



SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

October 2008
Annual Subscription Rs. 60

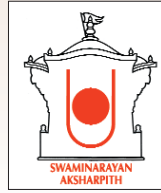
PRAYER

Importance and Benefits



SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN
August 2008

- 1 & 2. Shri Akshar Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bochasan.
3. Swamishri blesses devotees and youths on his way to Thakorji's darshan, Bochasan.
4. Youths perform a dance during the Raksha Bandhan Celebration, Anand-Vidyanagar (16 August).



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

October 2008, Vol. 31 No. 10

CONTENTS

1. *Swaminarayan History*
Shri Hari Cautions!4
Virtues more important than miracles...
2. *Prayer: Medical Science*
**Will Doctors Now
Prescribe 'Prayer'?**7
3. *Prayer*
Source of Strength10
4. *Prayer: Personal Experiences*
**Sincere Prayers
Are Always Answered**.....11
**Prayer: Food, Rest, Exercise,
for the Soul**12
**'Chant...!' Yogiji Maharaj Bestowed
a Bond With Prayer**13
**Prayer Amid Panic:
Real-life Experience**17
**Prayers: Helped to Obliterate
Heart Blockage**.....18
5. *Vicharan*
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan21
6. *Inspiring Incidents*
Living With Swamishri22
7. *BAPS News*
Bal-Balika India Trip 200823
India Experience 200823
UK National Karyakar Shibir 200824
**BAPS Charities Relief Aid for
Hurricane Ike Victims, USA**.....25
**BAPS Relief Work for Bihar
Flood Victims, Bihar, India**25

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 Aksharpath,
 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

In childhood our needs are basic and minimum: food, clothing and shelter. But as we grow we are influenced by our inner desires and expectations. Excessive desires and over expectations cause burden, pain and conflict. Cutting them down to proper size makes life easier, happier and hassle-free. It gives mental and emotional space to absorb distress, failure, insult, etc.

Life does not always work out the way we plan it to be. It is not straightforward, exact and trouble-free all the time because there are many factors and variables in play. For example, we suffer because of others, mistakes, when people are rude and stubborn, our computer breaks down, etc. By lowering our expectations we will be surprised with joy when things work out, and when they don't we will not be devastated.

Lowering expectations should not be misunderstood with lowering our standards of excellence and effort. It simply means accepting bad moods, mistakes, failures and glitches to be a part of life.

Over expectation is a sign of self-centredness. By reducing it we broaden our purview to include others. We learn to consider others, appreciate them, reward them and serve them. A shift from being self-centred to all-inclusive takes places. Arrogance gives way to humility, power dissolves into service and *dehbhav* is eradicated to unveil *atmabhav*, which is the core to an eternal and blissful life.

This is why we need daily prayer in life. This month's issue deals with the importance and benefits of praying to God. ♦

Shri Hari Cautions!

*Shriji Maharaj travelled to Visnagar
and was pleased with the chief
administrator Laldas' change of heart.
He blessed him and proceeded to
the village of Langhnoj...*



Maharaj then travelled to Meu and on to Langhnoj. There was a Hanumanji mandir there. Its large precinct was ideal to stay. But there was a *bawo*, endowed with magical powers, staying there. He was young and rotund. He had a *rudraksh mala* around his neck and a gold bracelet adorning his arm. The youthful *bawo* had won the confidence of the leader and other folks of the village through his magical powers. He had fulfilled the wishes of many women by giving them charmed amulets and strings. People would wash the soles of his feet with water and drink it. Such reverence and devotion from so many had buoyed him with joy and arrogance. All this toxicity was clearly reflected in his eyes and swagger.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to the Hanumanji mandir with his entourage with the purpose of residing there. The *bawo* got up and saw Shri Hari but he did not join his palms in

respect. He also saw Maharaj's sadhus, but their sterling saintliness made him flinch a little. He shot an uninviting and raw look at them. Shri Hari saw this and announced, "We cannot stay here. It belongs to the *bawo* with magical powers." On hearing this the *bawo* felt at ease. Maharaj stayed at another place in the village.

That evening many folks of the village came to Maharaj. They were naïve, unlettered and accustomed to seeing God only in those who showed extraordinary powers. They asked Maharaj, "People call you God. We will believe it to be so if you show us your divine powers." Shri Hari simply smiled at their words and replied, "I do not perform any miracles, but I abide by dharma and inspire others to do so. I encourage whoever comes to me to give up meat, liquor, adultery, stealing and other bad habits."

The village folks explained, "Maharaj, we have a *bawaji* staying at the Hanumanji mandir.

He performs a slew of miracles. He blesses women with sons. Our village chief has assigned all his family members to look after the *bawa*. His young daughter cooks food and serves him. Everyone serves the *bawaji* keenly.”

Shri Hari understood their expectation of him and replied, “My sadhus have renounced women and wealth, therefore they remain aloof. They do not know any magical spells and charms. Furthermore, it is magicians who perform magic and show miracles, but one should not be impressed and overwhelmed by them. Take the refuge of a true guru who has the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*.” Then Maharaj smiled and made a cautious, categorical remark, “Your *bawaji* has shown many miracles upto now. But he will perform a bigger miracle in a day or two. When that happens your eyes will open up to the reality of his nature.”

The village people left without understanding Shri Hari’s words. Maharaj stayed there for two days. The day he was to leave the *bawaji* ran away with the village chief’s young daughter. The chief sent his men in all directions to search for his daughter. Some of the village people came to Maharaj and said, “Maharaj, what you said the other day has come true. The *bawaji* has run away with the chief’s daughter. He has indeed shown us a bigger miracle!”

Maharaj reminded them, “That is why one must always see whether a guru possesses virtues prescribed by the shastras. Only one who has renounced money and women in eight-fold ways and offers *bhakti* and *upasana* with the belief that God is present on earth should be made a guru.”

Gangadas Suthar of Mansa arrived carrying fifty wooden eating bowls on his head. He placed them before Maharaj. Shri Hari was pleased with their quality and gave one each to Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and other

senior sadhus. “As we get more wooden bowls I shall give one to every sadhu. Look after them and don’t ever give them up. Never think of eating without your bowl.” Then Maharaj told the sadhus to proceed towards Karjisan. Shri Hari took two *parshads* with him and went to Dangarva at Jatanba’s house. But Jatanba was out to fill her pot of water. Shriji Maharaj looked up in the kitchen and saw a potful of milk suspended high from the ceiling. Maharaj told someone to bring it down. Then he drank a little and gave the rest to the *parshads*. Meanwhile Jatanba returned. On seeing Maharaj she was surprised and very pleased, “Maharaj, how come you are here? And you have emptied this vessel of milk!” She sent word to Brahmachari to prepare a meal for Maharaj. She desired that Maharaj should leave only after having a meal at her house. Shri Hari replied, “Our lunch is scheduled at Karjisan. I wanted to drink milk and it’s done. I ask for your leave.” The people of the village came to know of Maharaj’s arrival. Immediately Agraji, Amraji and others came to Maharaj. They offered *pujan* and *arti* and gifted him with a yellow shawl. Then Shri Hari departed for Karjisan. On arriving there he went to Nanabhai’s farmhouse. His farm had a luxuriant harvest of millet. Maharaj enquired, “Why have you not harvested your crop as yet?”

“Maharaj, Govindbhai (his brother) travels for *satsang* purposes so he gets no time for this. I’ll get it harvested later,” Nanabhai replied.

Brahmanand Swami told him, “You too travel for the spread of *satsang*. Whenever Maharaj travels in this region you travel with him.”

The next day, Nanabhai told a few Brahmin cooks to prepare a meal. Brahmachariji started making a meal for Shri Hari. Maharaj took the *parshads* and sadhus to the farm and harvested the five *vighas* of millet crop. Soon thereafter Govindbhai and Nanabhai came to the farm and they were surprised to see their crop harvested.

“Maharaj, what have you done?” they exclaimed.

“Service to two devotees,” Shri Hari replied smilingly. “Since you do not get time off from serving me I must serve you too.”

Govindbhai looked appreciatingly at Maharaj.

Shri Hari left Karjisan and travelled to Vadu, Pansar, Kalol and then towards Adalaj. The sadhus were waiting upfront. When they arrived at the narrow Kharisa pathway Maharaj observed a group of women walking a little distance ahead. But the sadhus in front of him continued in their stride. Maharaj indicated to them to slow down. But they failed to understand. When Nityanand Swami came Maharaj humorously told him to walk ahead. But Nityanand Swami understood and refrained from doing so. He stopped the sadhus from proceeding ahead further. When they arrived at Adalaj they settled down near the famous stepwell. Shri Hari sat on a cart. The sadhus prostrated to Maharaj and sat before him. Then Maharaj preached, “You have all renounced your homes, parents and relatives to please me. However, if you do not fully abide by the *niyams* I have given, then your asceticism will not remain intact. Today, I saw that you proceeded ahead disregarding our discipline. For whose darshan were you walking briskly? There were women ahead of you. Nityanand Swami understood what I said and he did not proceed ahead.”

Then Shri Hari told the sadhus to sing bhajans. Before the kirtans concluded many sadhus had unrolled their bedding and gone to sleep. Maharaj called Muktanand Swami and advised,

“I have gathered these sadhus to travel with me for my darshan, discourses and to benefit spiritually by doing *seva*. But after eating they take the benefit of sleeping. How much at loss they are! The senior sadhus should explain this to them. Without telling it is not possible to overcome lapses. If a sadhu does not obey the instruction of a sadguru then of what use is he? Therefore explain to them the purpose of their travelling with me.”

Muktanand Swami understood the purport of Shri Hari’s words. God comes to liberate all souls, but the aspirant has to understand his shortcomings and give them up. Then Muktanand Swami recollected Maharaj’s words when he had come to Adalaj earlier. “I wish to liberate souls equivalent to the number of mustard seeds that would fill up this stepwell. I have bathed here, hence whosoever bathes here, the oxen used for transporting stones for constructing the stepwell and any living thing that was crushed to death will be and have been liberated.”

Shri Hari and his sadhus bathed again in the stepwell.* Then Maharaj told Nishkulanand Swami to read the stone inscription.

Shri Hari travelled to Motera. Since he was banned from entering Ahmedabad (by the Suba) he camped at Motera to bless the devotees of the city and give them the benefit of his darshan and discourses.

(To be contd.)



Translation from *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*

by H.T. Dave

*In the kingdom of Sultan Mummmad Begda the queen of Virsinh Vaghela and the daughter of King Ven, Rudbai, built the stepwell in 25 January 1499 (Magh *sud* 5, Samvat 1555). It is unparalleled in beauty and intricate carvings in the whole of Gujarat. The stone inscription says that Rudbai (Rudande) was the queen of Dandahi (Dandhavya) region and wife of Virsinh Vaghela. She had constructed the stepwell for the liberation of her husband. The stepwell was built at a cost of 500,000 *tanka* i.e. Rs. 166,700. The entire inscription is written in Sanskrit except for the last three lines that are in Gujarati. (*Adalajni vavno shilalekh*, a monthly of Gujarat Vidyasabha.)

Will Doctors Now Prescribe

'PRAYER' ?

Excerpts from Gujarati article by Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas

Where in the entire universe since the dawn of human civilization did the first phenomenon of prayer resonate? In the lap of the Himalayas, on the banks of Saraswati and in Rig Vedic Bharat, at least 10,000 years ago.

"The oldest of all the known ancient records" is how the renowned philosopher and historian, H.P. Blavatsky, describes the Rig Veda, the most ancient of all documented records. "Please study them," is her exhortation to the scholars of the world.¹

When the German scholar Friederich Max Müller read the invocations and prayers in the Rig Veda he was overwhelmed. The erudition and prayers in the Upanishads made the German philosopher Schopenhauer indebted to India perennially. He stated, "In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, and it will be the solace of my death."²

Not only the Vedas, but a detailed analysis reveals an extensive list of such 'prayer literature'. The compilation of the 18 Purans is, essentially, an epic compilation of prayers: such as, the invocation by Gajendra and King Rantidev's prayer. In addition to the prayers of the Rig Veda or the Yajur Veda, the Ishavasya Upanishad or Shrimad Bhagvat, the Mahabharat or Ramayan, there are the prayers of saints and devotees hailing from every region of India: Surdas and Kabir, Rahim and Rohidas, Mirabai and Ganasati, Muktanand Swami and Premanand Swami, and countless others.

In this sacred land the prayer by King Rantidev is a matchless historical lesson on benevolence. And the prayers of Bhagwan Swaminarayan when he was instated by Ramanand Swami as the Head of the Sampraday are the pinnacle of compassion.

These prayers have given rise to a unique identity to India: "India, the land of prayers!" How true it is indeed that India is the land of prayers and that prayer is an invaluable asset of the Indians.

But the question remains: how many of these prayers are



remembered by the new generation of Indians. Aren't they oblivious of them?

The custom of prayer at the start of the day in schools and colleges in India is on the decline. It has been discontinued in many schools and colleges and for these modernized Indians, these profound prayers are replaced by the vulgar offerings of the TV.

Such disregard for prayer will be ill-affordable in the future. The loss of this bountiful inheritance of prayer bequeathed to us spells disaster. Since, the hurricane of change and modernization engulfing the world has claimed the life of prayer!

Yet there is still hope for the revival of prayer, for even in America despite the widespread materialism, prayer is still a part of life for the large majority.

Over the past century, many Western countries have endeavoured to link prayer and science. Alexis Carrel, the French doctor and Nobel Laureate, affirms having personally witnessed that prayer has healed facial bruises, injuries to the body, cancer, ailments in the urinary tracts and tuberculosis. Prayer, he opines, is an unfailing remedy.³

In response to a *Time* magazine article on 10 October 2004 titled "Can Prayers Heal", the Associate Professor of the Nursing Dept. at Rutgers University, states, "Who says that the research on prayer is not connected with science? I did research wherein I employed prayer and other forms of treatment to cancer patients. Keeping in view the patient's faith, the resulting changes were recorded. I came to the realization that the ailment had conspicuously diminished more in patients who accepted the prayer inclusive therapy than those patients who had a therapy without prayer. In cases of stroke, AIDS, deteriorating kidney ailments and several other

incurable diseases researchers have also attained similar results through their studies."

Dr Herbert Benson is the departmental director and an eminently versatile cardiologist-scientist of the world famous Harvard University. He has conducted research on prayer and health and this research has triggered an extensive discussion in America. In his book, *The Relaxation Response*, Herbert Benson provides reflections on prayer and meditation which have surprised the scientific world. With the support of Harvard Medical College and other medical institutions he used prayer and meditation therapy for 1,802 patients who underwent their heart bypass surgery.

In the E-magazine *Harvard University Gazette*, published by the Harvard University, Dr Benson says that from the Upanishads to modern prayer recitations, the concept of breaking of the train of everyday thought to gain a sense of calm is a worldwide phenomenon.⁴

Many eminent medical scientists and renowned medical organizations are conducting research on the effects of prayer on health.

In fact 84 of the 125 medical colleges in America have already introduced 'Philosophy – Health and Prayer' into their curriculums.⁵

In 1995, the reputed *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) published a study by the National Institute of Healthcare Research showing the beneficial effects of prayer on health.⁶ The article described a series of 12 surveys since 1930 by Gallup Poll on prayer and health. Commenting on these surveys George Gallop Jr. said that many Americans consider prayer as an important part of their lives, that prayers lead to miracles by God and that prayer gives them a feeling of proximity to God. He added that people accept that prayer does have a beneficial effect on health.⁷

The paper also describes the experience of Dr. Jeffrey S. Levine, Associate Professor at Eastern Virginia Medical School (Norfolk) who states that in 22 out of 27 studies on patients

with heart disease, cancer, tuberculosis and suicidal tendencies there have been favourable outcomes due to prayer.⁸

Professor Dr. Harold Konning of North Carolina Durham University Medical Center revealed that over 50 studies throughout America have shown that heart and diabetic patients who prayed had better outcome to treatment and less likelihood of depression.⁹

At the end of the paper the author, C. Marwick writes, "Spirituality and religion have important health benefits and more detailed studies using more accurate measures of this are warranted. The question today is not whether there are health benefits, it is how these benefits can be obtained. We can no longer afford to neglect this important clinical variable."¹⁰

A 1999 paper in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* revealed that 90% of patients had faith that prayer would help them in their illness and 94% wished that doctors also incorporated prayer and spirituality in the care of patients.¹¹

An article in the *New York Times* stated the opinion of physicians that 'the medicine of the future is going to be prayer.'¹²

The statements of these patients and doctors was experienced many centuries ago by devotees like Mirabai, who remained unaffected by poison due to her prayers.

The poisonous effect of the cobra that bit Yogiji Maharaj was negated by prayer in the Akshar Deri. Countless people have benefitted from the prayers of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, sadhus and devotees.

A leading scientist of the twentieth century, Dr. Charles Steinmetz, stated, "I think the greatest discoveries will be made along spiritual lines. Someday people will learn that material things do not bring happiness and are of little use in making men and women creative and powerful. Then the scientists of the world will turn their laboratories over to the study of God and prayer and the spiritual forces which, as yet, have been hardly scratched. When that day

comes, the world will see more advancement in one generation than it has seen in the last four."

The most important factor in prayer is to have faith and to unconditionally surrender at the feet of God.

Once, a French soldier who had lost a leg in battle, entered a place of worship. Someone sarcastically commented, "So you think that by praying here God will give you a new leg!" The soldier calmly replied, "I know that God will not give me a new leg, but he will give me the strength to live as if I did have one."

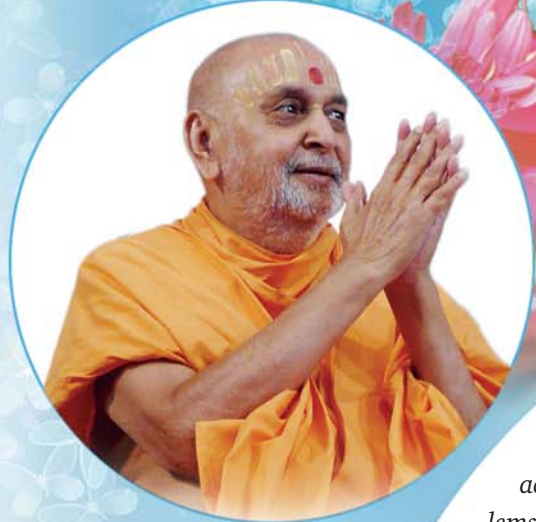
Prayer should be an integral part of one's life. Shri Ramkrishna Paramhansa once said, "It is natural, in fact, desirable to inform God of our joys and sorrows. Just like a husband and wife confide in each other, we should confide in God. At least once a day, we should open our heart out to him in prayer. This will certainly purify the mind. There is no doubt."

Much has been written on the benefits of prayer, yet many still do not use it. Only by sincerely engaging in daily prayer will one personally experience and benefit from its effects. It is important to develop a habit of praying and also to encourage all members of one's family to pray for each other. This will result in benefits for everyone.



1. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, The Theosophical Publishing House, USA, 2003. v.2, p. 606).
2. *Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 1, The Upanishads*, translated by Max Müller; Introduction, p. lxi.
3. Quoted in *Kalyan*, January 1935, p. 429.
4. 4 March 2004.
5. Fortuin A.H. Medical School Curricula in Spirituality and Medicine. *JAMA* 2004;291:2883
6. Marwick C. Should Physicians Prescribe Prayer for Health? Spiritual Aspects of Well-being Considered. *JAMA* May 24/21, 1995;273, No. 20:1561-1562.
7. *ibid.* 8. *ibid.* 9. *ibid.* 10. *ibid.*
11. King DE, Bushwick B. Beliefs and Attitudes of Hospital Inpatients About Faith Healing and Prayer. *J Fam Pract* 1994;39:349-352.
12. Sides H. The Calibration of Belief. *New York Times Magazine*. Dec. 7, 1997:92-5.

Source of Strength



Amid the extremes of materialism man has forgotten the basic supports of life. Consequently, he invites more problems, causing deeper pain and agony day by day. But a devotee who abides by the spiritual legacy according to the guidance of a guru experiences bliss despite problems. It is because of one powerful support: prayer.

Prayer is an essential spiritual endeavour. It is a unique period of communion with God. Through prayer a person meets God and acquires solutions to material and spiritual problems.

In particular, one piece of guidance by Pramukh Swami Maharaj is worth remembering. On 5 December 1986, he had told a scholarly South African priest, "A saint is invariably touched by the sorrow of a devotee. He feels for the devotees, shares their sorrows, and gives them consolation, he prays for them, and so their sorrows and burdens are lightened. Even a great person (God-realized) suffers sorrow. All have a physical body and so sorrow is inescapable. Therefore, one has to endure sorrow. Sorrow is there to stay but a guru bestows strength to a person through prayer. Our scriptures and philosophy teach precisely that."

In 1990 Swamishri was in Akola, where he said, "In times of sorrow pray peacefully and patiently. You will get strength to tolerate."

Prayer is a divine and extraordinary experience. It is impossible to describe in words the experience resulting from prayer; but this issue of Swaminarayan Bliss is a humble attempt to capture its importance, necessity and effects. The articles are translations from the Gujarati version that appeared in Swaminarayan Prakash, March 2007.

Appreciations to Gajendra Inamdar and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas for the translations.



Sincere Prayers Are Always Answered

Mahant Swami

Question: Can you describe an incident where you have prayed and the prayer was answered?

Answer: God unfailingly listens to every prayer. But a few manifest and can be witnessed. Shamjibhai (Shamji Ada) hailed from Gadshisha, a village in Kutch, but Mumbai had become his longstanding place of residence. His daughter was to give birth to a baby, but her doctors had predicted severe complications. Birth by caesarean operation was the safest, but still risky, option. Shamjibhai requested me to pray and I had prayed very very heartily to Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami. And prayer bore fruit. Without any operation or jeopardy a healthy child was naturally born, to the surprise of even the doctors.

Question: Does prayer ever fail?

Answer: Heartfelt prayers invariably come true. However, even intensely offered prayers may fail. But, even in such circumstances some good is ingrained.

Normally, I pray daily to God to resolve the problems and worries of the devotees. About 45% of the prayers come true. But, actually, it is my conviction that prayers come true 100% of the time. A prayer may have apparently failed, but it does surely come true. God is the all-doer and he does everything for the good of an individual only. Character is nurtured by gruelling tests. A prayer is only fulfilled if it is beneficial for the *jiva*. And if a prayer is not fulfilled, that

too, is for the good of the *jiva*. This is the true understanding.

Heart bypass surgery entails cutting the chest into two pieces. It causes scars on the skin and other difficulties. How troublesome! Yet, to rescue one from death it is obligatory. In the same way liberation of the soul is of utmost priority. If the material benefit is gained in the process, then fine. But what's the use if the body were to gain and the *jiva* to lose!

Similarly, a prayer may seem unfulfilled because the result does not match one's expectations. But God's wish may be altogether different. He wishes for the *jiva* not to lose but to gain. And the prayer will bear fruit in that way.

It is my conviction that a prayer never goes in vain. If the body does not benefit from prayer then the *jiva* certainly will. Maharaj blessed Dada Khachar fourteen times that his land issue be favourably settled. Yet it was not. But, in fact, this apparently negative outcome was in his benefit, since acquisition of the land would have caused waning of affection for the Lord. Even the slightest decline in attachment to God would have been costlier than the gains of acquiring the land.

Once in Purushottampura-Radhu Ashabhai's house caught fire. "Your sins are burnt!" quipped Shastriji Maharaj. "Otherwise love for God would have declined." And so from the perspective of testing staunchness, building of character and life, blessings and prayers have

certainly borne fruit.

In case prayers go unfulfilled, one should still believe that it is beyond our comprehension.

I knew nothing about prayer in my school days. We prayed in the school church. In spite of knowing the miracles and benefits of prayer I never paid attention to it.

I feel very very grateful to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swami and thank them that I am able to pray for the happiness of devotees. Such prayers arise naturally. Due to attachment to them I feel their pain and joy. Prayer for them emanates spontaneously. I know that God's will shall prevail. Nevertheless I don't resort to wisdom. Knowledge and matters of character and life take a back seat. Prayer just

*Work as if you
were to live a
hundred years.
Pray as if you
were to die
tomorrow.*

- Benjamin Franklin

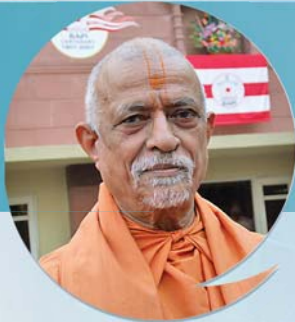
pours out, "Shriji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, please cure the devotees of their sorrows."

Only 45 per cent are fulfilled. Yet I don't lose heart. I pray but never sulk or challenge God's will. Whatever God does will always be good. I believe that he is the most benevolent of all.

If a prayer is not fulfilled, I believe that it has protected me in other ways. Perhaps, fulfilment of the prayer may have boosted the ego or caused

digression from the path of Ekantik Dharma.

I pray with confidence for devotees and others. For myself it is always according to the commands of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatit Sadhus. Never otherwise. ◆



Prayer:

Food, Rest, Exercise for the Soul

Dr. Swami

Prayer is food for the soul. We understand what food for the body is, but are oblivious of the food for the soul which is the life-giving force within the body.

Prayer is respite for the soul. Just as we need rest when the body suffers fatigue so does the *jiva* within needs rest when it gets tired. That rest is derived from prayer.

Prayer is exercise for the soul. People do exercises to keep physically fit and become

stronger. Similarly, prayer is a means to keep the soul spiritually fit and make it stronger.

Prayer bathes the soul. Just as bathing cleanses the body of dirt and infuses it with freshness, prayer cleanses the soul of impurities and invigorates it. Certain impurities are invisible, like the infinitesimal dust particles in the air which accumulate on the body during daytime. So, the body has to be cleaned everyday. What would happen if that cleansing is not done for a couple of days? Similarly, impurities

somehow do gather inside the soul through listening, seeing, reading, writing and other activities of daily life. We are made aware of this contamination of the soul by prayer and it is prayer which is the means to clean it.

Prayer is an infinite power. Prayer gives strength to the soul. Prayer is necessary to complete any work nicely. It energizes. After all, what is the strength of a man? It is limited, like the water of a shallow well. If you place an electric motor in the well you would quickly run the well dry. However, if you drill deep and build a tunnel to link the well with Lake Victoria and then install a pump, the well would never be exhausted of water. Similarly, prayer links us with God. God's power is infinite. Prayer taps into the infinite power of God, infusing us with the energy and ability to succeed in life.

Prayers are not always answered immediately. A prayer may or may not be answered today. Some may be answered tomorrow or after a year or even after many years. It depends upon the intensity with which the prayer is offered. But no prayer ever remains unanswered. Many people have experienced this.

Every religion of the world places great importance in prayer. Prayer is often an intrinsic part of the treatment of patients in many hospitals. Relatives of patients pray for their recovery. Specialists in prayer are appointed to guide the patients and their relatives in prayer. Scientists now also acknowledge the power of prayer.

A short while before the launch of the rocket to the moon, a press reporter asked the chief scientist, "What is the launch time?" The scientist said, "Eleven o'clock, sharp." The reporter then asked, "What preparations are left?" The scientist said, "Nothing, nothing. We are all set.

*Prayer
is not asking.
It is a longing
of the soul.
It is daily
admission of
one's weakness.
- Mahatma Gandhi*

Everything is ready, but we are now praying that we do not fail in this mission."

Prayer provides strength for success in any work.

Prayer is offered with various objectives. It could be for one's own or someone's sorrows and problems. It is not always to ask for something. Confessing one's faults to God and mentally seeking forgiveness is yet another form of prayer. If one errs in the act of praying, but confesses them

before God, God forgives those mistakes. If one has offended a person but apologizes to him then a gentleman would surely grant forgiveness. If a gentleman can forgive then God obviously forgives.

The solution to all problems is prayer to God.

Our obligations to God are just uncountable. To reminisce upon these obligations with sincere feelings of gratitude is also a form of prayer. We should thank God for everything he has bestowed upon us. We are grateful to someone who provides food, clothes or extends some favour to us. So, isn't it appropriate that we daily thank God, thus: "I exist because you are the support of my life. I was able to survive the past 24 hours because of your support." We should thank God, the saviour and life-giver.

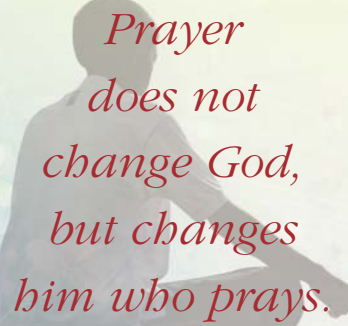
Students should pray for such strength, intelligence and good company that would enable them to excel in studies and lead a virtuous life that would please Maharaj and Swami. God has infinite intelligence, so pray to God for intelligence.

In worldly matters and *satsang* certain problems are very delicate. How should they be resolved. Through prayer, God will pave a way.

Abraham Lincoln prayed even during war! One such story was cited in the *Readers' Digest*.

During the War the soldiers were baffled and couldn't decide whether to surrender or forge ahead. They consulted Abraham Lincoln, who studied the situation; but he, too, couldn't think of a solution. He said, "Wait, my intelligence cannot fathom the solution. I shall pray and convey the outcome to you. That answer (to the prayer) shall prevail." And after Lincoln had prayed an inspiration came from within that the army should march onward, "Do not surrender, fight unto the end, there is no retreating." He conveyed this to the generals and ultimately the war was won.

Man can achieve much more through prayer than can be imagined. Pray to arrive at important decisions in your work. Pray daily in factories and in the office. Assign 5, 10 or upto 15 minutes to prayer. I am familiar with a few industrialists in whose daily schedule prayer is unfailingly included. They begin work only after prayer is offered by all members of the staff. The daily 8-hour work schedule of all the staff includes 10 minutes of prayer in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening. The impact has been such that in these factories not a single person has an addiction. It is true that the progress of the factory is dependent on good machines. But you also need good people to run these machines well. If the life of a person is well-oiled, stable and peaceful, and if they harbour good thoughts, then such a machine-operator will work well. One machine may do the work of 50 ordinary people, but no machine can do the work of even one extra-ordinary person. This is the result of prayer.



*Prayer
does not
change God,
but changes
him who prays.*

- Soren Kierkegaard

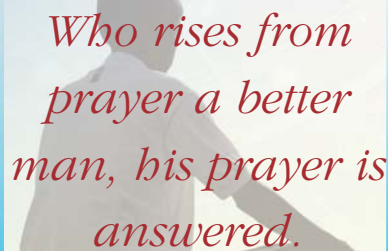
– the forms of *maya*. The biggest obstacles on the spiritual path are ego and attachment. One should pray for protection from them. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I-48, Maharaj has asked to pray seeking protection from the four kinds of evil company.

Prayer is like a telephonic link with God. One has to learn how to dial it. The first requisite is staunch allegiance to the deity one worships. One who has the unshakeable faith that Shriji Maharaj is Supreme God will be able to link up with him to pray. With such faith one may directly connect with God from anywhere. Such is the vital importance of *nishtha*. Outwardly everyone may appear to be doing the same thing. It is not difficult to fold the hands, shut the eyes or repeat words. Everyone can do so. But what happens within is a different matter altogether. The efficacy of an individual's prayer is directly proportionate to the extent to which he is staunchly aligned to the God he worships.

Prayer does the work of eradicating internal vices, base natural instincts, desires and ignorance.

Praying thus before God would instill inspiration and strength in a person.

However, remember that a prayer offered now may not be immediately answered, but it is a 100% fact that it will have an effect. ◆



*Who rises from
prayer a better
man, his prayer is
answered.*

- George Meredith



'Chant...!'

Yogiji Maharaj Bestowed a Bond With Prayer...

Sadhu Ishwarcharandas

Yogiji Maharaj embedded in us the glory of prayer from our very childhood.

To him prayer meant chanting of the divine Swaminarayan *mahamantra dhun*.

Even after all these years the vision of him engrossed in prayer and chanting *dhun* is still fresh in my mind: his eyes closed, face tilted slightly downwards, hands clapping, body, mind and his entire existence merged into the form of Shriji Maharaj, and every breath resonating with the melodious sound of 'Swaminarayan... Swaminarayan' – filling the atmosphere with sublime spirituality.

The proximity of Yogiji Maharaj in such an atmosphere forever bonded us to prayer.

My first experience of his divine prayer and *dhun* dates back to around 1949-50 in Mumbai. Shastriji Maharaj had stayed at Gulzarilal Nandaji's bungalow in Mumbai for two months and had celebrated the Bhim Ekadashi festival. The devotees of Africa had come to benefit from his spiritual company. At the rear of the bungalow, facing the sea, was a small room especially for puja. Yogiji Maharaj would regularly perform *arti* there and would make us young children sit with him in front of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and sing the *dhun* for about three-quarters of an hour. I have a faint memory that we felt as if we were compelled into singing the *dhun*. But his affection was such that we could not but sit! We children branded this *dhun* as 'giant'! Since, who would pray for so long everyday. But that

first experience of Yogiji Maharaj's *dhun* has been etched in my mind forever.

The 1950s touring in the company of Yogiji Maharaj exposed us to prayer and *dhun* which were quite a special experience. Wherever he was, in mandirs or in the villages, it was his routine to get everyone to sing the *dhun* in chorus daily after the evening *arti*. He prayed at every opportunity, laying the burden of any work – whether big or small – at the feet of Thakorji. He chanted the *dhun* and prayed patiently and persistently until the task was accomplished. He never tired, and just persevered in his typically enthusiastic style. Whether the question concerned an individual, a family, society, an institution, the nation or the world, Yogiji Maharaj had but one eternally powerful and universally applicable means – *dhun*. He would naturally say, "Sing the *dhun*."

A few memories are fresh in my mind. The devotees of Mumbai wished to acquire a hall for their *satsang* assemblies. So, every year when he visited Mumbai and stayed at Kapol Vadi for about 21 to 24 days he would offer *dhun* every evening so that "the hall would soon take shape." Many would therefore wittily ask, "Bapa are you are wishing to get a hall for singing the *dhun*?" Meaning, that neither was there a hall coming up nor was there an end to the *dhun* anywhere in sight! But his confidence and faith would never diminish. As a result of his prayers and *dhun*, the Akshar Bhavan was acquired. Since then it has blossomed into a magnificent

mandir, with a splendid *satsang* auditorium. There are also several *hari* mandirs in the suburbs of Mumbai. In the same fashion Yogiji Maharaj offered prayers and *dhun* for many years that 51 educated youth become sadhus.

A record of every big or small work for which Yogiji Maharaj offered prayers and *dhun* is memorable too. For example, prayer would be offered for rains during a season of scanty rainfall; and in case of a flood it would be for cessation of rains. All the sadhus and devotees would also recite the *dhun* according to his wish. At the old Smruti Mandir of Shastriji Maharaj (in Sarangpur) *dhun* would be chanted to pray that a beautiful mandir be built there and a *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj be consecrated there. When he visited the shrine where Maganbhai was cremated in Uganda, Africa, he chanted *dhun* that Satsang develops and mandirs be built in Toro, Jinja, Kampala and other places.

He regularly performed *dhun* for the inception of Youth Forums in big cities. He constantly offered prayer and *dhun* for all, that sadhus and devotees attain Ekantik Dharma and that everyone develops *samp*, *suhradhaybhav* and *ekta*.

When he visited the sacred places of the Sampraday, he would not fail to offer prayers and *dhun*, encouraging everyone present to join in chorus. In Vartal mandir he would devoutly sing *dhun* in front of the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. After darshan and circumambulations in the old mandir at Bhoivada in Mumbai Yogiji Maharaj would chant the *dhun*. After the darshan of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj in the Rangmahol at Kalupur mandir in Ahmedabad he would sit before the *sukh-shaiya*, briefly talk of God's glory and then sing *dhun*.

A *dhun* at the birthplace of Shastriji Maharaj

*In times of
misery, pray.
The misery will
disappear. Pray,
'O Maharaj!
O Swami!
Please help me.'*
- Yogiji Maharaj

in Mahelav was a must. Before Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Sarangpur, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj in Gondal and in the Akshar Deri (memorial shrine to Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami in Gondal) he immersed himself in *dhun*. He would sit in front of the Akshar Ordi in Gadhada and sing *dhun*.

In those days work was in progress under the sacred mango tree at Lakshmi Vadi

in Gadhada. Marble had been laid on the floor, but there were problems completing the roof. Whenever he visited Gadhada he would pray that the roofing be completed quickly. Similarly, he would remember to pray that the sanctified rooms of Shriji Maharaj in Karyani should be securely and permanently well covered. Thus, he would be anxious that the Sampraday's sacred places be well maintained and for this he wholeheartedly sang the *dhun*.

He prayed for many years for completion of the railway stations in Chhapaiya, and for a road and mandir in Gunatitnagar (Bhadra). He took such deep interest in and offered sincere prayers at every step. His prayers and *dhun* eventually succeeded. In his final years he would sing *dhun* so that a pinnacled mandir be built on the banks of the River Yamuna.

He sang the *dhun* so that mandirs would be built in Kolkata, Chennai and other cities. All those resolutions have materialized today. Of all these varied incidents one involving Haka Bapu remains immemorable. Once, in Gondal, the young Haka Bapu saw Yogiji Maharaj performing *mahapuja* in the Akshar Deri and heard him sing *dhun* for three prayers: may the number of sadhus increase, may Satsang flourish and may *seva* increase. Haka Bapu would laugh and joke that Yogi Bapa is dreaming since there is not the

slightest sign of these wishes coming true! So, one day he talked it over with Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj said, "Hakabhai, this Yogi is an eternal Yogi. His wishes are fulfilled and his words come true. His form is so divine that Swami-Shriji must concede to his wishes. You will yourself witness the fulfilment of his resolutions."

When Haka Babu witnessed how the power of Yogiji Maharaj's *dhun* and prayers had spread worldwide, he exclaimed, "That the Satsang has

*Prayer is the
atma's strength.
By prayer and
sincere effort suc-
cess and peace
are attained.*

*- Pramukh Swami
Maharaj*

flourished throughout the country and the world is all due to the power of Yogiji Maharaj's prayers and *dhun*. I stand witness to it."

This legacy of *dhun* and prayer bestowed by Yogiji Maharaj has been sustained by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

That panacea of *dhun* and prayer popularized by Yogiji Maharaj continue to have profound impact even today. For every occasion, grand or small, those sweet words tinged with his memories pour out of the heart, "Sing the *dhun*!" ♦



Prayer Amid Panic: Real-life Experience

Han Kop

The single most dramatic experience of my life happened in May of 1972. Actually, it was a series of events from my first encounter with the Swaminarayan Sanstha in Mombasa to a short stay in the Mumbai mandir and my first contact with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Gondal. The culmination of the effects of these visits took place in a remote place in Karachi off the coast of Pakistan. I was on my way back home to Holland enjoying the cool breeze and waters of the Arabian Sea. Local children had brought car tubes to float on. But they lost them to the wind. Feeling sorry for them I swam into the sea to retrieve their tube. I sat on it for a few minutes, out of breath.

The very moment I decided to slowly paddle back to the beach, which was a good 1,000 feet away, I saw a shark right in front of me. At first I froze from fear, then tried to lift my body out of the water. Failing to do so I started panicking and had visions of being eaten alive. The shark was clearly visible and my fearful mind had made it into a huge monster. Suddenly I remembered Swamiji and his last words before I had taken his leave: "Do not forget us!" he had said. This was the moment of truth for me. I experienced the strongest recollection of his presence.

He occupied my mind. The image of Swami Bapa, his face and eyes exactly as I had known them stayed with me. In fact I saw nothing else.

With my mind floating and my panic gone I was able to make the right decision. I jumped into the waves and swam back to the shore in record-breaking time. There and then I thanked Swamiji for having become my lifeline. I believed it to be a miracle of sorts, but perfectly acceptable and explicable.

The experience itself was a down-to-earth one. I was out there, scared to death, alone and desperate, with a strong sense of survival. I had nothing to grasp on to, nowhere to run away to and the engulfing presence of the shark and the ocean had minimized my chances of survival. Swamiji's all-encompassing protective power had felt supernatural. And a change had taken place within me on the spiritual level, something which for a Westerner is not easy to understand or

*Prayer
is the spirit
speaking truth
to Truth.
- Philip James Bailey*

accept. I had greatly felt Swamiji's closeness, experienced the conviction of his saving love. I have chosen – if choice is the right word – for Pramukh Swami Maharaj to be my guide, to lead me on to that path of conscience necessary for spiritual progress. In other words, he is the only person capable of transforming my life. Through this incident, more than 35 years ago, he has reached out, given his hand to me and I have grasped it. His touch has changed me. His words have carved my thoughts and his love has touched my soul.

The voiceless prayers which filled my mind when confronted by the shark were answered by Swami Bapa and have changed the course of my life.



Prayers:

Helped to Obliterate Heart Blockage

Dr. Indrapalsingh Kalra
(Cardiologist, New Delhi)

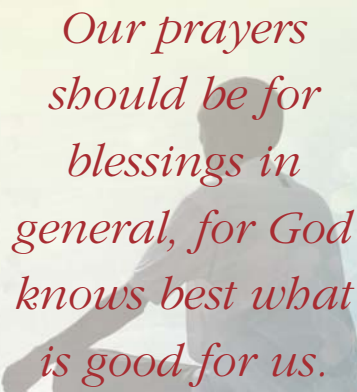
God alone is the all-doer. Nothing is in the hands of man. Man must have absolute confidence in God and must surrender to God's wish. Nevertheless he must pray and endeavour sincerely. God would then surely shower his grace on him. It is necessary, however, that his life be pure and heart absolutely clean as proposed by God. This is my own experience of prayer.

The story dates back to the 1970s. In spite of the demise and loss of my father and three brothers I had joined the Indian Air Force. As a medical specialist my duties were those of a squadron leader. My family was quite big; in addition to the brothers, there were eight sisters. The huge burden of a big family bore heavily on me. Yet my elder brother suggested that I continue working in the Air Force. He was

very proud of it. He had reassured me of sustaining the huge family and its responsibilities but at the tender age of 34 years he passed away. This heralded a deluge of ordeals in my life.

I resigned from the Air Force so that I could support my family and begin a career as a cardiologist. A short time afterwards, in 1979, my wife was diagnosed with cancer. The pressure of the responsibilities and circumstances was too much for me. Once, at 3.00 am, intense pain gripped my chest. It was angina! I consulted the renowned heart surgeon Dr Naresh Trehan who had flown in to Delhi from New York. He asked me to go to New York for treatment. The expenses would be high and place the family under financial strain. My nephews and my children were still young. Also, doctors at the Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York reviewed my wife's reports and concluded that there was no better alternative to the treatment she was already undergoing.

The problem of pain everyday in the early hours was too perturbing. I discussed my case with the eminent cardiologist Dr M.L. Bhatia at the renowned All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and he said that coronary angiography was necessary. Dr S.C. Manchanda, a renowned cardiologist, had just returned to Delhi from Australia where he had acquired advanced training. My wife and I had a candid, detailed, heart-to-heart talk with him. The outcome was a decision that both of us would undergo treatment here in India. I underwent an angiog-



*Our prayers
should be for
blessings in
general, for God
knows best what
is good for us.*

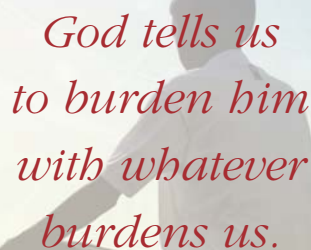
- Socrates

ing on God and praying, the body and mind are cured of diseases.

This touched me. During the *brahma muhurt* tranquility pervades the universe, twinkling stars illuminate the sky and when the quiet of the atmosphere is astir with waves of a cool breeze the pure souls wake up and pray to God. It was at the stroke of three that pain occurred in my chest. I accepted it as God's blessings and from then onwards I began praying and chanting God's name at precisely this time. I deemed my ailment the will of God and my wife also started reading regularly the holy prayer *granth*.

Renowned cardiologist Colonel K.L. Chopra often would cite this scientific fact that meditation and prayer caused the physiologically innate body organs to discharge a chemical called morphine, which gives pain relief. I too experienced it. Guru Arjunadeva, the fifth in the lineage of the Sikh religion, was able to sit atop a red-hot pot while chanting God's name!

The main thing is that if we accept pain and sorrow as God's will, the torture a disease inflicts upon the mind automatically vanishes.



*God tells us
to burden him
with whatever
burdens us.*

- Author Unknown

raphy that revealed a 69% blockage in the circumflex-artery of the heart. Treatment had to be imminent. At just that moment a line from the *Japuji Granth* by Guru Nanak came to my mind:

'Amrutvelā sachh nām vadiye vichār....

Kari snān simar Prabhu, apnā man-tan hove arogā...'

Meaning: By waking up at 3.00 am (in the *brahma muhurt*), taking bath, meditat-

*Terā kiyā mithā lāge,
Harnām padārth Nanak
māge...'*

Meaning: Everything bestowed unto us by God's will is sweet.

By believing that the ailment I suffered was the will of God, I transformed my way of life by praying during the *brahma muhurt*. I supplemented this with jogging and yoga. Yoga is not merely exercising physically, but it is actually aligning the mind with God.

So, by adherence to prayer and making a change in my lifestyle, day by day the disease regressed. In 1996 I had another angiography by famous cardiologist Dr G.S. Karla. He was astonished to see that all the blockages in my heart had vanished. Dr S.C. Manchanda, head of the Cardiology Dept. at AIIMS, Delhi, was a witness to this. He has researched extensively in this area.

In 1990 my wife passed away. In 1998 my son, Dr Indrapreetsingh, a gastroenterologist, died in an accident. He was just 34 years of age. He left behind two sons. Such a barrage of ordeals shook me to the roots, but I was able to bear them all because of the habit of praying and chanting God's name in the *brahma muhurt*. This realization was now crystallized.

I also came to believe that a family that prays in unison can remain united.

I was helped greatly by *satsang*. There is no difference between the God-realized Sadhu and God. Proximity to such a sadhu can vanquish the devilish natures of anger, lust, avarice, passion and ego.

I have met many different sadhus and it has ennobled me and provided me patience.

*Prayer
requires more
of the heart
than of the
tongue.*

- Adam Clarke

But the meeting at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Delhi, with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his blessings was the most momentous time of my life. The moment he put his hands on my head I suddenly felt a surge of divine peace. It was an unforgettable experience.

I now go to the mandir on Wednesdays and Sundays to attend the *satsang* assemblies, and on various occasions, my sons accompany me to *satsang*. It has done me a world of good. I also go to different gurudwaras for darshan and visit the Swaminarayan Akshardham regularly. Not only does it provide me infinite peace, but, as a doctor, I insist that my patients go to Akshardham and other sacred places. It heals them faster. Apart from treatment and medicines, I engage them in discussion on prayer, meditation, yoga and proper diet.

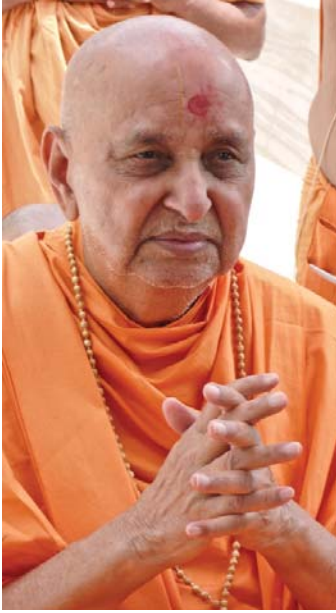
Any individual can experience the grace of Supreme God within by resorting to prayer and meditation. I still pray and meditate with my friends everyday, at that golden moment in the morning.

There is no denying that prayer keeps us mentally and physically healthy. It is an experience of divine joy.



*Prayer
is exhaling the
spirit of man
and inhaling
the spirit of God.*

- Edwin Keith



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's VICHARAN

August 2008

Bochasan, Vidyanagar, Atladra

1 August, Bochasan

At 4.00 pm Swamishri arrived for an assembly on the occasion of the solar eclipse. The assembly commenced with the Swaminarayan *dhun* followed by a discourse by Viveksagar Swami, bhajans by sadhus and a question-answer session with senior sadhus. The assembly concluded at 6.05 pm.

9 August, Bochasan, Vidyanagar

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

In the evening Swamishri departed from Bochasan for Vidyanagar.

16 August, Vidyanagar; Raksha Bandhan Festival

At 10.15 am Swamishri arrived at Akshar farm where an assembly celebrating Raksha Bandhan was in progress. Viveksagar Swami elaborated upon an incident of Shriji Maharaj from the *Harililamrut*. Thereafter a traditional dance was performed by youths. Swamishri was then honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. Then all the devotees ritually tied *rakhis*, sanctified by Swamishri, on each other's wrist.

In conclusion Swamishri blessed the assembly, "The more education one has the greater one's progress. Without it any society or country cannot develop and progress. Parallel to this progress also lies the observance of dharma. We have mandirs according to the various faiths of people in society. They increase people's spiritual inclination. The responsibility of providing and developing education rests upon society and the government. The blending of both (education and spirituality) gives inner soul-strength. The more one follows dharma, the more soul-strength one gets.

"Today is Raksha Bandhan. Sisters tie a *rakhi* on the wrist of their brothers. We pray to God to protect us. Because you live a householder's life you face many difficulties. But during such festivals we pray to God to protect all. God really protects. So today may all be blessed with auspicious feelings. By taking firm refuge in God he protects and blesses all with peace and happiness."

In all, 14,000 devotees attended the festival assembly and left after taking *mahaprasad*.

At 1.00 am Swamishri arrived at the hostel lawn to attend the lunar eclipse assembly. Despite the late night assembly thousands of devotees had gathered. The assembly programme included a discourse by Viveksagar Swami, speeches by Swamishri's attendant sadhus, and various interesting and humorous presentations by youths of the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralay.



Swamishri performs the
Janmashtami Celebration arti, Atladra

24 August, Atladra; Janmashtami Celebration

The Janmashtami celebration was held in the mandir assembly hall in the evening. Viveksagar Swami talked about spiritual equanimity, Dr. Swami and Mahant Swami discoursed upon the need of firm faith in God. The assembly programme was interspersed with kirtans, a traditional dance and honouring of Swamishri with garlands.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “The power generated through having firm faith in God protects one from the consequences after death. Wealth and bungalows do not pro-



In Atladra Swamishri performs the
murti-pratishtha arti for Dudhvada mandir

tect oneself. Our philosophy says that the body dies and one will leave everything that has been attained behind. The *atma*, by having refuge in God, attains the abode of God.”

26 August, Atladra

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Dudhvada. ◆

(Highlights translated from Gujarati report
by Sadhu Priyadarshandas)

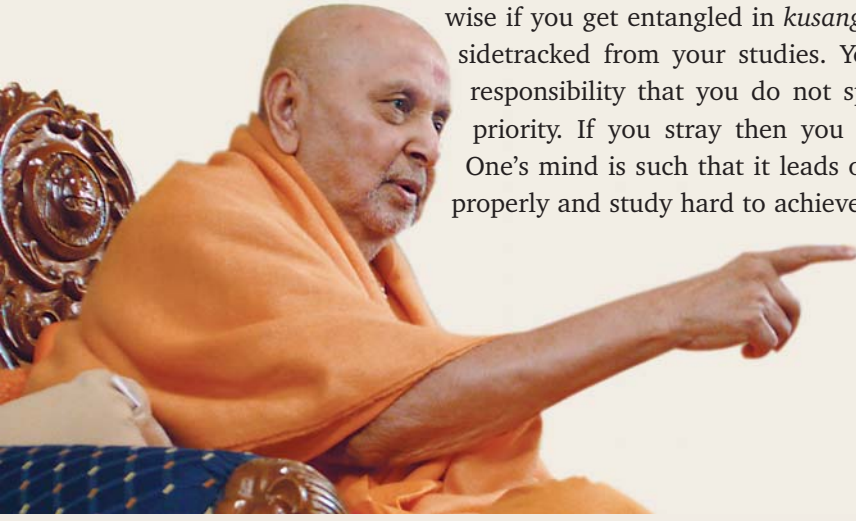
Living With Swamishri

MOULDING A SUCCESSFUL LIFE

24 August 2008, Atladra

During a personal meeting session Swamishri advised a teenager regarding his life, “At present give priority to studying well at school. Take care of your life: observe rules of moral conduct and be a vegetarian. You have to take care of these aspects now. Do not eat outside (in restaurants) and do not surf the net. Do *satsang* and inspire values in others. This will increase your firmness. Otherwise if you get entangled in *kusang* then you will decline and you will be sidetracked from your studies. You have to make your life. It is your responsibility that you do not spoil it. So your studies should be the priority. If you stray then you will be miserable and unhappy later. One’s mind is such that it leads one astray. Therefore adhere to *satsang* properly and study hard to achieve the best academic degree.”

Swamishri inspired a turning point in the life of the teenager. ◆



BAL-BALIKA INDIA TRIP 2008

Theme: Apni Parampara

July-August 2008



Group photo of shibir balaks with Swamishri

During July and August 2008 twenty *balaks* and *balikas* of the UK Bal-Balika Mandal participated in the 2008 India Trip themed 'Apni Parampara'.

The children visited all the major BAPS centres and pilgrim places in Gujarat and North India learning about the history of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. They visited New Delhi, Ayodhya and Chhapaiya, paying respects at the birthplace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and

other sacred places.

The children spent seven days with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Bochasan and Vallabh Vidynagar, where they enjoyed the festival of Rakshabandhan and had the rare opportunity of sitting through a *grahan* assembly with Pramukh Swami Maharaj from 1 am to 4 am.

The children enjoyed and were enlightened by their visit to India.



INDIA EXPERIENCE 2008

Theme: Brahmavidyani College

July-August 2008, Sarangpur



Kishores chant the Swaminarayan dhun on the banks of River Ganga in Kashi

During July and August 2008, a group of 11 *kishore karyakars* from the USA, together with 25 *kishores* and 23 *kishoris* from the UK visited India to participate in a special *shibir* in Sarangpur and tour various regions of India.

The daily schedule for the 15-day *shibir* in Sarangpur comprised of darshan of *mangala arti* and Swamishri's morning puja, 3-4 classroom sessions, one hour of *seva*, discussions, personal reading time and time for introspection. The topics covered included: Akshar Purushottam

Siddhant in Our Shastras, Siddhant in Other Shastras, Hindu Principles, Guru Parampara and question-answer sessions with senior sadhus.

After the *shibir*, the three groups embarked on separate tours exploring the mandirs and pilgrim spots of the Swaminarayan Sampraday, historic locations of Hindu culture, and various scenic destinations around India.

All groups visited the major pilgrim places in Gujarat, Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, Ayodhya and Chhapaiya.

The USA group then went to South India where they had darshan of the majestic mandirs at Mahabalipuram, Tanjore, Trichy, Madurai, Verkala, Trivendrum, Rameshwaram and also visited the historic caves at Ajanta and Ellora.

The UK groups visited the holy places of Haridwar and Rishikesh where they performed *arti* of the sacred river Ganga.

All the youths left with strengthened pride for India and Hindu culture and a deeper understanding of the BAPS. ◆

UK NATIONAL KARYAKAR SHIBIR 2008

Theme: Satpurush, Siddhanta, Sanstha

22-25 August 2008



Auditorium session

Over 450 *karyakars* from across the UK gathered at Warwick Conference Park on Friday 22 August 2008 for a four-day National Karyakar Shibir, entitled ‘Satpurush, Siddhanta, Sanstha’.

Structured with a balance of auditorium sessions, workshops, mandal-specific breakouts and team-building activities, the programme delivered the key message that the Sanstha is the Satpurush’s body and the Siddhanta is his soul. The workshop and training sessions complemented the spiritual learning with practical skills and specific requirements that the *karyakars* need to enhance their respective *seva*.

Karyakars and sadhus provided an enlightening insight into the concepts of *swarup-nishtha* and *agna, ruchi* and *anuvrutti* through powerful speeches, multimedia presentations and interactive sessions with the audience.

The understanding of God as *karta-harta*, a fundamental aspect of our Siddhanta, was addressed. Also, the concepts of *shraddha, khap* and *samagam* were effectively elaborated upon using sketches, speeches and videos interspersed with *prasangs* from the life of Swamishri and exemplary devotees.

Karyakars have an important responsibility to shape the future of BAPS and so in the third and final element of the *shibir* all *karyakars* had the opportunity to reflect upon their personal role in the Sanstha and were inspired to take personal responsibility to propel BAPS further.

Throughout the four days, many important concepts were learned and addressed to help *karyakars* progress in their personal *satsang* and *seva* roles. ◆

BAPS CHARITIES RELIEF AID FOR HURRICANE IKE VICTIMS

September 2008, Texas, USA



Hot meals for the hurricane-affected

On 12 September 2008, southeast Texas was ravaged by Hurricane Ike which knocked out power to almost 98% of southeast Texas. BAPS Charities launched its relief efforts immediately after the Hurricane in the devastated zones along the Texas Gulf Coast.

As the hurricane moved further north, BAPS Charities provided shelter to those in need and served hot meals of pasta and bread at a point

of distribution (POD) in Stafford. Throughout the entire week, BAPS Charities volunteers joined the FEMA volunteers at the POD location to distribute hot meals. Volunteers of BAPS Charities also reached out as far as Beaumont, Texas, to deliver hot meals.

On Saturday, September 20, 2008, BAPS Charities took these meals to local communities in downtown Houston, where many were still without power. In the Seabrook area volunteers went door to door to distribute hot meals to those that did not have transportation.

Maria Zamora of Houston said, "I was out of electricity for a couple of days so I know how enjoyable a hot meal will be to those who still do not have electricity. Thank you so much for your timely help. I really appreciate your commitment to serve." With a majority of Houston and its surrounding areas without any power for such a long period of time, these meals provided much needed assistance. ◆

BAPS RELIEF WORK FOR BIHAR FLOOD VICTIMS

3 to 28 September 2008, Bihar, India

Disaster

The recent mass flooding of the River Kosi caused mass devastation in the state of Bihar (Northeast India) with over 3 million people in 16 districts affected, 1 million people evacuated, thousands still missing, hundreds of villages destroyed and over 230,000 people left homeless with entire livelihoods destroyed. It was Bihar's worst flood disaster in 50 years.

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, set up base camps at Katihar and Patna with teams of

volunteers gathering first-hand information on the devastation and the type of relief materials required in the affected areas.

From Katihar, the BAPS team went to Madhepura, meeting the Relief Commissioner. BAPS was advised by the Government of Bihar to provide specific medicines to the medical camps organized by the Indian Army in the worst affected districts of Madhepura and Saharsa (North Bihar).

BAPS was instructed to provide relief to areas still unaided by any agency or organizations in the District of Madhepura.



BAPS medical camp for flood victims

Villages helped in the District of Madhepura:
 1. Padava Ghat 2. Gusai Tola 3. Panchhi Tola 4. Rahuar 5. Seema Tola 6. Tulsi Badi 7. Lachmania Tola 8. Manik Pur 9. Bind Toli.

Medical Help

BAPS has organized many large medical camps, treating thousands of flood-affected villages suffering from fevers, malaria, stomach upsets, diarrhoea, dehydration and skin allergies. Water purification tablets were also provided.

Relief Provided

BAPS provided home kits to 500 families in



Volunteers upload utensil sets for Bihar flood victims in a goods train

affected villages in the District of Madhepura. Each kit contained clothes for the entire family, food items (rice, dal, flat rice, salt, biscuits, etc.) together with other necessities and large plastic sheets for shelter. Over 3,000 sets of utensils were also distributed.

Counselling and Uplifting

Together with material relief aid, psychological and emotional counselling has helped victims cope with the trauma. BAPS sadhus and volunteers are actively counselling victims in the aftermath of the floods. Many have found inner strength to cope with the shock of the disaster. ♦

READ SWAMINARAYAN BLISS FROM ANYWHERE



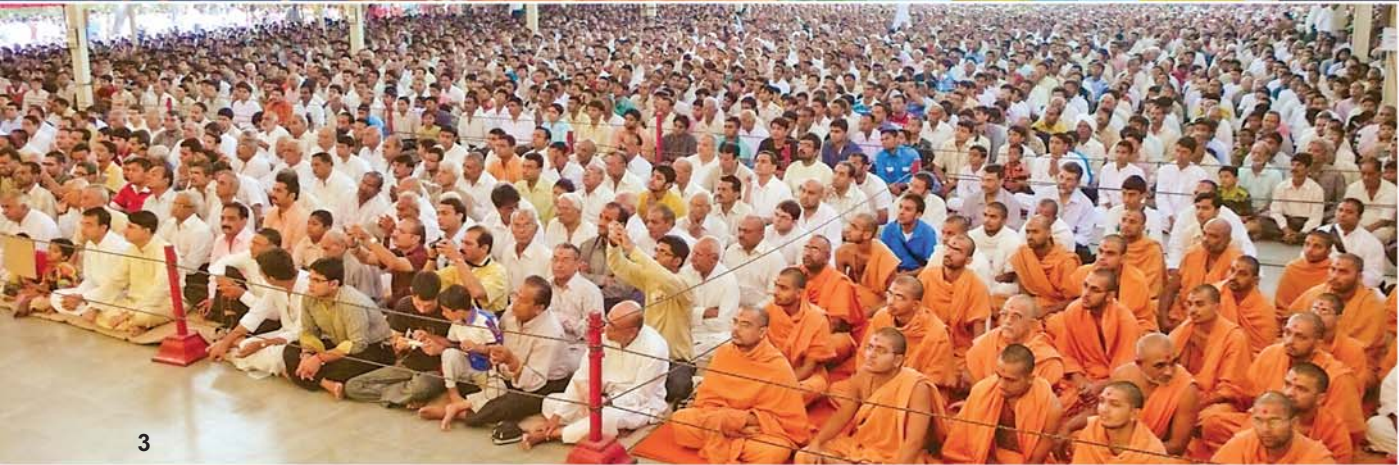
Now you can read the latest and past issues of *Swaminarayan Bliss* from anywhere.

Every month, a PDF version of that month's issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* is posted on the BAPS website for free use and download.

It is full of features that make reading more convenient and provides links to other BAPS website sections for more detail.

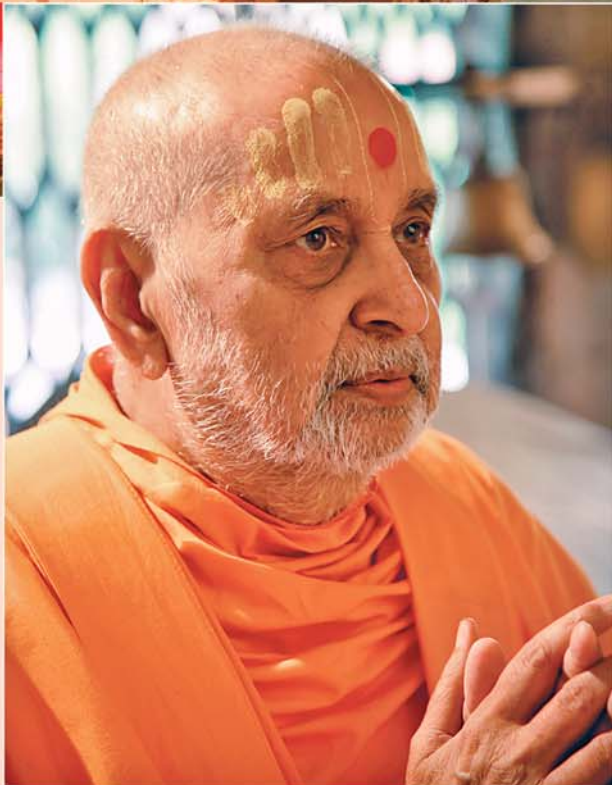
It's a great way to add to your spiritual knowledge and remain in touch with Swamishri's and the Sanstha's activities.

Check it out on <http://www.swaminarayan.org/publications/magazine/bliss/index.htm>



JANMASHTAMI CELEBRATION
24 August 2008, Atladra

1. Swamishri on stage during the celebration assembly.
2. Swamishri blesses the devotees.
3. Thousands of sadhus and devotees enjoy Swamishri's darshan and blessings.



**JAL JHILANI CELEBRATION,
11 September 2008, Ahmedabad**

After 23 years, the Jal Jhilani Ekadashi was celebrated in Swamishri's presence at the BAPS Swaminarayan mandir in Ahmedabad. A giant, water pool was set up in the large auditorium. Swamishri presided over the concluding rituals of the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony and performed *arti*. Then during Swamishri's morning puja bhajans relating to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine incidents in water were sung, and the traditional five *artis* were offered to Thakorji after sailing him in a remote-controlled fish-shaped boat. Finally, Swamishri blessed the thousands of devotees who attended.

More Details:

<http://download.baps.org/videos/2008jaljhilani.wmv>

<http://download.baps.org/videos/2008jaljhilaniblessings.wmv>