

SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

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Sculpting a Life of Integrity



SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN

Top: Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* of murtis for the new BAPS Mandir in the Nikol suburb of Ahmedabad (Bochasan, 23-7-2009).

Bottom: Swamishri blesses the devotees seated in the mandir compound in Atladra mandir.

Title Cover: Sculpture in the Sahajanand Darshan exhibition, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.



Happy
Diwali



In this coming New Year may all resolve to be regular in satsang and ghar sabha, give good values to our children and may we focus on God and turn away from worldly pleasures. May we introduce others to what we have attained and please God. May the New Year bring happiness to all; may the ignorance within be dispelled, may the flames of truth, compassion, ahimsa, mercy, love and wisdom be lit and may there be peace throughout the world. I offer such prayers at the Akshar Deri and to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

With blessings for the New Year.

*શ્રી સ્વામિનારાયણ
જી સ્વામિનારાયણ
જી સ્વામિનારાયણ*

*Jai Swaminarayan from
Shastri Narayanswarupdas
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)*





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CONTENTS

- 4 **Swaminarayan History**
A Day of Victory
The deceitful Gebi is defeated...
- 7 **Honesty**
Joy for the Honest
Misery for the Dishonest
The rewards of honesty...
- 9 **Honesty**
Personal Experiences
True stories of integrity...
- 16 **Festivals**
Diwali Parva
A period of eight enlightening festivals...
- 21 **Philosophy – Swaminarayan Vedant**
The Māndukya Upanishad: Precepts on the Ultimate State of the Ātmā
Realizing the true nature of ātmā...
- 24 **Philosophy – Swaminarayan Vedant**
The Aitareya Upanishad: Acquaintance of the Essence of Creation
Parabrahman is the source of everything...
- 26 **On Life**
To Exist is to Change
Experiences at Akshardham, New Delhi...
- 29 **Vicharan**
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan
- 32 **Inspiring Incidents**
Living with Swamishri
- 34 **BAPS News**
 - **UK National Shibirs 2009**
 - **Europe Karyakar Shibir 2009**

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FIRST WORD

From the moment we are born we get connected to our parents, relatives and the world. From infancy to old age we live in an intricate and delicate web of relationships. Our life's joys, achievements, failures and miseries are defined by our efforts and relationships with ourselves and others.

What are our relationship equations at home, work, in the neighbourhood, with friends and God like? Conversations build good relationships. Money, beauty or status also create relationships. But the elements that strengthen and allow our relationships to endure lie in the cultivation of mutual respect, love, peace and integrity. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the 19th century American poet and essayist, said, "The true test of a civilization is not the census, not the size of cities, nor the crops – but the kind of men the country turns out."

Whatever we earn, create and establish with integrity endures and rewards us with inner satisfaction and joy. Character enables us to live life fearlessly, purposefully and peacefully. Our relationships become genuine and less superficial. Integrity ultimately prods us towards developing strong connections with God and guru. Prayer and worship become our chief means to augment our bonds with God and guru.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan guides, "One who follows the path of righteousness forsakes stealing, adultery, slander and all other forms of sin. As a result, everyone in the world trusts him, be it a member of his family or anyone else. Only such a person likes the company of a true sadhu." (Vachanamrut Sarangpur 10). He adds further that such a person of character and love for the God-realized Sadhu attains liberation – an eternal relationship with God.

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A Day of Victory

At the behest of the king of Bhavnagar, Kanfata Gebi arrived in Gadhada to challenge Shri Hari. After a heated exchange with Brahmanand Swami and Dada Khachar, Gebi prepares to attack Shriji maharaj. Shri Hari instructs his Kathi devotees to respond...



All three, Brahmanand Swami, Dada Khachar and Ladha Thakkar, described what had happened to Shri Hari. Brahmanand Swami added, “He is foolish. It seems someone has instigated him to come here. I heard that Jiva Khachar had recently met him.”

Shri Hari merely smiled and said, “Because he is a fool we have to be wary. He has come to oppose.” Then Maharaj added, “Call Dada Khachar’s partner, Ahir Khachar.” When the latter arrived, Maharaj explained everything to him. He told him to come with his armed men. Maharaj also told the Kathi devotees to get ready. Some sadhus also took up bats used for washing clothes and staffs. Satchidanand Swami got hold of a plough. Shri Hari smiled when he saw them all. Then he checked the sadhus, “Sadhus should be compassionate and wedded to nonviolence. It is unbecoming for sadhus to arm themselves in such ways. The sadhus explained, “Maharaj, when we are attacked, we can tolerate and remain passive. But when our God is threatened, we simply cannot remain standing. So, today, we ask you not to say a word in this regard.” Shri Hari was happy with the love his sadhus had for him. He knew the sadhus would not enter into the fray. He was also

sure that Gebi would run away when the Kathis and *parshads* attacked him.

Shri Hari donned saffron clothes, took a sword in hand, tied a shield behind his back and got ready to face Gebi and his men. Nityanand Swami asked, “Maharaj, why have you armed yourself?”

“To fight against Gebi. If he wishes to be Kansa then he should know that Krishna is there to face him,” Maharaj replied.

“But, you have been cursed by Ashwatthama that if you pick a weapon you’ll never win. Then what of that?” Nityanand Swami reminded. Maharaj answered, “I sometimes accept a curse and at other times reject it.”

At that time Gebi played the drum as a clarion call to his men. “Did you hear that,” Maharaj said. “The fool has got ready to fight. His men will start advancing to attack us.” Shri Hari got up to face them. But Brahmanand Swami and Nityanand Swami made Maharaj sit down on his seat. In the meantime, Dada Khachar and Ahir Khachar came to Maharaj. They said, “Maharaj, no one can win us in sword fighting. We will finish off his men. But Gebi is an expert in the black arts. So, it will be difficult to capture him. So Maharaj, we pray to you to help us catch him.”

Maharaj replied to Brahmanand Swami, “That is why I have got ready to face him. When he will see me, his mantras will become impotent and useless.”

“That you can accomplish by merely wishing so. There is no need for you to come out and face him,” Brahmanand Swami explained. Nityanand Swami, too, supported Brahmanand Swami’s statement. Shri Hari smiled and told the Kathi devotees, “Get ready and go. When Gebi sees you, his power of mantras will dissolve. Today, you must all show him your might. Even the one who instigated him should realize that I am not a fake Brahmin, but...”

“The supreme God,” interrupted Nityanand Swami. Shri Hari blessed all and said, “Expose his deceit.”

With the proclamation of “Jai Swaminarayan,” Ahir Khachar opened the giant fort door. Dada Khachar, Somla Khachar, Ahir Khachar, Naja Jogiya and others galloped off to face Gebi. The latter was riding on a camel and his army of 400 men flanked on either side, fully armed. Ahir Khachar advanced speedily towards Gebi, and crashed into the camel’s belly. The impact toppled Gebi to the ground. Instantly, Dada Khachar rushed towards him, pulled out his sword and pinned him to the ground with his right foot on his chest. “You said you can penetrate the earth and go to *patal*, but before you can do it by yourself I will thrust you there with this sword.”

Gebi was petrified. His men, too, surrendered before the brave Kathi devotees and *parshads*. They had all been disarmed when the Kathis wielded their belts and swords. Shri Hari had told the Kathis to scare the wits out of them, but not to kill anyone. When Gebi’s men saw their master fall, they all ran away. Ahir Khachar dismounted from his horse, caught Gebi by his beard, pulled him up and slapped him twice. Then Ahir Khachar roared, “If you can, bring that shrine from the other bank of River Ghela to this side with your mantra. Use your mantra *vidya* or we shall show you our Kshatriya *vidya*. With one more slap from me I can send you to the doors of death!”

Gebi was trembling with fear. He folded his hands in forgiveness and asked, “Forgive me! Let me go alive. I will never come here again!”

“No, that’s not enough. You must declare that you will give up your bad ways and mend yourself. And understand this that the power of your mantra *vidya* has been destroyed by the wish of Swaminarayan. Now, you are powerless!”

“I’ll give it all up, Bapu! Let me go away free. I’ll never enter the outskirts of Gadhadra,” Gebi replied anxiously.

Dada Khachar took Somla Khachar’s sword and warned Gebi, “Believe yourself to be lucky today, because we are letting you go alive. Now don’t tread on the wrong path again.” Then Ahir Khachar released Gebi’s beard. Dada Khachar added, “Listen, God is supreme. No one can supersede him. Those who have challenged and confronted him have met with tragic consequences. Whoever has sent you here, tell him what I have said.” Gebi folded his hands in submission, touched the feet of Dada Khachar and took off.

Ahir Khachar and Somla Khachar were amused by the way he scampered off. The Darbars were truly brave, and their bhakti towards Maharaj shone through their courage. Their faces glowed with an aura of divine grace and blessings. They all returned to Maharaj and narrated everything that had happened. Then Brahmanand Swami told Maharaj, “Now, take off these combat clothes, sword and shield.” Shri Hari revealed, “It was when I donned these clothes and armed myself that these brave Kathis were inspired. Their courage shined today!” Then Maharaj told Dada Khachar, “Prepare *kansar* (a sweet food) in celebration of your bravery and victory. As long as such evil people reside on earth, unrighteousness shall flourish. I do not go to seek any one of them, but they come to me and I relieve the earth of its burden of evil.” ◆

(contd. next issue)

From Gujarati text *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*

by H.T. Dave



Joy for the Honest Misery for the Dishonest

Pramukh Swami Maharaj
18 October 2004, Nairobi

Q: It is the feeling of some people that they do not prosper economically even though they are honest to the core and strictly observe the codes of conduct, while those who are grossly dishonest are found to be financially well-off, living a life of luxury. How should we view life in this context?

Swamishri: People often get perplexed by such ironies in the world. Those who are honest do not make money while those who are dishonest do. The ways of the world are such that even the faithful lose faith, thinking, ‘We worship God and practice *satsang*, yet do not make enough money.’

Yet, we should work honestly and happily accept whatever we get. We should have strong faith that God is the doer and everything happens as willed by him.

We should also realize that God will do us good if we live honestly. Do not think that those who are dishonest prosper financially, because ultimately they will suffer from their sins, while

we will go to Akshardham.

If we have fewer riches, our worldly attachments will be fewer and we will reach the abode of God. If one doesn’t take it that way, one would tend to lose faith thinking that the dishonest travel by air and I have to go on foot. One should think positive. Why worry if one has to go on foot, since it will be good exercise and good for the body. Previously, people used to go on foot. Womenfolk had to walk to the well every morning to fetch water and draw water from the well with a rope. Also, they used to grind the grains. They would cook food at home and take it to their husband at the farm.

Such exercises kept people fit and healthy; so they had fewer diseases.

Now, all that is a thing of the past and there are no such exercises in our daily life. One travels, seated in a car and works seated in a chair at the office. And from the chair one goes back home by car.

Whether people go by car or fly by plane, they have their own set of problems to face. Those who practice dishonesty may seem to be enjoying, but that dishonesty is the cause of unhappiness. If one doesn't take refuge in God, one is bound to face a host of problems. One who makes money dishonestly faces disrepute and is not liked by others.

On the other hand, an honest devotee of God is loved by everyone. He may make little money but he has a bright future. He will experience the bliss of Akshardham and will be

liberated from the cycle of births and deaths, while the dishonest will have to face imprisonment. One who is driven by money invites trouble, even though he may feel happy for a period of time.

Riches do not necessarily bring happiness. If you have the right philosophical understanding, you will feel happy even if you live in a hut. Devotees of God always feel blissful since they draw their strength from God. The dishonest, on the other hand, will not be able to sleep peacefully even in a luxurious bungalow. They have to take sleeping pills. Whereas, the honest feel happy and peaceful.

Those who seek happiness should think of those less fortunate than themselves, but should not think of those who are richer. If one thinks of those who are richer, one will not feel happy, since one is not going to get the wealth they have. Think of the less fortunate: that they don't have food to eat and go hungry while we get enough to eat; think of those with a fractured hand or leg – that they have a fractured limb, while we are healthy.

Take life that way. That is the way to feel



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and is not liked by others.*

happy. Being a devotee, it doesn't matter whether we grow rich or not. That is the will of God. We should feel satisfied with what God has in store for us even after putting in all our efforts. That will do us good. Whether you live in America, London or Africa, you have to think that whatever God wills for us is good for us. If we live life with this understanding, we won't feel that the dishonest make a million and are happy. They are not happy. They are unhappy really. People who live honestly and worship God, are happier than the rest on the earth.

Plants that do not give fruits grow quickly, while fruit-bearing plants take time to grow. The bitter creepers grow even if they are not watered. But the useful plants take time to grow. You have to tend to them regularly. Likewise, if you want to qualify to reach Akshardham, you have to observe the prescribed rites and rules, practice honesty and morality while following the right *upasana*. Dishonesty leads to misery and unhappiness, only honesty bears the fruit of happiness. These are the words of God and the sages and are supported by the scriptures.

It is our great fortune that we have Shriji Maharaj as our God.

If we live with such understanding and knowledge, we will find peace and happiness at all times. ♦

Personal Experiences

FOR HAPPINESS, TURN TO SWAMI, NOT MONEY

Desingbhai Bhikhabhai Rathwa



My village is in the interior part of the Jetpur sub-district in the tribal belt of Vadodara district.

I was 14 when I first had darshan of Pramukh Swami. Then I became a *satsangi* in 1981. The sadhus informed me of the moral rules to observe.

I used to work as a labourer for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme. I also used to work as a labourer on three acres of land to make a living. Yet I could save some money as I was free from all addictions, thanks to *satsang* and bhakti.

I went to the SBI branch of Jetpur Pavi to withdraw some money on 3 December 2007. I came home with the money the cashier gave me. I had to pay a gentleman the next day. So I went to see him. When I counted the money, I learnt that the cashier had given me Rs.10,000 extra.

I thought of going to the bank the next day but I had to go to Baria for some urgent work.

The bank authorities detected the error. So they made inquiries. They also phoned me. I told them that I did receive Rs.10,000 in excess. The next

day I gave back the amount to the bank manager.

He enquired about me. I told him that I was a labourer and a volunteer of the BAPS and a disciple of Pramukh Swami, who has taught me not to pocket anything which belonged to others.

The manager was very pleased. He ordered for sweets and gave them to me. I offered it to the image of Maharaj I was carrying with me. Then he distributed it among the employees in the bank.

I told him, "Sir, it's the *satsang* that keeps us happy, not the rupees." And rightly so. I have been serving in *satsang* since 1986. I used to visit Adivasi areas for *satsang* walking 8 to 10 kilometres. Then, in 1992-3 I bought a bicycle. I became a *nirikshak* and cycled the distance of 12-13 km for *satsang*. On the way I sometimes saw tigers and bears, but by chanting the Swaminarayan mantra I would reach home safely. Today I have a motorbike and go for *satsang* covering 16-17 km.

I really feel happy. Swami once told me, "You will be happy even as a labourer if you work honestly."

LESSON FOR A LIFETIME

Ashokbhai J. Raval, Chief Mechanical Engineer,
Gujarat State Transport, Gandhinagar



Iam a technocrat, but five years ago I was appointed as chief controller of purchases in the Gujarat State Transport, with an annual purchase budget of Rs. 300-350 crore. This provided great scope for corruption. Companies would press me to buy their products. But it was a no-win situation. Even if one were honest, people would make unfounded allegations. So, I wrote a letter to Pramukh Swami for his blessings.

He blessed, "There won't be any trouble if you remain honest." With his inspiration I was able to resist all alluring offers.

Once, we purchased a product from a company as a matter of routine. So, the merchant came to gift me a large sum of money. I refused to accept it but he left it on my table, saying that if I didn't want it, I could donate it.

The next day I went to Akshardham to seek

guidance as to what I should do. I was told to ask the merchant himself to come and donate it.

Then I went to see the merchant and gave him back the amount. He was astonished.

That was for me a lesson of a lifetime.

I have been constantly inspired by Pramukh Swami to remain honest. So I made the whole

purchasing procedure very transparent and corruption proof, so that the government would not be at a loss at any point.

As a result I have made progress and am leading a happy life.

LEAD AUDITOR

**Sanatkumar B. Chattopadhyaya, Operation Head,
D.N.V. International Organization, Gandhinagar**



I was born and brought up in the interior village of Sultanpur of West Bengal. After studying upto 10th Standard I joined the Indian Air Force. Along with the Air Force duty I studied engineering and then gained an MBA from the National Institute of Personnel Management.

After taking voluntary retirement from the Air Force, I joined an international organization which issues an International Standard Organization (ISO) certificate to leading companies after auditing them for their quality of environmental care, health and safety, social accountability and information security. I work as lead auditor and operation head. The certificate is recognized by all countries throughout the world.

Due to the value of this certification, we often face tempting offers while on duty.

Once we went to a certain company for an audit. The report was going against the company. The head of the company came to know about this and came to see me in the evening, offering whatever money I asked for.

I refused, yet he insisted. I told him to correct the accounts. I also told him that if they prepared the report according to our list, society at large would benefit and that I was satisfied with what I would get for the audit and that I was worried about the environment around the company.

Eventually he agreed. When we returned for an audit after six months, everything was in tune with the audit requirements. The satisfaction that I got from it was great.

Once, I went to Rajkot to audit a grant-in-aid institute. On enquiry I learnt that there were many irregularities. They thought that I would be easily tempted. But I did not relent. So three men came to me one afternoon to threaten me. They said, "If you won't certify what's on record, it will be difficult for you to leave Rajkot."

I told them, "You have chosen to threaten the wrong person. I have served in the Air Force for 15 years. I am strong enough to face any situation. You cannot silence me like this."

Then they did not turn up. I have faced many situations like this but by thinking of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj I gain great strength and enthusiasm to face any eventuality.

Some people believe that you cannot make progress honestly. I don't think so. I hail from a small village. I joined the Air force because I couldn't afford further studies. Yet, today I work as an executive in an international organization and am happy.

Some people think that you cannot work with integrity in a Government or public sector organization. Others will not let you be. To some extent they are right. Many offers are made to corrupt you but you have to be resolute enough to refuse them. This requires inner strength which I get from Pramukh Swami Maharaj and BAPS.

I visited many places in search of an individual and institution that could lend support to my

moral fibre, and finally I found all these values in Pramukh Swami.

BAPS has given me the strength to resist any temptation. When I think of the life of Pramukh Swami and his sadhus, I feel inspired. I am also inspired by the sadhus since they have renounced their wealthy families and sacrificed their careers to serve God, guru and society. This thought makes me

ask myself, “Why can’t I refuse a bribe at least?”

One must have a role model to help one consistently cling to a life of honesty and morality. I have Pramukh Swami Maharaj as my role model. Where in the world could I find a greater role model?

If I were not associated with Pramukh Swami and BAPS, I cannot imagine what my life would have been like?

ONLY THAT WHICH IS DUE TO ME IS MINE

Dr V.P. Raval



When I finished my graduation in medicine and surgery from the M.P. Shah Medical College in Jamnagar, I had great ambitions. But my duties in various government dispensaries in the initial nine years changed all that. In the initial two years I came across some doctors who were not interested in money and were keen to serve the patients only. I also came across doctors who wanted to make money at the cost of the patients. As a medico I decided from the very beginning which course to take.

My heart bled when I treated very poor patients in Paliad as a medico. I also came from an ordinary family, so I knew what money meant to the poor and the state of the patients. Aware of the plight of poor patients, I started my practice in Amreli just to serve them. I took only a token charge of Rs. 2. My dispensary was named Sevabharati Hospital and the number of patients soon grew.

Some patients were so poor, they couldn’t afford even the low fees. Rather, we had to arrange for their meals. So, I and my wife decided to provide them meals also at our cost. My friends advised me to raise fees periodically but I did not because I was inspired to serve by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Around that time, when Pramukh Swami visited Amreli, I told him that I examine around 250 patients daily and it was tiring and the number of patients kept growing. I added further that a gentleman had advised me to raise the fees to help limit the number of patients.

Hearing this, Pramukh Swami became restless. He said, “That’s not necessary. With the grace of God, you will feel peaceful. Keep serving the people.”

After several years I had to raise fees a little but the dispensary is run even today on a charity basis with the inspiration of Pramukh Swami.

But there are testing times also. In the beginning there were alluring offers from pharmaceutical companies to prescribe their drugs. One executive came with an offer of a new car.

I told him it was of no use to me, since I would not like to prescribe needless medicines to poor patients for money. And he walked away. He might have thought that I would not succeed financially.

The other day officers from another company came. They offered to build a new hospital for me with accommodation. I told them that I did not even charge my rightful fees! So, how could I take what is not rightful for me?

Over the years though, I have seen that sooner or later your integrity and honesty are recognized. The companies and the doctors now offer me their services for the poor patients rather than gifts.

With honesty and integrity you make progress and get happiness. It is all thanks to Pramukh Swami that I could resist all temptations.

I attend *satsang sabhas* in my area at least twice in a month and also visit surrounding villages for *satsang*. That is what I value more rather than riches.

HONESTY IS ITS OWN REWARD

**Bhagubhai Manibhai (Adivasi Dholi Patel),
Train Coach Attendant, Jespore (Valsad)**



I am from Jespore, 14 km from Valsad in South Gujarat. I became a *satsangi* about 10 years ago after the consecration ceremony of the BAPS mandir in Navsari. I have been working as an attendant in the A/C coach of the Rajdhani train for the past 13 years.

Once, when the train reached Mumbai from Delhi, the passengers got off the train. While I was inspecting the coach, I found a jacket with gold ornaments worth at least one lakh rupees in the pocket. At once I informed my senior officer.

The passenger who lost the jacket phoned the railway office. Our officer called him the next day.

I also remained present with the jacket. I handed it over to him. He was very pleased.

The passenger asked about my background. I told him that I was a disciple of Pramukh Swami who taught us that it is a sin to take property belonging to others. Once I found a gold chain in the coach, which I also returned to the passenger.

I have been given awards for honesty by my seniors, but to me the values of *satsang* are worth more than all the awards.

I have an acre of land to cultivate and the railway job to make a living. There is no other source of income but I am content.

GATEWAY TO PLEASE GURU

**Shailesh Sagpariya, Accounts Officer,
District Primary Education Committee, Rajkot**



I was working as an accounts officer for the Gujarat Primary Education Committee in Rajkot.

One day some representatives of a computer company imparting training came to see me. They wanted me to arrange Modules I and II in computer training for primary school teachers of the Rajkot district, since the government had issued an order for such training.

I told them that about 50 employees had already received the training and that the training was of no use for the primary teachers. Yet they insisted upon me to issue the order and offered me a large sum to do so.

I explained that the primary teachers don't have to use computers in the course of their duties. There is not even any electricity in some schools. There are 7,500 primary teachers in 1,243 schools in the Rajkot district and the training would cost Rs. 4,700 per teacher. It would cost the government Rs. 35 million.

I did not want to burden the government with

such a large unnecessary expenditure. So I asked the representatives to go away. But they continued to talk to me in a threatening tone. Still I refused and then they left.

After a few weeks I visited a school for inquiry where I learnt that the company had managed to get the order issued in their favour and the training programme was also scheduled for the neighbouring districts also. One night I calculated the total burden on the government for all the schools in the state. It came to Rs. 1,450 million.

The next day I had to go to Gandhinagar. So I met an officer who is known for his integrity. I explained the whole training project to him and asked him whether the government wanted primary teachers to be trained in Modules I and II.

He said it was not intended to include the primary teachers and so he issued an order the next day which was circulated in all the districts of Gujarat.

When I reached Rajkot, I saw that the fresh order issued had displeased some officers and they

avoided my company. They even tried to harass me, but God was on my side and everything went in my favour. After some time, they began to like me for what I did.

I feel that honesty has its own profound influence and it earns you respect from all.

When Swami learnt about the whole episode in Gondal, he blessed me and told me to stick to my

life of honesty and not yield to corruption.

Once my brother's business was facing a financial crunch and I was in desperate need of Rs. 500,000 to help him. The next day a man came to offer me Rs. 700,000 as bribe for a project but I refused it as the words of Pramukh Swami rang in my ears.

I feel that the corrupt feel unhappy and desolate while I am quite at peace.

FREE FROM CORRUPTION WITH GOD'S GRACE

Bharat L. Upadhyaya, GCERT, Gandhinagar



I joined the Government of Gujarat in 1974 after completing my post-graduate education. Since then I have been selected for higher posts in the government after passing various GPSC exams.

In all this, I have experienced the grace of God to help me keep corruption at bay.

For some time I worked as an audit officer in the education department. I was often offered bribes to certify audit reports without auditing the books, but I was able to resist them all.

While working as a secretary in GCERT, I had to deal with many businessmen to make purchases. But I would work only according to the proce-

dures. Some merchants would come to offer me bribes, but I would refuse. In one case, the order was issued legally. Yet, the merchant came to offer me a large sum as a token.

It is believed that you have to be corrupt to prosper but my experience is altogether different. I have not even incurred the displeasure of my senior officers. I have always been protected by Shriji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami and my immediate officers.

Being honest has served me well. My officers have rated my performance better. As a result I have not been transferred in the past 20 years.

HONESTY BRINGS HONOUR TO GURU

Vaibhav A. Tank, Student, USA



Three years ago, I was a 7th grade student at Peterson Middle School in California.

Once we had a sports test for which the rule was that the answer sheet would be examined by another student of the class according to the model answer sheet given by the teacher. Thus, I scored 100 per cent. I knew one of my answers was wrong. So I asked my classmate to reduce one mark. But he and the other friends laughed at me. And he did not make the correction.

I did not like it. So I approached the teacher, Ms Martin, with the same request. She could not believe her ears. She wondered why a student would come forward to have a mark deducted.

But she was very pleased and told me that nobody would have come to know of this if I had kept quiet.

I told her, "God knows everything. And I don't want even one mark more than what I deserve."

She wanted to know who taught me these lessons of morality and honesty. I told her about the BAPS, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the sadhus.

She expressed her desire of meeting them but I explained to her that they observed the vow of celibacy. So, she wrote a letter to the saints and BAPS.

I was very young at that time but today I realize how we can gain honour for our guru by just being honest in life.

I OFFER AT THE FEET OF GOD THAT WHICH IS NOT MINE

Anonymous, Surat



An envelope addressed to Munivandan Swami was found on the step of the central shrine of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Surat on 16 January 2008. When he opened the envelope, he found 15 grams of gold and a short letter in which the writer introduced himself as a member of the Kishore Mandal, without giving his name:

Jai Swaminarayan

Pujya Munivandan Swami

In this envelope I enclose 15 grams of gold which I found. It belongs to somebody who lost

it. I had been waiting for someone to claim it, but nobody has turned up yet. It does not belong to me. So I decided to offer it at the feet of God.

I am a member of the BAPS Kishore Mandal and you know me too. I won't like to give my name, though.

I pray that God may help the person whom it belongs to in any other way.

Jai Swaminarayan

Member of BAPS Kishore Mandal

BAPS YOUTH WHO COULD NOT BE LURED BY A 3 MILLION DOLLAR FORTUNE

Nilesh Patel, New Jersey, USA



This is an account of a BAPS youth in the USA whose exemplary display of honesty filled Pramukh Swami Maharaj's heart with pride. It was an alluring opportunity to make a fortune of three million dollars just when he was trying to find his feet in the USA. He had yet not settled in the USA and was only working in a convenience store.

Nilesh Patel could easily have appropriated an unsigned lottery ticket worth three million dollars that belonged to a 76-year-old American lady to himself. Still, he returned the three million dollar-winning lottery ticket to the rightful owner. That was in 2004. He wrote a letter to Pramukh Swami and Swamiji wrote back to him, blessing him for his exemplary honesty.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote, "You have done your family and Satsang proud by giving back the lottery ticket to the old lady. This gesture will certainly please Maharaj, Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. You will have inner peace and be happy in life. I have prayed to Maharaj so that you may settle comfortably in the USA."

Swami blessed him in person in Edison say-

ing, "You have really done the Satsang proud and further honoured it. You will feel at peace in the heart of your hearts."

The following is the translated version of the letter of Nilesh Patel:

23 May 2004

*Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj,
Jai Swaminarayan.*

When I was working in a convenience store of a Jain gentleman from Baroda settled in the USA, an old lady aged 76 used to come regularly to buy newspapers and lottery tickets. The other day she came and gave me the lottery tickets to check and then went to another store close to ours. When I checked the tickets, I found that she had won three million dollars for one ticket. The ticket was unsigned and there was no one else in the store. I thought for a while not to speak to her about it, but then your smiling face flashed before my eyes.

When she came back, I told her that she had won three million dollars. She told me not to make fun of her and was not ready to believe it.

I showed the ticket to another customer in the store and he told her that she had really won it.

Then she believed it.

Swami, I pray to you to bless me and my family so that the thought of dishonesty may never enter

my mind again even for a second and I may live life peacefully, obeying your instructions.

Jai Swaminarayan from Nilesh

BLESSINGS TRAIL BEHIND HONESTY

**Vipul Arvindbhai Parmar, Gurukul Student (Gondal),
B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad**



Before joining the BAPS Gurukul in Gondal I was a member of the BAPS Bal Mandal in Gondal mandir. It was a source of great inspiration, encouraging me to excel in studies and make a bright future for myself.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the sadhus often cautioned us not to copy in exams. So I had resolved never to copy.

In the SSC Board exams, an atmosphere conducive to copying prevailed in our exam centre. The supervisors not only turned a blind eye to it, they facilitated it.

On the last day of the exams there was widespread copying. But I decided that copying was just not for me. I had finished the exam and was quietly waiting for the final bell to ring. The supervisor came to me and asked me to give my answer sheet to the student behind.

I told him courteously that I won't like to be part of the mass copying. Just then the principal of the school passed by and he could not say anything to me further to help the student behind for fear of being caught.

When we were students of Gondal Gurukul and

sat in the 12th Standard Board exams, the gurukul students did not copy, even though the supervisors encouraged it. The students included Dharmesh Ghadia, Vishal Pandya, Shravan Bagtharia and others. When the sadhus took us to Swamishri and reported the whole episode Swamishri was very pleased.

Swami was especially pleased to learn that even the supervisors knew the students of Akshar Purushottam Gurukul would not copy. Then Swami blessed us saying, "You have created a good image of the BAPS Gurukul and have added one more feather to the crown of the BAPS. This will help you in life and in your job or profession. You have shown exemplary courage and resolve. If you remain honest, God will bless you with success wherever you are."

And we have really felt Swami's blessings. That year 11 students of the Gurukul achieved high percentages and qualified for admission to various medical colleges. Also, Vimal Padhiyar and Nirmal Lakum and I appeared in the merit list for the first ten in the state in the Standard 12 Board exams.

ONLY MY MONEY MATTERS TO ME

Rasikbhai Lallubhai Mohila Adivasi, Dharmpur, Valsad



Ten years ago my life was all liquor and meat. I used to spend at least Rs. 5,000 every month on liquor, more than my income allowed.

The turning point came in 1999 when I went to Mahesana for labour. There I visited the BAPS mandir and met some sadhus who initiated me into the Swaminarayan fold and placed a *kanthi* around my neck. I also had darshan of Pramukh

Swami Maharaj and at once freed myself from all addictions.

I have been working for a decoration company as a labourer for the past 18 years. Once, while dismantling the decorations at midnight after a marriage, I found a bag with cash and golden ornaments. I thought somebody would be tempted to take it, so I hid it under the pillow of my bed.

(contd. on p. 31)



Parva means a group of festivals. Diwali Parva incorporates eight festivals: Ramaa Ekadashi, Vagh Baras (Govatsa Dwadashi), Dhan Teras, Kali Chaudash, Diwali, Nutan Varsh (Annakut), Bhai Bij and Labh Pancham.

On Ashadh sud Ekadashi, Bhagwan was bound by Bali Raja's donation. Pleased with such exuberant devotion, Bhagwan made him immortal by granting a three-day *utsav*. These are celebrated on Aso vad 13, 14 and Amas. In practice, this *utsav* begins all over the land on vad Ekadashi (11th) and Vagh Baras (12th). This period is also known as Deepalika, Sukhratri and Yakshratri (Bhavishya Puran 140).

RAMAA EKADASHI (ASO VAD 11)

Diwali festivities begin on Aso vad 11, known as Ramaa Ekadashi and Bhagvati Ekadashi. Ramanand Swami's guru, Atmanand Swami said, "A *mahotsav* is that which attains victory over *vasana*." Hence, Ekadashi is a *vrata* in which the ten *indriyas* and eleventh mind are auspicious sentiments of self-control.

VAGH BARAS (ASO VAD 12)

This is also known as Govatsa Dwadashi and Guru Dwadashi. On this day a milch cow and calf are offered *pujan* by chanting the following *shloka*

and given *dalvada* (fried lentil balls) to eat:

"Kshirodārnavasambhute surāsuranamaskrute sarvavedamaye mātagruthānārgyai namostute"

"O mother cow! You appeared during Samudra Manthan. You are the deified mother, venerated by *devas* and demons. Accept the oblations of my *puja*. I offer you my *pranams*."

Vagh refers to repaying one's financial debts. Therefore people clear their account books today and do not enter into new transactions, using new ledgers, until after Labh Pancham.

The *Bhagvadgomandal*, the Gujarati encyclopaedia, also describes this day as Pada Baras. There is a short story which throws light on the word *vagh*. On this day a demon named Vagh was vanquished. His body was dragged into the city. Merchants considered this inauspicious. Hence they stopped the exchange of money on this day. They only begin after the new *muhurt*.

DHAN TERAS (ASO VAD 13)

Dhan has two meanings; a herd of cows and wealth. In the past cows formed people's wealth.

Over time both were offered *pujan* on this day. Sanatan Dharma's shastras have advocated procuring wealth only through the codes of dharma. According to the Law of Karma, wealth acquired by any other means will create discord in one's life, as well as in society. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Lakshmi, in the form of currency, are offered *pujan*.

The latent sentiment is that this purifies one's wealth and that one may use it with *vivek* (discrimination). It is said that wealth used for self is termed *dhan*, that for others *lakshmi*, that for unethical purposes *alakshmi* (sinful) and that for Paramatma *mahalakshmi*.

The sentiment underlying Lakshmi puja is that the Lakshmi – wealth we have acquired – is ultimately the result of Paramatma's grace. For this we thank him on this day.

On this day, Dhanvantari, the physician of the *devas*, and *amrut* manifested. The *devas* obtained *amrut*. However without *adhyatma dhan*, even they experienced discord. Therefore they approached a realized sadhu such as Shukdevji, to hear *kathamrut* (spiritual discourses) and hence obtain *adhyatma dhan* (spiritual wealth). We are fortunate to have such a true sadhu today in the form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. By his he graces us *adhyatma dhan*.

We should introspect regarding the amount of this *amrut* that we have imbibed in the past twelve months. It is from such a sadhu that we obtain *dhan* in the form of Ekantik Dharma and virtues, such as, dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya*, bhakti, integrity, self-control, truth, straightforwardness and righteousness. The seekers of truth should do *pujan* of such spiritual *dhan* for life.

Children are wealth too. They thrive on *dhan* in the form of *samskars*. Parents should strive to sincerely impart this *dhan* to them.

KALI CHAUDASH (ASO VAD 14)

This is also known as Narak Chaturdashi because Shri Krishna vanquished Narkasur. Devotees pray and offer *pujan* to Hanumanji to

remove inauspiciousness and fear of evil spirits and beings. Throughout India, Mahalakshmi is offered *pujan*.

Origin

The evil king Narakasur, also known as Bhaumasur, of Prag-Jyotishpur, confiscated all the beautiful and valuable objects in the world. Rampaging through the three *lokas*, he also looted the earrings of Aditi, mother of the *devas*.

When the *devas* prayed for succour, Shri Krishna and Satyabhama vanquished Narakasur, releasing the 16,000 women captives. In jubilation, the *devas* celebrated the occasion by kindling *divas*. When Narakasur lay dying, he prayed to Shri Krishna, "Let those who bathe before sunrise on my death anniversary not go to hell." Shri Krishna granted the boon (Padma Puran, Uttarkhand 76/67).

Even today in South India, after an oil bath, a bitter fruit named *kaarit* is trodden on, symbolizing the destruction of Narakasur.

Another *katha* cites that once on this day, a king named Hem died. His relatives mourned immensely. This moved Yamaraja, who took pity. He declared, "Whoever lights *deeps* (*divas*) will not die during these five days of *Deepotsav*."

In essence this means that one who is enlightened within – becomes *brahmarup* – will not fear death.

For this we need to eradicate our fifty-one *bhuts*, namely, the three *gunas*, ten *indriyas*, ten *prans*, four *antahkarans*, five *bhuts*, five *vishays* and fourteen *devatas* of the *indriyas* by obeying the Satpurush. In becoming *brahmarup* and offering devotion to Parabrahman, we truly celebrate Kali Chaudash.

Rituals

Hanumanji is offered *pujan* using oil and *sindur* (orange powder).

It is traditional to eat *vadaa* and items made from *udad* (lentils) on this day.

DIWALI (ASO VAD 15)

Also known as Deepawali and Deepotsav, this is the final day of the Hindu year.

Origin

Mankind is forever steeped in the misery of *ādhī* (mental agony), *vyādhī* (physical sufferings) and *upādhī* (pain from external elements).

On the day when man is liberated from these, it becomes the day of Diwali, of bliss for him.

There are five stories celebrating this day:

1. Shri Krishna vanquished Narkasur, releasing people from misery.
2. Pruthu Raja extracted goodness from the earth.
3. During the Samudra Manthan, Lakshmi emerged from the ocean.
4. The Pandavas returned from their forest exile.
5. Shri Ramchandra returned to Ayodhya after his victory over Ravan in Lanka.

In essence people light *divas* on this day to depict their joy on being released from suffering inflicted by evil elements. Thus, this day came to be known as *Deepotsavi*.

Rituals

The Bhavishyottar Puran (140- 14- 29) cites details of how to celebrate Diwali from early morning.

- To augur success, those involved in trade and business do *pujan* of their new ledgers, known as Chopda Pujan (also known as Sharda Pujan). In the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's *shikharbaddh* mandirs, it is a tradition for sadhus to perform the Vedic Sharda *pujan* ritual of the devotees' account books.
- People light *divas* in their homes every evening.
- During Diwali it is a tradition in Hindu homes for the womenfolk to decorate a *rangoli* at the entrance or near the doorway, after washing the floor. A *rangoli* is an intricate and artistic design, using coloured powders. It represents an auspicious welcome for Lakshmi, who visits people during Diwali to grant wealth.

Sentiments

- People forgive and forget misdeeds of the past year and resolve to spend the coming year in peace, harmony, purity and to earn *lakshmi* by observing dharma.
- On this the darkest (moonless) day of the month, people light *divas* symbolically, praying to Paramatma for inner enlightenment.
- Diwali is a festival to resolve personal discord and familial conflict, to increase love, unity and harmony in the family and society.
- Finally, since we are graced by the infinite love of God and his holy Sadhu, we should feel fulfilled and contented, known as *puṇakampanu*. Therefore we should endeavour to consolidate our dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*, to further receive their benediction.

This is the ultimate sentiment of Diwali, poetically described by Brahmanand Swami - a poet-paramhansa of Bhagwan Swaminarayan:

*“Rāj māre din din Diwālī re,
Vālā maltā tamane Vanmālī re, jiho Giradhārī.”*

“For me every day is Diwali having met you, O Paramatma.”

NUTAN VARSH (KARTIK SUD 1): ANNAKUT Origin

On Kartik *sud* 1, New Year's Day, Vaman Bhagwan asked Bali Raja for three strides of land. Bali Raja pleased Vamanji by offering everything. In remembrance of his devotion, Vamanji granted a boon that this auspicious day will be famed as *Balipratipada* (Skand Puran 24/10). People therefore offer Bali *pujan* on this day.

The monsoon which commences in the month of Ashadh will have grown new crops by the end of Aso. Therefore the new harvest brought home is first used to cook exquisite foods for Paramatma. In Gokul, it was a tradition to offer these as thanksgiving to Indra – the deity of rain.

Observing these preparations, the child Krishna

questioned his father, Nandbaba, of the purpose. Nandbaba replied, “It has been a tradition to thank Shri Indra, who graces rain, which grows crops. That is why we live happily.”

Hearing this, Shri Krishna pointed out that the cause of man’s happiness and misery are his karmas, and Paramatma gives the fruits of his karmas accordingly. He added, “Since we are forest dwellers, *pujan* of this Mount Govardhan, the cows and Brahmins, is greater than Indra’s puja.” He then commanded everyone, “From now onwards, fodder shall be offered to cows and food to Govardhan” (Bhagvatam 10/25). Everyone accepted his injunction. Through Govardhan, Paramatma then availed of all the food offered. When Indra discovered that instead of him, *pujan* was offered to Govardhan in Gokul, he was enraged and deluged Gokul with rain, to destroy it. However to demonstrate Paramatma’s power, Shri Krishna raised Mt. Govardhan merely with his little finger. This sheltered the residents and cows of Gokul underneath.

The underlying sentiment of this episode is that mundane factors such as house, wealth, mountain, trees or earth, in themselves do not have the power to protect us. Only Bhagwan Purushottam has the power to deliver us. Relative to his powers, that of the lesser deities pale into insignificance. Therefore it is better to accept *sharanagati* (refuge) of Purushottam and offer him *pujan*.

Over the ages, these sentiments have been consolidated by offering Govardhan Puja. This is also known as Annakut. *Anna* means food and *kut*, mountain (Vishnu Puran 5.11.5.25).

Importance

This auspicious day represents joy and happiness during the whole year. In the Mahabharat, Bhagwan Veda Vyas reveals to Yudhishtir:

“O Yudhishtir, on this day of *padvo* (first day of lunar month), the person who remains joyous will experience happiness throughout the

year. One who remains miserable will experience misery the whole year.”

By first offering sumptuous foods to Paramatma on this day, devotees thank him. Therein they pray that through the whole year, they are blessed with his grace.

New Year’s Day signifies beginning the year afresh. By obeying the commands of Paramatma and the Gunatit Sadhu, devotees receive a new, edifying direction to live life contentedly and blissfully during the New Year.

Rituals

- Early in the morning children visit people’s homes with salt cubes (*sabras*) as a ritual of auspiciousness. The previous night, some people actually request neighbouring children to visit them the next morning with *sabras*.
- People go to mandirs for Paramatma’s darshan.
- People greet each other by saying ‘*Saal Mubarak*’.
- In all mandirs, Annakut is offered to the deities on this day. A vast array of vegetarian foods is traditionally arranged in tiers or steps, in front of Bhagwan. The sweets are placed nearest to Bhagwan. As the tiers descend, other foods such as *dal* (curry), vegetables, pulses and fried savoury foods are arranged. A mound of cooked rice, symbolic of Mt. Govardhan, is placed in the centre.

The Swaminarayan Sampraday celebrates festivals and observes modes of worship stipulated by Vitthalnathji, son of Vallabhacharya, founder of Pushti Marg Vaishnavism.

In BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs, sadhus begin to arrange the Annakut in the morning and finish before noon. Sadhus then sing *thal* kirtans composed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s poet *paramhansas*. These kirtans list and glorify the food items in an aesthetic, rhythmic and pleasant manner, praying to Bhagwan to accept

them. The singing lasts for about an hour. This is followed by a grand *arti*.

The Annakut is left for darshan for the devotees till evening, and then the food is removed. The *prasad* of sweets and dry foodstuffs is then distributed.

BHAI BIJ (KARTIK SUD 2)

Bhai and *bhratru* mean ‘brother’ and *bij* means two. The second day of the New Year, Kartik *sud* 2 is known as *Bhai bij*, *Yamdvitiya* or *Bhratru dvitiya*.

Origin

Once Yamunaji, the manifest form of River Yamuna, invited her brother Yamaraja and his attendants to have a meal at her home. However, work prevented him from accepting her invitation. Finally on Kartik *sud* 2, he visited her. She welcomed him warmly by performing his *pujan* with sandalwood paste, exotic perfumes and rich garments. She then served him sumptuous food in a golden plate.

After the meal, Yamaraja reciprocated his sibling love by gifting her expensive garments. He then requested her to ask him for a boon. She asked, “Every year on this day you should have a meal in my home. You should also release all those who are in Yamapuri (Hell). And to those who have food at their sister’s home on this day, you should grant happiness.”

Granting her boon, Yamaraja replied, “Those who bathe in the Yamuna, appease the *pitrus* (ancestors), have food at their sister’s home and perform her *pujan*, will not arrive at my gates.”

Sentiments

By serving food to her brother, a sister strengthens her sibling bond. Therein she also blesses him with health and longevity. As for her, the shastras ordain that she shall not become a widow. Those who do not eat at their sister’s home on this day lose all the *punya* accumulated during the past year and experience misery. Those

who do not have a sister, may have a meal at a cousin’s house or that of a friend’s sister.

LABH PANCHAM (KARTIK SUD 5)

Pancham and *panchmi* mean five. The final festival during the Diwali period is Labh Pancham, on Kartik *sud* 5. It is also known as Lakheni Panchmi and Saubhagya Panchmi.

Rituals

Those who have not performed Sharda Pujan on Diwali, perform *pujan* of their new ledgers (*chopda*) today and ritually open their shops and businesses. In the days following Diwali, including today, people visit friends and relatives, to renew solidarity. Sweets and other items are offered to guests, symbolizing ‘sweetening’ of relations.

Import

Labh means benefit. People today usually wish for material *labh* such as a good job, good in-laws, riches and so forth. Yet the shastras and sadhus inform us that the greatest *labh* is human birth itself. With this one should endeavour to realize Paramatma. Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has revealed the glory of associating with sadhus (*sant samagam*) in his Swamini Vato:

“If one possesses as many *chintamanis* – wish-fulfilling gems, as there are stones, and as many *kalpavrukshes* – wishing trees, as there are trees on Mt. Girnar, even then one would be better off burning them in order to do *sant samagam*.”

The Diwali period, then, is a quest for inner enlightenment. It is an occasion to eradicate one’s inner darkness, by renouncing any addictions, bad habits and *swabhavs* (base instincts) by obeying the *dharmashastras*, the Shikshapatri and the Gunatit Guru – the sadhu who has realized Bhagwan. One then becomes *brahmarup* and is subsequently graced with the ultimate enlightenment of realizing Parabrahma.



The Māndukya Upanishad

Precepts on the Ultimate State of the Ātmā

INTRODUCTION

The Māndukya Upanishad is contained within the Atharva Veda. This Upanishad is recited in the Māndukya Shākhā of the Atharva Veda, hence it is known as the 'Māndukya Upanishad'. Smaller, in size, than the other principle Upanishads, this Upanishad contains only twelve mantras. These twelve mantras are divided into four *khandas* (sections).



everything' (Māndukya Upanishad: 1/1). The same statement is then repeated using the word Brahman instead of Akshar. 'सर्वं ह्येतद् ब्रह्म' – '*Sarvam hyetad Brahma*' – 'Everything is pervaded by Aksharbrahman' (Māndukya Upanishad: 1/2).

Thus the all-pervasiveness of Aksharbrahman has been stated. The main reason for

stating this is to reiterate *brahmadrashti*

– realizing Brahman in everything. '*Sarvam*' means everything. If everything is pervaded by Brahman, then this includes all *ātmās*. Therefore they are *brahmarup* or *aksharrup*. This is a lofty principle on the path of spiritual endeavours. The same principle is then revealed again in clear words: 'अयमात्मा ब्रह्म' – '*Ayamātmā Brahma*' – 'This *jivātmā* is the form of Aksharbrahman' (Māndukya Upanishad: 1/2).

Thus it has been established that one must identify the *ātmā* as being *brahmarup*. A wonderful method to rouse this sense of being *brahmarup*. To realize one's *ātmā* as being *brahmarup*, one must first know it to be separate from the three bodies (causal, subtle and physical) and the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep). These bodies and states are ties which have clung to

THE PRECEPTS

In order to perform the true *upāsanā* and bhakti of Parabrahman, one must attain knowledge of one's *ātmā*, one must become *brahmarup*. This Upanishad gives simple precepts on the knowledge of *ātmā* and on awakening the sense of being *brahmarup* by associating with Aksharbrahman.

IDENTIFYING THE ĀTMĀ TO BE BRAHMARUP

One must know the glory of Brahman in order to become *brahmarup*. Hence, this Upanishad commences with a description of the greatness of Brahman. 'ॐ इत्येतदक्षरमिदं सर्वम्' – '*Aum ityeta daksharamidam sarvam*' – 'Akshar, whose glory has been sung by the word *aum*, pervades

the *ātmā*. In this Upanishad, the main message is to be aware of one's *ātmā* as *brahmarup*, separate from the three states. To develop the understanding that 'I am separate from the three states' one must first know the three states, only then is it possible to realize one's *jivātmā* to be *brahmarup*, above those three states. Therefore this Upanishad first describes the three states of the *jivātmā*, and after that, it describes the fourth state of the *jivātmā*, above the foresaid three, that of *brāhmisthiti* (the *brāhmic* state). Thus, here, with the words 'सोऽयमात्मा चतुष्पात्' – 'So'yamātmā chatushpāt' (Māndukya Upanishad: 2/1), the *jivātmā* has been described as being of four states (*chātushpāt*).

Let us take a look at these four states.

THE FIRST STATE: THE WAKING STATE

The waking state is described first, 'जागरितस्थानो बहिष्प्रज्ञः सप्तांग एकोनविंशतिमुखः स्थूलभृग् वैश्वानरः प्रथमः पादः' – 'Jāgaritasthāno bahishpragnaha saptānga ekonavinshatimukhaha sthoolabhug vaishvānaraha prathamaha pādaha' (Māndukya Upanishad: 2/1). This implies that when the *jivātmā* knows (*pragnaha*) the outer objects (*bahihi*) such as sound, touch, taste, smell and form, it is said to be in the waking state. In this waking state, the *jivātmā* experiences a variety of pleasures prominently using nineteen organs (*ekonavinshatimukhaha sthoolabhug*), namely: the five sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin; the five organs of action – the hands, feet, mouth, anus, and genitals; the five *prānas* (vital breaths); and the four inner organs – the mind, intellect, *chitt* and *ahamkar*. For example, when we are awake, to see with our eyes, to hear with our ears, to walk with our feet, to do something with our hands, in fact, whatever we do consciously are all actions of the waking state. In this state we are completely conscious of our physical bodies. Moreover, in the waking state, the *jivātmā* has been called '*vaishvānaraha*' by this Upanishad because in this state the *jivātmā* is able to experience all

outer objects (*vishva*). For this very reason, it is also known by names like '*vishva*' and '*vishvābhimāni*'.

In this way, the waking state, which is connected with the physical body, has been described as the first state.

THE SECOND STATE: THE DREAM STATE

'स्वप्नस्थानोऽन्तःप्रज्ञः प्रविविक्तभृक् तैजसो द्वितीयः पादः' – 'Svapnasthāno'ntahpragnaha praviviktabhuk taijaso dviteeyaha pādaha' (Māndukya Upanishad: 2/2). The state in which the sleeping *jivātmā* does not know (*pragnaha*) the outer objects during the waking state, but knows the inner objects (*antaha*) – is the dream state. In this state, one is not conscious of the physical body. When we see a dream, neither the five organs of action nor the five sense organs are active, but the inner organs, like the mind and intellect, are active. In this state, the *jivātmā* experiences a variety of objects in the dream world (*praviviktabhuk*). Paramātmā is the creator of this entire dream world. The *jiva* has no control there. Paramātmā creates this dream world in order to make the *jiva* experience the fruits of its accumulated prior karmas. In this real dream state, the *jivātmā* experiences the fruits of a great many accumulated karmas in a very short time.

Although the eyes are closed and there is darkness, yet, in this dream state the *jivātmā* experiences a variety of objects as if they were alight and so it is called '*taijasaha*'.

In this way, the dream state, which is connected with the subtle body, has been described as the second state. Now the third state.

THE THIRD STATE: THE STATE OF DEEP SLEEP

'यत्र सुप्तो न कञ्चन कामं कामयते न कञ्चन स्वप्नं पश्यति तत् सुषुप्तम्' – 'Yatra supto na kanchana kāmam kāmayate na kanchana svapnanm pashyati tat sushuptam' (Māndukya Upanishad: 2/3). This is the state in which not just the sense organs,

but the mind also rests. Moreover, that state in which absolutely no desires or wishes can occur like they do in the waking state, and in which even dreams cannot be seen is called deep sleep. Deep sleep means the state of being completely asleep. This occurs when a person is in intense sleep. At that time, he does not attain any outer knowledge. Even dreams cannot be seen within. Thus, in this state, rather than the physical or subtle body, it is the causal body that is prominent. In this state, by the wish of Paramātmā, the *jivātmā*, which is the form of knowledge, is absorbed in a fraction of the bliss of Pradhān-Purush. In this state of deep sleep, the *jivātmā*, residing as the form of knowledge, is known as '*prāgna*'.

In this way, the third state of deep sleep has been described.

Thus the three states of the *jivātmā* have been described. Purushottam Parabrahman Shri Swaminarayan has also given a detailed yet simple explanation of these very three states in Vachanamrut Sarangpur 6.

The main reason for describing these three states is to explain the unity with Brahman who is above these three states, and to attain the *brāhmic* state. Therefore, identification with that Brahman, i.e., the *brāhmic* state itself, has been described as the fourth state.

THE FOURTH STATE:

THE ĀTMĀ AS BRAHMARUP

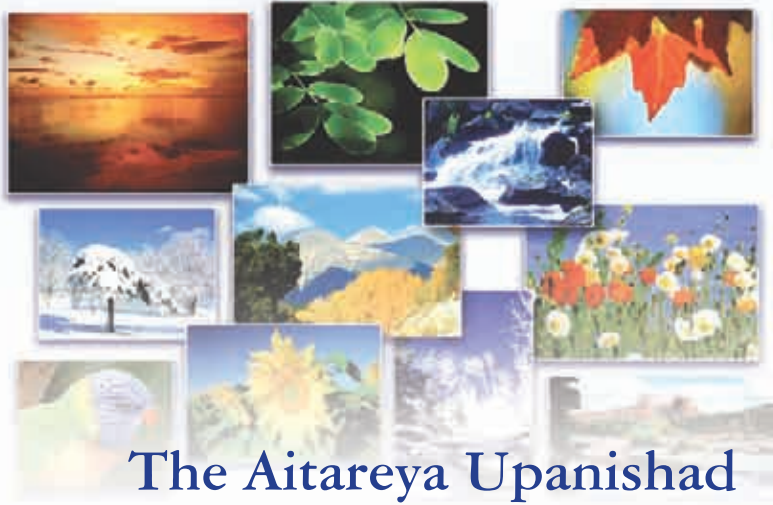
‘नान्तःप्रज्ञं न बहिःप्रज्ञं नोभायतःप्रज्ञं न प्रज्ञनघनं न प्रज्ञं नाऽप्रज्ञम्’ – '*Nāntahpragnam na bahihpragnam nobhāyatahpragnam na pragnadhanam na pragnam nā'pragnam*' (Māndukya Upanishad: 2/5). This means that there is a fourth state which can neither be called the waking state, nor the dream state, nor even the state of deep sleep. This state is distinct and superior to these three. In this state, the *jivātmā* has attained the sense of unity with Aksharbrahman, i.e., has become *brahmarup* – ‘ऐकात्म्यप्रत्ययसारम्’ – '*Eikātmīyapratyayasāram*' (Māndukya Upanishad:

2/5), as stated before in the mantra ‘अयमात्मा ब्रह्म’ – '*Ayamātmā Brahma*' (Māndukya Upanishad: 1/2). Moreover, ‘प्रपञ्चोपशमं शान्तं शिवमद्वैतं चतुर्थं मन्यन्ते स आत्मा विज्ञेयः’ – '*Prapanchopashamam shāntam shivamadvaitam chaturtham manyante sa ātmā vigneaya*' (Māndukya Upanishad: 2/5), that is, on attaining this state all illusions of *māyā* and infatuation with the world dissolve and *māyā* is overcome (*prapanchopashamam*). The *jivātmā* becomes tranquil (*shāntam*). The *jivātmā* becomes divine (*shivam*). In this way, the *brahmagnāni* (one who knows Brahman) considers the *jivātmā* that has attained qualities like (*advaitam*) with Aksharbrahman to be the fourth state (*chaturtha manyante*). Thus, the Brahmic state has been described as the fourth state, above the waking, dream and deep sleep states.

THE FRUITS OF THE BRĀHMIC STATE

Finally, to conclude, the Māndukya Upanishad ends by informing us of the benefits that one who has acquired the *brāhmic* state attains: ‘संविशत्यात्मनाऽऽत्मानं य एवं वेद’ – '*Sanvishatyātmnā'ātmanam ya evam veda*' (Māndukya Upanishad: 4/1), i.e., one who recognizes one's *ātmā* as *brahmarup*, having attained qualities like Aksharbrahman as mentioned in this Upanishad, such a *brahmarup jivātmā* is permeated by Paramātmā; that is, it forever realizes the form of Paramātmā.

Thus, this Māndukya Upanishad gives us the remarkable liberating precept of recognizing one's *ātmā* to be *brahmarup*, above the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep, in order to realize Paramātmā. ♦



The Aitareya Upanishad

Acquaintance of the Essence of Creation

Introduction

The Aitareya Upanishad is contained in the Rig Veda. Because it is encompassed in the 'Aitareya' Āranyaka of the Rig Veda, it is called the Aitareya Upanishad. This Upanishad is spread across three *adhyāyas* (chapters). The first *adhyāya* has three *khandas* (sections), the second and third *adhyāyas* have one *khandā* each. This Upanishad has become especially renowned in the philosophical world for its unique clarifications on philosophical matters.

THE FIRST ADHYĀYA

The creator of the entire world

Who is the cause of creation? Who is the creator? Who is the controller? Who is the nurturer? These and other enquires have been settled decisively in this Upanishad. With the words 'स ईक्षत लोकान् सृजा इति' – 'Sa eekshata lokānnu srujā iti' (Aitareya Upanishad: 1/1). Thus, Parabrahman has been clearly shown as the cause, creator, controller and nurturer of the entire creation. 'Eekshata' means he wished. At the time that the world we see around us did not exist, and everything was dissolved in a subtle form in *mahāmāyā*, Parabrahman himself, out of compassion, had a divine wish, 'Lokānnu srujā iti' – 'Let me create a variety of worlds which are

appropriate for the *jivas* and *ishwars* to experience the fruits of their karmas.' Thereafter, 'स इमान् लोकान् असृजत' – 'Sa imān lokān asrujata' (Aitareya Upanishad: 1/1) from *māyā*, Parabrahman created this variety of worlds and places of experience. Thus, the entire grandeur of Paramātmā, the creator of all the worlds, has been sung here.

The Creator of the World-Carers

'स ईक्षत। इमे नु लोका लोकपालान् सृजा इति' – 'Sa ikshata, ime nu lokā lokapālānnu srujā iti' (Aitareya Upanishad: 1/1). Just as Paramātmā has created various worlds, he has also created the world-carers who can control and nurture those worlds. That is he gives them a suitable body by which they are capable of controlling those worlds. This has been explained here, and furthermore, a detailed description of the creation of the body and organs of those world-carers, and of the method of occupation of the deities who rule over those organs has also been given.

The Provider for the World-Carers

Compassionate Paramātmā has created a variety of places as well as world-carers to look after those places. This Upanishad informs us that he is also concerned about nourishing them, 'स ईक्षतेमे नु लोकाश्च लोकपालाश्चाज्जमे यः सृजा इति' – 'Sa eekshateme nu lokāścha

lokapālāschā'nnamebhyaha srujā iti' (Aitareya Upanishad: 1/3). That Paramātmā desired to create food so that all these worlds and world-creators continue to be nourished. Food was created according to that wish, and all are nourished by that food.

Thus, the first *adhyāya* prominently explains matters such as Paramātmā creating the worlds appropriate for the *jīvas* and *ishwars* to experience the fruits of their karmas; and also creating the world-carers of those worlds; and creating food for their life-long nourishment.

THE SECOND ADHYĀYA

Creation of the human body

The main subject of the second *adhyāya* is the creation of the human body. It gives a clear presentation of how the *jīvātmā* attains a human body by Paramātmā's inspiration. The discrimination between the body and *ātmā* is automatically understood by this description. Thereafter, there is a description of what happens to the *jīvātmā* after its life-span in this body is over. This Upanishad states that the person who lacks *brahmavidyā* has to repeatedly wander in the miserable cycle of births and deaths, and those that imbibe *brahmavidyā* attain Akshardham and experience the bliss of Paramātmā.

THE THIRD ADHYĀYA

The Upāsana of Parabrahman

The first two *adhyāyas* describe the grandeur of Paramātmā well. The third *adhyāya* then instructs us to perform the *upāsana* of Parabrahman with knowledge of his greatness. The Upanishad says, 'येन पश्यति येन वा शृणोति येन वा गन्धान् जिघ्रति येन वा वाचं व्याकरोति येन वा स्वादु चाऽस्वादु विजानाति' – '*Yena pashyati yena vā shrinoti yena vā gandhān jighrati yena vā vācham vyākaroti yena vā svādu chā'svādu vijānāti*' – 'One should perform the *upāsana* of Paramātmā, by whose inspiration the *ātmā* can see via the eyes, hear via the ears, smell fragrances via the nose, speak words via the tongue, and know good and bad tastes' (Aitareya Upanishad: 3/1). If we did not have this body or these organs, then what could we do? We would not be able to perform any

endeavours for liberation. Kindhearted Paramātmā has compassionately given us all of this. He has given us a body, he has given us organs and he has poured strength into those organs. He has made everything convenient. Therefore, let us perform his *upāsana*, please him and attain liberation. This has been stated here forcefully.

Brahman Perception

In order to understand the full glory of Parabrahman, and in order to do his *upāsana* appropriately, one must become *aksharup*, one must be engulfed in the sense of being like Brahman, and for this very reason, one must know Aksharbrahman. This is the essence of the whole of Vedanta. Therefore, this Upanishad has indicated the *pragnān* form of Aksharbrahman with the words 'प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म' – '*Pragnānam Brahma*' (Aitareya Upanishad: 3/3). Moreover, 'यदेतद् हृदयं मनश्चैतत् ... सर्वाण्येतानि प्रज्ञानस्य नामधेयानि भवन्ति' – '*Yadetad hrudayam manaschaitat ... sarvānyetāni pragnānasya nāmadheyāni bhavanti*' – 'This heart, mind, etc. of ours – whatever we have – are all names of *pragnāna* Brahman' (Aitareya Upanishad: 3/2), that is, they are all pervaded by Aksharbrahman. Thus, we have been instructed to perceive everything as Brahman.

The Divine Fruits

This Upanishad then concludes by informing us of the fruits that one who becomes *brahmarup* and performs the *upāsana* of Parabrahman with knowledge of his greatness attains. 'अमृतः समभवत्' – '*Amrutaha samabhavat*' (Aitareya Upanishad: 3/4). Such a person attains divine Akshardhām and is released from the cycles of birth and death.

In this way, by calling Paramātmā the cause, creator, controller and nurturer of creation the Aitareya Upanishad tells us that he is the essence of creation. We should perform the *upāsana* of that Paramātmā. In order for that *upāsana* to be complete and free of hindrances we should adorn our *ātmās* with a sense of being like Brahman, and thus attain ultimate liberation. By explaining such principles this Upanishad has given us a clear view of the path to liberation. ♦

To Exist Is to Change



The Stark and the Subtle

I am not the same person I was five years ago. I am not the same person I was even a week ago. Time is forever moving and with it we are forever changing.

The relationship between ‘time’ and ‘change’ is abstract. Sometimes an hour can feel like a day. Sometimes more is accomplished in a day than in an entire month. Sometimes change that takes place in six months can exceed change that has occurred over the past 23 years. The latter I speak from personal experience.

For six months, I was humbled to partake in a *seva* opportunity at Delhi Akshardham that allowed for change beyond anything I have experienced before. For six months I had the opportunity to focus solely on personal and spiritual growth. No college exams to worry about. No work assignments to focus on. No family obligations. Although I knew these factors were not exempt from my life, they were in the backseat for now, enabling me to steer myself down the path less travelled.

External change was starkly evident from the moment I stepped onto Indian soil. It had only been three years since my last visit to India, and yet I could barely recognize her. The pace was

faster. The streets more crowded. The sun felt hotter and the fans seemed slower. The noise, deafening. The street animals, more prominent. My senses were in immediate overload. Yet, over time, this external change became wonderfully rhythmic. It was the constant tune of my day. The cause of such transformation? A steady change in perception. I waved farewell to my cultural myopia and embraced my external surroundings. This was a break-through moment. Once this barrier to entry was dismantled, I was finally able to see the exceptional beauty in the cultural variances. By opening myself up to change externally, I was able to achieve an even more exhilarating permanent change, internally.

Internal change was subtle and gradual. With the external environment so vivid and pulsating, I was unconscious of the quiet change that was taking place within me. This change did not become apparent until I read old emails and saw old video clips. I could barely recognize myself in either. My thought process had changed. My emotions were more controlled. I approached *seva* with a new zeal and ideology. I was happier. And whenever sorrow or frustration came to visit, I had a new consciousness within to help pull me out of the negative mindset. I knew these were

positive changes. But I wanted to work towards a *permanent* change. I wanted a strong, unshakeable foundation to build upon my *satsang* growth. So, no matter how variable the external environment continued to be, the internal change would remain constant and always point due north.

But how did such an internal change come about? What was the catalyst for such a change? Questions I asked myself one day in deep contemplation. I could only conclude one answer: observing the *sevaks* and devotees around me. Interacting with these devotees was my greatest revelation.

Which then brings us to the next obvious question, how exactly did the interaction with devotees contribute to this internal change? For this, I have no tangible reply. An unsatisfying answer, I know. Although I can neither quantify the internal change nor its root cause, I can try shedding some light on the matter with an example.

Revelation

Nine-thirty on a typical New Delhi, summer morning – I was sweating profusely. Wrapped in my *oodni*, I hoped to threaten the sun into submission, of course to no avail. I found a patch of shade and proceeded to wait for Aunt and Uncle. After weeks of trying to get our schedules to align, I was finally able to accept their invitation to come visit them at their home. From my temporary residence at Delhi Akshardham, it is only a five-minute rickshaw ride to their home in Pandav Nagar, twenty minutes by foot.

I did not have to wait long. I saw Uncle walking in the distance, making his way to meet me by my shady patch. He took one look at my predicament – huddled in a corner, head covered, in a bath of sweat – and suggested we take a rickshaw to his home. I protested. Aunt and Uncle make the 20 minute journey twice a day, Aunt carrying her young son on her hip. If they could walk, I was capable as well. But, he called the rickshaw anyway and I couldn't help

but let out a sigh of relief as I sat under the cool protection of its hood.

The rickshaw made its way through the narrow gullies of Pandav Nagar – a community that would puzzle any urban planner. Our rickshaw stopped at a five-storey home. I commented at how beautiful their home was, but Uncle was on his mobile, letting Aunt know we had just arrived. As we walked through the door, I met Aunt and her son. She navigated me to the stairs and we walked up four flights of stairs – Aunt carrying her son, Uncle with groceries in both hands, and me holding a small purse. I was the only one with a minor asthma attack by the time we reached the fourth floor.

I commented again at how beautiful their home was. Aunt laughed and said this entire building isn't ours; we live on the fourth floor. I looked around. The fourth floor was nice. An open porch area. Good space for her son to play. No, no, Aunt proclaimed. We don't own this floor. We rent a room on this floor. She walked me over to her home and my mouth dropped. The room was smaller than my freshman year dorm room in college. There were two beds, a small stove and a cabinet for their clothes. They shared a refrigerator and bathroom with another family. I recalled all the times Aunt had brought me my favorite food and snacks at Akshardham. How she had urged me to wear her *chanya chori* during a *samaiya utsav*. Little did I know about their financial situation at that time – that they currently were living on one person's income. And within these circumstances, and the fact that they had a young son to nurture, she had taken me in as a daughter with such joy and care.

On this particular summer day, it just so happened to be Ekadashi. Aunt offered me fresh fruit, homemade *sabudana ni sev* and *kesar* milk, the latter, a luxury for any home. We just sat for hours – talking, laughing, and sharing moments from our lives. I basked in their warmth, so moved by their hospitality. But hospitality is the wrong word. You use that word for people you rarely see

or meet only once. Uncle and Auntie had become kin. They didn't concern themselves with the fact that I would be leaving soon. That perhaps, we wouldn't be able to keep in touch due to the long distance. That perhaps, we might not see each other again for years to come. In the moment, we were family and that was all that mattered.

Delightfully Challenging

Imbibing the positive qualities from people and applying them to oneself is a practical piece of advice that we often hear in *katha*. My time here in India has made me privy to the qualities of so many '*mala na manka*' devotees. I have seen how devotees perform *seva* and what it means to truly be a *sevak*. I have felt the touch of humility and compassion up-close. I have heard *prasangs* and *katha* that have awakened my mind to a new understanding of *satsang* and the Satpurush. Obviously, such experiences could probably be ascertained outside of India. But there is something unique about this *bhumi* and its people. There is a warmth and vibrancy that I haven't felt elsewhere. *Satsang* in such an environment, and that too focused *satsang* for six months, has been an amazing experience.

Nevertheless, such an experience is not without its challenges.

Each person is raised in a specific environmental framework which becomes familiar and comforting. Take a person outside of this secure environment, and there is bound to be a temporary period of disorientation.

The first couple of months were an adjustment period. There were of course the basic environmental differences ranging from extreme differences in weather to the lack of instant hot water or a shower head. There is the development of heuristics in learning to use a striker to ignite a stove or figuring out how to keep your white clothes sparkling clean without a washing machine. There is a change in diet. Lunch is dinner and dinner becomes lunch. Then there are more acute differences such as culture

variations. Having been raised amidst simple luxuries such as hopping into a car and moving about freely, there was a loss of certain personal freedoms due to language differences, variations in gender expectations, and lack of specific skill-sets such as knowing how to drive on the streets of India. Then wrap all these new experiences in the sphere of *satsang*, in which 24/7 you are doing *seva* outside of your accustomed comfort zone. It can be overwhelming at first, particularly because this is not a social-work, grassroots-level service opportunity. This is *seva* in a *satsang* context. It is spiritual in nature and deeply personal. Additionally, there is a micro and macro picture to consider – what you say and how you behave not only leaves an impression of you as a person, but also shapes people's pre-conceived notions of *satsang* outside of India.

So it's like living in a pressure cooker for a while. But like any normal, functioning pressure cooker, the whistle blows and the steam is released. The result? Food is cooked in minutes rather than the hours it would have taken over an open flame. Similarly, my time in India had its moments of extreme pressure, but the process of internal change that occurred in six months has been more gratifying than change I have felt in the last 23 years. Above all, the intensity of living and working outside of my comfort zone was *delightfully* challenging because of the bigger purpose – to mould one's attitude and mindset with the desire to gain the *rajipo* of the Satpurush.

Thus, I am eternally grateful to Swamishri, whose *daya* – compassion – has allowed for this journey of personal and spiritual change from which I am continuously learning.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's

VICHARAN

11 July to 31 August 2009

Bochasan, Atladra, Ahmedabad



Balaks lead Swamishri from the mandir to his morning puja, Atladra



Balaks perform a traditional welcome dance in the Sunday assembly, Ahmedabad

11-29 July: Bochasan

29 July-18 August: Atladra (Vadodara)

18 - 31 August: Ahmedabad

21 July, Bochasan

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Nilkanth Varni (*abhishek murti*) for the mandirs in Nairobi and Kisumu in Kenya.

22 July, Bochasan

Swamishri arrived in the assembly hall at 6.00 a.m. to eugage himself in bhajan and discourses during the solar eclipse. Thousands of devotees had arrived from many villages and towns. Krishnapriya Swami discoursed in his inimitable humorous style. Viveksagar Swami also delivered a discoursed with reference to the occasion. After the eclipse concluded at 7.22 a.m. Swamishri had his bath and performed puja in his room.

23 July, Bochasan

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* puja and *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar Purushottam Maharaj (made of marble), Shri Ghanshyam

Maharaj (on canvas) and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev (canvas) and Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji (marble) for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Nikol, a suburb of Ahmedabad. Thereafter Swamishri blessed the devotees of Nikol.

2 August, Sunday, Atladra

The day was celebrated as 'Prapti Day'. Sadhus and youths sang bhajans related to *prapti* – the divine joy of having attained God and his God-realized Sadhu.

In the evening Sunday *satsang* assembly Viveksagar Swami delivered a discourse. Then children and youths performed a welcome dance before Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. A drama on *prapti*, written by Yogendra Swami, was enacted by youths. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "If one has attained God and realized his divine happiness then one finds material happiness to be fleeting. Real happiness lies in God, in doing his bhajan. Happiness lies in spiritual association with the God-realized Sadhu. Mira found happiness in God's bhajan but not in

the pleasures of her palace and opulence. The same happened to Narsinh Mehta. Parvatibhai and Govardhanbhai were also such devotees in the time of Shriji Maharaj. They were joyous because of their association with God. God has given us intelligence therefore we should contemplate on this subject, but not remain immersed in worldly happiness.”

9 August, Sunday, Atladra

The day was dedicated as ‘Children’s Day’. Children sang bhajans during Swamishri’s morning puja.

In the evening Sunday *satsang* assembly 3,000 BAPS children were present. Children performed a traditional dance, delivered discourses in the *parayan* format and enacted a short drama ‘Bhimnath na ranka’. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “If one receives values from a young age then one becomes good. With the prevailing atmosphere in society it seems that values are hard to imbibe, but Yogiji Maharaj was far-sighted. He knew that in future people would lose their values, forget the path of *moksha* and find it hard to study well. So we should be thankful to Yogiji Maharaj (for establishing the Bal *Mandal*).

“Be honest but never speak lies. Never copy during exams. Bow down to one’s parents. Secure a first class in exams. Do not eat outside food. Perform five *malas* daily and pray to God.”

The next day, prior to performing daily puja, Swamishri initiated about 500 children into Satsang by giving the *vartman* mantra.

14 August, Friday, Atladra, Janmashtmi

The evening celebration assembly was interlaced with speeches and dance. Aksharvatsal Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Tyagvallabh Swami spoke about the divine life of Bhagwan Shri Krishna. BAPS teenagers performed a lively traditional dance based on the bhajan “*Govinda ālā re...*”, describing Krishna’s pastime as a

child. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands. Finally at 9.40 p.m. Swamishri blessed the assembly, “We celebrate such festivals because of our devotion to God, to please him, to experience his divine bliss and to attain his divine abode. To listen and remember his divine incidents is also a means to attain *moksha*. When we attain God and his realized Sadhu we experience inner peace. Material things or pleasures do not provide inner peace, but cause turmoil.”

Swamishri concluded his blessings at 10.00 p.m. and performed *arti*. Thereafter he devotionally rocked Thakorji in a decorated *hindolo* amidst the singing of “*Nand gher ānand bhayo...*”.

15 August, Saturday, Atladra

On India’s 62nd Independence Day celebration Tyagvallabh Swami unfurled the Indian flag. Then the entire congregation sang the national anthem. A one-day camp was arranged for all *kishores* and *kishoris*. About 3,500 teenagers had assembled in the mandir precincts. Swamishri was garlanded on the occasion and blessed all with his darshan.

16 August, Sunday, Atladra

In the evening Sunday *satsang* assembly Viveksagar Swami concluded his discourses on the life of Muktanand Swami from the Harililamrut. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands. Then a drama “A Super Mall of Peace”, written by Yogendra Swami, was enacted by students of Akshar Purushottam Chhatralay (APC). Finally, Swami blessed the assembly, “We will do many things in this world and listen to all worldly talks, but they will not give us peace within. The more we see things of this world, the more they lead to distress and misery. Our shastras say that all worldly things cause delusion. But we rejoice in acquiring and indulging in them. But it is all due to our ignorance. Till we attain true knowledge and enlightenment, that all this is destructible and fleeting, we cannot get inner peace.”

23 August, Sunday, Ahmedabad

The evening Sunday *satsang* assembly commenced in the mandir assembly hall. Fourteen thousand devotees had congregated for the assembly. Viveksagar Swami discoursed on the Harilalpataru. Thereafter Swamishri was welcomed and honoured with garlands. Children performed a welcome dance and thereafter sadhus sang a bhajan, “*Sahajānand sindhu re...*” Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Till we do not realize the glory of God we remain spiritually poor. After attaining God and Satsang our poverty vanishes. We may go through thick and thin in life because this world is full of misery. But on realizing the glory and greatness of Shriji Maharaj we will remain mentally stable. So do not worry about the ups and downs in life. Remember God.”

31 August, Monday, Ahmedabad; Jal Jhilani Celebration

Prior to his morning puja Swamishri came for darshan of Thakorji in the mandir. Devotees or *ochhaviyas* were singing traditional bhajans beneath the mandir dome. To celebrate Jal Jhilani Thakorji was placed in a boat in a small pond of water. Swamishri steered Thakorji’s boat with a remote control console. Then Swamishri did darshan of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, seated in a boat revolving in another pond of water. Thereafter Swamishri responded to the *ochhaviya* devotees

singing bhajans. Then Swamishri performed his daily puja in the assembly hall, and celebrated the Jal Jhilani festival. In all, five *artis* were performed of Thakorji by children, teenagers, volunteers, and devotees and senior sadhus. After each *arti* Thakorji was placed in a remote controlled boat and steered in the makeshift pond. The fifth and final *arti* was performed by Swamishri. Then Swamishri steered Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a small boat while sadhus sang festive bhajans. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Due to your love and devotion God has made everything conducive for celebrating the Jal Jhilani festival. Shriji Maharaj has said that ‘without my wish a dry leaf cannot move’. Whatever inspiration we get, and whatever we are able to do is because of God’s wish. He is the all-doer. We must have a strong conviction with regards to this. As a result of having such faith we experience happiness and inner peace. Sometimes we think that if God is the all-doer then why does he give us misery. The answer reason is to remove our ego. God does good of all. We must accept both happiness and pain in our stride.”

Finally, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. ◆

*Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas*

(contd. from p. 15)

The man who lost it came the next day. He was worried and was looking for the bag. I asked him whether he was looking for the bag. He said he was.

On enquiry he told me that there were Rs. 108,000 in cash, a sari worth Rs. 22,000 and golden ornaments worth over Rs. 100,000.

Then I showed him the bag, asking him to check in my presence whether it contained everything. It did. So, he was very pleased to find it in tact.

He asked me why I did not take anything from it.

So, I told him, “I have just Rs.100 at home. Only that can make me happy. Your money cannot make me happy in any way. On another occasion, I had found a gold chain. I could not find the owner, so I threw it away. Only honesty can bring happiness. I make a living by putting in labour and I am happy about it.”

I then told him that it was all thanks to Pramukh Swami Maharaj that my family is happy. I am satisfied with what I get through my own efforts. ◆

Living with SWAMISHRI

UNDERSTANDING A DEVOTEE'S LETTER 23 July 2009, Bochasan

As part of his daily routine Swamishri was reading letters from devotees. After reading one Swamishri said that he could not understand what the devotee had written. He then placed it on one side and attended to the rest. After finishing them Swamishri took the letter he had kept aside. He read it again and tried to understand what the issue was, but he could not make head or tail of it. Then Swamishri instructed Dharmacharan Swami to ring the devotee and tell him to write the letter again with appropriate details.

Swamishri responds to the enquiries and problems of devotees only after properly understanding them. His patience and resolve to understand and provide proper guidance is praiseworthy and inspiring.

DE-ADDICTION – A WAY TO PROGRESS 8 August 2009, Bochasan

During Swamishri's daily session with devotees and visitors a member of a rural development organization come to seek his blessings. The member was addicted to tobacco. Swamishri urged him, "Give up tobacco. By so doing, you will attain progress. In matters of development, de-addiction

should be a priority. When people give up addictions they will achieve progress. So, first you will have to give it up and then inspire others to do so."

THE ROADMAP OF LIFE 20 August 2009, Ahmedabad

An industrialist and his two sons came for Swamishri's darshan and blessings. Swamishri was acquainted with the industrialist's association with Satsang. He told him to strengthen his *satsang* from within. Then, on learning that one of his boys was going to America for higher studies, Swamishri asked where he would be staying.

"In Los Angeles."

"Study hard. We have a strong *satsang* following there. Attend the weekly Saturday or Sunday assembly." Swamishri inspired him further, "Maintain our values in life. Do not fall into the habit of addictions or immoral ways. And never forget to remember God daily."

Swamishri blessed him and revealed to him the roadmap of life.

* * *

LESSONS IN ETHICS

A youth who, due to *satsang*, had changed drastically from his former violent behaviour came to meet Swamishri. The youth was undergoing

satsang training at the Youth Training Centre in Sarangpur. Swamishri blessed him for mending his life and advised, “When you return home after your training don’t revert to your old ways. You should never bat a wrong thought. It would better to sustain one’s self on a dry *rotlo*. But to trouble others and take away whatever is theirs is not the right way. When you return home make sure you do not get influenced by bad company. Resolve never ever to tread that path again.”

Swamishri showered his blessings upon the youth for having reformed his wayward ways.

* * *

FORMULA FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A youth came to seek Swamishri’s blessings to successfully pass his IAS (Indian Administrative Service) exam. Swamishri blessed him, “To do so you’ll have to study very hard. Be alert that you do not fall into bad company. Refrain from seeing movies, give up watching television and do not wallow in laziness. By attending satsang and adhering to moral disciplines you will pass.”

* * *

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

A youth prayed to Swamishri, “Swami, my relatives are steeped in addictions. They do not heed my words. Please bless them for a change in life.” Swamishri told the youth, “On behalf of them do *mala* and pray to God. Do not lapse in your effort, Maharaj will help and there will be a change and peace shall prevail.”

REDEEMING A YOUTH FROM AN ADDICTION

21 August, Ahmedabad

A father brought his son before Swamishri. A senior sadhu introduced the youth, “Swami, he was formerly in Dubai, but because of his drinking habit he had to leave. Then he went to Qatar. There too, because of his habit, he had to leave.”

“But drinking is prohibited there, “Swamishri argued.

“Yes, but he used to acquire it illegally. That is why he had to leave the country. His health too has deteriorated.”

Swamishri asked the youth, “Do you want to

give up your addiction. What have you gained from it? You have lost your livelihood and now you are unemployed. Your children’s future is disturbed. Don’t you realize what has happened? Because of your habit your body has withered. Look at your children, how nice they are.”

The youth replied, “Swami, I ask for your blessings.”

“You have had my blessings since long, but if you observe moral disciplines only then will they materialize. Without following the *niyams* how will my blessings fructify? Do you have a *kanthi*?”

“Yes.”

“If that is so then you should refrain from drinking liquor. Only then will you be happy.”

Swamishri blessed the youth. The youth pledged to give up his addiction.

DISSOLVING DELUSION

27 August, Ahmedabad

Swamishri was introduced to a youth, “Swamiji, he has a lucrative job. But twenty days ago he had a little problem in one of his kidneys. The doctor performed a minor operation and it became normal. But after the operation the youth became scared. He has not slept for the past twenty days.”

Swamishri encouraged the youth, “What is the need to be scared? Right now you are standing before me, and there is nothing wrong with you. Don’t be scared. Chant Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan. Engage yourself in doing bhajan. God has protected you and is still there to look after you.”

The youth responded, “I think I’ll go mad soon!”

“Because you think so, your thoughts are revolving around it. Whenever you get such thoughts, chant Swaminarayan. Believe that nothing is wrong with you, do your work and chant God’s name.”

The youth replied, “But I simply cannot understand my thoughts.”

Swamishri advised, “You are in delusion. Believe that nothing has possessed you. Chant Swaminarayan and start doing your work. Everything will turn out fine.” ◆

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas

UK NATIONAL SHIBIRS 2009

Theme: Vachanamrut – His Word, Our Life

Warwick Conference Park

26 to 31 August 2009

From 26 to 31 August Warwick Conference Park hosted four UK National Shibirs in the presence of Doctor Swami. From 26 to 28 August over 500 *kishores* and *kishoris* participated. Then from 29 to 31 August, over 370 members of the Sanyukta Mandal, 450 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* and 220 *shishus*, *balaks* and *balikas* attended.

The shibirs featured discourses, speeches, audiovisual presentations, discussions, breakout sessions and question-answer sessions on the Vachanamrut and topics elaborating upon its history, authenticity, importance and modern-day relevance. Other topics included Bhagwan Swaminarayan's personality, the philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and incidents from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj narrating how he is the

living embodiment of the Vachanamrut.

For the *shishus* (children aged 4 to 8), *balaks* and *balikas* (children aged 9 to 14) the sessions were specially adapted to incorporate games and other fun activities and focused on Hindu shastras in general helping them to learn messages to imbibe at home and in school.

The delegates thoroughly enjoyed this *shibir* and all departed with a much richer appreciation of the Vachanamrut, its teachings, and its place in daily life. As one delegate shared: "I've understood by coming to this shibir why I need to read the Vachanamrut and have learnt how to read it, too." Another added: "I've been reading the Vachanamrut for many years, but this shibir has helped me to realise the wealth and depth of wisdom the Vachanamrut contains."



EUROPE KARYAKAR SHIBIR 2009

Theme: Ap Rijo Em Raji...

18 to 21 September 2009, Guincho, Cascais, Portugal

Over 100 *karyakars* from Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom gathered at Guincho Beach, in Cascais, Portugal, in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami for the second Europe Karyakar Shibir, between Friday 18 September and Monday 21 September.



The *shibir* featured spiritual guidance from Pujya Doctor Swami, other motivational speeches, question-and-answer sessions, interactive workshops, group discussions and multimedia presentations.

Everyone departed to their respective countries thoroughly motivated and spiritually charged.





JAL JHILANI CELEBRATION, 31 August 2009, Ahmedabad

Top: Swamishri uses the remote to operate the boat carrying Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (inset) in the small pond.

Bottom: Over 10,000 devotees attended the Jal Jhilani celebration assembly.



Swamishri in Ahmedabad, 17 September 2009