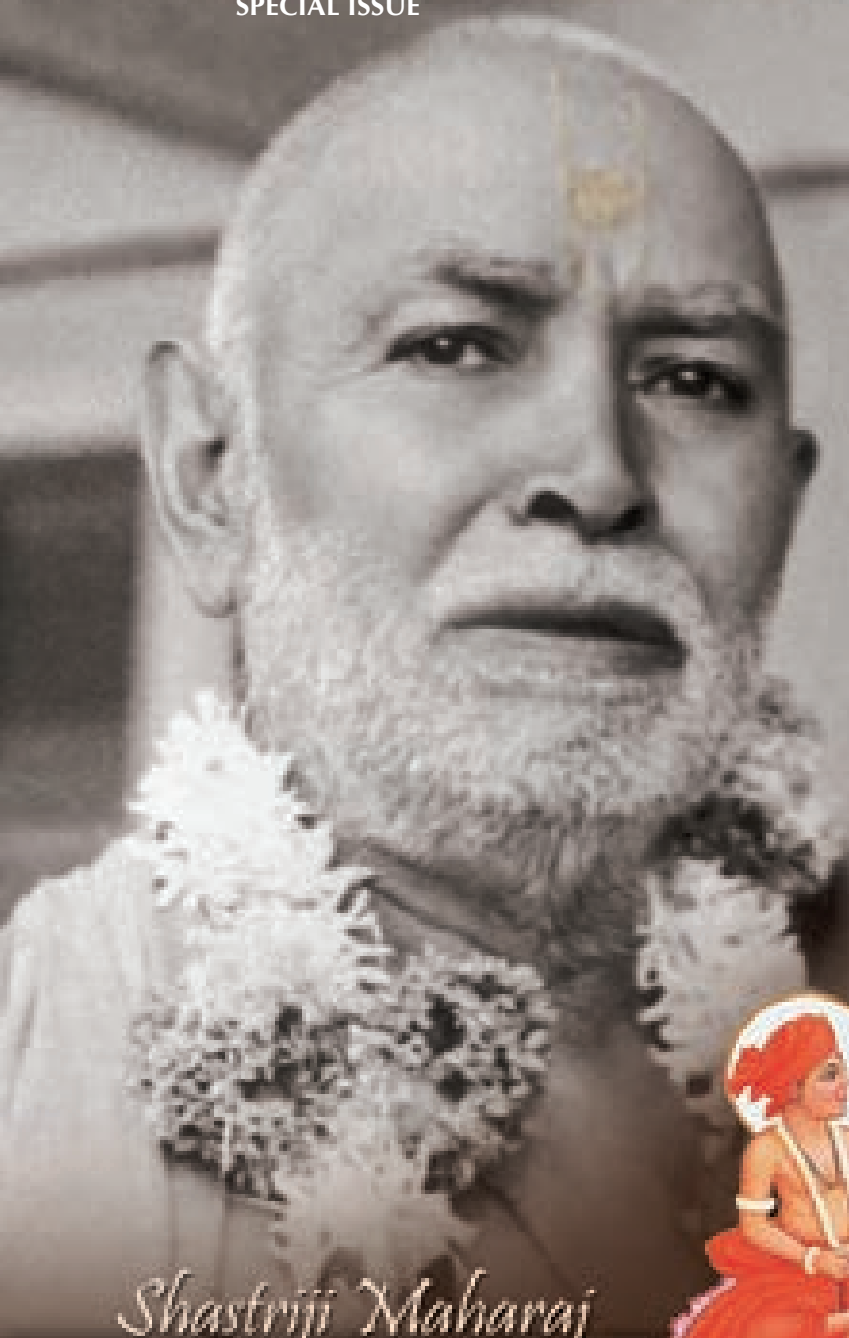


SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

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Shastriji Maharaj
A Great Leader

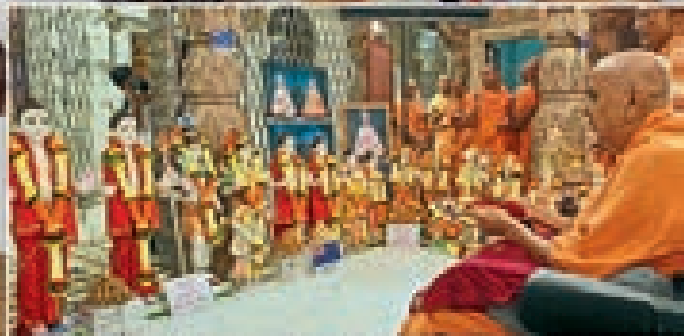


Akshar Purushottam Maharaj



HEARTFELT RESPECTS TO SWAMISHRI ON HIS 91ST BIRTHDAY, MUMBAI

On 2 December 2011, at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mumbai, sadhus and devotees offer their heartfelt respects at the holy feet of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on his 91st birthday.



In Mumbai, Swamishri performs arti of the *murtis* for new BAPS mandirs in India and abroad, and blesses all.



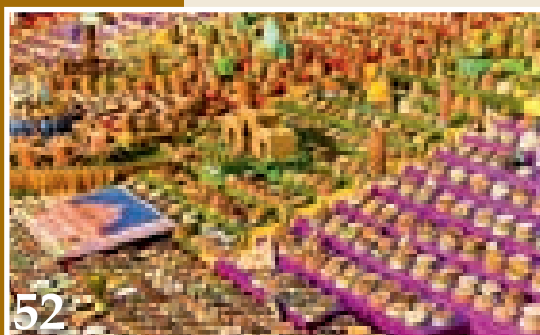
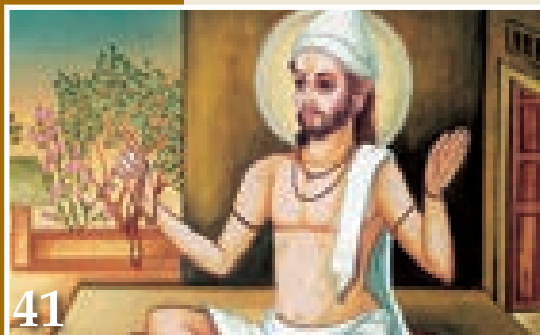
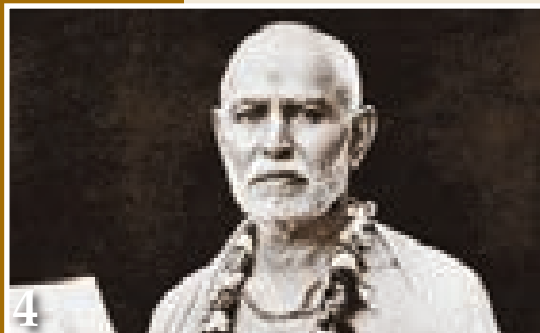
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Akshar Purushottam Maharaj



SPECIAL ISSUE

Shastriji Maharaj, A Great Leader

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

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FIRST WORD



An ideal manager can lead an organization to progress by practising the principles of management. But he may not prove to be a successful leader because leadership requires altogether different attributes. Therefore, it can be said that a successful leader can be a successful manager but a successful manager may not be a successful leader.

A step further, a successful leader can establish an organization and develop it, but an institution builder is several notches higher. The difference between an organization and an institution lies in how seriously their members take its basic values and principles and internalize them and identify themselves with it. An institution builder can also help intellectuals and spiritual aspirants to internalize those values. Not only that, he energizes them so much that they rise beyond their self-centred thoughts and strive to achieve the goals of an institution.

The world has witnessed many such institution builders. In the decades before and after India's independence, many personalities have founded prestigious institutions in various fields.

In the face of many odds during the British rule, Jamshedji Tata established a steel plant during the First World War to follow the western model for industrial progress. He also founded the

Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore and made a great contribution in the field of education before independence. Vishvasaraiya raised a hydroelectricity plant in old Mysore state. The Tatas also founded, under Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, well-known institutions like Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) with the help of the scientific acumen of Homi Bhabha, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Tata Memorial Hospital, one of the world's best known hospitals for cancer, and National Centre for Performing Arts. The All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), the dream of Pandit Nehru and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, was set up in 1942-3. Mahendralal Sarkar founded the Indian Association for Cultivation of Sciences (IACS) on the lines of the London-based Royal Institution where C.V. Raman did research and received the Nobel Prize. In 1944, Shri Ardeskar Dalal, then director of TISCO, floated the idea of establishing the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) on the lines of MIT after visiting America. Thereafter, the Government of India gave shape to it in 1961. In Ahmedabad Dr Vikram Sarabhai worked wonders when he founded the Ahmedabad Textile Industry Research Association (ATIRA), Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM).

Following in his footsteps, Vikram Sarabhai's contemporary scientists, Shri Satish Dhavan, Shri Brahma Prakash and Dr Abdul Kalam contributed a great deal in the field of atomic energy at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a unique spiritual institution was founded by the dynamic and bold Shastriji Maharaj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj founded the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) on 5 June 1907, enshrining the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in the small village of Bochasan of Anand district in Gujarat. The *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maha-

raj were ceremoniously installed in a majestic mandir. About 100 years before, at the time of the installation of the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan in Ahmedabad, Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself stated, "This Nar is part of Akshar and Narayan is part of me."

In order to spread the Akshar-Purushottam principle in its original form, Shastriji Maharaj founded this institution. Dolatram Pandya, a star litterateur of Nadiad, once said, "If he (Shastriji Maharaj) had not done this, Bhagwan Swaminarayan would have had to re-incarnate to do it." As Pramukh Swami Maharaj says, "If Shastriji Maharaj were not born, we would not have been introduced to the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. No one can really appreciate his efforts and divine powers with one's intellect. He internalized the *upasana* that Shriji Maharaj enunciated. Though he was frail, the power of Shriji Maharaj worked in him."

The divine Shastriji Maharaj had many beneficent virtues as well as such qualities which could help internationally acclaimed management experts evaluate him as the founder of a prestigious institution.

His outstanding spiritual personality was boundless and replete with divine virtues. He thus blessed countless with *moksha*. Sadhus and devotees of all ages who came into his contact experienced that Shastriji Maharaj showered them with the love of both mother and father. He wished liberation for all spiritual aspirants, however poor or illiterate. Just to please them he toured extensively, braving heat and cold, sanctifying their huts and homes and providing them succour in times of crises and financial constraints. At the ripe old age of 84, he gave discourses on the occasion of a *parayan* in Rajpur which such enthusiasm that could put to home any young man. When a devotee asked him to take rest, Swami said with a smile, "I always take rest seated in the *murti* of Maharaj but when I meet devotees like you, Maharaj asks me to talk. So I can't live without it."

Such epoch-makers have the ability to

transform the temperament, attitude, thoughts and behaviour of all persons who come to them. Sometimes only a brief meeting with him transformed the whole being of a person. When the mandir of Bochasan was in the making, the opponents contacted Hira Mukhi, a miscreant of Bochasan, to put obstacles during the construction of the mandir. When Hira Mukhi sponsored a meal for the BAPS sadhus in Bochasan Mandir, Shastriji Maharaj refused to eat. Shastriji Maharaj told him, “Your habits are unethical. I will eat only when you take vows and become a *satsangi* today.” When Hira Mukhi looked at Swami’s eyes, he felt a chill down his spine and experienced peace at heart. Hira Mukhi was changed to the core.

Then he used his courage for Satsang and in all projects of Shastriji Maharaj.

In Gujarat there were people steeped in superstitions and sensual pleasures. The ceaseless travels of Shastriji Maharaj and his sadhus inspired character-building in the lives of thousands of people. As a result of the simplicity, saintliness and discourses of the sadhus several notorious villages like Badalpur turned into satsang centres. The people of these villages began to live in honesty and morality. An outstanding characteristic of such an institution builder is that, “He creates a vision, communicates it to his followers and exhorts them to move towards that vision.”

Such institution builders are visionaries themselves and are also very clear about their goals. Not only that, but those who come into their contact develop an understanding of the goal and endeavour in the direction of that goal. They also provides persuasive communication for that.

Jethabhai (Swami Nirgundas) of Pij village was introduced to the glory and greatness of Bhagatji Maharaj by Muljibhai of the same village. When this bright and dynamic young man met Shastriji Maharaj at Vadodara mandir, Shastriji Maharaj talked to him for twelve hours at a stretch on the principle of Akshar-Purushottam

and convinced him of its truth.

When the construction of Sarangpur mandir was under way, the sadhus joined in the *seva* activities from early morning. One day sadhu Harikrishnadas was returning after a bath at the sanctified well with a pot of water perched on his head. At that time the Darbar of Jhinhjar commented, “Why take such pains?” Sadhu Harikrishnadas asked him to meet Shastriji Maharaj to know how important such *seva* was. The Darbar went to see Swamishri who, on the basis of Vachanamruts Gadhada I 71 and Vartal 5, explained, “Only the meritorious get the opportunity to serve the Sadhu of Bhagwan.” The Darbar was moved and he accepted Swamishri as his guru. Thereafter, he served the Sanstha.

Such institution builders have a deep foresight. They know what the coming decades will witness. Their forecasts are destined to be translated into realities. Their brooding is comprehensive. Their every step and work produce fruitful results in the future. They are also first-rate planners.

Shastriji Maharaj became poignant when his guru Bhagatji Maharaj passed away. But shortly thereafter he became calm and composed and made determined efforts to give shape to the Akshar-Purushottam principle. He thought of raising a large group of sadhus and devotees with robust faith in the Akshar-Purushottam principle. Then he endeavoured in that direction only. He toured Gujarat extensively and through personal contacts and discourses talked about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. He also selected devotees like Kuberbhai and Pujaji Bapu from Gohilvad in Saurashtra for the purpose. One satsang group regularly visited the villages of Sokhda, Sankarda, Vasna, Anjesar and Tundav in Gujarat. Outside Gujarat, Swami Nirgundasji toured widely in Mumbai, Konkan and Khandesh regions of Maharashtra. Swami Purushottamdasji and Pandya Narayanji Maharaj visited the other villages of Gujarat.

(Contd. on p. 14)



Shri Hari Celebrates the Devotion of Premibai

Shri Hari was residing at Vasta Khachar's darbar in Kariyani. After celebrating Diwali and Annakut he stayed on to give darshan and discourses to all...

THE PIOUS PREMIBAI

Premibai, a woman devotee of Deev, was seated in the congregation with the rest of the female devotees in Kariyani. Like everyone else she was engrossed in Shri Hari's darshan. At regular intervals, Premibai glanced at a small baggage pressed under her feet. Shri Hari had noticed this, and after a while he got down from his seat, walked through the assembly and came to her. Everyone was surprised to see Maharaj approach in this way. He had never done so before.

Shri Hari asked Premibai, "Sister, have you come to gift me clothes and jewellery?" Premibai was astonished by Maharaj's question. She took the bag in her hand and replied humbly, "Yes Maharaj. I have brought this with great care and devotion. I was eager to offer it to you personally but was confused about how to do it. However, you've come to me of your own accord and with compassion. Here Maharaj, accept this gift from a poor soul."

Shriji Maharaj took the bag and touched it with respect to his head and heart. He showered his grace upon her and returned to his seat. The entire congregation was amazed and wondered at Shri Hari's *lila*. Everyone in the assembly was awed at Premibai's devotion to Maharaj. In ad-

dition, everyone was curious to know why Shri Hari accepted her gift in this unique manner.

Shriji Maharaj then addressed the congregation, "Listen, O devotees and sadhus! Since many years, innumerable devotees have been offering me clothes and jewellery. But never before have I approached anyone to receive them." Then Maharaj told Mayaram Bhatt to open the bag and take out the contents. Shri Hari took the clothes in his hands and placed them against his body. He put on the jewellery and continued, "And, I've never explicitly expressed my joy upon anyone offering me a gift. Today, however, I am very happy with the devotee."¹ Immediately thereafter Shriji

1. Many months prior to her visit to Kariyani, Premibai had prepared clothes and jewellery to offer to Shri Hari. But at that time Mulji, a Brahmin of Rajula village, got news of her gift. Mulji was an adept swindler. He dressed like Swaminarayan, mounted on a horse and came to the port of Deev where Premibai lived. He proclaimed to her that he was Swaminarayan and thus accepted the clothes and jewellery she had reserved for Maharaj. Later on Premibai realized that she had been deceived. In spite of this, her devotion to Maharaj remained unshaken. She determinedly had another set of clothes and jewellery prepared and personally travelled to Kariyani to offer them to Maharaj. Shri Hari came forward to accept her gift because of her deep faith and devotion.

Maharaj donated the clothes and jewellery to Dinanath Bhatt. The devotees had, on several occasions, witnessed Maharaj's virtue of non-attachment and charity, but today the occasion was unique and memorable.

The assembly continued with questions from Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others. Shri Hari discoursed on how to erase envy in life, "Envy is the repository of all base instincts. The Shrimad Bhagavat states that a sadhu who is free of envy is blessed with Bhagavat Dharma. One who desires to tread the path of saintliness can erase envy in his life.

"The three causes of envy are desires for women, wealth and sumptuous food. However, if one is above these three weaknesses then his envy is born of ego. My act of giving away these clothes to Dinanath Bhatt must have aroused envy in someone. An envious person cannot appreciate, 'Glory to the one who gifted the clothes to Maharaj, and glory to Shri Hari for donating them to a Brahmin.' But one afflicted with envy simply burns within on seeing the donor donating and the receiver accepting.

"I am not in the least tainted by lust, anger, greed, ego, envy and jealousy in my heart. I am intensely averse to the five sense objects related to mundane word, touch, beauty, taste and smell.

"Whatever I accept in the form of food, clothes and other objects I do so after perceiving the devotees' devotion, but never for the sake of happiness and comfort for my body. I eat, drink and accept clothes for the cause of [spiritual elevation of] sadhus and devotees. However, when I feel it is not so for them but for myself, I renounce the objects instantly. I have totally dedicated my life to God's devotees who are committed to him in mind, action and word. Thus, I am bound to whoever is a true devotee of God. And the objects and wealth of the fourteen worlds are trifle to me."²

Shri Hari thus cheerfully celebrated the festivals of Diwali and Annakut in Kariyani. He blessed thousands of devotees, who had travelled from all regions, with his divine joy and wisdom.

Maharaj also wished to celebrate Prabodhini Ekadashi in Kariyani. Since the village was idyllic, each day Shri Hari discoursed at length and with profundity. On the day before *ekadashi* Maharaj's health declined. The mercury outside dipped further that night. A fire stove was ignited to keep Maharaj's room warm. Shri Hari asked Muktanand Swami to check his pulse. Swami replied, "Maharaj, you are unwell. It seems that times are hard for the devotees too, because you are the soul of all devotees. Your illness produces sadness in our hearts."

In reply, Shriji Maharaj talked about engaging oneself in austerities and his deep inclination for them. He explained, "It's been twenty-one years since the day I met Ramamand Swami. During this period I have come across hundreds of devotees who have offered me a variety of clothes, embellishments and food items. But, never have I become desirous of or attached to those gifts. The reason is because I am strongly inclined towards renunciation." Shri Hari then elaborated upon God's doership and the principle of offering bhakti to God with a spirit of servitude.

A few days later Maharaj got well. He celebrated the festival of Kartak Punam (Dev Diwali) and left for Loya. On the way he halted at the *darbar* of Hamir Khachar in Botad. Sura Khachar of Loya arrived there on that day. Maharaj asked, "Why have you come here?"

"For your darshan, and the other reason I'll tell you in private," Sura Khachar replied.

Shri Hari smiled and said, "Everyone present here is personal, so you might as well say it."

Sura Khachar was a little perplexed, but he began, "Maharaj, there's no problem in telling you here, but if you do not agree to and abide by

2. Vachanamrut, Kariyani 6

what I ask, I'll be in serious trouble."

Maharaj was a little amused at Sura Khachar's words, so he bantered, "What type of trouble will you land in?"

SURA KHACHAR'S TROUBLE

Sura Khachar spiced up his conversation, "I've been sent to bring you to Loya."

"By whom?" Maharaj asked amusingly.

"My wife. And, besides, who else could have the audacity to say so!"

"But what sort of trouble are you referring to?" Maharaj prodded.

"The problem could be big. See, you are God. And, supposing if you do not accept or agree to come!" Sura Khachar spoke earnestly.

"Then so what? If I am unable to come now I'll come later. My absence will not make Loya desolate and barren," Maharaj argued.

"O Maharaj, it would be too much. I was afraid you would say that. Oh, it's too much for me to bear," Sura Khachar replied anxiously.

"But how can it be too much for you? What sort of trouble are you talking of? Pardon me, but I fail to understand your words," Maharaj revealed.

"Maharaj, I would be in shambles."

The small congregation was avidly listening, but no one could plumb Sura Khachar's frustration. Shri Hari was in a jocular mood today. He pressed on further, "First, talk about your trouble and then about other things."

Sura Khachar took off his head gear (*fento*) and threw it in Shri Hari's lap, "Maharaj, if you do not come to Loya then I'll have to become a sadhu, because my wife has ordered so."

Shri Hari was amused. He smilingly added, "What's wrong with that? I'm ready to shave your head and give you the sadhu *diksha*."

"But Maharaj, you had once got my head tonsured and given *diksha*. And then you sent me back home. If you were to do this again, what prestige would I have left in my commu-

nity!" The entire assembly broke out in guffaws.

At that time Jivuba interrupted by conveying through Dada Khachar that Maharaj must come straight to Gadhada. The reason was that the brinjals in Lakshmivadi had turned out to be extraordinary and bountiful. She wished that Maharaj have them for lunch and dinner and also serve them to the sadhus. Shriji Maharaj agreed to Jivuba's request and declared that he would come straight to Gadhada. Sura Khachar sighed, "So Maharaj, you will not come to Loya! Then you might as well initiate me into a sadhu."

Shri Hari retorted, "Sura Khachar, are you under the sway of your wife or is she under your influence?"

Sura Khachar realized that Maharaj had amusingly wedged a question in the presence of all. In response, Sura Khachar shot back, "Maharaj, you are the master of countless universes and also the husband of Lakshmi (Lakshmi-*pati*), thus you are pleased on Jivuba³ and have agreed to go to Gadhada. If this is so for you, then what other fate can there be for an ordinary soul like me! It is of no surprise that I am under the influence of my wife!" The entire assembly broke out into peals of laughter. Shri Hari, too, laughed at Sura Khachar's repartee and said, "Dada, did you hear that! Sura Khachar has uttered a telling comment. Now tell your sister, Jivuba, that I'll not come to Gadhada. Instead, I'll have to go to Loya." ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

3. In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya Jivuba is believed to be the incarnation of Lakshmi.

BHAGAVAD GITA, ADHYĀY 2, BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA: A STEADY MIND

Part 8



Recap: In previous articles we took a look at Shri Krishna's pledge to explain yoga with the words 'Buddhiryoge tvimām shrunu' – 'O Parth, I will now explain the knowledge of yoga. Listen carefully' (Gitā 2.39). This yoga is conviction in the form of Paramātmā. This yoga of conviction in the form of Paramātmā is dharma. Thus, this is a special meaning of the word 'dharma'. Moreover, the glory of this special dharma is stated in 'Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt.' – 'O Arjuna, even the slightest practice of this dharma protects one from great fears' (Gitā 2.40).

MEANS TO ATTAINING YOGA

Now we will examine the teachings regarding the means to attaining that yoga.

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says to Arjuna, 'श्रुतिविप्रतिपन्ना ते यदा स्थास्यति निश्चला। समाधावचला बुद्धिस्तदा योगमवाप्स्यसि॥' – '*Shrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati nishchalā, samādhāvachalā buddhitadā yogamavāpsyasi.*' – 'You will attain yoga when your intellect, which has become unstable due to hearing a variety of words, becomes stable in *samādhi*' (Gitā 2.53).

This is a matter of stabilizing and clarifying one's intellect. Be it worldly or spiritual matters, a balanced mind is necessary. Intellectual stability means stability of one's thoughts; stability in one's decisions and convictions; stability in one's desires and ambitions. This is *sthitpragnatā* – steady-mindedness. Steady-mindedness is a test of mental health. Having a little intelligence is alright, but to be mentally disturbed is tormenting, detrimental, terrifying and destructive. The true picture of a man is painted by his thoughts, decisions, convictions and ambitions. One who has wavering thoughts has an unstable life. If one's decisions, convictions and ambitions are continually fluctuating, then one's whole life becomes disoriented.

An unsteady mind lacks adherence to principles. Such an unsteady-minded person usually does not trust others, is full of doubts and has a habit of changing his decisions without reason. He is continuously preoccupied by frenzied ambitions. He is over emotional. He is unpredictably pleased or angered. He is subject to intense and hasty over-reactions. He is unable to think of the situation as a whole. He is gullible. It does

not take him long to be misguided by anyone. He reads any old book and confuses his own thoughts. It does not take him long to turn back on his word. Many of these characteristics are seen in our own minds when we become subject to an unsteady mind.

Such mental restlessness is often the cause of negative emotions such as dislike, lack of enthusiasm and boredom. Mental disturbances such as worry, anxiety, rage, fear, delusions, addiction, vices and insomnia are also caused by such mental instability.

Arjuna was now a victim of such instability. His thoughts became confused, and so did his life. The instability of his decisions and convictions had shaken him. Shri Krishna Bhagwan could see this clearly. It was essential that his thoughts be steadied, thus he explained the necessity of a clear mind in the shloka mentioned.

A MIND STABLE IN SAMĀDHI

With the words ‘*samādhāvachalā buddhistadā yogamavāpsyasi*’ Shri Krishna has stressed on keeping one’s mind firm in *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is the pinnacle of yogic endeavours. *Samādhi* is when one’s *indriyas* (senses) and *antahkaran* become engulfed in Paramātmā. Therefore, *samādhi* is conviction in the form of Paramātmā. Only one who has attained unwavering conviction in Paramātmā has accomplished true *samādhi*; only such a person is a true yogi. Thus, Shri Krishna Bhagwan explains that it is impossible to attain such *samādhi* without mental stability.

Firm conviction (*nischay*) in the form of Paramātmā represents stability in understanding. In calm and clean water the full moon is reflected clearly and brightly, but, when a big rock is thrown into the same water, waves of turmoil are created. Thereafter, the moon and its brightness cannot be seen clearly. A similar thing occasionally happens to our understandings, especially spiritual ones. The reason be-

hind this turmoil varies.

Paramātmā is innocent, divine, compassionate, the destroyer of our miseries, full of bliss and the giver of happiness; there is no sin, *māyā* or selfishness, etc. in him – these are established spiritual understandings. We continually attain such understandings from our shastras and the Satpurush. Nevertheless, when we fall upon hard times, our understanding is put to its true test. Sometimes we may not make enough money, or may even lose what we have earned. We may occasionally be swamped by family problems, or come across social or business obstacles. We may even fall victim to illnesses or some other health problems. We may even be bombarded with insults. At such times, waves of doubts arise in our hearts. Our conviction in Paramātmā begins to waver – why does Paramātmā do such things? Why did he not find anyone else other than me? Why does he act in such ways? Many such doubts cause turmoil in our hearts, our thoughts become confused and our understandings are thrown into disorder. This is often referred to as having lost one’s mind. At such times, we do not know what to believe. This is what is called mental instability. Such mental instability causes doubts in one’s conviction in the form of Paramātmā. One’s peace of mind is lost. If this happens, one cannot master yoga and become a yogi.

Other than this, one’s thoughts are also obscured by desires for sensual pleasures, hence causing mental disturbance. As a result one becomes distanced from yogic endeavours, cannot focus one’s mind to meditate on Paramātmā and does not like devotion. Furthermore, there is a feeling of no worth to one’s day to day activities.

Sometimes, on seeing the human attributes displayed by Paramātmā, doubts develop in one’s understanding of his form. For example, on hearing the description of Shri Krishna playing *rās* with the *gopis*, King Parikshit became confused. A surge of doubts overtook him, and

he questioned, “Why did Bhagwan, the upholder of dharma, act in this way?” Thus, he began to doubt his convictions and his mind wavered. In this situation, how could *yogsamādhī* be attained.

To forget Paramātmā’s powers is also a kind of mental restlessness. Paramātmā is the all-doer – this is an eternal principle of the shastras. Nevertheless, man forgets that Paramātmā is the all-doer, and instead believes himself to be the doer. At such times, he has to face many mental challenges. Something similar happened here to Arjuna. When he roused himself to fight, he forgot the importance of the commands and wishes of Paramātmā. He forgot the principle that Paramātmā is the all-doer, and was blinded by the false arrogance that he himself was the doer. As a result his ego destroyed him and he became ignorant of dharma and his duty. He became disoriented.

What an irony! Although he had the direct yoga – company – of manifest Bhagwan in his own chariot, Arjuna was still unable to become a yogi. This is the powerful effect of mental restlessness. That is why Shri Krishna insists on keeping a stable mind.

A GULLIBLE NATURE

Shri Krishna has referred to Arjuna’s intellect as ‘*shrutivipratipannā*’. *Shruti* means to listen. *Vipratipannā* means confused. An intellect that has become confused by listening to variety of words is called *shrutivipratipannā*. Such a person is usually referred to as gullible. Another reason for Arjuna’s mental restlessness seems to be that he had attentively listened to somebody he should not have listened to. As a result, the great courageous warrior Arjuna was weakened to the state described by the words, ‘He felt weak... his bow was slipping from his hand’ (*Seedanti mama gātrāni... gāndeevam san-srate hastāt*); and he became ‘confused in matters of dharma’ (*dharmasammoodhachetāhā*). Although the great avatar of Paramātmā was beside him, he became ‘overcome by cowardice’

(*kārpanyadoshopahataha*). His enthusiasm from when he asked for his chariot to be positioned between the two armies was replaced by ‘I will not fight’. Although the listener, Arjuna, had made a mistake of listening gullibly, the words had still taken their effect.

The events prior to the Gita make one think deeply. Days before the battle of the Mahābhārat, the blind king Dhritarashtra thought of a plan. He called Sanjaya and told him to go to the Pandava camp. He, in detail, explained exactly what he was to say there, with exactly which words and in which manner. He knew that Yudhishtir was fond of dharma and that Arjuna was gullible, so he utilized all these factors in his plan. He was also well acquainted with Shri Krishna’s intelligence, yet he had left him out of the plan this time; the gullible Pandava’s were the target of his plot. It did not matter if Shri Krishna heard his words, but the Pandava’s should definitely not go without hearing them. Furthermore, the words were to be spoken to Yudhishtir, but Sanjaya was to take care that every single word be overheard by Arjuna too. This was a plot to shatter the Pandava’s enthusiasm for war, yet it was to seem like a genuine proposal for peace.

Dhritarashtra said, “O Sanjaya! Go to the Pandava camp and tell them that Dhritarashtra wishes for the good of them all. He constantly sings their praises and wishes for a peace treaty. O Sanjaya! You must continuously talk about peace and not get angered even the slightest.” He then explained exactly what he had to say. He praised the Pandavas extensively. In the end he gave Sanjaya an important guideline, “O Sanjaya! Take care that not a single word of yours angers the Pandavas in any way, or becomes the cause of war.”

Each word of Dhritarashtra seemed to reveal his soft corner for the Pandavas. Those words bore the capacity to win over the Pandava’s emotions in the blink of an eye. Anybody who heard

these words would think that Dhritarashtra was utterly opposed to war, such was their spell.

Sanjaya went to the camp of the Pandavas and began with the words, ‘अजातशत्रुं च वृकोदरं च धनञ्जयं माद्रवतीसुतौ च । आमन्त्रये वासुदेवं च शौरिं युयुधानं चेकितानं विराटम् ॥’ – ‘*Ajātashatrum cha Vrukodaram cha Dhananjayam Mādravateesutau cha, āmantraye Vāsudevam cha shaurim Yuyudhānam Chekitānam Virātam.*’ – ‘O one who bears no enmity, Yudishthir, Bhim, Arjuna, Nakul, Sahadev, the son of Vasudev – Shri Krishna, Sātyaki, Chekitān and Virāt are all invited to hear my message’(Mahābhārat, Utsav Parva 25.2). Having invited everyone to listen, he immediately turned to the Pandavas and addressed them directly. ‘सर्वैर्धर्मैः समुपेतास्तु पार्थाः संस्थानेन मार्दवेनार्जवेन । जाताः कुले ह्यनृशंसा वदान्या ह्रीनिषेवाः कर्मणां निश्चयज्ञाः ॥’ – ‘*Sarvairdharmaihī samupetāstu Pārthāhā sansthānena mārḍavenārjavena, jātāhā kule hyanrūshansā vadānyā hreenishevāhā karmaṇām nishchayagnāhā.*’ – ‘O sons of Kunti, you are all full of qualities and dharma such as compassion, mercy and simplicity. You have been born in the noblest family. There is not even the slightest cruelty within you, you are generous, you are modest and know well the effects of your actions’ (Mahābhārat, Utsav Parva 25.2). ‘Moreover, O Pandavas, you who have gathered a terrific army and you are full of goodness. Improper actions would never befit you. Any faults in you would be as visible as a black smear on a white piece of cloth. O Pandavas! No sensible person would exert themselves to do such a cruel act as war, which results in complete destruction, grave sins and hell, regardless of defeat or victory. Moreover, O Pandavas! If you kill the Kauravas, you will have killed your fellow castemen. To have killed one’s relatives would not be looked upon as something good. If you live, you will do so in disgrace. Such a criticized life is as good as death. You are the sons of Kunti, you would never do such things that befit only the inferior. There is no spiritual or economic benefit in such things. I have come to make a hum-

ble request. Think of a way in which the good of the entire family would come about.’ Finally, Sanjaya concluded his address to Shri Krishna and Arjuna. He said, ‘न ह्येवमेवं वचनं वासुदेवो धनंजयो वा जातु किञ्चिन्न कुर्यात्’ – ‘*Na hyevamevam vachanam Vāsudevo Dhananjayo vā jātu kinchinna kuryāt*’ – ‘I have faith that at least Shri Krishna or Arjuna will not let my request go astray. Not only that, if his life was asked for, Arjuna would give that too, then what remains to be said about other things’ (Mahābhārat, Utsav Parva 25.6-15).

Sanjaya’s address concluded. Yuddhishtir gave the answer on behalf of them all. Shri Krishna also let everyone know of his opinion and sent a message for Dhritarashtra accordingly. Days passed. The decision for war had already been made. The true effect of these words were realized when they affected Arjuna, who was ready to fight on the battlefield. If we read Arjuna’s words of the first *adhyāy*, we will see the results of Dhritarashtra’s plot. The words got to his head, his thoughts became confused, doubts seized his heart. His courage to fight suddenly melted, he forgot his duty and became obstinate in not wanting to fight. Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami has said that a person becomes like the words he hears. Arjuna is a perfect example of this.

That is why Shri Krishna discloses this truth to Arjuna and says, ‘*Shrutivipratipannā te yadā sthāsyati nishchalā*’ – ‘Steady your mind, which has become restless due to hearing a variety of words; you will not be able to become a yogi without mental stability.’

CONFUSED BY THE SHASTRAS

Another meaning of the word *shruti* is the shastras like the Vedas. Therefore ‘*shrutivipratipannā buddhihi*’ means mind that has become confused by the words of the shastras. This is rather surprising, that the shastras themselves cause confusion! Yes, this can happen, but it is not the fault of the shastras, but of the method. Shastras like the Vedas are oceans of true and

eternal principles, yet if the reader tries to read them by himself, tries to understand them with his own intelligence and does not take the guidance of someone experienced to understand their true secrets, the shastras become weapons. Definitive statements become the cause of doubt, and one becomes restless in confusion.

This is another reason for Arjuna's confusion. He faltered from the means to understand the secrets of the shastras. He began to guess his own meanings. He was now trying to explain the attributes of merit and sin to Shri Krishna. He did not even realize that he was being fooled and misled by his infatuation. His words, '*Utsādyante jātīdharmāhā kuladharmāshcha shāshvatāhā*' (Gitā 1.43), and '*Utsanna kuladharmānām manushyānām janārdana, narak-eniyatam vāso bhavateetyanushushruma*' (Gitā 1.44) show that he has faltered in understanding the true meaning of the shastras. When this happens, one is said to have become entangled in the shastras. Somebody caught in this net misunderstands the shastras, and, moreover, does not understand what should be really understood. This is intellectual confusion. Arjuna too, was caught in this net. Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan has said, 'No one is able to understand the philosophical principles found in the shastras; in fact, all are confused by them' (Vachanāmṛt, Gadhadā I 7). Arjuna was confused.

Shri Krishna Bhagwan wanted to pull him out of his confusion; he wanted to free him from the entanglement of the shastras. He felt it necessary that Arjuna begin to understand the shastras using the right technique. That technique was to understand the shastras through the eyes of an experienced *shrotriya* guru. For Arjuna, Shri Krishna himself was that guru. Arjuna had to attach himself to him and become a *samādhinishth* yogi. For this reason, Shri Krishna brought his '*shrutivip-ratipannā*' fault to his attention. The message here is to have discretion in what and how one reads.

This history is truly worth learning from. We realize the close connection between words and our minds. We can clearly see to what extent words can affect the mind. We should properly assess what we read or hear.

That is why Parabrahman Purushottam Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan warns us saying, 'However, such discourses regarding the nature of God cannot be understood by oneself even from the shastras. Even though these facts may be in the shastras, it is only when the Satpurush manifests on this earth, and one hears them being narrated by him, that one understands them. They cannot, however, be understood by one's intellect alone, even from the shastras' (Vachanāmṛt, Gadhadā II 13).

Thus, the base for attaining yoga through a steady mind has been given in this shloka. ♦

(Contd. from p. 6)

From 1907 onwards Shastriji Maharaj started building mandirs: first in Bocharan, then in Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladra and finally in Gadhadā. With tremendous foresight, he also acquired large swathes of land in Kheda district for the upkeep of the mandirs. He acquired 4,000 *vighas* on the outskirts of Radhu, Nayka, Varsang and Kaloli with the assistance of devotees. The land was under the names of devotees, who farmed them for their own sustenance as well as to provide financial support to the mandirs. The

principle of synergy in management was beautifully illustrated in the life of Shastriji Maharaj.

Shastriji Maharaj's unique personality is reflected through the variety of roles he fulfilled: as founder, nurturer, builder, expert administrator, unique manager and other virtues.¹ ♦

Gujarati Text: A.C. Brahmabhatt
Translation: Kaushik Joshi

1. This special issue commemorates Shastriji Maharaj's 147th birthday festival on 28th January 2012. The articles on Shastriji Maharaj focus on his leadership and managerial skills which he harnessed to the hilt in enshrining the Akshar-Purushottam *upāsana* in mandirs and in establishing the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

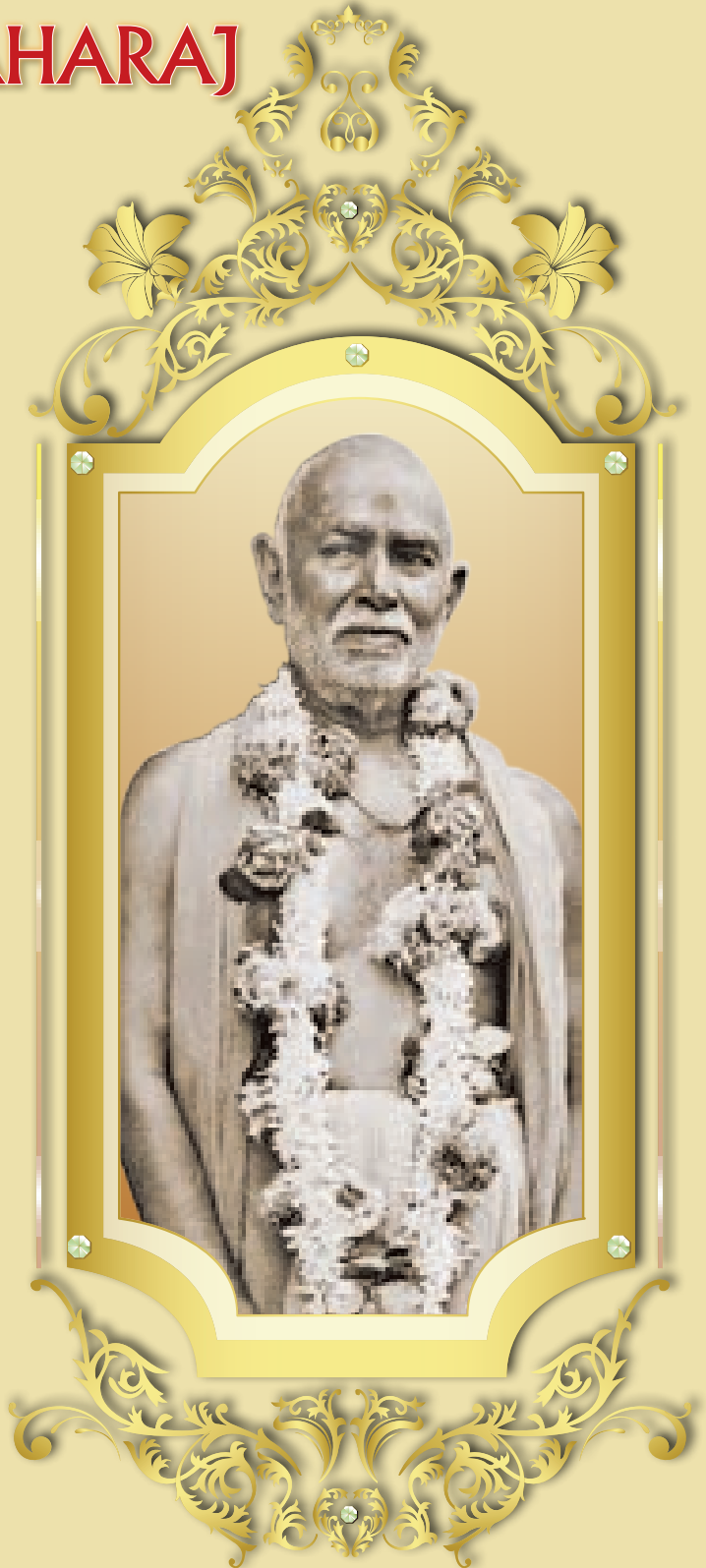
SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

A Great Leader

What qualities should the founder of a giant institution have? Modern management experts draw up a list of many characteristics; some of which are presented in this special issue.

Every characteristic is a management principle. We find that Shastriji Maharaj, founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, practised and applied all these principles during his life. A brief account of some of these characteristics is given here, though a whole book on each one can be written. When we look at this treasure of qualities, we feel that it is a source of inspiration for not only a founder of a spiritual institution, but also for a CEO of a successful business or the head of an ideal family. If not all, imbibing even one or two such qualities in one's daily life will prove to be useful.

The following articles were translated from 'Swaminarayan Prakash', February 2009.



1. HAVING A VISION

Translations of incidents 1 to 25 by Kaushik Joshi
Gujarati Text: Sadhu Amrutswarupdas



Shri Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

Vision is a sight into the future. A vision is not a dream, but a reality which is yet to take form.

A vision is not a figment of imagination.

A vision is an ability to look into the future and see the result of one's effort.

Shastriji Maharaj was an ideal visionary. Being a founder of an institution, he had also an ability to explain his vision to his co-workers. Management experts call it visionary leadership. It is the ability to explain the vision to people with him.

Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal with a vision. Dolatram knew it well. Dolatram Kruparam Pandya of Nadiad was a litterateur, scholar of Sanskrit and also a member of the Vartal Temple Board Committee. He did not like it when Shastriji Maharaj, a scholar and great sadhu, had to leave Vartal. Ten years after Shastriji Maharaj left

Vartal, Dolatrambhai met Shastriji Maharaj in Nadiad and told him about his confusion about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Shastriji Maharaj took this opportunity to explain his vision. He elaborately explained about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* with scriptural references and quotes from the Vachanamrut, emphasizing the principle of attaining the state of *akshar-rup* to offer highest devotion to Purushottam.

Dolatram could well understand the principle and congratulated Shastriji Maharaj. He said, "You have done what Shriji Maharaj would have had to re-incarnate to do. You have installed the *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami but in future your disciples will install your *murti* in gold."

The handful of sadhus and devotees with Shastriji Maharaj were empowered by his vision and they dedicated their lives for the purpose of *upasana*. In fact, they never flinched in their efforts, despite mounting difficulties and oppositions.

Shastriji Maharaj did not only see the vision, but he also lived it.

He told a young devotee, Hakabhai Khachar, about the BAPS mandir in Sarangpur, "People from all over will be drawn here."

In a letter dated 17 September 1939 addressed to his disciple sadhu Shrijiswarupdas, he wrote, "You may not foresee the future but I can see clearly that our institution will grow more in reputation and wealth than Vartal and Ahmedabad."

2. WINNING THE CONFIDENCE OF OTHERS

Sadhu Mangalvardhandas

Tolstoy has said, "Faith is the force of life." But to have faith in a principle personally and to inspire that faith in others is

altogether different. One can do that only if one has robust faith in a principle, sticks to the truth, and is unselfish and without hypocrisy.

Shastriji Maharaj was one such personality. He even won the confidence of Gordhandas Kothari who was a leading administrator of Vartal. It was very difficult for Shastriji Maharaj, who made a tailor and an unlettered Pragji Bhagat his guru, to win the trust of Gordhandas Kothari.

Gordhandas Kothari knew Shastriji Maharaj's abilities when he made him mahant of Sarangpur Hanuman Mandir. He sorted out the issue of a road passing between the mandir and *bhandar* with the approval of the Thakor of Limbdi. He also acquired about 85 houses adjacent to the mandir and raised the annual income of the Hanumanji mandir from Rs. 3,000 to 22,000. When other sadhus, with malice towards Yagnapurushdas, poisoned the ears of Gordhandas Kothari, he once told Kothari Khushal Bhagat, "There is no sadhu among the 2,000 sadhus of Vartal like Yagnapurushdas who has totally renounced women and wealth. I like

his speech, which is as sweet as sugar crystals."

It was Shastriji Maharaj's distinct ability to inspire confidence and trust in his projects. He even won the confidence of Vartal's chief *kotharis*, who had spotless character in matters of women and wealth. He won the confidence of Kothari Jetha Bhagat who worked as Kothari of Mumbai, Gadhada, Vadodara and Junagadh and Kothari Prabhudas who built a ghat around Gomati Lake in Vartal. He also won the confidence of Kothari Bechar Bhagat, Jeebhai, Shankar Bhagat, Chhagan Bhagat, Dhori Bhagat and Lallu Bhagat. All of them joined Shastriji Maharaj within six months of his leaving Vartal. They left power, position and wealth to join Shastriji Maharaj in his mission of establishing the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. It was indeed a monumental struggle; a great enterprise in creating an organization from no means.

3. UNIQUE AND QUICK DECISION POWER

Sadhu Vedantpriyadas

Taking decisions ordinarily and taking them in compelling circumstances is altogether different. Shastriji Maharaj could take such decisions with composure and courage.

It was the occasion of the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur in 1916 (Samvat 1972). After the *pratishtha* rituals the devotees sat down for their meal. A sweet item of *shiro* had been prepared. Some opponents came with an ulterior motive and tried to waste the *shiro* and create a shortage. The volunteer devotees were confused about what to do. They spoke to Shastriji Maharaj. He came there and began taking instant decisions. He called 300 devotees of Jhalavad to serve the *shiro*. To authorize them as volunteers he branded their backs with vermilion prints of his palm. Then it all worked well.

It was 1875 (Samvat 1931). Shastriji Maharaj wanted to build a *shikharbaddh* (spired) mandir

around the Akshar Deri, the cremation site of Gunatitanand Swami. But the king of Gondal state, Maharaja Bhagvatsinhji, stipulated challenging conditions in allotting the land for Rs. 25,000. His three conditions were: (1) To keep the Akshar Deri intact, (2) The mandir be built within three years and (3) To spend at least Rs. 10 lakhs.

Shastriji Maharaj had neither men, money, stones nor grains. Once, Yogiji Maharaj wrote in a letter to Shastriji Maharaj, "We have only Thakorji and eight *annas* [on account]."

Also, at the time, the mandirs of Bocharan and Sarangpur were still unfinished. In such circumstances the three conditions seemed impossible to satisfy. But Shastriji Maharaj had a rare decision-making power and confidence. He told the devotees, "Do not worry. We will spend twenty lakh rupees. Have courage."

Shastriji Maharaj's decision was not a blind

one. It was with vision, planning and acumen. Maharaja Bhagvatsinhji was also astonished because Shastriji Maharaj completed the mandir before three years and installed the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

Shastriji Maharaj was a sadhu of robust reso-

lution. He once said, “I have not taken any decision in life for which I had to repent.”

The profound power of taking quick and bold decisions is evident through the guru *parampara* – Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

4. AN EXPERT IN MANY ROLES

Sadhu Jaytirthdas



Shastri Yagnapurushdas defeats Mahidhar Shastri in a scriptural debate in Gadhadra

The founder of a mega organization has at times several roles to play. But to do it all alone is demanding. And to have an inborn capacity to do it is quite distinct. Shastriji Maharaj had that gift. Not only that but he excelled in it.

In addition to being a principled founder of the BAPS, he was learned also.

His teacher, Rangacharya, often said, “There is none like him in the Sampradaya” – “*Asmin Sampradāye ekameva.*” Shastriji Maharaj himself once said, “I completed my study in stages in about three years, which would take others 50 years to do.” Such was his sharp intelligence.

He was not a scholar of bookish knowledge alone. He defeated the renowned Mahidhar Shastri in a debate in Gadhadra. Later he explained the philosophy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to the renowned Advait scholar Jivanram Shastri of Rajkot and convinced him about its

veracity.

When Shastriji Maharaj discoursed on the Shrimad Bhagavat to the Bhagavat scholar Vishwanath Shastri, the latter complemented, “Even Shridhar Swami could not explain the Bhagavat like Shastriji Maharaj.”

Besides being a scholar and a staunch sadhu, he was also a culinary expert. He specialized in cooking sweet foods and vegetables, besides making *puranpuri* and Surati *dudhpak* (sweet milk with rice, etc.).

He had a natural capacity to do any work with excellence. He also possessed an expertise in architecture. Even eminent architects and engineers were impressed by his knowledge of construction and planning. He often made suggestions on various aspects of mandir architecture during the building of mandirs.

Once, he visited the workshop of sculptor Girdhari in Jaipur and saw that the feet of the *murti* of Balkrishna were not in proper proportion. He drew this to the attention of the sculptor, who accepted his error, and corrected the work. The *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Sarangpur is an example of his knowledge of sculpture.

Agriculture and running a farm for cows (*gaushala*) were also among the many activities of BAPS. He also had an uncanny sense of selecting a bullock for farming.

He would offer suggestions about what kind of land would be required for paddy, *tuver* and

wheat crops. He grew paddy even in the hard, stony land of Sarangpur. He also grew crops successfully on the lands of Shrijipura, Swamipura and Purushottampura.

Shastriji Maharaj played the roles of a sculptor, manager, an expert in economic affairs, an architect, treasurer and an agriculturist. Complementing him, Kothari Gordhandas of Vartal

once said, “Swami! You are an expert in shastras, renunciation (*tyag-vairagya*), bhakti, administration and also in choosing a bullock. Is there any thing that you do not know?”

In the words of Muktanand Swami, it can be said that Shastriji Maharaj was “*Sab guna pura-na...*” – “Full of all [divine] qualities,” and had the knowledge of many arts.

5. EARNESTNESS TO OFFER SACRIFICES

Sadhu Nirmalcharitdas

Shastriji Maharaj did not just ask the devotees to dedicate themselves for the cause of BAPS, but first he set an example by dedicating himself. It determinedly offered service with body, mind and heart. He lived each moment for the cause of the Akshar-Purushottam principle and *upasana*. He suffered a heart attack at the age of 85, yet he continued to work for this cause.

Once, Gulzarilal Nanda, who twice served as the acting Prime Minister of India, came for Swamishri’s darshan. Though he was unwell at the time, he spoke to Nandaji about Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. Babubhai Kothari did not like it. So he said to Swamishri, “Swami, the doctor has advised you not to speak. Why did you speak for two hours?”

Shastriji Maharaj said to Babubhai, “It doesn’t matter if I die while speaking about the Akshar-Purushottam principle. It would be worthwhile.”

Shastriji Maharaj was an embodiment of en-

thusiasm. Even in difficult times and circumstances, he worked tirelessly, regardless of his health.

About 60 years ago, Shastriji Maharaj travelled in third class by train and reached Muli station. It so happened that the host, Rupsangji Darbar, had not come to receive him. It was a dark night and raining heavily. Besides, Swami was suffering from rheumatism and could not walk. Yet he did not lose courage and patience. He crossed the Bhogava River on foot and reached the other bank after two hours. It was 11.30 at night when they reached the Darbar’s house. While all others were perturbed, Shastriji Maharaj’s face beamed with joy.

He faced all odds for the growth of the institution. The cause of spreading the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* was engraved in his heart.

He once told Harshadbhai Dave, “It would be worthwhile if I die while doing *seva* of Akshar-Purushottam.” Shastriji Maharaj’s sacrifice for the development of BAPS is an ideal for all.

6. ABILITY TO REMAIN STRESS-FREE AND KEEP OTHERS STRESS-FREE

Sadhu Sevanishthdas

Can a person remain composed and stress-free despite facing attempts to pierce large needles into his body, burn his eyes with

chilli smoke, and poison his food and kill him by other means?

Can a person remain stress-free with only

three *annas* in the account while the construction of mandirs of lakhs of rupees is in progress?

Can a person remain stress-free in the face of mounting opposition while engaged in making vigorous efforts as the founder of an institution?

Yes, he can! History is witness to it. Shastriji Maharaj was one such personality.

Finding him promoting the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in Vartal despite the opposition, Vartal's Kothari Gordhandas told him privately, "The sadhus here are up in arms against you, with crowbars and spades to root out your base. So I feel restless and anxious."

Feeling the *kothari's* affection for him, Shastriji Maharaj told him, "If we feel we are the doer of any activity then we will feel the weight of it. But if we believe Shriji Maharaj as the doer of everything, he will see to it that we remain unharmed."

It is necessary for any leader to remain stress-free in difficult times. But is that possible? When the odds are heavily against you, worldly understanding and abilities cannot help you to remain stress-free. In such times, only spiritual understanding helps. Shastriji Maharaj had that wealth of spirituality. That is the secret of his stress-free life. The letter he wrote to Nirgundas Swami at the age of 73 reflects his calmness and underlying spiritual understanding. He wrote, "We ourselves cannot do anything. Things will be done if Shriji-Swami shower their blessings and make it convenient. I do all that my intellect guides me to do and when I am faced with problems I leave it to Maharaj and Swami. Then the work is accomplished. So, the works of Shriji-pura and Junagadh have been left to Shriji-Swami. It will be

done as they wish. The mandir is Shriji-Swami's property, so they will take care of it. So there is no need to feel terribly pained. The projects of mandirs in Gondal and Sarangpur were also left to them. In Bochasan, it was the devotees' readiness that worked. Yet the problems were sorted out by Shriji-Swami. I take courage from this understanding. So, offer worship happily."

Shastriji Maharaj internalized the understanding that Bhagwan is the all-doer. So he always felt as light as a feather, even in the face of scores of problems. He often explained, "If one carries a pot of water perched on one's head, one feels its weight. But if one dives into the sea tonnes of water flows over one's head, but one doesn't feel the weight. So, if we are egoistic in our activities, we will feel the stress, but if we believe God to be the all-doer, we will be stress-free."

Life is full of struggles but when one happens to meet a great man, one feels peaceful. The presence of such a great man, who remains composed and cool amidst scores of troubles, also helps others around him to remain stress-free. All those who were associated with Swamishri in establishing the BAPS Sanstha experienced this, which is why they could wholeheartedly work for it.

Renowned advocate, Hariprasad Choksi, expresses his opinion in a letter, "During my association with Shastriji Maharaj, I drew great pleasure from his discourses and felt an intense inner calm." Shastriji Maharaj helped many become free of inner turmoil and be peaceful. He took care of both *moksha* and household affairs of the devotees of the Sanstha, thus combining spirituality with daily life.

7. EXPERT IN CHOOSING LAND FOR THE SANSTHA Sadhu Divyamangaldas

The cause of Akshar and Purushottam was dearest to Shastriji Maharaj. He often said, "I am a bullock of Akshar and Purushottam."

Just as a bullock works as directed by its owner, Shastriji Maharaj worked and lived according to the words of Purushottam or Shriji Maharaj.

Shastriji Maharaj did not choose cities like Mumbai and Ahmedabad for building mandirs to begin with! He chose rural places like Bochasan and Sarangpur instead.

Hariprasad Choksi, who was a Government advocate of Mumbai High Court and spokesman for Vartal mandir, once asked Shastriji Maharaj why he had chosen Bochasan for building a mandir.

Shastriji Maharaj replied, “Shriji Maharaj promised Kashidas that he would build a mandir. So, I chose it to fulfil his wish.”

Then Hariprasad asked why he had chosen Sarangpur also. Shastriji Maharaj replied, “Shriji Maharaj desired to build a mandir in Sarangpur and to fulfil his desire I chose Sarangpur.”

About Gondal mandir Swamishri said, “Sadguru Swami Balmukunddasji insisted on constructing a mandir above Akshar Deri. Just as there are Dada Khachar’s *darbar* and Gopinath’s *murti*, this is the place of Gunatitanandji, so I chose Gondal also.”

There were many obstacles in building the last mandir in Gadhpur. A mandir of marble stones was accomplished. Hariprasad Choksi said that he was one of those who argued that another mandir cannot be built there because there was already a Swaminarayan Mandir (of the old school) there. In reply Shastriji Maharaj wrote, “I will talk to you when you meet me in person. Shriji Maharaj desired to build a supreme mandir on the hillock there.”

And Shastriji Maharaj fulfilled that wish.

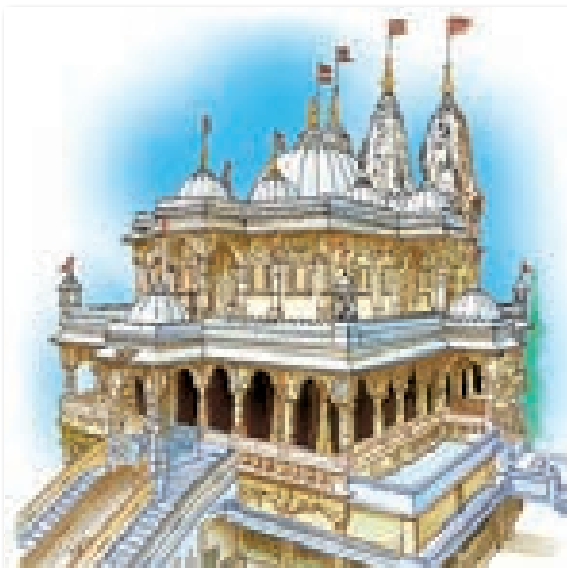
Despite all odds Shastriji Maharaj built the mandir on the land sanctified by Shriji Maharaj.

These mandirs are symbolic of his robust faith in the principle of Akshar-Purushottam, which in turn inspired faith in every disciple of the Sampradaya.

His vision to choose land for building mandirs was unique. He also inspired constant enthusiasm in the devotees.

8. DEVELOPMENT ALONG WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF PRINCIPLES

Sadhu Mangalcharitdas



First BAPS Mandir in Bochasan in 1907

When a person embraces a principle his development becomes bordered by a boundary. But it is hard for an ordinary person to develop an institution without compromising his principles. To remain staunch in his principles, a person has to strike a balance in his internal, external, personal and social personality.

Albert Einstein says, “Man is at one and the same time a solitary being and a social being.” This means a man has two personalities: 1. personal and 2. social. In his personal role, he tends to stick to his principles and likings. In his social role he is inspired to build relations with other people and spread his mission. Man’s greatness lies in striking a balance between the two. This was evident in the life of Shastriji Maharaj. On

the one hand he had robust faith in the principle of Akshar-Purushottam and on the other he had the goal of developing the institution which required co-operation from people.

When Shastriji Maharaj was building the Sarangpur mandir, the Thakor Saheb of Limbdi came to see Shastriji Maharaj and advised him not to install the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the sanctum sanctorum.

This sudden proposal raised two possibilities for Shastriji Maharaj. One was to say no to Thakor Saheb and invite his non-cooperation in the development of the Sanstha. The other was to agree to the proposal of Thakor Saheb so that there would be no obstacles in the building of the mandir.

Shastriji Maharaj cleverly found a solution against the proposal of Thakor Saheb. He told Thakor Saheb, “In the sanctum sanctorum, there will be only Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Since, I have become a sadhu for Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj only.”

Thakor Saheb accepted the explanation. Thus, Shastriji Maharaj did not displease Thakor Saheb and at the same time he asserted his principle.

While digging the ground for the foundation of Bochasan mandir, some pots of money and valuables were found. Shastriji Maharaj was informed by the devotees, but he was not tempted to use them in spite of facing a financial crunch. He instructed them to leave the pots buried in the ground.

Shastriji Maharaj inspired his sadhus to become scholars in Sanskrit and philosophy for the development of the Sanstha and also saw to it that there was no laxity in observing the moral and spiritual disciplines. Shastriji Maharaj achieved this balance brilliantly.

It was clear in the mind of Shastriji Maharaj not to compromise the basic principles of the Sanstha while seeking support of the people for development. This adherence to principles is central to the Sanstha even today.

9. EXPERTISE IN HARNESSING THE SUPPORT AND ABILITIES OF HIS DISCIPLES

Sadhu Bhaktiyogidas



Swami Nirgundasji

Shloka 66 of the Shikshapatri reflects the principle of discretion required by founders of successful and large organizations. It says,

“A person should be engaged for any work only after thoughtfully considering his abilities.”

Shastriji Maharaj successfully put this shloka to work. He engaged the smallest person as well as the eminent.

There was Sakar Bhagat of Limbasi village. He was quite thin and was suffering from asthma and cough. It was proposed to engage him in some activity of the Sanstha. But no one was ready to accept him. Everyone argued that he would be a burden because of his poor health.

But Shastriji Maharaj saw him differently. He said, “He would prove to be an asset to the Sanstha and he would be cured of asthma. I would like him to be *kothari* of the Akshar Mandir [Gondal].”

And indeed it happened so. Sakar Bhagat

joined Govind Swami in his duties in the *kothar* and managed the usage of ghee, gur and sugar. Then he administered the whole *kothar* of the mandir and served the devotees. He successfully managed the economic side also. Thus, he worked as *kothari* for 12 years and served the Sanstha.

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj could get things done by both the literate and illiterate.

The learned and intelligent Shrijiswarup Swami was also a good orator. But he looked after the lands of Chitrasar, Shrijipura and Purushottampura and also took care of farming. Once, Shastriji Maharaj relieved him of that work and engaged him in spreading satsang.

Shastriji Maharaj had the ability to choose the right man for the right job.

Nirgundas Swami was well educated and intelligent. Shastriji Maharaj entrusted him to solve the problems of devotees and the Sanstha's administrative matters with the government.

Shastriji Maharaj had that rare ability to know the personality of individuals.

When he saw the young Shanti Bhagat of Chansad, he identified his mettle at first sight. He entrusted him the administration of the Sanstha and also appointed him as the President. Today we can see that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has placed the Sanstha on an international level.

Shastriji Maharaj was thus an able and unique human resources manager. He developed the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha successfully and easily.

10. CARING FOR DEVOTEES

Sadhu Kirtanpriyadas

The prefix 'abhi' in Sanskrit means 'facing' or 'towards'. *Abhimukh* means to turn one's face towards someone or something. In other words it means to take care of others. A successful leader takes care of his men and thinks of their interests.

Shastriji Maharaj was one such leader. He remained protective and worried about the well-being of his devotees.

Always Protective

Motibhai of Anand was a staunch devotee of Shastriji Maharaj. His house caught fire in 1919. The fire was extinguished with great effort and the devotees thought that the house was gutted. But to their surprise only the roof was destroyed and everything inside was intact.

Motibhai went to Shastriji Maharaj to inform him, but he saw that Swamishri's hands were scorched upto his elbow. He was surprised to realize that Shastriji Maharaj had put out the fire in his divine form.

Constant Worrying

An ideal leader constantly worries about his companions. He engages himself in sorting out their problems.

In 1920-1, Swamishri visited Sayajipara near Vadodara. Ashabhai and Ishwarbhai were not at home. There was a heap of fodder and *guwar* (vegetable) in the courtyard. To save it from being stolen or damaged, he laboured for hours to place it properly in the barn. Only thereafter did he leave to continue his *vicharan*.

Constant Care

In the Gita, Shri Krishna speaks to Arjun, "One who worships me with whatever feelings, I also worship him with the same feeling."

Bhagwan and his Sadhu fulfil the desires of their devotees and take care of them. Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, likens this to an Emotional Bank Account.

A person leans towards you in the same proportion as you fulfil their wishes. Shastriji Maharaj travelled extensively to please devotees like

Karsandas of Rajkot, Ramchandrabhai of Nadiad, Ashabhai of Sadhi, Kuberabhai of Bhavnagar and others.

Shastriji Maharaj worked hard in building mandirs as well as in meeting and pleasing his devotees. The devotees wished for Swami's presence in times of trouble as well as on auspicious or inaugural occasions. And to please them, Shastriji Maharaj travelled by bullock cart from Khandesh in Maharashtra to Saurashtra. At times he travelled by train in third class.

In his old age he had rheumatism in both legs and sometimes he couldn't walk. He was often lifted by attendants and placed in a bullock cart. Once, in reply to letters from the devotees of Khandesh urging him to visit their region, he ex-

pressed, "I will come if I get some relief and can walk. Be pleased if I cannot come."

Jhaverbhai, a leading astrologer of Sojitra, was to die two days before Shastriji Maharaj came. Shastriji Maharaj said, "You had told me to promise you to come at the time of your death. So to honour that promise, I have come delaying your death." After having darshan of Shastriji Maharaj, Jhaverbhai passed away.

In Vachanamrut, Kariyani 6, Shriji Maharaj says, "I have donated my body for the devotees." And Shastriji Maharaj's *vicharan* reflects this statement of Maharaj.

By his leaning towards the devotees, he inspired the devotees to have strong faith in the principles of the Sanstha and to work for it, come what may.

11. LOFTY IDEALS AND HIGH STANDARDS

Sadhu Brahmamanandas

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is wedded to Vedic and Upanishadic principles, and the spiritual and moral codes prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Shastriji Maharaj exemplified these ideals in his life and thus set an ideal benchmark for his sadhus and devotees. As part of their moral code the sadhus of BAPS strictly observe renunciation of money and women.

Once, in 1922, Shastriji Maharaj was in Anand. From here he decided to go to Sarangpur by train. On reaching the railway station with his *potlas* (baggages) he looked for some devotee who would buy a ticket for him and another sadhu. But he could not find anyone. So he went back to Anand, with the hope of finding a devotee. But there was no one. The devotees of Anand had gone away to attend a marriage ceremony. Motibhai of Anand was also away, in Radhu. Thus Shastriji Maharaj went from pillar to post four times. Finally, he came across Gordhanbhai, son of Keshavlal, who bought them tickets for Botad.

The incident was amazing. One who was

building mandirs of lakhs of rupees did not have money with him to even buy a ticket. Such was his conviction in observing the code of conduct for sadhus.

Another ideal of a Swaminarayan sadhu is observance of eight-fold celibacy.

Even at the age of 86, Shastriji Maharaj observed such celibacy. His eyes and forehead reflected the radiance of his robust observance. Shastriji Maharaj followed this discipline whether it was in old age, ill-health or a public assembly.

A Sanskrit couplet says, "The whole world is tied to women and wealth. One who renounces these two is Parmeshwar with two hands."

Shastriji Maharaj observed many such ideals. He established high moral standards even among his devotees.

His sadhus' exemplary lives of moral purity set a standard typical of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya in society.

The observance of such high moral standards by sadhus have been the backbone of the ideals which inspire the devotees even today.

12. TRANSPARENT PERSONALITY

Sadhu Vivekshildas

The founder of an institution can inspire the best ideals and moral disciplines only when his life is pure and transparent.

Some men succeed by what they know, some by what they do and a few by what they are.

You may find many leaders who succeed using knowledge and efficiency, but there are very few leaders whose life is like an open book in terms of mind, deed and speech.

Shastriji Maharaj was one such leader.

Shastriji Maharaj's personality was the same both internally and externally. His spiritual life and his administration were absolutely transparent.

There was not an iota of hypocrisy in his speech and mind. His frank, truthful and forthright nature reflected his transparent personality. The administration and principles of the BAPS were also transparent.

His letter to the East Africa Satsang Mandal in 1927 reflected such purity and transparency. He wrote, "I do not know to serve my purpose by telling lies to others. And in untruth lies immense sin. I would never insist upon you to believe what is not true. Therefore if you have faith in me and think that I am truthful, believe confidently that 'Swami is *anadi* Akshar'."

Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter to Nirgundas Swami praising his method of work and expressing his liking for it. The humble letter reflected Shastriji Maharaj's transparency. He writes, "You get bored when someone does not come to listen to spiritual discourses, is infatuated with the world, and shows interest and satisfaction in mundane things, yet you give him a new life and make him [spiritually] strong. Whereas I am disinclined to people who show off and are obsessed with worldly riches. I would not like to speak to them or meet them because they are proud of their money and power while we are proud of our

devotion and strong faith. I cannot accept that. I congratulate you that you have compassion for all people. Therefore, I was not inclined to come to Mumbai this time. I was not well and I did not feel like coming also. I cannot work with the vigour you have: going to the the bungalow of Nanda Saheb and to the hall in Matunga to please all."

Such was the transparent frankness of Shastriji Maharaj.

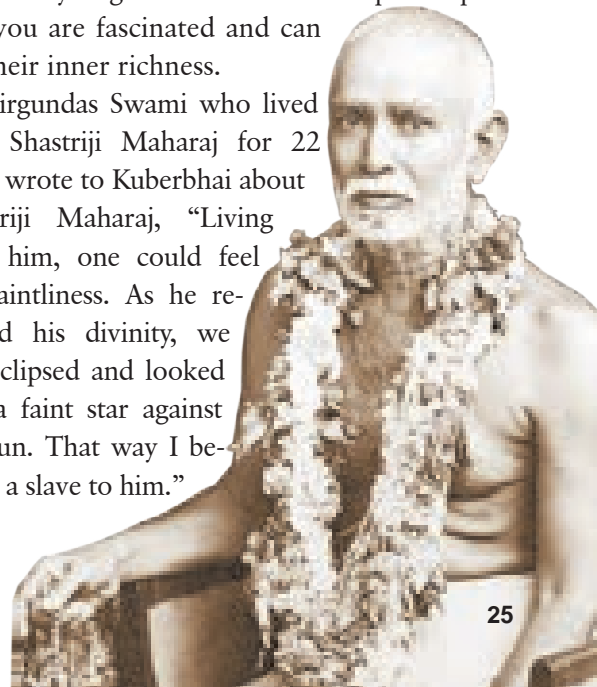
In another candid letter, Shastriji Maharaj wrote to Nirgundas Swami, "I feel sorry that I cannot come to see you often when you are with me. But when you are not with me, I think of you always. I hope you will pardon me of my tendency."

One who reveals his transparency does not try to impress others in any manner.

Once, Shastriji Maharaj was to go to see Thakor Saheb, the King of Limbdi. At that time, Shastriji Maharaj's dhoti was a little torn. Nirgundas Swami asked him to wear a new dhoti, but Shastriji Maharaj countered, "Will Thakor Saheb care to see my dhoti or my face?"

When you get close to such transparent people, you are fascinated and can see their inner richness.

Nirgundas Swami who lived with Shastriji Maharaj for 22 years wrote to Kuberbhai about Shastriji Maharaj, "Living with him, one could feel his saintliness. As he revealed his divinity, we felt eclipsed and looked like a faint star against the sun. That way I became a slave to him."



13. A SIMPLE LIFE WITHOUT EXPECTATIONS OF FACILITIES

Sadhu Varnirajdas

It was 1939. Shastriji Maharaj was 75 years old when one day he came to the residence of Babubhai Kothari after sanctifying the homes of devotees in Ahmedabad. Shastriji Maharaj always resided here when he came to Ahmedabad. Nirgundas Swami told Babubhai, “This place has a low ceiling and our *pagh* (head-gear) touches the ceiling. So, Swami has to bend to enter. Therefore arrange our stay at the home of Bhaishankar solicitor in Haveli Pol.” Shastriji Maharaj at once told Nirgundas Swami, “Shriji Maharaj used to live in a smaller house than this. This is Akshardham.” Ignoring the lack of facilities, Shastriji Maharaj’s perception of believing it as the *dham* of Bhagwan surprised the devotees.

Chandubhai Patel, education officer of Gondal state, spoke about the simplicity of Shastriji Maharaj on the occasion of his 81st birthday celebration in Bochasan. He said, “I say it on

oath that he has slept in a place infested with snakes, scorpions or poisonous insects without caring for his body. I have seen him supervising the quarrying of stones from the mine of Paneli and moving around in scorching heat without caring for meals for the mandir projects.”

Hakabhai Khachar, who was a witness to the simplicity of Shastriji Maharaj says, “Once, Shastriji Maharaj, his companion sadhu and I left for Ganod. In those days we had to travel by train. We had to go to Lathidad to catch the train. We reached Lathidad and the train was yet to arrive. At that time I saw Shastriji Maharaj sleep on the bare ground at the station. In spite of ants biting him he took the earth as a bed, his arms as pillows and the sky as cover.”

There was no place for facilities in his life. Inconveniences and obstacles could not deter him for the development of the Sanstha.

14. MAKING THE BEST USE OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Sadhu Atmachintandas

Human resources and material resources are the two important factors for the successful management and development of any institution. A layman would complain of lack of these resources and that is his weakness. Man would never be satisfied even if he has many facilities. A great leader, however, would use whatever facilities and means that are available to achieve his goal. That is his distinct characteristic.

In the time of Shastriji Maharaj the organization didn’t have money, materials, manpower or food grains. There was a dearth of everything. Still he made those circumstances his means and

employed them in building the Sanstha.

Here, an attempt is made to consider the material resources instead of human resources in the life of Shastriji Maharaj.

After offering *annakut* in Atladra Mandir Shastriji Maharaj visited Mathurbhai’s house. On returning to the mandir through the Choravala gate there were houses whose roofs were covered with new, indigenous tiles. Swami saw pieces of the new tiles scattered on the ground. Instantly he sat down to pick up the pieces. The devotees said the pieces would not be useful to cover a roof anymore. Swamishri said, “I know that.” Then he

continued picking the pieces. The devotees also joined him. They loaded all the pieces onto two carts and then unloaded them in a corner of the mandir grounds. Shastriji Maharaj revealed, “We have yet to build the living quarters for the sadhus, and these pieces can be used in the foundation.” Then he added, “Even great incarnations do not have the fortune of such *seva* for Maharaj-Swami, which we have got on New Year’s Day.” Thus, along with the right use of things, he pointed out the importance of *seva* also.

The Smruti Mandir land in Sarangpur was once rugged and full of pits. Shastriji Maharaj would sit there and get the pits filled. A devotee advised Swami, “Don’t waste your energy and money for improving the land. Instead, it would be better to buy agricultural land on the village outskirts.” Swamishri explained, “We are doing this to make a farm and grow grass for the cattle to eat. Then the cow’s milk can be offered to Thakorji. You will not understand that.”

Thus Shastriji Maharaj taught the devotees and sadhus to make the right use of things belonging to the Sanstha. This quality of Shastriji Maharaj is reflected in his life in the following cases:

- While cutting vegetables he would see that the ends of ladyfingers (*bhinda*) were cut properly.
- He would have the veins of *turiya* kept separate to add in the curry.
- He would peel or cut green vegetables in such a way that only a minimum part of them were lost.
- He would not let anything go to waste while

cutting spinach for cooking.

- Swami would ask to keep the threads and papers used in wrapping garlands for reuse.
- After visiting the lavatory he made economic use of mud for washing his hands.
- If there was more salt than needed to clean his teeth, he would save it for the next day.
- He would see that water used for brushing teeth or for bathing was not wasted and used for watering plants.
- He would see that not a drop of oil is wasted while overhauling the bullock cart.
- He would insist upon layering the bottom of the cooking pot with ash.

There are many such occasions in which Swami was frugal or made appropriate use of things. Whether it was agriculture or cooking, construction or travel, correspondence or satsang assemblies, Swamishri gave useful tips.

In modern times, leading companies and economy experts have advised economic use of one’s resources during recessions. In that context, the methods of Shastriji Maharaj can be useful to the world at large today.

Soma Bhagat was channelling water towards the farm, but because of the slope, the clay boundaries got washed away. So, Shastriji Maharaj asked Soma Bhagat, “I will sleep across the breach and you throw clay on my body.” In this way he made the water reach the crop. Shastriji Maharaj used to say, “We should use the body as a farmer uses a bullock.”

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj set an example of the appropriate use of even the smallest things.

15. A DISTINCT THOUGHT PROCESS

Sadhu Shrijikirtandas

Man’s advancement is limited by time, place and circumstances. Therefore, he cannot think further. The ideas of one who can think and rise despite such limitations in-

spire people at large for ages.

It was Shriji Maharaj’s wish to build an imposing mandir on the hill by the bank of River Ghela in Gadhada. And it was Shastriji Maha-

raj's resolution to translate that wish into reality. But the sadhus and devotees with him thought this was impossible.

They were right in a way because there were many factors which seemed to make it not possible: the *shikhars* and domes were still to be built for the unfinished mandir in Bochasan, people in Gadhada were not welcoming and accommodation was available only at Haribhai Mistri's house, people had made a strong case before the Maharaja of Bhavnagar to not allow Shastriji Maharaj to build a mandir, a fiat was issued not to allot land to him in Gadhada by Bhavnagar's Krishnakumarsinhji, and at 84 he was suffering from rheumatism and could not move about.

But Shastriji Maharaj had a broader and advanced vision. He resolved, "To build a marble

mandir with three domes. To build one that is imposing and could be seen from several kilometres. To build a ghat on the bank of Ghela river like the Manikarnika in Benares. To have 125 steps from River Ghela to the mandir. The ruler will change, we will get the land and the *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami will be installed." Today, the marble mandir on the hill by the bank of Ghela reflects the wonderful vision of Shastriji Maharaj.

In the face of all odds, he brought about a revolution of thought. He rose above all obstacles.

When others would not dare think, Shastriji Maharaj thought boldly and translated it into a reality. He was indeed an unparalleled leader and spiritual master.

16. EARNESTNESS TO LEARN AND TEACH ABOUT AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM UPASANA

Sadhu Achalmunidas

“Swami! You have lived long with Shriji Maharaj. Tell me, was it talked about at the time that ‘Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar’?”

In Surat, Bhagatji Maharaj asked Vignananand Swami, who had lived with Shriji Maharaj for 12 years. Hearing this, Vignananand Swami became alert. He looked around to ensure that nobody was listening. Then he said, “Yes, it was talked about in the time of Shriji Maharaj, and I have heard it from Shriji Maharaj himself.”

Young Yagnapurushdas, who had hid himself under the bed of Vignananand Swami, heard every word and became quite satisfied. When he came out from under the bed, Vignananand Swami was quite astonished to see him.

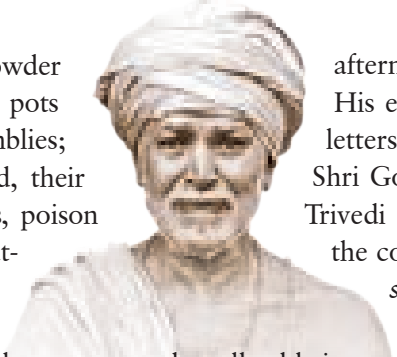
Yagnapurushdas asked him, “Swami, why didn't you tell me this upto now?” Vignananand Swami's answer was quite laconic. He said, “The fear of trouble.”

Yagnapurushdas sincerely wished to fully know the forms of Akshar and Purushottam, the philosophy that an aspirant can worship Purushottam only when he becomes *brahmanised*, and that one can become *brahmanised* only with the help of the Pragat Brahmaswarup guru, who is the gateway to *moksha*. He spent many hours at night with Bhagatji Maharaj to learn this and then would wake up his companion sadhu, Ramratandas, at midnight and talk to him about what he had learnt from Bhagatji Maharaj. His eagerness to learn this divine knowledge and explain it to others was unique. Once, while discoursing about Akshar-Purushottam in Atladra he forgot about having lunch until three o'clock in the afternoon.

Also, he didn't care for accolades or insults, cold or heat or hunger or thirst in spreading this knowledge. Troubles started when he earnestly started spreading the knowledge of Akshar-

Purushottam in Vartal. Chilli powder smoke was created and water pots were cracked to disrupt his assemblies; sadhus and devotees were kicked, their thighs were pricked with needles, poison was added to Swami's food and attempts were made to throw him in the fire.

His saffron clothes were taken away and he was compelled to become Dungar Bhagat from Yagnapurushdas. Yet, his spirit to spread the knowledge remained intact. He did not tire of speaking to Jetha Bhagat about the *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam from 4 o'clock in the



afternoon till 4 o'clock next morning. His earnestness is also reflected in the letters or words addressed to collector Shri Govindsinh Chudasma, Vinayakrao Trivedi and Harshadbhai Dave. He had the courage to give up the honour of a *sadguru* by leaving Vartal.

He was strong enough against all odds in spreading the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. He raised ornate mandirs, consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam, with courage and devotion.

Earnestness and courage is the sum total of his life of 86 years.

17. ABILITY TO FORESEE THE COMING CHANGES

Sadhu Yagnatirthdas

The world is constantly changing. But having the vision of the coming changes and the knowledge of their short-term and far-reaching impacts is not to be found in average leaders and laypersons. Therefore leaders of many organizations cannot endure such changes and the institution ultimately faces closure.

But Shastriji Maharaj was different. He could foresee the change, whether it was the Second World War or India's freedom struggle. During the Second World War, in 1944, Shastriji Maharaj told Khengarjibhai, "At present the Germans are showing their might in Europe and Africa, but have patience and keep watching. England will win the war." And the Germans eventually lost.

Shastriji Maharaj could see the past, present and future. At the time of the *parayan* in Karachi in June 1947, he prophesied to the devotees there, "There are very bad times coming ahead, so leave whatever you have and go back to your native places." And it happened with the terrible violence during the partition.

The devotees of Vartal had not yet realized

the potency of the frail Yagnapurushdas. They dismissed him as grass on the wall.

While installing the *murtis* of Ram-Lakshman in a small room in Bochasan, Shriji Maharaj said, "There will be a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Bochasan and the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj will be installed in the middle shrine. At that time these *murtis* (of Ram-Lakshman) will be also be installed."

Jhaverbhai asked Shastriji Maharaj, "When will the mandir be built and who will see it?"

Shastriji Maharaj said, "It will be built in two-three years and you will see it. When Nar-Narayan performed austerities in Vartal for five years the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan were installed in a *shikharbaddh* mandir. Likewise, these *murtis* of Ram-Lakshman will perform austerities here. Then, later on Maharaj will sit here with his abode." And on 5 June 1907 Shastriji Maharaj's words came true.

Swami was a visionary and seer of the future. When he appointed Pramukh Swami as the President, he said, "I leave the Sanstha blessed for a long time."

18. ESTABLISHED MEANS AND METHODS OF ADMINISTRATION FOR GROWTH

Sadhu Adarshswarupdas

The renowned philosopher Emerson said, “An institution is a lengthened shadow of its leader.”

For the long-term management of the Sanstha, Shastriji Maharaj established processes, methods and a hierarchy in administration. As Pramukh Swami Maharaj puts it, “Shastriji Maharaj has deeply established the Sanstha’s foundations to last for over a thousand years.”

The BAPS Sanstha, established in consonance with the principles of Sanatan Dharma and Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has its own unique character, which also reflects the personality and vision of Shastriji Maharaj.

Praising Shastriji Maharaj’s long-lasting managerial abilities, Manibhai Brahmabhatt, a former trustee of the Sanstha says, “The process and principles of management for the mandirs built by Swamishri has been federal. Every mandir manages its own affairs and is also responsible

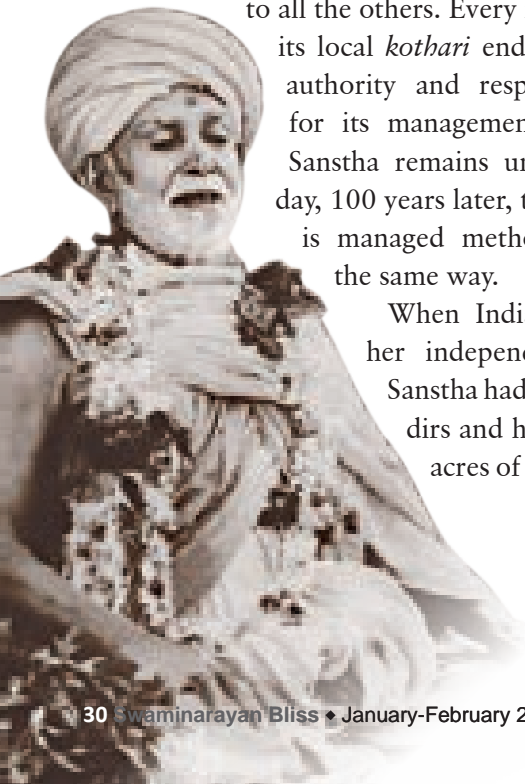
to all the others. Every mandir has its local *kothari* endowed with authority and responsibilities for its management. Yet the Sanstha remains united.” Today, 100 years later, the Sanstha is managed methodically in the same way.

When India achieved her independence, the Sanstha had huge mandirs and hundreds of acres of land which

Swamishri had registered as a Public Charitable Trust. Inspired by Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami had the trust deed prepared on 24 June 1947. Prior to that, Swamishri had studied the constitutions of several other religious trusts. Swamishri, after understanding the loopholes of other constitutions, which had led to ills in the administration of those organizations, framed the constitution of BAPS. Swamishri formed a committee for framing the constitution. Pramukh Swami Maharaj who was witness to it says, “The beginning was made by writing down the features of the constitution. Tulsibhai was appointed as the secretary. In the first meeting, Maganbhai and Nirgundas Swami proposed the resolution. Maganbhai was sent to Mumbai to consult the well-known High Court advocate Shri Hariprasad Choksi who advised, “Since it is a religious institution the trustees should be elected.” When Shastriji Maharaj read the suggestion, he categorically said, “I do not want elections in any form. In elections, anybody can be elected to run the Sanstha in their own way. Instead, there should be selection in which good, faithful, dedicated and helpful devotees be picked.”

Shastriji Maharaj could well see the ills of elections. He wanted to ensure an ideal [Sanstha] that was free of ills and with immaculate management. That was his goal, and the constitution was framed accordingly. As a result, the Sanstha has grown to its level today after 100 years and has developed its own unique impression.

It is said, “A leader should not have only a goal but he should have a clear vision in his mind.” Shastriji Maharaj established the BAPS’s administration, methods and processes with that vision.



19. TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AND HARNESSING THEIR TALENTS

Sadhu Bhaktikirtandas

It requires insight to pick the right people for the management and development of the Sanstha. But transforming the lives of people who lack values and to inspire them to work for the Sanstha is extraordinary. Shastriji Maharaj was one such person with that ability.

The life of Hira Mukhi of Bochasan was one of addictions and vices. No one even dared to lodge a complaint against him. Once, Hira Mukhi sponsored a lunch for sadhus when they visited Bochasan. But Shastriji Maharaj refused to eat. When Hira Mukhi requested, Shastriji Maharaj looked into his eyes and said, “Your behaviour is immoral and I cannot eat food sponsored by one who has strayed from dharma. I will eat only if you take vows of purity and become a *satsangi*.”

Mukhi was moved by Shastriji Maharaj’s saintliness and his spiritually radiant eyes. With remorse, tears welled up in his eyes and he agreed to wear a *kanthi*. Shastriji Maharaj placed the *kanthi* around his neck and said, “Your sins so far have been forgiven by God. Now, don’t commit new ones.”

Later, Hira Mukhi assured Gordhandas Kothari that he would help and co-operate in Shas-

tri Maharaaj’s projects till he breathed his last. And he did it with courage.

Shastriji Maharaj had that unique capacity to change the errant behaviour and beliefs of a person and inspire him to work for spreading his philosophical principles. One such example is that of Professor Jethalal Swaminarayan, who was an eminent mathematician, freedom fighter and an intellectual.

Describing his experience in a letter he says, “Influenced by today’s modern western education I had become an atheist. I was introduced to the greatness of Shriji Maharaj by Shastriji Maharaj. And only a great sadhu like Shastriji Maharaj could succeed in the difficult task of making an atheist into a theist. After that, at the word of Shastriji Maharaj, I began to write the Akshar-Purushottam Charitam, in Sanskrit. It has 6,000 shlokas. Though I am basically a mathematician, he inspired me to write about his divinity in Sanskrit. This is no ordinary miracle.”

Shastriji Maharaj also convinced intellectuals like Gulzarilal Nanda, Champakbhai Banker and Harshadbhai Dave, as well as illiterate people of small villages, and inspired them to make efforts for the growth of the Sanstha.

20. TURNING OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Sadhu P.J.das

Obstacles are part of anybody’s life. However, great men stand out by their tendency and response. Only the bold fight against or remain undeterred by obstacles, while the weak leave the work. Furthermore, great men turn obstacles into golden opportunities.

The learned and young sadhu hailing from a

high family became a disciple of Pragji Bhakta, who was an illiterate householder from a low-class family. This was one of the reasons why most people opposed Shastriji Maharaj. And it was like adding fuel to the fire when he talked about Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar and Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam. One

of his many opponents, due to ignorance, was Purani Morlidhardas of Dabhoi.

When Shastriji Maharaj narrated the principle of Akshar-Purushottam during a discourse in Dabhoi, many sadhus and devotees were impressed and drawn to him. After that Shastriji Maharaj visited the nearby village of Mandala at the invitation of the devotees. In his absence in Dabhoi, Purani Morlidhardas talked critically about Bhagatji Maharaj to his devotees, and tried to create a bad impression of Shastriji Maharaj. So, some of them were misled.

After some time, Shastriji Maharaj came back to Dabhoi. The devotees asked him who his guru was. Shastriji Maharaj was smart enough to sense that the Purani had tried to distort the matter. Shastriji Maharaj turned the situation into a golden opportunity and during his *katha* at night he explained the greatness of Gunatitanand Swami and guru Bhagatji Maharaj. The devotees were moved by the talk, which Shastriji Maharaj authenticated with references from many shastras. In fact, Morlidhardasji himself was moved by it and he tearfully acknowledged, “Wonderful Yagnapurushdas, wonderful! You have soothed my conscience today by speaking about it.”

Shastriji Maharaj’s life was full of obstacles, which he as opportunities and overcame.

Despite excelling in his Sanskrit studies, he

was compelled to drop them and was transferred to Junagadh from Rajkot. There he explained to the sadhus and devotees about the greatness of Jaga Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj.

When he was transferred to Hanuman Mandir in Sarangpur, he explained about the pure *upasana* to the devotees of Saurashtra and increased the income of the mandir ten times. He also enhanced the area and prestige of the mandir. There, he implicitly helped in the installation of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Vadhvan. But, people with malice complained about him, and he was called back to Vartal.

He also visited the regions of Charotar, Kanam and Bharuch and enlightened hundreds of devotees with the knowledge of and faith in Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

When finally he became an entity to reckon with, he was forced to leave Vartal for good. Thereafter, he built the first Akshar-Purushottam mandir in Bochasan.

In the autumn of his life there were proposals to make a compromise with Vartal. On hearing about this a devotee asked with concern, “Swami, what will be our fate if the officials of Vartal drive us out after taking away all our mandirs?”

Then, the beaming 85-year-old Shastriji Maharaj replied, “It doesn’t matter. We will begin again from scratch.”

21. INSIGHT TO PRIORITIZE THE RIGHT WORK Sadhu Adarshcharitdas

Rebecca Merrill says, “The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing.”

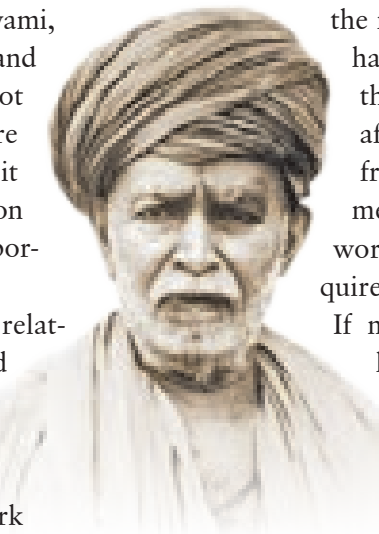
It is a challenge for even the best of managers to decide the priorities of work and see that the main work does not become subsidiary. Shastriji Maharaj was one such leader who could decide his priorities well.

When Shastriji Maharaj was in Sarangpur, his

foremost assistant, Nirgundas Swami, was travelling to villages around Bochasan. The devotees of Bochasan, Bhadran and Sunav requested him to visit their homes and said that if Shastriji Maharaj came, it would be better. Nirgundas Swami wrote a letter requesting Swamishri to come with five sadhus. For Shastriji Maharaj, however, the priorities were different. In his letter dated 13

October 1937 to Nirgundas Swami, he wrote, “Received your letter and read the news. The reason for not coming to Sunav is that there are important works on hand, and it didn’t appeal to me to abandon them. So, examine what is important.”

Another two instances were related to taking possession of land in Atladra and the collection of donations in Gana. To Shastriji Maharaj’s mind, taking possession of land was important work which Nirgundas Swami could do. But Nirgundas Swami wanted to engage Shastriji Maharaj in every work. In a letter dated 7 February 1942 Shastriji Maharaj wrote to Nirgundas Swami, “We have to sort out the acquisition of land in Atladra. The dealer is pressing upon us to pay



the money. To deal with him is in your hands. You can do it. If you take up the matter of getting land, I will look after the task of acquiring the money from Gana. If you insist upon taking me along, I will come, but the other work will suffer. My presence is not required for acquiring the land in Atladra. If my presence was needed I would have immediately come without asking you. Remember Maharaj and Swami, and do it with courage.”

Nirgundas Swami handled every task in the best manner according to Shastriji Maharaj’s the instructions. But Shastriji Maharaj’s own idea of priority was inspiring. His way of deciding priorities is a beacon of inspiration even for experts in time management.

22. SKILL TO INSPIRE TEAM SPIRIT

Sadhu Tapovatsaldas

An effective leader has the ability to inspire team spirit. Shastriji Maharaj was one such leader.

Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal on Friday, 13 November 1905 for the sake of a principle based on the Vedas, Upanishads and other Hindu shastras.

There were great odds against him – malicious men, obstacles and insecurity. People mocked him and asked, “What will he do with five sadhus and a handful of devotees?”

But their ridicules didn’t last long, because a proud team had already been grouped together. That was Shastriji Maharaj’s team. That team consisted of the experienced Nirgundas Swami as well as the young Aksharjivandas. The team also comprised of devotees of different castes, educations and ages. There were also rich, poor,

officers and working class people in it. It ranged from the national leader Gulzarilal Nanda to Dhula Bhagat who cleaned utensils. Such was the team. To an outsider it seemed impossible to unite them and get work done by them. But Shastriji Maharaj proved it could be done. All the members worked under one slogan, one central purpose and to achieve one definite goal.

Four months after Shastriji Maharaj had left Vartal, still no Punam (full moon day) had been celebrated in his presence due to his hectic travels to the villages to spread *upasana*. The first Punam celebration was held in Anand. About 800 devotees gathered. During the celebration a decision was made to build a mandir in Bochasan. The devotees pledged Rs. 40,000 for the mandir project. Such was the fervent spirit of devotees

within a short time of four months. The monetary pledges were made, but who would serve in the construction of the mandir? Whether young and old, sadhu or householder, educated or illiterate – all sacrificed with a spirit of belonging and devotional teamwork for the project. And soon, five mandirs were raised. Yogiji Maharaj says about that team spirit, “Fifty sadhus obeyed the order of Swami.” Shastriji Maharaj also used to say, “One sadhu works as would ten men.” What a great spirit they possessed!

Shastriji Maharaj inspired the spirit of *upasana* to such an extent that the sadhus and devotees worked till they breathed their last. For example, the unmatched earnestness of Nirgundas Swami to write letters containing 100 pages. Narayancharan Swami worked as *bhandari* all his life, while Bhaktivallabh Swami worked as *kothari*. Yogiji Maharaj served rigorously till the end of his life, while Pramukh Swami Maharaj today remains busy day and night at the age of

90 today. Devotees like Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan, Harshadbhai Dave, Ashabhai Patel and Motibhai Bhagwandas also served till their last breath.

The height of team spirit was the affinity the members had for one another: to sacrifice for one another and to tolerate and help each other.

Shastriji Maharaj was in Mumbai. His devotees, Ashabhai, Ishwarbhai and Motibhai, needed money to pay the revenue tax. Shastriji Maharaj asked Bhagwandas Sheth to help, and he did so without hesitation. Nirgundas Swami also asked the devotees of Khandesh to help and they did so by mortgaging their jewellery. Surprisingly, the devotees of Khandesh had not even seen the three devotees.

Shastriji Maharaj had shown, through his sadhus and devotees, a unique team spirit for all to emulate.

23. RESOLUTE TO MAINTAIN HIS VIRTUES IN DIFFICULTIES

Sadhu Adarshchintandas

Difficulties and obstacles test the greatness of any great man. A person may remain virtuous in ordinary circumstances but the approach he takes in difficult times decides his mettle.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj is an example of one who remained resolute even in the most difficult of times. Some examples are as follows.

It was the Kartik month of Samvat 1962 (1905 CE). In Vartal, there was a storm of protest raised against Sadhu Yagnapurushdas who believed and preached the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. Some people harboured malice against him since he was a virtuous sadhu and a large number of devotees were drawn to-

wards him.

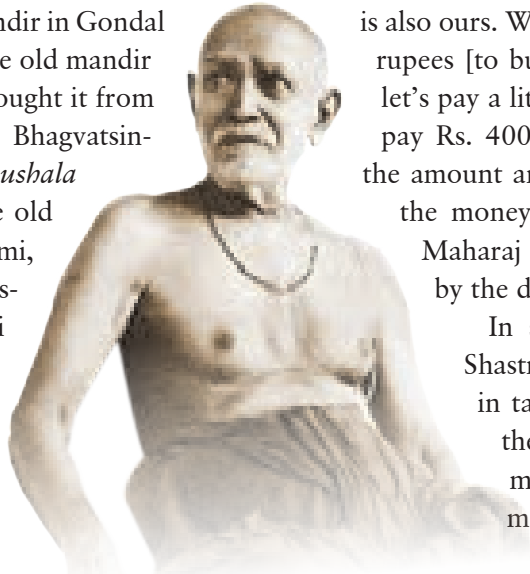
Then the protest and opposition reached its climax. Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal when he was urged to do so by some devotees. After leaving, he came across the police chief, Kishorebhai Patel, who loved and respected him. Kishorebhai was on his way to the mandir on having heard about the threats to kill Swami. He told Swami, “Swami, come back to the mandir. And give me the names of those who trouble you. I will send them to jail in Nadiad.”

Swamishri replied, “We don’t want to do that. We are sadhus, so we have to bear the hatred and insults of others.”

On hearing Swamishri’s words Kishorebhai was stunned.

The land of Akshar Mandir in Gondal was in the possession of the old mandir before Shastriji Maharaj bought it from the king of Gondal, Shri Bhagvatsinhji. They had built a *gaushala* earlier. The mahant of the old mandir, Krishnajivan Swami, proposed to collect expenses for that from Shastriji Maharaj. Some devotees advised Swamishri not to pay even a rupee.

But Shastriji Maharaj said, “The old mandir



is also ours. We are going to spend lakhs of rupees [to build the mandir here]. Then let’s pay a little more.” It was decided to pay Rs. 400. Krishnajivandas agreed to the amount and he subsequently received the money. The approach of Shastriji Maharaj was well appreciated even by the devotees of the old mandir.

In spite of a financial crunch Shastriji Maharaj was very liberal in taking the decision of paying the cost. Shastriji Maharaj remained virtuous even in the most testing of times.

24. BEING STRICT AND SOFT AT APPROPRIATE TIMES

Sadhu Vedsmarandas

Poet Bhavbhuti has said in *Uttar Ram-charit* that great men can be hard and soft at the same time.

A leader of an organization requires both these qualities to deal with various situations. Shastriji Maharaj had these qualities.

Once, two devotees of Mumbai told Shastriji Maharaj in Atladra, “You are the form of God. So, give us the numbers for gambling for the next three days.” Shastriji Maharaj was irked by this and said he never gave numbers.

The devotees said, “We have worn the *kanthi* of your Sanstha. So you will have to give the numbers.”

Shastriji Maharaj shot back, “If you are wearing a *kanthi* to get numbers, give it back to me.”

Both the devotees were surprised by the strong stand taken by Shastriji Maharaj, and they left the room. But Shastriji Maharaj immediately called his attendant sadhu and instructed, “Give them accommodation, then offer them snacks and tea, and finally take them for darshan.”

From this instance we can see that when it comes to observing a moral code, Shastriji Maharaj remained resolute in the face of any contrary proposal.

In the later part of this incident, he asks a sadhu to make all the arrangements for them, which shows that he was very kind and considerate.

Shastriji Maharaj was very strict with himself when it came to facing difficulties but on the other hand he was kind to the sadhus and the devotees in such situations.

Once, while getting off the train, Shastriji Maharaj’s head hit the wooden berth. At that time, Shastriji Maharaj commented, “The wood hit the wood.” He was tolerant of and indifferent to difficulties. Once he had a boil and rheumatism, yet he visited the homes of devotees in Dhrangadhra at the age of 84.

Shastriji Maharaj, who was tolerant and uncaring for his body, once saw Yogiji Maharaj bathing with very cold water in Koshindra. He was very merciful and asked a devotee to bring

a fire-pan to provide warmth to Yogiji Maharaj.

Shastriji Maharaj, who observed a waterless fast till the age of 75, was concerned when he saw others hungry.

In 1947 he was travelling by train to Karachi. On the way, Ashabhai's son, Ramanbhai, began to cry because he was hungry. When the train

stopped at a station, Shastriji Maharaj himself begged for *bhiksha* (alms). He brought *ganthia* (a snack) and fed Ramanbhai.

Thus Shastriji Maharaj had the radiance of the sun and the coolness of the moon.

25. TAKING CARE OF ALL DEVOTEES

Sadhu Vishvakirtandas

Man is a social animal, but he is self-centred. However, great men set an ideal of caring for others and a tendency to find one's own happiness in the happiness of others. That is their identity.

This story relates back to 1944. Shastriji Maharaj was in Atladra. At one o'clock in the night he woke up to answer the call of nature. He saw Khushalbhai walking worriedly. He asked him, "Khushalbhai, you have not gone to sleep yet?"

Khushalbhai didn't utter a word, but Swami perceived what was on his mind. Then he arranged a cot for him. He also gave his own mattress to him and told him, "You are a disciple of Bhagatji Maharaj and very pious. How can I sleep if you sleep on the floor?"

Like a mother, Swamishri cared for his devotees.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was suffering from dysentery in Rajkot. He was staying at Ada's shrine. At that time Hiribhai Chavda wrote a letter to

Shastriji Maharaj, "You praise Yogiji Maharaj a lot but he is seriously ill here. He has grown very weak. He cannot digest even a little food. Even when he eats only a little he has to visit the toilet five to six times. He doesn't take the medicines regularly. The sadhu with him also doesn't care for him properly. So, please send someone better to nurse him."

On receiving the letter, Shastriji Maharaj told Jagjivandas who was in his service, "Yogiji Maharaj is very ill and he needs a *sevak*. You work in a textile mill but resign and go to Rajkot by train this evening. In serving him, it's equal to serving Shriji Maharaj."

A few days later Shastriji Maharaj went to see Yogiji Maharaj in Rajkot.

He sent his own *sevak* for Yogiji Maharaj. That was how much he cared for his sadhus.

Shastriji Maharaj cared for all his devotees, rich or poor. As Pramukh Swami says, "Shastriji Maharaj was all love."

26. OUTSPOKENNESS FOR PRINCIPLES AND BENEFIT OF THE ORGANIZATION

Translation of incidents 26 and
27 by Anand Patel
Sadhu Adarshchintandas

Outspokenness does not mean that "I strongly utter whatever I believe in." In fact, it means striking a perfect balance by bearing in mind the feelings, benefits and principles of

the other person. A head of any organization can only become outspoken if he can achieve a proper balance between the three things.

Shastriji Maharaj had this inherent ability

since childhood. Recognizing this unparalleled talent in him, Bechar Bhagat, the assistant *kothari* of Vartal, proposed that he should help him in his work. But Dungar Bhagat, the childhood name of Shastriji Maharaj, clearly said, “I want to become a sadhu.”

The *kothari* was not satisfied with the answer and insisted, “Be a sadhu from within!”

Dungar Bhagat was small but his goal was clear. And so he firmly replied, “You become a sadhu from inside. I will become one when I meet a true sadhu.”

The incident that follows happened during the initial years after Shastriji Maharaj became a sadhu.

A month-long discourse on the Satsangijivan was organized in Junagadh. Shastriji Maharaj was the youngest of the four speakers. But on the last day a question arose, “Which speaker should be offered *pujan* first by the host of the *parayan*?”

Harilal Sheth, who had sponsored the *parayan*, announced that he would do the *pujan* of Shastriji Maharaj first as his discourses were the most enlightening.

On hearing this a few malevolent people disliked it and shouted, “Today, one whose guru is a tailor and a cobbler is being given a prominent status.” Shastriji Maharaj realized that because of caste distinctions they are denigrating Pragji Bhakta and Jaga Bhakta, who are great devotees of Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj was not one who would sit back and listen to such insults to his guru. He roared like a lion, “The right to become a guru is not limited only to an ascetic. Shriji Maharaj has also mentioned in the Vachanamrut that one cannot acquire the saintly virtues if one has pride for

one’s caste.”

The opponents had no answer to the bold statement of Shastriji Maharaj. When Harilal Sheth came to do *pujan* of Shastriji Maharaj he politely refused and said that the senior speakers should be respected first.

Shastriji Maharaj felt uneasy when there was any demeanour against the principles of *upasana*. In response he never hesitated in clarifying the matter.

Once, Shastriji Maharaj was unwell in Atladra. The then national leader and president of the Labour Union, Gulzarilal Nanda had come for darshan of Swami. During his conversation he said, “Swami, I do the *mala* by chanting your name. For me, you are God.”

On hearing this Shastriji Maharaj sternly rebuked, “You should not say like this. Swaminarayan is God. You should worship and chant the name of Swaminarayan. I do the same and also ask you to do that. This is my command. It would be a violation if you do not do so.”

Once at night Swamishri was resting in the assembly hall at Sarangpur. Some devotees from Africa came for Swamishri’s darshan. Ranchhodhbhai requested, “Swami, please give me some *prasad* for the devotees of Africa.” “What *prasad*?” enquired Swamishri. The devotees replied, “The footprints of your holy feet.” Swamishri refused sternly and said, “You can cut my feet if you want my footprints. We cannot worship the footprints of anyone else other than Shriji Maharaj.”

Once Swamishri was in Bharuch. He was unwell due to typhoid. Considering his age, weakness and illness the doctor advised Swamishri to have absolute bed rest. He added that his ablutions should be done in bed. But Swamishri



believed that the instructions of Shriji Maharaj were more important than the doctor's. In addition, he got diarrhoea. After every visit to the toilet he took the customary bath. Swamishri had always remained staunch in purity of mind and body and his firm aim was to obey the rules of Maharaj under any circumstances.

In a similar incident Swami was unwell while residing at Amblivali Pol in Ahmedabad. Naranbhai requested Swamishri not to have a bath due to illness. Swamishri told him, "Naranbhai, how painful would you feel if someone demolishes the house you built with great effort! In a similar

manner the Satpurush is a pillar of dharma and he inspires people onto the path of righteousness and devotion. If someone speaks ill about dharma how painful would it be for him?"

This was the remarkable trait of Shastriji Maharaj: forthrightness for the benefit of the organization, for the principles of the organization, for the members of the organization and for the safekeeping of the ideals of the organization. He spoke frankly not for his own interest or for his personal attachments. Only such a rare person can successfully balance the triad of feelings, benefits and principles.

27. INCORPORATING THE FEELING "I AM OF THE SANSTHA AND THE SANSTHA IS MINE."

Sadhu Dharmagnadas

"BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is mine and I belong to the Sanstha. It is my duty to maintain the good of the Sanstha. And for achieving that if I have to do all I can I shall consider it to be my great fortune." Isn't it a great achievement if every member of an organization wedded to do good for all believes this?

When Shastriji Maharaj laid the foundations of the Sanstha he had imbibed these feelings among the devotees and also ensured that it would remain for generations to come.

Devotees living in India as well as abroad have displayed this trait, whether they are rich or poor, ordinary or accomplished.

After consecrating four mandirs Shastriji Maharaj started the work of Gadhada mandir amidst much opposition. During his illness in Atladra Shastriji Maharaj was worrying about the Gadhada mandir. Champaklal Sheth and the then member of the Planning Commission for the Government of India, Gulzarilal Nandaji, visited Swami. Swami mentioned the dire financial situation for the construction of Gadhada mandir. Nandaji returned to Delhi and sent two

thousand rupees to Swami by selling his car.

In another incident while Shastriji Maharaj was in Atladra, Ranchhodbhai Umedbhai Patel of Africa learnt that the Sanstha was in need of money. On the very next day he donated Rs. 10,000 to Shastriji Maharaj. Ranchhodbhai had donated all his money which he had saved to spend in renovating his house.

There are innumerable incidents like these. For the service of the Sanstha devotees like Govindbhai of Dungri-Timba sold his horse, Narayanbhai sold his land and Bhudharbhai even tied up his wife. Even though Ashabhai's house was burnt down he borrowed five thousand rupees and donated it to the Sanstha. At a very old age he left his home to become a sadhu and serve the Sanstha. Devotees like Harshadbhai Dave dedicated their entire life for promoting the greatness and glory of the Sanstha. All the devotees of Shastriji Maharaj had only one motto, "I am of the Sanstha, the Sanstha is mine, and the benefit of the Sanstha is the goal of my life." ♦

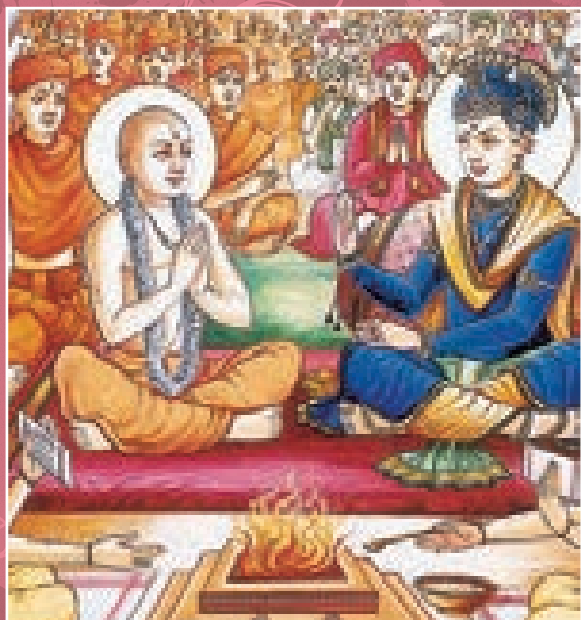
Hindu Festivals

January-February 2012

9 JANUARY 2012. POSH SUD PURNIMA AKSHAR DIKSHA MAHOTSAV

On this day on 20 January 1810, during the special *yagna* in Dabhan, Gujarat, Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave *diksha* to Mulji Sharma of Bhadra and named him Gunatitanand Swami. Gunatitanand Swami was the incarnation of Aksharbrahman, the ideal devotee and divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Today, there is a shrine on the sacred place of the *yagna* in Dabhan. Every year on this day a festive assembly is held in Dabhan to celebrate the occasion. It is thus an important place of pilgrimage for devotees.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan gives *diksha* to Mulji Sharma and reveals him as Aksharbrahman in Dabhan

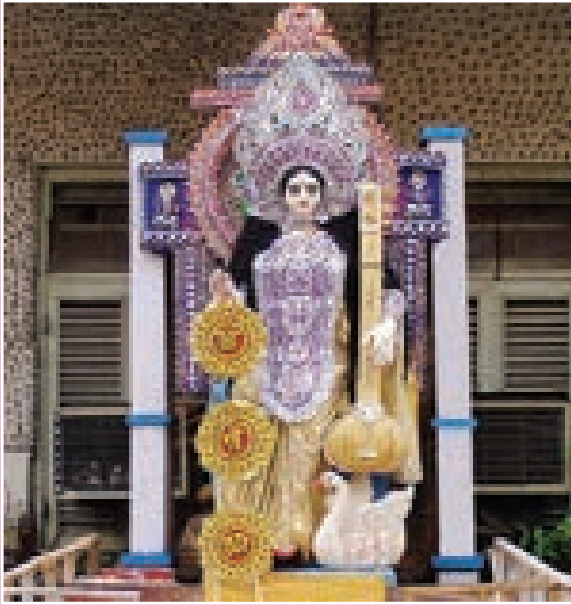
14 JANUARY 2012 MAKAR SANKRANTI (UTTARAYAN)

The month-long Dhanurmas festival ends on this day. The day marks the sun's movement into the *Makar rashi* – Capricorn asterism. The northward movement, known as Uttarayan, is considered auspicious and meritorious. 14 January is a day of donation of fodder to animals, grain and food to Brahmins and the poor, and money to Paramatma in mandirs. The northern path is also considered redemptive – the path to *mukti*, while the southern path symbolizes material pursuit and the gate to *Naraka* or *Yamapuri*. On this day pilgrims flock to bathe in Triveni Sangam in Prayag (Allahabad) in Uttar Pradesh and in Gangasagar in the Bay of Bengal.

In Tamil Nadu, a four-day period known as Pongal Parva is celebrated with as much zest as Diwali. On 13 January, known as Bhogi Pongal, the house is cleaned and the waste burned. On the 14th, Surya Pongal involves a special ritual of



Sadhus begging alms on Makar Sankranti



Saraswati puja in the streets of Kolkata



Milk abhishek on Maha Shivaratri

puja to Surya Deva and cooking pongal. Pongal is rice cooked in milk until it overflows from the pot. On the 15th – Mattu Pongal – puja is performed of cattle. The cows are beautifully decorated with beads, bells, neem leaves and bananas. The next day is Kaanum Pongal, on which business owners gift cash or grains to their workers.

28 JANUARY 2012

VASANT PANCHMI (MAHA SUD 5)

Vasant heralds the onset of spring. This day is especially celebrated in Bengal where Sarasvati – the goddess of knowledge and music – is offered elaborate puja. *Murtis* of Sarasvati are installed in beautiful *pandals* in streets so that passersby can offer obeisance and puja easily.

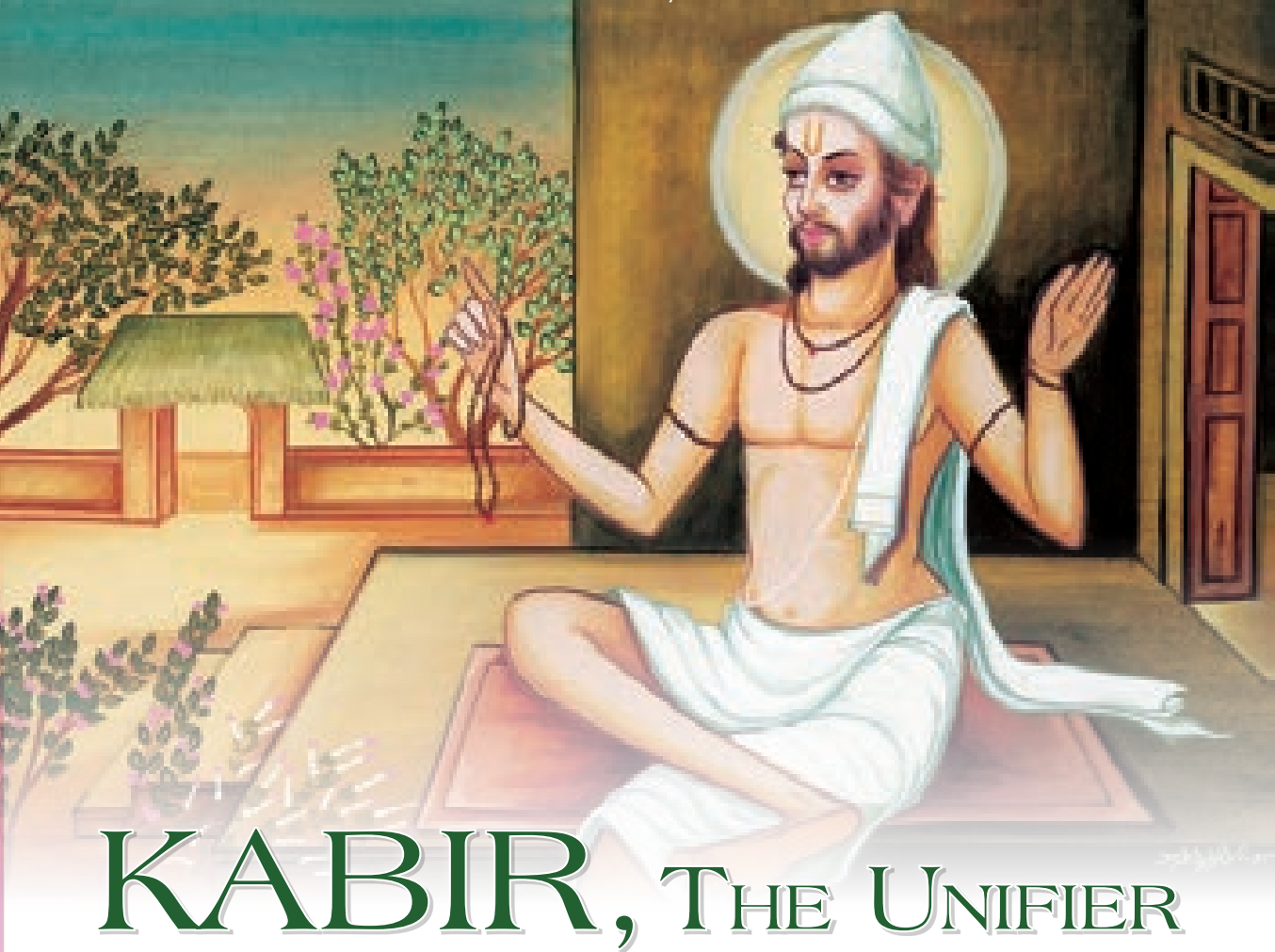
Elsewhere, Hindus also perform puja of the *Vasant kumbha* – a pot in which Paramatma and other deities are invoked. After *arti*, *naivedya* is offered of roasted grams, popcorn and dates. This is believed to remove excess *kapha* – mucous – formed in the body during winter. This helps to curb disorders common in spring, such as, allergies and hay fever.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, this *ut-sav* celebrates four important events, namely,

20 FEBRUARY 2012

MAHA SHIVARATRI (MAHA SUD 14)

Hindus worldwide celebrate this day on which Shiva manifested. This day also marks the appearance of the 12 self-formed *Jyotirlingas* in India. Devotees try to visit at least one which is nearest to them to perform milk *abhishek* of Mahadeva and offer *datura* and hibiscus flowers, *datura* seed pods, bili leaves, bael fruit and roasted sweet potatoes. In Somnath, the golden crown of Mahadeva is taken out only on this day in a procession through the town. In Gokarna, a coastal town in Karnataka, a huge chariot of Shiva is pulled by *pujaris* and devotees. People observe a *farari* fast on this day. On Mt. Girnar in Saurashtra, a massive *mela* is held on this day in which it is customary for thousands of sannyasis to bathe first in the Damodar Kund, followed by devotees. ♦



KABIR, THE UNIFIER

Kabir occupies a prominent place among the saint-poets of the medieval Bhakti Sampradaya. He cared more for the essence of religion than its rituals. He treated those who held a rigid position in matters of religion as misguided individuals who could not see the wood for the trees. He hectored such people in simple language much in the fashion of a stern schoolmaster taking a class of naughty boys. His first lessons were delivered in his native place Kashi, the seat of Hindu orthodoxy.

Kabir was an illiterate. His teachings have been preserved by his immediate disciples: Sur-at-Gopal, Dharmadas and Bhaggoji in *Kabir Vanis*, the sayings of Kabir. They are in the form

of *pads*, *dohas*, *sakhis* and *ramainis*; the first three are songs or couplets. In a couplet, in the *Bijak*, an important source of Kabir's life and philosophy, the saint says:

*Ink or paper, I never touched,
nor did I take a pen in hand.
The greatness of the four ages,
I have described by word of mouth.*

It is this word that is to be found in the *Bijak*, *Sakhis*, *Kabir Granthavali* and also the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scripture, which contains a lot of his sayings besides details of his life.

As for the medium, Kabir expresses his preference for the dialect of the spoken language of the day over Sanskrit in this *dohas*.

The language is also a jumble of Bhojpuri



Kabir Mandir near Kabir Vad, Bharuch

spoken in eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar, old Avadhi (Purbi), Braj Bhasha, Rajasthani and Punjabi.

The saint is unsparing in his criticism of elaborate rituals and superstitions. This naturally brought him into open conflict with the orthodoxies of both Hinduism and Islam. The pandits and mullahs tried their best to stall his efforts and physically eliminate him on several occasions. The saint persisted in preaching cult syncretism, unmindful of the obstacles these vested interests tried to place in his path. He kept an open mind and exhorted others to do the same. He succeeded in gathering a large number of followers around him. This naturally angered both Hindus and Muslims alike. The Muslims found that Kabir was not only running down the Puranas but he was not sparing the Koran either.

CORRECT ASSESSMENT

The best assessment of the saint's philosophy is to be found in the *Bhaktamal* of Nabhaji, a Vaishnava poet who lived around 1600:

“Kabir refused to acknowledge caste distinctions or to recognize the authority of the six Hindu schools of philosophy nor did he set any store by the four stages of life (*ashrams*) prescribed for Hindus. He held that religion (*dharma*) without devotion (*bhakti*) was not religion at all, it is *adharma*; and that asceticism, fasting and alms-giving had no value if not accompanied by adoration (*bhajan*). By means of *ramanis*, *sabdis* and *sakhis*, he imparted religious instruction to Hindus and Turks alike. He showed no partiality to either but delivered teachings beneficial to all. With determination he spoke and never tried to please the world.”

Kabir means the great, but the bearer of the name did not care for social status. According to tradition, the name was given by his adoptive Muslim parents Niru and Nima, who found him abandoned and floating on a leaf in Lakhtarana Lake near Kashi. He was born miraculously due to the blessings of Ramanand, a great religious leader of the times. It seems the father of a Brahmin virgin widow took his daughter for the darshan of Ramanand. On seeing the young lady he said, “*Putravati bhava*” – “May you be blessed with a son.” This blessing of the guru resulted in the birth of the infant, who was named Kabir. After his birth the young mother abandoned the child to escape social stigma. She was caught in the same dilemma as Kunti in Mahabharata and like the epic heroine chose the easy way out.

Kabir was born in 1398 at Kashi and passed away in Magahar in 1518. Some scholars dispute the dates but these are the generally accepted ones.

SIMPLE WEAVERS

Kabir's foster parents were Julahas (weavers) by profession. He took to weaving to support

his family and not to make a profit. What he wove for the day he would sell and support his aged parents and other family members. From this it becomes clear that he did not become a recluse. We get the names of four of his children from the Sikh scripture – two sons Kamal and Nihal and two daughters, Kamali and Nihali. According to the same source, his wife's name was Loi. Kabir spent most of his life in Kashi. Kabir has criticized Kamal for weaving to make a profit and for forgetting Bhagwan Ram.

That the saint did not become an ascetic is borne out by the following story. One day an indigent Brahmin approached him seeking help. Kabir had two pairs of clothes with him which he was about to sell in the village market. It was the first time that anybody had asked him for assistance. He gave one pair to the supplicant who wanted the second pair too, which Kabir gave out of generosity. This meant his parents would go to bed on an empty stomach. He was hesitant to go home empty handed. Then a man known to Kabir accosted him in the street and said, "Go home, otherwise your parents and family will be worried. Somebody has already supplied provisions for the entire month." Thus, Bhagwan Ram supplied his needs so that the family did not go hungry.

BHAGWAN RAM TO THE RESCUE

Kabir's foster parents belonged to the most backward weaver community who were recent converts to Islam – either from Hinduism or Buddhism. They were not accepted by either the Hindu orthodoxy or the elitist Turkish ruling class. In his sayings Kabir refers to Muslim masters as Turks, a clear indication that the recent converts to Islam, like Kabir's foster parents, did not enjoy any position or respect in the pecking order. But strange as it may seem when Kabir passed away at Magahar, both the Hindus and Muslims belonging to the Sufi sect claimed his body, so that they could perform the last rites as

prescribed by their religions. They were about to come to blows when, according to legend, a strange thing happened: the room in which Kabir's body had been kept was opened at the prompting from a voice from the sky. There was no body but only a heap of flowers, which the disputants divided among themselves and built a samadhi and a mausoleum. This clearly shows the tremendous influence Kabir had exercised over the contemporary society. What has been stated above is a broad outline of Kabir's life.

Scholars have woven the life story of Kabir from the warp and woof supplied by the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh sources.

A French savant, Prof. Charlotte Vaudeville, in her definitive biography of Kabir, *A Weaver Named Kabir*, says, "Being a man of the people, a poor artisan, Kabir could hardly have had any formal religious training; what he knew, he knew from experience or from 'hearing' alone. There is no doubt that he was, as P.C. Chaturvedi put it, a *bahushrut*, 'one who had heard much.' Living in and around sacred Kashi, he must have been in constant contact with the holy men of his times: pandits, yogis, Shaiva sannyasis, Vaishnava *vairagis*, Virashaiva Jangamas, *munis* and ascetics of every denomination;... which filled... the narrow lanes of the holy city of Varanasi. Jaunpur and Jhusi, sacred to Eastern Muslims and the residence of many Shaykhs and Pirs, were not far away, and we know that Kabir met them. This is the confused and somewhat discordant clamour that we perceive in his predication... He could hear what all those 'holy men' had to say, yet keep his own counsel."

KEEP YOUR COUNSEL

In one of his couplets he says:

*Saba se hiliye saba se miliye, saba se lijie nava,
Hāji saba se kahiye, basiye apane gava.*

*Mix with all, meet all, Take the name from all,
To all and everyone say: Yes, Yes; but dwell in
your own village.*

The saint travelled widely, visiting Mecca, Medina, Samarkand and Bukhara.

There is a great deal of confusion about Kabir's guru. Some say that the same Ramanand, who was responsible for Kabir's supernatural birth, was his guru. Others maintain that the saint did not specifically mention Ramanand as his guru. It is traditionally believed that Kabir once lay on the steps of one of Kashi's ghats. It was Ramanand's practice to go for an early morning dip accompanied by his disciples. As the guru was returning from his customary bath, his foot touched the prostrate figure of Kabir in the darkness. The startled guru exclaimed 'Ram, Ram.' Kabir treated it as the guru mantra. When told about this 'initiation', Ramanand sent for Kabir and inquired about it. Kabir stood his ground and maintained that when the guru uttered the words 'Ram Ram,' it should be treated as initiation.

It was usual in those days for people like Kabir to have a guru. Kabir said many things in praise of saints. One of the couplets reads:

*A saint retains his holiness
In the midst of ungodly crowds,
As the Malaya tree retains its coolness
In the embrace of a poisonous snake.*

One of the most important and oft-repeated sayings of Kabir is:

*Guru Govind dono khade, kisko lāgu pāya,
Balihāri gurudevki, jine Govind diyo batāya.
When guru and Govind (Paramatma) are present together, to whom should I bow first?
Glory to the guru, for it is he who showed
(me) Paramatma.*

It is inconceivable that a man with such views should be without a guru.

As Kabir's fame spread and he began to gather followers, both pandits and mullahs became incensed. The pandits of Varanasi banded together and conspired to drive him out of Kashi. A delegation went to Kabir's house and told him that their Assembly had passed a resolution expelling

him from Kashi as he was giving provisions and clothes to others without their sanction, and preaching radical views which disregarded the sanctity of the Hindu shastras. They told him he could be absolved of his sins by gifting 2½ *shers* of provisions to each of the 200 pandits who constituted the Assembly. How could a poor man like Kabir meet this demand? He was resigned to his fate and left his house. Then a miracle happened. A cart was seen parked opposite his house, laden with provisions, which were distributed as per the demand of the pandits. One of the recipients of the grains met Kabir and told him about the miraculous proceedings at his house in his absence. The saint was greatly surprised and the informant refused to believe that the saint was not in the know of things. Kabir realized that this was an act of munificence of Bhagwan Ram through one of his devotees.

Kabir spun a web of tolerance and lovingly impressed the people of his day in it. This has led to several interpretations of what he stood for. His legacy has become a very difficult thing to handle for succeeding generations. Most people are agreed on his saintliness and catholicity. He is acknowledged as a universal teacher who preached brotherly love, irrespective of caste, creed, social status and nationality. He has followers among the Hindus and Muslims. The Sikhs have gone a step further by including his sayings in their scriptures. His followers are called Kabir *panthis*, who divinize him. They are divided into eight branches. We do not find any consecrated images of Kabir in the Kabir Maths, but pictures show him dressed in the Sufi tradition. The Kabir *panthis* claim to be Hindus.

Kabir was greatly influenced by the Vaishnava Bhakti Movement. In his sayings he displays a deep knowledge of Pauranik lore. Through his sharp and sometimes sarcastic comments, Kabir trod on many a toe. His intention was not to wound anyone's feelings; all he wanted to do was to point out their untenable position.

PLOTS TO KILL KABIR

Once when Sultan Sikander Lodhi was visiting Kashi, Kabir was hauled up before him as one who was causing disaffection by propagating heterodox views. The saint was asked to explain his position. While denying the charge, he questioned the validity of the orthodox school. He made matters worse by refusing to salute and praise the Sultan at the start of the interview. The saint maintained that he would bow to Bhagwan Ram and none else. The angry ruler ordered him to be bound hand and foot and thrown into the Ganga. It is believed that Kabir safely reached the bank sitting on a deer skin. This episode Kabir has mentioned in his sayings.

The sultan realized that he was dealing with an extraordinary saint who did not care for authority, either spiritual or temporal. As the Kashi pandits joined the anti-Kabir chorus the sultan was further emboldened to victimize the saint. This time Lodhi hatched an inhuman plot to finish off the saint. Kabir was locked up in a house which was set ablaze on all four sides. But Kabir escaped unscathed from the diabolical act. When the sultan heard of this miracle he ordered that the saint should be shackled hand and foot and trampled under the foot of an elephant. When the mahout goaded on the beast to kill Kabir, all the animal did was to step aside after coming near the intended victim. It apparently changed its mind when the beast's eyes met Kabir's. In the end the ruler realized his mistake and sought the saint's forgiveness.

To show the importance of chanting God's name he writes:

*Though a man builds his house by the side of
Kashi
And keeps drinking pure Ganga water,
Without Hari's name there is no moksha,
So says Kabir, Ram's servant.*

Once a group of people came to Kabir's house in his absence. They told the saint's wife

about the problem that was troubling them. She advised them to chant Ram's name thrice. When Kabir heard of it later he felt sorry that his wife had asked the visitor's to chant Paramatma's name thrice. His logic was God's name need be chanted only once to get rid of worldly problems because chanting Ram's name thrice enables the chanter to attain *moksha*.

After grappling against orthodoxy all his life and emerging successfully from each encounter, the saint gathered a sizable following, and decided to spend his final days at Magahar, a place inhabited by low caste people. This was in keeping with a non-conformist like Kabir. The irony was not lost on a man who was born at Kashi, the holiest of holies of Hinduism.

The fight that followed for his body lends a macabre angle to his noble life. The body, according to legend, was reduced to a heap of flowers. The Raja of Benares, Vir Singh, got half of them and the other half was claimed by a Pathan noble, Bijli Khan. The two burnt and buried the flowers and raised a memorial shrine and mausoleum as per the rites of the two religions at Magahar near Gorakhpur.

Kabir has become many things to many people. Hindus consider him to be a Vaishnava *bhakta* and to the Sikhs he is a *bhagat*. Kabir *panthis* regard him as an avatar of the Supreme Being. To modern secularists he was a great social reformer. Sufis consider him as one of them. The saint's life shows how difficult it was to be good and humane in an age when religious conformity was enforced at the point of a dagger, and the slightest deviation meant certain death. Whatever problems he faced in life Kabir did not lose his steadfast faith in God. ♦

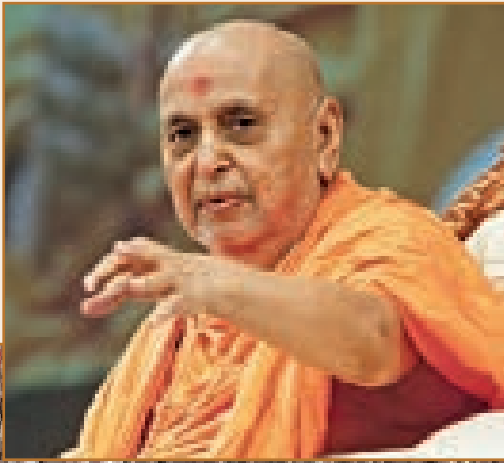
SUNDAY SATSANG SABHA

On 5 December 1999, Swamishri addressed the devotees during the weekly Sunday assembly in Anand and emphasized the importance and benefits of regularly attending the Sunday satsang sabha...



Yogiji Maharaj has instructed us to attend the satsang *sabha* every Sunday. He explained its importance and glory, saying that one should go to the Sunday *sabha* even if one has to forego Rs. 25,000 in profits. It is difficult to sacrifice such profits and engage in satsang and worship, but Swami (Yogiji Maharaj) says that one who has understood God's true glory does not do anything that will forfeit God. He has faith that God looks after our worldly welfare. Shriji Maharaj had asked

Ramanand Swami that may the devotees have enough food, clothing, etc. So, God looks after us, but because we have attachments to our body, family and relatives we think in worldly terms that we will incur a loss. But, we have Maharaj's promise and Yogiji Maharaj's blessings, so nobody has ever lost out and nobody will. These are the words of Yogiji Maharaj, who beholds Maharaj in person; with his blessings many thousands have become happy. Young and old, everyone has attained peace and happiness



one is following the Satpurush's *agna*; but, without this, no matter how much one engages in austerities, observances, donations and other endeavours one does not become *brahmarup* [or *atmasattarup*].

It is very difficult to overcome attachment for the body. However, by setting aside your home, business or other social works and coming to the Sunday *sabha* for a couple of hours, then for that period of time you have overcome your attachment to these things. So, by following the *agna* of the great Sadhu at least attachment to the world has decreased by this much. By coming to the *sabha* every Sunday and listening to the discourses will one not become *brahmarup*? Just as when one's business prospers, one's profits increase, similarly, by coming to the *sabha* one's spiritual balance will increase and one will experience the state of *brahmarup*. Your worldly desires will be overcome and *swabhavs* will change. You will feel inner peace and gain strength to engage in satsang.

This may appear to be a minor *agna*, but the gains are big. Swami says that one may turn a thousand *malas* daily, but turning only one *mala* by the *agna* of the Satpurush gives the fruits of turning a thousand. It is a short cut. But such glory is not understood.

Gunatitanand Swami went to Mt. Girnar. There, a mahatma was circumambulating the mountain by prostrating. Gunatitanand Swami said, "While you are offering prostrations, offer one towards Krupanand Swami and you will gain all the fruits." But the mahatma said that he would do so only if he was on his path. So, the *agna* of the Satpurush was not observed since there was lack of faith and understanding, otherwise *moksha* would have been attained by offering just one prostration.

So, to make our path short, we need trust and faith in the shastras, Maharaj and the Satpurush. Thus, we should focus on coming to Sunday *sabha* or whatever other *agna* is given.

through his blessings, and if we engage sincerely in satsang and bhakti we, too, will not suffer any loss.

By obeying this *agna*, we may have to forego some social engagements, but we will acquire a greater benefit. By following this *agna* of Yogiji Maharaj and attending the Sunday *sabha* we become *brahmarup*. You may not see the change, but within you will experience peace. Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut that one is behaving as the *atma* (*atmasattarup*) to the extent when

It is a matter of one day a week and that, too, for only two hours. The rest of the time you can do your work or business, but if this much time is given then the *jiva* is enriched and spiritually nourished. What is meant by this? That *moksha* is attained; Akshardham is attained. The more one focuses on and observes the commands of the Satpurush, the more one benefits. And one should also keep that as the aim – to reach Akshardham.

The Satpurush has spoken, Maharaj has spoken in the Vachanamrut and Gunatitanand Swami has talked about Akshardham. So, we should have the thought that we want to go to the *sabha* and contemplate on these talks. Then if one starts living according to their wishes, one becomes happy. So, whether you work, or run a business, or whether you're in India or abroad, keep this aim.

One day you will have to leave all this so prepare what is required for Akshardham. Just as one takes food, etc. when one goes out of town, similarly prepare for this. So attending the Sunday *sabha*, performing daily puja and visiting the mandir for darshan all enrich and prepare the *jiva*. Engaging in worldly activities and pleasures is for the body. Food for the *atma* is obeying the wishes of the Satpurush and God. In this way one's *antahkaran* is purified. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 8, Maharaj has instructed that we should engage our *indriyas* in the service of God and his holy Sadhu. His holy Sadhu is Gunatitanand Swami. We should serve both [God and Sadhu]. How should the *indriyas* be used in their service? When we do darshan [of God] with our eyes with *mahima*, so the sins of the eyes are burnt. Looking at immoral things are the sins of the eyes. Looking at improper forms creates bad thoughts in the mind and leads to such actions that incur sin. God and his Sadhu are pure, so by their darshan one's sins are destroyed.

Listening sincerely to discourses about God destroys the sins of the ears. Speaking deroga-

torily, insultingly, unnecessarily and gossiping incurs sin through speech. Hitting or harassing people with the hands also incurs sin. But, serving God and turning the *mala* absolves the sins of the hands. Going to the cinema, bars, casinos, etc. incurs sin by the feet. But, by walking to the mandir these sins are destroyed.

So, in this way, if one's senses, wealth, home and family are used in this *seva* then one's sins are destroyed, senses are purified and one attains God's abode. The *antahkaran* (mind) is filled with worldly desires and attachments, so by such *seva* it is purified. Then it is able to focus on God, offer worship and attain happiness, and one's sins are destroyed. It is said that contact with the wind blowing from such a Sadhu destroys 60,000 years of sins and converts them into merits. Whereas contact of the breeze from a sinner destroys 60,000 years of merits.

Thus, if one lives by the *agnas* then there will be no problems. Even if one is a householder, if one has sought firm refuge and has developed staunch faith in God then God will grant bliss.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 45, Shriji Maharaj says that since we are all said to be his he does not want to leave even the slightest fault in us; so be ready. If while engaged in worldly activities one does not live according to the *agnas* then one's *swabhavs* and desires are not overcome. So, Shriji Maharaj is ready. Are we? When taking a photograph the cameraman will tell us to look at the camera, but if we look elsewhere then it is not his fault. Similarly, Maharaj has told us; it is his wish and if we can live accordingly then our work will be done.

So, to constantly have these thoughts reinforced all should come to the Sunday *sabha* to listen to the discourses and bhajans. It will bring peace within, Yogiji Maharaj will be pleased and the fruits will be attained. ♦

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CANCER

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

This article will explain what is cancer, what causes it, what you can do to avoid it and how you can know if you might have it. A specialist in the treatment of cancer is called an ‘oncologist’.

WHAT IS CANCER?

Our bodies are made up of organs (e.g. liver, lungs, stomach, colon). In turn, these organs are made up of billions and billions of cells. Cells grow and when they become old or damaged, they die and are replaced with new cells. Normally, growth of new cells and death of old cells are kept in balance.

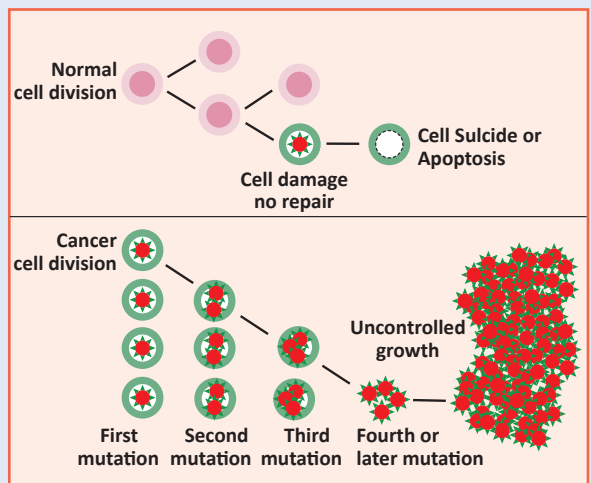
Cancer is a term which describes the uncontrolled growth of cells due to damage (mutation) in its DNA. So, instead of dying, damaged cells become immortal and continue to divide repeatedly and at a faster rate than normal (Figure 1).

There are two main types of growths in the body: benign and malignant. Benign growths are not cancerous, do not spread to other parts of the body, and are therefore not life-threatening. By contrast, a malignant growth will continue to grow, and will spread to other parts of the body.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CANCER?

Cancer is not just one disease, but many hundreds of diseases. There are many different types of cancer. A cancer is termed after the organ it originates from. For example, a cancer originating in the lungs is termed 'lung cancer'. Each

Figure 1: Loss of Normal Growth Control

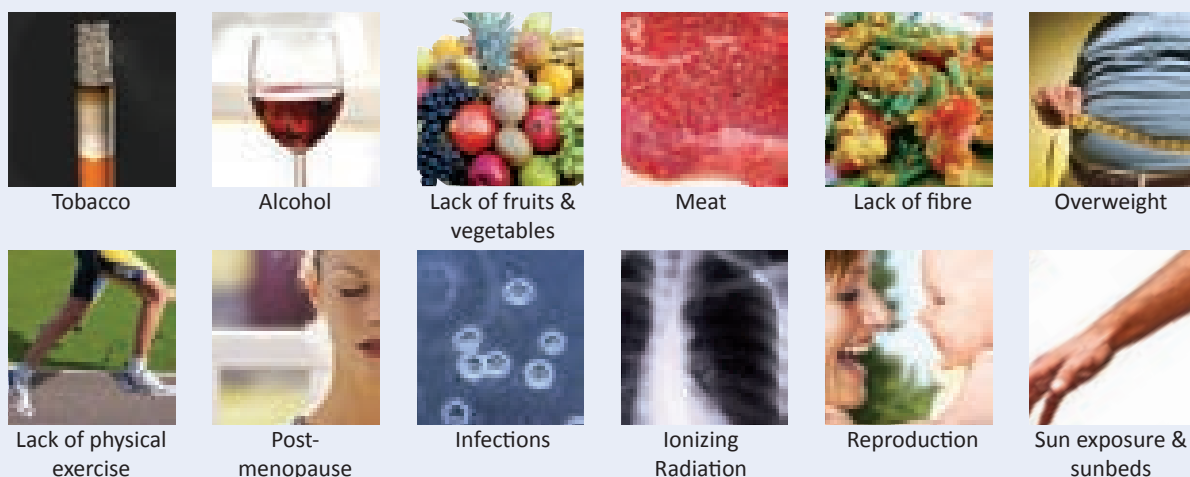


cancer type can then be sub-divided into many different types. For example, there are over 50 different types of lung cancer, each of which behaves in a slightly different way, and so may require different treatments.

The body part that the cancer started from is called the primary cancer site and the places to which the cancer spreads (commonly, lungs, liver or bone), are called secondary sites ('secondaries' or more correctly, 'metastases').

Cancers that have spread to other parts of the body still look like the primary site under a microscope, and still behave like the primary cancer. Therefore, a cancerous deposit in the liver from a colon cancer is called ‘a secondary deposit (or metastasis) from primary colon cancer’ rather than ‘liver cancer’, and is treated in the same way as colon cancer not liver cancer.

Figure 2: Probable Causes of Cancer



WHY IS CANCER DANGEROUS?

Cancers are dangerous and must be treated as they will otherwise spread to other parts of the body. As cancers grow, they interfere with the normal working of the organ, and make patients weak and frail as they use up the body's energy and nutrients to grow. Patients often therefore lose weight as the cancer grows.

Cancer spreads from its primary site to other parts of the body through the blood, the lymph system or by growing into a neighbouring organ.

IS THERE A CANCER EPIDEMIC?

Cancer is common, affecting 1 in 3 people. In general, there is no cancer 'epidemic', with only a very minor increase in cancer rates over recent years. This is probably because people are living longer. Therefore, our body's cells have a longer time to become abnormal and immortal. Hence, it is not surprising that cancer is generally a disease of the elderly, and is very rare in the young. This is a bit like a car. The older the car, the more likely the engine will develop a fault.

WHAT CAUSES CANCER?

It is often impossible to tell what causes a specific cancer in a specific person. People can

lead an addiction-free and healthy life and still develop cancer, usually because a body cell randomly becomes immortal. Cancer is very rarely due to factors inherited from one's parents.

However, there are some things that are known to cause cancer. Using tobacco (smoking or chewing) is the commonest cause of cancer worldwide. Tobacco causes cancer of the lung, mouth, neck, stomach, oesophagus (food pipe) and other organs. Before the widespread use of tobacco, such cancers were very rare. In the West, where governments have taken action to reduce tobacco use, lung cancer rates are falling. In the developing world, however, where cigarette consumption is actively promoted, lung cancer rates are steadily rising. This is a man-made global health catastrophe.

In India and East Asia, where chewing betel nut (*sopari*) or tobacco in *paan* is popular, rates of cancer of the mouth are very high. This is because *sopari* and tobacco and some pastes used in making *paan* cause cancer. Other well recognized causes of cancer include regular intake of alcohol in excess. This causes cancer of the mouth, oesophagus (food pipe) and stomach. A diet rich in red meat is also known to cause colon cancer in some cases. Recently, obesity has been identified as a major risk fac-

tor in developing cancer. The Western lifestyle causes obesity in many people. It has only recently been identified that body fat is an active organ, and too much of it, combined with a lack of exercise increases cancer rates. Again, this is an example of an entirely preventable cause of cancer. Figure 2 summarizes the common causes of cancer.

There is no good evidence to show that stress, emotional problems, mobile phone use or 'curses' cause cancer.

HOW CAN I PREVENT CANCER?

The risk of developing cancer can never be reduced to zero. This is because even by leading a healthy and risk-free lifestyle, cell errors will occur by chance alone over a long period of time. So, using the car analogy, even, if a person looks after their car carefully for many years, it may still break down. However, the risk of cancer can be massively cut by simple measures.

Trying to remain fit and healthy is by far the best way to prevent cancer. Specifically for our Indian community, remaining active and not becoming overweight is important. Not smoking and not taking tobacco are critically important in preventing cancer. Not drinking alcohol and not eating red meat will also help reduce the risk of cancer.

There has been a lot of research into whether taking nutritional supplements such as vitamins, herbs or antioxidants reduce cancer risk. None of these have been shown to work, and in fact some have been shown to harm patients.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I MIGHT HAVE CANCER?

Cancer is often difficult to detect until it has spread (as it is initially small and does not cause any symptoms), and by then it is usually too late to be cured. Some cancers in their early stages can be felt either as a lump (e.g. breast cancer) or, in the case of skin cancer, a mole that changes

shape, becomes itchy or starts to bleed. Lumps should always be brought to a doctor's attention. Some cancers cause specific symptoms. So, colon cancer causes bowel habit change: patients notice that they used to be regular, and now are irregular. Lung cancer can cause shoulder pain or recurrent chest infections. When cancer has spread, patients often feel run down, lose weight or develop night sweats.

HOW IS CANCER DIAGNOSED?

Cancer is diagnosed by taking a sample of the lump (biopsy) and looking at it under the microscope. Before that, however, patients will undergo some sort of scan to see where and how big the lump is. So, breast cancer patients will undergo a breast mammogram and breast ultrasound, lung cancer patients might need a bronchoscopy and colon cancer patients may need a colonoscopy. Cancers are usually assessed by CT scan and sometimes special tests. Depending on the cancer, it might take six weeks to make a diagnosis as many tests may be needed.

WHAT IS CANCER SCREENING?

Screening aims to pick up cancer at an early stage, before the patient has any symptoms. This improves the chance of being cured. Asian patients often do not take part in screening programmes and so are at a much higher chance of having cancer diagnosed at a later stage, when it is incurable.

Many countries have screening programmes. In the UK women are invited for regular breast mammograms and cervical smears. There is also a bowel cancer screening programme (a stool sample is tested). The role of blood testing to detect prostate cancer is controversial. ♦

(To be continued in next issue.)



MAHA-ANNAKUT CELEBRATION

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

Ahmedabad, 27 October 2011

In May 1962 (Vaishakh *sud* 7, Samvat 2018), Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad. As part of the year-long Golden Anniversary celebrations (2011-2012) to mark the completion of 50 years, a special Maha-Annakut was offered on the Hindu New Year on 27 October 2011.

Around 2,700 volunteers of all ages served enthusiastically to make this grand event a huge success. Planning began over a month beforehand and in the last 15 days volunteers endeavoured day and night to ensure the timely com-

pletion of all duties and arrangements.

About 700 children efficiently manned the specially built boothhouse, while other volunteers served in the parking, darshan arrangements, kitchen, security, housekeeping and other departments.

A total of 2,551 specially prepared vegetarian delicacies were offered to Thakorji in the Maha-Annakut. The majority of them were prepared at the mandir in Shahibaug. Other items were prepared at the homes of devotees in accordance with the codes of purity for Thakorji.

Over 800 male and female youths helped in decoratively preparing the dishes of all the deli-



cacies using circular trays of various sizes specially made of bamboo.

Under the guidance of sadhus, the delicacies were aesthetically and systematically arranged before Thakorji.

Certain items were presented in special ways. For example, 1,400 pieces of variously coloured *mesub* were used to make a model of the Delhi Darvaja (Gate) in Ahmedabad, which Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified. Also, a biscuit model of Ahmedabad mandir was made. Other creative designs were prepared using bakery and sweet delicacies.

The Maha-Annakut was set up in the newly

refurbished Yagnapurush Sabhagruh (Hall). It was 26 feet high and 76 feet long, and comprised of 27 steps, each 90 feet wide. Running down the centre of the hall was a 5-ft by 80-ft representation of the Sabarmati River, which flows through Ahmedabad. A portion of this was made of cake with intricate and colourful cream decorations. Fruits, vegetables and other edible foodstuffs were also used to form the river and decorate its 'banks'.

The first *arti* of the Maha-Annakut was performed at 10.00 a.m. by Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Kothari Satsangijivan

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UK

NEASDEN MANDIR LIGHTS UP IN PINK FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH 26 October 2011



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, was illuminated in pink on the evening of 26 October 2011 to support Breast Cancer Care during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The lighting of the Mandir was seen by thousands who had gathered for the Diwali celebrations and spectacular fireworks display.

The pink lighting was switched on by Marie Geiger from Breast Cancer Care.

The Mandir has been a keen supporter of Breast Cancer Care since 2007. Breast Cancer Care have also featured with stalls and information booths during a number of events organised by the Mandir in London, and activities by BAPS centres across the UK.

MAYOR OF LONDON BORIS JOHNSON CELEBRATES HINDU NEW YEAR AT NEASDEN MANDIR 27 October 2011

The Mayor of London Boris Johnson visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, during the Hindu New Year celebrations on 27 October 2011.



After a traditional welcome at the mandir gate, the Mayor and his delegation went on a brief tour of the mandir complex and joined thousands of others to witness the *annakut*.

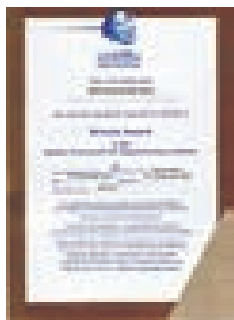
In the assembly hall, the Mayor and other distinguished guests performed the evening celebration *arti* ritual.

In his address to the assembly, Mr Johnson said, "I am very very proud and supportive of what you do in this amazing mandir and the incredible things you do for your community and all communities."

Before departing, Mr. Johnson also met some of the 1,200 volunteers involved in ensuring a pleasant and enriching experience for the tens of thousands who enjoy the festival every year. The Mayor expressed his admiration for His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in inspiring and mobilizing so many young people in such positive causes.

BAPS SUNDAY SCHOOL, LONDON, RECEIVES BRONZE AWARD FROM CONTINYOU 2 December 2011

The BAPS Sunday School at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, has been awarded the Bronze Award from ContinYou, one of the UK's leading education charities.



The Bronze Award signifies that the BAPS supplementary school meets all the essential requirements of the National Resource Centre (NRC) and has all the policies and procedures in place to safely and effectively offer children's activities to a nationally recognized standard.

Under a separate category, ContinYou presented The Swaminarayan School an award for their exceptional support to the BAPS Sunday School.

The awards were presented by the Rt. Hon. Mayor of Brent Cllr Aslam Choudry at a special ceremony on Friday 2 December 2011.

SOCIAL SATSANG – OPENING DOORS, MINDS & HEARTS: NATIONAL YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR AT BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, LEICESTER & LONDON
19-20 November 2011



The theme of the *shibir* 'Social Satsang' highlighted the importance of *sabhas* and *seva* in Satsang.

In their speeches, the sadhus gave practical guidance on the various aspects of Social Sat-

sang, such as, serving others, helping everyone amalgamate and feel welcome, *suhradbhav*, *katha* and *sabha*, realizing each other's greatness and learning from the lives of the guru *parampara*.

Audio-video presentations, video blessings of Swamishri, skits and interactive discussions also helped to reiterate the important concept of Social Satsang, *sabha* and *seva*.

OBSERVING UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY
BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, LONDON
20 November 2011

On 20 November 2011, BAPS, a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, commemorated Universal Children's Day at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London. It is "observed as a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children", promoting the ideals and objectives of the UN Charter and the welfare of the children of the world

Based on some of UNICEF's ten imperatives for children, the theme for the event was 'Shaping the Present, Nurturing the Future'. Over 300 children and parents learnt about the importance of the family, social and school environment in ensuring that children blossom into better human beings and ideal citizens.

They also learnt about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message 'In the joy of others, lies our own' and the various activities Pramukh Swami Maharaj has initiated for children internationally.

At the end the children and parents joined in a collective prayer for the well-being of all children around the world.

NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA WINTER REUNION
TRAINING CAMP, BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, LONDON
16-18 December 2011

Over 70 selected *balaks* and *balikas* from around the UK, together with 25 *sanchalaks* and *sanchalikas*, attended the three-day camp

at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, from 16 to 18 December 2011.

Based on the theme ‘Satsang Karo ne Karavo’ they were provided special training and guidance on various topics, in which they learnt about the inspirational work of *karyakars* from around the world, Swamishri’s vision for the future of Satsang, Swamishri’s compassionate nature, how *shravan*, *manan* and *nididhyasan* can help one progress spiritually, Bhagatji Maharaj’s exemplary life, the importance of mandirs in daily life, and how Satsang and Swamishri should be the spiritual focus of all.

In addition, workshops were held on how to gain maximum benefit from Satsang-related reading and listening to spiritual discourses.

The youngsters also enjoyed the teambuliding and other involvement activities.

The *shibir* gave the children with a deeper insight of Satsang and *seva*, inspiring them to progress spiritually and personally.

USA

SATSANG SHIBIRS

THEME: ‘OM SHANTI, SHANTI, SHANTI’

North America, August to December 2011



Between August and December 2011, a series of two-day Satsang Shibirs based on the theme ‘Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti’ were held across North America in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami. The *shibirs* helped to provide

the devotees with practical solutions to the challenge of balancing work, family, satsang and personal responsibilities.

The *shibirs* included spiritual discourses, interactive workshops and reflection sessions. Also, inspiring examples from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj guided the attendees on practical methods to simple and peaceful living.

East Africa

BAPS ORGANIZES MEDICAL HEALTH CAMPS, KENYA

20-21 November 2011



On 20 November 2011, around 170 people benefited from a medical camp hosted by BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi. The camp included checking of blood pressure, blood sugar level and bone density.

Another camp was held in Kikuyu town on 21 November 2011 at Akshar Health Care, in which about 100 local residents of Kikuyu town were provided free checkup and medication services.

BAPS CHARITY SERVICES TANZANIA, 2011 Medical Aid

- BAPS operates a permanent dispensary in Dar-es-Salaam which provides free medical treatment to elderly patients and to the first 50 children under 16 every day.



- BAPS sponsors 10 patients every month for hernia and hydrocoele operations.
- In November 2011, BAPS conducted an eye camp in collaboration with CCBRT Hospital in Lugoba.

Social Services

Every month BAPS youth and women volunteers visit hospitals, children's homes and old age homes to meet patients and residents and provide foodstuffs, toiletries, clothes and other essential items.

Asia Pacific

SATSANG SHIBIRS IN HONG KONG, SINGAPORE AND INDONESIA

September 2011



Between 29 August and 2 October 2011, BAPS sadhus conducted Satsang Shibirs in Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia, and satsang assemblies in the Philippines and Thailand. The one-day *shibirs* were based on the theme "Spiritual Quotient – Vidyanam Adhyatma

Vidya" and focused on spiritual intelligence as the supreme knowledge.

The participants learnt about the importance of emotional quotient, prayer, faith, positive thinking and daily rituals through lectures, group discussions and video presentations. The *shibirs* shed light on how to apply spiritual principles to help overcome the turmoil of daily life and provided an enlightening experience for all the participants.

SATSANG SHIBIR

THEME: SPIRITUAL QUOTIENT

DARWIN, AUSTRALIA,

26 November 2011



Based on the theme of 'Spiritual Quotient', a one-day Satsang Shibir was held in Darwin for the first time on 26 November 2011. Through interactive presentations and small-group breakout sessions family values, the power of faith and daily rituals as well as other practical aspects of spirituality were emphasized. A panel discussion based on the true-life incidents of the panellists and a group discussion on the story of Eklavya encouraged everyone to share their experiences and opinions.

India

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR

THEME: 'JIVISHU SWAMINE MATE',

31 October to 3 November 2011, Sarangpur

From 31 October to 3 November, around



1,800 *kishores* and *kishoris* from BAPS centres in the Bhavnagar, Amreli, Mahuva and Botad regions gathered at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur for a *shibir* in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami. Based on the theme 'Jivishu Swamine Mate' (Living for Swamishri), teenagers and youths were guided by senior and experienced sadhus on how to progress spiritually and earn the blessings of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The youngsters also received guidance on personality development and studies from experienced experts. At the end, the youths all pledged to perform daily puja and attend the weekly satsang assembly at their local centres.

NATIONAL LAUNCH OF WORLD DIABETES DAY AT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI 13 November 2011

On the eve of World Diabetes Day, the biggest campaign so far to increase awareness about diabetes prevention and management commenced

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Swami and the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Narendrabhai Modi.

Thereafter, every hour, until 8.00 p.m. *arti* was performed by the devotees. Throughout the day, over 80,000 devotees and well-wishers and 700 local dignitaries had darshan of the Maha-Annakut. They were all touched by the beauty, piety and divinity of the atmosphere.

In Mumbai, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had darshan of the Maha-Annakut through a live



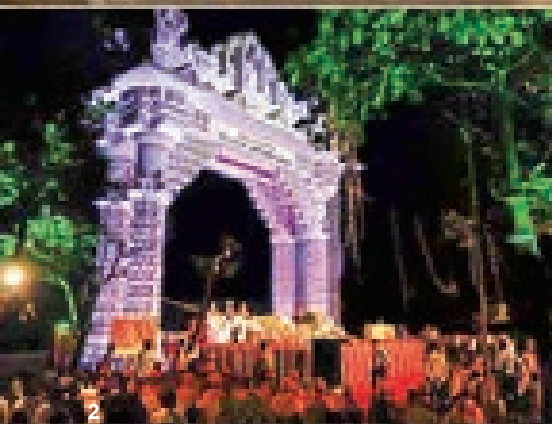
at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, India. It was part of the Abbot Blue Monument Lighting Challenge to illuminate iconic landmarks, monuments and buildings all over the world in the official blue colour on the eve of World Diabetes Day, thus supporting the global campaign for diabetes awareness.

The grand opening ceremony culminated with Dr Kiran Wali, Minister for Women and Child Development and Social Welfare, Govt. of NCT Delhi, illuminating Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir in a blue colour by pressing a button and thus simultaneously illuminating over 70 monuments and buildings across New Delhi and around the country in blue light. Among the other landmarks illuminated were the Red Fort, Qutub Minar, Old Fort, Kangra Fort (Manali), Ellora caves (Aurangabad), AIIMS, 13 gates of Ahmedabad and the Taj Mahal. Other attendees at this kickoff ceremony included representatives of national and international corporations, charity groups and NGOs, and distinguished doctors. ♦

webcast link and conveyed his blessings to all.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2,551 vegetarian delicacies.
- 2,700 volunteers.
- 80,000 visitors.
- *Arti* every hour from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.
- Special arrangements for the elderly and handicapped.
- 80-ft. model of River Sabarmati comprising of edible items. ♦



INAUGURATION OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN GANESH DWAR 14 December 2011, Mumbai

Every year tens of thousands of devotees gather at the popular Shivaji Park in Dadar to celebrate the Ganesh festival and ceremoniously immerse the *murti* of Shri Ganesh into the ocean.

1. At this spot, opposite the famous Sea-Link Bridge, Mumbai Mahanagarpalika (Municipal Corporation) and BAPS have jointly created the beautiful 65-ft. high BAPS Swaminarayan Ganesh Dwar, decorated with 1008 *murtis* of Shri Ganeshji.
2. Auspicious inauguration ceremony in the presence of Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and local dignitaries (14 December 2011).
3. Swamishri, after performing puja of *murtis* of Shri Ganesh for the Ganesh Dwar, offers his humble respects.



BLUE MONUMENT LIGHTING CHALLENGE SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 13 November 2011, New Delhi

1. On the eve of World Diabetes Day, the biggest campaign so far to increase awareness about diabetes prevention and management commenced at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, India.
The grand opening ceremony culminated with Dr Kiran Wali, Minister for Women and Child Development and Social Welfare, Govt. of NCT Delhi, illuminating Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir in a blue colour by pressing a button and thus simultaneously illuminating over 70 monuments and buildings across New Delhi and around the country in blue light. Among the other landmarks illuminated were the Red Fort, Qutub Minar, Old Fort, Kangra Fort (Manali), Ellora caves (Aurangabad), AIIMS, 13 gates of Ahmedabad and the Taj Mahal.
2. On 2 December 2011, Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland State, USA, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. He commented, "This is an amazing piece of architecture and achievement."

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