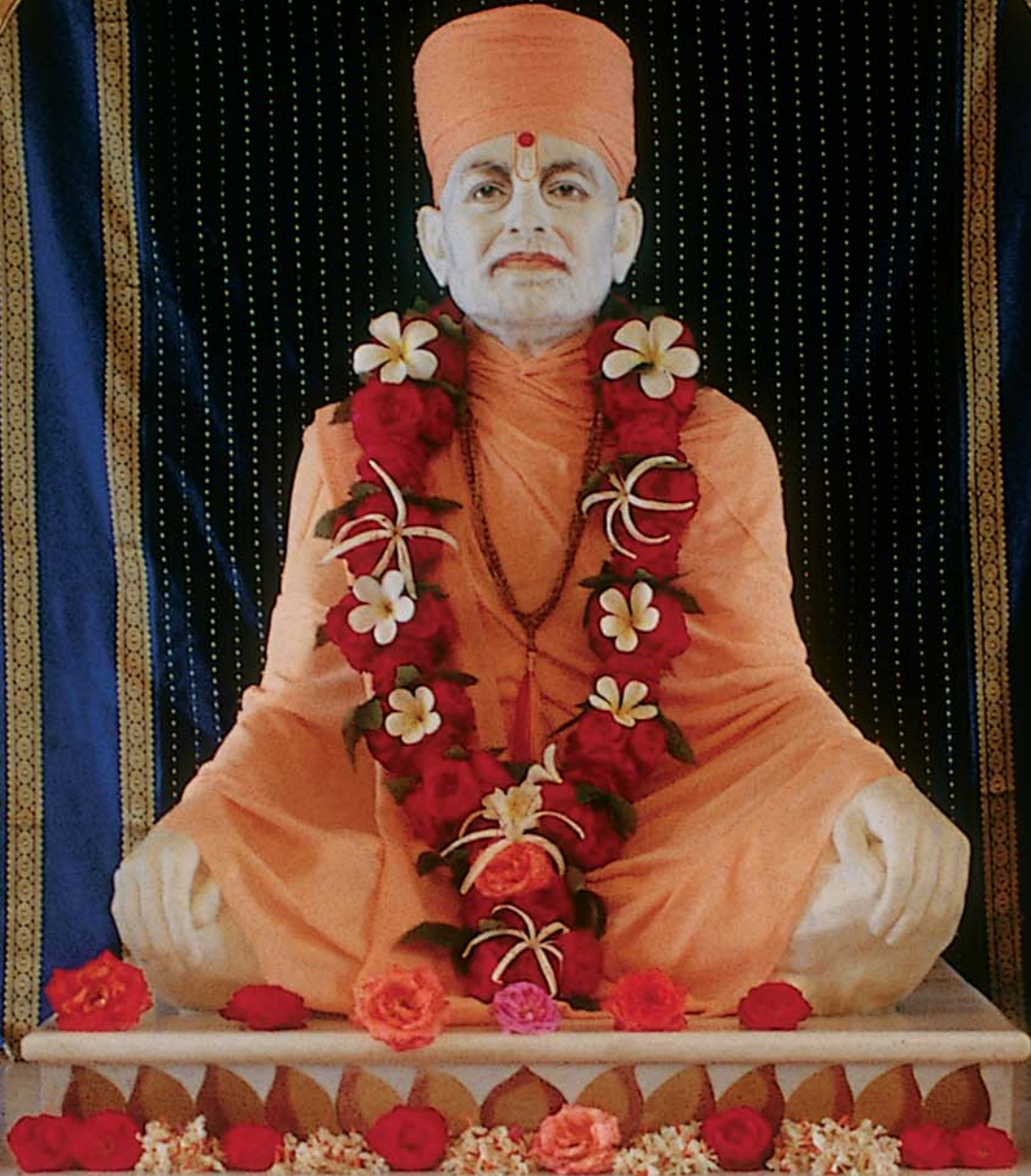


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

June 2008

Annual Subscription Rs. 60



Shastriji Maharaj: Master, Motivator and Manager



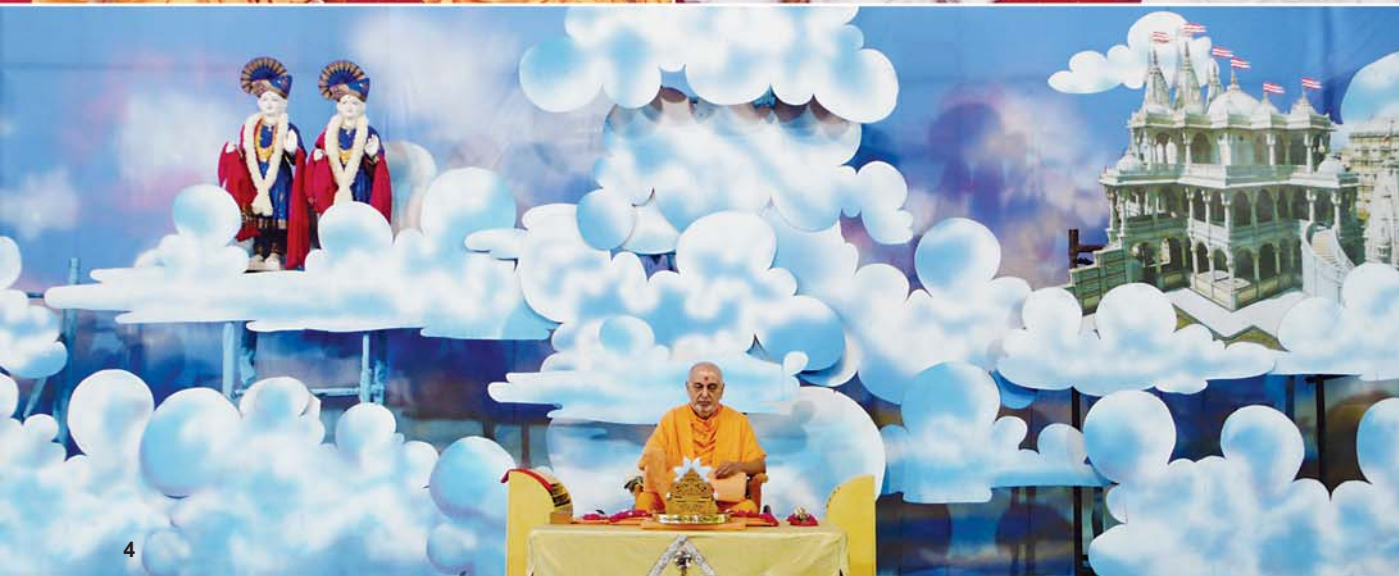
1



2



3



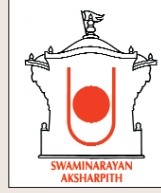
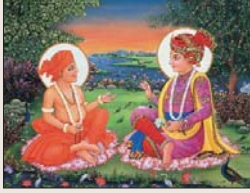
4

SWAMISHRI IN SARANGPUR, April-May 2008

1. Swamishri blesses the assembly of 8,000 devotees gathered for the *diksha* ceremony (23 April). 2-3. Swamishri blesses the 21 newly initiated sadhus and 30 *parshads*. 4. Swamishri performs morning puja on the occasion of Sarangpur mandir's 92nd *patotsav* (10 May).

Title: *Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Sarangpur*

Photos: Sadhu Yogicharandas



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

June 2008, Vol. 31 No. 6

CONTENTS

1. *Swaminarayan History*
Shri Hari's Sadness4
Effect of spurning Muktanand Swami's victory...
2. *On Life*
Music to Whose Ears.....7
The universal language...
3. *Guru Parampara*
Shastriji Maharaj: Master, Motivator and Manager11
Maximum output from limited resources...
4. *Great Indian Personalities*
Maharshi Valmiki15
Author of the Ramayan...
5. *Spirituality*
A Temple to Science?18
The unchanging Truth...
6. *Vicharan*
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan20
7. *BAPS News*
UK Kishore-Kishori Mandal 'Bring-A-Friend' Day, London23
Gujarati Spelling Bee Competition, Houston24
Anti-Addiction Rally, Jaipur24
Kishore Summer Shibirs, Gujarat25
Bal-Balika Summer Camps, Gujarat...26
Environmental Awareness Cycle Rally, Surat26

Website: www.swaminarayan.org

E-mail: magazine@swaminarayan.org

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-380 004, India.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Outside India (By Air Mail)

	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	India Rupees
1 Year	400	6	10	60
2 Years	800	12	20	110
3 Years	1200	18	30	160

FIRST WORD

How well do you listen?

Do you allow your friends to finish what they are saying? Or, do you often finish sentences before they can? Do you really try to understand what they are saying or do you assume you know what they are saying? During meetings are you patient and responsive or are you impatient and reactive?

Asking yourself these questions and many more will help you realize that your listening skill could do with some improvement.

Effective listening enables you to understand what the person is saying the first time. This helps you avoid making mistakes and misrepresentations. You can save a lot of time, and reduce error and stress by listening attentively. People often become vexed and uninterested when they are not listened to. Proper listening helps one avoid interpersonal conflict.

People who listen keenly are liked, trusted and respected. They give an impression that they genuinely care for what you have to say. And that is why they are most sought out for friendship and guidance.

How well do you listen to spiritual discourses? *Shravan* or listening is the primary and fundamental step towards spiritual realization. Without effective listening one is stymied from progressing to the next steps of *manan* (evaluation), *niddhidhyas* (repetition) and *sakshatkar* (realization). ♦

Correction: In last month's First Word the word Shaktipanthis was mistakenly repeated for the third type of kusang. It should have been Shushkavedanti, who believe God's abode, his divine form and the murti of God's avatar to be false.

Shri Hari's Sadness

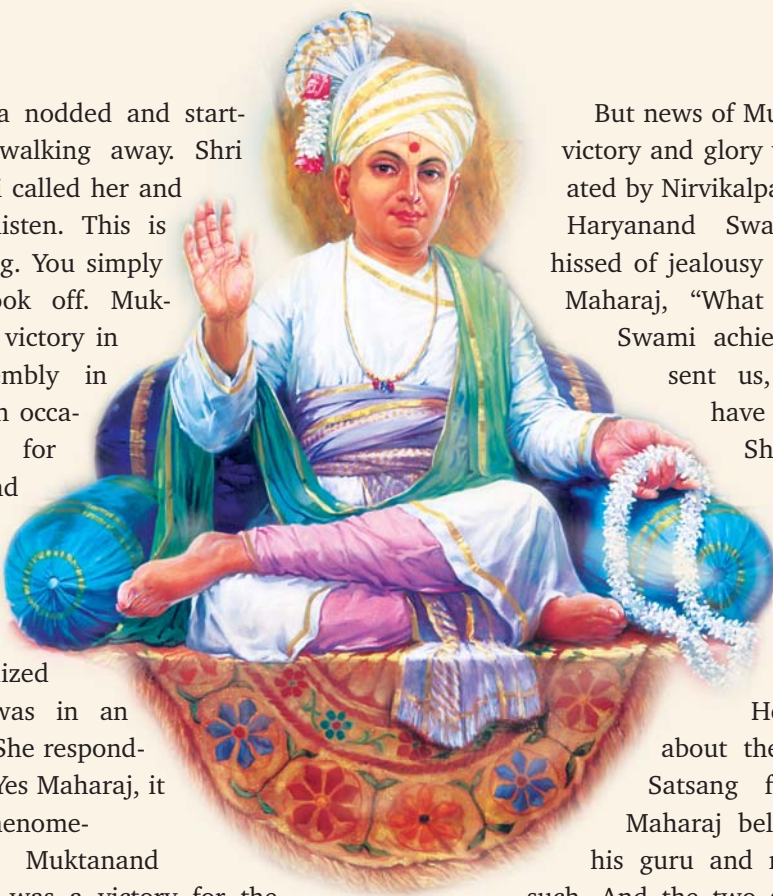
Muktanand Swami won a debate in Vadodara.

Shri Hari was pleased and rejoiced at the news.

But a new twist saddens Maharaj...

Motiba nodded and started walking away. Shri Hari called her and said, "Motiba, listen. This is not a small thing. You simply nodded and took off. Muktanand Swami's victory in the royal assembly in Vadodara was an occasion that calls for celebration and joy. Bring some sugar crystals. I want to give handfuls to all."

Motiba realized that Maharaj was in an exultant mood. She responded with gusto, "Yes Maharaj, it was indeed a phenomenal victory. Muktanand Swami's victory was a victory for the whole of Satsang. I shall order the sugar crystals immediately." After Motiba's departure, several sadhus came to Maharaj. Shri Hari narrated the good news about Muktanand Swami's victory. Shukmuni Swami praised, "Maharaj, he was victorious because of your grace." Maharaj replied, "I grace those who are eligible. And only then victory of such calibre happens."



But news of Muktanand Swami's victory and glory were not appreciated by Nirvikalpanand Swami and Haryanand Swami. They both hissed of jealousy and arrogance to Maharaj, "What has Muktanand Swami achieved! If you had sent us, we too would have been victorious."

Shri Hari was not pleased with their comment.

Muktanand Swami was like a mother in Satsang.

He was concerned about the prestige of the Satsang fellowship. Shriji Maharaj believed him to be his guru and respected him as such. And the two sadhus nourished

such ill feelings towards him! They considered him to be their peer. Their words were like poison vitiating the joy of victory. Shri Hari's face turned solemn and sad. He declared, "When there is no respect for each other in Satsang, no acceptance of another's greatness and stark jealousy and hatred for one's seniors, then it is not worth my staying any longer. These two sadhus

are personifications of ego. They are in Satsang, yet they are aloof and disconnected.” Then Maharaj added, “I shan’t stay any longer in this Satsang fellowship.” Thereafter, Maharaj returned to his residence and remained inside his room. When Nath Bhakta and Jusaji came and prostrated, Maharaj was pleased. He asked them whether they had rested well. Both of them nodded and replied that they were going to depart for Vadodara that day. Maharaj got up from his bed and embraced the two devotees to express his joy and blessings. Shri Hari told Adbhutanand Swami to bring to him a large piece of quality paper. Maharaj wished to print his *charnarvind* (holy feet) and send them to Muktanand Swami. Adbhutanand Swami brought the paper along with a large dish of saffron, sandalwood paste and kumkum mixed in water. Maharaj decided to imprint two hundred pairs. While he was imprinting, Shukmuni Swami tried to stop Maharaj from making any further effort, “Maharaj, you will get tired!” Shri Hari replied, “Muktanand Swami has achieved a great victory. Despite his advanced age and tuberculosis, see how much he endeavours. So, how can I tire in such minor effort. Even if I were to prostrate to such a sadhu, it would not be enough.” Shukmuni Swami remained silent and was awed by Maharaj’s respect for Muktanand Swami. He thought that Maharaj was pleased in praising Muktanand Swami, therefore his sadness would soon evaporate. So he simply listened and acknowledged Maharaj’s words. Then Shri Hari gave the two hundred pairs of *charnarvinds* to Adbhutanand Swami and said, “Go with Nath Bhakta to Vadodara and give the *charnarvinds* to Muktanand Swami. Tell him that Maharaj is very pleased with you, and has sent you these *charnarvinds*.”

Adbhutanand Swami prostrated before Maharaj, placed the *charnarvinds* with respect on his head and left for Vadodara.

Day by day Shri Hari’s sadness increased. He remained in solitude, not presiding over the

spiritual assemblies at all. When Mukund Brahmachari brought food for him, he would eat very little and that too only sometimes. Everyone became despondent at Maharaj’s sadness. Neither Brahmanand Swami nor Sura Khachar could dissolve Maharaj’s melancholy.

Once, Shri Hari said, “Soon, I shall go away to the forest. Like before, I will travel in the forests alone. If an aspirant comes my way I shall preach to him.”

Brahmanand Swami replied, “You will only come across animals. There will be no people wandering in the forest.”

Shri Hari explained, “Even though animals have less intelligence they do have some power of understanding. Man has the power of intelligence, but his base instincts of prejudice, enmity, lust and anger have made his intellect stubborn and evil. Therefore he is worse than an animal.”

Brahmanand Swami realized the strong tinge of disapproval still lingering in Maharaj’s sadness. He humbly beseeched, “Maharaj, we will try to become better humans. But that will be possible only if we have your association. Therefore, do not look at our faults. We live by your grace and compassion.”

The lamentations of Laduba, Jivuba and other women devotees heightened. They sent a message to Shri Hari, “Maharaj, you are our soul. If you leave us then only our dead bodies will remain.” But Maharaj was firm in his decision. They added, “If you leave Gadhpur because of your sadness then the whole of Satsang will criticize us.”

Shri Hari replied, “I will celebrate one last festival and then take permission to leave from the Satsang community of sadhus and devotees. But I do not wish to stay here any longer.”

“But which festival do you want to celebrate?” Sura Khachar asked.

“Come to the village of Adaraj in Gujarat. There, I shall celebrate the *annakut* festival and then depart forever. Send invitations to all the

devotees. I shall leave for Adaraj tomorrow, but no one should follow me.”

Some prayed, “Maharaj, since you are not coming back, allow us to accompany you to Adaraj. Even a little association with you will make our hearts peaceful.”

Shri Hari agreed and declared that all should leave on Aso Punam. Till then Maharaj stayed in Gadhada.

Shri Hari told Gopalanand Swami to go to Sundariyana, “Stay the night there and talk to Himraj Sheth (or Shah).” Gopalanand Swami left Gadhada at Maharaj’s bidding and reached Sundariyana. He stayed at the house of Dosa Khachar. The two sons of Himraj Shah, Pujasha and Vanasha, were working as administrators at the house of Dosa Khachar. Ten years earlier the two brothers had become *satsangis* on meeting Maharaj. Their father was eminent among all the Vaishnavs in town. In addition, he was a leading light in his own Modh community. Both his sons were *satsangis*. He was impressed by their high morals and practice of bhakti. Though he nursed an inclination towards the Swaminarayan Sampraday, he could not give up his allegiance to the Vaishnav sect because of his eminence.

Once Gopalanand Swami told the brothers to call their father to him.

“Swami, my father will not come,” Vanasha replied. Despite his disinclination he went because it was Swami’s command. He told his father, “Father I ask you to come for the darshan of Gopalanand Swami. He has put up at the Darbar’s house. He is a great Swaminarayan sadhu.”

Himraj Shah replied instantly, “Son, there is only one Swami – Vallabh Swami! All others are ordinary sadhus and *bawas*. I ask you to give up your sect so that our family name becomes illustrious again.”

Vanasha replied, “Father, our family’s prestige will increase in future because of our allegiance to the Swaminarayan Satsang. Many

wise and prudent people have started appreciating the difference between the decadent Vaishnav community and the sterling virtues propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. By and by you too will understand and appreciate this.”

Himraj Shah became pensive. He too was aware of the stark difference. He knew it was pointless in subscribing to his traditional faith when it was rapidly losing brilliance. But, he was afraid of his community’s reaction. He feared losing his prestige and the apparent sin he would incur upon himself by accepting another faith. So, he remained quiet.

Vanasha told Gopalanand Swami what had happened. Swami simply smiled and said, “Tell him that I seem to be unwell and require some medicine. Your father is a good *vaidya* and compassionate by nature. He will surely come.”

Vanasha returned home that evening. Seeing him a little dejected, Himraj Shah enquired, “Son, why do you seem downhearted?”

“Father, our Gopalanand Swami seems to have an illness. There is no other *vaidya* other than yourself in our village. Come and treat him or else we’ll have to call someone from Dhandhuka.”

Himraj Shah agreed instantly. Vanasha accompanied him. When they both arrived at the *darbar* of Dosa Khachar, the latter welcomed them, “Come Sheth! You have blessed my precincts today with your presence.”

“Bapu, your house and land were sanctified and blessed the day Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his sadhus came here. I have come to see Swami’s health and to make him well.”

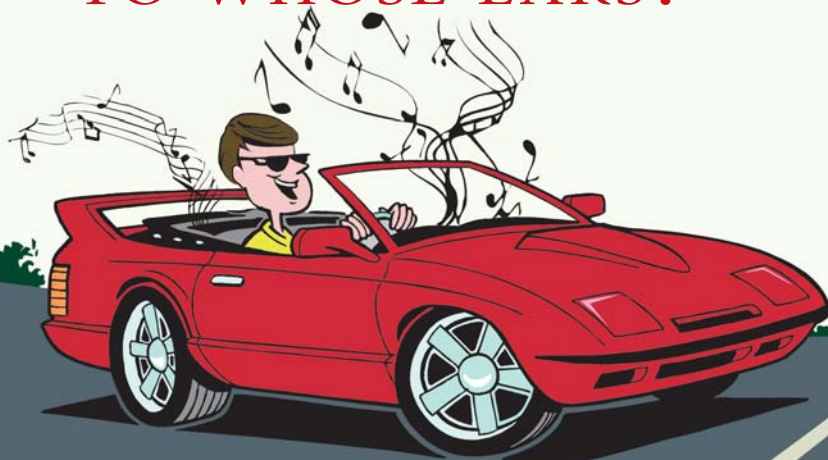
Dosa Khachar could not believe what he heard. Never before had he heard Himraj Shah speak in praise of another deity or sadhu.

(To be continued)



MUSIC

TO WHOSE EARS?



You've probably experienced this. It's a nice sunny day and you're waiting quietly at a traffic light, when suddenly a car screeches to a sudden stop next to you. Drowning even your thoughts, the car's surround-sound stereo speakers, with their volume controls fixed permanently on maximum, bombard your ears with a deafening sound. As you glance over and look through his open windows, you see the driver swinging rhythmically to the beat of the heavy metal, rap or pop music, blissfully ignorant of the attention and scorn he is attracting from surrounding commuters. To him it's music. To you it's just noise. This unexpected and uninvited intrusion generates feelings of frustration and anger within you and if your hands were long enough, you would probably reach over to wrench out the tape deck and dispose of it so that nobody else would have to suffer the same fate.

MUSIC: A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

But why does the music have this effect? After all, music is described as a universal lan-

guage. It is able to bridge barriers unbridgeable by other languages. In fact, no human culture is known that does not have music. Music is also a language of emotions. It is capable of producing powerful results. Different types of music will generate differing moods, emotions and actions. The rhythm, volume and even the lyrics of the song all play contributing roles to a person's response.

Music is a potent force, which not only reflects moods and emotions, but can also create them. That is why it is important to regulate the nature of music one listens to. A Turkish proverb states, "As the music is, so are the people of the country." Napoleon understood the enormous power of music. He summed it up by saying, "Give me control over he who shapes the music of a nation, and I care not who makes the laws."

IMPACT OF LYRICS AND MUSIC

Just because the sound of music is pleasing, it does not mean that it is always of positive

value. Music influences humans both in good and bad ways. These effects are instant and long lasting.

The lyrics of many songs and the music which accompany them encourage rogue and violent behaviour. They openly encourage obscenity, drugs, racism, premarital and illicit sex, and even rebellion. They generate thoughts of death, depression, suicide and other evils. Even the album covers often convey these negative and immoral messages using powerful visuals. Little wonder then that these practices are increasing in today's youth. The music industry, like other entertainment forms, influences young minds and effects changes in their values and lifestyle.

Recent market research by MTV led them to introduce a male character called 'Mook', and a female character, named 'Midriff'. Used prominently in various forms in all MTV programmes, these characters resemble famous real-life personalities and so the youths are led to emulate whatever the on-screen versions do in the belief that since their 'idol' is doing this, it must be okay. In this way the mind of youths is becoming increasingly distorted and morally corrupt. Noticeably, moral standards are on the decline. But trends can be reversed.

SPIRITUALITY IN MUSIC

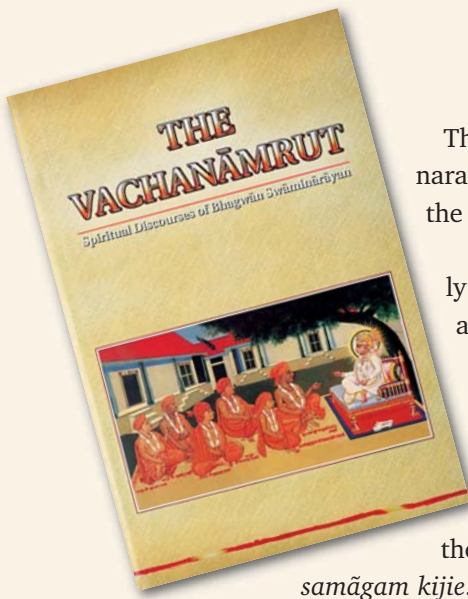
Bhagwan Swaminarayan also realized this potential for harmful effects due to music. He noticed that wedding songs sung at the time contained vulgar lyrics, not appropriate for recital on such holy occasions as weddings. He immediately instructed his *paramhansas* to compose suitable songs which described the purity of marriage and guided the bride and groom of their duties to each other and society.

On the spiritual path, devotional singing is regarded as one of the nine forms of devotion. In this age of increasing materialism, it is considered one of the more effective devotional forms.

The history of Hindu Dharma is marked by a long list of famous, devout poets whose bhajans have helped countless to rise spiritually: Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, Tukaram, and others. Bhagwan Swaminarayan also encouraged his *paramhansas* to compose bhajans to convey spiritual messages. In particular, they described the divine form and glory of God, as well as, the factors which result in spiritual decline and the qualities by which spiritual progress can be attained. The *paramhansas* composed thousands of bhajans, many of which are still sung regu-

BENEFITS OF MUSIC

- 🎵 Patients in intensive care units where sober background music is played need lower doses of drugs to control erratic changes in blood pressure compared with patients in units where no music is played.
- 🎵 Soft background music in intensive care units for premature babies, as well as a nurse's or mother's humming, helps babies to gain weight faster and to leave the unit earlier than babies who don't hear these sounds.
- 🎵 Music helped Thomas Jefferson write the Declaration of Independence. When he could not figure out the right wording for a certain part, he would play his violin to help him. The music helped him get the words from his brain onto the paper.
- 🎵 Music can affect memory. Mozart's music and baroque music, with a 60 beats per minute beat pattern, which activates the left and right brain simultaneously, maximizes learning and retention of information.
- 🎵 The ancient Greeks sang their dramas because they understood how music could help them remember more easily.
- 🎵 Vedic mantras in a wide variety of metres were composed by the enlightened rishis. This helped to memorize them easily and pass on these mantras without having to write them down.



MUSIC IN THE VACHANAMRUT

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine discourses and is the most important shastra of the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has frequently highlighted the singing of bhajans as an important way of attaining the spiritual bliss of God.

He often instructed his *paramhansas* to sing bhajans on various topics of spiritual importance.

Gadhada I-14: Shriji Maharaj asks the *paramhansas* to sing bhajans describing the glory of a true Sadhu, composed by Muktanand Swami. The *paramhansas* then sing the four verses of “*Sukhdāyak re, sāchā Santno sang, Sant samāgam kije...*”

Panchala-3: The *paramhansas* sing the bhajan “*Sakhi āj Mohan dithā re sheriye āvtā re...*” which describes the physical form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his divine mannerisms.

Gadhada II-48: Premanand Swami sings “*Vandu Sahajānand rasup anupam sārne re lol...*” in which he affectionately describes the divine *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shriji Maharaj is so pleased by the inner feelings with which Premanand Swami sang the bhajan that he says, “If a person is able to contemplate upon God in his *antahkaran* in this manner, and if he were to die while still 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 left to do.”

Vartal-11: Shriji Maharaj directs the *paramhansas* to sing, “*Mārā Harjishu het na dise re tene gher shid jaie...*” and “*Mārā Vāhalājishu vāhalap dise re teno sang kem tajiye...*” Both inspire valour in genuine spiritual seekers, giving them inner strength to face and overcome the ups and downs of daily life.

Vartal-12: Shriji Maharaj instructs the *paramhansas* to sing “*Dhanya Vrundāvanvāsi vātni chhāyā re jyā Hari bestā...*” This bhajan describes the glory of God, as well as everyone and everything he associates with.

Gadhada III-31: Shriji Maharaj asks the *paramhansas* to sing “*Jamunāke tir thādo, Jamunāke tir...*” and then proceeds to describe how to meditate on the *murti* of God.

In this way, Shriji Maharaj encouraged the composition and singing of bhajans which described the *murti* of God, praised the glory of God and his holy Sadhu, inspired courage in devotees, helped people to meditate and many other topics.

The main purpose of singing bhajans is to experience inner peace. So, in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-22, Shriji Maharaj describes the focus one must keep while singing and in all other activities, “Whichever activity one performs – whether it be singing devotional songs, reciting God's holy name, chanting the ‘Nārāyan’ *dhunya*, etc. – one should only perform that activity while remembering the form of God.” Thus, singing bhajans while contemplating on God enables one to experience the divine bliss of God.

HOW THE BRAIN PROCESSES MUSIC

Only recently have scientists begun to make headway in understanding how the brain processes music.

The ear has the fewest sensory cells out of all the sense organs – a mere 3,500 inner hair cells receive the sounds coming into the ear; compare this with 100 million photoreceptors in the eye.

Once the sound waves are sensed in the ear by the inner cells they are sent via the auditory nerve to brain stem. Individual hair cells are tuned to respond to different frequencies.

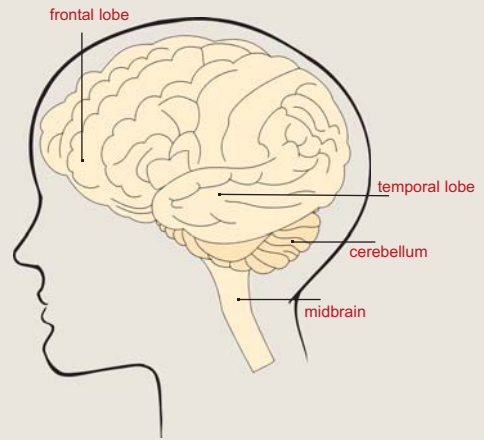
From the brain stem signals pass through several switching stations which filter the signals to determine the location from where the sound arose. The switching areas also recognize the various patterns that sounds are composed of.

This information then passes through the thalamus, which either suppresses the information or passes it on to the auditory cortex at the top of the temporal lobe just above the ear. This helps to control one's attention, enabling one to focus on selected sounds.

From the auditory cortex, signals are sent to the frontal lobe of the brain, located just behind the forehead, where the structure and meaning of the tune are analysed. This triggers the release of dopamine in the brain and generates a sense of reward. Both the auditory cortex and frontal lobe have widespread connections with areas of the brain that generate emotions.

Then the cerebellum, which is the area at the rear of the brain associated with body movement, reacts by gauging various aspects of the music tune, such as, tempo, rhythm and emotional high points. The cerebellum then triggers feet tapping, hand clapping, finger snapping and other body movements in relation to the tunes being heard.

These movements can occur even when one is not actively listening to music. Previously heard tunes are stored in the long term memory and recollection of these tunes also results in rhythmic body movements.



larly by devotees, young and old, and from which they derive tremendous inspiration.

Even today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj encourages sadhus and devotees to compose bhajans which inspire positive values and beliefs taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Such wholesome music is both refreshing and elevating. In today's hectic and stressful world, this type of music will give peace to one's mind and inspire a noble and pure life.

Today's youth can also learn from this. As Hindus, we have to shoulder the responsibility and sustain the standards of decency taught by

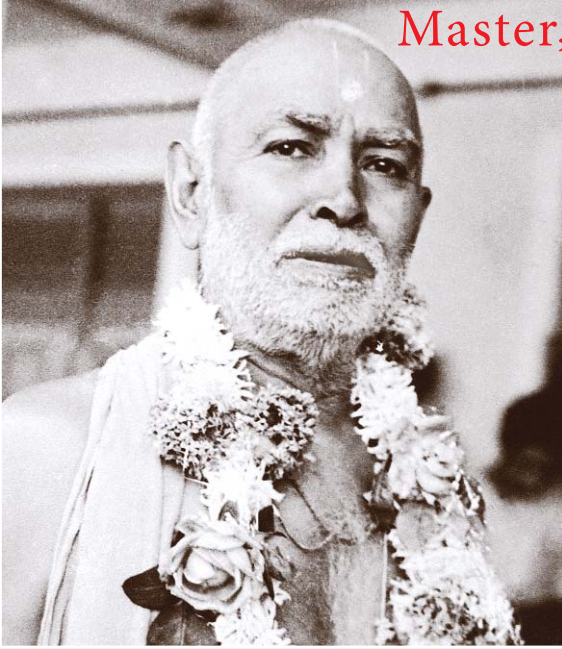
our rich tradition. It is in the hands of the youths to reject demoralizing songs and music. They must meet the challenge of preserving morals and values, otherwise the coming years will witness a spiralling decline of character. And this trend will only be perpetuated by subsequent generations of youths.

Now is the time to act. Now is the time to show that today's youth is not influenced by such vulgar lyrics and music. And now is the time to show the positive power latent in the mind of youth.



SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ:

Master, Motivator and Manager



An outstanding leader is one who emerges triumphantly from adverse circumstances.

Shastriji Maharaj was such a leader..

Shastriji Maharaj felt that the only way to propagate the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam was to build mandirs and consecrate the *murtis* of Purushottam, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and Aksharbrahman Gunatanand Swami in the central shrines. He had limited human and financial resources at his disposal, yet he built five magnificent *shikhar-baddh* mandirs. Once built, he skillfully managed the mandirs, paying attention to even the smallest of details. How was he able to accomplish such seemingly impossible tasks? The answer is he led by example. He was the master or guru, but he toiled selflessly, day and night. He was an ideal motivator, lifting the spirits of tired sadhus and devotees. He was an exemplary manager, using his available resources with great skill and to telling effect. The results speak for themselves. Today, these mandirs stand as testimonies to the clarity of purpose, irrepressible enthusiasm, selfless efforts and stirring qualities of Shastriji Maharaj: he was a saintly master, an ideal motivator and an exem-

plary manager.

Through his correspondence, we gain an insight into some of the problems Shastriji Maharaj faced and how he calmly found effective solutions. He was an adept judge of people's character and capabilities, motivating and managing them to produce the best results.

The shortage of sadhus was a major problem Shastriji Maharaj had to deal with. Each sadhu had a workload that would ordinarily require at least four sadhus. As a result, some of the sadhus were so tired that they were ready to quit. Once, the Kothari of Sarangpur Mandir, Harikrishna Swami, wrote a letter to Shastriji Maharaj, asking for two more sadhus to help him manage the mandir. Understanding the situation and the fact that there were very few sadhus, Shastriji Maharaj replied, giving him courage to manage the situation by giving his own example. At the time of this letter, Shastriji Maharaj had already built mandirs in Bochasan (1907), Sarangpur (1916) and Gondal (1934).

27 January 1936

To the devout Kothari Soma Bhagat and Kothari Harikrishnadasji, in the great holy place of Sarangpur, please accept 'Jai Swaminarayan' from Shastri Yagnapurushdasji in Bochasan.

I have received your letter concerning your need for two more sadhus. At present, I can arrange to send one sadhu at most from here. Otherwise, if you wish, we could call Balkrishnadas from Gondal. I will come there with one sadhu.

Harikrishnadas, as you are experienced in this seva, please continue to help. Adjust the timing of your duties in the office, but ensure that you do Thakorji's seva on time.

In Gondal, everyone was sick, and we had to finish construction of the stairs in time. Harijivandas, Gopinathdas, and Balkrishnadas worked day and night to help with the construction. At that time I helped by managing the kitchen. Everyone knows about that. Hence, our distinction is in doing seva. In this, our body (dehbhav) is our biggest enemy. Whatever we earn with our body (in the form of seva) is our true wealth. This is true wisdom.

Sincerely,
Shastri Yagnapurushdas

Shastriji Maharaj had outstanding management skills. Leading by example, even at the age of 76 he had a hectic schedule, travelling to the villages to spread the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, and meeting devotees and sadhus to help them solve their problems. In 1937, Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter to Nirgundas Swami, explaining his vision and guiding him through problems.

Aso vad 12, Vikram Samvat 1993

31 October 1937, Sunday

To Pujya Nirgundasji at the extremely holy place of Bochasan. Please accept 'Jai Swaminarayan' with blessings from Shastri Yagnapurushdas at Sarangpur.

I have received your letter with the news. There is only one sadhu for puja (Thakorji's seva in the mandir) here, and he is a novice. Harikrishna Swami has a high fever. Narayanmuni is alone in preparing for the annakut. Dharmavalabhdas is looking after the kitchen alone, and, from time to time, he has to stop due to arthritic pain. Bhagat is focused only on the farm; he does not know what is happening in the mandir. In this situation, having realized the need for more sadhus, I have rushed here. I even brought the two sadhus who were studying with me. They are helping in the preparation for annakut.

I am planning to leave here on choth or pan-cham¹ and will come wherever you say. So, after reaching Sunav (a village), let me know where I should come. Since it is not possible to gather five sadhus to come with me, I cannot come to Sunav at present. Also, I do not want to make the sick sadhus travel. As a result of such problems, I have postponed coming to Sunav. Also, Kashiba and Girdharbhai have already called us to their homes [in Bochasan] before. Only one – Chaturbhai (Shivabhai's brother) – needs to be given vartman (vows of satsang), so I thought it was not appropriate to come there considering all the problems here. Ambalalbhai from Bhadran wants to offer a meal to five sadhus, and Chhotabhai wants to donate new dhotiyas to the sadhus. We'll go to both of their homes when we go around for dharmado (tithes) collection. That's what I told both of them and they are happy with that. There are millions of such small tasks at present. Thus, from now on, please do not be affected by the circumstances that may disturb you from time to time and focus on doing essential tasks.

If we continue the way we are, we will not be able to finish even one task of the mandir. Even after taking such care, many tasks remain undone. Hence, appoint one person for all mandir-related tasks, so that I can retire and dis-course. I am still willing to go to the villages for discourses to spread upasana of Shriji-Swami,

the importance of mandirs and spread Satsang, but there must be someone else in charge of all the mandir affairs.

The truth is we cannot do anything with our own abilities. Everything happens only because Shriji-Swami, out of their compassion, help us and make everything favourable for us. Also, in future we will be able to survive only if they sustain us. I have done everything according to my capability. Whenever I have difficulties, I place the burden on their (Maharaj and Swami's) shoulders, and they finish the task. Even now, I have left the problems of Shrijipura and Junagadh on Shriji-Swami; it will be done according to their will. The mandirs and the property belong to them, so they will take care of them; therefore, we should not get dismayed.

In Gondal, we kept them [Maharaj and Swami] at the forefront and worked, and in Sarangpur, we also left everything on their shoulders. We remain courageous, knowing that they solve our problems. I am convinced that all construction work will be completed because skillful people like you are in our aid. Hence, be cheerful and keep doing bhajan.

*Sincerely,
Shastri Yagnapurushdas*

Shastriji Maharaj had very little manpower to help him in his work. However, he effectively coordinated the services of the relatively few sadhus and devotees available and engaged them in various tasks. Even if they were inexperienced in a certain task, Shastriji Maharaj would give them the responsibility, guide them and mould them so that they quickly became competent.

A very dedicated and intelligent sadhu, Shrijiswarup Swami was a great singer, orator and administrator. Shastriji Maharaj gave him the responsibility of managing the Sanstha's property at Chitrasar, Shrijipura, Purushottampura, and other places. While taking care of the property, people would come to Shrijiswarup Swami

and talk negatively about the Sanstha. Hence, at one point, Shrijiswarup Swami lost his enthusiasm to fulfil his responsibilities. Shastriji Maharaj wrote a wonderful letter to Shrijiswarup Swami during these difficult moments, giving him courage and remarkable advice.

*Bhadarva sud 4, Samvat 1995
17 November 1939*

To Kothari Shastri Shrijiswarupdasji and others who are residing at the extremely holy place of Chitrasar, loved by Maharaj and Swami, worshippers of Akshar-Purushottam, and living only according to Maharaj and Swami's agna, regards and 'Jai Swaminarayan' from Shastri Yagnapurushdasji, Jogi Swami Jnanjivandasji (Yogiji Maharaj), Kothari Aksharswarupdasji, and others at Gondal Akshar Mandir.

I received your letter and read the news. I came here on Bhadarva sud Bij². The two shikhars (pinnacles) on top of the shrines for Hanumanji and Ganapatiji are being built here. They will be ready by Sharad Punam. Besides that, three sides of the dining hall, the storage-kitchen, and the three rooms for the sadhus' residence have been built. Behind that, the four old rooms were pulled down and converted to one floor. The construction of that and the courtyards is going on, so I need to stay here for a while. However, Harijivandasji has gone to Jalalpur with Nirgundas Swami. Nilkanth Swami is also together with them. They will go to Bochasan after fitting the motor (engine). Thus, there is no one left here.

Swami Jnanjivandasji (Yogiji Maharaj) is here and will be going to Bhavnagar tomorrow. Aksharswarupdas is not feeling well here, so he is also thinking about going with him. Nevertheless, I will somehow manage my time to come there. Most probably, we will tell Nilkanth Swami to stay at Shrijipura, so he can take care of everything at Purushottampura with your guidance. Meanwhile, please go to Purushottampura and finish any urgent work. The whole monsoon sea-

son was unproductive, but if you make proper arrangements from now for the winter season, we can grow and harvest something from the land, which will be of use. Hence, start working on it now, as you had said in Sarangpur. Besides, your idea of planting bavto³ was great. So keep working on it with courage, as you see fit.

You are serving Satsang by applying your body and mind; therefore, do not be mentally affected by the talks of uninformed people. Even during the time of Kothari Jeebhai, there were such people talking nonsense about us. However, we are selflessly serving Shriji-Swami for the moksha of our own soul, so they will grant us the appropriate rewards at the end. Hence, please remain enthusiastic and continue your seva courageously and sincerely, while safeguarding your health and reputation. In the end, we will be successful.

The reason for freeing you from Purushottampura is that if someone as intelligent and learned as you uses his knowledge to spread Satsang, then Satsang will grow to ten times more than what it is today. And just as Shriji-Swami's, Bhagatji Maharaj's, and Jaga Bhagat Swami's names have become immortal, your name will also remain immortal. An example will be set, knowing that one brave soul (Shrijiswarup Swami) was born on this earth. Thus, you will feel extreme joy and you will also have rendered great service to Maharaj and Swami.

You might not be able to envision the future and my words right now, but I can easily foresee our Sanstha being more prosperous in both reputation and wealth than both the old regions (Vartal and Ahmedabad) combined. If you all seriously decide in your minds to do this task even at the cost of your lives, everything is favourable at present. However, what is lacking is people like you, who would be willing to travel throughout the villages, towns, and cities to spread Satsang.

You have certainly seen that Harmanbhai (in Africa) is not as knowledgeable or intellectual as you, nor does he have public speaking skills, but he has infinite faith in Shriji-Swami; therefore, he has

awakened the whole of Africa. He has convinced around 800 people to join Satsang. He has made the name of Swami-Maharaj and our group famous throughout the Satsang in all of India. Today, everyone is praising with one voice. You are even more capable, but too many responsibilities and activities have dented your enthusiasm and courage. You have started believing, "Do as much as you can and be satisfied with it." So now, reject all such negative thoughts and actions and start thinking positively. If you devote yourself day and night to spreading satsang, then, in just a short period, you will enjoy such happiness that cannot be obtained even after millions of endeavours in millions of births. If you do not focus on these words, then all that has been written will remain untouched. So, think deeply about what I have written above and begin to work accordingly.

I also very much wish to do the same, but my body is no longer capable. I am unable to do seva and put as much effort as I want to. Nevertheless, with dependence on you all, I continue to work ahead. However, nothing happens according to expectations. But, if you join in the work we can flourish quickly. The father-in-law of Chimanbhai Girdharbhai of Mumbai wants us to hold a seven-day parayan. There is one in Surat, too. Also, there are invitations from many other places. So, with someone like you helping, then nothing will be left undone. Shriji Maharaj worked hard to spread satsang, then Gopal Swami (Gopalanand Swami), Swami (Gunatitanand Swami), and others took over after him and Satsang continued to flourish.

Sincerely,

Shastri Yagnapurushdas



1. Choth is the fourth day of a month and pancham is the fifth day of a month in the Hindu lunar calendar.

2. Second day after new moon in the month of Bhadarva, the eleventh month.

3. A type of grain that is often used to make flour.



MAHARSHI VALMIKI

Maharshi means great rishi.

*Valmiki rishi is known as
ādi kavi (first poet), who
composed the first poem
(Ādi Kāvya) – the Ramayan –
in Sanskrit. He also composed
the Yog Vasishtha.*

There are two beliefs about Valmiki's life. The traditional and commonly known is that he was born of a rishi. During his childhood, while wandering in the forest, he got lost. A hunter found him and adopted him, naming him Ratnakar. After marriage, he became a robber to support his growing family. Once he confronted the famous seven rishis, known as the Saptarshis. They instructed him to ask his family whether they would share the consequences of the sins he commits to support them. On hearing that they would certainly not do so, he renounced worldly life to perform austerities in the forest. It is said that the Saptarshis (or Naradji in another version), gave him the 'Ram' mantra to chant during his penance. Not being able to chant 'Ram' easily, he was told to chant the reverse, 'Marā, Marā'. When chanted with speed, this automatically sounds as 'Ram'.

After Ratnakar had performed *tapas* for one thousand years, the Saptarshis returned to find an anthill had grown over his body. They removed the anthill, blessed Ratnakar and

named him Valmiki, from the Sanskrit *valmik* for an 'anthill' (Adhyatma Ramayan, Ayodhya Kand 6/42-88). The same story is cited in the Skand Puran, in which his name is Agnisharma, prior to becoming Valmiki rishi.

The second belief is cited by Valmiki himself in the Valmiki Ramayan. The details are cited in several *shloks*: (1) Uttarkand 111/11 – in which he states that he is the son of Pracheta muni. (2) Uttarkand 46/16 – which states that he is a *vipra* (Brahmin) and a friend of King Dashrath. (3) Uttarkand 96/18,19 – in which Valmiki utters oaths in Shri Ram's court in Ayodhya to endorse Sitaji's chastity: 'O Raghunandan, I am Pracheta's tenth son.... On the oath of the austerities I have performed for thousands of years, I have never sinned in thought, word and deed. I declare to you all, that if this Maithili (Sitaji) is tainted, then let all the fruits of my *tapas* not be granted to me.'

From the phrase, "never sinned in thought, word and deed", it may be understood that during any period in his past life, Valmiki could not have committed unpious acts such as robbery.

ADI KAVI: COMPOSING THE RAMAYAN

Valmiki lived in an ashram on the banks of the river Ganga. Once Naradji arrived and Valmiki asked him, “In this world today, who is that person endowed with virtues of righteousness?” “Shri Ram,” replied Naradji, and then briefly narrated Shri Ram’s life. Later, Brahmaji appeared before Valmiki and instructed him to write Shri Ram’s life story.

Valmiki then began to meditate on how to compose the story. At this time he went to bathe in the nearby Tamasa river with his pupil, Bharadhwaj. While bathing, he saw a hunter shoot an arrow and kill a male *kraunch* bird accompanied by a female. This angered Valmiki, who cursed the hunter:

*Mā nishād pratishthām twamagamah
shāshvatihi samāhā, yat krauncha
mithunādekamavadhihi kāmamohitam.*

‘O hunter, you have killed the *kraunch* bird engaged in love. Therefore you may not live long yourself’ (Valmiki Ramayan, Bal Kand 2/15).

Having uttered this Sanskrit couplet, known as *shlok*, in the *anushtubh* metre, Valmiki was surprised about how he had composed such poetry.

Returning to his ashram, he lamented about

the curse and wondered how he could circumvent its effects. Just then Brahmaji appeared before him and said, “I inspired this *shlok* to emerge from your mouth. Now compose the whole life of Shri Ram which you have heard from Naradji. By my blessings, you will be able to compose this Ramcharitra, which will be enjoyed by people until the end of life on earth.” Brahmaji then disappeared (Valmiki Ramayan, Bal Kand 1/2/32-36).

Thus Valmiki’s remorse vanished and he composed the Ramayan comprising 24,000 *shloks*. He later taught this to Shri Ram’s twin sons, Lav and Kush.

VALMIKI’S HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Maharshi Valmiki’s Ramayan and the Mahabharat by Bhagwan Ved Vyas, are known as *Itihas* texts. *Itihas* means ‘thus it occurred’. They are historical texts describing historical people and are not legends or myths as falsely written by the early colonial writers commissioned by the East India Co. to write the ‘History of India’. Valmiki rishi’s historical perspective cogently refutes the colonial writers’ denigration of India’s *Itihas* texts as being undatable.

Dates of major events in the Valmiki Ramayan using Planetarium Gold software

Event	Date	Valmiki Ramayan Reference
Shri Ram’s birth (Ramnavmi)	10 January 5114 BCE 12.30 pm	1/18/8-12
Bharat’s birth	11 January 5114 BCE 5.30 am	1/18/15
Shri Ram’s exile on his 25th birthday	5 January 5089 BCE	2/15/3
Fight with Khar-Dushan (13th year of exile)	7 October 5077 BCE	
Hanumanji’s visit to Lanka	12 September 5076 BCE	
Hanumanji’s return from Lanka	14 September 5076 BCE	
Shri Ram (& army) begin journey to Lanka	20 September 5076 BCE	6/4/46-51
Shri Ram reaches Ravan’s fort	12 October 5076 BCE	6/38/9-14
Death of Meghnath (Ravan’s son)	24 November 5076 BCE	9/91/16
Ravan enters battle	24 November 5076 BCE	
Shri Ram vanquishes Ravan after 7-day battle	4 December 5076 BCE	6/108/21-22
Shri Ram reaches Nandigram, nr. Ayodhya, after completing 14 yrs of exile	30 December 5076 BCE	

(Source: *Dating the Era of Lord Ram* by P. Bhatnagar, 2005)



Aerial view of Ram Setu

Valmiki used the ancient system of noting time based on the celestial positions of the sun, moon and the planets and correlating these with the 27 *nakshatras* (constellations). This field of study is known as *Jyotish*. During important events in the Ramayan, Valmiki notes these configurations allegorically.

In recent years, Indian researchers have fed these planetary configurations into the 'Planetarium Gold' software. This calculates and gives the equivalent English calendrical dates. Using this modern technique called Archaeo-Astronomy, an Indian scientist, Pushkar Bhatnagar has given the dates to major events graphically cited by Valmiki (see table next page).

Valmiki also vividly describes the details of the construction of Ram Setu, the bridge built to reach Sri Lanka. Valmiki names the species of trees used, such as, shāl, ashvakarna, dhava, vance (bamboo), kutaja, arjuna, tāl, tilak, tinish, bili, saptaparna, karnikar, mango, ashok, coconut, neem, etc. (Valmiki Ramayan Yudha Kand 6/22/50-72).

Scholars now contend that names such as Vānara, Rinchā, Rākshas, etc. denote a type of people, not animals or demons in the literal sense.

The curvi-linear bridge as seen in NASA's satellite image strongly indicates that this struc-

ture is man-made and cannot be a natural formation. Named Adam's bridge by the Portugese, this bridge was used by people to reach Sri Lanka until 1480 CE, when a sea storm damaged it.

Thus, from Valmiki's accurate descriptions of the astronomical bodies, which he intertwined with events unfolding on earth, Indian researchers today have scientifically established Valmiki Ramayan's antiquity and thereby attesting Maharshi Valmiki's astronomical acumen cum poetic genius.

The most unique feature about Maharshi Valmiki was that he was Shri Ram's contemporary. He had met the prince in his ashram while the latter was proceeding into forest exile. By his *tapas* and yogic abilities (*door-darshan* – tele-sight) he probably saw all the events from his ashram. Later he looked after Sitaji, who gave birth to Lav and Kush. He taught the Ramayan to these twins, and then sent them to Ayodhya to melodiously sing it to the citizens and later to Shri Ram in his palace. Shri Ram endorsed its authentic account. Hence, Valmiki's Ramayan is an historical account about Shri Ram, who is endowed with superhuman virtues. Goswami Tulsidas's Rāmcharitmanas is a bhakti shastra, believing from the beginning that Shri Ramchandra is God.





A Temple to Science?

Biren: Whew, its hot outside! Thank God I have airconditioning in my car and office. Otherwise...

Anil: Yes, it would really be difficult to live without that now.

Biren: On my way here to the mandir, I was thinking that modern science has given us so many things, so many miracles and blessings – airconditioning, medicine, electricity, cars, planes, internet, email,... In addition to our mandirs to God, we really need to construct a Temple to Science!

Anil: You're right about modern science giving us a lot, but I think constructing a temple to it is going too far. We humans have invented or discovered all this because of our God-gifted intellect. So, God's principles and religion are a better guiding light for our lives than science.

Biren: Why? Science has improved our lives, made it easier, more enjoyable, healthier, more comfortable. We would still be nomadic

tribes if it wasn't for the science of agriculture. We would be unable to travel long distances without the science of transport. The science of communication has given us the means to speak to people half-way across the world.

Anil: Yes, it has given us a lot. But don't forget – it is forever changing, forever improvising. That flexibility is good, but that's its weakness as well: What science labels as truth today, might not be true tomorrow.

Biren: But that's the whole point of science – it tries to discover the truth, and keeps searching for the correct chemical formulation or the correct biological reason until it finds out. Whats wrong with that?

Anil: Nothing wrong with it at all. But what I'm saying is that there's a stable and constant truth beyond just simple logic. You can build a strong life only on a stable base. If your base is shifting, then your life too will be going this way and that without heading in a forward direction.

Biren: Huh?

Anil: OK, let me try to explain this in another way. Tell me, can you build a ship on the water?

Biren: No, it has to be built on land and then put to sea. If you try building it in water, the ship – and probably the builders too – would drown.

Anil: Right. And would you build your home on shifting sands?

Biren: No, you need a solid foundation. A home built on a foundation of sand will collapse soon.

Anil: So if scientific principles themselves are subject to change, how can anything built on those be stable? They are useful, sure, but for shorter time spans only. You cannot call it absolute truth, nor is it everlasting.

Biren: I think you're wrong. Scientific principles are not subject to change. They're always the same, right? Like Newton's Laws, or Einstein's equations.

Anil: Oh well, you can just read up in the library or on some website. Just to give you the same examples you mentioned: Newton's principles don't apply to the very large scale of stars or very small scale of quantum physics, so they're not universal principles. And in his equations Einstein used a 'cosmological constant' which he admitted later was not just an error but 'a blunder.' In fact, in spite of all scientists till date saying that nothing can go faster than the speed of light, quantum physics now says that some particles called 'tachyons' do travel faster than light – though I

have no idea of how one can see those!

Biren: OK, so if science is not always true, what is your everlasting truth?

Anil: Just that God exists, and that we as humans have this unique opportunity to learn about him, know him, worship him. Once we begin to discover God and his teachings, through the scriptures, through the mandir, or through the God-realized guru, then we're on a voyage of discovery that is progressive for us and yet unchanging in itself.

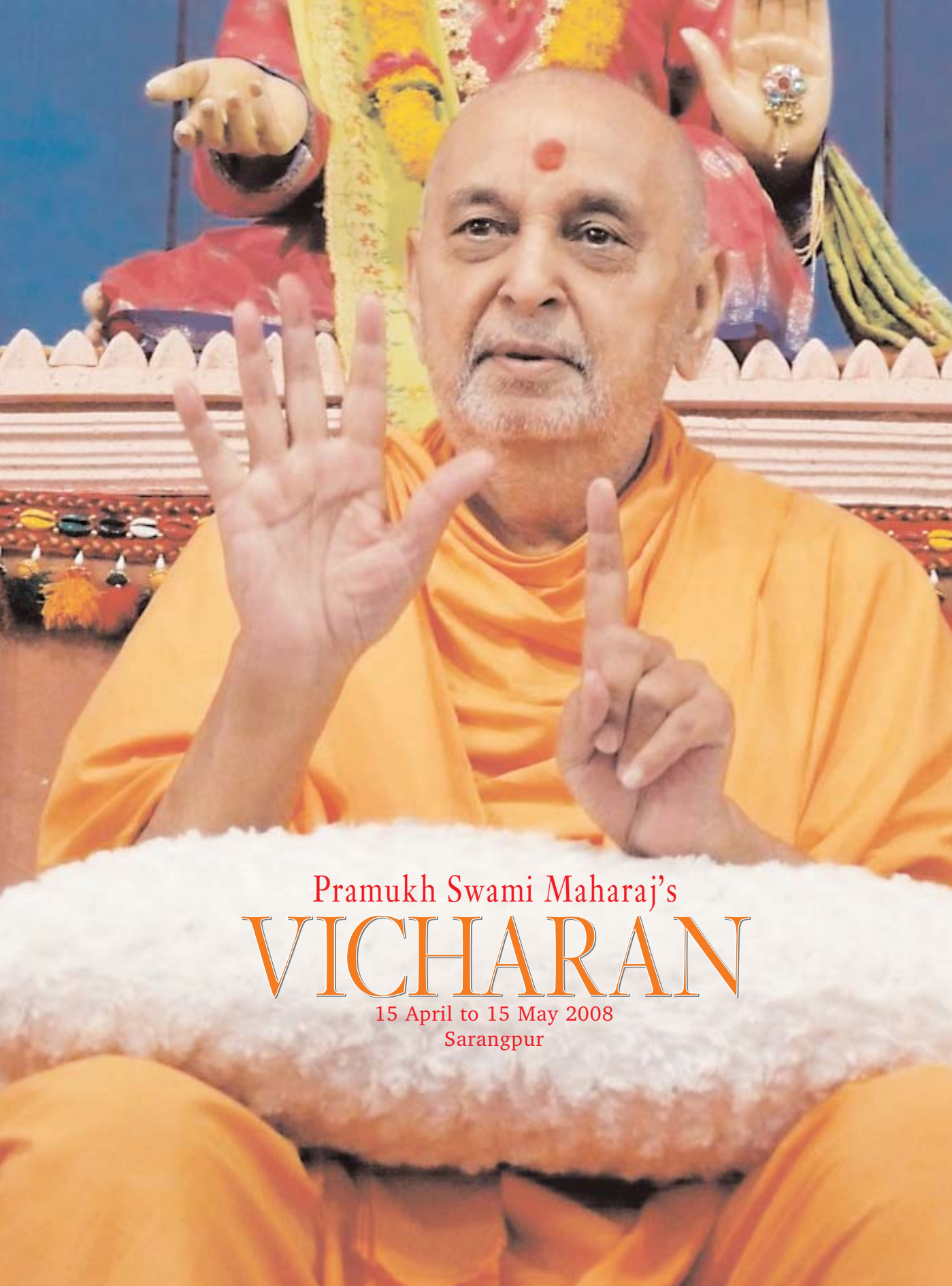
Biren: And what about all these inventions and discoveries?

Anil: We can, of course, learn a lot from science. It is invaluable. It can be a great hammer and chisel, but not a good sculptor. It is a good tool, but a poor master. It can give better toys for our kids, but it also gives bigger bombs. Medicine saves lives – and can be used to kill thousands as well. Without deep-rooted values to guide it, science can be easily misled or misused. Your life is helped by science, but it has to be guided by values beyond that. Science can help you immensely in reaching your life's goals, but it cannot give you inner satisfaction and fulfillment. It can help make you more comfortable, but it cannot make you a better person by eradicating ego, anger, greed, lust and jealousy.

Biren: Okay, okay, so I won't build that temple to science....

Anil: But please do use airconditioning in God's temple!





Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
VICHARAN

15 April to 15 May 2008
Sarangpur

Swamishri's daily routine comprised darshan in the main mandir, Yagnapurush Smruti mandir and other sacred spots in the mandir compound. This was followed by puja, then he personally counselled devotees before taking breakfast. Throughout the day he was engaged in meetings, letter writing and exercises.

15 April 2008

Before puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for a new *hari* mandir in Padvadar.

20 April 2008, Smruti Mandir Patotsav

Today marked the 27th *patotsav* of Yagnapurush Smruti mandir, built over the cremation spot of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.

Swamishri performed the *pujan* of Shastriji Maharaj's *murti* and then the *patotsav arti*.

After his morning puja, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Maharaj's arrival in this village has made it pure. Wherever God stays becomes a place of pilgrimage. Maharaj went to Dwarika, Jagannathpuri, Rameshwar and other places, and so they are all places of pilgrimage. Similarly, Maharaj stayed here and celebrated festivals, so it has become a pilgrim place.

"The great benefit for us is that this is our last birth. There will be no need to come on this earth again. We will go to Akshardham. There is no need to question 'What will happen now?' 'How will it happen?', etc. We have attained Maharaj and his Sadhu, Shastriji Maharaj, so we are liberated."

21 April 2008

The world's leading musical fountain and water show creator Yves Papain of France, came for Swamishri's darshan. With him were team members John Jossifakis and James Thomson. After puja, Swamishri welcomed them with garlands. They had visited Delhi and Gandhinagar Akshardhams and were touched by the simplicity of Swamishri's and the sadhus' lifestyles.

Yves Papain commented, "However big the shows I do they are temporary. When the show finishes everything ends. But Akshardham is eternal. All my shows are for entertainment, but the shows you do are inspiring."

23 April 2008, Diksha Day

Over 8,000 devotees were present in Swamishri's morning puja. The *diksha mahapuja* was performed during Swamishri's puja. Thereafter, Swamishri initiated 21 *parshads* into the sadhu-fold and 30 *sadhaks* into the *parshad*-fold.

As each youth approached Swamishri to receive *diksha* and the guru mantra, Swamishri blessed them with some words of special guidance.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Parents happily give their only sons whom they have raised and educated... They gladly present them at the feet of God... for this they will gain many merits and blessings.

"Sadhus serve to raise the awareness of dharma in the country, free thousands from addictions, help thousands shed bad habits, and encourage people to observe *niyams* and walk the spiritual path. The sadhus will serve society, the country and God and gain liberation for their *atma*.

"To observe the *niyams* of a sadhu, please God and guide thousands onto the path of God requires courage. Such courage has been shown by the parents and by the sons.

"The youths who become sadhus will truly become *ekantik* and will gain the strength to observe *niyams* and dharma, *agna* and *upasana* and please Maharaj."

26 April 2008

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the *hari* mandir at Jam-Ambardi.

1 May 2008

In the *pradakshina* of the Yagnapurush



Swamishri performs arti of murtis for Padvadar mandir

Smruti mandir Swamishri blessed the new batch of youths whose six-month course in the Youth Training centre was beginning today.

5 May 2008

The *mukhi* (town Chief) of Kokhra Mahemdabad came to meet Swamishri in the morning. His status was acquired by heredity. However, for six generations, family members had been devastated by addiction to alcohol.

One month ago, when the *mukhi* had come for darshan, Swamishri had told him, “Give up alcohol.” From that day he had not drunk at all. When he quit drinking, his family members also found it strange since drinking alcohol was a family norm. But the *mukhi* remained firm. Today he pledged to Swamishri, “Now, even if my throat is cut, I will never take even a drop of alcohol.” Swamishri said “God will be greatly pleased with you.”

10 May 2008, 92nd Patotsav of Sarangpur Mandir

Today marked the 92nd *patotsav* of Sarangpur mandir. The *patotsav* rituals of the *murtis* of *pujan* and *abhishek* in all five shrines began after *mangala arti*. After these Vedic rituals, an *annakut* was offered in each shrine. Swamishri then performed the *patotsav arti*.

After *puja*, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “The *patotsav* has been well celebrated today with *arti*, *pujan*, *bhajan* and *kirtan*. Every year the *patotsav* is held with all rituals. Some peo-



Diksha ceremony

ple say that it is because God’s powers have decreased. But God’s powers do not decrease; ours do. That is why we have to perform *pujan*. God is divine and his divinity never decreases. But this is done so that our *bhakti* and affection for God increases, we experience peace in life and our *satsang* increases.”

Then Swamishri read *Vachanamrut Sarangpur-7* and explained, “Our mind is constantly wandering; it never remains still. Just like a monkey is always roaming, so is the mind. It flirts from one thought to another. It travels abroad – without a plane, ticket or passport – and returns. But where the thoughts of the mind become calm is known as *Naimisharanya Kshetra*. Where our senses, worldly thoughts and desires are destroyed is known as *Naimisharanya Kshetra*.

“Where is *Naimisharanya Kshetra*? It is wherever the *ekantik* Sadhu of God is.... By associating with such a *Satpurush*, no attachment to worldly objects remains.”

11 May 2008

In the morning, the vice-chancellor of Somnath Sanskrit Vidyalay, Shri Pankajbhai Jani, and university advisor, Shri Rajendrabhai Nanavati, came for Swamishri’s darshan and blessings. They were very impressed by the Sanskrit *pathshalas* run by BAPS, and had granted AARSH in Gandhinagar affiliation to Somnath University. They also discussed the ‘Swaminarayan Vedant Darshan’ course to be launched by the University. ◆

UK KISHORE-KISHORI MANDAL 'BRING-A-FRIEND' DAY

4 April 2008, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



Visitors are guided through the exhibition

On Friday 4 April 2008 at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, the *kishores* and *kishoris* of UK held 'Bring-A-Friend' Day for the first time. Over 500 *kishores* and *kishoris* from across the country attended this memorable evening of hospitality and spirituality.

The guests were received at the tube and train stations by senior *karyakars* and then brought to the mandir. As they entered the mandir complex, a special photo of the *satsangi* hosts with their friends was taken in front of the mandir. They were then guided around the mandir and the 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition after which they offered *abhishek* to the

murti of Shri Nilkanth Varni in the Abhishek Mandapam.

The guests then gathered inside the Haveli for a cultural programme, which opened with a special screening of *Mystic India*. The inspiring history of London mandir was presented through a video presentation, followed by a vivid enactment of Alexander the Great and his time in India, where he learnt the power of spirituality. Personal experiences of *kishores* and *kishoris* were narrated to illustrate the powerful and positive impact the mandir has had in the lives of youths today.

Addressing the assembly, Yogvivek Swami spoke of the need for value-based education, and emphasized the benefits of the mandir as a centre for cultural, social and spiritual well-being. The cultural programme concluded with an insightful video showing BAPS Youth Activities in the UK and the inspirer of BAPS' world-wide activities, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The evening concluded with a delicious, traditional vegetarian meal. Guests were presented a gift pack of informative reading material and mementos of the mandir before they departed. ♦

OPINIONS

"What an amazing place...kind of awe-inspiring. Thank you for having us."

- **Jemina**

"I very much enjoyed finding out more about the Hindu culture. I feel I know a lot more about it and it has answered quite a few questions I had. "

- **L.J.**

"I really enjoyed my time here today. It was a real eye-opener. I have been past the Mandir but never been in! Thanks to my friend that I came today."

- **Shivani Patel**

"My experience this evening has reminded me of how life should be lived – through righteous values which many people tend to neglect!"

- **Neil Hirani**

GUJARATI SPELLING BEE COMPETITION

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Houston

11 May 2008



Gujarati Spelling Bee participants

On 11 May 2008, a total of 36 *balaks* and 32 *balikas* participated in the annual BAPS Children's Gujarati Spelling Bee Competition at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Stafford, Texas.

The boys and girls, aged 5-15, had begun preparations in March by learning the spellings, meanings and proper pronunciations of a variety of words. While many participants had taken part in other spelling bees, this one was

particularly special as it tested their knowledge of their mother language, Gujarati, which is actually a second language for most.

Their hard work and determination was apparent as they took the stage and confidently recited the words.

The main prize winners of this year were: Group 1: Darshan Patel, Dipali Patel; Group 2: Hemal Patel, Shruti Hariyani; Group 3: Sahil Patel, Jill Patel; Group 4: Romil Patel. The audience was full of proud family members and friends supporting the children in their quest to grasp their mother language.

Parents were delighted to see such enthusiasm in their children to learn Gujarati. Many parents agreed that teaching their children Gujarati has been a substantial challenge for them as the need to speak English remains greater in day-to-day life. They felt that this was an excellent way to encourage youngsters to learn Gujarati. ◆



ANTI-ADDICTION RALLY

26 April 2008, Jaipur

Over 1,100 students from seven major schools of Jaipur participated in the Anti-addiction Rally organized by BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jaipur on 26 April 2008.

The rally was flagged off by the Deputy Mayor of Jaipur Shri Virusinh Rathod. Speaking on this occasion the deputy mayor expressed hope that many people would be inspired to overcome their addictions and live a healthy life as a result of this rally. He praised the organizers and participants for their hard work and their sense of social service. Even the school authorities praised the rally.

Anti-addiction campaigns organized by BAPS have helped to create a world free of vices and addictions. ◆

KISHORE SUMMER SHIBIRS

2-25 May 2008, Gujarat

Theme: SVAS



Kishore participants, Ahmedabad

Based on the topics of Satsang/Sanskar, Vyaktitva Vikas (Personality Development), Arogya (Health) and Shikshan (Education), these 6-day summer shibirs for *kishores* and *kishoris* were titled SVAS.

The *shibirs*, organized by the Satsang Activity Central Office, were held in Mumbai, Surat, Gadhada, Ahmedabad, Atladra and Bochasan. The first began on 2 May and the last concluded on 25 May. The topic for each of the 6-days of the *shibirs* were as follows:

- Day 1: Satsang/Sanskar-1
- Day 2: Arogya
- Days 3 & 4: Vyaktitva Vikas
- Day 5: Shikshan
- Day 6: Satsang/Sanskar-2

In each of the *shibirs* an average of 175 selected *kishores* and 175 *kishoris* participated.

In each *shibir*, Mahant Swami was present the first three days and Dr. Swami for the last three days.

In addition to their enlightening speeches, the day's topics were presented through speeches by experienced sadhus, quizzes, questions and answer sessions, skits, discussions, debates,

story telling and audiovisual presentations.

All the *shibir* participants were divided into groups of ten, and each group had to produce project based on the Vachanmrut on the topic of *agna*.

The participants also memorized Swamini Vato, *shloks* and *sakhis*.

Prizes were awarded for the best project and to those who had memorized the most.

Every morning there were yoga classes conducted by experienced yoga practitioners.

In the evenings, the youths were given the opportunity to participate in a variety of indoor and outdoor sports: cricket, volleyball, carrom, chess, badminton and others.

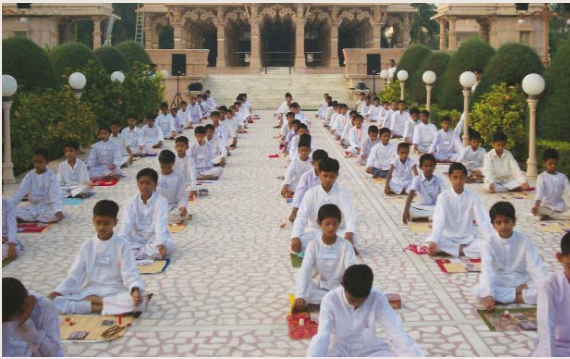
The participants also received valuable guidance on health, education and personality development from experienced doctors, educationists and other experts.

These 6-day *shibirs* were thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated by the *kishores* and *kishoris*, who resolved to progress in their personal, academic and spiritual endeavours.



BAL-BALIKA SUMMER CAMPS

May 2008, Gujarat



During the May 2008 summer vacation, over 22,000 *balaks* and *balikas* aged under 13, from throughout Gujarat and Mumbai, benefitted from special summer training camps.

The camps, each lasting between 5 and 7 days, were held at 75 locations for *balaks* and 70 for *balikas* in which children from 4,920 Bal and Balika Mandals participated.

Organized by the Children's Activities Central Office, the camps focused on the all-round



development of children, giving training and guidance on *satsang*, education and personality development.

The children learned general knowledge, study techniques, *yoga-pranayam*, English, public speaking, monoacting, dance, music and computing.

A variety of presentation techniques were used to teach the children in an entertaining, interesting and informative way.



ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS CYCLE RALLY

25 May 2008, Surat



Braving the sweltering summer heat, over 2,500 *balaks* and *balikas* of Surat took part in a cycle procession to raise environmental awareness in the city.

All the cycles were adorned with message placards pronouncing the importance of environmental protection. Also the message of environmental awareness was relayed through portable public address systems placed on tricycles.

The event proved to be educational for the participants and the people of the city.





1. The murti of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj adorned in garments of sandalwood paste.
2. The murtis of the central shrine in Sarangpur adorned with sandalwood paste garments.*
3. Swamishri engaged in darshan of Shastriji Maharaj on the occasion of Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir's 27th patotsav (20 April 2008).

*For more photos: www.swaminarayan.org/rituals/chandan

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM ON BBC WEBSITE

Since its opening in November 2005, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, has attracted over 12.5 million visitors from 113 countries.

Recently, details and photos of Swaminarayan Akshardham have been included by the BBC on their website: "BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham is a 100-acre Hindu temple complex in New Delhi, India. It aims to showcase Hinduism's ancient art, culture and spiritual heritage."

"Since its opening in November 2005, Swaminarayan Akshardham has become a popular landmark of India's cultural and religious landscape, attracting more than five million visitors a year."

Visit the Religion & Ethics section of the BBC website to see more.

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/galleries/hindutemple



PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA & GALA EVENING BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto, Canada, 1 May 2008

1. On 29 April 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper invited a BAPS delegation to Parliament Hill and presented them the Purna Kalash, given to him by Pramukh Swami Maharaj last year, to place in the Canadian Museum of Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians at the BAPS Swaminarayan Complex, Toronto. Since the mandir and museum were opened in July 2007, 350,000 Canadians and tourists, and children from 200 schools have visited. 2. Many leading dignitaries of Toronto attended the Gala Evening hosted by the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto, on 1 May 2008: Chief Guest, Hon. Monte Solberg, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development; Hon. Greg Sorbara, Member of Provincial Parliament, Ontario; Hon. John Tory, Leader, Progressive Conservative Party, Ontario; and Shri Satish Mehta, Consul-General of India.