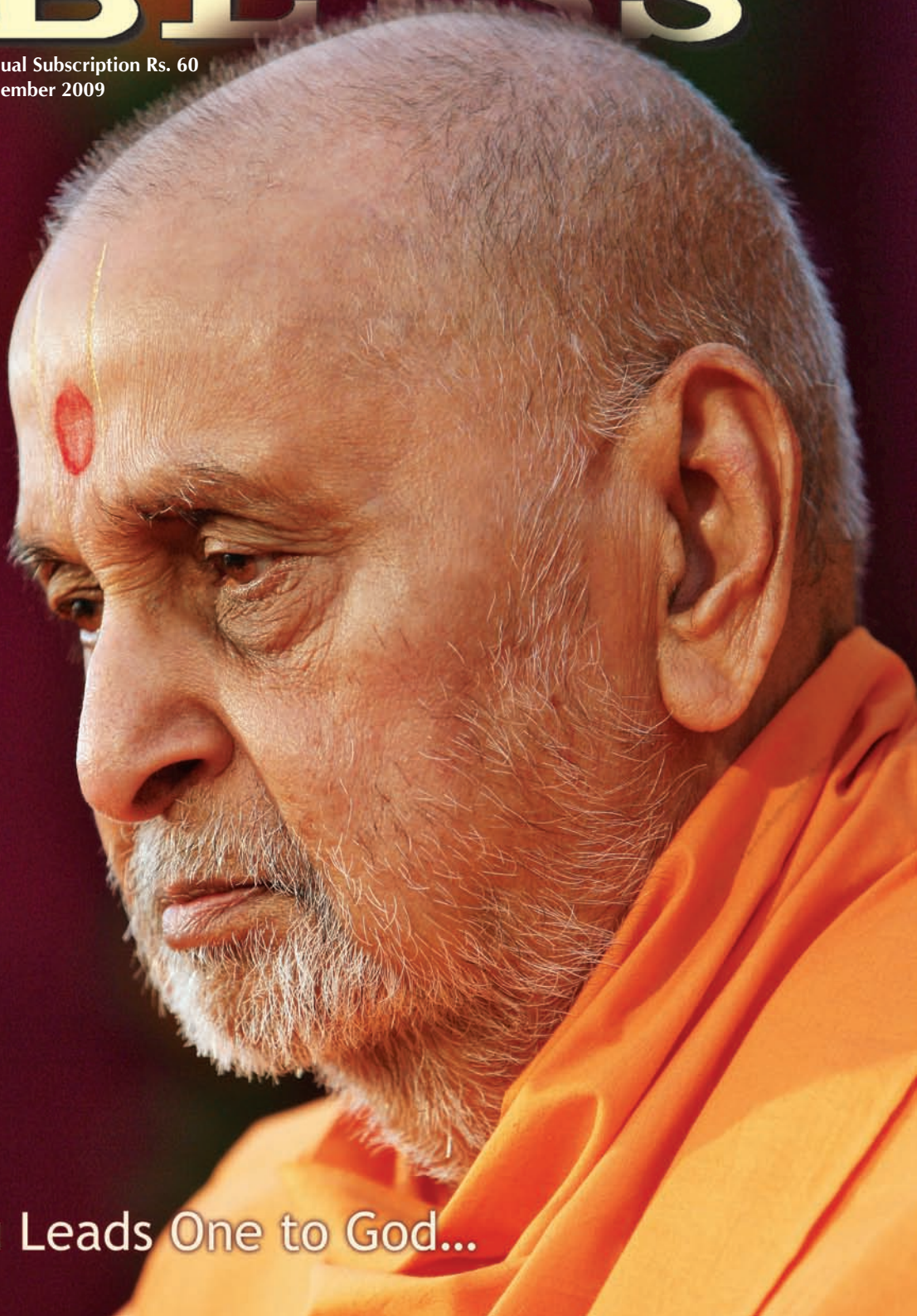
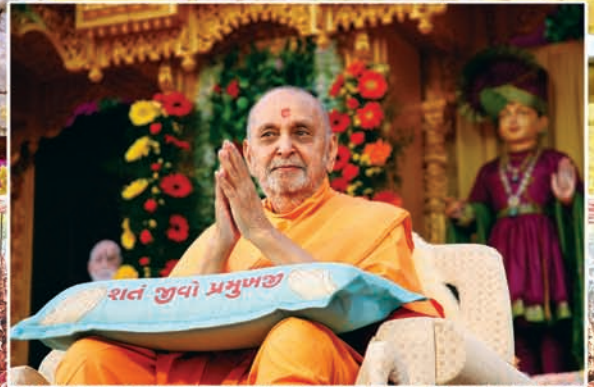


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A Guru Leads One to God...



Top: Annakut offered to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, BAPS Mandir, Gondal (18 October 2009).

Bottom: Devotees engaged in Swamishri's puja darshan on his 89th birthday, Bochasan, 25 November 2009.

Inset: On his 89th birthday Swamishri offers *pranams* to all after his morning puja.

Title: Swamishri engaged in Thakorji's darshan during his morning puja, Bochasan, 25 November 2009.



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CONTENTS

- 4 **Guru**
Guru Hari Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Brief life story...
- 9 **Guru**
What Is a Sampradaya?
Succession of gurus...
- 13 **Guru**
The Guru Leads One to God
Stories of life transformations...
- 20 **Philosophy – Swaminarayan Vedant**
**The Taittiriya Upanishad:
The Testimony of a Complete
Education, Part 1**
Vedic education traditions...
- 23 **BAPS Festivals**
**Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
89th Birthday Celebration, Bochasan**
- 24 **BAPS News**
- **Prime Minister of Canada, Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi**
 - **Inauguration of Akshardham Metro Station, New Delhi, India**
 - **Kishore-Kishori Shibirs, Gujarat, India**
 - **Archbishop of Westminster Visits BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London**

Website: www.swaminarayan.org

E-mail: magazines@in.baps.org

FIRST WORD

The Hindu shastras say there are three sources of miseries and problems in life. They are, *adhideva* – suffering or calamities due to the wrath or displeasure of the *devas* (sun-god, wind-god, rain-god, etc.), *adhibuta* – disease and affliction from other humans, animals and living beings, and *adhyatma* – suffering due to the whims and nature of the mind. To alleviate the first, one has to appease the *devas* through prayer and obedience and also take other measures. To counteract the second, one has to take preventive or curative actions. And to resolve the third, one needs to resort to *satsang* (spirituality) and, if necessary, psychological treatment.

With regards to the mind, if one's thoughts are skewed or unwholesome they give rise to anxiety, pain and conflict. Thus, cultivating a pure mind is necessary for happiness. A pure and happy mind provides solutions to many problems in life. Such a person is full of enthusiasm, confidence and humility. One who has a happy mind has no complaints or regrets. He or she is broadminded, tolerant, forgiving and helpful. Preparing such a mind is the purpose of spiritual practices and engaging in *satsang* with holy gurus.

Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have, through their purity, changed the lives of thousands of people. Even the wayward and the stiff-minded have been mellowed or transformed in their presence. Sometimes, these changes have been effected through their *darshan* or a gentle touch. For some, a few words have caused a sea-change. And for the devoted, such holy gurus have always inspired and nourished them on the spiritual path of *sadhanas*, and also in life.

This issue deals with stories of life transformations inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj,
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Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiyandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas,
Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas
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Guru Hari

Pramukh Swami Maharaj

A Brief Story of His Life

INTRODUCTION

The search is on. Many who are spiritually inclined are seeking for him. People are flying to wherever they get a hint of where he may be. Each potential figure is probed and cross-examined to confirm if he is the one; and all the while some of those who are searching are passionately reciting *shlokas*, bhajans and couplets that may provide new clues, new traces of who he is and where he may be.

The search for the Satpurush can take several lifetimes, but, thankfully, all those reading this have found that person. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the Satpurush. He is whom the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and other authoritative scriptures glorify as the true Sadhu. God-realized or Gunatit Sadhu. Shriji Maharaj has described the glory of the Gunatit Sadhu in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-27 as the 'sustainer of the world'.

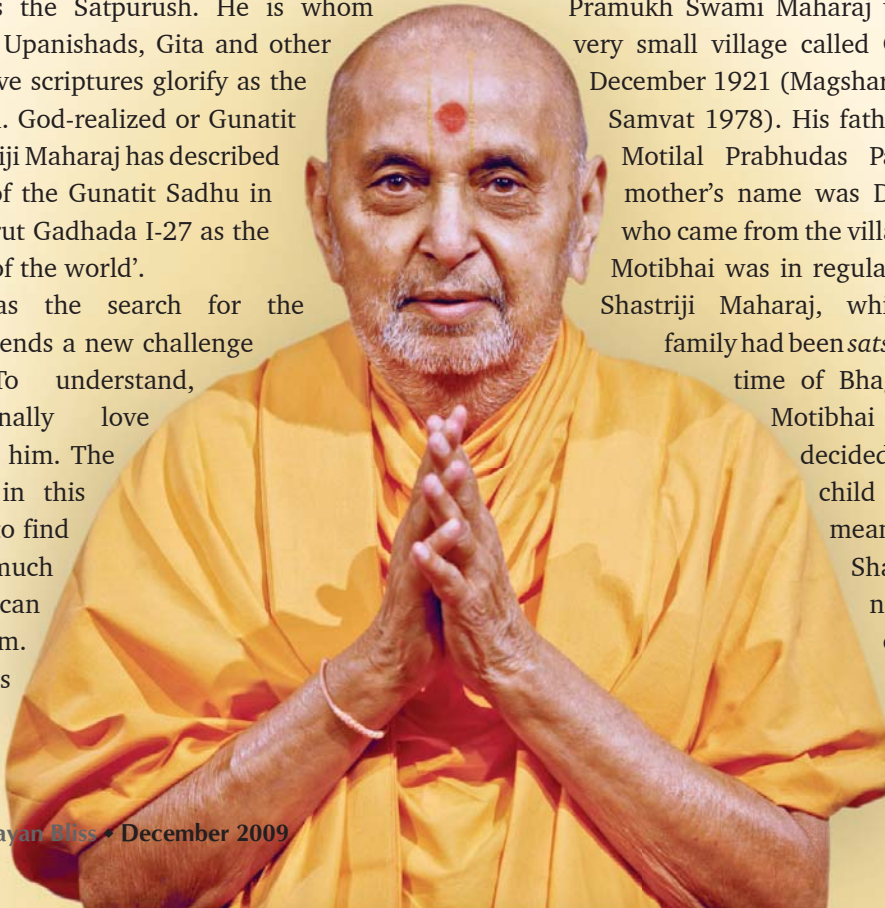
Now, as the search for the Satpurush ends a new challenge begins. To understand, unconditionally love and follow him. The first step in this process is to find out as much as we can about him. Where was he born? What was

his childhood like? How did he become a sadhu? Why did Shastriji Maharaj, his guru, choose young Narayanswarup Swami, who had then been a sadhu for only 11 years, as Pramukh (President of BAPS), over those 20-30 years his senior? What has he done as a guru for this world? Let us now briefly delve into the life of our guru.

THE CHILDHOOD YEARS...

The Satpurush has no worldly ties to his birth, birthplace or childhood. In fact, all his divine actions are for us to ponder over to purify our soul.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in a very small village called Chansad on 7 December 1921 (Magshar *sud* 8, Vikram Samvat 1978). His father's name was Motilal Prabhudas Patel, and his mother's name was Diwaliba Patel, who came from the village of Menpur. Motibhai was in regular contact with Shastriji Maharaj, while Diwaliba's family had been *satsangis* since the time of Bhagatji Maharaj. Motibhai and Diwaliba decided to name their child Shantilal, meaning peace. Shantilal had nine siblings, of whom four passed away at a young age. Shantilal



was the youngest. Shantilal started doing daily puja from the age of seven. His first puja was presented to him by Nana Akshar Swami.

As a child, young Shantilal excelled in his studies. When he began studying in Padra, a village 6 km from Chansad, he would insist on getting there early. His childhood friend, Ambalalbhai, recalls, “I used to be lazy, but Shantilal would always insist that we left on time. We would both take a long time in cycling but when it came to hills I would stop cycling and let Shantilal pull me uphill. He would happily cycle away without a single complaint.”

After some time Motibhai bought Shantilal a secondhand ‘Hercules’ cycle for Rs. 16. Shantilal daily cycled to school, carrying his lunchbox and water bottle. Shantilal’s lunch was a humble one. *Dhebra, vada, gadpuri* and pickles was the daily menu. This simple menu meant that less time was spent in eating and thinking of food and more time was spent studying.

After school hours, Shantilal spent his free time at one of three mandirs: Hanuman Gadhi Mandir, Satyanarayan Mandir and Swaminarayan Mandir. It was at the Swaminarayan Mandir that Shantilal would sit and listen to Haridas Bawaji’s tales of Haridwar and Rishikesh. Listening to these tales made Shantilal want to go to these places with his best friend, coincidentally also called Shantilal.

As well as studies, singing bhajans and offering bhakti, Shantilal loved sports. Cricket and swimming in particular were his favourite. Cricket was introduced to the village of Chansad by a government worker called Ramlal. He had bought a bat, ball and stumps and taught the children how to play. Roughly a year later, Ramlal was transferred elsewhere and he took the equipment with him. The children decided to get together and raised Rs. 500, quite a substantial sum in those days, for new equipment. All the children appointed Shantilal and Shankarlal to go to Vadodara to buy the equipment.

As they were getting ready to leave, a youth from Bhaili, the neighbouring village, approached



Guru Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Shantilal with a letter from Shastriji Maharaj, addressed to his father, Motibhai. Shantilal showed the letter to his parents. In the letter Shastriji Maharaj had instructed that Shantilal be sent to become a sadhu. Motibhai was reminded of the time when Shastriji Maharaj gave the infant Shantilal *vartman* and said, “He is ours. Please make sure to give him to us when the time is right.” That time had arrived. Without tears or anguish, his parents accepted guru Shastriji Maharaj’s wish and Shantilal immediately left.

At the age of 18 Shantilal embarked on a new chapter in his life.

TRANSITION INTO SADHU LIFE

Shantilal joined Nilkanth Swami and Ghanshyam Swami, two of Shastriji Maharaj’s sadhus, and accompanied them to the village of Sakarada and then to Bochasan. After a few days of travelling with Nirgundas Swami, Shantilal met Shastriji Maharaj in Ahmedabad. Shastriji expressed his wish, “In the morning, I want to initiate you as a *parshad*.” Thus, on the auspicious day of 22 November 1939 (Kartik *sud* 11, V.S. 1996) Shantilal became Shanti Bhagat.

Shanti Bhagat had one wish – to learn English. Initially, Shastriji Maharaj had said that he could learn from Khengarjibhai, a learned devotee in Ahmedabad. However, Shastriji Maharaj changed his mind and told Shanti Bhagat that for a sadhu it is better to learn Sanskrit rather than English.

Shanti Bhagat accepted his guru's wish straight away and went to Bochasan to study.

One day, Shastriji Maharaj tested the newly initiated Hariswarup Swami and Shanti Bhagat. He asked them to recite the eight forms of the word 'Rama'. Shanti Bhagat recited them fluently, but Hariswarup Swami had trouble. Pleased by young Shanti Bhagat's performance, Shastriji Maharaj told Hariswarup Swami, "When he becomes a sadhu this Shanti will look after the Sampradaya."

Some weeks later, Shastriji Maharaj decided to give Shanti Bhagat the *bhagvati diksha*. On the morning of 10 January 1940 (Posh sud 1, V.S. 1996) Yogiji Maharaj performed the *mahapuja* in the Akshar Deri in Gondal. Shastriji Maharaj performed the initiation rites and decided that Shanti Bhagat be named Narayanswarupdas, explaining, "He is the very form of Narayan." He then told Yogiji Maharaj to bless Narayanswarup Swami so that he acquires virtues like his.

Narayanswarup Swami then continued his studies first in Gondal and then in Bhadran with a group of other sadhus. While studying Sanskrit, they would also beg for alms in the streets of the village and serve in the mandir.

Impressed by his sharp intellect, management skills and saintliness, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Narayanswarup Swami as the Kothari of Sarangpur Mandir in 1946. He fulfilled this responsibility until 1950.

Shastriji Maharaj had a special affection for Narayanswarup Swami and fondly called him 'Naranda'. Once, Shastriji Maharaj fell ill in Sarangpur and casually remarked that if Naranda were there he would get better. Receiving this news in Atladra, young Naranda immediately left for Sarangpur, despite the heavy rains. Hanging off a train in the pouring rain for 100 km and then walking another 11 km from Botad station in the mud, potholes and flooded terrain, Narayanswarup Swami arrived in Sarangpur to the delight of guru Shastriji Maharaj.

APPOINTED PRESIDENT OF BAPS

As the years passed, under the guidance of Shastriji Maharaj, Narayanswarup Swami earned the respect of all through his saintliness and skills. His adherence to *niyams* was par excellence.

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj decided to appoint the 28-year-old Narayanswarup Swami as President of BAPS in his place.

However, Narayanswarup Swami did not wish for such honour, but, because it was his guru's wish he reluctantly accepted the responsibility. Others felt that he was too young for such a post, but Shastriji Maharaj boldly stated, "I have never taken a decision in my life that I have regretted." So, on 21 May 1950, at Amlī Valī Pol in Ahmedabad, Shastriji Maharaj draped Narayanswarup Swami in a *chadar* – a symbol of his appointment as President (Pramukh) of BAPS.

On this occasion Pramukh Swami pledged, "Today, before my guru and this whole gathering, I promise that I will fulfil my responsibility properly. Without caring for myself, I will remain loyal to this Sanstha and fulfil my duty to you."

IN THE PRESENCE OF YOGIJI MAHARAJ

On Vaishakh sud 4, V.S. 2007 (1951 CE) at 10.50 a.m., Shastriji Maharaj shed his mortal frame having handed over all responsibilities to Yogiji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj had left all administrative dealings to Pramukh Swami Maharaj who wholeheartedly accepted Yogiji Maharaj as his guru and did not take any decision without his consent.

Hence, because of Yogiji Maharaj's love and Pramukh Swami's hard work, the future of BAPS was bright.

For Pramukh Swami, being president also meant pulling carts full of stones, washing dishes, serving meals to devotees, and looking after farmlands and cowsheds. Night or day, bad weather or good, ill or well, Pramukh Swami relentlessly continued his duties with one goal: to please his guru. He often says, "My thoughts never differed from Yogi Bapa's."

Yogi Bapa personally arranged the celebration of Pramukh Swami's 48th birthday in Mumbai. During this celebration Yogiji Maharaj revealed Pramukh Swami's greatness to all, "Shastriji Maharaj has appointed him as president, so everyone should follow Pramukh Swami's *agna*. He is the form of Shastriji Maharaj – there is no difference between the two..."

Yogiji Maharaj often spoke of Pramukh Swami's glory and said that his wish of making 700 sadhus would be fulfilled by Pramukh Swami. (This came true in 2003 on Yogiji Maharaj's 111th birthday when the 700th sadhu was initiated.)

Once, Harshadbhai Dave, a senior devotee from the time of Shastriji Maharaj, asked Yogiji Maharaj what would happen to them in his absence. Yogiji Maharaj smiled and said, "Look to Pramukh Swami now. He will give you much more happiness than I have. Pramukh Swami is my everything."

Then, on 23 January 1971 Yogiji Maharaj shed his mortal frame. Thereafter, the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave everyone great strength.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ – PRAGAT BRAHMASWARUP

From the time he had become a sadhu, till the passing away of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami had always lived in the footsteps of his gurus and served under them devotedly. Yogiji Maharaj had often indicated that Pramukh Swami would be his successor as guru of BAPS. Sadguru Santvallabh Swami, a loyal disciple of Shastriji Maharaj and beloved of Yogiji Maharaj, was the first to proclaim Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the new guru. To please his gurus and continue the work they had begun, he engaged in intense, tireless *vicharan*. So intense, that just reading about it makes one breathless. For ten years, Swamishri, as everyone respectfully called him, followed a schedule full of exertion and difficulties. There were problems with transportation, accommodation and other logistics, yet he still travelled to see every devotee



Guru Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj

he could and sanctify their home. The following was the typical daily schedule for Swamishri:

- 5.30 a.m. – wake up, bathe, etc.
- 6.30 a.m. – puja, daily reading, *arti*, *katha*
- 7.30 a.m. – breakfast
- 8.00 a.m. – *padhramanis* begin
- Lunch would be at anytime after 12.30 p.m.
- 3.00 p.m. – rest and bathe
- 3.30 p.m. – move to a new village
- 4.00 p.m. – welcome sabha
- 5.00 p.m. – *padhramanis*
- 7.00 p.m. – evening *arti*
- 9.00 p.m. – *sabha*
- 12.00 midnight – *chesta*, meet devotees
- 12.30 to 1.00 a.m. – sleep

This was the schedule he followed for 10 years, during which he made a total of 6,464 village, town and city visits – an average of 2 villages a day. He accomplished such hectic *vicharan* in bullock-carts, rickety cars and hazardous rickshaws! Even when observing a *nirjala* fast or suffering from fever, he would complete the *padhramanis* arranged.

Upto 2007, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has travelled all through India and completed 27 overseas *satsang* tours (including three with Yogiji Maharaj, in 1955, 1960 and 1970). Swamishri has visited over 45 countries, including: UK, USA, Canada, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Dubai, Abu Dabhi, Japan, France,



Swamishri serves in the construction of a BAPS mandir

Germany, Italy, Portugal, Israel, Egypt and others.

As a result of his constant travels there has been a tremendous increase in the number of BAPS *satsang* centres and mandirs. Since 1971, Swamishri has consecrated 25 *shikharbaddh* mandirs and hundreds of *hari* mandirs in India, England, USA, Canada, East Africa, South Africa and other countries.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ IS FOR ALL

Amid all his hectic *vicharan*, building mandirs and hosting huge celebrations, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has still reached out to thousands of individuals. He has taken an active role in resolving the problems of devotees.

Swamishri has also immediately responded to the needs of society during famines, floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters by arranging for necessary relief aid. Swamishri's compassion is matchless and reaches all regardless of age, gender, status, caste or creed. Rudyard Kipling, a British literary genius says it best in his poem 'If':

"If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,

Or walk with Kings, nor lose the common touch,

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you
...yours is the Earth and everything that's in it."

His selfless love for all devotees, young and old, has won their hearts such that they dedicate themselves by observing his wishes. Thousands avoid TV, movies and all vices. Many youths are inspired to renounce this world, and today, there are over 820 BAPS sadhus who have dedicated their lives in the service of God, guru and society.

SWAMISHRI'S TRUE IDENTITY

Pramukh Swami Maharaj isn't like us, although he may seem so. He isn't human, but divine. He guides us on how to thoroughly practice *satsang* into our lives. Swamishri's life is an example of how an ideal devotee of God should live. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has built more than 700 mandirs, initiated over 820 sadhus, made over 15,500 city, town and village visits in India and overseas, replied to over 760,000 letters and personally counselled over 810,000 people. His social work is extensive, yet there is more to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The more one realizes his glory, the more one discovers that his true identity is still beyond that. Swamishri has a constant rapport with Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and he can free us of all faults and worldly attachments and bless us with the divine happiness of Akshardham.

So, who is Pramukh Swami Maharaj? Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the Ekantik Satpurush, the manifest form of Aksharbrahman and our key to attaining liberation.

No human language can do the fullest justice while praising the greatness of this divine entity. The more one tries to describe his immensely noble character the more one feels that is not enough.

On his 89th birthday may we offer our humblest and heartfelt prostrations to him and pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan to bless us with his darshan, love and grace for many years to come..





What Is a Sampradaya?

sampradaya as “*Sampradāya gurukramah*.” That is, a *sampradaya* means the flow of spirituality imparted by a succession of gurus.

In his treatise on *Amarkosh*, Bharat Mallik explains, “A *sampradaya* is the continued flow of the messages of good conduct given by the gurus to the disciples.”

Monier Williams, a renowned nineteenth century British Sanskrit scholar, defined *sampradaya* on the basis of the *Gruhyasutra* and *Shrautsutra* texts as, “A precept agreed upon with robust conviction and gifted by the guru to the disciple, who, in turn, as [the next] guru, gifts it to his disciple.”

This tradition of *sampradaya* has been followed in Sanatana Hindu Dharma in India since Vedic times, but it came into the limelight in Upanishadic times, with the *guru-shishya parampara*. Later, in Pauranic times the tradition became rooted. The *sampradaya* tradition was also replicated outside of India: for example, the Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, also had their own followers. The *sampradaya* tradition also spread to various branches of the arts and sciences. The tradition founded by Charak Rishi in Ayurveda became known as the Charak Sampradaya. If we extend this reasoning to modern physics, then the followers of Einstein’s relativity theory members can be called the Einstein Sampradaya.

In essence, a *sampradaya* is an institution which helps in applying spirituality in daily life.

The word *sampradaya* is made up of two words, *sam* and *pada*. *Sam* means complete and *pada* means to give. Hence, an arrangement for

Is a *sampradaya* (sect) a faction? Is it a straitjacket of rigidity? Does it represent narrowmindedness? Is it not linked with spirituality? What is the truth?

In a bid to please the audience religious story-tellers, authors and critics give their own, often blinkered, view of the word *sampradaya*; this invariably leads to confusion and misunderstanding.

Rationalists and intellectuals refer to ‘sect-free spirituality’, without even attempting to know what *sampradaya* really means. Their views are borrowed and contribute little of substance to the discussion.

What, then, does *sampradaya* really mean?

Sampradaya does not mean narrow-mindedness or factionalism or rigidity. According to the *Bhagvad Gomandal*, a *sampradaya* means “a rich institutional legacy of knowledge, code of conduct or both passed on by one or more distinctive founding persons (gurus)” (*Bhagvad Gomandal*: 9.8637).

The authoritative *Amarkosh* defines

the guru to give his disciple an exhaustive knowledge is called a *sampradaya*.

Sampradaya ideally means a set of precepts prescribed for the disciple by the guru and carried forward to future generations by worthy disciples, thus keeping the torch of knowledge alive.

This definition of *sampradaya* gradually became widely accepted. Thus, in a particular *sampradaya* the disciples would follow a common code of conduct, stream of knowledge, philosophy, mode of worship, rituals and festivals. The purpose of such a *sampradaya* is to nurture moral, social and spiritual values and spread them far and wide. It has, at its heart the wellbeing of all – followers as well non-followers.

Our generous and noble sages viewed a *sampradaya* in this way. So, one wonders how the word *sampradaya* came to mean factionalism? A look at the Upanishadic age explains this phenomenon.

In the Upanishadic period the *brahmanized* gurus taught their disciples knowledge to elevate them to the *brahmanized* state. Such disciples then furthered the tradition. Sometimes, gurus who were not fully qualified and proficient in the knowledge of the *atma* and Paramatma, tutored disciples. Those who followed such gurus became lost in their chaotic philosophy and were unable to fathom the truth. The sects founded by such gurus could not break out of their straitjacket and became narrow-minded.

The Chhandogya Upanishad has a beautiful story explaining this.

Once, both the *devas* (gods) and the *danavas* demons desired to know the nature of the *atma*. So the *devas* selected Indra and the *danavas* chose Virochan, the eldest son of Prahlad, as their representatives to see Prajapati to learn the nature of the *atma*. After they had spent 32 years with him, Prajapati revealed, “The form you see of yourself in the eyes, water, and mirror is *atma*.”

A *sampradaya*
means the flow of
spirituality imparted
by a succession
of gurus.

Virochan felt fulfilled with this explanation. So, he bathed, dressed up in the best of clothes and ornaments and saw his image reflected in the eyes, water and mirror.

Then he made it his mission to spread this idea of *atma* among

the *danavas*, saying, “Worship the body, treat it with the best of things, and just eat, drink and be cheerful.” This spread as their philosophy, and it came to be accepted that the body is the *atma*. Eventually, a *sampradaya* was founded on the basis of this skewed school of thought.

Indra, though, thought otherwise. Curious, he pondered, “How could my body be my *atma*? The body is perishable.” So, he followed a strict religious discipline for a total of 101 years to learn the truth from Prajapati.

Indra and Virochan were disciples of the same guru. However, while one followed the mundane, the other followed the spiritual path.

In this way, over time, many interpretations of the true forms of *atma* and Paramatma developed. Everyone believed their understanding to be the truth without seeking to verify.

There were others who realized the inaccuracy of such beliefs and sought to bring about reform. However, such reformers labelled everything as incorrect and they began non-*sampradayaic*, or secular movements.

Therefore, one needs a *brahmanized* guru heading the sect who can guide you on the intricate path of spirituality to discover the truth of *atma* and Paramatma. A sect is not merely a mass of followers. The Upanishads direct us to seek refuge unto guru. But who is a true guru? The Upanishads explain such a guru as one who has a true understanding of the scriptures and who is fully focused on Paramatma.

A genuine *sampradaya* is generally one which has a succession of *ekantik* sadhus as gurus. A *sampradaya* is not a seat of power.

Thus, in essence, a *sampradaya* means a

rich tradition of spiritual knowledge and ethics perpetuated by a *brahmanized* sadhu. BAPS is an ideal example of such a *sampradaya*.

Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan incarnated on this earth and revealed his Vedic philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam. To spread this philosophy on earth, he brought along Aksharbrahman, his divine abode. Thereafter, this divine knowledge was propagated successively by Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and presently it is sustained by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Dr Brian Hutchinson, a South African Christian priest and a professor, has studied the BAPS tradition of gurus. He notes that the seat of the guru in BAPS is not hereditary. Only a *brahmanized* sadhu is selected as guru, who in turn grooms one such from amongst his disciple-sadhus. The guru personifies the ancient Indian scriptural tradition and the qualities Bhagwan Swaminarayan has prescribed in the Vachanamrut.

In his book, *Hunting the Guru in India*, A. Marshall writes, “He (guru) should not be judged by the number of books he has written, nor by his oratory... nor by his reputation, nor by the size of his following... he need not be a scholar, (but) he must be a competent teacher” (p. 196).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has spoken of the qualities of such an ideal guru in many of his Vachanamrut discourses. He refers to such a guru as Satpurush, Param Ekantik Sant and with other honorific titles. In Vachanamrut Vartal 3, Bhagwan Swaminarayan describes the glory of such guru in vivid terms, “The *vadvanal* fire... stays in the ocean without being extinguished by the ocean water; it drinks the sea water and ejects it in the form of sweet water; in turn the clouds carry this water and shower it upon the world.... Similarly, the great Purush, like the *vadvanal* fire, transforms even the ‘salty’ *jivas* who are like the saline sea water, into ‘sweet’ *jivas*.... If a person serves one who is like... the *vadvanal* fire, by word, thought and deed, while staying within the tenets of one’s

dharma, then bhakti coupled with knowledge of God’s greatness develops in that person.”

Therefore, not only should the guru be spiritually competent, but the disciple, too, should be qualified to reach that state.

Sadguru Brahmanand Swami eloquently captures the essence of such a guru, in his verse *Guru ko Ang* (The Characteristics of a Guru), “Just as a goldsmith refines the raw gold by heating it, a tailor sews a designer garment after cutting the cloth, a carpenter makes furniture from wooden blocks, a sculptor chisels a figure out of the stone and a blacksmith heats iron to make designer utensils, a guru makes the disciple worthy of enjoying heavenly bliss.”

Praising such a guru, Brahmanand Swami says, “We adore a guru, who frees people from worldly bonds and leads fallen *jivas* to liberation, as the manifestation of God.”

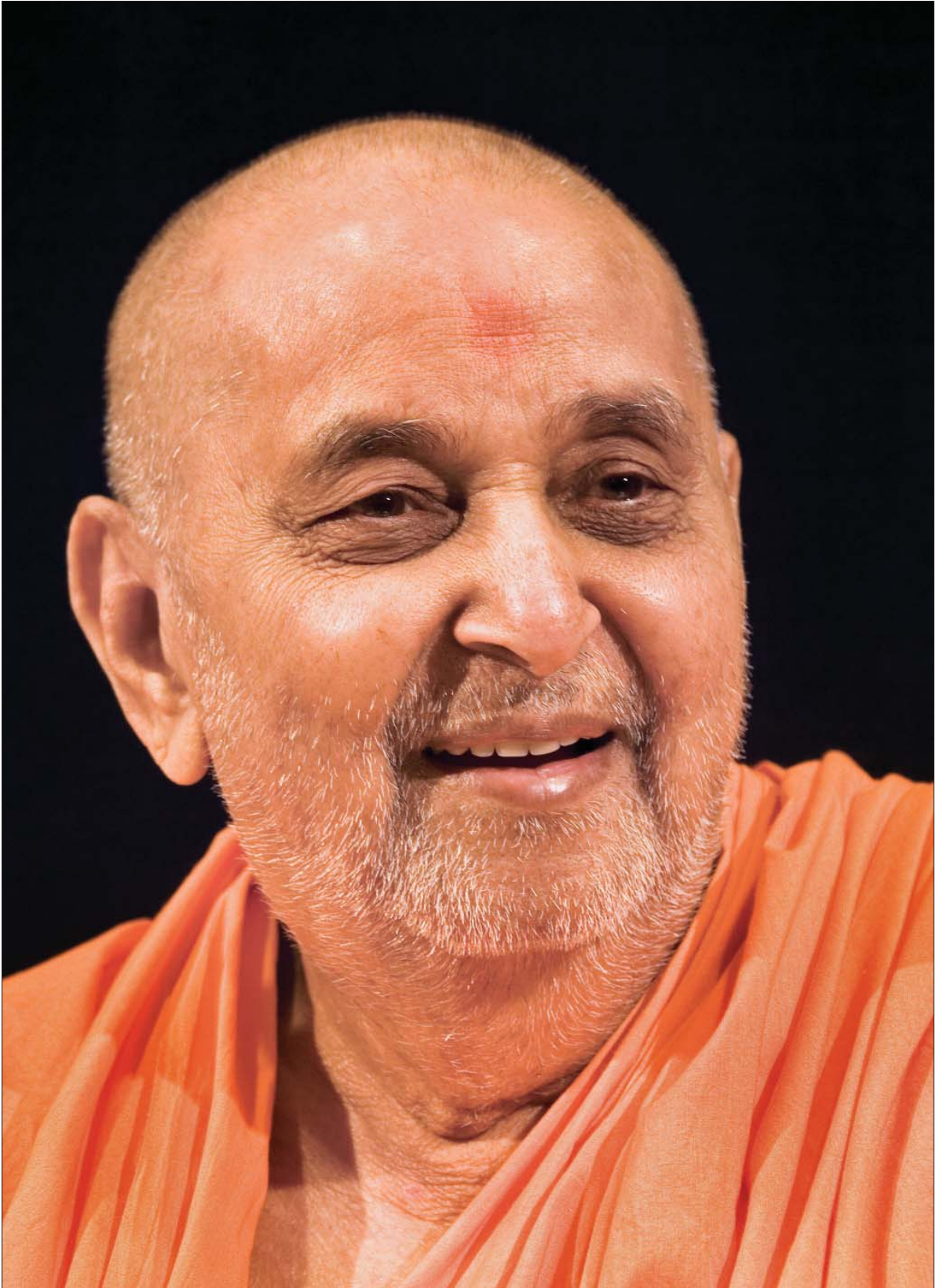
Premanand Swami addresses such a guru as Parmeshwar.

The lives of the BAPS gurus are full of inspiring stories of the spiritual transformation of thousands of people. Presently, *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj also has that distinct identity. Innumerable devotees have experienced how he has calmed their tormented minds with his soothing touch and teachings. He has freed them from addictions, sensual pleasures, evil company, bad tempers and other hindrances. Yet, he credits Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus for all that he does and achieves.

We can only express our heartfelt reverence to such a guru, who is free from all worldly traits and is one with God.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachanamrutam Gadhada III-2, “If a person develops conviction in the guru – who is the manifest form of God – in the same way that he has conviction in the non-manifest deities, then, as a result, he attains all of the *arthas* which are described as attainable.”





The Guru Leads One to God

Saint Kabir describes a *shishya* as raw clay and the guru as a sculptor who shapes a breathtaking work of art.

One may advance spiritually with devotion, but only a God-realized guru can make saints out of sinners.

When one thinks of Pramukh Swami Maharaj as a guru, this quality stands out.

Words will fail to assess the magnanimity of his work and his equanimity during visits to *adivasi* huts and palatial homes.

Perhaps you can make a list of the mandirs, schools, hospitals and cultural monuments like Akshardham he has raised and the relief centres he has opened for society. But it is simply not possible to fathom the feelings of the countless people who have changed for the better, from sinning to spirituality.

The following true personal accounts give a glimpse of the kind of metamorphosis that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired...

A SEA-CHANGE!

Shri Dilip Dholakia, Music Director, Mumbai



I was born into a Nagar Brahmin family in Junagadh, a place closely associated with Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami who spent 40 years there. My forefather, Chakubhai Nagar was his contemporary and also his disciple. So, *satsang* ran in the family, and during my childhood in Junagadh, I was exposed to *satsang*. I left for Mumbai in 1942 for my profession. I got lost in the world of music and films and all my links with *satsang* were severed. I didn't even realize that.

The turning point came in 1977. Sadhus from the BAPS Mandir in Dadar requested me to see them. They were planning to publish a long-play record of Premanand Swami's kirtans called

Premsakhi Hari Gun Gavat and they wanted me to do the music direction. When I went to the Dadar mandir, I had darshan of Pramukh Swami for the first time in my life. And his simplicity and humility left a lasting impression on my mind. I felt he wasn't just another sadhu. I felt his divinity. Then my life began to change. Whenever I met him, he reminded me of my sacred ancestral relationship to my forefather, Chakubhai Nagar. Then, I also began to feel proud of my family. My affection for Swamishri increased. Soft-spoken, his speeches, too, were simple. But in the course of my conversations with him I experienced his profound wisdom.

His speeches were simple but I felt thrilled. I wondered how could such a great sadhu be so simple? One day, I felt inspired to pen a poem, *Swami Bole ne Duniya Dole*.

My association with him began to change my personality.

The culture of Nagars of Junagadh depicts them on swings, chewing *paan* (betel leaves) and reading books. I was also addicted to tobacco. Some sadhus spoke to Pramukh Swami about my addiction, but Swami said the habit would break gradually. He did not ask me to stop eating it. But when I went to London in 1985 for the Cultural Festival of India I felt like breaking the habit of tobacco, and I did it.

Besides tobacco, I had several other bad habits due to my association with the film industry. But I gave them up after meeting Pramukh Swami.

When I went to Ahmedabad on the occasion of the Bicentenary Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1981, I felt the depth of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's love. I was standing on the grounds of the festival venue. Pramukh Swami was returning by car after the assembly. He saw me and asked a volunteer to call me. I went near him. He enquired lovingly about my health and where I was staying. He also asked me to join

the grand procession that was to take place. This loving gesture of his has remained etched in my mind. Swami has stood by me in times of difficulty, and lovingly and patiently helped me to sort out problems. This changed my life completely.

Once, Yogicharan Swami told Swami what my life was like before I entered *satsang*. Hearing that, Swami said, "Let bygones be bygones. We now have our *satsangi* back in our fold."

Pramukh Swami does not hold any academic degree and does not speak English, but he is a living spiritual university. Just as one earns degrees from a university, one experiences changes in life after entering Satsang and experiences spiritual joy. This is my own experience. Swamishri inspired a happy blend of both my household life and spiritual life.

Swamishri transported me to the world of ecstatic devotional music from the mundane film music. What a sea-change!

Through my contact with them, I was deeply touched by the spiritual heights of the 800 sadhus and the devotees. I am also touched by Swamishri's humility after creating the wonderful Akshardham mandirs in Gandhinagar and New Delhi.

Thanks to Pramukh Swami I got what I did not have and what I should not have.

MELLOWING OF A MEDICO

Dr Harshad C Patel, MD, Research Officer, Govt. of India, Ahmedabad



I was born in Malund village in the Patan district of North Gujarat and had my schooling there. I did not take studies seriously and liked to wander about. I was quite naughty and short tempered. I used to pick quarrels and liked beating up boys in school. I was promoted to the next class every year upto Standard 8.

I used to hang out at a place where a naked mendicant (Aghori) called Panchmukhi Bawaji had camped in our village. Other Aghoris also camped there. Aghoris eat meat and consume opium also. So,

I also followed them. The Bawaji began to like me, perhaps intending to appoint me as his successor. He took samadhi recently at the age of 113.

We were a cultured family, but away from home my world was altogether different. My father was a school principal. He used to cajole me and insisted upon me to study carefully. I scored 73% in my Standard 10 Board exams. In Standard 12, my result improved and I secured the highest marks in physics in the Board. Subsequently, I got admission to the B.J. Medical College in Ahmedabad.

I stayed in the college hostel. There, in the company of some like-minded students, I was back to my ways of mischief-mongering and wandering. Neglecting my studies, I began to lead agitations against the college authorities. I was arrested with 25 other students and imprisoned. I failed in the 1st MBBS exams. Soon thereafter, in 1985, I led an agitation against academic and job reservations for lower caste candidates. This agitation spread all over Gujarat and Pramukh Swami Maharaj mediated to help resolve the issue. We went to see him when he was in Ahmedabad. That was the first time I had his darshan. I wondered what he had to do with this reservation question. But, his selflessness touched me when he began persuading us. He wanted peace to prevail in Gujarat.

At last, the agitation ended. But I was still a militant leader. I got involved in political wrangling when I launched an agitation against the Mandal Commission. The then Chief Minister called us for talks since schools and colleges remained closed. The CM tried to impress upon me by speaking to my father who was the Principal of a college in Anand. But we did not relent. Sick of my stubbornness, the college authorities rusticated me. I challenged the order before the Gujarat High Court, and the court ordered in my favour that students who were enrolled on the basis of merit could not be rusticated. Eventually I passed through medical school and went on to earn my MD degree.

After the Ayodhya agitation in 1990, I was appointed secretary of a political party. I got involved in politics. Then I joined as a personal assistant to the minister in the Government of India. I even started a pharmaceutical factory, but suffered heavy losses. Other events battered me and I felt restless.

It was in such hour of need that Dr Hemant Patel, my college friend, suggested that I see Pramukh Swami. Hemantbhai had also turned a new leaf in his life thanks to Pramukh Swami. So, on 5 January 1999 we went to see Pramukh Swami in Ahmedabad.

Hemantbhai told Swamishri what I was like.

He also listened to me patiently. Then he asked me, “Do you feel remorse?” I said, “Yes.” He suggested, “Can you leave your post as personal assistant, close the factory and switch over to a job in the medical profession?” I told him, “I had earned my MD in dermatology on merit.”

Swamishri advised, “Then close your business and find a suitable job in your field.”

Then he lovingly advised me to give up all bad habits, and devote some time to *satsang* and serve the devotees. “That way you’ll feel happy and find peace,” he assured me.

I touched Swami’s feet and decided to do accordingly. I had never come across such a pious sadhu before to anchor my life with selflessness. Swamishri made me a *satsangi* and placed a *kanthi* round my neck. I was incorrigible, but Swamishri changed all that. Since that day in 1999 I have been regularly attending the *satsang* at the BAPS Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, and also attend the weekly *satsang* in my suburb.

Indeed, Swami placated me, helping me get rid of all my ills. I now take the sadhus for *sabha* to the medical college where I once raised a storm as senator and General Secretary.

I am now employed as a Research Officer at the National Institute of Occupational Health in Ahmedabad. I even presented a research paper at an international conference in Jamshedpur in 2006.

The sweeping change in my personality has surprised my medico friends. It also evoked in them respect for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I have become economically sound and earned respect in society. Above all, I have been able to please my parents no end, thanks to Pramukh Swami.

I observe Ekadashi fast regularly and every year observe *dharna-parna* and *chandrayan* fasts. In 2004, I observed an 84-day fast taking only liquids. On the occasion of the BAPS Centenary, I observed *dharna-parna* for six months. I went to Gondal after the fast where Swami gave me *paan* to break my fast. That memory will remain with me for a lifetime.

A GREAT TRANSFORMATION

Amit J. Bhavsar, Sales Executive, Paris, France



We are a staunch Hindu family, but I was born and brought up in Paris, France. So, Hinduism and the Swaminarayan Sampradaya were strange to me. I started smoking cigarettes at an early age and began to smoke cannabis at 14. I had notorious French friends with whom I even stole bikes and cars and committed household thefts to raise money for my addictive habits. We even robbed the tourists or local women of their purses. This was our way of life.

Cannabis is prohibited in France, and our gang was arrested by the police several times. However, we continued our wayward activities. I escaped the police firing several times. The streets of Paris were my home.

In the year 2000, my mother took me to the home of a relative. There, she told the relative, “Pramukh Swami is coming to Paris next week. So please take my son to him.” But the relative, who knew me well, said, “He has turned incorrigible. Just write him off.” My mother was dismayed, hearing that.

I had heard of Pramukh Swami before, but I did not care to see him then. This time, as my mother insisted, I went to the hall with her. Pramukh Swami was to come there for puja. After the puja, Swamishri was about to leave when I reached there. As I stood there aloof I saw Jigneshbhai, based in Rome, with Swamishri’s *mojdis* (shoes) in his hands. He saw me and called me near. He handed over the *mojdis* to me and asked me to place them at Pramukh Swami’s feet for him to wear when he comes out. I felt embarrassed and refused to do it, but before I could hand the *mojdis* back to him, Swamishri came out and I placed the *mojdis* at his feet. While doing so, I slightly hurt his toe. He looked into my eyes, smiled at me and even blessed me, raising his hand. I felt thrilled.

I felt drawn towards him with great affection. I cannot put that feeling into words. This was my first meeting with a sadhu.

Swamishri’s affectionate gestures changed my life, and I mellowed. I left all my addictions and ills at once. It was like a fresh lease of life. Friends from my gang came to take me back in their fold, but I confidently refused to go back. I feel that if Swamishri had not entered my life, I would have been languishing in French prisons.

Swamishri inspired me to become spiritual. So I began to attend the *satsang* assemblies. Since then, I have been to India four times for Swamishri’s darshan.

Once, in Atladra, I asked Swamishri, “You have helped me get rid of all addictions, but the ills of my inner self still remain. When shall I win over these?”

Swami blessed me, saying, “They have been gathered over innumerable previous lives. They will take time to go, but go they will.”

Then I persisted and asked Swamishri, “But how could I qualify for Akshardham if I do not get rid of my innate nature and passions?” I wept as I spoke. Swamishri wiped my tears and assured me, “They will go away. Maharaj has assured that. You will definitely go to Akshardham.”

I came to India in 2007 with some youths from Paris. Swamishri was in Gandhinagar then, but was unwell. We were told that we could not see him, so I was very disappointed. A sadhu arranged for us to have darshan from a distance. Even that would be enough for me. So we had darshan from afar, but Swamishri saw us and called me. He blessed us, saying, “Strengthen *satsang* within your *jiva*.”

He set a goal for me even in his illness. I do not have words to express my gratitude to him.

ANCHOR OF MY LIFE

Ramjibhai Patel, Businessman, Kampala, Africa



We are natives of Mandvi in Kutch. I was introduced to Satsang in childhood since my forefathers belonged to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. I am fond of reading, so I read books on Swami Vivekanand and Ramkrishna Paramhansa as a child. I was in search of a qualified guru, but I lost all faith when I saw some sadhus behaving in an indecent manner in our ashram.

I started a construction business while I was in my village and money flowed in. Soon I became addicted to smoking, gambling and liquor.

I knew I had gone astray. I felt the need of a guru. I visited several ashrams and institutions, but none appealed to me. I was still where I was, astray.

Meanwhile, my elder brother living in Nairobi (East Africa) came to know about my immoral ways. So he took me to Nairobi. But I remained what I was.

I went to Uganda in 1990 and started a construction business there. I began to earn lots of money and I went from bad to worse for I was alone there. I began to visit pubs at night.

My family was in Nairobi. They came to Kampala in 1996, but my life was still the same. Once, my daughter asked me to go with them to the Kutch temple. We went to the temple and on the way back home, we saw the BAPS mandir. So we went there also, as my children wanted. It was Sunday and the *satsang* assembly was in progress. I heard a devotee speaking. He was saying that though Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated 200 years ago, he still manifests himself on the earth through the Gunatit Sadhu. These words thrilled me. I felt I should come every Sunday and I began going there.

There, during four Sunday *satsang* assemblies, I heard about Pramukh Swami Maharaj, his

sadhus and their drives against addictions. I felt like getting rid of my addictions and I made a resolution to stop drinking and smoking. I continued eating tobacco, though, since that was just not possible for me to stop.

Once, in the assembly, a report was being read in which I heard about Pramukh Swami helping someone break the habit of eating tobacco. I at once stood up, fished out packets of *paan* and *gutkha* from the pocket and threw them into the dustbin. That addiction had been with me for 20 long years. I prayed to Pramukh Swami to empower me not to go back to it again.

I was now thirsting for Pramukh Swami's darshan.

After his bypass surgery in 1998, Swami went to Nairobi in November. So I reached there. Swamishri was speaking about King Rantidev with a focus on keeping cool in good as well bad times in life. That was my first darshan of him. I felt that I had discovered the guru I was so ardently looking for. I stayed there for a few days and studied his profile while he was offering puja, walking, eating and discoursing. I found him full of divinity.

Finally, I confessed before Swamishri and he guided me onto the golden path of spirituality. I saw that young and educated youths had renounced the world for him. Curious, I began to read *satsang* literature to know what Swamishri was like.

My association with the mandir and *satsang* slowly changed me completely.

Since then ten years have passed. It has been quite a relief for my family, especially my mother, who used to call me a 'demon'. My wife and children also felt tormented by my immoral ways. Pramukh Swami changed all that with just

a kindly look.

Today, I go for *satsang* assemblies in Sudan and Burundi. I can't believe I could have been like this without the grace of Pramukh Swami.

What a drastic change from pubs and five star hotels to *satsang* assembly.

Let me share an anecdote from the life of

Gunatitanand Swami which I like very much in this context. While Swami was once passing through a garden in Junagadh, a peacock sang. So Swami's divine sight rested on it. Thereafter, even a shooter could not kill that peacock.

I have been blessed by Pramukh Swami likewise. I feel I have been re-born.

A TURNING POINT THROUGH BLESSINGS

**Ganeshbhai Kolashiyabhai Ravat, Gram Sarpanch,
Chichpada, Ahwa, Dang District**



We belong to the Hindu Konkani scheduled tribe. So meat and liquor were a staple for me. We were quite poor, but whatever little I earned, I spent on liquor. As a tribe, we are very superstitious too.

Life was drab, until my visit to Ahwa eight years ago. I was seated in the porch of the rural bank where BAPS sadhus saw me. They called me and enquired about my life. I told them that I was a poor labourer and an addict too. They told me that they would come to my village the next day.

Ours is a sleepy village with a population of about 1,000. We did not have a road leading to the village. So, the sadhus had to walk for three kilometres to reach there.

I did not drink that day. I had gathered people of my village and we greeted them with drums. I brought the sadhus to my ramshackle hut. They spoke to us about Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and persuaded us to get rid of all our addictions.

That very day I stopped eating meat and drinking. Together we decided to hold a *satsang* assembly every Sunday also.

More villagers joined us, and soon they too gave up eating meat and drinking liquor. The atmosphere of the village also improved.

After a few days, I had my first darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Navsari. I felt quite peaceful. Then I met him in person. He blessed me, saying, "Ganesh, do not get addicted again. Focus

on worship and *satsang*. Pray to God. He will help you progress in life and even liberate you."

I started to work as a carpenter. I got enough work to do. Free from addiction, now I could also save some money. So we built a *hari* mandir in the village to seat about 200 people.

Then, due to Swamishri's blessings, I was elected as Sarpanch (Head) of Garkhadi village.

When I stood for Sarpanch, people ridiculed me since I did not have money to spend on canvassing. But I won by a whopping margin.

Swamishri asked me to make progress. So as Sarpanch, I have built 800 toilets in the village, for welfare of the people.

Authorities came from New Delhi and Gandhinagar to inspect our projects and we were awarded the Nirmalgram Award. I received the award from the President in 2008.

Satsang has benefited my family too. Both, my sons and daughter practice *satsang* as part of their lives and focus sincerely on their studies.

Our village committee meetings are usually noisy, with tempers running high. However, I go as Sarpanch with *tilak-chandlo* applied to my forehead. As a result, matters are sorted out peacefully.

I keep working with the confidence that I have a matchless guru like Pramukh Swami.

I, a lowly and depraved fellow, have risen to be head of the village! Thanks only to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

FREED FROM VICES

Yuvrajsinh M. Rathod

Industrialist, Jamla, Sabarkantha



We are from Ghangholi in Rajasthan, but in 1911 our ancestors got freehold property in Jamla in the Sabarkantha district of Gujarat from the king of Idar. So we have been living here since as a joint family. The Who's Who of Gujarat also contains a note on our lineage.

I was a stranger to the Swaminarayan Sampradaya until my friend took me to the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad while we were studying in a college there. But I did not go inside. I chose to sit on the bike in the parking area. I went there along with him several times thereafter, but I never entered the mandir. I argued that I was a meat-eater and drinker, so, I should not go in.

Since we are a Kshatriya royal family, meat eating, drinking and hunting were customary. We even sacrificed goats on occasions.

The turning point came in 2002 when my friend brought me the news that Pramukh Swami's 82nd birthday was going to be celebrated in Himatnagar. The land had to be developed for the site of the celebration. I thought of grabbing the contract. We had got the contract for building the Shamlaji national highway at that time. The sadhus called me for the celebration site also. So we stopped the highway work and started working on the celebration site with our dumpers and rollers. That is how I came into contact with BAPS. I

found it was a unique institution.

I got an opportunity to have Swamishri's darshan on his birthday. I was in the queue, but he caught my eye for a second. I saw a flood of light in his eyes and felt that here, was the true genuine guru. Then my family and I got closer to Satsang. I left all my vices when I first heard him. I began to offer puja daily which helped me control my anger.

It was difficult to break out of our customs as Rajputs. On festival occasions, we had to serve meat, eggs and liquor to our relatives and elders who came from Rajasthan. No more. It is now eight years since we stopped all that. That was when I had Swami's darshan for the first time.

My in-laws were also surprised at our turning vegetarian. At least 60% of our relatives were inspired to become vegetarian.

Before, we used to wake at 11.00 a.m. after drinking heavily the night before. Now we get up before sunrise and start the day with worship and puja.

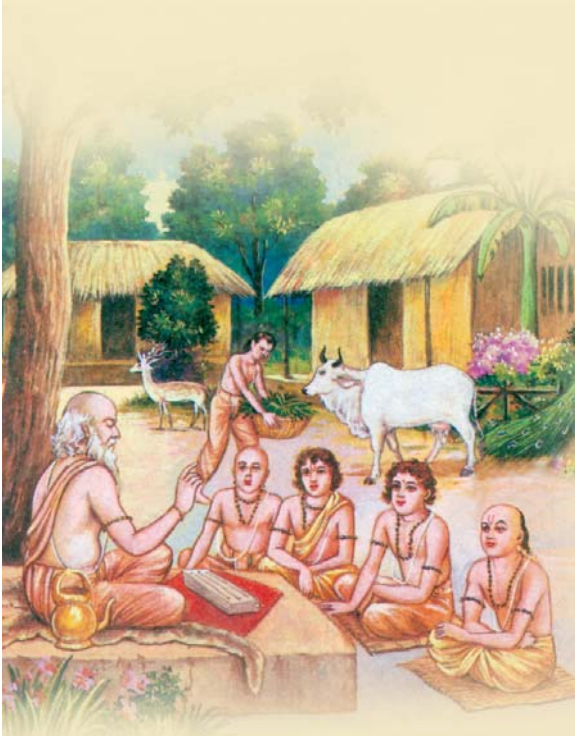
My in-laws have also changed a lot. Earlier, they used to go shooting six days a week. After we introduced them to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his code of conduct, they have now left shooting for good.

I now feel peaceful and quite satisfied. All thanks to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦

PHILOSOPHY – SWAMINARAYAN VEDANT:

GUJARATI TEXT: SADHU BHADRESHDAS;

TRANSLATION: SADHU PARAMVIVEKDAS



India has an ancient heritage of education. The ancestry of Vedic teaching and learning is a superb example of this. The type and extent of education that had taken place in India is astounding. Variety and vastness are both wedded to Indian education. This is easily experienced by glancing through the Vedic literature. Above this, its greatest uniqueness is that it is not lopsided or partial but it is all-round and complete. It is not fruitless or only fruitful to some extent, but it bears eternal fruits. This is because it is alive, alive with adhyātmavidyā, alive with brahmavidyā.

Let us take a glimpse at this interesting Vedic education by pondering over the Taittireeya Upanishad.

The Taittireeya Upanishad

The Testimony of a Complete Education

Part 1

THE TAITTIREEYA UPANISHAD: AN INTRODUCTION

This Upanishad is encompassed in the Krishna Yajur Veda. This Upanishad is recited as part of the Taittireeya Aranyaka in the Taittireeya *shākhā* (branch). Hence this Upanishad is also called the Taittireeya Upanishad. The Taittireeya Upanishad is split into three sections, each called a ‘valli’. The first of these is the Shikshāvalli, the second the Ānandvalli, and the third the Bhṛuguvalli. Let us see the precepts and essence of all of these three vallis.

THE SHIKSHĀVALLI: May Everything Be Blissful

The Taittireeya Upanishad commences trumpeting the words of the Shikshāvalli – ‘शन्नो मित्रः शं वरुणः। शन्नो भवत्वयमा। शन्न इन्द्रो बृहस्पतिः। शन्नो विष्णुरुक्रमः।’ – ‘Shanno mitraha sham Varunaha, shanno bhavatvaryamā, shanna Indro Brushaspitihi, shanno Vishnururukramaha’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/1). These are the words of the preceptors praying for peace before giving their precepts. It is a request for bliss and peace everywhere. Let the devas, like Mitra, Varuna, Aryamā, Bruhaspati and others, who have been appointed by Paramātmā to manage creation, be a source of happiness for us and shower peace everywhere. This prayer to Paramātmā at the onset of this Upanishad asks for the good of the whole of creation. This is the great and unique quality of Indian spiritual thought. The elimination of everyone’s every

misery, the experience of utmost bliss, the attainment of utmost peace – this has been the direction of Hindu Sanatan thinking.

Now let us see another message of this mantra.

I BOW TO AKSHARBRAHMAN AND PARABRAHMAN

‘नमो ब्रह्मणे’ – ‘*Namo Brahmane*’ – ‘I bow to Brahman’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/1). Using just the one word, ‘*Brahmane*’, the preceptor rishi bows to the two divine entities Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman. The reason for this is that later in this Upanishad statements like ‘*Brahmavidāpnoti Param*’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 2/1) and ‘*Satyam jñānam anantam Brahma*’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 2/1) refer to Aksharbrahman using the word ‘Brahman’, whereas statements like ‘*Ānando Brahmeti vyajānāt*’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 3/6) refer to Parabrahman using the word ‘Brahman’. Thus using the common word ‘Brahman’ for both Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman, the rishi bows with both these divine entities in mind using the words ‘*Namo Brahmane*’ – ‘I bow to Akshar-Purushottam’.

The reason for this bow is understandable. Upanishads are the shastras for *brahmavidyā*. The Upanishads themselves define *brahmavidyā* – ‘येनाऽक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्।’ – ‘*Yenā’ksharam purusham veda satyam provācha tām tattvato brahmavidyām*’ – ‘That by which Akshar, i.e., Aksharbrahman, and Purush, i.e., Parabrahman, are known in their essence is called *brahmavidyā*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13). For this reason, in the Taittireeya Upanishad, both these divine entities of *brahmavidyā* have been remembered and offered obeisance before precepts on *brahmavidyā* commence.

HOMAGE TO THE MANIFEST

After bowing, homage is now paid. ‘त्वमेव प्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि’ – ‘*Tvameva pratyaksham Brahmāsi*’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/1). The manifestation

Serve the manifest guru with supreme divinity, for he is the manifest form of Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman.

of both Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman is indicated here. This feeling of manifestation should be developed towards the Gunātīti guru, and be repeatedly strengthened. The guru himself is Aksharbrahman, and Parabrahman continuously resides within him. Thus, this sentence implies

that we should serve the manifest guru with supreme divinity, for he is the manifest form of Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman.

In this prayer for peace, we also experience the noble conduct of the teaching rishi.

THE TEACHER’S VOW OF TRUTH

To speak the truth is the first necessity of a preceptor, tutor or teacher. ‘ऋतं वदिष्यामि। सत्यं वदिष्यामि।’ – ‘*Rutam vadishyāmi; Satyam vadishyāmi*’ – ‘I will only speak eternal principles. I will speak the truth (i.e., I will not teach false principles)’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/1). With these words the rishi has vowed to speak the truth. Here, the rishi is a preceptor, a tutor, a teacher and it is his duty to teach. To lie is a sin, but to teach a lie would be a grave sin. This is a special feature of Vedic guru-*shishya* dialogues. The teacher understands his responsibility to the disciple and to society. He understands his duty. He is fully aware of how much a defiled education can ravage a disciple’s life, and affect the whole of society.

Moreover, an honest person must be tolerant. He knows that he must bear the occasional hostile reactions of speaking the truth. For this very reason, knowing the continual necessity of such honest and tolerant preceptors in society, the tutoring rishi prays, ‘तन्मामवतु। तद्वक्तारमवतु। अवतु माम्। अवतु वक्तारम्।’ – ‘*Tanmā mavatu; tadvaktāramavatu; avatu mām; avatu vaktāram;*’ – ‘O Lord! Save me. Save the orator, the teacher’ (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/1). Thus, the reason for praying for one’s safety is ultimately just to keep society well educated.

Thus, this mantra shows the ideal approach a teacher should have before commencing his lesson.

A SPECIAL MEANING OF THE WORD 'SHIKSHĀ'

Here, 'shikshā' doesn't mean punishment, but education, and even in that, a special type of education – education that is useful in the study of the Vedas. Our Vedas are an ocean of special knowledge. To be a true scientist, one must study them in detail. To study them, they must first be looked after.

As per our ancient traditions, a special method for preserving the Vedas as they are has been practiced. This method is one of systematic pronunciation and repetition. Thousands of years ago, when writing was not well established, our Vedas were preserved by this pronounce and repeat method of recitation. The fruits of this ancient tradition are the immense collection of authentic mantras we find in the Vedas today. The science that thoroughly explains this method of pronunciation and repetition is 'shikshā'. This is explained in this Upanishad. 'शीक्षां व्याख्यास्यामः' – 'Sheekshām vyākhyāsyāmahā' – 'Now we will explain shikshā' (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/2). With this proposition, the rishi lists the main topics of shikshā: 'वर्णः स्वरः। मात्रा बलम्। साम सन्तानः। इत्युक्तः शीक्षाध्यायः।' 'Varnaha svaraha; matrā balam; sāma santānaha; ityuktaha sheekshādhyāyaha' (Taittireeya Upanishad: 1/2). Varnaha means letters. This includes vowels such as 'अ - a', 'इ - i', 'उ - u', 'ऋ - ru', etc. and consonants such as 'क - ka', 'ख - kha', 'ग - ga', 'घ - gha', etc. So that the mantras of the Vedas can be pronounced properly, the shikshā texts first explain which part of the mouth or throat the vowels and consonants originate, as well as how they originate, and what their true pronunciation really is.

Svaraha means tone. Along with the pronunciation of the mantras, there is an amazing system of tones to enable the singing of the mantras.

Mātrā means duration. Here, the duration for which the vowels in the Vedic mantras should be sounded is explained. Durations such as *hrasva* (short) and *deergha* (long) indicate the length of pronunciation.

Balam means the force with which the letters in the mantra should be said.

Sāma means the similarity of the pronunciation of the letters.

Santānaha means the system for pronouncing the words according to their order. This is also known as *sanhitā*.

In this way, the Vedic shikshā texts give a detailed explanation of the aspects of pronunciation of the Vedic mantras that should be taken into consideration.

Naturally, one may question the necessity of this entire system for just the pronunciation of the Vedas. The answer is simple. Our Vedas are not ordinary books, they are divine shastras. We will find the answer to our question if we think back to thousands of years ago when there was no method of preserving or protecting knowledge by writing it down. The Vedas are an ocean of eternal principles. Each sentence is an eternal principle. In order to preserve these principles, our ancestors felt it necessary to first pronounce them properly, since the Vedas are recited as mantras. Vedic mantras are composed from words. And words are composed from letters. If the pronunciation or order of the words of the mantras is changed, then principles may be changed or lost. For this reason, the Vedic schools first taught their students about shikshā.

Thus, in the Taittireeya Upanishad, a proper explanation of shikshā, which is useful for studying the Vedas, has been given. That is why this part of the Upanishad is called the Shikshāvalli.



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 89th Birthday Celebration

25 November 2009, Bochasan

Devotees from around the world gathered in Bochasan to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 89th birthday on 25 November 2009. The celebratory atmosphere permeated throughout the mandir precincts from early morning. Swamishri's morning darshan route was lined with displays of goodwill messages and prayers; children and youths dressed in colourful costumes danced joyously.

In the central shrine of the mandir an *annakut* had been offered to Thakorji, and Swamishri performed *arti* in all three shrines.

Then, with folded hands, Swamishri greeted and blessed the sadhus and devotees along the route to his puja.

During Swamishri puja, the world-renowned percussionist, Shivamani, performed while the sadhus sang bhajans.

After puja, Swamishri was honoured with a variety of garlands, devoutly prepared by devotees of many *satsang* centres.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, "Shriji Maharaj has said, 'Engage the *indriyas* in the service of God and his holy Sadhu.' What are the activities of the *indriyas*? The eyes see, the ears listen, the tongue speaks, and so on. If we keep the activities of all the *indriyas* pure then the *antahkaran* becomes pure and peaceful.

"Today, our eyes wander towards watching the TV and cinema and as a result unrest develops within.

"What is meant by engaging the *indriyas* in the service of God? With the eyes, have darshan of God



and his holy Sadhu. Thus, the eyes become pure. To purify the ears listen to the discourses and bhajans of God. By smelling the flowers sanctified by God, the nose is purified. With the tongue speak the glory of God.

"By engaging constantly in the service and devotion of God one's *antahkaran* will become pure.

"With technology, bombs for mass destruction are made. What is the use of such

technology? True technology is that which helps people to live and become happy.

"God's technology brings happiness to all people. His technology enables every person to live in peace. By reading the Bhagvat, Upanishads, Gita, Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato and other shastras, one's external vision turns inward and peace is experienced. This is the purpose of mandirs and festivals.

"Shriji Maharaj has, in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-71, explained the Akshar-Purushottam principle and that he manifested to give us all bliss. This is the principle that Shastriji Maharaj spread.

"Everything happens by the wish of God. Yogiji Maharaj used to pray, 'May God do good of all'. We may do any amount of work; it may be the best, but do not believe that we are doing it. Believing oneself as the doer is ignorance and this results in misery. Believe God to be the all-doer.

"God has not come to give anyone misery. The holy Sadhu has come to do what is good for all. Whatever God does will be for one's good. May such conviction be strengthened in one's life."

Swamishri's birthday was also celebrated at all BAPS centres worldwide. ♦

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA, RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER, VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI

18 November 2009, New Delhi, India

On Wednesday 18 November 2009, the Prime Minister of Canada, Right Honorable Stephen Harper, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi to experience India's art, culture and values.

On behalf of Swamishri, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami welcomed the Prime Minister in traditional manner by applying a *chandlo* to his forehead, tying a *nada chhadi* to his wrist and placing a sanctified flower garland around his neck in a gesture of peace and friendship.

Feeling transported back in time, Prime Minister Harper expressed, "I just can't believe this temple was created in modern times. It's amazing how ancient this temple looks."

During his one hour visit, the Prime Minister admired the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate) and the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth), noting the intricately carved stone texture of the elephants which seemed so realistic.

The Prime Minister offered prayers for world peace and harmony and for the strengthening of Indo-Canadian relationships by offering *abhishek* on the sacred image of Neelkanth Varni.

Thereafter, the Prime Minister sat in the Sanskruti Vihar boat ride exhibition displaying 10,000 years of India's glorious heritage.

Expressing his experience in the guest opinion book, the Prime Minister wrote: "This is an extraordinary place. It is just overwhelming. I cannot express it with words. I hope I will be able to return and see it all in far greater detail."

The Canadian delegation accompanying the Prime Minister included Hon. Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs, five Members of Parliament: Deepak Obhrai, Nina Grewal, Patrick Brown, Devinder Shory and Tim Uppal, High Commissioners of both India and Canada, and leading Canadian businessmen of Indian origin. ♦

INAUGURATION OF AKSHARDHAM METRO STATION

12 November 2009, New Delhi, India

On 12 November 2009, Minister for Urban Development, Mr Jaipal Reddy, inaugurated the Akshardham Metro Station in the presence of the Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit.

"The Akshardham station is the tallest metro station built so far, with six levels which rise to 16.5 metres above ground and go 21 metres underground. The station has been designed to complement the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir nearby. Dholpur stone has been used on the exterior just like it has been done in the mandir", says Delhi Metro Railway Corporation

(DMRC).

During the public consultation process, local residents unanimously requested Metro officials for the station to be named 'Akshardham' metro station, since Swaminarayan Akshardham is nearby.

The network has been designed and built by DMRC, an independent company specially commissioned with the project and involving several multinational corporations, including from Germany, Japan and South Korea. ♦

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIRS

October-November 2009, Gujarat, India

During the Diwali vacation, thousands of BAPS youths participated in the *kishore-kishori shibirs* held at Sarangpur, Ahmedabad and Gadhada.

SARANGPUR

Two shibirs were held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, as below:

Surat Kishores-Kishoris

21-25 October 2009

Based on the theme 'Vachanamrut', 1,080 *kishores* and 895 *kishoris* attended. As a prerequisite, all the *kishores* and *kishoris* were required to memorize six selected Vachanamruts. The topics presented in this *shibir* included: Avatar-Avatari Distinction, Why Daily Personal Puja?, Swamishri's Unique Personality. The *shibir* theme was further discussed through speeches delivered by sadhus, audio-visual presentations and skits.

Bhavnagar Kishores-Kishoris

25-28 October 2009

Titled 'Swaminarayan Hare...' and based on the Swamini Vato, 1,100 teenagers and youths participated. In addition to the speeches, discussions, debates and audio-visual presentations, a well-designed exhibition on the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato was displayed. Also, the attendees formed small groups to present informal, fun activities as part of the 'Gunatit Anandam' fair. The youths also participated in the speech and poster design competition on the *shibir* theme.

AHMEDABAD

24-30 October 2009

Two *shibirs* were held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad.

Both were based on the theme, 'Char Vat Jivanu Jivan'. In the first, from 24 to 27 October 2009, 850 *kishores* and 635 *kishoris* from throughout Ahmedabad participated. In the second, from 27 to 30 October 400 *kishores* and 400 *kishoris* from Gandhinagar, Mehasana, Himmatnagar, Surendranagar and the rural areas of Ahmedabad attended. The four aspects of the *shibir* theme: Agna, Upasana, Suhradbhav and Ekantikma Priti were presented through speeches by sadhus, skits, audio-visual presentations, question-answer sessions and message-oriented activities. There was also an inspiring and informative presentation by Shri Atul Karwal, Traffic Commissioner of Ahmedabad, on his successful ascent to the top of Mt. Everest.

GADHADA

30 October to 2 November 2009

Over 900 *kishores* and *kishoris* from the Gadhada and Bhuj districts participated in this *Shibir* entitled '1 Step Up: Study, Society, Spirituality'. Through speeches, question-answer sessions, audio-visual shows, quizzes and other activities, the *shibir* topics were presented. Study guidance was provided in a special session by Shri Shaileshbhai Sagpara.

In all these *shibirs*, the senior sadhus addressed the teenagers either in person or through pre-recorded videos, guiding and inspiring the youngsters on a variety of important topics. Many experienced sadhus also spared time to present speeches at these *shibirs*. Through these variety-filled and enjoyable *shibirs* the youths gained valuable practical guidance on many topics of importance in their daily practice of *satsang*.

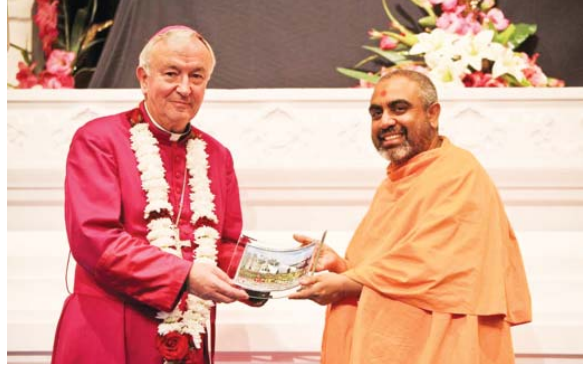


ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER VISITS BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, LONDON

Saturday 21 November 2009



Leaders of various faiths light the divo



A memento is presented to the Archbishop of Westminster

The Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden on Saturday 21 November 2009.

The Head of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales was greeted by Yogvivek Swami, who applied a *chandlo* to his forehead and then tied a *nada chhadi* on his wrist, symbolizing friendship and goodwill.

The Archbishop was guided around the Mandir complex. Before the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni he joined in prayers for world peace and harmony.

In the main evening assembly, the Archbishop was welcomed with rapturous applause and a flower garland. Yogvivek Swami and the Archbishop were then joined by Baha'i, Buddhist, Muslim, Jain, Sikh and Zoroastrian representatives to collectively light a lamp – symbolizing a shared commitment to understanding, respect and peace – while children chanted a Vedic peace prayer.

In his welcome address, Yogvivek Swami recalled Pramukh Swami Maharaj's meeting with Pope John Paul II in 1984 at the Vatican and also his visit to the birthplace of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem in 1999. Yogvivek Swami also shared Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message

to the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in New York.

In his keynote address, the Archbishop thanked everyone for the "the generous invitation and warm welcome" he had received. The Archbishop continued, "It is always good to come together like this, to strengthen each other, to learn of each other's faith and to rejoice in a spirit of dialogue and love." He shared the Church's appreciation "that the entire human race shares a common origin and a common destiny" and it is this unity which "impels us to seek common elements in our path through life as we play our part in the quest for fundamental values so crucial in our time."

The Archbishop further added, "It is with admiration that I see the many events and opportunities on offer in this complex for the wider community, and I salute the valuable contribution that you are making to the peaceful world we all strive to create. The concern and care that is shown here for our natural environment is just one example of the many causes on which we can work together.... It is truly inspiring to see the beauty of this place, and no less inspiring to see the commitment to helping the community that comes with it."

Before the Archbishop departed, mementoes were exchanged. ♦



inspired H.D.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Top: Around 6,500 *kishores* and *kishoris* from Surat, Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad, North Gujarat, Bhuj and rural areas of Ahmedabad and Gadhada participated in the Diwali *shibirs* in Sarangpur, Ahmedabad and Gadhada. Photo of *kishores* performing morning puja in Sarangpur.

Bottom: After three months of *vicharan* in the UK and Europe, Pujya Dr Swami toured Dubai, Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait. He inspired many through daily *satsang* assemblies and *shibirs*. A special assembly of Arab dignitaries was held in Bahrain.

Inset: Dr Swami and sadhus on stage with Arab dignitaries.



Prime Minister of Canada, Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, 18 November 2009. On behalf of Swamishri, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami welcomed the Prime Minister with a garland.



Left: The newly opened Akshardham Metro Station opposite Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, built by DMRC (12 November 2009). Right: Posters of Swaminarayan Akshardham in the metro station.