

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July 2009

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Swaminarayan Mahamantra

DOORS OPEN TORONTO

23-24 May 2009, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto



This year's Doors Open Toronto theme was based on Literature and 175 buildings were selected to participate in the event.

Visitors to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir marvelled at the traditions, heritage, values and architecture of Hinduism experienced through the Mandir and Heritage Museum.

They also learned that the Mandir has been built through the vision and inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the global voluntary efforts of the BAPS.

Visitors were amazed to learn of the many activities that are carried out by BAPS: educational, medical, community, environmental, disaster relief and others.

Almost all guests offered *abhishek* to the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni, praying for themselves, their family and peace in the world.

A special display of Sacred Hindu Literature (the Vedas, Mahabharat, Gita, Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri, etc.) in the foyer gave guests an opportunity to see authentic scriptural works in Sanskrit which are the roots of Hinduism.

After visiting the Doors Open event at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir for the first time, Karen Black, the founder of Doors Open, commented, "This is how I envision 'Doors Open'. Your (BAPS) message about 'Unity in Diversity' is what the message of Doors Open is."

Specially trained BAPS children and youths were at hand to answer or guide the visitors at every stage. All volunteers worked extremely well together and provided an unforgettable experience for the visitors.

VISITOR OPINIONS:

Quite easily, the most beautiful structure in the western world. Amazing!

- Loren S, Toronto

It was an experience like no other. Different from how it is portrayed in schools. I believe the event to be a success and there should be more events like this to show in the future, one where people can experience the culture hands on.

- Kevin Rodriguez, Brampton

Breathtaking. Magnificent. Volunteers were the soul of kindness and helpfulness. Learned such a lot about Hinduism. Thank you !

- D. Caimpeel, Toronto

I am not only amazed or awe-inspired by your beautiful mandir, but also appreciated the courtesy and knowledge of your many volunteers, including young children.

- Norma Inch, Toronto



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July 2009, Vol. 32 No. 7

CONTENTS

- 4 Swaminarayan Mahamantra
Yogiji Maharaj's Unfailing Asset
- 6 Swaminarayan Mahamantra
**Inspiring Incidents from
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Life**
- 10 Swaminarayan Mahamantra
**Source of Patience and Courage
Amid Fiery Challenges**
- 15 Swaminarayan Mahamantra
**Strength to Scale Life's
Mountainous Challenges**
- 20 Philosophy – Swaminarayan Vedanta
**The Mundaka Upanishad: Proclaiming
the Akshar-Purushottam Principle,
Part 1**
- 24 BAPS News
- **Summer Vacation Activities for
Children, India**
 - **Voluntary Service at Swaminarayan
Akshardham, New Delhi**
 - **Student Shibirs, SVAS, India**
 - **UK Bal-Balika Mandal Receives
Prestigious Queen's Award, UK**
 - **Kishore-Kishori Shibir, Sarangpur**

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The Swaminarayan Mahamantra articles in this special issue are translations by Kaushik Joshi, from the *Swaminarayan Prakash* May 2009 issue.

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FIRST WORD

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami says, "We will also have to liberate one who, knowingly or unknowingly, says 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' five to ten times."

So just think how great would be the liberation if one chanted the Swaminarayan mantra with great faith?

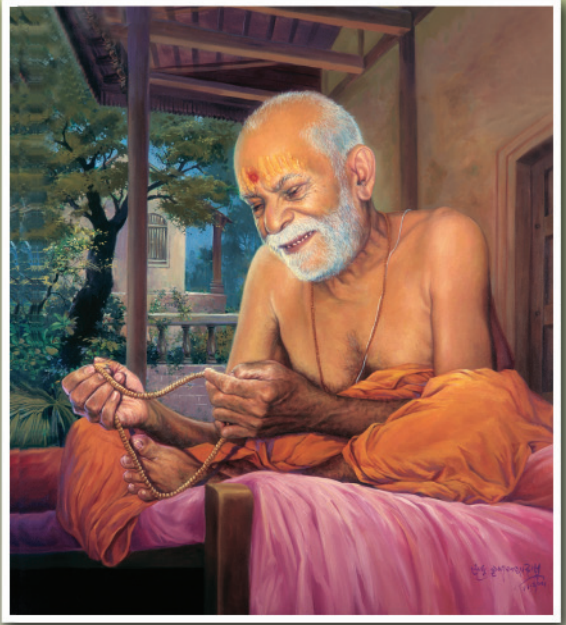
Pointing out its significance, Gunatitanand Swami says, "Worshipping God will bring us such spiritual enrichment that it is not equalled by acquiring one, or even a hundred universes."

Why then indulge in insignificant pursuits that can only defile you. Emphasizing the mantra further, Swami says, "With it, one becomes *brahmarup* and is freed from the bondage of Time (*kal*), karma and *maya*. That is how powerful this mantra is. Therefore, always chant it."

What has Swami left out for us to accomplish? He says that the Swaminarayan mantra is the source of accomplishing all that one has to do for *moksha* (liberation). The mantra can rid one of the desire for sensual pleasures, jealousy and ego and eventually lead one to a higher spiritual plane, making one *brahmanized*. It frees one from all worldly bonds. The strongest bond is that of *maya*. If one untangles oneself from it, one attains liberation. The Swaminarayan mantra can help one achieve that.

This July 2009 issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* features the experiences of some devotees on the role the Swaminarayan mantra has played in their lives. They have reposed great faith in it. They feel equipped to face any situation or experience. Whoever reads and thinks over these experiences will have their faith doubled because they have told everything honestly. ♦

Yogiji Maharaj's Unfailing Asset Swaminarayan Mahamantra



Yogiji Maharaj's divine *murti* is as fresh as ever in my mind even after so many years: his body, mind, even his whole being, absorbed and immersed in Shri Hari and face slightly angled downward with reverence, as he busied himself with soft clapping. Totally engrossed in chanting the *dhun* in this manner, the Swaminarayan mantra flowed effortlessly from his mouth with every breath, pervading the atmosphere.

In the divine company of Yogiji Maharaj, *dhun* had become a part of our life.

I first had the experience of the divine mantra in 1949-50 in Mumbai. Shastriji Maharaj had stayed at Gulzarilal Nanda's bungalow for two months and had celebrated Bhim Ekadashi there. There was a small puja room in the bungalow facing the sea where Yogiji Maharaj used to offer the evening *arti*. He would gather us children before Harikrishna Maharaj and join us in the *dhun* for an hour. I faintly remember that we were forced to do that, but his motherly and loving nature made us accept it. We children used to call the *dhun* a 'giant *dhun*' because who would offer such worship for so long.

However, that first impression of Yogiji Maharaj's *dhun* has remained etched in mind.

While accompanying Yogiji Maharaj during his travels in the decade from 1950 to 1960, we realized the significance of *dhun* even more. It was a routine every evening for Yogiji Maharaj to gather everyone and collectively sing the Swaminarayan *mahamantra dhun* after the *arti*, whether he was in the mandir or on tour. It was his characteristic to lay before Thakorji the burden of any work,

small or big, simple or complex and employ the means of *dhun* and prayer untiringly until it was accomplished. Whether it was a problem of an individual or a family, the society or the Sanstha, the nation or the world, an auspicious resolution or somebody's suffering, *dhun* was Yogiji Maharaj's unique method. He would naturally say "Karo *dhun*".

Some memories are fresh in mind. He had the *dhun* sung many times to pray for the acquirement of an assembly hall in Mumbai. Every year, during his stay in Mumbai at Kapolvadi, he used to have the *dhun* sung in the evening. Since the wish for a hall was not being realized and the *dhun* continued endlessly, some *satsangis* even jokingly said to Yogiji Maharaj, "Swami, do you intend to have a hall made of *dhun*?" Yogiji Maharaj, though, had endless faith in *dhun*. Eventually, the *dhun* and prayers bore fruits, and today we have a grand mandir and a *satsang* hall in Dadar, Mumbai, and *sanskardhams* (*satsang* centres) in various suburbs of Mumbai.

Likewise, he sang the *dhun* for many years so that 51 educated youths would become sadhus.

A list of the various reasons for which Yogiji Maharaj would invoke the power of *dhun* in the

Akshar Deri and at other places is itself very memorable. Inspired by him, the sadhus and the *satsangis* also used to sing *dhun*. For example, they would sing *dhun* if there was a shortage of rains and also for the abatement of torrential rains.

The Sanstha's secretary, Maganbhai of Surat, informed Swami in Gondal one night about the weather forecast on radio which informed that 'there is a storm in the sea and there would be strong winds and heavy rains'. Hearing this, Swami first chanted *dhun* for the stormy winds and rains to subside and then for flood waters in Bharuch and Surat to recede. These *dhuns* were sung in the afternoon, yet he asked the *satsangis* to join the *dhun* again at night. The Swaminarayan *dhun* was his primary weapon.

Once, the news of the alignment of eight planets and its ill-effects on the country had become widespread all over India. So, one *satsangi* asked Yogiji Maharaj, "What would happen to us?"

Yogiji Maharaj replied, "The devotees of God should not feel jolted on reading such news. If you have unflinching faith in God, you will not be affected by planetary positions or even by the final dissolution. They cannot influence us because of the power of prayer of the Swaminarayan mantra. Even the final dissolution would retreat."

At the old Smruti Mandir of Shastriji Maharaj in Sarangpur *dhun* was also sung daily so that a beautiful mandir with Shastriji Maharaj's *murti* be built. When Swami was in Uganda in East Africa, he chanted the *dhun* at the memorial shrine of Maganbhai to pray for the growth of *satsang* in Africa and for mandirs in Tororo, Jinja and Kampala.

There were regular *dhuns* also for establishing *yuvak mandals* in big cities. Since the devotees and sadhus had attained the company of Purushottam-Narayan (Shriji Maharaj) and the Gunatit Sadhu, Yogiji Maharaj wished that they grow spiritually, attain *ekantik* dharma and live together as a family with unity and understanding. For this, *dhun* and prayer constantly flowed from Yogiji Maharaj's lips and heart.

Whenever Yogiji Maharaj visited places sanctified by Shriji Maharaj he would invariably sing *dhun* and pray together with the devotees and sadhus. One such place was Harikrishna Maharaj's *murti* in Vartal. Also, in the old Swaminarayan mandir at Bhoiwada in Mumbai he would ask us to sing *dhun* after darshan and circumambulation. On his visit to the Kalupur Swaminarayan mandir in Ahmedabad, he would first have darshan of Ghanshyam Maharaj in the Rang Mahol, then go upstairs to the Sukhshaiya, say a few words on its importance and then have us join the *dhun*.

Mahelav, the birthplace of Shastriji Maharaj, was another place where *dhun* was part of every visit. And he would vigorously sing the *dhun* before Harikrishna Maharaj in Sarangpur, in Gondal before Ghanshyam Maharaj and in the Akshar Deri. In Gadhada he would sit before Akshar Ordi for *dhun* and prayer and then go to Lakshmi Vadi, where after a few words *dhun* would follow.

At Lakshmi Vadi in those days, while marble seating was being placed under the sacred mango tree, it remained uncovered for a long time. Swami saw this whenever he visited Gadhada and with heavy heart he would chant *dhun* so that the ceiling could be completed quickly. Likewise he chanted *dhun* so that the sacred rooms in Kariyani where Maharaj lived could be covered with a ceiling and be cared for.

Thus, Swami was worried about maintenance of the sacred places of Maharaj.

Yogiji Maharaj chanted *dhun* for many years for a railway station in Chhapaiya and to have a road, mandir and railway station in Bhadra. He took personal interest in this and followed up with the authorities in New Delhi. Eventually, the *dhun* bore fruits.

In the last years of his life, he chanted *dhun* for his wish of a *shikharbaddh* mandir on the banks of River Yamuna in New Delhi, as well as mandirs in Kolkata and Madras. Today, all these wishes have become reality.

(contd. on p. 9)

Swaminarayan Mahamantra

Inspiring Incidents from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Life

One familiar *satsangi* came to see Swami after puja and told Swami, "If someone asks me to leave the place where I am seated, I fly into a rage. Therefore, kindly bless me so that I get rid of anger forever. I will follow your advice till death."

Swami advised, "There is no need to get angry because it will always result in loss. If you chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, anger will get quelled."

- 4 March 2009, Bhavnagar

An industrialist of repute came for Swamishri's darshan after puja. He said, "My brothers and partners have left me alone. Please bless me so that I can fight the injustice." Swami told him, "Pray to God, have courage and patience, all will be well."

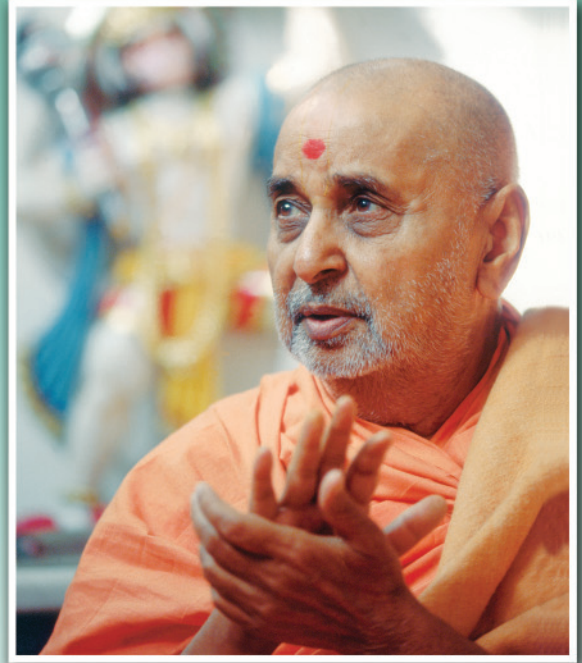
Somebody informed Swami that he had taken to drinking due to depression.

So, Swami advised him, "Have faith in God. Addiction won't help. There is no need for liquor and tobacco. Instead, think of God. He will help you. Chant Swaminarayan daily with your rosary."

- 18 March 2009, Sarangpur

While Swamishri was meeting the devotees, one told Swamishri, "I have accepted the Swaminarayan dharma, but tell me whether I should believe in astrology."

Swamishri replied, "There is no astrologer like God. Chant his name. Have faith in him alone. Pray to him. Swaminarayan mantra is the best, so



keep faith in it only."

- 28 January 2009, Vadodara

Swamishri was recuperating from an angiography. Dr Kiran Doshi asked Swamishri, "Did you feel heaviness in the chest while the angiography was in progress? How did you feel when the wire was inserted? Do you feel pain in the thigh of your right leg at the moment?"

Swamishri said, "I don't know anything. For 30-45 minutes I thought that something still remained to be inserted. The doctors were discussing among themselves, so I wondered when would they insert it, but I didn't feel it. I thought they were discussing how to do it."

Priyadarshan Swami joined, "Dr Kiranbhai came out to inform that you were asleep during angiography."

Swamishri said, "I did not feel sleepy either. I was chanting Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan."

Dr Kiranbhai explained, "The heartbeats of a patient increase during angiography, but yours remained stable at 60 till it was over."

The sadhus asked, "Were you not in tension about the angiography?"

Then Swamishri clarified, “Why should I feel tense? I was chanting Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan and having darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj’s *murti* before me.”

Then Swamishri revealed, “While having darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj during angiography, my mind raced back to the day when Shastriji Maharaj initiated me as sadhu. I recollected every detail of the occasion. Harjivandas spoke to me the previous night, Shastriji Maharaj embraced me at midnight and instructed Yogiji Maharaj to delay *mahapuja* the next morning. Jogi Bapa was seated in front of me during the *diksha* ceremony. Shastriji Maharaj was there and the *diksha* ceremony was taking place in the Akshar Deri.

“Shastriji Maharaj initiated me into a sadhu and asked Jogi Bapa to bless me that I would have the same virtues as he (Jogi Bapa) had. It all came to mind. I prostrated before him. It all flashed before my eyes. I was chanting Swaminarayan while I was thinking of all this. My eyes closed but when they opened, I had darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj.”

- 2 January 2008, Mumbai

A female devotee wrote in her letter from abroad, “My husband’s recent heart surgery was done successfully but he doesn’t visit the mandir of late and speaks ill of the *satsangis*. I also work as *karyakar* but I also find faults with the *satsangis*. We also quarrel many times at home finding faults with each other. In a fit of rage, I beat my children. When anger seizes me and my husband, we don’t realize what we speak. Please bless us so that we don’t get angry.”

Reading the letter, Swami smiled wryly and said, “Peace will arrive only when you change your nature. Write to her to chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan when they get angry and one of them should leave the place at that time.”

- 2 May 08, Sarangpur

After lunch a *satsangi* phoned from America. He said that for the past one month his son was feeling that he was going to die and had thus grown fearful. Swamishri picked the phone and asked, “What’s your name?”

“Akshar” the boy replied. Swamishri laughed and explained to him, “Your name itself is Akshar, so where does death come in? Nothing will happen to you, why fear? You are Akshar. Sit before the *murti* and chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan. I will also pray for you. Nothing will happen to you. You are healthy. This is only the force of your thoughts. Think instead of God and studies. Chant the Swaminarayan mantra. Have courage.”

- 7 August 2008, Bochasan

Today, a mass initiation ceremony was organized for over 600 newborn babies and new devotees. The atmosphere became noisy because of the babies. Yet Swamishri gave a few words of blessings, “Today, I give the mantra to all of you. Say in unison as I do. This is the ritual of our *sampradaya*. We have to nurture virtues in the children from childhood. So chant the Swaminarayan mantra three times into their ears. That will purify them. May your child become a good devotee, become virtuous, serve you well and be an ideal *satsangi*. I bless you for that.”

- 5 February 2007, Rajkot

While meeting the *satsangis* after breakfast, Chandubhai Dave’s son came and asked Swami, “Give me a guru mantra.”

“Just say Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan,” said Swamishri.

- 28 June 2007, Houston

The volunteers came with a local American man. He had made all the *yagna kunds* for the *pratishtha* arrangements. Swamishri blessed him, saying, “By your service for the *yagna* ceremony you will attain God’s abode.” Then Swamishri added, “Whenever you are in trouble, chant Swaminarayan.” Swami then asked the volunteers

to explain it to him and the volunteers then helped the American say Swaminarayan.

Swami added, “Swaminarayan mantra is a very divine mantra. It can liberate an individual of any caste or country.”

Swamishri’s faith in the mantra touched the American.

- 27 August 2007, Atlanta

A youth came to see Swamishri after breakfast. He was having delusions that his grandfather and other relatives were entering his body as spirits. As a result his behaviour had turned abnormal. Swamishri explained to him, “Your grandfather was a great devotee. He is definitely in Akshardham. How can he enter your body? It is only your suspicion at work. Get rid of it. If you think over it, it will haunt you for no good reason. So chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan. Only this will boost your morale. Don’t be an idler. Get going. Don’t waste away your life at this age. Get busy with work.”

- 7 January 2006, Surat

At 8.30 p.m. *karyakars* of Rajkot-1 Zone were present for darshan during dinner. One leading *karyakar* recollected how the spirits of his forefathers were blessed by the Swaminarayan mantra and attained Badrikashram. He told Swami, “Our Jadeja family was not much into *satsang*. The spirits of our forefathers often haunted us. My family was the only one in *satsang* then. So the spirits of our forefathers harassed us. They would knock on the door at 2 a.m. If we didn’t open the door, they would enter the house on their own, threatening, ‘We will make one of you mad tomorrow.’ And it would really happen. They would threaten to make one of us blind. Thus, our whole family was quite troubled. One night they knocked at my door. My mother didn’t open the door out of fear. So they came into the room on their own and slapped my mother, asking, ‘Why didn’t you open the door?’ They knocked out several of

her teeth in her youth. When I told you about this, you had asked me whether I had any such experience. I said no.

“Then you told me, ‘It is because you have robust faith in Maharaj. Nobody can trouble one who has such devotion. So keep it up and if someone appears, chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.’ So, we started chanting the Swaminarayan Mahamantra and the atmosphere at home changed. Once they knocked on the door at 2 o’clock at night. My mother didn’t open. So they entered the room, saying, ‘Don’t be afraid. Your son’s guru is leading us to Badrikashram. So we have come to say our final Jai Swaminarayan.’ Fourteen years have passed since then but they have not turned again.”

- 24 April 2006, Rajkot

One teenage boy came for Swamishri’s darshan. He was still a school-going student but the thoughts of lust for the opposite gender kept invading his mind. He said to Swamishri, “The whole day I think of the opposite gender. I feel drawn towards them and can’t help looking at them. I can’t concentrate on anything else. That obsession is turning into a goal of my life.”

Hearing this frank confession, Swamishri told him firmly, “It is the wrong path.” Then Swamishri elaborated, “At your age, you are supposed to study. If you concentrate on studies, you will accomplish good academic records which will help you progress in a job or business. Then you will be able to have a girl of your choice. If you spend time after them now, what will you do in the future? So, think of all this and focus on your studies. Work hard. Take a vow that you will not direct your instinct that way, will not have bad company and will not watch TV. Just think whose family you belong to? And how self-controlled your forefathers were? So take a vow and leave all bad company. Visit the mandir regularly. Keep only good friends. Bad company will ruin your life. Such people will keep you occupied with pursuits

like this. So, whenever such thoughts cross your mind, chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan and pray to God.”

Thus, Swamishri explained the importance of restraint to the teenager.

- 12 May 2006, Gondal

feel confident in any work.”

Swamishri at once advised, “Offer puja to God daily and tell the rosary five times chanting Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan and pray to God. Your confidence will grow.”

- 25 August 2006, Chennai

A devotee came for darshan. He said, “I don’t

(contd. from p. 5)

Once, a youth was going to purchase electric fittings (bulbs, switches, etc.) for the Bhadra (Gunatitnagar) mandir. Swami listened as the youth described the details. Then he said, “Let us chant the Swaminarayan mantra *dhun* so that we could get quality products at a good price.” Then closing his eyes, he began to clap.

Out of many such occasions, one of Hakabapu is unforgettable. When he used to serve at the Gondal mandir as a youth, he saw that Yogiji Maharaj used to sing *dhun* in the *mahapuja* with three wishes in mind, “May the number of sadhus increase, may the number of *satsangis* increase and may funds for the mandir increase.”

At the time Hakabapu felt these wishes were ludicrous and even thought Yogi Bapa had gone crazy because there did not seem to be even a flicker of hope of realizing these three wishes.

Once, when Haka Bapu told Shastriji Maharaj

about this, he told Haka Bapu in no uncertain terms, “Hakabhai, this Jogi is a Jogi since time immemorial. He is a sadhu whose blessings really work. All the wishes that he makes have to be fulfilled by Swami-Shriji. Such is his divinity. And you will see during your life all these wishes becoming reality.”

Years later, on seeing the growth of Satsang the world over as a result of Yogiji Maharaj’s *dhun* and prayers, Haka Bapu would vouch, “The spread of Satsang in India and abroad is due to the *dhun* and prayers of Yogiji Maharaj, I am a witness to this.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has retained that tradition of prayer and *dhun*.

The impact of those doses of *dhun* in earlier years is as fresh as ever, which is why on all occasions the words which come to the fore with Yogiji Maharaj’s divine memory are ‘*Karo dhun*’.

Gujarati text: Sadhu Ishwarcharandas

Translation: Kaushik Joshi

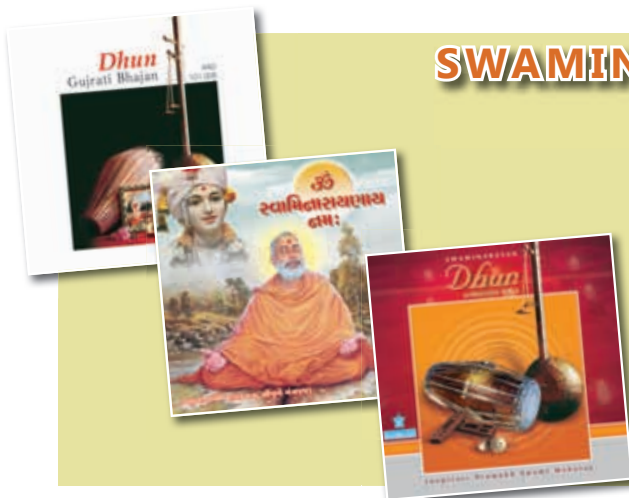
SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

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- Dhun
- Aum Swaminarayan Namaha
- Swaminarayan Dhun 2

Available from all BAPS Bookstalls





SOURCE OF PATIENCE AND COURAGE AMID FIERY CHALLENGES SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

Man has a limited capacity to fight against life's challenges.

*When facing the fiery conflict of life and death,
even the brave lose patience and courage.*

*Yet, amid such fierce challenges strength surfaces,
in even the ordinary, to combat the situation,
quell the raging fire and snatch life back from
the doors of death. How?*

The answer:

'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.'

The following are true stories of BAPS devotes...



Gambhirsinh K. Rathod, Ahmedabad
Commander, Indian Army, Kashmir

I joined the army in 1997 with the permission of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Since then my constant inspirational forces have been the Swaminarayan mantra and Swamishri himself.

Ours is an altogether different world. As a soldier of the Indian army I have performed extended duties on the borders of Jammu-Kashmir and the Siachin Glacier in the Himalayas where the temperature drops to -30°C. At a height of 21,000 feet there is snow all around. Only the force of God works here. So you become habituated to chant God's name. Here, the Swaminarayan mantra has been a storehouse of strength for me. Twice a day I sing the *arti* while meditating on Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, since neither a wick or incense stick can't be lighted where we have to live.

When we are posted at lower altitude, we get some water for bathing and then I can perform puja. But in the Himalayas it's difficult since even the drinking water has to be obtained by melting snow. One cannot even think of having a bath there. There, I offer *mansi puja*, chant the Swaminarayan mantra and read the Shikshapatri.

Over the years, my faith in the Swaminarayan mantra has grown and I have felt it works.

The day of 6 July 1999 will remain etched in my memory. The Kargil War was on and we reached there with all our weaponry. As task commandos, we were in the open, slowly marching forward on the snow-capped hills. There was no place for us to hide. The enemies saw us and all of a sudden rained bullets at us. We were only 25 metres from them and they were strategically placed. So it was unlikely we could escape or survive.

I will never forget this encounter because at that point of time I felt the Swaminarayan mantra rising from my navel. There were 12 of

us and the others too had faith in my mantra. So they too started chanting it and we felt emboldened. We rushed forward. I had a light machine gun but I felt I was not handling it; a divine power was controlling it. Drawing strength from that we rained bullets on the enemies. Suddenly, 120 soldiers of our platoon arrived and the enemy receded. Miraculously, we were unhurt. I, for one, believe that it was only chanting of the Swaminarayan mantra that came to our rescue.

When death stares you in the face, your faith in the divine mantra doubles. I had a more dreadful experience in the Siachen Glacier. The enemies were firing 25-30 km range cannon balls at us. There were only 10 of us. One ball was enough to kill us all, but we kept chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and were saved by our faith in it.

Often, the exercises in the army are risky, especially that of fighter planes somersaulting into a valley below. Your heart misses a beat. However, while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra I have successfully passed the tests.

I was posted to Jammu-Kashmir in 2003. Ours was a battalion of 850 soldiers. But we had poor ratings in discipline, shooting and accident protection. This came in our way for promotion. Again, I started chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and also inspired other soldiers to do it. Soon, we began to get good ratings.

A battalion is made up of 850 soldiers and each commander has 45 soldiers under him. I have 45 soldiers under me. Drawing inspiration from me, they have stopped taking meat and liquor. I have given them all a *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, which they carry in their wallets and have darshan every morning and evening. Now, they feel more confident. So, they call me Gambhirsinh Swaminarayan.

Postings change very often in the army. So we have to go to different places. It is difficult for soldiers to get acclimatized in the beginning but with the Swaminarayan mantra I feel that Maharaj is always with me and I soon get back to the task with dedication.

When I joined the army, the soldiers insisted that I eat non-vegetarian food but Maharaj and Pramukh Swami have always saved me from all that. The Swaminarayan mantra Swamishri has gifted me has actually turned into my saviour mantra.

MANTRA MAGIC IN THE FACE OF WAR



Satyam Anand Mehta, Atlanta, USA

My wife, Angelina Mehta, desired to join the world famous U.S. Marine Corps at the age of 17 merely as a challenge. It is known the world over as the most powerful army unit and one involved in the most risky operations. Its training is also very rigorous. When my wife (now 25) and her sister one year younger to her, decided to join the Corps, they had no idea how difficult life would be. But they were able to withstand the rigours due to the only power of the Swaminarayan mantra, and their prayers to Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Here, I put in their own words how *satsang* and prayer have helped them in the army:

“Both of us have been BAPS *satsangis* since childhood. By attending the Balika Mandal and Yuvati Mandal in Los Angeles and the special care of our parents, we had cultivated a strong faith in the Swaminarayan mantra and prayer since childhood. But its real value became apparent after joining the U.S. Marines.

“The training in the United States Marine Corps Reserves was also very daunting but with the support of the Swaminarayan mantra and prayer, both of us successfully completed the training.

“After the training, I had to do varied duties. I had to work as sergeant in Operation Iraqi Freedom in May 2007. I was posted for six months at the Civilian Military Operation Centre in Iraq taking care of the security and problems of the people there.

It was difficult going out in temperatures exceeding 130°F wearing a helmet, bulletproof jacket and carrying heavy weapons and the fear of sniper fire and attacks. We had to make do

with the bottleful of water for bath and brush. Onion and garlic-free meals were just not possible to have. We had to eat junk food. After a duty of 10 hours at a stretch, we had to stand guard for four hours carrying weapons weighing 35-40 kg. I was the only female among all male soldiers.

In the US Marines, you hardly get time for yourself due to the long duty hours. Yet, I did not lapse in performing my daily puja, reading of the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, writing of the Swaminarayan mantra, conducting the Sunday assembly on my own and observing the special fasts of Chaturmas. This was possible only because of the grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and prayers.

An event will remain forever etched in mind.

It was 29 May 2006. I was on duty as a non-commissioned officer at the Civil Military Operation Centre in Fallelujah in Iraq. That day the enemy troops caused an explosion which damaged the generator of the building. Then they launched all kinds of armed attacks and I began to think fast what to do as rebels were raining bullets at us. Besides, I was worried about the one hundred citizens who had come to see us as planned and were also with us at the time. I began to plan a counterattack to make the enemy realize that we were not a soft target.

I rushed to the terrace for a strategic position and on reaching there I began to chant the Swaminarayan mantra, while thinking of Pramukh Swami. This emboldened me and measuring up the situation, I launched a counterattack. Soon

the danger passed and we escaped the further attack. I was able to face the situation due to the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

It was August 2006 and we were on an inspection tour of our projects. While we were going back to the base camp, there was an explosion in which my friend, a marine soldier who stood guard on our High Mobility Multi-Purpose Vehicle narrowly escaped death as he sat down at the time of attack. He used to bring me food that was in accordance with our Swaminarayan diet while I was posted away from the camp. Whenever we met, he used to recite the Swaminarayan mantra with reverence and I feel that it saved his life.

Due to the explosion one tyre of our vehicle had burst. So, we had to change the tyre. We couldn't go to the city for fear of attack. Hence we

took the vehicle 300 metres away from the site of explosion. At 135°F and carrying 40 kg of arms, we changed the tyre at great risk to our lives. But nothing happened and we survived, thanks to the Swaminarayan mantra and faith in Shriji Maharaj.

I was awarded the Global War on Terrorism Service medal, Iraqi Campaign Medal, Combat Action Ribbon and C Service Deployment Ribbon for my duty in Iraq due to the grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj as he has inspired great faith in the Swaminarayan mantra in me.

As a token of my gratitude to America I unfurled its flag on the Civilian Military Operations Centre. Another flag I unfurled there was that of the BAPS on 11 September 2006 for my gratitude to the BAPS for the love and strength it has given me and as mark of respect for Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

COOL IN THE MIDST OF BOMB EXPLOSIONS



Nitinbhai K. Gadhia, Director and General Manager, Maliban Industries, Lebanon

It was July 2006 and I was in the city of Baalbek in Lebanon working as general manager of the Maliban SAL. Around this time Israel had launched bomb attacks on Lebanon to exterminate the Hizbullah group of militants. I had a feeling that something untoward will happen, so I started chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and thinking of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

I clearly remember the day of Sunday 16 July. I went home after the Sunday assembly, which we held every week. Then I went back to the factory at 9.15 p.m. just to see that it was safe. At 9.30 p.m. a fighter plane dropped a bomb near the factory. Before I could gather my wits there were three bomb explosions. My colleagues and workers were frightened. There was chaos all around, with people running around in search of safety.

I was confused for a while. Then, thinking of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I began to chant the Swaminarayan mantra and that gave me courage and warmth.

Ours was a glass factory whose furnace daily consumed 20,000 litres of diesel and the power station consumed 30,000 litres of heavy fuel. So we were at great risk of further explosions, and hence damage and injury, due to the stored fuel.

While chanting the mantra, I thought of shutting down the machines and the furnace and closing the factory. I couldn't decide because closing the factory would mean great financial loss. So I phoned Pramukh Swami. He gave me much strength and advised me to close the factory and save the lives of the employees. Then I felt confident and went to close the factory at midnight.

I took the workers in confidence and switched off the machines but the furnace would take at least seven days to cool. So I gathered the employees and decided to cool the furnace in three days.

It is probably more difficult to shut down a glass factory than to keep it working. We closed the factory for the first time in 10 years. The

second bomb had fallen near the quarters of the senior employees of the factory. There is another factory nearby. It was 2.30 at night. I went there and took all the employees to a hotel and lodged them there.

All through this period I kept chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and praying to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. God was showering his grace upon me by showing me ways to deal with these terrifying moments. The clock struck three at night.

I reached the factory early morning the next day and sent the employees of the first shift to a safer place. Only a few Indians remained. God inspired me to think that they should be flown back to India and soon this was arranged.

The next day I phoned Swamishri, informing him about the situation. He blessed me and encouraged me. I felt confident after I spoke to him.

On 18 July, as planned, I began preparations to send the Indian nationals back to India, but the Lebanese international airport had been damaged in the bomb explosions. So they had to go to Damascus airport in neighbouring Syria. There were 45 of them and tickets were difficult to get. So, Dubai-based *satsangi* Ashok Kotecha helped. A group of 15 was sent first as planned. Other Indians insisted upon me to leave Lebanon as well but I would not since Swami told me to leave last.

I came back to the factory at 10.30 in the morning. There were 12 workers with me. The furnace was cooling. Meanwhile, there was an explosion at the place where I live. It is considered one of the safest areas, so I feared that our factory would be attacked at any time. Quickly, we switched off the power station. Just when I was taking the necessary steps, a bomb exploded on our factory. It was 12.10 p.m. and I was in the office. I left the office to see and found that it exploded in our premises. The consternation multiplied but we kept praying and chanting the Swaminarayan mantra.

Soon there were four ear-shattering bomb explosions. We fled and went to an open field.

I was left numb. I counted how many we were and found that we were missing three: Mr Bindi, Mr Mana and Mr Dinesh Kumar. Our factory was razed to the ground and I thought that they would have been buried in the rubble.

A greater tragedy was averted thanks to Pramukh Swami Maharaj who inspired me to switch off the furnace and the diesel tank.

We began to look for our three missing colleagues under the debris. One was found injured and we quickly took him to hospital. Another was found in the housing colony. He was in coma and we rushed him to the hospital. The third, unfortunately, was found dead. We arranged to fly his body to India.

Fear was in the air. I emboldened some employees of the factory and began to collect important documents of the factory from the debris.


At last, after seeing off the rest of the employees, I prepared to leave. Before leaving, I went home, offered food and water to Thakorji and prayed. I left with the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. While I was leaving some Lebanese employees surrounded me and thanked me but one elder bluntly spoke to me, "If, in the explosion, our Lebanese employees had died and you had survived, we would not have left you alive. We would have killed you. But you are a genuine devotee and you saved us as inspired by God, which is why you are alive."

I felt that Swami once again saved me from the throes of death. I reached Syria by road and arrived at Damascus airport. Within a few hours, the Israelis had damaged that road by aerial attacks.

On reflection, I felt that all of us survived thanks to the grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj who led me to think of closing the factory. Had the factory been attacked while it was working, all the employees and workers would have been charred to death because of the furnace with 1800°C temperature besides thousands of litres of LPG, gas and diesel.

Isn't that a miracle?





STRENGTH TO SCALE LIFE'S MOUNTAINOUS CHALLENGES

SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

Even those greats who rock the world crack under the pressures of life's personal tragedies. The sudden loss of near and dear relatives is a shock few can handle. Yet some behold such flowing spiritual energy that they successfully scale personal tragedies. What is the source of such inner strength?

The answer:

'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.'

The following are true stories of BAPS devotees...



Yogendrabhai Parmar, Businessman, New Jersey, USA.

It was May 2004.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was at the BAPS Mandir in Edison. Several programmes were scheduled and our family was also enjoying the festivities and performing various duties there.

The day of 28 May arrived. It was morning. My son, Shreeji, a Grade 10 student, was engaged in preparations for the Children's Day. I was at home, inviting my friends on the phone to come to the mandir for Swami's darshan. The phone remained engaged but someone was trying to contact me. When I hung up, there was a call. In a distraught voice, he gave me the message, "Your son, Shreeji, has met with a serious accident. Come to the hospital at once."

I was shocked with disbelief. I started chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and thinking of Pramukh Swami while going to the hospital.

Shreeji had gone to the Raritan Expo Centre, near the Edison mandir, as part of the Children's Day preparations. They were on their way back by car. A youth was driving the car and Shreeji was seated beside him. Shreeji fell asleep as he was tired. The youth driver also felt drowsy for a while. When he woke up he saw a truck rushing towards the car. He tried to turn the car but it was too late. The car rammed in the girder of the truck. There was an explosion and Shreeji woke up. He screamed. His voice muffled at that very moment. It was a serious accident. A gentleman named Pankajbhai saw it and realized that the children clad in kurta-pajama belonged to the BAPS. He phoned the Edison mandir and several volunteers rushed there. The police also arrived. Shreeji had serious head injuries. Both of them were rushed to the hospital.

When I reached the hospital, the doctors were giving emergency treatment. Shreeji was fast asleep. All his body parts, except his head, were unhurt. I ran my hand over his body and felt that he would get well.

But that was not to be. Shreeji was very seriously injured, the doctor told me. I recollected the *satsang* discourses saying that God has destined the life-span of all human beings and man cannot change it. I reassured myself and left everything to God, but the thought of bearing the shock of losing Shreeji haunted me. Then at around 11 o'clock, Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself announced in the Children's Day assembly in the Edison mandir to start chanting the Swaminarayan dhun as Shreeji and another youth had met with a serious accident. And Swamishri himself joined in.

While the *dhun* was being sung, I felt a soul-force surging in my heart. Gathering courage, I asked the doctor, "Tell us, how serious is it?" And the doctor informed me, "He is brain dead. He cannot live any longer."

At that very moment I decided to donate healthy parts of Shreeji's body.

I told the doctor, "Keep my son alive for a little longer. I have to take an important decision after consulting my guru."

Meanwhile, the sadhus and devotees also came to the hospital and prayed to Maharaj with *dhun*. This helped us gather greater courage and patience.

I spoke to Swami on the phone later that day and told him that my wife desired Shreeji to be a sadhu.

Swami at once said, "I saw that your son was offering great *seva* for the past seven days. Now that is over. Take it boldly. Maharaj will keep Shreeji as sadhu in Akshardham as your wife desired. That is even better than being a sadhu here. He is now seated in Akshardham. So do not grieve."

Swamishri's words soothed me. Then I spoke to Swamishri about my wish to donate body parts of Shreeji. Swami agreed, saying it was a 'good idea.'

Meanwhile, Doctor Swami came and prayed by

singing the *dhun*. Then I went near Shreeji's bed and told him, "Jai Swaminarayan from all of us. Now, feel free to leave for Akshardham. Pardon us if we have hurt you."

And the life machine was switched off. And Shreeji's soul left for Akshardham.

I requested the doctor not to perform a post-mortem. But he said that would not be possible. So, I asked him to leave at least his eyes and kidneys untouched for donation.

Then we went home and kept chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Maharaj, Pramukh Swami, the sadhus and the *dhun* stood us in good stead. Surprisingly, my wife was not rattled having lost our only son.

To my mourning relatives, I said, "Find goodness in whatever God does. Shreeji has moved from a smaller house to the larger one, that is Akshardham. So take recourse to the Swaminarayan *dhun*."

Swami told me on the phone, "Bliss to you and

bliss to him. With the divine memories of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj I have seated him in Akshardham."

The next day was Jeth *sud* 10, the day Shriji Maharaj had left for Akshardham. My wife and I went to the mandir. We had darshan of Swami from a distance since Shreeji's funeral was not yet over.

After the funeral, we joined the *seva* as before. I was in the parking zone and my wife and daughter were in the Mahila Cell.

I have Shreeji's photograph at home as his memory. When I see it, I do not feel grieved. I think that he was not my son, rather a devotee and a *mukta*. He came to us just as a guest for some years and now is back with God.

I wonder how I, my wife and my daughter could face such a great loss with such composure.

It is thanks to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and chanting of the Swaminarayan mantra.

GETTING RID OF ANGER AND ATTACHMENT



Virchandbhai Modi, Kheralu, Visnagar

Anger was my nature since early childhood. I had quarreled with many people because of my anger.

Once I broke all the earthen pots in the kitchen because I didn't like the food prepared by my sister.

I was also habituated to stealing. I was uncivil. I was ill-mannered in matters of speech and food.

Thanks to a relative of mine, a turning point came in my life when he took me to Yogiji Maharaj. I told him what was I like and he initiated me as a *satsangi*, placed a *kanthi* around my neck, blessed me and inspired me to lead a good life. He advised me to chant the Swaminarayan mantra whenever I got angry.

This is when it all began to change. I started chanting the mantra and felt that my nature was changing.

Even today, whenever I get a fit of anger, I

chant the Swaminarayan mantra and I become aware of its effect and I become mollified.

After becoming a *satsangi*, I often asked my father also to become a *satsangi*, but he refused, saying he had faith in Shamlaji. He once told me, "If he (Shamlaji) himself asks me to do so, I will."

So I turned to *dhun* and prayer. Once I read Vachanamrut Panchala-1 at night and asked him to become a *satsangi*.

That night Shamlaji (Shri Krishna) appeared in his dream and asked him to go to Yogiji Maharaj, since only he could liberate him. Then he had darshan of Golok, Vaikunth, Kailash and finally Akshardham.

Our family God was Vir and we used to light a *divo* before his *murti* daily. After becoming a *satsangi*, I realized that Shriji Maharaj was supreme God and I need not pray to other deities. So we stopped lighting a lamp before Vir.

Sixteen years passed and my wife developed respiratory trouble in 1971. We consulted many doctors but it didn't help.

Once Vir appeared in a dream to our Brahmin neighbour and asked him to remind me to light a *divo* before his *murti*. He then told him, "I subject his wife to so much pain. Doesn't he realize?"

The Brahmin and the neighbours insisted upon me to have faith in Vir but I kept chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. I told them bluntly, "I don't care even if all of us die but I no longer have faith in any superstition."

The next day we chanted *dhun* and Vir entered the body of one man saying, "I am your slave." I told him, "Wear a *kanthi*." Chanting the *dhun* I placed a *kanthi* around his neck and he became quiet.

Another calamity visited us in 1997.

My son Jashu was working for a firm in Pune. He used to commute between Pune and Solapur by bus carrying a large amount of cash. A ruffian came to know this. He made friends with Jashu. Once, Jashu had put up at a guest house in Solapur with cash and had to go to Pune. The ruffian asked him to accompany him to Pune in a car since he was also going there. On the way he

looted him, killed and threw Jashu into a ditch. I went to Pune to enquire but to no avail.

Swami was in Ahmedabad then. I told him what happened and he consoled me, "He has now reached God's abode. So pray to Shriji Maharaj for peace."

I went home, lighted a *divo* before Maharaj and started chanting the *dhun*. I explained to my family, "It is God's will. He is now before Maharaj. Do not grieve. Chant the Swaminarayan mantra that will give inner strength and strengthen faith in God."

By the grace of Shriji Maharaj, the *dhun* brought us peace and we were able to cope with the tragedy. Soon after my son-in-law died and my daughter became a widow. Once again, the mantra and prayers gave us peace and patience.

Some of our relatives though, had misgivings, I complained to them, "Life is full with such uncertainties and death visits all mortals. For me, Maharaj-Swami are everything. In times of grief the only way out is Swaminarayan mantra. God is omnipresent."

OVERCOMING MENTAL STRESS WITH THE SWAMINARAYAN MANTRA...



Dr Madhusudanbhai D. Patel, MD Cardiologist, Ahmedabad

After passing my MD from Mumbai, in 1960, I began to practice as a cardiologist in Ahmedabad. Soon thereafter, a calamity struck me: my wife died in 1969. I grew restless and was suffering from insomnia. So I had to take sleeping pills for 3½ years.

Then, in 1972, I met a Vedanti Brahmin in my native village of Sojitra, who advised me to chant the Gayatri mantra. I chanted it millions of times and felt some relief.

I used to go to Sojitra once a week as a visiting doctor. Once, Ravjibhai Patel, a *satsangi* in Sojitra, phoned me to rush to Sojitra as his wife had

cardiac trouble. I went to his place and took the cardiogram. It was cardiac arrest. I told Ravjibhai, "I haven't brought any medicines. So you get the medicines I prescribe at once while I would give her cardiac massage."

Ravjibhai asked someone to fetch the medicine and he brought the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, placed them on the bed and chanted Swaminarayan *dhun* for half an hour.

I was a stranger to this ritual and was quite surprised by it. But his wife began to feel relief. The medicine also arrived and she survived.

That was my first experience with the Swaminarayan mantra. Though I was not a *satsangi*, I began to respect the mantra.

In 1978, Doctor Swami phoned me one night, "Would you please come to Sarangpur to examine Pramukh Swami Maharaj?" I agreed and I went to Sarangpur with Rameshbhai Dalal of Ahmedabad. That was my first meeting with Swamishri and I felt drawn to him.

Then I started chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. I felt peace and was cured of insomnia. My faith in the Swaminarayan mantra strengthened.

I went to Sarangpur again in 1978 to examine Pramukh Swami around the time of the Standard 10 (SSC) exams of my son, Tejas. As I prepared to leave for Ahmedabad after examining him, Swamishri asked me to stay for his puja darshan. After the puja, he chanted the Swaminarayan mantra and blessed me, "Your son will appear in the merit list of SSC Board."

I felt joyous. After reaching Ahmedabad, I began to regularly chant the Swaminarayan

mantra so that Tejas got good results. And it worked. Tejas topped the list in both SSC and in MBBS thereafter.

I tried the mantra in my medical profession also and got good results in complex cases.

Today puja, daily *satsang sabha*, Sunday assembly and spiritual reading have become an integral part of my life. I began to chant the Swaminarayan mantra every morning and evening before Thakorji.

My restlessness has disappeared and I feel at peace. I have never approached Swamishri for material pleasure.

Mantra has now become a part of my life. I begin in the early morning and continue for almost the whole day. I tell the rosary between 500 to 700 times a day, which does not allow any instincts to control me.

I cannot put the magic of Swaminarayan mantra in words.

Translation: Kaushik Joshi



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'ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठाम्'
- Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/1

'येनाऽक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्त्वं
प्रोवाच तां सन्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्'
- Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13

'अक्षरात् परतः परः'
- Mundaka Upanishad: 2/1/2

'यस्मिन्नाका निर्वाहा लोकितमहं तदेतदक्षरं ब्रह्म'
- Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/2

THE MUNDAKA UPANISHAD

Proclaiming the Akshar-Purushottam Principle

Part 1

a total of six *khandas* in three *mundakas*. *Mundaka* means head. This Upanishad gives comprehensive precepts on *brahmavidyā*, the foremost (head) of all *vidyās*, and therefore it is called the Mundaka Upanishad.

THE STORY

The description of *brahmavidyā* has been given through a *guru-shishya paramparā* (lineage). 'ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः सम्बभूव । विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता । स ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठामथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥ अथर्वणे यां प्रवदेत ब्रह्माऽथर्वा तां पुरोवाचाऽङ्गिरे ब्रह्मविद्याम् । स भारद्वाजाय सत्यवहाय प्राह भारद्वाजोऽङ्गिरसे परावराम् ॥' – '*Brahmā devānām prathamaha sambabhoova, vishvasya kartā bhuvansya gopta, sa brahmavidyām sarvavidyāpratishthām atharvāya jyeshtha-putrāya prāha. Atharvane yām pravadeta brahmā'tharvā tām purovāchā'ngire brahmavidyām, sa bhāradvājo'ngirase parāvarām*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/1-2). This means Paramātmā first created Brahmā, the creator and nourisher of this universe (*brahmānd*). He inspired *brahmavidyā* within him. Brahmā gave the teachings of this *brahmavidyā* to his eldest son, Atharvā. Atharvā taught this *vidyā* to a disciple named Angir. He explained this *vidyā* to Satyavāha, a descendant of Bharadvāj. Satyavāha Muni spoke this *vidyā* to one of his disciples named Angirā. Further in this lineage, 'शौनको ह वै महाशालोऽङ्गिरसं विधिवदुपसन्नः पप्रच्छ' – '*Shaunako ha vai mahāshālo'ngirasam vidhivadupasannaha paprachchha*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/3). The wealthy aspirant Shaunak, who himself had a big

Statements from the shastras, such as, 'विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते' – '*Vidyayā'mrutamashnute*' (Ishāvasyā Upanishad: 11) and 'विद्यया विन्दतेऽमृतम्' – '*Vidyayā vindate'mrutam*' (Kena Upanishad: 2/4) describe *vidyā* (knowledge) as the supreme means for *moksha* (liberation). Which *vidyā* is this? *Brahmavidyā*. *Brahmavidyā* has the strength too break the ties of the world. What is *brahmavidyā*? How does it break the ties of the world?

To experience this one must read, study, contemplate on and imbibe the teachings of the Mundaka Upanishad. The Mundaka Upanishad has left nothing in revealing the totality of *brahmavidyā*. Let us absorb ourselves in it.

INTRODUCTION

The Mundaka Upanishad, which is encompassed with in the Atharva Veda, has three main sections – each is called a *mundaka*. Each of these *mundakas* has two subsections called *khandas*. Thus this Upanishad has

place for *yagnas*, ceremoniously took the discipleship of Maharshi Angirā. One thought had been on Shaunak's mind for a long time: this world is filled with many varieties of things. This rare life that we have received is also limited. It is short. In this short life how much needs to be known in order to be freed from these worldly ties? Moreover, if we attempt to know one thing, something else will always be left unknown.

Is there a *vidyā* by knowing which all *vidyās* are encompassed, and nothing else needs to be known? By knowing which we become all-knowing. With these sentiments the aspirant Shaunak asked, 'कस्मिन् भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति' – '*Kasminnu bhagavo vijnāte sarvamidam vijnātam bhavateeti.*' – 'By knowing what does one know everything or know all the secrets of the shastras' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/3).

THE TWO TYPES OF VIDYĀ

There are not many who would ask about such matters. Hearing the question, Angirā Muni was pleased. He clarified one thing before answering, 'द्वे विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद् ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति परा चैवापरा' – '*Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yad brahmavido vadanti parā chaivāprā.*' – 'Shaunak! The wise experts of *brahmavidyā* say that there are two types of *vidyā* famous in this world. One is *parā vidyā*, the other *aparā vidyā*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/4).

Parā means paramount. The paramount *vidyā* of all *vidyās* is *parāvidyā*. This *parāvidyā*, i.e. paramount *vidyā*, is *brahmavidyā* itself. For this very reason, this Upanishad commences by explaining the supremacy of *brahmavidyā* with the words, 'ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठाम्' – '*Brahmavidyām sarvavidyāpratishthām.*' – 'It is *brahmavidyā* itself that resides as the prestige and support of all *vidyās*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/1). The Bhagavad

That by which both the entities 'Aksharam', i.e. Aksharbrahman, and 'Purusham', i.e. Purushottam, are known is called *brahmavidyā*.

– Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13

Gītā calls this *adhyātmavidyā*. 'अध्यात्मविद्या विद्यानाम्' – '*Adhyātmavidyā vidyānām*' (Gita: 1/32). Showing it to be a *vibhuti* it has placed it at the topmost position of all *vidyās*. The fruit that cannot be attained by any other *vidyā*, the fruit of *moksha* (liberation), can only be attained by this *parāvidyā*; this is the reason for its supremacy. In this way, what has been described in the shastras as *brahmavidyā*

or *adhyātmavidyā* has been presented here as *parāvidyā*.

The other *vidyā* is *aparā*. *Aparā vidyā* means mundane knowledge, distinct and minor to *parā*. It is *vidyā* which is obtained without realization merely in the form of information. Even if someone has the four Vedas with their six *angas* at their fingertips, but if it is mere knowledge of words and has not been imbibed in one's life, and has not resulted in realization, then that knowledge, although it is of the shastras, is *aparā*. This *vidyā* can never destroy misery. This can be understood better from the example of Maharshi Nārād. Maharshi Nārād knew the four Vedas, the Itihās scriptures, the Purānas, the science of reasoning (logic), *pitruvidyā* (ancestral knowledge), science of the constellations, *devavidyā*, *sarpavidyā* and many other *vidyās*. Nevertheless, 'सोऽहं भगवो शोचामि तं मां भगवान् शोकस्य परं तारयतु' – '*So'ham bhagavo shochāmi tam mām Bhagavān shokasya pāram tārayatu*' (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/3). O Gurudev! I am submerged in an ocean of misery. Please draw me out. Thus he acknowledged that he was miserable and asked to be freed from his misery.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BRAHMAVIDYĀ

Two types of *vidyā* have been mentioned. Of them, the characteristics of *parāvidyā*, i.e. *brahmavidyā* are then described. Maharshi Angirā says, 'येनाऽक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्' – '*Yenā'ksharam Purusham veda satyam provācha*

tām tattvato brahmavidyām. – ‘That by which both the entities ‘Aksharam’, i.e. Aksharbrahman, and ‘Purusham’, i.e. Purushottam, are known is called *brahmavidyā*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13).

Here *brahmavidyā* does not just encompass knowing Parabrahman but it encompasses the principle of knowing both these divine entities Brahman and Parabrahman, i.e. Akshar and Purushottam. This means that if someone only knows the form of Parabrahman, or only of Aksharbrahman then that is not complete *brahmavidyā*. Both must be fully known with complete realization. Only then can that *brahmavidyā* be said to be complete.

That is indeed why the rishis of the Taittiriya *shākhā* (school) say, ‘असन्नेव स भवति। असद् ब्रह्मेति वेद चेत्। अस्ति ब्रह्मेति चेद् वेद। सन्तमेनं ततो विदुः!’ – ‘*Asanneva sa bhavati, asad brahmeti veda chet, asti brahmeti ched veda, santamenam tato vidu!*’ – ‘One who does not know the existence of Aksharbrahman has squandered his own existence, and one who knows the existence of Aksharbrahman, himself attains true existence’ (Taittiriya Ānand Valli: 6). Maharshi Yāgnavalkya explains something similar to Gārgi in the Bruhadarānyaka Upanishad, ‘यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वाऽस्मिंल्लोके जुहोति यजते तपस्तप्यते बहूनि वर्षसहस्राण्यन्तवदेवास्य तद् भवति’ – ‘*Yo vā etadaksharam Gārgyaviditvā’sminloke juhoti yajate tapastapyate bahooni varshasahasrānyantavadevāsya tad bhavati*’ – ‘O Gārgi! Without knowing Aksharbrahman, even if someone performs *yagnas*, or does austerities for thousands of years, they will only attain a perishable fruit [i.e. they will not attain an eternal fruit]’ (Bruhadarānyaka Upanishad: 3/8/10). Moreover, ‘यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वाऽस्माल्लोकात् प्रैति स कृपणः’ – ‘*Yo vā etadaksharam Gārgyaviditvā’smāllokāt praiti sa krupanaha.*’ – ‘O Gārgi! Whosoever attains death without knowing Aksharbrahman is pitiful and lacking [because they will have to be born again]’ (Bruhadarānyaka Upanishad: 3/8/10).

In the same way, it is also clear that there is no chance for *moksha* (liberation) without knowing Paramātmā. For example, it is said in the Yajurveda, ‘तमेव विदित्वाऽतिमृत्युमेति नान्यः पन्थाः

विद्यतेऽयनाय’ – ‘*Tameva viditvā’timrutyumeti nānyaha panthāhā vidyate’yanāya.*’ Meaning, knowing God is the only path for reaching God’s abode.

The reason for this unique definition of *brahmavidyā* has also been explained for us by such scriptures. The Bhagavad Gitā says, ‘ब्रह्मभूतः प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति। समः सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम्॥’ – ‘*Brahmabhootaha prasannātmā na shochati na kānkshati, samaha sarveshu bhooteshu madbhaktim labhate parām*’ (Gitā: 18/54). Only one who becomes *brahmarup* i.e. *aksharrup* is benefited with the bhakti of Purushottam. The Taittiriya Upanishad also says, ‘ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम्’ – ‘*Brahmavidāpnoti Param*’ – ‘He who knows Brahman, i.e. Akshar, is *brahmarup* and only he attains Paramātmā.’ In this way, for eternal liberation, one must know Purushottam Parabrahman and offer bhakti and *upāsana* to him. It is clear that in order to accomplish that knowledge, *upāsana* and bhakti one must know Aksharbrahman and become *aksharrup*.

In this way, the supreme essence of *brahmavidyā* is to become *brahmarup* and offer bhakti and *upāsana* to Parabrahman. Only by compulsorily knowing both divine entities, Brahman and Parabrahman, in other words, by imbibing the Akshar-Purushottam principle, does the supreme essence of *brahmavidyā* blossom fully within us.

Now let us see how this essence is revealed here.

THE BEGINNING OF PARĀVIDYĀ

‘अथ परा’ – ‘*Atha parā.*’ – ‘Shaunak! Now I will explain what *parā vidyā* is’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/5). Angirā pledges to explain *parā vidyā*, i.e. *brahmavidyā*. Everything, from here on, till the end of this Upanishad, is in fact an expanded explanation of this *brahmavidyā*.

AKSHAR – THE FIRST TO BE ANNOUNCED

In this *brahmavidyā*, rather than starting with the teachings of Purushottam, Maharshi Angirā first starts with the announcement of Akshar. ‘यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते’ – ‘*Yayā tadaksharamadhighamyate*’

(Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/5). That by which Akshar, i.e. Aksharbrahman, is acquired, i.e. known in its entirety and realized. ‘Known in its entirety’ – Maharshi Angirā does not stop here. So that Aksharbrahman can be known completely, he also describes the divine form of Akshar. He says, ‘O disciple! What is that Akshar like?’ Well, ‘यत् तददृश्यमग्राह्यमगोत्रमवर्णमचक्षुः श्रोत्रं तदपाणिपादम् । नित्यं विभुं सर्वगतं सुसूक्ष्मं तदव्ययं यद्भूतयोनिं परिपश्यन्ति धीराः ॥’ – ‘*Yat tadadreshyamagrāhyamagotramavarnamachakshuhushrotram tadapānipādam. Nityam vibhum sarvagatam susookshmam tadavyayam yabhootayonim paripashyanti dheerāhā*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/6). This Akshar cannot be comprehended by worldly organs. It has no worldly ancestors, cast, limbs or organs, etc. It is eternal. It is capable of doing everything. It is all-pervading. It is extremely subtle. It is indestructible. It is the cause of all. The wise who have attained the liberated state can see it. This is what Aksharbrahman is like.

Having described the form of Akshar briefly, now he explains it in great detail.

AKSHAR – THE CAUSE OF CREATION

Paramātmā is independently the cause of the whole world. This is an eternal principle. Nevertheless, by that Paramātmā’s eternal desire, Akshar, whilst being under the control of and dependent on Paramātmā, is also the cause of the whole world. This is also an eternal principle! This has been explained here very simply with three examples.

Giving the first example Angirā says, ‘यथोर्णाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च’ – ‘*Yathornanābhihi srujate gruhnate cha*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/7). *Urnanābhi* means a spider. O disciple! Just like a spider creates threads and makes a web, and when it desires it swallows it back, in the same way creation is made from Akshar.

From this example, Angirā means to tell us that like a spider can easily create a web and retrieve it without itself changing, Akshar can similarly create the world.

Hethengivesasecondexample. ‘यथापृथिव्यामोषधयः

सम्भवन्ति’ – ‘*Yathā pruthivyāmoshadhayaha sambhavanti*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/7). This is an example regarding the herbs and plants that sprout on the earth. Just like countless herbs and plants grow on this earth according to their seeds, similarly this world is created from Akshar. On the earth, some trees have thorns, some are lush with fragrant flowers, some abound with sweet fruits whereas others may be bitter, astringent or pungent. The root cause of this variety is their seeds, not the earth. The earth produces and nourishes all, it is not biased or pitiless. Similarly, with regards to variety in the world, Akshar represents the earth. The differences we see in the world are due to the seeds in the form of the previous karmas of each *ātmā*. In this way, although being the cause of this extremely diverse creation, Akshar has no faults like pitilessness and prejudice. Akshar is nothing but divine. This has been explained by this example.

He then gives a third example. ‘यथा सतः पुरुषात्केशलोमानि तथाऽक्षरात्सम्भवतीह विश्वम् ॥’ – ‘*Yathā sataha purushātkeshalomāni tathā’ksharātsambhavateeha vishvam*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/7). Here, the example of hair that grows on the body has been given. Hair and nails grow naturally on the body. No effort has to be made. Similarly, the creation of this universe is no effort for Akshar. Akshar creates the universe effortlessly.

In this way, the manner in which Akshar, by the divine wish of Purushottam, becomes the cause of creation has been explained through these three examples. It then also explains how destruction takes place within Akshar. ‘अक्षराद् विविधाः सोम्य भावाः प्रजायन्ते तत्र चैवाऽपियन्ति’ – ‘*Aksharād vividhāhā somya bhāvāhā prajāyante tatra chaivā’piyanti*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/1/1). O Somya! This varied creation is created from Akshar, and at the time of destruction it dissolves into a small region of Akshar. ◆

- Gujarati text: Sadhu Bhadreshdas, Ph.D.
Translation: Sadhu Paramvivekdas

SUMMER VACATION ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

April-May 2009, Gujarat, India

The summer vacation is an opportunity for children to develop their non-academic talents. The BAPS Children's Wing organizes vacation activities to help such development.



Children explain anti-addiction messages to exhibition visitors

asset. To encourage healthy habits, special medical checkup camps for children were held. Guidance on how to lead a healthy lifestyle was given by experts. Over 12,000 children at 75 locations benefitted.

Talent Development Workshops

Over 20,000 boys and girls of the BAPS Children's Wing participated in these Talent Development Workshops which include training and guidance on story-telling, yoga, *parayan*, spoken English, dance, music (vocal and instrumental), general knowledge and satsang knowledge.

These workshops were held for 3 to 7 days at 82 locations throughout Gujarat and Mumbai.

Medical Checkup

Healthy children are a country's most valuable

De-addiction Campaign 2009

For a period of between 5 and 10 days, 2,000 children and *karyakars* set up de-addiction exhibitions in around 500 public places throughout Gujarat. Over 100,000 people visited the exhibitions of which about 15,000 pledged to give up their destructive habits.

Prayers

For a period of between 5 and 10 days, 1,788 girls (in 400 groups) visited hospitals and old age homes and offered prayers for the physical and mental wellbeing of all patients and residents. ♦

VOLUNTARY SERVICE AT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

April to June 2009, New Delhi

As with preceding years since the inauguration of Swaminarayan Akshardham, BAPS *kishores* enthusiastically performed voluntary service at Swaminarayan Akshardham during their summer vacation.

A total of six groups, each of 75 *kishores*, served for 15 days each between April and June 2009.

The teenagers helped in the maintenance, security, cloakroom, parking, accommodation, darshan and other departments. They served in shifts of about 8 hours a day.

All served with great dedication and enthusiasm despite the hot New Delhi climate. ♦

STUDENT SHIBIRS SVAS

May 2009, India



Group photo of shibir participants, Ahmedabad

Over 3,000 *kishores* and *kishoris* participated in the six 'SVAS Student Shibirs' held between 9 and 31 May 2009 at Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Gondal, Sankari and Bochasan (2). These 3-day *shibirs* focused on S – Satsang, V – Vyaktitva Vikas (Personality Development), A – Arogya (Health) and S – Shikshan (Education).

With a daily schedule from 6.15 a.m. to 10.30 p.m., divided in four variety-filled sessions, the teenagers were guided on these four topics through speeches by learned sadhus, experienced experts, quizzes, debates, discussions, skits and audio-visual presentations.

The teenagers also gained tremendous inspiration and insight from the speeches of Mahant Swami and Doctor Swami, and the video blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The Satsang sessions highlighted the damaging consequences of *kusang*.

The Vyaktitva Vikas session gave stories of success, inspiring the teenagers to also endeavour for such success.

The Arogya sessions focused on the need for a healthy diet, within the codes specified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and regular exercise to maintain good health. Basic yoga postures and *pranayam* were taught.

The Shikshan sessions discussed the roles of the education system, teachers and students in gaining a good education.

Also, the *kishores* and *kishoris* participated in a project on the Vachanamrut in which they worked in groups of ten to produce an assignment on 'Ego'.

The participants of the shibirs felt that they had gained self-confidence and a great deal of knowledge on how to progress in all aspects of their lives. ♦

BAPS WINTER WARM PROJECT

23 May 2009, Eikenhof, South Africa

For the fourth year running, The Swaminarayan Hindu Mission (BAPS) of South Africa conducted its 'Winter Warm' project, to help those in need during the cold winter months. This project is spearheaded mainly by the *kishoris* and *yuvatis* of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Lenasia. With detailed planning, preparations were made to distribute food, clothing and other gifts to needy children.

This year, on 23 May 2009, the team of *kishoris*

and *yuvatis* visited Lerato Educational Centre, in Eikenhof. With no electricity or power supply there, the centre operates from cold caravans. However, their neat and clean caravan classrooms showed that learning can take place anywhere, even in an informal settlement, if one wants to learn.

All 260 children were given a new pair of shoes, socks, hats, scarves, gloves and other gifts. ♦

UK BAL-BALIKA MANDAL RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS QUEEN'S AWARD

2 June 2009, London, UK

The UK's Bal-Balika Mandal has been declared as one of 95 volunteer organizations from across the country – and only one of two in London – to win this year's Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The Award recognizes the outstanding contributions made to local communities by groups voluntarily devoting their time for the benefit of others.

The prestigious national honour, equivalent to the MBE order (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), sets the national benchmark for excellence in volunteering with the activities of awardees judged as being of the very highest standard.

The Bal-Balika Mandal, which has been serving in the UK for over 30 years, received the Award for its exceptional community work of integrating value-based educational, social, environmental and recreational activities into one cohesive programme and successfully implementing it through a team of hundreds of dedicated volunteers. The programme aims to help children of today mature into responsible British citizens of tomorrow.

Winners of this year's Award were selected from 406 groups nominated by members of the public



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

who have been helped personally or witnessed the benefits of a group's work in their community.

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, UK, will receive a certificate signed by the Queen and an exclusive commemorative crystal. These will be presented by Her Majesty's representative for Greater London, Sir David Brewer, at a special ceremony arranged

by the Lieutenancy Office. Group representatives have also received an invitation to a Royal Garden Party event at Buckingham Palace in the summer.

The Award is overseen by the Office of the Third Sector, in the Cabinet Office. Kevin Brennan, Minister for the Third Sector, said, "Volunteering binds communities together and builds a stronger and kinder society. Often these unsung heroes go about their work without much recognition, that's why I'm particularly pleased to see their efforts recognized and rewarded by the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service."

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service was created by Her Majesty to mark the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 2002. For further details of the Award, visit www.queensawardvoluntary.gov.uk. ♦

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR

22 May to 1 June 2009, Sarangpur

Around 225 selected *kishores* and 200 *kishoris* from Gujarat and Mumbai participated in this special 10-day *shibir* in Sarangpur from 22 May to 1 June 2009.

The first three days were based on the agenda of the SVAS Student Shibir. In the remaining seven days the teenagers received training on various *satsang* and secular topics. During the first five

days Mahant Swami graced the *shibir* and inspired the teenagers with his thoughtful speeches. They also helped in the various daily services of the Sarangpur mandir.

Throughout the *shibir* the resident sadhus of Sarangpur helped to give the teenagers an in-depth view of *satsang*. ♦

MANDIR OPEN EVENING: BRING-A-COLLEAGUE DAY

14 May 2009, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London



The *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha organized their first Mandir Open Evening on Thursday, 14 May 2009. Over 350 guests attended, all of whom were either friends or colleagues of *yuvaks* and *yuvatis*. They were given the opportunity to experience the beautiful architecture, traditions as well as cultural and community activities of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.

The guests were received by volunteers and were traditionally welcomed at the Mandir before being taken on a guided tour around the Mandir complex. They also had the opportunity to view the 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition and perform the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

After the guided tour, the guests went around various displays in the Haveli hall, which depicted the activities undertaken by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

A short assembly was held in which the guests were told of the dedication and devotion of the volunteers in creating the mandir under the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Following a speech on the importance of family values and introspection in today's fast-paced life, the assembly concluded with prayers for world peace.

The evening was completed with a traditional vegetarian meal. As the guests departed, they were presented with a souvenir gift pack.



OPINIONS

- ❖ Thank you for a wonderful educational evening. Good to know that Hinduism is a moral, tolerant and liberal religion. Insightful and a spiritual tour for a non-believer.
- ❖ The Mandir itself deserves all of its accolades and I was most impressed by the story of how it was built. I am not surprised by what BAPS has achieved and what you will continue to achieve.
- ❖ I don't have enough words to express my gratitude and honour for taking part in such a beautiful evening. Can only say that may God continue to bless you and the mandir plentifully.



Swamishri chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*, Ahmedabad, 21 September 2008