

Divine Memories

(Part 3)

Translation
Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



PUBLISHERS
SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH
SHAHIBAUG, AMDAVAD-4,
GUJARAT, INDIA.

Divine Memories (Part 3)

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

Translation:

Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

First Edition: July 2003

Copies: 3,000

Cost: Rs. 30.00

ISBN: 81-7526-231-1

Cover Photograph:

Sadhu Yogicharandas

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Published & Printed by
Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Shahibaug, Amdavad-4
Gujarat, India

Website: www.swaminarayan.org

FOREWORD

As a humble homage to the divine life and work of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we take great pleasure in presenting a series of English publications begun on the occasion of his *Amrut Mahotsav* – 75th Birthday Celebrations.

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

To truly appreciate his divine personage, eyes of a different perception will be 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 Swamishri as he is.

These books are a series of experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Each book in the set presents him as seen and experienced from the various perspectives of sadhus of the Sanstha. 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 3 is based on the Gujarati text of *Jeva me Nirakhya Re* parts 3, 5, 6 and 7. This English version contains translations of selected passages from the original Gujarati.

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

– Publications Committee
Swaminarayan Aksharpith

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

The present spiritual leader of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, represents a succession of spirituality that began a little over 200 years ago in 1781. The year marked the birth of the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampraday, Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830).

Born in the village of Chhapaiya near Ayodhya in North India, Bhagwan Swaminarayan renounced home at the age of 11 to embark on a spiritual pilgrimage on foot that took him across the length and breadth of India. He received initiation from a Vaishnav Guru, Ramanand Swami, and eventually settled in Western India. He spent the next 30 years of his life in Gujarat and Kathiawad, spearheading a socio-spiritual revolution. With a faithful following of 3000 sadhus, he established the Swaminarayan Sampraday. He introduced innovative social reforms and undertook charitable work to help the poor and needy. In the tradition of the Bhakti Sampraday 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-religious reformer. The Swaminarayan Sampraday He founded emerged as one of the purest forms of Hinduism.

Through His spiritual presence, Bhagwan Swaminarayan continues to provide energy and experience through a succession of God-realised spiritual masters. The first Guru in the succession was His choicest devotee, Gunatitanand Swami (1785-1867), the

manifestation of Aksharbrahma. He in turn was followed by Bhagatji Maharaj (1829-1897).

After him, Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951) furthered the cause by establishing the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam. In consonance with the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj propagated the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma. He built five glorious mandirs and established the dual worship of God along with His choicest devotee. He founded the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) – a socio-spiritual organisation – in 1907.

The fourth spiritual master was Yogiji Maharaj (1892-1971), whose work carried the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan across the oceans to East Africa and England. He passed away after placing the oars of the Sanstha in the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 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 wedded to devotion from a young age. His parents, Motibhai and Diwaliben Patel, were disciples of Shastriji Maharaj and strict adherents of the Akshar Purushottam Sampraday. Shastriji Maharaj had discerned the potential of young Shantilal from the very day he initiated him as a devotee.

While studying in 6th grade, Shantilal received the call from guru Shastriji Maharaj to renounce home. With the blessings of his parents, he left home at the age of 17. Shastriji Maharaj initiated him as a *parshad* in November 1939 and less than two months later, as a sadhu in January 1940 in Gondal. 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 scriptures. He excelled in studies but had to discontinue them to serve in the mandirs. In 1943, he played an important role in the construction work of the new mandir in Atladra. From 1946-1950, he was given the responsibility of Kothari of the Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur.

In a relatively short span of time, despite his young age and inexperience, Narayanswarupdas had coped admirably in fulfilling the duties entrusted to him. His willingness to religiously adhere to the instructions of Shastriji Maharaj had won him the guru's total confidence. In 1950, when he was only 28 years old, Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as President (*Pramukh*) of BAPS in his own place. From then on, he began to be known as *Pramukh*, and so the more popular name of Pramukh Swami emerged. Before Shastriji Maharaj passed away in 1951, he instructed Pramukh Swami to work under Yogiji Maharaj.

For the next 20 years, the young disciple served Yogiji Maharaj with the same zeal and obedience as he had his predecessor. Pramukh Swami inspired, never through orders or commands, but through personal example and commitment. The 1960's saw a period of great expansion for the Sanstha.

On 23 January 1971, Yogiji Maharaj left this world. Pramukh Swami, the perfect disciple became Pramukh Swami Maharaj, to fulfil the role of the perfect spiritual master. Over the last three decades, under his able leadership and guidance, BAPS has spread in leaps and bounds. What was, nearly 100 years ago, a small institution with a few hundred devotees and a handful of

sadhus, is now a dynamic worldwide organisation with over 500 mandirs, over 8100 *satsang* centres, 700 sadhus and over a million followers spread over five continents.

With the inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Sanstha has enjoyed remarkable success in international festivals celebrated in 1981 (Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan), 1985 (Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami) and 1992 (Centenary Celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj).

The Akshardham Cultural Complex in Gandhinagar has won international acclaim as a unique centre for promoting humanity's lofty ideals and India's glorious culture.

Away from India, Swamishri has embarked on no less than 20 preaching tours abroad, covering over 50 countries in 5 continents over the last 30 years. Mandirs and *satsang* centres have been established in USA, Canada, Europe (UK, France, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Italy), Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Mauritius), South Africa, The Middle East (Oman, Bahrain, UAE and Kuwait), The Far East (Japan, Fiji, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong), Australia and New Zealand.

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London, built in traditional Hindu style is the first of its kind outside India.

The spectacular "Cultural Festivals of India" held in London in 1985 and in New Jersey in 1991 were overwhelmingly successful in relaying the timeless messages gleaned from the rich heritage and culture of India.

A whole array of activities flourish under Swamishri's guidance: social (famine relief, cattle camps, earthquake relief work), educational (literacy campaigns,

youth hostels), ecological (tree planting, well recharging, recycling projects), medical (diagnostic camps, blood donation), moral (anti-addiction drives), cultural (child and youth development), and spiritual.

Swamishri himself leads an austere life, without personal gains or comforts. Possessing nothing, asking for nothing, wanting nothing, he goes around giving his all. Despite his age, he travels from tiny tribal huts to modern metropolitan cities all over the world, to promote a life full of virtues, shining with an uncommon brilliance of moral and spiritual power. At his tender word, thousands have left addictions and walked the path of God.

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 and profound tranquility is a deep, fluent communion with God.

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Divine Memories

(Part 3)

1. BHAKTIPRIYA SWAMI

(KOTHARI SWAMI) MUMBAI

It was love at first sight – my first meeting with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Atladra left a lasting impression. Even though we had never met before, we sat in the middle of the assembly hall and he said, “Always faocus only on the *pragat satpurush* – aim to please him. There were many difficulties during the time of Shastriji Maharaj. May you be happy in every respect. Misery is purely in the mind.”



Swamishri was travelling by train from Vijaywada to Varangal. At the front of Swamishri’s section there was only a curtain, which, due to the frequent passage of commuters, led to difficulty in observing the code of conduct for sadhus. Swamishri said, “In these situations it is better to travel by first class than second A.C.” In terms of convenience, it was more suitable for Swamishri to travel by 2nd A.C., but for Swamishri the priority was to preserve the sadhu’s code of conduct.



We were travelling by train from Raipur to Amaravati. At 12.30 p.m. we offered *thal* to Thakorji. Some sadhus were singing the *thals*. Swamishri was engaged in the *murti* of Thakorji. It was as if he was actually seeing God in person.

At sunset, we started to sing the *godi*. Then the *arti* and the *ashtaks*. Throughout, Swamishri’s focus was the

murti of Thakorji. It was an inspiring sight. The concentration with which Swamishri offered his devotion to God offered a glimpse of his single-minded love towards God.



Even in the smallest of matters, Swamishri does not forget his beloved Harikrishna Maharaj. In 1990, Swamishri returned to Mumbai from London. After *dars-han* of the *murtis* in the main mandir, he was led to the small new lift which had been installed. After the Vedic rituals to inaugurate the new lift, he instructed that Harikrishna Maharaj be taken in first to sanctify the lift. Only then did Swamishri enter the lift.



Swamishri takes special care of ill sadhus. Balkrishna Swami, a senior sadhu who was based in Atladra, had come to Mumbai for treatment. After his morning *puja*, Swamishri went to see Balkrishna Swami, who was resting in the sick bay on the third floor of the mandir. Swamishri moved his hand all over Balkrishna Swami's body and recalled, "You are very senior. I was born the same year you received initiation. That was 70 years ago. You've truly served Maharaj. Everything will turn out fine." With Swamishri's blessings, Balkrishna Swami's health improved.

(Balkrishna Swami passed away on 9-8-1997, aged 94.)



2. BALKRISHNA SWAMI

Pujya Balkrishna Swami passed away on 9-8-1997, aged 94.

After being initiated into the sadhu-fold by Shastriji Maharaj in 1926, I used to tour with him to the villages. We sometimes visited Chansad. There, Motibhai Prabhudas Patel used to do a lot of *seva*. He even used to accompany us when we went around the village to beg for alms. In the village there is a sacred old Swaminarayan mandir where a loft was to be built. So, Shastriji Maharaj and I stayed there to oversee the construction. Motibhai came regularly to offer his services. At that time Shantilal (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) was young. I saw him only occasionally. Once, he asked me, "Shall I call my father?" I can still remember those words uttered in such a sweet voice! During our stay in Chansad, Shastriji Maharaj's fondness for Shantilal was clearly evident. I was obviously not aware at the time that this young Shantilal would one day become such a universally respected figure. I saw him merely as any other boy. But today, he has developed into such a great person. Shantilal came to Bocharan in the same year that the dome for the mandir was completed. At the time I was sitting on the stairs of the mandir. I was the first to meet him, so he asked me, "Is Shastriji Maharaj here?" "Yes," I replied. "Will you come with me to see him?" "Yes, certainly." "Do you know me?" Shantilal asked. "I may not know you, but I certainly do know your father," I answered. So I took him into Shastriji Maharaj's room. Shastriji Maharaj then sat with him and talked. I often recall this incident. It gives me great pleasure to think that at that time I got the

opportunity to take Shantilal to Shastriji Maharaj.



Around 1940, after Shastriji Maharaj initiated Shantilal into the sadhu-fold, several of the other sadhus felt that he was still too young to have been made a sadhu. Responding to these thoughts, Shastriji Maharaj, who was in Bochasan at the time, said, “He is young but won’t he grow? He will slowly mature and excel. He will inspire hundreds of thousands into Satsang. He will surpass even his guru!” In fact, when Shastriji Maharaj was giving him *diksha* in the Akshar Deri at Gondal, he said to Yogiji Maharaj, “Bless Narayanswarupdas that he develops virtues like yours. He will do the same as you are doing. In fact, he will achieve more, not less.” I was present on this occasion and I clearly heard these words of Shastriji Maharaj with my own ears. And when Shastriji Maharaj appointed Narayanswarupdas as the President of this Sanstha, none of us had any objections. We had faith in Shastriji Maharaj that whatever he does will be correct. Even though he was young (only 28 years old) when appointed, we trusted the judgement of Shastriji Maharaj. There is a big difference between his judgement and ours. We may have our own ways of reasoning, but the *satpurush’s* judgement is divine and superior to ours. That is why none of the sadhus opposed Shastriji Maharaj’s decision to appoint Narayanswarupdas as the President. Moreover, Bhaktivallabhdas, Aksharswarupdas and other sadhus, were all highly impressed by the saintly virtues of Pramukh Swami. Everyone respected him for his quiet, mature nature. He was humble and fair to all. He was always polite and never spoilt relations with anyone.



Question: What feelings do you have for Pramukh Swami Maharaj?

Answer: The same feelings as I had for Shastriji Maharaj. Even though the physical appearance is different, the Divine Spirit within them both is exactly the same. Their way of working may be different but their work is the same. Shriji Maharaj eternally dwells within him and is working through him. Whatever he says are the words of Maharaj. He works for the good of all. It is not easy to build new mandirs. Pramukh Swami constantly remembers his guru in all his work. And the continuous *vicharan* he undertakes is not an easy thing to do either.

Question: What qualities and virtues of Shastriji Maharaj do you see in Pramukh Swami Maharaj?

Answer: Everyone was in awe of Shastriji Maharaj. He was fearless. Pramukh Swami is also fearless like him. Shastriji Maharaj was a very powerful personality. So is Pramukh Swami. He has built grand mandirs, just like Shastriji Maharaj. See how he has inspired the growth of Satsang. In the time of Shastriji Maharaj, there were many difficulties, but he still built magnificent mandirs. Today’s situation is different. Satsang has grown in a big way because of the relentless efforts of Pramukh Swami. He has built so many mandirs – big and small. He has facilitated the worship of God and made it easily accessible to and convenient for all. Nowadays there is little opportunity for me to interact directly with Pramukh Swami, but he so lovingly arranges everything for me. Just like Shastriji Maharaj used to, he looks after us all so affectionately. He looks after everyone who has surrendered to him. Anandkand Swami was taking care of me. In 1991, he went to America for the Cultural Festival of India. Even there, Swamishri asked him,

“What arrangements have you made for Balkrishna Swami?” “We have kept a devoted Brahmin in his service,” replied Anandkand Swami. No matter where he is, Swami always takes care of me.



3. SATYAPRIYA SWAMI

Pujya Satyapriya Swami passed away on 22-11-2002, aged 72

All our Gunatit Gurus have excelled in their service to Shriji Maharaj. In 1965, preparations were in full swing for the Centenary Celebrations of Shastriji Maharaj in Atladra. Pramukh Swami was enthusiastically engrossed in all aspects of the preparations.

Once, at 2.00 a.m., the youth volunteers were asleep after a hard day's work. Just then a truckload of mattresses arrived. The driver was in a hurry to unload and return. I was with Swamishri. I suggested that the youths be woken up. Swamishri said, “They must be tired after having worked all day. It's not right to wake them up.” There was nobody else awake who could be called to unload the truck. Yet Swamishri was undeterred. He said, “Satyapriya, you climb onto the truck and throw the mattresses down one-by-one. I'll stack them up.”

“But, Swami...”

“Why? Can't I do it. You give and I'll arrange,” Swamishri interrupted and spoke with conviction.

In this way, Swamishri himself readily stacked the mattresses.



In 1981, Swamishri was in Gondal. Preparations were in progress for the Sharad Purnima festival. Swamishri summoned me to his room. Dr. Swami was also present. The atmosphere felt a little tense and serious. I wondered why Swamishri had called me.

Then Swamishri said, “Satyapriya, if you won't feel

offended I'd like to make a suggestion."

"Bapa! I would never be offended by what you say. Please speak," I replied.

"What if we delegate the task of producing the *Swaminarayan Prakash* to the newly-initiated sadhus? What is your opinion?"

I had been involved in the production of the *Swaminarayan Prakash* since 1965. My first thought was that I had committed some grave mistake. Lost in this thought, I hesitated in my reply.

"We only want to do this if you agree," Swamishri said, pulling me out from my thoughts.

"Bapa, have I made any mistake?"

"No. No. Its nothing like that. Its just that we thought it appropriate to place some responsibilities on these new sadhus. But only after hearing your view."

"Bapa! It's by your wish that I've been doing this *seva* and by your wish I'm prepared to leave. I have no objection at all."

"Now I feel better," sighed Swamishri. Swamishri is the President of the Sanstha and could have ordered me to give it up. But, instead, he sought my permission!



4. BHAGWATPRIYA SWAMI (KOLKATA)

In 1965, preparations for Yogiji Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav were in full swing at Gondal. We had a break in our studies, so we had gone to Gondal one month in advance to help out. Yogiji Maharaj had selected his favourite place, Gondal, as the site for the celebrations. However, the task to provide water for an expected attendance of 100,000 devotees was complex and difficult. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the main coordinator for all the preparations and he was working tremendously hard to complete everything on time.

Swamishri had attempted to acquire water by drilling bore-wells at several places in the mandir compound. But, these efforts proved unsuccessful.

The solution to the water problem was very difficult and worrying. But Swamishri was upto the challenge. After much thinking and discussion, it was decided to set up a pipeline from the nearby Lake Veri to the mandir's reservoir. Work began in earnest to meet the deadline.

At that time Swamishri was suffering from pyorrhoea, due to which his teeth had loosened. For this ailment Swamishri was applying an ayurvedic oil, Irmedad, to his gums every night.

Once, Swamishri came to his room at 11.00 p.m. I thought that his work must have finished early and so he had come early to rest. Swamishri rinsed his mouth, applied the oil, and asked me, "Will you come with me?" I realised that Swamishri had come just to apply his medication, so I got ready and we left for the Ashapuri Mata

Mandir, where the pipeline was being laid. Sadhus and devotees were working at full speed. When this session ended at 2.00 a.m., Swamishri called me and said, “You go back with the other sadhus. I’ll come later.” So I left. Then, as I lay down trying to get to sleep, I thought to myself that Swamishri was tolerating tremendous strain daily to meet the schedule, while I am more inclined to cater to my physical needs. Where is my devotion in this?

The success of the Amrut Mahotsav was entirely due to the untiring efforts of Swamishri.

Swamishri often says, “Once I start a task, I forget all needs to eat and sleep.”



In 1974, I was appointed to teach Sanskrit to the newly initiated sadhus in Sarangpur.

During this period, sadhus in Gondal had placed a photo of Swamishri in the Akshar Deri. Swamishri did not approve of this. Once, when he came for *darshan*, he threw the photo away. The sadhus would then place it back again. Many times he would say, “I’ve told you so many times not to place this photo here, yet you persist.” It was in fact due to their loving devotion to him as their guru that they persisted.

Taking a leaf out of the sadhus in Gondal, the sadhus in Sarangpur also placed a photo of Swamishri beside the marble *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj in the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. But Swamishri would give them stern, silent looks. And immediately they would remove the photo. So one day a thought came to the sadhus. They placed photos of Yogiji Maharaj and Swamishri together in the same frame and arranged it next to the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj. Seeing this arrangement Swamishri said nothing. He had *darshan* and started performing

pradakshina. Then he called me and said, “Why don’t you understand? Is there any need to place my photo? Do I have to bow down to my own photo!”

His point was valid. Since then no separate murtis of Swamishri were placed in the main shrines, unless they have been installed with full Vedic rites.



In 1993, Swamishri’s 73rd birthday was celebrated in Calcutta. The day after the celebrations were over, Swamishri requested to see the festival accounts. Two days passed, but due to other work pressures, we were unable to prepare the accounts.

On the third day, a public assembly was in progress at the Vidya Mandir. Swamishri called me to his seat and said, “I want the accounts by tomorrow evening.” Then he wrote the main points on a rough piece of paper and giving it to me, instructed, “I want answers to all these points.”

The following afternoon at 5.00 p.m. I was at the mandir when Swamishri called me from his room. He reminded me, “This evening all of you should come and present the accounts.” Rashmibhai Sheth, who was preparing the accounts, had been working on them since 6.00 a.m. When he had finished, we sat with Swamishri after his dinner. For one hour we presented the accounts. In between he would ask questions to confirm and clarify certain matters. He was pleased with the accuracy of the accounts and blessed everyone. Then he said, “Everything should be prepared on time.”

Swamishri encourages such accuracy in all matters. That is why the Sanstha is continually progressing.



5. GHANSHYAMCHARAN SWAMI

(SURAT)

In 1966, I was in Sarangpur with Swamishri for the Annakut festival. It was my first time with Swamishri. Swamishri himself made a list of the food items to be prepared and allocated duties to everyone.

On Diwali, the day before Annakut, at around 4.00 p.m. Swamishri came to the porch outside the office to help clean, peel and cut the vegetables that were needed to prepare the *shaks* for the Annakut in the morning.

Different vegetables were put in separate containers and washed with filtered water. Swamishri would draw our attention to subtle details. He would say to Hariprakash Swami and me, “Each *shak* prepared in the morning for the Annakut should be separated into 4 bowls. One for the central shrine. A second for Harikrishna Maharaj’s shrine. A third for the Dharmakul shrine and the fourth for Shastriji Maharaj at the Smruti Mandir. Once each bowl is ready, sprinkle it with *dhana* leaves, cover it with paper and then take it to the shrine.”

For us, Sarangpur was our training school and Swamishri was our teacher. Whatever the task, Swamishri always showed the way. Thus we noticed his expertise in everything. Daily, between the *sandhya* and *shayan artis*, Swamishri would go to the Smruti Mandir and perform 108 *pradakshinas*.

On the night of Diwali, Swamishri would sit in the *chopda puja*. And after the *annakut*, he would personally serve *jalebi-sata* and other *prasad* to the sadhus and mandir staff.

By the time he finished serving everyone, it would be past 4.00 p.m. Only then he would eat.

Once I made *puranpuri* for the *annakut*, from which he gave me *prasad* and showed his pleasure. He would often call me ‘7Pragji Purani’ and give me pleasant memories.

When we toured in the Zalavad region, to the villages of the *darbars*, he would call me “Ghanubha!”

And nowadays, he often calls me “Ghanshyam Bapa.”

Memories of these small and apparently trivial things reveal his love and bring back pleasant memories.



From Gadhada I travelled on many occasions with Swamishri and Narayancharan Swami, to nearby Lakhanka. Once, Narendra Chag was driving the car. On the way it became stuck and even Swamishri got out to help push the car out. But the car wouldn’t budge.

On the dusty path, two youths were passing by on their motorcycles. Swamishri told them, “Please come here and help us push the car out.”

As soon as the youths touched the car, it came out. Swamishri was overjoyed and exclaimed, “What a miracle.”



Once Swamishri was in the village of Kundhada near Bhavnagar. A group of us were with him.

We had put up in a local school. The evening assembly was held in the school compound. It began at 9.00 p.m. After a speech by Suresbhai Rajyaguru, I spoke. When Swamishri began his blessings, it was already 11.00 p.m. The audience appeared to be tired and saturated. Quite a few had begun to nod off. Stray dogs would wander through the assembly and cause disturbances. But despite all this, Swamishri spoke for 45 minutes!

After the assembly, we went to our room and sang the *cheshta*. It was late, so I annoyingly told Swamishri, “Bapa! It appears that you want to make these people *brahmarup* in one day! I think you should have shortened your blessings and delivered a mini-blessing, like Yogi Bapa.” Swamishri laughed loudly and replied, “Well, all of you spoke for a long time, so when I got the chance I made the most of it! That’s why I talked for so long.”

Thus, in a light-hearted manner Swamishri revealed his inclination for *katha*. He still often recalls this incident and the way I told him off! Then he adds, “He can do this because we are close.”



Many years ago, after Yogiji Maharaj’s birthday was celebrated in Vadodara, he performed a *murti-pratishtha* ceremony at Lingsthal. After this, I accompanied Pramukh Swami Maharaj on a Satsang tour of the Kanam-Vankal region. Aksharswarup Swami was also with us.

In one village, Swamishri and Manibhai (Salad) successfully resolved a land dispute between two brothers. Today, many years after the settlement, the brothers gratefully remember Swamishri’s intervention and say, “If Pramukh Swami had not mediated and settled the dispute then, there would have been violence between us and we would have been seriously injured or even killed!”

Swamishri’s life is for the benefit of others. It is like a mobile courthouse.

Even in those days Manibhai used to say, “Take the opportunity of Pramukh Swami’s *darshan* because there’ll come a time when you’ll only get his *darshan* from over a kilometre away.” And today these words have indeed become a reality.



6. DEVCHARAN SWAMI

(BHUJ)

In 1963, the Chaitri Punam festival was celebrated in Bochasan. Thereafter, I went with Yogiji Maharaj to Am-davad. Daily, a group of 15-20 of us youths had the privilege of bathing Yogiji Maharaj. After a week, Yogiji Maharaj prepared to leave for Rajkot. That morning, he asked me, “Which exam have you given?”

“Metric,” I replied.

“You’ll pass!” he blessed, then asked, “Will you obey my wish? Say yes!”

Continuing, he said, “Were going, but you stay with Pramukh Swami. Serve him. Get his tickets for him when he needs to travel by bus or rail. Keep proper accounts. Reserve a space for him in the bus or train. You have to serve him in this way. He is very great.”



Once, on a winter’s night, we took the Delhi Mail from Vadodara to Devas (in Madhya Pradesh). With Swamishri and myself were Nirannamukta Swami and Pragat Bhagat. We were travelling in 3rd class. We disembarked at 11.45 p.m. and went to a devotee’s house for the night.

He took out the few blankets he had, out of which I placed three on Swamishri. We all tried to get some sleep, but it was terribly cold. At 1.30 a.m. Swamishri woke and said, “Dev, it’s very cold. Are there enough blankets for you all?” I had only one blanket spread on the floor but none to cover myself with. Thus I was exposed to both the cold tiles underneath and the cold surroundings. Seeing

this, Swamishri told me, “Get up and take these blankets. Share them out.” I ignored the request! So, Swamishri himself got up and placed blankets on the other two sadhus. Then he went back to sleep – using only one blanket.

In the morning Nirannamukta Swami said, “It’s good you gave us a blanket – else we’d have perished from the cold!”



7. GNANPRASAD SWAMI (GONDAL)

In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj was in Mumbai. We received news that Pramukh Swami was arriving at Dadar Station by train. Immediately Yogiji Maharaj instructed Harshadbhai Dave, other senior sadhus and me, “Pramukh Swami is coming today. You must go to the station to receive him and offer prostrations to him.”

Pramukh Swami arrived in the early morning. After we returned to the mandir, he went to bathe. So we went for Yogiji Maharaj’s *darshan*. Yogiji Maharaj asked, “Have you bathed Pramukh Swami?”

“No, Bapa.”

“Then go and bathe him like you bathe me.” With this instruction, I went to where Pramukh Swami was having his bath. As I attempted to touch his feet, he scolded me saying, “What are you doing. You should only serve Yogiji Maharaj in this way. Go to him.”

I replied, “Yogiji Maharaj has sent me.” Pramukh Swami didn’t say a word. While bathing he quoted from the *Vachanamrut* and explained, “We should be faithful to one guru... focus on Yogi Bapa. He is our aim. If we please him, everyone else will be pleased. So serve him and please him.” These words revealed to me Pramukh Swami’s servitude, faithfulness and devotion to Yogiji Maharaj.



8. GHANSHYAMPRASAD SWAMI

(NAGPUR)

Construction of the Bhadra mandir was in progress. One day, just after midnight, I heard Pramukh Swami call out, “Ghanshyam! These devotees have worked hard. Is there any *sukhdi* and *gathia*? Let’s feed them.” There was nothing ready to serve at the time, so I started to make them. Swamishri also came to help me. He had a lot of experience in cooking, and so he was quick in his working. He taught me how to make the *sukhdi*. “First heat the ghee. Add the flour and let it cook properly. When ready, add the *gor*. Let the mixture turn the right colour. The important thing is to ensure that it does not remain uncooked. Then cool the mixture by spreading it into trays.”

Then he began the task of making *gathias*. Within a short time, everything was ready and he personally served everyone. This type of *darshan* was common then and I feel privileged to have been able to witness it.



In 1980, Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s 199th birthday was celebrated at the Cross Medan in Mumbai. During the 10-day celebrations, I served in the kitchen department under Tyagvallabh Swami. Swamishri was very pleased with the arrangements and management.

The rush of devotees on the final day was tremendous, since Swamishri was to leave for Gujarat in the afternoon. We were busy arranging lunch for the thousands who had come and also taking stock of the remaining

supplies so that decisions could be made on what to send where. Amidst this flurry of activity, Swamishri arrived. Politely, he said, “Ghanshyam, I would like to know how much it cost to run this kitchen, what is left over and what items were donated...”

I had no idea that I would have to provide all this information so quickly, so I hadn’t prepared it. Then, Pravin Bhagat (now Bhagwatcharan Swami) said to Swamishri, “What’s the hurry? You’re going this afternoon.”

Immediately Swamishri said, “There’s no coming or going for us. I want to know the accounts. You should have been thorough from the start. Real efficiency is when you can give something on demand.”

“We’ve written it all down,” I said, “but it’ll take 3-4 days to finalise everything. I’ll send it to you in Atladra when it’s ready.”

Swamishri explained which details to incorporate in the report. In due time, we forwarded the accounts and report to Swamishri. Subsequently, he wrote an 8-page reply, beginning, “I hope you were not upset by me asking for the accounts. Please forgive me. I have received the accounts you sent. The celebrations in Mumbai brought peace within. This was a mini-festival. We want to do a similar celebration on a grand scale in Amdavad...”

He had every right to ask for the accounts, yet he asked for forgiveness! His humility at all times is vividly apparent and extremely inspiring.



9. SATYAPRAKASH SWAMI

20-2-1972, Salad, The evening assembly had just finished. By the time Swamishri arrived to sleep it was 11.30 p.m. He said, "Here, let me read the mail."

So I gave him the letters. We were both engrossed in our work. A devotee was sitting at a distance, enjoying the *darshan* of Swamishri. Suddenly, Swamishri looked at the devotee and asked, "Is it possible to get some lemons?" He replied, "Let me go and see." When he returned he said, "There is none at home, so I'll have to go to the farm." Swamishri said, "O.K. Go there and get some."

I was puzzled as to why Swamishri would want lemons at this hour or the night. Then, explaining to the devotee, Swamishri said, "Give them to Balkrishna Bhagat (my *parshad* name at the time). He is fasting today. So, he will need them to break his fast in the morning." I was stunned. I realised only then that Swamishri was doing all this for me. So I said, "Bapa, don't worry, I'll drink buttermilk." But Swamishri insisted, "No. That's not the same. It is better to drink lemon juice."

The devotee left to get the lemons. He returned 45 minutes later and gave me the lemons. Only then did Swamishri say, "O.K. Now let's go to sleep."

Despite his hectic schedule and numerous responsibilities, Swamishri knew not only that I fasted on certain days of the month but also when.



Han and Paul Kop, two brothers from Holland, were on

a world tour in their landrover. They arrived in Mombasa and came in contact with C.T. Patel. Hearing about the glory of Swamishri, they cancelled their visit to Zambia and instead, in March 1972, arrived in Mumbai and then came to Gondal, where Swamishri was at the time. Both felt inner peace on meeting Swamishri and even requested to be given *kanthis*.

After a few days in Swamishri's divine presence they departed for Karachi. They camped on the seashore of Karachi. There, they experienced some negative thoughts and both of them removed their *kanthis*.

One day, they went for a swim in the ocean. At a distance some children were playing with swimming tubes. Suddenly, a strong wave carried away one of the tubes out of their grasp and the children started shouting. Han heard their cries and swam to where they were to help retrieve the tube. With great difficulty he succeeded.

Han, himself started to float using the tube. As he lay face up on the tube, he suddenly noticed that the water around him had turned choppy. To his horror he saw a shark circling him at great speed. Who could he shout to for help? Paul and the children looked on helplessly.

Suddenly, Han remembered Swamishri and prayed, "Save me, Pramukh Swami! Save me. I'll wear your *kanthi* again and never remove it. Forgive me for taking it off this time." As Han spoke, he had a vision of Swamishri. Smiling, Swamishri said only one thing. "Let go of the tube and come to the shore." Then the vision disappeared. As Han released the tube, the shark chased after it and Han speedily swam to the shore.

Han heaved a sigh of relief. He explained everything to Paul. Then he wrote a letter to Swamishri in English, which I translated to Swamishri, in which he confessed his mistake of having removed his *kanthi*. Swamishri

dictated a reply to me and gave special instructions to send *kanthis* for both the brothers.

From then on Han's attachment to Satsang increased and to this day he practices Satsang. In 1984, Swamishri visited his home in Holland.



Sarangpur, 13-7-73. It was the day for our monthly shave. Pragat Bhagat and I were helping the barber while he shaved Swamishri. After the shave, Swamishri bathed and returned to his room. Pragat Bhagat had collected a few strands of Swamishri's shaved hairs to give to a devotee as a sacred memento. Pramukh Swami realised this and told Pragat Bhagat strongly, "Flush them down the toilet and don't ever give such things to anyone."

Silently, Pragat Bhagat obeyed and returned to Swamishri. Then Pragat Bhagat said, "I've thrown them away, O.K. But I have Yogi Bapa's hair!"

Instantly Swamishri responded, "You only have his hair, but I have Yogi Bapa himself!"

Swamishri thus revealed his oneness with Yogi Bapa.



21-2-1975. Vinubhai Patel, a close colleague of film industry giants Johnny Walker and Satyajit Ray, had invited Swamishri to his native village of Sunav. The occasion was the opening of an office belonging to Bhulabhai Shroff.

Many of Vinubhai's film industry associates and actors, male and female, had also come. On the stage, was a white-robed sanayasin from the village Mobha.

In due course, Swamishri arrived. As he approached the stage, he noticed that the carpet on the stage was

continuous with that used in the seating area for all the guests – male and female. I was with Swamishri, holding the *murti* of Thakorji. Swamishri realised the danger of our vows being broken if we stepped on the continuous carpet. So when I requested Swamishri to climb onto the stage, he pointed out, "The carpet is continuous. And the ladies are seated at the back on the same carpet. This arrangement is unacceptable."

As Swamishri hesitated, Dahyabhai came and requested Swamishri to climb the stairs onto the stage.

Swamishri firmly but politely requested, "The carpet is continuous and should be separated."

Vinubhai was informed. Immediately, he arranged for the piece of carpet where the ladies were sitting to be separated from the rest. Only then did Swamishri take his seat on the stage.

Then the sanyasin already seated on stage said to Swamishri, "When I come to such public occasions, I do not fuss over these things and accept the arrangements made."

Swamishri replied, "I've just returned after nine months abroad. I didn't break my vows there. So why should I do so in my own country! This is our main vow. It is our *dharma*. I only attend functions, where our vows can be preserved!"



In 1977, Swamishri was in Chetham in London. Ishwarcharan Swami and I were with him. We had gone to the house of Rameshbhai, who although not a *satsangi*, had a lot of respect for Swamishri.

After we arrived, Swamishri and Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* and *arti*. Rameshbhai had invited several others as well to participate in the *pujan*. Swamishri

called them over one by one to talk to them. As one man approached, Swamishri talked to him and then offered, "Here, let me give you a *kanthi*."

Immediately the man said, "No, I won't wear a *kanthi*. I'm a Vaishnav."

Swamishri replied, "O.K. that's fine." Then he asked, "How many years have you been in this country?"

"Fifteen years."

"Do you take meat or alcohol?"

Hesitantly, the man replied, "I don't eat meat but sometimes when I go to parties, I do drink a little."

Swamishri pressed his point, "When you go to parties and drink alcohol, don't you remember that you are a Vaishnav? And that this is contrary to your faith? But when I offered to tie a *kanthi*, you refused on the grounds that you are a Vaishnav."

The man was speechless. He had not anticipated such a logical rebuttal. Reflecting on his mistake, the man agreed to wear a *kanthi*.

Swamishri explained, "Listen, it is not my intention to make you wear a *kanthi* and become a *satsangi*. But since you are a Vaishnav, become a true and faithful Vaishnav." Then, pointing to the man's son, Swamishri said, "Be careful that he doesn't follow in your footsteps and start drinking too!"

Then as Swamishri prepared to get up, the man came closer and insisted that Swamishri tie a *kanthi*. Swamishri duly complied and blessed him.

Swamishri's mission is not to convert people but to make them true and devout adherents of the faith they follow.



10. SADHUJIVAN SWAMI

(VALLABH VIDYANAGAR)

After the conclusion of a *parayan* in Anand, Yogiji Maharaj was making his way to the car of Manibhai Jivabhai. Since the car had been parked in the blazing sun, the upholstery of the seats had become very hot to sit on. Pramukh Swami immediately assessed the situation, took my *gatariyu*, quickly folded it and placed it neatly on Yogiji Maharaj's seat. Such was Swamishri's devotion to his guru Yogiji Maharaj.



On 25-1-1971, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj left his mortal body and returned to Akshardham. After the funeral rites were over in Gondal, everyone asked, "What now?" The answer was provided by Sadguru Santvallabh Swami. He revealed, "Now our guru is Pramukh Swami Maharaj." Then, while I was bathing after Yogiji Maharaj's cremation, one sadhu said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj is now in Yogiji Maharaj's place. Now we must work to please Pramukh Swami."

The following night, we were singing *cheshta* in the presence of Swamishri. I was focussed on Swamishri. But I felt others would comment that this was not proper to do so soon after the departure of Yogiji Maharaj. So I intermittently shut my eyes. After the recitation of the *cheshta*, I, along with the others, approached Swamishri to touch his feet. He held my left hand and gave me a supportive look which seemed to reveal that my focus of meditation was correct.

The following morning, after Shangar *arti*, Swamishri was descending the steps of Akshar Mandir, Gondal. He leaned on my shoulder for support as he climbed down. I said, “Upto now Yogi Bapa looked after me. Now I pray that you look after us.”

Instantly Swamishri said, “Yogi Bapa has not gone. He is still looking after us and will continue to do so. Do not worry. Be happy and worship God.”



Swamishri was in Vidyanagar. It was summer time. One day, at about 11.30 a.m. Swamishri was performing the *pujan* of a devotee’s new truck. I was standing under a tree and watching. The ground was hot due to the scorching summer sun. My feet were burning. After Swamishri had finished, he came to where I was standing and asked, “Don’t you wear any slippers?”

I replied, “No, for years I’ve had a vow not to wear footwear.” Swamishri was surprised. He immediately removed his slippers and gave them to me, saying, “Here, wear these. From now on use any footwear you find convenient.” How can I forget such love and care?



11. ANANDSWARUP SWAMI (GANDHINAGAR)

In 1972 there was a 3-day get-together for youths in the village of Gana, near Anand. A group of about 30-35 of us (youths) had gone from Mumbai for this occasion. At night everyone was introduced in the assembly. However, I was absent – resting because I was tired. The next day, Dr. Swami told me, “We’ll introduce you to Swamishri after his *puja* so you can get his blessings.”

When I went to receive blessings, Swamishri with great affection asked, “Where were you last night?”

“I was tired so I went to sleep,” I replied.

“For the next few days you’ll have to tolerate a little hardship and inconvenience. You should make it a point to attend every assembly,” Swamishri advised.

For me, this was the first time I had been advised like this by Swamishri. Actually, the real story was that we didn’t like the food. So a group of us took some sugar and went to the local dairy to have some milk.

Once, our group of youths from Mumbai even took the bus to Anand and ate there. On that occasion, the assembly was still in progress and Swamishri even saw us board the bus. Yet, he didn’t stop us nor did he tell us off afterwards. We had disobeyed his instructions that we all sit in the assemblies. But Swamishri kindly forgave us.



During the 1973 summer vacation, a group of 20-30 youths accompanied Swamishri on his *vicharan* in the villages.

Having lunched in Bhadran, we arrived in Gana by truck in mid-afternoon. Swamishri arrived there in the evening and enquired about how we had made our way to Gana. He was pained to hear that we had travelled in the scorching afternoon heat. He said, “I had told the truck driver not to rush, not to leave in the afternoon but to leave in the evening.” Swamishri then told the driver not to rush and transport us in the afternoon heat again. Bhadran and Gana are quite close, and all of us were young and able to tolerate the heat, yet Swamishri used to take care of us in every detail.



In 1982, I was one of a group of seven sadhus, led by Dr. Swami, on an eight-month tour abroad. When we returned, a few days before Kartik sud Punam, we went to Bochasan for Swamishri’s *darshan*.

Swamishri wished to welcome us and garland each of us individually. So he told Acharya Swami, who in turn told me. I said that it was not right since Swamishri is our guru and we are his disciples. I explained to Acharya Swami, “We have not done anything great. The devotees abroad received us and looked after us only because of Swamishri. And whatever devotion and discourses we delivered had been taught to us by Maharaj and Swami. So it’s not proper for us to be honoured like this. In fact, we should be honouring Swamishri. Then I add, “If Swamishri insists, then garland Dr. Swami on behalf of us all.”

When Swamishri heard this he insisted, “I want all to be garlanded and I want to garland them all personally.” And so he did. In the assembly he garlanded all of us. Swamishri respects and appreciates whatever we do for him.



12. GNANESHWAR SWAMI (SARANGPUR)

In 1982, during Swamishri’s Satsang Tour abroad, I had the duty of answering Swamishri’s mail and also writing the report of his *vicharan*.

Once, in London, Swamishri wrote a confidential letter to Rameshbhai Hathibhai Patel. Handing it to me to post, he asked, “Do you know the address?” Confidently, I said, “Yes,” thinking that it must be in the diary. But when I checked, I couldn’t find it. The devotee was well known, so I asked Viveksagar Swami, Narayancharan Swami and others if they knew the address. But no one knew exactly. Eventually we came up with the address, “Patel Traders, Anand.” I labeled the envelope accordingly and passed it on, with other letters, to Arunkumar to post.

That night, as Swamishri prepared to rest, he asked, “What address did you write?” Pleased that I had found a solution to the task, I told him the whole story. But Swamishri was not happy, he said, “If you didn’t know, you should have asked me. The letter was to be posted to his home address.” Then Swamishri gave his complete home address, which none of the other sadhus knew.

Afterwards, I phoned Arunkumar to correct the address on the envelope. But the thing that amazed me was that how many addresses does Swamishri remember!



In 1990, Swamishri’s 70th birthday and the 75th anniversary of Sarangpur mandir were to be celebrated in Sarangpur. He agreed to a 10-day festival. Many devotees

from throughout India and abroad were expected. How would it be possible to provide for their accommodation in a small village like Sarangpur? The mandir's existing *dharmashalas* would not be enough. Swamishri was concerned about the arrangements for the devotees. So he gave instructions to build new rooms on the mandir's land behind the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. However, since this arrangement would conflict with the proposed new master plan for the mandir, Akshaymuni Swami and I went to meet Swamishri. But since Swamishri wished that the new rooms be built, we dropped our proposals. Within a short time, Bhaktavatsal Swami had the rooms built. The festival was celebrated in grand style. One night, before leaving Sarangpur, Swamishri expressed his pleasure at the success of the festival. Then he turned to Bhaktavatsal Swami and said, "Kothari, the rooms were also completed in time and the needs of the devotees were taken care of. So, your money has been well spent!"

On regular days, the rooms in the mandir are not always full, yet Swamishri was satisfied that taking care of the devotees' needs even once justified the cost. Such is his love and care for them.



13. PURUSHOTTAMCHARAN SWAMI (NAVSARI)

26-2-84. I had accompanied Ishwarcharan Swami to Ukai for the idol-installation ceremony in the presence of Swamishri. After the installation ceremony, Swamishri had lunch. Then he called us and asked, "Now what did you come to ask?"

We had come for Swamishri's guidance on whether to purchase a new two-colour offset printing machine for Swaminarayan Aksharpith. Ishwarcharan Swami said, "Bapa, we already have a single-colour offset, but if we have a two-colour machine it will be useful."

Swamishri agreed and told me, "Contact this devotee in London and tell him to deal with the purchasing."

We were delighted. But since it was difficult to telephone London from Ukai, we decided to make the call from Amdavad. To my surprise, when we arrived in Amdavad, that devotee himself called. He said that Swamishri had told him we wanted to purchase a two-colour offset machine, and asked us the details.

How did Swamishri convey the message from Ukai to London so quickly? We learnt later that Swamishri had instructed one of the sadhus returning to Mumbai to make the call. Despite being involved in more pressing work and amidst such a busy schedule, Swamishri's ability to coordinate every small task is amazing.



In 1985, Swamishri had returned to Mumbai following his Satsang tour of the Middle East. The next day, I was

to return to Amdavad, so Swamishri asked, “What time are you leaving for Amdavad?”

“At 8 o’clock tonight,” I replied.

“I’ll have some letters ready, so take them from me before you go.”

Late that afternoon, I learnt that we would be leaving at 9.00 p.m. So I told Swamishri of the change in time and not to rush writing the letters. But Swamishri immediately placed a pile of letters in front of me and said, “You leave whenever you have to. My letters are ready.”

Despite jet lag and numerous people coming to meet him, Swamishri was as efficient as ever in replying to the devotees’ letters. It is difficult to imagine when he could have written so many letters during his tight schedule that day.



14. AKSHAYMUNI SWAMI (AMDAVAD)

Vitthal had no qualifications. So, with a large family to care for, he resorted to various manual jobs to make ends meet. He had been working in the gardens of Bochasan mandir for a while. Due to his cooperative and hard-working nature everybody was happy with him. One day in 1978, his normally smiling appearance was replaced by a sad, expressionless face. He was lost in thought and seemed to be worried about something.

We enquired and found out that his brother had been wrongly arrested and imprisoned. Vitthal and his family were helpless and in tears. There was no way they could afford to pay the bail money. They were desperate for guidance and help. So we decided to seek Swamishri’s advice and blessings. At the time he was in Dharmaj, just a few kilometres from Bochasan. We left for Dharmaj at about 2.00 p.m. Swamishri had just finished lunch and was in his room discussing some problems with a devotee. We waited outside. Then the door opened and Swamishri’s eyes fell on us. He asked, “When did you arrive? Have you eaten? Here, take a seat.” We felt hesitant at interrupting the discussion that was still in progress. Swamishri asked us, “Do you want to discuss anything?” Then he saw the sad-looking, trembling Vitthal. Swamishri called him and sat him by his side. He heard Vitthal’s story and blessed him. Swamishri gave him courage and pacified him with words of comfort. Then Swamishri made the necessary arrangements to free Vitthal’s brother. Vitthal was relieved; Swamishri had come to his rescue.



Swamishri spends his every moment thinking of God. He is pleased when others also engage in thinking of God at every opportunity.

In 1980, Swamishri was in Bochasan. After a short assembly, he made his way to his room for a bath. At that time, many sadhus and devotees had undertaken special observances for the Bicentenary Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

On the way, he saw the 84-year-old A.P. Patel who was sitting in the corner, writing the Swaminarayan mantra. Swamishri smiled in approval and approaching him, said, “Shriji Maharaj instructs us in the *Shikshapatri* not to waste time. We should use every possible moment to worship God.”



20-6-95, Sarangpur. Swamishri was in a meeting discussing plans for the London Mandir. Just then, Narayanmuni Swami entered with the programme for the Rath Yatra festival that was to be celebrated the following day. Swamishri then voiced his opinion, “Other jobs may be delayed but we should never delay in offering our devotion. That should be done without delay. If our activities overshadow us, then our devotion to God will be affected. So, first we must fulfil our duty to offer devotion.”



15. BHAGWATCHARAN SWAMI

(VIDYANAGAR)

5 April 1977. Swamishri was in the village of Bhard. When Swamishri entered the house where he was to stay, he immediately sat down in the courtyard. The reason? Swamishri had learnt that the two brothers who lived here were involved in a land dispute with each other and that they had taken the matter to court.

Swamishri called the brothers and engaged them in discussion. He mediated between them to bring about an agreement acceptable to both. Only when the dispute was resolved did Swamishri enter the house.

After this, I began to light the five cotton wicks of the arti. But one match was not enough. So Swamishri taught me how to light all five using only one matchstick. Since then I’ve never had to use a second!



In 1984, Swamishri was in Bhadra after returning from his Satsang Tour abroad. The 199th birthday of Gunatitanand Swami was being celebrated there. It had been a long time since I had had Swamishri’s *darshan*. Thus I had two wishes. First, that he would hug me – which he had never done before. And second, that he would sit me with him to eat.

I arrived at Bhadra at 10.00 a.m. After the morning assembly, Swamishri was coming off the stage. I offered my prostrations to him. When he saw me, Swamishri said, “Stop. Come here. Let me embrace you!” In this way, my first wish was fulfilled.

Swamishri then made his way to Fuliba Ashram for lunch. There, Swamishri's dining hall was crowded with sadhus, who were seated there for Swamishri's *darshan* while he ate. When I entered, Swamishri told me, "Bring your *pattar* and sit down here to eat!" I saw that the senior sadhus were seated next to Swamishri, so I said to Swamishri that I would eat later. Swamishri insisted strongly that I sit down to eat, but I was hesitant. Eventually, Swamishri gave me a little *prasad* in a small bowl, which I took into the kitchen to eat.

Thus, Swamishri read my mind and fulfilled my wishes.



1-12-1988, Atladra. I arrived from Vidyanagar. Swamishri was in the mandir having the *darshan* of Thakorji. Standing before Thakorji I bowed down and touched Swamishri's feet. So Swamishri told me, "You are from a respected background and are well versed with proper etiquette. But you should observe proper respect for Thakorji. Before Him, when you meet me you should not bow down to me. Outside, you can do 100 prostrations. But don't bow down to me when I am before Thakorji."

I replied, "After *arti* we bow down to each other."

Emphasizing his point, Swamishri said, "We should maintain Thakorji's respect. You wouldn't bow down to a servant in the presence of his king, would you?"

Thus Swamishri stressed the importance of observing the appropriate etiquette and respect for Thakorji.



28-2-90, Virsad. Swamishri had been invited to open the "Shriji Cold Storage" facility on the outskirts of

Virsad. Viveksagar Swami and Sarvamangal Swami were conducting the assembly. Meanwhile, Swamishri cut the ribbon, declaring the facility open. He then entered the premises. In the cold storage areas, wooden platforms had been laid at intervals on the floor. Swamishri was walking through the area at his usual brisk pace.

I was holding the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj and walking with Swamishri. One of the wooden floorboards was weak and as I stepped on it, it broke. As a result, I fell. I tried to maintain balance and prevent Thakorji from falling. But to no avail. Swamishri stared in disbelief at what happened. His face reflected the pain of Thakorji falling and being hurt. Immediately, Thakorji was picked up. Swamishri bowed down to Thakorji and prayed for forgiveness. Then we continued. Swamishri's paced instinctively slowed. When we arrived in the assembly, Swamishri sat facing Thakorji and again bowed down to Him, asking for forgiveness. For several minutes, it was as if Swamishri was totally oblivious of his surroundings. He was deeply pensive. He requested Priyadarshan Swami and Narayanmuni Swami to offer prostrations to Thakorji on his behalf. For Swamishri, Thakorji is not just a *murti*, but the very form of God.



3-4-1990, Sarangpur. Shriji Maharaj's 210th birthday celebration. During the assembly, Swamishri wanted to call me to discuss some matter, but he could not recall my name. Afterwards when I entered his room, I said to Swamishri jokingly, "If you can't even remember my name, how are you going to ensure my *moksha*?"

Swamishri, who was standing at the bathroom door, clicked his fingers a couple of times and instantly declared, "As easily as this."

Swamishri thus revealed the fact that Maharaj is still present in Satsang today.



Poshi Punam, 31-12-1990. Gunatitanand Swami's sadhu-initiation anniversary was being celebrated in Bhadra (Gunatitnagar). Swamishri was having breakfast. Damjibhai, who had gone there from Rajkot told Swamishri, "Bhagwatcharan Swami phoned from Vidyanagar. He told me to tell you that this festival should be celebrated in Dabhan and celebrating in Bhadra is not proper!" To this, Swamishri told Damjibhai, "Tell him (Bhagwatcharan Swami) that Brahma is everywhere. He is here and he is also there!"

This short statement put into perspective the true belief we should have.



14-11-1990, Bochasan. After having the *darshan* of Thakorji in the main mandir, Swamishri went to pay his respects at the memorial shrine of Purushottam Swami.

"It's not necessary to come all this way to the shrine when you are ill," I said. Swamishri replied, "You should not refuse me the opportunity for *darshan*. This *darshan* can help one recover however ill one may be. Read Vachanamrut Gadhada II-29 which describes that we should always desire for *darshan*."



19-11-1990, Bochasan. I asked Swamishri, "How can one who is unable to sing or deliver discourses please God and His holy Sadhu?"

Swamishri replied, "If he offers *seva* without any selfish desires or motives, then he will be blessed. But one

should not merely serve selected people and ignore others. One should never forget one's duty during *seva*."



7-3-1993, Mumbai. During Swamishri's breakfast, I commented to him, "Bapa, you have reduced the amount of breakfast you eat." Swamishri said, "Everything changes with age."

Priyadarshan Swami said, "Everything is decreasing, except your activities."

Swamishri responded, "My activities are much less than before."

I added, "You even work while you sleep!"

Swamishri explained, "If you sleep too much, you become lazy. You just need enough sleep so that you are rested. But by lying down without reason encourages laziness."

"When you're sleeping, you should think of America," I suggested.

Swamishri said, "Such thoughts are not necessary. Real thoughts are those related to God. Too much sleep creates laziness. It is better to be active."



2-5-1993, Bochasan. Today was Ekadashi. Swamishri sat down for breakfast. Together with Swamishri, everyone recited the pre-meal prayer: "*Shrimad sadguna.... Shantihi*."

Swamishri commented, "True *shanti* (peace) is possible only by worshipping God."

I said, "You brought *Shanti* (peace) with you from the start, so you are able to give it to others."

Swamishri replied, "This *shanti* (peace) is due to the grace of Shastriji Maharaj. It is not due to merely names.

Without Shastriji Maharaj everything would have been *ashanti* (not peaceful).”

(Swamishri’s childhood name was Shantilal)



7-3-1993, Mumbai. During Swamishri’s breakfast, I said, “If God had given us spare parts for the body, it would have saved us a lot of trouble. At least one could replace parts when required.”

Swamishri explained, “Whatever God has done is for our ultimate benefit. If He did as you have suggested, it would cause many problems – people would steal the best parts! This way, the body itself rejects non-matching parts. Even if one tries to replace a damaged part with someone else’s healthy part, it is often rejected. Whatever God has designed has been done after considerable thought. Otherwise, the poor would find it difficult to even live! And the strong would suppress others to hoard the best parts.”



16. RAJESHWAR SWAMI

(ATLADRA)

The scriptures state that even passing comments by the spiritually great are truths.

I experienced the power of Swamishri’s words when I was only 11 years old.

After Yogiji Maharaj had returned to Akshardham, whenever I met Swamishri, he would always say, “Get ready. I want you to become a sadhu!”

I thought he was merely joking and went along with him. On the occasion of the Kalash Ceremony of Amdavad mandir Swamishri said to me, “Now is the time for you to become a sadhu.” But at that time I was not willing.

Four years passed. In 1977, after Swamishri returned from his Satsang tour abroad, he fell seriously ill. After rest in Sarangpur, Swamishri came to Amdavad. The illness had made him weak. His daily schedule had been changed to allow him maximum rest and speed up recovery. The only public appearance Swamishri made during this period was for his morning *puja*. Private counselling sessions had also been cancelled.

The day after Swamishri arrived in Amdavad, he was returning to his room after *puja*. As he was climbing the stairs, he suddenly stopped on the third step, turned round and asked, “Where’s Kothari?”

“Here I am,” replied Suresh.

“No, not you,” Swamishri said, “Where is my Kothari?”

At that time I was standing on the steps at the kitchen entrance. Atmaswarup Swami spotted me and called me. I ran. Swamishri had climbed down by then and next to the

badam tree he hugged me, saying, “Where have you been? I’ve been looking for you.”

That moment was so great, that it is still fresh in my mind today.

Atmaswarup Swami explained, “Bapa, he is a *karyakar*, so he has to maintain discipline. If he comes close, while everyone else is kept at a distance, it would not be appropriate.”

Swamishri said, “Doesn’t matter. But you should come and meet me once whenever I come.”

Such affection from Swamishri changed my mind about becoming a sadhu. And so in 1981, on the occasion of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Bicentenary Celebration, Swamishri initiated me.



12-12-1985, Amdavad. On this day, the President of India, Zail Singh, was to visit the Gunatitanand Swami Bicentenary Celebrations. While Swamishri was engaged in discussions with senior sadhus I was summoned to meet him. As I entered, Swamishri welcomed me, and laughing, he said, “Dharmajivan Swami has many health problems and so now the responsibility of Kothari at Atladra is being given to you.”

I was stunned. I was not sure if I was capable of fulfilling this suddenly appointed responsibility. My stunned silence was interrupted by Swamishri, “What do you think?”

“Bapa,” I said, “I’m not sure I can do the job of a Kothari.”

Swamishri reassured me, “Maharaj and Swami are with you. They will do everything. So don’t worry.”

I accepted Swamishri’s wish. He showered me with blessings. Ever since, Swamishri’s words have proved

true. It is by the guidance and inspiration of Swamishri that I am able to fulfil my duties.



17. BHAGWATPRASAD SWAMI

(SANKARI)

25-11-89. Construction of the Mahesana *shikharbaddh* mandir was in progress. Swamishri was in Mahesana to attend the 7-day *parayan* that had been arranged. Swamishri was making his way to the assembly hall. Suddenly, before anybody knew what was happening, Swamishri joined the line of volunteers who were clearing soil from the foundation area. The volunteers were invigorated by Swamishri's appearance in the line. The work continued and Swamishri himself lifted 35 *tagaras* filled with soil. Then he made his way to the assembly hall to attend the discourses.



We had arranged a special function for some of the local dignitaries of Mahesana in the presence of Swamishri. Planning was meticulous and we tried to ensure that all arrangements were proper. I felt that we had taken care of every detail. At the end of the function, everyone received blessings from Swamishri and then went to the dining area. Then, as Swamishri made his way to his room, he passed by the dining area. He noticed that some of the elderly dignitaries were eating in a standing position. Turning to me, Swamishri commented, "You should arrange some chairs for the elderly. It is more convenient for them to sit and eat."



18. MUKUNDJIVAN SWAMI

(SURENDRANAGAR)

In 1972, I accompanied Swamishri to Mumbai. From there, Swamishri was to make his way to Sarangpur and then to Gondal.

I was with him upto Sarangpur. But I also wanted to go to Gondal. So I told Swamishri, "Bapa, I would like to come to Gondal with you."

Swamishri placed his hand on my head and reasoned, "You've been with me from Mumbai. So now you stay here."

But I insisted, "No Bapa, take me. I want to come." Seeing my insistence, and my young age, Swamishri gave in and said, "OK then. Get ready."

I jumped with joy and ran to get ready. I brought my *potlu* to the ambassador car Swamishri was to travel in. I saw that the car was packed and really had no room for me. Swamishri's staff and senior sadhus had taken their places. Swamishri arrived and sat in the front seat. I realised that I was wrong to have insisted so much, and feared that Swamishri would now point this out to me. But Swamishri said, "Come on," and moved over to make space for me to sit next to him.

Within no time, Swamishri was joking with me, just like a father and son would do.

On the way, Swamishri caught sight of my uncut nails, and asked, "Why have you grown your nails this much?"

I confessed, "Bapa, I've forgotten to cut them."

"O.K. But cut them as soon as possible. You shouldn't let them get this big. Dirt collects on their underside and

by eating with such dirty nails you are liable to fall ill.”
It was as if a father was lovingly guiding his child.



In 1973, in the month of Kartik, Swamishri was to go on a pilgrimage to the holy places in Kutch-Bhuj for the first time. Swamishri also remembered me and took me along with him. In the confirming letter he wrote specific details directing us how to reach Bhuj from Sarangpur. Twice he wrote that we should travel via Morbi on the road leading to Maliya to reach Bhuj. But we felt that it would be quicker and easier for us to catch the train from nearby Botad to Navlakhi Bandar. And from there reach Bhuj by public transport. So that is what we decided to do. When we arrived in Navlakhi Bandar, we learnt that the regular shuttle to Bhuj from there had been discontinued for the last six months!

So we backtracked by train to Morbi and then caught the bus to Bhuj. When we arrived it was late night and we were all exhausted after a hectic day of travelling. Swamishri was still up waiting for us. When we told him what had happened, he said, “That’s why I had written the details in the letter. But you ignored them, so you experienced a little trouble.” Then, he delivered the punch line, “While people do not follow the path pointed out by the Satpurush, they will continue to roam aimlessly in the ocean of life.”

Then Swamishri blessed us and gave us *prasad*.



Swamishri’s 69th birthday was celebrated in Bharuch. From there I had returned to Sarangpur where I learnt that Swamishri was to go on a Satsang tour of South India.

So I requested Gnaneshwar Swami to ask Swamishri if I could accompany him on the tour. Gnaneshwar Swami wrote to Swamishri, who replied directly to me. He wrote:

Date: 17-12-89

Pujya Mukundjivan Swami,

You expressed a wish to come to the south. But since the arrangements for cars, etc. have already been finalised, it is not possible to accommodate anyone else. So please forgive me. If you had spoken to me in Bharuch, I could have made the arrangements.

Shastri Narayanswarupdas

On reading this letter, I was stunned. Is there any other guru who would ask for such forgiveness from his disciples?

I was deeply hurt that Swamishri had to take such a step because of me. Even now, whenever I read this letter, I become tearful and pray to Swamishri that I live according to his wishes.



19. SANTSWARUP SWAMI

(SURENDRANAGAR)

In 1976, Swamishri was on a Satsang tour of south India. I and quite a few other sadhus were with him. I used to help Devcharan Swami, Swamishri's personal attendant, to prepare the meals. One day, lunch had been arranged at the house of a devotee, 6 km away from where we were staying.

After we had prepared the meal and offered *thal* to Thakorji, we realised that Swamishri's *pattar* had been left behind at our residence. After the *thal*, Swamishri sat down for lunch and waited for his *pattar*. Then, revealing the situation, Pragat Bhagat requested Swamishri, "Your *pattar* has been left behind. So, please eat without it today."

Hearing this, Swamishri replied, "It is Shriji Maharaj's wish that we eat in a *pattar*. You are with me every day and are familiar with your responsibilities. So ask someone to go and fetch it."

Swamishri sat patiently while we arranged to have his *pattar* brought for him. He spent the time by conducting an entertaining discussion. Only when his *pattar* arrived, 30 minutes later, did he eat.

Swamishri is firm in the observance of Shriji Maharaj's commands.



In Trichinapalli, we had put up at a small campus owned by a Gujarati. Tired from the day's exertions, we were all fast asleep. Suddenly, we were awoken by people

shouting, "Thief! Thief!" A thief had stolen from somewhere else and ran into our campus to hide from his pursuers. A group of about 100 people had gathered and was noisily searching for him. Swamishri awakened by the noise, emerged from his room, without his *gatariya* and wearing only his *dhotiyu*. He was holding a torch. Swamishri's room was on the roadside, so he immediately became aware of the situation. And as he proceeded to the roof to search for the thief, Ramcharan Swami entered Swamishri's room. He saw the *gatariyu* (upper cloth) but no sign of Swamishri. So Ramcharan Swami made his way to the roof.

He saw Swamishri standing next to the raised water tank. In the darkness, the thief had unwittingly fallen into the open-topped tank, as he searched for a hiding place.

Swamishri told Ramcharan Swami, "Help him out of the tank." As he was helped out, he trembled with fear.

Swamishri said, "Give him some water to drink. And don't beat him." Then Swamishri continued, "Also don't let him go out. The people down there are armed with sticks. They'll beat him up." The thief stared in silence at Swamishri, since he could not understand the language. But from his eyes, his trust in Swamishri was evident. He had understood the concern Swamishri had for his safety. Swamishri gave him some advice. He nodded his head. A short while later, the police arrived and took him away.

This incident revealed Swamishri's fearless and compassionate nature.



Swamishri departed one early morning from a village in the district of Kanam. Having covered four villages, Swamishri arrived for lunch in the fifth village at 3.00

p.m.! We had been waiting for Swamishri to arrive and in anticipation had warmed his lunch three times. After freshening up, Swamishri sat down to eat. I asked him, “Bapa, we heated the food three times waiting for you to arrive. Why do you undertake such gruelling schedules?” Swamishri replied, “Remember this, it is not in my fate to eat hot meals!”

These words revealed the relentless and demanding nature of Swamishri’s *vicharan*.



20. PRITAMPRASAD SWAMI

(MUMBAI)

13-8-1973, Mumbai. Swamishri had gone to the sea-shore at Juhu for a bath. Many devotees joined him in the sea. They lifted Swamishri and tossed him into the waves. Amidst the fun everyone was having, somebody’s sharp uncut nail cut a deep gash into Swamishri’s back. Despite this, Swamishri stayed in the salty sea water so that the enthusiasm of the devotees would not diminish. Only when he emerged from the water after a considerable time did it become evident that Swamishri had tolerated the stinging pain of the open wound. It took about 20 days for the wound to heal completely.



23-8-1973. Swamishri was in the village of Jambusar. At 10.00 a.m. Swamishri commented, “So far this year it has hardly rained. But let’s go to the terrace for a bath. Maharaj will send the rains!” And sure enough, when Swamishri arrived on the terrace, the rain started. For two hours, Swamishri, Dr. Swami, other sadhus and youths bathed in the rain. I still recall that day.



1980. I was very ill in Amdavad. Dr. P.T. Patel had put me on some high-powered medications which had caused me to vomit. I felt drained. My condition worsened. But after a day I recovered. Then I wrote to Swamishri. He replied, writing, “You were destined to go to *dham*. But for you this is a new life, so that till your last breath you can

serve Satsang, the Satpurush and the Sanstha. With this in mind at all times, serve in all ways. Any *seva* is possible. Join in all service enthusiastically. Maharaj saved you as a result of your past services.”



During a public assembly in Barshi (dist. Solapur), a Muslim became overwhelmed with tears while giving a speech welcoming and honouring Swamishri.

The reason? About four months previously he had had a dream in which he saw a snake. Muslims believe that such a vision signals death in the near future. The Muslim shook with fear. The snake raised its hood over his bed and remained still. Then, a Hindu sadhu appeared. It was Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri told him, “Push the snake away. It won’t harm you.” But the Muslim lacked the courage to do anything. So Swamishri pushed the snake, which then slid away.

At that point, frightened and bewildered, the Muslim awoke and saw a snake passing by his bed. He remembered Swamishri’s *murti*. But at the time he didn’t know anything at all about Swamishri. Fortunately, the next day, he happened to pass by the shop of a devotee called Suryakantbhai, where he saw a *murti* of Swamishri. Instantly, he realised it was the same person who had appeared in his dream and saved him. He went inside and made enquiries about Swamishri. The Muslim began attending the weekly Satsang assemblies regularly. In 1991, he wrote a letter in Arabic to Swamishri, who was in Africa at the time. Then when Swamishri arrived in Barshi to promote relief work for the victims of the 1993 earthquake in Maharashtra, he came to have *darshan* of Swamishri for the first time.



21. AKSHARPURUSH SWAMI (AMDAVAD)

1977, San Francisco. We had a three-day stay here. In the evenings, after dinner, Swamishri would use a toothpick to clean his teeth. So I kept a container of toothpicks handy. One evening Swamishri asked for a toothpick. I took one out from the container, but as I went to hand it over, it slipped from my grip. To avoid wasting time, I began to take another one out from the container. But immediately, Swamishri grasped my hand and said, “Find the one that has fallen. Don’t worry about the delay.” Thus Swamishri stressed the importance of economy, even for the smallest of things.



4-5-1979. Swamishri was in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. He was resting at the lodgings, conversing with the sadhus and devotees while they massaged his legs. Some of the sadhus were making *rotlis* in the kitchen.

During the casual talks, it was mentioned that Vishwavihari Swami had not helped in making the *rotlis*. Swamishri asked, “Why?”

Vishwavihari Swami replied, “Firstly, there was no space. And also my *rotlis* would be of very irregular shapes and sizes!”

“What’s wrong with that?” Swamishri asked. “Even if they turn out to be irregular you should go. With practice you’ll learn to make them round.” Then Swamishri advised the sadhus to learn how to cook. At that point I arrived. I had stopped helping to make the *rotlis* since my

finger was hurting. I sat near Swamishri and began to massage his legs. So he asked, “Are the *rotlis* ready?”

“No, they’re still being made,” I replied.

“You should have helped until the end,” Swamishri commented.

“Yes, but now I have this opportunity to massage your legs,” I said.

So Swamishri pointed out, “Serving to help make the *rotlis* is a greater service than this!”



5-5-1979. We were fasting on this day. At night we arrived in Pokhra and we stayed at the house of Lilabhai Nepali. After *arti* and *dhun*, Swamishri said, “Santo, if you continue singing *kirtans* until midnight, you can break your fast then!”

We were delighted by the offer and enthusiastically began to sing. At about 11.00 p.m. some sadhus began to prepare the vegetables. Swamishri entered and asked, “What vegetables are you using to make the *shak*?”

“*Karela* and potatoes.”

“Good. Make sure that the *karelas* are not spoilt. And make fresh *puris*. Make sure you sieve the flour before you use it” Swamishri advised.

“Have you brought a sieve with you?” Swamishri asked.

“Yes.”

“Also clean the rice before using it. Thakorji will be eating the meal. So be extra careful.”

Before we knew it, it was midnight. Swamishri began to prepare for bed. So I asked, “Bapa, now we can break our fast, can’t we?”

Swamishri smiled and said, “What’s the point now? It’s already 12 o’clock. Go to sleep and soon it will be morn-

ing. So break it in the morning!” After a short pause, he added, “You shouldn’t break your fast before 3.00 a.m. anyway!”



22. PRABODHJIVAN SWAMI

(BOCHASAN)

Swamishri was in Bochasan. After *darshan* of Thakorji, he went to the room at the end of the assembly hall, where the elderly Tribhakaka and Gordhanbhai (G.K. Swami) lived.

Swamishri enquired about their well-being. He asked about who was in their service attending to their daily needs. Someone told him that Prabhodjivan Swami was looking after them. Swamishri called for me and said, “Tribhakaka, G.K. Swami and Chhotakaka – these three are sadhus in the garb of householders. They have served the Sanstha since the time of Shastriji Maharaj. So you should attend to them properly. Give them what they want. Prepare food for them compatible with their health. Do whatever they request.”

Thus, Swamishri revealed the respect he has for these dedicated devotees and showed how they should be looked after.



1987: During our Uttarakhand pilgrimage we met with a very serious accident on our way to Jagannathpuri. I sustained a severe injury to my left knee. When I saw Dr. Vengsakar, an orthopaedic specialist, in Mumbai, he told me that my ligaments had been badly damaged in the accident. He stated that the damage was permanent and would continue to cause me great difficulty in walking. This worried me since it meant I would become dependent on others and would not be able to do any *seva*. I

prayed to Maharaj and Swami.

On the advice of Dr. Kiran Doshi, I sought a second opinion from the renowned orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Dholakia. But he arrived at the same conclusion. He said it would require an operation to replace the ligaments and, even then, a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed.

Then Swamishri arrived in Mumbai. Swamishri's room was on the fifth floor of the mandir. I was standing near and he asked, “How are you?” I explained to him the nature of the injury, the difficulties I was experiencing and the prognosis. He listened patiently and then stroking his divine hands over my left knee, he said, “It will get better.” At the time, I didn't believe it would. But after two days I really did feel an improvement. Gradually my difficulties disappeared in just a few days, and all my problems resolved. Even the specialists were amazed.

I feel that this miracle was due to Swamishri and has enabled me to continue with my *seva*.



1990. Cardiff, UK. I was with Swamishri and five other sadhus. A public assembly had been arranged. At the end of the assembly when Swamishri began his blessings, Krishnapriya Swami and I took Thakorji to the place where we were to have dinner to offer the *thal*. When we arrived, we realised there was still a lot to do and very little time left before Swamishri arrived. Hastily, we prepared the *thal*. Swamishri arrived while we were offering the *thal*. As our night halt was at another place, Swamishri called out, “Prabodh, bring the *thal*.” It was getting late so I hurriedly prepared a *thal* for Swamishri. While eating, Swamishri talked with the devotees of the house. At the end, Swamishri was served *khichdi*. I served

the *kadhi* with it and insistently served him a little extra. As Swamishri was about to finish dinner, Narayancharan Swami called out from the kitchen. He said, “Don’t serve the *kadhi*. It’s spoilt. There’s a funny taste to it!” But Swamishri had not uttered a word of complaint.

When I backtracked, I realised that in the hurry, I had used cream instead of yogurt to make the *kadhi*. The taste was quite awful. And because of the hurry I had even forgotten to taste it.

I was upset that through my mistake, Swamishri had had to suffer. Next morning, at breakfast, he commented jokingly, “At one point, I thought I should take it out of my *pattar*.” To add to this, I had forcefully served more to Swamishri. I admitted, “Bapa, I made a mistake in making the *kadhi*.” Swamishri replied, “Don’t worry. Thakorji ate it, so there’s no harm in us eating it.”

Swamishri has conquered the sense of taste and eats with a constant focus on Thakorji.



1990. Swamishri had travelled from London to Preston. He was having *faral* for lunch, since it was Ekadashi. Out of the blue, Swamishri questioned me, “Did you offer *shiro* and *puri* to Thakorji?”

“No, since there were many *farali* items in the *thal*,” I replied. “There were many sweet items too.”

But Swamishri was not satisfied, “Harikrishna Maharaj is asleep now, but in the evening offer him a full *thal*.”

Swamishri’s attention to details and devotion to the Lord is apparent from this incident. Despite many years of serving in the kitchen, I had forgotten this.



31-12-1995. It was the last day of Amrut Mahotsav.

After his morning *puja*, he was coming off the stage in the hydraulic lift. His car was waiting opposite the stage. Next to the lift, I was standing to introduce the cooks who were serving in the foodstalls. As Swamishri stood by his car, I told the cooks to bow to Swamishri and walk past one-by-one. In their hurry, one of the cooks lost his slipper which got pushed under Swamishri’s car. Swamishri, sharp as ever, noticed this and instantly pointed it out to me. “Take the slipper from under the car and give it to that cook.” At that time, as each cook walked past, I was introducing him to Swamishri. Meanwhile a youth had taken the slipper and handed it to the cook. When Swamishri blessed everyone he enquired, “Has the slipper been given back?”

Such follow up reveals the care and concern Swamishri has for each individual, whatever his status.



23. AKSHARVIHARI SWAMI

(LONDON)

In 1981, the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were held in Amdavad. I was serving in the Waterworks Department. On the festival site, Swaminarayan Nagar, a large number of tents for accommodation had been set up. This part was called Chhapaiyapuram. Adjacent to this area was a small hill. Using its height to our advantage, we built a large water storage pond on it, to supply water to the accommodation area.

Around the pond, sand was firmly packed into the side so that when full, the sides would not give way. The pond was connected by a supply line to an adjacent borewell. Only when the intervening valve was opened would water from the borewell flow into the pond.

One night, someone forgot to close the valve. Water filled the pond and started overflowing. Then early next morning, the sides gave way, releasing an enormous quantity of water. Over 12,000 rupees in damage had occurred.

In the morning, the Construction Department was informed. As the head of the Waterworks Department, I received a rebuke although I was unaware of the details of the mishap. I rushed to the place of the disaster and stared silently at the scene. At that moment Swamishri arrived in a car. He got out and stood behind me. Lost in deep thought, I was totally unaware of his presence. A few moments passed and as I turned I saw Swamishri.

“Vihari, what are you looking at?” he asked.

“Bapa, this pond has given way,” I said tensely, afraid that he might give me a deserved telling off for the complacency which led to this extensive and expensive damage.

But instead, Swamishri laughed and said, “Is that so. Has the pond given way?” In an instant my tension was relieved. I became relaxed. Swamishri observed the situation, guided and blessed me! Then he left.

His patience, encouragement, silence and forgiveness is an experience to behold. Out of this mishap, I became a little closer to Swamishri.



Once, during the month of Shravan, Swamishri was in Amdavad. It was the *hindolo* season. I was preparing a *hindolo* decorated with *rakhdis* when Swamishri arrived in the basement of the main mandir ready to go upstairs for the evening *arti*. The *hindolo* was not quite ready and I wished that Swamishri unveil it at this time. Although most of the *hindolo* had been fitted before the *murtis*, I was just applying the finishing touches to the chandelier of *rakhdis*. Swamishri saw us frantically trying to finish our work and asked, “What are you doing?” I replied, “Bapa, please wait a few minutes here while we finish this. If you go upstairs now, the *arti* will start with the *hindolo* incomplete. Swamishri stood still and waited. We quickly finished decorating the chandelier and ran up to fix it to the rest of the *hindolo*. It dramatically enhanced the beauty of the *hindolo*. Then Swamishri arrived to perform the *arti*.

Such is Swamishri’s cooperative and humble nature.



24. PARAMPURUSH SWAMI

(GANDHINAGAR)

1976, Mumbai. At that time, in the early morning on the ninth day of the bright half of every month, we used to hold a parade under the auspices of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Birth Bicentenary Celebrations.

On one such occasion, Swamishri joined the parade at 6.00 a.m. Then, on returning to the mandir, Swamishri went to bathe again. Before this, he told Devcharan Swami that his *dhotiyu* was torn a little and to get it repaired while he bathed. But when Swamishri returned, Devcharan Swami handed him a new *dhotiyu* to wear.

Swamishri noticed the change and asked, "Where is the one I gave you to get repaired?"

Devcharan Swami replied, "Wear this one for the time being. I'll get the other one sewn today so that you can wear it tomorrow."

But Swamishri was adamant, "No, get the old *dhotiyu* sewn now. I want to wear that one!"

Devcharan Swami replied, "But who can do this right now?"

Swamishri suggested, "Call Shamji Bhagat (at that time this was my *parshad* name). He can do it."

Devcharan Swami said, "I tried, but I can't find him."

Swamishri continued, "Find him wherever he is. It's not as if he has left the mandir, is it!"

I was in the office downstairs, when two youths came calling for me. They said, "Swamishri is calling you upstairs quickly. You have to repair his *dhotiyu*." I ran up to the second floor. Swamishri was standing in his room,

wearing his bathing cloth. I took his *dhotiyu* and when I returned after repairing it, Swamishri was still standing waiting for me.

It is against Swamishri's nature to delay even such ordinary tasks.



Once in Mumbai, Swamishri blessed me so that I excel in my Sanskrit studies. I asked Swamishri, "Do your blessings really work or are they just a formality?" Swamishri replied, "If you believe them to be true, they'll work, otherwise not."

Then in 1984 I was to give my first year exams for the Shastri degree. The dates for the exams were declared. Every year I used to write to Swamishri, informing him of the exam dates and requesting his blessings. But this year I decided against it, thinking that his blessings were not necessary to help me pass! I thought that if one had studied sincerely throughout the year, then one should pass. But if one hadn't studied sincerely, then, even with his blessings, one is unlikely to pass. With these thoughts, I decided not to write.

As always, I had studied hard throughout the year, but this time, when the results were declared, I learnt that I had failed. I had learnt my lesson. I realised that it was only through the blessings of Swamishri I had been able to progress in my studies, and not through my own efforts.

The following year, with the blessings of Swamishri, I retook the exams, and passed. Also, with the blessings of Swamishri, I passed the second and third year exams and earned the degree of Shastri in 1987. I sent my final year marks sheet to Swamishri. On it, he wrote, "With the blessings of Maharaj, Swami and Yogiji Maharaj you have

become a Shastri,” and returned the marksheet to me.

Through these events, I finally realised that whatever I have been able to achieve is purely due to the blessings of Swamishri.



25. AKSHARESH SWAMI (SARANGPUR)

During Yogiji Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations in Gandhinagar several youths, who were musically talented, had been initiated as sadhus. The next day, Swamishri called me and appointed me to stay in Sarangpur and give them training to develop their musical talents. I had been in Mumbai for over 20 years, but seeing Swamishri’s wish, I readily accepted.

After a few weeks Swamishri came to Sarangpur. He stayed for a few days and before leaving he went to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir for *darshan*. There, Haka Bapu garlanded Swamishri. Normally, Swamishri returns the garland to the person who has presented it. But this time, he kept it in his right hand and asked, “Where is Aksharesh?” I was standing at a distance when a sadhu came up to me and told me that Swami was calling me. I wondered why Swamishri would want to speak to me. As I arrived, Swamishri garlanded me. I bowed down to Swamishri. Then he said, “This is Shastriji Maharaj’s special place. Stay here and train the sadhus.”

It is impossible to express Swamishri’s love and care in words. In this short interaction, all my apprehensions regarding my new duties were resolved.



After the Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai, Swamishri went to Amalner to perform the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the new mandir there. One evening, during Swamishri’s dinner, a magician was performing. I was

sitting to Swamishri's left.

One trick involved holding two corners of a towel, and without letting them go, to tie and untie a knot. The magician showed how to do this, and then invited me to try. I managed to tie a knot. Then the magician took the towel from me and without touching the knot, removed it from the towel. I stared in amazement. Swamishri looked at me and said, "What are you looking at? Your inner knots will also be dissolved like this."

Swamishri revealed his spiritual powers through this statement.



26. DIVYASWARUP SWAMI

(ATLADRA)

In 1984, Swamishri visited the house of Madhavsinh Mangalsinh Rathva at Motibej (dist. Pavi-Jetpur). Many farmers from nearby villages had also come to the assembly. Madhavsinh's father Mangalsinh garlanded Swamishri. Mangalsinh was a very old devotee of the Swaminarayan Sampraday and he was a very devout person. Swamishri asked him, "How are you Mangalbhai? You are a very devout man."

Mangalsinh said, "Bapa, please bless us poor farmers. Please come to take us when we die." Swamishri looked into his eyes as if he was giving his assurance.

Two years later in 1986, Swamishri was in Atladra. Madhavsinh had come for Swamishri's *darshan*. After the evening assembly, he met Swamishri and informed him that his father, Mangalsinh, was not well. And that it was his father's wish to sip some sanctified water before he died. Swamishri turned to me and instructed me, "Give him some sanctified water after tomorrow's morning *puja*."

But the following morning, Madhavsinh had to attend to some business in the city and left without the sanctified water. Meanwhile, back at the village of Motibej, Mangalsinh passed away. Thus the family phoned the mandir to contact Madhavsinh and inform him.

I passed this message on to Swamishri. Immediately, Swamishri realised the assurance he had given to Mangalsinh two years before. But since Madhavsinh's whereabouts were unknown, Swamishri told me to call

any local devotee of the Pavi-Jetpur district. So I looked in the mandir compound and found Bachubhai Rathwa of Kundal village. I brought him to Swamishri. Swamishri gave him the sanctified water and a *kanthi* and instructed him, “Mangalbhai was a great devotee. Two years ago when I visited Motibej he requested me to look after him at his end. He wished to drink some of this sanctified water before he died. But that is not now possible. Nevertheless he offered true devotion to God and so he is seated in the service of the Lord. Place some of this holy water in his mouth before he is taken for cremation. Tell this to his relatives.”

Bachubhai left immediately. Only when Swamishri was informed that the final rites had been performed as he had personally requested, was he satisfied.



27. AKSHARJIVAN SWAMI (AMDAVAD)

In 1977, when Swamishri returned from his Satsang Tour abroad, a welcome assembly was held in Shanmukhanand Hall. I had composed a *kirtan* – my first ever: “*Kaho Swami! Apne shu sanmanva!*” It was sung by Gautam Bhagat.

The next morning, when I went to bathe Swamishri, he poured a half-filled pot of water over my head and said, “When you wish to compose a *kirtan*, you’ll be inspired from within. God will inspire you and it will be composed.” It was an unexplainable blessing from Swamishri, I hadn’t studied much and wasn’t talented in this field, yet with his blessings, what he said has since come true.



In 1988, I was blessed with the opportunity to travel with Swamishri during his 11-month Satsang Tour abroad and observe him from close quarters.

On 21-5-88, we were in Sweden at the house of Pravinbhai. Swamishri, wanting to give me a life-long memory, casually started the dialogue, “Sakshar! This country is famous for its ample milk production.”

“That’s good,” I said.

“There should be some memory that we have visited this country.”

“We have the memories of your *darshan* here. Do you have anything special in mind?”

Swamishri asked, “How do you like milk?”

“With your grace, I’m able to drink plenty of it. From

childhood, I've always been able to drink and digest milk," I said, thinking that he would serve me *dudhpak*!

Hearing my reply, Swamishri smiled and said, "O.K. Drink as much as you want here. When we return to India, don't drink milk!"

I said, "Fine, but there's a saying that one who drinks milk at night does not need a doctor."

"But greater than the diseases of the body are the diseases within," Swamishri explained.

I accepted his wish. In his all-knowing way, he freed me from my attachment to milk. He is the saviour of our spiritual life and he fulfills his objectives.



5-10-88, Manhasset. After lunch, Swamishri listened to a recital of Vachanamrut Gadhada Section I-68. I asked, "This Vachanamrut teaches us that God and the Satpurush know everything. So why do they tolerate the hypocrisy of *pujaris* and other devotees. You know everything about everyone, yet you shower your affection on all. Why don't you point out everyone's faults?"

Swamishri replied, "The Satpurush knows and understands everything about everyone. But he only tells them in the appropriate way. If he started speaking out, nobody would stay. Everyone would just get up and leave. This understanding develops slowly as one listens to discourses and then one's inclination changes.

"We appreciate the greatness of worldly people. If President Zail Singh was to come, everyone would stand to attention. Yogiji Maharaj used to say, 'You can't cough, even if you want to.'"

I asked, "We recognise worldly authority, but why is it that we can't maintain that same discipline in Satsang?"

Swamishri replied, "Those who realise the greatness (of

God and the Satpurush) do observe this discipline. But because we stay together, such an affection develops that discipline is not maintained. But its the inner feelings that are important so that you follow his wishes and commands..."

I asked, "You are constantly thinking of Harikrishna Maharaj..."

Swamishri interrupted, "And why not? Everything is because of Him. It appears to be just a small *panchdhatu murti*, but whatever is happening is due to Him. Even in the *murtis* installed in the mandirs, God Himself is manifest in them. When we do *darshan* our mind wanders elsewhere. That's understandable but even physically we do not observe proper respect and discipline. When prayers are being recited, we should sing along with focussed minds and pray. At that time, there should be no talking. First, train the body and then involve the mind. It is important that the mind is engaged in this. If this doesn't happen, we lose interest and faith in God."

Swamishri thus emphasised the importance of discipline before God and the Satpurush.



During Swamishri's 1988 Satsang Tour abroad, he visited Nakuru. Daily, after lunch, I used to read one Vachanamrut before him. One day, I was held up by some work and so was late in taking my lunch. In the meantime, Swamishri finished eating. So I told Brahmadarshan Swami to read the post-lunch Vachanamrut. As he started, Swamishri asked, "Where's Sakshar?" Someone replied, "He's eating!"

Immediately Swamishri instructed, "Call him here." When the message reached me, I got up, washed my hands and mouth and rushed to where Swamishri was

seated. Seeing me, he said, “You’ve been eating for countless births. But this (devotion to God) remains to be done. Our purpose is not to do the former. You can always eat later, but these discourses will pass... don’t let these opportunities go. So sit here.”

Thus, out of the blue, Swamishri had created an instance to teach me the priorities. At the end of the discourse, Swamishri said, “Now go and finish your meal.”

My hunger had gone, but I felt a deep satisfaction within.



28. ANANDJIVAN SWAMI

(DHULIYA)

1-2-1977, Mumbai. After his morning bath, Swamishri was drying himself. Swamishri’s *kanthi* needed changing, so Pragat Bhagat removed the old *kanthi* and then placed a new one around Swamishri’s neck. It took Pragat Bhagat just a few seconds to make the change, yet Swamishri advised, “You should place the new *kanthi* first and then remove the old one. This way no time passes without wearing a *kanthi*!”



Swamishri had arrived late at night to Mumbai from London. C.M. Patel had come with him. Swamishri got to sleep at 3.00 a.m. He covered himself with the duvet but on remembering C.M. Patel, he got up and called for me, asking, “Where have you arranged for C.M. *Kaka* to stay? Is there a bed in that room? Have you arranged for a youth to stay with him and serve him? What’s the name of this youth? Make sure C.M. *Kaka* gets hot water in the morning. Send tea to his room at 6.30 a.m. Tell the youth to wash C.M. *Kaka*’s clothes.”

Even in the middle of the night, Swamishri is always thinking about his devotees.



Valasan. In the morning Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the new mandir here. Then in the evening a film of Yogiji Maharaj was to be shown in the assembly. Swamishri was also present. The sadhus were

seated surrounding his sofa. I was lucky to get a place right at his feet. The lights were switched off. And the show began. Yogiji Maharaj appeared on the screen with folded hands. Immediately, Swamishri folded his hands and greeted Yogiji Maharaj, saying, “Jai Swaminarayan.” Hearing Swamishri, we all copied him. So Swamishri joked, “You’re all too late!”

Swamishri’s respect for his guru was apparent.



20-2-1984. Swamishri was in the tribal village of Amba near Bhavnagar. I was standing outside the hut of one tribal villager. Swamishri came out and stood in the open space in front of the hut. Then he said to me, “Just take a look. See how clean this is. Even the drainage channel is properly made. Who would say that these are mere tribal villagers?”

Swamishri had inspected their humble dwellings as if they were mandirs!



29. DHARMAKUVAR SWAMI

(BHADRA)

Time permitting, it is a practice of Swamishri’s that during his stay at any mandir, he will usually go around the entire complex to inspect the buildings and grounds. He especially goes to the kitchen.

Once, in Bhadra, Swamishri came to the kitchen. He looked at the cooked meal. On the opposite side, he saw the pile of utensils for washing. As he exited, he noticed a plate with about half-a-kilo of wheat flour in the washing area. Swamishri asked, “Why have you placed this plate of flour in the washing area?” Nobody had an answer. So Swamishri asked, “Will this flour go to waste?” The *bandhari* sadhu was next to Swamishri and after a slight delay, replied. “It appears to be the leftover flour used in cooking and has probably been discarded by the chefs. Swamishri directed, “If they discard it, their attention should be drawn to it.” Then he added, “Normally you are quite careful about such things and you serve Thakorji and the mandir with diligence. However, sometimes these sort of things can escape notice, so you have to be alert.”

Swamishri could have used harsher words to point out our negligence, but his considerate manner made it all the more effective.



30. GHANSHYAMVALLABH SWAMI (MUMBAI)

1983. Swamishri was in Bochasan. Due to the increase in the number of devotees visiting Bochasan, there was a shortage of mattresses to give to them for use during their stay. So Swamishri took immediate action. He arranged for wool to be bought from Limdi and cloth from Amdavad and told us to have the mattresses made.

On 5-2-1983 Swamishri suffered a heart attack in Sundalpura. From there, Swamishri was taken to Vadodara for rest.

During his rest period in Vadodara, sadhus from Bochasan went for Swamishri's *darshan* on 2-3 occasions. Each time they returned they informed me that Swamishri was asking about the mattresses.

So I prepared a detailed account of the whole project – how many mattresses have been made, how much wool and cloth have been used, what is outstanding and other particulars. With all this information, I felt I was ready to satisfy all of Swamishri's possible questions.

In Vadodara, I presented the information to Swamishri as he scanned a copy of the paperwork I'd prepared. At the end, he asked, "How many old mattresses do you have?"

I was speechless, because I hadn't taken account of the existing stock.

With this one question, Swamishri revealed his eye for detail and thoroughness.



In 1988, while Swamishri was in London, I fell ill in Bochasan. I was unable to eat and in a span of 15 days, I'd lost much weight and strength.

Tyagvallabh Swami wrote to Swamishri about my illness. Promptly, Swamishri replied and blessed me for a quick recovery. Within days I had recovered.

Four months later, we had gone to Africa, for Swamishri's 68th birthday celebrations. Having arrived in Nairobi, we went to Nakuru for Swamishri's *darshan*. Swamishri was overjoyed to meet all the sadhus. He embraced all, one-by-one. When my turn came, he embraced me and asked, "How are you now? Has the vomiting stopped?"

I was overcome with emotion. Even after four months and all the hectic activities of his tour, he still remembered that I had fallen ill. This is a characteristic of Swamishri's true love and care.



31. GNANYAGNA SWAMI

(AMDAVAD)

In 1974, Swamishri was on his first Satsang tour abroad after becoming the guru. He was staying at 'Fourways', in north London. Many youths were involved in a variety of different duties during Swamishri's stay. One afternoon, after Swamishri awoke from his afternoon rest, I went for his *darshan*. Swamishri was clipping his nails. Just then, Swamishri was called to leave for the public assembly that had been arranged in Acton Town Hall. So Swamishri got up, taking the nail cutter with him and made his way to Dr. Karia's car. On the way, he finished clipping his nails. When Swamishri arrived at the hall, I rushed to Dr. Karia's car and asked him, "Swamishri was cutting his nails in the car, so if any of his nail clippings have fallen inside, I would like one as a memento." We searched the car, but did not find anything.

Disappointed, we entered the hall. Swamishri had just begun addressing the assembly. Several times the microphone stand became loose and pointed downwards. So I sat next to Swamishri's seat and held the microphone stand in position. From this vantage point I noticed that Swamishri had cut his nails very deep. So after his blessings, I requested Swamishri, "Bapa, show me your hands." Swamishri showed me his hands. Then I asked, "You've cut your nails very deep. Doesn't it hurt?"

"Not when you cut them yourself," Swamishri replied. Then he continued, "Don't be tempted to collect mementos of nails, hair and other such things. We should merely do our duty."

Saying this, Swamishri walked off the stage, holding my hand. I hadn't told Swami that I had searched for any stray nail clippings in Dr. Karia's car. But, how can you hide anything from one who is all knowing?

This incident revealed Swamishri's ability to manage his time for maximum output and the importance he places on fulfilling one's duties.



32. SARVAMANGAL SWAMI

(ANAND)

In 1978 Swamishri was in Sarangpur, recovering from an illness. One night, at 2.30 a.m. I was performing my *puja* in Yogiji Maharaj's room. At that time, Swamishri awoke to visit the bathroom. From his room, he saw the light from the room I was in. Alone and unaided, he came over to the room. He saw me, and without saying a word, he left. I had not noticed his presence. I only realised that he had come when he told me in the morning. Then he said, "If you wake up this early, you'll fall asleep during the day. So wake up at 4.00 am instead."



Once in Sarangpur, I asked Swamishri, "What do you find more tedious – reading or writing?" Swamishri replied, "Neither. This is my devotion to Thakorji. So there is no boredom in it."

Even at this age, Swamishri is full of enthusiasm.



Wednesday, 23-8-1988, Bocharan.

I asked Swamishri, "You continually remind us of the high ideals by which we should be living. But when we don't follow them, don't you feel disappointed?" Swamishri replied, "No, after all, a *jiva* is a *jiva* – and is bound by *maya*. It is trying to tread the path towards God. Shriji Maharaj Himself was very forgiving. Slowly by trying, one will become *brahmarup*. That is what the *jivas* are like."



22-7-89, Bocharan. I asked Swamishri, "For many years you observed complete waterless fasts regularly. And that too with a heavy and tiring schedule. But now, on the fast days, we drink lemon water. Does this not upset you?"

Swamishri replied, "No, not in the least. Everyone has different physical stamina. But those who really want to do it never compromise. While those who don't want to do it will always find excuses."

I asked again, "Normally, you drink water quite frequently during the day. But when you break your fast, you drink very little. Do you not feel thirsty?"

Swamishri responded, "This has been my habit from the start. And anyway, in the early days, we never had lemon water. From the beginning fasting has never been a problem for me. Also, I broke my fasts after I had *darshan* of the Shangar *arti*. Ultimately, it all boils down to one's frame of mind. Some people find fasting difficult. Others may be capable of observing fasts for many days at a time, but they may not be prepared mentally."



9-11-1987, Bocharan. In the morning, while Swamishri was wearing his *dhotiyu*, I asked, "There are some people who when they are in need, act like devout *satsangis*. But as soon as their purpose is achieved, they ignore us. There is one person for whom Yogiji Maharaj made financial arrangements to enable him to study. Now he has a good steady job and I've met him on numerous occasions, but he's not interested in Satsang. I feel so angry with these type of people. But Bapa, you must have to deal with many people of this type. How do you feel in such situations?"

Swamishri replied, "It's true, about 10% of the people

we help turn out to be like this. But God and His holy Sadhu are always compassionate, whereas man is by nature self-centred. If one comes to Satsang for selfish aims and ego, then this happens. But those who join Satsang with true commitment never leave – no matter what difficulties they encounter.”



20-2-1989, Bochasan. In the morning I asked Swamishri. “You have such a master key as a result of which you are always happy and at peace, no matter what difficulties you face. What is the secret of acquiring this master key?” Swamishri gave no reply. But that evening, when Swamishri presided over the special eclipse assembly, he answered my question saying, “Sarvamangal wants the master key. For that you have to obey God’s commands, be tolerant, be humble and serve everyone. This will give you the master key. To acquire it is in your own hands. I am ready to give it. But it does not come easily.”



1991. I was with Swamishri in the village of Od in Kheda district. Viveksagar Swami was delivering a 7-day *parayan* on the *Shrimad Bhagwat*. One day, while I was teaching a *balak* how to perform daily *pūja*, Swamishri passed by. He saw me sitting down, “Here, let me teach him.” Swamishri taught the *balak*, blessed him, and continued with his routine.



33. KRISHNASWARUP SWAMI (AMDAVAD)

Once I made a 10-inch *murti* out of clay. I showed it to Swamishri one afternoon. For a while, he just observed it. After assessing it from different angles for about 10 minutes, he praised my efforts. He liked it because the *murti* was small and had a smiling expression. He said, “This small *murti* looks good.”

“Please tell me if I should make any improvements,” I requested. Then, after a while, Swamishri said, “The ears are not at the same level. So you can correct that. Everything else is fine.”

I was stunned by Swamishri’s detailed observation. I hadn’t even noticed that the ears were not level.



1995, Amdavad. Yogivallabh Swami approached Swamishri with the colour photographs of the *murtis* to be installed at the Ningala mandir. Swamishri performed *pūjan* of the *murtis*.

Later, when Swamishri was about to begin breakfast, he called Yogivallabh Swami and me. Swamishri asked, “What is the life of a colour print?”

“Not long, about 10-12 years. Then the colours begin to fade,” I said.

“For these types of *hari* mandirs, you should use oil paintings. So that there’s no need for frequent changes,” Swamishri said. Then he looked at me and asked, “You do oil paintings, don’t you?”

“Yes,” I answered, “But because we have a lot of work, I

get another artist to paint the *murtis*. Then I apply the finishing touches.”

Then, while imitating an artist using his brush, Swamishri commented, “You do that touching and I have to do touching on you. You should not let complacency creep in. Do everything properly.”

In this way, Swamishri gave me a lesson on how to do work thoroughly.



34. CHINMAY SWAMI

(SELVAS)

Swamishri placed great emphasis on our Sanskrit studies. He continuously motivated and inspired us to excel. In Mumbai, he arranged for good, learned scholars to teach us. To help our studies, he had classrooms, a library and reading hall set up on the fourth floor of Mumbai mandir.

Despite all these facilities, in 1984 I failed in the first part of my Sanskrit grammar exams for the Shastri degree.

I thought at length about how to inform Swamishri about my failure. Eventually I wrote him a letter, asking forgiveness.

Within a short time, Swamishri sent a reply from America. I trembled as I opened the letter and cast a quick glance at Swamishri’s reply:

“Jai Swaminarayan from Shastri Narayanswarupdas.

Blessings for having passed from the left! Now keep faith and try again... Blessings for your peace of mind.”
(Date: 21-7-84)

I was overcome by Swamishri’s unique compassion. Considering my failure as a ‘pass’ was an example of Swamishri’s lateral vision.



35. PURUSHOTTAMJIVAN SWAMI (KOLKATA)

In 1988, many sadhus accompanied Swamishri to East Africa. It was my *seva* to offer *thal* to Thakorji. Once, we were in Mwanza (Tanzania). Swamishri was staying at the house of Goswami. I was offering *thal* to Harikrishna Maharaj when Swamishri suddenly arrived and sat on the floor and joined me in singing the *thal*. I requested that Swamishri sit on the sofa, but he refused. As I continued my insistence, he explained, “No, in this situation it is not proper to sit on a sofa before Thakorji.”

Swamishri maintains respect for Maharaj at all times.



In 1991 Swamishri was to fly from Mumbai to Nairobi. Before leaving for the flight, Swamishri ate a little, then removed his dentures for cleaning. I asked him to give them to me to wash, but Swamishri said, “You pour the water, I’ll wash them.”

I insisted, “I’ll wash them.”

Again Swamishri refused, “No, we have to learn to serve ourselves. So I’ll wash them!” And he began to wash them himself. So I began to pour some mineral water from a bottle to enable him to wash the dentures. Immediately he said, “This is drinking water. And it is expensive. It’s not appropriate to wash with it. So bring some tap water.”



36. DHYANPRIYA SWAMI (MAHESANA)

Once, I went with Bhagwatprasad Swami to Bochasan for Swamishri’s *darshan*. A youth named Jayantibhai Modi had come with us. Bhagwatprasad Swami told Swamishri, “Jayanti has no son, so please bless him that he gets one.” Swamishri lovingly blessed him and then immediately left to attend the satsang assembly. During his blessings, Swamishri said, “First one youth came and asked permission to become a sadhu. Then another came for blessings that he gets a son. This is the way of the world...”

Afterwards, when the three of us approached Swamishri for permission to return to Mahesana, Swamishri looked at Jayantibhai and said, “Today I mentioned about you in the assembly. I hope you didn’t mind!” Jayantibhai was speechless. It was as if Swamishri felt he had made a mistake and was asking forgiveness from him!



In 1979, Swamishri was in Calcutta. At that time, he had been fitted with new dentures. But they had not set properly and were irritating his gums. He found it difficult to chew food.

From here, Swamishri went to Nepal. There were no *satsangis* in this region and we stayed in *dharmashalas*. We reached Janakpur. For some reason, the car which carried the sadhu who prepared Swamishri’s meals was late in arriving. We arrived early. I thought that since

Swamishri had not eaten much over the last few days – due to his ill-fitting dentures – we should make some *khichdi*. So I began the preparations. Within a short time, Swamishri sat down to eat. While he was eating, I quickly cooled some hot *khichdi* by spreading it on a dish and brought it to him. As I attempted to transfer some *khichdi* to his *pattar*, he stopped me and asked, “Have you offered it to Thakorji?” I thought that if I said no, Swamishri would not eat it, so I said, “Yes, it has been offered!” Immediately, Swamishri asked, “When did you offer it?” I hesitated in answering and then said, “Dev Swami offered it.” No sooner had I spoken than Swamishri sharply said, “You’re lying! Thakorji is seated here before us. I can see better than you. Are you lying? Go and call Dev Swami!” All this time, about 15 feet in front of Swamishri, Thakorji was resting on a seat but I didn’t know that.

I went to call Devcharan Swami. I explained the situation to him. So he told Swamishri, “We have taken some *khichdi* out for Thakorji in a different plate and were cooling it before offering it to Him. Dhyani thought you’d finish without eating the *khichdi*. That’s why he rushed.” But it didn’t matter. Swamishri refused to eat the *khichdi* anyway.

At night, as Swamishri prepared to rest, I sat in front of him. I was discussing the events of the afternoon with Vinu Bhagat (now Dharmacharan Swami). Swamishri asked what we were talking about and we told him that we were talking about the *khichdi* episode!

Swamishri said, “Whatever it is, you should offer it to Thakorji first then bring it to me. If you’d said that it still had to be offered to Thakorji, I would have waited a while. You’re right in your concern that I can’t chew anything. But what’s the point if you forget Maharaj.”

In any situation, Swamishri always places his beloved Harikrishna Maharaj first.



In 1982, I was serving as *pujari* at Amdavad. One morning Swamishri came for *darshan* as I prepared to light the wicks for the *shangar arti*. As he stood in the central shrine, he asked “What are the cotton wool wicks soaked in?”

“Ghee,” I replied.

“What type of ghee do you use?”

“Dalda,” I said.

Instantly Swamishri advised, “Don’t use that type of ghee for Thakorji. Use pure ghee to soak the wicks.” Thus he told us all that for the Lord we should use only the best.



37. AKSHARTIRTH SWAMI

(SARANGPUR)

I was not much into Satsang initially.

Yogiji Maharaj used to come to our house for *padhramani* and so my family elders insisted on my doing *puja*, *arti*, etc. After Yogiji Maharaj left this mortal world to return to Akshardham, Pramukh Swami came to the house opposite ours for *padhramani*. The younger son of the devotee who had invited Swamishri had a dislike for the Swaminarayan Sampraday. So he began to speak insultingly, “Who called these cheaters to my house? I don’t want these people in my house. Get out of my house. I don’t want you to set foot in my house!” He hurled a lot of unprovoked abuse at Swamishri. Without complaint, Swamishri exited the house. Seeing this whole incident generated much respect for Swamishri in my heart. It was as if he had set up the scene just for me!



Once, Swamishri was in the village of Tajpur, near Sarangpur, for a *parayan*. As he was taking his evening walk, I had a wish, “Swamishri is all-knowing. And even though there’s no reason for him to do so, it would be nice if he called me.” With this thought I began counting the number of rounds Swamishri had completed. On the 22nd round he called me and began talking to me, “You should get to know the devotees from these small villages and when they come to the mandir, you should look after them.” Then he asked about my studies.

Thus, unexpectedly, Swamishri displayed his omni-

science, his love and care for the devotees and also fulfilled my wish.



38. GUNNIDHI SWAMI

(MAHELAV)

In 1982, while Swamishri was in Amdavad, I had a high fever. Soon the day of Swamishri's departure arrived. That afternoon, Swamishri was to serve *jalebis* to all the sadhus personally. Tempted by the prospect of receiving *prasad* from Swamishri himself, I entered the dining area. Swamishri was seated and one by one all the sadhus went up to him to receive *jalebis*. I had decided that despite my illness, I would eat however many *jalebis* he gave me. I approached Swamishri and held out my *pattar*. Swamishri placed six *jalebis* in it and I went to sit with everyone else. As everyone ate, Tyagswarup Swami was serving more *jalebis*. He knew I was ill so he did not pressure me to take more. Swamishri observed this from where he was seated, and asked, "Why didn't you give more to him?"

"He's ill," replied Tyagswarup Swami.

"That's no problem. Give him some more. It will make him better," Swamishri instructed. So Tyagswarup Swami filled my *pattar*. A few minutes later Vishwavihari Swami came round serving *jalebis*. When he came up to me, Swamishri called out, "Give him some." Again Vishwavihari Swami filled my *pattar*.

Meanwhile, Santswarup Swami served Swamishri a *jalebi*. Swamishri ate a small piece and sent the rest to me. On one hand I was delighted to have received *prasad* from Swamishri, but on the other I was worried that my health would deteriorate further.

After eating, I went directly to the sick bay and slept.

To my surprise, when I awoke at 4.00 p.m. I felt much better. It was as if I had not been ill.

As Swamishri was leaving in the late afternoon, our eyes met and tears flowed from my eyes. He had fed me *jalebis* and cured me of my illness.



Once, in a period of 21 days, Swamishri toured 94 villages in the district of Kanam. I was with him at that time.

On 7-2-1985 we were in the village Nondhara. After inaugurating a new water tank in the village, Swamishri returned to his lodgings. The house was new and in the main room, a large rug had been laid out. As Swamishri approached the main entrance, he noticed this and stopped abruptly at the doorstep holding the vertical parts of the doorframe. He instructed the devotees, "First of all, please remove this rug." The devotees understood the reason and said, "But Bapa, no ladies will come here."

Swamishri insisted, saying, "You must bear in mind our vows. So please remove this rug." And only after the rug was removed did Swamishri enter the room.

After sitting down, Swamishri addressed everyone, "Now listen, you must understand the traditions of our Sampraday. When sadhus are seated, your attention is focussed on them and suddenly a young girl may enter unknowingly. She is innocent and is not aware of what is happening. But then we have to observe a fast. This will hurt them. So whenever sadhus come, you must bear this in mind. By insisting this time, you will remember in the future."

Thus Swamishri taught the traditions of the Sampraday and insisted that they be preserved.



Once Swamishri and a group of sadhus were travelling by car from Occhhan to Denda. On the way, a youth showed us a shortcut through a field. But a little way into the field, our car got stuck. So we all got out to push it. Swamishri also came out and despite our requests not to, he too pushed the car. After much effort the car was freed. Swamishri then commented, "See. You call me Brahmaswarup but this is my work!"

I asked, "Bapa, you are all-knowing, so why don't you warn us in advance of these situations?"

Swamishri replied, "Yogi Bapa used to say that you should savour these memories."

Truly, Swamishri undertakes hardships for our benefit.



7-2-1985, Bhimpura, dist. Bharuch. Swamishri had put up at the house of the village head, Chunibhai. The village had scant facilities. At around 11.30 p.m. Swamishri was preparing to go to sleep. He went into the back yard to use the bathroom. There in the open Swamishri spotted an elderly man smoking. The man noticed Swamishri and immediately threw away his *bidi*. Swamishri went up to the man and putting his hand on the man's shoulder, asked, "What's your name?"

"Mangal," he replied.

"What are you doing here?" Swamishri asked.

"I'm a servant at this house."

"Do you drink alcohol?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes, that I have to !" the man replied.

"But you must stop it," Swamishri said, and then explained, "Smoking is useless. It damages your health. So you must stop. By stopping you will become happy.

Smoking robs you of your money and your health."

"Yes, I'll stop," Mangal vowed.

Swamishri visited the bathroom and then went back to Mangal. "How many boys do you have?"

"Two."

"Do they have any addictions?"

"Yes, they drink alcohol."

Hearing this Swamishri said, "Bring them to me in the morning. I'll talk to them to stop and become *satsangis*. You must tell the rosary daily and leave this addiction. It will make you happy." Even at this late hour, Swamishri lovingly convinced the man to give up his addiction. Such is Swamishri's relentless and selfless drive to promote Satsang.



Thousands of devotees had come to Bochasan to celebrate the Guru Punam festival in the presence of Swamishri. The next day, Swamishri was leaving Bochasan. He had gone to the main mandir for *darshan*. Normally, after *darshan* he would sit in the car immediately. But this time, Swamishri went into the assembly hall. Everybody followed him. There, in the assembly hall, Manibhai of Thasra, was sitting, leaning against a pillar. Manibhai was old, poor and blind and he was telling the rosary. Swamishri went up to him and said, "Jai Swaminarayan, Manibhai."

He asked, "Who is it?"

Swamishri introduced himself, "It's me, Pramukh Swami." Manibhai's face lit up with joy. He extended his hands to touch Swamishri's feet. Swamishri bent down and placed his hands on Manibhai's head to bless him and asked, "How are you?" Manibhai was speechless. Tears of joy flowed from his closed eyes. After a few

moments, Swamishri departed. Then Manibhai revealed, “Yesterday, during the Guru Punam celebrations, I was unable to meet Swamishri personally because of the rush. I was very disappointed. But today Swamishri himself came and fulfilled my wish.”



39. BHAKTISAGAR SWAMI (SARANGPUR)

Our group of five sadhus – Brahmadarshan Swami, Prabhucharan Swami, Rasikvihari Swami, Bhadresh Swami and myself were preparing to leave for Bangalore for further studies in Sanskrit. We wanted to take a *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj with us – similar to the one Swamishri serves. Swamishri consented and guided us on how to offer devotion. He said, “It is good that you are taking Thakorji with you. I am pleased by your wish to serve Thakorji in this way. Our Sampraday is based on devotion. By keeping Thakorji with you, you will be able to offer devotion. Through devotion, the traditions of our Sampraday are preserved and the influence of atheistic traditions are negated. By serving and looking after Thakorji, He in turn, will take care of you. So serve Him wholeheartedly and with a full understanding of His glory.”



26-2-1993, Mumbai. We were listening to Swamishri when he vividly described the circumstances under which he had studied Sanskrit 50 years ago.

Swamishri said, “We had two teachers: Khodabhai Master and Dhaneshwarbhai. Both were dedicated devotees who had a lot of affection for Shastriji Maharaj.

“While we were studying in Khambhat, we had to beg in the village for our food. Under Shastriji Maharaj’s instructions we went as far as Tarapur and Nar to get alms. We used to go once every 15 days – on the day of

Ekadashi. People were very generous and with the hope of earning extra spiritual merits gave flour, oil, ghee and other things.

“One sadhu in our study group, Nirannamukta, had joined our Sanstha from Vartal. He had a liking for good things. He dressed in an up-to-date manner and insisted on tasty food. But he never came with us to beg for alms. Aksharjivan and I would go to beg for alms. And Nirannamukta would stay with the Brahmachari in the mandir.

“The Brahmachari would tell him, ‘We’re both studying, so we should team up to cook the meals. I won’t cook on my own. I’ll only cook if everything is cut and washed.’ But still Nirannamukta would not help. We would hear their exchanges and tell them, ‘You two study, but don’t argue.’ Then we would clean the grains, filter the flour and wash the utensils.

“Brahmachari would say, ‘I’ll make either *rotli* and *dal* or *rotli* and *shak*, but I won’t cook everything.’

“Nirannamukta would say, ‘I must have everything.’ The two of them would argue while we took care of the cooking. At night we would fill the water, wash the utensils and clean the kitchen area. We told those two, ‘You two study, but don’t quarrel.’ We didn’t mind doing the extra work. Aksharjivan was a very good sadhu.

“When we were in Bhadran, we used to get a lot of oil and ghee and *masalas* for cooking. One old lady used to donate enough to last fifteen days. In Bhadran everyone gave us pure ghee, so we used to send the extra ghee to Bochasan mandir. We even sent the extra grains, flour and pulses to Bochasan. In Bhadran devotees would even invite us for meals.

“In Bhadran our group of four sadhus comprised of myself, Aksharjivan, Brahmachari and Hariswarup –

Mahant from the mandir of Harikrishna of Chuda. We had to call the Mahant to eat when the meals were ready. He was weak in his studies. It took him two days to memorise the *Shabdaroopavali*, while I did it in one hour. When he walked, he held a handkerchief in his hand and a boy would hold a *chhatra* above his head. If the boy was not present, we would hold it.

“In Bhadran, the Shastri took our classes on the upstairs balcony. Hariswarup would allow us to come upstairs only for the classes, otherwise we were not allowed. We also prepared hot water for him to bathe and washed his *dhotiyas*.”

Swamishri described everything as if he was viewing it on a screen. His description revealed to us the extent to which he had served his co-students.

Swamishri continued, “There’ll be occasions on which you will quarrel, but live with unity and there will be no problems. In a small group, problems are likely, but whoever does more *seva* will benefit. Maharaj will be more pleased. Here, in a large group things pass unnoticed, but when on your own, your natural tendencies will become more evident.”

Thus Swamishri gave us sound, experienced advice to prepare the foundation for our long period of study in Bangalore.



Once Swamishri advised us about what to read to further our understanding. He said, “No scripture can compare with the Vachanamrut. You should study keeping the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato as your base. Read and study other scriptures, but the essence and philosophy should be understood in the way Maharaj has described. The words of other scriptures should not influence

you more than Maharaj's words. Only then can your base be considered robust. Study well, but keep the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato as your base." Swamishri continued, "There is no need to read other things or focus on other scriptures and literature. Read the scriptures and supporting texts related to your course. If you understand our Sampraday's true philosophy, you will have no problems. Maharaj's principles are true. Read those scriptures which explain them and no doubts will arise."



Once Swamishri said to us, "However much you study Vedant, Nyaya or Vyakaran, without a Satpurush you won't be able to understand. Only through a Satpurush are you able to understand the scriptures – not by the power of one's own intellect. The scriptures themselves reveal that without an Ekantik Satpurush you are not able to understand."



Once in Mumbai, the *Talks of Sadguru Tadrupanand Swami* were being read. Hearing the sentence, "After studying all the scriptures, one has to know God," Swamishri turned to us and said, "Bhadresh, you should study well. But who have you got to know ultimately?"

"God."

"Who is God?"

"Shriji Maharaj."

Swamishri said, "Yes, you have to know Him."



In 1994, Swamishri visited Bangalore. Swamishri was staying at the home of Rameshbhai Patel. One day, after

puja, he was meeting and blessing Rameshbhai's wealthy friends and business associates. Then a poor devotee came. Swamishri recognised him and asked, "Budhabhai. How come you are here? Who have you come with? What are you doing?" Swamishri enquired in detail regarding his current situation and then asked us, "Do you know him? He is a carpenter and a dedicated devotee from Kheda. He has done much *seva*. Remember him and call him to the weekly assemblies here." Then Swamishri turned to Budhabhai and said, "You should come to the Satsang and meet the sadhus. If you need any help let them know."

Afterwards Swamishri arranged for him to have breakfast. To Swamishri, there are no barriers of social class. Rich or poor – he cares equally for all.



40. BRAHMADARSHAN SWAMI

(SARANGPUR)

4-7-88. Ormond Beach, America.

After dinner at Mohanbhai's house, while Swamishri was answering letters, Ishwarcharan Swami telephoned from Amdavad. As their conversation continued, Swamishri suddenly stood up unaided and went into the bathroom to discuss some private matter.

Normally, Swamishri takes the support of two attendant sadhus to stand up. So when he returned to the room and sat on his bed, we asked, "Why did you get up? If you had just indicated, we would all have left the room."

Swamishri replied, "It is not proper to tell sadhus to leave like that. It is easier for me alone to move than to move all of you!"



Sarangpur. During breakfast about 250 sadhus, youths and devotees were seated on the mandir lawn. One of the sadhus delivered a speech in Hindi. At the end, Swamishri called Narayanmuni Swami, pointed out a mistake in the speech and told him to clarify the point to everyone. So, Narayanmuni Swami explained, "In the speech, he said that we are blessed with an attainment which even the *muktas* of Akshardham have not got. This is not right since it diminishes Shriji Maharaj's glory. Instead, we should understand that we enjoy the same attainment that the *muktas* of Akshardham enjoy."

This observation went unnoticed by everyone, yet

Swamishri's sharp listening skills picked up the error.



16-1-1992, Mumbai. Some questions were asked to Swamishri.

Question: Shriji Maharaj says in Vach. Gadhada II-35 and Vach. Gadhada III-36 that even by thinking of one-self as the *atma* for 100 years, one is not able to visualize one's *atma*. On the other hand, Gunatitanand Swami says in his discourses that if one constantly, 24-hours-a-day, believes oneself to be *atma*, *akshar*, then one will be able to visualise one's *atma*. What should we understand from this apparent paradox?

Answer: If one attempts to visualize one's *atma* by one's own endeavours, then it is not possible. But, by believing the Satpurush as one's *atma*, then one attains *sakshatkar*. By believing the Satpurush as one's *atma* and one's own real form and by developing love and attachment towards him, then one visualizes the *atma*. And if anyone asks, declare boldly that we have also had the *darshan* of God. The *darshan* of Yogiji Maharaj is equivalent to the *darshan* of Maharaj.

Question: The Satpurush is our *atma* and within the Satpurush dwells Paramatma (God). So when we have *darshan* of the Satpurush, do we believe that we are having the *darshan* of the *atma* or of Paramatma?

Answer: In Vachanamrut Gadhada II-8, Shriji Maharaj says that one should focus one's *indriyas* and *antahkaran* on the Satpurush and believe that we are having the *darshan* of Parabrahma seated within our true form – *brahma*. In each and every atom of the Satpurush's physical body, God is manifest. So his *darshan* is equivalent to the *darshan* of God. Now all we have to do is please him.



23-12-1995, Mumbai. For two days, during Swamishri's meals, I had been narrating the stories of sacrifice of the volunteers who had come to serve at the Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai. At the end, Swamishri called me and said, "Compile a list of those volunteers who are poor and have come here amidst great difficulties or have borrowed money to come here. We will help them. They have come here despite many hardships. They've stopped their work and business. When they leave here what will they do? You and Dr. Swami compile a list and decide. But we want to help – even if we have to give several *lakhs* of rupees."

All these volunteers had come to serve and earn Swamishri's blessings. But Swamishri was also deeply concerned about their welfare and keen to do whatever he could to help them.



Question: You have talked about believing the Satpurush as one's *atma*. But he is divine, free of all faults and above the influence of *maya*, whereas we are full of base instincts, faults, worldly desires and attachment for our bodies. So how can one believe the Satpurush as one's true form. Isn't it hypocritical to do so?

Answer: Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Vartal-5 that even though the worshipper is engulfed by *maya*, the God he worships is above *maya*, so ultimately he, too, will overcome the influence of *maya*. If one truly believes God to be free of all faults, then one becomes fault-free also. Still, we have to be vigilant. Believing ourselves to be fault-free like the Satpurush and above the influence of *maya* is not an excuse to forsake our vows and lapse in our duties. It is not an excuse to behave without restraint. Always focus on the Satpurush. How does he live and act?

Yogiji Maharaj was such a Satpurush, yet his life exemplified *dharma*, *gnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*. He never even casually lapsed in his duties and devotion.

Hypocrisy is believing oneself to be *atma* and the Satpurush to be above all influence of *maya* and base instincts and then using this understanding as an excuse to indulge in improper behaviour. But believing the Satpurush to be one's true form and at the same time making sincere efforts to overcome our faults and base instincts is not hypocrisy. In this way, such persistent effort will make us *brahmarup*.



41. VIMALPRAKASH SWAMI

(AMDAVAD)

11-7-1983, Amdavad. Swamishri had just finished lunch and was listening to the afternoon discourse. The subject of how to be a servant was being discussed. Swamishri said, "What are the qualities of a servant? He does as he's told. Those who do as per God's wishes earn His blessings."

Then Swamishri asked one of the sadhus, "Do you know the qualities of a servant? Do you know them properly?"

He replied, "I know them in theory."

Swamishri said, "They've not been put into practice. That's what you've come for."

The sadhu continued, "I've passed that task onto you!"

Swamishri responded, "Does the guru have to do everything?"

Another sadhu said, "If there is sincere effort on our part, then we earn your grace!"

Swamishri said, "It's because you've tried that you're sitting here. But if you constantly contemplate on the qualities of a servant, then you'll be able to turn away from bad habits and keep yourself on track."

Swamishri's message to us all was clear – we have to put in the effort to earn God's grace. Whatever theory we know, we have to take inspiration from the guru's life and put that knowledge into practice.



42. BRAHMATIRTH SWAMI

(SARANGPUR)

Despite the huge responsibilities placed on Swamishri, he fulfills them with enthusiasm and a particular attention to detail, accuracy and punctuality. This is evident whenever he is presented with accounts to analyse.

Routinely, in the kitchen department, we use 108 items. Next to each item, we make a note of the quantity used; how much of it was donated; how much was purchased and the remaining stock. These accounts are prepared by Chimanbhai of Anand, who is an expert in accounts. Then they are checked in detail by other sadhus and myself at least twice. Only then are they presented to Swamishri. But if there is a mistake, Swamishri is able to spot it in a matter of minutes. Despite such careful preparation, checking and re-checking, Swamishri's sharp and expert analysis picks out what we have missed. He advises on how to prevent such mistakes in future and blesses us. His method is so gentle and penetrating that these moments become memories to be cherished forever.



During Swamishri's 1988 Satsang tour abroad, I was blessed with the opportunity to serve Swamishri as his cook. The entire tour lasted 9 months, Swamishri's longest ever. But despite feeding Swamishri everyday, at the end of it, I was unable to decide what foods Swamishri likes most! For Swamishri, devotion to God is his favourite item, so he is not tempted by worldly tastes.



43. BRAHMAVIHARI SWAMI

(AMDAVAD)

Swamishri was in Gondal for *annakut*. We had sent a poem from Amdavad to him. The poem described how the elements of nature acknowledged the existence of an entity greater than themselves... the sun shines very bright, yet it says there is someone who shines brighter; the trees and plants are green and fresh, yet they say there is someone greener and fresher than them. At the end, we had posed a question, "Swami, everyone gives a different opinion of you. So we request you to tell us who you are?" Then we left a blank space for Swamishri to fill: "I am..."

Swamishri told Dharmacharan Swami to keep this to one side. When, after some time, Swamishri came to Amdavad, Swamishri told him to bring the letter out. I had forgotten about the letter altogether. Then, Swamishri asked me, "What do I have to write in the blank space?"

"Bapa, write down exactly who you are. And don't hide anything."

Swamishri said, "I am saint."

Again I requested. "Write exactly who you are."

Then Swamishri said, "How do you spell Aksharbrahma in English?" As I dictated, Swamishri wrote "I am Brahma-Akshar." Then he said, "Now how do I write 'Maharaj's das?' Spell it for me."

So then he wrote, "Maharaj's *Das*." Only then did he feel satisfied.



1985, Amdavad. This year's Jaljhilani festival was to be held at the Sarita Udyan in Gandhinagar. Everyone had left for the venue. Swamishri was due to leave shortly. Shukdev Bhagat (now, Shukmuni Swami) and I were cleaning Swamishri's room. It was about 9.00 a.m. Dharmacharn Swami was organising Swamishri's letters. Just then, Swamishri walked in and sat on a chair. There were a few minutes left before he was due to leave. He was totally relaxed.

I asked, "Bapa, what are you thinking?"

"To worship God and make others worship Him too!" replied Swamishri confidently.

Again I asked, "Bapa! Since your birth on this earth, which thought has repeatedly come to you? No doubt you get many thoughts about sadhus, devotees, mandirs. they're all God-related. But which thought has cropped up repeatedly?"

Swamishri looked at us and paused. Then, as we eagerly anticipated his reply, he said, "I'll tell you which thought I've never had!"

"Oh yes, please do."

Straightaway Swamishri said, "I never ever thought of doing anything unkind to anyone."

This is Swamishri's life motto.



July 1995, London. The new *shikharbaddh* mandir was under construction. Swamishri was on an inspection tour of the work in progress. Swamishri arrived in the *haveli* foyer. There, workmen were perched on scaffolding and plastering the walls. Suddenly, about 20 feet away one of the workmen, Melvyn – a Negro – jumped down from the scaffolding. He had a large muscular body – toned up by plenty of exercise. He came and stood beside me.

“All you sadhus are too thin,” he said.

I was worried he might cause a disturbance, so I kept talking with him.

“We’re not weak. We’re strong.” Then I explained that our inner spiritual endeavours are hard. He was interested, so I explained to him about the sadhu’s five cardinal vows. He was amazed.

We followed Swamishri up the stairs to the first floor, as we talked.

“For how many years has your guru not touched women?”

“About 55 years,” I replied, since Swamishri had been initiated in 1939.

Melvyn expressed a wish to meet Swamishri. Seeing him bare-chested and in shorts, I said it was not proper to meet Swamishri like this. So he immediately borrowed a T-shirt from one of his workmates. We reached the spot where Swamishri was standing and he bowed down to Swamishri. Then, suddenly he asked, “Since how many years are you observing this rule of not seeing women?”

“About 55,” I interrupted.

“No, No,” Swamishri said, “Tell him 75 years!”

Melvyn’s eyes almost popped out when I told him. I also learnt that Swamishri, not only from birth, but since eternity, has been pure. Even before initiation, Swamishri was aloof from worldly attachments.



In 1977, Swamishri visited Leicester. He was staying at the house of Dahyabhai Patel on Doncaster Road. I was 12-years-old and new to Satsang at the time. The *balaks* were allocated the duty of collecting fresh flowers every morning for Swamishri’s *puja*. A week beforehand we had visited certain streets and sought permission of owners to pluck roses from their gardens. We made a note of how

many we would pluck from each house. This would save a lot of money, since roses are expensive. Also, fresh roses were not available elsewhere so early in the morning. In the morning we went at 5.30 a.m. to pluck the roses.

The first day was no problem. Then I realised that we would have to do this every day. So we visited more streets to ask owners for their permission. People were not too keen on having too many flowers plucked from their gardens, but still agreed to give two each. When we went at 5.30 a.m. nobody would be awake, so instead of two, we often took three, with the intention of telling them in the evening! Thus, we used to get enough flowers. Swamishri learnt of our methods. Thus, one morning, Swamishri asked Gnanpriya Swami, “Who brings these flowers? Call those boys to me.”

We were pleased and went to Swamishri. He was reading the Shikshapatri at the time. He showed me one of the *shloks* and said, “See Maharaj has written that you should not take even one flower without the owner’s permission. That’s stealing. It’s fine if there are no flowers for my *puja*. But I don’t want flowers obtained like this. A *satsangi* should not steal!”

Even though we picked the flowers with the full permission of the owners, Swamishri felt that taking three instead of two was theft! Even though we did tell the owner in the evening what we had done.

Then on 10 July 1985, Swamishri arrived in London for the Cultural Festival of India. On his first morning, I was arranging the flowers in his *puja*. Smiling, Swamishri asked, “Where did you get these flowers from?”

Even after eight years Swamishri remembered that day!



44. VAIRAGYAPRIYA SWAMI

(MAHELAV)

1980, Anand. Swamishri was seated for dinner. Three rows of devotees were also seated with him, so I helped in serving food to them. Swamishri is very particular in ensuring that the devotees are served properly. Every item should be served to everyone. That day, while I was serving, Swamishri repeatedly stared at me without saying anything. I felt that I was doing something wrong, but I didn't know what. So I became a little apprehensive.

That evening, Swamishri arrived in the mandir. I took his *pagh* and went to put it in his room. He saw me and asked, "Where are you going?"

"To put the *pagh* away," I answered.

"What if I want to go out again. Who'll bring it?"

"I'll bring it," I said. So, Swamishri said sternly, "You'll probably be roaming elsewhere..." After a pause, he added. "Why were you serving with your left hand?"

I then realised my mistake.

"I'm a leftie," I said, "So I find it inconvenient to serve with my right hand." With this, he went into his room. Since then, I've remained a leftie in all my tasks, except serving. If by mistake I use my left hand, I always spill something or find it difficult!



3-2-1980, Khambhat. After a busy day, Swamishri arrived back at the residence and began to clip his nails. I sat nearby, watching. Then picking up one of the nails, I said, "Gosh, this is a big nail!" Swamishri immediately

realised my intention and said, "Now don't try to sneakily keep it. Put it back with the others."

Swamishri is not at all keen that anybody keeps a collection of these things. So I put it back. When he had finished, he gathered up all the nail clippings and threw them out on the roof. Then he went for a bath. In the meantime, with the hope that a few clippings had landed on the ground I went down to see. I searched but couldn't find anything. Then I returned to help Swamishri to bathe.

"Where did you go?" Swamishri asked.

"Oh nowhere," I replied.

"Didn't you go down to get some nail clippings? And yet you say you went nowhere!"

After his bath he held my hand and said, "Listen, only the holy relics of Shriji Maharaj should be collected. There's no benefit in collecting things like this." Then he added, "This *murti* is the true treasure. Remember it and preserve it. You'll have to keep those other things under lock and key and you'll be upset if you lose them."

Thus in a gentle, loving way he explained where our focus should be.



45. DIVYAPURUSH SWAMI

(SARANGPUR)

Swamishri was in Dumas, staying at the house of C.K. Pithawala. It was the birthday of Lord Nrusinh. Traditionally, on this day one is allowed to eat only *faral*. But Swamishri's health was not good and he was suffering from a stomach upset. Bearing this in mind, he was asked, "The sadhus will eat only *faral*. But you eat normal food. Who will know?" Immediately and sternly, Swamishri replied, "Shriji Maharaj sees everything. He will know. Nothing can be hidden from Him." Thus, Swamishri only ate *faral*. He does not compromise on even the smallest of rules, because he knows that God is watching everything.



Swamishri was in Johannesburg. His evening meal was at the house of a devotee. After Swamishri had finished eating, I was taking the *thal* back into the kitchen, but on the way I clumsily spilt some *adad dal* onto the carpet. Swamishri saw this and scolded me, "You don't take proper care, and so now the devotees' carpet is spoilt." As Swamishri continued, I stood speechless. Then suddenly he paused and asked calmly, "Did you make *rotlas*?" (*Rotlas* are commonly served with *adad dal*.)

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you bring them in the *thal*?"

"I forgot," I confessed.

Swamishri expressed surprise, "Do you know how to make *rotlas*?"

He continued, "What did you eat when you were at home?" In this way as Swamishri inquired into my past, his anger subsided completely.

I realised that he had scolded me for my benefit and so that my clumsiness didn't cause damage to devotees.



Once in Bochasan, Swamishri was eating lunch. The *rotli* in his *pattar* was cold, so I replaced it with a fresh, hot one. Immediately, Swamishri took the cold *rotli* and began to eat it. I insisted, "Why don't you eat the hot one?" He countered, "What will you do with the cold one?"

"I'll eat it," I said.

Swamishri looked at me and said, "I thought you were fasting today!"

I replied, "I'll eat it tomorrow!"

Swamishri said, "Don't worry about tomorrow. A sadhu should eat what he is served."



One day in Nairobi, during breakfast, a discussion on gurus developed.

Swamishri asked me, "Do you want to become a guru?"

I said no.

Swamishri asked again, "Then do you want to become a sadguru?" Again, I said no.

Swamishri explained, "Guru means one who has virtues. Don't you want to develop virtues?"

I replied, "Yes, I do want to develop virtues..."

"Then you want to become a guru," interrupted Swamishri.

I said yes.

Instantly, Swamishri said, "See, he does want to become a guru! Develop virtues like a guru, but always

remain a servant. Do you attend the discourses? By sitting in the discourses, you develop virtues.”

In this light-hearted discussion, Swamishri revealed the master key to success.

Swamishri is the guru of the Sanstha, yet he treats all with utmost respect. In 1983, I went to North India. When I returned to Mumbai and met Swamishri there, he immediately bowed down to me and touched my feet! He said, “You’ve just returned from a pilgrimage, so by bowing down to you, I can earn some of the merits of your pilgrimage!”

Swamishri has never hesitated to bow down to his disciples. He has such respect for everyone.



46. VIVEKNIDHI SWAMI

(VIDYANAGAR)

The President of India, H.E. Gyani Zail Singh, was a guest at the Gunatitanand Swami Birth Bicentenary Celebrations in 1985. A strict protocol for his visit was issued. Only 12 people would be allowed in the meeting hall when the President met Swamishri. Also, samples of all food and drinks prepared for the President would be taken for laboratory analysis.

A member of the President’s staff arrived in the reception room carrying a square wooden box. He requested that fresh coconut water be kept ready for the President. I prepared two steel cups and gave them to the staff member. He opened his box and brought out two glasses and a tray. He tasted the coconut water of one glass and poured the rest into one of the transparent glass cups. He poured the extra coconut into the other cup and put this cup into his wooden box. Thus two cups of coconut water were prepared – a steel one for Swamishri and a glass one for the President, from which a sample had been taken. The staff member gave the coconut water to the President, who held the glass cup in his hand. Swamishri also held his steel cup. The room was silent. Everyone’s attention was focussed on Swamishri. Swamishri offered the coconut water to Thakorji, which I had forgotten to do. The President watched Swamishri eagerly. Then Swamishri poured a little of the offered coconut water from his steel cup into the President’s glass cup. All the security staff were astonished by what Swamishri had done – since Swamishri had added untested water to the

President's cup and this amounted to a gross breach of security. Atmaswarup Swami explained to the President the significance of what Swamishri had done. He explained that Swamishri offers whatever he takes to the Lord first. And that Swamishri had offered the water to the Lord and given the President some of this sanctified water. The President was pleased and drank the water in his glass cup.

Even in the presence of the President, Swamishri does not forget the Lord. Such is his devotion.



After finishing his degree course in Fine Arts, Pankaj Vekaria had painted a large *murti* of Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the Guru Parampara – which is currently placed in the hall of the sadhus' residence in Vidyanagar.

While he was painting the *murti*, he showed it to many seniors, but very few improvements were suggested. Finally, Pankaj photographed the finished *murti* and took the photograph to show Swamishri. There were many waiting to meet Swamishri. And Swamishri himself was in a hurry. So he only got a hurried glimpse of the photograph. But even in this short time Swamishri noticed and said, "The *kanthi* and neck appear to be merged. Normally, the neck and face are distinguished, but in this case, they appeared merged." Thus from a fleeting glance at the photograph, Swamishri pointed out something which other artists had missed, but when asked again later they readily agreed.

Even today, when I look at this *murti* I recall the deep artistic insight of Swamishri.



Preparations for the Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai in 1995 were in progress. It was our department's responsibility to plan and prepare Swamishri's residence on the festival site. Many drawings were made and after much discussion, a model of the selected plan was made. Many experienced people had reviewed the plan in detail before approving it. In the final meeting, the well-known architect and devotee B.G. Bhatt reviewed the plans and model for over 40 minutes. His only suggestion was to add a fan in one of the rooms. Gnaneshwar Swami, Nikhilesh Swami and other experienced sadhus of the Construction Department also reviewed the plan and model. They were satisfied with everything. We then presented the plans and model to Swamishri. He commented, "Is it really necessary to do all this? After all it is only a temporary accommodation." He didn't seem too interested, so I was stuck for words. Breaking the silence, Swamishri asked to see the plans. I laid them out flat in front of him. Within two minutes, Swamishri pointed out, "Which door will people use to enter the meeting room from the waiting room?" In actual fact, we had overlooked this essential necessity. If Swamishri had not brought this to our attention, it would have been necessary to make significant changes later.

After the meeting with Swamishri, we showed the model to the architect and asked him if he could spot the design fault. He studied the model again, but did not spot it. When I revealed Swamishri's observation, the architect said, "Yes, the need for a door there has been totally overlooked."



One day, during one of Swamishri's stays at Vidyanagar, he decided to make an unannounced inspec-

tion of the hostel. As he entered a room from the rear gallery, he picked up a dirty rag, and dusted away the mosquitoes. Addressing the students of that room, Swamishri said, “You don’t have to invite the mosquitoes here. They’re bound to come. And then you’re likely to fall ill. So keep your room clean.” As news spread of Swamishri’s impromptu inspection, other students cleaned their rooms. Swamishri continued, visiting rooms at random. He arrived in Block ‘C’ and entered room 220, where Dhaval Barot was staying. The room was clean. So Swamishri turned back. Dhaval breathed a sigh of satisfaction. But as he was leaving, Swamishri noticed a large spider’s web on the ceiling surrounding the light bulb. Swamishri pointed it out to Dhaval and said, “Is this something you would find in a room that is regularly cleaned?” Dhaval thought to himself that they had cleaned everything, but overlooked this one site.

Swamishri’s message had been received. Swamishri continually strives to ensure that students of the Sanstha’s hostel develop in all ways.



47. UTTAMCHARAN SWAMI

(LOS ANGELES)

1993. Swamishri was to visit Junagadh and we had arranged for him to stay at the house of a devotee, instead of at the mandir. We informed him of this decision while he was in Gondal. Swamishri agreed, but when he arrived at Junagadh mandir he saw that all the facilities in the mandir were convenient for him to stay there. So he asked, “Why have you kept my stay outside? Everything is fine here.”

I replied, “The space here is small. The traffic of devotees would disturb you here and not allow you enough rest.”

“Understand one thing,” Swamishri interrupted, “Where there is a mandir, arrange my stay at the mandir. It is convenient for *darshan* and discourses and easier for meeting the devotees. Whatever anybody else says bear this in mind.”

Initially, Swamishri had agreed to stay outside the mandir thinking that the arrangements in the mandir were inadequate. But seeing even the minimum of facilities here he expressed his preference – demonstrating his desire to be more available for the devotees than concern for his own needs.



48. BRAHMAJIVAN SWAMI

(ATLADRA)

I had my first *darshan* of Swamishri during the Yogi Jayanti of 1977. I was studying in standard 8 at the time. I was with Becharbhai J. Patel, a devotee from Amreli. At the end of the assembly, we all queued up for Swamishri's blessings. As devotees passed by, Swamishri would ask them to pledge *mahapujas*. He would ask each devotee to pledge 500, 1000 or 2000 *mahapujas*. Then Becharbhai approached Swamishri. He asked, "How many *mahapujas* should I offer?"

Instantly Swamishri replied, "Offer ten." I was amazed because Becharbhai had a low income. But how did Swamishri know that? This thought drew me closer to Swamishri.



That year, Swamishri visited Amreli. He was staying at the house of Ratibhai Luhar. We went there for *darshan*. Ratibhai said to Swamishri, "Bapa, this Becharbhai has four daughters, but no sons. Please bless him."

Swamishri called Becharbhai closer and asked, "Would you like one son or two?"

"Bapa, one will be enough!" replied Becharbhai. So Swamishri blessed him and he departed. Some time later, a son was born to Becharbhai and his wife. Swamishri named him Devendraprasad.



Sant Swami was ill in Sarangpur. Swamishri had arrived from Rajkot to see him. During Swamishri's evening meal, I was seated opposite him. I had problems with my teeth, so he asked, "Pujari, what's the situation with your teeth?"

I replied. "Bapa! I will need dentures. Please give your blessings that they set properly and I can engage in devotion and service without difficulty." Swamishri opened his mouth and pointed out, "My lower gums have totally gone, so I have difficulties." Then, changing the topic of the dialogue, he said, "Listen, you have attained the company of a sadhu like Yogiji Maharaj. And you also serve Thakorji, so there's no question of having to get set. You're already set. Now you just have to enjoy."

"But Bapa, our base instincts do not allow us to enjoy this bliss," I said.

Swamishri stretched out his hand and with his first finger he began circling my eyes and said, "Do you want to be rid of your base instincts?... Do you want to be rid of your base instincts?"

I thought that I would become instantly free of all base instincts – such was the intensity of the situation.

Then Swamishri said, "If you do, then endeavour sincerely in observing your duties. You won't notice when your base instincts have gone."



49. DHARMABHUSHAN SWAMI

(BOCHASAN)

1987, Mumbai. Construction work on the festival ground for the Kalash Mahotsav was scheduled to begin. So, Swamishri arrived to perform the *pujan*. He arrived at the water tank near the kitchen. On this occasion, *shiro* had been made to distribute as *prasad* to everyone. I brought the *shiro*. Swamishri took off his slippers and standing on the muddy ground offered the *thal* to Thakorji.

Then as he began to distribute the *shiro*, he realised it was still too hot.

“Hey, this is still hot. I thought that you would have cooled it down before you brought it for Thakorji,” Swamishri said.

Then he himself spread the *shiro* in a plate, cooled it and offered it to Thakorji, pleading, “Maharaj, please forgive me. The *shiro* was too hot. It must have troubled you to eat it.”

With intense humility and devotion, Swamishri begged forgiveness and offered the cooled *shiro* to Thakorji.

Then he lovingly distributed the *prasad* to all the sadhus and volunteers.



When Swamishri comes to Bochasan, after he has had *darshan* of Thakorji in the main *mandir*, he goes to the other shrines for *darshan* before arriving at the shrines of Hanumanji and Ganpatiji. Finally, he goes behind the memorial shrine of Purushottam Swami. At the same

time, his sharp eyes are observing and noting everything.

One day, he noticed that some of the roof tiles had fallen off and the underlying metal rods had become exposed to the atmosphere.

Swamishri called me and instructed, “Make sure this is repaired by tomorrow. “So that day, I called the necessary workmen to have the damage fixed.

The next morning, Swamishri was pleased to see that the damage had been repaired. Then he said, “You should keep an eye on these things. Carry out regular maintenance. What if the rods corrode...”

Swamishri’s power of observation is second-to-none.



When Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the *mandir* in Donja, some necessary utensils had been supplied from Bochasan. After the celebrations, the sadhus and devotees responsible for them returned them. Swamishri enquired, “Has everything been returned?”

“Some dishes and bowls are missing,” I replied.

“Write to them to let them know,” Swamishri instructed, “and if they don’t return them let me know.”

A few days later Swamishri went to Gana for the *murti-pratishtha* there. After *puja* I went for *darshan*. When he saw me, Swamishri asked, “Have you had a reply from Donja yet? Write a letter to Acharya Swami. I’ll sign it.”

Swamishri’s interest in and insistence on such perfection in even the smallest things is remarkable.



50. AMRUTDARSHAN SWAMI

(ATLADRA)

In 1978, before I became a sadhu, my family was searching for a guru. However, I didn't have much faith in the Swaminarayan Sampraday. My family tried to get me to accept Swamishri as my guru. Even the efforts of other relatives and friends failed. Then during the *chaturmas*, Swamishri came to our home. Like everyone else, I bowed down to him. As I did so, he put his hand around my neck and asked, "Don't you have a *kanthi*?!"

"No," I said.

"Would you like to wear one?" Swamishri asked.

"Yes," I replied spontaneously. So Swamishri initiated me into *satsang*. From that moment my inner feelings changed totally. This first meeting and *darshan* changed all my pre-conceptions. From then on I became more involved in *satsang*.



During Swamishri's 1994 Satsang Tour abroad, my duty was to attend to his mail. After about 25 days, a devotee informed us that he was going to India and asked if there was any mail to take. So, with a view to ensure that the letters received are returned as early as possible, Swamishri began to read and reply to the letters. That day, he read and replied 26 letters in 20 minutes. I had a similar experience of his speed in Nairobi when Swamishri wrote 23 letters in 19 minutes.



During Swamishri's 1994 visit to America, a Children's and Teenagers' Convention was held at Mt. Poconos. At the insistence of the children, Swamishri struck a few balls with a baseball bat and cricket bat. This strained his shoulder, though the effect was not obvious immediately. The shoulder began to give him trouble when we arrived in San Jose. From there we went to Los Angeles. One night at 10.05 p.m., Swamishri was reading letters. I asked, "Bapa, does your shoulder hurt a lot?"

He put the letter to one side and sternly told me, "If your hand hurts, then don't write. My arm doesn't hurt, so I'll write the letters myself." Swamishri felt that he would be stopped from writing if he admitted an aching shoulder.

At the cost of his own health and with great discomfort he continued to write, just to please the devotees. (Subsequently, it required many months of daily physiotherapy for Swamishri's shoulder to become pain-free.)



51. BHAGWADJIVAN SWAMI

(AMDAVAD)

During Swamishri's Satsang Tour abroad in 1988, Janmangal Swami wrote a letter to him, requesting that some garlands of artificial flowers made of plastic or other synthetic material be sent for the *murtis* at Nadiad mandir. Swamishri wrote him a humorous, yet revealing reply, "You have requested artificial flowers. But being a knowledgeable person, why have you become attached to such artificial things? Real happiness lies with true things. We don't take or give artificial goods! We just give true goods – God and His Sadhu. If you want these, then let us know." (25-10-88, London).



Before the Bicentenary Celebrations of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami in 1985, we were on a preaching tour in the Panchmahal region. I was a *parshad* at the time. With us was Suresh Bhagat, a youth who was very familiar with the region. After completing part of our tour we returned to Atladra to celebrate Vasant Panchmi – the birthday of the Shikshapatri and Shastriji Maharaj – in the presence of Swamishri. At that time, Uttam Bhagat (Now Uttamcharan Swami) had come from Gondal. He required an experienced and capable person for the *gurukul* there. Suresh Bhagat was the right person for this. But at the same time, we needed him to help us in our task as well. So Swamishri called me and politely asked, "Suresh Bhagat is with you and is of great help.

But these sadhus need him in Gondal. So if you agree, is it alright to send him with them? It will cause you some inconvenience, but if you can release him it would be good. What do you think?"

For us, Swamishri's wish was our wish. It was not necessary for him to ask. He is our guru. Yet, still, he asked. Great people are known by the way they treat little people!



18-7-1988, Vrajbhumi, America.

A three-day shibir was being held here for children and teenagers. Everyone, including Swamishri and the sadhus, were staying on site. A photo session had been arranged in which individual photos of all the sadhus with Swamishri were being taken. When Aksharjivan Swami's turn came, he requested Swamishri to wear a pair of *chakhdis*. Swamishri refused, saying, "I don't normally wear them. So why should I do so now, just for the sake of a photograph?" But, due to everyone's insistence, Swamishri eventually agreed.

However, his one statement had revealed his true nature – that he was unwilling to be deceitful or hypocritical.



52. BRAHMAMUNI SWAMI

(AMDAVAD)

1985, Amdavad. During the Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami, I received the *parshad-diksha*. At that time, my duty was to look after the arrangements for people who came to meet Swamishri.

One day, Swamishri and Ishwarcharan Swami were engaged in some important discussion. Swamishri told me, “You stand at the door so that nobody comes in.”

“O.K.,” I said and stood by the door. I was having the *darshan* of Swamishri and my attention was not focussed on my duty. Suddenly, an old man dressed in the Kathiyawad style entered, removed his turban and repeating “Maharaj-Swami” began to prostrate.

Swamishri looked at me. I didn’t know what to do. So I ran to the elderly man, lifted him up and requested, “Bapa’s busy in a discussion right now. Come back later!”

Just then, Swamishri called out, “Now that he’s in, let him come. He’ll be happy.”

Swamishri blessed him and when he left he told me, “During these types of discussions, tell people to wait for a while. I’ll meet them later.”



14-5-1996, Gondal.

Swamishri was performing *pradakshina* in the Akshar Deri. Surrounding his path, sadhus, *parshads* and devotees were seated, singing “*Anubhavi anandama...*” Just at that time, the *pujari* sadhu arrived with the *thal*. As soon as he placed the *thal* before the *murtis*, I began to sing

“*Vasyo chhe chhogala valo...*” (One of the devotional songs traditionally sung while the *thal* is being offered.)

Instantly Swamishri said, “Wait...Wait. Let the curtains be drawn and the cloth covering the *thal* be removed.” When this was done, he said, “O.K. Now start singing.”

Hence, Swamishri’s devotion to the Lord was apparent. Even the smallest detail is sincerely upheld by Swamishri.



53. GNANVATSAL SWAMI

(RAJKOT)

Once while I was studying at the Vidyanagar Students' Hostel, Swamishri was there. While he was eating breakfast I recited from memory a letter written by Shriji Maharaj to the *paramhansas*. Swamishri asked, "Where did you obtain it from?"

"From the *Sarvopari Shrihari* book," I replied.

"Yes," Swamishri said, "I was wondering why you were speaking in Hindi."

Then, as per prior arrangement, Tushar Patel (now, Adarshjivan Swami) entered the room with a letter. Placing it in my hand, he said, "This letter has come from Akshardham. Maharaj has written it Himself."

"Let me read it," I said.

Swamishri innocently asked, "Is it a letter from Maharaj?"

"Yes," I confirmed.

"To you?" Swamishri asked. And then instructed, "Read it."

Attentively, Swamishri listened. Actually, I had prepared the letter in old-style Hindi. Swamishri had finished breakfast and so he listened carefully, while taking a little *mukhvas*. The end of the letter read, "Read this letter there before Pramukh Swami and tell him that it is My instruction that he gives *prasad* to all the youths."

In a serious tone, Swamishri said, "This is Maharaj's command. So bring some *prasad* for everyone!" Thus, he called for a plate of *jalebis* and began to give the *prasad* to everyone.

Even though the letter was made up Swamishri literally obeyed Maharaj's command.



Glossary

A

<i>adad dal</i>	A type of edible pulse.
<i>Akshar</i>	Second-highest of the five eternal entities; i.e., transcends everything except Purushottam. Also referred to as Aksharbrahma or Brahma.
<i>annakut</i>	Offering of many food items before the <i>murti</i> of God.
<i>antahkaran</i>	'Inner faculty'. The complete mind which comprises of four aspects, each characterised by its individual functions: called the <i>man</i> when generating thoughts and desires; the <i>buddhi</i> when consolidating thoughts, making decisions and resolutions, forming convictions, or discriminating; the <i>chitt</i> when repeatedly contemplating or focusing; and the <i>ahamkar</i> when forming a <i>sense of being</i> . Normally used in the singular since all four are aspects of the one <i>antahkaran</i> , but also often referred to as being four different <i>antahkarans</i> .
<i>arti</i>	Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the <i>murti</i> of God as an act of worship.
<i>ashanti</i>	Unrest.
<i>ashtaks</i>	Prayer verses sung after <i>arti</i> .
<i>atma</i>	The pure <i>jiva</i> distinct from the physical, subtle and causal bodies – i.e., distinct from the <i>indriyas</i> , the <i>antahkaran</i> , worldly desires, or any other traces of <i>maya</i> .

B

<i>badam</i>	Almond.
<i>balak</i>	Child.
<i>bhandhari</i>	Sadhu overseeing catering tasks.
<i>bhakti</i>	Devotion to God.
<i>bidi</i>	An Indian cigarette.
<i>Brahma</i>	See: <i>Akshar</i> .
<i>brahmarup</i>	'Form of Brahma'. Possessing qualities similar to those of Brahma.

C

<i>chakhdis</i>	Wooden footwear.
<i>chaturmas</i>	Four months of monsoon.
<i>chhatra</i>	Decorative canopy.
<i>chopda puja</i>	Worship of accounts books on Diwali.

D

<i>darbar</i>	Feudal chief; traditional house.
<i>darshan</i>	To see with reverence and devotion.
<i>dhana</i>	A herb used in cooking.
<i>dharma</i>	All-inclusive term used to mean righteousness, morality, religion, responsibility and duty.
<i>dharmashala</i>	Rest home for pilgrims.
<i>dhotiyu</i>	Lower garment worn by men.
<i>dhun</i>	Chanting of God's name.
<i>diksha</i>	Initiation.
<i>dudhpak</i>	Sweet delicacy of milk, rice and condiments.

F

<i>faral</i>	Food that can be eaten during a fast.
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G

<i>gatariyu</i>	Upper garment worn by a sadhu or <i>parshad</i> .
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<i>gathia</i>	Savoury, fried snack food.
<i>gnan</i>	Knowledge.
<i>godi</i>	Devotional songs sung before evening <i>arti</i> .
<i>gor</i>	Molasses.
<i>gurukul</i>	Residential school.

H

<i>hari mandir</i>	Mandir in which <i>arti</i> is performed twice daily and daily worship of deities is performed by a householder <i>pujari</i> .
<i>haveli</i>	Traditional mansion-like building, usually constructed of intricately carved woodwork.
<i>hindolo</i>	Swing.

I

<i>indriya</i>	'Sense', through which one can 'know' and perform actions.
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J

<i>jalebi</i>	A sweet delicacy.
<i>jiva</i>	Individual, embodied soul still bound by <i>maya</i> and consequently undergoing the cycle of births and deaths. One of the five eternal entities.

K

<i>kadhi</i>	Soup made of buttermilk, gram flour and spices.
<i>kaka</i>	Father's brother.
<i>kanthi</i>	Double-threaded necklace, usually made of <i>tulsi</i> beads, received by <i>satsangis</i> upon initiation into the Satsang fellowship, and worn as a

<i>karela</i>	sign of their affiliation to God.
<i>karyakar</i>	A bitter-tasting vegetable.
<i>katha</i>	Volunteer.
<i>khichdi</i>	Spiritual discourse.
<i>kirtan</i>	Spiced boiled rice and lentil grain.
	Religious hymn; devotional song.

L

<i>lakh</i>	One hundred thousand.
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M

<i>mahapuja</i>	Elaborate worship rituals of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, <i>muktas</i> , incarnations and deities.
<i>masala</i>	Spices used in cooking.
<i>maya</i>	One of the five eternal realities.
	The power of God responsible for creating attachment towards the body and its relations.
	Anything that deviates one from the worship of God.
<i>moksha</i>	Redemption, salvation, liberation.
<i>mukhvas</i>	Mouth fresheners eaten after meals.
<i>mukta</i>	Released soul.
<i>murti</i>	Sacred idol of God that is revered and worshipped.
<i>murti-pratishtha</i>	Consecration of images of God in a mandir.

P

<i>padhramani</i>	Visit by sadhus to sanctify a home.
<i>pagh</i>	Turban.
<i>panchdhatu murti</i>	Metallic <i>murti</i> made from an alloy of five metals.
<i>paramhansas</i>	'Supreme swan'. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterised by

<i>parayan</i>	his ability to discriminate between
<i>parshad</i>	<i>sat</i> and <i>asat</i> – just as swans were
<i>pattar</i>	traditionally considered to be able to
<i>potlu</i>	distinguish between milk mixed with
<i>pradakshina</i>	water.
<i>pragat satpurush</i>	Spiritual discourses.
<i>prasad</i>	Renunciant wearing white robes.
<i>puja</i>	Wooden bowl for eating.
<i>pujan</i>	A piece of cloth used as a bag.
<i>pujari</i>	Circumambulation.
	Manifest form of God's holy Sadhu.
<i>puranpuri</i>	Sanctified food.
<i>puri</i>	Worship or ritual of worship.
	The act of worshipping.
	Priest who performs daily rituals of
	the <i>murtis</i> .
	A sweet delicacy.
	A fried delicacy made of wheat flour.

R

<i>rakhdi</i>	A decorative, strand-like wristlet
	traditionally tied by sisters to their
	brothers on the day of Raksha-
	bandhan on Shravan <i>sud</i> Punam,
	affirming their loving bond between
	each other, and in particular, the
	brother's vow to protect his sister.
<i>rotlo</i>	A basic unleavened bread-like staple
	food of many parts of Gujarat, made
	generally of millet flour that is
	kneaded and patted into a flat,
	circular shape before being cooked
	on an earthen or metal hot plate.
<i>rotli</i>	Thin, soft, circular bread of wheat
	flour.

S

<i>sakshatkar</i>	Realisation.
<i>sandhya</i>	Evening.
<i>sata</i>	A sweet delicacy.
<i>satpurush</i>	Guru for a spiritual aspirant. (God's
	holy Sadhu; the manifest form of
	God).
<i>satsang</i>	The practice of spiritually
	associating with the <i>Satpurush</i> ,
	fellow <i>satsangis</i> , one's own <i>atma</i> and
	the sacred scriptures of the Satsang
	fellowship.
<i>satsangi</i>	Member of the Satsang fellowship.
	One who practises <i>satsang</i> .
<i>seva</i>	Service.
<i>shak</i>	Cooked spiced vegetables.
<i>shangar arti</i>	Evening <i>arti</i> performed at sunset.
<i>shanti</i>	Peace.
<i>shayan arti</i>	Last <i>arti</i> of the day performed before
	deities take rest.
<i>shikharbaddh</i>	Mandir in which five <i>artis</i> are
	performed daily and daily worship of
	deities is performed by sadhus.
<i>shiro</i>	A sweet delicacy, usually of wheat
	flour, ghee, sugar and condiments.
<i>shlok</i>	Stanza.
<i>sukhdi</i>	A sweet delicacy of wheat flour, ghee
	and <i>gor</i> .

T

<i>tagara</i>	Shallow circular metal container.
<i>thal</i>	Offering of food to God.

V

<i>vairagya</i>	Detachment.
<i>vicharan</i>	Spiritual travellings.