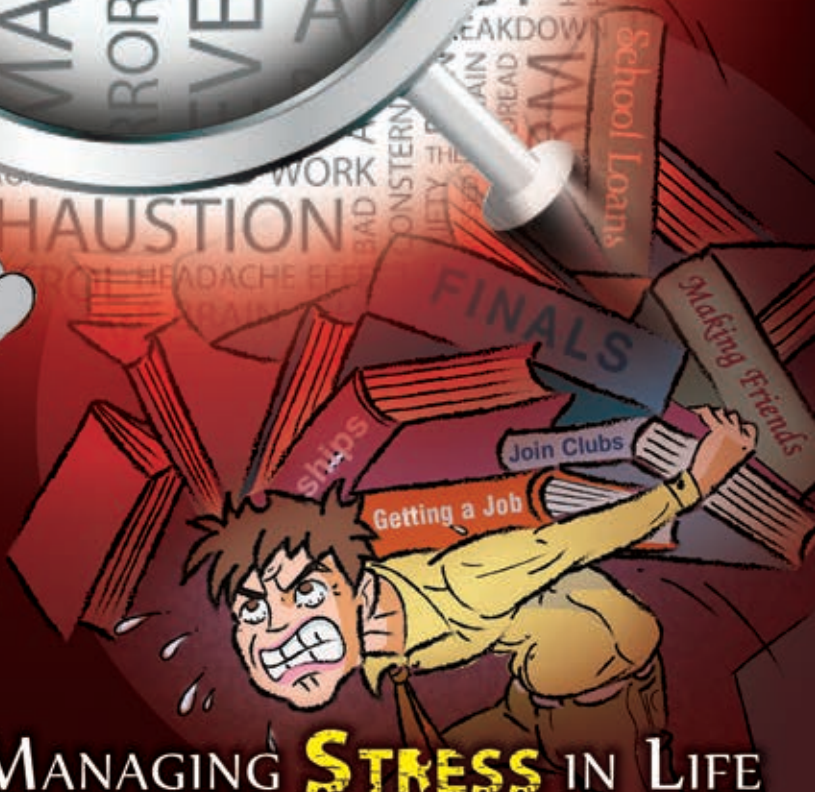
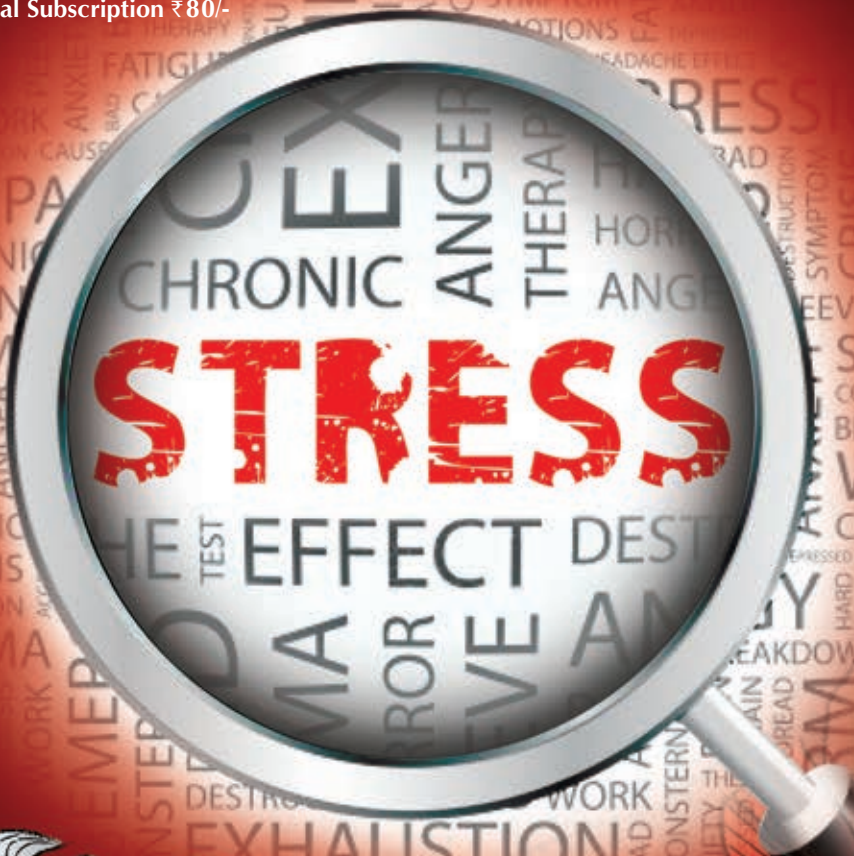


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MANAGING **STRESS** IN LIFE

ANNAKUT CELEBRATIONS

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs, October 2014



Gondal



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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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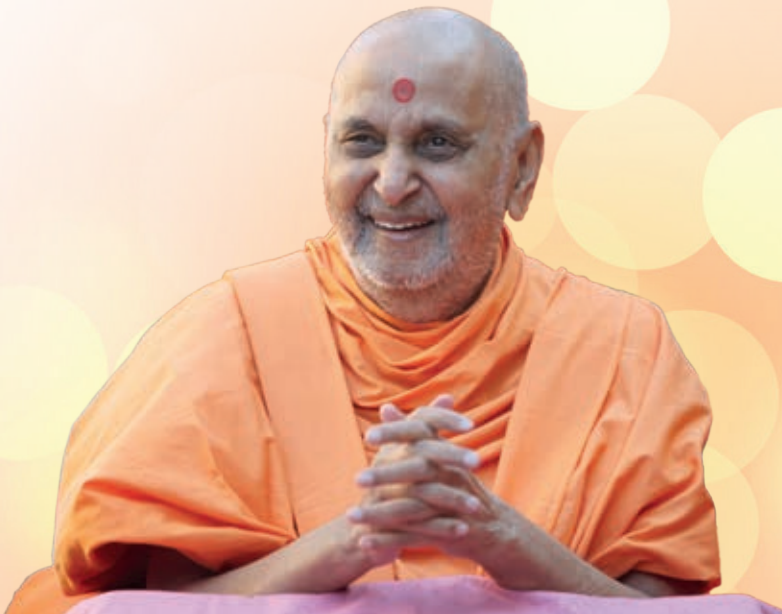
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CONTENTS



- 4 First Word
- 5 Shri Hari in Gadhpur
- 8 Managing Stress in Life
- 13 Daya
- 18 True Dharma
- 20 Namadev
- 23 Inspiring Stories of Volunteerism
- 32 Volunteer Departments
- 38 Spirit of Service and Sacrifice
- 40 Main Volunteers of Mandir Mahotsav
- 42 Guests' Opinions
- 44 Vachanamrut Nirupan
- 49 FAQs on Hinduism
- 50 Diwali & Annakut Celebrations
- 51 British Prime Minister Hosts Diwali Reception at 10 Downing Street, London
- 51 Diwali & Annakut Celebrations at Australian Federal Parliament, Canberra, Australia
- 52 BAPS Global News



Prostrations to Swamishri
on his birthday celebration
(29 November 2014)



FIRST WORD

The lives of great spiritual masters have common threads, in that they are staunchly anchored to the essential principles of morality and spirituality. Wedded to honesty, hard work, tolerance, ahimsa, charity, faith in God and other virtues, they dispense their duties selflessly for the uplift and liberation of mankind. Subsequently, they are adored and respected by all.

Ninety-three years ago a little boy, born in Chansad, Gujarat (on Magshar *sud* 8, Samvat 1978), innately possessed all the qualities of spiritual greatness. Quiet, unassuming and brilliant, as a child he was inclined towards devotion and faith in God. His daily visits to the village Swaminarayan Mandir, Satyanarayan Mandir and Hanumanji Mandir engaged him in rapturous devotion and singing before the deities. He had a penchant for listening to spiritual discourses, which sparked a resolve to renounce and retreat to Rishikesh and become a sadhu.

However, on meeting Shastriji Maharaj, he fully dedicated himself in his service and cause. The guru initiated him as a sadhu and named him Swami Narayanswarupdas. From then onwards his life pivoted around devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj, and their teachings.

Once, the main gate of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur, was under construction. Shastriji Maharaj had instructed that the entrance gate should be 24 feet wide. On the other hand Swami Narayanswarupdas and Arjunkaka felt that 16 feet would suffice. Their sole reason for their proposal was that Sarangpur, being a very small village, would be unlikely to host multitudes of pilgrims. Later, Swami Narayanswarupdas and Arjunkaka went to meet Shastriji Maharaj at Atladra, and voiced their view. Then, Shastriji Maharaj instructed Swami Narayanswarupdas to sing the 86th chapter of the Bhaktachintamani. The chapter described how the sun, moon and other devas had attained brilliance and greatness by their obedience to God's commands. After the singing of the chapter, Shastriji Maharaj asked, "What have you understood?" Swami Narayanswarupdas replied, "The gate's width should be 24 feet wide. I will do according to your bidding. I relinquish my view. I want to please you, so nothing more needs to be said about it." Immediately, Shastriji Maharaj got up from his seat and blessed Swami Narayanswarupdas, and joyfully proclaimed, "By following *agna* one is blessed and attains greatness."

Once, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami were in the village of Demol, Gujarat. The local devotees wished for Yogiji Maharaj to sanctify their homes, but Swami was scheduled to proceed further towards Ramol. So Yogiji Maharaj declared that Pramukh Swami would do the *padhramanis* on his behalf. At that time Pramukh Swami had a fever and a splitting headache, but he did not reveal it to anyone. After Yogiji Maharaj's departure the devotees took Pramukh Swami to sanctify 45 homes, and thereafter to address an assembly at the local school. When Pramukh Swami arrived at Ramol, Yogiji Maharaj concluded his blessings to an assembly and announced that Pramukh Swami would address them. By now Pramukh Swami was terribly feverish and shivering and he spoke with great

(Contd. on pg. 17)

Shri Hari in Gadhpur

Shriji Maharaj celebrates the festival of Vasant in Gadhpur and pleases the devotees...

Shri Hari decided to celebrate the Vasant festival of 1822 in Gadhpur. Devotees thronged to Gadhada for the event. Among them were Shambhu Shukla and Shivshankar Jani of Halvad, Shivram Bhatt of Shiyani, and Govindram and *darbars* of Methan.

Dada Khachar had, according to tradition, prepared a potful of water mixed with saffron. Shivram Bhatt and Govindram first performed *pujan* of the potful of water to commemorate the month of Vasant. Thereafter, Nityanand Swami bathed Shri Hari with the saffron-tinged water and sprinkled vermilion powder. Shri Hari, too, sprayed coloured water on the sadhus and devotees. Then Maharaj went to Jiva Khachar's *darbar*. Here, too, the festive spraying of coloured water and sprinkling of vermilion followed.

Shriji Maharaj did not take to heart Jiva Khachar's antagonism for him. To the contrary, Shri Hari always took care and desired that he did not fall from the path of *moksha*. But Jiva Khachar, out of his jealousy for Dada Khachar, remained blinkered to Maharaj's generous compassion for him. He invited Maharaj to his home to celebrate festivals and offered feasts, but he did this solely to outshine Dada's devotion. Shri Hari, however, was not happy with Jiva Khachar's ostentation. Only true devotion resonated with Maharaj. Despite this, Shri Hari pleased Jiva Khachar.

After concluding the celebration at Jiva Khachar's *darbar*, Maharaj and the group headed towards a nearby water body called Narayan Dharo to bathe and wash off the colours.



Thereafter, the waters took on a red hue. Then Shri Hari went to Dada's *darbar*. Here the devotees offered an abundance of dates and popcorn to Maharaj. After offering them to the *murti* of Vasudev Narayan, Maharaj ate a little and gave the rest as blessings to all.

That day's meal for Shri Hari was sponsored by Mokha Khachar of Khambhala. After having his meal, Shri Hari came to serve food to his sadhus. But, Muktanand Swami expressed his concern, "Maharaj, you must be intensely fatigued after spraying colours and bathing in the Narayan Dharo. If you say so I will serve the sadhus on your behalf."

Shri Hari was pleased with Muktanand Swami's care and love, but added, "What you've said is true, but the sadhus heartfully wish that I come and serve them. And by cherishing memories of me serving them will bless them with the fruits of accomplishing infinite spiritual endeavours. I gift my *murti* in all my actions. Those who are faithful absorb the bliss of my form."

Thereafter, Shri Hari served his sadhus.

Muktanand Swami mused about Shri Hari's greatness and will to grant eternal bliss to his sadhus.

The next day, Shriji Maharaj went with his entire gathering to Pipaliya at the passionate request of Vela Bhakta. The latter gave Shri Hari a cordial and festive welcome from the village outskirts. The entire procession terminated before a large open marquee by his house. Shri Hari alighted from Manki and proceeded to Vela's kitchen. Maharaj asked, "Vela, there are a large number of devotees with me. How will you manage their meals?"

Vela Patel replied humbly, "Maharaj, by your grace there won't be any shortage. Simply shower your grace." Shriji Maharaj looked at all the food items and declared, "Vela, because of your heartfelt devotion, the food will suffice for all. Serve the items plentifully to all."

Shri Hari came to the open marquee and sat down on a high seat arranged for him. After a while Maharaj told his attendant, Mukund Brahmachari, that he wished to bathe. After his bath Maharaj proceeded to have his meal and told his sadhus to take their meals, too. Thereafter, Maharaj discoursed to the assembly. After a while he noticed that the audience was drowsy because of the heavy meal. Thus, Maharaj told Premanand Swami to sing upbeat bhajans to ward of everyone's sleep. In the evening Maharaj returned to Gadhada.

The following morning, Shri Hari told Pragji Dave to read the Moksha Dharma scripture in the assembly. Whenever Maharaj felt an important *shlok* was being read, he would tell Shukanand Swami (Shuk Muni) to make a note of it.

TWO SENIOR SADHUS GO TO SHRINAGAR

A few days later, Maharaj instructed Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami to go to Shrinagar (Ahmedabad) along with their group of sadhus. Maharaj made the travel arrangements and informed them, "I will come there in the dark

half of the month of Maha (February-March). For the present, go and make preparations for the mandir *pratishtha*." Both the senior sadhus and their groups of sadhus bowed at Shri Hari's feet and departed.

In all, Shri Hari stayed in Gadhada for ten months. The devotees of Gadhada were blessed with the opportunity to serve Maharaj for such a long stretch. Shri Hari's darshan, discourses and celebration of festivals filled the devotees' hearts with divine joy. He also consolidated their spiritual faith. Maharaj stayed extensively in Gadhpur because of Dada Khachar and his sisters' love. He had tested their faith in many ways and displayed human traits during the course of his stay. Sometimes he showered his love and at other times he spoke bitterly to them. At times he became angry and strongly disapproved of Dada Khachar. Despite such actions, Dada Khachar's devotion and allegiance to him did not diminish, but rose a few notches higher. Shri Hari commented, "No one could stand up to such severe trials. And neither could any one retain his divinity for me after seeing my utter human behaviour. However, Dada Khachar and his family are of a different ilk." In fact they felt dismayed in the absence of *seva* to Maharaj, his sadhus and devotees. Whenever Maharaj praised them, they did not exult or become puffed with pride. Dada Khachar and his family remained enthused in Shri Hari's *seva* and stay in Gadhpur. Whenever Maharaj departed from Gadhpur to travel elsewhere for satsang, they would accept his wish and remain ever joyful. That was why Shri Hari always felt what more could he give to Dada Khachar and his entire family. In return for their profound and unerring devotion, Maharaj blessed them with the darshan of his *murti* in their hearts. Shri Hari believed Gadhpur to be his home, and by his association it had become like Akshardham.

DEPARTURE FROM GADHPUR

On Maha *vad* 6 Shri Hari departed from

Gadhpur towards Ahmedabad with an entourage of sadhus and Kathi devotees. As Maharaj passed enroute through the villages, devotees honoured and welcomed him festively. Many even joined him on his onward journey. On arriving in Jetalpur, near Ahmedabad, Shri Hari told all the devotees to stay there, while he and sixty *parshads* proceeded towards Shrinagar (Ahmedabad). Shri Hari entered Ahmedabad on Maha *vad* 11. He wished to see the *yagnashala*, dining arrangements, stock of food rations for the *pratishtha* festival as well as the accommodations for all devotees. Shriji Maharaj wished to make the best possible arrangements for his devotees and please them.

TENTS AT KANKARIYA LAKE

Shri Hari travelled through Mandvini Pol, Manek Chowk, Delhi Darwaja and came onto the road leading to the suburb of Shahibaug. He arrived at the Shahi Mahel, where the Collector of Ahmedabad, Mr Dunlop,¹ resided. The Collector had given permission for the land around Shahi Mahel to be used as accommodation for the devotees. Shri Hari observed the lush, beautiful gardens replete with fruit trees. He decided not to use them for accommodation because the gardens and trees would be damaged.

Shri Hari continued his scouting tour and arrived at Kankaria Lake. Here he saw a large area of open land with abundant trees for shade and ample supply of drinkable water from the lake. Maharaj preferred this place and decided to pitch tents there. Later, Shri Hari met Mr Dunlop, who welcomed him warmly. In the late evening Maharaj returned to Jetalpur.

BEAUTIFUL PROCESSION IN SHRINAGAR

The next day, on Maha *vad* 12, Shriji Maharaj set off from Jetalpur towards Shrinagar

(Ahmedabad) with his group of devotees. In Shrinagar, the devotees were ready to accord a tumultuous welcome to Maharaj and his entourage. Shri Hari arrived at Raipur Darwaja. The local devotees offered *pujan* to Maharaj, and placed a golden *pagh* on his head and flower garlands around his neck. They also decorated Manki, the mare of Shri Hari, with golden ornaments. Then Maharaj donned the clothes offered by the devotees and mounted Manki.

Shri Hari's procession was heralded with music and celebration as it advanced towards the city centre. It comprised of a cavalcade in the front, followed by a drummer on a camel, musicians playing drums, cymbals and *shehnais*, devotees and sadhus singing kirtans, scholarly sadhus chanting Sanskrit *shloks* from the Vedas and Shrimad Bhagvat, ten sentinels raising their golden sticks and proclaiming victory calls, Shri Hari on Manki flanked by *parshads* and finally ladies singing auspicious songs and bhajans. The grand procession marched into Ahmedabad with full honours. The city dwellers came out of their homes and shops, stood on balconies and terraces to watch and welcome the divine spectacle.

Mr and Mrs Dunlop approached the procession in an open buggy for Maharaj's darshan. He stopped his buggy on one side and expressed joy on seeing the colourful and disciplined procession. He doffed his hat and offered respects to Maharaj. The procession progressed ahead. Mr Dunlop proceeded towards Kankaria Lake to see the arrangements for Maharaj and his devotees. He saw innumerable chariots, horses and carts parked by the lake and guarded by sentinels. The devotees were absent because they had joined the procession. Mr Dunlop was satisfied with his officers' arrangements.

Maharaj's procession entered the main city bazaar. Raghunathdas, a renegade of the Sampradaya, saw the procession approaching the mandir built by Ramanand Swami. Since he

(Contd. on pg. 22)

1 Mr John J. Dunlop was formerly the Collector of Kheda, however, after he took over the dominion of Ahmedabad from the Gaekwad royalty on 30 November 1817, he started staying at the Shahi Mahel on the outskirts of the city.



Managing **STRESS** in Life

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a nonspecific response of the body to any demand upon it. It is a mismatch between perceived demands and perceived ability to cope with the pressures and loads placed upon us. It can be a mentally or emotionally disruptive influence. We generally use the word “stress” when we feel that everything has become too much to bear. Anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being is stress.

Stress can be positive (eustress), e.g. swerving your car to avoid a collision, or negative, e.g. unable to get up in the morning to face the overwhelming workload.

Yet, our mind does a poor job of distinguishing between daily stressful situations and life-threatening events. Anxiety or anger triggered by less important sources of stress, such as financial fears or traffic jams, don’t find a quick physical release and build up as the day rolls on. Adding to the turmoil is anticipation of potential problems, e.g. government warnings of terrorist activity or awaiting medical test results. Thus, the stress we experience becomes chronic or constant and may have medical repercussions.

Glance at the ten leading causes of death in America, and you won’t find the word “stress” anywhere. Yet many studies link stress to heart disease and stroke, two of the top ten killers. Heart disease alone was responsible for more than one in three deaths in 2002.

Stress also influences cancer and chronic lower respiratory tract diseases, which rank as numbers 2 and 4, respectively, in the top 10. With reference to executives alone, the American industry loses between \$10 and \$20 billion annually

through lost days, hospitalization and early death caused by stress.

WHAT CREATES STRESS?

The specific stressor (agent or stimulus that causes stress) and the duration of the stressor, plus the individual’s make-up determines the stress impact. Generally (but not always), the more stressors we experience, the more stressed we feel.

• Stressors may be:

- Physical, e.g. pollutants
- Social, e.g. loss of a loved one
- Psychological, e.g. jealousy.

Numerous scales have been developed to quantify the impact of various stressors. Professor Thomas Holmes (psychiatrist at the University of Washington) developed the Holmes Stress scale wherein 42 stressors were rated, including changing work or schools, trouble with the in-laws, a house mortgage and others. The death of a spouse was rated as the highest stressor, followed by marital separation. Minor law violations were rated as the least cause of stress. Interestingly, vacations scored higher as a stressor.

• A person’s personality may be determined by:

- Hereditary factors
- Environmental factors
- State of mind at the time of the stress.

We all vary with regards to individual make-up and handling stress. Probably the most well known description of personality types and their susceptibility to stress was done by two cardiologists, Friedman and Rosenman. They described Personality Types A and B.

• Type A

- Competitive personality who is constantly

striving

- Time urgency, hostility, aggressive

- Compulsive, hard driving, deadline driven

- Impatient due to delay, suppresses fatigue, and tries to control environment

- Doesn't listen and is a fast talker.

Type B

- Passive, restrained, not overly ambitious

- Non-competitive, unhurried, relaxed

- Listens and talks coherently.

The link between personality type and heart disease remains controversial though. It is now suggested that it is mainly hostility, a tendency to become angry quickly or react in a hostile manner, that predisposes one to cardiovascular disease.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE STRESSED?

There are two internal systems activated when stressed. One results in the release of corticosteroids (e.g. cortisone) and the other results in the release of the catecholamines (namely, adrenaline and noradrenaline).

Cortisone's function is to prepare the body for danger, suppressing local reactions so the body is better prepared to deal with the stressor. However, if chronically produced, as in stress, it reduces the action of the defensive cells and organs of the body, such as white cells, thymus and lymph nodes. Thus, we are more prone to infection and tumour cells can spread more easily. Cortisone stimulates glucose production and inhibits insulin predisposing us to diabetes.

Catecholamine release results in what is known as the fight, fright or flight response. Catecholamines cause the motor nerves to become excited. This in turn causes the major muscles to tense up as we prepare to fight (brace



for action), flee or freeze. When we are chronically stressed it leads to muscle spasms, resulting in symptoms such as tension headaches, backaches, neck and shoulder pain. At an extreme, muscle tremors may occur, together with increased breathing and sweating. Senses become hyperalert in preparation for danger and we experience decreased saliva flow.

Our bodies simultaneously try to react to the stress and recover from it as well. It's almost as if we are driving a high-powered vehicle by flooring the accelerator and standing on the brakes at the same time. But just like a car with a constantly revved-up engine, the brakes will fail, and the body's stress response continues unabated, repeatedly launching the stress response, impacting negatively on the body.

Chronic stress may lead to atrophy of body organs, specifically in the brain's hippocampus and prefrontal cortex. It may impact the heart, lungs, blood vessels and kidneys resulting in an increase in heart rate, respiratory rate and blood pressure. The higher your blood pressure, the greater your risk for a heart attack, heart failure, stroke and kidney disease.

Research published in *The Lancet* in 2004, which involved over 24,000 participants from 52 countries, demonstrated the role of stress in heightening heart attack risk. Despite variations in the prevalence of stress across countries and ethnic groups, stress levels were uniformly higher in the individuals who had suffered heart attacks than for their healthy counterparts.

The symptoms of stress may be physical or psychological. They include and are not limited to:

- Anxious thoughts
- Poor concentration
- Irritability





- Sleep problems
- Tense muscles
- Stomach ache
- Tiredness
- Weight loss or gain, etc.

COMMON STRESS RELATED ILLNESSES AND DISEASES

Cardiac

- Angina and myocardial infarction (heart attack)
- Hypertension and stroke
- Migraine
- Other heart or blood vessel diseases.

Digestive System

- Indigestion, nausea and heartburn
- Stomach and duodenal ulcers
- Ulcerative Colitis
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Diarrhoea or constipation

In England, during World War II, immediately following a bomb attack, people would appear in hospitals with bleeding ulcers.

Muscles and Joints

- Headaches
- Cramps/muscle spasms
- Back pain/neck pain

Others

- Psychiatric disorders
- Skin disorders
- Diabetes
- Cancer

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Common colds and Influenza
- Osteoporosis

“Stress Dwarfism” documented among children living in war zones or in orphanages where they were fed and housed, but were emotionally neglected.

Stress May also Predispose One to

- Accidents
- Work conflict
- Marital conflict

HOW DO WE NORMALLY DEAL WITH STRESS?

- Watching endless TV
- Withdrawing from friends or family, or conversely, jumping into a frenzied social life to avoid facing problems
- Overeating/undereating
- Sleeping too much/too little
- Drinking alcohol or smoking
- Lashing out at others in emotionally or physically violent outbursts
- Taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs, such as sleeping pills, muscle relaxants or anti-anxiety pills
- Taking illegal or unsafe drugs

However, these are ineffective stress solutions and are detrimental in the long term.

TREATMENT OF STRESS

Generally, when we go to a doctor for a stress related disease, he will primarily treat the disease with drugs. If it is a mental illness, drugs such as antidepressants or anxiolytics may be prescribed. Also, the patient is given practical advice on how to deal with the underlying stress.

Nonetheless, practical ways of treating stress are increasing as the unrelenting pace of living in a fast, technological, urban society increases.

SOME WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS

Deep, Diaphragmatic Breathing

Breathing in nasally and deeply, filling your lungs, allowing only your belly to rise. This heightens mindfulness and awareness, slowing the heartbeat and lowering or stabilizing blood pressure.

Guided Imagery

Imagining a blissful, comfortable environment, conjuring soothing scenes with specific details and using all senses to engage them. It helps to reach a state of complete relaxation with all the accompanying health benefits.

Meditation

A passive mental state that is often described as “emptying your mind” of active thoughts. Choose a *murti* of God or guru, word, sound, prayer or phrase to focus on. It results in lowering of heart-beat, breathing and metabolic rates to levels more characteristic of sleep or a state of hibernation.

Prayer

Studies show active religious life promotes healthier, longer, satisfying and happier lives. It is noted that there is less hostility and anxiety, lower blood pressure and better life quality among people with strong beliefs. Praying offers solace and comfort by reinforcing positive emotions, stimulating healthy physiological responses. Proper religious practice involves avoiding alcohol, tobacco and other vices that trigger stress.

Positive Thinking and Affirmations

A stream of positive thoughts drowns out negative thoughts. The key to alleviating stress is rehearsing success rather than rehearsing failure.

Mindfulness

A state of being aware of the

present and living more consciously. Living each moment of your life as it unfolds and remaining rooted in the present.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's injunction of performing daily puja, incorporates all of the above ways of alleviating stress. Besides achieving spiritual upliftment, daily puja leads to physical, mental and emotional enhancement. Puja also incorporates other known stress-alleviating techniques, such as:

- Emphasizing the practice of priority in our daily life
- Performing prostrations (*dandvats*) which are akin to Surya Namaskar
- Identifying oneself as *atma* instead of identifying with the various roles that generally cause stress, e.g. businessman, government official, etc.
- Inculcating humility, calmness and peace and recognizing Bhagwan as supreme. “When you realize full divinity in this form, you will immediately overcome evil instincts such as passion, anger and the like...” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 3).
- Understanding Maharaj to be *sarva karta* (all-doer), thus relinquishing ‘our control’ and surrendering to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Gunatitanand Swami observes: “If someone happens to come rushing in a violent rage, the devotee should still understand that whatever happens is as willed by my Lord. Without his will, nobody can move even a leaf” (Swamini Vato 1.88).

Nutrition

What you eat plays a big role in your overall stress level. A proper vegetarian diet, including fruits, is important.

Exercise

Improves cholesterol levels, lowers blood pressure, enhances one's immune system, and boosts metabolism and mood.



Yoga

Based on Indian philosophy, an excellent way to develop body awareness and elicit the relaxation response. Yoga has numerous health benefits that are being increasingly recognized by the western world.

Social Support

Confidants, friends, family and spouses provide the emotional support we need. Satsang, *ghar sabha* and extended family networks also play an important role.

In a study by Dr Dean Ornish to show reversal of atherosclerosis without surgery or drugs, he put participants on an extremely low fat vegetarian diet, a moderate exercise regime, and a variety of stress-management techniques, including yoga, meditation and group therapy. In the one year follow-up study, 82% of those who participated in these lifestyle changes had reductions in their coronary blockages.

All of the stress alleviating techniques described are preached and practiced by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. At age 93, some physical activities of Pramukh Swami Maharaj have obviously been curtailed, yet he maintains a stable and serene mind, amidst the chaos and excitement of the innumerable activities he oversees.

Swamishri needed to undergo an emergency bypass operation in 1998. He insisted that the procedure be done after 3.00 p.m. even though doctors wanted to operate immediately. The doctors accepted and Swamishri entered the theatre at 3.00 p.m. The operation was successful. Later, on being asked why he had wanted to wait till 3.00 p.m. Swamishri explained that it was to allow Thakorji to have his afternoon rest.

When most would generally be stressed regarding their own health and be considering their own convenience and schedule, Swamishri's health and convenience is always according to Thakorji's schedule.

Stress levels ran high for Gujarat, during the

terrorist attack on Akshardham in Gandhinagar 2002. Yet, Swamishri demonstrated absolute presence of mind throughout the entire episode despite being responsible for the Sanstha's actions. Swamishri remained calm, composed, equipoised, never reacting negatively inspite of the grave situation. With emotions being volatile, Swamishri called for and prayed for peace. When the attack was quelled, Swamishri immediately visited the complex and prayed for all those who had lost their lives, including those responsible for the attack. Rather than reacting impulsively, Swamishri remained calm throughout, responding optimally and controlling a highly stressful scenario. Following Bapa's example in the aftermath, Gujarat and India responded with similar sentiments, imbibing the spirit of calm and peace that Swamishri exudes.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna describes a person with a steady mind (*sthitpragna*) as one who is equipoised in happiness and misery, in gain and loss and in victory and defeat. Swamishri is a living embodiment in these contemporary times of this absolute Hindu virtue.

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Daya

Daya is compassion. Compassion is listed as one of the foremost qualities of a true sadhu in the 11th chapter of the Shrimad Bhagvat. Sant Tulsidasji says in the Ramacharitamans that a true sadhu has a tender heart that melts on hearing the sorrows and difficulties of those around him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has an amazing level of personal resilience, but his heart melts with compassion on seeing the sufferings of others.

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami says, “God is the root of compassion. It is from him that all compassion is born.”

A closer look at Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s life reveals just how true this observation is. The day he was appointed as the spiritual heir by Ramanand Swami, the 21-year-old Sahajanand Swami asked for two boons from him for the welfare of his disciples: “If your *satsangi* is destined to suffer the distress inflicted by the sting of one scorpion, may the distress of the stings of millions and millions of scorpions befall each and every pore of my body, but no pain should afflict your *satsangi*. Moreover, if the begging bowl is written in the destiny of your *satsangi*, may that begging

bowl come to me, but on no account should your *satsangi* suffer from the lack of food or clothing. Please grant me these two boons.”

The *paramhansas* who compiled the Vachanamrut describe Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s compassionate ways: “Upon hearing about a devotee in despair or difficulty, he would utter ‘Rama, Rama, Rama’. At other times he would give food, clothing and shelter to those in need. He could never tolerate another person being beaten or offended and would call out to intervene.”

Such compassion is also clearly visible in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His love for all living beings is the basis of his empathy for all. For him, to feel the pain and suffering of others is as natural as breathing.



Caring for livestock at the BAPS cattle camp in Raisan during a drought in Gujarat, 2001

Swamishri's care and concern for all living beings are evident from his active support for the victims of natural calamities, his involvement in anti-addiction drives and campaigns to promote vegetarianism, his mediation in resolving domestic quarrels and even social unrest. He has inspired tens of thousands of volunteers to help lessen the troubles of those around them.

In 1990 the monsoon had nearly passed in Gujarat, and not a single drop of rain had blessed the dry earth. Swamishri was in London at the time and was alerted on the grave drought situation. Swamishri's response was sleeping less at night. He would wake up in the middle of the night, sit up in his bed and pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan for the much-needed rain. One night, at about 2.00 a.m., his attendant sadhu realized that Swamishri was awake. He observed Swamishri for a while and then asked him why he was awake. Swamishri told him about his nightly prayer sessions. From then onwards, the attendant sadhu too joined in the prayers every night.

Not one to normally highlight such things, Swamishri wrote in a letter from London, "The monsoon has almost gone. It is natural that you are worried, but have faith in God. I am praying daily in the Akshar Deri. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Bapa will all shower their compassion. There is still time."

Swamishri has always shown his love and

kindness whenever he found or heard people suffering.

In 1979, due to severe rains the Machhu Dam in Morbi gave way. There was widespread destruction. Swamishri mobilized over 1,500 sadhus and volunteers to rush there and help. A volunteer still recalls the sorrow visible on Swamishri's face as he surveyed the muddy streets of Morbi strewn with bodies.

During the severe famine in Gujarat in 1987, Swamishri was visiting Ratanpura, a small town near Rajkot. The town had a government-operated cattle camp. The camp had about 5,000 famished calves. As Swamishri approached the camp, a group of calves gathered around him and followed him. The volunteer explained that the calves hadn't eaten for three days. Swamishri's eyes welled up with tears as he heard this. He remained silent. When he reached Gondal, he immediately summoned Jnanprasad Swami and said, "The way those calves in Ratanpura were running after us was unbearable for me. So, arrange to send some trucks full of fodder for them immediately."

In the days to follow Swamishri was not himself. He would stop his routine activity and would become lost in deep thought. He would say, "I can't think of anything else right now. I really feel for the people and livestock that are suffering because of the drought. In everything that I do, I think of the rain."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's concern gave birth to a project that was to change the lives of hundreds of farmers and thousands of cattle in Gujarat.

Watching helplessly as their livestock was perishing, the farmers decided to sell their cattle. Swamishri stopped the farmers from doing so. He organized cattle camps to take care of the animals until their owners could provide for them. Swamishri realized that these animals were the source of livelihood for their owners. The animals were nourished and looked after for a year till their owners were able to take care of them.

Pravinsinh of Vadheda couldn't help but cry

after seeing his cattle being cared for so well.

Kasambhai, a Muslim resident of Madhupur Gir, was touched by Swamishri's kindness, "I feel that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is my Khuda."

At 8.46 a.m. on 26 January 2001 a devastating earthquake rattled Gujarat. It measured 7.6 on the Richter scale, demolishing buildings, infrastructure and killing thousands. While most people were still recovering from the initial shock of the earthquake with its epicentre in Kutch, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had arranged warm meals for survivors in Bhuj by lunchtime. Swamishri mobilized the BAPS Sanstha's sadhus and volunteers to begin emergency relief work. For the whole year, Swamishri coordinated the Sanstha's earthquake relief work, often staying up till well past midnight to contact people in India and abroad to make the necessary arrangements.

At the BAPS relief camps in and around Bhuj, more than 40,000 people were fed warm and nutritious meals daily. Attending to the smallest of details, Swamishri called Vedagna Swami, the Kothari in Bochasan, regarding the grains being sent to Bhuj, "The grains that are being grinded for the relief kitchens have to be of the best quality. Make sure they are cleaned and sifted for small stones."

Swamishri visited the kitchen in Atladra where food packets for distribution were being prepared. After inspection he suggested that two green pickled chillies be included in each packet, explaining, "People from the Kutch region enjoy spicy food. Also, they will taste good with the sweets."

The survivors of the earthquake will probably never know the care Swamishri took in organizing the relief work.

Swamishri personally walked through the rubble-strewn streets of earthquake-devastated villages in Kutch, showering his grace and compassion on the survivors. He blessed the injured and traumatized victims to lessen their pain and sorrow.

More than 500 villages were provided with



Swamishri blesses an earthquake victim, Bhuj, 2001

aid and 15 villages and colonies were reconstructed. Today, these villages are considered among the finest in Gujarat, made possible by Swamishri's meticulous care.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's compassion is selfless. There are no expectations, except one – to please God.

Swamishri's tolerance is immeasurable, but he does not tolerate any cruelty to animals.

He has been a strong advocate of vegetarianism around the world. He often says, "Every being has the right to live. Killing to survive is just not humane."

With this understanding, Swamishri has successfully convinced hundreds of thousands of people to adopt a vegetarian diet. Speaking to a youth who enjoyed hunting as a pastime, Swamishri expressed his value for life, "Just as we have the right to live, don't they? Do not commit such a grave sin. These poor animals live on grass. Do they harm anyone? If somebody hits us do we not feel pain? They also have feelings. Promise that you will never kill again. You will find the strength to abstain. You will experience peace and happiness."

The youth agreed, but while taking the pledge he murmured, "I will not be able to stay without hunting." Swamishri heard this and then, looking directly into the youth's eyes, patiently explained, "What do you mean? There's nothing you can't live without. Give up that thought. You will get strength from satsang. Hunting does not benefit

you or the animals. The poor animals suffer and die. They also have a soul. God has given them an animal body and us a human body. You are a Kshatriya and so your duty is to protect. Killing is demonic, and the more you do it the more miserable you will become.”

Out of his compassion towards those that have addictions, Swamishri has personally counselled and inspired hundreds of thousands of people to give up such harmful habits. No matter how busy he may be, but whenever Swamishri meets someone entangled in addictions, he always finds time to speak to him and convince him to give up bad habits. He repeatedly reminds people of their vows to eschew their vices and constantly follows up with them for years.

Swamishri was meeting devotees as he walked towards the assembly hall in Ahmedabad, when suddenly a youth bowed at Swamishri's feet. A sadhu started to introduce him, but Swamishri interrupted, "I know him. How are you Atul? Are you still on it?"

"On what?"

"Brown sugar, Atul. I haven't forgotten."

Atul couldn't look into Swamishri's eyes. Swamishri noticed his body language and said, "You are still addicted? I have told you so many times. How have you benefited from it? Everyone is telling you to give it up. Is it because they want to harm you? You have to decide. How much do you take?"

"Around two hundred rupees worth daily."

"Where do you get the money from?"

"I have a job in the government where I can coax extra money from people."

Swamishri picked up on this point, "So you steal money. Your drug habit is one type of sin. Then you steal again from people to support your addictive habits; that's another sin."

After eight years of persistent effort, Swamishri was able to save Atul, the only son of a widowed mother, from the fatal grip of a silent killer.

Through personal meetings, letters and home visits, Swamishri's compassion has saved and pacified countless people. Whenever someone is in a difficult situation or condition, Swamishri is overcome with a feeling of pity: "How may I help?"

When Harshad Chavda, a youth who had been serving in the BAPS for many years, met with a car accident, Swamishri wrote him a 20-page letter to express his serious regret for not being able to serve him personally:

"The news (of your accident) brings me much pain. I am praying to Maharaj and Swami for your speedy recovery. I am praying for you in my morning puja as well. I also feel the pain you are suffering. I should be serving you in your time of need, because you have always selflessly served with great understanding and enthusiasm, and without concern for your health, hunger or thirst, or time of day. I can never serve you enough to make it up! The fact that I cannot serve you now is causing me immense sorrow."

Prabhashankarbhai Pandya of Ahmedabad, an elderly devotee from Shastriji Maharaj's time, recalls a moving incident to illustrate Swamishri's compassion:

"Once, I arrived in Atladra for the Vasant Panchmi celebrations at around 2.00 a.m. Everyone was asleep and there was no place for me to sleep. I decided to rest in front of the steps leading up to the assembly hall, using my bag as a makeshift pillow. At around 5.30 a.m. I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Pragat Bhagat – Swamishri's attendant. I saw a blanket wrapped around my body. 'Who covered me with this blanket?' I asked him. Pragat Bhagat replied, 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj had come in the middle of the night and covered you with his blanket.'"

In 2000, a young boy named Prashant, from the small village of Sagarkhedu Kharva, was seriously injured in an accident during the preparations for a festival in Surat. He was admitted to

the ICU of Mahavir General Hospital for treatment. Swamishri heard of the incident and was deeply saddened on hearing of the child's plight.

Coincidentally, Swamishri arrived in Surat that day. The next morning, he decided to visit Prashant in hospital and left by car. As they neared the hospital, they realized that the road leading to the hospital had been temporarily closed for repairs. Swamishri opened the car door, stepped out and expressed his wish to walk the remaining quarter of a kilometre. Supported by his attendant sadhus, he began to negotiate over pipes and ditches as he made his way to the hospital. Swamishri was 80 years old, yet he was not deterred by the physical obstacles. When he reached the hospital and entered the ICU, he placed his hands on the boy's head and whispered, "Prashant, Prashant... Jai Swaminarayan..."

Prashant was unconscious, but Swamishri spoke to the boy as if he was listening to every word. He then placed Harikrishna Maharaj's garland around Prashant's neck and prayed for his wellbeing. Then, Swamishri comforted the boy's father. His compassion touched Prashant's family beyond imagination.

Swamishri left the hospital and returned to his car, walking over the uneven ground, and leaping over ditches and manholes. He was satisfied, since

(Contd. from pg. 4)

difficulty. Haka Bapu then realized that Swami was ill, so he immediately concluded the assembly and took Swami to a devotee's home for medication and rest.

In spite of ill health Pramukh Swami did not inform anyone or refuse the commands of Yogiji Maharaj.

As a disciple of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri had centred his entire life around obeying his gurus and perceiving their glory in all their actions and works. Even after succeeding Yogiji Maharaj as the guru Swamishri endeavoured in fulfilling the wishes and dreams of Yogiji Maharaj and in further enshrining the

he had been able to soothe and care for an innocent young child and his family in their time of need.

Only a Satpurush who is beyond the attachments and needs of the body can truly and selflessly shower compassion on others. Only he can speak and live by the words.

"In the joy of others lies our own;

In the progress of others rests our own;

In the good of others abides our own."

That such a Brahmaswarup Sadhu engages in countless activities for the benefit of others is the result of his compassion, as described by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut: "For a devotee of God, even though *mayik* influences are overcome, intense compassion and affection for God and his devotees increases. But in no way are compassion and affection ever lost; they always remain" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 3).

The compassion of such a Sadhu is not shown only when he sees someone suffering. It is more than that. The ancient sages call it *akaran daya* – 'Compassion with no particular cause'.

Yogiji Maharaj called it *atyantik daya* or 'the compassion to free souls from the never-ending cycle of life and death'.

We are indeed fortunate to have such a sadhu in our midst. ♦

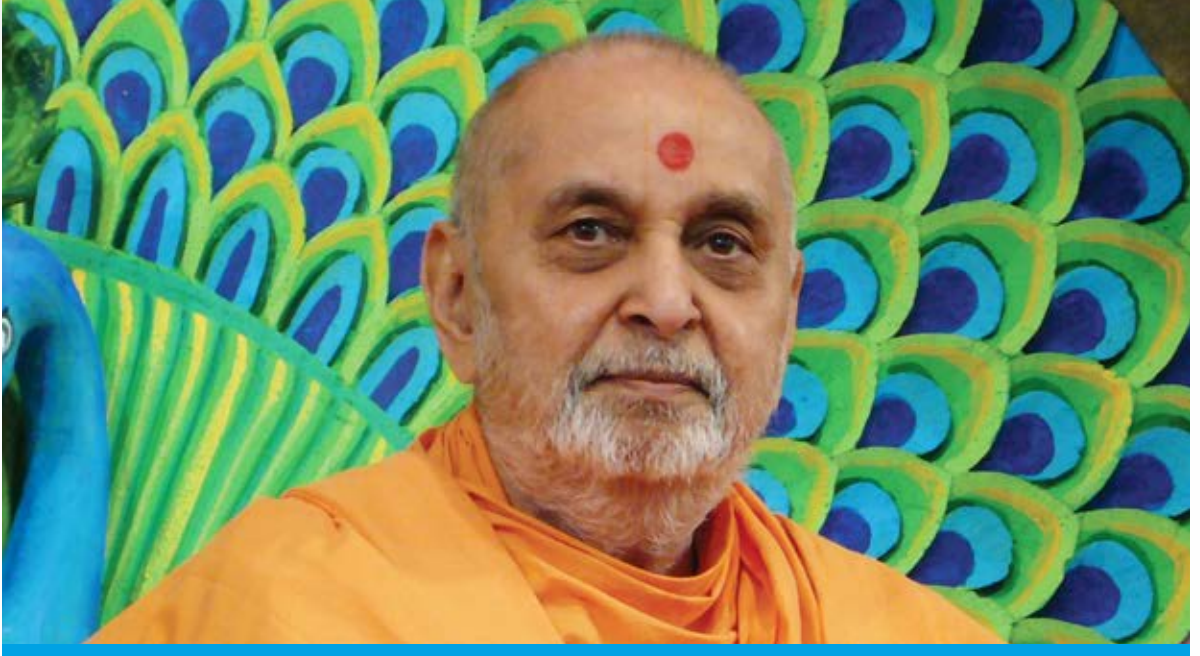
philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam for the *moksha* of countless aspirants. The cornerstone of his selfless life is his deep faith in and obedience to the principles of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*, and service to society. He has never deviated from his saintliness, spiritual allegiance and altruism in the face of profuse honours, and mundane distractions and issues.

We offer our prostrations to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj on completing 93 years and for entering into his 94th year (29 November 2014), and pray that he showers his abundant blessings and graces us all with a spiritually centred life.

We wish our readers a happy New Year. ♦

True Dharma

Swamishri blessed the evening satsang assembly held at the Sanatan Mandir in Kisumu, Kenya, on 7 October 1999.



We all swim in the ocean of life and are thrown in different directions by the ‘waves’ of this world and so struggle to remain afloat. When we develop a correct understanding we are able to float fearlessly in this worldly ocean and swim in the right direction. Such understanding develops by seeking the refuge of God and his true Sadhu. By engaging in such satsang, we can easily cross the ocean of life. Otherwise, we will drown.

Life is full of ups and downs, joys and miseries. In times of difficulty, our mind becomes disturbed. We reason that despite having prayed so much, we have not got what we want. So, we give up worship to God. But this is misguided. Only by firm conviction and refuge in God do we attain peace and happiness. The Pandavas were exiled to the forest and suffered many hardships. But they sustained their faith in Shri Krishna Bhagwan,

who told Arjun: “*Sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekam sharanam vraja;*

Aham tvām sarva-pāpebhyo mokshayishyāmi mā shucāha.” – “Give up all your resolves and surrender to me. I will liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve” (Gita 18.66). And by doing what Shri Krishna told them, they eventually won the Mahabharat War and achieved success.

Still, people live wilfully. They interpret the shastras in their own way and called it ‘dharma’. But that is not true dharma. The words of God are dharma. Whatever Bhagwan Ram, Bhagwan Krishna and Bhagwan Swaminarayan (in the Shikshapatri) have said is dharma. The Shrimad Bhagvat, Gita, Upanishads, Mahabharat, Ramayan, Vachanamrut and other shastras contain the words of God and instruct us to live a life of character.

Others may encourage us to eat meat, drink alcohol and indulge in other such things, but it

is wrong.

Our shastras declare, “*Ahimsā paramo dharma.*” – “Non-violence is the highest dharma.” So, if you ignore this and live wilfully, will God be pleased?

Navratri is a pure and pious celebration, but men and women ignore the traditions and dance together. That is not dharma.

The celebration of our festivals – Janmashtami, Ramnavami, Diwali-Annakut and others – is described in our shastras, but people ignore the traditions and celebrate them in their own way.

On Janmashtami we are required to fast, but instead people – both men and women – drink and gamble. That is not the proper way to celebrate. That is not true dharma. On festival days, we should listen to the divine inspiring stories from the shastras instead of engaging in worthless gossip.

Our shastras reveal how to live a pure life of good character and how to offer devotion to attain liberation. This is the purpose for which God has given us this human birth.

It is a typical tendency of people to do that which is prohibited. We drop litter, indulge in addictions and do other things we are told not to.

You have come here [to Africa] to earn money. But, having saved some wealth, people indulge in addictions. This is of no benefit. If we live by the wish of the holy Sadhu, we will experience peace and happiness. By living wilfully, liberation is not attained.

The life of Bhagwan Ram was an ideal for all. His pure life brought happiness to all his people. He suffered many hardships, but respected the wishes of his elders. He gave up the throne to uphold the promise of his father, Dashrath, to Kaikeyi. Today, people easily break their commitments to secure selfish gains. People do things to deceive others and make a profit. But to be dishonest in our dealings is a grave sin. We must remember that honesty is our true dharma.

People blindly crave for more and more wealth and power. For this, they do not care how

they get them. It is not wrong to acquire wealth and power, but it must be done while observing dharma. Honest effort – *purusharth* – is the first requirement. Establish dharma in one’s life and then endeavour. In this way, we become happy and experience peace. This also leads to peace in society, otherwise quarrels and fights break out over money.

Bhagwan Ram teaches us not to do anything that will harm or cause misery to others.

Today, many children often lack respect for their parents and elders. They do not listen to them and do as they please. But Bhagwan Ram obeyed his father, even though he knew he would have to face many difficulties.

Also, some married couples today often quarrel over small things and then file for divorce. But, the ups and downs in married life are to be faced together. After all, marriage vows are exchanged in the presence of fire, Brahmins and Vedic mantras as witnesses. This should be taken seriously. Many do realize this and endure difficult times together. They remain faithful to each other. Couples should serve each other and help each other to attain *moksha*.

In their desire for wealth, power and lust, people forget their dharma.

Lakshman was Ram’s brother. He did not think about benefiting from Ram’s predicament and claim his wealth. Instead, Lakshman accompanied Ram to the forest, served him and endured the hardships with him. Even Bharat did not sit on the throne, realizing that Ram was the rightful heir.

Nowadays, such brotherly affection is not often found. Disputes arise over land and wealth. Even the bond between parents and children has deteriorated, such that they take each other to court. But such actions should never even be contemplated.

It is not that you should not enjoy life, but do so while remaining sincere to our noble values and traditions. This will lead to peace all round.

(Contd. on pg. 43)



Namadev

*Namdev belonged to Pandharpur,
the nursery of saints.*

*He established rapport with
God at a young age.*

He was a contemporary of Jnaneshvar.

Namadev or Namadeo, also called Nama (1270-1350 CE), belonged to Pandharpur, the celebrated nursery of saints, in Maharashtra. Pandharpur is also called Pandhari and Pandurangapura. Its older name is Paundarikakshetra. It appears Namadev established a rapport with God while quite young. He belonged to a deeply religious family. His parents, Damashet and Gonai, would offer *naivedya* to Keshavraj, a form of Bhagwan Krishna housed in a Vaishnav mandir near Narsi, their ancestral village in the Vidarbha area, every day. But one day they had to go out and asked the five-year-old Namadev to make the offering. The boy agreed and offered milk to the deity. He waited a long time to see if Keshavraj would drink the milk. In his childlike innocence, he did not realize that all sanctified offerings would revert to the devotee and that God does not drink or eat them. But the young devotee was bent on making the deity drink what had been offered. The boy after waiting for a long time shouted to Keshavraj that if he would not drink the milk offering, he would end his life in protest. The deity was really in a fix. He did not want the innocent boy to carry out his threat. So he agreed to the boy's demand and drank the milk.

When Namadev's mother returned home, she

was in for a surprise. She found the milk missing! When she asked her son about the milk, she got the reply that God had drunk it all. Namadev explained to his surprised mother how the divine phenomena had happened. In disbelief, she repeated to her husband the incredible story. Next day, the boy was asked to offer milk to Keshavraj; unknown to Namadev his father was watching him and he found the story to be true.

So this was the boy's tryst with God. This initial encounter catapulted him into a front rank saint-composer and a great devotee of Panduranga Vithala (Krishna), the presiding deity of Pandharpur. He was the family deity of Namadev and had been worshipped by his ancestors since 1150 CE. They would unfailingly visit Pandharpur from their native village on every Ekadashi in the months of Ashadh and Kartik. We have scant information about Namadev and his family. A number of *abhangs* (verses) have been written by several persons calling themselves Namadev. They are called Namadev *abhangs*; we can place reliance only on what had been written by Namadev, the son of Damashet and Gonai, himself.

According to one source, Namadev led a life of crime to begin with but reformed later on. His gang had once killed 84 soldiers. After committing

the crime, when he visited the Amvadhya mandir, he found a child crying because he was hungry. The child's mother began to curse the fellow who had killed her husband along with 83 other soldiers, resulting in the child's plight. On hearing the woman's sad tale, Namadev became repentant, as he had been the cause of the family's misery. He decided to reform himself, so the story goes.

A story is told about his concern for animals. Once he was carrying dry *rotis*. A dog got hold of them and began to run away. Namadev ran after the dog with ghee so that it could have a proper meal!

There are two versions about his occupation. According to one version Namadev was a tailor. According to another report, the family were into the cloth business and Damashet owned a cloth shop. The young Namadev tried his hand at business but he turned out to be an utter failure.

One thing is certain, Namadev suffered a lot because of his low birth. The Brahmin priests of Pandharpur mandir would not allow him to enter through the front entrance of the mandir. Unmindful of this, Namadev once entered the place, dancing in ecstasy. He was subsequently thrown out. He has mentioned the incident in one of his *abhangs*, "O Lord! You are responsible for my birth in a low caste which has brought insult on me." Thereafter, it is believed that God responded to his *abhang* by turning the front side of the temple towards him and told him to go to the rear of the mandir to offer prayers.

As his faith in Vithala increased by the day, there was a corresponding decline in his interest in worldly matters. This worried his parents, and after Namadev married, it turned out to be a constant source of concern to his wife, Rajai, too. Namadev's apathy for his family had reached to such an extent that Gonai once actually quarrelled with Lord Panduranga for "spoiling" her son. But these matters did not affect Namadev in the least and he was absorbed in his daily worship

of Vithala.

Things were becoming difficult. Namadev had four children and Rajai was finding it extremely difficult to feed them. Namadev continued to be his usual pious self. He would not earn a penny, and the load of supporting the family fell on his wife's shoulders. This state of affairs is reflected in the *abhangs* composed by Rajai and her son, Gonda. Namadev is called Kutumb Kavi as his entire family, including the maid, composed poetry. Poor Rajai would feed her children with the little food she could manage to get and starve herself. In sheer desperation, she tried to kill herself and her children. It is said Panduranga intervened and saved the family from mass drowning when she threw herself in the river along with her kids. But she did not give up her efforts to put an end to her wretched existence. She tried to poison herself. But the poisonous stuff, the carcass of a snake which she tried to cook, turned into gold. It was another miraculous save by Panduranga's grace.

Meanwhile, there was no change in Namadev's routine. Unmindful of the family's plight, he would compose *abhangs* and sing them attracting large crowds. As time passed he acquired distinguished company in the form of Jnanadev or Jnaneshvar. Both of them undertook a pilgrimage. In the course of their *yatra*, they came to Delhi. There, Namadev had a harrowing experience. The Muslim Sultan was angry at Namadev's popularity. He wanted to show him in a bad light. So, he killed a cow and ordered the saint to restore her to life as part of testing his greatness as a worshipper of Hari or get converted to Islam. Namadev was least bothered about himself, more than anything else, he was eager to save the cow. He sought four days' time and began to pray intently to Hari. At the end of the fourth day, the severed head of the cow was joined to its carcass and the cow rose as if nothing had happened to the delight of Namadev and the people of Delhi. The Sultan realized that Namadev was what people claimed him to be – a genuine

devotee of God. Both Namadev and Jnaneshvar founded the Varkari sect of Vaishnavism; a Bhakti Sampradaya. Pandharpur has been the centre of the sect. The followers of the sect make it a point to attend the mandir regularly. They are vegetarians and adhere to the truth. The followers should observe fast on Ekadashi day and carry a *mala* (rosary). Varkari means a timekeeper. They got the name because of their adherence to a regular schedule.

According to one version, Jnaneshvar had little time left for promoting the Varkari sect after writing the *Jnanesvari*, and it was left to Namadev to propagate it through his kirtans. It is said Namadev and Jnanadev met several saints of the Bhakti Sampradaya during their *tirtha-yatra*.

In one of his *abhangs* Namadev says, “The Veda has to speak by thy might and the sun has to move round; such is the might of thee, the Lord of the universe! Knowing this essential truth, I have surrendered myself to thee. By thy might it is that the clouds have to pour down rain, mountains to rest firm and the wind to blow. Nothing moves at all (without thee). Oh Lord Pandurang! Thou art the cause of all.”

It will thus be seen that, though Namadev worshipped the deity at Pandharpur, he had full knowledge of the true nature of God, as given in treatises like the Upanishads; and it was this God that he tried to attain.

Namadev sings, “Your mind is full of vices. What is the use of the pilgrimages you make? What is the use of austere practices, if there is no repentance? The sins resulting from a mental act cannot be effaced by the highest holy place (literally: the father of the holy places). The essence of the matter is very simple: Sin is effaced by repentance.”

After spending his life in promoting devotion to God, the saint passed away at age 80.

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(Contd. from pg. 7)

had forcefully occupied it, he locked the front door to prevent Maharaj from entering for darshan. When the procession came near, Maharaj dismounted for darshan, but turned back due to the closed doors. Shri Hari uttered, “One who prevents anyone from Thakorji’s darshan is a grave sinner!” On hearing these words the Nagar devotees beseeched Maharaj for forgiveness, “Raghunathdas has led us astray. Because of his blasphemous preachings we were unable to come near you and avail of your satsang.”

Shri Hari smiled at them and advised, “You have all anchored yourself to him believing there is life in a dead body. But you should now recognize the difference between satsang and *kusang*;

give up the latter and attach yourself to satsang. Now that you have understood the truth, you will be liberated.” Then Shri Hari mounted Manki and the procession proceeded ahead. Many prominent citizens and well-wishers honoured Shri Hari with garlands along the route. On Maharaj’s arrival at the mansion of Himasha Sheth in Manek Chowk, his family members welcomed and honoured Maharaj with garlands. Finally, Shri Hari arrived at Nava Vas, where the new mandir was ready. ♦

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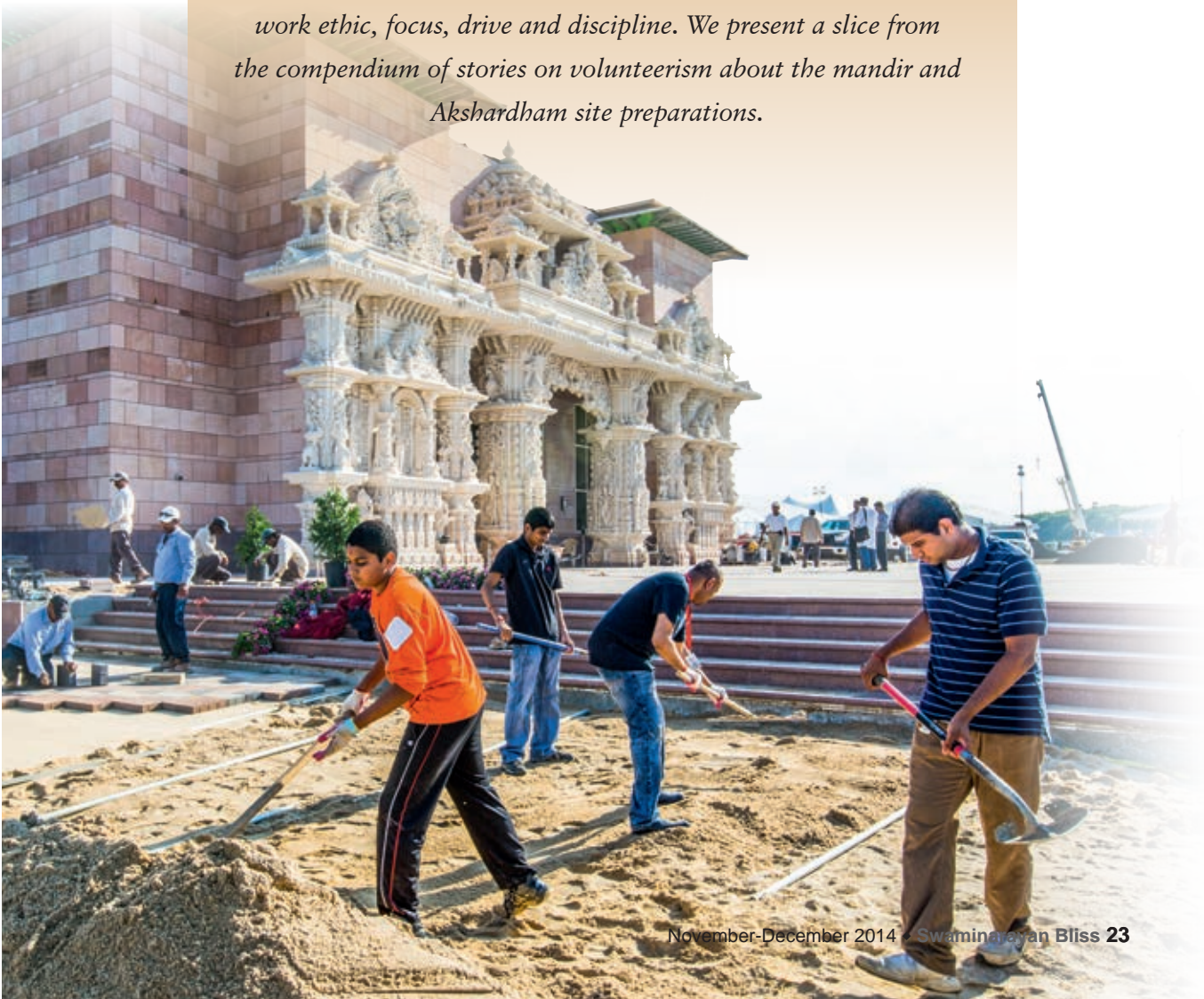
Translated from Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

INSPIRING STORIES OF VOLUNTEERISM

Robbinsville, New Jersey

From conception to birth, the shikharbaddh BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville, New Jersey, and its other buildings reflect an epic story of planning, execution, skill and divine grace.

Through the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the concerted efforts of thousands of artisans and BAPS volunteers climaxed with the accomplishment and inauguration of the mandir on 10 August 2014. The accounts of unsung heroes of volunteerism, young and old, male and female, resonate with relentless and selfless devotion, work ethic, focus, drive and discipline. We present a slice from the compendium of stories on volunteerism about the mandir and Akshardham site preparations.



The Akshardham site preparations and the Mandir Mahotsav in Robbinsville were accomplished through the humongous efforts of over 4,764 BAPS volunteers working in 25 main and 81 sub-departments. Some took leave from work, some left their businesses in the care of staff workers and some even resigned from their jobs because their requests for leave were not sanctioned. We present the outstanding services and immense sacrifices of some of the volunteers.

- Many BAPS volunteers and devotees had made great efforts in searching for a suitable site for Akshardham. Among them Dipal M. Patel resigned from his job to spend three years in scouting for land and in acquiring the Akshardham site. Dipal travelled to several parts of New Jersey State and studied the various land sites. Finally, his journey concluded at the Robbinsville site.

After acquiring the land, volunteers in large numbers were required for the site development. By Swamishri's blessings devotees from Philadelphia, Cherry Hill, Lansdale, Edison, Parsippany and other towns arrived in large numbers to serve every weekend.

- The devotees of Philadelphia Satsang *mandal* took up the *seva* of setting up scaffoldings during the mandir construction work. They toiled intensely for three-and-a-half years, travelling by car to the site twice a week. The devotees remained undeterred in their *seva* even during the severe winter months or hot summers. During the initial months of site development the devotees brought their meals from home because of the dearth in facilities. During the final countdown to the Mandir Mahotsav 30 volunteers came daily to rig or dismantle the scaffoldings and to move the heavy stones on site. Out of the many noteworthy volunteers Bharatbhai (Bob), in addition to his 40-hour weekly job, spent an equal amount of hours in *seva* at the mandir site. He operated a crane for moving stones, thus cutting the cost of hired labour. Bharatbhai's team included S.K.



Patel, Alpeshbhai Patel, Jigneshbhai, Bhavinbhai and others.

- Pujya Muniraj Swami made great efforts in acquiring stones for the *shikharbaddh* mandir and Akshardham Mahamandir from the mines in Italy, and Vinodbhai Patel stayed in Greece and Bulgaria to acquire stones from the local mines.

- In 2009, Vinodbhai Patel was one of the many volunteers who registered his name at the inception of the Akshardham project. His first duty was of supervising the Robbinsville site and later to give guidance to the artisans from India.

For the past three years Vinodbhai has been living in Bulgaria and Greece, away from his family who are in the US. The reason for his absence from the comforts of home lies in his steely resolve to serve for the Akshardham project in Robbinsville. He assesses and approves the quarried stones from the local mines for the project.



His initial months in Italy, Bulgaria and Greece were challenging. With cultural and lingual handicaps, Vinodbhai struggled to get his tasks done. Despite being alone and having to dispense all his domestic chores Vinodbhai did not flinch from his *seva*. Even the harsh and difficult conditions at the mines and the tough people he had to deal with did not deter him one bit.

Presently, he performs his *seva* resolutely in Greece and passionately follows the satsang disciplines. He adds, “I’ve never felt alienated from my family, and I experience that Swamishri is always with me.” Vinodbhai further opined that he felt blessed for having got the *seva* and that the challenging periods he has encountered were all Swamishri’s trials and means to mould him.

■ For the last three-and-a-half years Dilipbhai has been diligently offering his services everyday at the Akshardham site in Robbinsville. For

decades he served as a civil engineer in many BAPS events. Besides his *seva* during the CFI in Edison, 1991, he was also involved during the constructions of BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs in Houston, Chicago, Atlanta and *hari* mandirs in Cleveland, Edison, Jersey City and others.

■ After graduating as a civil engineer from Vidyanagar, Bharatbhai F. Patel (Kavitha) joined the BAPS to offer his voluntary services. At Swamishri’s bidding he served as a project manager at various construction sites of BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs in Gujarat. Then he migrated to USA.

Once the Robbinsville mandir construction began Bharatbhai often travelled from Chicago to offer *seva* during weekends and then return home. As the pace of construction increased, he started serving full-time from April 2013. A person of few words, he has never complained about or recoiled from working in the harsh weather conditions. Each day he put in 11 to 12 hours of exhaustive efforts on site.

■ Bhanubhai D. Patel’s (Piplag) *seva* in the construction department was noteworthy. He sold his booming business to spend all his time doing *seva* on site. Being multi-talented he operated giant machines and did welding work. He arrived on site daily at 8.00 a.m. and left after the artisans finished between 8 and 9.00 p.m. Sometimes, to give company to the other volunteers, he would join them in doing *seva* till 12 midnight. He would also serve hot meals to the volunteers at night. Bhanubhai served seven days of the week for the last four to five years, regardless of time and discomforts.

■ Ever since he settled in New Jersey in 1991 Bharatbhai (Bhavpura) has been offering his voluntary services in all the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir construction works in North America.

Since 2009 he has served full-time at the construction site in Robbinsville. His sincerity and untiring efforts on site were born from his profound faith in satsang. For three years he stalled

purchasing new furniture for his home and donated the savings for the Akshardham project. He furnished his home in 2013. In addition, since 2009, he has refrained from eating sweet foods (*mithai*) to please Swamishri.

Amidst all his *seva* on site he daily reads the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. Being an avid reader of satsang books he has read the biographies of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara seven times. Since 2000 he has refrained from eating in restaurants and food outlets. Bharatbhai performed *seva* at the Robbinsville site coupled with the spirit of *mahima*.

■ Dipteshbhai and Mahendrabhai Patel of Lansdale and other volunteers shouldered the *seva* of naturally beautifying the mandir grounds. They developed 30 to 40 acres of landscape by acquiring and planting varieties of saplings and flowers. Their hard work saved a hefty sum.

■ For the last one-and-a-half years Hasmukhbhai and Rameshbhai cultivated vegetables at the Robbinsville site, shopped for food rations and humbly served food to the artisans on site.

■ A couple of decades ago Kanubhai I. Patel (CEO of BAPS in North America) fully dedicated his life for satsang *seva* after resigning from a prestigious and lucrative job. Ever since, he has been looking after the administration of BAPS activities in North America. In spite of his administrative duties Kanubhai never hesitates in doing menial *seva* like washing dishes or helping out the volunteers serving in the parking lot. All his family members were also fully engaged in the mandir construction

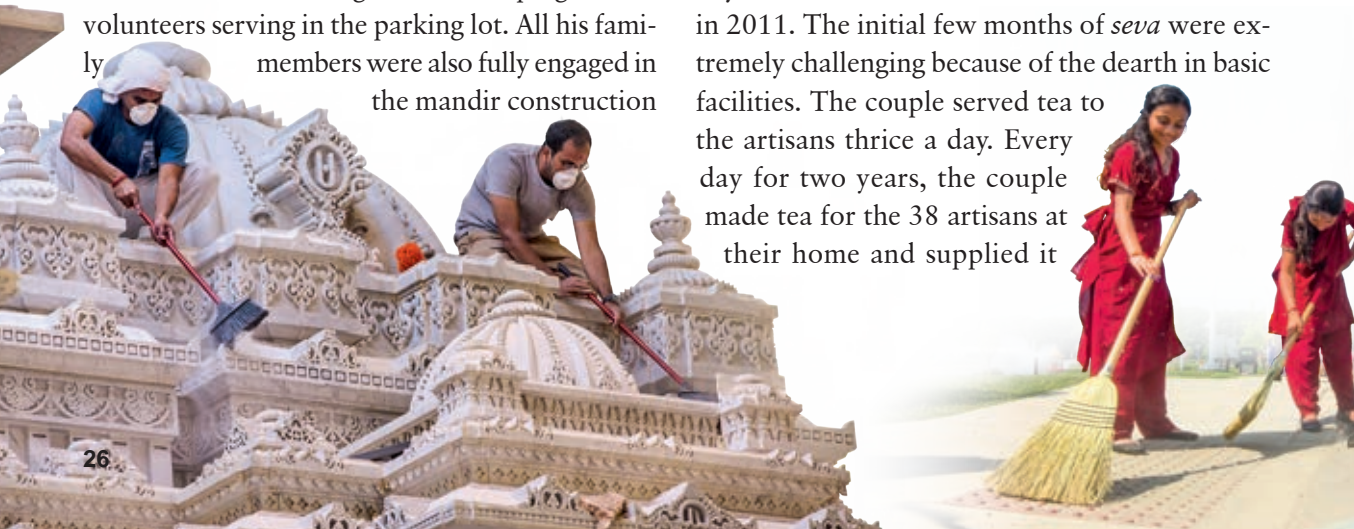
seva. His brother-in-law, Gunvantbhai, despite having had heart bypass surgery has been doing *seva* in the construction department at the Robbinsville site for the last four years. His close relatives: Dr Harshadbhai, Pankajbhai, Mayankbhai, Bakulbhai, Mahendrabhai, Dr Chiragbhai, Mukundbhai, Bharatbhai, Dipalbhai, Brijeshbhai, Darshanbhai and the female members of the household were engaged in the mandir *seva*.

■ Dineshbhai Ambalal Patel, originally from Bochasan, arrived in the US in 1988. When the Akshardham project commenced in 2009 Dineshbhai left his job to serve for one-and-a-half years in the construction and coordination departments.

■ Somabhai and his wife decided to sell their booming businesses and settle near the Robbinsville mandir site to serve honorarily. Their daily prayers for a suitable buyer were heard, and they resettled near the Robbinsville mandir site.

Somabhai was impressed with the BAPS satsang after having the brief darshan of Swamishri during his visit to Jackson Heights, New York, in 2007. In 2009, Somabhai visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi for the first time. The divine ambience and story of Akshardham inspired him for voluntary service at the Akshardham site in Robbinsville.

Somabhai and his wife started their *seva* on the day the artisans arrived at the Robbinsville site in 2011. The initial few months of *seva* were extremely challenging because of the dearth in basic facilities. The couple served tea to the artisans thrice a day. Every day for two years, the couple made tea for the 38 artisans at their home and supplied it



on site. They also supplied drinking water for all from their home. They have not taken any vacations nor attended any family functions for the past three years.

Somabhai and his wife's *seva* is inspiring and praiseworthy.

- In 2009, Pankajbhai joined the construction department on site, full-time. During the 12-hour concrete pour for the Akshardham foundation Pankajbhai was on duty from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

From 2006, other than his physical *seva*, he and his wife have refrained from buying a new car, going on their annual holiday and buying expensive clothes, and instead donated their savings for the Akshardham project. His wife, too, had made cuts in her personal expenses in her business to donate the money for the Akshardham project.

- Harikrishna V. Patel graduated as an IT engineer and soon thereafter he rejected a prosperous job to enrol for *seva* at Akshardham. He had intended to serve for a few months but stayed on for five years, coordinating the mandir construction work.

- Rajubhai S. Patel left his business in the hands of 35 staff members to serve full-time at the Akshardham site. He looked after the requirements of the artisans – related to food and accommodation – and also attended to parking and kitchen *sevas*. Rajubhai also took training in

operating large cranes and other machines on site. He had never missed serving a single day on site.

- Yatinbhai H. Patel, an IT expert, served in the IT department. Ratibhai B. Patel contacted many people and inspired them to do *seva*. His efforts inspired 70 families into satsang and in various services.

- In 1972, Babubhai C. Patel saw a photograph of Swamishri by which he was touched and joined satsang. During the CFI in USA, 1991, he had taken three months leave for full-time *seva* at the festival site.

From 2009, when work on the Akshardham site began, Babubhai drove four to five hours every week from Boston to serve in the electrical department. Even during the severe winter snowfalls in Boston Babubhai never relaxed from his weekly *seva* nor complained about the adversities. He sacrificed his annual vacations to serve more. Along with Babubhai many volunteer-devotees had offered their services in the electrical department. Dilipbhai Mewavala served for four years, driving from Edison to Robbinsville.

- Vinubhai's satsang roots go back to the time of Shastriji Maharaj, when his father was a *satsangi*. He, too, had had the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj, served Nirmaldas Swami and received the loving pats of Yogiji Maharaj. However, from 1962 to 1997 Vinubhai lost contact with satsang



because of his overseas job and tours. However, in 1997, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit to Kuwait revived Vinubhai's long forgotten bonds with satsang. After 25 years in Kuwait Vinubhai emigrated to the US.

For the last three years Vinubhai has served on site despite his advanced age and the harsh winters. He served daily from morning till 9.00 p.m. in a variety of services, like overlooking the construction work, accounting, wages of artisans, visitors reception and scrutinizing the quality of materials used on site.

- Members of the Akshardham security team also offered noteworthy *seva*. Ghanshyambhai Patel arrived daily at 6.00 a.m. at the Robbinsville Mandir site after a one-and-a-half hour drive from Jersey City. He unfailingly dispensed his duty for the last three-and-a-half years. In spite of bad weather or heavy storms Ghanshyambhai never lapsed in his *seva*. Once, during a heavy storm Ghanshyambhai's security cabin was buffeted and overturned, but he came out unscathed. Swamishri had blessed Ghanshyambhai, saying, "Nothing will happen to you. There is still a lot of *seva* to be done by you."

- The stone artisans were transported by bus every morning and evening between their accommodations and the mandir site. Pankajbhai Patel volunteered to drive the bus. But before he could start his *seva* he had to take driving lessons and acquire a licence. With the twin responsibility of *seva* and business Pankajbhai managed both with alacrity. Kaushikbhai N. Patel also served for five years as a bus driver for the artisans.

- The sacrifice and *seva* of Chirag Shah (Edison) in project administration and construction management were exceptional. He coordinated between the contractor and the BAPS volunteers on site. To cope with his responsibilities he gave up his job and worked full-time for more than six months.

- Brijeshbhai Patel served in the volunteer recruitment cell (*swayamsevak dal*) for the last



five years. Ritesh Patel left his job to serve in the kitchen department. Dharmik V. Sheth, 27 years old, gave up his job in October 2013 to serve full-time for the development of the Akshardham site. He later resumed his job at the instance of sadhus, but he still offers *seva* in the evening after work. Kishorebhai Makwana left his occupation to serve for one year for the Mandir Mahotsav decoration and *nagaryatra* departments. In the last two years Deep Patel spent many hours in sincere *seva* for Akshardham, the decoration department and Akshardham construction. Deep joined satsang in 2010 and had never had the darshan of Swamishri. Despite this he served as a dedicated volunteer. Jitubhai contributed significantly in preparing drawings of mandir plans in AutoCAD.

- Jagdishbhai and Jayantibhai Patel (Mandala) are brothers who performed the housekeeping services at the Akshardham precincts. They cleaned the washrooms, emptied the dustbins and did other menial *seva*. For decades both brothers have been doing this *seva* at their local mandir.



Hiral Patel, a young engineer, took two-and-a-half months leave to serve in the housekeeping department.

- Dhirubhai, Rohitbhai, Ambalalbhai and others performed Thakorji's *seva* for the past two years at the Robbinsville site. Their dedication and efforts in doing meticulous *seva* is also noteworthy.

- Since 2011 Jitubhai Amin sincerely served the stone artisans. In 2012, Jitubhai was confined to a wheelchair and used a walking aid for ten months. Even during such disability his spirit to serve did not ebb.

- Naginbhai Patel is a veteran devotee who has been serving in the kitchen department for decades. For the *seva* at Robbinsville Naginbhai retired from his business two years ago. His son, Yogesh, offered *seva* in the Sanstha's legal department, providing information and giving presentations to the township counsel for attaining permission for the construction work.

- Jay Kapadiya is an enthusiastic youth from Houston. He opined, "I was not able to serve

when Swamishri had inspired the construction of the *shikharbaddh* mandirs in America. So, with the announcement of the construction of Robbinsville mandir I decided not to miss the chance. As the mandir reached completion I and other *kishores* got more and more *seva*. Sometimes we served till four or five in the morning and still we were not fatigued, but happy and eager to do more. I am satisfied with the *seva* I got."

Many volunteers serving in other departments during the Mandir Mahotsav had also put in tremendous efforts. Some worked hard to enroll devotees and wellwishers to participate in the mandir *pratishtha yagna*. Giteshbhai and Amitbhai (Washington DC), who looked after the *yagna* department, strived for long hours each day.

Jigneshbhai and others sincerely rendered their services in the assembly hall. Sometimes they only found time to have lunch as late as 3.30 or 4.00 p.m.

- Kalpeshbhai Manek and his team put in great efforts in making arrangements for the *pratishtha*



and mass marriage ceremonies. Mitulbhai and Sanjaybhai Mangroliya looked after the sales of Aksharpith items. Bhagubhai Patel (Cherry Hill) looked after the general stores department for six months. Manishbhai and Shrijibhai coordinated with all the festival departments efficiently. Rakeshbhai (Edison) and his team toiled hard in developing the mandir site and rigging tents for the Mandir Mahotsav. Mayankbhai (Pharmacist) looked after the invitations for the festival, hospitality, and seating arrangements for leading devotees and guests for the *pratishtha* rituals. Dr Hemantbhai Patel, a trustee of BAPS, invited and took care of guests.

■ During the mandir construction the harsh winter conditions put the volunteers and artisans to the test. Gopalbhai Patel, a site supervisor, commented, “We all worked on site even when the temperatures plummeted to -7°C . Even the stone artisans worked with zeal all through the winter months.”

■ News of Swamishri’s arrival on 6 August 2014 for the Mandir Mahotsav had inspired thousands of devotees to attend the occasion. All prior planning for accommodation, dining and parking were upturned. The initial parking plans for a maximum of 4,000 cars on the mandir grounds had to be extended to 7,000. The volunteers of the parking department served unremittingly. The majority of them served for 16 hours daily, whereas some were barely able to grab two hours of sleep daily.

■ Jignesh Rai, a young *seva* enthusiast, undergoes dialysis three times a week because of his failed kidneys. During the Mandir Mahotsav he volunteered his services for the parking department. From early morning till late evening Jignesh rendered his services unflaggingly. He stoically weathered the scorching summer sun all day, not revealing an inkling of the difficulties he was going through due to his failed kidneys.

■ Suryakant Brahmhatt lives in New Jersey and works in the IT sector. He had hosted more than 25 devotees in his house during the Mandir Mahotsav. Moreover, Suryakant had volunteered his services in the parking department. On the night Swamishri arrived the devotees had assembled in multitudes for darshan. Thereafter, the mandir parking lot cleared at 4.30 a.m. Suryakant reached home at 5.00 a.m., and he was back on duty by 7.00 a.m. for the whole day. For the next five days Suryakant and his companions performed their gruelling parking duties with gusto. The parking volunteers also braved the burning summer heat, standing for 16 hours daily. Suryakant developed boils on the soles of his feet and yet like others he remained steadfast in his *seva*.

■ The kitchen volunteers too performed praiseworthy *seva*. For several weeks prior to the Mandir Mahotsav, the volunteers had laboured for long hours in preparing snacks. Once the Mahotsav began their efforts intensified further because the inflow of devotees had approximately doubled. Parallel to the kitchen *seva* was the Premvati restaurant services. Volunteers in this department also toiled immensely.

■ Ghanshyambhai (Jhadeshwar) has been volunteering his services for Premvati since the last four years. The stock of food rations and food items made for the Mandir Mahotsav were completely expended in two days during the *yagna*. Thereafter, Rohitbhai and Tejalbhai purchased more rations and the kitchen department prepared food items on an emergency basis.

■ Rajesh Jhariwala suffered a heart attack during the Mandir Mahotsav preparations. Subsequently, with the advice of doctors he had a pacemaker implanted. Three days after the implant Rajeshbhai returned to his *seva*.

■ Alpesh Patel is the vice-president of a prestigious pharmaceutical company. During the celebrations he took care of invited guests, serving food and snacks. His spirited demeanour did not belie his insomnia while doing *seva*.

■ During the Mandir Mahotsav a mass marriage programme had been arranged. In all, 18 couples were going to get married and 12 couples were to get engaged. Ashish Patel was one of the 18 bridegrooms who was neck-deep in *seva*. Because of his intense *seva* he could not spare time for his own marriage *mandap-muhurt*. He texted his invitees that his pre-marriage rituals were cancelled. Like him there were others who were also vigorously engaged in *seva* till the last moments before their marriage rituals. After their marriage, the couples attended the *karyakar shibir* or served during the *shibir*.

■ Dr Pankaj Mamtara has been for many years offering his voluntary medical services at the Edison satsang centre and during festivals and celebrations. His daughter was going to get married at the Mandir Mahotsav venue. Prior to her marriage ceremony she was deeply engaged in *seva* as a volunteer, Dr Mamtara was also engaged in *seva* and so was his future son-in-law.

■ Other than physical *seva* many volunteers performed extraordinary austerities to please Swamishri and for the success of the Mandir Mahotsav and Akshardham project.

Navrang Patel, about 45 years old, works as an IT expert for Alpha Company. He offered his services in the audio-visual department. No one could guess that Navrang, while sprightly operating a weighty video camera, was observing a waterless fast that day. Later, Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami found out that Navrang had been observing ‘Bhagatji Vrat’



during the entire Chaturmas (four months) for the last three years. Bhagatji *vrat* means observing two consecutive waterless fasts and having a meal once on the third day. Doing strenuous *seva* under such conditions was by no means an ordinary act of devotion. Furthermore, the senior sadhus were overawed on hearing that Navrang had observed *khatras* for 10 years prior to his ‘Bhagatji Vrat’. Navrang revealed the reason for performing such severe austerity, “To please Swamishri and for Swamishri’s good health, and for the successful completion of Akshardham.”

■ Raju Patel of Atlanta had observed the ‘Maha Bhagatji Vrat’ for one month. In this he observed a *nirjala* fast for four consecutive days and ate only once on the fifth day.

■ The story of Anilbhai Patel’s austerity is staggering. His ongoing 15 years of *dharna-parna vrat* till the completion of Akshardham Mahamandir is incredible.

Thousands of BAPS volunteers and artisans had worked tirelessly to fulfil the mandir project through their immense dedication and devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Through Swamishri’s blessings and inspirations the volunteers performed Herculean *seva*, which will forever resonate at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Robbinsville.

For inspiring stories of service and sacrifice by the Women’s Wing refer to *Premvati*, September-October 2014. ♦

VOLUNTEER DEPARTMENTS



Youths polish the carved mandir pillars



Women devotees prepare garlands



Visitors view the exhibition



Delegates register for the NLS



Volunteers prepare decorations

Dedicated volunteers are a valuable BAPS asset and form the bedrock of all BAPS activities. Young or old, male or female, all selflessly serve with the sole aim of pleasing Bhagwan Swaminarayan and *guru*hri Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Through the many decades of his exemplary life of selfless service, Swamishri has nurtured qualities such as endeavour, sincerity, thoroughness, sacrifice and others in the volunteers. Whatever the project – whether building a mandir, celebrating a festival or performing social services – BAPS volunteers dedicate their time, energy and resources to ensure its grand success. Even in the numbing chill

of winter, scorching heat of summer or torrential rains, they are not deterred from their duties.

Celebration of the Mandir Mahotsav 2014 marked the completion of the second phase of the BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex in Robbinsville, New Jersey. Devotees throughout North America were eager to volunteer and serve in whatever capacity required. They registered via a special website, providing details of their availability, skills and other experience. In total there were 2,002 male and 2,762 female volunteers. A total of 25 main departments, divided into 81 sub-departments were setup for the Mandir Mahotsav.

Each department had one or more lead sadhus



Youths serve in the housekeeping department



Women prepare decorative rangoli designs



Volunteers erect marquees for the festival

and several main *karyakars*. Volunteers from different regions were assigned to serve in these departments based on their experience or departmental needs.

Some sadhus and main *karyakars* – because of their experience – were responsible for more than one department, yet they diligently ensured that all tasks were completed on time.

The following are brief descriptions of the main duties and functioning of some of these departments.

ACCOMMODATION

Lead Sadhu: Nilkanthseva Swami.

Main Karyakars: Rajanbhai Patel, Ghanshyambhai Patel, Kiranbhai Patel, Kashyapbhai Patel.

Devotees from throughout America, Canada, India, UK, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Middle East and other countries were expected for the Mandir Mahostav.

To provide for their accommodation, hotels

and motels within a five-mile radius of the mandir were contacted to agree on discount rates for Mandir Mahotsav visitors.

A special website was set up to facilitate accommodation bookings so that visitors from anywhere in the world could select according to their requirements. Based on the details provided and preferences indicated arrangements for rooms and transport were made.

In figures:

- 38 hotels and motels used; 2,330 rooms
- 9,520 visitors accommodated
- 2,500 online registrations
- Accommodation for 940 volunteers, 700 National



November



Youths wash utensils



Women volunteers cut vegetables

Leadership Convention delegates, 120 mandir *pujaris*, 2,800 *bal-balika* and *kishore-kishori shibir* participants.

DECORATION

Lead Sadhus: Narayanmuni Swami, Brahmancharan Swami, Mangalswarup Swami.

Main Karyakars: Kishorebhai Makwana, Himanshubhai Patel.

Between March and August 2014, over 150 volunteers from Edison, Robbinsville, New York, Philadelphia, Parsippany, Albany, Springfield, Cherry Hill, Clifton, Skrenton, Westchester, Delaware, Syracuse, Virginia Beach and Richmond served in the decoration department. Among many other items, they helped to prepare the following:

- Mandir Mahotsav main gate
- Sabha Mandap entrance gate and stage
- Octagonal *chhatra* and lotus in Brahmasarovar
- 10 floats for the *nagaryatra*
- Stage for Swamishri's *jharukha* darshan
- Decorations for Women's Convention
- 18 decorated marriage *mandaps*
- Stage decoration for Yagnas for World Peace
- Mayur Rath and site for Akshardham Mahamandir Bhumital Pujan
- Entrance to Akshardham area
- Akshar Vatika stage for exhibition.

Initially, volunteers came on weekends, but as the event approached more volunteers contributed more time. In the last two months, many served full time. Together with experienced and skilled volunteers, were the inexperienced whom they patiently trained.

Despite the advance planning for decoration requirements, there were many unplanned requirements that arose and were fulfilled on time.

The schedule of the Mandir Mahotsav meant that the volunteers often had very little time in between events at the same venue to set up the decoration. Yet, through teamwork all targets were met.

EXHIBITION

A mandir represents peace, harmony, brotherhood, friendship and love.

The exhibition highlighted the necessity of mandirs in moulding one's personal life, and in inculcating family values and good habits.

The mandir also teaches empathy for those in difficulty and how to help others overcome their difficulties.

The mandir, comprising of intricate and eye-catching designs in stone, is a prime example of devotion to God. The exhibition halls featured banners of all the BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandirs in North America: Houston, Chicago, Toronto, Atlanta and Los Angeles.

The exhibition highlighted the many activities



Devotees arrive in the mandir campus



Volunteers serve in the parking department

BAPS undertakes from its mandirs. Using, eight large TV screens, videos enabled visitors to appreciate the educational, health, social, disaster relief and other social works performed by BAPS for the benefit of society.

The need to engage in daily satsang was also highlighted.

Guided by Yagnavallabh Swami and Mangal-swarup Swami, through the mediation of Mahendrabhai Barot, Mukundbhai Patel, and other senior and experienced devotees, the *yuvati mandal* prepared and managed the exhibition. They guided all the visitors and answered any questions that were asked.

The exhibition planning, preparations and execution was done by a team of 20 *yuvatis*. Guided by the sadhus through senior men volunteers they developed the theme, wrote the script, designed the artwork, recorded the videos and put it all together in a coherent and captivating display. The exhibition had six sections:

1. **Experiencing Inner Peace:** How the mandir helps to maintain one's peace of mind through the ups and downs of life.
2. **Forging Meaningful Friendships:** By co-operating with others, the mandir provides a forum where one can learn many things.
3. **Cultivating Familial Harmony:** The mandir teaches that by spending quality time together family unity is strengthened.

4. **Inner Transformations:** By regularly attending spiritual discourses in the mandir many have been inspired to shed their vices and bad habits, and to overcome troublesome inner emotions and traits.
5. **Community Engagement:** Through a multitude of activities, such as, walkathons, medical camps, blood donation drives and others, the mandir contributes to the welfare of the local community and society at large.
6. **Children:** Building a Brighter Future: From a young age children of all backgrounds are taught to develop a noble character and encouraged to develop their academic and artistic talents.

The messages learnt from the exhibition truly inspired all visitors and clarified the important and extensive role mandirs play in the lives of individuals, families and communities.

HOUSEKEEPING

Lead Sadhu: Nilkanthseva Swami

Main Karyakars: Hiralbhai Patel, Miteshbhai Patel

Men and women volunteers from Robbinsville and Richmond served tirelessly to ensure the cleanliness of the entire campus. From 4 to 28 July, *kishores* and elder volunteers cleaned the site to enable the setup of arrangements for the Mandir Mahotsav.

Much patience and physical effort were



Transportation for devotees to and from the mandir



Preparing a *yagna* session

required to ensure that garbage and stray items were properly collected and disposed of.

Throughout the festival period, teams of volunteers worked round-the-clock to ensure the cleanliness of the enclosed spaces and the open grounds. After each event, as the audience departed, the housekeeping volunteers entered, cleaning and preparing the location for its next event.

PUBLIC FLOW

Lead Sadhu: Nilkanthseva Swami.

Main Karyakars: Dineshbhai Shah, Rajbhai Patel.

With many people expected to the large campus, the majority visiting for the first time, it was necessary to ensure that they were guided to various parts of the complex smoothly.

The elderly, handicapped and mothers with young children were taken by golf carts from the car park to the mandir.

During the *nagaryatra*, volunteers ensured that the route was kept clear for all devotees to properly view the procession from the roadside.

Volunteers from Clifton, Albany and Syracuse served in this department.

ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

Lead Sadhu: Yogikirtan Swami.

Main Karyakars: Nikulbhai Patel, Jigneshbhai Patel, Vinodbhai Borsadiya.

Volunteers of this department were responsible

for setting up the *yagna* arena for each of the six *yagna* sessions and ensuring that the participants were guided to their designated seat.

During the assemblies and Swamishri's darshan these volunteers directed the seating arrangements so that all the devotees, men and women, were accommodated. In addition, they provided chairs for the elderly and disabled.

They also ensured that invited guests were appropriately seated in the assembly.

TRANSPORTATION

Volunteers of the transport department served in one of three teams: airport, accommodation or parking.

The airport team was responsible for taking devotees arriving by plane to their accommodation location. These volunteers were stationed at five airports – Newark, Philadelphia, Trenton, JFK (New York) and La Guardia (New York) – to receive the arriving devotees. At each airport, with prior approval of the authorities, booths were set up to receive the devotees. On arrival, all devotees were given a welcome kit with the Mandir Mahotsav details and snacks. They were then taken to their accommodation. Over 1,600 devotees were received and taken care of at the airports.

Between 1 and 10 August, the accommodation team provided transport for devotees from the



Visitors admire the mandir and *murtis*



Audio-visual control room

38 hotels and motels to the festival site and back using buses and minivans.

The parking team managed the three parking locations on the mandir site, which catered for a total of 4,700 cars.

In addition, they managed the 2,000-car parking location rented from Etna.

From early morning to late night, in the rain, cold or intense heat, these volunteers patiently and politely ensured the smooth flow of traffic throughout the campus.

YAGNA

Lead Sadhu: Yogikirtan Swami.

Main Karyakars: Kalpeshbhai Manek, Paushalbhai Patel, Rajeshbhai Patel, Rajeshbhai Doshi.

Due to the large number of devotees who had registered to participate in the *yagna* for World Peace, six *yagna* sessions had to be arranged.

A separate website was launched to enable devotees to register for the *yagna*. Also, a special software was developed to help process the online and offline registrations, and facilitate coordination with the transport, accommodation and other departments. Each registered participant was contacted by phone and informed of necessary details.

A full list of the various worship items required for the *yagna* was prepared. These items were acquired from India and locally.

Before the start of each *yagna* session the volunteers ensured that each participant was provided all the necessary items for the *yagna* rituals.

On days when there were two *yagna* sessions, they had only a short time to clear up and prepare for the second session. Yet, through efficient organization and teamwork, they were able to accomplish their duties on time.

In total, there were 210 *yagna kunds* and 17,566 devotees participated in the six sessions.

DARSHAN ARRANGEMENTS

Lead Sadhu: Mangalnidhi Swami.

Main Karyakar: Shri Nileshbhai Patel.

At specific locations, volunteer guides explained about the various features of the mandir, using laser pointers to highlight certain details.

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

The smooth-flowing and informative darshan arrangements were implemented by volunteers from Robbinsville and Philadelphia.

At the entrance, traditionally dressed volunteers greeted visitors and narrated details of how the mandir was built. Visitors were then shown a short video before being directed to enter from different entry points. ♦

Through the ‘Small Hands, Big Hearts’ project, many *balaks*, *balikas*, *kishores* and *kishoris* saved money in various ways to contribute to the mandir and Akshardham project. Many of them collected their savings in a special *kumbh* and felt great joy in donating their money. The following are illustrative of the profound devotion in the hearts of these youngsters. Thousands more like them have also lovingly and eagerly contributed.

- Yogesh B. Patel, Parsippany, Grade 4, saved money by not eating outside food.
- Arya Patel, Boston, Grade 6, declined a new pair of shoes and donated money for the mandir instead.
- Sahaj P. Pujara, Robbinsville, Grade 1, saved the spare change his dad gave him after their weekly shopping to spend on chocolates. He did not buy anything and gifted the money (\$23.50) to the mandir.
- Mitul and Akshay Patel, Parsippany, Grade 8 and 9, shovelled snow on their day off, earned \$40 together and donated it to the mandir.
- Nihar A. Patel, Scranton, Grade 7, has been making wrist bands to sell. He makes 10 different types, selling them for between 50 cents and \$1.75. Each band takes a minimum of 20 minutes to make. So far, he has raised over \$250. His target is \$1000.
- Neel R. Patel, South Boston, Grade 5, made ‘Rainbow Loom’ bracelets to sell in his family’s convenience store for \$1-2. Each bracelet took between 30 and 40 minutes to make. He collected \$260.
- Aashna and Akshika Patel, 7- and 9-year old sisters from Atlantic City, donated their Rakshabandhan money to Akshardham.
- Hazel Patel from Boston saved \$30 by not going on a trip to a popular amusement and donated the money to Akshardham.
- Puja Patel, a sixth grade *balika* from Clifton, also saved money by foregoing a trip to a theme park with her friends and donated the money towards Akshardham.



- Mansi Tejalbhai Patel, a fifth grade *balika*, won a drawing contest on fire prevention and safety organized by her local TD bank in Lodi, NJ, and received \$25 as a prize from the bank. She placed the money in her *kumbh* saying, “I donated it to Ghanshyam Maharaj and Swami’s *utaro*.”
- Vidhi and Priya, two *balikas* (grades 7-8) from Cherry Hill, collected money for Akshardham by shovelling snow in the cold northeast winters.
- Yesha and Mansi Patel, *balikas* from Cherry Hill, raised money by selling lemonade and popcorn. Their hard work and dedication earned them \$176 dollars in just two days.
- Shivani B. Patel, a middle school student from Edison, saved \$300 by not going on an optional school trip and donated to Akshardham.
- Krishna H. Patel from Edison had received \$288 as Diwali gifts, which she donated to Akshardham.
- Miti Vinod Patel, a Group 3 *balika* from Hartford, sacrificed buying a new computer for herself and donated the money for Akshardham.
- Dhara Paresh Patel, from Hartford, collected recyclable cans from her neighborhood and also sold candy around her neighborhood and donated the money to Akshardham.
- Moxa P. Patel, a nine-year-old *balika* from Jersey City, decided against going on a trip to a water park and donated the cost of the full ticket to Akshardham instead.
- Isha Patel, a nine-year-old *balika* from Jersey City, cancelled her birthday celebrations and a trip to a theme park, and together with all the money she was gifted by her family, donated it all to Akshardham.
- Mira, a first grade *balika* from Lansdale, chose not to buy fancy snow boots and donated the money to Akshardham.
- Rhea Hiren Patel, a Group 1 *balika* from Philadelphia, donated all her birthday money to Akshardham.
- Vaishali Patel, a *kishori* from Philadelphia, worked 80 extra hours to raise money for the Mandir Mahotsav.
- Puja Patel, a *balika* from Fall River, held a puja at her house, explained the importance of Akshardham to all the attendees and convinced them to donate to Akshardham. She raised \$150.
- Krishna Patel, a six-year-old *balika* from Springfield, donated all the money she was gifted on her birthday and placed it in her ‘Small Hands, Big Hearts’ *kumbh*. Then, she wrote a letter to Bapa, “Bapa, I love you. I am giving all of my birthday money for Akshardham.” ♦





MAIN VOLUNTEERS OF MANDIR MAHOTSAV

Mandir Design and Construction

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, Pujya Bhaktinandandas Swami, Pujya Shrijiswarupdas Swami, Pujya Dharmavatsaldas Swami, Pujya Aksharvatsaldas Swami, Pujya Munirajdas Swami, Pujya Paramnayandas Swami.

Legal and Administration

Kanubhai Patel, Yogeshbhai Patel, Dipalbhai Patel, Haribhai Patel, Sunilbhai Suthar.

Stonework

Harshadbhai Chavda, Vinodbhai Patel.

Engineering

Ashwinbhai Patel.

Sthapati

Prakashbhai Sompura.

ENGINEERING DUTIES

Contractor Review/Project Management

Dineshbhai Patel.

Site Supervision/Construction Management

Rohitbhai Patel (Sachi Construction), Bharatbhai F. Patel, Pankajbhai Patel, Gopalbhai Panchal, Hemantbhai Desai, Chhaganbhai Patel.

Stone Purchase

Kanubhai Patel, Vinodbhai Patel.

Structural Engineering

Pravinbhai Patel, Dilipbhai Tank.

HVAC (Heating, Ventilating, Air Conditioning)

Hareshbhai Patel, Vipulbhai Patel, Samipbhai Desai

Mechanical Engineering

Gunvantbhai Patel.

AutoCAD Drawing

Jitubhai Patel, Deepbhai Patel.

Electronic Engineering

Babubhai Patel, Dilipbhai Mevavala, Samirbhai Chauhan.

Road Improvement

Chandubhai Bhoraniya, Kiranbhai Patel, Maheshbhai Patel.

Surveyor

Bhaskarbhai Patel.

Gardens

Mahendrabhai Patel, Dipteshbhai Patel.

Budget & Accounting

Vipulbhai Patel, Mayankbhai Patel, Prakashbhai Bilakhiya, Manishbhai Parmar.

Mandir Mahotsav

More than 4,764 volunteers.

Mandir Mahotsav Committee

Pujya Yagnavallabhdas Swami, Viveknidhidas Swami, Haridarshandas Swami, Amrutnandandas Swami, Nilkanthsevasdas Swami, Chaitanyamurtidas Swami, Yogikirtandas Swami, Tyagvatsaldas Swami, Amrutcharitdas Swami, Mangalswarupdas Swami, Jnanishthadas Swami, Shri Kanubhai Patel, Shri Mayankbhai Patel, Dr Hemantbhai Patel, Shri Rajanbhai Patel, Shri Bharatbhai Patel.

Volunteers Department

Brijeshbhai Patel, Shriji Patel.

Audio-Visual

Mayurbhai Patel, Nilesbbhai Patel, Dhavalbhai Topivala.



Exhibition

Mahendrabhai Barot, Mukundbhai Patel.

Yagna Sponsorship

Mayankbhai Patel.

Public Flow

Dineshbhai Shah, Jaynilbhai Shah.

Aksharprith Gift Stall

Mitulbhai Patel, Sanjaybhai Mangroliya, Nimeshbhai Modi, Manishbhai Patel, Piyushbhai Patel, Ghanshyambhai Patel.

Facilities

Rakeshbhai Patel, Sagarbhai Patel.

Community Outreach & Media

Dipalbhai Patel, Siddharthbhai Dubal, Aksharbhai Patel, Leninbhai Joshi.

Murti-Pratishtha Ceremony

Kalpeshbhai Manek, Sagarbhai Patel.

Sabha, Vidhi, Darshan Arrangements

Jigneshbhai Patel, Nikulbhai Patel.

Cultural Activities & Nagar Yatra

Ashishbhai Patel, Sanjaybhai Patel.

Registration & Invitation Card Mailing

Satishbhai Patel, Bhaveshbhai Parmar, Kalpeshbhai Manek.

Master of Ceremonies

Alpeshbhai Patel, Saurinbhai Patel, Sagarbhai Patel.

IT

Yatinbhai Patel, Tapasbhai Patel, Mitulbhai Patel.

Transportation

Suryakantbhai Brahmabhatt, Atulbhai Patel, Nikhilbhai Patel.

Accommodations

Rajanbhai Patel, Kashyapbhai Patel, Ghanshyambhai Patel, Kiranbhai Patel.

Merchandise

Sanjaybhai Mangroliya, Dharmikbhai Sheth.

Kitchen-Shayona

Riteshbhai Patel, Ghanshyambhai Patel, Nitinbhai Patel, Rohitbhai Patel, Dharmikbhai Sheth.

Decoration

Kishorebhai Makwana, Himanshubhai Patel.

Housekeeping

Hiralbhai Patel, Rekhankbhai Patel.

Wind-up

Dipteshbhai Patel, Sagarbhai Patel.

Reporting

Vinubhai Patel, Bindeshbhai Amin, Rushikeshbhai Darji, Dineshbhai Prajapati.

Annakut

Shishirbhai Patel.

Samuh Lagna (Mass Marriage Ceremony)

Kalpeshbhai Manek, Devarshibhai Patel.

Superintendent Seva

Late Girishbhai Tank, Kaushikbhai Patel.

National Leadership Seminar 2014

Kanubhai Patel, Vipulbhai Buddhadev, Chiragbhai Patel, Aksharbhai Patel, Tapanbhai Parmar, Akhilbhai Patel, Mehulbhai Shah. ♦

GUESTS' OPINIONS

Excerpts of addresses made by guests during the various assemblies of the Mandir Mahotsav 2014 at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Robbinsville, NJ

Congressman Frank Pallone



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

this facility.

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

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

Congressman Michael Fitzpatrick



I am very proud to get to know [the BAPS] community, to represent you, to participate in your cultural celebrations, your charity walks, and I want to thank you for what you do for our

communities and our country as an organization.... So I brought with me a certificate and citation from my district and the House of Representatives which I will present to you and wish you many, many years of blessings and good times here at your mandir.”

Attorney General of New Jersey, John Hoffman



“The mandir is nothing short of breathtaking.... I could not help being struck by a tremendous sense of awe from the grandeur of the entire structure to the depth of the intricate

sculptures. I was moved by the notion that you, as an entire community, have created this holy space and that the temple reflects the beauty of the community that came together to build it.... It is at once, a lovely house of worship, a remarkable building achievement, and a beautiful addition to this community and more importantly, to the entire state of New Jersey.... The temple was created through the efforts of thousands of volunteers who gave freely of their time, their energy, their passion and their dedication to build it. And seeing such a community come together with faith and devotion to achieve a common purpose is something for which we all should celebrate.”



New Jersey Senator, Cory Booker



"I am so impressed, I am so impressed, indeed. I give reverence to an extraordinary structure that will stand in all of North America as one of the greatest places of faith that we have."

Maryland Congressman, Steny Hoyer



"This mandir will surely not only be a place of worship, but also of service; it will be a place where the saying 'In the joy of others lies our own' is translated from words into actions, as fol-

lowers of this movement have done throughout the world for the benefit of millions and millions

of people.... It will bring some of the vibrancy, diversity, and spiritual richness of India to the northeastern United States to the benefit of all of us."

Timothy McGough



Director of Community & Economic Development, welcomed BAPS to Robbinsville, "The Township of Robbinsville is extremely happy that BAPS chose Robbinsville to build this magnifi-

cent mandir. It will be a source of inspiration to all those who visit for generations. Already the Township has received the generosity and friendship of your congregants who have participated in so many community events. Truly, Robbinsville has benefited by having this mandir here." ♦

(Contd. from pg. 19)

Teach these values to the children and youths. Teach them about our religion. Otherwise they will be influenced by others and forget their responsibilities.

So, first it is the duty of parents to learn and do. Otherwise, what will they teach their children?

The devilish nature in man is taking hold, but his divine, godly nature needs to be nourished and revived. For this, we must learn from the shastras and stories of God.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired thousands of people to overcome their evil nature and vices and guided them to lead pious lives.

By living among them, talking to them and showering them with his affection he transformed them and inspired them to worship God. He taught them that God has given everyone a body and intelligence, so use them wisely to earn

wealth without hurting others and without committing sins.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan eradicated their devilish nature and turned them into true human beings. His sadhus toured the villages and did the same.

Thus, if we live a pure, noble life everything else will follow. Even if one has a lot of wealth, but if such virtues are lacking, then it will lead to misery. So, to become happy in the ocean of life one must sincerely observe our true dharma as taught by the Satpurush, shastras and mandirs. Wherever you go to live in this world, keep this true dharma with you. Visit the mandirs for darshan and devotion, and read the shastras. This will please God, who will grant you great benefits, protect you and take you to his Dham. ♦

VACHANAMRUT NIRUPAN

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of the spiritual discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is read daily by countless devotees and is also elaborated upon by sadhus and volunteers during the daily katha in BAPS mandirs and assemblies.

An elaboration on an excerpt of a Vachanamrut has been given here. It has been translated from 'Satsang Saurabh' in Gujarati.



A Smouldering Log; Waxing and Waning in Satsang

Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā I 28

On Posh sudi 14, Samvat 1876 [30 December 1819], Shriji Maharaj was sitting on a large, decorated cot on the veranda outside the room in line with the room of Shri Vasudev-Narayan in Dada Khachar's darbar in Gadhadā. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. At that time, the sadhus had sat down to eat in his presence.

Thereupon Shriji Maharaj said, "When a satsangi is likely to regress in the Satsang fellowship, vicious desires steadily flourish within him. At first, he begins to perceive flaws in all satsangis day by day. In his heart, he feels, 'All of these satsangis lack understanding; only I have true understanding.' In this way, he considers himself to be superior to all. Such a person remains constantly uneasy, day and night. He cannot sit peacefully anywhere during the day; nor can he sleep at night. Moreover, his anger never subsides. In fact, he constantly smoulders like a half-burnt log. A person who behaves in this manner should be known to be on the verge of falling out of Satsang. No matter how many days he spends in Satsang, he will never experience peace in his heart; ultimately, he will fall from Satsang.

"Conversely, when a person is likely to progress in Satsang, pure desires steadily flourish within him. Day by day, he sees only virtues in all satsangis. He views all devotees as superior to himself and considers himself to be insignificant. Moreover, he experiences the bliss of Satsang in his heart 24 hours a day. Such characteristics indicate that pure desires have flourished. In fact, the more such a person practises satsang, the more he benefits; and eventually, he attains profound greatness."

Having delivered this discourse, Shriji Maharaj bid 'Jai Sachchidanand' to all and returned to his seat.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

In this Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan sheds light on gauging our progress or regress in satsang. He says, “One in whom vicious desires grow is regressing, while one in whom pure desires flourish is progressing.” Here, Bhagwan Swaminarayan gives unique definitions of spiritual progress and regress.

Generally, we consider craving for sensual pleasures or violent action as vicious desire. However, in this Vachanamrut, Maharaj defines pure desires as perceiving the Satpurush as well as devotees to be absolutely divine, and vicious desires as preceiving human traits or flaws in the Satpurush and devotees.

Gumatitanand Swami too gives a similar explanation in the Swamini Vato, “Goodwill towards the great Sadhu is the way to overcome worldly desires, while ill will towards the great Sadhu engulfs one in desires to enjoy worldly pleasures” (1.151).

Thus, one who possesses goodwill towards the Satpurush and focuses only on the virtues of other devotees progresses, while one who purports human traits in the Satpurush and perceives flaws in other devotees regresses.

THE MINDSET OF ONE IN WHOM VICIOUS DESIRES ARE INCREASING

1. He perceives flaws in all *satsangis*.
2. He considers himself as knowledgeable and superior to all.
3. His anger never subsides.
4. He can neither peacefully sit during the day nor sleep at night.
5. He remains constantly uneasy – all day and night.
6. Like a half-burnt log, negative emotions smoulder in him.
7. He never experiences peace in his heart.
8. His involvement in Satsang gradually slackens off.

Bliss akin to Akshardham prevails in Satsang, yet some are miserable. The major cause of misery

and regress is less of physical misery, but a faulty disposition of mind (Swamini Vato, 1.99).

Thus, the principal reason behind remaining miserable even after attaining such divine Satsang is one’s own flawed disposition of mind.

■ Once, Yogiji Maharaj was travelling from Junagadh to Vanthali. On seeing an orchard of mangoes, he spontaneously said, “If the tanginess of perceiving flaws in others is not mingled with the bliss of Satsang, then Satsang would taste as sweet as a *kesar* mango.”

■ But why does one perceive flaws in others? According to Vachanamrut Loya 17, one perceives flaws in others for the following three reasons:

1. Ego.
2. Attachment to worldly pleasures.
3. And identification of one’s self with the body.

One begins to perceive flaws in others when one’s ego and attachment for worldly pleasures are challenged and criticized respectively.

One also starts perceiving flaws in others when one cannot attain an object, activity, person, position or place of one’s own desire. In addition, when one’s life events do not work out according to one’s personal inclination one becomes critical.

One may even perceive flaws in others when one is not praised or recognized for one’s efforts. At such times, instead of looking at one’s own shortcomings, one begins to see faults in others.

Nishkulanand Swami has said:

*“Nathi kholto khot m̐yli re,
De chhe bijāne dosh,
Kahe Nishkulanand nyāyini re,
Amtho sho afsos.”*

“Instead of looking for one’s own faults, One blames others for problems in his life. According to Nishkulanand Swami, such mourning is totally unfruitful.”

■ From ego arises envy. Shriji Maharaj once asked Muktanand Swami, “Among all my devotees, whom do you believe to be the best?” Muktanand Swami replied, “Dada Khachar.” Allaiya Khachar, who was present in the assembly, felt deeply offended and thought, “Why not

my name?” Then he thought his name would be mentioned next. But Muktanand Swami said, “Second best is Sura Khachar, and third is Mancha Khachar.” Allaiya Khachar felt so terribly insulted that his hand was on the verge of unsheathing his sword to kill Muktanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj immediately pacified Allaiya Khachar by countering Muktanand Swami, “You do not understand Allaiya’s greatness. Allaiyo is Allaiyo!”

Another example is that of Jiva Khacher. Shriji Maharaj used to take great care of Dada Khachar. The love that Maharaj showered upon Dada made Jiva Khachar very envious of Dada. Out of his envy, Jiva Khachar gradually developed ill sentiments towards Maharaj. He even tried to kill Maharaj.

Thus, a devotee perceiving faults gradually begins to see faults in everybody; even in God and the guru. He feels as if he is being opposed by all in every matter.

Just as a smouldering log burns slowly without any visible flame, a person who perceives flaws in others begins to feel dissatisfied from within. The sentiments of anger and envy never subside in his mind. He feels restless all the while.

ATTRIBUTES ASSIGNED TO A FAULTFINDER

1. He is like a rabid dog (G III 12). Whosoever listens to his talks also starts perceiving flaws in others.
2. He possesses a demonic intellect (G I 35).
3. He should be known to have severed his head (Loya 1). Sooner or later he will certainly fall from Satsang.
4. At any time, he may turn averse to satsang (Loya 17).

STAYING VIGILANT

Initially, one begins to see faults only in common, ordinary devotees. But if one is not vigilant, one may end up perceiving flaws even in God and his Ekantik Sant. Budho Dhadhal, a Kathi¹,

1. A person belonging to a tribe of warriors in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat.

was once sleeping on Dada Khachar’s cot with his face covered. At that time a barber who routinely served Dada Khachar arrived. He began to gently knead Budho Dhadhal’s feet presuming him to be Dada Khachar. After a moment, when he saw the reality, he sneered, “Oh! I have wasted my time on this undeserving person.” These remarks annoyed Budho. He got terribly angry with the barber. When Dada Khachar came to know of this, he gave Budho a mild rebuke. But this further annoyed Budho and he uttered a barb, “Even Dado is like the barber!” When Muktanand Swami heard this he too gently rebuked Budho. This irked Budho all the more, saying, “Even Muktanand Swami is like the barber!” So Maharaj called Budho and asked him to mind his language. But the foolish Budho remarked disparagingly, “Even Maharaj is like the barbar!”

Thus, perceiving flaws in even common or ordinary devotees can in due course lead to being critical towards God and the guru. For this reason, Yogiji Maharaj used to say: “Always see virtues in others. Never tread the way that leads to seeing flaws in others.”

THE MINDSET OF ONE IN WHOM RIGHTEOUS DESIRES ARE FLOURISHING

1. He sees only virtues in all *satsangis*.
2. Considers himself to be inferior than everybody.
3. Experiences the bliss of Satsang in his heart 24 hours a day.
4. He benefits more and more, and eventually attains profound greatness.

According to Vachanamrut Loya 5, the means to developing an unshakable foundation in Satsang is to cultivate the disposition of imbibing virtues from everybody.

■ Gordhanbhai Kothari, was a very competent and powerful administrator of Vartal mandir. He had unabatedly served three successive Acharyas. Even sadhus used to prostrate before him. For householders, he was an ideal *satsangi*. However, he continuously felt restless and disturbed from

within, despite his lifelong service, dedication and righteous conduct. Once, he humbly asked Bhagatji Maharaj, “Why don’t I experience inner bliss like you?” Bhagatji replied, “Believe all these devotees to be *brahmarup*.” In essence, Bhagatji was asking him to see only the virtues in all devotees. But Gordhanbhai retorted, “This advice is indigestible. I know the faults of all sadhus and devotees inside out. Many even confess their faults before me.” After listening to him patiently, Bhagatji Maharaj insistently reiterated, “Gordhanbhai! If you wish to attain bliss, there is no other way besides developing the disposition to see only virtues in others and perceive everyone as divine or *brahmarup*.”

Thus, the secret behind everlasting bliss that Bhagatji experienced, despite the external oppositions he faced, was his disposition to see only the virtues in others.

■ How could Yogiji Maharaj have experienced eternal joy amidst 17 long years of insults, torture and physical pain? Yogiji Maharaj had once said, “I am in this Satsang since past 50 years. No matter how dumb, foolish or hostile a person may be, or even if he belongs to a rival group, but I never perceive a flaw in that person. In fact, I stay vigilant to keep myself from noticing flaws in others. I see everyone as *brahmarup*.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj often says, “If one believes oneself to be a humble servant of others, one will never perceive flaws in others. Can one perceive flaws in anybody if one believes that others understand better than oneself; or others are more knowledgeable than oneself?”

WHAT SHOULD WE DO TO OVERCOME NOTICING OTHERS FLAWS?

1. Develop the conviction about oneself to be *atma* (Loya 17, Gadhada III 39).
2. Understand the glory of God (Karyani 9, Gadhada I 78).
3. Develop affection for *satsangis* (Vartal 11, Gadhada III 1).

CONVICTION ABOUT ONESELF AS ATMA

Amidst honours and insults, believe oneself to be Akshar. Hence, whose praise or insult should be taken to heart? (Swamini Vato 2.147). One’s identification with the body is overcome by believing oneself to be *atma*. As a result, flaws perceived in others because of honours and insults are also banished away from one’s mind. One who firmly believes oneself to be *atma*, remains dispassionate and indifferent to praises and insults. He remains absolutely unperturbed.

■ At an advanced age of 82 years, Gunatitanand Swami was terribly insulted in Vartal. But Gunatitanand Swami, amidst such deep humiliation, was completely unruffled as if nothing had happened.

■ After Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s gall bladder operation, a person who was prejudiced towards Swamishri insulted him gravely. Though unwell, Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained absolutely calm. This is a reflection of his *atmanishtha*.

UNDERSTANDING THE GLORY OF GOD

■ According to Gadhada I 24, when a fault is noticed in a devotee, one should think, “His *samskars* from his past lives or from this very life are extremely favourable (and as a result of) that he has attained this Satsang.”

■ One should also understand the glory of devotees due to their connection with God. According to Vachanamrut Gadhada II 8, for a person who has come into contact with God, there is no limit to his good fortune.

The leaves and bark of the *neem* tree in Dada Khachar’s *darbar* taste bitter even though Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified it by delivering discourses under it. Regardless of its bitterness, devotees still reverentially prostrate before it. Why? Because it was consecrated by Maharaj. Likewise, today all the devotees are associated with Swamishri. And so, regardless of their faults, they too should be held with similar reverence.

“*Tulsi jāke mukhanse, Bhule nikse rām*

Tāke pagki paheniya, Mere tan ki chām”

“If someone mistakenly chants ‘Ram’, then Tulsi would offer the skin of his body for his footwear.”

DEVELOPING AFFECTION FOR SATSANGIS

We overlook the flaws of someone whom we love or are related to. In fact, we ignore the flaws even though we notice them. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 59, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “One should develop as much affection for the God’s *sant* as for one’s relatives.”

- The *jiva* becomes *brahmarup* merely by describing the virtues of devotees. And doing so is no hard work (Swamini Vato, 4.136).

Pramukh Swami Maharaj says, “One cannot progress spiritually as long as one perceives flaws in others.”

- Thus, for surviving in Satsang, for progressing spiritually, or for attaining eternal bliss it is mandatory to develop the disposition of perceiving only virtues in others. One should contemplate continually: “For what have I come into the satsang for and what am I doing? I have come to rid myself of my own flaws. Keeping others vigilant about ridding their flaws is outside the domain of my responsibility.” One should always introspect: “Am I flawless? If not, then I do not have the right to see flaws in others.”

- Kabir, a famous Sufi saint, said:

*“Burā dekhan me chalā, Burā na miliyā koi,
Antar khoja āpnā, Mujse burā na koi.”*

“I looked for faults in others, but found no one completely amoral. When I introspected myself, I found myself to be most wicked.”

- Someone wrote a letter full of abuses to Gandhiji. Gandhiji kept the pin holding the pages together and threw away the letter.

DEVELOPING A SCULPTOR’S VIEWPOINT

- However rough or jagged a stone may be, a sculptor carves out a beautiful statue out of it. Likewise, no matter whatsoever indecent flaws are present in a devotee, but God and his Sadhu – with whom the devotee is associated – are pure.

Thus his flaws will eventually be eradicated. God and the Sant will make him pure. In this manner, if one develops a sculptor’s viewpoint, one will never perceive flaws in others.

- Gunatitanand Swami says, “When a flaw is noticed in a devotee, think of his virtues to banish the thoughts of his flaws. Just as fifty men can easily defeat five who come to confront them, likewise by concentrating upon the virtues present in a devotee, the thoughts of his flaws will be banished” (Swamini Vato, 2.18)

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “I do not like even the sight of one who speaks ill of a devotee. In fact, I do not enjoy food or water offered by a person who perceives flaws in a devotee of God.” (Gadhada III 21). So think, when Maharaj turns his face away from us if we speak ill of other devotees, would he ever accept a *thal* offered by us?

- Gunatitanand Swami says, “I do not like one who speaks ill of satsang though he may be donating 100,000 rupees daily” (Swamini Vato, 1.237).

- In the Yogi Gita, Yogiji Maharaj says, “Oh Shastriji Maharaj, you expect us to believe your devotees to be absolutely divine. If we perceive flaws in your devotees you will not allow us to sit near you. You will banish us.”

- Pramukh Swami Maharaj often says, “No matter how many flaws there are in someone, but wouldn’t there be at least one virtue among his flaws?”

The aforesaid words of the guru *parampara* should become the focus of one’s attention. Discern what are their likes and dislikes and then mould one’s life according to their wishes.

CONCLUSION

In this Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has shown two paths: First, the way that leads towards spiritual progress, and the second way drives one to spiritual downfall. Likewise, in more than 70 other Vachanamruts, Maharaj has repeatedly emphasized on ignoring the flaws and perceiving only the virtues in others. ♦

FAQs on Hinduism

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

1. What is the Gayatri Mantra?

The Gayatri Mantra is one of the sacred ancient verses from the Rig Veda 3.62.10 and the Yajur Veda 36.3. It is addressed to the sun-god (Savita), so it is called the Savita mantra. It got the name Gayatri Mantra because it was the first mantra to be written in the Gayatri metre that consists of three lines of eight syllables in each. It is believed to be the essence and summary of the Vedas and Hindu culture. It was revealed by God to Sage Vishwamitra.

The name Gayatri Mantra literally means “the mantra which protects one who chants it”. Chanting the Gayatri Mantra invokes divinity and blesses one with spiritual illumination, cosmic energy, intelligence, subtle discrimination, creative vision and healing powers. The prayer is chanted in the rituals of Sandhya Vandanam in the morning, afternoon and evening. It is also uttered in the *upanayana* ceremony, *yajnas* and others. The mantra is:

“Om *bhur bhuva svaha*,
Tat savitur varenyam,
Bhargo devasya dhimahi,
Dhiyo yo naha prachodayāta.”

“(We meditate on) Om (which pervades) earth, intervening space and *swarga* (heaven),

May we contemplate on the desirable radiance of the sun-god; may he guide our intellects.”

2. What is Sandhya Vandanam?

Sandhya Vandanam is the worship of Surya (sun-god). It is a ritual performed three times daily that includes worship, meditation and prayer performed every morning, afternoon and evening. Sandhya means “union”, which refers to

union or thresholds of day and night. Vandanam is a form of worship. Householders and ascetics are expected to perform it as a sacred duty.

The Upanishads mention the benefit of *sandhya* times: during sunrise there is a release of beneficial energy, and at dusk there is a withdrawal of non-beneficial energy. So Sandhya Vandanam is performed for one’s own benefit.

Repetition of the Gayatri Mantra forms a part of Sandhya Vandanam. The latter also includes ceremonies and mantra singing for personal purity and preparation. The different ceremonies that are performed are *achamanam* (sipping a little water for self-purification), *apo-marjanam* (invoking all holy waters and sprinkling them on oneself for purification), *pranayama*, *aghamarshanam* (repeating of mantras of cosmic creation and request for forgiveness of any sinful acts done unknowingly), *suryopasthanam* (invoking the sun-god), Gayatri *upasthanam* (invoking the goddess Gayatri) and *visarjanam* (valediction mantra – prayers and salutations to the invoked devas and devis to return when requested).

3. How can one put a permanent end to all doubts and questions?

As one advances in spiritual sadhanas one is blessed by the guru and God with higher levels of spiritual experience. The only duty of the devotee is to perform and intensify his or her sadhanas in accordance with the word and mandates of God, God-realized guru and shastras. The guru’s words are the essence and core of a devotee’s sadhana. In so doing, doubts and questions are resolved and he or she is blessed with liberation. ♦



Grand annakut in Sarangpur

Diwali & Annakut Celebrations

20 October-2 November 2014

Thousands of devotees and well-wishers participated in the auspicious Diwali and Annakut celebrations held at all BAPS mandirs worldwide. The highlight of festivities at each mandir was the grand decorative *annakut* of freshly prepared pure vegetarian delicacies offered to the deities on New Year's Day.

On 23 October, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Diwali was celebrated in Sarangpur. In the afternoon, Chopda Pujan rites were performed at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. Swamishri showered sanctified petals of flowers on the rows of account books, as a part of the puja rituals.

On 24 October, the Hindu New Year – Vikram Samvat 2071 – was welcomed with the traditional New Year's *mahapuja*. Thousands of devotees from India and abroad participated in the Vedic rituals. Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed his morning puja in the assembly in Sarangpur. After puja, he blessed all sadhus and devotees for the New Year.

Later, a grand *annakut* of over 1270 vegetarian dishes was offered to Thakorji in Sarangpur. Swamishri went for *annakut* darshan and performed the *annakut* arti in the mandir, Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir and in the assembly hall. ♦



Swamishri has darshan of the *annakut* at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur



Swamishri during the *chopda puja* ceremony, Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Sarangpur

British Prime Minister Hosts Diwali Reception at 10 Downing Street

20 October 2014, London, UK



On 20 October 2014 the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, celebrated Diwali in the Pillared Room at 10 Downing Street with Hindus from various denominations. Lord Dholakia, Keith Vaz MP, Bob Blackman MP, Shailesh Vara MP, Alok Sharma MP, Priti Patel MP, and other eminent Britons of Indian origin were present.

The event, organized by the Prime Minister's

Office, began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp amid Vedic chanting.

A small *annakut*, set up by BAPS volunteers, was offered to Hindu deities as part of the auspicious celebrations.

In his short address, Mr Cameron said, "A very big thank you to Neasden Temple for bringing this extraordinary and beautiful display to Number 10." After fondly recalling his visit to the Mandir last year with his wife, he went on to reiterate the shared values and history between the British and Indian people.

On this special occasion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had sent a message of goodwill to the Prime Minister, praying for the peace and well-being of all people in the UK, and for the light and warmth of God to guide us through our challenges. ♦

Diwali & Annakut Celebrations at Australian Federal Parliament

27 October 2014, Canberra, Australia



On 27 October the Federal Parliament of Australia in Canberra celebrated Diwali and Annakut in the presence of over 100 guests, including The Hon. Julie Bishop MP (Minister for Foreign Affairs), The Hon. Bill Shorten MP

(Leader of Opposition), His Excellency Shri Biren Nanda (High Commissioner for India), The Hon. Chris Bowen MP (Shadow Treasurer), The Hon. Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, The Hon. Senator Zed Seselja, The Hon. Michelle Rowland MP, The Hon. Senator Lisa Singh and 45 Members of Parliament. Other guests included representatives from the Indian, Nepalese, Fijian and Mauritian communities. The festivities began with lighting of the ceremonial lamp and Vedic chanting. BAPS volunteers from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra jointly organized the small *annakut* display of over 30 vegetarian foods. ♦



India

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF YAGNAPURUSH 13-21 September 2014



As part of the year-long celebrations of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj's 150th birth anniversary and in commemoration of the arduous travels he undertook to inspire spirituality in all, men and women BAPS volunteers and devotees visited the villages to conduct de-addiction camps, for personal satsang contact, student motivation workshops and mandir cleaning programmes. The campaign was titled, 'In the Footsteps of Yagnapurush – Suhrad Vicharan.'

On 13-14 and 20-21 September, in groups of four, volunteers and devotees visited their allocated villages throughout Gujarat. On the first morning of their two-day stay, they visited the main village school to motivate the pupils to study. Then, the group engaged in personal meetings with senior and elder devotees of the village to learn about their satsang experiences with Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, the group approached resident villagers to encourage them to give up their addictions to smoking, alcohol, gambling, etc. In the evening, they conducted a satsang assembly in which they presented bhajans and speeches.

On the second morning, the group continued

their contact of devotee-families in the village. In the afternoon, the groups, with the help of local devotees, would thoroughly clean a pre-selected mandir in the village. As a result of this *vicharan* to the villages, the participants all felt that their understanding of satsang had increased.

Summary: Men

- 620 villages visited.
- 2,480 volunteers and devotees participated.
- 15,300 families contacted.
- 66,300 devotees and well-wishers attended. The evening satsang assemblies.
- 18,600 man-hours of personal contact.
- 500 schools hosted study motivation presentations.
- 2,170 hours of mandir cleaning.
- 535 mandirs cleaned.

Summary: Women

- 2,343 villages visited.
- 9,618 volunteers and devotees participated.
- 49,460 families counselled.
- 70,000 well-wisher females attended the evening assemblies.
- 28,858 hours of personal contact.

KARYAKAR SHIBIR, JAIPUR 20-21 September 2014



Over 540 devotees from North India attended the Karyakar Shibir, entitled 'Nijatmanam

Brahmarupam...’, held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Jaipur, in the presence of Pujya Anandswarup Swami and Pujya Atmaswarup Swami.

The *shibir* theme was presented through speeches, skits, interactive activities, workshops, audio-visual shows, group discussions and question-answer sessions.

UK & Portugal

YAGNAPURUSH CHHE SATHE: NATIONAL SANYUKTA MANDAL ONE-DAY SHIBIR
7 & 14 September 2014, UK



Over 2,000 devotees from across the UK attended the one-day *shibirs* organized by the Sanyukta Mandal on 7 September at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Leicester, and on 14 September at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami).

Titled ‘Yagnapurush Chhe Sathe’ (Yagnapurush Is With Us), as part of the year-long celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj’s 150th birth anniversary, the *shibirs* focussed on the exemplary life of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and how it can provide vital guidance in every aspect of our daily living.

A panel discussion with learned sadhus provided further perspectives and a question-and-answer session with Kothari Swami addressed specific ways in which to imbibe these lofty spiritual ideals.

A series of videos and devotional singing extolling the divinity and greatness of Shastriji Maharaj interspersed and supported the discourses before the day was concluded with the video blessings of Swamishri.

‘OPEN HOUSE LONDON’

20-21 September 2014, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, joined more than 800 other sites to celebrate Open House London – the capital’s principal architectural festival, which is part of a growing global concept “showcasing outstanding architecture for all to experience, completely free. Open House initiatives invite everyone to explore and understand the value of a well-designed built environment”.

The Mandir was amongst a number of well-known buildings to be featured in Brent, including the Capital City Academy, Cottrell House, Wembley WC Pavilion, Roe Green Village, and the Underground Bunker in Neasden. The Mandir also joined other local places of worship such as Christ Church in Brondesbury and Ruach City Church in Kilburn.

Tourists and members of the local community from various walks of life visited the mandir throughout the weekend to appreciate the history behind the mandir’s construction as well as the significance of its religious architecture. Guests also enjoyed a tour of the ‘Understanding Hinduism’ exhibition during their visit.

Many visitors also shared experiences of

their visit in writing. Below are a few of those impressions:

Superb building lovingly maintained. Moving experience to witness the worship. Interesting exhibition which enlarged my understanding of Hinduism. Thank You. – Ann (Retired Teacher)

We are very grateful that you open this space to the general public and are so welcoming. It's been a pleasure to see inside this special building. – Tanya (TV Producer)

Really interesting. Beautiful to look at and lovely serene experience. Very well organized and everyone so helpful and friendly. An oasis on the North Circular! – Paul (Model Maker)

I was very impressed by the beautiful carvings and the dedication that went into constructing this amazing building. Thank you for sharing it. – Kaye (Teacher)

Very beautiful and spiritual place. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit and will definitely be back. I personally found a new sense of calm and spirituality. – Loraine

NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 27-28 September 2014, Lisbon, Portugal



The two-day Mandir Mahotsav began with an enlightening cultural programme presented by the Women's Wing on 27 September. Women of all ages presented folk dances, dramas and inspiring speeches emphasizing the necessity of mandirs and their role in fostering social harmony and holistic well-being.

In the afternoon, the *murtis* to be consecrated

in the mandir were taken in a colourful *nagar-yatra* to bless the city and its residents. Thousands came on to the streets to see the procession of beautifully decorated floats, traditional dances and the sounds of joyous music.

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* had previously been performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur on 24 April 2014. On the morning of 28 September, these *murtis* were ceremonially consecrated in their respective shrines by Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Kothari Swami amid Vedic chantings and rituals. The *pratishtha* celebrations of the new mandir included a special *mahapuja* during the morning where devotees and well-wishers offered their prayers for peace and well-being to prevail throughout the local community.

In the evening, a special dedication assembly was held in central Lisbon, where chief guest Dr Jitendra Nath Misra, Indian Ambassador to Portugal, as well as local dignitaries joined hundreds of well-wishers and devotees.

LONDON MANDIR LIGHTS UP IN PINK FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH 23 October 2014, London



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

Marie Harry, Breast Health Promotion Training

and Support Officer for Breast Cancer Care, was also present to observe the Mandir's support in action. "I'm in awe of the volunteers coming together wearing those [pink] colours," she said. "It's been incredible how the community has come together today. It's been wonderful to take part in this celebration at the BAPS Mandir and the image that will stay with me is that [of] how the community has come together to support breast cancer."

USA & Canada

NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIRS
21-24 August 2014, Seattle, WA



The four-day Mandir Mahotsav in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami comprised of spiritual discourses, a programme of devotional songs, a grand Mahayagna for World Peace and culminated in the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony performed by Mahant Swami. These *murtis* had previously been consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad, India, on 29 October 2012.

4-6 September 2014, Kansas City, KS

The 3-day *pratishtha* celebrations were held in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami. The programmes included a grand Vedic Mahayagna for World Peace, a lively kirtan *aradhana* and concluded with the Vedic consecration of the *murtis* by Mahant Swami and Tyagvallabh Swami.

In the *pratishtha* assembly, Mahant Swami



emphasized the importance of mandirs in shaping people's lives, and how Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired such places of worship around the world to preserve pure faith and devotion to God.

7 September 2014, Sharon, South Boston, MA



Devotees and well-wishers from Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey attended the *murti-pratishtha* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Sharon performed by Pujya Mahant Swami.

In the special evening satsang assembly, devotees who had dedicated their time and effort in getting the new mandir ready were appreciated and Mahant Swami spoke on the importance of *samp*, *seva* and *mahima*.

19-21 September 2014, Washington DC, MD

The three-day Mandir Mahotsav in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami celebrated the inauguration of the renovated mandir and consecration of the new *murtis*.

The celebrations included a welcome assembly, satsang *shibir*, a grand procession of the *murtis*



in elaborately decorated floats around the mandir campus, and climaxed with the grand Vedic *yagna* and consecration of the divine *murtis* in the renovated mandir by Mahant Swami.

KIDS' DIWALI CELEBRATIONS 11 to 26 October 2014, North America



Over 5,000 children participated in the BAPS Kids' Diwali Celebration at over 40 BAPS mandirs across North America. The celebrations combined traditional rituals with fun-filled games and patient explanations to help the youngsters gain a deeper understanding of Diwali and its traditions.

Families also participated in events ranging from rock climbing to making small oil lamps which symbolize the triumph of light over darkness.

Asia-Pacific

SANT VICHARAN 6-15 September 2014, Sydney, Australia

From 6 to 15 September Brahmadarshan Swami and Adarshmuni Swami were in Sydney



as part of their *vicharan* of the Asia-Pacific region during the auspicious months of Chaturmaas.

On 6 September, more than 1500 people attended the evening welcoming assembly in the suburb of Glendenning.

In the evenings, from 8 to 14 September, Brahmadarshan Swami gave an inspiring series of discourses on the Bhagavad Gita in which he described the ideal path to inner peace, and the importance of strengthening our Hindu beliefs and values.

Also, a special Karyakar Shibir, entitled 'Antarkhoj and Jnansatra', was also held on 13 and 14 September.

The sadhus also visited over 175 households to inspire and bless devotees around Sydney and in the suburbs of Liverpool and Wentworthville.

BHAGAVAD GITA PARAYAN AND JNANSATRA 20 September to 26 October 2014, Brisbane, Australia



Over 600 devotees and well-wishers attended the discourses on the Bhagavad Gita, a *shibir* based on the theme 'Introspection' and the

Jnansatra held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Brisbane, by Brahmadarshan Swami. The discourses highlighted the values of Hinduism revolving around the ideas of ideal parenting, family unity, ethical thoughts and behaviour, character-building, how mandirs reinforce moral teachings, preserve spiritual values and help in shaping lives, and the necessity of a guru to help one progress on the spiritual path.

BAPS Charities

WALKATHON

14 September 2014, Lenasia, South Africa



BAPS Charities hosted its first Walkathon in South Africa in Lenasia – south of Johannesburg.

A total of 380 enthusiastic walkers participated in the 5km walk through the main streets of Lenasia. Young and old people came together to walk for fun and for a purpose. Representatives from the City of Johannesburg Health Department also participated in the walk, thereafter providing service for measuring blood pressure and glucose, and prostrate screening.

Diabetes South Africa was chosen as the beneficiary for the inaugural walkathon due to the high prevalence of diabetes amongst the population. President of *Diabetes South Africa*, Mr Ranga Kuni, was presented a donation of R25,000 (USD 2230) by BAPS Charities to help further their mission in South Africa.

HEALTH SCREENING FOR UNDER-40s

27 September 2014, London



BAPS Charities organized a health screening session for the under-40s to screen for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, which are very common in the South Asian community. Early detection and treatment of risk factors helps to prevent long-term complications. After the screening tests, participants were given an opportunity to discuss the findings with an experienced doctor.

Risk factors were identified in six individuals, who were subsequently referred for a more detailed cardiovascular screening clinic that is regularly organized by BAPS Charities in collaboration with The Royal Free Hospital, London.

BAPS CHARITIES FOOD DRIVE

27 September 2014, Robbinsville, NJ



Despite the United States' economic prosperity, 33.3 million adults and 15.8 million children go hungry every day.

BAPS Charities held a food drive in Robbinsville, NJ, benefitting the Robbinsville Food Pantry and helping them to assist many local and nearby

families during the holiday season. Volunteers of all ages along with community participants collectively donated over 1300 canned and dried food items to the Robbinsville Food Pantry. Donated items included 950 cans of fruits, vegetables and beans, 192 boxes of pasta, 85 boxes of cereal and nearly 100 other food items like baby food.

HEALTH FAIRS

October 2014, North America



With the generous support of local doctors, dentists and other health care professionals, BAPS Charities organized its annual Health Fairs throughout North America as part of its global health and wellness initiatives. Depending on local availability, hundreds of patients were able to consult with doctors experienced in internal medicine, cardiology, nephrology, ophthalmology, ENT, family practice, psychiatry, dentistry, optometry, orthodontics, podiatry, physical therapy pain management and other specialties. Various blood and other screening tests were also conducted. In some places, lectures were presented providing guidance on common health issues.

COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP OF LOCAL PARK

5 October 2014, London

Volunteers from BAPS Charities teamed up with 60 children from The Swaminarayan Sunday School, London, to collect litter from Gibbons Recreational Park, Neasden.

The event was part of BAPS Charities' commitment to 'Seva Day' – an initiative where thousands of good-hearted people across the



world come together to perform *seva* (an act of kindness without expectation of reward) and experience the joy of giving in its truest sense.

The children, aged between 8 and 14, enthusiastically collected rubbish for three hours and filled ten large sacks with the help of adult supervisors. Aluminium cans found in the park were retained for recycling.

CARING FOR ORPHANS AT THE NEW LIFE HOME TRUST

26 October 2014, Nairobi, Kenya



BAPS Charities volunteers helped at New Life Home Trust in Kilimanito to care for 43 orphaned babies from a few days old to 6 months. The volunteers assisted the caregivers for 3-6 month-old babies in changing diapers, as well as feeding, playing with and putting the babies to bed. In addition, BAPS Charities donated 1,000 diapers, 40 cans of formula milk and an assortment of other supplies.

The Director of Life Home Trust appreciated the BAPS volunteers' assistance since it enabled them to give their staff time off. ♦



Los Angeles



Toronto



Chicago



Nairobi



SWAMISHRI CELEBRATES ANNAKUT IN SARANGPUR, 24 October 2014

1. Beautifully arranged *annakut* of sweet and savoury delicacies offered in the main mandir.
2. Swamishri engaged in darshan of the *annakut* in the central shrine.
3. Swamishri amid the grand outdoor *maha-annakut*.
4. A view of the grand outdoor *maha-annakut* arranged on the front podium of the assembly hall.