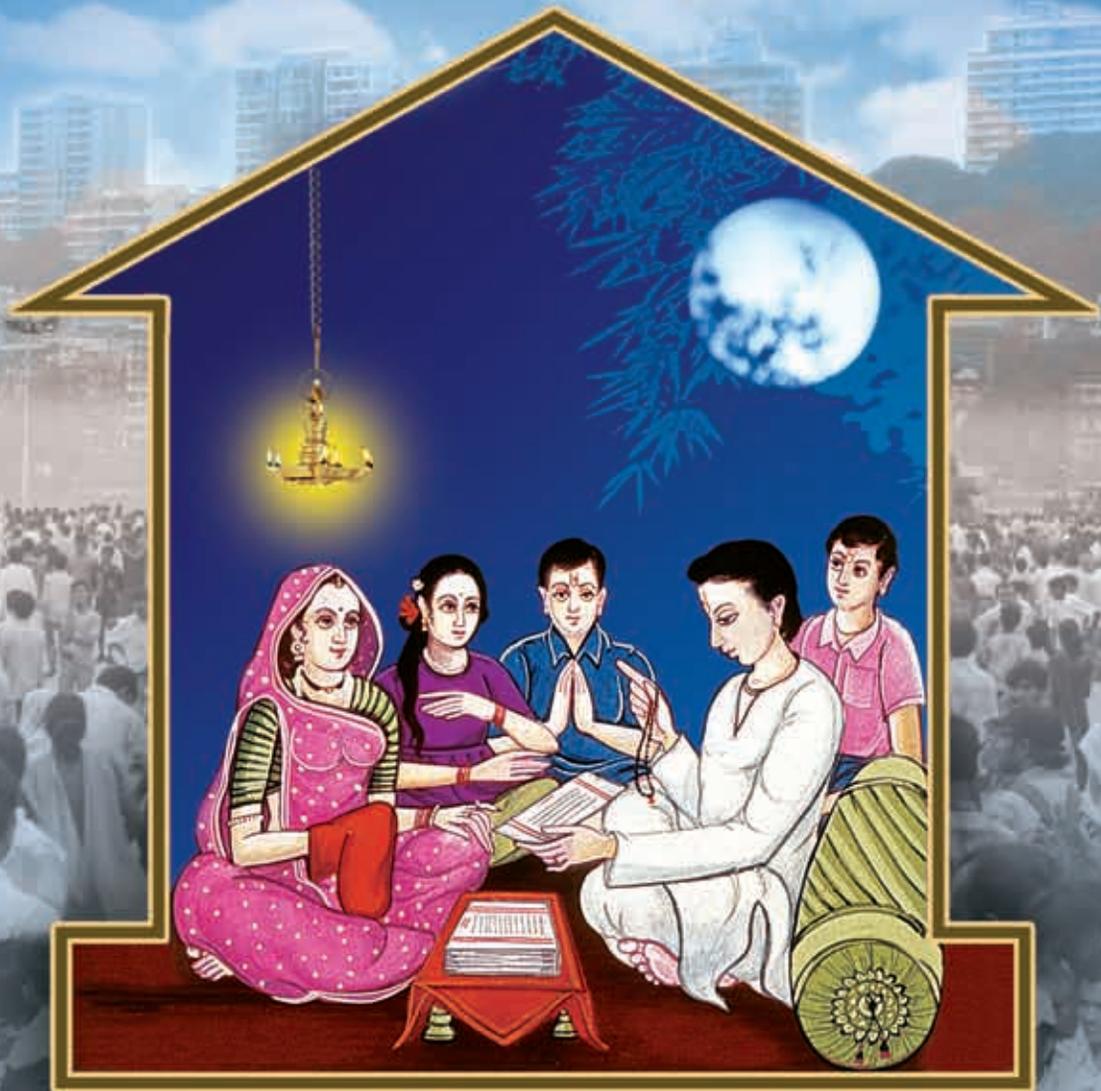


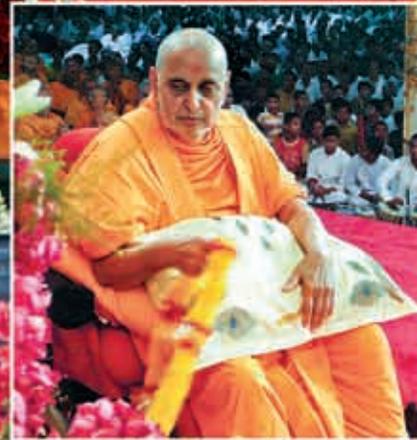
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**Ghar Sabha – A Key to Family
Harmony and Prosperity**



Swamishri celebrates Janmashtmi at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Atladra, 14 August 09



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In a booklet on parenting called *The Modern Romans*, the author describes, “Home is the foundation of any society. It is the most influential element in national greatness or decadence. It is the groundwork for learning individual character, values, goals, morality, self control and loyalty.” The early Romans understood this, hence it grew in power. In another book, *Rome: Its Rise and Fall*, Philip Van Myers describes that the early Roman society was founded on three principles: God, Country and Home. And the fundamental unit of Roman society was the home or family. Myers adds, “It was in the atmosphere of the family that were nourished in the Roman youths the virtues of obedience and deference to authority. The boys’ upbringing was founded on a profound conviction of the power of example, first of the father himself.” The author further states that this stability crumbled because men were away on business or fighting for new lands. Consequently, Romans at home practiced immorality, divorce rates increased and the family unit cracked up. Today, there are many more influences that destroy the integrity and unity of the family.

To resolve our growing conflicts, alleviate our excessive expectations and contain our soaring desire for material pleasures and independence we need a powerful corrective element. The only remedy Pramukh Swami Maharaj prescribes is daily *ghar sabha*. Sitting together with the family for 20 to 30 minutes daily and reading spiritual books is called *ghar sabha*. In many cases the most stubborn of family issues have been extricated through *ghar sabha*. This month’s issue is based on the topic of *ghar sabha*. May we take a leaf from the inspiring essays and testimonials. ♦

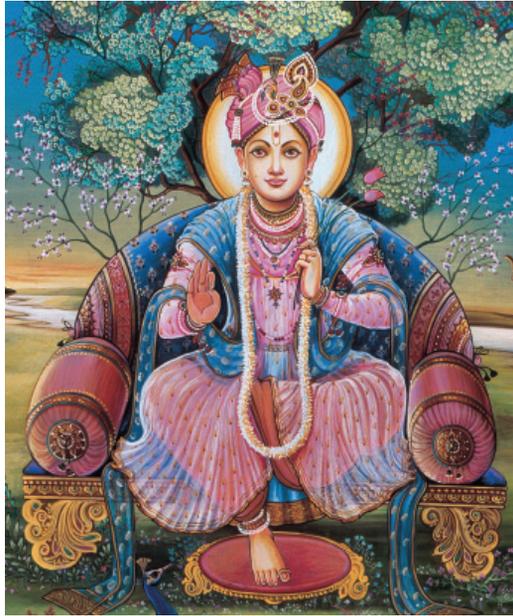
Another Challenge

Because of a severe storm Shri Hari cancelled his journey to Vadthal and returned to Gadhada. He then sent a letter with Jayanand Brahmachari addressed to Muktanand Swami...

Shri Hari dictated a letter to ShukmuniSwami addressing the devotees of Vadthal, “On Jeth sud 5 devotees and I set out from Gadhpur towards Vadthal. Shortly, a storm broke out. Sand and stones were whipped up. Our horses were unable to go forward because they were blinded by the sand. Subsequently, we all returned to Gadhpur. Muktanand Swami will come there, so you should seat him on my seat and offer your respects by performing his puja. By doing his puja, with my command, you will get fruits equal to doing my puja.”

Jayanand Brahmachari (Varni) took the letter and headed towards Ahmedabad. On reaching Ahmedabad he came to know that Muktanand Swami had left the day before. He was scheduled to rest in Memdavad that night. Then Jayanand Varni went to Memdavad. On enquiring there, he found out that Muktanand Swami was staying in a mandir on the outskirts. When Jayanand Varni reached the mandir he heard that Muktanand Swami had left.

Devotees living in the vicinity of Vadthal began arriving there on the day before Bhim Ekadashi, simply because they had heard that Shri Hari was going to come. The *paramhansas* had arrived in Vadthal. They discoursed beneath



a sprawling banyan tree on the outskirts. All were awaiting Maharaj’s arrival. Soon, they saw Muktanand Swami approaching. Everyone thought that Shri Hari must also be with him. When Muktanand Swami arrived everyone prostrated to him. He then took his seat. Kalidasbhai, the leading devotee of Vadthal, asked, “Where is Maharaj?” Muktanand Swami replied, “I have come from Shrinagar (Ahmedabad). Maharaj

should be coming here by tonight.” Shortly thereafter Jayanand Varni arrived. Muktanand Swami assumed that Shri Hari must not be far behind. After offering his respects to Muktanand Swami, Jayanand Brahmachari gave him the letter from Maharaj. “Read the letter. Maharaj has specially sent me here to let you know,” replied Varni. Muktanand Swami took the letter and pressed it to his eyes and heart with reverence. Then he opened the envelope and started reading the letter aloud. On hearing its content everyone was saddened. Shri Hari would be unable to come. But he had written in his letter to offer respects to Muktanand Swami and believe that he himself was present in person.

The festival of Bhim Ekadashi was celebrated with mirth and enthusiasm. The sadhus sang bhajans. Muktanand Swami addressed the

devotees. Thereafter the devotees offered their respects to Muktanand Swami by applying a *chandlo* on his forehead. At that time some sadhus and devotees experienced the divine bliss of samadhi by the grace of Shri Hari. They saw the form of Maharaj before Muktanand Swami, accepting the puja offered by them. When they all awoke from samadhi the devotees spoke of what they had seen. A wave of joy rippled through the assembly because Maharaj had truly accepted their devotion and respects.

Muktanand Swami felt a little uneasy after being offered *pujan* similar to that offered to Maharaj. He simply looked down in solemn silence. Jayanand Varni spoke to him, “Swami, the devotees performed your puja at the behest of Maharaj, so he has accepted their respects to fulfil their devotion.”

Muktanand Swami replied, “Maharaj is divine and the all-doer. He works through whomsoever he wishes to do so and thus showers the bliss of his divine form. But he works in accordance to the spiritual capacity of the person. Whereas the Sadhu who is his form, through him he manifests and works fully. But when Maharaj is manifest on earth, such a Sadhu does not reveal his divinity.” Kalidasbhai, the head devotee, enquired, “Swami, who is such a Sadhu at present?” Muktanand Swami simply smiled. Then he advised, “Maharaj definitely manifests through such a Sadhu. However, for the present we have the association of Maharaj, therefore we should be focused upon him and serve him as best we can.”

The next day Kalidasbhai sponsored a meal for all. After lunch he performed *pujan* of Muktanand Swami and offered him clothes and decorations that he had prepared for Shriji Maharaj. That evening Muktanand Swami left Vadthal for Shrinagar (Ahmedabad), the *paramhansas* too left to spread Satsang and the devotees returned home.

* * *

Vajesinhji Babu became the king of Bhavnagar after his father, King Vakhatsinhji, passed away

in 1860 CE. The royal seat of Bhavnagar was considered to be the seat of righteousness and friendship. King Vajesinhji belonged to this noble culture and tradition. However, because of his youthhood he was prone to the adverse influence of critical and negative talk that fell on his ears. His father, Vakhatsinh Babu, had realized the glory of Shriji Maharaj the day he transformed Ladu Barot (Brahmanand Swami). But, the reactions of his son, Vajesinhji, for Maharaj, were of antipathy. Because of his youthful years, and lack of experience and maturity, he spoke ill of Maharaj and believed him to be an ordinary person. Whenever Jiva Khachar came to his court, whatever good feelings he had for Maharaj would be tarnished. But whenever Dada Khachar visited him, his feelings would change into reverence. So Vajesinh’s mind vacillated between ill-will and respect.

One day, an ascetic of the Gorakh sect, called Kanfata because of the large holes in his ears, arrived in Bhavnagar. He was a native of Rajasthan, and exhibited many miracles by chanting mantras. He could disappear through the power of mantras, so he was called a Gebi. Thus he was popularly known as Kanfata Gebi. When Vajesinh Babu heard of his powers he called him to his palace. On seeing his scruffy appearance and intoxicated, bloodshot eyes, Vajesinh Babu asked him, “What is your motive behind the miracles you perform from village to village? Is it to make more disciples or to earn money?”

“I have four hundred disciples! I need money to sustain them. So I am doing all this to get money,” he replied hoarsely.

“Well, then you should go off to Gadhada. There is one Swaminarayan who has a lot of wealth. If you win him through your powers, you will get heapfuls of money. Furthermore, our kingdom will be rid of a great burden that he is.” Vajesinhji simply instigated him to pit himself against Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The Gebi was uncouth and shortsighted. But there was one thing he was wary of – Maharaj’s

brave guard called Bhaguji, who was from Rajasthan, and his strong Kathi devotees. So he told Vajesinhji, “Bapu, I will go to Gadhada, but Swaminarayan has a large contingent of Kathis and guards. So, a confrontation with him could result into a battle.”

“But you possess the power of mantras. You can attack and disappear at will. Therefore nothing will happen to you. By merely seeing your four hundred Marvadi fighters, the Kathis will shudder and fail to retaliate.” Vajesinh Bapu simply pumped him with praise. The Gebi, bloated with arrogance and joy, ordered his disciples to march with him to Gadhada and face Swaminarayan and his men. On the way, because of his intoxication for ganja, he fantasized about large money bags coming towards him. In his delirium the journey to Gadhada seemed brief and very hopeful.

He camped on the outskirts of Gadhada, beneath the shade of neem trees. A few natives of Rajasthan, who lived there in huts, knew about Gebi. They thus came to see him. The Gebi’s tent was filled with the smoke of hookahs. Two skimpily dressed women were fanning Gebi. His eyes were red from intoxication with drugs. His voice was hoarse, and he spoke in a slurred manner. News had spread that Gebi had pitched tents on the outskirts. Jiva Khachar came to meet him. On knowing that Jiva Khachar was the head of the village, Gebi honoured him. The Gebi’s disciples began narrating their guru’s glory to Jiva Khachar. “If guruji were to be buried in the ground here, then he could come out 30 kilometres away. He can fly in the air, penetrate the earth and disappear into thin air whenever he so wishes. Vajesinh Bapu has sent him to expose Swaminarayan’s devious ways.” Jiva Khachar merely listened. Then he got up and left. On the way he thought whether Gebi really possessed miraculous powers, or could he be a fraud? Then he simply mused that whatever he may be, but at least everyone would get to see some of his antics.

Soon, Gebi’s criticisms about Maharaj spread in Gadhada. Ladha Thakkar became concerned

and informed Shri Hari. “Maharaj, the Gebi from Rajasthan seems to have come to deceive. He appears to be bad. He has been sent by Vajesinhji of Bhavnagar. Jiva Khachar had gone to meet him. We must do something before he creates trouble.”

Shri Hari simply smiled without a flicker of concern. “Let us send Dada Khachar and Brahmanand to him and understand his purpose here. One should not be taken in by gossip and hearsay.”

Ladha Thakkar informed Brahmanand Swami and Dada Khachar about Shri Hari’s wish. Later they all went to see Gebi. Gebi was revelling with women in his tent. Dada Khachar sent word that he and Brahmanand Swami wanted to see him. Gebi told his guard, “Let them come in.” But Ladha Thakkar told him that if his women left then only could the sadhu enter. Gebi frowned and blurted, “Why are sadhus afraid of them?” Ladha Thakkar replied, “The question is not of fear, but one of discipline.” Thereafter, Gebi told the women to leave.

Brahmanand Swami and Dada Khachar entered the tent. They saw Gebi sitting comfortably on a raised seat with a hookah pipe in hand. Every now and then he would make gurgling sounds by drawing smoke from the hookah and exhaling clouds of smoke. His disciples often uttered “Ramo Ram.” Brahmanand Swami spoke to the Gebi, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan has prescribed the observance of absolute celibacy and renunciation of money for sadhus. Furthermore, they should engage in devotion to God. And this how we practice and live our lives.”

“What is your name?” Gebi asked.

“Brahmanand.”

Gebi broke out with a sinister laughter. “O Brahmanand! Can you see these two thorns on the stalk of this berry fruit? One is facing in the right direction and the other in the opposite way.

“If your Swaminarayan behaves properly then I’ll be friendly, but if he comes in my way then I will behave adversely.” Then he paused for a

(contd. on p. 23)

Cure for Family Issues

No matter how wise and intelligent people may be, there is discord at home: father and son, husband and wife, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and brothers and sisters are often at loggerheads. People tend to want things their way. That is the root cause of family discord. It is also the main reason for all political and professional differences.

However good a family may be, wealth drives a wedge between brothers. One begins to find fault with the other. This shatters the fabric of the family business, causing it to slide from riches to rags. If one lets go, there would be peace.

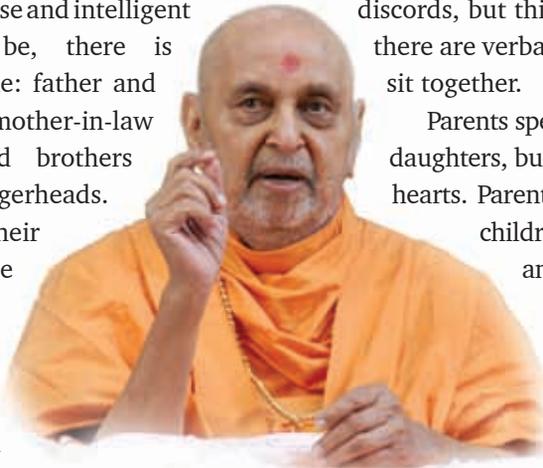
There are many such family issues. So, the only way to get peace is to cultivate wisdom, understanding and to know the glory of God as he is. One should realize that one is *atma*, worship Parmatma and believe that he is the all-doer. All the pleasures and pains one experiences are due to the will of God. With such understanding there is no misery.

It is the ego which is at play in all quarrels. Even if one is not at fault, one has to forgive and forget.

One should also cultivate *samkhyā* understanding, otherwise there will be no peace.

Gunatitanand Swami rightly says that only right understanding leads to happiness. If one has it, even the poor feel happy, and without it even the rich feel ill at ease.

When does such understanding remain? Daily *satsang* and reading of our religious texts will solve all problems. We should also turn the *mala*, worship, visit the mandir and hold *ghar sabha* for harmony in the family. *Ghar sabha* is a cure for all



discords, but this is not understood. Even if there are verbal duels, hold *ghar sabha* and sit together.

Parents spend money for their sons and daughters, but they have not reached their hearts. Parents don't spend time for their children to share their thoughts and listen to them. This distances both father and son. So, when he grows up, he tells his father to leave home.

A boy once told his mother to 'get out' of his home. The mother said, "My son, do you realize what you are saying? I have brought you up and educated you by putting in hard work and by grinding grains to feed you. Now I have grown old. You should care for me. I have spent a lot of money bringing you up. And now you want me to get out?"

The son was educated, so he said, "You breastfed me. So just tell me how much I have to pay for the milk?"

If this boy had been brought up in a religious environment and persuaded to give up bad company, he would not have asked his mother to leave home. He would have thought of serving her, knowing that she had brought him up and fed him, while she herself remained hungry at times.

When we were kids, our mother washed our nappies and fed us, while going hungry herself. We cannot imagine how much she suffered. Is it fair to disown our mother when we have grown up?

This would not happen if parents take care to know their children and share their thoughts. Children should develop affinity towards parents. Such feelings are developed through *satsang* and *ghar sabha*.

Men tend to care more for their spouses after

marriage. They should care for them, but there is a family too. It is their duty to care for their parents when they fall ill. A wife refuses to live with her mother-in-law. Where would the old go? You too are going to grow old, and will be treated likewise. You should spare a thought for this.

Ghar sabha and daily *satsang* are the sure cures for this.

Fathers also don't get the respect they deserve. The son treats whatever the father says as nonsense. The father spends money to raise and educate the son, and in that the father's wisdom is negated.

This is the scenario we have today. The only way out of it is *satsang*, *ghar sabha* and spiritual discourses. If the family members sit together, even for half an hour and hold *ghar sabha*, this will slowly change the atmosphere at home.

Every morning should begin with puja, worship and a visit to the mandir. Then, begin your work.

After dinner you should sit together to read our spiritual books and worship God. You should narrate stories from the shastras and share news of each family member's difficulties and successes; how they tolerated and cared for their family. Then only you learn to pass through such times remaining united.

We think that happiness lies in riches, whether it is money, bungalows, cars, flying by plane or going abroad. That is mere materialism. Unhappiness lies in not cultivating a spiritual understanding. We may have all the riches but without such an outlook, we end up having verbal duels. We lose respect for one another and family unity dies. This would not happen if we talk lovingly to the children. By sharing both mealtimes and worship with the family, love and respect grows for one another. There would be no disputes. We should try to know each other's problems.

God is the source of all peace. If we take refuge in him and worship him together, there will be no differences. We should sit together at least once a day. But we don't even have time for that. Some waste time till late evening by dining out,

taking drinks and eating meat, so how can there be peace in the family? So we should respect all the spiritual injunctions.

Ghar sabha is very important. But we find it tiring because it is often the same spiritual stories. Yogiji Maharaj used to relate a parable about a farmer. He had a small farm on which he grew only grams. So he had to eat grams in a variety of ways. Once, he didn't have his lunch. By evening he was very hungry. He asked for food. His wife served the same food. The husband got angry saying, "The same food?" The wife said, "You have only grams to make both *dal* or *roti*. It is only with this that you will be able to satisfy your hunger." So, we speak of worshipping repeatedly, but that is the only thing which will bring peace and happiness. When you take ill, and take medicines, you get well slowly. It takes a few days or even months. You have to follow the regimen.

So worship is the only way to resolve all differences. That is for all. Everyone in the family should make it a point to put an end to discord in the family and hold *ghar sabha*. Worshipping God has that magic.

Results are not attained overnight. There are members with different natures. You cannot change the nature overnight. It's not that easy. It takes time and patience.

All scriptures prescribe daily *satsang*. It does not help to get cross with each other. It is only with love and understanding that we can find harmony.

We honour the injunctions *Matru devo bhava*, *Pitru devo bhava*. But how should one deal with their temperaments? Often a person's nature only dies with them. So the children question, "How long do we have to bear with them?" But our culture emphasizes tolerance. You might argue, "How long?" I would say till we leave for Akshardham. We have to thank our parents for bringing us up, feeding us and educating us. We should not forget this and should be grateful to them.

So we have to develop understanding. If we take the nature of a person as it is, there would be no problems. *Ghar sabha* educates us on this. ♦



Oneness: The Word to Watch

If one were asked to make a list of one's property, one would think of cash, buildings, land, furniture, shares and ornaments. One would not like to lose them or see them decrease in value.

There is only one way to guard all this wealth and ensure that it continues to grow: unity in the family. Togetherness is an asset: united we stand, divided we fall. Unity or harmony itself is wealth.

We tend to appreciate only material things and enquire about things like clothes, cars, watches, etc. This is only material wealth.

Unity cannot be measured in pounds, dollars or rupees. It is more important. We also find that disunity results in loss of property.

A very rich man married a woman against the will of his parents. Now the young couple are going to separate. The man is ready to pay Rs. 300 crore to his wife to separate, but she demands Rs. 1000 crore. Thus, this disharmony has led to loss of property for the young man.

We read about such happenings in the

newspapers but don't spare a thought on them.

Our rishis have prescribed the unity of all mankind: '*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam...*'. We have to reach that ideal. But one has to begin with one's own family.

Focus upon this: 'My family is a united family.' Explain it to the children. Unity can be likened to a real gem in the family. It is our asset. We should realize the importance of unity and nurture for it.

Take Israel for example. The Jews had to live in different countries for 1,800 years but they were united. Finally, Israel was formed just over 50 years ago. But they have become a role model for development all over the world despite wars and struggles.

Gunatitanand Swami says that the Pandavas were flooded with miseries but they faced them with ease. This was because of their unity.

We cannot see electricity, but it has power. Likewise with family unity; it empowers us.

Take the case of a leading business house. The

two brothers were running a roaring business. Had they maintained their momentum for five years they would have been the leading businessmen in the city. Differences surfaced after their marriages and there was division. They didn't take legal action. They didn't even come to blows. But the togetherness was lost. Had they been united, they would have earned many times more.

In contrast, there is a case of two families in Lilivav village near Bhavnagar. They belong to the Kharag community. One family has 65 members, but they share the same kitchen. There is a village near Dhandhuka in which a harijan family has 80 members sharing the same kitchen. Such unity will bring success in the long term: "A family that eats together, stays together."

A *satsangi* from Ahmedabad is now settled in the USA and has an extended family of 18. He has four sons, two are doctors and one is an engineer, but they are all closely knit.

Make it a point to unite your family.

Unity is equivalent to earning a degree or making millions of rupees. It demands great perseverance.

The Ramayan is the best role model for us. Ram, Lakshman, Bharat and Shatrughna, the four brothers, and their wives, were united. They were brought up that way. It meant more to them than their royal background. Ramchandra was exposed to such values.

All was set for Ram's coronation. There were wreaths of flowers ready and people of the whole kingdom were jubilant. Then Rama was told, "You are not to be crowned!"

How would an ordinary mortal feel when his marriage invitations have been distributed and the procession reaches the bride's place where suddenly the in-laws reject the bridegroom. How would you feel?

Sitaji was not told to go with Ram. She accompanied Rama willingly. Sita personified the value that a wife is the shadow of her husband. She was brought up by her parents that way to treat her in-laws and husband with due respect.

Education is not all. A doctor, who was my classmate, was a gold medallist in the MD exams. He came to know a girl when he was studying as an undergraduate. Both studied together upto MD and then got married. Yet, they got divorced after a few years. They did not lack in money or status. Though they were highly educated, they could not remain united. Outwardly, they had everything, but inwardly, there was disharmony.

Unity is the source of all happiness. We think about clothes, shoes, hair, and other things, but don't spare a thought about unity.

I once met a boy studying in the ninth standard. He reads the *Times of India* for general knowledge. I asked him what he read in it. He replied, "Sports news." So, I asked him further to name a few leading cricketers. He named them. Then I asked him what were their secrets of success. He didn't know. This is meaningless. One boy read an ad for new cars in the newspaper and asked his father to sell their old car and buy a new one. It became a cause of family conflict. This leads us nowhere.

A united family is a happy family, even if it doesn't have modern amenities.

There is a boy named Ankit Soni in Nadiad. He tragically suffered an electric shock while trying to catch a kite. Both his hands had to be amputated. But the family was united. The family stood by him. The boy did not lose courage. He began to write with the toes of his feet. He scored 75.5% marks in the SSC Board exams. He even refused the offer of the SSC Board for a writer.

We invited him to our Nadiad mandir and felicitated him. He said that he can write with the same speed and ease as he used to with his hands.

His brother feeds him daily and his mother dresses him. Ankit is happy, even without hands.

Read such news in *ghar sabha* that will encourage you. You should think of your family.

Life is inseparable from misery. Even incarnations of God had to face it. However, with unity in the family, you can face all miseries.

There are four principles which promote family unity:

1. Meet Each Other (*Milan*)

We find that the members in the family do not meet each other because of their jobs, profession or TV. This leads to differences and the split widens gradually.

So, make it a point to meet each other. You can meet at *arti* time. You can perform puja together. Meet as many times as possible. You should also eat together. Then hold *ghar sabha* in the evening. This will bring you closer and generate unity.

2. Praise (*Mahima*)

Recognize and praise the talents and virtues of your family members. Encourage the children by appreciating them.

3. Help Each Other (*Madad*)

Help each other out in your house. In 1970 Yogiji Maharaj was in London. Pramukh Swami was also with him. They were staying at the home of Arvind Guru. It was lunch time and there were only a few volunteers. Pramukh Swami saw this and he began to spread the mats himself. He did not think of his position as the president of the BAPS Sanstha.

Pramukh Swami was in the USA in 1988, preparing to retire for the day. There were about five sadhus in the room. There was a personal phone call from a devotee. So, Swami stood up, went to the bathroom, finished the conversation and returned. The sadhus told Swami that they would have left if he had told them to. Swami said, "Why should I trouble you all?"

If you don't trouble anyone, that too would amount to helping out.

4. Forgiveness (*Mafi*)

One should forgive others for their mistakes, errors or omissions. And if it's your mistake or error, offer your sincere apology at once. Even if it is to your wife. You might argue, "Why should I apologize to my wife, of all persons?" You may find it as difficult as climbing a mountain. Never mind. At least you should offer apologies before God confessing that you uttered impolite words to

your wife 'which was not fair on my part.'

You live in a house with a family. You should think twice before whatever you speak. You are going to live together for the whole of your life. If you don't choose your words carefully before speaking, it could lead to serious consequences even if it was over a trifle. In household matters, you have to learn to forgive and ask for forgiveness.

There is a step further to forgiving. And that is to completely forget about it (mistakes) all. Which is more difficult. Some families tend to keep reminding a member of the family his or her mistakes time and again. Such attitude is not healthy for a family. That will add to your differences.

Think of Pramukh Swami Maharaj who forgives us for our errors and forgets it all simultaneously. Everyone in a family has to learn this art of keeping the family united.

Learn to forget the mistakes of others. There is spirituality in it.

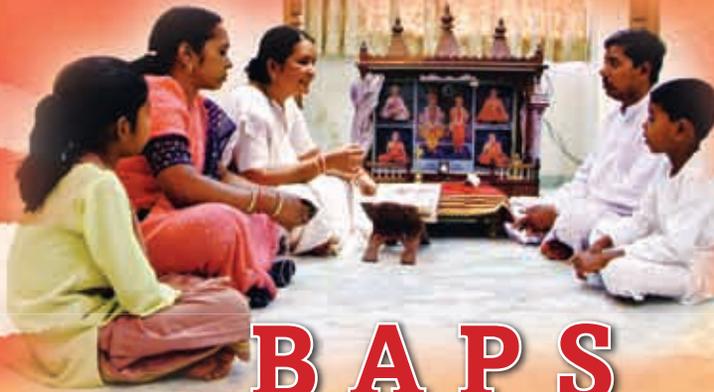
Build your family on these four principles: (1) Meet Each Other, (2) Praise, (3) Help Each Other and (4) Forgiveness.

Shastriji Maharaj founded the BAPS on the four principles of (1) Agna, (2) Upasana, (3) Sadbhav (fellow-feeling) and (4) Paksh (partisanship for the fellow-devotees).

Of these, *sadbhav* and *paksha* are important for the unity of a family.

Discuss the examples of unity in your *ghar sabha*. Make a list of such incidents – positive or negative – and spread them by word of mouth. Do whatever you can for strengthening your family. That way you can escape a split in the family and face all difficulties. You won't be perplexed by the difficulties. Not only that, you will feel equipped to find a way out of it.

And most important of all is prayer. Pray together for the unity of your family. Such prayer will bring divine strength that will unite a family in mind and heart. ◆



BAPS

Shows the Way to Family Unity

The words of the song 'Home, Sweet Home' penned by John Howard Paine find relevance at all times and at all places, East or West.

The poet says that the comforts and pleasures of home are far more desirable than the glitter of the world away from home. A home is where you cheer up due to the love and care of parents. It doesn't matter if it is a small hut. Paine writes:

*How sweet it is to sit beneath a fond father's smile,
/ And the cares of a mother to soothe and beguile;
/ Let others delight amid new pleasures to roam, /
But give me, oh, give me, the pleasures of Home. / To
thee I'll return, overburdened with care, / The heart's
dearest solace will smile on me there; / No more from
that cottage again will I roam, / Be it so humble, there
is no place like Home; / Home, Home, Sweet Home.*

An ideal home is one where a family imbibes values like selfless love and respect, where there are no quarrels or discord, where the aged are cared for, where the members of the family have faith in God, and there are prayers and daily worship.

Defining a Family

Sociologists the world over have tried to define a family but they have not been able to give a comprehensive definition. In 1990, Jane Traust, a research sociologist, stated that there is no universally acceptable definition for a family since it is so complex.

However, sociologists Henson and Lynch (1992) gave the following situational definition of a family: "Any unit that defines itself as a family including individuals who are related by blood or marriage as well as those who have made a commitment to share their lives."

The Western view of a family differs from the Eastern view. One Western model is a family with at least one parent and one child; the child could even be adopted. Some definitions even refer to couples not married yet living together.

However, Indian sociologists speak of only two types of families: (1) a joint family including parents, their married sons with their wives, unmarried sons, daughters and cousins, and (2) a nuclear family, comprising husband and wife, and their unmarried sons and daughters.

Breaking Families

The burning problem of society is of broken families. Increasingly, many marriages end in divorce within a few years. The spouses separate and re-marry, choosing different spouses. Their children feel lonely and orphaned, suffering great mental stress. Then they resort to drugs and become violent.

This phenomenon is common in many countries, including India. Therefore, Pramukh Swami Maharaj constantly alerts youths and parents.

Also, the influence of urbanization, modernization, alluring ads, the media, the modern

lifestyle and clashes of personal nature have played havoc with our joint families. Family members are often in conflict with one another. We read about the consequences in the newspapers: suicides, abductions, divorces, legal wrangles and murders.

Indian nuclear families are now being further divided. Unity and respect are being lost. When the children become adolescents, they begin to behave arrogantly with their parents.

BAPS Helps to Preserve Family Unity

BAPS has a long history of success in uniting families. Through the efforts of gurus of the Sanstha, many families have become united and peace-loving.

Shastriji Maharaj, the founder of BAPS, spent his whole life visiting the villages in Saurashtra, Gujarat and other regions, often on foot, ridding the families of addictions and superstitions, and uniting them with the ultimate purpose of worshipping God.

Yogiji Maharaj continued this mission. He focused on the youths, showering them with love and teaching them the lessons of moral restraint, discipline, respect and other healthy habits. He showed that each youth was capable of leading a thousand families.

Today, Yogiji Maharaj's great vision is alive and vibrant in the form of the Sunday assembly, Bal Mandals, Kishore Mandals and Yuvak Mandals. Due to these Satsang Centres, thousands of families are able to overcome addictions, adversities and the temptations of the modern materialism.

Pramukh Swami's Contribution

Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj continues to travel far and wide to fulfil the visions of his gurus. He receives scores of letters daily from devotees, and reads them carefully to resolve the rifts in the families. After careful consideration, he has suggested a sure cure: *ghar sabha*.

Explaining its impact, he says, "The family should get together for an hour in the evening and read religious texts. That will better your lives. This will in turn better the home, the society, the country and the world. We will then not need

conferences for world peace."

The BAPS has therefore focused on peace at home from its foundation – by instilling values in children. Parents don't have enough time for their children. They remain busy with their vocations. But, they should strike a balance between the two and raise their children in a way that ensures their all-round development.

Addressing a gathering of parents on 10 November 2006, Swamishri said, "What the children expect from you is love. If you won't love them, they will go astray. Shastriji Maharaj used to bathe near a neem plant. He used to say that he wanted to nurture it. The trees are still there in Sarangpur and Atladra providing shade and coolness. Likewise, you have to care for the children by giving them your time."

On another occasion, Swamishri told an assembly of parents, "In today's lifestyle, everyone eats alone. They don't meet each other. So there cannot be oneness. This leads to misunderstanding and quarrels. *Ghar sabha* resolves all this."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *ghar sabha* cure has worked wonders. Some examples: (1) a temperamental father overcame his anger, (2) a wife who once opposed *ghar sabha* now participates regularly, (3) a mischievous girl read *Yogi Gita* and turned obedient, and (4) strained relations between family members have improved. There are countless more such experiences.

Contribution of BAPS Sadhus

BAPS has over 800 dedicated sadhus who, under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, have been engaged in promoting family values by visiting homes.

The hostels run by BAPS are instrumental in shaping the lives of the youths in a healthy manner.

In 2003, 17,500 trained BAPS children contacted 475,000 families to promote awareness for an ideal family.

Under the leadership and inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, thousands of BAPS families are closely knit with mutual warmth between grandparents, parents and children. ♦

Ghar Sabha Experiences



Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired and guided countless families to conduct a daily Ghar Sabha or Family Assembly. This daily meeting of all family members has provided a unique forum for discussion, education and understanding. As a result this daily gathering has changed the lives of many individuals and fostered lasting family harmony. The following accounts reflect the profound effect that the daily Ghar Sabha has had on families...

NO MORE LONG FACES

Vinod Patel, Varachha, Surat

After we came to live in Petlad, we noticed that two nuclear families of one extended family quarrelled three-to-four times a week.

We had been holding *ghar sabha* for the past six years. So, one of the women from that family joined us. She felt peace. She started her own *ghar*

sabha. So the other family also joined. Today, both the families are united. No more long faces.

For the last ten years, our family has also been eating together. Only *ghar sabha* can inspire such unity and understanding. We cannot repay the debt to it.



THE WAY TO BECOMING A STAUNCH SATSANGI

Pankaj Patel, IT engineer, New Jersey

For two years my mother held *ghar sabha* on her own. Finally, her patience bore fruits and we also joined in. Of our six family members, I was influenced the most by *ghar sabha*.

I used to get angry very often with my children. My wife and parents did not like it, but *ghar sabha* did the trick. We read the BAPS publication, *Swabhav Vash Sansar*. It depicts how our innate nature plays havoc in life. Then we began to understand each other. So our ill-will gave way to healthy feelings.

Secondly, our children also became disciplined. *Ghar sabha* built confidence in them. They were inspired to go to school with *tilak-chandlo*. They became interested in our rites and rituals. They would recite *shloks* before their meals and would bow to the elders. They began to regularly visit the mandir. So, *ghar sabha* also improved their nature. We felt peace.

In our *ghar sabha*, we have placed emphasis on introspection. We prepare a chart in which everyone writes things he or she liked or did not like about the house or its members. We then make clarifications. This has brought us closer.

For example, I liked to read while eating, but the children wanted me to speak to them and enjoy; so I changed the habit.

Others often asked how we found time for *ghar sabha*. I was also pressed for time. But then we removed the TV and we had plenty of time.

I cannot list what *ghar sabha* has gifted us. Earlier, I used to go to the mandir, but did not pay attention to the discourses. Now, after starting *ghar sabha* I am able to understand them and I feel that my life has been influenced positively.

I feel that *satsang* is strengthened with *ghar sabha*.



THROUGH THICK AND THIN

Chimanbhai Patel, Surat

We live in a joint family, thanks only to *ghar sabha*. Our daughters-in-law were not *satsangis*, but because of *ghar sabha* they are today working for the BAPS Women's Wing.

Thanks to *ghar sabha*, we were able to remain strong in some unsavoury incidents.

One Sunday in 1996 my family had gone for *sabha* to the mandir, and I was away for some work. When we came back, we saw that someone had broken into our house. We felt jolted for a few seconds. But then we met for *ghar sabha*. By reading the scriptures we were able to remain

calm. The shock had lessened. We left it to Maharaj.

Swamishri was in Australia then. We faxed a letter to him and he replied, blessing us. Thereafter our economic condition improved.

Thanks to *ghar sabha* we now understand each other better.

This is especially true among the female members of the family who have to share the household work. *Ghar sabha* has united them.

In fact, *ghar sabha* has kept our whole family united.



FOUNTAIN OF LITERACY

Govind Patel, Farmer, Chamardi, Surendranagar

I was a smoker, but my family was more frustrated by my frequent visits to the *bhuvras* (witch doctor).

Once they sent me to a BAPS *shibir*. There, I learnt that we should have firm faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. From that day, we started *ghar sabha*. Initially, I would leave it half-way to smoke a bidi. But then I gave up smoking. It happened unwittingly.

Our economic condition also improved and with my brothers we were able to plan our farming

and finances much better.

When we used to read scriptures our sisters only listened. They felt like reading but could not read. We taught them how to read. Today, they are married with children and their families have also become *satsangis*. There are 12 children in our joint family. All the children are obedient, clever and cultured.

We feel that Swami blesses us with his kindly glance. That is thanks to *ghar sabha*.



CHILDREN'S INITIATIVE

Bipin Patel, Atlanta, USA

The unique thing about our *ghar sabha* is that the children take the initiative and begin it with mental worship (*mansi puja*). We read Swamini Vato and Vachanamrut.

Everyday we have a Q-A session. It shapes both the children and elders.

Even when we go out, they won't miss a single *sabha*. The children gather our relatives and hold a *sabha*.

We visit Chicago during every vacation. My sister

and in-laws live there. They were not *satsangis*, but our children impressed them. They would sit with their children and hold *ghar sabha*. Then they started their own *ghar sabha*. Our children also bought books for them. Now their children take their parents to the Sunday *satsang* assembly.

After *ghar sabha* our children recite the *cheshta*. They won't go to sleep before that. Even when we get back home late they insist on singing the *cheshta*.



COULD REMAIN GUJARATI TO CORE



Ashok C. Ashier, Businessman, London

We have been holding *ghar sabha* for the past 21 years, since my childhood when my parents and uncle used to read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato.

We find many temptations in our modern society, but thanks to *ghar sabha* they did not affect us. Yogiji Maharaj used to say, “We are known by the company we keep. We should not let others influence us. It should be other way round.” This is apparent in our children’s lives today because of *ghar sabha*.

Once, my eldest son, Darshan, had to go on a field trip from school. The school has predominantly English children. Some of their parents asked if Darshan was going. They wanted their sons to stay in Darshan’s dormitory. This surprised us, but it was because of Darshan’s good character. And that

was thanks to our *ghar sabha* which we held daily as directed by Pramukh Swami.

It is now an integral part of our life. We feel we are meeting Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami daily. The reading of scriptures has taught us lessons of service and dedication.

We use only Gujarati books in *ghar sabha* so that when the children go to the mandir they can follow the discourses. *Ghar sabha* is the reason why our children have been able to retain their Gujarati roots.

Often my father recollects his experiences with Pramukh Swami and his travels. This makes us feel proud of Satsang. *Ghar sabha* has also helped solve many of our family problems.

Obeying Swamishri and holding *ghar sabha*, has made our family united and strong.

GHAR SABHA AS A SCHOOL

Shantibhai Patel, Jamnagar

Once, my wife expressed her desire to study. I was surprised to hear this since my daughter had graduated and my two sons were studying in the 10th and 12th Standards. I wondered why, at 48, my wife felt like studying. I asked her who would teach her. She replied, “You are a *nirikshak* (Satsang volunteer). You are educated. So you can serve Satsang better. If I get educated, I can also serve.”

I asked her how she got the idea. She replied, “From our *ghar sabha*. Our sons read well. The *Prakash* contains news of the whole Satsang. But I have to wait till *ghar sabha* for that. So I thought I should get educated.”

And the mother turned into a student of her sons. The *balika karyakars* also started teaching her and now she has learned how to read and write. Thus *ghar sabha* became an instrument of change.

SUICIDE AVERTED

Shailesh Dhanani, Factory Worker, Rajkot

It is six years now since I got married. It was alright for some time, but then differences arose between us. I used to work in the factory and due to the workload, I sometimes reached home late. My wife became suspicious of me and this led to discord. My parents also were sick of it.

Around this time I rented a house in Rajkot. It belonged to Vinubhai. He used to work 15 hours a day, yet I found him always fresh and joyful.

At that time we were about to resort to a divorce. Tempers flared and my wife was almost ready to commit suicide. Vinubhai ran to our



rescue and calmed the situation.

I told Vinubhai the history of our married life. He returned home daily at 11.00 p.m. and conducted a *ghar sabha*. He advised me to sit with him. I felt peace. I started taking part in his *ghar sabha*. Then he introduced me to the sadhus at the mandir. They suggested that I start my own *ghar sabha*. I was alone in the beginning. Then the whole family joined. As a result, the

misunderstanding of my wife was removed and we became a happy family.

My economic condition also improved. Everything is on course now. Sometimes our *ghar sabha* lasts for one-and-a-half hours.

My parents who live in our native village also feel happy knowing this. Starting *ghar sabha* proved to be a watershed in our life.

GHAR SABHA ON CREMATION GROUND

Mahipatsinh Jadeja, Industrial Engineer, Rajkot

We have been holding *ghar sabha* since I became a *satsangi* in 1990. It has changed the atmosphere at home. The children learnt kirtans and how to give a speech. It raised their confidence. Both of my sons now are active members of the Yuvak Mandal. They do not eat out and for the past 18 years have not seen a film or watched TV. They visit the villages for *satsang* and help the villagers give up addictions.

They are now married. Their wives also do puja. They each have a son. We bought puja when they were born. Their parents do puja on their behalf. Also, we do not miss *ghar sabha* even if we get back home at midnight.

Once we had to go to the cremation ground.

We were likely to get back late at night so we held the *ghar sabha* there! Some people were attracted and they joined us. We talked to them about the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami. Three of them now visit the mandir regularly.

Once we went to see my uncle who had cancer. He was nearing his end. So we held our *ghar sabha* at his place. His family did not like the idea, but my uncle did not say anything. I told him that if it troubled him, we would stop. Then he said he had not heard anything like this in all his 65 years. The *ghar sabha* lasted one hour. A few hours later he died.

COMMUNICATION GAP RESOLVED

Diptesh D Patel, New Jersey, USA

When we started *ghar sabha* six years ago, we didn't know it would fill our lives with peace and joy. Thanks to it, my children have become cultured and they can understand our philosophy.

Ghar sabha has left a good impact on the children. Children are generally easily distracted. My son was interested in video games. But in *ghar sabha*, we would explain what it meant. Now he realizes that it is not good.

Ghar sabha has brought simplicity to our lives. *Ghar sabha* has also altered my approach towards others. Now I behave better with my parents.

My retired parents live with us. There were

some differences between us. There were communication gaps also. For example, my wife would cook something different from what my mother wanted to eat. We resolved such differences through *ghar sabha*. We discussed the cooking timetable.

We cover different subjects in the *ghar sabha*, such as, education, health, general knowledge, *satsang*-based games and others.

We have installed the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj where we conduct our *ghar sabha*. We offer food to him and dress him in varied clothes. We feel the divinity. ♦



The Mundaka Upanishad: Proclaiming the

Akshar-Purushottam Principle

Part 3



RECAP

Parā vidyā (‘परा विद्या’), or *brahmavidyā* (‘ब्रह्मविद्या’) is the means to ultimate liberation. Everything is included in *brahmavidya*. All *vidyās* are known by knowing it. Therefore, when a disciple named Shaunak asked, ‘कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति’ – ‘*Kasminnu bhagavo vignāte sarvamidam vignātam bhavateeti*’ – ‘By knowing which *vidyā* does one know everything?’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/3). Replying with the words, ‘अथ परा’ – ‘*Atha parā*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/5), Maharshi Angirā revealed *brahmavidyā* as the answer. Moreover, he defined *brahmavidyā* saying, ‘येनाऽक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्’ – ‘*Yenā’ksharam Purusham veda satyam provācha tām tattvato brahmavidyām*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13). Meaning, that by which both entities, *Aksharam*, i.e., Aksharbrahman, and *Purusham*, i.e., Purushottam, are known is called *brahmavidyā*. He also explained in great detail the forms, characteristics, powers and other qualities of the two divine entities, Akshar and Purushottam, mentioned in the definition of *brahmavidyā*. This has been described in the previous two articles of this series.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to be satisfied with just information on *parā vidyā* or *brahmavidyā*, i.e., the forms of Akshar and Purushottam. This would just be *aparā vidyā* in the name of *parā vidyā*. Therefore, so that we understand this *parā vidyā* in its true sense, Maharshi Angirā reveals something of great importance.

THE DOOR TO BRAHMAVIDYĀ: SURRENDERANCE TO THE GURU

‘Guru’ – an eternal word of Sanatana Hindu dharma. A word of great significance that reflects the Sanatana Hindu tradition. In the Mundaka Upanishad, the guru has been described as the door to realizing *brahmavidyā*.

‘O Shaunak,’ said Angirā muni, ‘तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्’ – ‘*Tadvignānārtham sa gurumevābhigachchhet*’ – ‘In order to realize that *brahmavidyā*, one must go to the guru’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/12). This statement by Angirā is the life-line of spiritual endeavour. It is not a merely a suggestion to surrender to the guru; it is an order, a command. The technique for unravelling the profound secrets of all the shastras is included in this command. Let us try to understand this matter in depth.

First of all, in this statement ‘*Tadvignānārtham sa gurumevābhigachchhet*’, Angirā muni has very cleverly used the word ‘*eva*’. By this one word ‘*eva*’ he has told us two special things. ‘*Eva*’ is used in the definitive sense of the word, for example, ‘you must do this’, meaning that it is compulsory; or ‘you will surely attain happiness’, meaning that you will definitely become happy. Here too, in

the above sentence, 'eva' exhibits two unique and remarkable meanings.

Firstly, in order to realize *brahmavidyā* 'अभिगच्छेद् एव' – '*abhigachched eva*' – one 'must go' to the guru. There is no other way. *Gnān* (wisdom) cannot be attained by oneself. You have to go somewhere.

Moreover, the second intention is 'गुरुम् एव अभिगच्छेत्' – '*Gurum eva abhigachchet*' – 'Only a guru' can be approached in order to attain *gnān*; one cannot go elsewhere. The world consists of people of various backgrounds, intellects, thoughts and experiences. In fact, they do not just vary, they may even conflict. So on whom do we base our decisions? This Upanishad brings to our attention that we should not go just anywhere, but we have to go to the guru.

Furthermore, this is not just an order to merely go – '*gachchet*', but to go well and entirely – '*abhigachchet*'. The purpose is not just to linger around the guru, but to truly associate with him. To explain this with an analogy: holding a sweet in one's hand is equivalent to lingering, but eating it is true association. Angirā Rushi reveals this secret later on too.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GURU

If surrendering to the guru is the lifeline of spiritual endeavour, then it is also necessary to decide who that guru is, and what he should be like. It is not an easy matter to lead someone to realize *brahmavidyā*. This is not even in the capability of a normal person. Not just anyone can become a guru for *brahmavidyā*. So who is that guru? What are his characteristics? These questions have also been answered by Angirā Rushi. Angirā says, "O Shaunak! The guru worthy of surrendering to should be 'श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्' – '*Shrotriyam Brahma nishtham*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/12). '*Shrotriyam*' means that he should know the essence of all the shastras. This is not about being a storehouse of information, but about having

experience. This is not just about knowing, but about practicing. Only one who lives according to that *gnān* can be the guru. That guru should be '*Brahma*' – Aksharbrahman himself – as well as '*nishtham*' – he should have staunch conviction in Paramātmā and should be solely engrossed in bhakti (devotion) towards Paramātmā. In the Bhagavad Gitā, such a guru has been referred to as 'उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः' – '*Upadekshyanti te gnānam gnāninastattvadarshinaha*' – 'wise and seer of the entities' (Gitā: 4/34).

Singing the praises of the guru, the form of Brahman, Maharshi Angirā says, 'यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद् यस्यैष महिमा भुवि' – '*Yaha saravagnaha saravid yasyaisha mahimā bhuvi*' – 'This *brahmaswarup* guru is all-knowing; he knows everything firsthand. He is educated in everything; he has all *vidyās* at his fingertips. Such is the extent of his divine glory.

Our knowledge is limited. How can we experience everything firsthand? Our mundane senses cannot exceed their limits. They can also be mistaken. Moreover, there is much that is not perceivable to us, and thus has become known to us by assumption or by being told. This is not the case for Aksharbrahman, due to the grace of Paramātmā his knowledge is all-encompassing, eternally proficient, firsthand, unmistakable, pure and precise. "Therefore, O Somya! This Aksharbrahman is 'वरेण्यं परं विज्ञानाद् वरिष्ठं प्रजानाम्' – '*Varenyam param vignānād varishtham prajānām*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/1)." Meaning, all those entangled in the net of *māyā* should take his refuge. They should make him their guru. They should pray to him.

Thus, having discussed the divine characteristics of the guru who makes us realize *brahmavidyā*, he then explains the method in which one should surrender to him.

THE METHOD OF SURRENDERING TO THE GURU

The unique method for a disciple wanting to attain knowledge to surrender to the guru is well-

established in our shastras. Here, words such as 'समित्पाणिः' – 'samitpānihi' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/12) and 'प्रशान्तचित्तायशमान्विताय' – 'prashāntachittāya shamānvitāya' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13) have been used to show his method.

Samitpānihi means one must go to the guru with *samidh* in hand. *Samidh* is fire-wood used in *yagnas*. A disciple obtains this *samidh* from the jungle. This represents the spirit of *seva* (service). If a disciple wants to attain knowledge, his first duty is to humbly and enthusiastically serve the guru. If he is lazy and arrogant, he will not attain knowledge even if he stays with the guru.

'*Prashāntachittāya*' means stability of mind and inner satisfaction. What can a wavering mind grasp? Nothing is understood if the mind is agitated. To attain knowledge we must focus our minds and serve the guru.

'*Shamānvitāya*' means control of the senses, forgoing unnecessary or unsuitable pleasures. The eyes do not see the unsuitable. The ears do not see the unsuitable. The tongue does not speak the unsuitable nor eat the uneatable. The skin does not touch the unsuitable. The nose does not smell the unsuitable. They only partake what is necessary and suitable, and only to the extent that is necessary and suitable, anything else is relinquished. If one tries to control all the senses in this way, then one can hear, understand and imbibe the precepts given by the guru. On the other hand, uncontrolled senses have a tendency of remaining submerged in pleasures. Therefore the realization of *brahmadevyā* is far away for those who are controlled by their senses.

Thus, he explains the obligation of a disciple who has surrendered to the guru. He then explains what our relationship with that guru should be like and how we should associate with the guru.

ASSOCIATION WITH THE GURU

Surrenderance! Surrenderance by mind, speech and actions – this is the true way of surrendering

to the guru. It is not enough to merely go to him or sit near him physically. One has to surrender and become engrossed. Angirā explains this principle with a nice metaphor. He says, 'तदेतद् अक्षरं ब्रह्म स प्राणस्तदु वाङ् मनः । तदेतत् सत्यं तद् अमृतं तद् वेद्ध्यं सो य ! विद्धि ॥' – '*Tadetad Aksharam Brahma sa prānastadu vāṅ manaha, tadetat satyam tad amrutam tad veddhavyam Somya! viddhi.*' – 'O Somya! That immortal and ever-existing Aksharbrahman is our life, our mind, our all. This is the absolute truth. Therefore we should penetrate through to him (*veddhavyam*), i.e., make him our goal and attain him. Therefore, make him your goal and obtain him (*viddhi*)' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/2). He then explains the method of attaining that goal. 'प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते । अप्रमत्तेन वेद्ध्यं शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत्' – '*Pranavo dhanuho sharo hyātmā Brahma tallakshyamuchyate, apramattena veddhavyam sharavat tanmayo bhavet*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/4). *Pranava* means Aum; Aum refers to Aksharbrahman. This is deduced from statements in the shastras, such as, 'ॐ इत्येतद् एतद्भ्येवाक्षरं ब्रह्म' – '*Aum ityetad etaddhyevā'ksharam Brahma*' (Katha Upanishad: 2/15,16), 'ॐ इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म' – '*Aum ityekāksharam Brahma*' (Gitā: 8/13) in which Aksharbrahman is described with the word 'Aum'. According to the *shruti* 'गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्' – '*Gurumevābhigachhet samitpānihi shrotriyaṁ brahma nishtham*' (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/12) that Aksharbrahman is the *brahmaswarup* guru.

Therefore this mantra means that *pranava*, i.e., the guru, who is the form of Aksharbrahman, is like a bow. One's *ātmā* is like an arrow, and that same Aksharbrahman is the target. Thus, just like an arrow clinging to the bow becomes one with the target, one should join one's *ātmā* to the manifest form of Aksharbrahman, the guru, i.e., profoundly associate with him and attain that very goal. In other words, one should become *brahmarup* and attain Akshardham. For in that Akshardham resides Paramātmā – the controller of Akshar.

Maharshi Angirā does not stop here. Revealing the greatness of Aksharbrahman, he further explains that this is the only thing worth doing in life. Everything else is useless. Therefore he says, 'तमेवैकं जानथाऽऽत्मानम् अन्या वाचो विमुञ्चथ' – 'Tamevaikam jānathā'tmānam anyā vācho vimunchatha' – 'O Shaunak! Drop (vimunchatha) other talks (anyā vācho) and only believe that Aksharbrahman to be your ātmā (Tamevaikam jānatha ātmānam)' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/5). His intention is that we never do what really has to be done and our priceless lives are squandered elsewhere. Therefore, when we find such a *brahmaswarup satpurush*, it is worth dropping all other matters, believe him to be our ātmā, unite with him, and seize the opportunity of becoming *brahmarup* and offering devotion to Parabrahman and thus attain liberation. Since, 'O Shaunak! 'अमृतस्यैष सेतुः' – 'Amrutasyaisha setuhu' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/5).' This Aksharbrahman guru is not ordinary; he is the divine bridge to attain Paramātmā. Through him we can easily attain Paramātmā, the Lord of Akshardham, who resides on the other side of this worldly course.

Thus, Angirā Muni has not just advised us to surrender to the guru, but he has also taught us the ideal method of surrendering to him totally.

He then reveals one more special method.

MEDITATING ON THE BRAHMASWARUP GURU

Can you meditate on the guru? This question will be answered here. Angirā Muni says that the best way to associate with the guru is by meditating on him; contemplating on his divine form, which is above *māyā*. This is true association with Brahman through contemplation. 'ॐ इत्येवं ध्यायथाऽऽत्मानं स्वस्ति वः पाराय तमसः परस्तात्' – 'Aum ityevam dhyāyathā'tmānam swasti vaha pārāya tamasaha parastāt' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/6). Meaning, Shaunak! If you want to overcome the deep darkness of *māyā*, then meditate on the

brahmaswarup guru who is ever above *māyā* and the *ātmā* of us all.

This sentence also has another meaning hidden within it. One should contemplate (*dhyāyatha*) on one's *ātmā* (*ātmānam*) as *Aum*, i.e., Aksharbrahman (*Aum ityevam*). One should unite oneself with Aksharbrahman while contemplating, 'I am Akshar, I am Brahman.'

Thus, Maharshi Angirā instructs us to associate with Aksharbrahman through contemplation and be aware of oneself as *brahmarup*.

In this way, until now, we have seen how our relationship with the *brahmaswarup* guru should be in order to attain *parā vidyā* or *brahmavidyā*, i.e., to know Brahman and Parabrahman in their entirety.

He then explains what divine fruits gained by an aspirant who attains *brahmavidyā* and realizes Akshar and Purushottam as they are by associating with the *brahmaswarup* guru in this way.

THE DIVINE FRUITS OF BRAHMAVIDYĀ One Becomes Brahmarup

'ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति' – 'Brahma veda Brahmaiva bhavati' (Mundaka Upanishad: 3/2/9). When an aspirant who desires to imbibe *brahmavidyā* knows (*veda*) 'Brahma' in the way this Upanishad has shown, then his own *ātmā* also becomes *brahmarup* (*Brahmaiva bhavati*). For him, the *bhakti* and *upāsana* of Purushottam no longer has obstacles. Furthermore, that devotee benefits from the darshan of Parabrahman.

Darshan of Blissful Paramātmā

'तद्विज्ञानेन परिपश्यन्ति धीरा आनन्दरूपममृतं यद् विभाति' – 'Tadvignānena paripashyanti dheerā ānandaroopamamrutam yad vibhāti' (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/8). 'Tadvignānena' based on the context this means that the wise see that divine blissful Paramātmā by attaining a thorough knowledge of Aksharbrahman, i.e., by becoming *brahmarup*.

A Living Experience of Liberation

Explaining the benefits a devotee who becomes *brahmarup* (*aksharup*) and realizes Parabrahman, the controller of Akshar, gains in this very life, Angirā Muni says, ‘भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः । क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे ॥’ – *Bhidyate hrudayagranthishchhidryante sarvasanshayāḥ, ksheeyante chāsya karmāni tasmin drushte parāvare*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 2/2/8). Here, the word ‘*parāvare*’ refers to Paramātmā – that to which even Aksharbrahman, who is above (*para*) *jīvas*, *ishwars*, *māyā* and *muktas*, is subordinate (*avara*). When one realizes that Parabrahman, who is the controller of Aksharbrahman, all the desires of the heart are overcome; all doubts are destroyed. One attains *nirvikalp* faith in the form of Paramātmā and all one’s karmas are destroyed, i.e., one is freed from the ties of karmas.

To instil this, Angirā again says, ‘O Shaunak! To one who is satisfied and content in having imbibed *brahmavidyā* thoroughly: ‘इहैव सर्वे प्रविलीयन्ति कामाः’ – *Ihaiva sarve pravileeyanti kāmāḥ*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 3/2/2). Here, in this body (*Ihaiva*), whilst still living, all misery-causing mundane desires (*sarve kāmāḥ*), are destroyed (*pravileeyanti*). He experiences liberation whilst living.

Such a *jivanmukta* (one who is liberated whilst still alive) attains the same divine blissful fruit after death too.

Attains Purushottam in Akshardham

‘वेदान्तविज्ञानमुनिश्चितार्थाः संन्यासयोगाद् यतयः शुद्धसत्त्वाः । ते ब्रह्मलोकेषु परान्तकाले परामृताः परिमुच्यन्ति सर्वे ॥’ – *Vedāntavignānūnischitārthāḥ sanyāsayogād yatayaḥ shuddhasattvāḥ, te Brahmaloakeshu parrantakāle parāmrutāḥ parimuchyanti sarve*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 3/2/6). Meaning, O Shaunak! Those that have developed conviction in *brahmavidyā* (*vignāna*) that is explained in the Upanishads (*vedānta*), such pure hearted *yatis* (those who have control over their senses) ultimately attain the abode in which Paramātmā resides, Brahmalo-

(Akshardham), and attain ultimate liberation. They never re-enter the course of this world.

Moreover, O Shaunak! One who knows *brahmavidyā* as it has been explained in this Upanishad, i.e., fully understands the forms of the two divine entities Akshar and Purushottam, ‘विद्वान् नामरूपाद् विमुक्तः परात्परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम्’ – *Vidvān nāmaroopād vimuktaha parātparam Purushamupaiti divyam*’ – ‘That wise person is freed from these mundane things, he goes to Akshardham, and attains the divine Paramātmā who is above even Akshar’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 3/2/8).

Thus, the fruit of ultimate liberation that cannot be achieved by other means is achieved by *brahmavidyā*.

THIS IS THE ETERNAL TRUTH

In this way, having pledged to explain *brahmavidyā* with the words ‘अथ परा’ – *atha parā*’ – ‘I will now explain what *parā vidyā* is’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/5), and defining *brahmavidyā* as ‘येनाऽक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्’ – *Yenā’ksharam Purusham veda satyam provācha tām tattvato brahmavidyām*’ – ‘That by which *Aksharam*’, i.e., Aksharbrahman and *Purusham*’, i.e., Purushottam both entities are known is called *brahmavidyā*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/2/13). Angirā has explained the divine forms, qualities and grandeur of Akshar and Purushottam throughout this Mundaka Upanishad. He has also explained the method to realize those divine qualities and grandeur, and finally he also acquainted us with their divine blissful fruits. Thus, having comprehensively revealed *brahmavidyā*, Angirā Muni closes with the words, ‘तदेतत् सत्यम्’ – *Tadetat satyam*’ – ‘O Shaunak! Whatever I have said till now is the supreme truth. This is the ultimate eternal principle. Do not doubt it’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 3/2/11).

Thus, this Upanishad concludes with the explanation of the supreme truth, the ultimate eternal principle. And finally, with the words

‘नमः परमत्रयिभ्यो नमः परमत्रयिभ्यः’ – ‘*Namaha paramarushibhyo namaha paramarushibhyaha*’ the proclaimer Rushi of the extraordinary Akshar-Purushottam principle has also been bowed to. Let us also bow to him.

CONCLUSION

We have learnt and savoured the precepts of *brahnavidyā* which fill the Mundaka Upanishad. In the Vachanāmṛut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given these same precepts in a brief and simple way. Here are his words: “Now, on the path of ‘brahma-gnān’, one should understand in the following manner: Brahman is not subject to change and is indivisible. Thus, it does not undergo change, nor can it be divided. When that Brahman is equated with all forms, it is because that Brahman is the cause of all – Prakṛiti-Purush, etc. It is their supporter and pervades all through its *antaryāmi* powers. Furthermore, that which is the cause, the supporter and the pervader cannot be distinct from its effect. It is in reference to this context that the scriptures equate that Brahman with all forms. However, one should not believe that that Brahman itself undergoes change and assumes the forms of all mobile and immobile beings. Transcending that Brahman is Parabrahman, Purushottam Nārāyan, who is distinct from Brahman, and is the cause, the supporter and the inspirer of Brahman. With such

(contd. from p. 6)

while, “Listen Brahmanand! If your Swaminarayan becomes Ram, then I shall behave like Ravan. And if he becomes Krishna, then I shall become Kansa. If he flies in the air, then I too shall fly to get him. If he goes to *patal*, I too shall follow him and pull him out. Fire cannot burn me, water cannot drown me, and the earth’s gravity cannot pull me down from space. These are my powers, so don’t forget! Tell your Swaminarayan that he has since long deceived and exploited others, but he has never come across a greater opponent than

understanding, one should develop oneness with one’s *jivātmā* and with that Brahman, and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him. With such understanding, ‘brahma-gnān’ also becomes an unobstructed path to attaining the highest state of enlightenment” (Vachanamṛut Gadhada II- 3).

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (Swami Yagnapurushdasji) has made this *brahnavidyā* which is described in the Upanishads and the Vachanāmṛut manifest by consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in majestic traditional mandirs. Furthermore, he pronounced across the world that the Aksharbrahman that has been described in the Upanishads and other shastras is Gunātītānand Swami himself, and Purushottam Parabrahman is Shri Sahajānand Swami Shri Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Today, the manifest form of that very Aksharbrahman, Brahmaswarup Guruhari Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, continues to deepen and strengthen the foundations of these eternal principles.

We are all extremely fortunate that we have come into contact with the embodiment of *parāvidyā*, *brahnavidyā*, *adhyātmavidyā* – the Akshar-Purushottam principle through the manifest *guruhari*.

In the manner of this Upanishad let us end with obeisance to the *shrotriya*, *Brahman*, *nishtha* Guruhari: ॐ नमो नारायणस्वरूपाय। – *Aum namo Nārāyanaswaroopāya*. ♦

me. Now I wish to destroy him.”

Brahmanand Swami gave a fitting reply, “Gebi, hear me. Don’t forget that Ram killed Ravan and Krishna destroyed Kansa. So it is you who has come across a greater opponent in Swaminarayan today. It is you who has exploited for too long and frightened people by your black arts. Remember, you’ll have to scramble from Gadhada in the middle of the night.” Then, Brahmanand Swami and the rest departed. ♦

(contd. next issue)

From Gujarati text *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*
by H.T. Dave

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS FOR NEW BAPS MANDIR IN WELLINGBOROUGH

22-23 August 2009, England



Grand procession arrives outside new mandir



Dr Swami performs murti-pratishtha arti

The grand opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Wellingborough, Northants, was celebrated on the weekend of 22-23 August 2009. The mandir is a completely new building on a site where the previous BAPS mandir – consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1977 – once stood.

On 22 August, a Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony was performed during the morning where devotees and well-wishers offered their prayers for peace and well-being to prevail throughout the local community.

During the afternoon, the *murtis* that were to be enshrined in the new mandir were placed on decorated floats and honoured in a grand procession through the streets of the town. After commencing at 2:00pm from Highfield Leisure Centre (Hindu Community Centre) in the presence of local dignitaries, the colourful procession followed a planned route through Wellingborough culminating three hours later at

the new mandir site on Mill Road.

In the evening, a special cultural programme was organized in the new assembly hall where young devotees performed dances, dramas and devotional songs to mark the joyous occasion.

The following day, on Sunday 23 August, the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Wellingborough, Northants, was inaugurated amid Vedic chanting and ceremonies. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic rituals of the *murtis* at Bochasan, in India, on the auspicious day of Guru Purnima on 7 July 2009. The new *murtis* were now ceremoniously installed by Pujya Dr Swami as other learned sadhus officiated the *murti-pratishtha* (invocation) ceremony in accordance with ancient Hindu scriptures.

The Mayor of Wellingborough, senior police officers and other guests from the community expressed their gratitude at being present on this unique occasion. ♦

BAL MANDAL CULTURAL PROGRAMME

26 July 2009, Melbourne, Australia

On the first Sunday of the auspicious Hindu month of Shravan, 26 July 2009, the children of the BAPS Bal Mandal in Melbourne, Australia, presented a cultural programme entitled 'Bal Prabhu Ghanshyam'.

The stage was beautifully decorated around the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, the childhood form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Balikas had decorated the hall with inspiring pictures from the life of Ghanshyam Maharaj. They also made a decorative *hindolo* based on the theme.

A wonderful exposition (*parayan*) on Ghanshyam Maharaj's life from the Harililamrutam scripture was eloquently presented by a *balak*. The *balaks* performed dances to the tune of vari-

ous kirtans, such as, 'Ghanshyam, Ghanshyam mari sathe ramva....' A very funny and message-oriented musical skit was performed by the children to show how innocent fish were saved by Ghanshyam Maharaj. A special session of games, 'Ramiye Ghanshyam ne Sang', was played by the under six-year-olds. They played games like bucket ball, obstacles course and pop the balloon. Then a video presentation on BAPS Bal Mandal activities was shown.

The climax of the evening was the comedy musical drama by the *balaks* called 'Dradh Ashro', which had everyone in laughter. The cultural programme presentation concluded with a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings and *arti*. ♦

10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF BAPS MANDIR, NAIROBI

26 July to 9 August 2009

Over 60 years ago, by the inspiration and efforts of Brahaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami, *satsang* was established in East Africa. Yogiji Maharaj visited there in 1955, 1960 and 1970 to consecrate mandirs. Then in August 1999 Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a grand *shikharbaddh* mandir in Nairobi, Kenya. To celebrate the 10th anniversary of its inauguration and also the 50th anniversary of the first mandir in Uganda, a team of sadhus led by Pujya Mahant Swami is currently in East Africa.

In Nairobi, over the past year, the BAPS have organized blood donation camps, clothes distribution to the needy, medical camps, *adhiveshans* for children and youths, an ideal family, campaign and other events to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the mandir.

During the main celebrations from 26 July to 9 August 2009, Mahant Swami conducted an enlightening series of discourses on the *Yogi Gita*, *shibirs* were held for children, youths and elders, and there were daily public assemblies, which were attended by over 3,500 people daily.

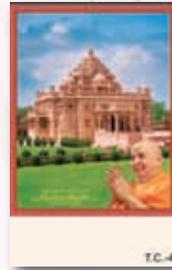
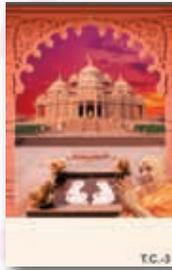
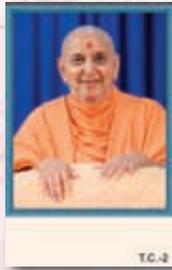
On 7 August the children and youths presented a cultural programme of traditional dance and drama.

On 8 August, 350 devotees participated in the Vedic *yagna* for the inauguration of the Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti*. Thereafter, the *murti* was flown in a helicopter to shower its divine glance upon the city.

On 9 August, the 10th Patotsav of the BAPS Mandir in Nairobi and the installation of the Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murti* was celebrated. ♦

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH

Calendars & Akshar Diaries 2010



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To advertise your family or business details contact the bookstall at your nearest *shikharbaddh* mandir.

Akshar Diaries 2010 available in three varieties: one page per day and half page per day versions.

NEW PUBLICATIONS



JAGTE RAHO

As part of the Parental Awareness Year organized by the BAPS Children's Activities Central Office, Ahmedabad, this excellent and inspiring DVD provides essential guidance for parents on how to interact with their children to cultivate noble character. It features short presentations on the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and its children's activities, as well the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. One of the highlights of this DVD is the insightful drama, 'Jagte Raho'. Through a series of short scenes, this drama presents commonly occurring situations from which parents can learn about how to improve their interactions and bonding with their children. The DVD concludes with in-depth guidance from Doctor Swami, who has many decades of experience in guiding parents.

This DVD is a must for all parents.



SMRUTI

A memorial book highlighting the birth and development of BAPS Satsang in Mumbai. Rare photographs of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj provide an insight into the growth of Satsang in Mumbai.

1st Edition: May 2009, ISBN: 81-7526-116-1

Pages: 348, Hardback



Above: Swamishri blesses children after their cultural presentation during the Sunday satsang assembly, Atladra, August 2009.

Below: Pujya Mahant Swami and sadhus during the Decennial Celebrations of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nairobi. Mahant Swami installs the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni consecrated by Swamishri, July-August 2009.





श्री घनश्याम महाराज
SHRI GHANSHYAM MAHARAJ, ATLADRA