

Inauguration of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir  
10 August 2014, Robbinsville, NJ

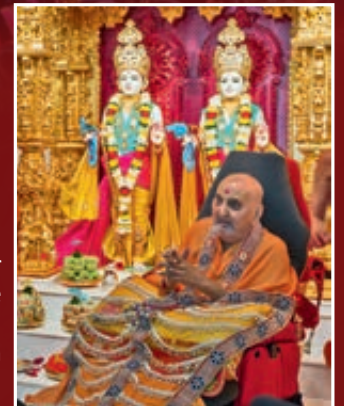


# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September-October 2014

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-

Swamishri after  
performing the  
*murti-pratishtha* in  
the mandir sanctum







### MURTIS CONSECRATED IN BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, ROBBINSVILLE

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman<br>Gunatitanand Swami | 5. Shri Shiv-Parvati-Kartikeya-Ganapatiji |
| 2. Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj                                       | 6. Shri Bhagatji Maharaj                  |
| 3. Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev            | 7. Shri Shastriji Maharaj                 |
| 4. Shri Ram-Sita-Lakshman-Hanumanji                             | 8. Shri Yogiji Maharaj                    |
|   | 9. Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj             |

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September-October 2014 Vol. 37 No. 5



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

**Founder:** HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

**Editor:** Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

**Contributors:** Sadhu Vivekjivandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

**Designer:** Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

**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



# CONTENTS



## SPECIAL ISSUE

- 4 First Word
- 8 Timeline of Events
- 14 Mandir Construction
- 18 Yagnas For World Peace
- 20 Grand Nagaryatra
- 24 Murti-pratishtha Celebrations
- 28 Mandir Facts & Figures
- 32 Mandir Mahotsav Events
- 38 Visitors' Impressions of Mandir
- 42 Media Coverage
- 43 Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan
- 46 Living with Swamishri
- 47 BAPS News





# FIRST WORD



Swamishri in front of the mandir in Robbinsville



**By Sadhu Ishwarcharandas**

*(Head of Akshardham Project)*

**F**or quite some time, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj had envisioned of building an Akshardham in North America. In 1997, he finally voiced this desire to the devotees and encouraged them to begin the process of finding suitable land. Initially, Dr K.C. Patel and Board Members began this

earnest search, which was later continued by a team of youths including Bharatbhai, Dipal, Hari, Sunil and Yogesh under the guidance and supervision of Pujya Yagnavallabh Swami and Kanubhai, CEO of BAPS North America. Based on Swamishri's guidance of finding a substantial area of land, they scouted for land in all directions, visiting many locations.

Finally, after a long search, a location was found in Robbinsville, New Jersey. At that time, in 2007, Swamishri was in America. When Swamishri was informed about the site, he instructed the devotees to proceed with the acquisition of the land provided the Township and the neighbours were supportive of the project. Thereafter, efforts were launched to procure the land. Prior to his departure from the US, since the legal proceedings were ongoing, Swamishri decided not to visit the site then, but would come in the future after it was acquired. Thus Swamishri's visit was postponed. Shortly thereafter, due to the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swamishri, we acquired 102 acres and later on, an adjacent plot of 65 acres. Upon hearing such news, Swamishri responded, "It is good we have got the land. I had not been able to come,





(Top left, clockwise) Akshardham site when acquired in 2008. Swamishri before Thakorji after performing the *pratishtha* rituals. Artisans sculpting stone at a workshop in Pindvada

but I want to.” This was the first of many times Swamishri conveyed his desire to visit the Akshardham site.

Meanwhile, the arduous task of designing the entire Akshardham complex began. When Swamishri was shown the overall site plan, he expressed that the *shikharbaddh* mandir should be made completely out of marble, just as Shastriji Maharaj had made one in Gadhada. Not only this, but he said the mandir should last for over 1000 years! To fulfil his wish, stone testing was performed on marble. Experts proposed to Swamishri to have the mandir enclosed inside a building so that it could be protected from the harsh climate changes in the northeast region of America. Swamishri gave his blessings to build the mandir within such a structure.

The mandir is ornately designed and made in alignment with the Hindu shastras. The mandir plans were drafted by a Sompura (traditional architect) and sadhus. Then, the stones were carved according to the designs and plans through the immense efforts of Harshadbhai Chavda, who runs a stone workshop in Pindvada, Rajasthan. The design for the *shikharbaddh* mandir was done by Prakashbhai Sompura (architect), Bhaktinandan Swami, Shrijiwarup Swami, Aksharvatsal Swami and others. Shri B.V. Chaudhary (New Delhi) and Ashwinbhai Patel (Ahmedabad) also provided their expert services as structural and civil engineers respectively.

The mandir was to be made out of Italian marble. To ensure the quality of the marble was suitable for the mandir, Pujya Muniraj Swami travelled to the quarries in Italy from time to time. The selected marble was then shipped to India and arrived in Pindvada,





During the Mandir Mahotsav devotees enter through the festival gate



Youths pay tributes to the mandir by performing a traditional dance

where it was shaped and sculpted by artisans according to various designs. Once carved, it was shipped to America and the mandir construction process began at the hands of Indian artisans and BAPS volunteers. Rohitbhai Patel of Sachi Construction and his team aided in the construction of the mandir, which had to conform to the American codes and conditions. In just over three years the entire mandir was ready, and enclosed within a building. Large skylights were installed on top of the building to allow natural light to flow in to enhance the beauty of the mandir exterior. Pujya Bhaktinandan Swami, Harshadbhai, and many sadhus and devotees made great efforts to finish the monumental task.

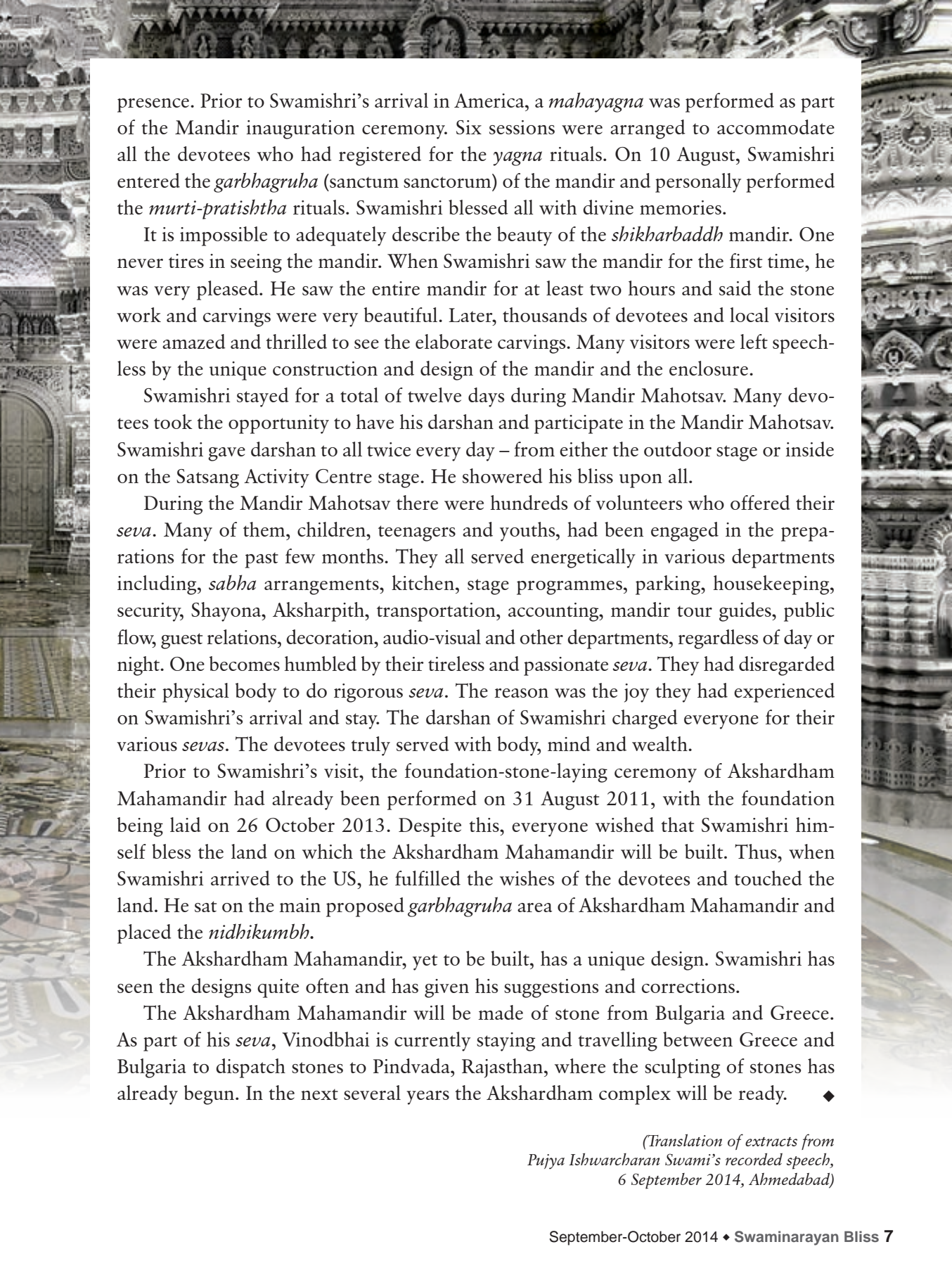
Throughout the entire construction process, Swamishri frequently shared his wish to go to the *murti-pratishtha* in Robbinsville. However, as time passed his health declined, making everyone believe there would be no chance for him to go. Furthermore, in the last two years, since Swamishri could not travel about (even in Gujarat), everyone believed that going to America was out of the question. The doctors, too, had refused. Despite these physical setbacks, Swamishri once more expressed his wish of going to the US to Pujya Yagnavallabh Swami and Kanubhai during their visits to India in 2014. Understanding his inner wish, we sought the advice of doctors once again to see if such a trip could actually happen. Dr Tejas Patel (Ahmedabad) declared that Swamishri's health was fine and that there would be no problem in taking him. When Swamishri was notified, he replied, "Let us go. With such a big event we should go." Thus, arrangements for Swamishri's visit to the US commenced.

On 5 August 2014, Swamishri left on a chartered flight from India. He arrived at 12.55 a.m. to the Akshardham complex and mandir in Robbinsville on 6 August 2014. At that time, many devotees welcomed Swamishri with tears of joy. No one believed it to be possible for Swamishri to come.

Thereafter, everyone felt that because of the long flight and jet lag, Swamishri would rest for the initial two days. But, to everyone's surprise, Swamishri came out the next day to see the Akshardham site. For two hours, he visited each and every corner of the campus. Swamishri was very pleased to see the land and the tree line that surrounded the entire site, giving it an ambience of serenity and peace. He felt that the site was most appropriate and Akshardham would turn out to be magnificent.

On 9 and 10 August, the *murti-pratishtha* was celebrated festively in Swamishri's





presence. Prior to Swamishri's arrival in America, a *mahayagna* was performed as part of the Mandir inauguration ceremony. Six sessions were arranged to accommodate all the devotees who had registered for the *yagna* rituals. On 10 August, Swamishri entered the *garbhagruha* (sanctum sanctorum) of the mandir and personally performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals. Swamishri blessed all with divine memories.

It is impossible to adequately describe the beauty of the *shikharbaddh* mandir. One never tires in seeing the mandir. When Swamishri saw the mandir for the first time, he was very pleased. He saw the entire mandir for at least two hours and said the stone work and carvings were very beautiful. Later, thousands of devotees and local visitors were amazed and thrilled to see the elaborate carvings. Many visitors were left speechless by the unique construction and design of the mandir and the enclosure.

Swamishri stayed for a total of twelve days during Mandir Mahotsav. Many devotees took the opportunity to have his darshan and participate in the Mandir Mahotsav. Swamishri gave darshan to all twice every day – from either the outdoor stage or inside on the Satsang Activity Centre stage. He showered his bliss upon all.

During the Mandir Mahotsav there were hundreds of volunteers who offered their *seva*. Many of them, children, teenagers and youths, had been engaged in the preparations for the past few months. They all served energetically in various departments including, *sabha* arrangements, kitchen, stage programmes, parking, housekeeping, security, Shayona, Aksharpath, transportation, accounting, mandir tour guides, public flow, guest relations, decoration, audio-visual and other departments, regardless of day or night. One becomes humbled by their tireless and passionate *seva*. They had disregarded their physical body to do rigorous *seva*. The reason was the joy they had experienced on Swamishri's arrival and stay. The darshan of Swamishri charged everyone for their various *sevas*. The devotees truly served with body, mind and wealth.

Prior to Swamishri's visit, the foundation-stone-laying ceremony of Akshardham Mahamandir had already been performed on 31 August 2011, with the foundation being laid on 26 October 2013. Despite this, everyone wished that Swamishri himself bless the land on which the Akshardham Mahamandir will be built. Thus, when Swamishri arrived to the US, he fulfilled the wishes of the devotees and touched the land. He sat on the main proposed *garbhagruha* area of Akshardham Mahamandir and placed the *nidhikumbh*.

The Akshardham Mahamandir, yet to be built, has a unique design. Swamishri has seen the designs quite often and has given his suggestions and corrections.

The Akshardham Mahamandir will be made of stone from Bulgaria and Greece. As part of his *seva*, Vinodbhai is currently staying and travelling between Greece and Bulgaria to dispatch stones to Pindvada, Rajasthan, where the sculpting of stones has already begun. In the next several years the Akshardham complex will be ready. ♦

(Translation of extracts from  
Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami's recorded speech,  
6 September 2014, Ahmedabad)



# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

## Akshardham Site Development

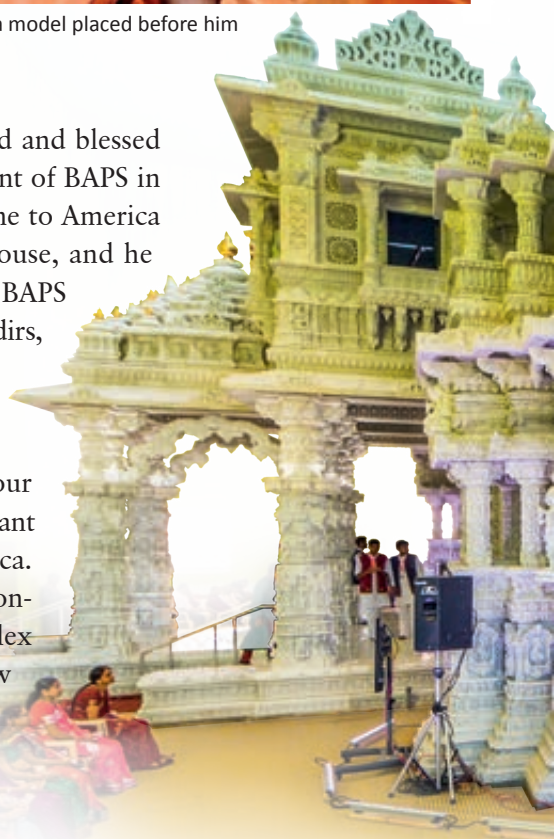
### Robbinsville, New Jersey



Swamishri looks at the Robbinsville Mandir plans with a model placed before him

#### INTRODUCTION

In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj had prophesied and blessed Dr K. C. Patel, who later served as President of BAPS in North America, “Pramukh Swami will come to America and consecrate a mandir opposite your house, and he will inspire the satsang manifold.” Today, BAPS in North America has six *shikharbaddh* mandirs, 89 *hari* mandirs, 70 sadhus and a following of thousands of devotees. The blessings of Yogiji Maharaj and the colossal efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the past four decades have seen the development of a vibrant BAPS satsang in many parts of North America. In 1997, Swamishri declared his wish to construct a Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex in North America. The epic story of how the project’s first two phases began and developed reflects the profound bhakti and efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, his sadhus and devotees.





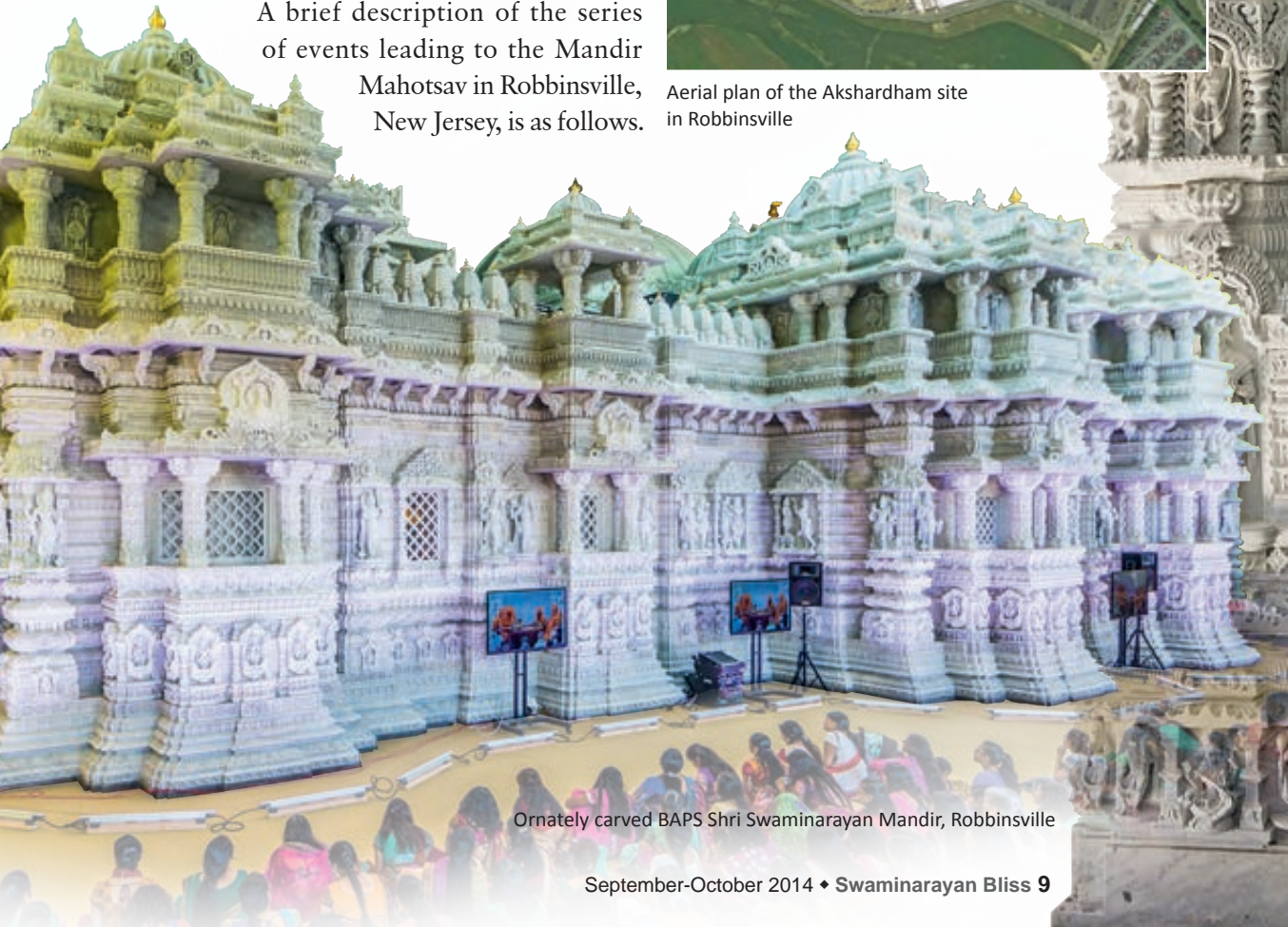
The Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex in North America is to be built in five main phases. They are as follows:

1. Phase 1: Satsang Activity Centre – this includes a large assembly hall for discourses, kitchen and dining areas, gymnasium for youths, and classrooms for cultural and religious education.
2. Phase 2: Shikharbaddh Mandir and Sant Ashram – the enclosed *shikharbaddh* mandir will also have an area where *abhishek* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni will take place. The *sant* ashram is adjacent to the mandir allowing sadhus easy access to the mandir.
3. Phase 3: Youth Centre – a dedicated area for children and youth activities to learn more about satsang and living a morally pure life. Classrooms, gymnasium and auditorium will fill this area.
4. Phase 4: Welcome Centre – this will include a reception facility, auditorium, Swaminarayan Aksharpith/souvenir shop, Shayona restaurant/food shop and the headquarters of BAPS North America Satsang.
5. Phase 5: Akshardham Mahamandir – accompanying the magnificent Akshardham Mahamandir will be a grand *parikrama*, ornate landscapes and gardens and inspiring exhibition halls.

A brief description of the series of events leading to the Mandir Mahotsav in Robbinsville, New Jersey, is as follows.



Aerial plan of the Akshardham site in Robbinsville



Ornately carved BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Robbinsville



Devotees are being informed about the site plan, August 2010



Work in progress on site, August 2010



Sculptors working on stone in Pindvada

## TIMELINE

**1997.** On 8 December, in Atladra, Swamishri expressed his wish to build an Akshardham in North America to the *sadguru* sadhus and senior devotees.

**1998.** After his heart bypass surgery in New York, Swamishri visited prospective sites for Akshardham in New Jersey.

**2004.** Swamishri wrote a letter from New Delhi to the US conveying his blessings for the making of Akshardham in North America.

**2005.** Swamishri was at the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vallabh Vidyanagar engaged in a discussion about Akshardham. He expressed his blessings for the project.

Later in the year, Swamishri wrote a letter blessing the *bal-kishore mandals* of northeast America to offer their services in the Akshardham project.

**2006.** In Mahelav, before the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj, Swamishri prayed for the creation of Akshardham in North America.

**2007.** From 1998 to 2007 senior BAPS devotees and volunteers visited 246 sites for the Akshardham project. Out of them all, a site in East Windsor, New Jersey, was found to be suitable. But upon submitting applications to build the complex, the governing body chose not to grant permission. The search continued elsewhere.

**2007.** Seeing the assembly hall totally full, with many devotees standing outside, during the Jal Jhilani celebration at the mandir in Edison, New Jersey, Swamishri happily alluded to the need for a bigger mandir, “Even I feel that something has

to be done.”

Before departing from the US Swamishri gave his approval, instructing the Board Members to acquire the 102-acre land in Robbinsville, New Jersey. Swamishri had expressed his wish to visit the site at Robbinsville before his departure to India, but due to ongoing legal proceedings, it did not materialize at that time. Thereafter, on many occasions, he reminded Pujya Yagnavallabh Swami and Kanubhai Patel about not having been able to visit the site.

**2008.** The site for the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex in Robbinsville, New Jersey, was acquired by BAPS. Thereafter, an application for the approval of plans was submitted to the Robbinsville Township authorities. On 22 October, members of the Robbinsville Township Planning Board, the governing body who determines whether a given project should be approved or not, took up the application for discussion. To ensure all questions were proactively addressed, a thorough presentation was prepared by BAPS volunteers in conjunction with their consultant team. The in-depth presentation took two meetings. During the second meeting, the Board was convinced and gave its permission on 29 October 2008 for the construction of the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex.

### 2009. Bhumi Puja of Land

On 14 February in Delhi, Swamishri endorsed and blessed the preliminary design of Akshardham Mahamandir. On 7 July, the *bhumi puja* rituals were performed on the site by sadhus and leading





Swamishri performs *bhumi puja* of soil from Robbinsville site in Bochasan, 2009



Swamishri performs the *shilanyas* rituals in New Delhi, July 2010



Dr Swami performs *shilanyas* rituals at the Robbinsville site, August 2010

devotees from across North America.

In November, the site work for the first phase commenced. Thereafter, as the site work progressed Swamishri conveyed his blessings.

#### **2010. Planning Permission for Mahamandir**

On 17 February, BAPS applied for the final design approval of the Akshardham Mahamandir and the *parikrama* (i.e. final phase of the project) to the Township Planning Board. Once again, to provide in-depth information to the Board and neighbours, the BAPS volunteer team along with the consultants spoke over two meetings to address all potential questions and concerns. The Planning Board was satisfied and declared its permission on 24 February 2010. As soon as the approval was granted, Swamishri, who was in Gandhinagar at the time, received a call from Kanubhai, notifying him of the events that had transpired that day. Swamishri was immensely pleased to hear the joyous news and expressed his blessings.

#### **2010. Shikharbaddh Mandir Shila Puja**

On 12 July (V.S. 2066, Ashadh *sud* 1), in New Delhi, Swamishri performed the *shila puja* rituals for the foundation-stone-laying of the Robbinsville *shikharbaddh* mandir. Swamishri also showered flower petals on the plans for the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex and sanctified them. Simultaneously, planning and preparations for the *shilanyas* ceremony were under way in New Jersey.

#### **2010. Shikharbaddh Mandir Shila Puja**

On 21 August (Shravan *sud* 13), the *shilanyas* or foundation-stone-laying ceremony for the

*shikharbaddh* mandir in Robbinsville commenced at 9.00 a.m. with the *mahapuja* rituals in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami. Dr Swami, sadhus and leading devotees performed the *shilanyas* rituals in the foundation pit while thousands of devotees participated in the rituals in a large adjacent marquee. Later, the devotees filled the *nidhikumbh* to be placed in the mandir foundation with currency coins of 60 countries. Finally, each devotee placed a brick, on which they had written ‘Swaminarayan’ along with their own name, in the foundation pit.

To include all the devotees who had enrolled for the *shilanyas* rituals, four sessions were held over 21 and 22 August. During the *shilanyas* assembly, Richard Levesque, then vice-president of Robbinsville Township Council, shared his sentiments, “The feeling of community, the feeling of family when I walked into the ceremony today was just amazing. That community and family aspect which BAPS brings to our community is second-to-none.”

Every year, from December to March, the northeast region of USA faces a severe winter season. At the Robbinsville site the heavy snow showers and sub-zero winds almost paralysed the construction work. The rains between April and November also hindered the construction work. Thus the construction pace of the *shikharbaddh* mandir encountered many challenges.

#### **2011. Akshardham Mahamandir Shilanyas Mahotsav**

On 31 August, the *shilanyas* rituals for the Akshardham Mahamandir were performed by



Swamishri performs *shilanyas* rituals of Akshardham Mahamandir in Mumbai, August 2011



Swamishri performs *shilanyas* rituals of Akshardham Mahamandir in Mumbai, October 2011



Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami also perform *shilanyas* rituals of Mahamandir in Robbinsville, October 2011

Swamishri, senior sadhus and leading devotees of North America at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Mumbai. Thereafter on 6 October, the ceremony was performed on site in Robbinsville by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and thousands of devotees. The entire ceremony was held in the divine presence of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (Thakorji) and Swamishri who simultaneously performed the rituals at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Mumbai. The ceremony was beamed live via video-conference between Robbinsville and Mumbai. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the event, saying, “Jai Swaminarayan to all. With such enthusiasm evident among the devotees, the project will be completed swiftly without any obstacles. We are pleased to see everyone’s faith and conviction, and despite the hectic pace of life in America everyone has sacrificed their time and effort for this noble work. Because of your unity, the project work is progressing and others are inspired to join in with you. We pray that you all become happy, attain strength of spirit and experience peace. May everyone involved in the project as well as all future visitors to Akshardham attain peace and liberation.”

The Akshardham Mahamandir *shilanyas* ceremony was held in six sessions over a period of three days (morning and evening) from 6 to 9 October. The volunteers put in great efforts in making the arrangements and preparing food packets for all the participating devotees. Once each session was over the volunteers cleaned up and arranged a new

set of puja articles for the next session of devotees. At the conclusion of each session, the devotees filed past the foundation pit to place their bricks.

## 2012. Murti-pratishtha of Robbinsville Murtis in Ahmedabad

On 22 July 2012 (V.S. 2068, Shravan *sud* 3), at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Guru Parampara and other deities for the Robbinsville *shikharbaddh* mandir.

The pre-*pratishtha* rituals were performed on the assembly hall stage by Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and leading devotees of North America. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha*, *pujan* and *arti* of all the *murtis* and in conclusion blessed the assembly, “By the wish of Shriji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and your sacrifices, such a big mandir is being built. And the mandir is the best. For many millennia people will have darshan of the mandir and benefit in accordance with our traditions. I congratulate you all, because to accomplish this project in America is not at all easy. The devotees of America have consented and are prepared to build the mandir. They have donated money, and the sadhus and devotees have dedicated themselves regardless of day or night. This is why the mandir is nearing completion. My blessings to all to sustain this spirit and zeal for service. The mandir will be completed soon and will be celebrated.”





Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for Robbinsville Mandir in Ahmedabad, July 2012



Final preparations prior to opening of Satsang Activity Centre, 2012



Ishwarcharan Swami performs the ritual placing of first stone on Mahamandir *jagatipith*, 2013

## 2012. Inauguration of Satsang Activity Centre

From 19 to 21 October the Satsang Activity Centre in Robbinsville was inaugurated by Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Jnaneshwar Swami as part of the first phase of the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex. The large assembly hall was declared open after the *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed on behalf of Swamishri by Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami. Swamishri had consecrated all the *murtis* on 22 July 2012 in Ahmedabad. The *pratishtha* rituals and the inauguration of the Satsang Activity Centre occurred over five sessions to accommodate all the devotees who had registered. A grand *annakut*, prepared by women devotees, was offered to the *murtis*.

On this occasion, Sheree McGowan, President of Robbinsville Township Council, praised, "I've known about the project since it first came to planning, and to watch it grow has been amazing. And the workmanship is incredible. I am also impressed with your sense of volunteerism and community service, and wish you could give lessons to the rest of the world."

With the opening of the Satsang Activity Centre, various events that benefited the devotees and community at large were organized: 1. Health Fair 2. Blood Donation Drive 3. Annual Walkathons for national and local charities 4. Children's Health and Safety Day 5. Food Can Drives 6. Toys for Tots 7. Women's Conference and 8. Career and Education Seminars.

## 2013. Akshardham Mahamandir Jagatipith Shila Puja

The foundation for the Akshardham Mahamandir was laid on 26 October. The event marked the largest continuous, single day concrete pour in the history of New Jersey.

The proposed Akshardham Mahamandir in Robbinsville will comprise of nine *shikhars* and 21 *upa-shikhars*. The entire mandir will be built on the *jagatipith*. The ritual placing of the first stone of the Akshardham Mahamandir *jagatipith* was held in five sessions over three days on 22, 23 and 24 November 2013. Swamishri had sent a sanctified *yantra* on which the first stone was placed. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami performed the ritual placing of the first stone in the presence of 50 BAPS sadhus and thousands of devotees from all over North America.

The Mayor of Robbinsville, David Fried, was present during the ritual. He said, "I feel very happy and honoured to be a part of this ceremony here today. I've seen here your volunteers help out in this project. Our country needs such spirits. Such selfless service is most admirable and inspiring. I feel proud and thankful that such a project is being done in our township. I thank all of you."

During the event a three-day *yagna* was held on the spot where the *garbhagruha* would be.

After this event, the planning and preparations for the *murti-pratishtha* celebration of the *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir, scheduled for August 2014, began in earnest. ♦



# MANDIR CONSTRUCTION

Robbinsville, New Jersey

## INTRODUCTION

Building a mandir is a very complex and arduous exercise. Firstly, it is not like any contemporary construction work. The mandir has to conform to the ancient science of Indian architecture in the *shilpa* shastras. Secondly, other than requiring sufficient funds, the process of building a *shikharbaddh* mandir involves site selection, drawing and sanctioning plans, choosing the appropriate stone, commissioning seasoned sculptors, transporting and finally piecing the stones together. Underlying the whole process of building a mandir is the colossal dedication and effort of artisans and BAPS volunteers.

Some salient aspects of how the Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville was built are as follows.

## PLANNING AND STONE SELECTION

In the initial stages, plans for the Robbinsville mandir were drawn and submitted to the town council for approval. Once they were sanctioned, the selection of stone was made taking into consideration the environment and weather of the region. Weak, fragile, or fragmented stone erodes over time.

For the Akshardham site in Robbinsville certain types of stone were not fit for the extreme local climate. In order to ensure that the mandir lasts for over a thousand years, rigorous testing was performed on many stone samples from around the world.

The developers and engineers selected Italian Carrara marble for the Robbinsville *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir. It's exquisite splendour



and quality to be intricately carved has been appreciated for centuries. In particular, Italian marble stands out for the right balance of beauty and durability. Blocks of marble were mined from the quarries in Italy. In all, a total of 68,000 cubic feet was extracted.

## TRANSPORTATION

After being selected and resized for transport, the stone was shipped nearly 4,500 miles by sea to Gujarat and then to the stone workshops in Rajasthan. More than 2,000 sculptors sculpted the stones at different workshops. Artisans who have inherited this trade for generations, transformed the slabs of stone into ornate components of the mandir.

## DESIGNING AND CARVING

The design and construction process is mandated by the ancient *shilpa* shastras or treatises on architecture and construction, which dictate the size of the components and some of the

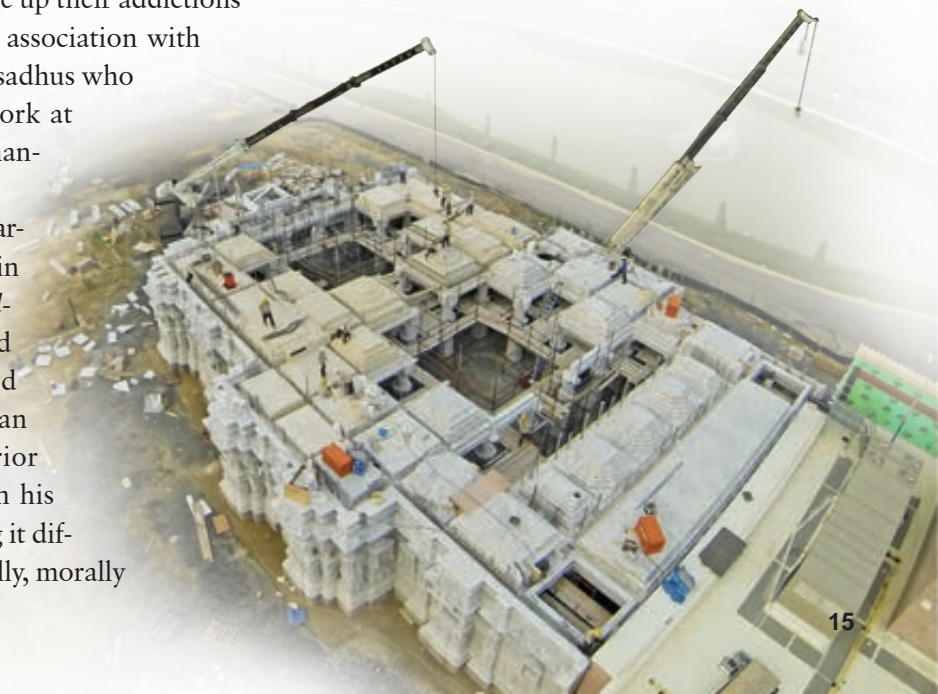




structural engineering. The series of traditional stone-mandir constructions over the past three decades by Pramukh Swami Maharaj has brought a resurgence of this ancient style of mandir construction and provided a means of livelihood for many traditional artisans and their families. Many artisans were also able to give up their addictions and bad habits due to their association with the volunteer-devotees and sadhus who guided or managed their work at the stone workshops and mandir site.

Narottamsinh Rana is an artisan who has been involved in building 22 BAPS *shikharbad-dh* mandirs around the world since 1992. He also worked on the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville. Prior to 1992, he was working in his local family business, finding it difficult to find his way spiritually, morally

and financially. He opined, “The benefit I got, besides my employment with the Sanstha, is sat-sang and the values found within. Due to contact of sadhus and devotees, my family and I began attending the mandir and even held *ghar sabha* to stay connected.”







## SHIPPING AND ASSEMBLY

Once the stones were carved and properly numbered at the workshops in Rajasthan, they were carefully packed to prevent damage and shipped to Robbinsville, 8,000 miles (12,875 km.) away. The average shipping time was approximately 24 days.

Once they arrived on site, the stones were laid out on pallets and put in order based on a unique coding system. Different alphanumerical codes identified each stone: which component it is a part of and the layer of its placement. Much like a 3D puzzle, the mandir was then put together stone by stone by artisans. Each stone had a specific role in the construction process. If one piece was misplaced, damaged or forgotten, the construction process would be disrupted.

Each milestone in the mandir construction was marked by a Vedic ritual; especially the groundbreaking ritual of the site, the *shilanyas* or foundation-stone-laying ceremony, the first

stone-laying ritual on the *jagatipith*, the first pillar-laying ritual in the mandir and others.

## CONCLUSION

During the 3 year construction process that began in 2011, countless volunteers and artisans contributed their services to this architectural and spiritual wonder. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiration was the driving force for their selfless service.

The exterior enclosure over the Robbinsville mandir will help to protect the marble from the harsh climate and allow visitors to comfortably engage in darshan and prayers. However, its true significance lies in its symbolic message: the need to build a mandir within. By developing qualities that allow God and his Sadhu to reside within, we attain true spiritual enlightenment and peace. Those who were involved and performed *seva* in building the Robbinsville *shikharbaddh* mandir can attest to this life transformative process. ♦









# YAGNAS FOR WORLD PEACE

1 to 3 and 8 August 2014



Devotees perform yagna rituals on the main stage

**T**he Mandir Mahotsav festivities began with a series of Yagnas for World Peace and Family Harmony.

Due to the large number of devotees eager to partake in this historic *yagna*, with many coming from countries outside of USA and Canada as well, six identical sessions were held to accommodate them all. At registration they were assigned the session in which they were to attend.

A special 486 x 164 x 40 feet marquee was erected to serve as the *yagna mandap*, in which 231 *yagna kunds* were built. A breakup of the 17,566 devotees who participated in the six *yagnas* is as follows:

	1 Aug	2 Aug	3 Aug	8 Aug
8.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.	-	2464	3067	4800
2.30 – 7.00 p.m.	2154	2391	2690	-

At the beginning of each session, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and other sadhus performed the initial rituals on the main stage, guided by *purohits* Shri Mukeshbhai and Shri Vasudevabhai, who chanted the Vedic *yagna* mantras.

The *murtis* to be consecrated in the new *shikhARBhaddh* mandir were placed on the main stage: Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Sita-Ram Dev, Shri Hanumanji, Shri Lakshmanji, Shri Shiv-Parvati Dev, Shri Ganapatiji, Shri Kartikeyaji and the Gunatit Guru Parampara.

After performing the *arti*, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami addressed the devotees, “For Hindus who believe in scripturally sanctioned rituals and *murti pujan*, mandirs are a lifeline. When the *murtis* are ritually consecrated, they became a living form of God. And only one who fully beholds God can invoke the presence of God in the *murtis*. Swamishri had performed *pujan* of these *murtis*







Pujya Mahant Swami and others perform the *yagna arti*



Devotees perform *yagna* rituals

before they were sent here.

“You will be guided on how to perform the *yagna* rituals. This is not an ordinary ceremony. In the past, kings performed *yagnas* to attain their desires, but you have participated to please God. By remembering God and guru, the mind and senses become still. I pray that may you and your families be blessed with peace and happiness.”

After the sadhus departed from the *yagna* arena, the devotees, sitting with family members and friends, sat in groups of 20 around a *yagna kund*. Experienced Brahmins stationed at each



A view of the main *yagna kund*

*yagna kund* guided the devotees in performing the rituals as directed by the lead *purohits* from the main stage. ♦



# GRAND NAGARYATRA

9 August 2014



Mayur Rath with the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj





Swamishri's Shri Harikrishna Maharaj

A spectacular, colourful *nagaryatra* of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the *shikharbaddh* mandir took place on the grounds of the vast Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex. Devotees from the USA, Canada, UK, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Australia, New Zealand and other countries participated.

The *nagaryatra* took place on the circular road inside the complex, with approximately 20,000 devotees observing and cheering along the roadside. The entire atmosphere was charged with divine spirituality.

At the front of the *nagaryatra* was a banner with the words, 'Mandir – A Place of Paramount Peace.'

Behind were the following items:

- *Murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a decorated Lamborghini car.
- Eight motorcyclists waving BAPS flags.
- *Balaks* on bicycles.
- Akshar Dhvani Band from Dallas, Texas, playing a variety of bhajan tunes.
- Youths carrying large flags of India and America.
- Devotees of BAPS Africa with a decorated banner featuring the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the names of all BAPS mandirs in Africa. Also, 100 devotees in traditional African dress (called 'banango') dancing joyously.
- Devotees carrying the national flags of over



*Murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (*panchdhatu*)



*Murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



*Murtis* of Shri Radha-Krishna Dev



15 countries.

- 25-ft. high Mayur Rath (Peacock Chariot) carrying the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Puru-shottam Maharaj; Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.

Around the *rath* devotional songs were sung to the accompaniment of instruments.

The *rath* was pulled by *balaks* and *kishores* dressed in *lengho-jhabho* and a yellow Mandir Mahotsav sash.

- Youths carrying banners with messages such as ‘Mandir Instils Values’, ‘To Study is Devotion’, etc.
- Youths dressed as various professionals, e.g. doctors, lawyers, scientists, soldiers, nurses, etc. to highlight their contributions to American society.
- *Balaks* dressed in *upvastra* and *lengho* engaged in daily devotional activities, such as, *mala*, *arti*, etc. With them were young

*balaks* dressed as *paramhansas*.

- Shri Radha-Krishna Dev on a decorated *rath*, surrounded by youths waving BAPS flags.
- Youths in traditional dress singing bhajans.
- BAPS trustees and Mandir Coordinators.
- *Balaks* dressed as clowns and walking on tall stilts.
- On both outer sides of the *nagaryatra* were *kishores* walking while waving BAPS flags.
- Shri Sita-Ram Dev on a *rath* with a replica of a decorated hut (similar to the type at Panchvati, where they stayed during their forest exile) and tall trees. *Murtis* of Shri Hanumanji and Shri Lakshmanji were at the front of the *rath*.
- *Balaks* carrying a banner with the message: ‘Mandirs Preserve Culture.’
- *Kishores* in peacock costumes dancing around the decorated *rath* carrying the





*murtis* of Brahaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj and Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.

- Group of male devotees walking.
- Women devotees in traditional dress walking while carrying *kalash-shrifal* and cloth-wrapped shastras on their heads in traditional style of honour and respect.
- *Yuvatis* waving flags.
- *Yuvatis* carrying 'Mandir Mahotsav' and 'Mandir Fosters Devotion' banners.
- Women devotees pulling a decorated *rath* carrying the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.
- *Yuvatis* dressed as famous women devotees of the past, e.g. Mirabai, Shabri, Ladhibai, etc.
- *Kishoris* artistically waving red and blue ribbons.
- *Balikas* and *kishoris* performing *ras* dance.
- *Murtis* of Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj on

the Gaj Rath (Elephant Chariot).

- *Balikas* and *kishoris* dancing.
- Mothers of youths from USA who have become sadhus singing *dhun*.
- *Murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (*panch-dhatu*) on a decorated *rath*.
- Banner: 'Mandir Strengthens Morality.'
- Women devotees singing the prayer '*Mahā-balavant Māyā tamāri...*'.
- *Yuvatis* and women devotees performing traditional festival dances.
- Shri Shiv-Parvati Dev, Ganapatiji and Kartikeyaji on a decorated *rath*.

Over 400 *balaks*, *kishores* and *yuvaks*, and 700 *balikas*, *kishoris*, *yuvatis* and hundreds of elder men and women devotees participated in the *nagaryatra*, which stretched over 1.5 kilometres from beginning to end. ◆





For the first time  
in BAPS history,  
the murti-pratishtha  
of a shikharbaddh  
mandir was performed  
in two sessions over  
two days...



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

# MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

9-10 August 2014

## 9 August 2014 (Shravan *sud* 14, V.S. 2070): Pre-Pratishtha Rituals

At 7.00 a.m., during the auspicious morning *muhurt*, Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Yagnavallabh Swami and other sadhus began the pre-*pratishtha mahapuja* rituals. Also participating were the devotees who had made significant sacrifices to build this mandir.

At 9.00 a.m., Swamishri arrived for the *murti sthapan* rituals. All the *murtis* to be consecrated were first offered *abhishek* with *panchamrut* (yogurt, milk, ghee, sugar, honey mixture). Swamishri then performed the *arti* and blessed the participating devotees.



Thereafter, a special assembly was held in Akshar Vatika, where thousands of devotees had gathered.

Among the guests were senior sannyasis of the Himalayan Academy in Hawaii: Shri Paramacharya Sadashivnath Swami and Shri Senthilnath Swami. They presented a *mala* of *rudraksh* beads to Mahant Swami for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. *Balaks* from BAPS centres in the northeast region performed a traditional dance to the tune of ‘*Mandiram, mandiram, mandiram, Swaminarayan Mandiram...*’.

*Shishu balaks* of the northeast region melodiously sang Vedic mantras hailing the glory of Shri Purushottam Narayan, Shri Akshar-Purushottam and the guru.

Following this, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, principal coordinator of the entire North America Akshardham project, addressed the assembly. He narrated the special design and construction features of the mandir. Then he described the plans for the beautiful Akshardham Mahamandir and requested all to contribute in every way possible.

Congressman Frank Pallone addressed the assembly, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen such carvings and such magnificence in any religious facility, any where. And I think it’s a testimony to all of you and to the Indian community and to the Hindu community that you built this facility.

“It preaches tolerance for other religions, it preaches peace and it basically preaches non-violence and I think it’s so important that Americans who are not of Indian descent learn more about Hinduism and what it means.

“It will not only be a place where all of you can come and meditate and contemplate and think about God and what you can do for your community, spiritually, but I think it also will provide an opportunity for those that are not Indian or not Hindu to see what Hinduism is all about and appreciate the beauty and spirituality of it.”

At the end, Mahant Swami addressed the assembly, “Param Pujya Swamishri has undertaken



Mahant Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Tyagvallabh Swami performs *abhishek* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Arti of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Devotees participate in the *pratishtha* rituals





Senior sadhus perform the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja*

this mammoth project to build Akshardham, in which we all have to give our support. God's work will be done, but we have to join in it."

Then, at 11.20 a.m., Swamishri arrived on the Akshar Vatika stage, welcomed by the Akshar Dhvani Band of Dallas. The entire campus echoed with *jai naads* as the *sadguru* sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands.

Also on this occasion, the doctors who have taken great care of Swamishri's health were honoured with garlands by the senior sadhus.

On this momentous day, Swamishri wrote a message, "Whoever comes here will attain liberation. This Akshardham is a place that will mould everyone's lives."

#### 10 August 2014 (Shravan *sud* Punam, V.S. 2070; Raksha Bandhan): Murti-Pratishtha Rituals

Today marked the auspicious day of Raksha Bandhan and the second stage of the mandir consecration rituals. At 8.00 a.m., Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami had commenced the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* rituals.

At 9.20 a.m., Swamishri first arrived on the Akshar Vatika stage to give darshan to the thousands of devotees who had gathered for this historic occasion.

Then at 9.45 a.m., Swamishri entered the *garbhagruha* to perform the *murti-pratishtha* rituals. While Swamishri performed the rituals in the central shrine before the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, simultaneously, Mahant Swami performed the rituals before Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Ishwarcharan Swami before Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Tyagvallabh Swami before Shri Radha-Krishna Dev.

As the Vedic mantras were recited, Swamishri and the senior sadhus performed the *nyasvidhi*, *netra-anavaran* and other rituals.

At 10.15 a.m., after the traditional *annakut* had been arranged before the *murtis*, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti*. Thereafter,



Swamishri offered *mantra-pushpanjali* and applied a *chandlo* to all the *murtis*.

After the *pratishta* rituals were complete, Mahant Swami garlanded Swamishri, and Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami offered a decorated *chadar*.

To commemorate Raksha Bandhan, Mahant Swami tied a *rakhi* on Swamishri's wrist. Swamishri blessed everyone, "I pray to Maharaj that you all become happy and prosperous."

At 11.00 a.m., the *murti-pratishta* assembly began in the presence of over 15,000 devotees. The stage was beautifully decorated with *shikhar* and arch designs.

*Shishu balaks* sang Vedic mantras at the start of the assembly.

Some of the invited guests then addressed the assembly. On behalf of Robbinsville Township Mayor Dave Fried and Timothy McGough, Director of Community & Economic Development, welcomed BAPS to Robbinsville, "The Township of Robbinsville is extremely happy that BAPS chose Robbinsville to build this magnificent mandir. It will be a source of inspiration to all those who visit for generations. Already the Township has received the generosity and friendship of your congregants who have participated in so many community events. Truly, Robbinsville has benefited by having this mandir here."

Maryland Congressman, Steny Hoyer, said, "This mandir will surely not only be a place of worship, but also of service; it will be a place where the saying 'In the joy of others lies our own' is translated from words into actions, as followers of this movement have done throughout the world for the benefit of millions and millions of people.... It will bring some of the vibrancy, diversity, and spiritual richness of India to the northeastern United States to the benefit of all of us."

New Jersey Senator, Cory Booker, said, "I am so impressed, I am so impressed, indeed. I give reverence to an extraordinary structure that will stand in

(Contd. on pg. 53)



Swamishri blesses the devotees



# MANDIR FACTS



Carving of Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrating the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for Robbinsville mandir





# & FIGURES



The inauguration of the new *shikarbaddh* mandir in Robbinsville, New Jersey, marked the completion of the second phase of the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex.

The new mandir is built using 68,000 cu.ft. of Italian Carrara marble. From quarries in Italy, the stone was sent to ten workshops in and around Pindvada in Rajasthan, India, where over 2,000 craftsmen sculpted the stones. Once carved according to the specified designs, the individual pieces of varying sizes were numbered and shipped to Robbinsville in New Jersey for assembly on site – a total journey of about 21,500 km.

Visitors to the new mandir are greeted by 236 sculpted peacocks in the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate), built of Bulgarian limestone.

The two-storey mandir is built in the *nagara* style of Indian mandir architecture and features *phamsana* type *shikhars*. Eye-catching pillars, decorative *jharukhas* (windows), embellished *mandovars* (inner and outer rear walls of *garbhagruha*), two large *ghummats* (domes) and 58 delightfully sculpted ceilings are the other main elements of the mandir. The rich and detailed carvings depict many of the important themes and messages of Hinduism.

On climbing the front steps of the mandir, visitors see the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, sculpted from one large stone, in the ceiling above.

On the outer *mandovar* are various carved poses of Ganapatiji, the 24 *chaturbhuj* forms of Vishnu, and beautifully designed stone windows.

The inner *mandovar* features sculptures of 91 decorated elephants in a variety of devotional postures, as well as statuettes of the presiding deities of the eight cardinal directions and the *murtis* of Shri Nar-Narayan, Shri Rukmani-Vithoba, Shri Lakshmi-Narayan and Shri Padmavati-Tirupati Balaji. At the centre is a sculpted scene of Pramukh Swami Maharaj performing the *murti-pratishtha* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the Robbinsville mandir in Ahmedabad.

The mandir has 94 pillars, which are adorned with statuettes of devas, avatars, rishis, *acharyas*, river goddesses and famous saints and devotees of the past. *Akshar muktas* in welcoming poses add to the beauty of the pillars. Linking the pillars at the top are *torans* (arches) with splendid intricate designs.

The inner walls of the mandir are decorated with ten scenes, made of multi-coloured stones, depicting incidents from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami which highlight the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

The main dome is adorned with statuettes of 16 *gandharvas* with garlands and 16 devas greeting all in various traditional ways.

On entering the main hall of the mandir, to the left are the shrines of



Shri Ram-Sita-Lakshman-Hanumanji and, further along, of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. To the right, the first shrine is of Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapati-Kartikeyaji and the second shrine is of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. At the front of the mandir, in the central shrine are the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. The right hand shrine houses the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and the left hand shrine has the *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev.

The entire mandir is enclosed in a permanent structure to facilitate darshan and worship, and protect the stone from the region's harsh climate. ◆



### KEY FACTS

- Mandir Style: Nagara ■ Shikhar Type: Phamsana
- Length: 133 ft. ■ Width: 87 ft. ■ Height: 42 ft.
- Material: Italian Carrara marble (approximately 68,000 cubic ft.)
- Stone Pieces: 13,499
- Each stone travelled a sea-journey of 11,000 miles (21,500 km.)
- Pillars: 98 ■ Beams: 176
- Domes: 2 domes of 30 ft. diameter; 34 ft. high
- Wall Murals: 10 ■ Arches: 66 ■ Decorative Grilles: 34
- Decorative Ceilings: 58
- 91 elephants with various musical instruments and flowers
- 44 *murtis* of Ganapatiji offering devotion with various musical instruments
- 4.7 million man-hours were required by craftsmen and volunteers to complete the mandir

### MURTIS

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan & Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami
- Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj ■ Shri Radha-Krishna
- Shri Harikrishna Maharaj ■ Shri Ram-Sita-Lakshman-Hanuman
- Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapati-Kartikeya
- Shri Bhagatji Maharaj ■ Shri Shastriji Maharaj
- Shri Yogiji Maharaj ■ Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- Shri Nar-Narayan ■ Shri Rukmani-Vithoba
- Shri Lakshmi-Narayan ■ Shri Padmavati-Tirupati Balaji

### DIRECTIONAL DEVAS

- Vayu ■ Varun ■ Yama ■ Nairutya ■ Agni ■ Indra ■ Ishan ■ Kuber

### MAYUR DWAR

- Peacocks: 236 ■ Height: 37'3" ■ Width: 65'7"
- Material: Bulgarian Limestone

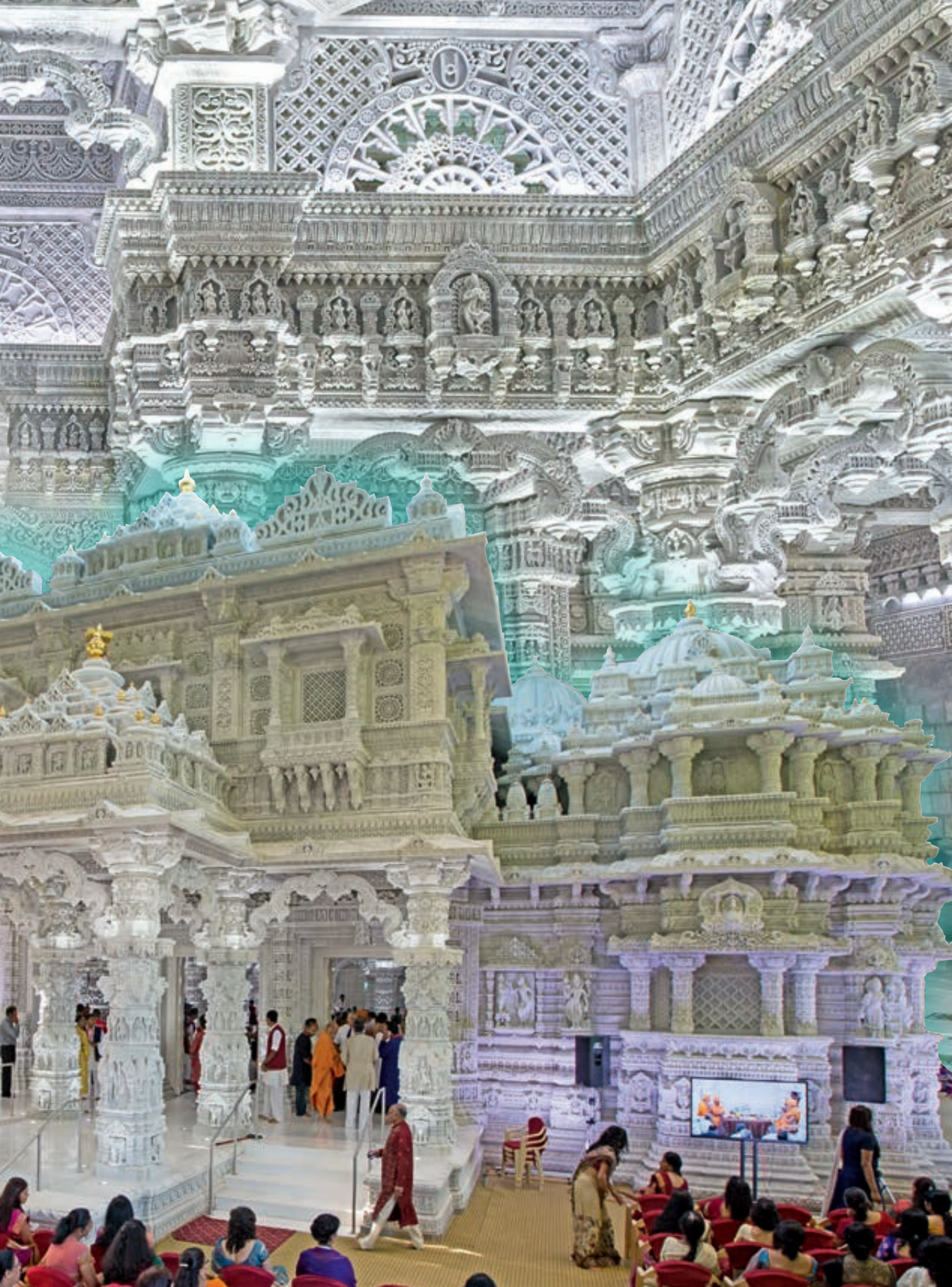
### UPPER LEVEL

- 2 large domes ■ 8 small domes ■ 5 *samrans* ■ 40 small *shikhars*

### MANDIR ENCLOSURE

- Height: 55' ■ Width: 135' ■ Length: 195'







# MANDIR MAHOTSAV EVENTS

In addition to the main celebrations described in the preceding pages, other notable events also took place during the Mandir Mahotsav. They are described below.

## VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION ASSEMBLY

7 August 2014

Over 4,000 volunteers, young and old, men and women, contributed to the great success of the Mandir Mahotsav. To acknowledge their selfless contributions, a special assembly was held on the morning of 7 August in Akshar Vatika.

Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami addressed the volunteers, describing the importance and benefits of such service, “By serving, one is able to overcome one’s inner malicious instincts and become pure. By such service one earns the blessings of God and his holy Sadhu and develops noble virtues.”

At 10.30 a.m., Swamishri arrived on the Akshar Vatika stage. First, he performed *pujan* of the *kalashas* (auspicious pots) and flagpoles that were to be placed on top of the mandir *shikharas*. Then, he held a *kalash* on his right shoulder, as if to salute the dedicated services of all the volunteers. Afterwards, Swamishri sanctified the special mementoes to be presented to the volunteers.

The devotion-filled atmosphere touched all the volunteers, who were delighted to receive Swamishri’s darshan and blessings.

## CULTURAL PROGRAMME

8 August 2014

An inspiring cultural programme was presented by the *balaks*, *kishores* and *yuvaks* of the northeast region.

The main presentation was a drama entitled ‘Moksha’ which revealed how mandirs make a positive impact in peoples’ lives, help to preserve Hindu traditions and culture, provide opportunities for all to serve the community and



Devotees enjoy Swamishri’s darshan in Akshar Vatika during the Volunteers Assembly



National Leadership Seminar



A drama enacted during the National Leadership Seminar





Youths perform a traditional dance during the Cultural Programme

express their talents, and enable spiritual progress.

The drama took the audience through the lives of three different families and their journeys to discover the significance of a mandir. Interwoven in this drama were thought-provoking speeches and traditional dances.

At the end, Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the assembly, “This Satsang is like a farm; those who are *mumukshus* (true spiritual aspirants) will grow and flourish. All parents should encourage their sons and daughters to develop a noble character. Teenagers and youths practice satsang, boldly and apply *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads to college and eagerly observe *niyams*; this is itself a

grand *yagna*. Swamishri has put in great efforts and tolerated many difficulties to establish and nurture Satsang here. Through the *satpurush* like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the door to *moksha* is opened. We have to develop firm affection and *atmabuddhi* towards him.”

## AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM CHHATRALAYA (APC) ALUMNI CONVENTION

9 August 2014

Since 1965, BAPS has operated student hostels (*chhatralayas*) in various towns and cities throughout Gujarat. Thousands of youths have benefited from their stay in these hostels and have migrated to countries worldwide, including the USA and Canada. During the Mandir Mahotsav, a special convention was held for former APC students. The convention began at 4.00 p.m. and over 540 alumni of the BAPS hostels in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Nadiad, Atladra (Vadodara), Surat, Bhavnagar, Mehsana, Dhule, Ukai, Bardoli and Adipur attended this grand reunion in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami.

Viveknidhi Swami (formerly one of the resident sadhus at APC, Vidyanagar) and other alumni recollected some of their experiences from their time in the hostel. Pre-recorded video messages from Yagnapriya Swami and Sadhujivan Swami were shown in the assembly. Based on Swamishri’s wish, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was welcomed and honoured in the assembly.

Finally, Mahant Swami addressed everyone

and spoke about Yogiji Maharaj’s wish to promote character-based education amongst students by establishing these hostels, “You are all very fortunate to have stayed at APC while studying. Ensure you are especially firm in observing *niyams* and dharma. If you are staunch in observing *niyams* and dharma, then Swamishri is with you. Talk to others about our *upasana*.”

The gathering concluded with group photos.

## WOMEN’S CONVENTION

9 August 2014

A special assembly for women was based on the theme ‘Pillars of Faith: Built to Last’. Over 475 *balikas*, *kishoris*, *yuvatis* and *mahilas* participated in dramas, traditional dances, mantra recitals, speeches and video shows. The presentation was conducted predominantly in English and Hindi, with recitals in Sanskrit and Gujarati.

It conveyed the message that the women of India have kept alive their traditions, culture and spirituality by following the guidance of the Satpurush. From the distant past to the present day, shastras, mandirs and satsang have enabled women of all ages and backgrounds to practice and teach devotion and faith.

The programme was well received by all, and the hundreds of hours of meticulous planning and practice by the cast was evident in the seamless presentation.

All were inspired with pride and respect for



APC Alumni Seminar



Women’s Convention



Hinduism and its timeless traditions and values.

## MASS MARRIAGE AND ENGAGEMENT CEREMONIES

9-10 August 2014

### Engagement Ceremony: 9 August

In the evening, ten couples were engaged to be married in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and over 1,600 guests.

The couples participated in the Vedic engagement rituals. The fathers of the *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* received blessings from Mahant Swami and performed the auspicious traditional exchange of *coconuts* and sugar crystals.

After the rituals, all the couples were blessed by the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Akshar Vatika.

### Marriage Ceremony: 10 August (Raksha Bandhan)

After the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in the morning, the mass marriage ceremony took place in the afternoon. A total of 18 couples were married in accordance with Vedic tradition. A separate decorated *mandap* was set up for each couple and their relatives. Experienced Brahmins recited the Vedic mantras and guided the rituals, while simultaneously, commentary in English provided further clarity. Over 6,000 invited guests attended the marriages to convey their best wishes to the couples.

Some of the couples were volunteers in the

various Mandir Mahotsav departments, and were active in their duties until only a few hours before their marriage. And after the ceremony, they promptly returned to their duties. Such was their dedication and willingness to please Swamishri.

## BAPS NORTH AMERICA LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

10-12 August 2014

Over 1,500 BAPS volunteers attended the BAPS North America Leadership Seminar held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, as well as Mahant Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami.

The seminar was based on the theme ‘Yagnapurush Chhe Sathe’. It commemorated Shastriji Maharaj’s 150th birth celebration by elaborating on the four guiding principles on which he established the BAPS: *agna*, *upasana*, *sadbhav* and *paksh*. Over the course of the seminar, speeches by the *sadguru* sadhus explored how these four aspects are integral for leaders to understand and imbibe to enhance their spiritual lives.

Mahant Swami spoke about Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s adherence to *agna* and seeing divinity in devotees. Another session elaborated on all the components of *upasana*. Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about developing *paksh* or loyalty towards God, his devotees and the Sanstha, and understanding that everything, good or bad, happens according to the wish of



Marriage Ceremony



National Leadership Seminar

Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Breakout sessions for departments were organized after the common sessions to enable volunteers to discuss about their specific activities. Further guidance and encouragement came from the closing session as volunteers learned about Swamishri's wishes for volunteers, focusing specifically on developing one's personal satsang, understanding the importance of *seva* and remaining humble while performing it. The positive spiritual messages throughout the seminar enthused and guided all the volunteers towards earnestly doing their best and offered practical nuggets of wisdom to further each individual's spiritual and social progress.

## AKSHARDHAM MAHAMANDIR BHUMITAL PUJAN

15 August 2014

Swamishri proceeded from the *shikharbaddh* mandir to the Akshardham Mahamandir site seated in a Mayur Rath. He was preceded by a procession of *balaks* and *kishores* waving Indian and BAPS flags, devotees dancing joyously to the rhythm of drums and sadhus. On both sides of the path, thousands of devotees were seated for darshan.

At the stone pillars of the Akshardham entrance gate, which were draped with colourful flowers, Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands.

At 11.10 a.m. Swamishri began the *bhumital*

*pujan* rituals. He performed *pujan* of the main *nidhikumbh* by filling it with *panchratna*, *panch-dhatu*, the waters of 108 holy rivers and flowers. After covering its mouth with a small red cloth and tying it with a *nadachhadi*, Swamishri placed the *nidhikumbh* in a small pit above which the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan will be consecrated in future. Swamishri then performed *pujan* of the instruments for construction and filled the main pit with cement using a trowel. Swamishri then placed his feet on the ground to sanctify the area.

He also performed *pujan* of the other *nidhikumbhs* and in his presence Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami placed them in the pits marking the sites of the other *khands* where *murtis* will be placed.

Swamishri then instructed the sadhus to offer *sashtang dandvat pranams* to the Akshardham site.

## MANDIR DEDICATION CEREMONY

16-17 August 2014

Following the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the new *shikharbaddh* mandir, two separate Mandir Dedication Ceremonies were held.

On 16 August, local civic dignitaries and other non-Indian residents were invited. Following a brief introductory speech by Kanubhai Patel (CEO, BAPS Inc.) and a short video about the mandir, everyone gathered at the front steps of the mandir. Here, leading dignitaries untied a ceremonial ribbon and declared the mandir open to



Mandir dedication ceremony



Mandir dedication ceremony



the public. Among the invited dignitaries were: Wayne D. Angelo (NJ Assemblyman), Daniel Benson (NJ Assemblyman), Sheree McGowan (Robbinsville Township Council President), Christine Ciaccio (Robbinsville Town Council), Vincent Calcagno (Robbinsville Town Council), and John Cimino (Mercer County Free Holder).

On this occasion, John Cimino presented a proclamation in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on behalf of Mercer County, Congressman Chris Smith presented a Congressional Flag and US Vice-president Joe Biden and Senator Chris Loones sent a certificate of honour.

On 17 August, leaders and representatives of Hindu mandirs and organizations from various regions were invited. After an introductory speech by Aksharvatsal Swami describing the importance of mandirs to society, Pujya Mahant Swami addressed the gathering, “We are all made up of three things: body, mind and soul. The body can be seen by all. The mind is appreciated when we see someone who has gone mad. Our tradition is of the *atma* (soul). Through this mandir, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is performing the task of sustaining our tradition. The mandir is pure and stable. If we develop such purity and mental stability, we will become divine, like a mandir.”

Thereafter, everyone participated in the *arti* and offered *mantra pushpanjali*. ♦



Aerial view of Akshardham Mahamandir Bhumital Pujan



Swamishri showers flower petals to sanctify the *nidhikumbhs*



Swamishri with the Akshardham team



Akshardham Mahamandir Bhumital Pujan ceremony, Robbinsville



# VISITORS' IMPRESSIONS OF MANDIR

*On 16 August 2014 a public dedication ceremony of the Mandir was held. All the visitors got the opportunity of seeing and experiencing the form and function of the mandir. Some selected opinions of the visitors are as follows.*

It was a mind blowing and serene experience. Thank you to all the volunteers, *sevaks*, organizers and Swamiji for giving us the opportunity to witness such a divine place on Earth.

**Aparna Chawla (Art of Living)**

I have been privileged to visit the site during construction as I am part of Arena Americas (the tent company) and thus was able to see the amazing transformation of the space and the building of the temple. It was then and is a wonderful spiritual experience. Art that reflects something intangible of spirituality is universally experienced.



Public Dedication Ceremony, 16 August







Such a welcoming experience and a testament to your people. Thank you.

**Jessica Moe** (Arena Americas)

It is very difficult to describe my feelings after spending time at the temple. Perhaps a combination of awe and spirituality came over me.

**Dave Doran**  
(Robbinsville Irish Heritage Association)

It has been an honour and pleasure to share in the opening of the mandir and bask in the feelings of peace and holiness. Congratulations to all who have worked for this day. May many more come here and receive many blessings and prosperity from their visit. I look forward to returning with my family in future. Wishing you much success in coming years as you expand.

**Daniel Benson** (NJ State Assembly)

The building and structure are amazing and so intricately designed, but the most touching part of the experience is how a mandir can bring together so many people from different religions, races and cultures. The new mandir is not just a place for prayer and reflection, but a place to build a community.

**Aman Seehra** (ONE Project)

Thank you for opening your doors! Spectacular! And very very well organized! Very hospitable!

**Flo Gange** (Robbinsville Board of Education)

Everyone is so nice, knowledgeable and helpful. This is my second visit. I had to bring my daughter back to show her how special this is. You are good neighbors. Welcome.

**Betty Ford** (Neighbor)



Beautiful people, wonderful experience. I am thankful for being able to be here.

**Sally Kohas**

Awesome! Outstanding experience sums up my first impressions. The temple is breathtaking. The happy, courteous and smiling volunteers made my visit definitely special. I do hope that we can collaborate together as we all work towards a common vision.

**Raby Suresh (Art of Living Foundation)**

This is my second time here and I cannot wait for many more to come. With every visit, the beauty of art, architecture, community and culture further blossom.

**Frank Pongratz**

Wonderful and spiritual day! Thank you to all the BAPS volunteers.

**Leona and George Fluck**

What a wonderful experience! Thank you for sharing your deep sense of community and hopefulness.

**Candus Hedberg**

My visit today was inspirational! It was not only awe-inspiring to tour the magnificent

mandir, with all of the marble sculpture and attention to detail, but more inspiring to be witness to the volunteerism that created this wonderful place and continues to maintain and grow and participate in the community.

**Julia Ayes (Maser Consulting)**

Outstanding! The entire event was perfectly organized. Our tour guide was fantastic. The temple is breathtaking. The beauty cannot be described in words. Thank you for inviting us.

**Sharon DeVito**  
(Robbinsville Board of Education)

Awe-inspiring! Perhaps most impressive is the coming together of the volunteers in the creation of the mandir and the center. Their collective efforts that have resulted in this living mandir are reflection of the people, their faith and their dedication to share that with the world.

**Jeromie Large (Maser Consulting PA)**

As always a fantastic and wonderful experience, certainly the most beautiful human creation in the township.

**Vince Calcagno**  
(Robbinsville Township Council)

This was truly a wonderful experience for me





and my family. Our firm has been fortunate to have worked with the staff and the volunteers of the BAPS community. And it has been an incredible journey to this point. I look forward to seeing the main mandir constructed and open. Best of Luck.

**John Sartor (PS&S)**

What an amazing and awesome place! I felt as though I had been transported to another place in time. It shows me that even something as simple and as hard as stone can be transformed into something as delicate and as beautiful as this magnificent blend of beauty and architecture. I look forward to seeing the rest of the complex to be completed. Amazing and awesome.

**Kathy Goodwine**

Wonderful building and facility. Even more wonderful is the warmth of the community and bringing people together in a spirit of oneness and service. Look forward to working together in the years to come.

**Ranu Dhillon (Harvard Medical School)**

This was amazing. The people were so nice and helpful. This was our second visit and we

plan to return. We were impressed by all the people involved and how they gave up their time. These structures are fantastic and a work of art.

**Jim & Brenda Hahn (Sight Logix)**

It was such a pleasure to meet everyone. The mandir is absolutely incredible. Thank you all so much for being so welcoming and knowledgeable and entertaining all of our group's questions.

**Megan A.**

The spirit of community and giving is very much alive. I see the caring and love to serve. So refreshing to see.

**Pearly Besman (Trac International)**

Was a great surprise. Did not expect the level of warmth of everyone. Food was great and also a surprise. The mandir was gorgeous and shows the level of commitment and faith. The community is willing to put forth to create a great place.

**Robin Taylor**

Very peaceful and awesome place. Welcoming atmosphere and people. Thank you for the warm hospitality.

**Colleen & Brian Clark**



# MEDIA COVERAGE

*The mandir opening was widely carried in the print and electronic media. The following is a partial list of some of the media coverage.*

- 'Adhyatmik Utkarshno Anero Utsav' (*Chitraklekha*, 25 August 2014).
- 'Carved from Marble: Second Phase of Akshardham Temple in Robbinsville, N.J.' ([www.newsindiatimes.com](http://www.newsindiatimes.com)).
- 'Robbinsville ma Sanskar-Adhyatmani Preranajyot' (*Gujarat Samachar*, 16 August 2014).
- 'In New Jersey's Desi Central, a great Hindu temple rises' ([www. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 10 August 2014).
- 'Robbinsville Home to Magnificent New Hindu Temple' ([www.my9nj.com](http://www.my9nj.com), 12 August 2014).
- 'Thousands celebrate dedication of traditional Hindu temple in Robbinsville' ([www.nj.com](http://www.nj.com), 17 August 2014).
- 'Hindu Temple Invites Public to Celebrate Complex Progress' ([www.trentonian.com](http://www.trentonian.com) and *Trenton Times*, 29 July 2014).
- 'New Jersey Tourism Attraction: A Majestic 162-acre Hindu Temple' ([www.eturbonews.com](http://www.eturbonews.com), 26 July 2014).
- 'Traditional Hindu Temple Opening in Robbinsville, Part of BAPS Community' ([www.nj.com](http://www.nj.com), 28 July 2014).
- 'Hindu Temple Invites Public to Celebrate Complex Progress' (*The Trentonian*, 30 July 2014).
- 'World's Largest Hindu Temple Being Built in New Jersey' ([www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com), 29 July 2014).
- 'New Jersey Welcomes BAPS Hindu Temple – One of the Only Traditional Stone Mandirs in North America' ([www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), 23 August 2014). ♦





# Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

June-July 2014, Sarangpur



Swamishri celebrates the festival of Rath Yatra



Swamishri blesses devotees on Guru Purnima

## JUNE

### 1, Sunday

The 2014 annual youth training batch was inaugurated in Swamishri's presence in Sarangpur. On behalf of the youths, Viveksagar Swami offered garlands of *mogra* flowers and *nadachhadi* to Swamishri. Then Swamishri blessed 122 youths from far while the bhajan "*Ame au Swāminā bālak...*" was being played.

### 2, Monday; 64<sup>th</sup> Pramukh Varni Din

Devotees from far and wide had come for Swamishri's darshan because the day commemorated 64 years of his appointment as President of BAPS. When Swamishri came out of his quarters to give darshan he had put on a *pagh* similar to Shastriji Maharaj's, had smearings of *chandan* on his forehead and a large conch shell in his hands. A giant backdrop of the room in Ambli Vali Pol, where Swamishri was appointed as president, added to the ambience of the event. The *murtis* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were arranged in front of the backdrop. Swamishri was honoured with a *kumkum chandlo* and garlands by senior sadhus.

To celebrate the occasion, youths danced in

colourful costumes. Thereafter, Swamishri was given a written version of Shastriji Maharaj's blessings to read. Then Swamishri's pledge to Shastriji Maharaj was relayed in Swamishri's own voice through the audio system.

Swamishri also rang a bell while the bhajan "*Gunatit kā dankā ālam me...*" was being played. Then some youths performed a skit showing the joy in Sarangpur after receiving the news of Swamishri's appointment as president. Finally, Swamishri sanctified 20 vessels of *shiro* to be distributed as *prasad* to all.

Swamishri also ate a little *shiro* to the joy of all.

### 3, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for a BAPS *hari* mandir in Utvala in the Mahuva region. Thereafter he blessed the devotees of Utvala from far.

### 17, Tuesday

In the Pramukh Darshan Vatika Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Malad (East), a suburb of Mumbai.

Thereafter, Swamishri blessed 400 devotees of Malad from far.

### 29, Sunday; Rath Yatra Celebration

In the morning, Swamishri came out on to the stage of Pramukh Darshan Vatika to celebrate the Rath Yatra festival. Swamishri operated a remote-controlled chariot of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

In the evening, from 7.50 to 9.00 p.m., an assembly to celebrate the Rath Yatra festival was held on the mandir grounds. At 9.00 p.m. Swamishri came out of his quarters to celebrate the Rath Yatra festival. Swamishri was seated in an illuminated peacock-shaped chariot. A festive procession preceded him: sadhus playing *kartals* up front, followed by youths waving the BAPS flags, youths carrying electrically lit torches, a chariot similar to the one pulled in Jagannathpuri with the festive *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, a small remote-controlled chariot with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and finally Swamishri's chariot. The procession advanced towards the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir with sadhus, *parshads* and devotees engaged in darshan from the large open ground. After darshan at the Smruti Mandir Swamishri performed *arti* of Thakorji and Shastriji Maharaj. About 4,500 devotees participated in the Rath Yatra celebration.

### 30, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the new *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Guru Parampara to be installed at the existing BAPS *hari* mandir in Nakura, Kenya. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees of Nakura from far.

## JULY

### 6, Sunday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the metallic (*panchdhatu*) *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to be installed in the *rang mandap* of Gadhada mandir and the marble

*murtis* of Guru Parampara to be installed in the newly built guru-*shikhars* in the mandir *pradakshina*. Swamishri ritually touched the *murtis* with a special rod (*suvarnashalaka*) to invoke the Divine. Swamishri performed the *abhishek* of the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and prayed that the wishes of all devotees are fulfilled. Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Luvara, Gadhada region. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees of Luvara from far.

Swamishri inaugurated a Gujarati book, 'Varta re Varta', for children and a DVD on the youth *adhiveshan* held in 2012, Sarangpur, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

### 7, Monday

Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni to be installed in the BAPS mandir in Houston, the *murtis* of Shri Guru Parampara to be installed in the guru-*shikhars* at Atladra mandir, *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Bhaili and the canvas *murtis* of Shri Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Karakhdi. Amidst Vedic chantings, Swamishri invoked the Divine by ritually touching the *murtis* with a *suvarnashalaka*. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha arti* and *mantra pushpanjali*. Finally, Swamishri performed the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni to be installed in Houston.

### 12, Saturday; Guru Purnima Celebration

From early morning, thousands of devotees had assembled in the mandir precincts of Sarangpur to celebrate Guru Purnima. As Swamishri's wheelchair advanced from his quarters towards the mandir, innumerable devotees, seated at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika, Narayan Mandapam and the large open ground, rejoiced at his darshan. After Thakorji's darshan in the mandir Swamishri performed *arti*.



On arriving back to the Narayan Mandapam stage Swamishri inaugurated an audio CD on the theme song commemorating Shastriji Maharaj's 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary. Swamishri blessed the devotees from far.

Swamishri also inaugurated a textbook on "Swaminarayan Vedant" by Shrutiprakash Swami for the first year B.A. Sanskrit curriculum taught at the Swaminarayan Sanskrit Vidyalaya, Sarangpur.

At 7.25 p.m., the Guru Purnima celebration assembly commenced outside the Yagnapurush Mandapam. The assembly celebration was themed 'The Ideal of Guru Bhakti – Shastriji Maharaj'. The celebration programme included dramas performed by youths, and speeches on the virtues of Shastriji Maharaj delivered by sadhus. At 9.30 p.m. Swamishri arrived for the Guru Purnima celebration seated in a decorated chariot pulled by sadhus. The *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were also installed in the chariot. While the chariot was heading towards the 'Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir' Swamishri looked on both sides of the pathway, blessing the devotees. At the Smruti Mandir Swamishri did darshan and performed *arti* of the *murtis* of Thakorji and Shastriji Maharaj. Then Swamishri's chariot was pulled towards the middle of the Yagnapurush Mandapam stage. With the *murtis* of Thakorji installed on a high pedestal and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj on either side, the rituals of guru *pujan* commenced. The entire assembly offered flower petals and performed *arti* as guru *pujan*. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated a Gujarati publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, 'Satsang Vihar, Part 3' and 'Brahmasannidhi, 2012'. Senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with flower garlands and a shawl. Swamishri also blessed the stage guests from far. At 10.27 p.m. Swamishri departed towards the Narayan Mandapam and his living quarters. More than 14,000 devotees were present in the evening for the Guru Purnima celebration.

### 13, Sunday

A five-day *shibir*, themed 'Shanti', for 55 and 35 *kishores-kishoris* of USA and UK, respectively, was inaugurated in Swamishri's presence in the morning.

### 15, Tuesday

Swamishri preformed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Vaghai (Dang district) and a *murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS tribal hostel in Rambhas (Dang). Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees of Dang district from far.

### 16, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the Vedic rituals for the foundation-stone-laying ceremony of the *shilas* for the newly proposed Smruti Mandir at the site of the present one in Gondal. Swamishri ritually sanctified the *nidhikumbh* to be placed in the foundation pit and also placed sanctified roses on the newly proposed plans for the Smruti Mandir. Prior to Swamishri's arrival the pre-rituals for the *shila pujan* were performed by Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami.

Finally, Swamishri was honoured with a rose garland that had been offered to the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj in Gondal. Swamishri also blessed Kothari Divyapurush Swami and Harshadbhai Chavda.

### 21, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Chikhli, Kakad Kuva and Joravasan in the Tithal region by ritually touching the *murtis* with a *suvarna-shalaka*, performing *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali*. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed devotees of the Tithal region from far. ♦

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

# LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

June-July 2014, Sarangpur

## IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

### 1 June

Swamishri's attendant, Narayancharan Swami, prayed, "Swami, a devotee is suffering from cancer. Bless him."

Swamishri replied briefly, "He will get well." Hariprakash Swami queried, "Swami, your mere words will make him well!"

Swamishri replied, "If he has faith (*shraddha*), he will get well."

Hariprakash Swami requested, "Swami, why don't you bless all so that there is no pain and misery in their lives!"

Swamishri stated, "Misery and pain are a part of life."

"Then bless all with the spiritual understanding you have, so that they will not be affected by misery," Hariprakash Swami urged.

Swamishri endorsed the answer to all our pains and afflictions, "That is true. Where there is spiritual understanding, therein lies happiness."

## MANTRA OF SERVITUDE, 1 July

An attendant sadhu asked Swamishri, "Swami, are you a guru, *sadguru* or a self-serving volunteer (*swayamsevak*)?" Swamishri replied humbly, "I am a servant (*das*)."

Swamishri's words and life reflect his spirit of servitude and humility.

## INTRODUCTION OF SWAMISHRI, 1 July

An attendant asked Swamishri, "If someone were to ask us about your introduction, how should we reply?"

Swamishri revealed, "One who does bhajan." The attendant added, "What if we were to say that you are the President of BAPS?"

Swamishri replied emphatically, "No, no. Say he does bhajan of God."

The quintessence of Swamishri's life is his unceasing love for God and to always worship and remember him.

## GURU BHAKTI, 3 July

Swamishri was shown a video about how the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angless was accomplished. At the end there was a photo of the mandir.

Swamishri had envisioned building the mandir in 1996, and it was built and consecrated in 2012. Swamishri's attendant remarked, "Swami, you had taken great pains and put in colossal efforts in making this mandir, and yet at the end they've taken a photo of the mandir instead of yours!"

Swamishri remained silent. The attendant quizzed further, "But you have built it!"

Swamishri replied, "The mandir was the wish and dream of Shastriji Maharaj. He has made it."

The attendant argued sweetly, "But how could Shastriji Maharaj do it when he wasn't present? The mandir was built by you."

Swamishri persisted, "It was accomplished by the wish of Shastriji Maharaj."

The attendant added, "Yes, the wish of Shastriji Maharaj, but with your efforts!"

Swamishri unassumingly uttered, "I cannot achieve anything."

Swamishri has always kept his gurus at the forefront of all his activities and pays tributes to them for all his achievements.

## ALWAYS HAPPY, 5 July

At 93 years, despite many ailments and eating nothing, Swamishri remains calm and happy. He has never complained about his discomforts and pains.

An attendant sadhu asked Swamishri, "Bapa, are you plagued by any discomforts or physical problems?"

Swamishri answered forthrightly, "What troubles! I am happy, happy and happy."

"But what type of happiness?" someone asked. Instantly Swamishri answered, "God's happiness."





## India

### MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE AT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 27 July 2014, Delhi



Over 260 eminent doctors from Delhi attended the Medico-Spiritual Conference based on the theme 'The Power Within' in the presence of Pujya Swayamprakashdas Swami (Doctor Swami).

The keynote address from Dr Prathap C Reddy, Chairman of Apollo Hospitals, was read by Mr. P. Shivakumar, COO, Indrasprastha Apollo Hospital. There were speeches by Munivatsal Swami on 'The Power of Purity', Dr H.K. Chopra, Senior Consultant of Moolchand Heart Hospital, on 'Divinity in Medical Profession', Vivekjian Swami on 'The Power of Divinity' and Pujya Dr Swami's blessings.

At the end, Atmoswarup Swami delivered a Vote of Thanks.

### YUVA PARAYANS

#### July-August 2014, Gujarat and Mumbai

This year's annual three-day *yuvak parayans* during the holy month of Shravan focused on Shastriji Maharaj, in the build-up to the celebration of his 150th birth anniversary.

On each of the three days the youths presented speeches, skits, bhajans, games and videos based on the following virtues of Shastriji Maharaj: 1.



Tolerance 2. Loyalty 3. Friendship.

Thousands of *yuvaks* at over 400 BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai participated.

*Yuwatis* also held separate *parayans* on the same topics at over 415 BAPS centres.

## UK

### NATIONAL SANYUKTA MANDAL SHIBIR 23-25 August 2014, Warwick Conference Park



The 2014 National Sanyukta Mandal Shibir was held in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

As part of the year-long celebrations for Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birth anniversary, the *shibir* was themed 'Gumatito'ksharam Brahma: Siddhant, Samarpan, Sadhana', highlighting the sacrifice and spiritual endeavours of Shastriji Maharaj to establish the fundamental principles of BAPS.

A series of speeches by sadhus and

practical applications were elaborated upon in the group discussions.

Kothari Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami shared their personal experiences during an enlightening Q&A session.

In addition, presentations, videos and team-building games further strengthened the *shibir* theme.

Swamishri's video blessings on the divine life and personality of Shastriji Maharaj provided a fitting conclusion to a memorable and very uplifting three-day journey.

### NATIONAL YUVAK-YUVATI MANDAL SHIBIR 23-25 August 2014, Warwick Conference Park



More than 750 youths attended the National Yuvak-Yuvati Mandal Shibir in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

The *shibir* was themed 'Likhitan Shastri Yagnapurushdas' – referring to the rich corpus of historical correspondences between Shastriji Maharaj and his contemporaries. It gave insights into the fascinating history of BAPS and the divine personality of Shastriji Maharaj and his extraordinary efforts in establishing BAPS based on the spiritual principles of *agna*, *upasana*, *sadbhav* and *paksh*.

The key messages of the *shibir* were delivered through a variety of media, including speeches, classroom sessions, open fora, interviews, dramas, videos and question-answer sessions with the two *sadgurus*.

The *shibir* also highlighted the leadership and

efforts of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the development of BAPS through video interviews of all the *sadguru* sadhus. The *shibir* inspired everyone to imbibe the values and teachings of Shastriji Maharaj with renewed vigour.

### NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA MANDAL SHIBIR 23-25 August 2014, Warwick Conference Park



More than 180 selected children attended the 2014 National Bal-Balika Mandal Shibir in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

The *shibir*, based on the theme 'BAPS: Niyam, Nishchay, Paksh', enlightened the children through an entertaining and informative play set in a courtroom illustrating how modern-day challenges can be addressed through the timeless teachings of Hindu faith and culture.

Kothari Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about the importance of the five fundamental religious vows prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Speeches and classroom sessions by sadhus and senior volunteers, explored the importance and challenges of *niyams* in greater detail, and provided an understanding of *upasana* and keeping *paksh*. Team-building games and an interactive exhibition furthered emphasized the *shibir* theme.

The *shibir* helped the children strengthen the values of *niyam*, *nishchay* and *paksh* firmly in their lives.



## NATIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI MANDAL SHIBIR

26-28 August 2014, Warwick Conference Park



Over 500 *kishores* and *kishoris* attended the annual National Kishore-Kishori Mandal Shibir in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

In keeping with the year-long celebrations for Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birth anniversary, the *shibir* was themed 'For the Sake of Akshar Purushottam' – an inspiring journey into the life and work of Shastriji Maharaj in establishing BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

The delegates were introduced to the eternal truth of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* through a montage of Hindu scriptural passages, a captivating video presentation, and short speeches. A stunning shadow dance introduced the life of Shastriji Maharaj, while sadhus elaborated further on the challenges he faced through engaging presentations. These were interspersed with live singing by *kishores*.

Ishwarcharan Swami explained in great detail the construction by Shastriji Maharaj of the first BAPS mandir in Bochasan.

Also, the hardships of the early years endured by Shastriji Maharaj were highlighted. Ishwarcharan Swami then shared his personal experiences of Yogiji Maharaj.

After this, in the form of an entertaining television show presentation, a panel of sadhus presented their analysis of a *kishore's* daily spiritual endeavours. Kothari Swami's discussion on *agna*, *upasana*, *sadbhav* and *paksh* thereafter provided



a fitting conclusion.

On the final day Pramukh Swami Maharaj's rapport with Shastriji Maharaj was presented through an impressive video, which was elaborated upon by Kothari Swami.

## OPENING OF NEW BAPS

### SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

30 August 2014, Leeds



The new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Leeds was inaugurated by Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami).

Over the past 26 years, regular weekly satsang assemblies by devotees and visits by sadhus helped Satsang expand and eventually necessitated a mandir where families can gather to strengthen their faith and devotion.

The inauguration celebrations of the new mandir included a special Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony in which devotees and well-wishers prayed for peace and prosperity in the local community.

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* had been performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur on 10 March 2014. These *murtis*

were consecrated in the new mandir by Pujya Kothari Swami amid the recitals of Vedic mantras. Thereafter, a special inauguration assembly was held.

## USA & Canada

### BAL-BALIKA SUMMER SHIBIRS 2014

12 June-1 September 2014



Over 4,000 children attended the Summer Shibirs held at BAPS Mandirs in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Robbinsville, Los Angeles and Toronto. Based on the theme, 'My Mandir, My Home', the *shibirs* provided a unique experience for children to learn how a mandir helps to develop their identity, personalize their bhakti through rituals and satsang practices, and strengthen their relationship with guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Following the fictional lives of three families and four children throughout the event, the performance depicted difficult issues faced by the current generation of children. Through the characters, the children learnt how to overcome their struggles and strengthen their connection with Swamishri, and in turn, how that connection enables them to excel in life.

### KISHORE-KISHORI SUMMER SHIBIRS 2014

15 June-31 August 2014

Centred on the theme, 'My Mandir, My Home', BAPS North American Regional Conventions were organized at BAPS Mandirs in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Robbinsville



and Toronto. Altogether, over 4,500 high school and college students attended and gained a deeper understanding of connecting to the mandir as their home.

Speeches by sadhus elaborated upon core spiritual principles found in the Hindu shastras and emphasized by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. They learnt that the mandir is a place where they can learn practical life skills that will help them face everyday situations in their daily lives. The *shibir* theme was further developed through cultural activities, practical workshops and other special programmes.

The *shibir* helped the youths understand and embrace their roots, learn how to preserve their identities, and remain grounded in their faith and culture.

### BAL-BALIKA, KISHORE-KISHORI NORTH

#### AMERICAN SUMMER CAMP 2014

2-11 July 2014, San Jose, CA



Over 250 delegates and 100 volunteers from the US and Canada participated in the second annual BAPS North American Summer Camp. Based on the theme 'Dradh Priti', the primary



focus of the camp was to enrich everyone's bond with guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The attendees participated in classroom sessions, discussions, cultural programmes and outings that helped them to learn and grow in their spirituality. They learnt about the daily bhakti rituals and the scriptural basis behind spiritual concepts. Education guidance was also given.

In all, the attendees, some of whom were on the verge of entering either high school or college, learnt how to stay grounded in their spirituality when away from home.

### **DASHABDI MAHOTSAV & NILKANTH VARNI MURTI-PRATISHTHA** **25-27 July 2014, Houston, TX**



Centred on the theme 'My Mandir, My Identity' the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Houston, Texas, celebrated its 10th anniversary on 26 July at the Wortham Center Theater in Downtown Houston. The programme traced 30 years of the history of Houston Mandir through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's efforts that led to the opening of the *shikharbaddh* mandir in 2004. The presentations through speeches, videos, classical dances and skits highlighted the importance of the mandir in cultivating a value-based life, and the need of serving others.

On 27 July, the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni was consecrated by Pujya Mahant Swami in the newly constructed Nilkanth Varni Maha Mandap, with its traditionally carved marble pillars and dome.

### **10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION** **2-3 August 2014, Chicago, IL**



The decennial celebration of the Chicago BAPS mandir was centred on the theme 'Shanti: Experience Peace'.

The festivities began on 2 August with a traditional *mahapuja* ceremony in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. Also, the ground-breaking ceremony rituals were performed in front of the mandir for the new cultural centre that will be constructed adjacent to the current mandir.

Celebrations continued later that afternoon with a special women's cultural programme that shed light on the mandir's history over the last 10 years. Through various skits, speeches, video presentations, and a panel discussion, the programme highlighted the need for spirituality and its ability to instil morals and values.

On 3 August a grand cultural programme was held at the Sears Centre Arena. The programme, organized and presented by the children and youth of BAPS, gave an in-depth view of how the mandir preserves culture, guides children, teenagers and youths, promotes and strengthens family values, instils inner peace, and assists society through charity. At the end, Pujya Mahant Swami highlighted that the involvement of youngsters is important since today's youth are the faces of tomorrow.

### **NEW BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR INAUGURATION**

**31 August 2014, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada**

In the 1970s, about 10 *satsangi* families lived



in Scarborough, but now through the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the diligent efforts of local sadhus and *karyakars*, the Satsang in Scarborough has now grown to over 250 families.

To cater for the growth in satsang activities the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Scarborough, Ontario, was built.

The Mandir Mahotsav festival began with a grand Vedic Vishwa Shanti Mahayagna on the morning of 30 August, in which more than 950 couples prayed for world peace and for the good of the community.

Later in the afternoon, a 3km long *nagaryatra* of the *murtis* took place in the heart of the city of Scarborough in which over 2,500 devotees and well-wishers from all over Canada participated. The *nagaryatra* was blessed by the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and other BAPS sadhus from North America and India.

The *murti-pratishtha* ceremony took place on the morning of 31 August. The *murtis*, previously consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, were installed in the new mandir by Mahant Swami. Then, BAPS children and youths of Scarborough presented an inspiring cultural programme in the *murti-pratishtha* assembly.

On this auspicious occasion, in service to the community, BAPS Charities donated a cheque for \$5,000, raised during the annual BAPS Walkathon, to Robert Biron, President & CEO of the Scarborough Hospital, to support the life-saving work of the hospital.

## Asia-Pacific

### BAPS PARTICIPATES IN 'MILLION TREES PROGRAMME'

5 July 2014, Adelaide, Australia



BAPS volunteers in Adelaide participated in the 'Million Trees Programme', a South Australian government initiative at Highbury Aqueduct reserve.

Inspite of adverse weather conditions, BAPS volunteers successfully planted more than 1,000 trees at the Highbury site. Dani Boddington, project manager for the Highbury Aqueduct Programme said, "I really thank the BAPS team for their fantastic contribution at this event. I was really impressed with everyone's approach and willingness to help."

### BHAGAVAD GITA PARAYAN AND JNANSATRA 18-25 August 2014, Adelaide, Australia



Daily, over 500 devotees and well-wishers attended the evening discourses on the Bhagavad Gita and other topics by Brahmadarshan Swami, to learn about the values of Hinduism regarding ideal parenting, family unity, ethical



thoughts and behaviour, character-building and the importance of mandirs. He also gave important insights on how to progress on the spiritual path and the necessity of a guru.

## BAPS Charities

### BAPS CHARITIES FOOD DRIVES

1 August 2014, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania



In July, volunteers of BAPS Charities in Tanzania conducted five food drives, donating nearly a metric ton of food and supplies to the following charitable organizations:

**Children's Retention Home:** It was started in 1962 in response to rising crime rates among the

youth, the home is run by the Tanzanian government and offers the inmates a chance for rehabilitation and re-entry into society as productive individuals.

**Al Masi Orphanage:** It is a certified home for orphan children founded in 1997. Some of the orphans are also disabled. The children attend the nearby government school, where they get free education.

**Al Hidayah Orphanage:** It is a certified home for parentless children founded in 2008. The children attend the nearby government school.

**Al Furqan Islamic Centre:** It was founded in 2011 by Mr. Hamisi Omari, who is the current caretaker of the orphanage. In addition to housing, the orphanage provides the children with free education in a nearby school.

**Salvation Army Matumaini:** It was founded in 1933 by British volunteers working in Tanzania. At present, the school is sustained by foreign aid and support from local citizens. The school provides free education to 200 physically disabled children, aged between 3 and 17. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 27)

all of North America as one of the greatest places of faith that we have.”

Thereafter, children and youths performed an energetic, traditional dance depicting the glory of mandirs.

Then, after the invited guests had been honoured and presented mementoes, Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly. He described the special design and construction features of the mandir and the grandeur of the Akshardham Mahamandir that will be built in the coming years. Afterwards, artisans who had contributed to the building of the mandir and sponsors of the Mandir Mahotsav were felicitated.

Yagnavallabh Swami delivered a vote of thanks

to all who had helped in the mandir project and festival celebrations.

Finally, Mahant Swami addressed the assembly, “That Swamishri has performed the *pratishta* means that Shriji Maharaj himself has performed it. Through the Sant, God sees and walks, so Shriji Maharaj himself has performed the *pratishta*. The volunteers have served believing all this is for Swamishri. God will grant everyone the fruits of this *seva*. In the same way, with the understanding of BAPS as one family, and maintaining *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*, the work for Akshardham is to be done. All should join in to support this project.” ♦

# New Swaminarayan Aksharpith Publications



Author: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

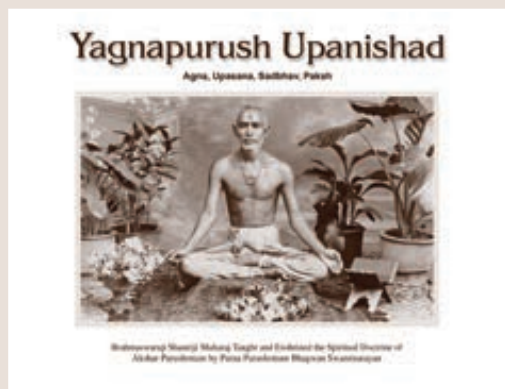
Pages: 235

ISBN: 978-81-7526-680-3

## Mandir

Faith | Form | Function

Mandirs represent the devotional heart of Hinduism. Their development over the millennia from simple thatch huts to ornate, majestic stone monuments symbolizes the ever-flourishing faith in God of the Hindus. Every aspect of a mandir's form is linked to God and functions to enhance a devotee's experience of and faith in the Divine. *Mandir: Faith, Form, Function* provides a concise, illustrated overview of the mandir. It also reveals how faith gave rise to its elaborate forms, which in turn has enabled functions that reinforce faith to enable countless souls to realize the Divine.



Pages: 196

ISBN: ISBN: 978-81-7526-679-7

## Yagnapurush Upanishad

Agna, Upasana, Sadbhav, Paksh

Shastriji Maharaj tirelessly endeavoured to establish and foster the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. His colossal selfless efforts were based on the four guiding principles of *agna*, *upasana*, *sadbhav* and *paksh*. These principles formed the foundations of the BAPS and continue to inspire all its activities to the present day. *Yagnapurush Upanishad* documents, through inspiring stories and rare photographs, the exemplary application of these four fundamental principles in the life of Shastriji Maharaj and also seeks to consolidate them in the lives of *satsangis*.



AVAILABLE AT ALL BAPS BOOKSTORES





#### MANDIR CARVINGS, ROBBINSVILLE

1. Intricately carved ceiling.
2. Ornate carvings inside the main dome.
3. Swamishri views the ceiling designs in the mandir.
4. Swamishri blesses all, with a sculpture of Swamishri performing the Robbinsville *murti-pratishtha* in Ahmedabad in the backdrop.
5. Beautifully sculpted peacock designs.





#### MANDIR MAHOTSAV 2014, ROBBINSVILLE

1. Tyagvallabh Swami performs *arti* during the Yagna for World Peace (8 August). 2. During the *nagaryatra*, youths pull the Peacock Rath with the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (9 August). 3. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha puja* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine (10 August).