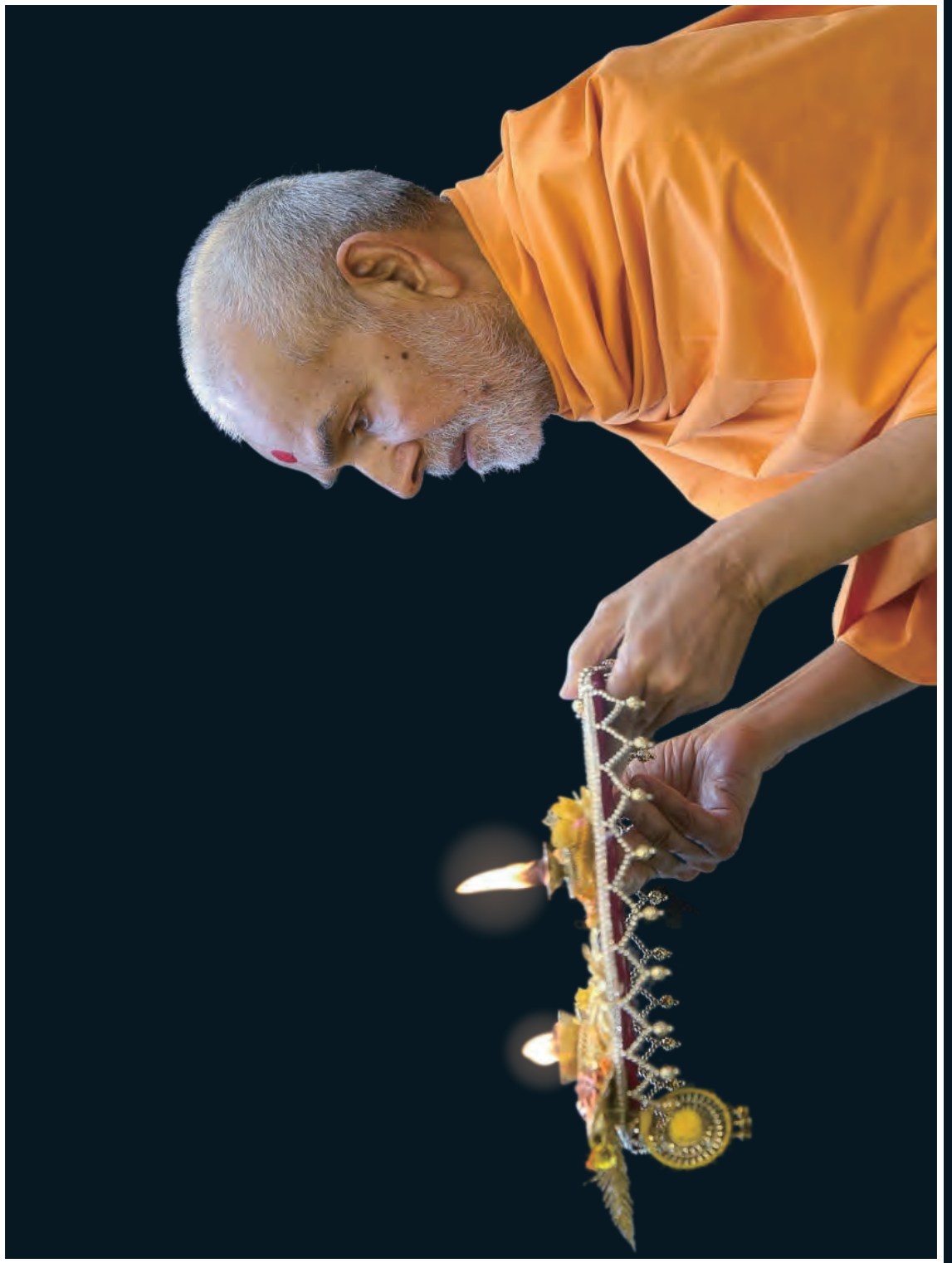


Mahan Rushi

Mahant Swami Maharaj

- Dr. Kirit Shelat, IAS (Rtd.)





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Publisher
**National Council for Climate Change,
Sustainable Development and Public Leadership (NCCSD)**
Ahmedabad

Mahan Rushi

Mahant Swami Maharaj

Author: Dr. Kirit Nanubhai Shelat, IAS (Rtd.)

First Gujarati Edition : June, 2019

Second English Edition : July, 2021

Published by:

**National Council for Climate Change,
Sustainable Development and Public Leadership**

Patel Block, Rajdeep Electronic's Compound,

Near Stadium Six Road, Navrangpura,

Ahmedabad-380 0014

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Rs. : 251/-

Printed by:

Sahitya Mundranalaya Pvt. Ltd.

City Mill Compound,

Kankaria Road, Ahmedabad – 380 022

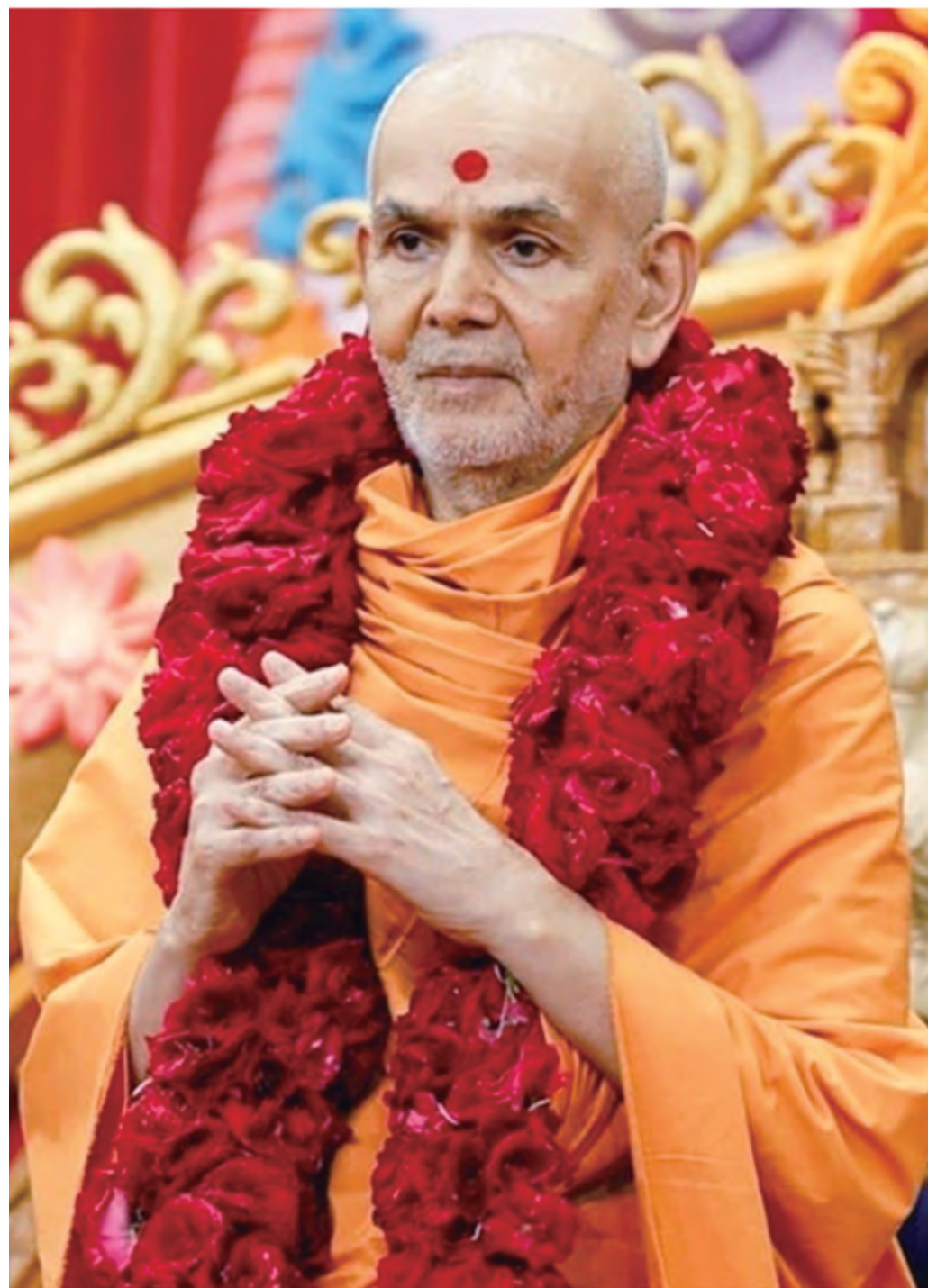
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Email: smpl99@gmail.com • Website: www.sahityaprint.com

Dedicated



Param Pujya Shashtriji Maharaj



PREFACE



Prof. R.C. Majumdar a prominent historian and professor of Indian history calls Swaminarayan Sampraday the greatest of the reforming sects of Gujarat. Prof. Raymond Brady Williams, a distinguished Professor of Humanities and Theology at Wabas College, Indiana USA, describes BAPS as “The Fastest growing Religious Group”. Shri Sahajanand Swami inspired the growth of faith in early 19th century. At the time of his demise in 1830, the Sampradaya had two major centres of growth – Kalupur mandir and Vadtal Mandir. Major expansion and spread took place under the

BAPS – Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. This was set up by Shastriji Maharaj in 1907.

Shastriji Maharaj followed Guru Parampara – created by Gunatitanand Swami. He expanded the idea of reaching out to the followers at their door-steps. The Gurus exhibited ‘Spandan’ the creative energy – vibration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj was followed by Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the current Head of BAPS - Mahant Swami Maharaj. The Gurus took Sanatan Dharma across the world and strengthened religious faith with spirituality and helped to others, irrespective of caste or creed.

Our association with Swaminarayan Sampraday is over a very long period of time. Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited our ancestral home at Balali Poal in Umreth – Anand district. My father late Justice Nanubhai and mother Taralaxmiben were devotees of Sampraday. Our association was enhanced when my father was District and Sessions Judge at Rajkot in 1959. Along with him – we all used to visit Gondal and pay respect to Yogiji Maharaj. At that time both Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj were young – Mahant Swami Maharaj was always with Yogiji Maharaj taking notes, while Pramukh Swami Maharaj was overseeing all activities. We had the honour of inter-acting with them. Our entire family, my brothers – Rohitbhai, Sureshbhai, Mahendrabhai, and sisters – Urmilaben, Indiraben and Geetaben – all follow the Sampraday. We used to pay respect to Santas – who had honoured us with their visit – both Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited our home and blessed all of us. My brother – Sureshbhai advises BAPS on legal matters and son Mitul assists him. Our children were moulded by Santas, Atmaswarup Swami imbibed

spiritual values in Vrajesh and his sons - Om and Arjun. Brahmavihari Swami moulded Mitul.

I first wrote about BAPS relief activities - post earthquake relief work in Kutch Gujarat in my book Mapping Development (2003). BAPS did outstanding work under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. That led me to write about his way of life - the Life Devoted to Others. I got an opportunity to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj when we - my wife Ila and I, visited Neasden Temple - London in 2004. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was also visiting it. I asked Atmaswarup Swami - can I write his biography? He asked me please ask 'BAPA' and take his permission - when I did that 'BAPA' gave it with a charming smile. I took the challenge inspired by 'BAPA' and "Yug Purush 'Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, A life dedicated to Others" was released by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who was then the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat, in January 2005 at Surat.

I was following Mahant Swami Maharaj. He has a yogic way of life - getting up very early, do yoga and prathana. He is mit-bhashi - speaks very less and learned. He has profound knowledge of our holy scriptures. I thought of writing his biography. During our visit to Salangpur in May 2017, I discussed this with Kothari Swami, Gyaneshwar Swami and Atmaswarup Swami. They advised me to take His consent. While paying our respects, I sought from Pujya Mahant Swami His permission and blessings for taking up this task, which He gave with a smile.

What inspires of this Saint - Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj is His humility. His low key - non-dominant - method of reaching out to all followers and non-followers. In fact He represents and heads BAPS - a multinational religious and spiritual organization spread over more than 55 countries with billions of followers. He is a true Yogi. He has concern for making life of the common person simple "Sahaj" and therefore He talks about Akshar Purushottam Darshan. He shows ways to come out from contaminated thoughts that are stored in our mind and that continuously disturbs the mind and our life and many a time our sleep. He talks about building four living walls of our own - our mindset to make our home a palace. He has himself created a modern context for religious scriptures and encouraged other Sadhus in Sampraday to revive values of our culture with modern context by doing research and writing about it.

He has interest in youth and keeping them par excellence. That is how

He inspired recitation of 300 slokas in “Satsang Dixsha Shastra” authored by Him. He wants to bring out the best in youth so that they perform very well in their life. He advises that laziness is worse than plague – it permanently disables a person from achieving his the best. He has identified it as an obstruction in our life and needs to be removed by conscious effort.

He follows not only his predecessors in Sampraday but also our great sages. Mahan Rushi like Vasishta, Vishwamitra, Agastya, Shankaracharya and others.

All this is brought out in the coming pages. The Gujarati book was jointly authored with Prof. D.R. Patel.

The book also incorporates the Guru Parampara, how Sanatan Dharma – spread across the world and how BAPS as an organization evolved – the roles of Sadhus and Volunteers. We have incorporated photos stories.

I indeed find myself privileged to write about the great saint Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj. I am sure this will be of value to all who have interest in Spirituality, personal development and simple way of life.

Jai Swaminarayan

Ahemdabad

Date : 12-07-2021

- Dr. Kirit N. Shelat

FOREWORD

MAHAN RUSHI MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ - A divine pinnacle of Service and Devotion



The perfect yogi and a great ascetic Bhagwan Swaminaray (2nd April 1781 - 1st June 1830) founded the Swaminarayan sampradaya in the year 1801 and brought a major transformation of central Hindu practices of Dharma, the sanatan Dharma and inspired followers to engage in humanitarian service activities. The enormous development and mammoth growth of this religion took place under the auspicious umbrella of Shri Bochasanvasi Aksharpurushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (B.A.P.S.) established by Shri Shashtriji Maharaj in 1907.

Puj. Yogiji Maharaj and Puj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, both spiritual successors of Puj. Shashtriji Maharaj spread this holistic and pure religious sect resulting in the creation of spiritually cultured societies based on the pious way of living in almost 55 countries of the world; more than 1200 temples are built and more than 1100 dedicated Saints are contacting and connecting people for moral and ethical living.

At present, Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj through his extensive communication inspires and provides encouragement and support pure life style in every household.

The author of this book, Dr. Kirit Shelat has a very long and close association and relationship with BAPS movement. Justice Nanubhai Shelat and Taralaxmiben Shelat, parents of Dr. Kirit Shelat were staunch followers of Swaminarayan life principles. Justice Nanubhai Shelat during his tenure as the District and Sessions Judge in Rajkot, and the entire family used to visit Gondal Akshar Mandir regularly. Pujya Yogiji Maharaj was highly pleased with the dedication of the Shelat family. Earlier Dr. Kirit Shelat has authored the book, "Yug Purush Pramukh Swami Maharaj" and was blessed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The book is translated in six Indian languages. The Gujarati and English editions have been reprinted.

The BAPS is recognized all over the world, as an ideal service-oriented spiritual organization by their operational characteristics of Noble Thoughts (Parhitchintan), Noble Actions (Paropkar) Noble Relations (Pramodbhav),

Noble Determination (Pratigya) and Noble Peace (Prashanti), woven into their working philosophy.

The spiritual successors of Bhagawan Shri Sahajananda Swami and Akshar Purushottam Sanstha have created and paved the path of happy and contented living by inculcating service and devotion orientation in the masses and worshipping Purushottam. The 'Sant Parampara' of Swaminarayan Sampraday, has through their own holy, life examples of 'walking the talk' has revived the true Sanatan ethical living throughout the globe.

The most befitting successor of Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj, by his magnetic charm of love, dedication, modesty and humility has strengthened the Swaminarayan family and the Akshar Purushottam movement around the world. Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj emphasizes harmonious social structure and mutually serving relationship amongst people. His life principle is "Akshar Aham Purushottam Daasom" Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj is an extraordinary example of 'Servant Leadership' in spreading true morality and spirituality.

Due to his natural inclination of serving humanity, Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj, right at the age of sixteen got associated with the Swaminarayan organisation assisting and serving his predecessor Gurus Shri Yogiji Maharaj, Shri Shashtriji Maharaj and Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj with whole-hearted dedication, discipline, sincerity and selflessness. Today with the same sacred spirit of love and compassion he is guiding and leading the Sampraday and the society.

In the phenomenal series of guiding gurus since the inception of Swaminarayan Sampraday by Bhagwan Swami Sahajanand. Swamishri Gunateetnand, Swamishri Bhagatji Maharaj, Swamishri Shashtriji Maharaj, Pujya Yogiji Maharaj and Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a large number of initiated 'Santvrund' and whole time 'Haribhaktas' have consolidated the basic Akshar Purushottam philosophy. In the same Guru-Parampara, Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj, by his magical energetic force enhancing and advancing the basic human values in the society. Because of his very long and extensive Dharm-prasaar, services and the qualities of an exemplary devotee, Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj is dear and respectable Guru to all.

As per the Upanishadic definition, Guru is the one who removes darkness; leads from Darkness to Light, from Unreal to Real, from Mortality to Immortality, Mahant Swami Maharaj is such an ideal guru in the spiritual pinnacle of Devotion and Service, possessing all the traits and qualities of

devotee-Bhakta narrated by Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita, in Chapter 12, the Bhaktiyoga;

अद्वेष सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।
निर्ममो निरहंकारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥ १३ ॥
संतुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्त स मे प्रियः ॥ १४ ॥
यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते व यः ।
हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स व मे प्रियः ॥ १५ ॥

“Those devotees are very dear to me who are free from malice toward all living beings, who are friendly, and compassionate. They are free from attachment to possessions and egotism, equipoised in happiness and distress, and ever-forgiving. They are ever-contented, steadily united with me in devotion, self-controlled, firm in conviction, and dedicated to me in mind and intellect.

Those who are not a source of annoyance to anyone and who in turn are not agitated by anyone, who are equal in pleasure and pain, and free from fear and anxiety, such devotees of mine are very dear to me.”

(Bhagavad Gita XII - 13,14,15)

The present Brahmswaroop Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj, even in his eighties provides continuous support and inspiration to the countless followers of the exceptionally fine spiritual organisation of Swaminarayan Sanstha, BAPS.

The creation of this book is also a meritorious outcome of such a spirited inspiration. The author of this book, Dr. Kirit N. Shelat has earned divine grace and blessing from Maharshi Mahant Swami Maharaj.

I take this opportunity to convey my “Jay Swaminarayan” to all.

Date : 12-07-2021

- Narayana

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the elite Santas and Haribhaktas for their invaluable help in giving a proper shape to the book and making my endeavour a success. The first edition is in Gujarati - published in 2018, was jointly authored with Dr. D. R. Patel.

I am indebted to Mahant Swami Maharaj for granting me permission to go ahead in writing and compiling.

All revered Santas namely, Atmaswarp Swami, Kothari Swami, Gyaneshwar Swami of Salangpur for providing encouragement through their valuable guidance. Books and publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpeeth, Shahibaug, "Swaminarayan Prakash" and "BLISS" and "Sadhutanu Shikhar"- were most useful as references, details, narrations and photographs. I am indebted to all of them. I have taken many extracts verbatim from that. I have also taken extracts from "Vibration" and "Pearls of Inspiration" by Vivekjivandas Swami, verbatim - I am grateful to him.

I am thankful to Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Brahmvihari Swami, Aksharvatsal Swami, Adarshjivan Swami, Yogivallabh Swami, Rishimangal Swami and other Santas for rendering me all direct and indirect help.

I am especially indebted to Vivekjivandas Swami for going through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

My sincere thanks to Shri Narayana Guruji for his enlightening 'Foreword'.

The credit for the printing of this book is due to M/s. Sahitya Mudranalaya Pvt. Ltd and Shri Shreyeshbhai Pandya for their whole hearted support and assistance.

I am thankful to Ms. Nisha Shah, Mr. Mohandas Kallingal, Mr. Nilesh Raval, Ms. Dhvani Pandya, Prof. Renu and Prof. Suresh Sheth for their interest and efforts in coordinating this work and to Shri Hasmukh Upadhyaya and Dr. R. Gopichandran who looked through the manuscript.

The support and ever collaborative participation of my family strengthened my intention and efforts to complete this book of highlighting the life and work of the great sage Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

With Koti Koti Vandan at the feet of Mahan Rushi Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj...

Jay Swaminarayan

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Sahajanand Swami - Bhagwan Swaminarayan





Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Bhagwan Swaminarayan with Aksharbramm Gunatitanand Swami

Introduction

Hinduism - The Eternal Religion

India is an ancient country and home to one of the oldest living civilizations of the world. Hindus form 83% of the 1.3 billion population. Hinduism is the oldest practiced religion in the world. There was a time when Sanatan Dharma, the traditional name for Hinduism, was prevalent in South-East, West Asia and beyond. Buddhism followed later across West Asia, Far East, etc.

Hindus believe in one God but worship several Gods and Goddesses; who are the manifestations of Paramatma - the supreme God. The deities are worshiped in mandirs, the abodes of Gods and in the homes of Hindus.

Sages known as rushis guided people and rulers about right and wrong. These holy men lived in Ashrams which were far removed from towns, cities and were mostly located in forests. Attached to them, were residential schools called Gurukuls. These forest academies trained the future rulers and teachers, alongside the sages. The Guru-Sishya tradition is a unique feature of ancient India. The Gurus showed the path to their disciples to attain the grace of God by leading principles and spiritual lives. But, more than that, these ashrams served as centers for ideal living and building leadership.

Several rushis or sages have contributed to the progress of the land - in religious, economic and political fields. These venerable personalities include Vashishtha, Vishwamitra, Agastya, Shukracharya, Patanjali and Chanakya. India has many such profound thinkers. Their philosophy recorded in the scriptures is valid and is in actual use, even today, in one form or the other regardless of whether it is yoga by Vasishta, Patanjali or Arthashastra by Chanakya. There is continuity in the history of this ancient land, which cannot be considered in isolation for any given period. There have been several periods of darkness and resurgence. In this resurgence Bhagwan's incarnations like Sahajanand Swami Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE) played a notable role.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were dark periods in Indian history. The Mughal ruler Aurangzeb died in 1707. This was followed by ineffective rule by his successors for 31 years, but the Mughal empire was on the decline. The French and British had arrived on the scene. Apart from this, the nation was plagued by a variety of internal fights. Its social life was disturbed. There were no rulers who could unify the country and there were no noteworthy religious leaders of high stature.

Gujarat did not escape this turmoil. It had Mughal Subas in some areas, while Gaekwad, a ruler from Maharashtra, had certain areas under his control. In the rest of the State, there were more than 300 small kingdoms, perpetually fighting with one another.

The society was orthodox. There were numerous caste groups. There were differences in standards of living between the upper and lower castes, businessmen, rulers and peasants. Polygamy was common. The status of women left much to be desired. Different kinds of intoxicating drugs like opium, ganja, charas and alcoholic drinks were commonly used. The rulers were known for their ruthlessness. This was thus a dark period in the history of Gujarat. The basic moral values of culture were at the lowest level. Religious rituals and temples were under the control of orthodox brahmins. There was a subsisting rural economy. There were recurrent droughts. People underwent great hardships.

‘Vaishnav Dharma’ (The religion that follows Lord Vishnu-Krishna) was popular and was dominated by the orthodox priests. The lower castes, peasants, agricultural labourers, rabis and artisans had limited or no access to temples.

Nilkanth Varni's Arrival in Gujarat : The Guru called him Sahajanand Swami

When Nilkanth Varni (the future Sahajanand Swami) arrived in Gujarat, this was the condition of the region. He was born in north India, at a place called Chhapaiya near Ayodhya, in modern Uttar Pradesh. He came to Gujarat after the death of his parents. When he left his residence, he was all of only 11 years of age. He was from a Pandey family and was born on April 3, 1781. He moved all over on foot for about seven years. He met Swami Ramanand in 1799 at a place called Loj in Mangrol Taluka of Junagadh District, in Saurashtra. Ramanand was a prominent religious leader, who worshipped Bhagwan Krishna. Muktanand Swami was his



Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (Bhagwan Swaminarayan)

prominent disciple. In the year 1800, Nilkanth Varni was given diksha and given two names : Sahajanand and Narayan Muni.

Establishment of Swaminarayan Sampradaya

On November 16, 1801, Ramanand Swami appointed Sahajanand Swami as his spiritual successor. A month later, Ramanand left for his heavenly abode, leaving Sahajanand solely in charge of the sampradaya.

Sahajanand Swami broadened the spiritual base. He gave the 'Swaminarayan Mahamantra' to His followers and charted a moderate path of spiritual sadhana whose aim was to attain ekartik bhakti (dharma, jnan, vairagya and bhakti). He also offered humanitarian services in time of famine, drought and other calamities.

In those days, He introduced certain basic religious and social reforms to bring the 'Swaminarayan' faith to the centre stage in Gujarat. Its main features were :

- (i) Religion for all, including the downtrodden, peasants, agricultural labourers, socially and economically backward people. He sent His sadhus on vicharan (visits) to villages and even to the fields to offer religious guidance. He threw open temples to all, irrespective of caste and social standing so that they could worship God. He had Himself built mandirs in Gadhada, Vadtal, Bhuj (Kutch), Dholera, Junagadh and Ahmedabad.
- (ii) He introduced a strict moral code of conduct for sadhus, who had to adhere to celibacy, and had to inspire satsang in five families daily before taking meals. They should be on the move from village to village. They must follow Nishkam (celibacy), Nirlobh (non-avariciousness), Nisswad (non-taste), Nissneh (non-attachment), Nirman (non-ego) as their way of life.
- (iii) He introduced festivals for all religious occasions. He started 'Samaiyas', where people got together, thus getting an opportunity to celebrate, have darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and meet other devotees.
- (iv) He delivered religious discourses and initiated discussions between his devotees and sadhus. He created written communication and used literature for this purpose.

- (v) He travelled constantly, visiting one village after another and readily met everybody who wanted to meet Him. He revived and further developed the tradition of visiting devotees at their houses.

The Religious and Social Reformer

In his short life span of 49 years, many of his opponents, religious or otherwise, tried to harass, malign or destroy Him. He won over all of them and all such people ended up becoming His followers. He, therefore, came to be known as the supreme incarnation of God and become popularly known as Bhabwan Swaminarayan. People accorded him great respect and believed that He was God. The local rulers both Marathas and Muslim Subas, and even the British, who came on the scene in later years, were impressed by Him. He wrote a religious-cum-social code of moral conduct known as the 'Shikshapatri', which gives guidance to His followers to lead virtuous lives. His religious discourse came to be known the as the 'Vachnamrut'. He succeeded in making people give up bad habits like alcohol, superstitious practices, etc.

Sahajanand Swami left for His heavenly abode in the year 1830. In the course of 30 years, He brought about revolutionary changes in the religious and social life of countless people, particularly of farmers, agriculture labourers and economically backward classes. His teachings attracted innumerable aspirants, their numbers increased and the Sampradaya gradually expanded.

Hindu religion is ancient. Nobody knows when it began, may be 10,000 years ago or even beyond that. As has already been pointed out there are many Gods to whom the people offer worship, but there are three main devas: Brahma - the creator, Vishnu - the protector and Shiva - the destroyer.

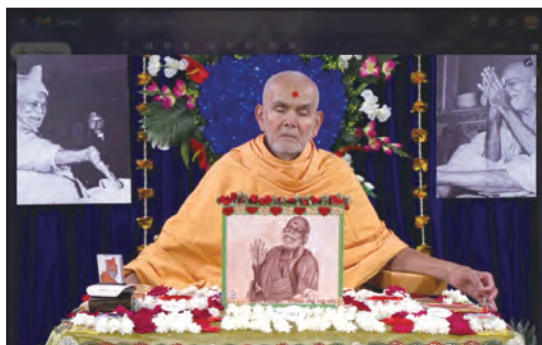
Krishna, an avatar or incarnation of Vishnu is the most popular of Hindu Gods. He is worshipped all over the country and His mandirs are in every nook and corner of this vast land. The devotees believe that whenever there is too much wickedness, Vishnu takes birth on this earth to fight evil. That is the story of Avatars. There have been ten Avatars, including Ram and Krishna.

The story of Sahajanand Swami began in Gujarat, in the last quarter of the 18th Century, when Krishna worship was the privilege of a few and the common people had difficulty in entering the temples. He built temples all

over Gujarat and threw them open to the masses. In his lifetime, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was worshipped as the God by his devotees.

By the time He passed away at the age of 49, He had earned a reputation as a great socio-religious reformer. It is believed that, through His spiritual presence, Bhagwan Swaminarayan continues to provide energy and spiritual experience through a succession of Gurus, the realised masters. The first Guru in the succession was His choicest devotee, Gunatitanand Swami (1785-1867), the manifestation of Aksharbrahma. He in turn, was followed by Bhagatji Maharaj (1829-1897). After him, Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951) furthered the religious cause by enshrining the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam in five glorious mandir to promote the worship of the supreme God along with his valuable devotee. Consistent with the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj propagated the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma. He founded the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a socio-spiritual organisation, in 1907. For more details about BAPS refer to www.baps.org.

The fourth spiritual master was Yogiji Maharaj (1891-1971), whose work carried the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan across the oceans to East Africa and England. He passed away after placing the reins of the faith in the safe hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1971. He was succeeded by the present guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj.



Guru Parampara



Bhagatiji Maharaj



Bhagwan
Swaminarayan



Shastriji Maharaj



Yogiji Maharaj



Gunatitanand
Swami



Mahant Swami Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

GURU PARAMPARA



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Mahant Swami Maharaj

Bhagwan (Lord) SWAMINARAYAN is all pervading and his 'spandans' – devine vibrations – prevail even today. He left his spiritual legacy through Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. His divinity continues in the BAPS every moment as ever. Gunantitanand Swami was the the first successor, followed by Bhagatji Maharaj – Pragji Bhagat, succeeded by Shastriji Maharaj who founded BAPS – (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha), followed by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the current guiding head is Mahant Swami Maharaj. Bagwan Swaminarayan marifests in earth through the Gunatit Guru Parampara.



Aksharbrahman Shri Gunatitand Swami (Bliss - Oct. - 2010)

Gunantitanand Swami

Gunantitanand Swami Maharaj was born on 28th of September, 1784 in 'Bhadra' village. His maiden name was Mulaji. His father was Bholanath and mother Sakarba. Bhagwan (Lord) Swaminarayan - Sahajanand Swami gave him diksha - when he was 25 years old - in the year 1809 (Samvat 1866). This was at Dabhan - Nadiad and he was named by Bhagwan Swaminarayan as 'Gunantitanand'.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had introduced him by saying "He has come along with us from "Akshardham" and he is "Akshar Brahma".

In 1811 (Samvat 1868) when Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited Salangpur he celebrated 'Holi Utsav' (festival) at house of Rathod Dhakhal. While he was explaining - a poetry - pad of Sant Kabir - "Sadguru Khela Vasant", he added "I am Purushottam Narayan and Gunatitanand is Sadguru".

Again in Panchala - he asked to disciples - "do you know who is this sant? He is our home - Akshardham".

Swamishri Gunantitanand expanded 'Satsang Sabha' (Meeting of Devotees) and spread of knowledge of Sanatan Dharma. He stayed in Junagadh as Mahant for more than 40 years."

He has extensively spoken about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and narrated his discourse with him as 'Swami Sathe Vato'.

Says Swamishri Gunantitanand "once Maharaj asked me to set up a mandal (groups). We can keep maximum - 10 - 100 -200 sadhus - but if we have groups of devotees and give them spiritual knowledge, spread will be faster. We followed what he said and set up groups of devotees. Our spread expanded phenomenally.

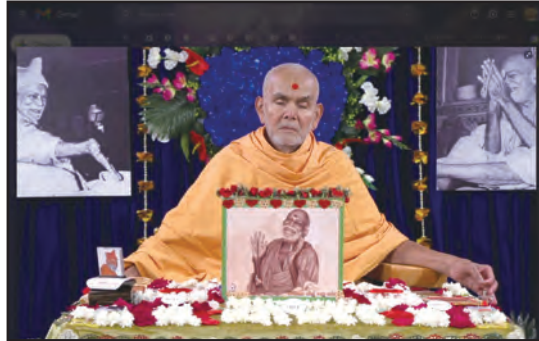
Says Sadhu Ishwarcharandas, "Gunatitanand Swami holds a unique place among five hundred paramahamsas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The life of Gunatitanand Swami is the very embodiment of pure divinity. He is revered as an ideal Sadhu and Guru. He was the first to reveal and spread supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on this earth. Gunatitanand Swami's life confirms the fact that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is ever manifest on this earth through Aksharbrahma and has kept the door of redemption for 'Jivas' open through a God realized Sadhu. Sadhu Ishwarcharandas further adds "Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed in 'Vachanamrut' that

he has incarnated on earth for the purpose of granting liberation to the 'jivas' and He has come with his Akshardham, divine muktas and powers According to these words, Bhagwan Swaminarayan brought Gunatitanand Swami as his Akshardham.

Swami Gunatitanand left for his heavenly abode - Akhsargaman on 11th October, 1887 at Gondal. In his memory 'Akshar Deri' was created.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say "Akshar Deri" is "Kalpavrush". Anyone who has Darshan - Mahapuja and Pradakshina - will get all his wishes fulfilled.

Recently BAPS celebrated 150 years of Akshar Deri on 20th January, 2018, - in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.



Bhagatji Maharaj

Bhagatji Maharaj was born in Mahuva - Bhavnagar in Samvat 1885 - 20-03-1829. His maiden name was Pragji. His father - Govindbhai was a tailor - his parents Govindbhai and Maluba were religious and had brought up Pragji accordingly.

Shri Bhagatji Maharaj was a devoted person. He liked to help and serve people. He looked after temple activities almost throughout day and night with little sleep. He was quite popular among devotees who always went to him for advice and support.



Bhagatji Maharaj

Pragji Bhagat has a noteworthy status in spreading the spiritual message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was entrusted with this mission by Gunatitanand Swami. Shastriji Maharaj worked very closely with him in this task. Once Sadhu Nandkishordas asked Bhagatji, "You are saying that Swaminarayan has seized me (mane valgi gayache). Is Bhagwan, a ghost (bhut), that he will seize / capture you?" Pragji Bhagat smiled and replied, "Ghost by nature try to seize / capture a person but if God - Bhagwan does it - why should we be surprised? God does not seize everybody - but only those are captured -seized by him who love him and have faith in Him."

He left for his heavenly abode on 7th November, 1897 at Mahuva - Bhavnagar. In his memory, a beautiful temple of Bhagwan Swaminarayan has been set up in Mahuva.

Shastriji Maharaj

Shastriji Maharaj was born in 'Mahelav' of Kheda district on 31/01/1865. His father Dhoribhai and mother Hetaba (a Patidar family) were spiritually oriented and imparted cultural values to him. In his childhood he was known as Dungarbhai. He liked to serve from childhood and was popular among the villagers who used to assign all and sundry task which he used to do willingly. He was popularly called 'Dungar Bhagat'. He studied in the primary school at Mahelav. He was out-spoken and a brilliant student.



Shashtriji Maharaj

Renouncing World & Diksha

From childhood Dungarji used to spend daily - a few hours at the temple, to sing devotional songs and recite mantras. He memorized the entire Bhagvat. Mahelav had one spiritual kathakar who used to say 'Katha' with a maan (copper pot). Once during the course of the Bhagvat Katha he departed for heavenly abode, 'Dungerji' who was very young, completed



Shashtriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj

this task and narrated the entire Bhagvat Katha and proficiently played the maan. Everyone was spellbound by his katha.

Master Architect

He had from childhood a flare for art and design. In 1932, a “Haveli” was under construction in Mahelav. He observed the construction process and design of ‘Haveli’ carefully. He finally went to Shri Jethabhai Suthar, who was incharge of the construction, and suggested that the pillars needed to be round-shaped at the entrance with an open space in front. This would make the building elegant. His suggestion was immediately accepted by the amazed Jethabhai Suthar.

This child, in years to come, designed five magnificent temples of Akshar - Purushottam : Bochasan, Salangpur, Gondal, Atladara and Gadhada. These Shikhar baddha temples were examples of traditional art; craft and minute architectural effects.

Akshar Purushottam concept development and departure from Vadtal

Gunatitanand Swamiji started “Dhyan Groups” in villages and Bhagatiji Maharaj made it popular. They used to meet regularly during prayers and storytelling - Bhagvat Katha etc. They became popular and Shastriji Maharaj expanded it further. Increasingly devotees started visiting them. Some jealous sadhus did not like his increased popularity among devotees. But due to his devotional activities - The Akshar Purushottam culture expanded - not only in villages - but major urban centres also started setting up such groups. But these jealous - disgraceful sadhus started creating obstructions, while the sincere sadhus who were involved in spiritual knowledge spread found these troublesome activities unbearable.

Devotees - Haribhaktas were also concerned and disturbed by such malicious propaganda against Shastriji Maharaj. Some started requesting him to leave Vadtal. But Maharajshree was reluctant. One day at Vadodara, Shri Ghanshyambhai Vaidya called a meet of devotees. There was a deliberation on this for hours and finally it was resolved that it is difficult for Shastriji Maharaj to continue to stay at Vadtal. They met Kothari Govardhanbhai and demanded the change. He agreed and stated that “Rudal Temple needs to be completed and Shastriji Maharaj may therefore, be requested to go to Bochasan and complete related task”.

But Shastriji Maharaj was still not agreeable – at that time Shri Krishnaji Ada from Rajkot quoted from ‘Shikhapatri’.

“One should leave the place which is infested with trouble and has threat to life and stay where one can have peace of mind”.

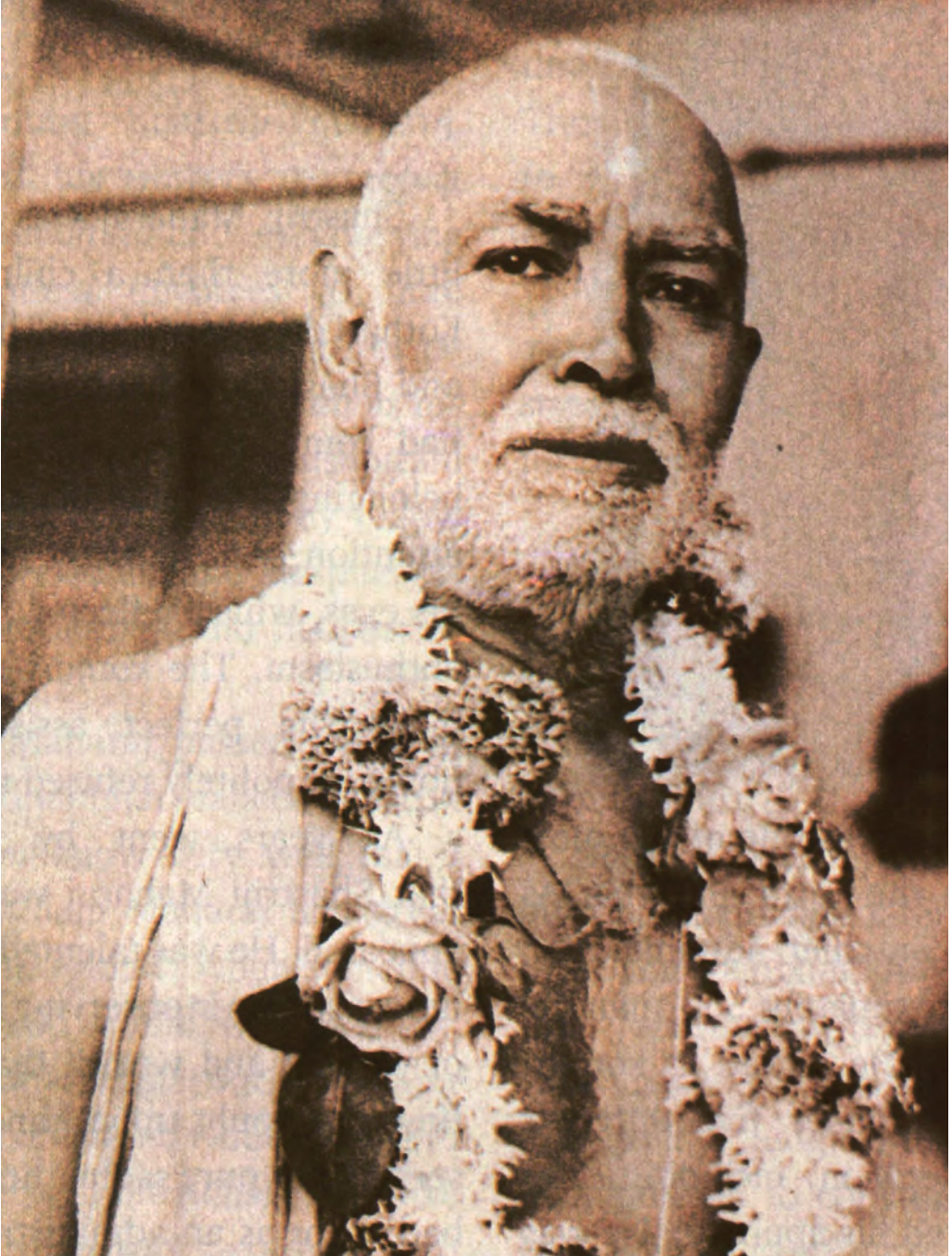
Finally due to all persuasion – Shastriji Maharaj along with other six sadhus – Swami Narayancharandas, Niranjandas and others – left Vadtal for Bochasan in 1905 – Samvat year – 1962 Kartik Vad-1.

Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha - BAPS

Vadtal – the seat of temple had administrators who did not like ‘Akshar Purushottam’ concept and its sacred status, its popularity and also Shastriji Maharaj who was spreading this spiritual knowledge. After moving out of Vadtal – Shastriji Maharaj developed Bochasan as the Centre of Spirituality and in the year 1907 he created a new organization for its expansion. He named it ‘Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha – BAPS’. His focus was to promote spiritual knowledge and concept of Akshar Purushottam. He had a great following and devotees asked him also to set up more temples so that larger number of people can get benefit. He initiated this with the cooperation of one and all – and most importantly all devotees – Haribhaktas contributed to this endeavor.

- The 1st temple was set up in Bochasan in the year 1907 with a grand ‘Murthi Pratishta’ function.
- The 2nd temple was set up in the year 1916 at Salangpur – Ahmedabad district which has become the a Centre for Learning – training for Sadhus and youth.
- The 3rd temple was set up at Gondal in 1934.
- The 4th temple was set up on the outskirts of Vadodara at Atladara in the year 1945.
- The 5th temple was set up in 1951 at Gadhada on the bank of the river Ghela.

When the Gadhada temple was under construction, Shastriji Maharaj’s health was declining due to his advanced age. Shastriji Maharaj spent the days of his final illness in Salangpur, during which he would daily attend the daily arti and meet devotees and sadhus. Everyone was praying for



Shastriji Maharaj

his recovery but the force of nature – prevailed and he left for the divine abode - Akshardham at Salangpur.

Yogiji Maharaj was at Mumbai and immediately reached Salangpur. Shri Gulzarilal Nanda came from Delhi. The ‘antimvidhi’ was performed with sacred rites.

Shastriji Maharaj had wished that his ill-health or departure should not delay the inauguration of the Gadhada temple. He had already entrusted Yogiji Maharaj this task. Yogiji Maharaj performed this as per his desire and ‘Murthi Pratishtha’ was done by remembering Maharajshree – as if he was present on Vaishakh Sud 10, 1951.

Yagnapurush Shastriji Maharaj was a Siddha Purush. He developed mass communication systems to spread Sanatan Dharma and propagated spiritual and moral principles laid down by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and in the ‘Shikshapatri’ as a way of life. He did this against adverse circumstances and opposition by jealous Sadhus and persons propagating against him. But he was firm and ‘nirbhay’. He used to call himself as ‘Balad’ – Oxen of Akshar Purushottam. He was willing to sacrifice anything for these principles. As part of his endeavour through mass communication he focused on spiritual discipline and thoughts, he set up a chain of temples across Gujarat and outside.

He created BAPS for setting up community centers, temples and spread of spiritualism through group meetings within Gujarat, in India and abroad. BAPS created infrastructure in a systematic manner as a spiritual spread management system on self-sustaining basis – in which Sadhus and Haribhaktas (devotees) came together for voluntary contribution for temple creation, its maintenance, helping and serving each other and those who needed help irrespective of caste and creed. This was spread as a new wave of Sanatan Dharma.

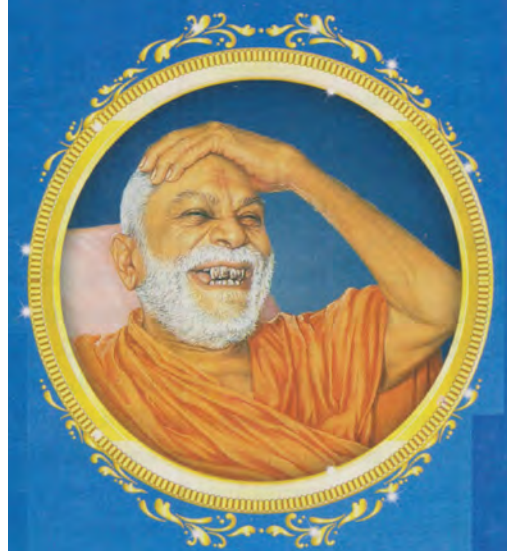
He prepared leadership within BAPS – both Sadhus and Haribhaktas – involved youth and created training centres.

He prepared Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj to take further the path laid by him across the world.

Yogiji Maharaj

Child Jhinabhai was born in Dhari - Amreli district on 23rd May, 1882. Father Devchandbhai and mother Puriba were followers of Swaminarayan Sampraday.

Sadhus of Swaminarayan from Junagadh used to visit Amreli. In Dhari, there was a temple which was looked after by Haribhakta Mohanbhai. Mohanbhai was not maintaining good health. Sadhu Krishnacharandas Swami who was in charge of this area - started looking for an alternate person - a Haribhakta who could do this work very well. He found Jhinabhai suitable - who used to visit temple regularly and involved in 'Seva' and was a devoted simple person. He therefore, requested him to take over all temple work who willingly took over the responsibility.



Yogiji Maharaj

Jhinabhai developed a desire to renounce society and become a sadhu. Sadhu Krishnacharandas first asked him to obtain consent of parents - who gave it, although they found it difficult to do so.

He was given 'diksha' by Sadhu Krishnacharandas and named Jhina Bhagat as Parshad.

In the year 1911 in Junagadh temple he was given Dikshas as 'Sadhu' by Acharya Saripatiprasad and named Sadhu Gyanjivandas. Later on he was called as Yogiji Maharaj.

Soon he became very popular at Junagadh among Sadhus, Sevaks and Haribhaktas. In the meanwhile in 1907 Shastriji Maharaj had set up BAPS. Yogiji Maharaj joined BAPS and moved to Gondal where a new temple had come up. He set up 'Akshar Deri' in memory of Swami Gunatitanand at Gondal. He made Gondal a famous 'Yatradham'.

He developed three divine vows (Sankalpas).



Yogiji Maharaj



Narayanswaroop (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) • Yogiji Maharaj • Shastriji Maharaj • Nirgundas swami



*THE DIVINE TRINITY OF BRAHMSWARUP GURUS
Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj (Centre), Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj (L), Pragat
Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj (R) Photo : Colorama Studio, Nairobi, 1970*



Yogiji Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj

First, Satsang across the world. By Satsang, he advocated divine relationship between 'Bhagwan' and 'Bhakta'. Secondly reduction or elimination of harmful thoughts or acts / activities. Thirdly this can be promoted by spiritual knowledge of Akshar Purushottam relationship.

He translated his divine vision into spiritual action through various programmes and activities.

- **Festivals** - Organization of religious festivals (utsav - samayas), made it possible for Bhaktas to meet each other and Sadhus. Festival programmes had also religious discourses. Senior Sadhus addressed Bhaktas and narrated Bhagvat Katha, Sikshapatri principles and quotes from Bhagwan Swaminarayan. All these include spread of voluntary services, helping each other and even outsiders, so on and so forth. These were held twice or thrice in a year.
- **Sunday Meets:** These were known as 'Ravi Sabhas'. These were held every Sunday at each centre - included bhajan - kirtan and katha and get together of bhaktas and santas / sadhus and spread of Akshar Purushottam.
- **Satsang Patrika** - News booklet: It is important to have written communication - bhaktas can study and absorb the knowledge - even those who cannot attend can get spiritual knowledge and information about activities of BAPS. Yogiji Maharaj used to write post-cards and acknowledge every letter he received.
- **Youth:** Organizing youth activities and involving them was another important initiative. Yogiji Maharaj's priority was the future generation. He carefully worked out ways of imbibing cultural values, reading of Holy Scriptures, understanding and reciting mantras, learning Sanskrit language and following principles of Sanatan Dharma and Sikshapatri as a way of daily life. He initiated 'training workshops' and debate competition. He promoted educational seminars, created training institutes, educational institutions and hostels for students. "Youth is my Heart" - he always used to say.
- He wanted even Sadhus to be educated. In Mumbai - Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami), Ramanbhai (Doctor Swami), Arunbhai Dave (Ishwarcharan Swami) were studying further. Arunbhai once asked him - if we are to be a Sadhu - why do we need to spend two extra

years for finishing education? Yogiji Maharaj replied – “I want you all to be graduated and well educated. I want to see your educational certificates”.

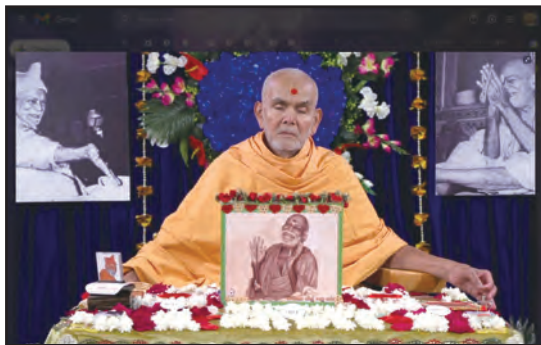
- BAPS Spreads Outside India: Shastriji Maharaj wanted to spread – Sanatan Dharma across the world. He had predicted that ‘Akshar Purushottam’ principle will spread everywhere. This started with Africa in 1955. Yogiji Maharaj visited several African towns. The first temple was set up at ‘Mombasa’ - Kenya in the year 1955 and a big “Murthi Pratishtha Mahotsav” was organized. Yogiji Maharaj spent six months visiting various countries in Africa.

His second visit was in 1960 and temples were set up at Kampala, Jinja and Tatro.

Thereafter he visited England and set up a temple at Islington in an old church. He expanded spread of spiritual message in England and Europe.

It was during this time that his health was not good and he suffered a heart attack. He called for all Santas – Pramukh Swami, Mahant Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and others. He suffered a third heart attack on 23rd January, 1971 and left for heavenly abode.

Yogiji Maharaj had often stated that Pramukh Swami Maharaj will follow up my work – Pramukh Swami is my everything – ‘Sarvasha’.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Chansad is a village on the outskirts of Baroda city in Gujarat state. Sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampraday used to visit there regularly. This included Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, the spiritual successors of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The villagers became staunch devotees as a result of these visits.

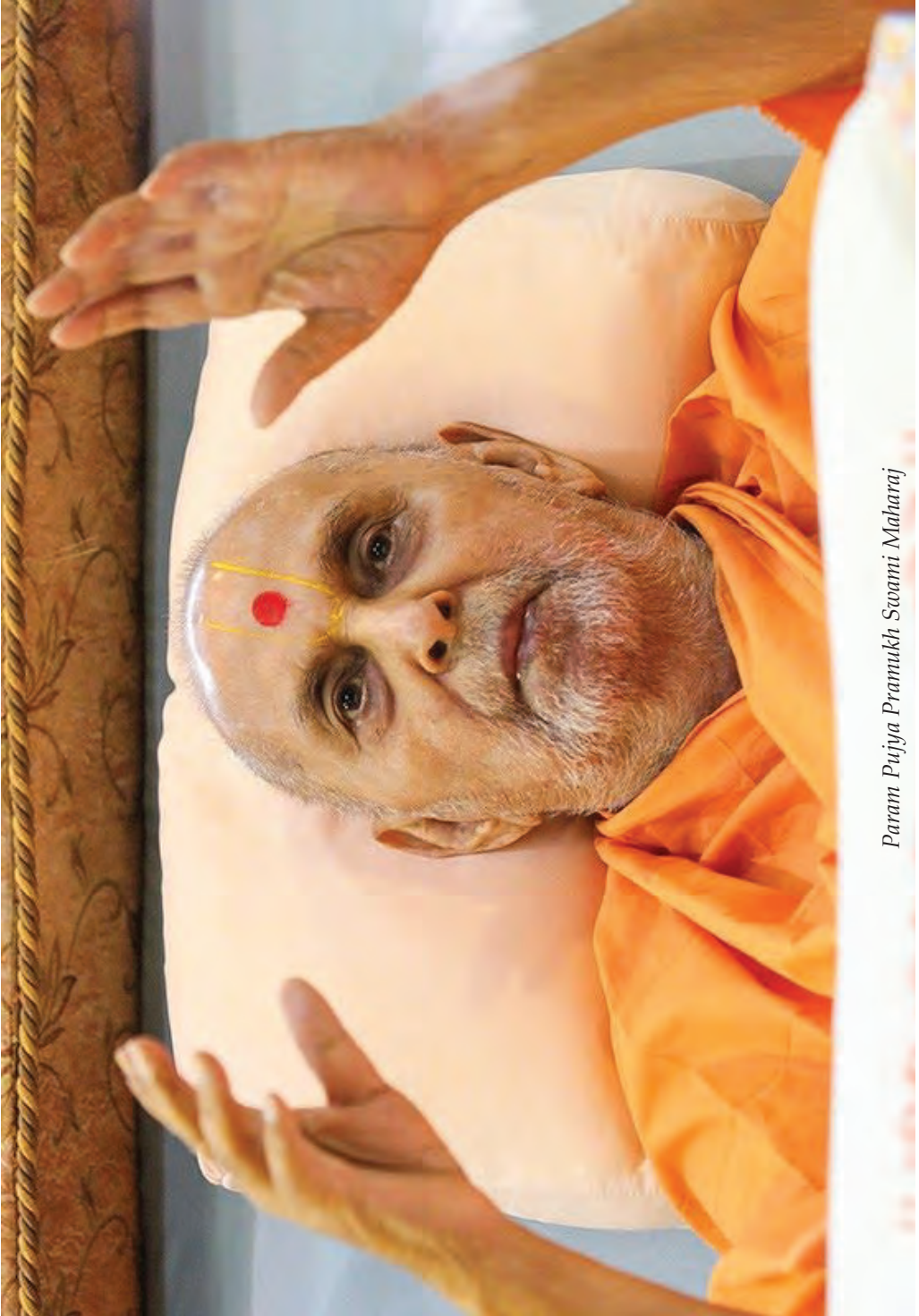
Shri Motibhai Patel, an ordinary farmer, lived in this village. He was a follower of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He and his wife Diwaliben, were simple village folk. Shantilal was their fourth son. He was born at Chansad on December 7, 1921. He was blessed by Shastriji Maharaj in the cradle itself. Shastriji Maharaj claimed the boy in these words. "He is ours. Bestow him to us in future".

It was Ekadashi, on Tuesday, November 7, 1939, Motibhai received a letter from Shastriji Maharaj. Shantilal was about to complete eighteen years. The message said "The time has come for Shantilal to come to Bochasan (the centre of the Swaminarayan Sampraday) to become a sadhu". His parents blessed him.

Diksha :

He underwent his training as a sadhu under the guidance of Ghanshyam Swami. They moved from village to village, mostly on foot. It was as if he was under a test to find out how determined he was to become a sadhu. He finally settled at Bochasan. Shankar Bhagat and Nirguni Swami took him under their care.

In Swaminarayan tradition Bhagat is the transition stage. A person is required to wear a white dhoti and eat from a platter. He has also to observe fasts and celibacy. The training was tough. The transition period involved rigorous training day in and day out. Shanti Bhagat worked hard and learned the scriptures, until Shastriji Maharaj was satisfied. He was taken to Gondal, where he was to meet another great spiritual leader Shri Yogiji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj initiated him as a Sadhu on Posh Sud 1, Vikram Samvat 1996, Wednesday, January 10, 1940. He performed Mahapuja at the Akshar Deri. Yogiji Maharaj blessed him and said "He will become great Sadhu". Shastriji Maharaj said "Let us name him Narayanswarup. I want him to study and become a scholar. I want to make him a great and powerful scholar". At that time, he was 19 years old.



Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Pramukh Varni Din celebration at Ahmedabad

He was the favourite of Shastriji Maharaj, who saw in him the making of a great spiritual leader. He asked Him to take over as Pramukh Swami (as President) of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha and said “I wish you to excel in every respect. This way will benefit the entire Satsang. You have to please me and the entire Satsang. This will put my mind at peace”.

He was pronounced as Pramukh Swami on Sunday, May 24 1951. He was 40 years old. The installation ceremony which was sombre and simple took place in the small ground floor room at Ambli Vali Pol, Shahpur, Ahmedabad.

After Yogiji Maharaj’s departure in January, 1971, Pramukh Swami succeeded him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj moulded himself into a perfect spiritual master. Over 55 years, under his able leadership and guidance, BAPS has grown by leaps and bounds. What was years ago a small institution with a few hundred devotees and a handful of sadhus, has now become a dynamic worldwide organisation with over 700 mandirs, 9000 Satsang Centres, 900 sadhus and millions of followers spread over five continents.

In a span of 55 years, Swamishri had spread Hinduism and the Swaminarayan Sampraday – all over India and in more than 54 countries of the world. This expansion was a true metamorphosis. He came to be recognized as the Hindu religious leader among the non-Hindu local population. Thanks to his inspiring efforts, India’s ancient achievements and contributions in the realm of spirituality and its tolerant philosophy have come to be recognized world-wide. This came about after a very long span of time, after several centuries.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s major contribution lies in inculcating a spirit of voluntary service among his followers. This is not confined to religious purposes to what is normally called Kar Seva. He moulded his devotees into volunteers who not only contributed in cash and kind, but more importantly their free time for social service. He inspired them to participate in helping people affected by disasters – natural or manmade. He enthused them to work for children, women, tribal families and weaker sections of the society.

He constantly engaged in spreading the message of peace, the true spirit of ‘Om Shanti-Shanti-Shanti’ all over the world. Even in the most provocative and difficult situations like terrorist attack on Akshardham – Gandhinagar



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Sadgurus

on 24th September, 2002, in which 33 people including one sadhu were killed and 77 wounded, he remained calm, asked everybody to remain calm and pray for all.

He was aware of the threat posed by western civilization and its impact on children at home and abroad. The Satsang for elders and the children's forum, youth forum and Women's activities are pursued at all centres, to promote the basic values of life. The children's forum, the most important activity inculcates healthy respect for parents and promotes spiritual values in life.

When I visited Salangpur in May 2015, with my sons Vrajesh and Mitul and our grandchildren Om and Arjun to pay our respects to Bapa, the Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we first took blessings of Pujya Kothari Swami – Gyaneshwar Swami and we were escorted by the young Sadhu Rushimangal. He had read "Yug Purush" the first edition when he was in final year LD Engineering College and he had got inspired to become a Sadhu under BAPS.

He asked me a question "what do you see in Him?"

I was struck. What have I seen in him?

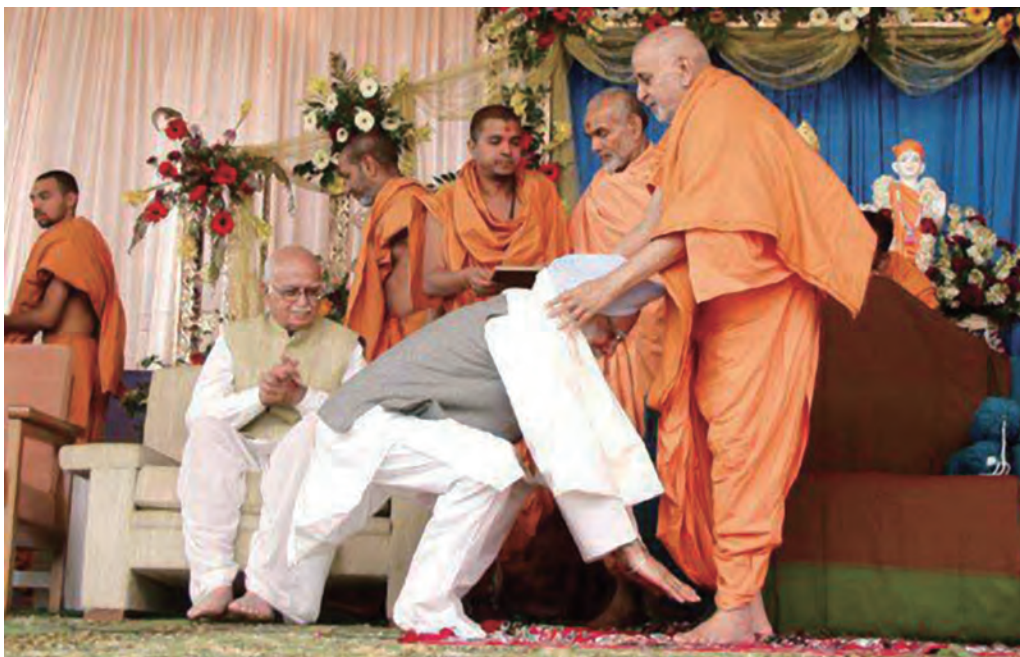
What did they see-the very big ones? – The President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Ministers – Dr. Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi, industrialist Ambani and Kamath so on and so forth. All high, mighty from India and abroad, like to meet him not once but from time to time. Why the poor farmer from a Kutch village or earthquake shaken student telephones him, when he is under trauma? Why a daughter writes to him about her family problem and seek a solution?. My nephew Dipak Dave who is in USA shares 10 percent of his modest income for Akshardham, USA following BAPA's call for donation and he came down from USA to Salangpur on 16th August – why did he and thousands of others like him do so?

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Many among you have lost a Guru, but I have lost father."

Why some call him 'Bhagwan', others Bapa, some Swamishri? Some view him as a Charismatic Sadhu and others view him as a distinguished Head of Hindu religion. Some feel that he is the Avtar of Lord Krishna who came in this Kalyuga. Some feel he is Antaryami (he understands your inner desire).



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam



Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessing Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh

What do all these persons from different walks in life find in him?

I paused for couple of minutes: what is common in that?:

Each of his followers found something to gain-adding value to his life when he met either personally or listening to him even otherwise or come into contact through Sadhus, Haribhaktas and the temple. The gain may be spiritual, physical or peace of mind, feeling of security, a solution to business or family problem, a completion of not getting completed task or to satisfy curiosity, so on and so forth.

Narayan Guruji calls him Divinity Personified and he sees him as a 'Pujaniy Sadhu' who emanates creative energy 'Spandan' and who has transformed religious context to spirituality and has vast transforming effect on modern materialistic society members.

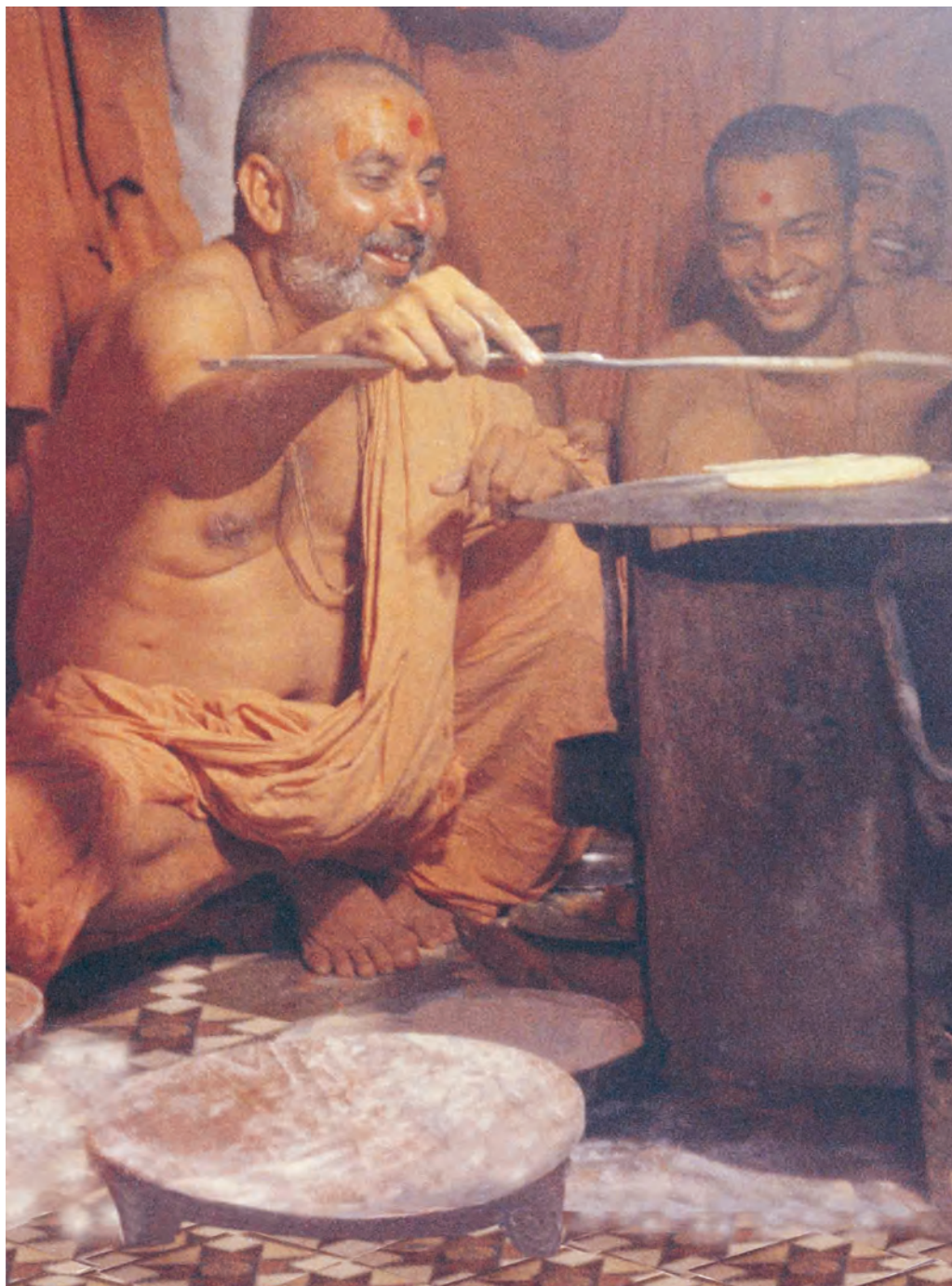
People who came to seek his blessings personally or remember him daily as a "Pratah Smaraniya", feel, that he enchants him because he inspires them to stay in family, live a good happy family life, progress in business, profession, job, studies, sickness etc. Further leave all worries, anxiety, enemies, and obstacles to him. He will take care of that because he is always there with them. His vibrations are felt by them wherever they are even away from his physical presence by thousands of miles. His gentle touch – sparsh, a pat in back – the 'dhabba' moved person internally. His simple word strengthens them enormously.

He was a human with compassion and accessible to followers and non followers any time personally / on phone or by letters and he responds to each of them individually. There were no barriers between him and his followers:

He was not merely a distinguished Saint who spread the religion, he changed the entire context of religion and the role of religious leaders and institutions in the modern world. This is the story of a man who believed that for a person to develop, he must grow spiritually; to be spiritual one must serve the faith by serving mankind without concern for caste, creed or race; to build the nation, one must nourish and nurture the youth, the children who are our future, to sustain society, we must protect and encourage religious and cultural diversity. This is a story of a man who has promoted spiritualism. A man who has gone beyond just leading a religious order to become a leader of human faith and culture. The man of the new millennium – The YUG-PURUSH.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj greeting Mahant Swami Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj as a cooking expert



Pramukh Swami Maharaj interacting with Mahant Swami Maharaj

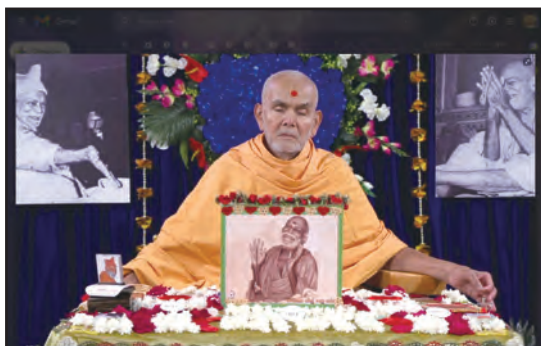


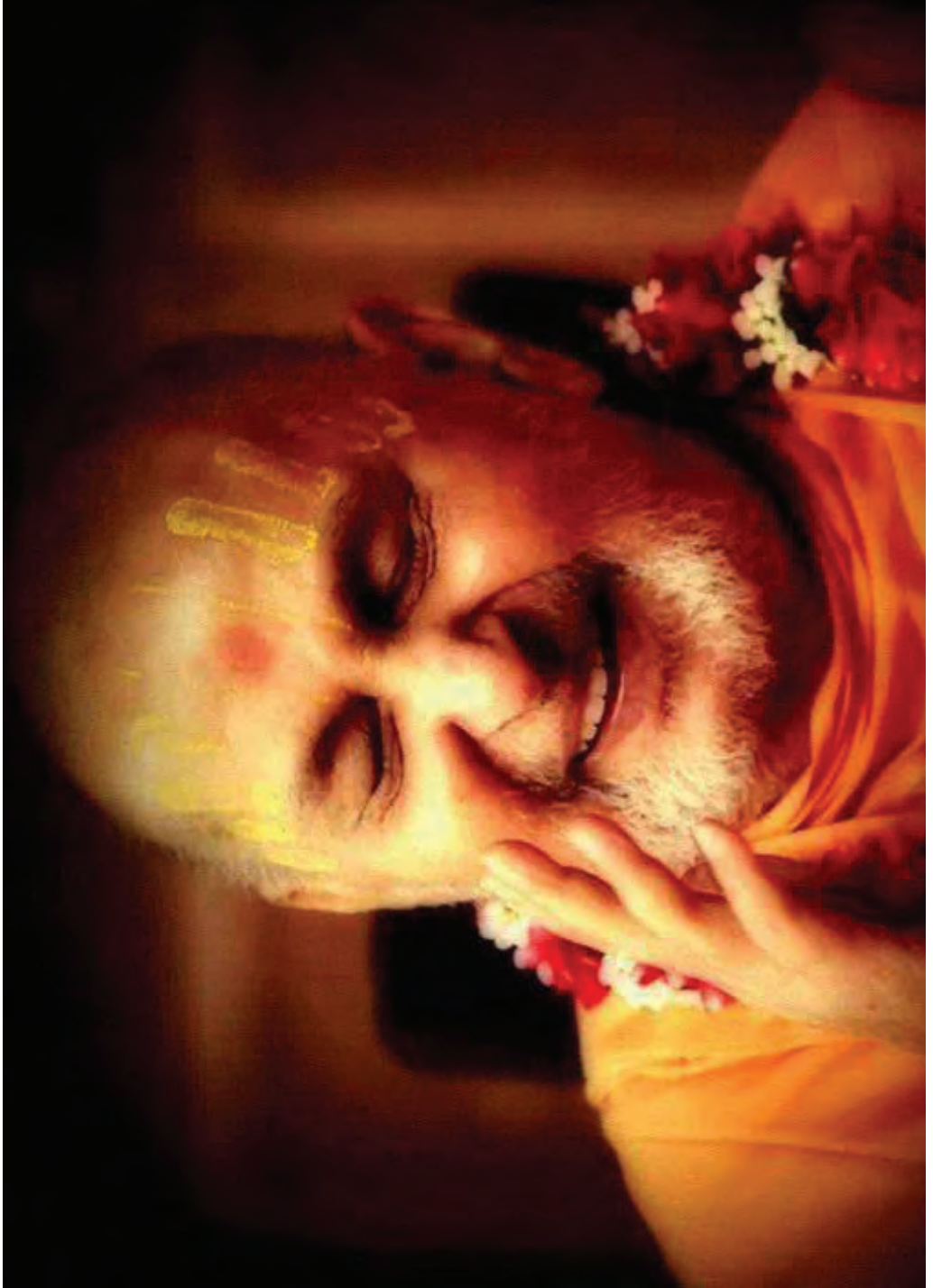
Pramukh Swami Maharaj with school children, Mount Abu

In the later years he was unwell (2011-12). He moved to Salangpur. He had foreseen events to come. He nominated Mahant Swami Maharaj for looking after his work in 2011-2013. He advised senior sadhus like Doctor Swami and Atmaswarup Swami to do vicharan in India and abroad. But he was very keen for Akshardham in USA at Robinsville – and visited it despite his delicate health. He performed ‘Murti Pratistha’ in August – 2014.

Although his health did not permit he gave daily ‘Darshan’ to sadhus and Haribhaktas at Salangpur. Says sadhu Narayancharan – who was with him since 1977, “BAPA never complained before or after by-pass surgery about physical pain or discomfort”.

What happened on 12-13 August, 2016? Continues sadhu Narayancharan, “He gave his daily Darshan – but his BP was going down. Doctor – Sants – Sadhu Yogi Vivek and Sadhu Atbhutanand attended immediately – without success. But BAPA was smiling – even when drop of BP continued. In the evening at 5 PM He said “Jai Swaminarayan”. We brought the Murti of Thakorji – which he daily worshiped. We told him “Swami – Thakorji has come. His eyes looked at Thakorji. This was an un-believable sight. His face was lit with divine light, anand and satisfaction. And left us”.





Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Mahant Swami Maharaj performing Agnisankar of Brahmlin Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj

‘Vinu’

Mahant Swami Maharaj



Young Mahant Swami Maharaj ‘Vinu’ with friends

Vinu (later to be known as Mahant Swami) was born to Dahiben and Manibhai Narayanbhai Patel on 13, September 1933 (Bhadarva vad 9, Samvat 1989) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India. Six months later Shastriji Maharaj had visited Jabalpur. He blessed the newborn child and named him Keshav. Shastriji Maharaj said to Manibhai, “Your child will grow up to serve the Satsang in a big way.” His family lovingly called him Vinu.

Manibhai was from Anand – Gujarat. He was in Jabalpur for business. Vinubhai obtained primary and secondary education in an English-medium

school in Jabalpur. He was exceptionally brilliant and completed his 12th grade at the Jabalpur Christ Church - Boys Senior Secondary School. By that time the family decided to shift to Gujarat. Vinu returned with his parents to Anand. He liked farming and joined College of Agriculture - Anand. Young Vinu had inner desire for deep spirituality. He had sharp intellect. In 1951-52, he came in the contact of Yogiji Maharaj and was attracted to Yogiji Maharaj's charisma and selfless love. He started travelling with Yogiji Maharaj during summer vacations. Yogiji Maharaj's love drew the young Vinubhai closer towards him.

In 1956, Vinubhai graduated with a bachelor's degree in Agriculture. Due to his spiritual inclination, he decided to take the path of renunciation. He did not pursue advance education or professional career. On 2, February 1957, Yogiji Maharaj joyously gave him the 'Paarshad Diksha' and renamed him as Vinu Bhagat. Once Yogiji Maharaj, while addressing some youth inclined towards becoming sadhus, said, "Along with Vinubhai 51 youths will take diksha. The punya [of that] will go to all. He will be the first [to take diksha]. "Then, Yogiji Maharaj told him to accompany him in his vicharan to look after his daily correspondence and other services. For four years he stayed with Yogiji Maharaj and received spiritual training.

Early days :

On 11, May 1961, on the occasion of the Kalash Mahotsav of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Gadhada, Yogiji Maharaj gave Bhagwati (saffron) Diksha to 51 educated youths. Among them, Vinu Bhagat was the first to receive diksha and named Swami Keshavjivandas. The name 'Keshav', given by Shastriji Maharaj when he was a child, reappeared when renamed as Keshavjivandas by Yogiji Maharaj.

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj instructed the 51 newly initiated sadhus to study Sanskrit in Mumbai. Swami Keshavjivandas was appointed as their head (mahant) at Dadar Mandir. Over the time, he became respectfully known as Mahant Swami. Yogiji Maharaj used to frequently write to the newly initiated sadhus about the greatness of Mahant Swami, "All should remain under the instructions of Mahant Swami. If anyone feels troubled or worried tell Mahant Swami about it. He will solve your problems."

Mahant Swami – Early Days

Mahant Swami was very much loved not only by newly inducted sadhus – but by children – young boys, also who visit temple revered him immensely. He used to help infuse spiritual values of Bhakti, self-less service, obedience, and respect to elders in all Sadhus and youth. This phenomenal bond multiplied and spread wherever he visited and stayed in Gujarat or outside.

1970 was a landmark year. Yogiji Maharaj visited Africa and England and he spread the sampradaya – by leaps and bounds. Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj had accompanied him. Yogiji Maharaj initiated number of new places of worship including setting up of a temple in London.

1971 – the following year was shocking. Yogiji Maharaj – departed for heavenly abode at the age of 79. Mahant Swami Maharaj was deeply missing Yogiji Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj shouldered the leadership following the Guru Parampara in 1971. The BAPS and sampradaya expanded. Another landmark year was 1979. Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated the setting up of Akshardham at Gandhinagar. The entire task was entrusted to Mahant Swami Maharaj who worked day and night to make this a wonderful monument.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj always held Mahant Swami in great esteem. In important functions where he could not go, he deputed Mahant Swami to represent him.

Under the leadership of Pramukh Swami Maharaj BAPS spread spirituality all over the world. But constant travel and day and night work made Pramukh Swami Maharaj weak. In March 2013 he nominated Mahant Swami Maharaj to oversee BAPS activities and guide all. Pramukh Swami Maharaj shifted to Salangpur. Despite Pramukh Swami Maharaj clear directions Mahant Swami Maharaj requested all santas not to publicize this direction. He completed all the works entrusted to him, continuously maintained a low profile as humble Sant. He said “I am a ‘servant’ of Maharaj and would like to remain so. Pramukh Swami Maharaj leads all of us to “Moksh” and we are all in his feet.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj stayed at Salangpur. Marathi Edition of Author’s work – on “‘Yug Purush’ Pramukh Swami Maharaj” was released by Mahant Swami Maharaj in his presence at Salangpur on 24 May 2013.

With Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Mahant Swami Maharaj says – remembering his early days of initiation in sampraday. “We all boys were returning from Atladara (Vadodara district) after participating in Krishna Ashtami festival. Pramukh Swami was also travelling with us, we were all together in same compartment. After train started, he talked to me. He enquired about my background and education carrier. Then he asked – suddenly – are you wearing ‘kanthi’ (sacred thread made from tulsi – to be worn around the neck)? I did not. He advised me to wear it and told me, please request Yogibapa get you to wear that. In the meanwhile one attending Sadhu came up with kanthi and Pramukh Swami himself put it in my neck. I was thrilled. Our conversation continued. He suggested, “would you like to become ‘Sadhu’.” This was just a suggestion – it was not an order or persuasion – a candid suggestion; discussed miseries of life; and role of Guru and Bhagwan Swaminarayan in liberation. Decision to be or not to be sadhu taken by oneself only. This talk gave me a direction and desire to become ‘Sadhu’ started growing in me.”

“I was with Yogiji Maharaj. Remembering that day”, Mahant Swamiji says – “I had an occasion to visit Ahmedabad.” We visited our temple in Ambli Pole. This was the place where Shastriji Maharaj had inaugurated Narayan Swaroop as Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Shri Babubhai Somnath was Kothari. He was very meticulous in use of resources. Pramukh Swami Maharaj appreciated this. In fact he used to cook his own food and serve all. Somehow he had come to know – I do not eat rice but like ‘Rotali’ (Indian bread). He started to give his portion of Rotalis to me and put ‘ghee’ (butter oil) in it while he himself used to eat only ‘Dalbhat’ – Rice. In those long days without our knowledge Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to take care of us.

Mahant Swami Maharaj with Yogiji Maharaj

Says Mahant Swami - I came in contact of Yogiji Maharaj as a student in Anand Agriculture College. This was in 1953 – 1956. During vacation I used to be with him and join him in his ‘vicharan’ (visits). After I completing graduation, I went to Gondal and got inducted as ‘Paarshad’. Yogiji Maharaj had his own style of building Sadhus and Paarshad. It was tough training – which built me and developed my capacity to work round the clock – even without taking any meals – many a times.

Mahant Swami Maharaj – known as Vinu Bhagat at that time was inducted

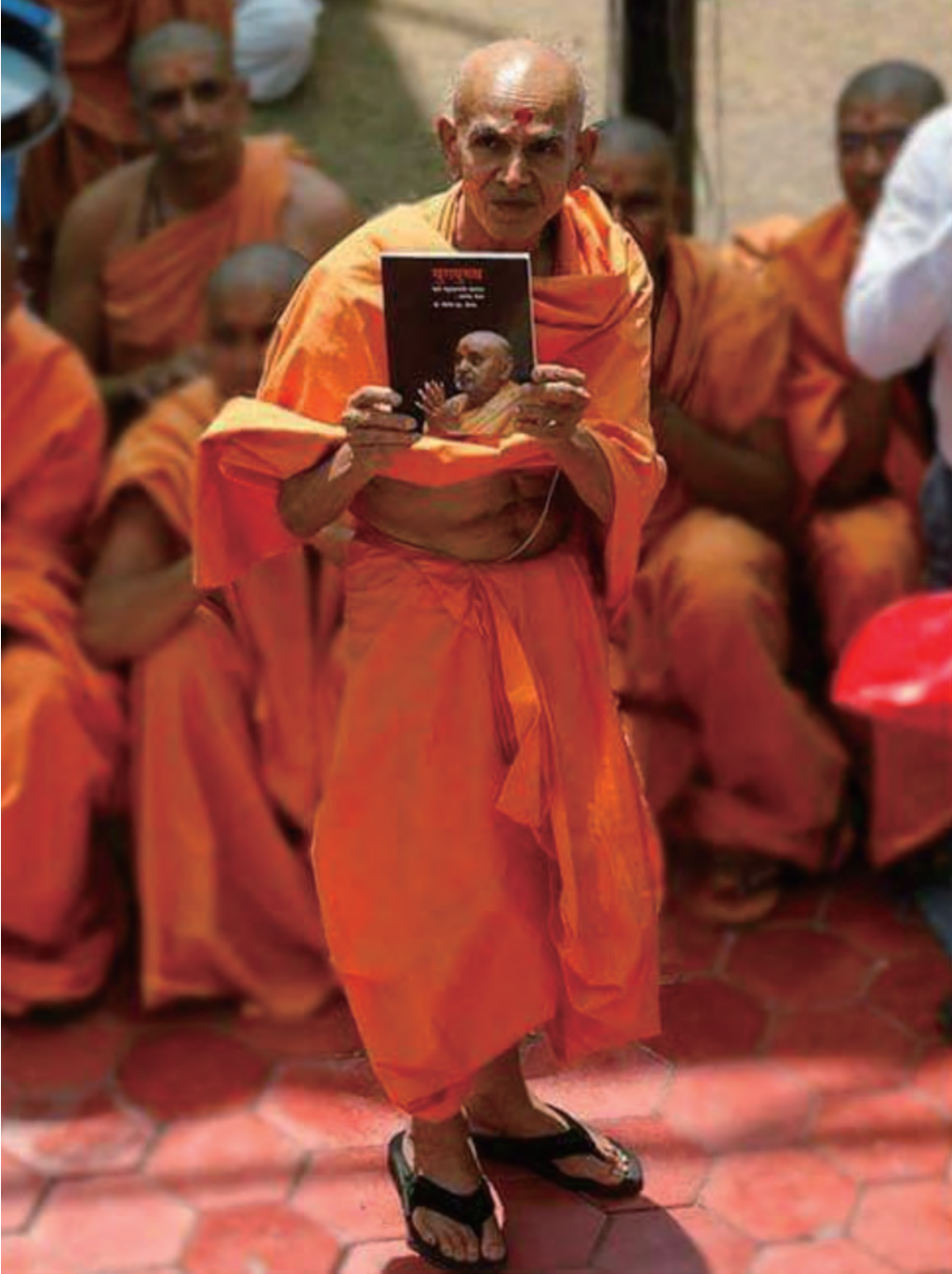


Pujya Yogiji Maharaj blessing Young Mahant Swami and other new Dixit Young Sadhus

as Sadhu on 11th of May, 1961, Yogiji Maharaj's birthday when he had completed seventy years. 51 young parshads were being given 'Diksha'. Yogiji Maharaj gave him Guru Mantra - Ashirvad and chandan tilak and finally 'Bhagva Vastra' sacred cloth - were given to him and he was given name of 'Keshavjivandas Swami' - applauded 'Jay Jay' by all present. The child Vinu named as Vinu Bhagat became Sadhu Keshavjivandas.

Yogiji Maharaj had seen the potential of Keshavjivandas. Yogiji Maharaj believed that newly inducted Sadhus need to be well trained in ancient scripts and religious rituals. They need to be 'Pandit' - learned persons who can give guidance to Haribhaktas and infuse spiritual values to younger generation. He selected Mumbai for this purpose. He nominated Keshavjivandas as leader and supervisor for this purpose and called him as "Mahant Swami". Mahant Swami became a respected and popular Sant among all.

In 1962 Yogiji Maharaj set up Harimandir at Dadar and appointed Mahant



*Mahant Swami Maharaj releasing the Marathi edition of "Yug Purush"
24 May 2013, Saturday*

Swami as Mahant and Bhaktapriydas Swami as its Kothari.

Yogiji Maharaj often said, “Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami are our important leaders – follow them. Pramukh Swami is in overall charge – we have laid foundation – he will build it further up. He is our Acharya. Follow his instructions and also follow Mahant Swami’s guidance – all will be well and God will be pleased. Your continued association with both of them will show you true spiritual path of Akshar Purushottoam.

The Spandan

Pramukh Swami Maharaj left for heavenly abode on 13th August, 2016. This created shocking waves. Antyesthi was held on “16th August 2016” at Salangpur. I was there with my brother Sureshbhai at the time of his ‘Antim Vidhi’:-

“I was standing behind the pyre.

Parampujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performed Agni Sparsh,

The Agni (Fire) flared and smoke was rising.

There was silence. But we felt the vibration – the ‘Divine Spandan’.

Vibration of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj – who had devoted his life to others and changed the context of Religion.

The divine Spandan was felt by one and all; the Sants, Mahantas the 3,00,000 devotees who were witness and billions more watching on televisions in India and across the world the Haribhaktas and the others.

Shital Ravi Kiran – the cool rays of the Sun were descending on us. The Divine Spandan – the creative energy has become all pervasive through Mahanta Swami who was standing behind. His Spandan continues to be spread through Mahant Swami. This is the Guru Parampara set by Bhagwan – Lord Swaminarayan”.

Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had entrusted his tasks to Mahant Swami Maharaj. In the meeting that was later in the day held in Salangpur Mahant Swami Maharaj was requested by Santas to lead them.

In the meeting held - Doctor Swami stated to all present – “What will happen now when Yug Purush – the divine personality has departed?” But he is with us only through Mahant Swami Maharaj. All of us will be continued to be guided by Mahant Swami Maharaj as we did it with



Mahant Swami Maharaj performing last rites of Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Darshan and last rites of Brahmlin Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Mahant Swami Maharaj with Bhagawat Dixit Santhorund

Pramukh Swami Maharaj through 'vibrations' (Spandan) in Mahant Swami. Ishwarcharandas Swami elaborated further: "Our Knowledge - is Eternal, Truth is our Knowledge." Gunantitanand Swami used to say - "I am eternal. I am not departing. It is the body (Deh) which goes or fall down - but I am going to remain in this world and from time to time seen as part of 'Guru Parampara'."

Added Swami Ishwarcharandas "Time and again Pramukh Swami Maharaj had elaborated that my successor is Mahant Swami - follow him - abide by his guidance.

"We have now more than 1000 santas - sadhus who are well educated. This started with Mahant Swami. At that time it was believed that educated youth does not like to become sadhu. But Mahant Swami - disproved this belief. He followed Yogiji Maharaj and persuaded him to give 'Dikshas' and become a sadhu. Yogiji Maharaj kept him for years together and trained him - in all different facets. He imbibed innumerable 'gun's virtues in Mahant Swami who was always a humble person. Yogiji Maharaj had entrusted education training of new sadhus and appointed him as 'Mahant' in Mumbai.

"Mahant Swami has had been always self-reliant - despite so many people - sadhus - bhaktas around him - he used to - wash his clothes and clean all utensils - used to prepare 'haar' garlands for Thakorji - this lifestyle itself is an education to young sadhus - who were amazed to see him to get up at 4 A.M. in the early morning and doing yogas. He speaks few words but his lifestyle - devotion - charisma - spreads divinity - divine light spandans everywhere. He is a Mahan Rushi.

Mahant Swami is now our leader - Guru Parampara started with Gunantitanand Swami how we will follow him. In him we see all gurus - Gunantitanand Swami, Bhagatiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj. By remaining in his constant contact - we will have truthful path, happiness and peace".

"Remember that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has not gone anywhere - these 'spandans' are in Mahant Swami - he is with us through him."

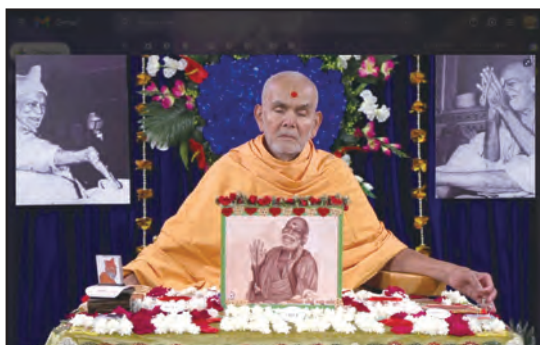
Pramukh Swami was not well. He shifted to Salangpur. He decided to entrust his task and, as his successor - as a Spiritual Guru of BAPS. In 2012-13 in presence of all sadgurus - Doctor Swami, Kothari Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Ishwarcharandas Swami, Vivek Sagar Swami and all other Sadhus. He formally entrusted this task. He also wrote a letter

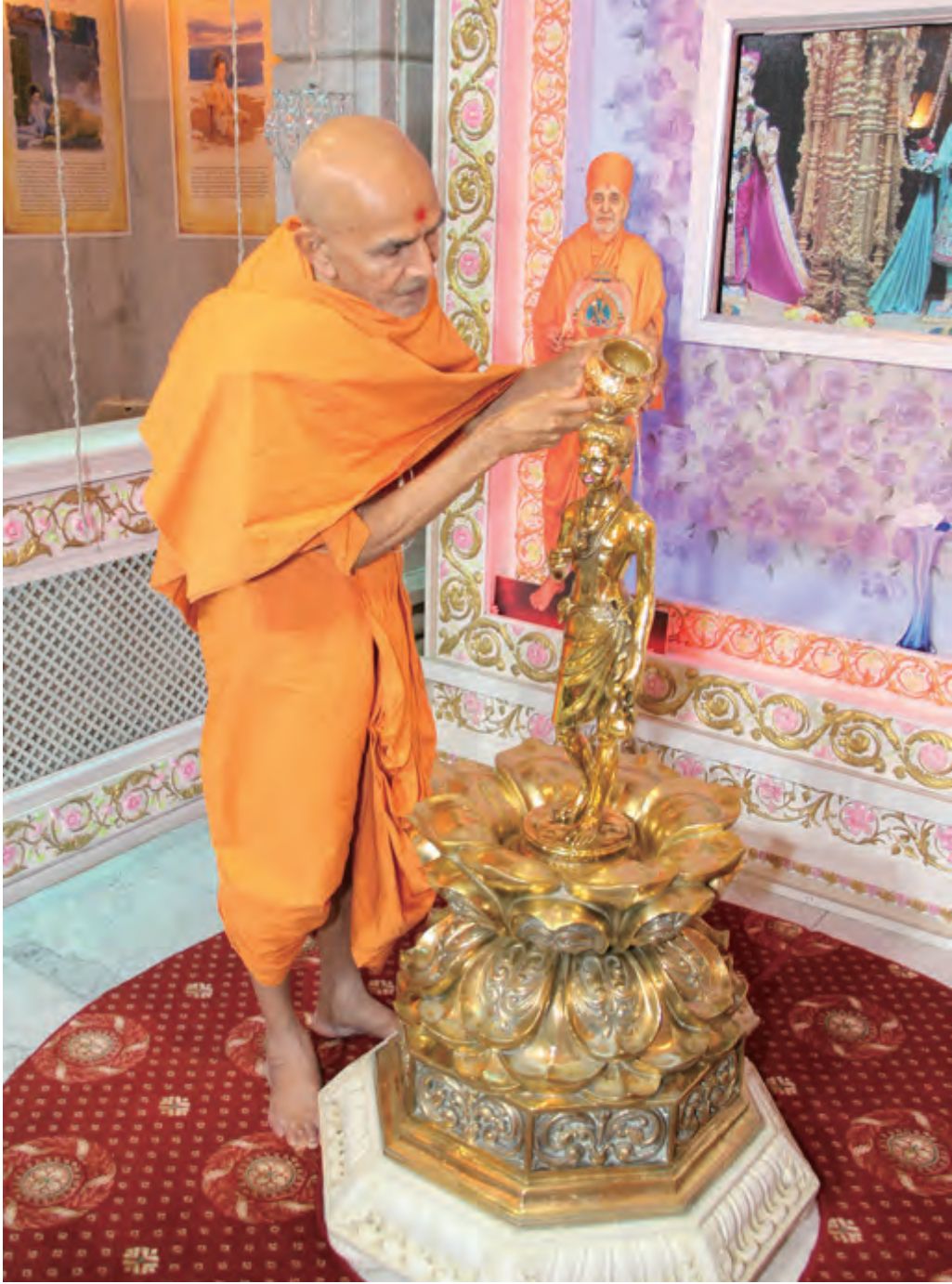
informing entire BAPS community in that regard. He addressed hereby inform all Thyagi, Grahi, Bhaktas that Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) created by Yagna Purush Shastriji Maharaj will have leadership of Mahant Swami Maharaj as 'Pramukh' after my departure. He will be Guru. I am doing this appointment of Mahant Swami Sadhu Keshavjivandas."

Despite this declaration and formally handing over the overall work to Mahant Swami, Mahant Swami maintained low profile. He urged Santans please do not declare this openly. I am a servant and would like to remain a servant. Gate to 'Moksh' and Guru of all of us is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Please accept my request.

On one side Pramukh Swami departed bodily - at that very moment his Spandans started through Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thousands who were present physically and those who were on TV felt assured Pramukh Swami has not passed away at all. He is with us in Mahant Swami. Mahant Swami Maharaj is leading the divine path created by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and he is with us to lead us - guide us and leading spiritual ways all across the world.

"We are all indeed grateful to Pramukh Swami Maharaj to bestow us such Guniyal Gunantit Guru - the Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj".





'Abhishek' by Mahant Swami Maharaj at London Temple



*Mahant Swami Maharaj with Chief Justice Tondon during annual celebration of
Toronto Temple, Canada*

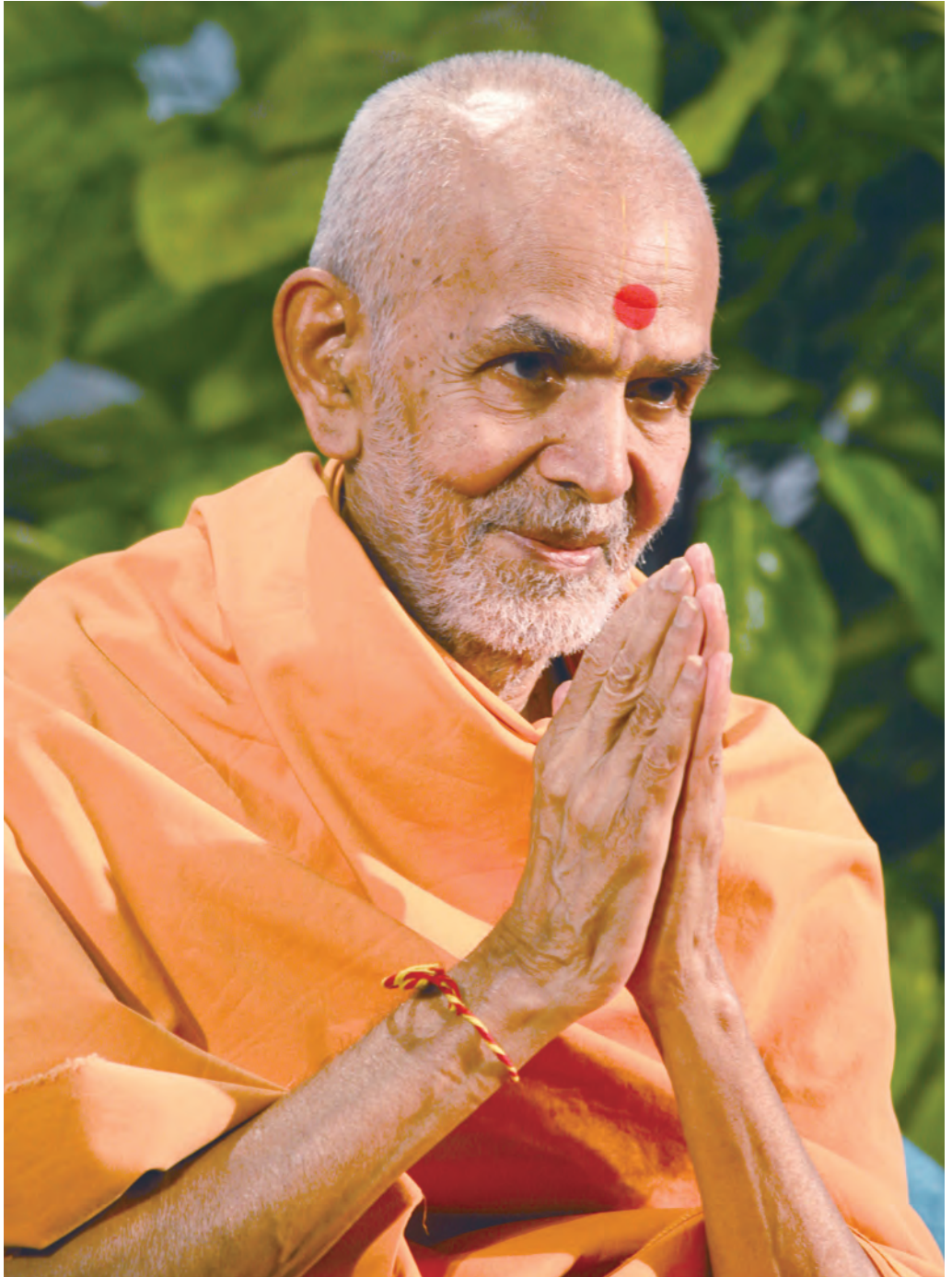




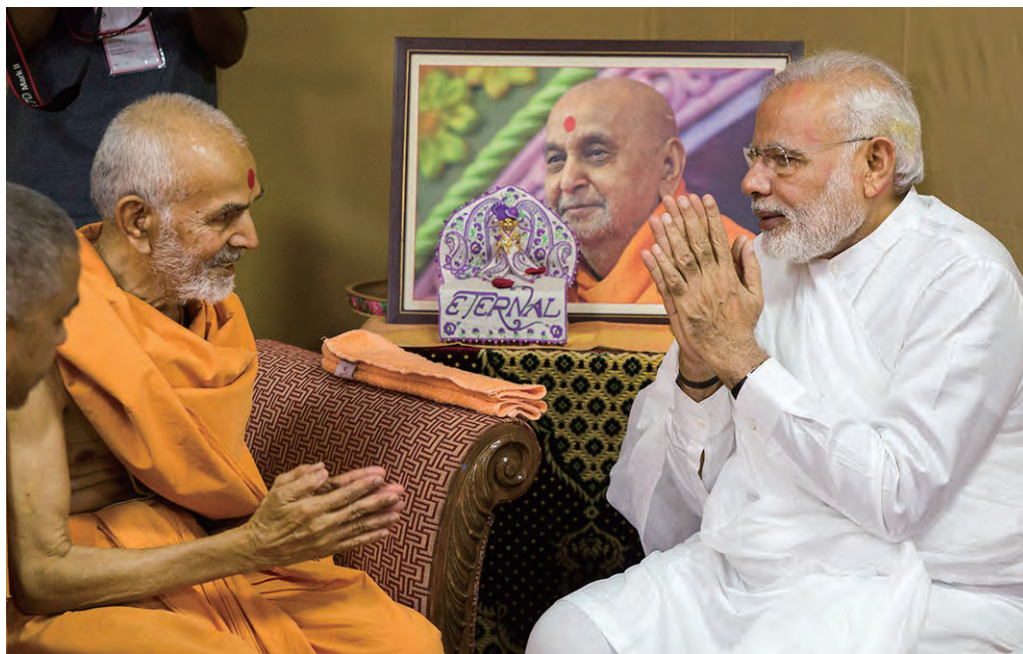
Mahant Swami Maharaj at Swaminarayan Temple Salangpur



Mahant Swami Maharaj at Bochasan Temple



Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj



Mahant Swami Maharaj with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi



Mahant Swami Maharaj with former U.S. President Barack Obama



His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in Atlanta, GA



Mahant Swami Maharaj during his first Gurupurnima celebration at Chicago, Los Angeles and Atlanta, USA

Spread of Spirituality – the Sanatan Dharma

The spread of Sanatan Dharma – Hinduism outside Gujarat and abroad initiated by Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expanded it in a big way and Mahant Swami Maharaj is taking it to new milestones. The objective is to keep Hindu tradition Ekantik Dharma – the way of life – devotion to God, tolerance, family ties – and such virtues alive – not only in Gujarat, but all over India and abroad – where Indians have migrated and have become ‘Non-Resident Indians’. This was initiated by ‘Gurus’ and followed by Vicharan; continues – all over India and world by Sadhus.

They paid special attention to meet the moral and spiritual needs of Gujaratis in particular – and others were initiated to form satsang groups within and outside country and non-residents settled abroad keeping in view their way of life and needs. Indians are settled in Africa, Europe and of course USA – Canada – many other parts of world like Fiji islands – Australia. A systematic initiative was started by Yogiji Maharaj. He visited Africa and UK and other countries outside India and within country wherever there were Gujarati settlements. This led to setting of local satsang groups to start with followed by setting of temples and attracted all Hindus – also non-Hindus who also like Hindu culture and values. Such temples also became place of tourist interest. They became not only places of worship – but centres for spiritual values and message of Ekantik Dharma on which Swaminarayan sampradaya is based. Pramukh Swami Maharaj immensely expanded this. In about more than 55 countries’ temples were set up – number of which were ‘Shikharbandh temples’ with classic traditional architecture mixed in modern technology and needs of climate and lifestyle of country concerned.

Here is the illustrative story of Neasden Temple at London which completed recently 50 years. It depicts how entire activities organized by mobilizing voluntary efforts and partnership of Sadhus – Haribhaktas, Hindus and even local non-Hindus residents. The other temples all had similar participative and voluntary efforts. This moral was followed across the world including Akshardham – Gandhinagar and greater detail Akshardham Delhi. But most interesting part all such holly centres – is that they are self-sustaining –

through variety of means – donations, contribution from salary income, voluntary assistance so on and so forth.

The Neasden Temple:

A brief history of Satsang in England:

This is an incredible story of human faith, dedication and divine blessings, a story of spectacular growth from a tiny seed to a huge banyan tree as it were. From a small shrine established by Yogiji Maharaj in 1970, the Satsang has grown into a major Hindu center for worship at Neasden, a London suburb. Under the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj the sapling grew into a giant tree.

The roots of the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission in London can be traced back to the early 1950's. It was the early post-World War-II years, when London was recovering from the aftermath of the devastating blitz. The small Indian community was scattered. Some of them were followers of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. They were the pioneers of the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission.

In 1950, with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Mahendrabhai Patel (Barrister), Purushottambhai Patel and other devotees started meeting for Satsang in London. As Mahendrabhai writes, "I landed in London in 1950 for further studies. Purushottambhai Patel was a devotee of Shastriji Maharaj, and was residing in the county of Kent. His address was given to me by Yogiji Maharaj".

The Indian community grew in size over time. In London, D. D. Meghani, his brothers and friends had been holding Satsang Sabhas in his office since 1953. Later arrivals from India and East Africa Navinbhai Swaminarayan, Prafulbhai Patel, Chitranjanbhai and others joined. They started the weekly assembly at the house of Prahladbhai in 1958".

The Saturday evening assemblies at Prahladbhai's residence in Seymour Place, near Baker station, attracted many devotees. With the spiritual dhun and kirtan, the assembly used to be concluded after a spiritual discourse by a devotee. The annual Annakut festival used to be celebrated at his house for several years.

The first mandir at Islington was inaugurated by Yogiji Maharaj on Sunday, June 14, 1970. Prabhudas Lalji had brought from Kampala (Uganda), the murtis which were installed, amid acclaim in the new mandir after yagna. Thousand of devotees participated in the function.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the mandir was performed on July 20, 1980 by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The mandir was declared open in 1982. It was around this time that Pramukh Swami Maharaj first proposed the idea of building a traditional shikharbaddh mandir (a traditional Hindu temple with pinnacles) where arti could be offered five times. In London, a new site at Neasden was selected.

The voluntary Efforts:

The Guinness Book acclaims the pinnacled Neasden mandir as “One of the wonders of the 20th Century”. The ‘Readers Digest’ chose the mandir among the 70 wonders of the 20th Century, because it was the sole ‘Marvel of Voluntary Effort’. The most significant fact is the way it came to be built with love and affection by an army of volunteers. They literally sweated it out to bring it into existence in record time:-

- Volunteers gave up good jobs to participate in the mandir project. Some cut their weekend holidays. A few gave all of their savings and wanted to give more. Children emptied their piggy banks to contribute their mite to the fund. A newlywed couple cancelled their honeymoon trip abroad. They got a refund from the hotel and paid the money to the mandir fund. Many children polished the marble carvings along with their elders.
- A devotee had given the money he had promised. His wife had sold her jewellery. The compulsive donor was not satisfied with this. He approached Swamishri with the query whether he should pay the £ 600 which he got from shop as wages. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had to agree.
- Aluminium took the place of gold to provide money for the project. Why aluminium? \$ 35 million worth of aluminium cans are thrown away every year. They are not biodegradable. They pose an ecological threat. Alcan Recycling Company is one of the largest recycling firms in Britain. It was willing to pay for used cans. This was a good opportunity to collect funds. So the can collection drive was launched. The devotee soon heaped the old mandir yard with cans. This drive was the first of its kind on such a massive scale in that country. Young and old participated in it enthusiastically. Kunal Patel (11), Pranay Patel (13), Tarun Patel (11) and Dhruv Kalan (11) won a British Telecom Environment Award. Their school The Swaminarayan

Hindu Mission Sunday School got a certificate and £100 in prize money for collecting 1,50,000 cans in a week.

- Sukhbhai of Birmingham (74) collected cans for three hours every day. He would deposit two bags every week at the mandir, changing two buses to reach there.
- One of the collectors was always armed with a magnet, so that he would not get iron cans even by mistake. He was taken for a scavenger and offered alms. When Chimanbhai of Crawley (74) explained the drive, the gentleman gave a cash donation. Chimanbhai collected 1,25,000 cans single handedly.
- It was not always smooth sailing for the collectors. Once a football fan emptied beer on a collector's head. He got a 'Thank you' from the collector.
- A total of seven million cans and 21 tons of aluminium foil were collected during the course of years. This was the largest collection by a charity organisation in the U.K.
- The CARE -A Fund Raising Project - was the brainchild of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It was launched in 1994. The colourful brochures conveyed the messages and perennial contribution of the mandir to anti-addiction drives, eco-friendliness, family values and value-based education. Brochures containing these values were offered to donors for better living. The devotees went from door to door. Despite the rough weather and rejections, they explained the philosophy behind the brochure to the entire local British community. The result, a huge collection.
- Skilled and unskilled volunteers worked very hard for building the mandir. Rest became a rare commodity for them till the mandir had been completed. After working round the clock, they would snatch a couple of hours' sleep. Then, they would have a bath, perform puja and go back to the mandir for more work. This was how the mandir came into being layer upon layer, over a three-year period.

Few example of unique of dedication of devotees

- Holidays and week-ends brought coach loads of volunteers from different parts of the UK to Neasden. So numerous were they, that their centres had to be given fixed time on fixed days. Volunteers

came from other parts of the world, too. There were people other than Indians. The local Britishers also joined in these efforts of many nationalities with Indian.

- Chandrakantbhai Patel (18) and Chandresh Patel (18) joined as volunteers in February, 1993. They did all sorts of work. From 1994, they stayed at the mandir site itself, so that they could render more service. They drilled 25,000 holes. A contractor would have charged £ 1 per whole. Says Chandrakant “Every time I saw the mandir, I realized the reality of Swamishri’s wish and my attachment to it grew. I think it is the most beautiful place on earth, and it is all due to Swamishri”.
- Jayesh Patel (22), a computer technocrat, used to polish the carved marble pieces. Once a brick fell on his knee. An X-ray showed that nothing was broken, but there was an internal bruise. Ever since that day, whenever Swamishri sees him, he enquires about his leg.
- Anupsinh Vakhatsinh Jhala (75) started coming to the work site from May, 1993. He used to polish and clean tiles. “My daughter called me in 1991 and told me a new temple is going to be built in London. I was in Africa and had plans to go to India. But I decided to come here and help”.
- The mandir also presents an exhibition of contribution of India to the world in the spiritual field.

Understanding the Hinduism

A permanent scientific exhibition “Understanding Hinduism” depicts the glory and greatness of Sanatan Dharma. The exhibition – ccupies over 2000 sq. ft. on the ground floor of the mandir. The wisdom of the ancient land is presented through visual effects, paintings, tableax and traditional craft work. The exhibition deals with the origin of Hinduism, its beliefs, glory and its contribution to education and religion. Illustrious heroes and heroines of Indian culture like Nachiketa, Shravan, Rantidev, Sita etc. are presented in colourful 3-D miniature diorama. It reflects the core values of Hindu ethos and culture such as:

- The beginning of Hinduism and how it spread.
- Principal beliefs of the religion as a way of life.



Understanding Hinduism - Gallery at Neasdon Temple, London





Shri Swaminaraya Mandir at Neasden, London



- Dioramas of Sita, Shravan, Nachiketa and others.
- The Glory of Sanskrit, the mother of all languages.
- The Contribution of India in Education, Mathematics, Astronomy, Surgery, etc.
- Life and Philosophy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and spiritual succession.
- Worldwide socio-spiritual activities of BAPS.

The Guinness Book of World Records 2000 Millennium edition hailed this effort. In page 36, under the Architects and Master Builders Category of the Knowledge Section, a colour photograph of the London mandir with brief details of the mandir have been included. The article reveals that the Shri Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden, U.K. is the largest Hindu temple outside India. It was built by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a 79-year Indian Sadhu (holy man), and is made of 2,828 tonnes of Bulgarian limestone and 2,000 tonnes of Italian marble. This was first shipped to India to be carved by a team of 1,526 sculptors. The temple was built at cost of above £ 12 million.

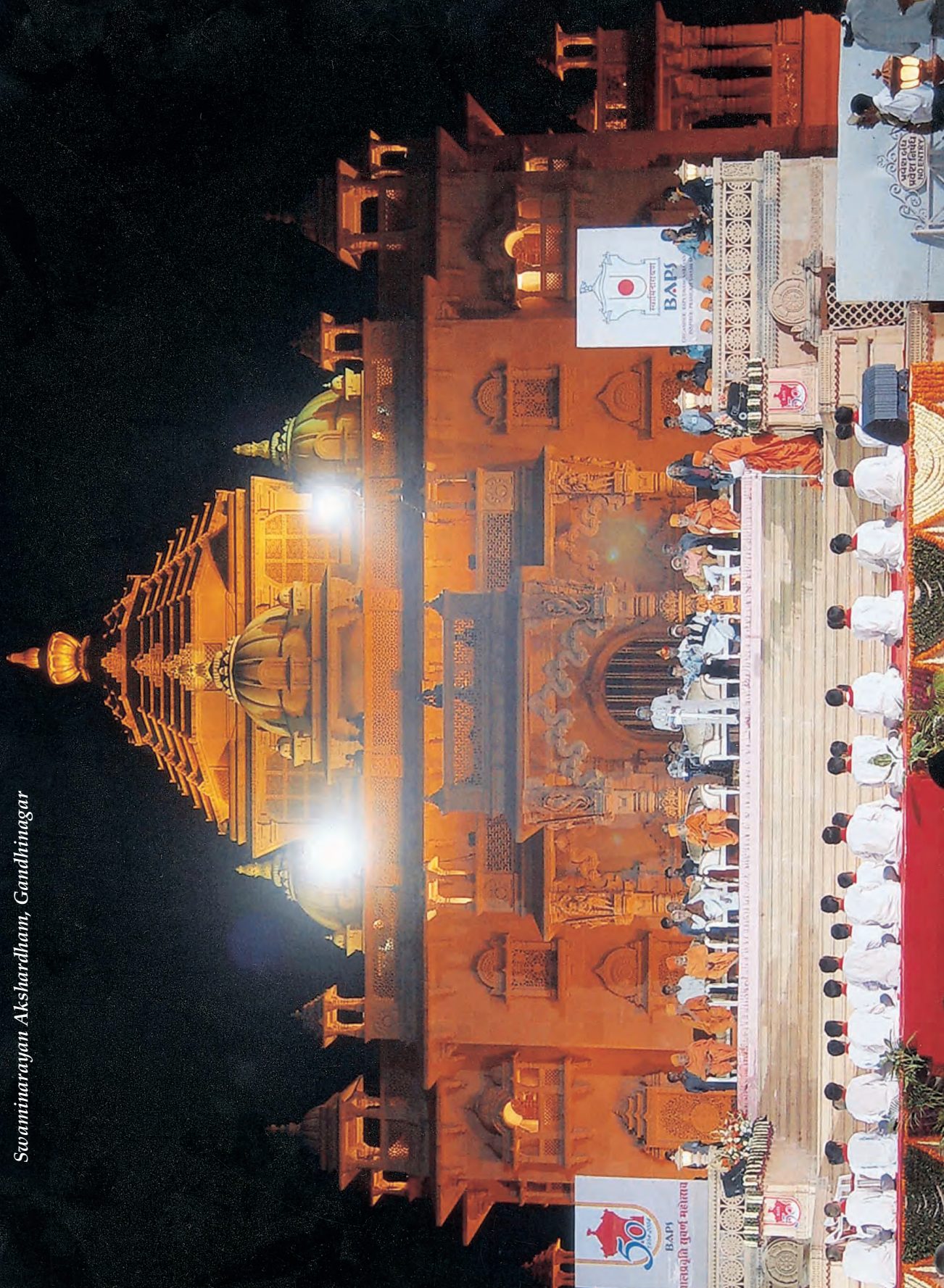
The London temple is an illustrative story. At home similar stories beginning with Akshardham, Gandhinagar. Kosamba - Tithal-Bulsar, Zadeshwar Bharuch and so on and so forth emerged. Each has stories of dedicated disciples working together under the spiritual guidance of Sadhus. Similar to foreign lands whether it is Nairobi- Kenya, Durban-South Africa, Oakland-New Zealand or New Jersey or Los Angeles in USA. Two more unique centres and temples were created in Chicago and Houston, USA. These are major ones, but there are large number of small centers in each of these countries and within India.

Akshardham – Gandhinagar

Pramukh Swami Maharaj – initiated this project which is a mega complex - spread in 100000 square meters in the capital city of Gujarat – Gandhinagar and its day to day work was supervised by Mahant Swami Maharaj along with Atmaswaroop Swami.

Akshardham – Gandhinagar is a major centre of attraction to anybody who visits Gujarat. It took more than 5 years to complete its construction. Every year more than two million people visit it.

Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar



This unique cultural complex is dedicated to Bhagwan Swaminarayan who inspired peace and harmony. The monument had the help and participation of thousands of devotees in construction. They came from all over from Gujarat and other parts of our country and abroad. This kar seva by both young and old was most noteworthy feature. My son (author's son) Vrajesh who was studying engineering joined this under the guidance of Atmaswaroop Swami who infused spiritual values of community service in him and many other young persons who had joined these efforts.

The Rajasthani pink stone as primary building material was selected and the square "Shikhar" was made octagonal. The monument faces north. The vast open space with water bodies enhances beauty of the complex. Its evening light and sound show is most popular – the dialogue between Nichiketa and Yamdev.

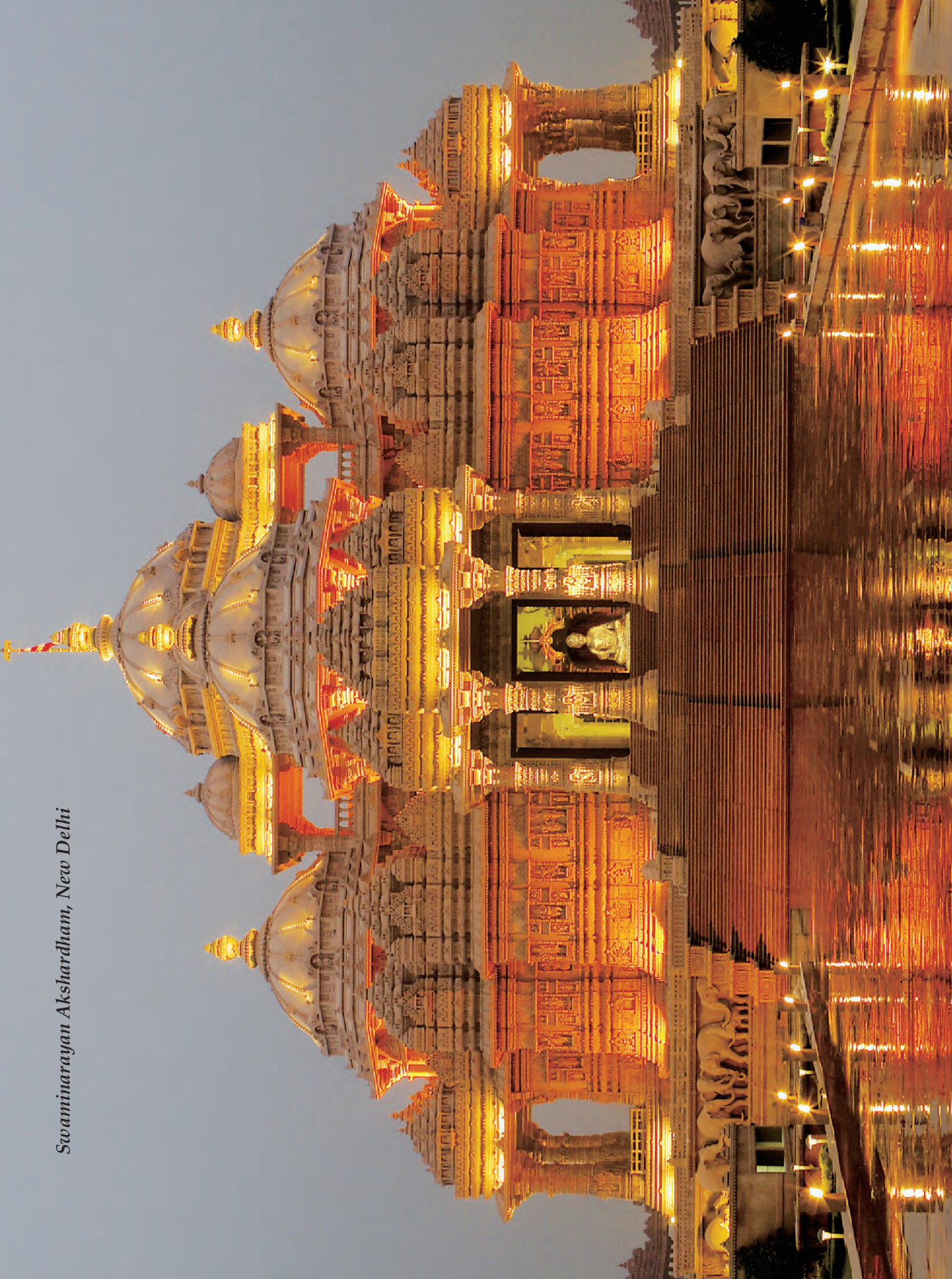
New Mandirs in USA and Canada

Two new traditional BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs (temples) in 2007 "One in Toronto and the other in Atlanta in North America were established." The Toronto mandir, was inaugurated on 22nd July. Many newspaper headlines praised architectural magnificence and the spirit "Extraordinary Etobicoke Temple and Marvel of Architecture". The Canadian media praised The Guardian; 'A Jewel for Toronto' (Toronto Sun), Canadian Hindu Temple weaves itself into Toronto Tapestry' (Globe and Mail); 'Built to stand 1000 years: Toronto's massive stone Hindu temple is truly a blend of old and new' (The Record); and 'Serenity that's set in stone' (The Star). The Prime Minister Hon. Stephon Harpes of Canada described it as a "Landmark of Canada". Canada's distinguished columnist on architecture, Christopher Hume, commented, "The new temple, completed last month, rivals even the most elaborate European cathedrals in its intricacy. It is one of the most extraordinary buildings ever seen in this country."

Atlanta temple

On 26th August, 2007 Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the murtipratishtha of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Atlanta, the third BAPS shikharbaddh mandir in USA and the largest in North America. On that occasion, he said, "This mandir is not just for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, it is for all. The more one visits the mandir and participates in doing satsang, the more inner peace one will experience. Respect the Gita, Upanishads, Bhagvat, other shastras, delities and mandirs. Remain firm in your faith and never criticize the faith of others."

Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi



Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed all the 140 craftsmen. “You have all contributed to the work of Satsang and at the same time received spiritual knowledge. All of you served well. We pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that you and your families attain peace and continue to serve the organization in this way. You have all served wholeheartedly. So God will protect you”.

Akshardham - Robbinsville - New Jersey - USA

This is another major contribution of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This is a mega project meticulously planned and under execution – under direct supervision of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Now construction has entered into the final stage. The ornately carved ‘amalak’ stone was ready to be fixed on top of ‘Maha-Shikhar’ and occupy the apex of “Akshardham Shikharbandh Mahamandir”. Mahant Swami Maharaj performed Vedic Puja Rituals of Ornate Amalak Stone for Akshardham, Robbinsville on 25 October, 2020 from Nenpur. The entire ‘Mahapuja’ rituals were relayed live on live baps.org for all devotees worldwide. This was done in the early morning of 25 October in Nenpur. The rituals were simultaneously performed at the Akshardham site in Robbinsville. Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed “The Project is being done with Samp Subradhbhar and ekta”.

Parallel to Swamishri’s puja the Mahapuja ceremonies were also being performed by Sadhu Yagnavallabhdas and other Sadhus in Robbinsville. Thousands of devotees, children and youth in their home prayed together with Mahant Swami Maharaj. The puja ceremony reached a crescendo with his blessings. “The project is done with samp, sabradbhor and ekta’. People from all over the world will visit and get inspired. All of you have made sacrifice through body, mind and wealth. It is indeed amazing that devotees are donating despite financial constraint due to the Covid pandemic. Shriji Maharaj came on earth with his ‘muktas’ and through them the ‘Seva’ is being accomplished. You are like ‘muktas’ and you have attained ‘Moksha’, and virtually whoever does your darshan will also attain ‘Moksha’.”

Swaminarayan Nagar - Rajkot

Mahant Swami inspired celebration of 97th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj which was held on 4th December 2018 in Rajkot. This was done on a grand scale.

- The exhibition and programme area was – 500 acres – 200 hectares of land with huge welcome gate – with five artistic temples. 6 exhibition



areas and a light and sound show which can accommodate 35000 people. There were more than 22000 volunteers who served millions who visited this. More over 8800 students visited. A Maha Yagna was organized – with community participation.

- On this occasion 35 young persons were inducted as Sadhus and Mahant Swami gave them Bhagrati Diksha. Most of them were highly qualified young persons from India and abroad.

New Mandir at Navsari

Navsari is one of oldest 'Shikharbaddha' mandir. In January 2020 the new Navsari mandir was inaugurated. It is in 11 acres. Its main features are –

- It is built with Rajasthan marbles
- 3 main and 2 secondary 'Shikhar' (pinnacles)
- 2 main 'ghummats' (domes)
- 17 secondary domes
- 19 golden kalash (water pots)

- Height - 82 ft. Length - 205 ft. Width - 188 ft. Podium size - 40 x 40 ft.
- 222 intricately carved pillars and 150 arches.
- 153 statues of divinities and inspiring devotees.
- 70,000 cubic ft of stones used

Mahant Swami carried out Murti Pratishtha on 30, January 2020 in the presence of more than 20,000 devotees.

Pramukh Swami Birthday Celebration - Mumbai

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday celebrations were held on 4th December 2019 in Mumbai in presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Over 7200 devotees from within and outside India attended this at D.Y. Patil Stadium in Vashi - Mumbai. Shri Amit Shah - Union Home Minister said - "Pramukh Swami Maharaj has rejuvenated Society's faith in Saints and Spirituality". Said Mahant Swami Maharaj "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a divine Saint, with pure mind. His whole life was divine and pure. He was simple, but he touched everyone. He guided countless on to the paths of righteousness and devotion to God. He accomplished many great works".

Dubai Temple

Mahant Swami inspired setting up of a temple in Abu Dhabi. Brahmvihari Swami has been overseeing it. In fact he suggested this to Sheikhs of Arab Emirates - UAE who liked the idea. They gave the land in capital's Abu Mureikha area and work was started. Thousands of workers in India and UAE are laying foundations for Abu Dhabi's first traditional Shikarbandh temple. This will attract and admit people of all faiths toward harmony in the society - which has multiple religions and its followers. The work of sculpture is in progress in Rajasthan. This will be unique temple which revives ancient art and architecture. Temple will welcome people from all faiths to understand Hindu way of life - values of tolerance, peace and harmony - among all in UAE. This is expected to be ready by 2023 - on a vast area 55000 square meters and additional 53000 square meters is expected to be allocated soon. It will have a large amphitheatre, a gallery, a library, a food court, community halls which can accommodate 5000 people - along with gardens, children play area, helipads so on and so forth. One important highlight will be its seven spires representing the seven emirates of the UAE. Says Swami Brahmvihari "the temple will be

a symbol of the UAE's values of inclusion and tolerance of all faiths and cultures. Each spire will contain stories of the life Deities. The facade wall and stairs of temple will present cultural and moral stories from various countries of the world. The flora and fauna carved on it will represent God's gift of nature. They will represent and express harmony between plants and animals from India, UAE and other countries of the world".

The grand shilanyas ceremony was performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 20th April 2019. It was attended by one and all of Indian community and leaders of Emirates and all local level foreign diplomats. Brahmvihari Swami and Mahant Swami Maharaj thanked the King - His Highness Khalifa Bin Zayad Al Nahyan and Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi.

Brahmvihari Swami explained: "The mandir will create an environment and a set of values that will celebrate humanity. He said - American Ideologist Dr. David Frank quoted; "Till now the BAPS has built 1200 mandirs worldwide and they are all inspirational. After Akshardham, your work becomes generational. But one single mandir in Abu Dhabi will be civilizational because it will bring civilization together".

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed 'poojan' of the construction and blessed the engineers overseeing construction. Swamishri placed the 'nidhikumbh' and main foundation stone in position.

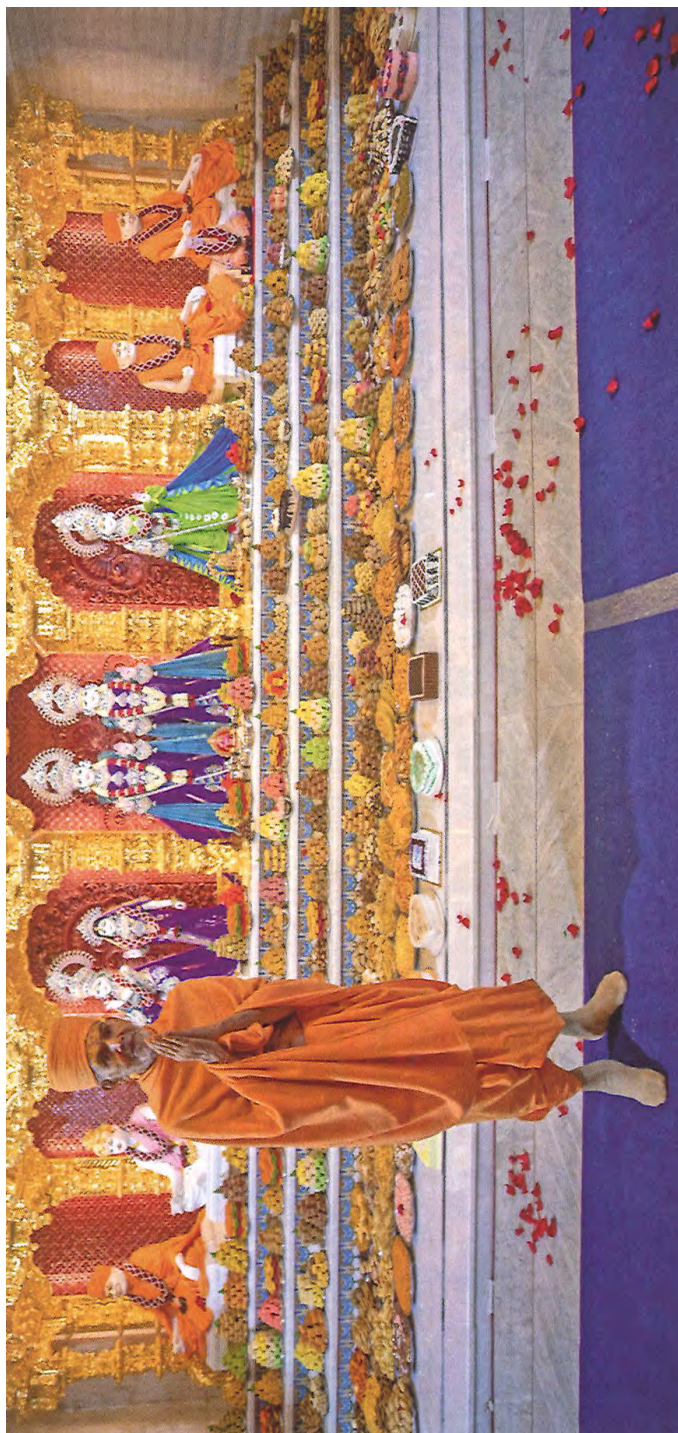
Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed all and said "This hall is overflowing with peace, love and harmony. It is a great gesture that is dedicated for tolerance and harmony. The whole humanity will benefit. This will truly be a heaven in the desert, an oasis in the desert."



Mahant Swami Maharaj at Kampala, Uganda with President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Navsari





Mahant Swami Maharaj offering prayers

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2020

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th Birthday Celebration

4 December 2019, Mumbai



*Cover Page of BAPS publication BLISS Covering Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
98th Birth Anniversary Celebration*



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson at Swaminarayan Temple, Neasden



Online ceremony of placing first pillar of the Shikharbaddha BAPS temple at Nasik



Murty Pratishtha Vidhi and Shilanyes puja for Pramukh Swami Smruti Mandir, Salangpur



Mahant Swami Maharaj at BAPS Temple, Abu Dhabi



H.E. Sheikh Nayan Al Nahyan receiver Swamiji at DWC Airport Dubai



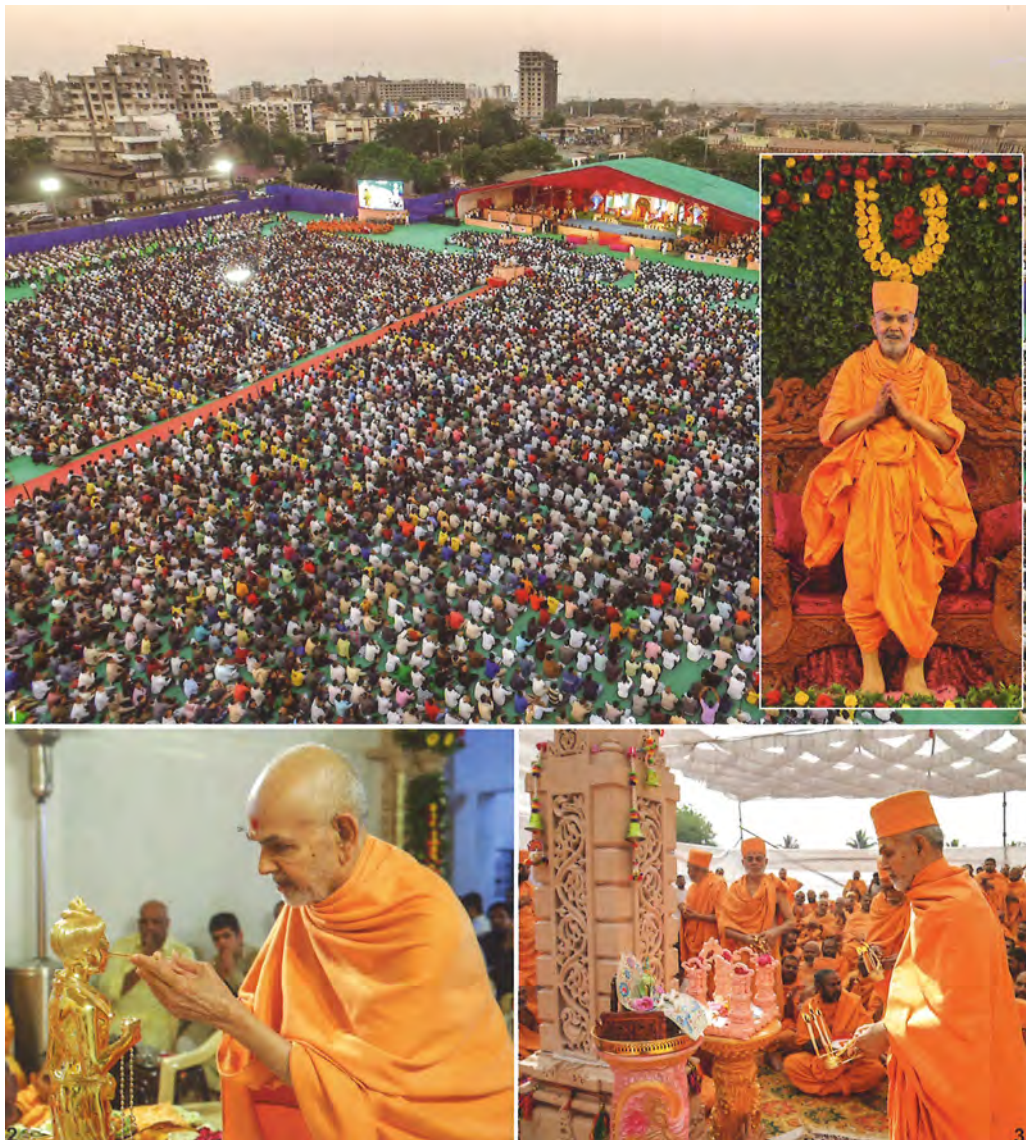
JANMASHTAMI CELEBRATION IN THE PRESENCE OF MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

24 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

1. In Swamishri's presence, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami (right) addresses the assembly.
2. Swamishri performs *arti* in the BAPS Mandir, Dar-es-Salaam.
3. Swamishri rocks Thakorji on a swing during the Janmashtami assembly.
4. Devotees during the celebration assembly.



Yogiji Maharaj Birthday anniversary June 2021



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN : SURAT, MAHELAV & NASIK
January - February 2019

1. Grand Uttrayan (Jholi) celebration assembly, Surat, 14 January 2018
(Inset : Mahant Swami Maharaj hails th Jholi call, 'Swaminarayan Hare, Sachchidanand Prabho...')
2. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* of the new Nilkanth Varni Abhisek *murti* and guru *parampara murtis*, Mahelav, 31 January 2019.
3. Swamishri perfoms the *pujan* and *arti* of the first sculpted pillar installed at the under construction BAPS mandir in Nasik, Maharashtra, 12 February 2019.



ભગવાન સ્વામિનારાયણના
પ્રાકટ્યોત્સવ પર્વે
ઑસ્ટ્રેલિયા ખાતેથી
હરિભક્તોને બળભર્યો પત્ર
લખીને પરમ પૂજ્ય મહંત
સ્વામી મહારાજે પાઠવેલાં
આશીર્વાચનો...



HH MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ
(Swami Keshavjivandas)

સ્વામી-શ્રીમ
૫.૫. પ્રમુખ સ્વામી Sydney
(Australia)
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મંગળવાર

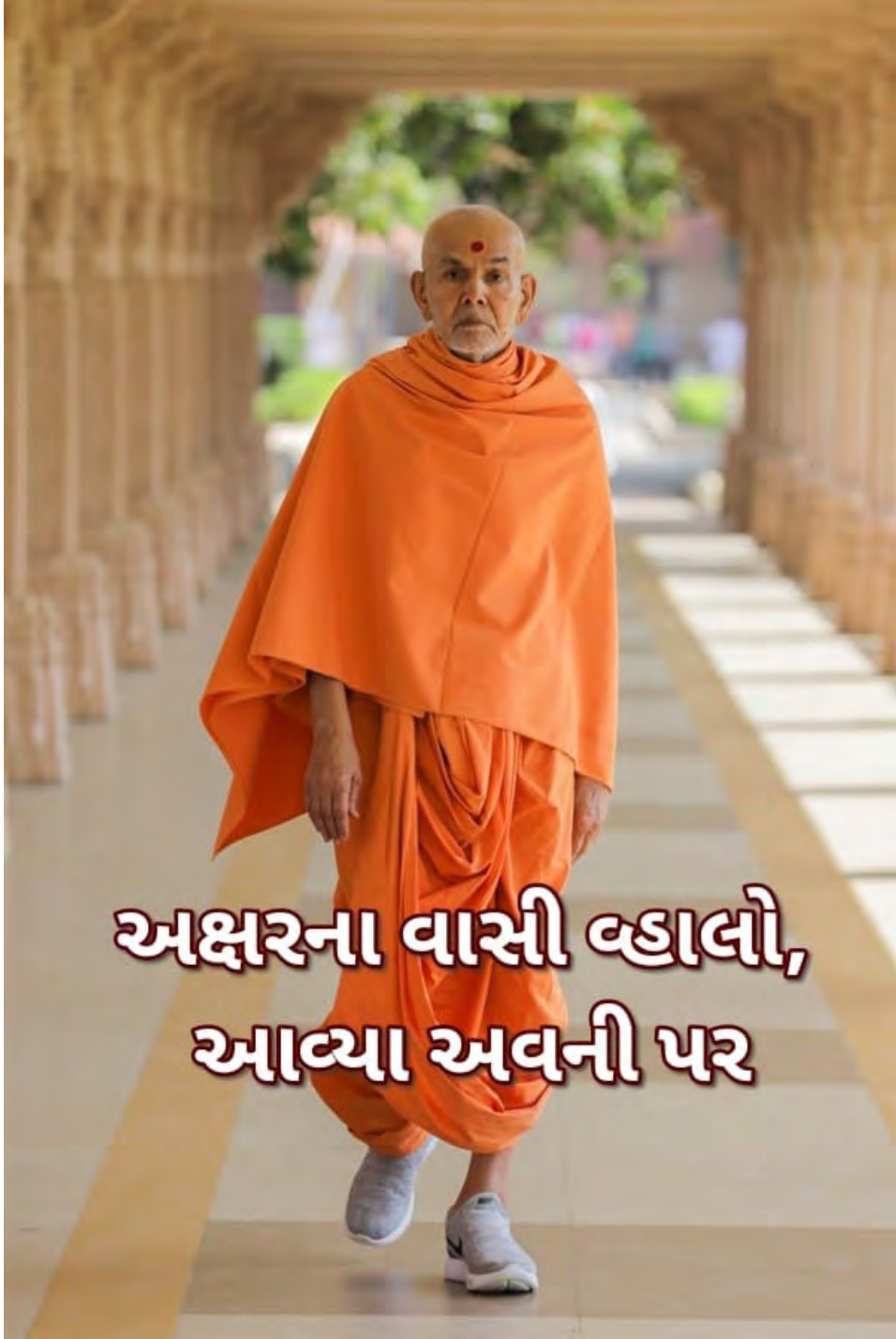
શ્રીહરિ-જયંતી ની ભેર

આપણી BAPS. સંસ્થામાં બધે
જોરેથી ડંકો વાગી રહ્યો છે. તેમાં પણ
૫. જાહેરાત સ્વામી ના જોરેથી સર્વોપરી
ડંકો વાગી રહ્યો છે. શાસ્ત્રીય મહારાજ
કેદારા કે સામે દેવો પૂર વાગે
તે પ્રત્યક્ષ અનુભવાય છે. ઉદારાની
વાત નથી. આમ તો ખરું જોતા, બધે
જોરેથી મહાર-પુરુષોત્તમ ની વાત છે.
બધા જોરેથી મહાર-પુરુષોત્તમ ના જ છે.
આપણી વાત સાચી છે, સંસ્થા સાચી
છે, સારંગી સાચા મળ્યા છે. તો મહારાજ
સ્વામી પણ ૨૦૦ વખત સાચા
છે. અને હાથને!

ધામ, ધામી અને મુકામ
સાચા છે. આ લોકોમાં એકાંતિક ભક્તો
સાચા છે. બીજા બધા સાચા જો રહ્યા છે
અને અરોજ કારણ આવો ભલો,
દિવ્ય સારંગી મળ્યો છે, સર્વોપરી
અને સારંગીની વાત છે.

જેને જેને સારંગી મળ્યો છે
તેના ભાગ્યનો ખરો સાબ એમ
નથી.

જોઈ સારંગી અતિ દુર
કરીને રાખવો. મહારાજ કેદાર
છે - જોઈ સારંગી સાચવવાનું
જાતન કરવું. સારંગી કેદારના રાજા
ના જયજી સ્વામિનારાયણ



Mahant Swami Maharaj 'Vato'

Vibrations

An aspirant asked Mahant Swami Maharaj, "What is the biggest obstacle in the spiritual path?"

"Having a mundane perspective ('laukikbhav') [towards God and the Satpurush]."

"What is it that hinders one in having a divine perspective ('divyabhav')?"

"One's base instincts ('swabhavs')."

"What should one do so that one's swabhavs do not cause obstructions?"

"Have faith (nischay), glory ('mahima') and divine feelings ('divyabhav') for God and his devotees."

Mahant Swami Maharaj lucidly revealed about overcoming laukikbhav – the biggest obstacle in the spiritual path.

Rajipo Upon a United Family

Divyatanay Swami recalled an incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj's inclination and rajipo on a family living unitedly and harmoniously together. He said, "In 2012, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited the satsang mandal in Indore. Here, a devotee named Dilipbhai Rathod lived together with his extended family of 35 members. Since his former house was small, Dilipbhai had bought a bigger home with three floors. So, arrangements were made for Mahant Swamiji's visit there.

"At that time it was decided by the Sanstha that (due to) Mahant Swamiji's [advancing age he] would only visit and sanctify the ground floor of any house. However, if the house had a lift he could visit the other floors.

"In Dilipbhai's case, his house did not have a lift. But he was happy with Mahant Swamiji's visit to the ground floor. However, when Mahant Swamiji heard about the family's unity and harmony, he said, 'Let us go

upstairs'. The sadhus said there was no lift. Swamishri replied that it didn't matter. Again the sadhus informed him that Dilipbhai had not insisted that he sanctify the upper floors. Yet, Swamishri climbed all the three floors, visiting all the rooms and the terrace on top. When he was called 'Why he had taken so much strain?' Swamiji replied, 'Look at their unity. How united they all stay!'

Everyone realized the importance of family unity, which earns the inner blessings and Rajipo of the Satpurush.

A Candid Dialogue

An extract from an inspiring dialogue between a spiritual aspirant and Swamishri is as follows:

Swamishri: Just as there are royal families in some countries, ours is a divine family. One may witness others' swabhavs, which should be ignored. Everyone is divine. One should not react but tolerate. By retorting to others how can one mould oneself!

Aspirant: How can I become attached to you?

Swamishri: Through interaction and spiritual association.

Aspirant: How can I do that, it may not possible to be with you all the time?

Swamishri: Through one's mind (mental association).

Aspirant: Does this mean that through mental association you hear us and are always with us?

Swamishri: Yes.

Aspirant: How do you reply when we mentally ask you?

Swamishri: Once you start doing it you'll get answers from within.

Aspirant: Who are you?

Swamishri: Satpurush. Our clear understanding is that we have the association of Maharaj, Swami and the Satpurush.

Oneness with Swami Bapa

Hitesh Patel and Dipen Patel informed Swamishri, "Today is the 13th, and ten months to this very day and time Pramukh Swami Maharaj departed

for Akshardham. Thereafter, we had prayed to you, 'May we bond with you.' And we have bonded with you in such a way that when we meditate on Swami Bapa you naturally appear shortly thereafter in our mind. We experience the same joy now as we did with Swami Bapa. We feel that Bapa has not gone."

Swamishri pointed his finger to his chest and revealed, "Ena ej chhe [He and I are the same]."

Atmic Power

Swamishri had a medical check-up by a specialist doctor. The doctor prescribed a medicine and added, "By taking this medicine you'll be happy".

Swamishri responded, "I am always happy." Then he added, "I only expressed my problem because I was asked to do so. Otherwise it would have stayed on anyway. In fact, I've had the pain from Kolkata [for the past two months]."

Atmaswarup Swami asked the doctor, "If he does not take your prescribed medicine, then what will happen?"

The doctor replied, "Then there is the possibility of him experiencing severe pain."

Swamishri revealed, "My life is going on due to [my] atma's strength."

The doctor praised Swamishri's inner strength, "You are very strong from within. Otherwise anyone else with your kind of ailment would have found it very difficult to tolerate. I've seen people cry due to this illness."

When the renowned doctor was asked about his fee, he replied, "I don't want any fees for my service. All I ask for is Swamiji's blessings."

The dialogue with the doctor revealed Swamishri's tolerance, atmic strength and the fact that he is always happy.

Striking Humility and Glory

In the morning, Swamishri performed the consecration rituals of Ghanshyam Maharaj's murti abhishek and the worship rituals of the base stone of the first under-construction pillar in the Paramhansa Mandapam at Akshardham, Robbinsville. Thereafter, Swamishri arrived at the satsang assembly to celebrate the occasion. Four pillars made of fiberglass, each having a murti

of a Paramhansa, were arranged as a backdrop on the main stage along with seats of Thakorji's and Swamishri. When Swamishri came to one of the pillars the Paramahansa positioned on it moved a little. On looking up, the Paramhansa smiled. Swamishri was amazed and expressed his joy to see a child dressed as Paramhansa Nishkulanand Swami. The Paramhansa was holding a flower garland. When he stretched his hand to honour Swamishri with the garland Swamishri beckoned for Thakorji to be brought to him so that the garland could be offered to him first. However, someone informed him that it had already been offered to Thakorji. Therefore, Swamishri took a few steps forward and the child – Nishkulanand Swami garlanded him. Then, Swamishri stretched his hands to touch the Paramhansa's feet. While the child kept gesturing 'no' with his facial expressions Swamishri reverently touched his feet. Thereafter, Swamishri went to the second pillar in which Muktanand Swami, another child dressed as a Paramhansa, was positioned. Swamishri also reverently touched his feet.

The whole assembly was overwhelmed by this divine sight. Swamishri's deep appreciation for the children dressed as Shriji Maharaj's Paramhansas was soul-stirring.

At the conclusion of the assembly, Swamishri garlanded both the child-Paramhansas and touched their feet again.

Swamishri, a guru, knew fully well that the Paramhansas were children dressed for the occasion, he humbly touched their feet because of the glory and esteem he has for the senior Paramhansas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. All the devotees were inspired by Swamishri's humility and the affection he has for God's disciples.

Following the Guru's Way

As part of the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the Akshar Deri in Gondal, a grand mahapuja ritual was held at the festival ground. In the concluding part of the mahapuja, Swamishri stood up to perform the arti. Swamishri's routine of standing up to offer the arti has been observed on many occasions. In spite of Swamishri being requested on all the occasions to remain seated and perform the arti, he has always stood up.

Brahmavatsal Swami asked Swamishri, "Swami, why is it that you stand up to perform the arti? Is it out of respect for Thakorji?"

Swamishri replied in the affirmative nod and added, “Swami Bapa [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] always stood up to perform arti. That’s why I stand up to perform the arti.”

Swamishri follows the devotional tradition practised by his Guru.

A Disabled Devotee

Swamishri was returning by car from his daily puja venue to the BAPS Mandir in Godhra. Many devotees were waiting on the footpath for darshan. While Swamishri was blessing them by looking at them, he saw a disabled devotee with flowers in his hands. Swamishri wished to meet the devotee, but by then the car had reached the mandir gate. Swamishri told the driver to stop, and he gestured to call the disabled devotee. It took (a little) time to find the devotee. So, the attendant sadhus, who were not aware that the devotee was disabled, suggested to Swamishri that they move ahead and wait inside the mandir compound. But Swamishri insisted upon having the car reversed towards the disabled devotee. But that time, the devotee arrived. Swamishri lovingly accepted his flowers and thus fulfilled his devotion. The devotee was overwhelmed with joy because he had not anticipated Swamishri’s close darshan and blessings.

Sanctifying a Poor Devotee’s Home

In the evening, Swamishri travelled to the village of Kothiya, about 12 km from the BAPS Mandir in Bodeli, Gujarat. Here, he visited and sanctified the hut of a poor farmer and devotee, Shri Ramjibhai Rathwa. The hut wall was made of bamboo strips, the roof of aluminium sheets and the floor of dried rice plant stalks. Ramjibhai informed, “We spread such stalks for a guest.” A small cot with a cushion of dried stalks was prepared for Swamishri’s seat. After placing Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on it Swamishri sat down. Then Swamishri applied chandlo on the foreheads of Ramjibhai’s nine family members. The members then honoured Swamishri with flower garlands. Thereafter, Harikrishna Maharaj was placed in the ghar mandir and Swamishri performed arti. Prasad of peanuts and sugar crystals were offered to Thakorji, and Swamishri ate a little. Thereafter, Swamishri asked the family members to introduce themselves and he blessed them individually. Then, Swamishri operated the manual grain crusher (ghanti) with his hands and sanctified it. Swamishri bent low because of the low ceiling and sanctified every part of the hut by showering flowers petals.

After coming out of the hut, Swamishri inspired and liberated two aspirants from addictions. Swamishri also sanctified the shed where the milch buffaloes were kept and showered flower petals on an ox tied nearby to a tree. Thereafter, Swamishri sat on an ordinary cot arranged on Ramjibhai's open field and addressed a small gathering of devotees and blessed them by showering flowers on them.

By the time to leave, Swamishri wished to sanctify Ramjibhai's farm. He walked with the support of two attendant swamis and showered flower petals there. Soon, thereafter, when Swamishri approached his car to leave, someone informed him that Ramjibhai was building a pacca house opposite his hut. Subsequently, Swamishri sent and showered flower petals there. Then only Swamishri departed to return to Bodeli mandir.

The all-knowing Swamishri thus fulfilled the wish of Gulabsinh, the nephew of Ramjibhai, who had desired that Swamishri come to their homes.

At 85 years, Swamishri fulfilled the wish of the poor devotees of Kothiya and took great pains to bless them and sanctify their ordinary huts and farms.

Bhagwan Is the All-doer

Apurvamuni Swami asked Swamishri, "When any work is successfully accomplished through your blessings then swamis and devotees praise you, "Through your blessings everything was accomplished well." then don't you get the thought that you did it?"

Swamishri candidly replied, "No, Bhagwan does everything. So, there is no question of having any other thoughts. I am not capable of doing anything."

Apurvamuni Swami asked another question, "When such large festivals are organized everyone starts praising you for their success. However, when something goes wrong people start blaming you. During such festivals do you ever think that something might go wrong or bad?"

Again, Swamishri stressed, "No. I have left everything upon Bhagwan[as the all-doer]."

Apurvamuni Swami added, "Don't you get stressed during such a large undertaking and responsibility."

Swamishri replied calmly, "Nothing of the sort."

God's Name and Prayers

Swamishri landed in Dar-es-Salaam after an eight-hour flight from India. While he was retiring for the night the attendant swamis requested, "Take a grand sleep after a long, tiring journey."

Swami revealed, "I don't take a grand sleep. I didn't sleep in the plane this afternoon."

A surprised swami enquired, "Then what were you thinking of?" Swamishri replied, "[I was chanting] Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Maharaj Swami and praying for solutions for some devotees' problem."

A Servant

Shri Krushnabhai Pandya, a devotee of Gondal, declared his own achievements in order to elicit an answer from Swamishri about his accomplishments. He said, "I am Shri Krushna Pandya. I was awarded the best national teacher's award. I was the principal of our school in Gondal. For years I had served as a regional head (Sanyojak) of satsang activities. These are my achievements; I would like you to let us know your accomplishments and who you are."

Without a moment's hesitation Swamishri replied, "A sevak."

Shri Krushna Pandya pressed him to elaborate further, but Swamishri gave the same reply, "I am a sevak." Then Swamishri bowed down to him in recognition of his achievements and services.

Home : A Divine Palace

'Home' - range of its warmth are expressed in all the languages. Each one of us desire to get back to 'Home' from wherever we are - whether travelling or attending daily chores outside.

But in the new millennium the family relations are getting more and more complex - due to variety of activities each one is doing and due to technological revolution of digital world, the joint family culture - parents staying with sons and grand-children is slowly disappearing. Even with single family - there are differences between the members - husband and wife, grown up children and parents. Although 'Home' is a place where person must get peace and happiness - at many a place - this is missing. People live under the same roof but spend more time on mobile phone - TV or laptop - though sitting next to one another.

Mahant Swami Maharaj lays emphasis to restore its (Home's) serenity. He mentions that Home is also a house of an individual with the same four walls.

He says that it is not enough to pray to God or participate and listen to Santas in Dharmasabha – each of one of us has to live a divine life – which consists of four principles – which are four walls that make home a Divine Palace.

- The first wall is to have a goal in life – say I want to become 'Brahmroop' – I would like to be part of God. This principle once adopted will change the way we behave with others – family members and even outsiders and change our attitude and reaction to what they say or behave.
- The second wall is our 'Feelings' – towards others. Mahant Swami says we need to have "Divine Feeling". We must treat others as 'Divine' as if they are representing God. If we take that attitude and understand – we will take care of them without any constraint in our approach. He gives the illustration of the 'Neem tree' of Ghatada and 'Khijada tree' (*prosopis spicigera*) in Salangpur. We treat them as divine and conduct prayers – because of their being in the place where Shri Maharaj used to be. Similarly we need to feel that our parents, wife – children, relatives, friends and servants – all are divine – that will give us peace, delight and respect in talking to them with one another. Further this has to be understood by all the members.
- The third wall – Mahant Swami explains is 'Nishtha' – 'sincerity'. We must speak what we mean – and not just for the sake of speaking or looking friendly. We must remain sincere to each other in our relations – we should not run down or criticize or malign – one against other but live in harmony and understanding and talk out our views and appreciation, acknowledge each others' strength and weakness – and simultaneously respect each other – even if there is difference of opinion or approach. This will make us feel, though staying in a 'Hut' – it as a 'Palace'. This gives us divine delight and satisfaction.
- The fourth wall – Mahant Swami Maharaj explains as following of the rules – 'Niyams' of life – laid down in Shikshapatri. When we sincerely follow that way of life, conflicts get mitigated and harmony enhances and our living becomes delightful.

The Mahant Swami Maharaj says – have these as four walls of ‘Home’ and live with peace – happiness – harmony and joy.

Akshar Purusottam Darshan

Mahant Swami has introduced Mantra – AKSHAR AHAM PURUSOTTAMDASOSMI. The Mantra promotes ‘peace’ in day-to-day life. The mantra is devoted to Guru and God and our merging into them. Mahant Swami says, we may follow our Guru and understand things as he understands and conduct ourselves as he is doing. Most importantly – like him we must devote to Purshottam – the God. This is called oneness with Askshar Brahma.

For ordinary person – or even one who is rich or well placed in life – life poses problems – related to health, income, family relations, achieving goals, obstacles, natural or created by jealous persons – so on and so forth. Each one wants to come out from it – and is making efforts to overcome this. But this takes time – may be a day – a month or even a year or years. In the meanwhile such persons get / tend remain disturbed and so at time loses his calm – and peace and cheerfulness of life. This makes life difficult. The mantra is the way out.

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains the Mantra – AKSHAR AHAM PURUSOTTAMDAS OSMI – “I am who is AKSHAR, is Das – Servant of Purushottam.” The Mantra is divided is made of two parts – one ‘Akshar Aham’ and second ‘Purushottamdasosmi’. “Here AKSHAR – means ‘GURU’ – I am AKSHAR means – I am one with my Guru – I follow him – in every manner.”

“Secondly Purushottamdasosmi means, I am a servant of Almighty God. This depicts our relation with God – as His devotee and work as His servant in life – in day to day living”.

If this is understood – the way of life infused in the Mantra is understood and followed, life becomes simple – irrespective of problems and the obstructions gets withered away.

Further understanding that I am AKSHAR and DAS of Purushottam helps to clean up the mind – like with a broom, we clean a room. Our mind is stored with collective memory of good and bad events, good and bad thoughts, fulfilled or desires not met with. Things which we wanted to say even to our family but do not open up being a social being. All negative

thoughts are garbage - rubbished in minds which constantly hurt us or make us angry within ourselves. This needs to be cleaned up and calmed by meditation on the mantra. That will give us peace of mind and joy in living.

Mahant Swami Maharaj gives two illustrations.

Suppose we are walking and somebody hits us and then further abuses us (gives galia), we would be naturally angry and at least reply to him or retaliate. In such a situation of 'Anger' or provocation - if we think I am 'Akshar' - what my Guru (Akshar) would have done? When we remember this for a moment, anger will subside and a major confrontation with any body is avoided.

Another illustration he gives is of a student who wants to get good grade and work hard but is not able to concentrate in his studies. In that situation if he remembers Purushottam - God - and look at his capacity and draws from Him - the God - His power, concentration will be bestowed on him automatically. Mere remembering of God and feeling that you are part of Him - will bring the desired strength to concentrate and achieve all that we want.

Practicing this in day to day life will enrich life and resolve difficult situations we are passing through. This is attained through Atmachintan - meditation on one's self, one's action - on Guru and Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Swaminarayan Mantra:

Says Mahant Swami - The Swaminarayan mantra is composed of two words - 'Swami' and 'Narayan', which signify the relationship between a devotee and his master. It suggests the Upasana of Akshar and Purushottam i.e. the Devotee and his Supreme Master. The Swaminarayan mantra, when understood in this sense, suggests that an aspirant has to become like Aksharbrahma and worship the Supreme Parabrahma. It explains the eternal and inseparable relationship between Akshar and Purushottam.

When recited loudly it emits a divine sound. Continuous loud recitation helps in concentration, meditation and attainment of ecstatic divine bliss. When recited in chorus, rhythmically and melodiously with musical accompaniments, it purges the mind of all impure thoughts and distractions and creates a divine atmosphere all around.

It fulfils all wishes, confers good health, a peaceful life, material prosperity

and worldly wisdom. It helps in preserving health and curing illness, helps in giving peace of mind, freeing the mind from fear, tensions and worries. It helps in resolving conflicts, helps in overcoming obstacles and hardships in life. It helps in putting an end to pain, miseries and sufferings.

The Future Generation

New Dimension

Youth, the future generation is key to development of society or nation – says Mahant Swami. We do not know the what challenges will come in future – but we can prepare our future generation to meet these challenges. This is the true spirit behind BAPS youth centers – across the world where – from children to graduates imbibe spiritual values and spirit of voluntary help to others and build themselves as proficient young persons.

Who can achieve Success?

Mahant Swami Maharaj says that we are at cross-roads – we have technology revolution –scientific discoveries and we are benefiting – but our youth – at many places is disillusioned. We have youth which is busy on ‘Cell Phones’ by chatting throughout day, neglecting education, eating fatty - junk foods and some even having growing drink / drug addiction or chewing tobacco and smoking habit. Many feel that our youth are distracted and wonder what will happen in the future? But we need to build our youth. Find time for them. Talk to them and motivate them and trust them – have confidence that they will make a new bright world.

He further says we need to build strong character with a spiritual base. We need to build the spirit of serving others – irrespective of caste or creed. We need them to be united for common purpose and for nation building – but most importantly have strong ties within family, obedience, respecting parents, serving / helping grandparents and have understanding of unity and harmony among all family members – even where there is difference of opinion or life style.

The youth activities – imbibing spiritual values in youth were initiated by Yogiji Maharaj and expanded by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj also is constantly interacting with them – all these to prepare them for building the future.

Almost every center has sports activities for young people, in addition to lecture sessions. In countries where fast food is liked by youth, same

is also made available. This is to enable entire family to visit and spend time in activities they like.

A central Training Centre is at Salangpur. This is also a center for training of Sadhus – the new entrants. Very carefully curriculum is designed with focus on updating their knowledge of present day and from Holy Scriptures and the values of life.

Training also involves re-skilling and up-skilling them in character building – to face life, up-coming challenges professional career with knowledge and confidence. This further requires building “Strong Determination” to achieve goals – whether in studies, sports, community services or professional career. Hence, providing this prepares them to become independent. Starting from basic house cleaning to cooking and be self-reliant along with studies or work.

Mahant Swami Maharaj wants youth to remain calm and peaceful – devoted to their own family – concentrate their studies and always be ready to help others. They need to be spontaneously inclined to respect all elders and have peace of mind and happiness in whatever they are doing. He wants them to excel in sports, adventure, serving others – step out and face the world and achieve their own goals.

Laziness:

Mahant Swami Maharaj is always thinking about how to improve oneself. He is also concerned on what are deterrents to a person’s development. He feels that, Laziness is a living person’s grave. On the occasion of the Vachanamrut Bicentenary celebration, he spoke about how to remove laziness.

“Bhagwan Swaminarayan recommends in the Vachanamrut to beware of laziness. He says that one should abstain from the company of any lazy person. Laziness is the biggest obstacle on the spiritual and temporal paths. He narrated two examples:

A teacher in a school held an extempore essay writing competition. The subject was, “Laziness Means...” all the students immediately started writing about laziness. Someone wrote, “Laziness is a great enemy.” Another wrote, “Laziness is a living person’s grave.” All wrote something of this nature. One student handed four pages to the teacher, but they were all blank except for the words, “This is called laziness,” at the bottom of the last page.

Once, a teacher asked his students, “Those who have been affected by laziness raise your hands.” Nearly all the students raised hands, except one. The teacher asked him, “Why haven’t you raised your hand?” The boy replied coolly, “Sir, I feel too lazy to raise my hand.”

These two incidents demonstrate what laziness is. Laziness is a sign of weakness, being irresponsible and careless. Laziness means not feeling like doing anything and remaining inactive. Laziness also means to rest (or sleep) more than required.” But with understanding its evils, and, determination one can defeat laziness.

- **Clarity of Goal:**

Firstly, it is important to have a clear goal. Fix your goal with regards to doing bhajan, bhakti, satsang work or your social duties or your own day to day work. Then, organize your time to achieve your goal. Thereafter, focus on your daily timetable by detailing your schedule from morning to evening. Thereafter, firmly decide to finish that work by evening.

- **Believing One’s Faults as One’s Enemy:**

Bhagwan Swaminarayan said that if one wants to oust any fault in oneself then one must develop a feeling of hatred for it. Make a resolute pledge, “Laziness is my enemy. It has spoilt a lot of things in my life. I will remove it from my life.”

- **Take Inspiration from those who are good:**

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 20, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states about giving up laziness: Bhagwan blesses that by participating in satsang it is easy to attain atma darshan or God-realization, however, whatever lapse that a devotee has is due to his laziness. In Vachanamrut Loya 6, Maharaj says, “If he [devotee] is very lazy, sleeps too much and when told by other to bathe, meditate or observe other niyamas, says, ‘I’ll do it later; what’s the hurry. I’ll do them slowly’ – then even he may otherwise be nice, one should avoid his company.”

Give up laziness to become a recipient of Shriji Maharaj’s grace.

BAPS Chhatralayas and School Complex

“Chhatralayas are places where youth can be built”, says Mahant Swami Maharaj. In 1954, Yogiji Maharaj was travelling by train near Anand. one



BAPS Chhatralayas and School Complex



student from Vinubhai's (Mahant Swami) Agriculture College came to meet him. He briefed him about educational facility available and also lack of hostel for out-station students. Yogiji maharaj felt that there is need for student hostel. He gave a call. The donation started coming... Shri Ambalalbbhai Patel, donated his land for Hostel (Chhatralay). In 1965, the building Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralay (APC) was completed and on 20 June 1965, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated it. This was the beginning. Over a period of time Chhatralay and schools-colleges came up at a number of centers.

The chhatralays provide a conducive atmosphere for education, and inspire values and personality development in the students. Daily satsang assemblies in the mornings and evenings, inculcate self-control, devotion and values in them. It provides opportunity to develop their personality through debates on current topics, quizzes, question-answer sessions on spirituality, speeches, inspiring dramas and skits, music concerts and traditional dance training, build up personality, Celebration of festivals and study circles organized on a regular basis promote students cooperation and harmony, develop motivation for social services like anti-addiction campaigns, cleanliness drives and relief work in time of calamity.

Several institutes have been established in Gujarat and outside Gujarat: Pramukh Swami Medical College, Karamsad; Pramukh Swami Institute of Electronics(Vidyanagar); School of Architecture(Vidyanagar); Pramukh Swami Science College(Kadi) and Pramukh Swami Planetarium (Rajkot) and several Secondary and Higher Secondary schools. For the underprivileged the BAPS has sponsored 15 new schools in Maharashtra, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Tripura, Vallabh Vidyanagar in 1967, Gondal Gurukul in 1967, BAPS Chhatralay Vadodra in 1983, Secondary School in Bhadra Village in 1984, Ukai Chhatralay in 1985, First Independent Hindu School in London in 1992, At Mount Abu Student Hostel in 1993 and Primary School in 2001 and Residential School at Sarangpur in 2001.

Mahant Swami Maharaj says, we need to provide support to students from far-flung and remote areas and even children of Non-Resident Indian. They need to have clean room, good food and opportunity for extra-curricular activities - our chhatralays need to become centre of attraction for youth building personality development.

Vishwa Shanti Mahapuja

London Mandir completes 50 years

The global online Vishwa Shanti Mahapuja in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj was organised through virtual media and involvement of senior swamis. This was a collective prayer for family harmony and world peace. The Neasden Temple in London created by Pramukh Swami Maharaj has touched the lives of people across the world. On its completion of 50 years this puja was organised with the participation of more than 31,000 devotees from 33 countries. They registered to participate in the mahapuja from their own homes, with several thousands more joining even without registering.

The ‘mahapuja’ was conducted from London Mandir by Sadhu Dr. Yog Vivekdas Swami along with other sadhus. While, from Nenupur in India, Mahant Swami Maharaj presided over the opening of the Mahapuja through a live video link. He offered his blessings and paid tribute to the tireless commitment of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in gifting London with this mandir and gave blessings that satsang activities would continue to flourish in the UK and throughout Europe.

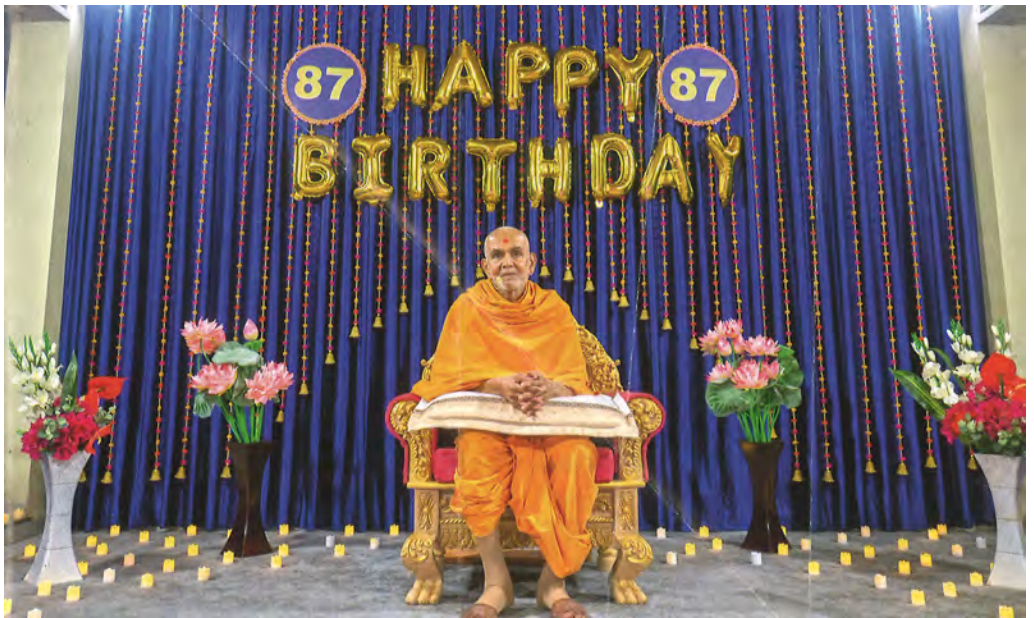
Mahant Swami Maharaj’s 87th Birthday Celebration

On 13th September 2020, Mahant Swami Maharaj’s 87th Birthday Celebration was festively held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the aid of computer multimedia BAPS swamis created a virtual stage with Mahant Swami Maharaj in Nenupur. The Sadguru Swamis and other swamis located in different mandirs wished him. The entire celebration programme was relayed in Gujarati, Hindi and English. The devotees in India and abroad savoured the celebrations at home.

In fact Mahant Swami Maharaj daily meets Santas – Sadhus who are based within and outside India virtually. He regularly inter-acts with them. He also interacts with devotees. Even in pandemic restricted life, he has opened gates for all.

Vedic Installation Ceremony of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami Alongside Shri Harikrishna Maharaj

For decades Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj worshipped the small chal Murti of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Aksharbrahma



Mahant Swami Maharaj's 87th Birthday online celebration



Photo 1 & 2 : Birthday celebration through video link
Photo 3 : Swamishri's pulling chariot of Thakorji and Gurus

Gunitanand Swami and taught us the ideal path of offering bhakti to Bhgwan. Mahant Swami Maharaj also continued the traditions of daily worships Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. On 31st October 2020, in consonance with the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, Mahant Swami Maharaj ritually installed a chal murti of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami besides Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

Mahant Swami Rewrites Arti

Mahant Swami Maharaj is a think – tank. He likes to explore new ideas-concepts. He felt that Swaminarayan Arti needs to be strengthened with new words. He asked Bhadresh Swami to work on it.

Says Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas:

“The word Arti has come from Sanskrit word aratrik which means something that remove darkness. It is the ritual performed since ancient times offering devotion to and honouring God. It is an expression of love, gratitude, prayer and immense faith for God. Its wicks enabled devotees to have the darshan of the murti in mandir before sunrise and after sunset in times before electricity became widespread.

The lyrics sung during the ritual are also known as the Arti. There are many Artis in Hinduism, which sing the praises of and respect to gods deities, gurus devotees and even rivers. Today, as in the past, Artis continue to be written as expression of genuine devotion to God and his devotee and to understand their glory.

In 1802, 11 months after Ramanand Swami’s demise, Muktanand Swami realized the divinity of Sahajanand Swami and composed the Arti..... ‘Jay Sadaguru Swami.....’ as a gesture of adoration and devotion. This new arti gradually replaced other artis and become popular.

Mahant Swami Maharaj guided Bhadresh Swami to offer devotion by recomposings arti extolling the glory of Akshar and Purushottam.

Says Bhadresh Swami:

“It was Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj’s innermost wish that siddhant established by Bhagavan Swaminarayan be presented in the form of a devotional scripture

In the process of writing this text, our talks turned towards the Mahapuja. Mahant Swami Maharaj said that along with Shriji Maharaj's Mahima, the glory of his ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami, should also be included in it. I worked on this for eight days in Gondal in Mahant Swami Maharaj's presence."

Mahant Swami Maharaj explained the way Shastriji Maharaj propagated the glory of Brahman (Akshar) and Parabrahman (Purushottam) – Gunatitanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj – and consecrated their murtis in the central shrines. Swamishri instructed me to compose an arti that include this Mahima and celebrates it. He explained in detail what points should be conveyed: Shriji Maharaj is Parabrahman, Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. Maharaj always is Sarvopari, Sakar, Karta and Pragat. Also, Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj always taught us to keep Dasbhav, Divyabhav and Suhradbhav; so those teachings should be included as well.

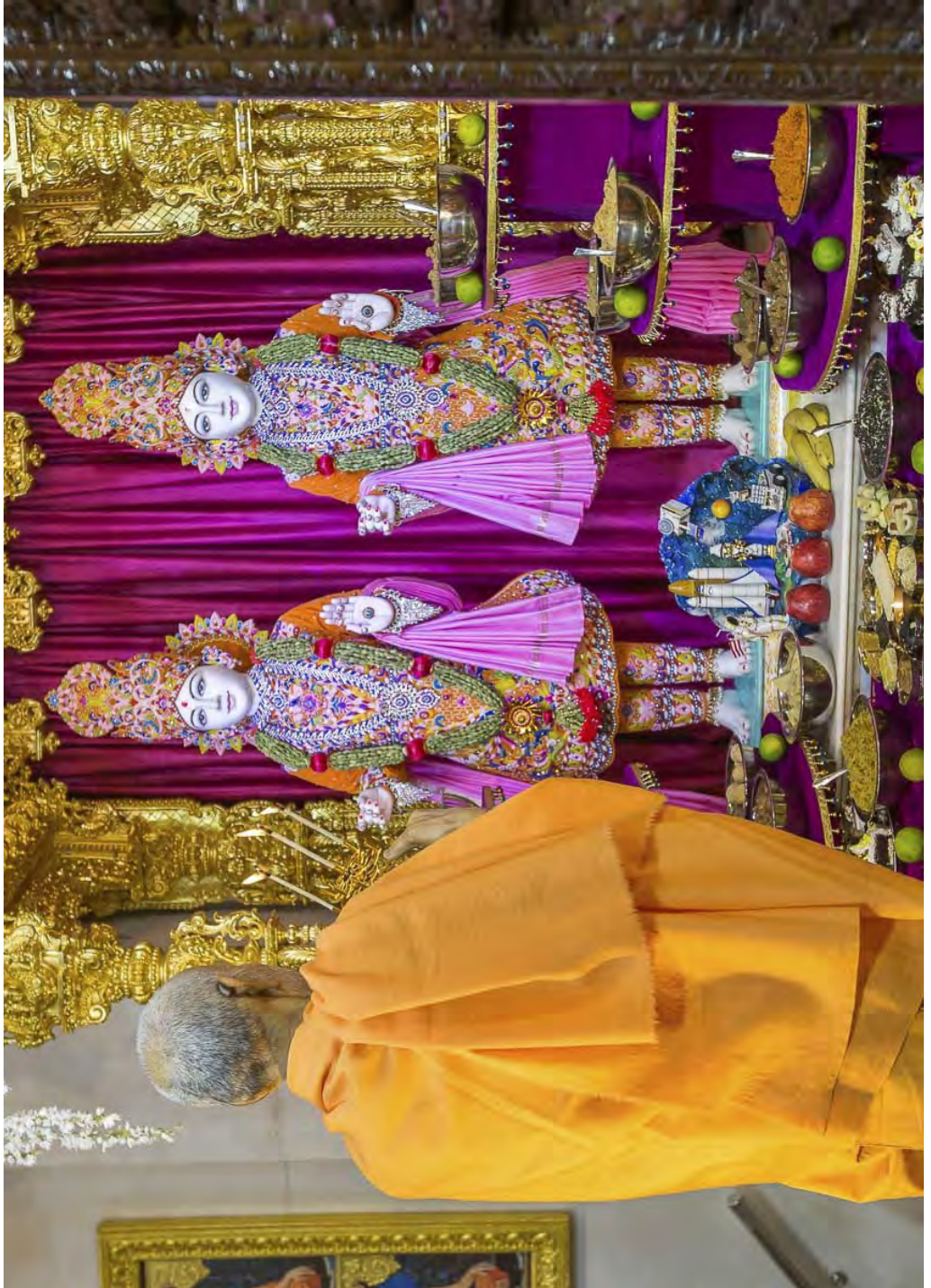
This Arti is the ultimate, divine tribute of Mahant Swami Maharaj to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj- Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami – and Shastriji Maharaj. It also reflects the joy of the devotees who are dedicated to the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Furthermore, it offers devotion towards God, Guru and the Akshar-Purushottam principle. It represents the inner voice of the entire BAPS family.

Mahant Swami Maharaj says :

"The Akshar Purushottam Arti is just grand. Whoever sings it with glory and faith will experience supreme peace, and Maharaj and Swami will come to take them[to Akshardham]"

"Each word of Akshar Purushottam Mahapuja is filled with glory; whoever performs or participates with true spirit in the Mahapuja will have all their wishes fulfilled and will become physically, mentally and financially happy. They will experience paramount peace, peace and peace within and will truly progress spiritually."

The Namavali describes the glory of [Shriji] Maharaj; everything is included in that. Reciting the Namavali will dispel all miseries and one will attain paramount bliss."



Mahant Swami Maharaj offering Arti

Shri Swaminarayan Arti

Inspired by

Pragat Brahmaswarup Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj

Introduction and Explanation

Jay Swaminarayan – jai Akshar Purushottam

Akshar Purushottam jay, darshan sarvottam....Jai Swaminarayan

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you!

O Akshar Purushottam Praise to you!

O Akshar Purushottam! Praise to you!

Your darshan is supreme...

Mukta anant supujit, sundar sakaram,

Sarvopari karunakar, manav tanudharam... Jay Swaminarayan...1

He [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] is worshiped by countless muktas (liberated souls), possesses a [divine] form and is splendid.

He, who is supreme and bestows compassion [on all],

Manifested [on earth] with a [divine] human form...1

Purushottam Parabrahma, Shri Hari Sahajanand,

Aksharbrahma anadi, Gunatitanand...Jay Swaminarayan...2

Purushottam Parabrahma is Shri Hari Sahajanand,

The eternal Aksharbrahma is Swami Sahajanand...2

Dharma ekantik sthapak, bhakt paritrata...Jay Swaminarayan...3

[Bhagwan Swaminarayan] is always manifest, the all doer,
and the bestower of ultimate liberation.

He is the establisher of ekantik dharma and

the protector of bhakti (devotion)...3

Dasbhav divyata saha, brahmarupe priti,

Suhradbhav alaukik, sthakit shubh riti... Jay Smarinarayan...4

Servitude with [an understanding of all to be] divine,

Offering [loving] devotion upon becoming brahmarup,

and divine amity;

[these] auspicious means he established...4

Dhanya dhanya mam jivan, tav sharane sufalam,

Yagnapurush pravartit, siddhantam sukhadam...
Jay Swaminarayan....5

Jay Swaminarayan, Jay Akshar Purushottam,
O [Akshar-Purushottam] My life is blessed! It has become fruitful at
your feet

This doctrine [established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and] propagated
by Yagnapurush [Shastriji Maharaj],
bestows ultimate happiness.

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you! O Akshar-Purushottam!
Praise to you!
O Swaminarayan! Praise to you!...5

Jay Swaminarayan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam, Jay Swaminarayan.

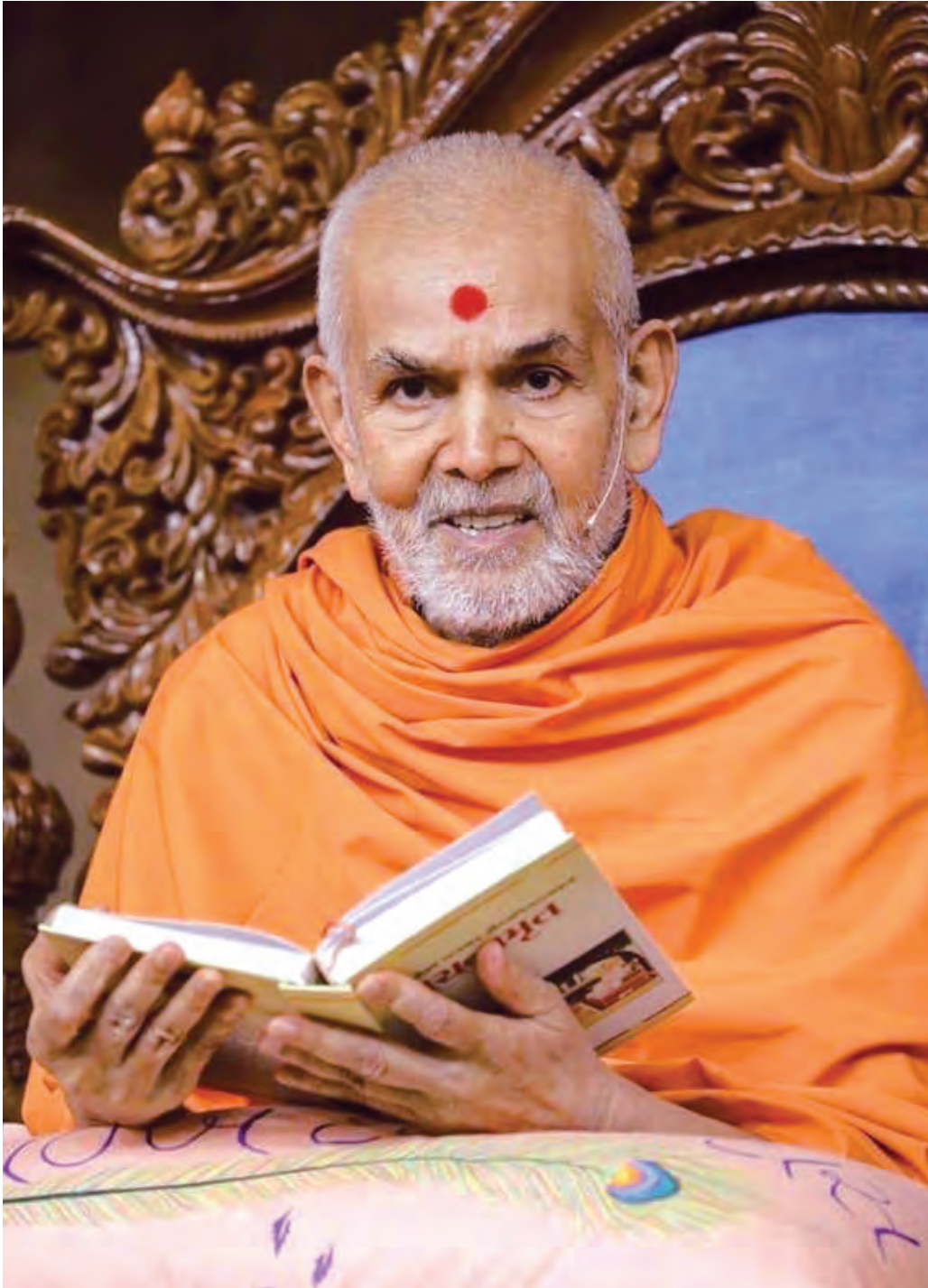
Shikshapatri

“Follow Shikshapatri says Mahant Swami, “the path laid down by Bhagwan Swami Narayan.

Having observed the decline in morality and social harmony, Bhagwan Swaminarayan worked for many years to improve the situation. He tried to improve the life style of followers and was successful; Shikshapatri is a distillation of this experience. It is in changing the attitude. It is also the primary scriptures of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It provides a framework on which moral, social and spiritual integration of a family and that society can be achieved. Its 212 verses provide a summary of duties for one and all and is both rational and progressive.

It reveals that devotion to God, righteous living, detachment from worldly pleasures and a knowledge of one’s true form as the atma (soul) is vital for spiritual progress.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan guided his devotees in matters of health, hygiene, dress, diet, etiquette, diplomacy, finance, education, friendships, morality, habits, penance, religious duties, celebrations and other areas. The codes are applicable to devotees of all stages and walks of life – young or old; men or women; married, unmarried or widowed; householder or sadhu. Devotees need to remain constantly aware of their duties. Bhagwan Swaminarayan therefore guided them to read Shikshapatri daily. Thus, even today, thousands throughout the world sincerely live life as laid down in the





Sadhus in Meditation

Shikshapatri. Written originally in Sanskrit verse, early manuscripts of the scripture were with commentaries in Gujarati. The first English translation was published by Professor Monier-Williams, Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University. The Shikshapatri has been published in 29 languages”.

Vachanamrut

The Vachanamrut is a compilation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s teachings from 273 discourses. The discourses are similar to that of the Upanishads in which dialogues occur between the guru and pupils.

Gunatitanand Swami says:

- “Maharaj has uttered much about his innermost secrets, wishes and principles (siddhants) in the Vachanamrut. One should focus one’s attention on these and imbibe them.”
- “The Vachanamruts contain the essence of the four Vedas, six-shastras and eighteen Purans. In these Maharaj has elucidated the principles. Hence one should study them.”

Shri H.T.Dave, the renowned BAPS scholar says:

“The Vachanamrut supremely elucidates true Vedantic understanding, discusses the gist of the four Vedas, expounds on the twelve Vedic Mahavakyas, discusses the interdependence of Samkhya, Yog, Vedant and Panchratra texts, describes the necessity of Samkhyanishta and Yognishtha to attain atma-realization, and reveals the constant manifestation of God – realized Satpurush who demonstrates bhagwat dharma, is the gateway to moksha and is the spiritual guide for devotees. The shastra also expounds on ekantik dharma comprising dharma, jnan, vairagya and bhakti, the spiritual state of Gunatit, the manifest (pragat) Gunatit Satpurush – who is the medium to attaining the gunatit state, Parabrahman Paramatma and his abode Brahmadham, and principles which aid the aspirant to attain atyantik moksha – ultimate liberation.

The Vachanamrut is the principal scripture of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It is a compilation of 273 spiritual discourses delivered by Bhagwan Swaminarayan from 1819 to 1829. It is a spiritual text filled with infallible logic, illuminating analogies and metaphors, and divine revelations that provide philosophical and practical answers to the deepest mysteries and questions of life. The Vachanamrut will enlighten all seekers about overcoming anger, understanding the nature of God, eradicating jealousy, knowing the

company one keeps, recognizing a true guru or developing faith in God. It is the essence of the Hindu scriptures based on the spiritual knowledge, deep spiritual insights and practical experience of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Supreme Reality Himself.

Satsang Diksha Mukhpath

Satsang Diksha Shastra is in Sanskrit. It consists of 315 Shloks'. It is a shastra of explaining people of Yagna and Agna revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is written by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Mahant Swami suggested that young devotees may like to recite this. The Youth were inspired by Swamishri to introduce this in their life-style by memorising all 315 shloks. In response to call - more 3100 Yuvak - boys and girls- "yuvak and yuvtis" participated in felicitation ceremony 18-20 February 2021. The entire event was on web-on-air. 300 yuvaks and yuvatis recited this. Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "At present you are 300 but many will follow you and there will be thousands like you." They were from all over India and abroad.

This started with initial on time registration of 5181 boys and 3664 girls 14 to 40 years of age. The programme started on 18 February 2021 - with assembly of all participants. Atmaswarup Swami introduced the concept developed by Mahant Swami Maharaj who wrote Satsang Diksha Shashtra. The selected 300 yuvaks devoutly sang verses of the Satsang Diksha in unison before Swamishri and the atmosphere become divine. .

It is not easy to remember and correctly recite all the shloks in Sanskrit while being occupied with day to day activities throughout. On the other hand, the youth enhanced their working hours and reduced rest and leisure time. It needed concentration, determination and continuing to have strong will - as one tends to forget or miss but all did this with great enthusiasm, devotion and powerful force which got generated within them for doing this. Swamishri blessed them all. Trophies, certificates, Prasad and mementoes were given. As for Diksha Swamishri said, "I am a Sadhu. I have God. I give you God. I have prayed for you all to be always blessed and resolute with inner strength."

Thereafter, the continuously burning divo (lamp) of Akshar Deri was brought before Swamishri. Using its flame, Swamishri lit the divo to initiate the undertaking that all should use the brahmavidya learnt by memorizing the



Satsang Diksha to further reveal the glory of Akshar-Purushottam.

After the arti, as the jai naad echoed everywhere, Swamishri and the sadhus in Nenpur all waved large BAPS flags in celebration. Simultaneously, all the youth joined in the celebration by waving small BAPS flags at their homes.

Before departing from the assembly, Swamishri made an impromptu announcement, instructing all sadhus, parshads and sadhaks watching from their respective mandirs to offer dandvats to all the youths as a mark of honour for their outstanding achievement.

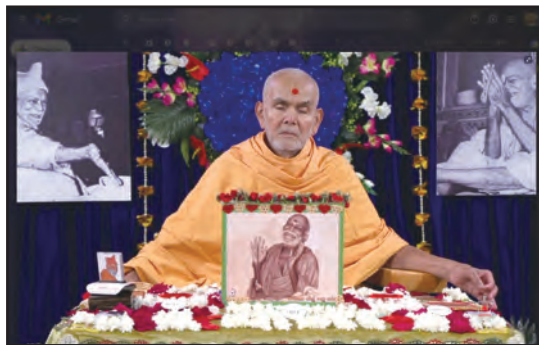
Thus, with hearts full of joy and divine memories etched for a lifetime, the youths revelled in the knowledge that Swamishri was truly pleased with their devout efforts.

Benefits Experienced

Through their hard work and desire to please Mahant Swami Maharaj, the participants experienced many personal benefits. The following are some of their experiences:

- Developed a habit to introspect in any situation to decide how to act.
- Consolidated the understanding that God is the all-doer.
- Resolved to read the Vachnamrut and Swamini Vato daily
- Realized the great fortune in having the opportunity to serve the satsang.
- Inspired not to miss Ekadashi.
- Gained the inner strength to cope up with family and other situation.
- Developed the confidence to attempt and achieve difficult tasks.
- Learned how to interact with others in a more mutually beneficial way.
- Developed more patience.
- Reduced expectations of being praised and egoistic feelings.
- Realized the power of Sanskrit to increase memory.
- Developed ability to remain calm in stressful situations.
- Better able to focus during meditation and puja.

- Realized that whatever God does is ultimately for our benefit.
- Experienced the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj in one's life. .
- Feeling of great joy for having fulfilled Swamishri's wish.
- Learnt how to effectively use time to be more productive.
- Developed a clearer and deeper understanding of Satsang principles.



Pearls of Inspiration

Brief Teaching of Mahant Swami Maharaj

Power of Thinking

By believing others as good for nothing and foolish, then God makes us like that. We become what we think about others. Therefore, we must perceive all to be divine and God's devotees.

Outcome of Fault-Finding

One who finds faults (abhav) in others definitely bears the outcome. What outcome? His intellect becomes corrupt and he gets bad thoughts.

Dissolving Negativity

The ways to dissolve a negative attitude are to cultivate the spirit 'in the joy of others lies our own' and to have nirdosh buddhi (perceive all as pure and faultless) for all.

Harmony First

By expressing samp (unity) only when others do so, then, there will be no end to conflict. Such an [attitude] results in our ruin. So, [to create or maintain samp] we should think about: what we can do, what type of thoughts we should have and the words we should say. Do not look at what others do or not do. We should express samp (unity) from our side.

Total Success

Q: What is total success?

A: To experience the highest peace within.

Benefits of Harmony

The benefits of working harmoniously are tremendous: one progresses immensely, attains colossal [inner] development and the country becomes happier. However, when a person fights, he destroys everything.

Vivekjivandas Swamishri

Solution to Family Woes

Q: How to resolve family problems and experience peace?

A: Try to understand each other.

Message for Kids

Q: What message do you have for kids?

A: Study intensely.

Four Principles

When someone errs tell him with politeness [vivek], with humility [namrata], by believing him to be yours [potana mani ne] and for the good of his soul [jiva nu rudu thay].

Stability of Mind

Q: Our minds are wavering. What should we do to attain stability of mind?

A: Do satsang. It takes 20 years to become a graduate. Likewise, one has to be patient in this, have faith and associate with sadhus [sant samagam].

Divine Mind

Q: What should we do to make our mind divine?

A: Engage in positive or wholesome thoughts. If a negative thought arises then flush it out instantly, because it will destroy you. However, once the mind becomes divine, problems will not affect you.

Types of Mind

Three Types of Mind:

1. An ordinary mind thinks of may not think. It does everything that comes its way.
2. A divine mind [inspires] good actions.
3. An evil mind never ever thinks of good thoughts; it thinks of spoiling things.

One Command

Q: Which agna [command] of yours should the youth follow so that you are fully pleased with them?

A: Observe niyams [moral rules].

Peace or Unease

One who sees his own faults [and makes efforts to remove them] will attain peace. But one who sees others' faults is a sinner and experiences unease.

Absolute Peace

By practising samp, suhrudbhav and ekta one attains Bhagwan's abundant rajipo. One experiences absolute peace. Whereas, finding faults in others [avgun] is like trash: one becomes agitated and causes agitation in others.

Bowing to Others

In satsang, you have to learn to bow down to others and not make others bow down to you. Also, understand others to be greater than you, and believe yourself to be insignificant.

Humility Binds All Virtues

Humility is a binding force. On attaining it, all other virtues remain bound and packed together. However, without humility, all virtues exit one after the other and one becomes empty and barren.

Keep Positive Company

Keep away from the company of one who is critical of others, because he will spoil your intellect [buddhi]. Like a rotten potato that spoils another potato by its association keep away from such a person.

ABC of Satsang

The ABC of satsang is to realize one's atma to be different from the body. Only thereafter will all of one's spiritual works be accomplished. As long as one's body and atma are entwined with each other no efforts [for moksha] will bear fruit.

Fruit of Satsang

What is the purpose of a mango tree? To produce mangoes. The purpose of a banana plant is to give bananas. Similarly, have you thought about the fruit of doing satsang? To be redeemed of dehabhiman [attachment and ego for one's body] and to believe that one is not the body but the atma.

Thakorji's Darshan

Q: What do you think about while doing Thakorji's darshan?

A: That God has showered his abundant grace upon us. He has given us a great spiritual association. So, I offer my thanks to him. I do darshan of him with the fullest concentration and eye contact.

Complete Faith

Q: How can one know that one has complete faith in Bhagwan and Guru?

A: One experiences inner joy. One remains stable no matter how much turbulence arises externally.

Vivek

To know one's base nature [swabhav] is vivek [spiritual discretion] and to dissolve the base nature is param vivek [highest spiritual discretion].

Solutions to Problems

A devotee of God should enter the domain of soul-power and the power of God's glory. Then, many problems will be solved. Physical power, intellectual power and other powers are of no use [in solving acute issues].

Kesar Mango

Q: How to get happiness from Satsang?

A: Swamishri showed a kesar mango and said, "Yogi Bapa used to say that by perceiving virtues in all, one will experience sweetness in life like the juice of kesar mangoes. By seeing good traits in others, having mahima and divyabhav one will experience intense joy. But when one sees faults in others one's life turns sour."

Dreams

Q: When you close your eyes to sleep what do you see in your dreams?

A: God's murti, devotees and sadhus.

Triveni Sangam

Swaminarayan Akshardham – New Delhi

A Triveni Sangam of Knowledge, Spirituality and Science

Swaminarayan Akshardham portrays the essence of India's glorious heritage in all its facets: spirituality, wisdom, art, architecture and science. It celebrates the past, addresses the present and shapes the future. It inspires all towards faith in God, peace and happiness, integrity and national pride. It is a testimony of volunteerism, talent and spiritual faith. Three hundred million hours of skilled and voluntary effort went into accomplishing the project in five years.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the inspirer, said "Akshardham is a place of faith and peace. It inspires, enriches and provides strength to mankind in its endeavour towards eternal happiness". It is a Triveni Sangam of knowledge, spirituality, and science and technology.

The former President, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, expressed that "Swaminarayan Akshardham, a new major centre of worship, has added glory to Indian culture and faith.

"But who is the creator? The creator we saw in the giant film theatre. A child wading through rivers, climbing over the snow-tipped Himalayas, slips and slips and then climbs and climbs, walking across the nation and discovering the cradle of India's civilization. Who is this child? Can you remember the child? Oh! That is the divine child, the child Swaminarayan. The Akshardham has become a place of education, experience and enlightenment. It creatively blends the traditional stone art and architecture, Indian culture and civilization, ancient values and wisdom and the best of modern media and technology. Multiple layers of this complex express the strength of the mind, will power of the human being, indomitable spirit, flowering kindness, fusion of scientific and medical talent, myriad colour of varied cultures and ultimately the power of knowledge. In essence, it is a dynamic complex with lively images.

Mandir

It is built with beautiful pink sandstone and white marble. The monument is 141 ft. high, 316 ft long. It is built without steel. It consists of 234 ornately carved pillars, 9 ornate domes, 20 quadrangle shikhars. It has a spectacular Gajendra Peeth (i.e., plinth of stone elephants) and 20,000 murtis and statues of India's great sadhus, devotees, acharyas and divine incarnations on its outer walls.

Swaminarayan Mandapam

Seated in the inner sanctum (Swaminarayan Mandapam is the beautiful 11-feet high, gold-planed murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, alongwith the Guru Parampara, namely Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The deities of Sanatan Dharma: Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Lakshmi-Narayan, Shri Shiv-Parvaati, avatars, and the four Chaturvyuh and 24 Keshav murtis of God are very prominent.

Paramhansa Mandapam

The Paramhansa Mandapam is 72 ft high. It is a grand, ornately carved dome. It has the murtis of the paramhansas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The four-sided and eightsided pillars are called the "Swastik Sthambhas". The pillars are carved with ornate murtis of the 24 different forms of Lord Keshav.

Ghanshyam Mandapam

The Ghanshyam Mandapam rests on eight pillars. It has a 38 ft wide saucer shaped dome that is 32 ft above the ground. The dome has a peacock design with a delicate murti of Ghanshyam Maharaj, the childform of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, at its centre. The pillars have beautiful carvings depicting the childhood incidents of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Lila Mandapam

The Lila Mandapam is 72 ft. high. On its four-faced pillars are carvings portraying stories from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as a child, teenager and in his later years.

Neelkanth Mandapam

At the age of eleven, Bhagwan Swaminarayan renounced his home and became known as Neelkanth Varni. He undertook a seven-year pilgrimage of India on foot. One finds the fascinating stories of Neelkanth carved on



Musical Fountain, Akshardham New Delhi

Ceremonial worship of water collected from 120 sacred rivers of India





Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's visit to Akshardham, New Delhi

the eight-sided pillars and saucer-shaped ornate dome that is 32 ft. above the ground. At the dome center lies the delicate and beautiful murti of Neelkanth Varni.

Smruti Mandapam

From 1781 to 1830 Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired new confidence in Sanatan Dharma. To show his life and work on earth, a replica of his footprints are displayed here in the Smruti Mandapam. Other relics displayed are his hair, mala, clothes and other objects, that serve as reminders of his presence on earth more than 200 years ago.

Sahajanand Mandapam

It has eight-sided ornate pillars supporting a saucer-shaped dome, 32 ft high. In its centre lies a beautiful stone murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Sahajanand Swami). He is seated beneath a sprawling neem tree. He became spiritual head at the age of only 21. At the age of 25, he initiated 500 scholarly and pious paramhansas. As a tribute to them, the mandapams and pillars of Akshardham have 500 marble murtis of the paramhansas.

Bhakta Mandapam

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, through his inspiration, elevated countless people, from the downtrodden to the Brahmin classes. Representing some of his thousands of noble devotees 148 murtis are displayed on the pillars of the 72 ft-high Bhakta Mandapam.

Purushottam Mandapam

In the Purushottam Mandapam one finds the beautiful marble murtis of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and divine devotees (muktas).

Mandovar

The ornate external wall of Swaminarayan Akshardham mandir is known as the mandovar.

The intricately carved mandovar is 611 ft long and 310 ft high. It comprises 200 sculptured stone figures of great rushis, sadhus, devotees, acharyas and divine incarnations. It is made of different levels: gajstar, sinhstar, vyalstar, kumbhastar, kalashstar, gavakshstar, jingha and chhajja. The kumbhstar includes 48 ornately carved murtis of Shri Ganeshji in different poses.

The mandovar at its base level is called jagati. In this layer one finds carvings of living things from our world. First, there is an elephant,

which is a symbol of strength, then the lion that symbolizes bravery and ferocity. Thereafter, one finds the vyal animal (an extinct Pauranic bird) that was renowned for speed. In the subsequent layers one finds carvings of flowers that symbolize beauty and fragrance. In the middle part of the mandovar one finds sculptures of the divine incarnations of God, sages, devas, acharyas and devotees.

Narayan Peeth

The top pradakshina of the mandir is called the Narayan Peeth. Here, beautiful bronze relief panels illustrate divine incidents from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The three panels, each 60 ft long, show Bhagwan Swaminarayan discoursing under the neem tree in Gadhadra, celebrating festivals and travelling by various means to reform and elevate people morally and spiritually.

Gajendra Peeth

The Gajendra Peeth, is the lower pradakshina featuring stories and legends of elephants with nature, man and the Divine. It is unique and captivating. It is ornately carved in pink stone stretching for 1,070 ft. The peeth pays tribute to elephants, symbolizing the entire animal kingdom. The displays reflect the messages of social harmony, peace and spiritual faith.

Narayan Sarovar

The Narayan Sarovar is a holy lake that surrounds the main Akshardham mandir. It contains holy waters from 151 rivers and lakes from all around the country, including Mansarovar. Narayan Sarovar has 108 gaumukhs, symbolizing 108 names of God.

Parikrama

The parikrama (circumambulatory path) is considered as pathways to offer reverence and devotion to God. The two-storey Swaminarayan Akshardham Parikrama is made of red stone from Rajasthan, and comprises 1,152 pillars, 145 windows and 154 samvaran shikhars. Every window and gallery in the lower parikrama provides different, breathtaking views of the Akshardham mandir.

Exhibition Halls

Each of the three exhibition halls depict the cultural and spiritual heritage of India in a modern and scientific way:



Gajendra Pith, Akshardham, New Delhi



1. Hall of Values (Sahajanand Darshan)

The principal theme of sculpting one's life for happiness, success and peace of mind is portrayed by a statue of a man sculpting himself. The exhibits portray the universal messages of ahimsa, endeavour, prayer, morality, vegetarianism, family harmony, etc., through film shows, 3-D dioramas and audio-animatronics presentations from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

2. Giant Screen Theatre (Neelkanth Darshan)

An epic film portrays the exciting and inspiring pilgrimage of the child-yogi, Neelkanth Varni, in late 18th Century India. It was shot in 108 locations, from the icy peaks of the Himalayas in the north to the pristine shores of Kerala in the South. The film depicts India's holy places, festivals and spiritual traditions on a giant screen that is over six storey high.

3. Boat Ride (Sanskriti Vihar)

A spectacular 12 minute boat ride experience through 10,000 years of India's glorious heritage:

- Witness the world's oldest village life and bazaar in Vedic India.
- Sail through Takshashila – the world's first university.
- Journey through the labyrinth of ancient discoveries and inventions by the great rushi-scientists of India, whose contributions to the world include zero gravitational law, aviation, plastic surgery, ayurveda and many others.

Murti of Neelkanth Varni

A beautiful 27 ft-high bronze murti of Neelkanth Varni stands in a determined and inspiring pose outside the large format film theatre.

Musical Fountain (Yagnapurush Kund)

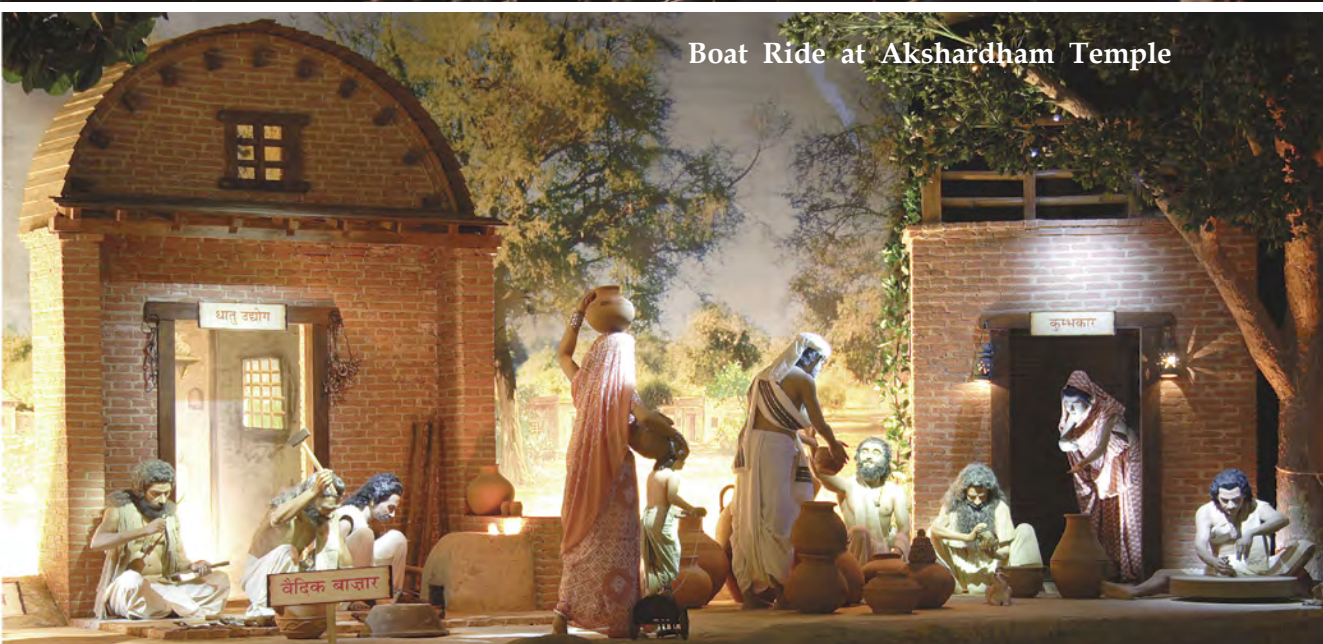
The Yagnapurush Kund is a combination of a Vedic yagna kund and a musical fountain. It has been so named after the founder of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and the 3rd successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Swami Yagnapurushdasji Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. The large yagna kund measures 300 ft x 300 ft, and has 2,870 steps and 108 shrines. In its centre lies the lotus shaped yagna kund. At night, the centre comes to life with a colourful musical water fountain show that echoes the Vedic sentiments of India. The musical water fountain is entertaining and breathtaking in all its beautiful colours, water patterns and messages.



Hall of Values



Giant Screen Theatre



Boat Ride at Akshardham Temple

Gardens of India (Bharat Upvan)

Bharat Upvan is a magnificent garden with a cultural ambience. It has manicured lawns, lush gardens and wonderful bronze statues of great role models of India. India's child gems, valorous warriors, freedom fighters, national figures and great women personalities inspire visitors with values and pride for our great nation.

Swaminarayan Akshardham is thus the Triveni Sangam confluences of spirituality, knowledge and technology.

There is a story about the famous scientist Galileo. Traditionally, it was widely and firmly believed that the Earth was flat and that Sun moved around it. But Galileo did not believe in that. His passionate curiosity provoked him to conduct research on this, which finally revealed that the Earth is round and not flat and that it moves around the Sun. When he made this proclamation the orthodox religious leaders did not like. He was told to retract his statement or face the direct consequences. Galileo took back his statement, but history proved him to be right. Such events have led to believe that science and religion did not match. They are two separate ways to view the world and life and even facts. Whenever there was a cry against religious dictates on the grounds of scientific reasons they say, "Do not bring religion into scientific theory and vice versa." This kind of thinking prevails even today in many walks of life.

Says Mahant Swami Maharaj -

"Akshardham have a different vision of religion for the modern world. It inspires people to believe in spirituality based on logic and actual self-realized practice. The use of science, technology and knowledge with spirituality creates a "Triveni Sangam" for the benefit of mankind. Such a Triveni Sangam develops a strong future generation that can face the unknown challenges of the millennia. Akshardham is such Triveni Sangam.

*This is the contribution of Yug Purush Pramukh Swami Maharaj to mankind."

The Trust

The Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

The first centre of BAPS was set up at Bochasan in 1907 in Anand District of Gujarat. On June 24, 1947, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj executed and registered a deed providing for the administration and management of the properties of Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. The deed was registered with the Sub-Registrar, Kaira on June 28, 1947. The deed provided for the management and administration of the trust. Therefore, it was submitted to the then Advocate General of Bombay C.K. Dafatari for approval and confirmation under Section 92 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. Ever since the Institution is being managed according to the terms of this deed. When the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950, was enacted, the trust was registered as a Public Trust on November 20, 1954. Thereafter, the head office was shifted to Ahmedabad and the Assistant Charity Commissioner, Ahmedabad registered it as a public trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act on February 2, 1977.

The organisation at that time was small. Its activities were fewer in number and the work was mostly confined to Gujarat. When the activity expanded it became necessary to make certain changes. These changes have been sanctioned by the Charity Commissioner. Similar trusts have been established in foreign countries where BAPS operates.

The main object of the trust is to undertake religious and charitable work and to advance education. Poverty eradication and promotion of social and cultural progress are the other important aims of the trust.

The organisation is democratic in character and has an inbuilt mechanism for addressing the needs of devotees, sadhus or even the trustees. It is the head of the organisation who is to resolve any disputes that may arise. His decision is final and binding on all.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj became the President of the sanstha in 1951. He was elevated to this status by his Guru, Shastriji Maharaj. Under his leadership and inspiration, the organisation has expanded. It has become today multi-national and multidimensional. The sanstha not only cares

for the spread of spirituality but also caters to the social needs of the community at large. So its work is a blend of spirituality and social service. It has confirmed the principle that “those who wish to sincerely serve society must be spiritually pure” and vice versa. Its current head is Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The aims of the organisation are to :

- i. Propagate and spread true learning and diffuse knowledge.
- ii. Establish and maintain dormitories, Gurukuls (schools), and Bal mandir (Kindergartens).
- iii. Promote general charitable objectives such as education, medical relief, alleviation of poverty and advancement of general public interest.
- iv. Set up youth, children’s, women’s and adult centres, including hostels, educational centers, etc.
- v. Promote environmental, medical, social, cultural and economic activities.
- vi. Eradicate illiteracy and addictions.
- vii. Promote morality, character and value-based life and propagate principles of religion.
- viii. Propagate public religious worship.
- ix. Construct temples and Harimandirs.
- x. Promote peace, harmony and tolerance.
- xi. Promote charitable activities through :
 1. Alleviation of poverty and help for the weaker sections of society.
 2. Education
 3. Medical and health service
 4. Any other activity to help people in general
 5. Publication of literature and propagation through multimedia channels.

Within the organisation a delivery systems exists to achieve these aims :
These comprise :-

- i. A worldwide volunteer force of more than 55,000, 160 regular activities for social betterment.
- ii. Special Disaster Relief Projects for earthquakes, floods, famines, fire, etc.
- iii. Financial assistance for education and medication.
- iv. Over 9,000 centers and many programmes for the development of youth and children.
- v. Hospitals, healthcare centers and medical camps.
- vi. Cultural programmes, seminars, conventions and conferences for cultural and religious harmony.
- vii. Centers for better educational facilities and development of tribes with hostels.

It was a firm administrative structure to run the organisation on a day to day basis. The decision-making process is decentralized. Every centre is autonomous in its daily activities. But there is a firm uniform chart of certain basic activities to be carried out. It has participative management system.

The following is the basic structure of the organisation :

- i. Board of Trustees
- ii. International body of representatives
- iii. National committees
- iv. Regional committees
- v. Local level committees
- vi. Special committees on need basis

i. Board of Trustees:

The Board of Trustees consists of twenty-one members. It includes ascetic and householder members. Ascetic member would mean a saint (sadhu) who is a lifetime celibate and totally devoted to achieve the aims and objectives of the organisation. A householder member would mean a married person or unmarried person who is not an ascetic. He serves the institution on

a voluntary basis. Mahant Swami Maharaj is the President of the Trust.

ii. International Body of Representatives:

This body guides the organisation at the international level. Decisions are taken at meetings convened at least once a year. This international body consists of BAPS trustees and representatives of major centres from India and overseas.

iii. National Committees:

National Committees of different nations constantly interact and guide the Board of Trustees for international work. These committees are responsible for charitable work in the particular country. The members meet regularly to fine-tune activities according to the geographical, cultural and demographical needs of the people.

iv. Regional and Local Committees:

Regional and Local Management Committees for men and women in different cities and regions oversee the day-to-day activities. They provide feedback to the higher-ups in the committees. All these committees take decisions independently in their day-to-day activities. They however keep in mind the broad objectives of the sanstha and its policy.

v. Need basis Special Committees :

The Board of Trustees form special committees on need basis for special projects like earthquake or famine relief, celebration of festivals or exhibitions. Such committees function till the project is completed as per the directives of the Board of Trustees. The entire Body, working through the above management teams, is cohesive. It functions smoothly to achieve the goals.

The current status of various important activities is as under:

But the numbers are growing everyday.

International Centers

- 3,300 centres in India, USA, UK, Europe, Africa, Pacific, Middle East
- 7,215 weekly assemblies for men and women, youths and teenagers.
- 5,400 weekly assemblies for children's

Worldwide volunteers

- 55,000 volunteers
- 12,000,000 annual volunteer-hours in service

Moral & Cultural Activities

- 630,000 annual satsang assemblies
- 34 million visitors to cultural festival in India, UK, USA, Africa.
- 554,790 students have appeared in the international cultural examinations.

Medical Activities

- 8 hospitals and healthcare clinics.
- 415,000 patients treated annually
- 76 medico-spiritual conferences have enlightened over 20,000 doctors.

Educational Activities

- 31 permanent educational institutions serve over 11,000 students.
- Over 5,000 scholarships awarded annually.
- 55 schools built in disaster-hit regions.

Environmental Activities

- Millions of trees and shrubs planted in thousands of villages.
- Thousands of water conservation project in hundreds of villages.
- Thousands of tonnes of paper collected for recycling annually.

Social Activities

- 33 disaster relief operations managed successfully.
- 50,000 family inspired to hold daily Family Assemblies.
- Over two million people inspired for quitting addictions.

Tribal Activities

- 800 permanent centres for tribal upliftment.
- Thousands of tribal families have given up addictions and superstitions.
- 9 mobile medical clinics treat 250,000 tribal vilalgas annually.

Sadhus meditating with Swamishri



Spiritual Activities

- Over 700 BAPS mandirs worldwide.
- Thousands of pilgrims visit BAPS mandirs daily.
- Over 1000 sadhus.

The above number and each activity is multiplying day by day. In order to understand the reasons behind the success of the organisation, it is useful to know how sadhus are trained and volunteers are motivated to work devotedly, without self-interest.

The Sadhu Tradition

Mandirs, scriptures and sadhus are recognised as the pillars of Hindu culture and tradition. BAPS preserves and promotes all three. The Gurus – Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and now Mahant Swami Maharaj have promoted new temples all over India and across the world and made holy scriptures in meaningful way more popular. They have inspired the tradition of pure sadhus and initiated and created a unique cadre of sadhus of BAPS throughout the world.

Very strict but public-oriented code of conduct for the sadhus exists to keep them pure and oriented towards public good. This is as under:

Nishkam:

8 fold celibacy - absolute brahmacharya.

Nirlobh :

Total renunciation of wealth and worldly possession, (not to touch money, not to keep money or have others keep them on one's behalf)

Nisswad:

The idea behind this rule is to keep one's palate in control by mixing food in a wooden bowl and then adding water before eating.

Nissneh:

To become non-attached to anyone or anything other than God. Renunciation of one's native place and near relatives.

Nirman:

Non-ego, be humble and serve everyone.

In short, all sadhus have to strictly practise the above five rules.

How a sadhu is trained

To guide and train the sadhus, a training centre for sadhus has been established at Salangpur in Ahmedabad District.

Satsangi youths who wish to become sadhus, initially spend 12 to 18 months as sadhaks (novices) at the centre. For this, youths aged 21 or over are given entry every December and March. During this initial period, they wear a 'jhabho' and 'dhotiyu' – the Indian traditional dress for man. Throughout the year, they engage in various services (seva), study Holy Scriptures study the Swamini vato, Vachanamrut, Shikhapatri, (Discourses of Aksharbramha Gunatitanand Swami), memorise kirtans and study other topics related to modern world and science also. They are given guidance regarding service and austerities. During this time, sadhaks observe the vows of a sadhu, except that in certain circumstances they can meet and visit their family members. During this intense training a sadhak has the opportunity to strengthen his wish to become a sadhu. At the end of this initial training, and with the written consent of his parents, they are initiated into the Parshad order.

On receiving this initiation, the Parshad wears white robes and stitched clothing is renounced. His head is clean shaven, except for a small 'shikha' (tuft of hair) and he is given a 'janoi'.

Even in this 'Paarshad' stage, training is continued. During this period the Vachanamrut (discourses of Bhagwan Swaminarayan) and the lives of all Gurus are studied in detail. Besides this, service and austerities also continue. The Vedas, the Puranas, Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagwat, Bhagvad Gita, Mahabharat, and other Hindu scriptures and world religions are studied. English, Hindi, Sanskrit and other languages are also taught. In addition instruction is given in music, art, science, modern technology and other creative subjects. Together with these studies, regular religious service and austerities continue.

After about 12-18 months, the 'Bhagwati Diksha' is given to the parshads. They now wear saffron robes. They are given a new name.

The daily routine of sadhus living in the training centre commences at 4-00 a.m. in the early morning. While remembering God, they bathe and perform personal puja. Then they attend the mangala arti at 5-45 a.m. from 6-00 a.m. various services begin: cleaning the mandir compound, making flower garlands for the deities, cutting vegetables, preparing meals, performing mahapuja, adorning the deities, cleaning the ashram, etc.

At 7-15 a.m. all attend the shangar arti. After the arti bhajans are sung describing and praising God. Then after breakfast, at 8-00 a.m., the morning discourse is held.

For one hour, experienced senior sadhus deliver discourses based on the Vachanamrut giving guidance and inspiration regarding the life of a sadhu.

Between 9-00 a.m. and 12-00 noon study classes, based on the syllabus, are held in the 'Yagnapurush Sanskrit Vidyalay' in the mandir premises. At 12-00 noon, lunch served, sadhus eat in a small wooden bowl. While the food is being served, everyone chants the 'Swaminarayan' mahamantra aloud. Then Vedic prayers are recited in unison before eating.

At 12-30 p.m. discourses are held daily in the assembly hall. There after the sadhus engage in personal study. At 4-00 p.m. all gather in the assembly hall for meditation. Scriptures are read. From 4-30 to 6-30, study classes are held. At 7-30 p.m. the sandhya arti is performed. At 8-00 p.m. dinner is served. At 8-45 p.m. the evening assembly commences. For one hour devotional songs are sung by sadhaks, parshads and sadhus.

Then they return to their rooms. After spending an hour in personal study, they retire for the night. Sadhus use a thin mattress for bedding. They sleep in the common dormitories or on the terrace, depending on the weather. Nobody has a separate room.

All these activities strengthen harmony between the sadhus. Despite hailing from different regions, countries and educational backgrounds, they blend with one another in perfect harmony.

The sadhus regularly observe between 5 and 7 waterless fasts every month. Many eat only once a day. They also undertake other difficult austerities, such as, dharnapama, chandrayan, khatras, taptakruchh, etc.

After completing 5 years in the training centre, Mahant Swami Maharaj assigns the sadhus to the various BAPS mandirs to engage in a variety of services. At over 500 mandirs, sadhus actively manage over 160 humanitarian services, including social, educational, moral, cultural, spiritual activities.

There are doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, and post graduates. There are graduates in science, commerce, arts, computers, management, law and other faculties. Some are graduates from prestigious universities such as Harvard and Oxford.

They are from different countries like USA, Canada, England and Africa. The youths, raised in a Western environment, have willingly accepted the strict vows and disciplines of a sadhu.

This cadre of learned and dedicated sadhus, seek to attain spiritual liberation and serve society. Since the wisdom of these sadhus bring inner peace, their lives exemplify the true ideals of India's noble sadhu tradition. They are responsible for motivating devotees in the Centers and inculcating spiritual values in life. They also work for organising day to day activities and major events and mobilization of resources. They are required to travel from one centre to another periodically. During their stay at the center, they are required to visit villages and meet their devotees by making personal home-visits. They also take an interest in children and youth during the visits and motivate them to visit the temple and teach them spiritual values in life.

The volunteers

Volunteers are devotees who want to serve the aims of the organisation apart from doing prayer or Darshan. Not all the devotees come out for social service. But there are many who participate. Some temporarily, others on long term basis. There is no compulsion to become a volunteer. It is simply due to personal motivation, a desire to fulfill something in life, which normally Grahasthi life (personal individual family life) does not provide. Shastriji Maharaj had initiated this and Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj expanded the role of volunteers. The Mahant Swami Maharaj made this further broad spectrum. A code of conduct in this regard – is developed and followed at all centers. This is presented as a dialogue between Swamishri and a devotee – aspiring to be a volunteer.

Question: After becoming satsangis and serving God day and night, we are still experiencing ups and downs in our worldly life. And often our family and social work is spoilt or comes to a halt. Why does this happen ?

Swamishri: Maharaj says that a devotee of God who has sought refuge at the feet of God has no troubles at all. He is free from the influence of kal, karma and maya. Worldly souls experience misery due to their karmas. Devotees of God encounter misery due to lapses in the observance of God's commands. We may not be aware of it but mistakes are made due to our deep-rooted desires and so difficulties are faced. These miseries have to be accepted. Miseries, hardship or problems arise in many ways

but God is testing to see if his devotee has staunch faith in Him. Dada Khachar was a great devotee. He gave everything of his to Maharaj and served Maharaj and his devotees with tremendous mahima. Yet Maharaj tested him and he lost his property. That by which he served Maharaj, the sadhus and devotees, and that by which he earned his livelihood, all that property was lost. His income stopped. Still, Dada Khachar did not feel that the difficulty was due to having refuge in Maharaj. No such thought, that Maharaj was testing him. In the past, devotees have been tested - Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, the Pandavas, etc. Those who are really true devotees are tested. Others are not. Even amid the difficulties, if one remains firm, then there will be no problems, what Maharaj has asked for is proper and he looks at it in that way. Those who pass the test have no worries.

Question: We serve in festivals, etc. to please God and as return we get the grant of Akshardham. Is this for sure?

Swamishri: God has come to give Akshardham to everyone. He is sure, but we have doubts.

Question: Now what we have to do? For how long do we have to please God ?

Swamishri: Until you shed this body you have to please God. When you marry, do you not have to sustain it for life? Do you not have to raise your children? You have to do it as long as you live. Until you become brahmarup you have to do this. Believe yourself to be fulfilled, but awareness has to be maintained so that no problems are encountered. Devotion and service to Maharaj has to be offered till the end.

The work of God should be followed with the same sincerity as one does one's worldly work. Like one does for the body, do for the atma, the soul. If your son earns a lot you are happy. Similarly the more you offer devotion, practice satsang, perform service, the more Maharaj is pleased. So, never feel satisfied. Continue to do as much as you can. The more you do the more one's swabhavs are controlled.

Question: This is for both sadhus and devotees - what should we become like ?

Swamishri: You have to become devotees of God. 'Nijatmanam brahmarupam' - when this state is achieved there will be no questions. Otherwise there will be disputes with each other. Questions will arise. One who is brahmarup

does not look at others' faults. He is engrossed only in the devotion and service he has to perform.

We want to become ideal. One who is perfect has no faults whatsoever. He desires only to worship God, please Him, understand His commands and act accordingly, karyakars need do nothing else. If you dwell on the faults of others no work is done. If a businessman goes around just looking at others, will his business flourish? If everyone is sincere and efficient in doing his own duty, there will be no problems. So, for sadhus or karyakars, there are no questions, one must resolve to work. One must resolve that one wants to serve. Whatever task is assigned, it must be done responsibly. It is our duty that the work assigned is done perfectly. Bal Mandal, Yuvak Mandal, Kishore Mandal- whatever duty is given, if it is done properly then will there be any questions? What you are doing is not a private or government job, it is service to God. Yogiji Maharaj used to say." This is Thakorji's job." So, this job should be properly performed. What do you understand from that? If karyakars carry out their work properly and responsibly, will any problems arise? Sadhus and karyakars have been assigned the work of Bal Mandal, Kishore Mandal and the Satsang Mandal. If everyone is alert in doing his own duties there will be no problems.

Question: In government jobs there is paperwork, the same is so in satsang. We all do the work but is there a need to fill in all these reports and forms ?

Swamishri: In your government jobs you do all this, don't you ? You have to inspect all the files, put them in order- isn't that a hassle ? Because you are paid, you do all that. A businessman has to appease his customers. So it is your responsibility to complete the paperwork sent to you. But if you do not complete and return the reports how can work proceed further ? You may feel that this job is not yet finished and more have arrived. You tackle questions at home or at work because you have determination. When you have a job, it carries responsibilities. We want to please God, so there can be no cheating in it. So, in each task, whatever paperwork is involved, you should spare time and do it properly and send it. Laziness in this will lead to a pile of work - if daily accounts are not written, there is a backlog. So remain alert, always. If there is constant awareness, then the work is done properly.

Question: We have many family and social obligation also. These we do

with enthusiasm and without having to be told. However, when it comes to satsang, we have to be reminded what work to do. Why is this so ?

Swamishri: In his talks, Gunatitanand Swami has said that the worldly path is not difficult since it is entrenched in the jiva from the beginning. That is why it is naturally followed. Does anybody have to guide us ? Do children have to be told to watch TV ? Even though they may not be studying in school, they know how to use a TV. This comes from within. Are there any colleges that teaches drinking alcohol ? Once drunk, that's it. It is because we have attachment to the worldly path that we follow it spontaneously. Whether anyone tells you or not, you take it as your responsibility to run your household. One's mind readily engages in such work, etc., but to engage it in devotion to God is difficult. And to understand this Gnan is difficult. Gnan is the knowledge of Atma and Paramatma; to become Aksharrup and worship Purushottam - that path of knowledge is difficult. One has to be repeatedly told to read the Vachanamrut, read Swami Vato, memorise them and kirtans. We have to go deep. Right to the base.

Question: Bapa, you have continuously served the Sanstha for years together. Never have you asked for facilities, or shown frustration or fatigue. We have never seen you yawn nor take a relaxing stretch. With what thoughts do you carry out this service ?

Swamishri: God has assigned this service, so it is done to please Him. All of you also do this, with great attention and care. You should have one aim - to please Him. You should have one aim-to please God. If you want to please other people in this world, you have to do the work they tell you to do. But this is for the bliss of the soul. Whatever gnan (knowledge) has been revealed to you is true. If this becomes engraved in your jiva then this knowledge will reach more people. You should not expect comforts. Do not look to see whether it is day or night. Everyone has understood this a little, so you all do this work. By sitting around, nothing is achieved. This work has to be done. Do not think it to be a burden. If one believes it to be one's great fortune then enthusiasm will be maintained. We do not want to deliver any false messages. If others do not understand, do not worry. But you should not hold back in talking of His glory. The knowledge we have attained, we should explain to others with enthusiasm because we want to please God. Since our birth we have pleased others-mother, father, wife, children, family, relatives, etc. This



Bhunga – A traditional house in Kutch style Built by BAPS



A school and houses for the Kutch Earth Quake Victims Built by BAPS





*BAPS Tsunami Appeal through special prayer meeting at Neasden Temple,
London with envoys of different countries*

time we want to please Shriji Maharaj and attain Akshardham. If this aim is firmly fixed, there will be no problems and you will feel what can be done to achieve it.

Resource Mobilisation:

This is extraordinary. All such temples need huge capital investment and later on there is a cost on maintenance. Similarly, all charitable activities, rehabilitation or relief work need resources. As narrated in the Neasden temple story or in earthquake relief work, this is all mobilised by devotees. There are all kind of donors. It is mass mobilisation of efforts and contribution, either by money or by time. No name plate gets affixed even if a donor has made a huge contribution. Multi-million dollars get mobilised by community efforts for creation of a temple like Neasden or Chicago or Akshardhams. They get funds from the community within India or abroad.

Outreach Activities:

There is a practice in all the centres to contact persons of other faiths and invite them to participate in major functions and festivals, as honoured guests. During the visits of sadhus and Mahant Swami Maharaj, efforts are made to make them available to meet as many devotees as possible - as well as, important persons - persons of eminence from different disciplines of that place. Meetings are also organized with heads of state and heads of other religions and organisation at home, as well as at abroad. It has a separate Multi-media and Publication Division at the headquarters and at every other centre. The Ahmedabad establishment is located at Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Sahibaug.

Covid-19 Relief – Initail Batch of Concentrator Received from UAE, to Ahmedabad, India:

To help India in this time of medical crisis, Oxygen cylinders, tankers and concentrators will be supplied from across the world through BAPS' network and its volunteers.

An initial consignment of concentrators reached Ahmedabad on 30th April. Ishwarcharan Swami and Brahmavihari Swami performed puja at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, with prayers for these instruments to be as helpful as possible for all patients. Many more such concentrators are on their way and expected to arrive soon, for distribution to different hospitals and healthcare centers in different cities.

Similar consignments were received from other centres Mahant Swami Maharaj prayed for the good health of all and for this crisis to tide over soon, by the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Publications

Magazines	Membership
Swaminarayan Prakash (Gujarati) merged with Swaminarayan (Patrik on 2001 after 45 years separate Publication)	60,000
Swaminarayan Bliss (English)	40,000
Swaminarayan Praksash Hindi	5,000
Women's Magazine - Premvati (Gujarati)	10,000
Bal Prakash (Gujarati) for Children	5,000
Bal Prakash (English) for Children	3,000
Other Publications:	
Over 500 books and booklets are published by Shahibag Aksharpith in several languages as under:	
• Gujarati	300
• English	100
• Hindi	70
• Marathi	15
• Bengali	3
• Tamil	1
• Telugu	1
• Several other languages	10
• Audio and video cassettes	400
• Audio CDs and Animated videos on the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan CDRom on Indian Culture	50

BAPS Centers of Spirituality:

These are the centers of worship to spread harmony, peace and love. They are not meant for fomenting hatred or fundamentalism or for conversion by lure of physical facilities. In every centre, men, women and children learn spirituality and the Hindu way of life by living unitedly as a peace - loving people.

Under Swamishri's leadership, the Hindu way of life, its spiritual content, its tolerant and peaceful disposition, the unity within the family, respect for parents and elders and sacrifice for society-all these have spread all over the world.

The Akshardham concept is unique. The first Akshardham temple came up at Gandhinagar, Gujarat and the Second Akshardham at New Delhi. The Third one is under construction at Robbinsville - New Jersey, USA. These are unique, miraculous and monumental creations of BAPS with the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. They inspire mankind, instilling the belief in God - the Bhagwan who is endeavoring for the upliftment of mankind for generation to come.

Centuries before the Hindu religion had crossed the frontiers of the country, it had made a great impact in foreign lands. Hindu temples are to be found in several south-east Asian countries like Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia. In more recent times through a systematic drive BAPS built a number of temples and centres in more than 54 countries outside India. Of course, the devotees are initially Indians who have migrated. But its impact has been felt as seen from the Neasden Temple story; even the local population has acknowledged this. Another important matter is that this drive has been successful in preventing the onslaught of western materialistic culture on our families and the new generation. The ancient spiritual values are revived.

Voluntary service to those who need it - without bias of caste or creed is a key religious message. The Haribhaktas who like to become volunteers are well motivated. They work - offer SEVA within temple - but in time of calamity like cyclone - drought - earthquake etc. they reach out led by Sadhus. This gives religious institutions and religions - a different meaning - message as a way of life - "it means serving people in need, irrespective of whether they are devotees or belong to some other religions or sect or country". The relief does not end with distribution of food packets - it goes up to supporting affected to live normal life - revival of individual and community - social and economic activities. It also includes support - assistance to restore houses / huts which are affected with 'healing touch' of Sadhus who sphere head such activities. The Kutch rehabilitation work is an illustration of the above.

It ignites inner desire we have to help - but most of us do not convert into action - busy in our own affairs. But this spiritual base once ignited - awakens a devotee to take out time from his regular life, be it business or job and join such voluntary efforts.

Mahan Rushi

Mahant Swami Maharaj - The Divine Power

In 2009, Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Nairobi, Kenya. He began his lecture series by saying “Know Thyself” and asked the audience, “How would you introduce yourself?” He went on to say that people would normally mention about his home, status, workplace etc. He elaborated “Our true identity is that we are those who have attained God on earth.”

Mahant Swamiji, The Divine Power

Lean is the man,
Faint is his smile,
But how powerful he is,
You will know in a while.

Thousands suns in his domain,
Rotating earth is his game,
Stars twinkle around him,
Universe moves with his name.

He showers streams of blessings,
With one blink of his eye,
Scripts destiny for all,
With colours of his spiritual dye.

One glimpse of his,
Gives freedom from misery,
His shadow alone,
Makes sorrow a history.

When words pour from his heart,
Inner soul gets sanctified,
Gentle touch of the divine,
Leaves the devotees dignified.

His one little step,
Shakes the heavens around,

One slight turn of his,
Puts to silence the turmoil's sound.

When he bows his head,
All Gods and Goddesses arrive,
Raising his head causes,
All living beings to survive.

His applying chandlo on forehead,
Binds us in eternal synergy,
Doing parikramas around his gurus,
He radiates cosmic energy.

When he folds his hands,
All our vices depart,
When he raises his hands,
Our janma chakras fall apart.

The mightiest force on the planet,
Practices samp and humility,
Donates every breath for us,
Considers praying for us, his duty.

Revered are his virtues,
Nispruh, Nirlobh, Nissneh,
Nirman, Nishkam, He and only he,
Is the door to Akshardham.

— Sunita Sharma

Mahanta Swami - Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Mahant Swami Maharaj held that both Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have moulded him. He talks about them - with great fondness and devotion - "Yogiji Maharaj was a great Saint - but very simple - always accessible to all - whether Sadhus - Haribhaktas and any other visitor. He was very humble and did not allow his 'greatness' to be expressed to anybody else. He used to behave - with each on par - with children, youth or seniors as equal to them. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was almost similar. He was humble. Easily accessible, used to respond by letters, phone or personal meet. He had also capacity to bring people together who had

opposite views, inspire the community at large – with his charismatic appeal. Both Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj – used to talk in very simple language with simple words. They were self reliant. Worked at multiple levels from children to Presidents of the countries. Their focus was on well being – happiness of the family – growth in their life and activities and support goals of youth or for that matter any devotee and promoted satsang as well gruh sabhas. They inspired a great confidence in their devotees – who always felt with ‘Ashirwad’ they will be successful in whatever they are doing or overcome obstacle they are facing.

Mahant Swami is also same – humble, accessible to all, walks among devotees, speaks less – ‘Mitbhashi’ , focus on well being of all – innovative and a think tank.

When we see one we forget another as we see them both Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Mahant Swami Maharaj – the Mahan Rushi.

Mahant Swami Maharaj is Rushi, a Mahan Rushi and has all such qualities of the exalted stature as described by Yogiji Maharaj in his Kirtan “Haji Bhala Sadhu”.

‘Tanaki Upadhi taje so hi Sadhu’

‘One who forsakes caring for his body is true Sadhu’

Mahant Swami never cares for own comforts and lived a very simple life. In his young days as a sadhu, despite being not well with 103 degree fever; he washed dishes and cleaned the dining area using ash which is harsh material and can affect the skin.

**‘Man apmane ekta sukh-dukh me sambhav;
ahi kesukh hai, nahi swarg luchav’**

**‘He possesses equanimity in honour and insult and in joy and misery;
he understands that the pleasures of this world are insignificant and
even those of paradise cannot entice him’**

Mahant Swami is very humble and lives a simple life – does not expect anything from anybody; whether an attending Sadhu or a devotee host. Once, he travelled to Patana and arrived on station even as the local host had not. It was midnight and with nowhere to go; Swamishri slept on a bench. Although the local host’s behaviour through his absence was not appropriate, Swamishri went to his house and blessed him.

‘Haji Bhala Sadhu, haridi Sadhu’

‘A true Sadhu is always engrossed in God’s devotion.’

Mahant Swami Maharaj as a young sadhu in Mumbai always asked for the opportunity to prepare garland – in fact, preparation of decorated garland for Thakorji takes a lot of time and concentration . In 1969, he prepared a six foot long garland and sent it to Gondal. Yogiji Maharaj, offered it to Ghanshyam Maharaj and said, “ Mahant Swami’s Bhakti is remarkable.”

‘Lalach lobh haram hai, grahe na ganthe dam....’

‘He has shunned greed and enticements. He does not harbour wealth. And he practises absolute celibacy. Moreover, he continuously chants God’s name’

This truly and aptly describes Mahant Swami. BAPS is a multinational spiritual organisation spread over more than sixty countries with millions of devotees and over 1000 Sadhus. Yet, Mahant Swami always maintains a low profile. He gets up very early, performs yoga and comes for prayer. He is the same for each and everyone, be a sadhu or devotee.

‘Muktanand so santke,sada rahat Haripas’

‘God forever resides within such a Sant’, says Muktananad.

Indeed, this is the secret behind Mahant Swami Maharaj. Being in his company is like Maharaj’s company. His darshan is Maharaj’s darshan. His loving words are Maharaj’s loving words. His blessings are Maharaj’s blessings. He is pure, divine, Aksharbrahma – who is manifest of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

This is why I called him Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj.

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GLOSSARY*

1. Agna Command/ Instructions.
2. Akshar The internal abode.
3. Akshar Purshottam The two images :-
 - A) Akshar Akshabrahman Gunatitanand Swami, the foremost disciple of Lord Swaminarayan.
 - B) Purushottam The supreme divinity, Lord Swaminarayan. They are worshipped together.
4. Akshardham
 - A) Divine abode of Lord Krishna or Lord Swaminarayan/ Heaven.
 - B) Name given to high-tech cultural monument in memory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, at Gandhinagar (Gujarat).
5. Arti The ritual of having lighted wicks before the deity as an act of adoration.
6. Ashram Residential place of holy persons/ Residential school where holy persons stay alongwith children and impart education.
7. Atmanistha Consciousness of one's self (Soul) as Atma.
8. Atmic Related to Atma.
9. Avtar Incarnation of God. In Hindu religion, it is believed that God descends birth on earth as a human being, whenever there is social

* Meaning of Sanskrit conventience terms used in the book

	disorder, anarchy, loss of religious values. He conquers the forces of evil and re-establishes spiritual values.
10. Bapa	Affectionate term used to address Mahant Swami Maharaj
11. BAPS	Bochasanvasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha.
12. Bhai	Brother.
13. Bhajan-Kirtan	Devotional songs.
14. Bhakt-Bhagwan.	The Devotee and the devoted.
15. Bhakti	Devotion.
16. Brahman	A) Akshar, Eternal abode of Lord Swaminarayan. B) Name of the supreme Deity the Creator.
17. Brahmcharya	The practice of celibacy.
18. Darshan	Beholding the Deity or holy person with reverence.
19. Ekadashi	The eleventh day of both dark and light halves of Hindu Lunar Month. It is considered as a holy day.
20. Gadhada	A village in Bhavnagar District of Gujarat. Lord Swaminarayan used as his base for 29 years. It has a magnificent stone temple.
21. Ghanshyam Maharaj	Lord Swaminarayan.
22. Gondal	It was here that Gunatitanand Swami passed away. A beautiful shrine is created in his memory known as Akshar Dev. Yogiji Maharaj also stayed here for long time.
23. Grihastha	The householder.
24. Guru.	A religious teacher, spiritual master.
25. Guru Parampara	Hierarchy of holy persons, spiritual masters.

26.	Hari Krishna Maharaj	Lord Krishna. Lord Swaminarayan is also called as Hari Krishna Maharaj.
27.	Harijan	A member of low caste.
28.	KarSeva	Voluntary service for spiritual or social work.
29.	Kothari	A Sadhu who is the administrative manager of a temple.
30.	Mahotsav	Festival Celebration.
31.	Mandir	Hindu place of worship, Temple.
32.	Mantra	Revered word holy hymn recited during worship or ceremony meditation.
33.	Murti	Statue of the deity.
34.	Murti Pratishtha	Religious function of installation consecration of the deity in a temple.
35.	Nischay	Firm Unshakable belief.
36.	Nirlobh	Freedom from covetousness, vow of poverty.
37.	Nirman	Freedom from ego.
38.	Nirvikalpa Nischay	Conviction of Lord's glory.
39.	Nishkam	Freedom from passion.
40.	Parshad	First stage of initiation into the sadhu life.
41.	Prasad	Sanctified food item, which is first offered to God and subsequently to be distributed to devotees.
42.	Pujya	Reverend.
43.	Rushi	Sage, Saint.
44.	Sabha	Assembly.
45.	Sadguru	Holy man who has renounced the world yet provides guidance to devotees.
46.	Sadhu	A person who has renounced the world and has taken initiation at the hands of a spiritual master to live a life aimed at God realization.

47. Sampraday	A religious fellowship, institution.
48. Sanskrit	The classical language of ancient India.
49. Sanstha	An organisation.
50. Satsang	Holy fellowship, associated with spiritual master, sadhus or other devotees.
51. Seva	Spiritual service.
52. Shikshapatri	Epistle of precepts 212 verses in Sanskrit written by Lord Swaminarayana in 1826. It outlines the basic code of conduct for the guidance of his devotees.
53. Shriji Maharaj	Lord Swaminarayan
54. Thakorji	Small metallic image of Shriji Maharaj.
55. Tilak/Chandlo	A mark applied to the forehead to signify faith in God.
56. Upanishad	Ancient Hindu Scriptures - They are philosophical chronicles of sages expounding the nature of God, soul and cosmos.
57. Upasana	Worship
58. Vicharam	Spiritual travels.
59. Yagna	Sacrificial worship where ghee (clarified butter) and grains are offered into a fire with the recitation of a special prayer - Mantras.
60. Yogi	A spiritually realised person.

Majority of the meanings are from the book “Pramukh Swami Maharaj” by Sadhu Shantipriyadas.

Spandan :

Spanda-Karikas’ translated by Jaidev Singh is a commentary on Siva Sutras published by Motilal Banarsidas Pvt Ltd, New Delhi - 2000

Spandan or Spanda is literally means movement or “throb.’. It connotes dynamism or the Creative Energy of the Divine: the Divine creative pulsation.



Author and his family members with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj



Author and his family members



Book release of Marathi Edition of 'Yug Purush', by Mahant Swami Maharaj, Sept. 2013



*Book release by Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami), Mumbai
'Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj', at Salangpur. Author with Narayan Guruji - 12 June, 2019*



Book release by Mahant Swami Maharaj – “Yug Purush”, Author with Narayan Guruji at Ahmedabad - 15 January, 2017



Georgia secretary of State declares MSM Honorary – Georgia State Citizen



Mayor of liburn Proclaims 1st Jyly 2017 as HH Mahant Swami Maharaj Day



1st July 2017 – Atlanta



About the Author

Dr. Kirit Shelat is Doctorate in Philosophy with Public Administration – is a public administrator. He has been awarded degree of D.Litt. – Doctorate of Science by Junagadh Agricultural University – India for his outstanding contribution in promoting Climate Smart Agriculture and Building Climate Smart Farmers. He had long spell of his carrier in Indian Administrative Service. He has hand into introduction in “New Extension Management – Krishi Mahotsav” approach in Gujarat as Principal Secretary – Agriculture – which doubled the income of farmers. He has designed and implemented large-scale projects for poor families, farmers and micro entrepreneurs and for development of remote rural areas. He has authored more than 20 books related to agricultural and rural development and related to impact of climate change and ways to meet that challenge at local level – village level. He is Executive Chairman of National Council for Climate Change, Sustainable Development and Public Leadership (NCCSD).

Dr. Kirit Shelat has written bio-graphy of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj – “YUG PURUSH, PUJYA PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ – a life dedicated to Others”. This is published in six languages with nine editions. He wrote bio-graphy of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj – “Mahan Rushi Mahant Swami Maharaj” – June, 2019 – This is in Gujarati.

About Publisher;
National Council for Climate Change Sustainable Development
and Public Leadership (NCCSD)

Building Self Reliant and ATMANIRBHAR-Climate Smart Farmers

In the new millennium the world is facing challenge of climate change with increasingly un-predictable weather events and its intense adverse impact on habitat. The cause of climate change is global warming - increased Green House Gasses. Although global warming is an international phenomenon - its adverse impacts are at local level. The severely affected are villages-the farm land and the farmers. The increased floods, cyclones, delayed rains, droughts, heavy rains on one day, un-seasonal hot and cold waves, frost - all these lead to crop-failures, low productivity of livestock & fisheries and mortality.

It was in this context that Dr. Kirit Shelat initiated a dialogue by organizing an International Conference on "Global Warming, Agriculture, Sustainable Development & Public Leadership" at Gujarat Vidhyapith - Ahmedabad in March 2010. The outcome of conference was - thought of setting up a special purpose - NGO with focus on Agriculture - "National Council Climate Change Sustainable Development & Public Leadership - NCCSD at Ahmedabad. This idea was discussed in a meet held in Delhi in May 2010. Justice B.P. Singh, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Shri Parshottam

Rupala, Dr. Y.S. Raj an & Shri Kantisen Shroff and others participated and welcomed idea. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Delhi at that time. The Promoters - led by Justice B.P. Singh, Dr. Kirit Shelat and others visited him and sought his blessing for this endeavor. Pramukh Swami blessed and said "This is a very good initiative. Our major challenge is livelihood of poor families in Rural Areas. I am sure all of your efforts will help them to have sustainable livelihood."

The Organization was rolled in September 2010 with Dr. Kirit Shelat as Executive Chairman and Justice B.P. Singh as its President.

NCCSD initiated its mission by organization think meets for policy formulation and capacity building training programme for farmers and



youth. The focus was to prepare public leadership - both elected and non-elected, and farmers to meet challenges of Climate Change. This was followed by series of initiatives:

- NCCSD Participated in “Conference of Parties” - meets of countries organized by UNFCCC to meet the challenges of climate change. ‘Agriculture & Farmers’ did not figure in COP discussions. The role of agriculture as nature’s tool for mitigation - was not recognized - NCCSD participated and organized side events and exhibition and also met senior leaders of International organization and explained how agriculture can mitigate the adverse impacts. NCCSD successfully prioritized agriculture in COP. The Paris Agreement accepted importance of food security, food productivity, technology transfer & capacity building. FAO also liked idea it created a special purpose organization called GACSA- “Global Alliance Climate Smart Agriculture”.
- At National level NICRA - National Institution for Climate Resilient Agriculture was initiated by ICAR. NCCSD took up ‘Capacity Building’ as part of it and developed Guide book for farmers for developing Climate Resilient Agriculture.
- NCCSD organized an International Conference on ‘Climate Justice’ in 2014. The Chief Justice of India inaugurated this. The issues related to farmers got focused and out-come were a liberal Crop Insurance Policy to cover even farmers, who have not obtained credit.
- In 2014 NCCSD initiated for technology transfer with Florida A & M University (FAMU), USA for Building Climate Smart Farmers. 26 Scientists from USA visited and trained farmers in Gujarat.

- NCCSD brought out a guidebook “Building Climate Smart Farmers - Doubling of Income of Farmers in Arena of Climate Change”. This book is authored by Dr. Kirit N. Shelat and Dr. Odemari Mbuya, FAMU - USA. NCCSD is regularly conducting think tank seminars, capacity building programmes - for farmers, rural youth, university students, government functionaries, developing new ideas for policies and sharing it with government.
- In response to call given by the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India - Shri Narendra Modi for ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT “NCCSD worked on Atmanirbhar Krishi and Farmers - Role of Stakeholders” It is organizing - as a follow-up series of Seminars on ATMANIRBHAR FARMERS through web-on-air. It worked with Agriculture Department - Govt, of Gujarat for developing Atmanirbhar Farmers - A Roadmap for Gujarat Agriculture -2020-30.
- NCCSD has brought out more than 25 publications and is proud to bring out this book which depicts what goes in making of a “Spiritual Leader”.

Contact us

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Development and Public Leadership (NCCSD)

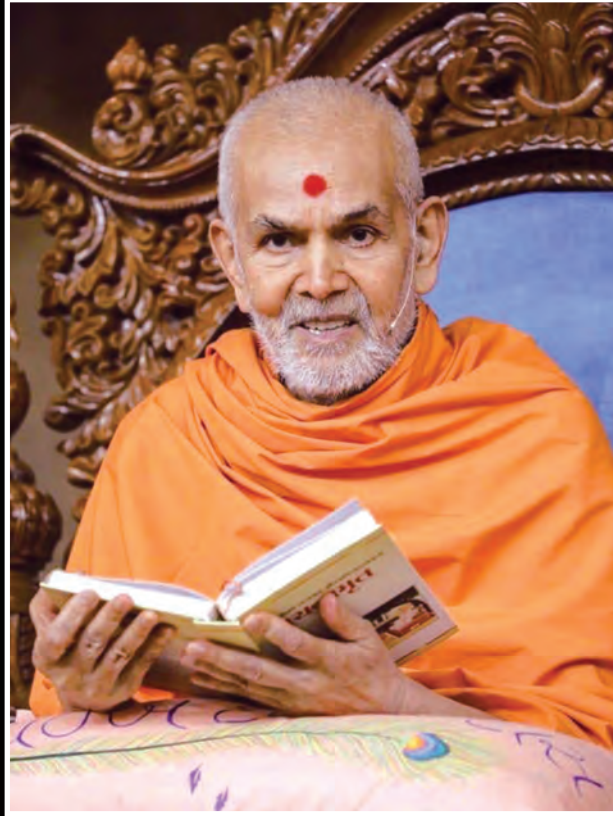
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