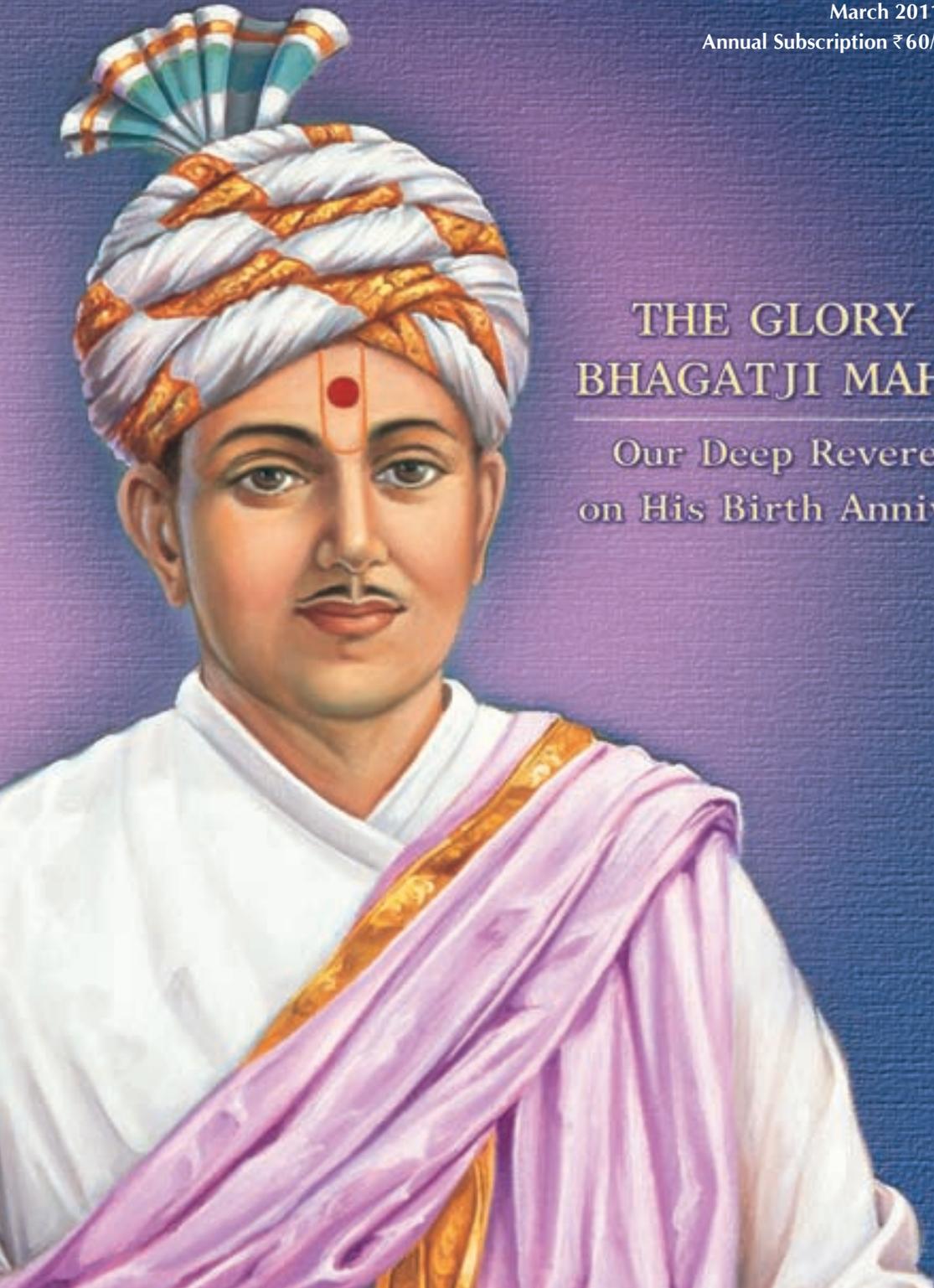


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THE GLORY OF BHAGATJI MAHARAJ

Our Deep Reverences
on His Birth Anniversary



Swamishri's puja with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, worshipped daily by Swamishri, Mumbai.



A diorama celebrating the 201st anniversary of Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiating Gunatitanand Swami into the sadhu-fold during the *yagna* in Dabhan (19 January, Yogi Sabhagruh, Dadar, Mumbai).

Swamishri blesses the Sunday satsang assembly held on the anniversary of Yogiji Maharaj's return to Akshardham (30 January, Mumbai).



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FIRST WORD

In the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagwan Shri Krishna preaches four important principles to Arjuna with regards to karma or action in life:

1. The state of *sthitpragna* (remaining unwavering and spiritually calm)
2. The ideal of *nishkam karma* (performing actions without desire and attachment)
3. The doctrine of *lok samgrah* (actions performed as a source of inspiration for and the welfare of people)
4. To totally surrender to him and obey his command.

The four ideals imparted by Shri Krishna to Arjuna mostly reflect the core of the Gita. This sage advice by Shri Krishna cuts across all barriers of time, faith, country or people. They are significant and applicable even today and for all times.

Most of the time life's conflicts and miseries stem from an absence of these four ideals. The more a person understands and internalizes the Bhagavad Gita in this light the happier, peaceful and stronger he or she becomes.

The wonderful exemplary life of Brahma-swarup Bhagatji Maharaj, the second successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, abundantly portrays the ideals of *sthitpragna*, *nishkam karma*, *lok samgrah* and total surrender to his guru Gunatitanand Swami. One finds that he absorbed insults and injustices with equanimity. His zeal to please Gunatitanand Swami, free of any mundane desires and expectations of fame, was monumental. His years under the wings of Gunatitanand Swami and even thereafter showed his innate humility and discipleship.

(contd. on p. 6)

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Shri Hari's Grave Illness

*Plague was stalking the region. Shri Hari allowed himself to be afflicted by it.
And in this period he showed his divine lila...*

"I WILL NOT LIVE MUCH LONGER"

The summer in Gadhada was scorching. Shri Hari seldom came out of his Akshar Ordi because of the stifling air. The windows and the door of Akshar Ordi were covered with thick curtains, and water was continuously sprayed on them to keep the room cool.

On 23 June 1820 (Jeth *sud* 12, A.S. 1876) Maharaj became ill. Slowly his health deteriorated. Muktanand Swami placed his hand on Shri Hari's forehead, and he found it to be very hot. Maharaj's condition saddened both Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami. Shri Hari revealed, "Swami, I think I will not live much longer. The summer heat is searing and it portends bad times ahead. Many will perish."

"But Maharaj bad times do not affect you. There is no need to become unhappy," Muktanand Swami spoke to Maharaj. Shri Hari remained quiet. The sadhus started praying by chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Maharaj closed his eyes and went to sleep. Subsequently the sadhus left the small room.

Later on that day Maharaj suffered bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea. Muktanand Swami had learnt ayurveda from Ramanand Swami. He prepared some pills and gave them to Maharaj. But Shri Hari threw them away. Muktanand Swami spoke humbly, "Maharaj, your present state of sadness will produce a decline in Satsang, and the evil-minded will gain an upper hand. Then the devotees will be rendered insecure." Maharaj remained quiet. Shri Hari's behaviour confused many. Some even perceived human traits (*manushya-bhav*) in him. Maharaj told Mukund Varni (Mulji Brahmachari), "I only want you, Nirgunanand, Vaishnavanand, Nityanand,

Shukanand and Nishkulanand to care for me. Don't allow anyone else in my service; otherwise he will perceive *manushya-bhav* in me."

Shri Hari was feeling extremely hot in the Akshar Ordi. He was burning with high fever. To cool his body wet cloth-pads were applied. One day Maharaj told Nityanand Swami, "I feel very hot here. I want to stay somewhere else." Instantly Nityanand Swami informed Dada Khachar.

Dada Khachar decided to set up a shelter in the open space behind his *darbar*. At the same time Maharaj told Nityanand Swami, "There is a grove of neem trees behind Dada's *darbar*. The shade there is quite dense. Set up a living quarter for me. Make arrangements for the waters of river Ghela to flow there."

Nityanand Swami was befuddled by Maharaj's last wish. Everyone felt that Shri Hari's incoherence did not only reflect his restlessness, but the seriousness of his illness. A cot was arranged beneath a neem tree. Then walls of thick cloth were set up around it. Sand from the river bank was brought and heaped in mounds on all four sides. Then a system of water trickling continuously on it was arranged. Special hand operated fans were brought and turns were arranged for sadhus to fan Maharaj.

Once everything was ready, Mukundanand Varni brought Maharaj. Maharaj lay on the bed covered with wet cloths to keep him cool. Muktanand Swami advised Varni, "Since Maharaj has fever he will catch a cold if you keep him wrapped in wet cloths. You must remove them after some time." Shri Hari heard this and replied, "I will not allow the fever to get the better of me."

THE TASK IS HUGE AND MY BODY HAS WITHERED

On hearing Maharaj's confident words Brahmanand Swami took courage and spoke, "Then why did you allow the plague to enter your body?"

"To see its effects. When it afflicts anyone it destroys blood vessels and transforms blood into water." Then Maharaj stopped talking. Suddenly, he retched and his bowls also started flushing unrestrainedly. Maharaj rolled on his bed and slammed his hands on it. The attendant sadhus cleaned the bed. Again the extent of Maharaj's illness worried everyone. Maharaj declared to Nityanand Swami, "I will not be able to live anymore. And I don't want to make any more efforts to live further."

Brahmanand Swami broke down crying. He averred, "If you go to Dham, I will bring you back. You had expressed your wish to strengthen the roots of Satsang. So did you say this to simply deceive us!"

"Swami, I uttered it, but the task is too big. And now my body has become reduced to half its size. I don't have any courage or will to live more!"

The attendant sadhus cleaned Maharaj's body. Muktanand Swami brought a sweetened drink of fenugreek and placed an ayurvedic pill to cure his diarrhoea. Shri Hari asked what it was.

"It is sweetened water of fenugreek. Drink it and you will feel cool and better," Muktanand Swami explained.

"But first remove the pill inside it," Maharaj ordered.

Muktanand Swami broke down at Maharaj's unwillingness to live anymore. Tears rolled down from his eyes and he appealed, "Maharaj, we will do whatever you say. All we wish is that you live, become healthy and shower your divine joy upon the devotees."

"Then what of the future of Satsang! Should the path of *moksha* be shut altogether?" Maharaj argued while trembling.

Nityanand Swami restrained everyone,

"None should speak any further. Let Maharaj rest." Immediately Maharaj rang out, "I want to rest at Mt. Salemal. Take me there. I will think of the future of Satsang there." Everyone turned quiet. Shri Hari also became silent. Everyone sat down. Outside, the *parshads* made sure there was not the slightest disturbance from anybody.

Jivuba, Laduba, Dada Khachar and all devotees were saddened by Maharaj's illness. No one had eaten that day. Everyone was turning the *mala* and praying. Devotees were periodically pouring water on the mounds of sand outside to keep Maharaj's room cool. The women devotees brought water from the River Ghela. Everyone's mind was poignantly absorbed in Shri Hari's form. They had forgotten about hunger and thirst.

I WANT TO GO TO MT. SALEMAL

Shri Hari was oscillating between the threshold of wakefulness and sleep. Once, he suddenly called out, "Where is Nishkulanand?"

"I am here before you."

"I wish to go to Mt. Salemal. Prepare a vehicle for the journey."

"Yes Maharaj," Nishkulanand Swami replied.

A little while later Nityanand Swami came in and asked, "Where is Nishkulanand Swami?"

"Maharaj told him to prepare a cart, so he has gone to gather wood," Mukundanand Varni replied. Nityanand Swami went outside and told Nishkulanand Swami, "Maharaj is simply performing *lila*, so you go back inside in his service. I will explain to Maharaj and make him understand."

"YOU PERCEIVE IGNORANCE IN ME?"

The senior sadhus returned inside. Maharaj was lying asleep. Then two sadhus each lifted the bed from its front and rear ends and tried to carry it a little. With the jerks and movement Maharaj awoke. He uncovered his face and asked, "What's happening?"

Nityanand Swami replied, "Maharaj, the cart is being driven on Mt. Salemal. Since the ground is rough the journey is bumpy."

Shri Hari smiled and stated, "I'll perform austerities on the mountain and from there I shall retire to Akshardham."

Nityanand Swami argued, "Maharaj, you have explained to us that Akshardham is with you. Those who talk of going up there are ignorant."

"So you perceive ignorance in me?" Maharaj quizzed Nityanand Swami.

"No Maharaj. I have simply echoed the knowledge you preach."

Shri Hari smiled wryly and then declared, "Swami, you are lying that we are travelling to Mt. Salemal. We are all here together [in Akshar Ordi]." On hearing this Nityanand Swami declared, "Maharaj, you have taught us so. When we say that you are ill, you tell us that we are perceiving human traits in you! And we say that you are well, then you counter us. You say that you cannot eat and you are unable to digest food. Thus, we are cornered on both counts. Now, tell us honestly whether you are really ill?"

"I am ill as well as in good health. When I desire to fall ill I can do so, and the same applies to my wellness," Shri Hari replied with a telling smile.

"Then, you'd better become well for the happiness of all devotees. All are sad and shedding tears for your grave illness. No one is eating and drinking. Be merciful upon all."

With Nityanand Swami's words, Maharaj replied, "Help me get up!" The attendants helped Maharaj to rise. Maharaj asked, "Bring me some *raab* made of millet flour. I shall drink it and get well."

(First Word, contd. from p. 3)

Once at the intimation of Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj watered 300 wilting mango trees. For three-and-a-half years he served for 23 hours daily in the construction work and other services in the mandir. In addition to his exhausting services, he fasted for two days and took only a single meal on the third day for

Instantly Jivuba prepared *raab*. Soon, someone brought a bowlful and offered it to Maharaj. Shri Hari drank it and asked Muktanand Swami, "Swami, is it okay to drink *raab*?"

"Yes, Maharaj. The effects of the plague will disappear." After drinking the small bowl of *raab* Mukundanand Varni was about to fill it up. Shri Hari told him not to do so. Then Brahmanand Swami appealed, "Maharaj, drink a little more so that we can partake of a little of your sanctified *raab*. I have been starving over the past few days." So, Shri Hari drank a little more and gave the rest to everyone. "Now I am well," Maharaj announced. "Take me back to Akshar Ordi." Mulji Brahmachari carried Maharaj to his Akshar Ordi.

Shri Hari drank a little amount of *raab* daily in the following days. He began walking after a period of ten days. Maharaj drank cool water and sugarcane juice every day from the hands of Nishkulanand Swami. Rupabhai, Rajabhai and Jhinabhai ordered gold-skinned bananas and had them sent for Maharaj in Gadhada. Shri Hari ate the bananas.

One evening, after sunset, Maharaj sat beneath the neem tree in Dada's courtyard. The sadhus sprinkled water on the grounds to mitigate the heat. Sometimes, Maharaj would tell Nityanand Swami, "Tell our sadhus, who are travelling to spread Satsang, not to travel in the harsh sun, because it could harm them. The sadhus can come for my darshan after the first rainfall. ◆

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

many months. Then at the word of Gunatitanand Swami he started the mission of spreading the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. This latter effort invited a barrage of insults, criticisms and temporary excommunication from the fellowship. In spite of the severe opposition Bhagatji Maharaj remained calm and composed, and wished for the good of all. ◆

ADHYĀY 2

BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA

Part 3



(Recap: In the previous issue we saw the virtues of Parth's surrender to Shri Krishna with the words, '*Kārpanyadoshopahataha svabhāvaha pruchchhāmi tvām dharmasammoodhachetāhā, yachchhreyaha syānnishchitam broohi tanme shishyasteham shādhi mām tvām prapannam.*' - 'O Lord! I, whose instincts have been overcome due to cowardice, and who has become infatuated in matters of dharma, ask you to decisively tell me what is for my well-being. I am your disciple. Please instruct me. I have surrendered to you' (Gita 2.7). Arjuna had surrendered to Bhagwan. This surrender demonstrated that he saw his own flaws. It was an acceptance of his flaws before the manifest guru. It was an acknowledgement of his flaws highlighted by the manifest guru and reflected his willingness to hear precepts that would lead to his liberation.

Now we will take a look at another valuable virtue of this utmost surrender.

FIDELITY

Arjuna's surrender is loyal to Krishna alone. He says, '*नहि प्रपश्यामि ममापनुद्याद् यच्छोकम्*' - '*Nahi prapashyāmi mamāpanudyād yachchhokam*' - 'O Lord! I do not

see anyone else who can rid me of my grief other than you. You alone are my saviour.' (Gita 2.8) Thus Parth's surrender is completely and specifically devoted to Shri Krishna.

Sorrow comes to everyone. Arjuna too. But the only difference is that the majority of people resort to a variety of different shelters to free themselves from that misery. For them, Bhagwan is just one of those many shelters. There is no committed belief that God alone is the support and the basis of one's happiness. Some such unfortunate and miserable people write books about how to become happy. They rattle their brains to find the secrets of happiness. Some resort to astrologers claiming to know the future. Some of the more superstitious resort to exorcists, black magic or witchcraft. Some of the more gullible surrender themselves to the intelligent who only have worldly knowledge, and willingly do just as they say. Some, however, try to get by on the basis of their own experience. But Arjuna has not resorted to any of these. He has done only one thing - he has made the manifest Bhagwan his guru. He has devotedly surrendered to him and him alone. He is willing to put the utmost trust in what he says, and to faithfully do as he says.

Let us remember Dhritarashtra for a moment, since all this news is in fact being related for Dhritarashtra to hear. Consider for a moment that on hearing '*Shishyasteham*' Dhritarashtra's thoughts must have taken a turn. He must have had to recalculate all his projections. Although blind, he must have clearly seen control of the situation slipping from his hands.

In order to understand Arjuna further, we should also take a special look at Duryodhan. A key difference already separates Duryodhan

and Arjuna at this point. In reality, both are understanding people. Both have introspected on their lives. Both have seen their own flaws. Just like Arjuna has recognized his flaws, Duryodhan says about himself, 'जानामि धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्तिर्जानामि अधर्मं न च मे निवृत्तिः' - 'Jānāmi dharmam na cha me pravrutitirjānāmi adharmam na cha me nivrutitihī' - 'I know what dharma is, but I cannot abide by it. I know that *adharmam* is, but I cannot revoke myself from it.' Thus, both are well acquainted with their own situations. Yet, Arjuna differs in knowing what he should do. 'In order to rid myself of my flaws, I have to make manifest Shri Krishna my guru. I have to take his refuge.' He knows this is the path that will uplift from his sorrowful state and revive his strength.

In this way, Arjuna is able to take a unique step forward. He can understand and accept the true means to progress. He is able to crush his ego. This has become impossible for Duryodhan. He cannot crush his ego. He cannot surrender to anyone. In fact, he has been crushed by his own ego. That is why he has shown his incapability in matters of abiding by dharma and retreating from *adharmam*. He says, 'केनापि देवेन हृदिस्थितेन यथानियुक्तोऽस्मि तथा करोमि' - 'Kenāpi deveṇa hrudisthitena yathā niyukto'smi tathā karomi.' Meaning, 'I will do whatever I feel is right.' Thus he has locked the door to his own edification.

Arjuna's actions make one thing clear. Some people say that to have a guru is a type of dependency. It is foolish to put one's trust in him and ignore one's own intelligence. It is not necessary to abide by someone else's experiences. One should move forward on the basis of one's own intellect and experience. There is no need to have a guru. To keep a guru shows one's weakness of mind and lack of intelligence. With such beliefs, they do not surrender to anyone. They do not accept anyone as their guru.

A typical word used for someone who has no guru is *naguru*. These *naguru* people are like stray beings. They are deprived of a guru's expertise and reservoir of knowledge. They never gain

a mature understanding. For this very reason, when the renowned devotee Goro the potter of Maharashtra checked Namdev by tapping him on the head, as if he was checking a pot, he said, 'Nāmā tu kacchā' - 'Namdev, you are incomplete.' Why? Because, Namdev was arrogant about his own knowledge. He believed himself to be learned and wise, and so had not yet made anyone his guru. Goro the potter said, "Namdev! You may be learned, but as you are still arrogant you will remain incomplete until you surrender to a guru. Therefore, make an experienced person your guru and surrender your arrogance at his feet. Namdev understood his mistake. He decided to surrender to a guru and in this way became the disciple of an experienced guru named Visoba Khechar. (*Kalyan* - Bhakta Charitam issue).

If a genuinely aspiring disciple surrenders to a true guru, we definitely find that even if the person was totally ignorant or immature before accepting discipleship, by surrendering to an experienced and wise guru, faithfully listening to his precepts and sincerely trying to abide by them, the disciple is, in a short period of time, able to grasp great secrets of spiritual and mundane knowledge, which are unattainable even after many years of effort on one's own.

In fact, the greatest secret of our *sanatan* tradition is this guru-disciple relationship. Since ancient times we can see this principle echoed in precepts like 'तद् विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्' - 'Tad vijnānārtham sa gurumevābhigachchhet' (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.12), or 'तस्माद् गुरुं प्रपद्येत' - 'Tasmād gurum prapadyeta' (Bhāgvat). Therefore, you will never find a great rishi of India who was a *naguru*. Our great rishis were examples of ideal disciples.

Here also, in the *Gitā*, Arjuna is such an example for us. With the words, 'Shishyasteham shādhi mām tvām prapannam' it is as though he is inspiring all *nagurus* to become disciples. He is teaching those without a refuge to take one. He is warning us so that we do not become like stray persons. He is tapping us and cautioning us not to remain incomplete. He is saving us from being

nagurus. He is making us conscious of the more subtle aspects of surrendering to a guru. He has enlightened the path of sincere surrendering.

These are the unique virtues of Arjuna's discipleship and surrender.

'NA YOTSYE' – I WILL NOT FIGHT

Sanjay then describes what Arjuna did after taking Shri Krishna's refuge: 'एवमुक्त्वा हृषीकेशं गुडाकेशः परंतप। न योत्स्य इति गोविन्दमुक्त्वा तूष्णीं बभूव ह॥' – '*Evamuktvā Hrusheekesham Gudākeshaha paramtapa, na yotsya iti Govindamuktvā tooshneem babhoova ha.*' – 'O King! After saying this to Krishna, Arjuna told Krishna that he would not fight and then became silent.' (Gītā 2.9)

Arjuna says that he will not fight even after taking the refuge of Shri Krishna! Why? Here, we are given a glimpse of reality. By taking refuge, it does not mean that we are instantly rid of our flaws, or that we instantaneously attain all good qualities. If a patient enters a hospital, meets a doctor, and openly tells him all his problems, he is still not instantaneously cured of his disease. If a student is admitted into the best educational institution and is given the best teacher, he still does not know everything instantaneously.

All of this just forms a base. It is the first step to becoming healthy or attaining knowledge. Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami says that a prince can be given the throne in a day, but he does not learn the art of ruling in a day. The same applies here. Arjuna has only just gained admission. The process to cure his disease and attain knowledge will now commence. Indeed, it is true that because he has found a true, experienced doctor, it will not take long.

Thus, we can once again see Arjuna's openness. He says what was on his mind, 'My mind is telling me not to fight, now you tell me what you feel.'

Shri Krishna Bhagwan was also pleased. The time was now right. Sanjay describes this moment between guru and disciple in an extraordinary way to Dhritarashtra.

TEARS AND JOY COME TOGETHER!

Sanjay said, 'तमुवाच हृषीकेशः प्रहसन्निव भारत। सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये विषीदन्तमिदं वचः॥' – '*Tamuvācha Hrusheekeshaha prahasanniva Bhārata, senayorubhayormadhye visheedantamidam vachaha.*' – 'O Dhritarashtra! Shri Krishna said the following, as if laughing at Arjuna who was in grief between the two armies.'

These words should be considered from a psychological point of view. Joy and tears in the same chariot. From a superficial point of view they are both in the same situation, yet there is a drastic difference in the outcome! Why? Here the Gita shines light on the effects of subtle feelings on the physical body.

The outward situation is not false, yet it is superficial. Krishna and Arjuna are both standing in front of an opposing army. The relatives of both of them are in that army. The Yadavs, Krishna's relatives, are in the Nārāyani division of the opposing army. This is the physical situation. But this is not the whole picture. It is when the subtle combines with the physical that emotions of joy and sorrow arise. The subtle is simply an attitude adopted to look at the physical. The magic is in the attitude. The scene is physical but the point of view is subtle. Our emotions are aroused by our attitude. These emotions then affect our physical behaviour and as a result we see scenes of laughter, play, tears and grief.

In today's world, we see that in financial, family or social problems some people become perplexed, cry, confused or mentally unstable. Some even commit suicide. Whereas, in the same situation, others are able to remain calm and stable; they realize that such waves of joy and grief are a natural part of everyday life and thus remain internally at peace.

Here, by showing us both grief and joy in the same *shloka*, the Gita inspires us to dive into the human mind.

Another meaning of the word '*prahasan*' is 'a sarcastic smile'. Arjuna had indeed become quiet, but only after saying that he would not fight!

Hearing this, Shri Krishna Bhagwan grinned. There was an immense contradiction between the great warrior Arjuna's natural instincts and his current behaviour, and on seeing this Shri Krishna could not help but grin.

THIS IS YOUR PRAGNĀVĀD

Krishna, with a grin on his face, said to Arjuna, 'अशोच्यानन्वशोचस्त्वं प्रज्ञावादांश्च भाषसे। गतासूनगतसूंश्च नानुशोचन्ति पण्डिताः॥' - '*Ashochyānanvashochastvam pragnāvādānshcha bhāshase, gatāsoonagatāsoonshcha nānushochanti panditāhā.*' - 'O Arjuna! You grieve for those who it is no use grieving for, and on top of that you speak like a wise man. But wise men do not grieve for those who are dead, or for those who are alive' (Gita 2.11).

Krishna designates Arjuna the title of '*pragnāvādi*' - 'one who acts as if he is wise'. This title is given to someone's whose speech and actions do not coincide. He who speaks like the wise and acts like the foolish is a *pragnāvādi*. Contradiction between speech and attitude generates *pragnāvād*. Someone is said to have engaged in *pragnāvād* when he bombards the listener with wise talk in order to prove his own stance. Trying to make one's mistakes look good by decorating them with attractive thoughts should be recognized as *pragnāvād*. To ingeniously and shrewdly cloak one's attachments in philosophical statements is *pragnāvād*. *Pragnāvād* is a natural habit of mankind. Whenever we get attached to a person, things, actions or places we often end up engaging in *pragnāvād* without even knowing it. This is a kind of deception and deceit and above all, it is the *pragnāvādi* person himself who is deceived the most. It is, in fact, impossible to do *pragnāvād* without deceiving oneself.

Well-known thinker Vinoba Bhāve explains *pragnāvād* in a very nice way using an analogy of a judge. There was once a judge who had sentenced hundreds of guilty convicts to death. One day his own son was tried in front of him as a killer. His son was proven guilty and it was the responsibility of the judge to sentence him to death. He hesitated

in doing so. He began to talk from an ethical point of view, 'A sentence to death is inhumane. Such a sentence does not befit mankind. With such a sentence, the guilty have no scope for improving. The murderer murdered under the extreme influence of his emotions, yet to sentence such a person to death is a shameful act for society and is a stain on humanity.' The judge began to present many such arguments. If his son had not been brought in front of him, the judge would have continually given many death sentences for as long as he lived. It was his attachment to his son that made him speak accordingly.

Many, like the judge, try to hide their attachment with *pragnāvād*. The same happened to Arjuna. His arguments relating to dharma and *adharma*, merit and sin, or ahimsa were not his own thoughts. They were just ethically sound looking arguments born from his attachment to his relatives. Shri Krishna Bhagwan was well acquainted with such infatuation of attachment and the use of words from the shastras to promote them. That is why he clearly said, '*ashochyānanvashochastvam pragnāvādānshcha bhāshase*' - 'You grieve for those who it is no use grieving for and speak as though you were a wise man.' Also, in order to give the example of true wisdom he says, '*gatāsoonagatāsoonshcha nānushochanti panditāhā*' - 'The wise neither grieve for those who are dead, nor for those who are alive.'

Even though this was a heavy dose of sarcasm, it was necessary. Krishna felt that Arjuna would be deceived by his own mind, and he therefore commenced the precepts for his disciple with the above words.

We should also take the aid of these words of the Gītā. We must introspect, "Am I deceivingly presenting the case in front of my guru in a way biased to urge what I want? Am I trying to hide my attachments in a cloak of ethical words? If this is the case, we must understand ourselves to be *pragnāvādi*. We should recognize such *pragnāvād*, abandon it and try and fulfil life's true duties, like Arjuna did. ♦

B *The Glory of* **HAGATJI MAHARAJ**



Nurtured under the guidance of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj's exemplary life of bhakti, service, obedience to guru, faith in God, upasana and many other virtues is an eternal beacon for all spiritual aspirants striving to attain spiritual perfection.

He endured many unprovoked insults and hardships, yet never wavered from his goal; such was his resilient determination.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 18, "If a person with shraddha encounters the company of a true Sant and develops shraddha in the words of that Sant, then all of the redemptive virtues of swadharma, vairagya, jnan, bhakti, wisdom, etc., would develop in his heart."

Bhagatji Maharaj reaped the fruits of such shraddha and company.

Fagan sud Punam, VS 2067, (19 March 2011), marks Bhagatji Maharaj's 182nd birth anniversary. On this auspicious occasion we pay tribute to him and offer our humble prayers that we, too, may develop such virtues...

Pragji Bhakta, or Bhagatji Maharaj (1829-1897), was born into a humble tailor family in Mahuva, a small town on the banks of River Malan in the district of Bhavnagar in Gujarat. His innate spirituality earned him the reverence of many sadhus and devotees, and they wished to learn more about him. One day, in Katpur, after the evening *arti*. Yagnapurushdasji asked Bhagatji Maharaj to narrate his life story...



Birthplace of Shri Pragji Bhakta, Mahuva



Memorial shrine on the banks of River Malan at the cremation spot of Shri Pragji Bhakta, Mahuva

BHAGATJI'S LIFE STORY

After the evening *arti*, everyone sat around Bhagatji. Yagnapurushdasji wanted to know Bhagatji's life story, so he asked him, "Bhagatji Maharaj, when did you first come into Satsang. What were you doing before that and what did you do after that?" Bhagatji was very pleased with this wise, learned and devoted young sadhu. Also, he had asked a question that was typical of one who believes there to be only peace in the actions of the manifest *Satpurush*. Bhagatji smiled and unblinkingly looked towards him for a while. He then narrated his life history.

"I was born on the 15th day of the bright half of the month of Fagan, VS 1885 [20 March 1829]. The first six years of my life were spent playing. I came into Satsang through the contact of Yoganand Swami, and the first time I met Gopalanand Swami and Raghuvirji Maharaj was in Pithavdi.

"For the next decade or so, I spent two months every year spiritually associating with Gopalanand Swami. Having spent 12 to 13 years with Gopalanand Swami, I then associated with Gunatitanand Swami. He was very pleased with me, especially in the year 1861 (VS 1917), when he granted me the three boons. I stayed continuously with Swami in Junagadh and by 1864 (VS 1920), he had guided me to spiritual perfection. Following that, they [members of the Vartal organization] excommunicated me from Satsang. A short while after, they accepted me back again. Gunatitanand Swami reverted to Akshardham in 1867 (VS 1923) and then I stayed with Shuk Swami and Pavitranand Swami. As time passed, I forged a close friendship with Vignandasji. Following that, I travelled to Vartal, Vadodara, Surat, Chansad, Nadiad and Petlad, fulfilling the wishes of many acquaintances.

"I have briefly narrated my life history to you."

The most direct way to earn the grace of the guru is to intuitively understand and abide by his inner wishes. Bhagatji Maharaj served guru Gunatitanand Swami in this way and earned his innermost blessings. Whatever the situation, Bhagatji had only one focus. He ignored the sarcastic taunts and unjust ridicule voiced by others and never lapsed in his service.

The result: Gunatitanand Swami blessed him with the highest state of God-realization...

MOVING THE DEAD DOG

One day, while the masonry work of the haveli in Junagadh was in progress, a dog happened to die on top of the stones lying outside the mandir, waiting to be used. No one moved the dead dog and the masons' time was being wasted. Swami heard about this and immediately called Bhagatji from where he was crushing lime.

"Pragji, please go and see why the stones have stopped coming," Swami said.

Bhagatji washed his hands and feet, and went there immediately. He saw the dead dog lying on the stones. Everyone else was just standing there looking at each other. Ordinarily, if Swami had asked any other devotee to have a look, they would have seen the dead dog and simply reported back to Swami, 'The stones have stopped coming because a dog has died on top of them.'

Bhagatji's actions were very different. He truly believed that Swami was all-knowing and yet had still called him to go and see what was happening. He swiftly concluded that it was Swami's wish to have the dog moved and restart the transfer of the stones promptly, so that the masons' time would not be wasted. Thinking like this, Bhagatji immediately changed his clothes and carried the dog away. The transportation of stones resumed and Bhagatji returned to crushing the lime after bathing. Several people saw Bhagatji do this and complained to Swami, "Pragji is dirty. He has touched a dead dog." Swami just listened to this and smiled, but did not respond.

REALIZING GOD BY LIFTING STONES

Once, in Junagadh, Mana Bhagat remarked to Gunatitanand Swami, "Pragji, the poor fellow, has left his home and family to stay with you and learn meditation. However, you do not ask him

to sit in meditation. Instead, you have exhausted him physically by making him observe fasts and work hard!" It was only natural for those who saw Pragji Bhakta outwardly as a simple tailor's boy to feel this way. But Swami wanted Mana Bhagat to appreciate Bhagatji's divinity.

Swami said to him, "I will make him realize God by making him lift stones. The fruits of austerities that are normally achieved after 7,000 years are achieved here within a few seconds. The state of realization does not develop just through meditation; it also develops when one performs service according to the words of the Sadhu. The service one does here is service for God and it is considered *nivrutti* dharma. Those who stay here have a genuine interest in this type of service and Pragji Bhakta has stayed here for this reason. Otherwise, the road is always open for him to leave." Mana Bhagat heard this and began to appreciate Swami's immense greatness and divine way.

BANANAS HAVE GROWN ON A CACTUS PLANT

One day, in the Junagadh mandir compound, Bhagatji was mixing lime near the haveli, while continuously remembering Swami's *murti*. At that time, Abhaysinh Darbar of Ganod and four or five of his kinsmen came and sat next to Swami.

Swami said to them, "Darbar, I have come across something unique. Bananas usually grow on a banana tree, but today why are bananas growing on a cactus plant? Pragji, the person currently mixing the lime, is a tailor's boy. However, he has attained control over his mind and senses by keeping his *vruttis* continually on Shriji Maharaj's *murti*. He has also perfected the

practice of yoga – something that great yogis even rarely achieve. He is capable of offering devotion to God in all three states.”

“Swami, anything is possible through your grace. He has achieved this because he has served you intensely,” the Darbar replied.

Swami added, “Until today, he had just persevered physically. However, now he will receive the fruits of serving me and making me happy. He has not cared at all for his body in the

last three-and-a-half years. No other ordinary aspirant could possibly undergo the arduous efforts he has made. He has to be an eternal devotee, because he is capable of truly fulfilling my inner wishes, for no other ordinary devotee could do this. I have now decided to free him from all his activities, so that he can just keep discoursing.” Having said this, Swami called Bhagatji and happily embraced him.

On many occasions, Gunatitanand Swami himself overtly and covertly highlighted Bhagatji’s spiritually elevated state to others. Based on these endorsements by Swami and their own experiences in the company of Bhagatji, many developed the firm understanding that Bhagatji

Maharaj was indeed the *param ekantik* Satpurush as the following accounts reveal...

ARISE GUNATIT!

To enable others to appreciate Bhagatji’s *gunatit* state, Gunatitanand Swami once asked Balmukund Swami to call Bhagatji. Balmukund Swami went to where Bhagatji normally stayed. As he was asleep, he called out two or three times, “Pragji Bhakta! Please wake up, Swami is calling you.” However, Bhagatji did not even stir and Balmukund Swami returned to Swami.

“Pragji Bhakta is fast asleep and is not waking up,” he told Swami.

“How did you try and wake him up?” Swami asked.

“I called out ‘Pragji Bhakta, Pragji Bhakta’ a few times,” Balmukund Swami replied.

Swami smiled when he heard this and said, “Now go and try again, but this time say ‘Arise Gunatit!’”

When Balmukund Swami went to Bhagatji and said this, the latter arose immediately and came to where Swami was. Swami then explained, “Pragji Bhakta is no longer Pragji Bhakta. He has become *Gunatit*. No wonder he couldn’t hear you when you called him Pragji Bhakta!” Through this incident, Swami convinced everyone of Bhagatji’s *gunatit* state.

AT PRESENT I AM MANIFEST THROUGH BHAGATJI

Motilal of Pij had availed of Bhagatji’s association in Nadiad. When he was returning, he thought to himself, ‘If Bhagatji really is the *Satpurush*, I should be able to offer continuous devotion to God.’ He had heard in Bhagatji’s discourses that whoever keeps faith in the words of the *Satpurush* becomes happy very quickly. When he got home, he tried his best to offer devotion to God continuously. Within just one month, he succeeded and achieved a completely different level of happiness. His body, his business, the world and in fact everything else became insignificant to him.

One night while he was sleeping, Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave him darshan.

“Maharaj! How should we understand Pragji Bhakta?” asked Motibhai.

“Pragji Bhakta is my *param ekantik* devotee, and at present I am manifest in Satsang through him. I want you to reveal this fact to everyone,” Maharaj replied.

Convinced of Bhagatji’s true form, the following morning, he went out to buy postcards in order to spread this message. In total, he bought 64 postcards for one rupee. He then

travelled to Nadiad and sent the postcards to all of his acquaintances in the villages.

The postcards read: 'Acharya Maharaj had summoned Pragji Bhakta of Mahuva and asked him to visit Nadiad in the month of Shravan. I have been to Nadiad to spiritually associate with him. I am now convinced that all the *ekantik* characteristics mentioned in the Vachanamrut by Maharaj are present in him. Hence, Maharaj currently manifests in Satsang through him. All should take the chance to spiritually associate with him and not criticize him. To do the latter would be like placing one's hand in fire.'

I HAVE ASSIGNED THE KEYS OF AKSHARDHAM TO PRAGJI BHAKTA

At around the same period, Bechar Bhagat, a *kothari* of Vartal mandir, and half a dozen *parshads*

travelled to Junagadh to listen to Gunatitanand Swami's discourses. They also wanted to travel to the five pilgrimage places. Swami satisfied them with his extensive discourses.

Once, Swami said to Kothari Ambaidas, "Kothari, I am free now because I have retired and assigned all the keys to Pragji Bhakta." When Ambaidas heard this, he was worried. He thought Swami had given all the mandir keys to Pragji Bhakta. Swami realized what he was thinking through his omniscient powers and clarified, "Ambaidas, do not worry. The keys to the mandir are here with me. It is the keys of Akshardham that I have assigned to Pragji Bhakta." When everyone else heard this revelation, they understood its significance. They realized that Bhagatji truly was Swami's form and that the doors of *moksha* would remain open through him.

In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 60, Shriji Maharaj states, "One can attain *ekantik* dharma only from someone who has already attained the state of *ekantik* dharma."

Bhagatji Maharaj was the manifest form of the *param ekantik* sadhu and reiterated Shriji Maharaj's statement to guide his sadhus and devotees...

ATTACH YOURSELVES TO THE SATPURUSH

Once, Bhagatji was performing puja and devotees from various regions were seated around him. After his *mala*, Bhagatji was folding his puja up when Dungarbhai asked, "Bhagatji Maharaj! If a mosquito sits on an eagle's wings, will it attain the heights of an eagle?"

Bhagatji smiled and replied, "If one becomes like a mosquito, then yes. However, when one develops the wings of *jnan* and *vairagya*, one can fly and be like a mosquito. If you become this sort of mosquito, then forget wings, but sitting on my head I will take you to Akshardham!"

Having said that, he added, "Many people still have doubts and question themselves, 'If we attach ourselves to the *Satpurush*, there may be some sort of problem.' Using flawed reasoning in this way, they dither. However, if you truly attach yourselves to the *Satpurush*, is there anything else

left to achieve? The *Satpurush* will attach you to Maharaj." Bhagatji then spoke extensively about attaching oneself to the *Satpurush*.

One of the devotees from Napad, who had been practising yoga, said, "I have managed to reach the first level, please show me the next level. Just as everything is available at the grocers and he provides one with whatever one asks for, in the same way, please show me the path of yoga too."

Bhagatji looked at him and replied, "Learn to offer devotion whilst following dharma. There is no value in miracles. If there was, then someone could create disorder by possessing powers like God." Correcting his understanding, Bhagatji added, "Having attached yourself to the *Satpurush*, offer worship and devotion in order that you can have Maharaj's darshan and receive the bliss of Akshardham in this very body."

Bhagatji spoke at length on this and removed this devotee's yearning for miracles.

CONCEPT OF THE MANIFEST

One day, Bhagatji was meditating in the mandir. The devotees of Thasra were sitting behind him and they had fallen asleep. Bhagatji woke them up and said, "You might think that I cannot see what's behind me; however, I can see from every pore of my body. Falling asleep in a place where God and his *Sant* are present indicates indifference to God." So saying, Bhagatji asked for Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 2 to be read and said, "We will not accomplish any work if we don't develop the same conviction towards the *pratyaksh* as we have for the past incarnations of God. Those who have attained *moksha* have attained it through refuge of the *pratyaksh*. The senses and *antahkaran* of a person who meets the *pratyaksh* form of God and his *Sant* become divine and are attached to God. Such a person's internal ignorance is overcome and he becomes *brahmarup*." Having spoken at length on this, Bhagatji added,

*"Yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau ।
Tasyaite kathitā hyārthaha
prakāshante mahātmanaha ॥"*¹

He continued, "There is no concept comparable to that of the *pragat* - manifest; just like the whole earth is illuminated only by the *pragat* (manifest) sun."

Ranchhodbhai asked sarcastically, "Today many people claim that, 'the guru will do everything and so we don't need to do anything'. This knowledge of theirs seems to make sense, so how should we interpret this?"

Bhagatji replied, "One has to make sincere efforts oneself. However, the concept of refuge (of God or the *Sant*) is something completely different. When one finds a guru, he simplifies the task to be done. It is like circumambulating a cow instead of the whole earth."

1. **Meaning:** All those attainments noted [in the scriptures] shine forth [i.e. are attained] for the great person who has the same profound *bhakti* towards the guru as he has towards God.
- Shvetashvatara Upanishad 6.23

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'DO, DO, AND DO'

One morning, Ranchhodbhai came to Bhagatji, prostrated and humbly prayed, "Bhagatji Maharaj, please forgive me. I was negligent in the assembly. I taunted you and asked sarcastic questions. However, I now realize that you are the great *ekantik Purush*. You have knowledge of Brahman, whereas I am just an insignificant *jiva*." Then, he narrated a dream he had experienced.

"In your dream, Shriji Maharaj gave you darshan dressed as a *brahmachari*," Bhagatji said, interrupting him.

"That's correct. It was exactly how you have described. You have revealed the facts of a dream I experienced three years ago. I have never seen a *Purush* such as you." Having said that, he continued, "In the dream, Shriji Maharaj told me 'do, do and do' three times. Please explain what I should 'do'. Maharaj did not say anything after that and so I will do whatever you say."

Bhagatji looked at him and said, "The first thing to do is to keep God and his *Sant* in your heart. The second thing to do is to remove any other thoughts and attach your *vrutti* in case you forget the *murti* in your heart. The third thing to do is to associate with the *pratyaksh* form of the *Sant* by thought, word and deed. This is what was implied by the words 'do'."

Ranchhodbhai was very pleased to hear this and happily went home. Meanwhile, Bhagatji and the rest of the group went to the mandir. Seeing Bhagatji's powers, every devotee's affection for him was strengthened.

Once drawn by Kalidas Mistry's affection, Bhagatji stopped at his house. Having discoursed for a while there, Bhagatji then went to Jhaverilal's house and noticed that Ullasram Pandya happened to be there.

"Oh! Where did you come from?" Bhagatji asked him. "I have come from Dabhoi," he said with hands folded.

(contd. on p. 24)



WATER IS LIFE

Thousands of years ago, the rishi of a famous Ayurveda text named *Bhavaprakash* stated that “Water is life to creatures” – *Jivanam jivinām jivaha*. In Sanskrit, there are 70 synonyms for water. One of them is *jivanam* – life.

Little wonder that the ancient peoples of the world preferred to settle around river basins, lakes and other sources of freshwater. Some of these civilizations included those along the mighty Saraswati and Ganga in India, the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia and the Nile in Egypt and northern Africa. A perennial source of freshwater for ancient man meant that he could stop his incessant foraging for food and instead settle down to produce crops through agriculture and irrigation. This also left him with spare time for higher pursuits such as art, music and religion.

RAINWATER HARVESTING

In India, those who lived in desert areas or cities, also practised rainwater harvesting. The monsoon rainwater falling on the roofs of their homes was drained into an underground tank. Such tanks are still commonly found in old houses in some cities in Gujarat. In Rajasthan, the water falling on wasteland was and is still diverted, by a gradient, into underground tanks made of stone, known as *kundis*. Such water is used for drinking for both humans and camels during the

summer when water in wells and ponds begin to dry out.

Gujarati pioneers in the early 20th century who settled in small villages and trading posts dotted along the railway from Mombasa to Kampala used to survive on rainwater diverted by ducts from their tin roofs into large tanks. An 80-year-old Gujarati trader recalls that as recent as the 1960s in Uganda, this was their only source of potable water since there was no piped water in remote villages such as Luwero, near Jinja.

IMPORTANCE IN RELIGIOUS RITUALS

In ancient Bharat, the rishis extolled water’s importance in many ways. They advocated *purta* karmas to attain *punya*. These karmas included digging wells, step-wells, ponds, setting up free water facilities (*parabs*) for travellers on roadsides and for pilgrims en route to important pilgrimage centres.

They also considered water as purificatory in all religious and domestic rituals. Water from holy rivers and lakes was carried long distance to bathe deities in other regions, for *abhishek* and in *sankalp*, *vartaman* and *achaman* rites. Bathing in holy rivers has been an ancient tradition to cleanse bad karmas and purify a person. A morning bath in a river or lake is considered more meritorious than having one at home (Chintyagama 4.3-5). Similarly, drinking water from a holy river was

and is also considered purificatory, righteous and sometimes curative in certain disorders of both the body and mind. On the death of a person, a few drops of the holy Ganga is poured in the mouth to ensure that the *jiva* of the deceased ascends to *swarga* and not be trapped in the transmigratory cycle.



Brijesh Mistry

Having briefly reviewed the role of water in man's life in general, we shall now examine its importance in the maintenance of our physical well being and ultimately our spiritual health (*adhyatma*).

IMPORTANCE IN PHYSICAL HEALTH

The human body, like the Earth, is composed of 75% water and 25% solid matter. When about 1% of body fluid in the form of perspiration, respiration, urine or defecation is lost, one experiences thirst. A 2% loss of water surrounding cells in the body's tissues can mean a 20% decrease in one's energy levels. When about 10% is lost due to diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera or bleeding, one risks death. The recent cholera epidemic in Haiti had taken the toll of over 4,000 lives by 28 January 2011. The salivary glands in the mouth use up about three pints of water a day to keep it moist. This reflects how much water the body consumes daily to maintain vital functions.

Water has five vital functions. It is a transporter, a dispersant, a lubricant, a coolant and enhances the electro-negative charge of blood cells. Red blood cells already have a negative charge to repel each other to prevent clotting and clumping. Pure water which is negatively charged, passes this to red blood cells.

A common practice and misunderstanding prevails in developed countries, especially among young people, that, instead of water, drinking sodas, artificially flavoured fruit drinks, juices,

colas, glucose or energy drinks, are equally healthy as far as fluid intake is concerned. However according to nutritionists and food chemists, this is a dangerous misconception. They firmly believe that there is no equivalent to plain, potable tap water. It does not even have to be bottled mineral water, which has its own problems regarding unhealthy chemicals released from the plastic by heat during transportation and storage.

In the past two decades, heavy advertising, coupled with fast-paced lifestyles has contributed to a drastic decrease in water intake during the daily schedules of schoolchildren, adults and more so the elderly, since their thirst sensation lessens with age. Chronic dehydration results in a host of ailments according to many naturopathic practitioners. A small number of allopathic practitioners are also beginning to realize this. One of the strongest proponents of this belief is Dr Feraydoon Batmanghelidj, MD, an Iranian physician who studied medicine in England. In his book, *Your Body's Many Cries for Water*, he explains in medical terminology how every function of the body heavily depends on the level of hydration - 'flooding' - of the body. In simple terms, a chronic 'drought' in the body, he says, can lead to 'dehydration diseases' such as headaches, migraine, heartburn (acidity), peptic ulcers, asthma, back pain, cramps, allergies, arthritis and many others. He believes that thirst is the last signal of dehydration. How did he discover this? As in many discoveries, by accident.

One night, while he was in Tehran's Evin prison during the revolution to depose the Shah of Iran, he came across a man howling in pain. Bent in a foetal position on the floor, he said he had a peptic ulcer. Since he had taken all the conventional medications such as cimetidine and antacid gels,

Dr Fereydoon was helpless. Then it struck him and advised the man to drink two glasses of plain water. Fifteen minutes later the man felt 50% better. Dr Fereydoon then advised him to drink two more glasses of water every hour during the night. In the morning, the man was strolling about without pain. Since this discovery, Dr Fereydoon has cured about 3,000 men suffering from peptic ulcers with only water, during his two-and-a-half year stay in prison. After his release in 1982, he went to the USA. There he reported his findings which were published in the *Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology* in June 1983. Since then he has

applied his water therapy to treat other diseases with remarkable success.

The crux of his advice is to drink about eight to ten glasses of plain tap water a day, until one's urine is colourless. If the colour is yellow, one should drink more. Along with this, he advises to take a pinch of salt (3 grams), by placing it on the tongue after drinking water, only once a day. This is to compensate for the salt loss during frequent urination. Water should be taken two hours after a meal. This is also sound advice in Ayurveda.

(contd. on p. 27)

SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION

Simple dehydration: thirst

Severe dehydration: extreme thirst, dry mouth and lips, thick saliva, giddiness, scanty, orange coloured and burning urine, feeling of intense malaise and fatigue, inability to concentrate or fuddled thinking, intense desire to lie down or sleep, sunken eyes, dry furrowed tongue (parrot tongue), loss of skin turgor (elasticity) and fainting.

Remedy:

Drink more water adding ORS (oral rehydration salts) as instructed on the packet. Alternatively, add one teaspoon sugar, pinch of salt, half a lemon to one glass (200 ml) of water. Drink this every 15-20 minutes in severe dehydration.

In India and coastal areas of the world where coconuts are available, a third alternative is to drink coconut water.

FILTERING WATER – BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN'S FORESIGHT

In 1826, Bhagwan Swaminarayan wrote the *Shikshapatri*, a code of conduct in 212 Sanskrit *shlok*s. In *shlok* 30 he gave wise and medically sound advice: not to drink unfiltered water or milk, nor bathe with contaminated water. Followers of the Sampradaya today continue to attach a piece of cloth on their water taps. The prudence of following such a practice in the late 20th century even in a developed country such as UK, is reflected by an article that appeared in the *Daily Mail* of 10 July 1996, with the title, '*Why Water Isn't Kosher*'. It pointed out to Orthodox Jews that minute freshwater shrimps (max. size 11 mm) were discovered in the tap water in London. A Thames Water spokesman said the shrimps live in pipe fissures and though not killed by chlorine, are harmless. The article recommended tying a piece of fine cotton muslin over the tap to filter the little creatures since Jews are not allowed to drink water containing shrimps.

In India and the tropics, filtering water with cloth removes disease causing organisms and agents such as worms, protozoa, cysts, eggs and larvae.



Freshwater shrimp
(*Gammarus pulex*)

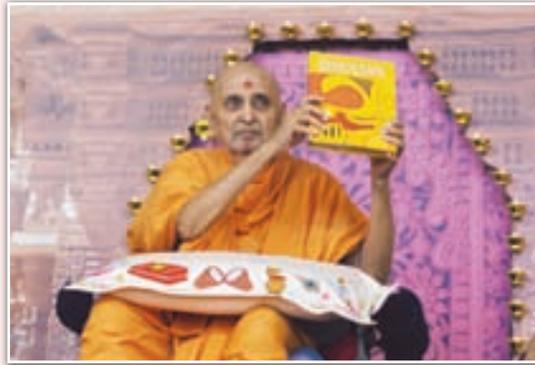


Entamoeba histolytica – causes
amoebic dysentery

HINDUISM

AN INTRODUCTION

REVIEWS



Hinduism, An Introduction,

is an excellent primary source of information on the history, traditions, philosophies, festivals, deities, devotees and many other aspects of Hinduism.

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

The publication was inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Gondal on Diwali (5 November 2010). Since then several revered spiritual leaders and distinguished scholars, judges, doctors, scientists and other public figures have reviewed the book and kindly sent their opinions.

With deep appreciation for their reviews, we wish to share them with our readers.

In this second instalment we share the reviews of two of the many illustrious spiritual masters.

Jagadguru Sri Sri Sri Padmabhushana Dr Balagangadharanatha Swamiji

71st Pontiff of Sri Adichunchanagiri Maha Samsthana Mutt, Karnataka

India is the Holy land. Sanathana Dharma, i.e., ancient Religion, has its roots firmly embedded in the fertile soil of spirituality.

It is here that human consciousness has evolved to its fullest state through great enlightened beings. These two books, "Hinduism, An Introduction", are written holistically in line with the old Hindu Tradition. Every Tradition

will have at least two significant aspects; one is ritualistic and second is philosophical, i.e., principle part.

Both philosophy and rituals of our Traditions have been constantly modified over the ages in the light of social and intellectual changes of the time.

Vedanta is an essential part of our Tradition.

Its principles are sublime and never considered as contrary to modern scientific truths, rather they are well regarded as complimentary. Even today science and Vedanta go hand in hand in spite of science and scientific thoughts have progressed enormously and taken very different directions.

In this book “Hinduism, An Introduction” by Sadhu Vivekjiandas, the learned author and practicing Hindu, and sadhu of Swaminarayana Sampradaya, has packed an unbelievable amount of information about Hinduism’s traditions, its principles, rituals, seers and the like.

The book informs and inspires Hindus worldwide. It ensures Hindus Unity in Diversity

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Head, Kauai’s Hindu Monastery, Hawaii

Publisher, *Hinduism Today Magazine*

This introduction to Hinduism is different from most in a number of important ways. We have chosen to comment on three. Firstly, the whole of Hinduism is presented in all of its grand diversity. So often in Hindu books does a part present itself as the whole. One philosophy is given as if it is what all Hindus believe. One Deity is mentioned as if all Hindus only worship Him or Her. The back cover introduces this concept effectively in saying: “Hinduism is a grand mosaic of many *sampradayas*, philosophies, rituals, festivals, mandirs, holy places, sadhus and shastras, and is often referred to by many scholars as a family of ‘religions’. Within these rich diversities, one can perceive common threads that bind Hinduism into a fascinatingly profound religion subscribed to by nearly one-sixth of humankind.”

Secondly, it shows the reader many facets of modern Hindu temple worship – again a topic often ignored in introductions to Hinduism. The scriptures upon which the ceremonies and architecture are based, the Agamas, are well de-

among all sects and lineages. The book also protects, preserves and promotes the sacred values and eternal truths hidden in our Vedas and Religious tradition. Anybody who studies this book should be able to feel the mystic nature of ancient Hindu philosophy and rejoice by following the rituals of the tradition.

“Hinduism, An Introduction” is a traditional storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. Divine effort of author will yield significant fruit in making men noble, moral, ethical and enlightened.

May all be blessed by the Almighty.

tailed. The centrality of rituals in Hindu life is succinctly stated: “Rituals form an integral part of worship and have been practised from generation to generation in countless homes and mandirs. They are deeply embedded in the Hindu culture.” Devotional practices from the key forms of personal worship through elaborate yajnas are described with the sanctity of them all emphasized in this key statement: “Hindus believe that the deity is present in the sacred *murti*.”

Thirdly, though presenting the multiplicity of Deities in Hinduism, the book stresses that Hindus all worship a Supreme Being. Chapter Two begins with: “The traditional defining principles of most Hindus are the belief and faith in one Supreme Divine Reality or Paramatma... (who) manifests in various forms. The belief in one Supreme God is called Ekeswaravada.” This is a helpful counter to what is unfortunately still encountered in many introductions to Hinduism which is that Hindus believe in a trinity of Gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

The two volumes on Hinduism are really a wonderful compendium to understand Hinduism or the Sanatana Dharma in its totality and depth. It is a great feat to have described about the entire gamut of Hinduism in given space, with a history of thousands of years, varied philosophies, vast rituals, many traditions innumerable ways of worship and really a very vast canvas of rituals. The two volumes develop systematically the concept and practice of Hinduism with its entire body of scriptural texts, rituals, methods of worship and its social contexts. They start with the basic philosophy of Hinduism enshrined in Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Dharmashastras; explain the core beliefs of it and then come to six systems of philosophy. Having built up the philosophical foundation, these volumes deliberate upon the Hindu Sampradayas, the Gods and Goddesses, temples, shastras and saints as also the sacred places of India along with the symbols of Hinduism. The second volume deals with the various methods of devotion as also with the lives of the great rishi-scientists of India. How Hinduism went through the globe through the efforts of great saints like Ramkrishna Paramahans, Ma-

harshi Arvind, Swami Vivekanand or Bhagwan Swaminarayan has been explained at length in these volumes. The author has done a right thing to include a separate chapter on Swami Narayan Sampradaya so that this otherwise very important Vaishnava Sampradaya finds an understanding and acceptance in the core intellectual fraternity of Hindus. The volumes are decorated with wonderful illustrations both enlightening and enchanting. The author of these two volumes has really done great service not to the Hindus around the globe but to the humanity at large. These volumes will help understating Hinduism in all aspects not only to the Hindus but to the followers of other religions also and will dispel many of the misconceptions that have crept in about Hinduism in the minds of its non followers, sometimes due to sectarian prejudices but many times due to genuine intellectual enquiries also. These volumes on Hinduism are very very useful both to an ordinary curious reader as also to university teachers, students and scholars. I bow in deep reverence to the author of these volumes for his monumental intellectual work.



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**I, Swami Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.
(Signed) Swami Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2011**

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's **VICHARAN**

January and 1-8 February 2011
Mumbai, Vadodara



Swamishri hails the *jholi* call during the Uttarayan celebration 14 January 2011, Mumbai

JANUARY & FEBRUARY

1-31: Mumbai

1-3 Feb: Mumbai

4: Mumbai, Vadodara

5-8: Vadodara

Highlights in Mumbai

On several days during Swamishi's stay in Mumbai various music artistes performed in his morning puja and offered their devotion. On 8 Jan. the BAPS Women's Wing celebrated Bhakti Din. Uttarayan Jholi celebrations were held on Sunday 9 January and Sunday 16 January. The Kishore-Kishori Karyakar *shibir* was held on 23 January, and the foundation-stone laying ceremonies of BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandirs for Pune and Nasik were performed by Swamishri on 24 January. Hundreds of devotees from different suburbs of Mumbai pilgrimaged by foot to Dadar mandir and fasted to please Swamishri and pray for his good health.

JANUARY

2, Sunday, Mumbai

The evening satsang assembly celebrated Swamishri's 72nd *diksha* anniversary. It was themed upon the virtues of a true sadhu highlighted in the Ramayan, Bhagavad Gita and the Shrimad Bhagvat. The entire programme was interspersed with video shows, speeches by sadhus and a cultural dance by BAPS children and youths. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly describing how Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj had endeavoured in establishing mandirs and satsang. They served with humility, tolerance and faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. "Yogiji Maharaj served in the kitchen. In Gondal, while the mandir construction work was going on, he would wake up at 4.00 a.m. and make food for the artisans. Our tradition is one of humility and service. The 500 *paramhansas* abided by the moral disciplines prescribed for sadhus and remained focussed on pleasing Maharaj."

5, Wednesday, Mumbai

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* for the *murtis* of BAPS *hari* mandirs in Dali (Mahelav region), Amod (Mahelav region) and Godavadi (Sankari region).

9, Sunday, Mumbai

To celebrate the first of two parts of the Jholi festival more than 7,000 devotees had assembled in the evening assembly. The devotees were seated in the Yogi Sabhagruh, Yogi Mandapam and several floors on Pramukh Sadan.

Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about the significance and glory of the Uttarayan festival. Thereafter a drama titled "A unique assembly of askhar *muktas* for Jholi" written by Adarshjivan Swami was enacted by youths. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "If one has devotion what can one not sacrifice? Dada Khachar gave his entire property to Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj put him through many trials, but he was a bona fide devotee and passed. The five Pandavs and King Ambrish were put to the test and they too passed."

14, Friday; Uttarayan Festival

After his morning puja Swamishri hailed the Jholi call of "Swaminarayan Hare Sacchidanand Prabho". Prior to this he explained in detail about how Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, himself and other sadhus used to beg for grains in the villages.

The festive ambience of Uttarayan was evident with the decorations of kites and grains

(The Glory of Bhagatji Maharaj, contd. from p. 16)

Bhagatji was very pleased and said, "It's good that you came because you were alone there." He asked him, "Through whose company did you develop affection for this Pragji Bhagat?"

On hearing this, Chaturbhai of Vaso replied, "Manishankar and Ullasram have both recognized you through Yagnapurushdasji's contact. Manishankar also used to come here, but you would send him away. However, he is new and he is the only Brahmin devotee in his village.

before Thakorji in the mandir sanctums and on the main auditorium stage.

19, Wednesday, Mumbai; 202 Gunatit Dikha Din

An ambience of a diksha ceremony was set up before Thakorji in the central sanctum of the mandir. Shriji Maharaj was shown engaged in initiating Mulji Bhakta into Gunatitanand Swami.

Prior to his puja Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs for suburbs in Mumbai, namely, Kharghar, Kandivali (East) and Virar, and Bodal (Kheda district).

30, Sunday, Mumbai

The evening satsang assembly was in commemoration to Yogiji Maharaj. It was themed on "Yogiji Sukhkari" - Yogiji Maharaj, the giver of happiness to all. The programme was interspersed with speeches, a dance and video. In conclusion, Swamishri praised the glory and saintliness of Yogiji Maharaj.

7, Monday, Vadodara

Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* for the second time of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Visnagar, Karjan, Vaso and Kapadvanj. He also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for BAPS hostels in Handod and Bardoli.

◆
Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjavandas

In addition, he has only just met you, so it would be good if you could let him stay."

Bhagatji agreed to let him stay. Manishankar then began touring with Maganlal and this pleased Bhagatji a lot. In this manner, whilst staying at Jhaverilalbhai's place, he made regular home visits to Dattram Barot, Gokul Barot, many other Barot devotees as well as several other affectionate devotees. He also gave bliss to everyone through his discourses.

Vasant Panchmi and 146th Birthday Celebration of Shastriji Maharaj

8 January 2011, Vadodara



The evening celebration of Vasant Panchmi commemorated the births of the Shikshapatri, Brahmanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami and Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. The stage backdrop, embellished with leaves and flowers, reflected the advent of spring. Swamishri's pathway was decorated with floral designs and *deepas*. The theme of today's festival was "Jai Jai Akshar-Purushattam" which highlighted the virtues and efforts of Shastriji Maharaj. The assembly programme included speeches by senior sadhus and skits and dances by youths. The programme was as follows:

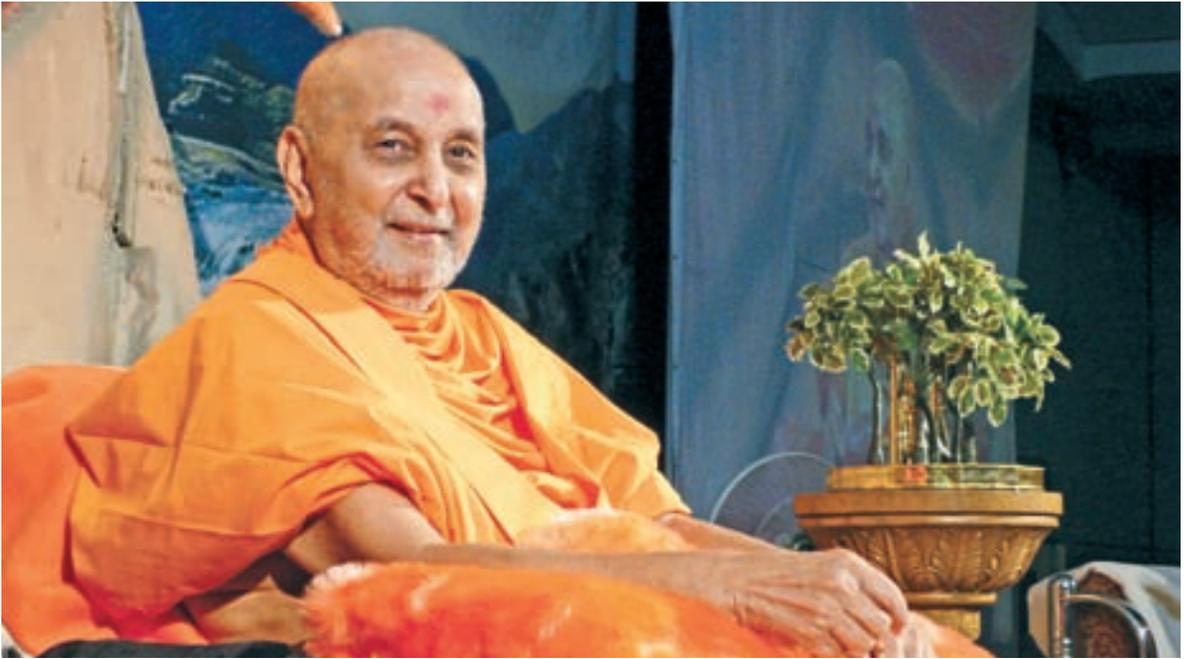
- The Spread of Upasana: Pujya Vivek-sagar Swami
- Vicharan of Shastriji Maharaj: Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami
- Shastriji Maharaj's love for devotees (skit): Bal Mandal
- Vicharan of Shastriji Maharaj: Pujya Dr Swami
- Hira Mukhi (drama): Youths

- The Living Guru Tradition: Pujya Mahant Swami
- Traditional Dance: Bal-Kishore Mandals
- Garlanding Ceremony by Senior Sadhus
- Video on assembly theme
- Swamishri's blessings.

Swamishri eulogized on the life of Shastriji Maharaj, "Shastriji Maharaj incarnated on earth through the wish of Shriji Maharaj. From his childhood he visited mandirs, listened to *katha* by sadhus, built mandirs of mud, installed Thakorji and performed *arti*. Viharilalji Maharaj gave him *diksha* and named him Yagnapurushdas. He studied the Hindu shastras and served in the Vartal Sampradaya with saintliness. On hearing about the principle of Akshar-Purushattam he consolidated it by meeting veteran devotees and sadhus and heard their testimonies in this regard. Then he met Bhagatji Maharaj and the principle was consolidated further. Shastriji Maharaj was born to establish and spread the Akshar-Purushottam principle and its mandirs." ♦

Living With Swamishri

January-February 2011



REMEMBERING GOD INCLUDES EVERYTHING

1 January, Mumbai

Kishorebhai Bhuptani, a devotee, asked Swamishri, "You are engaged 24 hours in remembering the name of God, but whenever you become free who or what do think of. Do you think of devotees, about the mandir (activities) or about your own health?"

Instantly Swamishri replied, "Everything is included while thinking of God. By remembering God the sadhus, devotees and all activities are encompassed."

REMEMBERING A DEDICATED DEVOTEE

6 January, Mumbai

A sadhu called from Chicago Mandir and talked with Swamishri. During their conversation Swamishri remembered a dedicated devotee serving in the mandir, "Convey my Jai

Swaminarayan to Kanu." As soon as Kanubhai found out that Swamishri had remembered him, he rang up Swamishri and said, "I am immensely pleased that you remembered me."

Swamishri praised, "I have to remember you because of your satsang, which is of soul-level, and your profound faith (*nishtha*). May your devotion and service remain of such calibre."

A devotee had sent an email describing his experience at a book-opening ceremony written by respected Dada J.P. Vaswani, a renowned spiritual master. It is as follows:

26 January 2011

To,

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and all Sadhus.

On the 25th of January 2011, Tuesday, I was privileged to have been given the opportunity

to attend a book launch at the National College, Bandra, Mumbai. The book was written by Res. Dada. J.P. Vaswani, who has always been a source of tremendous positive energy, good thoughts and faith for all his followers across the globe, most of them being Sindhis.

I was particularly touched by his words, because being a *satsangi* and hailing from a *satsangi* family right from my birth, I had heard most of the things he spoke, already. Some in our *satsang* books, some in the *pravachans* of our holy *sadhus* and some from the elders at home.

Towards the end of the function, after the book was launched, Mr. Niranjan Hiranandani, the president of the Hyderabad (Sind) National Collegiate Board, was called upon to deliver his vote of thanks. Amidst the other things he spoke, he particularly mentioned that, in the entire world, out of the many people he has met, Dada J.P. Vaswani is the most blissful person he has known. At this juncture a very peculiar

thing happened. Dada J.P. Vaswani insisted that he wanted to say something. Mr. Hiranandani paused for a while and Dada J.P. Vaswani said that he has had the honour of knowing one such man, who uses his silence in its best possible way. He said he is Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who runs an organization. He said that Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not speak much, and that people around him do most of the talking. But he said, there is a spark of divinity in his eyes and on his face. He said there are still some people on this earth, who are eternally blissful, one of them being Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Needless to say, I felt very proud on hearing this, because it was our own Bapa who was being talked about, and who was being praised by a man who had come in contact with Bapa only once but had experienced a lifetime of bliss and divinity. ◆

*Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas*

(Water is Life, contd. from p. 19)

Dr Fereydoon has appeared on TV and radio shows in the US and published two more books (for details see www.watercure.com).

In the next issue, we shall examine the water intake of school children, the effects on their health and advice for parents.

Disclaimer. This article on water is not intended as medical advice or discontinuation of any medication without advice of a physician. The information is only intended as an eye-opener for parents and adults.

Source refs:

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2. *Understanding Hinduism* brochure (C) 1995, Swaminarayan Aksharpath.
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5. *Your Body's Many Cries for Water* by Dr F. Batmanghelidj, MD (C) 2001.
6. "Water, the drink of Life" by Susan Clark, *The Times*, UK, 21 March 2000.
7. *Daily Mail*, 10 July 1996, UK. ◆

DIVINE WATER

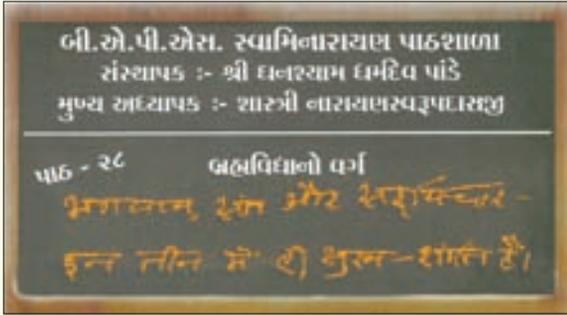
Ayurveda's texts consider rainwater, known as *divya jal* – divine water – as the most healthy, since it is naturally distilled and contains a minimum of total dissolved solids (TDS) – about 120 ppm. Compare this with river water which has a TDS of about 180 ppm.

Boy enjoying the monsoon downpour in Ahmedabad



SWAMISHRI'S MESSAGE OF THE DAY

January 2011, Mumbai



With the commencement of Dhanurmas on 16 December 2010, Swamishri wrote an inspiring message each day for one month.

The message was displayed on an electronic screen after his morning puja.

They are as below:

JANUARY, MUMBAI

- 1: BAPS : Be a Pure Sevak.
- 2: *Darek karya chivat ane choksai thi karva.*
Be careful and diligent in all your works.
- 3: *Hamesha savala vicharoj karva.*
Always think positively.
- 4: *Satsangma vighna kare teva kusangthi dur rahevu.*
Stay away from *kusang* that poses obstacles in *satsang*.
- 5: *Bhagwan ane Santma akhand nirdosh buddhi rakhvi.*
Always have pure thoughts and feelings for God and his Sant.
- 6: *Satpurush agal nishkapat-pane rahevu.*
Be profoundly undeceptive (honest) before the *Satpurush* (guru).
- 7: *Satpurushma dradh atmabuddhi karvi.*
Develop deep attachment for the *Satpurush*.
- 8: *Bhagwan ne sarva karta-harta manine jivaavu.*
Live with the belief that God is the all-doer.
- 9: *Prapti no kefkayam rakhvo.*
- 10: *Hu atma chhu em mani ne jivaavu.*
Live with the belief that one is *atma*.
- 11: *Roj sankhya vichar karvo.*
Think daily about the fleeting nature of all things.
- 12: *Bhagwan, Sant aur sad-vichar – in tinme sukh-shanti hai.*
Bhagwan, Sant and good thoughts – in these three lie happiness and peace.
- 13: *Bhagwan ane Santne raji karvano vichar hamesha rakhvo.*
Always think of pleasing God and his Sadhu.
- 14: *Potana atma ne brahmarup mani ne Parabrahman ni bhakti karvi.*
Believe one's *atma* to be *brahmarup* and offer *bhakti* to God.
- 15: *Hath, maan, irsha muki shraddha, khap ane samagam vadharva.*
Give up obstinacy, pride and jealousy and increase faith, affinity and spiritual association with Sadhu. ♦

KISHORE-KISHORI PRAYER ASSEMBLIES

Theme: Reading Ensures Progress
January 2011, Gujarat, India

With the all-important annual Board exams for Standards 10 and 12, and final year college exams due to take place in March and April, special prayer assemblies were held at 42 BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai. A total over 5,940 *kishores* and 4,510 *kishoris* personally participated in the collective mahapuja ceremonies to pray for everyone's success in the forthcoming exams.

The assemblies also featured inspiring guid-



ance from experienced sadhus, interviews with successful students, a skit depicting how improper company can distract one from studies and video blessings from Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The youths were also motivated to properly use the remaining time before their exams.

In some centres the youths also offered *abhishek* to the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. ♦

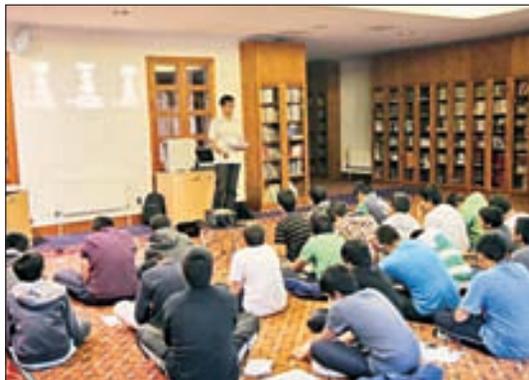
NATIONAL UK BAL-BALIKA WINTER TRAINING CAMP 2011

Theme: Satsang Karo ne Karavo

28-30 January 2011, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

Over 60 *balaks* and *balikas*, together with 30 *sanchalaks* and *sanchalikas*, who had participated in the India Trip and Summer Training Camp during 2010 attended the refresher three-day Winter Training Camp. They were provided special training and guidance by various speakers in a variety of ways on key topics concerning personal Satsang and holistic development.

The training camp also featured interactive sessions teaching techniques on how *bal sabhas*



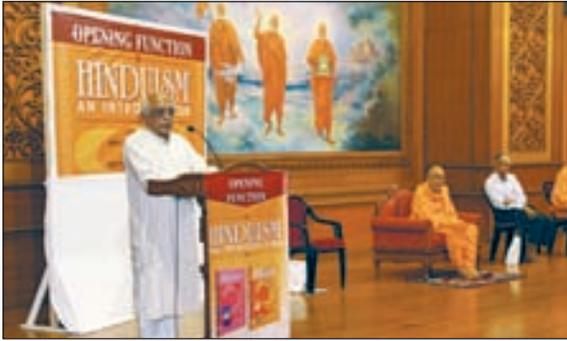
can be made more effective and enjoyable. This also proved to be a great time for bonding through team activities and presentations.

Throughout the three days, group discussions on topics such as daily satsang, peer pressure and other relevant practical issues were held.

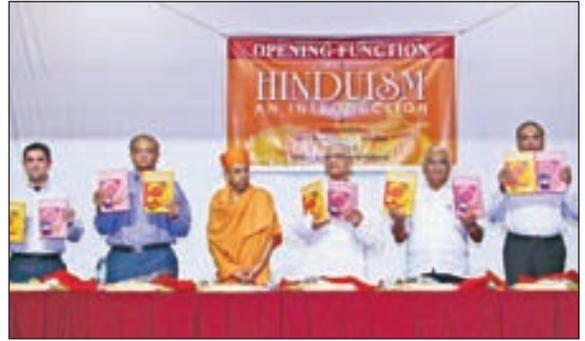
In summary, the training camp provided the children with a deeper insight of Satsang and *seva*, inspiring them to strive for further progress in their lives. ♦

'HINDUISM, AN INTRODUCTION' BOOK LAUNCH ASSEMBLIES

November 2010 & January 2011, Mumbai, Pune



Dr R. Chidambaram addresses the opening function at Swaminarayan Mandir, Dadar, Mumbai



Invited dignitaries display the book at the opening function at Jamnabai School, Vile Parle, Mumbai

Following the recent publication of *Hinduism, An Introduction* by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, a series of book launch assemblies were held at various venues in Mumbai and Pune during November 2010 and January 2011.

The seminars were held in Juhu, Vile Parle, South Mumbai, Dadar, Parla (E), Ghatkopar, Kandivali and Pune. Around 500 invited dignitaries, professionals, entrepreneurs and social leaders were present at each seminar.

The seminars began with welcome of the chief

guests. They then inaugurated the book. Thereafter, the author, Pujya Vivekjian Swami, spoke on the topic of Hinduism. Finally, some of the chief guests addressed the seminar and appreciated the high quality of the content and presentation of the book.

Among the chief guests were Shri Dr R. Chidambaram, Shri V. Ranganathan, Shri Mohanbhai Patel (ex-Sheriff of Mumbai), Shri Dilip Chhabria and others. ♦

BAPS CONGRATULATES...



BAPS youth **Dixit Joshi** was recently appointed as Head of Equities for Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) at Deutsche Bank and will be based in the London Office. He is one of only a few Asians globally engaged in Financial Services at this level of seniority. He was also a former board member for the International Swaps and Derivatives Association (ISDA).



Chandrakantbhai Patel of Ashton Satsang Mandal, who has been donating blood since the age of 16 years, has become the first donor in the UK from an ethnic minority background to reach 75 blood donations. He was honoured by the National Blood Service in an official awards ceremony.



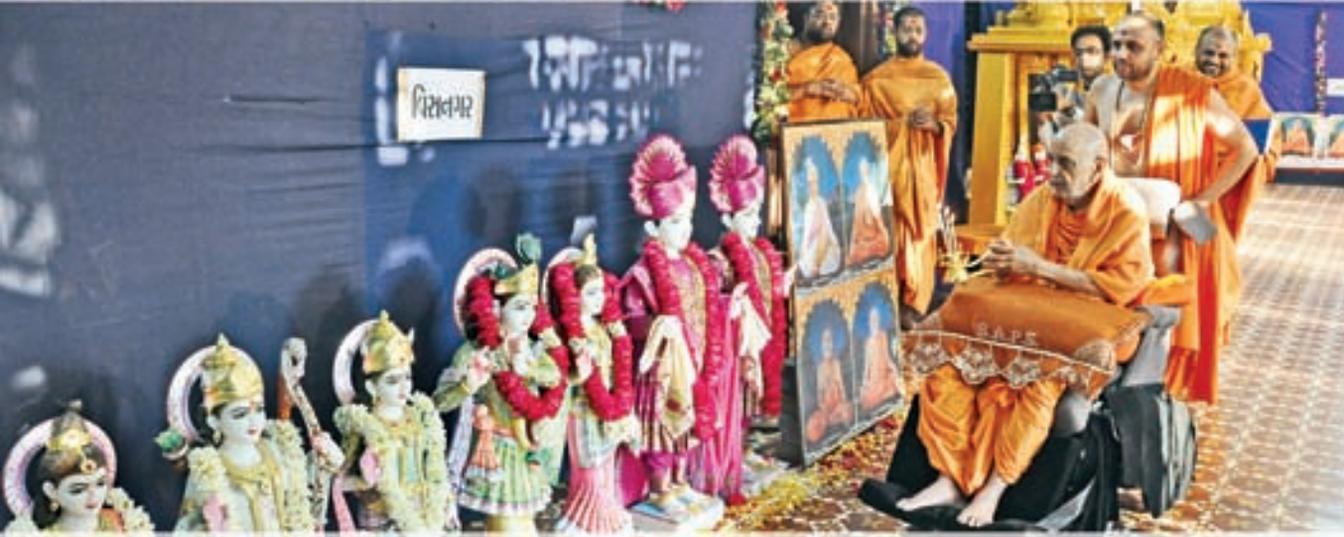
Jayeshbhai Patel of Kent, owner of Delmergate Ltd. Pharmacy group, has been awarded the Silver Standard of Investors in People by the UK Government. It the first Pharmacy group in the UK to win this award. Also, Jayeshbhai and Delmergate were acclaimed as the 'The best small Pharmacy multiple group', and 'Pharmacy of the Year' at the prestigious Alliance Healthcare awards.



Dr Jayendra Patel of Leicester has been awarded the prestigious 'Best Young Dentist' award for 2010, one of only five dentists in the UK to be accredited with this award. He was awarded first place for 'Best New Practice UK' and second place for 'Best Specialist Practice UK' in 2010. ♦



Murtis in the central shrine of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Atladra (Vadodara), (L to R): Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gopalanand Swami.



Swamishri performs arti of the murtis for new BAPS hari mandirs (7 February, Atladra).



On the way to morning puja, Swamishri joyously greets devotees seated in the mandir grounds, Atladra.



1

1-2. Swamishri and senior sadhus on the festive stage with a decorative backdrop of fresh, fragrant flowers on Vasant Panchmi celebration. 3. Thousands of devotees and sadhus perform *arti* at the conclusion of the celebration (8 February 2011, Atladra).



2



3