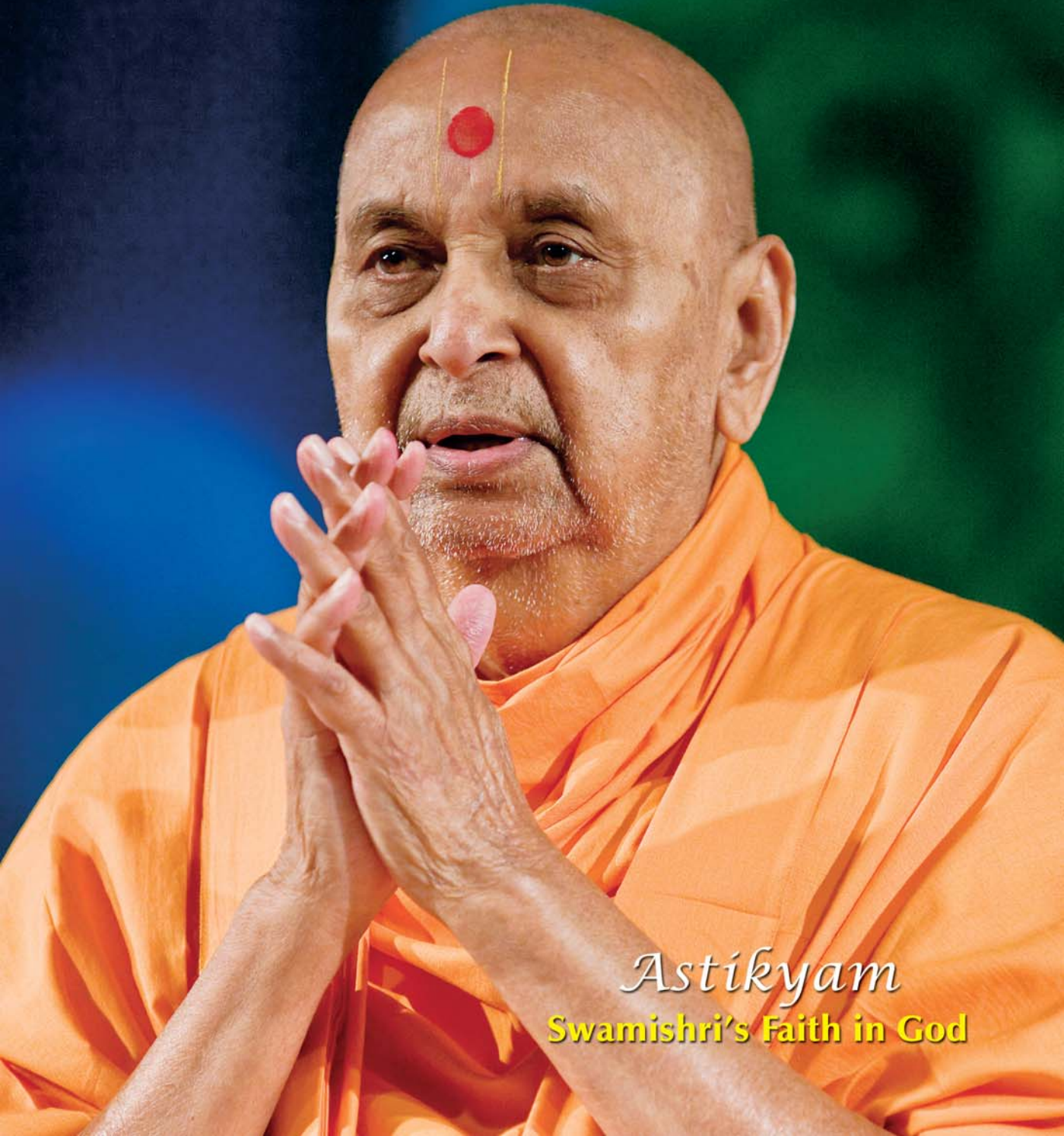


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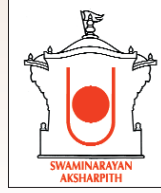
Astikyam
Swamishri's Faith in God



SHILANYAS CEREMONY

8 October 2008, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jamnagar

Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying rituals for the new BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir. Over 7,500 devotees participated in the ceremony.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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CONTENTS

1. *Swaminarayan History*
Fulfilling a Wish in Vartal4
Murti-pratishtha in Vartal...
2. *Guru Parampara*
Astikyam.....7
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's faith in God...
3. *BAPS Festivals*
Diwali and Annakut11
Celebrations in Gondal...
4. *Vicharan*
**Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
Vicharan**13
5. *Inspiring Incidents*
Living with Swamishri18
6. *BAPS News*
**Regional Leadership Seminars,
North America**20
Satsang Shibirs, North America.....20
**"Iti Vachanamrutm",
Kishore-Kishori Shibir,
Sarangpur**.....21
**Health Expo, BAPS Swaminarayan
Mandir, Auckland, New Zealand**22
**Opening of Medical Clinic and
Centres for Public Services,
Gadhada**22

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FIRST WORD

The invention of the wheel revolutionized our world of transport. It ushered in a new age in locomotion that made life easier, faster and joyful. But without the invention of brakes and gears, that help us control movement, the wheel might not have been as useful and safe. The wheel gives motion, but the brakes regulate motion.

The important quality of any system or situation is the degree of self-control one can exercise. In all kinds of martial arts the initial effort and discipline strengthens the body and endows speed to our reflexes. Then after attaining the black belt subsequent higher degrees are acquired by perfecting self-control and restraint.

God has endowed all life forms with an element of self-control. Human beings, however, have the maximum power of self-control. A proper application of this virtue produces untold benefits.

We should not view material objects with the purpose of indulgence. There are limits to which we should abide by. To help us do so we need to apply our *vivek buddhi* or intellect of discrimination. The purer our *vivek buddhi*, the easier it becomes to exercise self-restraint. And it is with this reason that our great *rishis* and sages prescribed austerity, vegetarianism, meditation, bhajan, *seva* and satsang for all to practice. Without these sadhanas it is not possible to sanitize our buddhi and make it virtuous and strong. No amount of human skill or intelligence can empower our *buddhi* with inner purity and soul strength. ◆



Fulfilling a Wish in Vartal

Shri Hari sanctifies the home of Nathu Bhatt in Ahmedabad and reveals to him the truth of his own supreme divinity and makes him realize his error...

Shri Hari advised Nathu Bhatt, “Since you have studied the shastras do they not describe the transcendent form of God? And from that form do you not know about the birth of other divine forms like *chaturvyuha*, *vibhuti* avatars,* *antaryamin* (indweller) and *archa* (*murti*)?”

Nathu Bhatt was not aware of this so he simply remained mute and kept looking expectantly at Maharaj. Shri Hari elaborated further, “Bhattji, the words of the shastras are very profound and difficult to understand by oneself. Those who have studied the shastras say that Svetvaikunth is the highest divine abode. However in reality the divine abode of Akshardham is infinitely beyond it. I am the presider and master of that abode. Through my will I take birth in the form that is required in any part of the universe. All the divine incarnations are born from me and again they merge into my form. What wrong has Damodar done by revealing my supreme form? He has talked in accordance with the shastras.”

*Mahabharat, Shanti Parva: 348-357

Nathu Bhatt regretted for what he had done, and asked for Maharaj’s forgiveness.

Shri Hari exhorted him, “You must ask Damodar to forgive you. Despite the fact that he has not studied the shastras he has genuine and absolute faith in me. He strongly believes that the root of all shastras is Shriji Maharaj.”

Instantly Nathu Bhatt bowed at the feet of Damodar. The latter stepped back and said, “Bhattji there is no need to apologise.”

Shri Hari was pleased with Damodar’s humility.

The next day a wealthy widow, Mrs. Parekh, sponsored a meal of *dukhpak* and other food items for Maharaj and his entire group. Shri Hari had his meal and then personally served food to the sadhus and other devotees. Then Maharaj departed from Ahmedabad and travelled to Jetalpur. Here, his living arrangements were made in the *mahol*, a traditional building. Soon thereafter an assembly was arranged beneath a tamarind tree. Ashajibhai, a local devotee, had made all the arrangements. Shri Hari told him, “Because this village is by the main road I have

made frequent visits here. I shall not stay here long. I wish to leave tomorrow.” Then Maharaj came to the spiritual assembly. He asked Anandanand Swami, Mahanubhavanand Swami, Swayamprakashanand Swami, Atmanand Swami and a few others to sit before him. Then Maharaj declared, “In Adaraj I had appointed four senior sadhus as *sadgurus*. Today I want to appoint another eight senior sadhus as *sadgurus* and give them the responsibility of the Satsang fellowship. They are firm in following dharma and have strong conviction in my divine form. So I ask you all to obey the words of Anand Swami, Mahanubhavanand Swami, Swayamprakashanand Swami and four more *sadgurus* in the same way that you obey my words. You must honour them and abide by their instructions. Since our Satsang is flourishing day by day I have appointed these twelve *sadgurus* for its care and nourishment. They will spread the light of spiritual knowledge everywhere. I have now given them the responsibility of fostering Satsang. They will now steer Satsang on my behalf.” All the sadhus and devotees present were pleased with Maharaj’s declaration. They felt the less the burden on Shri Hari the more they would receive his divine proximity. Shri Hari would subsequently be able to travel frequently to the villages of devotees.

Shriji Maharaj departed from Jetalpur and arrived at Vartal via Dabhan. The devotees rejoiced on having his darshan. Shri Hari said, “I am on my way to Gadhpur so I do not wish to stay here for long.” But the devotees replied, “Your mere darshan imbues our hearts with divine joy. But when you depart we revert to our natural selves. So just as in Gadhpur you have consecrated the *murtis* of Vasudev-Narayan for the devotees to have darshan in your absence we wish you to install your *murti* here.” Maharaj was pleased to know about their devotion. He immediately called Ramdas Swami and said, “The devotees of Vartal deeply desire to have my *murti* installed here. Show me the

place for its installation.” Ramdas Swami humbly replied, “Maharaj, the first time when you came to Vartal during your travels as Varni you sat beneath this *badari* tree. Thereafter on many occasions you have spoken about the glory of this place. So this would be the best place to install your *murti*.”

Shri Hari approved of the place and gave instructions to build a room immediately. “I wanted to stay here for only a day, but now I’ll have to stay for a few days more to fulfil the devotees’ wish.” Then Maharaj added, “Call Hiraji the sculptor. The *murti* to be installed will be called Nar-Narayan.”

“But Nar-Narayan means two forms,” Ramdas Swami added.

Maharaj explained, “I have brought Akshar with me, yet no one seems to have understood him. In the forms of Nar-Narayan, Nar is a part of Akshar and Narayan is my form.”

Hiraji, the sculptor, brought the two *murtis* of Nar-Narayan. Once the room was built beneath the *badari* tree Maharaj called for the two Brahmin pundits from Umreth, Haribhai and Ghelabhai. They conducted the *pratishta* rituals and finally Maharaj performed the *arti*. In this way Shri Hari consecrated his own form by installing the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan and hinted that he has an ideal devotee who is his abode. Finally Maharaj said, “Believe these *murtis* of Nar-Narayan to be my form and worship them.” Thereafter the devotees were served *prasad*.

Dalabhai told Maharaj, “I want to donate land for a magnificent mandir here in Vartal. How much land would you require to build the mandir, living quarters for sadhus, an assembly hall and other things?”

Shri Hari replied, “Let us think about that after I return again. Till then you decide on how much land you want to give.”

Shriji Maharaj departed from Vartal. He travelled to Valotva and took lunch at Vaso. Then he travelled ahead to Palana, Dholka, Sosarva and

camped by the pond on the outskirts of Chikhli. After having lunch Shri Hari proceeded towards Koth, Javaraj, Adval, Vagad, Nagnesh, Ranpur, Bhesjal and Nagadka. Here he stayed for three days at the house of Sura Khachar. Then he travelled to Botad and stayed at the house of Daha Khachar for ten days. Further on he stayed for another ten days in Sarangpur and fifteen days at the house of Vasta Khachar in Kariyani. Shri Hari then proceeded to Jhinhavadar to the house of Allaiya Khachar and resided there for seventeen days. From there Maharaj finally reached Gadhpur. It was near the end of the month of Posh (Dec-Jan) in 1819 CE.

Shri Hari saw that preparations for the celebrations of Vasant festival were afoot in Gadhpur. Maharaj stated, "I had not sent word that I would be celebrating Vasant here."

Jivuba replied, "Maharaj, we had so wished, and you always fulfil the wishes of your devotees. Dada Khachar (brother) and Lalita (sister) were also saying that you would celebrate Vasant here."

"So it seems that all of you have united in wishing so," Shri Hari replied with a smile.

"No, Maharaj. That is not so. It is you as the indweller (*antaryami*) in our hearts who, on knowing our longing, inspired us to make such a wish," Jivuba clarified.

As word spread that Maharaj was going to celebrate the Vasant festival there devotees started flocking to Gadhada. Daily, everyone listened to Maharaj's discourses and performed *seva*. Once Maharaj said in his discourse, "When I was travelling in the forests during my *vicharan* I came across a large pond. There was a renunciant (*bawaji*) living in a hut by the pond. I asked, 'How far is the village from here?' He replied, 'It is about six kilometres.' I asked further, 'What arrangements do you have for your lunch and dinner?' He replied with distress, 'Oh, I have to walk to the village and beg for alms. But whenever I am too tired to go I

simply fast for that day.' I was surprised to hear that. So I asked, 'Then Bawaji, why don't you stay near the village? Why do you take such trouble?' On hearing this the Bawaji beamed, 'Look child, what do you know! I had planted this banyan tree, and now it is like a son to me. How can I leave it and go elsewhere?'" Then Shri Hari explained, "It is quite easy to understand that a person becomes attached to his own kith and kin, but it is amazing when one becomes attached to trees, animals and trifle objects. To free oneself from such bondage one has to give up the base instincts and realize one's true form to be *atma* through spiritual knowledge."

During Maharaj's stay in Gadhada Ramchandra Bhatt of Ruvad village in Kanam district came with his brother, Ratneshwar, and mother to avail themselves of Maharaj's divine presence. Whenever Maharaj performed his morning puja, Ramchandra would come and sit before him and chant the *Vishnusahasranam*. Ratneshwar performed whatever *seva* he was shown and his mother was with Laduba and Jivuba engaged in doing whatever *seva* she was given.

One day, a twist occurred in the life of Ramchandra. The reason was Hasan, who ran a tobacco business in Gadhpur. On seeing Ramchandra he remembered that Ramchandra had some capital after selling his property and land. So Hasan went up to him with a proposal, "Let us be partners and sell the tobacco I have in Sardhar. Then we will share whatever profit or loss we get."

The naïve and gullible Ramchandra did not realize Hasan's crafty ways. He only thought that he would earn a little more money, and add it to his capital. Thereafter, he could happily do bhajan. Thus Ramchandra decided to accompany Hasan to Sardhar. ◆

(To be contd.)



Astikyam

Astikta is the belief that God exists. God infuses astikta in the hearts of his devotees. God is the source from which an aspirant develops true conviction in God. You cannot form a sentence without a subject. Similarly, God is the sole basis of spirituality.

Astikta has many meanings: God is the all-doer. Even when the entire creation is destroyed a devotee should remember that God still exists and has a divine form.

God is present in the eight types of *murtis*. He blesses the devotees and fulfils their wishes.

Also, *astikta* includes faith in the word of God, the Vedas and other spiritual texts.

The Gunatit Sadhu is the closest to God. Therefore, he is the ideal *astik* devotee. He has experienced and realized God; he lives *astikta*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) sees God in everyone and everything. Swamishri has immeasurable faith and conviction in God's *murtis*. He knows that they are not merely a symbol or form of God. In fact, he knows that God is present in the *murtis*.

The *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj he worships and serves daily is dearer to him than life.

In 1988 in Zimbabwe a TV reporter, Moses Fisi, pointed to the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj and asked, "What is that a symbol of?"

Swamishri replied, "This is not a symbol. This is Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He inspires us and guides us in everything that we do. We worship him. He fulfils the devotees' wishes and looks after their wellbeing. God is omnipresent, but he is always present in this *murti*. We offer everything to him before we use it."

Swamishri's faith in *murtis* is evident through this dialogue.

* * *

Just observing Swamishri serve and worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan instills *astikta* in others.

Shri Harikrishna Maharaj is the small metallic *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan which Swamishri keeps with him wherever he travels. Also referred to as 'Thakorji', the *murti* was initially from Junagadh. Aksharbrahman Gunatanand Swami used to worship the same *murti*. When Yogiji Maharaj left Junagadh, he was granted permission to take the *murti* with him. Yogiji Maharaj served the *murti* until he passed away to Akshardham on 23 January 1971. Since then, Swamishri has served the *murti* with the conviction that God is manifest within.

Thakorji is Swamishri's life. His existence is centred around Thakorji. He offers everything to him before he eats, drinks or uses it.

Swamishri keeps Thakorji in the forefront when he is honoured, or when he is inaugurating something. Grand celebrations and even *padhramanis* are performed with Thakorji as the centre of attention. Swamishri believes that everything is due to his grace and blessings.

In 1988, Swamishri was getting ready to go to a *satsang* assembly in a local community centre in Atlanta. A devotee walked up to Swamishri and demanded to meet him. He was

building a motel and wanted Swamishri's blessings. He had brought some soil from his property in a cloth. He wanted Swamishri to step on it and consecrate it.

Swamishri called Brahmaturth Swami and told him to bring Thakorji. Before the attendant sadhus could figure out what was going on, Swamishri sat down on the floor, took Thakorji into his hands and placed him on the soil. He chanted the *dhun* and placed flower petals on the soil. He told the devotee that the motel would turn out perfect because Thakorji had consecrated it.

The devotee was overjoyed, but more importantly, this incident showed Swamishri's unflinching devotion to and faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The Mayor of Nairobi had come to present Swamishri the Key to the City. As he walked to Swamishri to present him with the award, Swamishri led him by the hand and brought him to Thakorji. He told the Mayor to offer it to Thakorji and then accepted it.

* * *

Swamishri always shows his reverence for Thakorji.

If at times Thakorji's seat is lower than his, Swamishri immediately instructs, "This isn't right! God is almighty. We are his servants, so make sure his seat is higher than mine."

Swamishri was inaugurating the newly built air-conditioned J.J. Market in Surat. He arrived on the stage and noticed that there was a lavish seat for him and a very simple one for Thakorji. Swamishri told the attendant sadhu to place Thakorji on his seat while he sat on a plain one. It was only after the devotees decorated Thakorji's seat that Swamishri took his seat.

Once, Swamishri was exhausted from travelling all day. He arrived in Mahelav at about 8:00 p.m. The devotees had organized a procession around the village. Though Swamishri was extremely tired, he got onto the tractor and pleased the many devotees who were present.

Nearing the end of the procession, a devotee extended his hands to garland Swamishri. Swamishri grabbed his hand and said, "Offer it to Thakorji first and then to me."

Swamishri remembers Thakorji even amidst chaos.

If anyone tries to commend him on his devotion towards Thakorji, he says, "I don't do anything for Thakorji. He provides for us. Who are we to take care of him? He takes care of us."

* * *

Swamishri cares for Thakorji even when his own health is failing him.

In 1998, Dr Jeffrey Moses and Dr William Schwarz completed Swamishri's angiography at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York. They urged for an emergency bypass operation. Dr Subramaniam was called and he prepared himself for the operation. In the meantime, Swamishri had been fully examined and prepared for the major surgery. The time was 11:30 a.m. Swamishri decided to go in for surgery at 3:00 p.m. The physicians explained that it was not a good idea to delay. They should perform the bypass as soon as possible. Still, Swamishri insisted to wait till 3:00 p.m. The doctors accepted Swamishri's wish. So, Swamishri waited in his ICU room as sadhus read the *Haricharitamrut Sagar* and sang bhajans.

At exactly 3:00 p.m. Swamishri entered the operation theatre with Thakorji at his side. Arrangements had been made for Thakorji to be seated near him. It was a major operation, but everyone breathed a sigh of relief after it was completed successfully.

After two weeks, while Swamishri was recovering at Dr Mahendrabhai's house in Westchester, the sadhus asked why he had insisted on waiting until 3:00 p.m. to begin the operation.

Swamishri explained, "If we went in at three o'clock, we would be able to serve Thakorji *thal* and let him rest for a while before waking him up. We would be able to work according to his

schedule and not inconvenience him."

Swamishri's focus has always been Thakorji and his *seva*. He has never thought of himself.

* * *

Another symbol of his *astikta* is mandirs. Swamishri has built traditional mandirs around the world that are alive with spiritual and cultural activities. These mandirs are not just marvels of ancient Indian architecture. They are a symbol of Swamishri's faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Worldwide, he has inspired over 750 mandirs.

These mandirs are a haven for spiritual and religious activities that infuse *astikta* in those that visit them. Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, and traditional mandirs in London, Nairobi, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta and Toronto inspire hundreds of thousands of individuals to live morally pure and spiritually enriched lives.

Hundreds of people leave the campuses of these magnificent mandirs with a revived sense of faith and belief in God.

Mahendrabhai Jamnadas Amin would always house sadhus when they visited Nadiad. In fact, he had been doing so since Yogiji Maharaj's time. His wife, Bhanuben, had always been a firm believer in community service.

One afternoon, Mahendrabhai came home after talking to Swamishri about the plans for the new mandir in Vaso. He started telling his wife about it, but she wasn't too impressed, "Building mandirs is like piling stones on top of each other. Your Swami should build hospitals and community centres to help the needy." Mahendrabhai decided it was best not to argue.

That evening, Swamishri came to Mahendrabhai's house. Swamishri was sitting talking to Mahendrabhai and his male relatives about the Vaso mandir, "The mandir will be fabulous. It's a shame that some people do not understand the importance of a mandir. They think that these mandirs are just lifeless stone structures. They are a source of spirituality and values. There is a time in everyone's life when they

need solace and comfort. These mandirs provide that comfort and peace. That is why we build mandirs.”

Bhanuben was sitting in a nearby room and heard Swamishri's discourse. She immediately realized her mistake. She felt a surge of devotion overflow in her heart. Swamishri's talks had breathed faith and conviction in her. She was convinced that Swamishri's mandirs breathed spirituality.

Swamishri's intense faith in God has inspired many atheists and agnostics to believe in God's existence.

Satish Gujral is a renowned architect and the brother of former Indian Prime Minister Indrakumar Gujral. He has never believed in God! He had never visited mandirs or bowed to *murtis*.

After hearing a lot about Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, Satish Gujral came to visit it with his wife in November 2005. The atmosphere was different. He was feeling spiritually inclined. He couldn't seem to figure out why, but he couldn't resist going to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The rest is best described in his own words, "I am an atheist, but this monument has the power to make an atheist believe in God! The atmosphere here is beyond logic and reason. There is a divine power behind all of this. I can feel it. I feel that it is still with me. Don't get me wrong, I have seen the world. I have seen plenty of monuments, but I have never seen anything like this before. It is mind boggling. I am an architect myself and I have seen plenty of architectural wonders, but this is different. Given the limitations in India, this project should have taken about 50 years. Swamishri completed it in five! What they have made is truly remarkable. Monuments like these cannot be explained with logic. This monument is different to all others. It will attract many more people."

Thousands of devotees across the world have the firm faith that God is always present on

earth. The reason behind that faith is Swamishri's presence. He has nourished that faith on various occasions.

On 23 January 2006, Swamishri was in Mumbai paying a special tribute to Yogiji Maharaj. A youth stated his confusion, "Today, when they were singing Yogiji Maharaj's bhajans I thought of Brahmanand Swami. He was devastated when Bhagwan Swaminarayan left his mortal body for Akshardham. I am worried about what will happen to us in the future..."

Swamishri replied, "Always remember that Bhagwan Swaminarayan never left and is never going to leave. He will be present through the Gunatit Sadhu forever. He may change forms and be present through different mortal bodies, but he is always present. You will love and become attached to the other form too. Never even think that Bhagwan Swaminarayan has left this world."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan describes the importance of understanding God as always present on earth in Vachanamrut I- 37:

"There is a person who has bhakti for God in his heart. He understands that the manner in which the incarnate form of God resides on this earth, and the manner in which the devotees of God remain in the vicinity of God is exactly how they remain when *atyantik pralay* occurs. He also understands that God and his devotees possess a form; but never does he understand them to be formless...A sadhu with such conviction is so highly respected by me that even I place the dust of his feet on my head. In my mind, I am afraid of harming him, and I also long to have his darshan...In fact, the darshan of such a true Bhakta of God is equivalent to the darshan of God himself. He is so great that his darshan alone can redeem countless wretched *jivas*."



- Translation by Yogi Trivedi, USA,
from *Jena Gune Rijhya Girdhari'*
by Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas



Swamishri performs arti during Chopda Pujan

Diwali and Annakut

28-29 October 2008, Gondal

28 October 2008, Gondal; Diwali

At 6.40 p.m. Swamishri arrived on stage for the *mahapuja* rituals of Chopda puja. The function was arranged on the mandir grounds. Thousands of accounts books were arranged neatly on stage. Swamishri participated in the *mahapuja* rituals till they concluded at 7.40 p.m.

Viveksagar Swami addressed the large number of devotees. Finally, Swamishri blessed everyone, “People either take their accounts books to a mandir for sanctification or they do

the rituals at home. The rituals are done to bless one with pure thoughts so that one can earn money successfully and use it in a benevolent way. The rituals may appear formal, but they are in accordance to our shastras and culture. God is pleased by such rituals. We always have God in the forefront of all our festivals. By keeping God in the forefront of all our activities, God will bless us.”

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed all the account books by showering flower petals and rice grains.



Annakut offered to Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Gondal

29 October 2008, Gondal; New Year's Day

Thousands of devotees had gathered for Swamishri's morning puja darshan on New Year's Day. Sadhus sang prayers and bhajans during Swamishri's puja. Thereafter Swamishri gave blessings for the New Year, "Since the time of Yogiji Maharaj the annual *annakut* festival is celebrated here with great devotion and joy. The *annakut* festival is celebrated in all our mandirs and in all Vaishnav mandirs. Shriji Maharaj celebrated festivals to allow bhakti to flourish in the hearts of devotees. Bhakti should be offered in accordance with dharma. All of you have done a lot of bhakti. Today, we will have darshan of *annakut*. May all be inspired by God and attain peace by doing his darshan.

"Bhakti done with *dehbhav* does not last, because it is soiled with ego and jealousy. But

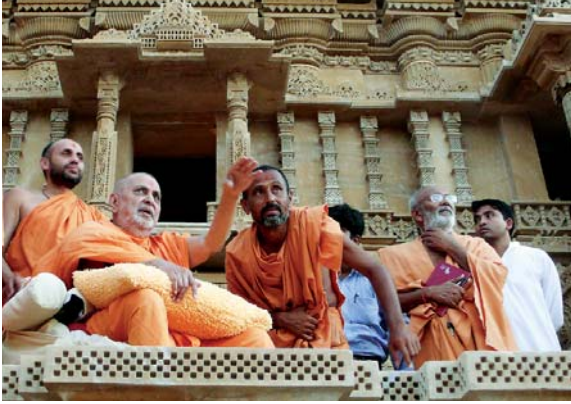
bhakti performed without *mayik-bhav* pleases God." Swamishri further explained that one should not look at the faults of others but look within oneself and make efforts to dissolve one's own faults.

At 11.35 a.m. Swamishri went before Thakorji in the mandir and sang *thals*. The *annakut* items in all the three shrines of Thakorji had been arranged beautifully. At 12.00 noon Swamishri performed Govardhan puja and the *annakut arti* in all three shrines. Thereafter Swamishri performed the *annakut arti* in Akshar Deri and blessed Maharaja Jyoti Bapu of Gondal and devotees.

In all, 20,000 devotees had *annakut* darshan during the whole day. ◆

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's VICHARAN

1 September to 30 October 2008, Ahmedabad, Jamnagar, Bhadra, Gondal



Swamishri observes the new mandir under construction, Bhadra



Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva assembly, Ahmedabad

Swamishri's daily ritual in Ahmedabad included darshan of Thakorji at 7.30 a.m. and thereafter he performed puja in the assembly hall where devotees would have darshan. Prior to his puja Viveksagar Swami conducted a discourse on Yogi Gita. When Swamishri came daily to perform his morning puja volunteer-devotees of different suburbs of the city displayed information about their *satsang* activities. Swamishri would bless them and also those who had pilgrimaged by foot to the mandir.

Every Sunday Swamishri attended the evening *satsang* assembly and gave blessings to the devotees.

During festive days the festival was celebrated during Swamishri's morning puja after which he gave blessings.

For 15 days Swamishri had EECF treatment (4-18 September).

11 September 2008, Ahmedabad; Jal Jhilani

After the *mangala arti* at 6.00 a.m. a ritual procession of Thakorji, in celebration of Jal Jhi-

lani, was carried out in a decorated palanquin. Senior sadhus and devotees circumambulated the mandir amidst singing of bhajans and with children dressed in festive costumes. Thereafter the procession terminated in the assembly hall where a *mahapuja* was held. Prior to Swamishri's arrival Viveksagar Swami explained the meaning and significance of the festival. When Swamishri arrived he performed the *arti* of the *mahapuja* and then performed his daily puja. During puja sadhus sang bhajans and the customary five *artis* were performed at regular intervals. During the bhajans Thakorji was placed in a remote-controlled boat in a large makeshift pool in the assembly hall. Swamishri's Harikrishna Maharaj was placed in another smaller pool before him. As the sadhus sang bhajans in consonance with the occasion a projection of different pictures related to Jal Jhilani appeared on a wide-screen backdrop on stage. The fifth and final *arti* was performed by Swamishri. Thereafter he blessed the assembly, "Because there is bhakti in our hearts for God we make such arrangements to please him.

Bhakti means to devotionally offer God what we use for our happiness. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had bathed in the river Sabarmati often. God is divine, whereas everything and everyone else is *mayik*. When the *mayik* comes in association with the Divine it becomes divine. So we must associate with God. This means doing daily puja, darshan, listening to spiritual discourses and singing kirtans in the morning. Then one should perform one's worldly duties. And again, on returning in the evening, one should offer prayers, *arti* and do *ghar sabha*. Association with God also means taking refuge in him, having firm faith and conviction in him and offering bhakti... May you remember this occasion in your last moments and attain Akshardham."

Finally, Swamishri also sailed the boat on which Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was installed with a remote control console. The entire hall, full of devotees, was overjoyed at the divine darshan of the Jal Jhilani festival. After 23 years (1985) Swamishri celebrated the festival in Ahmedabad. Thousands of devotees had observed a waterless fast on this day because it was a major *ekadashi*.

18 September 2008, Ahmedabad; Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva

After Thakorji's darshan Swamishri was going towards the assembly hall to perform his morning puja. Since it was a memorial day of Shastriji Maharaj in the *shraadh* period Swamishri was adorned with a *pagh* similar to what Shastriji Maharaj used to wear. On the way he was greeted by youths who were dressed up as famous devotees from the time of Shastriji Maharaj. During Swamishri's morning puja bhajans on Shastriji Maharaj's glory and work were sung by sadhus. Twice Swamishri raised his left hand in acknowledgement to the words "Yagnapurush is with us" when they were sung in his puja. After his puja Swamishri was honoured by senior sadhus with garlands and shawls. A variety of calendars for the year 2009

were inaugurated by Swamishri. Finally Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Shastriji Maharaj had come from Akshardham, so from childhood he performed bhakti even while he played. He consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj despite the flurry of trials and tribulations. He did not care for fame or glory. He had single-minded faith, that the principle of Akshar-Purushottam is genuine. So he built mandirs and proclaimed it to the world."

More than 14,500 devotees attended the celebration and took *mahaprasad*.

Programme Highlights

AHMEDABAD

3 (Sunday): Swamishri performed puja and *arti* of the *murti* of Shri Ganeshji on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi in the BAPS mandir.

7 (Sunday): Swamishri's blessings during the evening *satsang* assembly, "Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have explained that we should not feel and think that we have heard enough discourses and kirtans. We never tire or think it to be enough while doing our social duties like earning money at work, travelling abroad, or eating good food."

14 (Sunday): Swamishri's blessings in the evening *satsang* assembly, "You must do your worldly duties but be ever alert not to get soiled by *kusang*. To see without, and to eat and drink outside is all *kusang*. One spends painful, unhappy days when one looks at and eats things that corrupt oneself."

15 (Monday): Five thousand *kishores* and *kishoris* attended Swamishri's morning puja as part of Kishore Day.

21 (Sunday): Swamishri inaugurated the Sanstha's Herbal website, www.herbal.baps.org. Thereafter he blessed the *satsang* assembly, "Whatever discourses we listen to we need to reflect and repeat and then only can we realize them."

30 (Tuesday): A wonderful *annakut* had been arranged before Thakorji. Swamishri performed the *annakut arti* of Thakorji.

1 October 2008, Ahmedabad, Jamnagar

Swamishri departed from Ahmedabad at 11.00 a.m. and landed at Jamnagar airport at 11.30 a.m. He was welcomed by the Collector, Shri V.P. Patel. On approaching the new proposed mandir site Swamishri was welcomed by devotees waving BAPS flags, children dressed as *devas* showering flowers and youths adorned in accordance with the BAPS six-point theme of *siddhant, sadhuta, seva, samarpan, samp* and *satpurush*. Swamishri then went to the small *hari* mandir on site for darshan. Children performed a welcome dance while Swamishri gave darshan to the assembly. More than 2,500 devotees were present during the brief welcome ceremony.

5 October 2008, Jamnagar

In the evening *satsang* assembly Viveksagar Swami gave a discourse. Thereafter youths performed a drama on 'Samat Patel' – a dedicated devotee in the time of Shriji Maharaj. Then the Mayor, Shri Kanaksinh Jadeja, MLA Shri Laljibhai Solanki and district president of BJP Shri Nileshbhai Udani honoured Swamishri with garlands. Finally Swamishri blessed the assembly, "God does not take things away from anyone, but he gives to all. He will be pleased if we offer faithful devotion to him without being jealous of others. Through spiritual discourses our life becomes pure and through mandirs we attain peace by offering bhakti."

8 October 2008, Jamnagar; Foundation-stone Laying Ceremony

At the age of 87 years Swamishri personally wished to perform the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the grand *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan mandir in Jamnagar. The Vedic rituals commenced at 7.00 a.m. The entire walls of the foundation pit were adorned with red plastic and saris. A small canopy was set up over the main platform for the ritual ceremony. In all, there were 27 main *shilas*. On each of the *shilas*, Tyagvallabh Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Kothari



Swamishri performs rituals during the foundation-stone laying ceremony, Jamnagar

Jnanprasad Swami and other sadhus, guests and devotees performed the rituals. Thousands of devotees also performed the rituals with each having a foundation brick before them. When Swamishri arrived he performed the foundation-stone laying rituals from the main stage. More than 7,500 devotees participated in the rituals. After completing the rituals an assembly was held. The invited guests who honoured Swamishri were Mayor Kanaksinh Jadeja, Retired Air Marshal Mehra, MLA Mulubhai Bera, MLA Laljibhai Solanki, Collector V.P. Patel, City Commissioner K.N. Bhatt, IGP Shri Rabari, DSP Shri Jotangiya, Air Force Head Shri Harikumar and district president of BJP Shri Narendrabhai Trivedi. The former Defence Minister of India, Shri George Fernandes, sent a goodwill message for the occasion and regretted for being unable to attend the function due to ill health.

His message was read out in the assembly, "Unfortunately, I will not be able to be physically present, but shall be very much there in mind and spirit. This is because I deeply value and



Over 7,500 devotees participate in the foundation-stone laying ceremony, Jamnagar

appreciate the great work of national pride, goodness and unity that HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj is doing through the many BAPS services of health, education, culture and character throughout the world. Also, amazing cultural centres like Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi and Gandhinagar have become places of great inspiration and integration. But most importantly, I value the humility and simplicity of Swamiji, whom I have met a few times, and whose presence has filled me with utter calm and spiritual peace. Today, I extend my full support to the new complex at Jamnagar and the values upheld by BAPS... I salute all ideals and institutions that work for unity, peace and progress of our people and our nation and BAPS is one that I personally respect and revere. May the centre at Jamnagar help elevate society in the right moral, ethical and spiritual direction which remains the urgent need of our times.”

Collector Shri V.P. Patel said, “The BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs are centres of culture and character-building. Primarily they inculcate values among the young.”

Commissioner Shri K.N. Bhatt expressed his feelings, “Only through God’s grace can a mandir be built here. Pramukh Swami’s uniqueness is that no matter how great his accomplishments, he is simple, humble, polite and determined.” Mayor Shri Kanaksinh Jadeja said, “A

golden sun has dawned in the form of Pramukh Swami in Jamnagar today. An edifice to build character is going to be constructed here.”

Finally, the assembly climaxed with Swamishri’s blessings, “The foundation-stone laying ceremony has been performed in the presence of God, officers, everyone and especially Marshal Saheb. The foundation rituals were completed nicely through the cooperation of officials, devotees, businessmen and everyone. The crux of the matter is that we should never forget God who has given us this life. He has given us this life so that we may do good works, serve the nation and society. People in our country have a lot of spiritual faith. There are thousands of mandirs in which devotees worship God according to their means and faith. Yogiji Maharaj used to say, ‘May God do good of all.’ God has given us this human body so that we can do our social duties, and offer service to the nation and God. Together with this we must also strive for self-elevation.”

The assembly concluded at 11.07 a.m. About 12,000 devotees were served *mahaprasad*.

12 October 2008, Gunatitnagar (Bhadra)

On the previous day Swamishri observed the ongoing construction work of BAPS *shikhar-baddh* mandir in Bhadra.

After Swamishri’s morning puja the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was honoured by devotees. In conclusion Swamishri blessed the gathering of devotees, “Gunatitanand Swami, Akshardham incarnate, was born here. He inspired *satsang* in thousands and thus performed a great service on earth. We can have darshan of such a great person’s birthplace and also see the mandir coming up here before us. Though the village of Bhadra is small the great avatar of Akshardham was born here... You strive with faith at work, business, in farming and studying, similarly, by making effort and having faith in the words of God and his Sadhu one can accomplish everything. To become free of all misery one has



Swamishri on stage during the Sharad Punam celebration assembly, Gondal

to abide by the moral commands and also believe oneself to be *atma*, *akshar* or *brahman*.”

In the evening Swamishri went to the holy river Und.

14 October 2008, Gondal; Sharad Purnima

At 6.50 p.m. Gunatitanand Swami’s birthday celebration commenced on the grounds of the mandir farm. The celebration theme was “I am eternal”. In the beginning, Pujya Siddheshwar Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami addressed the assembly. Then children and teenagers performed a welcome dance. Thereafter, Swamishri arrived on the festival stage. More than 25,000 devotees were present in the assembly. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami talked about how Gunatitanand Swami spread the glory of Shriji Maharaj. Pujya Dr Swami discoursed on Gunatitanand Swami’s saintliness which is presently reflected in Swamishri’s life. Pujya Mahant Swami elaborated upon Gunatitanand Swami as being Aksharbrahman, and that Gunatitanand Swami is Swamishri. After each of the speeches an *arti* was performed by senior sadhus, devotees and the chief guest, Maharaja of Gondal Shri Jyoti Babu, and Shri Shivraj Babu.

Swamishri inaugurated a bhajan CD *Murti Pyari Re* sung by children. Thereafter he was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. The *kishores* of Gondal Satsang *mandal* performed

a traditional dance. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Today it is Sharad Punam. It is a day of joy, peace, coolness and one which calms our thoughts. Gunatitanand Swami discoursed in Junagadh. His talks, related to faith and trust in God, were penetrating. The listeners were inspired to offer bhakti, realize the glory of God, dissolve their worldly desires and experience the eternal happiness of their own *atma*. When one understands the true glory of God one realizes the futility of worldly joys and pleasures. And that was why Shriji Maharaj brought Gunatitanand Swami with him to teach us.”

At 10.05 p.m. Swamishri performed the final *arti*. Everyone in the assembly also performed *arti*.

22 October 2008, Gondal

After his morning puja Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of BAPS *hari* mandirs for Thangadh (Surendranagar district), Chalsan (Mahesana district) and Parvala (Gadhada district).

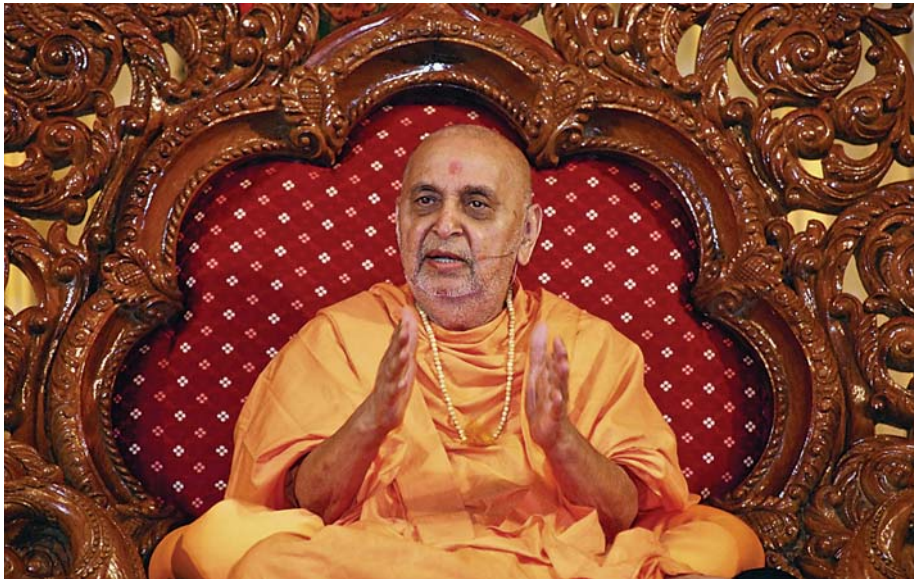
31 October 2008, Gondal

After his morning puja Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Bhesan and Budhel in Bhavnagar district. ◆

- Gujarati text by Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjavandas

Living With Swamishri



THE RIGHT TRADITION

7 September 2008, Sunday, Ahmedabad

While Swamishri was going towards the assembly hall for the Sunday *satsang* assembly hundreds of devotees were seated in the mandir grounds. As Swamishri passed by, devotees honoured him by hailing his name aloud, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj *ni jai*.” The wave of *jais* progressed as Swamishri advanced towards the assembly hall. Swamishri did not approve of the loud *jais*, saying, “When the discourse is in progress none should hail the *jais*.” Swamishri first went to the ground floor assembly stage to give darshan to the devotees. They were viewing the assembly, held in a hall below them, on a large screen. On leaving the stage Swamishri said, “The proclaiming of *jais* should be stopped because the discourse is in progress below.”

“But the sound of *jais* cannot reach the assembly hall below,” someone said.

“But what’s the point in repeating the same *jai* again and again. They should say the *jais* of Maharaj and the guru *parampara*,” Swamishri said.

“Your personality is such that people say your *jais* aloud,” a disciple replied.

“But it should not be done by forgetting the name of Shriji Maharaj and the guru *parampara*. They should say their *jais*.”

Swamishri insists upon the tradition of remembering God and the gurus first while proclaiming the *jais*. He also believes that the *jais* should not be hailed if they disturb a discourse.

RESOLVING A STUDENT’S DEPRESSION

14 September 2008, Ahmedabad

A young doctor met Swamishri. He was studying surgery, but because he found it difficult he was feeling depressed. He even contemplated on committing suicide.

Swamishri asked him, “Why do you feel this way?”

He replied, “No matter how hard I work I simply can’t cope up. Because of this my seniors are harassing me. I feel as if I won’t be able to study at all.”

Swamishri advised, “If that is so then change your subject to another stream of medicine. Don’t ever contemplate committing suicide. There is no need to die. And don’t slip into the habit of addictions. Pray to God. I too will pray for you. Things will work out well.”

OUR RELATION WITH GOD

6 October 2008, Jamnagar

A devotee introduced a relative of his to Swamishri, “He is my relative and a *satsangi* too. The problem is that only when he so wishes, he does the puja.”

Swamishri blessed him, “Our relations with others come and go, but our relation with God is for all times. So you must do puja and bhajan everyday.”

GIVING UP A BAD HABIT

9 October 2008, Jamnagar, Bhadra

A youth came to meet Swamishri. Many years before Swamishri had made great efforts in helping him give up his drinking habit. The youth had given it up altogether but he was still habituated to smoking. When Swamishri told him to give up smoking the youth replied, “The bigger habit has gone altogether. Now, it’s only the smaller one that remains.”

Swamishri advised, “It’s good that you’ve give up the bigger one, but if you keep the smaller one then it will allow the bigger one to creep in again. So make sincere efforts to give it up.”

HAVING FIRM FAITH IN GOD

17 October 2008, Gondal

A devotee rang from New York to tell

Swamishi that his deceased forefathers were troubling him.

Swamishri enquired, “Who are they troubling? Do they possess anyone physically?”

“No. It is just that my brother’s business and mine aren’t running well.” After listening to more details Swamishri advised, “It is all due to your past karmas. (*prarabhda*). There is no need to be superstitious. Chant the Janmangal Namavali daily. I will pray for you in Akshar Deri. If your business is in loss then close it down and think of starting another one. Tell all in your house to vest their faith in God’s power. If you become superstitious then you will start thinking in that way. Whatever is decided by our *prarabhda* is what we get in life. Wasn’t Dada Khachar a true devotee? But still he had to face problems and miseries. Ashabhai and Ishwarbhai during the time of Shastriji Maharaj went through a lot of trials. But because of their firm and singular faith God restored everything. So, be strong. I will pray for you in Akshar Deri.” Then Swamishri told an attendant sadhu to remind him the next morning to pray for the devotee.

The following day Swamishri prayed to God to resolve the devotee’s problem.



REGIONAL LEADERSHIP SEMINARS

June to October 2008, North America



Workshop session

Between June and October 2008, six Regional Leadership Seminars were held in which over 2,330 men and women volunteers participated. The theme was ‘Mahājano Yena Gataha Sa Panthāhā’, meaning, follow the path of the great.

Through these seminars, the senior volunteers serving in the various departments at all BAPS mandirs and centres throughout North America were given focused training.

The volunteers were given guidance on purity in personal life and the practical issues encountered while fulfilling their duties.

The *shibirs* were conducted by sadhus of the USA central office and visiting sadhus from India. Experienced veteran volunteers also shared their experiences. Through speeches, multimedia presentations, discussions, question-answer sessions and department-specific workshops many issues were discussed.

The volunteers departed with a strengthened feeling that as custodians of Satsang, they were responsible for fulfilling their duties sincerely and inspiring others. ♦

SATSANG SHIBIRS

June to October 2008, North America



Group photo of shibir participants, Toronto

A total of 26 Satsang Shibirs were held throughout North America based on the theme ‘Sakhi Samjanmā Ghanu Sukh Chhe’, meaning the key to happiness is under-

standing. Approximately 11,500 devotees participated in these two-day *shibirs* held at various BAPS centres between June and October 2008.

The theme was re-inforced through speeches by experienced and learned sadhus, question-answer sessions, workshops, audio-visual presentations and cultural programmes.

Guidance was given on the understanding required to balance *satsang*, personal and family life, placing emphasis on the prime role of *ghar sabha*. At a deeper level, devotees were enlightened on one’s true spiritual nature, and the glory of God and guru.

The participants were inspired and resolved to progress in their observance of *satsang niyams* and values. ♦

“TI VACHANAMRUTM”

Kishore-Kishori Shibir

1 to 5 November 2008, Sarangpur, India



A total of 1,910 *kishores* and *kishoris* from Surat utilized their Diwali vacation by attending this *shibir* in Sarangpur on the theme of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Vachanamrut.

The aim of the *shibir* was to inspire the youngsters to read and study the Vachanamrut daily and also to practice values which strengthen moral, spiritual and family values.

The *shibir* highlighted the glory of the Vachanamrut as an unparalleled shastra; how its messages are relevant even today and how to practice them in daily life; and the unique philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

Through speeches by senior *sadguru* sadhus and other learned sadhus, multimedia presentations, skits, quizzes, discussions and question-

answer sessions, the *shibir* messages were comprehensively conveyed to all the youngsters.

At the end of the *shibir* all the participants pledged to read and study the Vachanamrut daily and to bow to their parents daily. ◆



Group discussion with Ishwarcharan Swami

HEALTH EXPO

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

15 November 2008, Auckland, New Zealand



On Saturday 15 November 2008 a Health Expo was organized by BAPS Charities at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Auckland, New Zealand.

The Health Expo was inaugurated with the

recital of Vedic prayers. It was supported by the medical fraternity and the exhibitors: Diabetes Foundation, Arthritis Foundation, Allergy Auckland and the Heart Foundation. These organizations provided useful information and advice on basic medical awareness. There were also experts who gave advice on physiotherapy, alternative health, diabetes risk assessment, blood pressure, BMI test and dental care.

The services were provided free of charge.

As part of the expo, seminars were also arranged on the following topics: Understanding ayurvedic medicine, women's health, breast screening, cervical screening, preventing heart disease, diet and diabetes, and children's health.

Over 450 people benefitted from this Health Expo. ◆

OPENING OF MEDICAL CLINIC AND CENTRES FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

6 September 2008, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Gadhada



In the sacred town of Gadhada, BAPS continued its commitment to social services by inaugurating a health clinic and centres for anti-addiction, women's uplift and

environmental awareness.

The Vedic inauguration ceremony took place on 6 September 2008 in the presence of Jnaneshwar Swami, Kothari of Sarangpur BAPS Mandir, Adhyatmaswarup Swami, Kothari of Gadhada BAPS Mandir, Gujarat State Energy Minister Shri Saurabhbhai Dalal, former cabinet minister Shri Bhupendrasinhji Chudasma, and other dignitaries.

Echoing the view of all, Shri Saurabhbhai Dalal said, "The people of Gadhada will benefit greatly from the health clinic and the three centers."

These additions are a part of the ongoing contributions of BAPS to the welfare of Gadhada and surrounding villages. ◆



DIWALI AND ANNAKUT

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal
28-29 October 2008

In Gondal, Swamishri celebrated the festivals of Sharad Punam, Dhanteras, Hanuman Chaturdashi, Lakshmi Pujan, Diwali and Annakut. Thousands of devotees from India and abroad came to Gondal to celebrate these auspicious festivals in Swamishri's presence.

1. Swamishri showers sanctified rice upon the accounts books of the devotees during the Chopda Pujan Ceremony.
2. Devotees seated in the mandir compound during the Chopda Pujan Ceremony.
3. Swamishri and devotees perform the Annakut arti on New Year's Day.



On 29.10.2008 annakut was offered to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal



Chopda Pujan Video



Annakut Video