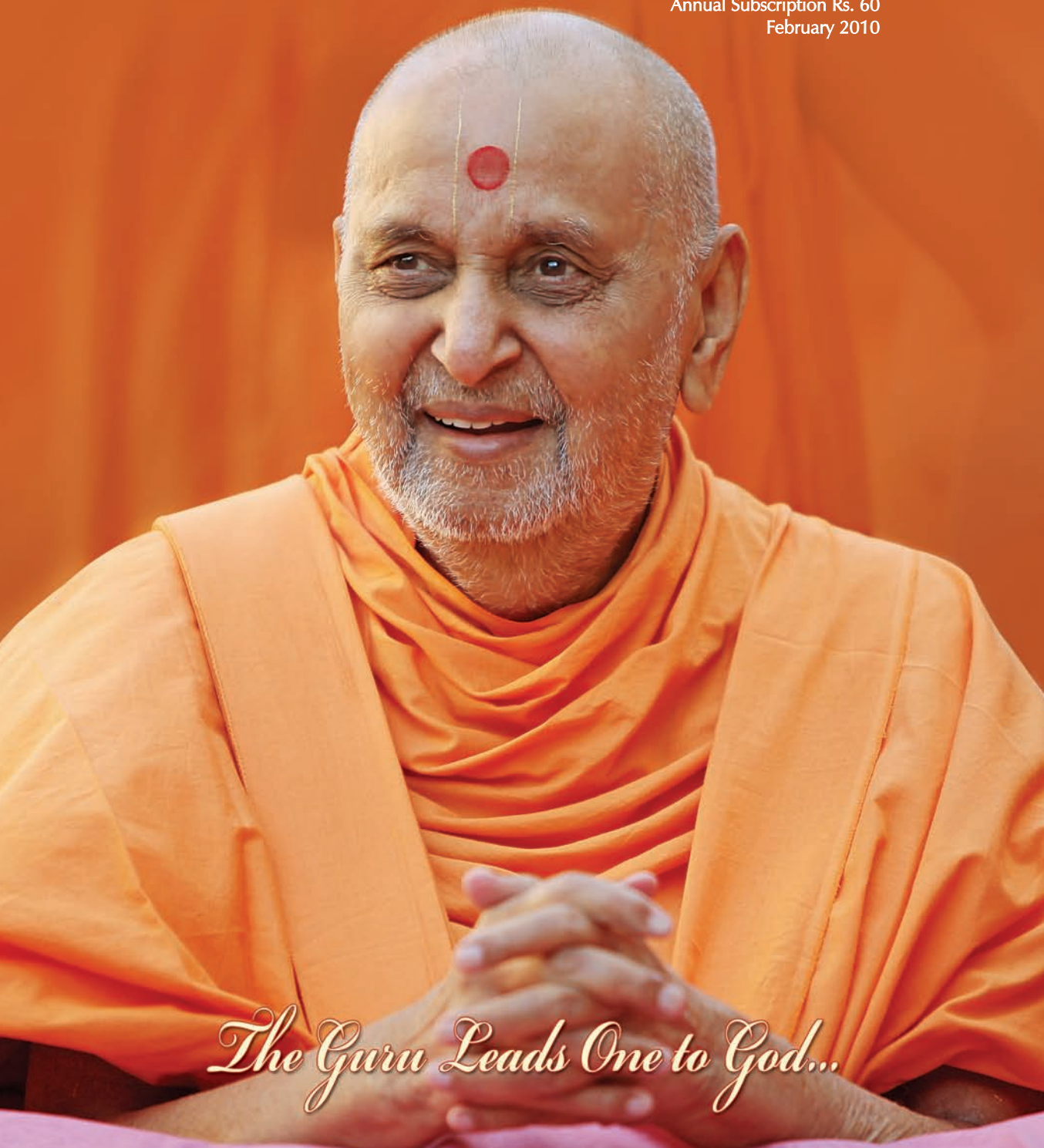
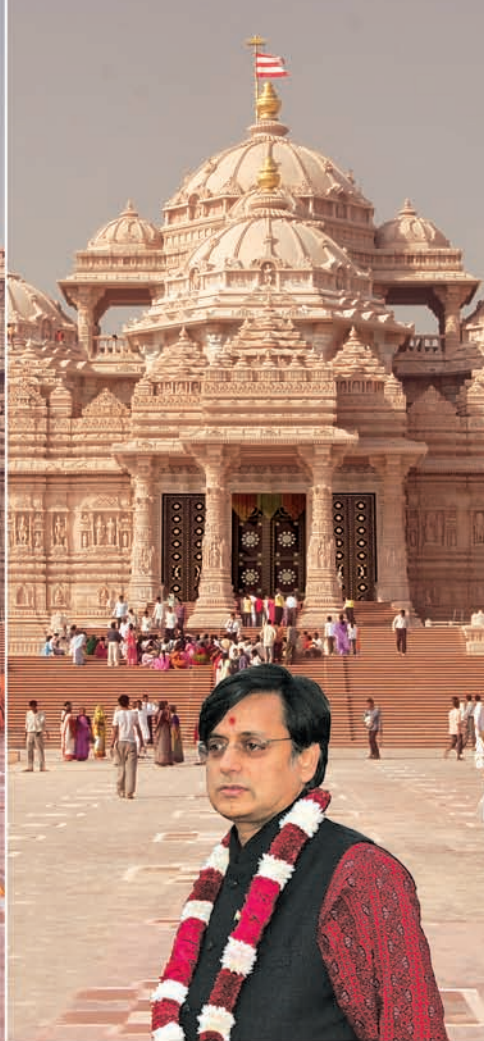


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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The Guru Leads One to God...



DISTINGUISHED VISITORS TO SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI

(L to R): India's Minister for Urban Development, S. Jaipal Reddy; Chairman of UNESCO's Executive Board, Shri Olabiyi Yai; and India's Minister for External Affairs, Shri Shashi Tharoor.

Their opinions noted in the Visitors' Book, together with those of other notable visitors, are given below.

I have been overwhelmed by the magnificent aesthetic achievement that the temple represents. The modern technological devices and ancient skills have been combined in a rare measure. In one word, it is a marvel created in a modern age.

S. Jaipal Reddy

India's Minister for Urban Development

I was highly impressed by this noble place of Indian spirituality, more simply, this noble place of universal spirituality. What has been done and is being done here gives evidence that hope of a reconciliation of Man with himself, with nature, with his ancestors and Gods is not lost.

I wish that this work and the spirit that lives here are known better and may become more widespread.

Olabiyi Yai

Chairman, Executive Board, UNESCO,
Ambassador of Benin to UNESCO

What an astonishing privilege it has been for me to make my first visit to Akshardham! It is a place of great beauty, informative architecture and thoughtful design. Also, the exhibitions and shows are magnificent creations of our culture, spirituality and humanity. Akshardham is truly a Hindu temple of which every Indian can be proud of. I shall be back again and again!

Shashi Tharoor

India's Minister of State for
External Affairs

I am very pleased to observe the magnificent Akshardham – a Hindu Temple complex – the centre of which is a monument to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is interesting to learn the incidents from his life, portraying messages of peace, harmony, humility and devo-

tion to God.

Since Vedic times, Hinduism is deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the people of India. I pay my fullest respect to Hinduism.

Vice Senior General Maung Aye

Vice-Chairman of the State Peace and
Development Council,
Union of Myanmar

My family was very moved and inspired by our visit. We all felt the spiritual emphasis on harmony and grace. We will never forget it – especially the lesson of iron and wood.

Timothy Roemer,

United States of America
US Ambassador to India



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FIRST WORD

A recent study revealed that the number of words our eyes and ears receive is 2.3 words per second, or about 100,000 words a day! It is astonishing, but it is true. With all the increasing time we spend on our mobile phone, computer and net, and other activities, we are exposed to 34 gigabytes of information each day. Our info age is overwhelming and flooding us. The alarming repercussion of this is the massive negative impact on our lives. Our attention spans have decreased. The tendency to think creatively and feel deeply have taken a toll. The overdose has made us stressful, irritable and less connected with our inner selves. Whatever we accomplish is sometimes superficial and personally unsatisfying. Relationships turn sour rapidly because of our growing impatience and intolerance. The over exposure also saturates our mind and disables us in appreciating the good things in life.

It is true that we cannot stop the frenetic pace of information and activities, but we can control and manage them for ourselves. We need to clearly define and limit our priorities. Decide every day what to do and how much to do. Never forget to avoid some things and focus on matters that concern and help us perform and be better.

To further alleviate the effects of info-fatigue, spend some quality time with your family, friends, doing *satsang* sadhana and engaging in your favourite hobbies. A daily session of *ghar sabha* has the cumulative effect of resolving mental stress, calming the mind and infusing enthusiasm and energy for a better life. Also, engaging daily in the basic *satsang* rituals of *arti*, *thal*, *mansi puja* and listening to *satsang* discourses are great stress busters and providers of inner peace and joy. ♦

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BHAGATJI MAHARAJ

and the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana



Bhagatji Maharaj (1829-1897) was the second spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. As instructed by Gunatitanand Swami, he remained a householder, but his determination to reveal the supreme glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam and the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar was not affected despite many tribulations. He lived a simple and saintly life, which touched even those who antagonized him. This combination of pious living and pure wisdom convinced many of the real truth of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Let us pay tributes to Bhagatji Maharaj's work of spreading the Akshar-Purushottam principle on the occasion of his 181st birth anniversary on 28 February 2010.

The concepts of Brahman and Parabrahman are repeatedly discussed in the Prasthantrayi – Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita. In the very first *sutra* of the Brahma Sutras, Vyasji states: “*Athāto Brahmajignāsa,*” by which he establishes that the knowledge of both Brahman (Akshar) and Parabrahman (Purushottam) is a prerequisite for attaining *moksha*. Further, in the Taittiriya Upanishad (2.1), it is stated, “*Barahmavidāpnoti Param,*” which means that only one who knows Akshar, i.e., becomes *brahmarup*, can attain Parabrahman.

Based on these, and many other revelations of the shastras, Bhagwan Swaminarayan stated

in the Shikshapatri (*shloka* 116), “*Nijātmanam brahmarupam dehatraya vilakshanam; Vibhavya tena kartavyā bhakti Krishnasya sarvadā.*” Meaning, “Believe oneself as *brahmarup*, separate from the three bodies – *sthul*, *sukshma* and *karan* – and in that *brahmarup* state always offer devotion to Parabrahman.”

Thus, Akshar and Purushottam are at the heart of the philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Throughout his life, Bhagwan Swaminarayan taught this philosophy to his sadhus and devotees, revealing himself as the manifest form of Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as the incarnation of Akshar. He emphasized that all

those who aspire to attain *moksha* must cultivate qualities like those of Akshar and in that pure, *brahmarup* state offer bhakti to Purushottam. Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed that he would remain ever-present on earth through the form of Akshar and continue to guide aspirants on the path of *moksha*. Thus, in this succession of *brahmaswarup*, God-realized sadhus he established, Gunatitanand Swami was the first.

Hence, after Bhagwan Swaminarayan's return to his divine abode, Akshardham, Gunatitanand Swami continued to teach this philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Through Gunatitanand Swami's spiritual talks and grace, countless aspirants attained the *brahmarup* state.

Despite the numerous times Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami had explained the truth of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, some found it difficult to accept and propagate. But, Gunatitanand Swami persisted in his talks to elaborate upon this Akshar-Purushottam principle from Bhagwan Swaminarayan's discourses in the Vachanamrut. Helping him in this task was Bhagatji Maharaj. Bhagatji Maharaj was a householder, but through his association with Gopalanand Swami (from 1839 to 1852) and Gunatitanand Swami (from 1852 to 1867) had fully grasped Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings. The circumstances at that time were that those in positions of power generally opposed the widespread and open discussion of this philosophy. Those who did venture to advocate it risked excommunication from the Satsang.

However, even this possibility did not deter Bhagatji Maharaj, who always talked about the supreme glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and, in particular, the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as the incarnation of Akshar. Understanding this glory would enable an aspirant to associate with the manifest form of Akshar in the true sense and progress on the path of *moksha*. The following examples are representative of his devoted efforts.

VAGHA KHACHAR ACCEPTS THE TRUTH

After the Kartik Punam festival in Vartal in 1865 CE (VS 1921), Gunatitanand Swami was returning with his entourage to Junagadh. On the way, he stopped at Sarangpur, where Vagha Khachar lived. He was a devout *satsangi*, but was troubled by dreams of violent fighting. He revealed this to Swami, who suggested that he come with the group to Junagadh. Vagha Khachar agreed, but said that he would need an attendant to provide for his daily needs. So, Swami appointed Pragji Bhakta, who was also with the group. Thus, Pragji Bhakta would serve Vagha Khachar and at the same time talk to him about Gunatitanand Swami's glory as Akshar. The talks irritated Vagha Khachar, so he complained to Swami and had Pragji Bhakta removed from his service. However, without an attendant, Vagha Khachar struggled. So, he requested Swami for a replacement. Swami said, "There is nobody except Pragji Bhakta. Let him serve you, and if you don't like his talks, just ignore them." Pragji Bhakta again began to serve Vagha Khachar and also resumed his talks and explained that only when he understood the true form of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar would his disturbing dreams end. This stunned Vagha Khachar and soon the group reached Junagadh. There, Vagha Khachar noticed that other devotees were really enjoying the divine atmosphere and beaming with joy, while he was not. Once, while serving on the mandir farm, he told this to Dama Sheth, who said, "If you have faith in Pragji's words that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar then you will experience peace." Vagha Khachar said that he would only accept this if Gunatitanand Swami himself told him. So Dama Sheth told Pragji Bhakta, who meditated on Gunatitanand Swami and requested him to come to the farm. When Swami arrived there from the mandir, Vagha Khachar asked him, "This Pragji says that you are Akshar. Resolve this issue for me." So, Gunatitanand confirmed, "It is as Pragji says." On accepting Swami's word, Vagha Khachar experienced total inner peace and joy.

Thus, despite Vagha Khachar's resistance,

Pragji Bhakta persisted and eventually led him to the true understanding.

PRAVITRANAND SWAMI IS FINALLY CONVINCED

Pravitrnanand Swami was a *nand paramhansa* initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He did not accept that Gunatitanand Swami was the incarnation of Akshar. So, when, one night, Pragji Bhakta spoke to Raghuvircharan Swami about Gunatitanand Swami's glory, Pravitrnanand Swami, who was resting nearby heard them and told them to stop. Pragji Bhakta replied, "This Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar and only by serving him through thoughts, deeds and words will Shriji Maharaj be pleased." Pravitrnanand Swami angrily rebuked Pragji Bhakta, "Who are you to teach me Swami's form." Then he threatened, "If I do not excommunicate you, my name is not Pavitrnanand!" But Pragji Bhakta calmly said, "Now, even Shriji Maharaj cannot excommunicate me." At this point Gunatitanand Swami arrived and instructed Pragji Bhakta to bow down and apologize to Pravitrnanand Swami. Pragji Bhakta did as instructed. Shortly afterwards, Pravitrnanand Swami used his authority to have Pragji Bhakta excommunicated from the Satsang, but Pragji Bhakta continued to talk about Swami as the manifest form of Akshar and observe the *niyams* of Satsang. Thus, soon after Gunatitanand Swami had returned to Akshardham, Pragji Bhakta was again accepted into the Satsang.

Once, Pravitrnanand Swami and other sadhus had gone to Anand. One day, some of the younger sadhus sang the 'Swaminarayan' *dhun*. This upset Pravitrnanand Swami, who told them to sing the 'Narnarayan' *dhun* as was the usual practice. However, the sadhus disobeyed him. This hurt Pravitrnanand Swami's ego and he returned to Vartal. There, Pravitrnanand Swami called for Pragji Bhakta to discourse to him. Pragji Bhakta came and said, "There is only one way to overcome ego, jealousy and other base instincts – to become *atmarup* and offer bhakti to God.

And the only way to become free of all faults and *brahmarup* is through the profound association of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami." Thus, in this way, Pragji Bhakta convinced Pravitrnanand Swami of the truth and practical necessity of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

SWAMI YAGNAPURUSHDASJI LEARNS THE TRUE PHILOSOPHY

In Surat, in 1883 (VS 1939), a grand celebration was held on the occasion of the *murti-pratishtha* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.

Bhagatji Maharaj was present and gave discourses throughout the day. On this occasion, Swami Yagnapurushdasji had come with his guru, Vignananand Swami, from Vartal. Bhagatji Maharaj was, at the time, stitching something and, at the same time, discoursing to the assembly on the glory of Akshar. This was the first darshan Swami Yagnapurushdasji had of Bhagatji Maharaj and he was instantly drawn to his divine personality.

Through the discourses of Bhagatji Maharaj, Swami Yagnapurushdasji learnt that, Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar – the divine, heavenly abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This understanding was further endorsed by Vignananand Swami and so Swami Yagnapurushdasji also fully understood this eternal truth.

Thus, throughout his life, Bhagatji Maharaj boldly proclaimed the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar to all and inspired countless aspirants on the path of *moksha*.

In doing this, he abided by Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wish revealed in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-71, "A devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others." In fulfilling this wish, Bhagatji Maharaj was always firm in stating the facts, but always polite in manner. Observing his saintly life, people would sooner or later realize the truth, accept it and themselves benefit spiritually by living accordingly. ♦

Guru-Shishya Relationship in BAPS



For his doctorate from the University of South Africa, South African priest, Dr Brian Hutchinson, wrote a thesis titled “Guru-Devotee Relationship in the Experience of Members of the Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sampradaya”. He came to India to research this topic and interviewed many BAPS devotees and sadhus for his study of the guru-shishya relationship. In his study Dr. Hutchinson captured the essence of the personalities of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, which is their motherly affection.

In the course of the interviews, Dr Brian Hutchinson carefully observed the spirit and vitality that bind the young and the old alike to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The following are extracts from his PhD thesis:

[In] the Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan movement,... whilst philosophy or *jnana* (liberating knowledge) is important, it is considered secondary to bhakti, (love for God), as the way to liberation. The movement belongs to that branch of Hinduism which Otto refers to as the ‘religion of grace.’

The writer’s contact with members of the movement impressed upon him that their predominant concern is with experience rather than doctrine. Whilst this may be said to be true for most religious persons, with this movement it

is especially the case that experience is the very centre of their concern. It arises firstly, out of the bhakti tradition to which the movement belongs, and secondly, from the fact that relationship with the guru is the focal point of their attention, and relationship is predominantly experienced rather than intellectually apprehended.

The fact that the guru is such an accepted integral part of the practice of Hindu religion means that the role often goes without mention.

Miller [1976:533],¹ with regards to guru-devotee relationship, suggests, “By understanding the importance of the role of the guru in Hindu tradition, we come closer to understanding the faith by which Hindus really live.”

1. Miller D., 1976/77. “The guru as centre of sacredness.” In *Sciences religieuses/Studies in Religion*. Vol. 6/5, p. 527-533.

For the members of the BAPS movement, the central issue in religion is their relationship to the guru. In order to grasp the meaning of what is said and done in the movement, this fact has to be kept in mind.... the respect, commitment and love of devotees for the guru, creates a context which is highly supportive of the belief.

THE SELFLESS LOVE OF THE GURU

Selfless love was the most frequently and enthusiastically reported characteristic of the guru, especially in respect of the respondents first becoming devotees and sadhus. One of the women devotees who the writer interviewed spoke feelingly of Yogiji Maharaj, "His [Yogiji's] innocence, his child-like love on his face. His magnetic personality. Deep penetrating eyes, as if hypnotising, not to influence people consciously [not to manipulate them]... but conveyed his love... his innocence... that Love is something we really enjoyed in our life."

This love is sometimes experienced directly in the inner experience of the devotee on the emotional, psychic, or mystical level. At other times it comes 'horizontally' through the human caring attitude and actions of the guru directed towards the devotee. For example, by the guru's showing interest in how the devotee is feeling, in his sensitive response to the needs of the devotee, and even in his attending to the devotee's basic physical comfort. An example of this practical caring love was given by Mahant Swami, who explained to the writer how Yogiji Maharaj had cared for him before he had been initiated. Yogiji Maharaj had personally made Mahant Swami's bed, told him when to go to sleep and woken him in the morning.

Viveksagar Swami, when he first saw Yogiji Maharaj said, "[I] was impressed. I saw great love in Yogiji Maharaj. I came for two or three days' celebration... I stayed for two months!"

Kothari Swami spoke of the factors which had drawn him to Yogiji Maharaj, "His selfless love experienced by each and every person. Even a child

knew he was loved by him... showered with love."

One sadhu whose family had not been members of the movement, and who said he had not been in any way interested in religion, spoke of his own becoming a devotee and sadhu, "It was Swamiji's [Pramukh Swami] pure love, his magnetic personality which attracted me to this movement."

Another sadhu said, "I was a devotee from birth. For being a sadhu I got the inspiration from the love of Swamiji [Pramukh Swami]. The love he used to offer us, share with us, that was the main thing that attracted me to become a sadhu."

THE PERSONAL INTEREST OF THE GURU IN THE DEVOTEE

Each devotee believes that he is known and perfectly understood by the guru. This is experienced not only in the inner life as a psychic phenomenon, but also in the external details of the devotee's life. An example of this common experience of the detailed involvement of the guru in the life of the devotee occurred with Bhaktavatsal, *kothari* of Sarangpur temple, who explained to the writer how he came to be in that position. He had originally come to India to attend university and as a result of his contact with Yogiji Maharaj and the sadhus he had been inspired to live a pious life.

"When Yogiji Maharaj passed away in 1971 I came to ask Pramukh Swami what I must do. He said what have you thought of? I said, 'To go to the U.S.A.' He said, 'That's alright.' He blessed me... saying, 'You will have a good job... a good life... However I was offered a job in Africa... I wrote a letter to Pramukh Swami. He said, 'Accept the job offered.' I used to write to Pramukh Swami when I had any trouble... Pramukh Swami inspired me. There were offers for me for marriage.... I wrote to Pramukh Swami [saying in effect that I did not feel it was right for me to be married]. When he came [to Africa] in 1974 he was very much pleased.... He called me and asked, 'What do you want to do, get married or proceed to U.K. or whatever?' I said, 'Well it's up to you..."

(contd. on p. 18)

The Guru Leads One to God



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

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

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

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

*Perhaps you can make a list of the mandirs, schools, hospitals and cultural
monuments like Akshardham he has raised and the relief centres he has opened for
society. But it is simply not possible to fathom the feelings of the countless people
who have changed for the better. The following true personal accounts were translated
from 'Swaminarayan Prakash,' August 2009, giving a glimpse of the kind of metamorphosis
that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired. The first part of 'A Guru Leads One to God...'
was published in the December 2009 issue of Swaminarayan Bliss.*

BLESSED BY THREE GURUS

Shri Shantilal Shah

Former Textile Mill Manager, Ahmedabad



After passing my B.Tech. from Mumbai University, I settled in Ahmedabad as I had got a job as Assistant Training Master in Jupiter Textile Mill, one of the city's leading mills. I used to live in the mill's residential quarters. Maganbhai Patel, an assistant engineer, was my colleague. Once, he came to my place and saw a photo of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. On knowing that I was a *satsangi*, he requested me to accompany him to see Shastriji Maharaj at Ambli Vali Pol in the Shahpur area of Ahmedabad. I refused politely since I belonged to the Kalupur seat and Shastriji Maharaj had separated from the Vartal seat. After a few days, I myself proposed to go with him. So one morning, we reached Ambli Vali Pol where I had my first darshan of Shastriji Maharaj. He was 83 then but his divinity and the glow in his eyes touched me.

Then I began to go there regularly. Yogiji Maharaj was also there in those days. His saintliness, childlike innocence and that blissful smile on his face were disarming. Previously, I had thought that Swaminarayan sadhus were unbecoming and irksome in their conduct. But Yogiji Maharaj was different; he was polite and caring. Thus, I accepted Shastriji Maharaj as my guru.

Gradually, my fascination for Shastriji Maharaj grew. However, two years later, in 1951, he left for Akshardham and Yogiji Maharaj succeeded him as guru. His love and care was such that I did not feel the loss of Shastriji Maharaj, and I began to like him as much as I had Shastriji Maharaj.

In 1953, I invited Yogiji Maharaj to my home town of Prantij and held a *sabha* there, despite the disapproval of some orthodox families.

I grew closer to Yogiji Maharaj. He helped me to

make progress both spiritually as well as materially. For 20 years I felt the warmth of his love.

When Yogiji Maharaj left for Akshardham in 1971 I felt distraught. Yogiji Maharaj had revealed Pramukh Swami as his successor, but I did not yet personally know him. However, our manager, Lallubhai Patel, often talked to me about Pramukh Swami, so I knew of his greatness.

Lallubhai often visited the mandir in Shahibaug to see Pramukh Swami and shared his experiences and feelings about Pramukh Swami with me. Thus, I began to like and respect Pramukh Swami. Besides, at the time of Yogiji Maharaj's cremation ceremony, Sant Swami (a senior sadhu) had declared, "Yogiji Maharaj has not left us. He is with us, dwelling in Pramukh Swami."

Thus, with the same adoration as Yogiji Maharaj, I accepted Pramukh Swami as my guru.

Events in my life later strengthened my devotion to him as my guru.

In 1971, my wife fell seriously ill. Her health was worsening. Relatives urged me to take her to Mumbai for treatment.

Pramukh Swami was in Ahmedabad at the time. I sought his sage advice. He asked me to continue with the treatment in Ahmedabad. However, despite treatment, her condition worsened. Doctors said there was little hope.

One morning, at five o'clock, she opened her eyes. She felt that Pramukh Swami, whose photo was placed before her bed, was blessing her.

To our utter surprise and against all medical expectations, she began to get better.

After a few days I received a letter from Pramukh Swami. He wrote, "Death hovered over your wife, but it receded thanks to the grace of Shriji Maharaj."

This event astounded us. Even the doctors were left wonderstruck.

The event in 1974 when Pramukh Swami along with other sadhus were denied passage to Nairobi in Africa also touched me when I saw him joyous as ever in Dadar mandir after his return to India. There was not a trace of gloom on his face.

This was yet another event which made me sure of his divinity.

I have been fortunate to accompany him on several of his *satsang* tours in India and overseas. Wherever I went, he lovingly cared for me. He has also cared for my family, from the marriages of my son and daughter, health of the family to other social issues. His care and concern for us have made us feel that we belong to his family.

Two occasions remain etched in mind.

In 2007, I went to Gondal with my son, Yogesh, to seek blessings for a matter relating to his profession. Two other *satsangis*, Girdharbhai Pokal and Mansukhbhai Pokal, were also with us. Girdharbhai introduced Mansukhbhai to Swamishri, saying, "Swami! Mansukh is my brother." Hearing this, Swami at once caught Yogesh's hand and said, "If he is your brother, this (Yogesh) is my brother."

We were thrilled to hear this.

Another incident took place in 2007 when I joined Swami on his visit to America. There, in Los Angeles, Swami fell ill. After three days, when he came out of his room, hundreds of devotees surged for his darshan. I was also there in the crowd.

Swami saw me and asked, "How is your health?"

I did not realize that Swamishri was asking me, but all eyes were fixed on me. Then, I realized that Swami knew about my back pain and the support belt I used to wear.

Then, Swamishri asked in detail, "Has your back pain got better? How did it start? Did you get it here or back in Ahmedabad?"

Since he became guru in 1971, Pramukh Swami has helped me to climb the spiritual ladder, and has all along showered his love and warmth on me. Having Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami as my gurus, one after the other, I feel that they are essentially the same entity. At 86, I now have nothing to gain or achieve. My only wish is to get closer to Pramukh Swami, please him still further and eventually remain forever in the blissful company of my gurus.

EVERY INCH A SADHU

Prof. Rameshbhai A. Dave

Retired Professor, Vallabh Vidyanagar



The occasion was the opening of the Akshar Purushottam Chhatralaya (APC) in Vidyanagar. I was there as an invitee. Two of my former students from V.P. College who had become sadhus saw me and took me for darshan of Yogiji Maharaj. He sized me up with his loving, piercing eyes and blessed me by patting me on the back in his unique way. I felt thrilled. I still feel that divine touch in my spine.

Once, I invited Yogiji Maharaj to my home, but he sent Pramukh Swami on his behalf. That is how I came to know Pramukh Swami and by God's grace my relationship with Swamishri endures to date.

Shastriji Maharaj aptly named him Narayanswarupdas as he has spread the glory of Swaminarayan worldwide. Indeed, Swami is a mobile *tirth* (place of pilgrimage). In times of calamity, his volunteers and sadhus invariably rush with timely assistance.

It is the *brahmanized* guru who guides the multitude of devotees and makes BAPS unique. The BAPS tree grown by Shastriji Maharaj has been tended down the years by Yogiji Maharaj, and presently, by Pramukh Swami Maharaj who has taken it to new heights the world over. The two Akshardham complexes, in Gandhinagar and New Delhi, are landmark achievements of the BAPS. Both are the inspiration of Pramukh Swami, and his fulfilment of the vision of his guru Yogiji Maharaj.

His humility and simplicity even on the day of the opening of Akshardham in New Delhi was quite touching as he attributed all his accomplishments to Shriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj .

Akshardham in Gandhinagar has its own saga of beauty and dedication. Unfortunately, it was targeted by terrorists, leaving a trail of death and

destruction. I still recollect the condolence prayer assembly held in the Akshardham premises soon after, in which Swamishri showed exemplary composure. He prayed for the dead and that the terrorists be guided by wisdom to act for the good of all.

Another occasion I am reminded of is the assembly held in a sports stadium in Ahmedabad to honour Pramukh Swami on his completion of 50 years as President of BAPS. It was monsoon and the sky was overcast with dark clouds, lightning and thunder. Swami was engrossed in turning his rosary. The *sabha* progressed unhindered and ended with Swamishri's blessings. As the devotees dispersed what they saw on leaving left them astonished. It had rained heavily outside the stadium during the assembly hour, leaving pools of water. The question on mine and everyone's mind was 'Who held an umbrella over the large stadium?' To me and all others, this was simply a miracle. I am tempted to quote the American author Fenz Warfel on miracles. He says, "For those who believe in God, no explanation is necessary, and for those who do not believe in God, no explanation is possible."

After my eye surgery, I went to Bochasan for darshan of Swamishri's puja. I could not see clearly yet, and even though he had not addressed the assembly, I had that uncanny feeling of having heard his discourse.

To quote Keats, "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

On returning to Vidyanagar, the news came that Swamishri was going to visit Vidyanagar on his way to Atladra. I felt elated. It was like a precious gift to me. But I take care not to see Swamishri personally for my domestic issues. I just pray to him to help me to be close to him for as long as I live.

Once, Swamishri was in Vidyanagar for the Annual Day celebration of the APC. The venue was the Town Hall. After the event, I was waiting for darshan with other devotees. Swamishri spotted me and gave me a rose. I leapt with joy. Then a devotee dropped me at the APC. Soon Swamishri arrived there. He came out of the car and took off his footwear. I bowed before him and picked up his footwear. Then Swamishri rested his hand on my shoulder and began to climb the steps for darshan of Thakorji. I have no words to express the feeling of ecstasy I had.

More was in store for me when I went to Pratapnagar in 1976 for a *shibir*. The next day was

FEELING OF FULFILMENT

Jayeshbhai Dholakia

Vice-President, Finance, Reliance Industries, Ahmedabad

I was born in 1952 into a Nagar Brahmin family which for generations had been staunch devotees of Shivaji and Mataji.

We observed strict disciplines, and rites and rituals, such as, *sutak*, pure vegetarian diet, no onions or garlic and no eating out. Upto the age of 40 I never saw a single film. Then, in the following two years, I saw 60!

My father worked for the Tata Advance Mill in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, from 1930 to 1978. During this time he witnessed the development of the BAPS Mandir, directly opposite the mill, from a bungalow to a grand *shikharbaddh* mandir. Yet, for years he did not enter the mandir, since it is a Vaishnav mandir and he was a Shaivite. He would, though, have darshan of the *dhaja* (flag) and *shikhar* (dome) everyday before entering the mill.

I knew about BAPS due to my friend, Dipakbhai, when, as chartered accountants, we both joined Reliance Industries in 1976. We used to come to the mandir every 15 days. In the beginning, I did not go for Thakorji's darshan and just waited downstairs, taking care of his shoes.

my birthday. So, as I desired to have Swamishri's darshan the next morning I woke up a little earlier than usual. As I went out, I saw Swamishri passing by, smiling at me. I felt blessed.

I cannot find words to describe the virtues and greatness of my guru. He is beyond all worldly frills. As a sadhu he is more than impeccable. His words are followed by thousands of devotees. To top it all, highly educated youths in the prime of their life show readiness to become sadhus, leaving behind well-to-do families and bright professional careers for the sake of their souls and society.

Memories of my guru keep multiplying but words fail me in singing his glory.



The decisive moment came in 1993 when Dipakbhai insisted that I come to listen to Mahant Swami's discourse in the Ambawadi suburb of Ahmedabad. Listening to him in the *sabha* at a *satsangi's* home, I at once vowed to give up drinking tea, reading newspapers, watching films or TV, and eating meals provided by the company. I began to like *satsang* and discourses.

The *katha* that day set me thinking about Pramukh Swami and I began to go wherever he was on Sundays for his darshan, especially at his puja hour. This has continued since then. Once, in Surendranagar, Swamishri saw me and told me, "You did not come last Sunday." And I was quite moved, knowing that Pramukh Swami, for whose darshan I used to go, himself took notice of my visits.

Another incident I cannot forget took place in Ahmedabad in 1993 when I stood in a queue for touching Swamishri's feet. Swamishri was seated on a cot with one leg dangling and the other crossed. Before joining the Satsang, I was against touching the feet of sadhus. So I

thought of leaving the queue, but remained there reluctantly thinking that it would look bad if I left the line. Everyone touched Swamishri's lower foot and advanced. However, when my turn came, I saw that Swamishri had crossed both of his legs and covered them. Later, I asked Dipakbhai why Swami had his legs covered even though everyone was in line to touch them. Dipakbhai and others there told me that those before him and others after him had, in fact, seen one foot uncovered and touched it before proceeding in the queue.

This divine incident touched me very much and I felt drawn towards Swamishri. I began to crave for his darshan.

In 1999, I was waiting for his darshan, seated with the devotees along the route Swamishri was to pass by. As Swamishri passed by, our four eyes met and filled me with such a divine experience that I still recall that moment vividly.

I feel that no one understands me and my feelings better than Pramukh Swami.

My earlier beliefs and meaningless way of life gradually gave way to a more meaningful and

refined life due to *satsang* with Swamishri. Through his discourses, dialogues with him, and reading of the accounts of his life, my life changed in many ways:

1. I have been inspired for nobler thoughts and actions.
2. My life became more meaningful.
3. I have been spared personal, social and economic misery in my life.
4. I became more organized in life.
5. I developed a greater sense of time and discipline during office hours.
6. My association with Swamishri has facilitated working with my colleagues and government employees and as a result their respect for Swamishri has strengthened my resolve for spiritual progress.
7. I have been graced with such love from Swamishri that everything else has been eclipsed and now I begin to feel fulfilled.

Having known Swamishri as he is, I feel that I still have much ground to cover on the spiritual plane. Nevertheless, I do not feel at a loss at all in life.

CHARTING A NEW LIFE

Kanubhai C. Patel

Businessman, Secunderabad

My family were followers of the Jain religion (in Agas), but we honoured all other religions as well. Thus, I had darshan of Shastriji Maharaj when he visited the home of our neighbour, R.U. Patel, way back in 1948. I was only 7 years old then. We migrated then to Burma in 1951 and lived there till 1964, but had to come back to India as the military junta came to power in Burma. My father started his business in Secunderabad and we have lived there since.

My father suffered a heart attack while in Burma. So, he retired from business. Our business partner was a relative. In his company I used to visit various clubs and soon became addicted to

alcohol. Then I started eating eggs and meat also. Smoking and tobacco soon followed. This way of life lasted for 25 years during which I spent *lakhs* of rupees on drinking.

Concerned, my family consulted several tantrics to cast a spell on me so that I would give up the addictions; but I did not care and it didn't work.

The turning point came in 1990 when Pramukh Swami came to sanctify the house of our friend, Jashubhai. My relatives told Swamishri what was I like. So Swamishri lovingly explained to me that I should not squander money and time on harmful habits as they would hurt my family



and ruin my life as well. Yet still I did not take this advice seriously.

Later, Swami was to come to Secunderabad for the opening of a new mandir. My friend invited me for the occasion. So I went there.

As Pramukh Swami began to discourse to the

assembly, I felt like shedding all of my habits and addictions. I felt that this was the last day of 25 years of addictive life. That was in 2000.

Today, my wife and I volunteer our services at the BAPS mandir in Secunderabad by making garlands for Thakorji.

UPLIFTED BY THREE GURUS

Mukundbhai Harmanbhai Patel

Aircraft Structural Engineer & Consultant, Boeing Aircraft Company, USA



I was born a *satsangi* because my father was a staunch disciple of BAPS founder guru, Shastriji Maharaj. He took me to India for his darshan in 1945 and 1947 when I was 8-10 years old. The *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj I saw then is still as fresh as ever in my mind.

Shastriji Maharaj was travelling by bullock cart from Anand to my native village, Gana, while my father and I were walking behind the cart. I recollect faintly that for some reason I was crying, and Shastriji Maharaj asked my father to have me seated with him in the cart. I feel thrilled when I think of those moments with him in the cart when he lovingly cared for me.

Before I could even know the meaning of the word 'guru', I had a guru in my life. My father would repeatedly explain to me, "This Shastriji Maharaj is our guru."

In 1951, when Shastriji Maharaj left for Akshardham, Yogiji Maharaj succeeded him. I had his darshan in 1955 in Mombasa. He was seated on a cot and discoursing. Then he recited one of his favourite kirtans, "*Hāji bhalā sādhu...*" in his inimitable style. I still feel thrilled when recalling that divine memory of his voice and style.

The next time I had his darshan was in 1958 in India. I was going to the US for further studies and my father wanted me to have the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj before leaving. So I went to India. I met him in Gondal with my father. He blessed me in the Akshar Deri and asked me to complete the course in three years. When I told my professors

they commented that people have difficulty finishing the course in four years, so how could it be completed in three. But, with Yogiji Maharaj's blessings I did it in 3½ years. I even got a job in the Boeing Company.

While I was in America, Yogiji Maharaj wrote me a number of letters, asking me to study properly and live by the *niyams* of *satsang*. He also wanted me to talk to others about the glory of Maharaj and the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam.

In one such letter (dated 25 September 1958) he wrote, "Concentrate on your studies. Read at least for eight hours daily. Remain a vegetarian. Eat simple food. Perform puja and apply *tilak-chandlo*. Try to start a *satsang* mandal there. We want to spread the glory of Swaminarayan in all continents. So be prepared to make efforts."

"Also, read one Vachanamrut before going to bed at night. Practice *satsang*. Such an opportunity will not come again. So, Mukundbhai, hold *sabha* every Sunday or fortnight. Start a *satsang* centre. That would be a brilliant achievement."

"I am sending flowers sanctified in the Akshar Deri which you can use. So keep them with you."

In yet another inspiring letter dated 27 November 1958 from Vidyanagar, he wrote, "May Swami-Shriji maintain the continued progress of dear Mukundbhai. Jai Swaminarayan with great affection from Sadhu Jnanjivandas, Mota Swami and Pramukh Swami from Vidyanagar.

"It's nice to know that five of you now live together. You will get along well since you are

all like-minded. I am pleased to know that you perform puja daily. Now we have to increase Satsang in America. That will be done by you.

“Vanrajbhai Mehta, you take care of that. Prepare 51 youths. There are many Hindus there. Speak to them. Be determined. Read the Vachanamrut at your convenience at night. This will enlighten you. Thanks to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, *satsang* has spread far and wide. It will be furthered by *yuvaks* like you.

“So, Mukundbhai, remain determined. I think of you always. I remember your face. You were young when we stayed together at Gana. You used to sit with me. Meet Dr Hen. Explain Vachanamrut Gadhada 1-37 to him. He will be pleased.”

As directed by Yogiji Maharaj, both of us had started *satsang* on a small scale. Expressing his pleasure about this, Swami wrote to us, “Jai Swaminarayan with great love from Sadhu Jnanjivandasji. Mukundbhai, I remember you always. Read regularly. Read at least eight hours a day. In four years you will earn a higher degree.

“Keep three things in mind:

1. *Upasana* of Akshar and Purushottam.
2. Observe all minor and major religious injunctions.
3. Develop affection for God’s holy Sadhu.

Everything else depends upon these three.

“Your father made great efforts to send you there for studies. So you have to appreciate his efforts and not fail even once. That would be just the right appreciation. May Maharaj bless you fully” (21 December 1958, Radhu).

In reply to one of my letters, Swami wrote from Gondal on 7 June 1959, “We read your letter in Gondal. The letter left us all thrilled. That you observe all *niyams* in America proves that Maharaj is manifest on the earth. So, Vanraj Mehta, contact fellow Indians there and explain to them in English who Bhagwan Swaminarayan was, for, we wish to spread his message to one and all.

“Vitthalbhai, Kantibhai, Ravjibhai and Nathabhai are also there for studies. Try to meet

them and bring them to the *satsang*. Keep contact with each other. Mukundbhai, received your letter. Now, cook your meals yourself and remain a strict vegetarian.”

In a letter dated 30 November 1959 from Mwanza, Swami reiterated these points. He wrote, “Mukundbhai, my only request now to you is to explain in English to our youths who Bhagwan Swaminarayan was and his contribution to society. That would be a great service.

“We can send you copies of the Shikshapatri in English. It contains all the wisdom. You may gift it and recommend them to read it.”

Swami was very keen to see that even *satsangis* living abroad followed the Shikshapatri. So he continued to write to me. In his letter dated 23 August 1964 from Sarangpur he wrote:

“Mukundbhai,... Observe all *niyams* and celibacy. Vitthalbhai is with you there. So, hold *sabha* on Sundays for at least two hours.

“Today is Punam. It is Baley (Raksha Bandhan) also. About 700 *satsangis* have gathered here. It is 11.30 a.m. and the *katha* is in progress. Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami are also here and I am writing to you.... Donate 10% of your income to the mandir. Then see how much strength you get.

“Read at least one Vachanamrut at night and ten Swamini Vatu if you have more time. In puja, turn the *mala* fifteen times. Then, five times before Thakorji. Make it a point to do this. You can do this as you have that spirit.”

Thus, Yogiji Maharaj continued to nurture me till his departure to Akshardham in 1971. Then Pramukh Swami became guru and he became the anchor of my life.

I did not have much contact with Pramukh Swami while Yogiji Maharaj was alive. However, in 1964 my father died and I came to India for dispersal of his ashes. Yogiji Maharaj asked Pramukh Swami to accompany me to Gadhada for this. Pramukh Swami then took me to Gadhada, Sarangpur and Gondal for darshan. In Sarangpur he himself served me *rotlo*, *khichdi* and chilies.

His humility touched me deeply.

In the seventies I worked as a structural engineer in various projects of the Boeing Company, including, Boeing 747, Boeing 767, rockets and the space shuttle.

I was not very active in *satsang* during this decade but Pramukh Swami unfailingly contacted me during his visits to America in 1974, 1977, 1980, 1984 and 1988.

In 1985, my 14-year-old son went to London for the Cultural Festival of India (CFI) at Alexandra

Palace. When he came back to America, I found that he had begun to apply the *tilak-chandlo* on his forehead. It really moved me. I recollected Yogiji Maharaj's letters and thought of getting back to *satsang*. I got closer to Pramukh Swami during the CFI in 1991 in America. I served for one year for the preparations of the CFI.

I have been very fortunate to have the grace of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj who together as one have guided me all along.

'KANTHI' CALLING

Narendrabhai S. Patel

Retired Businessman, London (now in Ahmedabad)



I migrated to Kenya (East Africa) when I was 18 years old. I used to wear a *kanthi* then as I was a Swaminarayan *satsangi*. But I was not much involved with *satsang*.

I settled in Nairobi in 1950 when I started my business there. Life was routine, but the year 1970 had golden moments in store for me.

We had to go to Jinja, Uganda, in 1970 for my cousin's wedding. We travelled the 400 miles from Nairobi by road and after a one-night stay prepared to leave for the return journey. For about 300 miles the roads were very rough and not suitable for driving. Then it started raining heavily. We were afraid of going back by the same route. While I was thinking over this, a relative named Manjibhai informed us that a very great sadhu by the name of Yogiji Maharaj was there in Nairobi, and that we must go for his darshan and blessings. Though I belonged to the old Gadhada Swaminarayan mandir, I thought it worthwhile to have the blessings of such a great sadhu.

So, we went where he was staying. There were about 20 people waiting to meet him. I was last in the queue. When I approached him, he placed his hand on my head and lowered my head into his lap. I felt overwhelmed at this and became speechless. Tears rolled down my eyes. Swami

asked me, "What bothers you?" I was alone with him. So, I told him, "We have been *satsangis* for four generations but no sadhu has ever put a *kanthi* around my neck. I wore it myself. That troubles me. Would you put one around my neck?" I hoped he would, but he refused. I shuddered. I felt that I must have made some grave mistake. He looked into my eyes, saying, "I won't do it today but your desire will be fulfilled by Pramukh Swami."

I did not know Pramukh Swami then, but thinking of him I left. Years rolled by and I almost forgot about the promise of Yogiji Maharaj.

Then, in 1981, I had to go to India as my mother had taken ill. One day, Jashbhai, our neighbour, told me that Pramukh Swami was to visit his place and invited me for darshan. I was not interested in going at that time, but I went as a mere visitor. Pramukh Swami came and Jashubai brought two garlands. He garlanded Swamishri with one of them and gave the other to me to garland Swamishri. I hesitated, but as he thrust it into my hand, I reluctantly greeted Swami with the garland. Then, as I was leaving, Pramukh Swami caught hold of my hand and asked a sadhu with him to give him a *kanthi*. Before I could even think of the next move, he placed the *kanthi* around my neck and blessed me saying, "The promise of

our guru has been fulfilled today.” I felt gratified and was speechless. I was convinced that Yogiji Maharaj in the form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj had placed the *kanthi*, otherwise how else could he have known what Yogiji Maharaj had promised me. And after so long how had he recognized me?

I felt reassured that I was in the lap of a worthy guru, having been cleansed of all my sinful acts.

Feeling confident and joyous, I returned to Africa. After a few years, I migrated to London. Then, incidentally, my daughter married Dr Madhav Jodhani, a devout *satsangi* in Ahmedabad. He gave me past issues of *Swaminarayan Prakash* and the biography of Yogiji Maharaj to read. Reading all this changed me completely. Since then, even though I sold newspapers and magazines in my shop, I gave up reading them.

I felt Pramukh Swami was summoning me. So I left London and came to settle in Ahmedabad. I began to visit the BAPS mandir regularly and soon my anger was controlled and I became calm.

Today, I wake up at 1.30 a.m. and after bath and puja, leave home at 3.45 a.m. to walk to the

(contd. from p. 8)

whatever you command.’ He said, ‘Well I wish that you become a sadhu.’ I said yes, I will become a sadhu, and that was the change of my life.”

Another sadhu spoke of meeting Pramukh Swami whilst at school in the U.K., “My turn came to garland Swamiji. He held my hand, asked my name.... After Pramukh Swami had left England, I wrote a letter to Swamishri... a paragraph only. So many people... so great crowds... [I was] shocked... got a reply in his own writing in Gujarati. I was so moved that he had time to write to a young child. Then I got interested in the movement.”

A sadhu who described himself as being used to the comforts of life explained how, coming to India, he at first had thought it impossible that he could settle and stay. He described Pramukh Swami’s attention given to him, “He gave me so much love, used to bless me, he used to remember me everywhere.”

BAPS Mandir at Shahibaug, which is 6 km from my place. After *mangala arti*, I make garlands for Thakorji. Then I attend the morning *katha*. After *katha* I offer my services in the inquiry booth at the mandir. This has been my routine for the past seven years or so. I am 78 and living alone, but Swami is there to care for me.

In 2007, I was afflicted with elephantitis. I thought of surgery, but learnt that such surgeries were generally of little benefit. So I dropped the idea.

When Swami was in Ahmedabad, Viveksagar Swami took me to Swamishri and told him about my disease. Swamishri blessed me, “I will pray to Maharaj. You too chant Swaminarayan. You’ll get cured.”

And I was cured of it in a week. I can now walk comfortably and still walk to the mandir every morning.

I have had many experiences to strengthen my conviction that Maharaj is manifest in the form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Can there be a greater fortune than this? ◆

The instructions of the guru are understood to be to the best advantage of the devotee, even if the devotee cannot understand the purpose at that time. Accounts were given to the writer by devotees of how they carried out instructions for which they could not understand the reasons at the time, and how these, in retrospect, had been perfectly suited to their situation.

The effect of this personal interest is to strongly reinforce the bond which exists between the individual devotee and the guru. It follows that the guru’s primary relationship bond is with individual devotees rather than with the body of devotees. The ability of the guru to individualise to this extent is one of the most striking and difficult aspects to comprehend. It is often remarked upon by devotees but perhaps occasions less amazement in them because of their belief in Akshar’s omniscience. ◆



The Chāndogya Upanishad

SIMPLE CONVERSATIONS ON HIGHLY SPIRITUAL MATTERS Part 1

It is the unique style of the Upanishads to narrate philosophy in a profound manner through simple and clear stories. The precepts on *brahmavidyā* have been narrated here through the story of Ushasti and Mahāvat, the conversation between Shvetketu and Udālak, the dialogue of Nārad and Sanatsujāt, and the story of Indra and Virochan.

This Upanishad is encompassed in the Sāmaveda. It consists of eight chapters of the Tavalkār Brahmin in the Sāmaveda.

BEGINNING WITH THE GLORY OF AKSHAR

‘ॐ इत्येतद् अक्षरम् उद्गीथम् उपासीत’ – ‘*Aum ityetaḍ Aksharam udgeetham upāseeta*’ – ‘One should contemplate on Akshar whose name is Aum and who has been sung of in all the Vedas’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 1/1/1). When reciting the Chāndogya Upanishad, the very first mantra sings the glory of Aksharbrahman. The reason for this can also

be understood – one cannot do the *upāsana*-bhakti of Purushottam appropriately without becoming *aksharup*. Also, for this very reason, when *brahmavidyā* is discussed in the Mundaka Upanishad, the dialogue commences with the words ‘अथ परा’ – ‘*Atha parā*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/5), followed by, “तद् अक्षरम् अधिगम्यते” – ‘*Tad Aksharam adhigamyate*’ (Mundaka Upanishad: 1/1/5), – thus the form of Aksharbrahman is introduced. The Māndukya Upanishad also begins by introducing Aksharbrahman with the words, ‘ॐ इत्येतद् अक्षरम्’ – ‘*Aum ityetaḍ Aksharam*’ (Māndukya Upanishad: 1/1). The very same thing happens in the Chāndogya Upanishad, too.

It then explains the benefits the knower of Aksharbrahman attains.

ENTRY INTO AKSHARDHAM FOR ONE WHO KNOWS AKSHAR

‘यदेतद् अक्षरम् एतदमृतम् अभयं तत्प्रविश्य देवा अमृता अभया

अभवन्। स य एतदेवं विद्वान् अक्षरं प्रणौति तदेव अक्षरम् अमृतम् अभयं प्रविशति। तदमृतो भवति।’ – ‘*Yadeta Aksharam etadamrutam abhayam tatpravishya devā amrutā abhayā abhavan, sa ya etadevam vidvān Aksharam pranauti tadeva Aksharam amrutam abhayam pravishati.*’ – ‘This Aksharbrahman is immortal, without birth or death, and fearless; one who knows it enters it.’ That is to say, enters Akshardham, becomes free of birth and death, becomes fearless and attains immortality (Chāndogya Upanishad: 1/4/4,5).

THE UPĀSANĀ OF PURUSHOTTAM WITH A FORM

The next section explains the form of Purushottam Parabrahman. ‘य एषोऽन्तरादित्ये हिरण्मयः पुरुषो दृश्यते हिरण्यश्म-श्रुर्हिरण्यकेश आ-प्रणवात्सर्व एव सुवर्णः ॥ तस्य यथा कप्यासं पुण्डरीकमेवमक्षिणी।’ – ‘*Ya esho’ntarāditye hiranmayaha purusho drushyate hiranyashmashrurhiranyakesha ā-pranavātsarva eva suvarṇaha. Tasya yatha kapyāsam pundareekamevamakshinee*’ – ‘This divine being, who is lustrous with divine rays, pervades the whole galaxy. His entire divine body – his beard, his hair, his nails, etc. all shine brightly like glittering gold. Moreover, his two eyes are as soft as a lotus and extremely beautiful’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 1/6/6,7).

These words of the Upanishad tell us that Paramātmā always has a form. Even in that, not just any form, but by saying ‘*purushaha*’ it tells us that he has a beautiful human form. For this reason, whether it is the divine form of Parabrahman present in Akshardham, or whether it is the divine form that pervades the infinite universes, this mantra urges us to never understand him as formless.

The benefit of understanding Paramātmā to be with a form is also not ordinary. It states here, ‘स एष सर्वेभ्यः पाप्मभ्य उदितः उदेति ह वै सर्वेभ्यः पाप्मभ्यो य एवं वेद ॥’ – ‘*Sa esha sarvebhyaha pāpmabhya uditaha udeti ha vai sarvebhyaha pāpmabhyo ya evam veda*’ – ‘One who understands this is freed of all sins’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 1/6/7).

In this way, the initial chapters of the Chāndogya Upanishad have given wonderful precepts on the divine forms of Akshar and Purushottam.

This unique glory is then explained through a dialogue between a father and son.

THE STORY OF SHVETKETU AND ĀRUNI: SADVIDYĀ

There was a rishi named Āruni. He had a son named Shvetketu. When Shvetketu came of age, his father told him to study, saying, ‘श्वेतकेतो वस ब्रह्मचर्यम्’ – ‘*Shvetaketo vasa brahmacharyam*’ – ‘Son! There is no one in our family who has not studied. Therefore, go and stay in some *gurukul*, observe celibacy and study’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 6/1/1). Shvetketu did accordingly. He stayed in a *gurukul* for twelve years. On completing his studies he returned home. His father saw him after many years. Instead of seeing the lustre of knowledge on his son’s face, he noticed a sense of arrogance. His father was upset. He called his son and said, “Son, what did you study that made you so arrogant? Hasn’t your guru taught you precepts on *brahmavidyā*?”

Shvetketu replied, “What are those precepts like?”

His father replied, ‘येनाऽश्रुतं श्रुतं भवत्यमतं मतमविज्ञातं विज्ञातमिति।’ – ‘*Yenā’shrutam shrutam bhavatyamatam matamavignātam vignātamiti*’ – ‘Son, *brahmavidyā* is such that on attaining it one hears even the unheard, i.e., nothing remains to be heard, nothing remains to be contemplated on, nothing remains to be known’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 6/1/3). Moreover, ‘यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृण्मयं विज्ञातं स्याद्।’ – ‘*Yathā somyāikena mrutpindena sarvam mrunmayam vignātam syād*’ – ‘Just like once you have thoroughly known a lump of earth, you have then known the form of everything that is made of earth, the same applies to this knowledge’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 6/1/4). Hearing this, Shvetketu became interested. He requested his father to give him that knowledge. His father was more than happy and gladly began to give precepts on *brahmavidyā*.

‘SAT’ IS THE CAUSE OF THE ENTIRE CREATION

‘सदेव सोम्येदमग्र आसीद्’ – ‘*Sadeva somyedagamagra aseed*’ – ‘Son, before creation there was *sat* – an eternally unchanging element which is above *māyā*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 6/2/1). It is from this *sat* that the entire creation has arisen.

Sat can mean one of four things: an *ātmā* roaming in the cycle of births and deaths, Paramātmā, Aksharbrahman or a *muktātmā* (liberated *ātmā*). In this context, though, it does not imply an *ātmā* which roams in the cycle of birth and death, because it is also entangled with *māyā* and is therefore counted as part of creation. Furthermore, every *muktātmā* was also previously bound by *māyā* and has wandered in the world through various births; therefore, it can also not be counted as the cause of creation. Only the two entities Brahman and Parabrahman are eternally liberated, they have always been aloof from *māyā* and are capable of creating the world. Therefore, here the word *sat* refers to these two divine entities.

His father continues, ‘सन्मूलाः सोम्येमाः सर्वाः प्रजाः सदायतनाः सत्प्रतिष्ठाः’ – ‘*Sanmoolāhā somyemāhā sarvāhā prajāhā sadāyatanāhā satpratishthāhā*’ – ‘Whatever creation can be seen, has all been created from that *sat* – Brahman and Parabrahman. Also, they are the cause of the sustenance and dissolution of creation’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 6/8/4).

Thus, O Shvetketu, that Brahman and Parabrahman are the cause of all. They are the *ātmā* of all; they pervade all, control all and support all. Therefore, ‘तत्त्वमसि’ – ‘*Tattvamasi*’ – ‘They are even the *ātmā* of your *ātmā*. Hence, you are also pervaded, controlled and supported by them’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 6/8/7). Shvetketu was pleased with this knowledge of *brahmavidyā*.

Here, just as the word *sat* has been used for Brahman and Parabrahman, *brahmavidyā* has also become known as *sadvidyā*.

Thus, through this dialogue between a father and son, this Upanishad has explained the secret behind the cause of the whole of creation.

THE STORY OF NĀRAD AND SANATSUJĀT: ‘BHOOMĀVIDYĀ’

‘अधीहि भगवः’ – ‘*Adheehi bhagavaha*’ – ‘O lord, give me knowledge’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/1). This is the innermost desire of Nārād’s heart. Nārād Muni became the disciple of Sanatsujāt, who said, ‘यद् वेत्य तेन मोपसीद ततस्त वक्ष्यामीति’ – ‘*Yad vetya tena mopaseeda tatasta vakshyāmeeti*’ – ‘First of all, tell me what you know, I will then give you knowledge beyond that’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/1). Nārād then began to tell him what he knew, ‘ऋग्वेदं भगवोऽध्येमि यजुर्वेदं सामवेदमथर्वणं चतुर्थमितिहासपुराणं पञ्चमं वेदानां वेदं पित्र्यं राशिं दैवं निधिं वाकोवाक्यमेकायनं देवविद्यां ब्रह्मविद्यां भूतविद्यां क्षत्रविद्यां नक्षत्रविद्यां सर्पदेवजनविद्यामेतद्भगवोऽध्येमि ।’ – ‘*Rugvedam bhagavo’dhyemi yajurvedam sāmavedam-ātharvanam chaturthemitihāsapurānam panchamam vedānām vedam pitryam rāshim daivam nidhim vākovākyamekāyanam devavidyām brahmavidyām bhootavidyām kshatravidyām nakshatravidyām sarpadevajanavidyāmetadbhagavo’dhyemi*’ – ‘O Lord! I know all the four Vedas. I know history and the Purānas. I know grammar, *shrāddh shāstra*, mathematics, the science of *utpāt*, *nidhi* shastra, the science of reasoning, ethics, the knowledge of the *devas*, all the limbs of the Vedas, the science of archery, astrology, *sarpavidyā*, *gandharavidyā* and other subjects like ayurveda (medicine), etc.’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/2). Despite this, ‘सोऽहं भगवो शोचामि’ – ‘*So’ham bhagavo shochāmi*’ – ‘I am immersed in an ocean of grief’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/3). ‘श्रुतं ह्येव मे भगवद्दृशेभ्यस्तरति शोकमात्मविदिति’ – ‘*Shrutam hyeva me bhagavaddrūshebhyastarati tam mā bhagavan shokamātmaviditi*’ – ‘I have heard from great people like yourself that one who knows Paramātmā overcomes the ocean of misery’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/3). ‘शोकस्य परं तास्यतु’ – ‘*Shokasya pāram tārayatu*’ – ‘Therefore, O lord, please help me cross the ocean of misery. Give the knowledge of Paramātmā’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/13).

Hearing this, Sanatsujāt says, ‘नामैवैतद्’ – ‘*Nāmaivaitad*’ – “O Nārād, the subjects you

think you know are just names” (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/14). Saying this he then teaches, ‘नाम ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Nāma Brahma*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/1/5), ‘वाचं ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Vācham Brahma*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/2/2), ‘मनो ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Mano Brahma*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/3/2), ‘संकल्पं ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Sankalpam Brahma*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/4/3), ‘चित्तं ब्रह्म’ – ‘*Chittam Brahma*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/5/3). That is, one should see Brahman in everything. He then says that one must also see this feeling of Brahman in one’s *ātmanā*. Even in the Bhagavad Gita, only one who is *brahmarup* has been gifted with the bhakti of Paramātmā. Therefore, although Nārād did not question further, this tells us to do the *upāsana* of Paramātmā. Then, stating, ‘एष तु वा अतिवदति यः सत्येनातिवदति’ – ‘*Esha tu vā ativadati yaha satyenātivadati*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/16/1), he tells us that one who speaks of Paramātmā, the form of *satya*, in this way is the greatest orator. He then continues, “O Nārād, know that Paramātmā, contemplate on him, have faith and conviction in him. Only if you attempt to attain all this will you derive the true benefits. You should only endeavour in something that gives you happiness. Therefore you must know where true happiness is.” This is exactly what Nārād wanted. Therefore he immediately requested, ‘सुखं भगवो विजिज्ञास इति’ – ‘*Sukham bhagavo vijignāsa iti*’ – ‘O lord, I want to know true happiness’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/22/1).

Sanatsujāt replied, ‘यो वै भूमा तत् सुखं नाल्पे सुखमस्ति भूमैव सुखम्।’ – ‘*Yo vai bhoomā tat sukham nālpe sukhamasti bhoomaiva sukham*’ – ‘O Narad, Paramātmā is the very form of bliss. There is no happiness in mundane objects’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/23/1). Therefore if you want to overcome misery then, ‘भूमा त्वेव विजिज्ञासितव्यः।’ – ‘*Bhoomā tveva vijignāsityaha*’ – ‘You should realize *Bhoomā* – the greatest, i.e., Paramātmā’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/23/1). Thus, he pleased Nārād by showing him the true way to happiness.

Here, the word *bhoomā* has been used to mean ‘the greatest’ – Paramātmā, therefore these

precepts are also known as *bhoomāvidyā*.

The objective of these precepts is that by conceiving one’s *ātmanā* to be like Brahman and knowing Parabrahman one can overcome the ocean of misery.

THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HEART AND BRAHMAN: DAHARVIDYĀ

The eighth chapter of the Chāndogya Upanishad starts with the advice to know the two divine entities Brahman and Parabrahman. ‘अथ यदिदमस्मिन्ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म दहरोऽस्मिन्नन्तराकाशस्तस्मिन्यदन्तस्तदन्वेष्टव्यं तद्वा विजिज्ञासितव्यमिति।’ – ‘*Athayadidamasminbrahmapure daharam pundareekam veshma daharo’sminnantrākāshastasminyadantastadanveshtavyam tadvā vijignāsityamiti*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 7/23/1). Here, *dahar* means small. In the body – which is like a city, there is a *dahar* – a house in the form of a small lotus-like heart. In that small house-like heart, there is something which is even more *dahar* – an even smaller space. That space is called *daharākāsh* or *chidākāsh*. This is one of the forms of Aksharbrahman. In that *daharākāsh* resides Paramātmā. This mantra tells us to find both that Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman.

Having said this, the glory of the form of Aksharbrahman is first explained. ‘यवान्वा अयमाकाशस्तावानेषोऽन्तर्हृदय आकाश उभे अस्मिन् द्यावापृथिवी अन्तरेव समाहिते उभावग्निश्च वायुश्च सूर्याचन्द्रमसावुभौ विद्युन्नक्षत्राणि यच्चास्येहास्ति यच्च नास्ति सर्वं तदस्मिन्समाहितमिति।’ – ‘*Yānvānvā ayamākāshastāvānesho’ntarhṛdaya ākāsha ubhe asmin dyāvāpṛthivee antareva samāhite ubhāvagnishcha vāyushcha sooryāchandramasāvubhau vidyunnakshatrāni yachchāsyeahāsti yachcha nāsti sarvam tadasmīnsamāhitamiti*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 8/1/3). Meaning, just like this external space pervades, similarly this space – *chidākāsh* Aksharbrahman – that resides inside everyone’s hearts pervades everywhere. The only difference is that the external space is mundane and limited, whereas this *chidākāsh* is unearthly, infinite

(contd. on p. 26)

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami DIKSHA BICENTENARY CELEBRATION

31 December 2009, Dabhan, Gujarat



Skit depicting the Dabhan Yajna of 1810 CE

At the conclusion of the special 18-day *yajna* held in Dabhan on Posh *sud* Punam, VS 1866 (20 January 1810), Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiated Mulji Bhakta of Bhadra, his ideal devotee, into the sadhu-fold and named him Gunatitanand Swami.

Thus, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of this *diksha*, the small town of Dabhan, near Nadiad, was host to the grand Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Diksha Bicentenary Celebration on 31 December 2009 (Posh *sud* Punam, VS 2066).

YAJNA FOR WORLD PEACE

In the morning, over 2,635 couples, seated around 279 *yajna kunds*, participated in the auspicious Yajna for World Peace. Around 175 Brahmin pandits guided the participants through the *yajna* rituals while chanting the auspicious Vedic mantras.

Swamishri performed the initial rituals of the *yajna*, and then blessed the participants of the *yajna*, “Many thousands came to the *yajna* 200 years

ago for the darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Today, also, we have such darshan. If we sit while beholding and remembering the *murti* of God, Gunatitanand Swami and Shastriji Maharaj, then we will experience them in all directions and will gain their happiness.

“It is our great fortune that by attending such celebrations, our lives are transformed for the better. This brings us peace. So, always cherish the memories of occasions like this. Recall these memories in your [daily] puja.

“If our bhakti is sincere, God will grant us infinite times more happiness than even the most powerful and richest of kings.”

After Swamishri had left the *yajna* arena, the *yajna* rituals continued, during which the following *homas* (offerings) were made:

- ◆ 10,000 Purush Sukta mantras
- ◆ 10,000 Parabrahman mantras
- ◆ 10,000 Aksharbrahman mantras
- ◆ 10,000 ‘Gunatitoashram Brahma...’ mantras

In addition, the Janamangal Namavali and other mantras were recited.



Swamishri performs arti at the end of the celebration assembly

DIKSHA BICENTENARY CELEBRATION

In the evening from 4.30 to 8.00 p.m. the main celebration assembly took place and was attended by over 40,000 devotees. The assembly was also broadcast live throughout the world on the AASTHA Channel.

The stage background featured a giant oil painting depicting Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiating Gunatitanand Swami during the famous Dabhan *yajna*. Directly behind and above the stage the rising full moon added to the splendour.

The central theme of the celebration assembly was based on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's prophesy at the time of the Dabhan *yajna* recorded by Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj in 'Shri Harilila-Kalpataru': "*Gunātītānandrupam vishvakhyātam bhavishyati*" – "Gunatitanand Swami will become famous throughout the world."

In the first speech, Bhadresh Swami described the glory of Aksharbrahman revealed in the shastras of Sanatana Dharma.

Then, BAPS *balaks* sang Sanskrit mantras from the Vedas and Upanishads describing the glory of Aksharbrahman.

Next, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami spoke on how Bhagwan Swaminarayan had repeatedly revealed Gunatitanand Swami as the incarnation

of Akshardham, his divine abode.

Thereafter, the youths of BAPS Mumbai presented a drama on the Dabhan *yajna*. Following this was another skit, entitled 'Paramhansa Goshti' in which the historic and authentic words of the *paramhansas* describing Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar were presented.

Then a slide show depicted the many mandirs of the Old School which have *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami describing him as 'Aksharbrahman' or 'Mul Aksharmurti'.

After this, Pujya Mahant Swami spoke on the contributions of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj in spreading the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as the incarnation of Akshar.

Next, Shastriji Maharaj's efforts were depicted through a short drama. Then Pujya Dr Swami described the efforts of Shastriji Maharaj in building mandirs and consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam.

This was followed by a speech by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, who narrated the work of Yogiji Maharaj in promoting the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

Thereafter, Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke on the tireless and ongoing work and achievements of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in teaching the Akshar-



Over 40,000 devotees attended the Diksha Bicenentary Celebration

Purushottam philosophy throughout the world.

Finally, Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the celebration assembly. He began by requesting everyone to take a pledge based on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's words in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-71, "When God incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jivas*, he is always accompanied by his Akshardham, his attendants – who are formed of *chaitanya* – and all of his divine powers. Therefore, a devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others.' Today, I pledge that I will obey this wish of Shriji Maharaj to spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Daily, I will contemplate on this fact, apply it in my life and will certainly talk about Akshar-Purushottam to all who come into my contact. In this way I will try to please Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

Then Swamishri continued, "As we all have taken this pledge, if we contemplate on it accordingly, then we will receive God's blessings and also experience peace."

Further, Swamishri added, "We do not know our true form. We know about this body – our name, native village, etc. But, our true form is realized through the knowledge of Akshar-

Purushottam. The Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, Ramayan, Bhagavat and other shastras have all revealed this knowledge. It is this wisdom which has been given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami.

"To become *brahmarup* and offer bhakti to Parabrahman is the core teaching of all the shastras. Shastriji Maharaj had such conviction in Akshar-Purushottam that he endured much difficulty to build mandirs. Today, everyone understands that. Yogiji Maharaj also had this understanding and he explained it to others. One who realizes this knowledge will be happy. If one lives with this understanding, one may go anywhere in the world to work, but one will not become attached. When can such an understanding be developed? When one seeks the company of the Satpurush.

"That is why, Bhagwan Swaminarayan brought such a Gunatit Sadhu with him [to earth] – Gunatitanand Swami. After him were Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. So, by keeping faith in their words, faith in the shastras, faith in the words of God and live accordingly, one will become *brahmarup* and attain the divine *dham* of God."

The celebration assembly concluded with *samuh arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali*. ♦

TWO RELIGIOUS LEADERS VISIT BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIRS IN AUSTRALIA

10 December 2009

On 10 December 2009, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the spiritual head of Kauai's Hindu Monastery (based in Hawaii), visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney, Australia. He was accompanied by two other sannyasins, Paramacharya Palaniswami, the editor-in-chief of *Hinduism Today* and Senthilnathaswami, the assistant editor.

They were warmly welcomed just before the evening *arti*. This was then followed by Satguru Bodhinatha's inspiring speech in which he outlined the need of sincerely obeying the wishes of a

living guru, without any doubts or fears because the guru knows much more than us.

* * *

On 19 December His Holiness Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swami of the Sriman Narayana Ramanuja tradition in Andhra Pradesh, visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Perth. He mentioned in his speech, "It is good to see all of you participating in regular spiritual activities under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I have met Swamiji on several occasions. He speaks very little, but very sweetly. He is great a Acharya." ♦

(contd. from p. 22)

and pervades even the mundane space. The intermediate worlds, our world and all the other worlds reside in it. Even fire, air, the sun, the moon, the constellations, etc. are all supported by it. Also, whatever existed before was supported by *chidākāsh* Aksharbrahman, and whatever will exist in the future will all be supported by it. Thus, in this Upanishad the pervasive Aksharbrahman has been linked to the hearts of all.

Further, since the word *dahar* has been used to describe Aksharbrahman that resides in everyone's heart, these precepts have also become known as *daharvidyā*.

Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwān Swaminarayan has also stated this in the Vachanāmrut: "In this way, Chidākāsh is present on all four sides of the *brahmānd* as well as within the *brahmānd*. When one's vision reaches the perspective of that all-supporting Chidākāsh, it is known as *daharvidyā*. Just as *akshividyā* and many other types of *brahmavidyā* have been described, this is also one type of *brahmavidyā*" (Vachanāmrut Gadhadā I-46).

One natural question that may arise here is that if Aksharbrahman is always resident in our hearts

as the pervading *daharākāsh*, then why do we not experience it? The Chāndogya Upanishad gives a clear answer to this: 'तद्यथापि हिरण्यनिधिं निहितमक्षेत्रज्ञ उपर्युपरि सञ्चरन्तो न विन्देयुरेवमेवेमाः सर्वाः प्रजा अहरहर्गच्छन्त्य एतं ब्रह्मलोकं न विन्दन्त्यनृतेन हि प्रत्यूढाः ।' – '*Tadyathāpi hiranyanidhim nihitamakshetragnā uparyupari sancharanto na vindeyurevamevamāhā sarvāhā prajā aharahargachchhantya etam Brahmlokam navindantyanrutenahipratyoodhāhā*' (Chāndogya Upanishad: 8/3/2). The example of an ignorant farmer is given. Just like a farmer on whose land there is buried gold, and who wanders on that land everyday and ploughs it, but because he does not know about the gold, he continues to plough the field in poverty. Thus, he is deprived of the benefits of that gold. Similarly, we are all in the same situation as the farmer. Aksharbrahman resides in our hearts, but our *ātmā* is 'अनृतेन हि प्रत्यूढाः' – '*Anrutena hi pratyoodhāhā*' (Chāndogya Upanishad: 8/3/2). Here, *anrut* means 'covered by the obstruction of eternal *māyā*'. Therefore, we do not experience that divine treasure.

Now, if we want to experience it, then there is no other means than to know about that buried gold. Therefore, the Upanishad now shows us the divine qualities of Aksharbrahman. ♦



AKSHARBRAHMAN GUNATITANAND SWAMI DIKSHA BICENTENARY CELEBRATION YAJNA
31 December 2009, Dabhan, Gujarat

An auspicious Yajna for World Peace was held in the morning in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Dabhan Yajna performed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1810.

1. Seated around 279 specially designed *yajna kunds*, 2,635 devotees participated and over 50,000 Vedic mantras were recited.
2. Swamishri performs *arti* during the *yajna* ceremony.



**AKSHARBRAHMAN GUNATITANAND SWAMI DIKSHA
BICENTENARY CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY
31 December 2009, Dabhan, Gujarat**

Grand evening assembly to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiating Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami in Dabhan (1810).

1. BAPS *balaks* sing Vedic *shlokas* describing the glory of Akshar.
2. Over 40,000 sadhus and devotees attended the celebration.
3. Children and youths present cultural programmes to re-enact the historic occasion.
4. Swamishri blesses the celebration assembly.