

YUG PURUSH

PUJYA PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

- a life dedicated to others

- DR. KIRIT N. SHELAT



Bhagwan Swaminarayan - BAPS - Pujya Pramukhswami Maharaj Yug Purush

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Dr. Kirit Shelat



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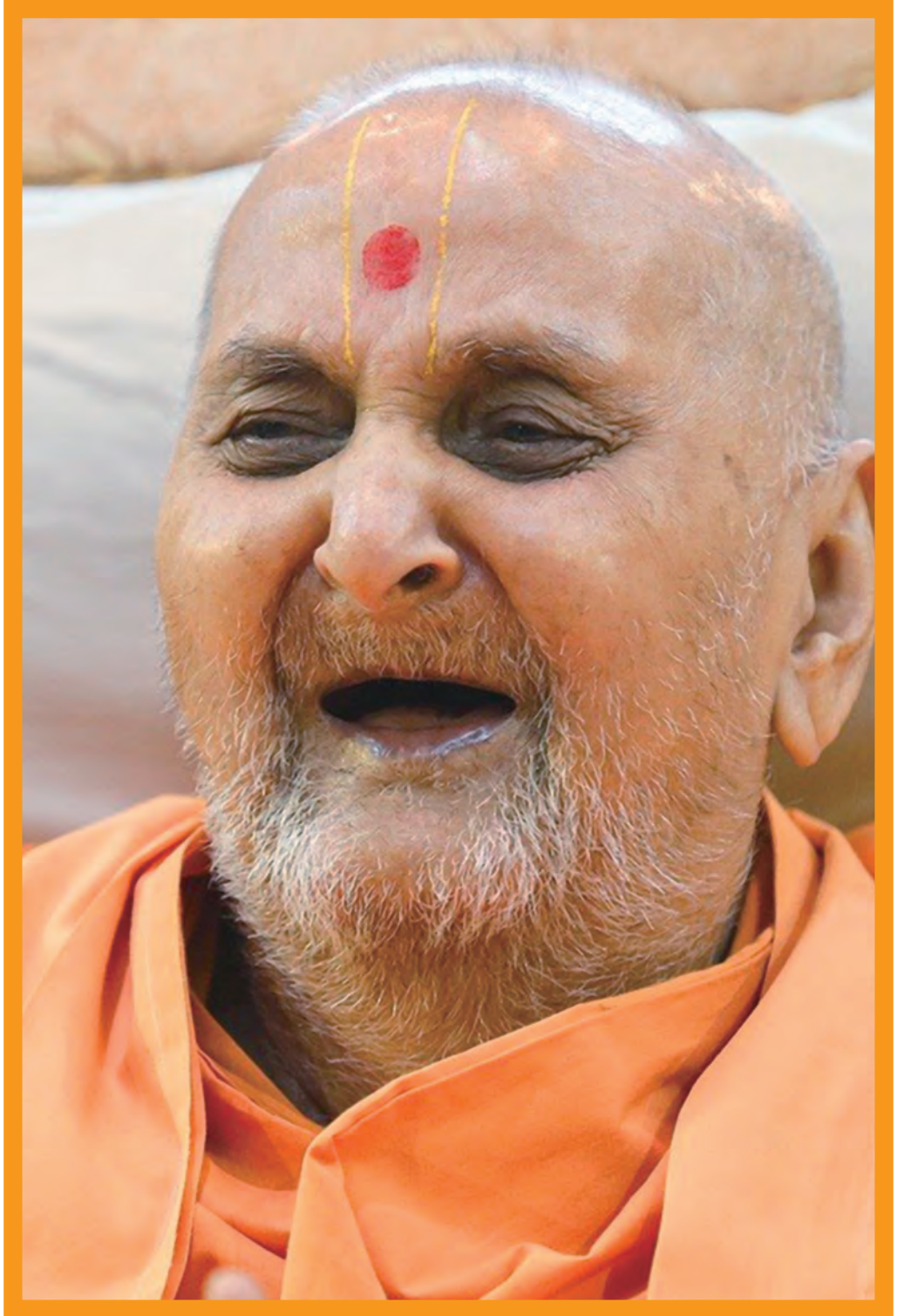
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17TH August 2016
The Swaminarayan Temple
Salangpur- India.

I was standing behind the pyre.

Parampujaya Mahant Swami Maharaj did Agni Sparsh minutes ago.

The Agni (Fire) Flared and Smoke was rising.

There was silence. But we felt the vibration - the Divine Spandan.

Vibration of Parampujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj - who had devoted his life to others and changed the context of Religion.

The divine Spandan were felt by one and all: the Sants Mahantas the 3,00,000 devotees who were witness and more then billions watching on television in India and across the World. The Haribhaktas and the others.

As he left, his legacy... his preachings... his thoughts were in the heart of all witnessing the moment.

The legacy of a life devoted to the humanity, of a religion enhanced to help others and the voluntary initiatives by the followers to help without cast or creed, a new generation prepared to meet an – unpredictable future challenges, a Triveni Sangam of Science, Technology and Spiritually. The context of Religion was transformed.

The Yug Purush

Shital Ravi Kiran - the cool rays of the Sun were descending on us.

The Divine Spandan - the creative energy has become all pervasive.

Divinity Personified – The YUG PURUSH

It is an occasion of Great joy that our dear Dr. Kirit Shelat has updated book of spiritual excellence “Yug Purush – Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a life dedicated to others”. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was “Yug Purush”, the person of new age and all ages, because in this materialistic world of present times, his life is an example of transformational and transcendental ascendance serving and inspiring whole world beyond the borders, religions, beliefs, casts and creeds, colours, sects and all kinds of divisions. He is a magnificent integrating spirit.

The expression “a life dedicated to others” truly and really defines the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He lived every moment and every day of his life in terms of “Parahita chinta” – noble thoughts for well beings for others, “Paropakar” – noble actions for the benefit of others, “Pramodbhav” – noble feelings for others, “Pratigna” – noble determinations to serve others and “Prashant”- noble peace to meditate for welfare of others, The “others” for him means all people and beings.

He was an inspiring visionary and practicing missionary whose thoughts, ideas, concepts and initiatives through Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) have ensured the creation of thousands of Institutions and Centers like Swaminarayan Mandirs, Akshardhams, Educational Institutions like Schools, Colleges and Vidya Mandirs, Health Centers, Multicare Hospitals and Arogyadhams, several organizations and individuals for caring, assisting, encouraging and serving millions of people in various ways in different parts of the world.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the perfect example of “Shanta Mahanta” the tranquil Great Soul described by Shree Adi Shankaracharya in his great work “Viveka Chudamani.”

**“SHAANTAA MAHANTO NIVASANTI SANTO
VASANTAVAT LOKA HITAM CHARANTA,
TEERNAA SWAYAM BHEEMA BHAVAARNAVAM,
JANAAN AHETUNA ANYAAN TAARAYANTA”**

“There are tranquil and great souls who are like spring season, doing what is good for whole world and people. They have transcended the dreadful ocean of this world themselves and without any selfish reason or returns they take “others” along the path of transcendence and transformation”.

This was what Pramukh Swami Maharaj had ensured to inspire and serve humanity to rise towards betterment in the fields of education, health, skill development, human Endeavour and excellence and other areas. He had ensured that BAPS promptly served in case of natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, cyclones, epidemics and all kinds of crisis situations wherever, whenever they occurred.

In cases of criticism, opposition, religious and communal conflicts and all kinds of attacks the Sadhus and Volunteers of BAPS have remained “SHANTA” tranquil, and carried on the relief work and Seva by the example of their teacher, guru and path shower Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was an outstanding example of a teacher, trainer, developer and Guru. Having personally met and experienced the vibrating humane divine touch and excellence of great Sadhus and Swamis of BAPS like Doctor Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, Yagneshwar Swami, Gnanvatsal Swami and others one can say that



Pramukh Swami Maharaj has attained extraordinary excellence in ensuring the nurturing, development and emergence of spiritual leaders and teachers in his own mould, thus assuring continuity of inspired and inspiring future contributions and Humane Ethical Excellence.

A master is known by Masters he nurtured and by masters who follow him.

This is like examples of Bhagavan Veda Vaysa, Bhagavan Buddha, Bhagavan Mahavira, Lord Jesus, Bhagavan Adi Shankara, Bhagavan SwamiNarayan and Shree Ramkrishna Paramhansa. It gives happiness to say that Pramukh Swami Maharaj has attained THAT level of divinity as personally and directly experienced by many and self. This is like kshetragna, field knower, and kshetra, the field. His field of influence for positive contribution is vast and ever present.

This is also the experience of Bharatratna and our beloved and honoured former President Abdul Kalam as expressed in his recent book "Transcendence."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had travelled to several countries and met extraordinary and ordinary people including pope, presidents, prime ministers, leaders of several countries, businessmen, officers, doctors, teachers, workmen and many others who have experienced his divine light for becoming contributors for betterment of society and Humanity.

Having heard, read, seen and experienced Pramukh Swami Maharaj there are two realizations. The first one is that he was a siddha, the fully realised and attained person. Bhagavadgita shows the path of becoming and being siddha.



**“YATAH PRAVRUTTIR BHOOTAANAAM
YENA SARVAM IDAM TATAM
SWAKARMANAA TAM ABHYARCHA
SIDDHIM VINDATI MAANAVAH”**

“From WHOM came living beings all.
By WHOM is pervaded is this all,
Own work as worship offering to them,
Person realizes and reaches HIM”.

So, the Supreme Being is the origin of all and the Supreme Being has also entered all of the people and is present in them. Serving people then becomes really serving HIM. Thus serving HIM through serving all, a person becomes siddha the realized one.

Thus Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a ‘Siddha’, the Realized One.

Further it is also said that realized one knows HIM and knowing HIM is verily becoming HIM.

The divine qualities of such a realized Sage and Saint are precisely described in the sixteenth chapter of Gita.

They are “Abhyam, Sattva Samsudhhi, Gnaana Yoga Vyavasthithi, Danam, Damaa, Yagna, Swadhyaya, Tapa, Arjavam, Ahimsa, Satyam, Akrodha, Tyaga, Shanti, Apaishunam, Daya Bhooteshu, Aloevpatvam, Mardavam, Hree, Achapalam, Teja, Kshama, Dhriti, Shoucham, Adroha, Naatimaanita”.

This is divine sampada, the wealth of divine qualities.

By the life and live examples of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj the qualities of “Fearlessness, Purity of personality, Unification with knowledge path, giving, self control, offering, self study, penance, being straight forward, non hurting, truth, non-anger, sacrifice,



peacefulness, non complaining, compassion towards people, non wavering, gentleness, modesty, non fickleness, brightness, forehearence, cleanness, non cheating and humbleness” are fully awakened and present in his being.

Thus Pramukh Swami Maharaj is fully the Divinity Personified.

Writing foreword for this noble book about such a divine personality Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a humbling experience for which many thanks are due to Author our dear Dr. Kirit Shelat and Shri Shreyas Pandya of Sahitya Mudranalaya Pvt Ltd. Ahmedabad.

With reverence to the Divine personality of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and with love and light to those who are bringing out the book, containing many shining examples of His divine qualities and those who shall be fortunate to read it, study, and walk in this Devine path and experience divinity which means you.

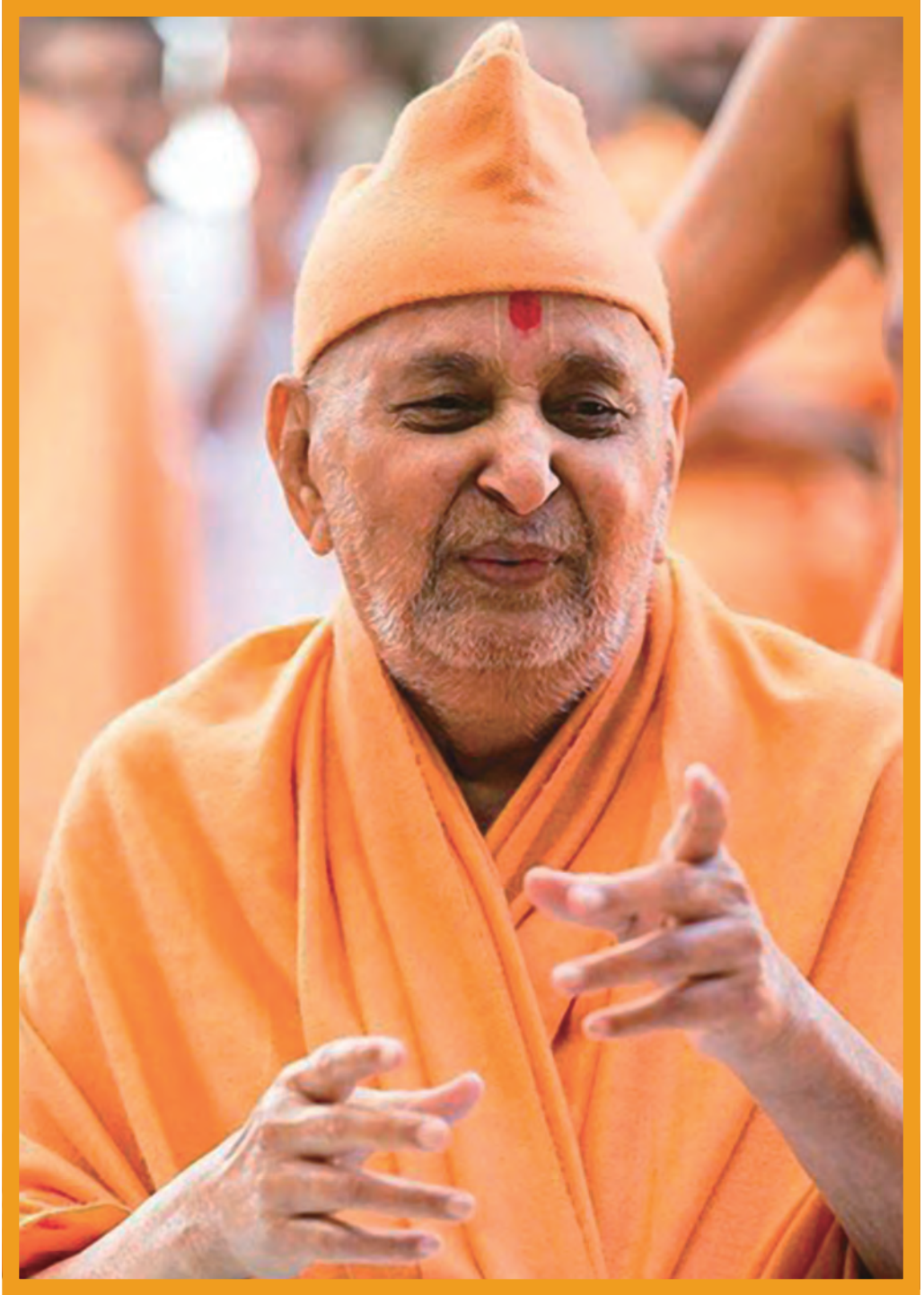
Namaste

Narayana

Dasera

11 October, 2016





Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj



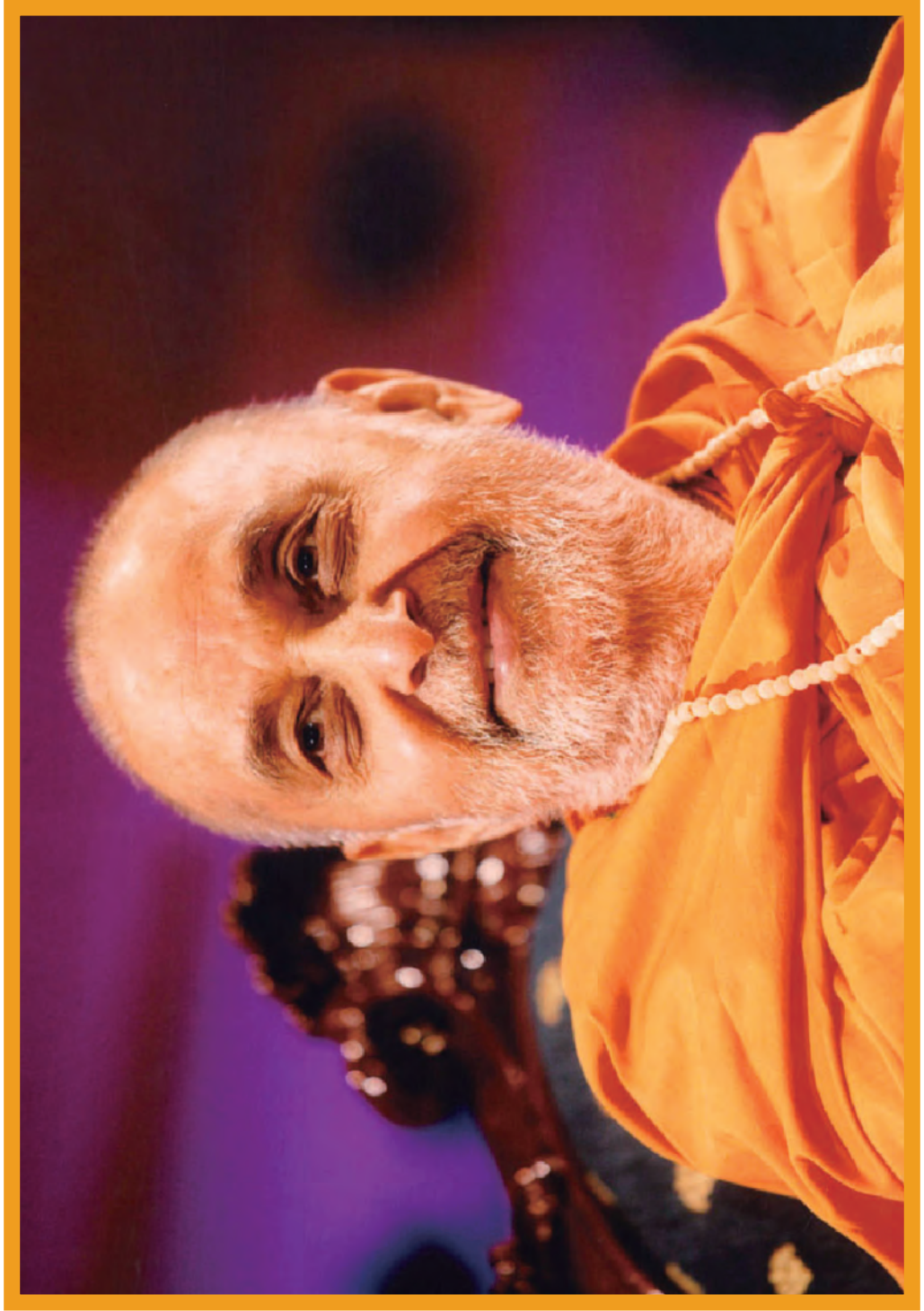
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Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj



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Sahajanandswami – Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Introduction

Hinduism – The Eternal religion

India is an ancient country and home to one of the oldest living civilizations in the world. Hindus form 83 per cent of the one billion population. Hinduism is the oldest practiced religion in the world. Time was when Sanatan Dharma, the traditional name for Hinduism, was prevalent in South-East and West Asia and beyond. Buddhism which Hinduism spawned spread to West Asia, Far East, etc.

The 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.

Sages known as rishis used to guide people and rulers in what is right and wrong. These holy men lived in Ashrams which were far removed from town and 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 on how to attain the grace of God by leading principled lives. But, more than that, these ashrams served as centres for honest living.

Several rishis or sages have contributed to the progress of the land - in religious, economic and political fields. These venerable personalities include Vasishtha, 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 Vasishtha, Patanjali or Arthashastra by Chanakya. There is a 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 sages like Sahajanand Swami played a notable part.

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 a high stature.

Gujarat did not escape from this turmoil. It had Mughal Subas in some areas, while Gaikwad, 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, between business men and rulers and peasants. Polygamy was common. The status of women left much to be desired. Different kinds of intoxicating drugs like afim, ganja, charas and alcoholic drinks were commonly used. The rulers were known for their ruthlessness. On the other hand, religious rituals and temples were under the control of orthodox Brahmins. This was thus a dark period in the history of Gujarat. There was a subsisting rural economy. There were recurrent droughts. The poor 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. The basic values of culture and morality were at the lowest level.

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 11 years old. He was from a Pandey family and was born on April 2, 1781 AD. 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. Lord Krishna was his idol. Muktanand Swami was his close associate. In the year 1800, Nilkanth Varni was given Diksha. He was given two names Sahajanand and Narayan Muni.

Establishment & Swaminarayan Sect

On November 16, 1801, He was made Acharya by Ramanand Swami. A month later, Ramanand left for his heavenly abode, leaving Sahajanand solely in charge of the sampraday.

Sahajanand Swami broadened the religious base. He prayed to Lord Krishna and referred to him as Shri Hari. He gave the 'Swaminarayan Mahamantra' to His followers and charted a moderate course. This path came to be known as 'Swaminarayan Sampraday'. He developed the concept of bhakti to Narayan through intense service with the grace of the Guru.

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

- (i) Religion for all, more so for 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 the temples to all, irrespective of caste and social standing so that they could worship Bhagwan Krishna. He inspired people to construct temples. He had Himself built mandirs at Gadhada, Vadtal, Bhuj (Kutch), Dholera, Junagadh, Ahmedabad etc.
- (ii) He introduced a strict Code of Conduct for sadhus, who had to adhere to celibacy, and had to meet five families daily before taking meals. They should be on the move from village to village. They should keep away from women. 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 visit new places outside their own villages and see the world.
- (iv) He initiated religious discourses and discussions between the people and the sadhus. He also introduced written communication and used literature for this purpose.
- (v) He travelled constantly, visiting one village after another. He met everybody who wanted to meet Him. He revived and further developed the tradition of visiting devotees at their houses.

The Religious – Social Reformer

In his short span 49 years of life, 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 an Avtar or incarnation of God and came to be called as Lord Swaminarayan¹. The 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 made available a religious-cum-social code of conduct known as 'Shikshapatri' which gives guidance to His followers on how to lead good lives. His religious discourse came to be known as 'Vachnamrut'¹. He succeeded in making people give up bad habits like alcohol, superstitious religious 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 the people, particularly of farmers, agriculture labourers and economically backward classes. His teaching attracted thousands, their numbers increased and the Sampraday gradually expanded. Under the leadership of Pramukh Swami it acquired a worldwide presence. The Indian diaspora was largely instrumental in spreading the Swaminarayan Sampraday abroad. It should be clearly understood that the sampraday is an off shoot of Sanatan Dharm. It is a form of reformed Hinduism which goes back to the halcyon days of Sanatan Dharm with its emphasis on moral values.



The Hindu religion is very ancient. Nobody knows when it began - may be 5000 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 Gods: 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 nine Avatars, Ram and Krishna among them.

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. He came to be known as an incarnation of God as Lord Swaminarayan or Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In his lifetime, he was worshipped as 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 spiritual 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 establishing the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam. In consistence with the teaching of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj propagated the worship of Lord Swaminarayan as Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar Brahma. He built five glorious mandirs and established the worship of God along with His choicest devotee. He founded the Bochasanvasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a socio-spiritual organisation, in 1907.

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.

The ancient spiritual tradition revived

In a span of 45 years, Swamishri has spread Hinduism and the Swaminarayan Sampraday, all over India and in more than 44 countries of the world. Not that it was not known abroad before, but its expansion was a true metamorphosis. He has come to be recognised 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 recognised worldwide. 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 by making available their free time for social service. He inspires them to participate in helping people affected by disasters - natural or manmade. He enthuses them to work for children, women, tribal families and weaker sections of society. This is for the first time in recent days that a religious institution has undertaken such work on this scale.

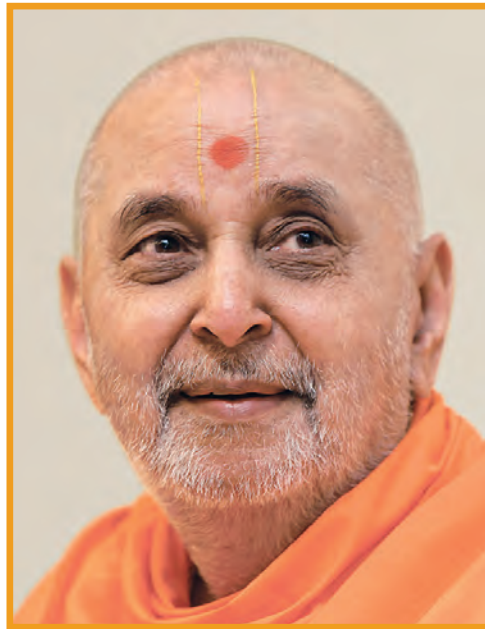
He is constantly engaged in spreading the message of peace. This is normally associated in Indian history with the name of Lord Buddha. Swamishri has spread this message, the true spirit of 'Om Shanti-Shanti-Shanti' all over the world. In the most provocative and difficult situations, he remains calm and goes ahead with his divinely ordained task. Of course this is in the true tradition of Rishi-Parampara.

He is aware of the threat posed by the western civilization and its absorbing impact on children at home and abroad. The Satsang for elders and the children's forum, youth forum, women's activities, all these 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.



He appeals to the people to work hard to achieve their goals. His inspiration has the force of God's command for them. Even fence-sitters are drawn to the Sampraday. Once they have darshan, had leading people all over the world are attracted by his saintly personality. The list of His admirers include Presidents, Prime Ministers, authors, artists, movie stars and commoners in India and abroad. To see him, is to like him and his work based on compassion. His inspiration makes people help one another even though they may be total strangers. Where else would you find a sadhu like Pramukh Swami Maharaj !

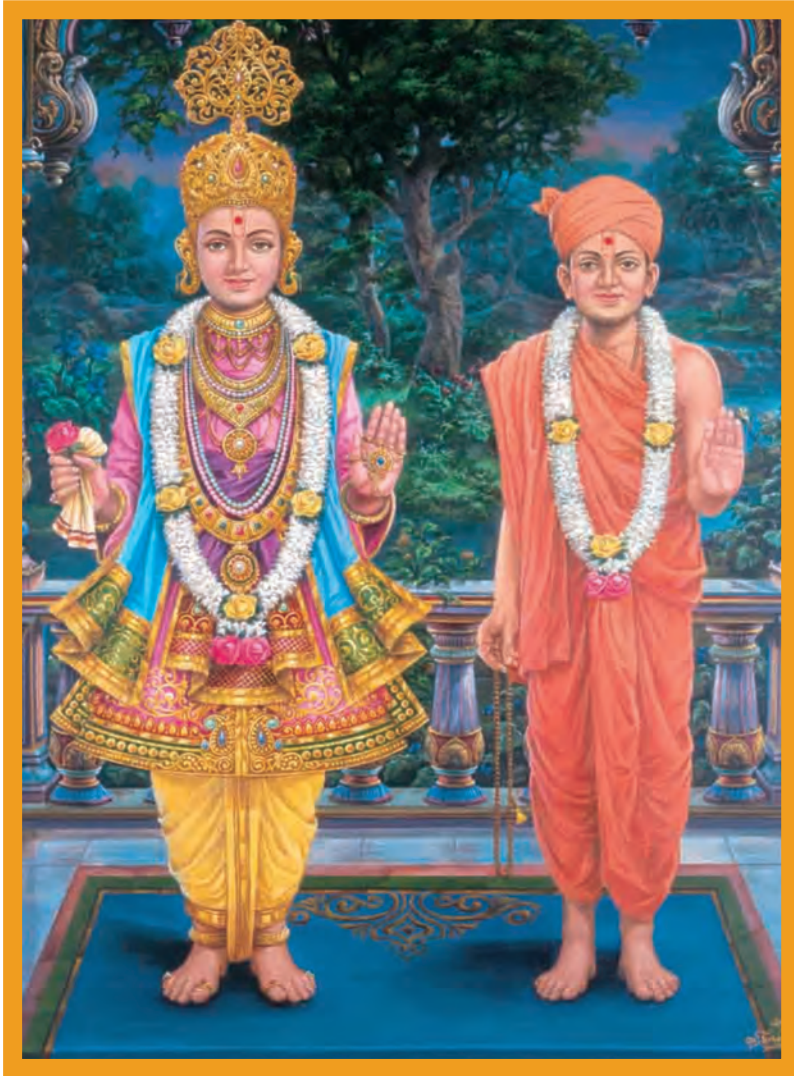
He has created an organisation for spiritual and social purposes which is like a Government or a multinational organisation. It not only creates sadhus, but also willing followers that work in the service of others without caring for caste and creed. In the following pages, this story-the story of a farmer's son, is narrated.





Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj, Shri Govind Devji, Shri Radhaji

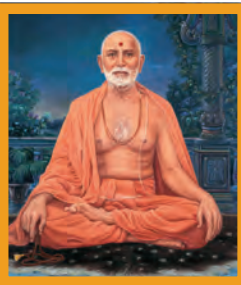




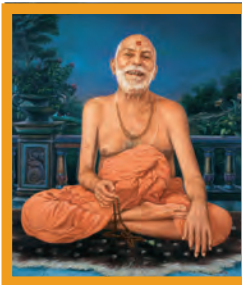
Bhagwan Swaminarayan and
Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami



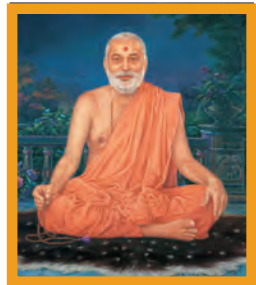
Pragji Bhagat



Shastriji Maharaj



Yogiji Maharaj



Pramukh Swami
Maharaj



Shantilal's Boyhood

The young farmer's son ehansad dedicates his life to Pujya Sastriji Maharaj :

Chansad is a village on the outskirts of Baroda city in Gujarat state. Sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampraday used to visit it regularly. This included Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, the spritual succesors 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". Motibhai was immensely pleased. He took up the task of providing Shantilal with a religious education that would help him to grow spiritually.

In his early childhood, Shantilal had watched his parents worshipping Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He started learning Sanskrit himself and undertaking fasts on Ekadashi (the 11th day after moon rise.)

His early childhood was spent in a deeply religious environment in that pious household. The sadhus who visited the village were impressed by his intelligence. They mentioned this to Shastriji Maharaj. They described the boy as a young person with potential, who could be initiated as a sadhu. Shastriji Maharaj tested Shantilal's intellectual power. He praised him for his ability to become a scholar and said, "you have the ability to become a Shastri". From his village school, Shantilal went to Padra, an urban centre of Baroda district. It had a Higher Secondary School, where English was also taught. Even during his student days, his



association with sadhus remained continuous. He had the opportunity to stay with Shastriji Maharaj on and off. He was popular with the sadhus because of his mild nature, needless to add village boys and the elders also liked him. He enjoyed playing cricket as a boy.

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. "Go, God will be pleased. We bless you with all our heart". Mother Diwaliben added, "Bhai (son) you are becoming a sadhu. Live as a good sadhu. Do as Shastriji Maharaj directs. Never think of returning home". His farewell had no scenes of sobbing and anguish, things one usually associates with such leave takings. The family was prepared for this moment. Shantilal was his usual calm and composed self. His journey into the spiritual world had begun.

Diksha :

He underwent his training as a sadhu under the guidance of Ghanshyam Swami. They moved from village to village, mostly on foot. Those were difficult days for Shantilal. It was as if he was under a test to find out how determined he was to become a sadhu. Did he feel sorry for having left home ! He finally settled at Bochasan. Shankar Bhagat and Nirguni Swami took him under their care. The training lasted from early morning to late at night. Once as he travelled to Ahmedabad, he had a high temperature. Shastriji Maharaj blessed him. "Your fever will subside. You will be O.K. in the morning. We want to initiate you as a Parshad"- the first step before one became a full fledged sadhu. It was Ekadashi, Wednesday, November 22, 1939. Shantilal was fully prepared. It was for this that he had left home and family, friends and school. He became Shanti Bhagat.

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 A.D. 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.

Shanti Bhagat started moving from one centre to another. He visited many villages and met a large number of people. He learned Sanskrit and scriptures. After six years, in 1946, he was appointed Kothari of Sarangpur Temple. Kothari Swami is an administrative post with religious activity. It involves overall supervision and co-ordination of temple work starting from prayers and satsang, to arrangement for the stay of devotees and Sadhus. Sarangpur is a major centre in Ahmedabad District. It is a hub of activities. He worked with great competence. He was very popular with senior and junior sadhus and devotees alike. He managed the affairs of the temple very well. At that time he was 25.

In 1950, Shastriji Maharaj made it known to the leading sadhus and devotees that he had decided to appoint Narayanswarup in his place as the Pramukh (president) of the sanstha. The reaction was mixed. Some agreed, others were aghast. Narayanswarup as a Sadhu was excellent, but could he shoulder the tremendous responsibilities that went with the post? Did he have the organisational flair? Doubts were raised. These seniors were concerned for the fellowship. Their misgivings were not due to jealousy, but out of a deep love for the Sanstha that Shastriji Maharaj had built from scratch. For almost 40 years, these people had suffered untold hardships. They had struggled against heavy odds to establish temples and spread the Akshar Purushottam Upasana. The fruit of their labour was now ripening. Would Narayanswarup cast everything to the wind? Maganbhai Patel once even said, "Swami, you are entrusting the Sanstha to this junior sadhu, but let us hope there never comes a time of remorse...".

Replied Shastriji Maharaj, "Maganbhai, we have done many things, but never have I once felt remorse. And I am convinced that in this decision, everything is well, as it should be. I will not be sorry. You look at his body, I look at his soul...".



On another occasion, Shastriji Maharaj told Chhaganbhai N. Patel of Mumbai, "By appointing Shastriji Narayanswarupdas as the Pramukh of this Sanstha, I am ensuring progress for the next 50 years". Shastriji Maharaj's confidence and faith in Narayanswarupdas soon won everybody over and his critics were silenced.

He was thus favourite of Shastriji Maharaj, who saw in him the making of a great spiritual leader. He wrote to him in the early part of 1951, "We have received your letter... My body can not be depended upon now. Because of merit acquired from previous births; even as a youngster, you have achieved fame in our following. You are intelligent, meritorious and fortunate. At a young age, you have attained the standing of a great sadguru." He then asked Him to take over as Pramukh Swami (as President) of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. The letter continued "I wish you to excel in every respect. This way you will benefit the entire Satsang. You have to please me and the entire Satsang. This will put my mind at peace".

Pramukh Varani Din :

Samvat 2006, Jeth Sud 4, Sunday, May 24 1951.

Initially Narayanswarupdas was unwilling to shoulder the responsibility as the President of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. He was both junior and less experienced compared to several other sadhus and devotees. He saw them as better equipped than himself to maintain and expand the Sanstha's work. But the master, Shastriji Maharaj, thought otherwise. He had chosen Narayanswarupdas and was convinced that only he could steer the fellowship in the needed direction. He was determined that Narayanswarupdas be appointed as Pramukh. When Narayanswarupdas realised that it truly was the sincere desire of Shastriji Maharaj, he accepted the position in all humility.

The installation ceremony which was sombre and simple took place in the small ground floor room at Ambli Vali Pol, Shahpur, Ahmedabad. This was used for years as a Satsang Centre in Ahmedabad. On Vikram Samvat year 2006, Jeth Sud 4, Sunday, May 21, 1951 A.D., at 5 o'clock in the evening a meeting of the Bochasanvasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha's



Managing Committee was held. Among members present were Sadguru Jagjivandasji, Yogiji Maharaj, Pujya Sadguru Akshar Purushottamdas, Sadguru Kothari Shastri, other sadhus and devotees. The proceedings began with a 'Jai' called for by Akshar Purushottam Maharaj.

Secretary Rasiklalbhai read out the minutes and directions of the earlier meeting. Pragat Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj beginning the proceedings said "Just as Sadguru Ramnand Swami had handed over the Gadi (seat of succession) to Shri Shriji Maharaj in his youth, so do I also hereby appoint from today, in my place, as Pramukh, Shastri Narayanswarupdas". After saying this, he draped a shawl around Narayanswarupdas' shoulders. Addressing him he said, "This Yogi Maharaj is vachansiddha (one who is true to his word) and very illustrious. Under his guardianship, you have to illumine the Satsang". Then Sadguru Yogiji Maharaj placed both hands on Shastri Narayanswarupdas' head and blessed him. Shastriji Maharaj then addressed the gathering. "Just as you have obeyed me, from now onwards, obey the commands of Sadguru Shastri Narayanswarupdas". Everyone happily assented, "We will all obey him". Rasiklalbhai read out the order of appointment. In this, it was stated that: "Shastri Narayanswarupdas is hereby appointed as the Pramukh of this Committee. He is, at present, the Kothari of Sarangpur Akshar Purushottam temple. He has shown a brilliant spiritual growth. He has also won the abundant love of the Satsang Fellowship. Considering the opinions and views of all satsangis, and also using my own discriminating intellect, I (Shastriji Maharaj) have appointed him in my place as the Pramukh of the Managing Committee". Everyone was pleased. The appointment was accepted amid a chorus of 'Jais'.

On this occasion, Ishwarbhai Prabhudas performed Puja of Shastriji Maharaj and the newly appointed Pramukh. He offered him a shawl and garland. He also spoke and offered sweets to all those present. Muktaraj Ashabhai expressed his best wishes to the new President and also performed puja.

Then Sheth Champaklalbhai and all other members and devotees performed puja. Kothari Harjivandas expressed his pleasure and said "On behalf of the entire sadhu group, I congratulate the new President and announce our complete co-operation".





Pramukh Varni Din celebration at Ahmedabad

The thin, reticent, young Narayanswarupdas responded by saying “My life-breath Guruhari, respected Sadguru Swamishri Shastriji Maharaj, Param Pujya Yogiji Maharaj, Sadgurus, respected sadhus, parshads and devotees. Pujya Guruhari Shastriji Maharaj has profoundly graced me. I am indebted to him. He has given me responsibility as the President of the Managing Committee. This is a matter of great honour to me. For the past 45 years, Guruhari has built temples worth lakhs of rupees at Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara and other places. He has installed Akshar Pursuhottam Maharaj in all these places. He has opened the road to ultimate salvation for countless aspirants. From now onwards, the responsibility for the Sanstha’s temples is mine, as well as that of the Committee members, and of all the sadhus and all those in positions of responsibility. Now, it remains for us to serve with mind, body and devotion. We have to fully expand the Sanstha with our joint efforts and the teachings of the God and Guruhari are to be spread throughout the world”.

“On this auspicious day, I pray from my heart to Guruhari, whatever strength, knowledge, inspiration I have, has been given by you. Until now, my life has been passed in your compassionate service. Now you have commanded me to undertake this seva. Please grant me capability and strength. May your disciples be happy in mind, body and wealth. Let them be unassailed by any unhappiness or hardship in this world and worship Shriji Maharaj to the last breath, and reside in Akshardham. Iseeky our blessings for this”.

“Today before you, Gurushri, and before this assembly, I take an oath that I will fully carry out my duties to the Sanstha. I will remain sincere and be fulfilled. You have cultivated this knowledge of Akshar Purushottam. I will preserve that and take care that it flowers in every way; and see to it that it blesses and fulfills the wishes of the entire fellowship. I ask that in all my duties for the good of Satsang, Pujya Yogiji Maharaj, Sadguru, senior sadhus, parshads and all disciplines, may please guide me. I appeal with a pure heart. Please give me your fullest co-operation to strengthen me to perform this service”.

“I thank, from the bottom of my heart, all the committee members, sadhus and devotees. In all the activities of Satsang, I seek your co-





SwamiShri at Prayer - A Study in Ekantik Bhakti



Yogiji Maharaj with Guru Hari



operation. Lastly, I pray that Pujya Guruhari remain healthy and have a long life”.

The assembly ended with everyone in high spirits. After its conclusion, a meal was served to all. After that, Narayanswarupdas went into the yard. Under the low tap near the wall, there were several dirty plates, pots and pans. The President sat down to wash them.

He became Pramukh Swami at the age of 28, under the guidance of two great spiritual leaders Shastriji Maharaj and by Yogiji Maharaj. He expanded the base of BAPS all over Gujarat. After the demise of Shastriji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami worked under Yogiji Maharaj. He relied on him in all matters. Yogiji Maharaj used to say “Pramukh Swami is a Great Sadhu”.

The Early Years :

Pramukh Swami moved on. His popularity spread far and wide. He was liked by one and all wherever he went and by whomever he met; he was both humble and noble. He did not mind even taking up a menial task like cleaning toilets. On one such occasion of puja and celebration at Sarangpur after the meeting, at dead of night, everybody was exhausted and had gone to sleep. Suddenly, it was noticed that Pramukh Swami was not in his bed. He was soon found cleaning the toilets and bathrooms behind the Sant Ashram. The attending sadhu tried to dissuade him by saying that others would do the job. But Pramukh Swami replied “You fetch water from the well in the bucket, I will clean the toilets”. In his travels, he often used to take a ride at the back of a truck. He often used to even spend whole night during such travels lying on a pile of harvested paddy or wheat.

Yogiji Maharaj Departs

Yogiji Maharaj was advancing in years. His health was not what it used to be. The responsibility of overseeing all the activities was on the shoulders of young Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In January, 1971, Yogiji Maharaj’s health deteriorated further. He was taken to Bombay for treatment. He suffered a severe heart attack. On January 23,1971, Ekadashi, he abandoned his mortal body. His body



was brought to Gondal by a chartered plane. Tens of thousands of people had gathered to pay their last respects. Pramukh Swami Maharaj held the burning straw in both hands and lit the pyre. As the flames rose and grew in intensity the heat pushed him back several steps. He watched it, lost in thought, his half-grown beard masking his grief. Suddenly, a voice came through the public address system. It was Sant Swami, who said "Yogiji Maharaj has not left us. He is present before us in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is now our Guru".

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had been groomed by both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. There were other senior sadhus. But everybody felt that he was the right choice. Pramukh Swami Maharaj earned the respect of all sadhus and satsangis even at that time. He also had a high degree of spiritual fervour. He was a good organiser. He has played an important role in expanding the activities and setting up new centres after becoming the head of the Sanstha. All sadhus felt that he combined in himself the strong points of both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. He was 50 at that time.

Later on addressing the gathering of sadhus, he said "Yogiji Maharaj has given us the responsibility to serve the satsang. Just as all of you brothers have given me your help till now, please continue to help me in the future. We will all have to work together".

This launched him on his endless journey for spreading the faith in the new modern world.

He faced many difficulties but had several goals to achieve. He never looked back. He travelled from one centre to another from Gondal to Kosamba, from Kosamba to Kolkata and then to New Delhi. Each centre has a unique characteristic of its own. To spread the aroma of Sanatan Dharma he had to journey from Africa to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., Canada. Wherever he went, he attracted thousands of devotees. He saw to it that every centre became a focus of social and spiritual faith in the modern, materialistic world.

After Yogiji Maharaj's departure Pramukh Swami Maharaj moulded himself into a perfect spiritual master. Over the past 45 years, under his able leadership and guidance, BAPS has grown by leaps and bounds. What



was 45 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.

With the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Sanstha enjoyed remarkable success in international festivals celebrated in 1981, The Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan - 1985, the Bicentenary Celebrations of Nityanand Swami -1992 and the opening of the Akshardam Gujarat Complex at Gandhinagar which was built in a very short period to be in time for the - Centenary Celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj. It has won international acclaim as a unique centre for promoting India's glorious culture.

Swamishri in the course of his vicharans abroad had covered 45 countries in 5 continents. Mandirs and satsang centres have been established in the U.S., Canada, U.K., France, Portugal, Holland, Mauritius, South Africa, Bahrain, U.A.E., Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand.

The new mandir at Neasden, London, built in the traditional Hindu style, is the first of its kind to be built outside India. The Chicago temple is another unique creation.

The spectacular "Cultural Festivals of India" held in London in 1985 and in New Jersey in 1991 were successful in relaying the timeless message from the rich heritage and culture of India.

The activities undertaken under his guidance and inspiration cover a wide field. They range from famine relief, cattle camps, and earthquake relief work to literacy campaigns, youth hostels, diagnostic camps, hospitals, mobile clinics, blood donation, moral anti-addiction drives, child and youth development, beside the realm of the spirit.

During the vacation period, many youths join Swamishri in his travels and avail themselves of His spiritual discourses, etc. He personally inspires them and a bond of love develops between Him and them. They become morally strong and confident as a result.

Even at the age of 95, he was active and guiding Sadhus and devotees despite his weak health.





DIVINE TRINITY OF BRAHMASWARUP GURUS

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj (Centre), Brahmawarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj (L),
Pragat Brahmawarup Mahant Swami Maharaj (R) Photo : Colorama Studio, Nairobi, 1970





BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir – Atlanta



Propagating Hinduism

London Swaminarayan Temple :

A wonder of world

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is paying special attention in spreading Hinduism worldwide as a way of life which stresses on intense devotion to Bhagwan, backed by its rich culture, tolerance, family ties, etc. These features constitute the Ekantik Dharma on which the Swaminarayan Sampraday is based, so much so that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is known abroad as a distinguished Hindu religious leader. His vicharans take him wherever the Gujarati community resides in India and abroad. The Gujaratis are spread all over the world, from Africa to Europe, US to Canada, Australia and elsewhere. The Swaminarayan community initially starts a centre for Satsang. This grows into a mandir, depending on the number of the devotees. Such centres/ mandirs become a centre of attraction. They are not only places of worship, but are centres for keeping spiritual values intact and places where the community can conduct religious ceremonies and educate the younger generation about the cultural ethos of Hinduism in general and the Swaminarayan Sampraday in particular.

In the following paragraphs, the story of the Neasden Temple at London is narrated to serve as an illustration about such activities abroad. It shows how the mandir project got started and has become an important centre for Hindus in Europe. The story has been successfully replicated elsewhere. Of course not all such centres boast of a temple as magnificent as the mandir at Neasden.

Brief history of Satsang :

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 centre 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 began to meet occasionally 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".

Slowly, the Indian community grew in size. 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 a few 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.

In the summer of 1959, the constitution of the Satsang Mandal was drafted. It was registered under the name of the 'Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, London Fellowship Centre'. D. D. Meghani was appointed as Chairman of the Mission, Mahendrabhai (Barrister) as Vice-Chairman, Prafulbhai Patel as Secretary and Chandrakant N. Dhupelia as Treasurer, Navinbhai Swaminarayan continued to enlighten the Satsang assemblies with his spiritual talks and experiences.





Shri Swaminaraya Mandir at Neasden, London



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

In 1972, hundreds of devotees expelled from Uganda migrated to England. The Islington mandir became too small to accommodate the increasing number of devotees. G. D. Patel played an important role in enlightening the growing congregation with his spiritual talks. On festive occasions hundreds of devotees had to stand outside in the streets. Such was the size of the gathering.

In 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj installed the huge murtis of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj and Radhakrishna in the Islington mandir. These had been retrieved from the Tororo mandir during the expulsion from Uganda.

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. The original plan was to construct the mandir on the Meadow Garth site itself. After consultations with architects and engineers, it was felt that the existing premises would be too small and unsuitable for the purpose.

In the meantime, the satsang had started growing. The centres flourished in Leicester, Wellinborough, Preston, Ashton, Birmingham, Coventry, Luton and Crawley. The late C. M. Patel, Chairman of U. K. Satsang Mandal, played an important role in this growth and development of the Mission.

In 1989, two miles from the Neasden mandir, a site from Neasden High School was acquired. The plans for a Hari mandir were approved by the local council. On June 20, 1990, Pramukh Swami Maharaj laid the foundation stone for a mandir on the Neasden High School grounds. After the ceremony, while he was leaving, he saw a 'For Sale' sign board



on the Arlington site near the temple on Meadow Garth. To the surprise of all, he asked Chandubhai Dalia to enquire about the land. It was purchased later on. On July 7, 1991, Swamishri laid the foundation-stone for a shikharbaddh mandir on the site. Work on the new mandir began in November, 1992. In an astonishingly short period of two and half years, the pinnacled mandir was completed and inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In early 1992, Sladebrook School across the road on Brentfield Road was acquired and refurbished and opened as 'The Swaminarayan Independent Day School' in August, 1992 — the first Hindu school in Europe.

From a handful of devotees five decades ago, the Akshar Purushottam Satsang has grown into a gigantic socio-spiritual organisation. Its youth and children's forums and women's wing all reflect the strength and growth of a powerful, spiritual and philanthropic organisation. The Swaminarayan mandir, a seven- pinnacled mandir, became a reality. It stands elegantly as a symbol, a source, a citadel of Hindu culture and faith for the new generation. The mandir is truly the crowing glory of a history chequered with struggle, determination and setbacks. The inauguration on August 20, 1995, marked the culmination of an epic story of effort, hard work and marshalling of physical and financial resources on a massive voluntary scale by the local community, inspired by the guidance of Swamishri.

The voluntary Effors

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.
- A brother approached Swamishri. He told him “My sister would like to give the jewellery she bought for her wedding”. That was before the marriage. Swamishri tried to dissuade, but they would not listen.
- “I want to sell my shares and give the money for the mandir”, a devotee told Swamishri. “But you know the market is down. You would not get a good price for them” he said. “Swami, if I stick around to get a good price, I will miss out on my seva”, the devotee replied.
- Aluminium took the place of gold to provide money for the project. Why aluminium ? Every year \$ 35 million worth of aluminium cans are thrown away. 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. And 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 everyday. 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 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.

Unique of dedication of devottes

- 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.
- 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 occupies over 2000 sq. ft. on the ground floor of the mandir. The wisdom of the ancient land is presented through visual effects, paintings, tableaux 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 diorayas. 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.
- Dioramas on 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 story of Shravan – Son : A devoted

Shravan was a young boy. Once, his parents expressed a wish to go on a pilgrimage. They were blind, old and not in a position to walk. They were poor, too, and could not afford a cart for travel. So, Shravan carried them in a pair of scales slung across his shoulders. He took them to all pilgrimage places and fulfilled their desire. He disregarded all difficulties of distance, terrain, climate and situations. Shravan stands as a glorious example of filial devotion.

The invention of zero :

The zero was invented in India. The earliest recorded date, an inscription of Zero on Sankheda copper plate was found in Gujarat, India (585-586 BC). In Brahma-Phuta-Siddhanta of Brahmagupta (7th Century BC), the importance of the Zero is lucidly explained. It was later on copied by the Arabs and they carried the zero to Europe in the 8th Century AD.

Surgical Instruments :

‘The Hindus (Indians) were so advanced in surgery that their instruments could cut a hair longitudinally’. Shushrut, a surgeon of those days, worked with 125 kinds of instruments, which included scalpels, lancets, needles, catheters, rectal speculums, mostly conceived from jaws of animals and birds to obtain the necessary grip.

Hindu civilization is a very ancient civilization, older than those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and China. The seers received scriptures from divine sources before the concept of time was born. Hindu astronomers were mapping the skies, doctors were performing surgeries when most of present day Europe was plunged in the Dark Ages.

Pujya Atmaswarup Swami, Mahant, Neasden mandir, provided the author with observations made by various publications about the mandir, besides entries in the visitor’s book.

The Guinness Book of World Records 2000 Millennium edition hailed His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj as a master builder. On page 36,





The spread of Hinduism - Shri Swaminarayan Temple, Nairobi, Kenya



under the Architects and Master Builders Category of the Knowledge Section, a colour photograph of the London mandir and Swamishri, together 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 lime-stone 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 cost £ 12 million to build.

THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY:

Stone wrote in a leading magazine “The Geological Society” as under:

- “The term load-bearing masonry is, in the building industry, usually understood to mean masonry that supports loads and/or resists forces additional to those due to its own weight. Self-supporting masonry is similarly understood to support only its own weight, although it often has to resist wind loads, e.g. as free-standing garden walls. The rare example is in the U.K. the Hindu temple or mandir in Neasden, London. The temple was constructed from Bulgarian lime-stone block supported on a plinth of Sardinian granite and the interior was lined with intricately carved marble from India and Italy”.
- “With the Swaminarayan temple set in the suburbs arrived a swathe of non-descript ugliness south of Wembley stadium, where the North Circular Road bends south towards the Thames. It is faced with 2,000 tonnes of Italian marble, carved until it seems to look like the milk on a cappuccino. In the hard light of summer, it glitters as if it is in the tropics. What is not marble, is grey lime stone from Bulgaria, or teak, also carved until the hardwood looks like a tapestry. It is the first temple in this style, to have been built for at least 100 years, anywhere in the world”.

The Evening Standard

- Richard Holiday and Allan Ramsey wrote in the Evening Standard, Friday, the August 18, 1995, “Yesterday afternoon, 17 painted idols were marched through the streets of Central London, from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square. They came from the Neasden mandir, an extraordinary



Hindu temple, which has been raised in an unprepossessing suburb in northwest London, and were paraded through the heart of London to welcome them to their new home”.

- The new temple in Neasden is a remarkable building by any aesthetic standard and it will probably become one of the sights of London.
- The temple’s materials may have cost not more than £3 million. But the labour that went into it would have cost a vast amount, had it been charged at Western market rates. It is in the labour of volunteers where the real wealth of the sect resides.
- The past couple of decades have shown an extraordinary revival of religious energy around the world. Often these revivals have taken violent and disturbing forms. It is hard to find a war anywhere in the world today that does not have a religious component. But one of the remarkable things about the Neasden mandir is that it is an almost wholly benign expression of religious flavour of peace and harmony.
- Amongst other things, the temple is a monument to family values. Religions play a huge role in preserving and strengthening family life, families in return, are the medium through which religious beliefs and practices are usually transmitted”.

The Times of India reported British home secretary affairs “Swaminarayan”

The Times of India carried an article on August 22, 1995. It wrote “A British Home Secretary, who interrupts his sacred weekly holiday to attend the construction of a Hindu temple. He greets the audience with ‘Jai Swaminarayan’¹ and reads out shlokas from the Bhagavad Gita. He made a telling contribution to multi-culturalism. This is what, Mr. Michael Howard did to the delight of thousands of Swaminarayan devotees gathered under the shadow of an exquisite temple, set to become a sight of London.

Indian High Commissioner Dr. L. M. Sanghvi described the temple as a gift to Britain from Pramukh Swami Maharaj and a monument to inter-faith understanding, and read out a message from the then Prime Minister of India, Shri Narasimha Rao.



The consecration of the Swaminarayan temple was an event as significant as Swami Vivekanand's lecture in Chicago, which made the world take note of Hinduism.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the larger congregation, and urged his followers to live a simple life of hard work and service, which alone could bring inner peace and harmony.

The Swami's followers projected a gentle face of Hinduism, which received considerable publicity in British media".

- **Prince Charles** wrote "It is an exciting and noble addition to the landscape of London, of which, you should be justly proud. It has raised my spirits, driving here this evening and turning the corner down that street and seeing this great shining, white building at the end of the street. I am so glad that you have been able to do this yourselves. This mandir reveals, (see Bliss May-June, 2000 special issue on the London temple) in the most vivid way, the spirit of all those thousands of hours of dedication and love and sacrifice and skill on the part of so many thousands of people from Britain and all over the world also have come together to make this building possible.
- **Tonny Blair (Prime Minister - United Kingdom)**, "I have never seen such a magnificent work of modern architecture as this. It is a magnificent mandir built, thanks to the love and devotion of countless people. It is a place of beauty, a source of inspiration and to worship and to reflect. It is a veritable pavilion of peace and of promise".
- **The Princess Diana**: "Even before entering the mandir, it is impossible not to feel the enormous love that has gone into the building of this magnificent house of prayer for the Hindu faith. I was touched by the peacefulness and tranquility that surrounds one, when passing through the doors of the temple. It is astounding that such beauty was constructed in only three years. My visit was a journey in learning and memory that I will always treasure. I send you, and all those who helped, to make this, my heartiest best wishes".



- **Dr. George Carey**, the Archbishop of Canterbury : “I have been impressed by the exquisite workmanship and the care and love that have gone into the building of this temple”.
- **Lolli Aboutoul**, Graphic Designer : “This place is : Generosity of spirit, beauty and peace”.
- **Jimmy Carter**, President of USA : “A truly beautiful and inspirational place.... This is the most remarkable place I have ever seen. I shall never forget this day in my life”.
- **Richard Branson**, Chairman, the Virgin Group: “This magnificent temple is one of the wonders of the world. The impact of the Hindu religion has only begun to be felt in Britain. I am very pleased and proud that this wonderful building has been built in Brent. It will become a centre for Hindus throughout the world to visit and see the uniquely diverse culture of Brent. This event has demonstrated a message of hope and peace for the whole world”.
- **R. Venkataraman**, President of India : “I have seen many temples, but none as beautiful as this. Such a temple cannot be built by man, such work is possible only by one possessed by God”.
- **Elizabeth Bond**, the opera singer: “It is fascinating to see religion/ culture. It can be in the middle of London. Heartening to see such support from so many different kinds and ages of people especially so many young people, wonderful charitable program. The warm welcome was appreciated by all of us. We were surprised by your openness and generosity ! As an active Christian, I am particularly impressed with so much shared belief”.

There are many more such opinions in the Visitors’ Book.

One of the most interesting articles on the temple, is written by Ian Pindar. This was published by Reader’s Digest in its November, 1996, British Edition. The author writes about how one community pulled together to build London’s answer to the Taj Mahal”.

The title of his article is “Neasden’s the Eighth (8th) Wonder of the World”. Extracts from the article are as under:



“The dream of building a beautiful mandir or temple in London, goes back to 1970, when the spiritual leader of a large religious movement based in the Indian State of Gujarat, first visited Britain. Known here as the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, it now has 2,000 devotees from among Britain’s thousands of Gujaratis.

The Mission’s guru is His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 75, known as Swamishri. He travels all over the world, inspiring projects for social and spiritual renewal. He has been a guest of the Pope and former Archbishops of Canterbury: In 1988, he was honoured by the British Parliament for his good work.

“At 75, most people reflect upon the money and status they have acquired,” says Ronald Patel, Sunday Editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer. “Swamishri has no money, but the devotion and respect he has earned no one can amass that wealth”.

Not only would they build the first traditional Hindu temple outside India, a rival to the Taj Mahal in scale and beauty but adjoining it would be a large cultural complex, with a permanent exhibition explaining the Hindu faith to non-Hindus.

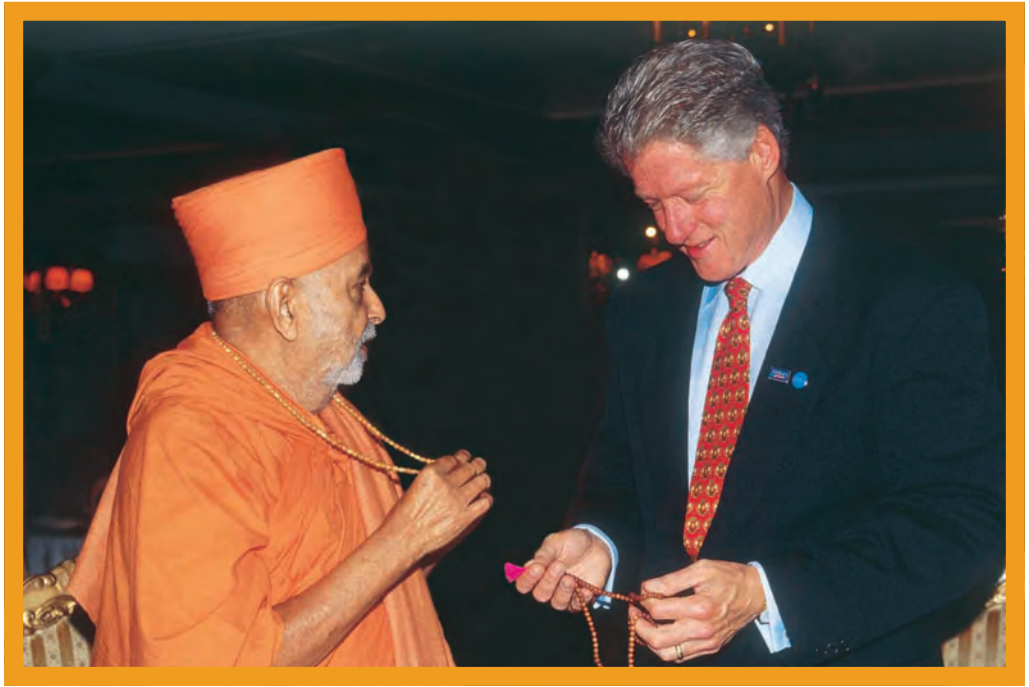
A Unique Cultural Complex :

The complex would be a display of architectural virtuosity. But the estimated cost was £10 million. Where would the money come from ? Declining a rich benefactor’s offer to pay for all the expenses, Swamishri threw the onus of fund-raising on to the community of devotees. They would need unrivalled determination and faith to meet the finishing date, Swamishri had given them August 20,1995.

First, the Mission’s members donated whatever they could afford. Then, in July, 1992, they embarked on a tireless fund-raising campaign across the country. After two years, pounding the pavements, devotees had raised almost £ 1.4 million good start, but not nearly enough.

Volunteers, old and young, took part in a sponsored walk, linking up with followers in Liecester, Birmingham and other Hindu centres. They contributed to the collection of cans in what became Britain’s largest aluminium-can recycling campaign”.





Pramukh Swami Maharaj with President Clinton



Swamishri with Prime Minister Tony Blair



Indian Architect C.P Sompura was designing the temple, the Mission also invited the British firm Triad Architects to design the cultural centre. When Assistant Architect Keith Meynell first saw the site, he was dismayed "This is a terrible place to build such a lovely temple".

Before the foundations could be dug, the polluted waste had to be carried away by special lorries. The ground was so waterlogged that it frequently subsided during digging. But by November, 1992, 194 concrete piles had been driven some 30 feet into the ground.

Then, an engineer, with experience of dam projects, created a unique concrete mix for the 22,600 square feet foundation slab. This had to be layered and set before winter, it took 225 truck loads 4,500 tonnes all poured in a single day. In November 1992, the enormous slab was covered with soil and left to cure for five months.

The Hindu scriptures specify that a temple may be built only from materials made by God. That rules out use of any metals. The temple's great central dome, which represents the sky, would have to be crated entirely of stones resting one on top of one other. It is the only modern dome of its kind in the country, not to be supported by steel".

Massive 2282 tonnes of lime stone were shipped to the Gujarat port of Kandla, to be carved by 450 stone masons and artisans, who have skills passed down through generations.

It took about eight and a half months for more than 26,300 individually numbered stones to be shipped to London. By June 1993, the first column bases - the kumbhis - were installed. Layer by layer the stones were slotted together. At last the devotees could see their vision taking shape. It was a shared labour. Bankers became electricians, lawyers swept the floor, accountants laid drains.

The impossible task : completed in 5 years by committed voluntaries

Two weeks before the six-day inauguration ceremony, there was still much to be done. Then the sadhus had arrived from India and took control. Keith Meynell drew one of them aside to voice his concern. The



sadhu smiled and said “it will open on time.” So it will. You have to admire their faith, thought Meynell.

But the sadhus had something more than blind faith. Some of them had 35 years experience in organizing the construction of temples. Despite their ancient vows, they were a very modern task force. Every day, they could be seen crossing the busy building site, talking on mobile phones over the thump of pneumatic drills. Somehow, they recruited a massive new volunteer army of more than 1,500 people and suddenly, it all seemed possible.

Just days before the inauguration, Meynell took a break to gaze up at the temple, with its pinnacles corkscrewing into a clear blue sky. As he ran his eye down the building, it struck him that the balustrade of the glittering marble staircase was missing. To comply with safety regulations and enable the place to open, plans were made to erect scaffolding poles. But next day, Meynell arrived to find a beautifully carved marble balustrade in place. It has gone up overnight. Again the volunteer’s determination had proved him wrong”.

Any visitor to the Swaminarayan Temple is in for a treat. The six domes and nine pinnacles, dazzlingly clean, shine triumphantly over Neasden’s terraced houses. Inside, you are greeted by a marble forest of pillars, each elaborately carved with a different story from Indian folklore.

Soon you reach the garbhdwar or inner sanctum, where the images of the deity are housed. High above, a corbelled dome filters soft sunlight on to the beams below. The sacred image of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, considered by his followers to be the supreme god, stands in the central bay.

On either side are statues of Swaminarayan and his other incarnations and statues of his companions. They stare with calm eyes, palms turned towards us in greeting, their cloaks, and head dresses sumptuously decorated in vibrant reds and golds. The overall effect is one of a joyous celebration of life.

To-day, school parties come on organized tours and tourists make a detour there to see what the Prince of Wales has called ‘An exciting and noble addition to the landscape of London’. Local people, too, are



impressed. Pal Cooper, 65, has been a Neasden resident for more than 20 years. Her small council house faces on to the temple site, watched it being built from the foundations upwards. She says she had to put up with a lot of noise during construction. After months of disturbance, the devotees invited her inside to see what all the fuss was about. It took her breath away. She explained "There is no getting away from it. It is a beautiful building". Lan Pinder concludes, "People from all faiths even atheists can say to one another, yes, the temple is beautiful and that is a starting point".

Another tribute is by Kathleen Rast. She narrates in "The Miracle of Neasden a Christian Woman's Tribute" as under:

"To Neasden, an Industrial District of London Town,
Came a Hindu Holy Man of great renown Swamishri
Maharaj who had a wondrous dream, He envisaged a
mandir a temple it would seem
To be built in the traditional Indian way,
Where the Hindus of Britain could come and pray.
The material to be used would be Marble so pure
That for a Thousand Years it would endure !
Italian Marble and Bulgarian Granite were sent
To India, to be wonderfully carved, they went.
Whilst, in London, the site was being prepared,
Cleared foundations laid no effort spread.
From whence would come the required work force ?
Volunteers flocked in their hundreds, as a matter of
Course,
Rallying to the support of their beloved Guru !
(In India stone carvers came forward too).
Fund raisers joined together to provide the haul
Of cash, so needful, gathering gifts large and small.
Men, Women and Children laboured to retrieve
Used aluminium cans would you believe ?
The money raised from recycling formed a large part
Of the grand total expected right from the start.
The mandir is now finished, despite all the fears,



Understanding Hinduism - Gallery at Neasdon Temple, London



Achieving its target in just three years ! Its Domes, Pillars and Pinnacles rise to the sky A Pearly Paeon of Praise to God on high ! Not only for Hindus were the banners unfurled, Swamishri's heart is as big as the World ! In erecting the mandir he has planted the seed Of welcome to all races, colour and creed. It stands in all its Glory, dominating the scene, The perfect fulfillment of a Holy Man's Dream".

New Mandirs in USA and Canada

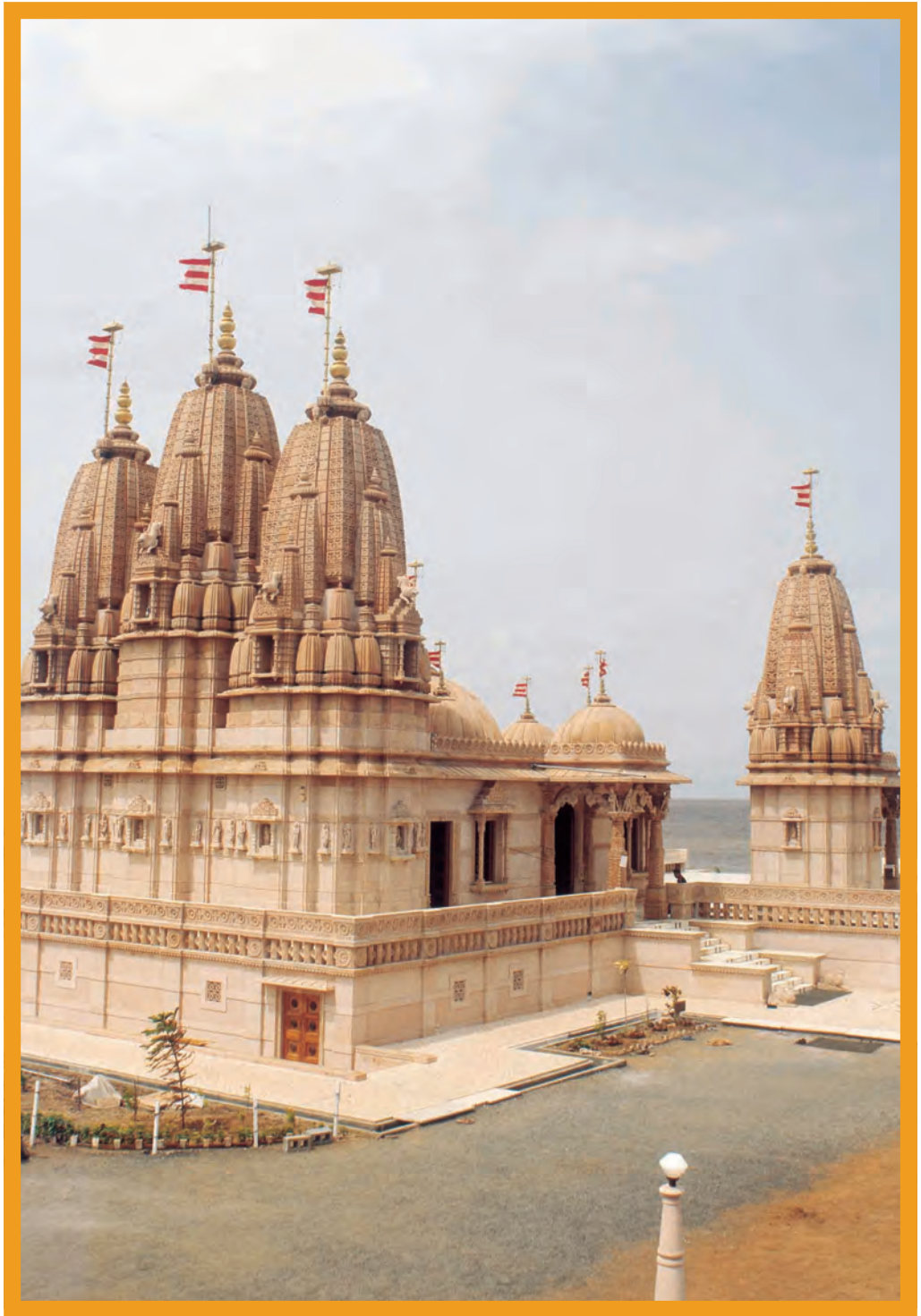
Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated Two new traditional BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs (temples) in 2007 "One in Toronto and the other in Atlanta in North America." The Toronto mandir, was inaugurated on 22nd July. Many newspaper headlines praised architectural magnificence and the spirit "Extraordinary Etobicoke 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 even 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."

Swamishri 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 have served well. We pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that you





Mandir on the Seashore at Kosamba - Gujarat



and your families attain peace and continue to serve the organization in this way. You have all served wholeheartedly. So God will protect you”.

Third Akshardham at Aobbins mile, New Jersey USA :

The third Akshardham temple, first at Akshardham temple, Gandhinagar, The capital city of Gujarat state; Second Akshardham temple New Delhi, Capital city of India. Third one is under construction and likely to be completed during 2018 are the unique, meraculous and monumented creation of BAPS with the inspiration of Pjuya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They are sure to inspire the mankind on the earth instilling he beliefs of the praghat Bhagwan who is endeavoring for the upliftment of mankind for the generation to come.

The London temple is an illustrative story. At home similar stories start from Akshardham, Gandhinagar. Kosamba - Tithal-Bulsar, Zadeshwar Bharuch and so on and so forth. Each has stories of dedicated disciples working together under the spiritual guidance of Swamishri. Similar are to be met with in 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 are created in the year 2007 in Chicago and Houston, USA. These are major ones, but there are large number of small centres in each of these countries and within India. Swamishri visits all small and large centres in his Vicharan at regular intervals, despite his age and health problems.

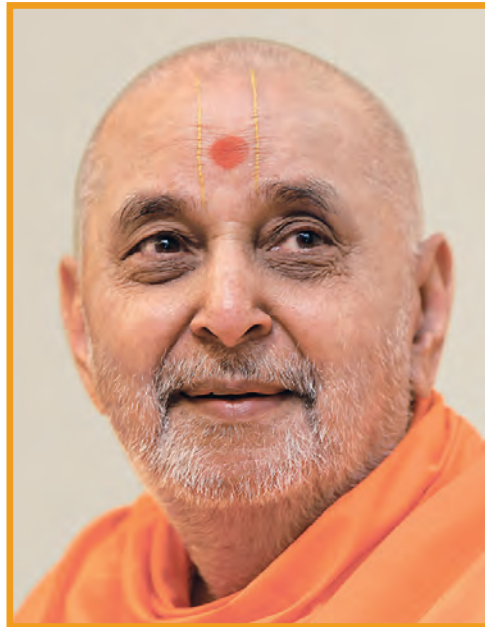
These are the centres of worship to spread harmony, peace and love, that is the message he gives. They are not meant for fomenting hatred or fundamentalism or for conversion by lure of physical facilities. In every centre, men, women and children learn spirituality and the Hindu way of life by living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

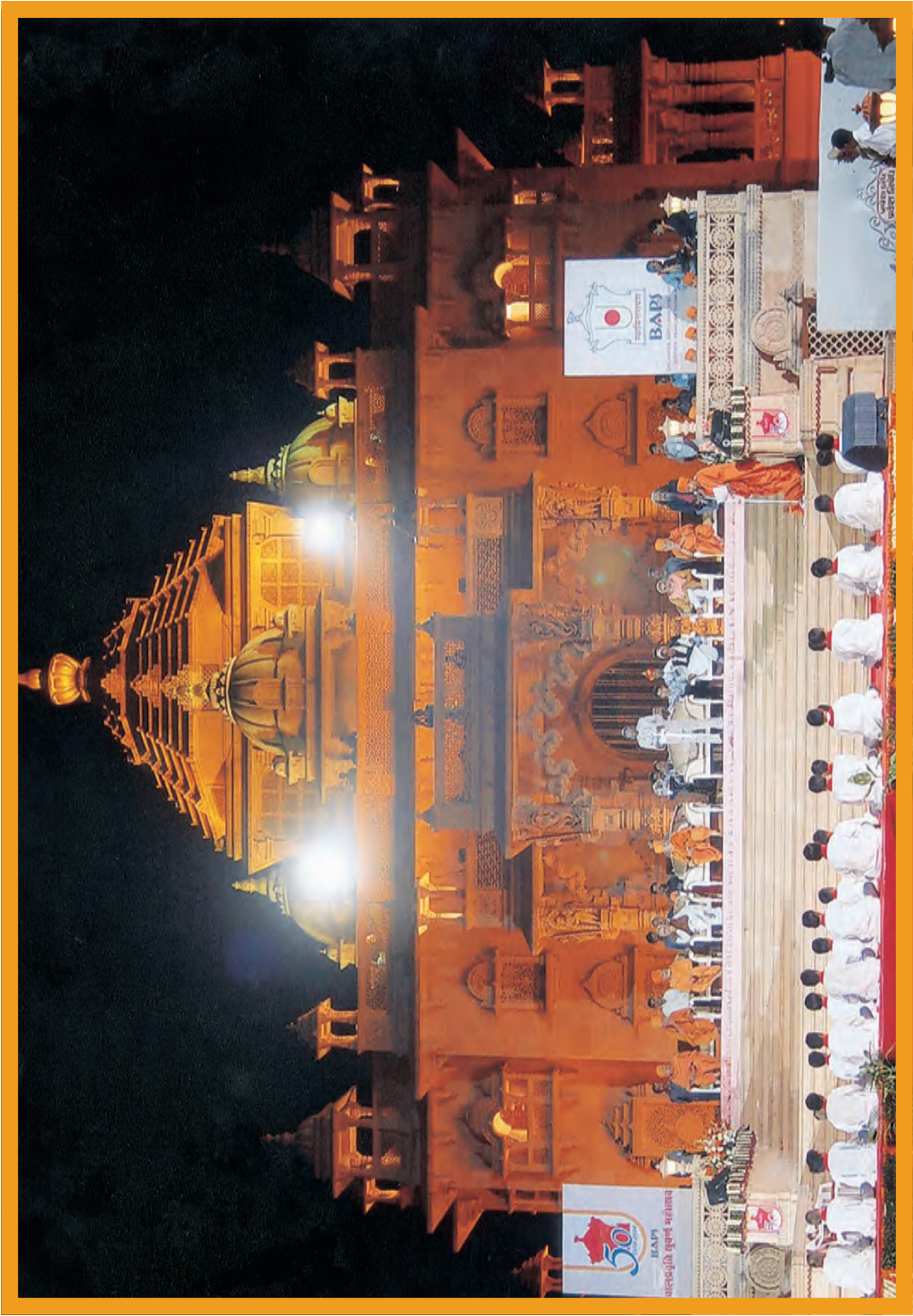
Centuries before the Hindu religion had crossed the frontiers of the country, it had made a great impact in foreign lands. Hindu temples are to be found in several south - east Asian countries like Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, etc. In more recent times through the systematic drive launched by BAPS under Pramukh Swami Maharaj built a number of temples and centres in more then 44 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 stood revived. All these temples, it must be said, have come through contributions from local communities, who have wholeheartedly participated in the venture.

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.

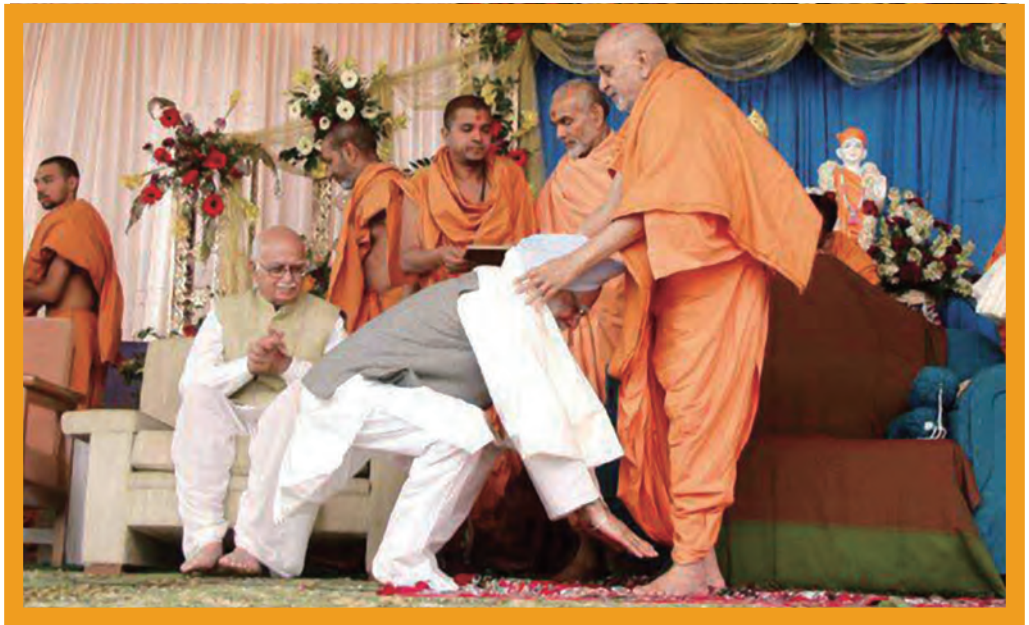




Swamishri and President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam with children at Akshardham, Gandhinagar on the occasion of Golden Jubilee of BAPS Bal Utsav



Swamishri Greetings President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam



Swamishri Greetings Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh





Swamishri with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Bringing Up Children

Yuvak mahotsav celebration in february 2014 in the presence of Dr. Abdul Kalam, Advaniji and Narendra modi

Child is the father of man. In a family, child rearing is most important as the future of the family depends on the child when he/she grows up.

The same is true for a society or civilization. But most often, this is lost sight of particularly in the current modern age, or “Kali-yug”, as it is called in our traditional lore.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has stressed time and again the need to raise spiritual values to build future society. Under his inspiration, children’s centres have come up. Despite his tight schedule, he finds time to meet children and answer their questions.

The following pages narrate one of the children’s festivals organised by BAPS. This took place at Akshardham, Gandhinagar. This was part of the celebrations of 50 years of BAPS children’s forum, in February, 2004.

On that day 20000 BAPS children assembled for the occasion as twenty thousand -orange, green and white balloons-floated in the sky above.

The celebration was a tribute to Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, founder of the BAPS’ children’s forum.

The participants were below 14 years and were, selected from BAPS forums throughout Gujarat. The chief guest was the former President of India - Shri A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. The other dignitaries included the Deputy Prime Minister of India. Shri L. K. Advani, the Governor of the State, Shri Kailashpati Misra and Chief Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

The function was on spiritual values and patriotism. It included various cultural programmes and a question -answer session with the President of India.



The proceeding began with the story of two boys : one the son of a fisherman (the President of India) and the other the son of a farmer (Pramukh Swami Maharaj). This was followed by patriotic dances and songs presented by the children. After this there was depictions of how the children's forums worldwide function - through dance, dialogue and song, "Hum bal sabha me jatehai - jivan ko Dhanya banane" (We go to children's assembly and make our lives noble.)

There was a colourful Presentation by children dressed as flowers and birds. With dance and song, they depicted the aim of the children's forum - to foster character, education, health and spirituality.

The next event was a lively presentation - an anti-addiction rally by children who marched through the assembly while singing songs and shouting slogans.

This was followed by a function where achievers - all former members of the forum, were honoured.

The details of some of the achievers is given below by way of illustration. (The year of their joining the children's forum is given in brackets)

Yashwant Jethwa - he lost his father at a young age. He belonged to a lower middle class family. He rose to be the District Superintendent of Police (D.S.P) in Madhya Pradesh after joining the IPS. (The Indian Police Services).

Rajesh Dhanka He joined the Indian Air force in 1980. He is currently serving as joint Director of Personnel.

Minesh Patel He joined the forum in London. He is now a fleet - manager in British Airways. He flies Air Force 1, the aircraft that carries the British Prime Minister.

Hari Krishna - won 10 awards in the International Bal Mahotsav in 1979. He is a well known cardiologist in the U.K. He has, at the age of 33, conducted over 800 open heart operations in Scotland.

Girish Patel He joined the forum in London. At the age of 19, he became an international polevaulter. He was also in the British Olympic Team.

Divyesh Tailor He developed as an entrepreneur with a multi-million property development company. At the age of 29, he was awarded “Young Property Personality of 2004”.

Vipul Vaghela. He was a senior scientist with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at Ahmedabad. He was working on indigenously developed satellites and remote sensing technology. Currently he is working full time for the Aksharpith mandir, HQ of BAPS Sanstha, Ahmedabad.

The majority of them belong to lower middle class families and are from rural areas. There are many other whose examples could be cited. Each of them has faith in spiritual values to enhance their determination and efforts to achieve what they have set out to achieve in life.

President Kalam addressing the children said :

“Good evening to all children, I remember a famous Kirtan of Saint Tyaga raja in Telugu -” *Endaro Mahanubhavulu Andariki na Vandanamulu*. It means - “There are several great men present here, my salutations to all of them” So I salute you all as the great saint did. I salute all the *Mahanubhavulu* -all the children, I greet you.

My friends, when I am in this place of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s temple and in the meeting presided over by Pramukh Swami here, what an environment ! I am seeing here a beautiful environment, a divine environment. How does this beautiful environment come ? Whenever anything is beautiful - a beautiful environment creates creativity. The creativity I saw just for an hour when I was sitting here and seeing the people and children : how creative they are ! I greet all the 25,000 children here and also half a million children, wherever they are watching this on their TV screens. My greetings and God’s grace are with you.

Friends, I see a beautiful thing has happened - Fifty years of BAPS and the service it has rendered to the children. I have also seen how it has blossomed in the great human beings it has created. I would like to greet Pramukh Swami Maharaj for such a great event. He has been responsible for such a great event in this divine environment.



You know, on June 13, 2001, I happened to meet Swamiji. It was a beautiful meeting with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We were together for more than about 90 minutes. At that time we were formulating India 2020. What is India 2020? What is the meaning of India 2020? That is when you all grow 25 years old, 30 years old, you should see a beautiful India, you should see a happy India, you should see a prosperous India, you must see a safe India.

I had a roadmap, prepared by 500 experts of our country. With that roadmap, I was with Pramukh Swami Maharaj for about two hours. I was telling him about how India could get transformed into a developed nation. There are 260 million people below the poverty line, we have to lift them up. And our GDP growth - Gross Domestic Product - rate of growth has to increase to 10 per cent and be sustained for 10 years.

He heard me, Pramukh Swami Maharaj heard me patiently. Then he asked me, what are the tools, what are the instruments, which will lead to bring prosperity throughout the nation? I told him the prosperity will come, in an integrated way in five areas simultaneously. The five areas are: education and healthcare coupled, agriculture and food processing coupled, and then the most important infrastructure and power generation - 300,000 MW power generation and also networking of rivers. These are the areas of importance and then fifth is the self reliance in critical technology.

I presented all my books, graphs and computer outputs. With all of these, I was discussing with him. And then, he asked me one question. That one question he asked, really even now, it is reverberating.

He said, "Kalam, there is something missing in these five areas of development."

I asked Swamishri, "What is it, that is missing?"

He said, "You should include a spiritual component in that, with the five areas."

Now, how do you make the spiritual component? Today, we are all working for a developed India. How do you make a developed India? After meeting Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I came to the conclusion. The great heritage, the civilization that India has, is because of a certain



intrinsic value system. That value system had to be built in a development process even in modern times. It looks to me that the most important thing is to have a beautiful citizen, an enlightend citizen, not one but we want a billion enlightened citizens.

When I am here in this divine environment, I am convinced we need a multi-dimensional approach for the creation of peace and development, not only in India but for the whole planet. How can we do that ? The first and foremost component to have is education with a value system. I am witnessing, whichever place I go, wherever a spiritual human being is there, the spiritual system and service are there. I have found that even without teaching in the classes, the environment itself educates our children with a value system.

This I have witnessed today on this campus, in this place, how half a million children are benefiting with all the education, wherever they study, but they are imbibing the value system. So I would like to congratulate the Swaminarayan temple authorities on such an excellent component they are giving to the children.

For us especially, for India as you know that we have got 540 million young people in this country. Nowhere has a democratic nation got 540 million young people below 25 years. Now this is a big resource for India. This is a powerful resource. If ignited, it is the most powerful resource on the earth, above the earth and under the earth. And definitely for a developed India these are the foundations, which have to come from the young people. I would like to say that whatever work is done in this divine place, is very important for national development.

God has created a beautiful earth. On this beautiful earth, every citizen has got a responsibility to be a beautiful citizen. How do you make a beautiful citizen ? How do you create an enlightened citizen ? An enlightened citizen comes out of a good value system and education. And the most important is value - education. I am sure that this institution - BAPS institution - is doing a great job. Dear children, (this was that) you can be a good human being. If you get the value system in young age you can be a beautiful citizen”.





Childrens at Prayer

Pramukh Swami Maharaj responded by saying that:

Our Indian culture and philosophy should be taught from the cradle. First, one has to understand one's (true) form. Because, we understand the physical body that we see to be our true form. We believe this. However, the body is perishable and it dies. We see this, yet our deep attachment for it is not overcome. Because of this, we face many difficulties and obstacles in our business and other work. But the scriptures say our work, whether it is political, social, business or any other, should be done with commitment (in order) to (run) our country. We should keep faith in God and learn from scriptures. They also teach us the philosophy that I am atma and by offering devotion to God I want to attain salvation.' The other thing we are told is that the body we have attained should be used for (the) salvation, progress and good of mankind.

On this topic, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said, "Nijatmanam brahmarupam dehatraya vinlathanam; vibhavya tena kartavya bhaktihi Krushnasya sarvada" - that is identifying one's self with Brahma, separate from the three bodies, one should always offer devotion to God (Shri Krishna) believe one's atma as brahmswarup and offer devotion to God. I am not the body. I am atma. Consolidate this belief, that the atma is eternal, immortal and full of happiness. It has no ego, no jealousy, no feelings of 'mine' and 'thine'. It is eternal. It is never destroyed. After leaving this body, if it has performed good karmas, it will attain God. If they are not good then birth and death await it. So if all these scriptural talks, which are our foundation, are understood properly then we can do all our tasks with ease.

When Yogiji Maharaj toured the villages, he gathered children for the evening arti. They came readily to the mandir to play the gongs and drums and for the prasad afterwards. In this way Yogiji Maharaj used to sit with the 50 children from a village. He gave this message to them daily. In every village talk he explained to them that their purpose in life is to worship God. So you should offer devotion to God. And he made them memorise, 'Swami ane Narayan, Akshar ane Purushottam, atma ane Paramatma'. So, He had a lot of love for children. He did not make any distinction between small or big, therefore, he sat with them and talked to them. Whoever came he talked about this so that this knowledge is attained.



Today, we see this principle in the life of our country's President, Kalam Saheb. In spite of his services to the nation and busy schedule he has specially come to this children's programme. He has put aside his work and made available time for this programme. He did not think that, 'I am the President and as the President what do I say to children? Why should I go?' He has put aside all his other work and taken time to come here. In the question-answer session, he gave answers with great love and affection. He gave solutions to their enquiries, and that is also a great thing. Normally, one who is of a very high status would not be interested in children's questions or tasks; but he has noble feelings for children. He always wanted to meet children and listen to their questions and give solutions for the good of the country and appreciate their love for the country. By the year 2020, he wants to make India a developed nation. He has (fixed) great targets for India. In terms of wealth and prosperity, the country needs to be developed and that is a necessary thing. But together with that material progress spiritual development is necessary and such virtues in us are our wealth. That spiritual wealth has to be preserved. While developing externally we also have to develop (just as much) internally, so that the difficulties that exist today between people - bias and dislike, partiality of 'mine' and 'yours' etc - all disappear. We have to remove all the inner faults in us and attain virtue. Everyone has virtues. Some have one, some two, some five, there may be faults, too, but there is no need to be afraid of them. We want to progress, so look only at the good in all. By accepting the virtues of all those who are small or big, we will gain many virtues. And if we focus on others' faults, our virtues will disappear and faults will multiply.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiated 500 sadhus and He said to each of them 'When you go to the villages, the people will reject you, insult you, persecute you and beat you. Still, you should tolerate it all, since you are born to help and liberate people. And you inspire them to live morally and be free from addiction. Therefore, daily, (between morning and night) you make five people take a pledge to live morally and without addictions.' Bhagwan Swaminarayan had given that instruction to all the sadhus, and it is given today by the President by making the children take a pledge to free five people from addictions.



It is a difficult thing to shun addictions in today's atmosphere. Yet the children in their campaign have endeavoured to do so. Some children were even beaten, but they did not give up. During the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the sadhus suffered repeated beatings, but they continued the work of freeing people from addiction. And in this way, thousands of people had an addiction - free life. Similarly, the children here to-day have taken the noble path to be free from the shackles of addiction. The President of India has such noble thoughts and feelings for all people.

Bharat is our country. Many great men and incarnations have been born in Bharat. They have blessed us with their inspiring words. Today, whatever difficulties we face, our culture and our values have been sustained because their words have been passed on from generation to generation. And even one or two of those words in our lives has the power to sustain us. We feel and ask what is the efficacy of that, of what effect are these talks? But if we have faith in and accept these talks, then our country will certainly progress and prosper materially and spiritual virtues will illuminate it. There will also be peace in the country and development”.

This was a memorable function - All children's events of BAPS are presented like this. All those who participate or watch it learn a lot, whether they are children, parents, teachers or others. The development of spiritual values in children is dear to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Golden Jubilee celebration of BAPS children forum

The BAPS Children's Forum came in to existence in 1954. The following account is to briefly state how this activity received importance and developed as a major activity. It is important to involve children in a spiritual way of life, provide confidence and strong will power to go ahead in their life. This enables them to progress in all walks of life while keeping family values on a firm footing, and respect for others in society and to parents - alike.

- 1954 : Yogiji Maharaj established the Bal Mandal at Matunga in Mumbai
- 1955 : Proposal to promote Children's activities discussed in detail during the first BAPS Yuvak Adhiveshan in Atladara.
- 1956 : First Bal Adhiveshan in Nairobi, Kenya.
- 1957 : Second Bal Adhiveshan in Mombasa, Kenya



- 1962 : Third Bal Adhiveshan in Kampala, Uganda
- 1964 : Fourth Bal Adhiveshan in Mwanza, Tanzania
- 1966 : First Educational venture for children - gurukul residential school established - in Gondal.
- 1969 : First All - India Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan, Atladara.
- 1970 : Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan in Nairobi and Kampala.
- 1970 : Bal Mandal established in London, U.K.
- 1971 : Second All - India Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan, Gondal
- 1972 : Satsang Examinations introduced for balaks and yuvaks
- 1973 : Children's activities initiated for tribal children in Selvas, Dadra-Nagar Haveli.
- 1974 : First Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan in London.
- 1974 : Bal Mandal established in New York, USA.
- 1976 : Third International Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan, Vallabh Vidyanagar
- 1978 : All-India Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan, Gondal.
- 1979 : BAPS Children's Activities Silver Anniversary-celebrated with study campaign, cultural programmes, recognition of London Bal Mandal by UN, public awareness drive, health awareness children's diagnostic camps, various competitions and publications.
- 1979 : International Bal Mahotsav in Vidyanagar to celebrate the International Year of the Child. Over 3,000 selected children attended.
- 1980 : National Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan, UK
- 1981 : Bal Pravrutti Centre Office established in Ahmedabad to coordinate activities of Children's Forum.
- 1984 : First National Bal-Yuvak Adhiveshan, USA.
- 1985 : Thousands of children participated in spiritual activities (Yog-yagna) during the build-up to the Bicentenary Celebrations of Aksharbrahma Gunantitanand Swami in Ahmedabad.
- 1988 : 'Bal Ghanshyam' newsletter launched to impart guidance to volunteers of Children's Forum.
- 1989 : Second International Bal Mahotsav, Vidyanagar. Over 15,000 balaks and balikas participated.





Drum Beats of Sanatan Dharma - Swamishri Among Yongsters



- 1991 : Children presented cultural programmes during the Cultural Festival of India at Edison, New Jersey, USA.
- 1991 : Children's activities launched in the Middle East Australia, New Zealand and the Far East.
- 1992 : In Gandhinagar, during the Centenary Celebrations of BrahmaSwarup Yogiji Maharaj, 5 trained balaks managed the Bal Nagri (Children's Wonderland) and its 28 departments. The Bal Nagri was visited by 3,500,000 people. One of the biggest de-addiction campaigns undertaken by BAPS with the help of balaks and their trainers.
- 1993 : Annual regional Bal Adhiveshan launched.
- 1993 : Annual Cultural study visits to India, organised by USA and UK Bal Mandals, begin.
- 1993 : Over 500 balaks and balikas in the UK begin a 3 year can collection project to promote environmental awareness. Over 2.5 million cans (aluminium) collected.
- 1994 : In Mumbai, 50 groups of balaks visited 1,225 patients in various hospitals to comfort them and pray for their speedy recovery. Also, 711 people were de-addicted by them.
- 1994 : Selected balaks received special public speaking training from experts.
- 1994 : First Bal-Balika Karyakar trainers Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar; 1,613 karyakars participated.
- 1995 : Story - Telling Sessions : During the Diwali vacation, 750 story telling sessions were organised in Mumbai. 71,250 balaks presented 22,500 stories in Gujarati, Hindi, English and Marathi.
- 1995 : During the Amrut Mahotsav Celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 1,600 trained balaks managed the extensive Bal Nagri and its 25 departments.
- 1995 : In London, over 250 trained balaks and balikas managed the Bal Nagri during the inauguration of the new mandir at Neasden. The Bal Nagri was visited by over 10,000 people.
- 1995 : In Gujarat and Mumbai, 75131 balaks contacted 122,316 people to impart the message of an addiction-free life.
- 1996 : National Bal Adhiveshan in US Aand Canada.



- 1997 : Regional Bal Adhiveshans. Over 20,000 balaks and balikas representing 100 regions participated in 14 competitions at 53 venues throughout Gujarat, Maharashtra and other states.
- 1997 : One thousand seven hundred selected balaks and balikas compete in a Story-Telling Competition, 560 participate in a public-speaking training shibir.
- 1997 : Children from 35 centres participated in Regional Bal Adhiveshans held at 5 places.
- 1998 : First Bal Karyakar Adhiveshan, Bochansan. 425 senior karyakars completed.
- 1998 : Inter-Regional Bal Pravrutti Karyakar Adhiveshan held at 24 venues, over 2000 karyakars participated.
- 1999 : Three hundred and eighty-three trained balaks presented cultural programmes at 218 places in cities and villages, inspiring over 236,400 people, to give up addiction, live a moral life, etc.
- 1999 : 'Bal Ghanshyam' launched in English for balaks and karyakars in the UK and USA.
- 2000 : 'De-addiction Campaign' by 10,000 trained balaks and balikas for 20 days during their summer vacation. They contacted over 800,000 people in cities and villages of Gujarat, inspiring them to become addiction-free.
- 2000 : BAPS Children's Wing is honoured for its services to society by the Governor of Gujarat.
- 2000 : Eight Hundred selected balaks participate in the National Shibir in USA.
- 2001 : National Bal Pravrutti Karyakar Shibir, UK. Over 130 karyakars participated.
- 2001 : National Bal Shibir in the UK attended by children from 20 centres along with the Parents' Training Seminar attended by over 500 parents.
- 2001 : Over 1,275 children attended the Bal-Balika Shibir. Over 360 balaks and balikas competed in the adhiveshan.
- 2002 : 'Swaminarayan Bal-Prakash' - First ever spiritual magazine for kids published.
- 2002 : UN-UNICEF invited BAPS to participate in a seminar in New York.



- 2003 : English edition of ' Swaminarayan Bal Prakash' launched.
- 2003 : First ever Shishu Adhiveshan was held in London, UK, at which 100 children aged 3-5 take part in 5 competitions.
- 2003 : Launching of various programmes to commemorate the BAPS Children's Forum Golden Anniversary Celebration.
- 2004 : On February 8, at Akshardham Gandhinagar, the President of India, H. E. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam attended the grand golden jubilee celebrations in the presence of 20,000 children.
- 2005-2012 : Regular annual "Yuvak Mahosav" was celebrated in Indian and in other countries of the world through respective regional B.A.P.S. wings.
- 2013 : On 6th January 2013, 60th Anniversary of these youth activities was celebrated at Sardar Patel Stadium, Ahmedabad. It was titled as "Yuvak Mahotsava". It was attended by more than 60,000 youths (male and female) and about 1,50,000 Satsangis in the divide presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The programme was full of cultural presentations and inspiring talks of dignitaries and Sant Mandal.

One of the recent programme was on 19th December 2015. 200,000 students-youth attended the celebration to mark the completion of Swamishri's 94th year and entry into his 95th.

And such programmes go on every year at all centres of BAPS – wherever they are. They ignite children, build their character, make them brave to take up challenges and be obedient.

We see that many young people from India call their parents abroad, not for a vacation, but to serve them. They use them to prepare their food, raise their children, so that they enjoy Western life, while their parents work for them. This is the impact of the Western culture on our people abroad. Of course, parents in the west do not bother to serve their children beyond a point like Indian parents do. The author has seen the impact of spiritual guidance of BAPS Centres on the families, whenever he had visited and stayed with such families abroad. He had experienced this during his stay with Ajitbhai and Dakshaben Patel in London and Dr. Dave in Dallas. All

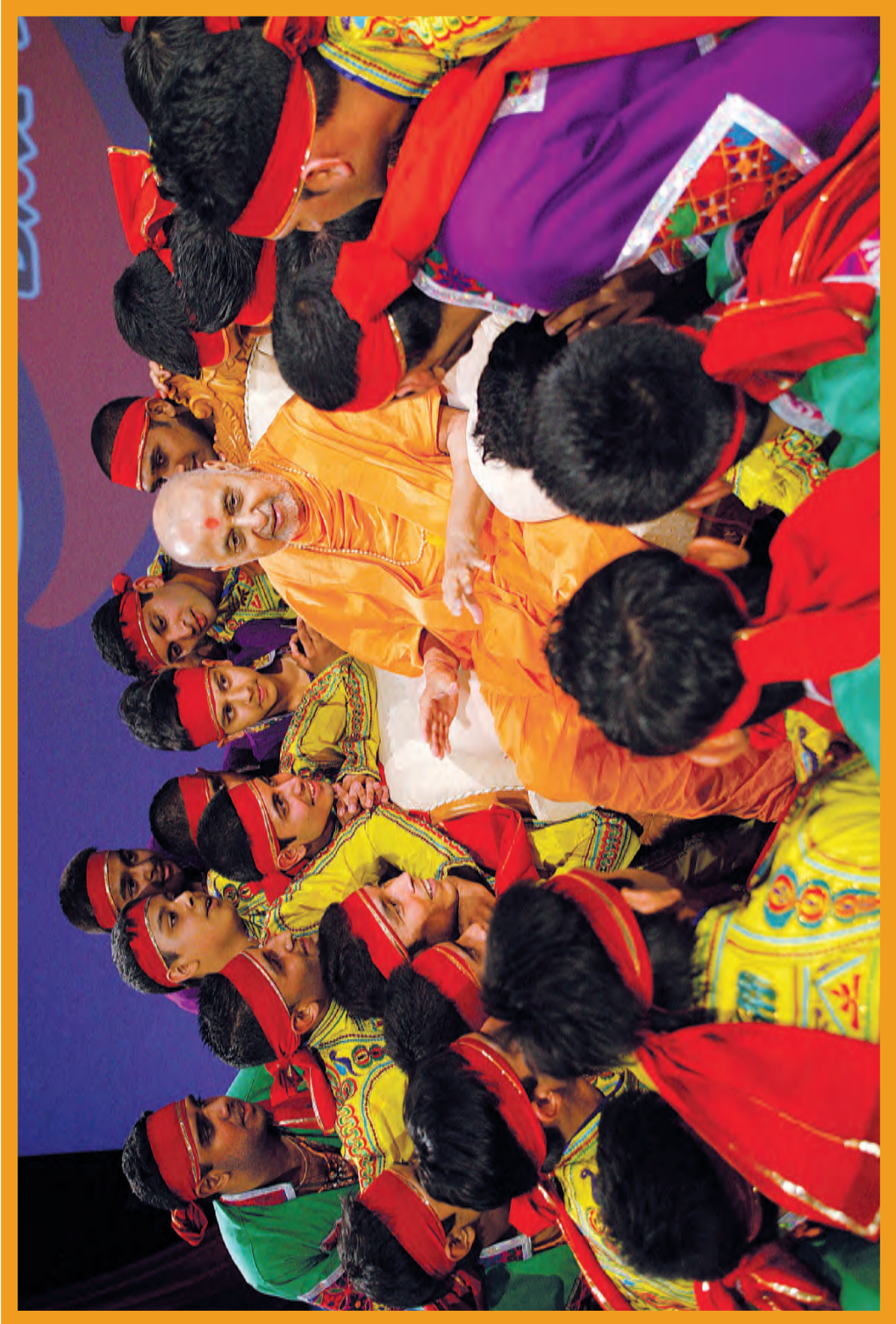


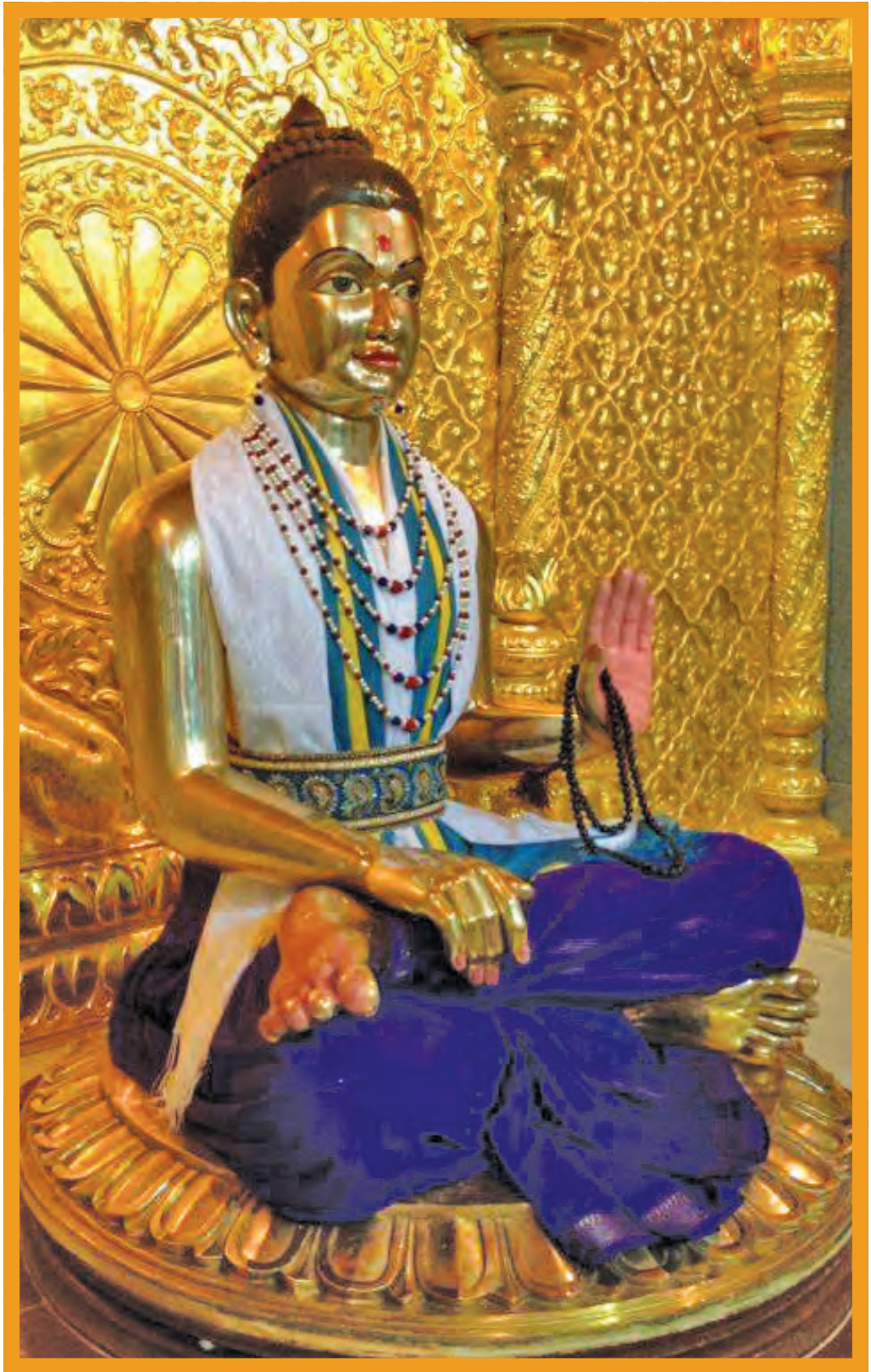
these families have remained united unlike many other who are religious but do not observe traditional family norms, with children deserting parents. The Satsangi families take care of their parents and their children also serve guests. At home also, this is equally true. The children behave better and have confidence here. They become achievers. This is a major investment in future generation, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Another major contribution especially for non resident Gujarati families has been to keep family tradition and love together and provide hospitality. Author recently went to Tallahassee – Florida – USA where we met Shri Kunal Vyas who was informed by Pujya Nilkathswarup Swamiji about the visit. Kunal and his wife looked after not only the Author but his entire team. Similarly, Author found Shri Kalibhai of Bhojan Group greatly hospitable in Paris where good vegetarian food is difficult. This attitude is a great contrast with some families or non resident families who are not the followers of BAPS. Some of the families when they visit relatives' home, the exploit their hospitality fully and hesitant to reciprocate the same when the relatives visit them. They are not willing to take them out or even allow lunch because they have gone out for work. and give them only breakfast and dinner. The BAPS has tremendous influence on its followers – their culture, hospitality and willingness to help others even whom they have not met and not likely to meet in future.

Swamishri has been in appreciating children and youths and imbibing culture and spirituality in them . This is one spect of his abundant love for youth. Once someone asked Swamishri, "Do you ever despair when we fail to live up to your wishes and benchmarks of good behaviour?" Swamishri replied, "How can a soul match with God's standards. A soul is after all a soul – enwrapped by worldly desires. The essential thing is that it has come into the path of God. Shriji Maharaj, too, had a broad mind. The fact that a person has come into the association of God is a great thing. He will thus gradually understand and attain liberation".









Earthquake in Gujarat - The one-man relief brigade:

Kutch Earthquake : adopting of 100 affected villages for re-establishment

It was 11.15 and the cold wintry night had given some reprieve to volunteers and sadhus who were engaged in providing succour to the victims at BAPS Earthquake relief camp in Bhuj. But not everyone was resting when the phone rang.

“Hello, how many people were fed to-day ?”

“Twenty-three thousand Bapa,” replied Brahmavihari Swami.

“There is an urgent need for food at Bhachau, Rapar, Anjar and Khavda. We will have to open spot kitchens to provide hot meals...”

“But, it would not be possible”.

“Why ?”

“Because there is no water, electricity and other facilities there. So, like other organisations, we are distributing food packets...”.

“Food packets are fine, but they are cold. If people get hot meals, it will make them feel better. Even if a mother serves cold meals **three times a day**, the members of the family feel that she has no love for them. Whereas, serving only a cup of warm milk, makes a lot of difference”.

The definition of service to humanity acquired a different nuance. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s telephone call that night infused a new perspective about humanitarian service. The next day, four new community kitchens were opened and hot meals began to be served.



One of the major contributions of Swamishri is the promotion of voluntary service for assisting people affected by disasters. Normally, providing relief is the business of the government. He created a permanent mechanism within his organisation to respond instantly to any disaster either natural or manmade. Whenever a calamity occurs, BAPS volunteers are the first to reach the spot to provide relief. This assistance is given irrespective of caste or creed.

He gave a new dimension to relief. It does not just stop at providing temporary relief in terms of food and shelter. It means giving permanent rehabilitation to the family, for the revival of economic and social infrastructure.

The conversation mentioned above was part of a massive relief work launched when a major earthquake struck in Gujarat in 2001 at 8:46 a.m. on January 26-Republic day. BAPS, under the inspiring guidance of Swamishri rose magnificently to the challenge. The story is one of quick, organized efforts to rescue people from tragedy and shock both through physical and spiritual assistance. This is a unique example of work of one single institution covering all aspects of relief and rehabilitation in more than 100 villages. This is also given by way of an illustration to provide a glimpse into the voluntary service inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The Earthquake in Gujarat on January 2001 quick and timely relief to earthquake affected areas

That January day, was one of the worst possible days in the history of Gujarat. The tragedy struck when Republic Day celebrations were in full swing. The earthquake cut like a scythe across the stage. People were taken unawares. It affected major cities like Ahmedabad, Bhuj and its effects had spread over thousands of villages, all over the State.

Within moments, more than 20,000 people were dead and lakhs injured. Approximately 2,55,000 houses vanished, developed a variety of cracks, or became unsafe. Kutch was the centre of the quake and more than 18,000 people died there. The major cities viz. Bhuj, Anjar, Bhachau, Rapar and more than 900 villages were affected. There was large - scale destruction of human and material resources.





To-day, Kutch District with rest of Gujarat is back to normal and thriving as before. BAPS contributed its mite to the stupendous relief effort.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj guided relief operations on an hour-to-hour basis.

- He provided a divine healing touch that assuaged the victims' sickness, grief and pain unleashed by the calamity. Within 75 minutes of the disaster, the BAPS Swaminarayan mandir at Bhuj was ready with its relief kitchen. In the first round, hot meals had been prepared for 4,000 people. During these early hours nobody was aware of the magnitude of the tragedy. The sadhus and volunteers of BAPS were mobilized within minutes and raced to the scene with relief. From that moment onwards, the BAPS relief kitchens functioned for 45 days, feeding over 40,000 people daily. The relief kitchens constantly catered to the victims in Bhuj, Anjar, Rapar, Bhachau, Khavda and other places.
- The author's advocate son Mitul went with his lawyer friends to distribute relief material in Kutch. They were going on behalf of the Bar Association of Gujarat High Court. They went to Rapar first found it in a terrible condition. They got a list of villages from the



Food being prepared for the Quake Victims

local administration to distribute relief material. They located a place, a broken temple site, for taking rest. It was a deserted place. In the evening, when they returned to Rapar, they found Ishwarcharan Swami of Shahibaug temple (who was in charge) with a team of volunteers. They had set up a tent and kitchen. Hot food, khichdi and vegetable were being served along with rotis. Bapa's message had reached and it was instantly acted upon.

- Despite the cold, sadhus and volunteers would get up early in the morning and work till late at night. The influx of people seeking food and shelter was continuous. The cooking stoves were blazing all day long. The volunteers did not frown or refuse despite the heavy work load. They served hot food to everyone with love and patience. Many families in Bhuj, due to their high social status, refrained from going to the relief kitchens for food. They merely sat by their collapsed homes. When BAPS sadhus personally took food containers and delivered hot meals to them, they were touched and felt greatly indebted. This facility was also availed of by many government servants who came for rehabilitation work from other places. Over 300 tiffin-carriers were delivered at their doorstep daily for many weeks.
- In Bhachau, tea and snacks were served from early morning till late at night. The breakfast included tea or coffee and bread, biscuits, ganthia, chevdo, etc. The afternoon meal consisted of chapattis, dal, rice and vegetables. In the evening, hot khichdi and kadhi were served.
- BAPS operated relief kitchens in other affected places like Rajkot, Moni, Surendranagar, Bhadra, Ahmedabad, etc.
- Despite the biting cold, the volunteers served the people wholeheartedly. They scrupulously observed their daily niyams, like puja arti, chesta, etc.
- The most surprising fact was that many devotees of Kutch who had suffered great personal loss also served as volunteers. Over 80 per cent of them had lost their homes in the earthquake. Many had even lost their family members.



- “The newspapers were full of stories about the havoc wrought by the earthquake. I decided to go there and serve as a volunteer”, said Philippe Violate, a resident of San Francisco City, U.S.A. He was on a vacation tour in India and was relaxing at Goa when the news of the disaster reached him.

Foreign visitors accompanying BAPS volunteers in relief

“When I went to the American consulate in Mumbai, they warned me, ‘Don’t go. It’s risky to go and serve like that’. At that time, an American official, who had just returned from Bhuj, informed me, ‘If you really want to serve, then one organisation is doing really good work BAPS. Go and meet them’. I decided to give it a try, and arrived there”.

“The BAPS relief camp was large. It ran 24 hours a day without a break. I served there for eight days. Loading and unloading relief supplies from trucks, cutting vegetables, going to the villages to distribute relief materials, etc. But the thing that touched me most was the people’s tolerance and courage to rise again. I learned later that one of the volunteers I served with had lost his father and young son in the earthquake. If this had happened to me, I would probably have not recovered from the shock. That volunteer’s enthusiasm, resilience and faith illumined my heart. I felt that when I returned to America, I would not be the same again.”

Bhuj was teeming with national and international media agencies and people. The city was virtually flooded with foreign reporters.

“Can I ask you a few questions ? My name is Carl. I have just come from Switzerland, I am the chief reporter of a Swiss Daily called Sonntags Blick.”

“Yes, but first can you help us in loading this truck with relief materials”, said a BAPS volunteer, who was busy loading the truck. Carl joined the volunteers. He spent that night in a tent at the BAPS relief camp. The next day, Carl went along with the volunteers who set off in 20 trucks loaded with food packets, water pouches and blankets. The convoy returned in the evening after distributing relief materials in the quake-hit villages. Carl was tired after an exhausting day’s work. He went straight to the BAPS relief operations office in the mandir and donated Rs.10,000.

To-day is my birthday. I thank you for giving me a wonderful birthday gift - the chance to help you help others'. The volunteers observed that Carl's eyes had become moist with tears of sympathy and feeling of joy for having served the earthquake victims.

The sun was about to set. It was the day after the earthquake. Every street in the village of Sukhpar was quiet. Virtually every house had been razed to the ground and it was one of the most frightening sights of the devastation wrought by the earthquake.

An old man was walking through the streets carrying a bag of cement and a trowel in his trembling hands. Some sadhus spotted him and asked, "Where are you going?"

"To rebuild my home," the old man replied.

The self - confidence of the elderly villager was powerful enough to stir their heart. The sadhus said, "Come, let us sit. We have come to share the burden of your grief."

"Oh! Where is the need to grieve? It's not as if some man has done this. This is the work of God! If some person had done this, you could complain, but when this has happened by the wish of God, what is the point in grieving? Whatever is the will of God... we will rise up again."

The elderly optimist cast a glance at the sadhus and smiled. The sadhus thought that even though the sun was setting in the sky, in some people's life the sun will never set. Such was their courage.

It was not only Carl who was impressed by the BAPS relief work. Whosoever came in contact with the volunteers was touched. The sheer logistics of reaching aid to the victims from village to village was immense. The volunteers saw to it that no man/woman was left out, the supplies reached the victims in the remotest of the villages.

Every morning, 18 to 20 trucks with relief materials would depart at 7 a.m. from the relief camp centre in Bhuj to the remote villages ravaged by the quake. The list of essentials distributed by BAPS included: blankets, clothes, tarpaulins, tents, torches, utensils, toothbrushes, toothpaste, oil lamps, candles, matches, footwear and many other items. Every victim was given food packets and provisions for cooking food.



During the survey of devastated villages, sadhus and volunteers would meet village chiefs called Sarpanchs to ascertain the number of survivors and the size of the surviving families. Thereafter, relief materials used to be distributed to each family according to the members in the family and their requirements.

In the sub-districts of Nakhatrana, Abdasa, Mandvi and other villages like Vandh, Gangon, Ratnapar, Naredi, Kotadi and many other villages, nothing had been received till BAPS sadhus and volunteers arrived with relief materials.

The volunteers also supplied every type of aid to victims in villages bordering the volatile India-Pakistan border with an escort provided by Indian para military forces.

The daily routine of distribution would begin at the crack of dawn and the work would continue late till night, they would be totally exhausted when they returned to the camp. The joy was of having saved and helped thousands sustained them all through the operations.

The magic of team-work

The Swaminarayan mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, served as the hub for soliciting and acquiring relief materials and transporting them to Bhuj. The whole operation was conducted by Ishwarcharan Swami. Besides Gujarat, BAPS sadhus and volunteers in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and south India helped in acquiring materials and donations from businessmen, commercial associations, corporate house for the relief and rehabilitation operation.

The relief operation was a massive team effort in which sadhus, male and female volunteers, devotees and children embarked on a door-to-door campaign for collecting donations and relief materials. Many business houses chains and organisations collected relief materials on their own and passed them on to the BAPS for distribution. Atmaswarup Swami, sadhus and volunteers in the UK made great efforts in collecting funds. Prince Charles gave a call for helping the victims by launching “Sponsor a Home Scheme” at Neasden mandir. In the US, Yagnavallabh Swami, sadhus and volunteers worked hard to raise relief funds.



After the initial four-and-a-half months of relief work, including construction of temporary shelters, the permanent rehabilitation project of BAPS started. This was a tough challenge, as illustrated by the reconstruction of Gunatitpur Village. It was decided to form a village from the scattered ruins of what used to be village. But to develop a suitable environment in the desert-like conditions was difficult. When the reconstruction work started, there was no approach road to the village. It was difficult to transport the necessary raw materials over the bumpy terrain. Frequent windstorms hampered work. They uprooted tents of volunteers and workers. The heat was also unbearable. The mosquitoes were a source of constant discomfort. In fact, at one point, 120 out of 258 volunteers had taken ill, they were, down with malaria ! As if this was not enough there were snakes and scorpions to be reckoned with. There were frequent after-shocks. Yet the volunteers persisted and inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, completed the work.

“We have no connection with these Sadhus, yet they gave us such comfort and support. We have no words to express our gratitude”. This unsolicited testimonial from the beneficiaries bears out the exemplary service rendered by the sadhus and volunteers of the sanstha.

Like all activities of BAPS, it was team work at its best, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami coordinated the relief operations. Other senior BAPS sadhus - like Pujya Doctor Swami, Mahant Swami, Tyagvallabh Swami, Kothari Swami and others - also provided valuable guidance and assistance. Atmaswarup Swami and Yagnavallabh Swami worked hard to obtain support from foreign donors. The Mahant of Bhuj BAPS mandir, Devcharan Swami and other local sadhus shouldered a heavy responsibility. Among them, Gnanprasad Swami, Gnaneshwar Swami, Akshaymuni Swami, Nikhilesh Swami, Vedanga Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, Brahmaprakash Swami, Rushiraj Swami, Brahmatirth Swami, Gnanbhushan Swami, Bhaktesh Swami and in all, 180 sadhus served in the relief and rehabilitation work. Also in Rajkot and Jamnagar, Yogiswarup Swami, Gnanvatsal Swami, Dharmakunvar Swami, Kapileshvar Swami, Dharmanidhi Swami, Yogivatsal Swami, Sadhuvallabh Swami, Santswarup Swami, Amrutcharan Swami and others coordinated the massive operation.



Some donors visited Kutch to see for themselves how the distribution work was going on. They congratulated the BAPS on the utilisation of their funds and relief materials.

Distribution of tools of trade to women rehabilitation

Courage is the forte of the people of Kutch. That is why they were able to quickly get back on their feet. BAPS provided them with the tools and they themselves accomplished the job of rehabilitation.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj saw to it that the famed craftsmen from Bhuj got the needed equipment required by their trade-sewing machines, embroidery work machines, goldsmiths' tools, tools for cobblers, carpentry tools, etc. were distributed. Farmers were also given aid. The monsoon following the earthquake brought the highest rainfall for 10 years.

Training camps were held for educated men and women in the villages to enable them to earn a livelihood. As a result of this, thousands of families are today able to support themselves. In Bhirandiyara improved handlooms had been supplied to weavers. They were also trained by master-weavers. They were also given raw materials.

Shops were provided along with merchandise to enable people to earn Rs.100-150 a day.

BAPS also set up kitchen gardens based on the drip irrigation system. Under this scheme, the beneficiaries were encouraged to plant and grow green vegetables for daily use. This helped in improving the environment. In schools, the students were encouraged to start kitchen gardens. A lot of homework was done before such type of vocational guidance was provided to 50 villages such as:

1. The beneficiaries, needs and skills were first identified.
2. They were provided with tool kits needed to make a fresh start.
3. They were linked to local demand, generated by massive rehabilitation work.
4. This was supported by up-grading of skills and imparting of spiritual values to come out of the shock and grief.

Swamishri initiated a scheme to help the student community. A lot of the schools were razed to the ground. Even if a school survived the disaster, reading was the last thing on the minds of the students, some of whom had lost their near and dear ones. But things could not be left like that. The future of the younger generation was at stake. So, BAPS adopted 49 schools in 39 villages in Kutch, Surendranagar and Rajkot districts. Over 16,000 students were provided with facilities to resume their studies. Plans were drawn up for building schools taking into account the size of the village and its future requirements. The schools were built using an earthquake-resistant design. Each room was provided with fans, tube-lights, tables, chairs, benches, etc. It was ensured that rooms got plenty of natural light and ventilation. Also, the design of the school building was such that should the need arise, another floor could be built on the existing structure. At the dedication ceremony, students were gifted with uniforms, bags, books and stationery in the presence of local residents and donors.

During one of the visits of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to Kutch, he was preparing to retire for the night. He looked tired. The entire day had been spent in visiting interior villages. Just then the phone rang. It was a student.

“I’m calling from Ahmedabad,” said the student in a trembling voice. The shock and fear he had experienced left him a wreck and he seriously thought of giving up studies.

“What will happen to me ? Shall I leave Ahmedabad ?” He asked Swamishri.

“Listen son”, he said in a soothing voice that put the student at ease. “Earthquakes could occur everywhere. London, America, Japan. In some of these places, they occur frequently. Still everybody is living. So don’t be afraid of earthquakes. Remember Shriji Maharaj. You will gain courage”.

But still, the youth did not get over his fear and continued to express his inability. Bapa interrupted and said, “Listen ! We are here to help you. So why do you worry ?” This firm statement of support removed all his fears. And he decided to go back to his studies.



Health services were launched on January 26, 2001 itself in Kutch, Ahmedabad, Surendranagar, Rajkot. During those days, 52 doctors, 36 para-medical staff and 14 volunteers served day and night. On the day of the earthquake itself 300 patients were treated. The volunteer doctors and paramedical staff gave cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, IV fluids, treatment for fractures and performed suturing. During the first few days 5,600 victims were treated on an emergency basis. Serious patients were transported with care to hospitals in Rajkot and Ahmedabad. In addition to first aid and emergency treatment, a proper minor hospital facility was set up on February 6 at the BAPS relief camp in Bhuj. The pressurized inflatable tent hospital named after Pramukh Swami Maharaj included X-ray, pathology laboratory, minor operation theatre and other facilities. BAPS doctors and nurses from Gujarat and those from other parts of India and foreign countries offered their services. In two weeks, the hospital treated 2,100 earthquake victims.

To ward - off an epidemic threat, the medical team conducted vaccine programmes in collaboration with the District Health Officer. Diagnostic camps were organized. Eye camps were held where free spectacles were distributed. Health awareness campaigns were also launched to combat malaria, jaundice, gastroenteritis, etc.

Post-traumatic measures

In addition to providing material and medical help, the sadhus went out to give emotional and spiritual support to the victims and their dependants. Pramukh Swami Maharaj personally blessed and infused strength in those who had lost their relatives, homes and livelihoods. He offered prayers and made an appeal for all to pray and remain calm and strong in the face of this natural disaster.

Doctor Swami and other sadhus visited Bhuj and other devastated places and revived the spirits of the victims by offering personal sympathies and by holding satsang assemblies and prayers.

Satish Bharatwala was a 35-year old expert in traditional embroidery. The earthquake nearly killed him. On January 27, 2001 he was removed from the debris and was given up for dead. On that chilly day, he was



placed in a row that contained dead bodies at the Jubilee Ground in Bhuj for cremation. The bodies of his mother, wife and son were also brought and placed nearby. The authorities were debating about the funeral arrangements. Suddenly Satish's regained consciousness. He realized what was happening they were trying to perform his last rites. He tried to scream, but no matter how hard he tried, he could not find the voice.

A BAPS volunteer noticed that Satish was not dead. He immediately wrapped a few blankets around him. He brought him to the BAPS relief camp. Satish was treated for hypothermia. In a few days, Satish recovered fully. Mentally, too, he started getting confident and stronger to bear the tragic loss of his entire family. In the following days, he gathered strength, under the spiritual care of BAPS sadhus at Bhuj and returned to what was left of his home to lead a normal life.

Reconstruction of villages

The most challenging task was the construction of new villages. The people of Kutch and Saurashtra have their own unique culture. It was resolved to preserve the traditions of the villagers. To do this, volunteers met the villagers to get their views and to know their requirements.

After an initial survey, the new construction site was selected. Rough plans for each village were drawn up. The sadhus and volunteers along with expert engineers and architects went into details minutely and prepared the final plans. At every stage, the local people were consulted.

The new villages were designed taking into account future requirements. While planning new villages, the main occupation of the villagers, provision of water, electricity, roads, etc. were kept in mind. Each village was provided with a panchayat office, community hall, school, playground, primary health centre, water tank, prayer hall, mandir, sewage arrangements, shopping centre, etc.

Additional land was procured wherever required. This was followed by the Shilanyas ceremonies. By March 2001, re-construction started in the villages.

The famous Vastushilpa Foundation for Studies and Research in Environmental Design also joined the BAPS team. Using the masonry



construction technique, with hollow blocks and reinforced M-150 concrete, earthquake-resistant column structures were constructed. For the roof, Mangalore tiles were used. Despite facing many odds, the engineers and volunteers completed construction work on schedule in almost all the villages.

Thanks to these efforts, the remaining residents of the devastated areas of Kutch and other places resumed their normal life within a year. This quick return to normalcy speaks volumes for the resilience of the people. Government officials and voluntary agencies, both from India and abroad, saw to it that the earthquake was a thing of the past.

The State Government came out with a very generous rehabilitation package covering housing, economic activities, etc. Capping it all, was the Gujarati spirit to bounce back when in difficulty that brought about the quick revival.

BAPS is no stranger to natural calamities. Of course the January earthquake was nearer home and truly catastrophic and devastating.

What follows shows to what extent BAPS has been able to serve man and beast:

- In 2000, BAPS provided fodder for 19,000 cattle and over 245 tons of sukhdi (nutritious food) for 40,640 affected people in 209 villages. In 2001, five cattle camps for 15,000 animals were opened for 6 months in Gujarat.
- In 1993, there was an earthquake in Maharashtra and Samudraal village had been reconstructed. Six hundred houses were built with basic facilities like nurseries, schools, dispensaries, water tanks, public offices, gardens and community centres. One hundred and sixty tons of food, 26,000 pieces of clothing, 5000 utensils were distributed and 2,150 jobs were provided to the local people.
- Following the floods in Surat in 1998, more than 30,000 food packets, 20,000 kg of flour and grains, 5,000 blankets, and 1,000 sets of household utensils were distributed. One hundred and two medical camps manned by volunteer doctors were organized.





Bhunga – A traditional house in Kutch style Built by BAPS



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



- Following the 1998 Gujarat cyclone 5,000 families living in 12 villages were supplied with truckloads of food grains and clothes. Medicines worth Rs.500,000 were distributed in Kutch. Ten school buildings were rebuilt in six villages of Jamnagar district.
- Tsunami struck coastal areas of South of India. BAPS Relief Team was immediately activated. By 4th January, 2005, more than 100 volunteers were active. Hot meal kitchen was set up on Mahabalipuram Road, eight affected villages were taken up for survey and distribution of food and household items alongwith material for temporary shelter. BAPS has worked out a detailed plan to assist affected people of Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar and even in Sri Lanka.

Here is a calendar of disasters tackled by the sanstha :

- 1974 Famine, Gujarat
- 1974 Famine, Maharashtra
- 1975 Famine, Gujarat
- 1975 Famine, Maharashtra
- 1977 Typhoon, Andhra Pradesh
- 1979 Flood, Morvi
- 1982 Floods, Saurashtra
- 1983 Floods, Saurashtra
- 1984 Famine, Ethiopia
- 1987 Famine, Gujarat
- 1992 Drought, Jamnagar
- 1993 Earthquake, Latur
- 1994 Earthquake, Los Angeles
- 1994 Epidemic, Surat
- 1995 Floods, West Bengal



- 1996 Cyclone, Andhra Pradesh
- 1997 Floods, Gujarat
- 1998 Cyclone, Kandla
- 1998 Bomb Disaster, Nairobi
- 1998 Boat Disaster, Mwanza
- 1998 Floods, Surat
- 1999 Floods, Mozambique
- 1999 Super cyclone, Orissa
- 2000 Drought, Gujarat
- 2001 Floods, West Bengal
- 2001 Earthquake, Gujarat
- 2001 Famine, Gujarat
- 2001 Floods, Orissa
- 2001 WTC Disaster, New York
- 2004 Tsunami, Southern India
- 2005 Relief to flood affected people, Gujarat, India.
- 2005 Relief to cyclone affected people in New Orleans, USA.
- 2006 Assistance to people affected due to heavy floods in river Tapi in Surat city and surrounding areas.

The BAPS volunteers are motivated and dedicated. They come from all walks of life and work without any remuneration. Swamishri himself sets an example through his personal tours which enable him to maintain personal touch with sadhus and volunteers who offer their services day and night.

Swamishri has given a new meaning to religious institutions and religion. Religion just does not mean offering prayers in temples or only religious guidance, but it also mean serving people in need, irrespective



of whether they are devotees or belongs to some other religion or sect. The relief does not end with the distribution of food packets, etc. It must also help persons to return to a normal life. Steps must be taken for the revival of economic activity. As a first step, a house should be provided if it is lost in a disaster. In all this, the sadhus provide the healing touch.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has also provided a new direction to public life through the example set by the BAPS, so that other religious and social organisations, may come out and help those in need. He has the knack of knowing the requirement of society at a given time. He has adopted modern methods for rapid progress - but the base is spiritual. He has the power to awaken the urge lying dormant in most of us to help others in times of need. That gives new meaning to life. That is the contribution of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to the modern world, which is otherwise busy working for its own personal ends.



BAPS's Tsunami Relief Fund





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



The soothing touch, An unforgettable Moment

Gems of Inspiration

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has been constantly meeting people from all walks of life. It is a part of his daily routine. He enjoys meeting children, youth, elderly people and the people from different segments of society, during his Vicharan (spiritual travel).

He has different ways of talking to children, youth, people from the business world, satsangis and sadhus. The message is the same- "Have faith in God, and do good to others" Effort has been made here to have a selection of some of the best possible examples, to illustrate the different ways, in which he inspires. The initial extracts are from the book called 'Friends of Friends' published by the Swaminarayan Aksharpith, while he was talking to children, while some extracts are from different issues of 'Bliss' Magazine and some are based on experiences narrated by sadhus, satsangis and people from different walks of life.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has been addressed as Narayanswarupdas, Pramukh Swami, Swamishri, Bapa, Swami Bapa etc.

He manifests himself in various forms to different people depending on the nature of the relationship they have with him.

He knows

One morning Swami Bapa was performing his puja.

Many Haribhaktas were having his darshan.

The sadhus were singing kirtans !

Swami Bapa drew an orange tilak on his forehead.

And then a red chandlo in the middle.

A small boy, Shvetanshu, was curious.

He wished to have a chandlo applied on his forehead.

Slowly he approached Swami Bapa.

He stood there without saying a word.



Everyone wondered what he wanted.
However, Swami Bapa knew what he wanted.
He did a beautiful chandlo on Shvetanshu's forehead.
But Shvetanshu did not go. His eyes searched here and there.
Everybody wondered what he wanted now !
Swami Bapa knew. Bapa picked up a small mirror and held it before his face.
Shventanshu was all smiles again ! That's what he wanted !
He wanted to see how he looked with the chandlo.
And Bapa showed him. He looked just great !
Swami Bapa knows the feelings of a small child.

The best food

Sadhus and Haribhaktas make many varieties of food for Swami Bapa.
Bapa first offers everything to God.
He always offers the thaal to Harikrishna Maharaj.
Once in Japan someone had made shiro.
But instead of sugar he had mistakenly put salt in it !
It was like salt in pudding !
Would you eat ice cream if there was salt in it?
The shiro with salt tasted like that! Yuck !
When Swami Bapa sat down for lunch.
He was served rotli, shaak... and that salty shiro also !
Nobody knew until a sadhu ate the shiro afterwards.
He said right away.
"My God, there is salt in this shiro !" But then he thought....
Bapa did not get mad. Bapa did not complain.
Bapa did not grumble. Bapa did not make a face.
Bapa did not bang his bowl.
The sadhus then asked Bapa why he did not complain.
Swami Bapa replied, "We take whatever food is offered to Thakorji.
Sometimes somebody may make a mistake while cooking. So why complain about it ?"



Swami Bapa is never choosy a bout food.
He never finds fault with the food served to him.
Whatever is in the thaal - he accepts it.
For Bapa the best food isThakorji's thaal.

Life full of Seva

Once Swami Bapa was in Bochasan.
Bochasan is the town where Shastriji Maharaj built the first Akshar Purushottam mandir.
Many sadhus live there today. It is a beautiful mandir.
Swami Bapa was paying a visit to the rooms of the elderly sadhus.
This was his daily routine. Swami Bapa always respects elders.
Once while he was passing by the washrooms his sharp eyes saw that the tiles were dirty.
They needed a good wash.
There were several sadhus and devotees around him.
Swami Bapa could have told anyone to clean them.
Bapa could have called the head of the mandir and complained to him.
But... .no, Swami Bapa went into the washroom and closed the door from inside
Everybody thought he was visiting the washroom.
But inside, a different story unfolded.
Swami Bapa had pulled up his dhoti to his knees.
and started cleaning the tiles with a brush.
Swami Bapa scrubbed and scrubbed. He scrubbed till all the tiles were clean.
When he came out of the washroom Swami Bapa had the joy of a job well done.
The joy of cleaning the wash room. The joy of doing the seva himself.
Swami Bapa loves cleanliness. He loves seva.
Even doing the smallest task gives him great joy. His life is full of seva.



A unique President

'Pramukh' means 'President'.

We call Swami Bapa 'Pramukh Swami'.

because he is the President of our institution.

Shastriji Maharaj selected Swami Bapa as the president.

He said, "Just as Ramanand Swami appointed Nilkanth Varni as his heir, so have I appointed Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as the President of this institution."

Swami Bapa was only 28 years old at that time. From that day onwards he is affectionately known as Pramukh Swami.

Swami Bapa did two unique things on that special day :

1. Bapa was very humble. He did not get inflated with ego because of his appointment as the new President, instead he prayed to guru Shastriji Maharaj to give him the strength and ability, the dedication and zeal to carry out the mission of the Akshar Purushottam faith as long as he lived.
2. After the memorable function was over, all the devotees had a good feast. Then they all lay down to have a nap. Only one person was awake and working I Guess who ? Pramukh Swami, the newly appointed President.

What was he doing ? Swami Bapa was washing and cleaning all the kitchen utensils - pots and pans, cups and bowls. He was scrubbing and washing all the dishes !

As the President, he could have asked someone else to do it. But Bapa did not do that. He did not use his power as the new President. He did not wake up anybody to help him. He did not even complain to anyone. Bapa did not leave the work undone.

He cleaned and washed everything. That is why Bapa is a unique President. He has a lot of powers yet he is always humble ! Our shastras say : "God resides in a humble, ego-free person." Bapa is a totally ego-free sadhu.

Perfect Devotion

The best darshan everybody enjoys is of Swami Bapa at his morning puja. Not a single day passes without Bapa performing puja.



Swami Bapa's day begins with puja.

After taking his morning bath, puja is the first thing that Bapa does.

He does not eat or drink before his daily puja.

That is what we are all supposed to do.

The darshan of Swami Bapa's puja is very soothing and peaceful.

The sadhus sing bhajans while Swamishri performs puja.

And the devotees look at Bapa with love and glory.

During his entire puja Bapa is absorbed in looking at Thakorji !

While everyone's mind is on Bapa, Swami Bapa's mind is on Thakorji !

Swami Bapa's focus is Thakorji.

If the lights are not proper, Bapa tells someone to adjust them.

So that he can have a better darshan of Thakorji.

For Bapa, Thakorji is not just an idol of metal or printed paper, but God Himself.

Once someone brought a nice big colorful garland for Bapa's puja.

He gave it to Bapa to offer to Thakorji.

Bapa felt that the roses were moist.

So Bapa held the garland gently in his gaataryu (upper cloth).

So that the cloth would absorb the water.

After a little while he offered it to Thakorji.

We too shouldn't offer wet flowers to Thakorji.

Swami Bapa's devotion to God is perfect! He doesn't forget even the smallest detail.

President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya once asked Bapa (pointing to Harikrishna Mahara

"What is this image ?"

Swami Bapa said, "It is not an image. It is God Himself."

A small voice

Swami Bapa is one of the busiest persons in the whole world.

Though he is extremely busy, Bapa never says, "I don't have time !".

This is because he organizes his time properly.





Annakut at Neasden Mandir, London

And therefore Bapa finds time for the young and old alike.

Swami Bapa always responds to children's questions.

Though he is great he answers even the smallest request of children !

Swami Bapa has dentures (false teeth)

After every meal he takes them out for brushing and cleaning.

Once after a meal Bapa took out his dentures.

A sadhu cleaned them and gave them back to him.

After placing them in his mouth he washed his hands. A small child was watching all this.

Curious about Bapa's false teeth he requested, "Bapa, show me your teeth !"

Without a moment's hesitation, Swami Bapa took out his dentures and smilingly said,

"Look, here they are." The child was so happy because Bapa didn't say no to him !

He then washed and cleaned his hands again.

All this for the loving curiosity of a child ! Bapa will do something extra for his beloved children.

At one place a child asked, "Bapa, I have heard that you had a big operation. I would like to see the big cut. Where is it ?"

Instantly Swami Bapa lifted his gaataryu (upper cloth), turned slightly and pointed his finger to the scar. It was the place where he was operated upon to remove his gall bladder.

The child was amazed. With joy he ran to tell others what he had just seen.

Think for a while, even when thousands had come to see and meet Bapa he still satisfied the curiosity of a small child !

Bapa is always willing to listen to the voice of small children.

Bapa belongs to children too, well, that is our Bapa !

Total Fitness

One thing that Swami Bapa likes is fitness. Bapa likes us to be fit in the minds body and soul.



When Swami Bapa was in Sarangpur, a 10-year-old boy came for darshan. For his age he was very heavy and overweight.

“Yes,” the boy said, “But I eat only once a day.

Sometimes if I am really hungry then I have a fruit or snack at night.”

“What do you have for snack ?” Swami Bapa enquired.

“Fries (chips).”

“How much do you eat ?”

“Only a few.”

“Do you eat anything else at odd times ?”

“No, I only drink water.”

“Then why haven’t you shed weight ?”

The boy shrugged his shoulders, “Oh, I don’t know.”

Swami Bapa encouraged him, “You should wake up early and jog every morning. Do some exercise. If you take care from now, then you will achieve fitness by the time you grow up.”

Do you have the best?

One child asked Swami Bapa, “What do you like best ?”

Swami Bapa said, “When you all do bhajan and bhakti. I’m also pleased when you all come to the Bal-Mandal, offer devotion, prayers, and study hard at school. Now tell me what do you like ?”

“Doing seva,” he said.

“That is good. Do seva of God and His sadhu.”

“Swami, do you have any holidays ?” another child asked.

“There are no holidays in devotion to God, just as there is no holiday in eating.

There should be no holiday in devotion I” Swami Bapa replied.

“What is the meaning of Brahmarup ?” another child asked.

Swami Bapa answered, “Brahmarup means that we should not have any bad qualities in us. We should not have worldly desires. We should only have supreme devotion to God. It is a state of eternal happiness and bliss of God.”



A great cook!

Yes, he is.

To cook is not a small job for Swami Bapa.

He believes that whatever work one does in the service of God is great. Satsang, office-work, preaching, reception, farming, cooking, cleaning—everything is considered to be of equal importance.

Nothing is minor, nothing is major.

The difference lies in our emotions, in our attitudes.

With what feelings do we engage ourselves in the service ?

If our feelings are to please God then whatever form of seva we do is great.

A few decades back, Swami Bapa used to go to the hot and dry desert-like areas of Rajasthan. There in the stone quarries he would select marble for our mandirs. From early morning till late evening Bapa would work in the hot sun. When he returned to the rest house he would do the daily chores. He would draw water from a 200-foot-deepwell. Then he would cook rotli and daal on a firewood stove. After offering the food to Thakorji, he would sit down with the other sadhu for his meal. Then of course, the cleaning up of pots and pans would begin.

Nobel Prize

Swami Bapa was in Vidyanagar.

We have a very big youth hostel there.

Hundreds of boys stay there.

They learn our culture, our religion and our heritage.

They go to regular colleges and become graduates.

All these boys are very much involved in Satsang.

Whenever they meet Swami Bapa they feel happy and fulfilled.

Swami Bapa cares for them and loves them. They also love Swami Bapa immensely.

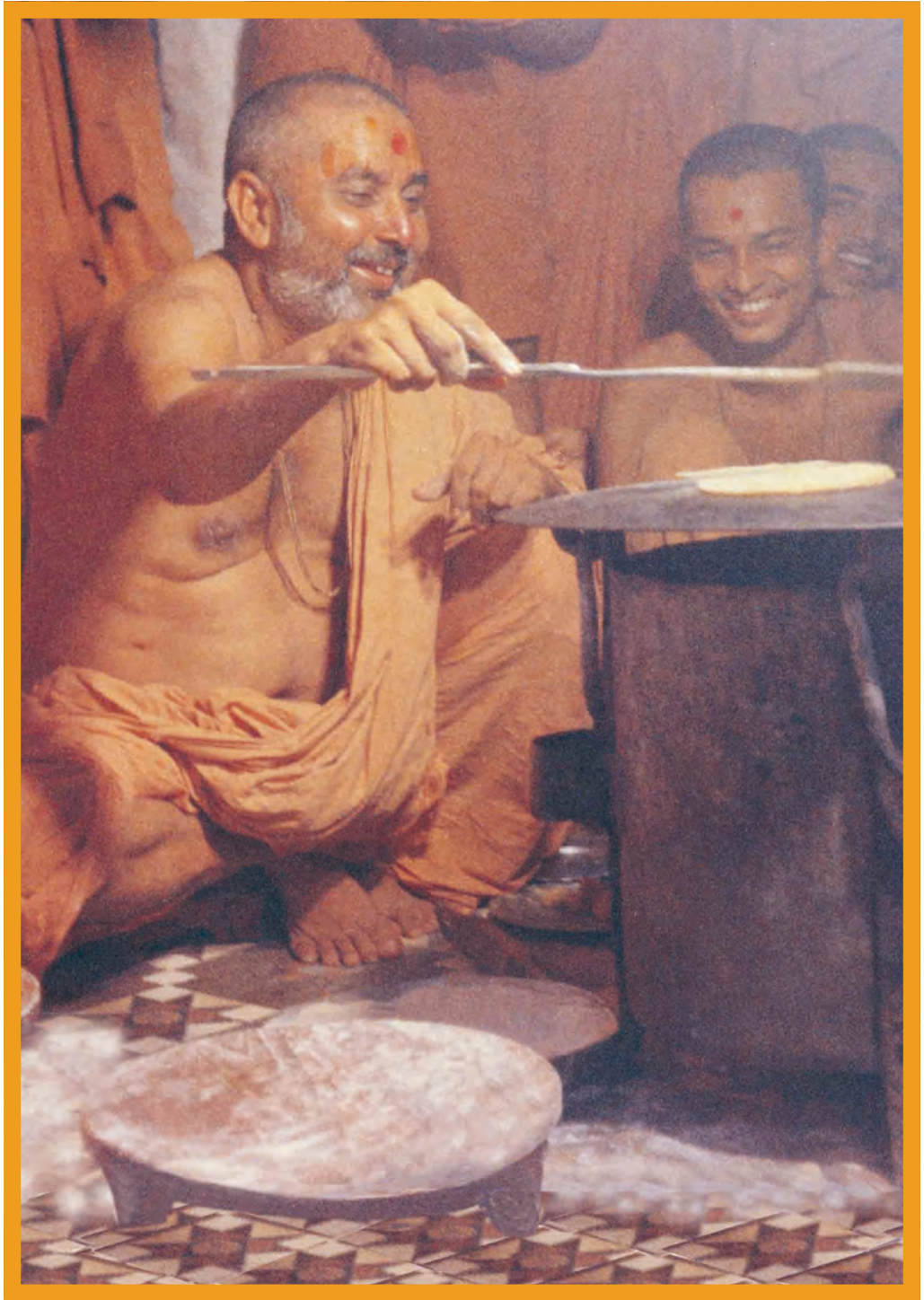
Once, Swami Bapa was having dinner. Some of the youth were discussing various topics.

Bapa was listening. He always listens a lot.

May be that is why he knows more and understands more.

Suddenly the topic changed to the Nobel Prize. It is a very prestigious





Swamishri in a New Role – as a Cook



award given to scholars, scientists, social workers or leaders who have made great discoveries or inventions or performed outstanding service to society.

Anybody who gets a Nobel Prize is respected all over the world.

He appears on the television, on the radio, in newspapers and in magazines.

He gets lots of publicity. Everyone plans for the Nobel Prize.

Rakshit, one of the boys, said, "Now the Nobel Prize should be awarded to Swami Bapa,

Bapa has done what nobody has done for humanity."

It is true that Swami Bapa has done much for millions of people.

Bapa's entire life has been for the good of the people. Therefore Bapa should get the prize.

Suresh asked Bapa, "What do you think about this Bapa?"

"For me, I have got you. I have these young men and these sadhus.

That for me is the Nobel Prize ! We have devotion for God -that is also the Nobel Prize.

There were tears in many eyes. What greater teaching can there be for children !

and youth than these feelings of Swami Bapa ! He thinks of us as his Nobel Prize. Bapa loves us more than a Nobel Prize ! That's why Bapa is the Noble of the noble. Bapa has the prize of hearts. Your heart. My heart. Millions of hearts !

Bapa has God

July 12, 1994 Swami Bapa was in Dallas.

He was enjoying himself with children.

"Bapa, which is the best moment of the day for you?"

one child asked.

It was a tough question. Some might say the moment someone praised us, was the best moment."

Or, "The moment when we did something great and good was the best moment.

And of course there are many days when we don't have any 'best' moments.



Not even a single one !

But for Swami Bapa each and everyday is full of good moments.

So which is the best ?

Swami Bapa replied, "All our moments, twenty-four hours a day, are with Maharaj.

So all the moments are the best ! While bathing, eating - in everything we do-we remember God."

Swami Bapa has an unbroken relationship with Shriji Maharaj.

• • •

On May 4, 1988 Swami Bapa was in Paris.

Pravinbhai and his family had put in extraordinary efforts in organizing the programmes and making arrangements for his stay.

Swami Bapa was pleased with their services.

On leaving, Bapa said, "All of you have done such a great service.

What can I give you in return ? I have God with me and I am giving you God !"

What a divine blessing !

• • •

In 1974, Swami Bapa was in Mombasa, Africa, a youth who always helped in the various services in the temple, was getting married. Bapa graced his marriage. His name was Bharat.

Bapa gave him a photo of Shriji Maharaj.

Swami Bapa said, "Your guests will give you other gifts but I only have God with me.

And I am giving you Him as a gift !"

Bharat has treasured that special gift ! He has imbibed the service of God in his daily life !

You can only give something to someone as a gift if you have it.

Similarly, God is in Bapa's body. God is in Bapa's mind. God is in Bapa's soul.

God resides in Swami Bapa. And that is why Bapa gives God to all of us.





Swamishri with Children of residential school at Mt. Abu



God-Realisation

Haresh Jani, a reporter from the daily Gujarat Mitra put a few questions to Bapa.

Jani : Shri Ram appeared in a dream to the Mahant of Ayodhya. He told him to perform the foundation-stone laying ceremony. Can this be true ?

Swamishri : Yes, our rishis were realized souls. Those who are engaged in spiritual endeavours are inspired and talk accordingly. Our rishis had practiced austerities. They attained the state of self-realisation.

Jani : Have you attained realisation ?

Swamishri : Ever since I met God I've had realization. I attained the knowledge of God through the Guru and thus got the realization.

Jani : What is the straightest path to heaven ?

Swamishri : The straightest way to His divine abode is by having the refuge of God and following the instructions prescribed by God and associating with a bona fide sadhu.

Inner purification

Ramesh, a satsangi youth living at the Akshar Purushottam hostel in Vidyanagar, confessed to Bapa about his weakness. He said, "Bapa, I love watching films. I have promised to stop watching movies but I can't stop myself from going to the cinema. So I fail to keep my promises."

A friend of his added, "He changes his hairstyle and beard according to the latest trends. He has a fad for clothes. He buys new clothes every 15 days."

Ramesh agreed and requested, "Swami give me a niyam so that everything gets resolved for life."

Bapa blessed Ramesh with some sound advice, "You desire to look good and want that others look at you and become attracted to you. Give



up this desire altogether. There is no need for all this. You can do without it. Look at us. We shave our beard only once a month. Still people come to see us. There is no need for superficial show. It is more important to make yourself better from within. Everyone has to rid themselves of the inner desire for material things. By keeping pace with the changing fashions, you waste time and money. By watching films, do you not allow desires for worldly things to enter within ? Instead of ridding your desires, you are allowing them to enter your mind. So do not watch films, do not go to discos and parties. Resolve to give these up altogether."

Ramesh agreed and received Bapa's blessings.

Key to spiritual realisation

A sadhu asked Bapa, "Science explains things logically. Spirituality is a matter of faith. No logical process is shown, one is told to believe. This is difficult".

Bapa replied by pointing to a lampshade nearby. He asked, "Who invented the light bulb ?"

"Edison"

"How long did it take to invent the light-bulb ?" Swamishri asked.

"Ten thousand experiments," the sadhu replied.

Bapa explained, "So the light-bulb was invented after 10,000 experiments. And today, when we press a switch there is light. But just think how much effort had gone behind inventing the light bulb."

"Our great rishis engaged themselves in spiritual endeavours for thousands of years and then attained God. In that realized state they wrote the scriptures. If we faithfully strive to do what they have prescribed, we will attain salvation."

Bapa pointed out that striving for faith is the essence of spiritual realization.

God's Doership

The General Manager of Atofina - a company that manufactures



plastics - Serge Lorek and his Deputy General Manager, Freddie Kwek, came to see Bapa. This was during his visit to Singapore in January 2002.

Lorek asked, "You provide guidance to parents about their problems with children. How is that possible when you have no experience of family problems?"

Swamishri : It is God who gives guidance. After listening to their problems, I remember Him, pray to Him and then reply. It is understandable that I do not have any experience in these matters, because I became a sadhu at a young age. But God has experience of the whole world and of all souls. So, I remember God and reply, and people are satisfied.

Freddie Kwek : How can someone who believes in God maintain his faith and devotion to Him in the face of financial and other problems ?

Swamishri : Life is full of problems. One experiences happiness and misery in an alternating cycle. One should believe that happiness and misery are due to God's wish. Whenever you face difficulties remember God. Whatever He does is for your own benefit. Whatever misery one experiences is for one's own good. Whatever He gives or does not give is all for one's benefit. So, by believing God to be the Doer, one's faith in Him will remain intact."

Honest actions

Liam Mallon, Operations Manager of Exxon-Mobil for Western Australia, came to meet Bapa during his visit to Perth in January 2002. In his conversation he asked, "There are so many problems in our world today, is there any hope for a better future?"

Swamishri : There is a lot of unrest in the world, but God will save our world. The future is good. It is the cycle of life where happiness and misery follow one after the other.

Liam : Ours is an international company. Wherever we go, we strive for the benefit of the people. We set up health centres and schools, but still people criticize us. How do we face this ?

Swamishri : Since you are doing your work with honesty and sincerity, the company will progress. Your honest actions will speak for



themselves. People may take a critical view of your company, but through your honest efforts you will have the grace of God upon you. If you work ethically, everyone will gain. So don't bear in mind what others say about your company. Your goals and motives are for the good of the country, for your employees and for people, that is why your company has progressed and been blessed by God. Wherever there are good objectives and good morals, God helps."

Solution to hatred

John Williams, an Immigration Officer in Perth, Australia, came to meet Bapa. Impressed with the BAPS socio-spiritual activities he said, "Your work is spread across multifarious fields. In spite of this, how is it possible for you to take interest in people and guide them?"

Swamishri : It is due to the grace of God and blessings of my Guru. In all the works we do God provides the inspiration and makes things possible through the efforts of volunteers and devotees.

John : What should we do to avoid hatred between individuals ?

Swamishri : By having absolute faith in God and obeying His commands, any individual is inspired with feelings of doing good to all. When he realizes that God resides in everyone, then he will have no hatred.

True colour of spirituality

At 10:15 p.m., just before Bapa was to retire for the night during his visit to Sydney, Australia, many children, teenagers and young men stood at the door having his darshan.

A sadhu told a child to sing the popular bhajan, "Tu rangai jane rangma." But he couldn't sing it properly due to his poor knowledge of Gujarati. Then the teenagers sang the verse properly.

Swamishri then pointed out, "Now sing 'Hum rangai jane rangma.' Because by singing 'Tu...' 'you are telling others to get spiritually coloured. So you must sing ! will get coloured....' It does not matter if you do not wear the saffron clothes of a sadhu. By imbibing spiritual values, knowledge renunciation and faith you will become



coloured by the colour of satsang and attain moksh. One must be coloured by the divine colour of God. Getting coloured means consolidating prayer, spiritual values, knowledge, renunciation and bhakti in one's self.

“To get coloured means one does not believe there is happiness other than in God. It means having supreme faith in God. No matter what type of happiness or misery comes your way believe that whatever God does is for your good.

GLORY OF GOD

During the morning prayers Kirtan, a young satsangi boy, recited the verse, “Tvameva Mata Cha Pita tvameva....” Then a sadhu asked Kirtan as to who his father was. Kirtan pointed to his father who was sitting nearby. Swamishri then explained to Kirtan, “Our true Mother and Father are God. In the worldly sense, you were born of your parents, but God gave you this body. Your father was not there to mould your body. God moulded your hands, feet, nose ears, etc. Everyone is born after God moulds them. You can't find such a master sculptor anywhere! Look how He has made our beautiful eyes, nose, mouth hands feet and teeth. And since God created you, He is your Mother and Father. God is the Mother and Father of your soul whereas your parents are the mother and father of your body. Don't you all children sing, 'Ghanshyam, Ghanshyam come and play with us.' Then the verse says Tvameva sarvam', meaning, 'God is everything for us.'”

Swamishri explained that God was Mother, Father, Brother, Friend and everything for everyone.

Faith in God's divinity

Harshadbhai Rana, a dedicated devotee, put a question to Bapa.

Harshadbhai Rana : Why does God show human traits (manushyabhav) ?

Swamishri: A devotee perceives divinity in that, whereas others doubt His divinity and are deluded. The latter will say, 'God blesses, but nothing happens,' whereas devotees like you feel that whatever has happened is for the good of all. A devotee will not doubt or get deluded, whereas a non-devotee will.



Rana : What understanding should one have so that one does not perceive human traits ?

Swamishri : How did you become rich ? Was it without any effort at all ?

Rana : Through your grace.

Swamishri : The grace comes afterwards, but first you have to try. Similarly, you have to make efforts in cultivating the belief that whatever God does is good and proper.

"If God forgives, why is there a hell?"

A ten-year-old boy, Jay Pandya, asked Bapa, "When God forgives the crimes of all, then why is there a hell ?"

Swamishri: Hell is not meant for those who have been forgiven for their crimes.

Jay : Then why is there a hell ?

Swamishri : Hell is for those who do not believe in God, for those who do evil things and subject others to pain and harassment. However, those who become devotees of God, who pray to Him and take refuge in Him, are forgiven for their wrong actions. And a devotee of God is blessed with the bliss of God's abode, Hell is for those who do not live by righteous values.

One God

Mayur Raval, a 5¹/₂ - year - old boy, said to Bapa, "There are two Gods - Thakorji and Swamishri."

Bapa explained, "There aren't two. He (Thakorji) is God whereas I am His servant. Do you understand ? God is Shriji Maharaj. We all have to offer our devotion to Him."

Eternal blessing

Ankit Parmar, a youth, recited a couple of verses, "Balto jhalto atma Sant sarovar jaay...." and then prayed, "Bapa, do always shower your blessings upon us."



Swamishri replied, "You have all been blessed but to always have that blessing you have to cultivate a good nature (swabhav) and offer devotion (bhakti) to God. If you give up your bad nature (swabhav) then the blessing will remain, but if you manifest your bad nature then you cannot be blessed. Hence you should give up your bad nature and offer devotion so that you are blessed forever."

Principles of Education

Mark Broadwith, Headmaster of Ficino School in Auckland, welcomed and offered his respects on meeting Swamishri. The Ficino School teaches Sanskrit, provides vegetarian food for lunch and stresses on value-based education. He said, "We have three principles, namely : to inspire students to remember God, to encourage them to live by the fine laws of creation and to find their way back to God. But it is a challenge for us to impart these principles to children who come from a wide range of family backgrounds."

To this Swamishri responded, "The challenge is there, but the principles you have adopted are good. Therefore, keep trying and the children will gradually imbibe good values."

Mark asked, "What do you think are the principles of education ?"

Swamishri replied, "Moral and spiritual values."

Inner Peace

Prior to retiring for the night, Swamishri saw young men and teenagers standing outside his room.

"Is everything all right ?" Swamishri enquired.

"Yes, everything is fine," everyone said.

"The body is fine, but it is important that the soul be fine," someone added.

At this, Swamishri elaborated and said, "That's what I have been asking. Is your soul fine or not ? The body may be healthy or ill, but the soul should be well. That is what you should strive for. There is food, drink and everything for the body. However to have peace within one's



soul is important. And this is attained through the power of (satsang) religious music, listening to religious discourses, reading good books and obeying the commands of Shriji Maharaj. Then there will be peace and happiness. God's happiness is infinite."

Solutions to anger and laziness

Bapa was travelling by Singapore Airlines from Auckland to Singapore. During the flight, Kirtan, a boy of thirteen, asked Swamishri a few questions.

Kirtan : I get very angry ! How can I overcome it ?

Swamishri : Whenever you get angry, remember Shriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and chant, 'Swaminirayan, Swaminirayan,' in your mind. If you think of God, your anger will subside. Now, just think, where is the need to get angry ? There is no gain in getting angry with anyone. By getting angry, your work is not done. In fact the other person is left miserable and distressed. By singing hymns, chanting 'Swaminarayan, Swaminirayan,' the distress of the other person, and yours, is dissolved.

Kirtan : I am very lazy. How can I get rid of lethargy ?

Swamishri: That you shouldn't have at all. How can you be lazy at such a young age ? If you have laziness at this age, then you won't be able to study and will never get a good job. Laziness is your enemy. Think like this and get rid of it.

Wake up early in the morning. Engage yourself in prayer and study. You should not be lazy in any type of work. Don't say 'later'. Do your work 'now'. Don't leave your studies, lessons, your prayers for tomorrow or later. Do it today.

After a while, Swamishri asked Kirtan, "Now I'll ask you a question. When you grow up will you be as good as you are now ? Because children get spoilt when they grow up. They don't come to prayer meetings, don't perform puja and they get into bad company. God will be happy and grant you spiritual liberation if you attend religious assemblies in your life.



Kirtan promised Bapa that he would attend spiritual meetings all his life.

The leader of social uplift

“In the happiness of others lies our own,

In the progress of others depends our own,

In the good of others abides our own.”

“Imbibe Morality.”

These words of Bapa are his goal. He has initiated many noble activities for the uplift of society.

He can feel the pulse of today’s society and so he is busily engaged in building a sound and solid society which has moral values, good conduct and devotion to God.

He has inspired anti-addiction drives and social reforms to redeem society. As a result, many people have given up addictions and bad habits like drugs, alcohol, smoking and gambling.

During the International Convention for Better Living in Ahmedabad (India) in 1985, Kenya’s Assistant Minister for Lands and Settlement, Joseph Muturia, was inspired to declare in public, “I feel at home here. Though as a Christian I’m allowed to take alcohol, I declare that from today I shall abstain from taking any alcoholic drink”.

Where will cattle go?

An old man called Keshubhabha of Naniboru cried his heart out, “Bapa, our village is located in the Bhaal region. There, even we humans suffer from shortage of water. Then how shall we take care of our cattle ? The sight of cattle without water is just unbearable. It’s better if we sell them rather than watch them die in our homes. We would then be relieved of the agonizing sight.”

Bapa consoled him, “No, don’t even think of selling your cattle. Bear the few unhappy days somehow. Tell others in the village who are thinking of selling their cattle not to do so as well. Otherwise you will all



be economically hard pressed next year. We will very soon come to your assistance.

And the same evening a middle-aged devotee of the Gondal region came and fell at Swamishri's feet. He spoke in broken words "Bapa, I've roamed everywhere. I have cattle but there is no fodder anywhere. I don't know what to do, so I have come to you." Raising him by his arm, Swamishri said, "Don't worry. We have planned to save your cattle. They will be saved at any cost. There will be no trouble."

And soon cattle camps were organized to take care of animals at different places.

Expert counsellor

They seemed to have everything that was possible. They had a luxurious home, car and a retinue of servants.

Yet something was missing. Discontent and a feeling of emptiness pervaded their lives. The pressures of modern living had begun to take their toll within the family. There was discord between husband and wife and members of the family. The relatives were also antagonized. Higher education, money and authority had led to inflated, obstinate egos. None was willing to bend before the other.

Bapa's words of wisdom, written on paper, reached that home:

"Each person has his own nature, but we should learn to live with each other.....that is important. The business is there....but take a little time out to care for the family needs....to help each other out.

"In the home, all belong to one family. Don't believe that each member is separate from the others. Speak and behave in such a manner that mutual love and friendship develop. The children are grown up, give them your love in the best way possible... Conversely, behave in such a way that they also develop love for you.

One letter in itself was enough to defuse the domestic strife. It encouraged the members of the family to develop cordial relations with each other.



The atmosphere in the house changed to one of tranquility and cooperation. Even today that letter remains framed, hanging high on a wall, as a source of inspiration to whoever cares to read it.

A girl from a satsangi family from Saurashtra married a bhangi (person of low caste). News of this unexpected love marriage proved too much for her family to handle. How could the family, well respected in social circles, face the shame. To add salt to the already deep wounds, other townsfolk rejected the family outright. The family poured out their predicament in a letter to Swamishri:

“My mother cries all day long. How can we show our faces to anyone? It’s a question of reputation. No one even bothers calling on mother or father... Because of what sister has done, mother is facing the consequences. Bapa! We can’t tolerate any more grief..we have no one else but you to turn to. You are our life....please show us the way. Mother hasn’t been out of the house for two months now... You understand that it is difficult for others to accept us...”

Swamishri replied:

“Your sister has already married - there is no need for grief. Whatever has happened has been determined by fate.... You did as per your duty. Therefore, accept whatever that has happened as Maharaj’s will....remain in high spirits don’t feel ashamed of facing society or religious meetings (Satsang). People may talk for a few days but soon they will forget the whole matter. Don’t worry if no one speaks to you for a while. In the present day, such incidents take place even in respectable homes.... Therefore there is no need to worry.... All will turn out for the best as per Maharaj’s wish.”

Shocked by the infringements of social tradition, the family had turned to Swamishri, at a critical moment in their lives. Swamishri’s guidance and words worked like magic and social relations resumed to normal in no time at all. Their lives became normal.

Miracles?

Hitesh Patel, a youth from London, had been touring with Swamishri in India for a year or so. He had a booking to return to London by Pan-Am



airlines on September 5, 1986. On the night prior to the flight, Swamishri gave him darshan, "Cancel this particular booking and book a seat for any other date." The very next day, Hitesh rebooked for September 7.

The world was later to learn that the Pan-Am Flight on September 5, 1986 was hijacked and the hijackers boarded the plane at Karachi, Pakistan. Nearly 400 passengers were held hostage for some 16 hours by the hijackers. A bloodbath ensued when a rescue operation was attempted, resulting in 21 deaths and injuries to 20. After returning to London, Hitesh duly wrote a letter to Swamishri, explaining exactly what had happened and expressed his sincere thanks for protecting him.

Vishnubhai of Chicago also described his experiences in a letter to Swamishri.

"My shop is in such an area that if one remains off guard for even a short time a theft will take place. The neighborhood is notorious for its high crime rate. After closing my shop on Friday evening. I inadvertently left the key in the lock! On Saturday and Sunday the shop remains closed.... so naturally I did not think about the key."

When Vishnubhai searched for the key on Monday morning, he realised what must have happened. Expecting the worst, he headed straight for the shop. The key was still in the door! He entered the shop but his worst fears were unfounded. Everything was exactly as he had left it on Friday evening ! His letter continued :

"When I returned to the shop on Monday, a regular customer of mine remarked, "On Friday night, I was walking past here and saw a person in saffron clothes guarding your shop. But on that day, I'd been drinking and therefore passed it off as a figment of my imagination. I returned the following day and to my surprise, I saw the same watchman present."

"A woman also came and told me that she had spotted a saffron-clothed security guard watching over my shop. I showed her a photograph of you that I keep in the shop. On seeing it, she remarked, "Yes...he is the one...he also had a rosary in his hand as he has in the photo."

"...Truly, if you hadn't come to my protection, my shop most certainly would have been looted and left in disarray."



Swamishri's replied to the letter in one sentence :

"...Who are we to do anything ? Shriji Maharaj is the real protector.... He is the all-doer..."

Regarding this aspect of the Lord, Swamishri says, "Whatever happens in this universe is the work of Shriji Maharaj. We are His mere servants. Independently, we are incapable of moving even our hands at our own will. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were great and powerful Gurus. Yet they never arrogantly displayed their powers, but remained ideal servants of Bhagwan at all times. We too, in every second of our lives must believe Maharaj as the all-doer.

Form Akshardham:

June 19, 1989 Bombay, A conversation between Bapa and Nilkanth.

Nilkanth : "Bapa ! Why do you go through so much trouble to keep us happy?"

Swamishri: "You have come all the way from your home putting everything aside for us. So we have to please you don't we ?"

Nilkanth : "My house is nearby. It is you who have come all the way from Rajkot."

Swamishri: "We have come all the way from Akshardham."

June 3, 1994. Children's Convention, Pocono Mountains America.

Question to Swamishri: "Bapa where do you come from ?"

Swamishri: "Well, we come from India, but..."

Tarun : "But everyone says you come from Akshardham ?"

Swamishri: "Who told you that ?"

Tarun: "My daddy."

Swamishri: "Do you believe your daddy ?"

Tarun: "Yes"

Swamishri: "Then believe this daddy (referring to himself) that we do."



One Vision

Bapa was flying from Bombay to London. The plane was passing over the deserts of the Middle East. Viveksagar Swami requested Swamishri, "Put on your spectacles, and look below. What do you see ?" Innocently Swamishri put on his spectacles, but Viveksagar Swami was implying that Swamishri look with his 'spectacles' of divine vision. "Not those spectacles", "Viveksagar Swami said/ Your spectacles."

Swamishri said just as innocently, "With those, nothing besides Akshardham can be seen !"

See For yourself

May 3, 1994. Wellingborough, England. Bapa asked young Rajendra of Milton Keynes, "Why don't you come anymore? Previously you used to give speeches and everything."

He replied, "Swami ! I have difficulty in realizing you as Akshar. What shall I do ?"

"Who told you that ?" Swamishri asked with a smile.

Viveksagar Swami was curious and asked the 13-year old, "What exactly do you find difficult about understanding Akshar ?"

Rajendra explained, "The bit about infinite cosmos spinning in every pore of Akshar. That's what I don't understand."

Swamishri said with respect for the young aspirant, "You'll understand with time, for you are still young. As you mature spiritually, you will see for yourself."

The lord of the Jungle

"The fifth of June, 1973, was a day I'll never forget", described Patel. It was through a jungle at a ride 4:30 pm we left Untwada to go to Junagadh. In our car, a Fargo, along with Bapa was Dr. Swami, Anupam Bhagat (presently Bhagwatpriya Swami), Devcharan Swami, Pragat Bhagat, A. R Patel, two other devotees and myself. The route would take us through the Gir Jungle. Shortly after entering the jungle, we came to a junction by a small dam. None of us were sure which way to go and so



the driver, Dajibhai, stopped the car and asked Swamishri, 'Which road shall we take ?'

"Take a left turn, "replied Bapa.

I don't know whether or not Dajibhai heard correctly, but he drove straight on. No-one said anything. As we drove on into the night we could see that the jungle was becoming more and more dense. Strangely, there wasn't a road sign, giving directions, anywhere. We were all becoming restless. It was now pitch dark outside and we hadn't seen a car or any people for a long time. The road was becoming worse and the fact that none of us knew where we were going was not comforting. But Dajibhai just drove on at full speed.

Suddenly someone shouted, 'Lion ! Lion !'. We looked out of the window and we could see a lion running alongside the car. After making sure all the windows were closed, Dajibhai slowed down the car so that we could have a proper look. A young, sturdy lion stood proudly in front of our car. Then it moved to the right and came and stood by Swamishri's door. There was silence, except for the sound of the frantic beating of our hearts. The lion stepped up and put its face to the windows. We all held our breath. To our shock and horror, Swamishri rolled down his window! Then Swamishri and the lion just looked at each other. A whole minute must have elapsed, after which the lion simply turned around and disappeared into the undergrowth !

".... And then there was more."

April 27, 1974, Bapa was in Nadiad. Devotees from the nearby village of Khatraj asked Swamishri to arrange an assembly in their village. Swamishri agreed. He specifically instructed them, "... cook enough food for about 50 devotees."

Many devotees from the neighbouring village also came to the evening assembly. At the end Swamishri unexpectedly announced, "No one is to leave without taking prasad."

Bhikhubhai one of the leading Khatraj devotees, came frantically to Swamishri, "But Bapa we have only a limited amount of food. You



told us to prepare food for 50, but because many devotees have called some guests, we've catered for around a hundred. Still, there's simply not enough to go round." Swamishri laughed at Bhaikhubhai's concern. This made Bhikhubhai even more flustered.

Swamishri got up and called confidently, "Come on, let's go to the kitchen." There, Swamishri lit a wick lamp in front of the images, folded his hands, closed his eyes, and said a silent prayer.

The main dish on the menu was dudhpaak- a rich milk delicacy. "Start serving!" Swamishri announced, as he took the mug of dhudhpak himself and began to freely and affectionately fill the devotees' bowls.

One local devotee was particularly worried about the food running out. Restlessly, he kept getting up to count the devotees as they sat down to eat. "100,200,300..."

Only after all the devotees had finished their meal, did Swamishri sit down with the sadhus to eat. Later that night, another two tractors carrying devotees arrived. They too were fed with a glad heart. In the end, 700 devotees originally intended for only 100!

In the joy of others

One autumn night in 1990, London

Swamishri's room in the temple at Neasden to be precise.

Probably two to three hours after midnight.

By chance, the attending sadhu, Narayancharan Swami happened to wake up.

In the dim light, he noticed the silhouette of a figure sitting up in the bed. He rubbed his eyes. No he was not dreaming. Yes, it was his Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He looked a little closer Swamishri was sitting up, eyes closed and palms joined offering a silent prayer. Narayancharan Swami also began to pray.

Thirty long minutes passed before the prayer came to an end. Curiosity writ large on his face, Narayancharan Swami asked, "What were you praying for?"



“Back home, a major drought is threatening Gujarat. People are suffering without water. I was praying for the rains to come so that the cattle and people are saved from this calamity,” came Swamishri’s reply.

Probing further, Narayancharan Swami inquired, “How long and how often have you been praying like this ?”

He received no answer. He asked again ... and again... and again. Only then did a halfhearted reply came. With great reluctance, Bapa disclosed, “Many times at night I pray. Those who come to me with their problems during the day, I pray for them at night. It’s more peaceful at night, much quieter!”

Touching the untouchable

In Sarangpur, Bapa was trying to draw the attention of some young men standing some distance away. Naturally the young men were reluctant. “But Babuji ! We are Harijans”, they shouted.

Swamishri responded, “ We also are the jans (people) of Hari (God)! We all have to become Harijans! Make your life pure and addiction-free.” He called the youths near and individually blessed them all.

Once Swamishri was presiding over an assembly in a village. Meanwhile a seedy-looking man came there, seeming somewhat reluctant to approach further. Swamishri’s eyes alighted on him. He called him with love, “Come brother! Here, take this flower. It has been sanctified by God. Here, come near.”

Swamishri’s compassionate eyes coaxed him to approach the stage. With bowed head, as if deeply ashamed, he came near the saint who has no reservations in his heart. The poor man bowed his head at Swamishri’s feet. His head received a gentle, loving touch with a hand -shattering the age-old taboo of untouchability! Bapa’s mere touch was enough to bathe him in love, enough to penetrate the depths of his spirit.

“Oh ! How cool,” he said.

Until now, anyone who had bothered speaking to him had done so



out of hatred or spite. Anyone who had cared to look at him had done so with contempt. Anyone who had touched him had done so with the intent of hurting him. But today it was not so. The sadhus next to Swamishri took the garland from the man's hands and gave it to Swamishri, who placed it around the man's neck. For the first time in his life, this poor old man experienced a sense of fulfillment.

Respect for women

Swamishri's regard for women is, more often than not, misunderstood and misquoted. True, his attitude towards the fair sex is somewhat different from the world's - but that is purely for practical and moral reasons.

It surprises many to know that Swamishri, who has never set eyes upon a woman - let alone talked to one - inspires incredible devotion in female devotees. In fact, their spiritual devotion and dedication, in many ways, surpasses that of the males. Physically, women may be far from Swamishri's gaze, but through devotion, discourses and service, they are close to the Lord and experience Swamishri's unique spiritual strength and warmth.

In a letter written to Swamishri by Jeanette, a Dutch devotee said: "You are such an important part of my mind. I have the feeling that you know already everything about me. During the day and especially during my little 'puja', I do not know how, but in a way, I'm 'talking' with you. It feels like the deepest friendship of my life. All good things I know, all the flowers I see, I send to you, for Bhagwan Swaminarayan, via my mind and heart. Distance is no problem for feelings. I thank you for being in my mind..."

Can I take your photograph ?

April 3, 1984, London. Peter Snowden, a freelance photographer had come to the temple to see Swamishri. Vivekjivan Swami asked him, "Would you like to ask any questions ?"



“I have this opportunity but I don’t know what to ask,” Peter replied somewhat confused. “I am really honoured. I am a Baptist and it is really odd for me to come to a Hindu temple.” Then he stared at Swamishri for a few moments and said with exhilaration, “Swamiji’s eyes ! They’re fascinating! His eyes are wonderful. I cannot look into his eyes.”

Peter took a few photographs of Swamishri, particularly close-ups of the eyes. Then with traditional British manners, he meekly asked, “Can I touch Swamiji ?” Swamishri just watched on innocently as the Englishman carefully stretched out his hand. Peter later had a photograph taken of himself with Swamishri.

When he left the room, he was shaking his head in disbelief. “The experience was mind-blowing! My mind was silenced, He seems very peaceful and calm. I can’t describe him. Whether my boss will pay me or not is immaterial. I have gained a personal experience. Tomorrow I’ll go to church and in our meeting when we are asked of any special experience I’ll talk about Swamiji.”

Support to Tribals

The social and moral advancement of the tribals has been an ongoing activity for the last thirty years. The work is going on in places like Selvas, Dadra-Nagar-Haveli, Dangs, Sabarkantha, Panchmahals and Saputara. On the morning of December 16, 1999, a tribal convention was held on the occasion of Swamishri’s 79th birthday in Valsad. Over 25,000 tribals from various districts of Gujarat gathered for the convention. Through the efforts of Swamishri, thousands of tribals have renounced their vices and addictions and have adopted the values of satsang in life.

Swamishri blessed the tribal convention. He said, “The ancient (adi) of all beings is God and those who reside (vasi) with Him are Adivasis. You are living in the lap of nature, availing your selves of its beauty, whereas the city dwellers do not get the opportunity of fresh air, water

and natural surroundings. God has blessed you all. Nearness to God means living a life that pleases God. Because of superstition, addictions and mundane indulgences, even if one is near God, one cannot experience His divine happiness. When something goes wrong, out of superstition, you immediately sacrifice a hen. You inflict death on an animal and indulge in liquor. But all this is harmful and non-beneficial to yourself. We pray to God that may you be redeemed of addictions and superstitions. There is no reason to be superstitious. If you have a headache then take some medicine, but don't sacrifice an animal."

Eat your own food

"Do not eat meat", Bapa never tires of telling devotees." It does not mean just beef, but includes all types of flesh of all animals. Fish, seafood and eggs are included in the meat category. God has gifted man with the earth that is bountiful in fruit, grain, roots and vegetables. Where is the need to kill an animal for food ? Should such slaughter be performed ? The Western world promotes eating meat in the name of health ! Does this mean that the rest of the world is unhealthy ?"

A London youth showed him a doctor's prescription saying that he should eat eggs. "The doctors will tell you and so will your friends," Swamishri retorted. "Look at me, I don't take meat and I'm still alive ! No one is dying ! Our rishis lived in the Himalayas with half-naked bodies and lived for thousands of years. Do you know this ? Western culture wants to change us, it wants us to forget our culture, and so gives such advice. There is so much else to eat. Take milk and ghee. They are more nutritious than eggs and build the body. If someone cuts your body, will it not pain ? Don't these animals suffer ? These Europeans stayed 150 years in India, did they adopt any of our ways ? Here take a vow.... We'll have to safeguard our heritage !" He poured a little water into the youth's right palm eliding a promise from him to stop eating meat.



25 Dollars

Nilesh of Los Angeles sent 25 dollars as a donation for the cattle camps run by our Sanstha during the Gujarat drought of 1987-1988. He had written :

I raised funds at school.... I have collected a total of 25 dollars so far.... Please use this to feed the starving animals.

Acknowledging his devotion, Bapa wrote :

“You deserve to be congratulated and have our blessings. In spite of your young age, you worship the Lord and took the initiative in offering this service. To think of the good of others is the healthiest thought of all. In our country, cows are treated with reverence while in your country, cow flesh is consumed. Make sure you only eat vegetarian food and encourage others to do the same.

The protest

Jim lived across the road from the Middlesex Country College, where the cultural festival of India had been celebrated. Because thousands of visitors came each day, many people had parked their cars in the neighbouring streets of the festival ground. Some locals had come together in opposition, and even printed their protest in a local newspaper. When Swamishri called him in, Jim began what he had come to say, “We owe you an apology. We did a lot against you all, but now we realized our mistake. I’ve come on behalf of our neighborhood to congratulate you. Your festival was superb. We got a chance to see India’s great culture, and we were thrilled. I used to come everyday, but today I’ve come especially to say sorry. We were wrong in causing such an uproar. We understood that later.

Swamishri listened calmly and replied, “It’s not important whether the newspaper printed your apology or not. Your genuine feelings are enough for us. God will be pleased and you will find peace.”



Jim added, "There is a French saying, 'When two people part, they leave a part of themselves behind.' We will cherish the part you have given us in our hearts forever."

Swamishri endorsed, "This is what Indian culture is all about."

What is God?

"Is God before your eyes?" questioned a youth.

"Yes, He is before me."

"Then show Him to me."

"God cannot be seen like that. You have to keep faith in the words of the spiritual master and explore yourself spiritually. I can see God Himself within my Guru. Is there anything more to be said? God may come before us in any form He pleases!"

The food for living

Once in Sarangpur it was 12:45 in the afternoon, and still Swamishri had not come out of his room for lunch. His cook for many years, Krishnavallabh Swami, entered the room and called, "That's enough now, come, don't you want to eat?"

Swamishri was engrossed in reading a chapter of Bhaktachintamani in preparation for his lecture that evening. Still reading Bhaktachintamani he said referring to the scripture, "Is not this eating!"

"Is that so?" said Krishnavallabh Swami who has a very friendly and outspoken relationship with Swamishri. He was not being rude, just playful.

"Yes, these are talks concerning the Lord's divine life and teachings, they are much greater than eating."



Who is behind this?

During the Yogiji Maharaj Centennial Celebrations. Shri L. K. Advani, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, came to Swamishri. He asked inquisitively, "You have a funny organisation here. I asked the people who are behind this grand festival and they told me they were the volunteers. I meet the volunteers, and they said it is really the sadhus' management. The sadhus all say we have done nothing, it is all Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiration. But who really...?"

Swamishri finished off the sequence for him. "In fact, it's all God's doing."

L. K. Advani was baffled. Never before had he seen such fabulous work with no one squabbling for the credit.

An Able Administrator :

Harish Dave - an advocate by profession, is looking after the administration and legal work of BAPS.

There was one institution which had numerous issues with BAPS - which needed settlement. Everybody had tried, but was unsuccessful. They were not willing to agree and always forwarded one reason or another for not agreeing.

Every time they came up with new arguments. Problem lingered on for a long time.

"Bapa, can you help ?" Asked Harisbhai.

The meeting was called. The representatives of that institution started with long arguments produced old files and made out a big case. Bapa listened patiently. He then explained the entire matter in a new perspective and its impact on public life. He quoted from past references and instances. No reference to any note or file. They were all amazed. Such a powerful



memory I Such lucid explanation of events ! A practical approach ! Within moments the issues got resolved.

The Trustees of the institution agreed to BAPS' proposal. Everybody departed with a smile on their face.

Where is Vitthal?

The sadhus and devotees lined the open roofed circumambulatory passage eager for darshan as Swamishri came to the Smruti mandir, the samadhi of Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri began walking round when he saw a very ordinary looking villager.

“Vitthal !” Bapa recalled the man's name and talked a while with him.

The sadhus asked who Vitthal was. “A potter,” replied Swamishri, “he served in the temple here when I was kothari.”

Forty years had elapsed and Swamishri had still managed to remember a potter who had briefly served with him.

Humility

My brother Sureshbhai Shelat is Senior Advocate in Gujarat High Court. BAPS takes advice from him in important legal matters. The family has very long association with Yogiji Maharaj and Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Sureshbhai invited Bapa to grace his residence in Saurabh Society, Ahmedabad in 1985. A time of 12.00 noon was given. Shri Sureshbhai had gone out on court work and was to come back at 12.00 noon. Bapa was so kind that he came a little earlier and reached Sureshbhai's residence at 11.00 a.m. Everybody in the family was feeling delicate as to what to do, how to convey Bapa that Sureshbhai was away and would be coming



soon. Bapa immediately discerned discomfort in the family members. He put them at ease by saying, "Do not worry, burry" I am not in a hurry. I have come hereto meet all of you. I will wait¹. He has such a simple nature and graceful manners.

Fore- Fathers

Nairobi,

September 23, 1994

After breakfast, Prakashbhai Bramabhadd came to see Swamishri. He wished to have a photograph taken with Swamishri holding his hand. He said, "Bapa, hold my hand." "We've held hands since the time of your forefathers," Swamishri replied. "Look, you are Prakash. Your father is Navnitbhai. Navnitbhai is Purushottambhai's son. Purushottambhai is Prahaladbhai's son. Then Himmatsinh, and after Himmatsinh, Haribhai. Haribhai's name is mentioned in the Bhaktachintamani. I've recalled your entire lineage up to Haribhai who had been associated with Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

Swaminarayan Aksharpith

Shri Vishnuprasad Pandya was a leading Printer and Publishers and had lead in Modernization of Printing Press in Gujarat. He invited Swami Shri to inaugurate his modern Printing Equipment-Photo Type Setting which was introduced first time in the year 1981 in his press Sahitya Mudranalaya. Swami Shri readily accepted invitation. He had a great interest in bringing out publications with modern methods and communicating devotees. He visited entire Press on that day and enquired in great details of various equipments.

The BAPS came out with a series of Publications, Magazines and set-up it's own Printing Press along with other Modern Media and Information Technology techniques has with State-of-Art Technology and it has a prestigious Publishing House known as Swaminarayan Aksharpith.



Swaminarayan Mantra

The Mystic Syllable with Divine Power

Swamishri has taken up the main challenge of keeping alive the basic values of life. During his visit to New Zealand - a young devotee asked, "Bapa, why 'Swaminarayan Mantra' should be recited ?"

Then Bapa provided detailed guidance : on the path of spirituality and mysticism, a mantra or mystic syllable is a 'must' for various reasons. The Supreme Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave the Swaminarayan Mantra on the thirteenth day after the demise of his Guru Ramanand Swami. The Swaminarayan mantra has spiritual force and divine power. It has the power to manifest right knowledge, spiritual light and divine bliss in the heart of an aspirant.

The 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 ideal 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. In short, it explains the eternal and inseparable relationship between Akshar and Purushottam.

When recited loudly it emits a sound that is divine. Its continuous loud recitation helps in concentration, meditation and attainment of ecstatic divine bliss. The mantra is the embodiment of God and his divine power. Therefore, when recited in chorus, rhythmically and melodiously with musical accompaniments, before the murti of God or in a mandir, it purges the mind of all impure thoughts and distractions. It creates a divine atmosphere around singers. Thus, the Swaminarayan mantra is identical with the spirit of the Lord.

The effects and impact of this mantra are very subtle, sublime and divine. Its power of spiritual influence is incomprehensible. The strength of its power is known to a scholar or a yogi. But it is also commonly



experienced by a devotee. The experience of divine bliss and the presence of the Divine is felt in the heart. Consequently, the devotee's interest and involvement in the world declines and he withdraws himself from the objects of enjoyment.

The Swaminarayan mantra liberates one from all sins, committed consciously and unconsciously in this life and previous lives. It is the Supreme mantra with the most subtle and purificatory effect.

Its single recitation equals the recitation of other mantras a thousand times.

Its recitation accomplishes all wishes. It confers good health, a peaceful life, material prosperity and worldly wisdom to a man of worldly desires, it helps in preserving health and curing illness, it helps in giving peace of mind freeing the mind from fear, tensions and worries. It helps in resolving conflicts. It helps in overcoming obstacles and hardships in life. It helps in putting an end to pain, miseries and sufferings.

However, to a spiritual aspirant it helps in getting rid of his faults, vices and insufficiencies. Its recitation helps in concentration and meditation. It alone helps in disentangling oneself from the cycle of birth and death.

It should be recited without interruption.

Bapa thus explained the deep meaning of the mantra.

**Transcendence - My Spiritual Experiences with
Pramukh Swamiji by A.P. J. Abdul Kalam with
Arun Tiwari published by Harper Collins India.**

This is one of the recent publication – the most touching is the Epilogue which is reproduced below with gratitude to the Publisher.

“It was a sweltering hot summer day in Delhi on 6th June 2014. The



temperature in the national capital breached the forty five degrees Celsius mark. I was taking my habitual late evening stroll in the garden. The gigantic arjuna tree as silent; there was not even a breath of wind to ruffle its leaves. The eight-day waxing moon sat around half past midnight. I asked my staff to put a chair in the open and leave me by myself. After a while I felt the waft of a gentle breeze and my eyes closed.

I imagine that Pramukh Swamiji and I are walking in space. We are summoned to the Divine presence. We meet various prophets and divine beings and offer them out most respectful salutations. We see heaven and hell; the torment of those in hell and the peace of those in heaven. A bright light engulfs us, and I can no longer see pramukh Swamiji. Only his grip on my hand is felt.

‘Where are we? What time is it? I ask

‘you are in eternity. It is time untimed, and space unspaced’. I hear the reply.

‘How can it be? I ask

‘How can it be any other way? Was there a time when you were not with God? Is there a place where you are not in God/ The Divine is always with you’.

‘But Pramukh Swamiji is in Sarangpur, a thousand miles away from me. How can he hold my hand?.

‘Why are you corralling the eternal in miles and minutes, Kalam? Why chain eternity with hours and seasons, and divide space into distances and places?.

‘But I am not able to see anything’

‘What do you want to see?’

I want to see you?

'The light in your eyes is not the light of you alone. It is my light that sees me in your eyes. I am the light in your eyes'.

'But I am breathing. How can it be that I am here in space and still breathing?.

"The breath within your breast is not the breath of you alone. All those that breathe, or even breathed the air, are breathing in your breast. I am the breath in your breast'.

'I am not able to thin this through. What is going on?.

'Your thoughts are not the thoughts of your alone. I am the thought that thinks in you'

'Is it a dream?'

'Your dreams are not your dreams alone. The entire universe is dreaming in your dreams. I am the dream that makes you dream/

'Why am I here?. Why is pramukh Swamiji here?.

Both of you have defeated the demon, who proclaimed his superiority over man. You have transcended his temptations. You have broken through his fences'.

'What do we do now?

'Go and tell the world that all life frms are inseparable from God, for God is everywhere, in everything and in everyone'.

I opened my eyes and saw the morning star shining above the arjuna tree, as a crowning jewel, in the fleeting hours of night.

What a dream I had! I thought.

Or is this the dream into which I have now woken?."



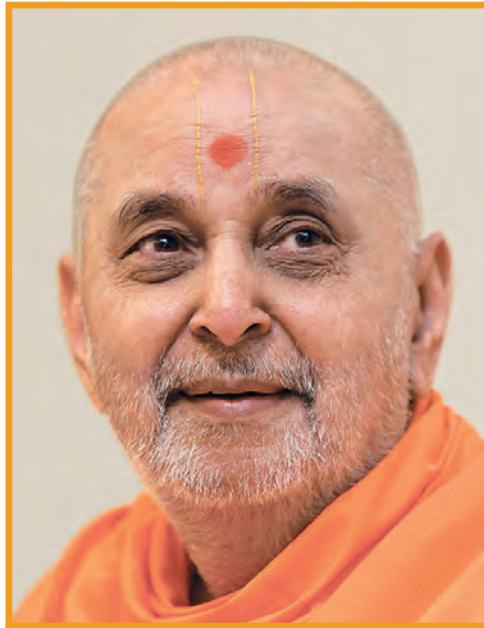
What is your address?

What is your address?

Many a time he is asked this question

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's reply is simple a smile

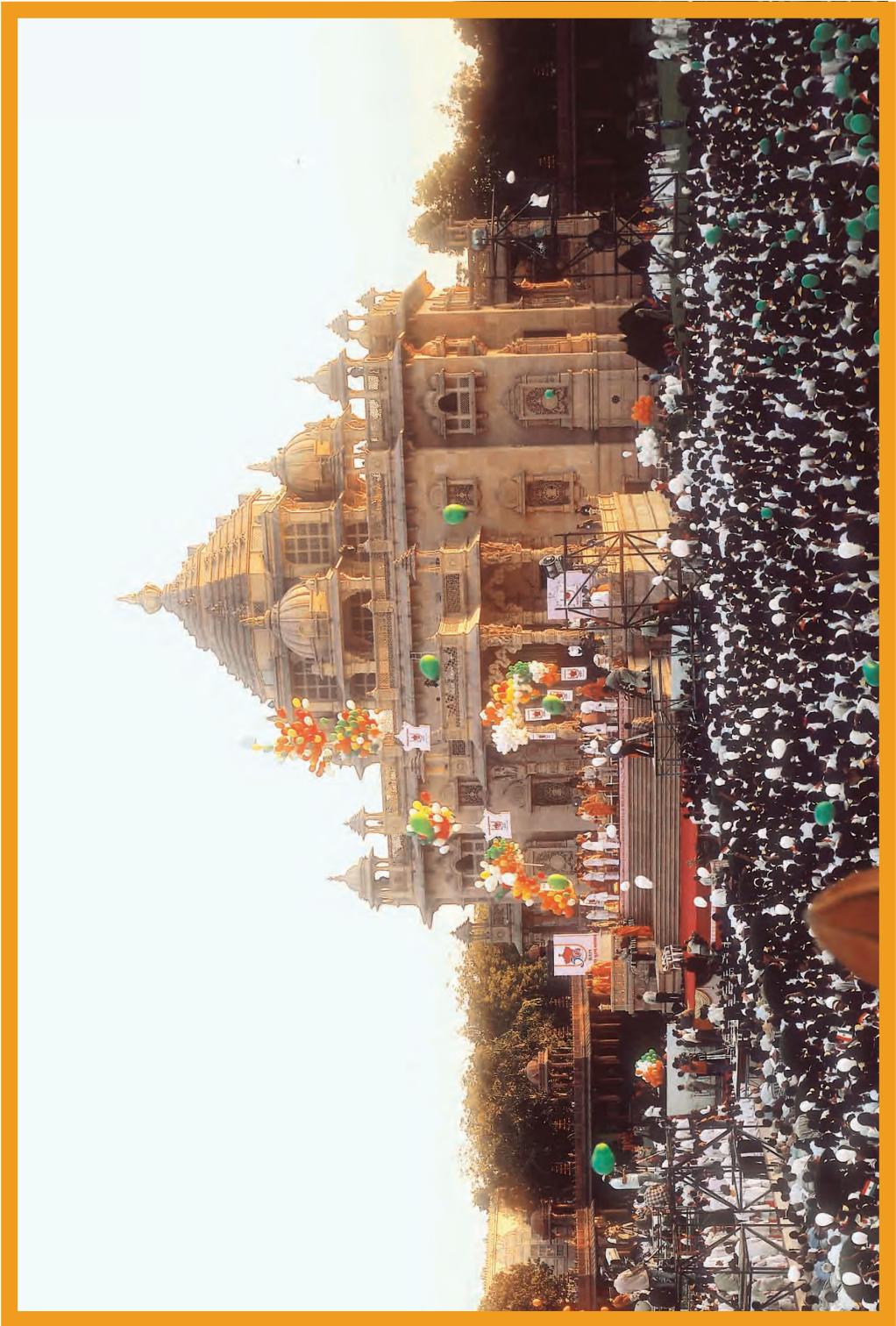
He is always on the move. He never stays long at one place. He is confined by no boundaries of place or people. The Bible also says "A house I have not – but I have houses". He is spreading the message of God every day from place of place.





Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Chidanand Swamiji and Shri Vishnu Prasad Pandya and Shri Shreyas Pandya





Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple – Gandhinagar

An Oasis of Peace

Hinduism is a tolerant religion. But in the wake of the Partition there were major clashes between the Hindus and Muslims. After Independence and under a secular constitution, the government gave the message of religious and communal harmony. However, due to social tensions and economic reasons, time and again, the country has witnessed communal clashes.

Gujarat, the place of Mahatma Gandhi, has a mixed population. Gandhiji spread the message of peace and compassion for all. He propagated religious harmony. But even in Gujarat, communal tensions and clashes have erupted time and again.

One such event was the burning alive of more than 50 kar-sevaks in the train at Godhra Station on February 28, 2002. They were returning from Ayodhya, the birth place of Bhagwan Ram. This was followed by communal clashes all over Gujarat.

After sometime, peace was restored, economic activity revived and life returned to normal. A terrorist group saw this as an opportunity. Their strategists thought that if they attack one of the most prestigious temples in Gujarat, there would be further clashes. These could spread across the entire country. They would be successful in paralysing India's economy. Its political stability will be affected.

Akshardham is a major centre of attraction. It is located in Gandhinagar, the capital city of Gujarat. It is one of the most beautiful temples, created by BAPS under the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Every year, more than two million people from all over the world visit it. It is a unique cultural complex dedicated to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who inspired peace and harmony. The monument had the help of thousands of people in its construction. Devotees from all over Gujarat and India contributed - Kar Seva -voluntary service by thousand of young men in



its construction work and other related activities was noteworthy. Almost all devotees sent the members of their families to assist and work at the site. The author's son Vrajesh who was studying engineering, says this was an amazing experience. Working under the guidance of Atmaswarup Swami, he followed the ideals of community service. He tried to imbibe spiritual values. Many young and old persons, who participated in the project have learnt and achieved something in life. This monument has immense significance for the people of Gujarat. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's constant presence motivated and encouraged the workers.

Swamishri had taken it up as his own special project. His ideas, suggestions and push were ever present at the site. He selected Rajasthani pink stone as the primary building material and also suggested that the square shikhar be octagonal. He insisted that the monument face the north. The vast empty space in front of the monument was also his idea. It enhances the beauty of the monument. The exhibitions are the finest in India and are of a world class level. They depict the Indian culture, its transformation and the growth of Swaminarayan Sampraday. The best available modern technology is used. Science is used here in the service of religion and culture. Swamishri would frequently meet the designers, engineers, builders, artists and even the work crews. At other times, he would write or speak on the phone.

This was selected as a target by the terrorists. On September 24, 2002, a white car dropped two terrorists outside gate No. 3 of the temple. The time was 4.45 p.m. It being evening time, there was a maximum rush of tourists. They jumped over the side fence and started firing guns. Then they entered the main walkway. There were many innocent visitors at this place. They fired at them. From this point, they entered the exhibition hall. A stream of bullets was fired on the people watching the audio-visual show.

By this time, there was an all-out alert. The police arrived on the scene quickly. Within a few hours they were supported by elite commandos. There was cross fire. Finally, both the terrorists were killed. But the damage was heavy. Thirty-three people were killed and 77 wounded. There were policemen and commandos, who got injured, some lost their lives. Sadhu Parmeshwar Swami was killed when he was protecting tourists and guiding the police.

The world was shocked. The Deputy Prime Minister - who was also the Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani arrived on the scene within hours. He held consultations with the State Chief Minister Narendra Modi. They wanted to make sure that there was no repetition of past events.

Under normal circumstances, we are all calm, good, understanding and helpful. But in adverse circumstances or when an attack takes place on our loved ones or our religious institutions, we break down and lose our common sense. Immediate desire for retaliation arises. We become violent and explosive. The emotional turmoil throws us off balance. When this happens to the feelings of an entire community, the consequences are volatile and disastrous and retaliation takes place. Such attacks can not be easily controlled by police or military forces and affect the entire society.

“All eyes were on the spiritual leader Pramukh Swami Maharaj,” writes Brahmavihari Swami, while recounting events in Swaminarayan Bliss issue of November, 2002. “The message of the terrorists attack reached him at Sarangpur Centre. Vishvavihari Swami called him within minutes after the attack. He was busy in a meeting regarding Kutch-Earthquake relief work. His balance of mind was amazing. He was a Sthitapragna, one not affected by emotions. He remained clam. He swung into action immediately.

On hearing of the event, he calmly informed those present, “Terrorists have entered Akshardham. They have killed many people. Let us pray to God that no further killing takes place”.

The whole world was shocked with disbelief, disgust and hatred at the cowardly act and emotions were aroused. Swamishri calmly prayed. He immediately appealed to the devotees and the people of Gujarat and India, to remain clam and peaceful and not resort to any violent moves or acts.

He received telephone calls from the President of India, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and State Chief Minister. He expressed his satisfaction at the action taken by the Government and appealed for peace.

For the next two days, September 25 and 26 - the people of India observed a bandh. All public services, offices and businesses were closed in



Gujarat, Mumbai and in other parts of the country. The nation-wide strike was a cause for concern. The strike could spark off violence on a national scale. But his appeal for peace prevailed. It had an overwhelming impact. No untoward incident took place in Gujarat or elsewhere.

Peace prevailed in subsequent days throughout the country. The plan of terrorist groups to send the country into communal turmoil had failed.

Journalists from all over the world and India, came to Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad. They were expecting something more to happen. After February 28, 2002 incident, what if terrorists strike at the other important religious centres of Gujarat ? But nothing of that sort happened. Tim Sullivan, the South Asia Head of Associated Press, asked a mandir official "Why has Gujarat remained peaceful this time ? Whenever something of this sort happens in Gujarat, there is violence". The official replied, "Due to Pramukh Swami's appeal the people have remained calm".

The leader of one organisation said "Swami, had you only signaled otherwise, things would have been different. There is peace in Gujarat and Bharat, because of your appeal. Through your power of austerity and goodness, there has been peace".

In a letter to the editor of THE TIMES OF INDIA on 8.10.2002, Kaushik Joshi wrote "In the wake of the attack on Akshardham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has shown magnanimity by not indulging in any blame game and imputing motives. Akshardham is his most priceless and wonderful creation. Yet, he has been calm. His saintliness is very touching".

At a memorial service held on September 29, 2002, at Akshardham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "What has happened has caused much pain, everyone feels anguished. We have offered peace prayers for the departed souls. May their families be blessed with inner strength to bear this loss. There has always been a conflict between the forces of good and evil. Ultimately it is the good that triumphs. God dispenses justice to all according to their actions. Prayer is a spiritual weapon. Gandhiji gained much strength from prayer. Our happiness does not lie in the misery of others but in the joy of others and their progress."



And thus, the feared blood bath, which normally would have followed the attack had been averted. The event was allowed to make history. The institution also assisted the injured persons and the affected families in addition to government assistance. The terrorists failed and the message of the peace-loving saint triumphed.

The millennium world peace summit

The United Nation organized on August 28, 2000, at New York, the Millennium World Peace Summit. Over 1800 spiritual and religious leaders, scholars and delegates participated. They represented almost all member countries and more than 12 major religions, spread over the entire world. This was the first-ever spiritual meet at the international level. There were 300 delegates from India. This included many prominent religious leaders Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Satyamitranandji and the like. On August 29, on the inaugural day, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was invited to address the Summit. He spoke in Gujarati. His speech was simultaneously translated in all other languages. He spoke on the religious legacy of India, its culture, the Hindu religion and its tolerance and peace-loving modes and contribution made by Hindu religion to mankind for that cause.

His speech was welcomed and appreciated by one and all.

Excerpts from the speech :

“Most revered Saints and religious leaders gathered from all over the world, UN Secretary General H.E. Kofi Annan, respected President of the Conference, Mr. Ted Turner and the organizers, today, the sight of so many religious leaders together at one place is in itself a moment of great joy and divinity. This is the first such religious summit guided by the UN and we wholeheartedly welcome this bold step, which recognizes the crucial role of religion in bringing about world peace.

Dialogue with religious leaders

Inter-religious dialogue and harmony is our immediate need. Religious leaders should often meet and talk to other religious leaders. We must freely communicate with each other.

When we met the Pope in 1984, many reporters asked, “What purpose will the meeting of two religious heads serve ?” We answered,



“Apart from creating understanding and friendship, when religious heads meet each other it lessens the bitterness between the followers of the two faiths and helps generate harmony. A single meeting, a simple dialogue can positively influence the minds of millions. The Archbishop of Canterbury visited Bethlehem, the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and met both the chief Rabbis of Judaism. It creates understanding, and generates genuine respect. This is why we often say, ‘Religion is that which spreads love for one another.’¹

In this age of growing environmental awareness, we have realized the value of life and bio-diversity and are trying to preserve all forms of life. Then what about religious diversity ? Let every religion exist and flourish. No big religion should usurp and efface small religious groups. Leaders should not dream of only one religion in the world, but dream of a world where all religions are One. Unity in Diversity is the lesson of life. Flourishing together is the secret of peace.

Just as the unity of our followers makes our faith strong and stable, unity of faiths will make our future strong and stable. We must remind ourselves that every civilization, culture and religion on this earth is like a goldmine, rich with values, wisdom and vision. Let us share this legacy and construct a common platform of values for the rest of mankind to stand on.

From Rigvedic times, the Hindus have professed this global broadmindedness of a Beautiful Borderless World with this prayer - “Ano Bhadraha Kratavo Yantu Vishvataha.” - Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.

Our spiritual master Yogiji Maharaj often said : Maaru e Saaru Nahi pana Saaru e Maaru - Rather than mine is the best, the best should be mine.

The Upanishads say, “Isha vasayam idam sarvam, yat kincha jagatyam jagat” - In everyone and in everything there is the divine presence of God. This spiritual unity connects us with the entire creation.

The Vedassay, Amrutasya putra vayam - We all are the children of God.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “We are all atmans - pure spiritual entities unattached to and unbound by caste, country, race and religion.”

And the Mahabharat says “Atmavat Sarva Bhuteshu” -Treat all living beings as oneself.

Dialogue with followers

Dialogue among religious leaders is not enough, a dialogue with our own followers is more important. A religious leader alone can change the minds of his followers. If every religion concentrated on improving the quality of spirituality of their own followers then there would be more faith and less fanaticism.

Let us teach our followers that religion does not grow by quantity of numbers, but by the quality of spiritualism. Vertical depth is much more important than horizontal spread. A Hindu should become a better Hindu, a Jew should become a better Jew, a Christian should become a better Christian, a Muslim should become a better Muslim. If the follower of every religion becomes a better and truer follower, then our world will be a much better world. Therefore, we should steer our followers away from fanaticism and focus on faith and pure living. Bhagwan Swaminarayan transformed the lives of dacoits like Joban Pagi and the lawless and violent tribes of Kathis. They became peace-loving people with His spiritual influence. In this way, through a weaponless revolution, with the medium of love and devotion, He transformed the lives of people. It works. But, if we work individually our impact is limited. If we all work together we will be able to bring about a large-scale transformation.

Dialogue with oneself

Lastly, there is nothing more important than dialogue with oneself. We must ask ourselves how close we are to the teachings of our founders. Let us put into practice their philosophies and teachings of love, truth, compassion, non-violence, harmony, faith, devotion.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given a universal, all-encompassing definition of religion, “Dharmo gneyaha sadacharaha” - Righteousness is Religion. “Let us not allow righteousness to weaken. That is why today’s religions should be both social and spiritual, and should benefit not only



its followers but all people, and not just people but all forms of life. Hence, the Hindu, from the dawn of civilization has continually prayed.”

O Lord ! May the skies be peaceful, the space be peaceful.

May the earth, the waters, the herbs and plants be peaceful.

May peace, peace and only peace prevail.

When we are at peace with ourselves and at peace with people and things around us, only then can we attain real peace.

Let us guide ourselves and our followers not just to tolerate but to respect other religions, not just to exist but to co-exist, and help others. We must not progress at the cost of others, but sacrifice a part of ourselves for the good of others. Because :

In the good of others lies our own.

In the progress of others rests our own.

In the joy of others abides our own.

Once again I thank you all and pray that the organisers, the UN, and all the people of our planet are blessed with peace, piety and progress by God and all the saints and sages who have walked on our earth.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s message and its actual practice is most noteworthy. There are occasions, when we see no relation between the two. There are fundamentalist forces, in the world today, which, behind the scenes, encourage communal hatred, terrorism, etc. These result in the death of many innocent people. Religion is for the mental peace of a person and harmony of the community. Swamishri has set an example by his conduct and his continuous efforts to keep this basic truth alive.





Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple – New Delhi



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, says "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 "I feel that I am in a different world. I am indeed delighted to participate in the dedication assembly of Swaminarayan Akshardham Cultural Complex at New Delhi in the presence of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. Today, when I entered the Akshardham Culture Complex, I get an answer for the question, how can you mix spirituality and social service ? How can you separate the two ? Those who wish to sincerely serve society, must be spiritually pure and only those who are spiritually pure, can sincerely serve society and serve the nation.

"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 spirit of the divine child entered into Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. And we see the birth of is Akshardham, the civilizational heritage of India in dynamic form in front of us.

“Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj has inspired thousands of people across the country and abroad and brought together the best of minds for creating a beautiful cultural complex. It 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.

“Now, Akshardham has happened at the dawn of the 21st Century with the commitment and dedication of volunteers (devotees). What has happened today at Akshardham inspires me and gives me the confidence that we can do it, the realization of developed India is certainly possible before 2020 with the millions of ignited minds like you.”

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.

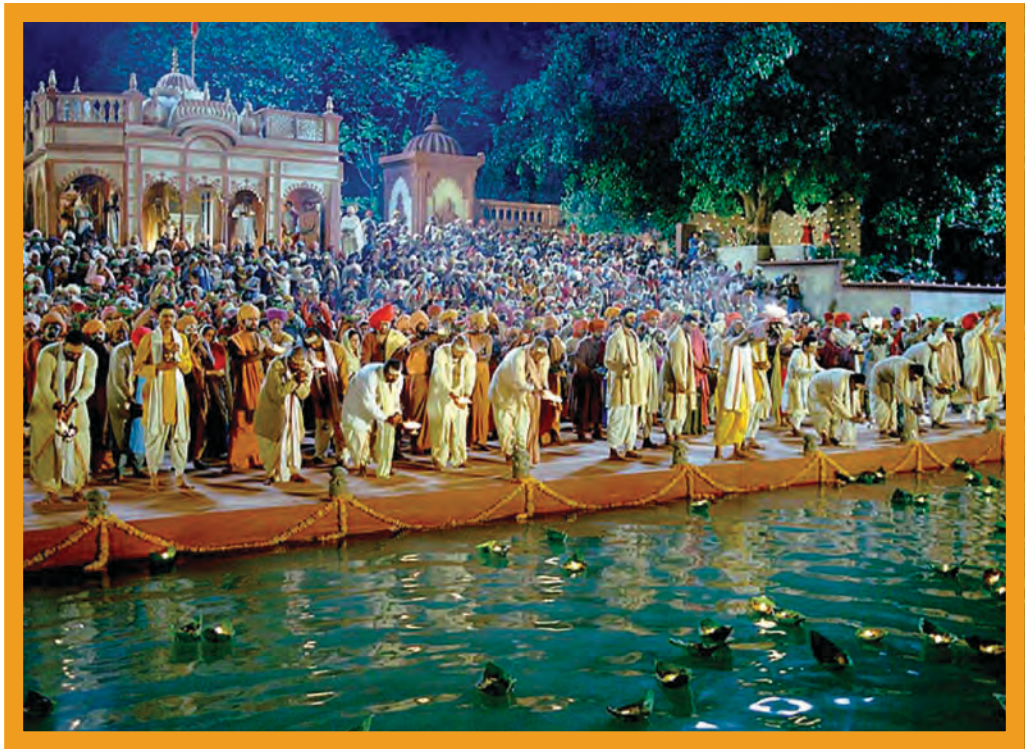
Swaminarayan Mandapam

Seated in the inner sanctum (Swaminarayan Mandapam is the beautiful 11-feet high, gold-plated 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-



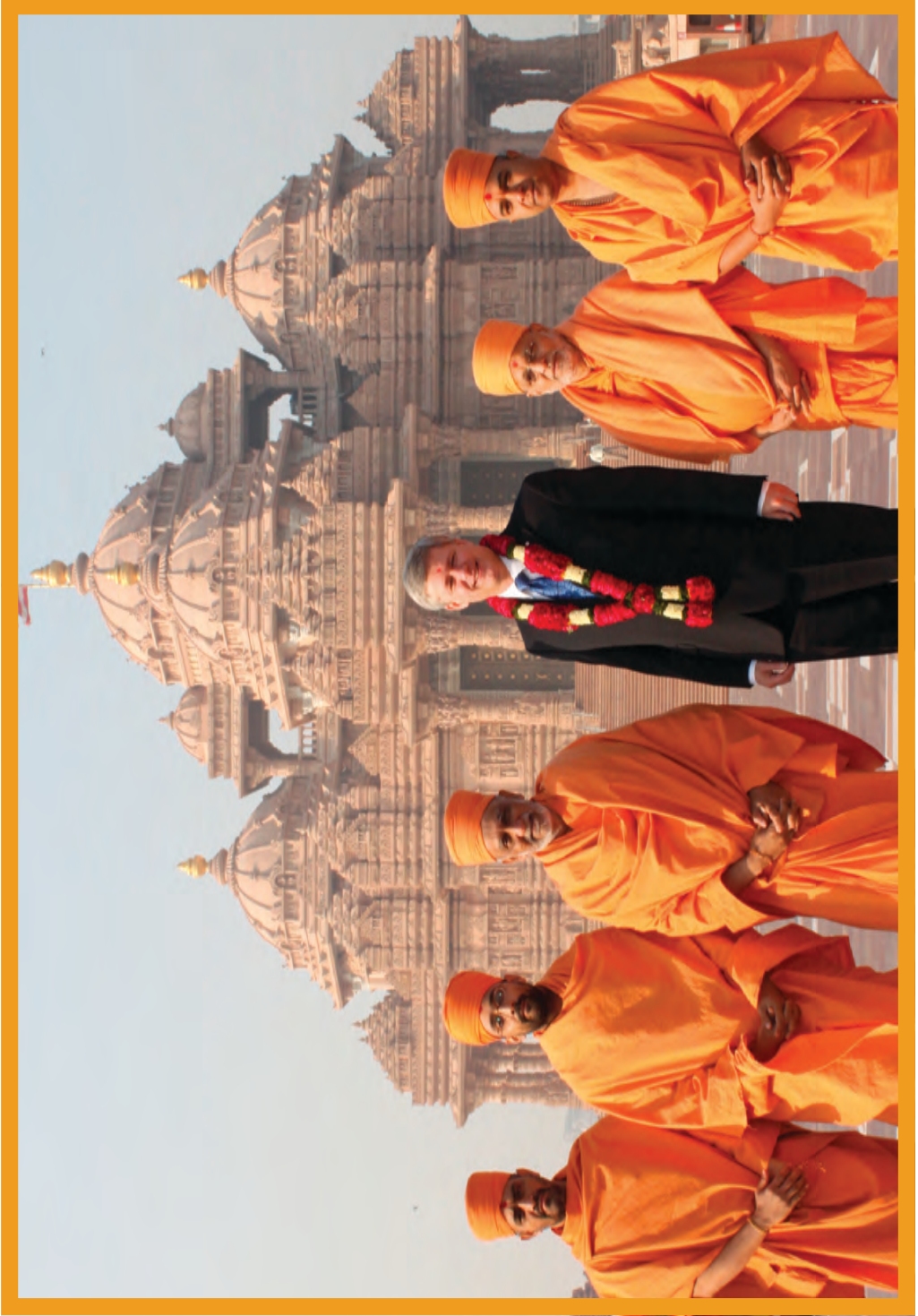


Musical Fountain – Akshardham – New Delhi



Holi water of 120 Rivers of India – Akshardham – New Delhi





The Prime Minister of Canada, Honourable Stephen Harper



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 eight-sided 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 child-form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, at its centre. The pillars have beautiful carvings depicting the childhood incidents of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Lila Mandapam

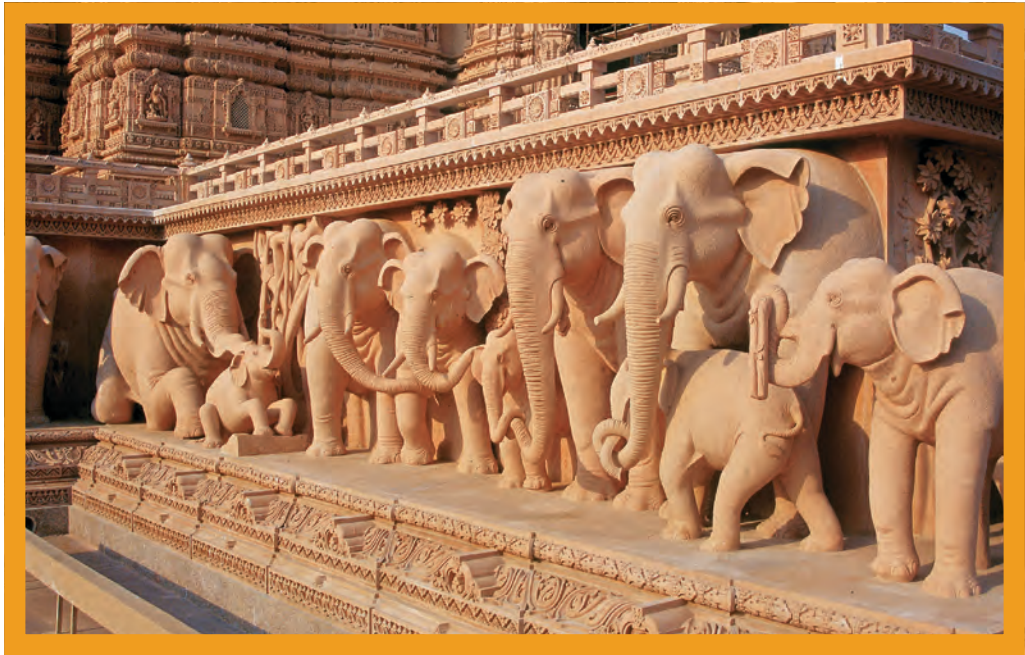
The Lila Mandapam is 72 ft high. On its four-faced pillars are carvings portraying stories from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as a child, teenager and in his later years.

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 the eight-sided pillars and saucer-shaped ornate dome that is 32 ft above the ground. At the dome centre 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.



Gajendra Pith, Akshardham, New Delhi



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 rishis, 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





Hall of Values



Giant Screen Theatre



Boat Ride



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:

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 storeys 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 rishi-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.

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.

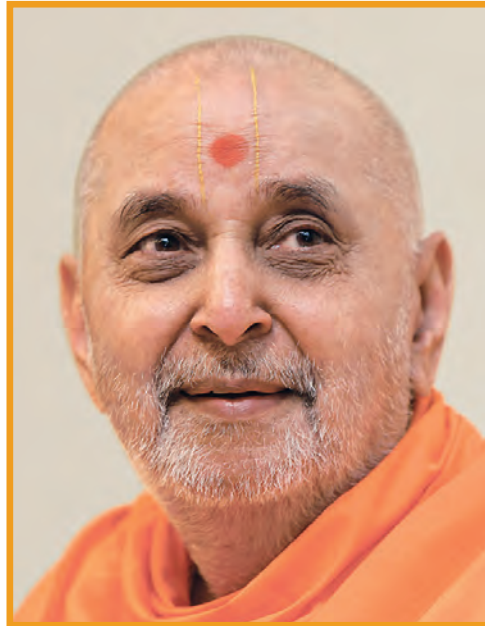
Swaminarayan Akshardham is thus the Triveni Sangam confluences spirituality, knowledge and technology.

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.

Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj has a different vision of



religion for the modern world. He inspires people to believe in spirituality based on logic and actual self-realized practice. He believes that 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 such is Triveni Sangam.





BAPS Centenary Celebrations

The year-long BAPS Centenary Celebrations were launched on 28 November 2006 at Bochasan on the occasion of Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj's 86th birthday celebration. On this day, hundreds and thousands of sadhus and devotees worldwide pledged to practice "YOGA – YAGNA" various niyams for inner spiritual progress and service during society to the whole year.

Swamishri's satsang tour abroad to celebrate the centenary year commenced on 7 May 2007, and concluded when he arrived in India on 16 October 2007, after visiting Nairobi, Kampala, Dar-e-Salam, Mombasa, Chicago, Houston, Toronto, Edison, Atlanta, Los Angeles and London.

Preparation Festival: From mid-September 2007 till 13 December, 2007 (Inauguration Day).

13,000 volunteers offered their honorary services.

Volunteers in 39 departments performed various services.

300 acres of land at Chandkheda, Ahmedabad, was used.

Initially the 300-acre site was cleared of shrubs and thorns and thereafter it was leveled. Then construction, electricity, water and other departments started the site work. A giant gate 350 ft wide and 51 ft high, was set up as the main entrance gate. Children and youths were trained in Ahmedabad for the stage performances during the Diwali vacation in October 2007. 2000 BAPS children and youths from all parts of Gujarat participated in the spectacular stage performance. They sacrificed the Diwali and New Year celebration.

The centenary celebrations were held on 13, 14, 15, and 17 December 2007.





BAPS Centenary Celebration – Women's Day



Campaign for abolition addiction



BAPS Centenary Celebration – Youth Day



BAPS Centenary Celebration – Children's Day

13.12.07: Youth Day

The six core values on which the BAPS was founded and is being sustained today, was presented by youths. More than 500 youths presented the following six values in an articulate and aesthetic manner:

1. **Sidhant** : The BAPS is founded on the principle of Akshar-Purushottam upasana. This principle was depicted by a unique pillar.
2. **Sadhuta** : The virtues of good action, speech and thought were depicted by a graceful dance of pure white swans that symbolized pristine saintliness.
3. **Seva** : The value of selfless service, devoid of ego, that was shown through a unique sweepers - dance by youths using wicker baskets and brooms.
4. **Samarpan** : The theme of self-sacrifice was depicted by a dance of youths dressed in life-like oxen which is symbolic of selfless sacrifice.
5. **Samp** : BAPS is one large family, spread over the whole world. This value of unity was depicted by a vibrant dance portraying the story of the unity of doves.
6. **Satpurush** : The guru is one in whom God is ever-present. This value was celebrated with a deepa-dance, ending in Pramukh Swami Maharaj lighting a lamp to officially inaugurate the celebrations.

14.12.07: Woman Day

The second day was BAPS Women's Day based on the theme of "Empowering Women". It was presented by 1000 women devotees 5 from, aged to 75 from around the world. BAPS Women's Activities have helped women to lead lives centered on spiritual values and human efforts to achieve success.

First, traditional prayers were offered by 100 young girls and 900 young women. Then they performed colourful folk dances depicting values of devotion, faith and unity. Then women devotees from India





Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj





Guinness World Records



and abroad expressed their personal experiences and benefits in doing satsang. Inspiring video presentations of BAPS women's contribution to society as ideal mothers, noble citizens and honourable devotees were shown on giant screens. A tribute was paid to 785 mothers who had given their beloved sons to become BAPS sadhus at the holy hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

15.12.07: Children's Day

The third evening celebrated Children's Day. Its theme was "Transforming Tomorrow". For generations, BAPS children's activities have inspired children to elevate themselves and those around them, to serve a more promising tomorrow.

The programme commenced with the singing of Vedic prayers by children, who were accompanied by tablas and sitars played by trained children. Traditional dances were also performed by children. More than 600 children participated in spectacular parades that included enormous cultural floats and inspiring skits and dialogues. An anti-addiction presentation was the highlight of the parade. Enriching performances and presentations about historical events and video shows were presented. Then star children were felicitated for their academic and sports achievements and for their services to God.

17.12.07: 87th Birthday and BAPS centenary celebration

The 87th Birthday of HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the BAPS Centenary celebration was attended by 275,000 devotees.

The 87th Birthday celebrations of BAPS's whole and soul, its inspirer, leader and guiding force – Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the grand finale of the Four-day celebrations. Young and old devotees from around the world offered Swamishri reverence and honour through innovative presentations, venerating performances and enlightening experiences.

The evening celebration assembly paid great tribute to gurus Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj who have shaped today's worldwide giant BAPS organization. Homage to Swamishri was paid by 600 youths through Vedic mantras, shloks and unique folk dances.



Swamishri's role as a Yug Purush was described through testimonials and speeches given by devotees and senior sadhus. Swamishri has contributed for the welfare and moral and spiritual progress of society through his untiring efforts and, spirit of "In the joy of others, in the progress of others and in the good of others lies our own."

On this Janma Jayanti Day, Guinness World Records declared two major achievements as world records. This was done by their representative Mr Michael Whitty, who came personally from London with the certificates. The announcement of the FIRST achievement was that of Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, as the world's largest comprehensive temple, covering an area of 86,342 sq. ft. The SECOND achievement was the conservation of 713 BAPS Mandirs by Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 5 continents between April 1971 and November 2007. This is the highest number of temples created by any person in the world said Mr Michael Whitty while addressing the gathering. "It takes a very special person to achieve such an incredible total and it is a unique feat in the world. I hope that we will soon be updating again to over 1,000 temples. Congratulations to His Holiness, BAPS and all involved in these wonderful achievements. Finally, your Holiness, for your remarkable achievement, you not only deserve applause, but you deserve a standing ovation."

In conclusion, Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the gathering of more than 275,000 devotees. He said, "The support and strength of God are important and should always be maintained. Today, amidst growing materialism in society one forgets this, and from the time one awakes only worldly thoughts arise."

"God has given us this human body so that from the time we wakes up we should wish that God liberates all and that all people throughout the world attain happiness. People get physical peace and comforts. But until one experiences peace in one's atma, it is incomplete.

"For this our ancient avatars, acharyas and rishis have given us the Bhagvad Gita, Upanishads, Brahmasutras. The principle of Akshar and Purushottam is in the Gita, Upanishads and Brahmasutras. And this is the principle Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed and established. If one realizes this, it will bring happiness.



“The shastras give us two types of knowledge, para vidya and apara vidya. Apara vidya is worldly knowledge. Para vidya is knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman, Atma and Paramatma, Akshar and Purushottam. Our birth is for attaining this wisdom. Gunatitanand Swami has said, ‘What is this birth for? To become akshar-rup and worship Purushottam.’ It is the essence of all shastras. Only if this is attained does one become enlightened.”

In hundred years, BAPS, under the present inspiration of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj has changed the face of religion, has merged science, technology and knowledge into spirituality, evoked the hidden capacity of human beings to voluntarily assist others, provided peace of mind to million of its followers and laid a new path of spirituality in the world.





BAPS centenary celebration
93 Birthday celebration of Prama Pujya Pramukh Swami
Maharaj – Sarangpur



Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj – BAPS



The Trust

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 Purshottam 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 multi-dimensional. 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.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has laid down precisely the aims of the organisation which 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 centres, 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 multi media channels.

Swamishri has established within the organisation a delivery systems 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 centres and many programmes for the development of youth and children.
- v. Hospitals, healthcare centres and medical camps.
- vi. Cultural programmes, seminars, conventions and conferences for cultural and religious harmony.
- vii. Centres for better educational facilities and development of tribes.

He has created 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.

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. Pramukh 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. It is headed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

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. **Special Committees on need basis:**

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:

Many ask, "How can you mix spirituality and social service?"

We ask, "How can you separate the two?"

Those who wish to sincerely must be spiritually pure and only those who are spiritually pure can sincerely serve society!



Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Seaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) is a socio-spiritual Hindu organization with its roots in the Vedas. It was revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830) in the late 18th century and established in 1907 by Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951). Founded on the pillars of practical spirituality, the BAPS reaches out far and wide to address the spiritual, moral and social challenges and issues we face in our world. Its strength lies in the purity of its nature and purpose. BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. This is done by mass motivation and individual attention, through elevating projects for all, irrespective of class, creed, colour or country. Its universal work through a worldwide network of over 3,300 centers has received many national and international awards and affiliation with the United Nations. Today, a million or more Swaminarayan followers begin their day with puja and meditation, lead upright, honest lives and donate regular hours in serving others. No Alcohol, No Addictions, No Adultery, No meat, No Impurity of body and mind are their five lifetime vows. Such pure morality and spirituality forms the foundation of the humanitarian services performed by BAPS.

International Centres

- 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

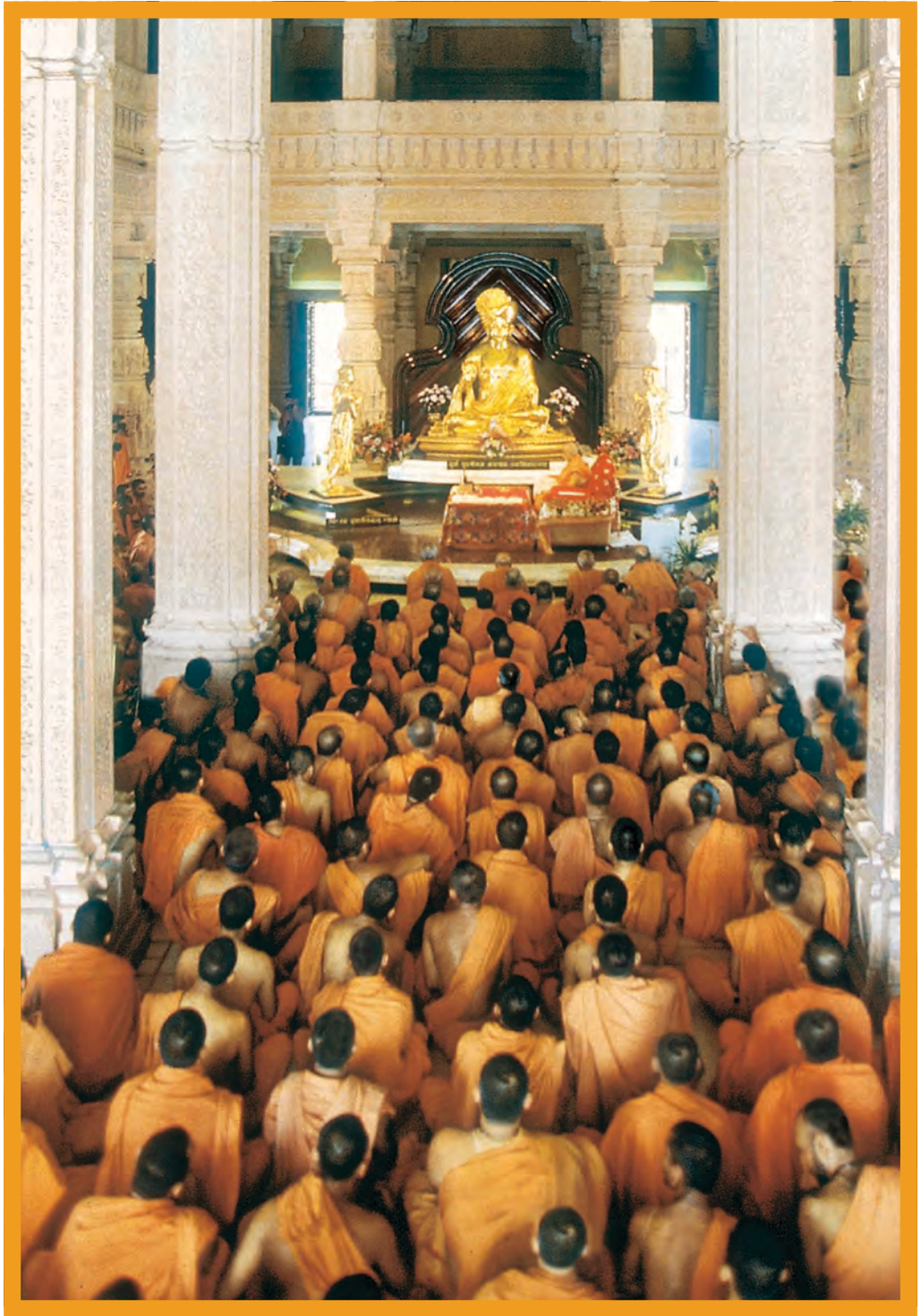
- 55,000 volunteers
- 12,000,000 annual volunteer-hours in service

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.



Swamishri with Sadhus at Akshardham



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 successfully managed.
- 50,000 family inspired to hold daily Family Assemblies.
- Over two million people inspired to quit addictions.

Tribal Activities

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

Spiritual Activities

- Over 700 BAPS mandirs worldwide.
- Thousands of pilgrims visit BAPS mandirs daily.
- Over 800 sadhus.

The above number 90 on changing everyday. 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. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has promoted new temples all over India and the world and made scriptures more popular. He has inspired the tradition of pure sadhus. He has initiated and created a unique cadre of sadhus of BAPS throughout the world.



He has established a very strict but public-oriented code of conduct for the sadhus - 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:

Not to become attached to anyone other than God. Renunciation of one's native place and near relatives.

Nirman:

Non-ego, be humble and serve everyone.

In short, he has created a cadre of sadhus who 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 Sarangpurin 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. Throughout the year, they engage in various services (seva), study the Swamini vato (discourses of Aksharbramha Gunatitanand Swami), memorise kirtans and study other topics 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





Sadhus in Meditation



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, Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiates him 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 parshad 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 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 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. 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 is 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 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 the harmony between the sadhus. Despite hailing from different regions, countries and educational backgrounds, they blend with one another in perfect harmony.

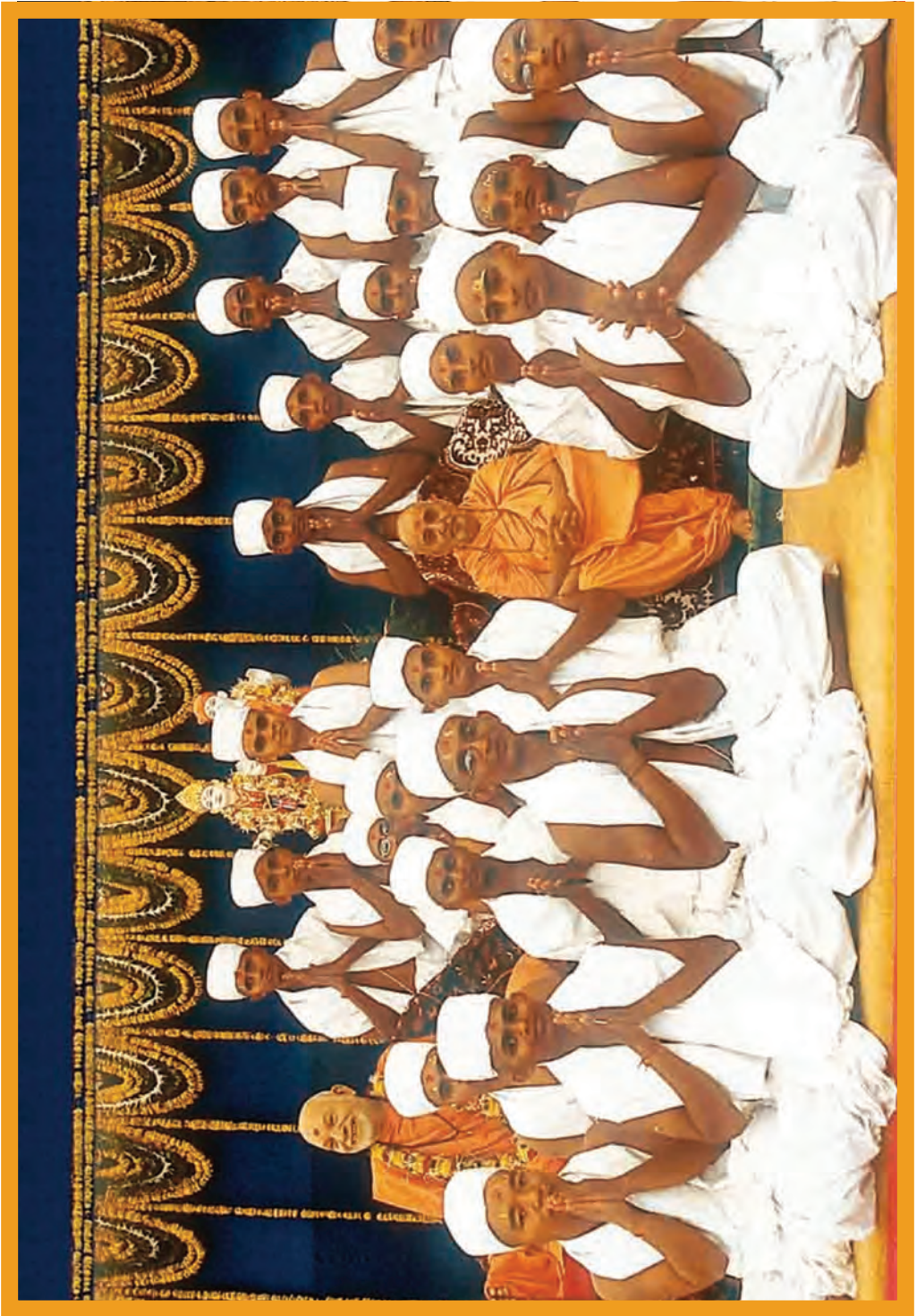
The sadhus regularly observe between 5 and 7 waterless fasts every month. Many eat only once a day. They also undertake other difficult austerities, such as, dharna-pama, chandrayan, khatras, taptakruchh, etc.

After spending 5 years in the training centre, Pramukh 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.

Among the sadhus, 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 and onwards.

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.



Swamishri with Parshads

They are responsible for motivating devotees in the Centres and for inculcating spiritual values in life. They also work for organising day to day activities and major events and for mobilization of resources. They are required to travel from one centre to another periodically. At their stay at the centre, 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 same visits and motivate them to visit the temple and teach them spiritual values in life.

The volunteers

The 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 or exhortation 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. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has provided a code of conduct in this regard - which becomes explicit from the following dialogue :

Guidance for volunteers

On 16-7-2002 during the Divya Sannidhi Parva in Sankari, the volunteers held a question-answer session with Swamishri.

Question: After becoming satsangis and serving God day and night, we are still experiencing upsand 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, 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 in 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 do we have left 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 done 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 to see then 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 for 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 aksharup 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 52 years. 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 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.

The key to becoming brahmaup

Viveksagar Swami said to Swamishri, "Our principle is Akshar-Purushottam, the mantra is Swaminarayan and our aim is to become brahmarup."

Swamishri confirmed, "That is true. Everyone has to become brahmarup. We have to realize our aim and mantra."

Viveksagar Swami asked, "How can we become brahmarup?"

Swamishri replied, "Only when the guru is pleased."

Viveksagar Swami enquired, "How can one please the guru?"

Swamishri replied briefly, "By doing what he says."

God accept his devotee's Bhav

Swamishri eats only a few small morsels in a day, and sometimes he does not eat anything for two to three days

Krishnavallabh Swami asked Swamishri, "What would you like to eat



today?" Swamishri remained silent. Then the attendant sadhus asked, "Would you like Thakorji to have something?"

Swamishri replied, "Yes, offer it to Thakorji."

Narayancharandas Swami explained, "Thakorji has already been offered that. But what will Thakorji who resides in you eat?"

Swamishri replied, "He accepts the inner feelings [bhavna] of all."

Question: For what purpose should we use the internet?

Answer: Science has advanced tremendously today. Before using anything we should exercise the power of discrimination (vivek-buddhi) as prescribed by our shastras. Such discrimination develops through the company of good people, the realized Sadhu and God.

The internet is both good and bad. With relation to business and academic studies, it is very lucrative.

Question : Should we chat on the internet?

Answer: You can chat on what is necessary, but not on unnecessary things. There is no objection to chat on academic or business aspects. If you want to know about religion you can chat.

There is no objection to chatting about things that enhance your character, culture, faith in religion and God, and make your life good and philanthropic. But there is no benefit in chatting about things that spoil your life, family and society. This means that you should not chat and listen to bad things.

Question : How much time should we spend on the internet?

Answer : Today, we see that people get so absorbed on the internet that they spend hours and nights using it. And its influence is more on the youths.

You should use it for a little while. Once you get the answer to your question, you should stop. There's no need to prolong it further. And if it is related to your studies, satsang and business then work on it but otherwise don't waste Your time.



Safeguard the mandir within and without

After the murti-pratishtha of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, on 1 September 1996, Swamishri blessed the devotees in the satsang assembly...

If you please God, he will grace you in all ways. God gives infinite times more than what we give. He gives Akshardham. However, when we perform seva, the only wish we should have is that we can please God. Only through his blessings will we have peace within us and in our worldly activities.

You have all endeavoured enthusiastically to set up this mandir. Now that the mandir is complete, your responsibilities have increased. We now have the duty to continuously serve God. Even in family, work or business life you all have responsibilities.

God looks after us, but we must look after God so that he does not leave us. If we do that which does not please God, he will go away. That is our big loss. Hence, if you preserve all this and practise satsang, you will experience peace and happiness.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 9, Shriji Maharaj has said that we must remain at the gateway of awareness. If we have many valuables in our home, we remain alert to safeguard them. So, just as we ensure the security of these worldly possessions, we should be vigilant to safeguard God who resides in our heart.

Best form of Bhakti

Anandanand Swami, an attendant of Swamishri, was performing pradakshina of Swamishri while Swamishri was lying in bed. Anandanand Swami asked Swamishri, "Is it not best to do bhakti of the living form (pragat) of God?"

Swamishri replied, "Yes."

To clarify further the attendant sadhu asked again, "Is it not best to perform circumambulations and offer bhakti to pragat?"



Swamishri said, “No.”

Anandanand Swami was perplexed at the contradictory answer. So, he asked Swamishri why he had said no.

Swamishri gave an enlightening answer, “Bhakti of pragatmeans devotion offered without perceiving any abhav-avgunin him. Offer devotion by eradicating one’s lust, anger and base nature. Bhakti done out of divyabhav(divine feelings for the Satpurush) is best.”

Swamishri underlined the importance of offering pure (nirdosh) bhakti towards the living form of God or the Satpurush.

Some other noteworthy features of the organisation are as under:

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 Pramukh 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 ksharpith, Sahibaug.

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 Bhagvan Swaminaryan - 50
- CDROM on Indian Culture

Resource Mobilisation:

This is extraordinary. All such temples need huge capital investment and later on there is a huge cost on maintenance. Similarly, all charitable activities, rehabilitation or relief work need huge 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. They get funds from the local community within India or abroad. It is interesting to note that the entire resources are generated by the community on its own.

An able administrator:

When we talk of successful institutions, we talk of the people, who lead them to success. Leaders live among the people who they lead, are a part of their day to day life. The role of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in this context is unique. Without even remotely compromising his disciplined religious life, he has successfully guided the BAPS to become a modern, efficient and effective institution. From organizing festival celebrations to undertaking relief work, from constructing town ships to educating the youth, BAPS has established itself as a torchbearer and role model for all like minded institutions. The multi media show and use of robotics at Akshardam is a reflection of the institutions expertise in modern science. Speaking through the language of modern time, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has communicated to millions around the world. Even those who do not believe in religion cannot ignore the contribution of BAPS to society. Says Shri Harish Dave “He is an able administrator, an extra-ordinary Chartered Accountant, a great organiser, hard task master, but he never raises his voice”.

Adds Upendra Bhatt, who assists in legal work “Bapa has a sharp memory and a sound common sense, which helps in big way to solve legal tangles”.

Faith:

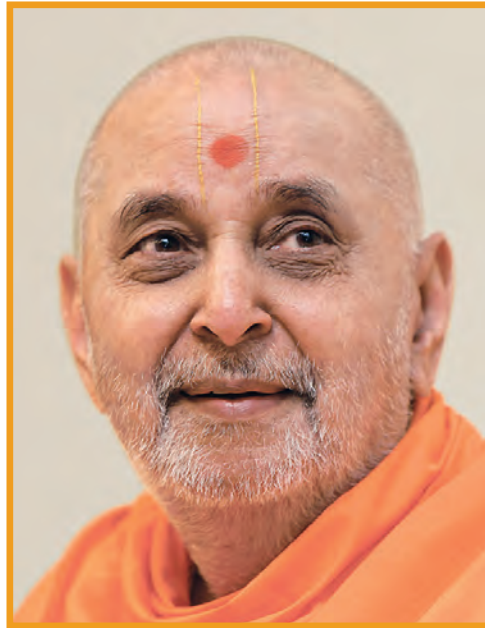
The devotees have great faith in their Guru - Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His words are taken as an agna (order). His advice is understood as something to be followed up. Faith in him make them help one another - in their worldly lives too. This faith in God creates “self-confidence” and that makes it possible to achieve impossible goals of life”. It gives them the will power to give up addiction - long established habits. It brings about family harmony and makes them respect and support one another, within and outside the family fold. It gives them inspiration to work voluntarily for society and institution - time and again as situations demand, whether it is for earthquake victims in Kutch or construction of the Akshardham temple at Gandhinagar.

All this happens because there is an inspiring Guru - Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He constantly keeps in touch with his followers - wherever



they are - in India or abroad by his constant Vicharan by travelling from place to place by making phone calls, by writing letters, by using mass media communication methods.

The story of a farmer's son does not end here. This is a continuing story in India where time and again, Divya Purushas have emerged to lead the society on the right path. This is an eternal story.





Through The Eyes of Others

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the Yug Purush of our times. He is an example of an ideal sadhu. He is also an ideal Guru to his innumerable disciples and followers the world over.

The opinions and inner experiences of some of today's leaders, who have met Swamishri are given below. These were made available to the author by Brahmvihari Swami.

Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj is an embodiment of peace love holiness, of 'shanti', 'prem' and 'gurukripa'. I had the privilege of coming into personal contact with this gracious spiritual luminary who, by his personal example as well as loving precepts, is guiding countless thousands of devotees and followers along the path of 'dharma' and spiritual living that leads towards the highest welfare of human beings.

Swamishri is a saint worthy of being adored. His personal life and day-to-day 'vyavahar' is such that he serves as a lofty example for sadhus and sanyasis to follow. In spite of being the revered head of the world famous moral and spiritual movement that originated nearly 200 years ago, I have observed in Pramukh Swami Maharaj such a rare simplicity of nature, humility of deportment and a total absence of self-importance. This is beautiful to behold and this always gives me great joy whenever I have the occasion of coming into his presence. His onerous responsibility sit lightly upon his shoulders due to his surrender to the Supreme Guru Bhagwan Swaminarayan and due to his conviction of being merely an instrument in the hands of the divine to carry out the divine will. It is really a sight for the gods to see worshipful Pramukh Swami Maharaj always with the deity of his adoration without whom Swamiji never moves out and who is given a seat of honour and a place of prominence upon any stage or dais that Pramukh Swami Maharaj may be occupying during important events. The prime importance is always given to the deity.



He has an aura of saintliness, friendliness and universal love (vishwamrem) that is tangibly felt when you come into his presence and proximity. All have heard Bhagwan Sri Ramchandra referred to as a 'maryada purushottam'. In revered Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we have a 'maryada-purush' of our times. We see him as an ideal sadhu. Swamishri is also an ideal Guru to his innumerable disciples and followers the world over. He is an ideal spiritual leader of the general masses of the present day humanity. In him we also find a lofty example of an ideal devotee. At the same time, Swamishri follows an ideal disciple of his great Guru-parampara.

He is an inspiring spiritual leader, an able organiser in the spiritual India of today. 'Daivi Sampada' shines in him and is seen in the manner in which he gives respect and reverence to those who go to meet him. He is at once a great devotee of the divine, a saint of eminence and an ideal person and an embodiment of goodness and 'dharma'.

Swami Chidanand

(Divine Life Society, Rishikesh)

*When I met Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj I got the feeling of meeting a spiritually mature soul. My short contact with him was enough to know that he is an embodiment of spiritual love, humility and simplicity. Such developed personalities only can bring emotionally nearer all sections of society and instil in them a sense of brotherhood and - the feeling of the presence of God in every human being. He loves all. Therefore, he gets love from all in abundance.

Acharyashri Vibudesh Tirthji Maharaj

*Shri Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the rarest jewel to adorn the spiritual crown of our country, requires no introduction. The fifth hierarch of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, this great saint has carved out a niche for himself by his humane qualities. Spiritual life, normally, is turned inward and is primarily concerned with the realisation of God, and leads the soul towards the path of Becoming. But this need not preclude the possibility of giving service to humanity, and this is exemplified by the Swamiji. He has given a new meaning to the ideal of sainthood by his extraordinary feeling for his fellow men. It is the Dhammapad which says: "A supernatural person is not easily found, he is not born everywhere. Whenever such a sage is born,



the race prospers.” And how true are these words! The number of persons who have been benefited by the grace of Swamiji is legion. The Swamiji finds God in his service to humanity, and the human race has prospered, thanks to the Swamiji.

Pujya Varad Yatiraj Jeer Swami

* ‘The Supreme Lord Narayana, in all reality, assumes, because of mercy, the body of a mortal and lifts up the worlds sunk in the ocean of misery. His hands are the Scriptures.’

A study of the life of H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj will reveal the truth of this text. It will show how he is really an incarnation of Bhagwan Swaminarayan; how he moves with all, young and old, literate and illiterate, and how he imparts the spirit of God consciousness to all, by his life, teaching and precepts. This he does also by having discourses, seminars, instructions, publishing periodicals and religious books. Being unattached by nature to all worldly things he spends all that is offered to him by his disciples and admirers for the benefit of human beings and creatures.

Dr. Shrinivas Raghavan

(Eminent Scholar of Ramanuja Vedanta)

* Oh! What a humble man, what a divine man! I’m yet to see such people in abundance. One of the very *rare* souls that our country has. One of the most impressive men I have met in my life. Pramukh Swami is very dedicated, very spiritually advanced.

Swami Atmanand

(Ramkrishna Mission)

* Your Organisation (Sanstha) is doing great service to mankind by spreading the message of goodness and joy. It is indeed commendable that the Swaminarayan Movement has not limited its work to the Movement alone, but has gone out in society, conducted a door-to-door crusade against the evils of society to promote peace and harmony.”

His Holiness, The Dalai Lama



“Swamiji has not done anything to gain name or fame for himself but has promoted social upliftment by throwing open the gates to freedom from vices and addictions.”

Muni Shushil Kumariji
(Jain Acharya)

“I can doubtlessly say that after Adi Shankaracharya, Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the one who has brought a revolution of inspiration in society. He has given so much to mankind that history shall speak. But one page in history will not suffice, a whole volume will have to be reserved for him.”

Pujya Satyamitranand Giri
(Head of Samanvaya Trust)

Pramukh Swami is one of the noblest souls I have met in my life. If the salvation of India and of the human race is to be achieved, it can only be through the great ideals which I find being propagated here.”

Nani Palkhiwala
(Eminent Economist and Advocate of India)

“It’s obvious from even a great distance that he’s a man of great spirituality, very pious and one has a sense in approaching him that he is a pure holy man.”

Bob Kaplan
(MP Canada)

“I felt completely at peace in his presence, as if my mind had been freed from all personal conflicts.”

Mr. Han Kopp
(A Social Teacher in Holland)

“ I’m convinced Swamishri is making a significant contribution in bringing peace of mind to our land.”

Mr. Leonard Scarcella
(Mayor of Houston, Texas)



“I am merely a Speaker of the House, but Swamishri is the Speaker of God.”

Sir George Thomas

(Former Speaker of The House of Commons in Britain)

“When you have looked at Pramukh Swami’s life and deeds, you will see in him compassion and a will to redeem a person from his material desires and feel devotion towards God.”

“I keep coming to him because he has no pride. This is only possible if one has realised God; Pramukh Swami is an adobe of God. Hearing him you feel that just as you need water to clean clothes, you need his words to cleanse your mind.”

Pujya Krishnashankar Shastri

(An eminent narrator of the Shrimad Bhagvatam)

“On coming into contact with Pramukh Swami, I have had a unique experience. He is an embodiment of an ideal saint-straightforward, simple and absolutely guileless.”

Pujya Ramswarup Shastri

(President of Akhil Bharat Sadhu Samaj)

“O what a humble man, what a divine man! I have yet to see such people in abundance. He is one of the very rare souls that our country has. He is one of the most impressive men I have met in my life.”

Pujya Atmanand Swami

(Former Head, Ramkrishna Mission, Raipur)

“Pramukh Swami has perpetuated an ideal life like that of God’s incarnations, saints, sages and great men. When I saw him, I noticed he is free from ego. We all need to associate with great saints to attain liberation.”

Gyani Zail Singh

(Former President of India)



“I am really impressed with Pramukh Swami’s pure life. He is like a bridge between many cultures. He has not only kept alive the Swaminarayan tradition but also inspired Godliness and spiritual awakening in thousands. Pramukh Swami has promoted love and unity in all communities.”

J. J. Karyuki
(MP, Kenya)

“The capacity to enlighten and the centre for spirituality are in India. Today, Swamiji is doing this. Outstanding. Worthy of praise. Even today, India can remove the darkness and unrighteousness of the world through its spirituality. “

L.K. Advani
Former Deputy Prime Minister of India

Witnessed an amazing show.

Akshardham has emerged as the most important creation of spirituality. A place for everyone to understand about Indian culture and heritage. I have not seen this type of phenomenon.

Message is told in a simple way – don’t use your powers, use them for the good of mankind. This will be a showcase for India and Hinduism.

Giving the message in a contemporary method is important. And nobody does it better than BAPS!

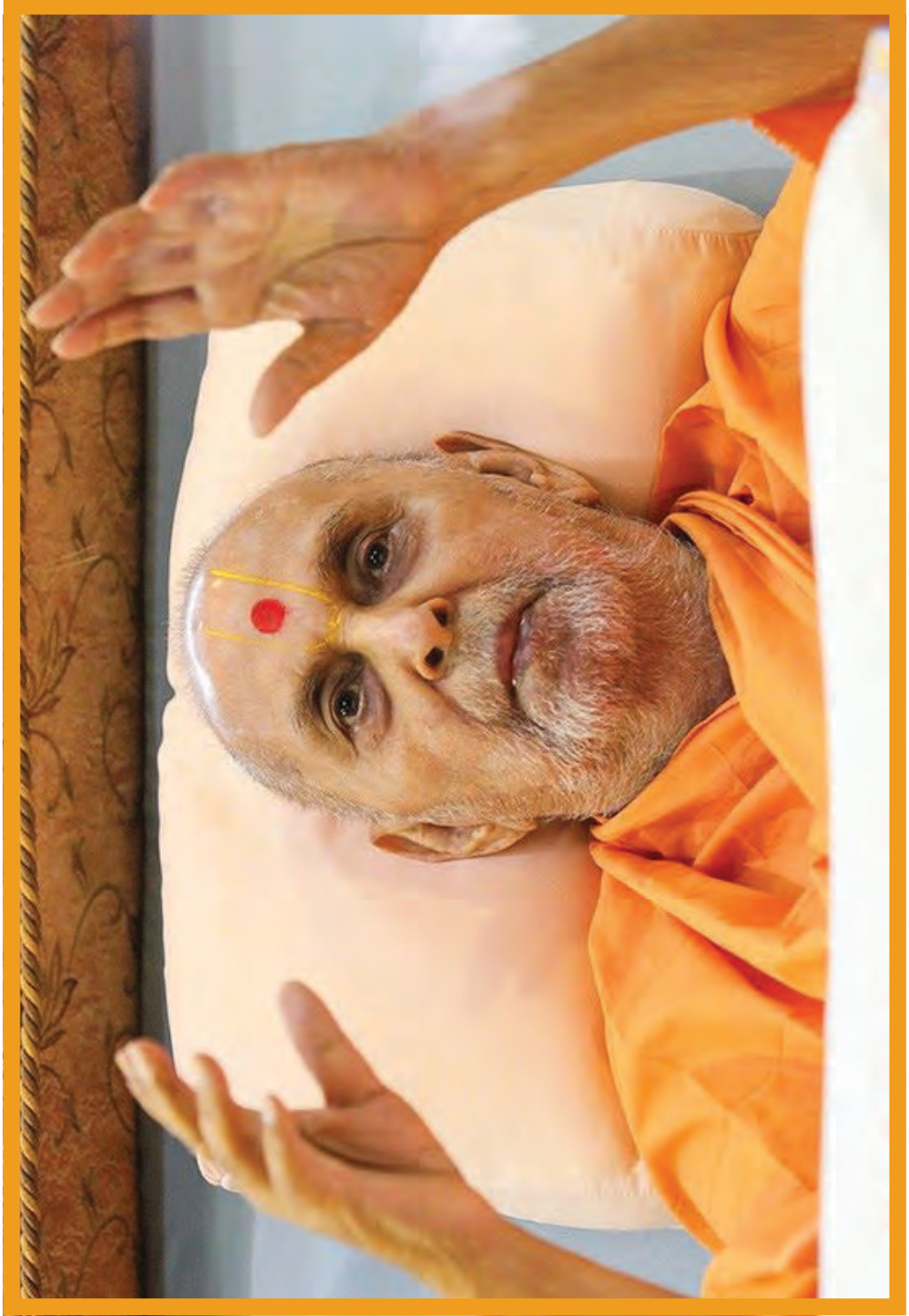
Visuals that strike you are how laser lights have been used. Audio experience is phenomenal. Larger than life images amaze you. Control of water and curving of lights not seen before. Fire over water is mind-boggling. Technical wizardry is impressive. However, you may have many technicalities but production may not be an orchestra. It may be a cacophony. Here it merges well and for me more important is the message which is phenomenal. From here everyone, from a child of 5 to a 95 year old, will take something which they will never forget.

Ashish Chouhan
Managing Director, Bombay Stock Exchange





BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Chicago



Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Life-Line

A chronology of important dates and events in the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

- **December 7,1921 :** Wednesday Magshar Sud 8, VIKRAM SAMVAT 1978-Born in the village of Chansad near Vadodara, Gujarat; named Shantilal
- **May 16,1929 :** Thursday Vaishakh Sud 8, VIKRAM SAMVAT 1986
Commences school
- **November 7,1939 :** Tuesday AsoVad 11, VIKRAM SAMVAT 1995
Leaves home to become a sadhu.
- **November 22, 1939 :** Wednesday Kartik Sud 11, VIKRAM SAMVAT 1996
Initiated as a parshad by Shastriji Maharaj, Ahmedabad.
- **January 10,1940 :** Wednesday Posh Sud 1, VIKRAM SAMVAT 1996
Initiated as a sadhu by Shastriji Maharaj at the Akshar Deri, Gondal - renamed Narayanswarupdas.
- **1939 -1946 :** Sanskrit studies, touring with Shastriji Maharaj, temple seva.
Construction work of a new temple at Atladra.
- **1946 -1950 :** Kothari of Sarangpur Temple.
- **May 21,1950 :** Sunday Jeth Sud, 4, VIKRAM SAMVAT 2006
Appointed as Pramukh - President of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha by Shastriji Maharaj, Ahmedabad
- **May 10,1951 :** Thursday, Vaishakh Sud 4, VIKRAM SAMVAT 2007
Shastriji Maharaj reverts to Akshardham, Sarangpur



- **1953** : Pilgrimage by special train with Yogiji Maharaj.
- **1959 -1960** : Accompanies Yogiji Maharaj to East Africa.
- **May 12, 1961** : Kalash ceremony, Gadhada temple
- **February 6,1965** : Centenary celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj, Atlandra.
- **May 4, 1967** : 75th birthday celebrations (AmrutMahotsav) of Yogiji Maharaj, Gondal.
- **November27,1968** : 48th birthday celebrations of Pramukh Swami in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj, Bombay.
- **April 22,1969** : Murti installation at temple at Bhadra by Yogiji Maharaj.
- **1970** : Accompanies Yogiji Maharaj to East Africa and the UK.
- **January 23, 1971** : Saturday Posh Vad 11, VIKRAM SAMVAT 2027 Yogiji Maharaj reverts to Akshardham, Bombay; cremation rites at Gondal. Pramukh Swami Maharaj accepts Guruship.
- **January 31,1971** : First sadhu initiation ceremony.
- **April 17, 1971** : First temple image installation Kosindraa.
- **June 3, 1971** : First Shikhar temple image installation, Sankari.
- **1971** : All-India pilgrimage by special train.
- **December 14,1972** : Murti installation at temple in Calcutta.
- **December 3,1973** : Kalash ceremony, Ahmedabad temple; initiation of 56 sadhus.
- **1974**: Third foreign tour - Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, UK, USA, Canada, S. Africa, Mauritius.
- **August 3,1974** : First Akshar Purushottam temple established in USA- in basement of house in New York.
- **October 19,1975** : Opening of Yogi Smruti mandir, Gondal.
- **1977** : Fourth foreign tour- UK, USA, Canada, S.Africa, Kenya, Tanzania.



Temples established in Leicester, Weillingborough, Ashton, New York, Dar-e-Salaam, Mwanza.

- **February 6,1978** : First serious illness, Bombay.
- **1979** : Fifth foreign tour- Nepal
- **1980** : Sixth foreign tour - Kenya, Tanzania, UK, USA, Canada, Africa (To commemorate Bicentenary Celebrations of Lord Swaminarayan)
- **September 6,1980**: Cataract operation on left eye, Boston.
- **September 23,1980** : Cataract operation on right eye, Boston.
- **March-April 1981** : Bicentenary Celebrations of Lord Swaminarayan, Ahmedabad; 37 day festival. Initiation of 207 sadhus.
- **April 19,1981** : Opening of Yagnapurush Smruti mandir, Sarangpur.
- **September 8,1981** : Gall bladder operation, Bombay.
- **March 1982** : Seventh foreign tour- United Arab Emirates
- **April 1982** : Eighth foreign tour-UK
Opening of New temple in Neasden, London.
- **May 1982** : 75th Anniversary of Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha, Bochasan.
- **October 31,1982** : Opening of Akshar Dwar, Gondal.
- **February 5,1983** : Heart attack, Sundalpura.
- **December 12,1983** : Murti installation at Shikhar Temple in Bombay.
- **1984** : Ninth foreign tour - Kenya, UK, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, USA, Canada, Fiji, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore.
Temples established in Preston (UK), Chicago and Los Angeles.
- **April 7,1984** : Meeting with Pope John Paul II, Vatican.

- **March-April 1985** : 10th foreign tour- United Arab Emirates
- **July-August 1985** : 11th foreign tour - UK.
Cultural Festival of India, Alexandra Park, London; 33 day festival.
- **July 20,1985** : Suverna Tula Mahotsav, QPR Stadium, London.
- **October-Dec. 1985** : Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami, Ahmedabad; 59 day festival. Initiation of 173 sadhus.
- **April 11,1986** : Operation to remove benign tumour from right thigh, Bombay.
- **August-Sept. 1987** : Pilgrimage of North India.
- **1987-88** : Cattle camps and famine relief activities in Gujarat.
- **1988** : Twelveth Foreign tour- UK, France, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, W. Germany, Sweden, Norway, USA, Canada, Trinidad, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, S. Africa, Mauritius.
Honoured by Parliaments of Britain and Canada.
Temples established in Atlanta and Houston.
- **May 1989** : International Children's Convention, Vidhyanagar.
- **May 1990** : Thirteenth foreign tour- UK, USA, Canada.
Temples established in Boston, Toronto, Birmingham (UK).
- **1991** : Fourteenth foreign tour - UK, USA, Canada, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, S. Africa.
Foundation stone laying ceremony of shikhar temple in London.
Temples established in Edison, Eldoret, Kampala, Jinja, Johannesburg.
- **July-August 1991** : Cultural Festival of India, Edison, New Jersey; 31 day festival.
- **July 20,1991** : Platinum Tula Mahotsav, Edison, New Jersey.



- **August 30,1992** : Opening of first Hindu School in Europe Swaminarayan Independent School - by Dr. Swami, Neasden, London.
- **October-Nov. 1992** Centenary Celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj, Gandhinagar; 34 day festival. Initiation of 125 sadhus.
- **November 2,1992** : Opening of Akshardham Cultural Complex, Gandhinagar.
- **1993-1994** : Murti installation at temple in New Delhi.
- **1994** : Fifteenth foreign tour - UK, USA, Canada, Sweden, Czech Republic, Kenya.
Temples established in Orlando, Dalias, San Jose.
- **October 1994**: International Youth Volunteers Convention, Vidyanagar.
- **Dec. 10,1994-95** : Murti installation at shikhar temple in Mehsana.
Sixteenth foreign tour - UK, Kenya, France, Germany, S.Africa.
Festival of Inspirations (mandir Mahotsav), London.
- **August 20, 1995** : Murti installation at shikhar temple in Neasden, London.
- **Nov.-Dec. 1995** : Amrut Mahotsav (75th Birthday Celebrations) of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bombay.
- **March 1996** : Murti installation at seven temples.
- **January 1997** : Murti installation at Shikhar Temple in Surat.
- **May 1997** : A tour of understanding and cultural exchange across the Middle East by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- **November 1997** : Grand Annkut Festival at Swaminarayan mandir, Neasden London.
- **December 1997** : Pramukh Swami Maharaj welcomed by Princes Charles and Prince Philip at St. James Palace and Buckingham Palace, London.



- **June 1998** : Pramukh Swami Tours tribal area of Gujarat.
- **September 1998** Swamishri recuperating after his bypass operation in New York, USA.
- **January 1999** : Murti installation at Shikhar Temple in Mehlav.
- **May 1999** : One of the wonders of the 20th century: Shri Swaminarayan mandir, London
- **August 1999** : The BAPS undertakes huge water conservation project in Saurashtra.
- **September 1999**: Colourful procession on the Eve of Consecration Ceremony - of Swaminarayan mandir, Durban, South Africa
- **January 2000** : Image installation at the beautiful new Shree Swaminarayan mandir on the sea shore of Kosamba (Tithal), Valsad district.
- **August 2000** : Guinness world records honours Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- **September 2000** : “We must not progress at the cost of others, but sacrifice a part of ourselves for the good of others...”

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj addresses the inaugural session of the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nation’s assembly hall, New York.

- **October 2000** : A dialogue on peace between Pramukh Swami Maharaj and President Bill Clinton.
- **December 2000** : The vision of Yogiji Maharaj to build a mandir in New Delhi being initiated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj through the Shilanyas Ceremony of Akshardham, New Delhi.
- **April 2001** : BAPS Earthquake Relief Work on Massive Scale.
- **July 2001** : Murti installation ceremony at Shikhar Temple at Murti-Pratishtha Festival, Sankari.



- **February 2002** : Swaminarayan mahamantra Bicentenary Celebration in the divine presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Gadhada.
- **April 2002** : Murti installation ceremony at Shikhar Temple in Auckland, New Zealand.
- **September 2002** : The President of the India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam meets Pramukh Swami Maharaj at Swaminarayan mandir, Ahmedabad.
- **February 2003** : Inauguration of Yogiji Assembly Hall, Mumbai
- **March 2003** : The mandir should be built on the banks of the Yamuna. HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj fulfilled the vision of Image installation ceremony at Shikhar Temple in New Delhi.
- **May 2003** : Swamishri Vicharan in Khandesh 12-21 February 2003. Swamishri in a satsang assembly, japi. (Inset) BAPS, Chhatralay in Dhuliya. Pramukh Swami Maharaj gives Diksha to more than 700 sadhus.
- **July 2003** : 700 BAPS sadhus-a gift to society by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- **February 2004** : Golden Jubilee of Bal Mandal of BAPS in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and H.E. President of India.
- **September 2004** : Murti installation ceremony at Shikhar Temple in Houston and Chicago.
- **January 2005** : Assistance to people affected by Tsunami in South India.
250 milch cows distributed to tsunami affected families of Kanyakumari, South India.
- **August, 2006** : 245 homes dedicated to tsunami affected two villages of Chennai through Governor Burnala.
- **January, 2007** : Vasant Panchmi was celebrated on 23rd January at Gondal in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The festival marked the birthday of Shastriji Maharaj and the 140th pratishtha



anniversary of Akshar Deri – a memorial shrine of Gunatitananda Swami. In his blessings Swamishri said :Bhagvad Gita speaks about Aksharbrahma Yoga in the 8th chapter and Purushottam Yoga in the 15th chapter. Shastriji Maharaj had confirmed and realized it.”

- **June, 2007** 24-30th June, 2007, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Houston BAPS temple, USA. On 30th June, 2007 the Triennial celebration was held in the presence of Swamishri and 4,000 devotees. Swamishriji blessed them all: “Develop spiritual wealth and pass such wealth, culture and values as a legacy to your children.”
- **July, 2007** : 22nd July, 2007: Murti Pratishtha ceremony of first shikharbaddha BAPS mandir in Canada in the presence of Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen J. Harper. The live telecast was made to 162 countries. Swamishri blessed the pratishtha assembly: “Shriji Maharaj incarnated on this earth and revived the need for spiritual wisdom.”
- **2-15 July, 2007** : Bal Kishore Yuva conventions in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at Jacksonville, Florida. 8,000 bal-kishore and youth devotees from USA, Australia and New Zealand attended the conventions. Swamishri inspired them to remain wedded to morality and devotion to God.
- **August 2007** : 26th August, 2007: Swamishri performed The murti pratishtha, of Atlanta BAPS temple, USA. It was the BAP’s 3rd Mandir in USA. With blessings of Swamishri, a yagna for world peace was performed.
- **October 2007** : 1-15th October, 2007 London: Swamishri blessed the kishore shibir, youth shibir and National shibir at London celebrated the BAPS Centenary Year Celebration on 7th October at London.
- **19th October, 2007** : Mumbai BAPS Centenary Year Celebration was held in Mumbai in the divine presence of Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. Over 15,000 devotees attended the celebration. Swamishri spoke about the grace of God and Guru.



- **November 2007** : 10th November 2007: New Year's Day celebration at Gondal attended by 20,000 devotees. Swamishri blessed the congregation: "A person or thing becomes divine through the association of God."
- **December 2007** : 13th to 17th December, 2007: BAPS Centenary Celebration at Chandkheda - Gandhinagar Highway in the holy presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. 1st day (13.12.2007) Youth Day, 2nd day (14.12.2007) Women's Day, 3rd day (15.12.2007) Children's Day, 4th day (17.12.2007) Swamishri's Birthday. (For more details see chapter on "BAPS Centenary Celebration.")
- **February 2008** : 11th February, 2008 Vasant Panchami celebration – Birth Anniversary of Shastriji Maharaj and Shikshapatri was celebrated in the presence of Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj in Mumbai.
- **March, 2008** : 22nd March, 2008, Pushpadolotsav (Holi) was celebrated at Sarangpur in presence of Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. Over 60,000 devotees from India and abroad had gathered. Swamishri blessed them: "God will always do what is for our benefit. He has come to bestow upon us his spiritual wealth."
- **April, 2008** : On 14th April, 2008, Swaminarayan Jayanti and Ram Navmi, 228th birthday celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was celebrated at Sarangpur in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri said, "Ram Rajya can only be possible today if we dissolve our base instincts."
- **May, 2008** : 10th May, 2008, 92nd Patotsav of Sarangpur Mandir was celebrated in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri said with reference to Vachanamrut, "Our mind is constantly wandering. We should strive to – attain a mental state free from worldly desires."
- **June, 2008** : 1st June, 2008, Sarangpur: Yogi Jayanti was celebrated in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishriji emphasized the sentiment of Yogiji Maharaj "May God do good to all."



- July, 2008 :** 4th July, 2008, Ratha Yatra celebration was celebrated at Sarangpur in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri blessed the assembly “If we give the reigns of our life’s chariot to God and his holy Sadhu, they will take us to Akshardham, the abode of God.”

18th July, 2008, Guru Purnima celebration was held in Bochasan in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Over 30,000 devotees from India and abroad attended the celebration. Swamishri blessed all “Living by the wishes of Guru brings happiness and liberation of one’s atma.”
- August, 2008 :** 16th August, 2008, Raksha Bandhan festival was celebrated at Vidyanagar in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Over 14,000 devotees attended. Swamishri blessed “Without education, no society or country can develop and progress. It should be backed up by Dharma.”
- September, 2008 :** 11th September, 2008, Jal Jhilani festival was celebrated at Ahmedabad in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri blessed the assembly “Because there is Bhakti (devotional offers) in our hearts for God, we make efforts to please him.”
- October, 2008 :** 8th October, 2008, Foundation stone laying ceremony at Jamnagar for BAPS shikharbandh Mandir. In the assembly Swamishri said “God has given this human body so that we can do our social duties and also offer services to the nation and God”.
- November, 2008 :** 13th November, 2008: Dev Diwali festival was held at Bochasan attended by 24,000 devotees. Swamishri blessed the congregation “While performing your worldly duties always keep God in the forefront and remember that you are doing everything to please him.
- December, 2008 :** 6th December, 2008, following the tragic terrorist attacked in Mumbai, Swamishri along with sadhus, devotees and dignitaries in India, USA, Canada, UK, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania,

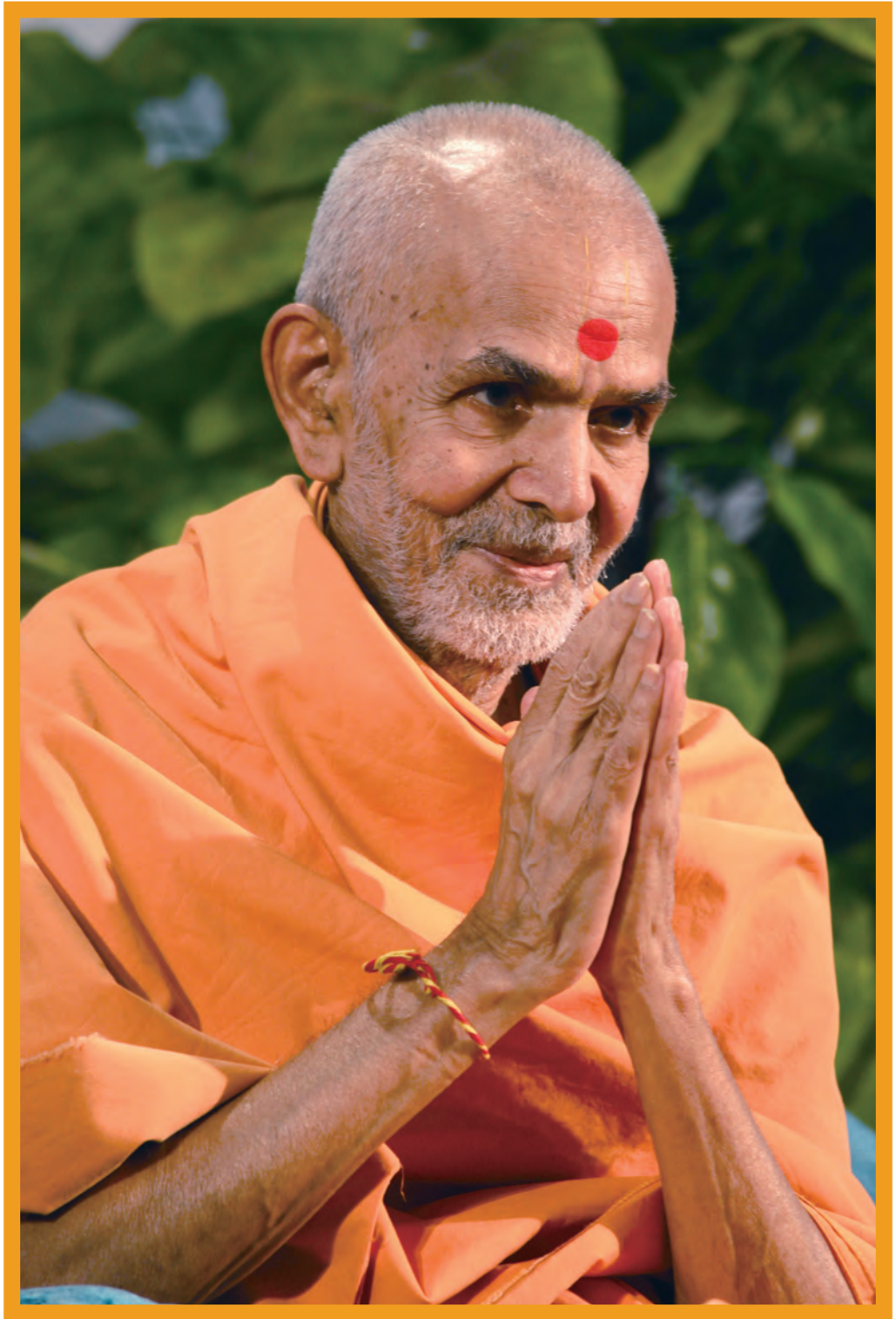


South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and other countries at all BAPS centres held prayers for peace and offered condolence.

- **January, 2009** : 31st January, 2009, Vasant Panchmi Celebration was held at Vadodara in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri blessed the assembly "For inner peace, one must imbibe knowledge given by God".
- **February, 2009** : 31st January and 1st February, 2009, the Silver Jubilee celebration of BAPS Swaminarayan Chatralaya at Atladra, Vadodara, was celebrated in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Vice Chancellor of M. S. University and Deputy Director, NASA, U.S.A.
- **March, 2009** : 11th March, 2009. Fuldol celebration was held at Sarangpur in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Over 60,000 devotees attended the celebration. Swamishri blessed the festival assembly "In life, one sometimes gets happiness and sometimes misery. But amid all this one should retain stability (of mind) with the understanding that whatever God does is for one's benefit."
- **April, 2009** : 3rd April, 2009, 299th Shri Hari Jayanti festival at Sarangpur was celebrated in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri blessed the assembly "On comparing our self with God, we realize how insignificant we are."
- **December 2009** : (31st December, Bicentenary Celebration of Gunatinanda Swami Dikhsha Mahotsav at Dabhu, Dist Kheda attended by more than 40,000 Satsangis came from all over the world.
- **April 2010** : (3rd April) Inauguration of unique world class water show "Sat Chit Anand" at Akshardham Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- **May 2010** : (18019th May, Murthi Pratishtha Mahotsava at Bhadra, the birth place of Swami Gunatitananda Swami, second linear sant of B.A.P.S..
- **August 2010** : (3-4 August): The players of Common Wealth Games







- **March 2012** : 8th March - celebration at Sarangpur in the divine presence of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. It was attended by over 1,00,000 Satsangis came from all over the world.
- **April 2012** : 28-29 April - Golden Jubilee Celebration (Patosava) of Shahibag Temple attended by large number of Satsangis in the Shahibag Temple complex.
- **January 2013** : 6th January - 60th Anniversary Celebration of “Yuvak Pravmtt” initiated at Sardar Patel Stadium, Ahmedabad. Attended by more than 60,000 Yuvak – yuvtis, with grand and holy presentations of yuvak activities.
- **February 2013** : 1st February - Vasant Panchami, 148th Birth Anniversary of Pujya Shatriji Maharaj was celebrated at Vadodara. Shastriji Maharaj Hospital” was inaugurated and dedicated for the public.
- **March 2013** : 1-3 March - National Seminar at Akshardham, New Delhi on Bhavani Swaminarayan like and work. It was attended by scholars from all over the world.
- **August 2014** : Tuesday,, Robbinsville At 12.52 p.m. (IST) Swamishri’s plane departed from Ahmedabad and travelled via Brussels to Newark airport, landing at 10.30 p.m. (EST). Swamishri’s visit to Robbinsville, New Jersey, was to perform the “Murti Pratishtha” rituals of the newly built BAPS shikharbaddh Swaminarayan Mandir and sanctify the land of Swaminarayan Akshardham. (For full report of yagna, nagar-yatraand murti-pratishtha refer to Swaminarayan 18-19, Monday-Tuesday, Robbinsville, Ahmedabad

Swamishri performed the murti-pratish-tha is rituals of the small murtis of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS harimandirs in Milwaukee, Pittsburg, KansasCity, Sterling Heights, Bloomington, Munster, Cincinnati and Keelhon. Once the marble murtis arrive at each centre the divinity in the consecrated small murtisof Shri



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj will be ritually transferred into them.

At 2.47 p.m. Swamishri departed from Robbinsville for Newark airport. Thereafter Swamishri resumed his journey to Ahmedabad via Paris. Swamishri landed at Ahmedabad airport at 7.50 p.m. and travelled to the mandir in Shahibaug. Swamishri was festively welcomed and honoured with garlands by Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami. For the next five days, till 24 August, Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees every morning and evening.

- **February 2015** : 15th February - the 150th birth anniversary of Pujya Shashtriji Maharaj at Vadodara. It was attended by more than 2,00,000 Satsangs came from all over the world.
- **April 2015** : 9-12 April Inauguration of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir Adelaide, Australia Four days of ritual ceremonies marked the inauguration of the new BAPS ShriSwaminarayan Mandir in Adelaide, Australia, in the presence Of Pujya Keshavjivan Swami (Mahant Swami).

After the traditional lighting of the auspicious lamp and welcoming rituals, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly, "This water show is a devotional effort using modern technology to reveal to the young generation of India the wisdom and knowledge of ancient India. It conveys the spiritual messages that God is the all-doer and that we should all shed our ego. The ancient rishis of India teach us these values."

Thereafter, Atmaswarup Swami addressed the assembly, adding that this show, made by BAPS sadhus and volunteers, is truly a gift to the nation and the world. He also stressed that this Indian marvel has been made possible by the voluntary efforts of so many dedicated individuals combining together to make this show and convey the message.



- **June 2015 :** (20th June), Dr. A.P.J. Abdhul Kalam dedicated his book "TRANSCENDENCE" my spiritual experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. More than 5,00,000 copies of this book was sold in just a short period of 8 months. This book is translated in 8 Indian and world languages.
- **December 2015** (9th December), 95th brth anniversary of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj at Sarangpur, Ahmedabad. Attended by more than 2,50,000 Satsangis from all over the world. It was celebrated in the presence of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- **April 2016 :** (10th April), The inauguration (Vimochan) of the book "Swaminarayan Hinduism" published by Oxford University, U.K. at Shahibag Swaminarayan Temple in the presenc of 250 literary celebraties and presided over by H.E. P. K. Kohli, Governor of Gujarat. It was attended by more than 10,000 Satsangis. The book is edited by Oxford faculty Raymond Williams and Yogi Trivedi. It is the compilation of the research articles on the life and works of Bhagvan Swaminaryan.
- **April 2016 :** (13th April) The centaury celebration of the Sarangpur Temple in the Holy presence of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, held at Sarangpur Swaminarayan Temple.



What goes into making of the Yug Purush

Prof. R. C. Majumdar calls the Swaminarayan Sampraday, 'the greatest of the reforming sects of Gujarat'. Shri Sahajanand Swami inspired the growth of this faith in the early 19th century. At the time of his demise in 1830, the Sampraday had two major centres of growth - Kalupur Mandir and Vadtal Mandir. But major expansion and spread took place under 'The Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam(Swaminarayan) Sanstha (BAPS) set up by Shastriji Maharaj in 1907. Prof. Raymond Brady Williams describes BAPS as "one of the fastest growing religious groups in Gujarat and perhaps in all of India". In fact, this is an understatement. BAPS is now one of the fastest growing religious organizations in the world. The person behind it was the spiritual leader Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Our association with the Swaminarayan Sampraday has been very old. My father the late Justice Nanubhai Shelat and my mother Taralaxmi were devotees of the Sampraday. When my father was the District and Sessions Judge at Rajkot in 1959 our entire family used to visit the Gondal Temple and pay our respects to Yogiji Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a young sadhu at that time looking after the overall developmental activities of BAPS.

Our entire family – my brothers Rohitbhai, Sureshbhai, Mahendrabhai, sister Urmilaben, Indiraben and Geeta - we all used to pay our respects to Pramukh Swami Maharaj at frequent intervals. He also honoured again by blessings us at our home at Patel Blocks, Ahmedabad in the year 1993.

In April, 2003, I wrote a book 'Mapping Development'. A year later, its Gujarati version was released. This was titled "GUJARAT NA VIKAS NO NAKSHO". In that I added three more chapters dealing with the new



developmental initiatives that had taken place in Gujarat. One of the chapters was “Earthquake, the Fragrance of the Saint”.

This dealt with the outstanding contribution made by the Bochasanvasi Akshar Purushottam Sanstha (BAPS) in rehabilitation activities in Kutch and other districts of Gujarat, which were devastated by the earthquake on January 26, 2001. This was inspired and guided by Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who supervised the entire work on a day-to-day basis.

While writing this, I realized that there was a need to document the unique contribution made by Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj to the society.

I got an opportunity, when, I and my wife Ila, were on vacation in London in May 2004. During our visit to Neasden Temple, I sought guidance from Param Adarniya Atmaswarup Swami. He liked the idea, but suggested “please seek approval of Parampujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj” who was also visiting Europe and Neasden Temple at that time. I requested for his blessings to narrate this story and he granted a go ahead’ with a smile.

What I have written in the forgoing pages is neither a comprehensive picture nor a detailed account of the varied and multifarious activities of the endearing sadhu. But an effort has been made to highlight a few important areas and deal with them in greater detail to depict how step by step, the transformation has taken place in BAPS and how concept of Sanatan Dharma got evolved, that appeals to new generation and has become acceptable with their modern lifestyle and how Hinduism got revived in the rest of the World and such how a vast organization operating in more than 50 countries is managed through discipline and voluntary efforts and contribution and is sustainable.

I have tried to present a true picture of the son of a humble farmer, who grew into a Sadhu. From there, he became President (Pramukh) of Sadhus at a very young age. The Pramukh of Sadhus became the spiritual head of the Sampraday and came to be known as Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His followers, both at home and abroad, have multiplied by leaps and bounds and the process continues.



BAPS and its more than 9000 Centres are now spread all over the world in more than 50 countries. This phenomenal expansion has been inspired by Him.

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 Parman Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we first took blessings of Pujya Kothari Swami – Gnashwar 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 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 APJ Abdul Kalam, Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi, Industrialist Ambanies and Kamath so on and so forth. All high, mighty from India and abroad, why did they 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 their family problem and seek a solution?. My nephew Dipak Dave who is in USA shares 10 percent of his modest income for Akshardham, U.S.A following BAPA’s call for donation and he ran 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 says “Many among you have lost a Guru, but I have lost father.”

Why some call him ‘Bhagvan’ , others Bapa, some Swamishri? Some view him as 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 Anter Yami (he understands your inner desire).

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

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



Each of his followers finds something to gain-adding value to his life when he meets 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.

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

People who come 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, 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'. His simple word strengthen them enormously.

He is 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 are no barriers between him and his followers:

- Brings/opposite views- thoughts together, inspires community and individual efforts for betterment of society.
- Talking in simple words, translating difficult self action and self discipline into simplified lifestyle through individual and community educational approach which the entire family may like to adapt and practice.
- Working at multiple level, simultaneously of society. Appealing to multiple and conflicting aims of an individual, even the conflicting nature of family members' goals and their individual goal and provide harmonized lifestyle and involves them in "Satsang" regularly at temple or in absence of that, Community Hall or a residence of Haribhakt.



- Staying not on Dias - “Vyas Pith” but moving in the midst of followers – walk with them by holding their hands and advising when they are not sure what to do and seek his guidance and always bless them.
- Explaining that “Fall and “Obstacles” are part of life, but “Getting up Carefully and Standing up Again and Start Walking towards goal is the “Sadhana”.
- He does not quote scriptures, but translates its essence, with personal conduct. He makes one to realize the relations, religious group, scriptures, Yantra-Mantra visiting temples cannot alone take one to self ‘realization’ and ‘truth’. It further needs Self Discipline and persistent Efforts’ and “Will to help others” and inspires them to make these as a part of their day to day life.
- He promotes the self confidence to reach one’s own heights, has transformal impact that assures one that he is always with him.
- His personal or verbal touch or advise saves mistakes and ignites a person.
- He uses modern technology - science in his new temples to depict the ancient technology in modern way. The Akshar Dhams are in fact synthesis of science, technology and spirituality.
- He indulges with future generations and imbibe them with spirituality.

One can go on enumerating as these are endless. But he is more of human – with compassion and endless flow of kindness through his eyes.

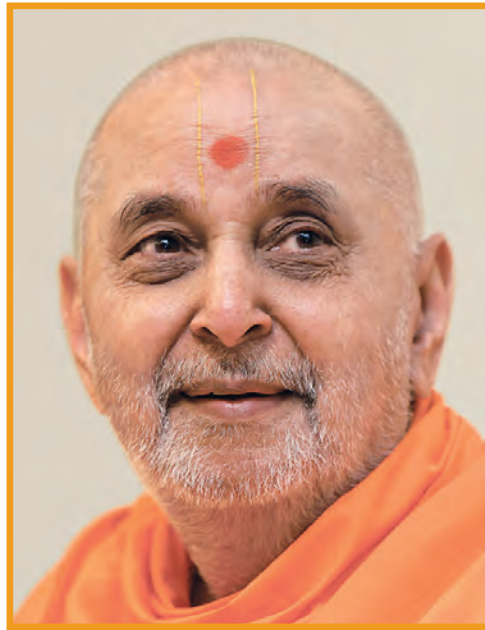
I am not writing merely about a distinguished Saint and his efforts for the spread of religion. The story is about how this person has changed the entire context of religion and the role of religious leaders and institutions in the modern world. This is the story of a man who believes that for a person 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.

I see him as the YUG PURUSH.

KIRIT SHELAT



13 August 2016 Salangpur

The Sadhu Narayan Charan was with Bapa as his personal attending Sadhu since last 37 years. Narayan Charan got 'Diksha' in year 1977.

Says Sadhu Narayancharan about the last moments:

Bapa never complained before or after by-pass surgery about physical pain or discomfort.

Did he decide to leave the world?

Says Sadhu Narayancharan- 'Yes'.

In the year 2011 he was not well at Bharuch and it was decided to shift him to Mumbai. At that time he did express- "I would like to go to Salangpur and rest there" But the Santas and Haribhaktas persuaded and he agreed for treatment at Mumbai.

He stayed in Dadar Temple under observation for eight months at Mumbai- before he came to Sahibag-Ahmedabad and moved to Salangpur. But once again he did come back to Ahmedabad for fixing of "pace Maker" as advised by Dr. Tejas Patel and he also visited Robbinsville- -Newjersey -USA for Murti Pratistha in 2014 for upcoming Akshardham.

Despite difficult health- he never got angry- and used to give 'Darshan' daily -sometime twice in a day. But slowly he reduced food intake and started taking only liquids.

What happened on 12-13 August -2016?

Says Sadhu Narayancharan he gave Darshan to Haribhakta and Sadhus on 12th August. But in the late evening his BP become low. This was not unusual with him and it has felt by everybody that it will become normal as usual.

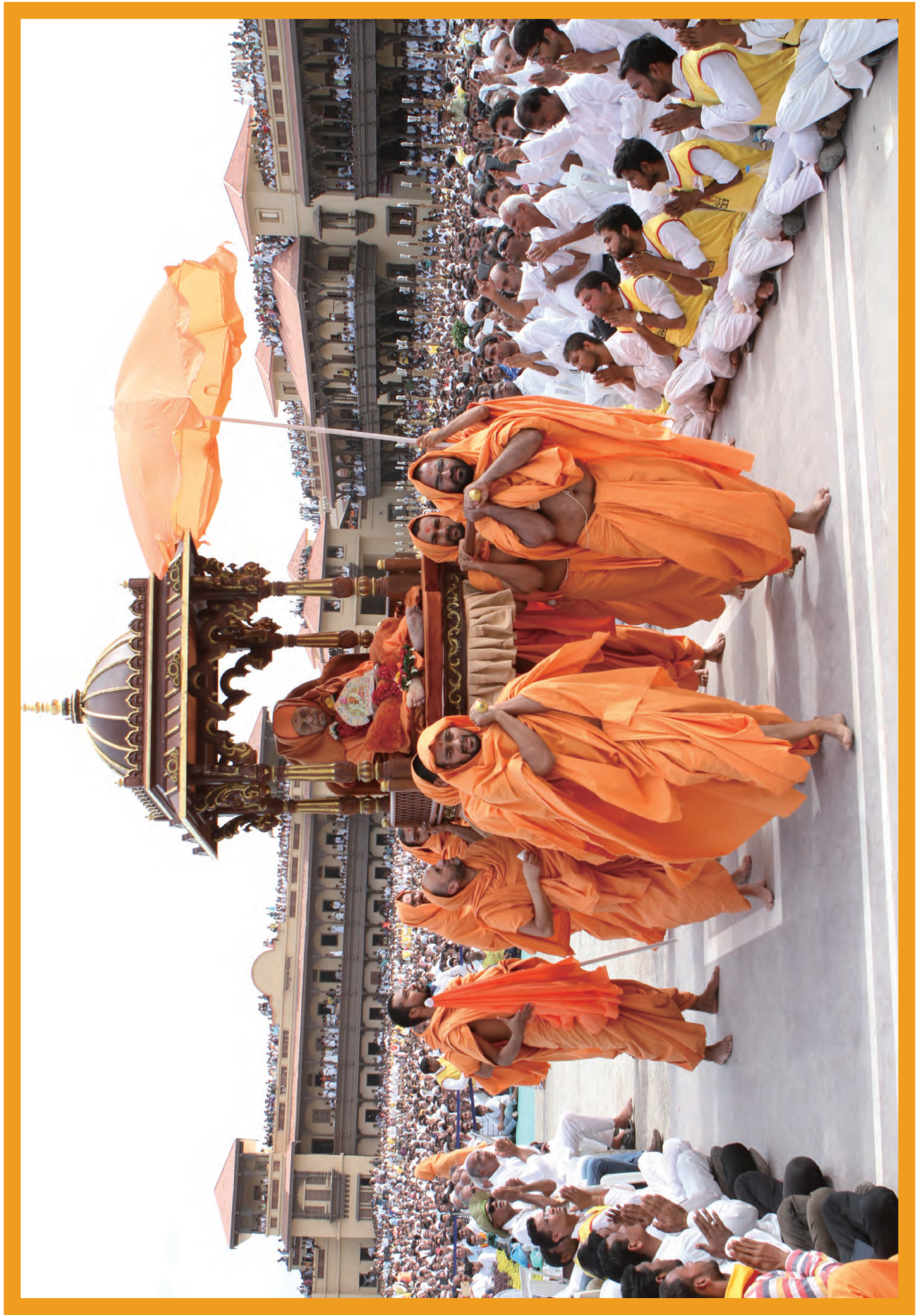


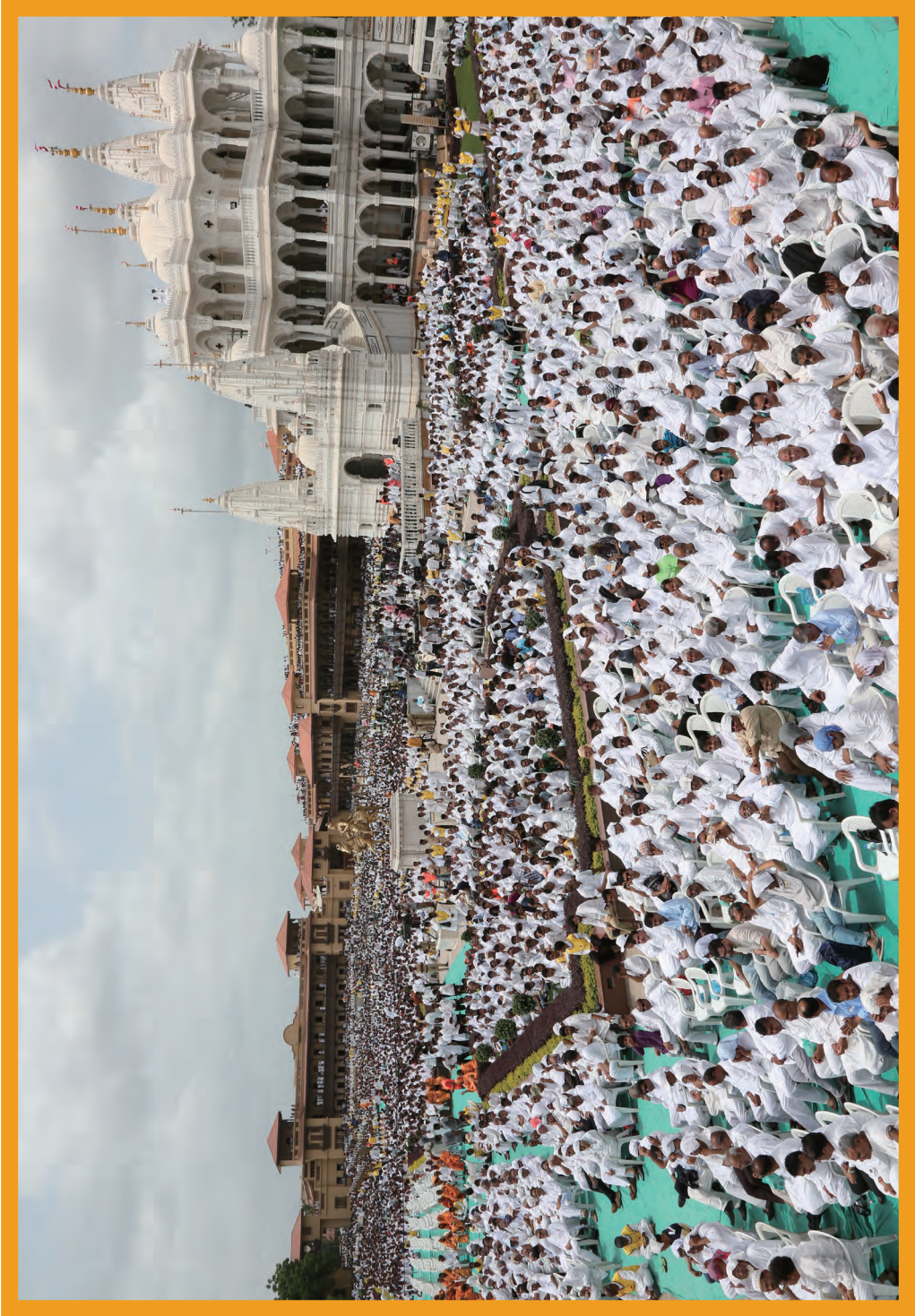
But he was immediately attended by the doctors Sants Sadhu YogVivek and Sadhu Adhbhuatanand. In fact they were looking after him all these days and have had excellence in Cardiology. The team was standing by and constantly trying for the recovery .But on 13th Morning around 7/Am the BP dropped further. But he did not show any pain as it happens during a normal heart attack.

He was smiling and with the drop of BP, the heart-beats were affected but he looked peaceful and comfortable. We asked him to and open his eyes-which he did –but did not express about any pain.

In the evening at 5 PM he said ‘Jai Swami Narayan’- we immediately brought Murti of Thakorjee which he daily prayed and was always with him. We told him “Swami-Thakorjee has come”. His eyes looked at Thakorjee. This has an un-believable site-His face was lit with divine light, ‘Anand’ and Satisfaction. And then he left us.

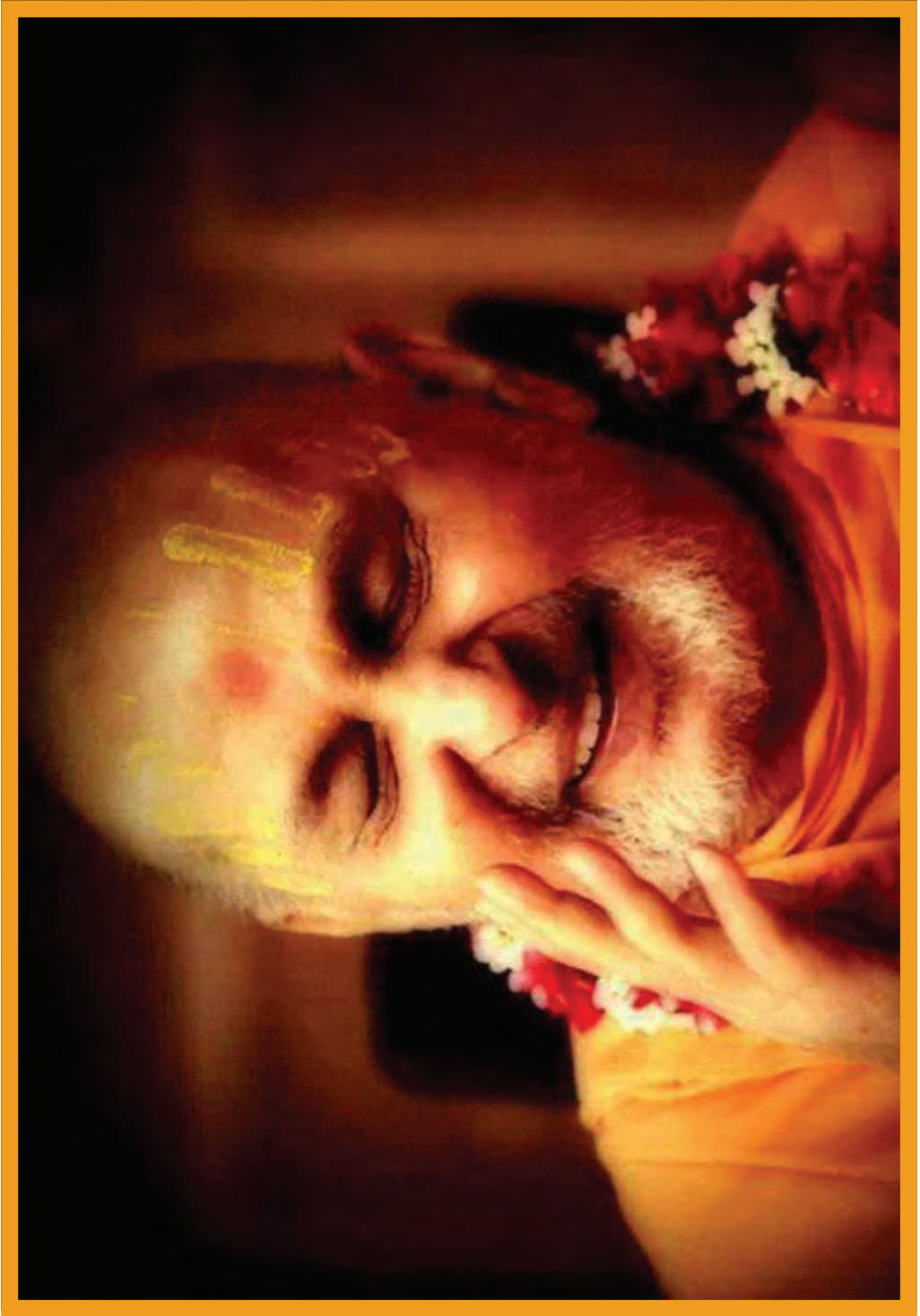
(Curtsey Adapted From)
Chitralkha
29th Aug 2016)











Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj



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 disorder, anarchy, loss of religious



values. He conquers the forces of evil and re-establishes spiritual values.

10. Bapa Affectionate term used to address Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
11. BAPS Bochasanvasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha.
12. Bhai Brother.
13. Bhajan-Kirtan Devotional songs.
14. Bhakt-Bhagvan. 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 dark 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 Devi. Yogiji Maharaj also stayed here for long time.
23. Grihastha The householder.

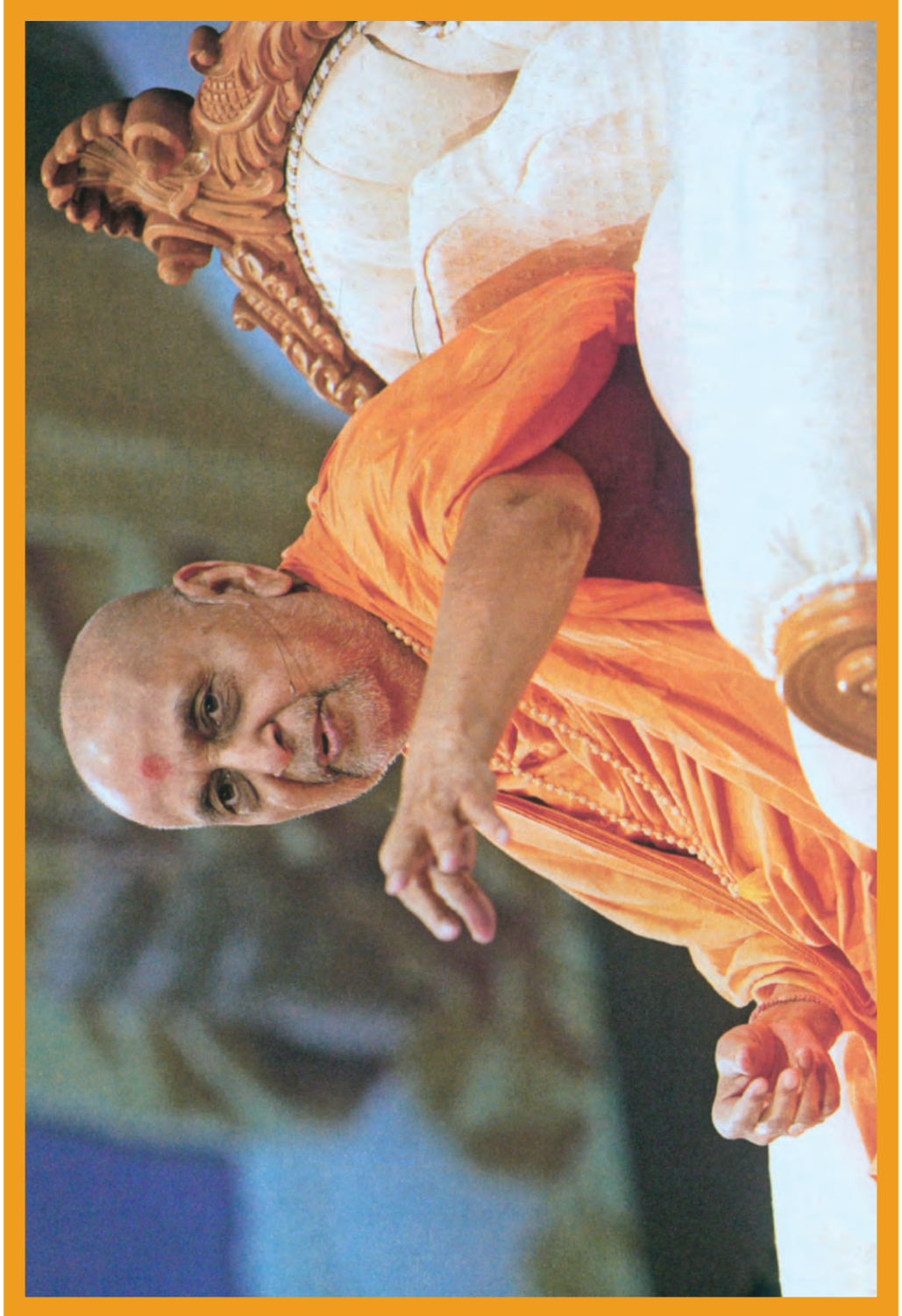


24. Guru.	A religious teacher, spiritual master.
25. Guru Parampara	Hierarchy of holy persons, spiritual masters.
26. Hari Krishna Maharaj	Lord Krishna. Lord Swaminarayan is also called as Hari Krishna Maharaj.
27. Harijan	A member of low caste.
28. KarSeva	Voluntary service for spiritual or social work.
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. Rishi 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. Swamishri Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
55. Thakorji Small metallic image of Shriji Maharaj.
56. Tilak/Chandlo A mark applied to the forehead to signify faith in God.
57. Upanishad Ancient Hindu Scriptures - They are philosophical chronicles of sages expounding the nature of God, soul and cosmos.
58. Upasana Worship
59. Vicharam Spiritual travels.

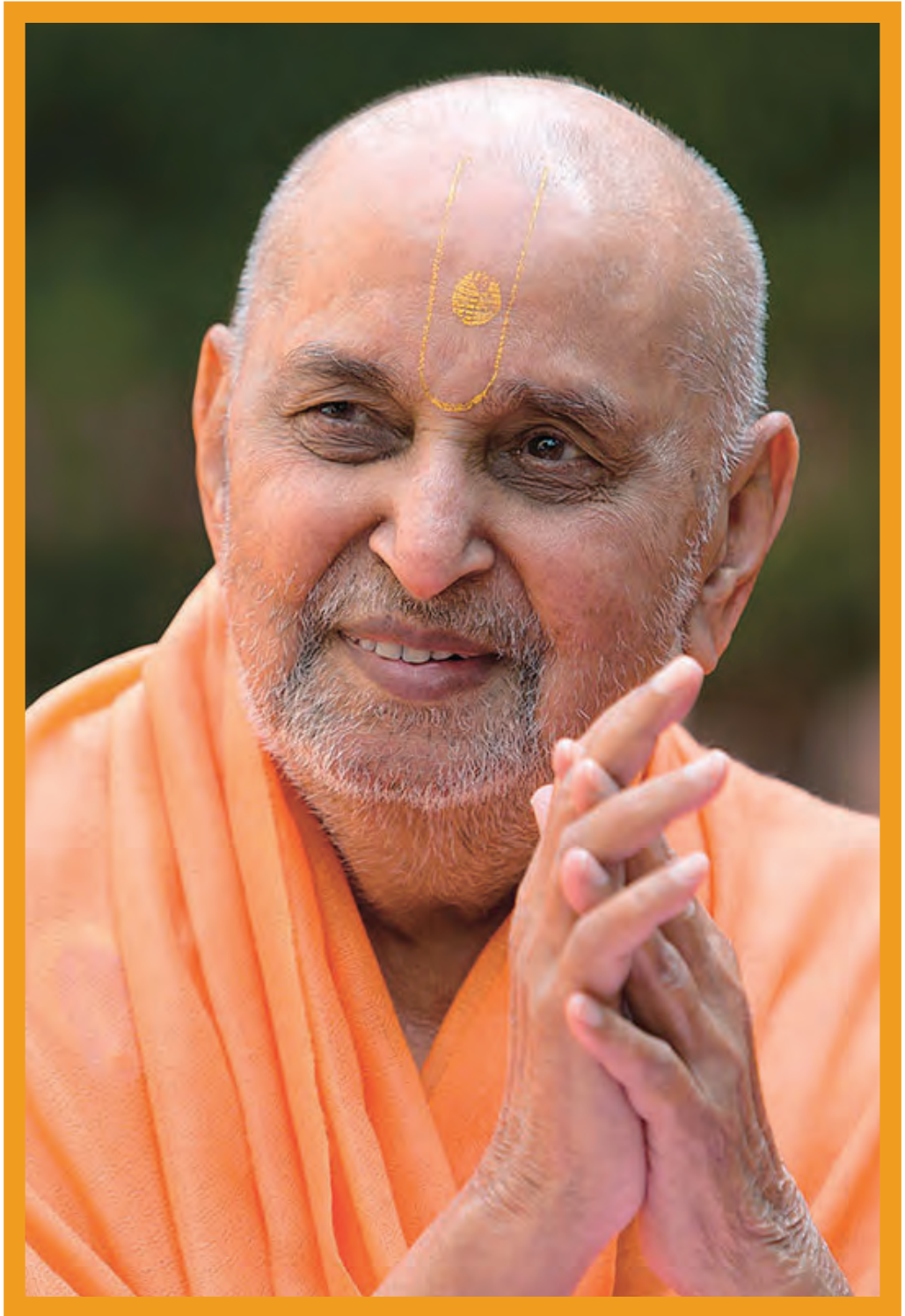




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FROM THE PUBLISHER

I am deeply honoured to take up the task of publishing this book “Yug Purush Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj” under the aegis of Shree Bhagwati Trust, named after my revered mother Smt. Bhagwatiben Vishnuprasad Pandya, a devout religious lady. It has been the policy of the Trust to undertake publication of books of special nature.

The Author, in his brief account, has brought out the multidimensional contribution made by Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj - this is a story of a farmer’s son of a remote village of Vadodara District of Gujarat, who has reached to such heights and made immense contributions to mankind. He has changed the meaning of voluntary service of religious groups and broadened it by awakening hidden values in a person to assist another person irrespective of cast or creed. The spread of spiritual values starts by initially setting up of a Satsang Centre, followed by the construction of a temple with multifarious humanitarian activities, whether it is in Gujarat or India or abroad. It brings out, how community gets together to construct a temple or assist people affected by earthquake, under his inspiration. It brings out the successful efforts, by which India’s contribution to the world is brought out to make us proud of our heritage - which is most often forgotten, under influence of the Western culture. It deals with imbibing of spiritual values to future generation. The Former President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam says that “Pramukh Swami Maharaj has added a new content to five areas of development, which he (The Former President) had prepared for making India a rich and prosperous nation in the years to come. This added component is a spiritual component, which is to be built in our system to make our citizens enlightened citizens, not one, but a billion enlightened citizens.”

I am deeply indebted to Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj as he has always been a source of inspiration not only for me but my entire family. My father Shri Vishnuprasad Pandya always had the blessing of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. M/s. Sahitya Mudranalaya has also been blessed with his footprints when Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj along with Chidananda Swami inaugurated the photo composing unit and later on



the offset printing machinery in my Press in 1981. With the blessings of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

I am also grateful to Dr. Kirit Shelat for giving me an opportunity of publishing second english edition. We have already published Gujarati and Hindi editions. I am grateful to Shri Ishwarcharan Swamiji and Shri Brahmavihari Swamiji and Shri Vivekjivan Swamiji for giving valuable inputs in this publication and allowing us to publish photography treasured by Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

We are happy to bring out third edition of this book in English, which narrates the latest happenings.

The inspiration for undertaking the task of publishing has undoubtedly been the life Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj which has touched me in more than many ways. I am solely responsible for any printing errors in my humble efforts.

This is released in memory of my beloved wife Late Bina who was the ardent disciple of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Date: 6th January, 2017

Shreyas V. Pandya
Sahitya Mudranalaya Pvt. Ltd.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Several people have helped me in writing this book. I have received invaluable aid and suggestions from friends, satsangis and sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. A lot of research had to be undertaken to present an accurate picture.

I am indebted to Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Atmaswarup Swami and Brahmavihari Swami who have helped me immensely in this venture. The book has assumed its present shape following discussions with them. The Bochasanvasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan (BAPS) and the Swaminarayan Aksharpith Sanstha Sahibaug, Ahmedabad have assisted me by making available photographs and other relevant material which have been used in this book. Shri Harisingh Chauhan for sharing the photographs.

I am thankful to Prof. Janakbhai Dave, a well-known scholar of Swaminarayan philosophy and Prof. D.R. Patel, a reputed academician, who have done their best to ensure that the book is conceptually and factually correct. In spite of this, if there are any errors, I am solely responsible for them. I would also like to thank Shri Upendra Bhatt, Head of Legal team in BAPS for his unstinted support and co-operation. Pujya Shreejiswarup Swami who heads the design studio at Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, was kind enough to provide me with photographs from their collection. I also express my gratitude to Aksharvatsal Swami, Yogi Vallabha Swami, Gyaneshwar Swami and Tirthswarup Swami.

Shri Shreyas Vishnuprasad Pandya of Sahitya Mudranalaya deserves all credit for undertaking the publication of this 9th edition of this book. I would like to express my thanks to Shri Kathan Kothari and Shri Abhay Kothari for designing the book.

I am grateful to Guruji Shri G. Narayana, a Corporate and Business Contributor, a path making Author, Trainer and Spiritual Teacher for agreeing to write a Foreword for the book.

Smt Lizamma Thomas deserves thanks for composing the work.

I also thank my wife Ila, who encouraged me to take up this challenge and my sons Chi. Vrajesh and Mitul, who helped me in writing the book.

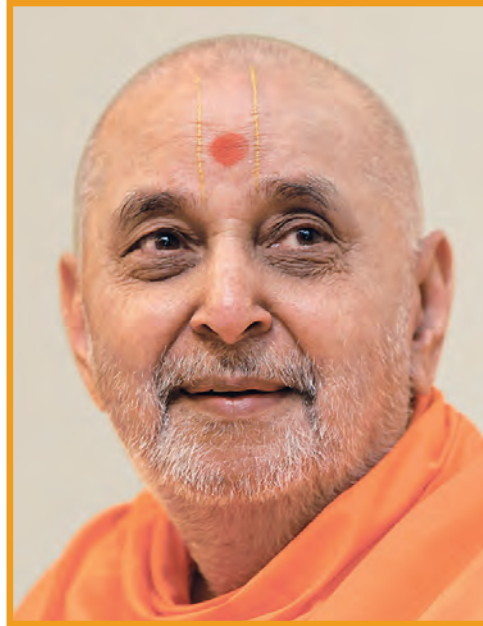
Finally, my gratitude is due to Pujya Shri Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj. He is not only the source of our inspiration, but also the source of comfort in our day to day life.

Ahmedabad

Date: 11th October, 2016

Kirit Shelat

Dashera





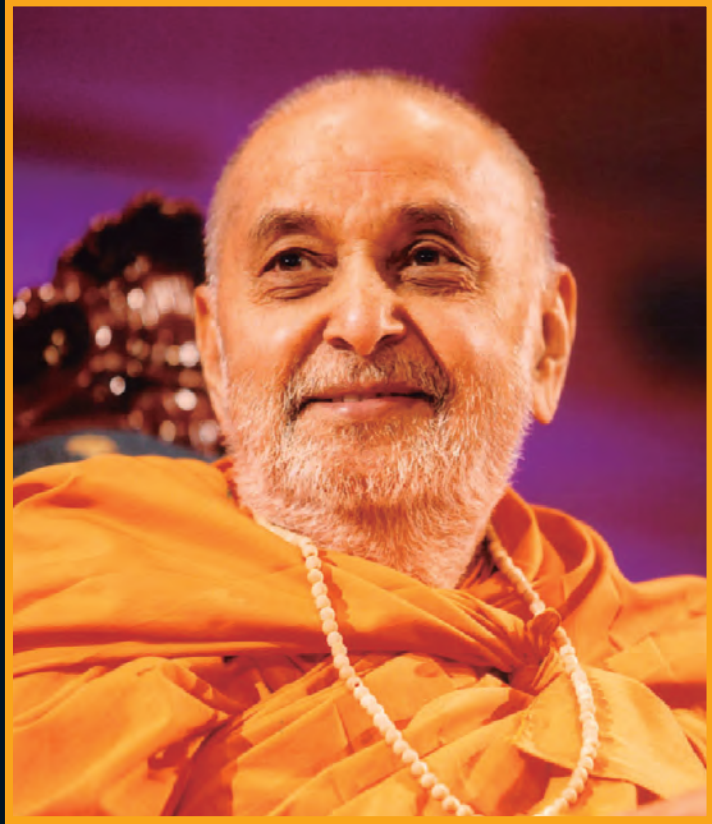












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