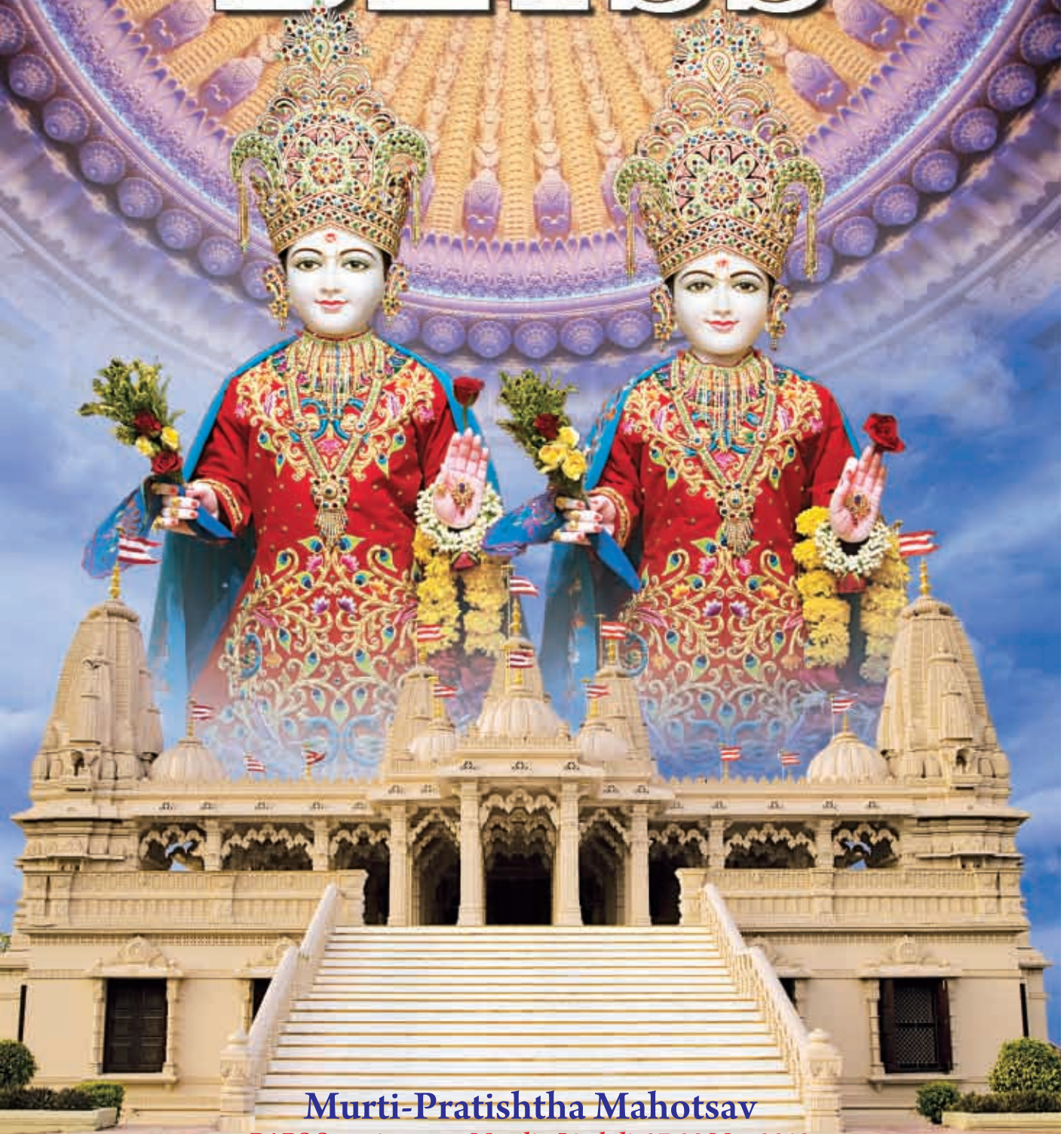


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July 2010

SWAMINARAYAN

# BLISS



**Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav**

**BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Limbdi, 27-28 May 2010**





Murtis in the three main shrines and abhishek mandap of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Limbdi







# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July 2010, Vol. 33 No. 7

## Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav, Limbdi Special Issue



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## FIRST WORD

The manner in which we conduct our lives gives rise to our habits and attitudes. No one can hope that living an indulgent, undisciplined and wanton life will not affect his or her state of mind. Gunatitanand Swami has stated that a person who overwhelms himself with worldly pleasures 'bruises' his soul. In other words the person cannot incline himself to practice morality and spirituality, which thus excludes him from the experience of lasting inner peace and joy.

The Hindu shastras have prescribed the road-map of life by denoting the four goals of human life: dharma, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. With dharma as the base the householder should pursue wealth (*artha*) and fulfil his worldly desires (*kama*). In fact, the main focus and goal is the last pursuit of life – *moksha*.

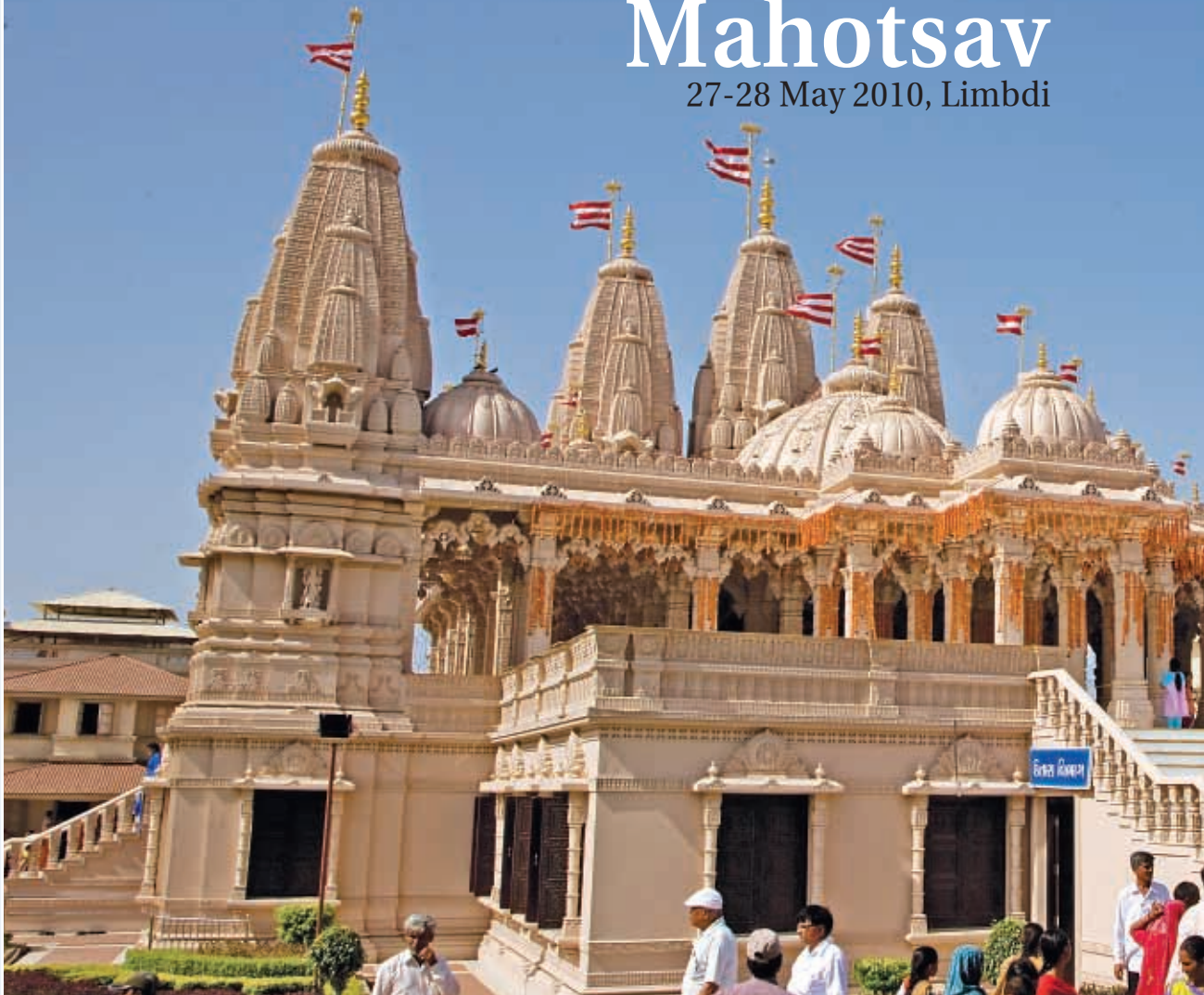
Without the spiritual unfolding of one's consciousness one indiscriminately hankers after worldly pleasures and activities. Thus one is left feeling discontented, empty, aggressive and restless. Only by making our spiritual practices the focal point of our lives will we be able to stabilize and add purpose, meaning and joy to our thoughts and actions.

The life and work of God and his holy Sadhu awaken a person's consciousness from the mundane to the spiritual. They gracefully remind, inspire and assist us on our journey towards *moksha*. A little faith and effort on our part liberates us from our ignorance and miseries and make us into receptacles of divine bliss.

The Hindu tradition of mandirs effects the spiritual enlightenment of our consciousness and liberates us from our insane pursuit of material pleasures. ◆

# Grand Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav

27-28 May 2010, Limbdi



**T**his Land of Jhalavad...

Dry thorny bushes, leaf-less trees in every direction...

Flowers here are small and water is merely a mirage;

Flowers and leaves shrivel without water, the intense scorching summers...

This Land of Jhalavad...

Look in the distance for miles and miles, you'll not see a single hill;

Just vast, open and flat land merging into the

horizon.

This Land of Jhalavad...

In these few words, poet Prajaram Raval has painted a picture of Jhalavad. It is a region nurtured by the Jhala and Rana Kshatriya communities. Limbdi is a city of Jhalavad, brimming with dharma and known as Little Kashi. The new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Limbdi is located at the mid-point on the highway between Ahmedabad and Rajkot.

The Jhalavad region has been sanctified by



BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Limbdi.  
(Inset) Swamishri performs murti-pratishtha

Bhagwan Swaminarayan and has a rich historical connection with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It has been the cradle of many courageous, dedicated and wise devotees of all communities. Even today, the stories of these devotees inspire devotion and sacrifice.

Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj reached even the remote villages of this region, enduring the rough terrains on their bullock-carts. Although times have changed and the infrastructure is now

vastly improved, one thing remains: the open tree-less terrains.

In 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a *shikharbaddh* mandir in this region at Surendranagar. The mandir in Limbdi is the second in this region. Commuters on the Ahmedabad-Rajkot highway are naturally drawn to this grand mandir right by the roadside.

About 100 years ago, Jhaverbhai Diwan, a leading devotee in the time of Shastriji Maharaj lived in Limbdi. Jhaverbhai introduced Maharaja Dolatsinhji of Limbdi State and other officials to the divine personality of Shastriji Maharaj. It was through the assistance of Limbdi State that the land for the *shikharbaddh* Sarangpur Mandir was obtained. Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Niryundas Swami frequently visited Limbdi, where Chhaganbhai Khatri, a native of Mojidad, had taken up residence. In 1955, Chhaganbhai was introduced to Satsang by Merubha Bapu of Chachana, who was present at the ground-breaking ceremony of the Sarangpur mandir performed by Shastriji Maharaj. Thereafter, satsang began to spread gradually throughout the Jhalavad region.

Chhaganbhai was very knowledgeable and wherever he went he conducted discourses. As a result Nathubhai Soni, Chunilalbhai, Shivlalbhai of Umralla, Pranshankarbhai, Lakshmishankarbhai, Shivubha Bapu, Nagardas Bapa, Gordhanbhai, Jethalalbhai, Chandulalbhai, Lakshmichandbhai, Laljibhai Master, Ghanshyambhai Bhaichandbhai Shah, Narsinhbhai, Narayanbhai and other devotees joined the Satsang.

Chhaganbhai also kept in touch with Pitambarbhai, Kesarbhai, Dharamshibhai, Motibhai, Bhagwanbhai, Bhudharbhai, Kasalchand Kothari, Balubha Bapu, Umedsangbhai, Lakshmanji and Ghanshyamji of Chachana, Kalyansang of Sauka, Hathubhai and Jashubhai of Fedra, Talshibhai Patel of Navagam-Sejakpar, Vashrambhai, Bhudharbhai Patel, Popatbhai, Makanbhai, Raghubhai of Pandari and other devotees, and as a result frequently benefited



from the company of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

Also, the saintly Santvallabh Swami constantly toured the entire region and strengthened Satsang. After him, Hariprakash Swami and Ghanshyamcharan Swami toured the area for over 30 years. Thereafter, Amrutcharan Swami and other sadhus have continued to nourish the Satsang.

The first satsang *sabha* in Limbdi took place at Muljibhai's home. Yogiji Maharaj encouraged the devotees to attend the *sabhās* with regular letters. On 9 September 1953, he wrote that 3,000 devotees will attend the satsang *sabha* in Limbdi.

Initially, no more than 60 devotees attended the *sabha*. However, Rajnikant Bhudharbhai Parmar, a relative of Ghelabhai of Acharda, resolved that he would not eat gur until the *sabha* attendance reached 100. After some years, his austerities bore fruit.

By the wish of Yogiji Maharaj, Ramjibhai, son of Chhaganbhai, donated his mudbrick house for use as a mandir, where, in 1964, *murtis* were consecrated. Later, this place was renovated by the support of Bhupendrabhai Shah and in 1975 Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the re-consecration of the *murtis*.

At present, the senior devotees include Muljibhai Khatri, Bhupendrabhai Shah, Prabhubhai Mistry, Vasantbhai Soni and the main satsang activities coordinators are Pravinbhai Jajal and Gatorbhai Patel. Under this mandir's jurisdiction are two satsang regions: Limbdi and Chuda, with a total of 34 satsang centres.

As satsang continued to grow, the need for a bigger mandir became apparent. In 1985, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed such a wish and then the search for suitable land began. Once, Swamishri was travelling on the highway and saw the land on which the new mandir has been built and liked it. After it was purchased, Santswarup Swami undertook the responsibility of coordinating the mandir construction project.

Then, with the help of Jnaneshwar Swami and Aruni Bhagat, the 8-acre land adjacent to the initial 4.5 acres was purchased.

## **MANDIR CONSTRUCTION BEGINS**

The mandir construction project was launched and devotees from Mojidad, Sejakpar, Acharda, Bhoyka, Anandpar, Chuda, Pandari, Pansina, Rangpur, Kantharia, Chhalarda, Hadala, Ramdevgad, Chhatariyala, Jobala, Laliyad and other places throughout Jhalavad actively lent their support. Men and women devotees also observed many fasts and other *vrats* in prayer for the successful completion of the project.

In 1998, Swamishri performed the *bhumi-pujan*. On 20 February 2007, Mahant Swami initiated the construction work for the *sikharbaddh* mandir. For the first time in Sampradaya's history, a *shikharbaddh* mandir has been built from intricate glass reinforced concrete (GRC), reinforced cement concrete (RCC) and fibreglass designs. Men and women devotees, young and old, served day and night from start to finish in every aspect of the construction process. The foundations were filled with 600 truckloads of sand. Also, teams of devotees would serve on a rota basis and in the last 18 months, they completed work requiring 2,100 bags of cement. Whenever called devotees would willingly and enthusiastically come to perform *seva*. Thus, with the dedicated combined efforts of all, this five-*shikhar* mandir, complete with the Shri Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Mandapam was finished.

While the mandir was under construction many other collective and individual activities were organized. A paper-recycling project was launched. The women devotees observed chain-fasting until the mandir inauguration. Many devotees, male and female, young and old, pledged to avoid their favourite foods. In addition, many performed *anushtan*, pilgrimages, etc. to earn the blessings of Shriji Maharaj for this project. De-addiction rallies were organized by the children's wing, in which many addicts pledged to give



Swamishri presides over the Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace

up their harmful habits. Also, the homes of over 850 devotees were sanctified by the visit of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

### MANDIR DETAILS

The mandir complex is a total of 12.5 acres and in addition to the grand east-facing mandir are the various ancillary buildings: to the left is the sadhus' residence, behind the mandir are the kitchen, guesthouse and permanent assembly hall. The mandir has a large front podium, under which is the Shri Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Mandap.

The designs were made by the BAPS Planning Cell under the guidance of Akshaymuni Swami, and with the help of Devdattbhai Trivedi.

The mandir comprises of 33,672 sq. ft. of GCC; it is 80 feet high, 120 feet long and 110 feet wide.

The assistant engineer was Bhadrayubhai Vyasa and the RCC contractor was Amrishbhai Makwana. The moulds for the intricate RCC and fibreglass designs were prepared by Brahmacharan Swami. The

designs were arranged in their appropriate places under the supervision of Santswarup Swami by Yogikishore Swami. The mandir features 73 intricately designed pillars. The mandir's main *shikhar* is 35 ft. high and the other *shikhars* are 31 ft. high. The main dome is 18.25 ft. in circumference and within it 32 dancing peacocks have been placed. On the outside wall of the three main shrines there are 11 stone-sculpted *murtis*. There are a total of 17 golden *kalashes* and flagposts atop the *shikhars* and domes. The front podium measures 42x57 feet and the *pradakshina* is 8.5 feet wide. Under the podium is the 2,740 sq. ft. Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Mandap.

The main sponsors of the mandir were Chandrakantbhai Pujara of London and his nephews, Kumarbhai Pujara and Dhruv Pujara. Significant support was also given by Ashokbhai Patel of New York. In addition, many devotees from throughout India, USA, UK and Africa contributed for the successful completion of this project.



Swamishri performs yagna rituals



Devotees pull the peacock float with the murtis of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj during the grand procession through the streets of Limbdi

### **YAGNA FOR WORLD PEACE: 27 MAY 2010**

From early morning, the mandir compound was abuzz with devotees from India and abroad eagerly awaiting the Shri Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace.

Veteran Brahmins, Shri Ghanshyambai, Shri Mukeshbhai Shastri and others recited the Vedic mantras as Mahant Swami, Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami and other senior sadhus performed the initial *yagna* rituals.

The main sponsors of the mandir sat around the seven main *yagna kunds* on stage. While in the *yagna shala* another 123 *yagna kunds* were set up. A total of 1,249 couples participated in the *yagna*.

Then Swamishri arrived on stage to perform the main *yagna* rituals before the *murtis* to be consecrated had been positioned prominently on the stage.

Swamishri also performed *pujan* of the *kalash* to be placed in the foundation of the new *shikharbaddh* mandir in Dhari, the birthplace of Yogiji Maharaj.

After performing the *yagna* rituals and *arti*, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have travelled extensively throughout the Jhalavad region. This

mandir is the result of their wish and everyone’s loving dedication. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and the *muktas* will all be pleased. Today, devotees have come from throughout India and abroad. It is because of everyone’s cooperation that the mandir has turned out bigger than expected.

“These *yagnas*, mandirs, *murtis*, festivals are not for increasing our fame and reputation, but are so that everyone’s circumstances improve, people understand the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and the *jivas* attain *kalyan*.

“Shriji Maharaj manifested on this earth with the purpose of establishing the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam. For this, Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the sadhus have undertaken *vicharan*. Then, by building mandirs in, first, Bochasan and then Sarangpur, Shastriji Maharaj spread the full glory that Shriji Maharaj manifested with his Dham and *muktas*. This region played a big role in enabling the building of Sarangpur Mandir.

“When one serves God, he returns the fruits of one’s services infinitely. What is meant by ‘infinitely’? *Moksha*. Worldly wealth comes and goes, but the real wealth is *kalyan* of the *jiva*. Just as when gold is heated, it melts first from within, similarly, when one listens to discourses and





Swamishri performs murti-pratishtha rituals in the central shrine

engages in *seva* and bhajan, one's ignorance melts away from within and one attains happiness. May God grant strength to all for this."

Then Swamishri performed *pujan* of all the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir and placed flowers at their feet.

The arrangements for the *yagna* were coordinated by Santswarup Swami with the help of Shrutiprakash Swami and Bhadresh Swami. Volunteers from Limbdi, Vadhan, Sayla, Bodiya, Chuda, Bahelapara and other towns helped with the preparations.

### **NAGAR YATRA: 27 MAY 2010**

In the afternoon, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir were paraded in a grand, colourful procession through the city. Thousands of devotees took part in the *nagar yatra*. The procession featured a variety of sections as follows:

- Leading the procession were 28 *darbars* traditionally clad on horseback.
- Senior devotees holding the *murti-pratishtha* celebration banner and *balaks* carrying BAPS flags.
- Motorbike riders carrying BAPS flags.
- Sadhus and *parshads* on foot singing *dhun*

and bhajans.

- Kalyanbhai of Surat with his well-known camel act.
- At appropriate junctions, experienced *darbars* performed sword-fighting tricks.
- Ishwarbhai of Kundhala on motorbike while balancing seven *kalashes* on his head.
- Musical band playing devotional tunes, with devotees dancing in joy.
- Swan Float with *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.
- Float with *murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj.
- Float with sadhus singing bhajans, with devotees dancing behind them.
- Sadhus and *parshads* on foot.
- Two decorated buggies seating Mahant Swami, Kothari Swami and other senior sadhus, followed by a musical band.
- Peacock Float with *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj casting their divine blessings on all.
- Blowpipe band from Badalpur playing devotional tunes.
- Float with *murtis* of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- Women devotees in traditional costumes



Children and youths perform a celebratory mandir dance during the murti-pratishtha assembly

dancing and carrying auspicious *kalashes* on their heads.

- Float with *murtis* of Shri Radha-Krishna Dev.
- Float with *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.
- In all, the procession featured 7 decorated floats, 2 buggies, 3 bands, 28 mounted horses, 25 bike riders and 13 decorated tractors.

As the 2 km-long procession passed through the main streets of the city, thousands of onlookers rejoiced in the vibrant and joyous atmosphere. Some elderly residents commented that the only other *nagar yatra* in Limbdi they could recall that so captured everyone was back in 1970 when Yogiji Maharaj was welcomed in Limbdi after his overseas visit.

The support of the local police helped with the smooth management of the procession. After two hours, the procession arrived at the new mandir.

In the evening assembly, a cultural programme was presented appreciating the dedicated services of the devotees of Jhalavad, children and teenagers performed a traditional dance and senior sadhus honoured devotees and others for their support of the project. Then children and teenagers of Bhavnagar presented dramas on the stories of 'Bhakta Sagram' and Kalyandas of Kadu and Malji

Soni'. After this, children and teenagers of Limbdi presented a drama on 'Pioneer BAPS Devotees in Jhalavad'. Thereafter Ghanshyamcharan Swami recalled the intense *vicharan* of Yogiji Maharaj in this region. Finally, videos of Swamishri's *vicharan* in Jhalavad and the building of Limbdi Mandir were shown.

### **MURTI-PRATISHTHA CEREMONY: 28 MAY 2010**

In the early morning of Nij Vaishakh vad 1, VS 2066 (28 May 2010), the preliminary rituals of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony were performed by Mahant Swami, Kothari Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami and other senior sadhus. Devotees were seated under the main dome and on the podium, from where they participated in the rituals.

At 8.00 a.m. Swamishri began the main Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the central shrine. At the same time, senior sadhus performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the other shrines: Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj – Mahant Swami, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna Dev – Kothari Swami, Shri Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Mandap – Tyagvallabh Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj – Ishwarcharan Swami, Shastriji Maharaj – Viveksagar Swami, Yogiji Maharaj – Siddeshwar





Swamishri performs abhishek of Shri Nilkanth Varni

Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj – Anandswarup Swami, Shri Sita-Ram-Hanumanji – Bhaktavatsal Swami and Shri Shiv-Parvati- Ganpatiji – Atmaswarup Swami.

After performing the rituals in the central shrines, Swamishri performed *pujan* of all the *murtis* in the three main shrines. Then he performed *pujan*, *arti* and *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and *pujan* of the Guru Parampara. Then Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji and Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganpatiji’.

Meanwhile, an *annakut* was arranged before all the *murtis*, Swamishri sat before the central shrine and the Swaminarayan *mahamantra dhun* was chanted while prayers were offered. A special prayer was offered for the successful completion of Akshardham in New Jersey.

Swamishri then gave sanctified flowers, rice grains and water to Shri Kanubhai Patel, main coordinator of the Akshardham project, to place in the *shilanyas* ceremony of the new *shikharbaddh* mandir in New Jersey to take place in the near future.

Thereafter, the Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti*.

## MURTI-PRATISHTHA ASSEMBLY

In the grounds behind the mandir, a canopied assembly hall had been set up with great difficulty, since the powerful winds had torn much of the covering cloth over the previous few days.

In the *murti-pratishtha* assembly the chief guests were: Shri Kiritsinh, State Environment and Forestry Minister; Pujya Charandasji Maharaj, Mahant of Kabir Ashram; Bipinbhai Dave, BJP President, Surendranagar; Shankarsinh Dalvadi, Leader of the Nagarpalika; Laljibhai Mer, former MP, Adibhavanandji Maharaj (Mahant, Ramkrishna Mission), Lalit Kishoresharanandas – Laldas Babu (Mahant, Saurashtra Nimbark Pith).

All were honoured on behalf of BAPS by Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami.

In the women’s section, senior women devotees honoured Varshaben Doshi, MLA for Vadhdvan.

After speeches by Kiritsinh, Siddeshwar Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Santswarup Swami delivered a vote of thanks to all for their help. He especially remembered the late Hariprakash Swami for his tireless efforts in this region. Then, after Swamishri was honoured with garlands, BAPS youths performed a lively traditional dance depicting the glory of mandirs.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “Our traditions have been presented and preserved due to mandirs. Anyone who comes to the mandir will experience the divinity and be inspired with values. Our traditions have spread through the Upanishads, Gita, Bhagavat, Ramayan, rishis, *munis* and mahatmas. Our traditions have survived due to the avatars of God and great sadhus. Now it is our responsibility to preserve these traditions.”



# Memories of Jhalavad



Swamishri makes an entry in his personal diary

**T**wo hundred years ago the land of Jhalavad in Saurashtra was sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

It was from here that great *paramhansas* like Abhutanand Swami (who left from his marriage altar to take initiation), Devanand Swami and Adharanand Swami. How can we forget Sagram Vaghri who was a staunch devotee? His pure conduct eclipsed even high-class devotees like Shivram Bhatt. This was the land once steeped in superstition. But Bhagwan Swaminarayan freed people from the bonds of superstition.

Malji Soni also belonged to this region and Shastriji Maharaj often came to see Malji Soni to listen to his narration of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar. Both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj visited this region extensively facing all odds. Shastriji Maharaj used to come to Narayan

Dharo near Acharda every year in the month of Bhadarvo. He celebrated an annual festival on the day of *amas* at least 40 times here. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj also celebrated this festival in later years in the presence of the devotees of Acharda, Bhojka and adjoining villages.

Pramukh Swami has also visited Jhalavad scores of times over the years.

## **PAINS PRAMUKH SWAMI TOOK**

The devotees of Acharda, Untdi, Pandari, Mojidad, Choki and 50 other villages become choked with emotion when they recall Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visits to their villages in the scorching heat of summer. He would happily visit every house, even during inclement weather. He would stay even at houses without electricity or put up at the village square. He would not be deterred by lack of toileting or bathing facilities. Even a painful abscess, the scorching sun or a sandstorm would not deter Swamishri from visiting the villages to please the devotees. And his modes of travels varied from bullock carts to tractors. The villagers vividly recollect with awe Pramukh Swami's weather-beaten, yet smiling, face and his grace upon them in sanctifying their homes.

Even today, at the ripe old age of 90, Swamishri has on the tip of his tongue the names of the devotees, their villages and the geographic details of the villages since he has visited them so many times. Take Limbdi, for example. According to the reports available, Swamishri has visited Limbdi 109 times since 1957 and has stayed there for around 200 days. There are memories galore with every street and house in the villages of Jhalavad.

Those were the days when Pramukh Swami Maharaj walked gracefully fast and no one could



keep pace with him. With that youthful zest Pramukh Swami Maharaj traversed Jhalavad villages facing many odds to promote satsang.

The love of the devotees was in equal measure as Pramukh Swami Maharaj's enthusiasm and willingness to dedicate himself to the worthy cause of satsang. He had no expectations of comfort and inconvenience did not matter to him.

Narendrasinh, a devotee of Bhojka, is moved to tears when he recalls the difficulties Swamishri faced in those days.

It 1982 when Swamishri was in Acharda for a *parayan* at Bhagwatsinh Babu's house. After the *parayan*, Swamishri used to go for house to house visits.

Once, in Bhojka, the visits ended at 11.00 p.m. and Swamishri arrived for dinner at the home of the village chief, Mangubha Jhala. At that time, a devotee by the name of Ajitsinh came there and talked to Narendrasinh, a devotee, about his wish to take Pramukh Swami Maharaj to his home since he missed an opportunity some years before. He wished to take Swamishri at that time.

Narendrasinh spoke to Hariprakash Swami, who spoke to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It was 11.45 p.m., Swamishri hurriedly finished dinner and got ready to go. There was no electricity in the village then. So, a petrol lantern was used. On the way he visited Narendrasinh's house also. While walking towards Ajitsinh's house, Swamishri's right foot got stuck in a muddy pool of sewage water. Leaving the sandal in the pool, Swamishri walked on with a sandal only on his left foot. The devotees only noticed this when Swamishri reached Ajitsinh's place and then went to collect the sandal.

In those days, Swamishri usually visited two to three villages a day. Swamishri's forehead and nose would become ruddy with vermilion as a result of the devotees applying *chandlo*. Most visits were on foot and Swamishri would at times take his *gatariyu* off to give relief from the heat. Yet Swamishri would meet them lovingly, showing no signs of fatigue. There was no electricity in the



A simple hut in Bhojka, lacking even the basic amenities. Swamishri happily tolerated such inconveniences during his stay to please the host devotee



During home visits Swamishri shows affection on members of a family, resolves their problems and strengthens their unity villages then and the devotees used hand fans.

In 1972, Swamishri had an abscess near his right ankle. It caused him much pain while walking. Yet, he continued his daily visits to the devotees' houses. The villagers of Bhojka and Laljibhai of Malod recollect the time when Swamishri arrived in Malod, "Swamishri sat near the well behind the mandir. Doctor Swami pressed the abscess and



Swamishri honoured in a procession on a tractor through uneven village roads during the afternoon scorching heat



Despite swirling dust and blistering heat, Swamishri patiently adjusts to the wishes of the villagers by sitting in a bullock cart



Such village processions were once a frequent daily occurrence

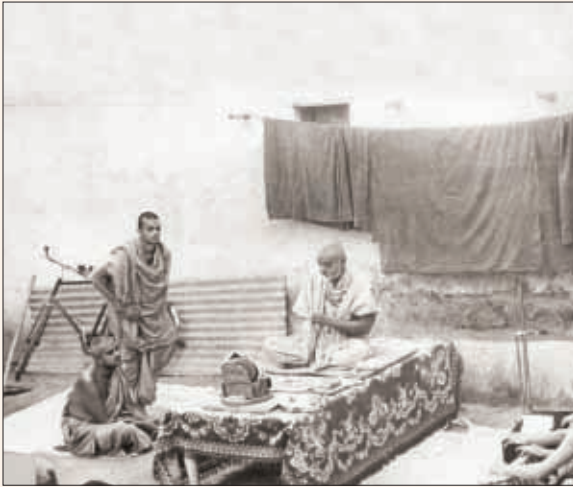
drained out the pus. The wound was deep. So, to prevent re-infection a lot of antiseptic powder was used to fill it and then tied with bandage. We were distressed when we saw it and told Swami that we would not have organized visits if he had let us know about it.”

But Swamishri said, “I have to see that the devotees are pleased.”

This also happened in Bhojka when Swamishri had an abscess near the ankle. Doctor Swami again drained the pus and dressed it but it still pained Swamishri. After his morning bath, Swamishri told Devcharan Swami that he could not go for the visits that day. The devotees did not know this. So, after Swamishri’s puja the devotees requested him for the house visits. Swamishri instantly agreed, despite his pain, and visited over 60 houses that day.

Lalajibhai Patel of Malod recalls, “It was 1971-1972. There were torrential rains in Jhalavad. Swamishri was in Kharva when we went to invite him to Malod. Swamishri agreed. After *parayan*, Swamishri left Kharva in the tractor trolley of Hemant Vira and Gangaram Mavji. The roads were damaged by heavy rains and there were pools of water. Malod is 15 km from Kharva. The tractor was being driven slowly. It was a bumpy ride but Swamishri travelled to Malod with a smile on his face. Then he went to Rampara which is 15 km





Whether in a confined village hut or an open space Swamishri always remained focused in his daily puja from Malod and then came back to Malod at 10 in the night. Swamishri travelled 45 km that day. By the time he got to bed, it was 1.00 a.m. The next day Swamishri visited 20 houses though the roads were swampy.”

Once Swamishri was going from Acharda to Bhojka by tractor and it got stuck in a rivulet. Only with great difficulty was the tractor pulled out.

Santswarup Swami recollects an incident connected with Limbdi, “We were to go from Limbdi to Nadiad in 1981, but our car broke down. After the car had been repaired, we left Limbdi. It was monsoon and the first day of *dharna-parna*. It was raining heavily. The car broke down again. Yogicharan Swami inspected the engine but to no avail. Swamishri himself came out of the car, and smiled as he was drenched by the rainwater. Then we asked Swamishri to be seated in the car. The sadhus pushed the car. The car was taken out of the flowing waters. Then there was a railway crossing ahead. It was sloping. So, the car had to be pushed again. Once it started Swamishri asked Indravadan to take the car to the garage. We reached Nadiad at 11 in the night. Here, Swamishri went to see Natubhai Shroff who was hospitalized after an accident. By the time Swamishri reached the home of Jamnadas Amin to rest for the night it was 12 midnight.”



After the village procession a sabha would take place, often finishing at midnight



Swamishri during the mandir re-consecration in Limbdi with Sant Swami (L), Hariprakash Swami (R) and devotees



Nagar Yatra through the streets of Limbdi prior to the mandir re-consecration in 1974



In villages lacking even the basic amenities Swamishri often bathed in the open, whether it was summer, monsoon or winter

While in Limbdi, Swamishri would perform *arti* in the *ghar* mandir of Bhupendrabhai Shah. Swamishri would also climb the stairs and perform *arti* again in the *ghar* mandir of Bhupendrabhai's son, Shashikant (Shashin).

Thus he pleased the young and the old alike.

It was 1968. Swamishri and Sant Swami were in the *sabha* in Limbdi. Hariprakash Swami was cooking in the kitchen. He was trying to make the batter for *malpuva*, but could not do it properly. Suddenly, Swamishri entered the kitchen, saw that he was struggling and taught him how to make the batter and to cook the *malpuva* properly. Swamishri spent half an hour. Then he went to *sabha*.

Swamishri has pleased the devotees in whatever way they have wished. From foundation-stone laying ceremonies to blessing machinery in factories to going for a meal at their homes, Swamishri has obliged in every way.

Whatever the situation Swamishri has always kept Thakorji at the forefront, since it is through his grace that everything happens. Sant Swami recollected an occasion in 1972-73 when



Discounting all difficulties Swamishri climbed down 10 ft. to perform the foundation-stone laying ceremony

Swamishri was in Vagad. There was no facility for cooking at the home of a devotee where Swamishri was to take a meal. So Devcharan Swami went to the mandir nearby, cooked the food and brought it to the home of the devotee. It was getting late so the devotee served the guests before the meal was offered to Thakorji. When Swamishri came to know this, he was displeased and rebuked the devotee. Food was cooked again and *thal* was then offered to Thakorji.

The sadhus who accompanied Swamishri during his travels recollect, "In those days there were no cement buildings in the villages. The houses had either tiles or metal sheets as roof. There was no electricity either. So the tiles and the sheets would get quite hot. The roofs were leaky too. So the sun rays and rain would fall on your face. Besides, the sadhus and the devotees would sleep near Swamishri. The sadhus would fan Swamishri by hand. But when tired they would doze off and fall on Swamishri. Yet Swamishri would never complain."

Devcharan Swami says, "In the summer days



of 1973 we were in Chachana. Swamishri had put up in an old mandir. Swamishri would retire for the day at 12.30 in the night, all tired.

“On one such summer night, Swamishri went to bed. There was no fan overhead. The heat was unbearable. The mosquitoes were humming around. It was a windless night. So Swami could not sleep. Swamishri carried his mattress to sleep in the courtyard. Then Devcharan Swami woke up and asked why he had come out of the room. Swamishri said, “It is too hot and there are too many mosquitoes.” Then he suggested to Devcharan Swami, “Let us go to the lake.” It was 2.30 at night. Both of them went to the lake and slept on the bank. It was somewhat cooler there, so they could sleep. Swamishri woke up the next morning and after puja, went on a daily round of household visits.

The devotees however did not have any idea of how and where Swamishri had spent the entire night.

Swamishri’s visit to Kholadiyad was also memorable. There was a *sabha* at night, in which the lighting was provided by a petromax lantern. Afterwards Swamishri went to the old mandir at 12.30. There was no wind. Swamishri’s bed was spread on the little platform. Swamishri had hardly got to sleep when the street dogs came barking. It was just not possible to sleep. Krishnavallabh Swami and Santswarup Swami chased the dogs away. Only then was Swamishri able to sleep.

Toilets were also not available at all the places Swamishri visited. So he had to go to the outskirts of the village early morning or at night for ablutions.

Swamishri was in Navagam-Sejakpur in 1972. He had put up at the old Swaminarayan mandir. At 6.00 in the evening, Swamishri felt like clearing his bowels. He talked to Pragat Bhagat. There was no indoor toilet. Pragat Bhagat asked, “Where could you go at this time? Swamishri said, “There are fields. I can go there.”

And Swamishri left. On the way back, there was a well. So Swamishri said, “Let me have bath here.”

Pragat Bhagat argued, “It is winter and it is biting cold.”

Swamishri said, “It does not matter. Let me have a bath while remembering Maharaj.”

Then Pragat Bhagat drew water out of the well and bathed Swamishri. It was 7.00 p.m. when they returned to the old mandir.

Those days there were no facilities for bathing also. So, Swamishri would go to the lakes of the villages. Swamishri also took his baths in the fields and under water pumps.

Swamishri performed his puja at the most unlikely places during his stay at these villages. One such place was the backyard of the house where there would be cattle on one side and the sadhus would leave *dhotis* and *gatariyas* for drying.

All this did not matter to him. For, he was inspired by the divine spirit of Akshar-Purushottam and the will to spread it far and wide.

Swamishri’s visits to Jhalavad are glaringly different and document the odds he faced and the unflagging spirit he showed for the sake of spreading the principle and satsang of Akshar-Purushottam in the footsteps of his gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

An anecdote of 1972 eloquently captures the spirit with which he travelled the breadth and length of Jhalavad.

Swamishri was in the mandir. It was noon. Devanandbhai of Ningala was fanning Swamishri. Swamishri had just about closed his eyes while Devanandbhai was trying to read Swamishri’s 16 holy foot marks. Swamishri’s eyes were half shut. So he asked him what he was doing.

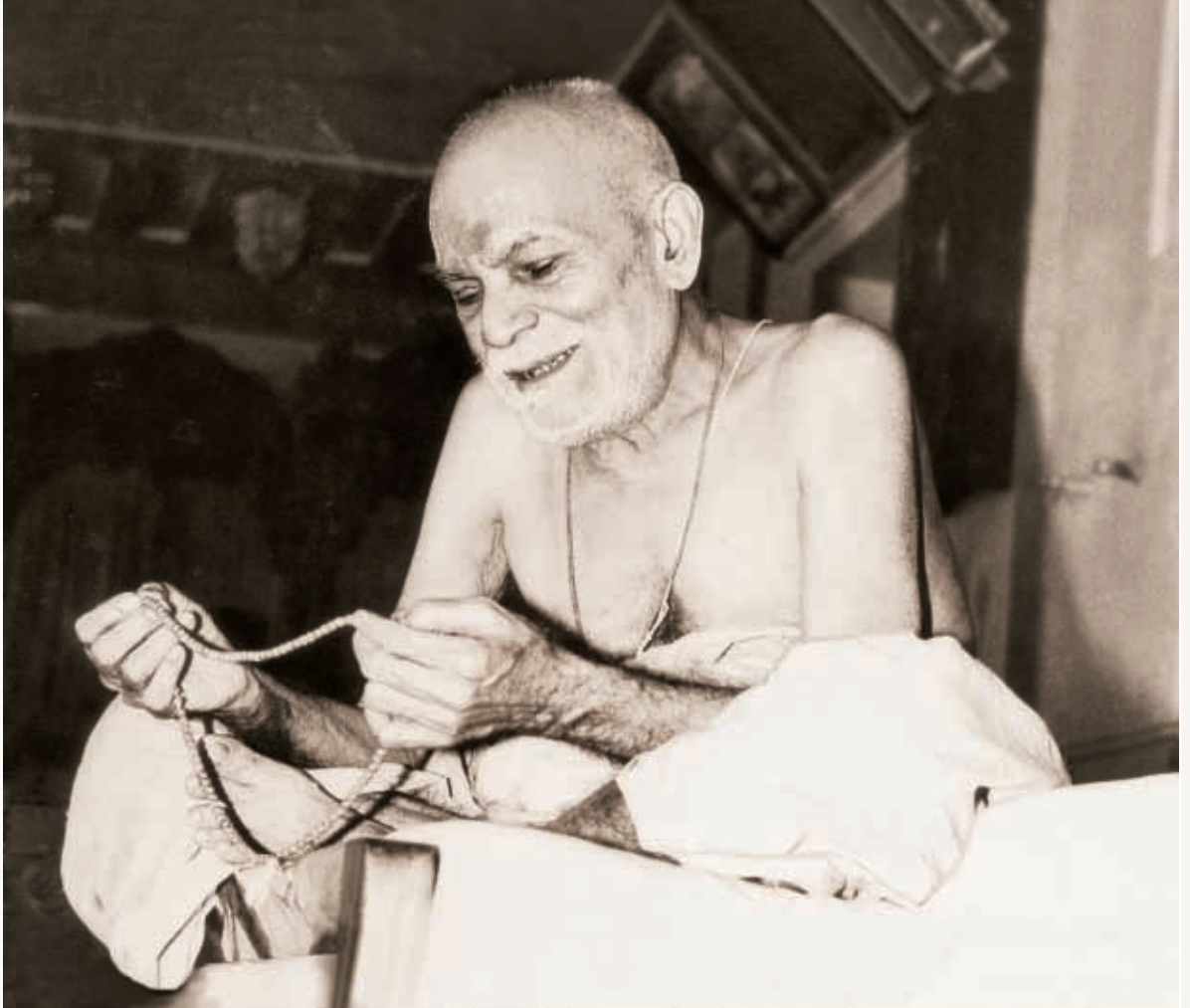
Devanandbhai said, “I’m trying to see the 16 foot marks.” Then, Swamishri, spontaneously said with a smile, “They have been erased by the number of household visits.”

These are the documentary memories of the pains Swamishri took for the noble causes of satsang and promotion of culture. ◆

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Kaushik Joshi

# Hāji Bhalā Sadhu...



Although Yogiji Maharaj had memorized over one thousand kirtans written by the *paramhansas*, the one he identified with most was Muktanand Swami's *Hāji bhalā Sadhu*.

In this kirtan, Muktanand Swami profiles a true sadhu, and without knowing it, described a sadhu who lived over one hundred years after him.



Yogiji Maharaj had a clearly defined objective in life, to please Shriji Maharaj and his guru Shastriji Maharaj. He achieved this by living a life of an ideal sadhu. At times, this required a great deal of sacrifice or the enduring of physical hardship. At the very least, it involved living life against the grain. It required making decisions that contradicted the path most people take.

For Yogiji Maharaj, however, the decision making aspect was easy. The path was natural. Because he had a clear sense of who he was and what he wanted.

When a war hero hears his country's national anthem for the first time after returning from battle, he gets a much deeper understanding of all that it stands for. Similarly, Yogiji Maharaj's passion for singing and explaining this kirtan leads one to believe that having put the words to life, he had a much greater understanding for everything this kirtan stood for.

\* \* \*

#### **TANAKI UPĀDHI TAJE SOI SADHU...**

*"He who forsakes caring for his body is a (true) sadhu..."*

At every moment, Yogiji Maharaj sidelined mundane bodily comforts and revived the traditional austere lifestyle of a sadhu. He exemplified Muktanand Swami's words, *'tanaki upādhi taje, soi sadhu...'*, one who disregards bodily worries is a true sadhu. For Yogiji Maharaj, the body was simply a tool used for God's service and devotion and was not meant to be pampered. Hardships strengthened his willpower and devotion. His every action echoed these sentiments.

In 1956, Yogiji Maharaj celebrated the Hari Nom festival with a waterless fast in Ahmedabad's scorching summer. Parched by thirst the youths found it impossible to sleep. So, they broke their fasts by drinking water at 3 a.m. Yogiji Maharaj, who was sixty-four years old, woke up at his regular time, walked to the Sabaramati River for a bath, patiently performed his daily puja, and then returned to the mandir to break his fast. The

youths travelling with Swami realized the control he commanded over his bodily needs.

In fact, he often purposely subjected his body to hardships. In 1954, Yogiji Maharaj was in Nondhana, where Punambhai had spread a stack of mattresses for Swami to sleep on. Swami only wanted one mattress to sleep on, yet at the devotee's insistence, he laid down to rest. After the devotees left the room, he had some youths remove the extra mattresses and revealed his feelings, "This body is going to burn to ashes one day. There is no need to pamper it. We should use our body as we do a pair of shoes and spend our time in God's devotion."

To Yogiji Maharaj, even the smallest incident was an opportunity to condition the body. In 1959, while walking towards the river in Bātada, small pebbles got lodged in his shoes under his feet. Arunbhai (presently, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami) went to remove the pebbles. Swami stopped him, "Keep two pebbles inside. Pain is good for me."

Age brought no change to this inclination. At 74, during the peak India's summer in May, he begged his attendants to let him fast on Ekadashi. His every thought and action was that of a sadhu – indifferent and unsympathetic to his body's needs.

#### **MĀN APMĀN ME EKTĀ...**

*"Equanimity in honour and insult..."*

It is said, that "the deepest craving of every human being is the desire to be appreciated". Appreciation boosts one's ego and becomes the motivating force in all that one does. If one is not careful, it can even become the main motivation in one's devotion to God (Vachanamrut Gadhada II 41).

Yogiji Maharaj was different. He used to say, "I don't like being honoured, I like being criticized." This attitude was one of the keys to his greatness.

A true sadhu is one who neither feels elated at being praised nor dejected in insults.

In 1967, a well-known poet named Dula

Kāg came to Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav celebration in Gondal. Immediately after the grand celebration assembly, he saw Yogiji Maharaj sitting on the floor plucking spinach leaves. Just moments before, he had seen Yogiji Maharaj sitting on stage in front of thousands of devotees as renowned personalities praised him. He realized then that Yogiji Maharaj was unaffected by praise.

Maharaj says that such a sadhu maintains equanimity when ruling a kingdom amidst thousands of people and wandering in the forest all alone (Vachanamrut Loya 10).

This equanimity is really put to the test in the face of insults.

In Vachanamrut Loya 16 Maharaj says the nature of an egoistic person is such that if he does not receive praise from a person, then he would overlook that person's hundred virtues and highlight an insignificant flaw.

However, Yogiji Maharaj was the exact opposite. He saw good in people who insulted him!

In Kolkata in 1968, Yogiji Maharaj went for darshan to a mandir of the old Swaminarayan Sampradaya. After darshan, Yogiji Maharaj went to meet the sadhus staying there. However, instead of welcoming him, they disrespected him. The devotees accompanying Yogiji Maharaj were offended. Sensing this, Yogiji Maharaj immediately pointed out how accommodating the sadhus had been in allowing them to have Thakorji's darshan.

*Vishnu Sahasranam* (a part of the Mahabharat) describes God's virtues in 1008 names. It says God is "*Amāni mānado mānyaha*."

Yogiji Maharaj had these divine virtues. He was born without ego (*amāni*), and he could praise others (*mānado*). This is why he is revered by everyone (*mānyaha*).

### **SUKH DUKHME SAMBHAV...**

*"Equanimity in joy or misery..."*

Life is often described as a roller coaster, with its ups and downs. Usually, people's emotions

mirror these experiences. Because of this, we often see people who are spoiled by wealth or devastated by trauma. Muktanand Swami says that a true sadhu is not like this at all.

In 1957, Yogiji Maharaj was travelling in a village named Ghoghavadar. He stayed at the home of a devotee named Haribhai. Haribhai was poor and had very little to offer guests who came to his home. The best he could do for Yogiji Maharaj was to clean the cowshed and offer him a place to sleep there. There, Yogiji Maharaj, the guru of BAPS, spent the night with mosquitoes amid the smell of cow dung and urine. The following day, Yogiji Maharaj was preparing to leave for the next village, Bandhiya. Haribhai had felt guilty for not being able to give Yogiji Maharaj better facilities. He asked, "Bapa, please bless me and improve my financial situation so that I may serve you and the sadhus as one should." When he began to apologize for his shortcomings, Yogiji Maharaj compassionately said, "I slept better here than others would in a mansion. You have been a generous host. You have not caused us any kind of discomfort. You have my blessings that soon, you will have a two-storey house."

When considering how frequently Yogiji Maharaj smiled and laughed, who could guess at the amount of hardship he purposely endured or the extreme asceticism he practiced. When considering the sublime peace that radiated from Yogiji Maharaj's face, who could guess at the number of painful diseases, he suffered from. And when considering the inspiration, encouragement and joy he gave to everyone he met, who could guess that he had suffered sixteen years of ill-treatment at the hands of the bitter Vignananand Swami.

In joy and misery, Yogiji Maharaj maintained complete equanimity. This is why, though he lived such a difficult life, his personality was so buoyant.

Yogiji Maharaj proved that in life, physical experience does not have to dictate our disposition or outlook.



## **AHI KE SUKH ALP HE, NAHI SWARG LUCHĀV..**

*“(He understands that) the pleasures of this world are miniscule, (and even those of) swarg cannot entice him...”*

Compared to the billions of people on this planet, Yogiji Maharaj had a totally unique view about where true pleasure lies. This was evident in his preference for simplicity.

In 1957, devotees from Africa came to Ahmedabad and gave Yogi Bapa a pen for letter writing and told him it cost Rs. 300. Swamishri quickly gave it back. The devotees persuaded him to keep the pen, informing him that it writes smoothly and doesn't leak. Yogi Bapa replied, “I cannot keep such an expensive pen. Mine is just fine!” Yogi Bapa used to keep a thick pen that frequently leaked in his hands.

In 1970, Yogi Bapa went to London. The devotees there wanted to show him the sights that made London a world-famous city. They took him to the post office tower, a building that is noted for its architecture. Yogi Bapa disrupted their explanation and said “Nairobi has the same thing (referring to the Hilton Hotel).” Then he said, “Everything in this world is perishable.”

Things that most people considered enjoyable had no effect on Yogiji Maharaj. In fact, they often seemed to distress Yogiji Maharaj.

Why? Because Yogiji Maharaj fully understood their ephemeral nature. He understood that they did not result in a lasting feeling of contentment and that they all carried side effects that eventually led to ignorance and dependency. But more than anything, these pleasures paled in comparison to the bliss Yogiji Maharaj experienced as a result of his attachment to God.

In 1968, after a procession in Atladra, a devotee asked Yogiji Maharaj, “While you are seated on the elephant, why don't you enjoy the scenery around you?” Yogiji Maharaj replied “In this world, the only things worth looking at are God and his Sadhu.”

Maharaj talks about what true eternal happiness



is in Vachanmrut Sarangpur 1. He says, “I would disregard all of the pleasures of the *vishays* of countless millions of *brahmans* just for one second's darshan of that God. Moreover, if one were to gather all the pleasures of the *vishays* of countless millions of *brahmans* even then it would not equal even a millionth of a fraction of the bliss which is present in just one pore of God.” Yogiji Maharaj experienced this bliss continuously and so, *maya's* frivolous joys meant nothing to him.

## **LĀLACH LOB HARĀM HAI, GRAHE NA GĀNTHE DĀM..**

*“He has shunned greed and enticements; he does not touch or keep money...”*

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had established special rules for sadhus so that they conquered greed. Yogiji Maharaj followed these rules perfectly.

In 1942, after doing *vicharan* in 37 villages in 15 days, Yogiji Maharaj came to Bochasan. Here, Motibhai from Anand saw that Yogiji Maharaj had a fever. He asked Shastriji Maharaj, “Shall I call a doctor?”

Shastriji Maharaj said, “The doctor won’t be able to cure this fever since it is of a different type.”

“A different type?” Motibhai asked.

“Today, he saw a sadhu who is not from our Sampradaya counting money with his hands. Since then he has had a fever. Tell me, what will a doctor do to cure this?”

Maharaj’s command about not touching money were so important to Yogiji Maharaj that seeing even an outsider break it was unbearable for him.

In addition to this, Yogiji Maharaj embodied the spirit of generosity. He never asked for or kept anything for himself.

In 1968 while Yogi Bapa was in Gondal recovering from an illness, devotees came for his darshan. When Yogeshwar Swami saw all of these devotees, he commented, “Bapa, all these people have come here for your darshan because they love you.”

Yogi Bapa replied, “I have cared for everyone. I have served everyone. I have not insulted anyone. I have not spoken behind anyone’s back. That is why everyone has developed love for me. I have not asked anyone for anything. I have asked for *seva* only for Thakorji, but never for myself. That is why people have developed this love for me.”

In 1963 while Yogi Bapa was in Jamnagar, he went to Anand Bapa’s Ashram. There he met the mahant, Shantiprasadji, who wanted to present Yogi Bapa an ornate shawl. Yogi Bapa told him “The shawl is very nice. We can place it on the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj in Gondal. These sadhus will send the shawl to Gondal.”

The mahant insisted that Yogi Bapa wear the shawl. Yogi Bapa then told the mahant, “Our sadhus do not wear ornate shawls. It is a command

in the Shikshapatri. This shawl will look good on Shriji Maharaj.” Shantiprasadji accepted Yogi Bapa’s resolve, saying, “Your devotion to the Lord is exceptional!”

This example shows how true and genuine Yogiji Maharaj’s devotion for Thakorji was. Although he always wanted the best for Thakorji, he wanted nothing for himself.

## **NĀRI NĀGANI SAM TAJE...**

*“Avoids a woman just as he would a snake...”*

Shriji Maharaj protected sadhus from the most dangerous obstacles on the spiritual path. He has stated in the Vachanamrut that the love between a man and a woman is what allows *maya* to propagate itself. Spiritually, it is also a cause for attachment and rebirth. In order to establish and propagate Ekantik Dharma, Maharaj dictated clear guidelines for devotees to follow. For sadhus, one of most important is the observance of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) in eight specific ways. Observing such celibacy is an achievement of the highest order, but for Yogiji Maharaj it was innate.

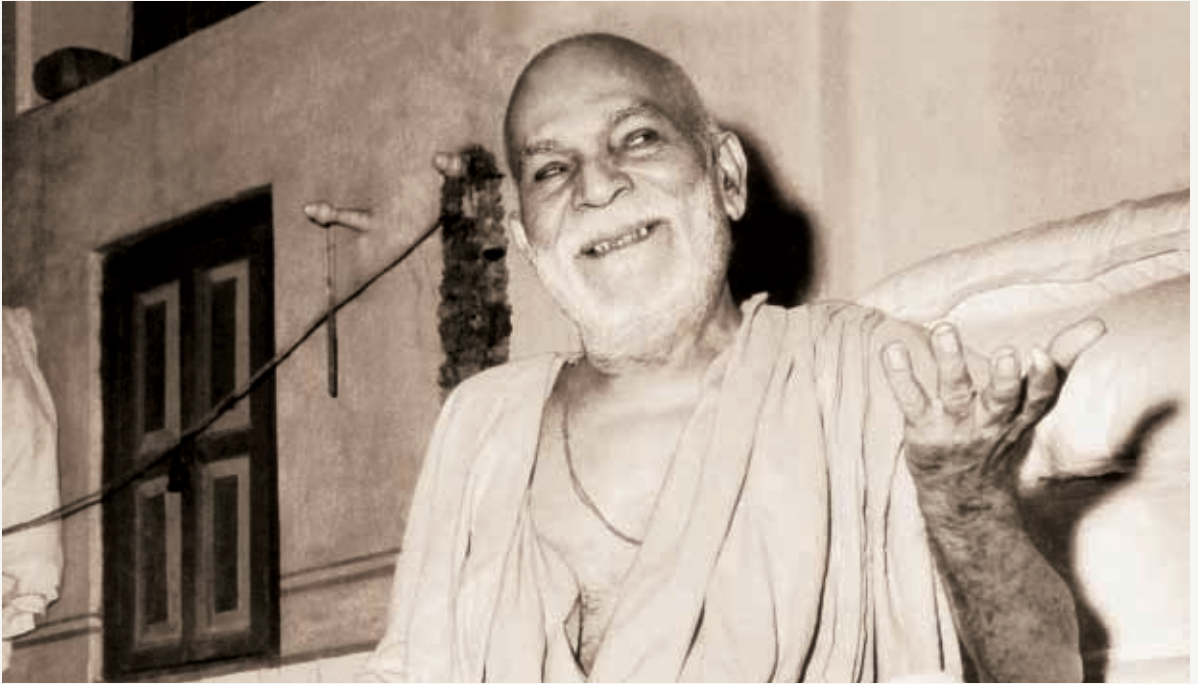
His aversion to worldly life was clear even when he was young. Puriba once talked to her son, Jinabhai, about getting him married. Jina said in a polite but resolute tone, “You have already ruined things for my brother; why do you want to ruin things for me?” Jina Bhagat was only seven at the time!

Naturally, as a sadhu he practiced celibacy to the highest degree. In 1960, Yogi Bapa was about to board a plane that was heading to Kampala. As he approached the plane, Yogi Bapa asked, “Where are the other passengers?”

Arunbhai said, “Everyone else is already seated in the plane; we’re the only ones left.”

Then Yogi Bapa called the devotees and said, “I don’t want to board the plane, because there are already women seated inside and they may touch us as we pass by.” Since it was Yogi Bapa’s wish, the devotees asked the pilot to request the passengers to disembark the plane. The pilot,





crew and other passengers respected Yogi Bapa's wish and after Yogi Bapa had boarded the plane and taken his seat, the remaining passengers re-entered the plane. Yogi Bapa remained resolute in observing his dharma, even at the age of 68.

In 1963, Yogiji Maharaj was in Bhayavadar. He went to a farmhouse where a young girl briefly stood on one end of the floor mat he was sitting on. Swamishri immediately got up and took a shower. Afterwards, he did not drink or eat anything. Other sadhus repeatedly tried to convince Yogiji Maharaj to eat, but Yogiji Maharaj refused. Finally, when Pramukh Swami made a fervent request, Yogi Bapa drank some milk. However he refused to eat anything. His age was 71!

A similar incident took place on 12 December 1965 in Gondal. Yogi Bapa was performing *pradakshinas* in the Akshar Deri, when a youth carrying a young girl in his arms touched Yogi Bapa. Yogi Bapa went directly to the bathroom to take a shower. It was 12:30 in the afternoon and he told everyone that he was going to fast for the remaining part of the day. At the time, he was 73.

Yogiji Maharaj's life has and will continue to inspire generations of sadhus in the practice of celibacy.

#### **“RATE NIRANTAR RĀM...”**

*“Continuously chants God's name...”*

One of the qualities of a true a sadhu is that he has an undisturbed connection with God through *seva* and bhajan-bhakti. Throughout his life, Yogiji Maharaj remained continually attached to Bhagwan Swaminarayan through these powerful connections. He was always chanting the *dhun*, turning the *mala* or remembering incidents of Shastriji Maharaj. He nurtured his attachment to Maharaj and Swami through his tireless devotion.

Yogiji Maharaj often said, *“Bhagwan bhaji levā...”* – “One should worship God...” Physical conditions never affected this inclination.

In 1970, as a result of his delicate health, Yogi Bapa received daily medical checkups in Nairobi. Once, Dr Kamdar asked Yogi Bapa, “Bapa, Nairobi is situated 5,000 ft. above sea level. You don't feel any breathing trouble here, do you?” Yogi Bapa replied, “I had breathing trouble back in

Mumbai. But, it is alright here. I feel very well.” Dr Kamdar asked again, “Then why don’t you stay here from now on?” Yogi Bapa then replied, “I might as well stay. It doesn’t make a difference to me because all I want to do is bhajan.” Thus, Yogiji Maharaj’s mind was naturally inclined to do bhajan.

Yogiji Maharaj, preferred to spend his free time doing *dhun* and *mala*. In Samvat 1993 (1937), when there were only seven or eight sadhus staying at Gondal mandir, Yogi Bapa would do 51 *malas* standing on one foot in front of Thakorji’s *murti*. After the *malas*, he would clap his hands and chant the Swaminarayan *dhun* for a long time. While singing the *dhun*, he would remember devotees individually and pray for their well-being.

Often, at night, Yogiji Maharaj would sit up and do *malas* as well. Once in 1967, Yogiji Maharaj was staying in the village of Mahijada. After a tiring day of *padharamanis* and *katha*, he went to the terrace where other sadhus and devotees were sleeping. He sat on his bed doing *mala*. A devotee named Himabhai, who was sleeping a few metres away, suddenly woke up and looked around to find Yogi Bapa doing *mala*. He decided to quietly watch and wait till Yogi Bapa fell asleep. To his surprise, Yogi Bapa kept doing *mala* until dawn.

Once, in 1958, while Yogi Bapa was asleep, Mahendrabhai (presently, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami), heard “Swaminarayan” coming from Yogi Bapa’s body. Even as he slept, Yogi Bapa’s continuous bond with God was unbroken.

Being a true sadhu, Yogiji Maharaj kept in constant touch with God through bhajan-bhakti.

### **MATTH NA BĀNDHE MAMATĀ KARI...**

“He doesn’t build a dwelling for himself...”

The words uttered by Lao Tse, a Chinese philosopher who lived over 2500 years ago, find a home in Yogiji Maharaj. In defining the nature of the spiritually great, he states: “He produces but does not own.

He acts and makes no claim. He achieves merit and does not dwell in it.”

Ever since Shastriji Maharaj appointed Yogiji Maharaj as the Mahant of Akshar Mandir in Gondal on Vaishakh *sud* 10, Samvat 1990, and asked him to manage the mandir’s administration and remaining construction, he wholeheartedly endeavoured for the mandir’s development.

In 1962, when devotees offered Yogiji Maharaj donations at a festival held at Narayan Ghat in Ahmedabad, Yogiji Maharaj had Rameshbhai Dalal send the donations directly to Gondal. Babubhai Kothari argued, “Donations received in Ahmedabad, should be used for Ahmedabad mandir projects.” Yogiji Maharaj beamed and explained that the donations would better help with the completion of Gondal mandir.

Harshadbhai Rana tells of a similar experience. He explains that when he brought a bag full of utensils for Sarangpur mandir, Yogiji Maharaj asked him to send them all immediately to Gondal.

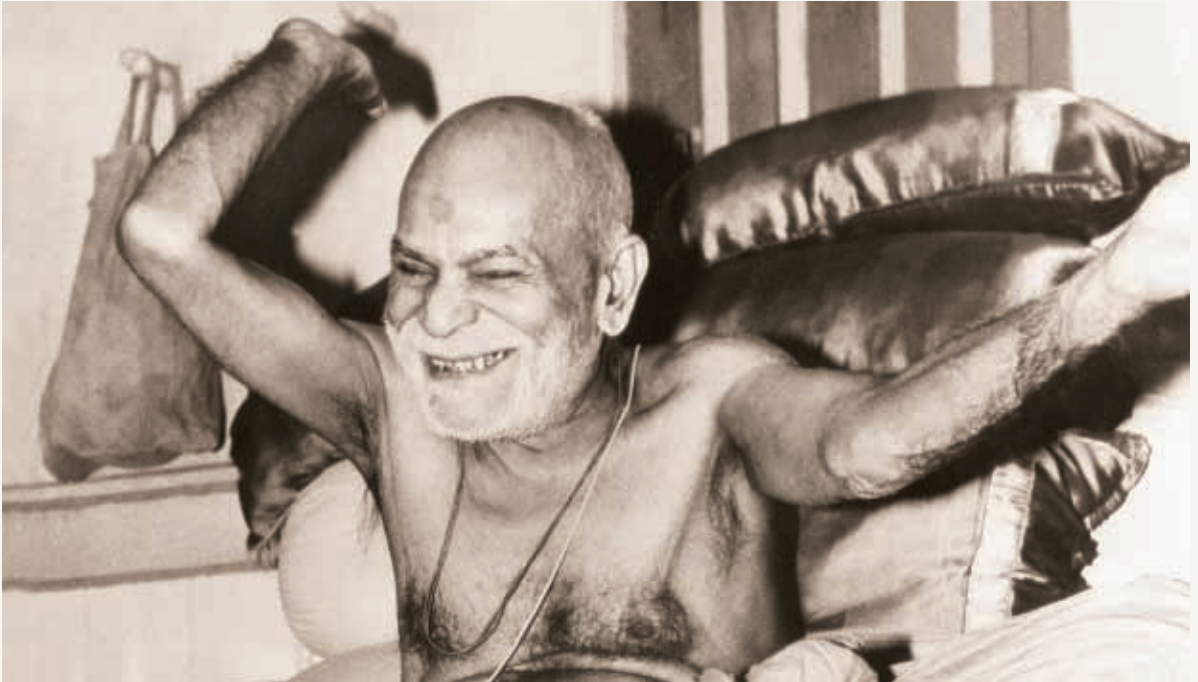
Kothari Swami from Mumbai adds that once when he sent a bill to Gondal mandir requesting payment, Yogiji Maharaj had it returned with a notice saying to never send such a bill to Gondal again.

To some, Yogiji Maharaj’s interest for the development of Akshar Mandir seemed to reflect an excessive attachment he had with the mandir. But attachment is characterized by an unwillingness to let go, a feeling of possession, and a demand for rights.

However, although Yogiji Maharaj often favoured Gondal mandir, he did not claim the mandir as his own. This is, in fact, true detachment – to strive and achieve, but not to possess and demand for one’s own comfort.

It was 1950 and the *patotsav* of Gondal mandir had just concluded. Summer was peaking as the heat had become unbearable. When Yogiji Maharaj requested the *kothari* of Gondal for a bullock cart to go to Vekri, the *kothari* turned away with scorn. He said, “There are no carts available.” Yogiji





Maharaj pleaded for a cart to drop him only part of the way, and that despite his failing health he would walk the rest of the distance. The *kothari* didn't answer. Eventually, he grudgingly sent a cart and ordered the driver to return after taking Yogiji Maharaj only half of the way. Without a word, Yogiji Maharaj left for Vekri.

Despite being the mahant of Gondal mandir, even when his requests were not properly met, he did not complain. It was through his efforts that Gondal mandir had developed into such a pious and prominent pilgrim place, however, he remained detached. Yogiji Maharaj produced, but did not own; he acted, but made no claim; he achieved merit and did not dwell in it. This is why Lao Tze in praise of him finishes, "In that he does not dwell, It does not depart."

### **SHATHATĀ KINI TYĀG...**

*"Total renunciation of deceit..."*

*Shathata* means deceit (One who tries to feign a quality that they do not possess). Gunatitanand Swami classifies three types of people in his discourses. He explains, "One who purposefully makes his own qualities known to others is of

the lowest category, one who does not announce his qualities and yet does not hide them falls in the intermediate category, and one who hides his qualities falls in the highest category (Swamini Vato 4.102)." Where does a deceitful man fall within these three categories? The answer is he does not – he is below even the lowest.

The words "*Shathatā kini tyāg*" in Muktanand Swami's kirtan applies to one who may have deceitful thoughts, but overcomes them. However, Yogiji Maharaj did not have any deceit; in fact, he hid the virtues he did have. So, according to Gunatitanand Swami, Yogiji Maharaj belongs to the highest category.

Incidents throughout his life reveal this truth. Once in 1954, in the village of Bandhiya, Yogiji Maharaj woke up in the middle of the night and started prostrating in the direction in which the youths were sleeping. Mahant Swami happened to wake up at the time. When he saw Yogiji Maharaj prostrating, he asked, "Whom are you prostrating to?" Yogiji Maharaj replied, "To the youths, who have forgone the pleasures of city life in Mumbai, and who are instead bearing all the hardships of travelling in these rural villages, tolerating

all the inconveniences and hardships.” Mahant Swami then asked, “How many times have you prostrated like this (without anyone knowing)?” Yogiji Maharaj avoided the question and replied, “Not many, we do what we can.” This is just one of many incidents where Yogiji Maharaj withheld his qualities.

Yogiji Maharaj never let anyone find out about the abuse that he took at the hands of Vignandas Swami. He never let anyone find out that he used to fast for ten days out of the month. He would serve everyone to their satisfaction, and when asked who did the *seva*, he would reply, “The *devas* came and did it.”

Where a fraudulent person claims virtues he does not have, Yogiji Maharaj denied the virtues he did have. Hence, Yogiji Maharaj was truly greater than we can even imagine.

### **KABAHU KRODH NA UPAJE, SO SĀCHĀ VAIRĀGYA...**

*“Total absence of anger is true detachment...”*

In this line, Muktanand Swami points to the absence of anger as a sign of true detachment. In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 14 Shriji Maharaj explains the root of anger by quoting Shri Krishna in the Gita saying, “Kāmāt krodhobhijāyate...” (2-62). Meaning, anger results from not attaining one’s desires. So, if you can find someone who never gives in to anger, it can be inferred that the person does not have any desires and that he has true detachment or *vairagya*. Yogiji Maharaj illustrated this perfectly.

One of the main things to look forward to during the summer in India is the sweet, juicy and refreshing mangoes. In Yogiji Maharaj’s time, sadhus living in the mandirs got a chance to eat these mangoes only once or twice a year.

Once, when Yogiji Maharaj was in Dangra, a devotee sponsored the sadhus’ meal that included mango *ras*. After the sadhus had finished eating, Yogiji Maharaj finished his *seva* and sat down to eat. *Ras* was poured into his *pattar* and as he was about to drink it, he noticed that some devotees

had arrived from Bhavnagar. Immediately, without taking even one sip of it, he poured it all back into the pot and lovingly served the devotees. All the *ras* was finished but it meant nothing to Yogiji Maharaj who received much more pleasure from serving it than drinking it himself.

If Yogiji Maharaj had even the slightest desire to drink the *ras*, he would have reason to be upset (even if it was just to himself) about what happened. Instead, he was thrilled to see the devotees and was glad to be able to serve them so genuinely that they had no idea they had interrupted his meal.

Truly, Yogiji Maharaj’s detachment from worldly pleasures had allowed him to live a life free of anger. In its place, he spent his life laughing and revelling in God’s bliss.

### **TYĀGE TIKHĀ TAMTAMĀ, RASNĀ BHOG VILĀS**

*“Renounces a desire for taste and other sense pleasures...”*

Yogiji Maharaj was a true sadhu from birth. As a child, when he sat to eat, he would mix his food together and add water to it. Thus he would make it tasteless and bland. Only when his mother would lovingly force him to eat things separately would he do so. He would peacefully eat whatever was served in his plate without requests or complaints.

As he grew older, his lifestyle never changed. Once, Swami was in Mumbai. He went to eat at the house of Manubhai Subedar. Manubhai had prepared many tasty items to offer to Thakorji and Swamishri. When Swami sat down to eat, he took a few items into his *pattar*, added water, and began to mix the food. Manubhai was shocked. He had prepared items of all tastes: spicy, sweet, sour, etc., and Swami had mixed everything into one bowl! He asked, “Swami, what taste do you get from this?” Swami replied with a laugh, “The taste of God!”

In 1962, Swami was in Savarkundla. A devotee named Vallabhbhai had fallen ill and



was eating mild food to improve his health. Once he was eating only rice and Yogiji Maharaj passed by. Swami saw him eating plain rice and offered Vallabhbai some of his own spinach to eat. He ate the spinach and spoiled his face. The spinach was plain. Only boiled – without spice or even salt! Swami used to eat this type of food everyday.

Yogiji Maharaj's attendant, Ishwarcharan Swami, describes Swami's diet, "He would only eat plain food. He would never touch milk, yoghurt, sweets, lentils, curry, savoury items, pickles or papad, etc.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has commanded his sadhus to conquer all of their senses, but he has put special emphasis on the sense of taste. Taste, if defeated, will uproot all other senses. Yogiji Maharaj had conquered taste completely.

### **MUKTANAND SO SANT KE, SADĀ RAHAT HARI PĀS...**

*"God forever resides within such a sadhu, says Muktanand..."*

Indeed, Yogiji Maharaj was an ideal sadhu. In fact, according to Shastriji Maharaj, he possessed innumerable saintly qualities, even those the shastras may have left out. Additionally, he did not have a trace of worldliness about him.

There was a deep secret to his success, one that lay beyond human perception.

Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami writes in the *Chosath Padi*:

*Jenā antarmā Avināsh vās kari vasiyā,  
Tenā kām krodh pāmyā nāsh Lāl tyā āvi rahiyā...*

"A person within whose heart God comes to reside, in him lust, anger and other *swabhavs* are destroyed..."

This was Yogiji Maharaj's secret – God resided within him. Yogiji Maharaj was the incarnation of Aksharbrahman, God's divine abode. Thus his relationship with God is eternal.

On one rare occasion in 1959, Yogiji Maharaj himself illustrated this point. He was in Ahmedabad when some of the sadhus and devotees came

across a fortnightly magazine called *Bhavan's Journal*. The journal had published a series of interviews under the title, "How God Came into My Life." The series featured various religious leaders explaining how they had come to realize God.

A youth named Arunbhai (presently, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami) turned to Yogiji Maharaj and requested, "Swami! Tell us how you came to see God. We'll send your story to the magazine for them to publish."

"I never came to see God," Yogiji Maharaj replied. "I see him eternally."

God was with Yogiji Maharaj because Yogiji Maharaj never forgot God. He had never failed to serve God with devotion, even as a young child at school in Dhari. As one would expect, all the children ate the food they had brought from home while playing or walking around. Yogiji Maharaj would sit on the floor and offer his food to a printed *murti* of God that he kept with him. Then he would eat the sanctified food.

Yogiji Maharaj's relationship with God was one that had always existed. And due to this oneness between the two, hundreds of thousands of people earned the precious opportunity to interact with God through him, earning for themselves spiritual fulfilment. They held his hands, looked into his eyes and saw in him the sparkle of divinity.

The great thing about a God-realized Sadhu, however, is that once he holds your hand, he never lets go. Yogiji Maharaj passed away in 1971, yet before doing so, he introduced the world to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a God-realized Sadhu just like himself through whom God's light continues to shine forth to this day. ♦

*Text by: BAPS Sadhus, Sarangpur*

# PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

15 to 31 May 2010

Bhadra, Limbdi

## 18, Tuesday; World Peace Yagna, Bhadra

Prior to the grand *murti-pratishtha* ceremony day of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Bhadra, a *yagna* for World Peace was held from 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon. In the evening a colourful procession of the *murtis* was held in the village. See details in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, June 2010.

## 19 Wednesday; Murti-Pratishtha, Bhadra

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the new *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. See *Swaminarayan Bliss*, June 2010.

## 23, Sunday, Bhadra

Prior to his morning puja Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of BAPS *hari* mandir in Ambavadi, a suburb of Ahmedabad.

## 27, Thursday, Limbdi

Swamishri presided over the Yagna for World Peace and performed the *pujan* of *murtis* to be consecrated in the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the BAPS *hari* mandir in Chachana.

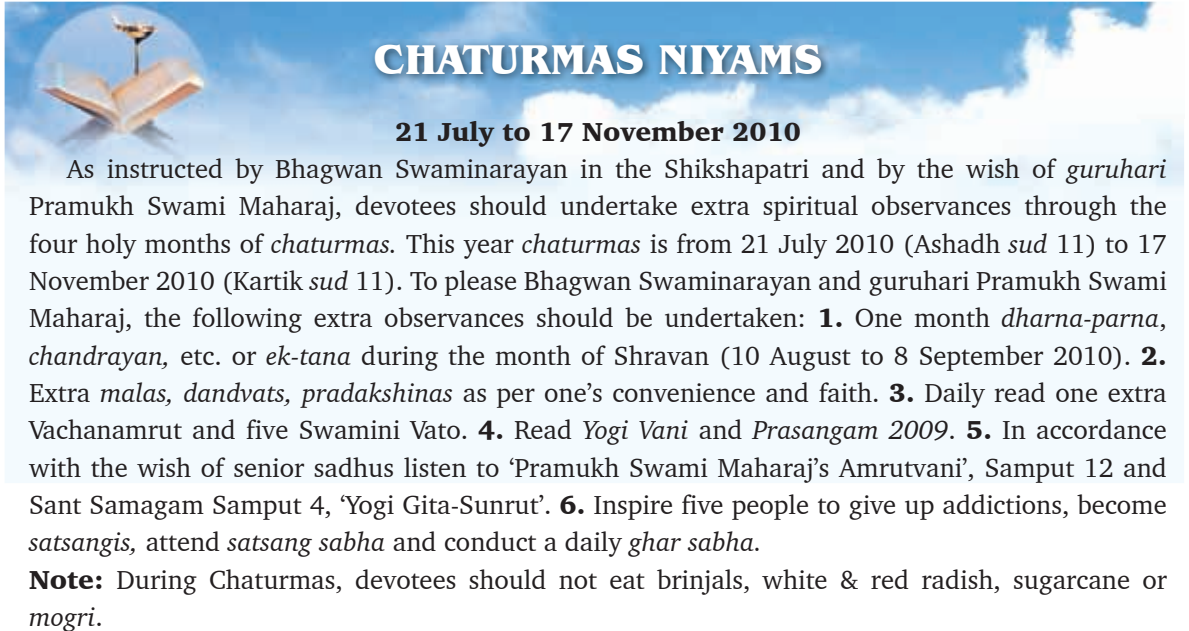
In the evening a grand, colourful 2 km long procession was carried out on the streets of Limbdi. For details see pp. 4-11.

## 28, Friday, Limbdi

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in the morning and thereafter blessed the *pratishtha* assembly. For details see pp. 4-11. ♦

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekivandas



## CHATURMAS NIYAMS

**21 July to 17 November 2010**

As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances through the four holy months of *chaturmas*. This year *chaturmas* is from 21 July 2010 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 17 November 2010 (Kartik *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken: **1.** One month *dharna-parna*, *chandrayan*, etc. or *ek-tana* during the month of Shraavan (10 August to 8 September 2010). **2.** Extra *malas*, *dandvats*, *pradakshinas* as per one's convenience and faith. **3.** Daily read one extra Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vato. **4.** Read *Yogi Vani* and *Prasangam 2009*. **5.** In accordance with the wish of senior sadhus listen to 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrutvani', Samput 12 and Sant Samagam Samput 4, 'Yogi Gita-Sunrut'. **6.** Inspire five people to give up addictions, become *satsangis*, attend *satsang sabha* and conduct a daily *ghar sabha*.

**Note:** During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals, white & red radish, sugarcane or *mogri*.



## SVAS SHIBIRS

6 May to 1 June 2010 Navsari, Bochasan, Ahmedabad



During the summer vacation in Gujarat, a series of six SVAS Kishore-Kishori Shibirs were held between 6 May and 1 June 2010 at Navsari, Bochasan and Ahmedabad. Each three-day *shibir* focused on Satsang, Vyaktitva Vikas (Self-Development), Arogya (Health) and Shikshan (Education).

Pujya Mahant Swami presided over all the *shibirs* and inspired the 1,466 *kishores* and 2,434 *kishoris* who attended with his thoughtful and practical guidance. In addition, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami at Bochasan and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami at Ahmedabad also inspired the youngsters.

The *shibir* theme, ‘Kahat He Sant Sujan...’, was presented through speeches, audiovisual presentations, debates, pre-recorded skits, question-answer sessions and video blessings from Pramukh Swami Maharaj on each topic. The teenagers were also inspired by video interviews of *satsangi* youths Shri Yashwant Jethwa (IPS Officer) and Bhavik Kotadia (Pilot) who have excelled in their careers while sincerely practicing satsang values.

The *shibirs* thus provided the youths with practical guidance on how to progress in every aspect of their lives. ♦

## KISHORE-KISHORE SHIBIR

Theme: Bolya Shri Hari Re

10-13 June 2010, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mumbai

From 10 to 13 June 2010, over 1,100 *kishores* and 700 *kishoris* from throughout Mumbai, as well as, Nagpur, Pune, Aurangabad and Barshi attended the Kishore-Kishori Shibir held in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Dadar, Mumbai.

Based on the theme ‘Bolya Shri Hari Re...’ the youths learnt about the Vachanamrut and the practical application of its teachings in daily life.

Through speeches on a variety of topics, senior sadhus, and other experienced and learned sadhus guided the youths on how satsang can be applied daily to ensure a peaceful and productive life.



The message of the *shibir* was further reinforced through audiovisual presentations, question-answer sessions, debates, discussions, skits, questionnaires, narration of personal experiences and other activities.



The *kishores* and *kishoris* thoroughly enjoyed the *shibir* and resolved to apply the principles they had learnt in their daily lives at home, school and the mandir. ◆

## SHIBIRS IN ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

March to June 2010



Question-answer session during a shibir



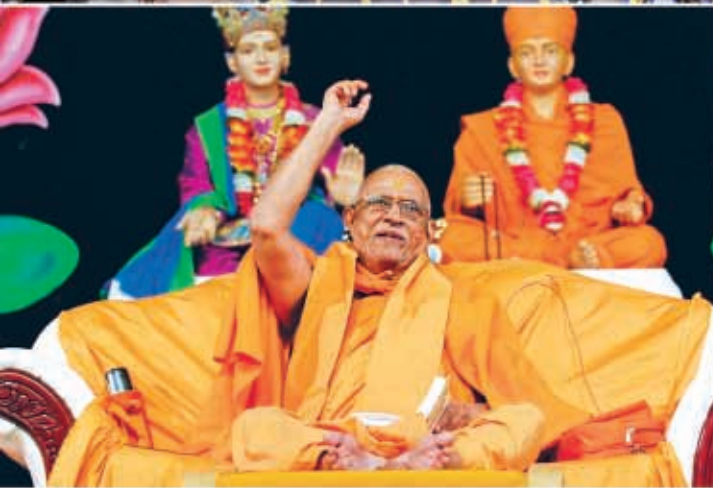
Devotees gain inspiration from a satsang sabha

With the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Vivekpriya Swami, Brahmamuni Swami, Jnanpurush Swami and Adarshwarup Swami visited Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and other Asia-Pacific countries giving valuable guidance and inspiration to BAPS devotees and

volunteers of all ages.

Between March and June 2010, the four sadhus conducted numerous separate *shibirs* and satsang assemblies in Australia (Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Porishone) and New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch) for children, youths and elders. ◆





**REGIONAL LEADERSHIP SEMINARS**  
**“Kariye Raji Ghanshyam”**  
**April-May 2010, North America**

As part of its commitment to social well-being and community development, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha hosts annual leadership seminars to help groom leaders that can contribute to the moral, cultural, spiritual, and humanitarian landscape of their local communities. Regional Leadership Seminars based on the theme “Kariye Raji Ghanshyam” were held in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami in all the six regions of North America. Volunteers of each region came together to participate in these three-day seminars.

Doctor Swami’s pragmatic and motivating oratory style inspired volunteers around the country. His lectures were complemented by a variety of workshops, multimedia presentations, interactive training sessions, and cultural programmes. The volunteers also received valuable by guidance from other learned and experienced sadhus.





**PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ IN LIMBDI**  
May 2010

(Top) The newly inaugurated shiBAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Limbdi.

(Inset) Swamishri blesses the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, 28 May 2010.

(Bottom) Devotees engrossed in darshan of Swamishri's morning puja, 30 May 2010.