

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September-October 2011
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Ganesh Chaturthi

Jal Jhilani

Vaman Jayanti

Navaratri

Dashera

Sharad Punam

Diwali

Nutan Varsh & Annakut



Hindu Festivals



SWAMISHRI IN SURAT AND BHIMPOR

May-June 2011

1. Over 35,000 devotees in the special Sunday assembly to celebrate Yogi Jayanti, the birthday of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. *Inset: Swamishri greets the devotees (29 May).*
2. Swamishri blesses the Pramukh Varni Din assembly (5 June).
3. Swamishri performs morning puja during his stay in Bhimpore (Dumas) from 7 to 18 June.

Title Cover: Names of deities from top left clockwise:

Shri Swaminarayan, Shri Rama, Shri Vaman, Shri Ganapati and Shri Krishna.



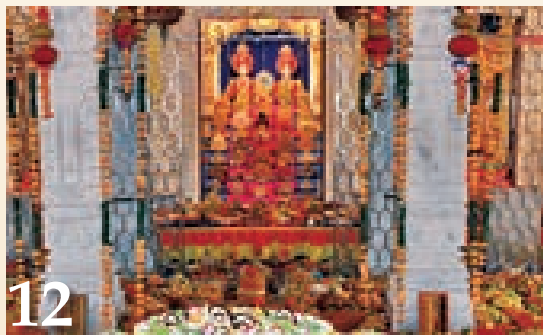
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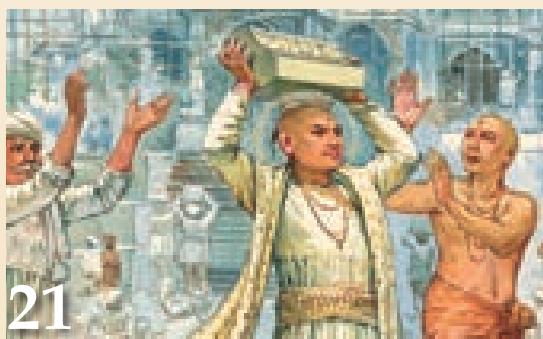


Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

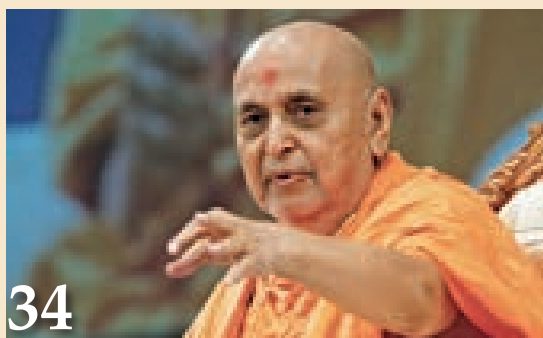
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In April 1978 Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

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FIRST WORD

The adage, “Success is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration” emphasizes the importance of perseverance. This is apparently reflected in the success stories of sportsmen, businessman, professionals and others.

Though perseverance plays a predominant role, a combination of other factors is necessary to achieve success, such as, talent, skill, creativity, right circumstances, motivation and divine grace. Many times hard work may not yield success, because the other factors are deficient. Thus, 1% inspiration is not an insignificant requirement. In fact it plays a major role in success. Without it, success cannot be realized.

Another trite saying about success is, “Success = Effort + Prayer.” One can understand the need for prayer, which seems to be a passive factor, through the idea that there are many aspects that are beyond human control, like the forces of nature and other things. To make them conducive and favourable one has to solicit the help of the Divine. Furthermore, Hindus believe God is the *karma-fal-pradata* – the giver of the fruits of one’s efforts. One’s actions cannot give results by themselves.

Prayer helps one to become good and inspire one to perform good actions.

So, other than the mantra of perseverance it is necessary to cultivate talent, creativity and faith in God.

One cannot



Bhagwan Swaminarayan gives darshan to Bhagatji Maharaj

exclude them in our effort-oriented lives. The more one practices spirituality the more one realizes the importance of the role of divine grace in all our tasks and accomplishments.

Bhagatji Maharaj engaged himself fully in following the commands of his guru, Gunatitanand Swami. He strived 23 hours a day for nearly three-and-a-half years in doing *seva*. He rigorously toiled and engaged his body, mind and heart in the construction work of the *haveli* in Junagadh. Finally, Gunatitanand Swami graced him with the realization of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. On seeing his divine form Bhagatji Maharaj uttered, “O Maharaj, you have truly blessed me. My spiritual endeavours are a trifle before your divine darshan and grace.” In spite of Bhagatji Maharaj’s colossal effort in *seva* he felt he had done nothing to receive the grace of Gunatitanand Swami.

As one scales the summit of spirituality one realizes that instead of effort, divine grace or prayer plays the major role – 99% divine grace and 1% effort. But the divine grace follows only after 1% of solid effort – effort to the tune of 99% percent. ♦



*Shri Hari accedes to the wish of
Vasta Khachar of Kariyani and visits
his village to celebrate and please
him and his family...*

SHRI HARI IN KARIYANI



IN KARIYANI

Shri Hari left Sarangpur and rode to Kariyani on his mare, Manki. He lodged at the home of Vasta Khachar, the village chief. Shri Hari was accompanied by a large entourage of senior sadhus, devotees, and scholars like Pragji Purani and Dinanath Bhatt. Both Pragji Purani and Dinanath Bhatt took turns to read the Purans before Shri Hari in the satsang assembly. They both were aware of Maharaj's divine glory. However, Dinanath could not fully understand and realize his divine form. And because of this shortcoming, he sometimes felt a void within.

Shri Hari often explained in his discourses, "God's form is wholly divine. When he takes a human form his actions are also human in nature. He behaves like a human so that spiritual aspirants can relate to him and develop bonds of love. One can partly understand his divine form by seeing and understanding his life and work. Finally, when one experiences his divinity one perceives him to be the supreme God in human form."

In spite of hearing such talks from Maharaj and reading such passages from the shastras,

Dinanath Bhatt still failed to realize the divine glory of Shri Hari.

SUPREME FAITH PREVAILS ABOVE ALL

Pragji Dave, however, was flexible, simple and trusting. Because of these qualities he had an abiding faith in Maharaj's divine form. But, on the other hand, Pragji was deeply desirous of worldly pleasures. He fervently wished to get married. So, sometimes he would get absorbed in such thoughts. Furthermore, he had an infatuation for tasty food. Because of these two desires he was often restless. Shri Hari sometimes humorously touched upon his weaknesses, but they had become so hardened and tenacious that he remained unaffected. Shri Hari expressed, "Pragji Purani has firm faith in his heart, but he is also a hostage to his weaknesses. In spite of that his faith will overshadow them."

Jadvaji of Surat arrived for Maharaj's darshan. He offered a decorative bed with a mattress, white bedsheet, white pillow and red knee-rests to Maharaj. Shri Hari expressed his joy, "If one wants to rid the desires for fancy things [rajogun] then offer them to God. When

God accepts, these desires are dissolved from the heart of the donor.” Then Maharaj elaborated upon his divine form.

GENUINE FEELINGS WILL BRING MAHARAJ

Jiva Dave of Jhamrala came to Kariyani for Shri Hari’s darshan. He bowed and touched Maharaj’s feet. Shri Hari patted him and asked, “Why hasn’t Gangaram come?”

“Maharaj, I have come to request you to come to Jhamrala, and Gangaram has stayed behind to make preparations for your arrival.”

Shri Hari smiled at Jiva’s love and enquired, “How can Gangaram be sure that I will come there?”

“Maharaj, he was saying that if his love for you was true then you’ll undoubtedly come.”

Shri Hari was pleased at Jiva’s innocence and Gangaram’s devotion. Maharaj declared, “I will come to Jhamrala tomorrow. But after lunch I’ll leave to return to Kariyani. So, remember not to overfeed us like last time or else you’ll have to give us a cart and a pair of bullocks.”

Jiva replied unhesitatingly, “Maharaj, whatever we possess is all because of your blessings. If you take our cart and bullocks we will be honoured and blessed. To serve you in this human birth is an honour and the true fulfillment of life.”

The next day Shri Hari travelled to Jhamrala. There were only three staunch devotees there. Maharaj stayed at Jiva Dave’s house. A large canopy had been rigged in his courtyard. Here, the village folk assembled for Maharaj’s darshan and discourses. After the discourses, lunch was arranged for all. First, Maharaj took his meal and then he came to serve *ladus* to the devotees and sadhus. The villagers were surprised to see Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself serving. They felt only he who is God could have such virtues of service and humility, whereas others merely pretend. Thereafter, Shri Hari sanctified the homes of devotees and well-wishers and returned to Kariyani by evening.

HIRJIBHAI OF KUTCH IN KARIYANI

The next day, Hirjibhai, brother of Sundarji Suthar, arrived from Kutch for Maharaj’s darshan. Shri Hari was pleased to see him and appreciated, “You have taken great pains by coming all the way from Kutch.”

Hirji replied, “Maharaj you have not visited Kutch for many years. So I was recalling your past *lila* in Kutch. And with that I was reminded of your divine form in my mind. Subsequently, my heart yearned for your darshan and I left home to come here and be with you.”

Shri Hari explained, “The further away you are, the greater the yearning for darshan becomes. One’s love also increases. And now that you’ve come, stay as long as possible. I am going to celebrate the festivals of Dashera, Diwali and Annakut here. Be with us till then and you may return to Kutch thereafter.” Hirji was pleased with Maharaj’s words and he stayed for the festivals.

“HOW WILL WE ATTAIN MOKSHA?”

Hirjibhai asked Maharaj, “It is not possible for us to gauge the extent of your deep compassion for us. We remain attached to you because of that. You are all-pervading through your power as the indweller (*antaryami*) in every *atma* and all things. And for the liberation of aspirants you have taken a human form. This is why we are all happy within. But when you leave earth how will we attain *moksha*?”

Hirjibhai had touched upon a relevant question. Maharaj replied, “The way to *moksha* that I have introduced will endure. Only then would my coming here be worthwhile. The means to *moksha* will remain so for eternity. After me a great guru will keep our Satsang alive and vibrant. I have come on earth to reveal the way to Akshardham. But if one does not follow the means to *moksha* then there will be no hope of liberation. Therefore, as long as aspirants follow the moral disciplines prescribed

by me and associate sincerely with the Gunatit Sadhu, then the pathway to liberation shall continue through each successor. But for one who disobeys the disciplines of Satsang then he or she will not attain *moksha* in spite of being in Satsang.” Then Shri Hari paused for a while and added, “Hirjibhai, one who has faith in satsang, remains humble before the Sadhu and understands the glory of all devotees will definitely attain *moksha*. By taking refuge at the feet of a God-realized Sadhu one attains *moksha*. So, there is no need to worry about it.”

MY SKILL HAS BECOME WORTHWHILE

The next day Shriji Maharaj called Hirjibhai and said, “I have had the seal of Nar-Narayan prepared by Narayanji Suthar. I would like you to see it.” Maharaj then asked for the seal.

On seeing the seal Hirjibhai commented, “Maharaj, Narayanji has been able to make the seal by your grace. But he learnt the art of seal-making from his son, Devram, and the latter learnt it from my brother Sundarji. Furthermore, I had brought a decorative saddle for your horse during the *yagna* in Dabhan. In this way our family’s skills have been put to good use for you.” Then Hirjibhai paused momentarily, and then continued, “Maharaj, now I’ve become old and so I’m unable to do heavy labour. So, I earn my living by repairing clocks.”

Shri Hari was pleased at his narration and said, “Hirjibhai, both you and Sundarji have spread Satsang in Kutch. The noble service you have rendered must have filled your inner core with pride and joy. Because of this your material thoughts and desires will get dissolved.”

HOW CAN ONE UNDERSTAND ANIRDESH (AKSHARDHAM)?

Shri Hari celebrated Sharad Purnima in Kariyani. Whenever he celebrated it his face beamed with ineffable joy. No one had till then ever asked him about why he was so joyful on

that day. Till then Shri Hari had never revealed the reason for his joy. Maharaj mused about it and felt when an opportune time arrived the devotees would understand the spirit of Sharad Punam.

On seeing Maharaj absorbed in thought, Muktanand Swami enquired, “Maharaj, what are you pondering about?”

“About Anirdesh,” Shri Hari replied briefly.

Muktanand Swami failed to understand, so he asked what he meant.

Maharaj explained, “How can one understand about that which is infinite!”

Before Muktanand Swami could enquire further a Kathi devotee came and placed a basketful of ripe mangoes before Maharaj. Shri Hari was surprised to see mangoes during the off season. The devotee replied, “I have a mango tree at home that bears fruit all through the year. And the mangoes are as sweet as honey.”

FIVE MANGOES AND A GOLD CHAIN

Shri Hari took two to three mangoes from the basket and closely examined them. He commented, “The mangoes are very good.” At that time Jaita Khachar, the young son of Vasta Khachar, came to Maharaj. On seeing the mangoes he sat down expectantly. Maharaj asked him, “Do you want the mangoes?” The child nodded his head. Then Shri Hari told him, “Give me the gold chain round your neck.” Jaita instantly took it off and gave it to Maharaj. Shri Hari took the chain and gave him five mangoes in exchange. The child smiled with glee and got up to leave when Maharaj made him sit beside him.

Shri Hari then addressed the assembly of sadhus and devotees before him, “Does Jaita understand the value of his gold chain? He gave it up for only five mangoes, but he does not know the real amount he could get in exchange for it. He is simply ignorant about the value of his gold

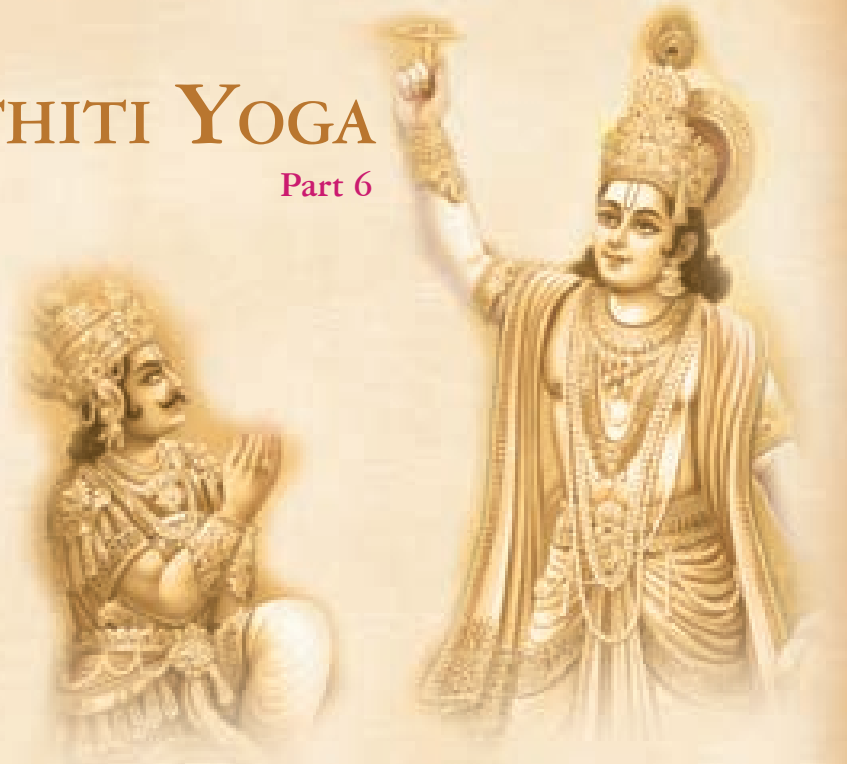
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ADHYĀY 2

BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA

Part 6

Recap: Shri Krishna spoke to Arjuna about the transiency of the world, about the difference between the ātmā and the body, and about the true form of the ātmā. This knowledge is what is meant by sāṅkhya jñān. Now let us see what happens thereafter...



A PLEDGE TO TEACH YOGA

Up till now, Shri Krishna had explained *sāṅkhya jñān*. Thereafter, explaining a very important principle, he says, “एषा तेऽभिहिता सङ्ख्ये बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु । बुद्ध्या युक्तो यया पार्थ कर्मबन्धं प्रहास्यसि ॥” – ‘*Eshā te’bhihitā sāṅkhye buddhiryoge tvimām shrunu, buddhyā yukto yayā Pārtha karmabandham prahāsyasi.*’ – ‘O Parth, I have explained *sāṅkhya jñān*, I will now explain the knowledge of yoga. Listen carefully. By this knowledge you will be freed of all bonds’ (Gitā 2.39).

This is a pledge to teach yoga. Bhagwan himself has made this pledge. This is the source of the divine river of yoga. It is the first time that the word ‘yoga’ has been used in the Gitā. This divine river will henceforth continuously flow all the way to the last *shloka* of the entire Gita where we find the words ‘यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णः’ – ‘*Yatra Yogeshvaraha Krishnaha*’ (Gitā 18.78).

Thus, having explained *sāṅkhya jñān* to Arjuna, Shri Krishna says that he is concluding the topic and beginning another. However, hereafter, right till the end of the Gitā, Shri Krishna does not say, ‘I have finished talking about yoga and now I will talk to you about a third topic.’ Yoga continues to remain the main subject right to the end. Thus we can confidently state that ‘yoga’ is the major subject of the Gitā.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD ‘YOGA’

The word ‘yoga’ is derived from the verb root *yuj*. Sanskrit grammar shows various meanings of the root *yuj*: relation, attainment or union (युजिर् योगे – *yujir yoge*); a state of trance or deep meditation (युज् समाधौ – *yuj samādhe*); miraculous powers (युज् ऐश्वर्ये – *yuj aishwarye*).

The Bhagavad Gitā illustrates all these meanings of yoga. The interesting thing is that the Bhagavad Gitā has directed all these meanings

to Paramātmā, and thus breathed life into them. Moreover, it has, with great ease, explicitly and undoubtedly proclaimed that Paramātmā means manifest Paramātmā, and that conviction in the form of manifest Paramātmā is yoga.

The system of philosophy propagated by Maharshi Patanjali is also focused on yoga. The term *ashtāṅg yoga* is widely used. It is this that Patanjali has described in detail, and thus his school of thought became known as Yogadarshan. He commences with the words ‘अथ योगानुशासनम्’ – ‘*Atha yogānushāsanam*’ – ‘Hereforth commences an explanation of yoga’ (Yogasutra 1.1). Thereafter, he immediately defines the word ‘yoga’. ‘योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः’ – ‘*Yogashchittavruttnirodhaha*’ – ‘Yoga means to restrain the mind’ (Yogasutra 1.2). The aim is to withdraw the mind from wandering to the sensory pleasures. As he continues, he calls this yoga *samādhi*. The Bhagavad Gitā links this *samādhi* yoga with the manifest form of Paramātmā. When one focuses completely on the manifest form of Paramātmā, one has accomplished *samādhi*. Such a *samādhinishth* person is called a yogi. This point has been reiterated by Shri Krishna repeatedly throughout the Gitā.

BEING SOLELY DEVOTED TO THE MANIFEST FORM OF PARAMĀTMĀ IS YOGA

Let us look at an example from the sixth *adhyāy*. A clear description of yoga is given in this *adhyāy*, revealing the qualities of a true *samādhinishth* yogi. Shri Krishna says, ‘सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि । ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्र समदर्शनः ॥’ – ‘*Sarvabhootasthamātmānam sarvabhootāni chātmani, eekshate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarshanaha.*’ – ‘One who can see Paramātmā in all living things, one who experiences that everything resides in Paramātmā, one who can see Paramātmā equally in everything is one with yoga’ (Gitā 6.29). This is a well accepted basic definition of yoga. The

Gitā then expands this definition to include conviction in manifest Paramātmā, ‘स योगी मयि वर्तते’ – ‘*Sa yogee mayi vartate*’ – ‘Such a yogi is ever engrossed in me’ (Gitā 6.31). Constantly remembering manifest Paramātmā is the highest level of *samādhi*.

This is, in fact, the very aim of the endeavour of *ashtāṅg yoga*. However, often, the means become the goal and the ultimate goal is forgotten. The endeavour of yoga (yoga sadhana) is an example of this. Many do these endeavours with the aim of experiencing *samādhi*, but they forget that true *samādhi* is to be completely engrossed in Paramātmā. Such endeavours are fruitless. They are a waste of time and energy. Krishna educates Arjuna to prevent him making such a mistake.

Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan has also explained true yoga sadhana in the same manner. He says, ‘A devotee whose *chitt’s vrutti* becomes focused on the form of God masters *ashtāṅg-yoga* without even attempting to master it’ (Vachanamrut, Gadhadā I 25).

THE SCARCITY OF YOGA OF MANIFEST PARAMĀTMĀ

The secret of yoga is also revealed at the start of the seventh *adhyāy*. Shri Krishna says, ‘मय्यासक्तमनाः पार्थ योगं युज्जन् मदाश्रयः । असंशयं समग्रं मां यथा ज्ञास्यसि तच्छृणु’ – ‘*Mayyāsaktamanāhā Pārtha yogam yunjan madāshrayaha, asanshayam samagram mām yathā gnāsyasi tachchhrunu.*’ – ‘O Parth, listen to how you, who have your mind attached to me and have taken my shelter, will know me fully and explicitly by doing yoga sadhana’ (Gita 7.1). The message of this *shloka* is that to focus one’s mind completely on manifest Paramātmā and to take his shelter is yoga sadhana; and to have undoubted conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā is its highest possible degree. However, not many reach this climax. Shri Krishna says, ‘मनुष्याणां सहस्रेषु कश्चिद् यतति सिद्धये । यततामपि सिद्धानां कश्चिन्मां वेत्ति तत्त्वतः ॥’ – ‘*Manushyānām*

sahasreshu kashchid yatati siddhaye, yatatāmapī siddhānām kashchinmām vetti tattvataha. – ‘O Parth, only one or so in thousands attempt to attain this state, and of those who attempt only a few truly know me’ (Gitā 7.3).

This is indeed very true. It is not easy to do yoga sadhana, and to do those endeavours understanding Paramātmā to be the ultimate goal is even harder. Further, to recognize the manifest form of Paramātmā and understand him to be the ultimate goal of yoga is indeed very hard to accept. For example, Shri Krishna was an incarnation (avatar) of Bhagwan. Nevertheless, many people of the time believed him to be a mere shepherd’s boy. He had killed the demon named Madhu; this is a fact, and hence he is also known by the name Madhusudan. Yet, many did not understand his abilities and would say that this Krishna has never killed a demon named Madhu, but is called Madhusudan since he has emptied many honeycombs (*madhu* means honey). Thus, even some of the most powerful and influential people of the time failed to recognize him. Thus he says, ‘*Yatatāmapī siddhānām kashchinmām vetti tattvataha*’ – ‘Only a few truly know me’ (Gitā 7.3).

YOGA – THE GREATEST SECRET

For this reason, the fourth *adhyāy* presents this yoga as a close secret. Shri Krishna says, ‘इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवान् अहमव्ययम्’ – ‘*Imam vivasvate yogam proktavān ahamavyayam*’ – ‘O Arjuna, I explained this everlasting yoga to Vivasvān, i.e., the Sun’ (Gitā 4.1). Thereafter, it had been spread in the world, but as time went on it gradually diminished and was forgotten. Therefore, ‘स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः पुरातनः।’ – ‘*Sa evāyam mayā tēdya yogaha proktaha purātanaha*’ – ‘I have explained and continue to explain that same ancient secret of yoga to you today’ (Gitā 4.3). ‘भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतद् उत्तमम्॥’ – ‘*Bhaktosi me sakhā cheti rahasyam hyetad uttamam.*’ – ‘You are my devotee and dear friend, therefore I have

revealed this secret of yoga, the greatest secret, to you’ (Gitā 4.3).

Truly, conviction in the form of Paramātmā is a personal matter. No one can understand it or believe it in place of another. It can be sometimes taken incorrectly and have an opposite effect. But Arjuna’s heart was that of a devotee. He had great affection for Shri Krishna. This affection was expressed with friendship. Moreover, this friendship was not like that of an ordinary person. It was saturated with a feeling of divinity. This is why Shri Krishna did not hesitate to reveal this personal secret to him. ‘अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन्’ – ‘*Ajopi sannavyayātmā bhootānāmeeshvaropi san*’ – ‘O Parth! I am unborn, i.e., I am not born by fate. I am imperishable. I am the controller of all things.’

A TRUE YOGI IS A TRUE UPĀSAK

In the ninth *adhyāy* of the Gitā, an exact description of yoga sadhana is given. Shri Krishna says, ‘सततं कीर्तयन्तो मां यतन्तश्च दृढव्रताः। नमस्यन्तश्च मां भक्ता नित्ययुक्ता उपासते॥’ – ‘*Satatam kirtayanto mām yatantashcha drudhavratahā, namasyantashcha mām bhaktā nityayuktā upāsate.*’ – ‘Those devotees who are ever engrossed in yoga continuously sing my virtues, they continually strive to attain me, they are firm in their vows and always humble. Whilst doing all of this, they do my *upāsana*’ (Gitā 9.15).

Thus, a true yogi is a true devotee and a true *upāsak*.

The same message resonates in the eighth *adhyāy*. Shri Krishna says, ‘अनन्यचेताः सततं यो मां स्मरति नित्यशः। तस्याहं सुलभः पार्थ नित्ययुक्तस्य योगिनः॥’ – ‘*Ananyachetāhā satatam yo mām smarati nityashaha, tasyāham sulabhaha Pārtha nityayuktasya yoginaha*’ (Gitā 8.14).

To accomplish yoga one has to learn to focus one’s mind on Paramātmā. This *shloka* promises that one will easily attain the *sākshātkār* (realization) of Paramātmā by simply doing yoga in this manner of focusing and always remembering him.

Further, in the twelfth *adhyāy*, the goal of the greatest yogi is described, ‘मय्यावेश्य मनो ये मां नित्ययुक्ता उपासते । श्रद्धया परयोपेतास्ते मे युक्ततमा मताः ॥’ – ‘*Mayyāveshya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate, shraddhayā parayopetāste me yuktatamā matāhā.*’ – ‘The yogi who engulfs his mind in me and does my *upāsana* with great faith is, according to me, the greatest yogi’ (Gitā 12.2).

WHERE THERE IS GOD OF YOGA, THERE IS EVERYTHING

Let us take a look at the words with which Sanjaya concludes the Gitā. Sanjaya says, ‘व्यासप्रसादाच्छ्रुतवान् एतद् गुह्यमहं परम् । योगं योगेश्वरात् कृष्णात् साक्षात् कथयतः स्वयम् ॥’ – ‘*Vyāsaprasādāchchhrutavān etad guhyamaham param, yogam yogeshvarāt Krishnāt sākshāt kathayataha svayam.*’ – ‘Having attained divine eyes with the grace of Shri Vyās, I have heard the great secret of yoga from the God of yoga, Shri Krishna, himself’ (Gitā 18.75). Therefore I say, ‘यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः । तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥’ – ‘*Yatra Yogeshvaraha Krishno yatra Pārtho dhanurdharaha, tatra shreervijayo bhootirdhruvā neetirmatirmama.*’ – ‘I believe that wherever there is the God of yoga, Krishna, and wherever there is the great archer, Arjuna, there is everything – grace, victory, prosperity and stable morality’ (Gitā 18.18).

Thus, the precepts of yoga, which commence

(contd. from p. 7)

chain. Similarly, till one does not understand the glory of God and his Sadhu one fails to realize their significance in spite of having their association. When one realizes their spiritual glory one also realizes their relevance. As Jaita grows up he will come to value his chain. Then will he give up his chain for five mangoes!” The devotees understood Shri Hari’s words.

Finally, Shriji Maharaj revealed a profound message from an apparently ordinary incident, “When one truly realizes the knowledge and greatness of God and his Sadhu then only will one realize the worldly pleasures to be fickle and

with the words ‘*Buddhiryoge tvimām shrunu*’ – ‘O Parth, listen to the precepts on yoga’ in the forty-ninth *shloka* of the second *adhyāy*, carry on continuously to the last *shloka* of the Gitā, ‘*Yatra Yogeshvaraha Krishnaha*’ (Gitā 18.78). From the beginning to the end, yoga is clarified throughout.

CONCLUSION

Pondering over the above sentences of the Gitā, it becomes clear that the yoga of the Gitā is completely based on conviction in Paramātmā. It is respected as being synonymous to conviction in Paramātmā and is invigorated by the practice of *upāsana* to Paramātmā. Yoga without conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā is not yoga at all. Yoga sadhana without the *upāsana* of manifest Paramātmā is not yoga sadhana at all. For this very reason, the closing statement of every *adhyāy* features the word ‘योगशास्त्रे’ – ‘*yogashāstre*’, to reinforce the message that the Gitā is a shastra which teaches the highest form of yoga.

Indeed, the Bhagavad Gitā has left no stone unturned in revealing this secret of yoga. There is nothing in it that could leave room for confusion.

To summarize its profound message, it can be said that the yoga of the Gita is yoga of the manifest form of Paramātmā. ♦

worthless. Subsequently, one’s mind will never be enticed by them.”

Shri Hari’s discourses resonated with a common note that one should revert one’s mental inclinations from the world and anchor them to God. After this accomplishment one’s spiritual endeavours come to an end, and one can be said to have attained the spiritually realized state. Many simple-minded devotees of Kathaiwad had attained this exulted state. And so Maharaj was pleased with them. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, New Delhi



Annakut on New Year's Day at
BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, New Delhi

Hindu Festivals

(September-October 2011)



From this issue onwards we shall overview Hindu festivals as they occur during the two months of every issue. For details, readers are requested to refer to 'Hindu Festivals (origin, sentiments & rituals)' by Sadhu Mukundcharandas, Swaminarayan Aksharpath, 2010, 2nd edition.

SEPTEMBER 1: GANESH CHATURTHI (BHADARVA SUD 4)

This celebrates the birth of Ganesh (Ganapati), the deity of auspiciousness. With intense devotion and fervour, Hindus worldwide consecrate clay *murtis* of Ganesh in home shrines and streets and perform puja, *arti* and offer *modak* (sweet balls) twice daily. This continues either until Jal Jhilani Ekadashi or *sud* 14 – Anand Chaturdashi, when the *prana* is revoked from the *murti* and the *murti* is then immersed in a nearby water body.



Ganesh visarjan on Chaupati Beach, Mumbai

The foremost sentiment underlying this *utsav* is that devotees pray to Ganesh to remove all obstacles from their lives during the next year:

*Vakratunda mahākāya suryakoti samaprabha,
Nirvighnam kuru me deva sarvakāryeshu
sarvadā.*

“O Ganesh, with a large body, curved trunk, the brilliance of a million suns, forever make all my work free of obstacles.”

SEPTEMBER 8:

JAL JHILANI EKADASHI (BHADARVA SUD 11)

Also known as Parshva Parivartini Ekadashi, on this day Bhagwan Narayan turned sideways – Parshva Parivartan – during his rest of four months of the monsoon in Bali Raja’s kingdom in Satal – one of the seven nether regions below Earth.

On this day, Shri Krishna also took the *gopis* on a boat ride on the River Yamuna. As ‘fare’ for the ride, he requested butter (*makhan*) from them. Therefore, it is a tradition to donate butter on this day.

Devotees observe a waterless fast. They perform the final puja of Ganeshji. After offering *naivedya* (food) of laddus, along with the *utsav-vigrah* deity, he is taken on a boat ride five times, a ritual known as *nauka* or *jal vihar*. During this ritual, devotees sing various bhajans, expressing

their *sharanagati* – surrender to Paramatma and the guru, for deliverance across the ocean of samsara. After the *prana* is revoked, Ganeshji’s *murti* is immersed in a river or ocean. This is celebrated with great fervour in Maharashtra.

SEPTEMBER 9:

VAMAN JAYANTI (BHADARVA SUD 12)

Bhagwan Vaman incarnated on this day, as a child *brahmachari*, in today’s Vanthali (formerly Vamansthali), near Junagadh. He requested Bali Raja for three strides of land. With two steps Vamanji covered the whole world and other *lokas* – regions. Then he asked Bali where he should place his third step. Bali offered his head. This pleased Vamanji, who then granted him a boon to remain at his doorstep in Satal.

Devotees fast for half a day and perform *shraddh* rites for *devas* and *pitris* – forefathers.

SEPTEMBER 28 TO OCTOBER 5:

NAVARATRI (ASO SUD 1 TO 9)

Also known as Norta, Hindus celebrate this festival of the victory of Paramatma’s Shakti Parvati over the demon Mahish. Hence Parvati is also known as Mahishasurmardini. Shakti is known by many names in different regions of India: Amba, Ambika, Bhavani, Chamunda and Durga. Women in Gujarat observe fasting to please Shakti – Mataji. At night, after performing puja and *arti* of Mataji, they dance the traditional *garba* and *dandia-ras*. To those who offer pure devotion, the goddess blesses them with *shakti* – power to eradicate their *vasana* – base instincts.

In north India, Hindus celebrate Navaratri by enacting the Ramalila on stage. They also hold the Ramacharitmanas Navahan *parayan*. This is a daily discourse on Tulsidas’s Ramayan. Every family recites the Ramacharitmanas from about 5.00 to 8.30 a.m. In Delhi, a *purnahuti yagna* by 108 families is held after completion of the *parayan*.

OCTOBER 6:

DASHERA (ASO SUD 10)

Hindus celebrate this day of the victory of Shri Rama over Ravana – of good over evil. Hence it is also known as Vijaya Dashmi. *Vijaya* means victory. Devotees burn effigies of Ravana, together with those of his son, Meghnath, and brother, Kumbhakarna.

In Maharashtra, people traditionally offer a *sonu* leaf of the Apta tree to each other for auspiciousness and eat *puran poli* – sweet stuffed *roti*. Students perform puja of Saraswati – the goddess of learning, art and music. Craftsmen perform puja of their tools. On this day, Hindus do not need to check the *panchang* for an auspicious *muhurt* (period). The whole day is considered *shubh* – auspicious. So they perform *shubh* endeavours such as inauguration of a business, *vastu* puja of a new home, *havan* and buy new home appliances or vehicles.

Gujaratis traditionally offer *jalebi* and *fafda* to Paramatma and have this *prasadam*.

OCTOBER 11:

SHARAD PUNAM (ASO SUD 15)

On this night, the full moon's luminescence is the brightest. On this night Shri Krishna played the *maha-ras* – a traditional folk dance – with the *gopis*, his most faithful devotees. Since the *gopis* offered sublime devotion with *atmanishtha* by transcending *dehabhav* – body consciousness, he showered them with divine bliss. Hence their devotion is glorified as the ideal form of *premlakshana* bhakti in the Narad Bhakti Sutras.

In the major mandirs in Vrindavan, Mathura and Gokul, the deities are adorned with rich garments. A forest type of ambience is created in these mandirs. Devotees play *ras* until midnight. Khir or *payasam* – a preparation of sweet milk and parched rice is offered to Bhagwan. This is then distributed to devotees.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Akshar-



Enacting Ramalila during Navaratri, Delhi

brahman Gunatitanand Swami incarnated on this day in Bhadra, Saurashtra, in 1785. He is the divine abode, Akshardham, of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and is his dearest devotee. The shastras of Sanatan Dharma greatly extol the glory of Aksharbrahman. The aspirant for *moksha* needs to become like Akshar to worship Parabrahman, and to realize him.

On this day, Bhagwan Swaminarayan also played the *maha-ras* with his *paramhansas* on two occasions, in Panchala and Sarangpur. In the latter, he touched Gunatitanand Swami's chest with a stick and proclaimed, "He is my Akshardham."

DIWALI PARVA

The Diwali Parva – the period includes celebration of Vagh Baras, Dhan Teras, Kali Chaudash, Diwali, Nutan Varsh (New Year's Day) and Annakut, Bhai Bij, and Labh Pancham.

OCTOBER 23:

VAGH BARAS (ASO SUD 12)

On this day, also known as Govatsa Dwadashi, a milch cow and its calf are offered puja. They are then fed *dalvada* – fried balls of lentils.

OCTOBER 24:

DHAN TERAS (ASO VAD 13)

Urban people perform puja of *dhan* – wealth



Grand Chopda Pujan at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal in the form of gold ornaments and currency. This is also known as Lakshmi Pujan. Thereby Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is offered veneration. The underlying sentiments are of purification of one's wealth, for prosperity in the coming year and to be granted Lakshmi's blessings so that one may use one's wealth for pious and noble purposes.

OCTOBER 25:

KALI CHAUDASH (ASO VAD 14)

Since Shri Krishna vanquished Narkasur on this day, it is also known as Narakchaturdashi. Devotees perform puja of Hanumanji to eradicate evil and inauspiciousness. He is offered *dalvada* – fried lentil balls.

OCTOBER 26:

DIWALI (ASO VAD 15)

This is the final day of the year in northern India. On this day Hindus celebrate several events:

Shri Rama returned to Ayodhya after his victory over Ravana in Lanka.

Shri Krishna vanquished Narkasur, releasing people from misery.

Pruthu Raja extracted goodness from the earth.

During Samudra Manthan, Lakshmi emerged from the ocean.

The Pandavas returned from their forest exile.

In essence people light *diyas* on this day to express their joy on being released from suffering inflicted by evil elements. Therefore this day is also known as Deepotsavi.

Hindus celebrate by lighting *diyas* in their homes and igniting firecrackers. They visit mandirs and pray to Paramatma for inner enlightenment. People forgive and forget any differences during the past year and resolve to live in harmony and unity in society.

In the evening, people perform Sharda Pujan, also known as Chopda Pujan, in which books, ledgers and now even laptops are worshipped.

OCTOBER 27:

NUTAN VARSH (NEW YEAR'S DAY) & ANNAKUT (KARTIK SUD 1)

On New Year's Day, Hindus visit mandirs for Paramatma's darshan, praying for an auspicious and prosperous year. They also offer thousands of food dishes to thank him, a festival known as Annakut. This literally means 'a mountain of food'. In northern India, *kut* also means 'pounded grain'. Therefore, *anna* – food made from this is called *annakut*.

The sweet and savoury dishes of *annakut* are offered to devotees as *prasadam*. In the Hindu diaspora, some of the greatest Annakut offerings can be seen in the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs in the UK and USA.

On this day, Hindus visit each other's homes, offer sweets and greet each other by saying '*Nava Varsha ka abhinandan*' – 'May the New Year be auspicious.'

OCTOBER 28:

BHAI BIJ (KARTIK SUD 2)

This is also known as Bhayya Duj in Uttar Pradesh, Bhau-bij in Maharashtra, Bhai-phota in Bengal and Bhai-teeka in Nepal.

(contd. on p. 29)

GUNATITANAND SWAMI

An Inspirer of Spiritual Knowledge

“If you want to learn worldly wisdom then go to Puja Sheth (of Sundariyana). But if you want to attain both worldly wisdom and *moksha*, then go to Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh.” This was the final advice given by Gopalanand Swami to Shivrul Sheth, Vaghji Amin, Manji Thakkar, Harikrishna Bhatt, Jeebhai Shelat, Jaso Gor and other leading disciples before he passed away to Akshardham.

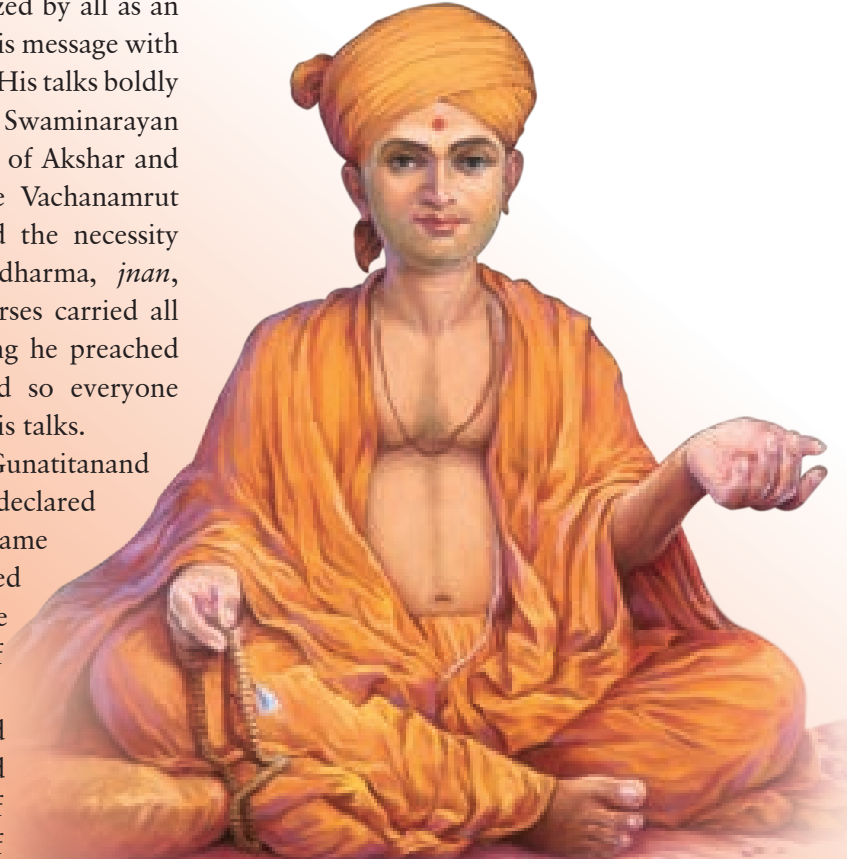
Gunatitanand Swami was respected in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya for his inspiring and forthright talks. He was recognized by all as an excellent orator who presented his message with apt anecdotes and perfect clarity. His talks boldly described the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as supreme God, the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam as revealed in the Vachanamrut by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the necessity of perfecting the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. His discourses carried all the more impact since everything he preached was exemplified in his life and so everyone appreciated the genuineness of his talks.

Such was the impact of Gunatitanand Swami's talks that Shuk Muni declared in an assembly at Surat, “The same inspiration that used to be attained by Maharaj's discourses can be attained today from the talks of Gunatitanand Swami.”

Thus, even scholarly and senior *paramhansas*, who had witnessed the development of the Sampradaya since the time of

Shriji Maharaj, praised Gunatitanand Swami's candid and enlightening discourses. Whenever, Nityanand Swami visited Junagadh, he commented, “Swami's talks are very spirited. I have heard many leading scholars but have never heard such lucid explanations of Maharaj's true form, dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. He is certainly the manifest form of Gunatit – just as Maharaj had described.”

Gunatitanand Swami's relentless preaching received added momentum in VS 1871 (1814 CE). During an assembly in Gadhada, Gunatitanand



Swami asked Shriji Maharaj, “Which of these four endeavours is the best – to engage in continuous meditation, to behave as *atmarup*, to serve the ill or to deliver discourses?”

Maharaj advised, “The first three endeavours are for a person’s own *moksha*. However, engaging in spiritual discourses liberates both the speaker and listener.”

With this in mind, when Gunatitanand Swami was appointed *mahant* of Junagadh Mandir, he arranged a schedule of 24-hour non-stop discourses. Whenever he was in Junagadh, he too, despite his administrative and other duties, spent much time daily discoursing.

To reach out to the people, Gunatitanand Swami used Junagadh as his hub and toured hundreds of surrounding villages. In this way he disseminated the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the hearts of thousands of devotees to such an extent that they were willing to sacrifice everything for him, as the following incident reveals.

Once, while Gunatitanand Swami and Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj were travelling from Vanthali to Manavadar, one of the bullocks pulling the cart became disabled. The Acharya’s *parshads* were instructed by Gunatitanand Swami to go to nearby Satalpur village and ask for a replacement in his name. They went, but instead of using Swami’s name, they used Raghuvirji Maharaj’s name. The villagers did not respond, so the *parshads* returned empty-handed. Swami sent them back again. This time, they gave Swami’s name and immediately the villagers themselves came to Swami to donate a good, healthy bullock to him. Witnessing all this, Raghuvirji Maharaj asked, “If non-*satsangis* have this much respect for you, what will your *satsangis* not do for you?” Swami replied, “The well of Junagadh can be filled with the heads of the devotees of Sorath, such is their understanding.” This was the depth of spiritual knowledge and spirit of sacrifice imbibed

by these devotees through the inspiration of Gunatitanand Swami.

Gunatitanand Swami did not confine his spiritual travels and teachings to just the Sorath region, but every year he visited Vartal for the annual spiritual camps. Even on route to and from Vartal, he spent time in the villages preaching to the devotees. There, he spent all his time either discoursing in the assembly or counselling devotees individually or in small groups.

Through his discourses Gunatitanand Swami ensured that his devotees were not distracted from their spiritual goal. Whenever necessary he would draw attention to possible hindrances and alert the devotees so that they did not deviate from their focus.

Shivlal Sheth was a wealthy and respected businessman in Botad whose life was deeply spiritual. He frequently visited Junagadh to stay in the company of Gunatitanand Swami and listen to his discourses. During one such stay, after the morning discourses, Shivlal Sheth visited the market and traded some gold, earning a handsome ₹150 profit. With this he sponsored a meal at the mandir. However, when he reported this to Gunatitanand Swami, the latter questioned, “Do you ever think of trading millions of tonnes of husk?” Shivlal Sheth replied, “No, Swami.” Then Swami said, “To the holy sadhu, except the *murti* of Maharaj, everything upto Prakruti Purush is dirt; there is no value in it. So by forsaking the darshan and talks of the sadhu, what have you earned?”

Once, in Junagadh, Abhaysinh, the Darbar of Lodhika, was seated in meditation. Gunatitanand Swami perceived his thoughts and commented, “Bapu! You won’t be able to accomplish the work in Lodhika sitting here. Lodhika is 75 km from here and when you go there the work can be done. So while seated here what is it that distracts you from Maharaj?”

While the work for the new *dharmashala*

in Junagadh was in progress, Jaga Bhakta and others were preparing the stones to be used in the construction. Gunatitanand Swami came to where they were working and asked Jaga Bhakta, “You are preparing stones, but do you remember the *murti* of God?”

“No Swami,” he replied.

“That is not right. Worship while you work,” commented Swami.

“I am not able to do that,” admitted Jaga Bhakta.

So Swami explained, “At first you did not know how to prepare these stones. But through practice you have learnt. Similarly, if you practice remembering God while you work, you will be able to master it.”

Gunatitanand Swami often said that his talks were like powerful arrows and therefore they were capable of penetrating into the hearts of even the most wicked of people.

Notorious bandits, Munja Suru of Lilakha and Valera Varu of Babariyawad, were transformed by their association with Gunatitanand Swami and they ceased to be a menace to society.

Ramo Hati of Maliya was set in his immoral ways. But Gunatitanand Swami visited his village and changed him. Swami asked, “Rama Hati! Would a lion eat laddus?”

“No, that is not its food,” replied Ramo.

So then Swami reasoned, “If an animal does not eat man’s food, then what do you think of man eating an animal’s food? Is eating and drinking such things the quality of a man?”

The logic of Swami’s argument convinced Ramo Hati, who immediately gave up his immoral habits of eating meat and drinking alcohol.

Many devotees, through Swami’s guidance, attained great spiritual heights and conquered their base natures, such as, ego, anger, jealousy, lust, etc.

Even Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj realized the true greatness of Gunatitanand Swami.

Shedding the ego of his status, the Acharya stayed with Gunatitanand Swami at Junagadh and by listening to his discourses attained the state of *brahmarup*.

Gunatitanand Swami was extremely particular in ensuring that all who came to Junagadh left with greater spiritual awareness.

Once Kashidas had gone to Junagadh. He had originally intended to stay one month, but stayed for two. Before he left, Gunatitanand Swami gave him the essence of the understanding he should take with him. Swami said, “There are four talks which are a lifeline for the *jiva*. First, the supreme *upasana* of Shriji Maharaj; second, *agna*; third, to attach one’s *jiva* with the Ekantik Sadhu; and fourth, to maintain friendship with the devoted.”

Such clearcut guidance was a hallmark of Gunatitanand Swami’s way of inspiring and enlightening his devotees.

Through his discourses, Gunatitanand Swami was able to bring peace to many in times of stressful situations.

Gunatitanand Swami was staying in Gondal mandir. The Darbar of Gondal was in a state of deep depression and grief due to the passing away of his young baby son. Gunatitanand Swami was invited to the *darbar*. There, Swami spoke to the Darbar in such a clear and caring manner that the Darbar felt real peace and was dissolved of all his grief.

Even to the experienced and senior *paramhansas* Gunatitanand Swami’s talks often shed light on matters which they had not fully understood.

Once in Vartal, Gunatitanand Swami discoursed on Vachanamrut Gadhada II 9 and explained the glory of Shriji Maharaj as supreme God. Hearing this explanation, Shuk Muni revealed, “Swami! Maharaj addressed this Vachanamrut to me and so I am the one who wrote it. But only today have I understood its true meaning.”

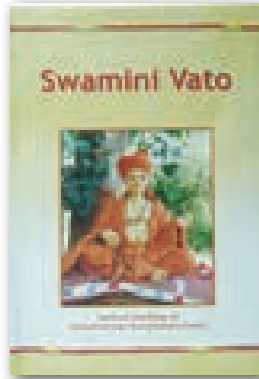
Gunatitanand Swami arrived in Aniyali where Bhai Atmanand Swami was residing. He was 116 years old and wondered why Maharaj had not yet taken him to Akshardham. Since ill health prevented him from travelling to Junagadh, Atmanand Swami requested Gunatitanand Swami to talk. Gunatitanand Swami explained the true form and supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj and with this removed the misconceptions Atmanand Swami had in his mind. He now realized that Shriji Maharaj was supreme God. A short while later, Atmanand Swami passed away to Akshardham.

Once, in Sarangpur, Pragji Bhakta was helping Gunatitanand Swami wash his hands at Narayan Kund. Gunatitanand Swami said, “I have a lot of *gnan* and wish to impart it to someone who deserves it.” Pragji Bhakta said, “Swami, give me that knowledge. I will spread it.” Gunatitanand Swami replied, “This knowledge is not attained so easily. You can get it if you renounce the world, dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to me and shatter the fetters of body and senses.” Pragji Bhakta resolved to become worthy of this highest spiritual knowledge.

Pragji Bhakta embarked on attaining this knowledge and served day and night in accordance to the wishes of Gunatitanand Swami. Together with physical service of all varieties, Pragji Bhakta fasted for two days at a time and ate only once on the third day.

In this way, Pragji Bhakta attained oneness with Gunatitanand Swami and understood his every wish. Whatever Gunatitanand Swami instructed, Pragji Bhakta would fulfil.

With such single-minded effort, Pragji Bhakta won the blessings of Gunatitanand Swami and attained the highest spiritual knowledge. Gunatitanand Swami was so pleased with Pragji Bhakta that he declared, “I have given the keys of Akshardham to Pragji.”



Gunatitanand Swami's fluent and insightful discourses appealed to all – rich or poor, young or old, sadhu or householder. There was always something of interest and value to listeners of all stages of spiritual development.

Gunatitanand Swami's talks were very direct. He elaborated upon many of his principles by the use of appropriate anecdotes and examples

based on his experiences and observation of human psyche. Thus, he was able to convey even the most complicated doctrines to even simple-minded, illiterate villagers.

The knowledge they gained did not just remain stored as theoretical concepts in their brains, but they were inspired to apply the principles in their daily lives and experience the true bliss of God.

In his 82 years on this earth, Gunatitanand Swami left a legacy that has been preserved upto this day. Some of his talks were compiled by his sadhus and devotees into the Swamini Vato shastra. His discourses are so universal that even today, whichever country one lives in or whatever one's background and circumstances, they serve as a guiding light to all genuine spiritual seekers. Many have experienced that by reading even a page of the Swamini Vato, there is always some guidance that provides relief and mental calmness from the problems and frustrations of daily life.

The reason they have such a powerful effect is because Gunatitanand Swami spoke with a genuine desire to uplift everyone spiritually. And as he is the incarnation of Aksharbrahman, he is nearest and dearest to Purushottam, Shriji Maharaj, and so serves as a bridge between man and God. So, by using this bridge with a pure heart and a genuine desire one can attain God and experience true, divine bliss. ♦



SEVA

Seva or service rendered with humility, selflessness and desire to please God has far-reaching benefits and joy...

The Italian composer and violin virtuoso Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840 CE), willed his enchanted violin to Genoa, the city of his birth. However, there was a condition: the instrument was to never be played again. Unfortunately, this condition sentenced the esteemed instrument to its early death. There is a peculiarity of wood: as long as it is used or handled, it shows little wear. However, when it loses the healing effect of touch and remains unused, it begins a speedy journey toward decomposition. Over the years, the exquisite, mellow-toned violin became nothing more than well packaged worm food. Nevertheless, its reminiscence gives testimony to two things: the genius of its musician and a reminder that life withdrawn from the service of others is stripped of existence.¹

Service is necessary for life. Without it we lose purpose and eventually our existence. Perhaps this is why Shriji Maharaj explains its significance when he reveals it as the only way to strengthen one's soul,² necessary for those who desire *moksha*,³ and the greatest spiritual undertaking.⁴

However, a variety of different activities can be categorized as service. With the right motivations, service can range anything: from the complex administration of large projects to something as simple as sweeping the floor, or even not hindering others. Although service has great value, which services are important? Is there even a distinction between the different types of services or are they all the same?

It is clear that amongst the vastness, there are some services that we crave, hope for with

crossed fingers, and even proactively attempt to attain; and then, there are the others: those at whose suggestion we cringe and fumble trying to find a way to excuse ourselves. Although such a distinction exists within our minds, is this distinction actual?

HUMBLE SERVICE – THE DIFFERENCE

An inquiry into the lives of those who have achieved greatness suggests that menial service has great significance. During the American Revolution, a group of exhausted soldiers were struggling to repair a wall of stone and dirt to protect themselves from enemy bullets. At this time a middle-aged man in civilian clothes rode past the group of soldiers. The leader of the battalion was so intent on standing chesty and shouting instructions that he conveniently overlooked helping his war-worn soldiers. When the unknown rider asked him why he didn't lend a hand, he responded imperiously and with an air of blinding dignity, "Sir, don't you know who I am? I am a corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers. Soon after the task was finished, the stranger turned to the corporal and suggested, "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again." The man in civilian clothes was none other than George Washington, the

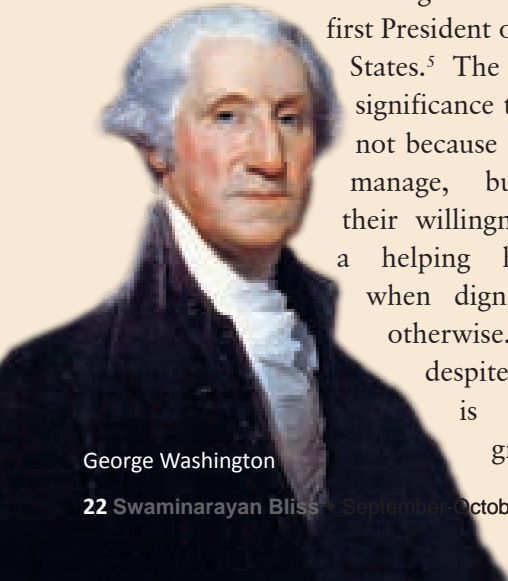
first President of the United States.⁵ The great bring significance to their lives not because of how they manage, but through their willingness to lend a helping hand, even when dignity suggests otherwise. Serving despite their status is where the greatness of

their existence truly lies.

Whether it is by washing dishes or sweeping the floor, our gurus have also expressed the message, "*Seva kare te mahant*" (One who serves is a *mahant*, a true leader). Clearly when he uttered these words, Gunatitanand Swami was not referring to managing the finances of the mandir but rather those chores that we so often try to avoid. When Muktanand Swami sings, "*Nichi tel male to māno bhāgya jo...*" (Believe yourself to be fortunate when you receive menial service...), he is not referring to delivering speeches and lead singing to an audience of thousands, but rather picking up used dishes left after others have finished their meal.

When Shriji Maharaj reveals, "One should serve Bhagwan and his devotee",⁶ "Those who are influenced by *tamogun* and *rajogun* should serve",⁷ "Those who desire to worship God, should serve God and his devotee"⁸ and "Those who serve are known as having *bhakti* and are the greatest".⁹ He intentionally uses the words *chaakri*, *tel-chaakri*, and *paricharya*. These three words all refer to physical, menial service performed by a *sevak* (servant), not an executive officer. When Shriji Maharaj also suggests that we make serving God and performing his *bhakti* our second nature like Uka Khachar did, he isn't implying that we only organize programmes and conduct meetings.¹⁰ They are all talking about experiencing delight, satisfaction and fulfilment in cleaning the bathroom, washing dishes, sweeping the floor and serving food. They teach us to develop a willingness to serve.

Our gurus haven't left it at that. They have by example further expressed not only the importance of performing menial service but also the method by which to perform such service. Shriji Maharaj carried stones on his head during the construction of Gadhada mandir. Gunatitanand Swami cared for the elderly and sick sadhus and even regularly swept the grounds in Junagadh despite being the mandir's



George Washington

mahant. Bhagatji Maharaj has, among many other services, carried back-breaking sacks of lime, watered mango trees at a mere suggestion and laboured, even at the risk of losing his eyesight, to prepare mortar. Shastriji Maharaj did *padhramanis* even when his knees gave way, and Yogiji Maharaj cooked *rotla* for labourers for over forty years after Shastriji Maharaj instructed him only once.

The legacy hasn't stopped there. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has spent his entire life performing this type of menial service. When Yogiji Maharaj went overseas, Pramukh Swami stayed in Sarangpur to celebrate the Jal Jhilani festival. Many of the devotees returned home the next day. It was mid-afternoon and the sweltering heat lulled everyone to sleep. A sadhu happened to awake, and found Swamishri's bed-roll empty. He went searching for him. As he approached a quiet area of the complex that had several toilets, he heard water splashing. He walked up to one of the open doors and he was taken aback at the sight of Swamishri cleaning the choked toilet. He requested Swami to let him take his place, but instead Swami suggested, "Here, take this bucket and help me by getting some water." Our gurus have led by following. Despite their greatness, they continue to perform menial service. This is their lesson of service.

In all of these instances, Shriji Maharaj and our gurus have not only emphasized, but also exemplified the significance of performing menial service. But what is so special about menial *seva*?

CONDITIONLESS MENIAL SERVICE

It is these types of menial services, which ask us to become free of expectations of facility, glory, praise or even appreciation, that lead to greatness. Menial services become humble when they are performed without conditions and expectations. In his book *70 X 7, The*

Freedom of Forgiveness, David Ugsberger narrates the story of General William Booth, the father of the Salvation Army, who lost his eyesight. After the doctors' efforts were frustrated, Bramwell, his son, was given the difficult task of informing his father that hope was nearly nonexistent. "Do you mean that I am blind?" the General asked. "I hear we must contemplate that," his son replied. The father lamentably continued, "I shall never see your face again?" "No, probably not in this world." "Bramwell," prided General Booth, "I have done what I could for God and for His people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God without my eyes." He was willing to serve God without expecting him to restore his eyesight. It is this same lesson that the five hundred *paramhansas* and Shastriji Maharaj's sadhus taught us through their sacrifice: to serve without conditions and expectations.



Bhagatji Maharaj mixes lime for the *haveli* construction in Junagadh

SELFLESS HUMBLE SERVICE

It's clear that there is a difference in the types of services that we perform. The difference lies in the intentions and motivations with which we perform our service. Although, with good intentions and motivations, all service is equally virtuous; menial service not only helps maintain these intentions, but also lends way to introspection and humility. Among the different types of service, performing menial service acts as a reminder that despite our talents, achievements and gifts, we are to serve God and his devotees. The greatness of this type of service lies in it as an expression of the individual's willingness to serve selflessly.

As the American President Franklin Roosevelt makes clear, it is this selflessness that gifts menial service its importance and transforms it into humble service. During a large part of Roosevelt's presidency, Harry Hopkins remained as his closest adviser. Hopkins held no cabinet position while Roosevelt was at his peak during World War II. Many even doubted him and considered him to be a "shadowy, sinister figure", and as a result, he was a great liability for Roosevelt's political campaign. Nevertheless, the president respected and trusted him dearly. When one of his opponents asked, "Why do you keep Hopkins so close to you? You surely realize that people distrust him and resent his influence," Roosevelt responded, "Someday you may well be sitting here where I am now as President of the United States. And when you are, you'll be looking at that door over there and knowing that practically everybody who walks through it wants something out of you. You'll learn what a lonely job this is, and you'll discover the need for somebody like Harry Hopkins, who asks for nothing except to serve you." This selflessness is what made Winston Churchill rate Hopkins one of the most powerful men in the world in the early 1940s. The source of Hopkin's greatness was his willingness to serve humbly.¹¹

TRUE SELFLESSNESS

Although unconditional, selfless service is characteristic of humble service; true selfless service involves something more. Richard Foster aptly hints at the missing element in *The Discipline of Service*, where he states, "Self-righteous service comes through human effort; [however], true service comes from a relationship with the divine."¹² What truly renders menial service humble is its association with the divine. This connection with the divine can arise in several ways, including: realizing the greatness of the service performed, directing ones' service towards God or his devotee, understanding God to be the ultimate cause of our actions, and serving only to please God. These are the lessons of true humble service our gurus teach us.

THE GREATNESS OF UNDERSTANDING GREATNESS

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was at the mandir in Anand. A devotee felt thirsty and demanded, "Yogi! Go fetch me a glass of water." Yogiji Maharaj jumped out of his chair, went into the kitchen, and soon returned with drinking water. He carefully offered it to the devotee. Several youths realized what had happened and voiced their disapproval of the devotee's irreverence. Yogiji Maharaj shook his head and corrected them, "Guru! He is a devotee of Shastriji Maharaj; I should offer him milk not just water." The humility in Yogiji Maharaj's service spurred from his understanding of Shastriji Maharaj's greatness.

SERVING GOD

Swamishri also directs all his service to God. On 2 November 2004, Swamishri was in Gandhinagar. He gave his blessings in the evening assembly, had his dinner and then sat in a long meeting with some sadhus. The meeting finished later than expected. As he was preparing to go to sleep, Swami sat on his bed and inquired whether Dharmacharan Swami had made the call that he

had asked him to make earlier. In the evening meeting Swamishri had asked Dharmacharan Swami to call Gunvantbhai Parekh, who lived in Bangalore. Admiring Swamishri's recollection, a sadhu said, "Although we had forgotten all about the call, you did not. You never forget to do something." Swamishri replied, "You should never forget Bhagwan and his service." Swamishri explains the principle of humble service: serve to serve God. Swamishri never forgets because he believes whatever he does, he does it for God.

GOD, THE CAUSE

Not only does he serve to serve God, but he believes God to be the ultimate cause of his actions. Once when Swamishri was in Ahmedabad, several distinguished guests arrived to meet him. A sadhu was busy attending to the guests and ensuring that they were suitably looked after. After an exhausting morning, he approached Swamishri, who was sitting alone in the light of a reading lamp, busily responding to letters. As the sadhu spoke, his exhaustion was clear in the tone of his voice. He said while shaking his head, "I don't know how you do it." Swamishri, who hadn't taken his eyes off the letter asked, "Do what?" The sadhu continued, "I've been with guests all morning, and I am exhausted." Swamishri didn't say anything for some time and continued to read. Then he slowly lowered the letter, looked from the top of his reading glasses, and said, "If one has truly served God, one does not become tired." True humble service is service done with God as the source of our strength. Understanding God, an inexhaustible source of energy, to be the doer or inspirer of our service, gives us endless strength and renders our service humble.

WITH THE INTENTION TO PLEASE GOD

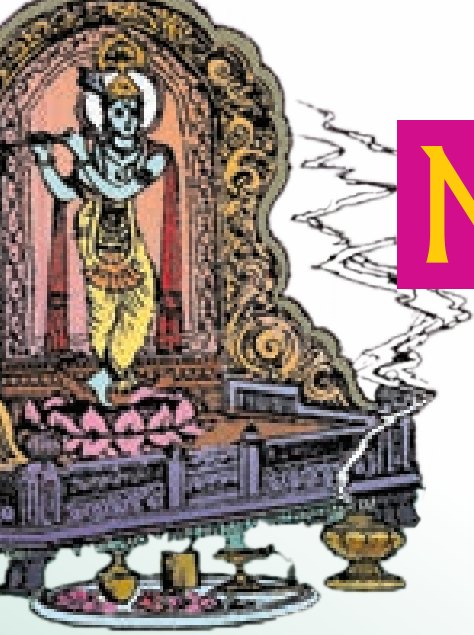
In Vidyanagar, Swamishri was asked by a youth, "What thought drives you to continue your *vicharan* even at this age?" Swamishri's answer explained another principle of humble

service. Swamishri replied, "I want to please Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj had instructed me, and I have decided that no matter what happens, whether I am praised or humiliated, I want to serve him without thinking about anything else. To serve is the purpose of this body. One should serve until the end. God is the doer."

Whether we serve or supervise, without this understanding our efforts turn into mere labour. However, when we serve with these principles in mind, not only does our service become humble, but also divine and allows us to experience God's divine presence. On 19 January 1985, Swamishri was in Surat. In the afternoon, a youth, Atulbhai Mehta, was mopping the floor alone. Swamishri saw him from a distance and quietly approached him so as not to disturb him. From behind he commented out loud, "Atul, you are mopping alone. Hand me a mop so that I can join you." Atul refused. Swamishri then placed a hand on his shoulder and said, "Atul, although it looks as if you are alone, I am with you. I will come to help you." When we live to humbly serve like the Satpurush, know that he is with us – that he supports us.

ENDNOTES

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2. Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 63.
3. Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 26.
4. Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 63.
5. *Today in the World*, 6 March 1991.
6. Vachanamrut, Ahmedabad 3.
7. Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 9.
8. Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 41.
9. Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 31.
10. Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 25.
11. *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 39, 1987, p. 5.
12. Richard Foster, 'Celebration of Discipline', *The Discipline of Service*. ♦



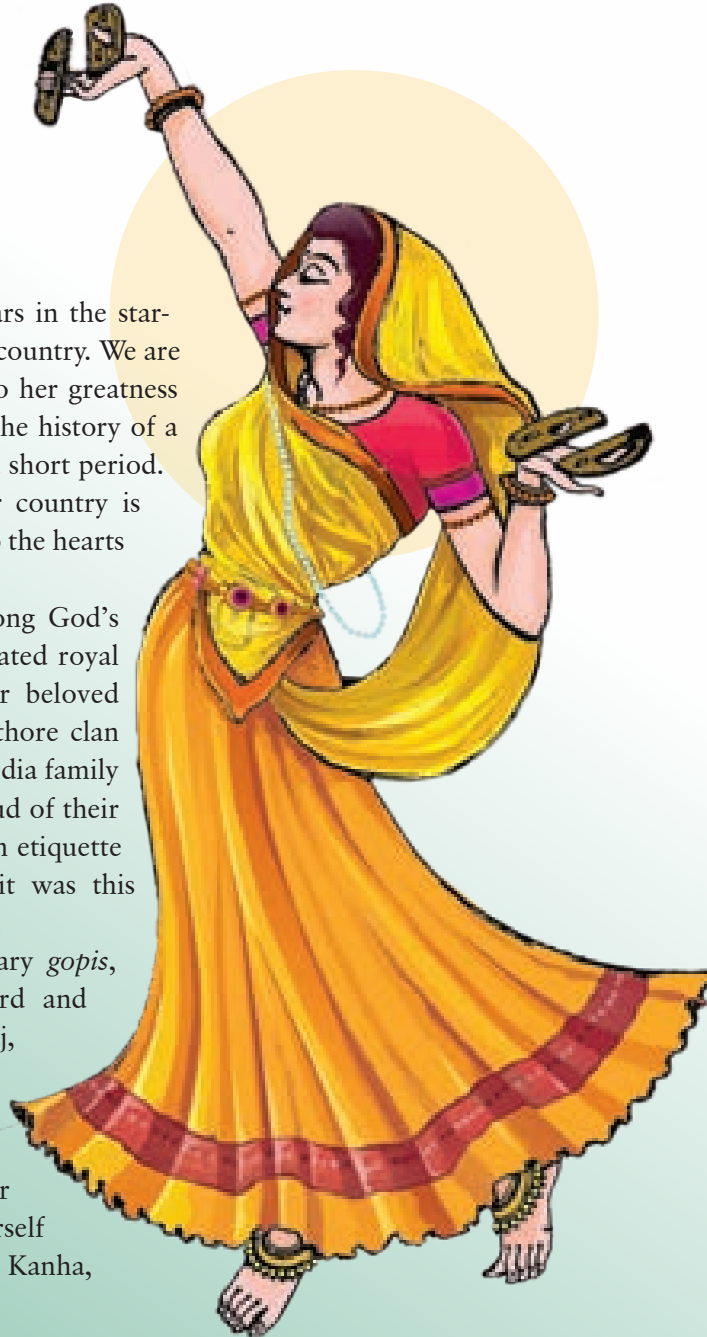
MIRABAI

A Great
Krishna Bhakta

Mirabai is one of the brightest stars in the star-filled spiritual firmament of our country. We are too near history to either add to her greatness or detract from it. For, five hundred years in the history of a nation that stretches back several millennia is a short period. But her place in the religious history of our country is unique as she had danced and sang her way into the hearts of millions of her admirers.

This Rajput princess was an Empress among God's devotees and a princess only in name. She treated royal conventions with disdain in worshipping her beloved Murlidhar (Krishna). She belonged to the Rathore clan of Medta, in Marwar, and married into the Sisodia family of Chitor, Mewar. The Sisodias were very proud of their lineage and did not tolerate any deviation from etiquette which they considered to be correct. And it was this etiquette that Mira flouted from the beginning.

Mira, like Andal of yore and the legendary *gopis*, considered Bhagwan Krishna to be her Lord and husband, even after her marriage to Bhojraj, son of Rana Sangramsimha (Rana Sanga) of Mewar. What is worth noting is the fact that while her menfolk clashed with Muslim invaders, and her father Ratansimha and her husband attained martyrdom, Mira kept herself busy singing bhajans in praise of Krishna or Kanha, unmindful of the din of battle all around.



She sums up her spiritual message in a kirtan, “*Satsang no ras chākh prāni...*” – “*O being! Savour the fruit of satsang, in the beginning it may be bitter. But as time goes on it will become as sweet as mango. Don’t you be proud of this body, in the end it will be reduced to ashes. You cannot take elephants, horses, other forms of wealth when you depart this world. If you resort to satsang you can have mukti; as the Vedas proclaim. Mira says take refuge at Hari’s feet.*”

A brief account of the times in which Mira lived places her remarkable life in the correct perspective. It is certain she belonged to the sixteenth century as Rana Sanga was a contemporary of the Mughal invader, Babar, who fought the First Battle of Panipat in 1526.

The century was a period of uncertainty in the history of India. The weak Lodhi dynasty was on its last leg. Rana Sanga, a brave battle-scarred Rajput warrior, made the mistake of inviting Babar to invade India. He was under the impression that the Farghana adventurer would hasten the end of the Lodhis, collect his booty and go back to his native Central Asia. But after defeating Ibrahim Lodhi at the First Battle of Panipat, Babar had other ideas. He founded the Mughal empire which turned out to be an enduring one till it was supplanted by the British in 1856. Rana Sanga had to fight Babar in the Battle of Khanua, near Agra. Ratansimha, Mira’s father, fought alongside Sanga in this battle.

Now coming to Mirabai, she became an ardent devotee of Krishna when she was three. It came about this way. Her grandfather Dudaji was a devotee of Krishna. One day a sadhu came to his palace. He had a *murti* of Krishna with him. Child Mira wanted the *murti* of Krishna; the sadhu was reluctant to part with it. Mira began to cry for the *murti* and gave up eating. According to one account Krishna appeared to the sadhu in his dream and asked him to hand

over the *murti* to Mira, which he did. The *murti* was to become a lifelong companion of the princess.

As long as Mira stayed with her grandfather she had no problems. When she was seven years old, she lost her mother, Hansaba. Just before that Mira saw a marriage procession passing by from the palace window. He asked her mother, “Who’s going to be my bride-groom?” Her mother replied, “Kanha.” That took root in her mind; and Mira had to face a sea of troubles once she entered the proud Sisodia family. The royalty worshipped Durga, the goddess of the warrior class, befitting the martial traditions of the family. As part of the ritual, they used to sacrifice animals and eat meat as *prasad*. This Mira could not do and made no bones about it. This led to a lot of friction between Mira and the Mewar royalty. These differences were fuelled by her sister-in-law, Uda. When she stood her ground an explosive situation developed. Things became worse after the death of her husband, Bhojraj. She was asked to ascend the funeral pyre of her husband which she flatly refused as she was wedded to Giridhar and not to any mortal.

Matters took a turn for the worse with the accession of Vikramjit (her brother-in-law) to the throne of Chitor. He tried to kill her by various means, but all his efforts failed by the grace of Giridhar Gopal (Krishna).

Mira continued to offer unalloyed devotion to Krishna till she merged in his *murti* in Dwarka, Saurashtra, in a state of ecstasy.

All the while she was singing and dancing before him. Her audience comprised sadhus and other devotees. With *kartal* in one hand and a stringed instrument in the other and *ghungroo* on her feet she used to sing her bhajans.

Mirabai has mentioned about her trials and tribulations in her compositions, not by way of complaint, but to illustrate the concern of

her loving Dinanath, who stood by her at every crisis in her life.

She addresses Krishna by various names: Kanha, Prabhu, Murlidhar, Giridhar Nagar, Ghanshyam, Dwarikadhish, Ranchod, Dinanath, etc. in her bhajans written in Marwari Hindi and Gujarati, with a sprinkling of Punjabi words. She herself set the tunes to her compositions.

By choosing Raidas, a leather worker as her guru, Mira had committed an unpardonable sin in the eyes of the Sisodia family. In another bhajan she describes the anger of Rana for choosing Raidas as her guru, *"Ignominy and shame and the scandal of the world, I cherish and welcome for the love of Paramatma, O Rana."*

"I care neither for the disgrace nor the applause of the world – for my spiritual path is different from that of the world. With great difficulty I gained my guru. If the world condemns me for meeting him, my preceptor, then says Mira, on such people's heads may hell fires fall."

When they made it impossible for her to worship her Krishna, Mira considered it the last straw on the camel's back and left Chitor. She set out on a *tirth yatra* connected with the *lila* of Bhagwan Krishna. In her bhajans she recounts the adventures of Bal Krishna during his Vrindavan days as a saviour – a role he played so admirably. These compositions relate to the killing of Putana, Kaliya *mardan*, crowned by the annihilation of his own arrogant Uncle Kansa. She touches on her own life and the trials and tribulations she had to undergo because of her intense

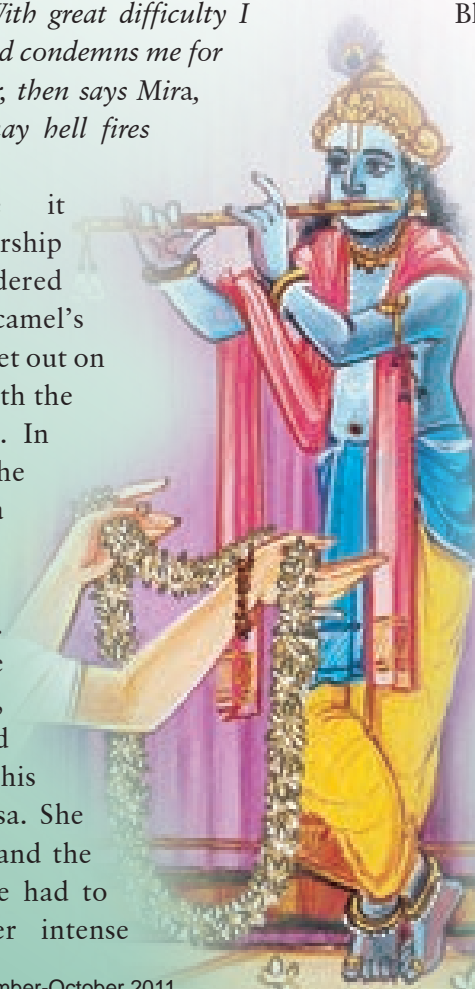
ardour and devotion to her Ghanshyam. She did a circuit of the places connected with Krishna, as had already been mentioned. During her stay in Vrindavan a strange thing happened. Mira expressed a desire to meet the distinguished Vashnava saint and disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Jiva Goswami. When she went to his hut she was told that he could not see a woman as it was against his code of conduct. Mira exclaimed, "I thought in Vrindavan the only man is Krishna and all others are *gopis*." On hearing this retort the Acharya realized his mistake. He came out of the hut and conducted her inside.

The following is the purport of what Mira had to say of her life and devotion as gleaned from her bhajans:

Referring to her marriage to Bhojraj, her temporal husband, she tells Vikramjit who harassed her the most, *"Ranaji I wholeheartedly love Girdhar. In my previous life I was a gopi of Vraj. I have come to this place by mistake. I was born in King Jaimal's house and was given in marriage into your family. I shall not forsake Krishna's name even for a minute even though you tried to poison me. Mira has married Hari."*

Talking of the purpose of human life one of her bhajans proclaims,

"O mind! You worship dear Mohan, the dear one who plays murali. You have crossed the seven seas, don't drown on the shore. Human birth is for liberation, why bother



about family. O mind always sing the praise of Giridhar's qualities." She was only exhorting others what she had done all her life.

When the ruler made it extremely difficult for Mira to worship Krishna she decided to leave Chitor for Medta. Before leaving she declared, "Govind nā guna gāshu..." – "I shall continue to sing Govind's virtues. I have vowed to take charanamrut and visit the mandir every day after getting up (in the morning).

"If Rana is angry, he will deprive me of my kingdom. But if Bhagwan is angry, I will die.

"The Rana (Vikramaditya) sent a cup of poison which turned into nectar. I will row the boat of Bhagwan's name and cross the ocean of Maya.

"Mira has taken refuge in Giridhar and shall ever remain at his lotus feet."

Mira's death in Dwarka at the age of 67 in

1546 was a miraculous phenomenon. The Chitor ruler and his subjects felt that the problems they were facing were a sign of divine displeasure at the way they had treated a great devotee of God. The Rana sought to make amends for it by sending a deputation of Brahmins with a request to Mira to return to Chitor. She was not willing to leave the peaceful Dwarka to an uncertain welcome in Mewar. She was not sure whether she would be allowed to worship her Giridhar Gopal in peace. She conveyed her message to the Brahmin deputation. The Brahmins went on a hunger strike to make her change her mind. Mira was greatly distressed at the turn of events. She entered Dwarkadhish mandir and never came out of it as she became one with her Murlidhar. ♦

(contd. from p. 16)

Bhai means brother. On this day, Yamunaji invited her brother Yama Raja to have a meal at her home. Similarly, Hindu women invite their brothers (or cousins) to their homes for a meal. The brother then reciprocates her sibling love with cash or other gifts.

In Mathura, a brother pours holy water on his sister's head through a sieve in the River Yamuna. This is in consonance with the boon that Yama Raja granted to Yamunaji: "Those who bathe in the Yamuna, appease the *pitris* (ancestors), have food at their sister's home and perform her puja, will not arrive at my gate [Yamapuri]."

OCTOBER 31:

LABH PANCHAM (KARTIK SUD 5)

Labh means benefit, *pancham* or *panchmi* means five. People usually wish for mundane *labh* such as prosperity, a good job, good in-

laws and so forth. However the shastras and sages consider human birth as the greatest *labh*. During this birth, they advise man to endeavour to realize Paramatma and so be forever liberated from the cycle of rebirths.

The shastras define *labh* as:

"*Lābhasteshām jayasteshām kutasteshām parājayaha,*
Yeshām indivarashyāma hrudayastho janārdanaha."

"He is the true beneficiary and the truly victorious, who has established Narayan, the consort of Lakshmi, in his heart."

In India, people perform puja [*muhurt* rituals] of their business premises and new ledgers on this day in the morning, then close up. Some perform *muhurt* rituals on Kartik *sud* 7. ♦

DAMODAR BHAKTA of Ahmedabad

The true measure of a devotee is to sustain the practice of satsang whatever the situation.

Damodar Bhakta had such faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and respect for the sadhus and devotees that he even met insults with a smile...

The assembly was jam packed. Maharaj was sitting on a raised seat. Sadhus, Kathis and Darbars were sitting in rows on either side. They added dignity to the atmosphere. One devotee was intently focused on Maharaj. He found it difficult to take his eyes off the graceful figure of Maharaj.

Shri Hari was engrossed in the Bhagvat discourse, when suddenly he began to cough. As the phlegm came out of his mouth, a devotee stood up, took off his turban, held it out and requested, “Maharaj, please spit into this.” That was the loving service he rendered.

The name of that devotee was Damodar. He was a Patidar from Ahmedabad. Since Shri Hari began visiting Ahmedabad, he had become a *satsangi*. Damodar understood the true glory of Maharaj. He also realized the glory of any animate or inanimate object, animal or human that came in contact with Shri Hari. If anybody slackened in satsang Damodar would at once explain to him the glory of Maharaj and satsang, and revived his faith once again. He would also render physical service. It was second nature to him. Whenever there was a festival he would be the first to arrive and the last to leave. He never considered any work to be too small for him. He would wash utensils, and clean rice and other grains. He developed a close rapport with other devotees and talked to them about the glory of Maharaj.

Once, Sahajanand Swami was going to Vartal to celebrate the Prabhodini festival. There was a large entourage of sadhus, *parshads* and devo-

tees with him. Damodar, too, was accompanying him. They made a night halt at a village named Naniboru in the Bhal region. In the morning, everyone went to the lake for bathing. Shriji Maharaj delighted the sadhus and other devotees by sprinkling water on them in benediction. At that time countless beings dressed in white clothes sprang up on the banks. The devotees thought that their belongings, which were lying scattered under the trees, would be taken away by these people. Damodar asked Maharaj, “Shall I go and guard the belongings?” Maharaj replied, “These are not human beings. They are *devtas*. They will not stay here. They have come for my darshan and will soon go away. So, don’t worry.”

Damodar looked at Maharaj with unblinking eyes.

Then the *devtas* worshipped Maharaj with flowers, prayed to him with folded hands and disappeared skywards. The devotees and sadhus who were with Shri Hari saw the spectacle. Maharaj came out of the lake, dressed and held an assembly. He explained, “There have been numerous previous avatars and you will have also had countless births. But only this time have you attained me.” Damodar asked, “The previous avatars were yours. So wasn’t it you we met in previous births?”

Maharaj replied, “It is all the same. All *ishwars* have gained their powers from me. I am supreme, the *avatari* of all avatars. I am the controller of all. No one controls me. All avatars are aspects of Chaturvyuh. There are countless in the infinite *brahmands*. They are all controlled by Akshar-

brahman. I am above Akshar, I am Purushottam.”

Shriji Maharaj had the capacity to explain difficult scriptural talks in a manner easily understood by others. Maharaj’s discourse on his form reinforced Damodar’s faith. He taught that if after understanding these talks one does not explain them to others, then one is accountable to Maharaj. Since otherwise, Maharaj’s efforts on this earth will go to waste. With folded hands he prayed, “Prabhu, you have graced me with a true understanding of your form. Please bless me that I may explain it to others.”

For some in the group Maharaj’s talk about himself was new. Others readily accepted it, clearing other doubts. By the time the group had reached Vartal, Damodar had convinced many of Maharaj’s true form. Devotees from many regions attended the Prabhodini festival at Vartal. There was much discussion regarding Shriji Maharaj’s supreme form. Everybody discussed it as per his understanding. Some even approached Shri Hari seeking clarification of certain points. He explained in detail that he is Purna Purushottam – Supreme God.

Thus, during this festival in Vartal, Maharaj explained to his devotees that they had attained Akshardham. Damodar etched every word of Shriji Maharaj in his heart and fearlessly talked to others about Shriji Maharaj’s supreme form.

Nathu Bhatt, a devout Vaishnav of Ahmedabad, became a *satsangi*. He applied a prominent *tilak-chandlo* on his forehead even while giving discourses on the Shrimad Bhagvat. Some members of the Vaishnav community did not like this. They decided that unless he gave up his Swaminarayan faith, and stopped applying *tilak-chandlo* and wearing the *kanthi*, they would not attend his discourses. This was conveyed to Bhatt by one of the Vaishnavs. Nathu Bhatt said, “I have taken refuge in Swaminarayan for the liberation of my *jiva*. I deliver discourses to earn my livelihood. If you don’t like it, I shall stop my discourses from today.” Thus, he staunchly

maintained his affiliation to Satsang.

Damodar was a close friend of Nathu Bhatt. They spent much time together and had many discussions. As a result, Damodar realized that there were some gaps in Nathu Bhatt’s understanding of Maharaj’s true form. Bhatt thought that Shriji Maharaj was like an actor who plays different roles at different times. That is, this Shriji Maharaj incarnates at different times in different forms, e.g. as Ram, Krishna, etc.

In fact Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had explained the true form of Maharaj, describing it as like the relationship between an arrow and the one who shoots it. Only, when the archer releases the arrow from the bow, is the arrow able to move. It is unable to move on its own. In the same way, only when the *avatari* (supreme God), Shriji Maharaj, sends the avatars into the universes are they able to do their work. It is his power which enables them to do so. Because of his past merits, Damodar was able to grasp these principles. Damodar thought, “Since Bhattji has come into my contact, it is my duty to explain to him Maharaj’s true form.” Thus, he said to Bhattji, “If you do not have absolute conviction in Maharaj’s true form, you will not be able to go to Akshardham.” Hearing this Bhattji was angered, and said, “O Kanbi! What do you know about the shastras?” With this he slapped Damodar and said, “Let us go to Maharaj and have the matter clarified.”

Both of them set out on a bullock cart for Vartal. There, they had Maharaj’s darshan and Nathu Bhatt said, “Maharaj, this Damodar is talking about things which are not in the shastras. He says you are supreme and above all avatars. So now, you explain things to him.”

Shri Hari smiled and said, “Nathu Bhatt, what does Damodar know about shastras. You are a learned man.”

Nathu Bhatt thought, “I don’t understand what Maharaj is saying.”

Then Maharaj said, “How can I figure in the shastras? I have come into this world for the first

time. Have you heard of anyone being married before birth?”

Maharaj's words made Nathu Bhatt think about these matters. Shri Hari put Bhattji in samadhi. He saw the splendour of different *dhams* (divine abodes) and their role in the scheme of creation. They were all bound by *maya*. Everything up to Prakruti-Purush was trapped by *maya*. Only Akshardham was above *maya*. He had darshan of the resplendent Akshardham. He saw countless liberated souls. He saw Maharaj sitting on the highest seat above them all. He also saw Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami in attendance to him. He found that all avatars were singing the praises of Purna Purushottam.

When he emerged from samadhi, Nathu Bhatt realized his mistake. He prostrated before Damodar, embraced him and sought his forgiveness. Bhattji was thereafter blessed with a special vision to look at Maharaj. Without Damodar this change would not have come about.

While talking about ultimate liberation in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 59, Bhagwan Swaminaryan highlights the staunch faith of Damodar in his divine form, “In the four Vedas, the Purans and the Itihas shastras, there is but one central principle, and that is that only God and his Sadhu can grant liberation. One who has worshipped and served Bhagwan or his holy Sadhu in previous lives will never lose affection for Bhagwan and his Bhakta. His faith will never waver, even if others try to influence him. For him, even if his own mind tries to deflect him, he remains steadfast. His faith remains firm like Bhalchandra Sheth's was, or Damodar's is.... When such faith is present know that person to be a devotee of God from previous births.”

In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has named only a few devotees. Of them, he highlighted Damodar's staunch faith.

Damodar understood the glory of Maharaj as well as other devotees.

Once, for some reason, a sadhu hit Damodar, but Damodar did not become upset or complain. However, when Shri Hari came to know of it, he sent for the sadhu and reprimanded him. At that time Damodar said, “Maharaj, a sadhu is like my father. A father has a right to beat his son. That is his privilege. Only if someone scolds or beats the *jiva* is it likely to remain well-behaved. Who will purify us except the sadhus? They are our true well-wishers. If you rebuke them, who will remove our faults?” Maharaj was pleased by the deep understanding of Damodar. As he had great regard for Shri Hari he would neglect his business and often accompany him on his *vicharan* and serve him diligently.

Once, Maharaj was travelling in the Gujarat region. Maharaj wanted to pass water, so he got down from Manki and went to an isolated area. He tried to loosen the cord of his *surval*, but it had become entangled. Several people tried to loosen it, but without success. Maharaj was beginning to feel uneasy. Then Damodar came up and deftly loosened the cord with his teeth. Shri Hari was very pleased with his prompt service.

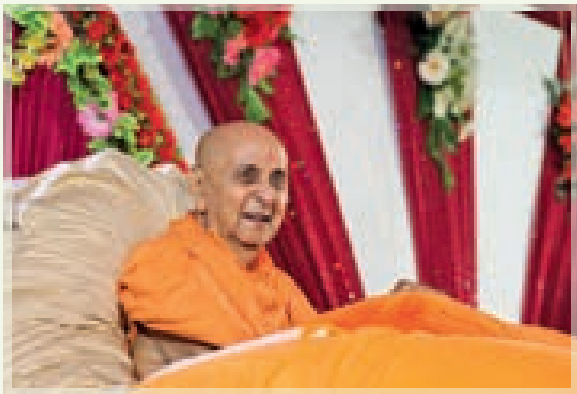
On another occasion some particle got lodged in Maharaj's eye and was causing a lot of discomfort. However much he tried, he could not get it out. So, Damodar offered, “Maharaj! If you permit I will remove it instantly.”

Maharaj said, “OK. Take it out.”

He tenderly held open Shri Hari's eyelid and swiftly removed the particle with his tongue.

Maharaj exclaimed, “You are an expert in removing particles from the eyes.”

Damodar replied, “And you are the expert in removing the particles of worldly desires that are lodged in the *jiva*. People who can remove particles that lodge in the eyes can be found in every village. Only you can remove particles that cause attachment to the world.” Maharaj was pleased with his understanding and blessed him. ♦



Swamishri during the lunar-eclipse assembly, Bhimpur

Mahadevbhai Patel of Aadmor village narrated how he was reformed from his vices through satsang, “I belong to a village by the seashore in Olpad sub-district. I was born in abject poverty. I was a labourer in a farm. At home we used to rear goats to sell them and also to kill some and eat them. I also drank lots of liquor daily. So I never had any savings left. My house was a hotbed of quarrels and conflicts. There was no peace at home. Then, in 1981, I went to serve at the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. There I met Shrijinandan Swami and he persisted that I quit my addictions. Finally, I pledged to do so. From then on my fate changed. There was peace in the house, and we were all happier than before. Presently I am a volunteer for the BAPS children’s activities overlooking centres in 87 villages.”

Shantilal Patel of Kapasi village revealed that he had till then consumed alcohol to the tune of ₹500,000. “In addition, I smoked two packets of bidis daily for 20 years. Gradually my health deteriorated. To liberate myself from the many ills I had I went to many *bhuvas* (witch-doctors). But it was pointless. Then I consulted many doctors, but they declared that I had only three to four months to live. Still I could not give up my addictions. I used to drink 16 *potlis* (small bagfuls of liquor) a day; and after that I would be in a state of oblivion. Whenever I had to walk in

Life-Transformations

During the lunar-eclipse assembly held in Swamishri’s presence on 15 June in Bhimpur (Dummas) several tribal devotees narrated their stories of transformation through satsang.

my house I would do so by resting my hands on the wall. This was how inebriated I was. Then one day a thought crossed my mind that Swaminarayan sadhus are pure and holy. Let me invite them home for lunch. A few sadhus came. They told me to sit down and take lunch with them. I hesitated a little because I was habituated to drinking prior to lunch. But then I sat down and took lunch. The sadhus talked and inspired me to give up my addictions. I put on a *kanthi* and pledged to refrain from addictions altogether.

“Before I accepted satsang my five friends, due to my chronic drinking habit, used to say that it wouldn’t be too long before they would have to perform my crematory rites. But I gave up my addictions and I am talking before you all now whereas they have all passed away.”

Virendra Khalasi was once an incorrigible addict. A week had elapsed since he had given up all his addictions. He had been a chronic drinker for the last 17 years and was notorious for igniting rows and conflicts at home. In his words he said, “After drinking I used to beat up my wife and children. Everyone was so scared of me that no one dared to speak to me. But Sanjaybhai Khalasi, a BAPS volunteer, persisted with faith and patience. Through his inspiration I went to see Akshardham in New Delhi. After the darshan I resolved there and then to give up my addictions. And that was how I gave them up and entered into Satsang.” ♦

Avoid Kusang

Swamishri has always guided that although TV does have positive and beneficial uses, all too often people are lured by and spoilt by the extensive negative and harmful programmes on TV. His concern is that TV damages the moral fabric of society and to prevent this its use must be limited, and if possible, avoided altogether. On 24 December 1999, teenagers of the BAPS Kishore Mandal in Surat presented one engaging and lively debate on the pros and cons of TV during the Sunday satsang assembly in the presence of Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

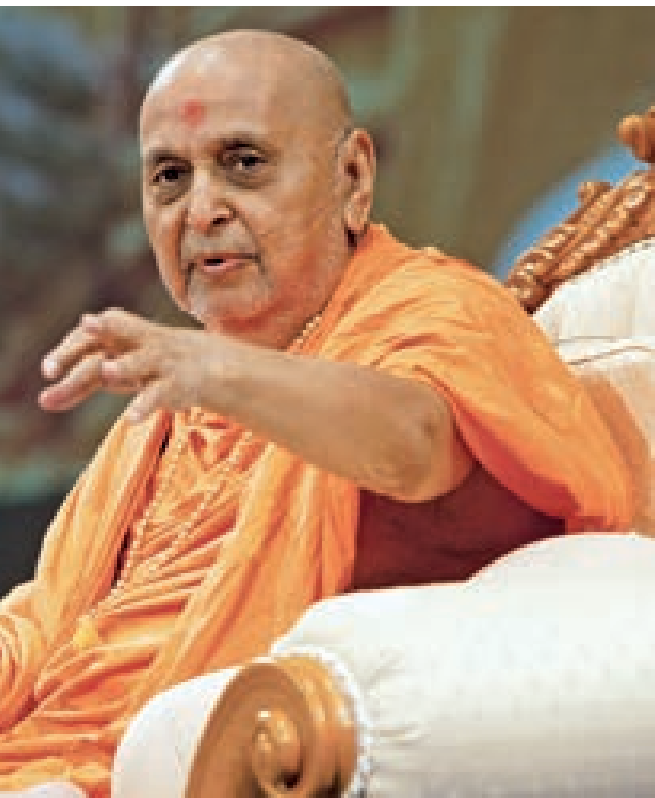


The arguments were so good that when one side spoke they seemed right and when the other team spoke they also seemed right. But, we should keep our focus on the words of the shastras, God and the holy Sadhu; observe their lives and work. Maharaj has said, “Never engage in *kusang*.” Everything is included in this, such as, TV and its other forms: cinema, theatre, etc. Yogiji Maharaj often used to speak about not watching cinema, so focus on his words. Otherwise, today, there are many who promote watching it.

We should have the firm understanding that science has given us this technology, but mainly without any direction. It is true that damaging things are contained in many programmes. And people first latch on to these bad thoughts, which are present in them. Maharaj has said that both satsang and *kusang* reside within. Satsang means dharma, *jnan*, *katha*, kirtan, bhajan. *Kusang* is present in the form of lust, anger, greed,

attachment, desires. So, depending on the external company one keeps thoughts arise within and one acts in that way. If you keep the company of satsang externally, you’ll have wholesome thoughts. So, Maharaj has said that you should remain distant from *kusang*. It is like a snake, scorpion, lion or cheetah. Even in a zoo you do not sit near them, since they will harm you. The same should be understood for *kusang*.

Bad things have more impact than good things. If you want to raise a good tree; effort is required, it takes time and you have to be constantly alert. Even after it is fully grown and bears fruits, it has to be trimmed to remove unnecessary branches. If proper care is not taken the useless branches will spread. This is like *kusang* – it does not take long to affect. Education is not required for this. You do not need to go to school or college to learn how to drink alcohol. People just start drinking. Such things are already present in people. They see others doing such



things and start themselves. For *kusang*, we have to warn constantly that it is wrong and harmful.

To give *sanskars* (values) is a great thing. If people are noble, there will be peace personally, in their families, society and country. If there are immoral people in society there will be quarrels and fights. TV is such that it shows people to fight, drink alcohol, commit adultery and bolsters the *kusang* within. Then people start behaving in this way and, slowly, like cancer, it spreads within society.

If there are even five bad people, they will spoil a group of 200. No, not just 200, but the whole of society and eventually the whole country. However, good people will improve the society and country.

Nowadays, young children quickly learn how to operate a TV. The children know what their parents do not. They know what comes on which channel, since their surroundings are like that in school, at home and outside. Unfortunately, par-

ents ignore this and do not show proper concern. But this lack of concern will one day result in tragic results. So, it is necessary to be alert from now. If the home atmosphere becomes polluted, there will be trouble. Everywhere, externally, it is like this; and within people it is the same.

If good messages are given and strengthened, there will be no problems. But people want to earn money and so focus more on these [bad] things. They plan so that others are attracted and see it more. The bad things shown on TV quickly attract people because of the *kusang* within [themselves]. But are people attracted to *katha*? Our mentality is that if we do not go to *katha* we think it is okay; that we will not lose anything.

So, *kusang* is nurtured. But this is not acceptable. [Gunatitanand] Swami explains that if one has gangrene in a finger or toe, it should be cut to save the rest of the body. Similarly, if *kusang* is ignored and even a little is allowed to enter, thinking, “It will not affect me. I am wise,” it will eventually destroy the mind. Even those with great patience have become disturbed.

Maharaj has explained this in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 18: If one enters a seven-storey palace, decorated with mirrors and furnished with comfortable furniture, in the presence of indulgent people who are serving and encouraging each other to drink [alcohol] and also where prostitutes are dancing, will one’s mind remain stable? Even the most determined people have fallen in the midst of such temptations. Saubhari and Parashar Rishis were of strong mind; they were not ordinary people, but even they were tempted and indulged. [Then Swamishri narrated in detail the story of Ekalshrungi, son of Vibhandak Rishi. See box for concise version.]

So, even those of firm mind waver and fall from their resolve. Regarding parties, people think, “I am firm, so what is wrong in going to see?” But the sensuous atmosphere is such that one’s thoughts are distorted and one indulges. In discos, men and women dance together, and

this leads to adultery. From this stems drinking, gambling and other vices. People do not realize that this is all harmful and so it is necessary to be resolute. Shriji Maharaj has said that our shastras forbid such male-female indiscipline. Remain clear of such bad habits. TV is an example of such a harmful thing. There are many more bad things than good on TV. So, even though they know, people watch these bad things. Even if you think your resolve is as solid as a mountain, you will still be affected. You can't say that, "I am a *satsangi* and so I will not be affected." If a *satsangi* drinks poison, even he will die. So, only if you firmly resolve can such harm be avoided.

People will tempt you with such things since they want to make money – from alcohol, drugs, etc. Even the government is happy to allow it since it gains from the taxes. But it does not realize that it ruins society.

Even TV is operated to make money. It does not care that people become spiritually bankrupt.

If each individual resolves and improves, the society and country will prosper. You have to resolve: not to drink alcohol, not to consume tobacco, not to go partying. All these things excite people's emotions and lead to problems. If people stop consuming, then providers will have

to stop producing. But, today, even 80-year-olds sit with the youngsters to watch TV; the whole family sits together to watch. They watch vulgar scenes together and so respect for parents and elders is lost. This leads to tension in the home. People watch TV thinking it will reduce tension, but eventually it increases tension; so, be alert. TV is like a ghost. To remove it, each individual has to resolve and take action. We can talk about everything, but only if resolute determination is developed will the problem be solved, otherwise it will spread everywhere, like a disease spreading throughout a body and thus destroying it.

So, everyone should resolve today that this [TV] is prohibited. Decide that you do not want to keep it in your house – everyone in the family, young and old, should insist on this. If some in the house wish to keep it, then it will cause discord in the home. When someone goes elsewhere to watch then quarrels will arise in the home. So, if everyone decides unanimously, the ghost of TV can be thrown out of the home, otherwise it will take control and cause misery.

So, the more we strengthen our practice of God's commands, the codes of the shastras and the advice of the great sadhus, the happier we become. ♦

STORY OF EKALSHRUNGI

Vibhandak Rishi was deflected from his austerities by the company of a wandering woman. Subsequently, he fathered a son, Ekalshrungi. Vibhandak Rishi lived alone in his ashram with Ekalshrungi. He shielded Ekalshrungi from all contact with women in the hope that he would not be distracted like he had been. So, Ekalshrungi did not know that women existed.

Once, there was a drought in the nearby kingdom governed by King Rompad. The learned Brahmins advised the king that if a pure-hearted person like Ekalshrungi set foot in the kingdom then it would rain. So, the king sent a beautiful woman of loose character to lure the pious Ekalshrungi into his kingdom.

While Vibhandak Rishi was away from the ashram, the woman entered and befriended Ekalshrungi. He was enthralled by her company and went with her to the nearby kingdom. The rains came. Then Ekalshrungi married and stayed in the kingdom. After three years, Vibhandak Rishi finally tracked down Ekalshrungi and was angry. He prepared to curse the king, but on seeing the two sons of Ekalshrungi, his two grandchildren, Vibhandak Rishi's anger subsided.

Moral: Worldly contact can tempt even the most resolute and dislodge them from observing their vows.

Obesity

Part 1



Worldwide, there has been an alarming increase in weight- and diet-related diseases over the past two decades. Not only rich countries, but also middle- and poor-income countries are experiencing the consequences of cheap, unhealthy, calorie-laden fast foods. This obesity pandemic is a serious threat to world health and urgent action is necessary to control and reverse it. This article briefly describes what obesity is and some of the problems it leads to.

WHAT IS OBESITY?

Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation in the body that presents a risk to health.

The fat may be equally distributed throughout the body or concentrated around the stomach (leading to an apple-shaped body) or the hips and thighs (resulting in a pear-shaped body).

There are several parameters which can be used to measure a person's level of obesity.

BODY MASS INDEX

The body mass index (BMI) is used to determine if a person's weight is in the healthy range.

BMI provides the most useful population-level measure of overweight and obesity as it is the same for both sexes and for all ages of adults.

It is calculated by dividing one's weight (kg) by the square of one's height (m).

For example, if a person weighs 80kg and is 1.7m tall:

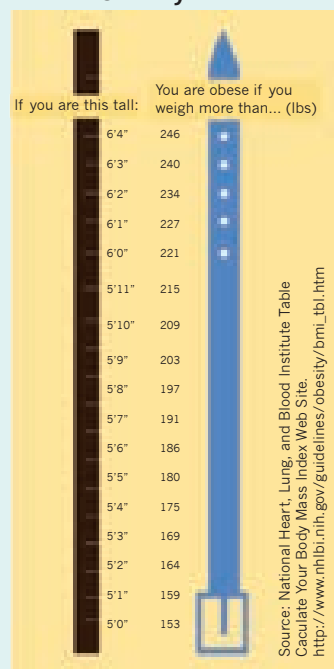
1. Multiply the height by itself $1.7 \times 1.7 = 2.89$
2. Divide the weight by this figure
3. $80 \div 2.89 = 27.7 \text{ kg/m}^2$

Thus, 27.7 is the BMI.

Based on this calculation, the World Health Organization categorizes people as underweight, normal, overweight, obese and very obese:¹

Category	BMI
Underweight	Less than 18.5
Ideal	18.5-25
Overweight	25-30
Obese: should lose weight	30-40
Very obese: lose weight now	Greater than 40

Obesity Table



However, although BMI indicates the health risk associated with being a certain weight for your height, it is just an approximate means of assessing body fat and risk to health.

1. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/index.html>

MEASUREMENT OF WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE (WAIST MEASUREMENT)

A second way of assessing one's body size is by measuring waist circumference, which is regarded as a more accurate indicator of risk than BMI in predicting associated health risks.

The waist circumference is measured by wrapping a tape measure around the narrowest point of one's waist (between the lower ribs and hips) while breathing out.

A waist circumference greater than 80cm (32in) for women and 94cm (37in) for men increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, for example, heart attacks and stroke, and diabetes.

The greatest risk is for women with a waist measurement of more than 88cm (35in) and men with a waist measurement of more than 102cm (40in).

In South Asians and other ethnic groups, lower thresholds are appropriate.

Classification of obesity by waist circumference (cm)²

Classification	Males	Females
Not overweight	<94.0	<80.0
Pre-obese	94.0 – 101.9	80.0 – 87.9
Obese	≥102.0	≥88.0

WAIST-HIP RATIO

A third parameter of obesity measurement has recently been introduced. It is suggested that a person's waist-hip ratio, which measures the proportion of fat stored in the body around the waist and hips, is the best predictor of a person's risk of a heart attack, making it a more practically useful measure than BMI.

The waist-hip ratio is calculated as follows: Measure the waist at its narrowest point; this is usually around the navel. Next, measure the hips at their widest point; most often this is around the buttocks.

2. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/specialist-guides/medical-conditions/a-z-of-medical-conditions/obesity/definition-obesity.shtml>

It is important not to pull the measure tape tight when taking either of these measurements; let the tape rest on the skin.

Finally, divide the waist measurement by the hip measurement. The figure obtained from this calculation is the waist-hip ratio. For example, if the waist measures 85cm (33in) and the hips are 100cm (39in), the waist-hip ratio is $85 \div 100 = 0.85$.

For men, a ratio of more than 1.0, and for woman a ratio greater than 0.8, indicates an apple-shape body and a greater risk of health problems.

KEY FACTS³

Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980.

In 2008, 1.5 billion adults, aged 20 or more, were overweight. Of these over 200 million men and nearly 300 million women were obese.

65% of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight.

Obesity is preventable.

FACTS ABOUT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY ⁴

Overweight and obesity are the fifth leading cause of deaths globally. At least 2.8 million adults die each year as a result of being overweight or obese. In addition, 44% of the diabetes burden, 23% of the ischaemic heart disease burden and between 7% and 41% of certain cancer burdens are attributable to overweight and obesity.

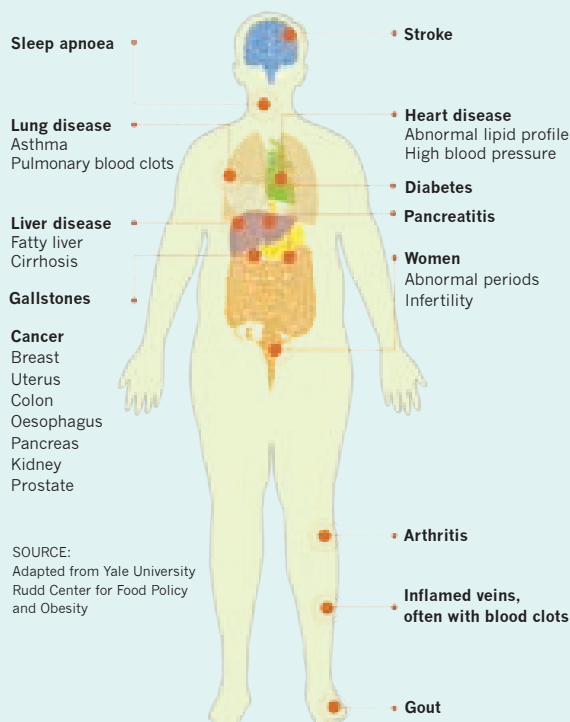
Stomach obesity, where weight is concentrated around the navel, is the most common type of obesity and affects 30 per cent of adult men.

Obesity and stomach obesity are rapidly increasing, especially in young people.

3. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/index.html>

4. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/index.html>

Medical Complications of Obesity



WHAT CAUSES OBESITY?

The fundamental cause of obesity and overweight is an energy imbalance in which more calories are consumed in the diet than expended by activity or exercise.

Obesity can be hereditary, so some people are at increased risk due to the genes they are born with.

Obesity develops due to:

- overeating (eating larger portions than you need)
- irregular meals
- eating processed or fast food
- not eating enough fruit, vegetables and unrefined carbohydrates, such as wholemeal bread and brown rice.
- lack of daily physical activity. Many people have jobs that involve sitting at a desk for most of the day, and rely heavily on their cars to get around. When it is time to relax, people tend to watch TV, or play computer games.
- Some genetic conditions can increase one's appetite.

- Certain medical conditions can cause weight gain, such as:
 - ◆ Cushing's Syndrome (a disease of the adrenal gland)
 - ◆ Hypothyroidism (an under-active thyroid gland)
- Certain medicines that can cause weight gain include:
 - ◆ Corticosteroids
 - ◆ Antidepressants

WHAT PROBLEMS CAN OBESITY CAUSE?

Psychologically, being overweight can affect a person's own body image and damage self-esteem. In some cases this can cause social anxiety and depression. Common physical problems include:

- difficulty breathing
- difficulty walking or running
- increased sweating
- pain in the knees and back
- skin conditions, such as, acne
- gallstones.

The following medical conditions are also more common in obese people than in those of normal weight:

- high blood pressure
- high cholesterol
- diseases related to hardening of the arteries, such as, heart attack and stroke
- type 2 diabetes
- some types of cancer (endometrial, breast, and colon)
- musculoskeletal disorders (especially osteoarthritis – a highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints)

The risk for these non-communicable diseases increases, with the increase in BMI.

These conditions are often known as obesity-related diseases and are some of the most common causes of death before the age of 75. This is why obesity increases risk of death.

The good news, however, is that overweight and obesity are reversible and preventable. ◆



Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's Address
Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi

Book Launch of HINDUISM AN INTRODUCTION

On 1 July 2011, a national book launch programme was held in the holy precincts of Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi. The book launch of 'Hinduism, An Introduction', published by Swaminarayan Akshardham was done by the Chief Guest Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. More than 250 eminent guests applauded the launch and the speech of Dr Kalam. An excerpt of his speech is as follows.

Hinduism indeed is a natural religion.

'Sarve Sukhinaha Santu,' – 'Let all be happy and blissful'.

I am indeed delighted to participate in the launch of the book 'Hinduism' written by Sadhu Vivekjiandasji here in the beautiful spiritual environment of Akshardham, New Delhi. I congratulate Sadhu Vivekjiandasji and greet the spiritual leaders, intellectuals, thinkers, social reformers and other distinguished guests participating in this event.

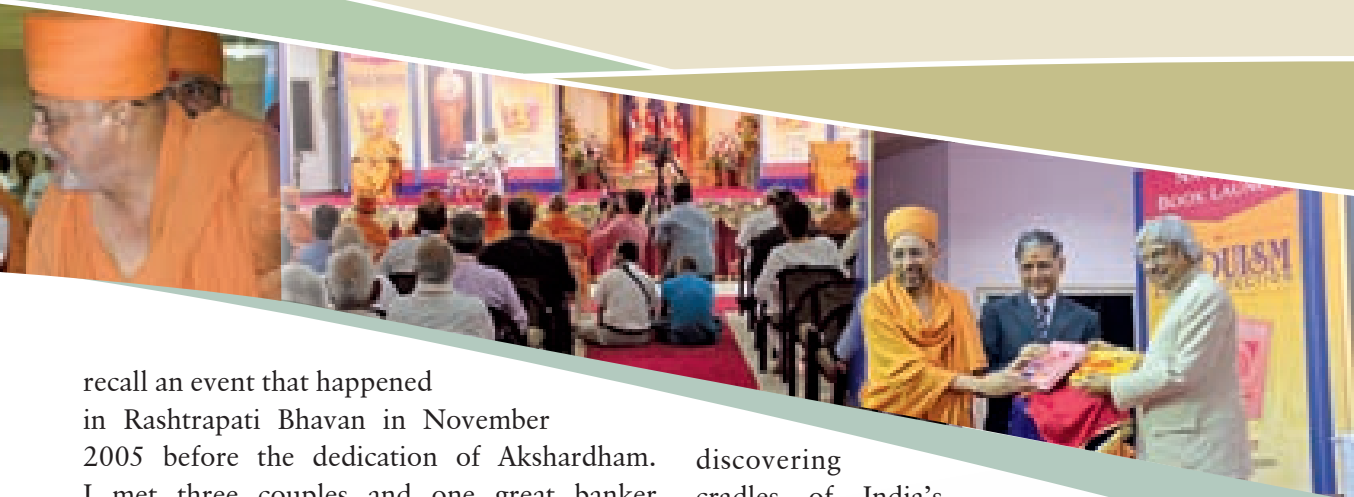
When I studied both parts of the book *Hinduism, An Introduction*, I really find that Hinduism is like a great river that tenaciously

moves forward retaining the ancient while dynamically evolving to meet the present and the future. I always feel, when I meet seers and saints and thinkers of Hinduism, *Hinduism indeed is a natural religion* which is the topic of my presentation today.

The book, *Hinduism*, by Sadhu Vivekjiandasji, extending into thirty chapters discussing a wide range of topics like Hindu philosophy, Hindu way of life and above all Hindu Sampradaya. What especially attracted me apart from other chapters were: Swaminarayana Sampradaya, Rishi-Scientists, description of Holy Places, selected prayers and questions and answers on Hinduism (FAQs). Let me discuss.

SWAMINARAYANA SAMPRADAYA

As I was reading the chapter 'Swaminarayana Sampradaya' in the book *Hinduism*, my train of thoughts focused on an event that took place on the day of the inauguration of Akshardham. When I entered into the great spiritual Akshardham Temple complex today, I



recall an event that happened in Rashtrapati Bhavan in November 2005 before the dedication of Akshardham. I met three couples and one great banker working in Atlanta, USA. All seven of them respected the values of Akshardham. They came a week before the dedication ceremony of Akshardham and visited this divine place. I asked each one of them two questions: What you felt when you entered Akshardham? After your journey through Akshardham, when you were leaving what thoughts came to your mind? All four male members told me that at the time of entry they felt like, they were entering into a gigantic monument. When they finished their journey of Akshardham, they uniformly said that it is India's civilizational heritage in dynamic form. Their hearts cried, "O Almighty! Who is the creator of this great phenomenon?" All the three women members said, when they entered they felt they were entering into their own ancient joint family home. When they finished their journey, they cried because they were leaving their great Mother India. They felt like that the mother was embracing the child, touching the child, feeling the child and felt the warmth of the mother in every one of them. But who is the creator? But who is the creator? The creator we saw in the theater; a child wading through rivers, climbing over the snow tipped Himalayas, slips and slips and then climbs and climbs, walking across the nation and

discovering cradles of India's civilization. Who is the child? Can you remember the child? Oh! That is the divine child, the child Swaminarayan. The spirit of the divine child entered into Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. And we see the birth of Akshardham, the civilizational heritage of India in dynamic form in front of us.

UNITY OF THOUGHTS AND ACTION

I was highly inspired by the book *Hinduism* by Sadhu Vivekjivandasji which brings out the unifying and universal concept of Hinduism. They are '*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*', meaning the whole world is one family; and '*Yatra bhavati vishvam ekanidam*', meaning the whole world is one nest. They also teach '*Sarve sukhinaha santu*', expressing let all be happy and blissful; '*Āno bhadraḥ kratavoyantu vishvataha*', radiating that noble thoughts come to us from whole universe. I consider these four noble thoughts of Hinduism, as the author puts it, are the spiritual foundation of Hinduism.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Hinduism is fascinatingly diverse, yet it has common threads or core beliefs among the many *sampradayas*. Hinduism advocates mainly the belief in one supreme reality called Paramatma, Par-

meswara, Parabrahman, Narayana or Bhagwan. The majority of Hindus believe and worship one supreme God without denying the existence of other gods or forms of the supreme God. The Hindus believe in Sanatan Dharma which includes belief in the authority of the Vedas, atman, karma, *punarjanma*, *murti puja*, *guru-shishya parampara*, ahimsa, four *purusharthas* and *varnashrama* dharma. Most Hindus believe that God is an all-pervasive reality who resides in all – both in living and non-living things. The faith in the all-pervasive power of God leads to the belief that all things are fundamentally rooted in God and not in materialism or atom. Let me recall a beautiful response from Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita which dates back to 5th century BC: “There has never been a time when you and I and the kings gathered here have not existed, nor will there be a time when we will cease to exist. As the same person inhabits the body through childhood, youth and old age, so too at the time of death, he attains another body. The wise are not deluded by these changes.”

Recently, I was going through a scientific statement, “Quantum physics has confirmed that every single possibility of anything and everything actually exists now.” The quantum physics indeed has a unique bridge between religion and science.

Astronomy: When I was studying the chapter on rishi-scientists, one thought came to me as a student of science. When Copernicus (15th century) and Galileo (16th century) established the dynamics of solar system, that the earth is spherical and orbits around the sun. For this scientific statement to the world, Copernicus was forced to withdraw his statement and Galileo was imprisoned for his lifetime. Whereas in 500 AD, nearly a millennium before Galileo and Copernicus, Indian astronomer and mathematician Aryabhatta discovered and publicly announced that the earth orbits around the sun in about 365 days, the Indian society accepted this scientific wisdom of Aryabhatta and he happily continued to propagate his scientific work.

Now let me take you eight centuries further deep into Indian history and discuss about the great Acharya Charaka.

THOUGHTS ON HEALTH

Acharya Charaka is popularly known as father of medicine. His work *Charaka Samhita* is an encyclopedia of Ayurveda and medicine. He principally said that sickness is an imbalance of *tridosha* in the body, namely, *vatta*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. To re-establish good health, he prescribed Ayurvedic medicines, changes in diet, habits and thoughts. While I was reading about Charaka in Hinduism, I was reminded of the book *Man the Unknown* by Dr Alexis Carrel, a doctor-turned-philosopher and a Nobel laureate. This book highlights how the mind and body have both to be treated in an ailment as the two are integrated. You cannot treat one and ignore the other which has been told by Charaka as early as 2nd century BC. We have to analyze why Aryabhatta and Charaka’s works are not fully visible to scientific and medical community across the world.

SACRED PLACES OF INDIA

Another area of interest for me, the chapter on Sacred Places of India, particularly on Rameshwaram, one of the four sacred *dhams*. The author says, presiding deity in Rameshwaram is Shivalinga called Ramanatha which is one of the twelve *jiyotirlingas*. I am tempted to say a few words about Rameshwaram, since I was born in Rameshwaram, brought-up in Rameshwaram and I have a strong umbilical connectivity in Rameshwaram even today where my brother of 94 years age lives with his family.

The great story associated with Rameshwaram is a part of the great Indian epic Ramayana. Even though the great war fought by Rama and the destruction of Ravana and bringing back Devi Sita was based on high dharmic principles, the great Purushottama Shri Rama was guilty of killing an accomplished Vedic scholar Ravana. This brings out the importance given to Vedic scholarship in

Hinduism. To purify himself from the sin of killing Ravana, Shri Rama had to perform a special puja for Lord Shiva. Shri Rama requested Hanuman to get a Shivalinga. Hanuman with his characteristic greatness went to Kailash and fetched two *lingas* from Lord Shiva himself. But there was a hitch. The puja was to be performed at a pre-determined auspicious time. Since, the arrival of Hanuman from Kailash was getting delayed, Sitaji made a *linga* out of sand there, and the puja was performed within the auspicious time. See the importance of time given by Hinduism. When Hanuman came back with two beautiful *lingas* from Lord Shiva himself, he saw that Shri Rama had already completed the puja. He was angry and he tried to remove the sand *linga* to replace it with the divine *lingas* which he brought from Kailash. Even the great might of Hanuman could not move the seemingly fragile 'Sand Linga' from its position. Tired Hanuman was sad. Shri Rama told Hanuman, even though we finished the puja today, everybody in future will worship the two *lingas* brought by Hanuman first and then only perform the puja to Ramalinga, the one installed by Devi Sita and Lord Rama. This tradition in Rameshwaram continues even today. We can see from this episode that even Purushotama is not absolved of his actions against a scholar, importance of time and the nobility and humility of the leader.

TOLERANCE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

When I read all the chapters of Hinduism, I get the great messages of societal tolerance and societal righteousness. What are the various issues on tolerance?

- Tolerance for people's opinion
- Tolerance for people's culture
- Tolerance for people's belief system
- Tolerance for people's styles and

Tolerance for new discoveries and disruptive technologies.

In fact, such an attitude, be it that of an individual or a collection of them, i.e., society, is the

hallmark of civilization and that is what characterizes and differentiates life from sheer existence. In this respect, *Hinduism* the book elaborately describes tolerance, tolerance and tolerance. Now let me recall a divine hymn on Righteousness which I have heard in many spiritual places.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE HEART

Where there is righteousness in the heart,
There is beauty in the character.

When there is beauty in the character,
There is harmony in the home.

When there is harmony in the home,
There is order in the nation.

When there is order in the nation,
There is peace in the world.

It is a beautiful connectivity between heart, character, nation and the world. In a society we have to build righteousness among all its constituents. For the society as a whole to be righteous, we need creation of righteousness in family, righteousness in religions, righteousness in education, righteousness in service, righteousness in career, righteousness in business and industry, righteousness in civil administration, righteousness in politics, righteousness in government, righteousness in law and order, righteousness in justice. I am sure, such prayers are there in every religion and if only believers of different religions follow this path, it will act as a foundation for promoting universal harmony, prosperity and peace, since every individual will be engaged in the action of God.

CONCLUSION: MY PRAYER FOR PEACE

Friends, in conclusion, I would like to recite the peace prayer which I had composed:

"O Almighty, create thoughts and actions in the minds of the people of my nation so that they live united.

O Almighty, bless my people a path of life with righteousness as righteousness gives the strength of character.

(contd. on p. 54)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's VICHARAN

May-June 2011

Sarangpur, Surat, Bhimpor (Dummas), Navsari, Sankari



Swamishri performs puja of the first pillar for the Nilkanth Varni Mandapam, Sankari

- 1-5 May: Sarangpur
- 6: Sarangpur, Surat
- 7-31: Surat
- 1-6 June: Surat
- 7: Surat, Bhimpor (Dummas)
- 8-17: Bhimpor
- 18: Bhimpor, Sankari
- 19-24: Sankari
- 25: Sankari, Navsari
- 26-30: Navsari

MAY

8, Sunday, Surat

The evening satsang assembly was scheduled as a welcome assembly for Swamishri. Initially, Pujya Viveksagar Swami addressed the assembly of 35,000 devotees and well-wishers. On Swamishri's arrival at 6.15 p.m. children welcomed Swamishri through recitations and an announcement of their efforts in inspiring 1,000 homes to do home-assembly (*ghar sabha*). Thereafter Swamishri was garlanded by senior sadhus. A traditional welcome dance was performed by *kishores* and a presentation of *kishore* activities was made.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the mam-



Swamishri celebrates a symbolic Rath Yatra festival by parading Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a chariot, Navsari

moth assembly, "It enthruses me to have darshan of all of you gathered here today in large numbers. It is the command of Yogiji Maharaj to attend the Sunday assembly. The liberation of *jivas* lies in obeying moral injunctions (*agna*) and in worshipping God (*upasana*). Yogiji Maharaj established the *bal mandal* and *yuvak mandal*. He had great foresight. Initially he used to write letters on what to do during the satsang assembly. Such activities are possible by having devotion to God. One faces both happiness and misery in life but by having refuge in God, observing morality and through God's grace one can live peacefully and do one's work successfully."

15, Sunday, Surat; Bal Din

The special evening satsang assembly was dedicated to Bal Din, Children's Day. Firstly, Pujya Viveksagar Swami discoursed to the assembly. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands and a shawl made of flowers. A drama, 'Parajay', written by Jayendra Vinchhi, was enacted by children and volunteers. The theme of the drama was how Kaliyug (the age of moral darkness) was defeated by the moral and spiritual steadfastness of Swaminarayan devotees.

During his blessings Swamishri praised the

drama and said, “Because one has desires and attachments for material objects one feels that one should earn money through wrong means too. But by endeavouring honestly and in accordance to the commands of our shastras and holy sadhus one will gain inner peace, peace in the family, society and everywhere. Because of desires man wallows in gambling, addictions and bad company which makes him miserable. Thus refuge in God gives one peace and happiness. Satsang means to associate with bona fide spiritual persons.”

22, Sunday, Surat; Kishore Din

The evening satsang programme was presented by *kishores*. More than 6,000 *kishores* and *kishoris*, and 30,000 devotees were present. Initially, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly. Then Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus. Thereafter a drama written by Jnanratna Swami, ‘Majiyaro’, was performed by youths. It was based on today’s family problems. Then a traditional dance was performed by youths.

Finally, Swamishri crowned the assembly with his blessings, “The drama was very good and effective. It depicted the problems one faces in the family. We all know, yet we cannot give up things because of attachment. Shriji Maharaj has said that such attachment is *maya*. But we must understand that nothing is ours. Once we die everything gets dissolved. Therefore believe yourself to be *atma* and offer bhakti to God.”

29, Sunday, Surat; 119th Birthday Celebration of Yogiji Maharaj

In the evening assembly tributes were offered to Yogiji Maharaj on his birth anniversary. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands. A drama by Jayendra Vinchhi, “Akshardham ni Atariye thi”, depicted the divine life and impressions of Yogiji Maharaj. Then a traditional dance was performed by *kishores*. This was followed by a video on Yogiji Maharaj. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Yogiji Maharaj loved everyone. On seeing him devotees brimmed with

love for him. The reason was that he was saintly. He had no desire for honour or glory. In fact he was most ordinary. He travelled showering his love equally upon those who were small or great. He always breathed and expressed that Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj were the all-doers. To find such a sadhu is very rare.”

30, Monday, Surat

Swamishri performed the second *pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Sachin and *pratishtha* rituals for the *hari* mandir in Olpad.

JUNE

5, Sunday, Surat; 62nd Pramukh Varni Din

In spite of the drizzling rain the devotees remained seated in the evening celebration assembly. Pujya Mahant discoursed to the assembly. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with garlands and a shawl. Then youths performed a traditional dance. Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami offered Swamishri an urn full of 115,591 rice grains whose husks were individually peeled by members of the *mahila mandal*. They had written a prayer beseeching Swamishri to make them pure and perfect like the rice grains.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “I have witnessed today the pure faith of the devotees of Surat. Despite the rain you have all come here and remained seated to avail of today’s satsang here. You have done so with the desire for darshan, satsang and *moksha*. You will all attain inner peace.” After Swamishri’s blessings the youths performed a drama, “Nirgun Rangi Charar”. The devotees remained seated patiently till the assembly concluded.

12, Sunday, Bhimpur (Dummas)

Swamishri resided at the home of Shri C.K. Pithavala. In his large residential precincts Swamishri performed his morning puja, during which thousands of devotees assembled for darshan. Shri C.K. Pithavala provided breakfast and lunch for all.

Despite being physically weak due to diarrhoea in the last few days Swamishri came to

perform his puja in public for the benefit of thousands of devotees who attended daily.

The day marked a special event: 167 years ago Gunatitanand Swami first worshipped the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (now with Swamishri) during a *mahapuja* ritual in Junagadh.

The Sunday satsang assembly commenced after Swamishri's morning puja. Swamishri blessed the devotees, "Delusion (*moha*) means believing something that is false or temporary to be true or permanent and conversely that which is true to be false. We need to consolidate the sentiment of service to God for it is only that which will be credited to our lives. Knowledge (*gnan*) means the world is temporary and God is eternally true."

15, Wednesday Bhimpor; Lunar Eclipse Assembly

In spite of the monsoon rains pouring heavily hundreds of devotees had pilgrimaged by foot to Swamishri's morning puja. Some had commenced from their village as early as 3.00 a.m. While Swamishri was performing puja there was a sudden downpour. This, however, did not deter the devotees from the puja darshan.

Tonight, from 11.52 p.m. to 3.37 a.m., Swamishri attended the lunar eclipse satsang assembly. More than 2,500 devotees had gathered for the special darshan of Swamishri. The nearly four-hour assembly included bhajans, testimonials from volunteers and tribal devotees, speeches and skits. In conclusion, Pujya Viveksagar Swami addressed the assembly and thereafter the Swaminarayan *dhun* was sung.

24, Friday, Sankari

Swamishri arrived for the evening satsang assembly. More than 20,000 devotees had assembled for Swamishri's darshan and blessings. After a welcome dance by *kishores*, a drama was enacted on the history of satsang in Sankari and garlands were offered to Swamishri by senior sadhus. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Sankari is a very small village and to have such a huge mandir is rare. But it all happened due to the wish of Yogiji Maharaj

and the dream of Somabhai. And with the establishment of this mandir satsang has flourished in the region. So many have given up addictions and gradually numerous *hari* mandirs have come up in the rural areas. Through these mandirs many have quit addictions and many more have been able to offer worship to God. When one develops love for God and offers devotion to him, only then a transformation takes place within."

26, Sunday, Navsari

For Swamishri's morning puja darshan more than 1,800 devotees had pilgrimaged on foot from the towns and villages of Donja, Chikhli, Vankal, Sarvani, Shiyada and Rankuva.

In the evening satsang assembly children, teenagers and youths performed a welcome dance. Thereafter Swamishri was honoured with garlands. A drama titled 'Mandir Nirman nu Mulya' written by Purnakam Swami, was presented by youths. As a grand finale Swamishri blessed the assembly, "We desire for all things on earth but we tend to delay in doing satsang. But when we realize God's glory and understand the moral injunctions prescribed in our shastras we are able to tread on the spiritual path. One should not become anxious of honour and insult, and happiness and misery. Never be fearful in upholding righteous matters. Obstacles present themselves while one treads the path of righteousness. God has given us this priceless body.

"When one abuses one's senses and mind and engages them in wrong things one experiences misery and pain."

More than 15,000 devotees had attended the assembly.

30, Thursday, Navsari

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS *kutir* mandirs at Jamlapada (Tithal region) and Ponsari. Thereafter he performed the *pratishtha* rituals of BAPS *hari* mandirs in Gandevi (Navsari region) and Vesma. ◆

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekchanddas



Living with Swamishri

May-June 2011

DISSOLVING MISERY

15 May, Surat

A devotee's wife had passed away. His grief and the burden of tending to his teenage children was weighing heavily on his mind. The calamity left him shattered and in dismay. He rang up Swamishri and expressed his woes.

Swamishri reassured him and strengthened his faith, "Live according to God's will. In spite of the problems and miseries that afflicted Dada Khachar he remained steadfast and happy. Believe God to be the all-doer and do not worry about what will happen and how things will turn out. Don't ponder upon these things. The world is temporary. You have served the Satsang with understanding and spiritual knowledge. Your health is fine and I bless you that it remains so. Do as much bhajan as you can and don't worry. You have done a lot of *seva*, so Yogi Bapa is happy and I too am happy. Now don't think negatively or depressingly."

PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE

20 June, Sankari

Swamishri was going through his daily correspondence. A devotee had sent a site map of some land plots in the town of Nasik by email. He had marked one plot and asked whether he should buy it. However due to the poor print on paper Swamishri could not make out as to which one he had enquired about. So he asked Dharmacharan Swami to see if he could make anything of it. But he too could not read the devotee's writing on the print. Finally, with the aid of a magnifying glass, Dharmacharan Swami was able to read what the devotee had written. On explaining it to Swamishri, Swami gave the decision to purchase it.

Swamishri's persistence in trying to find out the devotee's exact enquiry brings to light his sincerity and genuine desire in resolving the enquiries and ambiguities of devotees. ♦

New BAPS Mandirs

CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND, 26 June 2011



Newly inaugurated BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Christchurch

Over 320 devotees and well-wishers attended the Vedic *mahapuja* to mark the inauguration of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Christchurch, New Zealand. After more than 12 months of renovation work, the new mandir is now open to the community for daily darshan and weekly satsang assemblies.

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA, 17 July 2011

A Vedic Mahapuja was held to mark the completion of the first phase of construction. An assembly was also held to thank and appreciate the efforts of all those who have helped in making the mandir. The mandir will now host a range of cultural and spiritual activities for children, teenagers, youths and elders.

US-UK Youths Visit India

KISHORE-KISHORI INDIA TRIP

26 June to 2 August 2011

Selected from BAPS centres throughout North America, 52 *kishore* and *kishori karyakars* participated in the 2011 India Trip. Highlights of the trip included time spent in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the satsang

shibir in Gandhinagar titled, 'Brahmvidyani College', in the presence of Doctor Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami. The *shibir* featured



Kishores receive blessings from Swamishri in Mumbai

speeches and workshops elaborating on history of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, fundamentals of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, glory of the Satpurush, Sanatan Hindu Dharma and Indian culture by sadhus.

They also travelled to Rajasthan and Gujarat, where they visited various sacred sites of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and other places to explore India's history and culture. In the tribal areas of Tithal, they visited the homes of local BAPS *karyakars* and devotees and experienced first-hand the results of Swamishri's selfless work in reforming the tribals and inspiring bhakti in their lives.

The trip concluded with Swamishri's darshan in Mumbai. The *kishores* and *kishoris* returned home spiritually reinvigorated, taking with them many inspiring messages and memories.

BAL-BALIKA INDIA TRIP

20 July to 24 August 2011

Balaks and *balikas* from England visited India where they had darshan of some of most sacred places of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

They travelled throughout Gujarat to various mandirs and learnt about the Sampradaya's

history and traditions. They were also inspired by enlightening talks by senior and learned sadhus, including Kothari (Bhaktipriya) Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami.

On the auspicious day of Raksha Bandhan, they were blessed with Swamishri's darshan in Mumbai.

Their trip concluded with a pilgrimage to Swaminarayan Akshardham and then Chhapaiya, the birthplace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

As a result of this trip, the *balaks* and *balikas* were inspired to consolidate their satsang and to please Swamishri by pledging various *niyams*.

Satsang Mukhpath Competition

April to June 2011, India

During the summer vacation, *balaks* and *balikas* took part in the Satsang Mukhpath Competition which was organized by the Children's Activities Central Office and held in three stages between April and June 2011.

Based on a special booklet containing 500 important quotes from the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, as well as shloks and other satsang facts, over 9,320 *balaks* and *balikas* (aged between 8 and 14 years) took part in this memorizing competition.

For the first stage, held in April, they were required to memorize 100 items; for the second stage in May they were required to memorize 300 items; and for the final stage in June they were required to memorize all 500 items. At each stage, they were assessed by written tests.

The outstanding performers were presented prizes for their achievements.

Also, over 2,650 younger (aged 4 to 8 years) *balaks* and *balikas* took part in a separate *mukhpath* competition.

Medico-Spiritual Conferences

**February & June, July, August 2011
Gujarat, India**



Medico-Spiritual Conference, Rajkot

During February 2011, around 650 doctors participated in two separate National Medico-Spiritual Conferences held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur. The theme of these two conferences was 'Our Problems, Permanent Solutions'. The first was held in the presence of Dr. Swami and the second in the presence of Mahant Swami.

During June, July and August 2011, a total of about 3,000 doctors attended the nine Regional Medico-Spiritual Conferences held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandirs in Jamnagar, Himmatnagar, Mehsana, Surat, Bhavnagar, Vadodara, Rajkot, Junagadh and Ahmedabad.

The topic of the conferences was 'Yogaha Karmashu Kaushalam' – 'Expertise in Duties Is Yoga'. Various experienced and learned sadhus addressed the doctors during these conferences.

Personal Awareness Drive

2-11 August 2011, Gujarat

The current batch of 106 youths under training at the Yuva Talim Kendra in Sarangpur conducted the Antar Jagruti Parva – Personal Awareness Drive. The youths were divided into 27 groups and each group was assigned a specific number of villages to visit in ten days.

They visited a total 269 villages in 54 regions in Saurashtra, Sabarkantha, Charotar and South Gujarat.

The youths conducted over 420 satsang assemblies for children, teenagers and elders, performed more than 3,830 home visits to strengthen personal and family satsang and inspired around 1,350 people to give up addictions. They also held 107 special assemblies in local schools and conducted 180 evening processions through the villages.

The ten-day visits provided the youths with an inspiring, instructive and confidence-building experience.

Study Guidance Seminars

July 2011, India

With the new academic year having begun in June, BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai held special seminars to guide and motivate students to develop good study habits and to study sincerely.

Titled ‘Vanche te Vikse’ (Reading Leads to Progress), these seminars were held at 41 locations and were attended by around 10,000 *kishores* and *kishoris*. The students were informed about the importance and necessity of a good formal education, advised on appropriate reading techniques and also guided on how sincerity in practicing satsang helps one to prosper academically.

Shibirs

SATSANG SHIBIR

25-26 June 2011, Kolkata

In the presence of Pujya Dr Swami around 370 devotees participated in the two-day Satsang Shibir organized by BAPS Kolkata at the Gujarati Samaj Hall. The devotees were inspired by the speeches of Dr Swami and other sadhus on topics such as, Asmita, Unity, Glory

of Vachanamrut, Observing Dharma and others. Audio-visual presentations, discussions and question-answer sessions also helped to further the devotees’ understanding of the topics.

BAL-KISHORE NATIONAL SUMMER CAMP 2011
July 6-14 2011 San Jose, CA, USA



Classroom session

From 6 to 14 July 2011 60 selected *balaks* and 36 selected *kishores* from across North America participated in the Bal-Kishore National Summer Camp at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, San Jose, CA. The theme ‘Dradh Priti: Shastras, Siddhant, Satpurush, Sanstha’, was extensively explored through presentations by sadhus and experienced satsang volunteers.

The Camp helped the youngsters to learn how to advance in their spiritual and personal lives.

A similar camp was held for 95 selected *balikas* and *kishoris* from across North America between 6 to 12 July 2011 at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Cherry Hill, NJ.

REGIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR

8-10 July 2011, South Africa

Representing centres from South Africa, Botswana, Zambia and Malawi, a total of 160 *balaks* and *balikas* participated in South Africa’s first regional Bal-Balika Shibir which was held at the Willow Park Resort and Conference Centre in Johannesburg. Based on the theme ‘Sanskriti Naad – Echoes of Our Eternal Culture’, the 3-day *shibir* covered four major topics: India’s

contributions to the world; Four basic principles of Hinduism: Karma, Punarjanma, Avatar and Murti-puja; The three pillars of Hinduism: Shashtra, Mandir, Sant and; BAPS' contribution in sustaining and nurturing Hindu Sanskruti.

The *shibir* was thoroughly enjoyed by all the children and strengthened their pride for Bharatiya Sanskruti.

NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA WINTER SHIBIR **9 July, 2011, Auckland, New Zealand**

Around 100 *balaks* and *balikas* from Auckland, Rotorua, Christchurch, Hamilton and Wellington participated in this *shibir* at the Pramukh Swami Youth Centre in Auckland, New Zealand. Themed '1781: Swaminarayan Sampradaya', the children gained insight into satsang sadhana, five eternal realities and the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy through interactive sessions. Each session was complimented with an activity session in which children learnt how to apply these concepts practically in their lives. At the end of the shibir, all the *balaks* and *balikas* took *niyams* as part of their personal sadhana. The *niyams* included: to reduce the amount of time watching TV and internet use, to perform daily puja, to respect their parents, to study hard, to participate actively in *ghar sabha*, to do *ekadashi* and to attend Sunday *sabha*.

BAPS YOUTH CONVENTION **16 July 2011, Auckland, New Zealand**



Session on emotional quotient

More than 130 youths from Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua and Christchurch attended the one-day Youth Convention at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Auckland, New Zealand. Based on the theme 'Spiritual Quotient', the convention focused on how a career-oriented generation can better channel their time and resources into developing their spiritual quotient. Topics included: positive thinking, power of faith, the role of intelligence, emotional quotient and practical aspects of spirituality, such as, daily rituals. Many youths were inspired to live a more spiritual life based on satsang values and gain the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

NATIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR **BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London** **Sunday 31 July 2011**



Youths learn about the glory of Satpurush

Over 500 *kishores* and *kishoris* from across the UK attended the National Kishore-Kishori Shibir held in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami. The *shibir* theme, 'Satpurush – Know Him, Love Him, Serve Him', was presented through speeches, audio-visual presentations, discussions, personal testimonies and skits. Mahant Swami spoke about the intrinsic greatness of the Satpurush and also about having unshakeable faith in his words. In conclusion, he spoke of *atmabuddhi* and *dradh priti* as the basis of one's attachment to the Satpurush. ♦

Pyramids? Been there, done that. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon? Can't even see 'em! Meet the newest kids on the wonder block that are setting the tone for the new millennium
By Marking Jones

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Reader's Digest Proclaims Swaminarayan Akshardham as One of the 'Seven Wonders of the 21st Century'

July 2011, England



In its July 2011 UK edition (pp. 46-57), the prestigious *Reader's Digest* monthly magazine has selected Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi as one of 'The Seven Wonders of the 21st Century'.

Describing Swaminarayan Akshardham on p. 52, the *Reader's Digest* writes:

"The Taj Mahal used to be the undisputed champion of Indian architecture, but a new contender has now stepped into the ring: Akshardham Temple.

The biggest Hindu temple in the world, it was completed in 2005 and houses 234 hand-carved pillars, a 12-minute indoor boat ride, an Imax cinema and more than 20,000 statues (including 148 life-sized stone elephants). Hindu

guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the driving force behind the project, and a lotus-filled lake surrounding the building contains water from 151 holy rivers he's visited.

Construction took 12 million man-hours – if one person had started building Akshardham in AD650, they still wouldn't quite be finished – but 11,000 artisans and volunteers chipped in, so the temple shot up in five years and cost some £30m.

There are no concrete steel supports throughout the ten-story design. Instead, it's made up of carved pink sandstone blocks that have been expertly slotted together. Still, it's so well built that it's expected to see in the third millennium."

The other six selections on the *Reader's Di-*

gest list of 'The Seven Wonders of the 21st Century' are:

Spring Temple Buddha, China; Cave of Cry-

stals, Mexico; Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar; Baha'i Terraces, Israel; The Darvaza Gas Crater, Turkmenistan; Millau Viaduct, France. ♦

Dr Kalam Launches Book on Hinduism

1 July 2011, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi



More than 250 distinguished invited guests attended the national book launch of *Hinduism, An Introduction* in the presence of the former president of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi on 1 July 2011. The evening function began at 7.30 with an inspiring session of devotional and patriotic bhajans by Shri Jaydip Swadia. Thereafter, Vivekji van Swami, the author of the book published by Swaminarayan Akshardham, spoke about the salient features of the various beliefs, traditions, festivals, divine incarnations, holy places and sacred texts in Hinduism.

Dr Kalam praised the content of the book saying, "Hinduism is indeed a natural religion. It's virtues of tolerance and righteousness have produced a civilized race. When I studied the book, I really found that Hinduism is like a great river that tenaciously moves like a great river. The book brings out the underlying and universal concepts of Hinduism. All religions preach common values."

On behalf of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami blessed the assembly by saying, "The traditions of Hinduism

are alive today, even after thousands of years. Bhagwan Swaminarayan continued the heritage on the soil of Gujarat and today Pramukh Swami Maharaj has reflected the messages of Indian culture by creating cultural complexes like Swaminarayan Akshardham that promote a value-based and peaceful life."

Finally, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings were read out (see below).

Pujya Atmaswarup Swami, the head of Akshardham, delivered the vote of thanks.

The event was a collaborative effort of one month, organized and executed by Pujya Atmaswarup Swami and other sadhus and BAPS volunteers of Akshardham.

The event concluded at 10.00 p.m. and *mahaprasad* was served to all.

OPINIONS

Shri R.C. Lahoti

Former Chief Justice, Supreme Court of India

"Anyone who reads the book would be able to clear the cobwebs of misgivings and confusions about Hinduism, and will learn what real Hinduism is, what it really means."

Dr. W. Selvamurthy

Chief Controller, Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), Govt. of India

“I consider this book is a major milestone to spread the message of Hinduism which gives the philosophy of life, which gives the way to *moksha* and also the salvation for mankind. I feel that this is a very important milestone from Akshardham to spread the message of global peace and harmony.”

Prof. K.M. Singh

Former Member of National Disaster Management Authority

“It was indeed a very enlightening experi-

ence to attend the function today. As far as the book is concerned I would say that Hinduism is the mother of all religions. There is so little known about this religion among the people so I think that a book like this can go a long way in enlightening not only Hindus but people from all religions all over the world. And to that extent it is a great contribution to humanity.”

Prof. L.P. Singh

Former Professor of Philosophy, Delhi University

“In this book you have tried to cover the whole gamut of philosophical, religious and moral aspects of Hinduism.” ♦

Blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the Book Launch

To,

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Atmswarup Swami, sadhus and devotees,

It gives me great pleasure and joy that the honourable Shri Abdul Kalam Saheb will be nationally launching the book, ‘Hinduism, An Introduction’. The book provides a comprehensive and balanced introduction to one of the world’s ancient cultures and civilizations.

The author, Sadhu Vivekjivandas, and the editorial consultant, Shri Janakbhai Dave, have made great efforts in producing this book and have thus rendered great service to Hindu dharma. The book provides an introduction to the

universal values of Hindu dharma and the message of true Indianhood.

I deeply thank honourable Shri Kalam Saheb for coming and spending his valuable time for the occasion. May Bhagwan Swaminarayan translate Shri Kalam Saheb’s vision and efforts for the future into a reality and that a golden Vedic age dawns upon India.

I pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan to bless all the distinguished invited guests with peace and happiness in all respects.

With blessings

Jai Swaminarayan

Shastri Narayanswarupdas

(contd. from p. 43)

Help all religious leaders of my country to give strength to the people to combat the divisive forces.

Guide my people to develop an attitude to appreciate different ideologies and transform enmity among individuals, organizations and nations, into friendliness and harmony.

O Almighty, terrorism is a curse to humanity and the people who remove innocent lives

indeed are insane. Let the pain of the people transform the cruel minds.

O God, bless my people to work with perseverance to transform the country into a peaceful and prosperous nation.”

With these words, I launch both parts of the book *Hinduism, An Introduction*. I congratulate Sadhu Vivekjivandasji for this beautiful work. My best wishes to all the participants of this event. May God Bless you. ♦



SWAMISHRI IN MUMBAI

July 2011

1. Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Mumbai.

2-3. After Thakorji's darshan Swamishri greets and blesses sadhus and devotees seated under the mandir's dome.



**SWAMISHRI IN MUMBAI:
RAKSHABANDHAN AND JANMASHTAMI
August 2011**

1. Swamishri blesses the devotees on the auspicious day of Rakshabandhan (13 August).
2. Swamishri sanctifies the *rakhdīs* to be given to the devotees, praying for their protection in all aspects of life.
3. Swamishri blesses the devotees on Janmashtami (22 August).

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