

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2014

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*Newly Consecrated BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir
Jamnagar, 23 February 2014*

Inspired: Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Shri Akshar-Purusottam Maharaj



SWAMISHRI INITIATES YOUTHS INTO THE PARSHAD-FOLD

25 March 2014, Sarangpur

Thousands of devotees from India and abroad were present in Sarangpur to witness the initiation of 28 youths into the *parshad*-fold by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Sadguru sadhus presided over the *diksha mahapuja*, together with the 28 youths and their relatives.

Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj personally blessed each of the youths as they approached to receive the guru mantra from him to complete the initiation ritual.

In an era of increasing materialism these youths have renounced their personal ambitions and dedicated their lives in the service of God, guru and society.





Newly consecrated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Jamnagar

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

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Articles on the making and consecration of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jamnagar, were translated by Sadhu Vivekjiandas and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas from *Swaminarayan Prakash* and other source materials.

FIRST WORD

Fuldol is a time for fun and festivities. But amid this atmosphere of joy, its spiritual significance must not be forgotten. It is primarily a time to be sprayed by the colours of satsang and the *satpurush*.

This year commemorates the 150th birth anniversary of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. His life was vibrant with the colours of Akshar and Purushottam. And so, this year is an opportunity to colour our lives in the same way. In his address to the Fuldol assembly in Sarangpur on 17 March 2014, Pujya Mahant Swami reminded us all, “We all have to be coloured by the colours of the *satpurush*; the colours of Gunatit. There is no other way to *moksha*. No matter what sadhanas one does, it is not possible to become *brahmarup*. Only through the company of Brahman can one become *brahmarup*.”

“Shastriji Maharaj taught the practice of *agna* (obeying the commands of God and guru), *upasana* (worship of God with a full understanding of his true form and nature), *sadbhav* (developing rapport with God, guru and all devotees) and *paksha* (maintaining loyalty and support for the Sanstha, Satpurush and *satsangis*). He spent all his time for us. For Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, nothing means more to them than the devotees. So, can we not join in the reading, writing, chanting and dialogue *niyams* (for the 150th birth anniversary year celebration)? Doing so, will, in fact, benefit us. Our attachment and affection for Swamishri will increase. See how much effort Swamishri puts in for us. Even in such delicate health he comes out to give us darshan. So, can we not do this much for him? We should do according to the *satpurush*’s *agna* and wishes. Hence, on the occasion of Shastriji Maharaj’s 150th birth anniversary, all should enthusiastically and sincerely participate in all the programmes that are arranged.”

Festivals such as Fuldol help us to sustain the colour of spirituality in our lives. This spirituality is also sustained through regular visits to mandirs. Bhagwan Swaminarayan established the tradition of building grand mandirs; Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have enthusiastically continued this tradition. These mandirs serve as sources of spiritual inspiration, providing encouragement, guidance and opportunities for all who wish to engage more in spiritual endeavours.

The main purpose for which Shastriji Maharaj built mandirs amid times of immense difficulties was to enshrine the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam in the central shrine, so that all who came for darshan would understand this doctrine and teach it to others. The 150th birth anniversary of Shastriji Maharaj is an ideal occasion for us all to fully grasp the principles on which he founded the BAPS and colour our lives accordingly. It is, in fact, our duty to fully comprehend the philosophical basis of the Sanstha, since that is what sustains it and directs all its activities. This can be achieved by personally undertaking some of the reading, writing, chanting, listening and dialogue *niyams* specified for this auspicious occasion and then sincerely observing them.

Due to the foresight of our gurus, BAPS is blessed with a unique network of grand mandirs which continue to sustain spirituality in the young and old alike. Daily, they colour the hearts and minds of countless people with noble thoughts. That is why Pramukh Swami Maharaj continues to inspire the building of mandirs, small and large, throughout the world.

The latest BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir to be inaugurated is in Jamnagar. This issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* documents the enthralling details of its construction and consecration, and how it has embedded the colours of satsang and the *satpurush* in the lives of many. ♦

Shri Hari's Discourses and Celebrations

Shri Hari's stay in Gadhada includes a series of celebrations mingled with discourses...

JAL JHILANI FESTIVAL: 1821 (A.S. 1878)

Shri Hari was accompanied by sadhus, *parshads* and devotees to celebrate the Jal Jhilani festival by the river Ghela. The small *murtis* of Thakorji (Lalji) and Ganapati were being ceremoniously carried in a decorated palanquin. The procession passed through Manek Chowk, the centre of Gadhada, resounding with the festive sounds of drums, cymbals and shehnais. Devotees were enthusiastically engaged in singing bhajans. The village folks came out to eagerly watch the divine spectacle. Many joined the procession to participate and experience Shri Hari's divinity.

DEVOTION TO GOD'S MURTI FIRST

The festival was held by the Purushottam ghat where the waters of river Ghela were placid and deep. The sadhus had installed the *murtis* of Thakorji and Ganapati in a small boat. Five ritual *artis* were performed and then Ganapati was immersed in the waters. The *murti* of Lalji was dried after the ritual bath and adorned with clothes. Thereafter, a sadhu brought a dozen flower garlands and bouquets and offered them to Maharaj. Shri Hari asked, "Have you offered them to the *murti* of Lalji?" The sadhu said no. Shri Hari rejected the garlands and bouquets and reproached him, "We have brought the *murti* of Lalji to offer him *seva* and bhakti first. One must,



therefore, see to it that Lalji is offered due respects first. When one ignores the *murti* of God, it tantamounts to a lapse in devotion. To partake of things without offering to Thakorji first amounts to blasphemy. King Pruthu was mighty and powerful, yet he respected and honoured the *murti* of God."

Shri Hari then recalled an incident from his childhood years, "When I was in Ayodhya I used to go to the mandirs and worship the *murtis* of Ram, Sita and Lakshman. I worshipped Hanumanji at the Hanumangadhi Mandir. Then I used to read the Tulsikrut Ramayan with single-minded concentration at a monastery of ascetics. Once, after the demise of my father, Dharmadev,

my eldest brother, Rampratapbhai, arranged for the reading of the Shrimad Bhagvat at our home. I listened to it with utmost attention.”

WORSHIPPING THE MURTI SANCTIFIED BY THE SATPURUSH LIBERATES ONE’S SOUL

Shri Hari discoursed further by giving an important piece of advice, “The God-realized Sadhu inspires aspirants to walk on the path of *moksha*. When the guru gives a *murti* to his disciple, the very act of worshipping and revering it to be the form of God liberates his soul. A true disciple is one who follows the word of the guru. I have willed that this tradition of *moksha* will remain forever. The guru is like a fence and caretaker. Just as a farm without any fences becomes vulnerable to devastation by grazing cattle, similarly it is not possible to remain resolute in abiding by one’s *niyams* without a moral caretaker. And with time, one who does not have a guru becomes unethical and debased.”

VIJAYA DASHMI FESTIVAL

On the day of Vijaya Dashmi (September-October) Shri Hari was attired in beautiful clothes and ornaments. He then called Dada Khachar, Jiva Khachar and other *darbars* to accompany him to perform *pujan* of a Shami tree in the western part of Gadhpur. Everyone ritually performed *pujan* of the Shami tree. Then Maharaj explained its significance, “The reason behind performing *pujan* of a tree is to personally develop and promote respect for all trees. They are nature’s beauty, influencing our environment and providing fruits, flowers and refuge to humans and others. The earth’s fertility nourishes trees, and the latter provide nutrients to earth after they die.”

Shri Hari concluded the gathering and took the road to Uga Medi. The road was broad and open, so Maharaj spurred Manki. The *darbars* also prodded their horses to gallop faster, but failed to keep pace with Manki. Only Ram Khachar, the son of Mulu Khachar, was able to

tail Maharaj. Shri Hari became pleased upon him and placed a garland around Ram Khachar’s horse. Ram Khachar smiled because Maharaj had honoured his horse. Thereafter, Maharaj returned to Gadhada and to Dada’s *darbar*.

SHRI HARI OFFERS PUJAN TO COWS

After celebrating the festival of Dashera Maharaj also celebrated Sharad Punam in Gadhada. After twelve days, on the morning of Dhanteras, Maharaj wished to worship the cows. Normally on this day, money is ritually worshipped for purifying one’s wealth and prosperity. Shri Hari told the herdsmen early that morning, “Jodha and Arjan, deck your cows with strings of bells round their necks and feet. I want to do *pujan* of all our cows. Then I’d like to see them frolic.”

Jodha was excited, “Maharaj, we will be most fortunate and happy. But Maharaj, if you wish to see them play, you’ll have to hide.” Shri Hari smiled and enquired, “Why hide?”

“Because as soon as they see you they will raise their tails, moo with joy and rush towards you. Thus, you won’t get to see them play.”

“Okay, I’ll climb up a tree to watch them,” Maharaj answered.

As the day dawned Jodha and Arjan led the cows to the outskirts of Gadhada. Each cow was smeared with a *chandlo* on its forehead and adorned with a garland of flowers and bells around its neck and feet. Shri Hari was pleased to see the decked cows and asked, “Jodha, where did you bring all these decorations from?” He replied, “From who else but Jivuba. I informed her about your wish and she said that I could take whatever I needed from the *darbar*. She also added that she would not allow for any lapses.”

Shri Hari started moving among the mooing cattle doing *pujan* of each cow. He also showered flower petals upon them. Then Maharaj started explaining to Jodha, “Look Jodha, these cows are

our real wealth. Today, by doing their *pujan* we have done *pujan* of wealth.” Jodha was touched by Shri Hari’s words and uttered, “These cows are like mothers. Today, you have blessed them so they shall be liberated.”

Then Jodha and Arjan tried to segregate the cows into different groups before engaging them in a show of play. But the cows raised their tails in joy, mooed and gathered around Shri Hari. No matter how hard Jodha tried he failed to assemble the cows. So, he gave up saying, “Maharaj, where there is Krishna we fail to control the cows.” Shri Hari merely smiled as Jodha persevered to herd the cows into a corral.

Shri Hari went to the *darbar* of Jiva Khachar. He sat on a bed and had his meal of *malpuda* and *dudhpak* prepared by Jiva Khachar’s daughters – Amulaba and Amriba. Thereafter, Maharaj served the sweet items to all the sadhus. Then Jiva Khachar performed *pujan* of Shri Hari and offered donations. Jiva Khachar also performed *pujan* of all the sadhus and gave each a cloth to wear before performing *arti*. Then Shri Hari departed for Dada Khachar’s *darbar*.

ANNAKUT FESTIVAL: 1821 (A.S. 1878)

Vigorous preparations of food items for the *annakut* festival were under way. The *annakut* was being made under the supervision of Jivuba and Laduba. Two confectioners, Lakhu and Jechand, were also engaged in making the sweet items. Everyone was upbeat about celebrating *annakut*. Shri Hari came to see the food items on the day of *annakut*. They were decoratively arranged before the *murti* of Vasudevnarayan in Dada’s *darbar*. At that time a prominent Minister (Diwan) from the royal court of Bhavnagar, Parmanand Mehta, and other officials came to Gadhada on some official work. They also came to the *annakut* festival and respectfully bowed before Maharaj. They were pleased with the devotion and *annakut* arrangements. Shri Hari told them to have *prasad*.

DEVOTION COUPLED WITH DHARMA

The Diwan of Bhavnagar was sharp and intelligent. He had heard of many ill talks against Bhagwan Swaminarayan. However, on seeing Shri Hari firsthand he was convinced that there was devotion coupled with dharma in his presence. He humbly opined, “On whomsoever your grace falls, in him the virtues of dharma and bhakti arise. Then that aspirant becomes blessed to do satsang.”

Shri Hari advised, “Divine grace is required, but without the association of a true guru one fails to realize it.” The Diwanji exclaimed, “Even after having an association with God one requires a guru!”

Shri Hari explained, “The guru explains and reveals the true glory of God. That is why the shastras say that the guru is the gateway to *moksha*. In addition, the shastras describe the bona fide guru as the key to *moksha*.”

The Diwanji felt Shri Hari’s words to be profound. Maharaj continued, “Without the true worship (*upasana*) of the supreme God one cannot become *brahmarup* (God-realized). However, those who believe that they are God (*Aham brahmāsmi*) are like trees without any roots. By merely repeating that one is the king one cannot become a king, similarly, by uttering that I am Brahman (*Aham brahmāsmi*) one cannot become *brahmarup*. Only by associating with Brahman (guru) can one become *brahmarup*.”

It was time for the *annakut arti*. Shri Hari performed *arti* of Vasudevnarayan and then the Govardhan puja. Devotion and divinity permeated Dada Khachar’s *darbar* and the village of Gadhada. Everyone was absorbed in divine joy.



(Contd. in next issue)

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



HISTORY OF BAPS SATSANG JAMNAGAR



Jamnagar lies on the western coast of Gujarat. It is an ancient town and was once known as 'Little Kashi' because it was a centre of Sanskrit learning and debates by scholars. In its heyday, the town also boasted of being a popular centre of trade controlled by the *Baniya* community. Its citizens have been inclined to faith in God and the blessings of sadhus.

The town lies at the confluence of rivers Nagmati and Rangmati and was formerly known as Nagnath. However, in 1540 the ruler, Jam Raval, reconstructed the town and named it Navanagar. Gradually the town took the name Jamnagar from the title 'Jam' derived from the Jadeja lineage of kings.

In the later part of the 19th century King Vibhavji enriched the town with glorious buildings and sculptures. In 1914, King Ranjitsinh



A view of Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar

constructed a fortress wall surrounding the town with giant entrance doors. The king changed the image of the town, giving it the popular title ‘Paris of Saurashtra’.

The town was first sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1808 CE. The devotees at that time often gifted him with colourful headgears and clothes prepared by them. Some devotees, skilled in masonry and art, contributed significantly to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Nathu Kaba, Rupa Kachara, Purushottam Jeram and other skilled devotee-artists painted the life incidents of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on the walls of Swaminarayan mandirs, which still exist today.

Swarupanand Swami and his group of Swaminarayan sadhus tolerated insults and hardships while spreading satsang in Jamnagar

by eating the lakeside flakes of soil to satisfy their hunger.

In 1864 CE, Gunatitanand Swami came to Jamnagar with a group of sadhus and devotees to please the residing devotees. At that time the pundits of Jamnagar came to debate with the scholarly Achintyanand Brahmachari, an ascetic disciple of Gunatitanand Swami. But it so happened that he had not come. So, the pundits were about to return dissatisfied. But Gunatitanand Swami invited them to debate with him. The apparently unscholarly and unlettered Gunatitanand Swami spoke brilliantly on spiritual matters which impressed the pundits to such an extent that they became his disciples. At that time Gunatitanand Swami had prophesied, “In future, a three-*shikhar* mandir will be constructed here and sadhus shall reside here always.”



Swamishri surveys maps of Jamnagar for suitable land



Swamishri sanctifies the 32-acre site and gives guidance



Swamishri inspires social services in Jamnagar



Grand assembly in honour of Swamishri, Jamnagar, 1997

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had also dreamed of a mandir with the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the central shrine in Jamnagar. Whenever he visited Jamnagar his discourses at Ramjibhai Mavadiya's house resonated with the Akshar-Purushottam principle propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He would also call the masons and carpenters of Jamnagar to Sarangpur to help in the mandir construction.

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj visited Jamnagar and blessed the devotees with his divinity and wisdom. In 1965 when Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and other senior sadhus and devotees came to Jamnagar King Digvijaysinhji invited them to his palace. The king, impressed by Yogiji Maharaj's saintliness, honoured him and beseeched his blessings. Yogiji Maharaj's frequent visits to Jamnagar fostered satsang. These memories have been preserved at the Anandabawa Ashram. Out of the many dignitaries who was impressed by Yogiji Maharaj was Harjivandas Bardanwala.

Yogiji Maharaj established the Sunday satsang *sabha* in Jamnagar to perpetuate the Swaminarayan tradition established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Swamishri appointed Bhaskarbhai Dave, a new devotee, to take charge of the Sunday assemblies. But Bhaskarbhai asked as to how he could as a railway employee scheduled to be transferred in two years sustain the Sunday *sabha*. In reply Yogiji Maharaj blessed him, "Go, you will not be transferred. Spread satsang." And Yogiji Maharaj's words came true. Till the day he retired from his railway service he had not been transferred. And so at Yogiji Maharaj's behest Bhaskarbhai contributed to the growth of satsang in Jamnagar.

At the inception of the Sunday satsang *sabha* in Jamnagar only five to ten devotees attended. Initially the *sabhas* were held on a rota basis at Ramjibhai Mavadiya's house, Bardanwala Sheth's bungalow, near the Town Hall at Krishnakunj house and others. Through these Sunday *sabhas*

many aspirants joined the organization, including, Ramjibhai Mavadiya, Ratibhai Vasroliya, Savjibhai Nanani, Jitendrabhai Khetani, Manibhai Lalani, Krushnalal Dhirajbhai Pandya, Prabhudasbhai Nirmal, Ratilalbhai Dave, Purushottambhai Gohil, Ramjibhai Gohil, Pravinbhai Dasani, Kakubhai Nathwani, Mohanbhai Mavadiya, Keshubhai Kankhara, V.K. Patel, Ganubhai Rana, Ghanshyamsinh Rana, K.D. Pandya, Chandubhai Choksi, Bhimjibhai Patel, Kanjibhai Mandli, Lakshmanbhai Engineer, Gokaldas Sheth, Premshankarbhai Dave, Narayanbhai Jhala and others. All the devotees contributed to the growth and progress of satsang.

After Yogiji Maharaj departed for Akshardham in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited and graced the devotees and citizens of Jamnagar on many occasions. In 1972, Swamishri instructed that a place be purchased for satsang activities. Sheth Harjivandas Bardanwala made arrangements for an empty storage compartment on Nalvali Lane, opposite Ambar Talkies. In 1985, Swamishri consecrated a small *hari* mandir at this place. Subsequently, the satsang activities gained momentum. Thereafter Swamishri frequently visited Jamnagar and the surrounding region of Halar to rejuvenate and spread satsang. Swamishri had travelled extensively to inspire satsang in this region in 1953, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 and thereafter. Every year Balmukund Swami and Jnanprasad Swami came to Jamnagar from Gondal, and Devcharan Swami and other sadhus came from Bhadra to nourish satsang in Jamnagar.

In 1991, Swamishri appointed Sadhu Dharmanidhidas and Sadhu Shrijisevadas to stay in Jamnagar and said, “I want to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir and a spiritual complex in Jamnagar.” This was Swamishri’s firm resolve. And to realize his resolve Swamishri persevered through his visits in 1993, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005, 2008 and 2010. Let us recall some of



Swamishri performs Vedic rituals during the *shilanyas* ceremony, Jamnagar, 8 October 2008

the landmark efforts and events that culminated in the consecration of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Jamnagar.

From 1971 to 2010 Swamishri has made 147 visits to 40 villages of Jamnagar district. During his *vicharan* he visited the villages of Aliyabada, Anada, Arambhda, Aradhnadham, Balambha, Banugam, Bedi, Bet Dwarka, Dwarka, Bhadra, Bhesdad, Gorana, Gulabnagar, Hapa, Jamdudhai, Jamnagar, Jamkhambhaliya, Jamraval, Jamvanthali, Jashapar, Jaiva, Jodiya, Khakharda, Khakhra, Khedhera, Lalpur, Latipur, Liyara, Majoth, Mithapur, Moda, Moti Khavdi, Nava Ranuja, Okha Port, Saypar, Shekhpatt, Suraj Karadi, Vibhappar and others. Swamishri’s *vicharan* resulted in a surge of numbers of *satsangis* and the depth of satsang in their lives. In addition, 88 youths of this region have been inspired to take *diksha* as sadhus.

In 1993, Swamishri along with senior sadhus and 140 BAPS sadhus attended a seven-day long



Swamishri performs *puja* of the mandir's first pillar, May 2010

parayan on the Shrimad Bhagvat, sponsored by Maganbhai Samani, at the Anandabawa Ashram in Jamnagar. Swamishri blessed all during his seven-day stay.

Through Swaminishri's blessings the growth of Satsang inspired Maganbhai Samani to donate a 5-acre plot to the Sanstha in the heart of Jamnagar. A big shed for the weekly Sunday satsang *sabha* was constructed. For years the plot, named Akshar Vadi, became the venue for the Sunday *sabha* and celebration of festivals. In spite of this plot of land Swamishri kept searching for a larger plot for the construction of a *shikharbaddh* mandir.

During Swamishri's visit to Jamnagar from 1991 to 1998 he always emphasized to the devotees about his wish to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir. For this Swamishri himself had visited 40 different sites in Jamnagar.

In 1997, a grand public function to honour Swamishri was organized in Jamnagar. At that time Swamishri had instructed Sadhu Dharmanidhidas to specially look for land and then report to him in Gondal. A few days later he went to Gondal and showed a map of Jamnagar to Swamishri. Swamishri looked at the different sites and was inclined towards a plot on the outskirts of Jamnagar that was adjacent to the main highway. Swamishri raised both his hands and said, "We will get this land and a large *shikharbaddh* mandir along with a spiritual complex will be built here. All the devotees of Saurashtra will come here for darshan." That same evening, when Swamishri was in Akshar Deri, Gondal, he reiterated, "We will acquire that land and a *shikharbaddh* mandir and a spiritual complex will be built there. And people from all over Saurashtra will come here for darshan."

After Swamishri's prophetic words efforts were launched to attain details of the site. The land belonged to Jamnadas Joshi who lived in Hinckley, England. When Swamishri went to London on a satsang visit he contacted and met Jamnadasbhai. He blessed the ailing Jamnadasbhai with good health. Subsequently, Jamnadas came to India in 1998 and during the Fuldol festival in Sarangpur he pledged before Swamishri to give his land in Jamnagar to the Sanstha. Swamishri showered his blessings upon him.

In 1999, Swamishri visited the mandir site in Jamnagar for the first time. In the evening, a satsang assembly was arranged on the site during which Swamishri blessed the congregation.

In 2000, Swamishri visited Jamnagar and sanctified the 32-acre mandir site. In 2001, the Uttarayan festival was celebrated in Swamishri's presence in Jamnagar. During his stay he visited the mandir site and gave guidance about where to build the mandir and the other parts of the complex. The BAPS Planning Cell drew the mandir plans accordingly.

Prior to starting the process of acquiring permission for construction it was apparent that there were going to be many hurdles. Getting the necessary legal permissions for mandir construction was complex and was initiated with Swamishri's blessings in 2001. Amidst the challenges encountered Swamishri untiringly guided and motivated the volunteers. Finally, with Swamishri's benediction and the collaborative efforts of Sadhu Brahnaviharidas, Sadhu Dharmanidhidas and others permission for construction was granted in 2007. When the sadhus came to Swamishri with the letter of permission Swamishri sanctified it before Thakorji and generously blessed the sadhus. Then he enthusiastically declared, "I will come to perform the foundation-stone laying ceremony."

In 2008, with Swamishri's guidance, living quarters for sadhus and a large, makeshift shed were constructed with a small mandir inside.

From then on the Sunday *sabha* was held in the large shed.

Despite Swamishri's health problems at 87 years he deeply desired to go to Jamnagar for the *shilanyas* rituals. He mentioned his wish to come whenever he talked on the phone with the sadhus of Jamnagar. On 28 September 2008 Swamishri phoned Sadhu Dharmanidhidas and informed, "I am going to come to Jamnagar on 1 October and perform the *shilanyas* rituals on 8 October. Start the preparations for the rituals." Everyone was joyous on hearing the news. The only cause for concern was that they had only three days to make the preparations. Urgently, every BAPS sadhu from different Satsang centres rushed to Jamnagar to help in the preparations. With the help of devotees and volunteers the preparations were briskly accomplished.

On 8 October 2008 the *shilanyas* function was successfully held in Swamishri's presence. With the first step of the mandir construction accomplished Swamishri enthusiastically wrote his blessings on the mandir plans:

Swami Shriji

By the divine powers and blessings of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj a supreme mandir in Jamnagar will be realized according to the above drawn plans. Thousands of devotees and spiritual aspirants will come for darshan and shall attain moksha...

Shastri Narayanswarupdas'

Jai Swaminarayan

8 October 2008, Jamnagar

Swamishri wished that the mandir be made of ornately carved stones from Jaisalmer. Thus after the *shilanyas* rituals the stone work was launched at a brisk pace in Pindvada, Rajasthan. As the stones arrived in Jamnagar they were assembled without delay.

On 16 January 2009 the first stone was ritually placed on the foundation by Mahant Swami. Thereafter the mandir construction started.

(Contd. on pg. 15)



Story of Sacrifice and Service

Jamnagar is a prosperous city on the west coast of Gujarat and lies to the south of the Gulf of Kutch. It has been sanctified by the visits of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus. Here, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a grand, traditional stone *shikhARBaddh* mandir has been erected by the dedicated voluntary efforts and selfless sacrifice of countless devotees – men and women, young and old. Some details highlighting their efforts are presented below.

After the authorities had granted permission to build the mandir, the first task was to erect a perimeter wall to enclose the 32-acre site. For this, over 100 men and women devotees came every night between 9.00 and 12.00 and built the compound wall using 3,400 tons of sand.

Volunteers also spent many nights unloading stone (*shilas*) from Rajula for the mandir foundation. They also offloaded the 60,000 cu. ft.

of sculpted Jaisalmer stones which came from Rajasthan. Volunteer women devotees undertook the arduous task of polishing the stones before they were placed in position. From early morning to late night they diligently polished the stones while chanting the *dhun* and singing bhajans. Despite the physically demanding nature of the task, they persevered with patience and without complaint.

The electrical wiring and fittings were completed by experienced devotees.

For 11 years, over 200 volunteers of the security department served daily in teams on a rota basis, tolerating the winter cold, monsoon rains and summer heat without complaints.

A youth named Dhaval Padhiyar resolved at the time of the Shilanyas Ceremony in 2008 that he would not buy any new clothes for himself until the mandir *pratishta* and that he would donate the amount saved to the mandir project.



Volunteer devotees lay the entire electrical wiring for the mandir



Volunteers unload the 60,000 cu. ft. of carved stones that arrived from Rajasthan



Volunteer devotees build the giant boundary wall of the mandir during nightly *seva*

Young children also saved from their pocket money and birthday gifts to donate to the mandir. Many children and youths resolved not to eat any sweet foods.

Ranjanben Jamanbhai Kamani saved and donated money by not buying new clothes. Bhaktiben Dineshbhai Sankariya decided to save and donate money by cleaning her house herself and not employ a housecleaner.

To commemorate the Shilanyas Ceremony in 2008, an annual celebration was held. For five years, the sadhus and leading *karyakars* – Narayanbhai Faldu, Ashwinbhai Kotadiya, Kantibhai Bhanderi, Bharatbhai Gadhia, Parasbhai Mehta, Sitarambhai Vairagi, Pravinbhai Kachhadiya, Mineshbhai Patel and others – organized a variety of excellent programmes. These included discourses, honouring of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj by the Mahila Mandal, ‘Jamone Jamadu...’ and others.



Women devotees accomplish the difficult task of polishing the sculpted stones

In addition to the *seva* related to the mandir building project, the regular Satsang activities continued.

Narayanbhai Faldu, a dedicated *karyakar* since 1984, has over the past 25 years made daily visits to villages and towns within 150 km of Jamnagar for satsang. After returning home in the evening from his government job, he would visit remote villages, passing through difficult terrains and often returned home early next morning. Pathubha Jadeja also visited the villages for satsang activities, travelling by rickshaw or on foot.

Many such devotees selflessly dedicated their time and efforts in this way and earned the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Today, the completed mandir glistens brightly on the horizon due to the sacrifice of dedicated devotees. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 13)

On 13 September 2009 the first pillar was ritually placed on the foundation by Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami.

On 14 May 2010 Swamishri ritually established the first pillar in the mandir.

In this way the mandir started taking shape layer after layer. The mandir construction was accomplished by the colossal efforts of sadhus, devotees, artisans and the blessings of Swamishri.

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* were performed by Swamishri on 17 January 2014 in Sarangpur. Later, the *pratishtha* rituals of the mandir were performed by the senior sadhus on 23 February 2014.

For centuries the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Jamnagar will resonate with the principle of Akshar-Purushottam and the service and sacrifice of the devotees. ♦



BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR JAMNAGAR



A view from under the main dome of the mandir

A mandir is not merely a lifeless stone building. It is a living abode of faith, devotion, austerities and selfless service. It is where the *divas* of wisdom and devotion are constantly alight and the echoes of service continuously reverberate. It offers liberation to all, without discrimination.

The newly built BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir in Jamnagar is such a mandir and will for centuries to come serve as a centre for spiritual wisdom and enlightenment and will lead countless people towards ultimate liberation.

The mandir is visible from the Khambaliya

Bypass in Jamnagar, as one drives towards Dwarka. Travellers are naturally drawn to the glistening gold-like mandir.

As the visitor enters the 32-acre mandir campus through the main gate, the luscious green lawns are seen to both sides. A little ahead are the *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in which *abhishek* (pouring of sanctified water) is continuously offered. Visitors bow here, circumambulate and offer prayers.

Further along is the main staircase leading to the mandir. Before climbing up, the visitor can circumambulate the mandir on the ground floor



Intricately carved pillars and ceilings

and view the profusely and intricately carved *ja-gatipith* (plinth) of the mandir. It comprises of *jharukhas* (balconies), doors and sculptures of past famous devotees and *acharyas* of India, such as, Nimbark, Vallabh, Ramanuja, Harishchandra, Shabri, Jnaneshwar, Pundarik, Dayaram, Namdev, Maitreyi, Mirabai, Madalsa, Ansuya and many others.

To reach the 92 ft by 45 ft podium of the



Swamishri blesses the mandir plans: "A supreme mandir will be built here." Jamnagar, 8 October 2008

mandir, the visitor climbs the 16 steps of the main front staircase. At the top of the staircase, the visitor sees the enclosed main mandir in front. To the left and right are separate shrines housing the *murtis* of Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji and Shri Shiva-Parvati-Ganapati. These shrines are also embellished with beautiful intricate designs and statuettes.

At the centre of the main mandir is a roofed pillared entrance, with intricately carved statues of *gandharvas* (celestial beings) dancing while playing musical instruments such as the *mru-dang* (drums), shehnai and others. There are two smaller entrance doors, on either side of the main entrance. Flanking them, at both corner, are two large *jharukhas*. The entire mandir features beautiful intricate carvings and designs on the *mandovar* (external rear wall of *garbhagruha*), *jharukhas* (balconies), ceilings, pillars and multi-level domes.

The outer rear wall of the mandir is decorated with finely detailed carved designs and statuettes



Above: Profusely embellished main dome, with statues of the *paramhansas*
Below: Beautiful carvings and sculptures on the mandir exterior

of avatars, famous saints, rishis and devotees. After circumambulating the open *pradakshina* path, the visitor returns to the main front entrance.

Entering the mandir hall, the visitor encounters the elaborate ceilings, which include finely carved lotuses, flower petals, leaves and other marvelous designs.

In the centre is the inside of the main dome, every inch of which features breathtaking ornate designs and sculptures. It is further embellished with statuettes of avatars and Shri Nilkanth Varni in various meditative poses. The eight pillars supporting the main dome are decorated with intricate designs and statuettes of the *paramhansas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and devotees of the past. The other pillars are also similarly ornate.

At the front are the five doors leading to the three-shrine *garbhagruha*. The door frames of the *garbhagruha* are decorated with designs and statuettes. The central shrine of the west-facing *garbhagruha* houses the *murtis* of Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand





Elaborate interior designs and graceful sculptures

Swami. The northern side shrine houses the *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, while the southern shrine houses the

murti of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.

Interrupting the walls of the main mandir hall are the four guru shrines housing the marble *murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Behind the *garbhagruha* is an enclosed path enabling visitors to perform *pradakshinas* around the *garbhagruha* itself.

As visitors exit the mandir hall from the front, they hear the chimes of the bells hanging from the ceiling.

To reach the ground floor, on the left is a sloped pathway for wheelchair-bound visitors and to the right is a staircase.

Also, surrounding the mandir are other support buildings, including the assembly hall, sadhus' residence, kitchen and dining areas and others.

The entire campus is aesthetically designed and built and grants visitors tremendous peace of mind. ♦



IN FIGURES

Total stone used: 60,682 cu. ft.

Height: 58 ft.

Width: 138 ft.

Length: 181 ft.

Shikhars (Spire): 5

Ghummat (Main Dome): 1

Mini Domes and Mini-Spires: 18

Ceiling Sections: 74

Stambhs (Pillars): 130

Total Sculpted Murtis: 764

Total Man Hours: 1,095,000



MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Jamnagar
21-23 February 2014



Sadguru sadhus perform the Prasad Pravesh rituals



Thousands of devotees enjoy the cultural programme

The Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony invokes the divine presence of God in the *murtis*. As the Vedic rituals are performed by reciting Vedic mantras and touching each part of the *murti* with a special small stick (*darbhashalakha*), the *murti* ceases to be merely stone and becomes divine, ready to accept the devotion and service of all.

The *murti-pratishtha* celebrations of the newly built *shikharbaddh* mandir in Jamnagar were held from 21 to 23 February 2014. Prior to this, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of all the *murtis* on 17 January 2014 in Sarangpur.

21 FEBRUARY 2014

PRASAD PRAVESH CEREMONY

In the early morning, Pujya Mahant Swami and other senior sadhus performed the Vedic Prasad



Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the Jamnagar Mandir *murtis*, Sarangpur, 17 January 2014

Pravesh Ceremony in which ritual offerings were made under the main dome of the mandir.

Also present for the ceremony were the main devotees and sadhus who had contributed to the building of the mandir.

WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

In the afternoon, a special assembly for women was held in the mandir's permanent assembly hall, Yagnapurush Sabhagruha. *Balikas*, *yuvatis* and elder women combined to present an inspiring programme featuring bhajans, speeches, drama and dances. Over 5,000 women devotees from Jamnagar and surrounding districts attended the assembly (for detailed report, see *Premvati*, March-April 2014).

CULTURAL PROGRAMME

In the evening, an entertaining and enlightening



Over 9,000 *yajmans* participate in the Yagna for World Peace



Youths present an inspiring drama on the life of Bhagatji Maharaj

cultural programme was presented from the main celebration stage. With the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the centre of the stage, the senior sadhus were seated to either side.

The assembly began with *dhun* and bhajans by sadhus. After a speech by Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Dharmanidhi Swami, the *kothari* of Jamnagar Mandir, narrated the stories of how devotees dedicated their time and resources for the mandir project. The senior sadhus honoured these devotees on stage as their names were announced.

The invited guests included Shri Chimanbhai Sapariya (MLA, Jamjodhpur), Shri Pabubha Manek (MLA, Dwarka), Shri Meghijibhai Chavda (MLA, Kalawad), Shri Raghavjibhai Patel (MLA, Dhrol), Shri Dharmendrasinh Jadeja (MLA, Jamnagar), Shri N.B. Upadhyaya (Collector, Jamnagar), Shri Anupam Kumar (Commissioner, Jamnagar), Shri



Sadguru sadhus and chief guest on stage

Dineshbhai Patel (Mayor, Jamnagar), Shri Dr P.B. Vasoya (President, District Panchayat), Shri Mulubhai Bera (Chairman, Gram Gruhnirman Board, Gujarat) and others. All were honoured by the senior sadhus.

Thereafter, Mahant Swami addressed the assembly, “Everyone has served wholeheartedly in the building of this mandir. It’s not that if you donate 5000 rupees, God will bless you with 50,000. But he will generate light in your *atma*. Even by spending billions of rupees, the *atma* is not enlightened, but it is by performing this service. Such light in the *atma* leads to inner happiness. Only through satsang is the knowledge of how to live life acquired. Sadhus and devotees in the past have lived exemplary lives. They have remained stable no matter what the circumstances. May all progress, and experience peace and bliss.”

Then, a drama was performed by youths on



Mahant Swami performs *pujan* of the *murtis* during the *yagna*



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj on the Hansa Rath



Devotees pull the *rath* of Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj



Devotees pull the Mayur Rath of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

the story of how the disciplined, addiction-free life of Abhesinh, the Darbar of Lodhika and a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, impressed the Jamsaheb of Jamnagar.

Afterwards, a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *vicharan* in this region was shown on the large LED screens. Then youths of Rajkot performed dances and small skits depicting how the mandir inspires observance of *niyam*-dharma, establishes faith in God, inspires people to become noble citizens and serves as a centre for social uplift activities. Over 10,000 devotees attended this evening assembly.

22 FEBRUARY 2014

YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE

In the early morning, thousands of devotees arrived in the *yagna* arena to participate in Yagna for World Peace.

The *murtis* to be installed in the new mandir

had been arranged in a line on the main stage. Also, on stage were the main *yagna kund* and six other small *yagna kunds*. On the floor, in the rest of the canopied arena, were another 482 *yagna kunds*, making a total of 489 *kunds*.

At 8.00 a.m., the senior sadhus performed the initial rituals as the Brahmins recited the Vedic mantras. Then the senior sadhus performed *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis*. Afterwards, Mahant Swami and Dr Swami addressed the devotees who had gathered to participate in the *yagna*.

With the completion of the initial rituals, all the sadhus departed and the *yajman* couples continued to perform the *yagna* rituals under the guidance of experienced Brahmins.

In all, over 9,000 *yajmans* performed the Vedic rituals of the Yagna for World Peace.

GRAND NAGAR YATRA

In the afternoon, thousands of devotees



Sadhus sing bhajans during the *nagar yatra*



Sadguru sadhus honour the *nagar yatra*

gathered to participate in the grand *nagar yatra* – a procession of the *murtis* through the streets of Jamnagar.

Outside the entrance to the M.P. Shah College, sadhus and invited local dignitaries flagged off the *nagar yatra*. The procession featured a wide variety of decorative, entertaining and inspiring items:

- At the front were youths on foot carrying large flags of India and the BAPS and a celebration banner.
- Youths carrying Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a *palkhi* (palanquin).
- Youths mounted on horses and camels.
- Youths on motorbikes wearing a *safo* and BAPS sash.
- *Balaks* on foot carrying the flags of various countries where there are BAPS centres.
- *Balaks* on roller skates.
- *Balaks* dressed as devas.

- Youth with a playful life-size camel puppet (*sandhani*).
- Sadhus seated on decorated tractors.
- Decorated tractors with displays of inspiring messages and BAPS activities.
- Children and youths dancing to the tune of bhajans.
- Tribal youths from Chikhli, Selvas, Dahod-Limkheda and Poshina performing their traditional dances and displaying their special skills.
- Sadhus and youths on trailers singing bhajans.
- Youths of Badalpur playing the *bhungli*.

In the women's section, there were:

- *Yuvatis* on foot carrying the celebration banner.
- Women devotees carrying the *shrifal* (coconut) and *kalash* (waterpot), and bound manuscripts (*pothi*) on their heads in traditional style.



Sadguru sadhus inagurate the mandir's main gate



Sadguru sadhus perform the *pratishtha mahapuja* rituals

- *Yuvatis* in traditional costumes performing traditional dances.
- *Balikas* in white dresses with a BAPS sash.
- Women devotees dancing with *kartals*.
- *Yuvatis* carrying flags and large paper leaves imprinted with the Swaminarayan mantra.
- *Balikas* dressed as famous women devotees of the past.
- Decorated tractors with inspiring messages of BAPS Women's Activities.

Interspersed between these items were the floats carrying the *murtis*:

- Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the Mayur (Peacock) Rath.
- Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni on the Hansa (Swan) Rath.
- Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the Pushpa (Flower) Rath.
- Shri Bhagatji Maharaj and Shri Shastriji Maharaj on the Nauka (Boat) Rath.



Mahant Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine

- Shri Yogiji Maharaj and Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj on a decorative float.
- Shri Radha-Krishna Dev on the Jagannath Rath.
- Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji on the Garuda (Eagle) Rath.
- Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganapatiji on the Kailash Rath.

The entire procession stretched for 2 km from front to back and took about 3½ hours to cover the 6 km route. Along the way, thousands of onlookers watched with admiration and appreciation.

23 FEBRUARY 2014

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY

On Maha *vad* 7, V.S. 2070 (23 February 2014), the *murtis* were consecrated in the shrines of the new *shikharbaddh* mandir. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic



Devotees participate in the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja*



Dr Swami performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni in the *abhishek mandap*

murti-pratishtha rituals and performed their *pujan* and *arti* on 17 January 2014 in Sarangpur.

At 6.00 a.m., the *snapan* (preliminary bathing) rituals were performed in which senior sadhus offered *abhishek* to the *murtis* with saffron-scented water.

Then, at 7.30, the senior sadhus performed Vedic rituals at the main gate of the mandir complex. After entering the compound, they performed *pujan* of the large replica of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *charanarvind*.

Then, at 8.00, the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony commenced in front of the *garbhagruha*. First, the *mahapuja* was performed, then the consecration rituals were simultaneously performed in all the shrines by the senior sadhus: Mahant Swami in the central shrine to *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami to the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Tyagvallabh Swami to the *murtis* of Shri

Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev and Dr Swami to the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni in the basement *abhishek mandap*. Other sadhus performed the rituals in the remaining shrines: Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Jnanprasad Swami, Bhaktavatsal Swami, Yogiswarup Swami, Anandswarup Swami and Atmaswarup Swami. After the consecration rituals, Mahant Swami performed *pujan* of the *murtis* in all the shrines.

Then, an *annakut* was arranged in each shrine and the first *arti* was performed.

MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

After completing the consecration ceremony, the senior sadhus arrived on the main celebration stage for the *murti-pratishtha* assembly. In the backdrop was a large cutout of a *shikharbaddh* mandir and in the centre of the stage were the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami



Sadguru sadhus and invited guests on stage during the *murti-pratishtha* assembly

Maharaj. The chief guests were also seated on the stage with the senior sadhus. In front of the main stage was a separate dance stage and four large LED screens.

At 10.00 a.m., the assembly began with sadhus singing *dhun* and kirtans. Then, Anandswarup Swami spoke on the personal, social, worldly and spiritual benefits of mandirs.

Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami then addressed the assembly, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan has preserved the tradition of building mandirs. India’s traditions have been preserved through mandirs and the *upasana* of God has remained due to mandirs. *Upasana* leads to the *jiva*’s liberation. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has built mandirs which represent true *upasana*.”

Addressing the assembly, Dr Swami said, “A mandir is a college for *brahmavidya*. In the Bhagavad Gita, *brahmavidya* is described as *adhy-atma vidya* (spiritual knowledge). The Upanishads describe it as *para vidya* (the highest knowledge). One may study many streams of worldly knowledge, but without spiritual knowledge, life is incomplete. It is through mandirs that countless people learn *brahmavidya*. This develops them into *chaitanya* mandirs, meaning that mandirs transform life and inspire piety. Through mandirs, all should strengthen *swadharmanishtha*, *sanghanishtha* and *swarupnishtha*.

Among the invited dignitaries were spiritual leaders and public leaders: Pujya Shri Devprasadj

Maharaj (Spiritual Head, Shri Anandabawa Ashram), Pujya Shri Krishnamaniji Maharaj (Mahant, Krishnapranami Mandir, Khijda Mandir), Pujya Shri Rameshwardasji Maharaj (Saheb, Shri Kabir Ashram), Pujya Shri Vallabhrayji Maharaj (Moti Haveli, Jamnagar), Shri Saurabhbbhai Patel (Energy Minister, Gujarat Govt.), Shri P.K. Mehta (Former Air Mashall of India), Air Commander Shri Navalkarji, Shri Dineshbhai Patel (Mayor, Jamnagar), Shri V.P. Patel (Former Collector), and others. All invited dignitaries were honoured by the senior sadhus. Women dignitaries were honoured by senior BAPS women devotees in the women’s section of the audience. Some of the invited dignitaries then addressed the assembly.

Shri Vallabhrayji Maharaj said, “The shastras describe that a *sampradaya* is one that has a *par-ampara* and a mantra of God. Today BAPS is active in preserving India’s heritage. And today, it is a remarkable thing that youths are dedicating their lives at the feet of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Shri Rameshwardasji Maharaj spoke, “A mandir is necessary to experience the presence of God. Without mandirs, how will faith be cultivated in people? That is why mandirs are necessary.”

Shri Krishnamaniji Maharaj said, “In Hindu tradition, the bond between *atma* and Paramatma is eternal. To understand these eternal principles, we have many *sampradayas* which endeavour to teach the lay public. The work of BAPS, inspired by the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to

spread these teachings worldwide through mandirs is highly commendable.”

Shri Devprasadjji Maharaj said, “As long as the mind is not purified, one will not experience peace. To attain this, it is necessary to seek refuge at the feet of God and sadhus. Pious sadhus have the capacity to wash away the sins of society.” Then he recalled, “Four years ago, I suffered an accident. Immediately, Pramukh Swami Maharaj phoned Dharmanidhi Swami and told him to visit me and find out about my health. The sadhus came and my health improved. Yogiiji Maharaj has also blessed me. Many years ago, I served him for 15 days. May such blessings remain on all.”

Thereafter youths presented a dance based on the bhajan, “*He Parabrahman, He Swaminarayan, Āp charanme lākho vandan...*”

Then Brahmavihari Swami spoke about Swamishri’s active role and his divine work during the mandir building project.

Afterwards, Shri Saurabhbbhai Patel said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj says that a place where the mind experiences peace, the mind is steadied, Paramatma (God) is experienced, and traditions and values are preserved is, in the true sense, a mandir. Throughout the world, BAPS mandirs promote spiritual, cultural and educational activities. This Sanstha is always ready to serve society. I bow at the feet of the inspirer of the Sanstha, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Shri P.K. Mishra said, “The affection expressed by this Sanstha is great. I have never experienced such feelings anywhere. Even now, I feel that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is physically present on this stage.

“When I first had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I felt like he was a friend and that we had a very old friendship. I first met Swamishri in Ahmedabad. Since then, I have gone for his darshan once or twice a year. In April 2013, I received his blessings on my birthday. I will never be able to forget that moment.

“In 2002, I went to Bhuj after the earthquake. There had been much loss of life and injury. I asked the people about who had been helping them. They told me that the most support had been given by the volunteers of BAPS. I was delighted to hear this.

“By my association with the BAPS, my life has changed. My mother and I daily read the Vachanamrut. Just a week ago, we finished our first reading of the Vachanamrut. Last December, my mother turned 90, yet she reads a Vachanamrut every morning. In the evening, my mother and I both read that Vachanamrut again. My mother explains that Vachanamrut to me. She has read many scriptural texts and so she explains to me the words of Shriji Maharaj in the Vachanamrut. The words of the Vachanamrut immediately affect me. I say with conviction that I will repeatedly read the Vachanamrut.”

Then, the *kothari* of Jamnagar mandir, Dharmanidhi Swami, delivered a vote of thanks to all who had served in the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations.

The senior sadhus then garlanded the *murti* of Swamishri. Thereafter, the resident sadhus of Jamnagar Mandir, other *kothari* sadhus present, the 88 BAPS sadhus who hail from Jamnagar district and senior local *karyakars* also presented garlands and shawls to the *murti* of Swamishri.

At the end, Mahant Swami addressed the assembly, “We see a rocket flying in the sky, but we cannot see the 300,000 components of which it is made and enable it to fly. In the same way, we see this mandir, but many have contributed to it. The announcer would become tired while declaring their names – that is how much sacrifice has been given. Whether one has been thanked here or not, but God has taken note. God knows everything and will give blessings. You have all served with such faith and love that only God can repay that. God and Swamishri have affection for you and no value can be placed on that.

(Contd. on pg. 43)

PROFESSOR JETHALAL SWAMINARAYAN

Part 1



A Dedicated Worshipper of
Akshar-Purushottam

A Visionary and Great Scholar

An Ardent Patriot

living in the famous Kadva Pole, Ahmedabad. Shri Chimanlal was a personal adviser to Shri Keshavprasadji Maharaj, then religious head (*acharya*) of the Swaminarayan Mandir at Kalupur, Ahmedabad. Jethalal inherited the Swaminarayan faith from his wealthy and reputable family.

REPUTED SCHOLAR

Towards the end of the 19th century, members of this Patidar community were making their living from farming on the outskirts of the city of Ahmedabad. During this time there were some bright sons of this community, like Jethalal, who were enamoured by the new reformist education movement. Jethalal had a deep love for mathematics and had made his name in this field of study. His accomplishments in the field of mathematics were duly noted in the editorial of *Sandesh*, a popular newspaper. This editorial mentioned, “Of all leading mathematicians of the day, Shri Jethalal Swaminarayan was second only to Professor Paranjape, a top notch mathematician in the entire Bombay province” (*Sandesh*, 26 June 1941).

Jethalal went to Pune and studied under Professor Raghunath Paranjape the deep mysteries

This story begins at the beginning of the 20th century in India, when a new class of educated and so called cultured elites in society believed that religion was the purview of illiterate, uncultured and blind followers. These fraternities always ridiculed religions during this time. The reformist movements had gained momentum under British rule and the so-called modern education system was thrust upon their crown colony in place of indigenous Vedic education. Even at such a time, a galaxy of leading intellectuals, philosophers and respected educationalists of society were flocking to Shastriji Maharaj and were bowing to his feet as his disciples with utmost reverence. Among these intellectuals was one Jethalal Chimanlal Swaminarayan, professor of Mathematics at the famous Gujarat College in Ahmedabad.

He was born on 29 August 1884 in the Kadva Patidar family of Shri Chimanlal Harivallabhdas,

of mathematics. After this, he started his glorious career as a professor of mathematics, first with Gujarat Vidyapith and later with the renowned Gujarat College in Ahmedabad. In addition to mathematics, Jethalal also had a scholarly linguistic interest in Sanskrit. Jethalal had graduated with an M.A. degree in Sanskrit and was regarded among the leading Sanskrit scholars of the day. However, he chose to pursue a career in mathematics.

PUBLIC SERVICE

The split of the province of Bengal engineered by Viceroy Lord Curzon had precipitated into the *Bang Bhang* movement during 1908, leading to the public's aspiration for the country's independence from British Rule. Despite such a promising career in academia, Jethalal, at the young age of 22, chose to focus his energies on the independence movement and in the service of his country. He became restless with his fervour to serve his country. At that time, a convention of the Indian National Congress had convened and passed a three-pronged resolution of civil disobedience to British rule. Jethalal tendered his resignation from a prestigious and rewarding position in accordance with this resolution. The editors of *Sandesh* noted this and wrote in its editorial: "He had a very prestigious position at Gujarat College which he willingly gave up to take on the noble cause of liberating his country from the shackles of colonial rule. His sacrifice was no small matter. He could have instead secured a very honourable position at any other college in the state. However, he decided to sever his associations with all government run colleges and face inevitable financial hardships. This he considered his fortune in the service of the nation. Till his last breath, he considered any assistance or handout from the government unacceptable. His career as a professor and an intellectual was incomparable. One could not find a scholarly mind like him

in all of Gujarat. Despite being recognized as a leading mathematician of his time in academia, he was never disengaged from public service" (*Sandesh*, 26 June 1941).

Besides his academic career, Jethalal's political career was taking shape as well. After having resigned from his position as professor, he was a member of the legislative assembly for twelve years. This highly intelligent, incisively logical and gutsy patriot impressed all who knew him. A narrative in Mrs. Lilavati Munshi's book *Rekha Chitra* (pp. 207-208) vividly explained Jethalal's performance during one memorable day in a legislative session, which shows his true political acumen. This is the eyewitness narrative:

"Shivdasani (Member of Legislative Assembly) spoke after Petite (British Civil Servant). The proposal under consideration was by the Simon Committee; however, he spoke instead about the proposal of Bardoli Satyagrah. The next speaker was the honourable Swaminarayan. Who wouldn't know the honourable Swaminarayan? His oratory style, his dressing style, his thoughts and his representation could easily be praised as uniquely poetic. He could be easily classified as an icon representing the entire culture of Charotar. The following illustration provides a more in-depth glimpse into his character: while he was a student of mathematics in college, he used to scribble solutions to complex mathematical problems on the bathroom wall while taking a bath. His devotion to his chosen field of mathematics was nothing short of legendary. He is now representing the Swaraj (Self Rule) Party in the legislature."

The editor of the *Sandesh* newspaper, while speaking of Jethalal's dazzling performance in the Bombay legislative council notes: "When he started bombarding with his incessant questioning in the assembly, even the most seasoned veteran members used to get spellbound. Moreover, he was giving nationalistic speeches to the general public and was aptly conveying the patriotic

message to the masses. His power of oratory was straight forward and so effective that the public could easily understand his message” (*Sandesh*, 26 June 1941).

Well known author Ranjit Patel, a.k.a. ‘Anami’, who came to know him very closely wrote in *Prabudhha Jivan*: “An unassuming, unpretentious, sage-like social worker, a Sanskrit scholar and a great scholar of mathematics. He wholeheartedly involved himself in the Rashtriya Sanstha (National Institute) of Kadi and became its vice-president and later its president. He played a leading role in organizing, shaping and strengthening it. Years back he wrote dramas like *Maharana Hameer Sinha* and *Parakrami Gaurav or Pride of India*, which have been published. Very few students of Gujarati literature are familiar with these works. I have also found a patriotic poem *Swadesh Seva Ashtakam* penned in Sanskrit by Prof. Swaminarayan. In it, we can clearly see his intense patriotism. This poem exhibits the same patriotic devotion found in Bankim Babu’s *Anand Math* and Tagore’s *Ghare Bahire* novels. This poem will doubtlessly refresh our memory of this patriot.”

Professor Swaminarayan had a special honour to meet Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad on 4 January 1926 when His Highness visited the Sarva Vidyalaya in Kadi. In this we can see the Maharaja’s ability to recognize a true human jewel and Professor Jethalal’s unique personality.

Among various public services, he also served as president of the Hindu Mission and carried out activities on behalf of the Hindu Sabha. His beliefs and values were strongly influenced by the principles of the Arya Samaj. At the same time, he had unabated enthusiasm to serve in the political field. In this vein, he tirelessly campaigned and eventually succeeded in rescinding the order for the unjustifiable increase in taxes imposed on farmers of the Viramgam region. After this successful campaign, he joined the Dharasana Satyagrah (peaceful resistance) in 1931 and

willingly faced incarceration.

He toured many villages to rouse public awareness, without caring for his personal health. As a result he developed diabetes during his incarceration. On one side were his family troubles and on the other side his incarceration.

Adding insult to injury, he started suffering from tremors. His body became emaciated and all hopes of his survival were lost. Jethalal’s eldest son, Shantilal Swaminarayan, reminisces about these critical days of his life and writes: “During 1933, his body was completely spent due to his many family troubles. He started experiencing frequent episodes of tremors. He could barely respond to any conversation. Even, saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ would take him 15 minutes.”

MEETS SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

During these trying circumstances, there was a sudden turn of events in Jethalal’s life. Shantilal came in contact with a well-known educationalist, Vinayakrao Trivedi. Shantilal learnt from him that Trivedi had recovered from his own debilitating health, caused by insomnia, only by the blessings from a great sadhu, Shastriji Maharaj. On his advice, Shantilal located Shastriji Maharaj and went to the village of Nayka on the outskirts of Ahmedabad to receive his blessings. At first glance, Shantilal realized that Shastriji Maharaj was indeed a great sadhu. He passionately explained to Shastriji Maharaj his father’s predicament and begged for his blessings. Shastriji Maharaj said, “Shriji Maharaj will take care of everything. For now, stay with us during our *vi-charan* (travels).”

After travelling with Shastriji Maharaj for a few days in the surrounding villages, Shantilal returned with him to Ahmedabad and took Swamishri to grace his residence. On arrival, Swamishri looked at the professor, initiated him into Satsang and told him, “Just as you have dedicated yourself to the service of the nation, dedicate yourself to the service of Bhagwan

Swaminarayan.” Saying this, he instructed him to work on an epic scripture in Sanskrit depicting the life and work of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. But the question was how could he write a scripture of such magnitude in Sanskrit when he was barely able to speak, stand or hold a pen to write? However, Shastriji Maharaj blessed him and said, “You just say yes, your health will improve and we will manage all your temporal affairs and responsibilities.”

Professor Jethalal agreed and Shastriji Maharaj blessed him profusely. Then, a miracle happened. Shri Shantilalbhairav writes: “My father gained 20 pounds weight in only 18 days. He was able to walk seven miles by the tenth day!” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, August 1951, p. 439).

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM CHARITAM

Doctors and hakims (practitioner of indigenous medicine) were not ready to believe this miracle. Even Jethalal himself was not ready to believe this miracle! Jethalal felt that he was now reborn. He decided to dedicate his new life in the service of Shastriji Maharaj. Therefore, Jethalal, who was rescued from death, picked up his pen for this mission. It was the morning of 1 July 1935. After his morning meditation on guru Shastriji Maharaj, he experienced the vision of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in his heart. Bowing to these dual images of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Jethalal experienced an incessant flow of divine inspiration. The following verses flowed forth from his pen:

*Mumukshu jivouddhārṇāya śāśvataṁ
maheṭalesmin-avateernamishvaram,
Anantshaktim prakatam dayāmayam nanāmi
tam sākshara-Purushottamam.*

“Incarnating on this earth to free the souls desirous of *moksha*, omnipotent with infinite powers, omniscient, omnipresent, currently present and visible to us mortals, full of love and compassion, I bow to Purushottam Bhagwan along with his eternal abode, Akshar.”

This was the auspicious beginning of *Akshar-Purushottam Charitam*. Thereafter, his pen flowed uninterruptedly and with absolute lucidity.

Professor Shantilal Swaminarayan, his eldest son, writes about one more miracle, while reminiscing about the preparation of the epic book, “Jethiba, the mother of Khengaribhai Chauhan, the principal of Tutorial High School, used to experience *samadhi* (the eighth and highest meditative state according to Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra’s Ashtang-Yoga). She experienced *samadhi* merely by the blessings of Swami Shri Yagnapurushdasji. My father used to recite the verses from his new epic and he wrote and sang kirtans at the same time. There was an illiterate young girl named Sarju who also used to experience *samadhi* and during this state of *samadhi*, Shastriji Maharaj through her used to correct any grammatical errors” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, August 1951, p. 440).

In order to please his guru Shastriji Maharaj, Jethalal focused his mind completely in his endeavour of writing *Akshar-Purushottam Charitam*. Jethalal was convinced that the speed at which the writing of this epic was progressing was nothing short of a miracle. He writes, “I have started writing this epic *Akshar-Purushottam Charitam* in Sanskrit as per the wish of guru Shastriji Maharaj and so far, I have written 6,000 verses. The writing has progressed up to the period when Shriji Maharaj graced the village of Loj. My life was coming to an end due to my illness, but Shriji Maharaj, has exhibited his divine power and miraculously prolonged my life. Though mathematics was my primary field of study, he has empowered me to write an epic narrating his divine *lila* (acts) in the Sanskrit language. This is no ordinary miracle. Experiencing this firsthand, I tell you from my heart and mind that Shriji Maharaj himself is manifesting in Satsang through Shastriji Shri Yagnapurushdasaji (*Likhitan Shastri Yagnapurushdas*, Volume 1, p. 332, Date: 12 July 1937).

Again, after some time, Jethalal reiterates, “This was a life-altering moment for me. Though I was completely broken physically and mentally, I immediately became a strong volunteer. I have written ten thousand verses narrating the glory of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Day by day my life has turned progressively to a spiritual path. I have now been awarded a professorship at Sheth Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Arts (L.D. Arts) College. I had earlier resigned from the prestigious Gujarat College, a government institution, to serve the cause of farmers. In addition to my new responsibilities as a professor, I have been doing God’s work in accordance with the wishes of the divine sadhu Shastriji Maharaj.”

Jethalal would read the verses to Shastriji Maharaj as soon as he had completed them. Shastriji Maharaj would feel very happy as he listened to them. Shastriji Maharaj would even call Jethalal to read and narrate these verses whenever a *parayan* (series of discourses on spiritual books) was organized, be it in the Suryanarayan Vadi in Mumbai, Kashivishvanath Mandir in Ahmedabad or any other place.

DISCOURSES ON AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM

During the month of *adhik* Bhadarvo in V.S. 1992 (1936 CE), Shastriji Maharaj had organized one such discourse on the Satsangijivan¹ at the request of devotees from Ahmedabad. A *parayan* was organized in Kashivishvanath Mandir on the bank of river Sabarmati on the outskirts of Ahmedabad and Shrijiswarupdas Swami was delivering the discourses. At about six o’clock in the evening Shastriji Maharaj was discoursing to the devotees. Thereafter, as instructed, Jethalal sat on Shastriji Maharaj’s vacant seat and started reading a chapter from *Akshar-Purushottan Charitam*. Some of the devotees did not like Jethalal sitting on the same seat that Shastriji Maharaj had

sat earlier to give his discourse. On behalf of these devotees, Babubhai Kothari complained to Shastriji Maharaj, “The professor fails to observe proper reverence to you. He sits on your seat to give his discourse! This is not proper for a devotee.”

Shastriji Maharaj admonished Babubhai and said, “Professor is giving discourse on the deeds of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. For this alone it is alright with me even if he were to sit on my head much less on my seat.”

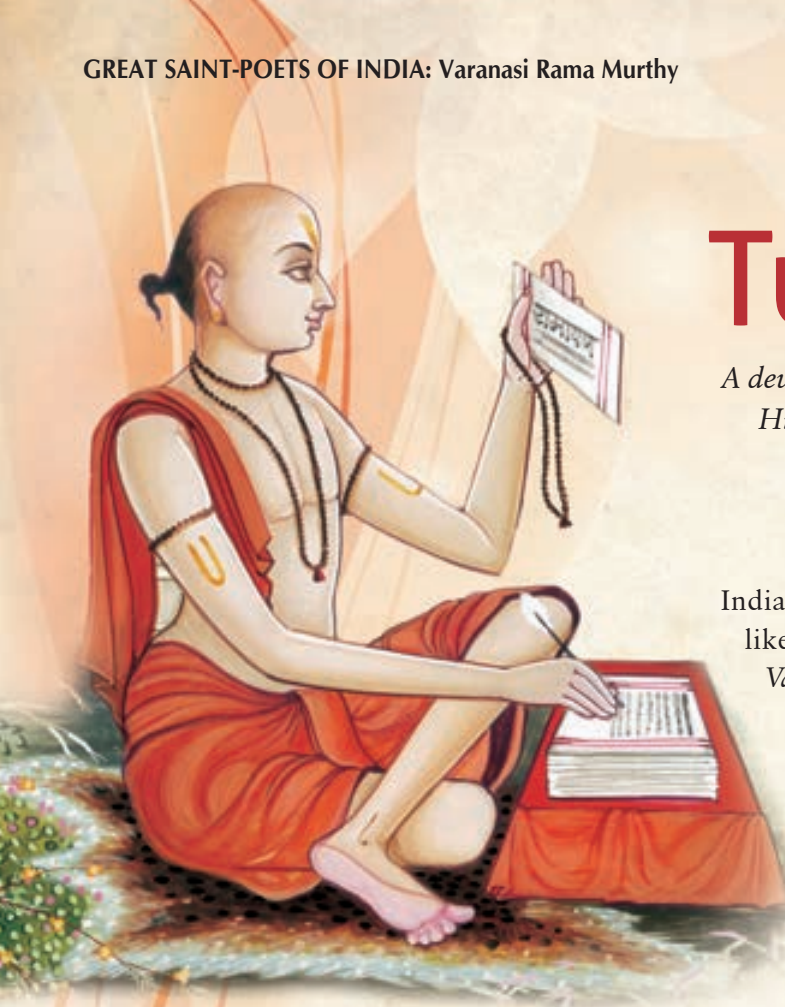
Babubhai was completely perplexed. His head bowed with respect to Shastriji Maharaj, a staunch worshipper of Akshar-Purushottam, and to the unswerving faith of Jethalal to the Akshar-Purushottam principle.

Yes, Jethalal, a Kadva Patidar, became an author, speaker and a poet all due to the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, and also became an active campaigner of the faith as well. This unprecedented and incomparable inspiration of Shastriji Maharaj pervaded every pore of Jethalal’s persona. Jethalal wanted to spread Shastriji Maharaj’s unparalleled spiritual qualities and power throughout the world. He was restless day and night to do everything in his power. For this, he kept up a steady stream of his writings in daily newspapers. He started writing articles in newspapers of his time: *Praja Bandhu*, *Sandesh*, *Gujarat Samachar* and others about the divine *samadhi* experienced by many merely by the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj. Jethalal also continued his writings with vivid narrations on *samadhi* in *Swaminarayan Prakash*. Thousands of aspirants started flocking to witness these miraculous *samadhi* episodes. ♦

Translation from Swaminarayan Prakash, October 2013

(To be continued)

1. A book in Sanskrit by a noted scholar-saint Shatanand Swami about Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s misson and his *lilas*, travels and festival celebrations.



Tulasidas

*A devotee of Bhagwan Ram who portrays
Him to be God in his popular work
– Ramcharit Manas...*

India. Tulasidas wrote several other works like *Vinayapatrika*, *Dohavali*, *Kavitavali*, *Vairagya Sandipani* and others. Tulasidas reportedly uttered the name of Ram as soon as he was born. So he came to be known as Rambola – one who uttered the name of Ram. His other name was Tularam. He is, however, widely known as Tulasidas, the name he acquired after renouncing the world. Tulasidas wrote in a mix of Avadhi and Braj dialects.

Tulasidas was a prominent Bhakti poet of the medieval period (8th to 16th centuries CE). Considered as an avatar of Valmiki, he preferred Hindi to propagate devotion to Bhagwan Ramachandra. His *Ramacharitamanas* and *Hanuman Chalisa* are popular throughout the Hindi-speaking world. *Ramacharitamanas* has become a household name in north India. It would not be wrong to say that it has replaced the Valmiki Ramayan among the literate public. The discourses on Ram based on Tulasidas's Ramayan draw crowds wherever it is recited; the narrator sometimes refers to Valmiki's scripture. *Ramcharitmanas*, along with *Sursagar* by Surdas, succeeded in rejuvenating the shattered spirit of a beleaguered

Tulasidas came on the scene at a time when things were looking gloomy for India. There was no effective central ruling authority. This was not something new to India. It had been like that for a long time. There had been moments of glory under some of the Hindu dynasties. At the time of Tulasidas even this did not exist. The foreign conquerors from Central Asia continued with the practice of total warfare. Muslim rule based in Delhi was teetering on the brink of collapse like a pack of cards. A new invader, Babar, was waiting in the wings to provide that push. Tulasidas belonged to this momentous period in the history of northern India. Rajputs fought valiantly against the Muslim invaders but there was no unity among themselves. This proved to be their undoing, despite incredible acts of individual bravery.

Tularam was born in Rajapur village of Banda district, in modern-day Uttar Pradesh, on the seventh day of the bright half of the lunar month of Shravan in the Vikram Samvat year 1554. His parents were Pundit Atmaram Dube and Hushi. The Dubes were Sarayuparin Brahmins. Tulasidas's mother died when he was still a child. After casting the horoscope, his father found that Tularam was born under the Mula star, which, it is believed, brings bad luck to the parents. So, Pundit Dube, out of blind faith, abandoned the child and left Varanasi, where the family had resided after Tulasi's birth, for good. Tulasidas mentioned this in *Vinayapatrika*, where he says that both his parents had abandoned him because of the malefic Mula star. That was the beginning of Tularam's troubles. Soon, even his aged grandmother, who looked after him, died.

According to another version, it was his nurse, Chuniya, who looked after him at her native village of Haripur till he was aged five. Before her death, both of them used to rely on the charity of the villagers, and whatever the orphaned boy would get through begging. That made Tularam utterly dependent on the villagers for his livelihood. He learnt to subsist on whatever he could get from the villagers and regularly attended bhajan and *arti* in the local Hanuman Mandir, which had virtually become his home. There, he came in contact with Pundit Narharidas. He was a very learned man who delivered discourses on the Ramayan. Tularam attended the recitals without fail.

GURU IMPRESSED

Narharidas was impressed by the boy's piety and bearing. On hearing of Tularam's situation, he took pity on him. At the conclusion of the recital, Narharidas asked the boy whether he would like to become his disciple. Tularam accepted the generous offer and bid farewell to his mandir-cum-home with a heavy heart. Narharidas imparted all the knowledge he had of the Vedas, Upanishads and other shastras to him. Tulasidas

turned out to be an apt pupil, he learnt everything the guru taught. He learnt to sing devotional songs; in this, he even surpassed the guru. After his education was over, the guru found a suitable bride for him.

According to another version, it was actually Sesha Sanatana, a friend of Narharidas, who was Tularam's teacher in Varanasi, where he learnt Sanskrit grammar, the four Vedas, the six Vedangas, Jyotish and the six systems of Hindu philosophy for a period of 15 to 16 years.

Mahipati in *Bhaktavijaya* notes that Tularam was a contemporary of Akbar. Tularam's father was in the service of Akbar and Tularam is reported to have been a friend of Todar Mal, Akbar's finance minister. So, Tularam belonged to a settled period in our history. Other scholars similarly adjust the name of the Sultan as per the chronology they choose to follow.

According to some scholars, Tularam was born in 1532 CE and lived for 126 years. Despite a difficult childhood, we hardly meet an instance in his life when he sought any official favours. He maintained a safe distance from the court. The *Ain-I Akbari*, a reliable account of Akbar's reign, does not mention Tularam. Considering the fact that the Mughal emperor was a great patron of letters and encouraged composers, this absence is rather difficult to explain.

According to Mahipati, once Tularam was forced to join Akbar when he was setting out on a tour. Tularam was reluctant to leave home but he had to go as it was the king's wish. During Tularam's absence, his wife, Mamata Devi, also called Ratnavali, received a message from her father that her mother was seriously ill and longed to see her daughter. After getting the permission of her in-laws, Mamata Devi set out to her parents' house. The messenger, however, told her on the way that the mother's illness was only an excuse to make her visit her parents as she had rarely visited them since marriage as Tularam would never let her go out of sight.

WIFE'S TAUNT

On returning and learning of her absence, Tularam left hastily in the dead of night to join his wife at her father's place. It was raining heavily and the Yamuna was in flood. To cross it he got on to a dead body to cross the river and by hanging on to a serpent reached Ratnavali's room on the upper storey. Such was his infatuation for her. She felt sorry to see her husband in such a plight. The wise Mamata Devi taunted him for this blind passion for her. In an outburst of spiritual fervour, she inquired of her husband how much better it would have been if he had displayed half as much love for Ram as he was showing for her body, which was but a bag of skin and bones. From then onwards, Tularam came to be known as Tulasidas. The saint-poet spent nearly 12 years in meditation after that rebuke.

A CHANGED MAN

It is obvious from this incident that Tulasidas was an ordinary, family man to begin with. This admonition from his wife changed him. He gave up all worldly connections and turned his gaze inwards. Nabhadasa, a contemporary of Tulasidas, described him as an incarnation of Valmiki. It is said that years later Tulasidas chanced to meet his wife. She expressed a desire to stay with him, serve him and worship Bhagwan Ramachandra. But Tulasidas at once left the spot. From his writings we glean that Tulasidas believed in the old order based on *varnashram dharma* backed by just rule where everyone's role in society was well defined. He maintained that those who believed in Bhagwan Ramachandra were bound by restrictions imposed by civilized society. He realized that Hindus were facing a crisis as their *dharma* moorings had become loosened by the influence of the rulers. It is precisely for this reason that *Ramacharitmanas* pictures an ideal society. There were no doubt individual aberrations, but with the advent of Ramarajya all these

aberrations were ironed out. Any transgression was strictly dealt with. That was the reason why Ram was born to chastise the wicked. We have in Ravan the chief culprit. Only Vibhishan among Ravan's family was saved because he walked the path of dharma. Other relatives of the *rakshas* king were just wiped out in the war. Ramarajya has become the ideal of devout Hindus down the ages.

GENESIS OF THE RAMAYAN

According to Priyadasa's *Bhaktirasabodhini*, written in 1712, Tulasidas was in the habit of visiting the woods outside Varanasi for his morning ablutions. He would put the remaining water in the roots of a tree which was inhabited by a ghost that was debarred from access to water sources. The grateful ghost wished to bless Tulasidas by granting his wish. The saint expressed a desire to have the darshan of Ram and his brother, Lakshman. This was not possible without Hanumanji's help. The ghost told Tulasidas, "You go and listen to the Ramayan in the Ramji Mandir. An aged Brahmin regularly comes there. He is Maruti (Hanumanji). He is the first to come and the last to go. He has a staff in his hand and a cap on his head. He wears an old garment." After this elaborate description, Tulasidas had little difficulty in recognizing Hanumanji. But the old Brahmin devotee refused to admit that he was the famous Ram *bhakta*, Hanuman. Tulasidas's persistence won the day. The poet was asked to go to Chitrakuta for Ram's darshan because Ram and Lakshman often visited the place. They indeed came on horseback. At first, Tulasidas failed to recognize them.

It is said that after Tulasidas had the darshan of his beloved Ram, Hanumanji asked him to narrate the exploits of the prince of Ayodhya. This was the genesis of his Ramayan. Like Hanumanji, Tulasidas practiced *dasya bhakti* – total surrender to God.

Tulasidas faced opposition from the traditional scholars for propagating Ramkatha (discourses on Ram) in a vernacular tongue, in this case the Vraj dialect, instead of Sanskrit. Their fears have come true, since Valmiki's classic in Sanskrit has been pushed to the background. Once, before such a situation had arisen, it is said that Valmiki himself had this fear and tried to sabotage Hanumanji's effort when he tried to inscribe the story of Ramachandra on the rocks. According to tradition, Rishi Valmiki himself had wanted Tulasidas to write Ram's exploits in Vraj, so that ordinary people, not versed in Sanskrit, could follow. This, it is claimed, was done to expiate for the sin in thwarting Hanumanji's efforts.

It took more than two years for the poet to compose the Ramayan, a task he began in 1572 CE. Although he stuck to the main theme of Valmiki, Tulasidas had introduced several new stories in his version. *Manas* is not merely a narrative of Ram's exploits. It is pertinent to observe here that Shri Ram had spent 10 of his 14 years of exile in Dandakaranya (parts of modern-day Chhatisgharh and other areas in the surrounding states). So, it is not merely about a war between Ram and Ravan. That came later and the prelude was no less exciting.

Like other saints, Tulasidas is also famous for miracles which he was forced to perform. He was merely interested in worshipping Ram and promoting his worship. Once, Akbar insisted that the saint should show him manifest Ram. Following Tulasidas's helplessness to oblige, the emperor forcibly detained him at Fatehpur Sikri. The devotee appealed to Hanumanji, who sent his companions to the fort and they began to wreak havoc. The monkeys targeted the wicked and those drunk with power and wealth. The followers of Hanuman emptied the granaries by distributing the grain to the poor and needy. Mischievously, they snatched the clothes of women who were bathing in the river. Akbar was told

that all this was a result of his harassing a devotee of Bhagwan Ram. When the king approached Tulasidas he was told that Akbar wanted to see Bhagwan Ram who would soon be approaching at the head of a vast army of monkeys. The king had enough of 'Ram darshan'; he pleaded with the saint to call back the monkey army. Soon the monkeys vanished as speedily as they had appeared and Tulasidas was set free. Thereafter, he stayed there for a year promoting the worship of Ram.

MIRACLE AT KRISHNA MANDIR

Once, Tulasidas visited Mathura and Vrindavan. While at Vrindavan, the mahant of a Krishna mandir told Tulasidas that he who bows to a deity other than his chosen deity would be considered a fool. The poet was equal to the occasion and composed a couplet: "O Lord! How shall I explain today's splendour, for you appear auspicious. Tulasidas will bow down his head when you take the bow and arrows in your hands."

As soon as he recited these lines, the deity gave up the flute and adorned himself with a bow and arrow. This shows Tulasidas's intense devotion to his chosen deity, despite the fact that Ram and Krishna are both considered avatars of Narayan.

Tulasi Ghat in the pilgrim town of Varanasi is named after him. Tulasidas lived a major portion of his life in Varanasi and passed away at the Assi Ghat. It is believed that the Sankatmochan Hanuman Mandir, founded by the saint-poet, stands exactly at the spot where he had the darshan of Hanumanji. ♦

VACHANAMRUT NIRUPAN

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of the spiritual discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is read daily by countless devotees and is also elaborated upon by sadhus and volunteers during the daily katha in BAPS mandirs and assemblies. An elaboration on an excerpt of a Vachanamrut has been given here. It has been translated from 'Satsang Saurabh' in Gujarati.



The Body, Bad Company and Past Samskars; One Becomes like One Perceives the Great

Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā I 58

At the time of the evening ārti on Fāgun sudi 5, Samvat 1876 [18 February 1820], Shriji Maharaj was sitting in the residential hall of the paramhansas in Dada Khachar's darbar in Gadhadā. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. At that time, an assembly of munis as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him.

Thereafter Mahanubhavanand Swami asked, "Maharaj, while staying in the Satsang fellowship, how one can eradicate all of one's faults? Also, how can one's bhakti towards God continue to flourish day by day?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "The more one continues to imbibe the virtues of the great Purush, the more one's bhakti begins to flourish. In fact, if one realizes the truly great Purush to be absolutely lust-free, then, even if one is as lustful as a dog, one will also become lust-free.

Conversely, if one perceives the fault of lust in the great Purush, then no matter how lust-free one may be, one becomes full of intense lust. In the same manner, if one views the great Purush to be full of anger or avarice, then one becomes full of anger and avarice. Therefore, if one understands the great Purush to be absolutely free of lust, avarice, taste, egotism and attachment, one will also become free of all of those evil natures and become a staunch devotee...

DISTINCTIVE FEATURE OF THIS VACHANAMRUT

■ We all attend satsang, but what is its benefit? Its benefit is complete transformation of one's life. It means getting rid of ingrained bad habits and base instincts.

■ Maharaj, herein, shows a panacea for uprooting bad habits and faults as well as an elixir to invoke pristine bhakti for God. Rather than prescribing intense austerities, he emphasizes upon developing the right spiritual cognizance.

For this, Maharaj shows three-fold solutions:

1. Perceive the Satpurush (guru) to be absolutely divine
2. Imbibe virtues of the Satpurush
3. Behave as a servant to other devotees of God.

1. Perceiving the Satpurush to be absolutely divine

■ There is no limit to the merits earned if one perceives the Satpurush to be flawless, unsullied, free of bias and divine. However, if one cannot perceive the Satpurush as unblemished, the loss incurred is also bottomless.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that one who perceives divinity in the actions of God and his Sadhu progresses spiritually day by day, just like the waxing moon on the second day of the bright half of the lunar month. However, if one harbours doubts in the actions of God and his Sadhu, then, from being bright like the full moon, one wanes (spiritually) and becomes dull like the new moon (Vartal 12).

Thus, Maharaj is blessing us and, at the same time, cautioning us too. He says that perceiving divinity in the Satpurush leads to spiritual riches, but harbouring doubts and perceiving human traits in him leads one to spiritual poverty.

■ It is very difficult to eradicate carnal desires and other faults.

Vishwamitra, even after performing austerities for 60,000 years, became enamoured

with Menka; Parashar became entangled with Matsyagandha; Saubhari saw a pair of fish making love and gave up his austerities to marry the 50 daughters of King Mandhata; Shiva was smitten with Mohini. There are many such examples.

And so, Bhagwan Swaminarayan shows us a simple and easy way to overcome these faults in this Vachanamrut. He says, "If one realizes the truly great Purush (Guru) to be absolutely lust-free, then, even if one is as lustful as a dog, one will also become lust-free."

■ *Maya* cannot spoil God or his Sadhu. In fact, according to Vachanamrut Vartal 7, when God associates himself with *maya*, *maya* also becomes pure and divine.

The actions performed by God (and his Sadhu) are like the actions performed by an adept magician. The phases of birth, childhood, youth, old age and death apparent in God are due to God's yogic powers of creating an illusion. In reality, God remains absolutely unchanged (Panchala 7).

■ When a person with a freckled face looks into a mirror, he sees those freckles in the mirror. The mirror, however, is spotless.

Likewise, the faults that one perceives in God and his Sadhu are in fact the faults present in one's own self. God and his Sadhu are absolutely pure and divine.

■ A person who perceives faults in God and his Sadhu is a graver sinner than one who may have performed the five grave sins (known as the *panch mahapaps*: 1. *Brahma-hatya* – killing a Brahmin, 2. *Madya-pan* – drinking alcohol, 3. *Suvarnani-chori* – stealing gold (or money), 4. *Guru-stri no sang* – having illicit relations with the wife of one's guru, and 5. *Charno sang* – company of one engaging in any of the previous four sins) (Gadhada II 46, Vartal 14).

To fulfil the wishes of a few devotees and to please them, Gunatitanand Swami ate three times a day. Some sadhus who used to eat only once in a day began to perceive flaws in such acts of Gunatitanand Swami. Consequently, after some

time, the fault-finding nature of these sadhus compelled them to leave Satsang.

Raghunathdas had developed aversion towards Ramanand Swami. He used to say, “Ramanand Swami has become infatuated with a young Brahmin boy from the East (i.e. Nilkanth Varni).” Due to such a flawed perception of Ramanand Swami, he later developed aversion towards Maharaj (i.e. Nilkanth Varni) too and, eventually, he left Satsang.

Thus, if one perceives flaws in the Satpurush, then one becomes overwhelmed with intense inner faults.

- Once Gunatitanand Swami asked, “What is the best as well as the worst thing among all (in Satsang)?” Then he himself replied, “The best thing is to understand God and his Sadhu to be divine, and the worst thing is to perceive human traits in them.”

- One cannot become flawless until one realizes God and his Sadhu to be absolutely flawless, pure and divine. However, one cannot realize God and his Sadhu to be flawless until one becomes flawless. Thus, there seems to be a paradox.

Giving a wonderful solution to reconcile this paradox, in Vachanamrut, Vartal 11, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “One should endeavour to develop intense affection for the God-realized Sadhu.” This is because one never perceives any flaw in a person for whom one has developed true love; furthermore, one willingly obeys him, puts trust in him, and even develops faith in him.

Thus, by having such intense love for the Satpurush, one develops absolute certitude that he is completely faultless, and so eventually, one too becomes faultless.

2. Imbibing virtues of the Satpurush

- When one perceives oneself to be great, one never recognizes one’s own flaws. But when one sees a person more virtuous than oneself, one easily understands one’s insignificance. For example,

the conceit of a millionaire dissolves on seeing the grandeur of a billionaire.

- In Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 66, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says that a person wishing to eradicate his faults should eradicate them by consulting the great. A supplementary viewpoint is that one can identify and eradicate one’s own flaws even by comparing oneself with and appreciating the glory of the Satpurush.

- One should see only the virtues in every person.

However, the virtues present in the Satpurush are special. They are divine, eternal, and redemptive. Even extremities of place, time, company, action, etc. cannot dilute his virtues. They are like a chain made of gold that does not sag or expand with changing weather. Thus, the virtues of the Satpurush are virtues to be imbibed by a spiritual aspirant.

- “What does becoming *brahmarup* mean?” somebody asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj. “To become *brahmarup* means to develop the understanding that a Satpurush has; to behave as he behaves; to devote oneself to God just as he is devoted to God,” replied Swamishri.

Thus, the Satpurush is the role model. One has to mould one’s life by taking inspiration from his life.

HOW TO IMBIBE THE VIRTUES OF THE SATPURUSH

1. See, listen and learn more about his virtues.
2. Comprehend his virtues and contemplate on them.
3. See one’s own faults and introspect with the Satpurush as the ideal.
4. Imbibe his virtues.

- We have seen Swamishri performing his daily puja, doing *katha*, eating meals, taking a morning walk, engrossed in writing letters, travelling, meeting devotees and giving counsel, consecrating homes of devotees, and discharging duties as the administrative head of the BAPS.

Let's reflect on Swamishri performing his daily puja according to the four guidelines mentioned above.

1. We have seen Swamishri performing his daily puja many times, but we should know in detail the way in which he performs different rituals while doing his daily puja.

2. Swamishri performs his daily puja so reverentially with the belief that God himself is present before him. Undeterred by joys and sorrows, insults and honours, physical ailments and diseases, rural inconvenience or urban opulence, he remains absolutely focused.

Contemplate on how Swamishri maintains such reverence and poise while doing his daily puja and try to comprehend Swamishri's viewpoint.

3. Compare Swamishri's daily puja with one's own daily puja and identify one's own shortcomings.

4. Overcome one's own shortcomings by embracing Swamishri's way of performing daily puja. Imbibe Swamishri's virtuous way of doing the daily puja, and enable your devotion towards God to grow.

In this manner, by imbibing the virtues of Swamishri, one gradually becomes more and more virtuous and one's bad habits and inner faults will be eradicated.

■ In Junagadh, there was a Nagar devotee. He was a gourmet who never tolerated even a little sloppiness in his food, and so his family members were fed up with him. Once, at Junagadh mandir, he saw Gunatitanand Swami having a meal. Swami took a millet *rotlo* (unleavened bread) in his bowl, crushed it, poured some buttermilk over it, added a pinch of salt, and then poured a little water into it. When he saw Swami having such a bland meal he was greatly impressed and appreciated Swami's saintliness. From that day, he too began to have simple meals.

■ Somebody asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "Which actions of Shastriji Maharaj did you adore the most?" Swamishri replied "I adored all his actions. All his actions were divine."

■ One should read the biographies of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*, and reflect upon the way in which they have done *seva*, offered devotion and discharged their duties as well as other tasks. On doing so one observes the following virtues in them:

1. They do not have any animosity or infatuation for anyone.

2. They are not envious of anybody.

3. They have no ego.

4. They have no ill will or aversion towards anybody.

5. They constantly believe that only God is the all-doer.

6. They perceive everyone to be divine.

7. They serve everyone with great reverence.

8. They serve without any expectation or self-interest.

9. They serve relentlessly, irrespective of joys and sorrows; honours and insults; conveniences or inconveniences, etc.

10. They never compare or demand better facilities and comforts as offered to others.

■ After making such observations one should compare one's own *seva*, bhakti, etc. with theirs and determine one's flaws. One should then try to emulate them; only then can one imbibe the virtues of the Satpurush.

■ Nishkulanand Swami says:

Koi kehshe je ā sant bahu sārā re, kharā ka-lyānnā karnārā re;

Etlo j gun je grehshe re, te to Brahma-Mahol vās leshe re.

"If somebody merely says that he is a nice sadhu, a genuine sadhu who really liberates others;

Just by perceiving him to be virtuous, one attains Akshardham."

2. BEHAVE AS A SERVANT TO OTHER DEVOTEES OF GOD

■ A Gunatit Sadhu is an ideal servant of God. One should voluntarily develop absolute servitude towards such a Sadhu.

■ A slave gets sold at the wish of his owner. He never complains, argues, demurs or gets into a dispute. Never does he harbour aversion towards anybody; neither does he have any ego nor any aspiration to become well known. He does not have any emotional bonds with any person, place or country.

■ Pragji Bhagat went to Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh with the singular purpose of attaining spiritual wisdom and enlightenment. However, Gunatitanand Swami asked him to carry stones, mix limestone powder, stitch a canopy, shave the sadhus and perform other menial services while simultaneously asking him to undergo severe austerities. Swami thus pushed him beyond the powers of human endurance.

■ Balmukund Swami and Yogeshwar Swami had come to Junagadh to become sadhus. But Gunatitanand Swami asked them to stand in the scorching heat of the afternoon sun for an hour every day for one month. Both emerged successfully through this daily trial because they had resolved to act in accordance to Swami's wish. They were both finally blessed by Gunatitanand Swami with saintly virtues and eventually attained God-realization.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj often says:

(Contd. from pg. 29)

"Now that this mandir has been built, it should be fully used. Air Marshall Mehra Saheb said that he experiences the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj here. That is a great thing. It reflects his love and attachment for Swamishri.

"By *seva*, one is enlightened within and earns infinite merits. Through *seva*, faith in the Satpurush, Swamishri, is attained. In return for giving a *datan*, Shriji Maharaj granted the old woman liberation like that of Muktanand Swami, since she had conviction in God. Similarly, all who have served in this mandir will be enlightened within and their faith in God will increase. Nothing compares to this." After Mahant Swami's

"*Dās nā dās thai ne, je rahe satsang mā,
Bhakti teni bhali mānish, rāchish tenā
rang mā.*"

"I (God) consider his devotion to be genuine, Who stays in satsang like a humble servant of all other devotees."

Somebody asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "What do you desire to become?" Swamishri replied, "An obedient servant."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is an ideal servant of God. We have to become his servant. Further, we have to also become a humble servant of other devotees in Satsang.

CONCLUSION

This Vachanamrut throws light on how to become free from worldly desires and our base instincts. In spite of the intense austerities and other sadhanas done by many spiritual aspirants in the past, they have failed in eradicating their base instincts. Shriji Maharaj shows the simple means of appreciating the saintly virtues of a Gunatit Sadhu or Satpurush to overcome one's inner *swabhavs*. The more one learns about the greatness of the Gunatit Sadhu like Pramukh Swami Maharaj the more one comes to appreciate him and thus be blessed with inner purity. ♦

inspiring words, the assembly and celebrations were concluded.

Over 30,000 devotees and well-wishers attended the celebrations.

AKHAND SATSANG-BHAKTI YAGNA

To commemorate the *murti-pratishtha* of Jamnagar Mandir, between 18 and 21 February 2014, devotees from Jamnagar and nearby centres offered their devotion by singing 684 bhajans, turning 1,885 *malas*, reciting the Janmangal Namavali 424 times, performing 4,189 *sashtang dandvats* and 12,622 *pradakshinas* and writing the Swaminarayan Mantra 138,158 times. ♦



Swamijis generally wear saffron coloured robes



The cow symbolizes Mother Earth, ahimsa and purity



The need for religion in life

FAQs on Hinduism

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

1. Why is the cow believed to be sacred in Hinduism?

God created the world and all living things. He also pervades in all things: *Ishā vāsyam idam sarvam yat kinchit jagatyām jagat* – God pervades the entire world, all life and things. So Hindus have a reverential attitude and behaviour towards animals, plants, rivers and mountains.

In Vedic Hinduism the cow was venerated and in classical Hinduism it came to be worshipped.

Due to the fact that the bull and cow were central to the agricultural society of the Vedic Aryans, and that milk and its products were used in *yajnas*, they became objects of veneration and worship. Bhagwan Shri Krishna's love for cows added fillip to the worship of cows. He is known as Gopala – the protector of cows. The other reason why the cow is venerated and worshipped is because it symbolizes purity, Mother Earth and ahimsa. It is also believed that the devas reside in its body. The five products of the cow that are highly valued for their sacredness and purity are milk, curd, butter, dung and urine.

2. Why do Hindus regard some trees and plants as sacred?

Hindus respect and revere most flora and fauna. This is not an uncivilized practice. In fact it reveals the sensitivity, perspective and depth of spiritualism that Hindus have for life. Today, people campaign for animal rights and environmental care, but Hindus have harboured this caring sentiment since millennia.

While modern man makes strident efforts to conquer nature, many Hindus worship her. Human life on earth depends on plants and trees. Hinduism teaches to regard some trees and plants as sacred, to use only as much parts of trees and plants as is required, and to apologize or pray to them before plucking flowers, leaves and fruits.

Certain plants and trees like tulsi, *billi patra*, pipal, banyan, coconut, etc., that have a special spiritual significance due to their association with deities, are worshipped or offered to God.



Hindus worship the deity of their choice

3. Why do Swamijis wear white or saffron coloured robes, and why do some shave their heads?

Swamijis or sadhus renounce and sacrifice their worldly life and family to realize God and serve society. Their saffron coloured clothes are similar to the colour of fire, which symbolizes sacrifice. The sadhus sacrifice their mundane life and ambitions to adopt a life of renunciation, hardship, tolerance, service and devotion to God. Another interpretation of saffron is that it consumes and purifies all, similar to fire. Some sadhus wear white because it symbolizes purity and peace. The motive behind shaving one's head is to become indifferent to *dehabhava* (body-consciousness) and renounce ego.

4. If one is honest and virtuous where is the need for religion in life?

By being honest and virtuous one gains *pu-nya* (merit), and subsequently attains the life of a deva in *swarga* to enjoy material pleasures. Once one's *pu-nya* gets exhausted one has to go through the cycle of births and deaths. According to Hinduism, one cannot attain ultimate *moksha* through the observance of morality alone. For that one has to take refuge in God

or the God-realized guru and perform spiritual sadhanas to imbibe dharma, *jnana*, *vairagya* and bhakti.

5. What does Hinduism say about religious conversion?

Hindus believe in one supreme God, and he is called by different names by the wise rishis. Hinduism accepts diversity of religions and beliefs and the different paths to realize God. So, Hinduism does not have an agenda for conversion. However, if anyone wishes to willingly embrace Hinduism then the person can do so. Furthermore, every Hindu has the freedom to worship and believe in the deity of his choice.

The coercive means and enticements for conversion adopted by some religions, have been the cause of conflict and pain in India and other parts of the world. It is better to let a person of any religion remain devoted to his or her own religion, have the personal liberty to choose, and not uproot the person from the traditions, culture and rituals of his or her own personal faith.

Hinduism teaches that real conversion should be vertical, that is, from a lower level of spiritual experience to a higher one, and not horizontal, that is, from one religion to another. ♦

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

February-March 2014, Sarangpur

FEBRUARY

7, Friday

Swamishri showered flower petals to sanctify the plans for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Fresno, Columbia and Greenville in America.

He also sanctified the *niyam* cards for the 'Become Adarsh' *adhiveshan* to be held in the UK and the prizes to be awarded to the students of APC, Vidyanagar, during its Annual Day programme.

9, Sunday

Offering their prayers for Swamishri's good health, 201 devotees of Gondal performed an 11-km *padayatra* from Botad to Sarangpur, while turning the *mala*. During the pilgrimage, they turned a total of 65,424 *malas*.

15, Saturday

Swamishri inaugurated the 'Sidhant Pothi', a blank notebook with the principles of BAPS printed at the top of each page. Sadhus and devotees will write in this *siddhant pothi* as part of their *niyams* for the Shastriji Maharaj Sardha Shatabdi Mahotsav.

At 5.50 p.m. Swamishri left his room for an extensive tour of the three-floor *sant ashram*. First, he visited Santvallabh Swami's old room, then he went to the new library, reading rooms, offices of the guruji sadhus, sadhus' study areas, Nishkulanand assembly hall and music rooms. At 6.45 p.m. Swamishri and the sadhus performed the evening *arti* on the terrace.

While returning to his room Swamishri visited the old library, which is now used as a computer room, the old main assembly hall and the sadhus'

dispensary. Throughout the visit, past memories were recalled at each place.

16, Sunday

Swamishri performed *pujan* of the *kalash* and flagpole for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Sathad, a village in Dholka district.

18, Tuesday

Swamishri inaugurated the newly redesigned BAPS Charities website.

19, Wednesday

Senior members of the Anand Nagarpalika honoured Swamishri on the occasion of their 125th anniversary celebrations.

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS mandirs at Mota Varachha and Ambeta, suburbs of Surat, and Rajpardi, a village in the Bharuch district.

Swamishri also sanctified the bricks to be placed in the foundations for the new BAPS mandir being built in Italva village, Sankari district.

27, Thursday

Swamishri inaugurated a new Swaminarayan Aksharpith audio publication, 'Dhun, Part 4'.

28, Friday

At 3.35 p.m. Shri L.K. Advani, a senior member of the Bharatiya Janta Party and MP for Gandhinagar, came for Swamishri's darshan.

Swamishri greeted him with a smile and blessed him. Shri Advaniji was delighted to have Swamishri's darshan and see him in fine health.

DR APJ ABDUL KALAM VISITS FOR SWAMISHRI'S DARSHAN

11 March 2014, Sarangpur

At 2.40 p.m. former President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam came for Swamishri's darshan at Sarangpur.

Senior sadhus received Dr Kalam on his arrival at the mandir. First, Dr Kalam had lunch, during which he watched a video of past Fuldol celebrations in Sarangpur. He delightfully exclaimed, "Swamishri is very energetic."

At 3.40 p.m., Swamishri received Dr Kalam under a specially erected gazebo in the Pramukh Udyan behind his room. Swamishri garlanded and blessed Dr Kalam, as well as Dr Y.S. Rajan and Shri Arun Tiwari.

Then, Dr Kalam stood up and as Swamishri tightly held his hand. Dr Kalam told Swamishri, "I am very happy to meet you. I have had darshan of your guru Shastriji Maharaj and come here." He continued, "By your taking part in the Fuldol celebrations, many people will be delighted." Dr



Kalam also commented, "You have created a big Sanstha. Millions of people have benefitted from your work. Youths and elders are all delighted by your work. We will forever remember the work you have done."

Then Dr Kalam touched the *mala* around Swamishri's neck. Swamishri smiled and the sadhus removed the *mala*, and placed it in Swamishri's hands. Dr Kalam bowed his head and Swamishri placed the *mala* around his neck and placed his hands on his head to bless him.

After the meeting, Dr Kalam addressed the gathering in the main assembly hall, saying, "When we met just now, Swamiji smiled. And when Pramukh Swami smiles, the whole world smiles." He also spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's contributions to the world and said, "One who gives is a saint."

Swamishri also blessed Advaniji for his 50th marriage anniversary later this year.

Later, Swamishri inaugurated the English e-book version of *Satsang Vihar*, Part 1.

MARCH

3, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Columbia, South Carolina, USA.

6, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Gandhidham, Kutch.

7, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Talala, Gir.

10, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Leeds, England.

15, Saturday

In the evening, a Volunteers' Assembly for the volunteers helping in the preparations for the upcoming Fuldol celebrations was held on the festival grounds in the presence of the *sadguru* sadhus.

At 8.40 p.m., the volunteers had Swamishri's

PUSHPADOLOTSAV

17 March 2014, Sarangpur



At about 10:45 a.m. Swamishri arrived in the Pramukh Udyan, where many sadhus from various mandirs who had come for the evening Fuldol celebration had gathered. The sadhus hailed the ‘jai naad’ and sang joyously as they enjoyed Swamishri’s darshan. Then, on behalf of all the sadhus, Tyagvallabh Swami prayed to Swamishri “Today, the sadhus have come here for the Fuldol celebration. Please grace us all that we all maintain *nirdosh buddhi* towards you. May we all serve with body and mind in your works. May we develop *sadhuta* in our lives and help expand the garden (of satsang) you have reared. We pray to Shriji Maharaj that may he keep you in good health and that we all enjoy your darshan for many more years. We pray at your feet that may all the sadhus attain *sadhuta*, remain firm in *niyams* and dharma and sincerely serve the Sanstha.”

At 5.40 p.m. Swamishri left his room to go to the Fuldol celebration in the grounds behind the school. Seated on his wheelchair, Swamishri was taken in a van to the festival site.

Over a period of many weeks, hundreds of sadhus, *parshads*, *sadhaks* and volunteers had served tirelessly to prepare the festival grounds. The preparations had been coordinated through 26 departments, such as, construction, electric, water, security, assembly arrangements, parking, catering, accommodation and others.

The celebration assembly had begun at 5.00 p.m. Before Swamishri arrived on stage, Viveksagar Swami, Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Dr Swami and Mahant Swami had addressed the gathering of around 95,000 devotees. New Swaminarayan Aksharpath publications were also inaugurated. Kothari Swami inaugurated *Hinduism: One God or Many Gods?* – a new English book; Tyagvallabh Swami inaugurated two new audio publications: *Jnansatra* and *Karu Vandana Pragji Sadgurune...*

Swamishri arrived on stage wearing a *pagh* in Shastriji Maharaj’s traditional style and sat inside the special glass cabin in the centre of the stage.

First, Swamishri sprayed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with saffron-scented water as Vedic mantras were recited. Then, at 6.15 p.m., using two mounted sprays, one to each side, to remotely control the array of sprays at the edge of the stage, Swamishri began to spray the devotees as they passed by.

Everyone danced and sang with delight as they had Swamishri’s darshan while walking through the spraying area. Swamishri continued for 45 minutes, until all the male devotees had been sprayed with the sanctified saffron-scented water.

After the grand celebration, Swamishri returned to his room.

DIKSHA MAHOSTAV

25 March 2014, Sarangpur

Today, 28 *sadhaks* were to receive *parshad diksha* from Swamishri.

At 8.00 a.m., the *diksha mahapuja* was performed in the presence of the *sadguru* sadhus in the Pramukh Darshan Vatika.

At 10.45 a.m., Swamishri was welcomed in the assembly. Thereafter, the *diksha* ceremony began. Each *sadhak* was first anointed with sandalwood paste by Tyagvallabh Swami, then he was given a *kanthi* by Kothari Swami and a *gatariyu* (upper cloth) by Dr Swami before approaching Swamishri. Swamishri gave the *diksha* mantra and blessed each new *parshad*. Then Mahant Swami placed a *pagh* on their head before they took



their seat in the assembly. Ishwarcharan Swami presented a certificate to the father of each *parshad*.

As each *parshad* came to Swamishri, Narayanmuni Swami described his personal details and announced his new name.

After the *diksha* ceremony was completed, Swamishri was taken along the ramp to give a closer darshan to the devotees.

Before Swamishri returned to his room, Mahant Swami presented him with 'Sarangstuti 2014' – a handwritten volume comprising of *shloks*, poems, articles and drawings by the student sadhus of Sarangpur.

darshan on the large LED screens. Swamishri was seated on his wheelchair in his sitting room, with a decorative backdrop. In front of him were two large decorated sprays on raised stands. At the same time, via large LED screens placed before him, Swamishri could see a live relay of the assembly in progress.

The sprays on the assembly stage were remotely connected to the sprays in front of Swamishri. Then, while looking at the volunteers, Swamishri began to manoeuvre the sprays and sprayed the volunteers as they passed by the sprays on the assembly stage.

Everyone was overwhelmed by this special experience.

16, Sunday; Birthday of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj

In the morning, Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir. There, he sanctified a sample of the *prasad* box that was to be given to the devotees attending the Fuldol celebration

the next day.

Then, Swamishri arrived in Bhagatji Maharaj's birthday celebration assembly in the Narayan Mandap. After blessing the sadhus and devotees, he returned to his room.

18, Tuesday

At 11.05 a.m., Swamishri arrived in the Pramukh Darshan Vatika to spray the sadhus. To the tune of festive bhajans, Swamishri operated the remote-controlled sprays as the sadhus joyfully passed by to be sprayed by the sanctified saffron-scented water.

At the end, Kothari Swami said a special prayer to Swamishri on behalf of all the sadhus.

22, Saturday

Swamishri inaugurated *Satsang Vihar*, Part 3, a Gujarati publication prepared by the Bal Pravrutti Central Office, to be used as a course book for the children's satsang exams. ♦



Global

**EARTH HOUR CELEBRATED AT BAPS
MANDIRS WORLDWIDE**
29 March 2014



Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London and BAPS Mandirs across North America joined the international community in participating in the world's biggest environmental event – The Earth Hour – on 29 March 2014 from 8.30 to 9.30 p.m. For one hour, the BAPS mandirs demonstrated their continual commitment for environmental conservation by switching off their lights. This adds to the permanent initiatives, such as, solar power, LED lighting, power saving fibre optics and others, which BAPS mandirs use to help sustain the environment.

Across the world, landmark places in 158 countries and territories from all seven continents dimmed their lights to join in the celebration of the Earth Hour.

Earth Hour is organized by the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations. Its mission is to stop the degradation of the Earth's natural environment and build a future where people live in harmony with nature.

India

NEW BAPS MANDIRS
Navli, District: Anand
19-23 January 2014



Five days of celebrations were held to mark the opening of the new mandir. Message-oriented dramas and traditional dances were presented by BAPS youths and children.

On 22 January, 282 devotees participated in the Yagna for World Peace. Then, a splendid *nagar yatra* took place.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Bochasan.

On 23 January 2014, Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Moviya, near Gondal
11-12 February 2014

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 8 February 2012 in Mumbai.

Then, once the mandir construction was completed, a Yagna for World Peace was held on the morning of 11 February 2014 in which 700 devotees participated. In the afternoon, a grand *nagar yatra* was held.

On 12 February 2014, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Boriya, Near Kandorda, District: Rajkot **18-19 February 2014**



On 18 February, a Vedic Yagna for World Peace was held. In the afternoon, a colourful *nagar yatra* parading the *murtis* took place. Then, in the evening, a cultural programme was presented by BAPS youths.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 4 July 2013.

On 19 February 2014, Pujya Mahant Swami performed the Vedic consecration ceremony of the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Bhavada, District: Dharampur **1-5 March 2014**



A five-day celebration was held to commemorate the new mandir opening, in which inspiring dramas and speeches were presented.

On the morning of 4 March, 310 devotees participated in the Yagna for World Peace. In the afternoon, a colourful *nagar yatra* of the *murtis*

was held from Khanda village to Bhavada.

On 10 January 2013, in Ahmedabad, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.

On 5 March 2014, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Santhal, near Dholka **3-5 March 2014**



A Satsang centre was established here in 2005. On 28 January 2011, Pujya Mahant Swami performed the *khat muhurt* on the mandir site.

On the evening of 3 March 2014, a programme of bhajan recitals was presented by BAPS youths.

On 4 March, a Yagna for World Peace and *nagar yatra* were held.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 17 November 2013 in Sarangpur.

Then, on 5 March 2014, Pujya Mahant Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir.

UK & Europe

NATIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI VIDYARTHI SHIBIR

Nilkanth Varni: His Journey of Inspiration **21-23 February 2014, London, UK**

More than 150 *kishores* and *kishoris* from across the UK took part in this year's Vidyarthi Shibir – 'Nilkanth Varni: His Journey of Inspiration' held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.



Drawing upon the inspirational qualities of Nilkanth Varni, the *shibir* guided the students on how his special qualities could be applied by modern-day youths in their personal and academic lives.

The *shibir* discussed the hardships Nilkanth faced whilst travelling throughout India without the aid of modern technology or personal comfort, the attitude required to successfully excel in studies and developed other attributes such as leadership skills, effective and fruitful revision and overcoming the distractions that may prevent academic success.

Also, there were group discussions, practical tips on the art of debating, one-to-one academic coaching sessions with professionals and teamwork activities.

From the *shibir* the students learnt the importance of gaining a sound education as well as preserving a noble character and keeping Swamishri at the forefront of all activities to find true fulfilment in life.

Africa

BAPS CHARITIES SUPPORTS THE NUNGWI LEPROSY CAMP

23 March 2014, Tanzania

BAPS Charities volunteers went to the Nungwi Leprosy Camp to offer support and supplies. The camp was established in 1964 by the then president, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere. Currently, the camp houses over 400 people, relying heavily on the support of NGOs.

The volunteers split into two groups: one group stayed with approximately 200 children, while the other group visited every house in the camp. The first group played games with the children gave them individual gift packets and snacks. The second group visited the houses of the patients to donate two weeks' worth of food rations. Problems that the family faced were discussed in order to plan future activities accordingly.

BAPS CHARITIES SUPPORT TO DEEP SEA SLUM FIRE TRAGEDY

13 April 2014, Nairobi, Kenya

On 9 April 2014 the homes of hundreds of families in Nairobi's Deep Sea Slum were burnt in an afternoon blaze.

In response to this tragedy, BAPS Charities in conjunction with the Red Cross provided mattresses, blankets, sets of assorted clothing, and family food packs containing maize flour, rice, beans, cooking fat and salt to the families affected by the fire.

KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

Theme: Yagnapurush Chhe Saathe

11-27 April 2014, Africa



Bal, kishore, yuva and vadil karyakars from 13 African countries participated in the three Karyakar Shibirs based on the theme 'Yagnapurush Chhe Saathe' – 'Yagnapurush Is with Us'. The *shibirs* took place at: Arusha, Tanzania – 11-13 April, in which 302 *karyakars* from Kenya and Tanzania took part; Jinja, Uganda – 19-21 April, in which 267 *karyakars* from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and

South Sudan participated; and Johannesburg, South Africa – 26-27 April, in which 160 *karyakars* from South Africa, Botswana, Madagascar, Malawi, Zambia and Congo were present.

The *karyakars* received guidance on: Dharmanishtha – sincerely observing the wishes of God and guru, and earnestly fulfilling one's duties as *karyakars*; Bhaktinishtha – understanding and practicing daily worship rituals, such as, puja, *mansi*, *arti*, *katha*, *smruti* and *sabha*; and Jnannishtha – the necessity of understanding the true form and nature of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Satpurush, and the need to become *brahmarup*.

The *shibir* topics were presented through speeches, workshops, videos, skits, audiovisual presentations, question-answer sessions, and video messages of *sadguru* sadhus and Swamishri's blessings. The delegates also benefitted from the experienced talks of Pujya Yagnapriya Swami and Pujya Vivekjivan Swami who were present at the *shibirs*.

The *shibirs* inspired the *karyakars* to strengthen their conviction in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus, and perform their duties with renewed faith, enthusiasm and diligence.

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR

Theme: Kahat Hai Sant Sujan

17-20 April 2014, Nairobi, Kenya



Over 430 *kishores* and *kishoris* from across the East African region gathered at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Nairobi, for the Kishore-Kishori Shibir themed “Kahat Hai Sant Sujan”.

This year's theme enlightened the delegates

about the importance of the God's word, the shastras and our guru. Topics such as *agna*, *asmita* and the Satpurush were discussed in great depth through speeches, videos, audiovisual presentations, discussions, participation activities, workshops, invaluable guidance from *sadguru* sadhus and inspiring blessings from *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Participants also relished the presence of two learned and experienced sadhus from India, Pujya Yagnapriya Swami and Pujya Vivekjivan Swami.

Yagnapriya Swami gave guidance on how to faithfully and sincerely follow the *agna* of God and guru. The delegates were taught the importance of observing the codes of *nishkam* dharma.

Vivekjivan Swami spoke about how to awaken the sense of *asmita* – pride in the God and guru we belong to and who we really are – through various profound *prasangs*.

The delegates also learnt about how Pramukh Swami Maharaj has sacrificed his life for the Sanstha and his devotees and how he has lived up to the promise he made to Shastriji Maharaj when he was made the President of the Sanstha.

The *shibir* inspired greater confidence in the youths to practice satsang in their daily lives according to the wishes of God and guru.

Asia-Pacific

SATSANG TOUR OF ASIA PACIFIC COUNTRIES 29 December 2013 to 25 February 2014

To nurture the satsang in the Asia Pacific region, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and sadhus – Aksharvatsal Swami, Madhurvadan Swami, Adarshmuni Swami and Yogismaran Swami – visited Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia.

On 30 and 31 December 2013, satsang assemblies were held at a local school in Singapore.

From 1 to 4 January 2014, in Hong Kong, the sadhus conducted satsang assemblies and *padhramanis*. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami discoursed



Ishwarcharan Swami honours Premier of New South Wales, Hon. Barry O'Farrell

twice daily to guide the devotees. Due to the dedicated efforts of the devotees here, a new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir will soon be ready for inauguration.

Then, after two days in Bangkok, Thailand, the sadhus arrived in Creswick, near Melbourne, Australia. Here, from 7 to 12 January, *yuvak-yuvati* and *kishore-kishori shibirs* were held for youths from throughout the Asia Pacific region. To conduct the *shibirs*, Amrutnandan Swami, Bhaktivardhan Swami, Snehmuni Swami and Purnajivan Swami had come from USA. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami and the sadhus guided and inspired over 850 youth delegates who attended the *shibirs*.

Then, the sadhus arrived in Melbourne, where a new mandir had been inaugurated last year. Many devotees enthusiastically attended the Kirtan Aradhana, Sanskruti Din and Uttarayan celebrations held during the three-day stay.

Thereafter, the sadhus went to Auckland, New Zealand. In 2002, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had consecrated a *hari* mandir here. The sadhus stay was split into two phases – one of three days and the second of five days. Many devotees benefited from the daily satsang assemblies, *shibirs* and festival celebrations held. Between their two stays in Auckland, the sadhus also visited Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, Christchurch, where the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir is said to be the world's southern-most Hindu mandir, Rotorua and Hamilton.

Then, on 4 February 2014, the group travelled

to Adelaide, Australia, where the main event was the *bhumi puja* for the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *mahapuja* in which many devotees also participated.

After their three-day stay, the sadhus went to Sydney, where on 9 February, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the renovated BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. Previously, in 2002, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* in this mandir. Other programmes during the four-day *murti-pratishtha* celebrations included a welcome assembly, Upasana Shibir, Vadil Shibir, Family Shibir and *mahapuja*.

Many devotees from throughout the Asia Pacific region participated in the various celebration programmes.

From here, the sadhus went to Brisbane, where a new mandir was to be consecrated. On 14 February, the *murtis* were taken on a cruise on River Brisbane.

On 15 February, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals. To commemorate this special occasion, sadhus presented a Kirtan Aradhana and Puja Ishwarcharan Swami spiritually guided the devotees in his address.

From Brisbane, the sadhus went to Perth. In 2002, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had consecrated a mandir here. Now a new mandir is to be built on a larger site. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami inspired the devotees during a special assembly at the new site.

After short stays in Indonesia and Cambodia, the group returned to India. During this hectic eight-week tour, the sadhus visited 20 cities in 7 countries.

Puja Ishwarcharan Swami inspired the devotees through his morning and evening discourses and personal counselling. The devotees, young and old, everywhere enthusiastically participated in all the programmes and derived great spiritual benefit.





Satsang Pihar

Part 1

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For iOS

Inspirer: Pramukh Swami Maharaj



PUSHPADOLOTSAV CELEBRATION

17-18 March 2014, Sarangpur

(Top & Middle) Around 95,000 devotees from throughout the world flocked to Sarangpur to experience the divine atmosphere of the Fuldol celebration. On 17 March, Swamishri sprayed the devotees with sanctified saffron-scented water and brought great spiritual joy to everyone's heart. *(Bottom)* Swamishri sprayed the sadhus with sanctified saffron-scented water during a special morning session, 18 March 2014.