those remarkable feats, you gave all credit to God and your gurus.

All glory to God and the Gurus; that has remained your *raison d'être* all along. Now, that's called sheer modesty!

Who would do that? All modesty.

You worked in perfect responsiveness to their wills. And, it seems God and your Gurus were working through you.

And today we find that the New Delhi Akshardham stands there as if speaking with a timeless voice of a great mystic that is characteristic of, who else? You.

Your strong spiritual leadership in the changing times inspired even the late Dr. Abdul Kalam and people of other religious faiths to admire you.

These days the word tolerance is in the news. But the disarming tolerance you showed at the time of the terrorist attack in Akshardham in 2002 was indeed edifying.

Your quiet appeal for peace moved all political and religious leaders.

Indeed, you set a robust example of tolerance. You prayed even for the terrorists!! Not an iota of ill-will.

What a humble gesture!

Looking back, we find that you worked even for the poor and uncouth tribals and illuminated the dark districts of Gujarat populated by the tribals.

You rushed to them just three months after Yogiji Maharaj left for Akshardham, as the head of BAPS.

You cared for their education, health and moral compass. Thus, all along you have been loving to God as well as to the humans and their needs.

You sorted out the tales of woe that householders brought, spending hours with them. To make their lives and our earth more heavenly.

Huge doses of humanity came from you in times of natural calamities.

Your sadhus have been guided by your motto which has humans at the centre, **“Remember, you don’t live in a world all on your own. Your fellow beings are also there.”**

Incisive, alert, authoritative guide and shrewd

sense of values have an ageless quality about you.

We are like infants in arms before you but you helped us share poetic beauty of inner spiritual experience.

You are so rich in things of the spirit, that business tycoons and scholars alike feel beggared in your presence.

Honoured times without numbers for your accomplishments, you simply worked by virtue of authority vested in you by Bhgwan Swaminarayan.

Shall we call it your divinity scape?

Posterity will indeed wonder that such a sadhu in mortal flesh dwelt on the earth!

Meanwhile, the *sadguru* sadhus have already planned your birthday celebrations for the next five years. Birthdays come and go. But yours makes a world of difference.

Dr Seuss said it just for you, “Today you are you! That is truer than true. There is no one alive who is you-er than you!!”

Every year on your birthday, a great many people feel excited to count their blessings.

Because you are everybody’s Guru. ♦

PRAMUKH SWAMI’S STAY AT A GLANCE IN SARANGPUR

From 5.5.2013 to 5.5.1015

Total Days: 707

Pramukh Mandiram 292

Glassroom (new) 40

Sant Ashram 8

Chiku Vadi 3

Yagnapurush Mandap Stage 3

DARSHAN BONANZA

Place Nos.

Mandir 120

Jharukho 256

Sarvasva 594

Garden 45

Glassroom 34

Rang Mandap 14

Vidyamandir (school) 2

Fuldol Stage 1

Smruti Mandir 88

On the Ramp 380

No. of days of Swamishri’s Darshan: 661 days

Total Hours of Darshan: 797

An average of 65 minutes daily

NEW MANDIRS CONSECRATED

Hari Mandirs 116

Shikharbaddha Mandirs 8

Total 124

Parshad and Sadhu Diksha: 97 youths

ULLASRAM PANDYA

Early Exponent of and Witness to BAPS's Rise



Kanam, a region in central Gujarat, is famous for its rich, peaty soil. During the 19th and 20th century, nonstop rainfall for seven to ten days was a common scene here throughout the monsoon season. However, for the sadhus from the Vartal Swaminarayan Mandir, located in the adjacent Charotar region, such adverse weather conditions in Kanam made it very difficult to travel around. So, Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj of Vartal, after due thought, decided to permanently assign the Kanam region to Sadguru Upendranand Swami, who usually endeavoured there for spreading satsang. Sadguru Upendranand Swami was a blessed disciple of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. By Gunatitanand Swami's grace, he had eradicated all his inner weaknesses and continually experienced divine bliss in his heart. He propagated Gunatitanand Swami's glory to several devotees of Kanam; one such devotee was Karunashankar Pandya, a learned Brahmin from the town of Dabhoi in Kanam. Karunashankar too, like Upendranand Swami, had visited Junagadh and personally experienced Gunatitanand Swami's phenomenal spiritual greatness. In Junagadh, in the presence of Gunatitanand Swami, he had observed that satsang was as lively as in the times of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Ullasram Pandya, the central character of this article, was the grandson of this well-known devotee.

Ullasram Dulsukhram Pandya was an early exponent of and an eyewitness to BAPS's providential rise. While the sun of the 19th century was setting, the dawn of the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine was breaking over the horizon of the new century. Ullasrambhai was a close observer of this momentous change. He championed the movement for the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine in manifold ways. Satsang was his pride and joy. Though satsang had come down to him as a family heritage from his grandfather, Karunashankar Pandya, he was initially unaware of Gunatitanand Swami's glory. But when he was around eighteen, Shastriji

Maharaj entered his life, and Ullasram dedicated the rest of his life in the service of the Akshar-Purshottam movement.

Ullasram was then studying at a high school in Vadodara. Around this time, Shastriji Maharaj too – as a bright young student named Sadhu Yagnapurushdas – was studying Sanskrit grammar in Vadodara under Pundit Rangacharya, a distinguished scholar of the Madhva philosophy. This proximity brought Ullasram closer to Shastriji Maharaj. As a result of this companionship, Ullasram was to develop reverence for Bhagatji Maharaj, become Bhagatji Maharaj's ardent disciple, and lay the foundation for a future

publication of his guru's biography. His testimony about those years of his life were sourced from the past issues of *Swaminarayan Prakash* and his speeches. It is as follows:

"I came in touch with Shastriji Maharaj in 1891 CE (Samvat 1947). During those days, a senior sadhu named Murlidhardas and his group of sadhus lived at the Dabhoi Swaminarayan Mandir. Since Murlidhardas was very aged, he could not benefit the devotees of Dabhoi with his spiritual discourses. The devotees therefore sent a Brahmin named Damodar Parot with a letter addressed to Kothari Gordhanbhai and the Acharya of Vartal Mandir requesting them to send a *purani*¹ to Dabhoi. The *kothari* and the *acharya* chose Yagnapurushdas – my guru Shastriji Maharaj – to go to Dabhoi. They suggested to him to stay under Murlidhardas's commands and deliver discourses to the devotees' satisfaction.

"During that period, I was studying English at a high school in Vadodara. But I had to return home because of my ill health in the rainy season. My home was just across the street from the Dabhoi Swaminarayan Mandir. Our family benefited immensely from the spiritual discourses and other occasions held there. Every day, during the month of Shravan, my father ritually offered tulasi leaves on the *murti* of Shri Hari while chanting the one thousand names of God mentioned in the *Sarvamangal Vishnu Sahasranam*. At that time, the *Sarvamangal* wasn't available as thousand separate names but existed in euphonically combined form. So my father requested Shastriji Maharaj to help him separate the names. In the afternoon, my father would go to Shastriji Maharaj's seat on the upper floor [of the mandir] where he used to contemplate for his evening discourse. While separating the names, Shastriji Maharaj used to talk about the divine powers of Gopalanand Swami, who was

also my grandfather Karunashankar's guru. He also talked about my grandfather's visit to Junagadh along with Bhagwan Bhikha Patel of Mandala village, and about Gunatitanand Swami's spiritual prowess that my grandfather experienced while he stayed there for 22 days in 1866 (Samvat 1922). Since my father could not write the separated names from *Sarvamangal*, I accompanied him as a scribe. In this way I, too, started sitting frequently with Shastriji Maharaj on the upper floor. The sadhus on the ground floor didn't like this, but as Shastriji Maharaj was helping us in separating the names, they couldn't forbid us from meeting him.

"Shastriji Maharaj's nature and enthusiasm were such that he would always discourse to anyone who came to meet him. In the assembly, he would discourse on Bhagwan Swaminarayan being the cause of all incarnations. With fascinating examples and arguments, he would describe Bhagwan Swaminarayan's glory as extolled by Gopalanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and others as well as inspiring episodes from their lives. But in the presence of the local sadhus, he couldn't talk extensively about Bhagatji Maharaj's greatness. At noon, because I used to meet him privately for separating the names of the *Sarvamangal Stotra*, he would describe before me some episodes from Bhagatji Maharaj's life. They were all so illuminating and telling that I began understanding the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gopalanand Swami, and others in the true sense. I already knew about Gopalanand Swami's greatness to some extent from my father and uncle as Gopalanand Swami was my grandfather's guru since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. But I wasn't aware of Gunatitanand Swami's greatness, which I came to understand then with great delight.

"With Dabhoi being a provincial town of Gaekwad State with government offices, devotees from surrounding villages often came

1. A sadhu who delivers spiritual discourses based on Sanskrit scriptures.

here. Because of the heavy rains during the monsoon season and the inconvenient train schedules, they usually had to stay here for two nights. Most of them chose Dabhoi mandir for staying over. At night, while delivering spiritual discourses, Shastriji Maharaj again narrated many extraordinary episodes that these devotees had never heard of. The devotees felt so happy that they started singing Shastriji Maharaj's praises wherever they went. They used to say that many sadhu groups have come here, but they had never heard such discourses before.

"After the aforesaid first acquaintance with Shastriji Maharaj at Dabhoi in 1891 CE (Samvat 1947), in 1892 CE (Samvat 1948) I had to stay in Vadodara for my matriculation. During that year, Shastriji Maharaj too came to stay in Vadodara. Four students – Shastriji Maharaj, Sachchidanand Brahmachari, Mayatitanand Brahmachari and Krushnapriyadas – were sent from Vartal to Vadodara to study Sanskrit grammar under Pundit Rangacharya, a distinguished South Indian scholar of the Madhva philosophy. Every morning at nine o'clock, he came to teach them at the Vadodara mandir.

"I was around eighteen then. Since I was studying English I used to stay in Vadodara. This meant I was mostly away from my home in Dabhoi. I consequently wasn't associated much with Satsang and understood very little about its values. I even took my daily meals in a hotel! Since the place where I was living in Vadodara city was a long way from the mandir, sitting with sadhus for understanding Satsang values rarely happened. Moreover, because I was a Brahmin, I was rather more in touch with the *brahmacharis*, who sometimes invited me to the mandir for meals. And when I returned, they offered me some buttermilk and pickles. However, they being pujaris were busily engaged in the *seva* of the *murtis* in the mandir. And therefore, they couldn't spare time to help me understand the Vachanamrut or the other scriptures.

"But thanks to the merits of my past births, I was born in a virtuous, *satsangi* family. Spiritual eagerness was innate in me – I was always curious about the discourses in the Vachanamrut. Thus during Shastriji Maharaj's stay in Dabhoi, I used to ask him about certain Vachanamruts, which he had happily explained to me in great detail. And this had forged a strong spiritual bonding between us. Swamiji too, as if brooding a faraway egg through his will, was completely pleased and bestowed his divine blessings upon me. In Vadodara now, every day after the evening *arti*, I was blessed with his darshan and discourse. And he narrated before me the entire life story of Bhagatji Maharaj.

"A friend of mine named Manishankar Pathak of Karvan village would also come along with me daily for darshan. Swamiji blessed him out of compassion for him and narrated before him Bhagatji's life story up to Bhagatji's spiritual enlightenment in 1864 (Samvat 1920). Not only that, Swamiji himself wrote Bhagatji's potted biography in very small handwriting on both sides of some thin paper for Manishankar to read daily. Manishankar gave it to me and I was extremely delighted upon reading it. I then secretly copied it. Later, I went to Thasra for some work. Here I met some of my *satsangi* friends who were studying with me in Vadodara. I gave my copy to them to read and they too, before returning it to me, secretly copied it at night – only later did I come to know about this. Swamiji had categorically asked Manishankar not to give the biography to anyone, but out of a spirit of brotherhood he gave it to me, and I to my friends in Thasra.

"In 1893 (Samvat 1949), Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj installed the *murtis* in the mandir at Lakshmi Vadi, Gadhada, and organized a grand festival there. Shastriji Maharaj informed us that Bhagatji Maharaj would be arriving on this occasion, so we all went to Gadhada.

"On the day of Holi in the month of Fagun in 1893 CE, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj was to

install *murtis* in a small mandir erected on the site where Bhagwan Swaminarayan was cremated. Open invitations were sent out in all directions, and so thousands of devotees gathered. Bhagatji had also come on this occasion. A grand assembly was in progress beneath a huge canopy at Lakshmi Vadi. Acharya Maharaj was seated on a decorated cot and Bhagatji was sitting beside him on the floor. Acharya Maharaj was very well aware of Bhagatji's greatness. He knew Bhagatji had attained spiritual enlightenment by Gunatitanand Swami's grace. He therefore asked Bhagatji, 'What does Bhagwan Swaminarayan reckon on this occasion?' Bhagatji replied, 'The distance between Shriji Maharaj and me in Akshardham is the same as that between you and me here! Shriji Maharaj is very much pleased with you! Joyously perform the installation ritual; there won't be any problem.' And thereafter, everything happened as Bhagatji had foretold – despite the gathering of thousands, nothing untoward occurred.

"During that festival in Gadhada, Shastriji Maharaj took me to senior sadhas like Yogeshwardas, Balmukunddas, Mahapurushdas, Atmanand Brahmachari, Jaga Bhagat and others, who narrated to me some extraordinary episodes revealing how Bhagatji had served Gunatitanand Swami through his mind, deeds, words; complied to Swami's every stated or non-stated intention and immensely pleased Gunatitanand Swami. I was delighted upon listening to them and developed absolute faith and affection towards Bhagatji. Likewise, Manishankar too developed affection towards Bhagatji. But the sadhus of Vadodara and Vartal became jealous; subsequently, a sadhu named Nirannmukta manhandled Manishankar, made abusive comments and insulted him. Manishankar told me everything about how he was mistreated when I returned to Vadodara to resume my studies after the holidays. Consequently, I wrote a letter complaining to Kothari Gordhanbhai

that the behaviour of such a sadhu can dislodge a newcomer from Satsang. Upon reading it, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj – showing his allegiance towards Bhagatji – scolded that sadhu and removed him from service.

"When the aforesaid festival in Gadhada concluded after eight days, we all returned home. Two months later, in the month of Vaishakh (in April), during the summer vacation, Govindbhai Master and others went to Mahuva. During his conversation with Bhagatji, Govindbhai read Bhagatji's brief biography written by Shastriji Maharaj. Bhagatji was pleased and praised Swamiji's sharp memory. He said, 'Whosoever reads or listens to my life story, half of his lust will be destroyed.'"

The profound impression Shastriji Maharaj had made on Ullasram during his student life remained etched in his mind all his life. Though he belonged to a prominent family that was dedicated to the Vartal diocese, when Shastriji Maharaj was forced to leave Vartal, Ullasram too decided to leave. He put his head on the block for the cause of the Akshar-Purshottam doctrine and joined Shastriji Maharaj. Despite his small income from his job as a teacher, he remained undeterred from the pressures of others and sang the glory of Akshar-Purshottam wherever he was transferred.

With the launch of *Swaminarayan Prakash*, the BAPS's monthly Satsang magazine in Gujarati, Ullasrambhai's aforesaid trait blossomed out even further. In 1938 CE, when the publication of *Swaminarayan Prakash* first began from Ahmedabad, Ullasrambhai was among the regular core writers. Deriving inspiration from Bhagatji Maharaj's brief biography written by Shastriji Maharaj on a few ordinary thin papers, Ullasrambhai authored a series of articles about Bhagatji Maharaj's life story. Therein he presented his personally witnessed instances of Bhagatji Maharaj's greatness as well as Shastriji Maharaj's personal experiences with Bhagatji

Maharaj, which he himself had heard several times from Shastriji Maharaj. Later, Harshadbhai Dave incorporated those articles seamlessly into Bhagatji Maharaj's unabridged biography.

Ullasrambhai's monthly column titled 'Pure Upasana' was published continuously in *Swaminarayan Prakash* for almost a decade. The articles written by him are like priceless stone inscriptions in the BAPS. His thoroughly researched articles are a vast treasure trove of innumerable historical facts. For instance, how did the publication activity first begin in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya? Ullasrambhai mentions that Gunatitanand Swami was the root cause. By Gunatitanand Swami's inspiration, the Vachanamrut, a book containing the spiritual discourses by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was the first book published in the *sampradaya's* history. Ullasrambhai writes: "Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami presided as the *mahant* of Junagadh mandir for 40 long years. Once, he woke up at midnight, came out and stood in the mandir courtyard. In a place opposite him, Jaga Bhagat was sitting and doing *mala*. On seeing Gunatitanand Swami, he too came out into the courtyard. Swami was staring at the sky. Suddenly, infinite shooting stars cut across the night sky! Jaga Bhagat, on seeing this surreal scene, curiously asked Gunatitanand Swami, 'Swami, what was that?' Swami replied, 'They're all spiritual aspirants; they'll now be born in Gujarat.'

"On the next day, Swami asked a merchant named Vallabhji Kuberdas from Ahmedabad, who had been coming for Swami's satsang to Junagadh for the last four to five years and who printed and sold books for his livelihood, to get the Vachanamrut printed so that an understanding of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's true form and knowledge may flourish in Gujarat. Then, according to Swami's wish, he along with Mansukhram Mulji, Hargovind Umedrav and other devotees from Ahmedabad undertook

the task of printing the Vachanamrut and other satsang literature" (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, Oct. 1946, page 147).

Erudition was not Ullasram's only virtue. Ullasram also scrupulously observed the moral codes, possessed unwavering faith in God, and always sided with the devotees with great pride. He fervently believed in Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and the Akshar-Purshottam *upasana*. He writes about Shastriji Maharaj: "Showering his love and care on me, Shastriji Maharaj frequently came to Bilimora, Kadi, Padra, Sinor, Karjan and other places where I was transferred in my job and graced me with his darshan and discourse. Today, because of my advanced age, I'm able to have his satsang in smaller or greater measure. And owing to that love and care he had showered on me, I never become unmindful of him for even a second, and, in my presence, no one can ever speak ill of him. Whatever few words I write or speak about his greatness, it's all because of his sublime grace."

Once, in those days, the editor of a periodical named *Sudha*, published from Rajkot, wrote blasphemously about Bhagatji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj. How could Ullasram, who was bursting with allegiance towards Shastriji Maharaj, tolerate such blasphemy? Addressing the editor of *Sudha*, in a column titled '*Charcha Patro*' ('Response Letters'), Ullasrambhai wrote: "To know about any person perfectly well and to describe his distinguishing features, one first needs to develop a deep acquaintance with him and know profoundly about him. To write or speak about anybody without doing so is like making a fool of oneself.

"Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has said, 'Even senior sadhus haven't been able to understand my opinion. So, how will you know about it?'

"Brother Amrutlal! You yourself are a staunch disciple of Swami Balmukunddasji, who was the

direct disciple of Gunatitanand Swami. You have always acted according to Swami's wish and likings, yet how did you get mistaken?

"The extent to which Swami Balmukunddasji himself understood Bhagatji's greatness and glory could be discerned from the following incident:

"In 1897 CE (Samvat 1953) Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj was to come to Junagadh to celebrate Janmashtami. Acharya Maharaj had also extended an invitation to Pragji Bhakta to come to Junagadh. During that period, Jibhai Ranchhod was the Kothari of Junagadh, and Shastriji Maharaj, who was studying the *Sutrabhasya* under Shastri Jivanram in Rajkot from 1894 to 1899 CE (Samvat 1850-55), also frequently visited Junagadh. In fact, it was Shastriji Maharaj who had motivated everyone to invite Bhagatji on this occasion.

"Acharya Maharaj and Bhagatji met each other at Jetalsar Junction and then they arrived together in Junagadh. At Junagadh railway station, Swami Balmukunddasji along with Yogeshwardasji, Jibhai Kothari, several sadhus and thousands of devotees were waiting with garlands, bouquets and crests made of flowers to receive them. With great pomp and ceremony, they welcomed Acharya Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj, garlanded them, made them and other distinguished guests sit in decorated buggies, and finally escorted them to the Junagadh mandir. Accommodations for Bhagatji and the devotees from Gujarat were arranged at Acharya Maharaj's old quarters. Cots, mattresses, pillows, etc. were also provided to them as part of their warm hospitality.

"Once, during this occasion, Bhagatji was lying on a cot. Devotees were seated all around him and listening to his discourse. A few devotees sitting near him were massaging his feet and fanning him. At that time, Dr Umiyashankar suddenly entered and saw Bhagatji in this condition. He straight away went to Swami Balmukunddasji and complained, 'It is unbecoming that Pragji Bhakta – a householder

– is getting his feet massaged! You must bring this mistake to his attention.' At that time, Swami Balmukunddasji replied, 'Umiyashankar, you don't understand anything! You don't know who Pragji Bhakta is attached to and what he has attained.' Then, explaining how Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had blessed him with spiritual enlightenment, Swami Balmukunddasji said, 'Pragji Bhakta enjoys the bliss of Shriji Maharaj seated in Akshardham all the time. During the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in Gadhada in 1893 CE (Samvat 1949), Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj had asked Bhagatji, "Tell me, what is Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish on this auspicious occasion?" Bhagatji replied, "The distance between Shriji Maharaj and me seated in Akshardham is the same as that between you and me here! Shriji Maharaj is very much pleased and there won't be any obstacles in the *pratishtha* ceremony; thus joyously perform it." Swami Balmukunddasji then narrated several such instances revealing Bhagatji's greatness to Umiyashankar. Upon listening to those instances, Umiyashankar was left astonished. He immediately went to Bhagatji, fell prostrate before him, and begged for forgiveness.

"Let me describe one more incident. Before Swami Balmukunddasji left his mortal body, he had gone to Sarangpur. While going to the Narayan Kund for a bath, he happened to pass by the new Akshar-Purushottam mandir that was still under construction. On seeing him coming towards the mandir, Kothari Shankar Bhagat and other sadhus of the new mandir came running towards him and prostrated before him. Swami then asked them, 'Where is Shastriji?' The sadhus replied that he was in Gujarat. Then they ushered Swamiji to the mandir and showed him the hall on the ground floor as well as the carved marble grille and pinnacles on the upper floor and the mandir steps. Swami was pleased by the devotional services of the sadhus. Blessing them he said,

‘Many devotees, sadhus and *parshads* were fortunate to get the *seva* of Shriji Maharaj, but only Shastriji has taken the wonderful opportunity to do the *seva* of Swamishri Gunatitanand Swami. There were many ‘nand’ sadhus serving Gunatitanand Swami, but none served him with such understanding of his true glory. Today, you all also understand Shastriji Maharaj’s immense greatness in your heart and perform this unmatched *seva*; you, too, are indeed extremely fortunate.’ In this way Swami Balmukunddasji had expressed his deep pleasure.

“Amrutlalbhai! What more shall I say? You yourself are fully aware of the principles of Satsang. You have also stayed in the company of enlightened *sadgurus*. However, the reason for your misplaced perception is bad company. The questions raised in your monthly magazine will all be answered henceforth. So, don’t worry or be sad.”

The editor of *Sudha* had also advocated for changing the names of the *murtis* of Akshar and Purshottam installed in mandirs built by Shastriji Maharaj. While challenging the editor on this issue, Ullasrambhai blushed red with indignation. In his column *Charcha Patro* (Response Letters) published in *Swaminarayan Prakash*, he wrote an open letter to the editor of *Sudha*: “No other sin causes more damage and misery to the *jiva* than that caused by being spiteful towards the Bhakta of God. There’s an old saying: ‘*Jo Kisikā liyā nahi to diyā bār hazār*’ i.e. ‘Not taking anything from someone is equal to giving him a thousand times.’ Therefore, if you can’t perceive virtues, at least don’t perceive any flaws in Shastriji Maharaj’s works. Perceiving flaws in an enlightened person leads one to becoming demonic and atheistic. Some thoughtless people say that if the names of the *murtis* installed by Shastri are changed then a compromise [with the old mandir] can be forged immediately. In fact, to speak so is also demonic. Ritually installed

murtis are not stone or bronze artworks; they are forms of God consecrated ceremonially by Vedic scholars and the Satpurush. During the installation ceremony of the *murtis* at Sarangpur and Gondal mandirs, while consecrating the eyes of God, the mirror placed before the *murtis* had cracked. This proved that God had been invoked into those *murtis*.

“When the Satpurush consecrates any *murti*, God is invoked into that *murti*. Not just that, the Satpurush can create new pilgrim places, compose new scriptures, and also groom others to become enlightened beings. But all of them – *murtis*, pilgrim places, and scriptures – even together cannot create one Satpurush. All the scriptures eulogize the glory of the Satpurush in this way. So Amrutlalbhai! You ought to be well aware of this fact. Saying anything more to you will be inappropriate.”

Ullasrambhai was a guardian of pure *upasana* and an ardent disciple of Shastriji Maharaj. He enlightened and kept everyone vigilant through the might of his pen. He also held Vachanamrut *parayans* at many places and earned both Shastriji Maharaj’s and Yogiji Maharaj’s abundant blessings. Thought-provoking articles penned by him form a part of the proud heritage of early exponents of BAPS.

Ullasrambhai was like a cornerstone of BAPS. In 1956, praising his services, Yogiji Maharaj sanctified his home in Vadodara and performed his *arti*. Later, in that same year, on Vaishakh *vad* 14, Ullasram breathed his last in Vadodara – the same city where he had received the first lessons on the Akshar-Purshottam doctrine during his student life from Shastriji Maharaj.

Ullasram Pandya’s meritorious services to Satsang will be remembered for all times to come.

◆
This article was translated
from the original Gujarati version
published in *Swaminarayan Prakash*,
September 2013

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu



Chaitanya Mahaprabhu promoted devotion to Bhagwan Krishna by constantly chanting his name. That appealed to the ordinary devotees as it did not call for much learning. Although a well-read man, he wrote little as he was of the view that unalloyed devotion alone leads to Krishna and not bookish knowledge...

During the 15th century Chaitanya, also called Gauranga because of his fair skin, and Vishvambhara, promoted the *sankirtan* (chanting) movement in praise of Krishna in Bengal. He was also called Nimai as he was born in a hut under a *neem* (margosa) tree at Mayapur, in Navadvipa (Nadia). In *sankirtan*, the climax is called *mahadhbhava* (highest feeling), the devotee loses consciousness of his surroundings while chanting Hari's name; he laughs and weeps like a mad man. Chaitanya was sometimes considered mad because of the zeal with which he chanted Krishna's name. This spiritual ecstasy is considered the ultimate in bhakti. Chaitanya proclaimed that to achieve Krishna, Vedic knowledge was not required; what was needed was pure love for God. He said, "One who has attained love for Godhead chants and dances spontaneously and naturally, not caring for the public. To spread the *sankirtan* movement, Chaitanya sent his disciples to Vrindavan while he travelled in Bengal and South India. "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Hare

Rama..." is the principal chant of this Vaishnava Sampradaya. The Rama here stands for Balarama, Krishna's elder brother, and not the Rama of Ayodhya, the son of Dasharath. In this *sampradaya*, Krishna is the supreme Godhead and Golok is his highest spiritual abode. Chaitanya prescribed chanting of Hari's name as the best method to attain *moksha* in Kaliyuga. Although he criticized *mayavadi* philosophers (those believing in Adi Shankaracharya's philosophy), this had not prevented Chaitanya from visiting the Kashi Vishvanath Mandir in Varanasi.

Apart from promoting Krishna worship, Chaitanya carried out the medieval version of re-converting Hindu converts to their parental faith. Two brothers, Rupa and Sanatana Goswami, became his disciples. These two learned Brahmins, when in the service of Nawab Hussein Shah of Bengal, had to put on a Muslim dress and adopt alien manners. Formerly, they were known as Dabir Khas (prime minister) and Shaka Mallik (private secretary) due to the nature of their work. The Nawab, himself a Hindu convert was

previously known as Subuddhiray, relied on them for administering the kingdom. The Nawab spent most of his time in hunting as he cared less for his kingdom, thanks to the loyal services of the Brahmin brothers. But after the Brahmin brothers converted, the ruler felt helpless because they gave up their administrative duties. The Nawab tried to put obstacles in their way, but they managed to negotiate their way through and succeeded in joining Chaitanya. Bengal came firmly under the heel of Muslim invaders in Nimai's time.

Mayapur (Navadvipa), where the saint (Chaitanya) was born in 1486 to Pandit Jagannatha Mishra and Sachi Devi, maintained its reputation as a centre of traditional learning despite the political upheavals that shook Bengal. After the destruction of Nalanda and other seats of learning in eastern India, Navadvipa provided shelter to scholars from those places.

Nimai was a good student, and he mastered grammar at Pandit Gangadas's *pathshala*. Then he studied logic under Vasudeva Sarvabhauma, a formidable *advaita* philosopher. He soon turned out to be a great logician. His fellow student, Raghunath, was very ambitious and aspired to be a famous logician. Once Chaitanya effortlessly solved a proposition in logic set by Sarvabhauma, over which Raghunath had been wracking his brains. He soon found in Chaitanya a competitor who would outshine him. Raghunath had written *Didhiti*, a commentary on logic. Chaitanya himself wrote a commentary on logic. After reading that, Raghunath wondered in Chaitanya's presence as to who would care for his work in comparison to Chaitanya's. The latter set at rest Raghunath's fears by throwing his commentary in the Ganga.

Chaitanya became a well-known scholar at a young age; he opened his own school of grammar and logic. He was married to Lakshmi by then. But he was so immersed in devotion to Krishna that instead of teaching, he would chant Krishna's name and encourage the students to do the same.

The vexed students protested at first but later relented and joined in the chorus themselves.

When he was eighteen, Chaitanya met Ishwarpuri, who was writing a book on the love of Radha and Krishna. On being requested, Nimai agreed to be a collaborator. Another momentous event in Chaitanya's life was his meeting with Keshav Kashmiri, a distinguished interpreter of the scriptures, on the banks of the Ganga. The scholar recited some *shlokas* in praise of Ganga at Chaitanya's request. To his surprise, Nimai picked one or two verses from the middle and asked the scholar to interpret them. Keshav was amazed at Nimai's phenomenal memory. The admiration was, however, short lived when Nimai pointed out grammatical errors in the composition. Eventually, Keshav accepted the mistakes and acknowledged Chaitanya as his guru.

The chant of 'Haribol' which became the signature of Chaitanya soon attracted devotees, some of whom were prominent people of Nadia. One of them was Nityananda (also called Nitai), who later became the chief disciple of Chaitanya. After some time, Chaitanya's wife died of a snake-bite. Sachi Devi arranged a second marriage, this time with Vishnupriya. Chaitanya decided to become a sannyasi at the age of 24 in 1510. His mother agreed to the proposal, but it came as a bolt from the blue to Vishnupriya. After a great deal of persuasion, she gave her consent. An *advaitin*, Keshav Bharati, initiated Nimai into *sannyasa*. From then on, he came to be known as Krishna Chaitanya. Thereafter, it was a life of ceaseless wandering for Chaitanya. He undertook a pilgrimage to places connected with Krishna, chiefly Vrindavan, in the Mathura-Agra region in 1514. Previously Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had sent Rupa Goswami and Sanatana Goswami to discover the holy sites mentioned in the Bhagavat there. Then they were joined by others who came to be known as *shadgoswamis*: Rupa, Sanatana, their nephew Jiva, and others.

Chaitanya's wanderings brought him to Puri

where he again met Vasudeva Sarvabhauma, who began to instruct him in Shankara's teachings. It was a self-appointed task he undertook. He told Chaitanya that he should know Vedanta, if he wished to succeed as a sannyasi. Out of respect for Sarvabhauma's age, Nimai politely consented. When Chaitanya started refuting Shankara by quoting from the Puranas, the aged scholar became impressed and wrote a composition called *Gaurangashataka* in praise of Chaitanya; it was during this visit that King Prataparudra Deva became a disciple of Chaitanya. At first Chaitanya refused to meet him, as he was against pomp and pageantry. But all this changed after the Odisha king became an ardent devotee. Sarvabhauma finally became a Vaishnava and a disciple of Chaitanya.

The Puri visit turned out to be a memorable one. But at one stage Chaitanya could not tolerate certain things because of his strict moral code and wanted to leave the place immediately. His disciples, however, prevailed upon him to stay back.

His next trip was a pilgrimage to the south, where he learnt most of the southern languages. During the southern sojourn, Nimai met Ramananda Raya, a governor in the Vijayanagar empire, on the banks of the Godavari River in Rajamahendravaram (Rajahmundry), in Andhra Pradesh. Nimai at once recognized in him a realized soul. He embraced him and that was the beginning of a lasting association. Chaitanya asked Ramananda to expound the divine love between Radha and Krishna, which he did. In the end, Chaitanya himself manifested as Radha and Krishna, but told him not to tell it to others as they might take him to be a mad man to make such a claim. It is said Chaitanya succeeded in converting Karnataka to the Bhakti tradition.

After the southern trip, Chaitanya visited Maharashtra. A miracle occurred when he was at Pune while on the shore of a lake. A mischievous fellow pointed to the lake and said, "Look there is your Krishna." Without a moment's

hesitation, Nimai jumped into the lake and very nearly drowned. After Chaitanya was rescued, the spectators started to beat the prankster. Chaitanya saved him from their wrath by saying he had done nothing wrong as Krishna is to be found everywhere. This was possible for him as he would always be in a heightened state of spiritual fervour.

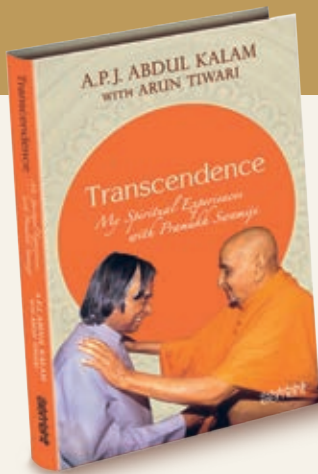
Chaitanya finally returned to Puri in 1516 and stayed there for 18 years, where he spent his time in worshipping Bhagwan Jagannath. He would become ecstatic while worshipping Jagannath. Finally, he entered the sea at Puri, never to return. At such times, he took the sea to be the Yamuna at Vrindavan.

Shri Krishna Chaitanya was an eminent proponent of the Gaudiya Vaishnava School of Bhakti Yoga, that is, loving devotion (*madhura bhava*) to Krishna based on the philosophy of the Shrimad Bhagavata and Bhagavad Gita. He established Gaudiya Vaishnavism in East India. Though a great scholar he wrote only two beautiful works. The first has only eight verses and is called *Chaitanyashikshashtaka*, and the second is called *Jagannathastotra*.

In the 20th century the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were spread to the West by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977), who founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). ♦

Sources

1. *Teachings of Lord Chaitanya* by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.
2. *Chaitanya Mahaprabhu* by Dr Vijayendra Snatak.



CELEBRATING Transcendence

September-December 2015

Nairobi, Bahrain, Muscat, Hong Kong, Dhule,
Jaipur

*More reports of celebration assemblies
of Dr Kalam's book, Transcendence,
held in some major cities of India and abroad*



Dignitaries on stage during the event in Nairobi: (From left) Rakesh Rao, Vimal Shah, Naushad Merali, Jonathan Mueke, Richard Makenga, Yogeshwar Verma, Hassan Omar Hassan, Mahendrabhai Patel, Joseph Muturia, Nitin Malde, Harshadbhai Rana, Arvindbhai Patel

26 SEPTEMBER 2015, NAIROBI, KENYA

Over 200 distinguished dignitaries attended the grand launch of *Transcendence*, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's last book, at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi, Kenya. *Transcendence* records Dr Kalam's spiritual experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, through the 14 years of their special friendship. Paramvandan Swami paid a tribute in his speech to Dr Kalam's lifetime of dedicated public service and contributions to the development of India. He also described how Dr Kalam regarded Pramukh Swami Maharaj as his 'ultimate spiritual teacher' who had placed him in 'a God-synchronous orbit'.

Then, amidst the chanting of Vedic verses, the book was launched by Shri Vimal Shah (CEO, Bidco Oil Refineries), Hon. Jonathan Mueke (Deputy Governor, Nairobi), Hon. Hassan Omar (Senator, Mombasa), H.E. Yogeshwar Varma (High Commissioner of India), Shri Nitin Malde (Chairman, Hindu Council of Kenya), Shri Naushad Merali (Founder, Sameer Group) and other invited dignitaries.

Thereafter, some of the invited guests addressed the assembly.

Joseph Muturia, a former MP, recounted his life transformation through his first meeting with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1985, when he was



Assembly to launch 'Transcendence' in the presence of leading Bahraini dignitaries

inspired to quit drinking alcohol.

Hon. Hassan Omar expressed that only true greatness can inspire at the very first glance, just as Pramukh Swami Maharaj had inspired Dr Kalam.

H.E. Yogeshwar Varma compared *Transcendence* to *Tirukkural* a work on ethics by Thiruvalluvar, a celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher, and encouraged all to read the book as a guide on how to progress.

18 OCTOBER 2015, BAHRAIN

The book launch in Bahrain was an opportunity to celebrate and share the spiritual values of Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj with leaders and decision makers in Bahrain.

Held under the patronage of H.E. Dr Abdul Hussain bin Ali Mirza, Minister of Energy, Kingdom of Bahrain, the book launch was attended by 275 distinguished guests. The Guest of Honour was the Indian Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Alok Kumar Sinha. Other guests included His Excellency Mr. Ebrahim Al Dossary, from the Prime Minister's Court; famous national poet Mr. Hassan Kamal; former Minister of Labour Dr Majid Al Alawi, Deputy Chief of Indian Mission Mr. Ram Singh, ex- Undersecretary of Ministry of Health Dr A. Abdul Rahman Buali. Chairman of

Bank of Bahrain & Kuwait Mr. Murad Ali Murad.

Dr Mirza was the Minister-in-Charge during the last visit of Dr Kalam to Bahrain in February 2015 and had interacted with him closely. In his address, Dr Mirza said, "It is awe-inspiring that in this age of a million distractions, we had a person like Dr Kalam, who chose to take time to explore the higher realms of spiritual thought within the framework of his life as a political figure and a scientist.... Dr Kalam also found the words – with the help of his colleague Professor Tiwari – to set his thoughts down for future generations – and for you and me so that we could ponder about the meeting of faith and science, and the greatness of a saint such as Pramukh Swami Maharaj whose motto is 'In the joy of others, lies our own'.... I urge each guest here to absorb the lessons of tolerance and spiritual fullness in the book *Transcendence* and live up to the goals that it sets before us."

Brahmavihari Swami delivered a thought-provoking keynote address in which he called for people to make sure they do not neglect the development and nurturing of the inner world that we all carry within us in the rush and pursuit of the outer world. He recalled how Dr Kalam first came to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj with a plan to



Dignitaries on stage during the event in Muscat: (From left) Anilbhai Wadher, Anilbhai Khimji, Bakulbhai Mehta, Ashwinbhai Dharamsey Nensey, Brahmavihari Swami, Sheikh Kanaksibhai Khimji, Kiranbhai Asher, Rohitbhai Patel, Manilal Limbani

develop India – a 5-point programme that was envisioned by 500 leading intellectuals after a year of discussion. Immediately, Pramukh Swami Maharaj pointed out that there was a very important sixth point needed – faith in God. It was a turning point for Dr Kalam, by his own admission, and changed his approach to development.

The programme also included the screening on large LED screens of the animation presentation 'A Tale of Two Boys' which traces the lives and coming together of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Dr Kalam. This was followed by the screening of excerpts from the book and the milestone dates on which Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj had met personally. The Indian Ambassador to Bahrain H.E. Mr. Alok Kumar Sinha said that the book launch emphasized the deep cultural ties between India and Bahrain. Professor Tiwari spoke of his experience in writing the book, "Just like the moon shines because of the reflected light of the sun, I too am here because of the light of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Dr Kalam," said Professor Tiwari. "The book is the result of over 120 hours of deep conversation with Dr Kalam, exploring his respect and spiritual regard for Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

29 OCTOBER 2015, MUSCAT, OMAN

The event was graced by Sheikh Shri Kanaksibhai Khimji, Shri Bakulbhai Mehta, Shri Ashwinbhai Dharamsey Nensey, Shri Anilbhai Khimji, Shri Kiranbhai Asher, Shri Rohitbhai Patel and 500 dignitaries.

The event featured a stirring animation presentation describing the stories of two boys – a boatman's boy who became a scientist and the 11th President of India, and a farmer's boy who became the president of BAPS and a world-renowned spiritual leader.

Brahmavihari Swami delivered the keynote address in which he also called for everybody to engage with their family and friends lovingly and to give love generously, making "love" a verb and not a noun.

The programme included the screening of excerpts from the book and the milestone personal meetings between Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter the guests paid a floral tribute to a photo of the late former president Dr Kalam as they took their place on the dais.

Then, after a video of Dr Kalam presenting his book to Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur on 20 June 2015 was shown, the celebration ceremony of the book took



Dignitaries on stage during the event in Jaipur: (From left) Shri Titu Tanwani, Shri Bharat Vyas, Shri Nirmal Goyal, Shri Gopal Kabra, Shri Mahendra Yadav, Vice-Chancellor Shri J.P. Singhal, Pujya Rajeshwar Swami, Pujya Anandswarup Swami, Justice S.S. Kothari, Shri Bhagwandas Atlani, Shri M.L. Gupta, Shri Harimohan Dangayach, Shri Manubhai Patel

place amid the chanting of Vedic mantras in which the stage guests inaugurated copies of the book and displayed them to the audience. Signifying the universal relevance of the book, diplomats representing various countries were felicitated and presented a copy of *Transcendence*.

Sheikh Shri Kanaksibhai and other guests on the dais also paid glowing tributes to the book and recounted their associations with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The event concluded with the singing of the national anthems of Oman and India.

8 NOVEMBER 2015, HONG KONG, CHINA

Around 550 dignitaries, leading businessmen from the Marwadi and Gujarati Samaj and other guests attended the special assembly.

Following the chanting of Vedic prayers as a tribute to Dr Kalam, Munivatsal Swami spoke in Hindi about the need for spirituality and Dr Kalam's meetings with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

This was followed by a video presentation of the unique spiritual friendship between Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and excerpts from the book.

Then, Divyamurti Swami spoke in English

about the unique values mentioned in the book and how Dr Kalam saw them exemplified in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The book launch ceremony took place with Vedic chants by *balaks* followed by the book release by BAPS sadhus, Mr. Arunachalam (Chairman, Indian Chamber of Commerce), Mr. Dixit Joshi (Global Head – Prime Finance, Deutsche Bank) and other stage guests.

DEDICATION ASSEMBLY OF 'TRANSCENDENCE' IN JAIPUR 5 December 2015

On 5 December 2015 a public dedication ceremony of the Hindi version of *Transcendence*, 'Arohan', was held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jaipur. The assembly was graced by eminent dignitaries and distinguished guests: Shri S.S. Kothari (Head of Lokayukta, Rajasthan), Shri J.P. Singhal (Vice-Chancellor, Rajasthan Vishwavidyalaya), Shri Bhagwandas Atali (renowned writer), Shri Harimohan Dangayach (industrialist), Shri Jitendra Pachar, Shri Gurusharan Gill (Additional Advocate General) and other officials and well-wishers.

During the assembly the animation



Dignitaries on stage during the event in Dhule: (From left) Ashutosh Ramgir, Arun Tiwari, Anandjivan Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, Arun Gujarathi, Bapusaheb Raval, Shrimant Mane

presentation of 'A Tale of Two Boys' was shown along with the timeline of events about the various meetings of Dr Kalam with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pujya Anandswarup Swami described the spiritual bond between Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Dr Kalam through unique incidents. Some of the stage guests also expressed their sentiments for Dr Kalam. In conclusion, Kothari Rajeshwar Swami gave a vote of thanks.

MARATHI TRANSLATION OF 'TRANSCENDENCE' RELEASED

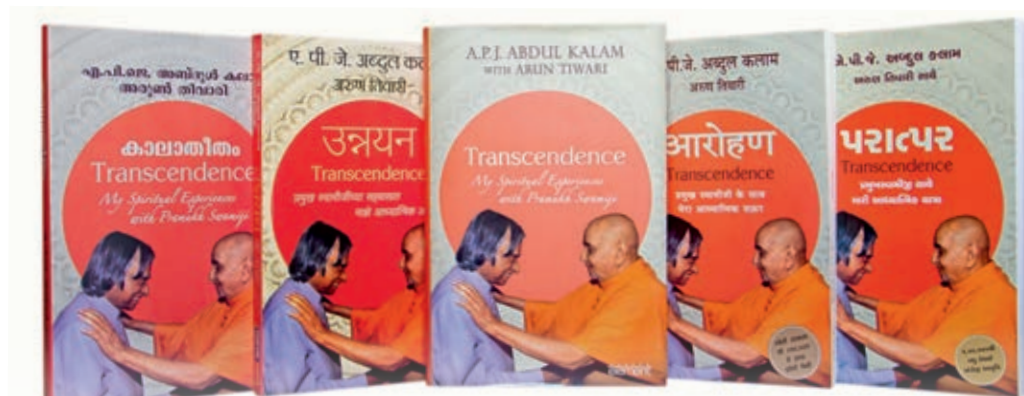
6 December 2015, Dhule, Maharashtra

Over 4,500 invited guests, devotees and well-wishers attended the grand book release of the

Marathi translation of *Transcendence*. Titled *Unnayan*, the translation is published by Sakal Prakashan, a part of the Sakal Media Group which publishes the leading Marathi language daily in Maharashtra.

The book launch featured videos depicting the stories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Dr Kalam and how Dr Kalam was inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The event also included speeches by Prof. Arun Tiwari, co-author of the original English book, Brahmavihari Swami, who personally witnessed the numerous interactions between Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Dr Kalam, Babaji Bhuse, Bapusaheb Raval, Shri Arunbhai Gujarathi and other guests. ♦



Transcendence published in other Indian languages:

Malayalam (Kaalaatheetham), Marathi (Unnayan), Hindi (Arohan) and Gujarati (Paratpar)

Inauguration of **NILKANTH ABHISHEK MANDAP**

14 December 2015, Akshardham, Gandhinagar



On 14 December 2015 the Nilkanth Abhishek Mandap was inaugurated with Vedic rituals at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar. The *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni was consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj during his visit to Gandhinagar on 4 August 2014.

The pre-installation *mahapuja* rituals were performed at 6.30 a.m. on the open grounds of Akshardham complex and simultaneously in the new Abhishek Mandap. Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Anandswarup Swami and many *yajmans* performed the *mahapuja* rituals.

The exquisite Abhishek Mandap was beautifully designed and prepared through the intense effort and devotion of Pujya Bhaktinandan Swami. The paintings of Nilkanth Varni, the beautiful statues, and the ornate ceiling and decorative marble floor are mesmerizing and pacifying.

The final installation ritual of Shri Nilkanth Varni was performed by Pujya Mahant Swami, and thereafter the senior sadhus performed the *abhishek* rituals. Then the *pratishta* assembly was held in which the senior sadhus addressed the devotees. In conclusion, Pujya Mahant Swami reiterated Swamishri's words, "Who ever faithfully performs the *abhishek* of this *murti* God will fulfil his or her good wishes."



Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Shri Vasudeo Kamath inaugurate 'Swaminarayan Darshan' exhibition

Shortly thereafter, another milestone event followed. The senior sadhus inaugurated the exhibition, 'Swaminarayan Darshan', on the first floor of the main Akshardham mandir. The exhibition includes unique paintings depicting the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The paintings were done by world-renowned artist Shri Vasudeo Kamath. The exhibition was inaugurated with Vedic rites by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Shri Vasudeo Kamath, and declared open free of cost for all. On the occasion Shri Vasudeo Kamath opined, "An exhibition of such calibre about a great person's life is probably a rare occurrence in our world today. I was able to paint such paintings by the grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj." ♦



Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami perform the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni after the installation ritual



REGIONAL SUMMER ADHIVESHAN-SHIBIRS

June-September 2015, North America

The 2015 Regional Summer Shibirs for both *balaks-balikas* and *kishores-kishoris* took place in the six North American regions between June and September. The *shibirs* were designed as part *adhiveshan* (competition series) and part classroom sessions based on the *shibir* theme with the aim of encouraging each participant's personal and spiritual development.

Like Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj

is also very passionate about youths participating in *mukhpath* competitions, since by memorizing and reciting passages from the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, the youngsters are able to cultivate an understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, and ultimately apply the teachings in their own lives and build a strong foundation of peace and happiness in their lives.

The competitive (*adhiveshan*) element



Pujya Dr Swami addresses the participants in the *shibir*

encouraged collaboration between the youngsters as they prepared and practiced. Study packs and audio links provided them with tools to establish spiritual engagement in their daily lives. The *adhiveshan* goal was to teach them the importance of reading and understanding scriptures such as the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, and memorizing them so that the quotes become part of their core knowledge.

Through these Adhiveshan-Shibirs, the youngsters learnt how to progress in their personal and spiritual development.

Bal-Balika Adhiveshan-Shibirs

Over 2,500 *balaks* and *balikas* from around the continent aged between 7 and 13 took part

in the two-day *shibirs* that were titled ‘Shanti: Within Reach’.

On the first day of each *shibir*, the children participated in the *adhiveshan*.

The second day of the *shibir* focused on the *shibir* theme through three classroom sessions:

- Shanti Through Smruti: Finding peace through the remembrance of and meditation on our guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- Shanti Through Abhyas: Finding peace through spiritual education, such as *adhiveshan* and satsang reading.
- Shanti Through Swami Bapa: Finding peace by understanding the greater meaning of spiritual tenets and following them in the pursuit of discipline.



A participant performs during the *adhiveshan*



Karyakar Adhiveshan 2015 - Samjan, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Each classroom session was split into four parts, exploring the concepts of *smruti*, *abhyas*, and Swamishri:

1. Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj's *bodh kathas* (moral stories) were presented in the form of skits to help the children visualize the stories.
2. Words of Wisdom presented as speeches by the sadhus covered the inspirational messages hidden in *prasangs* and real-life scenarios.
3. Interactive experiments that enabled the delegates to work alongside each other and use discussion to explore each topic in a personal way.
4. Group Experiment Time, a combination of group discussions and activities that allowed the delegates to understand how the concepts introduced throughout the classroom can be imbibed and implemented in their lives.

At the conclusion of each two-day *adhiveshan-shibir* a recognition ceremony was held to commend the youngsters for their dedicated efforts and participation in the *adhiveshan*. They had persisted to memorize extensive passages in Gujarati despite English being their first language. The pursuit of *shanti* is a competition within one's self to practice bhakti in daily life and create a balanced way of living.

Inspiring Bal Prasang

- Divya Patel from South Boston, who within

two weeks of joining Satsang, came to the *shibir* having prepared two bronze level *mukhpaths*.

Inspiring Balika Prasangs

■ A week before the *adhiveshan*, Megha, a 13-year-old *balika* from Dayton, Ohio, had to undergo an emergency appendectomy. Doctors advised her to "take it easy" and remain in the hospital for a few days. Megha was devastated because her surgery meant that she wouldn't be able to attend the *shibir* and give her *mukhpath*. She had worked incredibly hard and spent many hours preparing for the *adhiveshan*. Megha's mother expressed all of this to her *balika sanchalika*, who suggested that if Megha really wanted to give her *mukhpath*, she could do it through Skype. So, from Dayton, Ohio, an *adhiveshan* judge in Cleveland assessed Megha over Skype. That's the power of dedication. Megha won gold medals in Swamini Vato, *shlokas* and *sakhis*, bronze medals in kirtans and Vachnamrut quotations, and above all she got Swami's *rajipo*.

■ Before, when I recited my *mukhpath* there was no meaning to it. Now, when I sing it I know the importance of it, and I feel like I am singing it before Bapa. - Anchalben Patel, Perry

■ My motivation for the *adhiveshan* was keeping the thought in mind that, "I am doing this for Bapa, and he will be pleased." The main medal



Puja Dr Swami honours the *adhiveshan* winners

and prize is Bapa's *rajipo*. - **Ishaben Patel, Miami**

■ It was difficult to study for the *adhiveshan*, but I just reminded myself this wasn't a competition and I was doing it for Swamishri's *rajipo*. So I kept going. - **Kshama Kanani, San Jose**

■ Anjali Suva (Los Angeles) originally had not signed up to participate in the *adhiveshan*. She is new to satsang, but on seeing everyone studying she decided to try. She spent all her free time studying. She competed in the Swamini Vato *mukhpath* competition and received a silver medal.

Kishore-Kishori Adhiveshan-Shibirs

Over 2,500 *kishores* and *kishoris* between the ages of 14 and 22 participated in the two-day *adhiveshan-shibir* titled 'Shanti: A Thought Away'. In addition to the *adhiveshan* component, there were lecture-style sessions and group discussions to carefully deal with the theme.

Following the *adhiveshan*, on the second day, the *shibir* theme was explored in three parts:

- Shanti Through Smruti: Finding peace through remembrance and meditation.
- Shanti Through Priti: Finding peace through spiritual love.
- Shanti Through Antardrashti: Finding peace through introspection.

The *shibir* ended with a recognition ceremony to acknowledge the efforts and dedication of each

kishore and *kishori*. As high school and college students, the *kishores* and *kishoris* carefully balance their spiritual growth alongside their academic and personal endeavours. All participants left the *shibir* with a clear direction of how to create a habit of daily spiritual practices in their pursuit of *shanti*.

Inspiring Kishore Prasang

■ Yash Patel: The Swamini Vat, 'Nirantar mandirnu kām karyā kare pan jnan vrudhhi pāme nahi, jnan to sadhu samāgam thi thāy.' This *vat* really helped me as I used to do *seva* but never balanced it out with my mental satsang. So now, I have started to listen to more *katha* and read more rather than just doing mostly physical *seva*.

Inspiring Kishori Prasangs

■ A *kishori* from Chicago who had lost her eyesight (due to vision defects since birth) participated in the *mukhpath* and didn't let this be an obstacle for her. She won many medals, leaving the judges in tears by her performance and motivated the *karyakars* to do well in their *mukhpath*. - **Aneri Brahmbhatt**

■ A San Jose *kishori*'s mother passed away a short time before the *shibir*. So, we didn't think that she would come to the *shibir*, but she did. She even did the bronze-level *mukhpath* she had originally signed up for. ♦

Pujya Dr Swami's Vicharan Abroad

1 June to 15 November 2015, North America, UK & Europe



Pujya Doctor (Swayamprakash) Swami visited BAPS centres in USA and Canada for over five months, during which he gave spiritual inspiration to thousands of devotees who attended the satsang assemblies, *shibirs*, mandir inaugurations and other events.

The highlights of his *vicharan* in North America included:

- 'Bhagya jāgyā re āj jānavā' *parayan* (6-14 July).

- Shilanyas of new mandir, Beaumont, Texas (15 July).

- Samjan' Shibirs and Karyakar Adhiveshans: Houston (16-19 July), Atlanta (20-27 July), Los Angeles (27 July-4 August), Chicago (4-11 August), Toronto (11-18 August), Robbinsville (19-23 August).

- *Transcendence* Book Launch and Tribute to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam (Toronto, 16 August) – similar assemblies were held at all major BAPS centres throughout North America on this date.

- Meeting with Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper (Toronto, 17 August).

- 'Be A Perfect Satsangi' Shibir, Robbinsville (August).

- 'Be A Perfect Satsangi' Shibir, New York (12-18 October).

- Prasad-Pravesh of new mandir, Long Island (17 October).

- Shilanyas of new mandir, Edison (18 October).

En route to and from America, Dr Swami also visited BAPS centres in the UK and Europe. He celebrated Diwali and Annakut in London and then on 8 November he inaugurated the *hari* mandir in Preston.

He returned to India on 15 November, having strengthened thousands of devotees, young and old with the knowledge of satsang principles and guided them on how to apply them in their daily lives.



New Year & Annakut Celebrations with Pramukh Swami Maharaj

12 November 2015, Sarangpur



Swamishri amidst the *annakut* items arranged in the main mandir

Thousands of devotees from India and abroad participated in the traditional Vedic *mahapuja* rituals to usher in the Hindu New Year – Vikram Samvat 2072 (12 November 2015) in Sarangpur. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed his morning puja in the assembly. After puja, he blessed all sadhus and devotees for the New Year.

On this first day of the New Year, a grand *annakut* of vegetarian dishes was offered to Thakorji in the main mandir. Swamishri went for *annakut* darshan in the mandir and Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. ♦



Swamishri blesses the account books during Chopda Pujan ritual on Diwali day (11 November) at the Smruti Mandir

Diwali and Annakut Celebrations in Parliaments Abroad



UK Prime Minister hosts Diwali at 10 Downing Street, London



BAPS celebrates Diwali at the United States Congress, Washington D.C.

UK PRIME MINISTER'S HOME, 10 DOWNING STREET, LONDON 10 November 2015

Prime Minister David Cameron celebrated the Hindu festival of Diwali at 10 Downing Street, his official residence and office.

Trustees of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, were amongst the various British Hindus who had been invited to celebrate the event. In particular, volunteers from the Mandir had been requested to prepare the traditional *annakut* offered to the deities as thanksgiving on this day.

The event, organized by the Prime Minister's Office, began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp amid Vedic chantings. Along with British Hindus from various denominations, also gathered in the Pillared Room of the famous Prime Ministerial home were the Indian High Commissioner to the UK H.E. Mr Ranjan Mathai, Keith Vaz MP, Priti Patel MP, and several other eminent Britons of Indian origin.

Drawing upon the values of goodwill that are shared during Diwali and the Hindu New Year,

Mr Cameron remembered the “people at Neasden Mandir” in his Diwali message and paid tribute to the “devotion and dedication they derive from their faith by helping others”. These Hindu values of “generosity, responsibility, enterprise, family” are “the very best of British values” he said, before going on to thank all British Hindus “for their incredible contribution to Britain. We are better and stronger for it.”

Mr Cameron expressed his warm wishes for a happy and prosperous Diwali to all, and thanked the representatives from the Mandir for their efforts in setting up the *annakut* and festive decorations.

Both the Prime Minister and his wife Samantha Cameron requested the display to remain at their residence for forthcoming functions and conferences, including the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi later that week.

On this special occasion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had sent a message of goodwill to the Prime Minister, praying for the peace, safety and well-being of all people in the UK and around the world, and for the light of God to guide all

through these challenging times.

THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

4 November 2015, Washington D.C.

More than 30 members of Congress and over 1,200 prominent Indian Americans and their Congressional representatives from across the United States attended the Diwali celebration hosted by the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha co-sponsored the event along with other community organizations. BAPS Shayona prepared a menu of delicious Indian vegetarian sweets and snacks. BAPS volunteers also assisted with registration, VIP guest reception, and event coordination at the Library of Congress.

For over two hours, public leaders shared their thoughts on the diverse contributions of Indian Americans to the economic and cultural framework of the American landscape. They highlighted the importance of nurturing and advancing the longstanding relationship between India and the United States.

THE GEORGIA STATE CAPITOL BUILDING

13 November 2015, Atlanta, GA

Diwali was celebrated under the grand central rotunda with a beautiful *annakut* in the Georgia State Capitol for the first time in its 126 year



BAPS celebrates Diwali at the Georgia State Capitol Building, Atlanta, GA

history in the presence of State representatives from Georgia, the Indian Consulate in Atlanta and dozens of prominent Indian-Americans.

The event was organized by the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Lilburn, Georgia, in conjunction with Georgia State Representative B.J. Pak (Lilburn 108).

Leaders shared their thoughts on the diverse contributions of Indian Americans to the economy and culture of Georgia. They highlighted the importance of nurturing and advancing the longstanding relationship between India and the State of Georgia. Guests included State Representatives Hugh Floyd and Marin Pedro, Georgia State Public Commissioner Tim Echols, and Consul General Nagesh Singh from the Indian Consulate in Atlanta. Commissioner Echols said: "As we celebrate this Festival of Light and as we think of driving darkness from ourselves, from our neighbourhood, from our State... I think of the importance of training our children in understanding wisdom, justice, moderation. There is so much we can do in Atlanta."

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

19-22 October 2015, Melbourne, Australia

The Parliament House of Victoria hosted a four-day Diwali celebration.

The event was inaugurated on 19 October with three traditional rituals: lighting of the



Diwali-Annakut celebrations, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne

ceremonial lamp, *thal* and *arti*. Among the guests present were MP Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Industry, Energy and Resources (representing Hon. Daniel Andrews, the Premier of Victoria); MP Matthew Guy, Leader of Liberal Party and ex-manager of Government Relations for the Australian Securities and Investment Commission; MLC Craig Ondarchie, Shadow Minister for Trade, Investment and Jobs, (representing MLC Bruce Atkinson, President of the Legislative Council); MP Telmo Languiller, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; Mr. Nirmal Kumar Chawdhary, Head of Chancery & Vice-Consul General of India for Indian Embassy in Victoria and various distinguished community leaders and members of various participating Indian associations.

The traditional rituals were followed by a vibrant demonstration of Indian culture through singing of devotional songs, traditional dance performances, video presentations on the rich heritage of Indian culture and an insight into Diwali – the festival of lights, all wonderfully presented by various Indian organizations followed by a traditional Indian dinner.

From 20 to 22 October 2015, the Queen Victoria Hall at the Parliament of Victoria House witnessed marvellous exhibitions depicting the festivals, rituals, traditions, and essence of Indian culture by various Indian organizations.

The highlight of the celebrations was an *annakut* of 99 vegetarian delicacies artistically displayed and offered to the deities. The events were organized by BAPS and other Indian organizations.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE Sydney, New South Wales 2 November 2015

Over 300 guests attended the Diwali celebration held by the New South Wales state government at Parliament House. The event was hosted by Multicultural NSW, the state agency



Annakut at the Parliament House, Sydney

responsible for community relations and affairs.

Among the guests present were the NSW Premier Hon. Mike Baird MP, The Leader of the Opposition Mr. Luke Foley MP, Minister for Multiculturalism the Hon. John George Ajaka, the Indian Consul General Shri Sunjay Sudhir and Chair of Multicultural NSW Dr Hari Harinath.

BAPS volunteers prepared and arranged a decorative *annakut* and explained the significance of the *annakut* festival. NSW Premier Mr Baird was impressed by the *annakut* display of vegetarian delicacies.

On 11 November 2015, Member of Paramatta Dr Geoff Lee mentioned the contribution of the BAPS to the NSW members of the legislative assembly, "The BAPS community is very strong and provides strong leadership that is characterized by the right teaching of family values, the importance of education, the importance of working hard and the importance of personal achievement." He wished the BAPS community a Happy Diwali and commended BAPS for its fantastic work and contribution to society.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA PARLIAMENT 17 November 2015, Perth

Over 75 Members of Parliament and invited guests attended the first-ever Diwali and Annakut celebrations held in the Western Australia Parliament.



Annakut at the Western Australia Parliament, Perth

The event was hosted by Dr Mike Nahan, Minister for Energy, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests and organized by BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Perth.

The festivities began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp amid Vedic chantings. Hon. Colin Barnett (Premier of WA), Hon. Mark McGowan (Leader of the Opposition) and Mr Hasmukh Wadia (Trustee of BAPS Australia) lit the ceremonial lamp.

During the event, keynote speeches were delivered by Hon. Dr Mike Nahan and Hon. Mark McGowan, in which they acknowledged the rich and significant contributions made by the Indian community to Australia. Both reflected on the values of Hinduism and Diwali, and were proud to see them being displayed through BAPS in WA Parliament. H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message of peace and prayer was conveyed by a volunteer.

The highlight of the event was the magnificent *annakut* display of 50 vegetarian delicacies.

To commemorate the Diwali and Hindu New Year festivals, WA Parliament House was lit up with red and orange lights on 11 and 12 November 2015.

PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA 23 November 2015, Canberra

More than 40 parliamentarians and over 500 invited guests attended the biggest ever



Annakut celebration organized at Parliament House, Canberra

Diwali-Annakut celebration in the Great Hall at the centre of the Parliament of Australia in Canberra.

The highlight of the festivities was a spectacular *annakut* display of 80 vegetarian food items offered to the Hindu deities.

Among the guests present were Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, representing the Honourable Malcolm Turnbull – Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable Bill Shorten – Leader of the Opposition, Senator Richard Di Natale – Leader of the Australian Greens, His Excellency Navdeep Singh Suri – High Commissioner of India to Australia, the Honourable Philip Ruddock MP, Senator Zed Seselja, Ms Michelle Rowland MP, and Senator Lisa Singh.

The event was organized by the Hindu Council of Australia and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), Australia, in conjunction with Senator Zed Seselja.

The event began with *thal* and *arti* followed by the traditional lighting of the lamp by the distinguished guests. Thereafter, prayers, traditional dance performances and speeches marked the occasion and introduced guests to the core beliefs and values of Indian culture. ◆



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 95th Birthday Celebration

7 December, Sarangpur



According to the Gregorian calendar Swamishri was born on 7 December 1921. On that day, hectic preparations to celebrate Swamishri's birthday were going on in Sarangpur. Since Swamishri was born at 8.20 a.m. the curtains of his room opened for darshan to all the sadhus assembled.

Swamishri looked resplendent with a *tilak-chandlo* on his forehead. The decorations of balloons and lamps gave a celebratory air. A *samuh arti* was performed by the sadhus to greet and offer prayers to Thakorji and Swamishri. Thereafter, a garland of flowers prepared by sadhus was offered to Swamishri.

At 10.30 a.m. Swamishri came to the glass cabin (Pramukh Mandiram) to bless the devotees. The assembly hall was decorated with strings of balloons and banners of 'Happy Birthday 95'. Sadhus greeted Swamishri by singing 'Abhivandan...'. The entire assembly fervently

clapped and wished a happy birthday to guruhari. Garlands of flowers and decorated *chhadis* were offered to honour Swamishri. Then Swamishri sanctified new helmets for motorcyclists as part of a safety campaign for all *satsangis* launched by the BAPS.

At 5.42 p.m. Swamishri was wheeled onto the open stage of 'Pramukh Darshan Vatika'. A special assembly was in progress to commemorate Swamishri's birthday. Swamishri was welcomed by youths performing a cultural dance. Then a few milestone events from his childhood were enacted on the stage. After a skit announcing his birth in Chansad, Swamishri emerged from a backdrop that portrayed his house.

Then another skit was performed to show how Shantilal was inclined towards bhajan and bhakti from his childhood. Settings of the Hanumanji Mandir were created, where Shantilal used to listen to the discourses of the mahant and also sing bhajans. Swamishri took *kartals* in his hands, and played them while an audio-recording of him singing "Kyā tan mājta re..." was relayed.

Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke eloquently about Swamishri's childhood incidents: his early stay in Rajnagar, study in Padra, the annual swimming competition in the village lake and his departure from home on receiving a letter from Shastriji Maharaj.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami offered a prayer to Swamishri to bless them all with many years of his darshan and satsang. Thereafter, a lively traditional dance was performed by the youths of Bhavnagar *yuvak mandal*. In conclusion, a *samuh arti* of Thakorji and Swamishri was performed by 5,000 devotees. ♦



Children and youths greet Swamishri with a traditional dance



Swamishri blesses all from 'Pramukh Mandiram'



A skit by devotee-doctors portray how Swamishri loved doing bhajan-kirtan in his childhood at the Hanumanji Mandir



Swamishri smiles and responds during a skit



India

BSS BAL-BALIKA KARYAKAR SHIBIR 22-25 October 2015, Sankari



More than a thousand volunteers took part in this year's annual BSS Karyakar Shibir themed 'Sadhana'. The BSS programme is a special development course for selected children that takes place in hundreds of centres across India. Dedicated and talented volunteers take special time every month to mentor the children in public speaking, management, life skills and Satsang knowledge. It is to train and motivate these *karyakars* that an annual BSS Karyakar Shibir is organized.

The *shibir* explained that sadhana is the endeavour to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam. That endeavour has three important parts: *ahnik*, *seva* and *niyam-dharma*. Guidance on these topics were given through discourses by Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, video interviews with senior sadguru sadhus and workshops presented by experienced sadhus and volunteers.

There were also three special evening programmes during the *shibir*: a play titled 'Muktina Mandan' ('Beginnings of Mukti'); in honour of Dashera, an event called 'Swabhavdahan' in which the participants burned an effigy of Ravan which represented their negative qualities and

personality traits; activities involving things one can find around the house or in any village, showing how just a little bit of thought can take ordinary things and turn them into extraordinarily fun presentations giving important satsang and life lessons.

All participants left the *shibir* determined to increase the depth of their satsang and help the children in their charge imbibe these important values.

12 FIRST LADIES FROM AFRICAN NATIONS VISIT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 29 October 2015, Delhi



From the Indian-Africa Forum Summit III in New Delhi, 12 First Ladies from African Nations visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.

The visiting African delegation included H.E. Mme. Ana Paula dos Santos of Angola, H.E. Mme. Beatrice Harerimana of Burundi, H.E. Mme. Roman Tesfaye of Ethiopia, H.E. Mme. Lordina Dramani Mahama of Ghana, H.E. Mme. Mathato Mosisili of Lesotho, H.E. Mme. Keita Aminata Maiga of Mali, Lady Sarojini Devi Jugnauth of Mauritius, H.E. Mme. Monica Geingos of Namibia, Her Majesty Queen Inkhosikati Make Lafogiyane of Swaziland, H.E. Mme. Bongi Ngema Zuma of South Africa, H.E. Mme. Asha Mahmoud Mzee of Tanzania and H.E. Mme.

Edith Kutesa of Uganda.

Each First Lady was welcomed in a traditional Indian manner. After visiting the main Akshardham *maha*-mandir the delegation visited the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth) that features 148 life-like carved stone elephants depicting messages of social harmony, peace and spirituality.

Then, the delegation offered prayers for world peace and harmony by offering *abhishek* on the sacred image of Sri Neelkanth Varni.

The delegation also experienced the educational boat ride exhibition ‘Sanskriti Darshan’, viewing India’s glorious heritage and India’s contributions to humanity through the ages during the 14-minute boat ride.

SWAMINARAYAN VISHWASHANTI MAHAYAGNA

14-15 November 2015, Sarangpur



The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, built by Shastriji Maharaj, will be completing 100 years in 2016. Year-long celebrations are being held in Sarangpur to commemorate this centenary. The Yagna for World Peace was one among several programmes organized during the celebrations. More than 14,000 devotees from India and abroad participated in the Vedic *yagna* rituals, guided by 125 Sanskrit scholars.

During this two-day *yagna*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the *yagna* participants with his personal presence on both days to fulfil the loving sentiments of the devotees

Swamishri performed puja rituals and offered

rice and grains in the central *yagna kund*. He also performed the *arti* of Thakorji, and prayed for world peace and the well-being of all. A blood donation camp organized along with the *yagna* also received overwhelming response from the devotees.

UK & Europe

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 7-8 November 2015, Preston, UK



The inauguration of the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Preston was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Swayamprakash Swami (Doctor Swami) and sadhus from India and the UK.

The mandir marks the steady growth of Satsang activities in Preston over the years since Pramukh Swami Maharaj first visited Preston in 1974 and a further eight times until 2000.

The first BAPS *hari* mandir in Preston was established in 1984, in a disused synagogue. With the rise in the number of worshippers, the need for a larger facility arose. A property was acquired in the heart of the city with fundraising activities to support the project lasting over five years. The long-awaited opening of the new mandir is the fruition of tireless efforts by Swamishri, sadhus and devotees.

The two-day Mandir Mahotsav began with a special *mahapuja* in which devotees and well-wishers offered their prayers for peace and well-being to prevail throughout the local community.

The *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir

were taken out in a colourful *nagar-yatra* through the heart of Preston to bless the city and its inhabitants. The streets were filled with people who had gathered to see the procession of beautifully decorated floats, traditional dances and the sound of joyous devotional music.

On the morning of 8 November, the *murti-sthapan* ceremony was performed by Doctor Swami amid Vedic chanting and rituals. Previously, in Sarangpur, on 29 June 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals.

The auspicious occasion was marked with a vibrant kirtan-bhakti programme at the University of Central Lancashire where sadhus and youths sang bhajans to the accompaniment of an array of musical instruments.

On Sunday, a dedication assembly took place in the same auditorium in the presence of guests, civic leaders and various community representatives.

USA & Canada

KIDS' DIWALI CELEBRATIONS 8 November 2015, North America



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs across North America organized specially designed BAPS Kids' Diwali Celebration.

The celebration was themed, 'Diwali: Experience Our Heritage'. Various stations were setup for children and their families to learn about the customs and rituals associated with Diwali through hands-on activities. At one

station, children and their parents decorated *divas* to take home for their family celebrations.

The celebrations provided a festive environment for children to grow closer in the common cultural ties that bind them together, and to learn and experience the rituals around this five-day festival, such as the bright-coloured *rangolis* (ornate designs made of coloured powder), decorated oil lamps, elaborate *annakut* and other activities.

Parents participated with their children in the celebrations. Pramukh Swami Maharaj conveyed his blessings, encouraging families to work together in inspiring love and unity between each other with every passing Diwali.

BAPS CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP CELEBRATES DIWALI 15-29 November 2015, North America



BAPS Campus Fellowships hosted their Annual Diwali Celebration for over 3,000 attendees at 24 university campuses across North America. College going *kishores* and *kishoris* in various states, and often at remote campus locations, balanced their academic schedules to plan and organize the event. The student volunteers themselves prepared a variety of vegetarian food items to offer in the *annakut*.

The celebrations were themed, 'In the Joy of Others' and the sadhus reminded all faculty, staff, and students in attendance to think of each other during this festive time, and work for the betterment and advancement of society at large. The sadhus also shared their insights on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision for youth development

around the world. Students were encouraged to develop a practice of prayer and spiritual study in their daily lives, enabling them to find peace through faith over time. Spirituality and optimism inspire harmony and love within our families and communities.

At each celebration, *Transcendence*, written by the late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam was discussed, focusing on leadership, spirituality, and social responsibility as students learned about Dr Kalam's personal journey with His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Together, attendees performed *arti*, *thal*, and learnt about the significance of Diwali in Indian culture.

INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS HARI MANDIRS 18 & 25 October 2015, Canton Detroit, MI



On 18 October devotees participated in a Vedic Vishwashanti Mahayagna in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami, praying for world peace and unity. The evening programme consisted of inspiring discourses by the sadhus, and a kirtan *aradhana* programme.

On 25 October, Doctor Swami performed the auspicious *mahapuja* and *murti-sthapan* rituals of the *murtis* in the new mandir. Previously, on 27 April 2015, in Sarangpur, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.

Thereafter, in the assembly Doctor Swami explained the crucial role that mandirs play in communities across the globe, teaching families

to build relationships rooted in understanding and encouraging all that they can improve the world by first improving themselves.

Cincinnati, OH 24-25 October 2015



The opening of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Cincinnati, Ohio, was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami.

In 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was presented with the Key to the City of Cincinnati, Ohio. Encouraged by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, satsang activities in Cincinnati have continued to grow in both breadth and depth.

On 24 October devotees participated in a Vishwashanti Mahayagna, to pray for world peace and spirituality. During the afternoon *nagar-yatra* the *murtis* cast their divine blessings on the local community, while BAPS youths performed folk dances and played instruments alongside other devotees presenting cultural performances. In the evening a kirtan *aradhana* was held.

On 25 October, the *hari* mandir was formally inaugurated with the *murti-sthapan* ceremony. The first *arti* of the new mandir was performed thereafter. State Representative Niraj Antani was among the many dignitaries present on the occasion. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of these *murtis* in Ahmedabad, India, on 13 February 2013. Then, in the assembly, Doctor Swami encouraged all to serve each other and their communities through actively engaging in mandir activities.

Allentown, PA
1 November 2015



The *murti-sthapan* ceremony in the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Allentown, Pennsylvania, took place in the presence of Pujya Yagnavallabh Swami and other swamis. Since 1996, swamis have regularly visited the area, helping devotees develop their practice of spirituality. Devotees and well-wishers also offered prayers for world peace and harmony throughout the local community.

Previously, on 14 January 2014, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the sacred images in Sarangpur, India.

In the assembly afterwards, the efforts of hundreds of devotees who served to complete the mandir was appreciated. Youths from Lansdale and Allentown performed a cultural dance, and spoke about their experience of mandir and satsang.

Yagnavallabh Swami concluded by highlighting the value that the mandir would add to the community.

Middle East

BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR

Dubai, UAE, 29-31 October 2015

More than 100 children from all over the UAE attended the *shibir* based on the theme 'My Mandir My Home'. Through audio-visual presentations, skits and fun activities, the topics which were covered in the *shibir* included: Ideal way of doing darshan, Importance of *seva*, Chaitanya Mandir and Rituals: *arti*, *ghar sabha*, *mansi puja*



and *tilak-chandlo*.

The children gained insight into why the mandir is their home and they should value, respect and love it as such. They learned how the mandir helps them to strengthen their connection with God and guru and how that connection enables them to excel in life.

The children also performed *samuh* puja and *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

Brahmavihari Swami and Shri Arun Tiwari, co-author of the book *Transcendence*, also had interactive sessions with the children.

Asia Pacific

YUVA SAMMELAN

27 October 2015, Auckland, New Zealand



Around 300 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Auckland attended the special Yuva Sammelan held at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Auckland. The evening programme included a video presentation and a thought-provoking speech on the central theme, 'Ma-Baap Ne Bhulsho Nahi' (Do Not Forget Your Parents), by Paramchintan Swami. He highlighted the contemporary

challenges faced by youths and parents, while emphasizing that youth should appreciate the sacrifices made by their parents and the values that their parents have passed on to them. The event enlightened and motivated the youths towards leading a peaceful life through better relationships with family members.

BAPS Charities

FLOOD RELIEF WORK BY BAPS

5 December 2015, Chennai, India



Following the severe rain that flooded Chennai and surrounding areas, BAPS Charities responded to the immediate needs of those in severely affected areas. Over 60 volunteers operating six vans travelled to 17 villages along East Coast Road, Mahabalipuram, to distribute over 3,500 relief kits containing rice, grains, cooking oil, blankets and clothes.

SEWING MACHINES DONATED TO WATAMU PRIMARY SCHOOL

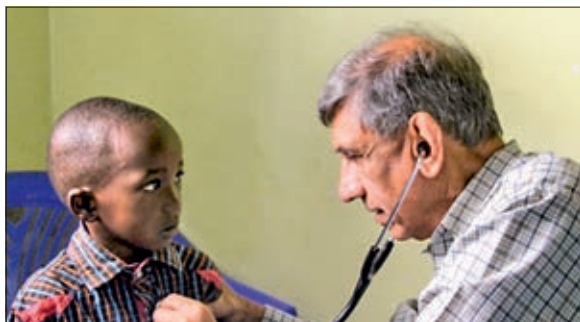
15 November 2015, Mombasa, Kenya



BAPS Charities volunteers visited Watamu Primary School, to donate eight sewing machines to the school and sponsor a meal for all students

and staff.

MEDICAL CAMP AT DADA'S COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION CENTRE, Nairobi, October 2015



On 18th October 2015 BAPS Charities held a medical camp for the students of Dada's Community and Education Centre in Nairobi.

Dada's Community and Education centre educates a total of 135 students out of which the centre houses 50 of them who are orphaned due to various reasons. The centre is run and managed by Nitin and Bindu Shah. The BAPS Charities team of doctors, dentists, optometrists, pharmacists and general volunteers arrived at 8:30 a.m. and were welcomed by the management of the home.

The children were then checked by the doctors for any deviation from the general physical well-being, and where necessary relevant medications were provided free of charge. This was followed by an oral health checkup and instructions on oral hygiene tailored for the children. The children's eyes were then tested for below average vision, which can adversely affect their education.

The reports of the findings were given to the management, which through further planning would be resolved with the help of well-wishers. In total 120 children and parents benefited from this exercise. At the close of the event the children, house mothers and management acknowledged the efforts of the team. BAPS Charities intends to further collaborate to restore the health of the children, paving their way to a more successful future.



Mukundbhai Harmanbhai Patel (1939-2015)

A Veteran Satsangi of USA Passes Away

Mukundbhai was born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1939, and was the youngest son of Harmanbhai Makandas Patel of Gana – who was a pioneer of BAPS Satsang in East Africa. With the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, at the age of 18, Mukundbhai was the first Indian from Kenya to go for studies to the USA. He graduated in Mechanical Engineering from Clemson University, South Carolina in 1961. Mukundbhai was one of the pioneers of satsang in the USA.

Thereafter, he worked for 39 years as a structural analyst for the Boeing Company in Seattle; working on the Chinook Helicopter, Launch Vehicles, the Space Shuttle (Thermal Protection System) and many other projects. He was known as ‘Dr Patel’ amongst the NASA Space Shuttle engineers.

From a young age he was deeply religious and was active in the *yuvak mandal* as guided by Yogiji Maharaj.

He had great determination and discipline, due to which he fulfilled Yogiji Maharaj’s *agna* in completing his degree in three years instead of the normal five. He sincerely followed the *niyams* and dharma of Satsang. While he was studying and then after his graduation, Yogiji Maharaj wrote inspiring letters to him.

In the early days when there were no mandirs in East Africa, Yogiji Maharaj inspired Harmanbhai to conduct *ghar sabha* daily. So, after *arti* every evening he would read from the Sampradaya’s shastras to the family, which had a great impact on Mukundbhai and Vinodbhai’s (elder brother) lives.

In 1947, at the age of eight, Mukundbhai and Vinodbhai went to India with Harmanbhai and had the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj, who also gave *vartman* to and blessed both.

Although he was the youngest brother in the family he was highly respected by all. He was

dedicated to Satsang and was one of the first to volunteer for full-time *seva* for one year for the 1991 Cultural Festival of India in America. He also served as one of the first *senior* regional coordinators for satsang development.

In 1985, he moved to the northeast part of the US, where he attended *sabhas* in the Philadelphia area. He acquired a house in Mickleton in southern New Jersey, where satsang *sabhas* were conducted from 1986 to 1998. From here the seeds were sown for the mandirs now in this region (Delaware, Philadelphia, Atlantic City and Cherry Hill).

In 2006, he returned to Seattle to work. He attended the *sabhas* which were held every other week at the Hindu Mandir. In May 2007, he purchased a house on 10 acres of land in Issaquah, a small city west of Seattle and from 2007 to 2014 the *sabhas* were held there. As the *mandal* grew from 40 to over 100 *satsangis* the house became too small. A building was acquired in Redmond and the *murti-pratishtha* was performed there in August 2014.

In 1984, Mukundbhai attended the wedding of Vinodbhai’s eldest son, Rajesh, in London. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in LA at the time. He called Mukundbhai in London and asked him to come to LA for the *murti-pratishtha*. Mukundbhai immediately flew from London to LA to attend the *murti-pratishtha* and thus followed his *agna*.

Mukundbhai was by nature very quiet and would always stay in the background to give others the opportunity to take *labh* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But Bapa would always call him and meet him during his visits to the US.

With his passing away, the Satsang has lost a senior, dedicated and sincere devotee who had earned the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. May Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj bless his soul with the eternal, divine happiness of Akshardham. ♦

BAPS CHARITIES



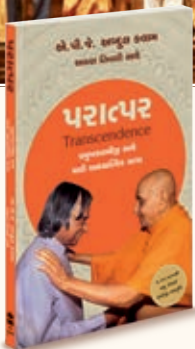
1. BAPS Charities organized Health Fairs at all its satsang centres in North America. A health awareness session was held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Dallas (17.10.2015)
2. Health Fair at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, New York (4.10.2015)
3. BAPS devotees donate blood in Calhoun, GA (29.11.2015)
4. BAPS volunteers donate sewing machines to Watamu Primary School, Mombasa, Kenya (15.11.2015)
- 5 & 6. BAPS volunteers prepare relief kits and distribute them to the flood victims, Chennai (5.12.2015)



H.H. PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 95TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Swamishri's entry and presence on the stage was the grand finale of the celebration. The senior sadhus honoured him with garlands and offered prayers. In conclusion, everyone offered reverence to Thakorji and Swamishri by offering the *mantra-pushpanjali* and performing the *arti* rituals.

The Gujarati version of *Transcendence* called *Paratpar* was inaugurated by senior sadhus and representatives from the publishers. The book, written by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, includes his spiritual experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



Printed and Published by Sadhu Swayamprakashdas on behalf of Swaminarayan Aksharpath and Printed at Swaminarayan Mudran Mandir, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004 and Published from Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004. Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas.