

**Bochasanwasi Shri Aksharpurushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha
Satsang Shikshan Pariksha**

SATSANG PARICHAY PAPER 1

Time : 9.00 to 11.15 a.m.

Total Marks : 75

Sunday, 6 March, 2022

Note : 1. Answer of the prescribed edition only will be accepted. Any other answer from different addition will not be accepted. 2. Numbers of the right side indicate marks of question number. 3. Numbers in the blanks on the right side of the answer indicate lesson number & page number.

👉 Important Note 👈

In the question paper the marks of each sub-question should be written in the box (

mark:1	
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) given on the right side and the marks obtained by the candidate should be written in the adjacent box. If the answer is wrong then write '0' (zero) in the given box. The sign or indication of true (✓) or false (X) of each sub-question should be marked only on the left-side before the question starts.

👉 Important Note 👈

While checking the answers, when you come across lengthy answers i.e. shortnotes, reasons, brief answer in five sentence etc. Justify to the left side of the paper for any marks deducted. If the candidate has forgotten to mention any mentioned points then the examiner can deduct mark likewise and explain to the leftside of the paper that which point is not mentioned by candidate. For example there is question in March-2013, Pravesh paper-1, "Transformation of JobanPagi" JobanPagi said to Maharaj, 'Oh Lord, I am crooked worthless and foolish. I was unable to recognize you for who are you. Oh compassionate one! please have pity on me. Please free me from my sins.' If any point is not written then write "My sins" at left side.

(SECTION-1: SAHAJANAND CHARITRA, 6th Edition, January 2013)

Q.1 In the sentences below, state who is speaking to whom and when. (Total Marks: 9)

Note : Who is speaking 1 mark, to whom 1 mark and when 1 mark.

1. "This milk is very sweet. Have you put sugar into it?" (3/2/24)

➤ Maharaj - Patalbhai's wife

➤ In Bhader, when Patalbhai's wife offered milk instead of buttermilk, Maharaj sipped it and told this to her.

2. "If you have realized my supremacy, how could you fail to narrate it?" (11/4/92)

➤ Maharaj - Paramhansas


➤ Paramhansas described Maharaj as Datta, Kapil and Vyas so Maharaj told them this.

3. "Some of our young men are addicts and indulge in all types of vices." (5/2/39)

➤ The Rajputs - Maharaj

➤ When Maharaj told the Rajputs to eradicate the practice of dudh piti, they told him this.

Q.2 From the given options, place a tick (✓) in the box next to the correct ones. (Total Marks: 4)

 **Note: One or more of the options may be correct. Full marks will be awarded only if all the correct options are chosen, otherwise no marks will be awarded.**


1. 2, 3, 4 (19/3/138) 2. 2, 3 (1/1/2-3)

Q.3 Fill in the blanks. (Total Marks: 4)

 **Note: Marks will be given only if both answers are correct.**

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Habits, God (13/2/99) | 2. Ahmedabad, Nar-Narayan (17/2/124) |
| 3. Kalyandas, etc. (6/2/47) | 4. Bania, Diu (2/4/14-15) |

Q.4 Write short note on any ONE of the following. (in 15 lines) (Total Marks: 5)

 **Note: Main points of short note are highlighted. If points are included than give full marks.**

1. Gift of Vision (9/3/72-73)

In **Limbdi**, **Maharaj** was a guest at **Mulji Sheth's house**. A cot was placed for Maharaj and the sadhus were also offered seats in the compound. Maharaj was making inquiries about the sadhus and devotees. At that time, **a blind woman** was seen entering Mulji Sheth's house, feeling the wall while walking. All the people were looking at Maharaj, but Maharaj saw the woman from a distance. Maharaj asked Mulji Sheth, who was sitting in the front of him, **"Who is that woman, toiling alone?"** Mulji Sheth hesitantly replied, 'Maharaj, **she is my wife.**' Maharaj observed, 'Really! It is troublesome to be blind. **The woes of a blind woman are endless. She has to do the household work and cooking.** Again she must guard against insects and mites. She has forever, to depend on someone's assistance or help.' Mulji Sheth replied, 'Yes, Maharaj, but we are helpless. That's our destiny. We must suffer it. In this world so many blind people are living helplessly. Even in blindness people have to do business. How can they continue otherwise?' Maharaj observed, **'It would have been good, if your wife had vision.'** Mulji Sheth replied, 'Of course it would be better.' Meanwhile, Mulji Sheth's wife sent for him and said, 'Maharaj has done us a great favour. **Look, I can see everything. I am sighted.** How beautiful Maharaj looks in his beautiful white surval and pagh! You too should change your dirty clothes and put on new ones and go and thank Maharaj that my vision has been restored by his mercy and grace.' Mulji Sheth's joy knew no bounds. He put on new clothes and rushed outside. He fell at the feet of Maharaj and said, 'Maharaj, you have done me a great favour. My wife can now see by your mercy and grace. You have illuminated her life. She has been craving for your darshan for a long time. **You are really satyasankalp.**' (wish-fulfilling) Maharaj stayed at Mulji Sheth's house for some time. Mulji Sheth and his wife served Maharaj with great devotion and love and derived great pleasure from it. Later on in his life, Mulji Sheth left everything and served as a manager to Shriji Maharaj.

2. End of Famine (11/2/89-90)


At the time of famine of 1869, Maharaj had given the sadhus the **vow of eating tasteless food - food without any of the six tastes (Khatras)** and made them wear rudraksha beads round their necks. After one year, Maharaj **invited all the sadhus and their groups to participate in the Holi festival.** At Kundal Maharaj stayed in the darbar of Mamaiya Patgar where the groups of sadhus arrived. The sadhus looked very weak and their bodies were so reduced that their ribs could be counted. **Some of the sadhus had become victims of night blindness on account of malnutrition.** Tears rolled from the eyes of the devotees when they saw the weak bodies of the sadhus so they requested Maharaj to withdraw such difficult vows. Mamaiya Patgar's mother,

Raiba, asked Maharaj, 'Why do you dress like a sannyasi? Remove this matted hair and get your head clean-shaven. Please start accepting everything and free the sadhus from the vow of eating tasteless food. Please fill the bowls of the sadhus to the brim. If you and your sadhus will accept everything, things will improve soon and people will be happy. There will be good rain and the earth will be green again. Failing this, the earth will be sapless and dead.' Maharaj was pleased with the innocent and devout entreaties of Raiba. He got his head clean-shaven, **freed the sadhus from the vow of eating tasteless food**, removed the rudraksha bead and offered them once again the tulsi kanthi and **asked them to don a Vaishnav attire**. Thus, he banished the drought and brought greenery back.

3. The Nuisance of Lolangar (7/4/60-62)

Kathi devotees said, 'Maharaj, you talked about the great yagna you performed at Jetalpur, but **we did not get such an opportunity.**' Maharaj replied, '**Well, we will do another big yagna this year.**' With these words, Maharaj, followed by some **five hundred Kathi devotees and three hundred sadhus**, left Kathiawad. He broke his journey at **Khokhra Mehmadaavad**. A **bawa called Lolangar lived here**. He tied an iron chain round his waist so he was known as Lolangar Bawa. He was instigated by **Raghunathdas** against Maharaj. His disciples saw the sadhus. Knowing that the **disciples of Jivanmukta were not carrying any arms**, Lolangar's thousand followers attacked the sadhus. Maharaj as a last resort sent Kathi **devotees to protect the sadhus**. With a one swift move, Bhaguji **felled the leader of Bawas** and the Kathis controlled the situation. They freed the sadhus. The bawas were no match against the skill and courage of the Kathis. Many were killed, many were injured and the rest escaped. After giving medical **aid to the sadhus**, **Maharaj sent them to Surat**. Considering it unsafe there, **Maharaj left for Vahelal in the company of some sadhus and Kathi devotees**.

Q.5 Answer ALL of the following, using one sentence (not just one word) for each answer. (Total Marks: 5)

 **Note: No mark for incomplete answer.**

1. Whom did Maharaj ask to compose bhajans to commemorate the weddings? (13/3/100)
A. Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami and Premanand Swami to commemorate the weddings.
2. What did the monkey recite after telling the beads? (17/4/127)
A. The monkey recited some verses from the Tulsi Ramayan after telling the beads.
3. What did Maharaj ask Mulu Khachar to become? (4/5/36)
A. Maharaj asked Mulu Khachar to become a satsangi.
4. Where in Rajkot and on which date was the meeting between Shriji Maharaj and Sir John Malcolm held? (24/2/160)
A The meeting between Shriji Maharaj and Sir John Malcolm held on 26 February, 1830 at the Political Agent Mr. Blane's bungalow on Diwan Road in Rajkot.
5. At which places did Maharaj built mandirs? (21/1/149)
A. Maharaj built mandirs in Ahmedabad, Vartal, Bhuj, Dholera, Junagadh and Gadhada.

Q.6 Give reasons for the following (two to three lines each). (Total Marks: 6)

1. **Maharaj embraced Gunatitanand Swami although his body was not soiled with mud. (18/4/132)**
A. By looking at Gunatitanand Swami's unassuming and innocent personality, Maharaj embraced Gunatitanand Swami although his body was not soiled with mud.
2. **The sadhu's pattar was filled with sweets. (23/3/157-158)**
A. The sadhu bowed down before everyone and collected the food, and as a result, the whole of the pattar was filled with sweets. In the same manner, if one can overcome his ego and collect just one virtue from everyone, his life will be filled with virtue.

3. Dunlop invited Maharaj to visit Ahmedabad. (14/2/103)

- A. The British established their rule in Ahmedabad and Mr Andrew Dunlop was appointed as the Collector of Ahmedabad. He was aware of the good law and order situation in the regions of Maharaj's influence. He was pleased with the law-abiding nature of the satsangis. So he asked one satsangi, 'Why does Swaminarayan not visit Ahmedabad?' The satsangi narrated the harassment and forbidding of him to enter the city to him. Mr Dunlop replied, 'You go to Swaminarayan and tell him that there is no more Peshwa rule in Ahmedabad. You are welcome to Ahmedabad and can happily resume your religious activities.'

(SECTION-2: SATSANG READER PART-2, 4th Edition April 2011)

Q.7 In the sentences below, state who is speaking to whom and when. (Total Marks: 9)

 **Note: Who is speaking 1 mark, to whom 1 mark and when 1 mark.**

1. "Ask her why she has come and whether she will stay here." (6/43)

- ⇒ Maharaj - Women
- ⇒ When in the women's room Bhaktimata appeared, Maharaj told this to the women.

2. "How can we say he is like other incarnations?" (1/4)

- ⇒ Nityanand Swami - The Sadhus
- ⇒ When Satsangijivan scripture was being written, most of the sadhus compared Maharaj with incarnations like Ram and Krishna. At that time, Nityanand Swami told this to the sadhus.

3. "You had given our father your darshan in the form of Shri Krishna." (2/15)

- ⇒ Laduba and Jivuba - Maharaj
- ⇒ They are asking in the context of when Maharaj gave darshan in the form of Shri Krishna. Shri Krishna is the master if Golok whereas you say you are the master of Akshardham. So what should we understand?

Q.8 Select the SIX correct sentences from below and write them in the correct story sequence in the boxes. (Total Marks: 6)

Topic: Dada Khachar (5/33-34)


(1) **Write the correct sentence numbers:**

1	2	4	5	9	12
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(2) **Correct sequence of sentences :**

2	5	4	1	12	9
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Note : (1) 3 marks will be awarded in the correct sentence number only if all the six sentence numbers are correct and (2) 3 marks will be awarded only if all the sequence of sentence numbers are correct. Otherwise no marks will be given.

 **Note: (1) Correct sentence numbers:** Give 3 marks only if six sentence numbers are correct in any sequence, otherwise no marks will be given. **(2) Correct sequence of sentences:** Give 3 marks if all sequence of sentence numbers are correct as per answersheet otherwise no marks will be given.

Q.9 Write short notes on 'The spread of Akshar-Purushottam Upasna by Krishnaji Ada' (8/66-67) (in 15 lines). (Total Mark 5)

Krishnaji Ada used to contact religious discourses in the Rajkot mandir every morning and evening. **People were gently impressed by his enlightening talks.** He always preached, 'Swami is Akshar and Maharaj is Purushottam.' However, some jealous sadhus and devotees could not stand the increasing popularity of Shastriji Maharaj. So, they decided to humiliate and insult him. They collected signatures on a statement which read, 'Shastriji Maharaj should not be allowed to stay at Rajkot mandir.' They managed to get signatures from certain leading sadhus and devotees, too. He resolved to back Shastriji Maharaj and **did not sign in the statement** but one of the leading devotee of Gunatitanand Swami, had signed the resolution. When Krishnaji

Ada learnt about this, he **severed all his relations with his gurubhai** and dear friend, **Himrajibhai**. He would talk about the greatness of Shastriji Maharaj to the devotees who called on him at his place. He used to tell the devotees, '**There is no sadhu in either of the two regions like Shastriji Maharaj**. Even at the cost of a hundred lives we must always side with him. He is such a sadhu.' The sadhus from Junagadh stayed at Krishnaji Ada's house. When it was learnt that he supported them, they **barred him from entering the Rajkot mandir**. **As advised by Krishnaji Ada, Shastriji Maharaj seperated from Vartal mandir** and built the first mandir in Bochasan and consecrated the metallic murtis of Akshar-Purushottam there. Ada started telling his followers to go to Bochasan, 'The Akshar-Purushottam philosophy which had so far remained restricted to a corner has now spread throughout the Charotar region. Therefore, **those who want to talk about or listen to it openly should go to Bochasan**.' In 1909, (Samvat 1865) a parayan on the Swamini Vatu scripture was conducted at Bochasan mandir in accordance with Ada's wishes.

Q. 10 Answer ALL of the following, using one sentence (not just one word) for each answer. (Total Marks: 4)

 **Note: No mark for incomplete answer.**

1. What is narrated in the kirtan composed by Raghav Bhakta? (7/49)
A. Raghav Bhakta narrated in detail the daily routine and other divine exploits of Maharaj.
2. What was the dispute between Dada Khachar and the Bhavnagar state? (5/38)
A. A dispute was going on between Dada Khachar and the Bhavnagar state regarding his estate.
3. Where did Shastriji Maharaj consecrate a murti of Mulji Brahmachari? (3/27)
A. Shastriji Maharaj consecrated a murti of Mulji Brahmachari at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur.
4. What did Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj say on seeing Gunatitanand Swami? (4/31)
A. 'Swami, I feel at peace by your darshan.'

Q.11 Rewrite the incorrect words shown below in relation to the sentence heading. (Total Marks: 4)


 **Note: Marks will be awarded only if a sentence is written completely correct. Otherwise no marks will be awarded.**

1. **Shri Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj:** Raghuvirji Maharaj appointed his son, Shri Bhagvat-prasadji Maharaj, as acharya and then on Maha sud 8, Samvat 1934 passed away. (4/32)
A. Shri Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj: Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj appointed his son, Shri Keshavprasadji Maharaj, as acharya and then on Fagun sud 7, Samvat 1924 passed away. (4/32)
2. **Mukundanand Varni:** Once, Muljibhai was assigned to escort the daughter-in-law of one his neighbors from her parents' house. The father allowed Muljibhai to escort the girl. (3/21)
A. Mukundanand Varni: Once, Muljibhai was assigned to escort the daughter of one his clients from her in-laws' house. The father-in-law allowed Muljibhai to escort the girl. (3/21)
3. **Premasakhi Premanand Swami:** It was evening when they arrived at Jhinabhai's gate. The assembly was about to start. But the musicians expressed their earnest desire to hear the Bhajans of Muktanand Swami. (2/14)

- A. **Prem Sakhi Premanand Swami:** It was noon when they arrived at Dada Khachar's darbar. The assembly was about to disperse. But the musicians expressed their earnest desire to hear the music of Premanand Swami. (2/14)
4. **Sadguru Nityanand Swami:** Prostrated in the holy waters in Kashipuri and Vrindavan, and prayed at sacred ashrams, but his goal of attaining a God was not achieved. Although he was disappointed, he was not disheartened. (1/1)
- A. **Sadguru Nityanand Swami:** Bathed in the holy waters in Jagannathpuri and Rameshwar, and prayed at sacred mandirs, but his goal of attaining a Satpurush was not achieved. Although he was disappointed, he was not disheartened. (1/1)
- Q.12 Give reasons for the following (two to three lines each). (Total Marks: 4)**
1. **Kamalnayan Shastri's all desires for worldly pleasures were subdued. (7/58)**
- A. Kamalnayan Shastri was very impressed by the pious atmosphere and the sadhus who had shunned wealth and women. All his desires for worldly pleasures were subdued. He experienced divine bliss. That peace is due to the presence of Shastri Yagnapurushdas.
2. **Hargovinddasji gave one laddoo to each of them. (8/64-65)**
- A. As Hargovinddasji began to serve the sadhus with two laddoos, Swami stopped him and said, 'Give only one laddoo to each of them. Only that many have been prepared.' So, hargovinddasji gave one laddoo to each of them.

(SECTION-3: ESSAY)

- Q.13 Write an essay on any ONE of the following. (in approximately 30 lines.) (Total Marks: 10)**

 **Note :** Essay is an independent original subject. In addition to following points many other points might be included. Examiner has to examine essay on the basis of originality, knowledge of sampraday, special analysis and point from any other scriptures.

1. A Ripe and a Firm Devotee

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj shares his thoughts about becoming a ripe devotee of God

When a potter makes pots he seasons them by putting them in a kiln. Thereafter, (drinking) water remains in it. Of what use are 1,000 unbaked pots? Only a seasoned pot can be used to store water because it is fully baked. Similarly, there are many devotees of God, but only those who are ripe and strong are the true ones.

Once, we were returning by train from Benaras. A devotee had brought two [clay] pots of drinking water for us to our compartment. A few minutes later, one of the water pots broke and the whole compartment got wet. Everyone was troubled by it. Just when the compartment was cleaned dry, the second pot cracked. The reason being that the pots had not been fully seasoned in a kiln.

We do not like to eat chapattis and rice that are not fully baked or boiled. We do not accept them, and instead throw them away.

When a devotee of God becomes strong in all aspects Bhagwan resides in him. Shriji Maharaj came on earth and discoursed to his devotees about becoming spiritually ripe and strong. When we do seva, other activities and satsang our focus should be on becoming ripe and strong.

Only during certain incidents or testing situations do we come to realize whether our satsang understanding is robust or not. It's like a student who studies throughout the whole year and he realizes how much he has learnt only when he takes an exam. In the same way, a devotee's understanding depends on how much he remains unwavering in a testing situation. There are those who come to satsang, but become sad, depressed and give it up

on facing a minor insult. Such people are not true (ripe) devotees.

Shriji Maharaj defines a true devotee as one who abides by moral instructions (niyam), has faith (nischay) and stands up (paksha) for God, his Sant and devotees. One who has resolute nischay in God and his Sant, strongly abides by niyams and has paksha for them – his satsang keeps on increasing. Shriji Maharaj stated this for Shukanand Swami.

To become ripe and strong one has to introspect. No camera has been invented to inspect things within ourselves. If it existed then the act of introspection would not have been so neglected. Whatever we do, we should introspect honestly. We should set our own question paper, correct it ourselves and give the marks ourselves. Be honest with yourself. Are Maharaj-Swami happy about what I am doing? Keep on inspecting.

When you cannot see your faults ask the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. They will tell you immediately. The speedometer in a car shows you the speed, then another meter will show you how much oil or petrol there is in the car. Similarly, the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato are our life's meters. So, we have to inspect ourselves.

When you have been in Satsang for twenty-five years and still you have no affinity (khap) for it then whose fault is it? It is your own fault! A person driving a car will keep his eyes constantly on the road. He remains alert that his car does not veer off the road even a bit. So, we should remain alert – are we doing anything that displeases Shriji Maharaj and Swamishri?

Do whatever you do for Satsang only for gaining Bhagwan's rajipo. He is always ready to be pleased upon you. Once, Yogiji Maharaj travelled to a village. There were not enough arrangements for his stay there. However, the devotees had lots of love and devotional feelings, so Bapa gave his abundant joy to them. When Bapa was about to depart the devotees cried and regretted that they had been unable to look after him and make proper arrangements for him. Then, Yogiji Maharaj replied, "I had come to please you. When you are happy everything is included in that." God and his Sant want to please you, and they do not want anything in return. All they want are your pure feelings (bhav). We are indeed extremely blessed. We have the association of Pramukh Swami Maharaj – a God-realized Sant. By doing even a little for such a Gunatit Sant he showers his rajipo on us.

It is not so that only when you get 100% (in your spiritual sadhanas) he becomes happy on you. But when you keep on making honest efforts he is equally happy on you. Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhadra I 5, "If during meditation one cannot behold the murti [of God] in one's heart, one should not lose faith and stop meditating. Those who persist in this way will earn the immense grace of God. Moreover, God will be bound by their bhakti." The main thing is the devotee's faith, inner love, enthusiasm and affinity (khap). Talent or skill are not God's parameters.

What can we give to Bhagwan? He has given us this human body. Then, whatever we earn through our body, intellect, knowledge, power, wealth – everything is his. It's okay that we take pride in giving to him. But he is pleased with us by the small things we humbly do for him.

We have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who is eternally in communion with Shriji Maharaj. When we are eagerly ready to sacrifice our everything at his feet the words of the Vachanamrut become a mirror for us. We are able to clearly see where our lapses obstruct us. Walk in the footsteps of the Vachanamrut, Gunatit Gurus and Pramukh Swami Maharaj to become strong in faith (nishtha), bhakti and upasana, seva and niyam-dharma. Then, we will easily become a ripe and strong devotee in whose heart Bhagwan will easily and eternally reside.

2. Coronavirus and Kusang: A Correlation

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended many plans and caused costly disruptions. The pandemic has paralyzed the world, freezing previously taken-for-granted free movement and

causing unprecedented disruption in personal, community, national and international plans. And there is still uncertainty about the future course of this pandemic. In many ways, the pandemic has jolted humanity out of its complacency, overconfidence and flawed habits. Our feelings of invincibility have been shattered by an invisible adversary which has rendered us largely helpless, defenceless and clueless. But we humans are resilient, resolute and resourceful. Even amid the enforced overnight changes, we have adapted to a 'new normal'.

NEW WORDS AND PRACTICES

Since the onset of the pandemic, many new words and ideas have entered the public vocabulary: flattening the curve, social distancing, frontline workers, R_0 (R nought), herd immunity, cytokine storm, spike protein, antigen, antibody, lockdown, superspreaders, contact tracing, mutations, mRNA and many others. Also, many new behaviours and social norms have become widespread: wearing masks, queuing while maintaining a distance, frequent handwashing and many more. People have become more hygiene conscious and expect others to consider the health of others when coughing, sneezing and even talking. Work from home, online schooling and video conferencing have become essential. But despite the grim situation, there are methods that can help us conquer the scourge.

THREE-PRONGED POLICY

A single exposure to the virus for a short time may not be a problem for the majority, but repeated exposure increases the viral load beyond even a healthy body's threshold to contain it – thus resulting in overt infection. The troubling aspect of SARS-CoV-2 is that even asymptomatic people may be infected and can be contagious – spreading the virus to susceptible people without knowing. Only in hindsight is a link established between exposure and infection. So, as the pandemic spread, authorities everywhere advised three main measures to limit one's chances of infection: proper mask wearing, social (physical) distancing and frequent handwashing. And places where these guidelines were strictly followed did reap benefits, flattened the curve and reduced the burden on limited medical resources. These common sense safeguards saved many lives.

CORONAVIRUS AND KUSANG

In spiritual terms, the coronavirus represents a form of kusang – which is company in various forms that endangers one's spiritual health. Just as the company of (exposure to) the SARS-CoV-2 virus jeopardizes one's physical health. Infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus can lead to a wide spectrum of effects, from mild, barely noticed illness to death. Recovery may result in a return to normal health (for most people) or leave one with chronic debilitating problems. Hindu shastras state that indulging in kusang, just like infection with SARS-CoV-2, can lead to a wide range of spiritual consequences – from fleeting to fatal. It all depends on the potency of and duration for which the particular form of kusang one is exposed to; just like exposure to the virus.

CONTAGIOUS

Among the more technical terms is ' R_0 ' – R nought – a mathematical term indicating how contagious an infection is. It represents how many people may become infected from one infected person. The higher the number, the more contagious the disease. Measles has an R_0 of 18, while R_0 for SARS-CoV-2 is estimated at between 2 and 3. The objective is to reduce R_0 to less than 1 to flatten the curve and control the spread of disease. So, what does all this have to do with spirituality? Well, the safeguards to protect against COVID-19 (and many other airborne infections) have parallels in protecting one's spiritual health. You will be familiar with the adage 'prevention is better than cure' – because if one contracts an illness, then, despite being cured, lingering debilitation (morbidity) may remain. The three main measures to prevent spread of the coronavirus advocate for avoidance of exposure to the virus. This is the same advice that shastras have stipulated for kusang – avoid it. Obviously, it is not always possible to avoid exposure to the virus or kusang. In that case, protec-

tion is required. So, social distancing can be regarded as avoiding, whereas wearing masks and washing hands are forms of protection. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 18, Shriji Maharaj states that by exposing oneself to kusang in the form of sense pleasures one risks spiritual decline. Different types of materialistic pleasures can be said to have different R numbers. Some lead to speedy spiritual decline because they have a rapid effect, while some cause a gradual regress. In the spiritual domain, the only safe R number is zero.

PROTECTION FROM KUSANG

We have a number of tools to fight off kusang. When a virus enters the body, the first line of defence is the innate, non-specific immune response and then later the adaptive, specific or targeted, response takes over. Similarly, when confronted with kusang, there is the need for an immediate response – to exit the situation, or if that is not possible, vigilance and courage to control the circumstances. The other, longterm, antidote to kusang is to surround and immerse oneself in satsang. As Mahant Swami Maharaj has stated in Satsang Diksha, verse 8: associate with the atma, Paramatma, guru and shastras, since this results in divine joy. Satsang is further bolstered by the community of devotees and the multitude of spiritual activities that enable one to reinforce the satsang ideals. This is somewhat akin to herd immunity. Sometimes, exposure to kusang can lead to the equivalence of a cytokine storm – wherein the mind whirls, churns and spins in a frenzy, destabilizing and disorienting a person and driving them to damaging consequences. Aggressive treatment is required to control a cytokine storm in the body, similarly swift, decisive action in response to the kusang antigen will limit the damage it does. Whereas, treatments for virus infections are predominantly physical – drugs, medical accessories, etc. – treatment for kusang is mostly intangible, using techniques that target the mind to calm it and enable it to think rationally.

VARIETIES OF KUSANG

Gunatitanand Swami, in his talks, describes three forms of kusang – variations of a problem that have the same harmful impact. Much like mutant or variant forms of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The first is external kusang: the company of overtly decadent people and indulgence in material pleasures without restriction. The second is internal kusang: one's inner demons, base natures, that deflect one from spirituality. The third is kusang within satsang: this refers to the negative, discouraging talks that stifle one's spiritual progress despite being immersed in satsang. People who indulge in such talks can be likened to asymptomatic spreaders. That is, just like some who are infected with SARS-CoV-2 do not show obvious symptoms and can spread the disease, these 'satsangis' outwardly show no signs, but inwardly are a source of kusang. One must learn to recognize such people and steer clear from them. To further the analogy, there may be superspreaders – some who are infected with the coronavirus are more contagious and spread the disease to a larger number of people. Similarly, some forms of kusang are highly transmissible and are easily contracted. They readily affect people and harm them spiritually.

MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

During this pandemic, some people have wilfully ignored the health and safety guidelines issued by government and medical authorities, endangering both themselves and others, in the false belief that they will not be infected or affected by the virus. However, subsequently, they and others fall ill, often with dire consequences. Spiritually also, overconfidence that kusang will not cause one harm is misplaced. Shriji Maharaj states in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 18, "None have been able to indulge in pleasures of the senses and yet remain uninfluenced by them; none will be able to do so in the future; nor is there anyone like that presently. Even one who has endeavoured for countless millions of years is incapable of remaining uninfluenced amidst temptations. Therefore, if you behave as I have described, you will benefit." One may feel that engaging in kusang is not harmful and leaves no lasting effects. But remember even those who have seemingly fully recovered from the virus have suffered sudden fatal outcomes that have baffled even the best doctors. Similarly, the

virus of kusang festers in the mind and can suddenly unleash lethal attacks in the form of thoughts and actions that lead to spiritual demise. To reinforce this point, in Vachanamrut Vartal 20, Shriji Maharaj says, “Even if one has such understanding [like King Janak], one should under no circumstances associate with any type of evil influence. This is a universal principle.” So, just as even those in robust health are strongly advised, encouraged and often forced (through lockdowns) to adhere to health and safety measures, even those who may be spiritually advanced should steer clear of kusang.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

The pandemic spurred an outpouring of help for those more severely affected by the strict measures. Frontline workers and other essential workers took great personal risk to shoulder the task of helping the ill and needy. At the same time, volunteers served vulnerable people to fulfil their essential needs. People rallied to help each other and minimize the suffering. Similarly, frontline spiritual workers willingly undertake many responsibilities to help and facilitate the spiritual growth of others. They frequently volunteer their time, energy and other resources for the benefit of others. However, even the best planning can only yield productive outcomes when the society acts as a collective in pursuit of controlling the pandemic. Since, only then can swift responses be implemented to counter changing circumstances. In the same way, the most effective way to counter kusang is to be a part of the society of satsang. This will enable rapid and effective responses to challenging situations.

FROM RIDICULOUS TO REASONABLE

Some ridiculed the measures enforced by government and medical authorities. However, drastic circumstances call for drastic measures and even extreme or draconian steps. Warning against resisting and wilful complacency in implementing these protective measures, Erin Bromage, associate professor of Biology at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, writes, “Actions that look ridiculous today will look most reasonable in three weeks.” Sometimes, people also ridicule others’ practice and observance of spiritual disciplines and codes; they consider them to be over the top, unnecessary and futile. However, when such ‘ridiculous’ practices are sustained in one’s life, the negative effects of kusang are avoided and one reaps the benefit of longterm experience of inner peace and happiness, contentment, and the blessings of God and guru. In hindsight, one realizes, that foregoing the material pleasures in the short term leads to greater, more lasting and beneficial outcomes and experiences. Ultimately, the adherence to spiritual discipline is justified. The lesson: it is better to appear ridiculous in the short term than to leave oneself vulnerable to dangerous consequences later.

IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

It has been said that every disaster movie begins with the government ignoring the scientists, leading to disastrous outcomes. Despite warnings and guidance from experienced professionals, inappropriate decisions and actions take place to the detriment of all. In spiritual terms, the shastras and the living guru are the scientists. They have highlighted the pitfalls of kusang and how to protect oneself from them. Yet people do not heed their warnings and refuse to follow their advice, only to suffer avoidable pain and misery.

FINAL MESSAGE

Now, one year on, in March 2021, the future looks brighter with the prospect of vaccines bringing an end to the pandemic. Though the vaccines do not provide 100% protection against infection, they are very effective in preventing serious illness and death. So, taking a vaccine at the earliest opportunity is the wise course of action. Vaccines and other measures will dilute the effect of SARS-COV-2 over time, but we still need to remain wary of a possible resurgence. Continued protection against the virus will still be required through vaccine boosters and other preventive actions. As for kusang, it is an ever-present threat. It continues to present in ever-changing and increasingly potent forms. We cannot let down our guard and must sincerely implement the protective measures to prevent infection. Only

daily practice of satsang as guided by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our Gunatit gurus can inoculate us against becoming infected by kusang.

3. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Heartfelt Love

In 1952, I joined the Satsang with understanding when I came from East Africa to India. In the first two years, I toured with Yogiji Maharaj during my college vacations. I had rarely interacted with Pramukh Swami (Swamishri). In 1960, Yogiji Maharaj initiated me as a sadhu and posted me in Mumbai. Swamishri used to come for a few days when Yogiji Maharaj was in Mumbai. As such, I did not come in close contact with Swamishri till 1970. In 1970, Swamishri was with us when I went to East Africa and England with Yogiji Maharaj. On many occasions I accompanied Pramukh Swami to padhramanis and sabhas. But there was no deep attachment with him. At that time, nothing was more important for me than Yogiji Maharaj. However, I was drawn towards Swamishri in London due to two incidents. In one incident, Yogi Bapa and the sadhus arrived at a devotee's home to have lunch. Due to lack of time, I was not able to prepare the seating arrangements for dinner by spreading paper on the carpet. Furthermore, I was preparing the food, which was not ready. So, I was dashing in and out of the kitchen to take care of both the arrangements. Swamishri saw this frantic movement of mine. He realized the situation and started making the seating arrangements and told me to finish the cooking. He could have asked other junior sadhus to do that service, but he did not do so, and started doing it himself. On seeing this, I was drawn towards him. In 1974, Swamishri posted me at Atladra as the kothari. Whenever Swamishri visited Atladra, I had to arrange all the programmes; especially the padhramanis to the devotees' residences. Once, Swamishri was to come to Vadodara in the evening directly to the home of the devotee where dinner had been arranged. Then, he was scheduled to go to Atladra for his stay. When the devotees living nearby came to know of Swamishri's visit they requested me that Swamishri also sanctify their homes. So, I arranged Swamishri's padhramanis to their homes. But, as was common at that time, Swamishri's arrival was delayed due to additions in his schedule. Swamishri was seated after taking dinner, but I could not muster the courage to tell him that some padhramanis had been arranged. I was under tension as the devotees had made the arrangements. Then, while departing, Swamishri asked me, "What is the programme?" I replied, "We have a few padhramanis and then we will go to Atladra for rest." Without showing any unwillingness or exhaustion, he enthusiastically said, "Let us go." I was touched by this incident and came closer to him. Another memorable incident took place when I was with Swamishri on our way from Bochasan to Atladra for the Vasant Panchami celebration. Ishwarbhai, a dedicated devotee in Jitodia, was about to breathe his last. Swamishri had decided to see him first and then proceed further. We all went to Jitodia. Ishwarbhai was lying awake on a bed in the veranda of his house. A seat was arranged on a nearby wooden cot for Swamishri. A murti was placed in a chair nearby and a divo was ignited before it. Swamishri took his seat on the wooden cot, while Viveksagar Swami and I sat on either side of him. Swamishri stroked Ishwarbhai's body and talked to him encouragingly. His sons performed puja and arti of Thakorji. Then, Swamishri told me to offer the prasada to Thakorji and then give it to someone to distribute it to the devotees. After offering the thal to Thakorji, I was about to give the prasada to someone when Swamishri took the dish from me to pass it on himself. However, a part of the dish of prasada had become hot because of a divo lying underneath it. I was unaware of this and as Swamishri took the dish from the side that was hot, his right hand finger got scorched. Still, Swamishri did not let go of the dish and tolerated the burning sensation. Any other person would have dropped the hot dish. But Swamishri held on to the dish and cautioned a youth standing in front of him not to hold the dish from that side. Thus, he saved the youth from getting his fingers hurt. After getting into the car, Swamishri asked Narayancharan Swami to bring some ointment to apply on his fingers, which had developed a large blister. The severity of the burns was apparent from this. After the celebration in Atladra, I approached Swamishri for permission to return to Bochasan. Then, I begged for forgiveness, "Swami,

forgive me. I am pained to see your blistered finger.” He dismissed my words smilingly. But I feel sorry whenever I remember this incident, and when I remember that blister on his finger, I feel pain. However, I still recall that painful incident because the experience of his enduring and pardoning nature is refreshed. By this incident, Swamishri drew me more towards him. Another incident of Swamishri also touched me. As per Swamishri’s wish, we eight sadhus went on a satsang tour of America in 1989. The tour was for four-and-a-half months. During the tour, my health deteriorated, and I lost my appetite and felt thirsty. I attributed this to a stomach ailment. I thought that once we returned to India, I would recover and be all right. I completed the satsang tour schedule and did not consult a doctor. But, after the tour, when we returned to Mumbai, I was very weak and called Dr Kiranbhai Doshi. From my physical symptoms and the blood and urine report, it was diagnosed that I had severe diabetes. I was admitted to Dr Kiranbhai’s hospital. Swamishri was in Ahmedabad at that time. Some of sadhus who had travelled with me went to Ahmedabad and gave the details to Swamishri. Swamishri then went to Mehsana from Ahmedabad and blessed me by telephone at the hospital. He said that I would get well soon and instructed me to take rest and not to come to Bharuch for the birthday celebration. In fact, we had hurried at the end of the America satsang tour in order to attend Swamishri’s 69th birthday celebration. But unfortunately, I had to pass that day in hospital. After one week, my health improved a lot by the timely and effective treatment of Dr Kiranbhai Doshi. From the hospital I went to the Dadar mandir for rest. After some days, Swamishri came to Mumbai for the mandir patotsav. Swamishri came at 12 noon for darshan and saw me near the murtis of Dham, Dhama and Mukta and he embraced me. He inquired about my health and blessed me. At night, when Dr Kiranbhai went into Swamishri’s room for darshan, Swamishri told him to treat me in such a way that I would never require any insulin injections. (At that time, I was taking insulin injections thrice a day.) Dr Kiranbhai said, “Bapa, he has acute diabetes and will therefore have to take lifetime injections.” But Swamishri said emphatically, “I do not wish that he continues injections.” He said this so firmly that Dr Kiranbhai Doshi could not argue further. And indeed, my health started improving from that day. As a result, the injections and medicines were gradually reduced. After a five-day stay in Mumbai, Swamishri was about to depart on a satsang tour of South India. When he was departing, I sought his permission to proceed to Bochasan. He said, “Do not be in a hurry. Go when you have completely recovered.” I got much relief by his blessings. I informed him, “I am taking half-a-tablet every day and the injections have been stopped.” He blessed me and said, “You will not require to take the tablet also.” Dr Kiranbhai and other doctors wondered about how such a severe case of diabetes was controlled so quickly. But this had happened by Swamishri’s blessings. Then, the half-tablet dose was also discontinued and I returned to Bochasan. I consider my diabetes as a blessing, since I got other benefits in life. But the greatest benefit was that I learnt about Swamishri’s feelings for me. He remembered me more than I remembered him, and he had much more love for me than I had for him. Being convinced of all this, I feel much pleasure in my heart. I am satisfied so much that Swamishri gave me much more than I had deserved and for the seva I had done.

 **THE END** 