

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

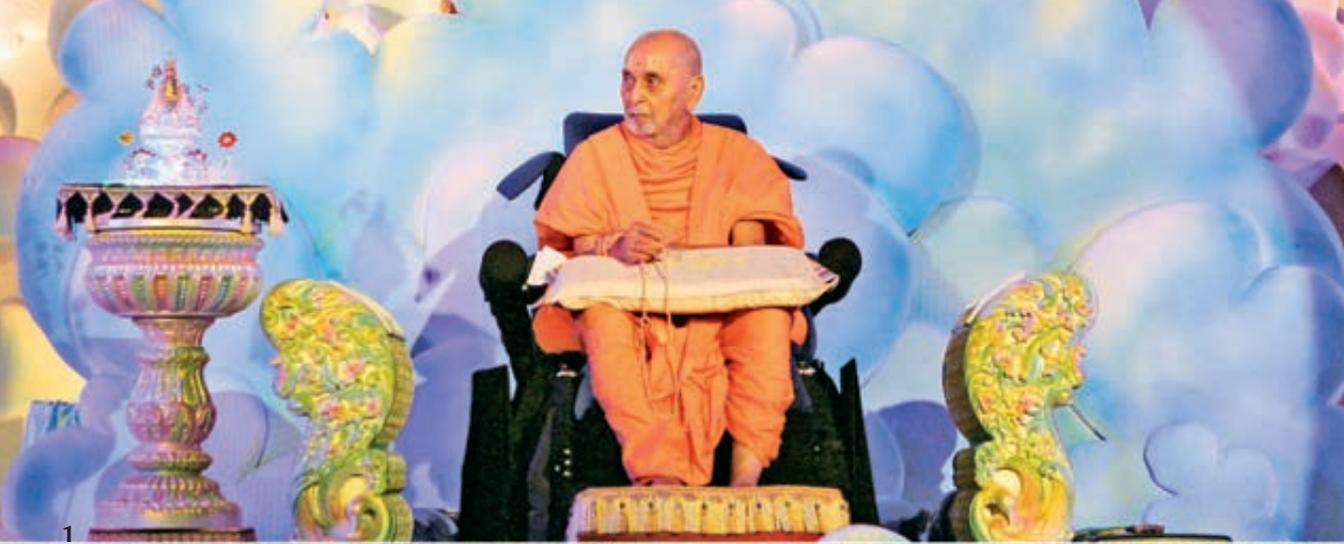
July-August 2011

Annual Subscription ₹ 60/-



The Guru Tradition in Hinduism

तक बुझना पारतर्हनामा अथवा रमा अन्तर्हनाकर ॥२७॥ जिहजसोनाको निवृत्तवकार
धरत ॥ अंतरजाति शाम ॥ करतचरित्रसोअनेविध ॥२८॥ जोफा ॥ प्रगतहोई अरुवाहिदो ॥ सो
सब चरित्रकरजोना ॥ आवतजावत चरित्रहेताके ॥ चरित्रकलेमेंनआवतवाके ॥२९॥ आवतजा
वनरहिहेतदा ॥ जेपेकेतेसदाहेहा ॥ आ तजा तदेवावतजोत ॥ नाकेएसेचरित्रहेसाउ ॥३०॥ भक्त



SHRI SWAMINARAYAN JAYANTI, 12 April 2011, Sarangpur

1. Swamishri on stage amid an enchanting backdrop of heavenly clouds.
2. Over 8,000 devotees gathered for the 230th birthday celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the presence of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
3. Swamishri performs the birthday celebration *arti* at the end of the assembly.

Cover Title: Diorama of Gautam Rishi blessing Satyakam Jabal, a disciple, for his sincere obedience (Akshardham, Gandhinagar).

Dedication

This special issue is dedicated to *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who is an epitome of the Guru Tradition in Hinduism, to mark the Guru Purnima Festival on 15 July 2011. The festival commemorates 1108 full moons of devotion and service to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Guru Parampara and to humanity in Swamishri's life of 90 years.



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July-August 2011 (Bi-monthly)
Vol. 34 No. 7



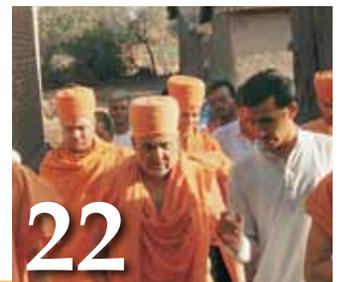
Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

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London & Wellingborough



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Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, Shahibaug,
Ahmedabad-380 004, India

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)			India
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	60
2 Years	1300	18	28	110
3 Years	1900	27	42	160

FIRST WORD

Hinduism is a dharma of enriching and breathtaking diversities. From hundreds of beliefs, sacred texts and philosophies to thousands of rituals, festivals, mandirs and gurus, Hinduism portrays a grand mosaic of practices and experiences to Hindus of all denominations and inclinations. Collectively most Hindus believe in God's presence and his manifestations on earth through enlightened gurus.

The 15th century mystic, Sant Kabir, emphasizes the importance of a guru in life: "In the midst of the highest abode there resides the Divine; he who has no Guru cannot reach the palace; he only will reach it who is under the guidance of a true Guru." Peter Brent, an English author, writes in his book, *Godmen of India*, "The Skeleton of Hinduism is the Guru. The continuity of divine awareness which runs through the succession of Guru by Guru is the chain that binds the religion together. The continuous presence of self-realized persons gives Hindus access to a constant inspirational source." In fact, the bona fide guru embodies the supreme divinity in all totality. To seekers of *moksha* he is the gateway to self-realization and God-Realization.

In this first instalment of the bimonthly edition of *Swaminarayan Bliss* we present to our readers the glorious Guru tradition in Hinduism. The issue comprises of articles about the ancient Guru tradition of Sanatan Dharma, and stories of guru-*shishya* relationships from ancient, medieval and contemporary times. In addition, two significant aspects of the great living guru of the BAPS Sanstha – Pramukh Swami Maharaj – have been described. They deal with Swamishri's legendary *vicharan* (holy travels) and his profound devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Like the illustrious moon Swamishri has illuminated countless people with the soothing light of his divine virtues, joy and enlightenment. Like the lustre of our moon that nourishes the multitude of herbs and plants for the benefit of all and inspires humanity with feelings of beauty and peace, Swamishri has nurtured and transformed the lives of innumerable people.

The many testimonies of youths and opinions of dignitaries in this issue pay homage to and provide insights on Swamishri's divine personality.

We offer our humble *pranams* and prostrations to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to honour his 1108th full moon anniversary that falls on Guru Purnima – 15 July 2011. ◆



MANDIR IN AHMEDABAD

After celebrating the Janmashtami festival in Sarangpur Shri Hari adds a new page in Satsang by initiating the construction of a mandir in Ahmedabad...

THE BEGINNING OF MANDIR BUILDING

Shri Hari was in Sarangpur. He called Anandanand (Anand) Swami and instructed, "Go to Ahmedabad and start building a *shikharbaddh* (traditional) mandir on the land given to us by the British officials. I want to consecrate the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan Dev, the first divine incarnations who came in this *brahmand* (universes and realms). Since people are not aware of them I wish to make them known. Both are the principal devas of earth and I wish to install their *murtis*."

Anandanand Swami prayed to Maharaj with one major concern in mind, "I will go as you wish, but how will I start without money." Shri Hari Maharaj smiled at his frustration and reassured him, "Don't worry. The devotees of Ahmedabad will give donations and the mandir will be done." But Shri Hari's words did not solve Anand Swami's concern. So Maharaj spoke to Bhaga Doshi, "Sheth, you are wealthy and also the mayor of Botad. You have attained prominence in the court of Bhavnagar. In addition, your devotion to God has further enhanced your name and profile." With Shri Hari praising him lavishly Bhaga Doshi was quick to understand that Maharaj wanted something from him. He asked, "Maharaj, what is it that you wish?" Maharaj was pleased and remarked, "Baniyas are a clever class because they understand quickly. Look, I have instructed Anand Swami to construct a mandir in Ahmedabad. But he is worried because there are no funds. I would like you to make some monetary arrangements for the present. Later, when the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir is done, we will return to you your sum from the money donated by devotees."

Bhaga Doshi was touched by Shri Hari's words. His eyes turned moist with love, "Maharaj, whatever wealth I have belongs to you. You only have to command me." Bhaga Sheth wrote a promissory note on a businessman in Ahmedabad asking for Rs. 10,000." Shri Hari asked, "Don't you have to apply your seal or stamp on the note?"

Bhaga Doshi smiled at Maharaj's particularity and said, "Yes, one normally has to apply a stamp but

the businessmen will recognize my handwriting and you'll have no problem."

Shri Hari was pleased with Bhaga Doshi's *seva*. Maharaj then assigned fifty *parshads* to join Anand Swami and help him in Ahmedabad.

In Ahmedabad, Brahmanand Swami had procured the official letter of propriety for the land from Collector Mr Gordon. He was thereafter awaiting for Maharaj's order to start the mandir. Shri Hari, on reading Brahmanand Swami's thoughts, had sent Anand Swami to help in the mandir construction.

One day, Shriji Maharaj thought that the framework and the major aspects of Satsang were well established. Satsang, too, was flourishing far and wide. His sadhus were travelling to distant places for the spread of Satsang. Maharaj felt that only with his sadhus grounded firmly in their moral disciplines will Satsang endure and become strong. Without them, the edifice of Satsang will collapse and die. Subsequently Maharaj told Premanand Swami to write a book, 'Vartman Vivek' – the dos and don'ts for sadhus. For the devotees, Maharaj had a separate letter written for their code of conduct.

To further nourish the moral conduct in his sadhus Shri Hari insisted that they recite together one kirtan each of Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami in the dining hall before lunch. Only thereafter would Shri Hari come to serve food to them.

Vasta Khachar of Kariyani arrived in Sarangpur with his family and several citizens. They all prayed to Maharaj to visit Kariyani. Shri Hari agreed, saying, "After taking supper you may return to Kariyani and start making preparations for our arrival. We shall stay there and celebrate Diwali and Annakut. The devotees of Kariyani were exulted at Maharaj's consent.

FOUR TYPES OF DESTRUCTION

The evening assembly was held at Maharaj's residence. Shri Hari explained the different levels of destruction: *nitya pralay*, *nimitt pralay*, *prakrut*

pralay and *atyantik pralay*. "By understanding the four types of destruction one is inspired with detachment (*vairagya*) from within one's *jiva*."

At that time an 18-year-old boy, a bard by lineage, of Barod village, was listening with rapt attention. Shri Hari looked at him often while discoursing. Maharaj was pleased with his concentration and interest in the *katha*. When the assembly concluded it was late night. The devotees, and the boy with his father returned to their lodgings. The boy and his father were staying at Bava Khachar's quarters. Another bard, Gaja Gadhvi of Rochka village, was sleeping in the same quarters. He was awakened when everyone arrived from the discourse. Gaja Gadhvi asked, "Where were you all till this hour of night?"

The boy replied, "We were listening to Maharaj's discourse along with the sadhus and devotees at his residence. The discourse concluded a short while ago."

Gaja Gadhvi was astonished by the boy's faith and patience for having stayed up so late. He asked, "What did Maharaj talk about?" The boy narrated the four types of destruction (*pralays*) that Maharaj had explained. As the boy spoke, his sweat voice floated through the silent night to Shri Hari's residence, which was behind their lodgings. Shri Hari was pleased with the boy's narration. The next morning Gaja Gadhvi came to Maharaj, who was discoursing to an assembly. Maharaj asked him, "Gadhvi, who was discoursing to you late at night yesterday?" Gaja Gadhvi pointed at the bard's boy. Shri Hari expressed his joy and called the boy to him. Maharaj tied a *pagh* (head gear), pressed his holy feet on his chest and gave him five rupees in donation. The entire congregation was overwhelmed by Shri Hari's generosity and joy upon the boy. Then Maharaj expressed, "To merely understand the four types of destruction I had explained yesterday was difficult. And, to remember them all would be extremely difficult; and, besides, if it were possible, one would not be able to articulate them. But because this boy
(contd. on p. 58)

THE GURU TRADITION IN HINDUISM

DR BRIAN HUTCHINSON

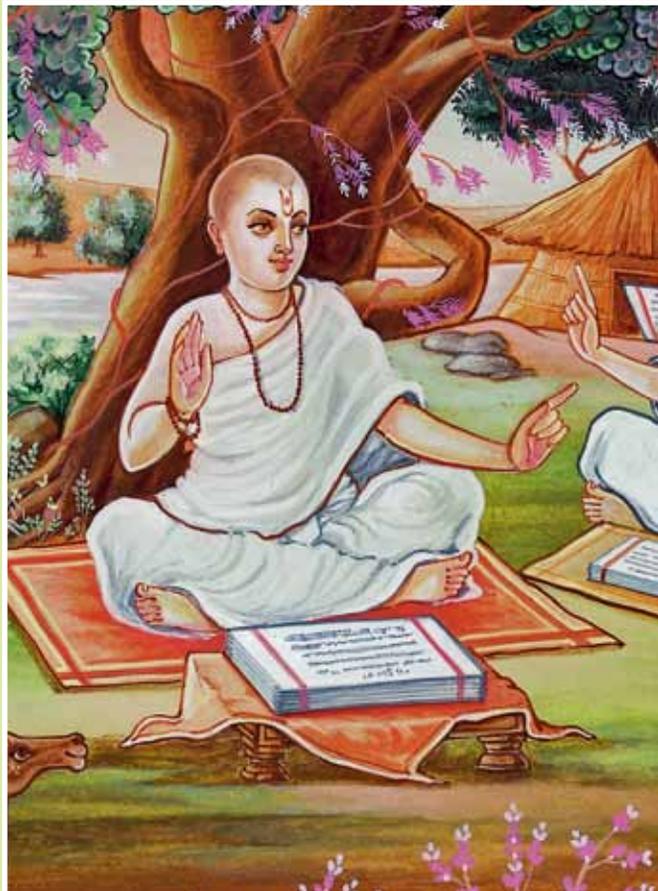
The following is an excerpt from the PhD thesis accomplished by Dr Brian Hutchinson in 1988, titled 'The Guru-Devotee Relationship in the Experience of Members of the Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sampradaya'.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP IN HINDUISM

In its general sense the term guru has been applied to any person, even one's father, who is in a position to provide some aspect of the education of the individual in Hindu society (McMullen, 1976:13). A more specific meaning applies in the case of the traditional family guru to whom a boy would be given for training in the Vedic lore once he had reached the age of twelve.

According to Ramesh Dave, a prominent householder scholar of the movement, in conversation with the writer, the family guru who acts more in terms of the priest is fast disappearing, whereas the guru-sampradaya tradition is continuing at greater intensity.

The guru, independent of the subject matter being communicated, is seemingly always 'more' than the message which he communicates. In other words, he enters into the process to such a degree that he himself becomes part of the message. Cenker (1983:184) uses the image



of the 'catalyst' [aiding change in other bodies without undergoing change in itself] for the guru. He says, "He is not only the teacher of doctrine but also the sacred center of a socio-religious institution, around which people gather to worship the gods and pursue liberation paths. Faith experience is engendered within the context of the *sampradaya*; this always occurs, however, in direct relationship to the living guru [that is, the individual relates not so much to the group as to the guru himself]."

THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE VEDAS

According to Padhye (1946:102), evidence from the Mohenjo-Daro excavations suggests that the institution of the guru is as old, or perhaps older than the Vedas. Mlecko (1982:21) says that the guru-*shishya* relationship was first recorded in the Vedas, "Here the guru was usually a Brahman,



it could also be shown that it had the sanction of the Vedas.”

Here Dasgupta follows the convention of including the Upanishads in the Vedas.

THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE UPANISHADS

The very term ‘Upanishad’ implies the centrality and existence of the guru in its meaning of ‘sitting down near’. In other words, the term may specifically refer to the method by which spiritual truths were communicated, that is, by a teacher or guru whose pupils gathered around him to receive instruction.

The Upanishads present the guru as essential to the attainment of the higher wisdom, knowledge of the Self, which is the primary goal of the Upanishads, cannot be attained without the guru.

“Only by knowledge received direct from the guru does one attain to the most beneficent. It is only he, in whom that knowledge is alive, that can communicate to the seeker” (Pandit, 1963:388).

The Katha Upanishad 2, (quoted by Pandit, 1963:388), has, “Unless told of Him by another, thou canst not find thy way to Him; for He is subtler than subtlety and that which logic cannot reach. This wisdom is not to be had by reasoning; only when told thee by another, it brings real knowledge.”

Sacrifice is insufficient to attain it, “The highest wisdom, which is the supreme stage, cannot be reached by sacrifice. One must go in a proper manner to a guru and discover from him the imperishable Man, the supreme reality” (Gonda 1965:409).

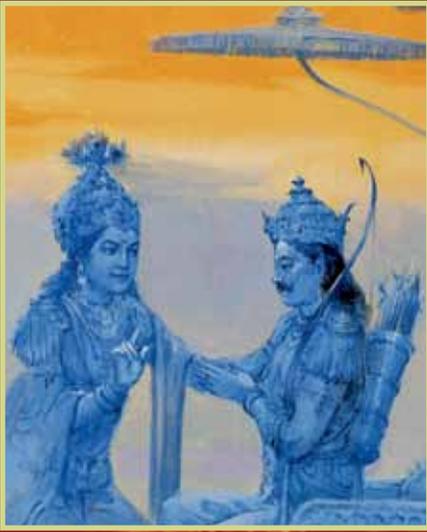
This belief in the importance of the guru is held so strongly that even the avatars, Bhagwan Swaminarayan included, have conformed to this pattern and have themselves had their own gurus.

The relationship between the devotee and the guru begins in the profound respect felt towards the teacher. Not only on the basis of the

a priest-teacher of the Vedas. At the very least, he was god-like. He embodied the Vedas and was given the same respect as the Vedas perhaps, thereby, laying the foundation for the later, intense devotion directed towards the guru.”

Respondents interviewed occasionally quoted the Vedas and other scriptures in their discussion of the guru-devotee relationship. They do not regard the relationship they experience with their guru as an innovation of the movement – though their guru is considered to be superior to those of other movements – but they understand the relationship to be that which is supported by scripture and tradition, and which is here being experienced in its most pure and true form.

Dasgupta (1927:16), reinforces the importance of this understanding with his comment that, “No change, no new idea could be considered right or could be believed by the people, unless



knowledge which he is understood to have, but for what he is in himself.

“The esteem given to the guru in the Indian tradition grows out of this initial conception of the teacher as both a knower of Brahman and a dweller in Brahman” (Cenkner, 1983:9).

It seems that such profound respect can easily merge into that of the love that is characteristically felt for the guru, not only in the bhakti movements, but in all guru-devotee situations, even where the teaching matter stresses mainly intellectual attributes.

The grace of the guru receives more emphasis in the later Upanishads, there, according to Cenkner, “liberation is virtually impossible without the knowledge and grace of the guru” (1983:10).

In these Upanishads there is a theistic emphasis, and ultimate reality is seen to consist in personal terms. The idea of impersonal Brahman is superceded. The most prominent of these is the theistic Svetasvatara Upanishad, which served as one of the main sources of the later doctrine of bhakti and to which tradition the movement belongs (Griffiths 1982:79). In the Svetasvatara (VI.23), (Tyagisananda 1964:136) devotion to the guru and to God are placed on an equal level, “These truths, when taught, shine forth only in that high-souled one who has supreme devotion to God, and an equal degree of devotion to the spiritual teacher. They shine forth in that high-souled one only.”

THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE EPICS, PURANAS, AND TANTRAS

The relationship between teacher and pupil is partly determined by the type of knowledge sought. The law books reflect a basic parental relationship between teacher and student because obedience to the laws is the basic orientation. In the earlier Upanishads, where knowledge of Brahman or knowledge of the Self is the aim, then a more intimate personal association between the guru and devotee comes about. It is the epics, Puranas and the early bhakti literature which establish the basis for the refined love relationship between guru and *shishya* (Cenkner, 1983:27), and which belongs to the understanding of the guru-devotee relationship in the movement.

“Be Me-minded, devoted to Me, Worshipping Me, pay homage to Me. Just to Me shalt thou go, having thus disciplined Thyself fully, intent on Me.”

- Gita 9.34

According to Mlecko (1982:40), the epics highlight “another response to the guru besides propriety and obedience; namely, devotion, the paramount dimension of bhakti. The Epics record the attempt to move away from the Brahmanic tradition in two areas: away from ritualistic (Vedic) and philosophical (Upanishadic) forms of worship to divine-human gods, the avatars, with emphasis on their human dimension.”

Spiritual progress in the devotee is seen in all instances of the relationship to be dependent upon assistance from the guru. Even the gods in human form, the avatars, conform to the system, and they themselves become devotees of a guru. In so doing, in addition to effecting their spiritual development within the human order, (again, their need for a guru for this purpose is a matter upon which persons hold differing views), they legitimise the guru-devotee relationship and reveal it as belonging not only to the human but to the divine order. A sadhu explained to the writer, “This is the traditional way that he [Swaminarayan] has accepted.... This is Hindu tradition; the belief that everyone must have a guru. Rama had a guru. The Lord having a guru helps to stress the desirable state of affairs. If the Lord himself had a guru then I too must have a guru.”

The classical model for the guru-devotee relationship occurs in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna appears to Arjuna in the guise of a charioteer. In guiding and advising him on the right way to think and act, he functions in the role of guru for Arjuna. Krishna is addressed as father, Lord and most venerable guru. Here devotion to the guru becomes indistinguishable from devotion to the Lord (Mlecko, 1982:21).

The Gita’s model, though representing the avatar-human encounter, is also accepted as the divinely ordained model for the guru-devotee relationship.

A leaf, a flower, a fruit or water,
Who presents to Me with devotion
That offering of devotion I
Accept from the devout-souled.

Be Me-minded, devoted to Me,
Worshipping Me, pay homage to Me.
Just to Me shalt thou go, having thus
disciplined
Thyself fully, intent on Me.

- Gita IX: 26 & 34, Edgerton 1964:48

In the Gita, Krishna, as avatar-guru, commends this relationship of obedience and devotion not only to himself but also to the human guru (Gita IV.34. Edgerton, 1964:26), “Learn to know this by obeisance (to those who can teach it), By questioning (them) by serving (them).”

That is, the attitude of loving devotion (bhakti), here being encouraged from Arjuna towards Krishna as God-incarnate, is understood to be the attitude which a devotee should show to his guru as the personal and immediate manifestation of the deity.

This humanizing of the concept of God which is strongly evident in the epics (Mlecko 1982:44) was continued in the Puranas and strongly influenced the understanding of the guru. Increasingly, devotion to the guru and devotion to God become indistinguishable. This identification of guru and God at least in the experiential area can also be seen in the Puranas, according to Mlecko (1982:44), “In the comparatively late portions of the Puranas, the devotional attitude towards the deity is shared by the guru. Even more, the guru is often identified with the highest deity of the sect.”

This attitude towards the guru has been a characteristic of bhakti movements in general.

The Swaminarayan sect, the ‘old’ and the Akshar-Purushottam branch, provide evidence to support this statement. Swaminarayan, during his ‘earthly’ lifetime, (1781-1830 A.D.), was apparently regarded as a sadguru. He evidently evoked an adulation and devotion in his devotees which elevated him in their understanding to the level of God himself. After his death, this conviction remained as the central moving force in the ‘old’ movement, focused on the *murti* of



Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

Swaminarayan and on his teaching. In the Akshar-Purushottam branch this continuing presence of Swaminarayan is also experienced as residing in his *murti*, and in his teaching, but in particular his presence is considered to reside in the guru. Thus for members of the movement the guru provides the most dynamic evidence of the presence of Swaminarayan.

The name 'Swaminarayan' itself carries the conviction of the whole sect that their founder was the holy man, the 'Swami', in whom the ultimate divinity, Narayan, was manifested. Members

chant the name as a mantra in public and private worship, and at other times in the life of the temple, notably at meal times before commencing to eat. The chanting affirms the belief that their founder was the human manifestation of the divine, and, as is the purpose of mantras, is believed to induce consciousness of God.

In the Akshar-Purushottam group the name has an additional meaning. It indicates that their guru is the 'abode' of God. Swami indicates the guru and Narayan the Lord. The guru is Akshar in whom Purushottam manifests, the Swami in whom Narayan is encountered.

A further similarity of the guru of the movement to the guru of the Puranas, is that the guru is not required to belong to any particular caste. The emphasis is upon the spiritual level of the individual rather than a traditional caste role. According to Mlecko (1982:44), in the period of the Puranas, "Religious authority was significantly shifting from orthodox Brahmans who knew the Vedas to the guru whose devotion and knowledge of Tantra led him to liberation."

Pandit (1963:388) emphasizes the influence of the Tantra in the guru tradition. He says, "It is the Tantra that has given firm shape to the tradition and worked out in minute detail the dynamics of the guru-sishya operation... In the tradition of the Tantra, the guru is the central pivot on which every movement in spiritual life turns. He is not just a learned man who can teach. It is profane to look upon him as human. He is much



more; in fact, he is looked upon as the Divine, even the very Divine Himself."

Mlecko (1982:57) makes the observation that in the Tantra the personalization of the deity moves to another level. He points out that there is a change in emphasis from the avatara, 'god descending', to the guru as 'man ascending' into divinity. Here, the guru, as *jivanmukta*, has attained freedom from karma and its limitations whilst still living physically. However, the belief in the movement is that the guru, as Akshar, has not needed to 'attain' the state of *jivanmukta* in order to grant release. With him, as one sadhu explained, "There is no question of development." The belief is that he is, by his very nature, 'eternally beyond *maya*'.

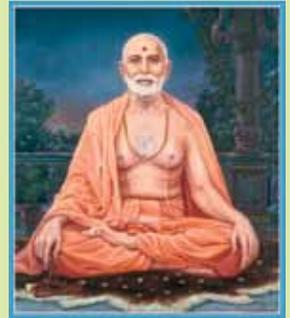
The association of guru and deity appears to reach its height in the Tantras. McMullen (1976:22), extracts the following statements showing the understanding of the guru from a number of Tantric sources, "There is no god higher than the Guru.... He walks on the earth, concealed for bestowing grace on the good disciples.... The worship of the Guru yields infinitely more merit than any number of observances, gifts, rituals, sacrifices, pilgrimages, mantra, *japa*, etc.... In this world all holy actions are rooted in the Guru.... Even when god Shiva is angry, the Guru is the saviour, but when the Guru himself is angered there is none to save. Ruin follows from the anger of the Guru, bad death from the criticism of the Guru, catastrophes from the displeasure of the Guru."

The guru has here become the dominating influence in spiritual life. All activity, book learning, ritual, must be "energized by the personality of the guru. It is only those acts that are inspired by the guru that yield bhakti and *mukti*" (Pandit 1963:388).

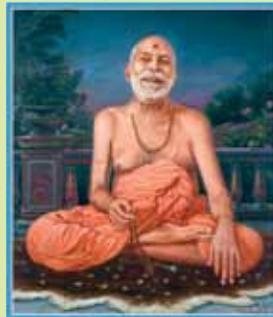
In the movement it is only obedience to the 'agna', the command and will of the guru that constitutes liberating action. Things which seem good in themselves are necessarily beneficial for the devotee; they need to receive the sanction of the guru's command.



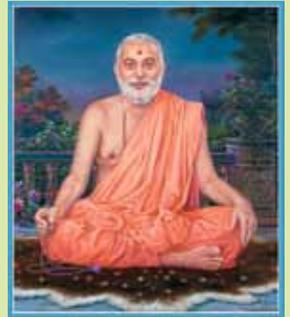
Bhagatji Maharaj



Shastriji Maharaj



Yogiji Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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GURU-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

IN SANATAN DHARMA'S ANCIENT SHASTRAS

Sanatan Dharma's shastras immensely extol the glory of the spiritual guru. The Guru Gita (32) of the Skand Purana states that 'gu' means darkness and 'ru' means remover of that darkness:

*Gukārashchāndhakārastu rukrāstanni ro dhakrut,
Andhakāravīnāshīvat gururityabhidhiyate.*

"The guru removes darkness and leads one to enlightenment."

It is important to understand this role of the guru since one cannot attain knowledge or enlightenment by self-endeavour. The Yogkundalini Upanishad (3.17) states that, "Only by listening to the guru's sermons does one gain knowledge of Parabrahman."

The Shvetashvatara Upanishad (6.23) shows how to serve such a guru:

*Yasya deve parā bhaktir yathā deve tathā gurau,
Tasyaite kathitā hi arthāhā prakāshante
mahātmanaha.*

"Offer devotion to the guru as one would Paramatma. Therein one attains all there is to

attain on the path to realize Paramatma."

The Bhagavad Gita (4.34) similarly advises the true aspirant:

*Tadviddhi pranipātena pariprashnena sevayā,
Upadekshyantitejnānamjnāninastattoadarshinah.*

"The disciple should prostrate to the guru, humbly pose questions to him and serve him. He will then impart the knowledge of Paramātmā, so ordain the wise sages."

It is the concept of *seva* – service of the guru, that we see depicted in the lives of three famous disciples from the ancient shastras, namely Aruni, Upmanyu and Satyakam Jabal (also Jabali).

The Upanishads stipulate one more immensely important discipline which pupils need to observe while studying in the guru's ashram. In the Prashna Upanishad (1.2), after having studied the Vedas and observed *brahmacharya*, six pupils approach Piplad Rishi for knowledge. He commands them to observe *brahmacharya* sincerely for one more year:

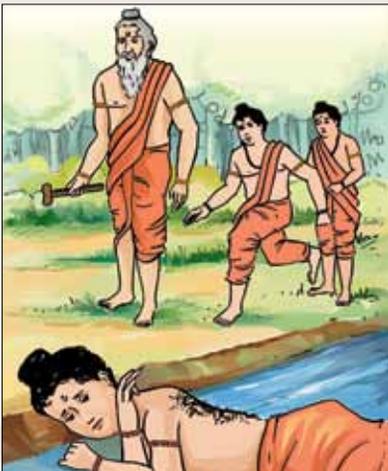
Brahmacharyena shraddhayā samvatsaram

The Bhagavad Gita (8.11) also advocates *brahmacharya* for those who wish to realise Akshar (Aksharbrahman).

1. ARUNI-UDALAK (Bruhadaranyak Upanishad 6.5.3)

Being the son of Arun Rishi, he was named Aruni (pronounced Aaruni). He was the disciple of Dhaumya Rishi. When he approached his guru to attain knowledge, the guru stipulated certain conditions for his eligibility. This was the tradition of the Upanishads. Generally there were four conditions to be observed by a pupil:

1. To serve (*seva*) in the guru's ashram.
2. To live with the guru, away from one's family.



Aruni lying down across a broken mud wall

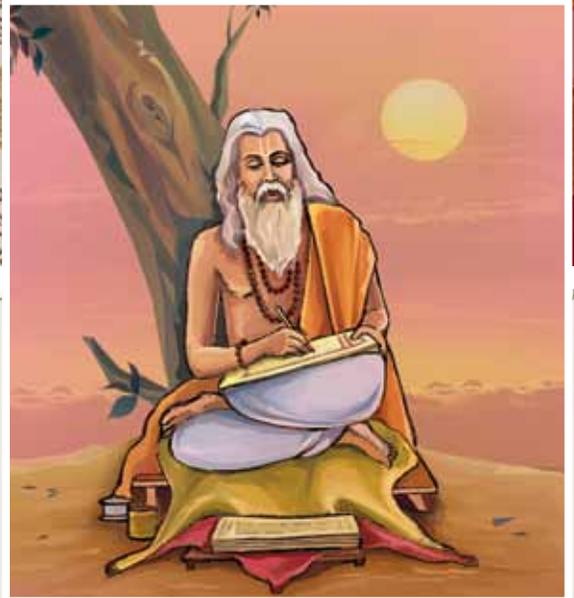
3. To convince the guru that he, the disciple, would not misuse the knowledge imparted by the guru.
4. To bear all physical hardships during studentship.
5. To observe *brahmacharya*.

When Aruni went to study at Dhaumya Rishi's ashram, the rishi instructed him to look after the ashram's agricultural land and specifically told him to make small mud walls on its borders to prevent water draining out of the fields. When Aruni arrived at one field, it was raining heavily.

To retain water in the field Aruni began shovelling mud to make a small wall. But the force of the rainwater would break it down. After many failed attempts, an idea occurred to him. He lay down sideways in the breach of the wall. This effectively stopped water spilling out. However, now that the wall was safe because of his body, how could he get up to return to the ashram?

Day turned to night. When Aruni had still not returned, the guru began to worry. He questioned the other disciples. They reminded him about his instructions to Aruni about making the mud walls. Therefore, the rishi went off to the fields. Here he called out Aruni's name. Aruni called back repeatedly to guide the guru to him.

By this time the mud wall behind Aruni had hardened and it was safe for him to get up. Therefore he got up and bowed to the guru. He related the events that prevented him from returning to the ashram. Then he said, "Now, what is your command?" Despite such an ordeal, Aruni requested for further service. Pleased by Aruni's enthusiasm to obey his commands, the guru blessed him and taught him *para* (spiritual)



and *apara* (mundane) *vidya*. He then told Aruni, "Since you have surmounted the wall [in the field], you will henceforth also be known as Udalak". Enlightened with knowledge, Aruni-Udalak returned home.

2. UPMANYU

(Mahabharat, Aranyak Parva, 3.32-84)

Upmanyu was another disciple of Dhaumya Rishi. When he approached the rishi for knowledge, the latter replied, "*Gāhā rakshasva*" – "Protect the cows."

Therefore Upmanyu spent the whole day in the jungle with the cows. When he returned to the ashram in the evening, he used to bow and prostrate to the guru. Once, the guru remarked, "O Upmanyu! You have become chubby. So tell me what do you eat in the jungle?"

Upmanyu: "I live by begging alms."

Guru: "It is a sin to eat without offering them to the guru. From now on, bring the alms to me. You shall have food only when I give it to you."

Upmanyu agreed readily, wishing to please the guru. A few days later the guru asked him the same question.

Upmanyu: "After offering food to the deity, I beg alms again for myself."

Guru: "This karma is against dharma. It puts an extra burden on householders. It also becomes

a problem for others begging alms. So stop this habit."

Again, Upmanyu complied by the guru's wish. A few days later, the guru questioned him.

Upmanyu: "I drink cow's milk."

Guru: "Again, this is another bad karma. It is improper to use cow's milk without my permission."

When the guru asked him again, Upmanyu replied, "I live on the froth that is produced while the calves suckle milk from their mothers."

Guru: "Then the calves must remain a little hungry. Do not take this froth either."

Upmanyu obeyed this wish of the guru. Once when he became very hungry, he forgot all his promises and ate a few *ankado* leaves [this is a poisonous plant]. This made him blind. While the cows returned to the ashram in the evening, he followed them by listening to their bellowing. On the way, he fell into a well.

Meanwhile, the cows reached the ashram. When the guru noted Upmanyu's absence, he wondered whether he might have fled, overcome by hunger because of his strict discipline. He then summoned the other pupils to search for Upmanyu. They called out his name every now and then. Soon they heard a reply.

Upmanyu shouted, "O gurudeva! I am here, in a well."

The pupils pulled him out. Upmanyu then related his story. The guru replied, "Sing the hymns of the Rig Veda in their proper musical metre and pray to the Ashwini Kumars [the twin physicians of the devas]. They will restore your sight."

Upmanyu obeyed and sang the hymns. The Ashwini Kumars appeared. They offered him a *malpudo* (sweet *roti* fried in ghee).

Upmanyu replied, "I cannot have this without offering it to my guru."

The devas tested his firm resolution further. "Once your guru had prayed to us and he ate the *malpudo* without offering to his guru. So do not worry. Go ahead and eat it."

Upmanyu remained steadfast and refused. This pleased the devas. "We are pleased with your devotion to your guru. You will regain your sight. You will attain greater fame."

Upmanyu then related the incident to the guru, who was pleased. He blessed Upmanyu, "You will regain your sight. You will gain knowledge of all the dharma shastras. As you read and study, you will gain greater insight and intuition."

To please his guru, Upmanyu tolerated hunger and ate only what he was allowed. He obeyed him sincerely without caring for his body even to the extent that he turned blind. Only then did he attain the guru's blessings and knowledge.

3. SATYAKAM JABAL (OR JABALI) (Chandogya Upanishad, 4.4-9)

Satyakam's mother was named Jabala. Hence he was known as Satyakam Jabal. Satyakam and his mother lived in a flimsy hut in the forest. To raise Satyakam, Jabala did hard labour work. She always told him stories about rishis, ascetics and celibates who performed spiritual endeavours in their ashrams in the jungle.

Once when he was old enough to study at a guru's ashram, he asked his mother the name of their lineage (*gotra*), about which his guru would inquire.

This perplexed Jabala since she did not have an answer. She would not lie because she had always urged Satyakam to live truthfully. Therefore, she said to Satyakam, "Since I arrived at your father's house, I was always busy serving. Hence I never had the time to inquire about his *gotra*. And he died soon after your birth. All I know is my name, Jabala and your name is Satyakam Jabala. Tell this to your guru."

Satyakam left in search of a guru. He arrived at the ashram of Gautam Rishi. Satyakam divulged to him that he wished to live as a celibate to study under him.

Gautam Rishi asked him about his *gotra*, to which Satyakam replied, "O rishi! I do not

know it. Even my mother does not know. She told me that I am Satyakam Jabal." Hearing this, the guru fell in deep thought.

He then said, "Nobody but a Brahmin can say this so truthfully. Therefore go and fetch fuelwood. I will perform your *upanayan samskara* rite (the sacred thread ritual) because you have not forsaken the truth." Gautam Rishi then invested him *janoi*. Then he told Satyakam to take his 400 weak cows into the forest and not to return until they had increased to a thousand.

Without asking a single question about his own food or shelter, Satyakam left for the forest with the cows.

For many years, Satyakam lovingly attended to the needs of the cows and protected them from wild animals. He gladly tolerated the hardships of living in the jungle, such as, danger of wild animals, lack of regular food for himself, rain, cold and heat, since he slept under the shade of trees. Except for the company of his cows, he probably had no contact with any humans. Without a determined yearning for *brahmavidya*, he would not have had the inner strength to overcome the above obstacles.

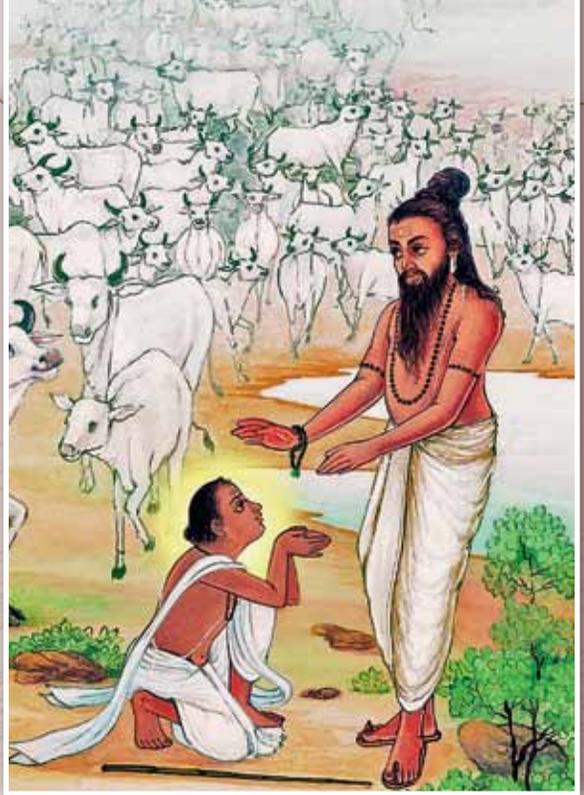
When the cows increased to a thousand, he began his journey back to the ashram. Along the way, various devas appeared and imparted partial knowledge about Brahman to him. By the time he reached the guru's ashram, his face radiated the lustre of Brahman. The other disciples noticed this.

The guru therefore asked him, "Who imparted the knowledge of Brahman to you?"

"The devas", replied Satyakam. "However, I wish that you impart this knowledge to me. I have heard that only the knowledge imparted by the guru renders it perfect."

Pleased with his humility, the guru imparted to him *brahmavidya*. Satyakam then returned home.

Similar to Aruni and Upmanyu, Satyakam did not pose a single question to his guru about his personal requirements of food and shelter.



Gautam Rishi blesses Satyakam Jabal

He must have possessed an intense craving to obtain knowledge in order to bear the hardships of living in the forest. How did he deal with the ever constant danger of predators such as tigers, lions, leopards and the more dangerous pack hunters such as hyenas and wild dogs? Besides animals, he braved the hardships of the weather. From a psychological viewpoint, his greatest foe was loneliness, to be able to survive without interaction with another human being.

Finally, the fact that he successfully obeyed the guru's instructions meant that during this period he also must have repeatedly fought with his mind, for he had initially approached the guru for knowledge of Brahman. How could this be achieved by looking after cows? However we are able to appreciate this today when we read about Buddhist or Shaolin monks being ordered to perform a meaningless task such as climbing a mountain backwards or on their hands. Similarly, Satyakam obeyed his guru's command without doubt and total faith – *sharanagati*. This is the mark of a true disciple of the Upanishad.

(contd. on p. 54)



Bhagwan Veda Vyas narrates the Shrimad Bhagavat to Shukhdevji

THE GURU AND THE SEEKER

The Sanskrit word 'guru' has been in use throughout India for many millennia, since the Vedic era. Translated, it means 'teacher', but actually represents a meaning beyond the general translation. 'Gu' means 'ignorance' and 'ru' means 'dispeller'. The guru, thus, is one who dispels ignorance – of all types – and gives knowledge. The original sense in which the title 'guru' was used referred to the spiritually accomplished seers of Vedic times who guided the young students living and learning in their ashrams, known as *gurukuls*. The guru tutored his young *shishyas* (students) in a variety of spiritual and secular disciplines. In this way the guru fulfilled many roles: as a teacher, counsellor, father-figure, and even as a bridge to the Divine. The guru was principally all this, and more. In this sense, he is an entity which has no exact equivalent in Western culture.

Traditionally, the guru is primarily regarded

as a personal spiritual mentor. He possesses not only theoretical knowledge but the experience of the spiritual heights to which he leads his *shishyas*. The sages of the Vedic and Upanishadic eras passed on this profound spiritual wisdom to their disciples. And the disciples, in turn, served their guru and, later, they too imparted this knowledge to their students.

In this way, the guru-*shishya* tradition of Hinduism has been nurtured from Vedic times right up to the present day.

THE NEED FOR A GURU

A question naturally arises: Why not directly serve God. Why is the guru required as an intermediary?

The story of Namdev provides the answer. Once, Sant Jnaneshwar, Namdev and other devotees had gathered at the home of Gora the potter. Sant Jnaneshwar, their leader, said to

Gora, "Test the pots gathered here to see whether or not they are well-baked. So, Gora took a stick and began tapping it on the heads of everyone present. No one said a word, except Namdev who protested. Hence, he was declared as the only unbaked pot. This insult offended Namdev and so he went for comfort to Lord Vitthala. But the Lord sided with Gora, saying, "One who does not surrender to a *sadguru* is an unbaked pot. When Namdev questioned the need for a guru, the Lord replied, that he too, in his avatars as Ram and Krishna had accepted gurus for guidance. Then, the Lord instructed Namdev to seek the refuge of the enlightened Visoba in the mandir of Mallikarjuna and serve him as his guru. Thus, by serving Visoba, Namdev became properly baked and attained enlightenment.

The following incident from the Swaminarayan Sampradaya also reinforces this point. Girdharbhai, nephew of Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal, was a genuine spiritual seeker. He searched throughout the Satsang to find a Satpurush, a true guru, as described by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. However, none could quench his spiritual thirst. Eventually, he prayed before the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in Vartal, which Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself had consecrated. After one month, Bhagwan Swaminarayan appeared before him and directed, "I remain manifest in the Satsang through Pragji Bhakta. Seek his company and I shall dwell forever in your heart."

Despite this clear instruction, Girdharbhai thought that since Pragji Bhakta was a tailor by profession this was not possible. Again he prayed to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Bhagwan Swaminarayan again gave him darshan and repeated his guidance. So, Girdharbhai went to Pragji Bhakta and from the very first meeting he was convinced and accepted Pragji Bhakta as his guru. Under Pragji Bhakta's guidance, Girdharbhai became a sadhu and also attained the enlightened state.

So, to attain spiritual enlightenment, one must surrender to a guru who is similarly enlightened.



Ramanujacharya



Namdev

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SEEKER

First, let us discuss some of the characteristics of a worthy *shishya*. A *shishya* seeking enlightenment surrenders unconditionally to the guru, submitting to his will without question. This is possible only when the seeker understands the true glory of the guru.

The guru may sometimes respond by subjecting the seeker to harsh, stern, unfair, prejudiced or even physically harmful tasks. This is done not to harass or frighten him but to test his resolve and strengthen him spiritually. It is done with the aim of elevating him spiritually and inspiring him on the path of liberation. Those who follow the guru's commands and tolerate such hardships earn the guru's blessings and experience the bliss of God.

The more distinguished seekers are able to intuitively understand the guru's wish. For example, Yamunacharya was a respected elderly guru of the Srivaishnava Sampradaya. He learnt of Ramanujacharya's outstanding qualities and regarded him as a suitable successor. They had never met, so Yamunacharya sent a disciple to call Ramanujacharya. However, by the time they returned, Yamunacharya had passed away and his body was about to be cremated. Ramanujacharya was disappointed that he was unable to meet Yamunacharya, but accepted him as his guru and felt comfort in at least having had darshan of his physical form. Before the cremation, he noticed that three fingers of Yamunacharya's right hand were bent into a fist. Other disciples told Ramanujacharya that the guru had three unfulfilled wishes: (1) to write a commentary on



Ramakrishna Paramhansa



Swami Vivekanand

Vyasji's Brahmasutras, (2) to promote the glory of Vyasji, Parashar and Nammalwar and (3) to spread the Srivaishnava philosophy. Ramanujacharya resolved to fulfil these three wishes. As soon as Ramanujacharya had made this pledge, the three fingers straightened. This demonstrated the inner bond between guru and disciple. Ramanujacharya later fulfilled all three wishes.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, also, such intuitive understanding was frequently seen between Gunatitanand Swami (guru) and Bhagatji Maharaj (disciple). This is clearly demonstrated when Bhagatji Maharaj watered the mangoe trees in the garden of Sankhdavadar and removed the dead dog to re-start the construction work of the *haveli* in Junagadh.

A dedicated disciple is one who is so united with the guru that he gives up his own resolves and accepts whatever the guru commands. Yogiji Maharaj often said, "I have always acted according to the wishes of Shastriji Maharaj, but not according to the calling of my own mind. So, Shastriji Maharaj has become extremely pleased. And today he gives darshan and I experience bliss."

QUALITIES OF A GURU

Regarding the role of a guru, Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa said, "He [the guru] brings man and God together, even as a matchmaker brings together the lover and the beloved."

This was experienced by Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902), when, as Narendra, he first met Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1836-1886) in November 1881. Overwhelmed by doubts about the existence of God, Narendra met Shri Ramakrishna at

the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. Immediately, the bold Narendra asked a question to which he had never previously received a satisfactory answer, "Sir, have you seen God?" Without hesitation, Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, I have. I see him as clearly as I see you, only in a more intense way." This emphatic declaration convinced Narendra, who accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guru. Expressing this conviction, Swami Vivekanand stated, "The guru must be worshipped as God, he is nothing less than that. As you look at him, gradually the guru melts away, and what is left? The guru's picture gives way to God Himself. The guru is the bright mask which God wears in order to come to us. As we look steadily on, gradually the mask falls off and God is revealed."

Qualifying the eligibility of a guru, Swami Shivanand (1887-1963) explains, "Mere study of books cannot make one a guru. One who has studied the Vedas and who has direct knowledge of the *atman* through *anubhava* (experience) can alone be enrolled as a guru."

Gunatitanand Swami has also described three yardsticks by which to measure the calibre of a guru, "Before accepting him, check the guru's purity in three ways: first, check his own behaviour; second, check the capability of the one he has served (i.e., his guru); and third, know those who have attained (knowledge) through his company (i.e., his disciples)."

Another revered Hindu sadhu, Swami Muktanand (1908-1982) describes the universal comfort provided by the guru, "On the one hand, he (the guru) is adept in spiritual matters and, on the other, he is exceedingly shrewd in his worldly dealings. Those aspirants who live under the protection of such a master pass through acute crises with ease and meet the most unfavourable circumstances fearlessly."

For the guru, exterior circumstances do not control his life, since his wisdom, strength and serenity are derived from within – due to communion with God.

The interplay between guru and *shishya* is well

illustrated by the Gunatit guru *parampara* established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Each guru serves as disciple to his guru and is also mentor to his successor and countless other devotees.

The tradition was set by Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself, who first served guru Ramanand Swami and then, as founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, led people to experience the bliss of God. He himself was revered as God and so, Gunatitanand Swami, the first guru, served him as both God and guru. Gunatitanand Swami renounced home at the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, performed austerities and physical service, and served in the demanding post as Mahant of the Junagadh mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Under Gunatitanand Swami's guidance, Bhagatji Maharaj experienced the highest state of God-realization. It is often said that Bhagatji Maharaj unquestioningly obeyed every command of Gunatitanand Swami, without concern for his own self or social status. Bhagatji Maharaj, for example, went to call Mt. Girnar, even though he was ridiculed by many claiming that he lacked discretion. Bhagatji Maharaj's reply, "I have obeyed the command. Now it is up to Girnar whether he comes or not," reveals the absolute subservience which had earned him Gunatitanand Swami's inner blessings.

Bhagatji Maharaj, in turn, nurtured Shastriji Maharaj, who boldly proclaimed the true understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy despite much opposition and hardships.

Shastriji Maharaj, as guru, formally established the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). He guided Yogiji Maharaj, who served with immense vigour to help in the construction of the initial BAPS mandirs and other foundational activities.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the present guru of BAPS, has served both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. As a newly initiated young sadhu, he served under Shastriji Maharaj, engaging in arduous physical services which were the priority at the

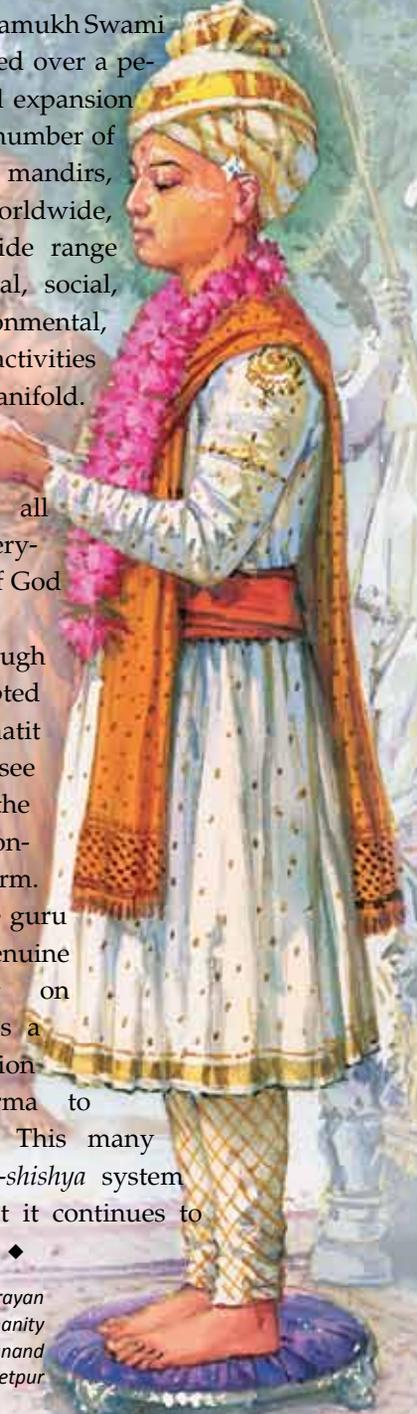
time. Also, initially under the guidance of Shastriji Maharaj, he expertly and efficiently shouldered the administrative responsibilities of the Sanstha. Then, under the guidance of Yogiji Maharaj, he continued to manage the Sanstha's administration and also significantly contributed to the rapidly growing Satsang activities.

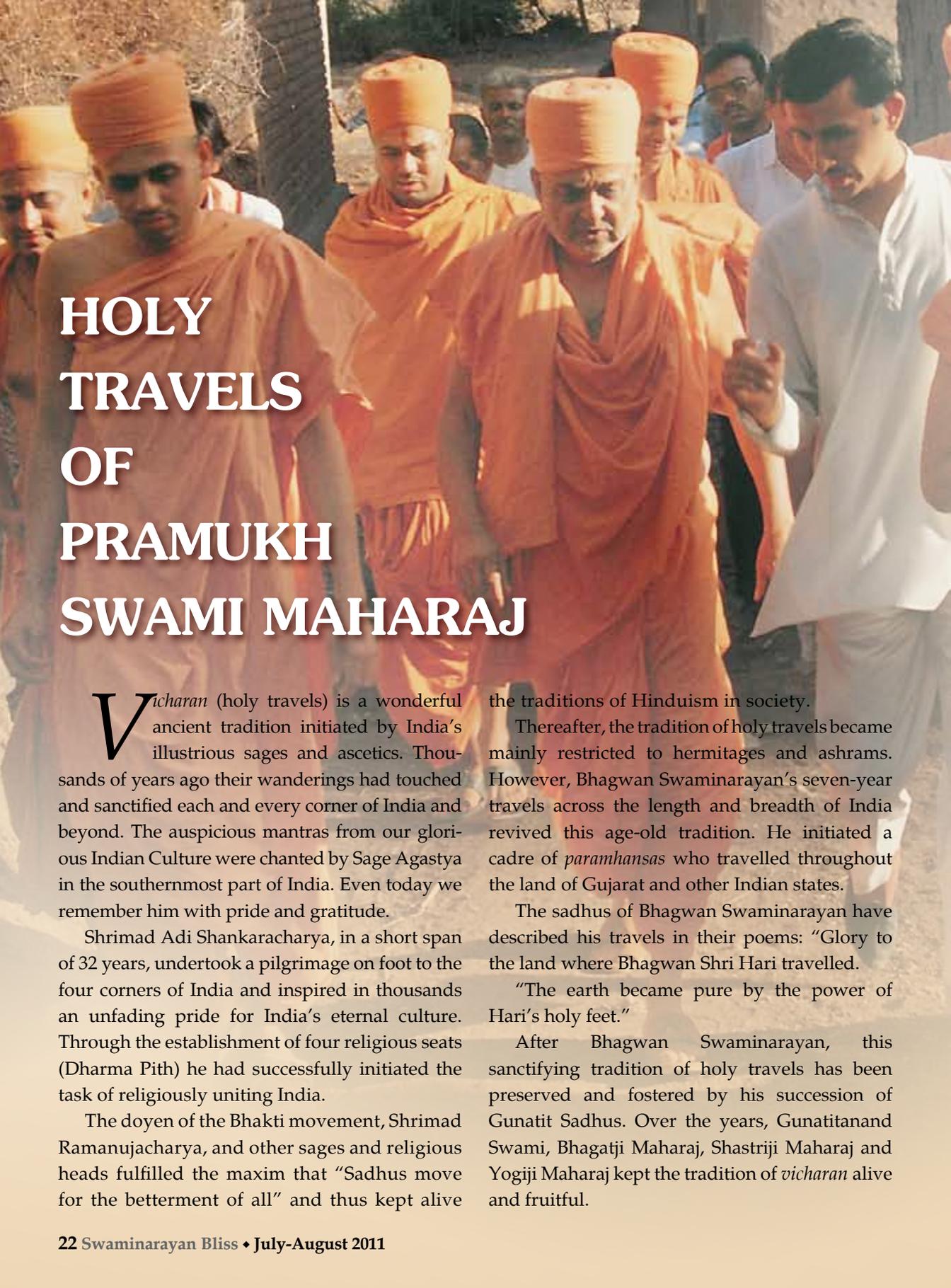
Now, as guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has presided over a period of phenomenal expansion of the Sanstha: the number of devotees, sadhus, mandirs, Satsang Centres worldwide, as well as, the wide range of spiritual, cultural, social, educational, environmental, medical and other activities has increased manifold. Yet, amid all this, he remains unburdened by it all and attributes everything to the grace of God and guru.

Thus, through this uninterrupted 200-year-old Gunatit guru *parampara*, we see the true ideals of the guru-*shishya* relationship in its perfect form.

To conclude, the guru who guides the genuine spiritual aspirant on the path to God is a unique contribution of Sanatan Dharma to world spirituality. This many millennia-old guru-*shishya* system is so profound that it continues to flourish even today. ♦

*Bhagwan Swaminarayan
pledges to serve humanity
before guru Ramanand
Swami in Jetpur*





HOLY TRAVELS OF PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

V*icharan* (holy travels) is a wonderful ancient tradition initiated by India's illustrious sages and ascetics. Thousands of years ago their wanderings had touched and sanctified each and every corner of India and beyond. The auspicious mantras from our glorious Indian Culture were chanted by Sage Agastya in the southernmost part of India. Even today we remember him with pride and gratitude.

Shrimad Adi Shankaracharya, in a short span of 32 years, undertook a pilgrimage on foot to the four corners of India and inspired in thousands an unfading pride for India's eternal culture. Through the establishment of four religious seats (Dharma Pith) he had successfully initiated the task of religiously uniting India.

The doyen of the Bhakti movement, Shrimad Ramanujacharya, and other sages and religious heads fulfilled the maxim that "Sadhus move for the betterment of all" and thus kept alive

the traditions of Hinduism in society.

Thereafter, the tradition of holy travels became mainly restricted to hermitages and ashrams. However, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's seven-year travels across the length and breadth of India revived this age-old tradition. He initiated a cadre of *paramhansas* who travelled throughout the land of Gujarat and other Indian states.

The sadhus of Bhagwan Swaminarayan have described his travels in their poems: "Glory to the land where Bhagwan Shri Hari travelled.

"The earth became pure by the power of Hari's holy feet."

After Bhagwan Swaminarayan, this sanctifying tradition of holy travels has been preserved and fostered by his succession of Gunatit Sadhus. Over the years, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj kept the tradition of *vicharan* alive and fruitful.



Before returning to Akshardham in 1971, Yogiji Maharaj revealed Pramukh Swami Maharaj as his successor. Since then, through his tireless travellings, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has continued to spread the universal message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan around the world. His unceasing efforts have known no barriers of time, country and people. Neglecting his physical needs, he has always focused on Shriji Maharaj's message of bettering people.

Viveksagar Swami vividly recalls those earlier hectic times, "Whenever Swamishri departs for another village, he is always in haste. However, stoppages on the way delay his arrival. On reaching the next village a tight agenda of programmes await him: the usual procession, an assembly and home visits. The same programme repeats itself in every village. If he comes across a mandir, he always gets down and does darshan. After the procession Swamishri always rushes through his evening meal.

"Is the milk ready?' he asks.

"No.'

"Hurry, and offer the meal to Thakorji.'

"While the attendant sadhu offers *thal* to Thakorji, Swamishri takes a quick bath. During that time, devotees from the host and other villages throng to see him. They come with problems regarding mandir lands, family differences, financial difficulties, health worries and other issues. Swamishri advises, settles disputes and blesses all. The attendant sadhu, after having offered *thal* to Thakorji, brings the food. While eating from his wooden bowl, Swamishri makes sure that all the food items are served to the devotees seated before him. In looking after them, he pays little attention to his own meal.

"During the afternoon, after lunch, if time permits, he reads and answers the pile of letters given to him by Dr Swami. After a brief siesta, he resumes his home visits. Following this, he either moves to the next village or if scheduled to stay on, he attends the evening satsang assembly.

This normally commences at 8.30 p.m., with the singing of *dhun* and bhajans. Haka Bapu, the first speaker, talks for at least forty-five minutes, then Dr Swami, and finally Swamishri begins at 10.30 p.m. or 11.00 p.m. He speaks for half an hour, sometimes an hour. After meeting the attendees one by one, he returns to his lodging for the night. It's already midnight. He says the *cheshta* (prayers) and then answers or reads some letters. Thereafter he retires for the night!

"Sometimes, at about 3.00 a.m., he wakes up for a visit to the bathroom, goes back to sleep and gets up at about 5.30 a.m. In remote, small villages, toilet and bathing facilities are scant. With only one bathroom, the sadhus and devotees have to wait in a queue. Swamishri brushes and bathes hurriedly. After wearing his dhoti and upper cloth he comes straight to his daily morning puja. He enquires as to which direction he is facing. If it is east or north he sits down for the worship. For at least forty-five minutes to an hour he patiently and calmly performs puja. After puja he rushes through his routine.

"Hurry up with the breakfast!' Swamishri insists.

"He rushes because he wants to begin the home visits at the earliest. He also tells the local devotees in charge to be ready and have everything prepared for the home visits. If his puja is arranged at another place, away from the place of his night halt, he makes a few home visits on the way. If the devotees for the home visits have not arrived after puja, Swamishri discourses on the Vachanamrut. Sometimes an entire hour elapses before he realizes that breakfast is waiting. He concludes the discourse, and instructs the ten-fifteen listeners to stay for breakfast. In spite of the lack of space he insists that breakfast be served to all in the same room. And as always... fast! Sometimes he skips breakfast due to the rush and sheer number of home visits.

"If the attendant sadhu places a leaf-plate for serving breakfast, he censures him and puts

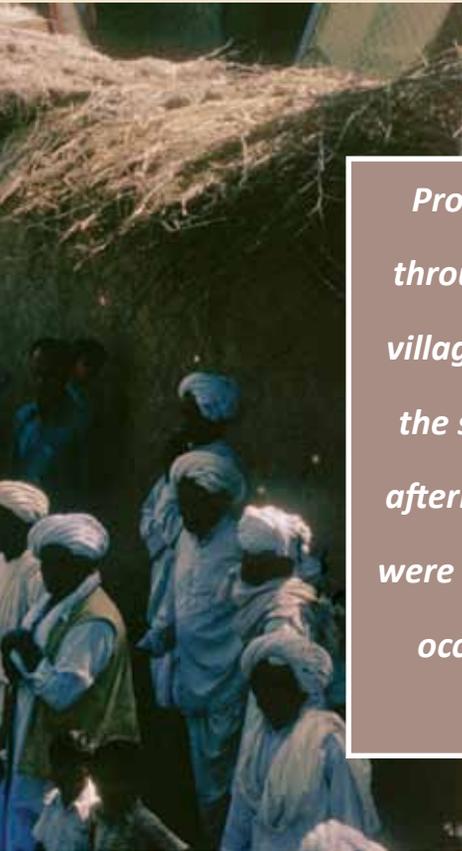


the plate on one side. He doesn't want to waste a 10 paise plate, and uses a piece of newspaper instead. If the host brings a steel plate he checks him, 'There is no need when paper suffices!' It is 9.00 a.m. when breakfast is over. People from neighbouring villages flock to see and seek his counsel.

"If it's a new village, the local people are unaware about how to honour Swamishri. So, they offer a garland to Swamishri first, without offering it to Thakorji. Swamishri tells them to wait, and amidst the crowd of people before him he calls out for the *murti* of Thakorji to be brought immediately. And if there is no one to instruct them about how to apply the vermilion, they take a pinch of vermilion and press it on his forehead. The extra powder sprinkles on his nose, face and clothes. While initiating children or seniors, Swamishri places a small string of beads (*kanthi*) round their neck. All this takes a lot of time. Then begins his round of home

visits in the village. On the way, if anyone brings his child to be initiated, Swamishri halts and performs the *vartman* ritual there and then. He instructs the guide to plan the route for the home visits systematically, 'Make sure we don't have to come back this way again.' Only 10-15 home visits are scheduled for the morning, but the figure often shoots up to 100 as he goes along. While Swamishri visits homes, Dr Swami goes through the mail at the residence, underlining the important sentences for Swamishri's perusal. The attendant sadhus prepare lunch.

"Swamishri is expected to return by noon, but he arrives at 1.00 p.m. Sometimes he comes at 2.00 or even 2.30 p.m. Quite often he never gets time to quench his thirst during the home visits. People ask him to sanctify their farms, their courtyards, grain stock, tractors, carts and even their buffaloes or cows! And Swamishri never refuses. After having lunch if someone wishes



*Processions
through dusty
village lanes in
the scorching
afternoon heat
were a common
occurrence*

to talk to him privately, he listens and counsels. Before retiring for an afternoon nap he hears a Vachanamrut. By the time he lies down it's past 2.30 p.m. He instructs the sadhus, 'Pack up and load our luggage in a tractor. I want to leave by four. Make sure nothing is forgotten. And before we leave I have 30 home visits to make, so wake me up at 3.15 p.m.'

"Swamishri wakes up on time. There are 20-25 devotees waiting to see him. He washes his face, drinks some water and meets the devotees. In between, he reiterates to load the luggage in the tractor. His afternoon home visits increase from thirty to forty and sometimes even more. He leaves at about 6.00 p.m. – two hours behind schedule! Sometimes, when he is about to leave by car, someone tells him that he has forgotten to visit his home. Swamishri immediately steps down and fulfils his wish. And we are left way behind schedule! And amid all this when our car stalls, Damjibhai the driver whispers,

'Swami, the gears have conked out.' Swamishri gets a little exasperated, 'What were you doing uptil now!... Never mind, see what you can do.' While the bonnet is raised, Swamishri picks up a bunch of letters. When the repairs are done, we get going on our way. By now the sun has started setting on a beautiful rustic horizon. We pass by the outskirts of a village. Silence and peace unroll for miles and miles before us. Swamishri is in the front seat, with one leg resting on the other. Wearing spectacles, he ploughs through the letters. When darkness sets in, he folds his spectacles and sings the *arti* and prayers, 'Jai Sadguru Swami...' And when he arrives at the next village the same cycle begins again – evening assembly, home visits and so on.

"During the day, the principals of the village primary and secondary schools insist that he address their students. This unscheduled programme of 20-25 minutes is arranged between his home visits. In cities, amid the hectic pace of activities, Swamishri sanctifies colleges and inspires the students through his discourses. If the village had been visited by Bhagwan Swaminarayan or Swamishri's gurus, he always reserves time to pay reverence to the holy spots."

For years Swamishri's travel itinerary followed the same hectic routine as described. Even today, at 90 years of age, Swamishri still travels though his *vicharan* has been curtailed because of his health and old age. But on the other hand his attendance to letters from devotees has increased and he still continues with the personal audience he gives to devotees and presides over the organization's administrative meetings.

In fact such holy sadhus are the holiest of holies. Wherever they go they sanctify things, places and people. And this is why they move before us in society. ◆

*- Excerpt from 'Immortal River',
a translation of 'Amrut Sarita' in Gujarati
Gujarati: Sadhu Viveksagardas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiwandas*

SWAMISHRI'S DEVOTION TO GOD



Bhakti is Devotion.
Parabhakti is Pure devotion.
Devotion par excellence.

It fills the emptiness in life with joy.

For one lost in the web of a never-ending forest, devotion offers direction.

For one burdened by the whirlwind of material desires, devotion lightens and enlightens.

And for one blinded by bodily attachment, devotion offers a cure, gently guiding the *atma*, the self, to Paramatma – God.

Bhakti is the supreme of all spiritual disciplines in man's quest to attain God.

Matchless, unparalleled, unique.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the embodiment of such bhakti.

Every action, every deed, every moment of Pramukh Swami Maharaj oozes with bhakti. The focus is his beloved Lord, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, also known as Shriji Maharaj, or simply Maharaj: from the moment Swamishri's eyes open in the morning, with his lips softly uttering 'Maharaj, Swami', to the moment he closes his eyes for the night, silently chanting 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...'.

During puja, darshan of Thakorji or singing of bhajans, his devotion is apparent. At other times, it is not so visually apparent. Those who have witnessed him sleeping testify that even in deep sleep, his face glows as if totally absorbed in devotion.

Mealtimes find him more interested in what is being read or recited than what is in his eating bowl. Be it a shastra or a recent publication, a speech by a child or a report by a devotee, he listens with rapt attention, his alert mind picking up even the most subtle of points. Patiently, he often clarifies a point or answers a query, demoting the morsel in his hand to low priority.

Someone has just returned from a pilgrimage to sacred places sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Swamishri bows low to touch the pilgrim's feet. Another has just completed a particularly arduous period of fasting; he comes for Swamishri's darshan, seeking permission to break the fast. Again Swamishri bows to touch his feet, expressing his pleasure at the aspirant's earnest endeavours to please God and guru. Efforts in devotion, however primary, by the devotees please him. It's their feelings that count.

In an assembly, his ears delight in hearing bhajans singing the praises of God. Often he joins in the singing or claps to the rhythm. Also, while listening to discourses by a sadhu or devotee, Swamishri frequently reads or writes letters. Nonetheless, his mind is never far away from the discourse, silently listening and actively absorbing. How much of the discourses he has remembered is soon revealed when it's his turn to

speak, talking in detail on the points mentioned by previous speakers.

He finds it difficult to hold back his enthusiasm when visiting sacred pilgrimage spots sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In 1987, during a pilgrimage in the Himalayas, age and health meant that he had to be lifted in a special carrier to reach the ancient mandirs of Badrinath and Kedarnath. Despite this, he did not allow himself to be carried all the way to the shrine. "We should really walk it up here, but what can we do? At least we managed to walk a little of the way."

With attendants on both sides assisting him, Swamishri's frail body prepares itself for darshan of the shrines. Without concern for his own hardships or ill-health, he takes a ceremonial dip in the freezing waters of a holy river, or braves the rains to offer circumambulations or prostrations. So absorbed is he in the glory of God, that he sees pleasure in the pains of a pilgrimage and honour in even the simplest of pious places.

And not one moment of time is allowed to pass without some act of bhakti. He is constantly engaged in nine-fold devotion to God. If his hand is not writing letters or blessing devotees, it soon finds a rosary to turn. A free moment, rare to come by these days, becomes an opportunity to chant the Swaminarayan mantra or sing a devotional song.

As for Thakorji's *murtis* in the mandirs, Swamishri sees not metal, marble or paintings, but Paramatma or Bhagwan himself in them. He ensures that Bhagwan is cared for with love; that he is offered food, looked after and adorned appropriately. With unabated breath and unblinking eyes, he relishes the darshan of his Lord. His discerning gaze somehow manages to spot the most subtle of details. Noticing a shawl adorning the *murtis* in winter, he instructs that it be used to cover Thakorji's back – concerned more about the Lord's feelings than mere decoration. "This is a living *murti*," he explains. "Thakorji experiences cold and heat, hunger and thirst; he needs rest." Even at night, Thakorji remains

uppermost in his mind – not allowing his driver to blow the car horn to signal his arrival in the mandir premises and thus not disturb the *murtis* of God late at night.

The *arti* is a special opportunity for devotion. Eyes fixed on the *murti*, he waves the lighted lamps in a circular fashion with care and love. He claps to the rhythm of the *dhun*, humbly folding his hands in prayer. In his love for God, he forgets many things. He forgets his age, and physical discomforts. He forgets his illnesses, his aches and pains, even his needs – and lays his life at the Lord's mercy, fully prostrating before the *murtis*.

He steadfastly adheres to principles. He does not tolerate in the slightest if Thakorji's importance is lessened. Often going to great lengths to correct misunderstandings, he patiently explains the facts. Any deviation from the pure *upasana* – mode of worship of God revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and propagated by Shastriji Maharaj – deeply pains him.

He constantly encourages the aspirants, young or old, sadhus or devotees, by tirelessly singing the praises of God, or offering guidance and inspiration. He inspires them, stressing the importance of bhakti and dharma, *agna* and *upasana*, service and faith.

When their wishes are fulfilled, the devotees thank Swamishri for his help. But he attributes everything to the will of Maharaj, "Shriji Maharaj's will...he rewards your devotion...it is due to his grace..." Even though it was Swamishri's prayers and blessings that made it rain or granted someone a son or saved another from illness – the list is endless – Swamishri laughs the matter away, tactfully moves on to another topic and highlights the power of Shriji Maharaj.

He is a staunch believer in the practice of traditional rites and rituals as laid down in the Hindu shastras. Using the appropriate paraphernalia and the chanting of mantras in rhythm, he insists that everything be done properly – taking no short cuts, skipping

nothing. He enjoys taking part in Vedic *yagnas*, groundbreaking ceremonies or *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies. Watching him invoking the presence of God into the *murtis* during the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony is a moving and elevating experience.

During the lunar and solar eclipses he delights in the added opportunity of doing bhajan – even at the oddest of hours: at two o'clock in the morning, he is as fresh as ever, ready to engage in bhajan for the period of the eclipse.

During celebrations, such as the Fuldol festival or Rath Yatra, the birth of Bhagwan Swaminarayan or birth of Bhagwan Krishna, Swamishri joins in the singing, and claps to the rhythm or swings the Lord with love. He occasionally sings himself, each word inspiring devotion in the heart of every listener. Swamishri often explains, '*Rāj māre din din Diwāli re...*' That is, every day is a festival, every day is a day of joy, since one has met the Lord.

The morning puja sees him in quiet contemplation. Silently turning the rosary and immersed in thoughts of his beloved Harikrishna Maharaj. His love is a spiritual offering which cannot be measured, only treasured. As the dish of sweet delicacies is offered to Thakorji, with deep devotion he gently coaxes him to accept the offerings.

He loves listening to scriptural discourses, never getting bored, tired or uninterested. He gives discourses with just as much enthusiasm to a handful of devotees as to an assembly of thousands. High fevers with shivers have not deterred him from giving discourses, neither have bed-confining illnesses ever stopped him from listening to scriptural readings. In fact, time, place, facilities, audience or his bodily limitations never interfere with discourses. In 1972, while travelling on the special train pilgrimage of North India, he discoursed for five hours on the Vachanamrut – that too while observing a complete waterless fast.

And Thakorji – the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj which is constantly with him – is his most

precious possession, indeed his only possession. He safeguards the sanctity and priority of Thakorji at all times. To him, nothing matters more than the Lord. His real wealth is his devotion to God. Without that, he would simply cease to exist. A garland, a meal, even a glass of water is always first offered to Thakorji. When boarding a train or plane, he ensures that Thakorji goes in first. Whatever the activity, whether bathing in the Indian Ocean, or receiving an honour in the Canadian Parliament, he always places Thakorji first: "After you my Lord, after you."

Prayer is his favourite pastime. One often finds him lost in prayer, praying with devotees in large gatherings and even praying quietly in bed at 2:30 in the morning. Prayer is his innermost tool, always at hand, the invincible force with which he faces the challenges of life. Be it a fever or a famine, death or a disaster, he calls upon God; swiftly submerging himself in prayer – always for others, never for himself.

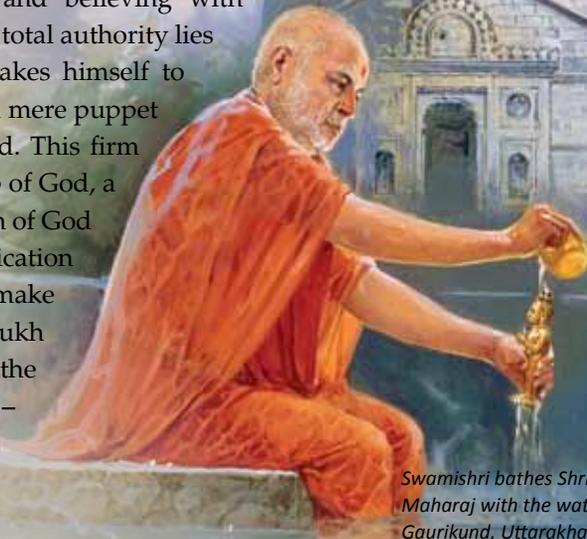
In the profound silence of his soul, there resides one desire: to remain eternally at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is the only place where he feels at home. He is totally subservient to the will of God. Whatever there is belongs to God; everything is due to his will, his grace, his strength. Without the Lord, he feels nothing is possible; with the Lord, he knows nothing is impossible. Accepting and believing with absolute conviction that total authority lies with God, Swamishri takes himself to be only an instrument, a mere puppet in the hands of the Lord. This firm belief in the all-doership of God, a crystal vision of the form of God and a clear communication with God are what make Pramukh Swami, Pramukh Swami. This is the secret of his success – unbroken faith in God. Perhaps that is why he manages to stay so

light and tension-free, even in the most taxing of circumstances.

Whatever God inspires in him, he inspires in others. And that is precisely why hundreds of thousands of devotees experience the presence of God through Swamishri and continue to receive inspiration in his very presence. Those who come near him, come closer to God. Slowly and steadily, they grow spiritually, see the face of fulfilment and touch the bliss of God.

This is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is the living form of *parabhakti* – devotion in its fullest, purest form. It is difficult to fathom the depth of Swamishri's devotion. How can one possibly express what is beyond comprehension? From his vast ocean of devotion, no more than a few waves probably become apparent to the passing observer; but even they may be more than enough to inspire the aspirant on the path of devotion and to progress on the path to the Divine. ♦

*Excerpt from 'Pure Devotion',
a translation of 'Para Bhakti in Gujarati
Gujarati: Sadhu Aksharjivandas
Translation: Sadhu Yogivekdas*



*Swamishri bathes Shri Harikrishna
Maharaj with the waters of
Gaurikund, Uttarakhand*

THE ROLE OF GURU IN LIFE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has steered countless people onto the path of spirituality and graced them with the experience of divine bliss. At the same time he has provided them comfort and guidance in times of their personal, family, social and professional difficulties. The following narrations are by BAPS youths who experienced Swamishri's selfless support in their times of need...



SWAMISHRI'S PLEDGE

M. Patel, UK

Do you remember the pledge that you took at the time of your marriage, at the start of your profession, or when you were initiated into Satsang? Pramukh Swami Maharaj (referred to as Swamishri hereafter) always remembers his pledge from when he was appointed by Shastriji Maharaj as the President of BAPS Sanstha. He had humbly pledged, "Today, O Gurushri, in front of you and this gathering, I pledge that I shall sincerely uphold my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the Sanstha and faithful to you."

Out of many incidents about Swamishri's commitment to the Sanstha and the devotees I am particularly touched by what happened on the day after the *murti-pratishtha* at Bodeli Mandir on 13 March 2011. On that day thousands of devotees had gathered for the weekly Sunday assembly. It was evening time and Swamishri's attendant sadhus were resisting Swamishri in attending the assembly, as he had a temperature of 99.4°F. After much discussion, Swamishri dismissed the efforts of the sadhus to stop him from going. As for Swamishri, the darshan of Thakorji and devotees was far more important than his fragile health. From this incident, it is clearly visible how Swamishri is living up to his

pledge that he took 61 years ago.

Over the years, Swamishri has had cataract, heart bypass and gall bladder operations and his health remains fragile due to old age. Once, whilst in hospital after his eye surgery, doctors informed Swamishri that complete eye rest was required. However, Swamishri's priority was to reply to a devotee's 18-page letter! Such is his compassion. There have been numerous such occasions where Swamishri has, without even thinking about his own health and comforts, gone out of his way to please and serve others, be they children, teenagers, youths, or the elderly, from all castes, creeds and communities.

As stated in Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami's kirtan "*Sant vināre sāchikon kahe, sārā sukhnī vāt...*" – The highest form of Swamishri's compassion is that he liberates us from the cycle of birth and death and anchors us to God by imparting the true knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma. Swamishri has manifested in human form on this earth so that we *jivas* who are entangled in *maya* can associate with him and by developing profound love and attachment towards him, can experience the bliss of Akshardham in this very life.

The question remains: how can we repay Swamishri? We are eternally indebted to him!

HE COMFORTS ALL

Nehal Chudasama, London, UK

Living in the hustle and bustle of the 21st century can be puzzling. Its twists and turns can leave a person feeling somewhat lost, disoriented and confused. Focusing upon finding a job, developing a lucrative career, socializing with friends along with other worldly activities leave the path of spirituality to gather dust, like an old bookshelf. The role of the guru is simple: to consistently remind us of the true reason for our

existence and our purpose for being upon this earth.

However, the care and love of Pramukh Swami Maharaj are unique. In an age which is governed by Information Technology, an era in which logic is known to be the guru of development, Swamishri does not fail to touch the hearts of the most influential and intelligent people in the world, as well as the meek and troubled villagers who seek his invaluable guidance, through his

compassion and his simple life. This is one of the incidents in which his compassion and care has touched me.

In 2005, Swamishri was in Atladra for the Janmashtami festival. A few days before this, I had received some news from home that had been playing in my mind and causing me severe unrest. Swamishri had heard about this. I was standing by his entrance waiting for his darshan, and was thinking about this whilst I waited. At the festival ground, before entering the assembly, Swamishri stopped by me. He placed his hand upon my chest for a few seconds and then said,

“Everything will be okay: do not be upset. Pray to Maharaj, he is the all-doer and he will guide you.”

Thousands of devotees were eagerly waiting for his darshan in the assembly, and yet he took out the time to comfort me. His words stuck to me like glue. Whenever I face even the smallest calamities in life, I remember Swamishri’s caring words, and I find the courage to move on and achieve greater things in life. “*Par upkâre pal pal mât re, upaje enât antar thi.*” From his heart flows unbroken compassion for others.”

FAITH IN THE GURU

Nirav Amin, London, UK

**Year 3 MBBS Student, University of London;
MSc Social Anthropology, University of
Oxford**

A guru is often considered a spiritual teacher, “the dispeller of ignorance”, and to have a special divine connection or true realization of God. The guru is also the true embodiment of spirituality and holiness. He has totally transformed my life, through one tool: faith.

My faith in Pramukh Swami has steadily increased by being fortunate enough to have had personal contact with him. When I look back through every single challenge in my life, Swamishri has been there to help me through. Whether this obstacle came in the form of an academic, health, moral or personal dilemma, he was there.

In February 2011, I celebrated my 21st birthday in the presence of Swamishri in Atladra, India. Whilst there, I was awaiting the decision of an application to Oxford University. I had not mentioned to Swamishri at any point, that I was applying nor awaiting any results. Whilst I was having a brief audience with Swamishri on my birthday, he brought up the topic of my education. Three years earlier, he had guided me to study for

a medical degree, and now he was asking about my progress. Then the topic of this new course became the subject of discussion. Swamishri enquired genuinely about the course’s details. He then said, “You will get into Oxford and you will be going there next year.” I was blown over by the confidence and conviction in his blessings. I went away beaming with joy. The Satpurush, who upholds millions of universes in every pore of his body, had given me this guarantee! Then my exam results arrived, and just as Swamishri predicted, I was offered a guaranteed place in the course!

On reflection, Swamishri was simply doing what the Satpurush can, the impossible. Faith in him was the only reason he blessed me in this way, and not due to any ability. It is through these incidents that I believe we can truly develop a faith so strong that our foundations will never falter, even if what he may say does not come true. What I have learnt from all of this is worth much more than any university admission or degree – have faith in him, and you will succeed.

MY REGRET WAS RESOLVED

Priyesh Patel, London

In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 2, Maharaj says: "Even after attaining Satsang, which is rare for even Brahma and others, affection remains for objects other than God because the person has not developed as firm a conviction for the manifest form of God... What I have explained may appear simple, but is very subtle..."

Countless times we hear the *mahima* of our guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In Sabha: if we listen. From books: if we read them. From friends: if we care. From our parents: sorry mum, I'm revising!

The value of a guru is infinite but we still chase the finite in the form of *maya*. When I went to a Satsang summer camp two years ago as a *balak*, we were taught how to guide visitors around the 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition at the London Mandir.

I was asked by one visitor, "Why this guru? Don't you believe in a direct connection with God?" Looking back, and certainly thinking of several things I should've said, there is one incident which stands out from many others. Very peculiar indeed, though it's much better heard than read!

I had just got my result for my Hinduism GCSE. I instantly phoned Swamishri to inform him of the good news. The phone was given to Swamishri as he lovingly said, "Yes Priyesh, Jai Swaminarayan." The words came out like a

friend addressing another friend – as if I wasn't some stranger calling from the hustle and bustle of London, but someone he knew for many years. This is where it all went wrong.

A flurry of English words came out in an Indian accent as I started to repeat what I said, using words like 'hopefully' and 'just'. I recorded the conversation on my iPod and played it over before my mum, who seemed somewhat disappointed. She had every right to be. She pointed out several things that I could have done right and although she was not angry, she clearly emphasized the fact that she was discontented at the way I had, frankly, messed up.

I thought over to myself: Why did I go wrong? I was at the Kishore Shibir in Warwick and on the first night, I listened to the conversation and wrote it out word for word. I was gobsmacked at what the final thing looked like as grammatical errors and wrong repetitive phrases gushed out of the page and filled my heart with total regret. I felt very bad that I did not speak properly and that I had made so many silly errors and I went to sleep feeling extremely guilty.

That very night, Swamishri graced me in a dream. He came into my room, sanctified my *mala* and *kanthi* and gave me *ashirovad*. Swamishri actually graced me, someone he has never met in person, spiritually. He re-assured my heart, my faith and certainly my mum when I narrated this to her!

GURU'S PERSONAL CARE

Tappan D. Parmar, Edison, New Jersey

BA, Business Economics; MBA, Global Business Strategy and Pharmaceutical Management Data Quality Analyst, Becton Dickinson

To mould one's life is very difficult. Swamishri makes that most difficult task so

simple. From when I was a child, Swamishri has been there guiding me at every step. In 1998, after Swamishri's bypass surgery, I had the opportunity to visit him in Westchester. Because of the limited number of people there, my brothers and I had the most special opportunity to sing throughout Swamishri's entire puja. After

breakfast, Swamishri was sitting with a few sadhus, and I sat in the corner of the room doing darshan. After the meeting ended, Swamishri looked my way and asked if I had any questions.

I replied, "No, I'm just doing darshan."

Swamishri responded, "Come here and take our blessings".

I went closer and sat at Swamishri's feet. My brothers came in and sat with me. Like a caring father, Swamishri started inquiring about us. Soon, he realized that I wasn't sure what field of study to pursue in college. So for the next 20 minutes, he discussed it with me until all my confusions were resolved. I was touched that Swamishri could sacrifice so much of his time to answer an unasked question while still recovering from open-heart surgery.

On another occasion, I had a question for Swamishri and, thus, sent him a letter to India. As usual, his response arrived in just a few days.

A few months later, Swamishri was in Edison, NJ. One day, a sadhu who had come with Swamishri asked me to go for a walk with him. While walking, he explained that he had translated my letter to Swamishri. Then he proceeded to clarify Swamishri's response to ensure I understood it clearly. After that conversation, he guided me towards Swamishri's room and had me sit down in one corner. Swamishri, after finishing his work, got up and walked toward me. Swamishri then asked if I had understood what he had written in his letter, and proceeded to explain it all again. I didn't know it then, but on his plane ride to America, Swamishri had told the sadhu who had translated my letter to follow up with me personally when he got to Edison. Swamishri had received thousands of letters since then, but he had not forgotten mine. What makes him unique is that he may be the guru of millions, but for me, there's only him and me.

GURU GUIDES FOR SUCCESS

Dipak S. Patel, New York City, New York

Director, BlackRock Financial Markets Advisory Group

BS, with high honors, in management from the Georgia Institute of Technology

MBA, with honors, in finance, strategic management, and real estate from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

While the guru has played an essential role in my spiritual development, he has also been instrumental in my professional development. In fact, my professional success has been a direct result of Swamishri's inspiration and guidance, which has pushed me to achieve more than I ever could have imagined. His guidance began with a simple question on whether business school was something I should pursue. This small question started a journey that changed the course of my future forever and brought me ever closer to understanding the need of a guru in one's life.

This journey started with the MBA application process, in which I was accepted to Wharton's top-ranked MBA programme in 2000. Once there, the market took a severe downturn and the job search became challenging, to say the least. Bapa provided guidance through numerous calls, meetings and letters on what opportunities to pursue, however it was at Morgan Stanley that I was able to experience his divine guidance first hand during the US financial crisis of 2008.

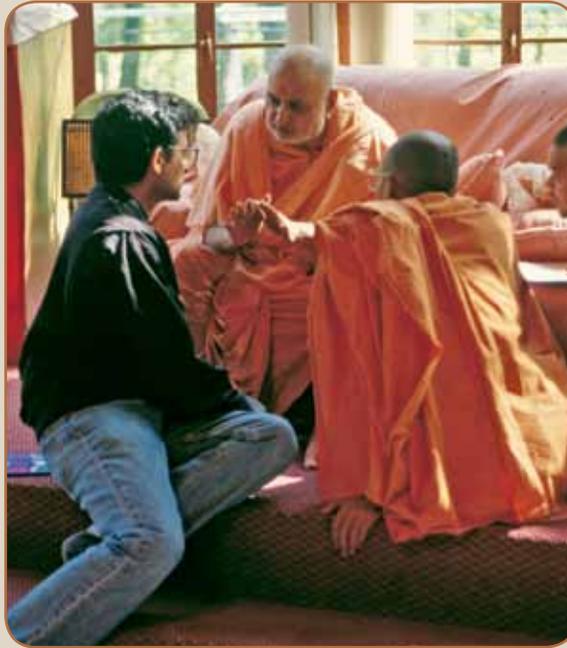
It all began with the collapse of Bear Stearns in early 2008, followed by the sale of Merrill Lynch on Monday, 14 September 2008. The very next day, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy leaving only two major brokerage firms standing, Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley. Wall Street had the entire financial system in a severe panic and the situation was not looking good going into the weekend. A person who had been meeting with the senior executives at Morgan Stanley

had mentioned to me on Thursday, “Dipak, I don’t think we’re going to make it.” On Friday, as I was standing in line at the department of motor vehicles to get my driver’s licence renewed, my phone began to ring. Bapa was on the line.

He asked me how things were going and told me not to worry as he had prayed to Maharaj that for my sake, my Company, Board and Management

would be saved. That Sunday, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs converted to banks and were saved just as Bapa had said. While certainly amazing, the even more divine part is that two months later, on 20 November, I was released from Morgan Stanley as the firm continued to face challenges.

I called Bapa to seek his advice and to see if



I should make a trip to India to see him. He said that if I wanted to come, then I needed to leave within the next couple of days. We arrived in Mumbai on 25 November and went to see him in Tithal on the same day. We were shocked at the precision of his guidance as a day later would have put us in the midst of the Mumbai Terrorist Attacks of 2008.

In Tithal, Bapa told me that once things

settled down I would find work at a small firm to be followed by work at a large firm. That is precisely how it unfolded. I’m currently a Director at BlackRock, a global financial firm, and have now been actively involved in Wall Street for nearly a decade, and none of this could have been achieved without the divine guidance of my guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

SWAMISHRI SEES ALL WITH EQUAL ESTEEM

Apoorva Patel, Boston, Massachusetts

BA, Public Policy, Duke University

2nd Year J.D. student, Harvard Law School

Swamishri’s most powerful guidance, remarkably, can sometimes take the form of silence.

When Bapa visited Charlotte in the summer of 2000, all of us *balaks* would cram into a tiny room at the devotee’s house where Bapa was staying, eager to have darshan of his daily walk on a treadmill. On one of those afternoons, I had the fortune of saying a short incident in front of Swamishri. As thrilled as I was at the opportunity, I was still bothered by one worrisome problem;

I could barely speak Gujarati! Try as I might, I just couldn’t put the words together properly in my head, much less articulate them in a manner worthy of presenting before Swamishri. Eventually, it seemed I had no choice but to say my incident in English.

Frustrated, and a little disheartened, I came into Bapa’s walk that afternoon with the lowest of expectations. Swamishri didn’t speak English, so what would he think of my miserable little narrative? Would he even notice me at all?

Yet many years later, I still vividly recall Swamishri’s gaze as we locked eyes once I began to speak. All at once, his look conveyed

so much – unwavering attentiveness, profound patience and, above all, soothing compassion. Bapa has heard countless *balaks* reciting *mukhpath* or deliver speeches over the years, but no matter how trivial or routine each presentation may be, and regardless of whether he even understands the language that is being spoken, Swamishri retains that magical ability to make each child feel a genuinely personal bond.

Our own tendencies illustrate the sharp

contrast between us and Swamishri. In our digital world, we struggle to hold a two-minute conversation with someone without instinctively clutching at our phones to send a text or check our email. That summer day, Swamishri taught a lesson in interpersonal skills that serves equally well in Satsang as it does for my home, work or school life. With the utmost sincerity, Swamishri holds an ordinary child in the same esteem as a dignitary, and inspires us to do the same.

THE GURU PROTECTS AND SUPPORTS

Sundip M. Patel, Merritt Island, Florida

BS Mechanical Engineering, MBA

Senior Staff Systems Engineer

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has guided me on many occasions in my personal life. His involvement in my life has been a true blessing which has brought me closer to him with each incident.

In 1985, as I was leaving the Cultural Festival of India in London in which I had participated as a volunteer, I went to Bapa for his blessings. He specifically told me, “When you go to a social occasion, make sure you don’t drink alcohol, but instead only take orange juice.”

At this time, I didn’t really know Bapa and he didn’t really know me personally (at least that’s what I thought) because it was the first time he had seen me since 1977. I thought to myself, “Why would he tell me this? I don’t go to parties, and I don’t drink alcohol.” I was going into my senior year of high school and our family friend circle was composed of six Gujarati families. When we would get together, alcohol was never present.

It wasn’t until I went to college away from home that I realized that he had predicted my future. While in my first year of college, I joined a fraternity, which are notorious for parties and drinking. It was then that I realized the significance of those blessings. He gave me that command to protect me from failing out of college. This incident brought me closer to him

and helped me realize why I needed him in my life.

In another incident, he showed me just how much he is involved in my life. In 1994, a special children’s camp was held at the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. During this camp, a treasure hunt had been arranged, which Bapa oversaw while sitting in a golf cart. I was not participating in the treasure hunt since I was a volunteer in the camp. Having completed some work in another building, I ran over to Bapa’s golf cart. Seeing me run like this, everyone thought I had found the treasure.

Narayancharan Swami asked in Gujarati, “Sunny, did you find the treasure?” Not knowing much Gujarati, I gave everyone a puzzled look. Then someone said, “Did you find the treasure?” By this time, Bapa and I were holding hands, and so I said, “Yes, I have found the best treasure!”

Bapa didn’t let go of my hand, and I did not let go of his. For a minute or so, I squeezed his hand and he would squeeze mine back. Then I got the courage to speak, and asked Bapa, in my broken Gujarati, “Are you holding my hand or am I holding your hand?” Bapa replied, “Just as Shastriji Maharaj held your grandfather’s hand, and Yogiji Maharaj held your dad’s hand, I am holding your hand.”

Such is his compassion that through the generations, the guru holds onto our hand and leads us to God.

SWAMISHRI'S APPRECIATES OUR EFFORTS

Tushar Tank, USA

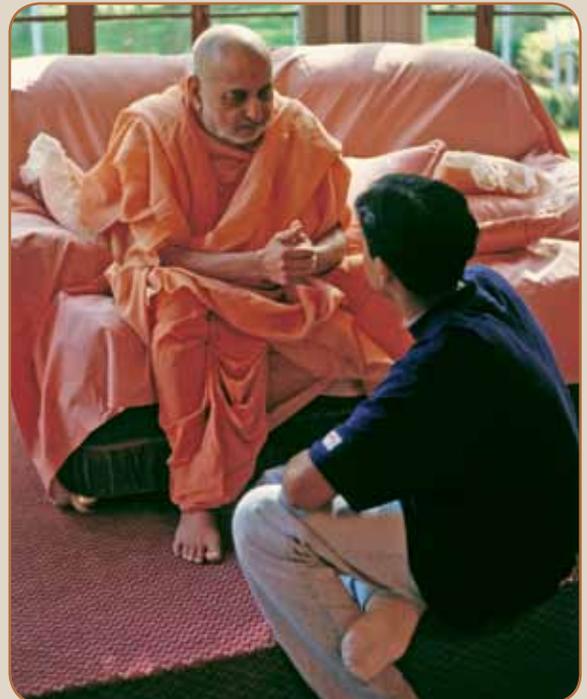
**MS Electrical Engineering, UC Berkeley
Algorithm Research and Development
Engineer**

The National Leads Meeting in Edison was the last event of Swamishri's 2007 North America tour. I was fortunate enough to be given the *seva* of making a presentation to the Satsang coordinators attending this meeting - many of whom were much older than me and more fluent in Gujarati. For these reasons, combined with the fact that I was speaking in English, I was hesitant to start the talk. Amrutnandan Swami simultaneously encouraged me and instructed me to begin the talk. With some trepidation I began speaking while tenuously adding some words in Gujarati. From the reaction of the audience it seemed things were going well so I relaxed and completed the talk with Amrutnandan Swami adding some very cogent and forceful concluding remarks.

In the midst of eating lunch that afternoon, Yagnavallabh Swami requested that we present this same talk to Bapa while he was eating his lunch. This was both exciting and nerve wracking news since presenting in front of Swamishri essentially meant saying everything in Gujarati with may be a few English words. I requested the sadhus that they should give the talk while we set up the audio visual. They in turn gave a dose of encouragement, essentially saying that I should talk and if I needed help they would be there. With this advice and the help of the audio-visual department we quickly found a television and computer to display the slides. However there was a great deal of difficulty getting into Swamishri's room. So we waited and were quite late in entering, by which time Swamishri had already begun eating. Compounding matters,

the cable attached to the computer would not work properly, so another computer had to be brought in. Luckily, this computer already had my presentation on it, and in a rush, I began speaking. While I had practiced the English talk for the Coordinators several times, I was very unprepared to give the same talk in Gujarati. Thus there were many fumbles and missteps. At several points I simply looked up to the sadhus in the room and took them up on their offer by simply saying 'help'. With everyone's assistance we were able to complete the presentation and the central idea was conveyed. I felt a great deal of relief and was having darshan of Swamishri while the sadhus were discussing the presentation. I noticed the audio-visual volunteer packing up the television so I began wrapping up the wires and the computer so that Bapa's room would be cleared quickly.

Then, I heard Bapa say something, but I assumed he was speaking to the sadhus. It was



then that Anandswarup Swami said that Bapa is saying 'Thank you' to me. I quickly touched Bapa's feet and he patted me on the back. While the presentation to the coordinators had gone well, the presentation to Bapa had many mistakes and glitches, yet through it all

Bapa listened attentively and asked questions. To me his simple phrase of thank you felt like getting a hug from Swamishri.

Swamishri appreciates our little efforts of *seva* and listens to what we present with patience to encourage us on the path of satsang.

A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND PEACE

S. Patel, Preston, UK

No other friend or relative is able to offer the care and compassion as a parent – none other than one person whose personal existence is for the service and wellbeing of others. From my personal experience, Pramukh Swami Maharaj as my guru fulfils the role of a parent.

In September 2005, I confronted one of the hardest times in my life with the loss of my father. Moreover, my elder sister was married away from home and therefore it was just my mother and I.

After two months, I had the opportunity to attend the opening of Delhi Akshardham. It was at this time I had the divine darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Although I'd had his darshan in the past, when I saw Swamishri at that time, I immediately felt inner peace and happiness for the first time after the loss of my father. It was as if he had come into my life as a glimmer of hope

which was otherwise engulfed in darkness and thereafter I quickly came to realize the significance of Swamishri as the guiding hand in my life.

Six years on and I'm still holding onto to him and will continue to do so for the rest of my life. Swamishri has touched my life in many different ways. He has given meaning to it and I consider myself lucky to have him in my life. Having lost my father, my life was plagued with inevitable grief and it was only Swamishri who provided me with solace and pacified my sorrow. With his grace, I not only found peace within myself, but over the years I have had the strength to encounter the overwhelming obstacles that I face daily in life.

I often wonder where I would have ended up if Swamishri had not entered my life at that time – probably a lost soul. Instead, I have found a father; a lifelong father whom I know is always standing there besides me, guiding me for the better.

THE BENEFIT OF FOLLOWING HIS WORDS

Vandan Popat, Wellingborough, UK

When Swamishri was present in London in 2006, an announcement in the mandir was made to the effect that those who wish to travel on his return flight to India could do so. This presented a golden opportunity for me to fulfil my dream as I had always cherished an earnest desire to be able to travel with Swamishri.

In the meantime, my father had already booked a ticket for my mother to travel aboard with Swamishri, but strongly refused for me

to travel with her insisting that he (my father) would not let me miss school under any circumstances. I was in a dilemma and looking at my sullen face, my mother stated that I should write to Swamishri.

This seemed appealing, so taking my mother's advice I wrote to Swamishri, expressing my true feelings, "Bapa, I wish to take up the opportunity to travel with you. It would mean that I would miss school for a fortnight, but that does not pose a hurdle since I can 'catch up' upon my return."

Swamishri replied almost instantly, “Vandan, I know you want to travel with me, but stay here in the UK and study. That will amount to your bhakti for me.”

This was not the reply I had expected, so I could no longer be justified in approaching my father and pleading him to have a change of heart. Since childhood, words have continually showered my mind that I should gladly and willingly

accept whatever *agna* Swamishri gives. With dignity, I accepted it but the significance of this was realized years later when my GCSE results were declared. With the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Swamishri and the backing of our sadhus in London, I scored a multitude of A*, A's & B's in all of my exams.

This demonstrates how Swamishri rewards us tremendously for following his *agna*.

SUPPORT THROUGH FAMILY CRISIS

Vismay Naik

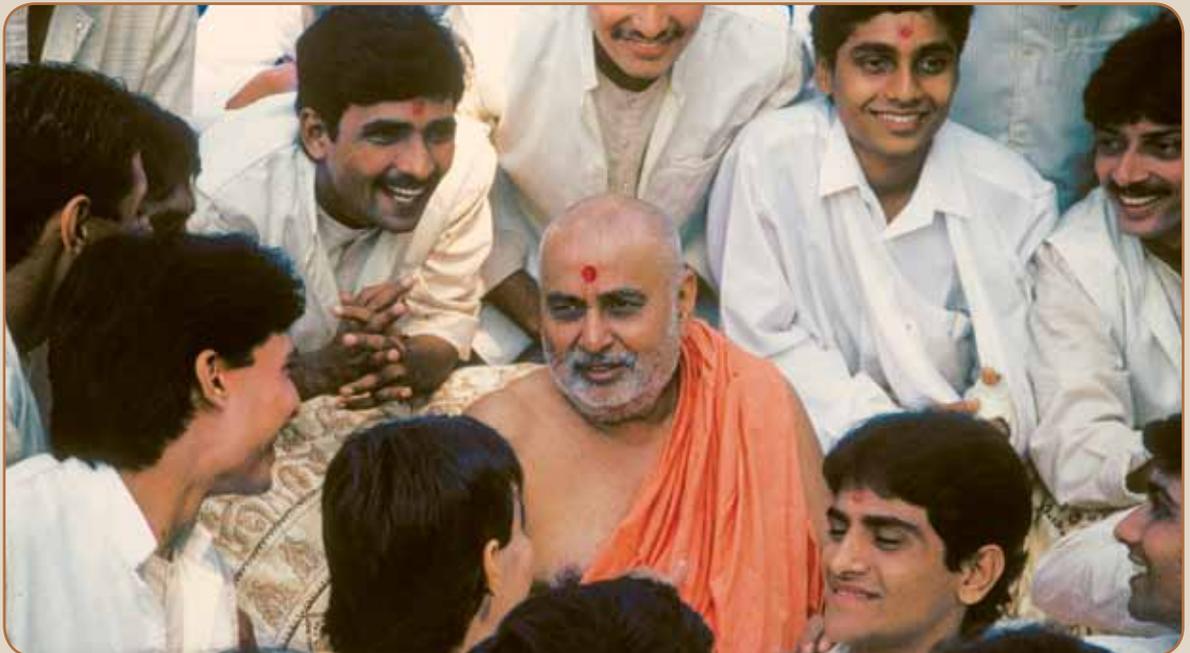
MBBS, Ahmedabad

My guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj has been the centre point of my life. Today whatever I am is due to his grace and blessings. I can never forget the support and solace that he has given to me in my academic and social life.

One special incident in my life shows how Swamishri contributed in our well being and happiness. It was in the month of March 2004 that our family faced the worst possible crisis ever. My father, the head of the family, was arrested and jailed under a false conspiracy. It was

the worst nightmare our family had never expected. We were completely shocked and totally blank. Everything happened so suddenly that no one knew what to do or whom to approach. We did not have the slightest knowledge of the legal procedures. Our relatives and friends were also not in a position to help us out. We were all alone in the midst of a grave crisis. Finally, we decided to seek Swamishri's blessings.

At that time Swamishri was on a satsang tour abroad. I personally called him and apprised him of what had happened. Despite his busy schedule he enquired and listened to me patiently. He



advised me to keep patience and have faith in God. He even said that he would also pray for us. Subsequently, in the course of time Swamishri gave his blessings not once, twice but three times on the phone. Almost 5 months passed by and we were still mired in the crisis. Our patience was wearing out. I decided to ask Swamishri one more time as to when it is all going to end? So I called him up on 17th September 2004 in Lenasia, South Africa. Before I could ask anything, Swamishri blessed me saying that everything will get over within a few days.

I prayed to Swamishri and asked him to be with us always. He said, "You have satsang in your soul so Maharaj and Swami are with you and they will protect you."

SOLACE AT CRITICAL TIMES

Anand Patel

Engineer and Businessman, Ahmedabad

I believe everyone in our world has a role model in life; someone to look up to for support and guidance in challenging situations.

My role model is guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I have always looked up to him in every phase of my life, whether it was in agony or anger and in happiness or despair. The very fact that the guru speaks to you on the same frequency helps one to find answers to our daily material and spiritual entanglements.

In 2008, I was 21 when my father suddenly passed away. I was left utterly devastated, and so was everyone in my family. We sought Swamishri's solace and strength. His words worked a miracle. Because of his soothing words my family was able to bear the terrible loss. The next morning my father was cremated, and immediately thereafter I went to appear for my final university exams in engineering. A month later when I got my result, I had stood first in class.

Another incident that shocked my family was when my mother was diagnosed with throat

In the next 15 days my father was released. Our lawyer, who had been doing his best all the while to get my father out, told us that it was not possible without divine intervention. Furthermore, in the midst of this issue I had appeared for my 1st year MBBS exam. For my results I got first class. This was a miracle, because I did not have the time to study nor was I in any condition to do so.

Today when I ponder back on those days, I feel very much blessed to have such a guru. His divine blessings gave us the patience and strength to face the crisis. Swamishri is a guru who not only looks after our spiritual growth but also takes care of our social wellbeing. I am forever indebted to him for all that he has done for me and my family.

cancer in 2010. We sought Swamishri's blessings, and he told us to give her the prescribed medical treatment and have faith in Maharaj. Seven months down the line, after chemotherapy and radiation, she is now completely cured. I can say that Swamishri and all the sadhus have always stood by us in all times. I firmly believe that in the absence of a guru, a person would fall apart in such circumstances.

Another point that I would like to make is Swamishri's teaching about living in a joint family. I realized its benefits during the hard times we had gone through. We were able to withstand all the pains during my mum's illness.

In conclusion, I feel that a guru does not only give you spiritual guidance and stands by you in hard times, but he also teaches you how to live and be a better person. Without a guru my life would have been rudderless and confusing. I sincerely believe that without Swamishri I would not have been the person I am today.

I offer my humble tributes and prostrations on the occasion of Guru Purnima to Swamishri for all that he has done for me and my family. ♦

EXPERIENCES

In his over seven decades of sadhu life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has reached out to people from all walks of life. He has left lasting impressions on many spiritual leaders, princes, presidents, high-ranking government officials and other dignitaries. Their recollections reveal a common experience of their meeting with Swamishri: his unassuming humility and profound saintliness...

The Dalai Lama

People around the world are starting to realize that power and material objects do not yield peace. They are turning to spirituality and religion to fill a void in their lives. Religion and spirituality is the key. Your sadhus are setting an example of content, co-existence and selfless service. There is an ideal for all of mankind. His name is Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pujya Ramswarup Shastri

Former Head of Bharat Sadhu Samaj

I would like to tell you all that we have amidst us a great soul who brings peace to the world and effects miraculous transformation of lives. We the saints of Haridwar and the 'Sadhu Samaj' offer our profound adoration to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pujya Swami Chidanand Sarasvatiji

Divya Jivan Sangh, Rishikesh

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the manifest form of purity, peace, affection and the guru's grace. His personal life and work are a shining example for all sadhus and satsangis to follow. Despite being the leader of a reputed worldwide spiritual organization, I have always seen his total simplicity, respect for all and total humility. He is an ideal guru. This world needs more people like him.

Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji

Chinmaya Mission

Spiritual progress and liberation can only be attained in the company of a God-realized sadhu. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a God-realized sadhu. His presence rids people of their materialistic desires.



Dalai Lama



Pujya Ramswarup
Shastri



Pujya Swami
Chidanand
Sarasvatiji



Pujya Swami
Chinmayanandji



Pujya
Swami Atmanand



Pujya
Harinarayanandji



Pujya Acharya
Sushilkumarji



Pujya Acharya
Mahapragnaji



Pujya Swami
Tejomayanandji



HRH Prince
Charles

Pujya Swami Atmanand

Ramkrishna Mission, Raipur

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

Pujya Harinarayanandji

Secretary, Bharat Sadhu Samaj

During the Centenary Celebration of Yogiji Maharaj in 1992, Pujya Harinarayanand Swami said: "Pramukh Swami has sacrificed his entire life in serving people and in spreading spirituality. I call him the jewel among saints. I use these words not to praise him but I say it as a responsible person of the Sadhu Samaj. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, like a shining constellation, is promoting spiritual values in the world. No other guru has spread spiritual values in India and abroad as Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

Pujya Acharya Sushilkumarji

Jain Guru

Pramukh Swami has left deep impressions of his spirituality on my mind. In appearance, he may seem ordinary. But behind his ordinary dress, his unique character makes him an extraordinary great soul.

Pujya Acharya Mahapragnaji

Jain Acharya, Terapanth

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life is an extraordinary example of love and harmony.

If the entire nation were to take a cue from him and live by those standards, it would solve all of our problems. He has sacrificed in the true sense.

Pujya Swami Tejomayanandji

President, Chinmaya Mission

A true sadhu is one in whom there is a confluence of virtues like gnan, bhakti and selfless service. We have an ideal example before us - Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In this beautiful creation of the mandir we see the stupendous efforts of Swamiji and his devotees. It reflects the guru bhakti of the devotees. This mandir is not only for Indians but also for the progress and elevation of the local people. There is no doubt it will open the horizons of life and inspire progress in the country.

HRH Prince Charles

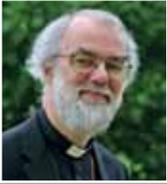
The Prince of Wales

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's humility and selfless love have touched my heart.

Dr Rowan Williams

Archbishop of Canterbury

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life is an example of spiritual beauty. That beauty shines throughout India and the world as he continues to guide mankind on the path to spirituality. He loves unconditionally and forgives. Revenge and vengeance are never to be seen in his life. This is illustrated in his credo: "In the joy of others lies our own..."



Dr Rowan Williams



Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam



President Bill Clinton



Shri L.M. Singhvi



Justice Shri B.J. Diwan

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Former President of India

I feel a very strong and divine aura in his presence. I feel at peace in his presence. I forget about all my worries and difficulties. He truly loves people unconditionally. That is why he is able to counsel and take part in their difficulties and problems. Their problems become his problems. I can see it in him.

President Bill Clinton

*Former President,
United States of America*

When I look into his eyes, they are filled with integrity. 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.

Justice Shri B.J. Diwan

*Chief Justice,
Gujarat High Court*

Despite being the President of BAPS, I have seen Swamishri perform menial *seva* in Sarangpur. 'I am the President of this organization. I cannot perform such ordinary tasks.' This kind of pride doesn't exist even in the deepest corner of his mind. He doesn't have the slightest trace of ego. He sees God in all.

Dr R. Chidambaram

Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, India

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a great spiritual leader. I have met him quite a few times

and each time I experience peace. Very few people's presence gives you that feeling. It is a feeling of spiritual elevation. Swamishri's presence has a mesmerizing effect. What surprises me the most is his ability to motivate and inspire so many people. It is always a pleasure and fortune to have his darshan.

Shri L.M. Singhvi

Indian High Commissioner in the United Kingdom

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given so much to mankind. It is indescribable. I have gained so much from his darshan, his blessings and that simple dialogue with him. Meeting such a God-realized sadhu gives meaning to one's life.

Bhagwan Shri Krishna says in the Shrimad Bhagvad Gita that he always manifests in the different ages. He is present today through Swamishri. His personality is as pure as the waters of the Ganga. Every time I meet him, I feel like I am bathing in the holy waters of the Ganga.

Dr Subramanian

Renowned Cardiac Surgeon, USA

On 6 September 1998 an assembly was held at Westchester County Center to honour Dr. Subramanian and his team of doctors and specialists. In his address he said: "Lord Swaminarayan descended on us at Lenox Hill Hospital to bless us to be able to help Swamiji in his bypass surgery... Swamiji was an extraordinary person for me to meet. Everyday after the bypass surgery, I would go to visit him. It was like seeing God everyday!"



Dr R.
Chidambaram



Dr Subramanian



Shri Manubhai
Madhvani



Shri
Nani Palkhiwala



Mr Bob Kaplan

During the Fuldol Festival at Sarangpur on 2 March 1999, Dr. Subramanian said: "God's greatest gift to me, Lord Swaminarayan's greatest gift to me, was in July last year when I operated on Pramukhji. It was a divine moment when I met Pramukhji for the first time. Two things impressed me when I met Pramukhji and which my father taught me. The first is karma - do your duty. The second is that we are born to give..."

Shri Manubhai Madhvani

Industrialist, Nairobi

Whenever I see Pramukh Swami I am reminded of Yogiji Maharaj. The people of Kenya are fortunate and blessed today to have a beautiful mandir here through the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. A mandir can be built when you have a mind and heart. And we can see the synergy of mind and heart in this mandir. The exhibition will play a major role in preserving our culture and traditions here.

Dr K.P. Narsimharao

President, Medical Council of India

"The simplicity and saintliness of Pramukh Swami touches deep. He never allows his greatness to ride upon his shoulders and lives naturally like one of us. His actions touch the heart."

Shri Nani Palkhiwala

Lawyer and Economist

Swamiji is the noblest soul I have ever met in my life.

Mr Bob Kaplan

MP & Former Solicitor-General of Canada

Without being able to speak Gujarati or Hindi, I am able to communicate with Swamiji... He is so spiritual and yet so dynamic... It is obvious from a distance that he is a man of great spirituality, very pious, and one has a sense in approaching him that he is a pure, holy man.

Prof. Jaroslav Fric

World-Renowned Multimedia Expert

The meaning of a guru I had not rightly understood. I believed that all sadhus wearing saffron clothes were gurus. So it took me some time to understand the word guru. Now, in one sentence I can say with conviction that, 'He [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] is a true Guru and the embodiment of Lord Swaminarayan on earth.'

In meeting him you feel that he is a part of the great infinity, a part of an extra-terrestrial greatness. I cannot describe him in words.

While taking photographs of him, I was trying to capture his thoughts and the depth in his eye. In all his photographs I find nothing but absolute purity, divine peace and love. This is my life's greatest experience.





WATER IS LIFE

PART 3

Sacred Waters

In this third and final article on water, we discuss how water is regarded as sacred by Hindus and how its sacredness is borne out from the day one's *samsara yatra* starts at birth to the end at death and even after.

PURIFICATORY BATHS

- At birth, a child is given a purificatory bath with water. The mother also bathes to attain purity.
- On awakening in the morning a person is only purified from the impurity of dreams and karmas during night sleep by having a bath. Hence *nitya pratah snan* – a daily morning bath – is the first daily ritual of purity attained by water. The shastras enjoin that this bath attains greater merit in the following manner: Do not bathe naked – '*Na nagnaha snānamācharet*' (Manu Smruti 4.45, Vishnu Smruti 64, Baudhayan Smruti 2.3.61, Sushrut Samhita, Chikitsa 24.100, Charak Samhita, Sutra 8.19, Mahabharat, Anu. 104.51, 67, Vishnu Puran 3.12.19, Agni Puran 155.22, Vaman Puran 14.47).
- The bath should be with cold water (Shankha Smruti 8.9-10, Daksha Smruti 2/64). This accords spiritual merit, besides the physical benefits of improving circulation to the internal organs and boosting immunity. Water also boosts the body's *prana* (vital wind) because water itself is *prana* – '*Āpo vai prānaha.*' A morning drench thus infuses *chetna* (energy) and invigorates us.
- Great *punya* (merit) is gained with a bath in a river, stream, lake or well (Chintyagama 4.3-5). A bath in an ocean confluence is superior to any of the above (Diptagama 55.2-4). Therefore, Hindus always try to bathe in holy rivers or lakes at least once in their life. On retirement, even aged people will make the most perilous journey to bathe in Mansarovar, in Tibet. This is the

most sacred lake in the world and the source of seven sacred rivers of India.

- Only after such a purificatory bath is the body eligible for religious rituals such as puja, japa and arti (Bruhad Yajnavalkya Smruti 7.121, Daksha Smruti 2.9).
- While bathing, one should chant sacred mantras, Bhagwan's holy names (Vishnusahasranama, Janmangal Namavali), names of the seven holy rivers and tirths (Laghu Vyas Samhita 2.16, Sankarshan Samhita, Acharatra 1.57). The vibrations of the mantras further purify and calm the mind.
- Purificatory baths are also taken after a haircut, death of a family member, tonsure (*chaul samskara*) and after an eclipse.
- In Rameshwaram, pilgrims first bathe in the ocean. Then they are drenched from the water of 22 wells in the mandir campus. After this, they have attained such purity that they have better darshan of Mahadevaji.

WATER IN PUJA RITUALS

- Water is used to purify one's self, a ritual known as *ang nayas* before beginning any one of the rituals mentioned below. The sentiment is to worship the Deity by becoming [like] a deity - '*Devo bhutva yajeddevam.*'
- Water is placed in a *kalash* (pot) in which



Purificatory baths in Rameshwaram

deities or the seven sacred rivers are invoked. This sacred water is then used during puja rituals such as *pavitrikan*, *havan*, *yagna*, *vivah samskara* (marriage), *simantonayan samskara* and *mahapuja* (in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya). The mantra chanted to invoke the rivers is: "*Gange cha Yamune chaiva, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmade, Sindhu, Kaveri, jalesmin sannidhim kuru.*" - "O Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri, please manifest in this water."

- If a sacred river dries up seasonally, then the sand of the river bed is touched with the hand and the hand is then touched on the eyes and head since the river's sacredness still prevails.
- Water is used to perform *achaman* and *sankalp* rites.
- Deities invoked in the betel-nut (*sopari*) are bathed with sacred water from the *kalash*. In some *sampradayas* this is also known as *abhishek*.
- Finally, to end the puja ritual, *ashirvad* (blessings) are given to the participants by



sprinkling sanctified water on them.

- Water is used for *abhishek* (bathing) of *murtis* during their *prana pratishtha* in new mandirs.
- In the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs, *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni is performed with water. This water retains his divinity and is given to devotees in bottles to be used in illnesses and to cope with other stressors in life.
- At the end of an *arti*, water from a *shankh* is poured clockwise around the *gyot* (lighted wick) three times to preserve the divinity received from the deity during *arti*. This is due to Varuna Deva's security to guard the divine energy infused in the wick. This divine energy is then availed of by devotees when they take *aska* of the *arti* (see photo).
- *Maha arti* is performed in the evening of several sacred rivers such as Ganga at Haridwar and Kashi, Yamuna at Mathura and Narmada at Chanod.
- Hindus also sprinkle water three times around their food dish before eating the

food. This is known as *jalavartan*. By this, one offers food to the Bhagwan within, but who is invoked out of one's self by the water.

- Water from a sacred river or any water body, is offered as *arghya* to the rising or setting Surya Deva (Sun-god) by cupping water in one's palms and letting it dribble down through the fingers. This is known as *Suryopasana* – solar worship.

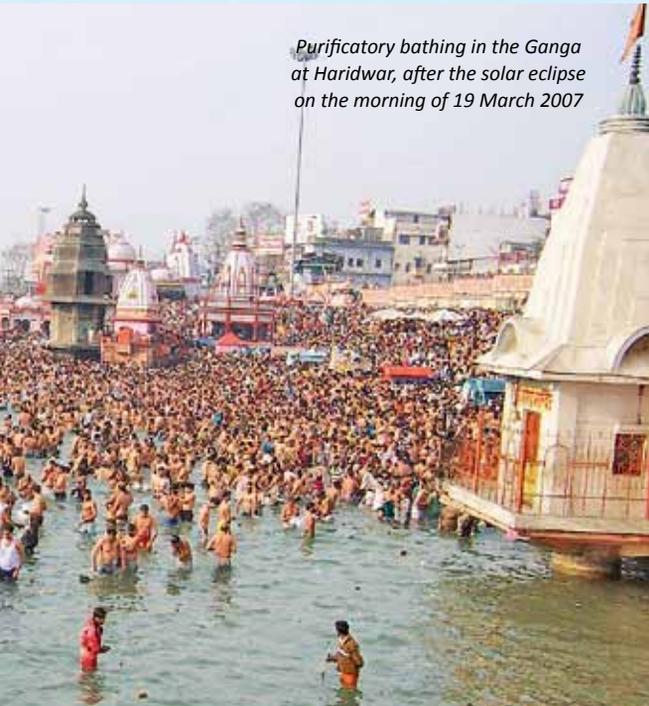
WATER AS A PURIFIER

- After sleep or a short nap, it is customary to rinse one's mouth with water twice to attain purity.
- After eating anything, Hindus rinse their mouths with water as a purificatory ritual known as *mukh shuddhi*. Only after this ritual, can a person get up from a meal. One does not need to rinse the mouth when *prasad* of a deity is eaten, since the *prasad* itself is sacred.

WATER IN YOGA

- In some yoga practices, water is sucked through the nose to cleanse the sinuses and airways, and released through the mouth. This is known as *kunjar kriya*, like an elephant which sucks water through the trunk. (Warning: this should not be attempted by novices).

Purificatory bathing in the Ganga at Haridwar, after the solar eclipse on the morning of 19 March 2007



Sankalp rite during Simant Samskara



Nauka Vihar during Jal Jhilani Ekadashi



Ganesh visarjan



WATER IN AYURVEDA

- In Ayurveda, the same procedure is known as *nasya*, except salted water is used. Water is also used in enemas to cleanse the bowels, a procedure known as *jal basti*, and in *swedan*, which is a herbal steam bath.
- Ayurveda also advocates walking on green grass with morning dew just after the sun's rays emerge. This is believed to improve one's health, *prana* and eyesight.
- Drinking boiled water during illness removes toxins known as *aam*, cited in the previous article (*Swaminarayan Bliss*, June 2011, p. 23). This occurs probably because minerals and chemicals are removed, as in distilled water. This, according to hydrotherapists, makes it prone to attract toxins. In the language of Ayurveda, *aam* is removed from the channels and tissues by this water. This re-establishes the equilibrium of the three humours of *vata* (wind), *pitta* (bile) and *kapha* (phlegm).

WATER IN FESTIVALS

- The grandest *utsav* in which water is liberally used is Dhuleti/Fuldol. Traditionally, colour from *kesuda* flower (*tesu*, flame of the forest) is extracted by boiling. This saffron coloured and fragrant water is first sprinkled on the deities with a bamboo or brass *pichkari* (water squirter).

The sanctified water is then sprayed on devotees who feel immensely blessed. In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, this festival has been celebrated on a large scale since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj celebrates it annually in Sarangpur, Saurashtra (for details see *Hindu Festivals - Origin, Sentiments and Rituals*, Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, 2010). Since this is the only *utsav* in which devotees get completely drenched by sacred water from the Guru, it attracts the greatest number of devotees from all parts of India and the world.

- Another festival in which water acts as a medium is during the Jal Jhilani Ekadashi celebration on Bhadarva *sud* 11. During the puja ritual, the *utsav vigraha* deity and a clay *murti* of Ganapati are taken on a boat ride - *nauka vihar* - five times in a river, lake or a makeshift pond. Appropriate bhajans are sung during the *vihar* or *jal yatra*. At the end, Ganapati's *murti* is immersed in the water. This is known as *visarjan* or farewell.
- In some south Indian mandirs, the *utsav* deities are bathed in the mandir's water tank during some festivals.

WATER AS HARMONIZER

- When a guest arrives in a Hindu home, he is first welcomed by offering water.



Bathing utsav
murtis during
Fuldol



Vartman (initiation) with water



Adalaj Vav, near Gandhinagar

If water is not offered by the family or accepted by the guest, this is considered disrespectful.

- For over two hundred years, two groups of Rajputs of Odarka and Kukkad, in a total of 45 villages in the Bhavnagar district, had avoided drinking water from each other's group of villages. In short, they had feuded over a disputed piece of land for which many of their ancestors had fought and died. This avoidance of drinking water is known as *appaiya* in Saurashtra. During the Raj, a British official had also tried for a truce but failed. After independence, repeated efforts by government officials also failed.

Finally, through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's efforts, the two groups agreed for a permanent truce. On 12 April 1990, Pramukh Swami Maharaj held a peace *yagna* on the disputed land for the *sadgati* – spiritual uplift – of the people who had died. Then both groups drank water from each other's wells, given by Swamishri himself. They then happily embraced each other. Sacred water from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's hands established permanent peace and harmony.

SACRED WATER INITIATION

Water is used to initiate a newborn or a new follower into the Swaminarayan Sampradaya in a rite known as *vartaman*. The guru, sadhus or

appointed devotees place a few drops of sacred water in the right palm of the person. The mantra “*Kāl, māyā, pāp, karma...*” is recited. Then the water is dropped on the ground. The person is then given a *kanthi* – a two-stringed neck chain of tulsi or sandalwood beads.

AT DEATH

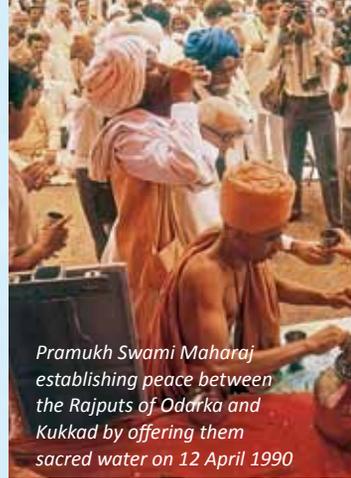
- During the final moments of a person's life, Ganga water is given to drink. If the person has already expired, a few drops of Ganga water and a tulsi leaf are placed on the lips. This ensures that the person's *jiva* attains a sacred abode such as Swarg and not an infernal region such as Narak.
- After death, the body is bathed with water and adorned with new clothes and draped with a white, unstitched cloth known as *kafan*.
- After cremation, the ashes and bone pieces, also known as *ful* (flowers) or *asthi*, are washed with milk and water from the nearest sacred river.
- The *asthi* then immersed in a holy river such as the Narmada at Chanod in Gujarat, in Ganga in northern India or at Triveni Sangam at Srirangapatnam, Karnataka, in south India. This is the confluence of the rivers Kaveri, Hemavati and Lokpavani. This rite is known as *asthi visarjan*. In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya devotees also perform this ritual in the river



Shankh water sprinkled around arti



Offering water to Surya Deva



Pramukh Swami Maharaj establishing peace between the Rajputs of Odarka and Kukkad by offering them sacred water on 12 April 1990

Ghela in Gadhadra and in river Gondali in Gondal, since Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his *paramhansas* had bathed in them, thus sanctifying them.

- In England, Gateshead Council has designated a part of River Derwent for British Hindus and Sikhs to disperse ashes.

HEALING WATERS

- In the BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya, there is a tradition in which sacred water is given to devotees in a bottle to alleviate *adhi* (mental stressors), *vyadhi* (physical problems) and *upadhi* (external stressors). This water can be from Akshar Deri, the sacred shrine in the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Gondal, the *abhishek* water from Nilkanth Varni or the water sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in his morning puja in which he dips a bead and a piece of cloth, both used by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in a jug of water, while he chants the Swaminarayan mantra and offers prayers. He also adds a few rose flowers offered in the puja. Thus this water becomes greatly sanctified.
- Experts who use water in healing believe that water has the ability to retain memory. When a healer holds a glass of plain water and directs loving and healing thoughts at the water, that water attains healing

qualities. If such a simple method can confer healing properties in water, then surely water sanctified during *abhishek* on Nilkanth Varni while the pujari chants Vedic mantras, and that sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in his puja, certainly attains immense divinity. This divine water induces amazing healings in devotees. For some, the illness may not be cured, yet the devotees feel solace at the *atmic* level. That is in itself is also healing.

- In Gujarat especially, a tradition prevailed for philanthropists to construct beautiful step-wells, known as *vavs*, to accrue *punya*. Besides providing water, they served as shelters for wayfarers who could rest there temporarily. The Ranki Vav in Patan and Adalaj Vav near Gandhinagar, are two such ornate *vavs*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his *paramhansas* bathed in the latter, to fulfill the wish of its builder, Ruda Rani, who wished to attain *moksha*. In her next birth, she was Queenmother Kushalkunvarba of Dharampur, who met and was liberated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
- When a Satpurush, such as Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who is a *jangam* (mobile) *tirth* bathes in a sacred river, lake or ocean, he purifies the infinite *pap karmas* that it has accumulated from the people who have bathed in it. For even holy water



Dispersing ashes in the Narmada at Chanod



Maha arti of the Ganga at Kashi

bodies need to be cleansed and re-charged spiritually by Paramatma and his realized sadhu.

immense importance in a variety of ways in the daily lives of Hindus and is rightfully *jivanam jivinaam jivaha* – life for all. ♦

Thus sacred water in Sanatan Dharma is of

Times Archive

A Hindu immersion ceremony on the Thames

The River Thames near Richmond in September 1974, and followers of his Divine Holiness Shree Pramukh Swami watch from Petersham Meadows as Hindu monks immerse "an image of God" at the ceremony of Jai Zilani. The occasion is a visit to Britain by the Swami on a mission of multi-faith understanding

Archive >

For a selection of historic pictures go to our website at timesonline.co.uk/archive

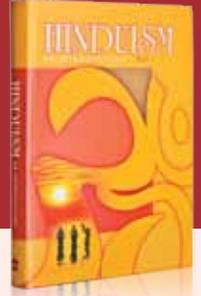
Ganesh *visarjan* during Jal Jhilani celebration on the River Thames at Petersham Meadows by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1974

References:

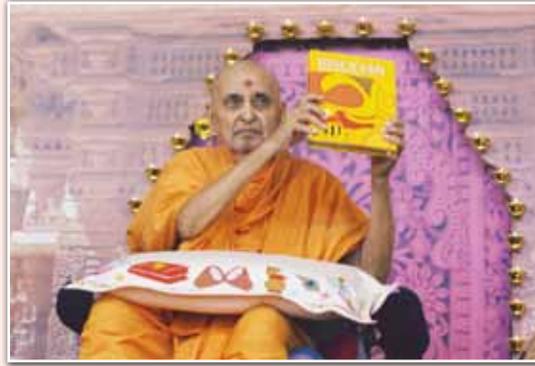
- The Times, London, 13-2-2009*
- Hindu Rites & Rituals* } Swaminarayan
- Hindu Festivals* } Aksharpith
- Brahmopanishad*
- Nityakarma Pujaprakash*
- Healing Energies of Water* by Charlie Rylie

HINDUISM

AN INTRODUCTION



REVIEWS



'Hinduism, An Introduction', published by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, Ahmedabad, 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 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 shared their opinions.

In this fourth instalment we share, with deep appreciation, the reviews of three of the many illustrious scholars and Vice-Chancellors of Sanskrit Universities in India.

Prof. Kutumb Shastri

Vice-Chancellor, Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

From time immemorial the worldly and spiritual progress of all living beings have been attained through the guru tradition of Sanatan Dharma. In this tradition a great soul is present on our soil. He, through his divine knowledge,

timeless thoughts and intense austerity, has successfully guided the whole world. Among the many *peeths* [seats of faith and learning] the name of Akshardham is said and seen with faith.

In the form of a flag-bearer of India's way of life and its traditions Swaminarayan Aksharpith has published an excellent publication called 'Hinduism' in two parts. I was deeply pleased on going through the book because it throws light on Sanatan Dharma's importance, spirituality and on how to attain worldly and spiritual progress.

The explanations given about the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Purans and Itihasas, Agamas and Darshans in the book, 'Hinduism', have been brought out with great simplicity for the liberation of humankind. In Part 2 the chapter on various sadhanas and rishi-

scientists of India have been presented lucidly and is very praiseworthy.

The book is attractive because of its beautiful illustrations and printing on art paper. Respected Swami Vivekjiandas has written these two volumes and presented the path of elevation for society.

I myself, and on behalf of the entire Sanskrit world, offer our congratulations for producing such an excellent book. In addition, I convey my appreciations to the publishers and to all those who have contributed in its creation.

Prof. Swatantra Kumar

Vice- Chancellor, Gurukul Kangri Vishvavidyalaya, Haridwar (Uttarakhand)

Hinduism is so multi-faceted, so varied in its modes of worship, so rich in its philosophical thoughts, so diverse in its places of worship and rituals that no single book, howsoever voluminous, can describe it in its entirety. Nevertheless, Sadhu Vivekjiandas's *Hinduism: An Introduction* published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, goes a long way in doing that. It is a very comprehensive and balanced introduction to Hindu beliefs, scriptures, deities, sacred places, festivals, spiritual practices, rituals, sages and thinkers. Divided into two parts, the book consists of thirty chapters which give brief but illuminating descriptions of abstract and concrete features that together constitute Hinduism. The first part of the book aims at describing the core of Hinduism. It begins with the explanation of the term 'Sanatan Dharma' by which it is known, and moves on to describe the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism. The succeeding five chapters focus on the Hindu sacred texts, philosophical systems and Vedantic teachings. Chapter 8 is devoted to the description of the four major sects of Hinduism. The author then goes on to describe Hindu gods and goddesses, its sacred places, rivers, festivals and rituals. The sixteenth chapter, which is the

last chapter of Part I, introduces us to something which one does not easily find in other books – the sacred symbols and objects of Hinduism. The second part of the book widens its scope by not only telling us about the famous Hindu devotees, which include child and women devotees, but also about the great religious reformers of this most ancient religion of the world. The chapter on 'Rishi-Scientists' is very interesting as it shows the rational and scientific base of Hinduism. Another remarkable chapter of Part II is the one which mentions the impact and impression of Hinduism outside India. The book gives information about some general facts and features of India as well. It ends with answering some frequently asked questions about Hinduism. Thus the book is a very good introduction to this ancient religion followed by a huge section of human population. What adds to the charm of the book are nearly seven hundred and fifty photographs, paintings, graphic compositions and maps. They give us a visual introduction to Hinduism. The book is well-planned and beautifully presented. One hopes that more such books will come in future through the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

Dr Mohan Gupta

Vice-Chancellor, Maharshi Panini Sanskrit &
Vedic Vishvavidyalaya, Ujjain, D.Litt. I.A.S. (Retd.)

The two volumes on Hinduism are really a wonderful compendium to understand Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma in its totality and depth. They describe the entire gamut of Hinduism in a short space, with a history of thousands of years, varied philosophies, vast rituals, many traditions and innumerable ways of worship. 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 the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Dharmashastras; explain the core beliefs of it and then come to the 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 spread around the globe through the efforts of great saints like Ramkrishna Paramhans, Maharshi Arvind, Swami Vivekanand or Bhagwan

Swaminarayan has been explained at length in these volumes. They have done a right thing to include a separate chapter on the Swaminarayan 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 only to the Hindus around the globe, but also to humanity at large. These volumes will help in understanding 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 inquiries 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 authors of these volumes for this monumental intellectual work.

(contd. from p. 17)

Finally, according to the Upanishads, the true guru is *brahmanishta* – Brahman – and is *shrotriya* – who knows the true meanings of the shastras. He should be served with *samidh* – fuel wood (Mundak Upanishad 2.12-13). The underlying sentiment of this key word *samidh* is to serve with total *sharanagati* – complete surrender, with body, mind and *atma*.

Today we are fortunate to have such a guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Therefore as his ideal disciples we should serve him sincerely and obtain *brahmavidya* from him and not by our own efforts alone (Mundak Upanishad 1.12.13).

In turn, this means that we should do only that which pleases Swamishri. As he often says, that the guru is pleased when we staunchly observe the precepts given by Shriji Maharaj in the Shikshapatri and other injunctions given in the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. Additionally we should also observe those commands that Swamishri himself has advocated over the years. Like the disciples of the Upanishads, it behoves us to observe all these injunctions with intense faith, whether we initially understand their meaning or not. Less faith caused by doubt leads to one's spiritual downfall – *sanshayātmā vinashyati* (Gita 4.40). ♦

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

April 2011, Sarangpur



Swamishri performs morning puja

Swamishri's daily routine at the BAPS Swaminarayan mandir in Sarangpur comprised of darshan in the morning of Thakorji, darshan at the Rang Mandap and Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. Brief skits were presented daily at the Smruti Mandir during which Swamishri responded with joy and words of wisdom. Thereafter he performed his morning puja in public, during which sadhus sang bhajans. Thereafter Swamishri also blessed and counselled devotees who met him at his residence.

During the rest of the day Swamishri remained engaged in meetings, writing letters, reading satsang publications and listening to spiritual discourses.

SARANGPUR

4, Monday; Bhagvati Diksha

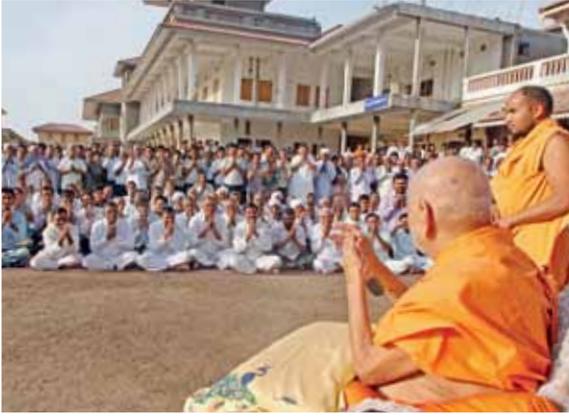
Swamishri gave *Bhagvati diksha* (initiation as sadhus) to 22 *parshads* and *parshad diksha* to one *sadhak* (Details in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, April-May 2011, pp. 50-51).

12, Tuesday; Shri Hari Jayanti

In the evening Swamishri presided over the 230th birthday celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shri Hari Jayanti. The festive

assembly, held on the mandir grounds, commenced at 7.00 p.m. The stage backdrop was made of clouds with the *utsav murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan seated on a golden throne. Swamishri's Harikrishna Maharaj was placed in a golden cradle. The celebration was themed on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's supreme glory. The programme was as follows:

- Bhajan: *Premavati sut jāyo re anupam...* sung by sadhus
- Speech: Shri Hari's unique divine powers and glory by Pujya Apurvamuni Swami
- Drama: How Shri Hari gave moksha, performed by Yuvak Mandal, Botad
- Speech: Shri Hari's unique sadhus by Pujya Brahmadarshan Swami
- Speech: Shri Hari's unique devotees by Pujya Siddheshwar Swami
- Speech: Philosophy of Brahman - Parabrahman and the unique guru *parampara* by Pujya Viveksagar Swami
- Swamishri inaugurated a booklet for children, *Good Habits and Bad habits*
- Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus
- Traditional dance by Yuvak Mandal, Bhavnagar



Swamishri greets the devotees on the way to Thakorji's darshan

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami came to liberate countless *jivas*. Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj faced many troubles, but they had a firm conviction that the principle of Akshar-Purushottam is genuine. They thus tolerated and subsequently today we find that this knowledge has flourished and been enshrined in so many mandirs, sadhus and devotees."

Then a *thal* of sweet foods and other items was offered to Thakorji. Finally, Swamishri and the senior sadhus performed the festival *arti* and rocked the cradle of Thakorji. The assembly concluded at 10.25 p.m. Swamishri had remained seated despite his old age for over three hours.

15, Friday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs at Rabod, Padra, Uber and Bardoli.

18, Monday; 30th Patotsav of Smruti Mandir

In celebration of the 30th *patotsav* (inaugural anniversary) of Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, a *mahapuja* was performed and thereafter the *murti* of Shastriji Maahraj was bathed with *panchamrut* and saffron (*kesar*) scented water. A flower shawl was draped on the *murti* and an *annakut* was offered. When Swamishri arrived he performed

arti and offered *mantra pushpanjali*.

After his morning puja Swamishri blessed the assembly, "By the wish of Shriji Maharaj and the grace of Shastriji Maharaj this mandir was built here. It is very beautiful and we all are able to avail of it. We had never thought that such a wonderful mandir would come up here, because the circumstances then were very difficult. Shastriji Maharaj had faith in and the blessings of Maharaj and Swami. He had soul-strength (*atma-bala*) and faith (*nishtha*) so the task was accomplished. When one has faith in God, the strength of his refuge and knowing his glory, then nothing is impossible to do."

21, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Jantral (Mehsana district) and Vatav.

22, Friday

A Kishore-Kishori Shibir of *satsangi* boys and girls from Vadodara and Bharuch districts was held for two days. On the inaugural day 1,486 boys and girls were present. As Swamishri proceeded towards the Smruti Mandir, a brief traditional dance was performed by some *kishores* and when the theme song was played the *kishores* excitedly waved the BAPS flags.

24, Sunday

A one-day Kishore-Kishori *shibir* was arranged for *satsangi* teenagers of Sarangpur district. The *shibir* theme was 'Nilkanth, Our Ideal'. After his puja Swamishri blessed the assembly of *kishores*.

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

SATSANG SHIBIR

6 June 2011, Auckland, New Zealand

More than 250 devotees participated in the one-day Satsang Shibir held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Auckland, New Zealand, on 6 June 2011 in the presence of Jnanpurush Swami and Adarshmuni Swami.



The theme of the *shibir* was 'Spiritual Quotient -Vidyanam Adhyatma Vidya'. The topics presented included: Daily Rituals, Positive Thinking, Asmita, Shraddha, Mahima and Spiritual Values.

The participants learned how to strengthen their faith in God and please the guru by obeying

his commands. Also, a panel discussion was held on 'How Faith Improved My Life' in which devotees from different backgrounds explained how they kept faith in God even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Everyone felt inspired by their resoluteness and unflinching faith.

The *shibir* was an inspiration for all and many devotees resolved to make their lives more positive and dedicate more time to satsang activities.

NATIONAL YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR 'SATSANG EVOLUTION'

15 and 21 May 2011

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London & Wellingborough

Based on the theme, 'Satsang Evolution', over 500 BAPS youths from all UK centres participated in the two one-day youth *shibirs* held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London (Sunday 15 May 2011) and BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Wellingborough (Saturday 21 May 2011).



spiritually with the help of satsang the changes occurring all around can be understood and managed.

The youths were taught that our Shastras, *Siddhant* and Satpurush have remained stable in an ever-changing world, and by

living in accordance with them the solutions to all problems are found.

The *shibir* focused on how by evolving

AN ANNOUNCEMENT

From this month, *Swaminarayan Bliss* will be published as a bi-monthly. Each bi-monthly issue will come to you with a variety of articles for teenagers, youths and others. We hope you will savour the new format and articles.

(contd. from p. 7)

had listened with utmost concentration and a calm mind, he was able to narrate it all to Gaja Gadhvi. Remember, when one listens with a calm and concentrated mind, only then are such subtle discourses understood and absorbed. One who listens to and does darshan in this manner is dear to me."

The entire assembly realized Shri Hari's inclination and joy towards one who properly engages himself in spiritual sadhnas.

BRAHMANAND SWAMI STOPS TALKING TO MUKTANAND SWAMI

Brahmanand Swami arrived in the satsang assembly in Kariyani. He bowed and touched the feet of Maharaj and sat nearby. Shri Hari asked, "Swami, did you not bow and touch the feet of Muktanand Swami?" Brahmanand Swami remained quiet. At that time Nirvikaranand Swami revealed, "Maharaj, Brahmanand Swami has stopped talking to Muktanand Swami."

Shri Hari was startled. He spoke in a stern tone, "What lapse has the guru (Muktanand Swami) made that you have refrained from talking to him?" Brahmanand Swami simply looked down and remained mute.

Nirvikaranand Swami explained further, "Maharaj, Vasudevanand Muni was a scribe of Brahmanand Swami. A few days ago he had a tiff with Brahmanand Swami. So Vasudevanand decided to leave Satsang. When Muktanand Swami came to know of it, he called the scribe and explained to him about the greatness of Brahmanand Swami. Despite trying to calm him down the scribe did not want to stay with Brahmanand Swami. Then as a last resort Muktanand Swami told him, 'If you feel that way [for Brahmanand Swami] then you can stay in my group; but don't give up Satsang.'

"Vasudevanand Muni agreed and stayed in Muktanand Swami's group. Because of this Brahmanand Swami felt bad."

Shri Hari was irked at Brahmanand Swami's

reaction and rebuked him, "Swami, you are a *sadguru*. You renounced the honours and praises showered upon you by kings, the opulence and pleasures of material things and the offers of marriage. Despite having such intense *vairagya* (detachment) you perceived fault in Muktanand Swami, who is the guru of us all, for taking your disciple under his care. Such a lapse has occurred because of the breach in attachment you have for your disciple. But Muktanand Swami saved one soul from leaving Satsang. How can you see fault in that?"

Brahmanand Swami was flustered. At that time Laduba, who was sitting in the women's wing, shot out piercingly, "Sadhus, too, have such undue attachment for their disciples. It is because of that one finds fault in a *sadguru* like Muktanand Swami. How can one call such a person a sadhu!"

On learning about Laduba's remark, Brahmanand Swami felt compelled to make a clarification. He humbly addressed Shri Hari, "Maharaj, I am not at fault for whatever that has happened. You know that once in Gadhada I became very ill. Before that I used to perceive good in all. However with the graveness of my fever you had declared that my lifespan was coming to an end. The devotees strongly wished and prayed to you that I live more. Then on your word, everyone offered a part of their lifespan to me. I believe that the lapse in my saintliness was due to the brief lifespan offered by a quarrelsome woman."

Brahmanand Swami's witty answer threw the whole assembly in peals of laughter. Laduba realized that her verbal jab was well answered. Then Brahmanand Swami prostrated before Shri Hari and Muktanand Swami and asked for forgiveness.

Maharaj showered his joy upon Brahmanand Swami. ◆

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



1



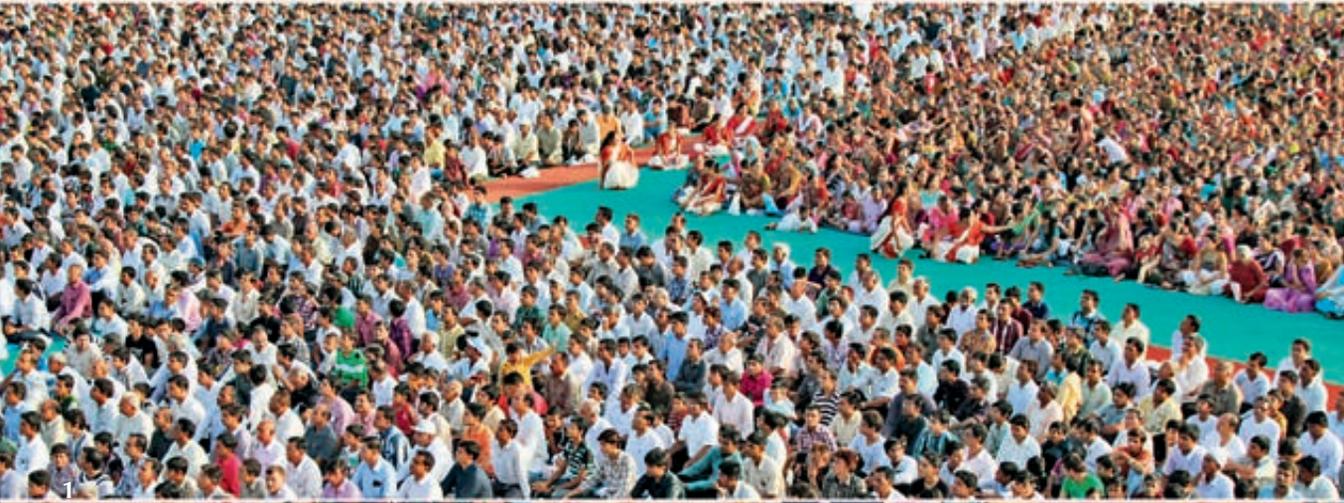
2



3

SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN, April-May 2011, Sarangpur & Surat

1. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* of the *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandir in Jantral (21 April, Sarangpur).
2. Swamishri blesses the youths of Vadodara and Bharuch at the start of their shibir (22 April, Sarangpur).
3. Children and youths present a drama entitled, 'Parajay' on Bal Din in Surat (15 May).



1



2



3

SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN, May 2011, Surat

1. Over 30,000 devotees in one of the weekly Sunday satsang assemblies held in Swamishri's presence.
2. Youths enact a skit during the Yogi Jayanti Celebration assembly (29 May).
3. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti* of the *murtis* for new BAPS mandirs at Sachin and Olpad (30 May).