

# SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

July–August 2017

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*Tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj*





## PARAM PUJYA MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN LONDON

15–21 June 2017

During Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay in London, thousands of devotees thronged to the mandir for his daily puja darshan at 5.30 a.m. Devotees also enjoyed the satsang assemblies, *shibirs* and other events in his presence. And youths performed various cultural presentations. Swamishri also daily guided all through his divine discourses.



# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2017, Vol. 40, No. 4



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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

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# Murti-Pratishtha in Bhuj

*Shri Hari travelled to Bhuj to perform the consecration ceremony of the murtis of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev in the newly built Swaminarayan Mandir in Bhuj. Maharaj would be inaugurating the second shikharbaddha mandir in the Sampradaya...*

## PREPARATIONS TO LEAVE FOR BHUJ

Shriji Maharaj stayed for a few more days in Sarangpur before leaving for Gadhpur. Here, he called Muktanand Swami and the other senior sadhus and shared, “The mandir in Bhuj is ready, and the auspicious date for the *pratishtha* is 15 May 1823 CE (Vaishakh *sud* 5, V.S. 1879). So, we will all have to leave in a few days. Therefore, call Gopalanand Swami to join us.”

Then Maharaj sat down for his meal. Thereafter, he went to his Akshar Ordi and called the *parshads*, saying, “Send the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev in a bull-ock cart to Bhuj today so that they reach there in time for the *pratishtha*.” Maharaj then called Shukmuni and told him, “I want to invite all the sadhus and devotees for the *pratishtha* in Bhuj. Thus, do the needful.” Shukmuni wrote the invitations and sent them to all the villages.

One year earlier, Shri Hari had started listening to the Mahabharat *katha* from Pragji Purani on 31 March 1822 CE (Chaitra *sud* 9, V.S. 1878). Whenever Maharaj was free he told Pragji Purani to read the Mahabharat. Finally, Maharaj finished listening to it on 19 April 1823 CE (Chaitra *sud* 9, V.S. 1879). On the last day



Shri Hari invited the Brahmins and treated them to a scrumptious meal. After six days, on 25 April 1823 (Chaitra *sud* 15), a messenger arrived from Bhuj with a letter saying it was time to leave for the *pratishtha*. Maharaj said that Gopalanand Swami should be called urgently to join him on his journey to Bhuj.

Gopalanand Swami arrived on the same day. Shri Hari called Mayaram Bhatt to decide upon an auspicious date and time to depart for Bhuj. Mayaram declared 27

April 1823 CE (Chaitra *vad* 2). Two days later, Shri Hari got ready early and told Dada Khachar not to accompany with him. Maharaj departed from Dada's *darbar* with his entourage of sadhus, 125 armed Kathi devotees and 500 *parshads* in carts, chariots and palanquins. As Shri Hari rode on his mare, Manki, two *brahmacharis* were fanning him and a *parshad* was holding a golden shade above his head. At the front of the procession musicians played drums, cymbals, *shehnais* and other instruments. Maharaj was departing from Gadhpur with festivity and joy. On arriving at the outskirts Shri Hari stopped and declared, “Only those who are to accompany me to Bhuj shall join me, while the rest shall return



to the village.” The latter offered prostrations to Maharaj and returned.

Shri Hari arrived in Mandavdhar village and stayed at Gova Patel’s home. After having lunch, Maharaj invited the local devotees and announced, “Whoever wishes to come to the *pratishtha* of Bhuj Mandir can join us.” Maharaj then proceeded ahead. During his journey Shri Hari either stayed the night at a village or stopped on the way to have lunch. In this way the large group crossed the desert of Kutch and travelled via Bhachau, Dhamadka and Dhaneti to finally arrive in Bhuj.

### SHRI HARI ARRIVES IN BHUJ

Shri Hari was festively received and welcomed in Bhuj by the leading devotees: Sundarji Suthar, Hirjibhai, Gangaram Mull and others. The King of Bhuj, Rao Shri Desadji, sent his royal army to welcome Shriji Maharaj. Leading the welcome procession was a man on a camel, playing the drum and heralding Maharaj’s arrival. Then followed men chanting Shri Hari’s name. Thereafter, percussionists played the *dhhol*, *shehnais* and cymbals. The king’s army marched ahead in full regalia and colours. The sadhus and *brahmacharis* recited Sanskrit *shlokas* and sanctified the air. Following them were sadhus singing bhajans. Shri Hari was riding his horse, Manki. He was wearing white clothes with a heap of garlands around his neck. The entire procession was grand and overwhelmingly divine. Everyone avidly rushed out of their homes and to their windows or galleries for Shri Hari’s darshan. Maharaj had come to Bhuj after a period of eleven years. Subsequently, the devotees revelled and danced to welcome their Lord. During his long absence many devotees savoured Shri Hari’s divine presence by reminiscing about his form and *lilas* they had experienced a decade ago. The scene was one

of ineffable joy and celebration. Tears of delight flowed from many devotees’ eyes. They offered garlands and prostrations. Their fires of yearning and separation were doused with the first glimpse of Shri Hari. The devotees and people of Bhuj gave a fitting welcome to the Lord.

### WE ARE WELL ESTABLISHED IN MAHARAJ’S HEART

Shriji Maharaj asked about the wellbeing of each devotee. He remembered each and everyone, calling them by names, even after being away for such a long spell. The devotees thus felt that though they had not often got the opportunity of his darshan in person they definitely had attained a place in his heart. Then Maharaj told them, “Now, all of you proceed ahead. I wish to see the newly built mandir.”

The procession came to a halt at Hirjibhai’s home. Shri Hari dismounted from Manki and went to his residence, Akshar Ordi. The guest sadhus and devotees were led to their accommodations. Shri Hari declared, “The *pratishtha* of the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev will be held in two days times. Devotees from all parts of Kutch must attend the consecration ceremony.” At that time Gopalanand Swami arrived and Maharaj instructed him, “Swami, the *pratishtha* rituals will be done after two days. Ask Pragji how many Brahmins will be required to perform the rituals. You’ll have to make arrangements for them as well as for the *yagna* rituals.” Gopalanand Swami touched Maharaj’s feet and said, “Maharaj, all the arrangements will be made in accordance to your wishes.”

### SHRI HARI SITS ON THE SINHASAN OF SHRI NAR-NARAYAN DEV

Shri Hari came to see the newly built mandir.<sup>1</sup> He expressed his joy and approval after seeing

1. The mandir consecrated by Shriji Maharaj was damaged during an earthquake on 26 January 2001. Two years later a small memorial mandir was constructed on that spot and another mandir was constructed elsewhere, wherein the *murtis* of Shri Nar-Narayan Dev, consecrated by Maharaj, were installed.

its ornateness. Gangaram Mull held Maharaj's hand and led him to sanctify the mandir *sinhasan* (seat). Then Maharaj observed the mandir *shikhars* (pinnacles), *ghummat* (dome) and *rang mandap* (prayer hall) and gave a few suggestions about the construction work.

The devotees of Kutch, who were artisans by profession, had built a beautiful mandir in a very short time. Shri Hari appreciated their masonry skills and artwork and lauded their devotion and efforts. In addition, Sunderjibhai and Hirjibhai's enthusiasm in getting the mandir construction done was outstanding. They did not see day or night while visiting the construction site. Shri Hari showered his blessings upon them as well.

Shriji Maharaj returned to his residence at Hirjibhai's house and took a bath. Thereafter, Ladhima and Mataji<sup>2</sup> offered a meal prepared by them to Maharaj. While he ate he talked with them and blessed them. Thereafter, he retired for the afternoon.

In the evening, Maharaj took Gopalanand Swami and other sadhus to the *yagnashala*. He observed the *yagna* pit. The *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev had been installed on the *yagna* stage. Maharaj told the principal Brahmins to commence the *yagna* at the auspicious time on the next morning. The Brahmins asked, "When will you come?"

"From the beginning. I wish to perform all the rituals," Shri Hari replied. The Brahmins were overjoyed and felt that Nar-Narayan Dev would truly be invoked by Shri Hari himself.

### SHRI HARI PERFORMS THE YAGNA RITUALS

The next day Shriji Maharaj arrived in the morning to perform the *yagna* rituals. The Brahmin pundits chanted Vedic *shlokas*. Women devotees sang auspicious bhajans and musicians

played musical instruments. During the ritual various devas were invoked and prayers were chanted. Ghee and sesame seeds were offered into the *yagna* fire. When the main consecration ritual of installing the *murtis* in the mandir sanctum came the *yagna* was concluded.

### CONSECRATING THE MURTIS OF SHRI NAR-NARAYAN DEV

It was 15 May 1823 CE (Vaishakh *sud* 5, A.S. 1879). The *murtis* were installed in the main sanctum of the mandir. Shri Hari entered the sanctum sanctorum and touched the *murtis* to infuse the divinities while the Brahmin pundits chanted the Vedic *shlokas*. Finally, Shri Hari performed the *pratishta arti* with the beating of drums and ringing of bells. Everyone hailed the occasion with *jais* and celebrated it with joy. When Maharaj completed the *arti* everyone proclaimed Nar-Narayan Dev's *jai*. The devotees felt that Kutch had at last been blessed with a mandir and the divine presence of the deities.

The next day Shriji Maharaj held a feast (*chorasi*) for all the Brahmins. All were fed to their hearts' content and given donations. Thereafter, the devotees sponsored meals for Maharaj and his sadhus during their stay in Bhuj. Finally, Shriji Maharaj departed from Bhuj and returned to Gadhpur.

On 7 July 1824 CE (Ashadh *sud ekadashi*, A.S. 1880), the first day of *chaturmas* (four holy months), commenced. Shri Hari told all to pledge special *niyams* for the holy months. ♦

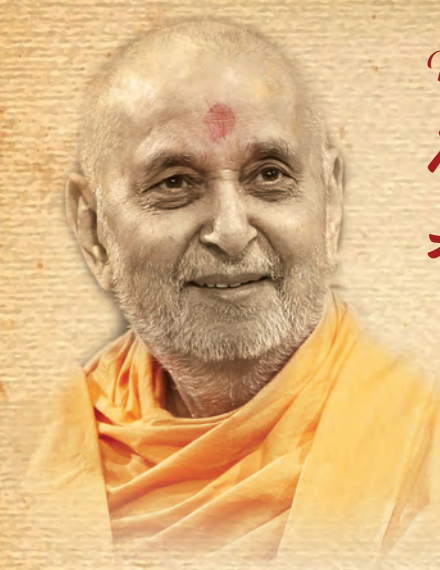
(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

2. Mataji was formerly known as Jhamkuba – the Queen of Udaipur. She renounced her home because of her husband's persecution. Shriji Maharaj gave darshan to her in a divine form and told her to climb down a rope hanging outside her window. Thereafter, Maharaj appeared as a Brahmin and led her to safety. She eventually had Shriji Maharaj's first darshan in Kariyani. Shri Hari sent her to Gadhada to stay with Laduba and Jivuba. Later, Maharaj named her Mataji and sent her to Bhuj to stay with Ladhima.





To,

## *Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Akshardham*

*13 August 2017 marks the first anniversary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's passing away to Akshardham.*

*In a stirring letter addressed to Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Akshardham, the writer looks back on his splendid life and contributions and also about how the BAPS continues to excel with Mahant Swami Maharaj as his spiritual successor*

**T**hough you are now ensconced in Akshardham back with Shriji Maharaj, we still marvel at the pace you worked in your lifetime. When you eventually closed your eyes to be back with Maharaj, it was indeed Death that died as you at once walked into eternity. The glory of the deceased is found in the memory of those living, but yours persists in a host of things other than living beings. Out of your spiritual passion were born the many worlds of BAPS. So, you will continue to live foremost in the two imposing Akshardhams (and one more under construction in Robbinsville) you gifted us, besides of course, your brilliant sadhus, the numerous temples, devotees and families you cared for, *ghar sabha* – the magic wand for family harmony – and the noblest deeds that echoed even on Western shores.

Nobody has done for Indian expatriates as you did – to hold them to the ground, their roots, so that they don't lose their bearings. In the USA, you held the Cultural Festival of India to offer them India's tastes, sounds and sights.

And they felt awesomely blessed as you made them realize – if you don't know who you are, you won't know where you are going.

The news of your journey back to Akshardham spread like wildfire. We would have grappled

with the god of death to have you back with us, but it seemed it was at Maharaj's bidding and of your own accord. So, we were helpless.

It was a sobbing Sarangpur as the lanes of this historic village became crammed full with your devotees. Nothing was on their minds that day except to join a beeline to Sarangpur for your last darshan. They came by whatever means they got.

Your body lay in repose for nearly four days in a controlled cold glass chamber. Sadhus and volunteers made all the arrangements at astonishing speed. Devotees filed past your body to catch a last glimpse all through the day and night for four days.

The day of cremation left indelible memories when a sea of devotees rushed to pay their respects to you. All eyes welled up with tears when Pujya Mahant Swami lit the funeral pyre and the flames leapt into the air. And it was on this day that we recited the heartrending words of the kirtan '*Pramukh Swāmi āvjo re, punaha padhārjo re...*' (Pramukh Swami goodbye, pray, come again...) that we used to sing on the day of your departure, wherever you were.

Even those who hadn't seen you even once came to have your last darshan. During the four days when your body lay in repose, a multitude



of people thronged to Sarangpur.

And why not? You had been our steady rock, gentle master and best friend. You were with us in the brightest day as also on the darkest night. Your one word could end a fight, one look could save a relationship and one smile could strike a friendship. We are mightily proud of having lived in your era.

In an insane world riven with a host of differences, your word was a balm for a weary soul. What a frame of mind you had!

As days roll by, your robust images come to mind. Images that brought BAPS thus far. We know, it was no easy walk into eternity as you worked as if in a fever with punishing schedules. So much so that the difference between your life and *seva* disappeared as your life was *seva* and *seva* was your life.

And when you were showered with honour, you unfailingly showed that gesture – to Maharaj belongs all praise, glory and honours.

How can one practise humility while being guru to so many?

*You taught us to be humble even when glory spreads like the sound of a gong in the sky.*

*You taught us to cast out ill will, pride and self-righteousness, and replace it with love, compassion and sympathy.*

*You taught us to unwrap ourselves from the limitations of selfhood.*

*And ultimately to find rapture in contemplating what is really true about this world and our life in it.*

More than words of wisdom, you set an example of divine living by going from place to place, at times even on foot, rising at dawn and generously caring for all without distinction of class or caste, and teaching the way to happiness.

We will remain greatly indebted to you for all that you did for us. You gave us your all. But we cannot thank you enough for the gift of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, who now stands rock-like for BAPS and its devotees. BAPS knows no

gloom and the infectious smile, typical of BAPS gurus and its sadhus, is back on the faces of all sadhus and devotees. We now spread flowers on the path of Mahant Swami Maharaj as we did for you.

Stepping into your shoes, Mahant Swami Maharaj has busied himself presently with sat-sang *vicharan*, blessing and counselling devotees and discoursing to them.

Your divine puja time is back with us as Mahant Swami Maharaj performs puja in public while devotional sounds fill the air.

And dearest Swami, yes, we have continued to hail the celebration of your centenary after *arti* and in all the Sunday assemblies. We celebrated your 95<sup>th</sup> birthday in Surat.

Having been with us for as long as four decades and a half as our guru, you would agree that the body of a BAPS guru doesn't belong to him, it verily belongs to the BAPS and its thousands of devotees hungering for their guru. And you pleased all and sundry, even children. We will cherish your memories till we breathe our last.

When we look back, we realize that you sweated blood to further BAPS causes. So, a fitting tribute came from Mahant Swami Maharaj himself during an assembly in Ahmedabad. He said, "Pramukh Swami did everything, rather more than everything he was expected to do. Now, nothing remains. Tell me, what remains now!"

But, as you would agree, BAPS has never rested on its laurels and there are miles to go yet – more sadhus, more temples, more societal projects and more of everything BAPS does.

O Swami Bapa, continue showering the divine vibes of Akshardham upon us so that the BAPS melody gets richer. Bapa, thank you for everything you've done for us.

Our heartfelt prostrations to you, Gurudev!

◆  
- Kaushik Joshi





# Tributes to PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

*Translated extracts of tributes offered by Mahant Swami Maharaj and  
the sadguru sadhus in Sarangpur*

## AN EMBODIMENT OF DIVINITY



When Swamishri passed away on 13 August 2016, hundreds of thousands rushed from all corners of India and the globe to Sarangpur for his final darshan and to pay their respects. Many distinguished people from India and abroad spontaneously paid glowing tributes to him. The overwhelming response reflected Swamishri's divine personality and monumental services to humanity.

I had known and experienced Swamishri at close quarters for over six decades. He was truly an embodiment of divinity and idol of compassion, simplicity, tolerance and humility. No words can describe his selfless Himalayan efforts in

sanctifying the homes of innumerable devotees, and personally meeting, writing letters and attending phone calls to guide, comfort, and provide spiritual succour to countless souls.

He touched and transformed millions of hearts to do good to others. He left a legacy of hundreds of temples and a vibrant satsang community. He inspired countless to live an addiction-free, morally upright and spiritually enlightened life. He motivated all to serve with the spirit of selfless service, and to live in harmony with humanity and in tune with God.

His devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj was unparalleled. The Akshar-Purushottam mandirs he built inspire bhakti, *upasana*, morality, *seva* and the universal values of Sanatan Dharma. In

the whirlpool of activities, his inner self was always anchored to God.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message, "In the joy of others lies our own," urges all to serve humbly and selflessly and contribute towards a happier, harmonious and peaceful humanity. He used to see God in all. He was one of the rarest souls that our country and the world have been blessed with. I pray that he forever showers his inspirations, blessings and spiritual guidance and wisdom upon us all. May his life credo, "To be the last of the least," be the guiding light for all devotees. And may all devotees consolidate *samp*, *suhradaybhav* and *ekta* in their lives and strive to advance his noble works to gain blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- HH Mahant Swami Maharaj  
(29 September 2016, Sarangpur)

### HE WAS MOST EXTRAORDINARY



Pramukh Swami Maharaj had studied upto sixth standard in Gujarati. He did not speak English. Pramukh Swami Maharaj appeared to be very ordinary in some aspects of his life. Yet, when we look at all his works and achievements, he was extraordinary. The reason for this was he had God's strength.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not have an iota of ego. Despite his great stature he had always remained humble towards all.

When anyone sees or knows about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's works he would feel deep respect for him, regardless of his religion, caste or country.

I believe that the honours Pramukh Swami Maharaj got in his lifetime very few people in our world may have received. His uniqueness was that he remained untouched by the honours offered to him and equipoised in the face of insults. Any other person in such situations would either become overexcited or pale-faced.

Because God was manifest in Swamishri's heart he remained unaffected by praise and insult. And subsequently he could accomplish all his works.

- Pujya Dr Swami  
(15 August 2016, Sarangpur)

### SUPREME DEVOTION TO GOD



Pramukh Swami Maharaj landed at Nairobi airport in 1974. Then an announcement was made that Pramukh Swami Maharaj and party would not be allowed to disembark the plane, but would have to return to Mumbai. At that time, Swamishri calmly replied, "Maharaj's wish prevails. God is the all-doer and whatever happens is due to his wish. We should remain happy in that."

The flight returned to Mumbai and we reached Dadar Mandir at 2.00 a.m. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was concerned that Shri Harikrishna Maharaj had not been offered any food all day. Swamishri cared less about the fact that he had fasted all day. He told Tyagvallabh Swami and Ghanshyam Swami to cook food and prepare a *thal* for Harikrishna Maharaj. Once it was ready and placed before Thakorji, Swamishri sat before him and sang *thal*. Then he offered prostrations, asking Maharaj to forgive him for not being able to offer him food. Then someone told Swamishri to take his bath, do puja and have his meal. But he refused, saying that Harikrishna Maharaj had eaten so it was fine. Thereafter, he went to sleep, and took his bath and did puja in the morning. After doing Thakorji's darshan he had breakfast.

For many, this and many other incidents, revealed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's supreme devotion towards Harikrishna Maharaj, and countless have been inspired to offer bhakti to God and please him.

- Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami  
(16 August 2016, Sarangpur)



## COMPASSION AND CARE FOR ALL



Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived his entire life for others. He never cared for his health and schedules for meals and sleep for the sake of pleasing the devotees.

Once, Swamishri was in Vasad (Gujarat). It was *ekadashi* and Swamishri was observing a waterless fast. Initially 22 *padhramanis* were arranged, but eventually Swamishri visited and sanctified 122 homes. On returning to the house where he was staying everyone realized that he had a fever of 102°F. When sadhus asked him when he got the fever, Swamishri replied that it had started the previous night. The sadhus said that if he had informed them earlier they could have cancelled the home visits. But Swamishri responded that the devotees, after making preparations for his visit, would have been pained by the cancellation. In this way Swamishri had never cared or paid attention to his health and discomforts.

- Puja Tyagvallabh Swami  
(15 August 2016, Sarangpur)

## SERVANT OF GOD



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's humble devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj was apparent throughout his life. He always gave all credit to his guru for his small or great achievements. During his nearly 50 years as guru he had immensely increased the progress of BAPS. The root of all this was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's faith and bhakti towards his guru Shastriji Maharaj.

He organized and celebrated mega festivals like the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1981) and Gunatitanand Swami (1985), Cultural Festivals of India in London

(1985) and USA (1991), Centenary Celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj (1992) in Gandhinagar, and he built Akshardhams in Gandhinagar and New Delhi. He established hundreds of mandirs in India and abroad, thus inspiring faith in countless devotees, youths and children. But he always attributed all his achievements to be the grace of Maharaj and Swami.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave up his physical body and appointed Puja Mahant Swami in his place. So, we must all obey his wishes and instructions and please him.

- Puja Ishwarcharan Swami  
(16 August 2016, Sarangpur)

## COLOSSAL VICHARAN



Regardless of day or night, Pramukh Swami Maharaj kept on doing his *vicharan*. Once, he did *padhramanis* all night in Philadelphia. On another occasion he had lunch at 5.00 p.m. instead of 12 noon. In spite of severe discomforts and difficulties he never lost his temper or became agitated. He silently tolerated hardships and pressures.

Looking back in retrospect one realizes that Satsang flourished greatly because of his *vicharan*. So, Swamishri has done great favours for us all. He spent every moment of his life for us. He earned the love and respect of millions of people from various religious, political and social spheres. Though Swamishri passed away at 95 years his work is ongoing, and in his place we have Mahant Swami Maharaj. This was the uniqueness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj; otherwise the works of such great persons come to an end after their departure. But this is not the case in our organization, and that is why the Sanstha is still progressing and moving forward. ♦

- Puja Viveksagar Swami  
(15 August 2016, Sarangpur)





## Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan: A Saga in Paintings

*This iconic publication of 49 outstanding paintings, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath, is the culmination of many years of dedicated endeavour and builds on a rich tradition of art in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. The following text is the Publishers Note in the book...*

**T**he concluding years of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century turned out to be the confluence of a crucial period in the history of India. On the political, social and religious front it was a period of total darkness. Western India, however, was witnessing a new dawn which was rejuvenating the millennia-old Indian culture. On the one hand there was a macabre dance of blind beliefs and violence, and on the other there was a peaceful revolution to uplift people from superstitions. *Ekantik dharma* was being ushered in to replace blind beliefs which

had been fobbed off as religion.

The reason for this resurgence?

Because in western India Swami Shri Sahajanand Maharaj – Parabrahman Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan – was spreading the light of spirituality. *Paramhansa* Swami Muktanandji, a contemporary saint of Swaminarayan Bhagwan, succinctly put the role of his master who pierced the veil of spiritual darkness in these words:

“A sun named Sahajanand has lovingly manifested, lifting the darkness of *adharma*...”<sup>1</sup>

Bhagwan Swaminarayan sounded the bugle to

1. *Kirtan Muktavali*, Swaminarayan Aksharpath, 10th Edition (1998), p. 395.



redeem mankind and within three decades showered nectarine rain. The noted Gandhian scholar, Kishorelal Mashruvala, writes, among other things, “He illumined the hearts of many others with his effulgence; he attracted the minds of several and controlled them with his lofty words as guru; he pilfered the stealing propensities of thieves [in other words, he reformed them]; he re-established the *brahmacharya* tradition which was on the decline; he reined in the unrestrained and independent renunciates; he showed the path to fallen gurus and acharyas; he gave women their rightful place in society and redeemed them; he taught right conduct to the underprivileged; he promoted literature, music and arts; he performed nonviolent sacrifices; he propagated the dharma of forgiveness; he championed cleanliness and good conduct; he nurtured pure devotion and the path of spiritual knowledge; he taught *bhagvat dharma* and the teachings of Vyasa. Such was Sahajanand Swami.”<sup>2</sup>

Born on 3 April 1781 in Chhapaiya, near Ayodhya, into an orthodox Sarvariya Brahmin family, Sahajanand Swami was, from a young age, known for his wisdom, intellectual acumen and sharp mind. He gave a glimpse of his divine traits from the very beginning. By the age of ten, he had completed study of the shastras and demonstrated his skill as a participant in a scholarly debate in Kashi. At the age of 11, he renounced home and crossed the mighty Himalayan peaks to enter Nepal and performed rigorous austerities at Muktinath-Pulhashram. He trekked from Sundarvan in the east to Kanyakumari in the south. After covering 12,000 km, he finally entered Gujarat. At that time the 18th century was coming to a close. His discerning mind enabled him to make a critical assessment of India. His compassionate heart was moved by what he saw

during the time which historians have labeled as ‘the darkest period of history’.

What he did subsequently can fill volumes in the annals of history. One of the founding fathers of our constitution and noted statesman, Kanhaiyalal Munshi, describes Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s entry into Gujarat in these words, “Being a Brahmin, a versatile pandit, a staunch Vaishnav, and an ideal sannyasi, the sadhu-cum-reformer added a great enlightenment to the culture of Gujarat by his life and living. A representative of a last religious era was reappearing on the threshold of the nineteenth century.”<sup>3</sup>

Renowned Gujarati litterateur, Yashvant Shukla, writes, “Where there was uncertainty, blind superstition, chaos, he came and worked for 30 years. He came to Gujarat in 1801. That means at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Bhagwan Swaminarayan came [to Gujarat] at the turn of the century, and became the harbinger of an era.”<sup>4</sup>

In the words of the famous poet Nahanalal, “Great souls sprinkle nectar upon the world. Swaminarayan sprinkled nectar in our Gujarat and revived it. What did Swaminarayan do? If we ask this historical question, we get the reply in one line, ‘Shriji Maharaj cleansed Gujarat with the waters of the Saryu and washed it in divinity.’ Swaminarayan was the sun of a new dawn.”<sup>5</sup>

Bishop Reginald Heber, a Christian missionary who was appointed as Bishop of Calcutta, had heard a great deal about Bhagwan Swaminarayan while in England. He came to Gujarat to meet him on 26 March 1825. He described the meeting in these words, “Some good had been done, Mr Williamson said, among many of these wild people, by the preaching and popularity of the Hindoo reformer, Swamee Narain, who had been

2. *Sahajanand Swami athva Swaminarayan Sampradaya*, Kishorelal Mashruvala, Navjivan Press, Ahmedabad, 2nd Edition (1940), p.80.

3. *Gujaratni Asmita*, Kanhaiyalal Maneklal Munshi, p. 63.

4. ‘*Atitishak Sandarbhma Swaminarayan Sampradaynu Pradan*’, Yashvant Shukla, in *Swaminarayan Sant Sahitya*, Raghuvir Chaudhary (Editor), BAPS Sanstha (1981), Ahmedabad, p. 125.

5. *Kavishvar Dalpatram*: Part 1, 1st Edition (1933).



mentioned to me at Baroda. His morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from the Shaster.... those villages and districts which had received him, from being among the worst, were now among the best and most orderly in the provinces. Nor was this all in so much as he was said to have destroyed the yoke of castes, to have preached one God..."<sup>6</sup>

A contemporary British historian, Henry George Briggs, was surprised at the transformation brought about by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Gujarat and writes, "While the present undisturbed state of the country compared to its condition previously will speak volumes for him."<sup>7</sup>

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was such an epoch-maker. Brahmanand Swami, a great poet-saint of that era and a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has given us a glimpse of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's greatness through 8,000 bhajan compositions; The distinguished poet, Premanand Swami, wrote 14,000 poems; Muktanand, Nishkulanand, Devanand and others penned thousands of poems and numerous books. Gopalanand Swami and Nityanand Swami, endowed with godly wisdom, wrote several classics. The versatility of these stalwart scholars has documented the divine personality of Bhagwan Swaminarayan for the benefit of every generation of Gujarat. Such was the personality of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

He had never visited England. Yet, 200 years ago, when he was alive, writings appeared about him in England. From Professor Monier Williams, who graced the Boden Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford University in the 19th century, to Gandhian thinker Kishorelal Mashruvala and the modern-day French scholar, Francoise Mallisson, all have tried to understand his life and work.

Paying a tribute to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Mahatma Gandhi writes, "What work one Sahajanand could do in Gujarat, the might of authority could not do and will never be able to do."<sup>8</sup>

*The Asiatic Journal*, published from London, writes in an 1823 issue, about the commendable work Bhagwan Swaminarayan was then doing in Gujarat, "In his lifetime, the most intelligent people in the province, while they regretted (as Hindus) the levelling nature of his system, acknowledged their belief that his preaching had produced great effect in improving the morals of the people. My own intercourse with natives leads me to form the same opinion."<sup>9</sup>

Noted Gujarati author, Chandravadan Mehta writes, "If Sahajanand Swami were not present, we could not have been able to put the appellation 'proud' (*garavi*) before Gujarat; instead of the good conduct, we would have had ugliness and disorderly conditions. Today, on hearing the name of Gujarat our hearts swell with pride. But for Sahajanand Swami, we would have been forced to hang our heads in shame. In Gujarat today, whatever good there is by way of conduct or nonviolence, a major share of the credit goes to Sahajanand Swami. He lifted Gujarat from the abysmal depths of degradation. Although a newcomer, he redeemed the place and uplifted the downtrodden. As such, Sahajanand deserves the salutations of every Gujarati."<sup>10</sup>

It does not stop there. Even during his life Sahajanand Swami was revered like Parabrahman (God) and was worshipped as such by more than 3,000 sadhus and over 20 lakh devotees.

The dedication and understanding with which his stalwart *paramhansas* maintained a record of

6. *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824-1825*, Vol. III, Reginald Heber (Bishop of Calcutta), p. 29, (London: John Murray, 1828).

7. *Cities of Gurjarashtra*, Henry George Briggs (1849), p. 233.

8. Gandhiji's speech broadcast from Akashvani, Mumbai, Murli Thakar (Editor). *Gandhi Vani*, Sastu Sahitya Mandir, p. 209 and *Gandhiji Vyapak Dharma Bhavna*, Navjivan Prakashan Mandir, Ahmedabad (1961).

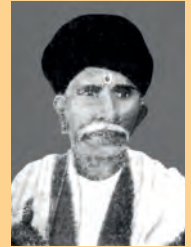
9. *Asiatic Journal*, First Series, London, 1823, XV, pp. 348-9.

10. *Bhagwan Swaminarayan ane Antyodaya*, 1st Edition, March 1999, Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad, p. 111.





During Bhagwan Swaminarayan's lifetime, his portrait was first drawn by the renowned artist and devotee Shri Narayanji Suthar (below) of Bhuj. On Vasant Panchami (Maha *sud* 5), Samvat 1880, he drew the line portrait of Shriji Maharaj (far left). In accordance with Shriji Maharaj's wishes, he also made other drawings. Under his tutelage, the talented saint Adharanand Swami also produced paintings of Shriji Maharaj (left).



his life and works is unparalleled in history. In this respect, particular mention should be made of their vivid portraiture of their master, his daily *lilas* and other aspects of his life, in both prose and verse. Rarely has such an account been maintained of a *mahapurush*, an emperor or leader in such detail as has been done in the case of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Even thousands of years from now there shall be no dispute about Bhagwan Swaminarayan's deeds and words thanks to these word pictures.

What did Bhagwan Swaminarayan look like? We do not have any photographs of him, as photography had not been invented when he passed away in 1830. But the description of his life by his *paramhansa* disciples for the benefit of posterity serves better than any photograph. Their pen sketches graphically depict Bhagwan Swaminarayan's physical appearance from head to toe. But, what is most interesting is that the description was penned, vetted and became popular during his lifetime. As an example let us consider the description of his face:

"To the right side of his nose, there was a big mole. Above it and below the corner of his eye, there was a small mole. Above and below the eyelashes of both his eyes, there were fine wrinkles. Above his nose, there were minute smallpox marks. In his mouth, there was a black mark on the lower right jaw. His tongue was red

like a lotus petal. In his left ear, there was a small round black mark. On his broad and high forehead, there were two lines projecting upwards in the shape of a *tilak*. Below the hairline on the right side of his forehead, there was a mark. On the lobe of his right ear, there was a small mole. On his upper palate there was a large mole. Just above the tuft of hair on the crown of his head, there was a small mole and to the right of the tuft there were three very small moles."

What was Bhagwan Swaminarayan's face like? His face was round; his forehead and cheeks stood out; his eyes were pointed and roofed by thick, black eyebrows shaped like a bow.

Such detailed descriptions by his contemporary poet-disciples enable us to visualize his handsome features in our hearts and minds even 200 years later.

But, like these word pictures, had any paintings of him been made during his life time? Yes, during his time some sketches were made which are valuable historic records and were used as *murtis* for worship. Thereafter, to this day, countless works of art have been produced to record his *lilas* and personality. The beginning was during Bhagwan Swaminarayan's lifetime by two blessed, pious artists – Shri Naranbhai Suthar and Sadguru Adharanand Swami. The pictures which the two drew while sitting before Bhagwan Swaminarayan retain their historic



value to this day as objects of reverence. Since then, over time, the work of these two artists has inspired numerous others to present Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life in art form.

This publication is a unique collection of paintings depicting Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life and work in a way that has never been attempted before. This outstanding presentation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's great life in the form of realistic paintings will, thus, become a significant and an invaluable part of the Sampradaya's art heritage. We are delighted to place this pictorial volume before the devotees and art lovers of the world.

Painting is a sacred medium that gives shape to the nebulous ideas of the heart. It transcends time and place and gives expression to the mental image of the artist; his sentiments and emotions find complete form. Mere colour, brush and canvas is like a body without life; the artist, with his sentiments, gives them shape and life with his creation. The lifeless materials come alive and give expression to his feelings.

The central subject of this artistic effort is Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This portfolio of oil paintings brings alive before one's mind's eye his life from birth to the end, focusing on his divinity and actions as supreme God. The album does not, however, cover the entire life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, but deals with 49 important incidents of his life. They are just like a drop in the ocean. But the artist has done full justice to the narrative. In this, every incident has been enlivened by the brush and feelings of the artist. The viewer must patiently examine each painting to appreciate the virtuosity of the artist and experience the joy that each scene evokes.

The credit for this outstanding set of paintings goes to master artist Shri Vasudeo Kamath. He has delved deep into each incident before painting and producing the final works of art. It is because of his capacity to do this that the work has acquired authenticity. We cannot adequately thank him for these monumental paintings. Future

generations will remember him with gratitude for giving them a glimpse and feel of Swaminarayan Bhagwan's life and work.

This is the first portfolio of oil paintings concerning Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the history of the Sampradaya. The portfolio is divided into three sections:

1. Ghanshyam Yug: the childhood of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, 2. Neelkanth Yug: the teenage years of his life and 3. Swaminarayan Yug: the period from age 21 onwards.

How did these paintings come into being? Here is a brief history.

Two hundred years after Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, walked in the footsteps of his master and promoted art, music and literature. It was his ardent desire that Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine *lila* be captured on canvas in realistic paintings, so that future generations would be inspired by his divine life. From beginning to end, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami has creatively guided every aspect of this project. His boundless devotion and enthusiasm have resulted in this unique collection of paintings.

Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj made important suggestions regarding the 49 incidents from Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life selected for illustration. Then, for hours on end, Ishwarcharandas Swami, Shrijiswarupdas Swami and Aksharvatsaldas Swami took each incident and discussed it at length from various angles with Shri Vasudeo Kamath before he proceeded with the art work. He first produced a rough sketch based on their discussions. Then, the above team of saints scrutinized each sketch, analysing in detail every aspect of the illustration. Thereafter, Shri Vasudeo Kamath made the necessary changes based on the critical reviews. It was not an easy task to visualize the locale, to choose the right colours, attire, backgrounds and other features of the scenes. But Shri Vasudeo Kamath succeeded



due to his own virtuosity, research and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings. It was indeed a challenge, but he succeeded in pleasing Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The artist's odyssey began in 1996 and concluded 15 years later. Finally, this pictorial epic came into being. Each painting brings out something unique in Bhagwan Swaminarayan's personality and provides a new angle to view it. The idea in publishing this artistic work is to make it accessible to as many people as possible.

We thank Shrijiwarupdas Swami for the attractive design and production of the book. We thank Aksharvatsaldas Swami for the informative Gujarati text that accompanies each painting. We thank Brahnaviharidas Swami and Amrutvijaydas Swami for the English text.

Renowned artist and art critic Shri Ravi Paranjape of Pune has assessed many art books. When this book was sent to him, he was deeply impressed and agreed to write the foreword. We profusely thank him for his valuable contributions.

This book would not have been possible without the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who himself was continuously immersed in devotion and service to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guided innumerable others onto that path also. After looking at the paintings, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj was delighted and profusely blessed the artist for producing this superb

portfolio. Millions of salutations at his feet.

Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj has always blessed Shri Vasudeo Kamath and his work. In placing this work entrusted to us by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the hands of Mahant Swami Maharaj, we experience great joy and the satisfaction that we have presented it to Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself in person.

It is worth noting that each one of these oil paintings has been produced at considerable cost, but this has been waived and the price of the book is based only on the cost of printing. Thus, enabling a wider circulation of this historic publication.

With these opening words, let us savour the divine life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in paintings presented by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha through Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

The true value of this pictorial publication lies not only in the paintings themselves, but in the way each viewer absorbs and lives the universal values propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In the end, the aim of art is to enjoy the bliss of God. It is also the object of these paintings.

We pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj to bless Vasudeo Kamath and the entire team involved in producing this pictorial publication. ♦

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith

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*The following is the book's Foreword by Ravi Paranjape, a renowned artist and art critic based in Pune...*



Ever since I was drawn to painting as an art, its two functions captured me intellectually and emotionally. The intellectual side of any painting sorted out the communication aspects in a painting, while the emotional side, I thought, revealed

itself through the expressive aspect. This view about a painting fitted very well in my Hindu ethos about culture, civilization and philosophy, that believes in the fact that *saguna* (the real) and *nirguna* (the abstract) are inseparable. My natural inclination towards Hindustani classical raga music reconfirmed my belief in this inseparability when I discerned the in-separability of raga,



*bandish-taal* and *khyaal* in Hindustani music.

Truly speaking, quality realism in painting can be enjoyed on three levels as in music. That is to say that a painting can be enjoyed and discerned as *shastra* (science), *vidya* (knowledge) and *kala* (art) as in music. This, in fact, should have been the first task conceived and carried out in the post-independence era by Lalit Kala Akadami when it was formed in 1957. But people who mattered then had nothing to do with nation building. Quite naturally therefore, the realism in painting came to be totally neglected in preference to the distorted trends from post-war Europe and the West.

Here I may perhaps be questioned about the relevance of realism to nation building, but probably the person who may raise the question will be one of those who has not ever heard about or seen the epic painterly works by artists like Olphonse Mucha, Laurence Alma-Tadema, Raja Ravi Verma, Norman Rockwell, S.M. Pandit and the like. All these great painters glorified their respective country's history and cultural heritage.

Ever since S.M. Pandit passed away in 1993, I was under the impression that there will be a long gap before an Indian painter with epic qualities would emerge. But I was wrong. Because Vasudeo Kamath, whom I knew so well, was quietly engaging himself in a huge project to paint epic works on the life of Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan. Thus from 1995 till the beginning of the 21st century Vasudeo completed 49 paintings on the subject. The subject involved a great deal of study of Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan's life history, long tours throughout the length and breadth of Bharat and innumerable pictorial studies from live models and photographs. Apart from this, the project must have tested Vasudeo Kamath's great visualizing powers and painterly virtuosity to organize every single work in this project; particularly where he has handled composition involving more than five human figures. I particularly would like to mention a horizontal painting by

Vasudeo in this book. It is a work depicting a huge procession where His Holiness Shri Neelkanth is entering some town. Every single figure here, a man, woman or a child, is very realistically painted. And one unmistakably witnesses a dramatic scene unfolding itself. This can be achieved only by such an artist who has the rare ability to be one with the chosen subject. This ability necessarily throws light on Vasudeo Kamath's intuitive approach to realism in art.

I do not know if Vasudeo personally would agree with me, however, I want to say that the kind of modernism that entered our art education, deprived the emphasis on the very qualities Vasudeo has displayed in the work for this project. Here, I want to highlight three works representing his rare qualities. It is not to say that only these three works are good. No, no! That is not my intention. Because I have liked each and every work of his from the point of view of pictorial organization, detailing relevant to the subject, his command over the paint medium and really first class figurative work.

The first painting that struck me in this respect was of Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan who is shown carrying a stone slab himself, and the other awestricken sadhu and his fellow stone carvers looking at Shri Swaminarayan at the site of a temple construction. Here Vasudeo Kamath's rare sense of perspective and his ability to handle architectural detail stands out effectively.

The second painting that appealed to me, both intellectually and emotionally at once was that of *gaushala* under mayhem caused by stormy rains. Here we see Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan shouldering a heavy girder of the roof to protect the cows. Here I feel all of Vasudeo Kamath's abilities were put to the most rigorous of tests that can be applied to a realistic painter. And I would like to congratulate him for the distinction he has acquired.

The third painting that I would like to highlight is that of the initiation ceremony where



Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan Maharaj is found bestowing his blessings to one of his sadhus. It is in fact a *yagna* ceremony with a huge gathering of his disciples, dignitaries, men and women attending the ceremony. I think this painting by Vasudeo stands out for its unique design strategy without which the painting would have resulted in what could be called a pictorial chaos. The broad areas in this could be considered to be those occupied by saffron clad sadhus, the auspicious yellow of the platform with Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan Maharaj, earthy brown area around the *yagna*, area of red carpet where the dignitaries are and a generally white area with tonal variations. Also, the area occupied by the roofs, building walls and the foliage. I personally feel that the festive looking support of the pandal, emanating from

the red carpet and the well tied up curtain showing garlands of marigold flowers is particularly noteworthy. This is so, because of the poles being compositionally correctly positioned. This indeed talks highly about Vasudeo Kamath, who is one of the top painter-illustrators of India.

Lastly, I would say that the worthy humanitarian and inspiring life led by Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan needed to be documented pictorially. And with the blessings of His Holiness Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a great saint of our times, I am very happy to find that my younger friend of international acclaim Shri Vasudeo Kamath has created this inspiring document in pictures so well.

I hope artists throughout India and abroad would like to own this pictorial treasure.

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*The following is the Preface by the book's artist, Vasudeo Kamath...*



I recall an incident which occurred a few years ago. A learned poet wished to have me paint a frontispiece for his collection of religious poems. He asked me about remuneration. I quoted a rate that I thought was reasonable at the time. Perhaps he thought it was too high; he began to explain that his was a book on religion and I should approach it as a service rendered to the divine. I told him with a gentle smile that I would not paint anything that smacked of irreligion. To paint noble paintings is my 'religion and karma'. I believe that my craft is a gift from God. After that he did not say anything and he did not commission me to paint the picture. So be it!

I can say with certainty that, till today, my work as an artist has not been profaned by 'irreligion'. My work has been informed by beauty and values. It has been my good fortune that most of

my creations have promoted Indian culture. No doubt, art has an element of aesthetic beauty and attraction, but it should not degenerate into an instrument of gross enjoyment; rather it should be a vehicle of culture. That has been my aim as an artist. I realize it is because of this that, by God's grace, I have been associated time and again with sadhus who have similar views.

I came in contact with the BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya in 1989. I first met Param Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, Param Pujya Bhaktinandandas Swami and Param Pujya Shrijiswarupdas Swami at Mumbai's Dadar Mandir. As a result of the love and affection I got from these saints I became attached to this Sampradaya.

During the first encounter, I was touched by Param Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami's gentle smile. Param Pujya Bhaktinandandas Swami looked at me as if he was glimpsing my inner soul! They had a look at my work and were satisfied by it. Param Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami told



me that I had to draw sketches for a book on the life of Param Puja Yogiji Maharaj. I willingly accepted the assignment. With this, my inseparable link with the BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya was established. After that I made a portrait of Yogi Bapa, picture stories of the Ramayan, the Mahabharat and Swaminarayan Bhagwan, and then other paintings.

Around the middle of 1992, Puja Ishwarcharandas Swami inspired me to paint the life story of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on canvas. Param Puja Aksharvatsaldas Swami narrated to me the full life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. As I was listening to the narration the sketches took form in my mind.

Before undertaking the work I made a request to Swamiji that I, along with my wife, would like to visit the places in Gujarat sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the course of his *vicharan*. Swamiji readily granted my request. Thus, I visited 200-year-old houses, inspected vehicles and took photographs of articles sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. At every holy spot I visited I felt the divine presence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and I obtained the golden key to prepare the portraits of the great soul.

My first portrait was presented on the occasion of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday celebration. I obtained the blessing of Brahaswarup Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He sanctified my work by applying kumkum on it. It took ten years for me to complete the project. Param Puja Bhaktinandan Swami, Param Puja Krishnaswarup Swami and others used to guide me in order to enhance the creative value of the pictures. Thus, the portraits became more beautiful and perfect.

It is difficult to draw historical pictures as the artist has to capture the ambience of that era. Just as one has to provide the dress, various poses and directions while arranging the stage, similarly, while drawing a historical picture, one

has to keep in mind the social conditions, dress, customs, etc. of the time. But in this case the artist has to do all these things alone, unlike in a stage setting.

My work is original and not an imitation. Every picture has sprung of itself. Bhagwan Swaminarayan spent his childhood in the village of Chhapaiya, near Ayodhya in North India. The pictures were drawn keeping in view the prevailing rural atmosphere of the place at that time. In the same way, Nilkanth's *kalyan yatra* throughout the length and breadth of India has been captured in sketches keeping the surroundings in view. Today, it looks as though these sketches have become a witness to the life and times of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The release of these sketches with the blessings of Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a matter of immense joy to me and all those concerned. May this serve as an inspiration to devotees and all others; that is my ardent prayer.

Nowadays such work is becoming rare. If it inspires others to take up such work, I shall consider my effort truly successful.

When I look at the pictures, I repeatedly get the feeling that I have not drawn them. God has made them through me. I was only an instrument in his hands. This sacred task was made possible only through Bapa's grace. 'This has not been done by me' – with this humble refrain I place this offering at the divine feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Whatever I have acquired as merits, I distribute among the members of my family, relatives and friends.

May this bring good fortune to all!

Jai Swaminarayan. ◆



# BOOK OPENING SPEECHES

*On 21 April 2017, a grand inauguration ceremony of 'Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan: A Saga in Paintings' was organized in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj, sadguru sadhus and renowned artists at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad.*

*Guest speakers addressed the mammoth assembly and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the congregation.*



## **Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj**

For many years I had been searching. Many paintings of God have been made, but within I felt something was missing. But on seeing the publication of Kamathji's paintings I feel fulfilled.

When I started looking at the book, I could not get past the third painting. Such divinity in them! The colour combinations, the expressions and actions of the characters are fantastic. I feel like repeatedly looking at the paintings. And Kamathji is also satisfied that his work is a success.

In the future, people will be inspired by these paintings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and produce their own art.

The distinguished artists on stage fully understand this art. The paintings are excellent and effective. The printing is outstanding.

Today, I pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj that may there be peace throughout the world and that this book inspires countless.



## **Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami Convenor, BAPS**

With Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings, we had tried for many years to produce paintings on the divine life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. For that, we had met many distinguished artists in Mumbai and throughout India. But, ultimately, God's will prevails. For the past 20-25 years, Vasudeobhai Kamath has given his



artistic services to the BAPS. He has been profusely blessed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It is through such blessings that this book has been possible. He also has the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who is the all-doer. He works through people to accomplish divine works. Kamathji also received blessings from Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Vasudeobhai has done this work wholeheartedly. He understood every incident, its surroundings and atmosphere, the characters involved and the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Through this publication, children and youths especially will be given a graphic insight into Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine life.



**Shri Vasudeo Kamath**  
**Renowned Artist, President,**  
**Sanskar Bharati, Mumbai**

Seeing today's assembly, I recall the incident of the sculptor of the unique Kailas Mandir, who

on seeing the completed mandir, said, "I have not made this. It has been self-made by the grace of God." That is what I experience here today. Just as in these paintings, canvases, paints and brushes have been used, in the same way a person named Vasudeo Kamath has been used. The true artist is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. What greater privilege is there than being a medium for his work?

In these paintings, the 200-year-old history of Bhagwan Swaminarayan has been painted. In our tradition, from ancient times up to Akshardham, the mandirs or monuments that have been made, you do not find the name of the sculptor or artist. Through these paintings, I pray that people forget Vasudeo Kamath and continue to be inspired for generations to come.

Art inspires life not only in humans but also in creatures. It is my great fortune that I have received the blessings of such a great saint and been a part of this art. I do not have words to describe my joy and experience.



**Baba Shri Yogendraji**  
**Distinguished Artist, Founder,**  
**Sanskar Bharati, Delhi**

I bow to the divine power who has enabled today's gathering to take place. He manifested on this earth, endeavoured for the liberation of mankind and gave humanity a new life. He created a system, which inspires society on to the path of life directed by the shastras.

Through Kamathji's paints and brushes, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the divine power, observed how the paintings were developing. How divine must his *lilas* have been.

I am thankful and bow to the organizers for convening such a distinguished panel of artists on this stage.

Only the inspirations of saints give direction. That Brahmaswarup himself is seated here. I bow to the highest Lord Bhagwan Swaminarayan and pray that he inspires us all.

Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj said to Kamathji, "Go, see what life there is like. Have darshan there and then paint it. I bow and pray to Paramatma to send such Brahmaswarup *mahapurushes* who are an ideal for this country and the world. Such *mahapurushes*, manifest on earth, give darshan, do their work, give direction and depart. I believe that such a power is seated here today and giving blessings. I repeatedly bow to that divine power.



**Shri Ravi Paranjape**  
**Renowned Artist and**  
**Art Critic, Pune**

The publication being released today is a landmark publication, in which reality is represented. The artist has captured the invisible and paramount emotions. In any exemplary painting, reality and intangible emotions cannot be separated. In this 21st century, one artist who has been able to bring such emotions to his paintings



is Vasudeo Kamath. He has produced such outstanding work that it will forever have influence. I firmly believe that on seeing this publication on Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the artists of not only India, but young artists worldwide will be profoundly impacted and inspired.



**Shri Advait Gadnayak**  
**Distinguished Sculptor,**  
**Director General, National**  
**Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi**

Art has no language. The canvas is ultimately only a canvas, but the painting drawn on the canvas manifests the emotions.

When I sculpt stones, at first there is a duel, then a resolution. Finally, the stage comes when the skin of the stone becomes one with the skin of the sculptor. The stone and the surroundings become one. This leads to creation. Eventually, even we do not know what is happening!

That is what has happened in this publication. The artist imagines. Sometimes, he sends a message to nature. When that reaches, a bond is formed. Then creation occurs.

When metal is rubbed against a magnet, it also becomes a magnet. Similarly, when one repeatedly contacts the highest power, one experiences it. The paintings we see here today are a necessity for society. With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Shri Kamathji has created such paintings. Congratulations to him.



**Shri Sachchidanand Joshi**  
**Renowned Art Critic, Member**  
**Secretary, IGNCA, Delhi**

In our Indira Gandhi Nation Centre for Arts, we have a book worth ₹ 200,000. The publication being released today is a mere ₹ 1200. In comparison, a book which contains magnificent historical paintings we can get so readily. For that, I bow to the sadhus.

To paint this book is truly an artistic challenge, which Shri Kamathji boldly undertook. We all know that Bhagwan Swaminarayan departed in 1830, while photography was invented in 1837. So, we are all thankful to all the sadhus and devotees of his time, who narrated his personality so vividly, that Kamathji has enlivened him through this collection of paintings.

One sees the *murti* of God within according to one's feelings within. I think that Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself entered Kamathji and gave darshan to him.

Through this artistic creation on Bhagwan Swaminarayan, I feel the tradition of Raja Ravi Vermaji, S.M. Panditji and Madhukarji. That tradition lives on through Kamathji. In the future, this publication will also inspire new artists.

The very first painting depicts the time of his birth. The portrayal is so beautiful: the expressions on the faces of the mother, the women around and the little kids on the trees. With beautiful imagination, this painting has such a grand poetic finish.

In another painting, he has superbly depicted the birth of the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*. Through his divine powers, Bhagwan Swaminarayan grants samadhi to a devotee. The expression on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's face at that time is truly astonishing. And the sadhus seated all around him also have different expressions. I have not seen such a wide variety of expressions depicting wonder.

I sincerely congratulate Kamathji for giving us this outstanding display of art. I also congratulate the reverend sadhus of BAPS, with whose blessings and inspiration, this has been created.



**Shri C.S. Krishna Shetty**  
**Renowned Artist,**  
**Administrator, National**  
**Lalitkala Academy, Delhi**

This saga in paintings, published by the Swaminarayan



Aksharpith, is an inspiring offering to the community of artists and art lovers. It is also a memorable insignia of Swaminarayan Aksharpith, who is the initiator of this project.

Swamiji, as a practicing artist myself, I offer my deep seated appreciation to you for this project. Without your farsightedness and dedication, this volume of works would not have come to fruition. I also take this opportunity to offer my congratulations to the artist Vasudeo Kamath, who I understand had been working on this epic project over many years and has come up with hundreds of iconic works tracing a detailed study of Shri Swaminarayan's life. The volume that we have in our midst therefore, has truly been a test of fire for its executor, because it has involved a detailed research into the life of this subject as also long trips to the corners of the country in search of valid documentation. Only then could such a lifelike and authentic recasting of biographical and spiritual detail have been achieved.

Before I am tempted to eulogize on the painterly skills that the artworks bring to life, I must pay due regard to some revolutionary aspects that this unique project has fielded. This volume of realistic paintings of yeomen quality brings to mind the greatest works of European art acknowledged by the world. Like the works comprising the present volume, the latter had been created in churches and monasteries and were commissioned by the clergy of these institutions. Such is the origin of frescoes in the cathedral in Milan, namely the Last Supper, and the plethora of artworks in the Basilica in Rome, to name a few. Those works are now in the category of human heritage. Today, with the fruition of these paintings on Shri Swaminarayan, Indian art has been bequeathed a historic takeaway. The paintings on Shri Swaminarayan, executed by Vasudeo Kamath, who is by all accounts the leading portrait master of our times, has instituted an Indian chapter to world art, on the same lines. The subject of his art has a spiritual takeaway and the

sponsors of this laudable project come from an enlightened order that is acknowledged for its activities worldwide. My congratulations to them for this farsighted and pioneering step in the field of art taken by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

Coming to the painterly aspects of the works, it has been a Herculean task for me, not to give in to the temptation of choosing favourites, from among the cache of works. Hence, I will try and share with you my observations on the supreme command that Vasudeo Kamath has displayed on the technicalities and the aesthetic inputs registered in these creations. His portrayals of the life of Shri Swaminarayan run as a continuous narrative through its telling visual strengths. The entire arrangement of the central figure and the surroundings, divests the need for speech to express human emotions. Thereby, it makes the artwork a holistic storytelling exercise, drifting away from being exclusively monoscenic, or largely continuous, in presentation. This, in a way is the masterly stroke of the artist that is the hallmark of the works. Often we use the term Indianness in paintings. Though it is very difficult to define it, we can feel the same in Vasudeoji's paintings. His treatment, rendition and use of palette really emphasize this Indianness. Another focus that is an offshoot of the narrative strengths of the works is the communicative content of the artworks. Their colour palette and the astute choice of surroundings, forms and settings, verbalizes the paintings with astute correctness. We travel back in time to the childhood of the great saint and rejoice in the celebrations of Mother Earth at his birth. We tremble with anxiety as the young Ghanshyam is submerged in the raging waters of the Saryu River. We become calmed in the presence of asthtang yogi Neelkanth and marvel at the young Neelkanth discoursing before the sadhu yogis, and much more. Such a perceptive rapport between art and its viewers is possible only when the artist *sadhak* has spent nearly half a century painting his subject, as has been done by Shri Vasudeo Kamath.



More importantly, the rich colour schemes for each work shows a rationale behind their choice. They range from the multi-hued depictions of early childhood scenes to the more challenging choices of the adolescent years passing on to a monochromatic restraint of sacrificial saffron for the paintings of his later stages. They take the viewer across life's journey, virtually hand holding our sensibilities, and have a tremendous act of liberating the mind and uplifting our thoughts, in a progressive climb. These creative triumphs thus seamlessly meld the spiritual into a lifelike mound, and become masterpieces from the brush of Vasudeo Kamath.

Being a part of these celebrations to honour and mark the opening of such a dedicated volume of art has been more than a proud privilege. It has been an eye-opener to be in these precincts and in the company of Swami and all the other *bhaktas*. I hope that this project marks the beginning of a long association of art with Swaminarayan Aksharpathi. I look forward to witnessing still more exciting and innovative landmarks to commemorate the signature bond that has been established on this platform today.



**Shri Samveg Lalbhai**  
**Industrialist, Art Enthusiast**

I received the loving blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on three occasions. Every time I experienced divinity. On seeing Bapa, you truly see an innocent child. The feelings you see on his face are a genuine reflection of his inner feelings. No pretence, no animosity, no showmanship, no arguments. For the liberation of the world, nothing but pure love.

Look at his eyes! Full of motherly love and fatherly concern, rivers of values flowed from him.

Vasudeoji received the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, through which his skills and knowledge flourished. With such blessings, he has produced such outstanding paintings. Looking at

those paintings, one feels one is seated at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

What a great saint Pramukh Swami Maharaj was! When mangoes grow on a mango tree, its branches bend; they do not become stiffer. Bapa did not promote himself. He did not tell Kamathji to paint him. He told him to paint Bhagwan Swaminarayan. We are indeed blessed to have had the darshan of such a great saint.



**Shri Pradyumna Vyas**  
**Director, National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad**

The ideas that the *mahapurushes* have given have been preserved for future generations in this publication. The greatest strength is that of spirituality. Artists, sculptors and authors give the divine power of spirituality a direction.

I congratulate Kamathji for his 15 years of austerity and efforts amid paints to give life to these paintings with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Such wonderful paintings. It feels as if those paintings are speaking to us. These paintings have brought the times of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to life. Even after 100, 200 or 300 years when people see these paintings, they will see that era. Today, our country has much need for spirituality. At the NID, I stress that only spirituality can eternally sustain our earth. Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj and saints have produced this pure work. To keep alive the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the use of such mediums can be used.

Using digital technology to promote the teachings of past greats and our millennia-old values is a need of the present.

Whether through art, poetry or other forms, how can we incorporate spirituality so that this earth becomes a better place to live in? As a design teacher, I believe that we need to understand philosophy.

(Contd. on pg. 37)



# ADHYĀY 4

## SAMBHAVĀMI YUGE YUGE – PROCLAIMING THE PRINCIPLE OF AVATARS

### Part 20

**O**ur shastras have given to all the understanding that avatars of Paramātmā occur in this world. This is a novel principle attributed to Vedic culture. We call this notion the avatar principle. It is Paramātmā's extreme compassion that he assumes avatars. It is the essence of spirituality. It is the fulfilment of bhakti. It is the boon of liberation. Without it, spirituality is just a word, bhakti is useless, and liberation becomes impossible.

From the Vedic period, this principle has been ingrained in Indian culture. The roots of this principle can be clearly found in the Vedas. Moreover, this principle has been explained even in Vedic literature such as the Taittiriya Samhita and the Shatpath Brahman. The same principle has been asserted in Puranic literature like the Shrimad Bhāgvat, as well as shastras like the Samhitas of the Panchrātra. The Bhagavad Gitā presents this principle to us even more clearly. With the words '*sambhavāmi yuge yuge*', the Gitā has proclaimed this principle to all. Let us take a more detailed look.

### The Ancient Ancestry of Yoga

Chapter four of the Gitā commences with a statement from Shri Krishna. Shri Krishna says to Arjuna, 'इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम् । विवस्वान् मनवे प्राह मनुर्िक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत् ॥ एवं पर पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः । स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परन्तप ॥ स एवाऽयं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः । भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम् ॥' – '*Imam vivasvate yogam proktavānamavyayam. Vivasvān manave prāha manurikshvākave'braveet.*

*Evam paramparāprāptamimam rājarshayo vid-  
uhu. Sa kāleneha mahatā yogo nashtaha paran-  
tapa. Sa evā'yam mayā te'dya yogaha proktaha  
purātanaha. Bhakto'si me sakhā cheti rahasyam  
hyetaduttamam.*' – 'I formerly told this yoga to  
the Sun deity, Vivasvān. Vivasvān told it to Manu.  
Manu told it to Ikshvāku. Thus, passed down  
through generations, this yoga came to be known  
by the great kings. But, O Arjuna, since a long  
period of time has passed, that yoga has been  
forgotten. Therefore, today, I have revealed that  
same ancient knowledge of yoga to you. Because  
you are my friend and devotee, I have revealed  
this utmost secret to you' (Gitā 4.1,2).

Here, the word yoga refers to conviction in the form of Paramātmā. From ancient times, teachings have been given that yoga is conviction in the form of Paramātmā. Whenever that yoga is forgotten, i.e. conviction in the form of Paramātmā is forgotten, an avatar of Paramātmā teaches it again and rejuvenates it. This is the intent of this *shloka*.

### Arjuna's Doubt

Hearing Krishna's words, 'I formerly told this yoga to the Sun deity, Vivasvān', a question arises in Arjuna's mind. The doubt is but natural. Arjuna asks, 'अपरं भवतो जन्म परं जन्म विवस्त्वतः । कथमेतद् विजानीयां त्वमादौ प्रोक्तवानिति ॥' – '*Aparam bhavato janma param janma vivastavataha, kathametad vijāneeyām tvamādaū proktavāniti.*' – 'With respect to time, you were only born recently, and the Sun came into existence in ancient times, therefore how



should I understand you speaking to the Sun deity' (Gitā 4.3). Arjuna's doubt reflects that he saw Shri Krishna as a human. Shri Krishna picked up on this.

### Shri Krishna's Answer

Resolving Arjuna's doubt, Shri Krishna says, 'बहुनि मे व्यतीतानि जन्मानि तव चाऽर्जुन। तान्यहं वेद सर्वाणि न त्वं वेत्थ परन्तप॥' – '*Bahuni me vyateetāni janmāni tava chārjuna, tānyaham veda sarvāni na tvam vettha parantapa.*' – 'O Arjuna, countless births of both you and me have occurred. I know of all of these lives, but you, Arjuna, do not' (Gitā 4.4). In other words, Shri Krishna explains, 'I existed even at the start of creation, therefore there is no cause for doubting how I told the Sun deity about yoga.'

### The Avatar Principle

Saying this much, Shri Krishna reveals the entire avatar principle in the following *shloka*. Shri Krishna says, 'अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन्। प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय स भवा यात्ममायया॥' – '*Ajo'pi sannavyayātmā bhootānāmeeshvaro'pi san. Prakrutim svāmādhishthāya sambhavāmyātmamāyayā.*' – 'Despite being unborn, despite being imperishable and the governor of all beings, I, embracing my nature, take birth merely by my own wish' (Gitā 4.6).

This *shloka* explains the manner in which avatars incarnate. The difference between the manner in which avatars are born and ordinary *jivas* are born is described in this *shloka* with the words, 'despite being unborn'. Ordinary *jivas* are born according to their previous karmas to bear the fruits of those karmas. That is not the case with the avatars of Paramātmā. The avatars of Paramātmā manifest due to some special intention of Paramātmā, not due to karmas. Furthermore, that special intention is an act of favour on the *jivas*. With the words '*sambhavāmyātmamāyayā*', which imply that 'I am born of my own accord', the Gita describes the manner in which avatars

incarnate and affirms the above difference.

The words '*bhootānāmeeshvaro'pi san*', i.e. 'despite being the governor of all beings', show the power of Paramātmā. When it is stated that Paramātmā incarnates as a favour on the *jivas*, one may question whether Paramātmā *has* to incarnate to do that favour on the *jivas*. Since, if is unable to do that favour without incarnating, then that would be a deficit in the abilities of Paramātmā. But that is not the case. Paramātmā is '*bhootānāmeeshvaro'pi san*', i.e. the governor of all and able to do anything. If he so wishes, he can do the good of infinite *jivas* by just thinking, yet, out of great compassion, he decides of his own accord to take an avatar to uplift countless *jivas*.

### The Types of Manifestation

Let us now take a special look at the manifestations of Parabrahman. When Parabrahman Purushottam specifically pervades another *ātmā* for a special task, then that *ātmā* is called an avatar. For example, the 10, 24, 39 or other numbers of well-known avatars, such as Matsya and Kurma, that the shastras like the Bhāgvat Puran and Panchratra describe are such specially pervaded avatars. Just like an arrow and its archer are different, similarly, the avatars and the cause of those avatars, Parabrahman, are different. Thus the term 'avatari' is used for Paramātmā. The *avatari* is the cause of the avatars.

Sometimes, Parabrahman himself comes in this world out of compassion, without making another *ātmā* the mediator. That is also called an avatar, but there is a great difference between the previously mentioned avatars such as Matsya and Kurma and such an avatar. This avatar is Parabrahman himself, so there is no difference like that which exists between the arrow and the archer. For example, the manifestation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in this world is such an avatar. That is to say, without making another *ātmā* as a mediator, Parabrahman himself manifested in Chhapaiya as a child of father Dharmadev and



mother Bhaktidevi. This is the manifestation of the *avatari* himself.

### Sambhavāmi Yuge Yuge

Clarifying the avatar principle even further, Shri Krishna says to Arjuna, ‘यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत । अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् । धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे ॥’ – ‘*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata, abhyut’thānamadharmaṣya tadātmānam srujāmyaham. Paritrāṇāya sādhoonām vināshāya cha dushkrutām, dharmasansthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge.*’ – ‘O Arjuna, whenever there is a decline in dharma and an increase in *adharma*, I assume an avatar. For the protection of the righteous, for the destruction of the wicked, and to re-establish dharma, I incarnate from age to age’ (Gita 4.7,8) .

This clarifies both time and reason. When does an avatar of Parāmatmā manifest? Well, whenever there is a need, i.e. when there is a decline in dharma and an increase in *adharma*, Paramātmā decides to assume an avatar. The reason for assuming an avatar is to protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked and to establish dharma.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan clarifies that to fulfil the wishes of the affectionate devotees is also one of the reasons that Paramātmā assumes an avatar. He says, “God assumes an avatar for only one reason: Having surrendered himself to the bhakti of those devotees who have intense love for him, God assumes whichever form the devotees wish for in order to grant them bliss. He then fulfils all the desires of his devotees. Since the devotees are corporeal and have physical bodies, God also becomes corporeal, assumes a physical body and showers affection upon those devotees. In addition to this, he suppresses his powers and behaves with the devotees as a son, or as an intimate companion, or as a friend, or as a relative. Because of this, the devotee may not maintain much protocol with God. Nonetheless, God showers his affection upon the devotee in

whichever manner he desires.

“Thus, the only reason God assumes an avatar is to fulfil the desires of his beloved devotees. Along with this, he grants liberation to innumerable other *jivas* and also establishes dharma” (Vachanāmṛut Kāriyāni 5).

The words ‘*yuge yuge*’ clarify that it is not the case that avatars occur in just Satya-yug, Treta-yug and Dwapar-yug, and not in Kali-yug. There is no restriction to which *yugs* an avatar can occur in, an avatar can manifest even in Kali-yug.

### Dharma Means Conviction in the Form of Paramātmā

The above *shloka* stated that avatars manifest to establish dharma. The word ‘dharma’ is also commonly used for the dharma of one’s varna (social class) and ashram (stage in life). Since ancient times, Indian society has been arranged by varna and ashram, and the word ‘varnāshram dharma’, or ‘dharma’ in short, is often used to refer to the rules of one’s varna and ashram. Here, when the Gitā says that the avatars of Paramātmā occur for the establishment of dharma, it is natural for someone to think that the avatars occur for the establishment of *varnāshram dharma*. But that is not the case, here the word ‘dharma’ does not refer to *varnāshram dharma*, but to *bhāgvat* dharma. *Bhāgvat* dharma means conviction in the form of Paramātmā. Avatars manifest to establish conviction in the form of Paramātmā, and this is what this *shloka* is telling us. Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains this very clearly saying, “In fact, God assumes avatars upon earth for the purpose of establishing dharma, and that too, not simply for the establishment of the dharma of one’s varna and ashram. After all, even the acharyas of *pravrutti* dharma, such as the Saptarshi and others have established the dharma of the four varnas and ashrams. God does not, however, assume avatars solely for that purpose; he assumes avatars to expound the dharma of his *ekāntik bhaktas*” (Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā II 46).



In another Vachanāmṛut, he says, “The type of dharma that is related to God is the one that was adopted by Nārād, the Sanakādik, Shukji, Dhruv, Prahlād, Ambrish, and other devotees. It is this dharma that is known as *bhāgvat* dharma or *ekāntik* dharma. In fact, this type of dharma is not different from bhakti; they are both one. The type of dharma that the avatars of God come to establish is this very same dharma. On the other hand, the dharma of one’s varna and ashram alone is extremely inferior compared to *bhāgvat* dharma” (Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā III 21).

Therefore, whenever there is a decline in *bhāgvat* dharma and an increase in the lack of *bhāgvat* dharma, i.e. an increase in atheism; it is then that avatars of Paramātmā manifest to ‘*dhar-masansthāpanārthāya*’ – re-establish dharma in the form of conviction in Paramātmā.

## Yoga Is Dharma

Dharma means conviction in the form of Paramātmā. This is the definition implied in the Gitā. This becomes clearer when we look at the *shlokas* at the start of this chapter and at those in the second chapter.

With the initial words of this chapter, ‘*Imam vivasvate yogam proktavānāhamavyayam*’ (Gitā 4.1), we see that the chapter starts off by talking about yoga. Yoga means conviction in the form of Paramātmā. Thereafter, it mentions ‘*yogo nash-taha*’ – that yoga was lost. After that, Krishna says, ‘*sa evā’yam mayā te’dya yogaha proktaha*’ – ‘I have revealed that same yoga to you today’. He then uses the word ‘dharma’ in place of the word ‘yoga’ saying, ‘*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata*’. Thus comparing the two phrases ‘*yogo nash-taha*’ and ‘*dharmasya glānir*’ it becomes clear that the word ‘dharma’ has been used as a synonym for ‘yoga’. Yoga means conviction in the form of Paramātmā, therefore it is clear that dharma, too, refers to conviction in the form of Paramātmā.

The same can be seen in the second chapter

of the Gitā. On completing precepts on *sāṅkhya*, Shri Krishna says, ‘एषा तेऽभिहिता सां ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु’ – ‘*Eshā te’bhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimām shrunu*’ – ‘O Arjuna, I have told you about *sāṅkhya*, now hear about yoga’ (Gitā 2.39). Immediately thereafter, he uses the word dharma instead of yoga saying, ‘स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात्’ – ‘*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*’ – ‘Even the slightest practice of this dharma protects one from great fears’ (Gitā 2.40). Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained that this dharma is conviction in the form of Paramātmā.

Thus, the synonymous use of the words ‘yoga’ and ‘dharma’ meaning conviction in the form of Paramātmā substantiates that avatars of Paramātmā occur to establish conviction in the form of Paramātmā.

## The Number of Avatars

How many avatars are there? Is there a fixed number? These are but natural questions. In Indian culture, ten avatars are renowned. For example, shastras such as the Agni Purān, Devi Bhāgvat and Mahābhārāt describe ten avatars. In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Shatanand Swami, Achintyanand Brahmachari, Muktanand Swami and Premanand Swami and others have described the ten avatars.

Like the 10 avatars, the 24 avatars are also widely known. A series of Sanskrit *shlokas* praising each of the 24 avatars can be found in a work named ‘Chaturvinshati-avatar-stotram’.

Nishkulanand Swami has described 31 avatars in his poems.

Thirty-nine avatars have been mentioned in the Samhitas of the Panchrātra of the Vaishnav Āgamas. Indeed, everyone has explained the principle of avatars according to their own understandings, but no one has negated, neglected or disrespected them.

Thus, our shastras have mentioned the avatars a great deal, but have nowhere put a restriction on how many avatars occur. Paramātmā can assume



as many avatars as he wishes. That is why, in the third *adhyāy* of the first *skandh* of the Shrimad Bhāgvat, after mentioning the names of 22 avatars and describing them, it ultimately states the principle that, ‘अवतारा ह्यसं येयाः हरेः सत्त्विधेर्द्विजाः । यथा विदासिनः कुल्याः शतशः स्युः सहस्रशः ॥’ – ‘*Avatārā hyasankhyeyāhā harehe sattvanidherdvijāhā, yathā vidāsinaha kulyāhā shataśaha syuhu sahasrashaha.*’ – ‘Just as hundreds and thousands of streams of water originate from an immense lake of water, similarly, countless avatars originate from Paramātmā, within whom countless divine qualities reside’ (Bhāgvat 1.3.26). Also, in the tenth *skandh* of the Bhāgvat, in a dialogue between Shri Krishna and King Muchkund, it is mentioned that it may be possible to count the grains of dust on the earth over many births, but it is impossible to count the number of avatars of Paramātmā. With the words, ‘Even I cannot count the avatars,’ it again establishes that the number of avatars is countless.

Even the words of the Gitā such as ‘O Arjuna, many births of both you and I have occurred’, ‘Whenever there is a decline in dharma and an increase in *adharma*, I assume an avatar’ and ‘I manifest in every age’ resonate the same innumerable of avatars. Therefore, it is impossible to say that ‘only a certain number of avatars of Paramātmā occur’ or ‘avatars only occur in certain *yugs*’. Thus, the avatar principle cannot be limited by quantity or time.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also mentioned the innumerable of avatars. Let us take a look at two such references from the Vachanāmṛut. In Vachanāmṛut Gadhadā I 78, Nirmalanand Swami asked Shriji Maharaj how one should develop one’s understanding in order to realize the immense glory of Parabrahman’s Sant. Shriji Maharaj answered, “When one contemplates upon the greatness of Matsya, Kachchha, Varāh, Vāman, Parshurām, Rām, Krishna and the countless avatars of God by thinking, ‘God has liberated countless *jivas* through Rām, Krishna, and

other avatars. I am extremely fortunate that I have attained the profound association of the Sant of that very God’ – then one begins to thoroughly realize the glory of the Sant day by day.”

In the Ashlāli Vachanāmṛut, Shriji Maharaj said that if their understanding is flawed then even the likes of the great Prajapatis do not attain Akshardham. Hearing this, the sadhus requested Maharaj to explain this flaw in their understanding. Answering their question, Shriji Maharaj mentions four types of flaws. Explaining the third flaw, he says, “Their third mistake is that they believe the innumerable avatars of God such as Rām, Krishna, etc., to be a part of God.”

Both of these Vachanāmṛuts support the fact that there are innumerable avatars of Paramātmā.

The avatars of Paramātmā manifest in this way, are not bound in number, and not bound to manifest only in certain *yugs*, i.e. avatars are countless and can occur in every *yug*. The avatars do not manifest to establish *varnāshram dharma*, but to establish *bhāgvat dharma*, i.e. to establish conviction in the form of Paramātmā. This, and more, we learn from the above *shlokas* of the Bhagavad Gitā.

Moreover, to not believe in avatars means to not believe in the Vedas, to not believe in the Gitā, to not believe in the Purānas such as the Shrimad Bhāgvat, to not believe in the Panchrātra Āgama texts such as the Satvasamhita, to not believe in the Smṛuti shastras such as the Manusmṛuti. Not only that, to not believe in avatars means to not believe in great texts like the Ramayan and Mahabharat which are foundational to Indian culture. In short, to not believe in avatars means to be non-Vedic, ignoble and atheistic.

Indeed, by proclaiming the avatar-principle in this way, the Bhagavad Gitā has truly kept the bhakti tradition alive. ♦





*Anger is an explosive emotion that ruins and destroys relationships, workplace environment, family life and, above all, the individual who gets angry. What causes anger, how is it expressed and how can it be managed?*

### WHAT IS ANGER?

Anger is an unwanted, irrational emotion that we all experience from time to time. It's an emotional state that varies in intensity from mild irritation to intense fury and rage, damaging our own lives and of those who are associated with us. It manifests as verbal, mental and physical assaults, relationship break-ups, bullying, and social withdrawal affecting family and working relationships. It is more likely to have a negative effect on interpersonal relationships than any other emotion.

### WHAT CAUSES ANGER?

External and internal events may both cause anger. We can be angry at an individual (spouse or supervisor) or event (traffic, cancelled flight), or by worrying about personal problems. Memories of traumatic or unjust events may also trigger anger.

Our environment, stress, work, financial issues, abuse, poor social or familial situations, time and energy constraints can all contribute to

fomenting anger. Anger may be more prevalent in individuals who were raised by parents with the same disorder.

The media has even coined phrases to describe new angry emotional states to match social trends or technological inventions that cause anger. The past decade has seen 'road rage', 'air rage', 'parking rage' and now we have 'net rage'.

Anger has been with us since time immemorial. Hindu scriptures abound with stories of those who in a fit of anger have cursed others. Durvasa Rishi cursed King Ambrish for not breaking his fast in his presence. King Parikshit got angry on Shamik Rishi, who was in deep meditation, for not attending to him, and thus placed a dead snake around the rishi and insulted him.

### HOW ANGER IS EXPRESSED

The most common expressions of anger are verbal and physical.

Our choice of words and tone of voice can reveal anger. Body language and other non-verbal cues may be expressed by trying to look physically



bigger and thereby intimidating, staring, frowning and fist clenching. Some people internalize their anger and it becomes difficult to notice any physical signs. However, it's unusual for an actual physical attack to transpire without 'warning' signs appearing first.

Fortunately, laws, social norms, common sense and religious principles mostly limit how much we may verbally or physically express our anger. Nonetheless, in spite of our efforts to contain anger, we sometimes 'let loose' and verbally or physically express anger.

It is a dangerous myth that it is good to 'let loose'. Some people use this theory as a licence to hurt others. Research has found that 'letting it rip' with anger actually escalates anger and aggression and does nothing to help you (or the person you are angry with) resolve the situation.

### ARE SOME PEOPLE MORE ANGRY THAN OTHERS?

Some people get angry more easily and intensely than the average person does. Others may not show anger in loud and spectacular ways, but are chronically irritable and grumpy. Easily angered people don't always curse and throw things; sometimes they withdraw socially, sulk or get physically ill.

People who are easily angered have a low frustration tolerance, they feel that they should not be subjected to frustration, inconvenience, or annoyance. They can't take things in their stride, and are particularly infuriated if the situation seems wrong or unjust. For example, being cut off in traffic.

The above causes may be genetic or physiological. There is evidence that some children are born irritable, touchy and easily angered, and that these signs are present from an early age. Another cause may be socio-cultural. We're taught that it's all right to express anxiety, depression or other emotions, but not how to cope with and express anger constructively.



Family background also plays a role. Typically, people who are easily angered come from families that are disruptive, chaotic and not skilled at emotional communication.

Seemingly harmless anger may cause invisible damage to the brains of young children. Verbal abuse from parents and peers causes changes in developing brains which tantamount to scarring that lasts into adulthood.

### EXPRESSING ANGER

Upon King Dasharath mistakenly shooting Shravan with an arrow, he was angrily cursed by Shravan's parents that Dasharath himself would suffer separation from his son, Ram. Similarly, Bhagwan Krishna was also cursed, out of anger, by Gandhari to suffer an inconspicuous death. He was thus killed by a hunter's arrow that pierced his ankle after being mistaken for an animal.

Outward expression of anger in modern





life is common. According to UK surveys, 45% of people regularly lose their temper at work, with half of them having reacted to computer problems by hitting or screaming at their computers, or screaming at or abusing their colleagues. More than 80% of drivers claim to have been involved in road rage incidents.

At the extreme end of the range, physical aggression becomes entrenched in some people's daily life with disastrous consequences. In surveys on anger done in the UK in 2005, the total number of school suspensions rose by 45,000. Suspensions for physical assaults on pupils increased by more than 11,000 and on adults by nearly 2,500. One in five workers were subjected to violence at work. The estimated total cost of domestic violence to society in monetary terms was £23 billion per annum, and every third day a woman was murdered at home, often by her spouse.

A Harvard study showed that close to 8 percent of adolescents display anger issues that qualify for lifetime diagnoses of intermittent explosive disorder, a psychiatric diagnosis.

A US study separating individuals into high-trait anger and low-trait anger people, showed anger-prone individuals were more than twice as likely to have been arrested and three times as likely to have served time in prison. Most murders in the US are committed because of or during arguments.

Anger and other negative characteristics have been responsible for conflicts, wars and death. But venting one's anger has never provided solutions or emotional fulfilment.

### CAN ANGER MAKE YOU ILL?

Anger is accompanied by a rise in stress hormones: cortisol and norepinephrine. These hormones increase blood pressure, pulse, body temperature and breathing rate, sometimes to dangerous levels, thus placing strain on our heart and other organs.

Our bodies are not designed to withstand high levels of adrenaline and cortisol over long periods on a very regular basis. People who are chronically angry die younger.

### SOME HEALTH PROBLEMS

1. High blood pressure, which can, in severe cases, lead to stroke or cardiac arrest.

Heart attack risk increases about five times in the two hours after an anger outburst; the risk of stroke more than triples.

The most recalled causes of an anger outburst were family situations, work and commuting. People who are chronically angry are six times

more likely than others to die of a heart attack.

Interestingly, regular exercise doesn't seem to lessen anger-related heart attack risk. Even participants in relatively good shape are more prone to heart attacks after intense anger.

2. Aches and pains, usually in the back and head.

3. Digestion problems.

4. Skin disorders.

5. Cancer.

6. Impaired immune system and reduced pain threshold.

7. Psychological and related problems:

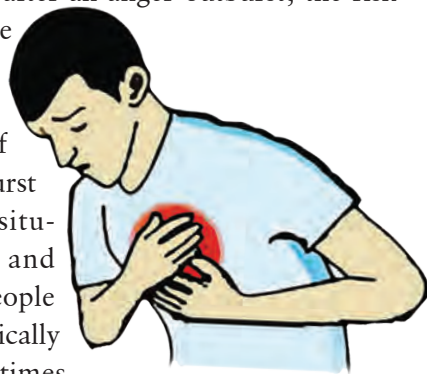
a. Depression and self-harm.

b. Sleep problems.

c. Reduced self-confidence, more risk-taking, poor decision-making.

d. Eating disorders.

e. Substance abuse.





## ANGER MANAGEMENT

The goal of anger management is to reduce both our emotional feelings and the physiological arousal that anger causes. We can't always get rid of, or avoid, the things or the people that enrage us, nor can we change them, but we can learn to control our reactions. People use a variety of both conscious and unconscious processes to deal with anger. The three main approaches are as follows:

### 1. Assertion



Expressing anger in an assertive, not aggressive manner is the healthiest way to manage anger.

We must learn to make clear what our needs are and how to get them met, without hurting others. Being assertive doesn't mean being arrogant or obnoxious, it means being respectful of yourself and others.

### 2. Suppression



Anger can be suppressed, and then converted or redirected. This happens when we hold in our anger, stop thinking about it and focus

on something positive. The aim is to inhibit or suppress our anger and convert it into more constructive behaviour. The danger in this type of response is that if it isn't allowed to have an outward expression, our anger can turn inward on ourselves. Anger turned inward may cause internal conflict, manifesting physically or mentally in a negative manner.

Unexpressed anger may also lead to other pathological expressions of anger, such as passive-aggressive behaviour (getting back at people indirectly, without telling them why, rather than confronting them head-on) or a personality type that seems perpetually critical, cynical and hostile due to having not learned how to constructively express anger. Not surprisingly, they may struggle with relationships.

### 3. External and Internal Calm



This means controlling our outward behaviour as well as our internal responses, taking steps to lower our heart rate, calming ourselves down, and letting the feelings subside.

In 2002, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was travelling by Singapore Airlines from Auckland to Singapore. During the flight, Kirtan, a boy of thirteen, asked Swamishri a few questions. Kirtan: I get very angry! How can I overcome it? Swamishri: Whenever you get angry remember Shriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and chant 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' in your mind. If you think of God, your anger will subside. Also think, what is the need to get angry? There is no gain in getting angry with anyone. By getting angry, your work will not be done. In fact, the other person, on whom you are angry, is left miserable and distressed. By singing bhajans and chanting 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan,' the distress of the other person, and yours, will be dissolved.

## OTHER ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

### 1. Relaxation and Yoga exercises



Simple relaxation tools, such as deep breathing, relaxing imagery (as Swamishri says, remember Shriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and chant 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' in your mind ) and yogic exercises can help mitigate angry feelings.

### 2. Cognitive Restructuring



Cognitive restructuring means changing the way we think. When angry, we curse and speak in harsh terms, thus reflecting our inner thoughts. Our thinking becomes exaggerated and overly dramatic. We need to replace these thoughts with rational ones. For



instance, instead of telling ourselves, “Oh, it’s awful, it’s terrible and everything’s ruined,” rather say, “It’s frustrating, and it’s understandable that I’m upset about it, but it’s not the end of the world. Getting angry is not going to fix it anyhow.”

Be wary of words like “never” or “always” when talking about oneself or others. “This machine never works,” or “you’re always forgetting things” are inaccurate. They make us feel justified in our anger and that the problem can’t be solved. They also alienate and humiliate people who may be willing to work with us on a solution.

Remind oneself that getting angry won’t fix anything and won’t make us feel better, but will make us feel worse.

Logic defeats anger, because anger, even when justified, is irrational. Use cold, hard logic and remember that the world is “not out to get you”; you’re just experiencing some of the rough spots of daily life. Do this whenever you feel anger getting the better of you, and it will help you get a more balanced perspective. Angry people tend to demand things: fairness, appreciation, agreement and insistence to do things their way. Everyone wants these things, and we are all hurt and disappointed when we don’t get them. But when we demand them, and our demands are not met, our disappointment leads to anger.

As part of cognitive restructuring, we need to become aware of our demanding nature when angry and translate expectations into desires. In other words, saying, “I would like” something is healthier than saying, “I demand” or “I must have” something. Thus, when unable to get what we want, we will experience the normal reactions – frustration, disappointment, hurt – but not anger. Sometimes we use anger as a way to avoid feeling hurt, but that doesn’t necessarily make the hurt go away.

### 3. Problem Solving



Sometimes, our anger and frustration are caused by very real and inescapable problems in our lives. It adds to our

frustration to sometimes find out that every problem doesn’t have a solution. The best attitude to such situations is not to focus on finding the solution, but rather on how to handle and face the problem.

Make a plan, follow it and check progress along the way. Resolve to give it your best, but also not to punish oneself if an answer doesn’t come right away. If we can approach it with our best intentions and efforts and make a serious attempt to face it head-on, we will be less likely to lose patience and fall into all-or-nothing thinking, even if the problem does not get solved right away.

### 4. Better Communication



When angry, we tend to jump to and act on conclusions. These conclusions may be very inaccurate. The first thing to do in a heated discussion is slow down and think through our responses. Don’t say the first thing that comes to mind, but slow down and think carefully about what we want to say. At the same time, listen carefully to what the other person is saying and take time before answering.

It’s natural to become defensive when criticized, but don’t fight back. Instead, listen to what is underlying the words: the message that this person might feel neglected and unloved. It may take a lot of patient questioning on your part, and it may require some breathing space, but don’t let your anger or another’s allow a discussion to spin out of control. Keeping your cool can prevent the situation from becoming disastrous.



## 5. Using Humour



“Silly humour” can help defuse rage in a number of ways. For one thing, it can help you get a more balanced perspective. There are two cautions in using humour. First, don’t try to just “laugh off” your problems; instead, use humour to help yourself face them more constructively. Second, don’t give in to harsh, sarcastic humour; that’s just another form of unhealthy expression of anger.

When angry, we feel that we are ethically, principally and morally correct, and that any blocking or changing of our plans is an unbearable indignity, and that we should not have to suffer in this way. Maybe other’s do, but not us!

Dr Deffenbacher suggests that when we feel that urge, try to picture oneself as a supreme ruler, who owns the streets and stores and office spaces, striding alone and having our way in all situations while others defer to us. The more detail we can get into our imaginary scenes, the more we realize that we are being unreasonable; we’ll also realize how unimportant the things we’re angry about really are.

What these techniques have in common is a refusal to take ourselves too seriously. Anger is a serious emotion, but it’s often accompanied by ideas that, if examined, can make you laugh.

## 6. Changing Our Environment



Sometimes it’s our immediate surroundings that causes irritation and fury. Problems and responsibilities can weigh on us and

make us feel angry at the “trap” we seem to have fallen into and on all the people and things that form that trap.

Give yourself a break. Make sure you have some “personal time” scheduled for times of the

day that you know are particularly stressful.

## 7. Some Other Tips for Easing Up on Yourself



**Timing:** If you and your spouse tend to fight when you discuss things at night – perhaps you’re tired or distracted or, maybe, it’s just

habit – try changing the times when you talk about important matters, so these talks don’t turn into arguments.

**Avoidance:** If your child’s chaotic room makes you furious every time you walk by it, shut the door. Don’t make yourself look at what infuriates you. Don’t say, “Well, my child should clean up the room so I don’t become angry!” That’s not the point. The point is to keep yourself calm.

**Finding alternatives:** If your daily commute through traffic leaves you in a state of rage and frustration, give yourself a project – learn or map out a different route, one that’s less congested or more scenic. Or find alternatives, such as travel by bus or train.

Life will be filled with frustration, pain, loss, and the unpredictable actions of others. You can’t change that, but you can change the way you let such events affect you. Controlling your angry responses can keep them from making you even more unhappy in the long run.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj maintained his composure through many conflicting and trying incidents. He showed respect for people who didn’t have the slightest respect for him. His ability to forgive and forget enabled him to mend the errant ways of others and reach a solution regardless of the complexity of the situation.

Swamishri had also dissolved the anger of others. The conflict between the Kshatriyas of Kukad and Odarka, involving 45 villages, threatened complete annihilation. In 1990, Swamishri gathered the Kshatriyas from both the villages,



talked to them and finally gave them water from each other's villages to drink and dissolved their animosity.

## 8. Professional Treatment



Psychiatrists recommend counselling, group therapy sessions and anger management classes as treatment options for anger disorders. In some cases, medication may be helpful in controlling emotions that lead to uncontrollable anger.

Finally, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had discoursed about anger and how to erase it altogether, "Anger stems from ego. In fact ego is the root of all bad instincts. If one has self-pride and others label one as good or bad, one is either emotionally carried away or explodes. But remember, we are neither very good nor very bad. We do not become so upon someone saying so. But we should not look bad in front of God. Remember Shriji Maharaj and then slowly try to remove these instincts. If one can realize that 'I am *atma* and I am pure', then there is no place for ego. We have to uproot it with such knowledge.

Also, if we can think that 'everyone understands, only I don't understand', then who will we get angry upon? There's no doubt about it, we have to eradicate our ego. It is because of our self-pride that conflicts arise. So forget our ego; whatever we achieve is due to God."

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(Contd. from pg. 25)

This publication captures the divine life and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and will inspire future generations of artists.



**Shri Madhav Ramanuj**  
**Distinguished Poet, Artist,**  
**Thinker**

Creation is the most important aspect of one's life. This Sampradaya has chosen the saffron colour of sadhus. No matter how much you look at it, you never tire.

Very few in India can produce this kind of

art. One of them is Kamathji. Michelangelo said, "I see the statue in the stone. I merely have to remove the barriers."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was also such an artist. He removed the barriers in our hearts so that we can see the *murti*.

Paints, canvas, paper, pencils, brushes – everything is available, but not everybody can create something like this. I have experienced that the proximity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspires and blesses.

The impression these paintings and the publication leaves on the heart can never be forgotten. ♦





## “Have You Heard?”

Once upon a time, an old man spread rumours that his neighbour, a much younger person, was a thief. As a result, the young man was arrested. But a few days later, he was proven innocent. After being released, he sued the old man for wrongly accusing him. In court, the old man told the judge, “They were just comments. They didn’t harm anyone.”

Before passing the sentence on the case, the judge told the old man, “Write all the things you said about him on a piece of paper. Thereafter, tear it into little pieces and, on the way home, throw the pieces out of your car window. Then come back tomorrow for the verdict.”

This seemed a little strange to the old man but he did exactly as the judge instructed and returned to court the next day. The judge told the old man, “Before receiving the sentence, I want you to go out and gather all the pieces of paper that you threw out of your car window yesterday.”

The old man was shocked. “I can’t do that. The wind spread them all over the place and I will never be able to find them again.”

The judge smiled and explained, “Precisely, my friend. Just like the pieces of paper that can

never be retrieved, your little words and comments have destroyed the reputation of this young man to such an extent that he will not be able to fix it. If you cannot speak well of a person, don’t say anything at all.”

“But I thought...he...was...a...thief,” the old man tried to defend himself, but the judge stopped him, “First get your facts right, then speak. Remember the golden rule: If in doubt, don’t say anything.”

It is said that a gossip has a nice sense of rumour. Gossips are worse than thieves because they steal another person’s honour, reputation and credibility which are impossible to restore. The old man duly learnt his lesson. It is said that three things never return:

the past, a neglected opportunity and the spoken word. We have to learn to become masters of our mouths otherwise we will become slaves of our words. Somebody has aptly put





it, “When your feet slip, you can always recover your balance, but when your tongue slips, you can never recover your words.”

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The ancient Greeks had a female personification of rumour called PHEME who went about with wings and a trumpet, spreading information that could bring infamy or could bring fame. The Roman equivalent, Fama, was more disturbing – having lots of eyes, tongues and feathers – but again she sent information, good and bad, rippling outwards and growing louder as it spread. This probably goes to explain why philosophers and religious thinkers throughout the ages have counseled against gossip. The general opinion holds that gossip damages the speaker, the listener and the victim. An old Irish saying suggests, “Those who gossip to you will gossip about you.” But we continue to gossip. Murmur something to me about a complete stranger and I will listen. Joseph Conrad put it nicely, “Gossip is what no one claims to like, but everybody enjoys.”

The word “gossip” is from Old English ‘*god-sibb*’, from *god* and *sibb*, the term for the god-parents of one’s child or the parents of one’s god-child. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the word assumed the meaning of a person who delights in idle talk – a newsmonger. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term was extended from the talker to the conversation of such persons. Later, it became known as just ‘close friends’ – people you would talk to and with whom you would exchange useful facts, amusing tales and exemplary stories of others’ failings, or spite aimed at those you already don’t like. This may explain why negative gossip gets a foothold. With a growth in power came a growth in negativity. So, by the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, gossip came mainly to define a

negative idle chatter and expressions of hatred. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw increasing mass media flirtations with gossip and it could be argued that, here at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we are living in the age of gossip. Gossip is considered by most to be a normal part of life. The problem is that gossip can become so malicious that it destroys a person’s self-esteem. Spreading gossip through the internet and through cell phones has led to social and emotional damage for many teens. There’s no doubt about it, gossip hurts. Those who constantly gossip don’t care who they’re hurting.

Our school gossip wasn’t just spoken. One may recall little notes. In fact, the power of gossip has been increased by the possibilities of publication. The fervour which sparked the French Revolution, for example, was partly fuelled by pamphlets filled with scurrilous rumours. Words of mouth are more authoritative on paper. But it’s not just the tone of gossip that has affected our public discourse. It has corrupted our content. In an unpleasant self-fulfilling prophecy, gossip is seen as something which sells well and is, therefore, increasingly all we get from the media – from news of royals walking about and wearing clothes to reports on spats between entirely fictional characters in soaps.

## FIVE TRUTHS ABOUT GOSSIP

Gossip obscures truth, sours our outlooks on each other and can trivialize any debate. Gossip appears to have the winning hand, even if it’s toxic, leaves no room for facts and is factually wrong. The five truths about gossip:

1. Makes you unsafe and eventually, lonely.
2. Projects insecurity.
3. Indicates emotional immaturity.
4. Comes back.
5. Lies to you.





## WHY DO WE GOSSIP?

Psychologists have studied various aspects of gossip. They've discovered that the main reason why we do it is to build social bonds with others. The dislikes shared between groups of people is more powerful in human bonding than common likes and interests. When people engage in gossip, they feel a shared sense of humour and mutual interests. They also feel a certain thrill when divulging "confidential information" about others. We've all heard it, and unfortunately, we've probably all played a part in it at some point or another. "Did you hear about Jack and Jill hooking up? Did you see how awful Tammy's hair looked at that party? Guess who's having marital problems?" Words like these come spilling out of our mouths. Regardless of who may be hurt by the gossip, many people just enjoy sharing gossip with their friends. We gossip so much that a study found about 80% of our conversations are spent discussing other people and their habits. Many people who gossip constantly actually revel in the misfortunes of others. When someone fails, has an embarrassing moment, or is involved in a "scandal", a gossipier takes pleasure in the fact that someone else is hurting, and they can't wait to share the news. With the Internet and cell phones, gossip has become far more socially and emotionally damaging, especially for teenagers and school-aged children. Awareness is growing about indirect bullying by spreading rumours or lies about another person, either through social media or in person. Gossiping can easily turn

to bullying, which can have a profound negative effect on a teen's mental health, emotional health and social development. Social media gossip can quickly turn into cyberbullying, as teens post insulting comments,

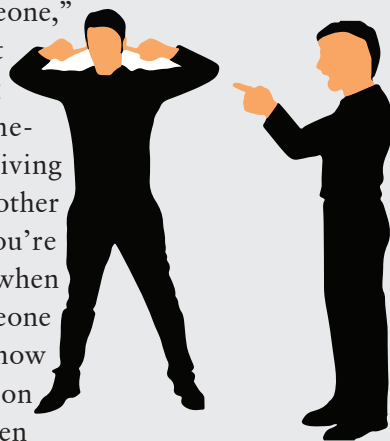
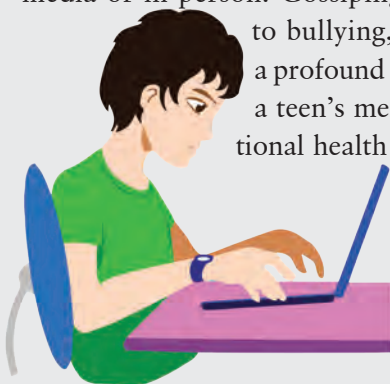
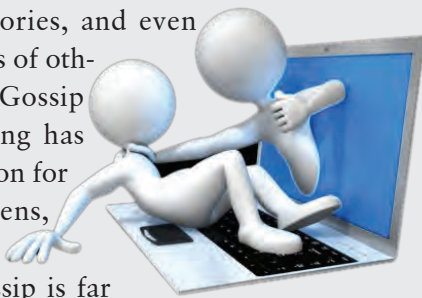
humiliating stories, and even obscene photos of other teenagers. Gossip as cyberbullying has led to depression for millions of teens, and suicide

for many. Gossip is far from harmless. It's important to remember that when you gossip, you're hurting another person, whether directly or indirectly. It might be tempting, but we really could do with less of it.

## HOW TO OVERCOME GOSSIP?

It seems that gossip is everywhere and can be hard to avoid. Next time someone attempts to pull you into gossip, see if this phrase can help. Psychologists have revealed a phrase that can stop a gossipier dead in their tracks. When someone is trying to involve you in a negative conversation about another person, simply ask, "Why are you telling me this?" Psychologists believe this phrase is effective for several reasons. First, the question dispels any self-serving motive from the gossipier. Second, it forces the gossipier to face the fact that you're uninterested in being involved. Relationship expert, Andrea Syrtash, explained that while gossip can help people bond with others, it can also be extremely hurtful. "People can use gossip to drag someone else under the bus, or it can help establish trust in someone,"

she said. "But it's worth being careful. If someone is always giving you the dirt on other people, then you're part of the mix when she talks to someone else. Be careful how much information you share." When





a negative person tries to drag you into harmful gossip, try responding in one of these six ways:

**1. Chime in with something ‘positive’:** If a person gossips constantly, it is probably because he or she lacks self-esteem or self-worth. People who gossip say negative things about others in order to make themselves feel better by comparison. Stop the gossip by saying positive things about the gossipers’ target. If they’re making fun of the way someone dresses, compliment their personality. Don’t let yourself be dragged down into the negativity. Eventually, the gossipers will give up when he or she sees you aren’t taking the bait.

**2. Start a conversation about cultural differences:** If the subject of the gossip is from another culture, the gossipers may be spreading rumors because he or she does not understand their customs and traditions. Instead of trying to understand, a person who enjoys gossip jumps directly to negative statements and accusations. Break up the gossip by starting a conversation about cultural differences. Help the gossipers understand that everyone is different, and acceptance goes a long way.

**3. Change the subject:** When a gossipers starts to talk about another person, respond by saying, “I hope you can help them feel more involved. Do you think you are willing to help?” Tailor your question to the situation. In whatever way you can, challenge the gossipers to help instead of hurt by spreading rumours. You’ll catch them off-guard and you might be able to change their attitude about the situation.

**4. Point out missing information:** A gossipers’ story often has holes. One way to shut down gossip is to challenge the holes in their story. It might be a specific time and date of event that supposedly happened, or whether or not they personally verified the gossip

that they’re spreading. This might help them understand that just because they heard a story, that doesn’t mean it’s true. And even if it is true, it’s impossible for them to have an accurate perspective on the situation unless they were there and experienced it personally.

**5. Confront the gossipers:** Before the gossip gets out of hand, confront the gossipers. Ask them why they are spreading rumours, or simply tell them that gossip makes you uncomfortable and you’d rather talk about something else. Confront them by letting them know that you recognize what they’re doing, and make sure they know that you don’t want to be a part of it.

**6. Avoid the conversation completely:** When a gossipers tries to drag you into their negativity, just avoid the conversation completely. Simply walk away. Tell them you don’t appreciate gossip or that you don’t want to be involved in the situation, or just turn around and leave. You’ll shut down a gossipers immediately by not giving him or her an audience to listen.

## PHILOSOPHER’S APPROACH

One day, a friend met the great philosopher Socrates. “Do you know what I just heard about your friend?”

“Hold on a minute,” requested Socrates. “Before you go ahead, please pass the Triple Filter Test.”

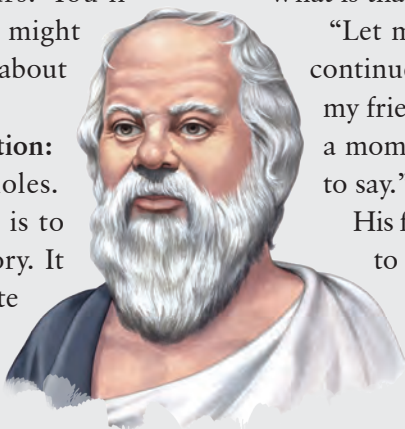
“The Triple Filter Test?” asked his friend. “What is that?”

“Let me explain” said Socrates, and he continued “Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and filter what you are going to say.”

His friend was bemused, but he listened to the advice patiently.

“The first filter is ‘Truth’. Have you made absolutely sure what you are about to tell me is true?”

*(Contd. on pg. 44)*







Truro School, Cornwall, England



Twin brothers, Yagnesh and Yogesh Patel

# Life Speaks

*The good behaviour and character of two young satsangi boys at Truro School in Cornwall, England, made a big impact on the teachers and pupils*

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj realized the latent potential of children and youths, and the need to direct their creative energy into positive ways. With this vision he established the BAPS Children's Wing in 1954 through which countless boys and girls worldwide have benefited holistically. Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj also encouraged children to excel in all aspects of their lives and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj continues to do the same. The following inspiring story is a testament to what the collective efforts of satsang and parental guidance can achieve.

Yogesh and Yagnesh Patel are six-year-old twins, born in Cornwall in southwest England in 2011. The boys and their family live about 300 miles away from the London BAPS Mandir and many hours drive away from the nearest satsang centre.

After birth, when they arrived home, their grandmother would daily sit them both in her lap, lay out their pujas and place a *mala* in their hands, symbolically performing their puja. Also, their parents applied the *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads and ensured that they observed *ekadashi*.

Now they independently apply *tilak-chandlo* and do puja every morning, after which they offer *pranams* to their parents and other elders in the house. Before they start eating their meals they always say a prayer. Every evening they perform the *arti* and participate in the *ghar sabha*, in which they sing the *dhun*, recite Swamini Vatos and offer prayers to Maharaj and Swami. They go to sleep whilst listening to the *chesta* and bhajans.

The twins started attending the nursery at Truro School in 2014. In 2015 they entered the Reception Class. The teachers in the class were very pleased with their behaviour and touched by their spirituality. The teachers learnt more about satsang by talking to the boys' parents and browsing the BAPS website. Yogesh then took an all-in-one *murti* to the school for his teacher. She was very happy to accept the *murti* and decided to place it on top of her computer so that she could see it while working.

One day, with Diwali approaching, the boys went to school with their mother and were very surprised to see the classroom wall decorated with pictures printed from the BAPS website of *anna-kut* being offered to Thakorji, Pramukh Swami





Diwali decorations on the school noticeboard



Display of the twins' visit to Nagpur for Mahant Swami Maharaj's darshan

Maharaj in Sarangpur, *chopda puja* and the names of the whole guru *parampara*. The teachers had made the whole presentation themselves!

Later that year, with the help of the teachers, all the children made a birthday card for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday to be held in Sarangpur. Throughout the year the teachers were eager to learn more about satsang as they were convinced that the boys brought spirituality to the school.

In 2016, after the passing of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Yogesh and Yagnesh entered Year 1 classes. The teachers were different to the Reception year class and naturally did not know much about satsang.

On their first day, both Yogesh and Yagnesh took the *murti* in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj is holding Mahant Swami Maharaj's hand to school. Yogesh asked his teacher if it was OK to keep the *murti* with him. She happily agreed and pinned the *murti* on the board. The boys' mother explained a little about BAPS and referred her to the BAPS website. Thereafter, she read about Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, and to Yogesh's surprise she printed the names of both gurus and pinned them under the *murti* herself. Yogesh would go every day and first bow down to both gurus before sitting down for his class.

A few days later, the head teacher asked for

another copy of the *murti*, as she wished to put it outside her office so that everyone visiting the school could have darshan.

In December 2016, the twins went to Nagpur for Mahant Swami Maharaj's darshan. Upon their return their teacher asked them to make a diary about their trip, which she then displayed on the main board located at the school entrance for all children, parents, teachers and visitors to view.

From September 2017, Yogesh and Yagnesh will be attending a new school in London, so on their last day at Truro Pre-Prep School in July 2017, their parents went to thank the teachers.

The head teacher and their class teachers specifically asked permission to keep the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, since they had learnt so much about them from Yogesh and Yagnesh and also felt at peace when they see the *murti*.

All the teachers said that it had been an absolute privilege to have the boys with them and that they saw a high level of spirituality and calm in Yogesh and Yagnesh. They said, "Most importantly we will miss the spirituality, peace and discipline they bring to our everyday lives." They also added, "We always took extra care of the boys' meals during *ekadashi* days to ensure their fasts could be observed."

The parents were surprised to hear this feedback and see the teachers' expressions.



The following is written by Natasha Mikail Jones, the boys' Reception Class teacher:

*Yagnesh was well behaved and always had good manners. He was very animated and excited when telling us all about his journey to India to see his spiritual leader. It was lovely to see how delighted he was when sharing his diary (documenting this trip) with the school during 'Celebration Assembly'. It has been wonderful for the children to learn about other faiths through Yagnesh's Swaminarayan faith.*

*Yogesh's behaviour has always been outstanding; he would always adhere to the rules and would never be swayed by others. If Yogesh saw a behaviour that he didn't think was appropriate he would move away from it. As a teacher, if I wanted to know what had just happened amongst friends, I could rely on Yogesh to tell me the truth without taking sides.*

*Yogesh has a sense of calm about him; all children will get upset about something at school at some point. Some children may also feel frustrated or angry. That said I don't recall seeing him angry about any situations in school. I have always said he emanates a way of peace.*

*Yogesh was so pleased that we were able to create a class display about his spiritual leader*

*and we as teachers felt blessed to be able to learn more about a 'peace' based religion in a world that needs to understand how pivotal peace is in today's world.*

*Every year, teachers around the world draw on children's experiences, using these as springboards to further their own and the children's knowledge and adding a depth of understanding that can then be applied to a broader range of subject areas. Yogesh and Yagnesh became teachers in their own way and in investigating their faith and experiences, I also encountered my own learning journey on the Swaminarayan religion.*

*When I sit at my desk, I often find myself smiling at a gift the boys gave me – the picture of the six spiritual leaders placed above my computer screen. When we close the door we also have a large Ganesha encouraging me to be the best teacher I can and install opportunities for the children to learn.*

*In the busy and confused world we live in, the inspired peace this family has introduced me to will always hold a special place in my heart.*

*Through the young lives of Yogesh and Yagnesh, we can see the positive impact of sincerely observing the wishes of our gurus and the niyams of satsang.* ◆

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*(Contd. from pg. 41)*

*"Well, no," replied his friend. "Actually, I have just heard about it."*

*"Okay, so you don't really know if it's true or not. Now let us try the second filter – the filter of 'Goodness'. Whatever it is that you want to tell me about my friend, is it good?" Socrates asked.*

*"No, it's quite the opposite," replied his friend.*

*"So you want to tell me something bad about him, but you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test because there's one filter left – the filter of 'Usefulness'. Is it going to be useful to me?" asked Socrates.*

*"No, not really," replied his friend.*

*"Well, if what you tell me is neither true nor good or useful to me, why tell me at all?"*

### **SWAMISHRI'S TECHNIQUE**

*A youth once asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "We may not speak ill of someone but what should we do when we get negative thoughts about others in our minds?"*

*Swamishri replied, "Do 'bhajan' when such thoughts arise in your mind. Engage yourself in God's devotion. If, possible, find some excuse and leave at once whenever such cynical conversations take place."*

*Need I say more?* ◆

# Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

February, March & April 2017

Gadhpur, Paliyad, Sarangpur, Vidyanagar, Ahmedabad, Pune, Delhi, Jalandhar, Pindvada, Abu, Sarangpur, Ahmedabad, Nairobi, Lenasia, Dar-es-Salaam, Mwanza, Kampala, Nairobi, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Ahmedabad



Annual day programme by APC students, Vidyanagar



Children's Day programme, New Delhi

## FEBRUARY

### GADHPUR & PALIYAD: 1-2

#### 1, Wednesday

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the consecration rituals of the *abhishek murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Guru Parampara *murtis* at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhpur. Swamishri and the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani inaugurated the 'Yagnapurush Dwar' and the exhibition 'Gadhpur Jota Shriji Sambhare...'. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, March–April 2017, pp. 29–37.)

#### 2, Thursday

At 4.45 p.m. Swamishri departed from Gadhada and arrived in Paliyad at 5.00 p.m. to attend the 248<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of Visaman Bapu, founder of the Paliyad *gadi* (spiritual seat). A Ram *katha* by Shri Morari Bapu had been arranged to celebrate the occasion. Swamishri did darshan at the Ramji Mandir and thereafter met Shri Morari Bapu. After a cordial dialogue and offerings of mutual respect, Swamishri departed for Sarangpur.

## SARANGPUR: 3-12

### 3-5, Friday, Saturday & Sunday; Bal Pravrutti Divya Sannidhi Parva

A two-and-a-half day spiritual camp for senior volunteers of the BAPS Children's Wing was held in Swamishri's presence. The theme of the *shibir* was 'Bhāgya jāgya re...'. Swamishri attended and blessed the volunteers during the *shibir*.

### 10-12, Friday, Saturday & Sunday; Satsang Pravrutti Divya Sannidhi Parva

A two-and-a-half day spiritual camp was held for satsang volunteers in Swamishri's presence in Sarangpur. The *shibir*'s theme was 'Bhāgya jāgya re...'. Swamishri gave darshan and blessings to the volunteers during the *shibir*.

## VIDYANAGAR: 12-15

### 13, Monday; APC Annual Day

In the evening at 6.00 p.m. Swamishri arrived for the annual day celebration assembly at Akshar Farm. Students of the APC (Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya) performed a traditional dance to welcome Swamishri. Then a wonderful drama,





Swamishri on stage during the AARSH lecture programme, Delhi

‘Tanu’, written by Jnanratna Swami, was enacted by students. The drama centred on an orphaned boy named Tanu, who lived with his strict grandfather. The boy took all his grandfather’s reproaches in a positive way and remained happy.

At the end, Swamishri praised the drama and its writer and blessed the assembly, “Having a positive attitude, in spite of having nothing, makes one happy. And conversely, in spite of having lots of money, a wrong understanding and ego mar everything. The drama portrayed the principles of the art of living. From it one is reminded about what a great life Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived. Despite facing a barrage of difficulties Pramukh Swami Maharaj was always happy. Our whole Satsang is divine. *Brahmavidya* means to perceive all *satsangis* to be divine.” Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the producer, music director and the performers.

## PUNE: 10–20

### 15, Wednesday

Around 4.20 p.m. Swamishri flew from Ahmedabad to Pune. He arrived at the BAPS Mandir in Pune at 6.20 p.m. amidst a warm welcome by the local devotees. Youths performed a welcome dance and Viveksagar Swami addressed the assembly. Finally, Swamishri praised the devotees, “You are all offering *seva* with the spirit of harmony, friendship and unity. There are only a handful of devotees here, however, volunteers from Mumbai have come here to serve.”

From 16–19 February a *maha-yagna*, women’s

day celebration, *nagar-yatra* and cultural programme were held and the *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior sadhus. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June, pp. 20–31.)

## DELHI: 20–25

### 23, Thursday; Children’s Day

As part of the Children’s Day programme children sang bajans in Swamishri’s morning puja. In the evening assembly children presented a programme themed on a Vachanamrut through questions and answers. Swamishri answered their questions on how to study successfully and the importance of abiding by *niyams*. Then Swamishri played a game with the children, ‘Shriji Says’. Thereafter, children held a round of questions on the Vachanamrut, Mahabharat and Ramayan and finally performed a traditional dance. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

### 24, Friday

The evening satsang assembly was held under the auspices of the AARSH lecture series. As a part of AARSH activities the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Sanstha was established in 2010. Viveksagar Swami spoke on ‘Yug Vibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj’. The second speaker was Dr Selvamurthy, former director of DRDO (Defense Research and Development Organization) and president of the Science and Technology Foundation at Amity University. He talked about the virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He also added, “I am fortunate to be here in Akshardham. Pramukh Swami Maharaj lives in all our hearts. Dr Kalam introduced me to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an avatar, an unparalleled saint and a manifestation of divinity.”

Swamishri inaugurated the website of BAPS Swaminarayan Research Sanstha. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly in Hindi, praising the lecture of Dr Selvamurthy.



Symbolic Holi Festival, Delhi



Swamishri blesses the artisans, Pindvada

## JALANDHAR: 25–28

### 25, Saturday

At 4.45 p.m. Swamishri departed by air from New Delhi and landed at Jalandhar airport in Punjab at 5.40 p.m. At 6.30 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the newly built BAPS *hari* mandir and was welcomed with a traditional bhangra dance performed by youths and a garland offered by Shri Subhashji Agrawal, a leading devotee.

On 26 (Sunday), a traditional procession of the *murtis* to be installed in the mandir was carried out. On 27 (Monday), the *prasad praves* rituals for the mandir were held. On 28 (Tuesday), Swamishri presided over the *murti-pratishtha yagna*. And on 1 March Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June, pp. 32–36.)

## MARCH

### DELHI: 2–4

### 3, Friday; Symbolic Holi Festival

At 7.00 p.m. Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in the Holi celebration assembly held on the large lawn facing the mandir. Prior to Swamishri's arrival Viveksagar Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami had spoken about the Holi festival and its significance. Then a video about Pramukh Swami Maharaj showering coloured water on the occasions of Holi was shown.

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the festive assembly, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan was totally divine and those who associated with him also became divine. God is divine, but to see the divinity

in his devotees amounts to celebrating Holi every day. By perceiving their divinity one's joy will be different altogether. In seeing divinity in all one forgets *dehbhav*.”

At about 7.35 p.m. Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then sprayed coloured water on Thakorji. Thereafter, Swamishri showered flower petals on the senior sadhus. Finally, the devotees came in double rows towards the stage and offered flower petals before Swamishri and at the same time were blessed with a shower of flower petals from senior sadhus. To the joy of all the festival provided fond, divine memories of Swamishri.

The next day a flower Holi festival was also arranged for all the Akshardham *sevaks*.

## PINDVADA: 4–7

### 4, Saturday

At about 5 p.m. Swamishri, senior sadhus and others flew from New Delhi to Udaipur. Then the entire entourage travelled to Pindvada by car, arriving at Harshadbhai Chavda's Divine Stone factory at about 8.00 p.m. A warm welcome was accorded to Swamishri.

### 5, Sunday

In the morning, Swamishri performed his *puja* on the grounds of the Divine Stone factory. Devotees and artisans from various parts of Rajasthan attended the *puja*. Children and youths from Shirohi Satsang Mandal performed a traditional welcome dance. Ishwarcharan Swami





Swamishri with children at the BAPS Students' Hostel, Abu

welcomed Swamishri with a flower garland.

At about 11.00 a.m. Swamishri visited the workshop where stones were being carved for Akshardham in Robbinsville. At about 12 noon an assembly was arranged for the artisans on site. Swamishri blessed all, "You may not be aware of the value of *seva* you have got here. Only after so many births does one get the opportunity of doing such *seva* for Satsang. Thus, do this *seva* with mind, heart and devotion." Then Swamishri blessed the artisans by showering rice grains and flower petals on them.

At around 7.00 p.m. Swamishri visited the other sites where work on Akshardham was ongoing. Then Swamishri blessed the Sunday satsang assembly. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was honoured with a *pushpa-tula*.

## ABU: 7-9

### 7, Tuesday

Swamishri arrived at the BAPS hostel in Abu at 1.00 p.m. amidst a warm welcome by the chief administrator Shri Shyambhai Raval, teachers and students.

In the evening, Swamishri visited the hostel playground where kids performed exercises and played games. At 7.00 p.m. Swamishri performed *arti* and attended the special satsang assembly. The hostel kids performed a traditional dance and a skit on 'King Gandu'. A question-answer session between the kids and Swamishri followed. Then the kids played a game called *rajipo-kurajipo*. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

## 8, Wednesday

At 10.30 a.m. Swamishri went to the hostel's playground. The students performed various activities like yoga asanas, and making paper toys, a garland of buttons, lemon water, etc. Then Swamishri went to one of the classrooms and took a class, explaining to the students that having a firm aim, belief, concentration, effort and faith leads to success.

## SARANGPUR: 9-14

### 11, Saturday

After completing his morning puja Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in the suburb of Parapatiya in Surat.

At 7.45 p.m. Swamishri blessed the volunteers and showered them with holy coloured water.

## 12, Sunday; Birthday Celebrations of Bhagatji Maharaj

After Swamishri's morning puja the festive assembly of Bhagatji Maharaj's birthday commenced. The celebration theme was based on 'Similarities Between Bhagatji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj'. The assembly programme comprised of discourses by learned sadhus and Pujya Dr Swami. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, saying, "Bhagatji Maharaj's spiritual sadhanas were universal, so they are acceptable by all. He was aware of the faults of 300 sadhus residing in Junagadh, but he never uttered a word about them and neither did he allow their faults to enter into his heart. This is a great thing. One can thus gain spiritual heights by not seeing the faults of others. Forgiving others is ranked second in spiritual sadhanas. The sadhana of seeing all as divine [*divyabhav*] is different altogether."

## 13, Monday; Pushpadolotsav

Swamishri celebrated the Fuldol festival in the evening by showering sanctified coloured

water on sadhus and devotees. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, March–April 2017, pp. 51–52.)

## **AHMEDABAD: 14–17**

### **15, Wednesday**

In the evening satsang assembly Swamishri celebrated the flower Holi festival. Devotees were showered with flower petals by senior sadhus as Swamishri gave darshan for nearly one hour.

## **KENYA, SOUTH AFRICA & TANZANIA: 17–31** **17, Friday; Ahmedabad to Nairobi**

At about 11.00 a.m. Swamishri and his entourage of senior and other sadhus departed by plane to Nairobi for satsang *vicharan*. The trip was known as Akshar Yatra. (For details of the visit, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June 2017, pp. 37–57.)

### **21, Tuesday, Nairobi**

During the evening satsang assembly at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi two unique events were held. The first was the dedication of three classrooms and a library for a government school, Tarakwa High School, in Bomet sub-country, about 225 km from Nairobi, built by BAPS Charities. The second was the declaration of the 1.29 km Masari Road as Pramukh Swami Avenue. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj addressed the assembly in English, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, ‘In the joy of others lies our own, in the good of others lies our own, in the progress of others lies our own.’ He actually lived every second of his life accordingly. He not only quoted this or [said it] just once in a while; he always lived the quote day and night. That was an extraordinary thing. He met everyone, right from the poor to the rich, with the same attitude. We, however, differentiate, seeing someone as poor or rich, whereas Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not have that [attitude]. He [had] no differentiation in his mind. He looked upon everyone as a human

being and did not differentiate.”

### **25, Saturday**

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Benoni.

## **APRIL**

## **DAR-ES-SALAAM, MWANZA, KAMPALA & NAIROBI: 1–14**

Swamishri met President John Magufuli of Tanzania in Dar-es-Salaam and celebrated Pushpadolotsav in the evening assembly (1 April). Kishore-Yuva Din was celebrated in Dar-es-Salaam (2). Swamishri dispersed the sacred *asthi* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Mwanza (4). Hari Jayanti was celebrated in Kampala (5). Dispersed Swami Bapa’s holy *asthi* in the Nile in Jinja (6). Met President Museveni of Uganda in Kampala (8). Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to Ronakbhai, renamed as Utkarsh Bhagat, in Nairobi (15). (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June 2017, pp. 49–57.)

## **AHMEDABAD: 14–23**

### **14, Friday**

Swamishri departed by air from Nairobi at 11.54 p.m. and landed at Sardar Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad at 8.30 p.m. (IST). On arriving at the BAPS Mandir Swamishri was given a warm welcome by sadhus and devotees.

### **16, Sunday**

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Tokyo, Japan. Swamishri also blessed Kuldeepbhai Mehta, a leading devotee from Tokyo.

### **21, Friday**

In the evening satsang assembly in the mandir hall a grand opening ceremony of an iconic art publication, *Bhagwan Swaminarayan: A Saga in*





Swamishri performs his morning puja in the mandir hall, Kolkata



Swamishri addresses the youths in Ahmedabad

*Paintings*, was held in Swamishri's presence. Shri Vasudeo Kamath, renowned artists and dignitaries attended and spoke on the occasion. (For details, refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June 2017, pp. 66–67 & 70 and also in this issue, pp. 21–25)

### **KOLKATA: 23–29** **23, Sunday**

Swamishri and his entourage of sadhus departed from Ahmedabad at about 10 p.m. and arrived at Kolkata airport at 12.15 p.m., and reached the BAPS Mandir at 4.00 p.m.

### **24, Monday**

At 7.10 p.m. Swamishri arrived in the mandir hall for the welcome assembly. Children and youths performed a traditional welcome dance. Thereafter, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri were offered *pujan* and garlands. Then youths and devotees enacted a drama themed on the subject that society is sustained by bona fide sadhus. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “It is not possible to attain God. But out of his compassion for mankind he incarnated on earth. How can an ant associate with an elephant? God incarnates in a human form to please us. Thus, we should follow his *niyams*.”

### **26, Wednesday**

In the evening satsang assembly 2,500 Bengali spiritual aspirants and well-wishers attended. Amrutcharitdas Swami addressed the audience

in Bengali and thereafter Swamishri blessed the assembly, “What is spirituality? Countless people perform actions related to their body, but the material world is temporary and God is eternal and real – such a belief is spirituality. This means that a spiritual life entails keeping God in the forefront.”

### **AHMEDABAD: 29 & 30** **29, Saturday**

At 11.10 a.m. Swamishri departed from Kolkata and arrived in Ahmedabad at 2.00 p.m.

### **30, Sunday**

A one-day *shibir* for youths was held in the mandir. At 12.45 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan from the glass cabin (*jharukho*). The youths were elated at Swamishri's darshan despite the scorching summer heat. Then Swamishri addressed the youths, “Shriji Maharaj and all the gurus of our organization loved unity. So, you must sustain and strengthen unity (*samp*) no matter what may come in your lives. You must think about what thoughts you should nourish with regards to unity. Also, think about what you should listen to, what words to say and how to behave. Unity is an attribute of God. When one has *upasana* and *samp* one won't have problems on the pathway to Akshardham.” ◆

(From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.  
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas)

# Observing Tolerance and Niyams

*On 27 March 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj was asked three questions in the evening satsang assembly in Lenasia, South Africa*

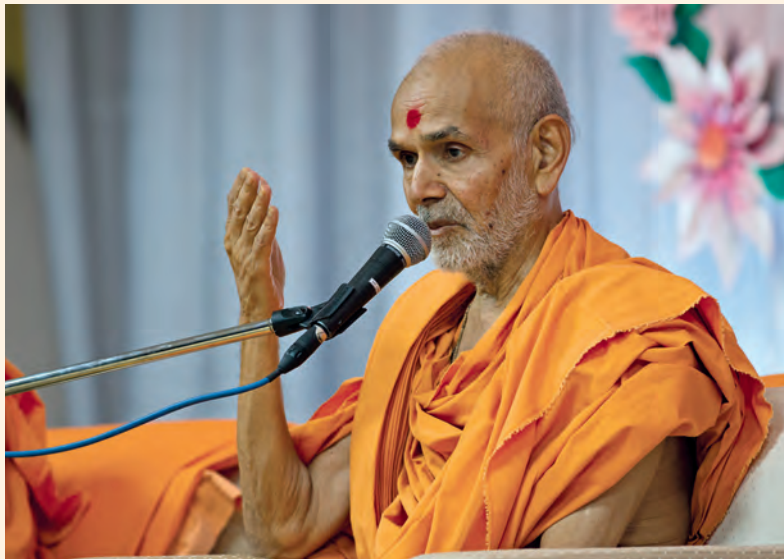
**Q.1.** Pramukh Swami Maharaj has tolerated a lot of hardships. Please guide us as to how we can face difficult situations in our life.

**A.** Yogi Bapa had said that the guru becomes happy and showers his blessings upon those who tolerate. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had tolerated immensely all through his life. One remains happy by bearing with whatever conditions, situations and things that come one's way. There is no end to having an attitude of demanding certain things.

Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave us lots of advice and understanding about tolerating others. By living accordingly one becomes happy, otherwise one will never have peace of mind. It is a great thing to tolerate. Though it is a little difficult, but one will become habituated once one walks on that path.

**Q.2.** We mostly follow *niyams*, but sometimes we lapse because we are not determined and strong. With what thought have you been able to follow them resolutely?

**A.** Yogi Bapa had consolidated in us that Shriji Maharaj is Bhagwan and Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman. By understanding these two things, one comes to understand the glory of how great God is and also how humble he is. Shriji Maharaj did *seva* of the sadhus in Loj. Yogi Bapa consolidated in us staunch faith in God and that material pleasures are



worthless. He gave a direction to our thoughts so that we could start doing what we are really supposed to do. Our ultimate goal is to realize Shriji Maharaj. We should believe staunchly that God and his Sadhu are true. No matter how lowly we may be but we have to have resolute faith and observe *niyams*. One must make efforts to follow *niyams*. Then all things will follow. One must also have patience and trust and not rush in these matters. By having these thoughts everything else will follow. Have trust and faith that our spiritual goal will be realized.

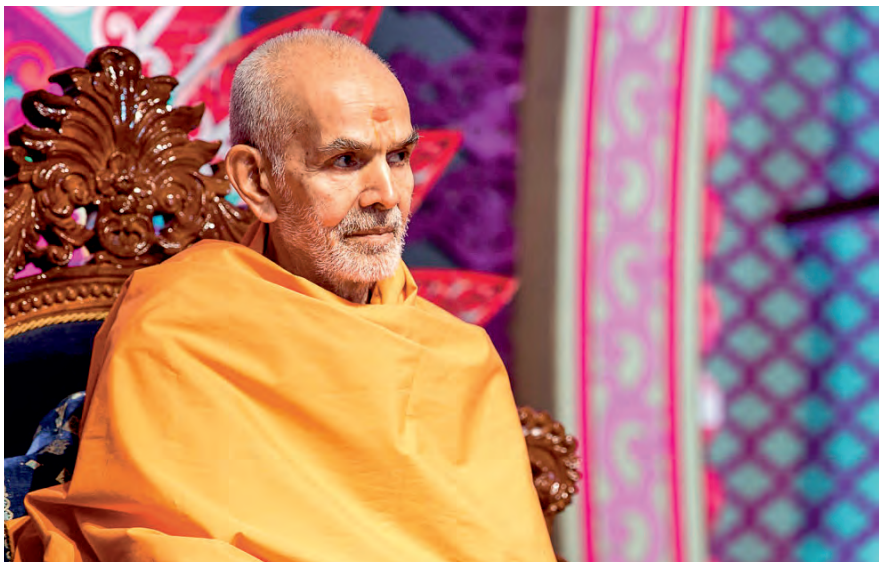
**Q.3.** What was it you saw in Pramukh Swami Maharaj that made you utter that he was a genuine sadhu?

**A.** Swami was without pretense and deception. He was simple and straightforward. He spoke frankly. He cleaned dishes on the day he was appointed as president of BAPS. ♦



# LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

February, March & April 2017



## FEBRUARY

### BLESSINGS TRANSFORM

#### 5, Sarangpur

Vivekprakashdas Swami narrated an incident of a devotee's transformation before Mahant Swami Maharaj and others in Sarangpur: "Vitthalbhai Rao was a BAPS devotee who lived in Bijol village, Gujarat. His father, Jemalbhai, was a non-devotee. In fact he was steeped in all types of addictions and vices. Vitthalbhai always nursed a deep wish that his father should abstain from his addictions altogether. Because of him meat was also being cooked at home. Subsequently, for three years Vitthalbhai had to fetch water for himself from a river to drink and cook his meals. Under this harrowing situation, Vitthalbhai took his father to Bochasan for Mahant Swami's darshan in 1997. He described to him about his father's nature and bad habits. Mahant Swami blessed Vitthalbhai and said, 'You will get the result in two to three hours time.' Then Mahant Swami initiated Jemalbhai into satsang and placed a *kanthi* around his neck.

Thereafter, Vitthalbhai and his father left. While they were travelling back to their village

Jemalbhai declared, 'I am blessed to have been initiated into satsang by a great sadhu. I pledge from now onwards to give up all my addictions.' From thereon his father became a staunch devotee.

\* \* \*

### SWAMISHRI'S HUMILITY

Chaitanyamurti Swami recounted an incident before Mahant Swami Maharaj and others in Sarangpur: In 2001, children *satsangis* from USA had come to India on a satsang trip. Mahant Swami was told to address them on 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj: My Friend'. Swami pondered and prepared his speech well. He also told an artist to make some illustrations and finally prepared a powerpoint presentation. Mahant Swami's speech was arranged in Bochasan. The boys were exhausted and the environment and culture was new to them. Swami's speech got a little prolonged and subsequently the boys outstretched their legs and went to sleep. After finishing his speech Swami left for Atladra. On reaching there Swami felt he had not delivered his speech as he had intended. So, Mahant Swami wrote a letter of apology to the kids, "I regret that I was unable

to explain to you what I had in my mind. That was a sort of punishment for you. My lectures are never so long. This was my first trial and therefore I was unable to balance my time. Next time it won't happen. Sorry, pardon me. Yours, Jai Swaminarayan from Sadhu Keshavjivandas."

## FULFILLING A DEVOTEE'S WISH

### 8, Sarangpur

Aksharpremdas Swami narrated an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj: "It was 2013, and Mahant Swami arrived in Jaipur. Once, Swami returned to the mandir after visiting and sanctifying the homes of devotees. A devotee was waiting in the mandir for Mahant Swami to arrive. He said, 'My home has been forgotten to be sanctified by you.' I knew the devotee was going to stay there for only two years and thereafter he would be moving elsewhere. So, I reminded the devotee that his house was under renovation and it would not be proper for Mahant Swami to visit it then. But he insisted and wished that you came. Subsequently, you said, 'Let us go.'

"It was 1.00 p.m. The attendant sadhu had told you not to go because you were already late for lunch. In spite of that you wished to please the devotee and thus visited his house and took your lunch after coming back to the mandir. You satisfied him, and then on our way back I asked you, 'Don't you get bored during such situations?' You replied, 'I've never held on to my resolve. Yogiji Maharaj taught us to please others. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had ignored his mealtimes to please devotees.'"

Mahant Swami Maharaj had disregarded his routine schedule and discomfort to please a devotee and respect his wish.

## MARCH

## ONENESS WITH PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

### 17, From Ahmedabad to Nairobi

Arvindbhai Saheb of Nairobi narrated before Mahant Swami Maharaj, "In 2003, I had invited

Pramukh Swami Maharaj to inaugurate my new factory in Selvas. But he was unable to come, so he told me, 'I will send Mahant Swami, who is like me and will bless you with happiness like me.'"

## APRIL

## GOOD ACTIONS

### 1, Dar-es-Salaam

Some devotees were using coloured pencils to colour a map of Africa. Swamishri stopped by to look at what they were doing. Someone restrained the devotees, "You cannot inspire the colour of Satsang in Africa in this manner." The devotees colouring the map paused and asked Swamishri, "How can we inspire the colour of Satsang in Africa."

"Through one's own actions and behaviour," replied Swamishri.

One's demeanour or virtuous personal behaviour is the key to inspiring others with noble thoughts and actions.

## ALWAYS A SERVANT OF GOD

### 5, Kampala

Two questions were addressed to Swamishri by an aspirant in a letter, "Give me your introduction?"

Swamishri wrote, "*Shriji na das* [the servant of Shriji Maharaj] and a *param ekantik sant* [God-realized Sadhu]."

The second question was, "When I pray in my daily puja does it reach you?"

Swamishri wrote, "The prayers you offer in your *puja* reach me."

Swamishri candidly revealed his servitude to Shriji Maharaj and also the fact that he is a sadhu of the highest spiritual calibre for the benefit of all aspirants.

## YOGI BAPA'S DIVINE REVELATION

### 9, Kampala

Arun Rana, nephew of Harshadbhai Rana of Nairobi, recalled an interesting incident of Yogiji



Maharaj revealing the greatness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. He said, “In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj had come to Kampala. At that time I was one week old, premature and ill. The doctor said that I would not survive. So, my father, uncle Harshadbhai and other relatives went to the mandir to seek Yogi Bapa’s blessings.

“Yogi Bapa blessed and said, ‘He will live.’ Then Bapa asked, ‘What is the child’s name?’ My father replied that he had not yet decided. Then Yogi Bapa said, ‘Call him Arun.’

“Then my father and uncle requested Yogi Bapa to come to my home and sanctify it. Yogi Bapa replied, ‘I will not be able to come, but I will send two sadhus who are like me. Will that be fine?’ My father and uncle agreed. And Yogi Bapa sent Pramukh Swami Maharaj and you to bless my home. So, Bapa had revealed then that Swami and you are like him.”

### KEEPING THINGS SPICK AND SPAN 23, Ahmedabad

Mahant Swami Maharaj was about to leave his room to depart from Ahmedabad Mandir on his onward journey to Kolkata. The attendant sadhu had packed Swamishri’s belongings. However, when Swamishri noticed the creased bedspread on his bed and the out of place pillow he started to smoothen out the creases and place the pillow appropriately. The attendant sadhu, who was in a hurry to leave, told Swamishri that the bedsheet and pillow would be arranged later by the youth volunteers. So, there was no need for him to do that. But Swamishri replied, “No. We should leave everything in a proper manner. In fact, it should be left in better shape than what it was before.”

Like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who always made sure that things were left in their proper place and everything was spick and span prior to leaving a devotee’s home, Mahant Swami Maharaj has the same trait of keeping things in proper place.

### CALM AND COOL IN A TESTING SITUATION 23, Kolkata

Swamishri departed from the Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad at 9.10 a.m. to proceed towards Kolkata by flight. He landed at Kolkata airport at 12.15 p.m., and the long journey to the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir was scheduled to be covered by helicopter. Since the helicopter had not arrived Swamishri waited, remaining seated in the aeroplane and later sat in a car at the airport.

The helicopter finally arrived at 1.45 p.m. Swamishri and the group of sadhus sat in the helicopter. A further 15-20 minutes were required to refuel the helicopter. Even thereafter the helicopter did not take off. On enquiring about the delay, it became known that it had not received flying permission from the control tower. By now everyone’s patience had frayed. In addition, it was *ekadashi*.

Swamishri’s attendant asked him, “During such testing situations don’t you feel stressed or bored?” Swamishri gestured as if he was turning the *mala* and replied, “I am happy because I’m doing bhajan of God.”

It was 2.45 p.m., and still the permission to fly had not been granted. Finally, it was decided to cover the journey to the mandir by road. At 3.00 p.m. Swamishri and his attendant sadhus travelled by car and reached the mandir precincts at about 4.00 p.m. He was welcomed with a garland. Then Swamishri patiently did darshan of Thakorji and blessed all the devotees in spite of being fatigued by the long journey. It had taken seven hours to arrive from Ahmedabad (9.10 a.m. to 4.07 p.m.)

Prior to retiring at night Swamishri was told that he had to go through a lot of hassle that day. He replied calmly, “It was God’s wish.”

Swamishri’s forbearance was exemplary. He remained unruffled and cool all through the journey, smiling and conversing with the sadhus. ♦

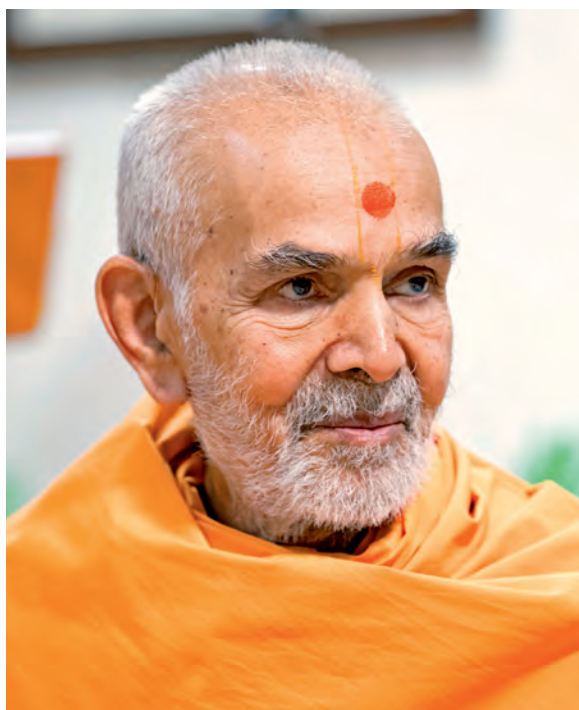
(From Swamishri’s daily report in  
Gujarati by Sadhu Brahnavatsaldas.  
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas)

# ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

February, March & April 2017

*When questions were posed to Mahant Swami Maharaj he revealed his spiritual understanding, perspective and sometimes his own spiritual state.*

*Let us see some of his fascinating answers and revelations.*



**Q.** What should we do so that our mind does not win over us?

**A.** Have resolute refuge (*ashro*) in God; resolute and nothing else! Then one would be able to defeat and demolish one's mind.

(4 February, Sarangpur)

**Q.** Haritilakdas Swami asked Swamishri, "We travel to the villages around Gandhinagar to conduct satsang assemblies. What is your message or instruction to the devotees?"

**A.** *Samp* (Harmony).

(4 March, Pindvada)

BAPS hostel kids in Abu asked questions to

Swamishri during his visit to Abu in an evening assembly:

**Q.** Do you not get tired of doing so much *vicharan*?

**A.** Because God is with me I do not get tired.

**Q.** From where did you learn to draw so well?

**A.** It is natural.

**Q.** What message do you have for us kids?

**A.** Study intensely.

**Q.** When do you get tired?

**A.** When you do not live harmoniously (with *samp*).

**Q.** Do you get tired of turning the *mala* [rosary]?

**A.** Never.

\* \* \*

**Q.** Shyambhai Raval asked, "By having which one virtue can one be blessed with all virtues?"

**A.** By bowing and touching the feet of all (humility).

(7 March, Abu)

**Q.** Dharmagnadas Swami asked Swamishri, "How can we get divine dreams like you do?"

**A.** To have *divyabhav* in all.

(16 March, Ahmedabad)

**Q.** Shrutipriya Swami asked Swamishri, "Do you experience the bliss of Akshardham?"

**A.** "Always."

**Q.** Harinarayandas Swami asked Swamishri, "What should we do to make our mind divine?"

**A.** Have positive or wholesome thoughts. If a negative thought arises then remove it instantly,



because it will destroy you. There won't be problems when one's mind becomes divine.

(17 March, from Ahmedabad to Nairobi)

■ One who understands the greatness of others and searches for one's own faults is a servant or *das*.

(18 March, Nairobi)

Q. What are the spiritual means to attain your inner blessings and warm embrace?

A. To have *nirdosh buddhi* [seeing others as pure and faultless] for all.

(23 March, from Nairobi to Lenasia))

Q. A devotee in the USA had asked a question in his letter to Swamishri, "What words should we use to philosophically introduce you?"

A. Swamishri wrote 'Param Ekantik Sant'.

(24 March, Lenasia)

Q. A youth asked Swamishri, "I find it very difficult to get rid of my *swabhavs*. So, what else can I do?"

A. Shriji Maharaj says believe one's *swabhavs* to be one's enemies.

(27 March, Lenasia)

To find out Swamishri's inclinations and opinions with regards to satsang the following questions were posed to him:

Q. To consolidate one's satsang which virtue is required? Swamishri was told to chose one of three balloons presented with each having a different word written on it: *subrudbhav* (friendship), *abhav* (abhor someone), *bhakti* (devotion).

A. Swamishri selected the balloon with the word *subrudbhav*.

Q. How can one remain cool and happy within? Swamishri was asked to chose one out of three balloons with the following words on them: *khap* (eagerness), *shraddha* (faith), *droh* (condemn a devotee).

A. Swamishri chose *khap*.

Q. Which quality should one cultivate in order to sustain one's faith (*nischay*) in God: *avgun* (find faults in others), *seva* (do service), *mahima* (understand the glory of others)?

A. Swamishri chose *mahima*.

Q. Which attribute enables one to progress in Satsang: *ekta* (unity), *kusamp* (disunity), *divyabhav* (perceiving all to be divine)?

A. Swamishri chose *divyabhav*.

(1 April, Dar-es-Salaam)

Q. A youth asked Swamishri, "What should one do to experience inner peace and become immune to bitter words hurled by others?"

A. Cultivate the thought that God is the all-doer. It is like a master key.

(8 April, Kampala)

Q. Jay Patel, a *satsangi* child, asked Swamishri, "Yogi Bapa's maxim was 'May God do good for all', and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's byword was 'In the good of others lies our own'. Then what is your maxim?"

Q. "The same, 'In the good of others lies our own.'"

(10 April, Kampala)

■ To have *nirdosh buddhi* for all is our *seva*. One has to follow this [principle] to gain spiritual heights.

■ The best spiritual sadhana is to cultivate *divyabhav* (have divine feelings for all).

■ Agreements always bring results and arguments always lead to more arguments. In agreement one experiences enduring peace.

(17 April, Ahmedabad)



(From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahnavatsaldas.  
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas)

# Satsang Vicharan by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami in Asia Pacific Countries

2 February to 6 June 2017

Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and a team of four sadhus – Priyaswarup Swami, Vedantapriya Swami, Taponishtha Swami and Bhaktikirtan Swami – completed a four-month satsang tour of BAPS centres in New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton, Rotorua, Christchurch and Queenstown), Australia (Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Perth, Adelaide and Darwin), Singapore, Indonesia (Jakarta), Thailand (Bangkok) and Hong Kong.

They were joined by other sadhus overseeing the satsang activities in the various countries – Paramchintan Swami and Priyachintan Swami in Australia, Shrijikirtan Swami and Adarshmuni Swami in New Zealand, and Munivatsal Swami and Divyamurti Swami in Thailand and Hong Kong.

In each centre, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and the sadhus conducted assemblies, *shibirs*, *parayans*, *kirtan aradhanas* and *padharamanis*, nourishing the satsang and spirituality of devotees and *karyakars* of all ages.

In each centre they also conducted special *shibirs* for *karyakars* and *shibirs* for children. They held *parayans* for devotees in which the BAPS doctrine that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is supreme God, Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar and the manifest Satpurush is the gateway to *moksha* was well explained.

In the weekly Sunday assemblies, the message of family unity and harmony was conveyed through topics like, 'Understanding Each Other', 'Forgiving', 'Tolerating', 'Necessity of Ghar Sabha' and others.

In Auckland, Adelaide, Melbourne and Singapore children and youths presented inspiring public cultural programmes in Hindi, imparting the message of nurturing values in



Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami blesses the cultural programme assembly, Auckland



Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performs the *shilanyas* rituals of BAPS hari mandir, Hamilton



Shilanyas ceremony, Hamilton



Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performs *arti* of Thakorji at the BAPS hari mandir, Christchurch





Satsang picnic, Gold Coast



Karyakar Shibir, Melbourne



Kirtan Aradhana, Canberra



Puja Tyagvallabh Swami with *balaks*, Perth

children and youths.

In Auckland and Sydney, public seminars for youths guided them on how to manage and balance their personal, professional, family and spiritual lives.

In Sydney, a special assembly for senior devotees was held, inspiring them to make satsang the centrepiece of their lives.

In Bangkok and Hong Kong, evening *sabhas* were held at the homes of wellwishers, in which they invited their relatives and friends to benefit

from the spiritual guidance of sadhus.

In addition, the devotees also celebrated the festivals of Fuldol (Auckland and Brisbane) and Shri Hari Jayanti (Sydney) in the presence of Tyagvallabh Swami and the sadhus. Also, Tyagvallabh Swami performed the Vedic groundbreaking ceremony for a new BAPS mandir in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Through this *vicharan*, the satsang of devotees was greatly strengthened. ♦



Cultural programme, Singapore



Puja Tyagvallabh Swami blesses a satsang assembly, Hong Kong





## Inauguration of Neelkanth Varni Animation Film

25 May 2017, Ahmedabad

Titled *Neelkanth and the Snows of the Himalayas: From Ayodhya to Badrinath*, the fourth part of the animation series on the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was inaugurated by Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj in a grand function on 25 May at the BAPS Mandir in Ahmedabad. Several thousand devotees had gathered for this special occasion. The stage backdrop comprised of a large LED screen on which high resolution images of the film were displayed.

The inauguration assembly began with a detailed narration, based on historic references, of Neelkanth's journey by Aksharvatsal Swami. He

also outlined how, under the guidance of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Shriji Swarup Swami, the youths of the BAPS Animation Studio had produced the film.

Pujya Dr Swami then spoke on how to live a spiritual life in the footsteps of Neelkanth Varni. Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami described how this animation film gives us a glimpse of Neelkanth Varni's supreme glory and how fortunate we are to have attained his refuge.

Following a devotional dance by *balaks*, paying homage to Neelkanth Varni, Ishwarcharan Swami and Shriji Swarup Swami took the animation DVD to Mahant Swami Maharaj for inauguration as the





assembly hall resounded with hails of ‘Neelkanth Varnini Jai’. Then, the BAPS youth volunteers who had endeavoured for 20 months to produce the film were felicitated and blessed by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Afterwards, a trailer of the film was shown on the Large LED screen. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly in which he praised

the efforts of the sadhus and youths in producing such an excellent film.

This animation film series project had begun with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and he had viewed the first 25 minutes of this fourth part and expressed his profound delight. Work on the animation series continues with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦



*Neelkanth and the Snows of the Himalayas: From Ayodhya to Badrinath – An impossible journey of faith and survival*

This fourth part in the animation series on the divine life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, depicts Neelkanth Varni’s journey from Ayodhya to Badrinath. We witness his thrilling trek across the Himalayas from Kedarnath to Badrinath. The combination of realistic animation, soul-stirring music and sound effects, created with modern stereoscopic 3D technology, transports the viewer back in time to provide a breathtaking experience of Neelkanth Varni’s spiritual odyssey.

The film can be viewed in 2D or 3D and is available in high definition on DVD and USB, and online. It can be viewed on mobiles, tablets, computers and smart TVs.

Languages: Hindi & English

Running Time: 70 minutes

Available at all BAPS bookstores



# HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthipushpa Visarjan at Mansarovar

11–13 June 2017, Tibet



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami (second from right) and sadhus scatter the sacred ashes in the waters of Mansarovar



Mahapuja rituals of the sacred ashes, Mansarovar



Arti of Nilkanth Varni, Mansarovar

In 1793, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in his teenage form of Nilkanth Varni, went from Badrinath to Lake Mansarovar and back during the inhospitable and challenging winter months, from October to March. The journey from Badrinath to Mansarovar and back took him six months, during which he spent February in the -25 °C (-13 °F) cold environs of the 15,000 feet high Lake Mansarovar, including a six-day *parikrama* of the lake. The low oxygen atmosphere does not support any vegetation here, and Nilkanth Varni remained without food, fasting for all these months.

On this sacred sanctified land, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Anandswarup Swami and a small group of sadhus and Shri Rohitbhai Patel (Dubai) and devotees visited Mansarovar to

scatter the *asthipushpa* (sacred ashes) of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the holy lake. On 11 June 2017, along with prayers and meditation, the sadhus performed *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni's *murti* in the sacred Mansarovar waters.

On 12 June, on the banks of Lake Mansarovar, in a location with a clear view of the majestic Mount Kailash, the sacred ashes of Bhagwan swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were worshipped with heartfelt devotion during a *mahapuja*.

On 13 June, exactly ten months after Swamishri's passing away, his *asthipushpa* were ceremoniously and respectfully dispersed in the sacred waters sanctified by Nilkanth Varni over two centuries ago.





# HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Asthipushpa Visarjan

18 June 2017, London, UK



HH Mahant Swami Maharaj scattering the sacred ashes of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the River Thames, London

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited London 19 times between 1970 and 2007. London's River Thames had also been sanctified by Yogiji Maharaj in 1970, when he bathed the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj. It was therefore fitting that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sacred ashes also be scattered in the River Thames, in commemoration of his longstanding and sacred ties with the British capital.

On 18 June, the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals prior to scattering the sacred ashes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior sadhus in the morning at London Mandir. All the devotees had the opportunity to participate in the *pujan* of several *kalashes* containing the ashes, thereby offering their own personal tribute to their beloved guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

After 4.30 p.m., the sacred *kalashes* were taken to the River Thames, where Mahant Swami Maharaj presided over the final rituals aboard the *River Princess* boat at Lambeth Pier.

The boat then began its journey towards Westminster Bridge, the first scheduled stopping point. Here, Swamishri performed the ceremonial dispersing of the *asthipushpa* (sacred ashes) of Pramukh Swami Maharaj into the Thames.

From a special observation area along the walkway opposite St Thomas' Hospital Gardens near Lambeth Palace the devotees were able have darshan of Swamishri dispersing the sacred ashes. Devotess and well-wishers also gathered at various bridges along the Thames, including Lambeth Bridge and Westminster Bridge.

The boat continued along the Thames and passed by various iconic landmarks of London, including the Palace of Westminster (the Houses of Parliament), the London Eye, and the Battle of Britain Monument.

The ceremony and scattering took place in accordance with British Law and through a dedicated service provider with the help of the River Thames's various marine and port authorities. ♦



## INDIA

### YUVA SHIBIRS: 'DIVINE LIFELINE'

1 April to 20 May 2017

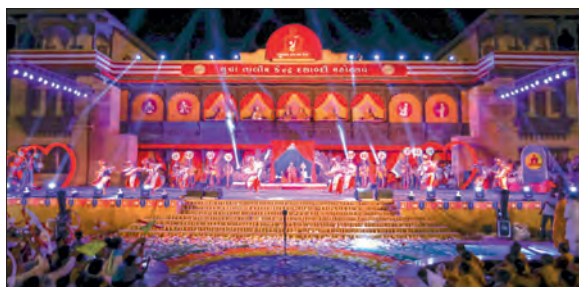


Over 24,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* participated in the 28 one-day *shibirs* held at 28 BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai.

Titled 'Divine Lifeline', the *shibirs* guided the youths on how Aksharbrahman is the divine lifeline that nurtures everyone's spiritual progress. They also learnt about the glory of the Akshar Deri in Gondal.

### 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF YUVA TALIM KENDRA

28 May 2017, Sarangpur



In the presence of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, over 10,000 devotees joined around 1,000 past and present youths to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yuva Talim

Kendra (Youth Training Centre) in Sarangpur, which was established by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2007. Since then, 15 batches of youths have benefited from the 6-month spiritual, management and value-based training under the guidance of experienced sadhus.

The grand evening celebration was presented in five parts:

1. Swamishri's Heart – Beats in the Form of the Sevaks.
2. Swamishri's Heart – Spreads Vitality Within the Family.
3. Swamishri's Heart – Beats for the Benefit of Society.
4. Swamishri's Heart – Sustains the Satsang.
5. Satpurush – Nurtures Everyone's Heart.

Through skits, audiovisual shows, thematic dances, speeches and other presentations, the messages of these five topics were effectively conveyed by over 400 participating Yuva Talim Kendra youths from Mumbai, Surat, Ahmedabad, Rajkot, as well as other cities and villages.

At the conclusion of the celebration assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, "Maharaj and Swami manifested on earth out of compassion and divine grace. The programme you presented was outstanding. But now, what is to be done? Observe the *niyams*. Swami Bapa has especially said, 'Till the end of your life, till the very last breath, observe the *niyams*.' By observing *niyams*, self-control is gained. By observing *niyams*, God is pleased. Maharaj has directed all to observe *niyams* and keep firm conviction. The youths have done a lot. After learning here, only by continually increasing one's enthusiasm, is one regarded as a true Yuva Talim Kendra *sevak*."



Then, an Amrut Kumbh of all the pledges taken by the Yuva Talim Kendra *sevaks* was presented to Swamishri to sanctify and bless.

### YUVA SHIBIR: 'LIVE FOR SWAMI BAPA' 26–28 May 2017, Mumbai



A total of around 135 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Jaipur attended the three-day *shibir* at the BAPS Swaminarayan Kalakendra, Vashi, Mumbai, in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami. Based on the theme 'Live for Swami Bapa', the *shibir* guided the youths on how to progress spiritually and earn the blessings of guru Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The six main topics, namely, Satsang, Shikshan, Swasthya, Satpurush, Seva and Sanskar were presented through speeches by senior swamis, panel discussions, open forums, debates, interviews, skits, audiovisual presentations and question-answer sessions, all providing insights and guidance for practical application in daily life. The youths learnt about the necessity of daily reading the shastras such as the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato to help nurture and strengthen personal spirituality.

They also learnt about the different types of *kusang*, and how to recognize and overcome them; the importance of decision-making; and respecting their parents and their duty towards them.

At the end of the *shibir*, many youths pledged to perform daily puja and attend the weekly satsang assembly at their local centres.

UK

### BRITISH PRIME MINISTER VISITS BAPS MANDIR

3 June 2017, London



The British Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Theresa May, visited the London BAPS Mandir and was greeted in traditional Hindu manner with auspicious marks of welcome and goodwill. She then performed *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, before proceeding to the mandir shrines where she offered flower petals at the central shrine of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

After meeting young and old volunteers of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, she met leaders of other Hindu organizations and members of the Hindu community. The Prime Minister addressed the congregation of more than 2,000 devotees and well-wishers, praising British Indians for being “inspiring role models” and encouraging them to help her make Britain the “world’s great meritocracy”.

She drew upon the “positive energy” and “strong sense of purpose and community spirit” that she experienced at the Mandir. “What you have accomplished here – and at so many Hindu temples across Britain – is not just a source of great pride for British Hindus but an inspiration for all British citizens.”

She praised British Indians for being “inspiring role models across all walks of life” and said their achievements were built “on the very best of British and Indian values”.

She also reflected upon His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s legacy of selfless service that

“will continue to benefit humanity for a long time to come”.

“Inspired by his own predecessor, Pramukh Swami dared to dream. He lived up to his motto ‘In the joy of others lies our own’. That mission is now being continued by Mahant Swami, who I am pleased to learn will visit London later this month.”

## SATSANG SHIBIR

17 June 2017, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



A one-day Satsang Shibir, titled ‘Satpurush: The Gunatit Legacy’, was held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. The event brought together devotees from across the UK and Europe, who were fortified with the vital spiritual understanding of God’s continual presence on earth through the Gunatit Satpurush.

The *shibir* programme began in the morning with darshan of Swamishri’s puja. Then, Swamishri inaugurated the *shibir* by lighting the lamp with selected *karyakars*.

The key concepts of the *shibir* were delivered through a series of enlightening discourses and panel discussions by sadhus visiting from India, including Atmaswarup Swami and Narayanmuni Swami. They drew upon the divine characteristics of the Satpurush as well as his unique, direct relationship with God.

Swamishri’s personal attendants also shared heartwarming accounts of Mahant Swami Maharaj’s selfless love for devotees.

Mahant Swami Maharaj graced the *shibir* in the final session of the morning, which involved

interactive activities to reflect upon the messages from the earlier session. A small group activity further illustrated the importance of unity and harmony.

Swamishri addressed the audience at various intervals to offer his personal guidance. He concluded the session by sharing the universal message of *ghar sabha* that he had personally handwritten on a whiteboard, thereby encouraging all *satsangis* to gather regularly in their homes to discuss satsang concepts and strengthen their family bond. He emphasized that this was the most effective tool to develop peace and harmony in the home and address life’s various challenges.

A special *shibir* was also organized for children that ran concurrently throughout the day. The programme began with an insight into the life and spiritual importance of the Satpurush.

Swamishri graced the *bal shibir* to the delight of young children, where he was welcomed into the hall by a guard of honour, comprising young children, and was presented with decorative garlands and a shawl that had been prepared by the *balaks* and *balikas*.

In a memorable session, the children interacted with Swamishri using a variety of toys and games which revealed underlying spiritual messages. A short question-answer session with Mahant Swami Maharaj provided invaluable guidance. Swamishri reinforced the key principles of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* through an annotated drawing that he had prepared especially for the *shibir*. Swamishri also sanctified a variety of artwork and poetry that children had prepared for the *shibir*.

## BAPS ANNUAL 10K CHALLENGE

18 June 2017, London

More than 3,800 people – from toddlers to senior citizens – joined the BAPS Annual 10k Challenge in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.





The nationwide charity Challenge brought together over 3,800 enthusiastic participants from towns and cities across the UK for a fun and healthy way to raise money for various worthy causes and local charities.

The funds from this year's event will go towards the Alzheimer's Society, the country's largest charity fighting dementia, and BAPS's multifarious educational, community and spiritual activities serving children, youths, families and the elderly.

The event was inaugurated in the morning by Mahant Swami Maharaj. Sadhus also flagged off the Challenge from the ceremonial gate of the mandir.

Later in the morning, Mahant Swami Maharaj attended the opening ceremony at Gibbons Recreation Ground opposite the mandir. Present in the assembly were Jeremy Hughes (CEO of the Alzheimer's Society), Dawn Butler (Member of Parliament for Brent North), Cllr Mohammed Butt (Leader of Brent Council), and The Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin (Chaplain to the Queen and Chaplain Speaker of the House of Commons).

Addressing the gathering, Mr Hughes said that the Alzheimer's Society is proud to work with BAPS to address the lack of support for people suffering from dementia and to raise awareness in local communities. He concluded by addressing Mahant Swami Maharaj, "Your philosophy, your Holiness, is amazing! It is a beacon and an example to the world."

After the opening ceremony, walkers, joggers and runners moved around the park to complete the 10 kilometres. Young children completed a number of circuits of their own, while

participating in various entertaining activities en route.

## NORTH AMERICA

### SATSANG SHIBIR

2–4 July 2017, Atlanta, GA, USA



Devotees from across the region participated in the two-day Satsang Shibir in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Based on the theme 'Bhagya Jāgyā Re...', senior swamis from India explained how constantly thinking of the greatness of God and his Gunatit Sant helps us to realize that their divine power and strength is enough for us to eradicate all of our base desires. They also explained how this also implies that thinking of the glory of God's devotees enables one to overlook people's minor faults and develop a positive outlook towards life and those around us.

Through his guidance and continuous *vicharan*, Mahant Swami Maharaj encourages and inspires spiritual living, nurtures faith in all individuals, promotes family values and unity, and strengthens small and large communities.

## ASIA-PACIFIC

### BAL-BALIKA SHIBIRS

19 February to 22 April 2017

A total of over 730 children participated in the seven one-day Bal-Balika Shibirs held at Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Perth and Adelaide in Australia and at Auckland in New Zealand in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and other swamis. Titled 'I Will Always Be with You', the



*shibirs* taught the concept of strengthening one's bond with the Satpurush.

The children learnt that observing the *panch vartmans* – abstaining from addictions, non-veg food, stealing and adultery, and observing social purity – will result in an everlasting bond with the Satpurush. Each topic included a presentation by a swami, followed by an activity based group discussion led by volunteers to help the *balaks* and *balikas* understand the true essence of each *vartman*.

The highlight of each *shibir* for all the children was witnessing Tyagvallabh Swami cook *shiro* in their presence. While cooking, Tyagvallabh Swami narrated incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj emphasizing the importance of observing dietary *niyams* in one's daily lives.

## KISHORE-KISHORI WINTER SHIBIRS

6 May to 4 June 2017



A total of 255 *kishores* and *kishoris* from throughout Australia and New Zealand attended the four *shibirs* held in Adelaide, Perth, Sydney (Australia) and Auckland (New Zealand).

Based on the theme, 'Dradh Priti', the one-and-a-half-day *shibirs* focused on how youths can develop intense love for the Satpurush through

thought, action, and speech.

Skits, enlightening presentations by swamis, practical activities showed how to implement these concepts in daily life. The youths also engaged in breakout sessions which included interactive activities, experiments and in-depth discussions in a workshop format. At the end of each session, the guidance of *sadguru* sadhus was received through video interviews.

The final session of the *shibir* emphasized the need for the manifest guru, and how Pramukh Swami Maharaj is present through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Through the *shibir* the youths understood the importance of developing profound love for the Satpurush, and that by having such a strong and unwavering connection with Mahant Swami Maharaj one finds direction in life.

## YOUTH SEMINARS

13 May to 16 June 2017, Australia



A total of 774 *yuvaks* and 578 *yuvatis* attended the Youth Seminars held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney in the presence of BAPS swamis. Based on the theme 'Dynamic Thoughts', the one-day seminars guided the youths on how to tackle the challenges of modern life in Australia by developing the correct attitude.

Among the seminar activities were a skit highlighting the main problems faced by youths and a motivational presentation by Paramchintan Swami addressing the answers to those predicaments.

The seminars taught the youths how a proper mindset can strengthen one's attitude, enabling them to handle the demands of daily life.



## FAMILY SEMINARS

17 June & 1 July 2017

Organized by the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan



Sanstha, BAPS devotees, together with many members of the wider community and leaders of multi-cultural organizations, attended the Family Seminars held at Burnside Community Centre in Adelaide on 17 June 2017, and at SNM Centre, Glendenning in Sydney on 1 July 2017.

Presented in Hindi by BAPS swamis, the seminars provided highly informative, insightful and practical guidance on the topic of 'My Family, Happy Family'.

The seminars highlighted the responsibilities of each member of a family and their inter-dependence. Key messages included guidance on balancing personal, family, social and financial goals, developing mutual understanding, sustaining traditional values, parenting and managing technology.

Families resolved to implement the practical activities, such as holding regular family assemblies, to help establish inner peace, harmony and happiness in the family.

## Africa

### KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

29 April to 21 May 2017

A total of over 825 men and women *karyakars* from 59 centres in 8 countries – (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Rwanda, Botswana, Zambia and Malawi) involved in satsang activities attended the four Karyakar Shibirs held in Kisumu, Kenya (29 April to 1 May 2017), Arusha, Tanzania (5–7 May), Lenasia, South Africa (12–14 May) and



Lusaka, Zambia (19–21 May). The *shibirs* were based on the theme 'Māno Mali Chhe Moti Vāt' – 'Believe You Have Attained a Great Tenet'.

Through speeches by swamis and senior *karyakars*, skits, audio-video presentations, discussions and question-answer sessions, the *karyakars* learnt about associating with the holy Sadhu, living as per God's and guru's wishes, true faith, refuge in God, pride in one's attainment, desire to earn the blessings and grace of God and guru, devotion, glory of the manifest form of Aksharbrahman, matchless Satsang fellowship, guru's affection for devotees, humble service and other topics essential for their personal spiritual progress and to assist them in their satsang duties.

## BAPS Charities

### BAPS CHARITIES RENOVATES HOSPITAL

1 April 2017, Kisarawe District, Tanzania



BAPS Charities handed over a fully renovated children's ward and operation theatre at Kisarawe District Hospital to Deputy Minister of State, Presidents Office, Regional Administration and Local Government Hon. Selemani Said Jafo (MP). In his speech, Hon. Selemani expressed his gratitude to BAPS Charities.

The event was also graced by members of the community from Kisarawe as well as district government officers and doctors from the hospital.

After the handing over ceremony, the volunteers of BAPS Charities distributed gift hampers to the patients in their respective wards.

## FOOD DRIVES

21 May 2017, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania



BAPS Charities organized a food drive for the 200 physically disabled children aged between 3 and 17 at the Salvation Army in Matumaini.

A similar food drive was held at Buguruni School for the Deaf & Dumb, which accommodates and takes care of 137 children.

## CHARITIES EXHIBITION

12–14 May, Nairobi, Kenya



BAPS Charities took part in Stawisha Maisha, an exhibition organized by the Asian Foundation, showcasing organizations that are transforming lives and communities in Kenya through their philanthropic work. A total of 47 organizations demonstrated their charitable activities for the less privileged members of Kenyan society.

BAPS Charities had an informative booth with interactive displays detailing its activities, focusing on Community Empowerment, Educational Services, Environmental Protection, Health & Wellness and Humanitarian Relief. ♦

## CHATURMAS NIYAMS

4 July to 31 October 2017

As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of *guruhari* Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances during the four holy months of Chaturmas. This year, Chaturmas is from 4 July 2017 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 31 October 2017 (Kartak *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken:

1. One month *dharna-parna*, *chandrayan*, etc. or *ek-tana* during the month of Shravan (24 July to 21 August 2017).
2. Extra *malas*, *dandvats*, *pradakshinas* as per one's convenience and faith.
3. Daily read one extra Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vato.
4. Those who, under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, have undertaken to daily read 'Jena Gune Rijhya Girdhari'/'Eternal Virtues' should finish reading it first. Then, daily read Bhagwan Swaminarayan's biography, Part 4 and 'Suno Aksharni Motai Re...'. Youths should read 'Suno Aksharni Motai Re...' and 'Shri Akshar Tirth'.
5. In accordance with the wish of senior sadhus, those who have not undertaken the 'Guru Shravan' observance under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations should listen to 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrutvani', Samput 7 or 8 and 'Sant Samagam' Samput 1 or 2.

Inspire five people to give up addictions, attend satsang *sabha* and conduct a daily *ghar sabha*.

Note: During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals, white and red radish, sugarcane and *mogri*.





## PUJYA YOGICHARAN SWAMI

Age: 63, Passed Away: 16 July 2017, Sarangpur

On 16 July 2017, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha lost a memorable spiritual star, Pujya Yogicharan Swami, in Sarangpur. His contributions to the Sanstha covered a whole gamut of services, and above all he served as a personal *sevak* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj for several decades. He was precocious and a spiritual savant.



Pujya Yogicharan Swami was born in 1954 and received the *parshad diksha* at the age of 11 from Yogiji Maharaj in February 1965 and the *bhagwati diksha* in September 1966. Despite very little formal education, due to his natural intelligence, enthusiasm and skills, and the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he acquired mastery in many subjects. He studied Sanskrit and became an *acharya* in Puranic Literature. He was very well read in all the Sampradaya's texts and was an expert historian on Swaminarayan history.

Yogicharan Swami was an expert in all aspects of music (*shastriya* and *sugam*) and excelled as a vocalist, instrumentalist and composer. His mastery in playing the sitar, *dilruba*, *tabla*, harmonium and other instruments was outstanding. He was also an accomplished recordist, setting high standards for the BAPS Sanstha's audio publications. He was a guide to many young musician sadhus and tutored them, especially ensuring meticulous practice for kirtan *aradhanas* and other occasions. His mellifluous style of singing bhajans inspired countless *satsangi* youths in India and abroad to sing in satsang *sabhas* and during Swamishri's puja.

In whatever task he was entrusted he always

gave 100% effort and focus. He was an accomplished photographer and gave creative contributions to many of the Sanstha's projects.

Intermittently, from 1977, he served as a personal attendant to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, especially serving with great care whenever Swamishri fell ill. From 1988 onwards, Yogicharan

Swami served full time as a personal attendant to Swamishri, continuing to oversee Swamishri's health with tremendous dedication. In this, too, he acquired detailed medical knowledge to ensure that all aspects of Swamishri's health were properly managed. Even experienced medical professionals praised his deep understanding of medical concepts.

Over the past few years, Yogicharan Swami was plagued with ill health, yet he selflessly continued to diligently serve Swamishri right till the end.

He possessed many outstanding abilities, yet he always preferred to remain in the background, promoting others. His humility, as well as friendly, warm and graceful personality endeared him to all.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj had blessed his soul with the attainment of the eternal bliss of Akshardham.

(Summarized from eulogy by  
Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami)



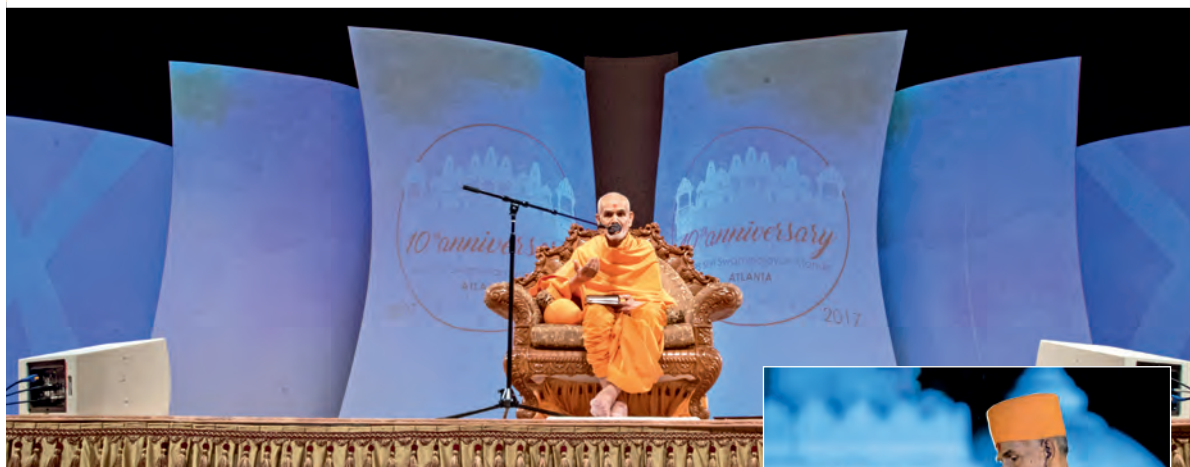
### **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S SACRED ASHES DISPERSED IN THE RIVER THAMES, LONDON**

**18 June 2017**

Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj ceremoniously dispersed the sacred ashes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the River Thames. Thousands of devotees gathered on Westminster Bridge and near the Houses of Parliament for the ceremony.

During his stay in London, Swamishri met the Indian Ambassador to the UK, Shri Y.K. Sinha.





#### MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN ATLANTA, USA

On 21 June 2017, Swamishri arrived in Atlanta to commence his satsang *vicharan* throughout North America. He was festively welcomed by youths with a traditional dance.

Devotees also joyously and devoutly welcomed him and benefited from his wise guidance.

Swamishri inaugurated the 10th anniversary celebrations of the BAPS Mandir in Atlanta, consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2007.

