

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May 2008

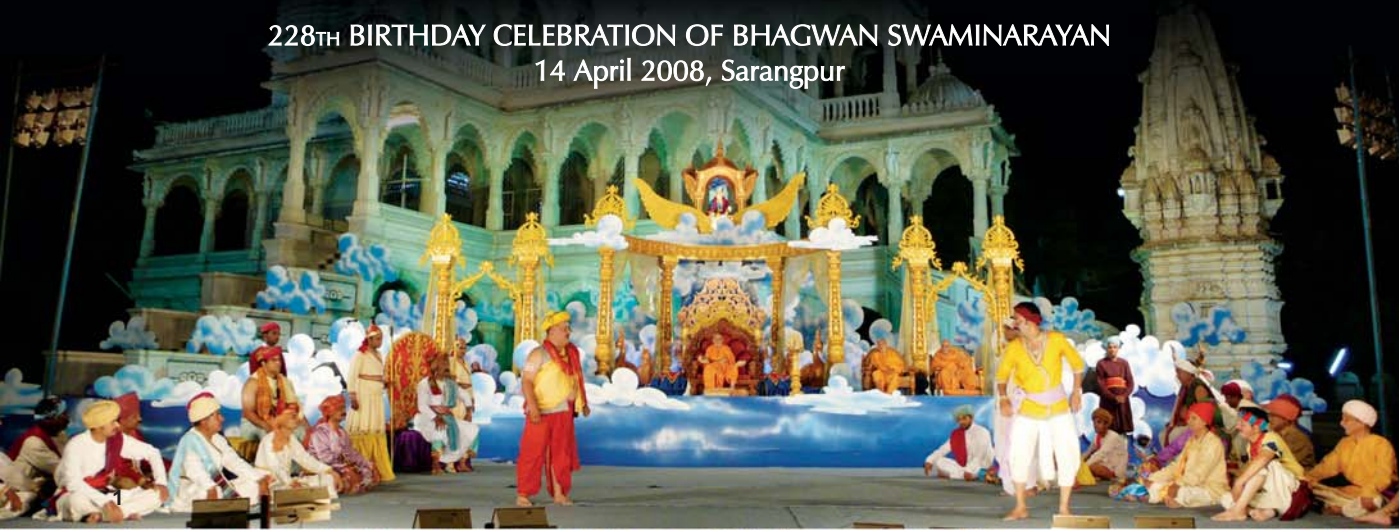
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I am sorry!

Three Most Difficult Words...

228TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN
14 April 2008, Sarangpur



1. Youths enact a drama on Bhakta Sagram's transformation. Mandir in background.
2. Swamishri on stage. 3. Devotees in the celebration assembly.

Photos: Sadhu Yogicharandas



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CONTENTS

1. *Swaminarayan History*
Debate in Vadodara.....4
Muktanand Swami defeats the Vedantacharya...
2. *On Life*
“I Am Sorry!”7
Apologize before it is too late...
3. *Guru Parampara*
Yogiji Maharaj’s Austere Life11
Fasting – a way of life...
4. *Personal Development*
Right Hand-Left Hand14
Teamwork...
5. *Bhajan History*
Orã Āvo Mārã Lerakhadã Laheri.....15
On the banks of river Ghela...
6. *Vicharan*
Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Vicharan16
7. *Inspiring Incidents*
Living with Swamishri18
Motivation and guidance...
8. *BAPS Festivals*
**228th Birthday Celebration of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Sarangpur....19**
9. *Life Transforming Story*
Rishubha Vala’s Transformation20
10. *BAPS News*
Parents’ Meet, South Africa23
Visit to Elderly Homes, London23
**BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and
Guesthouse Inauguration, India.....24**
Meals for the Needy, New Delhi.....24
National Sponsored Walk, UK.....25
**Dr. APJ Kalam Visits BAPS
Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto26**

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FIRST WORD

Bhagwan Swaminarayan emphasized the importance of doing *satsang* for spiritual progress and happiness. At the same time he underscored the need to refrain from *kusang*, or bad company, in any form. In one of his discourses he warns all devotees to avoid the four main types of *kusang*. The first are the Kudapanthis who dislodge you from spiritual vows (namely chastity) and make you morally impure and corrupt. The second type of persons are the Shaktipanthis who force you to eat meat and drink alcohol and deflect you from dharma. The third category are the Shaktipanthis who propagate that God’s abode, his divine form and the *murtis* of God’s avatars are false and thus make you stray from the bhakti and *upasana* of God. And finally the Nastiks who believe that only karmas are real and deny the existence of God, thereby displacing you from the path prescribed by the sacred shastras.

Today, *kusang* comes in appealing or seemingly harmless forms like social trends and bonds, business relationships, entertainment, rationality, criticisms and glamour. As Hindus and *satsangis* we have to be conscious that we have our own glorious culture, faith and value systems. We need to understand and affiliate ourselves to our own philosophy, set of moral practices, rituals, place of worship, deity, sacred texts, mother tongue, festivals, and social customs. Say no to wrong things. There is no need to feel alienated or left out when you do not participate with your peers in things that do not agree with our spiritual faith and moral character. ◆

Debate in Vadodara



*On Shri Hari's
word Muktanand Swami left
for Vadodara to participate in a
scriptural debate against the
Vedantacharya. The debate was
arranged by Maharaja Sayajirao
of Vadodara...*

It was 19 July 1818 (Ashadh vad 2, Samvat 1875). Shriji Maharaj celebrated the festival of *rath yatra* in Gadhada. Later, he also celebrated Ganesh Chaturthi and Jal Jhilani in Gadhpur. Maharaj had decided to stay there till he got news of Muktanand Swami's victory in a debate at Vadodara.

Muktanand Swami had reached Vadodara with his group of sadhus and devotees. They all stayed at the *hari* mandir on the grounds of Nath Bhakta's home. Word was sent to Maharaja Sayajirao that Muktanand Swami had arrived on Maharaj's instruction to debate with the Vedantacharya. The Maharaja called Bhu Puranik, a member of his court, and said, "I

would like to go and have the darshan of Muktanand Swami. Go and inform the members of the royal court, Ramchandra Vaidya, Shobharam Shastri, Narupant Nana, Bapu Saheb, Chimanrao Shastri and others, to accompany me. Also, make preparations for tomorrow's debate in the royal mandir."

The Maharaja came with his leading officials to have Muktanand Swami's darshan in the suburb of Vadi. On seeing Swami he felt a tide of joy and peace pervade his entire being. The Maharaja felt that the Vedantacharya would be defeated by the sheer saintliness of Muktanand Swami. The king narrated the Vedantacharya's propaganda and grapevine. Then Muktanand

Swami calmly explained, “I was present when the Vedantacharya came to Vartal. Shri Hari asked him to recite and explain the twelve principle *shloks* of the Vedas. The *acharya* failed to answer. When he was asked a second question, again he was flummoxed. Still Maharaj honoured him as a Brahmin and gave him Rs. 200. But when he reached Nadiad he talked flippantly about Maharaj. So Maharaj sent Nityanand Swami to Nadiad to debate with him. But he did not go to Nityanand Swami. So, don’t believe and be taken in by anything he says.”

Maharaja Sayajirao was young and intelligent. He understood the frivolity of the Vedantacharya. He ordered Bhau Puranik, “Declare in the city that tomorrow there will be an assembly in the royal mandir. The scriptural debate will be strictly between Muktanand Swami and the Vedantacharya. All the pundits sponsored by the state should be present if they wish to continue getting their monthly payments. After the debate concludes any pundit can ask questions with the coordinator’s permission. And if any pundit loses then he will not get any salary.”

The next day the arrangements for the debate were made in the king’s royal mandir near Mandvi. Two seats were arranged, facing each other, for the two contestants. Another two cushions were placed for the two judges, Chimanrao Shastri and Bhau Puranik. Muktanand Swami came with devotees to the venue singing a bhajan, “*Vāhalā rumjhum kartā Kān...*” The Vedantacharya also arrived with pomp backed by the evil Vitthalrao Diwan. Accompanying him were some *bawas*, who were barred from entering the assembly at the Maharaja’s word. The assembly hall soon became packed with many pundits, citizens and royal officials.

Muktanand Swami prostrated before the deity in the royal mandir. Then he prayed to Shri Hari before taking his seat. The assembly was impressed by the glow of austerity and *brahmacharya* on Muktanand Swami’s face. His saintliness and devotion touched the audience.

The Vedantacharya, however, came to the assembly and straightaway climbed onto his seat. His face showed signs of ostentation and vanity. The two judges, Chimanrao Shastri and Bhau Puranik, took their seats.

Muktanand Swami suggested that they begin by singing the peace mantras and a prayer. The debate started at 9.00 am. Muktanand Swami looked at the Vedantacharya. The latter recognized Swami to have been present during his debate with Shriji Maharaj in Vartal. He quivered with fear, thinking that Swami would talk about his defeat in Vartal. Muktanand Swami had decided to reveal the facts regarding his defeat at Vartal. He asked the Vedantacharya, “You had come to Vartal to debate with Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The Lord had told you to recite the twelve great *shloks* of the Vedas. Do you remember that occasion? Furthermore, you were asked to explain how the Vedas came into existence and describe the form of Akshar. Did you answer those questions? Let us begin today’s debate with those questions.”

The Vedantacharya was still ignorant about the twelve *shloks*. On facing the same questions again he felt drained of strength and nervous. Vitthalrao Diwan and the other pundits saw the blank and beaten face of the Vedantacharya. The pundits realized that he was a charlatan. A wave of protests surged through the assembly of pundits. But before anybody could react Muktanand Swami urged, “*Acharya*, speak the truth. We are in a royal mandir and in the divine presence of the deity. Tell the assembly what had happened in Vartal.” The two judges also told the Vedantacharya to speak the truth.

Finally, the crestfallen Vedantacharya confessed, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan is great. To make me feel easy despite my defeat and with due respect to my Brahmin birth and my status as an *acharya*, he gifted me Rs. 200. I, out of my misplaced abhorrence for him and wrong guidance from others, propagated lies about him.”

On hearing this Vitthalrao Diwan turned red with rage and hissed, "You liar and deceiver! You played a trick upon me!"

Instantly Bhau Puranik checked him, "Diwan Saheb, this is a spiritual assembly. It is not right of you to utter such words. Though you are a Diwan, we are the judges, therefore you'll have to speak with respect and in accordance with the rules."

The two judges declared, "Today, no scriptural debate has taken place in the assembly, but Muktanand Swami's saintliness and his bhakti for Bhagwan Swaminarayan have left a deep and abiding impression on the whole assembly. We therefore announce Muktanand Swami as the winner." The devotees were enthused at the declaration, whereas the Diwan got up angrily, rubbed his hands vigorously and stomped out of the assembly.

Then the pundits in the assembly asked Muktanand Swami to explain the differences between *ekantik dharma* and ordinary *dharma*, and bhakti and bhakti coupled with God's glory. Muktanand Swami answered the questions to everyone's satisfaction. The pundits and the lay audience were pleased with Swami's simple answers and modesty. The audience garlanded Muktanand Swami. The Maharaja honoured Swami with a garland and said, "The Vedantacharya's behaviour and propaganda was full of guile."

Muktanand Swami revealed, "Maharaj had told me in Gadhada that no scriptural debate would take place; instead the Vedantacharya would be exposed. Maharaj said that I had to go so that people could realize the truth."

Bhau Puranik, the king's official, added, "Your explanation of the differences between *dharma* and *ekantik dharma* and the meaning of bhakti coupled with God's glory is not easily found in the shastras."

Muktanand Swami replied, "Shriji Maharaj has explained such important principles in a simple manner. The shastras are like an ocean

and their essence can only be understood through a guru." Then Muktanand Swami and his sadhus and devotees left, singing kirtans on their way to the Vadi mandir. News soon spread that the Vedantacharya had been defeated. Thus hundreds of people stood by the wayside for Swami's darshan.

The devotees of Vadodara wrote a letter to Shriji Maharaj, describing the debate and defeat of the Vedantacharya. Nath Bhakta and Jusaji set off to deliver the letter to Maharaj. They reached Gadhada in two days. After the two prostrated before Shri Hari, Nath Bhakta announced with joy, "Muktanand Swami won the debate in the royal court in Vadodara. The Vedantacharya confessed about his wrongdoings and apologized in public."

Shri Hari stood up and happily exclaimed, "What did you say! Swami won the debate!" He then embraced both Nath Bhakta and Jusaji with joy. "Have you brought a letter?" Maharaj enquired. Shukmuni Swami read the letter aloud. Maharaj was very happy. He asked Nath Bhakta as to when they had left Vadodara.

"Two days ago. We travelled hurriedly, without resting on the way."

Maharaj saw that they were fatigued. He called Motiba (Jivuba) and informed her of Muktanand Swami's victory in Vadodara. Then Maharaj pointed to Nath Bhakta and Jusaji and said, "They have come here briskly, without resting on the way. Give them gur and ghee to replenish their strength and prepare hot water for them to bathe and relax." Then Maharaj added, "Motiba, tell all that my guru Muktanand Swami has won a debate in the royal court of Vadodara and declared that Swaminarayan is God."



(To be contd.)

“I Am SORRY!”



“I realize that by saying I’m deeply sorry, it might not be enough and sufficient to address the pain and hurt I’ve caused you.”

Marion Jones, the golden girl of the Sydney Olympics, wept openly as she uttered these words on 6 October 2007. It was a sad day for sport.

The only woman in history to win five medals in athletics at a single Olympics finally admitted in the New York District Court to having taken performance-enhancing drugs. A sprinter and long-jumper, who won three gold and two bronze medals in the 2000 Olympics, she had repeatedly denied taking steroids. But finally, she apologized to the world for her actions. She admitted she had taken drugs from September 2000 to July 2001.

“I want you to know that I’ve been dishonest... I have let my country down; I have let myself down. I betrayed your trust,” said Jones outside the court.

“Sorry seems to be the hardest word,” a famous star once opined.

Indeed, for Marion Jones it was hard enough admitting her mistake. However, one can guess that she probably had little choice, knowing that she would face a severe penalty if she did not plead guilty.

A commentator writes that sorry may seem to be the hardest word for many of us, but atonement is the new selling factor for celebrities. In other words, the word ‘sorry’ is uttered not so much out of fear of possible punishment but simply to bury the past.

The French football maestro Zinedine Zidane recently apologized for his infamous head butt on Italian defender Marco Materazzi in the 2006 World Cup Final in Germany. “It was inexcusable. I apologize,” he said.

More recently, the Argentine football legend, Diego Maradona, put to rest the longest-running, most-debated and much-relished episode in footballing history. In an interview, the little

genius apologised for his 'Hand of God' goal in the 1986 World Cup quarter-final against England in Mexico.

Maradona scored both goals in the 2-1 victory over England more than 20 years ago. His first goal in the quarter-final match was deemed by the match referee to be a legitimate header past England goalkeeper Peter Shilton, but replays confirmed he had illegally punched the ball in with his hand.

"If I could apologise and go back and change history, I would," said Maradona.

Many experts have commented that Maradona's statement itself deserves to be a subject of debate – maybe for another 20 years to come!

BUSINESS SENSE

Over the years, many sportspersons, politicians, and religious and social leaders have gathered enough courage to apologize and bury their erroneous past. Sometimes, even corporate giants have said sorry to save their reputation and their share of the market. For instance, in 1982, Johnson and Johnson recalled 30 million bottles of Tylenol pills from retail stores after seven people died from cyanide-laced pills. (*Time*, 30 April 2007). The company dealt with the potentially damaging situation by issuing a public apology and introducing tamper-proof packaging.

In another incident, it was reported that David Neeleman, CEO of JetBlue, an American budget airline, embarked on a week-long media apology tour after 100,000 travellers were stranded when "bad weather decimated its operating ability." In one case, JetBlue passengers were left on a snowed-in runway for more than nine hours. Neeleman was reported to have said sorry in national newspaper ads:



"Words cannot express how truly sorry we are for the anxiety, frustration and inconvenience that you, your family, and friends and colleagues have experienced."

Saying sorry is effective. Just imagine how you would feel if you were offended or wronged by a person; what would be your reaction if the person did not want to acknowledge his or her mistake and apologize for it?

The chances are that you would hold a grudge against that person and probably share such sentiments in your social circles.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Why would saying sorry – no matter how hard it is – still be important? Why do some people find it harder to say sorry than others?

One would venture to guess that pride and ego hold some of us back in saying it. We know for sure that not admitting a mistake can be very detrimental – not only for personal relationships but also for seeking solutions. Depending on the nature of the mistake, not admitting one can possibly have catastrophic consequences.

In 2000, the Japanese company Snow Band did not react to reports of outbreaks of food poisoning caused by their milk product until some 60 hours after the first reported incidents. Five days later, some 6,000 people had become sick. Consumers and the media were outraged that top executives in Tokyo had not even acknowledged the incident, let alone take responsibility for it. Consequently, the company went out of business.

Whilst the kind of mistakes we make in our everyday lives may not cause catastrophes or affect too many people, the negative consequences of not admitting our mistakes can

nonetheless be harmful and disastrous. Personal relationships can be damaged. More importantly, doors to solution-finding remain stubbornly locked. Admitting a mistake and apologising for it is the key – if not crucial – requirement in unlocking the door to find a positive way forward.

TAKING THE BLAME

On the spiritual path, too, one can progress rapidly if one admits one's mistakes and learns from them.

In his inspiring spiritual talks, Gunatitanand Swami says, "God does not look at the faults of *jivas*. If a *jiva* prays to God and says, 'I am at fault, then God forgives him for his mistakes.' "

Yogiji Maharaj often said, "I feel happy when someone points out my mistakes. It gives me an opportunity to improve and become better."

Yogiji Maharaj's humility was such that he tolerated the insults of others, even though he was never at fault. On the contrary, he willingly apologized to his persecutors, calmed them and made them feel happy.

God-realized Sadhus like Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj often take the blame upon themselves for the mistakes of others. Moreover, they never feel small or inferior in apologizing to others.

Saying sorry in this way can reverse ill feelings and open the way to finding solutions.

In 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in London, England. The local devotees had organized a *satsang* outing at Epping Forest. Swamishri, along with all the sadhus, was scheduled to arrive there by 10.00 am. Everyone had been looking forward to this event for a long time. Men, women and children from all over the UK had arrived early with enthusiasm and waited eagerly for Swamishri's arrival. But Swamishri was somehow delayed.

Finally, when he did arrive with a few trustees, it was already 12.30 pm. All the devotees were frustrated. Matters were made worse by a sudden downpour of rain which further dampened everyone's spirits. The situation got to a head when it was decided to abandon the event due to the rain. Everyone went home feeling dejected because they did not get Swamishri's presence for the whole assembly. It was natural in this situation to assign the blame on the trustees, since they had organized the home visits which had delayed Swamishri. A cloud of dissatisfaction and blame loomed all over. Swamishri came to know about the disheartened spirits of devotees and quickly stepped in to rectify the situation. The next day, he apologized before the assembly, "Look, whatever happened yesterday at Epping Forest is totally my own fault. The trustees were driving me to the park, but it was I who insisted on the home visits. As a result, we were delayed and could not make it on time. I am sorry."

In reality, it was nobody's fault, least of all Swamishri's, for he was delayed due to circumstances beyond his control. But Swamishri took the blame upon himself and restored harmony.

Everyone realized their own mistakes and they themselves apologized to Swamishri for their erratic behaviour and impatience. Swamishri never feels small in saying sorry, even though he is not at fault.

In 1987, Swamishri, along with a large contingent of BAPS sadhus and devotees, embarked upon a pilgrimage of Uttarakhand in the Himalayas (Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath). The whole event was planned well in advance. A group of sadhus had also carried out a pilot tour of the whole pilgrimage just to finalize the route and make arrangements. They



booked guesthouses, hotels and ashrams well in time for the huge entourage. Everything was set for the pilgrimage to begin.

The Uttarakhand *yatra* is an important Hindu pilgrimage. Many people from all over the world do it at least once in their lifetime. It was quite a coincidence that the Parmar family from London, England, had also embarked on this *yatra* at the same time as Swamishri and the sadhus. However, because they had not planned in advance, they could not find suitable accommodation at any of the places. As a result the family was furious and they wrote a stern letter to Swamishri on their return to London.

“We came on this *yatra* hoping to find accommodation. But wherever we went, they were fully booked because of your sadhus and devotees. Our *yatra* was ruined...”

Others would have brushed the letter aside. How could anyone wrongly blame Swamishri?

But Swamishri pacified the Parmar family

with a letter of apology, “I am sorry for the trouble and inconvenience we had caused. We would have been more than happy to arrange your accommodation if you had informed us then. We pray for you and your family.”

Swamishri never bears grudges with others, even if they wrongly assign blame to him. Swamishri’s life is an inspiration for all. With his ego-free personality he teaches us to live in harmony.

Sorry may be the hardest word to say. But by saying sorry we can improve our personal and professional reputation. Next time, you feel like saying sorry to someone, just go ahead. Don’t allow your pride and ego to block your path of constructive action.

Furthermore, reading *satsang* books and inspiring biographies, performing rituals like *arti*, *mansi puja* and introspection, and daily practice of yoga helps in improving our attitudes and behaviours. ◆



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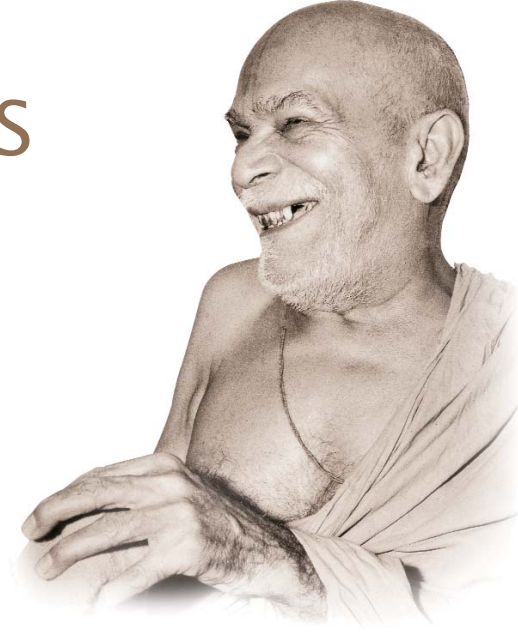
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YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S AUSTERE LIFE

From a young age Yogiji Maharaj had made austerity, and in particular fasting, the cornerstone of his way of life.

He led by example and inspired many youths to lead austere lives...



'YOGI'

When Jina Bhagat was initiated into the sadhu order, he was named Gnanjivan Swami.

Shortly after initiation Gnanjivan Swami went with some other sadhus for darshan to the Nar-Narayan Mandir in Kalupur, Ahmedabad. The next day, the young sadhus walked 10½ miles to the Adalaj Vav (stepwell), which had been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. After darshan and bathing at the well, others had their afternoon meal. Then they came to know that Gnanjivan Swami and Hariprasad Swami were fasting.

Everybody was surprised at the steadfastness of the two young sadhus, who refused to eat anything despite walking a distance of 21 miles that day.

Gnanjivan Swami would fast for two days at a time. He ate only simple food like *rotlas*, *dal* and buttermilk after offering them to Thakorji, and refused to eat rich foods. He used to sleep on a jute sack and used his arm for a pillow.

Due to his austere life, people began to call him 'Yogi' Swami'.

TWO FASTS IN A ROW

Yogiji Maharaj delighted in preparing food and feeding others daily, even though he himself would often fast. One day in Gondal, Shastriji Maharaj asked in the post-lunch assembly, "Where is Yogi Maharaj?" Nobody replied. Then he said, "Somebody find out if he has eaten." A couple of devotees went; they found Yogiji Maharaj washing the utensils. They said, "Shastriji Maharaj wants to know if you have eaten." Yogiji Maharaj replied, "I am fasting today."

The devotees were astonished, because the previous day it was *ekadashi* and he had already observed a waterless fast. It was nothing new for him. Yogiji Maharaj often observed two fasts in a row without others knowing about it.

The devotees bowed their heads in reverence at Yogiji Maharaj's feet.

FOOD ONLY FOR OTHERS

Shastriji Maharaj sent Yogiji Maharaj, Nirgun Swami and some senior devotees of Ahmedabad for the *murti-pratishtha* at Nempur mandir. On this occasion Yogiji Maharaj affectionately served *dudhpak-puri* to the devotees. After the

function was over, everyone returned to Ahmedabad. The devotees spoke in glowing terms about the way Yogiji Maharaj had fed them. Shastriji Maharaj then told them, "Ask Yogiji Maharaj how much *dudhpak-puri* he ate." When the devotees asked him, Yogiji Maharaj replied with a smile, "I am fasting." This was Shastriji Maharaj's way of reminding people about Yogiji Maharaj's greatness.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS

On Ekadashi Yogiji Maharaj would often say, "There are many advantages in fasting. Indigestion is cured. We gain strength. We increase our self-confidence. We please God. By fasting and introspecting we gain control over our limbs, mind, etc. If we observe a fast every five days then it becomes a habit. Fasting keeps us alert." By listing all these advantages, Swamishri encouraged all the youths to fast.

He further said, "Don't sleep during the day when you are fasting. We should never miss an opportunity to fast. In fact, we should go in search of it. If it is too difficult to go without food, we can sip a little water in the evening. When I was fasting, I would feel very thirsty. During daytime I would turn the *mala*, wash utensils and cook. In this fashion I would be evading sleep. At 4 o'clock I would go to the assembly. I used to get up at 3.30 in the morning on the day I had to break the fast."

RIGOROUS PRACTICES

As it was Janmashtmi Swamishri was observing a waterless fast. Several sadhus requested him not to undertake the rigorous fast because of his advanced age. Yogiji Maharaj flatly refused and said, "Shastriji Maharaj had undertaken such fasts even when he was 80. I am only 73 years old. If you let me fast I shall take you all to Akshardham. I shall see to it that this is your last birth. But let me undertake the

fast." They all felt powerless before his determination.

"I PITY THE JIVA"

Once, Yogiji Maharaj had asked a young boy named Hitesh to observe a fast. The youngster found it extremely difficult to observe the waterless fast, but he somehow managed till the evening. Then he could bear it no longer. He requested a youth called Pinakin, "Tell Bapa to relax the vow and permit me to drink water." As it was time for Swamishri's bath, Hitesh went along with the other helpers. Yogiji Maharaj asked, "Who is fasting today?"

On learning that Hitesh was observing a fast, he asked, "Guru, is your fast first class or second class? Did you take water?" Yogiji Maharaj regarded a waterless fast as first class and one with water as second class. Hitesh replied, "Bapa, I have not taken any water. But I can no longer continue this waterless fast."

"Guru," Swamishri said, as if imparting strength, "we should not drink water. We should always be in the first (class). Here, take these blessings. You will not feel the rigours of fasting."

Hitesh was on the verge of tears. But Swamishri would not relent. When Pinakin saw that Swamishri appeared unbending, he said, "Don't you pity this small boy? He fell down in the afternoon. Please let him drink water."

Yogiji Maharaj looked at Pinakin and said, "You are taking pity on his body. I am pitying his *jiva*." Then he told Hitesh, "Go and drink water. But only a glass."

How can any ordinary individual understand the spirit behind Swamishri's seeming sternness. He wished for the spiritual good of Hitesh. He had no intention of putting him in pain and discomfort.

'YOGI YOUTH COLLEGE OF FASTING'

For Yogiji Maharaj fasting was his matchless weapon. To him it was a panacea to cure the ills that confront modern youth. He used it to instill nobility and goodness in them.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was wearing his *dhotiyu* after his bath. A large group of youths was present. So, he asked five to seven youths to observe a fast the following day. Meanwhile, another youth came for darshan. Swamishri asked him, "Are you going to observe a fast tomorrow?" "Yes, Bapa," he replied.

"It has to be a waterless fast," saying this he patted his back. Laughing, Yogiji Maharaj said, "This is a college for fasting. Whoever comes here has to take his turn at fasting."

Pinakin suggested a name, "Yogi Upvas College (Yogi College of Fasting)."

"No, Yogi Yuvak Upvas College (Yogi Youth College of Fasting)," Swamishri corrected. Youngsters, who usually ate four or five times a day, would undertake waterless fasts at Swamishri's command. They would even willingly ask him for permission to undertake fasts. Youths who came to serve him had to undertake a fast once every five days. One day, while Yogiji Maharaj was having his bath, he spotted a new face. Swamishri asked him, "Who are you?"

"Bapa, I stay in the neighbourhood."

"Where do you come from?"

"I belong to Viramgam. I am studying here."

"What are you studying?"

"I am studying commerce."

"What is your name?"

"Mahendra."

"Will you fast tomorrow?"

The youth nodded his head as a sign of agreement. Yogiji Maharaj took the boy's head in his lap and said lovingly, "Don't nod your head, say 'yes, I shall fast.'"

This was a daily occurrence. Youths would bring their friends for Swamishri's darshan and

introduce them to him. Yogiji Maharaj would call them with affection. He would make inquiries about them, and then would lovingly ask them to undertake a fast. The young new comers would accept Swamishri's order to fast with enthusiasm. Even young boys would joyously undertake a fast. This made everyone wonder whether they were on earth or in Akshardham.

On special days, like *nom*, *ekadashi*, Ram Navmi, Janmashtmi, Swamishri would make a note of those willing to fast. Many times the list would contain hundreds of names.

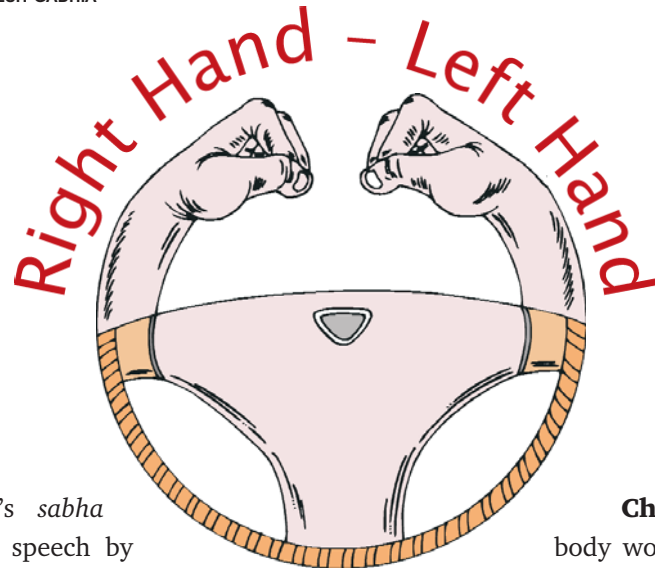
During the month of Shraavan many youths and boys would observe extra fasts to please Swamishri.

MIDNIGHT WISH

Swamishri had come to Bochasan from Ahmedabad for the Guru Purnima festival. He arrived in Bochasan at 11.30 pm. Thousands of devotees were waiting for his darshan. He was very tired. When he came to his room, it was almost midnight. Everyone was feeling sleepy. Swamishri met the devotees and while blessing them said, "Tomorrow everyone has to observe a fast. It is Guru Purnima. A waterless fast will bring immense benefits." Everyone accepted the order.

In today's materialistic world the senses hold sway and means like fasts to control the body are ridiculed. In such circumstances, youths and boys enthusiastically undertaking waterless fasts at Swamishri's command was a miracle indeed. Gunatitanand Swami has said in his talks, "One fast here (on earth) equals a hundred observed in Badrikashram and a thousand in Shvetdwp." Thus, fasting is beneficial, both for physical health and spiritual progress.

◆



Dilip: Yesterday's *sabha* was enjoyable – the speech by Anil about being positive about others was really nice, though I'm not sure whether its practical.

Chintan: I think its practical, and in fact necessary. Lets say I praise your handwriting – and I say that your right hand writes neatly but your left hand doesn't. Would that upset your left hand?

Dilip: What a strange thought – no, it would not. It's a part of me, and you're praising me, not just the hand.

Chintan: What if I praise your son Dhruv, saying that he sings bhajans better than you do – would you be jealous or proud?

Dilip: Proud, of course. *Dikro kono chhe!*

Chintan: And what if I praise some other member of your bhajan team – say, Falgun?

Dilip: Well, he's a good singer and *tabla* player, of course, but I don't think he puts as much devotion into it as he should. He needs to improve.

Chintan: So, you wouldn't really like it, and you're criticizing him just because I praised him. As part of a team, don't you think you should treat him like your right hand – and not as a totally separate person?

Dilip: Look, there's a difference – he's a different person, not my hand nor my son.

Chintan: True, but our body works in unison because it is guided by one brain. And a family binds together if it is guided by one person. A good team will follow instructions or rules from its leader. Whose instructions should you, Dilip, follow?

Dilip: As *satsangis*, we need to take our inspiration from and obey Pramukh Swami Maharaj – he is our brain!

Chintan: Then just as there are no fights between our right and left hand, there will be no arguments between us.

Dilip: You really present funny ideas – I was trying to imagine what would happen if our left and right hands do start fighting...

Chintan: Well, it might sound funny but it is real enough – we all are Swami Bapa's hands. And if your hands fight, one of them may or may not win, but you will definitely lose. Similarly if we argue or fight, one of us might feel, 'I have won' – but Swami Bapa will have lost. And if Swami Bapa loses, we all lose, none of us wins.

Dilip: So we should not fight or argue, but keep Swami Bapa's wish in mind and do *satsang* and *seva* in the right spirit – so we all win together!





Orã Ävo Mãrã Lerakhadã Laheri...

The construction of the mandir in Gadhada had begun. Once, Shriji Maharaj, together with a group of sadhus and devotees went to the banks of the river Ghela. They began to collect stones for use in the foundation of the mandir. The sadhus and devotees worked at full speed making piles of stones ready for dispatch to Dada Khachar's *darbar*, the site of the mandir. After a while everyone got tired and sat on one of the large piles for rest. Shriji Maharaj sat on a pile of stones opposite them and called out, "Santos! Come and sit near me." The sadhus in turn called out to Maharaj, "Maharaj! You come here. You will find it more comfortable here." The sadhus promptly spread out a seat for Maharaj and insisted that he sit with them. However, Maharaj continued to insist that they come to him. In this way, a friendly verbal struggle ensued. All of a sudden Brahmanand Swami stretched out his hand towards Maharaj and began to sing,

*Orã ävo mãrã Le'rakhadã laheri,
Kidho tam säru me jag veri... orã
Kāju nautam jãmã jarkasiyã,
Shobhe päghaladi shir soneri... orã 1
Nang jadiyah bãju berakhdã,
Kar pochi hemkadã paheri... orã 2
Tame rasiyã rangdãnä bhariyã,
Mukhe moraladi vãtã gheri... orã 3
Brahmãnandnã chhelã chhogãlã,
Chãlo chãl malapatã gaj kerì... orã 4*

Meaning:

O my Beloved Lord! Please come close, for I have forsaken all worldly pleasures for you (1).
You are adorned in a beautiful, new and glit-

tering *jamo*; a golden *pagh* adorns your head (2).

Both arms are adorned with gem-studded armlets; your wrists are adorned with golden bracelets and beautiful rings adorn your fingers (3).

You are full of the divine essence; your sweet words are reminiscent of the soothing tunes of a flute (4).

You are adorned with a feather in your *pagh*; Brahmanand says please come to us, walking slowly and regally like an elephant (5).

The second *pad* composed on this occasion by Brahmanand Swami was as follows:

*Maramãlã manmãnyã mãvã,
Ro'ne ãnkhalidi äge ävã... mar
Tãrã manmohan mithã venã,
Ävo shyãm tame mane sambhalãvã... mar 1
Nitya vã'shrm ävo mãre mandiriye,
Rudi chãl chaturãi shikhãvã... mar 2
Tame nãvo to hu dharmajine faliye,
Bahu het karine ävu bolãvã... mar 3
Brahmãnandnã bãl snehidã,
Rãkhu jor karine anahi dau jãvã... mar 4*

Meaning:

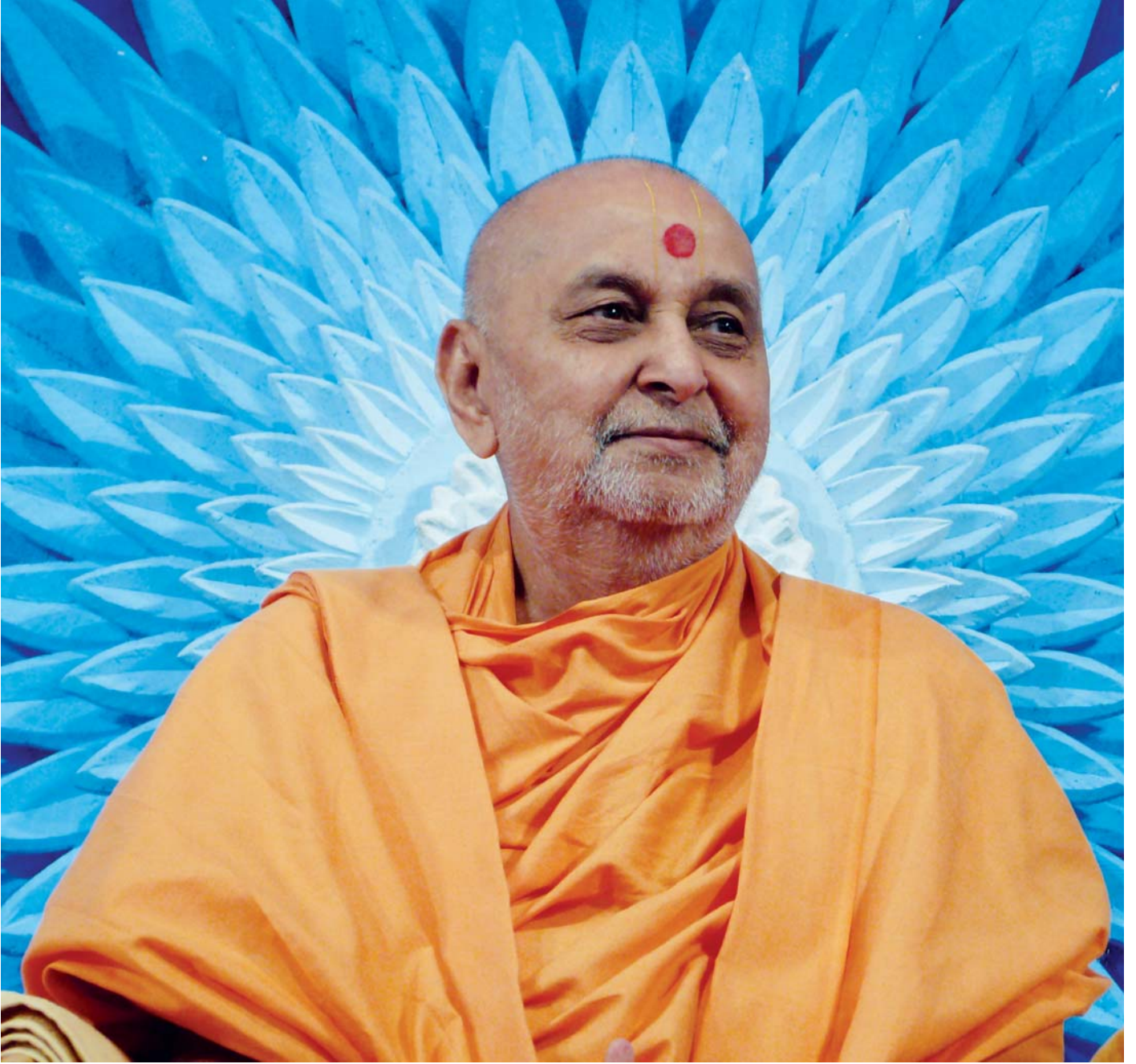
O Beloved Lord: We believe you to be ours; always stay before our eyes like this (1).

Please come near so that we may hear your sweet words (2).

O Beloved Lord! Please come daily to my mandir, and teach us how to cleverly live in this world (3).

O Lord! If you do not come, then I will come to affectionately call you (4).

You are the bestower of child-like bliss to Brahmanand; I insist that you come and I will not let you go (5). ♦



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
VICHARAN

1 March to 14 April 2008
Mumbai, Bhavnagar, Sarangpur



Mumbai: 1-13 March

Swamishri's daily routine during his recuperation after his angiography and weak health in Mumbai included morning darshan of Thakorji in the mandir sanctum, darshan to devotees, and blessing or conselling some devotees for any major problems. Then Swamishri would perform his morning puja, have lunch and later take his daily rounds on the mandir terrace in a wheelchair. During that time sadhus would sing bhajans.

Thereafter Swamishri would answer letters and take rest in the afternoon. Then Swamishri would either preside over meetings or read and answer letters from devotees. Thereafter he would walk for short periods on a treadmill and also listen to readings from Satsang books. After some brief yogic exercises Swamishri would attend to letters or meetings. After dinner Swamishri would preside over meetings or answer letters. Thereafter he would retire for the night.

4 March 2008, Mumbai

On taking Swamishri's echocardiogram Dr Lotlikar said that after one-and-a-half months of treatment and rest Swamishri's heart is healthy.

9 March 2008, Mumbai

In the evening Sunday *satsang* assembly Swamishri and senior sadhus blessed and honoured Dr Ashwinbhai Mehta, Dr Hunda, Inspector General of Police Shri Barve, Dr K.N. Patel, Dr Kiran Doshi and Yogicharan Swami. First, senior sadhus garlanded Swamishri and thereafter Kothari Swami garlanded all the doctors and presented shawls. Swamishri presented an Amrut Kalash as mementos to all the guests.

In his blessings Swamishri appreciated the services of the doctors, and then elaborated upon the meaning of *maya*. "Whatever obstructs



Balaks joyfully greet Swamishri, Mumbai

one from God's bhajan is called *maya*. *Maya* means I-ness and Mine-ness. When such feelings arise for money, property and relatives – that is *maya*. When one sees with *atmic* vision there is no I-ness and Mine-ness."

BHAVNAGAR: 13-18 March

During Swamishri's stay in Bhavnagar devotees had darshan of Swamishri's morning puja and blessings during Sunday *satsang* assembly. Every evening Viveksagar Swami expounded upon the prayer '*Maha balvant maya...*' by women devotees of North Gujarat to Shriji Maharaj during a Fuldol Festival in Sarangpur (*fagva*).

18 March 2008, Bhavnagar, Sarangpur.

Yesterday morning Swamishri had enquired of Rishubha's health. He expressed a wish to see him and bless him. This morning, Rishubha, who was not keeping well, was brought to the mandir. Swamishri blessed him and said, "Bapu, all these years you have profoundly engaged yourself in doing *satsang*. Like Ramsang Bapu you have done *satsang* with great courage. Now nothing more remains to be done. May you be in the service of Maharaj. Do bhajan of Maharaj and do not engage your mind in anything else. Like Ramsang Bapu who is in the service of (Maharaj), you too shall sit in God's service." (A couple of days later,



Swamishri sanctifies the vessels of coloured water and gulal for Fuldol, Bhavnagar

on 20 March, Rishubha passed away). See detailed story of Rishubha's transformation and dedication to Satsang on page 20.

At 10.30 am Swamishri departed from Bhavnagar and arrived in Sarangpur at 12.00 noon.

21 March & 22 March 2008, Sarangpur; Bhagatji Maharaj Jayanti and Fuldol Festival

Detailed report in April issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss*, pages 7-9.

27 March 2008, Sarangpur

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* for three BAPS *hari* mandirs in Raipur (district: Gandhinagar), Nirnaynagar and Chandlodiya (suburbs of Ahmedabad).

2 April 2008, Sarangpur

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

3 April 2008, Sarangpur

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandir in Navagam (Loliyana).

14 April 2008, Sarangpur

Swamishri celebrated the 228th Birthday anniversary of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Details on opposite page. ◆

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

PATIENTLY RESOLVING A DEVOTEE'S PROBLEM

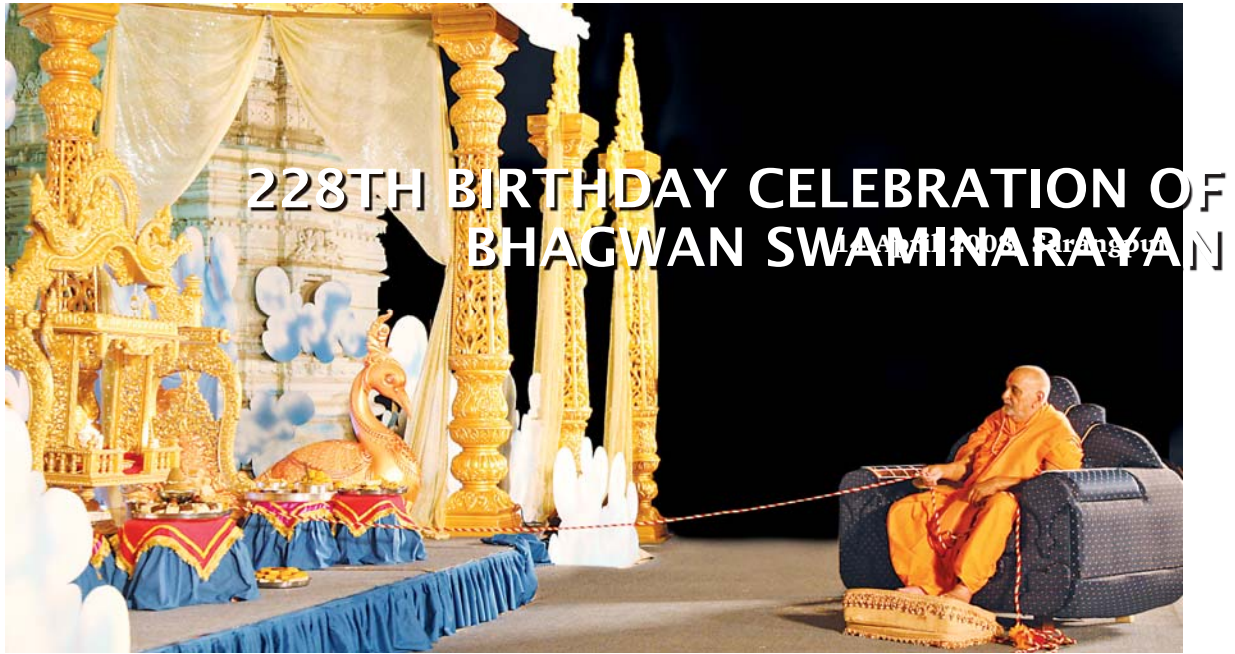
31 March 2008, Sarangpur

Swamishri was reading letters from devotees. Shri Natvarbhai Patel, a devotee of Panavada village of Sabarkantha district, had sent a note and site maps of his two farms. In his letter he had asked as to where he should bore the ground for water. After reading his letter and seeing the site maps Swamishri thought for some time. Before he could decide he was interrupted with a request to sanctify the newly built residential accommodations for devotees on the mandir precincts. Swamishri placed the letter

aside to sanctify the buildings.

On returning, Swamishri took the same letter in hand and read it again. Then Swamishri once again looked at the site map. The devotee had informed that the water level beneath one of his farm lands was nearly exhausted. He was drawing water from a common well on his second farm which was adjacent to his first one. Swamishri replied, "Since there is no water in his first farm, he should bore the ground around the common well (in his second farm)."

To resolve this seemingly minor problem, Swamishri patiently spent twenty minutes.



228TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

The 228th birthday celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan commenced in the evening, based on the central theme of Shriji Maharaj's infinite grace. It was held on the precincts of Sarangpur mandir with the entire mandir serving as the backdrop. The stage was decorated with ornate archways and pillars with a beautiful replica of a winged Akshar Deri in which the *utsav murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan showered divine grace upon all.

Ghanshyamcharan Swami elaborated upon the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj. Thereafter sadhus sang "*Premvati sut jāyo anupam...*" Viveksagar Swami spoke about the glory of the spiritual successors of Shriji Maharaj.

Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. Thereafter Swamishri inaugurated a publication on Shriji Maharaj's preachings, *Purushottam Boliyā Prite* compiled from Haricharitrाम्रुत्सगर by Aksharjivan Swami, an MP3 collection of bhajans sung by sadhus during the kirtan *aradhanas* performed between 1975 and 1981 and a DVD version of the film *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*. Thereafter a drama, 'Bhakta Sagram', written by Brahmaprakash Swami, was enacted by youths from Ahmedabad.

At 9.45 pm Swamishri commenced his blessings by appreciating the holy day to be the birth of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Bhagwan Shri Ram. Swamishri said, "The noble kingdom Ram had established, Ram *rajya*, can only be possible today if we dissolve our base instincts. Ram's life was full of virtues and that was why people respected him and countless worship him even today. All should take inspiration from his familial feelings and obedience to his father. Because of his father's order he lived in exile in the forest. Ram was polite, humble and caring towards his people.

"Only when one's base instincts get eradicated will Ram *rajya* dawn again on India. Shriji Maharaj said that one who lives a morally pure life and is wedded to *upasana* can experience happiness. God comes on earth to fulfil the wishes and love of his devotees. By so doing the devotees become attached to him and attain *ekantik dharma*."

In conclusion Swamishri performed *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj along with the entire assembly. Then Swamishri rocked the *hindolo* as sadhus sang bhajans in praise of Maharaj's birth and life, "*Dharma gher ānand bhayo...*" Thereafter senior sadhus rocked Thakorji on a decorated swing. At 10.15 pm Swamishri went to the mandir for Thakorji's darshan. An *annakut* had been arranged before Thakorji. Swamishri prayed for the good of all devotees and retired at 10.25 pm.

Rishubha Vala's Transformation



Rishubha Vala belonged to Talaja in Bhavnagar district.

Saurashtra is the land of the brave. His transformation at the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a saga. In the last days of his earthly existence, he had the privilege of being blessed by Swamishri.

Nothing is hidden from Swamishri. He knew that Rishubha's end was near, since he had been ailing for many days through old age.

On 13 March 2008 Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Bhavnagar to stay for five days. He remembered Rishubha two or three times because he had not come for darshan. On 17 March Swamishri called Kothari Somprakash Swami and told him, "Call Rishubha here. I would like to meet him. If he cannot come by himself, then send a car from the mandir. Send two sadhus to bring him. He can have the last darshan."

The next day, on 18 March, Rishubha was present at Swamishri's morning puja. On seeing him Swamishri was pleased. He not only blessed him but also garlanded him. Swamishri inquired about his health and assured him, "Now Shriji Maharaj will make you happier. Ramsang Bapu (his friend of Odarka village) is in the service of Shriji Maharaj. Similarly, Maharaj will take you to his abode and give you the benefit of his service. Now focus your thoughts on Maharaj."

Rishubha joined his palms before Swamishri. Then he returned home. He asked his son, Bhupendrasinh, to bring three *murtis* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He had two placed on both sides of his bed and the third put in front of him. Thereafter he began to chant the Swaminarayan mantra while all along engaging his mind on Swamishri.

Two days later, on the morning of 20 March, he told Bhupendrasinh to give him Swamishri's *murti*. He took the *murti* in his lap, and after having momentary darshan passed away to Akshardham. On learning of his departure Swamishri told his son, "Rishubha had served diligently. He is now in Akshardham."

Swamishri's visit to Bhavnagar seemed to have been to give final darshan and blessings to Rishubha. In the annals of Gohilvad the name of Rishubha will forever remain etched in golden letters as a story of epic transformation.

But, who was Rishubha Vala? How had he become a recipient of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's abundant grace and love?

Stories of chivalry and bravery abound in the land of Saurashtra, Gujarat. The sagas of brave Kshatriyas resonate and evoke a spirit of suspense, joy and pride whenever they are narrated at family gatherings. But among the heroic tales of Saurashtra there are many stories of moral transformation too. Over 200 years ago Bhagwan Swaminarayan had reformed many miscreants and dacoits through his divine persona. In the last three decades of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *vicharan* many have given up addictions and vices to lead a peaceful, charitable and righteous life.

One such monumental story is of Rishubha Vala of Talaja village.

Rishubha was popularly known as Sarkar, which means 'government'. His word was law. Even the Collector was not above it. Everyone

feared him. However his philanthropy was legendary. The poor, ailing and those with insoluble problems sought his refuge. But despite his selfless services he had a crippling weakness – addiction to alcohol! When he would drive drunk on the main street of Talaja all shutters of shops would be downed by the owners. No one would dare cross his path. People feared him when he was drunk.

Rishubha had two good friends – Nagrubha Gadhvi and a stationmaster in Bhavnagar. Both were worried about Rishubha's drinking bouts. One day they decided that the only way to reform him was to invite Pramukh Swami Maharaj to Talaja. They informed Rishubha of their intention, and the latter agreed to Swamishri visiting his house. Rishubha, however, felt that he had taken a vow not to drink several times before and continued drinking all the same. But his friends were resolute in bringing an end to it once and for all.

A few days later the two friends came to Rishubha and informed him that Swamishri was coming to Talaja the day after. Rishubha was surprised at the sudden arrival and asked what arrangements and rituals were to be performed by him.

“Bapu, nothing much needs to be done. Arrange a seat, *arti* and bring some fruits and flowers for Thakorji,” his friend explained.

“It is my good fortune that such a great sadhu will be coming to my house tomorrow,” Rishubha spoke with joy.

On 14 March 1979 (Fagan *vad* 1, VS 2036), Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Talaja at 4.30 pm. When Swamishri went to Rishubha's house, the latter was absent. When someone went to call him at his office, he was punch drunk and in deep slumber.

“Awaken Rishubha Bapu. Come, get up. Swamishri is waiting for you at your house. He has asked for you.”

Rishubha woke up startled, hurriedly washed his face and headed home. He stood on

the threshold of his house. Swamishri was sitting inside. On seeing Rishubha Swamishri called him affectionately, “Darbar, I have come to your house and why are you standing outside? Come inside.”

Rishubha replied, “Swami, I believe that when one's mouth reeks of alcohol, one should not approach a sadhu.”

Swami smiled and replied, “Darbar, do not think so. Come near and sit down. I have come specially to resolve your problem.”

Rishubha could not disregard Swamishri's soft, caring words. He came near and sat down. Swamishri continued, “The village folks speak highly of you and respect you for your charity and assistance. But when you get drunk all the homes and shops in the village close down. How grim it is! So, on my word give it up. Wear this *kanthi* and give up alcohol. Formerly Darbars used to give up their lives to uphold their pledges. Today, I want you to give me your word.”

Rishubha felt an inner churning and was touched by Swamishri's overwhelming divinity. At first he could not think of anything to say, but simply folded his palms. Then he said, “Swami, bless me! I will do as you say.”

The villagers looked on the occasion with disbelief and joy.

Rishubha held out his right palm to take the pledge. Swamishri poured a little water, made him take the pledge and placed a *kanthi* around his neck. Then Swamishri explained, “Darbar, today you have taken the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. All your sins have been destroyed. From henceforth do not take to any form of addiction and commit new sins.”

“Bapa, I give you my word. I shall not drink or smoke again. But, Bapa, today you will have to take dinner at my house. I will not allow you to go hungry.”

“But Darbar, today there is an eclipse. We have refrained from eating since several hours. We will definitely have lunch the next time we come here. I will fulfil your wish.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the sadhus accompanying him got up to leave. Rishubha walked with Swamishri to his car and bowed to him. When Swamishri's car left Rishubha felt, "Such a world-renowned and great sadhu has come to my house and if I do not obey his words, then there cannot be a greater fool than me."

Rishubha then went upstairs to the first floor of his house, and started smashing the stock of liquor bottles and glasses on the floor. When his wife rushed upstairs to see what was happening, Rishubha yelled at her, "This is no place for a woman. Go down immediately. I have pledged not to drink from today. When such a great sadhu has sanctified our house today, I am not going to drink ever again."

"But who will believe you. It is difficult for me to accept that you've given up drinking," said his wife.

"I leave it to you whether you want to believe it or not!"

Rishubha smashed all the liquor bottles. Then he went to his office. That day was Holi, a festival he usually celebrated in drunken revelry with friends. Soon his friends arrived. They offered drinks to Rishubha, "Bapu, we have brought special liquor for today's party."

"You'd better go away. When I tell you once, you must obey," Rishubha replied sternly.

"Sarkar, it seems you have drunk a lot more today than usual, because you do not know what you are saying."

"Why?"

"Because, you've never refused till now!"

"Today, a sadhu came to my house. Because of my pledge to him, I have said no to you all. Go and first smash the bottles outside, then you can come and I will tell you what happened."

His friends couldn't understand what had happened. They insisted that he join them. Finally Rishubha roared at them and they all ran away. They all left believing that because Sarkar had drunk a little more that day that was why he refused to join them and threw

them out.

Surprisingly, for the next two years, relatives and friends could scarcely believe that Rishubha had changed. People were skeptical about how a person like Sarkar could have given up alcohol and meat at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's bidding. Furthermore, not only did Rishubha remain firm in his pledge but he inspired others to give up their addictions. And so, thereafter, he became a recipient of Swamishri's abundant grace. Whenever Swamishri came to Bhavnagar he inevitably visited Talaja. In all, Swamishri had paid eight visits to Talaja. Rishubha often voiced how generously he had been graced by Swamishri, "Swamishri has a lot of love for me. Whenever I meet him he makes me sit before him and talks to me kindly. I feel very happy thereafter."

After becoming a *satsangi* Rishubha performed puja and *arti* daily. He would go for darshan to the mandir daily and attend the Sunday *satsang* assembly. He would arrive at 4.00 pm on Sundays and silently turn *mala* for one hour till the assembly commenced. In his later years, despite ailing health, he would climb the mandir steps for darshan and pay his respects to sadhus. He never spoke in a loud tone, addressed everyone with respect and never spoke about the faults of others. For many years he managed the mandir affairs of Talaja. Till the age of 75 years he used to go and ask for *jholi* on Uttarayan. He visited the neighbouring villages to spread Satsang. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was pleased by his devotion and zeal to uphold *satsang* in his life and inspire it in others.

Rishubha Vala's errant life was radically transformed through the *satsang* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He became an ideal devotee. All through his life he observed his pledge and faith and earned the immortalizing grace of Swamishri. Even today the land of Saurashtra has several such illustrious stories of transformation and inspiration.



PARENTS' MEET

29 March 2008, Johannesburg, South Africa

On Saturday 29 March 2008, around 120 parents and guests attended the Parents' Meet organized by the Bal-Balika Mandal of Johannesburg at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir.

The programme began with *balaks* singing prayers. This was followed by an audio-visual introduction on the Bal Mandal. A talk on 'Charitra and Sanskar' and a fun-filled drama (The Honest Thief) based on Yogiji Maharaj's parables were presented by the *balaks*.

The programme also included a presentation on Parent-Child Relationships, a cultural dance in which the stories of Prahlad, Shraavan and Dhruv were depicted, a speech on the benefits of and values children gain from participating



Balaks sing prayers during the Parents' Meet

in children's activities, and a quiz on the Mahabharat.

At the end *balaks* and *balikas* were presented awards for their achievements in the *mukhpath adhiveshan* that was held earlier in the year. ♦

BAPS CHILDREN VISIT ELDERLY RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES IN LONDON

12 April 2008

On Saturday 12 April 2008, children from the BAPS London Children's Forum, with the BAPS Community Care Team based at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, visited two elderly residential



BAPS children meet an elderly resident

homes in the Brent borough of London: The Mayfield and Carlton House. The children personally met and interacted with over 40 residents of various ethnic origins. This was an opportunity for the children to bridge the generation gap and implement communication skills they had been taught at the Mandir in

their Children's Forum classes. This event also helped inculcate the values of respect and consideration in the children, who clearly found it a very rewarding and enjoyable learning experience.

The children also sang bhajans and performed a traditional Indian cultural dance. The residents thoroughly enjoyed the performance and enthusiastically joined in the fun by clapping and playing musical instruments.

The BAPS Community Care Team has since been invited by the homes to make the visit a regular event. ♦



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR AND GUESTHOUSE INAUGURATION

12-13 April 2008, Jagannathpuri

Jagannathpuri, on the shores of the eastern state of Orissa, is considered one of the four 'dhams' of India. It is one of the most sacred places of pilgrimage for all Hindus.

On 11 June 2001, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a small mandir on the shores of the Indradyumna lake.

Then in 2004, a large plot of land was acquired and the groundbreaking ceremony was performed for building a mandir and guesthouse.

With the construction work nearing completion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for the new mandir on 19 December 2007 in Ahmedabad.

The *murtis* were then taken to Jagannathpuri for consecration.

On 12 April 2008, a Vedic *yagna* was held in the morning. In the afternoon the *murtis* were taken out in a colourful procession through the city streets.

The following day, Mahant Swami inaugurated the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and guesthouse. ◆

'AAP KI RASOI' MIDDAY MEAL FOR THE NEEDY

16 April 2008, New Delhi



The chief minister launches the Midday Meal project

Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir (BAPS), New Delhi, in association with the Delhi Government launched 'Aap ki Rasoi', a campaign to make Delhi hunger free, on 16 April 2008 at Nizamuddin Night Shelter.

It was inaugurated by Smt. Sheila Dikshit, ◆

Chief Minister of Delhi.

Hot food was served to 600 needy people, mainly women and children.

As there are a large number of destitutes who find it extremely difficult to get even one single meal a day, the Government of Delhi decided to provide meals to these people once a day in the afternoon.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir, is the first to start the programme in association with the Delhi Government.

The Chief Minister herself inspected and distributed lunch to many people.

Dr. Yoganand Shastri, Minister of Health, Family Welfare and Social Welfare (Delhi Government) and area Councillor were also present at the launch. ◆

BAPS NATIONAL SPONSORED FAMILY WALK & FUN RUN 2008

6 April 2008, UK



Participants run past the mandir



Walkers brave the cold and snow



Participants ranged in age from 4 to 90

Despite the bitter cold weather and heavy snow, the annual BAPS Sponsored Family Walk & Fun Run was successfully held at fourteen BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs and Centres around the UK on Sunday 6 April 2008. The year's event was held in conjunction with Diabetes UK, the largest organisation in the country working to improve the lives of people with diabetes.

The main walk in London commenced with a traditional opening ceremony in the Haveli of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden. The Chief Guest was Douglas Smallwood, Chief Executive of Diabetes UK. Other invited guests included Dawn Butler (MP for Brent South), Barry Gardiner (MP for Brent North) and the Mayor of Brent, Councillor Harshad Patel.

More than 3,200 participants, aged between 4 and 90, braved the cold weather to participate in the 10 km walk in London and thirteen other centres around the country: Ashton, Birmingham, Cardiff, Coventry, Havant, Milton Keynes, Leicester, Loughborough, Luton, Nottingham, Preston, Southend-on-Sea, and Wellingborough.

The event turned out to be an extremely enjoyable one for the whole family. It also proved hugely successful in raising funds for BAPS' multifarious charitable activities and Diabetes UK, as well as numerous local charities around the country. These included: the Children's Intensive Care Unit at the Leicester Royal Infirmary (Leicester); Acorns Children's Hospice Trust (Birmingham), which cares for life-limited children and their families; Baby Lifeline (Coventry), offering support to pregnant mothers and the newborn; and The Mayor's Welfare Trust (Loughborough). ◆

DR. ABDUL KALAM VISITS BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, TORONTO

19 April 2008



Dr Kalam performs abhishek of Shri Nilkanth Varni



Dr Kalam addresses the assembly

On Saturday 19 April 2008, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, former president of India, visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Complex in Toronto as part of his first trip to Canada.

Dr. Kalam was given a traditional welcome on his arrival at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir by Gnanpriya Swami and the Directors of BAPS Canada. Inside the mandir, Dr. Kalam paid his respects to the sacred *murtis* by offering flowers, after which Pujya Gnanpriya Swami explained the spirit of volunteerism of the Mandir. He also discussed the significance of the sacred *murti* of Nilkanth Varni, where Dr. Kalam joined him in offering prayers and *abhishek*.

Dr. Kalam was then guided through the Canadian Museum of Cultural Heritage of Indo-Canadians. As he entered the main Prayer Hall he was welcomed with a standing ovation by thousands of devotees and visitors.

In his address, Dr. Kalam expressed his honour in visiting this “beautiful temple” created with the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the dedication of volunteers, young and

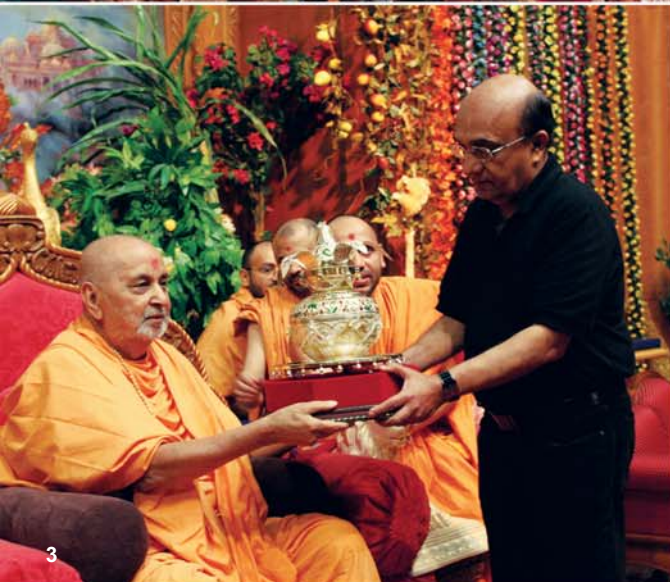
old. He spoke of the positive impact associated with BAPS and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “Whenever I have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj and visited various BAPS Swaminarayan temples around the world, I have noted righteousness in the heart of the devotees”

He concluded his speech by expressing his faith that BAPS would spread this message of righteousness across the world.

During a question-answer session, the children asked Dr. Kalam, “You have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj a few times, would you share your experiences and impressions with us.”

He replied, “I have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj nearly ten times. He loves human beings whether they are from India or Canada or any other part of the world. I learnt from him that along with material happiness, you also need a spiritual life for becoming an integrated human being to lead a happy human life.”

As he departed, he personally offered his best wishes to many of those gathered in the assembly. He also conveyed his respects to His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ◆



SWAMISHRI IN MUMBAI March 2008

1. Swamishri greets the devotees during morning darshan.
2. Devotees in Yogi Hall during the Sunday assembly.
3. Swamishri felicitates Dr. Ashwinbhai Mehta, a renowned cardiologist. Swamishri also felicitated Dr Hunda, Inspector General of Police Shri Barve, Dr K.N. Patel, Dr Kiran Doshi and Yogicharan Swami for their services during his medical treatment in Mumbai. (9-3-2008)

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