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## **HIS DIVINE HOLINESS PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ GRACES HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Two weeks of joyous festivities commenced as His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj graced the City of Houston on July 20, 2004. Continuing on his 95-day spiritual tour of North America, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Houston for the much anticipated inauguration of the first traditional *Shikharbaddh Mandir* on our continent by the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

Devotees and well-wishers from all over the world gathered at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir to welcome Pramukh Swami Maharaj with a *swagat sabha* (welcoming assembly). Swamishri entered the hall to the festive music of a band consisting of youths from Dallas. Thereafter, youths expressed their excitement through a folk dance characterized by colorful costumes and traditional dance steps. In his blessings, Swamishri remarked on the tremendous effort put forth to construct the beautiful Shikharbaddh Mandir in Houston. Devotees have made many sacrifices in order for this auspicious occasion to take place. He emphasized that man is given a body to worship God and attain Akshardham in this life. Thus, we should keep our senses aloof from worldly pleasures and absorbed in God-centered activity. He concluded by encouraging everyone to take advantage of the spiritual and cultural activities organized during the 14-day festival.

Swamishri concludes his North American tour with two historic events. The highlight of his trip to Houston will be the opening of the traditional stone and marble mandir, which is designed in accordance with ancient Vedic tradition. On Sunday, July 25<sup>th</sup> Swamishri will perform the Murti Pratishtha (idol installation ceremony) in this sacred monument. Similarly, on August 8<sup>th</sup> another traditional mandir will be inaugurated by Swamishri in Chicago, Illinois.

All of the BAPS events during the 95-day tour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj are open to everyone for participation. We invite the community at large to participate in these events and thereby support the diligent efforts to preserve cultural values and traditions.

## **Festival of Inspirations**

The Festival of Inspirations from July 20<sup>th</sup> – August 2<sup>nd</sup>, marks two weeks of jubilation as thousands of devotees and well-wishers from all over the world celebrate the opening of the first traditional, Shikharbaddh Mandir in North America. On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, BAPS saints will conduct a musical performance or a *Kirtan Aradhana*, consisting of devotional hymns. On the following day, July 24<sup>th</sup>, a grand Vishvashanti Mahayagna, a prayer for world peace, will be held in the presence of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. That evening, beautifully decorated floats will adorn the streets of Houston during the Shobha Yatra. The festival culminates on July 25<sup>th</sup> with the Murti Pratishtha, an idol installation ceremony, performed in accordance to ancient Vedic scriptures by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This auspicious occasion will mark the inauguration of the first traditional stone and marble Mandir on the North American continent. July 29<sup>th</sup> and July 30<sup>th</sup> have been dedicated to the spiritual progress and character development of youth and children. These days will consist of cultural programs including traditional folk dances, thought provoking dramas, and motivating speeches that serve to inspire the upcoming generation to live a spiritual and value-based life.

## **About Pramukh Swami Maharaj**

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of devotees across the world to lead a God-conscious, character-centered life. As the present leader of BAPS, he travels from village to village, continent to continent, inspiring people of all ages to center their lives on moral values and sound judgment. He emphasizes the importance of family harmony, community service and spiritual progress among others. Representing the essence of Hinduism, his compassion for humanity, universal wisdom and striking simplicity have touched many world religious and national leaders.

## **About BAPS**

The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide spiritual organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Founded on the pillars of practical spirituality rooted in Vedic philosophy, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Besides spiritual activities, through social and humanitarian activities BAPS endeavors to produce better citizens of tomorrow, who have very high esteem for their roots - the rich Indian heritage. Its 9,000 centers including more than 5,000 youth centers across the world support these activities of character building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to build a community that is morally, ethically and spiritually strong.

For more information on BAPS and further details of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's North America schedule and program, please visit <http://www.swaminarayan.org>.