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The Secret of Life After Death
The Kathopanishad



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FIRST WORD

We need to expand our perspective to life. Seeing it from a cosmic perspective will give us deeper insights into our own. It will enable us to transcend our mundane attitudes, conflicts and problems.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan provides a cosmic view in his discourses (Bhugol-Khagol Vachanamrut), which finds its source in the Hindu shastras. He explains how long it takes for a soul to get a human birth.

When the four *yugas*, i.e. Satya-yuga (1,728,000 years), Treta-yuga (1,296,000 years), Dwapar-yuga (864,000 years), and Kali-yuga (432,000 years) pass, it is called one *chokdi*. Thus one *chokdi* amounts to 4,320,000 human years. And with the passing of 1,000 *chokdis* one day (12 hours) of Brahma (creator) ends. The same number of *chokdis* amount to his one night. So, Brahma's single day and night amounts to 8,640,000,000 years. His 30 days make a month, 12 months make one year; and Brahma lives for 100 years. When Brahma dies, the *brahmand*, consisting of 14 realms (*lokas*), is destroyed. This is called *prakrut pralaya* (destruction). A soul gets a human body after 350,000,000 such *prakrut pralayas*. The total figure in human years is staggering!

Now, let us come back to ourselves – the way we live and think. This very thought of our long, cosmic journey in our attainment of human life should definitely inspire us to live rightly, nobly, peacefully and with the ulterior purpose of achieving *moksha* – as prescribed by the Hindu shastras. ◆

Pleasing the Devotees of Botad

Shri Hari

showered all with coloured water and celebrated the Fuldol festival in Botad.

But Daha Khachar, the host, had one unfulfilled wish...

“**B**ut Maharaj, I have been left out, untouched by a single drop,” Daha Khachar declared.

“But I can see that you are wet. Why do you say you have been left out?” Maharaj asked.

“Maharaj, you have drenched the streets of Botad with colour, but my own *darbar* and its precincts are dry.”

“Then let’s go to your *darbar* and celebrate.”

Shri Hari and his entourage proceeded to Hamir Khachar’s *darbar* with the same exuberance. At the *darbar*, Maharaj sprayed coloured water and *gulal* on the sadhus and devotees. The entire precincts took on a red hue. Shri Hari was red from head to foot and so were the devotees. Shriji Maharaj satisfied the wish of Daha Khachar and his father, Hamir Khachar.

Then Maharaj took a bath in a river on the outskirts and returned to Daha Khachar’s *darbar*. An assembly commenced with bhajans by the *paramhansas*. Januba, a government official of Ranpur, came for Maharaj’s darshan. He bowed before Shri Hari and placed a donation of one rupee and a coconut at his holy feet. The



official was enthralled by Devanand Swami’s soulful singing and the tune from the musical instruments. He showed it by swaying to the bhajan and music. Januba was delighted at Shri Hari’s darshan and impressed by Maharaj’s greatness for having such accomplished singers in his service. Then he beckoned his servants to bring the musical instruments he had brought with him. On seeing the instruments Maharaj asked, “You seem to be proficient in music.” The official nodded humbly. Shri Hari stated, “I had last seen such a variety of musical instruments at the palace of Queen Kushalkunvarba.”

“Will your sadhus play them?” Januba asked. “Yes.”



The sadhus tuned the instruments and started playing them. The sadhus sang bhajans of

Holi. The strains were so pleasing and soothing that the concert continued till early morning. All became oblivious of how the time passed. And with the dawning of a new day the festival of colours and music came to a close. Shri Hari went for his morning ablutions to the nearby river with his sadhus and devotees. The devotees and people of Botad were happy and thrilled by the celebration and music.

On the same day Gangaram Malla (wrestler), his son Madhavaji and other wrestlers arrived from Bhuj. They bowed and touched the holy feet of Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj asked, "Gangaram, these Kathi *darbars* are skilled at wielding the sword but they do not know the art of wrestling. Exhibit your skills for all to see."

On Shri Hari's command Gangaram and his team got ready to perform. Maharaj called Dahan Khachar and instructed him, "On their wrestling arena they have sand to absorb their fall. But here it is hard, so place some mattresses." Gangaram tried to dissuade Dahan Khachar, "Maharaj, there is no need for any mattresses. Our bodies are tough and can bear the falls because of our wrestling practices."

The programme commenced with a bout between Gangaram and his son, Madhavji. During the encounter neither could floor each other. Shri Hari and the audience watched with bated breath. Finally, both the father and son emerged victors from the bout. Maharaj was impressed by Madhavji's tenacity and skill. Then the other wrestlers too displayed their prowess, and everyone appreciated and applauded their talent. Maharaj called Bhaga Doshi and declared, "We should offer gifts to these wrestlers." But Gangaram interjected, "Maharaj, the only gift we desire is that you come and bless the land of Kutch. For the last seven to

 I ask
that my mind and
heart forever remain
engaged in your divine
form, and that they
do not get enticed by
any material
things.

eight years you have been skirting Kutch. So have mercy and compassion upon us."

Shri Hari assured, "Gangaram, the devotees of Kutch are always in my heart. I avoid those who transgress moral injunctions. You all abide by moral disciplines. I will fulfil your wish and pay a visit to Kutch."

Maharaj took lunch at Hamir Khachar's house. The meal of *dudhpak*, *puri*, *ghari*, *barfi* and other items were offered by him. His son, Dahan Khachar, pressed Maharaj to eat more. Shri Hari said, "You are asking me to eat more but go and make sure that the devotees with me are well fed." Dahan Khachar assured Maharaj, "Bhaga Doshi is taking good care of them." Maharaj approved instantly, "Then there won't be any lapse at all." Then Maharaj praised Bhaga Doshi's service, "This time, he disregarded his physical comforts in serving all. He was always ready and alert regardless of the time during day or night." At that moment Bhaga Doshi entered. While prostrating he spoke appreciatingly, "Maharaj, by your grace all is well. Your party has been fed to their hearts content." Shri Hari expressed his joy and blessed Bhaga Doshi by placing his hands on his head. "Sheth, you have served splendidly this time. Therefore ask for a boon." At this Bhaga Doshi became emotional. He replied, "Maharaj, by your grace I am well-off and well known. But my mind is not in these material achievements. I ask that my mind and heart forever remain engaged in your divine form, and that they do not get enticed by any material things."

Shri Hari was pleased and blessed him, "Sheth, by virtue of your service you have received what you have prayed for. By my grace your mind will not be entrapped in other things. Now, do you wish to ask for anything else?"

Bhaga Doshi prayed, “Maharaj, may my children and their future generations be always attached to you out of love. And may they perceive your presence and divinity in your lineage of successors.”

Shri Hari rectified Bhaga Doshi’s words, “Sheth, householders have a lineage, whereas I am a renunciant. Howev-

er, my successors are those who are wedded to and spread *ekantik dharma*, and have resolute faith in me. They are my kin and relatives.”

Bhaga Doshi failed to understand the purport of Maharaj’s words. But Shri Hari had revealed the attributes of his true successor. Then Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus visited the house of Bhaga Doshi. The latter performed an elaborate puja of Maharaj and offered *dhotis* to the sadhus and *parshads*. To others he gave donations befitting their status. Then Maharaj said, “Sheth, was the Fuldol festival celebrated in accordance with your wish?”

Bhaga Sheth replied humbly, “Maharaj, my wishes are trifle and small. It is you who had magnified them and celebrated it in a grand, unprecedented manner and magnitude. Dada Khachar is also pleased beyond measure. And that is why he uttered that you should celebrate another festival in Botad on such a scale.” Shri Hari simply smiled and said that he wished to leave and permit others to return to their homes. In response Monji Pandya stood up startled. He prayed to Shri Hari, “Maharaj, tomorrow I have arranged a meal for you and everyone else. I will not let you go today. You’ll have to come and dine with the entire following.” Shri Hari agreed, but asked, “You want the entire group with me to stay behind?” Monji replied affirmatively, “They are all a part of you. I do not wish to exclude them.” Maharaj was happy with Pandya’s understanding, and added, “Pandya, you have grasped my glory and mes-

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sage correctly. I do not prefer to be alone and bereft of my devotees. Those who understand the glory of my devotees, also understand my greatness.” Shri Hari agreed to his request.

The next day Maharaj was on his way to Monji Pandya’s house for his meal. He came across Bogha Luhar’s house.

The latter had readied a bed in his verandah. He had wished that Maharaj would come and sit on it. Shri Hari entered his house and sat on his bed. Bogha Luhar was pleased. Then Maharaj told him that he had sanctified his house. But Bogha humbly said, “Maharaj, how can you leave like this. I wish to apply kumkum on your forehead and do puja, and offer sugar crystals for *prasad*. Here, please have one piece and give the rest to the others.” After fulfilling his wish Maharaj told Bogha, “I have taken a meal at your place.” Bogha was overwhelmed by Maharaj’s grace.

Shri Hari came to Monji Pandya’s house for lunch. When Maharaj finished eating he personally served food to the sadhus and then to Dada Khachar and others. Finally, Maharaj returned to Dada Khachar’s *darbar* to make preparations for his departure. The Kathi devotees, who had come with him, were ready on their horses. Shri Hari mounted on Manki and the music band started playing a farewell tune. Everyone followed Shriji Maharaj and his entourage to see them off. Maharaj exited through the gate of Tajpur and arrived by a stepwell near Senthali. Unexpectedly, Maharaj dismounted and sat on a huge boulder. He blessed all the devotees and instructed, “Now you may all leave for your respective villages and towns.” He also told the devotees of Botad to return to their homes. Then Shriji Maharaj, his sadhus, Dada Khachar and other *darbars* travelled to Gadhpur.

Abhav-Avgun, Droh

First one develops a dislike (abhav), then one starts to criticize (avgun) and finally one does not hesitate to openly malign (droh). If one's focus on the glory of God, his devotees and Satsang is not maintained, these are the stages through which one may pass, ultimately leading to one's own fall from the spiritual path. In the Haricharitamrut Sagar, Bhagwan Swaminarayan describes the dangers of seeing faults in others and teaches how to avoid such malicious behaviour.

1. On the way from Bandhia to Pipaliya, Shri Hari said, "If a true sadhu is walking, then even the contact of the breeze he generates grants *moksha*. Even if the ignorant or irreligious bind, beat or insult him, he will not complain. He only wishes for the good of all. One who displeases such a sadhu is merely cutting his own neck. The Vedas describe many sins, but there is no sin greater than to commit the *droh* of a sadhu."

2. In Mankuva, Shri Hari said, "The sadhus and devotees are the form of Akshardham. If one develops *abhav* for them, then one falls from the path of (eternal) Akshardham, where Time has no entry. Those who develop *abhav* are not able to enter Akshardham. Even if all the sadhus and devotees help him, he is unable to find Akshardham. The fault of taking *abhav* is the biggest of all. Taking *abhav* of devotees is even more harmful than the faults of lust, anger and greed.

"Despite offering bhakti, one who considers sadhus and devotees as insignificant may be offering bhakti, but I do not consider him as a devotee. One who does not respect devotees, considers sadhus as mere beggars, and despite not having any virtues believes himself to be extremely great never develops any virtues. One who does not appreciate the greatness of others, how long will his own greatness remain?"

3. In Mankuva, Shri Hari said, "Those who believe that even maligning a devotee slightly is a grave mistake, and that until such *abhav* is

removed the *jiva* suffers the miseries of hell – (I ask you to) come and touch my feet. Do not be dishonest. Dishonesty will not remain unnoticed in one's behaviour. One's own actions are the true test of one's identity."

4. At the residence of Jiva Khachar in Gadhada, Shri Hari said, "When a 'devotee' is under the influence of evil, he perceives faults in all other devotees, and falls from *satsang*. The life-tree of such a wicked person who takes *abhav* of devotees rots from the roots and perishes. The rot in the form of *abhav* destroys such a person from within. A devotee who fears taking *abhav* of others, and understands the glory of all other devotees never speaks derogatorily. Such a devotee is never affected by evil influences. However, if one maintains a liking for listening to talks about the *abhav* of others, then there is no guarantee about one's future."

5. One who wants to sustain *satsang* right upto death should learn from the ways of the great devotees of the past. Without learning these ways, one may practice *satsang* for countless years, but will not progress. Both sadhus and householders should take note of this fact. One who understands this talk will daily progress in *satsang* and attain virtues. This talk I have revealed is highest of all. Only those who practice *satsang* will be able to understand it and will then have nothing more left to attain. This *satsang* is the highest *chintamani*. There is no *chintamani* other than this. This principle is understood by the wise, but others do not even recognize it." ♦

The Kathopanishad

THE SECRET OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

Have you ever thought about the secret of life after death? One who does will be able to think more deeply about life. This is shown in the Katha Upanishad (Kathopanishad). This thought flashed to a young child, causing him to keenly desire to attain that secret. He then reached the doors of death. He patiently persevered to discover the secret of that which exists after death. In fact, Death himself had to reveal the secrets of life after death. And finally, only when that secret was revealed, was the boy satisfied. The story of this Upanishad is extremely captivating and whoever reads it starts to think: Truly! The Kathopanishad gives one an experience of liberation whilst still alive.

INTRODUCTION

There is a *shākhā* (branch) of the Krishna Yajurveda called 'Katha'. This Upanishad is within that *shākhā*, therefore it is called the 'Katha Upanishad'. This Upanishad is spread across two chapters, called *adhyāyas*, each with three sub-chapters, called *vallis*. Thus, contained within the six *vallis* of the Katha Upanishad, we find clear and simple precepts on *brahmavidya* through the story of Nachiketa.

THE STORY

A rishi named Vajashravas performed a Vishwajit Yagna. At the conclusion of this *yagna*, one has to give one's all in donation. Vajashravas started donating to the Brahmins accordingly. He began to donate his cows; weak cows as well as strong, healthy ones. Vajashravas's son, Nachiketa, noticed this. Although young, he was mature in understand-





ing, knowledge and faith. He knew that after a yagna cows should indeed be donated, and it would be wrong not to do so. But giving away things that are a burden to oneself is not donation. Instead the giver himself becomes misfortuned. The finest and dearest things should be donated. This donation of weak cows by my father is not proper: 'पीतोदका जग्धतृणा दुग्धदोहा निरिन्द्रियाः। अनन्दा नाम ते लोकास्तान् स गच्छति ता ददत्॥' – '*Pitodakā jagdhatrunā dugdhadohā nirindriyāhā. Anandā nāma te lokāstān sa gachchhati tā dadat.*' – 'One who donates cows that cannot even drink water, cannot eat grass, cannot even give milk and have aged, attains the *loka* (realm) named 'Anandā', i.e. 'where there is no bliss' (Katha Upanishad 1/1/3). Nachiketa thought that by giving such worthless donations, his father will also attain such a misery-filled *loka*. With such feelings, Nachiketa, who cared for his father, was pained deeply. To stop his father's undesirable actions, he asked, 'कस्मै मां दास्यसीति' – '*Kasmai mām dāsyasi-iti*' – 'O Father! I am also a part of your wealth. Whom will you give me to?' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/4.) His father did not reply. Nachiketa repeated the question, 'Father! Whom will you give me to?' His father still paid no attention.

When Nachiketa asked for the third time his father became angry and said, 'मृत्यवे त्वा ददामीति' – '*Mrutyave tvā dadāmeeti.*' – 'I give you to Death' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/4). This sentence was meant to convey the message, 'Go away, don't bother me right now.' But Nachiketa was an ideal son and he thought that regardless of the fact that his father had said this in a fit of anger, his words should not go unobeyed. Hence, Nachiketa decided to go to the god of

Death, Yama Raja. His father found out and tried to stop him. However, Nachiketa felt that his father was trying to stop him due to the fear of death. He dumbfounded his father with an eternal truth. He said, 'अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वे प्रतिपश्य तथाऽपरे। सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः॥' – 'Anupashya yathā purve pratipshya tathā'pare. Sassyamiva martyaha pachyate sassyamivājāyate punaha.' – 'O father! Those

before us have all died. Those present and those in the future will also die. Because we are mortals, like plants we grow and die. So don't worry, think about the tendency of death and let me do as you said' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/6). His father gave him permission. Nachiketa set off towards the palace of Yama Raja.

THREE BOONS TO A UNIQUE GUEST

Nachiketa reached the palace of Yama Raja only to find that Yama Raja was away. He waited for three days without any food or water for Yama Raja to return. On the day after the third night, Yama Raja arrived. His old servants informed him of the unique young guest and suggested that he provide him some hospitality. Yama Raja did so. He pleased the child with water to wash his feet, flowers, a meal, etc. He also made a request, 'तिस्रो रात्रीर्यदवात्सीर्गृहे मेऽनश्नन् ब्रह्मन्नतिथिर्नमस्यः। नमस्तेऽस्तु ब्रह्मन् स्वस्ति मेऽस्तु तस्मात्प्रति त्रीन्वरान्वृणीष्व॥' – 'Tisro rātrīryadavātsīrgruḥe me'-nashnan brahmannatithirnamasyaha. Namaste'stu brahman svasti me'stu tasmātpрати trinvarānvrūṇishva.' – 'O Brahmin child! You are worthy of being offered prostrations. You have come to my palace as a guest. I am pained that you had to spend three nights without any food or

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- Katha Upanishad: 1/1/6

water. This was a grave mistake, since a guest should be well looked after. Therefore, O Brahmin! For my offence to be forgiven and that I may be liberated, I bow to you and request that you ask for three boons in return for the three nights you spent fasting' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/9).

THE FIRST BOON

Pleased with Yama Raja's generosity, the young Brahmin, Nachiketa, asked for his first boon, 'शान्तसंकल्पः सुमना यथा स्याद् वीतमन्युर्गौतमो माऽभि मृत्यो। त्वत्प्रसृष्टम् माऽभिवदेत्प्रतीत एतत् त्रयाणां प्रथमं वरं वृणे॥' – 'Shāntasankalpaha sumanā yathā syāḍ veeta-manyurgautamo mā'bhi mrutyo. Tvatprasrush-tam mā'bhidetprateeta etat trayānām prathamam varam vrune.' – 'O Death! Let all my father's thoughts come to rest. Let him be pleased with me and free of anger towards me. When I leave you and go home, let him recognize me as "his son". Let him talk to me with the same love and affection as he did before. This is the first of the three boons that I ask for' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/10).

What pure feelings the child has for his father! He had surrendered himself to death to stop his father's liberation being ruined. He also understood the pain that his father must be feeling due to this incident. Therefore we see Nachiketa's love for his father expressed here.

Hearing this, Yama was delighted, since at such a young age he had asked for something which even elders would not have thought of. Pleased, Yama Raja granted him his first wish.

THE SECOND BOON

Before asking for the second boon, the intelligent Nachiketa clarified, 'स्वर्गे लोके न भयं

किंचनास्ति न तत्र त्वं न जरया बिभेति। उभे तीर्त्वाऽऽशनायापिपासे शोकातिगो मोदते स्वर्गलोके॥' – '*Svarge loka na bhayam kinchanāsti na tatra tvam na jarayā bibheti. Ubhe teertvāshanāyāpipāse shokātigo modate svargaloke.*' (The word *svarge* refers to the abode of Paramatma.) – 'O Death! There is no fear in the abode of Paramatma. Even you, Death, are not there. Therefore there is no fear of things like old age. In Paramatma's abode there are not even any bodily feelings like hunger and thirst. It is a place full of supreme bliss. Therefore, *muktas* (liberated *jivas*) who are above all misery experience bliss there' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/12). Hence, 'स त्वमग्निं स्वर्गमध्वेषि मृत्यो प्रब्रूहि त्वं श्रद्धधानाय मह्यम्।' – '*Sa tvam-agnim svargyamadhyeshi mrutyo prabruhi tvam shraddhānāya mahyam.*' – 'O Yama Raja! You know *agnividya* by which one can attain that abode of Paramatma, teach it to me' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/13). 'एतद् द्वितीयेन वृणे वरेण' – '*Etad dviteeyena vrune varena.*' – 'This is what I ask for as my second boon' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/13). Yama Raja readily agreed and became a teacher. He taught him *agnividya*. One is naturally attentive in matters for which one has keen interest. Therefore, Nachiketa repeated whatever he was taught. The teacher's heart was won over! Yama Raja showed his pleasure by saying, 'तवैव नाम्ना भवितायमग्निः सृङ्कां चेमामनेकरूपां गृहाण' – '*Tavaiva nāmnā bhavitāyamagniḥ srunk-ām chemāmanekaroopām.*' – 'From now on, this *agnividya* that I have taught you will be known by your name. And here, have this beautiful garland of coloured gems' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/16). This was an additional blessing. One who is *nirlobhi* (free from greed) gets such benefits without any endeavour. But Nachiketa merely showed his gratitude; he did not care for the garland of gems. Indeed, as a result of Yama Raja's boon, this knowledge is known by the name 'Nachiket Agnividya'.

THE THIRD BOON

Asking for the third boon, Nachiketa says,

'येयं प्रेते विचिकित्सा मनुष्येऽस्तीत्येके नायमस्तीति चैके। एतद्विद्यामनुशिष्टस्त्वयाऽहं वराणामेष वरस्तृतीयः॥' – '*Yeyam prete vichikitsā manushhye'steetyeke nāyamas-teeti chaike. Etadvidyāmanushishtastvayā'ham varānāmesha varastruteeyaha.*' – 'O Yama Raja! There is one discussion that arises time and time again in the world and that is regarding matters after death. Some say there is nothing after death. Some say that there is something after death. Please give me a clear decision on this matter. This is the third boon I ask for' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/20).

Before we proceed further it is worthy to note that Nachiketa did not ask this question because he doubted whether there was something after death or not. This is clearly reflected from his talks to Yama Raja in his previous boon. His reason for asking is that the common person is generally baffled on hearing contradictory things. Sometimes, so called intelligent people, due to their arrogance, mislead gullible people with false logic. They confuse people by creating doubts regarding accepted facts by claiming that they are blind faith, a matter of sentimentalism or false. Thus, Nachiketa requests, 'Therefore, O Yama Raja! You are a wise and skilled orator. Whatever you approve will be accepted by all. The true principle will be revealed by your words. People will also recognize what is false. They will identify empty shows of words and webs of logic. People's conviction in the truth will become stronger. Therefore, O Death! You yourself explain to me the secrets of life after death.' This is Nachiketa's noble and humble request.

COMPETENCE – THE ELIGIBILITY TEST

Yama Raja was extremely impressed by this request. Indeed, Yama Raja knew how many secrets this young child had asked the solutions for in this one boon. There was no option or alternative but to reveal the heart of spirituality. The lofty mental attitude and intellect of Nachiketa, (who at first seemed a mere child)

had already been experienced. Nevertheless, in accordance with the established traditions, Yama Raja decided to test Nachiketa's eligibility and only then teach him the principles.

Yama Raja said, 'देवैरत्रापि विचिकित्सितं पुरा न हि सुविज्ञेयमणुरेष धर्मः। अन्यं वरं नचिकेतो वृणीष्व मा मोपरोत्सीरति मा सृजैनम्॥' – '*Devairatrāpi vichikitsitam purā na hi suvigneyamanuresha dharmaha. Anyam varam Nachiketo vruneeshva mā moparotseerati mā sru-jainam.*' – 'Nachiketa! Ask for something else. What you want to know is very subtle. Even the *devas* have struggled to understand this matter. You are still a child. This will not be easy to understand. Ask for something else' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/21). In this way, he first showed him the difficulty of the topic. But, as though attaining some new enthusiasm from this matter, Nachiketa said, 'देवैरत्रापि विचिकित्सितं किल त्वं च मृत्यो यन्न सुविज्ञेयमात्थ।' – '*Devairatrāpi vichikitsitam kila tvam cha mrutyo yanna suvi-gneyamāttha.*' – 'O Death! What you said has only increased my curiosity further. There must be some great secret hidden in something that even the *devas* struggle to attain. Therefore, even if the matter is subtle, I want to know it' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/22). Then Nachiketa continues to address Yama Raja, 'वक्ता चास्य किल त्वाद्गुण्यो न लभ्यः।' – '*Vaktā chāsya tvādruganyo na labhyaha.*' – 'When will I ever find a speaker of your calibre, who can simply explain the deepest principles lucidly?' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/22.) Therefore, 'नान्यो वरस्तुल्य एतस्य कश्चित्' – '*Nānyo varastulya etasya kashchit*' – 'I do not feel that there is anything else worth asking for instead of this. Therefore give me only this' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/2).

Yama Raja had by now realized the eagerness of the child. Yet he felt that the test should continue. *Brahmavidyā* can only be digested by one who is *ātmārup* (controlled by his *ātmā*) not by one who is controlled by his *indriyas* (senses). Thinking this, he tried to tempt him with other enticing things: 'शतायुषः पुत्रपौत्रान्वृणीष्व बहून्पशून् हस्तिहिरण्यमश्वान्। भूमेर्महदायतनं वृणीष्व स्वयं च जीव शरदो

यावदिच्छसि॥' – '*Shatāyushaha putrapautrān-vruneeshva bahoonpashoon hastihiranyamashvān. Bhoormahadāyatanam vruneeshva svayam cha jeeva sharado yāvadichchhasi.*' – 'O Nachiketa! Ask for progeny, fame, grandeur and a lifetime of a hundred years. Ask for abundant elephants, horses, etc. Ask for gold or a lot of land. Not only that, ask to live as long as you wish' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/23). And then Yama Raja continues, 'नचिकेतो! मरणं माऽनुप्राक्षीः।' – '*Nachiketo! maranam mā'nuprāk-sheehee.*' – 'Nachiketa! Don't ask about matters after death' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/25). Further, Yama Raja adds, 'एतत्तुल्यं यदि मन्यसे वरं वृणीष्व वित्तं चिरजीविकां च। महाभूमौ नचिकेतस्त्वमेधि कामानां त्वा कामभाजं करोमि॥' – '*Etattulyam yadi manyase varam vruneeshva vittam chirajeevikām cha. Mahābhoomau Nachiketastvamedhi kāmānām tvā kāmabhājam karomi.*' – 'Moreover, O child! For your boon ask for anything similar to what I have told you. I will make you wealthy. Nachiketa! If you ask, I will make you the king of the world. You will be the Lord of all. Whatever you want from this world, I will bring before you' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/24).

Yama Raja continues with generous and glamorous offers, 'ये ये कामा दुर्लभा मर्त्यलोके सर्वान् कामाँश्छन्दतः प्रार्थयस्व। इमा रामाः सरथाः सतूया न हीदृशा लम्बनीया मनुष्यैः। आभिरमत्प्रतप्ताभिः परिचारयस्व नचिकेतो मरणं माऽनुप्राक्षीः॥' – '*Ye ye kāmā durlabhā martyaloke sarvān kāmānshch-handataha prārthayasva. Imā rāmāhā sarathāhā satooryā na heedrushā lambhaneeyā manushhyai-hi. Abhirmatprattābhihi parichārayasva Nachiketo maranam mā'nuprāk-sheehee.*' – 'Ask as you wish for whatever is difficult to attain in this world for enjoyment as you wish. These beautiful women (on this chariot) which no man can attain, I will let you attain. But, O Nachiketa! The path after death is imperceptible, above logic, and hard to attain; therefore do not ask for that' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/25).

Yama Raja tested him in every possible way. He offered women, wealth, power and many other things. What was Nachiketa's response to all of this? The answer he gave was forever

etched in the golden pages of Indian history. Here is the response of the child Nachiketa, 'श्रोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयति तेजः। अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव वाहास्तव नृत्यगीते॥' – '*Shvobhāvā martyasya yadantakaitat sarvendriyānām jarayanti tejaha. Api sarvam jeevitamalpameva tavaiva vāhāstava nrutyageete*' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/26). The essence of this stanza is: 'O Death! We are all mortal humans. Everything you have told me to ask for – sons, animals, wealth, beautiful women, etc. are all 'श्रोभावाः' – *shvobhāvāhā* – inexistent tomorrow. None of this will remain tomorrow. You yourself are the one that brings an end to them all. Moreover, attractive women and other pleasures that you suggest I ask for weaken the organs of knowledge and action. As a result, one has to endure fatigue and depression. O Death, it is also a fact that even if one enjoys such (mundane) pleasures for a lifetime one will still not be satisfied. How can indulging in pleasures satisfy desire? You tell me to ask for a long life, but compared to Time itself it will still seem fractional.

'Therefore, O Yama Raja, keep your temporal, misery-giving and unfulfilling elephants, horses and other means of enjoyment to yourself. I do not want them.'

Also, Yama Raja had suggested that Nachiketa ask for 'वित्त' – *vitta* – i.e. wealth, and to live as long as he desires. Nachiketa countered that with the words, 'न वित्तेन तर्पणीयो मनुष्यो लप्स्यामहे वित्तमद्राक्ष्म चेत्त्वा। जीविष्यामो यावदीशिष्यसि त्वम्।' – '*Na vittena tarpaneeyo manushyo lapsyāmahe vitta-madrākshma chettvā. Jeevishyāmo yāvadeeshishyasi tvam.*' – 'Who has ever been satisfied by wealth! And in any case, the merit gained by having your darshan I will attain that also. Furthermore, how long one lives is in your very hands. Therefore, if you are pleased, why should I worry about that' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/27). Hence, Nachiketa says, 'यस्मिन्निदं विचिकित्सन्ति मृत्यो यत्साम्पराये महति ब्रूहि नस्तत्। योऽयं वरो गूढमनुप्रविष्टो नान्यं तस्मान्नचिकेता वृणीते॥' – '*Yasminnidam vichikitsanti mrutyo yatsāmparāye mahati broohi*

nastat. Yoyam varo goodhamanupravishto nānyam tasmānnachiketā vruneete.' – 'O Yama Raja! Give me the solution to the matter at hand regarding what happens after death. That is all; there is nothing else that Nachiketa wants' (Katha Upanishad: 1/1/29). Emphasizing his wish with such determination, Nachiketa became silent.

Yama Raja was impressed by Nachiketa's determination and maturity. He was momentarily confused as to how to praise the noble child. What he then said shows the impression Nachiketa had left on him. He said, 'श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतः तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः। श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद् वृणीते॥' – '*Shreyashcha preyashcha manushyametaha tau sampareetya vivinakti dheeraha. Shreyo hi dheero'bhi preyaso vruneete preyo mando yogakshemād vruneete.*' – 'O Brahmin child! There are two paths from time eternal – one *shreya* and the other *preya*. The *shreya* path is that of liberation, and the *preya* path is that of enjoying material pleasures. Most people turn towards the *preya* path, i.e. they are diverted by the desire for material enjoyment. Only a few who are steadfast and wise choose the right *shreya* path. But you astonish me.' 'स त्वं प्रियान्प्रियरूपांश्च कामान् अभिध्यायन्नचिकेतोऽत्यस्त्राक्षीः।'; 'विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये न त्वा कामा बहवोऽलोलुपन्त॥' – '*Sa tvam priyānpriya-roopānshcha kāmān abhidhyāyannachiketo'tyas-rāksheehi.*' '*Vidyābheepsinam Nachiketasam manye na tvā kāmā bahavo'lolupanta.*' – 'You understand women, wealth and power, which lure the mind and divert most, as insignificant and scorn them. I cannot see the slightest covetousness in you! You have passed the test Nachiketa. You are truly eligible for *brah-mavidya*. Therefore come, I have decided that the third boon you have asked for, regarding that after death, I will now explain to you' (Katha Upanishad: 1/2/3,4).

We shall see Yama Raja's explanation in the next installment.



Is the Dollar Really Almighty...?

A financial catastrophe had been simmering through the weekend, with desperate attempts to find a last-minute suitor failing in vain. As Monday's rush-hour commute ensued, the inevitable devastation had become the focal point of the mass media. The 158-year-old firm – which had survived the darkest hours of financial history – crumbled and waved the white flag. As streams of bewildered employees flowed out of the building with personal possessions hastily packed together in boxes, searching questions were asked to those empowered with safeguarding such organizations from adversity.

A stone thrown in a pond generates ripples that move ever outwardly. Thus, seldom are the negligent actions of one individual exclusively suffered by the wrongdoer. A reckless driver, for example, endangers the lives of the passengers inside the vehicle and pedestrians who inadvertently suffer injuries or worse because of his careless driving. Political conflicts that lead two nations into military battle invariably inflict suffering to innocent civilians. Similarly, the effects of the collapse of one of the world's largest financial institutions brought great misery not only to those who worked tirelessly for its prosperity, but also to many more who were unrelated directly to the company or even the financial sector.

Irrespective of the debate that would naturally follow events of this magnitude, an apparent lack of discipline and control could not be countered as a material factor. Psychologists will lend their expertise to scenarios of this nature by offering an insight into the rationale behind such irresponsible behaviour. The key players of such powerful institutions make decisions to generate wealth. However, the urgency



of generating large profits became a critical factor. There is a culture of making large amounts of 'fast money' with significant risks.

The current global events in the financial and money markets are symptomatic of the greed that is arguably the greatest current threat to modern civilization. Traders are rewarded based upon the size of the profits they accumulate on behalf of organizations, which in turn, face pressure from shareholders for larger dividends. Mediocrity is not acceptable in today's world and 'contentment is not better than riches'. This paradigm change has increased rapidly in recent times and, from a theoretical perspective, has changed the lifestyle of individuals and the business model of banks.

There had been a growing trend in the major world economies for banks to extend mortgages to people who could not afford them. The business reasoning for this strategy was to generate profits at the expense of the somewhat unsuspecting borrower. As part of the same equation, borrowers were driven by the temptations of materialism to live outside their means. These borrowers borrowed more than they could afford, as they sought to own homes to satisfy their self-esteem and display them as a symbol of their status.

Thus, we have compounded greed, on the part of the borrower and the lender. The loans that banks entered into were then subsequently 'repackaged' and sold. Should the borrower default on his obligations, the banks were legally empowered to repossess their homes. Imagine a car showroom, for example, with a number of cars that are in a very poor state of repair, in a portfolio containing other vehicles that are relatively superior in quality. The true extent of the stock of the business is camouflaged, because these substandard motors are part of the inventory – they may not be purchased and thus their value is disguised amongst the more elite models.

A consequence of this capitalistic irresponsibility

resulted in borrowers defaulting on their payments, thereby exposing 'greedy' and irresponsible banks to huge bad debt and dwindling client deposits. The borrowers could not afford to repay, and so the banks suffered losses on these loans. As news of this situation filtered into the media, customers became wary of depositing their money with these banks. This caused a liquidity or 'credit crunch', a situation where a bank cannot sustain its operations because its bad debt is more than the deposits in its books. House prices began to fall sharply and the business model became unsustainable. Banks were unable to recoup their losses from the security that was offered for the loans, and the gamble of being able to borrow large amounts of money for an asset that would always increase in value failed dramatically.

In response to this, many Western governments are now bailing the failing banks by taking over the bad debt (toxic investments) from them. In doing so, they are using the taxpayer's money. The same taxpayer who is now being punished did not enjoy the huge bonuses that the city workers used to make in good times.

In summary, poorer people who can barely afford decent meals are shouldering an even bigger responsibility of carrying the City elites on their shoulders. The same elites lived lavish lifestyles from the sweat of the poor when times were good.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in the Shikshapatri, "One should keep a daily record of one's expenditure and income and should always live within one's means...."

His sound financial principles, which address even modern financial problems, tackle the core of this economic crisis for borrowers. The responsibility of monetary discipline rests with the individual. The enticements for a lavish lifestyle are ever increasing – we face a constant onslaught of advertisements, enticing us to believe the lie of greed. The annual expenditure of advertising for children's products in Ameri-

ca, for example, increased from \$100 million in 1980 to \$15 billion in 2004.

Man's innate desire for material wealth is fuelled by unscrupulous enterprises exploiting his vulnerability. An endless availability of borrowing to satisfy the hedonistic wishes of instant gratification has transformed dreams into attainable objects, albeit synthetically. What was once out of reach became readily available. This led to a false economy, in which properties and goods were acquired by those who could not afford such possessions.

The consequence that the world is seeing for individuals is devastating. Repossessions of homes are at record levels, recorded at an average of 124 homes per day in the United Kingdom alone. Families are being evicted from their lavish properties because they cannot afford to pay their mortgages. The average amount borrowed by an individual outside of their mortgage is almost £5,000. An unknown author has poignantly stated *'Hindsight explains the injury that foresight would have prevented'*. The foresight is encompassed within the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His principles were established to prevent families from suffering this pain.

One may naturally counter and suggest that a desire for wealth leads to such consequences in the most extreme of circumstances, and the sequence of events that has led to the modern financial crisis are unlikely to be repeated. However, as Pramukh Swami Maharaj states, "There is no reason to believe that money alone brings happiness. One who is rich has many dangers to face. One who owns expensive possessions is ever concerned about safeguarding such articles. Today, many have progressed and accumulated wealth, yet with this comes the problem of taxes that burdens the mind. Wealth and materialistic possessions yield initial happiness, but within them are intrinsic problems. Thus, even the rich are unhappy and that is why Tulsidas says happiness lies in God and his holy Sadhu..."

The lessons to be learned from the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj are twofold: first, money is no surety of lasting and permanent happiness; moreover, it brings associated unhappiness; and second, the desire for material objects can lead one to borrow to satisfy one's wishes, and in some cases, to borrow an amount that one cannot afford to repay. This action ultimately yields unhappiness.

Pramukh Swami is a living embodiment of detachment. Dressed in orange robes and always accompanied by the *murti* of Thakorji, he inspires youths to remove their desires for the riches of this world and become engaged in the devotion of God. He invariably reminds us that we arrived on this earth without a penny, and will leave without taking any possessions. Although he underlines the problems associated with desire for wealth, he also guides people to focus their energies on God, the provider of true and lasting happiness.

Man has abandoned all notion of what is necessary to survive, even to live comfortably. The requirements are now beyond what is required to sustain a healthy, prosperous life. It is said, "The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed." This discussion on individual carelessness and misplaced priorities also applies to the large corporations who have provided the means for slapdash individuals to embark upon their dangerous journey of debt.

BC Forbes, founder of the Forbes Business Magazine believes, "The man who has won millions at the cost of his conscience is a failure." The corporations who were recording massive revenues from their ethically questionable practises ultimately failed and brought many others to their knees. Thus, the conclusion of the principles established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan is that sometimes, when you hold out for everything, you walk away with nothing.



Reconnect the Disconnection



Some time ago Dr. K.B. Kushal of the Dayanand Institute of Education, Management and Research was honoured by the Indian Planetary Society with the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement Award. On that occasion, he spoke of the challenges of the 21st century. In particular, he stressed that knowledge, more than material wealth, is going to be the most powerful asset. Already we know how important information and knowledge are in shaping the course of the economy of all nations, large and small.

He lamented that though in ancient India there was recognition of knowledge, due to the continuous aggressions on the country over the last 1000 years, it became disconnected and we became lost, resulting in an era where we were looked upon as an ignorant, backward society.

Indian civilization, which was based on the pillars of education, culture, research and health came to be described as a giant mass of people inhabiting a continent needing to be taught by the Western world.

However, Dr. Kushal said that contrary to Western propaganda and our own ignorance, knowledge has always been given a place of prime importance. He referred to *vidya* and while he was speaking parallel thinking went on in my mind about what a great knowledge society our own civilization was in the past. Dr. Kushal, reminded us of '*Jnānam param balam*' – 'Knowledge is the greatest strength' and a stream of similar sayings. Sutras and couplets based on *vidya* started coming to my mind:

येषां न विद्या न तपो न दानं, ज्ञानं न शीलं न गुणो न धर्मः ।
ते मर्त्यलोके भुवि भार भूता मनुष्यरूपेण मृगाश्चरन्ति ॥

“Those who lack wisdom, austerity, generosity, character, virtues and dharma are a burden on this earth and merely roam around like animals.”

Chanakya has said:

प्रथमे नार्जिता विद्या द्वितीये नार्जितं धनम्।
तृतीये नार्जितं पुण्यं चतुर्थे किं करिष्यति॥

“One who does not acquire knowledge in childhood, wealth in youth, merits in middle age, what will he achieve in old age?”

And how important was knowledge to us:

विद्या नाम नरस्य रूपमधिकं प्रच्छन्न-गुप्तं धनं
विद्या भोगकरी यशः सुखकरी विद्या गुरुमां गुरुः।
विद्या बंधुजनो विदेशगमने विद्या परं दैवतं
विद्या राजसु पूज्यते न तु धनं विद्या-विहीनः पशुः॥

“Knowledge is a form of man – it is hidden wealth; it brings pleasures, fame and happiness and it is the guru of all gurus. On foreign lands it is one’s friend; it is equal to the best of *devas*. Knowledge is revered in a king’s court, not wealth; a person without knowledge is like an animal.”

Dr. Kushal spoke of our society having always been a knowledge society.

Somehow we got disconnected from our past. Now, when knowledge is such a great source of power, it is very pertinent and necessary that we connect back to our past to gain inspiration. We must develop the fields of science, technology, economics, and others, not only for our own uplift but also to contribute to the world, as we were doing in the past.

And what a glorious past it was!

Chanakya gave the first treatise on political science (*Niti*). He gave his first treatise on economics, *Arthashastra*, in 400 BCE – which is more than 1,100 years prior to the father of economics in the West, Adam Smith, who wrote *Wealth of Nations* in 1776.

Chanakya says:

पुस्तकेषु स्थिता विद्या परहस्तेषु यदुधनम्।
कष्टकाले समुत्पन्ने नसा विद्या न तु धनम्॥

“In times of need, knowledge stored away in

books is not knowledge and wealth in the hands of others is not wealth.”

Charak and Sushrut gave their writings on medicine and surgery, respectively. Charak’s treatises on Ayurveda are still very good and being used in practice. Sushrut is known to have performed more than 400 types of operations including 23 delicate eye operations. This was around 600 BCE.

Then there was Varahamihir whose studies helped to calculate the distance between various planets and the earth, and who was also the first to use the words *anu* (atom) and *paramanu* (sub-atomic particle).

Around the sixth century CE Aryabhata carried out new research and contributed some new developments. The most important was calculating the relationship between the circumference and diameter of a circle as 3.141 (pi).

Kanada, who lived on the banks of the River Narmada, did research in atomic science. Baudhayan’s Theorem, originally in Sanskrit, was taught to the Greeks and later came to be known as Pythagoras’ Theorem. Also, our numerals from one to ten passed from us to Europe via the Arabs and so came to be known as Arabic numerals. The zero was invented in India, without which present day mathematics and computer science would not have been possible. In fact, logarithms and algebra were also developed here in India and arithmetic was always given the highest importance in our scriptures:

यथा शिखा मयूराणां फणिनां मणयो यथा।
तथा वेदान्त शास्त्राणां गणितं मूर्धनि स्थितम्॥

“Just as a feather decorates the head of a peacock, a gem decorates the head of a snake, similarly, mathematics is the decoration of Vedanta and other Shastras.”

In the 12th century the scientist Bhaskaracharya of Amravati, Maharashtra, was the first to observe the principle of gravitation.

(contd. on page 22)



Niyam, Nishchay, Paksh

Swamishri's discourse during the evening
satsang assembly in Gondal on
17 March 1999.

What are the qualities of a staunch *satsangi*? Shriji Maharaj describes a staunch *satsangi* as one who has *niyam*, *nishchay* and *paksh*.

Shriji Maharaj has laid down *niyams* in the Shikshapatri. Some are common to all, some are specific for men, some for women, and some for people of special status. To observe these *niyams* is the characteristic of a staunch *satsangi*. It is not proper if one does not follow these *niyams*, to it is not proper. So sincerely observe the *niyams* Shriji Maharaj has given in the Shikshapatri. To observe his *niyams* is a measure of one's staunchness and all who have observed them have earned the blessings of God. *Niyams* must be followed daily. But if one observes them one day and skips them the next day and so on, then they will not bear fruit. A child who goes to school daily will benefit, while one who does not attend will not.

Many Kathis Darbars travelled with Maharaj. Among them were Sura Khachar and Somla Khachar. They decided to undertake a *niyam*, so that Maharaj would be pleased. Thus, they pledged not to eat anything containing rice. The next day, a meal of tasty *dudhpak* (sweetened milk, rice and condiments) and *malpuva* was prepared. All the sadhus and devotees sat down to eat and then Maharaj began to serve. Sura

and Somla looked at each other and said to each other, "Today there is a feast of *dudhpak* and *malpuva*, and Maharaj himself is serving. How can we forego such an opportunity? So let's give up the *niyam* of not eating rice, and take the *niyam* of not eating wheat instead." Having changed their *niyam*, they consumed a heavy meal of *dudhpak* and *malpuva*.

The next day a delicious meal of *sata* and *jalebi* was prepared. Everyone sat down to eat. Sura and Somla thought, "These items contain wheat. Yesterday we changed our pledge and decided not to eat wheat. But now let's switch back to our original pledge – not to eat rice."

So, do not observe *niyams* in this manner. Fluctuating like this does not bring stability in observing *niyams*. If there is a steady flow of water, even if it is just drop-by-drop, then it will develop into a large pool of water. But if you pour only a bucketful occasionally, then it will all evaporate.

So a *niyam* is a *niyam* and should not be transgressed. Everyone must perform puja every morning. If someone thinks, I'll do it tomorrow, or the day after, or in the evening or the afternoon, then the *niyam* will not be upheld. So it is Maharaj's *agna* for all to bathe and do puja in the morning. Read one Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vato daily. Read the Shikshapatri, turn five *malas* and offer five *dandvats* daily. One must attend the Sunday assembly at the mandir, and as per Yogiji Maharaj's *agna* reach there on time (at the start). In fact, take your seat a few minutes before starts, and leave only after the *arti*. This way, one can be said to have obeyed the *agna*

properly. Otherwise, by coming late, one may think that the *niyam* has been observed, but not so for the entire duration. If someone comes to meet you, bring them with you or tell them to come later. But at that time it is Swami's (Yogiji Maharaj's) *agna*, so reach the assembly on time. By following such *niyams*, one gets peace in life.

Then there is *nischay*. *Nischay* is the firm belief that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is supreme, the *avatari* of all avatars, the cause of all causes, the Master of Akshardham, the form of Purushottam Narayan and he manifested on earth for the *kalyan* of the *jivas*. There is no difference between the form in Akshardham and that which is here. There is not even the slightest trace of *maya* in him. One should have *nischay* in God like one's firm conviction that a mango tree is a mango tree and a neem tree is a neem tree. Even if one is awakened from deep sleep this conviction should persist. Similarly, the conviction for Shriji Maharaj must remain. No matter what actions he performs or what he says, but he is divine. He is totally pure and he has no prejudices. This firm belief must remain forever. But if one day one praises and the next day one doubts, that is not true *nischay*.

Alaiya Khachar, at first understood this glory and brought 2000 into *satsang*, convincing them that by having refuge in Maharaj they will attain *moksha*. Then he changed and began criticizing Maharaj, claiming that he is not God, but a false Brahmin and that no one should go to Gadhada. In the Vachanamrut Maharaj has said that one who does this will not experience peace. Swami says that such a person does not have true *nischay*. So, once *nischay* is firmly established it must never waver. A mango tree may not bear mangos, but it is still a mango tree – that is its original nature. There is no change in that. So, one may or may not experience miracles, one's wishes may or may not be fulfilled, but still Shriji Maharaj is God. Just because he may not fulfil one's wishes does not mean he is not God. Even if he does not fulfil one's wishes, whatever he does is for one's

good. By fulfilling one's wishes there may arise difficulties or miseries. So, no matter what hardships one faces, one's *nischay* must be firm. All those who have had unwavering *nischay* have never had any problems.

If one is facing death and God is there before you, then not to think 'Why doesn't God protect me?' is true *nischay*. It reflects the belief that whatever he does is for my ultimate good.

Prahlad faced many hardships. His father tried to kill him, but Prahlad's *nischay* did not waver. He continued to pray to and worship God. His father was powerful and king of the three realms, yet Prahlad offered worship only to God. His *nischay* was so strong that although there were many attempts to kill him, he never doubted God's greatness.

Bhagatji Maharaj also faced many difficulties, but he, too, was firm.

So, no matter what difficulties one faces, never resort to superstitions. Continue to pray to God. Have the conviction that whatever God wills – happiness or misery – one's *nischay* will not change. '*Dāsnā dushman Hari ke di na hoy.*' – 'God is never the enemy of his devotees.'

Now *paksh*. *Paksh* is to give firm support to God and his devotees, no matter what difficulties one has to face. In Vachanamrut Gadhada III-7, Shriji Maharaj says that for one who wants *kalyan*, there is nothing more able to give one pleasure than God and his Sadhu. Just as one protects one's body and one's relatives, one must protect God and his devotees. Even if one's son is at fault, one sides with him. This is *atmabuddhi*, since one believes him to be one's own. Such *atmabuddhi* in God and his devotees is true *paksh*. Under no circumstances should such *paksh* be abandoned – whether one faces death or injury, or honour or insult. So, one should help support devotees of God to the best of one's ability.

Thus, one with firm *niyam*, *nischay* and *paksh* is a staunch *satsangi*. May all be blessed with such virtues. ♦

Who's in Control?



It's just gone past two o'clock on a chilly but bright afternoon in January. You're on a plane at London's Heathrow Airport, waiting to take off. Your mind is already consumed by thoughts of the warmth of Dubai – your destination. Half an hour later, the captain announces, “Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. I'm afraid we will be departing at approximately 3.00 p.m., slightly later than scheduled.” A few passengers sigh at the announcement whilst you fidget with your seat belt.

The time eventually passes and the plane roars into the air. Unusually, a few minutes after take-off, the plane shakes considerably, and the distinct smell of smoke engulfs your nostrils. Once again, the captain makes an announcement, “Brace for impact!”

Panic circulates through your veins. You look outside through the window to see you're about to land on water. With your eyes closed, you

think of Maharaj and Swamishri and pray to him to look after you, and to help you, to save you in your time of need.

The above story will no doubt ring a bell in your mind. A very similar incident occurred in the city of New York on Thursday 15 January 2009. Minutes after take-off from La Guardia Airport, a plane carrying 155 people, hit a flock of birds, and Captain Chesley Sullenberger quickly took the decision to ditch his plane in the River Hudson, which splits Manhattan and New Jersey.

Landing a commercial airliner in water is extremely rare and landing it successfully requires an extremely high degree of skill. The fate of the other 154 people onboard the plane lay in the hands of Captain Sullenberger. His heroic actions meant that, apart from one passenger who suffered two broken legs, no one suffered any serious injury.

As the plane came down into the water, each

passenger would have been fully aware that they were not in control of whether they would live to see the next day. Less dramatically, in our day to day lives, there are also many times when we are not in control and our fate does not lie in our hands. For example, as you sit on a bus, ultimately the bus driver is in control. When you sit an exam, obviously thorough preparation significantly increases the chances of success, but ultimately the person who sets and marks the exam will determine your result – it is they who are in control!

But ultimately, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and our beloved Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj are in control. They are the all-doers. It is their will that prevails. In the Swamini Vato, Gunatitanand Swami has said, “God is the all-doer. If we want to sleep now we cannot, and once asleep even if a thief comes and robs us, we are unable to wake up. Thus, God is the all-doer.”

So, what does this discourse mean for us as *satsangi* students? Does it now mean that we shouldn't study hard for our exams because the results are in Maharaj's hands? No, it in fact means the opposite. We should still work extremely hard but with the additional under-

standing that the results of our labour are for Maharaj to decide. It is also important to know that we are much more likely to succeed by working hard since it is this which will earn us Swamishri's grace, and it is only his grace which will deliver the results we crave.

The hustle and bustle of modern-day life can result in much tension, anxiety and stress, even in the life of a *satsangi*. Yet again, the understanding of Maharaj as the all-doer can provide immense benefit on this front. Swamishri often says that we should work hard and sincerely in all aspects of our life and keep total faith in whatever fruits that Bhagwan Swaminarayan dispenses. After all, it is said, “*Dāsnā dushman Hari ke'di hoy nahi, jem karshe tem sukhaj thāshe*”, which means that God can never be the enemy of his devotee and whatever he does will result in happiness for the devotee. It may be a short phrase but it can eliminate a lot of stress from our lives, if we remember it every day as we encounter the ups and downs of life.

So, remember: “Who is in control?”

Nilkanth (Newsletter), UK, January 2009



(contd. from page 18)

He designed the Khand Meru which thereafter travelled to Europe and came to be known as Pascal's Triangle. Also, we can go on listing the great contributions to science by Brahmagupta, Nagarjuna and many others.

Universities like Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain, Vallabhipur and others flourished in different parts of India. At these universities research was carried out, theses were written and knowledge was spread all over the world through different channels. This is what H.G. Rawlinson observed, “India suffers today in the estimation of the world, more through the world's ignorance of her achievements than in the absence or insignificance of her achievements.”

So, we should reconnect to our rich temporal and spiritual knowledge, which was overshadowed and lost in some parts for 1000 years due to foreign suppression and hegemony.

Now is the time to realize the true value of our inheritance. Appreciate what is ours, co-ordinate it with what is available from elsewhere and proceed from here to more effective and productive civilized behaviour where self respect, dignity and originality become the order of the day. In short, reconnect the disconnection and move forward.





THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL, NAGPUR

Inaugurated in 1997 by HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj, The Swaminarayan School in Nagpur, at present, caters for students from Pre-Primary to Standard 12. Affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education, this English-medium school has attained a high pass rate in the Standard 10 Board exams.

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**244 East Wardhman Nagar, Swaminarayan Marg,
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Ph.: 09372735888 (Chhatralay) 09325464349 (Gruhpati)



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The Director,

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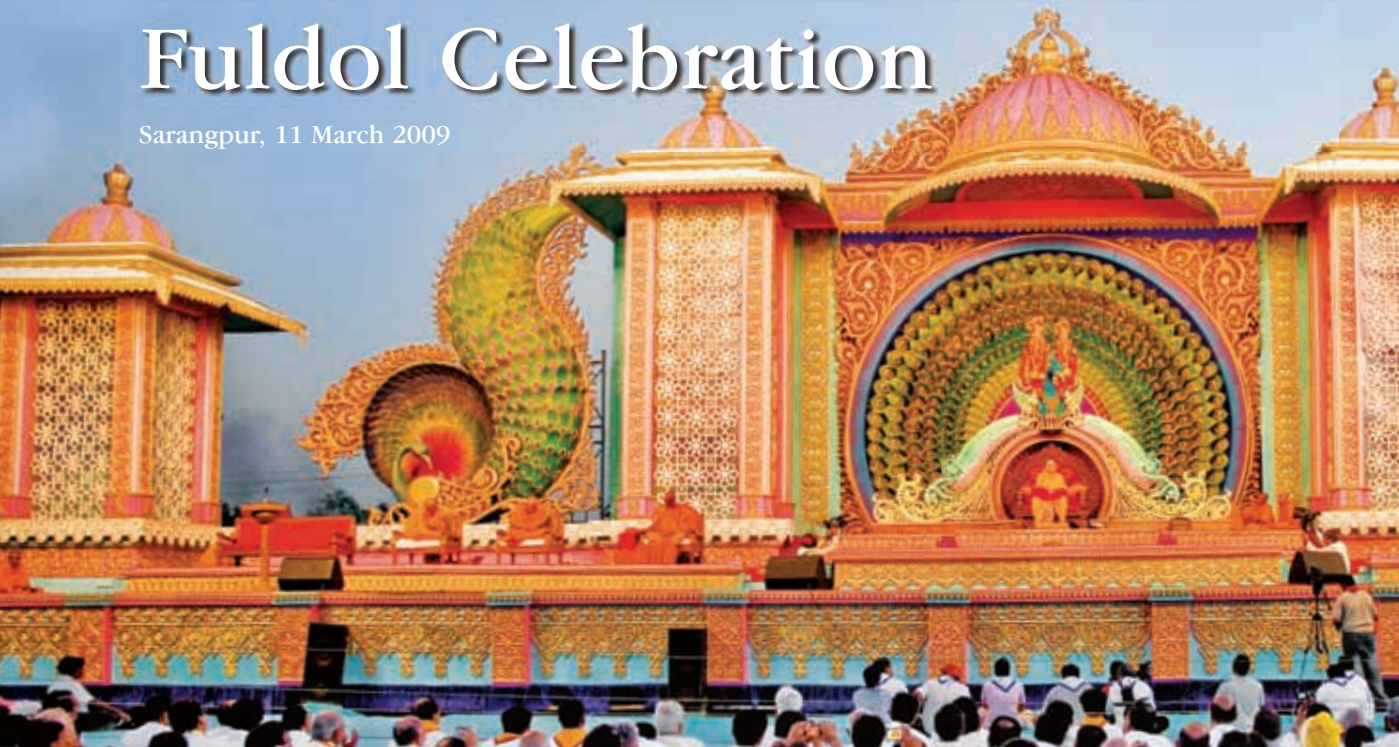
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E-mail: swamivmatladara@yahoo.co.in

Fuldol Celebration

Sarangpur, 11 March 2009



Over 60,000 devotees from throughout India and abroad gathered in Sarangpur for the grand double celebration of Bhagatji Maharaj's 180th Birthday and Pushpadolotsav in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Held on the spacious grounds of the BAPS Vidyamandir, Sarangpur, the evening celebration assembly began with inspiring speeches by senior sadhus and bhajans. Afterwards, publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith in Gujarati, Telugu, Kannad and Tamil were inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Amrutvani 13, a selection of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's audio blessings over the past year, was also released.

Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Yogiji Maharaj used to talk about '*bhida bhakti*'. You all understand the glory and divinity of Akshar and Purushottam, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, respect their work and so you all tolerate such difficulties here.

"All have been tolerating hardships for countless births. But that was for worldly happi-

ness and wealth, whereas the inconveniences tolerated here are for the *kalyan* of one's *atma*. The purpose of this human body is to attain *kalyan*. Gunatitanand Swami used to say, 'This body is for becoming *akshar-rup* and worshipping Purushottam.' So, these difficulties are tolerated for attaining ultimate *kalyan* and the divine bliss of God.

"Worldly desires, attachments and one's nature are all forms of *maya*. Prayers are offered so that they do not hinder. To overcome *maya*, the refuge of God is required. To cross the ocean, a small boat is of no use, one needs a large ship. Thus, God is the large ship that helps one to cross the ocean of *maya*. We have the association of greats like Gunatitanand Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and so should attach to them. How does one attach to them? By following their wishes and commands one will experience inner bliss and eternal peace. As one's *satsang* is strengthened attachment for the world diminishes.

"One tolerates hardships to gain worldly



pleasures. So, to attain *kalyan* of the *atma* one should cheerfully and patiently tolerate difficulties. In life, one sometimes gets happiness and sometimes gets misery. But amid this, one should retain stability (of mind) with the understanding that whatever God does is for one's benefit. A doctor may inflict pain through injections or operations, but one believes that it will cure the disease.

"Before, business and work were good and everyone was happy, but now there is a recession and everyone is worried about what will happen. But if we believe that whatever God does will be for our good, we will experience peace of mind since God is the all-doer.

"Out of ignorance one feels that one has lost everything, but we all know and understand that (when we die) we will not take anything with us. Everything will remain here. The more *satsang* one practices and the more reading of shastras – Bhagvat, Gita, Swamini Vato, Vachanamrut, Bhaktachintamani and others – one does, the more peace one experiences since

they describe the glory of God.

"Shriji Maharaj is manifest Purushottam. His divine abode is Gunatit. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj are bestowers of *moksha*. This understanding must be strengthened. Bhagatji Maharaj has tolerated a lot and never had any doubts in obeying the commands. Similarly, if we strengthen this knowledge then whatever happiness or misery, honour or insult we face there will be no problems.

"All devotees of God have faced problems, but they have remained firm and never given up. Because they had sacrificed everything for God, their knowledge gave them happiness. This is the knowledge of Akshar and Purushottam. The deeper this knowledge the greater one's happiness and peace."

Then, senior sadhus garlanded Swamishri with garlands of different materials devoutly prepared by various *satsang* centres.

This was followed by *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj and Swamishri spraying Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj with saffron-scented water as the sadhus sang Vedic verses.

Finally, Swamishri sat on a specially prepared *rath* and for one hour slowly coursed through the sadhus and devotees seated in the assembly, drenching everyone with sanctified saffron-scented water. ◆

ROYAL COUPLE VISIT THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL, LONDON

Wednesday 4 March 2009



His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, accompanied by Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, visited the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir and The Swaminarayan School, London, on Wednesday 4

March 2009 to celebrate the Hindu festival of Holi.

After the mandir visit the royal couple visited the school where they listened to traditional Indian music, sat with children of the Prep School and took part in the Holi-themed activities. They then went to the Senior School where they visited an arts class. Finally, the royal couple observed children playing Holi in the traditional manner of throwing coloured powder and spraying each other with water. The pupils were showered with flower petals by the royal couple as a token gesture of their having taken part in the festival.

Following a Holi dance depicting the advent of spring, the royal couple were presented with mementos by the Head Girl and Head Boy of the Senior School before bidding farewell. ♦

NATIONAL FAMILY SEMINARS 'NURTURING HAPPY FAMILIES'

March 2009, UK

As part of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's 'International Family Year' the theme of this year's Family Seminars was 'Nurturing Happy Families'.

The Seminars began with a reading of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings: "From the Swamini Vato and the life of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, one can learn how to practise Satsang and perform one's duties so that one can experience peace continually. Therefore, the more we engage in reading these books and strengthen our Satsang and also contemplate on the way in which the gurus lived their lives, then when we face challenges in our lives, we will also experience happiness and be able to lead a successful life; our children will also become happy through this same inspiration."

The seminars educated families through speeches, presentations, interviews, videos and interactive programmes on the theme, 'The family that sits together, plays together, works together and prays together stays together.' The topics covered included: 'Family Time – Ghar Sabha', 'Sitting Together', 'Working Together', and 'Praying Together', 'Playing Together', 'Family Workshop' and 'Staying Together'. The families left with a strong commitment to do *ghar sabha* at least twice a week. Some of the sessions were conducted according to different age groups, while some were held as family sessions.

Seminars were held in Leicester, Ashton and two in London, with a total of 428 families (1694 people) attending. ♦



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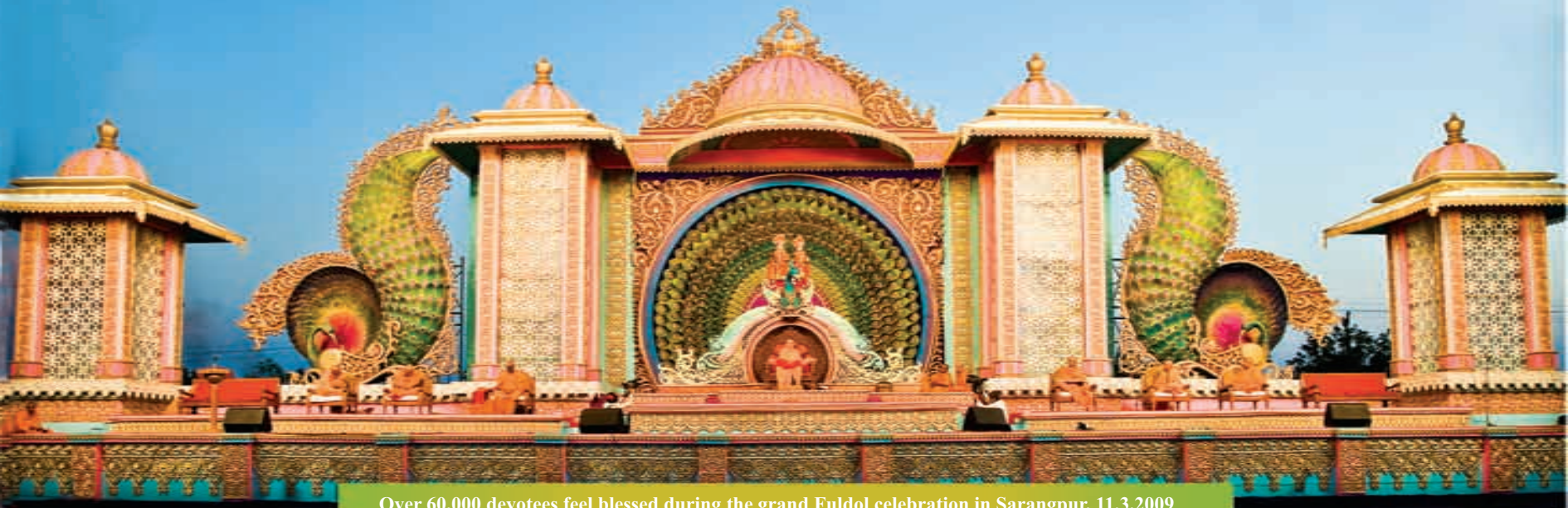
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ROYAL VISIT TO LONDON MANDIR AND THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL

On 4 March 2009, HRH Prince Charles and HRH Duchess of Cornwall visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir and The Swaminarayan School in London.

After a traditional welcome and darshan in the mandir, the royal couple visited the school, which is ranked as one of the best private schools in England.

1. The Prince and Duchess in the mandir observing the *rangoli* after having darshan of the deities. 2. Joyous reception by the staff and children of The Swaminarayan School. 3. The royal couple observed the various cultural and artistic activities of the school children.



Over 60,000 devotees feel blessed during the grand Fuldol celebration in Sarangpur, 11.3.2009

