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NEW BAPS MANDIR IN TORONTO GRACES INTERFAITH CONFERENCE

“Every Hindu should become a better Hindu, every Jew a better Jew, every Christian a better Christian and every Muslim a better Muslim and every follower should become a better follower...”, were the sentiments expressed by His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the spiritual leader of the internationally renowned socio-spiritual organization the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) during The Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations in 2000.

July 18th 2004, saw these same sentiments expressed during an inter-faith service to coincide with the opening of a new BAPS Mandir (temple) in Toronto. Held in the presence of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the service was also graced by respected religious figures as Father David Warren, Imam Abdul Hai Patel as well as representatives from the Sikh, Jewish, and Jain communities.

Leading with the timeless adage from the Vedas, “The whole world is one family”, a Viswashnati Mahayagna (World Peace Prayer) was held and the whole event stressed the need for respecting people of all faiths and working in harmony with the community. Integrate

The weekend of interfaith service also saw the inauguration of the new BAPS complex. It consists of a proposed stone and marble traditional temple with an adjoining Haveli. The Haveli, which traditionally conveyed a courtyard like architecture, serves as the main prayer hall. It is rich with intricately carved woodwork and lavishly furnished with color and a variety of emblems. The combination of its architecture and color provides it with a truly authentic Indian atmosphere.

The inauguration held on July 17th 2004 witnessed the image installation ceremony in the Haveli. This is an important part of any mandir inauguration, and with the chant of Vedic hymns as per ancient Hindu scriptures, thousands of devotees and well wishers from Canada, United States and England observed Pramukh Swami Maharaj and senior saints Pujya Doctor Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami install the marble idols in a majestic hand carved *sinhasan* (shrine) of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and His ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami. These were installed along with those of Radha-Krishna, Sita-Ram, Shiva-Parvati, Ganeshji and Hanumanji.

BAPS mandirs are a hive of activity and Pujya Doctor Swami took the mandir inauguration as an opportunity to reinforce this. “A mandir is more than a mere building, it is the vehicle to progress spiritually, to impart cultural values on our youth, to mould character, foster family unity and serve the community”, said Pujya Doctor Swami, one of the very senior sadhu (saint) of BAPS.

“Saints and volunteers at these centers provide flawless inspiration for better living. Inspiring a peaceful, progressive life, free from crime, aggression and addictions” explained BAPS spokesperson Chandrakant Sachdev. “Specialized weekly assemblies are regularly conducted at all BAPS centers. While children learn through stories and rhymes, teenagers through multimedia and sports, youths

through discussions and dramas, the elderly progress through scriptural reading, discourses and introspection.” concluded Chandrakant.

The BAPS Shree Swaminarayan Mandir (Haveli) is located in Toronto at 61 Claireville Road close to the Finch Road exit on Hwy 427. Daily *aarti* takes place at 6:45 am and 6:30 pm. A weekly assembly occurs every Sunday from 3 pm. to 5 pm. For more information please call the BAPS Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto at 416-798-2277.

The Toronto visit of Pramukh Swami Maharaj is part of a 95-day North American tour. Prior to his Toronto visit, Pramukh Swami Maharaj graced many spiritual and cultural programs in the major cities of United States, including New York, Edison, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Orlando. His visit will culminate with the inauguration of two traditional Hindu mandirs in Houston and Chicago. These temples, the first of their kind in North America, have been crafted and constructed using traditional techniques as described in the ancient Vedic scriptures. These historic inaugural ceremonies will be broadcast live on the TV Asia network. The ceremony for the Houston temple will be transmitted on July 25th and Chicago will be transmitted on August 8th. Broadcast time for both events will be from 9:30am to 12:30pm Central Time.

For more information on BAPS and further details of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s North America schedule and program, please visit <http://www.swaminarayan.org>.

About Pramukh Swami Maharaj

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of devotees across the world to lead a God-conscious, character-centered life. As the present leader of BAPS, he travels from village to village, continent to continent, inspiring people of all ages to center their lives on moral values and sound judgment. He emphasizes the importance of family harmony, community service and spiritual progress among others. Representing the essence of Hinduism, his compassion for humanity, universal wisdom and striking simplicity have touched many world religious and national leaders.

About BAPS

The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide spiritual organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Founded on the pillars of practical spirituality rooted in Vedic philosophy, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Besides spiritual activities, through social and humanitarian activities BAPS endeavors to produce better citizens of tomorrow, who have very high esteem for their roots - the rich Indian heritage. Its 9,000 centers including more than 5,000 youth centers across the world support these activities of character building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to build a community that is morally, ethically and spiritually strong.