

Divine Memories

Part 1

Inspiring experiences of sadhu disciples

about

Pramukh Swami Mahara**j**

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BAPS Sadhus

Translation:

Sadhu Paramtattvadas



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Ahmedabad, India

Divine Memories Part 1

(Personal accounts of sadhu disciples as they have experienced Pramukh Swami Maharaj in daily life)

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

More than eight million people had visited the Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai between November 27 and December 31, 1995, the mahotsav was held to mark the 75th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The number of devotees reveals the high regard in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj is held. Sadhus and devotees, who had experienced his saintly and diligent life at first hand, have written an account of their experiences..

In reality, the lives of great souls cannot be captured in a library of words. Everyone who has attempted to bring to light different perspectives of Pramukh Swami Maharaj has undoubtedly experienced this.

To truly appreciate his divine persona, eyes of a different kind are needed. Where the world of words unquestionably proves inadequate, this venture to express Swamishri on paper can at best be only a modest attempt to portray him as he is.

Each book is only a verse in the saga of a figure who has sacrificed his entire life for the good of the society he travels in.

Divine Memories, Part 1 is a translation of *Jeva Me Nirakhya Re, Part 1*, by Sadhu Paramtattvadas. We express our gratitude to him.

We hope this publication will open at least a small window into the fascinating realms of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

As the fifth spiritual leader of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), Pramukh Swami Maharaj, represents a [disciple](#) succession of spirituality that began over 200 years ago in 1781CE. The year marked the birth of the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was born in the village of Chhapaiya, near Ayodhya in North India. By the age of seven, he had mastered [all](#) the shastras under the guidance of his father. After his parents passed away, Bhagwan Swaminarayan renounced home at the age of 11 to embark on a seven-year, 12,000 km barefoot pilgrimage across the length and breadth of India. He observed the spiritual landscape of India, before settling at the ashram of Ramanand Swami in Loj. [After receiving](#) initiation from him, Ramanand Swami appointed him as his successor [because of his piety and lofty spirituality](#). Bhagwan Swaminarayan spent the next 30 years of his life in Gujarat and Kathiawad, spearheading a socio-spiritual revival. With [a following](#) of 3,000 sadhus and many thousands of devotees, he established the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. He introduced innovative social reforms and undertook charitable work to help the poor and needy. In line with the ancient Vedic tradition of Bhakti Sampradaya, he constructed six grand mandirs. His work concentrated on promoting personal morality and moulding spiritual character.

In his own lifetime, he was worshipped as God by some two million devotees. By the time he passed away at the age of 49, he had earned a reputation as a great socio-spiritual leader. The Sampradaya he founded has emerged as one of the purest forms of Hinduism.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's spiritual presence on this earth continues through a succession of God-realized spiritual

masters. The first guru in this succession was his ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami (1785-1867CE), whom he revealed as the manifestation of Aksharbrahman. He in turn was followed by Bhagatji Maharaj (1829-1897CE).

The third spiritual successor, Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951CE), established the BAPS in 1907, in consonance with the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shastriji Maharaj emphasized the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. He built five glorious mandirs, consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrines and thus furthering the Vedic ideal of dual worship of God along with his ideal devotee (Bhakta-Bhagwan).

The fourth spiritual master was Yogiji Maharaj (1892-1971CE). Through his guidance and inspiration the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan has crossed the oceans and reached East Africa and England. He passed away after placing the reins of the Sanstha in the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in January 1971.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born in the village of Chansad, 12 km from Vadodara, in Gujarat on 7 December 1921. Known as Shantilal in his childhood, he was a budding devotee from a young age. His parents, Motibhai and Diwaliben Patel, were disciples of Shastriji Maharaj and staunch adherents of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy. Shastriji Maharaj had discerned the spiritual potential of young Shantilal from the very day he initiated him as a devotee.

At the age of 17, Shantilal received guru Shastriji Maharaj's call to renounce. So, with the blessings of his parents, he left home. Shastriji Maharaj initiated him into the *parshad*-fold in November 1939 and less than two months later, at Gondal in January 1940, initiated him as a sadhu. He was renamed Sadhu Narayanswarupdas.

For 11 years, Narayanswarupdas served under the guru. During the initial years, he toured with Shastriji Maharaj and

studied Sanskrit and the shastras. He excelled at studies but had to discontinue them to serve in the mandirs. In 1943, he played an important role in the construction of the new mandir in Atladra. From 1946 to 1950, he served as Kothari (administrative head) of the Akshar Purushottam Mandir in Sarangpur.

Despite his young age, Narayanswarupdas had excelled in fulfilling the duties entrusted to him and thus won Shastriji Maharaj's total confidence. In 1950, when he was only 28, Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as President (Pramukh) of the BAPS in his own place. From then on, he began to be known as Pramukh Swami. Before Shastriji Maharaj passed away in 1951, he instructed Pramukh Swami to work under Yogiji Maharaj.

For the next 20 years, Pramukh Swami served Yogiji Maharaj with the same zeal and obedience he had served Shastriji Maharaj. The 1960s were a period of great expansion for the Sanstha.

Before Yogiji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham on 23 January 1971, he had revealed Pramukh Swami as his successor.

Since then, under Pramukh Swami Maharaj's able leadership and guidance, BAPS has grown as a highly respected worldwide socio-spiritual organization.

With the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the BAPS has made noteworthy contributions to society in various fields besides spiritual, social, moral, cultural, educational, medical, environmental and tribal.

In particular, the majestic Akshardham complexes at New Delhi and Gandhinagar have won international acclaim and renown as centres which reflect India's ancient history and culture, and inspire universal ideals.

Outside India, he has instilled fresh pride for Sanatan Dharma among all Hindus by building traditional mandirs, based on ancient Vedic architectural principles in London, Nairobi, Houston, Chicago, Toronto and Atlanta.

Also, the spectacular Cultural Festivals of India held in London

in 1985 and New Jersey in 1991 were a success in portraying our timeless cultural heritage.

Swamishri himself leads an austere life, possessing nothing, seeking nothing, he goes around giving his all. Despite his age, he travels from humble tribal villages to modern metropolitan cities all over the world, guiding people of all ages and backgrounds to lead a life full of virtues, service to society and spirituality. At his tender word, thousands have given up addictions and walked the path of God. Swamishri has inspired, never through orders or commands, but through personal example and commitment.

His striking humility, profound wisdom and simplicity have touched many. His love for mankind and respect for all religions is weaving a fabric of cultural unity, interfaith harmony and universal peace.

The sole reason behind his unique success is his deep and uninterrupted state of God-realization.

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1. SADHU SANTVALLABHDAS

(Passed away: 13 January 1993)

Question: If Shastriji Maharaj were to return to earth what would have been their reaction to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's accomplishments?

Answer: They would have been simply delighted. Shastriji Maharaj was very fond of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He entrusted him with the administration of the Sanstha when the latter was very young. In fact, he was a mere handful of bones, feeble and fair of complexion.

Shastriji Maharaj is all-knowing. Nothing could be hidden from him.

Shastriji Maharaj told the young sadhu, "This physique doesn't suit your position. So make sure it improves." So Swamishri's frail build improved, thanks to the sadhus blessings.

He would probably be so overjoyed by what he's seeing, that he'll be saying, "Oh how Pramukh Swami has done me proud!" Nirgun Swami too would have been literally been dancing with joy.

We may not be able to see Shastriji Maharaj, but he is always with us in his divine form. He would be really pleased. Gunatitanand Swami, Maharaj - they're always looking after us. Satisfied. Pleased.

Shastriji Maharaj had great faith in Pramukh Swami. When he handed over the responsibility of the administration, many devotees like Maganbhai and Chhaganbhai felt, "He's so young. How will he manage? Will he be able to look after the Sanstha? It's all going to break down. He shouldn't have been given the job." But Shastriji Maharaj had a ready reply, "I know his soul. You cannot see that."

Many years have passed and with Shastriji Maharaj's grace and the strength provided Maharaj, Pramukh Swami has been able to

manage the Sanstha with the help of the sadhus, devotees, youths so smoothly that nobody feels hurt and everyone is satisfied. He looks after each member of the Satsang. The same trend continued in Yogi Maharaj's time, too. The Sanstha witnessed great progress then. Shastriji Maharaj had specifically told him, "Work under Yogi Maharaj. Obey him." Shastriji Maharaj even told Yogi Maharaj to bless Pramukh Swami with his qualities and saintliness.

Shastriji Maharaj had told Pramukh Swami right at the start, when he wrapped the shawl around him, that Yogi Maharaj would give *diksha* and oversee all the rest, but when he was not present, he should look after matters. Shastriji Maharaj thus told Pramukh Swami to administer *diksha*, the charge of the Sanstha's activities, besides assuming the reins of Guruship - everything, in fact, after Yogiji Maharaj. Then Shastriji Maharaj placed Pramukh Swami's hand in Yogi Maharaj's hand.

It's almost 17 years since Yogi Maharaj passed away. The whole world knows, and everyone can see for himself what great work Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done! Shastriji Maharaj once said, "Once I've gone, if growth can continue like this for ten years, Satsang would double in size." But Pramukh Swami has increased it tenfold, and accomplished ten times as much. Shastriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami should feel extremely happy.

It is still the wish of Maharaj and Swami that Pramukh Swami should continue to spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* throughout the world. Akshar Purushottam mandirs are still to be built by Pramukh Swami in every country. That appears to be the wish of Maharaj and Swami. That's the strength and energy Maharaj and Swami have endowed him with and will continue to give.

Gunatitanand Swami is also present among us. Pramukh Swami is sitting here. He has come from Akshardham to be with us. If we hold on to his finger we can reach Akshardham with effortless ease. A train compartment disconnected from

the engine gets left behind. Hold on to Swami and **he will make sure that** this will be our final birth.

The wise **always** realize that Maharaj is forever present on this earth. (Vachanamrut Panchala-7). And **such people** can see the presence of Maharaj in the lineage of Gunatit gurus.

Today, Shastriji Maharaj is manifest through Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Pramukh Swami himself is not **Purushottam**; we are not saying that he is God. If we did, we'd be **playing down** God's individuality. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj is Aksharbrahman; **his** Gunatit. Purushottam and Aksharbrahman have an inseparable relationship. Therefore Maharaj suppresses Pramukh Swami's own individuality and works through him preeminently.

We **merely** see Pramukh Swami **Maharaj** with our **eyes** - but if we acquire the divine vision **like** Arjun, then we'd see only Maharaj. His darshan is Maharaj's darshan. (Vachanamrut Gadhada I-37 and Sarangpur-10).

Maharaj dwells in **every** limb of Pramukh Swami - so **the latter** can be called the form of God.

If we don't have the conviction of God being present in Pramukh Swami, then our shortcomings will be **difficult** to overcome. Even if we have faith in Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, but not in Pramukh Swami - then our **moksha will remain** incomplete. **Thus, our** ultimate liberation **will become** impossible.

We have met Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and if we **had** served them sincerely, in the true sense, then we'd have **had** faith in their words and **would have** realized Pramukh Swami as he is. On the other hand, if we **had failed to** realize the greatness of Pramukh Swami, then we have not really served Shastriji Maharaj or Yogiji Maharaj. It just goes to show **that** we have no faith in them.

Pramukh Swami is Gunatit, divine; absolutely divine. There is nothing worldly in him in the least. He has nothing to do with his physical body. No **taint** of *maya* pollutes him... Cultivate the

understanding that Pramukh Swami is divine to such an extent that nothing can shake it; absolutely nothing.

After reading, studying and understanding the four Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Gita, the Ramayana, the Bhagavatam, and others - all we need to realize is that all the previous incarnations of God, such as Rama, Krishna, etc., along with Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj - are present today in this Pramukh Swami Maharaj!”

(Selected extracts from *Pujya Santvallabh Swami's* discourses.)



2. SADHU BALMUKUNDAS

I am writing my experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's saintliness and how Bhagwan Swaminarayan dwells within him.

Work on the Bhadra mandir was underway. Just before its inauguration in 1969, Yogi Bapa came to Bhadra and stayed for a considerable time. He observed the seva of the youths and sadhus, and gave them guidance. He motivated everyone with his talks. At that time, Swamishri (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) had not a second to spare. He'd keep late hours, sometimes working into the early hours of the morning. I once found him lying on a mound of gravel with absolutely nothing beneath him - sleeping; totally exhausted! It was the time when he had been helping in laying the water pipeline.

As president of the Sanstha and as a senior sadhu, if he had asked for one attendant, five would have been presented to him - but Swamishri never cared for his body when it came to exerting himself in the service of God or Guru.

Swamishri's love for his devotees is unbounded. He has seen to it that Yogi Bapa's absence is not felt. He loves and looks after us, just like Yogi Bapa had done.

In 1984, Swamishri was abroad. I had to go to Rajkot for an operation to remove a kidney stone. Dr. Bajadia, a devotee from Ahmedabad, was with me. During the operation, the doctors in Rajkot removed one of my healthy kidneys without consulting anyone! Of course, I didn't know it then. But when my blood urea began to rise in the weaker left kidney, Dr. Bajadia investigated and learned that they'd taken out my healthy right kidney!

By then, Swamishri had returned to Mumbai from his satsang trip abroad. He was informed of my condition by telephone.

Swamishri arranged for me to be immediately transferred to Mumbai. We **reached** Mumbai by **air**. At the same time Swamishri was **preparing** to go by plane to Ahmedabad. However, he waited for me to arrive. He sat on a chair in the **courtyard of** Dadar (Mumbai) **mandir**. We arrived at the mandir. I was about to get out of the Ambassador car when Swamishri called, “No. Don’t get out. I’ll come there...”

Swamishri came and blessed me. He brought Thakorji too - for me to have darshan. Imprinting a *chandlo* on my forehead and placing his hand on my shoulder, he said, “Do darshan of Thakorji and go to the hospital. Maharaj will see to it that everything works out fine...”

I was admitted to hospital. The doctors **conducted** a few tests, but were certain that there was no hope. Nonetheless, **a satsangi** doctor insisted **on my** dialysis. I underwent dialysis twice. And my kidney began **to function normally once** again!

I was discharged from hospital after 19 days. I couldn’t eat or drink **anything**. They had me on intravenous glucose.

Once, I said a short, silent prayer to Bapa. “Now what is your wish for me?” At that precise moment, I felt thirsty. I wanted a glass of cold water. I never drink chilled water or water from the refrigerator. Never. But that day I drank three glasses of cold water and began taking food and fluids. I went back after four months for a checkup, but the doctors said I didn’t even need medication!

A short while after that, in Porbandar, I again began to get pains due to my kidney. We returned to Gondal, and Kothari **Jnanprasad** Swami informed Swami in Ahmedabad. Swamishri said, “Show it to Dr. Dhanani in Botad. If nothing comes of it there, **come to** Ahmedabad...” But **later** Swamishri instructed us to go to Mumbai and be treated by Dr. Kiran Doshi. Fortunately though, the stone passed out in my urine. In this way, Swamishri protected me twice.

I must mention that Shastriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami

are present in our Satsang today through Swamishri. They are fulfilling their devotees' **wishes** through him. I was Kothari of Gondal mandir from 1970 to 1981. During those days, Swamishri blessed me on many occasions. I was fortunate enough to have had the chance of serving him. I had never before handled the management of such a large mandir, but with his grace I completed my duties.

Today, only by his grace, his blessings, am I able to do *katha-varta*. I pray that he keeps blessing me with the strength to do *seva*.



3. SADHU ISHWARCHARANDAS

Having been a *satsangi* from childhood, I've had the pleasure of seeing Pramukh Swami Maharaj as 'Narayan Swami' in my early years. In those days, Shastriji Maharaj's overpowering personality radiated itself throughout the Satsang. He was everyone's centre of attraction. We were all very young, and Shastriji Maharaj used to call us lovingly, to him.

Nirgun Swami used to call us children and youths too - to talk to us about Satsang and teach us kirtans such as "*Dayalu Prabhu Akshar Purushottam*", "*Ame sau Swamina balak*", etc. We were drawn closer to him as well.

Yogiji Maharaj would treat us with love as well, to teach us Swamini Vatos, *dhun*, etc. - so he was very much close to our hearts too. His all-round saintliness meant that after Shastriji Maharaj, he naturally became the centre of everyone's hearts.

Of all the mandirs, Sarangpur made great appeal for us, as Shastriji Maharaj stayed there the most. And along with the mandir's magnificence and its rustic air, the atmosphere always imparted a feeling of divinity and pride on our simple little minds.

There we used to see Pramukh Swami who was Kothari at that time. He looked after the mandir along with the aged Harikrishna Swami. Pramukh Swami served in the main office; Sant Swami, Sanatan Swami and Dharmakishore Swami were *pujaris*; while Harjivandas Swami and Ramji Bhagat were involved in the construction work.

One thing stands out. As we were kids - many sadhus used to call us, play with us, even tease us in a friendly way. I cannot remember Swamishri ever doing that with us. He was always serious in dealing with us.

This impression became so entrenched, that years later, as I began to mature in Satsang, that image remained firmly implanted

in my mind. This shows that I rarely got close to him.

I still remember a delicate Swamishri sitting alongside Shastriji Maharaj on the stage decorated with banana leaves to celebrate the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav of Shastriji Maharaj (in Atladra).

Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Nirgun Swami and the other sadhus I remember well. But of Swamishri, I have only foggy memories as he always preferred to keep aloof.

Then as a youth when I travelled with Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was often with us. But even then, I never really got to know him intimately. He was engrossed in his work - writing letters, doing *padhramanis*; and we were occupied with our work. Especially in the villages, he would give discourses from the *Satsangjivanam* or *Bhaktachintamani*. Yogi Bapa insisted more than anything that all of us youths attend the discourses.

In 1959-60, I accompanied Yogiji Maharaj on his overseas tour as his personal attendant. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was with us as well, along with Sant Swami and Balmukund Swami. We were a small group - so everyone had their own responsibilities to discharge. What's more, Sant Swami and Balmukund Swami were given a separate schedule and spent a great deal of time touring together. This left our small group even smaller.

However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj always came to help us wherever and whenever the need arose. He was very regular in waking up Thakorji; bathing and attending to him, as well as arranging items for Yogiji Maharaj's puja in the morning. He'd take all the responsibility for Thakorji's seva.

In public gatherings, Yogiji Maharaj always insisted on Pramukh Swami Maharaj addressing the assembly. Swamishri never really cared for speaking in public. But Yogiji Maharaj would introduce him... "Now the president of our Sanstha, Narayan Swami, will speak. All of you listen carefully..." So he had no choice but to get up and speak. He'd talk for 20 to 25 minutes, *atma*-Paramatma being his general theme.

To this day, the indelible impression of those days remains with me, fresh as ever.

During that Satsang tour, I was entrusted with the seva of cooking for the sadhus. Everyone in the group preferred mild food. Due to his health, Yogiji Maharaj preferred bland food. Sant Swami and Balmukund Swami also ate mild food. That left only Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He was able to eat spicy food, but for nine months he ate whatever I cooked. And what's more, I was still a novice at cooking. There was always the possibility for making mistakes. But not once did he tell me, "It was like this or that," or ever say, "It should be like this..." Neither did he ever give even the faintest hint as to what things he particularly liked. Whatever was served in his eating bowl, he quietly ate - with head down, remembering Maharaj. That's when I first realized that this sadhu seems to be beyond the instinct of taste.

In all those months of travelling together, I can't recall a single occasion where he happened to make jest or even talk without a reason. I gradually realized how meek and contemplative he was.

Completing the African leg of our tour, we arrived in Aden and stayed there for a week.

During our stay there, I bought a sleek elegant Shaeffer ball pen from the city. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was always writing letters, so I thought it would be useful for him. And that he would like this graceful little pen. He accepted it too - but without any response whatever. I gathered that he took it only so as not to hurt my feelings.

Then I received diksha. I had the opportunity of working with Swamishri in February 1965 for the Centenary Celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj. I was looking after the exhibition and decoration sections. Swamishri oversaw the entire festival and worked day

and night, not [caring for](#) food or [rest](#).

We came closer really only in 1966, on the *panch-tirthi* tour of sacred places in Saurashtra and Gujarat.

In the same year, I remember having had a special encounter.

Yogi Bapa's 75th birthday had been planned well in advance to be celebrated in Vidyanagar. Dadubhai and his companions - who [had](#) later [been](#) excommunicated from the Sanstha for activities contrary to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's principles - were [originally](#) involved in the preparations of the festival. [But](#) their behaviour, which was neither conforming to the Sanstha's philosophical or ethical disciplines, gave rise to a very confused and disturbing [situation](#). Calls to cancel the Vidyanagar festival were [made](#).

Hearing news of this, Dadubhai's accomplices - Becharbhai Patel of Africa, Gordhanbhai Contractor of Anand, and Jashbhai of Sokhda - immediately came to Ahmedabad from Vidyanagar. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were both in Ahmedabad at the time. It was evening. [A satsang](#) assembly was in progress in the mandir courtyard. And they all came, huffing and puffing, wanting to meet Swamishri.

Yogiji Maharaj and Swamishri went with them to the old assembly area behind the mandir. The [people](#) from Vidyanagar were really worked up. As soon as they arrived, they began [hurring](#) all sorts of abusive remarks [at](#) Pramukh Swami Maharaj - in the presence of Yogi Bapa [they behaved](#) as if they were [in charge](#) of the Sanstha! [A](#) couple of devotees saw the commotion. Soon all of us arrived there too.

Due to selfish motives and misplaced loyalties, these people had lost their [spiritual direction](#). And their absolute wanton behaviour reflected badly on their character and their disrespect for Pramukh Swami as president or even Yogiji Maharaj as guru. Their disgraceful, outrageous language - "It's about time you learnt to put your tail down..." and the like - infuriated some of our younger devotees [and they barged into](#) the room. Obviously,

no one could contain themselves **after** seeing Swamishri being insulted so blatantly in this way.

Swamishri **tried** to **restrain** us and push us back. “Out!” he cried. “All of you get out! You’re not to do anything. They’ve come to talk to me, so let them finish what they have to say. Now all of you, please leave.”

Swamishri was using all his strength to force us out **of** the **room**. But we were too incensed **to leave things alone**. The meeting abruptly ended there. The objectors from Vidyanagar realized it wasn’t wise to **hang** around and left as fast as they could. But to ensure that none of us did anything unbecoming to them, Swamishri escorted them right up to the main entrance, and at the same time, tried his best to keep us **from getting at them**.

That’s when I realized how calmly and coolly Swamishri **could face** opposition **and** respect **his** adversaries!

There are many such experiences from those times of Swamishri’s patience, composure, quietness, and deep understanding. **Whenever I think of them I am** lost in amazement **the way in which I witnessed** Swamishri arriving at a compromise with thoughtless opponents. Even in the most awkward of situations, there was this **trait** in Swamishri - but **no trace** of resentment or displeasure.

I **have experienced** his impressive but instinctive **steadfast** saintly **qualities** on many occasions.

In this way, the manner in which Swamishri has followed the ideals of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj to the letter, with no regard for himself, reveals his supremely divine personality to all.

Again, during Yogiji Maharaj’s Amrut Mahotsav (75th Birthday Celebrations **in 1967**) I had the good fortune to work with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I was looking after the exhibition, decoration and procession, among other things, but again it was Swamishri who had **taken the** responsibility of the whole festival on his head. He met the volunteers and briefed them on their **duties** - and if

needed, he'd go himself to help them. His attention to detail made things run smoother, faster and better. It inspired the youths and encouraged them to get on and accomplish even the toughest of tasks. The same was witnessed during the inauguration festival of Bhadra mandir in 1969.

Swamishri's decision regarding the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentennial Celebrations in 1981 was astonishing. Precisely at the time the festival was to commence, Gujarat was rocked by student riots. Talks of postponing or even cancelling the festival began. But Swamishri was adamant. He said, "Let the preparations continue. The festival will be celebrated as scheduled, on time! Maharaj will see to it that everything settles down."

And that's exactly what had happened.

A different problem loomed over the Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami Bicentennial Celebrations in 1985. The rains were late. Without water, the festival simply would not be feasible. Many social leaders called for it to be cancelled. However, with Swamishri's blessings, an almighty downpour of rain a fortnight before the celebrations were to commence put all worries at rest. And the festival ended as a great success.

One of my most exceptional experiences was during the Gandhinagar Akshardham project.

In 1971, at the inauguration of the new mandir in Sankari, a special meeting of senior sadhus was held with Swamishri to discuss the bicentennial celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1981. It was in these preliminary discussions that the idea of building a monument to commemorate the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was put forth. Swamishri accepted the proposal and called for further discussions on the matter.

Thereafter, Swamishri's encouragement and inspiration proved

invaluable. They are the reasons behind Akshardham and its success and glory today.

At the outset, we had intended to erect a memorial pillar - like that built in the remembrance of many legendary kings and rulers from the regal era of Indian history. But then that suggestion was changed with the idea of an exhibition commemorating Shriji Maharaj's life and work. This led to the concept of erecting a monument.

Talks centred around an RCC (reinforced cement concrete) building, keeping in mind a modest budget and short time span. Swamishri, on the other hand, had different plans. He submitted his view that a sturdy stone structure be built in the best possible way, one which would serve as a memorial to Bhagwan Swaminarayan for thousands of years.

With Swamishri's grace, we met several Sompuras, the traditional architects of India, and came across the pink stone quarries in Bansipahadpur in Rajasthan. Swamishri liked the stone, and even though costs would rise considerably, decided that this was the stone for the monument.

Location was another dilemma. Gadhada, where Shriji Maharaj had stayed for 25 years, was an option. For tourism's sake, Ahmedabad was also a candidate. But eventually, Swamishri gave the final word that the monument should be built on the land sanctified by Yogiji Maharaj in Gandhinagar.

Questions like how and what will the end result be like kept pestering us. But with Swamishri's inspiration, we got help and advice from experts from all over the world. How or from where the help came still remains a mystery to us. It made me firmly believe that Akshardham is nothing but the sum of Swamishri's encouragement and inspiration.

Internationally acclaimed multimedia producer Prof. Fric's* involvement in the project was the direct work of Swamishri too. Attracted by Swamishri's simplicity and saintliness, Prof. Fric, a native of the Czech Republic, felt that he ought to do something for

him. The result was the unique multimedia presentation *Sat-Chit-Anand*, in which modern technology is used to project the ‘spiritual technology’ Swamishri pointed out as being *atma* and *Paramatma*.

The *Sant Param Hitakari* audio-animatronics show was a very ambitious and expensive venture. To use state-of-the-art technology to re-enact an assembly from Shriji Maharaj’s time including sadhus singing a kirtan to the accompaniment of traditional instruments was a daunting challenge indeed. But, with Swamishr’s blessings it was fulfilled most satisfactorily.

Despite harrowing problems of manpower, money and materials, Swamishri’s contributions in giving his invaluable time and decisive guidance saw the [successful completion of the](#) entire Akshardham [project](#).

Yet right until the end, we were still apprehensive: “How will it all end up?”, “What will it be like?”, “Will Swamishri like it?” We prayed earnestly to him. Many times we felt he was testing our faith. He’d often tell us off and encourage us too: “Be careful... Nothing but the best will do... Make sure you keep at it... It must be completed on time...”

By passing through thick and thin, and amid intense pressures of time and resources, it all ended perfectly. Swamishri was pleased. And he expressed his deep satisfaction.

* * *

A memorable incident from 1991. Swamishri’s 71st birthday celebrations in Gondal. Sadhus were offering Swamishri various garlands. I was handed a garland made entirely [of](#) popcorn [as an offering](#) to Swamishri. I placed it around Swamishri’s neck, and bowed [at](#) his feet. Then I was given a garland made of pulses, beans and lentils. It was rather heavy to lift. As I gave it to Swamishri, I casually said, “Bapa, this garland is very heavy. You won’t be able to wear it.”

I didn’t particularly want Swamishri to wear it either. But before I could finish my sentence, Swamishri remarked, “You have

to accept both the heavy and the light. In life, we have to tackle the ups and the downs.” So saying he accepted the garland.

Those few words from Swamishri helped me understand that life requires a balance - a balance between happy and hard times, though both are probably self-inflicted. But by making God and Swamishri the focus of our lives, we can rise above happiness and hardships.

* * *

Another incident from 1991, this time from America during the Cultural Festival of India. It was 20 July, Gurubhakti Day. Swamishri entered the spacious Raritan Center Expo Hall in Edison, New Jersey. The dancing *balaks* and youths, the music, the bands, and the love of all the devotees present welcomed Swamishri. He made his way from the entrance up to the stage in a palanquin. Everyone was lost in the ecstasy of the divine atmosphere.

As Swamishri stepped down from the palanquin to take his place on stage, he asked me, “Have you brought Yogiji Maharaj’s *murti*? Bring it right away.”

Arrangements were swiftly made and a small black and white photo of Yogiji Maharaj was brought. We wondered why Swamishri had asked for it.

It became clear when Swamishri sat in the scales. He held both the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj and the photo of Yogiji Maharaj while being weighed against *sakar*. Throughout the ceremony he bowed his head in humility and devotion to God and guru.

* * *

Swamishri’s personality is hard to fathom . The reason? He hides his virtuous qualities.

Those close to him are easily put on a wrong scent. Without doubt, then, those who try to know Swamishri from a distance could very rarely gauge the depth of his personality.

We can only pray that we realize his true greatness!



4. SADHU DHARMAJIVANDAS

The Ahmedabad mandir was **consecrated** by Yogiji Maharaj in 1962. The festival was celebrated with great fanfare.

It was **evening** **when** the festival **ended**. Everyone had dispersed. Swamishri was personally loading a truck **the mandir** with mattresses and utensils which had been borrowed from the Gondal mandir. He had to go to 'Khengaribhai's School' - where the devotees had been put up - to collect the mattresses from there. He asked me to pack my things. **After uploading the mattresses from the school** Swamishri **instructed** the driver, "Take it to Gondal."

During the past few days, Swamishri had been immersed in *seva*, and had neglected both food and rest as a result. He hadn't had a good night's sleep in days. So as soon the truck got onto the highway Swamishri **dozed** off. The driver moaned, "Maharaj, if you want to **sleep** go to the back!"

The truck **stopped** and Swamishri climbed into the back where I was **with** the mattresses. Hurriedly, I arranged a few mattresses - and Swamishri fell fast asleep. It must've been 10-12 days since Swamishri had last had a proper rest.

Early morning, we **passed** for Surendranagar. By now, the driver was feeling sleepy too. He decided **halt to have a nap**. **When** Swamishri opened his eyes **he** asked, "Why have we stopped?"

"The driver's gone to sleep," I replied.

"Fine," Swamishri said, before **laying down to sleep again for a while**.

We began our journey again at **8.00 a.m.** By the time we arrived in Gondal at 11 o'clock, Swamishri had talked to me at length about the festival, its management, and the spirit of *seva*. In Gondal, he completed his morning rituals, went for Thakorji's darshan, and came down for lunch.

Whatever the circumstances, whether in **villages** or **while**

travelling, whether day or night, and in the midst of people, Swamishri has taken everything in his stride with a smile. I have been a witness to this and this incident gives a glimpse of his life then.

* * *

Sometime around 1961-62, we had to rush to Atladra from Ahmedabad immediately. Secretary Rasikbhai Patel came to drop us off at the railway station. We were to take the 12:30 p.m. local from Vartal. "What ticket shall I buy?" asked Rasikbhai.

"Third class," Swami said naturally.

Rasikbhai bought the tickets. After we got into the train, Rasikbhai left. No devotees or youths were accompanying us.

A few minutes later, a Muslim family's marriage party climbed into our carriage. As there was little chance of us being able to maintain our sadhu disciplines, Swamishri said, "Come on. Let's go to second class."

When we got there, we were faced with the same difficulty. Swamishri and I got off and stood on the platform. He told me, "I'll look after our baggage. You go and see if you can find Rasikbhai."

I ran. Rasikbhai had already gone out of the station, but luckily I saw him from afar and called out to him at the top of my voice. He heard me and came back.

Swamishri requested him, "It seems as if we will not be able to observe our sadhu disciplines in the other compartments. You'll have to get a first class ticket."

The train was about to leave, but Rasikbhai managed to rush back with the tickets just in time. We found our seats and settled down for the journey.

I remarked, "Swami, we should have taken first class tickets in the first place! It would have saved all this hassle."

"Listen Dharmajivan," Swamishri said. "We should never waste even a single penny of Thakorji's. Do you understand? Whoever wastes Thakorji's money will have to suffer. We should try to economize wherever we can. If we can help, why miss out!"

Witnessing Swamishri's **managerial** skills, his sense of responsibility to the Sanstha, and his pure sincerity was an invaluable experience for me.



5. SADHU DEVCHARANDAS

In 1967, Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav (75th birthday) was being celebrated at Gondal. Swamishri had persevered for over three months making all the preparations for the festival. It was summer, and there was no sign of water. Swamishri got experts to look for water in the stony outskirts of Gondal, but their search proved futile. Every third day Yogiji Maharaj would write a letter of blessings (that water be found). He sent people too. He also wrote enthusiastically to Swamishri, "A flood of water will gush out! There's plenty of water! Drill a well on this site."

After seven such letters, seven wells were dug. But still no sign of water. Swamishri's faith and patience, however, did not waver. Neither did he opt to change the location of the festival. He just knew that it was Yogiji Maharaj's wish that the celebrations be held in Gondal, and so everything would be fine in the end.

Swamishri was right. His faith and efforts did pay off. Water was soon obtained from a bore-well and the nearby dam, and accommodation for the devotees was arranged all around the town.

On 17 May 1967 Yogiji Maharaj's birthday was celebrated with great joy. One hundred thousand devotees were fed that day. Thakorji was taken out in a grand procession upon an elephant. Yogiji Maharaj gave beautiful blessings that day too. He didn't forget to mention Pramukh Swami's untiring efforts in making the festival possible, adding, "Who would work so hard besides our Pramukh Swami?"

The following day, Yogiji Maharaj was to depart for Gadhada. Before he left, he called Swamishri. He said, "Swami, please stay on here. Make sure everything is wound up properly. Clear the money matters too. Then I'll call you. We'll meet then."

Yogiji Maharaj was going for parayan in Gadhada. After the

parayan, he went to Sarangpur. The 400 devotees from East Africa, who were travelling with Yogiji Maharaj, had organized a *parayan* there. Four days later, the devotees asked Yogiji Maharaj to call Pramukh Swami. On the morning before the final day of the *parayan*, Yogiji Maharaj sent word to Pramukh Swami in Gondal asking him to come to Sarangpur.

With Swamishri were five sadhus from Mumbai and two other sadhus who had been initiated during the Amrut Mahotsav. After clearing up all the accounts and settling details, Swamishri was ready to leave for Sarangpur in the jeep at five in the evening.

The five Mumbai sadhus and the two newly initiated sadhus asked, “Can we come along too? We’d like to spend some time travelling with you.”

“The car’s too small,” Swamishri explained. “It will be too crowded. You won’t find it comfortable at all. Why don’t you come by train tomorrow?”

“But we don’t mind, really. We’ll squeeze in somehow. We just want to be with you.”

“Fine,” Swamishri agreed. “Come along then. Load your *potla*. We don’t want to be late in reaching Sarangpur. If we rush, we might make it in time for the final darshan tonight.”

I remember it well. That battered old jeep - with six sadhus and Darbar Hakabhai at the rear; and the driver, me, Pragat Bhagat and Swamishri in the front.

We left at 5:30 p.m. As it got dark, the jeep passed Dhasa village and came on the road leading to Patna alongside the Kalubhar River. There were off-season showers ahead. Here too the clouds had gathered - and pretty soon it began to pour!

We made a brief halt. Everyone sat quietly in the vehicle with nothing much to say. Except Hakabhai Darbar.

He called from behind in his typical style. “Now what? I told you we should have left at four. But no! You have to worry about everyone, don’t you? You’ve managed to pack all these

here in the back. We can't even breathe! Tell us then, what are we going to do now?"

Swamishri said calmly, "We'll wait here for a while. The rain will soon subside."

"I'm getting out," announced the Darbar. "I need to breathe!" But where could he go in the dark?

He tried his best and managed to get half his body out of the jeep. By now it was almost pitch dark, and the battering rain got much worse.

Then Swamishri said, "I think I'll go for a bath." (Swamishri wanted to go to the lavatory.)

"Here!" I exclaimed. "But Gadhada's so close now. Where will you go here?"

I knew Gadhada was only 10-12 km away, but nevertheless Swamishri insisted.

"Here, give me the *loto*. I'll have a bath in the river." And with that he got off, changed, filled the *loto* with the river water and found a quiet, undisturbed place. He returned to the riverside, washed his hands and sat down to bathe.

Suddenly, Swamishri spotted a man with a torch in his hand passing by. Calling him over while still pouring water over himself with his *loto*, Swamishri asked, "Please, we'd like to get to Gadhada. Can you tell us how much it's been raining? Do you think the floods will settle?"

"Uh uh!" the man gestured solemnly. And then in one continuous breath explained, "This won't even clear by the morning. It's really pouring down. There's flooding everywhere. I'm afraid you'll just have to turn back."

"But turn back to where?" Swamishri asked. "We want to reach Sarangpur after Gadhada."

"In that case, you'd be better off taking the Bhavnagar road to Valbhipur, then from there on to Barvala," he suggested. The man with the torch had made Swamishri think.

Then, **after** wearing his *dhotiyu* **while** standing on the muddy river bank, Swamishri returned to the jeep. There, Darbar was waiting.

“A **royal** mess, Bapji!” he moaned. “A **royal** mess!” We can’t trust you. Come on. We’ll just have to go back.”

Swamishri kept smiling. Wrapping his *gatariyu* around himself, he said, “Let’s go the way that man **had suggested**. We **want** to reach there, don’t we! Besides, things like this help us realize the value of Yogi Bapa’s darshan.”

Each one of us, already half wet, rearranged **ourselves** in **our respective** places. Then we took the road to Bhavnagar; the time was around 9:30 pm. Once we were on our way Darbar soon **resumed** his friendly talks again.

When we left Dhasa behind, the **rain** seemed to be getting **worse**. It was 1:30 by the time we reached Barvala. Sarangpur was still a **farther** 15 km away. And it was country lanes the rest of the way.

Then all of a sudden, the driver stopped **the jeep** and got out. “What’s the problem?” asked Swamishri. “Come on. Hurry up. It’s not far now, and the **rain has slightly decreased**. Get in. We’ll have dry roads ahead if we’re quick.” The driver obediently got in and we took off once more.

We reached the outskirts of Khambhda, a village near Sarangpur. Encountering **knee-deep** water from the stream, the driver was a little hesitant in proceeding through the water.

“Nothing’s going to happen,” Swamishri said confidently. With faith and perhaps a little desperation from a night of difficult driving, the driver let the jeep into the stream. It was fine for a while - but abruptly it came to a halt.

“What’s **it now**? Why **has** it stopped?” inquired Swamishri. “Check **whether it has** got stuck in a ditch or something.”

The driver got out. So did Swamishri. They soon found the reason why the jeep had **come to a sudden** stop. **No fuel**.

“Swami, we’ve run out of fuel,” explained the driver.

Darbar groaned. “Oh my God! We’re stuck in the middle of the flood in the middle of the night. Nice one! Who are we going to call at this time of night? Let’s just stay put.”

Swamishri asked Darbar, “Darbar, what shall we do?”

“You tell me!” Darbar retorted.

“I tell you what,” Swamishri bargained, “that you stay here and look after our things. We’ll start walking.” Before anyone could say another word, Swamishri was already well on his way to the other side of the stream and was calling the rest of us to follow him. The Mumbai sadhus followed apprehensively behind.

Swamishri said, “We’ll go ahead and send a tractor...”

It was dark and the roads poor. We couldn’t even make out who was walking in front of us.

“Everyone follow me,” Swamishri instructed. “Dev, Pragat - you be the last.”

At around 2-2:30 a.m., our ‘procession’ began its onward march. Halfway through, we couldn’t find the road ahead. So Swamishri cut a path across some fields. But it was all ploughed land, and in places our feet were sinking over a foot into the mud.

The Mumbai sadhus asked, “Which way are we going?”

Swamishri replied, “You all wanted to be with us, right? So here we are!” Then a little more seriously, “Bapa’s darshan is not so easy to get? Don’t worry. We’ll soon reach Sarangpur. Be careful, don’t fall!”

One of the new sadhus remarked, “Swami! If I had known this was going to happen, I would definitely have come tomorrow.”

Swamishri was calm though. He encouraged, “Come along now, it’s not that bad. We are nearing Sarangpur. We shall be there soon. Look, can you see the road! Come on. Hold on to each other’s hands. We’re almost there now.”

It was around 3:30 in the early hours of the morning when Swamishri knocked on the Sarangpur mandir gate.

“Jiva!” called Swamishri. “Open the gate, Jiva.” The gatekeeper

emerged, lantern in hand. Through his **sleepy** eyes, he looked at Swamishri **and exclaimed**, “Narayan Swami! At this **hour?** And your muddy feet!”

All was dark in the mandir. With the help of some light escaping from a crack in the door, Swamishri found his way to the steps. From the **balcony**, Sant Swami called, “Naranda! You’re here? But you’re soaking!” He opened the other door and we made our way up the assembly hall steps.

Swamishri said, “Let **us have** a bath.” As we approached the rooms, we saw Yogi Bapa talking to **young men** in the dim light of a lantern. (It was his usual early morning session of *katha*.) Yogi Bapa saw us too.

“Who is **it?** Oh, it’s Swami! You made it! Good. You’ve had darshan as well now. So why don’t you **have** a bath. We’ve been waiting all night for you. You didn’t have any trouble getting here, **did you?**”

“Oh no Bapa,” Swamishri said instantly, “not at all.”

* * *

Even during Yogiji Maharaj’s time, the **construction** work on the Gadhada mandir was still going on. Marble for our mandirs had to be bought from Makrana (a marble quarrying village in north Rajasthan). Pramukh Swami was always the one who had to go and see to all the arrangements for this.

In the **month** Fagun (around March-April) of 1968, we left with Ishwarbhai Sompura **by Delhi Express** from Ahmedabad. We’d told Maganbhai Jijibhai, one of Shastriji Maharaj’s leading devotees and a respected figure in Ahmedabad, to prepare some dry snacks for us in the morning. I had explained, “Make enough **for five people to last** for 8-10 days. We’re leaving in the evening so bring it around four in the afternoon.

At precisely 4 o’clock, Rasikbhai (**Secretary**) had kept a horse and cart ready for us outside the Shahibaug (Ahmedabad) mandir office. We left - Pramukh Swami, Nirannamuktadas,

Patitpavandas, the attendants, and Sompura.

On the train we found our places in the third class compartment. Whenever we travelled by third class, Swamishri always preferred to spend the night on the top **berth**. He **would** never let me take any sort of bedding for him. It'd just be a saffron bedsheet and a pillow. And all he'd **to** cover himself with would be his *gatariyu*. In his usual way, he **would fall** asleep.

At 7:00 am, we got off at Fulera. There, on the platform, we had a bath. Swamishri sat on a bench **for** his puja. **He** generally preferred **to do things all by** himself, never expecting anything from his attendants. And he'd always be the first to finish **and ready** to go.

The train for Makrana **arrived on the platform** at 9:00 am on the narrow-gauge line. We got **in**. After offering the snacks we had brought with us to God's *murti*, we **ate a little**. The train left at 11:30 and arrived in Makrana at 1:30 in the afternoon.

Here, all the Muslim workers in the workshops knew Swamishri as 'Narayan Swami'. **One worker called** Mustafa Miyaji always came to greet Swamishri at the station. While in Makrana, he **was** with Swamishri wherever he went, even dropping Swamishri off again at the station **at the time of departure**. Mustafa would **also** carry Swamishri's *potlu*. Swamishri had total faith in him. Swamishri made it a point to keep Mustafa close by in the mornings and afternoons while eating so that he could **serve** him properly.

This time, Swamishri spent most of Fagun, **a** total of 29 days, in Rajasthan. This included the festival of Holi too. All the time, surviving on that stock of dry snacks that was originally meant to last 10 days. Swamishri never asked for milk or anything for himself, but insisted upon arranging some for Rasikbhai.

The work for Gadhada mandir had finished. Now, the extra stones were to be sold off. For this, Swamishri left **early at 8:00 am**. He'd go to each shed and workshop, dealing and bargaining. Returning at 2:00 pm, he'd be gone again an hour later and not return until 8-8:30 in the evening.

Every night, Rasikbhai and Swamishri would count the stones and measure them. A total of between 2,000 and 3500m³ (90 to 110 pieces) of stones were left. Yogiji Maharaj wanted them all to be sold off, rather than then occupying unnecessary space. Realizing it to be Yogi Bapa's wish, Swamishri had come. It was to be his final assignment in Makrana.

For 22 days Swamishri wandered here and there, neither successful in finding a customer nor striking a suitable deal. By now, Nirannamuktadas and Rasikbhai were fed up. They kept nagging at Swamishri. "Let's go. It's been long enough now. We can let Mustafa take care of the rest." The debate would be resumed every night. All five of us slept in one line, so naturally I overheard everything.

Twenty-four days had passed now. But Swamishri was still saying, "This is Yogiji Maharaj's wish - so we'll only go after everything has been sold."

That same day, Pragat Bhagat was down with a ranging fever. He vomited several times. The following morning, Nirannamuktadas and I told Swamishri, "Swami, Pragat is ill. We need to get a doctor to see him and give him some medicine."

That day Swamishri was particularly busy. He left for the sheds. The afternoon passed. Evening fell. The next day, Pragat Bhagat's fever had still not subsided. All he did was cry all day long.

Swamishri returned around 2:30 pm. I was next to Pragat Bhagat pressing his head and trying my best to comfort him. But I couldn't help it - I began to cry as well.

As Swamishri entered the small room, he saw me and Pragat Bhagat. "What's up? What are you crying for? Ok, it's a fever, but there's no need to cry!"

Swamishri sat down on Pragat Bhagat's side and placed his hand on his head. Suddenly, tears started running from Swamishri's eyes too. "Oh! He does have a very high temperature, doesn't he!"

Comforting us both, Swamishri said, "Don't worry. We'll soon

be out of here. The fever will subside.” Then in a soft, loving voice he began. “Dev, you haven’t seen Shastriji Maharaj, have you? But we have to do this *seva* because it is his wish, his command. I always did everything according to Swami’s (Shastriji Maharaj’s) wish - never doing anything against his wish. Shastriji Maharaj built this Sanstha single-handed. Understand? He fell ill too. And he was alone. There are six of us. So what’s there to worry about? Why the tears? These things happen. Just accept it. See, when I was working on the limestone for the Atladra mandir, red blotches covered my entire body. It was intolerable. When Swami found out, and his hand passed over the blisters, everything disappeared. I was fine. This little patch on the nose remains as a sign. So Pragat will be fine too. Come on, let’s give him some rice.”

I brought the rice. It wasn’t the age of spoons then, so Swamishri took a small morsel of rice and placed it in Pragat Bhagat’s mouth with his hands.

Pragat Bhagat started feeling better almost straight away. By four that same afternoon, he was up and about. The fever had vanished.

The next day in one of the sheds, Pramukh Swami met a sannyasi from Agra wearing white clothes. Negotiations for the stones began. Soon a deal was struck. That evening the sannyasi came to see the stones and agreed to buy all of them. The job was done.

Precisely on the 29th day we left Makrana for Ahmedabad.

That was Swamishri’s last visit to Makrana.

19 October 1968, Akshar Mandir, Gondal. That was the holy day of Dhanteras, and it was being celebrated in the mandir courtyard. Thousands of devotees had devoutly filled books with the sacred Swaminarayan mantra. A marble shrine to the left of the mandir had been set up to perform a small ritual of the mantra books. Yogiji Maharaj consecrated the Lord’s marble *charnavind* within the shrine. Throughout the ceremony, Yogiji

Maharaj kept Pramukh Swami by his side. “Yes, don’t forget our Pramukh Swami... he’s the ‘owner’ of the Sanstha, you know. We can’t do the rituals without him.”

After the celebration, Swamishri was ready to leave for Sarangpur. Sant Swami was in a hurry to get back to Sarangpur too, because the Annakut festival was only three days away.

Swamishri came to Yogiji Maharaj to take his leave. Yogiji Maharaj lovingly enquired, “How are you going?”

“Don’t worry,” Swamishri assured him. “Everything will be taken care of. We’ll take a bus.”

Yogiji Maharaj flatly refused. “We can’t let you go by bus. Call Sant Swami. There’s a jeep here. Take that.”

Yogiji Maharaj had already kept that jeep ready for Swamishri’s use. Swamishri loaded his things onto the jeep. There were also some large boxes to be taken for the *annakut*. Soon we left.

The jeep was packed with boxes and passengers. Either it couldn’t manage the load, or for some other odd reason, the jeep’s gears got stuck even before we had reached the main gate. The jeep was really only used for transporting lighter loads.

Anyway, we all got out. And along with everyone, Swamishri began pushing the jeep to park it under the berry tree. We all unloaded it together.

Until 3:30 pm, Swamishri just sat on the assembly hall steps, meeting people. We’d been told to wait until another vehicle could be arranged. Suddenly Yogi Bapa emerged. He was on his way to the Akshar Deri. He was surprised to see Swamishri still here. “You’ve not left yet?” he asked.

Someone explained about the jeep. Yogiji Maharaj suggested, “Then why don’t you take that small black car?”

Soon the car was ready to leave. On driving through Gondal we reached the Sangramji High School turn near the college yard when the car stopped. It wouldn’t move. The driver checked and found a mechanical fault. For some reason, today was turning out

to be a difficult day with vehicles.

Swamishri said, “Take the car back to the mandir. We’ll just go by bus.”

By the time we pushed the car all the way back to the mandir, it was 7 pm. We had started trying to leave at noon, but seven hours later, we were still no closer to our destination. Yet Swamishri was calm and unperturbed.

A little later, we left again - for the third time that day.

As Yogi Bapa saw us off in another car, we heard him say, “Go! Now you’ll reach with no problems. Nothing can happen now.”

Just as we reached the main gate - bang! Punctures in two tyres!

Swamishri just smiled and got out. He said, “We’re all getting worked up for no reason. Go and leave all these boxes and stuff in the store. Just carry what you can.”

The sadhus in the mandir saw me returning and asked, “What happened? Why have you come back? Where’s Pramukh Swami?”

“He’s already on his way to the bus stand,” I replied.

When Yogi Bapa came to know of this, he quickly sent a boy after Swamishri. “Call Pramukh Swami back. Tell him we have a big car coming for him. We simply can’t send Pramukh Swami by bus.”

As soon as Swamishri heard of Yogi Bapa’s instructions, he turned back and returned to the mandir. The same freshness, the same calmness, and that same graceful gait.

Yogi Bapa was waiting for him on the assembly hall steps. Swamishri came up to the steps and said, “Bapa, don’t worry. We’ll find a bus. It’s no trouble, really.”

But Yogiji Maharaj was adamant. When Arunbhai of Rajkot arrived, he ordered us to go in his De Soto car. He said, “Now this is your real farewell. This car has come especially for you...”

When we finally left, it was 8:45 pm.



6. SADHU ATMASWARUPDAS

I have been fortunate enough to have been blessed by Yogiji Maharaj's special pats, so you could say that I have been in Satsang since then. But my inclination and interest towards Satsang grew really only after 1974. The reason being Swamishri himself.

On account of my academic career, I had to move to Mumbai, and there I found myself among many *satsangi* youths. We all became good friends. Our best days were when Swamishri **visited** Mumbai. Whenever he blessed us with affectionate pats, it reminded me of Yogiji Maharaj.

In 1974, after Swamishri's unexpectedly early return to India from his first tour abroad as guru, he stayed in Mumbai for **over a month**.

One of those days **happened to be** Shivaratri. While the afternoon *thal* was being offered, Swamishri sat on the bare floor of the small assembly hall in Akshar Bhuvan, busy writing letters. After the *thal* finished, I came to Swamishri. He held my hand and escorted me to Yogi Bapa's room. He sat down facing me on the floor **of the balcony at the far end**. We chatted away. He asked my name, about my studies, my parents; everything. During this casual and informal conversation, I just happened to mention the fact that in Africa I had been blessed by Yogiji Maharaj's pats.

Hearing this, Swamishri suddenly touched my feet with his hand, and then touched his **hand on his** own head - as a mark of respect and reverence. I was stunned.

"Oh!" Swamishri said overwhelmingly, "you've had Yogi Bapa's pats!"

Since that day, my attraction towards Swamishri **increased**.

In 1974, we, **the young members** of Mumbai Yuvak Mandal,

had organized ourselves into various departments for *seva*. I was allocated the public relations department. After the distribution was complete, we all went down to the office on the ground floor of the old Akshar Bhuvan building.

Swamishri was *there*. He looked particularly relaxed as he leaned back in the sofa, one foot resting upon the other. Swamishri listened to the new arrangements we had made and then looked *at* Dr. Kiran Doshi who was sitting beside me. Swamishri commented, “Kiran’s quite good at public relations.”

The conversation then turned to Kiran’s intense desire to go to America. Swamishri asked him, “Why do you want to go to America? Do you want Lakshmi (wealth)?”

Before Kiran could answer, Swamishri showed the sole of his left foot and said, “Here, there’s as much Lakshmi (money) as you want right here. It’s all yours.”

We were all left speechless. Swamishri seemed to have illustrated to us the verse from Narsinh Mehta’s bhajan in which the Lord tells us:

“Lakshmiji ardhāṅgṇā māri, te mārā Santni dāsi re...”

(My wife is Lakshmiji, the servant of my Sadhu.)

Once, *the* Mumbai Yuvak Mandal *had* organized a question-answer session with Swamishri on the terrace of the old Akshar Bhuvan building. One question posed to Swamishri was, “Today, in 1974-5, there are 40,000 unemployed graduate engineers and a further 60,000 unemployed diploma engineers. What would be your solution to this problem?”

Swamishri shook his head slowly, and with a smile, said “If they all come here and become sadhus, then they’d be able to serve God and your unemployment problem would be solved too.”

Swamishri’s unexpected answer *was greeted with* a wave of *laughter*. But then Swamishri added, “It’s *not* easy *to* become a sadhu. It has to be written on your forehead (in your destiny).

The rest just end up roaming around.”

In 1975, I'd joined the Nirlon company in Mumbai. I did my puja daily, but was still a little shy in putting on the tilak-chandlo before going to work. Once, when I was working in the nightshift, I decided to take the plunge and try doing the tilak-chandlo daily. I figured that as none of my seniors would be there at night, I'd be saved from too much embarrassment.

As I arrived for work that first night, my engineer colleagues naturally asked me about my tilak-chandlo, and I satisfied their curiosity with some confidence. But then things changed.

It was around 1:30 am when one of the machines developed a fault. It was a vital machine and if it wasn't repaired instantly, the company stood to lose Rs. 125,000 every hour.

The first thing we did was call our immediate boss. He then called his superior, and one by one, in no time, the company's entire senior work team had gathered - the Senior Engineer, Deputy Chief Engineer, Chief Engineer and the General Manager. The very people I was hoping to avoid because of my tilak-chandlo had all come together at the same time. They even noticed the tilak-chandlo on my forehead, but they were so engrossed in repairing the faulty machine that no one questioned me or so much as raised an eyebrow.

The machine was back in operation an hour later, but with that, my embarrassment had also taken flight. And my tilak-chandlo became a permanent part of me.

I truly felt that Swamishri himself must have set up the whole incident to help me overcome my shyness.

1975. A bath in the cold water of the river Und (in Bhadra) had taken its toll on Swamishri's health. By early evening, he'd already been stricken with a high fever. Later that night, when we arrived in the village of Bhesdad from Bhadra, Swamishri was

told to rest and **was** given an injection to help **subside** the fever.

The sadhus requested, “There’s no need for you to attend the assembly tonight. We’ll go ourselves.”

Swamishri remarked, “It’s not proper if all the devotees come and the guru sleeps.”

“But Bapa,” the sadhus urged, “there’s still the **consecration ceremony** of the women’s **hari** mandir tomorrow morning. That’s going to be tiring enough. So why don’t you take a little rest right now.” Swamishri remained silent.

It was **time** for the assembly to begin and Swamishri **went** there. His body **was** still burning with fever, **and his** face clearly looked off-colour and rather frail.

To speed up the assembly, Narayan Bhagat (Viveksagar Swami) and Doctor Swami **spoke briefly**. Swamishri was told too, “Give only short blessings. We want you to get back and rest.”

But once Swamishri **started**, he kept going. For 70 long minutes Swamishri spoke to the devotees in the assembly as if he were **as** fit as a horse.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II-29, Shriji Maharaj describes the qualities of someone who is totally engrossed in God. He explains, “Regardless of any diseases or ailments that may be a source of pain for him...**when** he hears talks of **God he** would be instantly relieved of all his miseries.”

I experienced this for myself in Swamishri that night.

* * *

One hot summer day in 1975, the devotees of Umreth had arranged **to take** Swamishri **in procession**. I was **moving** around Swamishri’s decorated car **to make** sure. **That evening was going on smoothly**.

Suddenly, Swamishri called me and **asked** me to get into **the** car. He **made** me sit **beside** the driver. A few moments later, **he remarked**, “Consider this your wedding procession. There is no need for another one. Now the time has come for you to wed

the Lord!”

Thus Swamishri strengthened my wish to become a sadhu in a very touching way. After this incident my desire gathered greater momentum.

25 December 1975. Swamishri arrived in Ahmedabad from Nenpur. That happened to be a special day. Swamishri had come especially for the ceremonial opening of ‘Shriji Svar Kala Kendra’ - a centre for music, ‘Shriji Lalit Kala Kendra’ - an arts and crafts centre, and the ‘Akshar Purushottam School of Philosophy’ - all for the sadhus of the mandir.

In his opening address, Doctor Swami mentioned, “Swami, these are all educated sadhus from abroad, but when a couple of days ago they were told that the lavatories were not being cleaned because the cleaners had not been coming, they eagerly agreed to perform the seva themselves.”

Swamishri listened carefully to every word, and then cast a slow, graceful glance at all of us. It was exquisite. That divine, graceful look in his eyes; that love and affection - one simply had to be there to experience it. It was simply out of this world; so fulfilling.

Shriji Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut Gadhada III-27 that all the senses can be satisfied merely by the divine darshan of God. Such experiences with Swamishri often reveal to us his pure divinity.

1976. Chaitra sud 9, Hari Jayanti; the birthday of Shriji Maharaj according to Hindu calendar. Swamishri was in Ahmedabad. A waterless fast was observed for the day.

Swamishri’s hectic schedule of padhramanis began from early morning. After going from house to house in the scorching heat of Ahmedabad summer, he returned to the mandir after 2 o’clock in the afternoon. Then he wrote some letters and read a little from the Satsang periodicals. At 4:00 pm, he was back on the road ready for another round of padhramanis. When Swamishri

returned, Pragat Bhagat, his attendant, had kept some ice ready to cool the water for Swamishri to bathe. From this you can imagine how hot it must have been.

The main Hari Jayanti assembly was in the evening. The waterless fast had really drained us. We just about made it to midnight. Then many of us had a bath and performed our puja at night, and went to the kitchen for a long awaited drink of lemon water.

When we returned, we noticed that the light in Swamishri's room was still on. It was 12:35 am. It was so hot that Swamishri simply couldn't sleep. Despite the exhausting day, and the fast, Swamishri still appeared as fresh as ever.

At the age of 56, after having spent the whole day sanctifying homes, without drinking even a drop of water, Swamishri eventually went to sleep at 12:45.

And as if that were not enough, only after completing his routine the next morning, Swamishri took only three-quarters of a small glass of orange juice at 7:30 am, after the shangar arti.

It put us younger sadhus to shame.

In 1977, Swamishri had once gone for darshan at the old Swaminarayan mandir in Kalupur, Ahmedabad - the one consecrated by Shriji Maharaj himself. He was lost in the darshan of the central shrine murtis when a young pujari from within the sanctum began hurling abusive comments at him.

"Pramukh Swami, why do you bother coming here for darshan? There's no need for you here... You want to change the Shikshapatri to suit you... and you want to become God don't you?..." He bombarded him with one accusation after another.

Swamishri remained unruffled throughout. He did not even look at the young pujari. He calmly continued with his darshan. As for us, we were all burning with rage at the pujari's insolence.

After darshan, Swamishri came to the private quarters of the pujaris. Here, the senior pujari invited Swamishri to grace his room

as he held Swamishri in high respect. He accepted the invitation.

After they sat down, one of the devotees accompanying Swamishri, Jayantibhai Kothari, complained to the senior *pujari*, “One of your disciples just insulted Swamiji. He accused him of...” The senior sadhu was deeply hurt hearing this and immediately asked for forgiveness on behalf of his junior.

“Oh, it was nothing,” Swamishri said, making light of the incident. “We’ve had plenty of insults hurled at us before. We’re used to it now.”

Then Swamishri patiently explained, “We haven’t changed the Shikshapatri, but just printed a pictorial version of it. Of course, not all the verses can be shown in a picture form, so only some have been selected. We have no intention of changing Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Shikshapatri. It’s just so that kids and others find it more appealing.”

The *pujari* was happy to have entertained Swamishri. Before Swamishri left, he bowed to Swamishri’s humility and apologized once again.

Swamishri’s 1977 foreign tour was a most gruelling experience for him. No doubt, the heavy demands on his body throughout the tour contributed to his illness after the tour ended. It was Swamishri’s first serious illness, which had already set in when he landed in Mumbai. After one- and-a-half months rest in Sarangpur, Swamishri arrived in Ahmedabad. He had not fully recovered yet, and the signs of weakness were more than apparent.

In a friendly tone, Shrihari Swami requested Swamishri, “Why don’t you give your illness to us? Just transfer it!”

Swamishri replied with a smile, “Sorry. It’s not transferable. Besides, whatever Maharaj has done has been for the best. Otherwise there would have been processions in every village with bands and all the rest (as a welcome-back from abroad). And we wouldn’t have been able to say no and hurt the devotees’

feelings. This way, it's worked out nicely.”

Swamishri's words acted as a sign of relief, of having been 'saved' from praises and honour. It seemed as if Swamishri had accepted the illness on purpose to avoid the tributes.

The incident had a profound effect on me.

Swamishri visited the Tanzanian city of Mwanza in 1980. One night, a *kirtan aradhana* had been organized. Some youths were on the stage tuning the instruments in preparation for the programme. One of the youths, Hasmukhbhai, brought his *dilruba* to Swamishri.

Swamishri took the string instrument in his hands and looked at it inquisitively. Then, somewhat playfully, Swamishri asked, “Which *raga* shall we play now?”

“*Malkauns*.”

“*Bhupati*.”

“*Kalavati*.”

“*Megh Malar*”... the suggestions came one after the other.

Swamishri laughed and suggested, “Let's play *raga Sukhiyo* (Happy)!”

So saying, Swamishri tried a few strokes of the bow on the *dilruba* and returned it to Hasmukhbhai.

Of all the various *ragas* in Indian music, Swamishri seems to have a monopoly on *raga Sukhiyo*. Forever immersed in the song of God, Swamishri's words seemed to chime with the conviction that he wants to instil this melody of happiness in our hearts too.

1980. Johannesburg, South Africa. Swamishri had retired for a little rest following lunch at Rameshbhai's house. When Swamishri woke up, a local newspaper reporter was waiting to interview him. For the 20-minute or so interview, I served as interpreter between Swamishri and the reporter.

That afternoon, Swamishri was in somewhat of a hurry,

because he still had a few *padhramanis* to finish before going to meet the brother of the leader of the Radha Swami organization. I pressed the reporter, “OK now. Swami **has a schedule of** other engagements, so could you make this your last question please.”

He asked his final question, “Since you stay away from ladies, don’t they feel neglected or discriminated against in any way?”

Before I could translate the question into Gujarati for Swamishri, Swamishri began his answer. “Tell him to come to India and see for himself!”

What was even more surprising was that before I could even begin to translate Swamishri’s Gujarati reply into English for the reporter, the reporter started jotting something down in his pad. I was baffled, **but** also **wary**. I felt that if this reporter misinterprets this delicate issue, it could be damaging to us. So I asked him, after he had finished, “What did you write down?”

He read out his notes, “Swamiji is telling me to come to India and see firsthand for myself that there are hundreds of thousands of women who worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and none of them feel discriminated against!”

I was shocked. It was a word-for-word translation of Swamishri’s reply. This incident made me realize that Swamishri is above language; **it** cannot constrain him. Maybe that’s why everyone can connect with him and understand him so easily.

It was purely by his grace that he had me tag along as interpreter on that tour. In actual fact, he has no need for any of us - it’s we who need him.

1980. Friends’ Hall, London. In **my** speech **before** Swamishri’s blessings, I mentioned, “It is Gunatitanand Swami’s wish to see the chant of ‘Swaminarayan’ **mantra** resound from every leaf in this world. But when can that **happen**? Only when **the chant of** ‘Swaminarayan’ **echoes out of our** every pore; then consider that as good as the whole world chanting **it!**”

Swamishri nodded his head in agreement. Reverting to this statement in his blessings, he quietly revealed, “We are fortunate to have a guru whose every pore proclaims the devotion of Maharaj. So by his grace, we too will be able to have our every pore, and every nook and corner of the world with the worship of ‘Swaminarayan’.”

While we were in London in 1980, a letter from India arrived. Shvetvaikunth Swami was handling Swamishri’s correspondence on that tour. He couldn’t quite make out what the letter was about so he passed it on to me. I tried my best, but the handwriting was so illegible that I couldn’t make head or tail of it. We decided we ought to show it to Swamishri, but doubted very much if anything would come of it.

That evening, Swamishri presided over the assembly in Friends’ Hall. We took the letter to him and explained our failure to decipher the contents. But Swamishri just put on his spectacles and said not a word further. For 20-25 minutes he struggled. Again and again he patiently read the letter, trying somehow to recognize even the odd word or phrase. In the end, he succeeded in at least extracting the essence of the letter. Immediately he took out his pen and pad, and wrote a reply.

Swamishri genuinely cares and wants to help or else he would not have spent so much time and effort on a letter from an ordinary devotee. The patience, the enthusiasm, the spirit with which he nourishes us and takes time out for us shows the extent of his affection.

1980. The London devotees wished to organize a special outing with Swamishri in order to spend some time with him. Accordingly, picnic was arranged at Epping Forest. Devotees had gathered in large numbers to make the most of this opportunity.

It was planned that Swamishri would complete a few padhramanis on the way before coming to Epping Forest. The

sadhus began the assembly and awaited Swamishri's arrival. They waited, but there was no news of Swamishri.

The fact was Swamishri had been caught up with more *padharamanis* than he could comfortably manage.

In the assembly, everyone, including some BBC reporters, were anxiously waiting for Swamishri. The reporters were hoping to cover the assembly for their *India Dances and Festivities* show. But soon the reporters' patience ran out, and they left.

Half an hour later, Swamishri arrived. I was with him. As soon as he sat down in the assembly, a drizzle began. Someone quickly sheltered Swamishri with an umbrella. Then he was asked to sit on a swing hanging from a nearby tree. As it started raining heavily, the assembly dispersed and Swamishri went inside a nearby school hall.

Everyone's expectations and the excitement of the trip were belied. They were supposed to spend the whole day with Swamishri. But it was not to be as the senior devotees had taken Swamishri on *padhramanis*. Being hurt, some criticized the seniors amongst themselves. "They should've known. No *padhramanis* should have been kept in the first place... We had just about managed to get the BBC to come and even they left... Nobody cares about ordinary devotees..."

By evening, these words of criticism had reached Swamishri's ears.

The next day at the mandir in Islington, Swamishri asked for the microphone after his morning *puja*. He asked a sadhu to open Vachanamrut Gadhada I-16.

Swamishri began his discourse with an apology. "Sorry. Firstly, I would like to apologize for yesterday. It was my fault. I am to blame for arranging the extra *padhramanis* and thus turning up late for the assembly. It's no one else's fault - so please, forgive me."

Swamishri's words were so full of love and regret that every single devotee's heart was pierced. The critics realized their

mistake in airing their disappointment in public. Those who (in actual fact) had organized the extra *padhramanis* in the first place were stunned to hear Swamishri **bear** the blame for their mistake.

Many **shed tears of regret** in the assembly that morning.

2 September 1980 **was** Janmashtami, **Lord Krishna's** birthday according to the Hindu calendar. In the morning, Swamishri had travelled from New York to Boston for **an eye check-up**. Now we were making the return journey back to New York.

The eight-hour **road journey would be** tiring for Swamishri. **So, the** sadhus urged him to lie down **at** the back of the van. Thakorji had been placed neatly in the upper berth of the van. He too had been put to rest for the journey **and** the lights were switched off.

Suddenly there was a thud. Something had fallen to the floor.

"What **is** it? What **is** it?" Swamishri asked along with the other sadhus as he sat up in his seat.

A sadhu disclosed, "It **is** Thakorji. He's fallen from above."

It was as if Swamishri had been struck by lightning. With a somewhat shaky voice he cried, "Thakorji hasn't fallen out of his case has he?"

We switched the light on inside and were relieved to learn that Thakorji had merely turned over within his own little case. But Swamishri was all the more distressed.

Tears were running down his face. With his throat choked up, and hands gently massaging Thakorji, he kept muttering, "O Maharaj! Forgive me. Please forgive me Maharaj!"

For Swamishri, it was as if Shriji Maharaj had actually fallen down and hurt himself. And that it was his fault. For Swamishri, Thakorji isn't just a metal icon, but the Lord in person.

In the van itself, he began prostrating **in atonement** for what he believed was his mistake. One... two... three... five... ten... twenty... twenty-five **dandvats....**

Swamishri himself was ill, but one after the other he continued **offering** prostrations. No one could stop him either. He still wasn't satisfied, but what else could he do?

He decided to offer *thal* and beg forgiveness in that way. Then Swamishri just sat before Thakorji with his *mala*; motionless and speechless. He wouldn't talk or eat or drink, or anything. He still couldn't forgive himself. In reality, he wasn't to blame at all, but all the way, he just **felt** that it **was** his fault. Thakorji had fallen. And it hurt Swamishri.

* * *

During his 1980 tour of America, Swamishri had been experiencing difficulty in seeing for **some time**. **He has gone totally blind** in the left eye. **An** ophthalmic surgeon, Dr. Hutchinson, was consulted in Boston. He advised an immediate cataract operation. A delay **would** carry the serious risk of Swamishri losing his sight **forever**. With the date for the operation fixed, Swamishri returned to New York.

When Swamishri was in New York, Dr. Hutchinson phoned from Boston regarding the arrangements for the operation. He explained that everything was fine except for one thing - there were no male nurses available. The two he did know of, were booked for the whole month.

Dr. Hutchinson put forward a solution himself. He suggested, "When Swamishri is under anaesthesia, he'll be unconscious. Then there'll be no problem with female nurses there? They'll be gone before Swamishri **regains consciousness**."

I made matters absolutely clear on the phone. "I'm sorry but that won't do under any circumstances. Our vows are quite firm in these matters. There can be no compromise."

The helpful doctor promised to try his best once more.

As I put the phone down, Swamishri asked me about the operation arrangements. I explained about the anaesthesia and the female nurses.

“What did you say?” asked Swamishri.

“I said that it won’t do - even if you are under anaesthesia.”

Swamishri spoke **emphatically**, “Not even if unconscious should our rules be broken! If our rules cannot be safeguarded satisfactorily, then I don’t want the operation done here.”

Swamishri knew well that if the operation was postponed any longer, he could end up losing his sight for good. But he would rather forsake his eyes than **flout** the command of Shriji Maharaj.

Shriji Maharaj writes in Vachanamrut Gadhada II-61, “A renunciant who, despite encountering wealth and women in his travels to other regions, remains unaffected and continues to firmly adhere to all of his *niyams*, is considered to be great among all renunciants.”

In 1980, Swamishri’s 60th birthday was celebrated in Vadodara.

After performing his puja on the morning of his birthday at Ashokbhai Patel’s ‘Aims House’, we all lined up to receive blessings from Swamishri. I was last in the line.

When my turn came, I said, “Bapa, bless me that I can follow your every wish.”

Swamishri folded his hands and said to us sadhus, “Bless me that I can follow your wishes.”

“But Bapa,” I jumped in, “it can’t work that way round. You have to bless us to please you.”

Swamishri chuckled and concluded, “Let’s keep it mutual. You please me and I’ll please you.”

News of the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentennial Celebrations held in Ahmedabad in 1981 echoed throughout the state. But unfortunately, Gujarat was trying its best to contend with a burning problem: student riots. Even during the festival, fighting often **broke out** in the city. But in ‘Swaminarayan Nagar’, the festival campus just off Subhash Bridge, the mood was one of

devotion and delight.

On the afternoon of the main day of the festival, 12 April, Swamishri was in the Press Office behind the large canopied assembly arena being interviewed by some reporters.

One reporter asked bluntly, “The city is ablaze with fighting and looting. What steps have you taken to resolve the issue?”

Swamishri, as composed and serene as ever, gave a short but confident reply. “We have prayed for peace.”

“No,” the reporter pushed, “have you actually gone to the streets and alleys, to the houses? What has your Sanstha done practically to help the people? Prayer can’t do much.”

Swamishri reiterated his previous answer with yet more conviction. “We have faith that our prayers will work.”

I don’t think that reporter had **much faith in Swamishri’s faith**, because he didn’t seem very satisfied.

Anyway, that evening in the main assembly, Swamishri called for a collective prayer. Swamishri appealed to the **packed audience**, “Let us pray that the differences between the students and the politicians be reconciled, and that peace prevails throughout Gujarat.”

Surprisingly, the many months of strife and struggle ended the very next day. The students and politicians worked out **a compromise**, and peace was reinstated.

Whether the reporter realized the power of Swamishri’s prayer or not is a different matter, but the then Chief Minister of Gujarat did inform the Prime Minister, “The riots subsided because of Pramukh Swami’s blessings.”

A ‘Sadhus’ Convention’ had been arranged at Mount Abu in 1981. It so happened that the 31st anniversary of Swamishri’s appointment as president of the Sanstha fell on one of those **blue days**.

That morning, Swamishri beautifully explained Vachanamrut Gadhada I-27. Thereafter, all the sadhus dispersed to perform their various allocated duties. I went to the main hall, where I sat

down to peel some vegetables.

Seeing us, Swamishri got up from his sofa and sat down on the floor alongside us.

Indravadan, Swamishri's driver, just happened to be passing by. Swamishri called him. "Here," Swamishri said, "let's do a partnership (in the *seva*)."

Indravadan replied, "But why don't you be a sleeping partner. You just watch. We'll do the *seva*."

"No way!" Swamishri said, returning the offer. "It has to be a joint effort, otherwise it can't be called a partnership."

Swamishri continued peeling. A little later I happened to mention, "Bapa, Yogi Bapa had sat down to chop spinach on his 75th Birthday in Gondal like this too."

Swamishri revealed, "Yes. He was sitting just like this."

Swamishri very rarely directly acknowledges his oneness with Yogiji Maharaj, yet his life itself is proof enough.

One afternoon in 1982 at Ahmedabad, Swamishri was taking lunch when Jnanyagna Swami recited a popular quotation in English. I then quoted Socrates' famous words, "I know only one thing, that I know nothing."

Swamishri was very pleased when he heard this statement. He commented, "Yes. This is the way. If one can really imbibe these words, one would never feel like talking ill of anyone."

After celebrating the 1983 Janmashtmi festival in Sarangpur, Swamishri stayed on there for a few days. **Once, an informal question-answer session took place between a few sadhus and Swamishri.**

I asked a question. "Bapa, Yogiji Maharaj had a lot of aspirations, hopes for the future. Do you have any of your own?"

Swamishri was quick to dismiss the issue. "No, no. Shastriji Maharaj's and Yogiji Maharaj's aspirations are our aspirations..."

But when we pressed him further, he finally revealed, "There are

two. One, that Akshardham in Gandhinagar becomes a magnificent success. And the other - that a grand mandir be built in London.”

With both projects being Swamishri’s ‘personal’ projects, it seems that God must have been obliged to see them to their fulfillment. It can be no wonder then that today, Akshardham shines bright as the **crowning** jewel of India’s **glorious** culture and humanity’s universal values; and that the largest traditional mandir in the western world, the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London, has become the focal point of Hinduism in Europe and Britain itself. All by the divine power of Swamishri’s aspirations and inspirations!

Swamishri was quite distressed by the **violent** unrest in Gujarat in 1984-5 caused by the student riots. He himself had taken an active interest in **resolving** the problem **by** personally meeting leaders from both sides - the students and their parents, and the politicians.

In one such meeting, Swamishri was negotiating terms with Gaurang Shah - a student leader, Shankarbhai Patel of the parents council, and a few other government officials.

Nearing the conclusion of the meeting, one of the government officers said in a somewhat disheartened tone, “We’ll do as you say, but only God’s wish will prevail.”

“This is God’s wish,” Swamishri enforced, “and it is God who is telling you to do it.”

It was a divine and breathtaking moment. Swamishri had almost ‘accidentally’ revealed his connection with the Lord in the heat of the discussion.

A verse from Nishkulanand Swami’s kirtan sprang to my mind:

*“Sant bole te bhelo hu bolu re,
Sant na bhule huye na bhulu re.”*

“When the Sadhu speaks, it is I who speak with him,
He forgets me not and I forget him not.”

When Swamishri visited New Delhi in 1986, he was accorded

an invitation by the President of India, H.E. Gyani Zail Singh, to grace the presidential palace.

The meeting turned out to be a memorable and historic occasion. When Swamishri was about to leave, he removed the *mala* from his neck and offered it to the President. Then Swamishri said, “We are sadhus, so we have nothing else to give you except this *mala*. Use it to remember God.”

The President accepted the *mala* with deep gratitude and touched it to his forehead. He was quite overwhelmed. He remarked in return, “Swamiji, whenever I chant with this *mala*, I will remember you.”

Swamishri never failed in passing on his message of devotion even to the President. Who else, besides such a pure and sincere sadhu like Swamishri, could do that?

Many more incidents have been engraved in my memory, each one reveling a special quality, a unique characteristic of Swamishri. This makes his company all the more powerful and inspiring. Every moment with him and near him, leads us towards God. Let us pray that together, with Swamishri holding our hand, we can scale higher and higher heights of spirituality.



7. SADHU YAGNAPRIYADAS

It was around 1967 and the Akshar Purushottam Mandir of Kanthariya was nearing completion. Modubha and other devotees from the village came to Gondal to meet Yogiji Maharaj to discuss the inauguration. Yogiji Maharaj said, “Take Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami.” So according to Yogiji Maharaj’s command, Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami came to Kanthariya.

Three days before the *murti-pratishtha*, a *parayan* was organized in which Pramukh Swami and Sant Swami both discoursed twice a day.

One afternoon, after finishing the morning discourse, Pramukh Swami came to the kitchen. He noticed that Devcharan Swami was alone rolling *puris*. There was no one to fry them. Seeing this, Pramukh Swami quickly turned a dirty old oil can upside down, sat on it, and began putting the raw *puris* one by one into the frying pan. Tomorrow, the same Pramukh Swami would consecrate the *murtis* in the mandir. But today, here he was frying *puris* sitting on an upturned tin can.

I was still young at the time but I remember that scene distinctly. It really touched me that Pramukh Swami has no airs that ‘I am president’, or ‘I should be respected’. He looked so comfortable being what he is so good at, a humble servant.

In 1972, Swamishri visited our Akshar Purushottam Chhatralay in Vidyanagar. Ganesh Sindhar, a 10th Standard student from the small village of Kankarvadi near Viramgam, was staying in the hostel at the time. He was a delightful and energetic young boy, and deeply attracted to Swamishri. He innocently asked Swamishri to come and grace his village. Swamishri replied, “When we are in that region, we’ll definitely arrange something.”

Later that year, Swamishri came to Sarangpur to celebrate the

spring festival of Fuldol. There Swamishri's forthcoming touring schedule was **worked out**. Ganesh had also come to Sarangpur for the festival. He made it a point to remind Swamishri about the promise he had made in Vidyanagar. The programme had already been **chalked out** but Swamishri called Narayan Bhagat (Viveksagar Swami) and had the route slightly altered so as to include the village of Kankarvadi.

On 1 May 1977, Swamishri arrived in Kankarvadi at around 7:00 pm. Ganesh had insisted that Arvindbhai Swaminarayan and myself come to Kankarvadi from Vidyanagar too.

The dusty and bumpy road into the village **kicked up** clouds of dust as **Swamishri's car** made **its** way to Ganesh's modest mud-house. It was a small, meagre place.

There was only one **concrete** house in the entire village. **There was no** electricity, **and** no bathrooms or lavatories. Outside in the yard, Swamishri sat in a lantern-lit assembly. It was summertime - extremely hot and sticky. With no electricity anywhere, fans were out of the question.

For the night, we climbed up onto the terrace of **the concrete** house. Swamishri slept right alongside us upon a mattress on the floor. In the morning after, completing his usual routine, Swamishri was off to do some *padhramanis* in the village. He returned, attended the assembly, **and after having** lunch, retired for a little rest in the mud-house.

It was simply boiling in that room. No light. No ventilation. But Swamishri was soon fast asleep. We took it in turns to fan Swamishri with a makeshift hand-fan. God knows how useful it really was. But anyway, the tranquil, tender smile on Swamishri's face - despite all the inconvenience - was shining as bright as the sun outside.

Swamishri had lovingly come all the way to a village which had no other *satsangis* and no proper facilities, just to satisfy one teenager. For both Ganesh and Swamishri, it was a 'festival' of a lifetime. Swamishri left him and his family - and even me - with

so many memories.

* * *

It was the inner wish of Charutar Vidya Mandal leader and [the Union Finance Minister](#), Shri H.M. Patel, that a modern hospital and medical college be set up in Vidyanagar. A pasture in the village of Bakrol was chosen for the project. H.M. Patel requested Swamishri to grace the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the future hospital and college.

Swamishri arrived at the Vidyanagar hostel the day before the ceremony was scheduled. A few of us youths reached the site early the next day to make sure of all the arrangements. There we saw the small stage, about two feet high. Upon it, a long 15-20 feet carpet stretched out from under a few mattresses. I called Manibhai Patel, secretary of the society and a staunch devotee of ours. I explained to him that the carpet that ran out from beneath the mattresses was not acceptable according to our Satsang [code of conduct](#). The same carpet for both Swamishri, sadhus and the female guests would not do. And Swamishri himself would not let it pass.

Manibhai listened apprehensively because to change the arrangements now - while professors from nearly every Vidyanagar college, prominent industrialists and other VIPs were watching - would [be a little embarrassing](#). What's more, if someone were to ask why he was changing the seating arrangements, it would put him in the tight spot of having to explain the sadhu's [discipline with regard to females](#). This delicate topic could prove hard to swallow for some, and the last thing Manibhai wanted was to upset someone or cause an uproar.

The dilemma was still [agitating](#) in Manibhai's mind when Swamishri's car pulled up. Swamishri got out and was warmly greeted by H.M. Patel and other VIPs. They led Swamishri to the stage. But Swamishri was quick to deduce from the setup that things weren't right. He immediately began moving the carpet out from underneath the mattresses himself. At the same time, he started telling us off too.

“You youths should know better. You know our rules and disciplines... and I thought you came early to set things up.”

Together with Narayan Bhagat (Viveksagar Swami) we youths quickly **got up** on **the** stage and neatly rearranged the carpet. H.M. Patel and the other hosts just **looked** on, baffled by the commotion. Anyone else would have been embarrassed to change the carpet, and would probably have let things be. But Swamishri **never** swerved from his principles for fear of falling from others' respect.

Staunchness in obeying Shriji Maharaj's commands was a valuable quality I learned from Swamishri that day.

* * *

The Bicentennial Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were going to be celebrated in 1981 with great fanfare. A five-year programme from 1977 was planned with smaller projects as part of the grand celebration. As the main festival **days** grew closer and closer, the Kheda district in central Gujarat buzzed with excitement. The centre of the activities in Kheda at that time was Vidyanagar and our Akshar Purushottam **Chhatralay**.

In 1979, looking for a more organized and systematic approach to our activities, we decided to set up a team of volunteers who would be delegated different regions within Kheda itself. Arvindbhai Swaminarayan, Yogendrabhai Jani, Kanubhai Patel, Bipinbhai Gandhi, and a few others made up a team of ten. Every week they'd go to their allocated areas and provide valuable guidance to and boost the morale of the other volunteers.

Just a few days after the team members had been allotted their regions, Swamishri happened to arrive in Vidyanagar. I felt it would be a good idea to hold a small meeting with Swamishri and the volunteers.

When I put forward the suggestion to Swamishri, he **readily** agreed. Everyone was informed and the meeting began at 10:00 pm in the hall above the kitchen.

Swamishri was sitting on the floor on a small mattress-like seat

as we all **were sitting** around him. I introduced each volunteer to Swamishri in turn, also mentioning **the** area he had been allocated to oversee. Swamishri listened attentively. After I finished, each team member gave a brief report **confirming** his area.

The meeting concluded with Swamishri's motivating blessings. He said, "We have all accepted the responsibility of trying our best to please Maharaj. So now we have to become regular in going to our allocated villages - not **missing a single one**. Take time out from your work or business..."

Midway, Bipinbhai Gandhi, a teacher by profession, asked, "Swami, it's **Ok** if we don't go when we're ill, isn't it?"

"Only if you're too ill even to go to school," Swamishri responded; and then added, "but if you can go **to** school to work, then why can't you go to the villages to please Maharaj?"

The love and logic in Swamishri's words still remind me today of how active and enthusiastic Swamishri expects us to be in order to serve the Sanstha.

* * *

Whenever Swamishri visits Akshar Purushottam Chhatralay in Vidyanagar, students are organized into groups - sometimes according to their different subject faculties or sometimes according to their Satsang involvement - and arrange an informal sitting with Swamishri.

Once it was the turn of the 12th Standard Science students. The session was held in the old mandir hall where a swing had been **arranged** for Swamishri. The teenagers were already sitting neatly on the floor when Swamishri arrived.

The sadhus introduced each of the students by their name and 10th Standard results. Finally, Swamishri was requested to say a few words.

Swamishri talked quite strongly on studying sincerely and steering clear of distractions such as movies and TV, and eating out. He went as far as to say that it didn't matter too much if

we turned a few less *malas*, but we should stay well away from those two nuisances.

While Swamishri was eagerly talking, one of the links in the chain holding up his swing came undone for some reason. The swing came crashing to the floor, **bringing** Swamishri down with it. We were all shocked **by the accident**. None of us could say a word or even move for a split second or two. Regaining our senses, we **rushed to help** Swamishri **get** up, not that he needed the help so much.

“I’m fine!” Swamishri maintained. “Really, ‘I’m fine.’”

Naturally we were rather concerned about whether Swamishri had been hurt or not; but he just sat down on the floor and continued from where he had left off. Even at the end, he met each student individually, reconfirming their promises to stay away from TV and outside food.

How could such a scene like this have happened? We sadhus looked at each other with utter guilt and disgust. Nobody felt like saying or doing anything. Nothing made sense.

But Swamishri? He was as light as ever. As if nothing had happened at all. I know if it had been anybody else, their ego would have been bruised more than anything. It’s obvious, isn’t it? Falling over like that in front of a whole group of young boys would be absolutely hilarious for them. Anyone would have been embarrassed. In fact, if it had been anyone else, he would have told **us off**. At the least he would have shown some sort of displeasure. But nothing. Absolutely nothing. Not a word from Swamishri. Not even a frown or a bitter look. That’s the beauty of Swamishri. So open-hearted, he can forgive and forget anyone and everyone. The way in which he **put up with** the **incident** taught me a great lesson in life.

* * *

Swamishri’s entry into the Vidyanagar **chhatralay** campus is always a special affair. The students always found new, original ways of making Swamishri’s welcome impressive and memorable.

In 1989 we were thinking about what to do this time round when a student by the name of Tushar Patel came up with an original idea. “Why don’t we have the students pull Swamishri from the main gate on a bullock-cart,” he suggested. “It’ll be really traditional, like in a real village.”

Everyone loved the idea and we all got to work on the project.

The big day came. Students had decorated the hostel main gate with traditional village ornaments. We also had a few students dressed up in traditional village outfits, complete with farmers’ staffs. The rest of the students lined the road on both sides from the entrance to the hall. We all waited in anticipation for Swamishri’s arrival.

Finally, Swamishri’s car pulled up. Tushar, looking like a true village farmer, opened Swamishri’s door and asked Swamishri, that since it was the wish of all the students, if he wouldn’t mind sitting on the cart. Swamishri accepted the offer. With utter smoothness, Swamishri transferred from Mercedes to bullock-cart. We had kept a small six-step climbing block to help Swamishri get onto the cart.

Seeing Swamishri on the decorated cart, the students couldn’t control their joy. All the instructions they’d been given about staying in line were forgotten in the cheering and shouting. And suddenly there was a mad rush of students towards the cart. It had been planned that only the costumed students would pull the cart. But now the cart was engulfed by a sea of students, and fresh waves were still coming in.

At least 15 to 20 students pushed and shoved their way to the front of the cart and began to pull. Some pulled in one direction; others pushed in another. You can imagine the outcome. Absolute mayhem. Chaos.

To add to the pandemonium, the entire campus exploded in a deafening cheer. *“Pramukh Swami Maharajni Jai! Pramukh Swami Maharajni Jai!”*

Poor Swamishri. He was trying his best to control the crowd

with hands high up in the air. Swamishri's soft voice uttering, "Begin with Maharaj! Say Maharaj's 'Jai' first!" was soon drowned in the students excitement and joy.

In the end, the cart made it safely to the mandir. But where was that block of steps to help Swamishri climb down from the cart? It'd been left at the entrance in all the excitement. Swamishri was left to make a delicate jump from the cart with the help of Narayancharan Swami and Priyadarshan Swami.

After **doing** darshan in the mandir, Swamishri came to the campus lawn where a short welcoming assembly had been arranged. In an almost delicate tone, Swamishri began his gentle telling off. "I know love knows no laws, but you should always begin 'Jais' with Maharaj. Keep Shriji Maharaj ahead in whatever you do. This is a part of our discipline as a *satsangi*..."

Swamishri mentioned not a word about the disorder of the students pulling his cart or the discomfort he had had to suffer. But I think all the students realized their mistake anyway.

I suppose that **shows** Swamishri quite nicely. He is always looking to please us, no matter how much he has to tolerate himself. He has never ever cared for his personal comforts or convenience, but cares always for others. He could have easily scolded us. There was no real need of the cart, and we hadn't even asked him or informed him in advance. But he just accepted things as they were and kept us happy.

Swamishri has visited the rooms of each and every single student in the hostel. He has even given personal meetings to many. He has never said no to anything. Many times we don't even let Swamishri know beforehand about certain decisions and programmes; at the most he is informed at the very last minute. Yet **he** has always said yes to everything. Always **never** "no".



8. SADHU BHAKTIKISHORDAS

Whenever Swamishri was to come to Gondal, Yogiji Maharaj always made it a point to write to Balmukund Swami, Nirgun Swami and me to inform us of the impending visit. He'd give us detailed instructions too in his own typical but unique way. "Pramukh Swami is coming. He'll be staying there. So the sadhus should go to greet him at the station. Prostrate to him. Serve him new food items everyday. And make *puran-puri* of course. Sit with him after *katha-cheshta*... When he leaves, see him off at the station. Only return to the mandir after the train leaves... Remember whatever he says to you. You sadhus should meet and do *goshti* after his discourses... so Shastriji Maharaj's bliss can be experienced."

Obedying those words of Yogiji Maharaj proved immensely rewarding, because after Yogiji Maharaj's passing away, I was able to attach myself to Swamishri without any doubt or hesitation whatever.

Around 1966-7 Swamishri had come to Gondal. He would come to the office every day after the morning assembly. Chhagan Bapa used to look after things back then, so he would sit with him and clear the previous day's accounts. Then he would go to the Akshar Deri for *pradakshina*. At four or five in the afternoon, he would take either me or Nilkanth Swami to the farm with him to check things there.

I always offered Swamishri something special to eat whenever he came to Gondal - depending upon the season. If there were raw peanuts or gram, I would bake them on an open fire. Baked gram suited Swamishri more I think. It was nice, Swamishri and the sadhus gathering round the fire in a circle to eat like that. When the pods broke off from their stem, Swamishri would gather them up with a dry stalk or twig. And position them neatly on the

hot ashes to keep the done ones warm. As we ate them, he'd pass them around; a few at a time to everyone. Some he would peel himself, and some he would give to us to peel. When about a handful of gram was ready, it was offered to Thakorji. The *prasad* was passed round to everyone. Only then would Swamishri take a few grains himself, unfailingly uttering "*Maharaj-Swami jamo; Shastriji Maharaj-Yogiji Maharaj jamo,*" as he did so.

If I got some gram ready and gave it to him, he would take a little - just to keep me happy. But then say, "Everyone should peel the gram himself."

There were interludes of laughter. And if Swamishri saw someone gobble up a handful at once, he would laugh and comment, "Take a couple at a time. They tast better that way. It's no fun eating them all at once."

Sometimes, Swamishri would eat raw peanuts too in the same manner.

Sometimes he would talk of the mandir's history, or the Akshar Deri, or even memories of Yogiji Maharaj. Often, he would also talk about the discipline, rules and regulations of sadhus. He was ever so tactful, you could hardly tell he was giving advice.

He would sit with us while we sang the *cheshta* too, leaning against the second pillar towards the *murtis* in the assembly hall with a pillow or folded quilt for support. During the *cheshta*, someone would often come and ask him something. Then after replying to him he would return instantly to singing with the same concentration.

After *cheshta*, the sadhus would gather around Swamishri and just muse over the day, perhaps mentioning some funny or interesting episodes. Half an hour or so later, Swamishri would go to his room. There he would read. If he wasn't busy, then the discussion would continue in the room, sometimes till well into the night.

He'd never go to sleep before 11:30 pm. About midnight he'd get up and softly say, "OK then, Jai Swaminarayan to everyone."

Whenever he was in Gondal, the whole mandir seemed full of energy and ecstasy - as if a fresh lease of life were instilled in every sadhu and devotee.

* * *

Swamishri was in Navagam for the opening of Himmatbhai's new cotton mill. Swamishri graced the mill and scattered petals everywhere.

At dinner that evening at Himmatbhai's house, Swamishri told me to sit next to him. I was rather shy and looked for a place a little further up. But all the other places were already taken. In the end, I nervously sat down to eat next to Swamishri.

It was a traditional meal, typical for the Jhalawad region - *rotla*, *shak*, a spicy raw-mango pickle, fresh butter and buffalo milk.

I took half a *rotlo*, at which Swamishri laughed but didn't comment on. A little while later, Devcharan Swami came with a piping hot *rotlo* for Swamishri. He skillfully sliced open the upper layer and lavishly spread butter both inside and out. As he attempted to put it in Swamishri's *bowl*, Swamishri stopped him. Instead, Swamishri took the *rotlo* in his hand, which was by now almost dripping with melted butter, and swiftly *placed* it into my *pattar*. Then he himself called for some gur for me to eat along with the buttered *rotlo*.

"Eat up," he called, "this is a traditional Jhalawad meal!"

I've experienced the pure, perfect motherly love of Swamishri many a time. But that meal I'll never be able to forget.

* * *

The passing away of Yogiji Maharaj on 23 January 1971 had left the whole of Gujarat numb. The state of the *satsangis* and Satsang as a whole was one of total dismay. Even the sadhus seemed lost. At this most delicate and critical of times, many important and urgent decisions had to be taken. The patience, composure and maturity I saw in Swamishri at that time was exceptional.

A memorable incident unfolded during those difficult days.

Swamishri had gone with the Trustees to Akshar Vadi to select the site for Yogiji Maharaj's **last** rites. The place where the current Yogi Smruti Mandir is was ultimately chosen. That's where I had planted some wheat. And it had grown really well, like never before.

On the morning of 24 January 1971, at about 9 o'clock, Swamishri called me to Shastriji Maharaj's old room. We were alone. He began **softly**, "Bhakti, you know the Trustees and senior devotees have chosen the cremation site. It's where you have grown **the** wheat. So what shall we do now?"

The president of the Sanstha was asking me, an ordinary, simple sadhu. It was like a king asking his servant. I was **put to great** embarrassment. "Swami," I exclaimed meekly, "whatever you've decided is fine. You don't have to ask me."

"You did plant the wheat yourself," Swamishri explained politely. "You've worked hard for it, so of course we have to ask you."

My insides churned seeing Swamishri so modest and caring.

Then he asked, "Do you have any sickles here? If not, get a few from our *satsangi* farmers. Get things ready now. I'm sending some devotees. Mow half from the side of the road, but keep half on the water tank's side. If need be, we can cut that later."

As I got up to leave Swamishri **took** hold of my hand. "Bhakti, the wheat is still green. Can it be useful as fodder for the cattle?"

"For a couple of days maybe," I explained, "while it stays green. But not for much longer than that."

"That doesn't matter. As you start cutting, keep filling the tractors. And distribute it in the streets of Gondal among the stray cattle. Give some to that charitable asylum for crippled animals. At least that way the wheat won't go to waste."

Everything was done **according to** Swamishri's instructions.

In the evening **were** the cremation **rites** of Yogiji Maharaj's physical body. No one had eaten for almost two days. So I had some *khichdi* and other things made. Swamishri told everyone to eat a little. There, in the old dining hall, he sat down in a line with

all the other sadhus to eat the *khichdi*.

Swamishri's first monsoon after becoming guru was spent in Gondal. One day he called me, and just like Yogiji Maharaj often did, he asked me if there was any particular *seva* that could be shared among everyone. "Lots of devotees are here. If there's any *seva*, why don't you arrange something?"

So I got the sacks of wheat out that needed cleaning. I emptied them in the assembly hall to make a long streak of **brownish** yellow. Devotees sat down on either side. Swamishri came and sat down on a quilt too. Seeing Swamishri, others who were just wandering around outside came in to join us in cleaning the wheat.

Then Swamishri said to a devotee, "Yes, now read the Vachanamrut." We had the Vachanamrut reading on one side, Swamishri's darshan, and everyone busy **picking** small stones and **cleaning** rubbish from the wheat.

Soon it was time for Swamishri's rest. Someone called out, "Bapa, why don't you go now. We'll do the rest."

"There's not much **left**," Swamishri said, pointing to the not-so-small pile still left to be cleaned. "Might as well finish it and go. It's no big deal."

We pressed further. The fact was, we were all eager to send Swamishri off to bed on time so that he could get up early and come with us at 3:30 **pm** to the Gondali River for a bath. When we explained this to Swamishri, Swamishri replied, "Don't worry, I'll come there as well. But let's finish the wheat first."

The wheat was cleaned. Everyone left. And Swamishri went for his afternoon nap later than usual. Yet keeping our invitation in mind, Swamishri was ready on time to come with us to the river. We all had a great time in the water there with Swamishri.

In the water, the sadhus chorused the *kirtan*: '*Sakhi nā'vā padhāro Maharaj re* (O my dear Maharaj, come for a bath)'.

Swamishri placed Harikrishna Maharaj in a boat and gave him a little cruise by himself before climbing in as well. Swamishri even dived into the water off the boat's edge.

Every moment with Swamishri was pure bliss. He took care of both the *seva* and the hearts of all the sadhus - teaching us that *seva* is more important than just having fun, yet still sharing a few light moments with us.

* * *

So many incidents happened thereafter, with so many things to learn from each - Swamishri's management power, his affection for devotees, his attention to detail and discipline, his total disregard for his own body..

I only pray that I can truly recognize his divinity, attach myself to him totally, and please him in every way I can.



9. SADHU PREMPRAKASHDAS

In 1962, at the age of ten, I was inspired by Devprasad Swami to come and stay in the Gadhada mandir. The sole reason being to study in the village school.

Out of ignorance and innocence, I often made obvious mistakes. Because of this, getting told off by Mukhi Swami became a daily occurrence. The **pujari**, Muktijivan Swami, **intimidated** me everyday. “Just you wait till Pramukh Swami comes. I’ll tell him everything. And we’ll soon have you out of here.”

I was really scared. If I had to leave, a whole year at school would be wasted. Then one day, I got news that Pramukh Swami was arriving the next day.

My mind started racing. “Pramukh!” The name itself, along with all the connotations of president, conjured up a stereotype image of a big, stern and authoritative man. I thought to myself, “If the Gadhada mandir Kothari is this stern, how stern would the ‘Pramukh’ of all six mandirs be! How will he arrive? What will he look like? What will he say to me?”

In those days, Swamishri generally took the train from Sarangpur to Botad, and then changing at Ningala, arrived in Gadhada at around seven in the morning. The driver, Lakh, and Bhimo the cleaner, would go to pick up Swamishri at the station in the tractor. Swamishri would be waiting; pillow under one arm, and waterbag or a bag of *prasad* in the other.

But today Swamishri came by horse-drawn carriage. He was out of breath from climbing the hillock. As he reached the top, he told the Kothari, “The carriage driver is waiting **down**. He needs to be paid.”

I was looking on from a little distance, with both fear and curiosity, trying my best to make out what **the** “Pramukh” would be like.

Just then I heard the Kothari call out to me. “Hey **boy**! Come

here.”

He got someone to give me Rs. 1.50 from the donation box, and told me to go and give it to the driver. Throughout this little procedure, Swamishri's eyes were fixed on me. I counted the money. Swamishri saw this too, and checked I hadn't made a mistake. Then delicately he responded with one word, “Good.”

Before I left, he gave me some final instructions. “The driver's name is... Ask his name first, and then count the money in front of him.”

Now there's nothing out of the ordinary in any of this, but somehow, the sweetness in Swamishri's voice and the affection flowing from his eyes shattered all my preconceived ideas about him. It was almost magical. Up till then, I had been afraid. But now that fear had taken flight. It was a mysterious kind of feeling. I sprinted all the way down the hill to pay the driver. I wanted to get back to Pramukh Swami as fast as I could.

After that first encounter, Swamishri began building a friendly rapport **with me**.

* * *

I say with pride that I've had the good fortune to have been witness to the friendly and delightful times shared between Swamishri and Harjivandas Swami, the *kothari* of Gadhada mandir.

The first such incident I remember was when Swamishri asked me about my studies.

“Come here, son,” Swamishri called, beckoning me towards the pile of gravel he was sitting on.

“Sit here, opposite me. Now, what's your name?... From what village?... And your father's name?... How did you find your way here?... Oh, to study. What are you studying?...”

I answered most of the questions. Harjivan Swami answered the **remaining**; and then added jokingly, “He's Dev's (Dev**prasad** Swami's) ‘personal disciple.’”

“Oh **really!**” smiled Swamishri as he quipped, “We're Dev's

(God's) too, you know.”

Harjivan Swami continued describing me in my presence. “He’s young, but smart; always **has** an answer for everything.”

This sounded like a subtle complaint against my bad habit of answering back. But Swamishri took it positively. “That’s good. He’ll be useful to us in winning scriptural debates! So make sure you study hard and become really learned. You **pay** attention to your studies don’t you? Concentrate on both your studies and *seva*.”

Then softly concluding at the end, “It’s nice to have all the answers, but be aware that you don’t talk back to the elders. Respect them. Be humble and polite to them.”

Swamishri’s art of praising before correcting is so effective. With so much power and authority, he knew exactly how to tackle a 10-year-old.

In 1963, Yogiji Maharaj initiated me as a *parshad*. But there was always a shortage of sadhus in the mandirs, so it wasn’t long before the time came for me to be initiated as a sadhu.

Yogiji Maharaj himself used to select our **names** then. But that day, Yogiji Maharaj asked Swamishri, “What shall we name him?”

At the end of a five-minute discussion, Swamishri said, “How about Premprakash?”

Yogiji Maharaj liked the name, and that was that.

So from the very beginning, in even naming me, Swamishri has blessed me with sweet memories.

After initiation, I stayed in Gadhada and looked after the electric works of the mandir. Serving under Kothari Harjivandas Swami, I managed to win him over. Probably that was why he never minded my presence whenever he and Swamishri talked. In that way, I consider myself rather lucky.

Kothari Harjivandas was quite bold in his words and ways, though full of saintliness. And firm in all the **moral** rules and regulations of a sadhu. He never kept aside so much as even a

penny for himself. His faith and conviction in Shastriji Maharaj was unquestionable.

Just one thing itched him. Seeing the meagre state of all the other mandirs compared to Gondal's rising wealth left him frustrated with Yogiji Maharaj. He wondered why Yogiji Maharaj was collecting everything at Gondal, and 'ignoring' Gadhada.

Though Harjivandas never disrespected Yogiji Maharaj, he was always that much closer to Swamishri and could open up freely to him.

One particular night in 1965, on a heap of gravel in the Gadhada mandir yard, the three of us sat. Kothari Harjivandas expressed to Swamishri the problems of making ends meet in Gadhada, and sparked off the Yogiji Maharaj-Gondal issue. Soon, Kothari was getting a bit carried away. "Why doesn't anyone tell Yogiji Maharaj! If others don't, at least you should as President of the Sanstha. Shastriji Maharaj has given you the power; it's up to you..."

"Is Gondal the only mandir we have? Don't we have other mandirs too? Don't you know how short we are of sadhus here?" Then pointing to me, he continued, "God knows how I'm running the mandir with thumb-sized sadhus like him. There's 51 sadhus in Mumbai! For how long are they going to be stuck there, that's what I want to know! If they're supposed to be so young and tender, then isn't he (pointing to me once again)?"

Kothari's rage was irrepressible. Swamishri let him empty his heart out, simply listening, without a word or expression in response. Both friends were at different ends - one in a total frenzy; the other absolutely composed. And me watching in all innocence, not old enough to realize anything except that something serious was being discussed.

As the Kothari's storm settled, Swamishri took over the discussion - not as the president, but as a friend. He laid out the truth in a firm but friendly way.

"Listen Harjivandas, you know Shastriji Maharaj was no

ordinary man; like a lion he was. And yet just as loving. Without comparison. Now because we may be caught up too deep in the management of things here, and when sometimes some things don't work out just as we planned, then it's quite easy to fall into the habit of finding fault in the [Satpurush](#). 'He's not quite doing this right' we may feel. But if Shastriji Maharaj were to show what may appear to us as 'taking sides' or being biased, would you, having served him so much, take fault in that? No, you wouldn't! Well then simply take Yogiji Maharaj to be that same Shastriji Maharaj. There's no difference between them. Shastriji Maharaj himself has praised Yogiji Maharaj on various occasions and [expressed his happiness](#) on him. You very well know that. And you also know what Swami (Shastriji Maharaj) had said when he performed the *arti* of these (Gadhada mandirs) *murtis*? You did serve Shastriji Maharaj a lot during his final days.

"...and about my power. I don't know the first thing about power if it means going against Yogiji Maharaj's wishes. Just remember that! Shastriji Maharaj told me to work under Yogiji Maharaj and serve the Satsang. Ever since then, it's been whatever Yogiji Maharaj says - 101%. Nothing else, nothing less.

"You and I, we've always been friends, right? I know you've a lot of love and respect for me. After all, it was you who Shastriji Maharaj turned to to convince me to accept the presidentship. Well I'm telling you today with that same love and respect, never doubt Yogiji Maharaj in whatever he does. It's all divine.

"It's only because we take the mandir to be ours that we feel it is up to us to look after it and improve it. But without him, we cannot do a thing. The devotees are nourished by him. It's because of him that money rolls into the mandir. So all we have to do is try our best. He's the one running the show. He's done a great job so far, and he will keep it up too.

"You're right about the shortage of sadhus. But not only here; it's a problem everywhere. Swami (Yogiji Maharaj) is well aware

of that. And if he still keeps all those sadhus in Mumbai, it must be for some reason you and I can't foresee..."

Somewhere about there I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I remember was one of them giving me a shove, telling me to go inside and sleep properly. Both Swamishri and Harjivandas had just got up to go to sleep themselves. I recall the time then; the watchman had just struck four on the bell.

After that night, Kothari Harjivandas's love for Yogiji Maharaj grew much deeper. He often talked about Yogiji Maharaj's greatness. Yogiji Maharaj kept him with him while travelling around Gondal, Rajkot, Gorana, Junagadh, etc., and gave him a lot of personal bliss. Many times the Kothari also asked for *prasad* from Yogiji Maharaj.

* * *

I had heard a great deal about Mumbai, and I craved for the chance to go and see for myself one day. Because the atmosphere there had been **spoiled** by the unfortunate Dadubhai episode, Swamishri wasn't keen on sending me at that particular time - in case I got disturbed. But bringing up an excuse about my studies, I put forward a proposal to go to Mumbai.

"I've already had a word with Siddheshwar Swami," Swamishri said, "and he'll make all the arrangements here (in Gondal). There won't be any need to go to Mumbai."

I was heartbroken **and had** nothing left to say. Another sadhu urged Swamishri on my behalf. "He wants to go to Mumbai but can't speak up."

The following morning, Swamishri was doing his puja in Shastriji Maharaj's room. I went for darshan. Swamishri called me near and smothered me with affection as he said, "You're very dear to me; you know that don't you. But right now, I'm not totally happy with the atmosphere there in Mumbai. I could very well send you there, but I am just worried that you may get hurt. And I don't want to see that happen. However, since you really

want to go, I don't mind sending you. But promise me one thing: if I find it necessary to call you back, you won't get upset?"

Here was Swamishri, so much more powerful, superior and older, worrying about an insignificant sadhu like me - and trying to keep me happy. Where else in the world could you find a person like Swamishri!

The words "...if I feel it necessary to call you back, you won't get upset will you?" still serve today as beacons of light that keep me aware and indebted to Swamishri.

* * *

Around the same period, my most moving time with Swamishri developed. Before I go on to the incident, the situation at that time needs to be explained.

You could say that 1955 to 1965 was Dadubhai Nathubhai Patel's 'Decade of Disruption', in which his anti-Sanstha, unprincipled and underhand ways had been developing. To nourish his personal ambitions and desires, he took advantage of Yogiji Maharaj's pristine saintliness. But amid all of this, Dadubhai found Pramukh Swami to be his biggest obstacle, because it was Swamishri who had to take it upon himself to tell Dadubhai what to do or **what not to do**. Swamishri's only intention being to do whatever was best for Dadubhai, the Sanstha, and everyone as a whole, nothing else. But Dadubhai was least concerned with Swamishri's pure and selfless motives. That's why Dadubhai had quickly come to the conclusion that the best and easiest way to solve all his troubles would be to 'get rid of' Pramukh Swami. So around 1964-65, he had several of 'his men' slowly seize control of matters within the Sanstha and began to **create** disorder.

Yogiji Maharaj's 74th birthday celebrations were to be celebrated in Vidyanagar. Dadubhai had **independently** announced beforehand **that** Yogiji Maharaj would be initiating females into saffron on this occasion.

Swamishri had played the leading role among the sadhus in protecting the ideals of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Yogiji Maharaj by taking a firm stand against these groundless claims of Dadubhai. Ever since then, Pramukh Swami had become a prime target for them, and many efforts were made to harm Swamishri in whatever way possible; physically and psychologically. Swamishri, bold and fearless as he was, was not in the least intimidated by their torments. This only aggravated them more.

Eventually, in May 1966, the Board of Trustees, with Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami, came to the decision to excommunicate Dadubhai. This put Swamishri, as head of the Trustees, in some jeopardy.

With Dadubhai leaving, a further 39 sadhus who were affiliated to him left in protest of his expulsion. They assumed that their leaving would be too much of a loss for Yogiji Maharaj to suffer, and so to call them back, Yogiji Maharaj would be obliged to reaccept Dadubhai too. But their assumptions fell through. Neither were the 39 sadhus recalled, nor Dadubhai reaccepted. Again, this only helped in fuelling their animosity towards Swamishri.

Everyone was well aware of the danger Swamishri was in. All the sadhus had asked Swamishri to be extra vigilant and not to endanger himself further by taking undue risks. But Swamishri was the same old 'cool and composed, free and fearless Pramukh Swami' everyone had come to know and respect. He had absolute faith in God and Yogiji Maharaj. But naturally, the sadhus were still rather worried for him.

When the 39 sadhus left the Sanstha, Yogiji Maharaj personally asked Swamishri to go to Mumbai and reconcile matters with them. But all of Swamishri's efforts were in vain; they refused to budge an inch. However, their leaving had no effect on Yogiji Maharaj either. This angered them.

Then they received advice that perhaps they could do more damage to the Sanstha by staying within it rather than outside.

So now they began efforts to re-enter. But would the Satsang community accept them now, especially after all they had done to Yogiji Maharaj?

Their next move was to try and meet Yogiji Maharaj himself. Maybe he would give in to their pitiful pleas. Yogiji Maharaj refused point-blank to even talk about them, let alone **see** them. By now, a tremendous feeling of bitterness against these traitors had spread throughout Satsang.

Once, while **Yogiji Maharaj was** in Gondal, **there were** news **that** on the 1 **pm** train ‘the 39’ were coming to see **him**. As a last-ditch effort **they** had misled a few new devotees from Rajkot, and through them, **attempted** to force a meeting with Yogiji Maharaj. However, Yogiji Maharaj was as firm as ever, “I don’t want to see them. If they want to come, let them meet Pramukh Swami.”

Swamishri was ready and willing to negotiate with them openly if that was what Yogiji Maharaj wanted. But with all the risks involved, the sadhus and trustees would never have agreed to it. Instead, a secret meeting was arranged. Besides Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri, Rasikbhai Secretary, Haka Bapu, and Chandrakantbhai Trivedi, whose car we went in, **left for** the mission.

In those times of tension, Swamishri’s attendants and other elder sadhus were paying close attention to Swamishri’s safety. Swamishri’s personal attendant, Devcharan Swami, was also well aware of the threats on Swamishri, and would in no way let Swamishri attend a meeting alone like that. But then who would go with Swamishri as his accompanying sadhu?

Swamishri had the answer. He needed a sadhu who would do only and exactly as he was told to do, not letting anyone know why or where they had gone. I fitted the bill perfectly. Swamishri chose me to accompany him to the meeting. I was only 14 at the time.

That day, the day the meeting was scheduled, Yogiji Maharaj had arranged a special assembly at 4:00 pm in the *gurukul*. He had announced it quite strongly himself the previous day,

“Tomorrow, there will be an assembly in the *gurukul*. Everyone, young and old, is to come there on time. No one is to stay here. Everyone must come.”

Siddheshwar Swami and Ramcharan Swami were busy making the arrangements for the assembly. Yogiji Maharaj’s personal announcement had attracted a throng of devotees to the *gurukul*. With Yogiji Maharaj arriving there early, the devotees had packed the grounds to the brim well before time. Swamishri must have sent Devcharan Swami off early to help in the assembly arrangements too.

The mandir was empty; not a soul was in sight. I was about to follow the flow to the *gurukul* when Swamishri stopped me at the steps of the assembly hall. He told me to get my *pagh* and wait for him at the office below the mandir. I realized that I was going out with Swamishri. But where, I didn’t quite know. This was my first outing with Swamishri. Mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension of how to behave with him filled my heart.

The car was waiting on the other side of the mandir; the side of Ghanshyam Maharaj’s *murti*. Haka Bapu was already at the *gurukul*. We had to pick him up from there. Until the point of getting into the car, I was still under the impression that we were going into town to make a phone call. We didn’t have a telephone in the mandir then, and I knew that Swamishri often went with Siddheshwar Swami to make phone calls at the town post office.

But instead of turning towards the town centre, the car took a turn towards Rajkot. And despite there being plenty of parking inside the *gurukul*’s large playground, the car waited outside.

I may have been young and not quite mature enough to understand everything, but I could sense that ‘we may be off to Sokhda to meet the ‘opposition’!

Talk of a private meeting had been the subject of public discussion for quite some time. And so, as the possibility flashed through my head, the seriousness of the matter suddenly hit me.

I didn't have the guts to ask Swamishri, and besides, it just didn't seem the right thing to do at the time.

'Maybe I should get out and tell someone, at least inform someone that we're on our way to Sokhda to...?' Before I could even finish this thought of mine, Haka Bapu got in, and the car sped off. It must have been around 4:30 pm.

A little initial light-heartedness was followed by talk of the issue at hand. When Swamishri spoke, he was careful not to reveal too much. That made my task of trying to work out where we were going and what exactly was going to happen there, all the harder. However, Haka Bapu and Trivedi took me as just an innocent little boy, and didn't really take notice of my presence too much.

Soon enough, things started making sense. Swamishri was on his way to meet Hariprasad (the leader of the breakaway group) to discuss the case of the 39 sadhus who had left.

Now I had real cause to worry. What if they did something to Swamishri? I recalled the not-so-pleasant experience I had in 1966 when Yogiji Maharaj's birthday was celebrated in Vidyanagar. They had put up in our youth hostel, and I had somehow been trapped there too, alone. That harassment got me worried about Swamishri. Now Swamishri was alone; in their territory. Anything was possible.

The car left the Rajkot road and took to the Ahmedabad highway. But then not so long later, we pulled off onto a dirt track. Our rendezvous was a mango orchard belonging to 'Kohinor Paper Mills'.

Right in front of us I saw two sadhus waiting. My heart raced. I could hear it all the way down in my stomach. Nothing less than death ran through my childish imagination. And not all my fears were absolutely groundless if you can appreciate the circumstances of the situation. This was no small issue.

One thought kept playing in my mind: How will I answer to everyone if something dreadful happens to Swamishri and I am asked, "Why did you go in the first place?" My head began to

ache with worry. I literally felt tired of thinking. Everything had happened so fast.

The car came to a halt. We got out.

Today was *ekadashi*; a fast. The other two sadhus were busy eating mangoes. One of them offered one to Swamishri. But Swamishri explained he was fasting. The same sadhu urged me to have one, but Swamishri quickly interrupted, "He's fasting too."

Swamishri wanted to get down to business. He wanted to finish the talks and leave. But of the two cars that had left from Sokhda - one with the village chief and two sadhus, Hariprasaddas and Madhavjivandas; and the other with Mukundjivandas, Aksharviharidas and three other sadhus - the one with five sadhus had broken down somewhere after Ahmedabad and been left behind. Hariprasaddas was unwilling to begin before the second car arrived. Apparently, the main negotiators were in that car. So we waited.

A long hour passed by with no sign of the second car. Swamishri decided to take the initiative. "Look, there's no need to delay matters further. Let's just hear what you have to say. If the car comes, all well and good, if it doesn't, then..."

Everyone moved nervously into the nearby mud-hut, measuring not more than 8' by 10'. Up till now, I had been with Swamishri all the time. But here, Swamishri said to me, "Why don't you wait outside for a while. We'll just finish our little discussion here."

I was of the opinion that I shouldn't leave Swamishri alone even for a second. But I couldn't pluck up the courage to fully express my objection against Swamishri's instruction. Nonetheless, I took my time in leaving. Haka Bapu, considering me to be nothing more than a senseless kid, told me to stay put. Swamishri knew though that I wasn't all that immature. I could understand some things, if not most. It could well prove dangerous if I went back to Gondal and recounted half-understood or misinterpreted facts. So with this in mind, Swamishri affectionately placed his hand on my head and asked me to leave once again. I had no choice but to leave.

Fortunately though, there was a grill just above where Swamishri was sitting in the hut. I sat down there. I overheard everything without anyone even realizing I was there.

The essence of the discussion was basically a repetition of what Swamishri had told Hariprasad in Mumbai. Swamishri calmly reminded him, “I’d told you then that it’s in your best interest to compromise and come back to Yogi Bapa. Once the trustees make a decision, you’ll regret it.” Swamishri continued to explain that true peace and bliss were only to be found by obeying Yogiji Maharaj’s wishes.

Twenty minutes passed before Swamishri emerged from the hut. It was quite late in the night, so we were eager to get back straight away.

Meanwhile in Gondal, a frenzied search had begun for Swamishri. Every possible place in Rajkot was contacted to find out Swamishri’s whereabouts. If Swamishri had gone to Sokhda, he would have taken the road via Limdi. Devotees were informed to hold up the car on the road itself. Phone calls to Ahmedabad were made too. But Swamishri was nowhere to be found.

It didn’t take too long for everyone to work out who had gone with Swamishri as his *jod*, ‘that 14-year-old boy’. This worried everyone all the more.

Soon the clock ticked wearily past 11 **pm**. Most of the sadhus were still awake, some pacing back and forth, some sitting at the steps - all with eyes glued anxiously to the front gate.

At that time we were on the road to Gondal from Rajkot and I had already breathed an almighty sigh of relief. Swamishri, as if our adventure was an everyday occurrence, had forgotten the whole issue and was talking about me with utter affection. He said, to no-one in particular, “He wants to study Sanskrit. Dev (Devprasad Swami) wasn’t too keen on sending him, but he’s an intelligent boy. I thought that if he studies, he’ll serve the Sanstha, be an asset.” Then, ever so delicately, he also mentioned, “When

we get back to Gondal, don't discuss anything about our visit today. Where we went or who we met, or what we talked about. OK?" Basically, Swamishri didn't want the matter to explode into an all-out point of public conversation.

Not even a crumb of the tension I had initially left with remained. All my worries evaporated in Swamishri's warmth. It just felt good to be next to Swami. And I wanted to enjoy every moment of it.

With it being so late, I expected everyone at the mandir to be asleep. "That'll mean the questions will at least be stalled till tomorrow," I had thought to myself. But little did I, or even Swamishri, know about how worried the sadhus had been trying to figure out where we had disappeared to. To add to the drama, Yogiji Maharaj had played the perfect role of "Don't ask me? I don't know where they've gone either!" So much so, that before going to bed, Yogiji Maharaj had 'innocently' asked the sadhus, "Any news of Pramukh Swami yet?"

The other **person** in the act was Rasikbhai Secretary, Trustee Secretary and close friend of Swamishri. Despite knowing everything, he was playing ignorant too. Seeing the other sadhus so worried had him in a difficult corner, unable to tell the truth and unable to bear their tension. He tried to relieve the sadhus as best he could by being positive, "Let's not get too anxious. Shastriji Maharaj will look after him. He always was his favourite. He'll protect him, you'll see. Shastriji Maharaj won't let anything happen **to** Pramukh Swami... He's probably just gone out to... or maybe the car's broken down... Why don't we just say a prayer and go to sleep. They'll be here by morning. I don't see the point in us all losing sleep over this." A faint air of suspicion did arise in the minds of many that maybe Rasikbhai was hiding something. "But then again," everyone concluded, "Pramukh Swami would never go to such an important meeting without Rasikbhai."

When the headlights of our car **illuminated** the mandir entrance, I could almost feel everyone's sigh of relief hit me like

a gale force wind. For seven long hours, they had been holding their breaths. Everyone swarmed around the car, barely letting Swamishri get out. Swamishri knew a storm of questions awaited him. And if the sadhus didn't get the answers they wanted from him, they would come to me. Swamishri **had** quickly instructed me before the car came to a complete stop. "As soon as you get out, take the basket from the boot, put it on your head, and take it to the office. Leave it there beside the stairs and climb up. Find a dark corner upstairs and **go** to sleep."

I liked the plan. But before I even got halfway to the office, four or five sadhus surrounded me. I tried my best to shake them off with my feeble excuse of taking the basket to the office, but it didn't work. Someone took the basket from my head. And then a thundering round of fast-fire questions ensued. "Where did you go? Who else came with you? Who did you meet? What did you talk about?"

I managed to sort of hide the truth. But my efforts to hide the truth were transparent. Siddheshwar Swami realized I was basically talking like a trained parrot. "I need another way to get the truth out of him," he must **have** thought to himself. So he picked me up, and took me to the garden behind the rooms. He stopped anyone else from following him. Then for 15-20 minutes, he told me off. "I hope you realize you've made a terrible mistake. Why didn't you come and tell someone the moment you knew where you were going? Now, I want to know the whole story."

Intimidated, I told him, from beginning to end. But before I did, I asked for his word, "Pramukh Swami shouldn't know that it was me who told you." That made me feel only a little bit better.

As for Swamishri, he had already made his way upstairs to the terrace and was getting ready to go to sleep like usual. The sadhus, out of immense love for Swamishri, wanted to tell Swamishri never to take such risks again. Despite it being so late, they went straight to Swamishri's room and began questioning Swamishri. Swamishri also tried his best to conceal the truth, but Siddheshwar Swami told

Swamishri that they knew anyway. Everyone piled upon Swamishri at once. “Never ever take such risks again!”

Swamishri listened calmly. At the end, he gave his official statement. “Yogiji Maharaj and Rasikbhai did know. They (the other sadhus) had been waiting to meet Yogiji Maharaj for some time and sent several messages to that effect. But Yogiji Maharaj didn’t want to see them. In the end, Yogiji Maharaj asked me to meet them once. With Yogiji Maharaj’s command, there’s no thinking twice. If we had let everyone know, everyone would have said no. So we decided to keep it **secret**.”

The following morning, I met Swamishri in the main mandir upstairs near Ghanshyam Maharaj’s *murti*. I was half hoping to avoid Swamishri, a little scared that he may tell me off for letting on about last night. But Swamishri seemed in a light mood. He asked me smilingly, “So, how are you today?”

Even after so many years, Swamishri often remembers our ‘escapade’ together, and refers to me as his ‘special *jod*’.

* * *

Swamishri had worked tirelessly, day and night, to **solve** the water problem faced **during** the preparations for the Amrut Mahotsav celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal in 1967. I was one of the few who were fortunate enough to have witnessed the wonderful sight of Swamishri’s devotion and dedication to his guru.

After two miserable failures, it was decided that a 1.5 km pipeline be laid to transport water from Elephant’s River-trench to the Akshar Ghat bank on the Gondali River. It was a daunting task; a challenge only Swamishri had the boldness to accept.

Every night, the sadhus helped in laying the pipes. Swamishri would be there too, helping. I remember seeing Swamishri many times with his *dhotiyu* **slightly** raised and tied in a knot, armed with a spanner or hammer in hand. Returning from the river at two in the morning was nothing out of the ordinary for Swamishri. Sometimes it would **even be four**.

As part of my *seva* there, I often had to run between the mandir and the river - to fetch some drinking water or tools of some sort for the other sadhus. It was a job I would have normally found tedious and laborious. Except that I had come across a bicycle. I had loved to ride my *cycle* whilst back home, and the chance to do so again excited me. Merrily I rode back and forth, eager to help the sadhus in getting whatever they wanted from the mandir.

Soon Swamishri found out about my *bicycle*. He lovingly made me understand, “We have to help, but within the confines of our discipline. Now there’s nothing wrong with a bicycle, but do you think it really suits a sadhu? And another thing; it’s not good to get into the habit of going out alone. Always go with another sadhu. It can lead to problems. So I think you’d better do a fast to atone, just so that you don’t feel like doing it again.”

As far as I was concerned, the issue was settled. I thought nothing much of it thereafter. But two days later, while we were walking at night to the river trench, Swamishri slowly disengaged his finger from my clasp and folded both his hands. Then putting them to his eyes, he began, “Sorry. Please forgive me! The other day, I told you off. I didn’t hurt your feelings did I? I gave you a fast. It must have been difficult.”

I was stunned. I just didn’t know what to say. Should I agree or accept the apology or what? But before I could utter a word, Swamishri began teasing, “The Gadhada *kothari* and your guru, Dev, will tell me off, you know. ‘What? You’ve been harassing my disciple?’ But you know I didn’t tell you out of spite or to harass you. It’s only that I have great affection for you and I want to see you grow into a good sadhu. So please forgive me.”

The whole issue was so small, there was nothing really for me to be upset about. Besides, Swamishri could never hurt anyone anyway. But I don’t think he could bear the thought of upsetting me. How tender and humble he is.

As serious and sober as Swamishri appears, he still possesses that remarkable knack of turning the most painful of situations into a **cause** for laughter.

An exhibition had been **arranged on** the grounds of our *gurukul* in Gondal as part of Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav celebrations. Swamishri took me along with him one day when he went to inspect it. There, Ishwarcharan Swami took Swamishri around and explained the details of each exhibit. That left me alone, idle and bored - the perfect recipe to indulge in a stunt.

Being the young boy **that** I was, I **thought of a** game of my own: to see if I could close my eyes and make my way out **of** the exhibition tent by memorizing the zig-zag path **in the** exhibition took. As I departed on my **exercise**, somewhere along the way I walked straight into the end of a bamboo pole being carried by a couple of youths. Blood squirted out from beneath my eye, and I began to feel a little faint. Thank God my eye **was not damaged**.

Swamishri soon **heard of it** and left his inspection to run to **me**. He checked the cut. To confirm nothing had happened to my eye, he held up his fingers. "How many?" he asked as he changed them; one, two, three. Satisfied and relieved, he comforted me with words to the effect "Maharaj saved you. Nothing **has** happened to your eye."

The cut began to heal, but **left** an eye-shaped **scare** below my **eye**. The sadhus made the most of my childish pranks and teased me about my **scare**. Swamishri joined in once too. "A third eye is a sign of wisdom," he jested, "so make sure you become wise."



10. SADHU NARAYANPRASADDAS

There was a cheer on every face and **gladness** in every heart. The grand festival **to** celebrate the *murti-pratishtha* of the Ahmedabad mandir (1962) had just come to a **conclusion**. With everyone gone, all that **reminded** of the celebrations was a littered mandir campus.

We youths had been allocated different duties during the festival. My *seva* was to clean the bathrooms and see to it that the garbage trolleys, where everyone left their **disposable** plates, were emptied on time.

Thousands of devotees had dined **that evening**. The garbage bin in the kitchen behind the sadhus' quarters **was filled** to the brim. It was around 10 **p.m.**, maybe a quarter past ten. I was trying my best to push the heavy and overflowing trolley up a slope to reach the main garbage tip. I was alone, tired, and fast losing **the battle against** the slope. There was no one **around whom I could approach for help**.

Just at that time, Swamishri emerged **from** meeting. He saw my feeble and frustrated efforts, and literally ran to my aid. Together, both of us pushed the garbage trolley **up** the slope and emptied **the contents** in the tip. He even helped me return the empty trolley to its original place.

There was a **glow** in his eyes **that** showed not only that he never considered himself above such *seva*, but also how much he enjoyed doing even the most menial of jobs with an ordinary youth like me.

* * *

After my *diksha*, in 1968, Swamishri, Sant Swami, Mahant Swami, Dr. Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, and myself were together in Kolkata. In those days, there were very few devotees there. When there wasn't anyone to meet or no *padhramanis* to go to, we would come together and engage in a little light talk

and discussion.

Once I jokingly commented to Swamishri, “Swami, you’re a respected sadhu, the President. Yet why doesn’t anyone come here to see you?”

Swamishri replied in a flash, “President? Who’s bothered about presidents. He’s not worth a penny. It’s because of Shriji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Bapa that you and I are here today, **and** that devotees respect us. Otherwise no one would stop to even ask us the time of day. It’s only because of Yogi Bapa’s saintliness that these big businessmen (merchants of Kolkata) come.”

“But Swami,” I continued, “you have saintliness too. Sant Swami and these other sadhus, they’re all...”

Again Swamishri interrupted. “Yes, that may well be true, but we’re still all the servants of Yogi Bapa.”

5 May 1968. We were getting ready to leave Kolkata for Benares. As usual, there were so many last minute things to do; pack our things, meet the devotees,... even prepare some snacks to eat on the journey. Swamishri and the senior sadhus were busy. Devcharan Swami was occupied in making other arrangements. So it was left to me to make the snacks.

I started rolling the *puris*. The oil was sizzl**ing**, telling me it was ready for the *puris*. But there was no one to fry them. Swamishri happened to pass by and looked in. He gathered that I was alone. “Here,” he said instantly, “I’ll fry **them**.” And so saying, he **over**turned an empty kerosene can near the stove and sat down on it **and** started **fry**ing the *puris*.

He was so relaxed **as he performed the self-appointed task**. He could well have said, “Hold on, I’ll go and call someone to help you.” But no, he sat down himself, not the least concerned about his **position** or **power**. His simplicity and humility deeply touched me.

In 1970, I was fortunate to have had the chance to travel abroad

with Yogiji Maharaj. Some of us had put up at Chittranjanbhai Patel's home in Wembley, London. Yogiji Maharaj was staying in Dollis Hill, at Arvindbhai Patel's (Guru's) house.

One morning, a few of us were massaging Yogiji Maharaj's legs when he asked us about where we were staying. Then, Yogiji Maharaj began suddenly, "Do you wash Pramukh Swami's *dhotiyas* for him? You should, you know. He's like a guru, in place of Shastriji Maharaj. Serve him well. Don't take him to be like others. He's far, far greater."

"Bapa, I wash his *dhotiyas*," I said, relieving Yogiji Maharaj's concern.

He was pleased. "Maharaj will come personally to take you to Akshardham!" Yogiji Maharaj continued, "You won't get a chance like this to serve him again. In future, you'll have to vie for Pramukh Swami's *seva*. He won't be so easily available. So make the most of this opportunity."

A few moments of silence followed; but Yogiji Maharaj still had something more to add. "Through Pramukh Swami, Maharaj and Swami will sway the whole of Europe... Never before and never again will such charisma prevail!... So Narayanprasad, don't be so naive..."

During that overseas tour, many of Swamishri's qualities became apparent to me: his simplicity, straightforwardness, depth, his ability to tackle several things at a time and still pay attention to each of them, his managerial skills, and others. He was so cooperative and simple, too. Everyday after Yogiji Maharaj's puja, he would make straight for the kitchen to help prepare the breakfast. He would lay out the bowls and paper dishes; if the milk was too hot, he would cool it according to the sadhus' liking. He would not eat himself, but always look after the others. If ever I prepared a dish for him, he would cleverly change the subject, "Listen Narayanprasad, you should never worry about me... Look,

Anupam Bhagat has burnt his foot. See if he wants **anything**. Why don't you feed him lovingly and attend to his needs?"

I remember Swamishri revealing one of his distinctive likings one day. He said, "I prefer the night, to stay up late and do **gosh***ti*."

Along with Swamishri's deep spirituality, his affection and compassion led young sadhus like me to **draw** closer to him and savour his love, his divinity.

* * *

Soon after Yogiji Maharaj passed away in 1971, a *parayan* in his memory **had been** arranged in the village of Mahelav. Early in the morning of the concluding day, Swamishri was on the floor above the mandir brushing his teeth. I happened to be downstairs where I saw an elderly man standing, waiting for something. I didn't know quite what. So I asked him. He replied, "I need to see Pramukh Swami Maharaj now. It's urgent!"

When I inquired about the reason, he answered, "I didn't confess to Yogi Bapa. So I have to tell Swami everything."

I took the disturbed man upstairs to Swamishri. **He** listened, still brushing his teeth, as the man poured out his heart in one single breath. He basically told Swamishri about his mistake. As he talked, Swamishri stroked his back, consoling and comforting him and adding a couple of words every now and **then**. And that was it.

After completing his confession to Swamishri, the man seemed a **changed** person. He came to me in absolute joy and said, "I wanted to **open** my conscience to Yogi Bapa. For the last 50 years I've been a **victim of guilt conscience and suffering from** depression. I can't tell you how I've had to suffer the pain of my sins. But now it's gone. All gone. Swami has made it disappear." Then slowly he added, "You know something? Yogi Bapa hasn't gone. He's just come back looking younger."

* * *

I remember the grand procession in Nadiad in 1971. Swamishri was sitting on the float. It was somewhere around 4 or 4:30 in

the afternoon on a typical hot summer day. Everything was fine except for one small thing: I had no shoes to wear. The roads felt as if they were on fire as I hobbled along, trying not to make it obvious that my feet were burning.

Swamishri must have noticed my bare feet. He called down to me from high above on the float. “Here!” he shouted, as he took off his own slippers and threw them down to me. “Put these on. It’s not good for your feet and eyes to walk barefooted in this heat.”

Without stopping to think, I put them on. How was I to know they were Swamishri’s? A couple of minutes later, it dawned on me: these look like Swamishri’s slippers! I took them off immediately and held them with my hands.

Swamishri saw this and called out again. “Put them back on your feet. I didn’t give them to you to wear on your hands!”

I just couldn’t bring myself to wear Swamishri’s slippers. In the meantime, another youth, who was watching this ‘long-distance’ conversation between guru and disciple, politely offered me his slippers. I put them on and put Swamishri’s concern to rest.

On 30 January 1976, Swamishri was in Sankari, at Shaligram Maganbhai Patil’s house on the first floor. There, three brothers came to meet him.

Swamishri asked their names.

“I’m Narayan Patil,” said one.

“I’m Narayan Vithal Patil,” said the other.

“I’m Narayan Bhau Patil,” declared the last brother.

Swamishri burst out of laughing. “This here with us is Narayan Bhagat, sitting next to me is Narayanprasad, and I’m Narayanswarup! Today all the ‘Narayans’ (gods) have got together. They’ll hold a meeting and talk about their individual universes!”

Swamishri’s spontaneous light-hearted outburst must have worked wonders for the three strangers, for they took vartmans and joined the Satsang. And they’re staunch satsangis even to this day.

As per Swamishri's instructions, I was touring the tribal villages of Selvas, a region bordering Gujarat and Maharashtra. A few centres had already been set up since Yogiji Maharaj's time. So from 1975 to 1979, I toured the south Gujarat villages. It was almost a jungle region, stretching from Songadh (Vyara) to Donja (Valsad). Included in the region were some of the most underdeveloped areas of Selvas.

Slowly, Satsang spread to places like Sankari, Navsari, Vyara, Ukai, Madhi, Karcheliya, Donja, Selvas, Kosamba Bhagada, Randhra, etc. - making a total of some 212 villages with active Satsang centres.

Once in June 1979, Swamishri was touring the Mahuva area of the region. He was working his way to tribal villages like Dedvasan, Kharpa, Fulvadi. Roads to these villages were still being built. Huge boulders, bags of cement, gravel and grit all lay scattered along the mud-tracks. It was almost impossible for a car to pass, at least not without the likelihood of getting a punctured tyre or two. Walking to the village huts was out of the question because they were too far off. To make things worse, it began to rain.

"Bapa," I urged Swamishri, "let's call it off. It's simply not worth the trouble."

Swamishri retorted in an instant, "I won't wear out just by walking in a little rain, you know! If these devotees can live in such poor conditions; and if you sadhus can tour these villages and tolerate the mosquitoes, the dirt, the inconveniences of food and water, then why can't I take a little trouble too?"

No-one could say a word. Swamishri was so fit and healthy then, that we youngsters used to get tired just keeping pace with him. By evening, we'd be totally exhausted. But Swamishri was ever fresh, ever energetic and ever enthusiastic to meet the devotees, to take interest in their lives, to share and solve their problems.

We came to an extremely poor devotee's home. His name was

Dalu Madri. After coming in contact with the sadhus the year before, he'd given up all bad habits of drinking alcohol, meat eating, violence and stealing. His only desire was to call Swamishri to his house. Whether you could call his 'house' a house or not only became apparent when we reached his modest hut. Even where to make Swamishri sit became a problem. Dalu had cleared the buffalo shed and prepared a small seat on a ledge. The sadhus sat on a crooked plank of wood supported by a couple of stones, normally used to tie the buffalo to a peg in the ground.

With the formalities of the *padhramani* over, I introduced each member of the family to Swamishri. So pleased was he to hear of Dalu's new turn in life, he embraced him and all his family members.

Swamishri remarked, "You may be poor, but seeing you brings peace. People may call you 'backward' or 'underdeveloped', but is it true? Now you have Satsang. You've become pure... It is nice meeting you, seeing your devotion and your peaceful lives here in this hut."

Swamishri then turned to face the far stretching, bare landscape around him, randomly dotted with similar mud-huts and half-clothed children playing in the dirt. As if 'honouring' the devout villagers, Swamishri said, "In Shriji Maharaj's time, the 500 *paramhansas* stayed among the poor too, just like these."

I've seen Swamishri go from village to village, from hut to hut in these tribal areas. Rain or shine, he has satisfied each and every devotee in all villages. Just recalling all that Swamishri has gone through for the devotees makes me fascinated.



11. SADHU DHARMACHARANDAS

It was 23 April, 1985 and preparations for the Navsari mandir inauguration were under way. A procession carrying the *murtis* to be consecrated was going to be taken through the town. Before retiring for rest in the afternoon, Swamishri instructed the youths, "Make sure all the arrangements are made. Fill the barrels in the trailer with water. If there's no ice, get some from town. Serve nice, cold, filtered water to everyone, lovingly. It will be a great service."

When Swamishri got up in the afternoon, he wanted to have a bath - but the procession had already arrived. So, Swamishri was asked to sit on a sofa in the trailer. He saw the *murtis* pass by, and in this way gave darshan to all the devotees who had joined the procession. Straight away thereafter, the assembly started and Swamishri attended that too.

When the assembly was over, it was time for the evening *arti*. Swamishri was making his way back to the room when Amrutlal, a *satsangi* youth, came up to him. "I'd like to see you," Amrutlal said.

Swamishri was ready to go to the *arti*, so he said, "I'm in a hurry. Can we talk standing?"

Swamishri listened patiently to the youth's problems.

After the *arti*, Swamishri sat with Manibhai of Johannesburg. Before dinner, he counselled another devotee. Subsequently, Swamishri attended the evening assembly and another meeting.

On top of that, Acharya Swami had been hurt in an accident. So, Swamishri visited him in hospital after the meeting. By the time Swamishri returned to his room, it was 11:45 pm.

Normally, Swamishri has go to the bathroom about 5 pm. But with the procession and the rest of the engagements thereafter, Swamishri had not had a minute to spare - even for himself. The whole day had passed in satisfying others. Such incidents are

quite the norm in his life. When it has come to helping others, he always gives his all - and a little bit more.

* * *

On 28 April 1985, Swamishri came to Kurel from Navsari. After dinner, he attended the evening assembly. There he wrote some letters. Swamishri laughed a lot during Doctor Swami's discourse that evening.

The assembly over, Swamishri left for Dayabhai's new house. There he retired to rest after singing the *cheshta*.

The sadhus were massaging Swamishri's legs when a sadhu began to clean the blanket covering Swamishri. It was full of dust.

"What are you doing?" Swamishri asked. "Is it dusty?"

"Yes," the sadhu replied. "I'm just cleaning it."

Swamishri commented instantly, "Don't bother. This body is made of dust anyway!"

The sadhu realized the depth of Swamishri's words that very night.

It got rather chilly as the night wore on. Swamishri didn't have enough blankets to keep him warm, but he chose to lay peacefully in bed without complaining. It must have been in his sleep that Swamishri covered himself with the mosquito net that was lying nearby.

When the attendant sadhu woke up at 5 am, he saw Swamishri half-covered with the mosquito net. "Were you feeling cold at night?" he asked.

No answer.

The sadhu gave Swamishri another blanket, and Swamishri finally slept for an hour or so.

Swamishri really does believe the body to be nothing but 'dust'.



12. SADHU KRISHNAPRIYADAS

Swamishri was in Sarangpur for the *Jal-Jhilani* festival. I had come **s**pecially for Swamishri's darshan, my age then **was** 15 or so I guess. When Swamishri came to do *pradakshinas* at the then small memorial shrine over Shastriji Maharaj's cremation spot (above which stands the present Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir), I sang two kirtans I had been taught by the sadhus: *Āva ne āva re...* (Stay before my eyes like this forever and ever...) and *Re sagpan Harivarnu sachu...* (True matrimony is that with God...). Swamishri's fleeting glance convinced me that 'he has taken note of me'.

After the *pradakshinas*, Swamishri walked back to the mandir. On the way, he held onto my wrist and said, "You sang beautifully." I was sort of expecting him to say that, but what came next, I definitely hadn't anticipated. Swamishri added, "Do you want to get 'married'?"

I was embarrassed. Timidly, I explained, "Swami, in our family, they prefer **the boys** to get a little older."

Swamishri smiled. How was I to know that Swamishri wasn't talking about marriage in the literal sense!

"Not with somebody from this world. I'm talking about God!"

Now it made sense. Swamishri was talking about **my** becoming a sadhu. I explained my family situation to Swamishri. "Bapa, all of my family, right from my forefathers, believe in Lord Shiv. I don't think they'll agree to **my** becoming a sadhu."

Swamishri patted me on the back and gave me the moral support I needed. "Just mention it. Maharaj will work things out for you."

Today, after so many years, I think to myself that if it hadn't been for those few passing moments with Swamishri, maybe I wouldn't be here, where I am today, as a sadhu. I can't thank Swamishri enough.

During my Diwali vacation in 1973, I travelled with Swamishri in Gujarat. One morning in the village of Limbdi, I was watching Swamishri clean his teeth with a *datan*. I had already asked Pragat Bhagat, Swamishri's attendant, to give me Swamishri's used *datan* as a memento for me to keep.

Swamishri finished brushing his teeth. He washed the *datan* and gave it to Pragat Bhagat to throw away. But Pragat Bhagat passed it on to me, as per our prior agreement. Swamishri saw this. "Throw it away! Throw it away, I say!" Swamishri said, quite upset. "These pieces of wood will do you no good in Satsang. Only by attaching yourself to the Sadhu will you truly understand Satsang and enjoy its bliss, not by collecting useless mementos like this."

Swamishri's words revealed both his preference and his principle.

* * *

In 1975, a special memorial shrine to Yogiji Maharaj with Shriji Maharaj's holy footprints was consecrated in Gondal. It was a particularly special occasion for me because that was when I was initiated into the sadhu-order.

Swamishri was busy with the Vedic rituals. The place was teeming with devotees, some of whom had travelled from far off villages to witness the auspicious event.

Unexpectedly, the Maharaja of Gondal, Jyoti Bapu, arrived. His unanticipated arrival raised the question of where to seat him. Haka Bapu, who was escorting him, became restless. We had to adhere to the Maharaja's protocol, yet the thought of making new arrangements and having to make him wait put everyone in a dilemma.

Swamishri was sharp though. He grasped the problem straight away. Without any further delay, Swamishri shuffled over on his seat and made room for Jyoti Bapu. "Here, sit here Bapu," Swamishri respectfully called to him.

Throughout the ceremony, Swamishri and the Maharaja shared the same seat. Swamishri's quick thinking and humility struck

everyone present.

1977. Kisumu. Swamishri arrived at Mewani Sugar Factory after almost three hours of exhausting *padhramanis*. As he relaxed in the reception lounge, the fatigue on his face was clear. I knew he must have been thirsty because he hadn't drank anything since we'd left that morning. So I offered some water to Thakorji, then offered it to Swamishri. But Swamishri wanted to wash his hands first. They had become red with all the *kumkum* from the *padhramanis*. I quickly found a large bowl in which Swamishri could wash his hands. As I brought both the bowl and glass of water to Swamishri, he suddenly pulled away his hands. I thought Swamishri was teasing me. So I moved even closer.

"Krishnapriya," Swamishri said, "the glass has Thakorji's sanctified water. I can't wash my hands with that. Bring another glass of water."

Such a subtle point, yet Swamishri has never let his devotion for Thakorji falter.

On Hindu New Year's Day in 1990, Swamishri *rang up* the Ahmedabad sadhus from London and blessed each of them over the telephone. Throughout the 20-minute call, Swamishri continuously stroked the forehead of a white ceramic elephant that stood next to his sofa. After the call, Swamishri sat down to eat. And I decided to play a little game. I sat down next to Swamishri's seat exactly like the ceramic elephant. I even had a flower basket placed on my back. Swamishri looked at me with curiosity.

I said, "Bapa, I'm very jealous today."

"Why?" Swamishri asked *surprised*.

"Throughout that phone call, you were stroking that other elephant's forehead. What about me? You've never done that to me. I'm just as big!"

Swamishri doubled up in laughter and called me closer. I lifted

my ‘trunk’ and saluted him. By now, Swamishri’s laughing was uncontrollable. He picked up a **ladoo** from the *thal* and held it in front of me. I tried to take it in my hand, but before I could do so, Swamishri placed it directly in my mouth.

Later, several of the other sadhus present told me, “The expression of compassion on Swamishri’s face when he gave you the *prasad* was simply indescribable.”

“*Tat mat Guru sakha tu, sab vidhi hita mero*; (You are my father, you are my mother; You are my guru and friend. You are the one that wants the best for me).”

Many times I’ve experienced the truth of this verse in my own life. Such an open and unpretentious **person**, Swamishri has showered so much bliss upon me, taking me to be his very own child. How can I ever forget that?



13. SADHU YAGNAVALLABHDAS

April 1977. The Chaitra *sud* 9 festival, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday, according to the Hindu calendar, had been celebrated by Swamishri in Ahmedabad. The next day, we all came to attend Swamishri's morning puja. It was only early morning, yet the blistering heat was telling on me. Besides, I hadn't really recovered from the previous day's fast - even though most of us had broken it late the night before. Swamishri, on the other hand, had yet to drink anything. Nevertheless, he was as fresh as ever.

After his puja had finished, Swamishri, in a spontaneous burst of joy, showered a heap of roses upon the devotees. The devotees revelled in Swamishri's grace.

Seeing this, I thought to myself how wonderful it would be if Swamishri gave me a rose too. "But I'm still new, and young. Why would he give one to me?" I concluded, and dropped the thought.

As per Swamishri's normal routine, he got up from his puja to go for darshan of the *murtis* in the main mandir. He walked towards the pujari's basement entrance through a path flanked by youths. I stood there among the crowd. Swamishri didn't even know me in particular. But as he passed me, he gave the two roses he had been holding into my hand. He walked away; I was left motionless. Somehow he knew. Somehow he fulfilled my wish.

Enrolment for volunteers wanting to serve at the Yogiji Maharaj Centennial Celebrations in 1992 had finished. One evening when I was in Sarangpur with Swamishri, he called me to his room. He asked for an update on the volunteers. I explained all the details of how many were expected to come from where and to do what.

After listening to the whole report, Swamishri instructed me to keep a reserve-force of 500 volunteers aside for emergencies. I agreed, but wasn't exactly convinced about whether it was

necessary. We had never had a reserve force in any of our previous festivals. Nevertheless, 200 volunteers were kept aside.

From the day the festival gates opened, the unexpected happened. Thousands lined up to see the Akshardham complex. Crowds everywhere - at the food stalls, kitchens, everywhere. We were sure that 12,000 volunteers could have coped normally. But the volunteers controlling the Akshardham queues were struggling to contain the crowds. The reserve force Swamishri had asked us to keep was deployed. Without it, chaos would have spread across all the departments - simply because no other department could spare any of their own volunteers.

Only then did I realize what a blessing Swamishri's foresighted advise was.



14. SADHU SHRUTIPRAKASHDAS

The first and crucial part of the Gunatitanand Swami Bicentennial Celebrations in Ahmedabad was over. It was 2 November 1985, and still 40 days of the festival were left. Sadhus and devotees were doing their best to please Swamishri. With the commencement of the ‘International Convention for Better Living’, dignitaries from all over the world over came to address the assemblies and visit the grounds. They were eager to see the attractions, especially the man behind the whole festival, Swamishri himself.

Internationally acclaimed economist Nani Palkhivala had just left the evening assembly after greatly praising the celebrations and the noble work of Swamishri. Being a Saturday evening meant there was a great rush of devotees wanting to meet Swamishri too. VIPs were waiting in line as well. With all that, the Secretary of the All India Sadhu Samaj, HH Swami Harinarayananandji had also arrived. He was to speak in the evening assembly. A sadhu came to Swamishri to give news of Swami Harinarayananandji’s arrival.

Swamishri was to attend the assembly too, as soon as he had greeted Swami Harinarayananandji. But before Swami Harinarayananandji could get in, I managed to sneak my way to Swamishri.

“I’m leaving for Mumbai,” I told Swamishri.

“Why?” Swamishri asked, “The festival is still going on.”

“Yes, but my major department duties have been completed. I’m rather tired. I’ll be back in a couple of days after some rest.”

Swamishri did not like what he had just heard.

Slowly he began, “You’re still young, and you’re already tired? We’ve come to do *seva*, you know! How can you think of anything else so long as our hands and feet are working?”

The other sadhus were getting restless. Swami Harinarayananandji

had already arrived and was being kept waiting. There was a long queue to attend to as well before Swamishri could get to the assembly on time. And here Swamishri was, talking to me. The others signalled to Swamishri to cut it short. Swamishri ignored them. He didn't seem to care. Without a **care** in the world, he continued telling me off. His number one priority at that moment was to shake off my laziness.

For Swamishri, work is not a job but *seva*; not duty but devotion. How could he tolerate **someone** 'getting tired' on the path of devotion?

He continued, "Do as much as **you** can. But remember; it's no job, it's the *seva* of the Lord."

31 August 1987. Delhi. After visiting **places of** pilgrimage in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, five busloads of sadhus arrived and eagerly awaited Swamishri's darshan. Our Himalayan pilgrimage was going to commence from here.

Today, our 'Gangotri' bus reached Swamishri. Chinmay Swami explained to him the route of our tour, where we were going to halt and also what *seva* each sadhu had been allocated.

Swamishri asked me, "What are you going to do?"

"Clean the toilets and bathrooms," I replied.

"Chinmay," Swamishri exclaimed, "you can't let Pandit do that. Don't you know he's a great scholar?"

Swamishri's words carried deeper meanings that were revealed in his following statement.

"Good. It's a good *seva*. At least this way you won't become egoistic. If you feel, 'Oh, I'm a scholar,' then it's all worthless. So do clean the bathrooms. It's a great *seva*."

Swamishri has time and again taught me valuable lessons in saintliness, humility, devotion, understanding, love, sincerity and duty.



15. SADHU NANDKISHOREDAS

It was **the year** 1970 **in** Kampala, **Uganda**. I was sitting in the assembly, near the front. Somehow, I caught Yogiji Maharaj's eye. He gestured with his finger and called me to him. The assembly was in progress, but I got up anyway. Yogiji Maharaj affectionately checked my neck for a *kanthi* and while delicately rolling his finger in my ear, said, "Say I will!"

I didn't understand what Yogiji Maharaj **meant**. But Gunvantbhai Dani explained, "Swami is asking 'will you become a sadhu?'"

I nodded. And that was that. Only the three of us knew anything about that conversation.

Soon thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj passed away. And being involved in my studies, I forgot everything about becoming a sadhu.

Then in 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was coming to London for the first time as **Guru**. A deep sense of curiosity mixed with several doubts began playing in my mind. Somehow I had the impression that Pramukh Swami was 'very strict and stern. He won't tolerate any mistakes...' I wondered what Pramukh Swami would be like. 'Will he be as loving as Yogiji Maharaj? And pat me on my back? Will he call me?'

After touring the countries of East Africa, Swamishri arrived in London. We all gathered in the old Islington mandir for **his** darshan. The welcome assembly was a light **an informal** affair, with Swamishri lifting everyone's spirits **higher**. But I wasn't going to be convinced that **easily**. My skepticism had **left me**.

After the assembly, we came in line for closer darshan. I **came to** Swamishri. Totally unexpectedly, Swamishri began rolling his gentle hand around my neck. He bowed down a little and patted me on my **back**. He asked, ever so lovingly, "So what about that deal of ours? About becoming a sadhu? You know you have to become a sadhu!"

“Yes,” I agreed gleefully.

Swamishri was pleased. “Good, good,” he added.

All my doubts melted. How did Swamishri know about what only I, Yogiji Maharaj and Gunvantbhai had discussed? I truly felt that Yogi Bapa had not gone at all. He lives on today in Pramukh Swami.

From then onwards, my involvement in Satsang grew even more.

* * *

With Swamishri showing such deep-rooted detachment from worldly attractions on one side, he is just as particular when it comes to practical day-to-day affairs.

One day, Swamishri was staying at Bhagubhai’s house in Hoboken, New Jersey. Before coming to **take dinner**, he decided to go and see the devotees eating in the back garden. The devotees were enjoying a buffet dinner using disposable plastic plates. After making a small suggestion about serving water to everybody, Swamishri sat down to **have his meal** in his room.

While Swamishri was having **dinner**, someone brought a plastic plate to show him. Swamishri inspected it closely and asked Bhagubhai, “How much **does this** cost?”

“Five dollars a dozen,” he answered, “And the cups, two dollars a dozen.”

Swamishri laughed and remarked, “In India, our leaf-plates are much better. Bigger and cheaper too.” Then he asked, “Can you reuse these plates?”

“No, Swami,” the youths replied, “They’re ‘use-and-throw’ plates. You use them once and throw them away.”

“But they’re so nice, you could wash them and use them again,” Swamishri commented.

Even though Swamishri regards everything as merely dust, he can still give the lesson of value - not to waste even the smallest, seemingly insignificant of things in life.

* * *

1981. Swamishri was going from Sarangpur to Bochasan for the Guru Purnima festival¹. Out of sheer grace, Swamishri had taken me along with him in the car.

Initially, he talked a lot. Then as we neared Dhandhuka, the sun began to set and the skies became splashed with the golden, rusty colours of dusk.

Swamishri was in the front; Yogicharan Swami, Santswarup Swami and I were in the back. Turning round slightly, Swamishri looked to me and said, “Do you know the *godī*?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Come on then,” Swamishri said, “Sing.”

I was holding Harikrishna Maharaj in my lap. As I started off with the *jais*, Swamishri finished what he wanted to say. “*Arti, ashtak, godī* - wherever you may go, never forget them. It’s Maharaj’s *agna*. Before, the sadhus used to sing all the kirtans off by heart as well. Never needed books!”

Then we started the *godī*. “*Sant samagam kije...*” In traditional style, with just the right tempo, Swamishri’s smooth, melodious voice sang away.

Even in a whirlwind of activities, Swamishri has always remained unwavering in his devotion to Shriji Maharaj.



GLOSSARY

A

agna	instruction, order, command
annakut	offering of many food items to the <i>murti</i> of God
tatma	soul

B

balak	child
bhupali	a musical tune

C

chandlo	round mark of kumkum powder on the forehead.
charnavind	holy feet
cheshta	verses sung at night describing the daily routine and glory of Shriji Maharaj

D

datan	thin, soft stick cut from certain trees used for cleaning teeth
dhotiyu	unstitched, long piece of cloth traditionally worn by males as a lower garment, usually wound around the waist with one end tucked in after passing between the legs. Also known as 'dhoti'.
dhun	continuous chanting of the holy name of God
diksha	initiation
dilruba	a stringed musical instrument

E

ekadashi	the eleventh day of each half of the month, on which a fast is observed
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G

gatariyu	upper garment worn by a sadhu or <i>parshad</i>
godi	devotional songs sung before evening <i>arti</i> .
goshthi	discussion
gurukul	residential school

J

jai	victory, triumph
jod	companion

K

kalavati	a musical tune
kanthi	double-threaded necklace, usually made of tulsi beads, received by <i>satsangis</i> upon initiation into the Satsang Fellowship, and worn as a sign of their allegiance to God
katha	spiritual talks or discourses
khichdi	spicy boiled rice
kirtan aradhana	a programme of devotional songs
kothari	administrative head of a mandir
kumkum	vermilion powder used for applying <i>chandlo</i>

L

ladu	a sweet delicacy in the form of a ball
loto	a metallic waterpot

M

mala	rosary
malkauns	a musical tune

maya	ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities. Anything that deviates one from the worship of God
megh malar	a musical tune
murti	sacred icon of God that is worshipped
murti-pratishtha	traditional Vedic ceremony in which <i>murtis</i> , are ritually consecrated in a mandir

N

niyam	moral and spiritual disciplines
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P

padhramani	visit by sadhus to sanctify a home
pagh	turban
panch-tirthi	a pilgrimage
paramhansas	‘supreme swan’. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterised by his ability to discriminate between truth and untruth - just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to separate milk from water
parayan	spiritual discourses
parshad diksha	initiation into the monastic order where a youth is given white robes to wear
pattar	wooden bowl for eating
potlu	cloth used for tying together belongings
pradakshina	circumambulation
prasad	sanctified food
puja	worship or ritual of worship
pujari	priest who performs daily rituals of the <i>murtis</i>
puran-puri	a sweet delicacy
puri	a fried delicacy made of wheat flour

R

rag	a musical tune
rotla	thick coarse bread made of millet flour, usually the staple diet of villagers

S

sakar	lumps of processed sugar crystals
sat-chit-anand	truth-Consciousness-Bliss
satpurush	guru for a spiritual aspirant
satsangi	member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practises satsang
seva	spiritual service
shak	cooked spiced vegetables
shangar arti	second <i>arti</i> of the day, performed after breakfast has been offered and the <i>murtis</i> have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands
sud	bright half of the lunar month

T

thal	food devotionally offered to God
tilak-chandlo	‘U’ shaped mark made with sandalwood paste and a round mark of <i>kumkum</i> in its centre; a hallmark of one’s allegiance to the Swaminarayan Sampraday

U

upasana	worship of God, with special emphasis on his greatness and glory
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V

vartman	vow
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