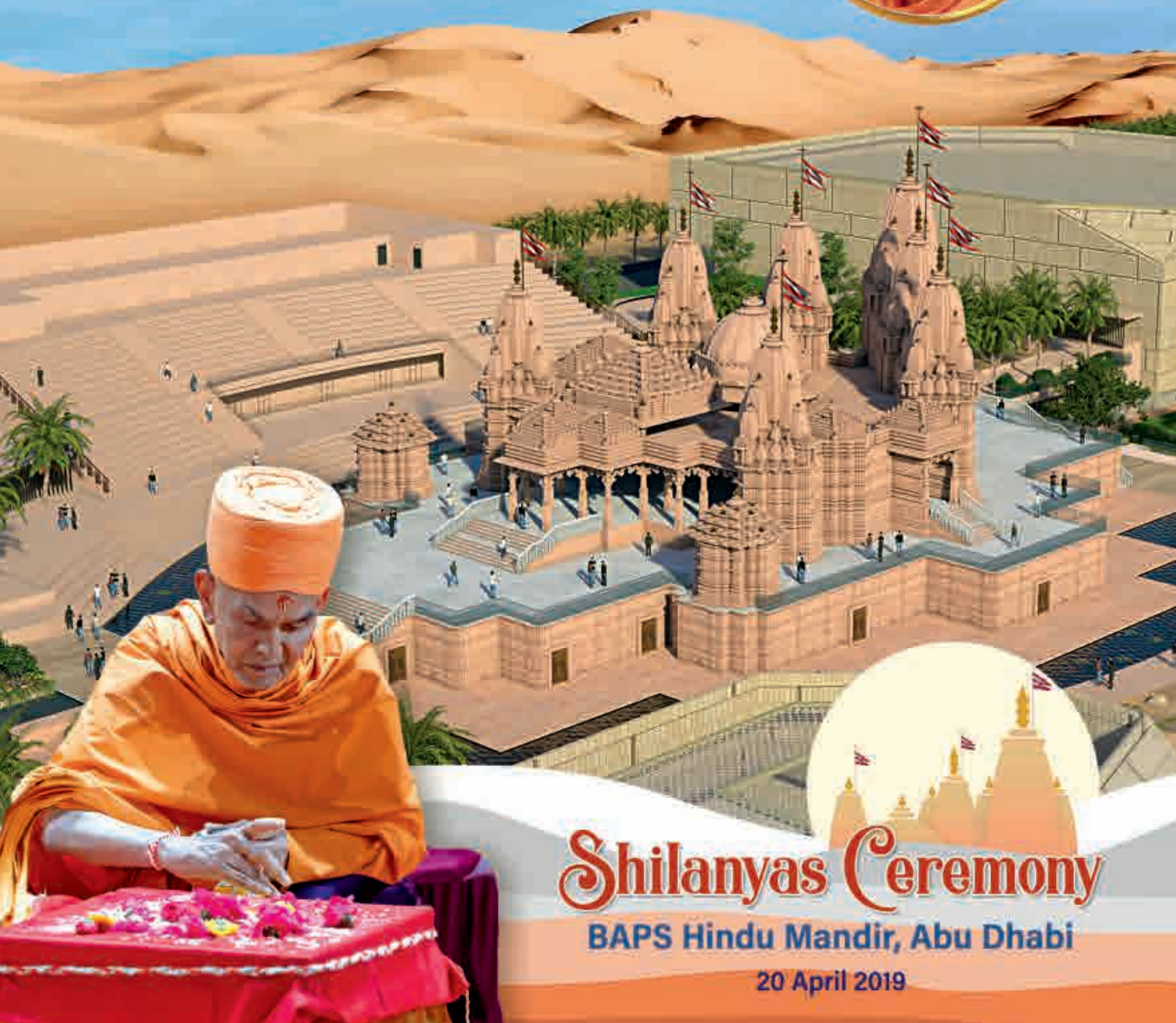


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2019

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



Shilanyas Ceremony

BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi

20 April 2019



1



2

SHILANYAS CEREMONY, BAPS HINDU MANDIR, ABU DHABI 20 April 2019

1. Swamishri, government ministers and dignitaries perform the concluding foundation stone-laying rituals.
2. Distinguished guests perform the Vedic *shilanyas* rituals in the excavated foundation area.

Title Cover: Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the *shilanyas* rituals of the Mandir in Abu Dhabi – a long-cherished dream of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



Architect's design of proposed BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi

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Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

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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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SHRI HARI IN GADHPUR

The paramhansas and devotees listened eagerly to Shri Hari's discourses in Gadhpur. Once, devotees from a village came to request Shri Hari to send a swami to discourse in their village...



Shri Hari arrived in Dada Khachar's *darbar* and sat in the verandah outside Sombai Foi's room. Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Chaitanyanand Swami and other *paramhansas* sat before him. Shortly thereafter, Mulji Brahmachari brought lunch and placed it before Maharaj. Shri Hari said, "You should have taken the lunch to Akshar Ordi!"

Mulji Brahmachari replied, "I brought it here so that the *paramhansas* could have your darshan and receive your *prasadi*." Shri Hari smiled at Mulji's reply and remarked, "Brahmachari has no personal wish for *prasadi* or darshan. He simply remains passionately engaged in *seva*. He understands my glory as well as the glory of the sadhus and devotees in equal measure." Then, Maharaj took lunch.

THE THORNY TREE IS FORTUNATE

While Shri Hari was having lunch his eyes fell on a thorny tree before him. He commented smilingly, "This thorny tree is also fortunate because Purushottam Narayan's eyes have seen it." A little while later Maharaj added, "And this neem tree is also very fortunate and blessed because I have sat under it many times and held spiritual assemblies and performed many *lilas*." The *paramhansas* were listening avidly to Maharaj's words. Shri Hari continued, "You all swamis and devotees, who are associated with me, are indeed most

fortunate and blessed. Even the milk of cows, curd, fruits and flowers that have been used by me – all are very blessed and fortunate. They will all be liberated after one or two births."

I DO NOT LIKE THREE THINGS

On hearing this, Muktanand Swami asked, "Maharaj, still another birth will be required to attain *moksha*?" Shri Hari explained, "Those who have understood and realized my divine form will be liberated in this birth." Then, Maharaj praised, "You are all very fortunate and blessed, but you'll have to understand my wishes and inclinations. You should abide by what I like and abstain from what I don't. Now listen, I don't like three things: Firstly, one who is stiff and arrogant and does not bow down to anyone; secondly, he does something for the sake of becoming great; and lastly, one who behaves out of ill-will towards swamis and devotees. I am not pleased with these three things. So, a devotee must always remain humble and straightforward."

Then, Maharaj got up to leave. Mulji Brahmachari gave him *mukhvas* to eat. Shri Hari added, "In Satsang, one finds nectar (*amrut*) as well as poison. So, drink *amrut* and become immortal, but never taste poison." Muktanand Swami and Dada Khachar fully understood Maharaj's words, whereas others took them to be sound advice for all.

PLACE YOUR HOLY CHARANARVIND ON MY CHEST

A few days later, devotees of Shri (now Shi) village of the Jambusar Bara (coastal) region of Gujarat arrived in Gadhpur. They had Shri Hari's darshan and narrated how Vignananand Swami had inspired satsang in their region. Thereafter, they requested, "We wish to organize spiritual discourses (*parayan*) on the Shrimad Bhagvat by a swami in our village so that aspirants can benefit."

Shri Hari called Vignananand Swami and instructed, "You have to accompany these devotees to their village and discourse on the Shrimad Bhagvat."

Vignananand Swami humbly replied, "Maharaj, I have studied the Shrimad Bhagvat, but I do not have the skill and intelligence to do *katha*."

Shri Hari was pleased with his modesty and commanded, "Swami, go on my instruction. I am the bestower of intellect and powers, so be confident and go with the devotees." Vignananand Swami had no option because it was Shri Hari's wish. He humbly acknowledged, "Maharaj, since it is your *agna* I will go, but press your holy *charanarvind* on my chest and I shall do darshan of them while delivering the discourses."¹

Shri Hari was pleased with Swami's devotion and so he asked for a bowl of sandalwood paste (*chandana*) mixed with saffron (*kesar*). Then, Maharaj dipped his feet into the bowl and pressed them on swami's chest. Vignananand Swami was overwhelmed with joy and felt divine energy coursing through his body. He then asked, "Maharaj, when shall I leave?"

"Leave tomorrow after lunch."

CELEBRATION OF FESTIVALS IN GADHPUR

The Indian New Year of 1825 (A.S. 1881) had

set. Shri Hari celebrated the Dev Podhi Ekadashi (July) festival in Gadhpur. Maharaj gave the *paramhanas* special *niyams* to observe for the four holy months. Thereafter, Maharaj also celebrated Janmashtmi in Gadhpur.

Shri Hari told Brahmanand Swami to return to Vartal and complete the mandir construction, "I will be residing in Gadhpur till you arrange the *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the month of Kartik (October). As soon as you inform me I shall come there a little earlier."

SHRI HARI GOES TO BOTAD TO SEE BHAGA DOSHI

A few days later, a *parshad* came to Dada Khachar's *darbar* and informed Maharaj, "Bhaga Doshi is suffering from an interminable illness. He is lying on his deathbed and is eager to have your darshan."

On hearing this, Shri Hari instantly stood up. He called Naja Jogiya and instructed, "Prepare Manki and bring her to me. I want to leave for Botad right now."

In the meantime, Jiva Khachar arrived. On hearing the news about Bhaga Doshi he said, "Maharaj, wait for a while. I, too, will join you." Shri Hari looked at him and said, "Be quick, I shall be at your house soon."

Jiva Khachar immediately returned home. When Maharaj arrived with Naja Jogiya he saw Jiva Khachar sitting on a cot in his compound talking with relatives. Shri Hari asked, "You have as yet not got ready!"

Jiva Khachar replied, "Maharaj, you might as well not go, because I've just received the news that Bhaga Doshi has passed away."

Shri Hari looked into Jiva Khachar's eyes and questioned, "Bapu, are you informing me that Bhaga Doshi has passed away?" Then Maharaj added, "Bapu, if you do not wish to come it's

1. From the oral tradition in Satsang it is believed that Vignananand Swami kept his eyes on the impression of Shri Hari's *charanarvind* and discoursed for seven days and pleased the devotees. While he took his daily bath he cleaned the surrounding area of the impression with a wet towel to make sure that it remained as it was.

okay. I am going.” And Shri Hari galloped away towards Botad.

When Shriji Maharaj reached the outskirts of Jotingda village there was a sudden shower of heavy rain. Shri Hari’s silver threaded clothes and Manki’s saddle became drenched and spoilt. Naja Jogiya spoke with utter discontent, “How bad it is!” Shri Hari spiritedly replied, “Bhaga Doshi is a devotee of such high calibre that if 100 such clothes and saddles were drenched or spoilt I would not have minded one bit!” Naja Jogiya remained mute and repaired his understanding.

Thus, Shri Hari entered Botad in his wet clothes and came to Godad Khachar’s *darbar*. Here, he removed his wet clothes and put on a pair of fresh ones. Manki’s saddle was removed and placed in the sun to dry. Then, Maharaj proceeded to Bhaga Doshi’s house. Bhaga Doshi was lying on his bed, chanting Maharaj’s name and eagerly awaiting for his darshan. When Shri Hari arrived he sat on a chair by Bhaga Doshi’s bed, and gently started stroking his head. Bhaga Doshi opened his eyes. Shri Hari spoke aloud, “Bhaga Doshi, look here. I have come because you have been remembering me!”

Bhaga Doshi turned his eyes towards Maharaj, and he was filled with emotions. A torrent of tears flowed and Shri Hari calmed him, “Do not cry. This is not the time to cry.” Bhaga Doshi replied in a chocking tone, “Maharaj, these are tears of joy, in celebration of your love and compassion for me. I do not fear death. My soul will leave this body and receive a divine body to ascend to Akshardham and eternally sit before you.”

Shri Hari remarked, “But I do not wish to send you to Akshardham now. I want you to have darshan of the constructed mandir and *pratishtha* ceremony in Gadhada.” Then, Maharaj asked, “Bring a bowl of millet soup with sugar for him to drink.” After Bhaga Doshi drank the bowl of soup Shri Hari went to Godad Khachar’s *darbar*, took lunch and departed for Gadhada.

SUCH DECEPTION WITH ME?

On arriving back to Gadhada Shri Hari went to Jiva Khachar’s house. There, he found Jiva Khachar engaged in a casual conversation with his friends and relatives. On seeing Maharaj he got up. Shri Hari dismounted and gave the reins of Manki to Naja Jogiya. He came near to Jiva Khachar and declared, “Jiva Khachar, Bhaga Doshi is now much better. Who gave you the news that he had passed away?”

Jiva Khachar remained silent for a while and then spoke softly, “Oh, it was a rumour, so I merely informed you.”

Shri Hari replied emphatically, “Should one believe a rumour related to someone’s death! Shouldn’t you have enquired further? It was about an esteemed businessman of Botad and not an ordinary person. Furthermore, he is a great devotee. Thus, to float such unfounded news about him is most improper. You believe me to be Bhagwan and yet you tried to deceive me!”

Jiva Khachar had nothing to say. Shri Hari then mounted Manki and came to Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. On seeing Shri Hari’s grave face Dada Khachar asked, “Maharaj, how is Bhaga Doshi?”

Shri Hari replied, “He is well.”

Then Muktanand Swami explained, “We got news from Jiva Khachar’s house that Bhaga Doshi had passed away.”

Shri Hari replied with a tinge of pain on his face, “He had also told me, ‘Bhaga Doshi has passed away, so there’s no need for you to go.’ Jiva Khachar is a prominent figure. He knew that I had once promised Bhaichand Sheth [Bhaga Doshi’s father] that I would take care of his son, but now with his departure my pledge has proved to be wrong. Such was Jiva Khachar’s bad intent. But I’ve kept him alive. I have not given up my support and responsibility towards Bhaga Doshi.”



(Contd. in next issue)

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

BAPS Satsang in the UAE

A BRIEF TIMELINE



The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates or kingdoms. Since its inception in 1971, the principles of tolerance and harmony of the founding fathers have guided its growth as a nation. The UAE is home to people of over 200 nationalities. In particular, Hindus have resided in the UAE for decades and have contributed significantly to the economic progress of the country. They form the largest expatriate group in the country.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the UAE in 1982, 1985, 1997 and 2001 and over the years BAPS devotees have faithfully gathered to conduct weekly satsang assemblies. Their satsang has been further nurtured by the regular visits of *sadguru* sadhus and other BAPS sadhus from India.

The following is a brief history of satsang in the UAE leading up to the Shilanyas Ceremony for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.

1974



Rajendrabhai Dave and Ramnikbhai Luhar started a weekly *sabha* at home in Dubai.

1975

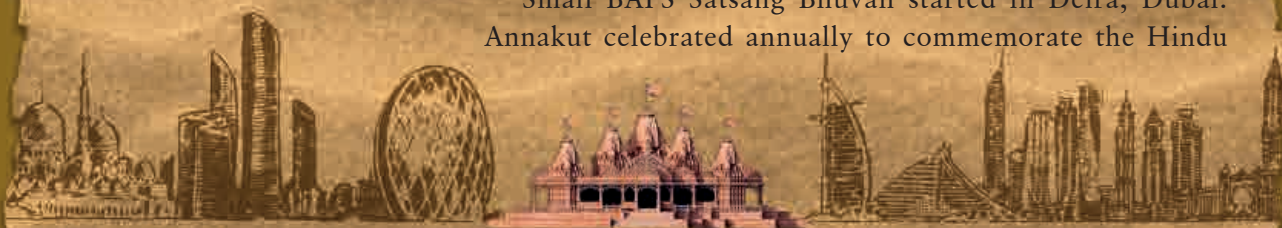


Harikrishnabhai Amin, Hasmukhbhai Patel (Mama), Gangarambhai, Vinodbhai Jethwa and other devotees join the weekly satsang *sabha* in Dubai.

1977



Small BAPS Satsang Bhuvan started in Deira, Dubai. Annakut celebrated annually to commemorate the Hindu





1982: Bhagwandas Bhatia welcomes Swamishri at Sharjah airport



1982: Swamishri graces the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan, Dubai

New Year. Dineshbhai Thakkar and Ramanbhai, Jaynarayanbhai Patel, Pankajbhai Thakkar and others joined.

1982



Bhagwandas Jethanand Bhatia of Sharjah helped Rajendrabhai Dave to obtain a VIP visa through His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi of Sharjah to facilitate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit to UAE from 18 to 25 March. Bhagwanjibhai Bhatia, Rohitbhai P. Patel, Bachubhai Trivedi, Rajendrabhai Dave, Dineshbhai Thakkar, Jaynarayanbhai Patel, Ramnikbhai Luhar and others welcomed Swamishri at Sharjah International Airport. Swamishri was hosted at the home of Shri P.D. Patel, father of Rohitbhai P. Patel, in Dubai, and Khimjibhai Depala in Abu Dhabi.

19 March: Swamishri graced the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Dubai.

20 March: Swamishri visited the 100-year-old Vaishnav Haveli for darshan.

21 March: Evening assembly at Indian Social Centre in Abu Dhabi; Ambassador of India to UAE HE Lalit Mansingh attended.

23 March: Consul General of India in Dubai Praveen Lal Goyal came to meet Swamishri.

Swamishri also visited Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah.

Inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit, devotees began a weekly satsang *sabha* in Abu

Dhabi at the residence of Rajendrabhai Dave on Guru Purnima. After six months, weekly *sabhas* continued at the homes of Khimjibhai Depala, Nandlalbhai Depala and Rajendrabhai Dave, in rotation.

Also, frequent *sabhas* were held in labour camps on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi. New Year Annakut celebrations held at the home of Rajendrabhai Dave.

1985



20 March to 4 April: Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited UAE. He stayed at the home of Rohitbhai P. Patel in Al Hamriya.

- Satsang assemblies at the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Deira. Public assemblies held at Lakha Lulla's Astoria Hotel.

1988



Satsang *sabha* started in Ajman.

1989



Pujya Doctor Swami and sadhus visited the UAE.

1992



Pujya Viveksagar Swami and sadhus visited the UAE.

1994



Satsang *sabha* started in Sharjah.



1985: Evening satsang assembly at Astoria Hotel, Dubai



2001: Swamishri with Sheikh Hamed Bin Majid Al Qasimi, Sharjah

1997



27 March to 10 April: Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the UAE. He resided at the home of Rohitbhai P. Patel in Al Jafiliya.

- Swamishri honoured in public assemblies at the Indian Consulate in Dubai by Consul General Prabhu Dayal.
- Public assemblies at the Astoria Hotel.
- Swamishri honoured by the Gujarati and Jain communities in Dubai.
- Satsang assemblies in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ajman.

3 April: Swamishri graced the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Sharjah.

2001



5 to 12 April: Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited UAE, residing at the home of Rohitbhai P. Patel in Al Jafiliya. Mahant Swami also accompanied Pramukh Swami Maharaj during this visit.

6 April: Swamishri was honoured by the Ambassador of India to UAE HE Krishan Chander Singh, Consul General Shri Asoke Kumar Mukerji and the Indian Association of Dubai.

7 April: Swamishri graced the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan, Nadishala, Ajman.

8 April: In Sharjah, Swamishri was received by Sheikh Hamed Bin Majid Al Qasimi, Minister for Justice, at his home.

- Public assemblies at the Astoria Hotel.



Swamishri offers three prayers and envisions a mandir in Abu Dhabi during a desert visit

5 APRIL 1997

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visits Al Khawaneej, a desert area on the Dubai-Sharjah border.

There, Swamishri prayed, “May peace prevail here and everywhere. May all religions of all countries grow greater love for one other. May all countries be free of internal enmity and prejudice towards each other and may they all progress in their own unique way.”

Then, Pramukh Swami Maharaj stated, “May a mandir be built in Abu Dhabi!”



2001: Assembly at the Indian Association, Dubai



2001: Swamishri with devotees in Ajman

- Mahant Swami went to a desert area and prayed for the fulfilment of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's prophecy of a mandir in the UAE.

2005



BAPS Satsang Bhuvan, Ajman, was moved to the Al Karama area.

2006



In Mumbai, India, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj sanctified *murtis* for the BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Deira, Dubai. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami placed them in the Satsang Bhuvan in Dubai.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj entrusted Brahnavihari Swami to oversee Satsang activities in the Middle East. Subsequently, Brahnavihari Swami has visited the UAE on countless occasions to develop the Satsang and meet government officials.

2007



BAPS Satsang Bhuvan, Ajman, was moved to the Al Bustan area. In India, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj sanctified the *murtis* for Ajman.

2010



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and sadhus visited the UAE.

2012



Swamishri blesses Brahnavihari Swami to meet the rulers of the UAE and request permission for a mandir.

25 May (Pramukh Varni Din): Satsang centre started in Ruwais.

2013



21 May: Brahnavihari Swami had the first meeting with HE Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan at his royal majlis in Abu Dhabi.

22 May: Request letter submitted to HE Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Culture and Education, for a socio-cultural centre in the UAE.

9 July: Media reports of probable land to be granted for a BAPS Mandir.

11–28 August: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and sadhus visited the UAE.



2013: Frequent meetings took place with HE Sheikh Nahyan at his royal majlis, Abu Dhabi



2015: PM Narendra Modi tweets about the UAE government's allotment of land for a Hindu mandir



2016: HE Sheikh Nahyan at the *Transcendence* book launch, Sharjah

16 August: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami graced the new BAPS Satsang Bhuvan in Al Satwa, Dubai.

2014



16 September: Request letter to HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, for a socio-cultural centre and a Hindu mandir in the UAE.

2015



16 August: The UAE Government graciously decided to allot land for a Hindu mandir. Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi publicly appreciated the Government's decision at an assembly of more than 60,000 people in Abu Dhabi. He tweeted from the Grand Mosque: "I am very thankful to the UAE Govt for their decision to allot land in order to build a mandir in Abu Dhabi. This is a great step."



2018: Site for BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Mureikha, Abu Dhabi

2016



23 March: HE Sheikh Nahyan attended the launch in Sharjah of *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji* – a book by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam on Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

4 September: Allotment Order from the Crown Prince's Court to grant 5 acres of land.

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and Mandir Limited were chosen and entrusted by the governments of both the UAE and India to construct, develop and administer the mandir project.

2017



8 April: Brahmavihari Swami discussed with Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the initial ideas for the BAPS Hindu Mandir.

May: Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and sadhus visited the UAE.

24 October: In place of the 5 acres of land granted in 2016, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan issued an order and generously gifted a 13.7-acre plot of land at Abu Mureikha, between Abu Dhabi and Dubai, to enable the building of the BAPS Hindu Mandir and cultural complex.

2018



18 January: Brahmavihari Swami discussed detailed designs of the BAPS Abu Dhabi Mandir with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



2018: Mahant Swami Maharaj performs *shila puja* in the Akshar Deri, Gondal



2018: Audience with the Crown Prince, Presidential Palace, Abu Dhabi

26 January: In the Akshar Deri, Gondal, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* of the *shilas* for the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi.

10 February: For the first time ever the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan used his Presidential Palace to receive a head of state and other visitors. Following his meeting with the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, and the formal signing of eight MOUs between the UAE and India, announcements in Arabic and English invited the BAPS delegation to approach the two leaders. The Crown Prince and the Prime Minister both stood up to warmly welcome Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Brahmavihari Swami, and the BAPS Hindu Mandir committee members. As the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi was officially announced in the royal court, a golden Amrut Kalash and an elegant commemorative book were presented to each leader amidst a standing ovation.

11 February: Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi, in the presence of over 1,700 Indian and Emirati dignitaries at the Dubai Opera, unveiled a model of the traditional stone mandir to be built in Abu Dhabi. Simultaneously, the auspicious Vedic Shila Pujan was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami at the mandir site in Abu Dhabi, which was streamed live at the Dubai Opera. In his address, the Prime Minister thanked the Crown Prince HH Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan for providing the land and permission for building a traditional mandir.

Mandir Limited received the necessary government approvals and official licenses to fund-raise for this community project of love, tolerance and harmony.

The process of surveying land and discussions on the design of the master plan began.

9–23 March: Pujya Dr Swami and sadhus visited the UAE.



2018: PM Narendra Modi unveils mandir model, Dubai Opera



2018: HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan (third from left) at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi



2019: BAPS Hindu Mandir Foundation Stone-Laying Ceremony



2019: Swamishri performs the *shilanyas* rituals

16 May: Permit granted to Mandir Ltd to collect donations.

26 June: HH Sheikh Abudullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi

9 August: Mandir Limited signed a contract appointing RSP Architects Planners & Engineers as the lead consultant and designer for the BAPS Hindu Mandir.

6 November: Meeting at palace of HH Sheikh Abudullah to discuss the Mandir master plan.

9 November: Grand Diwali and Annakut celebrations in Abu Dhabi attended by over 10,000 dignitaries, devotees and well-wishers.

20 November: Crown Prince Court approved the Mandir master plan concept.

2019



10 February: Official permission granted to the proposed BAPS Hindu Mandir as a place

of worship.

18 to 29 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj visited the UAE. Hosted at the homes of Rohitbhai P. Patel in Jumeirah Park and Amitbhai Patel on the Palm Jumeirah.

18 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj received at Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC) in Dubai as a State Guest of the UAE by HE Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Cabinet Member and the Minister of State for Tolerance.

20 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Shilanyas (Foundation Stone-Laying) Ceremony in the presence of government ministers, dignitaries, and 5,000 devotees and well-wishers on the 27-acre BAPS Hindu Mandir site at Abu Mureikha, Abu Dhabi.

21 April: Mahant Swami Maharaj honoured by His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan at his royal majlis and the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi. ♦

- Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

*Early history and photographs provided by
Shri Rajendra Dave*



2019: Government ministers participate in the ceremony



2019: Swamishri with HE Sheikh Nahyan at the Grand Mosque

ROYAL WELCOME

HE Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan Welcomes

Mahant Swami Maharaj to the UAE

18 April 2019



HE Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan welcomes Swamishri at DWC Airport in Dubai and escorts him towards the terminal

Devotees of the UAE had been devoutly preparing and eagerly waiting for several months for Mahant Swami Maharaj's visit.

Today, 18 April, marked the end of their wait.

Dr B.R. Shetty, a highly respected Indian-origin businessman and philanthropist in the UAE, went to Ahmedabad with his private plane to bring Swamishri and other sadhus for their 12-day visit to the UAE.

At 10.53 a.m. (IST), the flight departed from Sardar Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad, and landed at the Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC) in Dubai at 12.15 p.m. (local time).

As the plane came to a halt on the tarmac, a red carpet was laid out to greet Swamishri. First, Brahmavihari Swami came out with Shri

Harikrishna Maharaj. Then, Swamishri descended the steps. At the bottom, on behalf of the UAE government, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Tolerance, welcomed Swamishri with a warm handshake and embrace.

Conveying Swamishri's sentiments, Brahmavihari Swami told HE Sheikh Nahyan that Swamishri had brought God and his blessings for him, and the entire UAE and surrounding region.

His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan responded, "Yes, we have been waiting. I feel blessed, our country is blessed, the whole region is blessed with your presence and purity. Consider the UAE as your home. We are welcoming you to your home."

Then, Brahmavihari Swami said to His



At the airport, children shower flower petals to honour Swamishri and HE Sheikh Nahyan

Excellency, “If you remember you had asked me to hold your hand and take you to heaven. Well, he is the person who can. Hold his hand and he will lead you to heaven.”

Then, holding Swamishri’s hand, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan escorted him along the carpet to the airport terminal. Inside, *balaks* dressed in traditional costumes honoured them both with a shower of flower petals.

As they conversed, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “You have come here from far, and I am sorry that we are a little late and kept you waiting.”

His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan said, “I would have waited for weeks to see you and greet you.” Then, still holding Swamishri’s hand, he added, “You are a very spiritual person. I can feel it in my heart. You have blessed the world.”

After a photo session, Sheikh Nahyan Mabarak Al Nahyan again held Swamishri’s hand and escorted him outside to the waiting car, where he bid him farewell.

Thus, with this official welcome, Swamishri’s 12-day visit as a State Guest of the UAE government began.

From the airport, Swamishri went to Jumeirah Park, where his stay had been arranged at the newly built home, named ‘Mansavovar’, of Shri Rohitbhai Patel and his sons.

Across the road from here, a large air-conditioned marquee had been erected for the morning

and evening assemblies. Smaller marquees adjacent to the rear had been erected to provide dining areas for the devotees for the duration of Swamishri’s stay.

Swamishri arrived in the welcome assembly at around 1.15 p.m. Hundreds of devotees from the UAE, Middle East and other countries were present. Everyone was delighted to have Swamishri’s darshan. After brief speeches by Brahmavihari Swami and Atmaswarup Swami, Swamishri was welcomed with garlands. Then, he departed from the assembly.

Swamishri reached ‘Mansarovar’ and before entering he performed the ritual inauguration of the home in the presence of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

For nine days, this would be Swamishri’s base. Thereafter, Swamishri would be staying for three days at the home of Shri Amitbhai Patel. ♦



Swamishri, HE Sheikh Nahyan and Mandir Ltd committee members



Architect's design of proposed BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi



GRAND Shilanyas CEREMONY

BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi
20 April 2019



Located at Abu Mureikha, a short drive from Exit 366 off the E11 expressway between Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the 27-acre site of the BAPS Hindu Mandir was the venue for the historic Shilanyas (Foundation Stone-Laying) Ceremony. For many weeks, the dedicated volunteers had been devoutly planning and preparing for this momentous occasion.

Flags of India, the UAE and festive messages decorated the entrance path to the site. On one side, atop a high sand dune, a large cutout of the Mandir was displayed welcoming all.

Two large air-conditioned marquees had been erected – the larger one, 40m by 90m, housed the excavated foundation area (W: 16m, L: 11m, Depth: 1.6m) where the main Shilanyas Ceremony would take place, the main stage (Width: 14m, Length: 6m, Height: 1 m), and approximately 2,500 dignitaries, well-wishers and devotees who would be participating in the Vedic *shilanyas* rituals. The other marquee, 40m by 60m, accommodated around 2,500 devotees and well-wishers who had come for darshan of this auspicious occasion.

Before sunrise, volunteers began to arrive to make the final preparations. From 7.30 a.m. devotees from the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, India, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, UK, France, USA, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Thailand and other countries began to arrive for the ceremony. Eager with excitement and dressed in traditional attire, the participants took their seats in the main marquee. Before each, on a stool, were a *murti*, a small *shila* (stone) and worship items for the *shilanyas* rituals.

At the front of the marquee was the stage, with a 45 ft wide by 15 ft high LED screen as a backdrop on which a variety of slides, videos and live visuals were displayed throughout the ceremony and assembly. In front of the stage, below ground level, was the elegantly decorated excavated foundation area. Here, the primary *shilanyas* rituals



Swamishri performs puja of the main *shila*

would be performed and the main foundation stones would be ritually placed into position. The area had been meticulously prepared with a red carpet, and flowers and other decorations.

At 9.00 a.m., a short video of the mandir project – from Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s prophecy in 1997 to the present – was shown.

Two large LED screens had also been set up for the audience – one at the front of the marquee and the other in the middle.

Then, Shrutiprakash Swami with his team of sadhus and pandits led the Vedic *shilanyas* rituals.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the worship of the central foundation stone while Vedic mantras were recited. For the benefit of participants who were new to this ceremony, the rituals and instructions were also explained in English.

In the excavated foundation area, worship of the other eight main foundation stones was performed by Atmaswarup Swami, Anandswarup Swami, Jnaneshwar Swami, Gurudev Shri Rakeshbhai Jhaveri (revered Jain guru), Ambassador of India HE Navdeep Suri, Consul General of India Vipul, Dr B.R. Shetty, Shri Sudhir Shetty, Shri Vasu Shroff, Shri Yogeshbhai Mehta, Shri S.M. Rao, Shri Harshadbhai Mehta, Shri Bakulbhai Mehta, Shri Ramesh Ramakrishnan, Shri Mayank Patel, Shri Rohit Gupta, Shri Mahendrabhai Patel, Shri Lai Huen Poh, Shri Somasundaram Lakshman, Shri Rohitbhai P. Patel, Shri Manubhai P. Patel,



Ishwarcharan Swami and dignitaries perform the *shilanyas* rituals in the excavated foundation area

Shri Ghanshyambhai Pagrani, Shri Maheshbhai Patel, Shri Amit Patel, Shri Kiran Asher, Shri Binay Shetty, as well other senior BAPS devotees and dignitaries.

Outside the foundation area, on the floor of the marquee, were many distinguished guests participating in the rituals: Mr Nazeem al Kudsi (grandson of former President of Syria), Shri Ram Buxani, Shri Vinodbhai Adani, Mr Michael Magill, Mr John Wong and others. Many Emiratis from throughout the UAE were also present.

At 10.30 a.m., Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and

Devotees and well-wishers participate in the *shilanyas* rituals



Aerial view of the mandir site





Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj were welcomed into the ceremonial marquee. Everyone was overjoyed to have this darshan as Swamishri took his seat by the central foundation stone to continue the *shilanyas* rituals.

Brahmavihari Swami applied a *chandlo* to Swamishri's forehead and tied a *nadachhadi* to his right wrist. Then, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the construction implements and the engineers who will be overseeing the construction.

Thereafter, as Vedic chants continued, Swamishri placed the *nidhikumbh* and main foundation stone into position, and using a trowel

poured white cement on the main stone. Other dignitaries also poured cement on the main stone.

After the conclusion of the rituals, Swamishri and all others came up from the foundation area. Swamishri went to the adjacent majlis (reception area) to receive the government ministers who had come to participate in the ceremony: His Excellency Dr Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Chairman of the Department of Community Development and Member of the Executive Council, His Excellency Dr Thani Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, and His Excellency Dr Ahmad Bin Abdullah Humaid Belhoul Al Falasi, Cabinet Member and Minister of State for Higher Education and Advanced Skills. Swamishri warmly met the guests, who expressed their delight to be present for this auspicious and historic celebration.

Then, Swamishri returned with the guests to the ceremonial marquee and at the entrance they unveiled the 'Gift of Gratitude' (see box on p. 20) – a special artwork celebrating the Year of Tolerance to be presented as a gift on behalf of the Indian community to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan for his generosity and support for the BAPS Hindu Mandir project.

Swamishri, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, the honourable ministers, Ambassador HE Navdeep Suri and Dr B.R. Shetty

Ishwarcharan Swami performs *shilanyas* rituals



then entered the excavated foundation area for the concluding rituals.

As Vedic mantras were recited, Swamishri and all others placed sanctified small *shilas* on the main *shila*, poured white cement and showered flower petals on the central foundation area. Finally, they collectively poured water from three *kalashes* containing water from three of India's most holy rivers – Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

Thereafter, Swamishri and all others made their way to the stage. The celebration assembly began with everyone standing for the national anthems of the UAE and India. Swamishri then welcomed and honoured the guests with garlands. Thereafter, the assembly featured a series of speeches, culminating with Swamishri's blessings.



Swamishri and chief guests perform the concluding *shilanyas* rituals



Brahnavihari Swami

"At the beginning of my welcome address, I would like to tell especially the king, His Highness Khalifa Bin Zayed al Nahyan, the

Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and also all the rulers and leaders who have expressed lots of love, shown so much faith and extended their complete support



GIFT OF GRATITUDE

The artwork consists of two major parts, 'the base' and 'the frame'. The base is created using seven large sandstone blocks representing the seven Emirates of the UAE. These blocks interlock with each other creating a strong foundation for the frame. The interlocking symbolizes unity and harmony in governance, in communities and in the growth of all seven Emirates. Pink sandstone from Rajasthan, India, has been used for the base – the same stone from which the BAPS Hindu Mandir will be hand-carved by 2,000 stone craftsmen.

The frame is made of 4,875 metal fins having unique lengths which cast shadows of various lengths. The fins are organized in such a way that they cast long and short shadows to render a beautiful portrait of the late HH Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. This portrait of the Father of the Nation represents

the inherent values of peace and humanity throughout the realm.

Small metal fins reflect the cultural diversity and prosperity of the evolving UAE. As the viewer moves away from the fins, the large artwork articulates into two images – The Founding Father of the UAE on one side and the ghaf – the symbol of the Year of Tolerance – on the other.



Swamishri and dignitaries pour the sacred waters of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati upon the main foundation *shila*

to what we are experiencing this morning, that I have no words to express my joy. It is ineffable for me to express how much joy we feel together, not just as the Hindu community and not just as the Indian community, but as the community of the world. We thank the rulers of this nation for reposing so much faith and love in everyone. Today, this day is auspicious and special because to all the Excellencies who are present on the stage and to everybody who is listening across the globe, this is the beginning of a long-standing dream of the Indian community to have a temple, a traditional temple in this land. I believe that the UAE, which people from more than 200 nations call their home, is more than just a summary of humanity; it is not just a place that talks about tolerance, but we have experienced it first-hand.

“When the temple land was allotted [in 2015] and our beloved Prime Minister announced it to a packed audience of 60,000 in Dubai, all stood up to give a standing ovation, which was an expression of our enormous joy. Today, when the first *shila* was being worshipped here, a leading member of our community, who is unfortunately not present here today because of an illness, sent

me an SMS that summarizes the love that the Indian community has. He expressed, ‘Swami, I have been living here for almost 70 years and it has been our dream [to have a temple] as a community. So, the news of the temple transported me to my childhood days as you are starting the temple construction in Abu Dhabi.’

“The mandir will create an environment and a set of values that will celebrate humanity. A great American, Indologist, historian, writer and speaker, Dr David Frawley, who is known as Vamadeva Shastri, told me in Abu Dhabi, ‘Till now, the BAPS has built 1,200 mandirs worldwide and they all are inspirational. After making Akshardham, your work became generational. But one single mandir in Abu Dhabi will be civilizational, because it will bring civilizations together.’”

“The Mandir will not only bring two countries, two cultures, two communities, two religions, but the entire humanity together; and that is the beauty this country has been able to do. The news of the allocation of land for the Mandir sent a signal of global inclusiveness, cultural and spiritual inclusiveness around the world.

“People and the media ask me as I travel in



Dignitaries, devotees and well-wishers participate in the *shilanyas* rituals

this part of the world about what I think of the Year of Tolerance? I want to correct and say that in the UAE the celebration of tolerance is not just for one year, it is a lifetime message continued from the founder, His Highness Sheikh Zayed. The message of tolerance, love and harmony has been passed down from one generation to the next. Here, tolerance is no longer just a noun. It is a verb that we can see in action. Which country doesn't believe in tolerance? Which culture or religion does not talk about tolerance? Who doesn't value harmony? The UAE has established a Ministry of Tolerance and have created laws, bylaws and sublaws. The UAE has created programmes and have shared and opened its heart to the entire world. That is the reason why people across the world consider it a home. It is because of this reason that over 3.3 million Indians are here and continue to stay here permanently. That's the love the UAE has shown to all of us.

“When Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and I were welcomed at the Presidential Palace in 2018, we took the two different designs of the Mandir to the Crown Prince. One was a closed design, whereby the Mandir would be inside a normal building and the other was the traditional open-to-the-air Mandir. In front of 400 senior Arab delegates, the Crown Prince selected the open

traditional Mandir design. The Crown Prince said that the whole world should be able to see it.

Our Prime Minister, Shri Narendrabhai Modi, had talked to the Crown Prince that he would like to have land for a Hindu Mandir, and so, through the generosity of the Crown Prince and the request of Shri Narendrabhai Modi the land for the Mandir was allocated. I believe it is very important that the spirit of friendship begins with the leaders. His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan personally came to Delhi to see Akshardham and spent two hours. Initially, the land allocated was 2.5 acres. I requested for more land, since to create a Mandir for the entire Hindu community, we would require multiple halls, so that everybody could practise their faith in the best way possible. So, we requested for more land. They gave 13.5 acres.

“And His Highness Sheikh Abdullah said, ‘If the temple premises will have halls, a vegetarian kitchen, a library and an exhibition, then the whole world will come there. So, the land from the road to the border of the temple is yours.’ Thus, he gave another 13.5 acres for parking, so that everybody can celebrate their own faith in a genuine way. However, this generosity gives us more responsibilities.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1997, had

lovingly prophesied in a desert in Sharjah that there would be a Mandir in Abu Dhabi. When God wishes, everything happens naturally. Everything started coming together. Some of the strongest support and greatest love has come from HE Sheikh Nahyan Mabararak Al Nahyan. When I went to him, he said, 'Write a letter.' We wrote a letter and he said he would take it to the Crown Prince. He has shown so much love. That's one of the reasons that everybody who is present on this dais, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Environment, and also Dr Mugheer who takes care of Community Affairs, created a special cell to accommodate our needs. Thereafter, the first building permission, Number 001, was given the BAPS Hindu Mandir. Thank you very much to the entire community and all the leaders who have been with us. But the story doesn't end here.

"Harmony generates harmony. The entire Indian community has come forward: the Hindu Samaj, Vasu Shroffji, Kandhariji, the Sikh Samaj, people like Dr B.R. Shetty, Harshadbhai Mehta, S.M. Rao, Ramesh Ramkrishnanji, Yogeshbhai Mehta, Rohitbhai Patel, Mr Lai Poh of RSP and all have joined hands together in this project of creating this wonder.

"The inner spirit of my guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj was, 'In the joy of others, lies our own.' Yes, the makers are the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. But, people will forget those who make the Mandir. The Mandir belongs to those who use it. Nobody remembers who made Stonehenge, nobody remembers who made the Kedarnath and Badrinath mandirs. The faithful who go there reap the benefits.

"Mahant Swami Maharaj, who is softly spoken, is the inspirer of this Mandir project. His blessings have worked wonders.

"When we ask him what is the biggest problem of this world? He says it is lack of harmony. We asked him what is the solution to that problem? He said one word – Harmony. We asked how

we can achieve harmony? He said, 'By being in harmony with everyone and everything around you.' Then we asked, 'How we can be in harmony with everything around us?' He said, 'By being in harmony with yourself, inner harmony.' Then we asked, 'How can we have harmony within ourselves?' He said, 'Be in harmony with God. Be in harmony with the religion that you practice. Generating harmony inside will generate harmony outside and everywhere.'

"Today, more than 2,500 people from all communities and creeds have come and been seated since 8 a.m. We deeply thank you from our heart. Around 2,500 are watching this from another tent. The message of this mandir is that it is a spiritual oasis of harmony. And this spiritual oasis is on the banks of three rivers: Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. The three holy rivers will flow through this land and bring the energy of love and creativity. Let's make this beautiful Mandir as a gift to this nation and express our appreciations."

Then, a two-minute video depicting an animated rendition of the proposed mandir complex was shown on the LED screens.



Ambassador HE Navdeep Suri

"We couldn't have reached where we stand today without two absolutely critical elements.

"First, it is the determination of the sagacious leadership of UAE to make this temple a manifest symbol of UAE's spirit of tolerance. That clarity of purpose ensured that the temple project moves forward rapidly despite the challenges that arose due to very simple reason that there has never been a temple before in Abu Dhabi. New rules had to be written, new precedents had to be created, and at every step where there were hurdles, the leadership stepped in and said that we want this done. A big thank you to the leadership for this.

"HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, conveyed to me the

gist of his conversation with the Crown Prince HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He said (quoting HH Sheikh Mohammed), ‘We agreed that we will have a Hindu temple at Abu Dhabi. Then, it should look like a Hindu temple. Why it should look like anything else?’

“The second, and equally critical element in this journey, was the absolute commitment and vast management capacity that BAPS has brought to this project, taking it forward as a sacred mission and duty.

“Over the next century, perhaps the next millennium, our future generations will look back on this historic day and recall the vision and

leadership of those who helped in making the Indian communities dream of a Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi a reality.”

Then, the Ambassador read out the message sent by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi on this historic occasion (See box below).



HE Dr Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili

“This comes as a result of the great relations between two nations and cultures. Our presence here today really shows the strong relations between our two nations. This temple, with all who are working in the background, resembles the

PM NARENDRA MODI'S MESSAGE

When complete, this temple will symbolise the universal human values, and spiritual ethos that form a shared heritage of both India and the UAE.

It embodies the timeless Vedic values of वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् – ‘The Whole World is One Family’ and आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः – ‘Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides.’

On behalf of 130 crore Indians, it is my privilege to convey our greetings to my dear friend, and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. I deeply appreciate his vision for the future of the relationship between India

and the UAE, and for this entire region. I place on record, our appreciation for the continued support of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan.

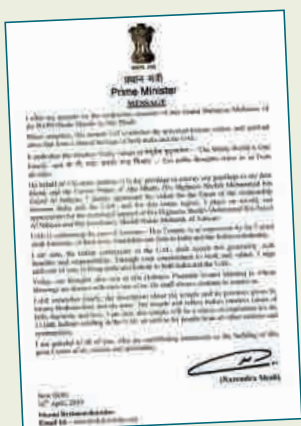
UAE is celebrating the year of tolerance. This Temple is an expression by the United Arab Emirates of their love, friendship and faith in India and the Indian community.

I am sure the Indian community in the UAE shall accept this generosity, with humility and responsibility. Through your commitment to work and values, I urge each one of you, to bring pride and honour to both India and the UAE.

Today, our thoughts also turn to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj ji, whose blessings are always with each one of us. He shall always continue to inspire us.

I still remember fondly, the description about the temple and its premises given by Swami Brahmavihari and his team. The temple will reflect India's timeless values of faith, harmony and love. I am sure, this temple will be a source of inspiration for the 33 lakh Indians residing in the UAE, as well as for people from all other cultures and communities.

I am grateful to all of you, who are contributing immensely to the building of this great centre of art, culture and spirituality.



greatness of tolerance of this country. As my colleague said earlier, this temple holds the licence number 001 and this shows the importance of the temple, harmony and tolerance.”



Dr B.R. Shetty, Chairman of Mandir Limited

“I would like to thank HH Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, HE Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mabararak Al Nahyan and all the communities and people of the UAE for supporting this project. It is not a joke to have received such a huge piece of land in a prime location of Abu Dhabi. When we went with the Mandir designs, I told Brahmavihari Swamiji that the Crown Prince would select the traditional design, because they are not hypocrites. Moreover, wherever we went, in every department, we were welcomed. Everybody supported in all aspects. Now, when His Highness has given us such a beautiful land on the main highway, it’s our duty to add to the skyline of the UAE. That is the harmony of this project and the power of Abu Dhabi. Recently the Pope came, and now Mahant Swamiji has come and we can see communal harmony. His Highness has done so many good things for the community.”



Mahant Swami Maharaj

“This hall is overflowing with peace, love and harmony. The atmosphere is such that everyone can experience it. Right from the morning till now, no one would have had any thoughts other than about peace, love and harmony. I deeply thank from my heart the king, the royal family, the government, the ministers, all the officers and the entire nation. The king has put a lot of trust in us and that is a big responsibility for us. This trust is due to the pure intentions and work of BAPS around the world. The people here are wise. They have seen the pious lives and work

of the sadhus and that is why they have become more and more involved.

“It is a great gesture that they have dedicated this whole year for tolerance and harmony. From the Mandir, the values of peace, love and harmony will continue to spread. The whole of humanity will benefit. This will truly be a heaven in the desert; an oasis in the desert. May all be blessed with peace of mind, prosperity and good health. Peace is not attained by money or intelligence; peace only comes to those who crave for peace. Congratulations to all of have worked together to achieve this. We shall remain together till the end.”

At the end of the assembly, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, International Convenor of BAPS, delivered a heartfelt Vote of Thanks.

When the four-hour celebration concluded at 12.50 p.m., the joy of the 5,000 dignitaries, guests, devotees and well-wishers who had participated in and observed this auspicious and momentous occasion was evident on the faces of all.

Thereafter, throughout the day, devotees and well-wishers from the Art of Living, Chinmaya Mission, Jain Samaj, Dubai Gurudwara, Brahma Kumaris, ISKCON, Ayappa Samaj, Tamil Samaj and numerous other spiritual and social organizations visited to offer their respects and devotion and have darshan of the foundation stones. Meanwhile, groups of singers representing various communities sang bhajans and verses from the Gita, Bhagavat, Upanishads and Vedas on the main stage: BAPS *balaks*, Bhajan Bharti Group (separate groups of boys and girls), Abu Dhabi Veda Samaj, Mohana Group (separate groups of boys and girls) and Telugu Samaj (separate groups of boys and girls). In this way the devotional and festive atmosphere was sustained until 6.00 p.m. when darshan closed.

To enable all worldwide BAPS devotees to enjoy the darshan of this historic occasion, the entire ceremony was webcast at a special time selected to suit most viewers.



MESSAGE FROM HIS EXCELLENCY SHEIKH NAHYAN BIN MABARAK AL NAHYAN



Although His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Cabinet Member and the Minister of State for Tolerance, was unable to attend the Shilanyas Ceremony due to unavoidable engagements, he conveyed his sentiments:

His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj is a renowned global leader whose teachings are a source of spirituality, inspiration and joy. He is a powerful advocate for human brotherhood and wholesome relationships that are so essential to maintaining peace and prosperity around the globe.

His Holiness's visit to our country speaks to our aspirations as global citizens to achieve fulfilment and harmony. It helps us to overcome obstacles that we may face in achieving this human goal. [It] is an opportunity for us to marvel at the power of your teachings and of your example in working together as human beings to remove conflicts between different elements of the population, to build a spirit of tolerance as a gateway to understanding, to establish trust with our fellow human beings, and to engage people who are different from us with respect and a quest for peace and coexistence.

I share your optimism that this Hindu Mandir will be a gathering place for people devoted to one of the world's great religions. I share in your pride that His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, made this land available to the Indian community in Abu Dhabi.

The United Arab Emirates is a multicultural community. Ours is a tolerant country that allows people from different places and from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to live here in harmony and cooperation, as good human beings. Good human beings work for peace and cooperation, prosperity and the well-being of society. Good human beings tolerate and respect one another and understand each other's good motives, whatever their cultural differences may be.

In the UAE, tolerance builds bridges that accommodate our individual beliefs. Tolerance allows us to talk with one another and to understand and appreciate our differences. Tolerance allows us to work together to improve the economic and social well-being of human societies. And tolerance helps us to recognize our common virtues and, hence, helps us to work effectively together.

I am very aware today of the special relationship between India and the United Arab Emirates. We have a long history of friendship and cooperation. In the UAE, we think of India as a very special country.

Today marks, for all of you, the beginning of something very special. For you now will have a new temple that will serve both as a place of worship and as a community centre for all. However, a building is only stone and mortar. What makes it a community asset is the way you will use it. The new Mandir will only come alive with your energy and your vitality. ♦



Mahant Swami Maharaj Honoured at the Royal Majlis and Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

Abu Dhabi, 21 April 2019

During his visits to the Middle East, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had been warmly received and developed a rapport with Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain; Prince Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain; and members of the royal families of Oman, Dubai and Sharjah.

On 21 April, the day after the Shilanyas Ceremony at Abu Mureikha, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister for Tolerance and a highly respected member of the royal family of Abu Dhabi, invited Mahant Swami Maharaj and 50 BAPS sadhus to his royal majlis in Abu Dhabi.

Shortly after 4.30 p.m. Swamishri arrived with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj at the majlis. Outside, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan greeted Swamishri with a warm embrace, while expressing his regret at being unable to attend the previous day's Shilanyas Ceremony.

Then, His Excellency held Swamishri's hand and escorted him up to the main seating area of

his majlis. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the 50 sadhus were also seated there. Dr B.R. Shetty and other members of the Mandir Ltd committee were also present.

Brahmavihari Swami explained to Swamishri about the constant encouragement and guidance given by His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan for the mandir project. Swamishri expressed his gratitude for his wholehearted support.

His Excellency then said to Brahmavihari swami, "He is not just your spiritual leader, he is also my spiritual leader."

Thereafter, His Excellency personally greeted all the 50 sadhus.



Swamishri is guided inside the main prayer hall of the Grand Mosque

From here, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mabararak Al Nahyan sat Swamishri in his own car and drove him to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque.

While driving, His Excellency said, “I feel so blessed that you came to my home and you especially sat in my car. I am honoured and privileged.”

Brahmavihari Swami said, “It is a rare thing and it is due his pure love.”

His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan said, “I can feel it. He has a very holy face; he is a spiritual man. And I can feel him here inside me. Now I will never sell this car, this car will be with me. And the memory will never leave me. It’s a great feeling, a very holy feeling.” Then, he added, “Please also bless my family and children and grandchildren.”

Brahmavihari Swami then told His Excellency that Swamishri was delighted to learn that he personally served his parents despite the many maids and servants he has.

His Excellency said, “This is a divine duty. This is like worshipping God when you look after your parents and I did look after my father after his accident.”

Then, His Excellency said to Swamishri, “I want to convey His Highness Mohammed Bin Zayed’s greetings. He had a previous commitment, and he asked me to convey his appreciation that Swami has taken the time to come to do the foundation and to have this great testimony of humanity being built in Abu Dhabi and the UAE.

As Swami said ‘This will be the face of peace’.”

HE Sheikh Nahyan continued, “Swami’s love for humanity and peace comes from his heart. That is why he has spread so much love and so much peace all over the world.” Then, holding Swamishri’s hand, he added, “And he is my spiritual leader, I love him and respect him.”

Swamishri said, “Everything is done by God. I am completely free. There is no pressure on my head. Everything is God’s will.”

Swamishri added, “Because you could not come yesterday, we have this opportunity to get closer. It is better this way. Whatever happened yesterday was for the best. Yesterday, we would have just done the rituals and separated.”

HE Sheikh Nahyan nodded, “I agree.”

Swamishri said, “This we will remember always.”

Again, HE Sheikh Nahyan agreed, “It will always be in my heart being so close to Swami. I admire him, love him and I am honoured and privileged. I am so touched and so moved emotionally to be with him. I’ve been waiting for this great honour.”

Swamishri said, “I am also very happy. That you have served your parents gives the biggest joy.”

HE Sheikh Nahyan said, “I am privileged, honoured and blessed by this feeling from Swami. I appreciate it very much. It will stay in my heart. I am moved by it; I am touched.”



HE Sheikh Nahyan honours Mahant Swami Maharaj and 50 BAPS sadhus at his royal majlis, Abu Dhabi

The conversation continued and just before arriving at the Grand Mosque, Swamishri again said to HE Sheikh Nahyan, “The one value of serving parents gives birth to all the other values which you possess.”

On reaching the world-famous Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, HE Sheikh Nahyan assisted Swamishri out of his car and, holding Swamishri’s hand, led him towards the Grand Mosque. While walking, HE Sheikh Nahyan said, “Now Abu Dhabi will have two great places of worship: The Grand Mosque and the BAPS Hindu Mandir. What a wonderful temple you are making. I have seen the pictures. It’s incredible, beyond imagination.”

At the entrance of the Mosque, Swamishri and His Excellency were formally received by His Excellency Dr Yousif Alobaidli, Director General of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Centre.

Thereafter, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mabararak Al Nahyan and His Excellency Dr Yousif Alobaidli guided Swamishri and the sadhus, explaining the significance of many aspects of the mosque. At the Qibla Wall, Swamishri paid respects to the 99 names of Allah inscribed in Kufic calligraphy script.

As HE Sheikh Nahyan and Swamishri made their way to the external courtyard, they were greeted by devotees, well-wishers and visitors who were eagerly awaiting to pass on their respects.

At the breathtaking colonnade, which has

1,096 pillars, photos of HE Sheikh Nahyan and Swamishri were taken. Here, on behalf of Swamishri, Brahnavihari Swami wrote a message in the Guest Book, commending and supporting the efforts for global harmony by the government and people of the UAE. Before signing the Guest Book, Swamishri himself wrote, “Heartiest pranams to everyone who visits this place.”

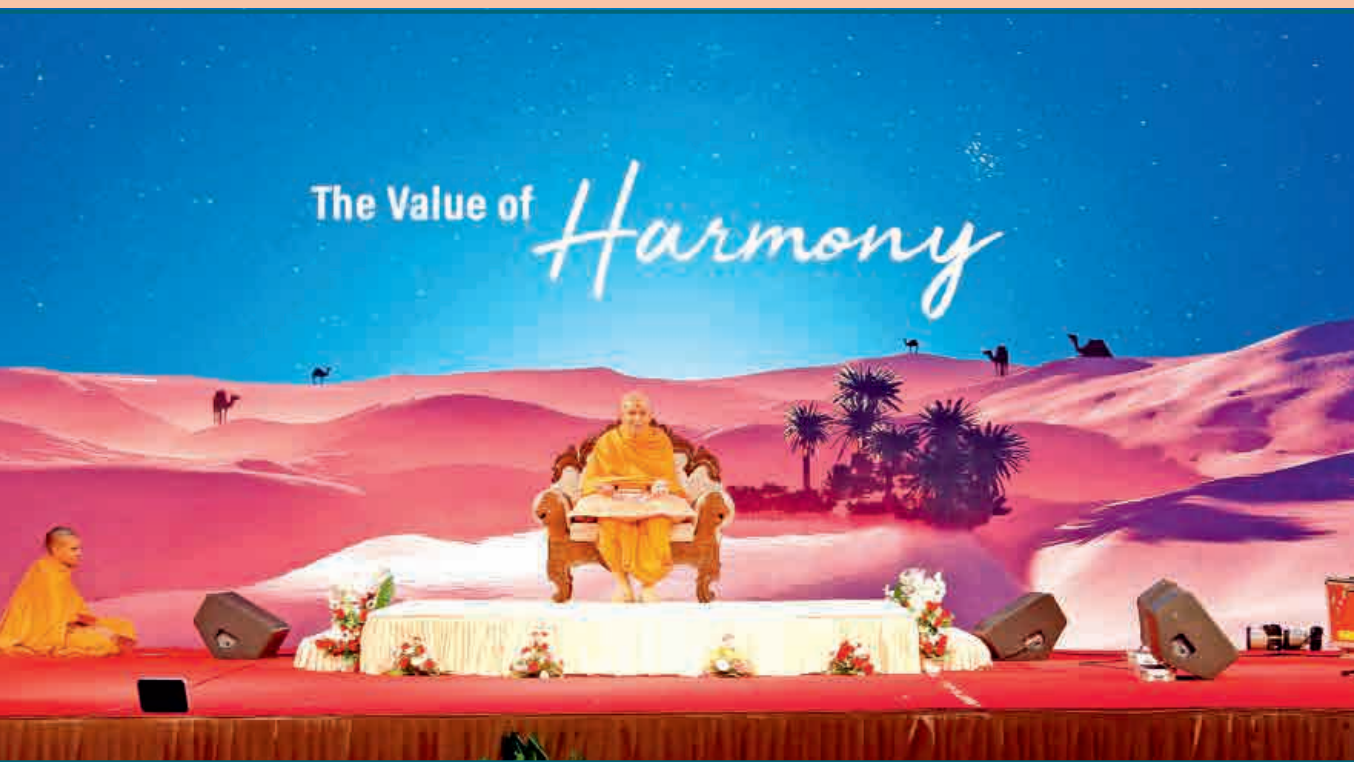
Then, His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan again personally drove Swamishri in a golf cart to give a view of the Martyrs’ Memorial, where Swamishri closed his eyes and prayed.

From here, HE Sheikh Nahyan drove Swamishri to the helipad, where he had arranged his helicopter to take Swamishri back to Dubai. Before they parted company, His Excellency and Swamishri embraced several times.

SWAMISHRI VISITS GURUDWARA

On 25 April 2019, Swamishri visited the Guru Nanak Darbar Sikh Gurudwara in Dubai. There, Swamishri honoured the Guru Granth Sahib with a garland. Thereafter, Shri Surender Singh Khandari welcomed Swamishri and escorted him on a brief tour of the facilities.

As Swamishri was departing, Dr Omar Al-Muthanna, CEO, Community Development Authority of Dubai, was passing by the Gurudwara. He stopped and greeted Swamishri. Swamishri, too, was delighted by the unexpected meeting. ♦



DAILY EVENING SATSANG ASSEMBLIES

21–26 April 2019, Dubai

During Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay in Dubai he resided at Shri Rohitbhai Patel's home in Jumeirah Park. Every morning Swamishri performed puja from 5.30 a.m. to 7.15 a.m. and attended the evening satsang assembly from 7.45 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. in an air-conditioned marquee situated opposite Rohitbhai's home. About 2,500 devotees from the USA, UK, India, Saudia Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Africa and the UAE daily attended both the sessions. During Swamishri's morning puja children recited verses from the satsang scriptures and swamis, BAPS youths, members of the Mohana group, Bhajan Bharti group, Nand Govindam Bhajan Mandal and Swami Samarth group sang bhajans.

From 21 to 26 April, invited guests attended the evening satsang assemblies to listen to bhajans and lectures by swamis and receive Swamishri's blessings. They also shared their spiritual experiences from the dais. On Sunday evening, 21 April, a Women's Day celebration assembly was held. The evening assemblies from 22 to 25 April were themed on values: Value of Harmony, Value of Service, Value of Faith and Value of Humility. The theme of the morning assembly on 26 April was Value of Gratitude. Edited excerpts of the speeches by guests in these assemblies are presented below.

WOMEN'S DAY: 21 April (Sunday)

In the evening, the UAE BAPS Women's Wing

celebrated Women's Day by presenting a unique cultural programme acknowledging the achievements and roles women play in society today. The event, held at Jumeirah Park, Dubai, was attended by over 1,000 females of all ages from the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, India, USA, UK and other countries.

The programme showcased the on-going commitment to women's activities and matters of importance to women, as inspired and guided by the spiritual leader of BAPS, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The two-hour event began at 7:30 p.m. with a beautiful recitation of the Shanti Paath (Vedic Peace Prayer) and was attended by Mrs Bubbles Kandhari, Vice-Chairperson of the Guru Nanak Darbar in Dubai, Mrs Reema Shetty-Bitar, Co-founder and Chief Executive of The Foodsters Inc., Mrs Falguni Mehta and many other prominent figures of the UAE women's community.

Themed on the 'Value of Love', women from various communities and spiritual beliefs

participated in the memorable musical and cultural presentations. The theme was artfully conveyed through videos, traditional dances, meaningful dramas, a magnificent cultural parade involving over 150 women, panel discussions and speeches by eminent guests who shared their inspiring testimonies and experiences.

Mrs Bubbles Kandhari shared her feelings in the guest book, "The most amazing programme, with utmost love, humility and compassion, setting the best example of tolerance for the world."

A lead volunteer for the event added, "We're so grateful for the overwhelming support of so many inspiring women who presented and attended today. We hope the event empowered women of all ages to reflect on their personal journey and that they continue to shine professionally, personally and in support of others through faith, courage and love."

At the end of the event, the entire assembly prayed for the victims of the attacks in Sri Lanka.

VALUE OF HARMONY: 22 April (Monday)

Anandswarup Swami eloquently spoke in English about the Value of Harmony. Thereafter, the invited guests addressed the audience in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.



Shri S.M. Rao

Steel magnate in the UAE

"What is harmony? Harmony is keeping in tune with everyone. We heard the music [bhajans]. Music is music when the *tabla* is in tune with the harmonium and the harmonium is in tune with the voice. So being in tune is harmony. If you are out of tune it would be cacophony." Thereafter, Shri S M Rao sang a prayer to God.



Shri Ramesh Ramakrishnan

Philanthropist and Chairman of

Transworld Group – a shipping and logistics conglomerate

"I didn't have the privilege of meeting Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, but today after having heard the talk [by Anandswarup Swami] a while back, it appears to be that I have a great connect with him. There was so much learning and inspiration I got from the half-hour talk.

"Those of us who have been living in the UAE and been dreaming and wanting to have a temple here; this dream has now come true and we had the most important *shilanyas* function





on 20th April. That day will be remembered by all of us and etched in our minds all our lives. The mandir project will continue to bring peace, harmony and joy to all of us in this part of the world. I want to make a special mention here about the tremendous efforts by the BAPS, led here by Pujya Brahmagavihari Swami and ably supported by Dr B.R. Shetty, who have been relentlessly working with perseverance.

“The UAE government has been celebrating 2019 as the Year of Tolerance to strengthen the harmony between various nationalities and religions in this country. Needless to say, the founding father of the UAE and the current leadership has always believed in and offered acceptance and tolerance to all of us who have been living here for so many years. We all are blessed by living in this great country and it is our responsibility and duty to give back to this country and also be responsible residents. This is quite important. We have to understand the traditions, the culture and we have to become very, very responsible in whatever we do. In return, we have got a massive gift from the government that has allowed us to have a wonderful temple in this part of the world.

“In today’s world, the word tolerance has great significance. Countries around the world are recognized by the cooperational harmony amongst nations and people. It is a key to the success of mankind and planet earth. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the rulers of this great country for giving us the freedom to practise our faith with other religions, thus highlighting UAE as a global capital of harmony.

“Thank you very much for giving me an opportunity of coming here and sharing [my thoughts] with you.”

“I didn’t have the privilege of meeting Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, but today after having heard the talk a while back, it appears to be that I have a great connect with him. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the rulers of this great country for giving us the freedom to practise our faith with other religions, thus highlighting UAE as a global capital of harmony.

- Shri Ramesh Ramakrishnan



Shri Harshad Mehta

Veteran diamond businessman and a known philanthropist supporting various causes in the educational field



“Jai Jinendra, Jai Swaminarayan. We always hear in motivational speeches that if you dream, if you work hard, you can achieve your goal. Tell me frankly, how many of you ever dreamt of having a temple in the UAE? Very few. This is something like a miracle. I have been here since sixteen years and I never dreamt about it. There are many people who have been here for 50 years. They also never dreamt about having a temple. However, because of our dear PM Modi *saheb* and swamis – they really have brought to us a beautiful gift here in the UAE. It came from all the sections of our society: from the locals, from the King, from the Sheikh, all the authorities, the people here and the businessmen, all liked this idea and that’s why we have all gathered here to felicitate it.

“Second thing which I would like to share with you is that there are more than 11 religions in the world. They all believe in ten major values. When I talk with the *swamis* here, I hear that our object for this temple is to inspire people to follow values and bring harmony. UAE is known for values. I had only heard about Ram Rajya, that you can leave your doors and windows open, and there is no threat whatsoever. I experienced this in the UAE. You can roam fearlessly even at 2 a.m. I pray to all to follow your religion rigorously, but also balance the value system with your religion. No one should be hurt by our speech and actions. We are here to spread the value of harmony.”

VALUE OF SERVICE: 23 April (Tuesday)

In the evening satsang assembly, swamis sang bhajans and thereafter Aksharvatsal Swami spoke in Hindi about the Value of Service.



Shri Surender Singh Kandhari

Chairman of Guru Nanak Darbar (Gurudwara) in Dubai and a renowned industrialist



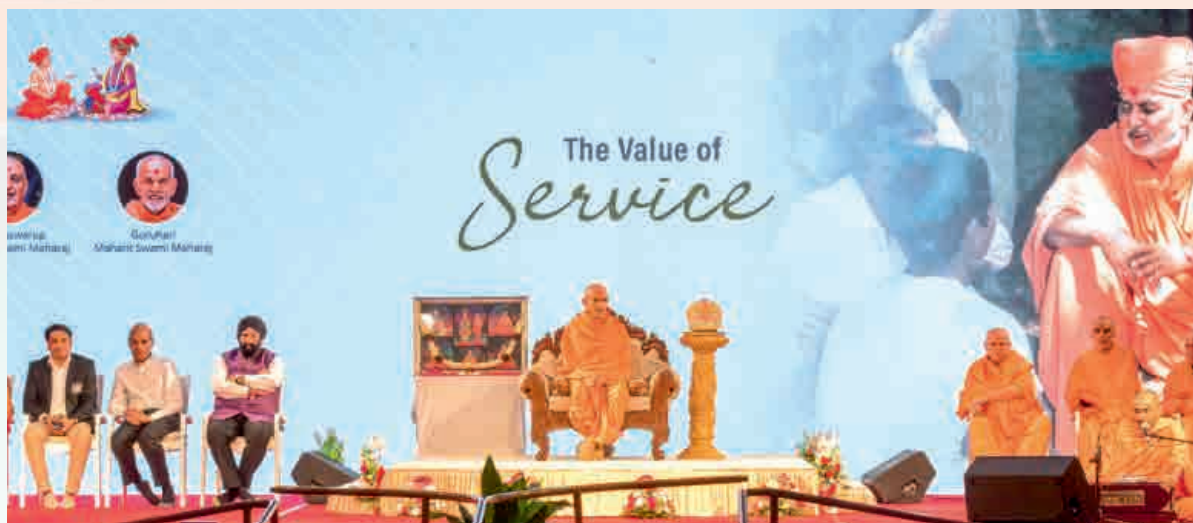
“First of all, my congratulations to the mandir committee for creating history by [performing the *shilanyas* rituals for] the first [traditional] Hindu temple in the UAE; the first [traditional] Hindu temple that will be built in the whole of the Middle East.

“The subject today is ‘Value of Service’. The swamiji earlier spoke so much about service and *seva* that I cannot add much to what he said, but I believe that if one does not do *seva* selflessly then one will not get its fruits.

“*Seva* is not just giving money or food. *Seva* is bringing happiness to people. If you smile at your neighbour and make him happy, that is also *seva*. You are giving happiness to this world, you are making this world a better place.

Our object for this temple is to inspire people to follow values and bring harmony.
UAE is known for values. I pray to all that follow your religion rigorously,
but also balance the value system with your religion.
No one should be hurt by our speech and actions.

- Shri Harshadbhai Mehta



“I always say that Bhagwan has given us two hands. With one you serve others and with the other you earn your living. But use one to serve others. This is the only thing which can take us to *moksha*. If you want to go to heaven, you have to do *seva*. If you don’t do *seva*, you can never ever think of attaining God Almighty’s grace and blessings. I would say that everybody should make one commitment, that every day I will make at least one person happy. That will make this place a much better place to live.”



Shri Rajendra Bengani

Founding member of the Jain Centre, and
a Jain scholar who runs a Jain Pathshala in Dubai



“We had all attended the Abu Dhabi *shilanyas* programme. I believe that after the festival of Navratri again Navratri follows [the next year]; after Baisakhi again Baisakhi follows; after Vishu again Vishu follows; and before Eid one also celebrates Eid. All these celebrations were reflected together in the *shilanyas* programme. The reason being there was a spiritual atmosphere. On that day, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists were present because this mandir will not belong to one, but to all! However, the question was what is the common denominator between all those who came there? What was it that pulled everyone there? After studying [what I saw], I was reminded of one thing. It has been written that cows may be of different colours but their milk is white. When we were all there – Jain, Hindu, Muslim, etc – all belonged to *sampradayas* [sects] but their dharma was one. On that day, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj said that dharma is peace, dharma is harmony and dharma is love.

“During the Year of Tolerance the proposed mandir can be said to be like ‘fragrance pervading gold’. But this analogy falls short. In the shastras, one finds the mentioning of ‘*mani-kanchan yoga*’

“ I think Bhagwan Swaminarayan will bring that jewel [i.e. mandir]
on this land [i.e. gold] in Abu Dhabi and thus effect a ‘*mani-kanchan yoga*.’

This is not a simple task. The reasons why this will happen successfully
are our rulers here and the blessings and grace of Swaminarayan and swamis.

- Shri Rajendra Bengani

[association of jewel (*mani*) and gold (*kanchan*)]. Both jewel and gold have their own individual values, however, when they are studded together their individual value increases much more. This is what the Abu Dhabi mandir will be like. I think Bhagwan Swaminarayan will bring that jewel [i.e. mandir] on this land [i.e. gold] in Abu Dhabi and thus effect a '*mani-kanchan yoga*'. This is not a simple task. The reasons why this will happen successfully are our rulers here and the blessings and grace of Swaminarayan and swamis.

"There is a saying, 'Well begun is half done.' So, with the *shilanyas* rituals accomplished, half the work is done. We are all fortunate to have so many swamis here, which seems to have happened for the first time." (*Translation of Hindi speech.*)



Jitendra Vaidya
CEO of PrimeFour Inspection



Jitendra Vaidya shared his thoughts on today's value of service, "There are some tasks that we do we remember for some time; some works that we accomplish we remember till we live; and some works that we finish and are of use to our children, they remember even after we pass away. However, the work of making a mandir in the UAE by the Swaminarayan Sampradaya will not only be remembered for this year or this century, but for eras.

"Friends, nothing goes in vain. There is an outcome to everything. If one does something bad, there is a bad outcome; and if one does something good, there is a good result.

"*Seva*, is a Sanskrit word. It means doing work with your [heart and] mind, but not taking anything in return. Serve your parents, serve the poor, elderly, mother cow and all animals.

"According to our Hindu belief after many births we get this human birth. It is believed to be the best birth because all other animals spend their lives eating. However, humans have the capacity to think more than [merely eating]. We can build a society and serve [others]. To serve others is our duty. When you take something after doing *seva*, then it is not said to be *seva*. But I believe, in spite of taking a reward [or money] for doing *seva*, it is still *seva*. When you have a sweeper, domestic helper or an office worker, though he may not be an expert his services should be considered to be *seva*. And one should value his *seva* because it makes one's life better.

"Whatever we do, our child observes us the most. And his observation becomes his impressions [*sanskars*]. If you wish your child to serve you and also serve others, then it is necessary that you should serve too. When you have addictions, never think that your child will listen to you when you tell him not to [smoke]. But when you do *seva*, your child will also do *seva*."

"Friends, I had never imagined about a mandir site in the UAE, which we have got here! Jai Swaminarayan."

(*Translation of Hindi speech.*)

Some tasks that we do we remember for some time; some works that we accomplish we remember till we live; and some works that we finish and are of use to our children, they remember even after we pass away. However, the work of making a mandir in the UAE by the Swaminarayan Sampradaya will not only be remembered for this year or this century, but for eras.

- Jitendra Vaidya



VALUE OF FAITH: 24 April (Wednesday)

In the evening assembly, Vivekjivan Swami spoke in English about the Value of Faith. Thereafter, the invited guests shared their experiences and thoughts.



Shri Yogesh Mehta

CEO of Petrochem Middle East (PME),
the largest chemical distributor in the Middle East and Africa



“Three days ago, when Mahant Swamiji came to my home, I don’t know but my home is now the home of God. I now carefully tread in my own home. I am lucky, but let me tell you a little bit about myself with a view to show to you how the influence of the Swaminarayan Dharma came to a mere mortal like me. My name is Yogi, which came due to my father who was a devout Swaminarayan. He took me to Yogiji Maharaj when I was a baby and Yogiji Maharaj said, ‘Give him my name.’ And that’s why my name is Yogi.

“And somehow after that, I lost my way and I forgot myself that I am a Swaminarayan. Things happen. You know humans are humans and we lose our way.

“There has been so much change in the Swaminarayan Dharma that I think we are very evolving, very modern, very caring and have very different dynamics. I am really proud to be a part of it.

“After seeing the mandir *shilanyas* arrangements I felt that though I am a corporate man I couldn’t have managed and arranged it. The discipline and the entire smooth management that you saw during the *shilanyas* ceremony – that is the Swaminarayan Dharma. My wife is more astute and more religious than me, and I see there are more women and ladies in the Swaminarayan Dharma than men. So I stand here very, very humbly, but I am very, very proud that I am a Swaminarayan, a recent

“After seeing the mandir *shilanyas* arrangements I felt that though
I am a corporate man I couldn’t have managed and arranged it.

The discipline and the entire smooth management that you saw during the
shilanyas ceremony – that is the Swaminarayan Dharma.

- Shri Yogesh Mehta

Swaminarayan. I think this *kanthi* is a magic wand. Whenever you have an issue, you just touch it with your hand and chant the Swaminarayan mantra and see how peaceful you become and hopefully all your prayers will be answered.

“I am a small trustee in this temple. I am more lucky that I am a part of this movement. I am proud and would want very much that we have this temple in the UAE. People go to the temple to find salvation, to find spiritualism, to find peace and happiness and that’s why this Hindu temple of Swaminarayan is coming to the UAE. I can’t really thank enough the people of the Swaminarayan Dharma. The most iconic and the most modern temple is coming to Abu Dhabi, and hence to the UAE and hence around us.”



Shri Dharmesh Patel

Owens a lighting control systems manufacturing company and is a trustee of an NGO, International Association of Human Values



“There were two things that I observed and experienced during the entire *shilanyas* ceremony. I would say that one aspect was what we all saw and quantified. Another aspect was beyond the realm of humans. As a professional, I can’t understand as to how meticulously the whole event was planned. Yes, a lot of planning went into it, probably lots of discussions and rehearsals and everything. But there was one quantity and quality that was constantly seen in the entire event and that was the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

“The unsung heroes, the volunteers, have become the trademark, the brand name of BAPS. So a big round of applause to the volunteers. We will never be able to thank them enough for their services. So, we should keep showering our love upon them and pray for them.

“I can’t describe how our Indian culture, our Sanatan culture, for the *shilanyas* ceremony was so beautifully executed and systematically explained to all of us. And I am very happy that we now all know the importance of the *khat muhurt*. That was the aspect that I saw, I understood and I could relate to.

“During that time, something else was happening in me and I couldn’t figure out what it was. The teachings of my gurudev Sri Sri Ravishankar came to my mind that when you have an intention of doing something good for humanity, the entire nature will join forces to support you. And I experienced that during the *shilanyas*. There was an overwhelming feeling coming from inside, and I am not sure whether I should share this feeling outside. I experienced emotions that day. There was something strange happening in the environment.

“Later on I figured out, yes, there was love flowing, blessings been poured and raining and I found the connection between the two. When the mantras were being chanted and when I felt that wow factor coming, I saw Mahant Swami Maharaj’s face was smiling; the wider the smile, the more blessings were coming down to us.

“As Swamiji said, one should have faith and we should continue prayers. After the *shilanyas*, gurudev Sri Sri Ravishankarji called me and asked, ‘Dharmendra, how was it over there?’ I said, ‘Gurudev, it was an overwhelming experience. It felt good because we were creating history; we were a part of history.’ Gurudev said, ‘Isko bahot aage leke jana hai. Yaha sirf Swaminarayan ke liye nahi hai, yaha sirf Bharatiyo ke liye nahi hai, yaha puri srushti ke liae hai.’ [‘This is to be taken much more forward. This [mandir] will not only be for Swaminarayans and Indians, but for the entire creation.’]

“Aren’t we fortunate that it is happening in our lifetime and happening for the first time in history? Please come forward. Pick up your *seva* of any form, any shape you like. Even if you can’t do anything, continue to pray for the success of this mandir and continue to pray that Mahant Swamiji



showers his blessings upon us and continues to guide us and we leave a lasting impression for the generations to come. Thank you.”

VALUE OF HUMILITY: April 25 (Thursday)

In the evening satsang assembly, Atmaswarup Swami elaborated in English on the Value of Humility. Thereafter, the guests shared the dais and expressed their thoughts and feelings in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.



Shri Paras Shahdadpuri

Former diplomat with the Indian Foreign Service and served as a diplomat in China, the US, Saudi Arabia and Libya. Currently the Chairman of Nikai group of companies



“What I could not see in my dreams that dream of a mandir will become a reality. I’ve been staying here since the last 21 years. I profoundly congratulate the rulers, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, HH Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and HH Sheikh Mohammad Al Rashid Bin Maktoum. They have really shown us a real way of human tolerance and understanding through their donation of land for the mandir. They have given us an opportunity of having a mandir which can be near to every human being’s heart.

“I’m deeply grateful to the rulers here, Mahant Swami Maharaj, the devotees and especially the volunteers. I have never seen people with such zest and devotion. I was fortunate to have been to the *shilanyas* ceremony and what an amazing arrangement! It was absolutely meticulous.”

As a professional, I can’t understand as to how meticulously the whole event was planned. Yes, a lot of planning went into it, probably lots of discussions and rehearsals and everything. But there was one quantity and quality that was constantly seen in the entire event and that was the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

- Shri Dharmesh Patel



Dr Adel Hassan Mohammed Ahmed

Lawyer and Specialist in health, safety and security management

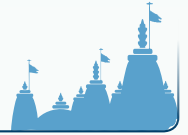


“Namaskar and Jai Swaminarayan to everyone. It is my great pleasure to be with you and to be accepted as one of the volunteers here. I don’t consider myself as a guest, I am one with the BAPS. I’ve seen different occasions, I’ve seen people coming together, small groups or big groups, and I’ve tried to link most of the things I’ve seen here in front of me to what I believe in as an Arab or as a Muslim. We have most of the values that I am seeing here today. I heard swamiji talk about humbleness and I linked that to Sheikh Zayed, the founder of the UAE. Once, he was asked, ‘Why do you allow people to come to your country and start their businesses and lives?’ He replied, ‘The land is from God. Why should we stop people from coming to this land?’ This is our school of thought, and I have seen lots of these values within this community [BAPS]. I’ve known Swami Brahmavihariji and Ashok Kotecha working for this community. We must all promise that we will not let them down and give them all the support. We are blessed to have Mahant Swamiji here and I was blessed to receive him at the airport. Thank you very much and I am looking forward to seeing this temple come up.”



Shri Pankajbhai Gupta

Co-founder and CEO of Gulf Islamic Investments and Founder of Agile Financial Technologies



“Trust me, I am not trying to exaggerate what I am seeing here today. It is a near impossible thing. A place in Dubai, with such a huge gathering, where we are able to pursue our faith, our being and at the same time that which reflects our heritage. India is a great reflection and example of diversity. And the UAE, which is a home to more than 200 nationalities, is the biggest proof of diversity. I would like to thank the leaders and rulers of this country, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, ruler of Dubai His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Al Rashid Bin Maktoum. They have given us this opportunity because of their generosity.

“This [proposed] temple is a great effort of BAPS and the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj and the tireless work of every volunteer. My salutes to them. This is an unbelievable work.

“I would like to share a small incident. My elder son asked me, ‘Why is it important for you to go to the *shilanyas*? And what is so special about the organization you keep talking about?’ I highlighted a very important aspect of this community or this organization, which I think is reflected in every volunteer, the organization management and commitment. I told my son that if you ever want to see an act of selflessness, commitment and passion, go to any event or setup of BAPS. You will find volunteers working with their heart and with all humility. They don’t think about which positions they belong to and which families they come from. Here, I would like to specially mention Rohitbhai

“Sheikh Zayed, the founder of the UAE was asked, ‘Why do you allow people to come to your country and start their businesses and lives?’ He replied, ‘The land is from God. Why should we stop people from coming to this land?’ This is our school of thought, and I have seen lots of these values within this community [BAPS].”

- Dr Adel Hassan Mohammed Ahmed

Patel's family. I have no words! The kind of unflagging support they give to this noble cause, I think it is impossible for anybody to describe in words. I told my son that our religion teaches us to do anything with commitment and selflessness. Don't have doubts about it, but do it with passion.

"I spend much time in Saudi, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and other parts. Ninety-nine percent of my dealings and communications are with very senior people in these countries. For the last 16 to 17 months the topic of the BAPS Mandir would come up in my discussions. And I tell them that what you see in BAPS is a reflection of Indian culture. It believes in harmony, peace and love. The BAPS believes in coexistence with everyone. It makes me feel proud that I am associated with you. We all have to come together and see that this dream is fulfilled in the best form.

"I have a humble request to every brother and sister here that let's take this task as our commitment and our dream. I don't see this temple as a temple of the BAPS, Hinduism or Indians. This is a temple for the world. We have received an opportunity to make it happen."



P.V. Shaheen

Advocate and Managing Partner of Goodwill

Law Corporation in the UAE and specializes in corporate law



"In the name of God, most merciful and gracious. Guruhari Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, my dear brothers and sisters, I salute you all with greetings in peace and humble submission. Peace be upon you. May God Almighty shower his mercy upon you so that all of you be prosperous. May I start with a quote from the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, "A common form of worship and a common place of worship is a necessity of humanity." That is why I see no distinction in temples, churches, masjids and gurudwaras as they are nothing but the abodes of the same Almighty God. We all worship in different ways. These places of worship are the creations of faith. And it is so unfortunate that we are living in a time where we see so much intolerance in many parts of the world. I'm referring to what happened to the churches in Sri Lanka and the masjids in New Zealand a few weeks back.

"A similar incident had happened in India in the Akshardham temple, Ahmedabad, 2002. A terrorist attack took place and 30 noble lives were lost and several got injured. After this incident, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the temple and he prayed for everybody, including those terrorists who were overpowered, shot dead and lying there. He sprinkled water from the Ganges and spread rose petals there and prayed that not a single drop of blood should be shed in the name of this attack, because I have forgiven everybody. There was no revenge at all. Such wonderful divine words can only come from a blessed soul, a person who has celebrated humility. That speech from Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a lesson today in criminology and criminal administration that is being taught across all law colleges in India. That is why our beloved former president Shri APJ Abdul Kalam did not have any second thought while accepting Pramukh Maharaj as his spiritual guru.

My elder son asked me, 'Why is it important for you to go to the *shilanyas*? And what is so special about the organization you keep talking about?' I told my son that if you ever want to see an act of selflessness, commitment and passion, go to any event or setup of BAPS. You will find volunteers working with their heart and with all humility. They don't think about which positions they belong to and which families they come from.

- Shri Pankajbhai Gupta



“It has always been a blessing, an honour and a privilege for having worked with this noble venture, from writing the very first application to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi seeking permission of the land for creating a temple, then, for creating a constitution and bylaws and in forming the company – Mandir Limited. It’s an opportunity to do *seva*. Let me renew my pledge, ‘So long as I am alive, so long as the temple is there and Goodwill Corporation is there the *seva* will continue free of cost. BAPS temple will not have to pay even one dirham to any lawyer for legal consultations.

“I have learnt today what it means to be *dasanudas* [a humble servant].

“Many people ask me why are you associated with the temple and why you have kept it so close to your heart? The reason why it is close to my heart is that I am born to a father who has been the president of a temple festival committee in my village for the last 45 years. Thank you very much on this auspicious and blessed evening. Jai Swaminarayan.”

VALUE OF GRATITUDE: 26 April (Friday)

The morning satsang assembly, themed on the Value of Gratitude, was held from 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon. Brahmavihari Swami elaborated in English upon the Value of Gratitude and acknowledged the services and generosity of the royalty, dignitaries and BAPS volunteers. Thereafter, the stage guests addressed the assembly.



Shri Mahendrabhai Asher

Seniormost CA and Founder and Former Chairman of the
Dubai chapter of the Law Institute of Chartered Accountants of India



“I came to Dubai in 1971 and at that time there was a Haveli where we gathered and prayed. Though we prayed, we had an inner wish that how much better it would be to get a large place of worship. Now, we can say that we will get a complete temple built here.

“It has always been a blessing, an honour and a privilege for having worked with this noble venture, from writing the very first application to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi seeking permission of the land for creating a temple, then, for creating a constitution and bylaws and in forming the company – Mandir Limited. It’s an opportunity to do *seva*.

- P.V. Shaheen

I must thank Pramukh Swami Maharaj for that, whom I had the opportunity of meeting when he came here. Since it is God's wish and the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj the mandir will definitely happen."



Nazeem Al Kudsi

Businessman who lives in Abu Dhabi. His grandfather was the ex-president of Syria in the 1960s



"Jai Swaminarayan. By the grace of my guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and by the grace of Mahant Swami Maharaj I feel very fortunate today to share with you a few thoughts about gratitude. Gratitude for me has meant a personal journey. I was completing 30 years of government service. Little did I know that God had a better plan for me than the little plans I was making. During my visit [to Ahmedabad in 2012] I was fortunate to visit [the BAPS] temple.

"The story of the Swaminarayan temple [in Abu Dhabi] is the most powerful story for us living in this region. At the most basic level, it was and it is a beautiful example of 'karma yoga', of how people of a community across all walks of life work towards a specific goal. However, all efforts and organization are meaningless if they are not for bhakti. It's meaningless because it engulfs that powerful energy. I can tell you that the breadth of a powerful wave is coming to our society at the most important time.

"I tell my many friends, family and acquaintances, from outside your community, there is a great lesson to learn from the Swaminarayan: how they work together and how in the face of many, many technical difficulties they perceive the grace of Pramukh Swami. He is always present in every second of this journey. I am grateful to be a small part of this effort. I am grateful to God to have chosen me to go in that year [2012] and be in the presence of Pramukh Swami and receive his darshan. I have learnt many lessons and I continue to learn. My wish is to be a simple man who will clean the [Abu Dhabi] temple. The presence of this temple will have a far, far more powerful outcome. And I'd like to say the new breath of dharma is going to enter our community. Jai Swaminarayan."



Shri Venkatesh

Chairman of the Dubai chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and Co-founder of the Dubai Tamil Family Association



"I feel honoured to be here and also during the *shilanyas*, which was a lifetime memory. I thank the Supreme Lord for blessing me with this opportunity. I have been living here since 23 years and always had a dream of having a temple in this place, and it's really a dream come true for me and for thousands of people who live here. The one thing that connects all here is respect for all, and faith and bhakti to God.

"We have made a dream into a reality which was impossible nearly a decade ago. Wearing a saffron dress here was very difficult [at one time], however, seeing so many swamiji's here in saffron is truly a transformation – thanks to the rulers and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and all swamiji's.

I tell my many friends, family and acquaintances, from outside your community, there is a great lesson to learn from the Swaminarayan: how they work together and how in the face of many, many technical difficulties they perceive the grace of Pramukh Swami. He is always present in every second of this journey.

- Nazeem Al Kudsi

“It is not happiness that brings gratitude, but it is gratitude that brings happiness. The mandir will be a precious gift. At this juncture, I thank His Highness Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and all the rulers of this great nation and also to His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj for this great step of bringing a temple into an Arabian land. I am confident that the rulers of this country and the PM of our country have given the responsibility to the right people, who will execute this with perfection. This will be the place where people of all faiths will experience India in the UAE and will come to know Hindu spirituality in an inspirational way. May God shower his choicest blessings on all of us. Thank you all.”



Shri Lavesh Daswani

Member of the Chinmaya Mission



“Namaste, Shanti. It is monumental that the rulers of this land have allotted land to us to build a temple, and we thank them. We have spoken about the temple but as a first generation child who grew up outside India, there is something much more important that we have touched upon, and that is our children. Think that for the first time they are going to touch the land and feel their gods. A place where they can practise Sanatan Dharma through *seva*. Every Friday, every week, they will learn to sing the Lord’s name and feel its sweetness; something that the [present] generation has lost, and we will be giving this connection to them.”



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami

Senior Swami and Convener of BAPS global activities



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami acknowledged the efforts and contributions of all well-wishers and BAPS volunteers for the mandir project, “For years Hindus have been living here. There is a beautiful Vaishnav haveli, Sai mandir, a mandir of all devas and all offer bhakti according to their faith. However, there was a need for a wonderful and beautiful mandir and complex where our children, teenagers and youths could benefit spiritually. By the blessings of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj the Lord inspired the Crown Prince here and he gave us the land for the mandir near Abu Dhabi.

“All the speakers on the stage expressed their kudos to the volunteers, so we should appreciate them as much as possible. They stood in the scorching heat performing their parking and security duties, offering *seva* in the kitchen and making the dining arrangements. For days and nights all the male and female volunteers have performed their *seva* with love and to please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

“When this mandir is being built it is our duty to offer our services with body, mind and means. Today, we may not realize this but when the *pratishtha* rituals will be done thousands will come and we will feel happy because we had offered our services here.

I am confident that the rulers of this country and the PM of our country have given the responsibility to the right people, who will execute this with perfection.

This will be the place where people of all faiths will experience India in the UAE and will come to know Hindu spirituality in an inspirational way.

- Shri Venkatesh

“Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj prays daily for the accomplishment of a beautiful mandir here so that we can all have darshan of the deities, do bhajan and bhakti and progress in life. The mandir will become a holy pilgrim place. Just as we wish to go to Dwarika, Somnath, Shrinathji, Jagannath Puri, Rameshwaram, by God’s grace all the pilgrim places will be included in the one mandir here. We will have darshan of all the deities and pilgrim places of India here in the forms of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Radha-Krishna, Sita-Ram, Shiv-Parvati, Tirupati and others. We will experience joy throughout our lives and be enriched with our sanskars, culture, *niyams*, faith in God and the nine types of devotion.” (*Translation of Gujarati speech.*)



Shri Vipul

Consul General of India in Dubai



“Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you all on behalf of the Government of India as the Consul General in Dubai and express a hearty welcome to Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and thank him for making this visit for a beautiful temple that will be coming up in Abu Dhabi. I feel very proud, fortunate and privileged in having met him and to meet all the sadhus of BAPS who have come for this wonderful occasion.

“My introduction to BAPS was through the Akshardham temple in Delhi. I used to commute every day from Ghaziabad to Delhi and always used to see Akshardham on the right hand side and I always thought that who built such a huge temple here? This temple is so grand. However, I couldn’t go inside for many years and when I went I had thought that it was such a grand and beautiful temple. But, I came to know more about BAPS only last year when PM Shri Narendra Modi came here to unveil the model of the mandir and when there was a ground-breaking ceremony of the temple. We had an opportunity to work with BAPS when there was a programme of the PM in the Opera House.

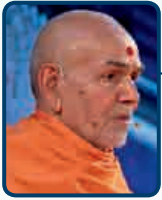
“When you are talking about volunteers today, I must say that the BAPS volunteers helped us so much during that programme and they were absolutely outstanding. The maximum work for the success of that programme was done by the BAPS volunteers, however, the appreciation was delivered to the Consulate.

“I consider myself very fortunate for my posting in Dubai during this time when this temple is coming up. The temple will really be timeless and become a symbol of peace and harmony in the world. This temple will also be an enduring symbol of the India-UAE friendship. It will be a symbol of the contributions we Indians have made to the UAE and will also be a symbol of the love and affection that the rulers of the UAE have shown towards Indians.

“Today, we are present in such large numbers in the UAE, with more than 3 million people, and we should be thankful to the UAE for everything. This temple will be a symbol of tolerance which is so dear to both India and the UAE. I am fortunate in having been involved in this project in some measure. When the temple will come up, it will be a great place to show that humanity is one. Once again, I thank Mahant Swami Maharaj for blessing this land and for being with us. Thank you.”

“The temple will really be timeless and become a symbol of peace and harmony in the world. This temple will also be an enduring symbol of the India-UAE friendship. It will be a symbol of the contributions we Indians have made to the UAE and will also be a symbol of the love and affection that the rulers of the UAE have shown towards Indians.”

- Shri Vipul



Mahant Swami Maharaj

Spiritual Guru, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha



As a culmination to the six-day satsang assemblies in Dubai, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the final morning assembly themed on the Value of Gratitude. He appreciated the services and efforts of all, “All the speakers praised the volunteers’ *seva* and were amazed. They never thought that such *seva* could be possible. All the stage guests spoke from their heart. There was no pretense. They all wanted to say more, but because of the time restraint they were unable to do so. They all spoke honestly. The mandir is yet to be constructed, but prior to that it has become visible. Because of everyone’s feelings the mandir is being seen. However, when the mandir becomes ready, what will happen is a matter of imagination for us.

“The swamis who spoke have imbibed what they said. Ishwar Swami is like my soul. He handles everything, though he does not appear to be in the forefront. He is fully realized in [spiritual] *jnan* and is totally blessed by Bapa. Brahmavihari Swami has brought everyone together and created a feeling of *samp* [togetherness and harmony]. A premium level of *samp* has been created.

“What is *samp*? To give up one’s own wilfulness and not demand from others. One shouldn’t think that I will do something only if the other person does it. Instead, one should think about what one should do; what type of thoughts one should have and how one should talk, walk and behave. This is *samp*. And it is being seen here.

“Swami Bapa’s and Yogi Bapa’s maxim was *samp*, *subrudbhav* and *ekta*. Congratulations to all. In this way the mandir will be accomplished.”

Finally, Swamishri felicitated all the guests and blessed them. (*Translation of blessings in Gujarati.*) ♦

Edits and Translations: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

Audio Transcriptions: Bansal Bhalja

“What is *samp*? To give up one’s own wilfulness and not demand from others. One shouldn’t think that I will do something only if the other person does it. Instead, one should think about what one should do; what type of thoughts one should have and how one should talk, walk and behave. This is *samp*.

- Mahant Swami Maharaj

VOLUNTEER DEDICATION



Volunteers assemble a large cutout of the mandir on a high sand dune at the mandir site

The BAPS Hindu Mandir planned for Abu Dhabi has captured the attention of people all over the world.

Its steady progression from a cherished dream into an impending reality has been possible due to the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj and the generosity of the rulers of the UAE.

However, the backbone of the project is the volunteer force – male and female, young and old.

The Satsang Mandal in Dubai is relatively small compared to the size of the project it has been tasked to complete. Yet, the dedication and enthusiasm of all to contribute in whatever way possible is a major factor that has enabled the completion of daunting targets.

The visit of Mahant Swami Maharaj to the UAE from 18 to 29 April 2019 was primarily to perform the Shilanyas (Foundation Stone-Laying) Ceremony for the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Mureikha, Abu Dhabi.

With less than three months to prepare, the limited volunteer force was mobilized by the department leaders to thoroughly plan and prepare for the 12-day visit of *guruhari* Mahant Swami

Maharaj and all the events that would be taking place in his presence.

Although the mandir site is in Abu Dhabi, the majority of UAE devotees live in Dubai and Sharjah, with a few in other states. Thus, the centre of planning and preparation was the BAPS Mandir in Dubai.

To put the task into perspective: the site of the Shilanyas Ceremony was a barren desert strip of land 100 km from Dubai and 45 km from Abu Dhabi. Surrounding the site is acres of sandy desert. So, it was imperative that detailed planning be undertaken in terms of what needed to be done on the site and what equipment, materials and manpower would be required to accomplish the tasks. Since, the omission of even the smallest item would mean a 200-km round trip to fetch it!

Serving in over 20 departments – construction, transport, kitchen, decoration, facilities, security, outreach and others – lead volunteers held meetings to plan and then initiate the execution of their necessary tasks.

Throughout this period, volunteers managed their time efficiently – attending to their personal jobs and businesses by day and joining in the *seva*

in the evenings. Often, they would serve till past midnight to meet the schedules. Despite the inevitable fatigue, their desire to serve and please guru Mahant Swami Maharaj motivated them to continue amid numerous challenges.

As Swamishri's arrival date approached, the intensity of the *seva* increased, yet the teamwork and willingness to serve enabled all challenges to be met.

Throughout this entire period, the volunteers were guided and encouraged lovingly and meticulously by the resident sadhus of the UAE – Aksharatit Swami and Paramvandan Swami.

The number of available volunteers peaked for the day of the Shilanyas Ceremony – around 400 men and 275 women served throughout the day.

Thereafter, core teams attended to the wind-up of the arrangements set up on the mandir site, while other volunteers served from morning till night at the Pramukh Swami Mandapam (marquee) and dining areas at Jumeirah Park, where over 2,000 devotees daily came in the mornings and evenings for the assemblies in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In addition to volunteers from Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Ruwais, Ras Al Khaima and Ajman, volunteers from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, USA, UK and Australia also came specially to help in whatever capacity was required.

Also, volunteers from local communities, such as CAPSS, Friends of India, ISKCON and others, and well-wishers from nearby labour camps, also helped.

The following is a brief overview of some

of the salient tasks accomplished by some of the departments.

CONSTRUCTION

- Levelling the mandir site to enable erection of the marquees and parking arrangements.
- Digging the 16m by 10.8m by 1.6m foundation area and reinforcing the walls to ensure its safety.
- Volunteers spent innumerable hours every day in the blazing sun without shade, to level the land and excavate the foundation area in preparation for the Shilanyas Ceremony.

FACILITIES

- Erection of the marquees and set up of required amenities on the mandir site for the Shilanyas Ceremony and at Jumeirah Park for the daily *sabhas* and dining.
- Housekeeping – ensuring daily, prompt removal of waste.
- Provision of clean toilet facilities.

KITCHEN

- The women devotees had prepared and stored in advance 15,000 *parothas*, 18,000 *theplas*, 13,000 *kachoris*, 3,500 *samosas* and 3,500 spring rolls.
- Daily meals – morning, afternoon and night – were prepared at Dubai mandir and transported to Jumeirah Park.
- For the Shilanyas Ceremony, over 4,300 full-meal *prasad* packets were prepared to give to the participants.
- Daily washing of utensils and preparing vegetables, grains, etc. for cooking.



Swamis and volunteers convene for a daily meeting



Preparing the mandir site for the Shilanyas Ceremony



Excavating and reinforcing the *shilanyas* foundation area



Preparing banners for display



Erecting the welcome gate for the ceremony



Women volunteers prepare food items



Setting up the worship items for the ceremony participants

DECORATION

- Preparing and erecting decorative welcome gates, flags, stage props, etc. on the mandir site and at Jumeirah Park.
- Decorating Swamishri's residence.
- Preparing decorative garlands and *artis*.

SECURITY

- To ensure security of materials and people on the mandir site and the marquees at Jumeirah Park.

MEDIA

- Contacting print and electronic media houses to provide them information about the Shilanyas Ceremony.
- Receiving and assisting the journalists, photographers and videographers who came to cover the event.

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

- Arrange cars, vans, trucks and other vehicles to transport volunteers and materials as required for all departments.
- Assist visitors from outside UAE by arranging cars for commuting to and from their lodgings to the events.
- Mark out parking areas on the mandir site and guide cars, buses, etc. to efficiently use available spaces.
- Manage the numerous parking areas in the vicinity of the Jumeirah Park marquees and guide all visitors accordingly.

Volunteers of each department contacted well-wishers who generously supported the events by providing many items in kind and by giving their expert guidance whenever required.

Throughout Swamishri's stay as the State Guest of the UAE government, 17 government-appointed security personnel were present day and night to safeguard Swamishri and to ensure the smooth completion of his daily itinerary. They, too, sincerely carried out their duties and were touched by Swamishri's saintliness and the cordial nature of the devotees and all visitors.

Prior to Swamishri's visit, many devotees offered their devotion to please Swamishri by undertaking austerities for several months – observing fasts and abstaining from favourite foods.

All the guests who attended the Shilanyas Ceremony and the satsang assemblies thereafter abundantly praised the dedication and services of the volunteers. ♦

MEDIA COVERAGE

The UAE media generously appreciated and reported about the arrival of Mahant Swami Maharaj on 18 April 2019 in Dubai and the subsequent foundation-stone laying ceremony (*shilanyas* rituals) of the BAPS Hindu Mandir on 20 April in Abu Dhabi. Several English and Arabic newspapers, TV and radio channels also covered his visit to Shaikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi. The event was also covered by the international media.

Glimpses of some media coverage are as follows.



PRINT MEDIA, UAE (APRIL 2019)

English

- Gulf News (18, 20 & 21)
- Khaleej Times (20, 21 & 22)
- The National (21, 22 & 24)
- Gulf Today (21 & 22)
- Al Itihhad
- Al Khaleej
- Arab News
- Abu Dhabi World (English & Arabic Magazine: 25 April–1 May)

Arabic

- Al Khaleej (21)
- Daily Al Bayan (21 & 23)
- Al Etihad (21, 22 & 23)
- Emarat Al Youm (21)
- Al Watan (21 & 23)
- Al Roeya (21)

South Indian

- Gulf Madhyamam Daily (21)
- Malayalam Manorama
- Mathrubhumi, The National Daily in Malayalam (21)

TV CHANNELS

- SkyNews Arabia
- Media One
- Zee TV
- Janam TV
- Jai Hind
- The Mathrubhumi
- Al Hurra TV
- Daily Thani
- Amrita TV

RADIO

- Dubai Eye (ARN)
- Radio Mirchi FM
- Suno FM
- Radio 4 (BBC India)

INDIAN MEDIA

TV Channels

- ABP Asmita

Newspapers (Gujarati)

- Divya Bhaskar
- Gujarat Samachar

TV9

- BBC News Hindi

- Nav Gujarat Samay (Gujarati)

- Mid-Day



Alethiad

Alroeya



Alkhalaj



EmaratAlyoum



Daily Al Bayan



Gulf Madhyamam Daily



Alethiad



Mathrubhumi

Letters to the Editor

UAE'S FIRST HINDU TEMPLE SYMBOLISES COEXISTENCE

I write to you in reference to Ramola Talwar Badam's report '*Stunning Hindu temple set to symbolise peace and tolerance*' (April 20). Abu Dhabi deserves to be lauded for this initiative. The future temple on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi will become a symbol of tolerance, not simply a place for worshippers to enjoy. This shows that tolerance and unity can overcome anything and underlines the strong links between the people of India and the UAE.

Building a traditional Hindu temple in a Gulf country sends a strong signal: that religious coexistence is possible. The future house of worship will embody the UAE's will to maintain religious harmony and uphold the beliefs of all people, irrespective of their caste, creed and origins.

The UAE attracts people from all over the world, with different backgrounds. This temple will be a symbol of togetherness. It is also a proud moment for millions of Hindus working all over the world because an Arab country has acknowledged the importance of their traditions and culture.

Ramchandran Nair, Muscat

The National, 22 April 2019 (p. 12)

TEMPLE IS A PERFECT GIFT IN THE YEAR OF TOLERANCE

The entire Indian community is extremely happy and delighted at the construction of the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi. It is just 93km away from Dubai. We are deeply indebted to the leadership of the UAE for allocating the land for this temple.

My wife and I went to Abu Dhabi on Saturday to be a part of the ceremony. The excitement was so high that we could barely sleep the night

before and reached well ahead of schedule for the ceremony. And it was truly a mesmerising experience. It was history in the making.

I have been in the waste management sector for over three decades. I provided complimentary waste bins at the venue. It was my way of contributing to this mega event.

Ramakant Dixit, Dubai

Khaleej Times, 22 April 2019 (p. 8)

ADORABLE UAE

I was happy to read in your newspaper that the construction of the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi started on Saturday with the foundation stone-laying ceremony on the 13.5 acres of land donated by Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

I was also happy to note that prior to the celebration assembly, a Gift of Gratitude – an intricate piece of artwork comprising a base made of pink sandstone – the stone that will be used for building the temple – and metal fins of various sizes forming an image of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, was unveiled.

I consider the UAE the best in the world because it has successfully proved that tolerance and peaceful coexistence are the best antidotes to a world filled with xenophobia and quest to build separation walls.

Hosting some 200 nationalities and letting them live and work in incredible harmony is an accomplishment that most other nations could only dream of. Every individual in the UAE would enthusiastically vouch for the fact that this is the safest, most progressive and harmonious society.

Srinivas Iyer

Gulf Today, 22 April 2019 (p. 10)

THE VACHANAMRUT

An Introduction, Part 2

In this second article of the series we discuss Bhagwan Swaminarayan's adornments described in the first paragraph of each Vachanamrut and the language of the Vachanamrut.

ADORNMENTS

Bhagwan Swaminarayan adopted the garb of the local people by wearing simple white garments, such as a dhoti on the lower body and *kediyu*, *dagli* or *gatariyu* on the upper body. The *dhoti* and *gatariyu* are long, unstitched garments. On the head, he wore various types of *pagh* and *safo* common in contemporary Kutch and Saurashtra. This traditional garb endeared him to the devotees. On rare occasions, such as festivals, as instructed by Ramanand Swami, he wore richly embroidered garments offered by devotees.

The *Harililamrut* (6.15.58–59) cites the first occasion on which he accepted and wore such rich garments brought to Dhoraji by devotees of Surat in 1807, during the festival of Fuldol. He wore a *jamo* of *jari*, *surwal*, other *shangar* and a *mugat* on his head.

“*Māvāne shir mugat dharāvio, hato Suratnā sanghe karāvio;*

Pelvelo evo shangār, dharyote din Dharmakumār.”

“The devotees of Surat had made a *mugat* (crown), which they placed on his head. These were the first such ornaments offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.”

The simple white garments he usually preferred to wear reflected

his *vairagya* and austere life. This all the more established and strengthened the bond of devotional attachment of devotees for him. This bond prepared them to receive spiritual instruction whenever imparted by him, especially during the period of the Vachanamrut.

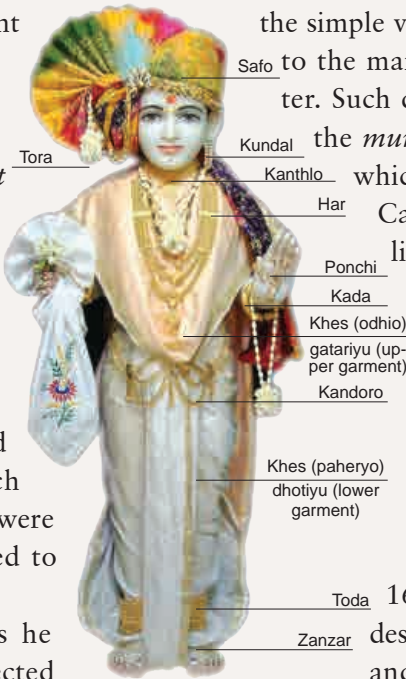
The description by the *paramhansas* of his apparel is of importance since it gives readers a vivid impression of his persona. This exciting journey back in time also provides information about several aspects of life in early 19th century Gujarat, about Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself and the intense love of the devotees who visited the places of the Vachanamrut, to offer him puja and to listen to his divine *katha*. It provides details of handwoven fabrics and golden embroidery in the absence of power looms and sewing machines. It provides valuable information about the flora in Saurashtra and Gujarat then,

the simple varieties in the former compared to the many fragrant varieties in the latter. Such details help readers to visualize

the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, which calms the hyperactive mind.

Calming the mind is necessary to listen to *katha* and absorbing its salient principles.

Of the 273 Vachanamruts, Shriji Maharaj has adorned simple white garments on 234 occasions and coloured or rich garments on 39 occasions. All white garments, described as ‘*sarva shvet vastra*’, were worn 161 times; other white garments, described as ‘white *khes*’, 66 times; and ‘white *surwal*’ 7 times. This



means that he wore white garments on 234 occasions (161+66+7).

In the first paragraphs of the Vachanamruts, the following types of garments are cited: *khes*, *dhotiyu*, *dagli*, *chadar*, *chofal*, *rajai*, *pachhedi*, *shelu*, *rento*, *surwal* and *angarkhu*. Head adornments include *pagh*, *feto*, *bokani* and *moliyu*,

The labelled photograph shows most of the above.

The flower *shangar* (adornments) cited include: *tora*, *bajubandh*, *gajara* and *berkha*.

All these were probably adorned on Maharaj by a personal *sevak*, such as, Mulji Brahmachari or a *paramhansa*.

The flowers in the Gadhada *kathas* were specially grown by Sachchidanand Swami on a plot of Dada Khachar's land on the outskirts of Gadhada.

KHES

The word 'khes' needs some clarification. It denotes either an upper garment – *uparno* – known today as *gatariyu*, or it describes a *dhotiyu* worn on the lower body. Whether it refers to a *gatariyu* or *dhotiyu* can be gleaned from the verbs *odhio* (ઓઢવો હતો) and *paheryo* (પહેર્યો હતો). When the verb *odhio* is used for *khes*, it means a *gatariyu*, and when *paheryo* is used, it means a *dhotiyu* (Vaghela 1988:121). This is evident in Sarangpur 3. Maharaj has adorned two *khes*; a *khes* with a black lining as a *gatariyu*, because *odhio* is used, and also a *khes* as a *dhotiyu*, because *paheryo* is used. This meaning is further supported in Gadhada III 23, when Maharaj describes the ritual of *mansi puja*. He advocates offering, “a washed, white *khes*.” Since he uses the verb *paherva apvo* (પહેરવા આપવો), it means a *dhotiyu*. If he had used *odhva apvo* (ઓઢવા આપવો), then it would mean a *gatariyu*. Only in one Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 43, is the word *dhotiyu* used to mean a *dhotiyu*. Otherwise in all cases in the Vachanamrut, the word *khes* is used. When the word *chadar* is used with the verb *odhi*, it also means a *gatariyu*, as in Vachanamruts Gadhada I 14 and 17.

EYE-CATCHING SHANGAR

On rare occasions in the Vachanamrut *kathas*, Shriji Maharaj is adorned in special ways: a *mala* of *moti* (pearls): Gadhada I 13; a new tulsi *kanthi*: Gadhada I 64, Gadhada II 48; turning a tulsi *mala* with the hand: Gadhada I 70, Panchala 4, Ahmedabad 5 and Jetalpur 2; a *rakhdi* on his wrists: Gadhada II 9 on Shravan *sud* 14, instead of the usual Shravan Purnima. Also, in his hands, he has clasped a pomegranate in Vartal 13 and Jetalpur 3, a lemon in Jetalpur 1, 3 and a handkerchief in Jetalpur 2. In Gadhada I 32 and 59, his forehead is smeared with *kesar chandan* paste and in Jetalpur 4 his upper body is anointed with *kesar chandan*.

VACHANAMRUT'S PROSE ENRICHING GUJARATI LITERATURE

The Vachanamrut is written in Gujarati, since Bhagwan Swaminarayan delivered his discourses in Gujarati. As a written language, Gujarati was evolving and continued to do so until the end of the 19th century.

In 1865, the famed Gujarati poet Narmadashankar Dave, popularly known as Kavi Narmad, systematized Gujarati grammar. This led him to write the gist of the *Iliad* in good Gujarati prose in 1870. The year 1887 witnessed the first classical novel, *Saraswatichandra* by Govardhanram Tripathi, in accurate Gujarati. From this we glean that the Vachanamrut's linguistic excellence was far ahead of its time.

Not surprisingly, scholars of modern Gujarati have lauded the shastra's prose.

The renowned Gujarati litterateur, Umashankar Joshi, eruditely scrutinized the intricate modes of expression used by Shriji Maharaj in the Vachanamrut, which he detailed in *Swaminarayan Sant Sahitya*. He eulogizes its unique lingual excellence and contribution to Gujarati literature of the early 19th century, “Vachanamrut is a pinnacle of Gujarati prose's excellence” (Chaudhary 1981:14).

Chandravadan C. Mehta, another renowned

scholar of Gujarati literature, lauded the Vachanamrut, especially its contribution in enriching Gujarati grammar, “Extinct grammatical expressions have been revived and can be read throughout the Vachanamrut, such as the absolute locative – the *sati-saptami* of Sanskrit: “*Pachhi Nāradji gānvidyā sheekhavtā havā ane Bhagwān āgal gātā havā*” (Gadhada I 4). Similarly, some verbs and nouns have been used in a unique manner, without obstructing the meaning. Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s contribution in enriching the language is substantial. Mehta further considers the following usages and expressions as novel:

- *Potānā swarupne jovāno ādar karyo ane na dithu?* (Gadhada I 20). “It is noteworthy how well the word *ādar* has been used here.”
- *Bhagwānno nishchay ane mahātmya rupi jene khatāi chadi hoi* (Gadhada I-24).
- *Ashtāng yogne sādhave karine chittno nirodh* (Gadhada I 25).
- *Samjanne kefe karine chhaki pan javu nahi* (Gadhada I 25)
- *Dhruvajie Bhagwānni stuti karvā māndi, tyāre Vedādiknā arthni saheje sfurti thai* (Gadhada I 29).

Eminent scholars of Gujarati literature have commented on the Vachanamrut’s language:

“In this manner one comes across words enriching Gujarati prose on every page of the whole text... He [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] has explained the most abstruse concepts of *adhyatma*, yoga, meditation and *tapas* in the most simple and straightforward sentences in the Vachanamrut... His statements have the weight of experience... There are no ambiguous statements, nor complicated constructions which are not understandable. There are only sayings which easily penetrate the heart of the sympathetic reader. This is Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s important contribution to Gujarati prose.”

- Chandravadan Mehta

“Vachanamrut is a pinnacle of Gujarati prose’s excellence.”

- Umashankar Joshi

“The Vachanamrut’s language is markedly to the point, concise, depicting only one meaning, understandable by those less educated, with simple words and straightforward sentences and construction and, where necessary, using examples to clarify meanings.”

- Kishorelal Mashruwala (1922:125)

“The collection of the Vachanamruts of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is a jewel of the Gujarati language.”

- Kishorelal Mashruwala (1981:84)

“Even from the viewpoint of linguistic textbooks the Vachanamrut is important. From the manner in which the language has been voiced by Shriji Maharaj, in the same manner its linguistic form has been preserved. Hence, it is the most supreme piece of Gujarati prose of a hundred and fifty years ago.”

- Arunodaya Jani (in Chaudhary, 1981:91)

“According to all the critics, the book [Vachanamrut] is the finest specimen of Gujarati prose. The sentences are well-balanced and the style compact and lucid. It has the local colour of Saurashtra.”

- K.K. Datta, historian, *A Comprehensive History of India* (XI 1985:848)

In the third article, we shall discuss the imagery used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan to explain philosophical concepts and innovative meanings of selected Sanskrit *shlokas* from the shastras.

Source References:

- Chaudhary, R. (1981) *Swaminarayan Sant Sahitya* (Gujarati). Ahmedabad: Swaminarayan Aksharpath.
- Vaghela, B.G. *Bhagwan Swaminarayan nu Samkalin Lokjivan* (Gujarati), 2nd ed., 1988. Ahmedabad: Swaminarayan Aksharpath. ♦

(For details see ‘Vachanamrut Handbook: Insights into Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Teachings’, Swaminarayan Aksharpath, 2007, and ‘Adornments of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut’ – forthcoming publication.)

Vachanamrut: A Note



John B. Carman

Parkman Professor of Divinity,
Professor of Comparative Religion Emeritus,
Harvard Divinity School, USA

In 1974, John Carman was invited for the inaugural function of the English version of the Vachanamrut translated by Shri H.T. Dave held in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's presence in New York. His speech on this occasion is presented below

Your Holiness, distinguished leaders of the community, and all those gathered here for this special occasion. It is an honour for me to be invited to take part in this ceremony.

It is a pleasure to be able to assist in a very small way in this important translation and publication [of the Vachanamrut]. You have been good enough to ask me, a professor of religion at an American University and a Christian minister, to take part in this event. That you have included one who is not a member of your religious community, I find highly significant.

I appreciate the invitation and I stand here as one who has tried to make a respectful and sympathetic study of other religions and one who is especially interested in the religious history of India. My own special study has been on the thought of the great acharya Ramanuja. There is a story, perhaps the favourite story at the present time among the followers of Ramanuja in South India, which I think is appropriate for this occasion. Many of you have heard it before, but I think it is a story that doesn't suffer from repetition.

Ramanuja had already been chosen to be the head of the community following the death of Yamunacharya, but because he had not been able to receive instruction from Yamunacharya, he had to go to five principal disciples of Yamuna, each of whom gave him instruction in some aspect of the faith. When he went to the one who was himself

a guru known as Tirukacchi Nambi, the great guru of Tirukottiyur, a town in what is now Tamil Nadu, he had to take a great oath that he would not reveal the secret that was to be entrusted to him. No sooner had he left the guru's presence, however, he went to the Vaishnava temple and walked up to the balcony on an upper story. This temple is unusual in South India because there are three shrines, one above the other. From the balcony outside the shrine on the top story he called down to Shri Vaishnavas assembled in the courtyard below and shouted out the secret explanation of the mantra that had been given to him by the guru. Of course the guru very quickly found out, and he angrily summoned Ramanuja back into his presence and asked him, "Do you not know what the penalty is for disclosing this secret?" Ramanuja then replied, "Yes, surely I know that I must go to hell, but is it not better that I go to hell and that all of these others receive liberation through hearing the special words that you have revealed to me?" Upon hearing this, teacher Tirukacchi Nambi saw the great love and compassion that filled Ramanuja. Recognizing that this was indeed the grace of the Lord filling Ramanuja, he embraced him and said that henceforth he would be Ramanuja's disciple since God's great love and God's desire for the liberation of mankind was so perfectly expressed in Ramanuja.

Why is this story about a brash disciple who broke his guru's command and disclosed his

secret important to us this morning? Because with the English translation and publication of this volume you are disclosing to the world – at least to those who can read in English – the teachings of Swaminarayan. This is a bold step you are taking, for in traditional Indian fashion, religious teaching ought to be imparted from teacher to pupil after various requirements are met. In other words, the one who receives such important teaching must be an *adhikari* – ‘suitably qualified’. When a book is put in a bookstore, however, it can be picked up by anyone who wishes to read it. That brings the risk that the book may be misunderstood. There is certainly a danger of controversy, but perhaps the greatest danger is the one-sidedness of a merely academic understanding. The knowledge of the head is sometimes separated from the knowledge of the heart so that one gets some kind of intellectual grasp of the teaching without really entering into it fully with body and soul. These dangers are quite real, but the fact that you have gone ahead with this publication shows that you are taking seriously the teachings of your founding guru, of Swaminarayan himself, the teachings that his divine messages should be made available to the world. The entire devotional movement in India down through the centuries has been a process described in the Bhagvat Puran as a great stream in which bhakti flows from one part of the country to another, in which the carefully guarded teaching of the ancient rishis is now made available, in a new devotional form, to millions of Hindus. Each devotional movement, including your own, has taken the risk of making religious secrets available to the masses.

Now yours is not the only religious community that has been willing to take this risk. The Christian community, of which I am a member (and the particular Protestant denomination to which I belong) has for long faced this problem with respect to its sacred books, especially with respect to the Bible and with respect to the teachings of Jesus. If the

scriptures are freely distributed, anyone can read them and anyone can misunderstand them. There are those who have held that the Bible should not be read by ordinary people because of this risk of misunderstanding; it should only be carefully explained by those priests or professors who can be confidently expected to understand its meaning. My Protestant forebears, however, long ago decided that there was a message in that book that was sufficiently important, that it was worth taking the risk to disclose its message to the world. They believed that such a risk could be taken because of their confidence that the same Spirit that inspired the words of the sacred book would guide those who read it. That is why Christians translate and distribute their scriptures. I am sure that you feel the same way about the translation of the discourses of Swaminarayan. That is the reason why you are willing to put this book, the Vachanamrut, into bookstores and give it to those who may not be members of your community. You also believe that the same Spirit who inspired its author will also guide its readers.

I should also like to comment on a few things that struck me in the book itself. One is so familiar to you that you may be surprised I mention it. Yet students of Indian religious history are constantly faced with the difficulty of the lack of firm and definite dates in this history. In this book, however, every discourse is precisely dated. This is a chapter of religious history which one might say is in the full light of day as far as our knowledge of history is concerned. It is a common Western misunderstanding of India that there is no sense of history in India. I think that in what you hold dear as a community and what is called the guru *parampara*, the succession of the gurus, one sees that special sense of history which is important for the religious people in India.

I should like again to refer to Ramanuja, not to something in his own writing but to one composed in his honour by one of his disciples (Amudanar). Here, a verse is quoted from the ancient Tamil

saint and sage Nammalvar in which it is said that the power of Kali will be broken. The disciple says in his verse in praise of his guru that today this prophecy has been fulfilled – the power of Kali has broken. Now you know that according to the Hindu view of history we are living in the worst of the four ages – that we are living in the Kali-yuga – in the age of darkness. This is an age when the cow of dharma has to try to stand on only one leg. What does it mean that in this age, in this Kali age, the power of Kali has been broken? Surely it means this, that when the teacher, who is filled with the grace of God and the truth of God, speaks the full dharma – dharma standing on all four legs – is in that teaching, and in the community that practises that teaching, the full dharma is manifested again. In the world in which we live it is quite clear that the powers of darkness are rampant. That is not any the less so because of the teaching of Ramanuja or because of the discourses and the light of Swaminarayan. Nevertheless it is still possible within a world of darkness to have a point of light; indeed, to have more than a point of light – to have a growing circle of light. Surely the history of your movement and of many other religious movements has been the ongoing effort to foster that growing circle of light. A sense of history is the recognition that specific things that have happened on specific days have meaning because from that specific day all the way up to the present, the Divine light has remained from guru to guru. Perhaps it is appropriate to read in this connection just a few lines from one of Swaminarayan's discourses in which he says something precisely on this subject:

“He similarly assumes human form out of great commiseration for the ultimate redemption of *jivas*, and suppresses His infinite greatness and profundity of powers. He thus becomes accessible to all human beings who desire to offer Him worship. One who was so far noumenon became phenomenon in the form of the human God, an

insignificant form as compared to His vast and infinite greatness. The assumption of the insignificant human form by Lord Purushottam is for easy assimilation by human beings who desire to seek His contact and feel congenial with Him.

“Just as a small ant requires only a small means for its subsistence, as a bigger means would spell its death rather than growth, similarly Lord Purushottam assumes a human form for fostering spiritual growth in the *jivas*. When the god of fire is invoked, he appears before human beings in a serene human form subduing all his fiery flames, similarly, Lord Purushottam also suppressed His infinite powers, greatness, divinity, etc., and assumes human form with great commiseration, for the ultimate redemption of the *jivas*. However, those devoid of intelligence who do not have the requisite knowledge of the attributes and working of God callously ask, ‘Why does not the Lord exhibit His powers?’ But they cannot realize that the suppression of His divine powers is for the ultimate redemption of the *jivas*. If, however, He exhibits all His powers and manifests His fullfledged divinity, even millions of macrocosms would pale into insignificance before such greatness of His. How can the *jivas* stand such greatness? One, who has so realized the knowledge of the infinite greatness, divinity and glory of God in human form is beyond the influence of *kal*, karma and *maya*. For him there remains nothing more to attain.”¹

The assumption, I repeat, of the insignificant human form by Lord Purushottam is for easy assimilation by human beings who desire to seek His contact and feel congenial with Him.” The Lord is the Lord of cosmic powers and those powers have been manifested and will be manifested again, but for the redemption of human beings it is essential that the Lord comes, we may say, in human disguise, so that we should not be overwhelmed by His power but should be attracted by His love. ♦



SWAMINARAYAN ASHRAY DIKSHA MANTRA

Initiation Mantra for Taking Refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan



धन्योऽस्मि पूर्णकामोऽस्मि निष्पापो निर्भयः सुखी ।
अक्षरगुरुर्योगेन स्वामिनारायणाऽऽश्रयात् ॥

Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj gifted the ‘Swaminarayan Ashray Dikshamantra’ for spiritual aspirants seeking refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. When we seek refuge of Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan through association with the present Brahmaswarup Gunatit Guruhari, we become blessed (*dhanya*), fulfilled (*purnakam*), free of wrongdoing (*nishpap*), fearless (*nirbhay*), and blissful (*sukhi*). Clarifying this principle, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj inspired the creation of this mantra. On the 238th

celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s birth, Swamishri conferred this new mantra for the first time upon all devotees present during his morning puja. He also announced that, henceforth, all new spiritual aspirants will attain refuge under Bhagwan Swaminarayan through this mantra.

*Dhanyo’smi pūrṇakāmo’smi niṣpāpo nirbhayaḥ sukhī,
Akṣara-guru-yogena Svāmīnārāyaṇ-āśrayāt.*

Through the association of the manifest Aksharabrahman Gunatit Guruhari, I have attained refuge under Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan. By this, I have become blessed (*dhanya*); I have become fulfilled (*purnakam*); I have been released from wrongdoing (*pap*) that has bound me over countless births; I have been freed from the fear of *kal*, karma, and *maya* and have become blissful by the limitless, divine happiness of Sahajanand Shri Hari.

Upon reciting this mantra, the following mantra should also be recited:

Akṣaram ahaṃ Puruṣottama-dāso’smi.

“I am Akshar and the servant of Purushottam.”



INDIA

YUVAK ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA 2019 8–16 April 2019, India

A total of 95 youths from this year’s first batch of the BAPS Yuva Talim Kendra undertook *vicharan* to 187 villages in Gujarat.

Divided in 23 groups, each of four youths, they visited a total of 2,673 homes, inspiring young and old devotees to perform daily personal puja, visit



the local mandir for darshan, attend the weekly

satsang assembly, daily read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, conduct a regular *ghar sabha* (family assembly), observe a fast on *ekadashi*, etc.

The youths conducted 187 satsang assemblies, 125 children's assemblies and 28 assemblies in schools – in which over 5,900 children participated.

They arranged evening *bhakti feris* (processions through the villages) in which over 4,400 devotees participated. In addition, they encouraged around 830 people to refrain from addictions.

UK

BAL-BALIKA KARYAKAR LEADERSHIP TRAINING CAMP

23–25 February 2019, London

More than 60 selected children's activities *karyakars* from across the UK attended a leadership training camp to help enhance their skills. Senior volunteers and experienced swamis guided



delegates through discourses, interactive sessions, teamwork activities and role-specific guidelines based on the ideal values of leadership gleaned from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The three-day camp served to strengthen many important attributes required to understand and nurture children and to serve them more effectively with humility and care.

BAL-BALIKA MANDAL SPRING CAMP

29–31 March 2019, Kingswood Grosvenor Hall, Kent

More than 100 children from The Swaminarayan Sunday School, accompanied by volunteers from BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, participated in a three-day educational activity camp.



The camp was designed to build self-confidence, unity and leadership skills, and required many months of meticulous planning.

Over the three days, the children challenged themselves through a variety of tasks specially designed to harness their abilities and overcome personal fears.

Children learned to enrich their daily morning prayers through *samuh* puja. In the evenings they participated in *arti*, *thal*, various group activities and cultural programmes.

BAPS ANNUAL CHALLENGE

28 April 2019, UK



More than 3,000 enthusiastic participants – from toddlers to senior citizens – from BAPS centres in 20 towns and cities across the UK participated in the BAPS Annual Challenge for a fun and healthy way to raise money for various national and local charities.

The funds will go towards supporting BAPS's multifarious educational, community and spiritual activities serving children, youths, families and the elderly.

This year, the event will support BAPS's national charity partner, the National Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) – the UK’s leading charity campaigning and working to protect children from neglect, harm and abuse.

Some of the funds will also be donated to various local charities to support their outstanding work in their communities around the UK.

Participants walked, jogged or ran the designated 10 km route in the various centres to complete the Challenge.

This year’s event will support the following local charities: Kiran Talking Newspapers and Rainbow Trust (North and West London), Barnardo’s (Chigwell), Crawley Open House (Crawley), Charity Link (Leicester), Living Without Abuse (Loughborough), Happy Days Children’s Charity (Luton), The Mayor of Greater Manchester’s Charity (Manchester), Milton Keynes Hospital Charity Cancer Centre (Milton Keynes), Demelza (South East London), St Raphael’s Hospice, Sutton (South London) and others.

ASIA-PACIFIC

INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

18–19 April 2019, Griffith, Australia



Two days of celebrations marked the official opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Griffith. Around 1,000 devotees and well-wishers of Griffith and from all capital cities of Australia attended the celebratory programmes.

On the afternoon of 18 April, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir were seated in decorated floats and honoured in a grand colourful parade through the streets of Griffith.

In the evening, at the local Yoogali Club, BAPS sadhus and volunteers presented a melodious programme of devotional bhajans. This event was also graced by Griffith City Council’s Emeritus Mayor John Dal Broi. In his address, Mayor Dal Broi deeply appreciated and commended the efforts of BAPS and its volunteers, and also praised the contribution of the local Indian community to the greater Griffith area.

On the morning of 19 April, the auspicious Vedic *murti*-installation rituals were performed by Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami. In honour of this occasion, women devotees from the community had prepared an *annakut* of more than 100 vegetarian delicacies to offer to the deities.

Senior representatives of the Griffith City Council, prominent local businessmen and women, and community leaders were also present for the Mandir opening.

On the evening of 19 April, at Yoogali Club, a special cultural programme was presented on the theme of family unity, hard work and the importance of being a role model for children to create and nurture the citizens of tomorrow.

Previously, in Sarangpur, on 17 December 2018, HH Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of these *murtis*.

BAPS WALKATHON, ADELAIDE

6 April 2019, Australia



Promoting the theme, ‘Building a Better Community, One Step at a Time,’ over 200 people participated in the 7-km Walkathon 2019 organized by the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Adelaide, along the scenic Torrens River. The \$13,301 raised

from the Walkathon 2019 were donated to the Women's and Children's Hospital Foundation.

Present on this occasion were Mr. Surender Par, Councilor for Plympton Ward, and Ms. Heidi Wolff, Fundraising Officer of the Women's and Children's Hospital Foundation.

MIDDLE EAST

YUVAK SHIBIR: 'VACHANAMRUT: OUR IDEAL' 4–5 April 2019, Kuwait



Over 75 *yuvaks* attended the Yuvak Shibir based on the theme 'Vachanamrut: Our Ideal'. The youths were guided on the topic through speeches by swamis relayed live from India, workshops, audio-video presentations, skits and other activities. The *shibir* inspired the youths to daily read and study the Vachanamrut. The youths also participated in various devotional rituals which they were encouraged to continue in their daily lives.

AFRICA

SATSANG VICHARAN BY BAPS SWAMIS 6–11 March 2019, Ghana

A team of four BAPS swamis based in Nairobi, Kenya, visited Ghana. It was the first time BAPS swamis had undertaken *vicharan* there.

Jigneshbhai Soni (Surat), Jayeshbhai Patel (Master), Jigneshbhai Patel (Dar-es-Salaam) and other devotees have been holding satsang assemblies over the past five years.

During their six-day stay, the swamis performed *padhramanis* in Accra, the capital of Ghana, as well as Kumasi and Tema, visiting the homes of and spiritually guiding over 60 devotees and well-wishers.



The swamis also conducted a 'Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja' in which senior devotees and other well-wishers participated.

Two evening public satsang assemblies were held at the Osu Sanatan Mandir, which were attended by a total of over 350 people. Pujya Satyanand Swami, a disciple of Swami Shivanand, and leading representatives of the Gujarati Samaj also attended the assemblies.

SATSANG VICHARAN

9–13 March 2019, Guyana



For the first time, BAPS swamis, Priyaseva Swami and Yogikirtan Swami, undertook *vicharan* in Guyana, strengthening the faith of devotees and the Hindu community.

The swamis conducted a satsang assembly in Georgetown at Pravinbhai Dave's residence in the presence of His Excellency Mr V. Mahalingam, High Commissioner of India to Guyana. Also present was Dr Yesu Pershaud, Chairman of Demerara Bank Ltd.

During their stay, the swamis paid their respects at several Hindu mandirs, performed *padhramanis* to the homes of devotees and addressed an assembly of over 500 students emphasizing the importance of spirituality in their lives. ♦

Review Essay on 'An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology'

Harvard Theological Review, one of the oldest scholarly theological journals in the United States, is a prestigious quarterly journal that has been a central forum for scholars of religion and theology since 1908. It publishes compelling original research that contributes to the development of scholarly understanding and interpretation in the history and philosophy of religious thought in all traditions and periods.

Its website states, “*Harvard Theological Review* does not publish short book reviews.... On occasion, we do commission a review essay of a significant book or set of books recently published.”

Hence, the inclusion in the January 2019 issue (pp. 126–32) of the *Harvard Theological Review* of a review essay by Catherine Cornielle, Professor of Comparative Theology, Boston College, Massachusetts, USA, on the book *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology* (Author: Paramtattva Swami, Publishers: Cambridge University Press, 2017) is especially noteworthy.

The review essay is notable in that its author has accurately identified and lucidly stated the key philosophical tenets of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan that are presented in the book: Swaminarayan is Parabrahman the *avatari*, *pragatpanu* through Aksharbrahman, Aksharbrahman as distinct from Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman as the living guru, the centrality and essentiality of the guru for *moksha*, the necessity of becoming *brahmarup* and offering devotion to Parabrahman, that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is a distinct school of philosophy from Vishishtadvaita, and other aspects of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

She writes, “The book provides a clear and coherent exposition of the

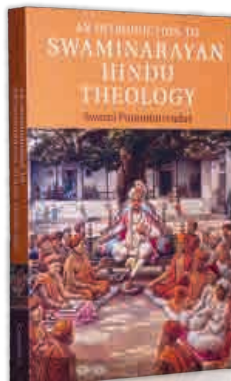


principal teachings of the tradition. The author demonstrates an impressive command of the texts and the materials, both those deriving from within the Swaminarayan tradition,... also the broader Hindu textual tradition... represent[ing] an invaluable resource for those belonging to the tradition. And for outsiders, it offers a very helpful introduction. It... succeeds in offering a remarkably clear and comprehensive overview of the central teachings of the tradition.”

She also writes, “Like many other Hindu traditions, the Swaminarayan tradition is strongly centered on the worship of the guru... Swaminarayan is himself regarded as the full and sole manifestation or form of the highest reality, Parabrahman. However, one of the unique theological features of the tradition is the recognition of a second ultimate reality, Aksharabrahman, which is the source of the succession of living gurus (Brahmasvarupa gurus) in the tradition. Liberation can only be attained through the grace of the guru.

She further highlights, “A more distinctive aspect of Swaminarayan theology is its notion of Ishvara. The term does refer to the traditional personal gods of Hinduism (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, etc.), but they are closer to sentient beings than to Parabrahman... Their role in the process of salvation or liberation is entirely overshadowed by the importance of Parabrahman, Aksharabrahman and the living gurus.”

Thus, as stated in this review essay by a distinguished scholar, *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology* provides an excellent overview of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. ♦





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MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN THE UAE 21 April 2019

1. Swamishri, HE Sheikh Nahyan, BAPS sadhus and dignitaries at Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi.
2. HE Sheikh Nahyan honours Swamishri and 50 BAPS sadhus at his royal majlis, Abu Dhabi.
(Inset) Swamishri presents a golden Amrut Kalash to HE Sheikh Nahyan.



SHILANYAS CEREMONY

20 April 2019, Abu Dhabi

1. Dr B.R. Shetty, chairman of Mandir Ltd, addresses the celebration assembly in the presence of Swamishri, government ministers and dignitaries.
2. Devotees, dignitaries and well-wishers from throughout the UAE and other countries participate in the *shilanyas* rituals.

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