

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November-December 2015

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**Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Saintliness**

Humble Prostrations to Swamishri on His 94th Birthday Celebration

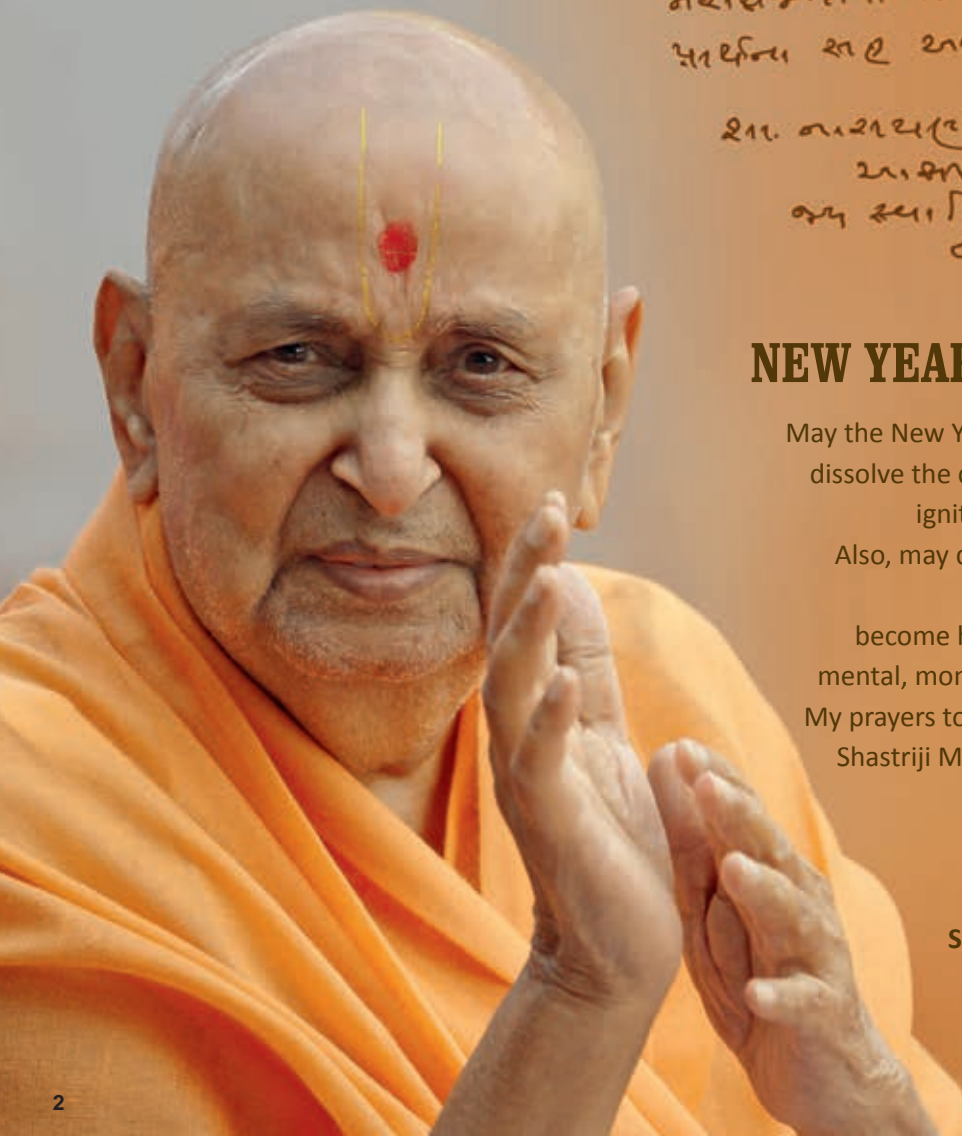


# નૂતન વર્ષના આશીર્વાદ



નૂતન વર્ષ સર્વને સુખદાતા થાય  
 અજ્ઞાન રૂપ અંધારા દૂર થાય અને  
 જ્ઞાનરૂપ જ્ઞાન પ્રગટે તેમજ  
 દેશ પરદેશ વચ્ચે સ્વમિશ્રુતી તથા  
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 માનસિક આરોગ્ય, આર્યસભ્ય જ્ઞાનની  
 પ્રાપ્તિ થાય તે માટે ભગવાન  
 સ્વામિ નારાયણ તથા શાસ્ત્રીજી  
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 પ્રાર્થના કરી આશીર્વાદ છું

શા. નારાયણ સ્વરૂપદાસના  
 આશીર્વાદ સહ  
 વ્ય સ્વામિ નારાયણ  
 વાંચક



## NEW YEAR'S BLESSINGS

May the New Year bring happiness to all,  
 dissolve the darkness of ignorance and  
 ignite the lamp of knowledge.

Also, may devotees and well-wishers  
 in India and abroad  
 become happy, and attain physical,  
 mental, monetary and spiritual peace.

My prayers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan,  
 Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj,  
 and blessings to all.

With Blessings and  
 Jai Swaminarayan  
 Shastri Narayanswarupdas



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# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November-December 2015 Vol. 38 No. 6

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

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



# FIRST WORD



In his discourse on Raja yoga, Swami Vivekanand emphasized upon the need to be focused in one's endeavours. He eloquently stated, "Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life – think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced."<sup>1</sup>

The lives of the Gunatit gurus exemplify absolute obedience to the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and their guru – making that one idea their life. No amount of opposition, difficulties or discomforts have deterred them in their spiritual efforts. It has always amazed and impressed *satsangis* as to how Bhagatji Maharaj bore the brunt of severe ridicule, insult and excommunication; how Shastriji Maharaj persevered in propagating and enshrining the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine; how Yogiji Maharaj tolerated the tyranny of Vignandas Swami for 17 years and thereafter made Herculean efforts in helping Shastriji Maharaj realize his mission, and how Pramukh Swami Maharaj pleased Shastriji Maharaj and fulfilled the wishes of Yogiji Maharaj. The answer lies in their commitment to only one idea – to please their guru.

When Shastriji Maharaj told the young Narayanswarupdas Swami to prepare lime for the construction work in Atladra, he doggedly stuck to his responsibility despite the scorching sun and the heat produced from the lime. In another instance, Narayanswarupdas Swami faced the rigours and dangers of standing on the steps of a train carriage from Vadodara to Botad in torrential rains and thereafter wading through flooded roads to reach Sarangpur; all because the ailing Shastriji Maharaj had called him.

When Narayanswarupdas was 28 years old Shastriji Maharaj aspired to appoint him as president of BAPS. But he hesitated, because he felt he was junior and inexperienced in comparison to other sadhus and devotees, who were better equipped to shoulder the responsibility. However, with Shastriji Maharaj's repeated urgings the young Narayanswarupdas Swami complied to please him.

On many occasions Pramukh Swami Maharaj has revealed that he had only one resolve after becoming a sadhu – to do what Shastriji Maharaj bided. Additionally, he often declared that he had never differed from the wishes and inclinations of Yogiji Maharaj.

In 1967, a meeting was held to decide the venue for the celebration of Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav (75<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration). With the prevailing drought in Sorath and Saurashtra some of the trustees insisted that it be held in Bochasan and others felt it should be organized in Atladra. But when Pramukh Swami said that it should be held in Gondal, everyone rebuked him strongly. Swamishri however stuck to his decision because he knew it was Yogiji Maharaj's wish. After the meeting was over and when everyone had left, Yogiji Maharaj profusely blessed Pramukh Swami and expressed his *rajipo*.

After becoming the guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has continued to strive relentlessly in fulfilling all the wishes of Yogiji Maharaj: a large entrance gate at Gondal mandir, golden *sinhasans* for Thakorji in Gondal, mandir in New York and spread of Satsang in North America, *shikharbaddh* mandir in London, Swaminarayan Akshardhams in Gandhinagar and New Delhi, *shikharbaddh* mandir in Mahelav, sadhu *diksha* to 700 youths and other things. Behind each of his accomplishments lies his single focus and monumental effort to please his gurus.

This issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* pays tributes to Swamishri on his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration (19 December 2015) through a selected number of photo-stories that portray his saintliness and services to society. Each story shows what 'making one idea his life' can achieve.

We wish all our readers a Happy Diwali and an awesome New Year. ◆

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol 1. Fifteenth Edition. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977, p.177.

# Gunatitanand Swami Serves the Ailing Sadhus

*During his stay in Gadhada Shri Hari consolidates the principles of dharma in his paramhansas and devotees. Thereafter, Maharaj departs for Vartal to perform the stone-laying ceremony for a shikharbaddh mandir...*



## SATSANG IS THE MEANS TO BECOMING GOD-REALIZED

After the Fuldol celebration of 1822 CE (A.S.1878) was over in Gadhada, Shri Hari instructed Krupanand Swami and Purnanand Swami to inspire satsang in the Valak region. He told them, “Aspirants are inclined towards Satsang due to its moral disciplines and practices. We have propagated the practice of celibacy and other virtues which reflects true dharma, and is the right means to attain Akshardham. Thus, both of you go and preach about offering bhakti coupled with dharma, and nourish *jnan* and *vairagya* among aspirants so that they do not become bound by *maya*.”

The senior sadhus understood that Satsang is not something casual or superficial but the means to attain the God-realized state. The two senior sadhus and the sadhus in their groups prostrated

before Maharaj and left for the Valak region.

The next day Maharaj was walking with a handkerchief in hand on the verandah of the north-facing rooms of Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. Many sadhus and devotees assembled in Dada’s courtyard to do darshan of Maharaj. At that time Muktanand Swami humbly asked Shri Hari, “Maharaj with what reason are you walking alone on the verandah?”

Shri Hari knew that Muktanand Swami had absolute faith and *divyabhav* in all his actions. He replied, “During meditation it is easier to behold the moving form of God rather than his static form. Thus, to pacify a restless mind it is better to engage it in the living and moving form of God. By so doing the mundane mind becomes pure and calm.”

Muktanand Swami knew that Maharaj’s *lilas* were meant to bless aspirants with *moksha*.

## INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDY THE VIDUR NITI

Shortly thereafter, Bhavanbhai Kamdar came for Maharaj's darshan along with some fellow devotees of Botad. He prostrated to Maharaj and stood on the ground by the verandah. Shri Hari looked at Bhavanbhai, who said "Jai Swaminarayan" and stretched his hand to touch Maharaj's feet. Shri Hari came to the edge of the verandah to enable all to touch his feet. Then Maharaj advised, "Bhavanbhai, you are an administrator of a kingdom, therefore you should know about how to be of greater benefit to the king, kingdom and Brahmins."

Bhavanbhai modestly replied, "Maharaj, I administer with the intellect you have endowed me with. Other than that I know nothing." Shri Hari was pleased with his candidness and added, "Listen Bhavanbhai, the instructions Vidurji gave to his brother Dhrutrashtira is known as the *Vidur Niti*.<sup>1</sup> You should study it to become proficient in administration. Furthermore, you should read *Dharmakhyan* [by Muktanand Swami] – which includes my incidents – to enable you to strengthen your faith in me."

Bhavanbhai agreed, "Maharaj, I shall read both the scriptures." Shri Hari was pleased at his readiness to abide by his words, and told him to take his meal before departing for Botad.

## ATONEMENT FOR VERABHAI

The month of Chaitra (April) arrived. Shri Hari made preparations to go to Vartal. There, he wished to perform the foundation-stone laying

1 *Vidur Niti* is a part of the Udyog Parva of the Mahabharat. When the Pandavs returned to Hastinapur after their 13-year exile they asked for their share of land from the Kauravs. However, when Duryodhan refused, the Pandavs pledged to fight for their land. On hearing this, Dhrutrashtira became restless and asked Vidurji to come to him. Thereafter, Vidurji preached to Dhrutrashtira about dharma, *jnan*, character, qualities of a pandit and a fool, and what a person should accept and renounce in life. In addition, he taught about the power of intellect, the fruits of having a pure intellect, the characteristics of a fine person, the duties of a host, who is a friend and other things. This code of moral instructions and advice is called the *Vidur Niti*.

ceremony of a *shikharbaddh* mandir.

Maharaj left Gadhada with a large retinue of *paramhansas* and devotees. Along the route Jiva Khachar made arrangements for a night's halt at Ugamedi village. Shri Hari slept for the night on a bullock cart. The whole retinue woke up early to reach Kariyani by dawn. Shri Hari stayed the night there and decided to journey ahead early next morning. But Vasta Khachar and Raghav Patel prayed to Maharaj that they depart after having lunch. Maharaj agreed to their request, and they started making preparations. Early next morning, Verabhai took a babul stick for brushing his teeth without asking anyone from Vasta Khachar's house. Then he went to the village pond and performed his morning ablutions. On returning, Verabhai repented for not taking permission to use the babul stick. He realized it was a breach of Maharaj's command. So he confessed to Shri Hari, "Maharaj, I have committed a petty crime. I took a babul stick without asking Vasta Khachar. I therefore want to atone for my transgression." Shri Hari was pleased and told him to perform ten prostrations to each sadhu and five prostrations to each devotee present there. Verabhai complied and earned Shri Hari's blessings.

## FOUNDATION-STONE LAYING CEREMONY IN VARTAL

After having lunch at Kariyani Shri Hari travelled via Sundariyana, Vrajalka, Dholka, Jetalpur, Memdavad to finally reach Vartal. Here, thousands of devotees had arrived to celebrate the Shri Hari *jayanti* festival. After the celebration the devotees departed for their respective villages and towns. Thereafter, the leading devotees of Vartal, Joban Pagi, Kuberbhai and Ranchhodbhai, reminded Maharaj about his promise to build a *shikharbaddh* mandir. Shriji Maharaj had already decided the site for the mandir. He had called Purushottam, the sculptor from Vadnagar, for the foundation-stone laying ritual. When Maharaj told him to prepare the mandir plans,

he suggested, "If we construct a mandir similar to the Narayan Dev mandir in Nadiad then it will draw thousands for darshan."

Shri Hari thus decided to personally visit the mandir in Nadiad. After seeing it Maharaj called Purushottam to Nadiad and declared, "I want to build a much better and bigger mandir in Vartal than this."

Maharaj returned to Vartal and instructed the devotees to make preparations for the stone-laying ceremony. Maharaj performed the ceremony on 4 April 1822 (Chaitra *sud* 13, A.S. 1878).

### **GUNATITANAND SWAMI SERVES THE AILING SADHUS**

Soon thereafter, eighteen sadhus were taken ill in Vartal. Since no one was willing to take care of them Shriji Maharaj instructed Gunatitanand Swami to do so. Swami wholeheartedly started performing their *seva*. He would daily bathe them, prepare food items according to their inclinations, and wash their clothes and quilts.

Once, Swami was returning after washing the quilts in the Gomti pond. At that time Maharaj was returning through the doorway of Hanumanji after having lunch at Vasan Suthar's home. Both Maharaj and Swami crossed each other's paths. Gunatitanand Swami was always fully engrossed in Maharaj's divine form. Subsequently, Maharaj stood there transfixed. Swami came near to him. Then Maharaj said, "Sadhuram, can I go?" And Swami replied humbly, "Yes Maharaj." Thereafter, Shri Hari proceeded towards the assembly hall where all the devotees had witnessed what had happened. When Maharaj arrived in the hall he was feeling uncomfortable and hot. His attendants, Bhaguji and Bapu Ratanji, started fanning him. Shri Hari rebuked them and exclaimed, "I don't need anyone's service. Remove the burden that sadhu has placed on me!"

Bhaguji understood Maharaj's words and ran towards Gunatitanand Swami and unloaded the wet quilts from his shoulders. Then he brought

them all and placed them before Maharaj. Shri Hari instructed Bhaguji, "Go to the sadhus' quarters and make an announcement that whoever had given their quilts to wash should come and take them now." Subsequently, the ailing sadhus came and took their quilts, while those who were healthy did not come out of shame and guilt.

Maharaj then told Gunatitanand Swami to sit besides Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami. Shri Hari asked the senior sadhu, "Of what calibre is Swami?"

Both the senior sadhus averred, "He is a very good sadhu. He recites many kirtans and discourses well. He serves all and observes fasts and other austerities too."

Shri Hari smiled at their superficial answer and said, "You have merely described his external qualities, but you are unaware of his inner virtues."

Then Shri Hari revealed, "This sadhu is very great. The reason being that he has realized my form prior to being in his mother's womb, while he was in her womb and even at present in all the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. He has gripped my *murti* like someone who tightly holds a snake with a pair of tongs."

On hearing this Mahanubhavanand Swami blurted out, "Why are you gripping Maharaj as such, let go of him!" Shri Hari smiled at Swami's naive words. He clarified, "Swami, I am not pained or troubled by that. In fact he sees me always. It is difficult for others to behold my form in this manner. He is my eternal servant – Mul Aksharbrahman. The multitude of people you see following me today will also follow him. Through him the Satsang will come to realize my supremacy. No one else here knows my true glory more than he does. So how unbecoming it is for healthy sadhus to make him wash their quilts!" Thus Shri Hari explained the greatness of Gunatitanand Swami in the satsang assembly.

(Contd. on pg. 52)





# PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S SAINTLINESS

*This special issue of 'Swaminarayan Bliss' features some outstanding photo stories about guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj to commemorate his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday and entry into his 95<sup>th</sup> year on 19 December 2015.*

*For more than three decades Swamishri's vicharan has been captured on camera by Yogicharan Swami, who has been travelling with him. From the photos presented one will notice the special skill he has of capturing the events and situations. Every photo documents satsang history in celluloid.*

*Since Swamishri is reticent by nature, he rarely speaks about himself. However, each photo in this selection speaks volumes about his profound saintly personality. Behind each of them is a story, a message and a history.*

*Out of several thousands of photos taken by Yogicharan Swami we have selected and included a few in this special issue; three photographs by anonymous photographers have also been included. Every photo is supplemented with a brief write-up, describing the situation or event, and a photo caption.*

*We ask our readers to carefully observe each photo and read the description to savour the unique spiritual personality of Swamishri. Sometimes, you may experience yourself as a time traveller, reminiscing the times you have been with Swamishri.*

*We are greatly indebted to the invaluable contributions and moments that Swamishri has gifted to us. We pray for his good health and many more years of his divine presence and offer humble prostrations at his holy feet.*

*The photos and the stories of Swamishri have been sourced from 'Swaminarayan Prakash', December 2013. The Gujarati text was translated by Sadhu Vivekjivandas and Sadhu Amrutvijaydas.*



## A Unique Student



28.1.2001, High School, Padra

On 28 January 2001, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Padra, a small town near Vadodara. He had previously visited Padra on several occasions, but today it was a special visit at the requests of his disciples. Swamishri arrived at the Padra high school where, as Shantilal, he had studied way back in the 1930s. Despite being the guru, today he had momentarily become a student by sitting in the same classroom and on the same bench. Many who were present there were reminded of his classmate Ambalal Babarbai's revealing testimony, "Shanti and I went to school together. I was a little lazy, whereas he was very punctual. Thus, he hurried me into getting ready for school. We travelled to school together on one bicycle. Either he or I pedalled the cycle. Whenever we came across an incline I would tell him to take over. He never complained about it and pedalled with joy. He was very tolerant from the beginning.

"In studies, he stood first. Sometimes I secretly hid behind a train wagon to smoke a bidi. Whenever I tried to urge him to have a smoke, he replied, 'God sees all our doings.' He never uttered abusive words nor did he harass or play mischief with anyone. If someone scolded him he never answered back. He always tolerated.

"Our school's headmaster trusted him only. He knew that Shanti would never say a lie. So, whenever there were any rows or mischiefs in class the headmaster always referred to Shantilal's account and opinion and did as he said. Shanti was very honest."

Shantilal's integrity and belief in God's pervasiveness gave credibility to whatever he said or did. He had always nurtured an inclination to learn, to accept whatever that was good and to be always honest in all his thoughts, actions and feelings. ◆



5.6.2000, Ambli Vali Pol, Ahmedabad

## Pilgrimage to the Iconic Ambli Vali Pol

On 5 June 2000, Pramukh Swami Maharaj walked down the historic Ambli Vali Pol in Ahmedabad, where he was appointed as President of BAPS by guru Shastriji Maharaj in 1950. The day marked the 50th celebration of Pramukh Varni Din. Swamishri had come to have darshan and to pay respects to the place where his guru had blessed him.

The Pol's ambience was festive and pulsating with joy. Amidst the chorus of loud *jai*'s and showers of rose petals Swamishri walked alongside Thakorji on the narrow decorated pathway. The occasion turned out to be historic and memorable.

It was in this iconic Pol that Shastriji Maharaj gave the *parshad diksha* to Swamishri on 22 November 1939. Here, too, he had studied Sanskrit under the tutelage of Shastri Girijashankar. Later, Swamishri took a pledge to serve the Sanstha till his last breath. He had also begged for alms here and scrubbed utensils. But today, he was being hailed as a world-renowned

and respected guru. Despite all his achievements he has never uttered a word about them nor about his unparalleled efforts and sacrifices. While everyone in the Pol was saluting his works and achievements Swamishri was humbly appreciating the greatness of devotees and well-wishers who once resided here. Every home and name of the devotees in Ambli Vali Pol were well known to him.

Someone asked him, "After you were appointed as president did you not feel small in scrubbing the utensils?" He replied, "Becoming the president does not stop one from being a *sevak*." Everyone present realized that his spirit of servitude was unflinching. Yes, after 50 years, despite the meteoric rise of BAPS and Swamishri's global popularity, Swamishri had not changed – he was the same *sevak* who had scrubbed the utensils on Pramukh Varni Din 50 years ago! ◆



## Special Bond of Guru and Disciple

Several decades ago Shri Mahendraprasad Shankarprasad Trivedi had emigrated from India to settle in America. In July 2000, 75-year-old Mahendraprasad read in the local daily that a great sadhu of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, had arrived in Edison, New Jersey. The news sparked his memory of an incident that had happened in 1950. At that time his aging father, Shankarprasad Mulshankar Trivedi, had given him a photo and said, “Son, this is a rare photograph of a great

sadhu of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya named Swami Yagnapurushdas, aka Shastriji Maharaj. I have carefully and dearly cherished it.” Then Shankarprasad narrated the history behind the photograph, “It was 1940, and the first two to three months had passed by. At that time I was working as a magistrate in Dholka and I had bought a new camera. I was deeply interested in photography. My friend Shri Hargovindbhai, who was employed as an administrator in Lathidad, took me to Sarangpur to have the darshan of a



arrival Swamiji's face beamed with divine joy and love. Swamiji told him to sit next to him. While I was looking at Swamiji and the young sadhu through the camera I distinctly noted that the feelings on Swamiji's face had changed. There was a vast difference between the photos of Swamiji with Hargovindbhai and Swamiji with the young sadhu. The reason being the presence of the young sadhu. The young sadhu, too, had a magnetic personality. On seeing him Swamiji's face blossomed with divine joy. I, too, experienced divine joy on seeing Swamiji bloom in the presence of his favourite disciple. And so I captured that unforgettable moment with my camera. Whenever I look at this photo I am reminded of that divine experience. That is why I have dearly treasured this photo as part of my unique experience. From now onwards you take care of it."

great sadhu called Shastriji Maharaj. I was greatly impressed by his personality. He was sitting in a small room of a mud house. He was illustrious like the sun. Out of my interest as a photographer I took a photo of Shastriji Maharaj and Hargovindbhai seated together (above right). I still had one more plate left. So, I expressed my wish to take one more photo of Swamiji seated alone. But Swamiji stopped me and told me to wait till a sadhu arrived. He asked someone to call the sadhu. When he came, I was greatly surprised because I had expected a senior and mature sadhu. He was only 19 years old, probably freshly initiated two to three months back. But on his

Mahendraprasad, a Shaiva follower, had looked after the photo given to him by his father. Now that he was 75 years old he felt he should gift it to Pramukh Swami. And thus Mahendraprasad travelled to the mandir in Edison. On meeting Swamishri he enquired, "In this photograph we have Shastriji Maharaj, but who is this young sadhu? For many years I've been searching for an answer." Immediately thereafter when Mahendraprasad learnt that the young sadhu in the photo was none other than Pramukh Swamiji himself he became emotional and overwhelmed with joy.

Today this photo reflects the unique bond between the guru and his disciple! ♦

27.3.1990, Sarangpur



## Reviving a Forgotten History

For 23-year-old Narayanswarupdas Swami the words and commands of Shastriji Maharaj were his life breath. He totally immersed himself in whatever the guru told him to do. He never entertained an iota of doubt, complaint or hesitation in whatever Shastriji Maharaj said.

In 1944, Shastriji Maharaj told the young Narayanswarupdas to prepare lime for the construction work at Atladra. Disregarding the acute summer heat of April and May, Narayanswarupdas strived hard in fulfilling his guru's word. He shovelled lime and sand into the circular groove and then operated the stone wheel pulled by an ox to crush and mix the lime and sand. After 108 rounds the mixture of lime and sand would be ready for use in the construction work. Then the mixture would be removed from the groove, filled into disc-shaped metal vessels and then supplied to the masons. All day he laboured diligently. After

a few days his tender physique could not bear the severe heat and back-breaking labour. While others had excused themselves, Narayanswarupdas remained unremitting in *seva*. Eventually, the heat took its toll. He felt a strong burning sensation in his body, which resulted in angry red patches throughout his body. He also became feverish. At that time Shastriji Maharaj was not well and resting at the *hari* mandri in Jhadeshwar. So, he called Narayanswarupdas Swami to sing the Bhaktachintamani before him.

When Shastriji Maharaj saw Narayanswarupdas Swami he got up from his bed and embraced him. He noticed that Narayanswarupdas had red patches on his face and so asked, "What has happened to you?" Then, Shastriji Maharaj gently passed his hands over Swami's face while uttering "Swaminarayan..." and blessed him that all would be well.

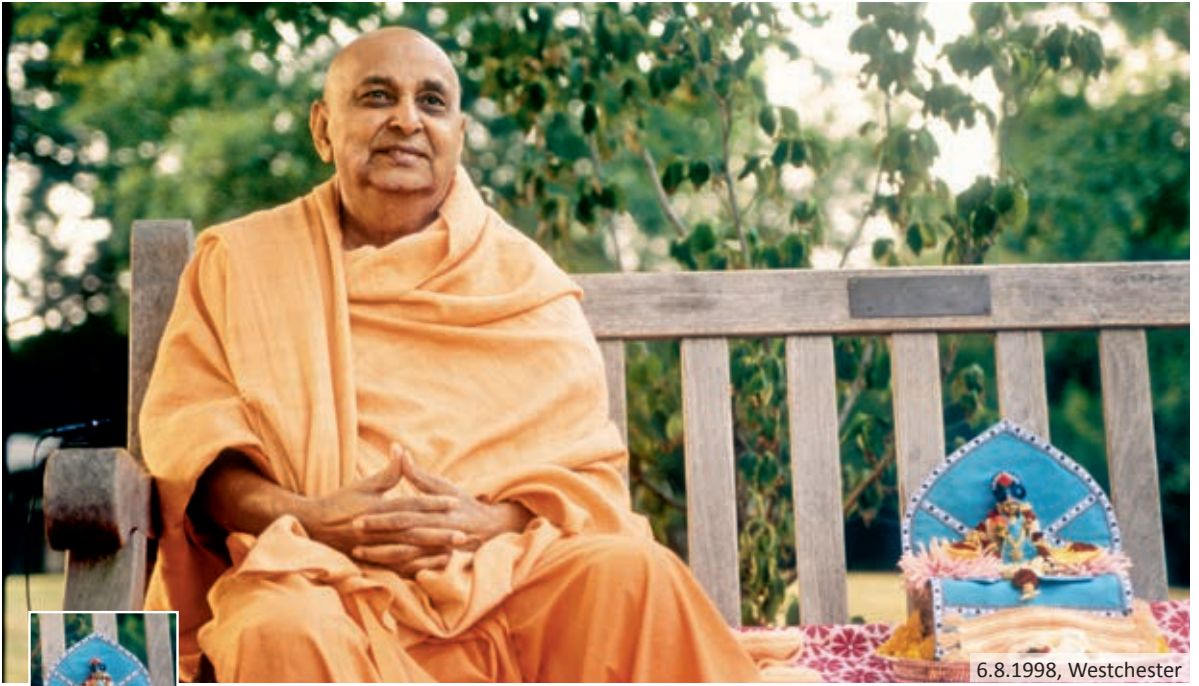


Five to six days later the red patches subsided and disappeared altogether. Only one red patch remained on the tip of his nose as a mark of his guru bhakti.

The astonishing fact was that while the young Narayanswarupdas was engaged in such rigorous *seva* for eight to ten months he was also a member of the Sanstha's trustee board. Decades later, when Narayanswarupdas became well known as Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he was asked about how he had reconciled doing such severe *seva* when he was also a trustee. Swamishri replied, "Doing *seva* was a matter unrelated to rank or position. There were no distinctions of being big or small. Whatever *seva* was shown, it was to be done. I have always entertained feelings of being a *sevak* from the beginning."

Till 1990 the lime-crushing equipment (*chakki*) was still existent behind the BAPS mandir in Sarangpur. It was similar to the one which Swami worked with in Atladra (bottom left photo). Swamishri was requested in Sarangpur to demonstrate how he had operated the *chakki* (above left photo). And he once again operated it at the age of 70 with the same efficiency that he had done in earlier times. Coincidentally, at that time, Devprasaddas Swami, the leading supervisor during the construction work in Atladra, was also present. Swamishri and Devprasad Swami are seen sitting on the wooden axle of the *chakki*. The scene revived a past memory of *seva* and guru bhakti!





6.8.1998, Westchester



## Joy in Simplicity

It was evening, 6 August 1998. Submitting to the requests of all, Swamishri agreed to come to the lush green Parkland Park in Westchester. Swamishri had come out into the open after one month, still recuperating from his heart bypass surgery. A simple quilt was laid on a wooden bench for Swamishri to sit. The singing of birds and the shrill sound of crickets were pervading the crisp evening air. Amidst all this Swamishri was softly singing a bhajan in chorus with the group of five sadhus, “*Dharma Kuvarni rit suni manmā dharo...*”. In spite of physical weakness and the ordinary arrangements, his spirit of joy deeply touched the hearts of all. What was the source of his joy?

Simplicity has always been his second nature. Decades earlier he had often slept on a wooden bench in Bochasan mandir despite him being the president of BAPS. In Gadhada he had slept the night on a mound of sand, in Lakhyani and Dangra on a pile of pebbles, in Rojid on a cart filled with mud, in Sarangpur on the open balcony of the assembly hall and in Sayla on a pile

of rice stalks. He has never asked for special arrangements or requirements for himself.

Once, he travelled by truck from Ahmedabad to Nayka. There, he slept at a devotee’s house on the verandah opposite a cowshed. The place was stinking, full of bedbugs, motes of plant stalks that caused sniffles and rats falling from a suspended ceiling of hessian. Yet, he slept soundly with joy.

The above photo of Swamishri sitting on a bench in Westchester represents one of the many similar incidents which reflect his spirit of joy in simplicity. ♦







1968, Gondal

## Passion for Seva

As president of BAPS and even after becoming the guru, Swamishri has always remained a *sevak* in all his works and on all occasions. He has never allowed position, authority, fame or awards to thwart him from doing any type of menial *seva*.

He has avidly participated in rolling chapatis in the kitchen and also in serving food to devotees. The former Chief Justice of Gujarat, Shri B.J. Diwan, had witnessed Swamishri spread cow dung for flooring in the traditional way.

Whether it was cleaning toilets or picking up babul sticks used by devotees for brushing teeth, Swamishri has done the lowest *seva* with joy and without any hesitation.

In 1965, Yogiji Maharaj performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the *gurukul* in Gondal. Thereafter, youth volunteers joined in the excavation work for the foundation. Pramukh Swami, then president of BAPS, picked up a shovel and container and started helping out in the excavation work. Regardless of his position and

type of *seva* he has always nourished a life-long passion to serve. ♦



Foundation work for Gurukul, 12 May 1965, Gondal

9.5.1981, Nana Rajkot



## His Relentless Vicharan

The spring sun was remorselessly beating upon the tiny village of Nana Rajkot in Saurashtra. Swamishri, seated in a bullock cart, was being welcomed by the villagers in a procession. The above photo provides a glimpse into the rigours of his monumental *vicharan*.

In the winter of 1982, Swamishri was walking with about ten tribal devotees in the village of Aambaatalaat, as part of a procession to welcome him (see bottom right). Such occasions reveal his unique character as a spiritual traveller, striving his utmost to uplift all.

Very often people ask Swamishri, “What is your address?” Swamishri answers with a smile, simply because he is always on the move, doing *vicharan*. He travels to villages and cities, farms and fields, homes and huts; sanctifying and blessing ceaselessly. He has reached out to countless people to dissolve their pains and celebrate their joys. He has always lived in the midst of society to resolve its sufferings and calamities.

Even where there have been no roads,

Swamishri has travelled out of compassion and service. His visits to the straw and mud huts of tribals in the Selvas, Panchmahal and Dang regions bear testimony to his selfless services. He has disregarded a body fever of 102°F and sanctified 122 homes in Vasad; in 20 days he had visited 90 villages in the Surat region and 95 villages in the Kanam region.

In many villages, despite the lack of basic amenities and other issues, Swamishri has





1.11.1991, Bhadra

remained undeterred and unflappable in his *vi-charan*. When he travelled in the Bhal region he remained calm and happy, but those accompanying him became frustrated and irritated. The reason being that the region challenged them like no other place: they had to put up with drinking the murky and salty waters of the village pond, the scorching sun, absence of electric lights and fans and the assault of dust particles saturating the air! To add to these travails every village carried out a procession (*nagar-yatra*) to honour Swamishri. This further created clouds of dust.

Then, invariably, a satsang assembly followed coupled with *padhramanis*. But Swamishri never complained or got agitated.

Sometimes his day turned out to be long and weary. It was *ekadashi* on 9 March 1979 and Swamishri had observed a waterless fast. He left Gariyadhar at 8:00 a.m. and travelled to Morba, Chavoliya, Kutana and finally to Velavadar. In every village he had to sit through the *nagar-yatras* and make home visits.

That same evening, Swamishri performed the *murti-partishtha* at the BAPS *hari* mandir in Mota Bhamodra, then he presided over the public assembly in Jesar till 11:30 p.m. before finally retiring for the night.

The stories of Swamishri's arduous and historic *vi-charan* in thousands of villages and towns will forever remain etched in the annals of Satsang history. However, the notable fact of it all is that Swamishri has never ever mentioned or complained about his *vi-charan*! ◆



20.2.1984, Aambaatalaat



28.12.1994, Ahmedabad



15.9.2001, Sarangpur

## Compassion and Respect for All

All through his life Swamishri has always been in the midst of devotees and well-wishers. They seek Swamishri's darshan and guidance for solace and answers to stubborn issues in life. The spectrum of people vary from the aged to children, youths to mature adults, renunciants to householders and tribals to NRIs – all seeking to be rejuvenated by his divine blessings. Swamishri receives all with compassion and respect. He believes that the struggling souls on the battlefield of life are pious pilgrims aspiring for God-realization. That is why he takes interest even in their trivial matters and provides succour.

Not only members of a single family, but countless such families going back four generations have found solace in Swamishri's presence. For the sake of others he has disregarded his needs and tolerated the adversities of time and place. Even late hours, fatigue or hunger have not hindered him from resolving the problems and disputes of devotees.

On 28 December 1994, Swamishri was on his way to his living quarters after completing

his morning puja in the Ahmedabad mandir. Jethabhai, an aged farmer-devotee of Rakanpur village, placed his hand on Swamishri's shoulder and said lovingly, "On having met you I am very happy. Now take me to Akshardham. But take care of my son and make sure that his satsang becomes strong." And then he unwittingly pressed Swamishri's left shoulder, which was paining due to a frozen shoulder. Despite this, Swamishri did not utter a word about the pain and blessed Jethabhai.

Several years later, Jethabhai's great grandson, Munir, stopped Swamishri while he was returning to his living quarters in Sarangpur mandir. Munir said something in his childish manner and asked Swamishri to bless him. Without a moment's hesitation Swamishri lovingly blessed him.

Thousands have experienced tranquility and renewed confidence in expressing themselves uninhibitedly before Swamishri. And, Swamishri patiently stops wherever he may be and listens to no matter who it is or whatever the topic may be. ♦



Swamishri sanctifies the *mala* for Ramsang Babu, 5.3.1995, Odarka

## A Drastic Transformation

**R**amsinh Vakhatsinh Gohil, a leading Kshatriya of the village of Odarka in Saurashtra, was once the hallmark of notoriety. He was popularly known as Ramsang Babu. His name evoked dread in the entire region. Even the police department feared him. Prior to India's independence the notorious Bhupat Barvatiyo sought the help of Ramsang Babu to accomplish his evil machinations. As the protagonist of a hardcore criminal gang Ramsang Babu successfully achieved whatever mission he set his eyes on. Furthermore, he had relegated his life to addictions, orgies, hunting animals and eating meat.

In 1977, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the house of Ramsang Babu in Odarka and ushered in a radical change in his life. Impressed by Swamishri's divine charisma and words of wisdom he instantly gave up his criminal ways and addictions and pledged to do the *mala* daily. He abstained from hosting liquor and other parties at his house and replaced them with satsang

assemblies. Daily, Ramsang Babu performed puja, 51 *malas*, attended satsang *sabha* and had satsang books read to him. His allegiance to satsang became so strong that he inspired it among his gang members.

Swamishri's divine influence also transformed the likes of Rishubha, Temubha and others in the region. The citizens of Saurashtra were amazed by their transformations and breathed with peace and joy.

During Ramsang Babu's last days Swamishri visited Odarka and sanctified his *mala*. Babu averred, "Now I do not require the support and refuge of anyone except yours. After having met you where is the need for me to look for God!" And thus till his last breath he kept on saying, "God resides in every pore of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, otherwise how could I have been transformed?" ♦



5.9.1989, Sankari

## Love for the Ailing and Poor

**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj had arrived in Sankari, a remote village in south Gujarat. He was scheduled to stay there for two to three days. Swamishri reminded *kothari* Prabhushwarup Swami that he wished to bless the ailing Lallu, a servant of Somabhai.

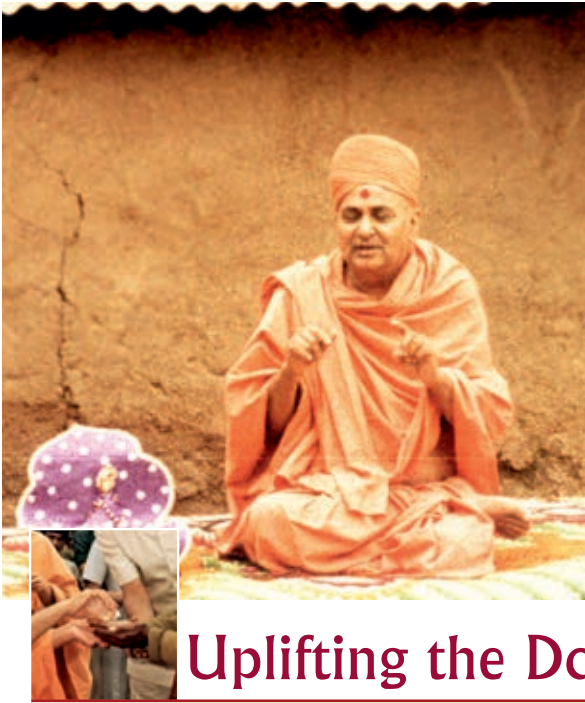
But who was Lallu and what was so special about him? Lallu belonged to a backward tribal sub-caste. He was very poor and worked as a servant for many years at Somabhai's house. Whenever Swamishri came to Sankari Lallu always came for darshan and served in whatever way he could. Swamishri always blessed him lovingly.

This morning Swamishri remembered him and expressed his wish to see him. But Swamishri's schedule for the day was very tight. A large number of devotees from the Surat district had come to meet him. In addition, devotees were waiting for him to bless the satsang assembly. After the discourse he had to meet thousands of devotees while they filed past him. In spite of all this, Swamishri took some time out and went to Somabhai's house. Youth volunteers had brought Lallu to Somabhai's house. Swamishri came to him while he was lying

awake in bed. He had become emaciated because of diabetes. Lallu could barely raise and fold his palms in respect. Swamishri placed his hand on Lallu's head and body and praised him, "Lallu, you have served Thakorji, the mandir and sadhus well. God will shower his grace upon you. Do bhajan by saying 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan'. Maharaj will liberate you and take you to Akshardham. Do not think otherwise. Remember Maharaj and be happy." Then Swamishri garlanded him. Lallu broke down and with folded palms prayed, "Bapa, Bapa." He felt his life to be worthwhile and blessed because Swamishri himself had come to bless him in his final hour.

Swamishri graced Lallu, and as he was leaving Somabhai's house Lallu heard Swamishri tell Prabhushwarup Swami, "Take care of Lallu. He has no one other than us." At that time Lallu whispered, "Swami, you have considered me to be yours. Now it matters not if I have no one else!"

A few days later, after Swamishri had left Sankari, Lallu passed away. He attained Akshardham through his *seva* and the abundant grace of Swamishri. ◆



5.2.1985, Harijan Enclave, Bhoj

## Uplifting the Downtrodden

“God harbours no distinctions of upper and lower class. Whatever differences we find in people are due to their karmas. If one’s karmas are good then one can become great. Today, we find addictions have become a part of many people’s lives here. That is why you have not been able to improve your standard of living. Even if you are of ordinary means or live in a hut, you will be respected if you have values. There are good values within you, but they need to be lived in life.”

These words of Pramukh Swami Maharaj resonated through the satsang assembly of harijans and *vankars*. Swamishri had ignored the inconveniences of travel and the lack of facilities at the harijan enclave in the remote village of Bhoj, Gujarat. The harijans had assembled outside their ramshackled huts where Swamishri addressed them with camaraderie and love. His objective was not only to inspire them but to transform their lives. When the assembly was over many came up to Swamishri and pledged to give up their addictions to liquor, bidi and tobacco.

A month after Swamishri’s departure the

festival of Dhuleti arrived. Like every year, guests from the harijan community flocked to their enclave in Bhoj to party on liquor. But they were surprised to see a small satsang assembly in progress. The men and women were reading the *Shikshapatri*. The festival was celebrated with piety and moral purity. When the guests insisted that they all drink liquor, the harijan devotees retorted, “Brothers, don’t force us. We have become disciples of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We have pledged not to drink.”

Their words rang with pride and the joy of living a moral life. By Swamishri’s grace and effort an ambience of nobler living had been established among a backward and poorer section of society. ♦





12.4.1990, Odarka

## 200 Years of Hatred Dissolved

**K**ukad and Odarka are two small villages in the Bhavnagar region of Gujarat. The feud between its people had persisted for 200 years. The issue was a boundary dispute between the two villages. The Gohil Darbars of both villages are brave and hostile people. In many past battles several of their ancestors had become martyrs. The feud had spread to 45 villages under their alliances. The enmity had climaxed to the point where each side had totally refrained from drinking water (*apaiya*) from villages belonging to the opposite group.

For years Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar, many British officials and other esteemed people had failed in their vigorous efforts to bring harmony between the two factions. But after Ramsang Bapu's transformation he felt the issue should be resolved. So, Bapu requested Swamishri that the enmity could only be resolved through his efforts and grace.

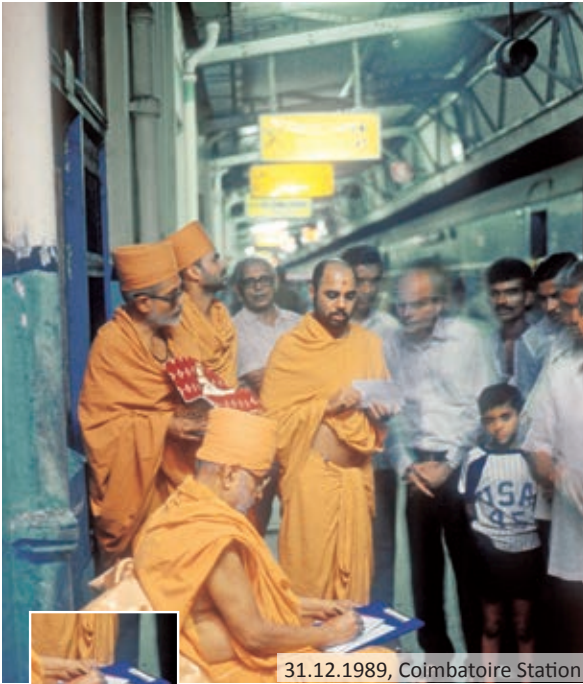
After many months of effort both factions agreed to bury the hatchet. Thereafter, Pramukh

Swami Maharaj arrived in Odarka on 12 April 1990. The day marked a new chapter in the history of the Gohilvad region. Swamishri ritually bathed the tombstones of the martyrs with *panchamrut* and the waters of all the allied villages. Then Swamishri personally gave glassfuls of drinking water sanctified by Thakorji to the Darbars of both the villages and those allied to them, and dissolved their mutual hatred.

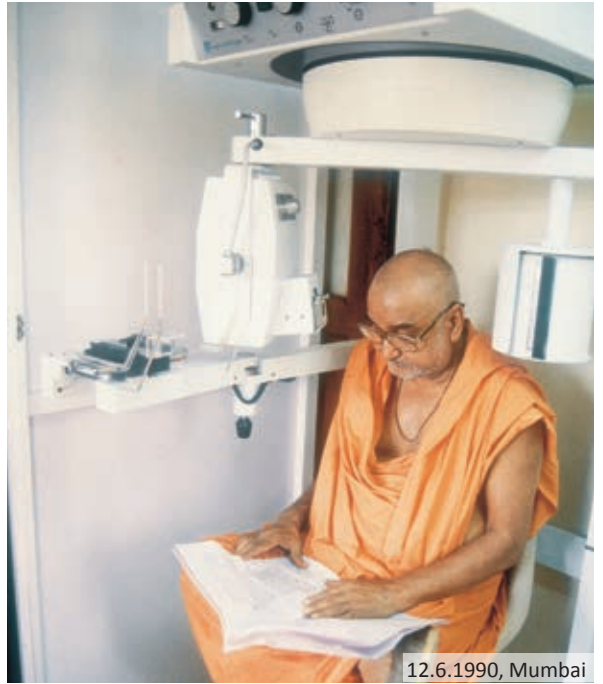
Swamishri advised to them all, "To give up hatred and hostility is humaneness. By renouncing and forgetting hostility you will attain progress. You have given up *apaiya*, but remember you have to abstain from drinking alcohol [and indulging in other addictions]!"

Today, after 25 years, tranquility still reigns in the villages of Kukad and Odarka and its allied villages. Many still opine, "Only Pramukh Swami could have done it." ♦





31.12.1989, Coimbatore Station



12.6.1990, Mumbai

## Inspiring Faith and Providing Solutions Through Letters

Through the last four decades countless letters from devotees to Swamishri have comprised of enquiries, personal conflicts, business problems and prayers. In his replies, Swamishri has provided solace and guidance. He has always spared time to answer letters from children and seniors, scholars and the semi-lettered, and devotees and others. He has also patiently attended to letters, whether they were succinct or long-winded, legible or illegible.

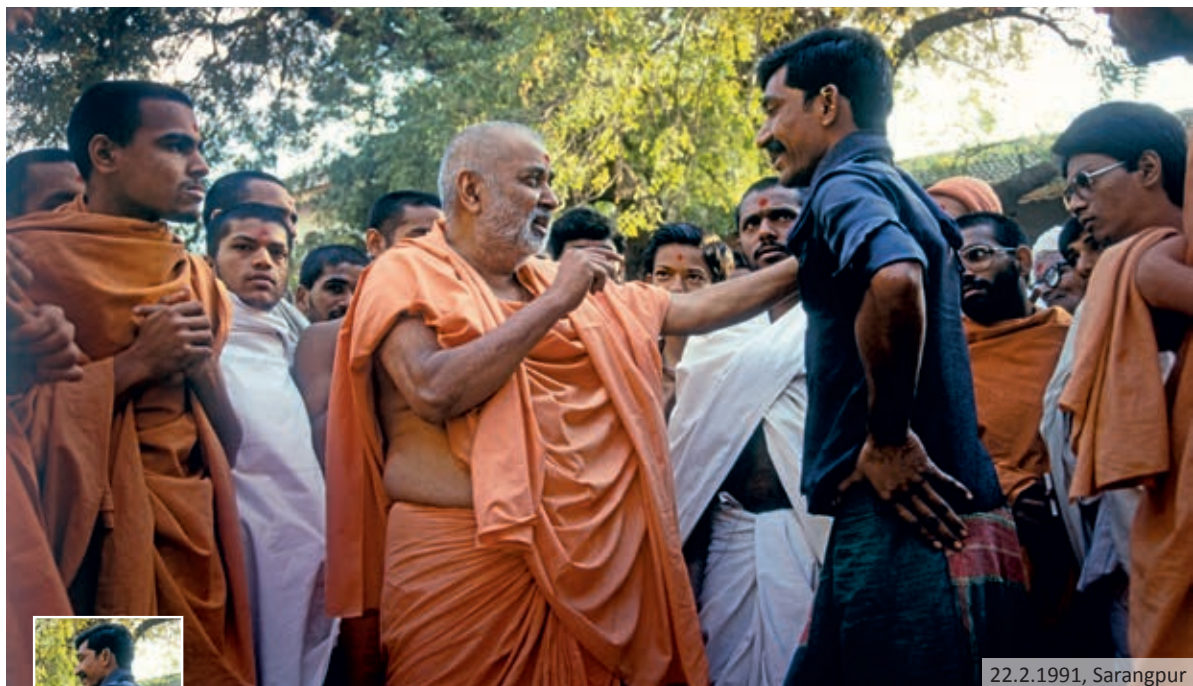
Swamishri has read and replied to letters in a variety of situations: during satsang *sabhas*, while travelling by car or train, on a railway platform, prior to his afternoon sleep, in an elevator, during a procession, and while talking on the phone. He attends to them whenever and wherever he is.

Once, the council members of Limbdi town had arranged a public function to honour Swamishri. The state finance minister and other dignitaries came on stage to present the citation.

Swamishri remained absorbed in reading a letter till the point they came near to him.

Once, Swamishri had gone to Dr Dikshit's dental clinic to get an X-ray of his painful gums. While the dentist was making the preliminary arrangements Swamishri started reading letters. When everything was ready Swamishri was asked to sit on the dental chair. He got up without raising his head, still engrossed in the letter. He continued reading it while he walked to the X-ray machine and till the moment of taking the X-ray. In all, five X-rays were taken. He resumed reading the letters during each interval.

Once, Prof. Raymond Williams asked Swamishri, "How do you decide what to write to the questions posed to you?" Swamishri replied, "I reply with the inspiration of God. I tell all to repose faith in God. Without faith and trust in God nothing is possible." ♦



22.2.1991, Sarangpur

## Ocean of Compassion

Whatever the time, whatever the circumstances, whenever Pramukh Swami Maharaj meets an addict his compassion overflows and he enthusiastically and patiently endeavours to free the addict of his vice. He never tires of trying to convince the same person to leave his addiction. Swamishri has personally counselled thousands of people and inspired them to overcome their addictions.

One morning in Sarangpur, after puja, as Swamishri was walking from the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir towards his room, he saw Hira Bharvad's grandson. The young man had joined to help in the mandir's *gaushala*. Swamishri called him, blessed him and gently asked, "Do you smoke?"

He replied, "Yes."

Swamishri insisted, "You should stop. There is no benefit in it. Does your grandfather smoke?"

"No," he replied.

"Then why do you smoke? Even at his age, he does not require to. Why do you need to?"

Swamishri's caring and loving approach ignited the youth's resolve and he agreed to stop.

\* \* \*

One afternoon Swamishri was travelling by car. As the car slowed on approaching a corner Swamishri saw a shepherd strolling along while smoking. Swamishri recognized him, "That's Popat Bharvad of Manjipura." Swamishri had the car stopped and called out to him. Popat was surprised. Who could be calling his name from a car? He ran towards the car and saw Swamishri. Swamishri put his hand on Popat's shoulder, looked him in the eyes and said, "Bhagat! Now you are a devotee. You should not smoke."

Swamishri's soothing tone touched Popat's heart and he instantly vowed never to smoke again.

Throughout his life Swamishri has cared for the well-being of even the most ordinary members of society. He makes no distinctions. ♦



8.10.1987, Gondal

## Due to Sainly Compassion, We Survived

**I**n 1987, Gujarat was in the grip of a severe drought. Cattle were dying all around. People were facing starvation. So BAPS, inspired and guided by Swamishri, began its drought relief project. Around this time, Swamishri visited a cattle camp in Ratanpur, near Rajkot, where about 5,000 drought-hit calves were being kept. Many of these young calves followed Swamishri wherever he went. The administrators informed Swamishri that for the past several days these calves have followed whoever came, since they have not had anything to eat. Swamishri was moved to tears on hearing of their sorry plight. He was speechless. After the visit, he immediately went to Gondal and instructed Jnanprasad Swami, “I couldn’t bear to see the poor, hungry calves running around behind me in Ratanpur. Please tell Yogiswarup Swami in Rajkot to send some truckloads of grass there right now.”

Thereafter, Swamishri’s every gesture reflected

his deep concern for the difficulties people and animals were facing. Often, Swamishri sat alone lost in deep thought. And from this were born the exemplary BAPS Cattle Camps, where thousands of cattle were cared for. Once, Swamishri said, “I want to make arrangements to care for a lakh (100,000) cattle. Why can’t we do that? Just look at their suffering. This is not a favour towards them, but a God-given opportunity to serve them. They have come to the feet of God.”

Due to Swamishri’s compassion, management, decisiveness and foresight, thousands of cattle were saved. The farmers declared, “Swamishri thought about our cattle. Who, except the most compassionate would do this?” ◆



22.8.1979, Morbi

## For the Good of All

In August 1979, the Machhu Dam in Morbi burst, resulting in widespread flooding. Swamishri was in Ahmedabad at the time. He was saddened on hearing news of the disaster.

On All India Radio, Swamishri broadcast an appeal to BAPS volunteers everywhere to immediately go to Morbi to help. The response was swift and overwhelming. Under Swamishri's guidance, large-scale relief work was launched. Swamishri himself left Ahmedabad in the early morning to reach Morbi.

Speedily, Swamishri surveyed the situation by visiting the mud-filled homes and streets. His first decision was to set up a relief kitchen. He comforted the unfortunate victims. He sanctified the waters of Machhu River with Thakorji and prayed, "May all who have lost their lives be liberated and may the town quickly regain its vitality." Swamishri organized an efficient system to manage the relief work. Seeing Swamishri's rapid action in response to the flood, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Babubhai Patel, and many

others, voiced, "With the help of Pramukh Swami Maharaj Morbi again became a habitable place. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's volunteers selflessly cleaned others' homes and raised their spirits."

While in Morbi, Swamishri pondered, "How will the Muslims of the town be able to celebrate their Eid festival tomorrow?" He called the Muslim leaders and invited all Muslims to dine at the BAPS relief kitchen.

The next day, over 5,000 Muslims were treated to a celebratory meal including sweets and savoury items.

Swamishri's gesture touched everyone and demonstrated that he was a spiritual luminary beyond all differences. ♦



30.10.1990, London

## Middle of the Night Prayers

Gujarat was again facing a devastating famine. Swamishri had commenced large-scale relief work and cattle camps to cater for the affected people and cattle. The cattle camps operated for a year. During this time, in 1990, Swamishri visited England for some necessary mandir work.

One night, at about 2:30 a.m., Swamishri's attendant sadhu suddenly woke up. In the dim night, he could see Swamishri sitting up on his bed. A closer look revealed that Swamishri had folded his hands and closed his eyes in prayer. For half-an-hour, the attendant sadhu observed Swamishri. When Swamishri's eyes opened, the sadhu asked, "What were you praying for?"

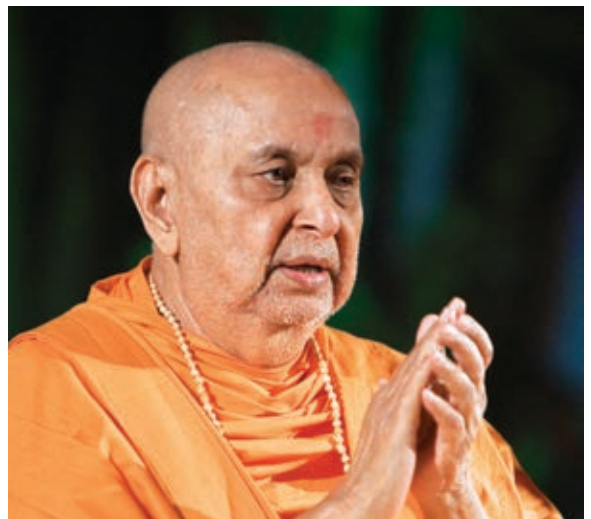
Swamishri replied, "There is a severe drought in India and people are struggling without water. I was praying for the rains so that all people and animals have enough water."

The sadhu enquired further, "How often have you prayed for this?" But Swamishri remained silent. The attendant politely and repeatedly asked the question. Eventually, Swamishri revealed,

"Many times I pray at night. During the day many people present their questions and problems to me, so I pray for them."

The attendant sadhu was deeply touched by Swamishri's night-time prayers for others.

The above photo was captured by Yogicharan Swami without Swamishri's knowledge as he sat in prayer in the middle of the night. ♦





## Pillar of Moral and Spiritual Obedience

In 2000, the United Nations had for the first time gathered 1,800 spiritual leaders from 54 countries for the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. Of these, only 53 spiritual leaders had been selected to address the Summit. And Swamishri had been invited to bless the inaugural session in the main UN assembly hall.

However, Swamishri firmly follows the vows of male-female discipline for sadhus established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan wherever he goes. He

does not compromise on this foundational *niyam* ordained by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. So, only when the organizers had assured that appropriate arrangements would be made did Swamishri agree to address the UN Summit.

On his arrival, Swamishri was respectfully received by the organizers. Before entering the main assembly hall, he enquired to ensure that the arrangements were in accordance with the vows given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Only then did he take his seat. Swamishri's blessings



28.8.2000, UN, New York

were in Gujarati, which were instantly translated into English, French, Russian, German, Chinese and Spanish for the benefit of everyone. The audience was attentive and appreciated Swamishri's unique formula for world peace. They applauded Swamishri till he returned to his seat. Swamishri's purity touched UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, CNN Chairman Ted Turner and the spiritual leaders. Some of the Hindu spiritual leaders proclaimed, "You have upheld the nobility and honour of Hindu Dharma."

Despite such great acclaim from others, Swamishri's only satisfaction was in being able to obey the vows of a sadhu as instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Someone asked, "What if arrangements had not been made to uphold the vows?"

Swamishri swiftly replied, "We would not have attended."

For Swamishri, preserving the injunctions of Bhagwan Swaminarayan are more important than being honoured by the UN. That is why he has remained a life-long pillar of moral and spiritual obedience. ♦





8.11.2000, Akshardham *shilanyas*, New Delhi



## Joy in Guru Bhakti

On 8 November 2000, the auspicious *shilanyas* ceremony for the grand Swaminarayan Akshardham complex on the banks of River Yamuna in India’s capital, New Delhi, was arranged.

At 11:05 a.m., at the appointed auspicious time, Swamishri placed the *nidhi kumbh* in the foundations, amid joyous Vedic chants. At 80 years, Swamishri was so overjoyed that he risked losing balance as he ignored his own health limitations and bent low to assist the volunteers in lifting and placing the heavy *kurma shila*.

Swamishri’s jubilant demeanour was obvious to all. As he gazed unblinkingly at Thakorji, his satisfaction was clearly visible.

Highlighting this, Mahant Swami noted in his speech, “Today, everyone seated here is happy and so is Swamishri. But there is a difference between the two. Swamishri’s joy is derived from his guru bhakti. He is happy that this will lead to the fulfilment of guru Yogiji Maharaj’s wish. Swamishri does not believe that he is doing this work, but his guru is doing everything. Swamishri is merely

the instrument through whom God is working.”

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “Whoever comes here will attain liberation.” Hearing these words, everyone was convinced that only one who desires the liberation of all is a suitable medium through whom God can remain forever; and only he can accomplish such great works. ♦







15.1.2005, Mumbai

2004, London

## Motherly Love to Children

The assembly hall at the BAPS Mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, was packed to capacity. The *balaks* were about to present their Parents' Day programme on the performing stage. Earlier, the *sanchalaks* had requested Swamishri to take his seat at 6:30 p.m. He had agreed to do so. The young *balaks* had prepared thoroughly and were eagerly looking forward to performing before Swamishri. However, an urgent unscheduled meeting had to be held, preventing Swamishri from attending on time. The *balaks* yearned for Swamishri's presence. And, how could mellow-hearted Swamishri refuse the loving invitation of the *balaks*. So, he curtailed the meeting and quickly arrived in the assembly.

The children were being treated to a magic show, but they were more interested in Swamishri. On seeing him, the children exploded with delight. They presented their well-rehearsed drama, and dances, and engaged directly with Swamishri in a momentous dialogue.

Finally, a *balak* named Kunal embraced

Swamishri on stage and said, "Thank you Bapa! You came!" Everyone was spellbound by this incredible sight. Tears of joy rolled from their eyes. Swamishri's eyes, too, were moist with delight.

\* \* \*

Often the question arises: what is it about Swamishri that young children are drawn to him like metals to magnet? On seeing Swamishri, the *balaks* erupt with joy.

Thousands of children of the BAPS Children's Wing worldwide have experienced Swamishri's selfless love. Swamishri's heart is forever open to them all.

For decades, Swamishri's routine was such that during his meals, he would sometimes engage in discussions with children and youths. They would receive inspiration and guidance. Seeing the freestyle interaction between Swamishri and the children convinces one that he holds no barriers or distinctions. There is no generation gap, for they all experience his genuine, selfless motherly love. ◆



## Shower of Inner Feelings

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**I**t was the last day of the 31-day Yogiji Maharaj Centenary and Gandhinagar Akshardham Inauguration celebrations in 1992.

On the Swaminarayan Nagar festival site, the 17,000 dedicated volunteers were seated.

Their months of selfless efforts had made the entire celebrations possible and Swamishri wanted to express his heartfelt gratitude for their voluntary service.

The assembly featured many emotional recollections of the celebrations, *samuh arti* and *pushpanjali*. Finally, Swamishri rose to bless the volunteers, “You have all performed extraordinary service, which cannot even be described. Even if

I perform hundreds of thousands of prostrations to you all it would not be enough. Please forgive me if you have had to face any difficulties. You have all offered *pushpanjali* to me, but I also want to offer *pushpanjali* to you all.”

With this, Swamishri took a big rose garland and as he held it up to honour the volunteers, he became emotional. All the volunteers and sadhus seated were also overcome with emotion. There was silence. This respectful silence between guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his *shishyas* pierced the hearts of all. It was a memorable moment that was etched in the hearts of all.

\* \* \*



3.12.1992, Gandhinagar



June 1994, New York

In times of droughts, floods, earthquakes and other disasters, many are amazed at how at a single call from Swamishri thousands of youths volunteer to serve. These free-spirited, independent and often temperamental youths embrace selfless service and spirituality. At the root of this willingness to serve is Swamishri's genuine love for them.

In New York, a youth came to meet Swamishri. He declared that he was frustrated and fed up with life and to add thrill he had started taking drugs. Swamishri affectionately comforted him, "You are totally healthy, yet others have taken you down the wrong path."

"But Swami, I'm bored," the youth sighed deeply.

"Bored! What are you bored about?"

Swamishri began to enquire deeper. "You have a healthy body and you are young; so what is there to be bored about? You can overcome any situation. Engage in devotion. You will experience the joy of Akshardham."

As Swamishri spoke, the youth's mental turmoil resolved, boredom vanished and he became charged with renewed zeal.

Swamishri's personality is such that he can connect and the generation gap between him and the youths is reduced to zero. That is why, even dispirited and drifting youths discover new energy and optimism in his presence. They are revitalized to pursue the higher ideals of life. ♦



5.4.2001, Gandhinagar

## He Promotes Others

In 2001, (former) president of America Bill Clinton was descending the steps of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, when he suddenly revealed his experience of Swamishri, “You know something, ever since I met him in Miami, I was moved. When I look into his eyes, they are filled with integrity.”

After coming down the stairs Mr Clinton sat on a sofa to put on his shoes. Swamishri was standing nearby. With the mercury touching 41 °C a light white cloth was held as a canopy to shield them from the sunlight. Mr Clinton continued to chime the glory of Swamishri, “See, there are too many leaders, religious groups and people in this world who believe that by pulling others down, you can bring yourself up. And by discounting others, isolating or segregating them... but (pointing to Swamishri) he is different! Swamiji connects. He connects with others and everyone around him. He works through connectivity. That is why he has been able to bring peace and harmony and so many people together.”

The former president added further, “The first time Pramukh Swami met me in Miami, I saw in his eyes that he is a man who has not come ahead by eclipsing others. He has come forward by always placing others before him. And that is why I had a deep desire to meet him again.” And so saying Mr Clinton looked respectfully at Swamishri and gestured with his hand to sit on the sofa.

He continued, “In order to embrace what they believe they have to reject other people and their convictions. And he [Swamishri] is the person I have met who is trying to go beyond all that.”

In just one meeting Bill Clinton was overwhelmed by the depth of Swamishri’s profoundly peaceful and deeply spiritual personality. ◆

## Godly Sadhu



6.11.2005, Delhi

Just a few moments earlier, the grand inauguration ceremony for Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi had concluded. The event had been graced by the President of India, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and many other dignitaries. Everyone was overawed by the occasion and the divine personality of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the inspirer. It was a memorable day in India's cultural history. As he descended the steps of Akshardham Mandir, President Kalam offered a supporting hand to Swamishri and began to describe his experience, "Ever since I stepped foot in Akshardham I have constantly had a question in my mind that how is it possible to do this divine work in just five years by engaging thousands of people. And from within I found the answer: Bhagwan Swaminarayan has fully entered your *atma* and from there the whole of Akshardham has been created, spontaneously."

Swamishri said, "It is God who does the work by working through others."

President Kalam said, "You are a wellspring of spirituality. You have such divine power that seeing this work, I feel that anything is possible in this world."

Swamishri said, "I pray to God that through the divine energy in you, you accomplish great works for the country."

President Kalam was overjoyed to experience the divinity of Akshardham and Swamishri. ◆



5.12.1995, Mumbai

## Pure Faith in God

**B**orn to an Indian father and American mother, Ronald Patel had established himself as a distinguished Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. He was highly respected as the Sunday Editor of the *Philadelphia Enquirer*.

In 1991, when amid much personal reservation and reluctance, he met Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Edison, New Jersey, for the first time, Swamishri's divine love at once overwhelmed him.

Then, in 1992, at Swamishri's request, he undertook his first visit to India, where he further experienced Swamishri's fatherly love. The story of how Swamishri connected Ron with his native village in Gujarat is long and intriguing. But, this had established an unbreakable bond between Ron and Swamishri. To express his experience and feelings, Ron published a special supplement in America. Then, in 1995, he again visited India for Swamishri's darshan. Again, Swamishri's selfless love further convinced him of Swamishri's divine spiritual nature.

In 1998, after Swamishri had undergone heart

bypass surgery, Ron conveyed his best wishes to Swamishri that he live for a hundred years. He wrote, "In your eyes I experience the love of my father and mother. You are the person most dear to me."

On 13 September 1998, in New Jersey, Ron interviewed Swamishri for 30 minutes. He posed many questions, but Swamishri's replies echoed with just one constant theme: that God is the all-doer and whatever he does is for our good.

Such was Swamishri's conviction in this belief, that during the interview, Ron was simply overwhelmed. He declared, "In my entire life, I have never seen such firm faith in a person. As a journalist I have asked many awkward questions to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, but the overriding message of his answers is that his soul is pure. I have interviewed so many people, but what I have seen in Swamishri I have never ever seen in others. That is, his pure faith in God." ♦



6.9.1998, Westchester

## A Heart Surgeon's Unique Experience

On 6 September 1998, Swamishri made his first public appearance following his heart bypass surgery. A special felicitation assembly had been arranged at Westchester County Hall to honour the doctors and others who had served Swamishri. Among them was the renowned cardiac surgeon, Dr V. Subramaniam. As his name was announced for him to address the assembly, the audience greeted him with extensive applause. Dr V. Subramaniam got up from his seat. He approached Swamishri with folded hands and then prostrated to him on stage, in full view of the audience. Dressed in a crisp suit and tie, the renowned surgeon bowed at Swamishri's feet. Nobody had expected this; everyone in the hall and on stage was taken by surprise. Swamishri blessed Dr Subramaniam and presented him with an *amrut kalash*.

Then Dr. Subramaniam spoke, "On 7 July 1998 at Lenox Hill Hospital, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived, I felt that Bhagwan Swaminarayan has descended into my operating

theatre. After his bypass surgery, when I daily went to meet him I felt that I was going for the darshan of God. Going to him every day, I felt I was being purified."

Regarded as an atheist and one who merely believes in doing one's karma, the words of this industrious cardiac surgeon left everyone stunned.

Then, on 20 December 2000, in an interview on Zee TV international channel, Dr Subramaniam was asked, "You have performed over 20,000 heart operations. During this time, have you had any extraordinary experience?"

He replied, "Once, I was operating in Lenox Hill Hospital on Pramukh Swamiji of the BAPS Sanstha. When I held his heart in my hand I had a unique experience. I felt as if some divinity had pervaded the entire operation theatre. I had never felt that in the other 20,000 operations, but only when I held Swamiji's heart." ♦



7.4.1981, Ahmedabad

## Ultimate Experience of Sainthood

In 1981, under the guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the BAPS had organized the 37-day Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Ahmedabad. During this festival, sadhus of all denominations from all parts of India were invited for a special four-day conference.

Thousands of sadhus, *mandaleshwars* and *dharmacharyas* attended.

The celebrations took place on a 200-acre site in Ahmedabad, specially transformed into a spiritual township called 'Swaminarayan Nagar'.

Everyone was impressed by the arrangements, but most of all, everyone was touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's matchless simplicity, sainthood and humility.

President of the Akhil Bharat Sadhu Samaj, Swami Ramswarup Shastriji, opined, "In Pramukh Swami's company, I experience something entirely different. He is simple, humble and straightforward. This is the first requirement of a sadhu. Through his own life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj

is inspiring such humility. In this dark age of Kaliyug, he is a personality who preserves the dignity of the Sadhu Samaj. If anyone can inspire purity in the world, it is Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

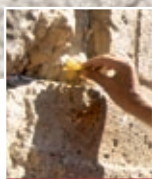
On this occasion, the secretary of the Sadhu Samaj Mahamandaleshwar Shri Harinarayanandji suggested that a female national leader be invited to the conference. To this, Swamishri humbly clarified, "You may do so but, as per the command of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, I will not be able to attend, so please excuse me."

Appreciating Swamishri's firm observance of *nishkam* dharma, Harinarayanandji declared in his speech, "I have observed Pramukh Swamiji from close quarters. He has no ego, no hypocrisy, no arrogance. He has full realization of his *atma*. He is divine. He does not harbour desire for worldly fame or wealth. Pramukh Swami is the living form of that which is described in the Vedas. Pramukh Swami has placed Hindu dharma's ancient traditions on the highest pedestal." ◆





3.9.1999, Wailing Wall



## May God Do Good for All

Swamishri was in Israel, the birthplace of Christianity and Judaism. It is also a holy place for Islam. Swamishri expressed his wish to visit the holy places of these faiths.

On the morning of 3 September 1999, Swamishri went to Bethlehem to the birthplace of Jesus. With the aid of his attendant sadhus, Swamishri bent low to enter the birthplace by descending a few steps. He sat on a stone seat. The spot where Mary had given birth to Jesus was signified by a 14-point star. Swamishri had Thakorji placed there and with intense focus prayed for interfaith harmony and world peace.

Swamishri also visited the Wailing Wall, one of the most holy places of the Jewish faith. Swamishri was seated in a wheelchair, which he had moved up close to the wall. Located in the Old City of Jerusalem, for centuries, the Jewish faithful have come to the wall to pray. They write their prayers on a piece of paper and slot it in a crevice anywhere on the wall.

Here, Swamishri first led the recital of the



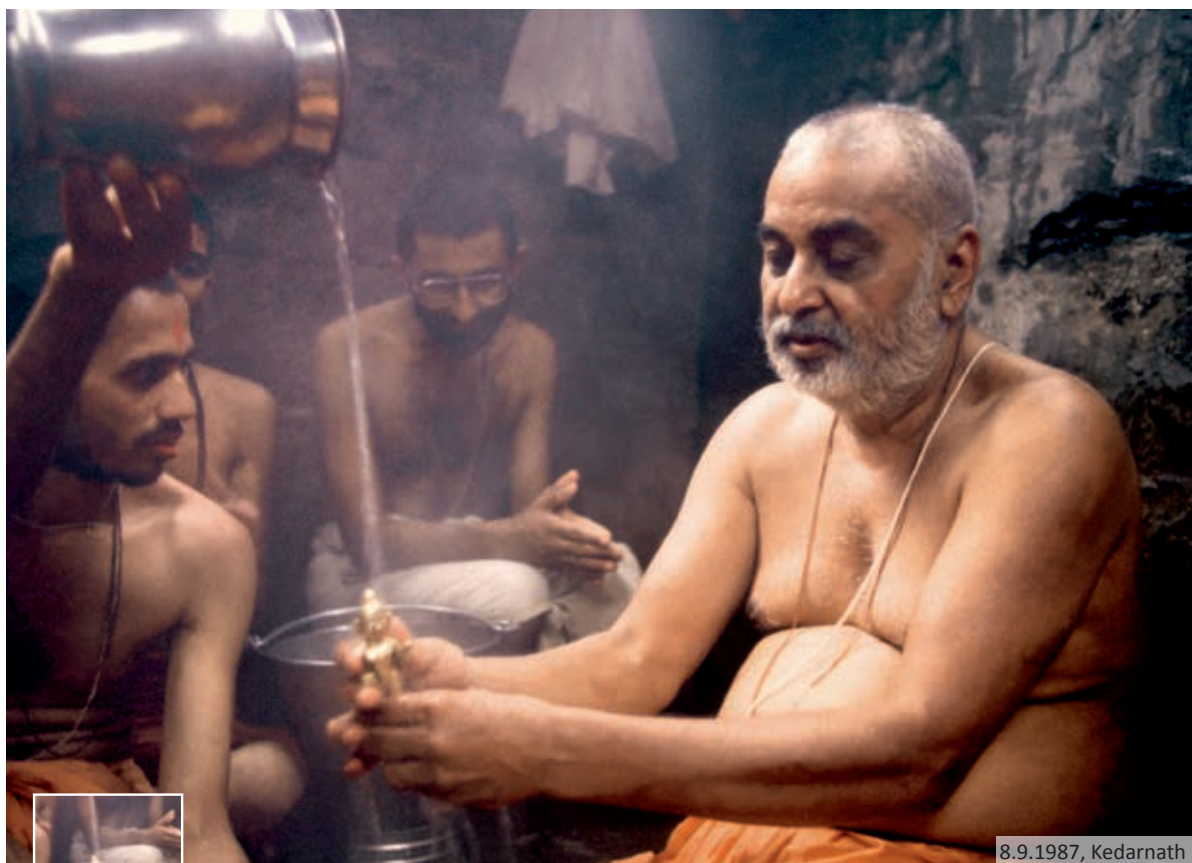
Shanti Path (Vedic prayer for world peace). Then, he placed two sanctified flowers in a crevice on the wall and chanted the *dhun*.

Later that afternoon, the sadhus asked Swamishri why he had placed flowers. Swamishri explained, “One, so that the prayers everyone have said in the past are fulfilled.”

“And the reason for the second flower,” the sadhus asked.

“So that the pure prayers of all who come in the future are fulfilled.”

Everyone was humbled by Swamishri’s profound respect for the pilgrim places of other faiths. ◆



## God Is More Important

The fatigue was evident on the faces of over 350 sadhus and devotees returning after the arduous 17-km pilgrimage by foot to Kedarnath at a height of 12,000 ft. Amid the biting cold, to help them relax and refresh their aching bodies, they began to bathe in the natural hot water well – Gaurikund.

Despite the reluctance of his doctors, Swamishri had also undertaken this pilgrimage. Soon, he, too, arrived at Gaurikund. His attendants had made preparations for him to bathe. Before entering the *kund*, Swamishri instructed, “Bring Harikrishna Maharaj. He will also be tired from the pilgrimage. First, we will bathe him.”

For 20 minutes, Swamishri patiently and devoutly bathed and massaged the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, with the belief that he was

bathing a living person. Swamishri ignored his own fatigue.

Everyone paid respect to Swamishri’s profound devotion to the Lord. ♦





20.8.1991, Raritan Center, Edison

## Scales of Devotion

In 1991, the grand 31-day Cultural Festival of India was in progress in Edison, New Jersey. As part of the celebrations, the devotees of North America had arranged a special *tula* to honour Swamishri at the Raritan Center in Edison. The moment Swamishri entered the hall, he called Ishwarcharan Swami and asked, “Have you brought a *murti* of Yogiji Maharaj? Bring one right now.” Where could a *murti* of Yogiji Maharaj be found instantly? What does Swamishri want it for? Nobody knew.

Swamishri waited patiently for the *murti*. Soon, a framed *murti* of Yogiji Maharaj was presented to Swamishri. He was delighted. But the reason he had asked for the *murti* only became clear when Swamishri sat on the scales for the *tula* ceremony. Together with Harikrishna Maharaj,

Swamishri held the *murti* of guru Yogiji Maharaj and sat humbly on the scales. That Swamishri’s service and devotion to God and guru flow naturally from his heart was clearly evident to all. ♦



# A Thousand Stars on the Badge

*The story of how the BAPS Satsang was established in London and then flourished to produce a premier shikharbaddh mandir in 1995*



On 1 July 2012, Spain created history. It was a clear night at the Olympic Stadium in Kiev, where they defeated Italy to become the undisputed football champions of Europe. Even Andrea Pirlo, whose performance throughout the tournament sent several countries packing, was unable to produce magic. It seemed that the former Juventus midfield maestro had forgotten his wand in the dressing room. The only tricks that night came from the Spaniards in the form of clinical passes, through-balls and slick one-two's.

If there was even a sliver of hope for the Italians, it was soon gone. An injury forced them

to play a man short for the better part of the second-half. Ten men and tired legs were no match for the Spanish Armada.

For Spain, this trophy was a major triumph. It marked their hat-trick of victories, as they had already won the previous European competition in 2008 and the World Cup in 2010. Winning three major tournaments back-to-back is a feat unrivalled in the world of football. That's why many dubbed that Spanish side the greatest football team ever. Though such an accolade is debatable, never had a side looked so strong since Pele and Jairzinho last stepped onto the pitch for Brazil in the 1970s.



passing and dribbling skills.

Secondly, Spain have had to make a big sacrifice – forego immediate results for long-term success. They could’ve ploughed the money into building state-of-the-art stadiums or luring even more of the best foreign players to La Liga (the top Spanish football league), but they didn’t. To their delight, the investment in training academies paid off. No less than six of the players who lifted the trophy in 2010 and 2012, were products of youth training academies.

There it is. We’ve just seen how hard work and sacrifice managed to turn an underperforming team into one of the best of all time. These same principles also managed to put a little-known borough of London onto the global tourist map.

### SHRIJI MAHARAJ IN LONDON

London in 1950 was not a great place to live. It had been five years since WWII ended and yet the damage of the German blitz was still being felt. Millions of homes lay in ruin. High-rise flats were propping up to provide shelter for the homeless. Coal fires were burning to combat the biting cold. This only added to the darkness of the times as clouds of thick, black smoke rose from chimney-tops across the city. The few scattered Indians who lived here, had yet another woe – food. Indian groceries, grains and pulses were hard to come by. Travelling from shop to shop, they would find nothing, often having to make do with plain bread and butter – sometimes for months on end. Add to that the sense of alienation in a foreign land and one can begin to gauge the daily grind they had to endure.

It was around that time, with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, that a handful of devotees began meeting and conducting satsang assemblies. Then, in 1953, Yogiji Maharaj had blessed Dahyabhai Meghani, “Go to London, we want to spread satsang there.” Dahyabhai went to London and on his arrival he met a handful of devotees. In just a short time, his humble office became the



Yogiji Maharaj in London, 1970

focal point of satsang activity. It continued this way for many years.

When we think of London, pictures of a cosmopolitan capital, a global financial centre and the iconic Big Ben spring to mind. Few would equate this historic city as one of any major religious significance, in the way Jerusalem is sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. Yet somehow London’s religious footprint was about to change forever.

Yogiji Maharaj had a vision for London – one that no one else could have imagined. When he visited Africa in 1970, the London devotees invited him to grace their city. He agreed. But, on one condition – that they find a suitable place for a mandir. The devotees were stumped. There simply weren’t enough devotees to fill a mandir, and that aside, they had meagre financial power to buy a

BAPS hari mandir in Neasden





First BAPS mandir in Islington, London

place to make into a mandir. However, little did they know that only a few years earlier while looking at a map of London, Yogiji Maharaj had made a pencil mark on a spot where a place would be acquired for the mandir. And that's exactly where it was found. Islington, North London was the new address for the Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, the name then adopted by the British arm of BAPS.

Amidst great delight and fanfare, Yogiji Maharaj arrived in London on 23 May 1970. Two days later, during his blessings he revealed, "This city is sacred because Shriji Maharaj has showered his grace upon it. The [British] collectors of the Nadiad and Kheda districts had met Maharaj. When the Governor [Sir John Malcom] died in London, Maharaj came in a divine form to redeem him." The next day, Yogiji Maharaj added, "In the future a huge mandir will be made

here... this is a blessing from Shriji Maharaj."

Shriji Maharaj had given the blessings; Yogiji Maharaj had planted the seed; Pramukh Swami Maharaj would give shape to the vision. On 14 June 1972, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in the village of Piplana, near Junagadh. While bathing, he prophesized, "May there be a *shikharbaddh*<sup>1</sup> mandir in London and may one hundred sadhus grace the image installation ceremony."

### NEO-MEDIEVAL CELEBRATION OF FAITH

True to Yogiji Maharaj's foresight, the Islington mandir soon became too small to accommodate the growing number of devotees. In 1980, a *hari* mandir was built in Neasden, though at the same time plans for a *shikharbaddh* mandir were always on the agenda. A ray of light shined through in 1984, when a large plot of land was acquired in Harrow. The 4.5 acre site would have been a perfect location for the *shikharbaddh* mandir, until a major bottleneck – the Department of Environment – refused to grant planning permission. A hard-fought, two-year campaign resulted in defeat. Many lost hope, but Swamishri continued to believe.

The devotees would have to carry that disappointing memory for another six years, until 1990, when a 'For Sale' sign appeared on the site of an old warehouse, literally across the road from the

1. A *shikharbaddh* mandir is a mandir that has tall pinnacles, one above each shrine housing the *murti* of God. Usually, most mandirs have three such *shikhars*. The London mandir has seven shrines and therefore seven *shikhars*.



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* in Neasden, 1982



Swamishri and senior sadhus perform the *shilanyas* rituals in 1991

existing mandir. On Swamishri's instruction the land was purchased. The search for a suitable site, which had encompassed twenty-three different locations, had finally come to an end. On 7 July 1991, Swamishri laid the first foundation stone for a *shikharbaddh* mandir – the largest outside of India. That stone marked the beginning of an eventful chapter in the saga of London mandir.

### A JOURNEY OF TEN THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STONE

What would normally have been a routine decision turned out to be quite difficult: selecting the right stone for the proposed mandir. In India, where most *shikharbaddh* Hindu mandirs are built, the usual choice is marble or sandstone. But Britain is thousands of miles away from India, and its climate is as predictable as picking the winning lottery numbers. It is said that in Britain you can experience all four seasons during the course of one day – that's why sometimes you never know whether to leave your house with an umbrella or a bottle of sun-screen!

To meet this challenge, engineers and architects scoured scores of European and Indian quarries, trying to find the right stone. They carried out

extensive tests and eventually agreed on Bulgarian limestone for the exterior and a combination of Italian and Indian marble for the interior. Since the stone was not too far from England, some thought that it would incur fewer transport costs, reduced time delays and less chance of damage. Wrong. In fact each block of stone first had to be shipped to India for carving, then re-packed to avoid damage and finally shipped back to England: a journey totalling some ten thousand miles.

More than 1,500 skilled craftsmen, with hammer and chisel in hand, chipped away at the stone, bringing it to life. The task wasn't easy. It sometimes took four craftsmen up to sixty days to complete just one pillar.

Artisans and volunteers







Construction of *shikharbaddh* mandir in London

### MADE IN INDIA, BUILT IN ENGLAND

The mandir's location is somewhat idiosyncratic. Surrounded by decaying tower blocks, terraced housing, empty warehouses and a car rental service, the only neighbour of any fame is the home of English football, Wembley Stadium. Walk five minutes from the mandir and you come across a giant, blue and yellow crinkly shed, the Swedish furniture store IKEA. Anything bought from there comes flat-packed, ready for you to assemble at home. Even if you can't tell the difference between a flat-blade screwdriver and a Phillips-head, no need to worry – the box comes with detailed instructions and step-by-step diagrams.

Assembling a piece of furniture is one thing, but putting together a giant 9,000-tonne jigsaw puzzle

with 26,300 pieces to arrange – some weighing up to 5½ tonnes – is no easy task. While building your new furniture, if you can't find the right piece, you might look back in the box or under the sofa and you'd probably find it. But with the mandir, 'looking back in the box' means someone in India rummaging through any one of the 14 workshops. Even if you found the right piece, you would be facing a costly one-and-a-half month delay before it arrived. Thankfully, due to Swamishri's grace and leadership, no such glitches occurred.

On the mandir construction site the majority of the labour work fell on the shoulders of dedicated volunteers. They would arrive from Leicester and other northern cities by the bus-load. Sometimes they would be told to come back the next week because there were simply too many volunteers already in *seva*. Some even travelled thousands of miles, from Africa or the USA, to take part in this unique *seva*. In total, a force of 3,000 volunteers would unite to make Swamishri's dream come true.

They were ready for any task thrown at them, be it unloading containers, sorting stones, operating forklifts, electrical wiring, plumbing, landscaping, etc. Some 100 volunteers had given up their jobs or taken a year out from studies so that





Swamishri ritually opens the mandir in 1995

they could offer their *seva* full-time. A further 1,000 part-time volunteers would leave work or school, come straight to the mandir site, fit in a graveyard shift and return home the next morning only for a quick shower and puja. Then they'd do it all over again.

### SCROLLS OF SACRIFICE

Among the faithful, many were rebuilding their lives for a second time. Originally, they had emigrated to Uganda, believing it would offer the prospect of a better life. However, a dictator gone awry ordered the expulsion of all Indians, virtually overnight. Their dream had vanished – and along with it, their homes, cars, pressure-cookers, money in the bank and even the bundles of notes hidden under the mattress for safe-keeping. From their homes, the wooden cupboards were taken with the clothes still hanging, freshly ironed, merely waiting to be worn. The only clothes they could keep now were those they were wearing.

Given this history and that in the nineties Britain was suffering from its longest recession since the Great Depression, the willingness with which devotees donated thousands of their hard-earned pounds is a testament to their sacrifice and love for their guru. Many sold their shops

or investments at a loss, simply so that they could contribute toward the mandir project. Swamishri, concerned for their future, tried to convince them otherwise. But they assured Swamishri that they'd be able to subsist.

The sacrifices were huge. Children gave up things they liked the most – chocolates, new clothes and computer games. Young kids broke their piggy-banks while women donated their cherished jewellery. Newly-weds cancelled their honeymoon plans and channelled the money into the mandir. Many chose to walk instead of taking the bus or train – giving the savings to the mandir project. Retired devotees turned back the clock and left the comfort of their home by temporarily

Kids contributed in collecting empty cans





Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha* rituals, 1995

becoming newspaper ‘boys’. Those already at work took on extra part-time jobs, sometimes working through the night. Together, these funds made a notable difference.

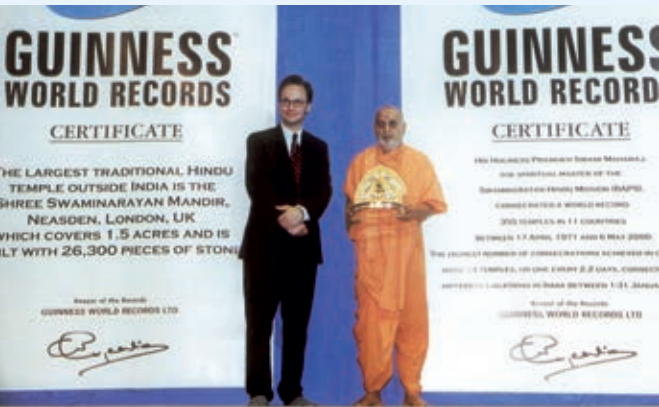
One unusual, but significant source of funding came straight from the rubbish bin – aluminium cans. In conjunction with Alcan Recycling Company, the devotees conducted the largest can collection project ever in Britain. But it came at a cost. Kids were bullied for rummaging through bins. They’d be laughed at and have empty cans thrown at them. At a football match, one young volunteer received more than just a can – a rowdy fan went as far as emptying his can of beer over the helpless child’s head. Elderly devotees

would spend many hours collecting cans from the streets. Occasionally, at the day’s end, tired and eager to return home, they wouldn’t be allowed to board the bus because of the rubbish bags full of cans and the stench the bags carried with them.

Despite the countless sacrifices, there were still a few who harboured doubts of whether the project would be completed in time. In an anxious meeting held only seven months prior to the completion date, there was more than one long face at the table. After all, twenty-seven months was an awfully short time in which to build something of this magnitude. Moreover, despite the immense sacrifices, there was a dearth of funds. But Swamishri was confident that his devotees would deliver. In the meeting he was silent from beginning to end, while all those sitting around him descended into a state of denial. Then, suddenly, Swamishri boldly announced, “Don’t you know, my devotees are ready to go to market and sell themselves for the mandir!” They had already sold everything they had; they themselves were the only thing left to be sold.

And they did just that. The culmination of 27 months of hard work and over a decade-and-a-half of planning came to an end on 20 August 1995. For this was the day the *murtis* of

Guinness World Records for BAPS Mandir, Neasden



Akshar-Purushottam would take up a new permanent residence in London.

The bells rang loud in triumph during the image installation ceremony. Exactly one hundred sadhus graced the occasion.

The unique, brilliant-white mandir was heaven-sent. The carvings deep, reflecting how the devotees had sacrificed themselves for the project. The stones locked together, strong to last a thousand years, like the bonds of unity. The marble steps, signified how the devotees climbed spiritually closer to God. And the *shikhars*, towering high above the North London sky, sent a message of the devotees' firm faith.

Deeply touched, Swamishri commended on the day of inauguration, "The *seva* you all have performed so devoutly and with heart-warming love, with no concern for the time of day, fatigue nor health, is just indescribable. A thousand pranams! A thousand congratulations!"

### STARS ON THE BADGE

Spain may have produced the finest football team in the world today. They have three major wins that future generations of Spaniards can be proud of. But, in the grand scheme of things, they are yards behind the best. Brazil, the most successful footballing nation ever, have five stars on their badge – symbolizing their five World Cup victories. Italy and Germany come next with four stars on their badge. Spain, like England, only have one.

(Contd. from pg. 7)

Muktanand Swami and others were pleased to hear Maharaj's revelation. Then he asked Shri Hari, "Swami has been in my *mandal* for quite some time and he serves me well, yet I was not aware of his greatness to this extent. You have done well to have declared his glory today. Till now I had perceived him to be a *sevak* and thus engaged him in doing *seva*."

The next day Muktanand Swami was having lunch. Gunatitanand Swami held his eating bowl

To be truly great, one needs to win, and continue winning. As we have seen, there is no substitute for hard work and sacrifice.

Swamishri and his devotees have shown just that.

In 2007, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was awarded the Guinness World Record for 'Consecrating the Most Hindu Mandirs by a Single Person' – at the time 713 mandirs, spread across five continents. No doubt that behind the stone, cement and bricks used to build each mandir, there lies a story of hard work and sacrifice. Hours spent on site, working through the rain, sun and snow. Thousands, if not millions, of valuable savings donated from the first step to the tallest *shikhar*. Dinners eaten cold or not at all. Health ignored. All these sacrifices and more are buried deep in the foundations of every mandir.

Today, the total number of BAPS mandirs stands at over one thousand worldwide. Each mandir is a success-story in itself, an achievement, an honour, a medal.

Each mandir is a star.

Imagine that – a thousand stars on the badge. Each star yet another symbol of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and his devotees' endless hard work and sacrifice. However, no such badge exists, and Swamishri, who built all of these magnificent mandirs is completely oblivious to any 'World Record' or even stars on the badge. Isn't that a record in itself? ◆

before Muktanand Swami and asked for his *prasadi*. But Swami replied, "You have deceived me all these years. From now onwards I will not give you my *prasadi*." Thus, from then on, after realizing the greatness of Gunatitanand Swami, Muktanand Swami abstained from giving him his *prasadi*.

Before departing for Gadhada Shri Hari gave some instructions related to the mandir in Vartal.

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of  
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

# Conspicuous Consumption



Some consumers buy products or ask for services not because they need them but to impress their friends, peers, co-workers or neighbours. They want to show off that they belong to the high end of the social spectrum. They also buy very expensive items, regardless of their purchasing power. This type of buying is called 'Conspicuous Consumption'. Such flashy consumers influence other classes to emulate their behaviour, which results in the wastage of money.

Conspicuous Consumption is the latest trend the world over, especially in developing nations. Surprisingly, such consumers are not restricted to the rich class, they also belong to the middle class or even the lower middle class. The poor aspire to imitate the rich and the rich strive to imitate the celebrities and other icons; the cycle goes on.

In the 19th century, after the second Industrial Revolution, there emerged an upper class that indulged in buying extremely expensive goods.

The Norwegian American economist and sociologist, Thorstien Veblen (1857-1929), describes in his book, *The Theory of Leisure Class*, the lavish consumption pattern among the upper class, which had accumulated wealth in the aftermath of the second Industrial Revolution. He coined the term 'Conspicuous Consumption' in his book. The costly luxury goods that were purchased by this class were known as the 'Veblen Goods'.

Later in the 20th century, with the rise in living standards, the middle class that had emerged started flaunting and demonstrating their purchase of Veblen Goods, regardless of their needs.

Conspicuous Consumption in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cuts across all social borders the world over, embracing even the lower middle and poor classes. Conspicuous Consumption has given rise to consumerism that has induced addictive and narcissistic behaviour. The desire for immediate gratification, heightened hedonistic expectations and exhibitionist behaviour has started to prove

problematic and even suicidal. Even those whose pockets do not permit buy very expensive items by taking loans or, at times, even resorting to stealing; just to flaunt their goods before their neighbours. This madness for materialism has resulted in envy, thefts and increased crime rates.

Today's Veblen Goods include posh cars like Ferrari, Lexus, Mercedes Benz, Porsche or Rolls Royce, expensive jewellery, costly home appliances, exorbitant apparels, very costly furniture, etc. The Reinast Toothbrush made of solid titanium sells for \$4,200, but it does not guarantee cleaner teeth than an ordinary \$2 brush! Nowadays, costly apps for the iOS, such as 'I Am Rich App', cost \$999.99. It was reported that eight such apps were sold in one day! Many are also fond of buying costly jewellery for their pets! There are conspicuous advertisements like, 'I shop, therefore I am', stimulating one's snobbishness.

India is no exception to Conspicuous Consumption. Many lavishly spend much beyond what their purse permits on marriages, birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, wine parties and vacations. Even India's rural youths stubbornly pressurize their hapless parents to buy them costly motorbikes, extravagant smartphones and clothes just to impress their friends. One study shows that there are on the one hand around 10 million conspicuous customers in India and on the other 450 million Indians living below the poverty line!

Contrary to the growing number of conspicuous consumers there are also those who live frugally. Many famous personalities from the business, scientific, spiritual and other fields subscribe to such simple living.

The late Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, though an eminent scientist and renowned thinker, lived an extremely simple and austere life. He did not own any property nor a fridge, TV, car or an air conditioner.

Warren Buffet, a billionaire, and a renowned business tycoon and philanthropist, writes in his popular book entitled, *Seven Secrets for Living a*

*Happy and Simple Life*, "I just naturally want to do things that make sense. In my personal life too, I don't care what other rich people are doing. I do not want a 405-feet long boat just because someone else has one. I need to learn not to spread my legs beyond the reach of my blanket. I have been using the mantra of 'less is more' to simplify every aspect of my life."

H.H. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has impressed and motivated thousands of people to live a simple and thrifty life. Swamiji is a great proponent of simplicity and austerity. He has preached the lesson of simplicity to thousands of youths and devotees.

A devotee met him in Vadodara on 28 February 2011, seeking his advice about whether to buy a watch costing ₹1.25 crore. Swamiji asked, "Does as an ordinary watch not show the same time?" The devotee replied, "Yes, it does Bapa." "Then where is the need to buy such a costly watch?" asked Swamishri. The devotee agreed and dropped the idea of buying it.

A devotee from abroad had come for Swamishri's darshan to Rajkot on 2 May 2003. He had arranged his daughter's marriage with a boy living from the same town as theirs. In a personal meeting with Swamiji he said, "Swami Bapa, we want to have the wedding ceremony in a simple and economical way. The boy also, wants it done simply and with minimal cost, but his parents are insisting upon spending lavishly. What should we do?" Without a moment's hesitation Swamiji replied, "All of you, including the couple, want it to be done low-key and with simplicity; thus there is no need to make it extravagant and pompous. Tell the boy's parents that Swami has insisted upon getting them married in a simple ceremony."

In spite of running a mega spiritual organization Swamishri avoids unnecessary expenditure and costs and inspires others to lead a frugal life.



# Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

August-September 2015, Sarangpur

AUGUST

2, Sunday

Condolence assemblies were held today at all BAPS centres in India and abroad to pay tributes to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, who passed away on 27 July.

The main stage at Pramukh Darshan Vatika comprised of a *murti* of Thakorji, a photo of Dr Kalam and a large replica of Dr Kalam's last book 'Transcendence' in the backdrop. Sadhus eulogized on Dr Kalam's life and works. At 9:30 a.m. Swamishri garlanded the photo of Dr Kalam and offered flowers as a mark of respect. Thereafter, prayers were offered by singing the Swaminarayan *dhun*. In conclusion, everyone joined in singing the national anthem.

4, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the painted *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Guru Parampara for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Amijhara, a suburb of Surat.

6, Thursday

The preliminary *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the under-construction *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Dhuliya were performed. The marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Vitthal-Rukhmai, Shri Lakshmi-Narayan, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Hanumanji and Ganapatiji, Shri Guru Parampara (paintings) and a small *panchdhatu murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj were arranged on the stage.

At 9:25 a.m. Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals by touching the *murtis* with a

*suvarna-shalaka* (gold-tipped rod) amidst Vedic chantings. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali*. Swamishri also blessed 350 devotees who had come for the occasion from Khandesh.

11-22

Due to cough and cold Swamishri rested for eleven days, and whenever possible he gave darshan to the sadhus and devotees from his bedroom.

29, Saturday; Raksha Bandhan

At 8:30 a.m. the celebratory assembly for Raksha Bandhan commenced at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Learned sadhus addressed the audience about the importance of Raksha Bandhan.

At 10:36 a.m. Swamishri gave darshan from Pramukh Mandiram (cabin). He rocked Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a small *hindola* decorated with *rakhdhis*. A prayer was offered by all to Thakorji and Swamishri to protect them from *maya*, namely ego and attachment. Finally, senior sadhus tied sanctified *rakhdhis* to all the devotees.

During the evening darshan of Swamishri youths performed a drama on how Shriji Maharaj protected Naja Jogiya.

SEPTEMBER

1, Tuesday

During the morning darshan Swamishri blessed 1,400 youths from Rajkot, who had assembled for the four-day *shibir* themed "Balihāri gurudevki...". In the evening, youths performed a skit on the *shibir* theme and presented a cultural dance before Swamishri.

### 3, Thursday

Today's historic day marked Nilkanth Varni's arrival in Loj in 1799 CE. Some excerpts from the Nilkanth Yatra film were shown and thereafter a skit was enacted by youths on Nilkanth Varni's arrival at the stepwell in Loj. In conclusion, a mass *arti* was performed.

### 5, Friday, Janmashtmi Festival

At 7:15 p.m. the Janmashtmi festival assembly commenced with *dhun* and kirtan. Puja Viveksagar Swami discoursed about the life and work of Bhagwan Krishna. When Swamishri arrived in the Pramukh Mandiram (cabin) youths of the Youth Training Centre performed a drama on the birth of Shri Krishna. Thereafter, the senior sadhus performed the festival *arti*. Then Swamishri rocked Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on a decorated wooden crib amidst bhajans celebrating the divine birth of Bhagwan Krishna. In conclusion, *prasad* of *panchajiri* was distributed to all the devotees.

### 7, Monday

Swamishri inaugurated an English publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *The Royal Path of Brahnavidya: Swaminarayan Sadhana*. The original book in Gujarati was written by Brahmadarshan Swami. It was translated into English by two female *satsangi* youths of London, Neha Patel and Rupal Patel.

### 8, Tuesday

Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to two youths: Harikrishna Patel (London) and Pinal Patel (Houston). The former was named Dhruv Bhagat and the latter Shukdev Bhagat. Presently, there are 948 sadhus and *parshads* in the BAPS.

### 17, Thursday

The festival of Ganesh Chaturthi, the birth of Shri Ganapatiji, was celebrated in Swamishri's presence. At 11:15 p.m. a colourful and festive

procession heralded the *murti* of Shri Ganeshji, carried in a palanquin, into the Pramukh Darshan Vatika hall. The *murti* was then ritually worshipped in Swamishri's presence. Senior sadhus performed *arti* and offered laddus to Shri Ganapatiji.

In the evening, youths performed a skit about Ganesh's obedience to his mother's instruction and how Shivji showered his grace upon him.

### 20, Sunday

As part of the year-long centenary celebrations of Sarangpur Mandir blood donation and medical checkup camps were organized. After the inauguration in Swamishri's presence a display of the two camps was arranged on the stage of Pramukh Darshan Vatika. Swamishri blessed all.

### 24, Thursday; Jal Jhilani Festival

Senior sadhus performed the *mahapuja* rituals as part of the Jal Jhilani celebration. Thereafter, sadhus addressed the assembly. The celebration stage was festively decorated with the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Ganapatiji and a makeshift pond and boat. When Swamishri arrived at the Pramukh Mandiram it seemed as if Swamishri was seated in a boat.

The festival commenced with a beautiful procession, comprising of flag-waving youths, dancing children, conch-blowing sadhus followed by Thakorji and Ganapatiji placed in a palanquin, sadhus playing *kartals*, children and teenagers dancing and youths waving the BAPS flag. Thereafter, Thakorji and Ganapatiji were installed on the stage. This was followed by the performance of five *artis* interspersed with singing of bhajans by sadhus. Swamishri performed the final *arti* and thereafter he operated the remote control boat with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. The devotees rejoiced at the divine darshan of Thakorji and Swamishri. ◆

(Translation of excerpts from Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati)





## London Mandir 20th Anniversary Finale Celebrations

### BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London

22-23 August 2015

Through creative three-dimensional projection mapping, innovative visual effects, a series of inspiring video presentations and enlightening discourses, a team of more than 190 performers and crew brought to life the history, memories and future of London Mandir in a spectacular three-hour production in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Atmaswarup Swami and visiting sadhus from India.

Ishwarcharan Swami first provided a contextual history to the occasion by elaborating on Yogiji Maharaj's vision expressed during his visit. Devotees participate in the 20th mandir *patotsav mahapuja*



to London in 1970. Atmaswarup Swami and others continued the journey by recalling the tremendous sacrifice and devotion of thousands of worshippers and well-wishers during the planning and construction of the Mandir as well as honouring those who have continued to give their untiring support since its opening.

A colourful musical stage performance revived the devotional vibrancy experienced during the Mandir Mahotsav in 1995. The culmination of the dances was an emotional recreation of the first *arti* in the Mandir in front of a panoramic Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performs *abhishek* on *patotsav day*





Swamishri lights the lamp in Sarangpur and senior sadhus light the lamp in London Mandir to inaugurate the finale celebrations

backdrop of the shrines.

Emotive testimonies by devotees and sadhus spoke of the profound impact of the Mandir on individuals, families and the community over the past 20 years. The wider impressions conveyed through local, national and international media were also shared.

Memories that have been shared, heard and felt were captured through the thoughts of sadhus who have experienced its spirituality. The treasure trove of memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Mandir was fondly relived through a touching video compilation. Swamishri also provided a fresh new memory to cherish, as he sent blessings for the celebrations from Sarangpur, Gujarat, while he watched the programme live.

Puja Mahant Swami performs the *patotsav arti* of Thakorji



A look towards the future became the focus thereafter. Mahant Swami reinforced messages of personal spirituality and unity that will become the foundation for devotees and volunteers for the next 20 years and beyond.

A vibrant finale dance was followed by a concluding prayer. The joyous occasion was brought to a close with the news that the iconic arch of Wembley Stadium had been illuminated in orange to honour the Mandir's 20th anniversary celebrations.

As everyone departed, they were treated to a creative visual presentation projected onto the main steps of the Mandir, with the whole façade of the complex coming to life with colourful lighting effects. ◆

A cultural dance during the celebration assembly





## UK Launch of 'Transcendence'

2 September 2015, London

Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Atmaswarup Swami, as well as His Excellency Ranjan Mathai, High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom, and other distinguished guests, civic leaders and community representatives participated in a special assembly at the London BAPS mandir to launch Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's book, *Transcendence*.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami introduced the work of the Mandir in London over the past 20 years in serving worshippers, well-wishers and the local community. Pujya Atmaswarup Swami spoke about the deep friendship between Swamishri and Dr Kalam.

Inspiring video presentations highlighted Dr Kalam's spiritual and philosophical transformations during his 14-year friendship with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In his keynote address, Mr Mathai paid tributes to both Dr Kalam as a statesman, scientist and rishi, and the London Mandir.

Concluding the ceremony and citing several passages from *Transcendence*, especially an interview of Nelson Mandela, Pujya Mahant Swami urged the audience to not only read the book, but to imbibe its messages, "It is a universal book, for people of all faiths, nations, ethnicities and vocations, because it is about higher values such as peace, spirituality, tolerance, patience and service." This, he explained, would be the highest tribute to Dr Kalam's life, work and legacy. ♦





## India

### SINHASTHA KUMBH MELA Nasik, 14 July to 18 August 2015



Every 12 years, a Purna Kumbh Mela is held in Nasik, on the banks of River Godavari. Based on the planetary formations which occur every 12 years, the occasion is called the Sinhastha Kumbh Mela.

This year, millions of devotees and 300,000 sadhus, mahatmas and sannyasins flocked to the Kumbh Mela to bathe in the holy waters.

During the celebrations, the BAPS mandir in Nasik provided free medical aid, food, water and buttermilk to thousands of sadhus and pilgrims. An exhibition promoting de-addiction and noble living was also set up, inspiring many pilgrims to quit their addictions and lead a pure, devout life.

Over 180 BAPS sadhus visited the Kumbh Mela, where they offered worship to the sacred River Godavari and, on 15 August, participated in the special ritual bath.

Also, over 300 BAPS men and women volunteers dedicated their time and energy to serve during the Kumbh Mela.

### 'SANSKRUTI' YUVA PARAYANS Gujarat & Mumbai 14 August to 20 September 2015

Thousands of youths attended the annual



*parayans* held during the auspicious month of Shravan. Based on the main theme of 'Sanskriti' three 2-hour schedules were provided by the Satsang Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad. *Yuvaks* at 525 BAPS centres and *yuvatis* at 611 BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai, prepared and presented the programmes to their fellow youths. The topics covered were: *murti puja* (image worship), *punarjanma* (rebirth), *karma siddhant* (principle of karma) and *avatarvad* (incarnations of God on Earth). The topics were elaborated upon through speeches, *parayans* on stories from the shastras, skits, audio-visual presentations and involvement activities. The *parayans* helped the youths to deepen their understanding of the important concepts of Hindu Dharma.

### KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Kolkata 15-16 August 2015

Over a hundred *kishores* and *kishoris* from Kolkata participated in the two-day *shibir*, based on the theme 'Cultural Quotient'. Prior to the *shibir*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had sent his blessings from Sarangpur on 12 August. The *shibir* included speeches presented by sadhus from Sarangpur on various topics, such as The Qualities of God, Karma and Punarjanma,



Aparavidya, Vegetarianism, Murti Puja and The Importance of a Guru. During the *shibir*, the youths took part in *maha-abhishek*, *samuh arti*, and other traditional Hindu rituals. They also participated in various team-building activities. The *shibir* gave the youngsters a better understanding of Indian culture and their spiritual roots.

### RAJKOT YUVA SHIBIR

Sarangpur, 1-4 September 2015



Around 1,100 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from Rajkot attended the special Yuva Shibir held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur.

To become eligible for the *shibir*, the youths were tested on basic satsang knowledge and selected passages from the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato which they had memorized.

The youths participated in competitions which involved designing posters, composing kirtans and writing essays.

The *shibir* theme – ‘Balihari Gurudevki: Jinhe Govind Diyo Batay’ – was elaborated upon through speeches by *sadgurus*, and other learned and experienced swamis, solo mimes, skits, debates, question-answer sessions, discussions,

dances, audio-visual presentations and topic-related practical activities.

Separate sessions were organized for *yuvatis* in which they presented cultural programmes.

Throughout the *shibir*, the youths were blessed by the daily darshan of guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *shibir* enabled the youths to deepen their understanding of and devotion to God and guru.

### BAPS YOUTHS CLEAN RAILWAY STATIONS

Ahmedabad & Rajkot, 2 October 2015



As part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign), BAPS youths helped to clean the main railway stations in Ahmedabad and Rajkot and raise awareness among passengers to keep India clean.

Before the cleaning sessions began a short assembly was held in the presence of the local MPs, senior railway officials and other dignitaries.

To raise awareness of each person’s individual responsibility to maintain cleanliness, the youths also presented a short skit, designed and displayed message-oriented banners and prepared a short video advert, which was repeatedly relayed on the video screens at the railway station.

All the officials appreciated the sincere and creative endeavours of the youths in cleaning the stations and raising awareness among others to keep India clean.

### SATSANG JNANAMRUT COMPETITIONS

Gujarat & Maharashtra, 11 & 18 October 2015

Based on the *Satsang Jnanamrut* booklet,



separate competitions were held for *karyakars* and devotees.

On 11 October, 5,000 men and 5,250 women *karyakars* participated at 53 venues in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Their competition was conducted in three stages. The first stage was a 30-minute multiple choice question paper. Those meeting the necessary requirement proceeded to the group discussion stage, from which *karyakars* were selected for the final *mukhpath* (oral test) stage.

On 18 October, network volunteers (*sampark karyakars*) and other interested devotees participated in a separate competition which involved only a 30-minute written test. A total of 12,100 men and 12,500 women from BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Maharashtra participated at 225 venues.

Top performers in each competition were awarded prizes.

Through these competitions, the participants developed a deeper knowledge and understanding of Satsang history and philosophy, and Hindu culture.

## UK & Europe

### EUROPE SATSANG SHIBIR

Paris, 9 August 2015

More than 350 devotees from France, Belgium, Germany and Ireland attended a satsang *shibir* in Paris in the presence of sadhus from London and visiting sadhus from India.

Entitled 'Maro Haribhakta', the *shibir* focused

on the key characteristics of an ideal devotee based on the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. These ideals were explored through speeches by the sadhus, devotional songs, videos and a drama.

The sadhus spoke about the identity of a spiritually elevated devotee, the importance of observing a moral code of conduct to progress in all walks of life, the principle of faith in God and guru, how a devotee can develop a profound sense of conviction, and the need to reflect upon the spiritual greatness of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his spiritual successors.

The following day, a satsang *sabha* was held in which the chief guest was Yves Pépin, creative consultant for the multimedia water shows at the Swaminarayan Akshardhams in New Delhi and Gandhinagar.

### EUROPE KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London 22-23 August 2015



Youths from various countries in mainland Europe attended the Kishore-Kishori Mandal Shibir in London in the presence of Pujya

Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Atmaswarup Swami and visiting sadhus from India.

Based on the topics of ‘Niyam, Nishchay, Paksh’, the *shibir* featured addresses by Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami about the importance of spiritual observances, faith and developing a deeper spiritual understanding of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Drawing from the Vachanamrut and the gurus’ teachings, sadhus explored various spiritual concepts and offered practical guidance on applying these principles in daily living.

During the evenings, the youths joined thousands of devotees in the main assembly hall to witness the 20th anniversary finale celebrations of London Mandir.

Prior to the *shibir*, the group spent three days at the BAPS Mandir, Leicester, where they benefitted from spiritual nourishment in the form of discussions and group activities.

The delegates departed from London with renewed motivation to excel in their personal spiritual journeys and with stronger unity.

### UK NATIONAL SANYUKTA MANDAL SHIBIRS 29 August & 12 September 2015



The UK National Sanyukta Mandal Shibirs were held in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and visiting sadhus from India on 29 August at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, and on 12 September at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Leicester.

The events brought together more than 1,800

people from around the UK and was based on the key teachings of Swamishri for a spiritually enriched life: religious observances, faith and understanding the greatness of others.

Mahant Swami encouraged delegates to demonstrate strength of character and conviction in one’s beliefs, even in times of adversity. He also reflected upon the ideal relationship that one should develop with Swamishri by introspecting upon his virtues and spiritual qualities.

Ishwarcharan Swami highlighted the importance of unflinching faith towards the fellowship, its principles and for Swamishri, and suggested practical techniques for imbibing such resoluteness.

The discourses were interspersed with a series of enlightening videos supporting the key messages of the *shibir*.

### UK NATIONAL KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR BAPS Mandir, London, 6 September 2015



The UK National Kishore-Kishori Mandal Shibir was held in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Atmaswarup Swami and visiting sadhus from India.

Entitled ‘Niyam, Nishchay, Paksh’, the *shibir* enlightened youths on the importance of spiritual observances, faith and loyalty through discourses by sadhus, audio-visual presentations and interactive panel discussions.

Ishwarcharan Swami explained the principles of an ideal devotee from the Vachanamrut and the teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Mahant Swami elaborated upon the

fundamentals of faith, and provided practical guidance on how a youth in today's world can develop faith in God.

An emotive video presentation of cherished moments with Swamishri during his previous visits to London provided a fitting finale to the event.

### UK NATIONAL YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR BAPS Mandir, London, 13 September 2015



Over 850 youths from across the country attended the UK National Yuvak-Yuvati Mandal Shibir in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami and visiting sadhus from India.

Entitled 'Maro Harihbhakta: Ishak, Asakti, Veg', the *shibir* focused on how one's zeal, attachment and passion can help accelerate spiritual progress. Profound questions exploring the purpose of human life and the impact of one's choices were answered through insightful discourses from sadhus, informative skits, self-reflection sessions, creative audio-visual presentations and video excerpts of Swamishri's blessings in which he explained his expectations of an ideal devotee.

The sadhus spoke about the importance of becoming the ideal spiritual aspirant, the impact that negative influences have in one's judgement, and inspiring real-life examples of youths who have demonstrated strong spiritual ideals by making the right choices in challenging circumstances.

Personal testimonies from youths highlighted the consequences they have experienced from their choices.

Mahant Swami outlined the fundamental importance of spirituality and explained how

Satsang inspires one to make the right choices. He emphasized the need to make correct choices by drawing inspiration from Swamishri as our ideal and by continually introspecting on one's spiritual progress.

### OPEN HOUSE BAPS Mandir, London, 19-20 September 2015



Open House London is "the capital's greatest architectural festival... celebrating the buildings, places and neighbourhoods where we live, work and play." It is organized by Open-City, an independent, non-profit architecture education organization championing the role of well-designed places in creating and sustaining a successful, vibrant city.

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London – one of London's iconic religious buildings – joined more than 700 other architectural marvels in welcoming hundreds of visitors for an in-depth guided tour. Guests were greeted upon arrival by young BAPS children, who explained the history and significance of the Mandir and its distinguishing features. Some of the visitors also joined worshippers for one of the *arti* ceremonies during the day.

Many of the visitors shared their experiences about the Mandir:

■ *Absolutely beautiful – stunning! I have seen it on television but never thought I would be fortunate enough to visit. Thank You!*

■ *Extremely satisfying to find a temple like this in this part of the world.*

■ *Brilliant! So good to be able to see inside*



the temple, but more so to learn more about Hinduism. Everyone here has been so lovely, informative and helpful.

■ Overwhelmed with how welcome we were made to feel. As a non-religious person it was the warmest experience I have had. Many thanks.

■ It is amazing, inspiring, beautiful and relaxing. I've been here many times as a Jew even though it is not my religion.

■ A wonderful spiritual experience from first sight and beyond. It felt like an oasis amongst the chaos of the world.

■ Best Open House so far – very friendly and knowledgeable guides, including children. Amazing building as well! Will recommend a visit again.

■ Arti was a very moving experience. Thank you so much for welcoming us to such a beautiful and spiritual place.

### UK NATIONAL BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR BAPS Mandir, London, 26 September 2015



The UK National Bal-Balika Mandal Shibir was held at the London mandir in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami. Entitled 'My Mandir, My Home', the one-day *shibir* enlightened more than 400 children from across the UK and parts of Europe about the importance of a mandir in one's life.

During the *shibir*, the children learnt about the rich history of London Mandir, the vision of Yogiji Maharaj and the tireless efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Memories of previous *shibirs* for children

held in the presence of Swamishri in the UK were presented through videos, together with the key teachings of Swamishri.

Through classroom sessions, group discussions and stories the children learnt about how the Mandir was built and how they can strengthen their bonds with God and guru. A magic show demonstrated how the Mandir has transformed hundreds of lives.

During the *shibir*, Mahant Swami explained the importance of the sacred *murtis* in a mandir, and how one should offer devotion to God through various rituals. He also encouraged all to remain connected with Swamishri for success in all walks of life.

### CHATURMAAS BAL PARAYAN Paris, 29 September 2015



The first ever Bal Parayan in Paris, France, was themed 'Ghanshyam Charitra', in which children delivered eloquent discourses on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's childhood. The narrations were supported with enlightening cultural performances that included a vibrant dance, drama, and devotional songs extolling the divine sports of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as a child.

## Asia-Pacific

### TRIBUTES TO DR APJ ABDUL KALAM AND LAUNCH OF 'TRANSCENDENCE'

Australia & New Zealand, 1-30 September 2015

Distinguished Indian-Australian community leaders, representing various Indian cultural or



ganizations, attended the special events organized at BAPS centres in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney in Australia to pay tribute to the late former president of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, and launch his final book, *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji*. A similar assembly was also held in Auckland, New Zealand.

#### HEALTH SEMINAR

**BAPS Mandir, Adelaide, Australia**  
**12 September 2015**



Many local residents attended the health seminar held with the support of experienced experts in cardiology, immunology, general medicine, dentistry and other medical specialties. The specialists presented helpful insights in maintaining a healthy lifestyle through a variety of visual presentations and interactive sessions. They gave useful information on physiotherapy, body mass index, blood pressure, dental and oral hygiene and the importance of a healthy heart. The seminar helped increase awareness of the importance and ways of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

#### HEALTH EXPO

**BAPS Mandir, Sydney, Australia**  
**19 September 2015**



Over 120 people attended the Health Expo organized by BAPS in Sydney with the support of WentWest. The Expo focused on cancer and the need for early detection of all types of cancer. Experienced speakers and health professionals from Cancer Council NSW, Bowel Cancer Australia and Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia made presentations on ways to minimize cancer risk through healthy lifestyles, detecting early symptoms and the options for seeking help.

Breast Screen NSW also provided free breast cancer screening for local women, using their mobile screening van in the area.

Participants also visited the information booths set up by WentWest, Cancer Council NSW, Stroke Foundation, Bowel Cancer Australia, Westmead Breast Cancer Institute, the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation and other health organizations.

### USA & Canada

**NORTH AMERICA KISHORE-KISHORI**  
**MANDAL INDIA TRIP**

**4 July to 5 August 2015**

A selected group of 34 *kishores* and 45 *kishoris* from North America journeyed to India to strengthen their foundation of spirituality by experiencing the ancient Hindu traditions that remain in practice throughout India, and are preserved at BAPS mandirs in North America.



Themed ‘Shanti Through Samjan’, the journey began at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, where the delegates learnt about the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Then, the first phase of the trip was a tour of South India to retrace some of Nilkanth Varni’s expansive journey. Visiting the same mandirs as Nilkanth Varni had further refined the delegates’ perspectives on India’s rich history of devotion.

Next, the delegates arrived in Sarangpur, to attend ‘Brahmvidhyani College’ – a one-week *shibir* filled with enlightening discourses by learned swamis. They learnt about the relevance of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy in daily life and how through spiritual understanding (*samjan*) one can consolidate faith, optimism and trust. The delegates were boosted by Swamishri’s daily darshan and involvement in *seva* programmes at the 17 mandirs they visited. The delegates were humbled by the affection and consideration they experienced when they met local devotees at each mandir.

The trip helped to strengthen the delegates’ ties to Hindu culture and their spiritual connection with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

puja in the morning. The schedule included speeches by Narendraprasad (Acharya) Swami and Janmangal Swami relayed live from India via Skype. The devotees also presented speeches and a drama. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed and benefitted from the experience.

## BAPS Charities

### ORPHANAGE FOOD DRIVES Tanzania, July-August 2015



BAPS Charities in Tanzania conducted food drives for the following charitable organizations, donating over a metric ton of food and supplies:

**Help2Kids Orphanage:** Founded in 2010 by Help2kids International, a Swiss NGO that operates in Africa. It houses children aged from 4 to 18 years and also provides them food, education, healthcare, and a family environment to grow up in. The goal of the NGO is to help the children break the cycle of poverty, and live productive lives.

**Buguruni School for the Deaf & Dumb:** A home and school for 200 young disabled children aged between 3 and 15 of disadvantaged backgrounds from all over Tanzania. The home

## Middle East

### SATSANG SHIBIR

#### Doha, Qatar, 26 September 2015

Around 40 children and devotees participated in the first-ever one-day *shibir* in Doha. Themed ‘Malana Manka’, the *shibir* began with *samuh*

was founded in 1974 by the Government of Tanzania. At present, the school is sustained by the Government, the Society for the Deaf and other well-wishers.

**Al Hidayah Orphanage:** A certified home for parentless children. Founded in 2008, it is home to 65 orphans aged from 2 to 18 years. The children attend the nearby government school.

**The New Life Orphan Home:** A certified home for about 100 parentless children. It was founded in 2001.

**Yatima Group Chamazi Orphanage:** Founded in 2001, it houses over 130 orphans, whose ages range from a few months old to 18 years.

## HEALTH FAIRS

### North America, August to October 2015



Over 1,360 doctors and medical professionals provided their voluntary services during the Health Fairs organized at over 43 BAPS centres throughout North America. Over 9,400 people of all ages benefitted from the expert guidance of specialists from a wide range of medical and surgical specialties. A variety of blood and screening tests were also performed. In addition, the Health Fairs featured lectures providing guidance on common health issues.

## CHILDREN'S HEALTH & SAFETY DAYS

### North America, August to October 2015

Over 2,000 children, along with parents and caretakers participated in the educational and fun-filled Children's Health & Safety Day sessions held at 17 BAPS centres across North America. This year's theme focused on the



National Institute of Health's 'Media Smart Youth' campaign empowering children and their families to 'Eat, Think, and Be Active!'

Through interactive workshops and activities, the Children's Health and Safety Day introduced children to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy foods by reading labels, carefully observing advertisements, brushing twice daily and reducing television and screen time to less than two hours a day.

The participants also had an opportunity to meet healthcare professionals from various backgrounds and emergency responders who paid a special visit to the event using emergency vehicles. Some centres organized a Teddy Bear Clinic, which allowed youths to become a parent and decide how to make their 'unwell' teddy bear better by visiting different healthcare professionals and receiving advice.

Simultaneously, parents and caretakers attended separate sessions to learn the best practices to reinforce and integrate many of the topics their children were learning.

## DONATION TO BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION

### BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London

#### 29 August 2015

BAPS Charities donated £25,000 to the British Heart Foundation, raised by thousands of people of all ages – from young children to seniors in their nineties – who participated in the BAPS Charities Annual Challenge earlier this year.

In this year's Challenge, fundraisers participated in a 10-kilometre walk or run, tandem



skydives, or bike rides from London to Brighton or London to Paris.

Dr Mike Knapton, Associate Director of the British Heart Foundation, said the donation “will support training for children and adults in basic life support. We can save thousands of lives with the money you have so generously donated to us.”

### BIKE RIDE CHALLENGE: LONDON TO PARIS 5-7 September 2015



As part of the BAPS Charities Annual Challenge to raise funds for various worthy causes, seven brave and motivated BAPS cyclists undertook a physically challenging 242-mile London to Paris Bike Ride.

Riders began at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, 5 September from Chelsfield Lakes Golf Club, cycling resolutely through scenic villages in England and France, completing their journey at the Palace of Versailles on Monday evening. The route required the participants to climb a total distance of 3,400 metres.

### DONATION TO DADA'S COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION CENTRE

Nairobi, 6 September 2015

BAPS Charities donated textbooks to 135

orphaned children studying in Standards 1 to 8 at Dada's Community and Education Centre in Kawangware, an underprivileged area of Nairobi.

### DONATION TO THE ROSA FUND BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London 19 September 2015



BAPS Charities donated £10,000 to Rosa: The UK Fund for Women and Girls, at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London. The funds were raised from its Annual Challenge in which over 3,000 participants walked or ran 10 kilometres in many towns and cities across the UK.

Rosa is a charity which focuses on safety, economic justice, health and well-being, and leadership and representation for the benefit of women and girls in the UK.

### TREE PLANTING Nairobi, 20 September 2015

A total of 220 BAPS Charities volunteers joined KENVO (Kijabe Environment Volunteers) in planting 5,000 seedlings at the Kereita Forest. Funds raised during the BAPS Charities Annual Walkathon in 2015 were utilized to buy the seedlings and host the event.

Through such tree planting projects, BAPS Charities is committed to preserving the environment. ♦



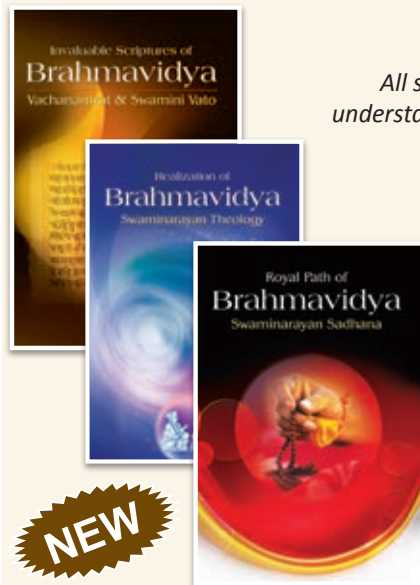
## ‘Smithsonian’ Magazine Selects Delhi Akshardham in Top 25 Places to See



The September 2015 issue of *Smithsonian*, the monthly magazine of the world-famous Smithsonian Institution based in Washington, D.C., features the ‘Smithsonian’s 21st Century Life List’, a list of the 25 greatest new places they feel should be on the ‘to see’ list of all travellers. Included in this list is Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. On page 33 they write: “Delhi, India. Throbbing Temple. Behold the 20,000 hand-carved statues – and the robotics – at the Akshardham Temple.”

On the Smithsonian website, photographs are included with a more extensive description under the heading ‘Throbbing Temple: Delhi, India’: “With nine domes, 234 pillars and 20,000 statues all hand-carved from red sandstone or marble, Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple is both the largest Hindu temple in the world and an amazing amalgam of the ancient and the modern. Built with traditional engineering techniques, the temple rests

not on a steel superstructure but on giant interlocking chunks of stone, atop a base decorated with 148 stone elephants, each carved from a single block. Begun in the year 2000, the temple drew on the labors of 15,000 artists and volunteers to meet an opening date in 2005; it now attracts nearly three million visitors a year, reportedly accounting for more than 70 percent of Delhi’s tourism. But the temple is more than a testament to traditional methods; it has an IMAX screen, a spectacular musical fountain show and a Hall of Values, which features 15 3-D dioramas employing robotics, fiber optics and animatronic technology to present the messages of compassion, endeavor, prayer, morality, vegetarianism and family harmony. Also state of the art is the security operation, after a terrorist attack on another temple in 2002. Visitors aren’t allowed to bring cameras or electronic devices into the building (you can have your picture taken by a volunteer at a designated spot), nor can you wear a belt. Dress accordingly.” ♦



### A TRILOGY ON BRAHMAVIDYA

All satsangi youths and devotees should read the trilogy on brahma vidya to understand the core principles and practices of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

*Invaluable Scriptures of Brahma vidya* contains detailed explanations and elaborations on the forms of Brahman and Parabrahman from the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato.

*Realization of Brahma vidya* comprises of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s profound theological and philosophical teachings about Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman, *maya*, *ishwar* and *jiva*.

*Royal Path of Brahma vidya* deals with *sankalpnishtha*, *swarupnishtha*, *swardharmanishtha*, *sampnishtha*, association of the Gunatit Satpurush and other aspects.

Available at all BAPS Bookstores



**BAPS CHARITIES SERVE SOCIETY**

1. BAPS Charities Seminar for Dental Professionals, London (17 September 2015).
2. Eye Screening at BAPS Charities Health Fair, Charlotte, NC (10 October 2015).
3. BAPS Charities Bike Ride Challenge, in which 7 BAPS youths cycled 242 miles from London to Paris (5-7 September 2015).
4. One of the many BAPS Charities Walks, USA.
5. BAPS Charities Orphanage Food Drive, Tanzania (July 2015).
6. Children get to tour the ambulance at the BAPS Charities Health and Safety Day, Robbinsville, NJ (25 October 2015)

For more information: <http://www.bapscharities.org>



### PRATISHTHA AND FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS

August-September 2015, Sarangpur

1. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Dhuliya, Maharashtra (6 August).
2. Swamishri celebrates the festival of Janmashtmi. An *annakut* is offered to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj (5 September).
3. Swamishri celebrates the festival of Jal Jhilani and performs the final *arti* (inset) (24 September).

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