



Satsang Prasang

Brahmaswarup
Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Pragati Brahmaswarup
Mahant Swami Maharaj

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Guidelines for Satsang Prasang

One of the various competitions in the **Satsang Adhiveshan** is the ‘**Satsang Prasang**’ competition, which includes 100 inspirational prasangs.

The purpose of the ‘Satsang Prasang’ competition is for all devotees to study these 100 prasangs in depth. These prasangs highlight the glory and teachings of **Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus**, as well as prasangs from the lives of some of contemporary bhaktas, from which we will gain immense inspiration.

Let us all wholeheartedly engage in this study and strengthen our Satsang journey!

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Bhagwan Swaminarayan

The Purpose of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Manifestation

The Supreme Sarvavatari Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan manifested on this earth out of his unconditional compassion for all souls. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 78, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “God – who transcends Akshar, who is beyond mind and speech, and who is imperceptible – himself, out of compassion, resolves, ‘May all the enlightened and unenlightened people on Mrutyulok behold me.’ Having resolved in this manner, God – whose will always prevail – out of compassion becomes perceivable to all people on Mrutyulok.” What was the purpose of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's arrival on this earth? Shriji Maharaj himself revealed the reasons for his manifestation.

In 1820 CE (Samvat 1877) Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to Kariyani to celebrate Diwali-Annakut when Gopalanand Swami arrived from Vadodara for his *darshan*. Shriji Maharaj greeted him with an embrace and then led him to Akshar Ordi. After seating Gopalanand Swami beside him, Shriji Maharaj asked the other sadhus and devotees to leave. Nishkulanand Swami, assuming Shriji Maharaj was about to discuss something important, entered the room. However, Shriji Maharaj asked him to leave as well, directing his attention to the construction of the new washing area. With the doors of Akshar Ordi now closed, Nishkulanand Swami's curiosity was piqued, and he attempted to listen from outside. Inside, Shriji Maharaj asked Gopalanand Swami, “Swami, I have come here with my Akshardham and all the *muktas*. Do you know why?” Gopalanand Swami replied, “No Maharaj!” Then Shriji Maharaj revealed to Gopalanand Swami, the six objectives behind his manifestation on earth:

1. To propagate my *sarvopari upasana* and *gnan* on this earth.
2. To preach to the followers of previous *avatars* the knowledge of my form and *upasana* and send them to Akshardham.
3. To liberate Bhaktidevi and Dharmadev from the harassment of evil people and bless them with the bliss of my *murti*.
4. To revive and spread the long-forgotten *ekantik dharma*, which consists of *dharma*, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti* coupled with the understanding of God's glory.
5. To give the fruits of the austerities and *bhakti* in the form of my *darshan* to those ascetics and yogis who have been worshipping God since eternity; to fulfil the wishes of those *mumukshus* who have great affection for God, and to shower them with love.

6. To initiate sadhus who embody *ekantik dharma*, build *shikharbaddha* mandirs for worship, and create scriptures narrating my divine incidents and the principles of *ekantik dharma*. To establish on this earth the lineage of Param Ekantik Sant, who will forever sustain *ekantik dharma* and keep the path of liberation to Akshardham open.

Nilkanth Varni's Fearlessness

Passing through the snowy paths, shrubbery, and valleys of the Himalayas, Nilkanth Varni arrived in Shripur, a village established by Naradji. Outside the village stood a hermitage, the Kamleshwar *Math* (monastery), Nilkanth Varni decided to sit on a small platform nearby. The villagers were drawn to this child *brahmachari*, whose body, though emaciated by austerities, radiated a divine glow. The *mahant* of the *math* also rushed to see Varni. It was evening time. The *mahant* said to Varni, “*brahmachari*! Please come inside the *math*. It is dangerous to stay outside; there are wild animals. It is not wise to sit on the platform.” But Varni remained silent. Thinking he was observing a vow of silence, the *mahant* gently shook Varni and said, “Maharaj! Listen to me. If you do not want to come inside the *ashram*, please go to the village and stay the night there because there is imminent death here.”

Varni, calm and content, replied to the *mahant*, “I do not stay where there are many people. I prefer to live outside a village, in a place like this and under the sky. I am not afraid of death. Hiding from death does not prevent it.” The *mahant* found Varni's words stubborn and returned to the *ashram*. Varni calmly sat in a meditative posture. But the *mahant* was restless with worry for Varni. He frequently glanced at Varni from the *ashram* window.

The sun had set. Two *prahars* (six hours) of the night had passed, there was complete silence everywhere. Suddenly, breaking that silence, an earth-shaking roar of a lion was heard. The *mahant* and the villagers woke up hearing the deafening roar. Roaring fiercely, the lion, with paws as large as plates, stamping its feet, swinging its huge tail, its eyes glowing like molten copper, slowly approached and stood before Varni. Nilkanth Varni glanced at the lion. As soon as his gaze fell upon it, the lion became motionless and experiencing the divine bliss of *samadhi*, lay down at Varni's feet.

Fearfully, the *mahant* opened the door of the window. He and his disciples stood outside the window, watching in astonishment. After a while, Nilkanth Varni began to stroke the lion's body. With Varni's touch, the lion woke up from *samadhi* and became conscious. It began to lick Varni's feet. All the disciples and the *mahant* looked at each other in awe and exclaimed in unison, “This is no ordinary human being, but the manifestation of Bhagwan!” This lion, which kills humans and animals and whose roar would tremble the hearts of many, had become like a docile cow before Varni!

As dawn approached, the lion bowed its head to Varni and disappeared into the forest! The *mahant* ran to Varni and with folded hands, said, “*brahmachari*! You are a very valorous person. I wish you stay in our ashram. I shall make you the mahant. We have an annual income of Rs. 100,000.” Nilkanth Varni interrupting him, said, “Look *mahant*! If I was interested in *ashrams* or income why would I have left home? I have to visit many pilgrim places and redeem countless souls. And I want to explain to the world about true satsang.” He spurned the offer of *mahantship* and proceeded towards the mountains. The *mahant* and the villagers watched him go as he slowly vanished into the distance, convinced that, “This Varni is the manifest form of Bhagwan, who has come for the welfare of all living beings.” In this way, Nilkanth Varni fearlessly continued his *vicharan*.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 55, Shriji Maharaj says, “When I renounced my home, I did not even like to keep clothes. In fact, I liked to stay only in the forest, but I was not the least bit afraid. Even when I came across large snakes, lions, elephants, and countless other types of animals in the forest, there was not the slightest fear of dying in my heart. In this way, I always remained fearless in the dense forests.”

A Varni Above Worldly Attachments

While guiding countless souls who were lost on the path of liberation, Nilkanth Varni arrived in Vanshipur. There, radiating a divine glow, he sat in deep meditation in a *swastik* pose under a banyan tree. The king of Vanshipur was immediately drawn to his divine presence and wondered, “Could it be that ‘Narayan’ himself has come to bless me today?” Overwhelmed with devotion, the king invited Varni to his palace. Seeing the king’s sincerity, Varni agreed. The king, showing deep respect, seated Varni on his royal horse and personally held the reins as he walked alongside. Upon seeing this divine guest, the queen was also mesmerised. She had the *darshan* of Purushottam Bhagwan in Varni.

The king and queen had two daughters, Ila and Sushila, who were equally captivated by Varni’s *darshan*. The queen, longing for a son, felt that Purushottam Bhagwan had arrived in this form to fulfil her wish. The entire royal family – king, queen, and princesses – became deeply devoted to serving Nilkanth Varni. They enjoyed Varni’s company and wisdom so much that they developed an intense desire to keep him in their kingdom.

One day the queen approached Varni and said, “brahmachari! We wish to hand over this kingdom to you. We also want you to marry our two daughters. So, give up the thought of going to the forest and performing penance.”

But how could Varni, who found even carrying a handkerchief burdensome (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 10), bear the weight of the kingdom and the worldly bonds? Therefore, Varni politely declined the queen’s proposal. The queen, blinded by infatuation, forgot that Varni was the Supreme Bhagwan himself. In her frustration, she said, “You are still young, but when you grow older, you will not be able to live without a woman. Kamdev (the god of desire) has shattered even the great sages – how will you escape?”

Deluded souls, bound by *maya*, often assume that even Bhagwan is bound by worldly desires, just as they are. Seeing the queen’s ignorance, Varni smiled within, feeling pity for her. He gently explained, “My joy lies in going to the forest and meditating on Paramatma.” The queen tried to frighten him by mentioning the dangers of wild animals, but Varni firmly responded, “Mother, the only thing to fear is attachment. I have come to this world to redeem people from this allurements of *maya* and grant them the bliss of my divine Akshardham. I have not come to be attached to a kingdom or relationships.” Hearing Varni’s piercing words, the queen had a spiritual awakening. The veil of ignorance in her heart disappeared, and she realised

the truth. That same night, Nilkanth Varni quietly left Vanshipur and continued his journey.

Nilkanth Varni faced many temptations throughout his travels, that could easily sway even the most virtuous person. King Ranjit Singh of Punjab and King Ran Bahadur of Kathmandu were ready to offer their entire kingdoms to him. Queen Kushalkuvarba of Dharampur also surrendered her kingdom of 500 villages at the feet of Shriji Maharaj. However, Shriji Maharaj remained untouched by such temptations and worldly attachments. He always remained unaffected and detached from the material world.

Nilkanth Varni's Selfless *Seva*

As Nilkanth Varni, Bhagwan Swaminarayan traversed India on foot, uplifting countless souls. During his travels from Venkatadri to Kanchipuram, he encountered Sevakram, an ascetic renowned for his Sanskrit scholarship and expertise in the Bhagwat. Impressed by Sevakram's deep understanding of the Shrimad Bhagwat and his beautiful recitation of the “*Gopika Geet*,” (poems describing the love of Gopis for Shri Krishna) Nilkanth Varni chose to stay with him for a time.

While Sevakram was a skilled orator, he lacked the qualities of a true ascetic. Despite possessing a thousand gold coins, he had neither disciples nor anyone to serve him. During his journey, Sevakram fell ill with dysentery, suffering frequent, bloody stools that left him weak and in agonising pain. Soon, he was unable to walk and began to weep in despair. Seeing Sevakram's suffering, Nilkanth sympathetically comforted him by saying, “Do not worry, I will take care of you.”

From that moment on, Nilkanth dedicated himself to Sevakram's service, day and night. Beneath a large banyan tree, in a banana grove, he prepared a comfortable bed of banana leaves, one arm's length high. He lovingly tended to Sevakram, washing his soiled clothing multiple times a day, without hesitation or disgust. Nilkanth would venture into the village, beg for alms, and then cook and feed Sevakram.

Despite this, Sevakram never once offered to share his food with Nilkanth, even though he sent Nilkanth Varni to purchase provisions with his own money. Consequently, Nilkanth often had to fast when he received no alms. At times, he endured fasts lasting two days, yet Sevakram never suggested using his funds to prepare a meal for both of them. Nevertheless, Nilkanth Varni served him diligently and lovingly for two months until Sevakram fully recovered.

Upon Sevakram's recovery, they continued towards Rameshwaram. Sevakram, now strong enough to digest a pound of ghee, made Nilkanth Varni carry his heavy, 20-kilogram luggage. Despite having always travelled with minimal possessions, Nilkanth Varni carried Sevakram's load without complaint. Sevakram showed little appreciation or concern for Nilkanth Varni's well-being, treating him as a mere servant. Nilkanth Varni realised, “He has no *bhakti* and no appreciation for anyone's *seva*.” Recognising Sevakram's ingratitude, Nilkanth Varni decided to leave him.

Selfless service is inherently challenging. However, to serve an inconsiderate and ungrateful person with unwavering affection for months is the epitome of *seva*. Through this incident, we witness Nilkanth Varni as the ultimate example of selfless service.

Purifier of Bhakti, Founder of Ekantik Dharma

Right next to Ramanand Swami's *ashram* in Loj was the home of Jivraj Sheth. Every day, Muktanand Swami would give spiritual discourses there. One day, Nilkanth Varni attended this spiritual discourse with some sadhus. He noticed that men and women were sitting together while listening to the discourses. Nilkanth Varni thought, "This is an impediment to doing *bhakti*. This can create an obstacle in a sadhu's observance of eight-fold celibacy. Additionally, sitting together during spiritual discourses could increase their inner distractions and sway both men and women from their path of *bhakti*." With this thought, Nilkanth Varni immediately left the *sabha*. The next day, when Muktanand Swami went to deliver a spiritual discourse, Nilkanth Varni told all the sadhus, "Come to the mandir. I will conduct spiritual discourses for you there. Men and women sitting together and listening to *katha* like this is not appropriate according to our *dharma*." When it came to observing *niyam dharma*, Nilkanth Varni did not worry about what others thought of him. Thus, after explaining this *dharma* to everyone, Nilkanth Varni established a new tradition in which men and women sat separately to listen to *katha*, ensuring purity in *bhakti*.

Nilkanth Varni was new to the *ashram*, and though he was only 20 years old at the time and 23 years younger than Muktanand Swami, his spiritual authority was undeniable, as seen in this prasang. One day, Nilkanth Varni noticed a small opening in the *ashram*'s wall. The house next door belonged to a householder, and Nilkanth Varni observed a sadhu and the householder's wife exchanging fire for cooking through the small window. Seeing this, Nilkanth Varni told Muktanand Swami, "This hole in the wall will one day surely compromise the sadhus' *dharma*. Thus, sadhus should maintain no relationship with any woman, whether direct or indirect, as this is considered inappropriate." Saying this, without waiting for approval from Muktanand Swami, Nilkanth Varni himself plugged the hole in the wall. Muktanand Swami was deeply impressed by Nilkanth Varni's firm insistence on observing celibacy as prescribed in the scriptures and inspiring others to observe the same.

Nilkanth Varni did not tolerate any impurities or compromises in *dharma* and *bhakti* under any circumstances, nor was he influenced by modern practices. His actions continue to teach and inspire future generations about the importance of celibacy and discipline in the spiritual path. Bhagwan Swaminarayan established a *sampradaya* in which he provided clear guidelines for both renunciants and householders on observing moral conduct between men and women. This is why we sing in the *arti*: "*Dharma ekantik sthapak, bhakti paritrata*" [He is the establisher of *ekantik dharma* and protector of pure *bhakti*].

Unparalleled Prayer and Boon Born from Compassion and Love

On the auspicious day of Kartik *sud* Ekadashi in 1801 CE (Samvat 1858) the city of Jetpur in Saurashtra was filled with excitement from the morning. The fragrance of the sacred *ahutis* (offerings) and the flames of the *yagna* created a divine atmosphere. Devotees were swarming the streets and walkways.

The appointment of Sahajanand Swami as Guru of the satsang fellowship was marked by a ceremony following Vedic customs. Ramanand Swami placed a *har* (garland) around Sahajanand Swami and applied sandalwood paste and a red *chandlo* to his forehead. Ramanand Swami then performed *arti* and directed Sahajanand Swami to assume the responsibility of the Sampradaya by taking a seat on his own *gadi* (seat of religious head of a Sampradaya).

Then, speaking to the sadhus and followers, Ramanand Swami said, “Today, Purna Purushottam Narayan himself has blessed this earth to establish Bhagwat Dharma and to guide countless souls to Akshardham in the form of Swami Sahajanand. Your liberation is ensured if you fully comprehend this Sahajanand Swami’s divine form and cultivate an everlasting conviction in him.”

Ramanand Swami then invited Sahajanand Swami to ask for a boon on this auspicious day. With folded hands, Sahajanand Swami humbly prayed:

“1. If your satsangi is to suffer the pain of one scorpion sting, then may the pain of the sting of millions of scorpions befall on each and every pore of my body; but no pain should afflict your satsangi. 2. If your satsangi is destined to have a begging bowl (face severe hardship due to their past karma), then let that begging bowl come to me (may that severe hardship fall upon me); but your satsangi should not suffer from want of food or clothing. Please grant me these two boons.”

On seeing the magnanimous sentiment of Sahajanand Swami, the eyes of Ramanand Swami and the devotees became wet with tears of joy, and their hearts filled with profound indebtedness upon hearing this deeply compassionate and unique prayer.

Many people empathise with the suffering of others, but Bhagwan Swaminarayan took their pain upon himself and made his followers happy. In Vachanamrut Kariyani 6, Shriji Maharaj says, “I have sacrificed my body for the sake of those who are devotees of God by word, thought, and deed.” Such was Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s profound love!

Ājni Ghadi Re Dhanya...

The renowned poet Ladudan Gadhvi was an expert in four languages, grammar, and the science of poetry (*Pingal* Shastra). He had mastered 24 different arts, including equestrian knowledge (*Ashva Vidya*), elephant training (*Gaja Vidya*), and *Samudrik* Shastra (the study of body features and their significance). Gifted with exceptional intelligence, a sharp memory, and an innate ability for spontaneous poetry, he was honoured with numerous titles and awards from various royal courts. These included *Suvarna chandrak* (golden medallions), *Rajkaviratna* (royal poet), *Pingal Vidyacharya* (master of poetic arts), *Maha Mahopadhyaya* (greatest of the great scholars), *Maha Shighrakavishwar* (supreme instant poet), and *Shatavadhani* (a rare format of performance where the human intellect is put to ultimate test of mental concentration on over 100 tasks at once).

Once, when Ladudanji visited Bhavnagar, Maharaja Vajesinh Bapu summoned the royal jeweller to adorn him with gold ornaments. The jeweller had a striking *Gopichandan tilak* on his forehead along with a round red *kumkum chandlo*. Curious about this, Ladudanji inquired about its significance. Before the jeweller could answer, Maharaja Vajesinh Bapu interrupted and said, “Ladudan! I need you to resolve a dilemma of mine. In my kingdom, there is a village called Gadhada. A man named Swaminarayan has come there. The Kathis (a warrior community) consider him to be Bhagwan. This appears to me as a deception, and I request that you investigate him.”

Ladudan agreed to test Swaminarayan. However, the jeweller, trying to caution him, advised, “Kaviraj! If a statue made of salt enters the ocean to measure its depth, it will dissolve into the sea itself. So, proceed wisely.”

Filled with the pride of youth, erudition, and fame, Ladudan set off to Gadhada. En route, however, doubts arose in his mind. What if the rumours were true, and the goldsmith was right? Troubled by these thoughts, Ladudan resolved to impose four unspoken conditions upon Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He reasoned, “If Swaminarayan is truly Bhagwan, then may he remove a garland of roses from his neck and place it around mine, may he address me by name and introduce me to the assembly, may he reveal to me the sixteen divine marks said to be on the feet of Bhagwan, and may the Shrimad Bhagwat Shastra be recited before me while resting on a black cloth.” With these conditions, he reached the outskirts of Gadhada.

Upon entering the village, Ladudan experienced a divine peace. Sahajanand Swami was seated beneath a neem tree, surrounded by sadhus and

devotees. Before him, the Shrimad Bhagwat Shastra was being recited while resting on a black cloth. As Ladudanji entered Dada Khachar's court, Swaminarayan Bhagwan called him by name, welcomed him by presenting the rose garland he had been Āearing, and introduced him to the entire assembly. Simultaneously, Ladudan observed the sixteen divine marks on Shri Hari's feet. Overwhelmed with joy, Ladudan spontaneously composed a verse:

*‘Ājni ghadi re dhanya ājni ghadi,
me nirkhyā Sahajanand dhanya ājni ghadi...’*

(Blessed is this moment, truly blessed is this moment, for I have seen (met) Sahajanand Swami, truly precious is this moment.)

In that instant, the doors to Ladudan's heart opened, and he entered a state of *samadhi*. In his trance, he beheld Shriji Maharaj seated in the magnificent Akshardham, more radiant than countless suns and moons. Within that divine abode, infinite liberated souls experienced the unending bliss of Shri Hari's beautiful form. Even after awakening, this vision of Shriji Maharaj remained vividly etched in his mind. Ladudan was transformed from a royal poet into Shri Hari's *paramhansa* (sadhus initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan), Brahmanand Swami. The salt statue had indeed dissolved into the sea.

Many *paramhansas* underwent similar transformations, transitioning from worldly prominence to spiritual eminence. Nityanand Swami, a scholar of the four Vedas, possessed vast scriptural knowledge. Gopalanand Swami, with mastery over the eight yogic powers, could control the movements of celestial bodies. Santdas could enter *samadhi* at will, while Swarupanand Swami maintained constant awareness of his *atma*. Vyapkanand Swami revived a deceased horse. Nishkulanand Swami embodied renunciation and detachment, and Muktanand Swami exemplified saintliness. Gunatitanand Swami was the manifestation of Aksharbrahma, whose every pore contained countless universes. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's charisma and power were extraordinary. He initiated over three thousand virtuous *paramhansas*, inspiring them to renounce their worldly lives and adhere to *niyam-dharma*.

“What Are the Qualities of a Humble Servant?”

Sundarji Suthar, an administrator to the king of Kutch, once travelled to Gondal with a royal marriage procession from Bhuj. Upon arriving, he learned that Bhagwan Swaminarayan was in the nearby town of Bandhia. Promptly, he entrusted the guards with the procession and hastened to Bandhia for Shriji Maharaj’s darshan. Shriji Maharaj, residing at Mulu Khachar’s house, decided to test Sundarji.

“Who has come?” Shriji Maharaj inquired.

“Maharaj, your humble servant,” Sundarji replied.

“What are the qualities of a humble servant?” Shriji Maharaj asked.

“One who does as one is told,” Sundarji answered.

“Really? Then renounce your worldly attire and ornaments immediately and become a sadhu,” Maharaj commanded.

Sundarji relinquished his worldly possessions, shaved his head and beloved beard and moustache, and became a sadhu without hesitation. Subsequently, Shriji Maharaj sent him on a pilgrimage to Kashi. Sundarji, a devotee of unwavering resolve, did not question Shriji Maharaj’s seemingly odd request. Shriji Maharaj, with a grin told Muktanand Swami, “Look at what I have done! I have transformed a minister into a sadhu.” Muktanand Swami responded, “How can this be considered a great deed? While many in Kathiawad harass us, the people of Kutch were friendly due to Sundarji’s presence. Now, Jagjivan Karbhari (minister), who already dislikes us, will create even more difficulties. We may even be deprived of food in Kutch.”

Upon hearing Muktanand Swami’s concerns, Shriji Maharaj said, “Then call him back.” Mulji Brahmachari was sent to call Sundarji. Upon their return, they bowed at Shriji Maharaj’s feet.

“Who has come?” Shriji Maharaj asked.

“Your humble servant,” Sundarji replied.

“If you are a servant, then resume your original attire, take your shield and sword, and escort the prince to the bride’s house,” Shriji Maharaj instructed.

As commanded, Sundarji, who had recently become a sadhu, once again donned his worldly clothes and ornaments. However, his shaved beard and mustacho could not be restored. Undeterred by potential public criticism, Sundarji obeyed Shriji Maharaj's command. Yet, this incident instilled a degree of false pride in Sundarji. He remarked to Shriji Maharaj, "Maharaj, do not subject others to such rigorous tests; they may not be able to endure them."

Shriji Maharaj remained silent, but, as the destroyer of ego, he remembered Sundarji's words. Shriji Maharaj sought to eliminate all imperfections in his devotees. Even a devotee possessing the highest virtues was not immune to Shriji Maharaj's scrutiny if tainted by ego. Shriji Maharaj then devised a plan to dispel Sundarji's arrogance.

During his travels, Shriji Maharaj reached Bhadra. From there, he sent a letter addressed to wealthy rulers and *darbars*, including Sura Khachar, Alaiya Khachar, Amro Patgar, and others. Maharaj wrote, "Upon reading this letter, Mancha, Sura, Somla, Mamaiya, Aja, Virdas, and other devotees, wherever you may be—at home or on your farms—renounce everything, including food and water. I will be pleased. Proceed to Jetalpur and take diksha from Ramdas Swami. From there, journey to Kashi, and meet me in Bhuj upon your return."

Following Shriji Maharaj's wish, all the devotees left their homes. Kalyandas, from Kadu, was amid his wedding rituals. His uncle, Aja, arrived with Shriji Maharaj's letter, declaring his intention to become a sadhu. Kalyandas, upon reading the letter, felt compelled to follow Shriji Maharaj's command as well. Despite being in the middle of his own wedding, he decided to obey. Both of them immediately left to become sadhus, as instructed in Shriji Maharaj's letter. Although his name was not explicitly mentioned, Kalyandas believed that "infinite births have been wasted on worldly pursuits, wives, and children, but this birth offers an opportunity to be blessed by Purna Purushottam Narayan." He considered himself included in the "etc." at the end of the devotees' names. Everyone went to Ramdas Swami. Shriji Maharaj appeared to Ramdas Swami in a dream, instructing him to bring the newly initiated *paramhansas* directly to Bhuj instead.

From Bhadra, Shriji Maharaj travelled to Bhuj. After several days, the newly initiated *paramhansas* arrived with Ramdas Swami. Shriji Maharaj prostrated before them and walked halfway to receive them. He introduced each one to Sundarji Suthar, saying, "Each of them owns up to five, twenty-five, or fifty villages. Upon reading my letter, they renounced everything and rushed here with complete faith in me."

Sundarji Suthar's eyes filled with tears. His ego dissolved, and he understood the significance of Shriji Maharaj's words. He recalled his remark in Bandhia and sought forgiveness. Shriji Maharaj then issued a new command to the *paramhansas*, instructing them to shed their newly adorned saffron robes and resume their worldly attire. All except Kalyandas, who wished to remain a *paramhansa*, returned home. Shriji Maharaj permitted Kalyandas to stay and named him Adbhutanand Swami.

A single letter from Shriji Maharaj inspired these well-respected devotees and rulers to renounce their homes, families, and villages to become sadhus. Such was Shriji Maharaj's divinity that all who came into contact with him were freed from worldly desires and attachments. How dedicated must those devotees have been, willing to obey Shri Hari's every command!

A Cow Out of a Donkey

Jhaverchand Meghani, a renowned and highly acclaimed scholar of Gujarati literature and a national poet, described Joban Pagi's former life, 'Killing a human with a knife, cutting him into pieces and throwing him into the fire was like roasting eggplants to Joban!' Such was Joban's fierce personality. At that time, Joban Pagi's fear was widespread in Gujarat. It was said that Joban's arrow could travel unhindered from Gujarat to Kolkata and Pune; that is, no thief or robber dared to harass anyone carrying it. Joban had twice robbed the treasury of the Gaekwad government, which had placed a 50,000 rupees bounty on his capture. Yet, no one would betray his whereabouts. Even powerful princely states trembled before him. Joban would steal over vast distances, even in broad daylight, and remain uncaught.

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan held a grand yagna in Dabhan, attracting thousands of devotees from across the land. The finest horses of the great *darbars* were present, including Bhagwan Swaminarayan's famed *Rozo Ghodo*. Joban, tempted by the horse's reputation, thought, "If I had such a horse, I could travel long distances in a short time, and this would help me loot more in a short time!" That night, Joban carefully entered the stable under a dense banyan tree. As he attempted to untether the horse, he saw a globe of light. Looking up, he saw Bhagwan Swaminarayan adorned in golden clothes. His hand fell back, and Joban, hiding from Bhagwan's sight, quietly slipped into the darkness.

A few days later, Joban walked into an assembly to meet Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He touched Bhagwan Swaminarayan's feet, and with tears in his eyes, he slowly stood up and apologised to Shriji Maharaj in a trembling voice, 'Maharaj! I came to steal your horse the past few nights, but I saw your divine form everywhere in the stable. Maharaj! I am a sinner; I did not recognise you. O Bhagwan! Please have mercy upon me and pardon my great sins.' Hearing Joban's heartfelt plea, Shriji Maharaj patted his back, consoled him, forgave him, gave him *niyams*, and told him to give up his evil deeds. Joban, who had terrorised Gujarat, became a devotee. He began a spiritual life, serving and worshipping Shri Hari. When Shriji Maharaj came to Central Gujarat, Joban and his brothers served as Shriji Maharaj's bodyguards. Joban even donated his land for the construction of the Vartal Mandir.

Once, Joban had to go to the village of Vaso for some work. Kashiyabhai was sitting on a second-story balcony overlooking the street of his house. On seeing Joban, he thought to himself, "Once upon a time, on hearing Joban's 'roar' (loud voice), all the doors and windows of Vaso would be immediately

closed. Even babies would stop crying out of fear. Today, that same Joban silently walks through the streets of Vaso, wearing a *tilak* and a *chandlo* on his forehead, and a *mala* around his neck!”

Kashiyabhai, who opposed Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was astonished by Joban’s transformation. Out of curiosity, he called Joban, “O Joban! What magic has Swaminarayan worked on you that you walk so firmly with this bold *tilak* on your forehead? Does Swaminarayan miraculously turn a donkey into a cow?” Joban replied firmly, “Kashiyabhai! Do you still want to see a miracle? Isn’t it a miracle that you can talk to me like this? I was the chief of thieves. Swaminarayan made me a devotee. He gave me a *kanthi* around my neck and a *mala* in my hand. Did he not transform me, a donkey, into a cow?” Hearing this answer, Kashiyabhai immediately understood the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Joban had developed a profound attachment for Shri Hari. When Shriji Maharaj left for Akshardham, Joban could not bear this sorrow and couldn’t find peace anywhere. “How and why am I still alive without Maharaj?” he kept lamenting. The sadgurus tried to console him. They asked him to take the ashes of Shriji Maharaj’s last rites daily. So, while eating, Joban started mixing these ashes into his meals daily. He would think of Shriji Maharaj and find solace, and only then would he eat food.

One day, Joban sat down to eat. *Rotla* (millet bread) and buttermilk were served in a bowl. When Joban asked for the ashes, his wife hesitantly said, “The ashes are finished.” These words hit his ears, and Joban was shocked. “Huh?” His breath grew shallow, his eyes widened, and his body became lifeless! Joban went to Akshardham at that very moment! Such was Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who transformed a ferocious and ruthless robber like Joban into a great devotee!

‘*Anishuddha*’ Rice Grains

The queen of Dharampur, Kushalkuvarba, had immense love and devotion for Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Despite having many servants, she personally undertook the arduous task of hand-husking rice to produce “*anishuddha*” (flawless and unbroken) grains for Bhagwan Swaminarayan. One day, Bhagwan Swaminarayan took some of these rice grains in his hand. Selecting a single grain from his palm, he asked the sadhus, “What is this?”

The sadhus were surprised by Shriji Maharaj’s question. Everyone knew rice was a daily staple. Why would Shriji Maharaj ask such a basic question? “Maharaj, it is rice,” they replied. Shriji Maharaj repeated his question, “Santo! What is this?” Again, the sadhus were perplexed. Muktanand Swami finally asked, “Maharaj! It is a grain of rice. Why do you keep asking?”

Hearing this, Shriji Maharaj smiled. He rose from his seat, approached the sadhus, and showed the rice grains. “Santo! See how perfectly whole these rice grains are? Not a single one is broken, neither at the top nor the bottom.”

Hearing that, Muktanand Swami said, “Maharaj! The queen removed the outer husk of every grain with her own hands, so naturally, they are perfect!”

Shriji Maharaj smiled again. “Imagine the effort required to husk each grain by hand, ensuring it remains whole. I want you all to be as perfect as these grains. Do you realise the efforts I put in to make you so?”

Shriji Maharaj’s words caused the sadhus to reflect deeply. They were overwhelmed by the boundless compassion of Purna Purushottam Narayan.

Muktanand Swami then said to Shriji Maharaj, “Maharaj! You are right. Your abode, Akshardham, transcends *maya*. You strive to make us worthy of that abode by removing every imperfection. This is your immense compassion. Please also grant us the ability to strive for this perfection.”

Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 45, “I don’t want the slightest imperfection to remain in those who are said to be mine.” How fortunate we are that Bhagwan himself has taken the responsibility to perfect us. Today, Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj makes the same effort to eradicate our imperfections and mould us into perfect grains of rice. We must now strive to make his efforts worthwhile!

“Please Have Mercy Upon Me!”

In 1809 CE (Samvat 1866) Bhagwan Swaminarayan celebrated the Fuldol Utsav in Bhuj. He sprayed so much colour that the ground turned crimson (red). Such an abundance of *gulaal* was dispersed that the sky itself was painted a pink hue! The people of Bhuj experienced a festival of such captivating grandeur for the first time in their lives. The day after the Fuldol festival, the sadhus and devotees seated Shriji Maharaj on a flower-adorned swing (*hindolo*) and swayed him to their hearts' content. Devotees travelled from far and wide to participate in this unprecedented celebration.

Following the festival, devotees from Kanthkot, Dhamadka, Mandvi, Badadiya, Mankuva, and other villages sought Shriji Maharaj's *darshan* before returning home. Requesting his permission to leave, they said, “Maharaj, please bestow your mercy upon us!”

Shriji Maharaj replied with a gentle smile, “Please have mercy upon me!”

The devotees heard Shriji Maharaj's words, but in their eagerness to depart, they began their journey home. Along the way, they reminisced about the festival, recalling the divine atmosphere, Shriji Maharaj's radiant appearance, and the abundance of colour he had sprayed. Suddenly, one devotee asked, “As we were leaving, Shriji Maharaj told us to have mercy on him. He is the one who graces us with his mercy. Why would he have said this?” No one could answer. To resolve their confusion, they decided to return. Upon their return, they asked, “Maharaj, you asked us to have mercy on you as we were leaving. Please explain why you said this. You are our *Ishtadev*, the one we pray to; you are the one who showers us with mercy.” The devotees looked anxiously towards Shriji Maharaj, awaiting his response.

Shriji Maharaj explained, “Your body is approximately three and a half arm-lengths long, and within it resides your small heart, only three fingers wide. It is in this heart that we reside. Therefore, keep your heart pure. If you harbour desires for worldly things, we will not wish to stay there. So, please have that much mercy on me.” Hearing these words, the devotees understood Shriji Maharaj's meaning and resolved to remain vigilant, preventing worldly desires from overtaking their minds and hearts. They vowed to keep Shriji Maharaj's words at the forefront of their thoughts.

The controller of infinite universes, Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan, along with Akshar, resides in the small mandir within our hearts. However, we must remain constantly vigilant to ensure that the “trash” of our negative

tendencies (*swabhavs*) and worldly desires and attachments does not infiltrate that sacred space.

How Rare an Attainment!

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was residing in Sarangpur. One night, as Shriji Maharaj was about to sleep, Mahanubhavanand Swami began massaging his feet. Suddenly, Shriji Maharaj pulled his feet away. Seeing this, Swami was surprised! He asked, “Maharaj! Is there some flaw in my *bhakti* that you are denying me the opportunity to serve your feet? We have renounced the world for you, endured insults, criticism, and hardships to please you. We have followed all your *niyams* and gone through every test you put before us. What more is left for us to do that you refuse us this privilege?”

Hearing Swami’s words of sacrifice, Shriji Maharaj smiled and shared an example:

“Swami! A beggar once went to a wealthy man’s house asking for alms. The wealthy man told him, ‘You won’t be able to digest food given for free. Instead, sweep my courtyard, and I will pay you.’ The beggar agreed and cleaned the courtyard. Afterward, the wealthy man asked, ‘Now tell me, what should I give you as wages?’ The beggar replied, ‘Give me 10 kg of gold!’ Hearing this, the wealthy man was shocked and said, ‘You did work worth just a few pennies, yet you ask for 10 kg of gold?’”

Continuing, Shriji Maharaj said, “Your renunciation of home, your penance, your emaciated bodies – these are akin to merely sweeping the courtyard. These efforts are worth only a few pennies to me. Yet, you desire to serve Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan? In the past, great kings renounced their kingdoms and retreated to the forest for penance, yet they did not even have a glimpse of Parabrahma Purushottam. How does your renunciation compare to theirs?”

Mahanubhavanand Swami immediately recognised his error, realising he had already received the greatest reward for his austerities – the attainment of Bhagwan. Nishkulanand Swami has sung:

*“Āgaḥ bhagat anek thayā, sahyā teṇe sharire bahu dukh re;
Toye Prabhu pragaḥ pāmyā nahī, pāmyā pan nāvyā āvā sukh re...”*

[Many devotees have come before; they have endured much pain in their bodies. Even then, they did not attain the manifest form of Bhagwan, they did not receive such happiness...]

Even without great efforts or worthiness, we have attained the rare association of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the supreme ruler of infinite universes, and his divine lineage of Aksharbrahma Gunatit Gurus. This is our greatest fortune! We must now cherish and preserve this attainment with unwavering faith and devotion.

“Who is ‘Swaminarayaniya’?”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan built six magnificent *shikharbaddha* mandirs to preserve *upasana*. He consecrated various pairs of *avatars* within these mandirs: Nar-Narayan Dev in Ahmedabad and Bhuj, Lakshmi-Narayan Dev in Vartal, Gopinathji Dev and Radhikaji Dev in Gadhada, Madan-Mohan Dev in Dholera, and Radha-Raman Dev in Junagadh. He then appointed sadhus to reside in these mandirs, practice, and propagate satsang. Over time, these sadhus began to identify themselves with the specific *avatars* of their respective mandirs, adopting labels such as ‘*Narnarayaniya*’ or ‘*Laxminarayaniya*’.

One day, Bhagwan Swaminarayan gathered the sadhus and instructed them, “Those who identify as ‘*Narnarayaniya*,’ sit on this side. Those who identify as ‘*Laxminarayaniya*’ sit on this side...” He systematically separated the sadhus according to their perceived affiliations. When no one remained, Shriji Maharaj remarked, “Is there no ‘*Swaminarayaniya*’ among you? You all wear my *janoi* (sacred thread), my *kanthi*, and my *tilak*, yet none of you claim to be mine?” The sadhus immediately recognised their error. They prostrated themselves before Shriji Maharaj and declared, “Maharaj, we are all ‘*Swaminarayaniya*’!”

If we relate this incident in the present context, we see that during festive celebrations or while doing *seva* in different departments of the mandir, everyone takes responsibility and serves with dedication. However, these *sevas* can sometimes become sources of attachment, leading us to think in terms of ‘my *seva*’, ‘my department’, ‘my *mandal*’ or ‘my mandir’. This mindset fosters feelings of rivalry or subtle jealousy towards devotees from other *sevas*, departments, or mandirs.

We must remember that we are all devotees of the same Bhagwan, disciples of the same Guru, followers of the same *siddhant* (principles), and members of the same *sanstha*. The Satpurush is the body, and the various *sevas*, departments, and mandirs are all different yet integral parts of that body. When we neglect, envy, or fail to support a particular *seva* or department, we are, in effect, failing to support the Satpurush. On the other hand, when we cultivate a sense of unity and love with other volunteers, departments, and mandirs offering assistance and celebrating their progress, we are truly serving the Satpurush. If we serve and do *bhakti* with this understanding, our efforts will be truly meaningful.

“Mithā Vahālā Kem Visaru Māru...”

Out of immense compassion, Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan graced this Earth. His primary purpose was establishing *ekantik dharma*, a mission he accomplished in just 30 short years. Subsequently, Bhagwan Swaminarayan decided to return to his divine abode, Akshardham. During his final illness, he called Gunatitanand Swami from Junagadh to Gadhada. In a private meeting in Akshar Ordi, Bhagwan Swaminarayan conveyed his intention to depart for Akshardham. Shriji Maharaj instructed Gunatitanand Swami, “Through your association, teach others to cultivate my supreme *nishtha*, inspire them to become *brahamarup*, and make them worthy of Akshardham.” Following this, he recited verse,

*“Mithā vahālā kem visaru māru, tamathi bāndhel tan ho,
Tarsyāne jem pānidu vahālu, bhukhyā ne bhojan ho...”*

[My beloved, How can I ever forget you when you are a part of my existence, my consciousness?

The way the thirsty long for water and the starving for food, I long for you.]

Through these words, Shriji Maharaj revealed his oneness with Gunatitanand Swami. Emphasising Gunatitanand Swami’s greatness, Shriji Maharaj declared, “This Gunatitanand Swami is Gunatit (who transcends the three *gunas* – *sattvagun*, *rajogun*, and *tamogun*) and he is my abode, Akshardham. In his divine form, he is always with me (he is inseparable).”

On Jeth *sud* 10, 1830 CE (Samvat 1886), the morning had inauspiciousness in the air. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who had sanctified this Earth for 49 years independently and by his own will, returned to his divine abode. The grief of this departure spread throughout the land. Everyone, with heavy hearts, performed Shriji Maharaj’s final rites at Laxmi Vadi in Gadhada.

After the final rites were completed, Gunatitanand Swami, carrying a water pot, walked towards the bathroom in Laxmi Vadi. Observing the lush green grass beside a flowing stream of water, he reflected, “Oh! Just as water is the life of this grass, bringing joy and vitality, Maharaj was my life, and he has left me.” Overwhelmed by this thought, Gunatitanand Swami lost consciousness. In reality, Parabrahma and Aksharbrahma are never separate. However, the physical separation from Shriji Maharaj caused Gunatitanand Swami to faint. Within that moment, Shriji Maharaj appeared before him and awakened him, saying, “Where have I gone? I reside forever within you, forever within you,

forever within you.” With these words, Shriji Maharaj showered his infinite love upon Swami.

Although Bhagwan Swaminarayan physically departed from Earth, he remained present through his Anadi Mul Aksharmurti, Gunatitanand Swami, to ensure the path to *moksha* remains perpetually open for spiritual aspirants. This incident serves as proof of this truth.

Throughout the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj repeatedly assured his devotees of his enduring presence through the Gunatit Satpurush. “Whenever God is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the Sant who has the realisation of God – because the *jiva* can also attain liberation through him.” (Vachanamrut Vartal 10)

Presently, we have attained that same Shriji Maharaj through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Bhaktaratno

Just Satsang, No Expectations

Agatrai, a village near Junagadh, was the home of Parvatbhai, a devoted disciple of Ramanand Swami. Parvatbhai, along with Muktanand Swami and Mayaram Bhatt, had made a solemn vow: they would not be swayed by any miracles, even if someone showed Shri Radha-Krishna in their palm. Their unwavering loyalty was reserved solely for Ramanand Swami. However, upon his first meeting with Nilkanth Varni, Parvatbhai's conviction shifted. He recognised Nilkanth Varni as the Supreme Bhagwan.

Parvatbhai was a leading devotee in satsang. Ramanand Swami always included him in important decisions regarding satsang. When Ramanand Swami decided to appoint Bhagwan Swaminarayan as his successor in Jetpur, he first disclosed this to Ramdas Swami, Muktanand Swami, and Parvatbhai in private. Such was the esteemed position of Parvatbhai in the satsang fellowship.

Beyond his involvement in satsang decisions, his spiritual state was equally profound. Even during mundane tasks, such as working in his fields, Parvatbhai maintained his *ahniks*. He would offer *thal* in *mansi* to Shriji Maharaj. Once, while Parvatbhai was engaged in *mansi*, a fellow farmer shook him, and a *rotlo* (millet bread) and yogurt materialised from his empty hands, falling to the ground. Shriji Maharaj once explaining the definition of a true *satsangi* told Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami that they were *gunbuddhi satsangis*, meaning their spiritual state was still influenced by the three *gunas* (*sattvagun*, *rajogun*, and *tamogun*). He, however, considered Parvatbhai and Gordhanbhai to be his true *satsangis*. Furthermore, when Swarupanand Swami experienced inner turmoil, Shriji Maharaj advised him to listen to Parvatbhai's spiritual discourses for solace.

Parvatbhai was such a great devotee and deeply dedicated to Shriji Maharaj. On one occasion, Shriji Maharaj requested grains from Parvatbhai for almshouse. Without a moment's hesitation, Parvatbhai donated his entire stored supply – sixteen *kadshi* of grains, approximately 6400 kg—which required eight to ten carts for transport.

However, on another occasion, the same devoted Parvatbhai went to Gadhada to be in Shriji Maharaj's presence and have *darshan*. For seven days, Parvatbhai sat near Shriji Maharaj, absorbing his *darshan* and listening to his spiritual discourse. One day, Shriji Maharaj asked the brahmachari, “Where does Parvatbhai eat?”

“Maharaj, he must be eating in the *darbar*,” the brahmachari replied. Shriji Maharaj then asked Jivuba the same question, to which she responded, “Doesn’t he eat here? The brahmachari must be feeding him.”

Finally, Shriji Maharaj asked Parvatbhai directly, “Where do you eat?”

With humility, Parvatbhai answered, “Maharaj, I nibble on some roasted gram here and there. Just having your *darshan* satisfies me.” Despite such an extraordinary act of generosity of donating his whole livelihood, no one in Gadhada inquired about his own meals. Still, Parvatbhai did not feel disheartened. He never slackened in satsang, nor did he harbour any resentment towards Shriji Maharaj, the sadhus, or the devotees. He remained steadfast in his *seva* and *bhakti*. Seeing Parvatbhai’s transcendent state and his life free from any expectations, Shriji Maharaj was immensely pleased.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 70, Shriji Maharaj has said, “If I practice satsang, my ill body will recover’, or ‘As I am childless, may I get a son’, or ‘As my sons are dying, may they stay alive’, or ‘Since I am poor, may I become rich’, or ‘If I do satsang, I will regain my lost assets’, One should not practice satsang harbouring desires for such material gains.”

We, too, should strive to practice satsang selflessly, solely for the purpose of our *moksha*. By doing so, we will truly please Shriji Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

A Dedication Beyond Compare

Among Bhagwan Swaminarayan's devotees, Dada Khachar stood out as a paragon of virtues. His unwavering love for Bhagwan Swaminarayan was unmatched, and he remained ever eager to obey every *agna* of Shriji Maharaj. Time and again, Shriji Maharaj put Dada Khachar through severe tests, yet he emerged victorious in each one. That is why Shriji Maharaj would say, "Dado is Dado. Dado is my everything. I cannot live without him."

Once, Shriji Maharaj called Dada Khachar and said, "Dada! Transfer this estate to your sisters." Without a second thought, Dada Khachar immediately handed over his entire wealth to them without any hesitation. Shriji Maharaj then told him, "You no longer have a right to stay here. If you wish to stay, you must remain as a servant." Without question, Dada Khachar started living as a mere servant in his own palace!

Another time, in a *sabha*, Shriji Maharaj publicly said, "You are dismissed from your service. Leave immediately." Many present in the *sabha* were confused and wondered why Shriji Maharaj was treating such a great devotee this way. But Dada Khachar had no such doubts. Without uttering a single word, he simply bowed at Shriji Maharaj's feet and left with his wife Jashuba and son Bava Khachar. As they departed, Bava Khachar, who was hungry, began crying. Dada Khachar went to the granary to fetch some gram flour, but Harji Thakkar refused to give any, saying, "Maharaj has not given permission." Without arguing, Dada Khachar left empty-handed.

As Dada Khachar reached the outskirts of the village, Shriji Maharaj suddenly burst into tears in the *darbar*. He immediately said, "Call Dada back!" When Dada Khachar returned, Shriji Maharaj embraced him and restored his estate by taking it back from his sisters.

Despite such harsh tests, Dada Khachar never wavered. He remained as obedient as a puppet in Shriji Maharaj's hands, never questioning his actions or harbouring doubts about him.

At Shriji Maharaj's request, Dada Khachar selflessly dedicated his entire *darbar* to the sadhus and devotees. Shriji Maharaj frequently organised grand festivals in Gadhadra, hosting thousands of devotees. The expenses were enormous, yet Dada Khachar never hesitated to spend for Shriji Maharaj's sake. Even when his estate was under legal dispute in the Bhavnagar court, making finances tight, he never once complained to Shriji Maharaj. He never doubted, "If Maharaj is truly Bhagwan, why is he not removing my suffering?"

Shriji Maharaj lived in Dada Khachar's *darbar* for 28 years, calling it his own home. He once explained why, *"Even if I strike Dada five times a day, he will still tolerate it. I never allow him to settle in one place, and I must have made him move fifty-six times by now. Yet, Dada has never even wondered, 'Why is Maharaj doing this to me?' That is why I choose to stay here."*

If we cultivate the same level of surrender, faith, and unwavering *bhakti* as Dada Khachar, then no hardship or challenge will shake our satsang. Shriji Maharaj himself will reside eternally in our hearts, making it his divine abode.

“To Prosper in Worldly Affairs...”

Once, Gunatitanand Swami addressed an assembly and said, “According to Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s *agna*, those who set aside a tenth or twentieth of their earnings for *dharmado* will never face loss. Their wealth will not be burned, stolen, or seized by the king.”

Among those present was Darbar Mansiyo Khuman, a devoted follower from the village of Senjal. With firm faith in Swami’s words, he began setting aside some of his earnings for *dharmado*. From his annual income of ten thousand rupees, he regularly donated a tenth according to the Shikshapatri. As a result, his wealth grew immensely, reaching two lakh rupees within a short time. He stored this amount in two large pots and buried them deep within a room in his house.

A former servant, dismissed for misconduct, knew about this hidden treasure. One night, he devised a plan to steal the buried wealth. Since Mansiyo Khuman’s palace was near a river, the servant dug an underground tunnel from the riverbank leading toward the room. However, upon reaching his destination, he found nothing. Frustrated and disappointed, he left empty-handed.

The next morning, Mansiyo Khuman’s son, Jiva Khuman, noticed the tunnel in the room and immediately alerted his father, exclaiming, “Bapu! Thieves have stolen the treasure during the night!” Mansiyo Khuman calmly replied, “Jiva, don’t worry. I have already set aside Bhagwan’s share.” When they checked inside the room, the vessels of wealth were untouched, just as they had been left.

Gunatitanand Swami emphasised, “To prosper in worldly affairs, one should offer a tenth or twentieth of their earnings to Thakorji.” Similarly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj reinforced this principle, saying, “Give a tenth or twentieth of your income to Thakorji, and you shall be freed from *vāsanā* (deep desire for material things which are the cause of our rebirths)” Thus, for a life of peace, prosperity, and spiritual fulfilment, one must practice regular and sincere *dharmado*.

Unflinching Conviction, Unshakeable Understanding

Ladhibai from Bhuj was a devoted disciple of Ramanand Swami. After Ramanand Swami's passing, she had a divine *darshan* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the *murti* of Raghunathji at the Raghunathji mandir in Bhuj. From that moment on, her conviction in Shriji Maharaj's supreme divinity became unwavering. She dedicated herself entirely – body, mind, and wealth – to Shriji Maharaj and immersed herself in his devotion. By Shriji Maharaj's grace, she even attained *samadhi*.

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan celebrated a grand Annakut festival in Bhuj due to Ladhibai's deep inner wish. During the assembly, Shriji Maharaj reinforced the importance of unwavering faith, saying, “As long as one's conviction in my divine form remains steadfast, my grace will always be upon them. However, if doubts, arguments, or wavering thoughts arise, I will become helpless.” Ladhibai etched these words deep into her heart.

To test her resolute faith, one day Shriji Maharaj gave her an *agna*, “Dress like a married woman (she was a widow), wear a colourful *sari*, apply a red *chandlo*, part your hair with *sindoor* (vermilion powder), and walk through the crowded marketplace carrying a water pot on your head.”

At that time, society imposed strict norms on widows, making this an extremely challenging *agna*. Yet, without hesitation, Ladhibai obeyed, adorning herself like a happily married woman. She did not let doubt cloud her mind with thoughts like, “What will society think?” With a pot on her head and singing devotional hymns, she walked boldly through the busy market.

People were astonished to see her in such attire. Some even mocked her, asking, “Ladhi! Whose house are you getting married into?”

With unshaken conviction, she replied, “Purushottam Narayan's!” When she returned, Shriji Maharaj was immensely pleased with her steadfastness and devotion.

In Vachanamrut Loya 3 Shriji Maharaj says, “What would a person who has faith in God and his Sant coupled with the knowledge of their greatness not do for the sake of God and his Sant? For them, he would renounce his family, renounce any fear of public ridicule, renounce a kingdom, renounce pleasures, renounce wealth, renounce his wife, and in the case of a woman, she would renounce her husband.” When such absolute reverence and unwavering faith

exist, thoughts like “What will people think?” disappear, and only Shriji Maharaj and his Sant remain the sole focus of one’s life.

Highest Level of Understanding

In the village of Nenpur, in Mahemadabad Taluka (District), there lived a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan called Devji Bhagat. He lived a life of detachment from his physical self. Both he and his wife, Kankuba, were completely immersed in the devotion of Shriji Maharaj day and night. They had only one son, who, by Shriji Maharaj's grace, was blessed with *niravaran drashti* (no barriers like walls, wood, metal, or distance could stop him from having *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj). Sitting at home, he would witness Shriji Maharaj's divine acts and constantly meditate upon his *murti* in his heart.

In 1819 CE (Samvat 1876), when their son turned twenty years old, proposals for his marriage started arriving. However, Devji Bhagat and Kankuba had only one heartfelt prayer to Shriji Maharaj. They said, "O Maharaj! Let our son belong solely to you. Please bless him so that he remains detached from *maya* (worldly affairs)."

As if responding to their inner plea, Shriji Maharaj suddenly took their son to Akshardham. Typically, when an only son passes away at a young age, parents are left devastated, often losing their sanity in grief. But Devji Bhagat and Kankuba remained steadfast, believing, "Our son has now been permanently placed in Shriji Maharaj's *seva*."

Understanding that relatives and villagers would come to mourn, which might lead them to weep unnecessarily, Devji Bhagat reasoned, "Instead of grieving, wouldn't it be better to engage in *bhajan* and *bhakti* of Bhagwan?"

He told his wife, "I will go to the farm, and you go to Gadhada. Take a pot of ghee from our buffaloes and prepare a meal for Shriji Maharaj and the sadhus. I will simply make and eat dry *rotlas* in the field. This way, we can peacefully continue our devotion towards Bhagwan."

They locked their home and went their separate ways – Devji Bhagat to the fields and Kankuba towards Gadhada. Seeing their locked home, relatives and villagers who had come to offer condolences had no choice but to return.

When Kankuba reached Gadhada, she bowed at Shriji Maharaj's feet.

Shriji Maharaj asked, "Is Patel happy?"

She replied, "Maharaj! He was happy before, but now he is even happier."

Shriji Maharaj, knowing everything, wanted to highlight their deep faith and understanding to the assembly, so he asked, “What happened? Tell us.”

With absolute composure, Kankuba narrated the passing of their son. Hearing this, the entire *sabha* was astonished.

Shriji Maharaj then said, “Look at this devotee’s understanding! His only young son has passed away, yet he has sent a pot of ghee to prepare a meal for the sadhus and me. Meanwhile, in this *darbar*, the grief over five-year-old Hiruba’s (Panchuba’s daughter) passing has not subsided, and even my meal was stopped. But Hiruba was simply fulfilling her past-life’s resolve to serve me a meal. She was reborn, served me a meal, and then returned to Akshardham.”

Upon hearing Shriji Maharaj’s words, everyone in the *darbar* realised their mistake and understood that there was no reason to grieve. Life inevitably brings joys and sorrows, but if we accept Bhagwan as the all-doer and our eternal well-wisher, we will find inner peace and remain steadfast in satsang.

Devji Bhagat and Kankuba’s profound understanding deeply impressed everyone. This very understanding earned Devji Bhagat a place among the sacred names in Shriji Maharaj’s *mala*. If we, too, cultivate such supreme understanding, we can find a place among the beads (*manka*) of Shriji Maharaj’s *mala* as well!

“Here Comes Our ‘Jati’!”

Sura Khachar, a great devotee of Loya village, had dedicated his entire life to satsang. He shared an extraordinary bond with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and was one of his closest friends. He strictly adhered to the code of *dharma* in satsang and observed such an unwavering vow of celibacy that even Kamdev (the god of desire) could not shake his resolve.

Once, Sura Khachar travelled to Jasdan for work and stayed in Thakor Saheb’s palace. However, Thakor Saheb disliked Swaminarayan Bhagwan. A wicked thought entered his mind – to corrupt Sura Khachar and defame both Swaminarayan Bhagwan and his devotees in society.

At midnight, Thakor Saheb sent an immoral woman to Sura Khachar’s room. She knocked on the door. Sura Khachar, who was alert even in his sleep, immediately called out, “Who is it?”

With a soft, pleading voice, the woman said, “I live in this house. My son has a fever, and I need medicine. Please open the door.”

With a cautious heart, Sura Khachar slowly opened the door, but the woman suddenly pushed her way inside. She tried to seduce him with vile gestures. Realising the trap, Sura Khachar immediately drew his sword. In Gunatitanand Swami’s Vaat 2/113 it says, “Before contact is made with material pleasures, be fearful like a goat (i.e., run away from them), but if contact is made, become like a lion (i.e., chase them away).”

Sura Khachar roared like a lion, brandishing his unsheathed sword and frightening the woman away. After expelling her from the house, he thought, “Staying here is dangerous.” Without wasting a moment, he mounted his horse and rode through the night to Gadhada.

Upon reaching Gadhada, Sura Khachar entered the royal courtyard, where Shriji Maharaj was addressing a *sabha*. Seeing him, Shriji Maharaj turned to the assembly and declared, “Here comes our ‘*jati*’ (celibate devotee)! Even in solitude, when tempted by a woman, he remained pure and untainted.” Saying this, Shriji Maharaj embraced Sura Khachar with immense pride.

In this age of Kaliyug, Bhagwan Swaminarayan established a divine satsang fellowship where such strict *dharma* is upheld, turning Kaliyug into Satyug (an era of truth and purity).

Shriji Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 33, “If a person strictly observes the vow of non-lust, then even if I were a thousand miles away from him, I would still be close to him. Conversely, if a person is slack in his observance of the vow of non-lust, then even if he is beside me, he is as good as a hundred thousand miles away. And I only like the service offered by a devotee who is lust-free.”

No matter how far away we may be from the Satpurush in terms of physical distance, the key to being with him undoubtedly and without fail is following the vow of non-lust. In today’s technological age, it is easy to become careless regarding this principle. Social media, movies, web series, TV Shows, and inappropriate internet use can weaken our vow of non-lust.

To truly remain in Maharaj and the Satpurush’s divine presence, we must:

- Avoid activities that compromise our purity.
- Use technology wisely and with discretion.
- Follow the principle: for men, ‘One-woman, eternal celibacy,’ and for women, ‘One-man, eternal celibacy.’

If we hold fast to *nishkam dharma* (the vow of non-lust), we, too, will always remain in the loving embrace of Shriji Maharaj and the Satpurush!

With Whom Does Shriji Maharaj Get Along?

Mulji Brahmachari served Bhagwan Swaminarayan with great devotion. Once, in Bhadra, Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave Mulji Brahmachari his shoes and instructed him, “Apply oil to these shoes yourself. Do not give them to anyone else.”

Following Shriji Maharaj’s command, Mulji Brahmachari began oiling the shoes. At that moment, Vashrambhai arrived and requested, “You serve Maharaj daily, so allow me to do this *seva* today.” He insisted and took the shoes from Mulji Brahmachari and began oiling them. Shriji Maharaj then passed by and saw what had happened. Shriji Maharaj asked Mulji Brahmachari, “I had told you not to give the shoes to anyone. Why did you give them to Vashram Bhakta?”

To test Mulji Brahmachari’s faith, the all-knowing Shriji Maharaj said, “You are excommunicated. From today, you shall not wear shoes or eat rich and sweet foods.” With this, Shriji Maharaj relieved him of his *seva* immediately.

Mulji Brahmachari then went to Ramdasbhai in Dabhan and stayed with him for six months. Once the summer came around, the mangoes of the Dabhan mango orchard ripened. Ramdasbhai prepared a basket of 1.5 *maunds* (about 30 kg) of mangoes for Shriji Maharaj, but there was no one to deliver them.

Mulji Brahmachari immediately volunteered, saying, “Give it to me; I will take it.” Despite the scorching summer heat, he walked barefoot to Gadhadra, carrying the heavy basket of mangoes. Upon reaching Gadhadra, where Shriji Maharaj was in *sabha*, he placed the mangoes before him, bowed, and said, “Jai Swaminarayan.” But Shriji Maharaj turned his face away and did not respond.

As Mulji Brahmachari wandered through the village, a carpenter’s wife recognised him and asked, “brahmachari! Why haven’t you been seen for so long?”

He then narrated the incident of Shriji Maharaj’s *agna*. Feeling compassionate, she invited him to her home and offered ghee, jaggery, flour, and other groceries. But Mulji Brahmachari only ate *bati* (baked dough ball) and returned the ghee and jaggery. When the woman asked, “Why did you refuse the ghee and jaggery?” Mulji Brahmachari replied, “Maharaj has forbidden me from eating rich and sweet food.”

Even while excommunicated, he faithfully adhered to Shriji Maharaj's penance for six months. This demonstrated the extraordinary divinity he had in Shriji Maharaj!

Seeing his devotion, the woman took him to Shriji Maharaj and, while scolding, asked, "Maharaj! How have you become so merciless? This brahmachari walked barefoot for sixty miles in this scorching heat to bring you mangoes, and you didn't even greet him?" Shriji Maharaj smiled and said, "I have nothing against him! Call him here." Hearing this, Mulji Brahmachari was instantly reinstated in Shriji Maharaj's *seva*. He immediately prepared and served Maharaj *ras* and *rotli*, bringing joy to Shriji Maharaj once again.

Despite being tested through humiliation and hardship, Mulji Brahmachari never wavered, never felt distressed, and maintained unwavering devotion of Shriji Maharaj. That is why Bhagwan Swaminarayan praised him, saying, "This brahmachari never wavers in his faith, which is why I have a deep connection with him and get along with him."

How can we connect with Bhagwan and the Gunatit Sant? Shriji Maharaj states in the Vachanamrut Gadhada I 76, "A true *satsangi* is a person who...remains totally undisturbed until the end of his life regardless of whatever stern commands I may impose – even if I compel him to forsake his preferences and enforce my own. In fact, I effortlessly and naturally develop affection for such a devotee." If we cultivate such unwavering faith and maintain divinity in all his actions, then Shriji Maharaj and the Satpurush will always remain connected with us!

Satsang Above All!

In the village of Sundariyana resided Himraj Shah, a wealthy merchant of the Modh Vanik community. Himraj Shah was a devoted senior of the Vaishnav tradition and a follower of Vallabh Swami. Among his three sons, the eldest, Vanasha, embraced the Swaminarayan Satsang. Whenever Vanasha spoke to his father about the greatness of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Himraj Shah would firmly respond, “Vallabh Swami is the only true Swami; all others are divine but secondary.” Himrajbhai held this conviction firmly.

Once, *yogmurti* Gopalanand Swami visited Sundariyana. Himraj Shah had no intention of meeting him, but due to his expertise in Ayurveda, he naturally felt inclined to serve sadhus. Vanasha cleverly invited his father to the mandir under the pretence of checking Gopalanand Swami’s health. Himraj Shah sat beside Swami and placed his hand on Swami’s wrist to check his pulse – but to his astonishment, he could not detect a pulse anywhere! Each time he attempted to find Swami’s pulse on his hands, feet, throat, or chest, it seemed to disappear. This experience shocked Himraj Shah. He realised that this was no ordinary man but a perfect yogi with mastery of Ashtang Yoga. He thought, “If a disciple possesses such divine powers, then surely his Guru, Swaminarayan, must be Bhagwan himself!” Himraj Shah bowed to Gopalanand Swami and, with firm conviction, embraced the Swaminarayan Satsang.

From then on, Himraj Shah began worshipping the manifest Purushottam, Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan. However, his relatives and community disapproved. They tried to convince him to renounce Swaminarayan but failed, as he remained firm in his conviction.

Seeing his unwavering resolve, the community leaders decided to excommunicate him. They decreed that no one should interact with him, conduct business with him, or attend any family events. Thus, six years passed in isolation.

As Himraj Shah’s final moments approached, he called his three sons – Vanasha, Punjasha, and Jethasha – along with his nephew, Bhagabhai. He advised them, “This world is temporary. Stay patient, remain fearless, and hold onto satsang with unshakable faith. Always act in a way that pleases Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” Saying this, he left his body while remembering Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

When it was time for Himraj Shah’s final rites, his sons sent invitations across villages and made elaborate preparations. They purchased ghee, sugar, and jaggery in large quantities. Seeing this, the community elders arrived with a

warning, “If you include satsang in the final rites, we will excommunicate you too, and the rituals will be ruined. Remove your *kanthi*, and everyone will attend.”

Vanasha boldly replied, “No one abandons their mansion out of fear of mosquitoes. Likewise, we will never abandon Swaminarayan, nor will we remove our *kanthi*. Our faith is as dear to us as our heads!” Hearing this, the community leaders proposed another compromise, “At least remove your *kanthi* just for the day of the ceremony. If not, then stay hidden in a room until the guests finish eating.” But the brothers stood firm. They declared, “Even if the earth itself collapses, we will never leave satsang!”

Therefore, the community leaders sent letters to all surrounding villages, warning, “Whoever attends Himraj Shah’s funeral will be excommunicated.” Upon learning of this injustice, Vanasha sent his nephews, Hirabhai and Bhagabhai, to Gadhpur to inform Shriji Maharaj.

Hearing about their unshakable faith, Shriji Maharaj was moved to tears and said, “These brothers have given up their community for us and have taken such a firm stand!” Saying this, he immediately travelled to Sundariyana with his sadhus and devotees. For several days, the three brothers prepared a variety of delicious meals for Shriji Maharaj, the sadhus, and the devotees, lovingly serving them. Not only did Shriji Maharaj partake in the offerings, but he also played *ras*, did *rangotsav* (sprayed sadhus and devotees with colours) and filled everyone’s hearts with divine bliss. Himraj Shah’s family was honoured by Shriji Maharaj’s grace, and they felt eternally grateful to Shriji Maharaj for his presence during their father’s funeral rites.

Satsang is our true and divine family. Shriji Maharaj and Swami are our real parents, and the sadhus and devotees are our closest relatives. Having received such an invaluable family, should we ever forsake it for worldly relationships? Let us never allow our faith to weaken, for losing such a rare and divine satsang would be an immeasurable loss!

“Addicted to Serving”

One morning in Gadhpur, as devotees were making their way to Akshar Ordi for their daily darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, they noticed an unpleasant sight – a dog had soiled the very platform where Shriji Maharaj would sit.

Seeing this, people murmured among themselves:

“Oh no! The very spot where Maharaj sits for *katha* has been dirtied!”

“Where will Maharaj hold the *sabha* now?”

“This is terrible.”

“But what can be done? Dogs act according to their nature.”

Despite the filth being in plain sight, the devotees only discussed it, expressed their displeasure, and walked away.

A short while later, Uka Khachar arrived. He had just taken his morning bath in the Ghela River and was on his way to Shriji Maharaj’s darshan when his eyes fell upon the defiled platform beneath the neem tree. He immediately thought, “Maharaj will soon come here for *sabha*. By cleaning this, everyone will benefit from the discourse, and I will also get the opportunity to serve.” Without hesitation, he grabbed a broom and water, cleaned the entire platform, bathed again in the Ghela River, and then went for darshan.

Seeing Uka Khachar approaching, Shri Hari, the all-knowing Bhagwan, turned to him and, intending to teach everyone a lesson, asked, “Bhaktaraj! You usually arrive early, but today, you are late. Why is that?”

Uka Khachar was a silent sevak, unwilling to speak of his own *seva*. He remained quiet. Another devotee, however, narrated the entire incident, explaining why he had arrived late. Everyone assumed Shriji Maharaj would scold him for the delay, but instead, Shri Hari was immensely pleased. Shriji Maharaj stood up, embraced Uka Khachar, and placed his lotus feet on his chest. Addressing the sabha, Shriji Maharaj said, “You all saw the filth on the platform beneath the neem tree. Yet, none of you resolved to clean it. Only one who truly understands my glory and has a heart to serve could perform such *seva* as Uka Khachar did today.”

Every morning, he and his wife would wake up early, bathe, perform their puja, and then sweep the entire road from Dada Khachar’s *darbar* to Unmat Ganga, carefully removing stones and thorns to ensure that sadhus and Shriji Maharaj could walk without discomfort. During summer, after sweeping, he

would sprinkle water along the path to keep the ground cool for those walking barefoot. This habit of selfless service became his very nature. Uka Khachar recognised the greatness of all sadhus and devotees of Shri Hari and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to *seva*, seeking only Shriji Maharaj's *rajipo*. Thus, Uka Khachar's name is remembered in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya for his selfless service and humility. So pleased was Shri Hari with his *seva* that in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 25, Shriji Maharaj says, "Just as Uka Khachar has become addicted to serving the sadhus, in the same way, if one becomes addicted to serving God and his Sant to the extent that one would not be able to stay for even a moment without serving them, then all of the impure desires in one's *antahkaran* will be destroyed."

How often do we come across opportunities to do various *seva* in our mandir?

But instead of taking ownership of them, do we think...

"Oh, that's the kitchen team's job."

"That's the facilities team's responsibility."

"That's for the maintenance crew."

"That's for the sabha coordinators."

...and walk away?

Or do we, like Uka Khachar, seize the moment, recognise the glory of *seva*, and serve selflessly, with devotion, humility, and the sole intention of pleasing our Guru and Bhagwan? By seizing such opportunities for *seva* with faith and sincerity, we will experience the true fruits of selfless service.

A Bhakta with *Suhradbhav* is My Very Heart

Jhinabhai was a devotee with a deep understanding of Shri Hari's divine glory. He equally revered all devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Once, during a visit to Mangrol for some work, Jhinabhai heard of the severe illness of Kamalshi Vanjha, a fellow devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Moved by concern, he immediately went to check on him. What he saw pained him deeply – Kamalshibhai was bedridden, unable to care for himself, and his bodily functions were confined to the very bed he lay on. No one had been cleaning up after him, and flies swarmed over his frail body. Seeing Jhinabhai, Kamalshibhai broke into tears.

Jhinabhai asked, "Why are you in such a state?"

With sorrow, Kamalshibhai replied, "No one is willing to care for me, and this is my fate. I only wish Maharaj would take me to *dham* now." Hearing this, Jhinabhai called for Kamalshibhai's sons, hoping they would serve their ailing father. But none of them were willing to take responsibility. This sight filled Jhinabhai with grief. He then asked, "What if I were to take Kamalshibhai to my house in Panchala?"

"That would certainly lessen our burden!" they replied. "You can take him right now!" Without hesitation, Jhinabhai went around the market and hired three labourers to help carry Kamalshibhai's cot. Since a fourth labourer was unavailable, Jhinabhai himself took up one leg of the cot on his shoulder while holding the reins of his mare in his other hand. Thus, the village leader of Panchala carried a devotee's bed on his shoulder as he walked through the busy markets of Mangrol! A short distance later, a fourth labourer was found, and Jhinabhai brought Kamalshibhai home, giving him a place in his own room and personally tending to his care.

Since Kamalshibhai's arrival, Jhinabhai's sister Adiba had been sulking. But since her brother was the village leader, she didn't dare to voice her complaints openly. One day, Kamalshibhai was suffering from a severe headache, and Jhinabhai requested Adiba for some ground black pepper to prepare a medicinal paste. Adiba replied coldly, "We are out of black pepper." Jhinabhai, understanding her intent, suppressed his dismay and said nothing. A few days later, he pretended to have a headache himself and asked for black pepper. This time, Adiba immediately ground the black pepper and offered to apply the paste on his forehead. Jhinabhai took the bowl, smashed it onto the ground, and furiously asked, "Where did this pepper suddenly come from? You refuse to serve

a devotee of Maharaj, and you think I wouldn't notice? From this moment, you are no longer my sister. Do not show me your face again!" In his unwavering devotion to a fellow devotee, Jhinabhai severed all ties with his own sister.

Distressed, Adiba took her complaint to Shriji Maharaj. Shri Hari called Jhinabhai and explained the situation, advising him to reconcile. Adiba, with tears in her eyes, sought forgiveness. At Shriji Maharaj's request, Jhinabhai ended the silent feud with his sister. Yet, until Kamalshibhai's last breath, Jhinabhai personally cared for him. At a time when social discrimination was widespread, serving someone of a lower caste was unheard of. Yet, Jhinabhai, a respected village leader, selflessly cared for Kamalshibhai with devotion. Thus, when Jhinabhai passed away, Shri Hari himself carried his palanquin on his shoulders. For every step Jhinabhai had walked carrying Kamalshibhai's cot, Shriji Maharaj walked twice as many, offering an eternal tribute to his service.

Shriji Maharaj has said, "The extent to which one devotee has *suhradpanu* (kinship) towards another is the extent to which they are my life force." If we cultivate true *suhradpanu* with devotees—by offering service, care, and support – we become as dear to Bhagwan as life itself. And what greater fortune can there be in life than this?

Bhaktaraj Shivlal Sheth

Shivlal Sheth was a wealthy businessman during the times of Gunatitanand Swami, with assets worth nine lakh rupees. He was raised with the values of satsang from birth. From childhood, he was blessed with the company and *seva* of great *paramhansas* like Gopalanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami, Siddhanand Swami, Yoganand Swami, and Bhayatmanand Swami. This constant association nurtured his *bhakti*, enabling him to live with detachment in the material world.

Initially, he was closely associated with Gopalanand Swami, but before leaving for Akshardham, Gopalanand Swami advised him, “If you wish to learn both worldly conduct and the path to *moksha*, go to Junagadh and seek the guidance of Gunatitanand Swami.” Obeying this command, Shivlalbhai wholeheartedly engaged in Gunatitanand Swami’s *samagam* with deep enthusiasm and with the sole purpose of achieving *moksha*. He also made significant financial contributions to the Sampradaya. During Harikrishna Maharaj’s *murti pratishtha* in Gadhpur, he spent ₹22,000—a vast sum of money – to organise a grand festival. Despite being a great donor, his greatest virtue was his humility.

One day, while Gunatitanand Swami was conducting a discourse, a crunching sound interrupted the silence. Swami asked, “Who is chewing bones in this assembly?” It turned out that Shivlal was chewing *sopari* (betel nut), and the sound was noticeable. Out of embarrassment, most would want to hide their identity in the large *sabha*. Still, Shivlal – despite his status and prestige – stood up, walked out, spit out the *sopari*, and returned to the assembly without hesitation. At that moment, he took a lifelong *niyam* never to chew *sopari* again. Yet, despite being corrected in front of everyone, he felt no resentment or distress! Even with immense wealth and prestige, he humbly accepted his mistake, reflecting his deep dedication to satsang.

By Gunatitanand Swami’s grace, Shivlal attained the highest level of restraint over his sense of sight, using his vision only for that which was pure and virtuous. Once, during a family function, his wife’s younger sister (sister-in-law) had been staying at his house for several months. Despite living under the same roof, Shivlal, who practiced strict discipline in interacting with women, remained completely unaware of her presence. One day, while he was eating, his sister-in-law served him food. By mistake, she poured too much ghee into his rice. As he instinctively glanced up to ask, he saw her for the first time and asked, “When did you arrive?” Hearing this, she was shocked! Even after living in the same

house for months, he had never once looked at her! Such was the incredible discipline he had over his senses!

Shivlal's depth in meditation was also extraordinary. Once, his father, Bhaga Doshi, requested, "Shivlal, teach me how to meditate as you do." Shivlal humbly replied, "Father, you won't be able to meditate as I do because before I begin, I first envision setting our entire mansion and the entire city of Botad on fire. I reduce everything to ashes. Then, I discard my own body and sit upon the heap of its remains." This demonstrated his profound detachment from material possessions and his physical existence.

Having deeply imbibed the principles of satsang, Shivlal Sheth devoted his life to selfless service and pure devotion. Despite being a leading donor and a respected householder, he remained humble and spiritually inclined, making his life a powerful source of inspiration for all.

Swami Vignandasji's Oneness with Bhagatji Maharaj

Girdharbhai of Thasra was the nephew of Vartal's Kothari (chief administrator), Shri Gordhanbhai. From an early age, he was deeply spiritual and had many saintly qualities. His constant thought was, "If I could find a great, elevated Sadguru, I would become a sadhu and stay with him to attain *brahmastithi* (spiritual enlightenment) in this very life." From Vachanamrut Vartal 19, he had learned that true liberation is only possible by meeting Bhagwan or the realised Sant connected to him. With this understanding, Girdharbhai made a firm resolution to seek such a Satpurush and associate with him. Determined in his pursuit, he set out on a journey through satsang to find such a Sant.

He stayed with Mana Bhagat in Gadhada for three months, with sadhus in Kotda for two and a half months, and in Junagadh, he associated with Mahapurushdasji and Raghuvirdasji. However, he still did not find inner peace. He then stayed with Nirgunadasji in Ahmedabad for two months, but even there, he was not fully satisfied. Later, he spent two and a half months with Achyutdasji in Bhuj, who was known for his unwavering spiritual vision of the *atma*. Yet Girdharbhai's heart remained unsettled. Exhausted from his search, he returned to Vartal, resuming his *seva* in the mandir's *kothar* (storehouse). After completing his duties, he would stand on one foot before the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, turning the *mala* and praying fervently.

Pleased by his intense devotion and determination, S Maharaj finally granted him divine *darshan*. Overcome with joy, Girdharbhai, with a choked voice, prayed, "O Maharaj! Bless me with uninterrupted bliss of your *murti* and reside eternally in my heart." In response, Shriji Maharaj, pleased, said, "Bhaktaraj! Such a state is attained by serving a truly Ekantik Satpurush (a God-realised Sant). At present, such a Satpurush is Pragji Bhakta – go and serve him." Saying this, Shriji Maharaj disappeared.

Girdharbhai was surprised. He thought, "Maharaj did not point me towards a great Sadguru but instead directed me to Pragji Darji, a tailor who spends his entire day stitching in the mandir *sabha* hall!" His mind wavered between belief and doubt. To resolve his inner conflict, he resumed his rigorous penance. After a month of such intense austerities, Maharaj again granted him divine *darshan*, smiling as he said, "Bhaktaraj! The true *Ekantik* Satpurush in the present time is Pragji Bhakta. Beneath the guise of a tailor, he constantly beholds my divine form, has mastered *Ekantik Dharma*, and is a truly great soul. Give up the bias of caste and status and surrender to him – only then will you find peace." Assuring him of this truth, Shriji Maharaj vanished once again.

For Girdharbhai, this divine confirmation was enough. Without any further hesitation, he surrendered at the lotus feet of Bhagatji Maharaj, dedicating himself to his *seva* with body, mind, and speech. Seeing his unwavering faith, Gordhanbhai realised that Girdharbhai was ready for renunciation, and so he was given *diksha* and renamed as Swami Vignandasji. As Vignandas Swami deepened his association with Bhagatji Maharaj, his renunciant virtues blossomed further. Through Bhagatji Maharaj's divine connection, he became singularly devoted to Shriji Maharaj's *murti*. He firmly believed, "Bhagatji is my very *atma*." Shedding all bodily consciousness, his mind, speech, and actions remained entirely immersed in Bhagwan. He achieved a state where, in all three states – waking, dreaming, and deep sleep—he perceived only Bhagwan.

Such intense *bhakti*, however, was not always understood. People ridiculed him, calling him 'Bandiya...Bandiya...' (a taunt mocking his *bhakti*), but he remained undeterred. His divine mission was clear—to unite sincere seekers with Bhagatji Maharaj and reveal the profound greatness of the *Ekantik* Satpurush. Wherever he went, he passionately glorified Bhagatji Maharaj, inspiring countless seekers. Soon, Bhagatji's name resounded everywhere in satsang.

In an attempt to curb this growing influence, Vignandas Swami was transferred to the distant region of Khandesh. It was an unfamiliar place, where people had little knowledge of satsang, the regional language was different, and the local customs and way of life were foreign to him. Yet, undeterred, he diligently cultivated satsang in Khandesh. He spread Bhagatji Maharaj's divine glory so widely that soon, shiploads of devotees began traveling from Khandesh to Mahuva to seek Bhagatji Maharaj's association. Even today, satsang in Khandesh honours and cherishes the unparalleled contributions of Vignandas Swami.

Vignandas Swami's intense yearning for liberation, his unwavering and immense love for Bhagatji Maharaj, and his relentless dedication to revealing the *Ekantik* Satpurush will continue to inspire generations to come.

An Exceptional Example of *Divyabhav*

Among the rarest sadhus who dedicated his entire life to serving Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and propagating the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana was Sadguru Nirgundas Swami. Regarding his service, Shastriji Maharaj himself once said, “In the propagation of satsang, Nirgun Swami’s contribution is worth 14 *annas* (87.5%), while everyone else collectively amounts to just 2 *annas* (12.5%)!” Nirgun Swami relinquished prestigious positions within the Sampradaya, endured severe hardships, and tirelessly worked to spread the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana. He strengthened the faith of devotees in Africa by writing detailed, scripture-like letters filled with spiritual nectar. To understand the depth of his divinity, loyalty, and unconditional allegiance toward Shastriji Maharaj, a single incident is enough.

Once, in Sarangpur, Nirgun Swami’s *dhoti* had torn. He approached Shastriji Maharaj to request a new one. Shastriji Maharaj refused and instructed him, “You won’t get a new one. Instead, stitch the old one together and continue wearing it.” (Nirgun Swami was told to perform ‘*dandiyu*’ – a method of tearing the *dhoti* down the middle and tying the ends together to make it wearable again.)

Despite this, Nirgun Swami did not express a single complaint. He never thought, “I serve so much, yet my Guru refuses to give me a simple *dhoti*?” Instead, he wholeheartedly accepted the *agna*. However, what happened next was even more astonishing. A travelling ascetic arrived in Sarangpur and required a *dhoti*. When he requested one from Shastriji Maharaj, he immediately pulled out a brand-new *dhoti* from storage and gave it to him.

Upon witnessing this, Nirgun Swami playfully remarked, “You give him a new *dhoti*, yet you tell me to stitch my old one?” Shastriji Maharaj calmly explained, “You have the direct support of Shriji Maharaj and Swami themselves. This ascetic has no one to rely on, so he must be given assistance.”

Despite exhausting himself in selfless service for the *sanstha*, Nirgun Swami never developed even the slightest *manushyabhav* (human sentiment) toward his guru. Instead of feeling dejected, he praised the boundless glory of Shastriji Maharaj even more!

Nirgun Swami’s *seva*, marked by his unwavering *divyabhav* (perceiving divinity), unparalleled enthusiasm, and lifelong loyalty, stands as an eternal beacon of inspiration for all.

Even If the Universe Shatters, the Rope Shall Not Break!

As per the grand resolve of Brahmaśwarup Shastriji Maharaj, the construction of the Sarangpur Mandir was in full swing. The sadhus and devotees worked tirelessly, day and night, dedicating themselves completely to this sacred endeavour. Soma Bhagat, a man of immense stature, was among them, lifting and placing massive Porbandar stones with such might that all who witnessed it were awestruck. He served with the steadfast conviction, “If I give my life in this *seva*, I will attain a seat in Akshardham before Maharaj.” One incident, in particular, reveals Soma Bhagat’s unwavering patience and unshakable faith in the Guru’s word.

A massive pillar stone, weighing approximately 150 *maunds* (about 3,000 kg), was being hoisted into place at the centre of the mandir. It was secured by seven thick ropes and was being lifted inch by inch to the chants of “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.” Suddenly, one rope snapped. Before anyone could react, another broke... then another, and another – until six ropes had snapped, leaving the entire weight of the stone hanging by just a single remaining rope! Everyone feared the worst. If the stone plummeted, it would shatter the carefully placed stones below, leading to great damage.

Despite the danger, no one let go of the rope. Some devotees rushed to call Shastriji Maharaj, who arrived swiftly. He raised one hand and firmly said, “The stone will not fall.” Someone hesitantly suggested, “Should we lower it slowly?” But Shastriji Maharaj’s response stunned everyone, “Why lower it? Lift it higher!” Turning toward Soma Bhagat, Shastriji Maharaj said, “Soma Bhagat! Climb onto the stone and re-tie the broken ropes.”

A wave of shock spread through the crowd. Climb onto a stone hanging by a single rope? If Soma Bhagat, a man of immense size, were to step on it, the stone could crash down with him! But Soma Bhagat saw something beyond this world – he saw Akshardham in his Guru’s *agna*. There was only one unwavering truth for him, “The Guru’s word must never go unfulfilled.” Without hesitation, this 35-year-old giant sprinted forward and climbed onto the stone. As soon as his full weight pressed down, the stone shook violently, causing a jerk that sent shockwaves through the twenty men holding the rope below. The entire crowd stood frozen in fear, anticipating a disaster. But Soma Bhagat remained undeterred. He began retying the broken ropes with lightning speed – one, two, three... Even amidst this perilous task, his gaze kept returning to Shastriji Maharaj. There stood his Guru – calm, unwavering, with his blessing hand raised in absolute assurance. This gave Soma Bhagat unshakable certainty, “Even if the

entire universe were to shatter, this stone will not fall.” Once the ropes were fully secured, Soma Bhagat climbed down, rushed to Shastriji Maharaj, and bowed at his feet. Shastriji Maharaj placed his divine hand upon Soma Bhagat’s head, locking eyes with him, radiating infinite grace and satisfaction. The crowd murmured in awe, “Blessed is Soma Bhagat! Blessed is his unwavering devotion to his Guru!”

We are the heirs of such resolute devotees who risked everything for their guru’s word. By keeping their examples before us, we too can seize opportunities at any cost and in all situations to please our guru.

An Opportunity Not Worth Missing

The *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of Dharmakul *murtis* at Sarangpur Mandir was approaching, and during this time, Shastriji Maharaj had arrived in Radhu. Just a village away, in Purushottampura, lived Ashabhai, Ishwarbhai, and Motibhai, who owned vast lands and estates. Around this time, they had built a grand new bungalow to store their agricultural produce, ensuring it was well-furnished and suited to their status. They had an abundant harvest that year – 600 *maunds* of cotton, 700 *maunds* of chickpeas, 1,000 *maunds* of wheat, and various other grains, all stacked and ready for sale (a unit of weight; 1 *maund* = 20 kg). But then, disaster struck. A burning matchstick accidentally fell into the cotton, and in moments, the fire spread uncontrollably. Before anyone could react, the flames engulfed everything – all their wealth, property, and possessions turned to ashes. The family barely managed to escape with just the clothes on their backs.

While in Radhu, Ashabhai received this devastating news. Yet, blessed with spiritual insight from Shastriji Maharaj, he remained unmoved. Upon reaching Purushottampura, he saw everything burned to the ground – a sight that would break anyone’s heart. But for this family, it was simply a divine test from Bhagwan himself. Instead of lamenting, they calmly sent a messenger to bring *khichadi* from Radhu, as there was nothing left to eat. That night, they gathered as usual for dinner. The next day, Shastriji Maharaj arrived. Seeing the immense loss, he was deeply pained. He consoled the two brothers, but then, as if one more test remained, he remarked, “This is merely an obstacle in our work. We came to collect funds for the Sarangpur *murti-pratishtha*, and this misfortune occurred.”

For most, hearing such words at that moment would have been unbearable. It would have surely caused one to perceive *manushyabhav* (human-like qualities) in Shastriji Maharaj. But Ashabhai, Ishwarbhai, and Motibhai were no ordinary devotees – they saw Shastriji Maharaj as Bhagwan himself.

Even after losing everything, their only thought was fulfilling their Guru’s *agna*. Without hesitation, Ashabhai asked Motibhai to take a loan from a moneylender. Once the funds were secured, they placed the money at Shastriji Maharaj’s feet. Shastriji Maharaj, stunned by their devotion, asked, “Where did you get this from?” Ashabhai replied, “Swami, we would move heaven and earth for you. Please accept this and bless us.” Seeing their unshakable faith, Shastriji Maharaj was deeply moved. He embraced them and said, “In such difficult times, even when food and clothing are uncertain, bringing money on interest and offering it – who else could do such a thing?” Motibhai then spoke with firm conviction, “Swami, only those who have the power to give generously can ask

for donations at such a time. And you – you are the very form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself! If we let go of this moment, we will miss out on the divine grace you have come to bestow upon us. How could we let this opportunity slip away?”

It is easy to serve when times are favourable. But what kind of faith does it take to serve in adversity, hardship, and in the face of total loss? Everything was reduced to ashes, yet these devotees offered whatever they had at their Guru’s feet. Can there be a greater example of surrender in this world?

Pioneering Satsang in Africa: Maganbhai

Maganbhai Patel illuminated East Africa, often referred to as ‘*Andharkhand*’ (the dark continent), with the divine light of Akshar Purushottam. Until the age of 31-32, Maganbhai’s life revolved around luxury, food, and comfort. He worked as a railway station master in Kibwezi, maintaining a strict and disciplined nature with no tolerance for leniency. However, his *purva sanskars* (past virtues) and divine grace led him to meet Harmanbhai Patel, a devoted follower of Shastriji Maharaj, who was transferred to the same station. Through Harmanbhai’s influence, Maganbhai was drawn to satsang.

Once, during a trip to India, he visited Bochasan and had the *darshan* of Shastriji Maharaj. He experienced such a divine revelation from the very first moment that he accepted Shastriji Maharaj as his guru. Overcome with emotion, he fell at Swamishri’s feet, sobbing uncontrollably. Shastriji Maharaj blessed him and said, “All your past sins are forgiven. Now, remain in satsang and spread it further.”

From that moment on, Maganbhai dedicated himself entirely to spreading satsang. Whoever encountered him – whether big or small – was introduced to the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj. As a station master, anyone needing approval for a wagon release had to seek Maganbhai’s permission. He would tell them, “Listen to my *katha* for a while, and then I’ll grant you permission.” Thus, whether known or unknown, every visitor was drawn into satsang. Between train schedules, and during any free time, he used to discuss satsang over telegrams with other railway station masters who were devotees. Through the association of Nirgundas Swami, Maganbhai deeply studied the Vachanamrut, spending entire nights immersed in its teachings. His discourses continued from the evening *arti* all the way until dawn, at which point people would grab their toothbrushes and begin their morning routines! He even gave up his evening meals to further spread *upasana*. From Tororo, Mbale, Jinja, Kampala, Masaka, Buikwe, Bududa, Bukedea, Nagongera, Nairobi, and to Mombasa, he travelled tirelessly, establishing centres of spiritual discourse and instilling firm faith in Akshar-Purushottam within countless souls.

While singing the glories of Shastriji Maharaj, Maganbhai would become emotional and say, “By serving Shastriji Maharaj, we are directly serving Shriji Maharaj himself! We have found in this very lifetime what others attain after death!” When speaking of Shastriji Maharaj’s glory, Maganbhai would sometimes say, “What more can I say? I have already held back my words (in speaking his true glory). If I were to speak the full truth as it is, the world would

break my back.” His reverence for devotees was such that he would humbly roll over in the dirt sanctified by the footsteps of these devotees, and his joy of spiritual realisation was so profound that he would leap in bed at night, exclaiming, ‘I have found Shastriji Maharaj!’ Maganbhai had once given his word to Shastriji Maharaj saying, “The African Satsang Mandal will complete the Gadhpur Mandir project.” To fulfil this vow, he encouraged devotees, saying, “If Shastriji Maharaj commands us to do something, should we not sell ourselves for it? When we were born as cows, bulls, buffaloes, and goats, we were sold countless times. Now, in this human birth, if we must be ‘sold’ to fulfil his *agna* to complete Gadhpur Mandir, so be it! One must be ready to die for the words of the Guru.” His words radiated the true spirit of surrender – a burning passion to sacrifice everything for the Satpurush.

Although a householder, Maganbhai lived like a sadhu. Shastriji Maharaj himself declared, “I am carrying out my mission in Africa through Maganbhai. Seek his association.” Despite living only 51 years, Maganbhai transformed countless lives. Drenched in the ocean of his guru’s glory, he spread the upasana of Akshar-Purushottam with unparalleled dedication, becoming an eternal bead in Shastriji Maharaj’s *mala*. Like Maganbhai, let us dedicate our lives to spreading the Upasana of Akshar-Purushottam and become a precious bead in the *mala* of our present Guru. For in this lies the true fulfilment of life.

The Vyasji of Our Sampradaya

Harshadbhai Dave was a historian of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, often referred to as the “Vyasji of the Sampradaya.” His life’s mission was to establish and spread the Akshar Purushottam Upasana. Over his lifetime, he penned over 6,000 pages detailing the divine lives of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus, making an invaluable contribution to the Sampradaya’s history. Additionally, he authored various other denominational scriptures.

Despite his scholarly brilliance, which could have earned him thousands of rupees, Harshadbhai chose to serve selflessly until his last breath, expecting nothing in return. Yogiji Maharaj once expressed his deep reverence for him, saying, “Even if we were to wash Harshadbhai’s feet and drink that water, it would still be an insufficient honour for his contributions.” He had gained the inner blessings of three Gunatit Gurus – Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This was because, along with his service, he exhibited a remarkable firmness in *nishkam dharma* (vow of non-lust), which Yogiji Maharaj had personally instructed him to uphold with great vigilance.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was doing *katha* in the old *sabha* hall of Gondal Mandir. As Harshadbhai was about to enter the *sabha*, a female devotee stopped him. She had brought some *prasad* in a container and requested him to empty it into the kitchen and return the empty container to her. Harshadbhai did as she asked and handed back the empty container. Later, when Harshadbhai came to bow at his feet, Yogiji Maharaj told him, “Today, what you did with the container was not appropriate.” Surprised, Harshadbhai asked, “Bapa, what was wrong? I simply emptied the food into the kitchen and returned the container. Where was my mistake?”

Yogiji Maharaj explained, “The mistake was that you accepted it directly from her hands. You should have asked her to place it down first. Then, you could have picked it up, emptied it, and placed it back down for her to collect. We do not directly exchange objects hand-to-hand. Since this was an error, observe a fast for a day as atonement.” This incident highlights how meticulous Yogiji Maharaj was about even the smallest aspects of *nishkam dharma*!

Since we are also engaged in spreading upasana, our responsibility is equally significant. The Satpurush expects us to maintain the highest standards of conduct. When we uphold *nishkam dharma* with purity, we earn the *rajipo* of the Satpurush. Harshadbhai was extremely vigilant in this regard.

On another occasion, a female devotee visited Harshadbhai's home. At the same time, his wife was called by an elderly neighbour for some household assistance. She quickly stepped out to help and returned within minutes. Though Harshadbhai was deeply engrossed in his work, upon noticing that his wife had momentarily left the house, he sternly told her, "Are you aware of what you just did? Do you not know the teachings of the Shikshapatri? I was alone in the house with another woman! You should have informed me beforehand so that I could have stepped outside instead!"

This incident reflects the great caution Harshadbhai exercised in following Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *agna* to never remain alone with a woman other than one's spouse.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 33, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states, "If a person firmly observes the vow of non-lust, then he is never far from God – whether he is in this realm or beyond. Moreover, my affection for such a person never diminishes...even if I were a thousand miles away from him, I would still be close to him."

Harshadbhai enjoyed the immense *rajipo* of the Satpurush due to his unwavering commitment to *nishkam dharma*. If we, too, maintain purity in *seva* and steadfastly uphold *nishkam dharma*, we will experience the constant presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Only then will we attain his *rajipo* and grace.

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami

An Unquenchable Thirst for Darshan

It was the monsoon season. A light drizzle fell steadily. A cool and gentle breeze spread across the surroundings on that *Krishna Paksha* (dark lunar fortnight) night. Bhagwan Swaminarayan was seated in a *sabha*, and all the sadhus were engrossed in listening to his nectar-like words. Among them, Gunatitanand Swami was completely absorbed in Shriji Maharaj's *darshan*, like a *Chakor* bird (unwaveringly) fixates on the moon. After concluding the discourse, Shriji Maharaj proceeded to the *darbar* to deliver a discourse to the women devotees. The sadhus began dispersing, returning to their respective places.

Despite spending until midnight in Shriji Maharaj's presence, Gunatitanand Swami's thirst for darshan remained unquenched. Thus, he stood under the roof overhang outside the student sadhus' room, eagerly awaiting Shriji Maharaj's return. At that moment, Muktanand Swami stepped out of his room for some reason. Noticing a figure standing in the dark under the eaves, he inquired, "Who is standing there?"

Gunatitanand Swami humbly responded, "It is I, Gunatitanand." Surprised, Muktanand Swami asked again, "Why are you standing here so late at night? Go and rest now." With folded hands, Gunatitanand Swami respectfully replied, "Maharaj is still in the *darbar*, delivering a discourse to the women devotees. He will soon return to his resting place. I am standing here, longing for one more glimpse of his *darshan*."

Hearing this, Muktanand Swami was left utterly astonished! He thought to himself, "What an incredibly devoted and faithful Sant! He has no concern for his body or sleep." With this thought, he returned to his room to sleep. However, as he sat on his seat, he began contemplating, "This Sant has already mastered deep meditation in such a short time under my guidance. He constantly experiences the divine form of Shriji Maharaj within his heart. And yet, how intense is his eagerness for the *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj's manifest form!" Lost in these reflections, Muktanand Swami spent the entire night awake.

Meanwhile, Gunatitanand Swami stood there for nearly two hours, partially drenched, his mind unwaveringly fixed on Maharaj's *darshan*. Late that night, as Shriji Maharaj finally emerged from the *darbar* and walked towards the Akshar Ordi (his resting place), Gunatitanand Swami caught a brief yet radiant glimpse

of his form in the darkness. Satisfied, he then left and rested under a tree outside the village.

*Koṭi brahmāṇḍ uḍe rommā re, Mul 'Akṣhar' avatār;
Harivar ango-ang mahāltā, toy nirkhyā palvār;
Ubhā Aksharbrahma bhinjtā...*

[Countless universes rise in awe from each pore of his divine form; he is Akshar, manifest. Every limb of God radiates divine brilliance, Yet only a fleeting glimpse can be taken of him. And in that sacred moment, even Aksharbrahma stands drenched in devotion before him.]

Even though infinite universes reside within each pore of Aksharbrahma, and even though Gunatitanand Swami had fully realised Shriji Maharaj within himself, his longing for the *darshan* of the *pragat murti* (manifest form) remained unparalleled! Gunatitanand Swami serves as the supreme example of how devotees should cherish the opportunity for the *pratyaksh darshan* of their Guru and Bhagwan.

Discipline of the Eyes

In the year Samvat 1869, a severe famine struck the region of Kathiawad. To ease the suffering, Bhagwan Swaminarayan sent Muktanand Swami along with 200 sadhus to Surat. Among these sadhus was Gunatitanand Swami.

Opposite the sadhus' lodging, in a dilapidated house, someone had tied up a mischievous monkey. Due to its restless movements, almost everyone's gaze naturally fell upon it.

One night, during a discourse, Muktanand Swami addressed the sadhus, "See how restless our senses are! They are constantly deceiving us. Across from us, there is a monkey. We have no reason to look at it, yet none of us could refrain from glancing at it. Whoever has not seen the monkey, please stand up."

Hearing this, all the sadhus were stunned! Among the 200 sadhus, only Gunatitanand Swami stood up with folded hands. Seeing this, Muktanand Swami was deeply astonished and exclaimed, "Out of 200 sadhus, you alone have mastered control over your sight! Even my own eyes were drawn to that monkey."

Even though the Gunatit Satpurush is eternally enlightened, he still behaves as an ideal seeker to provide us with a perfect example of spiritual practice.

Control over one's sight strengthens one's discipline in the path of spirituality. It awakens inner spiritual energy, helps the mind remain focused, and most importantly, deepens our connection with Swamishri.

When we look at our Guru, self-introspection should arise within us:

- Do I have the same restraint over my sight?
- Do my eyes ever cross the boundaries of discipline?
- Would Swamishri be pleased if I fail in this vow?

Answering these questions honestly reveals our true spiritual state.

Always remember – whether our eyes are on the Guru or not, the Guru's eyes are always upon us. Nothing remains hidden from the Omniscient One. Even this simple awareness helps cultivate discipline over one's sight.

Blessing Thy Oppressors

Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami, was once travelling with Krupanand Swami's group of sadhus. The group reached Juna Savar village on the banks of the Shetrunji River. The sadhus set up camp near the river while some went to the village to collect alms.

At that time, opponents of Swaminarayan sadhus were spreading hatred against them, calling them “*mundiyas*” (negative connotation of shaven-headed ascetics) specifically to insult them. These opponents saw the saintly Swaminarayan sadhus as a threat to their own influence and livelihood. Their slander had spread to Juna Savar village, influencing Uga Khuman, the local ruler, who became a staunch opponent of Swaminarayan Satsang.

He ordered his servants, “Drive these sadhus out of the village! Gather the youngsters, chase them, and rain dust, dung, and stones upon them!” Following the order, a mob of young villagers rushed toward the sadhus, snatching their *jholis* (alms bags) and pelting them with stones, dust, and dung. Some even used thorny acacia branches to beat the sadhus, injuring them severely before expelling them from the village.

These sadhus, who wouldn't even harm an ant, were now left wounded and bleeding. Despite the pain and hunger, they joyfully continued chanting “Swaminarayan.” However, some, unable to bear the pain, let out soft cries of suffering.

Nearby, some shepherds and village women fetching water noticed the situation and began whispering, “How cruel is this ruler! He mercilessly beat these poor sadhus and didn't even let them collect alms. How can God ever bless such a man ever to have a son?”

The sadhus overheard these words. Gunatitanand Swami then told the sadhus, “The ruler opposes us only because he doesn't understand. Instead of wishing ill upon him, let us pray for him to have a son. When his son is born, one day sadhus will be welcomed into his home.” The sadhus began chanting for Uga Khuman to be blessed with a son. Just as a tree struck with stones still gives sweet fruits, these gracious sadhus blessed their oppressor instead of cursing him.

In time, Gunatitanand Swami's blessings bore fruit – Uga Khuman was blessed with a son, Jivna Khuman. When Gunatitanand Swami later visited the village again, Jivna Khuman himself came forward, held Swami's hand, and led all the sadhus into the palace. He arranged for a grand meal for them. Seeing this,

Uga Khuman wept tears of repentance. Gunatitanand Swami forgave him completely and instructed him to chant “Swaminarayan” while doing five *malas* daily.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has instructed sadhus in the Shikshapatri, “Even if an evil person insults us, we must endure it and only think of their welfare. We should never even wish for their harm, let alone act upon it.”

Gunatitanand Swami effortlessly exemplified this teaching in his life, transforming hatred into love through compassion and selflessness.

“This Is Our Tilak!”

During the festival of Fuldol, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, along with his assembly of sadhus, arrived in Panchala. One day, in a *sabha*, Bhagwan Swaminarayan distributed small yellow clay pieces – resembling sandalwood – to all the sadhus and instructed them to use that for applying *tilak*.

The next morning, Shriji Maharaj observed that none of the sadhus had *tilak* on their foreheads. Curious, he asked the reason, to which the sadhus responded, “With what should we make *tilak*?” Shriji Maharaj reminded them about the pieces of clay he had given them the previous day. Upon hearing this, the sadhus were taken aback, as they had considered those pieces to be Shriji Maharaj’s *prasad* and had consumed that instead.

Understanding the situation, Shriji Maharaj once again provided them with new pieces of clay. The next morning, the sadhus came to the *sabha* wearing various oddly shaped and uneven *tilaks*, displaying an amusing variety of designs. Seeing this, Shriji Maharaj laughed heartily.

To demonstrate the correct *tilak* and to reveal his choicest devotee, Shriji Maharaj personally applied *tilak* and a red *chandlo* (vermillion mark) to Gunatitanand Swami’s forehead. Addressing all the sadhus, he declared, “Look! This is our *tilak*!” Further clarifying, Shriji Maharaj stated, “Just as there is no other Bhagwan superior to me, there is no other Sant like him.” Through this declaration, Shriji Maharaj revealed his supreme Purushottam form while establishing Gunatitanand Swami’s unique identity as Akshar.

On numerous occasions, Shriji Maharaj introduced Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar to sadhus and devotees. In Dabhan, on Posh *sud* Punam of 1810 CE (Samvat 1866), Shriji Maharaj initiated Mulji Sharma, giving him the name Gunatitanand Swami. On this occasion, Shriji Maharaj proclaimed, “Today, I feel immense joy in giving initiation to Mulji Sharma, who was born in Bhadra and is the manifest form of my eternal Aksharbrahma Dham. This Aksharbrahma Dham is beyond both the upper and lower realms, and within it, I eternally reside with my infinite liberated souls.” This historic moment is also captured in the Harililakalpataru scripture 7/17/49-50.

Through various divine incidents, Shriji Maharaj consistently affirmed the supreme glory of his greatest devotee, Gunatitanand Swami, the Mul Akshar manifestation, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of liberation (*moksha*) for all seekers.

“My Eternal Servant”

Once in Vartal, following Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s command, Gunatitanand Swami was engaged in serving sick sadhus. He would prepare food according to their preferences, take care of them, and even wash their blankets. Seeing this, some healthy sadhus also added their blankets with those of the sick sadhus for Gunatitanand Swami to wash. In total, there were about eighteen blankets, but Gunatitanand Swami, without any complaint or reluctance, continued his *seva* lovingly.

After washing the blankets in the river Gomati, Gunatitanand Swami carried the extremely heavy load on both shoulders and walked towards the mandir. His body was drenched in sweat from the physical exertion, and the wet blankets dripped water down his body.

At that very moment, Shriji Maharaj, after having his meal at Vasant Sutar’s home, arrived at the Hanuman Gate of the mandir. As soon as Gunatitanand Swami saw Shriji Maharaj, he became immersed in his divine form, gazing at him with unwavering devotion. Shriji Maharaj, too, was bound by Gunatitanand Swami’s hold of love and stood still. A divine exchange of glances between the Bhakta and Bhagwan ensued.

After a while, Shriji Maharaj asked, “Sadhuram! Shall we leave now? Gunatitanand Swami then withdrew his gaze. Shriji Maharaj then proceeded to the *sabha*. However, after a short time, Shriji Maharaj started feeling physically uneasy. Seeing this, the sevak sadhus started fanning him, and someone even brought cold water. But Shriji Maharaj said, “I do not need anything, but that Sant has placed a burden upon my shoulders. Please, lift it off.”

Shriji Maharaj meant he felt the weight of the blankets on Gunatitanand Swami’s shoulders. Upon hearing this, Bhaguji immediately ran to Gunatitanand Swami, took the blankets off his shoulders, and brought them to Shriji Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj then called for those whose blankets they were. The sick sadhus came to collect theirs, but the healthy ones, feeling ashamed, did not come forward.

Shriji Maharaj then called an immediate *sabha*. He knew that Gunatitanand Swami was his eternal servant, always eager to serve sadhus and devotees. However, it was important for everyone else to realise that Gunatitanand Swami was no ordinary sadhu to be engaged in such tasks.

Shriji Maharaj then asked Muktanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami, “What kind of sadhu is this Gunatitanand Swami?” They replied, “He is a great sadhu. He has memorised many *kirtans*, delivers great discourses, serves tirelessly, and is highly austere.”

Shriji Maharaj smiled and said, “You have only spoken of his visible virtues, but he is far more than that. Just as one holds a snake tightly with pincers, he has grasped my divine form in all three states – waking, dreaming, and deep sleep.”

Hearing this, Mahanubhavanand Swami, a swami from North India who took Maharaj’s words literally, remarked (towards Gunatitanand Swami), “Why have you caught hold of Maharaj, let him go!”

Shriji Maharaj explained, “He has held on to me eternally, yet I feel no distress. However, for others to hold on to my form as he does is extremely difficult. This sadhu is my Eternal Sevak. Through him, my supreme form and worship will spread throughout the entire Satsang. No one understands my true greatness the way he does. So, how can it be appropriate for healthy sadhus to make him perform menial tasks?”

Thus, Shriji Maharaj explained the divine glory of Gunatitanand Swami to all the sadgurus. The fact that Shriji Maharaj physically felt the weight of the blankets on Gunatitanand Swami’s shoulders proves the oneness between Akshar and Purushottam – a bond beyond worldly understanding!

The Sculptor of *Brahmi Sthiti* (Brahmic State)

Once, after celebrating Janmashtami, Gunatitanand Swami set out on a journey with Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj across the Sorath region. On the way, Raghuvirji Maharaj offered a *pendo* (sweet item) to Swami, saying, “It will be late before we reach our destination. Please eat this *pendo*.”

Gunatitanand Swami politely returned the *pendo*, replying, “If you continue this way, our friendship will not last.” Raghuvirji Maharaj insisted earnestly, saying, “At least eat half of it!”

Gunatitanand Swami then broke the *pendo* into two halves – one half he gave to Jaga Bhakta, and the other half he held in his hands, thought about it for a while and said, “The five hundred *paramhansas* are holding my throat and saying, ‘This is poison, don’t eat it.’” (What Gunatitanand Swami intended by saying this is that anything that is rich and lavish and that digresses from the *agnas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in this case – *pendo* – is equivalent to it being poison.)

Witnessing such renunciation and detachment, Raghuvirji Maharaj humbly asked Swami, “If you practice such strict discipline, what will become of us?” Gunatitanand Swami confidently responded and said, “Hand over your position to Bhagwatprasadji Maharaj and come to Junagadh as a pilgrim. I will melt your base nature. If I do not melt your base nature and make you *gunatit*, then I am not *Gunatit*!”

With immense yearning for liberation, Raghuvirji Maharaj wholeheartedly accepted Gunatitanand Swami’s words. In 1860 CE (Samvat 1917), after handing over the Acharya position to Bhagwatprasadji Maharaj, he retired and moved to Junagadh. For three and a half months during the monsoon, he lived as a pilgrim under Gunatitanand Swami’s guidance.

He renounced indulgences like refined tastes and excessive sleep, dedicating himself entirely to Gunatitanand Swami’s association.

- He would wake up early, attend the *mangala arti*, and be present for Gunatitanand Swami’s discourses until the *shangar arti*.
- After *darshan*, he would quickly prepare simple meals like *khichadi* or *bati* with *mung dal*, eat swiftly, and return to the *sabha*.
- Even in the afternoon, instead of resting, he attended more *katha* by Gunatitanand Swami.

Observing his unwavering faith and humility, Gunatitanand Swami expounded upon *sarvopari nishtha* (ultimate conviction) and *ekantik dharma*, completely transforming him. That is why Gunatitanand Swami used to say, “Among the entire Vartal region, only Raghuvirji Maharaj truly recognised me.” To “recognise Gunatitanand Swami” meant to have the firm conviction that he was the manifestation of Aksharbrahma.

Years later, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj asked Vartal’s Kothari, Gordhanbhai, “Is it true that Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj believed Gunatitanand Swami to be ‘Akshar’?”

Gordhanbhai confidently replied, “Yes! In 1860 CE (Samvat 1917), when Raghuvirji Maharaj went to Junagadh to associate with Gunatitanand Swami, he had completely immersed himself in Swami’s divine form.”

Gunatitanand Swami often said, “If a devotee surrenders his mind to his guru, he will free him from the inner faculties of ignorance. But without this it will not be removed.”

We may have accepted the refuge of the Gunatit Sant, but if we truly offer our minds and wholeheartedly engage in his association with faith and eagerness, just like Raghuvirji Maharaj did, then we too can attain the Brahmic State (the state with absolute oneness with the Gunatit).

“One Who Serves is Mahant”

Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami served as the Mahant of Junagadh Mandir for forty years. However, he was never affected or taken by false pride for his position. He viewed this responsibility as *seva* to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, which was evident in his humble conduct.

Once, the Mahant of Tarnetar visited Junagadh Mandir to meet Gunatitanand Swami. Upon arrival, he saw Gunatitanand Swami sweeping the mandir courtyard. Curious, the Mahant asked, “Where can I find the Mahant of this mandir?”

With humility, Gunatitanand Swami replied, “Go inside, you will find him there.” A little while later, after washing his hands and feet, Gunatitanand Swami took his seat. The Tarnetar Mahant was astonished to see him and asked in surprise, “You are the Mahant? Weren’t you just sweeping the courtyard?”

Laughing, Gunatitanand Swami replied, “In our tradition, the one who serves is the true Mahant.”

For forty years, Gunatitanand Swami held the Mahant position, which in itself was remarkable. Then Gunatitanand Swami took down his *jholi* from the nail on the wall and showed it to the mahant of Tarnetar. Swami had no item made from metal, even his *tilakya* was made of wood. The garments he wore were made of coarse cloth. The mahant of Tarnetar was surprised to see such a detached mahant. Then Gunatitanand Swami explained to him, “We have renounced women and wealth and therefore, our *mahantship* has been sustained.”

On hearing this, the mahant also felt that this is absolutely true. Among them the disciples kill the guru and occupy the throne, tempted by money and material things.

The Gunatit way is unique – it values *seva* over status or material possessions. Our Gurus have upheld this legacy, and we must follow in their footsteps. By participating in mandir *sevas*, either through *agna* or according to our ability, we, too, can become part of this divine heritage. Isn’t that what makes us true heirs of the Gunatit tradition?

Equanimity in Honour or Humiliation

In 1866 CE (Samvat 1922), during the Chaitra Punam festival, Gunatitanand Swami arrived in Vartal. Pragji Bhakta had begun spreading the message that ‘Gunatitanand Swami was the manifestation of Aksharbrahma’, as per Gunatitanand Swami’s wish. However, some people were displeased with this idea, and they planned to rebuke Gunatitanand Swami during the festival’s *sabha*.

On the morning of Punam, in the main *sabha*, Karunanand Brahmachari from Gadhada, under the guidance of Hariswarupdasji (a disciple of Shukmuni Swami), questioned, “This Gunatitanand Swami is also being worshipped like God. People revere even his nails and hair! Why does no one object to this?”

Hearing this, Shukmuni Swami added, “Swami, why don’t you control this? This belief is causing many issues in Junagadh – are you in favour of it?” Turning to the assembly, he declared, “Do not call me Shukji anymore!”

Then, pointing at Gunatitanand Swami, he warned, “And Swami! You must not allow people to call you Akshar!”

Like a heavy storm, an outpouring of insults followed. Unperturbed, Gunatitanand Swami calmly listened. Then he said in a grave tone, “Only Shriji Maharaj is God. Nobody else can become God. I am a Sant. But, just as where there is the rule of a king, there is also the rule of a queen. So, where the king’s order prevails, there too, the queen’s order prevails. Similarly, just as where there is the glory of God there is the glory of his Sant as well.”

Hearing this, no one could respond further.

Seeing the great Sant insulted in the *sabha*, Prabhudas from Sinjiwada stood up and challenged everyone, “Who among you has the right to speak to Swami like this?”

At that precise moment, someone went to call Acharya Bhagwatprasadji Maharaj, and soon, the arti began. The assembly dispersed to attend the *shangar arti* (morning arti).

Gunatitanand Swami accompanied Acharya Maharaj to the mandir for *darshan*. As they were leaving, a gardener stood waiting with a garland of fresh roses. Following the Acharya’s instruction, the gardener garlanded Gunatitanand Swami. After *darshan*, Gunatitanand Swami was walking back to the sadhu’s

residence when he encountered Hariswarupdasji, the very disciple who had criticised him earlier.

Without hesitation, Gunatitanand Swami removed the garland from his neck and placed it around Hariswarupdasji's neck. With a smile, Gunatitanand Swami recited a verse:

*Haldi jaradi nav taje, khataras taje na ām;
Gunijan gunako nav taje, avgun na taje gulām.*

[Just as turmeric never loses its yellow hue, a raw mango does not give up its sour taste. Similarly, a virtuous person never abandons their virtues, nor does a slave forsake their faults.]

Then Swami walked ahead gracefully. Shortly after, Sadgurus like Adbhutanand Swami, Shuk Swami, and Pavitrnanand Swami invited Gunatitanand Swami to their seat. With deep reverence, they offered him *dhotiya*, performed his ceremonial *puja*, and placed a sack of sugar at his feet as a token of respect. They folded their hands and said, “Swami, please forgive our words.”

Even in moments of intense honour or dishonour, Gunatitanand Swami remained completely undisturbed. Seeing such unwavering stability, even the senior sadhus realised the truth – Gunatitanand Swami truly was ‘Gunatit’ – beyond all worldly qualities!

Savji Seized the Opportunity of *Rajipo*

Once, Gunatitanand Swami was overseeing the construction of a new guesthouse for pilgrims in Junagadh. While inspecting the entrance, he turned to Krushnasevadas Swami, who was working on the construction, and asked, “If we keep the doorway as it is, can we still install the decorative wooden panel (*motiyo*) behind the roof’s edge?”

Krushnasevadas replied, “No, Swami, the doorframe would have to be removed in order to fit the *motiyo*.” Gunatitanand Swami firmly responded, “The doorway must not be removed.”

The next morning, Gunatitanand Swami was getting a *mundan* (his hair was being shaved) when Savji, a mason arrived for *darshan*. Gunatitanand Swami casually asked Savji the same question, “Can the *motiyo* be installed without removing the doorway?”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Savji confidently replied, “Yes, of course! I will make it happen.” Hearing this, Gunatitanand Swami was immensely pleased. He immediately stood up in the middle of his *mundan*, went to Savji, and embraced him.

Later, when Krushnasevadas, while in the kitchen storage heard that Savji had assured Swami he could install the *motiyo*, and in return being pleased Gunatitanand Swami embraced him, he rushed to Gunatitanand Swami and said, “Swami! I will install the *motiyo*.”

Swami, smiling, replied, “That *rajipo* has already been taken by Savji!”

A Satpurush is immensely pleased when we accept his words with unwavering faith and act upon them without doubt. Savji did not stop to analyse whether or not the *motiyo* could be installed – he simply believed that since Gunatitanand Swami had spoken, it was now his duty to fulfil it, no matter what.

By instantly embracing Gunatitanand Swami’s words with faith, even before completing the task, Savji had already received the ultimate reward – Swami’s immense *rajipo*. When we align ourselves with the wishes of the Satpurush and serve with *rajipano vichar* (the thought of pleasing), we experience boundless grace and divine fulfilment in our lives.

A Pledge Like No Other

Gunatitanand Swami once visited Una as part of his yearly *vicharan* (spiritual travels). Due to communal tensions at that time, several wealthy merchants, including Vallabhjibhai, Karamchandbhai, and others, fled from Una to Hadiyad for safety. Vallabhjibhai's brother, Kalyanji Sheth, who was touring with Gunatitanand Swami, expressed their distress, saying, "All the merchants have taken refuge in Hadiyad. If they return to Una, they fear losing their reputation. But if they move to Bhavnagar, they will suffer great financial loss, as they have a significant amount of unpaid dues to collect from people they lent money to in Una. They are in a severe crisis."

Hearing this, Gunatitanand Swami reassured them, saying, "Follow my advice, and all your troubles will disappear." Kalyanji Sheth eagerly responded, "We will do as you say! If you wish, we will vow to offer silver doors and a swing for Radha-Raman Dev."

In response, Gunatitanand Swami smiled and said, "I do not ask for such offerings. Instead, take a vow to firmly accept and propagate that Shriji Maharaj is supreme. If you do this, your troubles will be resolved immediately."

Kalyanji Sheth was astonished and said, "Swami! Taking a vow to recognise Purushottam Narayan as the Supreme Bhagwan is something completely new. By doing this, we not only gain liberation but also worldly success. From today onward, we will firmly believe in Shriji Maharaj's supremacy and spread this truth to others."

As soon as the merchants made this vow, within a short time, the Nawab himself invited them back with great honour and celebrations. Their crisis disappeared completely. The misunderstandings caused by the situation were resolved through Gunatitanand Swami's guidance, and their faith in Shriji Maharaj as the Supreme Bhagwan became unshakeable.

Gunatitanand Swami's greatest achievement was spreading the truth of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's supreme divinity. If Gunatitanand Swami had not manifested, people might have regarded Swaminarayan Bhagwan as just another manifestation. However, Gunatitanand Swami firmly established his supremacy in satsang.

Even those who had lived closely with Shriji Maharaj for years struggled to recognise his true divine form, but Gunatitanand Swami eliminated this. For example:

- Atmanand Swami, who lived 116 years, was called to Akshardham only after Gunatitanand Swami enlightened him about Shriji Maharaj's supremacy.
- Rampratapbhai, Shriji Maharaj's elder brother.
- Shukanand Swami, Shriji Maharaj's right-hand .
- Muktanand Swami, who was considered the mother of satsang.
- Premanand Swami, the great sant-poet.

All of them attained firm conviction in Shriji Maharaj's supremacy through Gunatitanand Swami. No other *paramhansas* preached Shriji Maharaj's true divine form as explicitly and powerfully as Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Thus, it is rightly said:

*Sampurna mahimā Shrijino ne pativratāni tek,
Pekho santo pānchaso, (pan) Gunātīt to ek.*

[He understood the full glory of Shriji Maharaj and possessed an unwavering, singular devotion (like the resolute vow of a devoted spouse) to him. There were 500 *paramhansas*, but there was only one Gunatit.]

With Gunatit, Become Gunatit

Once, Dajibhai, the Darbar of the village Kamrod came to Junagadh for official work. He decided to stay at the Swaminarayan Mandir, where Gunatitanand Swami, as per Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *agna*, ensured hospitality for all visitors – providing lodging, meals, and other necessities. Anyone who experienced Gunatitanand Swami's hospitality could never forget it. Gunatitanand Swami arranged Dajibhai's stay in the hookah loft, a special lodging designated for non-devotees addicted to intoxicants like tobacco, opium, and alcohol. Gunatitanand Swami gave this separate accommodation so they could stay and smoke without being self-conscious of others' judgment. Moreover, the hookah loft was separate from the rest of the mandir so that devotees would not be troubled by their bad habits. Gunatitanand Swami understood that sermons alone wouldn't convince these *darbars* to give up their addictions, but by interacting with devotees and observing their lifestyle, they would naturally be inspired to forsake their bad habits.

During the morning *katha*, Gunatitanand Swami asked Dajibhai, “Darbar! Have you found a guru?” Dajibhai replied, “I am searching for one, but I haven't found a true guru yet. Once, when I found someone to make my guru, in return for accepting me as a disciple, he demanded two bottles of alcohol and two goats. I realised, if they engage in the same activities as I do, how can they uplift me?”

Hearing this, Gunatitanand Swami laughed and said, “Darbar! Such people are not true Gurus. We guide individuals to follow the five vows of no alcohol, no meat, no thievery, no adultery and purity of conduct. while leading them to devotion toward Swaminarayan.”

Upon hearing Gunatitanand Swami's words and beholding his divine presence, Dajibhai felt a profound change within him. His inner conflicts ceased, and his heart was drawn towards Gunatitanand Swami. With folded hands, he vowed, “Swami! From today, I give you my word that I will never drink alcohol or eat meat. I do not steal as it is, and I will no longer engage in deceit or manipulation.”

Recognising Gunatitanand Swami as a true *Mahapurush*, he then hesitantly yet openly confessed, “However, Swami, in my youth, I consumed *tramba* (an intoxicant of copper ash to get high) and even ate the tongues of sparrows (meat considered delicacy). Because I consumed such *tamsik* substances, I will not be able to uphold the vow of non-lust.” Gunatitanand Swami, pleased with

Dajibhai's honesty, reassured him, "Follow these four vows sincerely. As for the vow of non -lust – I will help you uphold it."

Gunatitanand Swami then initiated Dajibhai into satsang and told him to do five *malas* while focusing on him. Dajibhai did five *malas* while looking directly at Gunatitanand Swami. Gunatitanand Swami looked into Dajibhai's eyes and destroyed the lust in his heart. Through Gunatitanand Swami's grace, Dajibhai experienced tranquillity in his heart, and all thoughts of lust subsided. Dajibhai felt fulfilled. Then, taking Gunatitanand Swami's permission, he returned to his room.

The next day, after completing his government work, Dajibhai took Gunatitanand Swami's leave and returned home. Freed of inner obstacles, he began to do constant bhajan of Swaminarayan. Every day he would eat two pounds of *puris* along with 2.5 litres of whole milk sweetened with two pounds of *sakar* (sugar cubes). Despite his prodigious appetite and strong physique, he no longer felt any lustful urges. Gunatitanand Swami had purified him completely!

Gunatitanand Swami was like a *vadvanal* (a form of fire that resides within the ocean but remains inextinguishable) capable of transforming even the most hardened individuals. He turned:

- The most sinful souls like Munjo Suru from Lilakha village into virtuous ones.
- The most notorious criminals like Valera Varu into noble individuals.

Every soul who associated with Gunatitanand Swami was purified and enlightened. Shriji Maharaj had said, "Anyone who spends even a month in the company of Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh will have all their flaws removed." Gunatitanand Swami established Junagadh as a training ground for attaining a Brahmic state, where countless seekers became one with Brahma. Even today, this tradition continues through Mahant Swami Maharaj, preserving and passing down the legacy of the Gunatit Sant!

“Swami! Are You Truly Akshar?”

Following a celebration in Vartal, Mul Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami arrived in Sarangpur. Here, he stayed at the residence of Vagha Khachar. One day, Vagha Khachar asked him, “Swami! Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachanamrut Kariyani 12 that without focusing on Bhagwan’s divine form and words, the root ignorance due to the base instincts cannot be eradicated. Yet, at night, when I sleep, I still see dreams where I feel as if I am in distress, bound in conflict, or even physically harmed. These subtle impressions do not seem to fade. If these subtle attachments with the body in the dreams persist, then how and when will the causal attachments of the body be removed? And if these attachments remain, how can one attain and reside in Maharaj’s divine Akshardham?” Hearing this, Gunatitanand Swami smiled and replied, “Vagha Khachar, if you wish to eliminate the attachments of the subtle and causal body, then come to Junagadh. We will help you remove all these there.”

To this, Vagha Khachar lightly responded, “Swami! I need a servant who can prepare warm water for me, massage my legs, and carry my luggage. If I get such a companion, then I will come.”

Swami promptly answered, “This Pragji is your attendant. He will serve you in every way – both in this world and the next. Stay with him and listen to his words.” From Sarangpur, Gunatitanand Swami set out for Gadhada. Along the way, Pragji Bhakta not only served Vagha Khachar but also engaged him in deep spiritual discussions. During their conversation, Pragji Bhakta boldly declared, “Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar.” This statement shocked Vagha Khachar, and he immediately retorted, “Pragji! Do not say such things in my presence.”

Later, Vagha Khachar complained to Swami, saying, “Swami! This Pragji calls you ‘Mul Akshar.’” Hearing this, Swami laughed, covered his mouth with a cloth, and jokingly said, “Oh, he’s crazy! Don’t keep his company anymore.”

However, as the journey continued from Gadhada to Vankia, Vagha Khachar found himself unable to proceed without the companionship of Pragji Bhakta. He admitted, “Swami! I cannot manage without a servant.” Swami replied, “I have assigned you Pragji. If you don’t like his words, then simply don’t listen to them.”

Thus, reluctantly, Vagha Khachar continued to stay with Pragji Bhakta. Along the way, Pragji once again said, “Only when you truly understand that Swami is Mul Akshar will the attachments of the causal body disappear.” These words did not appeal to Vagha Khachar, but he continued on the journey and finally reached Junagadh with the group.

In Junagadh, all the devotees were engaged in *seva*, collecting pebbles as per Swami's *agna*. The devotees from Mahuva mandal were continuously discussing the divine form of Gunatitanand Swami. Their joy was evident on their radiant faces. Seeing this, Vagha Khachar wondered, "Why do all of them experience such bliss, but I do not?" He shared this concern with Dama Sheth, who replied, "If you develop faith in Pragji Bhakta and accept that 'Swami is Mul Akshar,' then you too will experience the same joy." Vagha Khachar hesitated and said, "I may accept this, but only if Swami himself confirms it."

Hearing this, Dama Sheth conveyed the matter to Pragji Bhakta, who then sat in meditation and, through his spiritual focus, called Gunatitanand Swami. Swami, who was seated in the *sabha* hall, suddenly held a sadhu's hand, walked to the garden where the devotees were, and asked, "Pragji! Why have you called me?" Pragji Bhakta humbly responded, "Swami! Vagha Khachar has a question for you."

Gunatitanand Swami then turned to Vagha Khachar and said, "Ask whatever you wish." Vagha Khachar asked directly, "Swami! Pragji says that you are Mul Akshar. Please resolve this doubt for me." Gunatitanand Swami calmly responded, "What Pragji says is true." Upon hearing this, Vagha Khachar, still in disbelief, asked again, "Swami! Are you truly Akshar?" Swami smiled, nodded in affirmation, and confirmed it with his divine presence.

At that moment, Vagha Khachar was overwhelmed with divine joy; his doubts, material desires, and faults dissolved. Even his terrifying dreams vanished, and he was blessed with the *niravaran* state (no barriers like walls, wood, metal, or distance could stop him from having *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami). Through Pragji Bhakta's guidance, Vagha Khachar established a firm conviction in Gunatitanand Swami's divine identity.

Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj has also revealed his true identity to us on numerous occasions, affirming that he is Akshar. If we develop firm conviction in his divine form, then even in this very body, we can begin to experience the bliss of Akshardham.

Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj

Ask, and It Shall Be Granted...

In 1861 CE (Samvat 1917), Gunatitanand Swami instructed Pragji Bhakta to stitch a grand canopy (a beautifully adorned large covering placed above the assembly hall) for the *sabha mandap*. Bhagatji worked tirelessly for 18-19 hours daily, stitching the canopy while continuously singing bhajans. Bhagatji completed a task that would normally take ten tailors 60 days, single-handedly, in just 41 days.

Gunatitanand Swami was immensely pleased with Bhagatji's enthusiasm for achieving *brahmavidya* (spiritual knowledge) and said, "Pragji! I am extremely pleased with you. Ask for anything, and I shall grant it." Bhagatji remained silent. Gunatitanand Swami then added, "Perhaps you are thinking, 'What can this Sant give me?' But know this – whatever this Sant says, Bhagwan Swaminarayan fulfils. So, ask for anything, and I will grant it."

Then, Gunatitanand Swami himself said, "I am telling you to go home and travel to Mumbai. In twelve months, you will receive 60,000 rupees (equivalent to approximately 8 million rupees today). Use it to do *samagam* of the sadhus and experience divine bliss."

But Bhagatji was firmly committed to his spiritual goal. He also understood Swami's inclination, vision, and philosophy. Recognising Swami's words as a test, Bhagatji folded his hands and said, "I have been in satsang for thirteen years under Gopalanand Swami and nine years under you, and never have I heard that wealth or sensual pleasures bring true happiness. So, if you are truly pleased with me, grant me these three boons, First, bestow upon me your divine knowledge. Second, show me your true abode, so I know where you reside. Third, ensure that my soul remains firmly devoted to satsang and that I never stray away for even a fraction of a second from Shriji Maharaj."

Swami was stunned by Bhagatji's request. Wanting to further test his disciple, Swami said, "Why do you need spiritual knowledge? Instead, I will grant you the boon that I will personally take you to Akshardham after your death."

But Bhagatji had already determined what true happiness was. Holding firm to his request, he replied, "If you are truly pleased, I only seek these three boons. Without them, I have no interest in ruling the Earth, attaining Indra's throne, or even being the master of *Prakriti-Purush*." Gunatitanand Swami, overwhelmed with joy, declared, "You can have your three boons if you are prepared to leave home and stay here and dedicate your life for them."

Now, Bhagatji faced two choices. Swami had already assured him of Akshardham, so he could either accept wealth and live a comfortable life, or he could abandon all worldly ties, endure intense hardships, and strive to attain Swami's divine knowledge. Without hesitation, Bhagatji chose the difficult path of spiritual pursuit.

Gunatitanand Swami, deeply moved, exclaimed, “Wow, Pragji! Your soul is extraordinary! No one has ever asked for this before.”

To become worthy of Gunatitanand Swami's knowledge of *brahmavidya* was not as easy as ‘drawing lines in *lapsi* (sweet porridge)’ (a simple task) – it was a heroic endeavour, marching onto the battlefield with one's head in hand and a dagger in one's stomach, ready to embrace any sacrifice. And such a pursuit was not for the faint-hearted – it required a warrior as fearless as a lion. Bhagatji Maharaj was such a spiritual lion. His life serves as a beacon of inspiration for all true seekers.

‘Anuvruti’ Is Bhakti

Once, Gunatitanand Swami set out with sadhus and devotees toward the meadows of Sankhdavadar. On the way, they stopped at Maliya. After their meal, at noon, a spiritual discourse was underway. At that time, Swami saw mango trees drying up in the mandir’s orchard. Observing this, he remarked, “These mango trees are drying due to lack of water.”

Many present heard Swami’s words, but no one grasped their true meaning. However, Bhagatji Maharaj immediately understood Swami’s intent. Even when we understand the inner felt wish of the Satpurush, often, following through is difficult. Most people would have responded:

- “Yes, Swami, its summer, and there’s a water shortage. That’s why they’re drying.”
- If a more assertive person spoke, they might blame the caretaker’s poor management and suggest a detailed action plan.
- And if a direct *agna* is given, most would request a team of 15–20 people to assist in watering the trees.

There were 300 mango trees to be watered – not with a sprinkler system. Water had to be manually drawn from a river, carried in pots, and poured on each tree.

Despite the immense physical effort required, Bhagatji did not hesitate. Swami had not even given him a direct *agna*, yet he took it upon himself as his duty to please Swami. Without telling anyone, Bhagatji found two pots, fetched water from the river, and began watering the trees. He gave each tree four pots of water. He continued tirelessly until almost the entire day had passed.

By the time he finished, all 300 mango trees had received water. His clothes became completely drenched from carrying the heavy pots.

Let’s reflect on the scale of his effort:

- A single pot held 15 litres of water.
- Each tree required 60 litres of water.
- Total water carried: 18,000 litres!
- Distance between two trees: 10 feet.
- Distance from the river to the trees: 50 feet.
- Carrying two pots at a time, Bhagatji covered a total of 44 km (~27 miles)!

Gunatitanand Swami had simply made an observation at noon about the trees drying, and Bhagatji Maharaj immediately sprang into action. By 6:30pm, he had completed the task and arrived at the evening assembly. This means he carried water-filled pots for 44 km in just 6.5 hours, covering 6.5 km per hour – all for Swami’s *rajipo*! When one follows the Satpurush’s words with such swiftness and sincerity, one becomes *brahmarup*.

Seeing Bhagatji’s devotion and selfless service, Gunatitanand Swami joyfully said, “He never considers his body; his only goal is to please me. This is true love! That is why I am extremely pleased with him.”

Bhagatji Maharaj embodied the true essence of the spiritual principle “*Bhaktiyā-nuvrutya*” – “Following the Satpurush’s *anuvrutti* (innermost, unspoken wish) is true devotion.” He upheld this ideal throughout his life.

“Dedicated My Life in the Service of Swami”

Pragji Bhakta was determined to attain the supreme knowledge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan through Gunatitanand Swami. To do so, he left his home and dedicated himself entirely to Gunatitanand Swami’s *seva*, even at the cost of his own life. His resolve was unshakable – he would go to any lengths to please Swami, even at the cost of his own body. Gunatitanand Swami, however, constantly tested his determination in various ways.

In 1917, Gunatitanand Swami initiated the demolition of the old *haveli* (ornate building) on the premises of Junagadh Mandir in order to construct a new one. Swami assigned Pragji Bhakta to this work and deliberately tested his endurance. He formed groups of ten sadhus for others but assigned only two or three to Pragji’s group for the difficult task of digging the foundation. Without complaint, Pragji Bhakta engaged in the *seva* with greater zeal. With Swami’s blessings, his group was the first to complete the foundation work.

Once the foundation was ready, it had to be filled with clean sand – a task that required soaking and washing the sand first. However, since this work would drench their clothes, most found excuses to avoid it. Observing this, Swami ordered Pragji to do it. Without hesitation, he began the work. He fetched large vessels of water, poured sand into them, cleaned them by hand, and filled baskets. He then lifted the heavy baskets onto his head, ran to the foundation, and emptied them, repeating this tirelessly from morning to evening.

By the end of the day, his clothes were drenched, his body exhausted, yet he never stopped to rest. Seeing this, Swami remarked, “He truly knows how to please a Sant.”

Mixing lime mortar was a more gruelling task – a job that could cause blindness and severe burns on the hands and feet. Fearful of the consequences, no one stepped forward for the job. But when Swami instructed Pragji, he willingly accepted the dangerous task.

1. He carried heavy sacks of lime, weighing 240 kg (12 *maunds*), which others would throw onto his back. However, engrossed in Gunatitanand Swami’s *murti*, he never complained thinking that Swami was testing him.
2. He emptied them into a pit, poured water over the lime, and mixed it with his own hands and feet.

Seeing him work, some warned him, “This will make you blind! Your hands and feet will be ruined!” Pragji simply smiled and proudly replied, “I have dedicated my life in the service of Swami!”

For three and a half years, Pragji worked without a break, eating only once every three days. His only goal was to please Gunatitanand Swami.

He never ignored a single word from Swami. Once, Swami playfully instructed him, “Pragji! Go call Mount Girnar!” Pragji immediately set out for Girnar. People mocked him, saying, “Pragji has no sense! The Guru may speak, but one must have wisdom in following orders.”

Pragji responded, showing every aspirant the right path, “A disciple must obey every *agna* of the guru without question. I will bow my head to Girnar and tell it, ‘Swami has called you.’ If Girnar does not come, it will be disobedient – not me!”

Bhagatji Maharaj embodied the highest form of spiritual discipline – where one locks away logic and follows the guru’s words with absolute faith. Mahant Swami Maharaj explains, “If you argue in your mind, you will never obey. You must surrender your heart.” This is the true secret of spiritual success – to dive into the guru’s *agna* without analysing or questioning, but with firm faith and total surrender.

Sixty-Eight Places of Pilgrimage at Thy Feet

After the Annakut festival in Junagadh, Bhagatiji was washing the large, greasy pots used for cooking. The dirty water from the washing area flowed into a pit near the courtyard.

At that moment, Gunatitanand Swami arrived and stood near the pit. As the dirty water, flowing from the washing of the utensils touched his feet and trickled down into the pit, Swami turned to Bhagatiji and asked, “Pragji, where can one find all the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage?”

Bhagatiji immediately grasped the deeper meaning behind Gunatitanand Swami’s words. He realised the water touching Swami’s feet was gathering in the pit. With the firm conviction that ‘All sixty-eight sacred pilgrimages reside at the feet of my Sant,’ Bhagatiji Maharaj immediately leaped into the pit!

Overcome with joy, he poured the dirty water all over himself, bathing in bliss. The onlookers were stunned. Some murmured, “Pragji is foolish! That’s dirty, greasy water. He has no sense!”

Seeing their ignorance of not understanding the true glory of the Satpurush, Swami smiled and said, “Only one who has truly realised the glory of the Satpurush would act in this way.” Swami then lovingly addressed Bhagatiji Maharaj, “Pragji! That’s enough now. Go bathe in clean water. Such an opportunity doesn’t come often, and you seized it!”

Such was Bhagatiji Maharaj’s understanding of the Satpurush’s greatness. When every action of the Satpurush is perceived with an understanding of his greatness, the barriers of the senses and conscience break, and nothing remains except the Satpurush. By understanding such greatness of the Satpurush, our affection towards him keeps increasing (Vachanamrut Vartal 11).

Akshar *Gnan* Proclaimed

Through Gunatitanand Swami's grace, Bhagatji Maharaj attained the realisation of Parabrahma. Just as Bhagwan Swaminarayan was under the loving command of Gunatitanand Swami, he was equally at Bhagatji Maharaj's command. Entrusting him with the responsibility of guiding the devotees, Gunatitanand Swami appointed Bhagatji as the Guru of all followers and granted him the authority to impart spiritual knowledge and administer atonements for purification. Furthermore, Gunatitanand Swami gave him a special *agna*, "You are my dearest disciple. According to my wish, spread the true knowledge of Akshar throughout the entire satsang."

Following this *agna*, Bhagatji Maharaj began proclaiming the glory of Akshar. Just as a moth burns in a flame and becomes one with it, Bhagatji willingly endured all hardships with a smile, upholding Gunatitanand Swami's instruction. Whether people liked it or not, he fearlessly declared that Swami is Akshar. Because of this, many opposed him – even during meals or social gatherings, people ridiculed him. Some even went to the extent of insulting him with harsh words.

Once, Bhagatji explained to Kama Sheth of Una that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. Enraged by this statement, Kama Sheth slapped Bhagatji. Yet, Bhagatji bore it with a smile. In satsang, Bhagatji's identity was described as, "The one who endures the most insults yet remains calm and unwavering – that is Bhagatji!"

As Bhagatji's proclamation of Akshar spread, influential figures in the *sampradaya* opposed him even more. They sought ways to stop him, eventually expelling him from satsang and forcing him to leave Junagadh Mandir. As Bhagatji left Junagadh, Bhandari Kunjviharidas mixed poison into *laddus* he had given to Pragji for his journey. On his way to Mahuva, Bhagatji unknowingly ate some of the poisoned *laddus*. The poison spread throughout his body, and he suffered its effects for the rest of his life. Yet, even after being poisoned, Bhagatji never wavered in spreading the truth that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar.

Even after being excommunicated, he sat outside the mandir and continued preaching about Akshar. When Gunatitanand Swami was at Ahmedabad to celebrate the Ram Navmi festival, Bhagatji would tell the devotees, "Look, there goes Akshar – have its darshan!" Pointing at Gunatitanand Swami, he would declare, "The one lying down is Akshar, the one speaking is Akshar, and the one

walking is Akshar.” Through his efforts, around 150 sadhus and 200 devotees in Junagadh firmly believed that Gunatitanand Swami is the eternal Akshar.

Bhagatji Maharaj inspired many prominent devotees, including:

- Vagha Khachar of Sarangpur
- Fulchand Sheth of Mahuva
- Damodar Sheth
- Devjibhai of Vanthali
- Mangalji Thakkar of Rajkot

Among sadhus, he convinced:

- Kothari Trikamdas of Junagadh
- Nirgun Swami of Ahmedabad
- Vrundavandas Swami
- Sadguru Pavitranand Swami

Before Bhagatji Maharaj, the knowledge that ‘Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar’ was limited to Junagadh. However, he spread this truth across the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Just as Bhagatji sacrificed his body for this principle, we too should dedicate ourselves to preserving the principles, *sanstha*, and glory of the Satpurush—for that is the highest form of *seva*.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

Absolute Conviction in Swaminarayan

In 1939, a grand *murti-pratistha* (murti consecration ceremony) of Ghanshyam Maharaj was held in Surat. This very event became the occasion where Shastriji Maharaj (as Yagnapurushdasji) first met Bhagatji Maharaj. At first glance, Shastriji Maharaj immediately recognised Bhagatji as his Guru and accepted him wholeheartedly.

One day, Bhagatji Maharaj asked Yagnapurushdasji, “Sadhuram! Do you have complete conviction in Swaminarayan?”

Hearing this unexpected question, Yagnapurushdasji was surprised. Folding his hands, he humbly replied, “I have firm conviction that Maharaj is the Supreme Purushottam Narayan.”

Bhagatji Maharaj smiled and responded, “The conviction you have is that of Narayan alone! Until you firmly believe that Gunatitanand Swami is ‘Mul Akshar’ (the eternal abode of Bhagwan), your conviction in Swaminarayan is still incomplete.”

Yagnapurushdasji, with his sharp wit and rational mind, replied, “My Guru, Vignananand Swami, is an extremely learned and highly experienced sadhu who had a direct association with Shriji Maharaj. Yet, he never mentioned this concept to me. So, where did you get this new teaching?”

Seeing his sincerity and intellect, Bhagatji Maharaj was pleased and confidently replied, “Your Guru knows this truth too.”

Yagnapurushdasji proposed a plan to test this, “If you can make my Guru say this himself, then I will believe it.”

The following day, Bhagatji Maharaj visited Vignananand Swami while he was seated on his seat. Meanwhile, Yagnapurushdasji secretly hid beneath his cot to overhear the conversation.

Bhagatji Maharaj casually asked Vignananand Swami, “Swami! In your time, there was talks that Gunatitanand Swami is ‘Mul Akshar.’ Can you please recall that for me?”

Hearing this, Vignananand Swami looked around cautiously and then softly replied, “Yes, I have heard this directly from Shriji Maharaj many times.

Gopalanand Swami also frequently explained this principle. This truth is deeply embedded in my soul.”

Upon hearing this confirmation, Yagnapurushdasji immediately emerged from under the cot and boldly asked, “Swami! Why have you never told this to me before?”

Vignananand Swami was initially startled, but recognising his faithful disciple, he calmly explained, “Even now, many devotees struggle to understand and accept Shriji Maharaj’s supremacy as Purushottam. So, how could they even digest that Swami is Akshar? But now that you have heard it, know that this is the truth, and keep it firmly established in your heart.”

Had Shastriji Maharaj only kept this truth to himself, he would not have become Shastriji Maharaj! Instead, he firmly resolved, “If this Akshar-Purushottam knowledge is true, then it must be spread across the world!” From this one decisive moment, the foundation of Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant was laid.

Drawn like the Chakor to the Moon...

Shastriji Maharaj was so deeply attached to Bhagatji Maharaj that he simply could not remain without seeing or hearing from him. Whenever an opportunity arose to meet Bhagatji Maharaj, he would eagerly rush for his association. However, Bhagatji Maharaj often tested Shastriji Maharaj's devotion.

Once, when Yagnapurushdasji (Shastriji Maharaj) and other sadhus went to Mahuva for Bhagatji Maharaj's *darshan*, Bhagatji sternly rebuked them, "Aren't you ashamed? What will the devotees say? Go back immediately across the river!" After saying this, Bhagatji left abruptly. Despite this, Yagnapurushdasji joyfully followed him. Seeing his innocent and sincere face, Bhagatji's anger subsided.

At another time, while Bhagatji Maharaj resided in Ahmedabad, Shastriji Maharaj was in Mahemadabad. There, he passionately preached Bhagatji's glory to every devotee who visited the mandir, inspiring them to go for *darshan* and association in Ahmedabad. He would personally escort devotees to the train station for their journey to go have *darshan* of Bhagatji Maharaj. Likewise, whenever devotees returned from Ahmedabad, he would eagerly meet them to hear every detail about Bhagatji Maharaj.

Hearing devotees' experiences, Shastriji Maharaj himself longed for Bhagatji's *darshan*. He travelled to Ahmedabad, but when Bhagatji saw him, he sternly asked, "Why have you come?" Since many sadhus frequently ran to Bhagatji for *darshan*, some envious individuals spread false accusations, claiming that Bhagatji's disciples were breaking social norms. To avoid further conflicts, Bhagatji sometimes scolded the sadhus harshly. However, Shastriji Maharaj found joy even in Bhagatji's reprimands, understanding them as his loving tests. Eventually, seeing his sincerity, Bhagatji blessed him with the joy of *darshan* and association.

Similarly, once Shastriji Maharaj, along with Vignandasji and other sadhus, went to Petlad for Bhagatji's *darshan*. They sent a message that the sadhus had arrived at the mandir. However, Bhagatji replied publicly to the devotees, "Return as you came! Why have you disobeyed my *agna*?" He then ordered them to leave the mandir. Despite such severe trials, Shastriji Maharaj's love for Bhagatji never diminished.

On August 11, 1896, Shastriji Maharaj wrote a heartfelt letter to Bhagatji, "It has been exactly two years since I last had your *darshan*. I have neither seen

you nor had your association since then. Please, out of your mercy, grant me the joy of *darshan* and *samagam* (association).”

He wrote five such letters, but Bhagatji did not respond to any of them. Even in the face of such challenging tests, Shastriji Maharaj’s longing for his Guru never faded. Instead, he would joyfully proclaim, “Just as a fish cannot live without water, I cannot live without Bhagatji Maharaj!”

Such unparalleled love, like that between the moon and the Chakori bird (symbolises intense love. The Chakori bird is said to be enthralled with the moon and gazes at it constantly), only arises when one has true devotion for the Satpurush. And when such a connection is formed, all spiritual aspirations are fulfilled (Vachanamrut Gadhada III 2).

Lifting the Injunction Against Jaga Bhakta

Jaga Bhakta, a blessed disciple of Gunatitanand Swami, used to narrate profound discourses on *upasana* in Junagadh. Even great *sadgurus* and devotees would sit by him, eagerly listening to his divine talks. His growing glory and influence fuelled jealousy and resentment among certain individuals.

At that time, Jibhai Kothari was in charge of the Junagadh Mandir. He was a simple-hearted devotee who held great reverence for Bhagatji Maharaj. However, those spreading false rumours poisoned his mind about Jaga Bhakta. Being gullible, Jibhai Kothari believed their words. Not realising Jaga Bhakta's true spiritual stature, he issued an official order, "No sadhu or devotee is allowed to visit or listen to discourses in Jaga Bhakta's room. Anyone who does so will be excommunicated from the mandir." Moreover, Jaga Bhakta himself was banned from giving discourses in the *sabha* hall. This verdict was also supported by Vartal's chief Kothari, Gordhanbhai.

This decree deeply saddened all the devotees in Junagadh, but none dared to oppose Jibhai Kothari's command. For Jaga Bhakta, this was a heart-breaking moment. His only joy in life was singing the glory of Shri Hari and Gunatitanand Swami and spreading their *upasana*. Discourses were his very form of devotion, his life. Now, that life had been snatched away from him, leaving him utterly sorrowful.

Upon hearing of Jaga Bhakta's ban, Shastriji Maharaj in Rajkot immediately drafted a long letter to Jibhai Kothari, explaining Jaga Bhakta's immense spiritual greatness. However, he soon realised that a letter would not be enough. Instead, he tore up the letter and decided to go to Junagadh in person that day.

Upon reaching the Junagadh Mandir, he had *darshan* of Thakorji and then proceeded straight to Jaga Bhakta's room. Some people tried to stop him, saying, "Going there is forbidden." With fearlessness, Shastriji Maharaj replied, "There is no restriction for me." He then entered Jaga Bhakta's room.

Jaga Bhakta was astonished and asked, "How did you come here? Coming here has been forbidden." Shastriji Maharaj boldly declared, "From today, this ban is lifted! Do not worry. I will personally resolve everything with the Kothari." With this assurance, he returned to his place.

Meanwhile, in the mandir, a major uproar erupted. "Yagnapurushdasji has defied the ban and gone to Jaga Bhakta's room! He even offered him

prostrations!” The news spread like wildfire. However, Shastriji Maharaj paid no attention to the outcry.

That very night, he called Jibhai Kothari for a meeting. Until 4am, he patiently explained Jaga Bhakta’s supreme greatness. Kothari eventually realised his mistake. At dawn, he bathed, took a sandalwood paste and garland, and personally approached Jaga Bhakta’s seat. With deep remorse, he performed Jaga Bhakta’s *pujan* with sandalwood, offered him the garland, and prostrated before him. He then lifted all restrictions, allowing everyone to visit Jaga Bhakta, and even requested him to resume delivering discourses in the *sabha*.

Without fear of excommunication or concern for public opinion, Shastriji Maharaj boldly stood up for Jaga Bhakta. Similarly, we too must always stand firm in our support for Shriji Maharaj, the Satpurush, and all devotees, without yielding to social pressures or worldly concerns.

Ideal Gurubhakti

Swami Yagnapurushdasji (later known as Shastriji Maharaj) was studying in Rajkot. It had been nearly a year since he had met Bhagatji Maharaj, and he eagerly longed for his guru's *darshan*. Meanwhile, in 1953, the festival of Janmashtami was to be celebrated in Junagadh, where Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj was also expected to be present.

Yagnapurushdasji thought, "Let's invite Bhagatji Maharaj to the Janmashtami festival in Junagadh. If he is now honoured there with the highest respect – in the very place where he was once insulted, given poison, and excommunicated from satsang – it will establish his divine triumph throughout the Sampradaya."

Yagnapurushdasji, demonstrating extraordinary *gurubhakti*, worked tirelessly to bring Bhagatji Maharaj to Junagadh. Being highly intelligent and exceptionally skilled in practical affairs, he devised a plan, "If Bhagatji travels directly to Junagadh, opponents will get an opportunity to protest. However, if we secure an official written order from Acharya Maharaj, no one will be able to oppose his visit."

Thus, Yagnapurushdasji wrote letters to staunch devotees from Gujarat, urging them to request Bhagatji's presence at the Junagadh festival. The devotees were overjoyed and began sending letters to Acharya Maharaj, expressing their collective wish, "Please invite Bhagatji Maharaj to the Janmashtami festival in Junagadh." Additionally, Yagnapurushdasji himself wrote a letter to Acharya Maharaj from Rajkot, stating, "This time, many devotees from Gujarat wish to attend the Junagadh festival. If Bhagatji Maharaj is invited, it will greatly uplift their enthusiasm, and they will also benefit from his spiritual discourses."

These repeated requests influenced Acharya Maharaj, who ultimately issued an official order inviting Bhagatji Maharaj to Junagadh. A sealed letter of approval was sent to both Bhagatji Maharaj and Yagnapurushdasji.

Upon the letter's arrival, Yagnapurushdasji immediately travelled to Junagadh, met Kothari Jibhai, and made all necessary arrangements for Bhagatji's grand reception. On Janmashtami, Acharya Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj arrived in Junagadh together. Yagnapurushdasji had arranged two horse-drawn carriages – one for Acharya Maharaj and an identical one for Bhagatji Maharaj. Bhagatji Maharaj was provided with the same level of hospitality and accommodation as Acharya Maharaj. The Nagar Brahmins of Junagadh, senior sadhus, and devoted followers – who had once been blessed by the presence of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

Gunatitanand Swami – were overjoyed to have the *darshan* of Bhagatji Maharaj after so many years.

Thus, Yagnapurushdasji ensured unparalleled honour for Bhagatji Maharaj in Junagadh. It was the very same place where, in 1921, Bhagatji had been excommunicated under Acharya Maharaj's orders. And now, years later, it was by Acharya Maharaj's own order that Bhagatji was invited back with great reverence. Shastriji Maharaj later declared that merely remembering this remarkable event of ideal *gurubhakti* burns away all inner defects like lust, anger, and pride.

“Shriji Maharaj Alone Is the Doer”

In Vachanamrut Vartal 13, Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains, “When a ship sails past a mountain of magnetic rock, then all of the iron nails of the ship are drawn towards the magnetic rock. Similarly, when a person does darshan of God’s form with *shraddha*, be it the form of a king or the form of a sadhu, his *indriyas* are drawn towards God.” For this reason, the Gunatit Satpurush is often compared to a magnetic mountain, possessing an extraordinary spiritual aura that naturally attracts seekers.

Wherever Shastri Yagnapurushdasji (Shastriji Maharaj) travelled, devotees would gather in large numbers, captivated by his discourses and divine presence. However, this growing influence became unbearable for those who opposed him, leading them to stir conflicts within satsang. Kothari Gordhanbhai privately advised Shastriji Maharaj to contain the situation, saying, “Swami, wherever you go, grand assemblies and festivals take place. Many people are drawn to you, which has sparked strong resentment among certain sadhus. They cannot tolerate your increasing influence, and I fear they may create great obstacles for you. To maintain harmony, I suggest you limit your teachings and interactions.”

Shastriji Maharaj calmly listened, but his faith remained unshaken. He firmly believed that any influence or divine aura seen in him was solely the work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He humbly responded, “It is difficult for me to travel from village to village to conduct discourses to devotees, as I am often on the move – sometimes in Gujarat, other times in Sarangpur. Thus, we gather at one place for a day or two to collectively experience the joy of discourses, devotion and meditation of Bhagwan. If people are drawn in and witness divine splendour and influence, that is entirely the grace and doing of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Nevertheless, if you and others doubt my intentions, let next year’s festival and Vachanamrut discourse be organised in Vartal. This will surely help dispel any uncertainties you may hold.”

Hearing this unwavering faith, Kothari was deeply moved and admitted, “Swami, I have no doubts about you. But those wearing saffron robes have taken an oath to uproot you completely. That is what worries me.” Kothari’s words reflected his deep love and respect for Shastriji Maharaj, as he genuinely wished to shield him from difficulties.

However, Shastriji Maharaj was not one to retreat in the face of opposition. He confidently assured Kothari, “If we believe ourselves to be the doers, then we must bear the consequences. But if we understand that Shriji Maharaj alone is the

doer, he will never let harm come our way. Even if hardships arise, we will accept them as Shriji's purification process – refining us like pure gold. We should never let opposition disturb our inner peace. Moreover, Maharaj has declared, 'I have attained Bhagwan, and if I fail to guide those who seek my association toward salvation, then what is the value of my knowledge?' With this in mind, we must never hesitate to glorify the supremacy of Bhagwan, even in the face of resistance."

Hearing these words, Kothari Gordhanbhai stood stunned, deeply admiring Shastriji Maharaj's unwavering patience and faith. These words about Bhagwan's doer-ship are etched in stone – guiding how one should stand firm in both worldly matters and spiritual service. If we hold onto this principle, we, too, can remain resolute like an unshakable mountain amidst life's greatest storms.

Shriji Himself Has Done It...

To boldly establish and spread the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, Shastriji Maharaj resolved to consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam together. Around 1899 CE (Samvat 1955), some sadhus, including Kunjvihariprasad and Nirmaldas, parted ways with the Ahmedabad Gadi (diocese), intending to build their own grand *shikharbaddh* mandir. However, executing such a large mandir project was beyond their capacity.

At the time, Shastriji Maharaj was serving as the Mahant of Sarangpur (Hanumanji) Mandir. Swami Nirmaldas met Shastriji Maharaj in Limbdi and shared the challenges they faced in constructing the mandir. Recognising this as a golden opportunity to reveal the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, Shastriji Maharaj set forth a condition, saying, “If you install the *murtis* of our Ishtadev, Purushottam Bhagwan Shri Sahajanand Swami, along with his supreme devotee, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, we will assist you in every way you need – and Maharaj himself will help you as well.”

Swami Nirmaldas agreed, saying, “If you can help us acquire land in Vadhwani, we will enshrine the *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami.”

Through Shastriji Maharaj’s recommendation, the Thakor Saheb of Vadhwani generously donated land on the banks of the River Bhogava for the mandir. This marked the beginning of the first Akshar-Purushottam Mandir. Since Shastriji Maharaj was still residing in Vartal, he managed the Vadhwani mandir activities from there, even sending devotees to Jaipur to have the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* sculpted.

The *murti-pratishtha* was scheduled for Maha *sud* 5, Vasant Panchami of Samvat 1961. Opponents tried everything to prevent Akshar-Purushottam from being enshrined in Vadhwani. They even held a meeting in Muli to strategize against it. However, Shastriji Maharaj remained fearless. He instructed all devotees who had firm faith in Akshar-Purushottam to attend the Vadhwani *murti-pratishtha*.

Kunjvihariprasadji had promised to install the Akshar-Purushottam *murtis* in the central sanctum. However, Shastriji Maharaj cautioned the devotees, saying, “Even if there is opposition, insist that the *murtis* be placed in the central sanctum. If the opposition becomes too strong, then as a last resort, install them in the side sanctum.”

It seemed impossible that Akshar-Purushottam would be installed in the central shrine without resistance. Yet, despite intense opposition, Shastriji Maharaj's devotees showed immense courage and successfully installed the *murtis* in the first shrine. Thus, for the first time in history, Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were enthroned in Vadhwan, marking the first great victory of Upasana!

Late at night, Shastriji Maharaj received a telegram in Vartal, confirming that the *murti-pratishtha* was successfully completed. Holding the telegram, he immediately went to Kothari Govardhandas and, in great joy, declared, "Akshar-Purushottam Dev has been enshrined in Vadhwan!"

Hearing this, Kothari Govardhandas was deeply shaken. He admitted, "I had resolved that as long as I lived, I would never allow Akshar-Purushottam to be installed. But today, you have done it!"

To this, Shastriji Maharaj, with the power of unwavering faith, responded firmly, "I too had resolved that Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj should be installed in your lifetime – and today, my resolve has been fulfilled!"

Kothari sighed deeply and humbly acknowledged. "Shriji has done it."

At that moment, Shastriji Maharaj declared with absolute conviction, "Shriji himself has indeed done it!"

Through these words, Shastriji Maharaj revealed his profound spiritual realisation – that Shri Hari was working through him.

Thus, through his unparalleled devotion, unwavering faith, and absolute reliance on Maharaj's divine will, Shastriji Maharaj transformed the eternal Vedic Akshar-Purushottam philosophy into a manifest reality!

The Passion for Spreading Upasana

Jethabhai of Pij was studying at the Kala Bhavan (a renowned college) in Vadodara. During that time, Shastriji Maharaj resided at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Vadodara's Wadi area. Through the association of Govindbhai Master, Ullasrambhai, and others, Jethabhai developed an affection for Bhagatji Maharaj and frequently visited the mandir. He came into contact with Shastriji Maharaj, who recognised Jethabhai as a sincere spiritual seeker.

One evening, after Thakorji awakened, Shastriji Maharaj and Jethabhai met. They did *pradakshina* together for a while and then sat nearby around 6pm. Shastriji Maharaj began speaking about the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

Engrossed in the discussion, Shastriji Maharaj spoke passionately, and Jethabhai listened attentively. They were so immersed that they remained unaware of the *sandhya arti*, *shayan arti*, and even the silence of the night. Only when the mandir tower chimed at 4am did they suddenly realise they had been talking continuously for 10 hours!

Years later, reminiscing about this incident, Jethabhai wrote in a letter, "What an enthusiasm Swami had for sharing spiritual knowledge! It felt as if I had a direct encounter with Bhagatji Maharaj. Swamishri spoke for ten straight hours. This deeply moved me. I travelled to Mahuva four times to have Bhagatji Maharaj's *darshan*, and through that association, I gained the blessings of the Satpurush."

Through Shastriji Maharaj's deeply impactful words, Jethabhai developed unwavering faith in Akshar and Purushottam. Even before meeting Bhagatji Maharaj, he firmly believed that Bhagatji Maharaj was a supremely realised Sant. Eventually, he dedicated his entire life to spreading the Akshar-Purushottam wisdom. Upon receiving initiation, Jethabhai of Pij became Swami Nirgundas.

Shastriji Maharaj once said, "In satsang, Swami Nirgundas alone spread fourteen *ana* (88%) of the *upasana*."

Thus, it was Shastriji Maharaj who prepared Nirgundas Swami as the chief commander in the army of propagating *upasana*. Shastriji Maharaj always carried the burning zeal of instilling firm faith in Akshar-Purushottam among those who associated with him. For this, he neither considered time nor cared for his physical well-being.

We, too, are children of the same Shastriji Maharaj. Today, we are part of the same *upasana* propagation mission. If we, like Shastriji Maharaj, enthusiastically share the teachings of the *Sanstha*, *Satpurush*, and *Siddhant* without concern for time, circumstances, or obstacles, then we shall surely earn the immense blessings of our Guruhari.

The Historic Departure from Vartal

Shastriji Maharaj endured countless hardships to spread the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. His opponents tried everything to silence him, but he remained steadfast. Once, Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal warned him, saying, “Those in saffron robes have vowed to uproot you, armed with anger and violence.” This warning soon proved true. During a mandir visit in Vartal, Ghanshyamdas stabbed Shastriji Maharaj’s thigh with a long needle, resulting in gushing blood. Another sadhu, Sukrutjivandas, even kicked Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj’s mere presence in Vartal unsettled many. But he remained absolutely fearless, like a lion in the forest.

In Samvat 1961, during the Chaitra *sud* Punam assembly in Vartal, upon Shastriji Maharaj’s encouragement, Galbhai boldly proclaimed the *jaynad* of Akshar-Purushottam. This infuriated the opposition. Just hearing the name ‘Yagnapurushdas’ would ignite rage in their hearts. Even Shastriji Maharaj’s followers sensed the rising hostility and feared that he could no longer stay in Vartal for long.

As the Kartik Punam festival of Samvat 1962 approached, tensions escalated. His opponents had now decided to eliminate him altogether. On Kartik *sud* 12 (two days before Punam), his opponents poisoned his meal, hoping to kill him. However, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami were protecting him, and he miraculously survived. This left his enemies utterly frustrated and shocked. On Kartik *sud* 13, they planned to throw him into the burning cooking fire during the meal in the mandir’s kitchen. However, that day, 25-30 devotees accompanied him. As tensions rose, five devotees lifted Shastriji Maharaj and carried him out of the dining hall.

On Kartik *sud* 14, devotees had approached Kothari Gordhanbhai to request permission for Shastriji Maharaj’s *mandal* to leave for Bochasan. However, Kothari, bound by the Acharya’s authority, could not permit it openly. Instead, out of concern, he warned them, “This time, do not leave Shastriji Maharaj alone!” Hearing these concerning words, they all became very alert.

The devoted disciples urged Shastriji Maharaj to leave Vartal for his safety. However, with firm determination, Shastriji Maharaj resolutely declared, “Do not speak of leaving Vartal. Bhagatji Maharaj once told me, ‘Even if they tear you into pieces, I will stitch you back together but never abandon the gates of Vartal.’ Hence, I have no intention of leaving. Even if my body perishes, I will never

forsake my Guru's *agna*." Seeing Shastriji Maharaj's unparalleled faith in his guru, all bowed down to him in reverence.

Finally, on Kartik *sud* Punam, Shri Krishnaji Ada, a great scholar, urged Shastriji Maharaj to leave Vartal. Considering Ada as the divine voice of Bhagatji Maharaj, he accepted this as Maharaj's will and decided to depart.

On Kartik *vad* Padvo (the day after Punam), devotees made one last attempt to seek official permission from Acharya Lakshmiprasadji. However, the Acharya dismissed them angrily, saying, "Who will give him a written permission? The whole country is open – he can go wherever he wants!"

Hearing this, Shastriji Maharaj gravely stated, "We never wanted to separate from the mandir or the fellowship, but if this is Shriji Maharaj's will, then we must leave."

Before departing, he stood before Harikrishna Maharaj and prayed, "O Maharaj! We do not wish to leave, but if this is your divine will, then please remain with us forever." Then, with just five sadhus and around 150 devotees, Shastriji Maharaj walked out of Vartal mandir from the gate next to the shrine of Hanuman, stepping onto a thorny and difficult path, leaving behind all comforts – all for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam Upasana.

Thus began the great spiritual revolution that would establish the eternal glory of the Akshar-Purushottam principle.

“Vartal and I Are One”

Even after leaving Vartal to spread the principle of Akshar-Purushottam, Shastriji Maharaj faced immense hardships from his opponents. A group of hostile individuals travelled from village to village, intending to harm him. Despite this, Shastriji Maharaj endured everything with saintliness. Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in the Shikshapatri, “If a sadhu is insulted or even attacked, he must tolerate it and always think of the other’s well-being.”

Shastriji Maharaj lived by this principle. He never acted against the well-being of Vartal. In fact, whenever others spoke negatively about Vartal, he intervened to stop them.

Once, when Shastriji Maharaj was in Anand, a famous and influential religious leader of another large sect wished to meet him. This leader was well aware of Shastriji Maharaj’s unparalleled scriptural knowledge and thought, “Since Yagnapurushdasji has now separated from Vartal, we can bring him to our side and use him to defeat the Vartal sect in debates.”

However, Shastriji Maharaj immediately understood his intention and responded with wisdom, “When certain kings sought to fight against the Kauravas, they first sent a disguised ascetic to the Pandavas in the forest to learn their stance. At that time, Yudhishtir declared, ‘In your war with the Kauravas, we and the Kauravas are one. Together, we are 105.’ Similarly, in front of you, Vartal and I are one.”

Madhavtirth, the religious leader was completely stunned. He had not expected such a response. Witnessing Shastriji Maharaj’s selflessness and unwavering respect for Vartal, he developed immense admiration for him and declared, “In the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya, there is no equal to Shastri Yagnapurushdas in scholarship and saintliness.”

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states, “Despite these powers, though, he tolerates the praises and insults of other people. This itself is also a great feat because to tolerate, despite being so powerful, is not easy for others to achieve. Therefore, one who tolerates in this manner should be considered to be extremely great.”

Shastriji Maharaj embodied this extraordinary virtue of having no enemies. His unmatched strength was not in defeating others but in winning their hearts through love, wisdom, and tolerance.

“Oh, Swami! Please Accept Your Place”

To embody the Akshar-Purushottam knowledge and open the path of liberation for countless souls, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj departed from Vartal. With no money, resources, or support, relying only on his steadfast faith and asking for alms, he initiated the construction of a magnificent mandir in Bochasan. Though Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal with only five sadhus and a handful of devotees, he was accompanied by the divine strength of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami. Thus, in just one and a half years, the *murti-pratishtha* (murti consecration ceremony) was ready to take place. The auspicious occasion was set for Vaishakh *vad* 10, 1907 CE (Samvat 1963).

On the day of the *pratishtha*, the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was gracefully installed in the mandir’s central sanctum. Next, the *murti* of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, which was lighter in weight, was to be placed. However, despite the efforts of many, the *murti* would not budge! No matter how much they tried, it would not lift even an inch.

Everyone became exhausted and finally approached Shastriji Maharaj to explain the situation, “Maharaj’s *murti* was installed easily, but Swami’s *murti* is not moving. We have tried everything, but it won’t lift.” Upon hearing this, Shastriji Maharaj immediately entered the yagna hall, took a chisel from the artisan, and prayed before Gunatitanand Swami’s *murti*, “Oh Swami! We left Vartal for your sake. We endured insults, rejection, and hardships for your cause. Now, please be merciful and accept your place in this mandir.”

As soon as Shastriji Maharaj placed the chisel beneath the *murti*, it miraculously lifted, and the devotees successfully installed it in its designated place.

From a worldly perspective, one might assume that the solution would have been gathering more people to lift the *murti* forcefully. However, this event was divinely orchestrated. Shastriji Maharaj was not ordinary – he was a Sant of extraordinary spiritual power.

Everyone witnessed his unwavering faith in Swami and Shri Hari when he prayed. With his heartfelt plea, Gunatitanand Swami accepted his rightful place in the mandir. This event not only solidified the truth of the Akshar-Purushottam principle in the hearts of all but also demonstrated that Bhagwan himself had arranged this miraculous occurrence to reveal the authenticity of Shastriji Maharaj’s mission.

Through this divine miracle, Shastriji Maharaj firmly established Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Bochasan, ensuring that the victory of true *upasana* resonated across the universe!

Mahant Swami Maharaj beautifully summarises this message, “Maharaj and Swami are the ultimate truth. Our Akshar-Purushottam principle is the eternal truth. The Satpurush is the true guide.” If we wholeheartedly trust in the words of our Guru and dedicate ourselves to spreading this *upasana*, then Akshar-Purushottam will also be enshrined in the mandirs of our hearts.

“Your Disciples Will Enshrine Your *Murti* in Gold!”

Shri Dolatrambhai Krupashankar Pandya, a renowned author of Gujarati literature and profound scholar in Sanskrit language, as well as a member of the Vartal Committee, was deeply inspired by Shastriji Maharaj’s virtues. When Shastriji Maharaj was in Vartal, Dolatrambhai was drawn to his wisdom and saintliness. However, when Shastriji Maharaj separated from Vartal, Dolatrambhai was left wondering, “Why did Swamishri leave?” But he remained convinced that “Swamishri would never act against the true principles.”

In Samvat 1972, Shastriji Maharaj visited Nadiad. Still seeking answers to his long-standing doubts, Dolatrambhai invited him to his home. Seeing Shastriji Maharaj after ten years, he was overjoyed. Yet, a lingering thought remained in Dolatrambhai’s mind, “Swamishri should reunite with Vartal.” So, he asked, “Swami! Do you intend to reconcile?”

With both humility and firmness, Shastriji Maharaj replied, “We are always open to reuniting. If Vartal accepts the principles of Vachanamrut Gadhada II 21, then we have no objections.”

Curious, Dolatrambhai asked, “Swamiji! I know you would never separate for anything other than the principle. Please explain to me the significance of Gadhada II 21 and its principle.”

Seeing Dolatrambhai’s sincere spiritual yearning, Shastriji Maharaj explained the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhant* based on Gadhada II 21. He emphasised that true liberation is only possible when one understands the glory of the manifest Bhagwan and the manifest Sant. He further explained with scriptural evidence and historical events that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is Purushottam, and Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma. Finally, he concluded, “According to Shri Hari’s principle and divine wish, we have built a mandir in Bochasan, where we have consecrated Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami alongside Purushottam Shri Swaminarayan in the central sanctum.”

Shastriji Maharaj’s profound clarity, scriptural depth, and compelling explanations mesmerised Dolatrambhai. He became firmly convinced that true conviction in Swaminarayan requires faith in both Narayan and Aksharbrahma.

Overcome with awe and reverence, Dolatrambhai declared, “Swami! You have accomplished a mission so great that Shriji Maharaj himself would have had to manifest again to fulfil it. Your glory is unparalleled! Today, you have

consecrated metal *murtis* of Maharaj and Swami, but in the future, your disciples will enshrine your *murti* in gold!”

Thus, even a renowned scholar like Dolatrambhai was spiritually transformed by Shastriji Maharaj, reaffirming the power of his divine presence and resolute faith in Akshar-Purushottam. Such was the extraordinary spiritual influence of Shastriji Maharaj!

“Shaved Only for Akshar-Purushottam”

Shastriji Maharaj initiated the construction of grand *shikharbaddh* mandirs to establish the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. For the first time, he consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central sanctum of Bochasan Mandir, proclaiming the principle openly. The next magnificent mandir was built with his exceptional vision in Sarangpur.

Numerous challenges arose to prevent the construction of Sarangpur Mandir. There was no money, no resources, no manpower, and no support. There was continuous opposition from certain people. Despite these hardships, through Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s divine will and Shastriji Maharaj’s extraordinary spiritual power, the day of the *murti-pratishtha* finally arrived. However, opponents made one last attempt to hinder it.

The Thakor Saheb of Limbdi had donated 24 acres of land for the Sarangpur Mandir. These detractors poisoned his mind, saying, “This Shastri is going to install the *murtis* of his gurus, Jaga Bhakta and Pragji Bhakta! Our *sampradaya*’s tradition is to install only Radha-Krishna in the central sanctum. If Radha-Krishna are not placed there, the mandir will not be in accordance with tradition!”

These words influenced Thakor Saheb, and he questioned Shastriji Maharaj, “Swamiji! We have donated this land for the mandir, but we have heard that you intend to install the *murtis* of Jaga Bhakta and Pragji Bhakta. We had discussed placing the *murtis* of Mahaprabhu Shri Krishna and Radha. So, which *murtis* will you be consecrating?”

Upon hearing this, Shastriji Maharaj smiled. Then, with firm resolve, he replied, “We have never even dreamt of installing the *murtis* of Pragji Bhakta or Jaga Bhakta. Moreover, the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna will indeed be placed in the first shrine of the mandir.”

Thakor Saheb said, “But in the central sanctum, only the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna should be enshrined!”

At that instant, Shastriji Maharaj’s eyes gleamed with divine radiance. Looking directly into Thakor Saheb’s eyes, he boldly declared, “Thakor Saheb! Every hardship I have endured in this body has been for Mahaprabhu Shri Sahajanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami. We have shaved our heads only for the sake of Akshar-Purushottam i.e., sacrificed our lives). (*Ā mundāvvyu chhe te pan Akshar Purushottam mâte ja mundāvvyu chhe.*) Therefore, in the central sanctum, only Akshar-Purushottam’s *murtis* will be installed!”

This thunderous proclamation of unwavering conviction left Thakor Saheb awestruck. With folded hands, he humbly said, “Swamiji! Do as you see fit. Please do not consider my words.”

Shastriji Maharaj constructed mandirs solely by the strength of his steadfast faith in Akshar-Purushottam without yielding to pressure or fearing losing the donated land.

He often proclaimed:

- “We are mere servants of Akshar-Purushottam!” (*“Āpane to Akshar Purushottamnā baladiyā chhie.”*)
- “Even if someone preaches Akshar-Purushottam while sitting on my head, it would not be enough!” (*“Akshar Purushottamni vāt koi mārā mātā upar besine kare to pan ochhu chhe.”*)
- “If I have to sell myself for Akshar-Purushottam, even that would not be enough!” (*“Akshar Purushottam mātē vechāvu pade to pan ochhu chhe.”*)
- “We have dedicated our life for Akshar-Purushottam!” (*“Ā mundāvyu chhe te Akshar Purushottam mātē mundāvyu chhe.”*)

With these four profound statements of Shastriji Maharaj firmly in our hearts, let us serve with dedication and unwavering devotion!

The Charity That Grants Moksha

In Samvat 1980, Shastriji Maharaj visited Bhavnagar at the special request of his staunch devotee, Kuberbhai. Along with him were Yogiji Maharaj, Nirgun Swami, and other sadhus.

One day, Shastriji Maharaj called Kuberbhai and said, “Today, we are going to go out into the town to collect alms (for *jholi*).”

Hearing this, Kuberbhai was taken aback. With deep concern, he said, “Swami, my home is here, and there are also many other *satsangis*’ homes in this town. If you go begging for alms in the streets, it will feel very embarrassing for us!”

But Shastriji Maharaj remained resolute and replied, “Kuberbhai, your *seva* is indeed immense. However, Bhagwan Swaminarayan went out to beg for alms and instructed his *paramhansas* to do the same. His purpose was to allow countless spiritual seekers to have *darshan* and attain salvation through their generosity. We must follow his *agna* and go for *jholi* as well.”

Kuberbhai could not argue further against Shastriji Maharaj’s firm conviction. That day, as Shastriji Maharaj walked through the streets of Bhavnagar, he filled the air with the divine chant, “*Narayan Hare! Sachchidanand Prabho!*”

The news spread like wildfire across the town, “Even a respected householder like Kuberbhai is going out to collect alms with the sadhus!” Curious and overwhelmed, hundreds of people gathered to witness this extraordinary sight. Seeing Shastriji Maharaj’s divine and serene presence, the people of Bhavnagar were drawn toward him, and they generously filled the *jholi* with offerings. Shastriji Maharaj held one end of the *jholi*, and Yogiji Maharaj held the other end.

These two Gunatit Sants walked through every alley of Bhavnagar, spreading the divine grace of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. It was not just a collection of grains but a grand movement of eternal salvation, inviting all souls toward ultimate liberation.

This was not an isolated event. Shastriji Maharaj collected *jholi* in many towns, including Sarangpur, Nadiad, Bhadran, and Dharmaj. One day, Nirgun Swami asked him, “Swami, we are all eager to serve you. Why do you still go out to collect alms yourself?” Shastriji Maharaj responded with deep spiritual

wisdom, “For the cause of Akshar-Purushottam, even if I had to sell myself at the home of an outcast, it would still not be enough. (*Akshar Purushottam mātē vechāvu pade to pan ochhu chhe.*) Every single grain that comes into my *jholi* – I have vowed to take each and every one of those donors to Akshardham!” Thus, Shastriji Maharaj transformed a simple act of collecting alms into a divine mission of spiritual liberation, ensuring that countless souls were uplifted.

“If He Were to Sit on My Head to Deliver It...”

In 1936, during the extra month of Bhadarva (Adhik Mas), the devotees of Ahmedabad requested Shastriji Maharaj to hold a *parayan* (discourse series) on the Satsangijivan scripture. This was organised at the Kashi-Vishwanath Mandir on the banks of the Sabarmati River. During this event, Sadguru Shrijiswaprupdas Swami delivered discourses from the Satsangijivan, and every evening at 6pm, Shastriji Maharaj personally shared divine wisdom. Following this, as per Shastriji Maharaj’s *agna*, Professor Jethalal Swaminarayan would read chapters from “Akshar-Purushottam Charitam.” Notably, Professor Jethalal would sit on Shastriji Maharaj’s seat while reading and explaining the text.

Some devotees were uneasy about a disciple sitting on the guru’s seat to narrate discourses. They felt this diminished the guru’s dignity and status. Representing them, Babubhai Kothari approached Shastriji Maharaj and expressed his concern, saying, “Swami, this professor sits on your seat to give discourses! This does not seem appropriate.”

For Shastriji Maharaj, Akshar-Purushottam was everything. His entire life was devoted to spreading this knowledge to the world. He had sacrificed his existence for this cause. In response, Shastriji Maharaj firmly rebuked Babubhai, saying, “Professor is narrating the divine incidents of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj! This discourse is so sacred that not only should he sit on my seat, but even if he were to sit on my head to deliver it, it would still not be enough!”

Hearing these powerful words, Babubhai was left speechless. The unshakable conviction of Shastriji Maharaj, the foremost propagator of Akshar-Purushottam, was crystal clear. With great humility, Babubhai lowered his head in reverence.

Through this incident, Shastriji Maharaj revealed the immense value he placed on those who spread the Akshar-Purushottam principle. He was ready to put such a devotee on his head, demonstrating the unparalleled honour of this service. We are fortunate to be engaged in the same divine *seva* of propagating Akshar-Purushottam *Upasana*. This *prasang* also teaches us how to perceive and respect our fellow devotees and *karyakars* (volunteers) involved in *seva* with us. If, due to human nature, someone’s actions or speech ever seem undesirable, we should remember that they are serving the divine Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. By adopting this perspective, our behaviour towards them will be filled with reverence and appreciation. Like Shastriji Maharaj, we should enthusiastically engage in this divine *seva* and honour those who contribute to it. Doing so will ensure that we find a permanent place in the heart of our guru.

The *Samadhi* Chapter Initiated by Shastriji Maharaj

Bhagwan Swaminarayan introduced a unique *samadhi* chapter, through which he granted thousands of spiritual seekers an unshakable conviction in his supreme form and affirmed his divine presence on Earth. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 22, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states, “That Sadhu possesses as much majesty as God.” True to this principle, Shastriji Maharaj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, also revived and propagated the *samadhi* chapter.

On Maha *sud* 6, 1929 CE (Samvat 1985), the *murti-pratishtha* (murti consecration ceremony) of Harikrishna Maharaj took place in Sarangpur under the divine guidance of Shastriji Maharaj. During the evening *arti*, Shastriji Maharaj was gazing at the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj from the mandir balcony. Standing beside him was Radharamanprasad, son of Vartal Acharya Lakshmiprasadji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj instructed him, “Fix your unwavering gaze upon Maharaj’s *murti*.”

Upon hearing and trusting these words, Radharamanprasad concentrated intensely on the *murti*. As he continued focusing, he entered *samadhi* and became utterly still. Seeing him in this motionless state, the surrounding devotees panicked and rushed to Shastriji Maharaj, saying, “Something has happened to Radharamanprasad! He is lying still and not responding!” Shastriji Maharaj reassured them, “He has entered *samadhi*. Bhagatji had already informed Prabhudas Bhagat that Shriji Maharaj would begin the *samadhi* chapter within our *mandal*. Now, it has begun.”

This marked the official revival of the *samadhi* chapter in satsang by Shastriji Maharaj.

Many Devotees Experienced *Samadhi*

- Among the sadhus, Dharmaswarupdasji Swami and Aksharjivandasji Swami frequently experienced *samadhi*.
- Popatlal Soni, a devotee from Vadhwan, entered *samadhi* in the Bochasan Mandir hall. In this *samadhi*, Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed to him a divine *shikharbaddha* mandir made of *sakar* (sugar).
- Among the women devotees, Jethiba, the mother of Khengarjibhai, received divine *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj in *samadhi*, attracting crowds of people eager to witness the event.
- Hasmukhben, the daughter of prominent Vedant scholar Shankarlal Thakkar, attended Jethiba’s *samadhi* event. Shriji Maharaj sprinkled sandalwood water on her during the gathering, triggering her own *samadhi* experience.

- Later, Shankarlal Thakkar himself also entered *samadhi*.
- Maniba from Rajkot also frequently experienced *samadhi*.

***Samadhi* Gatherings in Major Cities**

Public *samadhi* gatherings were held in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Surat. These events were publicly announced in newspapers, drawing large crowds. During these gatherings, Bhagwan Swaminarayan would offer *prasad* in *samadhi*, including bananas, grapes, *kumkum* (vermilion powder), almonds, and sugar, which would miraculously descend from the sky into the hands of the devotees. People who witnessed these divine occurrences were left in utter amazement. The Ahmedabad newspapers of the time reported extensively on the *samadhi* chapter led by Shastriji Maharaj.

Influence on Scholars and Dignitaries

The famous Gandhian scholar from Poland, Shri Maurice Frydman (Swami Bharatanand), personally attended the *samadhi* gatherings in Ahmedabad. He was deeply moved by the divine experiences, including the *prasad* appearing from the sky.

Prominent figures influenced by the *samadhi* chapter included:

- Gulzarilal Nanda, former Acting Prime Minister of India
- Professor Jethalal Swaminarayan
- Punit Maharaj
- Parsi philanthropist Jarbanu Sorabji Mistry
- Kishorlal Mashruwala
- Ahmedabad State Transport Divisional Officer Vrajlal Mehta

Through these divine manifestations, devotees gained an unshakable realisation that, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan is present today through Shastriji Maharaj.”

“Tame Jivyā Amāre Kāj...”

Due to the tireless efforts of Sadguru Nirgun Swami, satsang was flourishing significantly in Khandesh. However, if Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj personally visited the region, it would add even greater motivation and inspiration to the devotees there. Wishing for this, Nirgun Swami wrote letters requesting Shastriji Maharaj to visit and bless the devotees.

Despite his frail health, Shastriji Maharaj was determined to visit the devotees in Khandesh. He travelled from Sarangpur to Ahmedabad to reach there, stopping at Jalila Road Station. His right leg had become stiff the night before, yet he still pushed himself to board the train. However, during the journey, his other leg also became stiff! Now, he could not take a single step.

His accompanying attendant sadhus, Narayanswarupdasji and Chaturbhuj Swami, had to lift and carry him off the train. Deep in his heart, Shastriji Maharaj felt uneasy as he realised that he might not be able to proceed further to Khandesh and bless the devotees. From Jalila Station, he wrote an emotionally moving letter to Nirgun Swami, describing his painful physical condition,

“...We, five of us, had prepared to come to Khandesh via Ahmedabad, planning to reach Atladra on Friday. However, I do not know what Maharaj and Swami’s wish is. Just last night, my right leg became severely stiff – the arthritis flared up badly. Still, I couldn’t bring myself to change our plans, and we continued our journey. But I could not walk at all when I got down from the ox cart. My left leg, too, is in great pain. I had to be lifted and brought to (Hargovind) Master’s house. Now they will have to lift me onto the train. We will reach Ahmedabad and then Atladra, but if my legs do not improve and the pain worsens, I cannot proceed. However, if even a little relief comes and I can walk, then I will surely come. If, for some reason, I cannot come, then please try to understand and remain content. If Ashabhai and others can come, I will send them instead. But if my condition improves, the five of us will surely come...”

The words, “I did not change my decision and continued my journey” speak volumes about his unwavering determination. The phrase, “If even a little relief comes and I can walk, then I will surely come” reflects his deep yearning to be with every single devotee and please them. Even with stiff legs and unbearable pain, Shastriji Maharaj’s efforts to visit and uplift devotees remained uninterrupted. The lineage of Satpurush have sacrificed their bodies and comforts for our happiness. Because of this selfless love and sacrifice, devotees’ hearts naturally overflow with gratitude, singing, *“Tame jivyā amāre kāj, ame jivshu tamāre kāj, vhālā Shāstriji Mahārāj”* (“You lived for us, we will live for you, beloved Shastriji Maharaj!”)

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

“Will Swami Be Pleased?”

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj travelled with Pujya Krishnacharandas Swami’s *mandal*. Wherever this *mandal* went, Yogiji Maharaj’s spirit of service, devotion, and pure love spread like a fragrant breeze.

Once, the *mandal* arrived in Kukavav village. Wherever Yogiji Maharaj went, he would eagerly seek out opportunities to serve. During that time, brass utensils were commonly used. One of Yogiji Maharaj’s favourite *seva* was polishing brass vessels to enhance their lustre and prevent rust.

Bhagwanbhai, a devotee, would bring the necessary materials, and Yogiji Maharaj would polish the utensils while singing *bhajans*. After finishing, he would show each utensil to Bhagwanbhai and ask, “How does it look? Will Swami be pleased?”

Deep within Yogiji Maharaj’s heart was a constant desire to please his Guru. Krishnacharandas Swami would take the polished vessel, turn it in all directions, inspect it carefully, and then proudly show it to all the other sadhus in the *mandal*. Praising Yogiji Maharaj, he would say, “Gnanji is truly remarkable! He has mastered every skill. He excels in everything he does. He knows how to please Bhagwan and the Sant!”

This simple phrase “Will Swami be pleased?” carries within it the essence of all spiritual endeavours. All spiritual endeavours find fulfilment only through the Guru’s *rajipo*. *Rajipo* is our true wealth. Through the Guru’s *rajipo*, one experiences divine fulfilment and purpose in life. “Will Mahant Swami Maharaj be pleased?” – This question should guide every action of our lives. Ensuring that each deed aligns with this thought is, in itself, our highest spiritual endeavour.

Tolerance is Saintliness

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj defined true saintliness in one word – ‘Tolerate.’ This profound statement was not mere philosophy but a reflection of his own experiences and hardships. Yogiji Maharaj tolerated unimaginable suffering throughout his life, yet his face never lost its divine bliss. It seemed as if he took on the world’s sorrow, but it still radiated boundless joy.

Among the seven sadhus who left Junagadh Mandir with the blessings of Swami Krishnacharandas, Swami Vignandas was the leader. Yogiji Maharaj spent 17 years serving under Vignandas Swami. However, their personalities were very different:

- The guru was short-tempered; the disciple was infinitely patient.
- The guru was rigid and stubborn; the disciple was ever accommodating.
- The guru was intolerant; the disciple was tolerant beyond measure.

Yogiji Maharaj’s humility and patience (and saintliness) frustrated Vignandas Swami, leading to many instances of cruelty and mistreatment. Yet, Yogiji Maharaj never complained nor allowed a single negative thought against his guru.

Once, after serving food to all the sadhus, Yogiji Maharaj sat down for his meal in the mandir’s *bhandar* (kitchen storeroom). His habit was to sit humbly, his head bowed between his knees, mix his food with water, and eat quickly. Just as he prepared to eat, Vignandas Swami stormed in, overcome with anger. Without warning, he picked up a pair of tongs lying nearby and pinched Yogiji Maharaj’s right calf with full force.

Yogiji Maharaj’s legs were thin and frail, and the calf muscle was barely covered with flesh. The harsh grip tore through his skin, pulling both flesh and blood with it. Blood streamed down, but Yogiji Maharaj did not utter a single cry. As if nothing had happened, he stood up to apologise – but his leg collapsed beneath him due to extreme pain.

Vignandas Swami coldly walked away, leaving Yogiji Maharaj bleeding and collapsed. Other devotees bandaged the wound, but the scar remained for a lifetime – a permanent mark of immense suffering.

In Sokhada, Vignandas Swami's cruelty went even further. He pushed Yogiji Maharaj off the open balcony of the mandir, sending him crashing down 14-15 feet into the courtyard. A fall from such a height could have been fatal, but by the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Yogiji Maharaj miraculously survived.

On another occasion, a Darbar (a well-respected chief) donated food items to the mandir but forgot to provide ghee. When the chief found out there was no ghee for his meal (since he was expecting some as he thought he had brought it to the mandir), he became upset and left in frustration. Vignandas Swami, without a second thought, grabbed a burning log from the stove and mercilessly beat Yogiji Maharaj with it. His entire body was bruised, and his chest bore deep red welts. The beating was so severe that Yogiji Maharaj lost consciousness. Yet, after exhausting his anger, Vignandas Swami added further punishment – he made Yogiji Maharaj fast as a form of atonement!

Despite enduring such unimaginable suffering, Yogiji Maharaj never spoke ill of his guru. Instead, he would say, “If my uru scolds me, it helps me progress! If my Guru is pleased, I can move forward!”

Would any of us be able to live even a single day with someone like Vignandas Swami? Yet, Yogiji Maharaj endured it for 17 long years without losing his smile, peace, or devotion. If we reflect on his endurance and tolerance, do our struggles in life or satsang still seem unbearable? His life teaches us that true saintliness is not seeking comfort but enduring everything with a smile.

Morsels of Love

Once, Yogiji Maharaj went to Narayan Dharo (a riverbed in Sarangpur) with some sadhus for a bath. At the same time, two sadhus from the Muli Mandir, Uttamcharandas and Narayanprasaddas, were also present there. These two harboured malicious intentions and planned to attack Yogiji Maharaj. As soon as Yogiji Maharaj entered the water, they picked up stones and waited on the shore. However, due to the Amas festival, there were many devotees present, and they could not throw the stones. When Yogiji Maharaj came out from the water, they instead showered him with harsh words and insults. To Yogiji Maharaj, insults were merely an ornament of saintliness. Smiling, he walked by without any reaction.

Time passed, and Narayanprasaddas, one of the insulting sadhus, embarked on a pilgrimage. His destination was Kariyani, but he stepped on a thorn on the way, injuring his foot. Due to heavy rains, his wound worsened, getting infected, and he could barely walk. Along with another sadhu, he reached Botad station and hired a horse carriage to Sarangpur. However, the cart driver refused to go further to Kariyani due to muddy roads. Instead, he dropped them at Sarangpur and left.

They visited Hanumanji's Mandir, but the mandir doors had closed by then. Heavy rain continued to pour and since they belonged to the old Muli Mandir, they believed the new mandir (BAPS) would not accommodate them. However, Narayanprasaddas was in great pain due to his injured foot. At 11pm, they knocked on the doors of BAPS Sarangpur Mandir with no other choice.

By that time, everyone in the mandir had retired for the night after their discourse and *cheshta*. Only Yogiji Maharaj was still awake, preparing to sleep. The mandir watchman informed him that two unknown sadhus were seeking shelter. Yogiji Maharaj walked to the door without hesitation and warmly welcomed them. He then insisted that they have dinner. However, the kitchen had no leftover food. So, Yogiji Maharaj offered them the sanctified *prasad* from Thakorji's *thal*: *puris*, pickles, and chickpea flour *laddus*.

The two sadhus were famished, and as they ate each morsel, they felt overwhelmed by Yogiji Maharaj's love. Afterward, Yogiji Maharaj even arranged bedding for them.

As they settled down, Yogiji Maharaj gently asked them the purpose of their visit. Narayanprasaddas replied, “We were on our way to Kariyani for *darshan*, but the cart driver left us here due to the rain. We plan to leave early morning.” At dawn, Yogiji Maharaj arranged another cart to take them to Kariyani.

By this time, Narayanprasaddas recognised Yogiji Maharaj. The same mouth that once hurled insults at Yogiji Maharaj was now being fed with his loving hands. Realising this, tears of repentance streamed from his eyes. Overcome with emotion, he said, “Yogiji Maharaj! You are truly beyond enmity. You bear no ill will toward anyone. Your heart is filled only with love.” However, Yogiji Maharaj gently placed his hand over his mouth, gesturing to forget the bitter past. His face reflected the thought, “I have done nothing special. Shouldn’t one do at least this much for their own people?”

Such a rare, selfless, and forgiving Sant is impossible to find in this world. If we can imbibe even a fraction of Yogiji Maharaj’s love, humility, and ability to forgive, our hearts, too, will overflow with peace, joy, and selflessness.

Prostrations to Devotees' Belongings

On December 7, 1956, Yogiji Maharaj went on a pilgrimage to South India by train. This 45-day journey included a group of around 650 devotees. Before heading to Setubandh Rameshwar, they decided to stop at Pondicherry. While all the devotees went to visit the Aurobindo Ashram, Yogiji Maharaj stayed on the train with a few others, including Vinubhai (now known as Mahant Swami Maharaj), Jashbhai, and another sadhu.

After completing his morning rituals, Yogiji Maharaj said, “Come, let’s do *pradakshina* of the train carrying the *devotees*.” The train had 18 long meter-gauge carriages, making it a long *pradakshina*. After completing one and a half rounds, Yogiji Maharaj suddenly started doing *dandvats* before the train. Seeing this, Jashbhai curiously asked, “Bapa! Whom are you doing *dandvats* to?”

Yogiji Maharaj replied, “I am doing *dandvats* to the devotees.”

Jashbhai said, “But there is no one here! All the devotees have gone to see the ashram.”

With a radiant smile, Yogiji Maharaj responded, “But their belongings are here, aren’t they?”

Witnessing such an extraordinary display of reverence, everyone stood speechless! In the world, disciples bow before their guru, but how often does a guru prostrate before the belongings of his disciples? Such humility is exceptionally rare!

In 1954, Yogiji Maharaj visited Bandhiya for a *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. That night, several youth devotees slept in the mandir courtyard. At midnight, Yogiji Maharaj needed to go to the restroom. Coincidentally, Vinubhai also woke up at that time. To his astonishment, he saw Yogiji Maharaj doing *dandvats*!

Shocked, Vinubhai ran toward him, helped him up, and asked, “Bapa! Whom are you doing *dandvats* to?”

It wasn’t towards the mandir’s *murtis* nor in any specific direction of worship. Instead, he was doing *dandvats* in the direction of the youths who were sleeping. Out of curiosity, Vinubhai asked, “Why were you bowing down to them?”

With great love, Yogiji Maharaj replied, “These youths have renounced worldly comforts, leaving behind cities like Mumbai to serve selflessly. My heart is filled with respect for them. We must recognise their greatness!”

Overcome with admiration, Vinubhai asked again, “Bapa! How many times have you done this?” With his usual humility, Yogiji Maharaj smiled and dismissed the question, “Not much, just as much as I can.”

Yogiji Maharaj’s heart overflowed with pure devotion, humility, and respect for everyone. Even in the middle of the night, he bowed down to the devotees without anyone noticing. Such unparalleled humility truly reflects his divine vision – seeing greatness in others and serving them selflessly. If we learn to appreciate and serve others with the same respect, we too can experience the same joy and enthusiasm that flowed endlessly from Yogiji Maharaj.

Seeing Good Everywhere

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was travelling to Sarangpur with a group of sadhus by train. During the journey, he engaged everyone in *goshthi* (spiritual discussions), narrating incidents from the Swamini Vato and Vachanamrut, filling the air with joy and devotion.

At Vadhwan Station, a group of young men boarded the train. Yogiji Maharaj, immersed in divine happiness, continued singing *kirtans*. However, as soon as the train started moving, the young men began playing cards. The *kirtans* disturbed them, so one of them rudely said, “Hey, Sadhu Maharaj! Stop your *bhajans*. We are playing cards here, and your loud singing is distracting us.”

Hearing this, Yogiji Maharaj immediately stopped singing without any sign of displeasure. The young men, entirely focused on their card game, became so distracted that they missed their stop at Ranpur Station and unknowingly travelled all the way to Botad. By the time they realised their mistake, it was already 2am, and they had to spend the entire night in the freezing cold. They also had to pay an extra fare for the journey from Ranpur to Botad.

Observing their situation, someone remarked, “See what happened because they didn’t let us sing *kirtans*!” Immediately, Yogiji Maharaj gently corrected him, saying, “Guru! That is not the right way to think. Instead of focusing on their mistakes, we should learn from their virtue. Just as they were completely engrossed in their game, we should cultivate the same intensity in our devotion to Bhagwan.”

Yogiji Maharaj’s eyes, mind, and heart never perceived faults in others. His life was entirely devoted to seeing virtues and recognising the greatness in others. He had permanently put up a ‘No Entry’ sign for negativity and shortcomings. If we take inspiration from Yogiji Maharaj’s life and develop the habit of appreciating virtues even in those who oppose us, we will find peace in every situation. Cultivating an attitude of seeing the greatness and doing *gun-grahan* (imbibe the virtues of others) is essential for spiritual growth and stability in satsang.

A Love That Never Fades

“Balwant! Why are you up?”

“Swami! I need to wake up Dada Bapu.” Ten-year-old Balwant replied.

“Why do you need him?” came the affectionate voice of Yogiji Maharaj, the Mahant of Akshar Deri.

“I need to go to the washroom,” the child said hesitantly, glancing at Yogiji Maharaj sleeping nearby.

“Oh! There’s no need to wake him up. I will take you,” replied Yogiji Maharaj with care.

Placing his *mala* aside, Yogiji Maharaj stood up. It was monsoon season, and heavy rain poured down with thunder and lightning outside. Picking up a sack from the corner, he said, “Balwant! Cover yourself with this sack and wrap it around your body. I’ll prepare everything and take you outside.”

Yogiji Maharaj quickly arranged a small metal pot with some mud inside, under a tamarind tree, placing two bricks beside it for balance. He also set down a brass water pot nearby for washing. This setup was carefully placed near the tree trunk to ensure the child wouldn’t get soaked in the rain.

Returning to the doorway, he gently called out, “Balwant, come.” The child got up and walked with him. Yogiji Maharaj covered his head with the sack, shielding him from the rain, and led him under the tamarind tree. “Go ahead,” he said, stepping aside to give the boy privacy.

Once Balwant was done, Yogiji Maharaj carefully washed his hands with water and soil, ensuring he was clean. Then he softly instructed, “Balwant, wipe your feet on the cloth at the entrance before going back to bed.” His every word was filled with love and tenderness. Soon the child was fast asleep again.

Meanwhile, Yogiji Maharaj returned to the tree, picked up the waste pot, carried it far away, and emptied it into the drain. He then washed the pot and placed it back under the tree. Despite the pouring rain and darkness, he completed the entire process with great care.

After thoroughly washing the pot and hands, he took a bath, wrung out his soaked clothes, and hung them up to dry on a rope inside his room. By then, it was already past midnight, around 1am. Standing soaked in rain, shivering in the cold, Yogiji Maharaj's face glowed with love, compassion, and selfless *seva*. The Mahant of the Akshar Deri, serving a young boy in the middle of the night, showed the depth of his ocean-like devotion towards his devotees. Witnessing such selfless love and kindness, the hearts of countless devotees can only say, "Swami! Your heartfelt love will never be forgotten!"

Nourishing Young Hearts

The youths loved being around Yogiji Maharaj. He would talk to them, play with them, feed them, humour them, and take a genuine interest in their personal lives.

Once, while residing in Kapolwadi, Mumbai, Dineshbhai, a young student from Africa who was studying in Mumbai, came to visit Yogiji Maharaj. He had a great love for Yogiji Maharaj, but he was also fond of watching movies.

One day, Dineshbhai came for Yogiji Maharaj's *darshan* and then went to watch a movie. While bathing, Yogiji Maharaj noticed that Dineshbhai was absent in the evening. He waited for him, even keeping a plate ready for dinner. After some time, when Dineshbhai returned, Yogiji Maharaj, full of joy, asked him where he had been. Without hesitation, Dineshbhai honestly replied, "Bapa! I went to watch a movie."

With an innocent smile, Yogiji Maharaj asked, "Oh! What was in the movie? Tell me in detail." Dineshbhai said, "The world is selfish; there is no real happiness. Couples get married and then divorce."

Hearing this, Swamiji enthusiastically said, "Oh wow! The movie teaches such great lessons. Then you should go every day!" Then, after a brief pause, he gently added, "But in the evening, be sure to attend the *sabha* first. When it's time, you can leave. If we ask where you're going, just say 'college'..."

With this clever yet kind way, Yogiji Maharaj began guiding Dineshbhai. For the next few days, this continued. Every time Dineshbhai left the *sabha*, Yogiji Maharaj would jokingly say, "Dinesh! It's time for college. Study well!" When Dineshbhai returned in the evening, Yogiji Maharaj would ask him for full details about the movie.

One night, after watching a movie, Dineshbhai had dinner and went to Yogi Bapa's room. Seeing him, Yogiji Maharaj suddenly sat up and said, "Dinesh! My chest is hurting a lot. Please give me some medicine." Dineshbhai panicked and rushed outside to call a doctor. But Yogi Bapa held his hand and stopped him, saying, "No, you should give me the medicine! My pain is severe."

Dineshbhai was totally confused and did not know what to do. Then, Yogi Bapa calmly said, "If you stop watching movies, my pain will go away." These

words shook Dineshbhai to his core. He had never imagined that his single bad habit could hurt his Guru. Deeply moved, he immediately apologised and made a firm vow never to watch a movie again.

In this way, Yogiji Maharaj, with his loving and unique approach, helped a young man overcome a bad habit. He first won the youth's love and trust and then gently guided him onto the right path. This approach is an ideal example for today's parents and guardians.

In modern times, parents often impose their own wishes on their children through force, strictness, or pressure, which only widens the generation gap. Instead, as a Sanskrit saying wisely advises, "*Prāpte tu shodashe varshe putram mitra-vadācharet*" ("When a child turns sixteen, treat them as a friend.") By treating youngsters with understanding and friendship, they can be gently guided towards the right path. Through this unique method, Yogiji Maharaj created an ideal youth society filled with discipline, values, and devotion.

Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj

The Bridge of *Gurubhakti*

By the *agna* of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj served as Kothari (chief administrator) of the Sarangpur Mandir from 1946 to 1950. During this time, he took on the task of constructing a bridge over the Falgu River, which flowed in front of the mandir gates.

Shastriji Maharaj had expressed his wish, “This bridge should be twenty-four feet wide.” However, at that time, the population of Sarangpur village was less than a thousand. The number of vehicles used by visiting devotees was also quite limited. Additionally, financial resources were scarce, and construction materials were limited. Considering these factors, Swamishri and Arjunbhai, a devotee overseeing the construction, decided, “Even if the bridge is only sixteen feet wide, two vehicles can still pass without much difficulty. So why increase the expenses unnecessarily by building a larger bridge?”

With this thought, Pramukh Swami Maharaj went to Atladra to consult Shastriji Maharaj. He met him around 4–5 and explained the matter regarding the bridge’s width. Shastriji Maharaj listened carefully but gave no response.

That same night, Shastriji Maharaj called Swamishri to his room and instructed him to read the 86th chapter of the Bhaktachintamani. With his melodious voice, Swamishri began singing the following verses:

“The moon, the sun, cosmos, the ocean, etc.-
 All abide by my words;
 Water, earth, fire, air, etc.-
 Even they fear me in their hearts.
 All of them know that whatever is commanded by the great one
 will be fulfilled;
 Such is the power of my words—do you recognise them or not?
 If you truly understand the power of my words,
 Then follow them with wisdom;
 If you do not accept them wholeheartedly,
 Then how can you claim to desire *moksha*?
 You are all wise and have heard many divine discourses;
 Yet, if you disregard even my smallest commands, what will you
 gain?”

When Swamishri finished singing, Shastriji Maharaj asked, “Did you understand the meaning of these words?”

“Yes,” Swamishri replied.

“What did you understand?” Shastriji Maharaj asked.

“The bridge should be twenty-four feet wide.”

Hearing this response, Shastriji Maharaj was immensely pleased. With deep affection, he embraced Swamishri and blessed him immensely.

This incident teaches us an invaluable lesson: True *gurubhakti* lies in setting aside our own reasoning, preferences, and intentions to follow the Guru’s will and inner wish with complete faith and devotion. By creating this situation, Pramukh Swami Maharaj demonstrated the ideal way to practice *gurubhakti*.

Whenever we have to make a decision in our *seva*, we should not rely on our personal opinions, logic, experience, or the views of others. Instead, we should ask ourselves, “What is the wish of the Satpurush? What is his *agna*?” Following this principle is true *gurubhakti*. Only through such *seva* can we attain the Guru’s *rajipo*.

No Seva Too Small

In 1955, the Jal-Jhilani festival was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Sarangpur. Devotees from all over Gujarat had gathered for the occasion. After doing *parna* (breaking fast), everyone dispersed the next day. The sadhus and devotees staying at the mandir also had their lunch and lay down for some rest.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's attendant sadhu, Dharmajivandas Swami, had prepared a bed for Swamishri to rest. As Swamishri lay down, the attendant sadhu also rested nearby. However, after a short while, when the attendant sadhu woke up, he found Swamishri's bed empty. Worried, he immediately sat up and went searching for him.

Looking around, he reached the very back of the mandir premises. What he saw there left him completely astonished! Swamishri had placed his *gatariyu* (upper garment) aside and tucked up his *dhoti* (lower garment). With a coarse broom in one hand and a bucket of water in the other, he was cleaning the general toilets that had become dirty from people using them during the festival.

The attendant sadhu was stunned by the humility and selfless *seva* of the president of the *sanstha*! He immediately ran to Swamishri and tried to stop him, asking, "What are you doing? We will take care of it."

The ever-serving Swamishri simply replied, "Two hands are better than one. You bring the water, and I will continue cleaning." Without hesitation, he resumed scrubbing. Pramukh Swami Maharaj neither ordered anyone nor gave any advice about maintaining cleanliness – he simply led by example.

The scriptures may say, "Selfless service is supremely profound," but for Pramukh Swami Maharaj, *seva* was as natural as breathing! This single incident reveals his humility, deep-rooted spirit of serving like an owner, and boundless enthusiasm even for tasks considered lowly by others.

“One with Such Devotion Can Attain the Ultimate Task”

In 1942, Shastriji Maharaj was in Sarangpur, suffering from severe arthritis pain. As a result, he remained there for nearly a month. One day, he softly mentioned, “If Narayan Swami (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) comes to Sarangpur and recites the Bhaktachintamani *katha*, my health will improve.”

Shastri Narayanswarupdas was overseeing the Atladra Mandir construction site at that time. The moment he heard this, without any delay, he packed his *potalu* (cloth bag), took a fellow sadhu along, and immediately set out for Sarangpur. It was pouring heavily, but no storm could deter Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s determination.

At 3am, he reached Vadodara railway station to board a train for Ahmedabad. However, the train was overcrowded, and due to the rain, all the coach doors were closed. Swamishri went from one coach to another, from the first to the last and then back to the first, but no one opened the door. The train was preparing to depart. With an unwavering resolve to reach Shastriji Maharaj at any cost, Swamishri clung onto the footboard of the third coach behind the engine. As the journey progressed, the difficulties increased. Harsh rain showers, howling winds, and tiny coal embers from the engine hit his thin body. He had to balance his feet on the narrow footboard while ensuring his grip on the railing was firm. Despite enduring these hardships, Swamishri reached Ahmedabad. From Ahmedabad, he managed to find a place to sit. By around 3:30pm, he arrived at Botad station. The exhaustion of travelling all night and into the next afternoon weighed on him. Additionally, the roads from Botad to Sarangpur were flooded, making vehicular travel impossible. Swamishri started walking. At that time, there were no paved roads between Botad and Sarangpur. He walked through muddy paths and flooded fields. The waters of the Vokla River (a small river) surged up to his chest and neck. What lay beneath the water was unknown. Yet, Swamishri kept walking, relying solely on his faith in Shastriji Maharaj.

Seeing his devotion, as if by divine will, a shepherd appeared. He said, “Come, I will help you cross.” Handing Swamishri the end of his wooden staff, he led him through the treacherous waters, guiding him all the way to Sarangpur.

Upon reaching Sarangpur, Swamishri went straight to Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj was resting on a cot. Swamishri, still in his drenched clothes, immediately prostrated before him. Seeing his beloved disciple, Shastriji Maharaj sat up in surprise and asked, “How did you get here in such heavy rain?”

Swamishri's response reflected his unwavering *gurubhakti* in just one sentence, "It was your wish, so I came." He did not utter a single word about his extreme hardships.

Deeply moved by Swamishri's sacrifice, dedication, and love, Shastriji Maharaj was overwhelmed with joy and said, "One with such devotion can attain the ultimate task (Akshardham)..." He then embraced Swamishri, showering him with blessings despite his clothes still being soaked.

When following the Guru's *agna* or serving selflessly, our comfort zone often holds us back. When we face discomfort, we hesitate or slow down. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life teaches us that when we step beyond our comfort zone and serve with boundless enthusiasm and devotion, the Guru's immense blessings and *rajipo* are bestowed upon us.

Acting According to the Guru's Wish

A meeting was being held in Gondal to decide where to celebrate Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav. While Yogiji Maharaj personally wished for it to be held in Gondal, he did not openly express his preference to the senior sadhus and devotees. Mota Swami wanted the celebration in Atladra. Maganbhai, the secretary of the organisation, preferred Bochasan.

At that moment, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who always lived according to Yogiji Maharaj's wishes, firmly stated, "We should celebrate the Amrut Mahotsav in Gondal, as it is Yogiji Maharaj's beloved place."

However, there was a severe water shortage in Gondal at that time. Hearing Pramukh Swami's statement, Mota Swami immediately questioned, "Where will you bring water from during the summer?" Without hesitation, Pramukh Swami Maharaj placed his faith in his Guru and replied, "Bapa is here! He will bring the water!"

This response frustrated Mota Swami even more, and he retorted, "Do you think Bapa has nothing better to do than fetch water?" Unshaken, Pramukh Swami Maharaj boldly declared, "If necessary, I will bring water from Bhadar Dam myself!"

His unwavering determination and deep devotion to fulfilling Yogiji Maharaj's wish led to the final decision: The Amrut Mahotsav would be celebrated in Gondal. After the meeting, Yogiji Maharaj, overwhelmed with joy, blessed Pramukh Swami Maharaj by giving him a hearty pat on his back with both his hands.

Bhadar Dam was approximately 30 km away from Gondal – yet, for one wish of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was ready to arrange a massive pipeline for water supply! The Amrut Mahotsav was organised over 35 acres of land. Pramukh Swami Maharaj took full responsibility for every aspect of the celebration: Water supply, publications (book stall), stage and event setup, guest services and accommodations. He often stayed awake for nights at a time to personally oversee the arrangements. Once, recalling his experience, he humbly remarked, "In Gondal, I never really slept. Just as I was about to lie down, I was called back up! If I sat to eat, I had to get up again in the middle of the meal! But, by Swami's grace, I never felt tired or fell ill."

Despite numerous challenges, Pramukh Swami Maharaj never wavered – his focus remained solely on Yogiji Maharaj's happiness. Often, we get caught up in our planning, desires, and conveniences, forgetting to consider the Guru's will.

But when we set aside our preferences and wholeheartedly follow the Guru's wishes, we receive the true *rajipo* of the Satpurush.

A Guru-Centric Life

In Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life, his Gurus – Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj – were always his main focus.

At Gadhada Mandir, the Kothari, Swami Harijivandas, had a deep reverence for Yogiji Maharaj. However, observing Gondal Mandir’s prosperity against the limited financial resources of the Gadhada Mandir, he often pondered this disparity. He felt that Yogiji Maharaj paid special attention to Gondal Mandir but did not focus as much on Gadhada Mandir.

One day, unable to contain his thoughts, he expressed his concerns to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “Why does no one tell Yogiji Maharaj about this? If no one else does, at least you should. You are the president of the organisation – you should say something.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not respond with authority. Instead, he explained with affectionate understanding, “When we are focused on material aspects, and things don’t go as we wish, we may begin to perceive human traits in the Satpurush (lose faith). We may think, ‘They are not handling things correctly.’ But understand this – Yogiji Maharaj is none other than Shastriji Maharaj! There is not even an iota of a difference between them. And if you speak of my authority—then know this, I have never considered myself to have any authority beyond Yogiji Maharaj’s *agna*. Shastriji Maharaj instructed me to always serve under Yogiji Maharaj’s guidance. Since that day, I have firmly believed that whatever Yogiji Maharaj says is the absolute truth.” Upon hearing this, Harijivandas Swami’s doubts disappeared.

For Pramukh Swami Maharaj, there was never any doubt regarding Yogiji Maharaj’s words or actions.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj possessed a sanctified *mala* from Bhagwan Swaminarayan, given to him by Shastriji Maharaj on Yogiji Maharaj’s request. This *mala* had a sacred connection to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj, and Yogiji Maharaj.

One day, an elderly devotee from Shastriji Maharaj’s time borrowed the *mala* under the pretext of showing it to his relatives – but never returned it. Pramukh Swami Maharaj repeatedly reminded him to return the *mala*, but the

devotee kept making false promises and excuses. Eventually, he told Yogiji Maharaj, “Tell Pramukh Swami to stop asking me for the *mala*.” To please the devotee, Yogiji Maharaj told Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “From now on, do not have any intentions of retrieving the sanctified *mala*.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said, “Since Yogiji Maharaj had said so, I have never again thought about retrieving the *mala*.” Letting go of a cherished possession is never easy. But with just one *agna* from his Guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj erased the *mala* from his heart and memory.

Such detachment and the ability to follow *agna* are only possible in a Guru-centred life. If one’s focus remains on the Guru, his words, *agna*, and preferences, then in satsang and *seva*, there is never confusion, never a question – only clarity and devotion. In the same way, let us centre our lives around Mahant Swami Maharaj and serve him with love and devotion.

“Swami! Your Compassion Knows No Bounds!”

December 6, 1973 – the Ekadashi of Magshar *sud* – became an unforgettable day in history. On this day, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s compassion overflowed in an unprecedented display of love for his devotees. Swamishri was in the village of Vasad and because it was *ekadashi*, as usual he observed it with a strict waterless fast – meaning no food or water throughout the day. At 8:30am, after completing his morning *puja*, a list of *padharamanis* (home visits) was prepared. That day, 15 visits were planned. Everyone estimated that the total visits might extend to 25—but no one could have foreseen the eightfold increase in numbers!

By 2:45pm, when Swamishri finally paused, he had completed an astonishing 122 *padharamanis* – all while maintaining his waterless fast!

By the end of these visits, everyone was exhausted. However, even on a fasting day, Swamishri upheld his discipline of not napping in the afternoon. Instead of resting, he immersed himself in *seva*, reading and responding to letters from devotees. During this time, someone noticed that Swamishri was running a fever of 102°F. Concerned, Dr. Swami asked, “Did the fever just start?” Swamishri replied, “No, I’ve been feeling sick and weak since morning.” Yet, despite his fever and fatigue, he never let anyone know of his discomfort – because his only concern was pleasing his devotees.

At 5:30pm, Swamishri proceeded with his scheduled plans as if nothing had happened. Even though everyone insisted on postponing the programme, he ignored his own suffering, traveling through Oda and Bharoda to reach Sundalpura by 7pm. By then, his body was still burning with fever, but at 9pm, he attended the evening *sabha*, pleasing devotees. Finally, after concluding *cheshta*, he retired to rest at midnight.

Watching Swamishri completely disregard his physical discomfort just to fulfil the wishes of devotees, the accompanying sadhus and devotees couldn’t hold back their emotions. Their hearts sang in praise, “*Kāyā nichovi karyā krutārath, amratnā pānār, Swāmi! Karunā aparampār!*” (O Swami! You exhausted your body for us, fulfilling us showering us with divine nectar – Your compassion knows no bounds!)

Just as a gardener carefully nurtures each flower and plant, Pramukh Swami Maharaj nurtured the hearts of his devotees with the same tender care. On February 18, 1990, the village of Malav in Panchmahal district bore witness to

this divine love. That night, while traveling to Palli village, Swamishri detoured towards Malav – for one reason: The previous day, a young boy named Shambhu had invited Swamishri to his home.

The road to Malav was rugged and bone-jarring, but Swamishri endured the discomfort to keep his promise. Finally, he reached the humble home of the four-year-old child. After completing the *pujan* and *arti*, Swamishri noticed that little Shambhu, distracted and wandering around, had missed the chance to perform *arti*. He gently asked, “Did you do *arti*?” Shambhu replied, “No.” With a warm smile, Swamishri held Thakorji in his own hands and said, “Here, take it – do the *arti* now.” As Shambhu joyfully performed *arti*, his face lit up with happiness. Shambhu was delighted to have welcomed Swamishri into his home. And Swamishri was equally delighted – for he had brought happiness to a child’s heart.

Having visited over 250,000 homes throughout his life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj touched the lives of countless devotees. Even today, when devotees recall his compassion, they can only say, “Pramukh Swami! Your compassion knows no bounds!”

This is Brāhmi-sthiti...

January 25, 1974, was a historic day. It was Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s first trip overseas after becoming the Guru. The day before, they had a huge farewell at Podar College. And even then, thousands of devotees showed up at the airport, hearts heavy, to say goodbye to their beloved Guru. After giving everyone his blessings, Swamishri left for his *vicharan* (spiritual tour).

When the flight from Mumbai landed in Nairobi, Africa, the atmosphere was filled with *jaynads* (hailing of *jays*). Devotees eagerly awaited *darshan* of their beloved Guru. Inside the plane, sadhus and devotees were equally excited to meet the devotees of Africa and experience spiritual bliss. There was an overwhelming sense of joy and anticipation everywhere.

However, within moments, this joy turned into worry and distress. An airport authority officer arrived, holding a document, and announced, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj is not allowed to get off the plane.” Everyone was shocked. For a moment, it felt unbelievable – no one could comprehend what was happening!

Only six sadhus and three devotees were allowed to disembark while the rest had to return. Despite this sudden restriction, Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained completely composed. With a *mala* in hand, he continued chanting calmly and peacefully. He did not argue or question the order. He did not get agitated or upset, even though it was a humiliating moment.

Just then, a second order was issued, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj and everyone else must return – no one is allowed to enter.” Even the luggage that had already been checked through customs was sent back. Inside the plane, everyone was in disbelief. Outside, at the airport, devotees’ faces fell. The garlands they held felt meaningless. Some devotees even fainted from the shock.

Due to a misunderstanding, they had to return on the same plane they came on. Hearts were broken – what was meant to be a joyous occasion had turned into sadness and shame. But amidst all this, Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained unchanged. His *mala* continued to move in his hand. His face held the same serene and composed smile. The same joy that he had when he arrived was present even as he departed. He was neither troubled by the situation, nor disturbed by adversity, nor unsettled by humiliation!

At that moment, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote a profound teaching – words of wisdom in Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami’s diary, “Whatever happens is Shriji Maharaj and Yogi Bapa’s will. One should remain content. However they keep us, we must accept it. Never consider any situation as suffering. Becoming *aksharrup* and offering devotion to God is the path to transcend sorrow.”

These words are like the Vedas, guiding us to stand firm in the storms of life. At that moment, all witnessed the living embodiment of Bhagwan Shri Krishna’s teaching from the Bhagavad Gita: “*Eshā Brāhmi Sthitihī*” – This is the brahmic state, the ultimate state of equanimity.

No Care for His Own Body

In 1977, Pramukh Swami Maharaj did *vicharan* (spiritual travels) in America. When local devotees presented his itinerary, it included several air travel arrangements. Swamishri immediately instructed, “Cancel the flights. We will travel everywhere by car.” This decision was not for his own convenience but out of concern for the devotees’ financial burden. Yet, it meant that Swamishri would have to endure immense hardships. Without considering his physical comfort, he tirelessly travelled across America, a country three times larger than India, spending sleepless nights on the road.

During this journey, Swamishri neither worried about his time nor about his physical limitations. On September 6, 1977, after traveling 250 miles, he arrived in Boston at 11:45 pm. He had spent the entire day traveling on the road, with no afternoon rest and no dinner. Just as he was about to retire for the night, a devotee requested Swamishri to visit his home. Without hesitation, Swamishri agreed and went for to conduct *padharamni* in the nearby town of Arlington. By the time he returned, it was 1:30am!

On September 1, 1977, Swamishri started *padharamnis* (home visits) in the morning after breakfast. By the time he arrived for his lunch in New Haven, it was 4:45pm!

During the same tour, Swamishri travelled from Dallas to Austin just to meet one devotee. After satisfying the devotee, he travelled back to Dallas, arriving at 2:30am!

Once in Philadelphia, he continued doing *padharamnis* until 4am.

On October 10, 1977, Swamishri began one of his most exhausting travel stretches. He covered 400 miles, reaching Kansas City at 3am. The next day, October 11, he travelled 200 miles and had lunch in Wichita at 2pm. That night, he left at 10pm, traveling 450 miles overnight and reached Pueblo, Colorado at 6am on October 12. After a 100-mile morning drive, he arrived in Littleton. That night, he embarked on an 800-mile journey to Las Vegas, leaving at 8pm. October 13: After reaching Las Vegas at 4pm, he continued his travels without rest. After covering 700 miles, he reached Dublin, California at 5:15am on October 14.

In just four days, Swamishri travelled 3,000 miles, spending four consecutive nights in a car!

Swamishri never slept in a car during his travels. Even on overnight journeys, he remained awake. Upon arrival, he immediately resumed his spiritual duties – *padharamnis*, *sabhas*, and discourses. This left no time for rest during the day.

Reflecting on his 1977 *vicharan*, Swamishri once said, “During the 1977 tour, our days began early and ended at midnight or even 1am. Upon arrival, all would be so tired that we would just collapse onto our sleeping mats. We slept, did *puja*, had breakfast and then, *padharamnis* resumed. Lunch was always in a different location, far away, usually at 2 or 3pm. By 4 or 5pm, *padharamnis* started again and continued until midnight.”

In 92 days, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited 29 states and 150 centres and travelled 16,235 miles by car. With no concern for his own body, he undertook this gruelling *vicharan* for us, to bless us, and to uplift us. How can we ever repay such a debt to a Guru like him?

Vicharan: An Endless Journey for Gifting Moksha

What was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's permanent address? There was no fixed answer to this question. "A Sant is someone who travels for the benefit of society." Pramukh Swami Maharaj personified this message in the ancient scriptures of India. He tirelessly travelled without concern for his body, comfort, or time. He traversed over 17,000 villages, outreaching from the humble huts of tribal communities to the grand residences of the wealthy. Regardless of caste, creed, social status, or nationality, he moved across all boundaries. Just as the sacred River Ganga washes away sins and purifies all, Swamishri's *Vicharan*-Ganga cleansed society of vices and addictions wherever he went. Through discourses on righteousness, moral values, and devotion, he transformed thousands of lives and made them truly worth living. For over four decades, without any personal motive, he undertook intense and relentless travels, proving the purity of his heart and his selfless desire to liberate all.

In 1979, Pramukh Swami Maharaj *did vicharan* for a month through tribal villages near Surat.

His purpose? To free the tribals from the grip of addictions and inspire them toward a righteous life. His presence revived their spirits, giving them a new direction in life. At the end of the month-long *vicharan*, his total donation from the tribals was just 49.50 rupees. From there, Swamishri reached Surat, where preparations were underway for the Bicentennial Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Within half an hour, devotees pledged 700,000 rupees in donations for the festival. Someone remarked, "Swami! We spent a whole month in the villages and received just ₹49, while here, in just half an hour, we received ₹7 lakh!" At that moment, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's heart overflowed with his divine vision and selfless love as he replied, "Remember, we do not do *vicharan* for money. In those villages, tribals renounced their addictions, gave up eating meat, and resolved to live a moral life. That, for me, is worth more than billions of rupees."

With such truthfulness and selflessness, Pramukh Swami Maharaj won hearts across the world – from tribal villages to American homes. Thus, it is no wonder that he continues to sit on the throne of countless hearts, even today!

Pramukh Pratigna

On May 21, 1950, a historic event took place in the Ambli Vali Pol of Ahmedabad. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj appointed 28-year-old Shastri Narayanswarupdas as the Pramukh (President) of BAPS. However, what truly made that day immortal was the “*Pramukh Pratigna*” – the solemn vow taken by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His words were, “Today, in front of my Guru 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 until my last breath. You have nurtured this divine Akshar-Purushottam garden; I will persevere daily to ensure its growth with full dedication, care, and relentless effort. I desire to receive the blessings of all in satsang, and I trust that you will also fulfil this wish of mine.”

These words are etched in history in golden letters, as they reflect the lifelong commitment of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. From May 21, 1950, to August 13, 2016 – for 67 years – not a single moment passed where he did not uphold this vow.

On August 29, 1980, in Maryland, USA, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was leaving for his lodging after having a light breakfast. As he was putting on his footwear, he mistakenly placed his right foot in the left shoe. A sadhu noticed this and asked why. Swamishri simply said, “I can’t see clearly.”

Hearing this, the sadhus insisted that he see a doctor immediately, but that very evening, a grand public gathering was scheduled for the Bicentennial Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Swamishri postponed his medical examination to avoid disrupting the devotees’ plans. In reality, he had been suffering from an eye problem for the past nine months, but he endured it so that devotees would not face any financial loss due to disruptions in planned events and any other inconveniences due to the time taken from work. For the next 270 days, Swamishri travelled tirelessly across 329 centres worldwide, despite his worsening condition, because the words of his vow echoed in his heart, “I shall sincerely uphold my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the *sanstha*”.

On July 10, 1994, in Dallas, USA, doctors diagnosed Swamishri with frozen shoulder syndrome. The sadhus were shocked because he had never revealed his pain to anyone. After investigation, they discovered that a month earlier, during a *shibir* at the Pocono Mountains, Swamishri had played cricket and baseball with

balaks and *kishores* to please them. That activity had injured his shoulder muscles, leading to severe swelling. Yet, for an entire month, Swamishri continued his *vicharan*, discourses, mandir inaugurations, and writing letters without showing the slightest sign of pain. Even at age 73, he remained steadfast in his vow, “I shall sincerely uphold my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the *sanstha*”.

On September 22, 1998, a month after undergoing bypass surgery, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Dr. Dayanand Nayak’s clinic for a check-up. At the end of the consultation, the doctor firmly advised, “You must take complete rest until December. No personal meetings. If unavoidable, meet only five people per day. Travel should be completely stopped. If you must, stay in one place for at least a month. Also, deliver discourses only once a week.” Pujya Aksharvatsaldas Swami, who was serving Swamishri, carefully noted these instructions in his daily journal. However, as soon as they got into the car, Swamishri told him, “Do not share the doctor’s instructions with anyone.” Swamishri did not stop there. At the following *sabha*, he asked Aksharvatsaldas Swami to announce, “The doctors have given Swamishri permission to resume his *vicharan* as before!” Swamishri was willing to go against medical advice, even at the risk of his own health, to fulfil his vow, “I shall sincerely uphold my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the *sanstha*”.

On August 9, 2014, Dr. Subrahmaniam, the surgeon who performed Swamishri’s bypass surgery, came for his *darshan* in the USA. Seeing Pramukh Swami Maharaj in America, he was astonished and told the sadhus, “I cannot believe that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is here in front of me in America!” Then, looking at Swamishri, he asked, “How much pain must you have endured on that flight?! You must truly love your devotees.” But for Swamishri, it was never about the pain – it was always about his vow, his devotion, and his selfless love for devotees.

Even after leaving his physical body, he still gave *darshan* for four days so that devotees from distant lands could see him one last time. His “*Pramukh Pratigna*” remained immortal! Today, that same Pramukh Swami Maharaj has manifested before us in the form of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Now, it is our responsibility to make a vow of our own, “I shall sincerely uphold my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the *sanstha*.” And, like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we must live by that vow until our last breath.

Purushottam Bolya Prite

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 13, Shriji Maharaj speaks about his supreme divine form. Before revealing these truths, he clarifies, “What I am about to say to you, I say not out of any pretence, or out of any self-conceit, or to spread my own greatness. Rather, it is because I feel that amongst all of you sadhus and devotees, if someone can understand my message, it will tremendously benefit that person; that is my purpose in sharing it.”

Even when Bhagwan manifests on Earth, people often fail to recognise him due to their *mayik* (mundane) perception. Without realising the true form of Bhagwan, one cannot attain liberation. That is why, out of compassion, Bhagwan and the Gunatit Sant reveal their true identity when the time is right.

On August 8, 1991, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was travelling by plane with his sadhus from Lilongwe to Dar es Salaam (in Africa). During the flight, Shukmunidas Swami asked Swamishri, “Bapa! You just spoke about singing the glory of Bhagwan. However, how should we understand you?”

Swamishri clearly and firmly replied, his voice resonating even over the roar of the aircraft, “Purna Purushottam Narayan, Shriji Maharaj, is supreme and manifests fully in every pore (of the Satpurush), a constant, eternal vessel in which Shriji Maharaj resides.”

He continued, “You sing the kirtan ‘*Sant te swayam hari...*’ (Such a Sant is God himself). Bhagwan sees through the Sant’s eyes, hears through the Sant’s ears, and speaks through the Sant’s words. There is no difference at all! The body may appear separate, but in reality, it is Shriji Maharaj himself. There is no attachment, hatred, or flaw – only a pure and divine heart. Though the Sant may appear human and show human-like traits, he remains transcendental. This is the highest conviction! True *satsang* means to develop such unwavering conviction. Our attachment, love, and *atmabuddhi* (an intense emotional bond that culminates in oneness) should be only here, nowhere else! This is the ultimate truth. This is Shriji Maharaj himself. If this conviction is firm, one will never drift away. One will remain ever committed in following Guru’s *agna*, never acting on personal desires. One will constantly see divinity in everything without doubt or hesitation. Others may claim, ‘I am not *antaryami* (all-knowing),’ but ‘I am *antaryami*.’ Whatever you do, wherever you go – even to the farthest corners of the world – I see it all.”

Ordinarily, a Satpurush makes great efforts to conceal his divine powers. But on rare occasions, he reveals his true form out of sheer grace. Hearing these powerful words from Swamishri, everyone present there witnessed “*Purushottam Bolya Prite*” (Bhagwan speaking out of love) first-hand.

This very divine form of Bhagwan is present before us today in the form of Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj. To serve and worship him with such firm conviction is the essence of true *satsang*.

Humility Personified

In 1994, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 74th birthday celebration was held in Mehsana. He also gifted the city a magnificent *shikharbaddh* mandir on this same occasion.

The following evening, Narayanmunidas Swami, Rushirajdas Swami, and other sadhus approached Swamishri with a proposal, "Tomorrow, after the birthday assembly, we plan to have devotees come for personal *darshan* in four rows."

Since thousands of devotees were expected to come for *darshan*, this arrangement was made to save time so that Swamishri could return to his quarters without delay. But Swamishri was not pleased with this plan. He asked, "How can four people come together at once?"

The sadhus replied, "Why not? If two people can come at once, then four can too."

Swamishri remained silent. His displeasure was evident. He felt that this arrangement would not allow him to meet each devotee properly. He was not concerned about his time or his meals – his only concern was that devotees should feel satisfied.

Noticing Swamishri's reaction, the sadhus who had proposed the idea felt uneasy. They assured him, "We will do as you prefer, Swamishri."

But Swamishri, embodying humility, responded with wisdom, "Gunatitanand Swami has said, 'To do as the Sant says is best. To do as per one's own wish is worst.' So, what you all have decided is the right thing to do."

Despite being the guru, Swamishri chose to follow the wishes of his disciples, leaving them deeply touched by his humility. However, sensing his preference, they modified the arrangement to allow devotees to come in two rows instead of four.

The next morning, on his 74th birthday, Swamishri gave Narayanmunidas Swami a flower from his *puja* and said, "I thought about it all night. You all must have put great effort into planning this, and it is not right for me to change it. So, let it be as you originally arranged."

On a day when thousands of devotees gathered to honour him, it was Swamishri's humility that left everyone bowing their heads in admiration.

Eternally Pure

In 1995, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in London with 100 sadhus to spread the glory of Akshar-Purushottam in the Western Hemisphere. The magnificent, intricately carved *shikharbaddh* mandir, embodying the values of Sanatan Hindu culture, left even local Europeans in awe. Many were drawn not only to the mandir but also to its divine creator – Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

One such admirer was Melvin, an Afro-Caribbean worker involved on the mandir site. Upon hearing about Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vow of celibacy, he was astonished that someone in the modern day and age could uphold such a strict discipline of lifelong celibacy.

One day, as Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived to inspect the mandir, Melvin eagerly approached him. Bowing down at Swamishri’s feet, he asked, “Since how many years are you observing this rule of not seeing women?”

Before Pramukh Swami Maharaj could reply, Brahmaviharidas Swami, who stood nearby, answered, “For 60 years.” This rough calculation was based on Swamishri’s initiation as a swami at the age of 17. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj immediately corrected him, saying, “No, tell him – 75 years.” (i.e., He has not had such desires since birth; his age at the time was 75).

Hearing this, Melvin and everyone present were left speechless. In Swamishri’s words, they could hear the echo of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s divine words, “From the day I was born to this very day, I remain eternally flawless. (Vachanamrut Gadhada II 33)

Such was Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s lifelong purity. The virtues of the Aksharbrahma Gunatit Satpurush are not cultivated through effort or practice—they exist within them as eternal. Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj is also such an eternally perfect Aksharbrahma Satpurush.

The Ideal of Selfless Seva

On January 26, 2001, at 8:46am local time, a devastating earthquake struck Bhuj and the entire state of Gujarat, leaving the region in turmoil. At the time, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Bochasan. Realising the gravity of the disaster, he immediately instructed urgent relief efforts to reach the affected people.

Within just an hour and fifteen minutes of the earthquake, the BAPS Mandir in Bhuj set up its first relief kitchen, serving hot meals to 4,000 affected individuals. This marked the beginning of a well-organised, long-term humanitarian effort, setting an ideal example of selfless service.

One day, while overseeing the preparation of food packets for earthquake victims at Atladra Mandir, Pramukh Swami Maharaj personally visited the kitchen. He noticed that each food packet contained 150 grams of *ganthiya* and 75 grams of *boondi*. Observing this, he thoughtfully suggested to the head cook, “Add two pickled chilies to each packet. People from the Kutch region enjoy spicy food. Also, it will enhance the taste.” He also emphasised the importance of cleanliness, instructing that grains should be thoroughly cleaned before use and that only filtered water should be used for cooking.

Despite overseeing large-scale relief operations, Swamishri paid great attention to even the most minor details. The extent of his thoughtfulness became evident when he ensured that the relief kits for earthquake victims included nail clippers, brooms for cleaning homes, clothes lines for drying clothes, and even *chandla* packets for women. For the first time in history, essential everyday items like these were included in relief supplies – something rarely seen in government or NGO-led efforts. The reason? Pramukh Swami Maharaj truly understood people’s needs at a personal level.

A world-renowned Reuters news agency senior officer visited the relief camps and praised Swamishri’s unique approach to disaster relief, saying, “I have participated in relief efforts in South Africa, Turkey, and many other natural disaster zones. But I have never seen a relief camp like this because you serve people’s needs and emotions.”

Under Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s guidance, 6,500 volunteers and 180 sadhus tirelessly provided relief aid across 409 villages and 107 urban areas in Bhuj and Morbi. At 11 major sites, relief kitchens served 40,000 meals daily,

ensuring that no one went hungry. Over the course of one and a half months, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's humanitarian efforts fed 1.8 million people!

During one such relief effort, a truck carrying supplies met with a terrible accident near Anjar. Two sadhus were severely injured, and one of them lost consciousness. Needing urgent medical attention, they rushed to a nearby temporary hospital run by an international relief organisation. But to their shock, the staff there refused to provide treatment, coldly stating, "We only treat earthquake victims, not accident victims."

Despite repeated pleas to save a dying sadhu, the hospital staff remained firm in their heartless decision. Due to the delay in medical care, the injured sadhu passed away. This outraged everyone, mainly because the same organisation's 450 employees were eating daily at the BAPS relief camp! The volunteers decided, "The next time they come to eat, we should tell them – our kitchen is only for earthquake victims, not others." But when Pramukh Swami Maharaj learned about the incident, his response reflected his saintly nature and boundless compassion. He gently calmed everyone and said, "Even if they refused to help us, we must still serve them and offer our support."

At a moment of deep sorrow, having lost a sadhu who was like his own child, Swamishri chose forgiveness and service over retaliation – a true testament to his spiritual greatness and universal love.

Akshardham Response

September 24, 2002, is etched in history in two ways—first, as the day of the tragic terrorist attack on Gandhinagar Akshardham, and second, as a testament to Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s profound stability and unwavering compassion, even in the face of terror.

When a brutal act of terrorism hits home, it is natural to feel fear and turmoil. But instead of succumbing to distress, Swamishri remained calm and focused, guiding devotees and well-wishers toward peace. His ability to maintain serenity, empathise with the suffering, and inspire self-restraint was not that of an ordinary human – it was the mark of a divine being.

At 4:50pm, while Swamishri was in Sarangpur, he received the shocking news via phone. At that moment, he was engrossed in a meeting regarding Kutch’s earthquake relief and rehabilitation efforts. Without even a hint of panic, he simply said, “Terrorists are in Akshardham. There’s been a lot of violence. Let’s all pray that no one else gets hurt, that peace returns, and that they catch the people responsible.”

He then immediately immersed himself in prayer. Calls began pouring in from the President of India and dignitaries around the world, offering their condolences and concern. Meanwhile, Swamishri stayed in constant contact with those handling the crisis in Gandhinagar. By 9pm, almost all visitors had been safely evacuated except those in the multimedia theatre. Due to the continued gunfire from the terrorists, officials decided to keep the remaining visitors safe inside overnight.

When Swamishri was informed of this late at night, he promptly arranged for them to have water, tea, snacks, and restroom facilities—displaying leadership and deep personal care for every soul affected by the incident.

Even amid this chaos, Swamishri remained vigilant about one crucial aspect—ensuring that the response to the attack did not spiral into revenge-driven violence. He stayed awake the entire night, closely monitoring the situation. At 12:35am, he was informed that a young sadhu, Pujya Parmeshwardas Swami, had been killed by the terrorists’ bullets. Swamishri deeply grieved for the loss. But in that exact moment, his mind also foresaw the potential consequences. When people learn that a sadhu has been killed, their emotions will surge. Anger will rise, and Gujarat may once again descend into unrest. Realising this, Swamishri

immediately issued appeals for peace through newspapers and television. His appeal had an extraordinary impact. For two consecutive days, Gujarat and India observed a voluntary shutdown. Even a vast metropolis like Mumbai came to a standstill. World leaders grew concerned – Would this shutdown trigger further violence? But to everyone’s astonishment, Swamishri’s call for peace prevailed. Even in sensitive regions like Ahmedabad, there was no major outbreak of violence. People demonstrated immense restraint, and leaders worldwide credited Swamishri for this remarkable outcome.

The attack on Akshardham, a revered place of worship, was an intolerable atrocity for many. It was a painful strike against Hindu sentiments. However, Swamishri’s voice remained calm and unifying, “This is a time for unity and compassion. Pray that such brutality never occurs anywhere, to anyone.” For him, the well-being of all humanity was of the utmost importance.

A well-known leader of a major organisation told Swamishri, “Swami! If you had even slightly indicated otherwise, people would have reacted violently. But because of your appeal, Gujarat and India remain at peace today.”

At an international conference on terrorism in Germany, world experts praised Swamishri’s calm and patient approach, coining the term “Akshardham Response” to describe his extraordinary handling of terrorism through peace, stability, and nonviolence.

Even when disasters strike, our Gurus have taught us how to respond—with unwavering faith, unshakable stability, and universal compassion. This is the proper response to adversity – the Akshardham Response.

Not Even the Weight of a Pebble

In 2003, the construction of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi was in full swing. The land stretched for acres, covered with mountains of stones, symbolising the immensity of the project.

In this context, Pujya Brahnavihari Swami once remarked to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “Swami! Even if these stones were given as a gift to someone, they would be overwhelmed because how is one to manage such a vast and complex project? Whereas you are handling everything with such a worry-free mind and yet in such an organised manner.”

Swamishri calmly smiled and replied, “There are so many stones here, yet I don’t feel even a pebble’s weight on my chest. Because I am not the one doing anything. Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Guru Yogiji Maharaj arrange everything. It all happens by their will.”

Swamishri possessed the extraordinary ability to make mountains of responsibility feel lighter than a pebble – by believing that Bhagwan is the true doer. This belief kept him completely free from worries.

Swamishri didn’t just say “Bhagwan and Guru do everything” as a formality. It was an absolute conviction deeply rooted in his being. He found it difficult to even listen to any words contradicting this truth.

After the completion of Akshardham, sadhus naturally praised him, saying, “Swami, you have accomplished an extraordinary feat.” But Swamishri immediately rejected this notion and explained to everyone, “Everything was done by Bhagwan and the Guru.”

The sadhus, however, knew that he was the one who had tirelessly worked to bring this grand vision to life. So, they remained steadfast in their praise. One day, while alone in the bathroom, Swamishri was overheard saying to himself, “I am trying so hard to make people understand that Bhagwan is the doer, and I do nothing. But why don’t they understand that and accept it?”

The attendant sadhu, who heard this, was left astonished. What was even more surprising was that Swamishri’s eyes welled up with tears, feeling pained that people credited him for what was truly Bhagwan’s work. One can offer all

honours to Bhagwan in public, but to feel the guilt in private for even unintentionally receiving credit – that is true humility and devotion!

Sadguru Santvallabh Swami, a senior sadhu from Shastriji Maharaj’s time, used to say, “If anyone were to sit in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s position for even one day, managing the responsibilities of this organisation, they would go insane!” Yet, in the midst of such an overwhelming workload, Swamishri remained light-hearted and at peace.

On September 4, 1994, in London, someone asked him, “Swami, with so many responsibilities, how do you stay so fresh and energetic?”

Swamishri humbly replied, “I do everything as per Bhagwan’s *agna*. I don’t take anything upon myself. Without the feeling of ‘I am doing this,’ one remains absorbed in Bhagwan and the Guru. If something is gained, then it is Bhagwan’s wish. If something is lost, then it is Bhagwan’s wish. When you accept this, there is no burden, only peace.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who accomplished unparalleled feats, lived by one unwavering principle, “The Guru and Bhagwan alone are the doer and giver. What are we to claim?” His life teaches us how to transform massive mental burdens into something as insignificant as a pebble.

The key is simple, “Bhagwan is the doer, and whatever happens is for my good.” When we genuinely believe this, we will experience peace, and through us, others will find peace as well.

The Permanent Project

In 2005, with the inauguration of Delhi Akshardham, BAPS entered a new era. Recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records as the “World’s Largest Comprehensive Hindu Temple,” the Delhi Akshardham mesmerised the world by being completed in just five years.

Reader’s Digest listed Delhi Akshardham among “The Seven Wonders of the 21st Century.” Every eminent personality who visited showered endless praises upon Pramukh Swami Maharaj for this remarkable achievement.

Before the grand inauguration, during public assemblies, dignitaries lavishly praised Swamishri, and he was honoured with numerous awards. But Swamishri, who remained detached like a lotus in water, would calmly turn his *mala*, unaffected by the accolades. His mind remained immersed in the remembrance of Bhagwan because, to him, Akshardham was not a world-record-breaking monument but an embodiment of devotion to Bhagwan and Guru.

A defining moment came on November 24, 2005, when world-renowned heart surgeon Dr. Subrahmanyam visited Swamishri. After experiencing Akshardham, he said, “As soon as I entered Akshardham, I felt a deep sense of peace, as if all other concerns had simply disappeared.”

Then, he asked Swamishri a heartfelt question, “Swami, what is your next project?”

Swamishri humbly replied, “To spread satsang, to engage in and inspire others to worship God, to bring peace to the world, to cultivate faith and good values in people – that is my ongoing project. These mandirs are just a by-product of that.”

For Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Delhi Akshardham was merely one small aspect of his ultimate project – devotion to Bhagwan. His sole mission in life was to do *bhakti* and inspire others to do the same. *Bhajan* was his profession, his *mala* was his wealth, and Bhagwan was his everything.

Thus, it is no surprise that his work manifested divine wonders for the world to see. In the same way, when we prioritise Bhagwan over activities in our own lives, our *seva* truly becomes meaningful.

Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj

Complete Surrender to the Guru's Words

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was in Gondal, where a *seva* was underway to clean out a heap of waste. Yogiji Maharaj instructed the sadhus to participate in this *seva*. All the sadhus were filling baskets with waste and emptying them into a tractor.

Amid this, Yogiji Maharaj suddenly asked, “Where is Mahant Swami?” Someone replied, “Swami has a high fever of 103°F, so he is resting.”

Hearing this, Yogiji Maharaj instructed, “Call him. If he does *seva*, his fever will go away.”

Some of those present wondered, “How can Yogiji Maharaj call him for such laborious *seva* while he has such a high fever? And how can *seva* cure a fever?”

However, upon hearing Yogiji Maharaj's wish, Mahant Swami Maharaj immediately obeyed without any second thoughts. With his frail, feverish body, he joined the physically demanding task of shovelling waste and continued so for two hours!

Even for a healthy person, this task would have been physically exhausting. Yet, Mahant Swami Maharaj, burning with fever, dedicated himself to it completely. Later, recalling this incident, Mahant Swami Maharaj humbly remarked, “Yogi Bapa had said, ‘The fever will go away if you do *seva*.’ But the fever never actually went away! However, the memory of that *seva* has remained with me forever.”

Despite the fever not subsiding, he never doubted his Guru's words. Instead, his focus remained solely on pleasing Yogiji Maharaj. Through this, Mahant Swami Maharaj demonstrated unwavering obedience to his Guru – to the extent of enduring physical exhaustion without question. When we develop such eagerness to serve and please our Guru, we earn their divine blessings and *rajipo*.

A Disciple's *Jodan* Through *Divyabhav*

After receiving *Parshadi Diksha*, Mahant Swami Maharaj was known as Vinu Bhagat. From 1957 to 1960, Yogiji Maharaj kept him as his beloved personal attendant. Before taking *diksha*, Vinu Bhagat had experienced immense love from Yogiji Maharaj, and he believed that after initiation, his bond with Yogiji Maharaj would grow even stronger.

However, for the first three months after *diksha*, things were very different. Yogiji Maharaj deliberately distanced himself from Vinu Bhagat, behaving as if he did not even recognise him.

After about three months, Vinu Bhagat travelled with Yogiji Maharaj to Bhavnagar. That day was Hari Jayanti, and everyone was fasting. Unable to sleep at night due to the fast, Yogiji Maharaj woke up and approached Vinu Bhagat. He gently woke him up and said, “Since neither of us can sleep, let’s do *goshthi*.”

That night, Yogiji Maharaj lovingly conversed with him for a long time. In the end, he said, “You have passed the test!” Yogiji Maharaj then showered his blessings, saying, “I bless you with the merits of doing 178,000 *malas*.” Since it had been 178 years since Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s birth, Yogiji Maharaj symbolically gifted this merit with immense affection.

Throughout those three difficult months, Mahant Swami Maharaj never once doubted Yogiji Maharaj’s actions. He never wondered, “Why did Yogiji Maharaj suddenly stop talking to me after showering me with love before?” Instead, he saw everything as Yogiji Maharaj’s divine *lila*. Years later, on Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 95th birthday, Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed his feelings in a prayer, “Swami! Whether you speak or remain silent, whether you look at me or not, whether you smile or not – everything feels divine!”

This vision of seeing everything divine in his Guru was not something Mahant Swami Maharaj had developed later in life – it had been a part of him from the very beginning.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj instructed Vinu Bhagat to fast for five consecutive days without water. Even after five days, Vinu Bhagat did not question his Guru’s decision. He was even prepared to continue fasting on the sixth day. Reflecting on this incident, Mahant Swami Maharaj once said, “At worst, what would have

happened? The body would have perished. But as long as Yogiji Maharaj was pleased, that's all that mattered to me.”

On the sixth day, Yogiji Maharaj himself woke up early to prepare food and personally served him – expressing immense *rajipo* at Mahant Swami Maharaj's obedience and faith.

Mahant Swami Maharaj exemplified how a disciple should have complete *jodan* (deep bond) with unwavering faith and *divyabhav* in the guru. When such a deep bond is established with the guru, there is nothing left to attain – one experiences a constant state of fulfilment.

Do Not Make Hasty Decisions

Yogiji Maharaj had initiated nine educated young men as sadhus, granting them *Bhagwati Diksha*. In the early days, these sadhus resided in Kandivali, Mumbai. One afternoon, an elderly man arrived while all the sadhus were eating. He stood there for a while, observing the sadhus as they ate.

Seeing him, the sadhus began making assumptions internally, “It’s lunchtime, so he must have come for food.” Each sadhu, in his own way, jumped to conclusions about why the elderly man was there. However, one sadhu did not rush to judgment – Mahant Swami Maharaj. He neither spoke nor joined in the assumptions of the others.

After finishing his meal, Mahant Swami Maharaj approached the elderly man and engaged in conversation. During their discussion, the elderly man revealed his real reason for coming, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan instructed sadhus to eat in a *pattar* (wooden bowl). But I had never witnessed this practice. When I heard that Yogiji Maharaj’s sadhus follow this tradition, I came here just to witness them eating in *pattars*.”

When Mahant Swami Maharaj shared this with the other sadhus, they realised their mistake. They had all assumed different reasons for the man’s presence, but in reality, he had come only out of reverence and devotion.

Often, we judge people hastily based on their external appearance or actions. Without fully understanding the situation, we make assumptions and misjudge their character, leading us to see faults where none exist. However, just as Mahant Swami Maharaj avoided making assumptions and took the time to understand the man’s true intent, we should also refrain from hasty judgments and take a moment to assess situations carefully and appreciate the goodness in others.

“May I Go for *Padharamani*?”

In 1990, Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj embarked on a spiritual tour across North America. Since a large number of sadhus accompanied him, he personally established some guidelines for smoother arrangements. One such directive from Pramukh Swami Maharaj was, “If any sadhu wishes to go for *padharamani* to a devotee’s house, he must first inform Pujya Gnaneshwar Swami and seek his approval.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj was also a part of this tour. During the journey, a *padharamani* was arranged for Mahant Swami Maharaj in New York. In adherence to the established guidelines, he approached Pujya Gnaneshwar Swami to seek permission, humbly asking, “May I go for *padharamani*?”

Hearing this, Pujya Gnaneshwar Swami was stunned. He immediately expressed his disbelief, saying, “Swami! This guideline was meant for the other sadhus, not for you. You are a Sadguru Sant! You do not need to ask me for permission.”

However, Mahant Swami Maharaj replied with deep humility, “Swamibapa has given an instruction, so I must also follow it!”

Positions of authority, seniority, or prestige can subtly inflate one’s ego, creating a sense of superiority over others. But here, Mahant Swami Maharaj – a highly revered Sadguru Sant—did not consider himself above the rule. Instead, he demonstrated complete humility and obedience, just as other sadhus would.

Such utmost dedication to even the smallest instructions is a testament to true servitude and discipline. If we also develop this level of obedience (*agnapalan*) and humility, the Satpurush will be pleased with us.

“I Do Not Need Any Other Taste”

Mahant Swami Maharaj’s meals are completely devoid of taste—no salt, no spices. For years, he has eaten only boiled food, without pepper or seasoning, and the same meal every day. There has been no variety in his diet for decades!

In the year 2001, a group of *balaks* and *kishores* from North America visited India on a spiritual journey. During their visit, they saw Mahant Swami Maharaj eating in Bochasan. Curiously, the children asked, “What are you eating?”

Swamishri pointed toward his *pattar* (wooden bowl) and asked, “Would you like to taste it?”

The children were delighted, expecting to experience something delicious. Swamishri took a small portion of *parvalnu shak* (pointed gourd curry) from his plate and gave it to one of the *balaks* on a spoon.

Excitedly, the child took a bite, but the moment it touched his tongue, he spat it out, blurting out, “Thoo... Thoo...!” The *shak* was completely tasteless!

Shocked, the *balak* asked, “How do you enjoy eating something so utterly flavourless?” With enthusiasm, Mahant Swami Maharaj replied, “I have had the joy of meeting Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. That itself is enough—I do not need any other taste.”

Most people seek variety in food, but Mahant Swami Maharaj never even thinks about it. He has no requests and no complaints. His meals follow a strict routine – same food, same portion, same order, every day. Through Mahant Swami Maharaj, we witness true detachment from taste, because his joy does not come from food, but from Bhagwan. He eats only to sustain the body, but his true nourishment comes from devotion to Bhagwan’s *murti*.

“Please Forgive Me”

In 2001, a group of children from North America visited India on a spiritual trip. During their stay in Bochasan, Mahant Swami Maharaj was scheduled to give a discourse. His topic was “Swamibapa – Our Best Friend.”

A defining quality of Mahant Swami Maharaj is his deep commitment to any task he undertakes. Whenever he is assigned a topic for *katha*, he thoroughly contemplates, reflects, and prepares meticulously to ensure it is presented with clarity. To prepare for this particular *katha*, he travelled to Nadiad for focused study. Knowing that American children enjoy engaging presentations, he decided to make it more interactive. He personally drew 30–40 illustrations and even prepared a PowerPoint presentation to make it more visually appealing.

With such extensive preparation, Mahant Swami Maharaj began his discourse in Bochasan. However, the children were exhausted from the long journey. As a result, many dozed off during the talk, and some even lay down and fell into a deep sleep!

After completing the *katha*, Swamishri travelled to Atladra. From there, he wrote a heartfelt letter of apology to the children, “I am truly sorry that I could not convey what was in my heart. It must have felt like a punishment to you. Secondly, you are not accustomed to such long and difficult discourses, so that was another punishment. Thirdly, your knees must have been in pain, as I noticed how uncomfortable you were sitting cross-legged. My talks are never this long. This was my first attempt at using a slide presentation, and I could not manage the time well. This will not happen again. Please forgive me.”

Even though none of this was Swamishri’s fault, he took all the blame upon himself and sincerely apologised!

Years later, when someone asked Mahant Swami Maharaj, “Did you not feel that, as an elder, you should not have to apologise to young children?” he humbly replied, “It’s not about being big or small. In satsang, we must become *das na das* (a servant of a servant). Even if a child is young, we must be willing to serve him and become his servant.”

On another occasion, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “Asking for forgiveness should be without hesitation. Even Pramukh Swami Maharaj has asked for

forgiveness despite not making any mistakes! From him, we have learned that this is the best path – the path of peace.”

Often, even when we are at fault, we struggle to apologise. But here, Swamishri teaches us that even if it's not our fault, seeking forgiveness can resolve countless conflicts – whether in management, our satsang community, or within our own families. By following in Mahant Swami Maharaj's footsteps, let us also strive to walk the path of unity and peace.

“I’ve Never Made a Fixed Plan...”

In 2013, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Jaipur. He was going from house to house, doing *padharamanis* and blessing devotees. As the number of *padharamanis* increased, the schedule was delayed. The local sadhus received phone calls from the attendant sadhus, saying, “Please bring Mahant Swami Maharaj back to the mandir as soon as possible, and cancel all further *padharamanis*, because Swamishri’s meal and rest are being delayed.” However, even at the age of 80, Mahant Swami Maharaj was visiting each home with such immense love and care, that no devotee wanted their *padharamani* cancelled. So, he continued visiting homes until 1pm.

Finally, when he reached the mandir, a devotee came running to him, saying, “Swami! My home was left out during your *padharamani*!”

His house was undergoing some minor renovations, so local sadhus tried to explain that they would visit in the future. But Mahant Swami Maharaj gently pressed the local sadhu’s hand and said, “Come on, let’s go to his house for *padharamani*.”

Without a second thought, instead of going to his room for his delayed meal, he walked towards the car, signalling the accompanying sadhus to join him. Skipping his meal, he went to the devotee’s home, making him happy.

After about half an hour, he returned to the mandir and sat for his meal. A sadhu curiously asked him, “Swami, don’t you ever feel tired and bothered in such situations?”

With utmost simplicity, Mahant Swami Maharaj replied, “I’ve never made a fixed plan that I must do things a certain way. Yogi Bapa taught us to do what makes all the sadhus and devotees happy.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj has dedicated his entire life to the sadhus and devotees. He never prioritises or considers his own time, body, or convenience – he lives solely for us. While we try to please him, in reality, he is the one constantly striving to keep us happy!

Your Shoes, My Head

On August 13, 2016, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed away, the entire world's attention turned to Mahant Swami Maharaj. As the new leader of BAPS and the spiritual guide of millions of devotees, the weight of immense responsibility now rested upon his shoulders. Yet, Swamishri remained completely detached from this burden. His speech, behaviour, and actions were just as humble and simple as those of any other sadhu in the organisation. His unwavering stability and saintliness stood out to everyone.

During this time, while Swamishri was in Sarangpur, a devotee light-heartedly remarked to him, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj entrusted you with this responsibility. Just as Swamibapa travelled extensively, so have you. Just as he pleased both sadhus and devotees, so have you. We have witnessed both of these qualities in you. But there's one thing we have yet to see – whether the divine glory and powers that Pramukh Swami possessed have manifested in you."

In response, Mahant Swami Maharaj firmly stated, "If you ever find even the slightest flaw in my observance of the five vows, then you can place your shoes upon my head (act of showing the ultimate dishonour)! But as for divine powers and miracles, I have no understanding of them."

Who else can say with such unshakable confidence that, after over five decades of monastic life, they have never wavered even slightly in their spiritual vows? For a Sant of such immaculate purity, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 26, "He is staunch in his observance of the five religious vows; and believing himself to be *brahmarup*, he worships Purushottam Bhagwan. Such a Sant should not be thought of as a human being, nor should he be thought of as a deity, because such behaviour is not possible for either humans or deities. Indeed, even though that Sant appears to be human, he is still worthy of being worshipped on par with God."

How fortunate are we to have the association of such a Sant, who is truly worthy of being served like Bhagwan.

Forever a Servant

On October 2, 2016, in Nadiad, during Mahant Swami Maharaj's lunch, students residing in the hostel gathered for his *darshan*. As the meal concluded, the youths approached Swamishri and said, "Swami! Today, we want to recreate a historic moment."

They then sang a Qawwali that had once been presented before Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The lyrics were, "The sun asks, the moon asks, the stars shining in the sky ask... Who is Pramukh Swami? Who is Mahant Swami?"

After completing the devotional song, the students asked Swamishri, "Swami! When this Qawwali was sung before Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he described himself by saying, 'Pramukh Swami is a Sant, a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and a disciple of Yogiji Maharaj.' So today, Swami, we request you to reveal who Mahant Swami is."

The entire audience waited eagerly. A microphone was placed before Swamishri, and without a moment's hesitation, he replied, "*Das na das*" (A servant of a servant). This profound moment of humility and servitude was etched in everyone's hearts.

For a Satpurush, servitude is not a learned virtue but an inherent way of life. Despite being the guru of millions, he does not see himself as a guru. Despite being Aksharbrahma manifest, he does not hesitate in bowing at the feet of devotees. Swamishri firmly believes, "Everyone is greater than me, and I am the lowest." Through his thoughts, words, and actions, he constantly inspires us to cultivate the same spirit of selfless servitude in satsang. Mahant Swami Maharaj often says, "*Dasbhav* (feeling of servitude) – The Expressway to Akshardham." If our Guru chooses to be *das na das*, then as disciples, should we not strive to be *das* as well?

“Infinite Universes Are Governed from Here!”

On April 15, 2018, Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Hong Kong, staying on the 46th floor of the Harbour Front Landmark building.

During a light meal, Swamishri, without any context or reference, gestured toward the towering skyscrapers outside and said, “So many people live in these buildings, but no one knows what is happening inside this room.” The accompanying sadhus were taken aback. They tried to grasp the deeper meaning behind Swamishri’s words – “No one knows what is happening inside this room.”

“But what does he mean?” they wondered.

Then, with a gentle smile, Swamishri calmly revealed, “Infinite universes are governed from here!”

The sadhus were stunned. Before they could even process the gravity of this statement, Swamishri effortlessly shifted the conversation, saying, “Gadhada was located out of sight. King Vajesinh had no idea that from there, the rule of infinite universes was being governed.” With this, Swamishri redirected the focus entirely toward Shriji Maharaj. He continued, “In IMAX, they show how Nilkanth Varni walked past so many people. The Supreme Bhagwan, the highest authority, the one above all – He passed right by them, yet no one recognised him!”

As he spoke, his face showed expressions of great wonder. Returning to the moment, Swamishri then boldly expressed, “Others couldn’t recognise him, but we – we have met that very same, the very same Supreme Bhagwan, in person!”

At first glance, Mahant Swami Maharaj appears to be an ordinary sadhu. He acts so simply that we find it hard to believe, ‘This Swami, who walks with the support of attendant sadhus, is Aksharbrahma? Such is his glory! He is the very form of Parabrahma?’

But once, in an assembly, Swamishri himself explained, “Just as a billionaire possesses countless riches but does not go around displaying them, or a world champion remains a champion even if he does not constantly demonstrate his skill – similarly, a Satpurush does not always reveal his divine glory. He lives humbly, suppressing his immense power.” Yet, at times, out of grace on his disciples, to reinforce faith in his true form, or sometimes spontaneously he reveals his glory and spiritual power. If we can truly grasp his words and wholeheartedly believe in his divinity, then an abundance of divine joy will fill our lives.

Where Can One Find a Guru Like This?

“Oh, my beloved volunteers! You have all done something incredible. There are no words to describe it.”

“Shriji Maharaj is so immensely pleased – beyond what you can even comprehend! You have truly achieved something extraordinary!”

“During the main *arti* of the inauguration, I will remember all of you... This inauguration is happening today because of the 12,000 volunteers. Now, my wish is to personally perform *arti* of all of you.”

These words come from a heartfelt letter written by Swamishri to the volunteers who served in the construction of North America Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ. As these words spread among the volunteers, their hearts filled with deep emotions. Swamishri had shifted all credit for the grand construction of Akshardham onto the volunteer devotees.

Taking Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vision as his own, Mahant Swami Maharaj became the guiding force behind the completion of this enormous project. It was his one call that inspired thousands of devotees to leave behind their homes, businesses, and responsibilities to dedicate themselves to this selfless service. Everyone who had been a part of this journey felt one thing deeply – it was only through Mahant Swami Maharaj’s divine presence, grace, and blessings that Akshardham became a reality before their eyes. Yet, despite being the very reason for its success, he gave all credit to the volunteers!

During a special volunteers’ assembly, Pujya Narayanmunidas Swami, with great emotion, humbly requested Swamishri, “Please, don’t put the dust of our feet on your head, just do darshan of it and bless us all.” Yet Swamishri could not hold back. He bowed and took the sacred dust from the volunteers’ feet on his head. Witnessing this divine moment, tears flowed freely from the eyes of all present. Each heart echoed a single thought – “How fortunate are we to have a Guru who sees so much *mahima* of us!”

A similar event occurred after the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shatabdi Celebrations. Swamishri requested the sacred dust from ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar’ and said, “For days, I have been thinking – I must place the dust of this campus upon my head. Because in this place, so many volunteers have served tirelessly, so many sadhus have dedicated themselves, and millions of

devotees and well-wishers have gathered. Every single person who served as well as stepped on this campus is divine. So, it's my wish to place the sacred dust of those feet who have stepped foot on this divine campus upon my head.” Filled with an ocean of admiration in his heart, Swamishri placed the dust of the devotees’ feet upon his head.

He himself is Aksharbrahma, beyond time and space. Even the Vedas, in their attempt to glorify the Ekantik Sant, can only cry out “*Neti, Neti*” – “He who is infinite and indescribable!” His very existence is so powerful that countless universes fly around like atoms in each pore of his body. Even Parabrahma – the Supreme Bhagwan – longs for the dust of his feet. And yet, this same great Sant, Mahant Swami Maharaj, bows before us and places the dust of our feet upon his head! Where in this world can one find a Guru like this? If we could see Swamishri with even a fraction of the *mahima* with which he sees us, we would truly be blessed.

Associating with Brahma Through Contemplation

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the Vachanamrut, emphasises the importance of contemplating on Brahma as a means of spiritual association. From the lives of the Gunatit Guru Parampara, we can clearly witness this virtue of deep contemplation (*manan*). They consistently reflected upon and internalised the divine incidents of their *Ishtadev* and Gurus, making *manan* a way to experience and cherish their Guru's life. In this context, let us take a glimpse into Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj's life.

Vinubhai was once sitting near the Goya Lake embankment (Anand). As Yogiji Maharaj was about to leave the village, he lovingly called Vinubhai, smiled warmly, and said, "We are leaving now. Please forgive any mistakes we may have made." With these words, Yogiji Maharaj blessed Vinubhai and departed. However, this moment deeply impacted Vinubhai, leaving him shocked. He continuously reflected on this single event for a long time. As a result, all his past prejudices faded away, and his heart was filled with repentance. Divine thoughts began to flow within him, "What an extraordinary and unparalleled Sant! His love surpasses even that of one's own parents! What a pure and innocent divine smile he has! What an exalted level of saintliness he possesses!" Overwhelmed by these thoughts, he longed for Yogiji Maharaj's presence again. Even though physically separated, through deep contemplation, Vinubhai was constantly in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj.

Sometime later, Yogiji Maharaj was traveling by train to Mumbai, and as the train stopped at Anand railway station, many devotees gathered for his *darshan*. Vinubhai, too, came to get a glimpse of his Guru, but due to his shy nature, he watched from a distance. To Vinubhai's astonishment, Yogiji Maharaj stepped down from the train and walked directly to him! Once again, he showered unbounded love and blessings upon him. That divine affection, grace, and saintliness overwhelmed Vinubhai. Soon, the train whistle blew, signalling Yogiji Maharaj's departure. However, Vinubhai remained seated there, lost in deep reflection on the event. He kept revisiting that divine moment in his mind, savouring its spiritual depth.

For the next fifteen days, he returned to the railway station, sat on a bench, and immersed himself in contemplating this profound experience for hours. Reflecting on this, Mahant Swami Maharaj later wrote, "When I met Yogiji Maharaj, I became completely attached to him. Everything else faded into insignificance. Yogiji Maharaj became the very centre of my life." Thus, through

continuous contemplation, Vinubhai kept experiencing the presence of Yogiji Maharaj, and before he knew it, his Guru had become the very focal point of his life. Just as Vinubhai remained immersed in contemplation, we too should regularly reflect upon the divine incidents of our Guru's life, allowing ourselves to become Guru-centred. This is the true fruit of satsang.
