

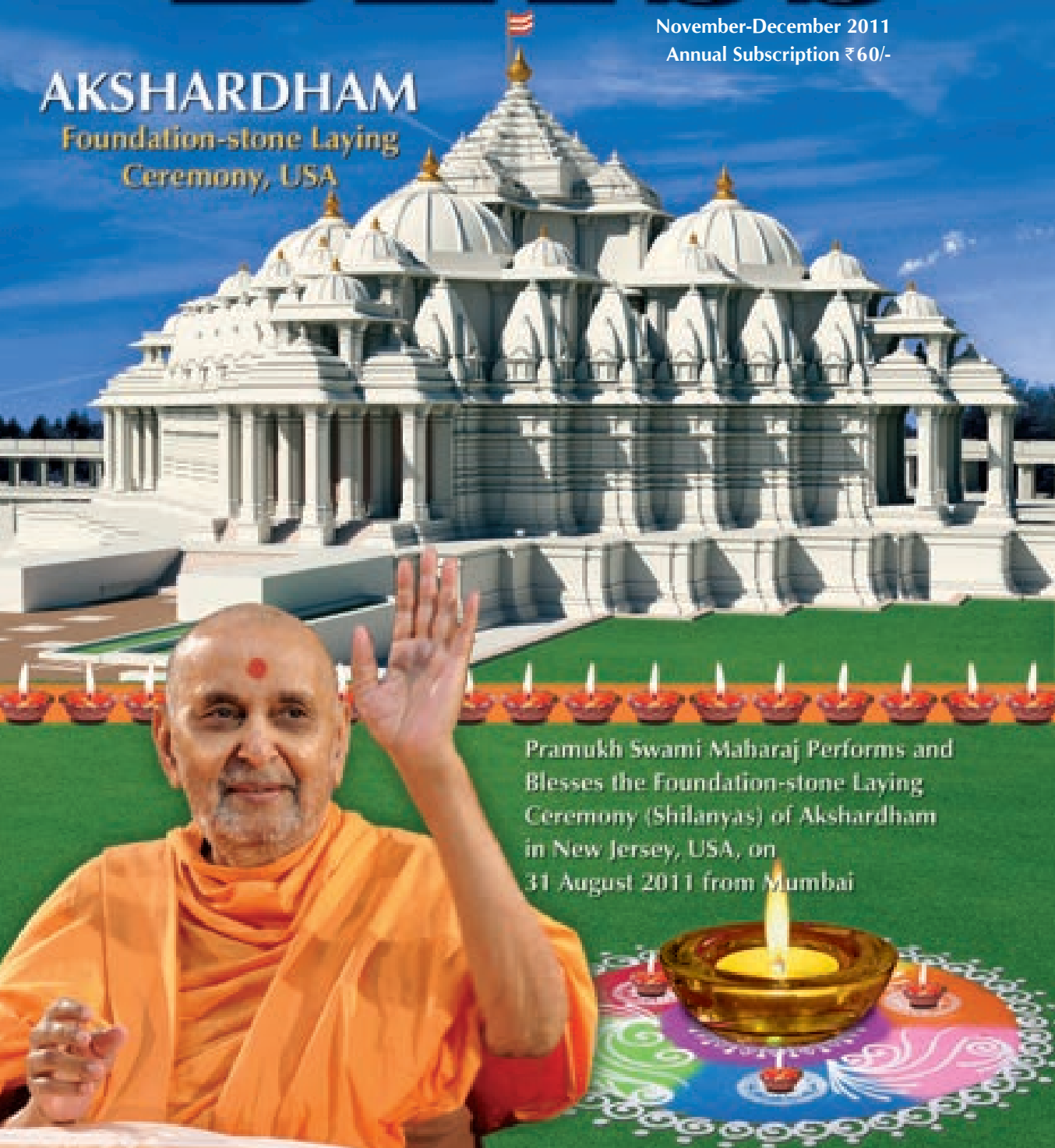
SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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AKSHARDHAM

Foundation-stone Laying
Ceremony, USA



Pramukh Swami Maharaj Performs and
Blesses the Foundation-stone Laying
Ceremony (Shilanyas) of Akshardham
in New Jersey, USA, on
31 August 2011 from Mumbai



SWAMISHRI IN MUMBAI, 11 October 2011

Above: On the auspicious occasion of Sharad Purnima, the birthday of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Swamishri offers heartfelt prayers. Top Right and Left: Swamishri is also honoured and engages in joyous dialogue with the devotees.



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Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

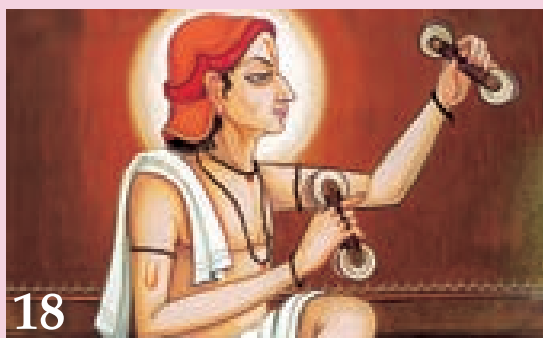
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In April 1978 Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the 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

Why do people sometimes find life boring and even depressing? One common reason is the daily routine of waking up, going to school or work and back home. Years of repetitive effort at work and daily interactions deflate one's enthusiasm for life. Many do not have choices besides complying to their robotic routine.

In spite of this dilemma you can extricate yourself from the cycle of monotony. The key to this is inspiration. When you fail to sow and nourish a higher thought or feeling, you remain simply confined to ground level, obsessed with yourself and your own activities. Lack of inspiration shackles you to your lower self, resulting in a blinkered life of eating, drinking and merrymaking. Self-centredness gives rise to selfishness and unhappiness.

On the other hand as you go beyond yourself and the gross things in life, you feel exhilarated and charged. Selflessness is the catalyst to happiness and inner progress. This single virtue can unlock your inner potential and add zeal to your actions.

Our world has many skilled, intelligent and talented people, but how many strive in life with the noble ideals of truth, justice, compassion, nonviolence, honesty, morality and pure faith in God? Selflessness is born from the practice of these ideals. But the reality of human personality is that our thoughts and efforts are mostly focused on our own selves. Consequently, we experience temporary feelings of importance and pleasure. But this facade soon collapses to leave us in disillusionment and depression.

However, our lives can change magically when we wake up with the inspiration to serve God, guru, his devotees and mankind selflessly. Then, our daily activities and work will become joyful and not drudgery.

The lives of Gunatit gurus amply reflect the magnanimous spirit to serve others. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has always strived endlessly to serve and make others happy. In all his efforts, he has paid no attention to circumstances, the hour of day or his ailing conditions. Even today, at ninety years, he selflessly serves the devotees by answering their letters, meeting them, talking to them and responding to them with a smile, a gesture and a prayer. He also praises the efforts of sadhus, children, youths and volunteers: be it a discourse, kirtan, decoration of Thakorji, relief work in times of calamity, a skit, a publication or *seva* in a festival.

The radiance and joy on Swamishri's face are the hallmarks of his profound spirituality and spirit of selfless service. The same cycle of rituals, worship and travellings have never tired him because he considers them to be a service (*seva*) to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus. So, Swamishri's life is a beacon of inspiration. Taking a leaf from his amazing selfless personality can help resolve our boredom and unhappiness and infuse energy and enthusiasm into our lives. ♦



Shri Hari Reveals His Purpose on Earth

*Shri Hari blesses the devotees of Kariyani with his darshan and divine lila.
One day he reveals the six reasons for his birth on earth to Gopalanand Swami...*

“YOU SPOKE THE NAME OF SWAMINARAYAN!”

One day Shri Hari came out of his room to see Vasta Khachar. On the way he saw a woman devotee playing with her child. Shri Hari stopped to witness the interplay of mother and child. When the child uttered, “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan,” the mother became ecstatic. She smothered her child with loving kisses and embraces and rejoiced, “O child, you spoke the name of Swaminarayan! I’m extremely pleased with you and eager to give you anything and everything.”

Shri Hari smiled and showered his grace

upon her. By then Vasta Khachar arrived and asked, “Maharaj, what makes you so happy?”

Shri Hari did not hear Vasta Khachar’s words but he blessed, “I’ll have to grant *moksha* to this woman similar to that of Muktanand Swami.”

Shri Hari applauded Vasta Khachar, “Vasta, this lady beholds my name with such glory and esteem. Truly your house is like Akshardham!”

Vasta Bapu was elated with Shri Hari’s acknowledgement. He replied, “Maharaj, it is all due to your glory. Your words of wisdom and glory have pervaded the hearts of the young and old alike here.”

GOPALANAND SWAMI'S ARRIVAL

Shri Hari declared that he would celebrate the festivals of Diwali and New Year's Day in Kariyani.

A few days later a devotee arrived from Vadodara and gave news of Gopalanand Swami's imminent arrival. Shri Hari was in his room, Akshar Ordi, dictating a letter to Shukanand Swami. Maharaj asked the devotee where he had come from. "I've come from Vadodara. At your behest Gopalanand Swami will be arriving here soon. I hurried to let you know of his coming in advance." Shri Hari was pleased and blessed the devotee. Maharaj wished to receive Gopalanand Swami, so he proceeded to welcome him.

On seeing Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami started prostrating. Maharaj held his hands and raised him, "Do not prostrate anymore. You have travelled far and must be tired." Shri Hari embraced Swami and asked him, "Are you happy?"

"Yes, by your grace I'm well."

Shri Hari looked lovingly at Gopalanand Swami without blinking his eyes. All witnessed the love and respect Maharaj had for him. The arrival of Gopalanand Swami enthused all.

Nishkulanand Swami was constructing an open-air bathing area for Maharaj. He added, "Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami comes from a city therefore he must be happy!"

Shri Hari asserted, "The city life does not affect him. He is spiritually high so he can create an ambience of renunciation and austerity like that of a forest." Nishkulanand Swami simply stood still mulling over Maharaj's words. He recalled how he had rejected a delicious meal in Vadodara, in Gopalanand Swami's presence, and left as quickly as possible. He had then felt as to how a sadhu could restrain his senses and mind in the face of sumptuous meals offered by devotees? Today, however, Shri Hari's praise for Gopalanand Swami made him realize that

Swami was immune to the sense pleasures of the city life and that he had the power to unshackle many from its bondage.

Shri Hari took Gopalanand Swami to his room. He sat on his bed while Gopalanand Swami settled on a blanket spread on the floor. Maharaj enquired about the devotees of Vadodara and how they were faring. After some time Mulji Brahmachari brought lunch for Maharaj. Shri Hari told Gopalanand Swami to wash and refresh himself. After his meal, Maharaj instructed his attendant to send the *prasad* to Gopalanand Swami.

In the evening, Maharaj told Shukanand Swami to call Gopalanand Swami. Shri Hari wished to speak to him alone in Akshar Ordi. He told Shukmuni to leave. On learning that Maharaj had called Gopalanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami left his work and entered Akshar Ordi to hear him. Shri Hari told him, "Swami, you must oversee the work or else it will not be done properly." Nishkulanand Swami went out, hastily appointed someone to supervise the work, and returned to hear Maharaj.

Again Maharaj insisted, "Swami, without your supervision the work will not be done according to your expectation. Therefore go and oversee the work yourself."

When Nishkulanand Swami left, Maharaj bolted the door. But Swami got an inkling that Shriji Maharaj was going to reveal something of great significance to Gopalanand Swami. So, he sat outside listening through a crack in the door. Maharaj asked Gopalanand Swami, "I have come from Akshardham with my abode and *muktas* like yourself. Do you know my purpose on earth?"

Gopalanand Swami said, "No!"

"Then listen. I have come to accomplish six things. After revealing them to you may you endeavour further in realizing and spreading them in Satsang."

Gopalanand Swami became attentive and eager to hear what Maharaj had to say.

Shri Hari revealed, “The first reason is to spread my supreme *upasana* and knowledge; second, to liberate the past avatars and their devotees through the knowledge of my divine form and bless them with Akshardham; third, to establish *ekantik dharma* on earth; fourth, to give the bliss of my form to Bhaktidevi and Dharmadev; fifth, to bless aspirants engaged in pilgrimage, austerities, charity and other things with my association and bless them with Akshardham; and the sixth and final reason is to liberate innumerable souls by taking them to Akshardham through the association of my ideal devotee. I have come from Akshardham on earth for these six reasons. We have to fulfil them all.”

Gopalanand Swami prayed humbly, “Maharaj, they will be realized through your divine powers.” Then, a loud rap on the door interrupted their dialogue. When the door was opened Nishkulanand Swami entered and declared, “Maharaj, from your revelation today I’ve discovered the missing link.”

Shri Hari was puzzled and asked, “What is it?”

“Your glory as Purushottam – the supreme Bhagwan,” Nishkulanand Swami replied with joy. He continued, “When you first arrived in Loj I went to Kutch for Ramanand Swami’s darshan. But the guru reproached me for coming and reiterated his command to go to Loj for your darshan. I asked him, ‘How great is Varni?’ Ramanand Swami explained, ‘Lalji, you’ll not believe me now but the supreme Purushottam Narayan, the incarnation of all incarnations, has arrived in the form of Varni. I and countless like me are insignificant before him. In future, when you’ll realize this, you will sing his glory profusely, regardless of any constraint.’”

Shri Hari and Gopalanand Swami smiled at Nishkulanand Swami’s narration. Maharaj averred, “It is difficult to understand this and

imbibe it in one’s heart.”

Nishkulanand Swami replied with joy, “Maharaj, guru Ramanand Swami revealed your supreme glory and today you have endorsed it. Now, where lies the difficulty in understanding it? We do not expect a miracle from you. Whoever understands this will be blessed, and whoever fails to do so will be unfortunate.”

Shri Hari restrained Swami from making such a forthright statement, “To people who do not understand my divinity the notion of my supremeness will be like a bolt from the sky. Therefore, be judicious and reveal it to only those who have affection for you.”

DIWALI FESTIVAL IN KARIYANI (1821 CE, A.S. 1877)

On the loving insistence of Vasta Khachar, Maharaj had decided to celebrate Diwali in Kariyani. As word of this joyful news spread to the neighbouring villages and to far off places thousands of devotees began flocking for the celebration.

On Diwali night a *deep-mala* was lit in the courtyard of Vasta Khachar’s house. A high seat was arranged for Shri Hari to preside over the festival. When Maharaj arrived, he was decked in fine clothes and jewellery to please the devotees. He was wearing a richly embroidered dark red *surwal* (lower garment) and a black coat inscribed with the name of ‘Narayan’ and ‘Swaminarayan’. He had a blue-coloured cloth-band tied neatly around his waist and a garland of yellow fragrant flowers around his neck. Shri Hari looked gorgeously divine. The devotees before him became lost in darshan. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)
From Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan
by Shri H.T. Dave



ADHYĀY 2

BRAHMI STHITI YOGA: YOGA IS DHARMA

Part 7

Recap: With the words ‘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). Shri Krishna pledged to explain the secret of yoga. This pledge was to explain yoga which is conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā.

YOGA IS DHARMA

Shri Krishna says to Pārth, ‘नेहाऽभिक्रमनाशोऽस्ति प्रत्यवायो न विद्यते। स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात्॥’ – ‘Nehā’bhikramanāsho’sti pratyavāyo na vidyate, svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt.’ Meaning, there is no loss in commencing this yoga of conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā, that is to say, no effort to

attain it is futile. Moreover, even the slightest practice of this dharma (conviction of God) protects one from great dangers (Gitā 2.40).

‘Asya dharmasya’ means ‘this dharma’. Let us take a look at the word ‘this’. ‘This’ is a pronoun. A pronoun is a word used instead of and to indicate something already mentioned. The shloka before this mentioned the yoga of conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā. It is this yoga that the word ‘this’ refers to. Therefore, it is clear that ‘this dharma’ is synonymous to the yoga of conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā.

This is a unique concept of dharma. In a general context, ‘dharma’ normally refers to the dharma of one’s caste and stage in life. In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna Bhagwan goes beyond that and sees dharma as conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā. ‘धारयते इति धर्मः’ – *‘Dhārayate iti dharmaha’* – ‘That which upholds all is dharma.’ Paramātmā, pervading everywhere, upholds all. Conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā is our lifeline. It is also the basis of liberation. Paramātmā, being our refuge, rids us of our miseries. That is why, in the Gitā, Shri Krishna Bhagwan repeatedly uses the word ‘dharma’ when giving precepts on conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā. We can see this clearly in many other cases.

ESTABLISHING DHARMA OF YOGA

The fourth *adhyay* of the Gitā starts with precepts on yoga. Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, ‘इमं विवस्वते योगं प्रोक्तवानहमव्ययम्। विवस्वान् मनवे प्राह मनुर्िक्ष्वाकवेऽब्रवीत्॥ एवं परम्पराप्राप्तमिमं राजर्षयो विदुः। स कालेनेह महता योगो नष्टः परन्तप ॥ स एवायं मया तेऽद्य योगः प्रोक्तः सनातनः। भक्तोऽसि मे सखा चेति रहस्यं ह्येतदुत्तमम्॥’ – *‘Imam vivasvate yogam proktavānahamavyayam, vivasvān manave prāha manurikshvākave’braveet. Evam paramparāprāptamimam rājarshayo viduhu, sa kāleneha mahatā yogo nashtaha paran-tapa. Sa evāyam mayā te’dya yogaha proktaha sanātanaḥ, bhakto’si me sakḥā cheti rahasyam*

hyetaduttamam.’ – ‘O Paramtapa Arjuna, I previously explained this yoga of conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā to Vivasvān. Vivasvān explained it to Manu. Manu explained it to Ikshvāku, and continuing in this way the *rājarshis* attained this knowledge. But eventually, after a long time passed, that yoga was forgotten. Therefore, I explained that mystic yoga to you today’ (Gitā 4.1-3).

In other words, ‘I have come to revive that forgotten yoga of conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā.’ Thereafter, in the seventh and eighth shloka, this is stated even more clearly with the words, ‘यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत। अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम्। परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्। धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगे युगे॥’ – *‘Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati Bhārata, abhyutthānamadharmaḥ tadātmānam sru-jāmyaham, paritrāṇāya sādhoonām vināśhāya cha dushkrutām, dharmasansthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge.*’ – ‘Whenever dharma declines and *adharma* increases, I manifest to protect the sadhus and destroy the *adharmis*. O Bharata, I manifest in age after age to firmly establish dharma’ (Gitā 4.7-8).

It is worthwhile analyzing the words used in the above shlokas, such as ‘yogo nashtaha’ (Gitā 4.3), ‘sa evāyam mayā te’dya yogaha proktaha’ (Gitā 4.3), ‘dharmasya glānihi’ (Gitā 4.7), ‘dharmasansthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi’ (Gitā 4.8). At first the word ‘yoga’ has been used, and thereafter, the word ‘dharma’ has been used in its place. The forgetting of yoga has later been referred to as the declination of dharma. The revival of yoga has been referred to as the establishment of dharma. Therefore it is clear that incarnations of Paramātmā are for the establishment of yoga. That is to say, for establishing conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā. It is this establishment of conviction for which the word ‘dharma’ has been used in the phrase ‘*dharmasansthāpanārthāya*’.

In the current context, we should remember

the words of Parabrahman Purushottam Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan, “God assumes avatars upon earth for the purpose of establishing dharma, and that too, not simply for the establishment of the dharma of one’s varna and ashram. After all, even the āchāryas of *pravrutti dharma*, such as the Saptarshi and others have established the dharma of the four varnas and ashrams. God does not, however, assume avatars solely for that purpose; he assumes avatars to expound the dharma of his *ekāntik bhaktas*” (Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā II 46). “The type of dharma that the avatars of God come to establish is this very same dharma [i.e., Bhāgvat dharma, conviction in the form of Paramātmā]. On the other hand, the dharma of one’s varna and ashram alone is extremely inferior compared to Bhāgvat dharma, because it is through Bhāgvat dharma that the *jiva* crosses God’s *māyā* and attains the abode of Purushottam” (Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā III 21).

SECRET DHARMA IS CONVICTION

‘इदं तु ते गुह्यतमं प्रवक्ष्याम्यनसूयवे...धर्म्यम्’ – ‘*Idam tu te guhyatamam pravakshyāmyanasooyave... dharmyam*’ – ‘Arjuna, I will now tell you about a secret dharma’ (Gita 9.1, 3). With these words the ninth *adhyāy* commences with a pledge to reveal a secret dharma; what is that secret dharma? The Gitā says,

‘मया ततमिदं सर्वम्’ – ‘*Mayā tatamidam sarvam*’ – ‘Everything is pervaded by me’ (Gitā 9.4), ‘मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि’ – ‘*Matsthāni sarvabhootāni*’ – ‘All living things are upheld by me’ (Gitā 9.4), ‘न च मां तानि कर्माणि निबध्नन्ति’ – ‘*Na cha mām tāni karmāni nibadhnanti*’ – ‘Karmas cannot bind me’ (Gitā 9.4), ‘मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम्’ – ‘*Mayādhyaakshena prakṛtihi sooyate sacharācharam*’ – ‘Under my control, nature creates the whole of creation, including both animate and inanimate things’ (Gitā 9.10), ‘अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम्’ – ‘*Avajānanti mām moodhā mānusheen tanumāshritam*’ – ‘The foolish

people who have taken a human birth and do not know my supreme nature disregard me. The foolish who do not know my superiority are disrespectful’ (Gita 9.11), ‘पिताहमस्य जगतः’ – ‘*Pitāhamasya jagataha*’ – ‘I am the father of the world’ (Gitā 9.17), ‘मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु’ – ‘*Manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru*’ – ‘Focus your mind on me. Devote yourself to me. Worship me. Bow to me’ (Gitā 9.34). Thus, the entire ninth *adhyāy* directs one to develop conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā. Therefore, it is clear that Shri Krishna Bhagwan calls these precepts of conviction ‘*dharmyam*’ (Gitā 9.2), i.e., he identifies them as precepts of dharma.

CONVICTION IN PARAMĀTMĀ IS NECTAR OF DHARMA

Let us now take a look at the twelfth *adhyāy*, which also features precepts on conviction with words like, ‘मय्यावेश्य मनो’ – ‘*Mayyāveshya mano*’ – ‘Engrossing your mind in me’ (Gitā 12.2), ‘सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्पराः’ – ‘*Sarvāni karmāni mayi sannasya matparāhā*’ – ‘Dedicating all your actions to me, becoming focused on me’ (Gitā 12.6), ‘मयि बुद्धिं निवेशय’ – ‘*Mayi buddhim niveshaya*’ – ‘Keeping your intellect fixed on me’ (Gitā 1.8), ‘मामाप्नुमिच्छ’ – ‘*Māmāptumichchha*’ – ‘Desire to attain me’ (Gitā 12.9), ‘मत्कर्मपरमो भव’ – ‘*Matkarmaparamo bhava*’ – ‘Focus your actions on things relating to me’ (Gitā 12.10), and after all of these precepts of conviction, it concludes by referring to these precepts as ‘धर्म्यामृतमिदम्’ – ‘*Dharmyāmṛutamidam*’ – ‘nectar of dharma has been identified’ (Gita 12.20).

Thus the twelfth *adhyāy* also uses the word dharma to refer to conviction.

DIALOGUES ON YOGA ARE DIALOGUES ON DHARMA

Let us finally take a look at the last *adhyāy* of the Gitā. Shri Krishna Bhagwan himself regards this dialogue with Parth to be a dialogue on dhar-

ma. He says 'इमं धर्म्यं संवादमावयोः' – '*Imam dharmyam samvādamāvayoho*' – 'This has been a dialogue between us on dharma' (Gitā 18.30). It is as if the precepts spread across the 18 *adhyāys* of the Gitā are summarized in one word, 'dharma'.

Yoga is the main subject of the Gitā. That is why the Gitā has become renowned as a 'yoga shastra' (scripture on yoga). The word '*yogashastre*' is also recited at the end of every chapter of the Gitā. Yet, by calling this whole dialogue on yoga a dialogue on dharma, Shri Krishna Bhagwan has affirmed the unity between the two.

Thus, we can see that the yoga of conviction in Paramātmā has been explained throughout the Gitā from start to end as dharma. This same yoga has been referred to with the word 'dharma' in the sentence '*svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt*' (Gitā 2.40).

This special and distinctive meaning of the word 'dharma' was first revealed by Parabrahman Purushottam Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan. He says, "When the Mahābhārat war was fought... Arjun never became disheartened, despite committing countless misdeeds during the war. He maintained firm faith in God. Conversely, Yudhishtir had not committed any sins whatsoever, and yet, because he had faith in the words of the scriptures, he felt, 'I shall never attain liberation.' Even when all of the rishis, Vyāsji and even Shri Krishna Bhagwān himself attempted to explain to him, still he did not forsake his remorse. Only when Shri Krishna Bhagwān took him to Bhishma and had him listen to Bhishma's discourse on the true meaning of the words of the scriptures did he develop some faith. Nevertheless, he did not become totally free of doubt like Arjun. Thus, one who is intelligent should intensely maintain spiritual strength based on the conviction of God.

"Even the slightest strength based on this conviction will protect one from great dangers. Shri Krishna Bhagwān has also said,

स्वल्पमप्यस्य धर्मस्य त्रायते महतो भयात् ॥¹

This verse means, 'If one has the slightest strength based on the conviction of God, it will protect one from great calamities.' For example, when Arjun fought in the Mahābhārat war, he encountered many, many types of grave dangers in the form of *adharma*. Yet, he was spared from those dangers because of his conviction in God" (Vachanāmṛut, Gadhadā II 9).

Here, Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan calls conviction in Paramātmā courage of conviction in God. He explained the meaning of the word 'dharma' in the above shloka, and in the explanation of just this one word, he has explained the entire Gita. He has brought out the secret hidden within the Gita. Many have contemplated on and discussed these words before, but Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan is the only one who has brought to light this approach of understanding the word dharma to mean conviction in the manifest form of Paramātmā.

Hence, conviction in Paramātmā is the prominent meaning of the word dharma. That is why Shri Krishna Bhagwan talks of the value of this dharma saying, '*Nehā'bhikramanāsho'sti*' (Gitā 2.39) – 'There is no loss in commencing this dharma', '*pratyavāyo na vidyate*' (Gitā 2.39) – 'There are no unwanted side-effects' and '*Trāyate mahato bhayāt*' (Gitā 2.39) – 'It protects one from the great fear of countless births and deaths'.

Thus, the Gita considers the conviction in Paramātmā as yoga. Calling this yoga 'dharma' in the phrase '*svalpamapyasya dharmasya*' (Gitā 2.39), it reinforces that yoga. And, telling us about the fruits of that yoga, it inspires us to perfect it in our lives. ♦

1. *Svalpam-apyasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt* ॥
- Bhagavad Gitā 2.40



Swamishri performs the Akshardham Shilanyas rituals with senior sadhus and devotees at Dadar Mandir, Mumbai

New Jersey Akshardham Shilanyas Ceremony

31 August 2011, Mumbai

For several days Swamishri had been informed about the details of the Shilanyas (foundation stone-laying) ritual for Akshardham in New Jersey, USA, to be performed in the mandir at Dadar. Swamishri thoroughly understood the entire planning, from every ritual procedure to where the ritual stones would be placed, and the accommodation and seating arrangements of the devotees. He also gave several suggestions.

Formerly, the rituals were planned to be done by senior sadhus in the *abhishek mandap* in the presence of five devotees from USA. Then, as decided, Swamishri would arrive at the end and shower flowers on each of the *shilas*. But everything changed at Swamishri's behest. Swamishri declared that he would like to do his morning puja beneath the mandir dome and be present for the entire Shilanyas ritual. Several sadhus requested Swamishri that because of his ailing health he should come later. But Swamishri was determined to be present and declared, "I'll be there at 7.00 a.m."

In the morning, prior to Swamishri's arrival for Thakorji's darshan, more than 60 devotees from USA and some principal devotees of Mumbai were accommodated beneath the mandir dome for the Akshardham Shilanyas ritual. The principal *shilas* for the rituals were placed beneath the mandir dome and the rest were arranged in the vestibule outside Thakorji's shrine. A live telecast by Aastha Channel was arranged so that devotees in North America and the UK could have darshan of the entire historic ritual. Swamishri arrived at 7.00 a.m. After Thakorji's darshan he started his puja beneath the mandir dome. The dome and pillars were decorated with festoons of flowers and an arched backdrop of colourful flowers adorned Swamishri's seat.

When Swamishri commenced his puja the Shilanyas ritual began simultaneously with Vedic chantings by Brahmins. To Swamishri's right Pujya Kothari Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and to his left Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami were performing the Shilanyas ritu-



Swamishri pours cement in a gold vessel



Swamishri showers sanctified rose petals on the shilas

als. The devotees were also performing the rituals before Swamishri. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was pedestalled on a golden throne and adorned in golden clothes. Swamishri happily responded to the devotees during the ceremonial rituals. The ritual worship of *pujan* and *panchamrut snan* were performed on Shri Jabreshwar Maharaj (small metallic *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj) and Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

At 7.45 a.m. Swamishri completed his personal puja and the main *shila* for the foundation was arranged on a platform before Swamishri. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was placed on the *shila*. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke briefly about the Akshardham project. Then Swamishri performed *pujan* of the main *shila* and the golden *yantras* with rice grains. Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* of six *nidhi-kumbhs* and one main *kumbh* and then ritually placed Anant and Kurma inside the main *kumbh*. On behalf of all, Shri Kanubhai Patel (CEO of USA Satsang Mandal) placed gold coins inside the main *kumbh*. Then Pujya Kothari Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Viveksagar Swami performed *pujan* of the remaining *shilas* placed before the mandir shrines. Swamishri then scooped a mixture of cement and concrete and placed it into a golden vessel, thus

marking the climax of the ritual. The entire congregation joyously chorused the *jais* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*.

Thereafter Swamishri and the devotees performed *arti*, *mantra-pushpanjali* and chanted *dhun* to pray for the success of the Akshardham project, Swamishri's good health, happiness of devotees in mind, body and wealth, and for peace and prosperity in the world. Finally, the *pujan* of a coconut and chanting of prayers concluded the Shilanyas *mahapuja* rituals.

Swamishri tied *nada-chhadis* and applied *chandlo* to the Brahmin priests, Shri Ghanshyambhai Shastri of Anand, Mukeshbhai from Ahmedabad and others, for beautifully conducting the Shilanyas rituals. Swamishri also tied *nada-chhadis* to Kanubhai Patel and Harshadbhai Chavda. Then the senior sadhus honoured Swamishri with garlands and a shawl.

Swamishri also inaugurated *Prasangam, 2010*, a Swaminarayan Aksharpith publication by Sadhu Priyadarshandas.

In conclusion, Swamishri gave his blessings for the festive occasion, "We built the first Akshardham in Gandhinagar and countless people have experienced peace in its precincts. Then we

(contd. on p. 48)

Akshardham Mahamandir Shilanyas Mahotsav

October 6, 8-9, 2011, Robbinsville, New Jersey (USA)



Swamishri participates in the Shilanyas rituals via a live video-conference link

Swamis, devotees, and well-wishers celebrated the sacred foundation stone-laying ceremony (*shilanyas*) of the Akshardham Mahamandir on 6, 8, and 9 October 2011. The celebration consisted of six sacred Vedic ceremonies – two on each day – marking the start of construction of the Akshardham Mahamandir. The usual green landscape of this site off US Highway 130 was transformed into a paradise of gleaming colours and captivating sounds. Christine Ciacchio, President of Robbinsville City Council, was awed by the site's transformation. "We have come a long way in the last year. The buildings are coming up fast and I can see the love and excitement radiating everywhere. When I speak with the youth, I feel their confidence. The parents love it. The community loves it."

Prior to the ceremony, participants took a

tour of the entire complex and then enjoyed a programme of bhajans. The *shilas* (sacred stones), sanctified on 31 August 2011 by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Mumbai, India, had been sent to New Jersey for the final ceremony. This commenced on the morning of 6 October, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj led the Shilanyas ceremony from Mumbai, India, via live video-conference, as Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, other sadhus and devotees performed the rituals in New Jersey. In subsequent sessions over the next several days, devotees enjoyed Swamishri's performance of the ceremony through playback of the video. It was a unique memory for all those present – a Shilanyas ceremony performed by the devotees in the presence of Swamishri, despite both being separated by a few oceans and thousands of miles.

After the rituals, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed his enthusiasm for the project and blessed the assembly, “With such enthusiasm evident in the devotees, the project will be speedily completed without any obstacles. We are pleased to see everyone’s faith and conviction, since despite the hectic pace of life in America, everyone has offered their time and effort for this noble work. Because of your unity, the project work is progressing and others are inspired to join in with you. We pray that you all become happy, attain strength of spirit and experience peace. May everyone involved in the project as well as all of the future visitors to Akshardham attain peace and liberation.”

The Shilanyas rituals were followed by a spiritual assembly celebrating Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vision of Akshardham as well as inspirational stories of dedicated volunteers and families.

The Sanstha’s sincerity and respect for the community was appreciated by all those who participated and witnessed it. Robbinsville Mayor David Fried remarked, “What has happened here today is truly amazing. I am excited for all of you. I am excited for the community. It’s unique that so many people are willing to volunteer their time and give their energy to make something happen. That is something we really need more of. On behalf of my council and my community, I thank you for choosing our town.”

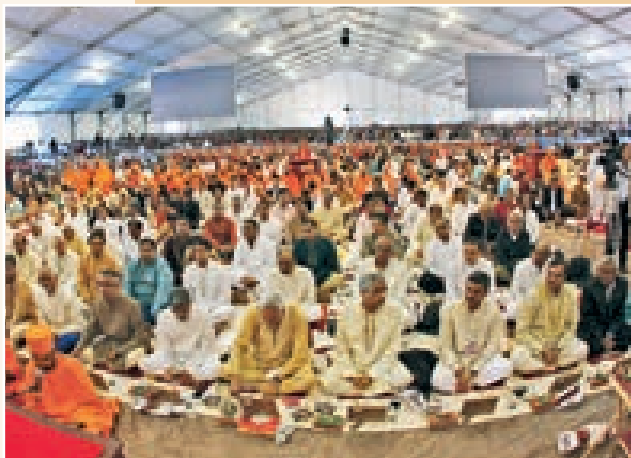
This significant milestone was achieved through the vision and blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and strong support from the BAPS volunteers, neighbours, and town officials of Robbinsville, New Jersey. ♦



Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami perform rituals at the Akshardham site



Mahant Swami pours sanctified water into the foundation



Thousands of devotees participate in the Shilanyas ceremony

Hindu Festivals

November-December 2011



Hatadi of vegetable offerings on Deva Prabodhini Ekadashi



Pilgrims bathing in the Pushkar lake on Kartik Purnima

An overview of the major festivals during November and December 2011...

6 NOVEMBER: DEVA PRABODHINI (KARTIK SUD 11)

On this day Bhagwan Vishnu awakens from his four-month *yog-nidra* (divine rest) at the doorstep of King Bali. He then returns to Vaikunth. On this day people observe a waterless fast. The first harvest of vegetables after the monsoon is decoratively offered in mandirs. This is known as *Hatadi*. *Arti* is also performed.

This day also marks the beginning of Tulsi Vivah, a five-day festival celebrating the divine marriage of a *gopi* named Tulsi with Shri Krishna. In Vaishnav mandirs, the tulsi plant is symbolically placed in a marriage *mandapam* with Shri Krishna and offered puja. On Purnima, when Tulsi Vivah ends, jubilant devotees light *diyas* and explode fireworks.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Kartik Ekadashi also marks four important occasions, namely, Dharmadeva's birth, *diksha* to Nilkanth Varni by Ramanand Swami on 28 October 1800 in Piplana, appointment of Sahajanand Swami as head of the Sampradaya by Ramanand Swami in Jetpur on 16 November 1801 and *parshad diksha* to Shantilal (His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj) in Ambliwadi Pol in Ahmedabad by Shastriji Maharaj in 1939.

10 NOVEMBER: DEVA DIWALI (KARTIK SUD PURNIMA)

Bhagwan Vishnu arrived in Vaikunth on this day after leaving King Bali. The devas celebrated this occasion which thus came to be known



Tulsi Vivah at the Keshav Deva mandir, Mathura



Celebrating Dhanurmas in mandirs

as Deva Diwali. In India people visit the sacred Pushkar Sarovar in Rajasthan to have a meritorious bath.

The five-day Tulsi Vivah festival ends on this day.

2 DECEMBER: PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S JANMAMAHOTSAV (MAGSHAR SUD 8)

Swamishri was born on this day in Chansad in 1921. This day is celebrated worldwide by devotees of BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

16 DECEMBER: DHARNURMAS BEGINS

This day marks the beginning of a month-long festival of Dhanurmas, known as Margali in south India. The importance and glory of this month is cited in the Bharadhwaj Samhita and Purushottam Samhita of the Panchratra shastras.

During this month Paramatma is offered puja and sweets. Shastras such as the four Vedas and other texts are displayed in the *garbha gruha* of mandirs.

In the Venkateshwar Swami Mandir in Tirumala, the Tiruppavai Pasurams of Andal (poetical treatise centred on Krishna-bhakti), the great female Alwar, are sung during this month instead of the usual Suprabhatam, as ordained by Shri Ramanujacharya.

In all mandirs of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, textbooks and toys are offered with the underlying sentiment that Paramatma goes to school during this month, so sweets and savoury snacks are also offered to him.

(For details see *Hindu Festivals (origin, sentiments & rituals)*. 2011. Swaminarayan Aksharpathi.) ♦

Narsinh Mehta

A Doyen Among Saint-Poets

*Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye re,
je pida parāi jāne re...*

"A Vaishnav is one who understands and empathizes with the sufferings of others..." The message rings true even today, in the aftermath of two World Wars fought to eliminate all wars, when our world is poised on the brink of a nuclear holocaust.

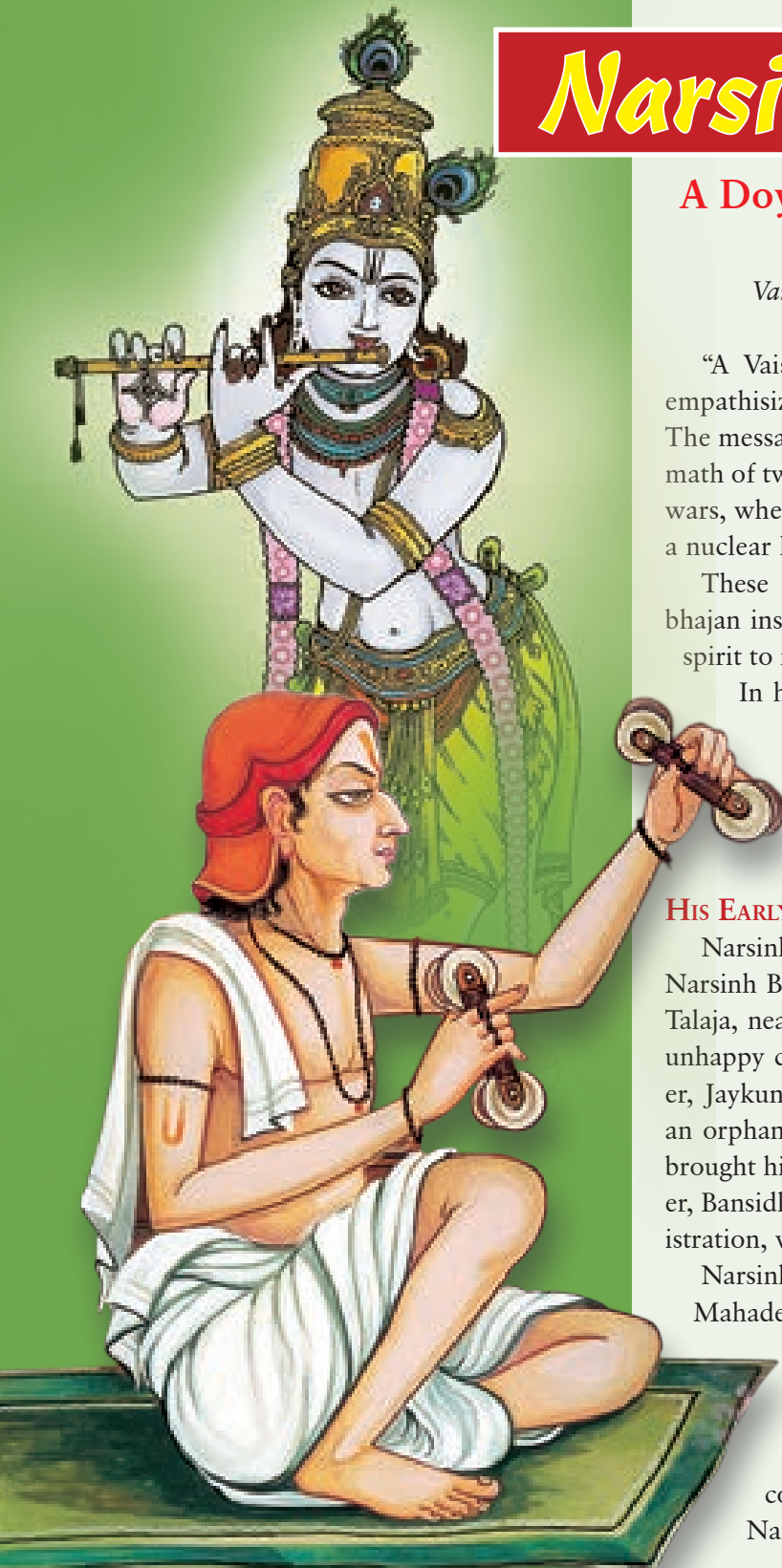
These soothing words of Narsinh Mehta's bhajan inspire feelings of inner ecstasy and the spirit to integrate the ideals of a true Vaishnav.

In his bhajan the saint-poet of Junagadh proclaims the universal message of love and affection, for which the ancient land of India is so justly famous.

HIS EARLY YEARS

Narsinh Mehta (1414-1475 CE), also called Narsinh Bhagat and Narsinh Ram, was born at Talaja, near Junagadh in Saurashtra. He had an unhappy childhood relieved by his grandmother, Jaykunvar. He was born dumb and became an orphan at the age of five. His grandmother brought him up, with what help his elder brother, Bansidhar, an officer in the Junagadh administration, would provide.

Narsinh Ram used to visit the Hatkeshwar Mahadev Mandir in Junagadh along with his grandmother. It is said that an ascetic at the Hatkeshwar mandir cured him of his dumbness and predicted that the young boy would become a great devotee of Krishna. When Narsinh Ram started speaking at around



age nine, he uttered the name of Krishna Bhagwan. Since then he made it a point to sing the praise of Krishna, wherever or whoever asked him. In one of his compositions he proclaims:

“*Akhil brahmānd mā ek tum Shri Hari,
Jujve rupe anant bhāse;
Dehmā deva tum, tattvamā tej tum,
Shunyamā shabda thai Vedā vāse.*”

“O Shri Hari! Although you are the Supreme Personality of Godhead in the *brahmānd*
You appear to be many and eternal;
You are the divinity in the body,
You are the life force in all beings.

In the vast expanses of space you are reflected as the word in the Vedas.”

He would even go to sing bhajans in the huts of people who were socially downtrodden and treated as untouchables. Because of this, he was ostracized by his own community.

Day by day Narsinh Mehta became more and more steeped in devotion to Krishna. Often, the Lord took over his temporal affairs so that the devotee could pay undivided attention to his worship and inspire others to do the same. Shri Krishna proclaims in the Bhagavad Gita, “*Yoga kshemam vahāmyaham*” – “To them I carry what they lack, and I preserve what they have.”

Narsinh Mehta lived a life of penury, rich only in spiritual content, reminiscent of Sudama. His earthly possessions consisted of a *murti* of Bhagwan, *kartal*, a circlet adorned with a peacock feather and a *pitambar*; all of which, it is believed, were presented by Krishna himself.

After Narsinh gained the power of speech, Bansidhar, his elder brother, thought of educating him as they belonged to the cultured Nagar Brahmin community who were noted for their scholastic achievements and administrative skills. Thus, Narsinh was admitted to a Sanskrit *pathshala* (school), but he turned out to be a poor student. So, his vexed brother and sister-in-law, Durit Gauri, entrusted him with the task

of cutting grass for their horses. Durit Gauri turned out to be his tormentor for life, harassing him at every stage. If ever she was nice to him, it could be called a momentary aberration.

HIS MARRIAGE TO MANEK GAURI

When Narsinh Mehta was in his late teens his grandmother thought of his marriage because she was afraid that he would turn into a sannyasi. He was accordingly married to Manek Gauri, who came from a well-to-do family. In the normal course such a marriage would have been unthinkable. For, Narsinh Mehta’s outstanding attribute was his unfailing devotion to Bhagwan Krishna. A father, before giving his daughter in marriage, would look to the financial condition of the prospective bridegroom. Narsinh Mehta’s position was nothing to write about on the material side. However, his brother was a man of status. Considered in worldly terms, Manek Gauri’s father was running a risk in marrying her to Narsinh. Despite her rich family background, Manek became a *sahadharmancharini* – a companion in the truest sense of the term. She put up with the unconventional lifestyle of her husband, bore him two children: a daughter named Kunvarbai and son, Shamaldas. She stood by him through thick and thin and not a single bitter word crossed her lips despite the many problems she had to face in their lives. Whenever Manek Gauri expressed concern for the morrow, Narsinh Mehta asked her to leave all concerns to Bhagwan Krishna.

Narsinh Mehta’s naivete in social affairs made him the butt of Junagadh. But he treated the idle sneers of his community with the tolerance of a *sthitpragna*, leaving everything to God, who looked after him till the end.

One of the last acts of Narsinh Mehta’s grandmother, before dying at 95, was to arrange the marriage of Kunvarbai with a boy hailing from a rich family of Una, Saurashtra.

MIRACULOUS EPISODES

Like all devotees of his genre, Narsinh Mehta's life is full of miracles which are recalled with reverential awe. His life was centred around mandirs. Whenever God put him to the test he came out successful each time. He also overcame apparently insurmountable difficulties with God's grace.

His first encounter with the Divine was when he sought shelter in a Shivalaya for seven days after being turned out of the house by his brother and sister-in-law. He piteously cried clinging to the deity. Shiva took pity on him and granted him darshan. It is believed that Bhagwan Shiva took him to Dwarka where he was enabled to witness the spectacle of Krishna Bhagwan's opulence in Dwarka. After conferring his grace on his devotee, Krishna Bhagwan told him to return to Junagadh to be with his family. Krishna explained to him the duties of a householder. It was at the time of parting that Bhagwan gave him a *pitambar* and other things. After returning to his brother's house, Bansidhar, a staunch Shaivite, ridiculed him for his Vaishnava attire and asked him to undertake a job, so that he could support his family.

KUNVARBAI'S MARRIAGE

The marriage of Narsinh Mehta's daughter, Kunvarbai, is another milestone episode in which God intervenes by using his divine powers. Kunvarbai's marriage was arranged with Vacchraj, the son of a Nagar Brahmin named Shirang Oza. Surprisingly, a few days prior to the wedding day the house of Narsinh Mehta was quiet. There were no signs of hectic preparations for the arrival of his in-laws and guests. Two days before the marriage, Narsinh Mehta was invited to the nearby village of Vanthali to participate in satsang and singing bhajans in a gathering of sadhus and sannyasis. Narsinh left, planning to return in a day or two. But he became lost in devotion and satsang. Two hours

before the arrival of the bridegroom, in-laws and their guests Narsinh was nowhere to be seen. His family members were worried about welcoming the retinue without him. How unsocial and insulting it would be for them. But moments later, to everyone's joy, they saw Narsinh Mehta approaching with a group of men. Then Narsinh and the men hurriedly made the welcoming and lodging arrangements. In no time, decorations, tents, refreshments and a feast for the guests were ready. When the in-laws arrived they were overjoyed with the arrangements. Kunvarbai was gifted rich clothes and embellished with gold ornaments. Many were awed by the opulence and generosity of Narsinh Mehta. After the marriage ceremony was over the in-laws departed with the newly married couple to their home. Meanwhile, in Vanthali, Narsinh suddenly remembered about his daughter's marriage. He rushed back to Junagadh and was amazed to see a beautiful *mandap* for the marriage. On learning that the marriage was over and that Kunvarbai had departed with her in-laws Narsinh realized that his Lord had managed the entire occasion. Narsinh prayed to his beloved Krishna and thanked him.

THE MARRIAGE OF SHYAMALDAS

The marriage of Narsinh Mehta's son, Shyamaldas, was performed in an equally supernatural manner. The Diwan of Vadnagar, Madan Mehta, was looking for a suitable bridegroom for his daughter. He sent his family *purohit* (priest) to Junagadh as it had a large Nagar Brahmin community. The priest was given a letter of introduction addressed to a former classmate of the Diwan. With his help the *purohit* interviewed a lot of boys but found none of them suitable. When he was on the point of leaving Junagadh to announce the failure of his mission to his master, Narsinh Mehta's name was suggested by his contact, more out of spite than goodwill. The *purohit* liked Shyamaldas and his



Narsinh Mehta's Choro where he often sat to sing bhajans, Junagadh



Murti of Shri Damodar (Krishna) worshipped by Narsinh Mehta, now in the mandir opposite the Choro

good nature. He was also greatly impressed by the piety of Narsinh Mehta. The *purohit* reckoned without the cussedness of the Nagar community and reported his recommendation to the Diwan.

The marriage date was fixed and invitations were sent out. The Nagar Brahmins of Junagadh took it amiss that a poor Brahmin's son should be chosen in preference to so many other eligible bachelors. So, they sent a letter to the Diwan pointing out the fact that Narsinh Mehta's son was not at all suitable with respect to his high status. The Diwan was in a fix as to how to call off the marriage at that late stage. Then he thought of a plan and wrote a letter to Narsinh Mehta, asking him to come for the wedding with a grand procession comprising of rich men, bussinessmen, elephants, horses, etc. The Diwan knew that Narsinh did not have the means, so he would have a genuine reason to call off the marriage. But Narsinh Mehta was his usual unflappable self. He set out on the appointed day to Vadnagar with his bhajan group to the horrified protests of Manekbai who was afraid that the marriage proposal would be cancelled. According to lore Krishna Bhagwan came in disguise here by leading a gorgeous procession of men and women, decorations, expensive gifts and jewellery. The Diwan was awestruck when he saw the procession and

regretted having written such a nasty letter to Narsinh Mehta. When he advanced to meet the procession, he mistook Bhagwan Krishna, who was in the procession, for Narsinh Mehta. Imagine the Diwan's surprise when Krishna described himself as a humble servant of Narsinh and offered to take him to the bridegroom's father. The interview between the two would-be relatives was out of the ordinary. On the one side was Narsinh Mehta who was humble to his fingertips and on the opposite end was the Diwan who had displayed his social arrogance not so long ago. To make up for his gaffe, the Diwan profusely apologized to the bridegroom's father. The marriage of Shyamaldas concluded in grand style. Again the Lord had saved the day for Narsinh Mehta.

FEAST IN HONOUR OF HIS DEPARTED FATHER

It was customary in those days for the Nagar Brahmins to arrange a community feast to commemorate the death anniversary (*shrad-dh*) of close relatives. When the death anniversary of Narsinh's father came, a prominent member of the community approached him and insisted on such a feast. Narsinh Mehta expressed his inability, but could not convince the community leader. Instead of a few as originally intended, a lot of Brahmins came for the feast. It was felt that ghee would not suffice.

Narsinh Mehta armed himself with a container and went to the market. Nobody was prepared to give him credit to buy ghee. In the end a merchant agreed to supply the required quantity of ghee on condition he sing some bhajans. That was an irresistible invitation. He started singing kirtans and soon a crowd gathered in the shop. Meanwhile, Bhagwan Krishna realized Manek Gauri's predicament and delivered the ghee in disguise. Before that Akurji led a group of cooks who had already started cooking sumptuous food for the Brahmin guests. When Bhagwan came in the guise of Narsinh Mehta, Manek was under the impression that it was her husband who had brought the ghee. Imagine her surprise when the real Narsinh Mehta appeared with the ghee. By then the guests had already started to leave after a good meal. Such is the care Bhagwan takes of his genuine devotees.

In another incident, four merchants were on a pilgrimage to Dwarka. On arriving in Junagadh they were looking for someone who would write a *hundi* for seven hundred rupees for Dwarka. (A *hundi* is a note of credit which could be encashed at the destination.) Such practice was prevalent at that time as carrying large amounts of money was considered unsafe. Some pranksters directed the pilgrims to Narsinh Mehta's house. Without hesitation he wrote out the *hundi* in Shamalsha Sheth's name at Dwarka. After reaching Dwarka, the pilgrims found to their surprise that there was nobody by that name. The pilgrims were convinced that they had been taken for a ride.

At that time in Junagadh, Narsinh Mehta remembered about the *hundi* he had written. He sat before the *murti* of Shri Krishna and started singing, "*Māri hundi svikāro, Mahārāj re...*" – "O Lord, please accept my *hundi*..." He prayed to God to pay the amount to the pilgrims. God heard his prayer and he took the form of a merchant called Shamalsha Sheth. The Sheth ap-

proached the pilgrims and gave cash in exchange for the *hundi*.

ALLEGATIONS GALORE

All manner of allegations were levelled against Narsinh by members of his Nagar community. One of them involved a woman of easy virtue. She was actually sent to entice him, but became his follower. This was not to the liking of his detractors. Then some of them complained that Narsinh Mehta was posing as a great scholar and misinterpreting the shastras. Some even insinuated at his character because of his singing sessions in the presence of females at the Damodar Mandir. The matter was brought before Ra' Mandlik, the ruler of Junagadh. He had heard a great deal about Narsinh and his devotion, but when complaints began to pour in he was left with no alternative but to lock him in jail and put him to a stiff test. He declared that the garland on the *murti* of Krishna in the mandir should come around Narsinh Mehta's neck by next morning. If he failed to get the garland, he would punish him as he desired. Narsinh Mehta calmly absorbed himself in singing Krishna's glory. He sang all night and the next morning as the sun was rising the garland flew into Narsinh's cell. It is said that the prison gates where Narsinh was imprisoned opened on their own and a glow entered the premises to garland him. The king apologized for his folly and released Narsinh Mehta.

After this miracle Narsinh Mehta lived for five years, which were reckoned to be peaceful years because he did not face any temporal turmoil. In all his appeals to Bhagwan Krishna he was more concerned about the Lord's prestige if asked-for help was not rendered and not about his own fate or standing among his peers. In fact, he had no peers. His daughter, Kunvarbai, and widowed daughter-in-law, Juthibai, were with him when he ascended to Krishna's abode. ♦

Aalsi Ganchi and Alibhai

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's spirituality appealed to people from all strata of society. He was revered as God by the rich and poor, educated and illiterate, and young and old. He was revered even by Muslims, such as Dosa Tai, Kesar Miya, Miyaji and others. The following are brief accounts of two such Muslim devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

AALSI GANCHI OF MANAVADAR

Before Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to Loj, among Ramanand Swami's devotees, the four main householder disciples were Anandji Sanghedia of Mangrol, Parvatbhai of Agatrai, Mayaram Bhatt of Manavadar and Aalsi Ganchi. The four had taken a vow that come what may they would never acknowledge anyone else as God except Ramanand Swami. They were so devoted to him that they had resolved to stick to him even if Narayan himself came in person with Lakshmi. Even if somebody showed them Radha-Krishna in their palm, their conviction in Ramanand Swami would never waver.

Even other disciples had firm faith that Ramanand Swami was divine. But these four excelled all in their conviction. They were always eager to have his darshan and to serve him. They continually praised Ramanand Swami's sterling qualities, which always brought happiness and prosperity to others. But Ramanand Swami himself never said that he was God.

• • •

Once, Ramanand Swami came to Manavadar. He bathed in Lakshmi Vadi and was sitting

under a berry tree. Then Shyamji Jatakia, who was present in the assembly, asked Ramanand Swami, "Swami, is there anyone greater than you?"

Ramanand Swami said, "Yes, he who is greater than me, and by whose will I have come here, is the supreme God. He is currently on a pilgrimage. He will come here after some time. His glory and spiritual charisma outshines everyone." Among the disciples listening to the guru's prophetic words were the four leading devotees. At that point Aalsi Ganchi got up and said humbly, "Lord, we believe you as supreme."

Ramanand Swami said, "Listen Aalsibhai! God alone is above everyone else, and I, too, have worshipped him to become great. If you seek *moksha*, then believe him as God, and live according to his wishes."

This was the first time that Ramanand Swami talked of someone superior to him. Everybody was surprised by what he said. Aalsi asked, "Swamiji, when he comes here, how will we recognize him?"

Swamiji said, "I will recite a couplet and explain its meaning to you. Ask the meaning of

these same verses to him when he arrives. If what he explains and what I have explained is the same then understand him to be the greatest of all.”

Ramanand Swami recited the verses,
“*Nabhmā udao jo gano, to udupati mukh malkāy;*
Pan rajnichir raj tulya chhe, brahmāndoni may.

Ude rommā anant je, enā pan ādhār;
Nar-tan chhupyo olkhe no bedo par.”

“If you count the stars in the sky, the moon will smile. Since they are like a grain of sand when you take all the *brahmands* (universes) into account. In whose every pore there are infinite (such *brahmands*) and he who is their support; one who recognizes him in his human form, attains *moksha*.”

Ramanand Swami called Aalsi to his side and whispered the significance of the couplet in his ear. Aalsi remembered every word of what his guru explained. After going home, he wrote it down to be doubly sure. Many years passed. Nilkanth Varni arrived in Loj and Ramanand Swami declared his glory to all. Ramanand Swami initiated him and named him Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni. Then, in Jetpur, Sahajanand Swami was appointed as guru by Ramanand Swami, who shortly afterwards passed away to Akshardham. Sahajanand Swami treated the old disciples of Ramanand Swami with great respect. He visited village after village and made the devotees very happy. He put them in samadhi and they all experienced his glory.

In the course of his *vicharan*, Maharaj came to Manavadar. He had his meal and after taking rest, went to Lakshmi Vadi in the evening. After having a bath, Maharaj was sitting in the assembly. Aalsi Ganchi requested Maharaj to explain the meaning of the couplet that Ramanand had recited. Maharaj explained the couplet in exactly the same way that Ramanand Swami had explained. Aalsi experienced an inner light. He had great faith in his guru's words. So he at once

recognized Maharaj as God.

Aalsi was a Muslim and his income was meagre. He operated a *ghanti* (mill) and earned very little. Farmers would bring their peanuts and sesame seeds to be crushed in the *ghanti* to extract the oil.

He used to sit on the edge of the *ghanti* and drive the bullock with pride, as if he was king of the world, and daily offered devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

People who knew of his difficult financial circumstances would ask him, “Aalsi, what have you found that you are so happy?”

He would reply, “What shall I say brother? A poor fellow like me has found a diamond. I have attained the supreme Purushottam Narayan. That is why I am happy.”

Aalsi was so close to Maharaj that Shri Hari would be very informal with him. Aalsi would sing bhajans to please Maharaj. Also, whenever Maharaj visited Manavadar, he bathed in the river Ksharvati and would play in the water with Aalsi.

Aalsi's body was very bulky. Sometimes Maharaj would sit on his back and ride him like a horse. He would pass his hand over his large bald head. He would press his feet as if they were in stirrups and urge Aalsi to go fast as if he were a real horse, “Move, horse, move. Move properly, OK...”

Aalsi would joke, “The horse has not been properly fed, yet you are kicking it. So, sit straight otherwise it will throw you off.”

Maharaj would reply, “This horse seems to be very unruly.” In this fashion Shri Hari would play and joke with Aalsi.

Maharaj was so pleased with his selfless, pure devotion that he often gave Aalsi gifts as a sign of grace and showered him with blessings.

ALIBHAI OF GANOD

Alibhai, another Muslim devotee of Shri Hari, was a native of Ganod. People also

called him 'Junabhai Khatri'. Alibhai became a *satsangi* through the company of Abhaysinh Darbar of Ganod. There was great opposition from his family and community for his Satsang connection. But he did not bother about it in the least and continued to seek refuge in Shri Hari. He openly observed all the norms prescribed for a *satsangi*. Such was his boldness. Because of his steadfastness, he had to face many difficulties in his daily life. But he brushed aside all the travails and courageously offered devotion.

Once, Shriji Maharaj visited Ganod and held a meeting in the garden on the banks of the Bhadar river. He was delivering a discourse on good conduct. At that time Alibhai was on his way to get married. His carriage stopped at the garden. He knew that Maharaj was addressing the assembly in the garden, so he went for darshan.

Ali prostrated before Maharaj and stood with folded hands before him. All he wished was to be blessed by Shri Hari as he was going for an auspicious ceremony. "With his blessings there would be no problems," Ali thought. So he patiently waited for Maharaj's permission and blessings. But Shriji Maharaj went on with his discourse without taking notice of him. The *parshad* observed Ali's predicament. He told Maharaj, "Ali is waiting for your blessings and permission to go."

Maharaj ignored the pleadings of the *parshad* and continued with his discourse as if nothing had happened. After a few minutes the *parshad* once again said, "Maharaj! Alibhai will not go without your permission. Grant him permission." The *parshad* repeated this twice, but Shriji Maharaj did not utter a word!

The people attending the marriage got upset as time passed by, but Alibhai was patiently waiting with folded hands. Finally, Muktanand Swami said, "Maharaj, Alibhai is waiting for your permission to go. He has come to seek your

blessings as he is going for his marriage. His carriage is waiting outside. Bless him and grant him permission to go."

Then Shri Hari acknowledged Alibhai's presence. "Go, go get married. How can one worship God when he is deeply inclined towards marriage!" Shriji Maharaj repeated this three times. Ali once again prostrated before him and went on his way. But Shri Hari's words left a deep impression on his mind.

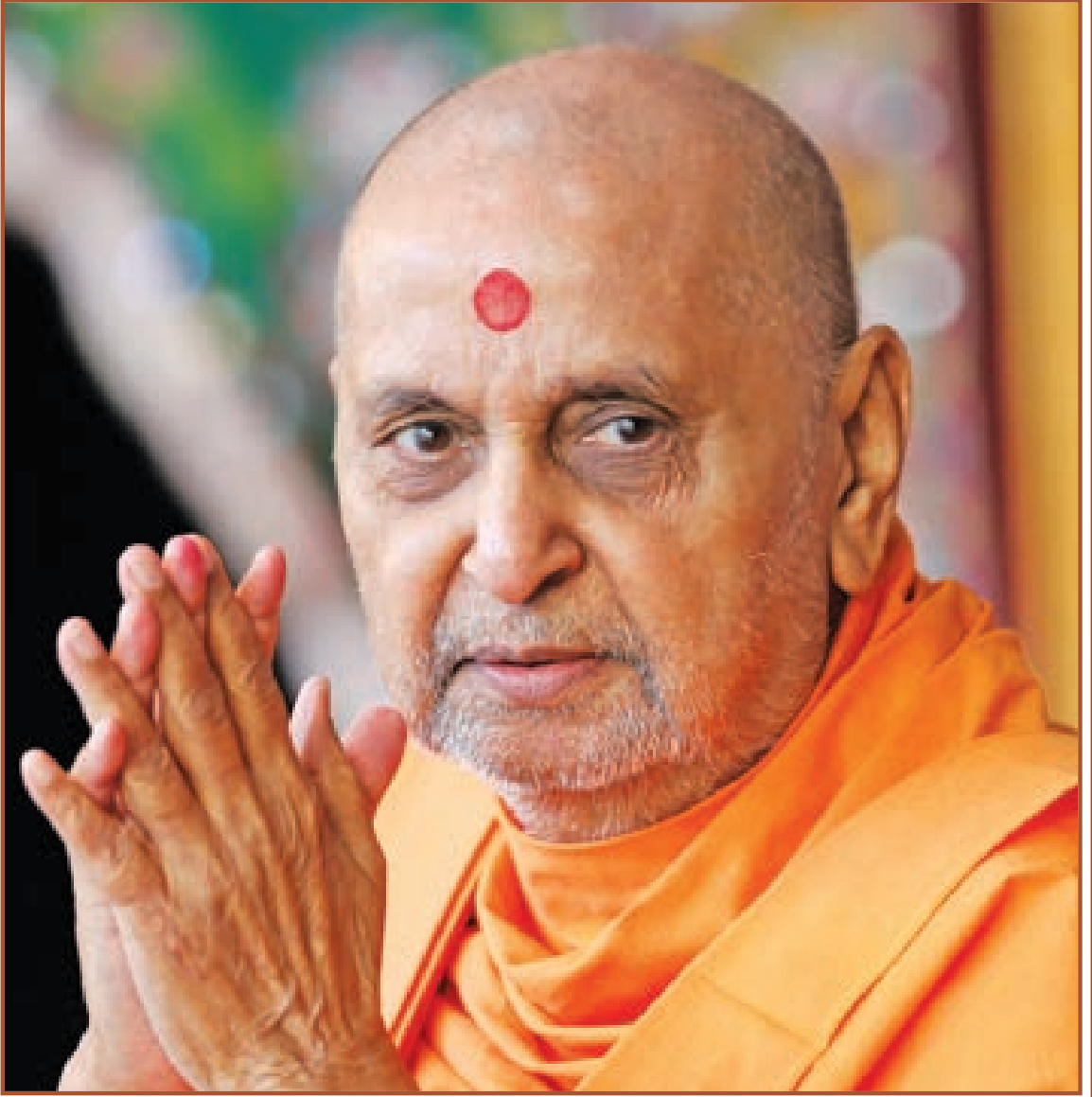
Two years after the marriage, Ali was blessed with a son. He was brought up in the tradition of Satsang. When he was 18 years old the time came for his betrothal. Ali had brought up his son with care and educated him properly as per his ability. He took him aside and said, "Son, all these days I have been looking after you. I educated you, taught you a trade and even performed your betrothal. You are now 18. There should be no difficulty for you hereafter. Whatever you feel fit and proper, you do. The day I was going to get married, what Maharaj told me became etched on my soul. Since then, I have been waiting for you to grow up so that I can hand over the business to you. You have to look after yourself. I have performed my duty. I shall stay in the mandir and engage myself in singing bhajans and performing puja. Once a day, send food for me. This is all you need to do for me."

The son replied, "Father! It is my duty to serve you. You worship God and I shall serve you the way you want me to serve."

Thus, Alibhai detached himself from worldly worries in his youth. After this he would accompany Abhaysinh to listen to discourses, bhajans, etc. Both of them would together discuss spiritual matters and enjoy the full benefit of Satsang.

Purani Raghuvirdas Swami was a great Sanskrit scholar and a noted speaker at the Junagadh mandir during the time of Aksharbrahman

(contd. on p. 36)



Shaucham

Shaucham means to be clean, spotless, pure.

*The ancient Hindu shastras prescribe five forms of purity:
in mind, action, character, speech and the physical body.*

*The Gunatit Sadhu, who has realized God, exemplifies all the five forms of purity.
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life radiates the fragrance of this quintet of purity.*

A pure mind is one that is free of malice or hatred. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's mind and heart are pure.

To perform good deeds without expectations reflects purity of action. Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) has been performing good deeds for nearly 90 years without expecting anything in return, except the blessings of God.

Whatever the circumstances, to live by God's moral laws is the mark of a pure character. Swamishri has resolutely followed the moral code given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Purity of speech is to speak that which is truthful, pleasant and beneficial. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words have comforted, guided and inspired millions worldwide.

Hygiene and cleanliness are the hallmarks of physical purity. Swamishri always stresses the importance of a hygienic and healthy lifestyle.

Adi Shankaracharya has grouped these five forms of purity into two main categories: internal and external. External purity pertains to one's body and the surrounding environment. Internal purity is that of one's mind and soul.

Throughout his life Swamishri has worked tirelessly to promote such internal and external purity among all: purity of body, mind, actions and thoughts; and purity in the individual, family, home, mandir, community, nation and the world at large.

Swamishri states, "To become pure within, one must first begin with outer purity." Swamishri's life is full of incidents which illustrate this belief.

This is an incident from the 1960s. Thousands of devotees had gathered in the small town of Sarangpur to celebrate the Jal Jhilani Ekadashi festival. After the festival was over, the devotees left for their homes and the volunteers were taking rest in the afternoon. Swamishri, too, decided to rest.

After a while, Dharmajivan Swami, who was

sleeping near Swamishri in the assembly hall, noticed that he had gone somewhere. So, he got up and started looking for him. His search led him to the common toilets at the rear of the mandir campus.

To his surprise, Swamishri was cleaning the overflowing toilets. He was carrying a bucket full of excreta and taking it to the dumpsite, pausing momentarily between rounds to sweep the toilets.

Dharmajivan Swami quickly ran to Swamishri and tried to forcibly take the bucket and broom from him. Swamishri simply remarked, "Don't make a noise. You will wake up the other sadhus who are resting. Now, two is better than one. If you want me to finish this sooner, get me some water so that I can clean the toilets."

The President of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha happily performed the most menial and repulsive of services.

After the Kalash Jayanti Celebrations in Gadhadra in May 1961, Swamishri joined volunteers in cleaning the dining areas. In 1971, on the morning of his birthday celebration, he had been just as eager in picking up the used *datan* sticks outside a bathroom in Dharmaj.

Once, as Swamishri was passing through the mandir corridor in Bochasan, he stopped to look at the condition of a bathroom. As he peeked in, there was a strong stench indicating that the bathroom hadn't been cleaned for some time. Swamishri walked in, locked it from the inside and started scrubbing away. The sadhus and devotees assumed that Swamishri was using the urinal. It was only after he came outside that they realized that he had single-handedly cleaned the whole bathroom. The incidents show that he has an inclination for cleanliness and hygiene, and to clean up whenever an opportunity arises.

Swamishri was staying at a devotee's new house in Anand. The house had just been constructed and still had paint and cement stains on the tiles in the bathroom. Swamishri went in for

a shower and decided to clean the tiles himself. Narayancharan Swami stopped him and said, “We are only here for a day and a half. Why bother with all that extra effort?”

Yet Swamishri was adamant, “We should leave the place in better condition than we had found it. The devotee was kind enough to let us stay at his place. He might not have had the time to clean up. We should help him. It is our *seva*.”

Swamishri often says, “Our home and mandir should be clean, so that God would like to stay there. How can you expect God to stay where there is filth? Keeping the mandir clean inspires everyone to keep their homes clean. If everyone kept their homes and neighbourhoods clean, it would make the whole country a cleaner place.”

Swamishri’s insistence on cleanliness and hygiene has inspired many devotees to adopt and promote a similar lifestyle.

Dr Rajiv Vyas lives in Cherry Hill, NJ. A practising physician, Dr Vyas has a staff of over 38 physicians and 800 healthcare employees under him. Yet, he begins his day by visiting the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Cherry Hill. After darshan, he goes to the public toilets in the mandir and cleans them each morning before going to work.

In Surat, a group of affluent youths clean the general toilets every Sunday.

Dr Rohit Patel, Dr Dipak Patel, Anup Morzariya and other youths have been washing dishes and cooking utensils on Saturdays in London mandir for over 22 years.

These youths and devotees have pleased Swamishri with their efforts to clean and tidy their homes, mandirs and surroundings. Swamishri has blessed them, many times saying, “Since you work so hard to clean and purify the outside, God will purify your hearts and souls.”

Swamishri’s efforts to promote cleanliness have helped create a spiritually pure and

physically tidy environment in all BAPS mandirs around the globe. To this day, he makes it a point to check the bathrooms and other facilities at even the smaller mandirs as well as the mega-mandirs like Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar and New Delhi. He inspects every nook and corner of the mandir, in particular, the kitchens, dairy room, storage area, public conveniences and the *garbhagruha*, for dirt or clutter. At the students’ hostel in Vidyanagar, Swamishri occasionally makes impromptu checks on the students’ rooms. Frantically, the students try to clean them, but Swamishri’s sharp and trained eyes quickly analyze their efforts. He sweetly reprimands those that are not clean and praises those that are.

During his stay at Sarangpur in October 1997, Swamishri was inspecting the mandir grounds. He entered one of the bathrooms and immediately called the head organizers of the housekeeping department to bless them, “This is very clean. It should be like this all the time and everywhere. Very good.”

Even during large festivals, when the arrangements for the thousands of people who attend ultimately rest on Swamishri’s shoulders, he undertakes unannounced inspections of the festival grounds to ensure that the proper level of cleanliness and hygiene is constantly maintained. He specially insists that the kitchen and dining areas be kept spotlessly clean. *Kothari* and *bhandari* sadhus and volunteers are first to hear from Swamishri about keeping the mandirs and kitchens under their charge clean.

Swamishri was visiting New York in 2004, where he met Subhodhbhai Amin. Swamishri was speaking to him and his Jewish partner about their dairy business and the conversation veered round to matters of cleanliness. Swamishri said, “Whenever you make any yogurt, *paneer* or even when you process milk, make sure that hygiene is a priority. Ensure that all the utensils and machinery are scrubbed

before you start producing any dairy products. You are from Vahelal and a descendent of Vakhatba. You come from a family that is very particular about its purity; it only makes sense for you to do this.”

Swamishri’s devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan is reflected through his insistence on cleanliness in Thakorji’s *thal*, ornaments and the shrine itself. He even stresses the importance of personal hygiene to the cooks that prepare Thakorji’s *thal*.

Swamishri has visited over 250,000 homes and each *padhramani* echoes the same message, “You do not need a large home, but a home that is tidy and clean. Things that belong in the kitchen should never be left in the living room and vice versa. It is important for us to practise these ideals so that our children learn them. Cleanliness and spirituality are the keys to a happy home.”

These experiences highlight Swamishri’s insistence on external purity. The following incidents highlight Swamishri’s internal purity and life free of deceit and prejudice. He tirelessly inspires even those who come only into fleeting contact with him to attain internal purity of the mind and soul.

Swamishri insists that community leaders, politicians and other public figures be pure in character and reputation.

Speaking to a local town representative he said, “You have to lead by example. It is your duty to make this town a better place to live in. You can only do it by living a spotless life so that it makes an impact on the society.”

Once, in Atladra, Swamishri walked by a few youths who were cleaning the filters of an old air-conditioning unit. He stopped and said to them, “The filters of this AC unit became filled with dirt so it had to be removed for cleaning. Similarly, when life becomes spoilt by bad habits it is degraded. So you have to inspect your char-

acter for impurities and cleanse it.”

Swamishri has transformed the lives of thousands of people around the world and they provide testimony of his contributions in purifying society.

A tribal devotee from the village of Uber described his first darshan of Swamishri, which changed his life, “I first had your darshan in Atladra. I didn’t think it was ever going to happen, but it did. It was like a miracle. With your blessings, my entire family has stopped eating meat, smoking and drinking. We have been able to bring our tempers under control. It has been eight months now and I can say that we feel 100 percent purified! My adulterous behaviour has also gone. I feel privileged to have received your blessings.”

On 18 July 1996, a youth came to meet Swamishri in Dallas, Texas. In 1994, he had promised Swamishri that he would quit drinking and eating meat. He bowed at Swamishri’s feet and described his success, “Swami, though it seemed impossible, your blessings made my wife’s dream a reality. I have given up eating meat and all other addictions. In fact, I don’t even get angry any more. I never thought it would be possible, but you made it happen.”

These are just a few of the countless transformations people have had as a result of their association with Swamishri.

Only one who is clean, pure and spotless can transform the lives of others. Thousands of individuals have developed inner purity through Swamishri’s blessings and many more are in the process of achieving it. ♦

SATSANG EXAMS: BASIS OF TRUE UNDERSTANDING

On 23 December 1999, the youths of Surat performed a drama entitled 'Bap-Dadano Satsang' in which the necessity and benefits of reading and sitting for the Satsang Exams was effectively conveyed. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

The drama was very nicely performed. Everything we need to know about in Satsang was covered. Sometimes, we feel that we are established in and familiar with Satsang and know everything. True, but the exams are kept so that we study our [Satsang] books. All our traditions have been described by Maharaj, and if we know something about our *niyams*, dharma, *parampara* and history then we can answer any question. However, just giving the exams is not enough, reading must be repeated so that we remember, otherwise we will forget. Then, after listening [or reading], we should contemplate on the talks. Repeated and constant study leads to *sakshatkar*. What is *sakshatkar*? If you are awakened from sleep and questioned and you instantly give the answer, that is *sakshatkar* (realization).

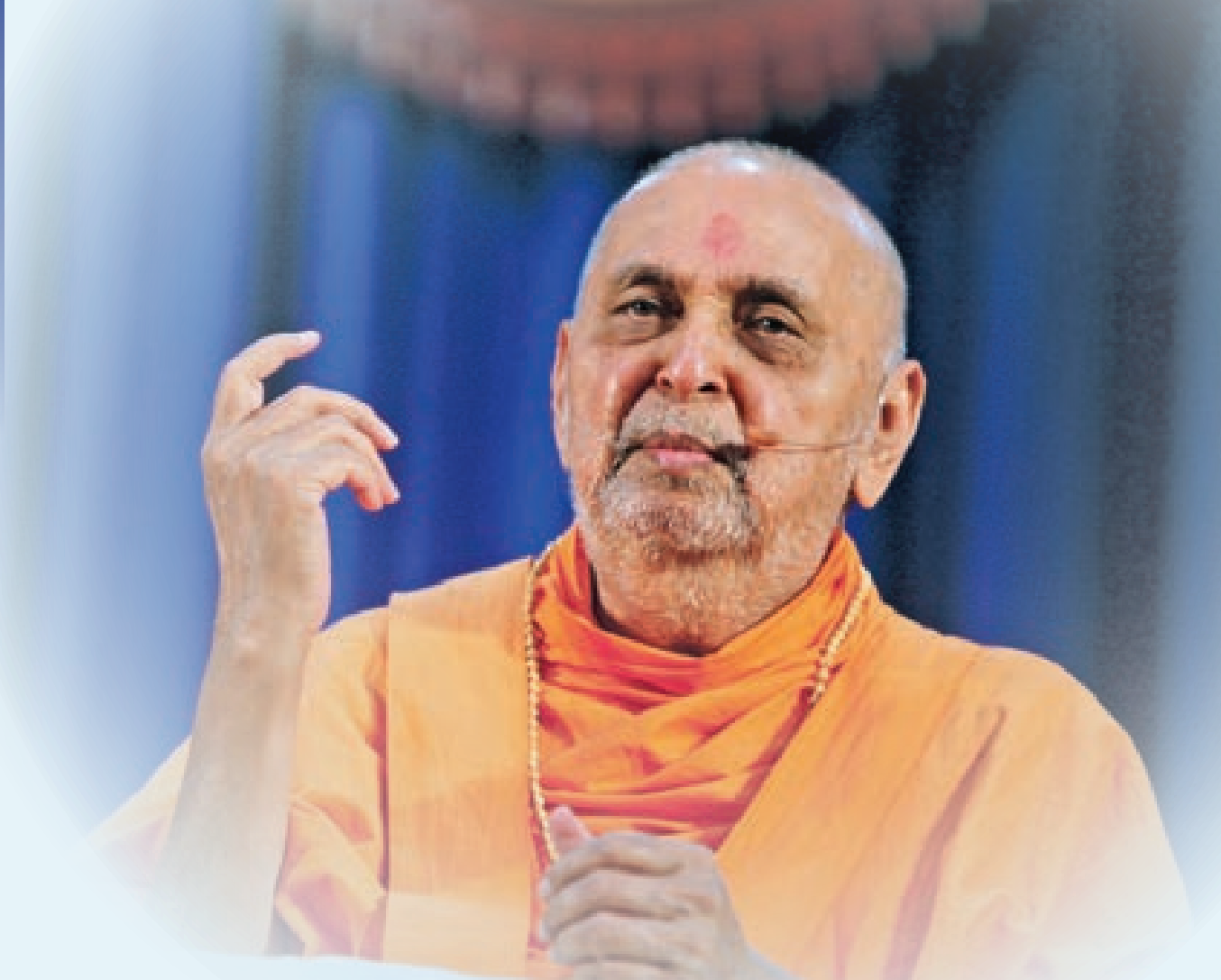
All have *sakshatkar* of their names, families and communities since such matters are constantly heard. From birth, parents reinforce your name, family, relatives, worldly possessions, etc. Even in your sleep and dreams you see all these things.

Similarly, details of Shriji Maharaj, his *parampara*, texts, Vachanamrut and so on should be well understood, just like we know the worldly things.

Firm faith in Shriji Maharaj should be devel-

oped, so that nothing can trouble us. Once we firmly believe that a tree is a mango tree, even if others try to convince us that it is a neem tree, our belief does not change. There should be a similar conviction towards Satsang, *niyams*, dharma and shastras.

You all have jobs and work, but read a little every day. Take out half-an-hour to read and re-read. Read one Vachanamrut a day. You'll finish it in 262 days. Even if you read one Shikshapatri *shlok* [daily] you will become familiar with it. Read just one, but sincerely and thoughtfully – think, what is the message in this? Just like you do for worldly things. If you have 100 items in your shop, you learn everything about them. Similarly, in Satsang we should know properly about these things, so that we never have any doubts about whether Shriji Maharaj is God or not or Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar or not. If someone asks us and we do not know, then it is not good. But, Shriji Maharaj has said, 'I have come from Akshardham, with my Akshardham, divine *parshads* and my powers. Understand this and talk about it to others.' This is Shriji Maharaj's command in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 71. What does he mean by saying that he has brought his Dham with him? That Akshardham has come in human form. Only if we have understood all this can we tell others. Also, what are



his principles? What questions did he ask during his travels throughout India? In every ashram, he asked the *mahants* and *mahatmas*, what is the nature of *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman? These are the five eternal realities he asked about. Other *acharyas*, *sampradayas* taught about [one, two or] three eternal realities, while Maharaj talked about five. It is necessary for us to know all this.

Shriji Maharaj talked about Brahman and Parabrahman from the very beginning. Brahman is Gunatitanand Swami and Parabrahman is Shriji Maharaj himself.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 21, Shriji Maharaj describes the two forms of Akshar. These talks by Shriji Maharaj in the Vachanamrut about Ak-

shar should be properly understood and consolidated. In Dabhan, Shriji Maharaj revealed who this Akshar is when he initiated Gunatitanand Swami during the *yagna*. He said, 'This Mulji Sharma is Akshar.' And all this is described in the Harililakalpataru shastra which is published by the Vartal diocese with the approval of the Acharya. Also, under the *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami consecrated in the Junagadh region he is described as 'Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami'.

Even the great Gopalanand Swami spoke about Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Akshar. He revealed Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar to his staunch disciple, Malji Soni. In the *Kirtan Kaushtubh Mala*, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj states



Devotees appear for Satsang Exams at a centre in Gujarat

that Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami had given him the *vartman* and initiated him into Satsang. Viharilalji Maharaj was the Acharya, so his statements are authentic and trustworthy.

If we understand all this, then we will not waver when we are questioned by others. We have heard all these talks, but now go into detail and read for the exams. All should read the book on *upasana* in which all questions are answered and everything is described.

Read the Vachanamrut once, twice,... daily and repeatedly. If you read two pages every day then slowly you will attain *sakshatkar*. You will develop the firm conviction that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar, Shriji Maharaj is Purna Purushottam Bhagwan, the supreme *avatari* of all avatars, and that the Satpurush is the gateway to *moksha*. There is only one God, Shriji Maharaj. Nobody can become like him. Shriji Maharaj has stated in the Vachanamrut that everyone's greatness is due to him. Maharaj clearly says that Gunatitanand Swami is not God. In fact, we do not say he is God and have consecrated his *murti* as Shriji Maharaj's servant, as Brahman, as Akshar. Maharaj wants to make us all *gunatit* like Gunatitanand Swami, and that is why he brought him here. To be like Akshar means to remove all worldly desires. Maharaj has stated

all this, and Shastriji Maharaj analysed it all. He saw the power of Bhagatji Maharaj, that he was Gunatit, and understood his glory. Shastriji Maharaj accepted him as his guru; even though he himself was a sadhu and a learned scholar, while Bhagatji Maharaj was only a tailor. Shastriji Maharaj saw that the qualities of the Satpurush described in the Vachanamrut are present in Bhagatji Maharaj. And through Bhagatji Maharaj, he developed the conviction that Gunatitanand

Swami is Akshar.

Vignananand Swami also confirmed this to Shastriji Maharaj. Further, the texts of Viharilalji Maharaj and Raghuvirji Maharaj described this. The *sadgurus* of Junagadh, such as, Balmukund Swami and others revealed that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. Shastriji Maharaj heard this fact from Malji Soni of Bhoyka. Other shastras, such as, the Gita, talk about Akshar. In the 8th chapter of the Gita, Akshar is described and in the 15th chapter, Purushottam is described.

So, who is Akshar and Purushottam is described in the shastras. Maharaj has clearly shown that Akshar, or Brahman, is Gunatitanand Swami. We have to become like him [in virtues] and offer bhakti to God. There are not two Gods. What do we have to become? Servants, devotees and offer worship to God. In Lakshmi-Narayan, Lakshmi is the devotee. In Radha-Krishna, Radha is the devotee; there are not two Gods, one is a servant. In Shiva-Parvati, Parvati is the devotee and servant. In Nar-Narayan, Nar is the devotee. This is the tradition of dual worship [Bhagwan along with *bhakta*]. Similarly, Shriji Maharaj manifest on earth with his main, ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami. These are the *murtis* Shastriji Maharaj consecrated in the mandirs. Without proper knowl-

edge, this is not understood.

Ramchandrabhai Thakar of Nadiad regularly visited the old school of Vartal mandir. Every week he would take a tin full of *magas* or laddus to be offered daily to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Vartal. Once, at the old mandir in Nadiad, he heard a description of Akshar in the Vachanamrut being read and thought that these *bandiyas* (followers of Shastriji Maharaj) have changed the words. He went home and checked in his old copy of the Vachanamrut authorized by the *acharya*. The words were exactly the same. He thought that even though everyone says the *bandiyas* are wrong, they are not. And he joined Shastriji Maharaj, served him for life and properly understood the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

If Ramchandrakaka had not checked he would not have known the truth. Shastriji Maharaj used the same Vachanamrut as that authorized by Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. Not a single letter has been changed or added.

The book on *upasana* contains all the details about what we need to understand about our philosophy. Also, we should know about the other shastras of our Sampradaya so there are no doubts. This is what Maharaj's avatar was for. And the principles which Shastriji Maharaj gave, that Shriji Maharaj is supreme God and Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar, are not imaginary. People say he wanted to become God. But that is not true. Shastriji Maharaj had left Vartal and was independent. If he wanted to consecrate his own *murti* he could have done so, but he consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam, and not of himself. The devotees would have been happy to consecrate his *murti*, but his objective was to explain the true, pure *upasana* of Akshar and Purushottam. Shastriji Maharaj himself used to chant the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. Even Yogiji Maharaj chanted 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' and offered great, loving devotion to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. If he believed

himself to be God, then why did he offer devotion to others? [This shows that he believed himself to be a servant of God.]

For us, anything that sidelines Maharaj is a lapse in *upasana*. Similarly, not understanding Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Akshar is also a deficiency in *upasana*. Shastriji Maharaj stressed this so that nobody would have any doubts. Yet, the prejudiced still allege that Shastriji Maharaj wanted to be treated like God. But, Shastriji Maharaj never entered into arguments with anyone. He continued to explain the true belief and now the *murtis* (of Akshar and Purushottam) have been consecrated across the oceans in America, Australia, London, Europe and other places. The truth has been established. People throughout the world have accepted this principle as the truth and offer worship accordingly. We can confidently proclaim this principle, but we need to know the details. So fill in the form to give the exams. Even 80-year-olds can give the exams. You might say how can 80-year-olds go back to studying, but we study a lot of other things, sit around to gossip and read many other stuff. So, it is not that there is no time. This is our principle and we have to talk about it. Don't we talk about our business wherever we go? Accordingly, we must read about it. Spare some time in the morning or evening to read. The purpose of giving the exams is that we understand our principles and develop conviction in them. So, adjust your time and sit with preparation for the exams. Fill in the form and give the exams, but do not cheat. Write what you know, but never do wrong. It does not matter whether you pass or fail. We have come to gain the true knowledge, so write what you know and by doing this you will learn it and it will be consolidated. It does not matter if you do not get high marks, but do it to please God. So, fill the form, read and prepare as best you can and write what you know. Swami will be pleased by this, so all should try. May Maharaj grant all with such strength. ♦

Sahajanand Swami Re, Na Pragatat Ā Same Re...

During Muktanand Swami's stay at the Ram Mahol ashram in Dhrangadhra he witnessed the inappropriate behaviour of the sannyasis. When he returned to Gadhada, he narrated his experiences to Shriji Maharaj. Then, Maharaj told him to compose bhajans to describe his observations and conclusions. So, Muktanand composed and sang four bhajans. The words of the first are:

*Sahajānand Swamire, na pragatat āsamere,
Prāni koi pāmat nahi bhavpār re;
Matiyā ne pākhandi re, shabdni jālmā re;
Bāndhi bāndhi balat jiva apār re...*

Sahajānand

*Kāmi krodhi lobhi re, guru thai bestā re,
Jati sati jadat nahi jagmāy re;
Jnān ne vairāgya re, bhakti jhurine re,
Mari jhari jāt na lādhat kyāy re...*

Sahajānand 1

*Kālingāni foju re, karat ati jor ne re,
Kari guru panditmā parvesh re;
Māns ne madirā re, partriya sangthi re,
Dharmana rahat nahi lav lesh re...*

Sahajānand 2

*Vadhat vatāl re, ghana ā sansār mā re,
Varna adhāre thai ektār re;
Sant ne asantmā re, kai samjat nahi re,
Bhavjal budat sau sansār re...*

Sahajānand 3

*Naraknā panththi re, kai na mukāvtā re,
Koi na karat bhavsetu uddhār re;
Muktānandkahechhere, tenādukhtāliya re,
Jāu ene vārane vāramvār re...*

Sahajānand 4

Meaning:

If Sahajanand Swami had not manifest at this time, no one would have been able to overcome the cycle of births and deaths. Selfish and hypocritical gurus trap people in the web of their preachings and lead them only to hell...

Even those who are full of lust, anger and greed parade themselves as gurus. Nowhere can true yogis or faithful wives be found. Spiritual wisdom, detachment and devotion would have died out crying for genuine practitioners had Sahajanand Swami not incarnated (1).

The force of Kali-yug would have greatly increased and would have entered the guru of (even) the learned. By the consumption of meat and alcohol and indulgence in adultery not a trace of dharma would have remained (2).

All the 18 communities would have engaged in converting each other and become one. Nobody would have understood the difference between a true, genuine sadhu and a false sadhu. The entire world would have drowned in materialism (3).

Nobody would have diverted people from the path of hell (*adharma*); nobody would have liberated people from this world. So, Muktanand says, (Sahajanand Swami) has destroyed our miseries and that is why I repeatedly go to him (4).

The words of the second bhajan are:

Sahajānand Swāmi re,

pote Parabrahma chhe re,

Swāminārāyan jenu nām re;

*Satyadharma sthāpi re, adharma tāliyo re,
Kidhā vā'le nij jan ati nishkām re...*

Sahajānand 1

*Potānā āshramni re, rit pragat kari re,
Kali madhye kāmni lidhi lāj re;
Samju ne shānā re, jāni e pratāpne re,
Nischay kari jānyā Shri Mahārāj re...*

Sahajānand 2

*Jam ne pākhandi re, kute chhe petne re,
Jāne lidho āpno sarve grās re;
Satsang felāyo re, sarve sansārmā re,
Kene gale jai nākhshu have pāsh re...*

Sahajānand 3

*Ekāntik dharma re, pragat kari āpiyo re,
Kidhā vā'le brahmarup nij dās re;
Muktānand kahe chhe re, jau ene vārane re,
Jene mune āpya behad vās re...*

Sahajānand 4

Tali jāy jāt varna ahamkār re...

sadguru 1

*Vartmān pānch re, palāve dradh kari re,
SambhalāveHarinācharitra(param)udārre;
Evā gurudev re, Govind sam jānie re,
Jene sange pāmie bhavjal pār re...*

sadguru 2

*Guru vinā jnān re, na pāme manmukhi re,
Kahe chhe em mahāmuni Veda Purān re;
Evu te vichāri re, sadguru sevjo re,
Jethi Hari pāmie pragat praman re...*

sadguru 3

*Gurujinā vachan re, vichāri ur dhārjo re,
Tāla tame moh mamtā abhimān re;
Muktānand kahe chhe re, evi rite vartatā re,
Tene ur vās kare Bhagwan re...*

sadguru 4

Meaning:

Serve a true *sadguru* with pure feelings, so that all the various desires of the mind are overcome...

By those company, one's love for God increases, and one's attachment for caste, community and body is overcome, serve such a true *Sadguru* (1).

One who insists on the observance of the five vows; (*nishkam*, *nisswad*, *nissneh*, *nirlobh* and *nirman*) and generously narrates the divine episodes of Shri Hari – such a *Sadguru* should be known to be like God and by his company one transgresses the ocean of life (2).

Those of wilful mind will not attain spiritual wisdom without a guru – so say the great sages and the shastras. So, think about this and serve the *Sadguru* so that you can attain manifest God (3).

Behold the words of the guru in your heart and overcome worldly desires, attachments and ego. Says *Muktanand*, God dwells in the heart of one who behaves like this (4).

The words of the fourth bhajan are:

*Sant samāgam re, shuddh thai kijie re,
Sant thaki lijie vivek vichār re;*

Meaning:

Sahajanand Swami is himself (the manifest form of) *Parabrahma* (God). His name is *Swaminarayan*. He established true dharma, destroyed *adharma* and made all his devotees free of lust and desires (1).

He reawakened the traditions of *brahmacharya* and in this Kali-yug embarrassed the force of lust. Those who are wise and understanding, realized His power and with true faith developed conviction in *Maharaj* (2).

Yam and those who are hypocrites cry out in despair, that their territory has been taken away. *Satsang* has spread throughout the society, so around whose neck will we (*Yam* and others) place the chain of bondage (3).

Sahajanand Swami has established the *ekantik* dharma and inspired his devotees to become *brahmarup*. *Muktanand* says I surrender to him who has given me extraordinary refuge (4).

The lyrics of the third bhajan are:

*Sadguru sāchāre, seva shuddh bhāvshu re,
Jethi tale manna vividh vikār re;
Jena sange vādhe re, Prabhu sange pritdi re,*

*Kapat kubuddhi re, ur thaki tālie re,
Tālie jutha tan ahamkār re...*
sant 1

*Sant jan sange re, harigun grahie re,
Avgun ur thaki karie tyāg re;
Irshā abhāv re, na levo santno re,
Tansukh tajvā grahi vairāgya re...*
sant 2

*Krodh na karvo re, harijan upare re,
Vachan suni nav bāndhvu ver re;
Samji vichāri re, vachan mukhe bolie re,
Van samaje na vāvie jher re...*
sant 3

*ShriNārāyan re, swāminā dās je re,
Tene sange rahevu thaine gulām re;
Muktānand kahe chhe re, evi rite vartatā re,
Sant sange pāmsho Akshardhām re...*
sant 4

Meaning:

Let us become associated with the Sadhu

and become pure. From the Sadhu let us learn true discrimination of right and wrong. Let us remove deceit and bad thoughts from our heart. Let us overcome false ego of the body (1).

By the company of the Sadhu, let us imbibe the virtues of Shri Hari and remove the faults within us. Never attribute faults to or be envious of the Sadhu. Renounce bodily comforts and adopt detachment (2).

Never become angry with the devotees of God. Upon hearing their words, never develop enmity towards them. Speak only after understanding and due thought. Never sow the poison (of enmity) by not understanding others (3).

Shri Narayan is the servant of Swami; associate with him as a most humble servant. Says Muktanand, those who behave like this, by their association with the Sadhu, will attain Akshardham (4). ♦

(contd. from p. 25)

Gunatitanand Swami. He progressed because of the encouragement and support provided by Gunatitanand Swami. He was a great speaker and could speak on any subject for hours on end. Once he came to Jaliya (Varjang), near Ganod, to give discourses. Alibhai regularly attended the discourses in the company of Darbar Abhaysinh. The discourses lasted for a month. A day prior to the end of the discourses Alibhai touched the Purani's feet after the discourse, embraced him and said, "Purani Maharaj, this is my last 'Jai Swaminarayan' to you. I shall not be able to come to your discourse again."

The devotees, who were standing around, said, "Tomorrow is the last day, please do come."

Alibhai said, "Tomorrow I am going to Ak-

shardham. So, for me, today is the last day of the discourse."

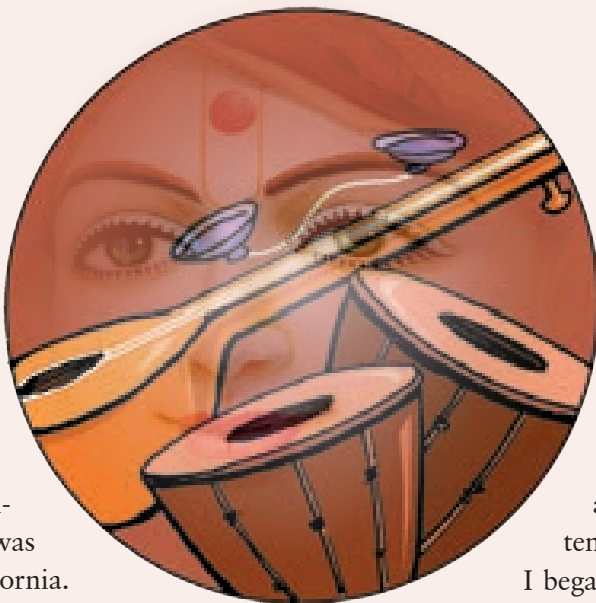
The next day Alibhai attended the mandir service along with Abhaysinh and when the time came for shedding his body he went home. He told the Darbar, "Now, I shall go home since, if I give up my body here, my relatives and friends will have to come to the mandir and that is not proper." At home Alibhai sang bhajans for some time. Then he had the divine darshan of Shriji Maharaj with his sadhus! He told the people around him, "See, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has come to take me to Akshardham. I am going with him." He said his last 'Jai Swaminarayan' to all and passed away to Akshardham. His life is an excellent example that *satsangis* from any community and background can attain the highest spiritual state. ♦

MUSIC AND BHAKTI

I was born and raised in the USA. It is a land of freedom and independence. How fortunate to be born into a country that highly values freedom of religion.

My interest in Hinduism began when I was in high school in California. In my psychology class, I did a research report on Hinduism. I lived in a town with no Indian culture. This was my first exposure to the Hindu concepts of avatars, reincarnation and karma. Seeing photos of the different deities for the first time lit a spark in me. At the time, I had no idea how far this spark would guide me.

I have been living in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1992. This is one of the most culturally diverse regions in the United States, if not the world. It is also a hub for Indian culture. I even dare to say that it is a suburb of India! Most of the major subcultures of India and religions of India have representation here on a grand scale. For classical Indian music and dance, the Bay Area is the best place to be in the US. Through this music, I came into contact with BAPS Satsang, ultimately leading to my *vartman* (initiation) by Pramukh Swami



Maharaj in 2007.

Classical music of India has imbedded the essence and fundamentals of Hinduism.

I have been a musician since I was a small child, so was naturally attracted to the virtuosity and deep emotional content of Indian classical music.

I began learning *tabla* from Ustad Zakir Hussain in 1995. Through

him, I began to understand the guru tradition of Hinduism and how integral a role the guru plays in all aspects of one's life. In India's classical music tradition, one's own endeavour is insufficient to reach mastery. A guru is required. I began to understand that when one accepts a guru, that one surrenders fully to the guru. This practice and sentiment come directly from Hinduism.

I became more and more dedicated to the art of *tabla*. Through constant listening to classical and devotional music of India, I learned much about the different gods and goddesses of Hinduism. The sense of devotion, praise and yearning for the divine in the music deeply inspired me. Specifically, I began to understand the concept of bhakti through this music. I became familiar with famous musician saints and poets such as Mirabai, Tulsidas, Annamacha-

rya and Thyagaraja. Their compositions are infused with bhakti, and listening to and performing their compositions gave me a glimpse of their profound devotion to their respective deities.

The San Francisco Bay Area is also rich with many Hindu temples. For the past 10 years, I have been invited to perform *tabla* at many of these temples regularly, and annually participate in many of the main holidays, like Diwali, Jan-mashtami, Ram Navmi, etc. Most of the time, I am the only non-Indian at these functions, but I felt a strong attraction to these vibrant temple festivals. In particular, I became very interested and attracted to Vaishnavism.

Being immersed in Hindu culture in the Bay Area, I had the desire to become initiated into Hinduism. The God of Hinduism is not to be feared. I found that Hinduism's God can be your friend, and your beloved. Hinduism's God adores mountains of sweets, and mischievously steals butter. Hinduism's God loves to dance to intricate drum patterns, and loves to be swung on a swing with devotion. The God of Hinduism has deep love for all living beings, and brings ahimsa to the world. I wanted to be directly linked to this God of colours and celebrations. This required finding a guru. I had been involved with different Hindu sects. I was inspired by some gurus, but did not feel quite comfortable taking the leap of initiation.

During my explorations, I ventured into the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Milpitas, California, in 2002. I was there to see a *tabla* concert, but came away with a deep impression of the *murtis* of God. I had been learning about Krishna bhakti, and the *murtis* at this temple were so elegant. I became a regular visitor just to have darshan of Shri Radha Krishna at this Mandir, some 40 miles from my home. I did not know about Bhagwan Swaminarayan or the Akshar Purushottam *upasana*. I would sit dur-

ing *arti* and be captivated by the Swaminarayan *ashtak* following the *arti*. The atmosphere was very serene.

I was then invited to play *tabla* at the Sunday satsang. I was honoured. At the *sabhas*, I noticed how disciplined the *satsangis* were. They strived for spiritual purity, yet were not fanatical, nor did they preach or force me into anything. There was no attempt at proselytizing. I was very impressed by their soft character, humility, conduct, patience and strong sense of morality. These qualities were especially exemplified in the few Swamis I met. I thought this influence must be due to their guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

I found out that Pramukh Swami himself would be coming to open the new temple in Milpitas. I knew without a doubt that I wanted him as a guru. BAPS embodies the spiritual purity for which I have been striving. I easily fit in, since the devotees are vegetarian, do not smoke, drink alcohol, nor do drugs. BAPS also values and propagates traditional music of India, so this also drew me in.

It was a warm autumn evening in 2007. The Satsang assembly was underway inside the mandir. I was mentally preparing myself for the most important life decision: to receive *vartman* from Pramukh Swami. I went outside for some air. There was a forest fire nearby, and smoke coloured the setting sun a deep red, appearing like a kumkum *chandlo*. Was this a coincidence that the sun appeared as the iconic emblem of devotion in Hinduism on this particular day? I took it as a sign from Bhagwan himself.

I was then taken to the queue. I had brought a bouquet of flowers for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I entered, and suddenly I was standing before Swamishri. I knew my life was about to change. A devotee described me to Pramukh Swami: I play *tabla*, am a vegetarian and have

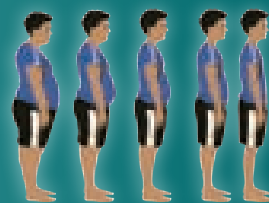
(contd. on p. 44)



obesity

Part 2

Management and Prevention



The previous article dealt with the causes and consequences of being overweight. Part 2 describes that although health problems related to weight are increasing worldwide, it is possible to reverse and prevent these difficulties by controlling diet and exercising...

Obesity and overweight are conditions in which weight gain (predominantly fat) has reached the point of endangering health. The prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased rapidly over the past two decades in the developed world and it has been described by the World Health Organization as 'a global epidemic' (WHO, 1998).

Obese people are more likely to suffer from a number of serious diseases, many of which are life limiting. Besides the physical effects, there are also considerable emotional and social effects. Weight loss in overweight and obese individuals improves physical and emotional health, often dramatically, and may also reduce obesity-related deaths.

To achieve weight loss and maintenance, lifelong sustainable changes in diet, physical activity, healthy lifestyle and behaviour are necessary.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND WEIGHT LOSS

The science behind being overweight comes down to a matter of energy balance. Excess fat is stored when people take in more energy (through food and drink) than they are using up in physical activity.

Our current environment means that it is easier to gain weight than it used to be. We have access to cheap, processed foods that are high in calories and we tend to do less physical activity in our daily lives. This has led to increasing

numbers of people becoming overweight.

The best way to treat obesity is to reduce the amount of calories in the diet and to exercise more. The type of diet and exercise which is safe and will bring benefit varies from person to person. Any significant changes to lifestyle should be made only under medical supervision.

If we can reduce the number of calories that we take in, and increase our levels of physical activity, we can shift the energy balance back in favour of a healthy weight.

All weight loss programmes aim to shift the energy balance so that the energy going in is less than the energy going out. We can do this by:

1. Changing the types and amount of food and drink we consume, e.g., swapping a glass of fruit juice to water will save about 200 calories per day.
2. Increasing the amount of energy we use up, e.g., for a man or woman weighing 90kg, walking 30 minutes will use about 235 calories.

However, doing both at the same time is the best way to lose weight and keep it off for good. In general, most women will lose weight if they take food and liquids having 1,200 to 1,500 calories per day. Most men will lose weight if they take in between 1,500 and 1,800 calories per day.

The best way to lose weight is slowly. A weight loss of 1 to 2 pounds a week is possible, safe, and will help keep the weight off. It will also allow time to make new, healthy lifestyle changes.

To lose 1 to 2 pounds a week, obese adults

should cut back their calorie intake by 500 to 1,000 calories a day.

Very low-calorie diets with fewer than 800 calories a day shouldn't be used without medical supervision.

Healthy Eating Plan

A healthy eating plan gives your body the nutrients it needs every day. It has enough calories for good health, but not so many that you gain weight. A healthy diet should contain:

- meals based on starchy, high-fibre carbohydrates, such as wholegrain bread, pasta and rice
- at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- a moderate amount of low-fat protein, milk and dairy products
- a very small amount of foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt

Foods to Limit

Foods that are high in saturated fats raise blood cholesterol levels and should be reduced or avoided. (Try and increase foods with unsaturated fats which will help keep your cholesterol levels down.)

Foods and drinks with added sugars give extra calories without nutrients like vitamins and minerals.

Portion Size

A portion is the amount of food that you choose to eat for a meal or snack. It's different from a serving, which is a measured amount of food and is noted on the Nutrition Facts label on food packages.

Cutting back on portion size helps reduce calorie intake.

Food Weight

Studies show that people tend to eat a constant 'weight' of food. Knowing this, you can

lose weight if you eat foods that are lower in calories and fat for a given amount of food.

For example, replacing a full-fat food product that weighs 2 ounces with a low-fat product that weighs the same helps you cut back on calories. Another helpful practice is to eat foods that contain a lot of water, such as vegetables, fruits, and soups.

Children and Diet

Many lifestyle habits begin during childhood. Thus, parents and families should encourage their children to make healthy choices, such as following a healthy diet and doing enough physical activity.

As children are still growing, they may need to follow a special kind of diet to make sure that they are still getting all the nutrients they need to develop healthily. If your child is overweight or obese, consult your doctor before making any significant changes to his or her diet.

Children who are overweight due to a health condition should seek medical guidance.

INCREASE EXERCISE

Research suggests that increasing the amount of exercise is an effective way to lose weight, and the results are even better when combined with changes in diet.

Reduce Sedentary Behaviour

Reduce the amount of time spent being physically inactive, such as, watching television, napping or sitting at a computer.

Increase Lifestyle Activity

Being active doesn't just mean doing organized exercise. Increasing lifestyle activity is a great way of doing daily exercise, e.g., walking to work or school, climbing stairs, gardening, sweeping the floor, etc.

Then build up slowly to at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (i.e.,

cycling or fast walking) every week. Moderate intensity means that you are breathing slightly more than normal, but you can still comfortably talk as you exercise.

You don't have to do the activity all at once. You can break it up into short periods of at least 10 minutes each.

When starting a physical activity programme, seek necessary help and supervision to avoid injury. If you're obese, or if you haven't been active in the past, start physical activity slowly and build up the intensity a little at a time.

Choose physical activities and sports that you enjoy, as you are more likely to continue doing them. Being physically active and eating fewer calories will help you lose weight and maintain weight loss over time.

Children and Exercise

Children should be encouraged to do at least 60 minutes of moderate activity each day. The activity can be in one session, or several sessions that last 10 minutes, or more. As with children who are overweight, or obese, they may need to do more than 60 minutes of exercise. You should check with your doctor before your child starts a new exercise programme.

MEDICATION

Taking medication, under medical advice, for obesity is normally one part of a weight loss programme, and requires a long-term change in lifestyle that includes diet, physical activity, and behavioural changes for lasting results.

SURGERY FOR OBESITY

Weight loss surgery, also called bariatric surgery, has been found to be an effective treatment for some obese people. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)¹ recommends that weight loss surgery should only be offered if all the following conditions apply:

- You have a BMI of 40 or more, or you have a BMI of 35-40 and a serious health condition that could be improved if you lose weight, such as type 2 diabetes or high blood pressure.
- You have tried all the appropriate non-surgical methods, such as diet and exercise, but have failed to achieve or maintain a beneficial level of weight loss for at least six months.
- You agree to commit to long-term follow-up treatment after surgery at a specialised obesity service.
- You are fit and healthy enough to withstand the anaesthetic and surgery.

Weight-loss surgery limits the amount of food and liquids the stomach can hold. Lifelong medical follow up is needed after surgery. Your doctor may also recommend a programme both before and after surgery to help you with diet, physical activity, and coping skills.

SUMMARY

The key to losing weight and maintaining the weight loss is to continue with the lifestyle changes. Adopt these changes as a new way of life.

- Follow a healthy eating plan. Make healthy food choices.
- Focus on portion size. Watch the portion sizes in fast food.
- Be active. For example, go for a brisk walk, bike or run.
- Reduce screen time. Limit the use of TVs, computers and video games because they reduce time for physical activity.
- Keep track of weight, body mass index (BMI), and waist circumference.

Successful weight-loss treatments include setting goals and making lifestyle changes, such as eating fewer calories and doing physical activity regularly. Medicines and weight-loss surgery also are options for some people if lifestyle changes aren't enough. ♦

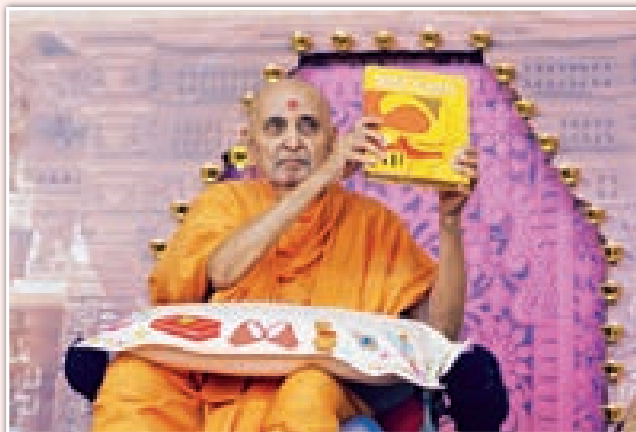
1. <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/TA46>

HINDUISM

AN INTRODUCTION



REVIEWS



Hinduism, An Introduction, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad, is an excellent primary source of information on the history, traditions, philosophies, festivals, deities, devotees and many other aspects of Hinduism.

The book is in two volumes, with a combined total of 712 pages and 748 photographs.

The publication was inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Gondal on Diwali (5 November 2010). Since then several revered spiritual leaders and distinguished scholars, judges, doctors, scientists and other public figures have reviewed the book and kindly sent their opinions. With deep appreciation for their reviews, we share them with our readers in each issue. In this fifth instalment we share the reviews of three illustrious dignitaries.

Dr S.K. Sama

Honorary Physician to the President of India; Chairman of Board of Management, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi

It was a pleasure to read the two volumes of this book. I find the book is very exhaustive, giving full details of the religious philosophy, beliefs, rituals and traditions of Hinduism. Broadly, it has brought out the essence of

our religious philosophies, the aim of which is self-realization, *moksha*, belief in immortality of soul and concept of rebirth, the law of karma, the scientific method of consecration of the *murtis*, filling them with divine energy, and

worship of the image of the deities. Most of the accepted principles of Hinduism are based on Vedic knowledge. Based on these principles there are lots of diversities in the rituals and the worshipping of many gods. There are worshippers of Brahma, and his incarnation in human form. Similarly, there are worshippers of Shiva and his avatars. People also worship Hanuman, Swaminarayan, Buddha and many *devīs* like Lakshmi, Kaali, Saraswati, Radha, Sita, etc... Hinduism also believes in the avatar of the almighty God on earth in human form as and when necessary. We also strongly believe

the various ways of self-realization or *moksha* that is based on Patanjali yoga, i.e. *gyaan* yoga, *bhakti* yoga, *karma* yoga, *dhyaan* yoga.

The beauty of our religious philosophy as written in this book, and its general acceptance of each tradition by the others without any criticism is because we see God in every being. The do's and don'ts in social life are also well mentioned and described in this book which is the basis of harmony, compassion and acceptance of each other. I feel that the book will become popular not only in India but globally.

Justice J.M. Panchal

Judge, Supreme Court of India

I had great pleasure in going through “Hinduism, An Introduction: Part I and Part II”.

The publications inform readers about the spiritual, cultural and social heritage of Hinduism in a simple but convincing manner. Hinduism is not considered to be a religion but a way of life, because religion is interwoven into the life of a Hindu, the way nerves are interwoven in our bodies. Hinduism is a grand mosaic of many *sampradayas*, philosophies, rituals, festivals, mandirs, holy places, sadhus, *sants* and shastras. It is often referred to by many scholars as a family of religions. *Hinduism, An Introduction* (Part I and Part II) features succinctly a brief history and core beliefs of Hinduism. It addresses frequently asked questions about Hinduism and expresses the glorious and magnificent wisdom from the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayan, Mahabharat, etc. The work presents

the rich heritage of sacred texts, symbols and objects and explains in a user friendly but effective manner the four main Hindu *sampradayas*, i.e., Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism. It introduces God and his manifestations and emphasizes the importance of the three pillars of Hinduism: Mandir, Shastra and Sant. It journeys to the sacred places and rivers of India and persuades people to participate in and celebrate the holy festivals and follow the splendid traditions of India. It enlightens about the ways of spiritual sadhanas, reveres *acharyas*, spiritual masters, holy men and women and great devotees, and pursues the work of rishis-scientists of India. It introduces the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and enriches the knowledge as to how to lead a simple, content and useful life.

Mahendra Anand

Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India

Hinduism may not be a proselytizing religion and Hindus may not have shown much of a missionary zeal, but it's high time for Hin-

dus to reach out to the world with the word of what authentic Hinduism means to a practicing Hindu. Now that India, with a vast Hindu

majority, is emerging as a major player on the world scene and the internet is shrinking the world by the hour, this book serves a timely need.

The book treats the subject of Hinduism in a comprehensive manner and should become a premier primer for students of Hinduism everywhere. It will help correct many a misconception about Hinduism as it brings out scientific, logical and spiritual foundations of Hindu belief systems. The book maintains historical perspective and spells out the whole range of principles and practices of all major Hindu sects and highlights their systems of philosophy from the ancient to the modern, each one a facet in the fluid mosaic, a note in the eternal symphony of all-inclusive Hinduism. It thus

demonstrates how Hinduism, a confluence of myriad paths leading to the one and only Divine, has managed to thrive over the millennia. It shows why a Hindu can only smile at those who claim that their path is the only true path.

The author has done an outstanding job and rendered a great service not only to Hindus, but to all who may be interested in understanding the true spirit of Hinduism. This book, therefore, should reach every part of the globe. One hopes that the translations of the book in all major languages of the world would follow. Reading this book, one feels humbled with a deep sense of gratitude to the author, the editor, the publishers and all who made this excellent book a reality. ♦

(contd. from p. 38)

been involved with Hindu culture for some time. Pramukh Swami smiled at me and patted me on the back, saying “Good, Good.” All I could do was smile, as I was speechless. The devotee expressed my desire for *vartman*, and suddenly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was pouring the sacred water into my right palm and reciting the initiation mantra. He gave me a rose as *prasadi*, which I still cherish, and put a *kanthi* on my neck, which I have worn ever since. He gave the *agna* that I must attend *Ravi sabha*, and chant with *mala*. The devotee said that I live far away from the mandir, and Pramukh Swami said, “So what!” A feeling of immense love and a thrilling bliss overtook me. I had never had such a feeling before, and it lasted for some time. I felt I had encountered the embodiment of divine love.

Since my initiation in September 2007, I play and teach *tabla* at the BAPS Mandir in San Francisco every Sunday. When I first met Pramukh Swami, I did not understand that he is Pragat Brahmaswarup. A senior sadhu asked

me shortly after my initiation to describe my impression of Pramukh Swami. The experience of meeting him was deeply profound and words fell short to describe him. I did not yet have the knowledge. All I could reply was that he is a spiritually perfect Guru. For the past four years since my initiation, I have delved deeply into the spiritual philosophy and history of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and BAPS through English publications and Satsang exams. It was through my study for the Satsang exams that I began to understand the true form of Pramukh Swami, as Pragat Brahmaswarup. Since then, I have visited Swamishri in India the past three years for Guru Purnima. The knowledge I have attained through the Satsang exams has enriched my darshans and personal meetings with Swamishri. The more knowledge I attain about our beloved guru Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the more awestruck and speechless I become. ♦

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

July, August and September 2011

Navsari, Ankleshwar, Jhadeshwar (Bharuch), Mumbai

- 1, July: Navsari, Ankleshwar, Jhadeshwar (Bharuch)
- 2-10: Jhadeshwar
- 11: Mumbai
- 11-31: Mumbai
- August and September: Mumbai

JULY

1, Friday, Navsari, Ankleshwar, Jhadeshwar (Bharuch)

At 5.35 p.m. Swamishri departed from Navsari and arrived at the GIDC Colony at 6.50 p.m. to perform *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* at the new BAPS *hari* mandir. After performing the rituals, Swamishri blessed the assembly of devotees.

At 7.25 p.m. Swamishri left Ankleshwar for Jhadeshwar.

3, Sunday, Jhadeshwar; Rath Yatra Festival

The day marked the decennial celebration of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jhadeshwar, Rath Yatra festival and the occasion to honour the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in its centenary year in the BAPS Sanstha.

At 4.30 p.m. a festive *rath yatra* of Harikrishna Maharaj was taken out in the mandir precincts. It converged into an assembly. Pujya Viveksagar Swami narrated incidents of Swamishri's devotion to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Thereafter the attendant sadhus, Narayancharan Swami and Priyadarshan Swami, recounted how Swamishri reveres and offers bhakti to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. This was followed by a drama performed by youths on the same theme and a traditional dance by children. Swamishri then steered the remote

controlled *rath* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, evoking joy and bhakti in the hearts of all.

Then, to mark the decennial celebration of the BAPS mandir in Jhadeshwar, a video on Swamishri's *vicharan* was shown. This was followed with narrations by youths and sadhus on how the mandir has inspired them. Thereafter, children and teenagers of Ankleshwar satsang *mandal* performed a traditional dance. Swamishri was then honoured with a large garland by sadhus.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Shastriji Maharaj has blessed the village of Bharuch. A mandir was later built in the village by the efforts of devotees. Then as our satsang flourished we started looking for more land. Motibhai resolved to give us this invaluable land here in Jhadeshwar. A mandir was built here through the cooperation of Lalji Sheth, Ganeshbhai and other devotees."

At 11.45 p.m. Swamishri experienced a minor physical ailment. After treatment he felt well and slept soundly.

9, Saturday, Jhadeshwar

According to the Gregorian calendar, 100 years ago on this day Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was brought by Yogiji Maharaj into the BAPS. When Swamishri came out from his living quarters he had Harikrishna Maharaj in his lap. Thousands of devotees were pleased at the unique darshan of God and guru. Swamishri performed *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni and then did darshan of Thakorji in the mandir.

Swamishri blessed all the sadhus and gave

darshan to the devotees.

In the evening he listened and replied to letters from devotees while resting in bed. Then he listened to an audio CD of Bhaktachintamani.

11, Monday, Jhadeshwar, Mumbai; Deva Shayani Ekadashi

At 10.15 a.m. Swamishri travelled by the Gujarat Express train to Mumbai for a medical checkup and rest. The train arrived at Dadar, Mumbai, at 4.00 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees at the railway platform and then arrived at the mandir. After Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri retired to his living quarters.

In the following days the doctors who checked Swamishri said all was well and that he required proper rest.

In the days following his stay in Mumbai Swamishri would come for Thakorji's darshan in the morning, bless the devotees from a distance and thereafter perform his puja in his room. During the day he would listen to spiritual discourses, read and attend to letters from devotees.

MUMBAI

13 July, Wednesday

According to the Indian calendar (Ashadh *sud* 13) the day marked 100 years of the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in BAPS satsang. Yogiji Maharaj had brought the *murti* from Junagadh with him when he joined Shastriji Maharaj in Rajkot.

In the morning, Swamishri came out from his living quarters with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in his lap.

31, Sunday

All day long Swamishri was unable to eat anything due to nausea. He was given medication and also treated for his lower back pain.

AUGUST: MUMBAI

2, Tuesday

Since the last several days Swamishri had

almost no appetite for food. Despite taking medicines for nausea he was still feeling uneasy.

At late night Swamishri suffered diarrhoea and a slight fever the next morning. By evening the next day (3, Wed.) his diarrhoea was cured but Swamishri felt weak and drained. This state persisted for the next several days.

5, Friday

In the evening, Swamishri saw 'Shri Swaminarayan Charitra, Part 1: Ghanshyam and the Storm of Evil' – a DVD animation film produced by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi. The hour-long DVD was the first in-house production accomplished through the guidance of a team of sadhus and a group of dedicated BAPS youth artists.

Swamishri inaugurated the animation DVD and appreciated the production.

13, Saturday; Raksha Bandhan

Swamishri arrived for darshan in the *abhishek mandap* and also appreciated the variety of *hindolas* made by *kishores* and *kishoris* of Mumbai for Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. After Thakorji's darshan Swamishri blessed the devotees who had come from far off places to celebrate the festival of Raksha Bandhan. Senior sadhus offered a shawl and garland of *rakhdis* to Swamishri. Swamishri sanctified the *rakhdis*, which were later tied by sadhus on every devotee's wrist.

SEPTEMBER: MUMBAI

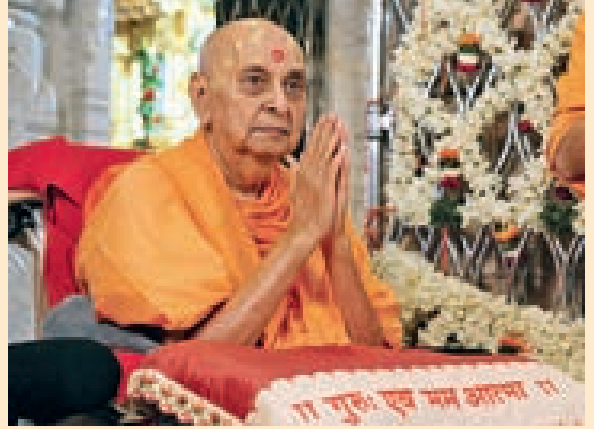
8, Thursday; Jal Jhilani Festival

The Jal Jhilani festival was celebrated beneath the mandir dome before the *murtis* of Thakorji. It commenced at 8.00 a.m. The celebration was interspersed with speeches, bhajans, *arti* and Thakorji being taken for a boat ride in a small pool of water. Shrirang Swami, Apurva Muni Swami, Viveksagar Swami and Dr Swami addressed the gathering.

(contd. on p. 52)

Guru Purnima Festival

15 July 2011, Mumbai



At 9.20 a.m. Swamishri arrived for darshan in the *abhishek mandap* and thereafter he proceeded to the mandir for Thakorji's darshan. Pujya Viveksagar Swami had concluded his discourse on the importance and glory of guru on the festive occasion of Guru Purnima. Swamishri then blessed the devotees seated beneath the mandir dome with smiles and gestures. Everyone was pleased to see Swamishri in good health. Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Kothari Abhayswarup Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands and a shawl. Swamishri blessed all, saying, "Blessings to all on Guru Purnima. May the sentiments of bhakti flourish in your life. This festival has been celebrated in Bochasan ever since Shastriji Maharaj built the mandir. Yogiji Maharaj also celebrated the festival in Bochasan.

"I pray to Maharaj on this day of Guru Purnam that may our times be favourable to all. May your businesses grow, your employment be profitable and the seasonal rains be plentiful. May the year yield good harvests and joy to all. May your *seva* and bhakti forever escalate and your faith in Maharaj become resolute.

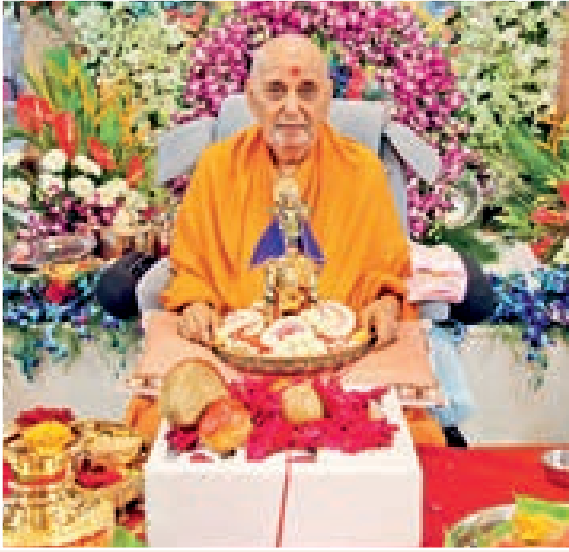
"Today, I have come here because of my health, but your devotion and prayers to God have made me well. The doctors have checked

my condition and declared that I'm well. The human body is subject to good and bad health. The attributes of ageing are apparent and everyone experiences them. However, today I've had your darshan. Maharaj and Swami are happy with your profound bhakti. May Maharaj make you all very happy and peace prevail in your family, society and country."

Swamishri performed his morning puja in his room. After taking lunch, he answered some letters from devotees.

At 7.30 p.m. Dr Lotlikar took an echocardiogram of Swamishri's heart. He declared, "Swami, your echocardiogram is the same as it was six months ago. This means that your heart is as well as it was six months ago." Everyone was happy with the good news. Swamishri spoke with great equipoise with reference to the discomfort he had felt in Jhadeshwar, "I was not in the least worried or afraid as to what would happen to me. Whatever that happens is due to God's wish and will."

Swamishri's spiritual equanimity and poise is rooted in his deep faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It was an inspiring experience and message for all on Guru Purnima day. ♦



Swamishri with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj at the conclusion of the rituals

(contd. from p. 13)

built another one in Delhi. Both projects were supervised by Ishwar Swami and the team of sadhus with him.

“Whatever works we accomplish are done to please God. They are not done for fame, but to please God and for peace to prevail in all. After the inauguration of Akshardham in Delhi [in 2005] the devotees of America were overjoyed and resolved to have one built in America. You have all happily come here from America to participate in this foundation-stone laying ceremony of Akshardham in New Jersey. Such wishes, inspirations and enthusiasm are inspired through the grace of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Everyone is excited and charged with firm faith and belief that what can’t one do for God and his Sadhu. One can see this spirit of robust faith in the hearts of devotees residing in India and abroad. It is through your enthusiasm that such big projects are accomplished.

“We have acquired a piece of land there and work on it has already started. The construction work for the mandir is going on and the Shilanyas [for Akshardham] we have done here today.

“The Akshardham in Delhi has amazed and pleased all. The reason being that it was the wish

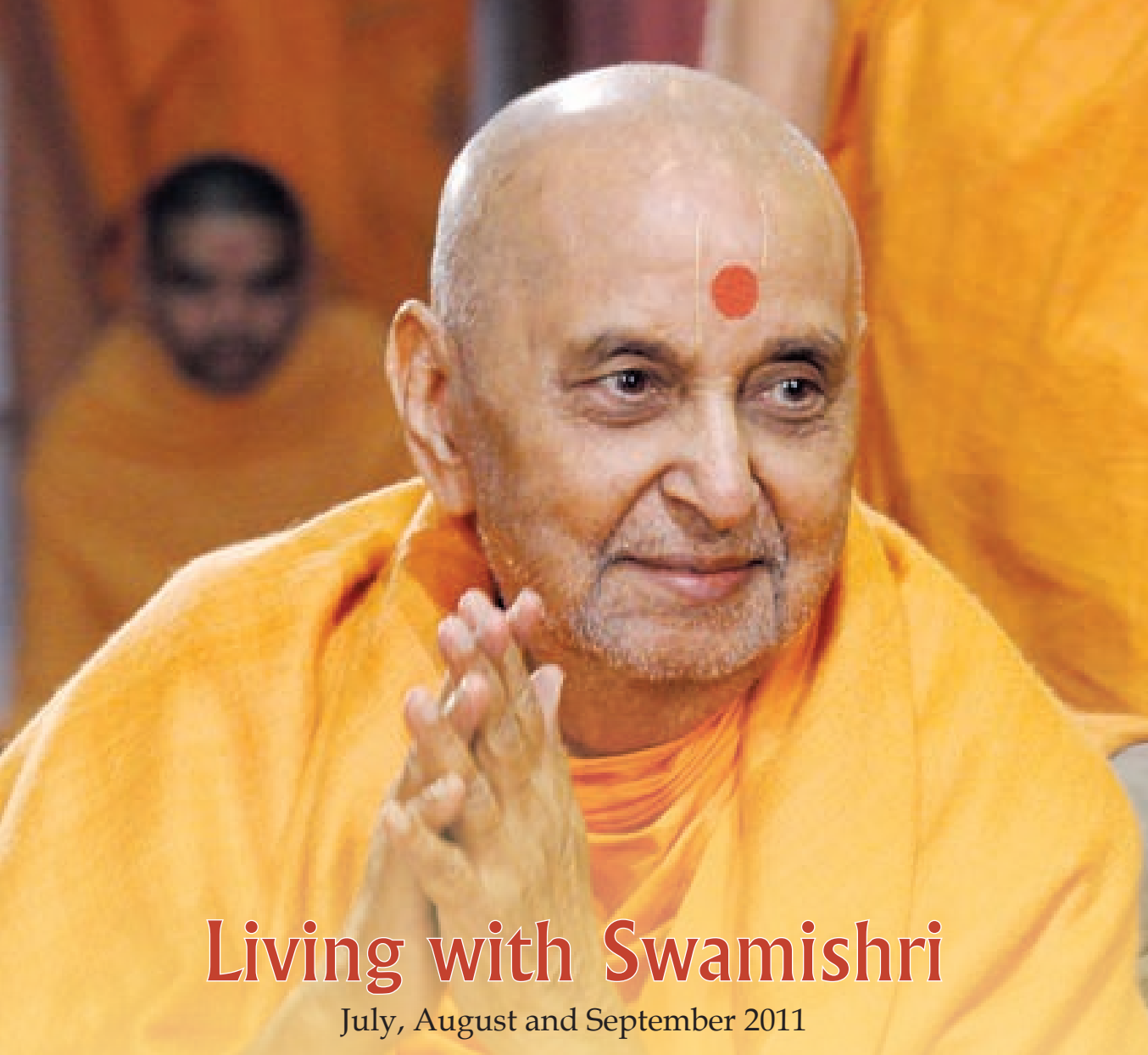
of Maharaj, Swami, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Maharaj. You have all pledged and started giving your support. Though it may be small [before God’s effort], but God believes it to be of importance. This is because you have served with devotion and an understanding of God’s glory. I pray to Maharaj that the mandir [Akshardham] be completed in no time, and there be no obstructions along the way. May the glory of Akshardham spread everywhere and that all come for darshan. May Maharaj and Swami bless you all with happiness in mind, body and wealth and enable you to offer *seva* in this manner.”

Finally, to commemorate the occasion, several *shlokas* and a poem in Sanskrit composed by Bhadresh Swami and Aksharjivan Swami respectively were sung.

Swamishri was beaming with joy as he showered his pleasure upon the devotees for their effort, faith and enthusiasm.

A few days later, Swamishri, with reference to the Shilanyas ceremony, explained to Kothari Abhayswarup Swami, “Look, it was good that I came early for the [Shilanyas] ritual! If I had come late then the devotees would not have been satisfied. All our occasions are never small or minor, they gradually grow in size. If we had finished the rituals simply the devotees would not have been satisfied. Everyone was satisfied with the Brahmin priests’ performance of the rituals. If I had arrived late and the rituals had been cut short and completed in only 15 minutes, then no one would have been satisfied. But I came [early] and sat beneath the mandir dome to perform my puja. See how the devotees, who made great efforts to come from America, were pleased and satisfied. The rituals were conducted properly and thus everyone was happy.”

Despite Swamishri’s ill-health he had insisted upon coming early at 7.00 a.m. to preside over the entire ceremony. He also desired to have the ceremony done elaborately and satisfy all the devotees. ♦



Living with Swamishri

July, August and September 2011

THE WISH TO BLESS A DEVOTEE

9 July, Jhadeshwar (Bharuch)

On the night of 4 and 5 July Swamishri had minor discomfort in his body. The next morning all was well, except that Swamishri was fatigued. He was advised to rest and cancel all personal audience with devotees for some time.

Today in the morning, after having darshan of Thakorji in the mandir, Swamishri expressed a wish to bless all the sadhus who had come for darshan. The arrangement was made.

Then Swamishri personally wished to bless a

devotee who had donated land for constructing a mandir in a village. The attendant sadhus informed Swamishri that it was not appropriate to do so because of his weak health. Then Swamishri asked the attendant to take his phone number so that he could speak to him and bless him. Even this was not possible, so Swamishri was told that he could talk to him after he had recovered fully.

It is amazing how Swamishri takes care of sadhus and devotees and deeply desires to meet and bless them for their *seva*, regardless of his own health.

BELIEF IN GURU'S DOERSHIP

13 July, Mumbai

One hundred years ago today Yogiji Maharaj joined Shastriji Maharaj in the BAPS, bringing with him the sacred *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

Adarshjivan Swami praised Swamishri's devotion, "You have never forgotten Harikrishna Maharaj in all your activities. Yogiji Maharaj brought him into the BAPS, and you have spread his glory throughout the world. You also took him to the United Nations assembly.

Swamishri replied humbly, "It is all due to his [Yogiji Maharaj's] wish. Otherwise what is it that I can accomplish! When he spoke of Jamralla we took it to be as good as Germany. So whatever that has been achieved is due to his wish."

Adarshjivan Swami added, "His [Yogiji Maharaj's] wish and your effort [in realizing it]."

Swamishri argued, "His wish is of prime importance."

Adarshjivan Swami explained, "Everyone makes wishes but one who translates them into reality is also important."

Swamishri reiterated humbly, "It is because of his wish that all things are possible, whereas I am unable to do anything."

In spite of all his incalculable endeavours we find that Swamishri is ever humble and grounded firmly in his conviction of guru Yogiji Maharaj's doership.

SERVICE TO GOD

12 August, Mumbai

Swamishri was seeing a video film of the *pratishtha* rituals of various *hari* mandirs he had performed in Mumbai. On seeing the same ceremonial rituals Brahmavihari Swami asked Swamishri, "You have repetitively performed the *pratishtha* rituals of thousands of mandirs, yet, you never get bored in doing the same thing again and again."

Swamishri replied nonchalantly, "Why

should I get bored! When God is being invoked and installed it is a *seva* on one's part."

"But the rituals of placing the betel nuts and showering rice grains are the same. Still we see that you do them with unresigning and ever-fresh faith."

Swamishri replied, "Doing rituals is bhakti. The more one does them the more one benefits personally. This is possible when one has understood their glory."

SWAMISHRI'S CARE

19 August, Mumbai

Every morning, after Thakorji's darshan in the mandir, Swamishri blesses from a distance the devotees seated beneath the mandir dome. This morning Swamishri had seen and blessed Mahendrabhai Barrister's son, Navnitbhai, and his brother-in-law, Piyushbhai.

Later during the day Swamishri read Shri Mahendrabhai Barrister's letter from Nairobi. Thereafter he asked Dharmacharan Swami to find out the phone number of Navnitbhai. When Swamishri talked to him in the evening he said, "I saw you this morning but was unable to speak with you. I wished to talk to you and have thus rung you up. By the grace of Maharaj you have been blessed with *seva*. May you be able to do your work well, with unity and harmony. You have sound spiritual knowledge and understanding." Swamishri then enquired about his business. Swamishri also talked with Piyushbhai, the brother-in-law of Navnitbhai. He had also come in the morning for Swamishri's darshan on his 50th birthday. Swamishri blessed him and conveyed his good wishes. Piyushbhai felt elated and said, "By speaking with you I feel joyful and as good as having celebrated by birthday with you."

Navnitbhai expressed his appreciations to Swamishri, "We are pleased by your blessings on the phone."

Swamishri satisfies devotees through personal conversations and blessings.

GURU BHAKTI

1 September, Thursday, Mumbai

Whenever Swamishri is praised for any of his works he always gives the credit to his gurus Yogiji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj. He gives total recognition for the creation of Akshardham in New Delhi and Gandhinagar to Yogiji Maharaj. He says that it was Yogiji Maharaj's wish and dream, and they were accomplished by his grace.

With reference to the Shilanyas ritual for Akshardham in New Jersey, Brahmavihari Swami told Swamishri, "It is your guru bhakti that you attribute all the works you accomplish to the wish and grace of Yogiji Maharaj. But the Akshardham project for America is your own wish and dream. It cannot be counted as Yogi Bapa's dream."

Swamishri smiled and countered, "How can it not be so! Have you seen Yogi Bapa in prayer and *dhun*. I have seen him. Ishwar Swami has seen him, haven't you?"

Ishwar Swami replied in affirmation.

Swamishri continued, "Yogi Bapa daily wished and prayed that may sadhus and mandirs increase. Thus all the new [BAPS] mandirs that have been built in India and abroad can be said to be the result of Yogi Bapa's wish and prayer. His prayer 'May mandirs increase' includes all our mandirs today and also the ones in future."

Ishwarcharan Swami explained, "All three [gurus] are one. Whether it is Shastriji Maharaj who wishes, Yogi Bapa who wishes and Swami Bapa who wishes – all are one."

Swamishri corroborated further, "That is true but my argument is also correct."

The foundations of Swamishri's guru bhakti and humility are profound, and he counts all works or achievements as the result of the wishes and blessings of his gurus.

CONSOLING AND PRAISING A BEREAVED DEVOTEE

2, September, Friday, Mumbai

Harishbhai Kanabar, the chairman of Nai-

robi Satsang, rang Swamishri to say that his only son, 19-year-old Jay, had passed away in a car accident. Jay was a dedicated youth who was soulfully engaged in satsang activities. In spite of the terrible calamity Harishbhai and his wife had displayed great patience and equanimity. He informed Swamishri, "The funeral is over. We commenced his last rites from the mandir with the mandir band playing a happy spiritual score. We distributed *penda* and sugar crystals to all the devotees."

Swamishri became emotional on hearing his words of faith and glory for Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then Swamishri praised and blessed, "Harish, you are a genuine devotee. Your whole family has digested satsang in its real sense. You have taken the side of satsang with great courage. Your son was pious and you performed his last rites with the music of the mandir band. You have made the occasion of death far greater than that of a marriage ceremony. You have imbibed satsang into your soul. We have heard and speak of great devotees of the past, but we find them to be present today. You have proved that to be true. Your wife has also shown such inner strength and courage. You have transformed a sad occasion into a festive one because of your faith in God and by not worrying about what your community says. Your son is in Maharaj's lap in Akshardham. He is happy and so is Maharaj. To have such calibre of devotion and joy is all due to the grace of Yogi Bapa and Shastriji Maharaj. Otherwise, another would give up his daily puja. One would simply break down in grief and give up one's faith. But you have firmly established satsang in your soul, and so you will have immense happiness, peace and the ability to do a lot of *seva*. Your son is in Akshardham."

While Swamishri was talking to Harishbhai there was sympathy and a divine glow on his face. Even his words resonated with joy at Harishbhai's spiritual faith and understanding.

SOLVING A PROBLEM

22, Thursday

A BAPS volunteer's son was born on Diwali day or Amas, a night of no moon. Several Brahmins declared, with reference to astrology and *gyotisha* shastra, that one born on Amas should have a religious rite done to usher in peace in his life. The volunteer and his wife were staunch *satsangis*, so they did not wish to perform the religious rite. However, with growing social pressure from his relatives, the volunteer decided to write a letter to Swamishri and do whatever he wished.

Swamishri replied, "Offer 100 *mahapujas* at Akshar Deri in Gondal and he and his wife do an extra *mala* daily."

Swamishri's blessings and instructions provide solutions to one's past karmas and consolidate one's faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

GURU'S GUIDANCE AND BLESSINGS

22 Thursday

A devotee wrote a letter to Swamishri describing that his wife was in a state of confusion and fear for the past three years. She would break down crying anywhere without any rea-

son, and sometimes become listless and thus refrain from doing any chores at home. He added that she would break down crying in the satsang assembly and at home. She was also plagued by horrifying dreams. When he had asked Brahmin pundits about this, they replied that her ancestors were troubling her. Then, to appease them, they prescribed a *pitru-shanti yagna*. But he did not agree to do so. Instead, he sponsored a meal for Thakorji and sadhus at Gondal mandir with the hope that their blessings would heal her wife. After that his wife felt better for a few weeks, but her condition relapsed. The volunteer had asked Swamishri what he should do next.

Swamishri replied, "Both of you are strongly wedded to Satsang. Have firm faith, understanding and refuge in God. Offer 30 *mahapujas* at Akshar Deri and God will bless her with wellness."

A Gunatit guru's guidance and blessings provide solutions and strengthens spiritual faith in the lives of many suffering souls. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

(contd. from p. 46)

At 8.55 a.m. Swamishri arrived, and after Thakorji's darshan he performed the fifth and final *arti* of the festival. Thereafter Thakorji was taken for a boat ride. In conclusion, Puja Kothari Swami immersed the *murti* of Shri Ganapati in the pool of water.

16, Friday; Shastriji Maharaj's Memorial Day Celebration

In the morning, Swamishri performed *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni in the *abhishek mandap*. As part of the special darshan of Thakorji in the main sanctum of the mandir the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj had a pot with *dudhpak* flowing

into the bowl held by Gunatitanand Swami.

Swamishri sanctified the bowls of *dudhpak* from Sarangpur and Mumbai, placed before Thakorji, with rose petals. Then Swamishri blessed the devotees with gestures and smiles.

Swamishri gave instructions that sadhus serve the devotees *dudhpak* for lunch as part of Shastriji Maharaj's memorial day celebration.

During lunch Swamishri acknowledged the sentiments of devotion and love of Puja Kothari Swami and Puja Viveksagar Swami and drank a cup of *dudhpak* offered by them. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

New BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir Opens in Leicester

8-9 October 2011

The new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir on Gypsy Lane in Leicester opened its doors to the public on Sunday, 9 October 2011. It was the culmination of nearly three years of tireless efforts by hundreds of dedicated volunteers and devotees.

The two-day 'Festival of Inspirations' marking the opening of the Mandir commenced on the morning of Saturday 8 October 2011 with a Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony. Devotees and well-wishers offered their prayers for peace and well-being to prevail throughout the local community and country.

In the afternoon, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the Mandir were paraded through the heart of the city in a colourful *nagaryatra* to bless the city. Thousands came out on to the streets to enjoy the procession of beautifully decorated floats, traditional dances and the sounds of joyous music.

Anthony Wright of Marfitt Street shared: "As soon as I saw what was going on I had to call my children. I think it is amazing to see the whole community coming together and having a good time, especially in light of the recent riots. It's nice to see something positive for a change."

On the morning of Sunday 9 October, the sacred *murtis*, previously consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in India, were installed in the new mandir by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

Among those who have eagerly welcomed the new Mandir in Leicester were the City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby, "I'm so delighted because I've watched the Mandir grow, and know how much it means to the community, how much energy and effort people have put in to make it happen. I think it's a great tribute to the community and it has – and is going to be – one of the most important features of not just the physical part of the city but the spiritual part of the city in the years ahead."



Ishwarcharan Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals



Grand *nagaryatra*



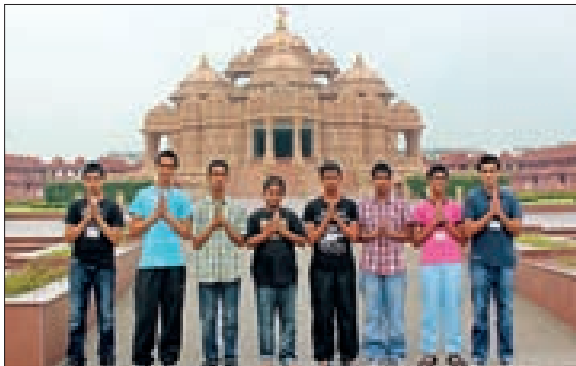
Devotees and well-wishers queue for darshan



UK

KISHORES-KISHORIS FROM FRANCE SERVE AND LEARN

27 July to 25 August 2011, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, India



From 27 July to 25 August 2011, 23 *kishores* and *kishoris* (aged 15 to 22 years) of BAPS Satsang Mandal in Paris, France, performed voluntary *seva* at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.

They served diligently in guiding guests and dignitaries, attending to the information centres, managing photo spots and other departments. Their enthusiastic services were deeply appreciated by the permanent staff of Swaminarayan Akshardham.

The youths also attended in-depth classroom and discussion sessions on Hinduism conducted by Dr Janakbhai Dave, Director of BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute at Swaminarayan Akshardham. The topics covered included: Sanatana Dharma, core beliefs of Hindus, Hindu shastras, Shad Darshanas and Vedantic teachings. In addition, they learnt about Swaminarayan history and philosophy, and explored the cultural and social challenges of modern society.

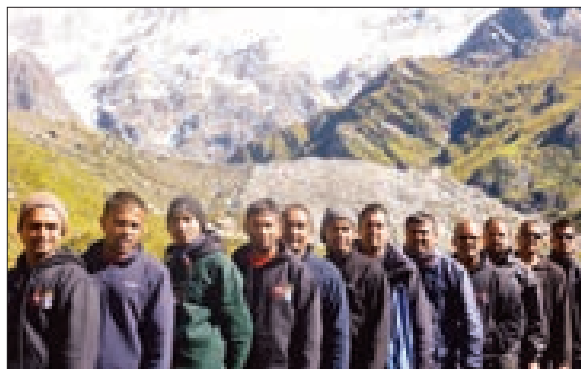
The *kishores* and *kishoris* also had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Mumbai for 5 days and benefitted from the experienced

guidance of Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and other sadhus.

Through this visit the youths gained much practical experience, and a deeper understanding of Hindu Dharma and the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

UK YUVAK-YUVATI KARYAKAR CHAR DHAM YATRA

8 to 26 September 2011, India



Yuvak karyakars during their pilgrimage to Kedarnath

From 8 to 26 September 2011, a group of 18 *karyakars* from across the UK participated in the first ever Yuvak-Yuvati Mandal India Trip. This inaugural trip followed the Himalayan travels of Nilkanth Varni and the footsteps of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Uttarakhand Yatra of 1987. The itinerary included some of the most sacred places of Hindu pilgrimage, including the four ancient mandirs of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, collectively known as the 'Char Dham'.

The trip commenced with a two-day visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi where the exhibitions on the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Neelkanth Kalyan Yatra large-format film provided everyone with a taste of the journey ahead. With further inspiration from Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Atmas



Yuvati karyakars outside the Badrinath Mandir

warup Swami, the group departed for the 12-day pilgrimage to the Uttarakhand region of the Himalayan mountain range.

The pilgrimage began in Haridwar with the *karyakars* experiencing the mass *arti* of the holy Ganga River at Harikipaidi ghat and bathing in its icy waters.

From there they reached Yamunotri at 10,800 ft. and had darshan of the holy Yamuna River and mandir.

Next, they reached Gangotri, at 11,200 ft. The *karyakars* performed a *mahapuja* for Swamishri's health. From here, the group visited Gaumukh – the icy mouth and source of the River Ganga – at 12,700ft.

The neat destination was Kedarnath at 11,700 ft. It is considered to be the most ancient of the four Dhams.

At the fourth Dham in Badrinath, the *karyakars* had darshan at sunrise of the golden Nilkanth Parvat, one of the most beautiful sights in the Himalayas.

After mandir darshan, the *karyakars* visited the ancient town of Mana, where the holy sites of Vyas Gufa, Ganesh Gufa, Saraswati River and the road on which the Pandavas ascended into *swarg* are located. This place is extremely auspicious for all Hindus as it is considered to be the site where the Vedas, Upanishads, and Mahabharata shastras were written.

Descending from the central Himalayas, the *karyakars* visited the holy town of Rishikesh.

In the following days, the group enjoyed the breathtaking Sat-Chit-Anand watershow at Akshardham in Gandhinagar, and had darshan at Ahmedabad Mandir and Amli-Vali Pol.

The trip concluded with the divine darshan and blessings of Swamishri in Mumbai.

Experiences

“A life changing experience and an insight into what Nilkanth Varni went through for all mankind. Now I appreciate why this *yatra* is highly recommended for all Hindus.”

- Vishal Patel

Yuvak Karyakar

“A truly amazing spiritual journey where total divinity existed, and the presence of Nilkanth Varni and Swami were felt every step of the way. Words can't express what a life changing experience it's been for me. The memories will be treasured always.”

- Naina Patel

Yuvati Karyakar

NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR 2011

‘DISCOVER – FOLLOW – REALISE’

10 September 2011

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



More than 400 children attended the National Bal-Balika Shibir on Saturday 10 September 2011, held in the presence of Anandswarup Swami at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London. The theme for this year's *shibir* was ‘Discover - Follow – Realise’.

The *shibir* helped the children to:

- Develop a deeper understanding of Swamishri and build a closer bond with him (*jodan*)
- Become proud and confident in speaking to others about our guru
- Understand Swamishri's true form according to the shastras
- Use Swamishri as a practical role model and implement his virtuous qualities in their own life

The 'Discover' session highlighted Swamishri's achievements and how people of all backgrounds have been touched by Swamishri's pure and divine character. Then the children were guided on how Swamishri can be introduced to others including family, friends and those unfamiliar to him. Also, *balaks* narrated their personal experiences with Swamishri, and how this has positively impacted their lives.

The session on 'Follow' comprised of three separate classrooms, in which the children learned how to become an ideal child, an ideal student and an ideal satsangi, as per the wishes of Swamishri.

In the final session, 'Realise', the children learned about the true form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj: that he is the Gunatit Satpurush – Aksharbrahman, the ideal devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

EUROPE KARYAKAR SHIBIR

'Satpurushne Samajvaa'

16-18 September 2011

Guincho, Cascais, Portugal



From 16 to 18 September 2011, over 150

karyakars from Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom gathered in Cascais, Portugal, for the fourth Europe Karyakar Shibir, held in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Anandswarup Swami.

The aim of this year's *shibir*, entitled 'Satpurushne Samajvaa', was to gain a better understanding of the Satpurush. Inspiring talks by the sadhus helped to show the qualities of the Satpurush and how to better understand his wishes.

Over the three days, there were plenty of opportunities for *karyakars* from different countries to meet and learn from one another. Everyone was inspired and resolved to strengthen their personal satsang and *seva* in their respective regions.

THE SWAMINARAYAN SCHOOL, LONDON, RANKED THIRD IN A-LEVEL RESULTS September 2011

The Swaminarayan School, London, has been recognized as the third best independent school of its size after this year's A-Level results in a table published by *The Daily Telegraph* based on data supplied by the Independent Schools Council.

Congratulations to all the students, parents, teachers and governors for their excellent achievements.

East Africa

EAST AFRICA KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR

'Vachanamrut – The Word of God; Live It'

Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania 5 to 9 August 2011

Over 374 *kishores* and *kishoris* from Nairobi, Mwanza, Tanga, Arusha, Kisumu, Nakuru, Kampala, Eldoret and Kericho assembled at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Dar-es-Salaam for the five-day East Africa Kishore-Kishori Shibir in the presence of Priyavrat Swami and other sadhus.



The *shibir* theme, ‘Vachanamrut – The Word of God; Live It’, was presented by the sadhus through inspiring speeches giving in-depth knowledge and practical guidance on the Vachanamrut.

Pre-recorded videos and live telephone speeches by the *sadguru* sadhus from India helped to further clarify and consolidate the principles of the Vachanamrut. Swamishri also sent a letter of blessings from Mumbai to all the participants.

The *shibir* gave the youngsters a deeper understanding of the Vachanamrut and helped to strengthen their unity. All resolved to read and contemplate upon one Vachanamrut daily.

BAL-BALIKA NATIONAL SHIBIR ‘SHASTRAS – WALK THE TALK’ 12-14 August 2011, Nakuru



From 12 to 14 August 2011, over 320 children from throughout Kenya attended the National Bal-Balika Shibir held at Greensteds International School in Nakuru. The *shibir*’s theme was ‘Shastras – Walk the Talk’. The children were taught the central messages of some

Hindu shastras, such as, Vedas, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato and Shikshapatri, and how they could be applied in daily life.

Through workshops the children learned the importance of observing dharma and the value of faith in God at all times, even in moments of uncertainty and doubts. Inspiring video presentations, thought-provoking discussions, and challenging games and activities consolidated the message of how the shastras can be a guide through life’s daily challenges.

The children also learned how Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the ‘Living Shastra’ because of his pure life devoid of worldly attachments. The *shibir* inspired the children to gain a better understanding of the shastras and an eagerness to study them in greater detail.

A *mukhpath* competition was also held in which 40 *balaks* and 30 *balikas* participated.

India

ANNUAL REGIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR 19-21 August 2011, Gondal, India



Around 880 *kishores* and 770 *kishoris* from Rajkot, Morbi and Gondal participated in the Annual Regional Kishore-Kishori Shibir held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Gondal from 19 to 21 August 2011 in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami.

The theme of the *shibir* ‘His Vision’ Our Mission’ inspired the youngsters to understand

the selfless and universally beneficial vision of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and make it their mission to fulfil it. The *shibir* schedule was split into the following sessions: Sankalp, Samp, Sampark, Satsang, Smruti and Seva. The messages of each session were effectively conveyed through enlightening speeches by senior and learned sadhus, workshops, question and answers, skits and multimedia presentations.

Through the *shibir* the youths gained a deeper insight into the noble vision of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and guidance on how they can incorporate it into their daily lives at home, college and work.

PRESIDENT OF REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI
14 October 2011



The President and his family perform abhishek of Neelkanth Varni

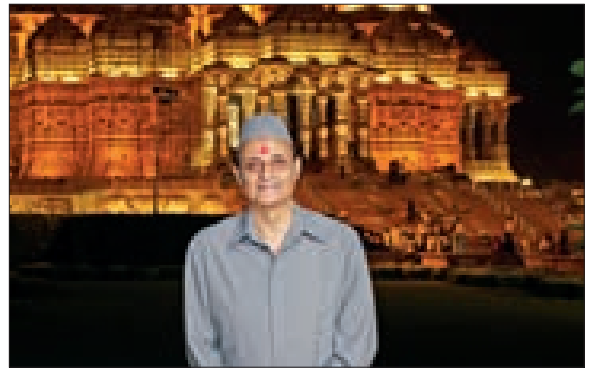
The President of Republic of the Union of Myanmar, His Excellency Thein Sein, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi on 14 October 2011. He was accompanied by his family, and a 50 member delegation of Cabinet ministers and officials.

The President offered prayers for world peace and harmony and for the strengthening of Indo-Myanmar ties by offering *abhishek* to the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni.

Expressing his experience in the guest opinion book, His Excellency wrote: “The artistic skill of

architecture being made in the construction of the whole complex is of high standard. I am of the view that the complex should be maintained to exist forever. Any religion can keep people civilized. The more there are people who respect religion, the more peaceful the world will be. I wish to pay another visit to this place.”

DR KARAN SINGH VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI
19 October 2011



Dr Karan Singh, MP of Rajya Sabha, President ICCR and Chairman AICC Foreign Affairs Department, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi on 19 October 2011.

Awestruck by the Akshardham Mandir, Dr Singh expressed, “This is the most magnificent *garbhagruh* (inner sanctum) that I have seen in the world.”

He offered prayers for world peace and harmony by performing *abhishek* on the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni.

Reflecting upon his experience Dr Karan Singh wrote: “This is my first visit to Akshardham and I have been profoundly impressed by the grandeur, the beauty and the extraordinary artistic creativity that has gone into the making of this great monument. The beautiful film on Sri Swaminarayan projects the great guru in a most impressive manner. I congratulate Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the entire Swaminarayan movement for this achievement. As a worshipper of Lord Shiva, I can only say, ‘Jai Neelkanth!’ ” ♦

NEW PUBLICATIONS

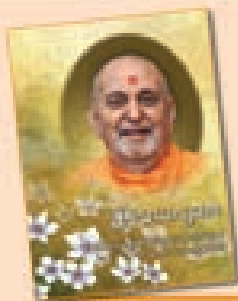


MYSTIC INDIA FILM AND THE STORY OF ITS MAKING

Mystic India is the true story of an 11-year-old child-yogi of India, named Neelkanth Varni. It depicts his epic 12,000 km, 7-year barefoot journey through the length and breadth of India. The film reveals Neelkanth's encounters with nature and man, and the majesty and mysticism of India's art and architecture, music and dance, faces and festivals, customs and costumes. It also portrays India's profound spirituality, which makes her a mystic land of meditation, contemplation and enlightenment.

Inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, *Mystic India* is a large format film created by a team of technical staff and 570 BAPS volunteers, who offered one million hours of honorary service. The film has been shown in over 50 prestigious giant screen (Imax®) theatres worldwide, including, London, Singapore, Atlanta, Houston, Orlando, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland and Mumbai.

In 2005, *Mystic India* won the 'Audience's Choice Prize' award at the 10th International Large Format Film Festival at Le Geode, France.



PRASANGAM

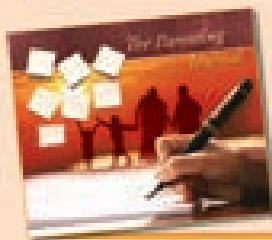
Inspiring incidents and messages from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *vicharan* in 2009. The brief accounts on Swamishri motivate and encourage both youths and adults.

Translator: Pratiksha Amin, USA

Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad

ISBN: 978-81-7526-429-8

Pages: 244



PARENTING JOURNAL

A unique colourful guide for parents on how to instil values, culture and spirituality in children. The book also guides parents on how to improve their approach and relationship with children.

Translators: Sailesh Patel, Aashika Patel and Iva Patel

Adapted for English by: Sejal Daswani

Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, **ISBN:** 978-81-7526-430-4, **Pages:** 72



INDIA'S GLORIOUS HERITAGE

An illustrated booklet for children and teenagers on India's glorious heritage. It briefly deals with Hindu beliefs, shastras, *sants*, mandirs, scientific discoveries, yoga, music, literature, education and the main features of BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad

ISBN: 978-81-7526-439-7, **Pages:** 64

Available at all BAPS bookstores



**VEDIC SHILANYAS CEREMONY FOR SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM
NEW JERSEY, USA, 6 to 9 October 2011**

"Satsang will grow in America through Pramukh Swami Maharaj," Yogiji Maharaj blessed over four decades ago. The recently held grand Akshardham Shilanyas Mahotsav (foundation-stone laying ceremony) was a testimony to this. Under the inspiration and guidance of Swamishri, BAPS has initiated the construction of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Jersey, USA. Between 6 and 9 October 2011 thousands of devotees from throughout North America participated in the auspicious Shilanyas Ceremony in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami in New Jersey. Swamishri also participated in the rituals and blessed the occasion from Mumbai through a live video-conference link.