

SWAMISHRI IN MUMBAI
February 2008

Top: Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj installed near the *hari* mandir in BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. (11-2-2008)

Bottom: Swamishri welcomes the renowned Yogacharya Shri Ramdevji Maharaj. He invited Swamishri to visit and sanctify his ashram in Haridwar and also commented, "In the language of yoga, one who is called a *siddhapurush*; one whom the Vedas and Upanishads describe as *Gunatit*; and one whom the Gita calls *sthitpragna* – all these qualities were evident in Yogiji Maharaj. And his divinity and energy resides in you." (10-2-2008)



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

April 2008, Vol. 31 No. 4

CONTENTS

1. *Swaminarayan History*
Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara4
The Diwan's plots fail...
2. *BAPS Festivals*
Pragji Bhakta Birthday & Pushadolotsav Celebrations.....7
3. *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*
Shri Hari's Detachment.....10
No desire for worldly objects...
4. *On Life*
The Hidden World of Youth: Stress Among Teenagers12
Need for planning and understanding...
5. *Great Indian Personalities*
Andal15
Wedded to God...
6. *Personal Development*
Use the Tools You Have... But Carefully18
Use swabhavs wisely...
7. *Bhajan History*
Vandu Sahajanand Rasrup Anupam Sar Ne Re Lol20
8. *Vicharan*
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan22
9. *Inspiring Incidents*
Living with Swamishri25
10. *BAPS News*
National Satsang Prasar Karyakar Conference, London26
Parents' Congregations, Surat26
BAPS Horses Win at Kama Horse Show, Bhavnagar26

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas
Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjivandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas
Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-380 004, India.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)			India
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	400	6	10	60
2 Years	800	12	20	110
3 Years	1200	18	30	160

Website: www.swaminarayan.org

E-mail: info@swaminarayan.org

FIRST WORD

Nitpicking and backbiting are the common failings of mankind. It is often done casually and brings no credit to anyone. Colleagues and friends with whom you share your criticisms will not think highly of you in the long run. They will be cautious while dealing with you because they know that you could do it to them behind their back. Bad mouthing neither consolidates friendship nor raises your esteem as is wrongly thought of.

Such deplorable conduct does not give you inner joy, relaxation and peace of mind. In fact it spawns stress, negativity, pessimism and anxiety. Negativity breeds negativity. You are left with an uneasy, sinking feeling, sleeplessness, lack of concentration, bad health and little joy. Furthermore, the issue remains unsolved. Don't you find yourself weak and demotivated after a session of critical talks and gossip! Remember, negative talking and hearing are both harmful and destructive.

When backstabbing, you are always anxious, and do not want others to overhear you for the simple reason that they would go and tell the person you are criticizing. Whenever you have something critical to say, that is bothering or hurting you, then tell it straight to the concerned person.

Form a habit of cultivating a healthy outlook through daily *satsang*. Try to think and speak positively about a few things every day. Also, read positive things daily. You will notice an all-round improvement and strength in your personality. ♦

Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara

*The Diwan of Vadodara,
Babaji Apaji and his son,
Vitthalrao Balaji, nourished an aversion
towards Shri Hari. After Babaji's death,
the new Diwan also cultivated a deep
hatred towards Maharaj...*



Babaji Apaji was succeeded by Gangadhar Shastri. But he was soon murdered in Pune. Then Babaji's nephew, Vitthalrao Devaji, was appointed as Diwan. He too cultivated a hostile attitude towards Shriji Maharaj. Vitthalrao employed a Brahmin named Dhundhuba – an expert in the dark arts. He offered him a substantial amount of money to kill Gopalanand Swami with his tantric powers. But when he approached Gopalanand Swami, the latter transported his soul into samadhi to experience the punishments of Yampuri. His body lay lifeless. His anxious daughter sent a messenger to request Gopalanand Swami to awaken him. By Gopalanand Swami's grace Dhundhuba came out of samadhi and he asked for forgiveness, "I have sinned terribly, punished innocent people and extorted money. And worst of all, I used my powers to try to kill you. I believe the suffering I went through in hell was a punishment for my evil actions. I ask for forgiveness and wish to become your disciple." Gopalanand Swami blessed him and advised,

"You are a Brahmin. You have studied the Gita and Bhagvatam. Why did you stray from the teachings of such holy books to learn the dark arts? Now give up your evil ways and company and study the holy shastras on a daily basis. Your youngest daughter, Mathura, is a pious soul. Though you are her father, give up your pride and live in accordance with her words."

Vitthalrao was shocked with he heard of Dhundhuba's transformation. He realized that whatever means he employed in suppressing Satsang fail. In fact, Satsang was flourishing day by day. He, therefore, decided to use his political powers to uproot it.

With the demise of Maharaja Anandrao Gaekwad, Sayajirao II came onto the royal throne of Vadodara. Though Sayajirao was under age he was very brilliant. The kingdom was run by the advice of Diwan Vitthalrao. The Diwan spoke disparagingly and critically of Satsang and Gopalanand Swami. Soon, Sayajirao became fed up with his talks. The Diwan then sent two of his trusted aides, Bhau Puranik and

Narupant Nana, to confront Gopalanand Swami. But, to the dismay of the Diwan, they were impressed of Swami's illustrious personality and devotion to Shri Hari and became his disciples. Then the Diwan sent his army commander, Babu Saheb, and a hundred of his men to Vartal to defeat Shri Hari, but he too was transformed by the divine personality of Shri Hari and became a *satsangi*.

On learning of the conversion of his high-ranking men into devotees, Sayajirao was convinced that Swaminarayan and his sadhu, Gopalanand Swami, were great divine personalities. He went to meet Gopalanand Swami, at the house of Nath Bhakta in Vadodara. Sayajirao, who was accompanied by officials, was impressed by the radiant and calm aura on Gopalanand Swami's face. He felt pacified by Swami's grace. He was touched by Gopalanand Swami's discourse on *atma*-Paramatma, righteousness and unrighteousness. After hearing the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, he resolved to take refuge at the Lord's feet and become his disciple.

Gopalanand Swami had worked a miracle. The ruler bowed at his feet and prayed, "Swami, come and sanctify the royal palace. On hearing your talks I have mentally taken the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, but whatever initiation rituals are required I wish that you come and perform them in my mandir."

Gopalanand Swami was pleased with his piety, and said, "I will definitely come when circumstances allow me to do so. Your wish will be fulfilled by Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

The 21-year-old Sayajirao Gaekwad was drawn to the divine personality of Gopalanand Swami.

Thereafter the Diwan's plan to eradicate Satsang in the Gaekwad kingdom fizzled out. From then on at night he would often wake up startled from his dreams, and see the divine aura of Swaminarayan in his room. This infuriated him,

and he unknowingly bit his lips and nails, sometimes pulling his hair violently. By so doing he would feel that he was tearing and punishing Swaminarayan. Such was his madness that while drinking the blood that oozed from his body he would roar with laughter, imagining that he was drinking Swaminarayan's blood. His bitter hatred for Swaminarayan made him restless. Sometimes he imagined seeing Swaminarayan in his bedroom, as if he had come to catch him. He would then storm at him, only to bang his head against the wall.

During this time a pundit of Vedant philosophy (Vedantacharya) returned to Vadodara after his defeat in a debate before Shriji Maharaj in Vartal. He came to know that the Diwan was bitterly against Shri Hari. The pundit decided to capitalize on the Diwan's hatred. He lied to him, "Swaminarayan is highly pretentious. He lost against me in a scriptural debate. Then he gave me Rs. 200 to keep my mouth sealed. But how can truth remain concealed? The Mahant of the mandir in Visnagar is here. He told me that Swaminarayan feigned divinity in Visnagar and spread the net of *satsang*."

The Diwan was listening with great interest. He told him, "Tell all this to the Maharaja. I will arrange a meeting for you. There are several pundits who are against Swaminarayan. I wish to expose Swaminarayan and destroy him. You make arrangements for a scriptural debate, and I will help you."

The Vedantacharya nourished bitter feelings for Shri Hari after his defeat in Vartal. He was enthused at the Diwan's response, but he did not approve of his plan to destroy Maharaj. He was a Brahmin by birth and culture. He agreed to assemble the pundits, hold a debate, and defeat Swaminarayan. However, he decided not to involve himself in the Diwan's extreme its olot.

A rumour was circulated in Vadodara that the Vedantacharya had defeated Swaminarayan in a debate in Vartal, and to keep his defeat

under wraps, Swaminarayan had given him a bribe. The Mahant of Visnagar and many other sannyasis pitched in to spread the rumour. When King Sayajirao heard the grapevine he was pained. At that time, the Diwan came to see him. He said, "O King, have you heard about it? The Vedantacharya defeated Swaminarayan in a debate in Vartal, and to suppress the news Swaminarayan had given him Rs. 200. Listen to what happened from the Vedantacharya himself. I'll bring him before you."

"I don't want to meet the Vedantacharya and hear lies. If he is proud of his knowledge, then let me arrange a debate with Gopalanand Swami," the Gaekwad replied curthy.

The Diwan smiled foxily, and replied, "Honourable King, when Gopalanand Swami hears that the Vedantacharya is in town, he will immediately beat a hasty retreat."

The Gaekwad perceived the Diwan's rancour. He told him, "I'll call Nath Bhakta and other devotees and ask them to call Swami here or inform Swaminarayan. But you take care of the Vedantacharya that he does not run away. I definitely want to arrange a debate."

Syajirao called a few devotees to enquire about Gopalanand Swami's presence. They informed, "Swami has gone to Umreth on Maharaj's word. He will return here only when he gets the command from Maharaj. At present Shri Hari is in Gadhpur. We will have to send word to Maharaj."

The Gaekwad gave the order, "Send a messenger on horseback to Gadhpur with a request that Gopalanand Swami should arrive here in two days. If this is not possible, then with Maharaj's permission another scholarly sadhu should come to expose the Vedantacharya's deception." The devotees of Vadodara sent Prabhudas, a devotee, on a swift horse with a note to Maharaj, saying, "A Vedantacharya is presently in town. Though he lost the debate in Vartal, he claims that he had defeated you. The Mahant of Visnagar has also joined hands with

him and is uttering barbs against you. The Gaekwad called us and informed us of this rumour on the grapevine. He wishes that either Gopalanand Swami or another erudite sadhu be sent here immediately for a debate with him."

Prabhudas travelled to Vartal first and then took *parshad* Jusaji with him to Gadhada. When they arrived they saw Shri Hari seated beneath the neem tree, discoursing to an assembly. Prabhudas prostrated to Maharaj and gave the letter. Maharaj gave the letter to Shukmuni and told him to read it aloud. Shri Hari smiled and replied, "The Vedantacharya was defeated in Vartal. Thereafter he did not face Nityanand Swami in Nadiad, and still he says he defeated me. A debate has been arranged in Vadodara and the Gaekwad requests to send a scholarly sadhu. I wish Muktanand Swami to go and defeat the Vedantacharya."

Muktanand Swami humbly questioned, "Maharaj, how can I defeat the Vedantacharya? He is a great scholar, whereas I have only studied the Bhagvatam."

Maharaj reassured, "The power of scholarliness depends upon saintliness and the guru's grace. The Vedantacharya is arrogant of his knowledge, whereas you are an idol of saintliness. And you also have my grace upon you. So it will not be difficult for you to defeat the Vedantacharya. Go, you have my blessings. Victory will be yours!"

On Shri Hari's word Muktanand Swami prepared to leave for Vadodara with his group of sadhus. Shri Hari called Bhaguji and told him, "Yoke the best of oxen to a cart. Muktanand Swami has to reach Vadodara at the earliest." Maharaj removed the garland of roses he was wearing and placed it around Muktanand Swami's neck, applied a *chandlo* on his forehead and blessed him. Muktanand Swami and his group departed. Prabhudas and Jasuji returned with them.



(To be Continued in next issue)

Pragji Bhakta Birthday & Pushpadolotsav Celebrations

21-22 March 2008, Sarangpur



PRAGJI BHAKTA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

On 21 March 2008, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj's birthday was celebrated in Sarangpur. During Swamishri's morning puja, sadhus sang bhajans describing the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Today is Bhagatji Maharaj's birthday. He boldly spread the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. He identified Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar, the abode of Maharaj, and that all have to become like him. He faced many difficulties and much ridicule in promulgating this principle. He was even ex-communicated from Satsang for this. But he explained to all that Gunatitanand Swami was the eternal Akshar.

"He had realized spiritual wisdom through the company of Gunatitanand Swami. Bhagatji Maharaj explained this wisdom in tailoring terms. He said, 'I cut two stitches and take two stitches. That is, the stitches of attachment to body and

relatives are cut and the stitches of association with God and his holy Sadhu are formed.'

"Develop *atmabuddhi* (profound association) with God and the holy Sadhu. Believing oneself as Akshar and offering bhakti with that awareness brings great joy. Bhagatji Maharaj taught this. Even if one does not understand anything else today, understand two things: that two stitches are to be cut and two are to be taken."

PUSHPADOLOTSAV

On 22 March 2008, over 60,000 devotees from India and abroad gathered for the Fuldol festival.

The influx of devotees from near and far added to the spiritual vibrations of Sarangpur.

The festival stage and assembly area was prepared on the grounds adjacent to the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir.

The grand stage was prepared with 35-ft



sky-coloured backdrop. On one side of the stage was a scene depicting Sarangpur village 225 years ago in which Bhagwan Swaminarayan celebrates Fuldol at the house of Rathod Dadhal and identifies Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar. On the other side was a scene from a Fuldol festival celebrated in Vartal in which Bhagwan Swaminarayan was honoured on a special swing set up between two mango trees.

The celebration assembly began at 4.45 pm with *prarthana* and bhajans. Thereafter, Priyavrat Swami spoke on the glory of this celebration, Viveksagar Swami described 'Swamishri's Colours' and Dr Swami spoke on 'What It Means to Be Coloured by Swamishri's Colour.'

Swamishri arrived at 5.45 pm and greeted the dignitaries on stage: President of NCP, Maharashtra, Shri Arunbhai Gujarati; Home Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Himmatji

Kothari; Speaker of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, Shri Ashokbhai Bhatt; Shri Bhupendrasinh Chudasama; Shri Kiritsinh Rana; Shri Ambalalbai Rohit and others.

Ishwarcharan Swami spoke on 'Caring for Swamishri's Health'. He said that Swamishri's health is fine, but that leading doctors have advised him to rest. So we should feel blessed by Swamishri's darshan from a distance.

Following this, Mahant Swami spoke, giving practical guidance on how we should now serve Swamishri and revel in the divine memories he has blessed us with.

On this occasion, the following publications were inaugurated by Swamishri: *Shikshavalli* written by Viveksagar Swami (Gujarati); and *Ghanshyam Charitra, Yogiji Maharaj, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami* (all in Tamil); and brochures on Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi in French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, Gujarati, Kannad, Telugu, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, Udiya and Punjabi. The senior sadhus then honoured Swamishri with a variety of garlands.

After his blessings, Swamishri sprayed the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with saffron-scented water while sadhus sang Vedic verses.

Thereafter Swamishri sprayed the devotees and sadhus with the sanctified water, concluding at 9.15 pm.

Swamishri graced the celebration assembly for 3½ hours and granted everyone divine bliss.

Everyone departed, thoroughly soaked in spiritual joy and devotion sprayed by Swamishri. ♦



Swamishri's Blessings

22 March 2008, Sarangpur

“These type of celebrations were also held in the time of Shriji Maharaj. Rangotsavs were held in Vartal and here in Sarangpur. This village is small, but Nishkulanand Swami writes, ‘*Shobhāvānt Sarangpur gām...*’ (The beautiful village of Sarangpur...). In those days there were no facilities, so how can it be beautiful? One may doubt. But ‘beautiful’ because Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj, and his sadhus and devotees had come to the village and this celebration took place.

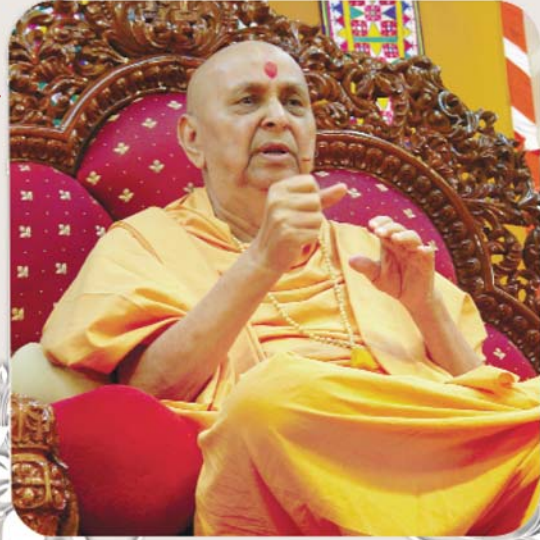
We do many things to beautify our mind. But the association of God and his devotees is the true decoration. So, the women devotees of North Gujarat prayed, ‘*Mahā balvant māyā tamāri, jene āvariā nar-nāri... Je je lilā karo tame Lāl tene samju alaukik khyāl.*’ (Your powerful *maya* which has trapped all men and women... Whatever actions you perform, may they all be perceived as divine...)

When one sees the human-like actions of God, one becomes confused. Doubts may arise that: Is he really God? He may accept illness, he may be clumsy while eating, travelling, walking, talking, etc. But the shastras guide us to sing the glory of both his divine and human-like actions.

When Ravan abducted Sitaji, Bhagwan Ram displayed human-like traits. He would ask the animals, birds and trees, ‘Have you seen my Sita?’ Shiv and Parvati saw him in this apparently despaired state. So Parvati told Shiv, ‘I’ll assume the form of Sita and reduce his shock.’

Shivji said, ‘He is God. When he assumes a human form, he acts like a human. So do not be deluded.’ Yet, when Parvati assumed Sita’s form and went to Ram, he said, ‘O Sati (Parvati), why are you alone? Where is Shivji?’ Hearing this, Parvati was embarrassed.

Whether he displays madness or another



trait, God’s actions are to foster devotees’ love for him. They increase the bhakti of devotees. In whatever way possible, the devotees’ recollection of and attachment towards God is to be increased.

That is why devotees have asked for protection from *maya*, which has trapped and brought misery to countless people. Devotees have not asked for worldly pleasures, but have asked for the highest bliss.

Maharaj grants them their wish, but on one condition: always believe me to be fault-free. I am divine. When this is resolute in your mind, then *maya* will not trouble you.

Thus, we have to understand that we should not be drawn to *maya* and never attribute human traits to God.

God will always do what is for our benefit. He has come to give his spiritual wealth to us. Worldly wealth will come and go, so do not be attached to it. Those who have attained this spiritual wealth, and have no worldly wealth, still continually experience divine joy.”





SHRI HARI'S DETACHMENT

"There is no object which can obstruct me."

- Shri Haricharitamrut-Sagar: Pur 6, Tarang 26

"Brahmachari! Keep some food for the afternoon!"

"If I were to think of what I was going to eat this afternoon or the following morning, what meaning would there be to my renunciation?"

Hearing these words from a tender eleven-year-old child, the

villagers of Amarpur were taken aback. The villagers had been observing this impressive child since dawn. Sitting under a banyan tree on the outskirts of the village, the luminous child-yogi was the centre of attraction for all. The devout people from the village brought him fruits and sweets. Accepting their devotion, Nilkanth Varni offered the fruits and sweets to Thakorji, ate a small amount himself and distributed the rest among the villagers standing around him. One of the villagers had made the initial request on seeing this young, homeless child, and wondering what he would eat that afternoon. However, noting the absence of desire in Nilkanth Varni's reply, everyone was speechless. They realized that he was not an ordinary child.

One of Shri Hari's innate qualities was his lack of desire for any worldly objects. He was an ideal of detachment during his seven years

of pilgrimage throughout India, submitting his body to intense austerities and staying aloof from all temptations.

Even after his arrival in Loj, his focus remained the same. Once he called Muktanand Swami and told him, "After you arrange for me to have darshan of Ramanand Swami, the two of us will retire to the forests and constantly engage ourselves in the meditation of God; we shall never return to stay amongst people." Remembering this incident 28 years later, Shri Hari says, "Such was the resolution of my mind then; even now, I feel exactly the same." (Vachanamrut Gadhada III-13)

However, for the spiritual uplift of the people, Shriji Maharaj accepted Ramanand Swami's command, forsaking his inner wish, and stayed among the fellowship of devotees to guide them on the path of spirituality. He mixed with devotees and showered them with his love. They all revelled in this natural bliss called *Sahajanand*. However, within, Shri Hari remained extremely detached from everything besides his beloved devotees. Maharaj explained, "I would be unable to stay where I do not find such devotees of God, even if someone were to try by a million means to keep me there. Regardless of how well one may serve me, I simply cannot get along with one who is not a devotee of God. In this way, I have attached my mind with profound love to God and his devotees; and other than God, I have no liking for anything else." (Vachanamrut Gadhada III-13)

"For example, if the only son of a king dies

when the king reaches the age of 60 or 70, the king would become disinterested in all things. In the same manner, I constantly remain disinterested – while eating, drinking, mounting a horse and even when I am pleased or displeased.” (Vachanamrut Gadhada II–55)

Shri Hari was offered the worldly pleasures of kingdoms, marriage and wealth many times, yet not once did he feel enticed. No place, person, or object was ever able to bind him.

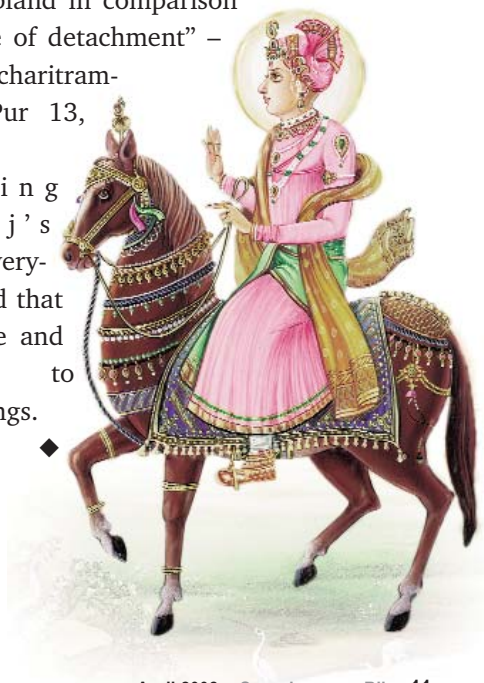
Once, in Gadhada, Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar, Alaiya Khachar, and other devotees were discussing the best type of vehicle. Some said a chariot with a canopy and curtains, someone else suggested an elephant, and others believed it to be a high pedigree horse. They came to the conclusion that the Rojho breed of horses, and in particular the Rojho horse which Maharaj rode, was unparalleled and the best means of transportation on earth. They sang the praises of Maharaj’s horse as Maharaj listened. Then Maharaj instructed everyone to go to the river Ghela to bathe. Maharaj mounted his decorated horse and also headed for the river. The devotees were captivated by Shri Hari’s attractive appearance and the horse’s majestic strides. After bathing, Maharaj mounted his horse and made his way to Jiva Khachar’s residence. Here, Maharaj saw Pragji Dave. Without wasting a second, Maharaj dismounted and put the reins of the horse in Pragji Dave’s hands and said, “*Krishnarpan*. I present this horse to you.” The Kathi devotees pleaded, “Maharaj this is the best horse in the region, you cannot just give it away to a Brahmin!” Whilst walking away, Maharaj turned his head and replied, “I do not like to keep such nice things.” The devotees thought to themselves that Maharaj is indeed a unique personality. (*Nirgundas Swamini Vato: 326*)

In Dabhan, a grand Vedic *yagna* was taking place. One night a devotee offered Maharaj opulent garments. Maharaj wore them as night-clothes. At this time another devotee, Narayandas from Surat, had a wish to sleep near Maharaj. As

he came close, Maharaj woke up due to the noise and began to scream, “Thief! Thief!” All the sadhus and devotees came running to see what had happened. Upon seeing Narayandas, everyone realized the truth. In spite of this, while sitting in his bed, Maharaj unexpectedly took off his garments and threw them. In the end, he was left with only one garment covering his body. Maharaj explained, “I do not want anything in which fear resides.” Seeing Maharaj sit in the biting cold wearing only one garment, a devotee offered Maharaj a simple cloth to wrap around his body. Maharaj refused. At this point, the devotees were confused. They also discarded their clothes, except for one garment and sat, shivering, in front of Maharaj. Even then, Maharaj did not budge. Finally, Ramdas Swami got up and gave Maharaj a sweet reproach, “You should act maturely and appropriately since you are sitting on the throne of liberation.”

Respecting Ramdas Swami’s request, Maharaj put on his garments and enlightened, “My soul has a liking for renunciation. When it is wonderstruck by relinquishing, there is nothing that can stop me. And when I am intensely wonderstruck, I forget my body exists. All the flavours in this world are bland in comparison to the taste of detachment” – (Shri Hari-charitram-rutsagar: Pur 13, Tarang 20).

Hearing Maharaj’s words, everyone realized that he is divine and detached to worldly things.



The Hidden World of Youth: **STRESS** Among Teenagers



The high school hallway is abuzz with activity. In one corner, a group of football players anxiously await their upcoming game with a rival school. In another corner, a group of disgruntled students complain about their latest science project. Passing through the hallways is the debate team, posters in hand, on their way to advertise for a fundraiser.

To an observer, the scene is nothing out of the ordinary. From afar, a person cannot sense the tension in the environment, nor can they see the thoughts racing through the students' heads.

By the end of the week, one of the four science students will be bullied by a football play-

er. One of the students on the debate team will spend hours worrying about an upcoming test. And most of the students in the hallway will drink alcohol.

Such a hidden culture within high schools, in addition to the demanding environment at home, has been a source of increasing stress among teenagers.

Will Schworer, a recent high school graduate, wrote in his hometown paper, "From the first time we take our first steps in the school, we realize that school...actually leads most of us deep into the shadow of the valley of stress."

A recent study done by Reuters showed that one in three kids feels stressed out every day. The study also showed that two in three kids feel stressed out at least once a week. Time and time again, statistics have proven that the root of such stress is embedded in three sources: schoolwork, peer pressure, and parental expectations.

High school students are constantly under pressure to perform well in school. Because their grades determine which college they get into, there is added pressure to get into honors classes and be at the top of the class. Additionally, college admissions committees look at extracurricular activities and letters of recommendation. Most students work hard in those extracurricular activities as well, whether they are on a sports team or president of the Beta

Club. They spend quality time with their teachers, building relationships that will materialize in the form of recommendation letters. Concentrating on all these elements takes up time and often saps the energy out of teenagers so that they are constantly stressed, tired and sleep-deprived.

For conscientious students, the high school culture revolves around building a track record to gain admission into a good college. For others, high school is a forum for popularity and wild parties. But this doesn't mean that the students who don't drink, smoke and date are free from such influences. Peer pressure is a far-reaching evil within the culture of not only high schools but all schools and colleges. There is constant pressure to dress cool and be popular, and teenagers who don't are often shunned. Dating is rampant, as is drinking and smoking. Teenagers are pressured to join the bandwagon and often become extraordinarily stressed, depressed or uptight as a result.

At home, parents also become a primary source of stress among teenagers. Parents constantly push their kids towards certain careers or colleges. They burden the child with the family's finances. They give minimal importance to things like clothes, claiming that such things are not important. By doing this, parents set a trap for their teenagers. They are allowing their child to be made fun of in school. Additionally, some teenagers often have to take care of a family business or a sick family member.

For *satsangi* youths, mandir adds a new set of responsibilities. Both *kishores* and *kishoris* are committed to expending a certain amount of their time a week to their *seva*. They carry out daily *niyams* such as Satsang reading and singing *chestha*. 'Sunday for Swami' has become a part of their weekly routine. Because Satsang is often so firmly embedded within these teenagers' lives, they sometimes struggle to fit in socially. They aren't able to put their foot down and remain firm in their *niyams* because

the outside world places so much pressure on them. They struggle to find the balance between Satsang and their social life.

A Powerful Impact

Stress among teenagers endangers their mental health and can lead to depression, lack of confidence, and even suicide, the last of which is less common among *satsangi* teenagers.

Statistics released in 2001 by the American Justice Department show that one out of every four kids is bullied. It is a commonly known fact that suicide is the third leading cause of death among teens. Other statistics show that one out of every 20 teenagers suffers from depression. The Office for National Statistics in England found that 33% of teenagers suffer from panic, anxiety or depression caused by the stress of exams.

Recognizing Which Battles to Fight

In his book *All Grown up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis*, Dr. David Elkind, a professor of Child Development at Tufts University, classifies teenage stress into three categories: Type A, Type B, and Type C.

Type A stress is both foreseeable and avoidable. This can include an upcoming test or application deadline. It can also come up when following *niyams*. If a *kishori* is fasting on *ekadashi*, she can foresee that she will need to eat something before the evening track meet. She can avoid such unnecessary stress by packing food. This type of stress is the most easily controllable through time management techniques and proper planning.

Type B stressors are neither foreseeable nor avoidable. These stressors are the most taxing on a teenager's energy. They are also the type that cause teenagers to plunge into depression and anxiety. Type B stressors can include being bullied or an unexpected assignment for class. They can be more severe, such as a car accident or a fight with parents.

Type C stress is foreseeable but unavoidable. This can include the death of a loved one or waiting to hear from the college admissions committee. Teenagers can address this type of stress head-on by understanding that everything happens for a reason. They can prepare for the worst and hope for the best in such a situation.

As mentioned above, Type A and Type C stressors can be handled through simple time management and planning. Once teenagers learn to recognize stress in such a way, they can focus on addressing Type B stress, the most prevalent. The most effective way to address Type B stress is to ask for help. Teenagers can turn to their counsellor, parents, *sanchalaks*, and other *kishores* or *kishoris* for help.

Swamishri: The Best Counselor

For *satsangi* teenagers who battle so much stress daily, the best counsellor, parent and friend is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He has the answers to helping teenagers solve their problems. Swamishri's words of wisdom show what teenagers can do to relieve stress in each of the three areas listed above: schoolwork, peer pressure, and parents.

Time and time again, Swamishri emphasizes the importance of time management. He advises

that efficiently managing time helps students prepare better and perform confidently. Swamishri often quotes Yogi Bapa, "Study regularly, four hours a day if in school and eight hours if at college; then you will be confident in any exam. Fear comes due to lack of preparation. So prepare extensively and pray fervently."

He also tells his beloved youths to prioritize and give the most importance to education, family, and Satsang. Recognize obstacles along the way and overcome those obstacles through the firm understanding that school, family and Satsang are the most important things in life.

Swamishri, in his teachings, focuses extensively on peer pressure. He stresses that peer pressure is evil and can sway a teenager from the path of Satsang. The solution to this evil is for teenagers to carve their niche within society. *Satsangi* teenagers need to be personable, but they need to show people that they are proud of who they are. They need to stand up with confidence in their way of life. This will show their peers that they can follow their religion firmly.

Also, Swamishri encourages all to firmly follow *niyams*, which will prevent teenagers from being drawn into the vicious web of smoking, drinking and dating. It will strengthen the

(Continued on page 19)

STRESS HARMS MEMORY

That stress makes one forgetful, whatever one's age, is well known. Researchers have discovered that even short term stress can harm memory and make people forgetful.

Researchers in the USA have found that corticotrophin releasing hormone (CRH) seemed to have a vital role in blocking memory in stressful circumstances. Memory and learning occurs at synapses, which are junctions of brain cells, called neurons. Synapses are located on dendritic spines, which are specialized protrusions on neurons. The researchers found that CRH causes much disturbance on the dendritic spines when animals are stressed.

The lead researcher of the study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience*, Dr Taille Z Baram, explains, "Stress is constant in our lives and cannot be avoided. Our findings can play an important role in the current development of drugs that might prevent these undesirable effects and offer insights into why some people are forgetful or have difficulty retaining information during stressful situations."

ANDAL

The girl who would marry
none other than Paramatma

Between the 5th and 9th centuries, South India witnessed a widespread flourishing of the bhakti movement by the immense fervour of bhakta poets. These comprised Vaishnavites or Shaivites. The former group was led by mystics known as *Ālwārs*. *Ālwār* means one who is immersed in devotion to Bhagwan. During the mid 9th century, one of the 12 *Ālwārs*, Periyalwar, also known as Vishnuchitta, lived in Srivilliputtur, a town near Madurai. A pious brahmin, Vishnuchitta lived by accepting alms and spent his time growing flowers in his garden for Bhagwan *Vatapatrashāyi* in the local mandir. *Vatapatrashāyi*, another name for Vishnu, means ‘one who lies on a leaf of the Vata (banyan)’. Vishnuchitta devotionally cared for tulsi plants, the favourite leaf adornment of Bhagwan Vishnu. One day he discovered a female baby blissfully sleeping under a tulsi plant. This day is recorded in the *Divyasuri Charita* as Kali 97, Nala year, 4th day in the month of Adi, *Shukla paksha Purva Phalguni*. Considering the child as a gift from his Beloved, Vishnuchitta took the baby home. He named her Goda (Godai). *Go* means cow, *indriya* and earth, *da* means “gift by”. Hence Goda meant ‘gift by Mother Earth’. This is similar to Sitaji, who was found in a furrow in a field. Godai was also called *Nācciyār* and *Āndāl* – one who attracts.

Godai grew up in an atmosphere of devotion. She helped Vishnuchitta in growing flowers for their favourite *avatār*, Shri Krishna. She



listened to Bhagwan’s *lilā* from her father. She then composed and sang poems adoring Shri Krishna as her bridegroom. She often wondered whether her beauty was worthy of *Bhuvana Sundara* – the most beautiful in the world. Therefore she would wear the garland made by her father for *Vatapatrashāyi* and saw her reflection in well-water. She would then place it in the basket. Unbeknown to Vishnuchitta, he would take this garland to the mandir. Once he discovered Godai wearing the garland. On that day he did not offer the garland to the deity. That night, Bhagwan appeared to him in a dream. He inquired about the absence of the garland on that day. Vishnuchitta explained. Bhagwan *Vatapatrashāyi* then replied that he preferred the garland first worn by Godai,

which has the fragrance of devotion. Henceforth Vishnuchitta took garlands first worn by Godai to the mandir. Since then she came to be called *Shoodikkodutta Nācciyār* – the beloved who first wore the flowers and then offered them to Bhagwan, and ‘Āndāl’ – she who ‘ruled’ over the Lord.

When it was time for her to marry, Vishnuchitta asked her about whom she wished to marry. She boldly replied that she would only marry Bhagwan Shri Ranganatha at the mandir in Shrirangam. She would not wed any mortal. This worried Vishnuchitta deeply. However Shri Ranganatha appeared in his dream, assuring him that he would marry Āndāl and that he should bring her to the Shrirangam mandir with great pomp. Bhagwan Shri Ranganatha also appeared to the mandir’s priests, commanding them to prepare for Āndāl’s arrival from Srivilliputtur.

Vishnuchitta then arranged for Āndāl’s wedding procession to Shrirangam, a distance of two hundred miles from Srivilliputtur! Āndāl arrived in a palanquin with bridal clothes and jewels presented by the Pandya King, Vallabhadeva. She jumped out and rushed straight into the sanctum, towards the murti of Shri Ranganatha. The priests watched in bewilderment as she scaled the pedestal and embraced her Lord. In a divine flash, she merged with Him. She was then only fifteen years old. Everybody then heard a divine voice that Āndāl was married and that Vishnuchitta should return to Srivilliputtur to build a mandir and consecrate the murtis of Āndāl and Shri Ranganatha. Since then there is a mandir of Āndāl in Srivilliputtur. Flowers grown in a garden besides it are offered to Āndāl everyday. The garland worn by Āndāl the previous day is then offered to Vatapa-trashāyi the next day.

Āndāl’s birth anniversary occurs during the Pubba Nakshatra in the month of Adi (usually

in July) and is celebrated in the south as *Tiruvadippoora*. On this day, the Rathosavam festival is celebrated in Srivilliputtur, when she and her consort Ranganatha mount the *ratham* (chariot) for procession through the town. Even today, Āndāl’s murti can be seen in three shrines in Srirangam and in Srivilliputtur. Tradition also considers her to be the incarnation of Bhumi Devi (Mother Earth), to show mankind the path to His lotus-feet. Hence she is also present in all Sri Vaishnava mandirs in India, next to her Lord.

Moreover, in Srivilliputtur, the tulsi garden in which she was discovered, has been preserved. Vishnuchitta’s house, next to the Vishnu mandir, has been converted into a mandir honouring Āndāl. It also has the well in which she admired her reflection while wearing the Lord’s garlands.

Āndāl’s Devotional Poetry

Āndāl is the only female among the Ālwārs. Her poems have a special charm of their own. Whereas the other Ālwārs had to imagine themselves in a feminine role – *nāyaka-nāyaki bhav* – Āndāl could enact this naturally. She composed two poetic works in Tamil in her short life; *Tiruppavai* and *Tirumozhi*. *Tiru* means the highest; *pavai* means religious vow.

Tiruppavai

Āndāl composed her first work, the *Tiruppavai*’s thirty *pashurams* (verses), during the month of Margazhi (Margali) or Dhanurmās. These embody the principles of the Sri Sampraday. In Āndāl’s poem, her quest is totally for spiritual love. Imagining herself as a *gopi* back in the days of Shri Krishna, she yearns to serve him:

*Here then is the meaning and purpose,
Of our early morning approach to you,
for worshipping at Thy golden lotus-feet.*

SHRI RAMANUJACHARYA'S FOR ANDAL'S TIRUPPAVAI

Sri Ramanujacharya, the exponent of Vishishtadvait philosophy, was fond of reciting the Tiruppavai, which earned him the name Tiruppavai Jiyar. His love for Tiruppavai's pashurams was such that he fulfilled a wish Āndāl made in one of the hymns; that if she was successful in her union with Bhagwan Rangannatha, she would offer 100 *thadas* (dishes) of *Akkaravadishil* – rice cooked in milk with jaggery, similar to *sakkar pongal*, to the Lord of Azhagarmalai. Ramanuja fulfilled this wish by offering the 100 *thadas*.

*Though we belong to a clan of cattle-grazers,
Never must you discard our services as mean.*

*Not for today's worship only have we come to
you, Govinda,*

*But always – for seven generations to come –
forever – Will we feel related to you, will be at
your beck and call.*

Let all our other desires be destroyed.

In the first five poems, Āndāl exhorts how one may become worthy of being accepted by Paramatma. Both body and mind should be absolutely pure, with no other desire except the craving for Paramatma. Āndāl preaches total *sharanāgati* to Bhagwan just as a *pativrātā* (loyal wife) lives only for her husband, to please him. Āndāl beseeches Shri Krishna to awaken and ascend his 'throne' – the pure hearts of the bhaktas. Āndāl invites him to adorn their hearts.

Tiruppavai is an exuberant *bhajan* – of wonder and affection for Bhagwan, of *prārthnā* and *sharanāgati*, praising the glory of Sri Ranganatha at Srirangam. During Margali, one hymn is chanted per day in all homes and mandirs in the early morning during Aradhanam. Its discourses are also held all over India, in other languages such as Telugu, Kannada, Hindi and English, during the Tamil month of Margali (Dec. 15th to Jan. 14th).

Tirumozhi

Āndāl's second work, Tirumozhi, also known as Nācciyar Tirumoli, meaning "sacred sayings", consists of 143 verses detailing various phases of spiritual adoration experienced by her. In many verses, she reiterates her desire to love only Tirumal (Vishnu). In a poem of eleven verses she describes a 'dream', recounting with rich imagery, each phase of her wedding to Bhagwan. Then she describes her ride with Him in a caparisoned elephant procession through the town.

Āndāl transcended the limits of human vanities by destroying mundane desires. In the whole range of Tamil literature, Āndāl remains a unique bhakta poetess, for projecting the perfection of *nāyaka-nāyaki bhav* in her mystic poetry, for her inspiring spiritual quest and resolute determination to attain union only with Paramatma. Her Tamil poetry also reflects a fine literary and philosophical flair far beyond her teenage years.



Use the Tools You Have... But Carefully

Chintan: Ah, there you are, Kundan. I was looking for you since afternoon.

Kundan: Kem bhai, not to make me a scape-goat for another of your classroom exercises, I hope?

Chintan: Actually, this is a small exercise which I plan on conducting with my seventh grade students. You might enjoy it too, though you might not understand it at first.

Kundan: Me, not understand a seventh grade game? Hah!

Chintan: Okay, here's the exercise for you. Take this hammer. hold it in your hand, examine it. And answer my questions. . . . Is it a tool?

Kundan: Yes, of course.

Chintan: Can you use it?

Kundan: Yes, of course.

Chintan: Can you misuse it?

Kundan: Well, yes, but only if I want to do that.

Chintan: When you use it, does it use you?

Kundan: Um, no, I don't think so. I use it – the hammer is an inanimate object, how can it use me!

Chintan: Does it control you or do you control it?

Kundan: Of course I control it. Are you crazy!?

Chintan: OK, fine, I'll come back to that soon. Now, would

you use it with the same force on thermocol and on wood?

Kundan: No, obviously not!

Chintan: Imagine if you walk around with it all day, and keep swinging it left and right – or hitting each nail you see – would others like to walk close to you?

Kundan: I guess not. It would be dangerous for them – they could get hurt. With irritating people like Falgun, of course, it might be a handy tool to use!

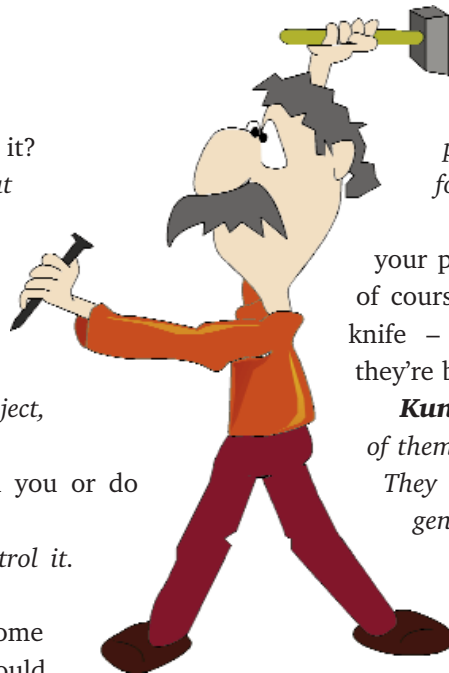
Chintan: You don't like Falgun, do you? Well, forget that right now. Say if you had a chainsaw. Would you use the hammer to cut a chain or rope, or use the chainsaw to fix a nail?

Kundan: Not if I was in my senses! Each tool is to be used for a specific purpose. There is a time and a use for each tool.

Chintan: Right! Try hitting your palm with the hammer – gently, of course. And hit your palm with the knife – ha, ha, don't be so scared, they're both tools!

Kundan: Look, you might call both of them 'tools,' but there is a difference. They are used differently - sometimes gently, sometimes a little harder. Each has its own use – and has to be used at the right time.

Chintan: Correct! You



wouldn't use the hammer as strongly to hammer a nail on a wall as to hammer it into styrofoam?

Kundan: *Of course not. You have to judge how strongly and how much to use the tool.*

Chintan: So the learning from this exercise is - any tool can be used :

Productively or Destructively,
Protectively or Aggressively.

Kundan: *That's nice, my friend, but I don't think you wanted to talk only about tools of carpentry or chainsaws, did you?*

Chintan: No, that is only an illustration. The tools I wanted to tell you about are our skills, including our oratory, intelligence, strength, and even our swabhavs.

Kundan: *Swabhaavs? Swabhavs as tools?*

Chintan: Yes, why not? Provided you know how and when to use them. Just go back to what I asked you about the hammer and the



knife, and use 'Krodh' (anger) instead of the hammer. Your replies will be the same!

Kundan: *You mean, like 'Does Krodh control you?'*

Chintan: Yes . . . and also, 'Can you control it?' and can you use it constructively?

Kundan: *I see your point. People would obviously dislike me if go around with hot temper, getting angry at people. It would be like carrying an unsheathed sword or a loaded gun, ready to hurt another aggressively – people will avoid sitting near me, or talking to me, because they will be afraid of my hurting them!*

Chintan: Right. So maybe you can try from today to control these 'tools' better – and to use them with discretion.

Kundan: *That's an interesting exercise, Chintanbhai. I will try to control my emotions and use them for better results.*



(Continued from page 14)

teenager's resolve, making him or her better able to handle peer pressure and even teach others about her religion.

On the home front, teenagers can also take several steps to understand their parents, instead of just making it a one-way street. They can do this with the understanding that parents do try and empathize with what they are going through. Teenagers should maintain open communication with their parents and discuss any problems they are having. If a mother has hurt her daughter, the daughter should talk to her about it, but should do so in a respectful way. She should calmly try to talk her parents into seeing her side of things.

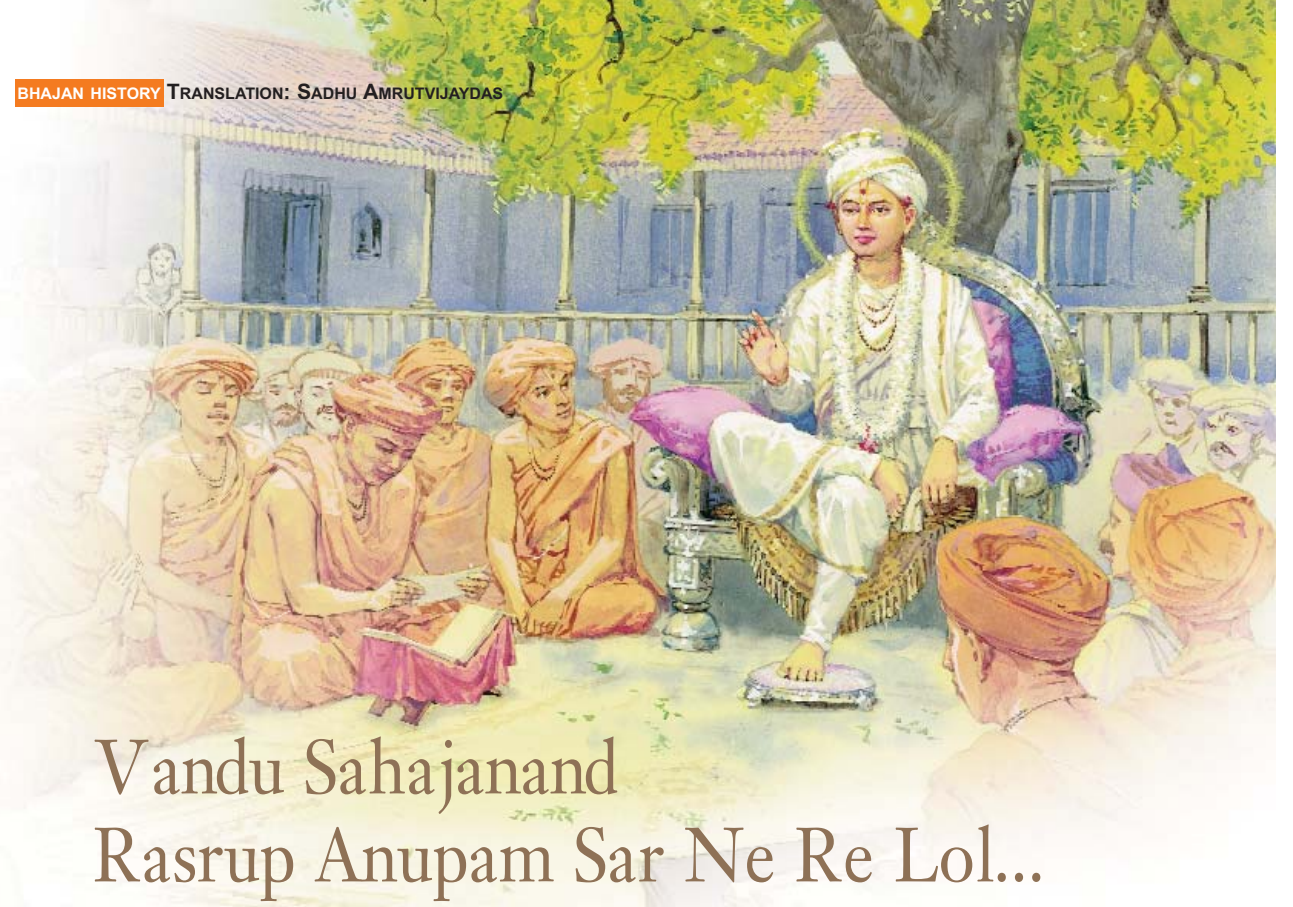
Swamishri says, "All parents are not as old-fashioned as we think. They only want to help and make us good. That's why they continuously try to guide us. But we should make an effort

to understand them. We should never forget all that they have done for us. If we remember this, we'll be able to accept their views."

This, too, will pass...

Overall, teenagers can handle stress by remembering one thing: "This, too, will pass." With each battle they fight, this phrase and Swamishri's words of wisdom should serve as their guiding light. And lastly, teenagers should always remember to pray to Maharaj and Swami to give them strength. They should look to them for inspiration with the understanding that God is the all-doer.

In the words of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "One needs awareness. Whatever you think may happen, never keep tension. It merely makes you irritable and impatient. Remain peaceful. God is the all-doer, not us. Understanding this ultimate truth brings peace to the soul." ◆



Vandu Sahajanand Rasrup Anupam Sar Ne Re Lol...

It was the morning of Maha vad 13 Samvat 1880 (27 February 1824). Shriji Maharaj was seated in Dada Khachar's darbar near the Vasudev-Narayan room. Sadhus and devotee were seated before him in an assembly.

Just at that time, a devotee of goddess Mataji arrived there. His forehead was marked by sindoor, his hand gripped a trident and his head was covered by a red turban. From a distance, he respectfully prostrated and then approached Maharaj and sat directly opposite Him.

"O Sahajanand Swami," the devotee began, "You are God. So, if you permit, I will sing a garbi about Mataji." Sensing his devotion, Maharaj responded, "OK, you may sing."

Immediately, the devotee began in a rhythmic tune,

*"Mā tu pāvāni patrāni,
bhavāni Mā Kālkā re lol.
Mā tāre dungarde chadvu te,*

ati ghanu dohyalu re lol."

His devotion was apparent to all as he continued,

*"Mā tāri mukhni morādtā joi,
lobhānu mukh chandā tāru re lol.
Mādi tāru mukhdu jovāne kāj,
āve chhe kunvar Nandno re lol."*

When he had finished, Shriji Maharaj expressed his pleasure by presenting him with gifts and blessing him.

With his wish fulfilled, the devotee again prostrated to Maharaj and departed.

Then Maharaj turned to Premanand Swami and asked, "What did you think of the garbi. Wasn't it a pleasant tune? Its composer has devoutly described the glory and form of Mataji. You should compose something like this."

Premanand Swami understood Maharaj's wish.

The next day, Maha vad 14, was Shivratri. Shriji Maharaj was seated in the east-facing

veranda of Dada Khachar's *darbar*, wearing all white clothes. His neck was adorned with a new *kanthi* of tulsi beads and garlands of flowers. An assembly of sadhus and devotees were seated before him. Shriji Maharaj instructed the sadhus to sing *kirtans*. So Premanand Swami stood up and finely observing the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj, he described its appearance.

"Vandu Sahajanand rasrup,
anupam sār ne re lol;
Jene bhajtā chute fand,
kare bhav pār ne re lol..."

He sang with such feeling that the entire assembly became engrossed in the *darshan* of Maharaj's divine *murti*.

One after another, the verses flowed from Premanand Swami's lips. He sang a total of eight verses, giving a detailed description of Maharaj's form and reflecting the thoroughness of his observations.

When he had finished, Shriji Maharaj blessed him and said, "The devotional songs you sang were very nice. After listening to them I thought in my mind, 'Since this sadhu contemplates upon God's form in this way, let me get up and prostrate before him.'

"If a person is able to contemplate upon God in his inner faculties in this manner, and if he were to die while harbouring such a desire for God, he would definitely not have to take another birth. If he engages in such contemplation of God, he has certainly attained the highest state of enlightenment while alive... In fact, one who is able to contemplate upon God's form like this has become fulfilled and has nothing more to do."

Continuing to show his profound pleasure, Shriji Maharaj said, "If a person is able to contemplate upon God as described in these devotional songs, then he is freed from the bondage of *kal*, karma and *maya*. In fact, regardless of the family in which such a person is born the parents of such a person should also be considered fulfilled" (Vachanamrut Gadhada II-48).

These eight verses are sung every night as part of the *cheshta* by all devotees of the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

The words to the first verse are as follows:

Vandu Sahajānand rasrup,
anupam sārane re lol;
Jene bhajtā chhute fand,
kare bhav pārne re lol...1
Samaru pragat rup sukhdhām,
anupam nāmne re lol;
Jene bhav Brahmādik dev,
bhaje taji kāmne re lol...2
Je Hari Aksharbrahma ādhār,
pār koi nav lahe re lol;
Jene Shesh sahastramukh gāy,
nigam neti kahe re lol...3
Varnavu sundar rup anup,
jugal charane nami re lol;
Nakhshikh Premsakhinā Nāth,
raho urmā rami re lol...4

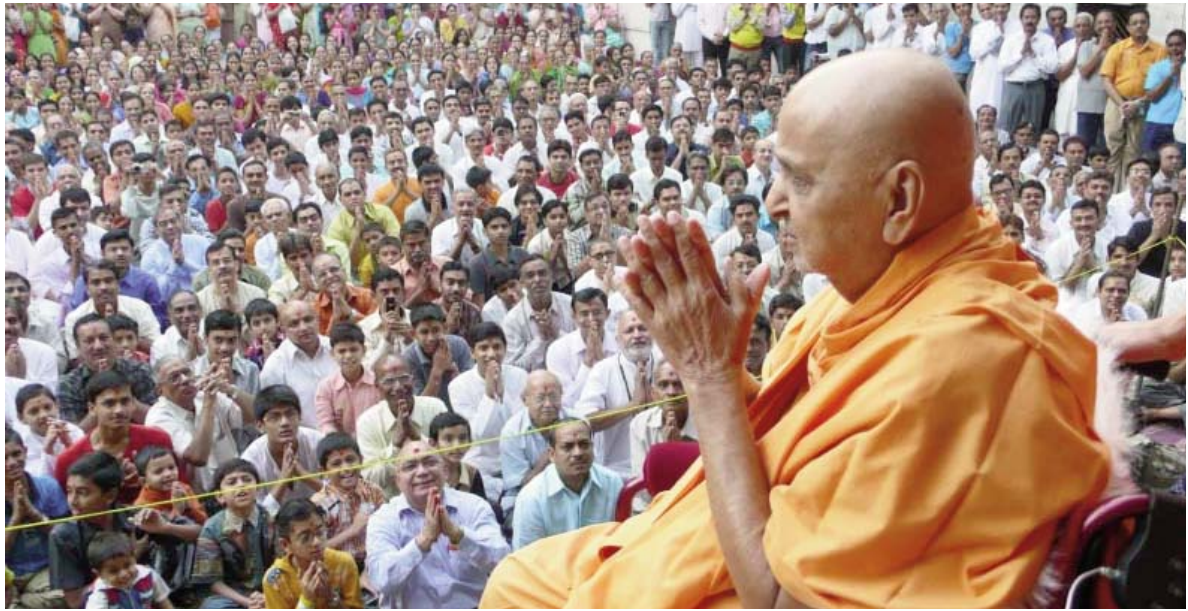
Meaning

I bow to Sahajanand, who is full of all the nine poetic sentiments, unique and the essence of everything. By worshipping him one transcends worldly desires and *maya* (1).

I contemplate on this manifest form (of Shri Hari) which is the abode of all divine bliss. By chanting the unique name of this Shri Hari, even Shiv, Brahma and other deities overcome their desires (2).

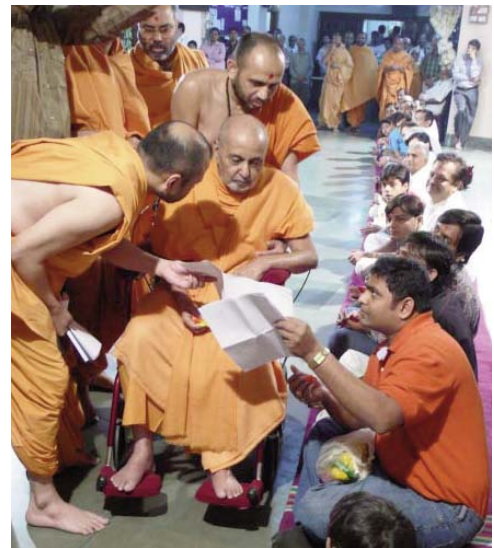
This Shri Hari is the support of even Aksharbrahman and that is why his divine virtues and powers cannot be fully understood. Sheshnarayan sings his praises with his thousand mouths, but still he is unable to fully describe them. Even the Vedas are not able to fully describe his glory (3).

Only by his grace and by bowing at the feet of this manifest (Sahajanand) have I been inspired to describe his beautiful, unique *murti*. So, before I describe your divine form, I (Premanand) pray that your divine form, from head to toe, resides forever in my heart (4). ♦



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's VICHARAN

January and February 2008, Mumbai



Clockwise from top: Swamishri greets devotees at Mumbai mandir; A devotee seeks guidance from Swamishri; Swamishri prays before the newly consecrated murti of Shastri Maharaj ; Swamishri performs murti-pratishtha for murtis of BAPS mandir in Nana Vagchhipa, Rabadi and Rohina

1 January 2008, Ahmedabad, Mumbai

With the doctors' instruction for Swamishri's health check-up in Mumbai Swamishri departed from Ahmedabad airport at 5.00 pm. On landing in Mumbai Swamishri went to the Dadar mandir for Thakorji's darshan. Thereafter Swamishri left for Jaslok Hospital.



Swamishri plays ras with the sadhus

2 January 2008, Mumbai

In the morning Swamishri's ECG and echo-cardiogram were taken. Thereafter at 11.05 am Swamishri was wheeled into the cath-lab with the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

At 11.55 am Dr Ashwinbhai Mehta, who was going to perform the angiography, Dr Fayaz Shawl, a leading expert in critical angioplasty from Washington DC, and Dr Bhattacharya, a renowned heart surgeon of India, arrived.

From 11.00 am sadhus and devotees at all Satsang centres in India and abroad had started saying prayers and dhun.

The angiography was completed by 2.00 pm. The doctors were satisfied with the condition of Swamishri's heart vessels.

Later when Swamishri was asked as to what he was doing, he replied, "Bhajan." He recalled the day when Shastriji Maharaj gave him *diksha*.

The next day Swamishri returned to Dadar mandir for recuperation.

Every morning, Swamishri performed his morning puja in his room and thereafter went for Thakorji's darshan. On returning, Swamishri would give darshan to all devotees. From 8 January, Swamishri started his daily rounds in his wheelchair on the mandir terrace. The doctors had advised him to have half-hour daily exposure to morning or evening sunlight. During the day Swamishri read and replied to devotees' letters, rested and walked briefly on a treadmill.

9 January 2008, Mumbai

The day marked Swamishri's 69th *diksha* anniversary. Sadhus sang bhajans and shloks in praise of Swamishri during his morning puja. Before Thakorji an ambience of a *diksha* ceremony had been set up. When Swamishri arrived on a platform to give darshan to the assembled devotees, Kothari Swami tied a *nada-chhadi* on Swamishri's right wrist to celebrate the occasion and Viveksagar Swami offered a garland.

12 January 2008, Mumbai

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Ashi. Thereafter he blessed the devotees.

13 January 2008, Mumbai

For convenience of devotees the Uttarayan-Jholi festival was celebrated today. After Thakorji's darshan Swamishri hailed the *jholi* mantra, "Narayan Hare Sacchidanand Prabho..." before the devotees. Then Swamishri blessed all, "Jai Swaminarayan. Blessings to you all that Maharaj keeps you happy in body, mind and wealth, and that *satsang* becomes firm in your soul."

In the evening the Uttarayan festival was celebrated at Bhakti Park in the presence of senior sadhus and 12,000 devotees. Swamishri con-



Books used by Shastriji Maharaj for his studies

veyed his blessings by telephone, “Our Indian festivals are our traditions. Shriji Maharaj celebrated Diwali, Annakut, Fuldol and other festivals. That tradition is alive today. Festivals are associated with God. Through bhakti, spiritual discourses and kirtan our faith and values are strengthened. They give peace and happiness in one’s life. Peace lies in listening to the divine incidents of God.”

19 January 2008, Mumbai

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Hanumanji and Ganapatji and Guru Parampara for BAPS *hari* mandir in Dabhan. Thereafter he blessed the devotees.

27 January 2008, Mumbai

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Jalundh (Khambhat district) and Vadola.

FEBRUARY

Swamishri’s daily routine included *Thakorji’s darshan*, *darshan* and *blessings* to devotees and *morning puja*. Daily, either in the morning or evening, Swamishri would go on his rounds on the *mandir terrace*. Thereafter Swamishri would engage himself in answering letters from devotees,

reading *satsang* books and occasional meetings.

11 February 2008, Mumbai; Vasant Panchmi

A *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj was consecrated in the *hari* mandir at Dadar mandir. The preliminary *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed by Kothari Swami. Finally, Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals. Then the study books used by Shastriji Maharaj were brought for darshan. Finally, Kothari Swami and Viveksagar Swami garlanded Swamishri to commemorate the occasion.

21 February 2008, Mumbai

During Swamishri’s daily morning round on the *mandir terrace* sadhus presented incidents from the life of Brahmanand Swami. They sang, “*Sakhi Gokul gamnā chowkmā re...*” Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was placed near Swamishri and sadhus played *ras*. Then Swamishri was given the *ras* sticks and the devotional programme climaxed with Swamishri striking his sticks with the sadhus’ sticks one after another.

22 February 2008, Mumbai

Swamishri performed the *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Nana Vaghchhipa, Rabadi and Rohina. Thereafter he blessed the devotees.

24 February 2008, Mumbai

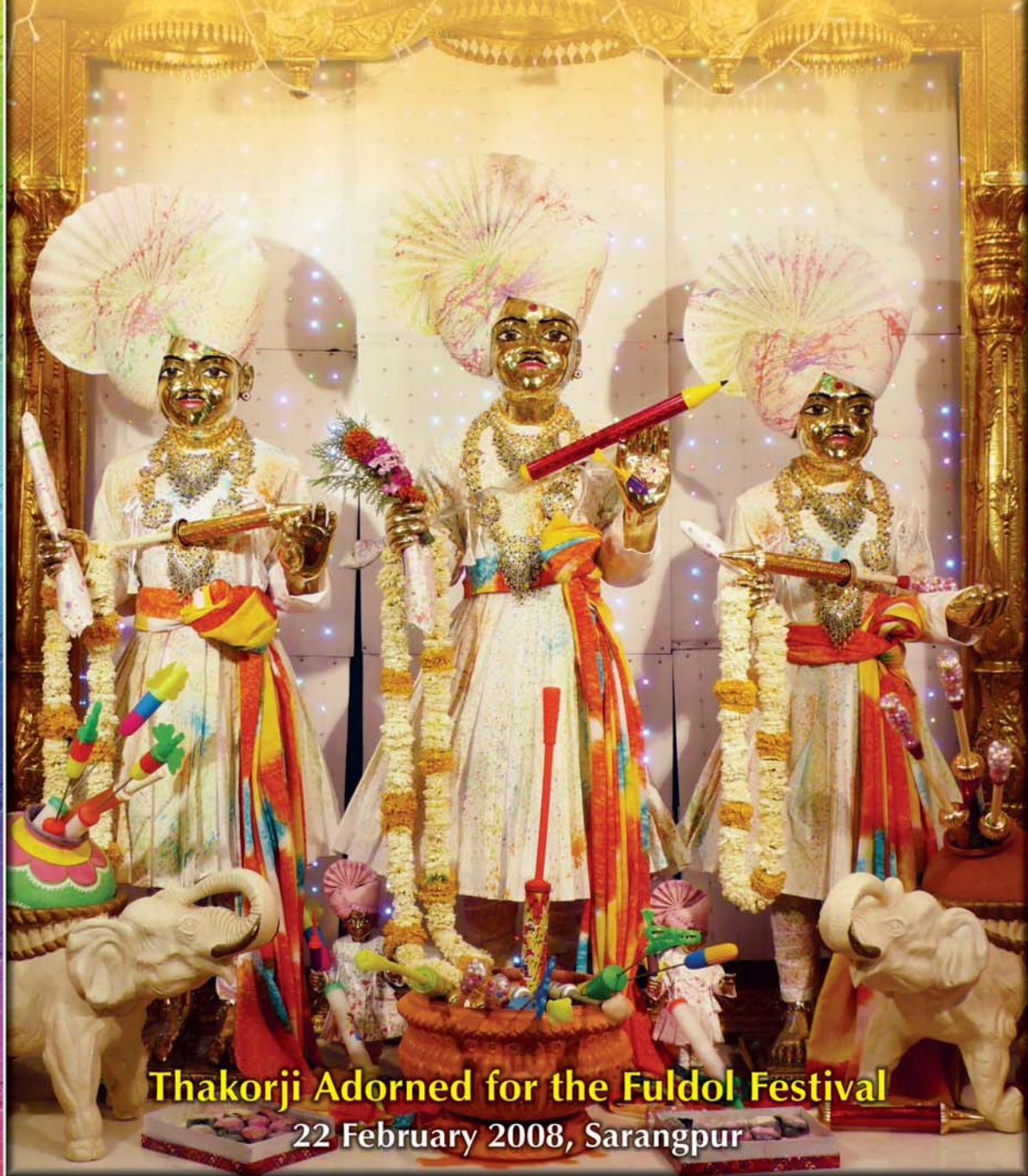
Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* of BAPS *hari* mandirs in Tithal district, namely, Tejlav (Vad-faliya), Jatmandva (Dharampur), Orvan (Donja), Saraiya and Kudvel. Thereafter Swamishri blessed the devotees.



SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

April 2008

Annual Subscription Rs. 60



Thakorji Adorned for the Fuldol Festival
22 February 2008, Sarangpur

NATIONAL SATSANG PRASAR KARYAKAR CONFERENCE

17 February 2008, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

BAPS *karyakars* from across the UK gathered at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden on Sunday 17 February 2008 for the National Satsang Prasara and Management Karyakar Conference.



Karyakars seated in the mandir Haveli

The conference outlined the forthcoming *satsang* projects and initiatives to be undertaken by BAPS in the UK and Europe in 2008-9.

The conference focused on personal development and improvement of inter-personal skills through small sketches, interview panels, group discussions and presentations. Also group activities and exercises within various departments and *mandals* focused on improving communication, emphasizing commitment and priority setting. ◆

PARENTS' CONGREGATIONS

12-18 February 2008, Surat, India

To enlighten parents about their duties, a series of Parents' Congregations was organized by BAPS Bal Mandal, Surat. The sessions were held from 12 to 18 February 2008.



Volunteers present a skit

Invitations were sent out to parents and volunteers were trained well in advance. All were briefed on the work assigned to them and their responsibilities. Everyone

worked with enthusiasm and vigour. More than 16,000 parents attended the sessions and were inspired to make positive changes in their approach to their children. They realized how important it is to impart good values to their children. Children also vowed to perform their duties earnestly. ◆

BAPS HORSES WIN AT KAMA HORSE SHOW

22-24 February 2008, Bhavnagar



Recently, from 22 to 24 February 2008, the 10th Kama Horse Show was held in Bhavnagar, Gujarat, by the Maharaja Shri Krishnakumarsinhji Memorial Trust. Horses from the BAPS stable in Gadhada competed in the show against thoroughbred horses from Gujarat. They were assessed by experts for their breed, appearance, colour, walking, running, dancing and other features and skills. BAPS horses won 1st prize in the Best Marwadi Horse category, 2nd prize in the Best Kathiawadi Horse Category and 2nd Prize in the Reval Walk category.

Congratulations to the horses and their caretakers at Gadhada. ◆



LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

ABSORBED IN GOD AND GURUS

2 January 2008, Mumbai

After his angiography Swamishri was asked, “Were you under tension?”

Swamishri replied with great ease, “I was engaged in bhajan and darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj.” Then Swamishri revealed, “While the angiography was going on, I was engaged in Harikrishna Maharaj’s darshan. Then I distinctly recalled the occasion when Shastriji Maharaj gave me *diksha* as a sadhu. At night Harijivandas (Swami) talked to me (about taking the sadhu *diksha*). After I consented, Shastriji Maharaj embraced me and instructed me to tell Yogi Bapa to perform the (next day’s) *mahapuja* later (than normal) in the morning. When (Swami) was giving me *diksha* in (Akshar Deri) Yogi Bapa was before me. Shastriji Maharaj told Yogi Bapa to bless me so that I would receive virtues like him. I recollected everything. I offered prostrations to him. I remembered all this clearly, and was also chanting the name of

Swaminarayan. My eyes were closed, and when I opened them I would have darshan of the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj.”

During the tense medical investigation Swamishri was unworried and absorbed in God and the memories of his guru.

SPIRITUAL UPRIGHTNESS

30 January 2008, Mumbai

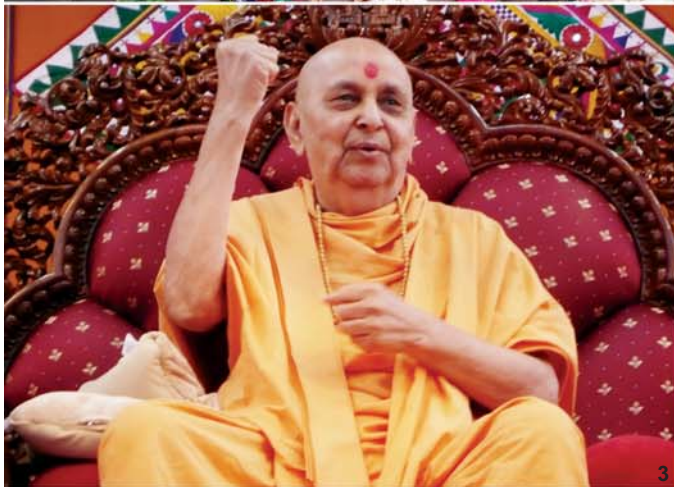
It was time for dinner. Swamishri was seated on his bed leaning on a few cushions. Narayancharan Swami came to make the arrangements and asked, “Would you like to sit straight?”

“All my life I’ve been straight. I’ve never sat in an awkward way,” Swamishri replied in a casual and telling manner.

“I’m referring to your sitting posture on your bed,” the attendant sadhu clarified.

“I’ve always sat straight and walked straight,” replied Swamishri with a smile.

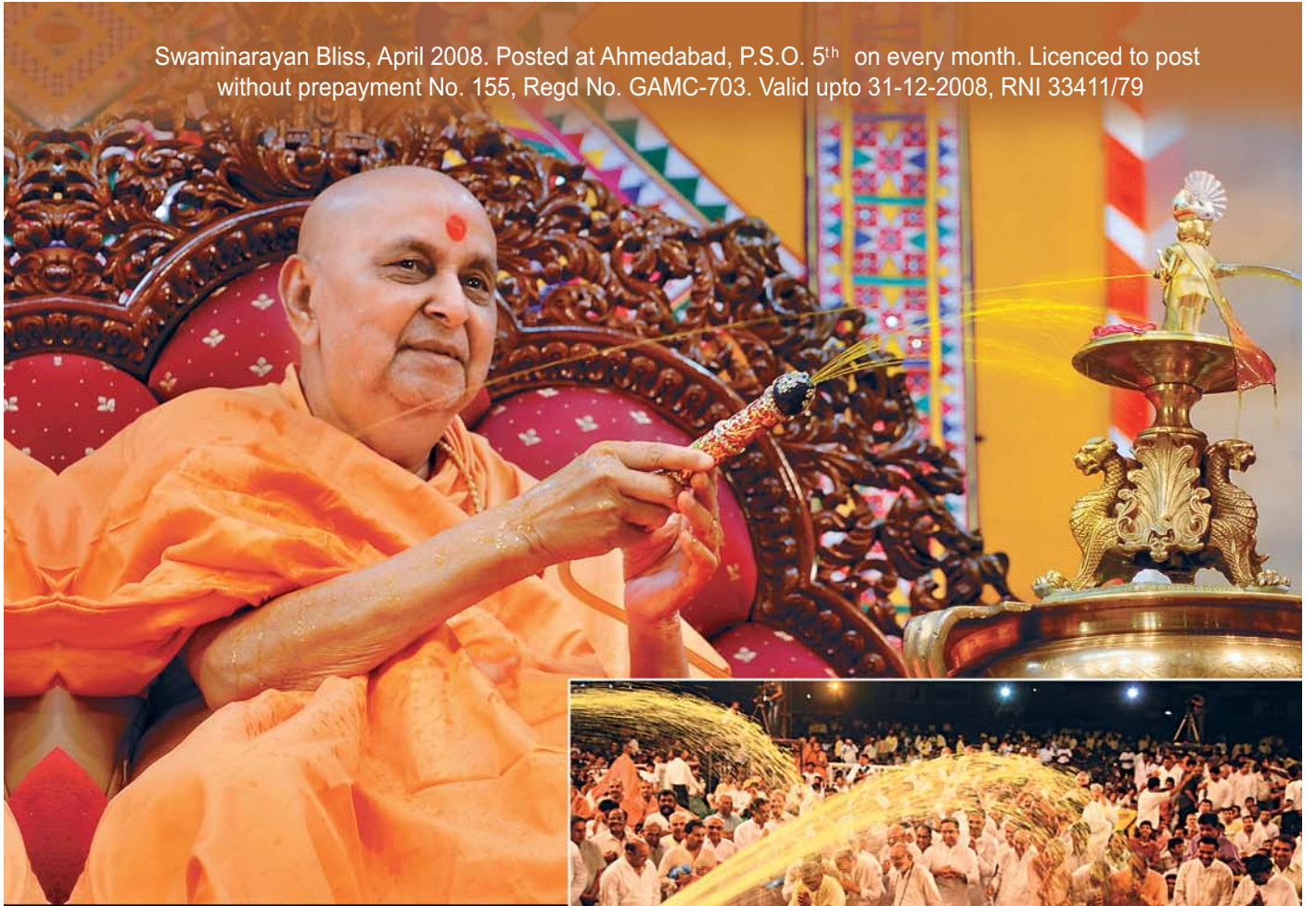




PUSHPADOLOTSAV CELEBRATION
22 March 2008, Sarangpur

- 1 & 2. Stage backdrop: Scene of Bhagwan Swaminarayan seated on a *hindolo* in Vartal, and Bhagwan Swaminarayan playing ras with Gunatitanand Swami and identifying him as Akshar at the house of Rathod Dhadhal in Sarangpur.
3. Swamishri joyfully gestures to the words of the bhajan: '*Vartāl gām fulvādie āmbāni dāl...*'
4. Swamishri blesses the festival assembly.
5. Over 60,000 devotees attend the memorable Fuldol celebration.

Swaminarayan Bliss, April 2008. Posted at Ahmedabad, P.S.O. 5th on every month. Licenced to post without prepayment No. 155, Regd No. GAMC-703. Valid upto 31-12-2008, RNI 33411/79



Top: Swamishri sprays Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with saffron-scented water.
Bottom & Inset: Swamishri sprays devotees with sanctified water.