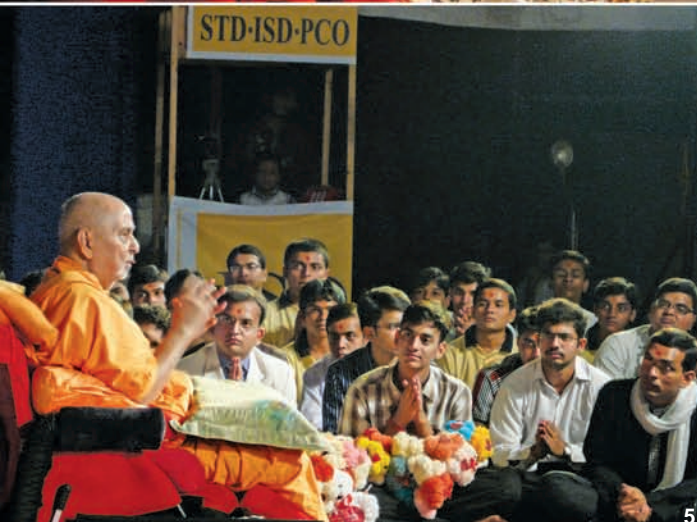
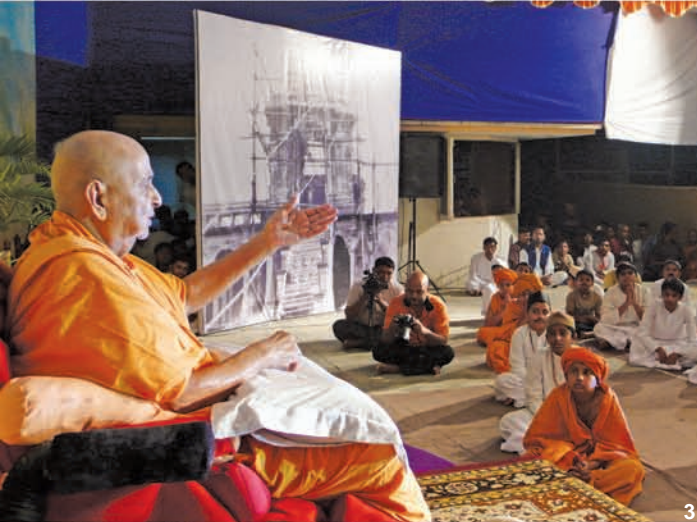


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

Annual Subscription Rs. 60
March 2010



Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Personality



SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN, DECEMBER 2009

1. Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha arti* of the *murtis* for new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Pipalav, Verakhadi and Boriya (Bochasan, 2 Dec.).
2. On his arrival Swamishri blesses the students of the Akshar Purushottam Chhatralaya (APC) and local devotees (Vidyanagar).
3. Swamishri blesses the Sunday assembly after children performed a drama, 'Jivishu Swamine Mate' (Vidyanagar, 6 Dec.).
4. Thousands of students and devotees seated in the Sunday assembly (APC, Vidyanagar, 6 Dec.).
5. Swamishri blesses the audience during the APC Annual Day assembly (Vidyanagar, 13 Dec.).
6. Swamishri performs morning puja on the grounds of APC, Vidyanagar.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March 2010, Vol. 33 No. 3

CONTENTS

Swaminarayan History

- 4 Shri Hari's Rapport with Gunatitanand Swami**
Releasing Swami's trapped foot...

Bhagwan Swaminarayan

- 7 Shri Hari's Care for Children**
9 Spiritual Fulfilment of Maharaj's Female Devotees
11 Through Thick and Thin
13 The King of Kings
15 Maharaj: The Shining Moon

Spirituality

- 16 Swarupnishtha**
Shriji Maharaj's true, divine and supreme form...

Philosophy – Swaminarayan Vedant

- 20 The Chāndogya Upanishad, Part 2**
Vedic tradition of education...

Vicharan & Inspiring Incidents

- 24 Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Vicharan; Living with Swamishri**

BAPS News

- 26 The Swaminarayan School: Second Rank in Independent Schools League Table, London**
26 Medical and Eye-Care Camp for Tribal Citizens

Website: www.swaminarayan.org

E-mail: magazines@in.baps.org

FIRST WORD

One of several reasons of God's birth on earth in Hinduism is to fulfil the wishes and devotion of devotees. Shriji Maharaj travelled in Gujarat for 30 years, celebrating festivals, discoursing and fulfilling the wishes of his *paramhansas* and devotees. He transformed and liberated them through his divine love and preachings.

On one occasion, Shriji Maharaj was having lunch at Hirabhai's house in Jaliya. At that time, Hirabhai's mother mused that if she had a child like Maharaj she would daily bathe and feed him. Maharaj read her thoughts and decided to fulfil her wish there and then. Shri Hari stopped eating, drank a little water and got up expressing discontent.

Hirabhai's mother asked, "Why have you got up without finishing your meal?" Maharaj replied with a grimace, "I don't want to stay here for even one minute!" "But what's wrong?" she asked.

"If you call me by saying, 'Come here, son,' I shall stay," Maharaj explained. The lady of the house turned shy and quiet. "How could she say that to him when she reveres him as God," she thought. Shri Hari left and proceeded towards the village outskirts. Behind him, a growing crowd of confounded and grieving devotees followed, pleading him to stay. A local villager told Maharaj, "Why are you being so cruel and apathetic? Your devotees are crying behind you and you don't care to turn back." Shri Hari told him that he would if the lady merely said, "Come here my son." The local man turned to Hirabhai's mother and chided her, "What is there for you to lose in saying what Maharaj wishes?" The lady retorted, "But, he is God! How can I address him as such!" By then Shri Hari had reached the village outskirts. The lady realized that Maharaj would not return, so she breathed with courage and said,

(contd. on p. 6)

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj,
Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas,
Contributors: Sadhu Vivekijivandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas,
Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas
Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-380 004, India.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)		India	
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	400	6	10	60
2 Years	800	12	20	110
3 Years	1200	18	30	160

Website: www.swaminarayan.org, E-mail: magazines@in.baps.org

Shri Hari's Rapport with Gunatitanand Swami



In the last instalment, Shri Hari visited Gadhadi at the invitation of Amba Sheth. He hosted Maharaj and 300 of his sadhus for lunch. After returning to Gadhada, Damodarbai, a devotee from Ahmedabad, gave a letter to Shri Hari. The letter contained shocking news...

THE WAYS OF EVIL MEN

Shri Hari had told Shukmuni Swami to read the letter given by Damodar Patel of Ahmedabad aloud. As the contents were revealed they shocked all. The letter said, "There are still many enemies of our sadhus lurking around in Ahmedabad. The morning after Janmashtami, Muktanand Swami was performing his puja rituals. At that time someone brought food and other items wrapped in paper for offering to the deity. One of them contained *morthuthu* (a poisonous herb). The *morthuthu* was disposed of by burying it deep in the ground. Then Ravaji opened a small packet of *abil* powder and mixed a little with sandalwood paste for puja of Thakorji. Then he worshipped Thakorji with it and applied the sanctified sandalwood paste on Muktanand Swami's forehead. Shortly thereafter, Muktanand Swami experienced a burning sensation on his forehead. Ravaji too experienced a burning sensation in his hands. Instantly someone rubbed off the sandalwood paste on Muktanand Swami's forehead with a wet towel. His skin had turned red, but still Muktanand Swami continued with his discourse, till he finished. Then he told Ravaji that there was a poisonous thing mixed with the sandalwood paste. When Ravaji opened the packet of *abil* powder he realized that someone had added a potent poison in it. He immediately buried the packet in the ground.

"So, Muktanand Swami was saved because of your grace. But the evil tendencies in some people have not changed. They have however been restrained to some measure by the strict enforcement of law and order by the British. In this case, the evil-minded had reared their head in a devious way."

After listening to the letter, Shri Hari closed his eyes in prayer, repeating the name of God, "Hari, Hari." Then he dictated a reply addressed to Damodarbai: "Those who are diabolical will never give up their tendencies, and so we should never give up our virtues and saintliness. Muktanand Swami was saved because of his saintliness. God is the all-doer. He will always save and protect the good."

The letter was dispatched to Damodarbai. Then Maharaj spoke to the senior sadhus about Muktanand Swami's saintliness and pure life.

MAHARAJ'S ONENESS WITH SWAMI

Once, Maharaj suddenly uttered, "Take it out gently or else it will break."

Brahmanand Swami was startled at Maharaj's strange words. So, he asked, "Maharaj, what are you saying and who are you speaking to?"

Shri Hari called his attendant, "Brahmachari, remove my foot or else it will break."

Mulji Brahmachari stood bewildered. He said, "Maharaj, you are sitting comfortably on a cot.

There's nothing wrong with you, yet you tell me to remove your foot. What is the problem?"

There was an expression of fleeting pain on Maharaj's face. Shri Hari replied, "My abode's foot had got stuck in a recess between rocks in the River Ghela, but now it has been freed."

No one understood what Maharaj had said. So, Brahmanand Swami requested, "Maharaj, can you clarify what you mean." Shri Hari looked at Gopalanand Swami and revealed, "Nirgunanand Swami of Bhadra, the one whom I had initiated as a sadhu at the *yagna* in Dabhan and named him Gunatitanand Swami, was bathing in the river Ghela along with Krupanand Swami. Then unexpectedly, his foot got wedged in the gap between some rocks. That was why I was saying 'Remove my foot'."

Gopalanand Swami knew that Maharaj was in constant rapport with Gunatitanand Swami, and that was why he identified Swami's experience to be his own. The assembly, too, realized this unique relationship.

A little while later, Gunatitanand Swami arrived with Krupanand Swami. Maharaj called Gunatitanand Swami closer to see his right foot. Swami's foot was bruised, and Maharaj showed it to others. Then Maharaj asked him, "Swami, what had happened? How did you hurt your foot?"

Krupanand Swami replied instead, "Swami's foot had got stuck between rocks in the River Ghela. At that time he was remembering you and uttering your name. And when he was pulling his foot out it got bruised."

A NEW CHAPTER FOR SADHUS

Shri Hari introduced new resolutions from time to time for his *paramhansas* to abide by. They were to test their spiritual faith and morality, purify them by removing the dross of *swabhavs* and strengthen them spiritually. A few days earlier Maharaj had given a new order to follow. He had also dictated it to Shukmuni Swami, and asked him to send the letter to the senior sadhus. The content of that letter read, "All my *paramhansas* should tolerate cold, heat and rain. You should

not take shelter by a pile of straw bales. Engage yourself in austerity as much as possible. At night, sleep in a desolate place where you cannot even hear the sound of barking dogs."

Haridas Swami, a *paramhansa* of Shri Hari, found the rules too stringent. He felt he would be unable to follow them. So, he decided to leave the Satsang fellowship. Yet, at the same time, he aspired to continue following the principle disciplines of a sadhu. He further resolved not to lapse in his supreme faith for Maharaj and divinity for Satsang. Haridas went to Maharaj and confessed his thoughts. Shri Hari smiled and said, "You have been shaped by Satsang in such a way that you will not like it elsewhere. But since you have decided to go, I cannot force you to stay. In this Satsang one has to renounce all feelings associated with one's body and mind." The sadhu bowed in respect to Shri Maharaj and took leave of Satsang.

A few days later, Maharaj celebrated the Jal Jhilani Festival of 1820 (A.S. 1876). Thakorji was taken to the River Ghela for a bath, and five *artis* were performed. Maharaj also bathed and played with the devotees and sadhus. Thereafter, Shri Hari put on white clothes and returned on his Manki to Dada's *darbar*. Here, Maharaj sat under the neem tree and held a spiritual assembly. Brahmanand Swami requested Maharaj to rest, but he refused because it was *ekadashi*. Then Maharaj inspired on *ekadashi* day that all should restrain their mind and senses from indulging in worldly things and instead anchor them to God. While Maharaj was discoursing, Haridas Swami, who had left Satsang, arrived. Shri Hari called him closer. Haridas prostrated with difficulty before Maharaj. He came closer, bowed his head at Maharaj's feet and broke down crying. Shri Hari pacified him by stroking his head with his hand. When Haridas calmed down, Maharaj enquired, "Sadhuram, tell me what happened to you all this while?"

Distraught, Haridas replied, "Maharaj, either you erase my faith in you or you accept me into Satsang and keep me with you."

Maharaj replied, "Sadhuram, I cannot dissolve

your faith. To do that you would have to associate with bad company.”

Haridas barely managed to remain seated. With his sobs intensifying, he suddenly collapsed to the ground. His upper cloth fell off, exposing the severe persecution he had gone through. To everyone’s horror, his body was battered and bruised. In some parts, his skin and flesh hung loosely on his back. Shri Hari got up instantly and sat down before him. He gently stroked him with his hand and asked, “Tell us what happened? Who inflicted these wounds on you?” For a few moments Haridas could not say a word. Instead, he broke down crying furiously. Everyone was shaken badly by the sight. Shri Hari was still stroking and consoling Haridas. Then Maharaj assured him, “Sadhuram, you stay with me. There is no need to fear or worry now. But, tell me how it all happened. Who tortured you so terribly?”

Haridas soon regained his composure and replied, “Maharaj, the day I left you, I started travelling from village to village. I used to stay at the village square, in a rest house, at a mandir of Shankardev or in the open, always chanting your name. Whoever I met, I spoke about your glory and inspired faith in them.” At that juncture Haridas tired. Maharaj asked for water and gave it to him. But Haridas asked, “Maharaj, is it not the day of observing a waterless *ekadashi* (fast)?” Maharaj answered, “Yes, but not for you. You drink the water. It is an order.” Haridas drank the water and felt at ease.

“GIVE UP THE NAME OF SWAMINARAYAN”

“Maharaj, I arrived at a small village,” Haridas continued. “There was a Ramji Mandir. It was 10 p.m., and I decided to spend the night there. I hung my *joli* on the wall and started chanting

(First Word. Contd. from p. 3)

“Come here my son!” Instantly, Shri Hari turned back and returned to her home.

Daily, she served him with a variety of meals and the finest milk from one of her buffaloes. Once Maharaj told her that she had added sugar crystals to the milk so he would not have it. The lady replied that the milk was naturally sweet.

‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’. Immediately a few *bawas* staying there came up to me. “Whose sadhu are you and what name are you chanting?” they asked. I replied, “I am a sadhu of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and I am chanting his name. If it disturbs you then I shall chant it in my mind. But they became livid at the name of Swaminarayan. They roared, ‘Give up the name of Swaminarayan or else we will burn you and kill you!’ But I paid no heed to their words. I simply retreated to a corner and continued chanting your name. Then the *bawas* became more infuriated. They took their pincers and heated them in a small kiln. And they threatened me, ‘Oye, stop uttering the name of Swaminarayan! Do you see these pincers? We will strike you and burn your body.’ So I stopped saying your name aloud and started saying it in my mind. But when they saw my lips moving they knocked me to the ground and started branding my entire body with the red hot pincers. The searing pain was too much to bear. But I could not help saying ‘Swaminarayan’ aloud. The more I said your name, the more they attacked me. Then I lost consciousness. After that they all returned to their places to retire for the night. When I came around I opened my eyes. I saw a *bawa* sitting besides me. He was gently stroking my body with his hands to relieve me of my pain. He gave me water to drink and asked, ‘Sadhuram, where were you heading to?’ I replied, ‘I had left Gadhpur, but now I wanted to return.’ My body was burning painfully with the branding of hot pincers. I was bleeding all over. I was in no condition to lie down to sleep. So, I sat all night doing your bhjan. Then early next morning I left, and have just about managed to arrive here before you.” ◆

(Contd. next issue)

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

Then, she milked the buffalo before Maharaj’s eyes and offered the milk to him. On drinking it, Maharaj exclaimed, “It is sweet as sugar! Name the buffalo, Sakariya (the sweet one).”

Shri Hari stayed at Jaliya for forty-five days and accepted the devotion and service of Hirabhaji and his family. ◆

Translated from *Adbhutanand Swami’s Talks*

Shri Hari's Care for Children



Shriji Maharaj pleases the young child by giving him his sacred hair

A jubilant and vibrant atmosphere pervaded the city of Junagadh. Flags and banners lined the streets while the sounds of trumpets, drums and bells could be heard from miles away. Hundreds of Kathi Darbars paraded on their elegantly decorated horses. Some fired their rifles in the air to honour and celebrate the arrival of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who was seated regally atop a decorated elephant. The entire city, including the King of Junagadh, eagerly watched as Maharaj crossed their city in a splendid procession.

At the height of the celebration, a small boy ran from the crowd into the march of horses and musicians. He was holding a small, fresh, cucumber in his hand and wanted to give it to Maharaj. As he weaved through the crowd he neared Maharaj's elephant. He jumped, but

even with his arm fully outstretched, he was too short to reach Maharaj. A sadhu saw the boy and approached him. He picked him up and the boy extended his arm to present the cucumber to Maharaj. Bending low, Maharaj reached down from the elephant and took the cucumber. He was touched by the boy's simple, yet lovingly offered gift. With no regard for public approval, Maharaj began to eat the cucumber while seated atop the elephant in the midst of the procession! Maharaj was not worried about what the king would think; he only cared about fulfilling the wish of his small child-devotee.

Sadguru Muktanand Swami knew how much Maharaj cared for children and so described him as *bal sanehi*. Thus, not only did Maharaj have great love for children, but children also had great love for Maharaj. The following stories illustrate this.

સાદુરુ

Once, Maharaj was in Gadhada getting ready to have his head shaved. A ten-year-old boy had come to see Maharaj. He loved Maharaj dearly. The boy told the barber, "Once you have finished, please give me some of Maharaj's sacred hair." The barber agreed.

The barber carefully shaved Maharaj's head while the child eagerly waited. After completing his job, the barber cleaned the area, put the hair into a bag, and hurriedly walked away. He had forgotten his promise to the boy. The boy was unable to stop him and so began to cry.

Maharaj saw the boy and went up to him. He placed his hand on the boy's back, and asked, "Why are you crying?" The innocent child revealed his wish and what had happened. Maharaj said, "Oh, is that why you are crying? Here, let me give you some hair." Maharaj reached for his fine *shikha*, cut the end of it, and gave the strands of hair to the boy. The boy began to jump up and down with

joy! Throughout his life the child never forgot Maharaj's timely affection.

Maharaj understood the subtleties that made children happy. Moreover, he understood their language and minds, and he was sensitive to their feelings.

ଓଓଓଓଓଓ

Once, in Gadhada, a snake slithered towards the seated devotees. Maharaj dashed towards it as soon as he saw it. At the same time, a seven-year-old child came to touch his feet. In his haste, Maharaj pushed the child aside. Bhaguji and Mulji caught the snake and took it away from the mandir. Everyone was relieved that the snake had been caught. Maharaj then remembered the young child who had been hurt in the frenzy. He called the child to comfort him and gave him two ripe mangoes. Although Maharaj had simply intended to save the boy, he still wanted to do something to make the child smile.

ଓଓଓଓଓଓ

Maharaj took children's innocence in stride. Once, Paravatbhai's son, Megho, bit Maharaj while playing; and Dada Khachar's son, Bava, often sucked on Maharaj's toe!

In addition to all of this, Maharaj inspired the highest character traits in young children. A boy named Shaluk Pagi from the small town of Mahudiyapara, near Vartal, had grown melons on his farm. As they were growing, Shaluk decided that he would first offer them to Maharaj before eating any himself. As soon as the melons were ripe, he filled a basket and left for Vartal to meet Maharaj. On the way, he became hungry. He looked at the melons and his mouth began to water. He stopped under a tree and looked at a delicious green-yellow melon. As he was about to eat it, he stopped himself thinking, "What are you doing? It is for Maharaj."

But his mind would not back off and told him, "Eat it. Maharaj gets fancier and tastier gifts from wealthier people. You want to offer simple fruits! How will you look in front of the rich devotees

if you make such a plain offering? Will Maharaj even accept them? Even so, just eat one. There is still the entire basket to offer."

He battled his mind. He thought, "Maharaj will undoubtedly accept my offering because he loves children. He feels that even our simplest, sincere, offering matches any other." The boy continued his journey towards Vartal. On the way, he battled his mind numerous times. Finally, he reached the assembly in Vartal.

Maharaj called Shaluk near and asked, "What have you brought in your basket?"

Shaluk timidly replied, "Melons, Maharaj."

Maharaj eagerly said, "Let me have one." Hesitantly, Shaluk looked towards the sadhus and devotees. Then he slowly took out a melon and offered it to Maharaj. Maharaj knew about Shaluk's fight against hunger and his mind to bring the melons to Vartal. Maharaj was so touched by his sentiment that he ate an entire melon in the assembly. He was pleased with Shaluk's determined devotion and rewarded him with a basketful of *sakar* (sugar crystals).

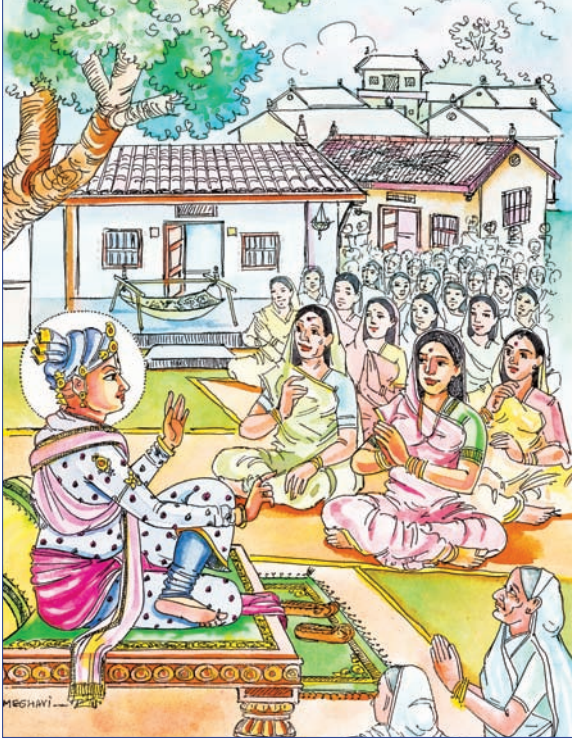
ଓଓଓଓଓଓ

Maharaj even imparted the highest form of spiritual knowledge to young children. Dada Khachar, one of Maharaj's greatest devotees, had loved Maharaj since he was a young child. When Dada Khachar was seven, Maharaj often called him to teach him kirtans, talk about the shastras and to tell him about the glory of God's avatars. When Dada Khachar asked Maharaj, "Maharaj, you talk about the avatars, but who are you?" Maharaj replied, "I am the source of all avatars, Purushottam Narayan." Hearing Maharaj say this always made Dada Khachar very happy.

Whether it was fulfilling a wish, accepting their devotion, playing games or imparting wisdom, Shriji Maharaj was ever ready to do anything for children. He was, in the truest sense, *bal sanehi*.

◆

Spiritual Fulfilment of Maharaj's Female Devotees



Shriji Maharaj blesses an assembly of his women devotees

There was social inequality in the 18th and 19th centuries. Not only in India, but also in Colonial England, newly independent America, and throughout the entire world, women were discriminated against and were repeatedly subjected to injustices. In Gujarat, in stark contrast to the times, Maharaj enabled women to become socially independent, teaching them to read and write, to speak in public and to nurture their other talents. In fact, some 85 years later, the Sampradaya's women were selected as teachers for the first girls' schools in Gujarat.

Maharaj's proactive approach to women's empowerment inspired in these women an even higher aspiration. With knowledge of the scriptures, they realized that true happiness lay in spirituality.

ଓଡ଼ିଆ

Darkness had engulfed the entire city of Udaipur. The night was still. But suddenly, Udaipur's Queen Jhamkuba awoke. She looked around, only to find that the entire palace was fast asleep. This was her chance. It was the perfect opportunity to escape from the tyranny of her wicked husband, the king. Without thinking twice, she fashioned a rope out of some saris and carefully lowered herself out of the palace window. She cast one last glance at the palace and then disappeared into the dark night.

Queen Jhamkuba was a devotee of God who wished to spend her life in Gadhada, worshipping Bhagwan Swaminarayan. But what had driven her to leave her luxurious palace life for a life of austerity in Gadhada? Perhaps it was the qualities of *vairagya* and *bhakti* that Maharaj had kindled within her. Or perhaps it was simply a burning desire to meet God.

The Upanishads, the Ramayana, the Shrimad Bhagvat and other Hindu shastras speak of many women who had reached great heights of spirituality. They speak of Sita's unparalleled loyalty to Lord Rama, of Madalsa's complete detachment from the world and of Draupadi's unshakeable faith in Lord Krishna. But these and other such women had lived in a long gone era of history. Maharaj, on the other hand, was able to inspire thousands of women like Jhamkuba. In his one lifetime, he was able to infuse their lives with the lofty ideals described in the scriptures, leading them towards spiritual perfection.

Jivuba and Laduba of Gadhada, for instance, were so detached from the world that they were swiftly able to convince the royal poet Ladudanji

to renounce his lavish lifestyle and to become a sadhu. He became Brahmanand Swami, one of Maharaj's most senior paramhansas.

Vajiba of Vijapur also had strong faith. So, when Maharaj himself went to her house disguised as a travelling *bawa* to test her, she did not budge.

Then there was Kadvibai of Jetpur, who jumped into the flooded Bhadar at Maharaj's command; the women of Vahelal, who risked their lives to defend Maharaj against Lolangar's vicious pack of *bawas*; the wife of Sagram Vaghri, who did not take the ornament lying on the road and refused to go against dharma even in the worst of times; and Minbai, who was blessed with *niravaran drashti*, or the power to see Maharaj wherever he went.

Aside from these women, there were countless others who were detached from the world, who could enjoy the divine state of samadhi whenever they wished, whose minds were always attached to Maharaj, and who were untouched by the evils of lust, greed, ego and other base instincts.

These and thousands of other women had achieved such spiritual greatness by Maharaj's grace that Maharaj even praised them before assemblies of enlightened *paramhansas*. Many such instances are recorded in the Vachanamrut.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada III-24, Maharaj compliments Rajba's detachment, Jivuba's faith and Laduba's desire to please God. In Loya 3, he compliments Ramba, Mataji, Ladhiba and others for their willingness to surrender everything they have for God. And in Sarangpur 2, he praises Kushalkuvarba for the way she internalized his *murti* while doing his darshan. Then he suggests to the *paramhansas* and devotees that they too should learn to do darshan in such a way.

However, Maharaj not only infused his female devotees with such great spiritual qualities, but he also granted them spiritual fulfilment by

guaranteeing them a place in Akshardham. Such fulfilment flavoured their lives, allowed them to deal with life's problems while remaining unscathed and made the fearful reality of death a joyous celebration.

In the town of Ghanla, there was a woman by the name of Mulibai. As the time of her death came near, she told her husband, "Tomorrow, Maharaj will come to take me to Akshardham."

At first, her husband was in disbelief because she was as healthy as ever. The next day, he was stunned to see her preparing to die, but her movements were so natural as she greeted death.

He finally accepted that she was leaving him. At last, he mustered the courage to ask, "Your *kalyan* is fixed, but what about mine?"

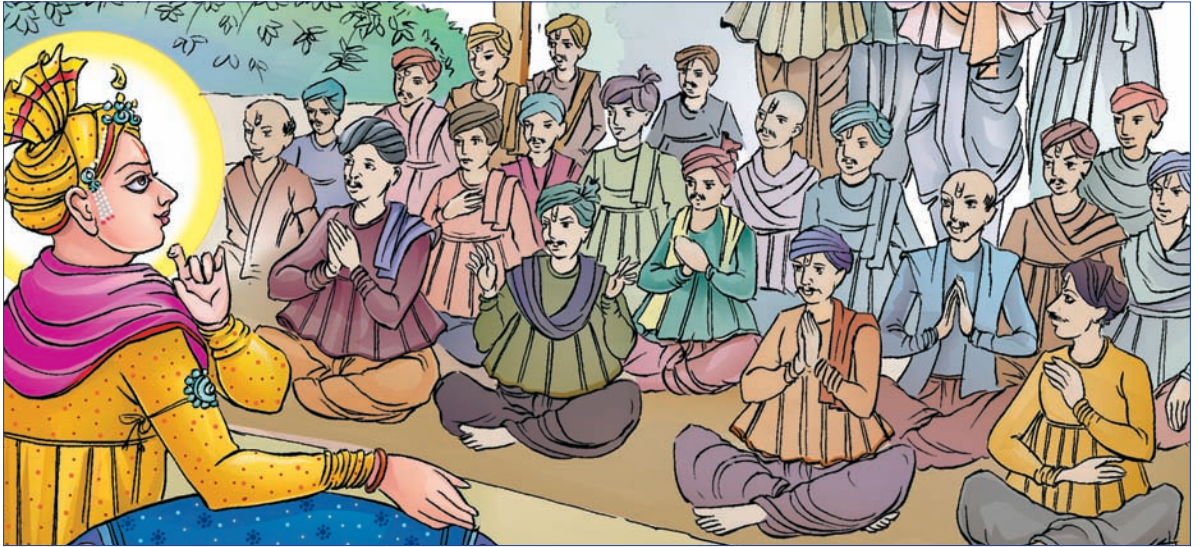
Mulibai confidently replied, "With my own hands, I have served Purna Purshottam Narayan. And so whoever has eaten *rotlas* made with these hands will surely get liberation, as well. Where, then, is the doubt in your liberation?"

So saying, she left her body like a gallant warrior, exiting the battle field after a swift victory.

Another such devotee was Tuljabai, wife of Diwan of Vadodara. Three days before her death, she announced that Maharaj would be coming to take her. When death finally approached, she joyously dressed in her wedding clothes and leapt into death's arms, bidding 'Jai Swaminarayan' to all those around her.

Thus, Maharaj fulfilled the spiritual needs of all his female devotees, by sharing his divine bliss with each of them and made them feel that God was truly theirs. ♦

Through Thick and Thin



Devotees offer their reverence to Shriji Maharaj

And so he walks along the seemingly endless beach, careful to step in one of the two pairs of footprints. As he treads the path once travelled while holding hands with God, he relives various instances of his life. There were instances of happiness and pain, success and disappointment, harmony and strife. After some time, he comes to an abrupt stop; he notices that on his path during all of life's happy moments there were two sets of footprints: his own and God's. But, when the waves got rough; when living seemed a greater burden than death, there was only one set of footprints: he was all alone. He turns and growls to God, "Where were you when I needed you the most?" As he pours out his frustrations, God listens with a knowing smile. He looks up at God and sneers, "What are you so happy about?"

God answers with motherly softness, "You were not alone; it was then that I had picked you up, held you in my arms, and carried you forward."

It is God who carries us when getting up, let alone walking, seems hopeless. Shriji Maharaj's life is filled with moments in which he carried his devotees through life's turbulent waters. Samvat 1869 (1813

CE) would bring shivers to those who lived through its testing times. The famine had hit Gujarat hard. People were often found scavenging for a morsel of food and drops of water. Shriji Maharaj's devotees were among those who suffered.

However, Maharaj carried them when they needed him the most. Jesangbhai from Vaso came to Vartal wearing torn, soiled clothes. Maharaj immediately asked, "How many grains do you have left?" Unable to hide his embarrassment, Jesang admitted, "Eleven *maunds* stored in a large container." Maharaj placed his hand on his shoulder and instructed, "Seal the container from the top and take however many grains you need from the small hole at the bottom. As long as you keep the lid sealed, the grains won't run out. Sell the grains to buy ghee, sugar, clothes, and whatever else you need." Maharaj provided for his devotee when he was unable to stand on his own feet.

It is comparatively easy to give food to a hungry man, but fulfilling someone emotionally is much more difficult.

Affluent devotees often brought Shriji Maharaj exquisite delicacies in decorated golden and silver

plates when he stayed in the mansion in Jetalpur. Jivan Bhakta, a devotee from a modest home, also wished to offer Maharaj a *thal*. However, whenever he came with his *thal*, he would become embarrassed when he saw what the other devotees offered Maharaj. He couldn't afford tasty delicacies. He couldn't even provide a decent plate that wasn't cracked or worn at the edges. He kept thinking, "Why would Maharaj ever accept my *thal*?" For eighteen straight days, Jivan Bhakta brought his *thal* and took it back home without offering it to Maharaj.

Then, one day he mustered the courage and approached Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj eagerly reached for the *thal*, and began eating the half-cooked *rotlo*. With his mouth half full, Maharaj exclaimed, "I find this *rotlo* to be the most delicious delicacy." Jivan Bhakta's apprehension vanished and his face lit up; God had accepted his devotion.

Shriji Maharaj's love for his devotees was so great that he often forgot his own needs when it came to fulfilling his devotees' wishes.

In Samvat 1886 (1830 CE), Maharaj's health deteriorated severely. He was barely able to stay awake, let alone walk. He would remain in bed all day, occasionally getting up to eat only a few morsels of food. Dada Khachar's entire *darbar* had turned ghostly ever since Maharaj announced that he would soon return to Akshardham. Sobs replaced the joyous chirping that once resonated from the tree in the middle of the courtyard. With each day, Maharaj's condition worsened.

One day a letter arrived from Kakabhai, a devotee from Rojka. He stated that he would not live long and requested Maharaj to grace him with his darshan. As soon as Maharaj read Kakabhai's letter, he rose from his bed and gave orders to have his horse prepared; he would be going to Rojka. His attendants stood in disbelief, wondering, "Is he serious?" Just a few minutes before he could barely speak, and now he wants to go to Rojka on a horse. Before they could voice an objection, Maharaj effortlessly mounted his horse and was on his way.

When he saw Maharaj, Kakabhai's eyes welled

with tears. Trying his hardest to hold back, he expressed his gratitude in an unsteady voice, "Please free me from this body, and keep me forever in your service." Maharaj held his hand and comforted him. This was one of the reasons why he had come to earth. He was here to carry his devotees, even if it meant putting his own needs aside. Afterwards, Maharaj returned to Gadhada and resumed his illness.

Even when devotees had lost direction and their will to walk; when they'd lost faith and their will to serve God, Shriji Maharaj had carried them to the right path.

Vasta Khachar had decided to stay for the night at Jiva Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada. Maharaj asked him not to go, and that if he must, then not to pay attention to what he would hear. Vasta went, and throughout the night, Jiva Khachar and Budho Dhadhal slandered Maharaj. They accused Maharaj of coaxing Dada Khachar to give him control of his *darbar*, and claimed that Maharaj's concern for Vasta was aimed at taking control of Vasta's three villages. Vasta not only heard, but also began to believe their toxic accusations. The following morning he went back to Kariyani visibly upset, without even meeting Maharaj. Maharaj sensed that there was something wrong and immediately set off for Kariyani. When he arrived, Vasta Khachar's face had transformed into a spiteful scathe. Maharaj understood and began to explain, "Why would I want your three villages, when Kushalkuvarba was ready to give me her three hundred?" Vasta's expressions softened. Maharaj continued, "And when I was travelling as Nilkanth Varni, a Nepali king offered me his two daughters and his entire kingdom..." By the time Maharaj had finished, Vasta was sobbing at

Maharaj's feet asking for forgiveness. Even when it seemed as though they had lost faith in Maharaj, Maharaj never lost faith in his devotees.

Shriji Maharaj remains with his devotees when they need him the most. This is his greatest gift to us – his unceasing love. He does not abandon us during difficulties, but rather carries us through them. ♦

The King of Kings



King Laldas of Visnagar seeks Shriji Maharaj's blessings

It was an era of kings; an era in which people felt no greater power than the rule of royalty. Many of these kings had small kingdoms but for the common man, the *raja* (king) practically represented divinity.

However, by the eve of the 19th century, many of these feudal leaders had squandered the glory that their positions originally held. Despite once enjoying divine status, some kings of Bharatvarsh were now wasting away in vice. Indulgence in extravagance overshadowed their subjects' welfare. And though their public image was in shambles, they had not given up their sense of self-importance. The time had arrived, however, when even they would have to bow to a greater presence.

Shri Sahajanand Swami Maharaj, the king of all kings, would give direction to their wayward lives. He ruled beyond the borders of any one kingdom. Adorning simple white clothes, he journeyed throughout kingdoms of the Indian subcontinent bringing true spirituality to the poor and rich alike. And his revolution did not exclude even the greatest of kings.

Kings once deemed unapproachable, and in some cases uncontrollable, were instantly tamed by Maharaj's divinity and compassion. King Mahadatt of Butol, the terrible King Ranbahadur of Kathmandu-Nepal, Raja Mukunddev of Jagannathpuri, King Vajesinh of Bhavnagar, and King Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara are just a few of the foremost kings impressed or transformed by Maharaj. The list goes on to include the feudal rulers of Gadhada, Kariyani, Loya, and numerous other kingdoms throughout Kathiawad and Gujarat. At the tender age of ten, he melted the heart of the scholarly King of Kashi. At eleven, he gave blessings to the renowned King Ranjitsinh of Punjab.

Maharaj inspired a thirst for enlightenment within these kings in two ways.

MESMERIZED AT FIRST SIGHT

An array of kings were captivated by Maharaj at first sight. The historian Adharanand Swami recalls the conversation between King Ranjitsinh and Bhagwan Swaminarayan at Badrinath in his detailed work, *Haricharitamrut*sagar (Pur 2, Tarang 20-23).

Ranjitsinh: I am your servant. I will do as you wish. Not under any circumstance will I let you go. Please do not let go of those of us who have taken your refuge.

Maharaj: I am a Yogi and you are a Bhogi, I am a renunciant while you relish worldly pleasures. My heart is in the jungles while yours in your palaces. I am disgusted by vices while you drown yourself in them. How could we possibly get along?

Teary eyed, **Ranjitsinh** responds: You are a soul free of any attachment. I am bound by the webs of infatuation. I am at your refuge. It is your name which I chant. May your memory forever reside in my heart and may I eventually realize the fleeting nature of this royalty and its treasures. Please bless me.

The king of Vanshipur and King Mahadatt of Butol (Nepal) were fixated by Maharaj's tender, emaciated body and instantly realized that he was not a child but God himself. King Mukunddev of Jagannathpuri happened to just pass by Maharaj meditating on the banks of the Indradyumna Sarovar and felt the presence of God. He welcomed Maharaj into his city by placing him upon the grand chariot of Jagannathji. The king even helped pull the chariot through the city.

Even Muslim rulers, whose faith denied the possibility of God manifesting on Earth, were awed by Maharaj. The Nawab of Junagadh openly declared his conviction that Maharaj was in fact 'Khuda' present on Earth. A mere glance of Maharaj was enough to arouse the devotion lying dormant deep within the hearts of these kings.

HUMBLED BY HIS DIVINE PERSONA

Arrogance had prevented a few kings from accepting Maharaj's greatness, even though Maharaj had gained widespread reverence. Some were simply ignorant while others were swayed by fickle gossip. Despite this, Maharaj did not harbour any hostility towards these kings. Whether the kings supported him or not, Maharaj simply carried on his work of uplifting people who were in need. Those who made attempts at defaming Maharaj, however, were soon faced with the reality of Maharaj's divinity.

Throughout the State of Bhavnagar, people flocked to Gadhada to have a glimpse of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. King Vakatsinh of Bhavnagar, after watching many of his statesmen become disciples of Swaminarayan, began to look at him as a competitor and an enemy to the state. In the name of public interest, the king convinced the clever poet Ladudan Gadhvi to put Maharaj to the test. Realizing that Maharaj was genuinely God, Ladudan surrendered to Maharaj and became a sadhu – he was named Brahmanand Swami.

Still unconvinced, Vakatsinh called the transformed social misfit, Sagram Vagri, to his court trying to learn what magic spell Maharaj had

used on him to change his life. Sagram laughed off this assumption and rectified the king, "Look at my transformation, this is the true miracle of Swaminarayan in Kaliyug! Even you can be liberated by accepting his refuge." The king was lost for an answer. Maharaj's unbelievable effect on these individuals was enough for him to admit Maharaj's greatness.

When these kings surrendered themselves to Maharaj, he gave guidance to them on how to be better leaders.

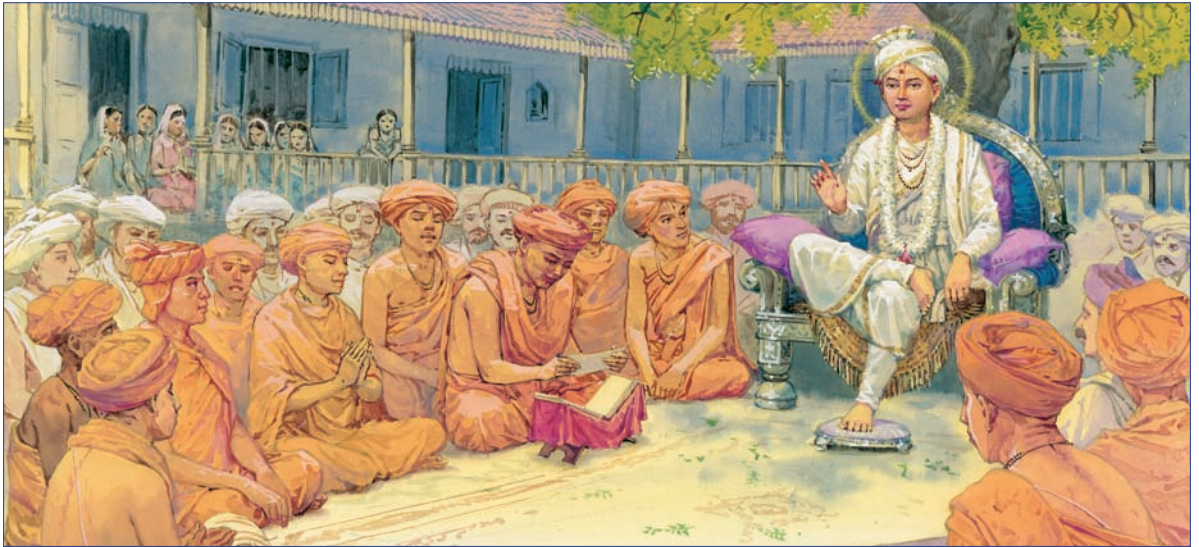
When Maharaj miraculously cured Nepal's King Bahadur's chronic illness, he offered a mass of treasure to Maharaj. Uninterested in material wealth, Maharaj requested the king to simply release the innocent prisoners held in his dungeons. After uplifting the wicked Laldas Subo of Visnagar, instead of keeping the platters of jewels he offered, he ordered him to use the money to feed the poor Brahmins who lived in his kingdom. Maharaj's purpose was to serve the common man. He had no interest in conquest or fortune.

The Queen of Dharampur State offered her entire kingdom to Maharaj. Maharaj simply replied, "Only a donkey bears the burden of a donkey's load. I am here to offer liberation to millions. Why would I need such a kingdom!" Maharaj did not differentiate between rich and poor, powerful and weak, as noted in Vachanamrut Gadhada II-13, "A king and a beggar are the same to me... even sitting with honour on an elephant and walking on foot are the same to me. Whether someone honours me...or throws dirt on me – all are the same."

Of note is the fact that despite the vast numbers of kings he bore spiritual command over, history tells us that Maharaj never used these kings' influence as an instrument for proselytization. Maharaj had spread his spiritual message by winning people's hearts.

His mission was to improve the life of each person he met. Perhaps this was the quality in Maharaj that the kings found most endearing; the same quality Maharaj rekindled in many of them. ♦

Maharaj: The Shining Moon



Shriji Maharaj inspires the paramhansas through his discourses

Nanalal Kavi, a renowned Gujarati poet, once said, “The moon, surrounded by constellations of stars in the night sky, resembles Shriji Maharaj, surrounded by his sadhus; his living *murtis* of celibacy and worldly detachment.”

Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami and Sadguru Bhumanand Swami, two of Shriji Maharaj’s senior sadhus, used the same analogy to describe Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus, “Shobhe tãre vintyo jem chandra...” – which literally means, shines like the moon wrapped (surrounded) by stars.

So who were these stars that surrounded Shriji Maharaj?

What were they like?

There was Gunatitanand Swami, who was Aksharbrahman incarnate; Gopalanand Swami and Vyapakanand Swami who were capable of performing awesome miracles; Muktanand Swami, who could subdue anyone’s anger by his mere presence; Nityanand Swami, a brilliant scholar of the four Vedas; Nishkulanand Swami whose detachment from the world was compared to Jadbharat; Swarupanand Swami, who always saw

his own *atma*; Santdasji, who could enjoy samadhi by his own will and travel between the three realms; Bhai Atmanand Swami, who did not have any consideration for his body; Premanand Swami and Devanand Swami who were born poetic geniuses.

Capable, powerful, talented, and pure-hearted spiritual aspirants were attracted to Shriji Maharaj from all over India. Some were like Svayamprakashanand Swami, who left their own disciples; others like Advaitanand Swami, who gave up his own powers. Some were like Ramanujanand Swami, who was wealthy, some like Anandanand Swami, who was the head of an ashram. Others were like Nrusinhanand Swami and Mahanubhavanand Swami, who were mahants of mandirs. Then there were some who were like Adbhutanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and Govindanand Swami, who left privileged lifestyles to be with Shriji Maharaj.

After becoming disciples of Shriji Maharaj, these sadhus had to endure tough physical conditions, such as, extreme heat, cold, hunger, thirst, insults and even injustice. How did Shriji Maharaj get such talented and accomplished sadhus to endure

these hardships? How did he inspire them to shed all attachments to their families, something that all men crave?

By performing miracles? No, these sadhus could perform miracles themselves. There were sadhus like Gopalanand Swami who could alter the course of planets and stars and Vyapkanand Swami who brought a dead horse back to life.

By exhibiting intelligence? No, there were many scholars amongst the sadhus like Nityanand Swami, whose scholarship intimidated any scholar who dared faced him in a debate.

By offering worldly pleasures? No, there were sadhus like Brahmanand Swami who by himself had accumulated more wealth than most of the kings that resided in Gujarat. And they left everything they had to live a life of poverty instead.

So what did Shriji Maharaj give them? Kishorelal Mashruwala, a famous political figure in India, noted, “Unconditional love flowed from Maharaj’s eyes.” This unconditional love had a divine source, and thus, everything else paled in comparison.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was in Jetalpur. There, he dined at Gangama’s place. On the way to her house, the sadhus sang kirtans while Maharaj clapped and sang along. The heat had returned after the rainy season and the sun was blazing. Bhaguji held a decorated umbrella to protect Maharaj’s eyes from the sun. Maharaj tried to push the umbrella away twice, but Bhaguji firmly held the umbrella in a fixed position. Finally, Maharaj grabbed the umbrella and flung it to the ground, causing it to break. “Why are you holding up an umbrella for me when all the sadhus are walking in the sun?” asked Maharaj.

Once at night, Shriji Maharaj was delivering a discourse when he noticed that many of the sadhus were asleep. He then invited the awake sadhus to approach him and embraced each one individually. Instantly, Jignasanand Swami and the other sadhus who were sleeping were awakened, “Wake up, wake up, Maharaj is hugging everyone.” Eventually all the sadhus woke up and hugged Maharaj.

In Vartal, Shriji Maharaj was serving *motaiya ladus* to the sadhus who were seated in lines in the dining hall. Meanwhile, a greedy merchant was watching this event. Intent on getting his own share of the *ladus*, he pinched his son really hard. The innocent boy wailed, drawing everyone’s attention.

The sadhus consoled the child, “Calm down, calm down, Maharaj will give you some as well.”

Realizing the father’s motives, Maharaj reproached him, “You feed your child and I will feed all of mine!” Maharaj proclaimed the sadhus as his own children.

After the drought of Samvat 1869 (1813 CE) in Gujarat, Shriji Maharaj decided to celebrate the Fuldol festival in Gadhada. He sent invitations to sadhus touring in both nearby and far regions. Consequently, all the sadhus began making their way to Gadhada. Maharaj received the message that the sadhus have started to proceed towards Gadhada. Maharaj ordered Naja Jogiya to get a horse ready. “I want to receive the sadhus”.

Dada Khachar, Abhel Khachar, Jiva Khachar, and other *darbars* accompanied Shriji Maharaj to welcome the sadhus. They went as far as Kundal (A village 25 miles away from Gadhada). Maharaj was so thrilled that he got off his horse and offered *dandvats* to the sadhus. The shocked sadhus rushed to Maharaj to stop him. Then Maharaj embraced each sadhu individually.

Nishkulanand Swami writes in the ‘Chosath Padi’:

*“Je je Hari e karyu het, evu kare kon apane re;
Tāt māt sagā samet, manya sanehi bholapan re.”*

Meaning: Who else can give the same type of love that Shriji Maharaj has given to us? No one! He gave them love that no relative, father, or even a mother could give.

It was this love that made the sadhus remain attached to Maharaj. It was this love that gave strength to those sadhus to endure a lifetime of adversity. It was this love that cultivated the great heights of spirituality that those sadhus achieved. And it is that same love that Swamishri has for his sadhus today. ◆

SWARUPNISHTHA

*Understanding the true and full glory of God is swarupnishtha.
Such understanding forms the foundation of all spiritual endeavours.*

It is the basis upon which the jiva attains moksha.

*The following article on swarupnishtha is a translation of
a speech by Pujya Doctor Swami.*

THE ULTIMATE GOAL AND ITS ATTAINMENT

Hinduism teaches that there are four endeavors in human life – *dharma* (living ethically), *artha* (striving financially), *kam* (satisfying desires), and *moksha* (attaining liberation). Of these, the ultimate goal is *moksha*, also referred to as *kalyan*, *atyantik kalyan*, *atyantik moksha*, *param kalyan*, *param pad*, and achieving Akshardham. Different faiths have different words to describe their ultimate goal. For example, Buddhism refers to the ultimate goal as “nirvana.” Christianity calls it “heaven.” Regardless of what it is called, this aim should be life’s primary goal; mine, yours and everyone’s. Wherever we are, whatever we do, whatever we become, and whatever circumstances we are in, all said and done, this is what we have to achieve.

Moksha can be thought of as the total absence of flaws and the complete development of virtues, or it may be conceived of as the removal of our inner ignorance and the attainment of spiritual enlightenment. Without working toward achieving *moksha*, one cannot experience true happiness and one’s life work cannot be said to be accomplished. One can end up as the ruler of the entire world, but failing to achieve *moksha*, feelings such as loneliness, lack of satisfaction, emptiness and anxiety will remain. If the need for *moksha* is understood, then everything has been understood. Accordingly, striving to achieve *moksha* must be our first priority.

Swaminarayan Bhagwan, the *avatars*, and *mahapurushes* have described numerous means

for achieving *moksha*. Methods such as *tapa* (austerities), *tyag* (renunciation), complete knowledge of the shastras (*jnan*), *yagna* (religious sacrifices), *yatra* (pilgrimage) and *ashtang-yoga*, are just a few of the paths to attaining *moksha*. The sheer number of methods often leads to confusion, raising questions about which method is most effective for attaining *moksha*. This uncertainty causes people to adopt the method they observe others following. For example, if a person sees someone doing *tapa*, that person would feel more inclined to practice *tapa*. While there is nothing wrong with this, it fails to address the root of the confusion – it does not guarantee that a person will engage in the one method that is the most effective – the method that incorporates all other methods. This ideal method to achieve *moksha* is *swarupnishtha* – the firm conviction in God and His Sant with a full understanding of their glory (*mahima*).

The Vachanamrut explains the idea of *Swarupnishtha* through four concepts that appear frequently throughout the shastra: *Upasana*¹, *Nischay*², *Nistha* and *Ashro*³. The importance of these words is explained throughout the Vachanamrut, including in Gadhada section I -56, in which Maharaj says:

“Many people become realized yogis, many

1. *Upasana* literally translates to “sitting near”. It relays the philosophical understanding of the nature of God as well as the mode of worship of God, i.e., how one understands God to be like, and how one worships Him. Sometimes synonymous with *bhakti*.
2. *Nischay* means conviction of the form of God.
3. *Ashro* means taking refuge in God.

become omniscient, many become deities, and thus attain countless types of greatness, including the highest state of enlightenment. All this is achieved through the force of the *upasana* of God. Without *upasana*, though, nothing can be accomplished.”

To further explain the importance of *upasana*, Maharaj says in Gadhada section III-36:

“I have heard all of the scriptures and have formed a principle. I have also travelled throughout this land and seen many realized yogis.’ So saying, he narrated the stories of Gopaldasji and other sadhus. He then said: ‘I believe that it is impossible to see the *atma* and Brahma without *upasana* and meditation of God’s form. Only through *upasana* can the *atma* and Brahma be seen. In fact, wishing to see the *atma* and Brahma without *upasana* is like attempting to lick the sky with one’s tongue; even if one tries for a hundred years, one will never be able to taste it as sour or salty. Similarly, the *atma* and Brahma simply cannot be seen without the *upasana* of the form of God – regardless of the efforts one may resort to.’ “

Gunatitanand Swami has also emphasized the importance of *swarupnishtha*. He explains that all the means of attaining moksha, such as *tapa*, *tyag*, and *yagna*, tantamount to a string of zeroes, whereas *swarupnishtha* represents the number one in front of those zeros. Although a string of zeroes has no value, adding a one in front of the zeroes instantly transforms the number into something immense. Gunatitanand Swami’s metaphor signifies the fact that the various means of attaining *moksha* by themselves are worth nothing in the absence of the ultimate method – *swarupnishtha*.

Shriji Maharaj, describing how *swarupnishtha* is the best of all spiritual endeavours, has asserted that no spiritual endeavours can bear fruit without *upasana*. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I-40, Maharaj explains that Bhagwan’s *upasana* is equal to mastering *ashtang-yoga*⁴. If one perfects *ashtang-*

4. System of Yoga comprising eight progressive steps in leading ultimately to yoga, i.e., union with God. The eight steps are *yam* (restraint), *niyam* (observance), *asan* (posture) *pranayam* (mastering breathing), *pratyahar* (withdrawal), *dharna* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (trance).

yoga, one can control one’s mind such that he attains *samadhi*⁵. Similarly, Maharaj explains that one can attain the same elevated spiritual state through an attachment to God’s divine form – by perfecting *swarupnishtha*. Therefore, *swarupnishtha* is equal to *ashtang-yoga* for the purpose of attaining *samadhi*. Furthermore, Maharaj lauds the greatness of *swarupnishtha* over *ashtang-yoga* in Gadhada II-14, in which he explains that oneness with the form of God cannot be achieved by *samadhi* or *ashtang-yoga* alone. A firm conviction in the form of God (*nischay* and *nistha*) is critical to achieve the ultimate goal of *moksha*.

EVEN GREATER THAN ATMA-REALIZATION

Maharaj routinely extols the importance of atma-realization. In the Bhaktachintamani the *paramhansas* tell Maharaj they are willing to follow his every command. If he so desires, they are willing to live in the snowy Himalayas with minimal clothing. They are willing to forsake food and water and subsist on air alone. They are willing to do whatever he says. This is the extent of their courage and faith. The *paramhansas* go on to say, “If you wished it, we would sleep on the bare ground. If you wished it, we would take a vow of silence, or sit without moving at all or even blinking!” This was the strength of their devotion. Pleased with their faith, Maharaj replied, “I am sure all of you would do this without hesitation. I have no doubt about it. But, let me tell you what I want you to do – what you have to actually focus on. Believe yourself to be *chaitanya* (consciousness); understand yourself to be the *atma*, not this body.”

Maharaj repeatedly emphasizes the importance of atma-realization, however, Maharaj has also frequently and clearly stated in the Vachanamrut that *atma-nistha* is secondary to *swarupnishtha*. Despite the importance Shriji Maharaj placed on atma-realization in this incident, he says that it pales in comparison to *upasana*, *nistha* (conviction), and *ashro* (refuge in God). For example, in Gadhada 5. *Samadhi* is a state of elevated spiritual consciousness and divine bliss.

I-61, Maharaj explains:

“Only the firm refuge in God is helpful at the time of death, whereas *atma*-realization alone is of no use whatsoever at the time of death. For this reason, one should firmly cultivate faith in God.”

An incident from the life of Swarupanand Swami highlights what Shriji Maharaj meant in describing *atma*-realization as secondary to *swarupnishtha*. Swarupanand Swami had such an incredible understanding and *mahima* for Shriji Maharaj that his stories are often featured along with the incidents of Gunatitanand Swami. Once, Swarupanand Swami was sick. When someone mentioned the illness, Swarupanand Swami replied, “Although the pony is weak, the rider is strong!” Swarupanand Swami expressed that although his body, the pony, might have been weak, his *atma*, the rider, remained distinct and unafflicted. Maharaj praised Swarupanand Swami’s spiritual state by remarking, “Others merely speak about this, but Swarupanand Swami lives it.” Maharaj further described the glory of Swarupanand Swami by declaring that “Even his *darshan* is liberating.”

However, once Swarupanand Swami became seriously ill – the pony became even weaker. Although Swarupanand Swami remained undisturbed by ordinary illnesses, he found himself experiencing some spiritual unease when he became deathly ill. Even though this unease was minimal and not outwardly evident, it persisted in Swarupanand Swami’s mind. In Gadhada II-35, Maharaj describes the solution for spiritual unease that he had provided to Swarupanand

Swami – to focus on the form and incidents of God. Essentially, Maharaj explains to us that faith in God – *swarupnishtha* – is more important than *atma*-realization – and this alone will prevent all unease.

To attain *swarupnishtha*, we must have absolute faith in the words of the *ekantik satpurush*, who has reached the pinnacle of *swarupnishtha*. We do not ourselves have the experience of complete *swarupnishtha*, but if we believe in the words of the *satpurush*, who does have this experience, we eventually can experience this ourselves. In this case, believing is seeing!

To cultivate such absolute faith is not simple. But if we have intense attachment for the *satpurush*, we will naturally have faith in his words. In Vachanamrut Vartal 11, Maharaj explains, “... when one has strong affection for someone, one will never see the person’s flaws, and one will always believe the person’s words. This is natural on the worldly path and it is also natural on the path of liberation. Therefore, intense love for the Satpurush is the only means to realizing one’s *atma*; it is the only means to realizing the greatness of the Satpurush; and it is also the only means to having the direct realization of God.”

Thus, the key to *moksha* is *swarupnishtha*, and the key to *swarupnishtha* is developing intense affection for the *satpurush*. Now we can understand why, in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-54, Maharaj describes the *satpurush* as the gateway to *moksha*.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS – INFORMATION STATEMENT

- 1. Place of Publication:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.
- 2. Period of Publication:** Monthly.
- 3. Printer’s Name:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.
- 4. Publisher’s Name:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

- 5. Editor’s Name:** Swami Swayamprakashdas
Nationality: Indian
Address: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.
- 6. Owner’s Name:** Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4.

I, Swami Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.
(Signed) Swami Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2010

The Chāndogya Upanishad

SIMPLE CONVERSATIONS ON HIGHLY SPIRITUAL MATTERS Part 2



THE DIVINE QUALITIES OF AKSHARBRAHMAN

‘अपहतपाप्मा विजरो विमृत्युर्विशोऽजो विजिघत्सोऽपिपासः सत्यकामः सत्यसङ्कल्प – ‘Apahatapāpmā vijaro vimrutyurvishoko vijighatso’pīpāsaha satyakāmaha satyasankalpaha’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 8/1/5). The form of that Brahman is sinless, free of *māyā*, without old age and untouched by death, i.e., it is eternal. It has no regrets or misery. It has no distractions like hunger or thirst. Its desires are always fulfilled. Its resolves never fail. These are all Aksharbrahman’s eternal qualities. *Māyā* can never obstruct it. That is why it says, ‘सत्यान् कामान्’ – ‘Satyān kāmān’ (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 8/1/6). That is, these qualities of Aksharbrahman are *satya*, i.e., remain the same forever.

Saying this, it then tells us the most beneficial uniqueness of Aksharbrahman, ‘स सेतु विधृतिरेषां लोकानामस भेदाय’ – ‘Sa seturvidhritireṣhām lokānāmasambhedāya’ – ‘That Aksharbrahman is the bridge to attain Paramātmā and ultimate liberation, and it is the support of all’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 8/4/1).

Thus, these precepts on Aksharbrahman have been given in various ways. The main purpose is that we become acquainted with that Akshar and that we firmly associate with it. Also, we should know the form of our own *ātmā*, imbibe the qualities of Brahman within it and thus becoming *brahmarup* attain Parabrahman.

THE STORY OF INDRA AND VIROCHAN – ĀTMAVIDYĀ

Learning that Prajāpati gives clear and fitting precepts on the form of *ātmā*, both the *devas* and the *asuras* desired to hear those precepts. Of them, ‘इन्द्रो हैव देवानामभिप्रवव्राज विरोचनोऽसुराणाम्’ – ‘Indro haiva devānāmabhipravavrāja virochano’surānām’ – ‘Indra presented himself in front of Prajāpati as a representative of the *devas*, and Virochan as a representative of the *asuras*’ (Chāndogya Upanishad: 8/7/2). They obeyed celibacy for thirty-two years in order to obtain the knowledge of the *ātmā*. Then Prajāpati asked, “What have you come for?” They both requested him to give them knowledge of the *ātmā*. Prajāpati then said, ‘य एषोऽक्षिणि पुरुषो दृश्यते एष आत्मेति’ – ‘Ya esho’kshini purusho drushyate esha ātmeti’ – ‘The person that can be seen in the eye is the *ātmā*.’ Hearing this, Indra and Virochan said, “O Lord, this can be seen in water or in a mirror. Which *ātmā* are you talking about?” Prajāpati then took them both to a vessel filled with water and said, “Look in here. What do you see?”

“We see ourselves from head to foot,” they said.

Prajāpati then said, ‘साध्वलंकृतौ सुवसनौ परिष्कृतौ भूत्वोदशरावेऽवेक्षेथामिति’ – ‘Sādhvalankruttau bhootvodasharāve’vekshethāmiti’ – ‘Both of you wear the best clothes and jewellery and

then look into the vessel of water' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/8/2). They both did accordingly.

"What do you see?" Prajāpati asked.

"We see ourselves dressed up in good clothes," They both replied.

Prajāpati then replied, 'एष आत्मेति' – 'Esha ātmā' – 'That's the ātmā' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/8/3). Hearing this they both became silent and prepared to leave. Seeing this, Prajāpati began to worry, "I haven't yet given them a true and complete understanding of the ātmā. I have only just started. They are leaving, being satisfied with just this much! This will result in 'ते पराभविष्यन्ति' – 'Te parābhaviṣhyanti' – 'them being defeated'" (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/8/4). Indeed, so it happened, of the two, Virochan believed that the reflection that can be seen – the body – is itself the ātmā. Therefore, to look after the body, worship it, and pamper it is itself knowledge of the ātmā. Thinking this, 'विरोचनोऽसुरान् जगाम' – 'Virochano'surān jagāma' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/8/4). Virochan reached the assembly of the *asuras* and announced that the body is itself the ātmā and it should be pampered. The *asuras* immediately accepted this. This very belief resulted in indulgence. This means that indulgence, which has resulted from believing the body and the ātmā to be one, is demonic.

On the other hand, Indra felt differently. Contemplating on Prajāpati's statement, he doubted it. He felt that it is but common for one who is adorned with good clothes and jewellery to see that in the reflection in a water-vessel. But if the body was blind, dumb or disabled then it would also appear as such. Does that mean that the ātmā is subject to such changes? 'नाहमत्र भाग्यं पश्यामि' – 'I don't think this is right' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/9/1). Let me go and clarify the matter by asking. Indra thus returned to Prajāpati and expressed his doubts. Prajāpati said, "I will surely give you the answer to this, but for that you will have to observe celibacy for thirty-two years." Since Indra had a true hunger for the truth, he did so. Thereafter, pleased, Prajāpati said, 'य एष स्वप्ने महीयानश्चरत्येष आत्मेति' – 'Ya esha svapne maheeyānashvaratyeshā

ātmēti' – 'That which enjoys various objects in a dream is the ātmā' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/10/1). Indra heard this, but he doubted again. He thought that someone who is blind may not be so in a dream; he might be able to see. Also, if the body is injured, it might not be injured in a dream. What am I to understand from this? This is not comprehensible. He presented this doubt to Prajāpati. Prajāpati said, "Observe celibacy for another thirty-two years." Indra did so. He then came to Prajāpati again. Pleased, Prajāpati said, 'यत्रैतत् सुषुप्तः समस्तः स प्रसन्नः स्वप्नं न विजानात्येष आत्मेति' – 'Yatraitat sushuptaha samastaha samprasannaha svapnam na vijānātyesha ātmēti' – 'The state in which even dreams are not seen is called the state of deep sleep. A person in deep sleep is the ātmā' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/11/1). Indra heard this, thought about it, and once again had a doubt that one is not conscious in deep sleep. In this state, a person is immersed in ignorance. How can such a person in deep sleep be believed to be the ātmā? He presented his doubt to Prajāpati. Prajāpati said, "Now observe celibacy for another five years." Indra did so. Pleased with Indra's determined desire to know, Prajāpati revealed to him the true understanding of the ātmā, 'मघवन्मर्त्यं वा इदं शरीरमात्तं मृत्युना तदस्यामृतस्याशरीरस्यात्मनोऽधिष्ठानमात्तो वै सशरीरः प्रियाप्रियाभ्यां न वै सशरीरस्य सतः प्रियाप्रिययोरपहतिरस्त्यशरीरं वाव सन्तं न प्रियाप्रिये स्पृशतः' – 'Maghavanmartyam vā idam shareeramāttam mrutyunā tadasyāmratasyāsharāsyātmanāādhi-shthānamātto vai sasharāraha priyāpriyābhyām na vai sasharārasya sataha priyāpriyayārapahatirastyasharāram vāva santam na priyāpriye sprushataha' – 'O Indra, this body is perishable. Its death is inevitable. It is just a temporary place of residence for the ātmā. The ātmā is eternal despite the fact that it resides in the body. It is indestructible. Therefore, O Indra, as long as you believe yourself to be the body you will have feelings of mundane misery and happiness. Once the belief that you are the body subsides and you truly realize the ātmā, then mundane misery and happiness no longer affect one' (Chhândogya Upanishad: 8/12/1). So what is the form of the

ātmā which has attained liberation? The answer, 'य आत्माऽपहतपाप्मा विजरो विमृत्युर्विशोकोविजिघत्सोऽपिपासः सत्यकामः सत्यसङ्कल्पः' – 'Ya ātmā'pahatapāpmā vijaro vimrutyrvishokovijighatso'pipāsaha satyakāmaha satyasankalpaha' – 'It becomes free of sins, free of conditions like old age, free of death, free of grief, above hunger and thirst; its desires are fulfilled and its resolves succeed' (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 8/7/1).

Then, Prajāpati said something special, 'एष संप्रसादोऽस्माच्छरीरात् समुत्थाय परं ज्योतिरुपसम्पद्य स्वेन रूपेणाभिनिष्पद्यते' – 'Esha samprasādo'smāchchhareerāt samutthāya param jyotirupasampadya svena roopenābhinishpadyate' – 'O Indra, when the *ātmā* attains liberation, i.e., becomes liberated, it attains a form like Brahman and attains the supreme lustrous Paramātmā' (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 8/12/1).

Here, the words '*svena roopena*' should be noted. Previously in *daharvidyā* the qualities of Aksharbrahman were shown with the words 'Ya ātmā'pahatapāpmā vijaro vimrutyrvishokovijighatso'pipāsaha satyakāmaha satyasankalpaha' (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 8/7/1). Here, Prajāpati says that the qualities of the *ātmā* are the same. This means that we should first understand Aksharbrahman as possessing these qualities and then develop the awareness of one's own *ātmā* as with these qualities of that Brahman. By doing this the qualities of that Brahman are imbibed in the *ātmā*, i.e., the *ātmā* becomes *brahmarup*; and when the body dies, the *ātmā* goes to Akshardhām and attains a form like Aksharbrahman, i.e., attains a divine body. This form like that of Brahman has been mentioned here with the words '*svena roopena*'.

Indra was satisfied on hearing these precepts from Prajāpati.

Thus, the story of Prajāpati, Indra and Virochan guides us to the true knowledge of the *ātmā*.

In this way, various aspects of the knowledge of the *ātmā* have been given here through different stories.

Now let us see, through a story that gives an

important message, how the endeavours to attain spiritual knowledge, that seem so difficult, are made simple and easy.

THE STORY OF SATYAKĀM JĀBĀL – BRAHMAVIDYĀ ENTIRELY ENCOMPASSED IN THE GURU'S COMMAND

There was a woman named Jabālā. She lived in a hut and survived through hard labour. She had a son named Satyakām. As Satyakām grew up, one day, he said to his mother, 'ब्रह्मचर्यं भवति वित्त्यामि किंगोत्रो न्वहमस्मीति' – 'Brahmacharyam bhavati vitsyāmi kingotro nvahamsmeeti' – 'Mother, I am considering studying the Vedas. For that I want to observe celibacy and stay with a guru in a *gurukul*. Therefore please tell me my ancestral family name' (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 4/4/1). Hearing this, Jabālā sunk into deep thought, as she did not have the answer to the question. Jabālā said, 'नाहमेतद् वेद तात यद्गोत्रस्त्वमसि' – 'Nāhametad veda tāta yadgotrastvamasi' – 'Son, I don't know about your ancestral family name' (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 4/4/2). She explains, "You were born when I was young, and at that time, all my time was spent in serving guests. Therefore, I never had a chance to ask your father about your ancestral family name. All I know is 'जबाला तु नामाहमस्मि सत्यकामो नाम त्वमसि स सत्यकाम एव जाबालो बुवीथा इति' – 'Jabālā tu nāmāhamasmi satyakāmo nāma tvamasi sa satyakāma eva Jābālo bruveethā iti' – 'My name is Jabālā and your name is Satyakām. There is no doubt about that. Therefore, if your guru asks you anything regarding this matter, tell him honestly that you are Satyakām, the son of Jabālā'" (Chhāndogya Upanishad: 4/4/2). Jabālā's words were those of truth, simplicity and openness. This was the greatest lesson for Satyakām. His mother's character shaped his life. Satisfied by the answer, he went to Gautam Rishi, the son of Haridrumat, and humbly requested him, 'ब्रह्मचर्यं भगवति वत्स्याम्युपेयां भगवन्तमिति' – 'Brahmacharyam bhagavati vatsyāmyupeyā bhagavantamiti' – 'O lord, I have come to study. I will observe celibacy. I wish to become your disciple. Please accept me'

(Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/4/3). Gautam asked, 'किंगोत्रो नु सोम्यासीति' 'Kimgotro nu somyāseeti' – 'What is your ancestral family name?' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/4/4). Satyakām replied, 'नाहमेतद् वेद भो यद्गोत्रोहमस्मि...' – 'Nāhametad veda bho yadgotrohamasmi...' – 'Ācharya, I don't know anything about my family name. I asked my mother about this matter, but she didn't know either. However, my mother's name is Jabālā and my name is Satyakām, therefore all I can say about myself is that I am Satyakām, the son of Jabalā' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/4/4). He then narrated the entire conversation with his mother. His mother's truth, simplicity and openness were reflected in Satyakām's words. Even the āchārya was astonished at her nobility. He had received the answer to what he wanted to know. If one's speech is so truthful, then what is there to doubt in the family name? He accepted Satyakām and gave him the *upveetam* – the sacred thread. Then, separating four hundred weak cows he said, 'कृशानाम् अबलानां चतुःशता गा निराकृत्योवाच' – 'Krushānām abalānām chatuḥshatā gā nirākrutyoṡva' – 'Take these four hundred cows and do not turn back until they are a thousand' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/4/5). Satyakām said, 'नासहस्रेणावर्तेयेति' – 'Nāsaḥsreṇāvarteyeti' – 'As you wish, O guru. I will not turn back until there are a thousand cows' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/4/5).

Satyakām took the cows to the forest. He began to care for the cows enthusiastically as the guru had commanded. Years passed. Satyakām did not know how time passed while serving the cows to please his guru. The four hundred cows had now become a thousand healthy cows. He began to experience the grace of his guru. First of all the god of air became pleased with his faith and austere service. He said, "O Satyakam, 'ब्रह्मणश्च ते पादं ब्रवाणीति' – 'Brahmanashcha te pādāṃ bravāṇēeti' – 'I will tell you a quarter of the knowledge of the form of Paramātmā' " (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/5/2). Saying this, he gave precepts on the form of Paramātmā. He then said, 'अग्निष्टे पादं वक्तुमिति' – 'Agnishṭe pādāṃ vaktumēti' – 'Agni will tell you the

secondquarter' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/5/2). The next day, Satyakām was leading the cows towards the ashram. Evening set in. Satyakām gathered the cows together and lit a fire. He sat in front of the fire and watched over the cows. Agnideva said, 'ब्रह्मणः सोम्य ते पादं ब्रवाणीति' – 'Brahmanaha somya te pādāṃ bravāṇēeti' – 'O Satyakām, I will explain a quarter of the form of Paramātmā' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/6/3). Satyakām began to experience that the *devas*, of their own accord, serve one who obeys the guru's commands. His knowledge continued to increase. After that Suryadeva (the sun-god) came and explained another quarter of the form of Parabrahman. Finally, a bird called Madgu explained the fourth quarter to him. Thus, Satyakām attained *brahmajñān*. The lustre of that *brahmajñān* began to shine from his face. He came to the ashram and came into the sight of his guru. On seeing him, his guru said, 'ब्रह्मविदिव सोम्य भासि' – 'Brahmavidiva somya bhāsi' – 'Beloved Satyakām, you look like one who has attained the knowledge of Brahman' (Chândogyā Upanishad: 4/9/2). Who taught you? Satyakām told him everything. After narrating what happened, he said something unique, "Although the *devas* taught me and they are all worthy of respect, you are my true guru. I have heard that only knowledge which has been attained by the association of a guru like yourself is the most beneficial. Therefore you yourself teach me *brahmavidyā*." Seeing his devoutness Gautam fulfilled his wish. By obeying the guru's commands, Satyakām joined the line of those that have attained *brahmajñān*.

Indeed, from the story of Satyakām Jābāl, we see how *brahmavidyā* in its entirety is incorporated in the guru's commands.

Thus, this Chândogyā Upanishad has revealed every aspect of *brahmavidyā* to us, by giving us precepts on the divine forms of Brahman and Parabrahman, their divine qualities, and revealing that those divine qualities can only be obtained by appropriately following the guru's commands.

◆

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's VICHARAN

December 2009

Bochasan, Vidyanagar, Anand, Mahelav, Nadiad, Dabhan

DECEMBER

- 1-4: Bochasan
- 4-6: Vidyanagar
- 7: Vidyanagar, Anand, Vidyanagar
- 8-19: Vidyanagar
- 19-28: Mahelav
- 28: Mahelav, Vidyanagar, Nadiad
- 28-30: Nadiad
- 31: Nadiad, Dabhan, Nadiad

BOCHASAN

2: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Pipalav, Verakhadi and Boriya. He also performed the *re-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the *hari* mandir in Jitodiya.

VIDYANAGAR

6, Sunday: In the evening *satsang* assembly members of Anand *bal mandal* performed a drama 'Jivishu Swamine Mate' to commemorate BAPS Anand Mandir's tenth anniversary. The drama brought to life the extraordinary stories of sacrifice and service by veteran devotees of Anand.

In conclusion, Swamishri appreciated the drama in his blessings, "The drama presented was most enjoyable because it revived memories about the services of devotees in the time of Shastriji Maharaj. They served with body, mind and wealth in testing times. They served to establish the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam, to please Shastriji Maharaj and to be blessed with liberation for their souls."

8: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Khajurdi.

13, Sunday; Annual Day Celebration:

The special evening assembly programme was presented by students of APC. They sang a ghazal and performed a traditional dance. Outstanding student achievers were felicitated. A drama, "Ghadtar", was enacted by APC students. It was based on the true story of a *satsangi* boy's steadfastness in *niyams* and *satsang* during challenging situations. In his blessings Swamishri praised, "The drama presentation was wonderful and inspiring. All should take a leaf from it. Parents should also take inspiration from the drama. Yogiji Maharaj, who established this hostel, used to say that it is a college of *brahmavidya*. Whoever wants to learn *brahmavidya* should prepare himself like the main character in the drama. The boy was put through many trials and yet he did not give up in his resolve to remain steadfast in *satsang niyams* and daily puja."

MAHELAV

20, Sunday; Bal Din: In the evening *satsang* assembly members of the *kishore mandal* enacted a drama called 'Paksh'. Thereafter *balaks* and *kishores* performed a traditional dance on the bhajan "Yagnapurushne dwār...". Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands. Finally, in his blessings, Swamishri explained, "This village is fortunate and blessed. Shastriji Maharaj was born here and a mandir has been made here. Those who come here on a pilgrimage receive the fruits of doing all pilgrimages. The reason being that Maharaj, Swami and Lakshmi-Narayan are present here in the *murtis*."

NADIAD, DABHAN, NADIAD

31, Thursday; Gunatitanand Swami Diksha Bicentenary Celebration: In the morning Swamishri presided over a grand *yagna*

held on the grounds adjacent to the BAPS mandir in Dabhan. More than 2,635 devotees participated in the ritual *yagna* around 279 *yagna kund*s and with 175 Brahmin pundits chanting Vedic mantras.

In the evening, the celebration assembly commenced at 3.45 p.m. It was relayed live in

India and abroad. The assembly theme was based on Gunatitanand Swami's universal glory. The assembly programme included speeches by senior sadhus, mantras sung by children and a drama by youths. The celebration climaxed with Swamishri's blessings. For a detailed report see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, February 2010, pp. 23-25. ◆

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

WHEN DOES GOD LIBERATE HIS DEVOTEE?

3 December 2009, Bochasan

A devotee phoned Swamishri and requested, "Do come and liberate me at the time of my death."

Swamishri replied, "Have refuge (*ashro*) in God and do bhajan. Maharaj will come to liberate you."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has promised that he would personally come to liberate his devotees at the time of death and take the soul to his abode, Akshardham. To attain this Swamishri guided a devotee to have firm faith and refuge in God and always remember him.

FORMULA FOR A COMPLETE LIFE

6 December 2009, Vidyanagar

A *satsangi* youth sought Swamishri's blessings on his birthday. Swamishri replied, "You must keep God (in your life) and do your work properly. These two things encompass everything."

Faith and devotion to God and fulfilling our duties and responsibilities in life are Swamishri's mantras for a complete and satisfied life.

FOUR DISCIPLINES FOR STUDENTS

8 December 2009, Vidyanagar

BAPS *kishores* were seated in the Akshar Purushottam Chhatralaya (APC) grounds in the morning for Swamishri's darshan. When Swamishri arrived he blessed and inspired the teenagers, "All of you study well, do bhajan, do puja daily and abide firmly by the moral rules and disciplines (*niyams*)."

TRUE PROGRESS

10 December 2009, Vidyanagar

While Swamishri was on his way to perform his morning puja, several fat APC students joked, "We progress immensely at APC."

Swamishri asked in response, "Yes, do progress. But in what?" With these words Swamishri proceeded to the mandir hall to do his puja.

On returning after his puja, Swamishri explained the meaning of progress to the same students, "Firstly, it is very important to obey *niyams*. Then, after completing your studies, whether you live here or go abroad, you must not allow any type of addiction in your life. Don't do anything that is wrong. Do bhajan regularly. Remember Maharaj routinely. Practice the principles of *satsang* and inspire them in others too. And whatever you're gained here through *satsang* teach it to others. After coming into *satsang* true progress lies in advancing ahead."

Swamishri revealed the essence of true progress to the youths.

GURU'S GUIDANCE

26 December 2009, Mehalav

An aspirant, practicing meditation daily, asked Swamishri, "I meditate daily. In it all my thoughts cease altogether. But then I experience blankness."

Swamishri guided, "Do *mala* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. You will see his *murti*."

The aspirant asked, "Is my meditation alright?"

Swamishri assured him, "Yes. Do *mala* of Swaminarayan and you will see Maharaj." ◆

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas

THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL: SECOND RANK IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS LEAGUE TABLE

London, January 2010

The Swaminarayan School in London has achieved second place in the Independent Schools League Table published by *The Daily Telegraph* on 13 January 2010. The table also confirmed the School as the top-performing independent school in London. This builds on the achievements of January 2008, when the School was ranked fourth among the UK's top independent schools.

The league tables chart the performance of



English secondary schools in GCSE examinations taken in mid-2009. Schools are ranked by the percentage of pupils gaining at least five A* to C grades, including the key subjects of English and mathematics, which is the Government's preferred measure of achievement.

Mr Savjani, Headteacher of the School, emphasized, "The secret is teamwork – pupils, parents, teachers and governors all pulling in the same direction." ◆

MEDICAL AND EYE-CARE CAMP FOR TRIBAL CITIZENS

Poshina Referral Medical Centre

16-18 January 2010, Poshina, Gujarat, India

From 16 to 18 January 2010, BAPS Charities and Medical Wings International joined efforts to organize a free medical and eye-care clinic for the tribal citizen of Poshina and Khedbrahma.

A total of 16 doctors – 3 from the USA, 3 from the United Kingdom, and 10 from India – served over 2,700 tribal villagers during the three-day camp. Villagers received general medical, paediatric and skin care. Also, wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches were given to disabled villagers, while over 300 pairs of high-quality shoes and slippers were given to children in need. Around 550 villagers received detailed eye testing, of which 450 villagers were given



new pairs of glasses to correct vision disorders.

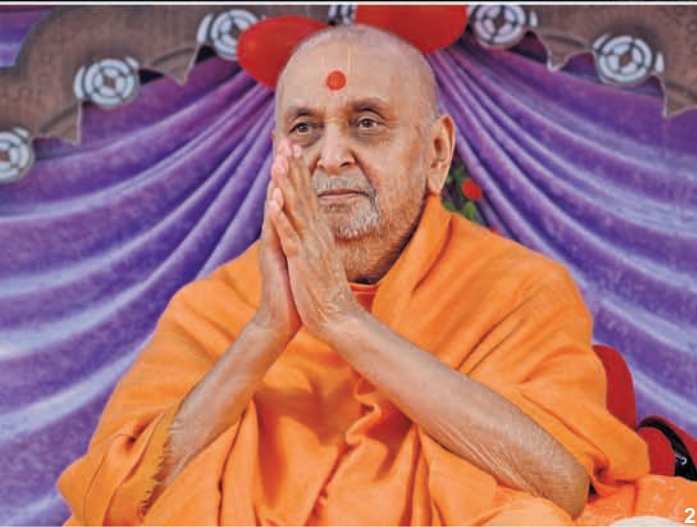
Each patient was also counseled in hygiene awareness and an anti-addiction exhibition was set up to educate villagers on the ill effects of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Young mothers were offered tips on raising healthy children within the

constraints of their limited daily medical and dietary facilities.

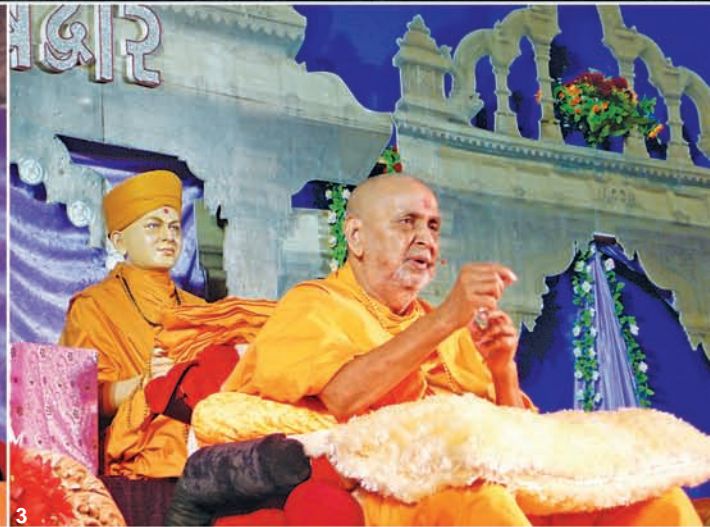
The camp was another step in the ongoing efforts by BAPS to raise health awareness in tribal areas. For the past 25 years, BAPS sadhus and volunteers have supported the medical, educational, and family needs of thousands of local tribal citizens. ◆



1



2 3



4

SWAMISHRI IN MAHELAV December 2009

During Swamishri's 10-day stay in Mahelav, from 19 to 28 December, thousands of devotees took the opportunity of his darshan and blessings in his morning puja and Sunday evening satsang assemblies.

1. BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mahelav, by night.
2. Swamishri bows to all on arriving at the Sunday satsang assembly (20 Dec.).
3. Swamishri blesses the Sunday Bal Din assembly (20 Dec.).
4. On the way to his morning puja, Swamishri is introduced to and blesses the local *karyakars*.



SHILANYAS CEREMONY OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, HIMMATNAGAR, 10 JANUARY 2010

Swamishri presided over the auspicious Vedic Shilanyas Ceremony for the new *shikharbaddh* mandir in Himmatnagar, Gujarat. Over 6,000 devotees participated in the Vedic ceremony, and a total of 25,000 attended the celebration.

1. Shilanyas Ceremony in the vast foundation area of the new mandir. (Inset) Swamishri performs the Vedic rituals.
2. Swamishri performs puja of the main *shila* to be placed in the foundation.
3. Swamishri blesses the assembly of 25,000 devotees from main stage. Senior sadhus are seated on both sides.
4. Swamishri blesses the assembly.