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Personal Magnetism

Incidents from the Life of Shriji Maharaj



HONOURING SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ February 2009

In 1949, Atladara, thousands of devotees honoured Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj on his 85th birthday by celebrating his Suvarna Tula. The devotees devoutly weighed Shastriji Maharaj against sugar crystals and then weighed the sugar crystals against gold.

To commemorate the 60th anniversary of this historic occasion, on 2 February 2009, the devotees of Atladara re-enacted it in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Weighing scales were set up under the same neem tree (above) where the original celebration took place. On one side a *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj was placed and on the other side sugar crystals. Devotees dressed in the traditions of that period joyfully hailed the glory of Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri also participated in the celebration by placing sugar crystals on the scales.

Then, on Sunday, 8 February 2009, the occasion was celebrated on the main assembly stage, and again Swamishri, the sadhus and devotees honoured Shastriji Maharaj (inset).





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Website: www.swaminarayan.org

E-mail: magazines@in.baps.org

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas
Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas
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FIRST WORD

The Vaishnava tradition in Hinduism believes that God manifests on earth in four ways: (1) through his avatars (*vibhav*) in times of spiritual darkness, (2) through his properly consecrated *murti* (*archa*) in mandirs, (3) within the hearts of all beings as their inner controller (*antaryamin*) and (4) in the form of a guru or bona fide sadhu.

The principle that God takes a human or other forms to liberate countless souls and destroy evil is called *avatarvad*. Avatar means 'one who descends'. The approximate word in English is 'incarnation'. It, however, does not exactly reflect the meaning of avatar, because the Hindus believe that though God himself takes a living form and shows all the physical traits, he is totally divine.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on earth (1781-1830 CE) for the ultimate *moksha* of countless souls. His personal form was the locus of infinite divinity, beauty and bliss that was experienced by countless aspirants and the non-initiated. His presence transformed, induced samadhi and inner peace, brought joy, and strengthened morality and faith in the lives of thousands.

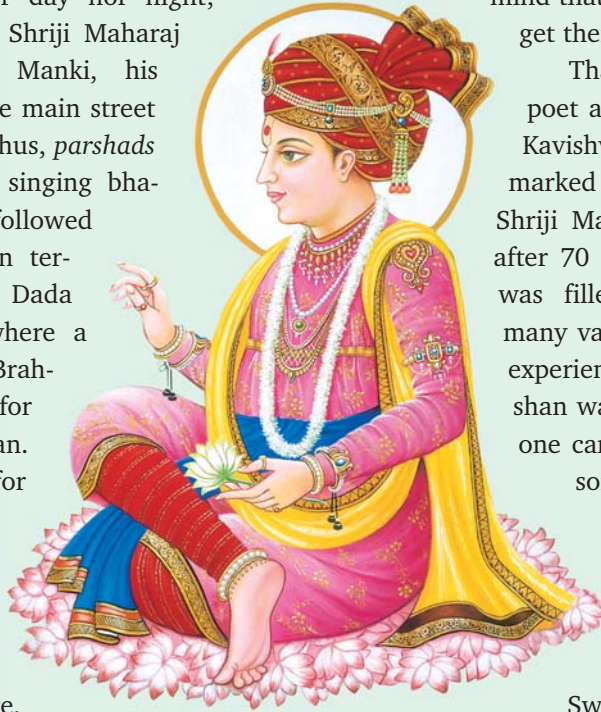
This issue celebrates the divinity and personal magnetism of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on his birth anniversary on Chaitra *sud* 9 (3 April). The articles describe how his form impacted the aspirants, the importance of his holy feet that were attributed with the 16 holy signs and the clothes he wore, which are believed to be sacred and respected by devotees. ◆

Personal Magnetism

Incidents from the life of Shriji Maharaj

It was neither day nor night; simply, dusk. Shriji Maharaj was astride Manki, his mare, trotting on the main street in Gadhada. His sadhus, *parshads* and devotees were singing bhajans while they followed him. The procession terminated at Dada Khachar's house, where a group of Shrimali Brahmins were awaiting for Maharaj's darshan. They had gathered for an annual occasion to commemorate the death anniversary of a kin. On learning that God was present here, they had decided to come to Dada Khachar's house. Shriji Maharaj saw the Brahmins and dismounted. He gave his mare's charge to Bhaguji and said, "Bhaguji, feed the mare." Then Maharaj sat on a cushioned seat on the verandah of the east-facing room of Dada's house. He welcomed and honoured the Brahmins with a smile as they entered the assembly. The Brahmins were pleased. Some even took the vows of initiation and became his disciples.

Among the group was an eight-year-old Brahmin boy. He had seen and heard Maharaj dismount from Manki and say, "Bhaguji, feed the mare." The occasion left a deep impression on him. Decades later, when the boy had reached his twilight years, at 78 years, he stated, "The gesture and words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan left such an indelible impression in my



mind that I have not been able to forget them."

That child was the legendary poet and literary giant of Gujarat, Kavishvar Dalpatram. The occasion marked his first and last darshan of Shriji Maharaj. But amazingly, even after 70 years, during which his life was filled and impacted with so many varied mundane incidents, his experience of Shriji Maharaj's darshan was fresh and vivid. From this one can surmise the magnetic personality of Shriji Maharaj.

The famous Gujarati poet Nanalal, the son of Dalpatram, opines about Maharaj's divine, arresting personality, "The Swaminarayan Sampradaya

has got at one go a slew of religious wealth like the Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri, and traditions of dharma, poets, *sadgurus*, festivals and celebrations. All these are a great fortune for the Sampradaya and the country. But if they were to be placed on one (weighing) pan and another thing put on the other, then the latter would come down. And that thing was present when the seeds of the Sampradaya were being sown. Today, we do not have that thing, but at that time it was priceless. That thing was Shriji Maharaj's personal magnetism. His saint-poets have described it on many occasions and many times" (*Kavishvar Dalpatram* Part 1).

Truly, Shriji Maharaj's personality inspired a unique attraction and cast a spell. Wherever he went, people swarmed to him like bees to flowers. So many became mentally lost and

absorbed in his divine presence.

Adharanand Swami, a disciple of Sadguru Muktanand Swami, describes Shriji Maharaj's personality in his work, *Haricharitamrut Sagar*; "After fixing one's mind on one part of God's *murti* one cannot fix it on another." If one wanted to shift one's gaze from Shri Hari's eyes to his nose, then it would be like moving the Himalayas. Such was the divine beauty and magnetism of his form. The devotees became overwhelmed and felt fulfilled by his form, from head to toe. Premanand Swami and the other saint-poets have written hundreds of bhajans describing his form.

One might think that such descriptions of Maharaj's overwhelming beauty by the *paramhansas* may be idealistic or expressions of emotional tides. But such inferences could be proved wrong through many testimonies and incidents that have been recorded in Satsang. There are no hyperboles, ornamentations or wrong descriptions.

Once, Shriji Maharaj arrived at the village of Unza. He camped by the village pond. Later, while he was discoursing to an assembly, Nityanand Swami, Parmanand Swami, Mahanubhavanand Swami and others came. The three had not taken sadhu *diksha* at the time. When Nityanand Swami saw Shriji Maharaj's teeth he felt, "Such a set of teeth cannot be that of an ordinary human being. He is truly a God." From that point onwards firm faith dawned upon Nityanand Swami. He was given sadhu *diksha* by Maharaj in the village of Meghpur (*Shri Haricharitrachintamani*. 3.394).

Shano Bhagat was an aspirant born and bred in Bhadra. On one occasion he had gone to the village of Allaiya. There, he saw Shriji Maharaj for the first time, and his divine form became deeply etched in his heart. He never forgot Maharaj's form till his last breath.

Once, Maharaj arrived in Rojid (near Sarangpur). A local boy turned his face away out of aversion for Maharaj. But in so doing he caught a momentary glimpse of him. And that momen-

tary darshan of Maharaj worked a miracle in his life. He became a *satsangi* after Maharaj concluded his mortal stay. Later, he developed detachment for mundane things and became a sadhu at the hands of Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. He was named Sadhu Madhusundadas. Every year, during *chaturmas* (four months), he performed austerities by surviving on only one fruit for the whole day (*Shri Haricharitrachintamani*. 3.212).

Once, while Maharaj was travelling on horseback, he stopped by the Utavali river near Barvala for his horse to quench its thirst. At that time Radha, the wife of Vashram Luvana, and Dayabhai Sutar's mother came to fill their water pots. On seeing Maharaj they were attracted by his divinity. Once the mare finished drinking Shriji Maharaj trotted off to Gadhada. The women too left their water pots by the river side and followed Maharaj to Gadhada on foot.

The *paramhansas* have praised Maharaj to be a 'mine of beauty'. Just as one who digs a mine keeps on finding jewels, likewise the *paramhansas*, who were literary giants, kept on discovering different facets of Maharaj's divine form and described them.

In 1804 CE (Samvat 1860) Shriji Maharaj visited the village of Memka. The young poet, Gaja Gadhvi, had accompanied Ajabhai Patel for Maharaj's darshan. Shri Hari had finished his morning bathing ritual and was coming out of the river. On seeing his gait Gaja Gadhvi was convinced that Maharaj is God. He felt that no one could walk in such a manner other than God. Gaja Gadhvi gave up his householder's life to be initiated as a sadhu by Shri Hari. He was named Purnanand Swami.

The unique facet of Shriji Maharaj's form was his divinity. On seeing mundane things one's mind gets excited and unstable. However on having Maharaj's darshan the mind became tranquil, and one's inner instincts were eradicated. Premanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami vividly lauded Maharaj's forms.

Once, the wife of the Diwan of Dharampur-Vandsa thought, "If Shriji Maharaj is God then he should know how to eat." She invited Maharaj for a meal at her residence. The lady was a connoisseur of cuisine. She prepared Maharaj's plate in an orderly way, placing each of the items in a sequential manner. When Shri Hare started eating with his fingers, he did not allow them to be smeared by whatever he ate. The lady was impressed by this. Then, out of an attraction for Maharaj she entertained an inappropriate thought. In response, the all-knowing Maharaj threw up whatever he ate and left.

After this incident Shri Hari came to Ahmedabad. One day, a few women devotees had sponsored a lunch. When the meal was ready they felt that it would not suffice. So they asked Maharaj to permit them to cook some more food. Shriji Maharaj refused and predicted, "Even the quantity you have made will be left over. There is no need to cook fore more." Shri Hari himself came to serve the women devotees. As he served, the women were mentally drawn towards his divine form. This filled their hearts with joy. Subsequently, they were unable to eat all that Maharaj had served. The Diwan's wife was also seated in line when Maharaj was serving. She too was absorbed in Maharaj's divine form. To her surprise her bad thoughts were dissolved.

This was a brief account of Shriji Maharaj's divine, magnetic personality. His divine form not only dissolved many people's mundane desires but also ignited love for God. Premanand Swami poetically penned the incident into a bhajan, "*Hāre teri Sānvari surat chhatādār...*"

Shriji Maharaj's divine personality attracted thousands of aspirants. His beauty and divinity could not be compared to any human being. The *paramhansas* and devotees 'drank' his *murti* profusely and experienced spiritual fulfilment.◆

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas
Gujarati: Sadhu Adarshjivandas
 (Swaminarayan Prakash, April 2008)

HOW TO ENGAGE IN THE DARSHAN OF GOD

"While doing darshan of God one should not look from side to side. The novelty and divinity experienced in one's heart at the time of the first darshan of God should remain exactly the same. Moreover, one should look at the form with a fixed gaze and then closing one's eyes, one should internalise that form exactly as it is in one's heart. For example, in Dharmapur, Kushalkuvarbāi did my darshan, and at the same time, closed her eyes and internalized the form in her heart. Similarly, one should do darshan while keeping an attentive mind and a fixed gaze, but one should not do darshan as other ordinary people do. If, along with the darshan of God, one also looks at other people, cats, or dogs, then when one has a dream, one sees not only God, but also those other objects. That is why one should do darshan of God with a fixed gaze, not with a wandering gaze. One who does darshan of God while keeping one's sight under control will feel that darshan to be continually novel.... On the other hand, a person who does darshan superficially, with a mundane vision, would feel God's darshan and commands to be commonplace. Although he may do darshan every day, for such a person it is as if he has not done darshan at all. When such a person engages in worship, his mind would not remain stable. Specifically, when he attempts to concentrate on God while his thinking is diffused, other objects he may have seen would spontaneously sprout in his mind along with God. Therefore, one should do darshan only of God. The mind of one who does darshan in such a manner remains only on God during worship. His thinking does not become diffused; instead, it becomes concentrated." ◆

- Vachanamrut Sarangpur-2

Worshipping the Charanarvind of God

Sanatan Dharma or Hinduism is a goldmine of sublime spiritual symbolism. Some of the most inspiring symbols relate to the form of God. Every atom of God's apparently human form is divine. When one worships with this belief one attains great spiritual heights.

And in this form the *charanarvind*, holy feet, of God carry the most profound significance.

Even from a secular viewpoint, in olden days people would bow at the feet of a ruler as an act of submission. This act of surrendering oneself and seeking refuge 'at the feet' of someone more powerful and capable provides one with protection and support.

So, to surrender at the feet of God and dedicate oneself totally to him is the ultimate acknowledgement of one's subservience to God, the cause and creator of all. This sentiment has always played a central role in the Bhakta-Bhagwan tradition of Sanatan Dharma.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme avatar, manifested on earth in human form from 1781 to 1830. A measure of his divinity is gauged by the fact that over 3,000 *paramhansas* and *sadhus* and two million devotees wor-



Charanarvind in Akshar Deri, Gondal

shipped him, with the firm conviction that he was the supreme avatar of God. He taught the Vedic philosophy that one has to become *akshar-rup* and worship at the feet of **P u r u s h o t t a m**. Describing this doctrine, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in *Vachanamrut Gadhada III-7* that "a devotee should firmly keep his mind at the holy feet of God. Just

as an iron nail that is firmly affixed to an iron surface can never be separated, similarly, one's mind should be fixed firmly at the feet of God."

Thus, the feet of God are worshipped with the utmost reverence, and in doing so, one progresses spiritually. Yet, even when one attains the elevated God-realized state, one still remains subservient to God.

Shriji Maharaj describes this characteristic of devotees in *Vachanamrut Gadhada II-67*, "Those devotees of God who become *brahmarup* still behave as God's servants and engage in his worship. In this way, devotees of God attain qualities similar to those of God, and yet, the master-servant relationship between them is maintained."

This principle is exemplified in the lives of

the Gunatit gurus – the succession of God-realized Sadhus established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and through whom he remains manifest on earth.

One night in Sarangpur, Shastriji Maharaj was resting in the assembly hall. Just then, some devotees from Africa arrived in the assembly hall. Swamishri looked at them compassionately. Ranchhodbhai requested Swamishri, “Swami! Please give some *prasad* to the devotees of Africa.”

“What *prasad*?”

“Give the imprints of your feet (made with kumkum).”

Surprised, Swamishri asked, “Mine?”

“Yes.”

“If you want my footprints then cut off my feet! The feet of others, except that of Maharaj, must not be worshipped.”

Swamishri’s emphatic reply left no doubt in the minds of the devotees. After this episode, realizing Swamishri’s servitude to Maharaj, nobody ever asked for the imprints of

Swamishri’s feet.

Such an understanding of servitude is evident in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life also. Once, in London, Krishnamurti Pattani, a BAPS youth volunteer, asked a question in reply to which Swamishri said, “It will happen according to God’s wish.” Krishnamurti said to Swamishri, “For us you are our God. We will do as you say.” Correcting his understanding, Swamishri interrupted, “Shriji Maharaj is the only God. We are his servants, his devotees.”

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have repeatedly taught and practiced this principle of servitude to God as a key pillar in the philosophical doctrine of BAPS. Their every thought, word and deed reflects worship at the two feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan: ‘*Ham to ek Sahajānand upāsi...*’ (We worship only Sahajanand...) ◆

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
Gujarati: Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas
(Swaminarayan Prakash, March 2006)

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

The Sacred Charanarvind of Shriji Maharaj



In the Padma Puran, in the form of a dialogue between Brahma and Naradji, Veda Vyasji describes the sixteen holy signs that are present on the feet of God: Eight on the right foot and seven on the left. The sixteenth may be present on either foot. Elaborating upon this, Shrimad Jivagoswami writes in his *Vaishnavtoshni Tika*, “When these sixteen signs are present on the feet of a person, understand that person as the manifest form of Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan. If an avatar has two, three, four, five or more signs, then understand the increasing glory of that avatar.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave darshan of the sixteen holy signs on his feet to the *paramhansas* and devotees

innumerable times, thus convincing them that he was the manifest form of Purna Purushottam Narayan.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was seated under a mango tree in Vartal. The *paramhansas* were keenly observing the divine signs on his feet. Four wellwishers approached for Maharaj's blessings. He stretched his legs and seeing the sixteen sacred signs on his feet, they said, "Maharaj, seeing your feet makes us think that you are Purna Purushottam Narayan. But looking at your body makes us think you are human. We've seen many assemblies like this, but nowhere have we seen so many people intently focused on one person. Please explain the significance of this to us." Shriji Maharaj replied, "Vairat Brahma prayed for 50 years and 1½ *pahor* days of his time (one day and night of Brahman equals 8,640,000,000 human years) so that these *charanarvind* manifest on this earth. Now you may conclude as you wish."

Shriji Maharaj was in Gadhada, when the renowned poet Ladudanji, of Khan village at the foot of Mt. Abu, came to test him. Ladudanji had made four wishes for Bhagwan Swaminarayan to fulfil, among which was "If Swaminarayan is God, let him show me the sixteen signs on the feet of God described in the shastras." All four of his wishes were fulfilled by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Ladudanji was convinced that Shriji Maharaj was the supreme God. He then accepted initiation from Bhagwan Swaminarayan into the sadhu-fold and was named Brahmanand Swami.

Many such incidents were witnessed by not only his *paramhansas* and devotees but also by non-devotees, testifying to the fact that Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the manifest form of Purna Purushottam Narayan (supreme God).

On numerous occasions, Bhagwan Swaminarayan imprinted his sacred *charanarvind* on the chest of *paramhansas* and devotees as a form of blessings and to show his pleasure at their devotion and service. He also gave

imprints on cloth, some of which survive even to this day. The first recorded instance of this was in Vansda, when Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited the palace of Raysinhji, the son of Queen Kushalkunvarba's neice, Jitbai. Raysinhji served Shriji Maharaj in his palace for three days. Pleased by his service Shriji Maharaj offered him a boon. Then, as taught by his wife, the queen, he humbly requested, "Maharaj, by your grace, we have all the comforts of this world. But so that we forever remember you within our hearts and can offer worship to you daily please grace us with the imprints of your sacred *charanarvind*." Shriji Maharaj agreed. Immediately Raysinhji presented Maharaj a large bowl of saffron-mixed sandalwood paste. However, the queen had forgotten to send a cloth on which Maharaj could place his imprints. Both Maharaj and Raysinhji stood looking at each other, while others rushed to get a cloth from the queen. However, understanding Maharaj's hint, Raysinhji removed the new *safo* on his own head and spread it out on the floor. Maharaj dipped his feet in the bowl and began to walk on the long cloth. He walked forty steps, imprinting his sandalwood-layered *charanarvind* and giving the royals memories for a lifetime.

In this way, the sacred *charanarvind* of God are revered by the devout and this symbolizes their servitude and allegiance to him. ◆

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
Gujarati: Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas
(Swaminarayan Prakash, March 2006)



The Sixteen Sacred Signs

Many paramhansas have noted the sixteen holy signs on the charanarvind of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Among them the descriptions by Nishkulanand Swami in Chinhachintamani and Bhumanand Swami in Shri Ghanshyam Lilamrutsagar are especially noteworthy. They describe the signs and the benefits gained by meditating on them.

RIGHT FOOT SIGNS

Ashtakon: Octagon



Meditating on this sign grants a devotee the fruits of *ashtang-yoga* (eight-fold yoga), a place in Akshardham, which is beyond the eight barriers, and thus frees him from the cycle of births and deaths.

Urdhva Rekha: Crease Line



This sign runs from the space between the great toe and the first toe to the heel of the right foot. Meditating on this sign spiritually elevates the mind and takes the devotee to the highest abode, Akshardham.

Swastik



This sacred sign symbolizes the focusing of God's energy from all four directions to the centre.

Meditating on this auspicious sign grants the devotee a happy life free of misery, the *ekantik* (God-realized) state and rapport with God.

Jaambu: Blackberry



This sign is shaped like a *jaambu* fruit.

Meditating on this sign ensures that a devotee's mind does not become attached to material objects. Also, just as the *jaambu* fruit contains ample juices, a devotee enjoys the ample juice of God's divine form.

Jav: Barley Grain



This sign is the shape of a barley grain. It is located at the origin of the *urdhva rekha* sign.

Meditating on this sign destroys all one's sins, purifies the mind, and grants one the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma. It also ensures enough worldly wealth and comforts.

Vajra: Weapon of Lord Indra



The *vajra* is an implement as long as a *trishul* carried by Lord Indra. Its front portion is pointed and oblong-shaped.

Meditating on this sign helps one overcome one's inner enemies and removes the desires for material pleasures, enabling the mind to focus on God.

Ankush: Goad



An instrument used to control an elephant, comprising a pointed tip and a curved extension to the side.

Meditating on this sign enables a devotee to overcome all feelings of lust and to become strong in worshipping God. The devotee also attains the virtues of *dharma*, *jnan*, *vairagyia* and *bhakti*.

Ketu: Flag



A flag sits gracefully atop a *mandir* and is also carried by the chief warrior of an army. A flag symbolizes victory.

Meditating on this sign symbolizes that, just as a flag flutters according to the wind direction, a devotee lives by the commands of God and attains happiness. It also helps one to overcome lust and other material desires.

Padma: Lotus



A lotus grows amid water and represents the seat of Lakshmi.

Meditating on the lotus enables a devotee to remain free of material attachments and focus one's mind at the feet of God.

A lotus is able to blossom even in muddy water, similarly a devotee is able to remain free of material attachments, despite fulfilling all his worldly obligations. Just as a lotus does not sink into water, a devotee is not submerged by the forces of ego, attachments and material pleasures. The heart of such a pure devotee is like a lotus, so God resides within that devotee's heart.

LEFT FOOT SIGNS

Trikon: Triangle



A triangle-shaped sign.

Meditating on this sign frees a devotee from the bondage and miseries of the three *taaps* – *adhi*, *vyadhi*, *upadhi*; the three bodies – *sthul*, *sukshma*, *karan*; and the three states – *jagrut*, *swapna*; *sushupti*. One becomes *brahmarup* and eligible to worship Purushottam.

Kalash: Waterpot Bearing Coconut



Shaped like a brass waterpot, this sign is also known as *amrut kalash*. It is a symbol of completeness.

By meditating on this sign a devotee attains total fulfillment and becomes *akshar-rup*. *Kalashes* occupy the highest spot on a *mandir shikhar* and so the devotee attains the highest abode, Akshardham.

Gopad: Cow's Footprint



This sign is shaped like a cow's hoof.

For a devotee meditating on this

sign, the vast material world becomes the size of a mere cow's hoof, thus, enabling him to easily traverse it to reach God. Also, just as a *kamdhenu* cow is worshipped, the devotee is also honoured and all the places of pilgrimage are encompassed in him.

Dhanushya: Bow



Bow-shaped sign, also called *megh-dhanush* in the Padma Puran.

The *dhanush* symbolizes humility and strength. Meditating on it makes a devotee humble, wise, polite and fearless. It also enables him to overcome lust and other base natures.

Meen: Fish



A fish-shaped sign.

Meditating on this sign grants a devotee stability of mind. It also empowers him to live life engrossed in the *murti* of God rather than the ocean of materialism.

Ardha Chandra: Crescent Moon



This sign is the shape of moon on the seventh or eighth day of its waxing-waning cycle.

The moon symbolizes peace. A devotee meditating on this sign overcomes all miseries and experiences inner peace and profound happiness. The spiritual light within glows.

Also, just as the night lotuses blossom due to the light of the moon, the devotee blossoms with *bhakti* and faith through the light of God.

Vyoma: Sky



This sign represents the vast, endless space of the sky. Space is manifest within earth, water, light and wind, yet it remains unaffected by them. Similarly, a devotee meditating on this sign remains aloof from all material attachments, and God resides within the purified space of his heart.

He, thus, attains Akshardham. ◆

Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
Gujarati: Sadhu Shrutiprakashdas
(Swaminarayan Prakash, March 2006)

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Adornments



The adornments of Bhagwan Swaminarayan during his 49-year life on earth (1781-1830 CE) can be divided into four periods: (1) in childhood as Ghanshyam, (2) as Nilkanth Varni, (3) as Sarjudas and (4) as the head of the Sampradaya.

(1) CHILDHOOD

Until the age of eleven in Chhapaiya and Ayodhya, Ghanshyam probably wore a *kediyu* on the upper part and a *surval* on the lower part of the body.

(2) NILKANTH VARNI

From 1792 till 1799, during his Kalyan Yatra through Bharat, his garb was of a yogi. This is described in the *Haricharitamrut Sagar* (2/1): loincloth, a *mekhala* (jute-like string tied at the waist), a *janoi*, hair tied in a knot on the head, *tilak-chandlo* on the forehead, a *batwo* – cloth bag tied at the neck to hold the *shaligram* known as Bal Mukund, a two-stringed *kanthi*, a water gourd with cloth filter, a wooden *dand* (staff), wooden bowl for alms, the diary (*gutko*) containing the essence of the Vedic shastras that he learnt from Dharmadeva and a *mala*.

(3) SARJUDAS

On Shravan *vad* 6, Samvat 1856 (21 August 1799), he arrived in Loj and stayed at Ramanand Swami's ashram. The following day,

Muktanand Swami gave Nilkanth Varni an *alfi* to wear. This is a long-sleeved, one-piece garment reaching just below the knees. Since Nilkanth was a native from the region of the river Sarayu, Swami called him Sarjudas. He wore this garment until the day Ramanand Swami initiated him as a sadhu.

(4) HEAD OF THE SAMPRADAYA

On Kartik *sud* 11, Samvat 1857 (28 October 1800) in Piplana, Ramanand Swami gave *diksha* to Sarjudas. His garb consisted of white upper and lower garments, a loincloth, a two-stringed *kanthi*, a *janoi*, a *tilak-chandlo* on the forehead and *tilaks* on the chest and both upper arms. Ramanand Swami named him Sahajanand Swami.

One year later in Jetpur on Kartik *sud* 11, Samvat 1858 (16 November 1801) Ramanand Swami appointed Sahajanand Swami as the head of the Sampradaya. Ramanand Swami adorned him with silk garments and also commanded him to wear rich robes whenever devotees gifted them to him.

After Ramanand Swami's demise, Bhagwan Swaminarayan wore simple garments such as a saffron garment, a white dhoti and a cap (*alfi topi*).

Only during the Holi festival in Dhoraji, on Fagun *sud* 15, Samvat 1863 (23 March 1907), did he yield to the devotional insistence of

HEAD ADORNMENTS



Sanctified *pagh* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Mugat gifted by Queenmother Kushalkunvarba of Dharampur



Warm cap with a sandwich layer of cotton, worn during winter



Bokani – a *safo* with one end tied over the ears during cold spells, cited in seven Vachanamruts of Kariyani and Loya



Kachchhi topi – worn during the great famine of 1812-13



Dakshini *pagh* (South Indian)

devotees from Surat, who gifted him rich-garments which he wore. Henceforth, in accordance with Ramanand Swami's command he began to occasionally put on richly embroidered garments and gold ornaments embellished with gems and pearls, silk *jama*, *dagli*, *angarkhu*, *pagh* and *mugat* which devotees offered (see images on p.14).

However he innately preferred to wear simple and white garments as worn by the lay people then. We glean this from the Vachanamrut, the most reliable and accurate compilation of his teachings, which also include descriptions of his garments during each discourse. From 1819 to 1829, four senior and erudite *paramhansas*, namely, Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and Shukanand Swami compiled the Vachanamrut. Of the 273 discourses, in 161 Bhagwan Swaminarayan is described as wearing white garments, in 19 he is described as wearing a *surval* and in 93 he is described as wearing a *khes* or dhoti.

KHES

Khes as known today is a narrow band of cloth, similar in shape to the English muffler or Hindu *dupatto*. However, in those days, *khes* meant either a *gatariyu* (upper garment) or dhoti (lower garment). This depended on the verb used to describe how the garment was worn. If the verb was *odhio*, then *khes* meant *gatariyu* and if the verb was *paheryu*, this meant dhoti.

During the hot months of Chaitra, Jeth or Bhadarva, he wore a *gatariyu* and dhoti as recorded in Vachanamrut Gadhada II-1, 30, 34. During winter he adorned sewn garments such as *dagli* and *surval*. During extreme cold weather, he wore a *dagli* with cotton wool stitched into the garment, as in Loya-1, 3 and 7. Additionally, on even colder days, for extra warmth, he also wore blanket-like garments – *chofal*, *chadar* or *rajai*, as mentioned in Vachanamruts Loya-15, 17 and 18.

On such occasions when devotees gifted him rich silk garments of *kinkhab* he would wear

ADORNMENTS ON UPPER PART OF BODY

Kediyu



As the name suggests, the *kediyu* (*ked* = waist) reaches the waist. It is more pleated at the chest and shorter than the *dagli*. About 12 hands length (*hath*) of cloth was used just in the pleats!



Angarkhu of muslin with stripes like the *dorianu* mentioned in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-38

Dagli



Reaches just below the waist, usually worn during cold weather, e.g. in the Vachanamruts of Loya



Red *jamo* made of thicker cloth than the *angarkhu*, occasionally embroidered with gold threads

DRAPES



Silk *khes* lined with golden threads, also used to tie *pagh*



Red-lined *chofal* draped in winter



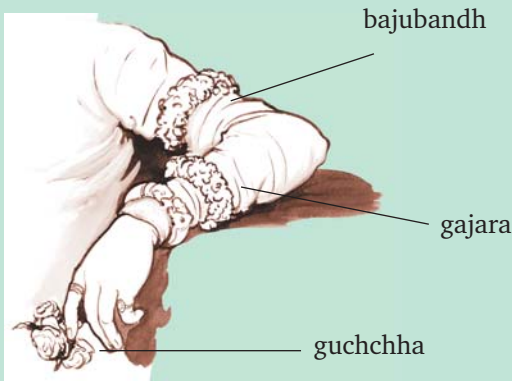
Gold-lined white silk dhoti

(Displayed in Abhishek Mandapam, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad)

ADORNMENTS ON UPPER PART OF BODY

Garment	Area of Adornment	Garment	Area of Adornment
<i>angarkhu</i>	whole body	<i>khes</i>	<i>odhio</i> – means <i>gatariyu</i> , to cover upper half
<i>bokani</i>	on head – one end of <i>safo</i> tied over the ears		<i>paheryo</i> – means dhoti, to cover lower half
<i>chadar</i>	either <i>gatariyu</i> or light blanket-type drape	<i>pachhedi</i>	draped in cold weather
<i>chofal</i>	light blanket-type drape in cold weather	<i>pagh</i>	worn on head
<i>dagli</i>	upper part of the body	<i>rajai</i>	draped in cold weather
<i>dhotiyu</i>	<i>odhiyu</i> – upper part, i.e. as <i>gatariyu</i> <i>paheryu</i> – on lower part i.e. as dhoti proper	<i>rento</i>	tied on head or as <i>gatariyu</i> or sash
<i>fento</i>	tied on head or as sash around the waist	<i>safo</i>	tied on head
<i>jamo</i>	rich garment on whole body	<i>shelu</i>	tied on head or as drape (<i>gatariyu</i>)
<i>kediyu</i>	upper part of the body	<i>surval</i>	trouser-like garment, close fitting on lower legs (see below)

FLOWERS AND FLOWER ADORNMENTS CITED IN THE VACHANAMRUT



Bhagwan Swaminarayan was often adorned with flowers and flowers in decorative form, such as, *tora*, *bajubandh*, *guchchha*, *gajara* and garlands. The *tora* hung from the *pagh* or *safo*. The other items are depicted on the image on the right.

The flowers included: *chameli*, *mogra*, *dolariya*, *hajari*, *gulab*, *borsali*, *guldavadi*, *champo* and *karnikar* (for details see *Vachanamrut Handbook*, pp. 93-104, 3rd edition, 2007).

ADORNMENTS ON LOWER PART OF BODY

Silk *surval* of red *kinkhab* (e.g. Loya-2)



Cotton *surval* (e.g. Loya-4, 5, 9)



FOOTWEAR



Ornately carved *paduka* (*chakhdi*) with metallic rattles (*ghughri*).
The middle pair was gifted to Vakhatba of Vahelal, north Gujarat.

Cloth *mojdis*

them briefly and then gift them to a Brahmin. Such was his *bruhad vairagya* – intense detachment.

Before meals, he invariably first bathed and then adorned a yellow or green silk dhoti known as *pitambar*, also commonly called *abotiyu*. The upper half of the body would either be bare or adorned with a *khes*.

FOOTWEAR

As Nilkanth Varni, he walked bare-footed for seven years throughout India, tolerating all forms of rough terrain in the rocky and icy Himalayas and dangerous forest floors which teemed with leeches, scorpions, other insects and snakes.

After 1801, he wore hand-crafted *mojdis* of leather or cotton, *paduka* (*chakhdi*) – wooden sandals – exquisitely carved by devotees (see above).

Source references:

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I, Swami Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

(Signed) Swami Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2009

The Kena Upanishad

The Secret to the Source of All Energy



The Kena Upanishad is encompassed in the Sāma-Veda. The Sāma-Veda comprises of a brāhmana (chapter) called the ‘Tavalakār’. The tenth anuvāk (sub-section) of the fourth adhyāy (sub-chapter) of this Tavalakār Brāhmana is the Kena Upanishad. This Upanishad starts with the question ‘केन?’ – ‘Kena?’ ‘By whom?’ Hence it is called the ‘Kena’ Upanishad. This Upanishad, which is in the form of a guru-disciple dialogue, is spread over four parts or khands with a total of 35 mantras. The text of the Veda prior to the Kena Upanishad contains a detailed explanation of karma. The point at which the Veda talks about the inspirer of all karmas marks the beginning of the Kena Upanishad.

A DISCIPLE’S CURIOSITY

The Kena Upanishad begins with a question from an inquisitive disciple: ‘केनेषितं पतति प्रेषितं मनः केन प्राणः प्रथमः प्रैति युक्तः। केनेषितां वाचमिमां वदन्ति चक्षुः श्रोत्रं क उ देवो युनक्ति॥ – ‘Keneshitam patati preshitam manaha kena prānaha prathamaha praiti yuktaha. Keneshitām vāchamimām vadanti chakshuhu shrotram ka u devo yunakti’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/1). Each phrase of this mantra is of great importance.

‘केनेषितं पतति प्रेषितं मनः।’ – ‘Keneshitam patati preshitam manaha.’ The mana – mind – contemplates. It is a part of the antahkaran, which comprises four aspects – mana, buddhi, chitt and ahamkār – collectively called the four antahkarans. Here, the word ‘mana’ implies all four antahkarans. So, the meaning of this phrase is, ‘O Gurudev! Who is the inspirer who gives these four antahkarans their faculty to function.’

‘केन प्राणः प्रथमः प्रैति युक्तः।’ – ‘Kena prānaha prathamaha praiti yuktaha.’ Prāna (breath) is predominantly air. It is needed even when we are in our mother’s womb. We unconsciously continue to breathe without any intervention. Association with breath has become synonymous to life. One who no longer breathes is considered dead. Moreover, it is this prāna that propels the actions of our bodies. Prāna moves our hands. Prāna moves our feet. Our eyes can see, but it is prāna that opens our eyelids. Prāna is of great importance in our bodies. Here, prāna (breath) implies all five types of prāna – prāna, apāna, vyāna, samāna

and *udāna*. Meaning: ‘Who is it that breathes this *prāna* into our lives? Who gives *prāna* the faculty to sustain life?’

‘केनेषितां वाचमिमां वदन्ति।’ – ‘*Keneshitām vāchamimām vadanti.*’ Speech can be heard everywhere in creation. Birds chirp, and animals roar, neigh, shriek, creak, bellow or growl. Man has an extensive ability to speak. We can sing various tunes and speak in different languages. Here, speech implies all five organs of action – speech, hand, feet, anus and genitalia. Meaning: ‘O Gurudev! Who inspires the faculty of these organs of action?’

‘चक्षुः श्रोत्रं क उ देवो युनक्ति।’ – ‘*Chakshuhu shrotram ka u devo yunakti.*’ *Chakshu* means eyes. They can see various objects. They can decipher millions of colours. They can perceive shape, quantity and distance. The eyes have many such capabilities. *Shrotra* means ears. They contain 30,000 sensitive points and can recognize over 300,000 sounds. Here *chakshu* and *shrotra* imply all five organs of knowledge – the eyes, ears, tongue, nose and skin. Meaning: ‘Who inspires the faculty of these five amazing organs of knowledge?’

Thus, the first mantra is a presentation of a disciple’s curiosity.

Now let us see the guru’s answer.

THE GURU’S ANSWER

‘श्रोत्रस्य श्रोत्रं मनसो मनो यद् वाचो ह वाचं स उ प्राणस्य प्राणश्चक्षुषश्चक्षुः।’ – ‘*Shrotrasya shrotram manaso mano yad vācho ha vācham sa u prānasya prānashchakshushashchakshuhu*’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/2). *Paramātmā* is the giver of all strength. What is that *Paramātmā* like? He is ‘*manaso manaha*’ – the mind of the mind. Thus, he gives the mind the faculty to think and contemplate. He is ‘*prānasya prānaha*’ – the breath of even breath. Thus, he gives breath the faculty to sustain the body. He is ‘*chakshushashchakshuhu*’ – the eye of the eyes. Thus, he gives the eyes the faculty to see. He is ‘*shrotrasya shrotram*’ – the ear of the ears. Thus, he gives the ears the fac-

ulty to hear.

Hence, it has been clearly stated that *Paramātmā* is the root inspirer of all knowledge, desires and actions. It is *Paramātmā* who mobilizes the organs of knowledge and action, and the *antahkaran*.

Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan also says in his discourses, “God awakens the *jiva* from unconsciousness through his ‘*jñān-shakti*’ and makes it aware of its actions. This is known as ‘*jñān-shakti*’, the faculty of cognition. Furthermore, whatever action a *jiva* engages in, it does so with the support of what is known as God’s ‘*kriyā-shakti*’, the faculty of conation. Finally, whatever object a *jiva* desires is acquired with the help of what is known as God’s ‘*ichchhā-shakti*’, the faculty of volition” (*Vachanamrut Gadhada I-65*).

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has also said, “God is the all-doer. If we want to sleep now we cannot, and once asleep even if a thief comes and robs us, we are unable to wake up. Thus, God is the all-doer” (Swamini Vato: 1/201).

With this background, the Upanishad then sheds light on another matter.

PARAMĀTMĀ IS AXIOMATIC AND OF INFINITE ENERGY

Someone may question that if *Paramātmā* gives the eyes, ears, mind and other organs and *antahkaran* their faculty, where does *Paramātmā* get that faculty from? Is there anyone else who gives faculty? Such doubts are clarified here explicitly: ‘यन्मनसा न मनुते येनाऽऽहुर्मनो मतम्’ – ‘*Yanmanasā na manute yenāhurmano matam*’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/5), ‘यच्चक्षुषा न पश्यति येन चक्षूषि पश्यन्ति’ – ‘*Yachchakshushā na pashyati yena chakshoonshi pashyanti*’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/6), ‘यच्छ्रोत्रेण न शृणोति येन श्रोत्रमिदं श्रुतम्’ – ‘*Yachchhrotrena na shrunoti yena shrotramidam shrutam*’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/7), ‘यत्प्राणेन न प्राणिति येन प्राणः प्रणीयते’ – ‘*Yatprānena na prāniti yena prānaha praneeyate*’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/8).

The meaning of this is that we need tools such as our eyes, ears and mind in order to see, hear and think; we need breath to breathe; we cannot see, hear, think or live without these; but this does not apply to Paramātmā. His energy is not dependent on anything. Although Paramātmā's form is complete in all ways, with all divine organs, he is not dependent on tools like the eyes and ears to see or listen. If he wishes, he could see and hear without utilizing any organs, because he is all-capable. Nevertheless, he is also omniscient. For someone who knows all, what remains to be known? He always has an axiomatic, eternal and infinite energy. Also, despite the fact that he gives countless *jivas* and *ishwars* the organs and faculty to see, listen, etc., his reservoir of energy can never be exhausted. No matter how much you give from infinity, infinity remains infinity.

Thus, the primary teaching is that Paramātmā is the all-doer.

Even though Paramātmā is the all-doer, one who, due to one's arrogance, does not believe him to be so, and believes oneself to be the doer is ignorant and foolish. This is like a dog that walks under a cart thinking that it is he who is moving it. To explain this, this Upanishad features a conversation between the *devatas* and a *yaksha*.

THE DEVA-YAKSHA DIALOGUE

Once there was a battle between the *devas* and the *asuras*. Due to the power of Paramātmā the *devas* won. However, the *devas* forgot about the grace and the all-doership of Paramātmā and became arrogant. They began to boast, 'अस्माकमेवायं विजयोऽस्माकमेवायं महिमेति' – *Āsmākamevāyam vijayosmākamevāyam mahimeti* – 'This victory is due to our own effort and strength. This is our own glory.' Compassionate Paramātmā thought, 'The *asuras* were overcome through my grace, but now the poor *devas* have been overcome by evil (*asuri*) instincts. If this arrogance increases, the victory over the *asuras*

will only result in misery. To attain true bliss, the *devas* should attain the knowledge of who is the root source of all energy.' With this thought, Paramātmā took the unusual form of a *yaksha* (a deity). As they celebrated, the *devas* saw this *yaksha* but could not recognize who it was (Kena Upanishad: 3/2). Agni-deva (the *deva* of fire) was sent to inquire further. Before Agni-deva could ask anything, the *yaksha* asked, "Who are you?" (Kena Upanishad: 3/2.)

‘अग्निर्वा अहमस्मीति। जातवेदा वा अहमस्मीति।’ – *Āgnirvā ahamasmeeti. Jātavedā vā ahamasmeeti.* – 'I am Agni,' he replied (Kena Upanishad: 3/4).

The *yaksha* asked further, 'तस्मिंस्त्वयि किं वीर्यम्?' – *Tasminstvayi kim veeryam.* – 'What is your ability?' (Kena Upanishad: 3/5).

‘अपीदं सर्वं दहेयं यदिदं पृथिव्यामिति’ – *Āpeedam sarvam daheyam yadidam pruthivyāmiti* – 'I can burn anything on earth,' boasted Agni-deva (Kena Upanishad: 3/5).

Hearing this, the *yaksha* placed a blade of grass in front of him and asked him to burn it (Kena Upanishad: 3/6). Agni tried to burn it with all his might, but 'तन्न शशाक दग्धुम्' – *Tanna shashāka dagdhum* – 'he could not burn the blade of grass' (Kena Upanishad: 3/6). Therefore, embarrassed and disappointed, Agni turned back without obtaining any information about the *yaksh*. He told the *devas*, 'नैतदशकं विज्ञातुं यदेतद् यक्षमिति' – *Naitadashakam vijnātum yadetad yakshamiti* – 'I cannot understand who this *yaksha* is' (Kena Upanishad: 3/6).

Vayu-deva (the wind-god) was then sent. He also had the same conversation with the *yaksha*. 'What is your ability?' the *yaksha* asked.

'I can blow away everything on earth!' replied Vayu. The *yaksha* put a blade of grass in front of him and asked him to blow it away. Vayu tried, but it did not move at all. He tried again with all his might, but the blade of grass did not move even the slightest. His ego was shattered. Embarrassed and disappointed, he did not even remember to ask the *yaksha* who he was, and returned, crestfallen.

When both these *devas* returned unsuccessful, Indra himself prepared to go. But when Indra reached the spot, the *yaksha* disappeared. In his place, Indra saw a beautiful woman. It was the goddess Parvati. Indra asked her about the *yaksha*. She revealed, “The *yaksha* was Paramātmā himself. It is due to him that you were victorious against the *asuras*.” Hearing this, Indra realized that they had been falsely arrogant and that the true glory is that of Paramātmā’s since he is the all-doer. Indra humbly departed and Parvati disappeared. Indra then informed the *devas*. Being the first *devas* to attain the knowledge of the all-doership of Paramātmā, Indra, was considered to be the greatest amongst them.

The essence of this conversation is that evil (*asuri*) instincts can only be overcome by the grace of Paramātmā. Without his strength and will nothing can be done to even a blade of grass. Therefore, one should never be arrogant.

Let us now understand the means given in this Upanishad to grasp the essence of Paramātmā’s all-doership.

प्रतिबोधविदितं मतम्

‘Pratibodhaviditam matam’ – ‘This statement can be understood through *pratibodh*’ (Kena Upanishad: 2/4).

Pratibodh are the precepts understood from the guru in order to understand Paramātmā’s form and qualities.

The understanding of Paramātmā’s all-doership is exemplified in the guru’s life. Thus, he strengthens this understanding in our lives through his words and actions.

In 1970, some devotees who were descendants of Bhaga Doshi (a staunch devotee from Botad in the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan) had come to meet Yogiji Maharaj in Mumbai. While meeting Yogiji Maharaj, they said, “Swami! You have attained a great feat. You have done what hadn’t been done even in Shriji Maharaj’s time. You have spread *satsang* outside

Gujarat, even to London.” Hearing this Yogiji Maharaj said, “What are you saying? You shouldn’t say that. Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer. It is by his grace that *satsang* increases. Who are we? If a dog walks under a cart and believes that he is moving it – then it is wrong. It is Shriji Maharaj who does everything. Victory is by his grace.”

Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj once said, “Just like a puppeteer remains in the background and controls the puppets in a puppet show, Paramātmā controls the strings of all. It is his great energy within us. That is why we are able to do whatever we do. Everywhere in the world it is by his energy that anything is done. Therefore we should remember that all the credit goes to him.”

We should repeatedly reinforce this precept of *pratibodh*.

One who imbibes this divine understanding in their life also attains a reward just as divine. This is shown in this Upanishad.

THE REWARD: IMMORTALITY

‘अमृता भवन्ति’ – ‘Amrutā bhavanti’ – ‘One attains immortality’ (Kena Upanishad: 1/2, 2/5). Immortality means ultimate liberation. Knowing Paramātmā as the all-doer means that one is free from ignorance, desires, evil-instincts and misery. However many activities a person does, he does not feel the slightest burden of them. He doesn’t get tired or fed up. His ability to work remains ever-fresh and continuously increases. He cannot be shaken by praise or insult. He always keeps a steadfast intellect. He has attained liberation and is therefore absorbed in happiness, peace and supreme bliss.

On 4 July 2003, in Ahmedabad, at 11.00 a.m., the head of the Gujarat Legislative Assembly, Prof. Mangalbai Patel, came for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan. He asked Swamishri, “How do you run all these 500 mandirs and spread *satsang* internationally so calmly?” Swamishri smiled, joined his hands and said, “I

don't run them. It is Paramātmā who runs everything. He is the all-doer. If we believe we are the doers, then in some actions we will succeed, and in others we will fail. Then we become disappointed and lose heart. My guru Shastriji Maharaj taught that if we carry a pot of water on our heads, we constantly feel its burden. But if we dive into water, we have tons of water above our heads, yet we don't feel the slightest burden. That is why we constantly believe that we don't do anything, it is Paramātmā who is doing everything. That is how we run this organization.”

On 20 July 1985, in London, as a mark of their devotion, the devotees weighed Pramukh Swami Maharaj with sugar-crystals, and in turn weighed the sugar crystals with gold. Swamishri's address on this occasion reflects his feelings and understanding. Swamishri said, “First, I bow to Parabrahman Sarvāvatāri Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who gave me this body. Second, I bow to my gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, who blessed me and accepted me. Without their grace I would not be standing here. Nothing happens without Paramātmā's grace. The belief that ‘I am doing this’ is false. Paramātmā is the all-doer. Even a dry leaf does not move without his wish. Without the grace of Paramātmā, no one is capable of doing or saying anything. Everything is created, sustained and destroyed by Paramātmā's energy. If we understand this glory then we will no longer be egoistic. Without Paramātmā's energy, even a roasted popadom cannot be broken.”

That same day, someone came to meet Swamishri and insulted him with inappropriate words. Nevertheless, there was no disturbance in Swamishri's feelings. He remained in the same internal state of bliss during the insult as he had during the grand honour in front of thousands of devotees just a few hours earlier. This is the astounding result of understanding that Paramātmā is the all-doer.

The Upanishad then explains the importance of immortality.

REALIZE THIS IN THIS BIRTH!

Life is uncertain. No one knows when death will come. In such circumstances there can be no delay in understanding this. One can't keep peace on hold. One can't wait for happiness. That is why the Upanishad says, ‘इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति न चेदवेदीन्महती विनष्टिः’ – *Iha chedavedee-datha satyamasti na chedavedeenmahatee vinashtihi* – ‘One who has attained the above understanding has attained true liberation right here. Otherwise one should be understood to have suffered the greatest loss’ (Kena Upanishad: 2/5).

Therefore, we should put aside our laziness and negligence. We should surrender to a guru, accept his precepts and thus attaining the grace of Paramātmā we should attain immortality in this very life.

उक्ता त उपनिषद् – THIS IS THE ESSENCE

In this way, Paramātmā is the all-doer. He is the one who gives the *indriyas* and *antahkaran* their ability. We should not be falsely arrogant and believe that ‘I am the sole doer’. Thus, giving the disciple the key to liberation and peace, the guru concludes, saying, ‘उक्ता त उपनिषद्’ – *Uktā ta Upanishad* – ‘This is the essence. This is the Upanishad. I have passed it on to you’ (Kena Upanishad: 4/7). Thus, we have obtained the essence of the root source of all energy in this Upanishad. ◆

VICHARAN

1 to 31 January & 1 to 8 February 2009

Surat, Atladara (Vadodara)

11 January 2009, Surat: Poshi Punam, 200th Diksha Anniversary of Gunatanand Swami

More than 10,000 devotees had pilgrimaged by foot from different suburbs to the mandir for Swamishri's morning puja darshan. Children sang bhajans, presented a speech and story, recited Swamini Vato and performed a skit in Swamishri's puja.

In the evening *satsang* assembly more than 35,000 devotees were present. The assembly programme was themed upon the 'Future of BAPS' and presented by BAPS children and youths. Finally, Swamishri blessed the mammoth assembly, "In everything one requires faith in God and trust in a bona fide sadhu. With that one can achieve the impossible. Who had thought that science would advance so rapidly? However, we see planes flying in the air. God is the father of science. He has a broad vision to liberate countless souls. Yogiji Maharaj so wished and *satsang* flourished in India and abroad. When he spoke one felt it was not possible, but we see it to be a reality today. Yogiji Maharaj had noble thoughts..."

14 January 2009, Surat; Uttarayan

The evening assembly was in celebration of Uttarayan. Traditionally, it is a day of kite-flying and donations. But with the severe economic recession in the diamond houses thousands were affected. Bearing the financial hardship of devotees in mind Swamishri had instructed that no arrangements for receiving donations be made and that only a *satsang* assembly would be arranged.

A drama, 'Guru Dakshina', on the theme of

faith and sacrifice for God, scripted by Jayendra Vinchhi, was performed by youths. A new publication, *Prasangam*, written by Sadhu Priyadarshandas was inaugurated by Swamishri. Swamishri also blessed Narayanprasad Swami for achieving the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' in the faculty of art. Thereafter Swamishri was garlanded by senior sadhus. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Man does not know of the glory of God and thus does not become a recipient of his power. Such a beautiful world he has created. His creation cannot be totally understood through our intelligence. Science has made great advancements, but it cannot create what God has done. So, one who becomes a devotee becomes a recipient of God's power..."

18 January 2009, Jhadeshwar (Bharuch)

A series of discourses on Vachanamrut was delivered by Brahadarshan Swami. Finally, in the evening *satsang* assembly Swamishri blessed, "When one becomes a devotee of God one attains peace in this world and Akshardham. It is through spiritual knowledge that one attains them. Without true knowledge one cannot understand the truth. One should ceaselessly engage oneself in listening to spiritual discourses, kirtan and bhajan. Whatever worldly happiness one experiences is due to the presence of *atma* within. Liberation is attained through knowledge of God."

22 January 2009, Jhadeshwar (Bharuch)

After concluding his morning puja Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of two BAPS *hari* mandirs: Jolva and Karantha.

25 January 2009, Vadodara

In the evening *satsang* assembly children of BAPS Vidyamandir (school) performed traditional dances and delivered speeches. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly of devotees, “Those who take the path of bad company spoil their academic performance, life and family. Those who do *satsang* progress and become happy. *Satsang* comprises of four things: (1) God who is truth and eternally existing, (2) Sadhu, (3) Shastras, and (4) Dharma. When one obeys and follows these four things one experiences peace in one’s life, family, responsibility and business....”

28 January 2009, Vadodara

Swamishri performed the *pratishta* rituals of *murtis* to be installed in the newly built BAPS *hari* mandir at Viramgam and the re-*pratishta* of *murtis* for the *hari* mandir in Nenpur.

31 January 2009, Vadodara; Vasant Panchmi Celebration

The Vasant Panchmi celebration assembly theme was *agna, upasana, sadbhav* and *paksh*. Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Dr Swami and Mahant Swami discoursed on the four subjects. On Swamishri’s arrival a traditional dance by youths and a procession of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were performed and carried out. Swamishri inaugurated two publications: *Ham Pahachane* by Aksharjivan Swami and Shatanand Muni’s *Hari Gita*. After the garlanding ceremony Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Shastriji Maharaj spread the mission of Shriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj fostered it and today through their wishes it has spread in India and abroad. Many types of work are done in the world, but those that please God are of honour to us. Worldly celebrations are for entertainment and joy but they do not bring peace to our soul. For inner peace one must take refuge in God and offer devotion to God. The more we imbibe the knowl-

edge given by God the more we experience peace within...”

1 February 2009, Vadodara

Prior to his morning puja Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying rituals of puja, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* for the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Mahuva. The senior sadhus had completed the preliminary rituals before Swamishri’s arrival. Swamishri blessed the devotees of Mahuva and said, “The mandir will be one of the best. Maharaj will liberate you all and take you to Akshardham...”

The Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralay (APC – hostel) in Atladara was celebrating its silver jubilee on this day. The students of the hostel sang bhajans in Swamishri’s puja.

In the evening Swamishri arrived for the silver jubilee celebration of APC. A traditional dance was in progress on stage. A brief video showed clippings of 25 years of APC. A drama, ‘Navyugnu Nirman’, written by Yogendra Swami was enacted by youths. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. In all 1,350 students had stayed and graduated from the hostel. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Through the hostel one’s life is transformed, enriched with values and a feeling of pride and glory is gained. Yogiji Maharaj was a great sadhu who dreamed and wished of such things. Shastriji Maharaj built mandirs to establish the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. Yogiji Maharaj fostered that knowledge immensely and that is why he made great wishes. The thought of establishing a *chhatralay* was his. The first one was in Vidyanagar. He called it a college of *brahmavidya*. Where there are no values, the effects of bad company takes over. Today’s youths are interested in drinking, gambling and immoral behaviour. That was why Yogiji Maharaj desired for the establishment of *chhatralayas*. Through them one is saved from *kusang*. The youths (who presented the stage

programmes) have been inculcated with values and that is why they have presented what we have seen today...”

3 February 2009, Vadodara

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS hari mandir in Jesingpura, and the re-*pratishtha* of *murtis* for the hari mandir in Antoli and Nilkanth Varni for New York mandir.

8 February 2009, Vadodara

In the morning and evening a *shibir* on the Vachanamrut was conducted by Brahadarshan Swami.

The highlight of the evening *satsang* assembly was the *tula* (weighing) of Shastriji Maharaj. Sixty years ago, in 1949, Shastriji Maharaj’s Suvarna Tula was held in Atladra. He was weighed against sugar crystals and after Shastriji stepped down from the balancing scale jewellery and gold were placed by devotees. To commemorate that occasion a giant scale was arranged on stage with the *utsav murti* of Shastriji Maharaj seated on one pan. The stage backdrop was a scene from Dada Khachar’s *darbar*.

On Swamishri’s arrival Kothari Rajeshwar Swami explained the glory and importance of the *tula* celebration. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. Then Swamishri blessed the assembly, “You have all got the auspicious thought of celebrating and remembering the *suvarna jayanti* (golden birth anniversary) of Shastriji Maharaj. The life incidents of God and celebrating his glory bring peace to one’s soul. One may attain any object of this world but one will not experience inner peace. But God’s incidents, bhakti and service to him imbues one with peace.

“A devotee of God finds no happiness other than in God. He finds nothing besides God to be the best. One should read our shastras. Read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. Listen to the Bhagvat, Bhagvad Gita and Upanishads. You

will feel happy and joyful, because they are divine. By listening to them with devotion one will experience joy. Shriji Maharaj established the *sampradaya* and gave the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. Shastriji Maharaj studied it and confirmed it to be true...”

At 7.30 p.m. the Suvarna Tula programme commenced with puja, on Swamishri’s behalf, by Viveksagar Swami of the *murtis* of Harikrishna Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj. The *murtis* were placed on the *tula* (scale). Swamishri placed small sugar crystal bags on the scale. Then all sadhus and devotees placed sugar crystal bags on the scale. Swamishri remained seated, giving darshan to all. The celebration induced joy and devotion in the hearts of all.

HIGHLIGHTS: JANUARY SURAT

4. Over 35,000 devotees and well-wishers attended the Sunday *satsang* assembly.

5. Seven hundred female devotees observed a waterless fast and pilgrimaged by foot to mandir.

7 & 12. Mass *satsang* initiation ritual of babies by Swamishri.

8. Rural Day celebration in which devotees from rural areas pilgrimaged by foot to mandir.

JHADESHWAR

22. Mass *satsang* initiation ritual of babies by Swamishri

VADODARA

28. Celebration of Shikshapatri day.

Celebration of Brahmanand Swami day.

Celebration of Nishkulanand Swami day.

3 Feb. Celebration of Guru Hari day.

4. Celebration of Nilkanth Varni day.

Celebration of Shri Hari day.

Celebration of Yogiji Maharaj day. ◆

- Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

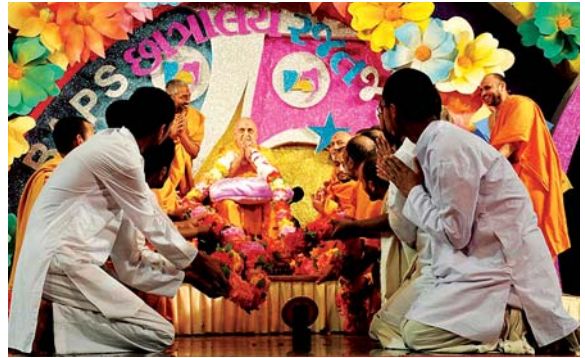
Translation: Sadhu Vivekshivandas

SILVER JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN CHHATRALAY

31 January to 1 February 2009, Atladara, Vadodara, India



Presentation by Chhatralay students



Sadhus and students honour Swamishri with a garland

A grand two-day celebration was held on 31 January and 1 February 2009 to mark the Silver Jubilee of the BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralay at Atladara, Vadodara, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Many past students had come from different parts of India as well as from USA and Australia to celebrate the last 25 years of the BAPS Chhatralay in which they had enriched their lives with values of Discipline, Dedication, Determination and Faith in God.

Beginning in 1983 with less than 30 students, the Atladara Chhatralay was, in fact, the first ever inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Since then, it has developed gradually with an annual intake of over 150 students living in a modern purpose-built campus just across the road from the BAPS Mandir.

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations comprised three sessions featuring light-hearted skits and meaningful debates on various topics that also showed how to balance studies with *satsang*. The sessions were capped with inspiring talks from Mahant Swami, Dr Swami and Viveksagar

Swami on topics such as character-building, cultural values and hard work.

One of the special guests over the two days was Dr Kamlesh Lulla, the Chief Scientist and Deputy Director of NASA in Houston, USA.

The Chief Guest of the event was Dr Rameshchandra Goyal, Vice-Chancellor of M.S. University, who emphasized the need of sacred knowledge as an integral part in moulding the lives of students and that the BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralay caters for the all-round development of youngsters.

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations concluded in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj who has selflessly inspired, encouraged and guided hundreds of students towards higher values throughout the last 25 years. The students performed a colourful and lively traditional folk dance, and a drama on how to avoid the evil influences of *kusang*.

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations brought together old and young students who have shared a common experience over the past 25 years. The event itself was a memory to cherish for a lifetime. ◆

MASS VEDIC MAHAPUJA CEREMONY

21 February 2009, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad



Arti during the Vedic mahapuja ceremony

Over 1,200 *kishores* and *kishoris* participated in the collective Vedic Mahapuja ceremony held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad, on Saturday, 21 February 2009.

This annual prayer assembly is held primarily for the benefit of students appearing for their

Standards 10 and 12 Board Exams and college students.

The main *mahapuja* ceremony was performed on stage by sadhus, while each of the students seated in the audience also participated by performing the Vedic rituals.

Prayers were offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, *devas* and gurus by and on behalf of the students for success in their forthcoming exams.

Following the *mahapuja* ceremony, there was a speech inspiring confidence and positive thoughts in the students in the final run up to their exams. The assembly concluded with a motivating video show, depicting that a person can achieve whatever targets he sets.

The students left with the message that prayers and efforts will bring success and peace of mind. ◆

APC VIDYANAGAR ANNUAL DAY

22 February 2009, Akshar Farm, Anand



Traditional dance by Chhatralay students

The BAPS Chhatralay in Vidyanagar celebrated its 45th Annual Day on Sunday 22 February 2009, with a special programme in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and over 3,000 present and past students and devotees.

The main feature of the assembly was a drama entitled 'Katha Manni, Vyatha Manavni' written by Jnanratna Swami. The drama depicted the vastly different outcomes in the lives of

two youths who are placed under a variety of financial and mental burdens. The story showed a poor *satsangi* youth who is able to cope with all the mental, physical, financial and social pressures in his life due to his faith in God. However, another youth, who has only fleeting contact with *satsang* and little faith in God, breaks down mentally under the pressure of social responsibilities. The story goes on to reveal how, through prayer and reinforcement of *satsang* he had been exposed to, the second youth is able to recover.

Thereafter, youths of the Chhatralay were awarded prizes for their academic achievements and for their performances in the various activities of the Chhatralay.

The assembly concluded with an inspiring address by Mahant Swami, who spoke about maintaining faith in God in all situations to help one cope with the ups and downs of life. ◆



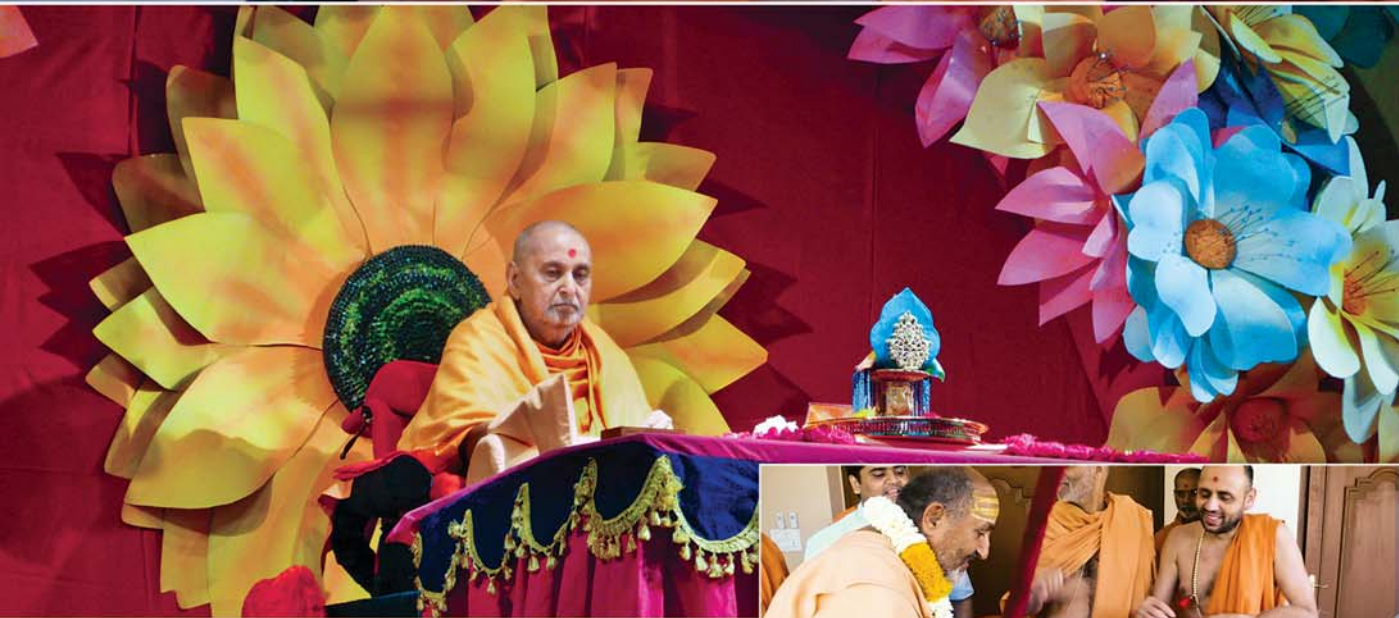
SHILANYAS RITUALS OF MANDIR IN MAHUVA

Shastrij Maharaj had wished to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Mahuva, the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj. To fulfil this wish, a grand mandir has been planned on a seven-acre site on the outskirts of Mahuva.

(Above) Swamishri performs *pujan* of *shilas* for the *shilanyas* ceremony of the new mandir (Atladara, 1 February '09).

(Below) Senior sadhus and devotees perform the *shilanyas* ceremony in the presence of 5,000 devotees in Mahuva, 19 February 2009.





SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN

(Above) Swamishri greets the devotees during morning darshan in Bharuch (22-1-2009).

(Below) Swamishri performs morning puja on the occasion of Vasant Panchmi celebration (31-1-2009).

(Inset) Swamishri welcomes and honours Jyotish-pithadhisvar Shrimad Shankaracharya Shri Madhavashramji of Joshimath to BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Atladara (3-2-2009).

