

An Introductory Study Programme of
BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism for Children



Satsang Pihar

Part 1

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SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH
Ahmedabad

Satsang Vihar: Part 1 (English Edition)

(An Introductory Study Programme of
BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism for Children)

Inspirer: His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj

Presented by: Children's Activities Central Office,
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha,
Shahibaug, Ahmedabad - 380 004, Gujarat. India.

Illustrations by: Ranjitsinh (Meghavi)

Coloured by: Sanjeev Mishra (BAPS Design Studio)

4th Edition: June 2017

Copies: 3,000 (Total 21,000)

Price: ₹ 60/-

ISBN: 978-81-7526-358-1

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Published & Printed by

Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad-4
Gujarat, India.

Websites: www.baps.org
kids.baps.org



Aksharbrahman
Shri Gunatitanand Swami



Parabrahman
Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan

LET US FLY TO AKSHARDHAM

Look at those birds, high up in the sky. Seeing them we wish we could fly, soar above the whole world and see all the things on this colourful globe. "If only," we think, "God had given us wings!" The truth is, he has! He has given us two wings – not ones quite like the birds, but real strong wings nonetheless. He has given us the wings of *agna* and *upasana* so that we may fly. And not just fly above this Earth, in its wide sky, but fly higher than this galaxy and beyond this universe. Our wings are so powerful, they can take us all the way to Akshardham.

This *Satsang Vihar* series helps us to fulfil our dream of flying. They will help us use our wings of *agna* and *upasana* and become ideal devotees who can enjoy the happiness of Akshardham here on Earth. If you read this book attentively, try to understand it and put its teachings into practice, you will be an ideal *bal bhakta* before you know it – flapping your wings and soaring in the divine joy of Akshardham.

(Note: In every chapter the **bold** letters represent key words or a key sentence.)

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1. WHO IS A HINDU?

A child was playing by himself. Someone asked him, "Are you a Hindu?" He replied, "Of course I am!" Instantly, another question was thrown at him, "Then **explain who is a Hindu?**"

The child was lost for words. He simply didn't know. As a result he lost interest in playing. That evening he did not enjoy his meal at home. His mind repeatedly echoed with the last question. Soon, he was feeling very tired. He lay down on his bed before his usual bedtime. He prayed to God to give him the answer to the question. His eyes closed thereafter and he slipped into deep sleep.

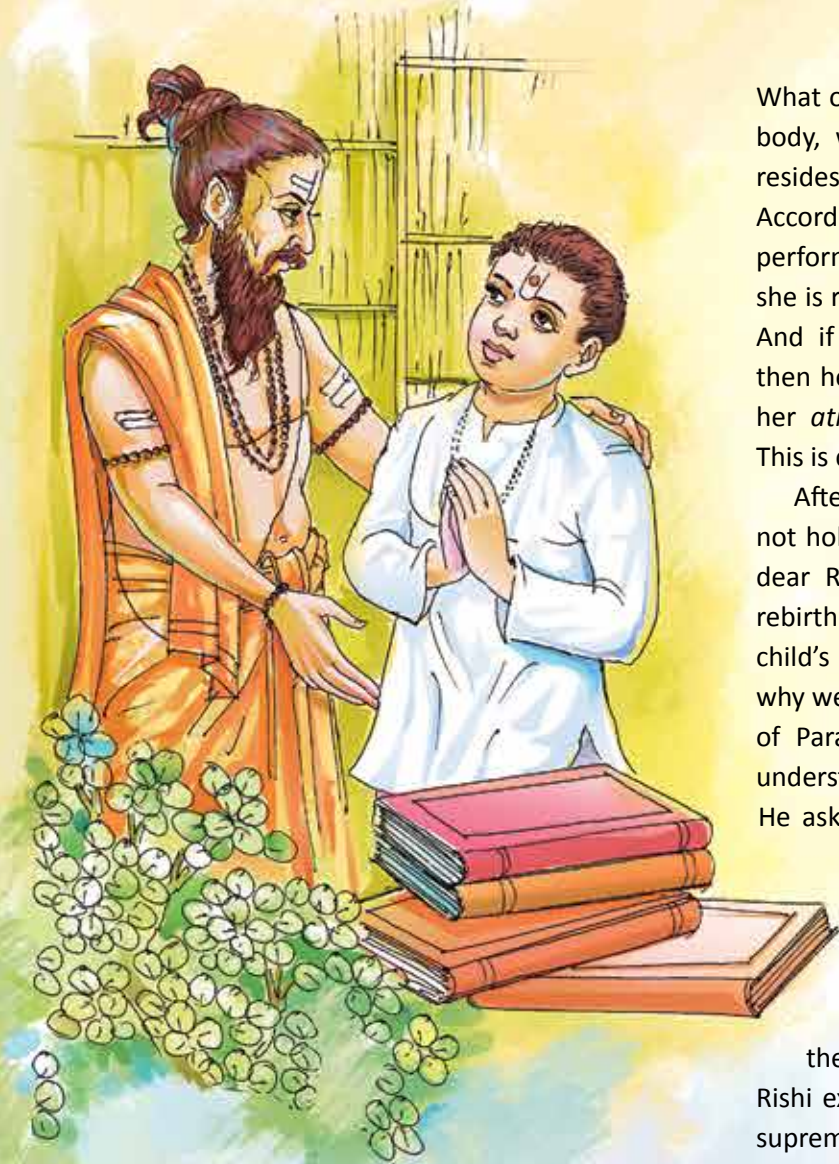
It was past midnight. The child had a beautiful **dream**. He found himself in an era that was thousands of years back in time. He heard the

sweet chanting of Aum. On opening his eyes in his dream he saw a huge sprawling tree. Beneath it sat a **Rishi** absorbed in meditation. The child smiled and thought, "God has answered my prayer. Now I'll get the answer to my question! The boy greeted the sage, 'Jai ho Rishi Maharaj, Jai ho...'

The child quickly walked towards the sage. He bowed in respect and sat before him. After a while the Rishi opened his eyes. The boy asked, "Rishi Maharaj, what is the meaning of Hindu! And who can be called a Hindu?"

The Rishi took hold of the boy's hand and led him into his hut. There, he showed him the **four Vedas**: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The Rishi added, "One who believes in the Vedas is





What one sees on the outside is called the body, which perishes. Each *atma*, which resides in the body, is pure and eternal. According to the **karma principle** if a person performs good karmas (actions) then he or she is rewarded with good results or fruits. And if the person performs bad karmas then he or she gets bad fruits. Then his or her *atma* goes through countless births. This is called **rebirth** or **punarjanma**.

After this interesting talk the child could not hold back his curiosity. He asked, "But dear Rishi, can we not bring an end to rebirth?" The Rishi was pleased with the child's intelligence, and he replied, "That's why we have to learn about the knowledge of Paramatma." The child failed to fully understand and connect with the answer. He asked, "Sorry, I didn't catch what you

said. What is that knowledge of Paramatma?" The Rishi took the child before a small mandir inside his hut. Both folded their palms together and bowed before the **murti** of Bhagwan (God). The Rishi explained, "This is Paramatma. He is supreme. He has a form. He is divine. He is the all-doer and always present on earth through a spiritually realized Sadhu. He lives not only in his divine home called Akshardham, he comes down to earth as an **avatar**. This, we can say is the knowledge about Paramatma."

The child gave a blank look to the Rishi. He again expressed, "My mind is more confused than before. Tell me in short who is a Hindu?" The Rishi smiled and replied patiently, "Now listen carefully. **To understand this in a single point: One who believes in the four Vedas is a Hindu. To say it in two points: One who believes in *atma jnan* and Paramatma *jnan* (knowledge of God) described in the Vedas is a Hindu.**

And to understand it in four points: One who believes in 1. Karma, 2. Punarjanma (Rebirth), 3. Murti-puja and 4. Avatarvad (Reincarnation of God), which are related to *atmajnan* and Paramatmajnan in the Vedas, is a Hindu."

The Rishi asked the child, "Son, do you know how the word Hindu was born?" The child simply scratched his head and burst out, "Rishi Maharaj, I don't know. Tell me!" The Rishi took the boy by the banks of the River Sindhu nearby. The child saw many rishis, their wives and children by the river bank, engaged in spiritual sadhana. The boy was amazed by the divine atmosphere. The Rishi explained, "They are the ancestors of the **Hindus**. They are known as Aryas. From the banks of the River **Sindhu** the knowledge of Sanatana Dharma in the Vedas spread. The original name of our religion is **Sanatana Dharma**. Sanatana

means that which has no beginning or end. It was the Persians who named us Hindu from the River Sindhu. In brief, Hindus are those who believe in Vedic knowledge that flourished on the banks of the River Sindhu.

The child now felt satisfied and happy. At last he had the history behind the word 'Hindu'. The Rishi continued, "Son, our Hindu culture is believed by Hindus to be the greatest culture in the world. The highest and final goal of life in our Hindu Dharma is to become *atmarup* and offer bhakti to Paramatma."

The child jumped with joy and pride. Suddenly, his eyes blinked from his sleep and soon he was wide awake. He saw his mother was trying to wake him up. The child uttered 'Jai Sanatana Dharma' and got out of bed.

a Hindu. They are the most ancient of all sacred texts."

The child asked the Rishi, "Tell me what the Vedas are all about."

The Rishi gave a seat to the child and answered, "The Vedas contain the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma. And this knowledge is very clear and unique."

"What is this **knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma**?" the child enquired.

"Listen dear child, *atma jnan* is the knowledge of one's *atma*. All living things like insects, animals, birds, humans and plants have *atmas*.



2. BIRTH AND REBIRTH

Hindus believe that the *jiva* or soul takes one birth after another on its journey to spiritual perfection. The human birth is the best of all forms the *jiva* takes in its cycle of births and rebirths.

Are there any true cases to prove this principle of birth and rebirth? Let's see.

Shriji Maharaj was in the village of **Kariyani**. **Vikamshi Khachar**, a devotee, was seated before him. Maharaj told him, "In your last birth you were born in a **carpenter's family** in **Khambhat**. Your name was **Narayan**. Your **father's name** was **Hirabhai** and your **mother's name** was **Punjiben**. When you died, your mother was deeply shocked and mourned your loss. Eventually, she became blind. Your **house was mortgaged to a Bania**. Your former mother is presently staying in a small hut built by the Bania."

On hearing this, Vikamshi Khachar was a little dazed and saddened. He asked, "Maharaj, is there any **proof** of what you have described?" Shriji Maharaj replied, "Your father had hidden **Rs. 500**

inside the third beam of the main room of your **house**. Take a lamp to light the beam and you'll find a piece of wood nailed on it to cover the money kept inside."

Vikamshi immediately left for Khambhat. On reaching there he enquired about his former mother and found her. On asking her about her son she said with tears, "I had a son called **Narayan**. He **died young**. Then shortly after, his father passed away. Ever since, I have been reduced to poverty and misery."

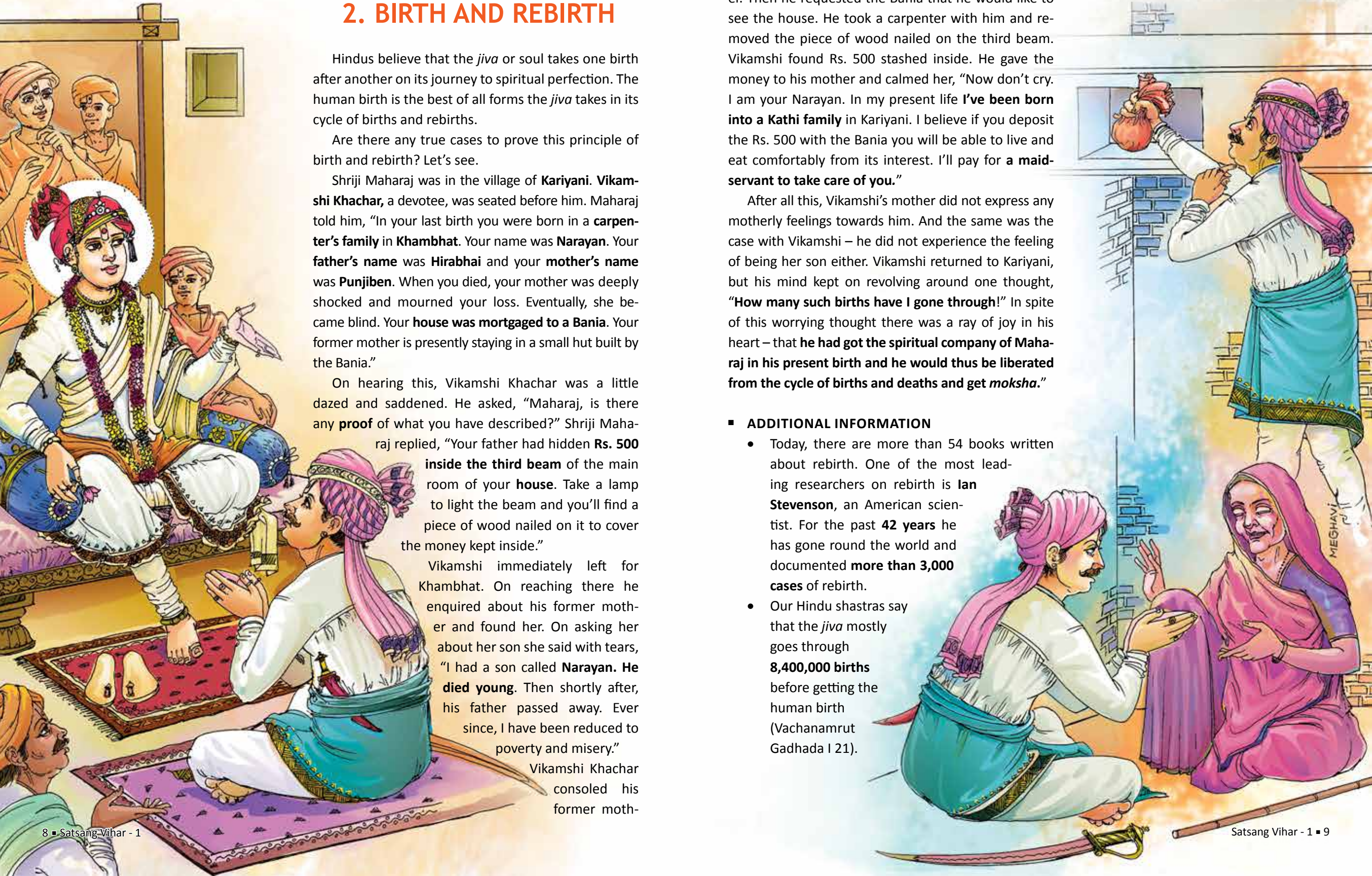
Vikamshi Khachar consoled his former moth-

er. Then he requested the Bania that he would like to see the house. He took a carpenter with him and removed the piece of wood nailed on the third beam. Vikamshi found Rs. 500 stashed inside. He gave the money to his mother and calmed her, "Now don't cry. I am your Narayan. In my present life **I've been born into a Kathi family** in Kariyani. I believe if you deposit the Rs. 500 with the Bania you will be able to live and eat comfortably from its interest. I'll pay for a **maid-servant to take care of you**."

After all this, Vikamshi's mother did not express any motherly feelings towards him. And the same was the case with Vikamshi – he did not experience the feeling of being her son either. Vikamshi returned to Kariyani, but his mind kept on revolving around one thought, "**How many such births have I gone through!**" In spite of this worrying thought there was a ray of joy in his heart – that **he had got the spiritual company of Maharaj in his present birth and he would thus be liberated from the cycle of births and deaths and get *moksha***."

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Today, there are more than 54 books written about rebirth. One of the most leading researchers on rebirth is **Ian Stevenson**, an American scientist. For the past **42 years** he has gone round the world and documented **more than 3,000 cases** of rebirth.
- Our Hindu shastras say that the *jiva* mostly goes through **8,400,000 births** before getting the human birth (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 21).



3. REVIVING DEAD FISH

Non-violence or ahimsa is one of the many moral principles in Hinduism. It is born from the belief that God is present in all things – living and non-living. This principle of ahimsa has been revived and strengthened through the ages by the avatars of God.

The childhood name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was Ghanshyam. His father's name was Dharmadev and his mother was called Bhaktimata. From childhood Ghanshyam performed many miracles. Once in Chhapaiya, where **Ghanshyam** was born and raised as a child, he went to play with his friends to the **Meen Lake**. Whenever they went there they played along its banks and swam in the cool waters.

On that day, as they were getting ready for a **swim**, Ghanshyam's eyes fell on a **fisherman**. He was dark and strong.

Each time he threw his net in the water he pulled out a hefty catch of **fish**. The poor fish flipped and gasped for air and finally **died**. Ghanshyam was

filled with disgust for the fisherman and **compassion** for the dead fish. He thought,

"Such is the fate of these poor, innocent fish!" Ghanshyam decided to do something about it there and then.

He boldly waded through the water to the fisherman and challenged him, "Hey, Fisherman! Why are you killing fish? What right does any person have to kill an

animal? **God resides in every soul**. Don't you know killing is a grave sin?"

On hearing these preachings from a child the fisherman laughed rudely. He jeered, "I may do anything! Of what concern is it to you!"

Ghanshyam, the Lord, **thought**, "I must teach him a lesson now!" So, he looked at the fish and made a wish. To everyone's surprise the dead **fish came to life**, and they all jumped back into the water. Seeing his efforts going to waste, the **fisherman** became furious. He roared, "You have brought my entire day's hard work to naught."

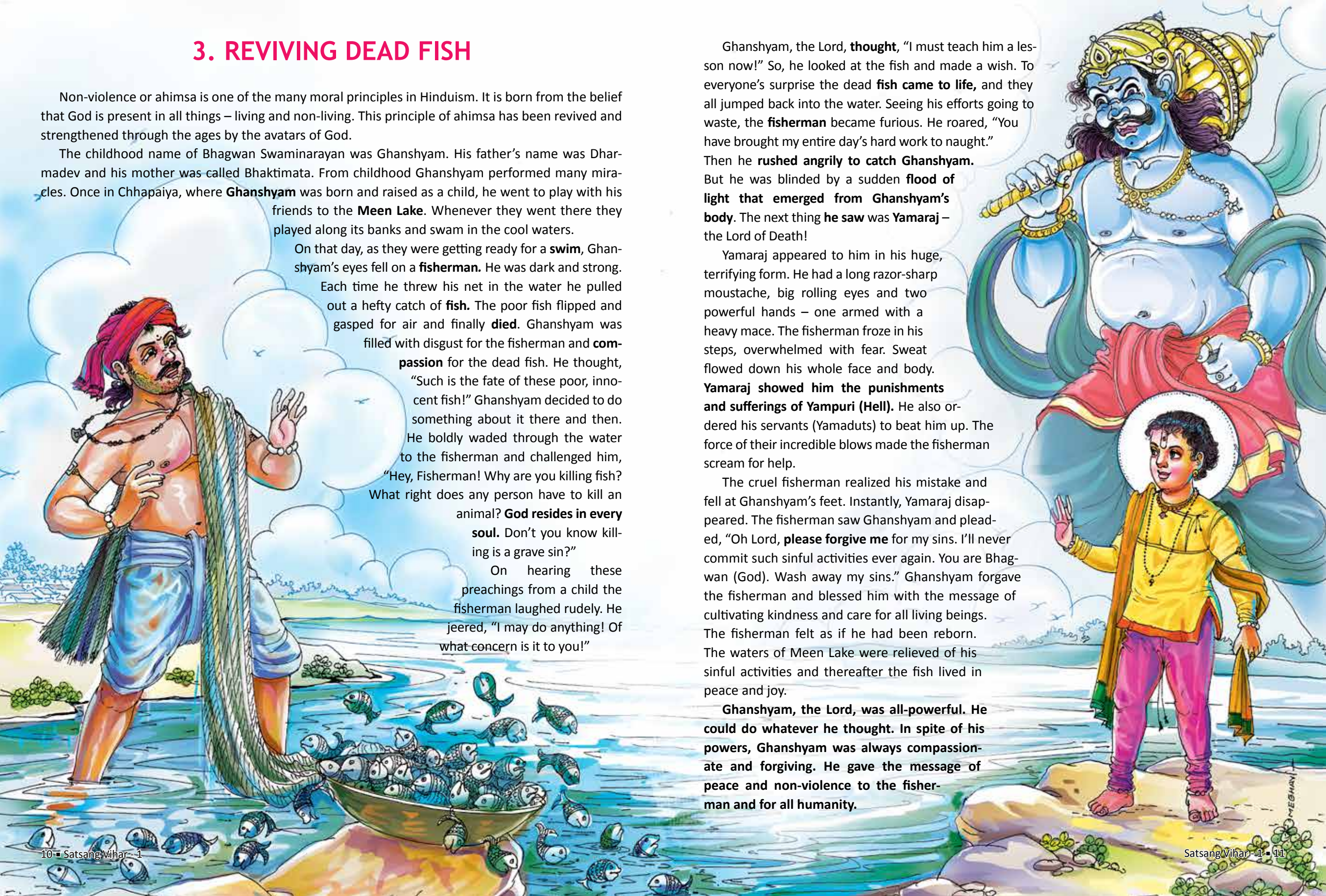
Then he **rushed angrily to catch Ghanshyam**.

But he was blinded by a sudden **flood of light that emerged from Ghanshyam's body**. The next thing he saw was **Yamaraj** – the Lord of Death!

Yamaraj appeared to him in his huge, terrifying form. He had a long razor-sharp moustache, big rolling eyes and two powerful hands – one armed with a heavy mace. The fisherman froze in his steps, overwhelmed with fear. Sweat flowed down his whole face and body. **Yamaraj showed him the punishments and sufferings of Yampuri (Hell)**. He also ordered his servants (Yamaduts) to beat him up. The force of their incredible blows made the fisherman scream for help.

The cruel fisherman realized his mistake and fell at Ghanshyam's feet. Instantly, Yamaraj disappeared. The fisherman saw Ghanshyam and pleaded, "Oh Lord, **please forgive me** for my sins. I'll never commit such sinful activities ever again. You are Bhagwan (God). Wash away my sins." Ghanshyam forgave the fisherman and blessed him with the message of cultivating kindness and care for all living beings. The fisherman felt as if he had been reborn. The waters of Meen Lake were relieved of his sinful activities and thereafter the fish lived in peace and joy.

Ghanshyam, the Lord, was all-powerful. He could do whatever he thought. In spite of his powers, Ghanshyam was always compassionate and forgiving. He gave the message of peace and non-violence to the fisherman and for all humanity.



4. GHANSHYAM IS EVERYWHERE

Ghanshyam was an extraordinary child. He was five when his parents shifted from Chhapaiya to **Ayodhya**.

In Ayodhya, Dharmadev taught him the Hindu shastras each day. Ghanshyam listened to him with utmost concentration. Hearing once was enough for him. He would fix it in his memory, and the knowledge became his forever. Listening or reading with concentration is the best way to study.

One day, while Dharmadev was doing his daily puja, Ghanshyam watched him. After seeing it once, he knew how to do puja. And then he started doing it daily. Keen obser-

vation also plays an important part in learning.

Even at a young age Ghanshyam went to the river alone. There he swam and bathed by himself. He took puffed rice grains and roasted grams from home to feed the turtles. He had given each of them different names. On calling them by their names they would come to the surface and open their mouths.

Another routine **Ghanshyam** followed was his round of daily darshan of mandirs in Ayodhya. Ghanshyam was familiar with all the mandirs. And among them all, the Ramji Mandir and Hanuman Gadhi Mandir were his favourite.

Once, Ghanshyam went to the **Hanuman Gadhi** Mandir and sat down to listen to the **story of the Ramayan**. Soon it was mid-afternoon but Ghanshyam was absorbed in the *katha*. At home, his family members were worried. His eldest brother, **Rampratapbhai**, came looking for him at the Hanuman Gadhi Mandir. On seeing Ghanshyam, he called out, "Let's go home!"

Ghanshyam replied, "Brother, the *katha* is about to end. Why don't you come back after having darshan at the Radha-Krishna Mandir."

Rampratapbhai went to the **Radha-Krishna Mandir**. To his amazement he saw Ghanshyam listening to the *katha* there. Ghanshyam told his brother, "Brother, go and come back after having darshan at the Ram Mandir. Then we will go back together."

The same thing happened at the **Ram Mandir**. Rampratapbhai thought, "There must be some mistake on my part. How can there be three Ghanshyams?" So, to make sure, he went closer. Ghanshyam told his brother, "Go and visit the Hanuman Gadhi. Then we'll return home."

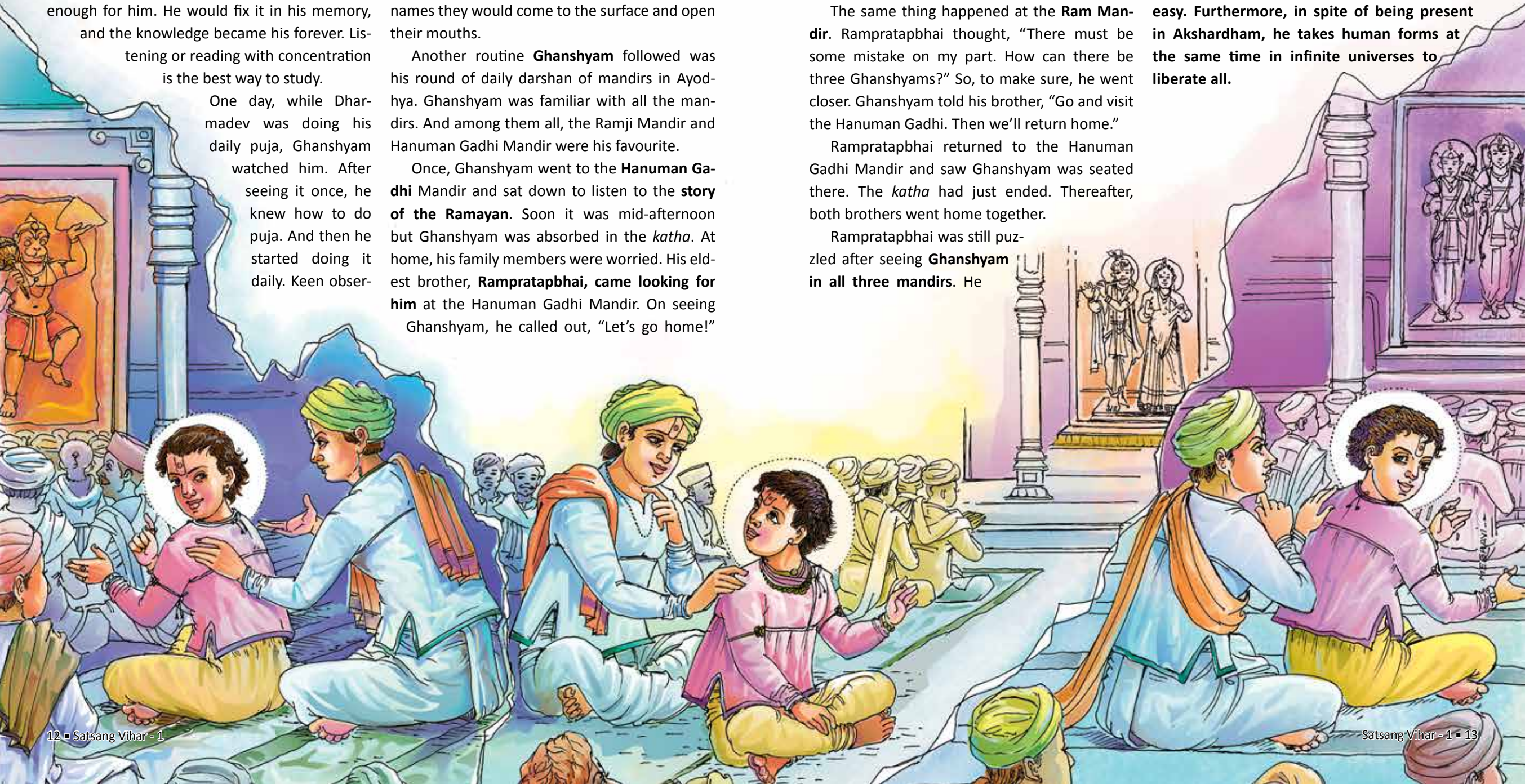
Rampratapbhai returned to the Hanuman Gadhi Mandir and saw Ghanshyam was seated there. The *katha* had just ended. Thereafter, both brothers went home together.

Rampratapbhai was still puzzled after seeing **Ghanshyam in all three mandirs**. He

thought that his brother was miraculous.

Rampratapbhai's query was solved 35 years later, when he came to Gujarat. There, he saw Ghanshyam in the form of Sahajanand Swami. Immediately, he understood that his brother was the **supreme God** and that all his actions and **incidents were divine**.

So, Ghanshyam was the Supreme Lord. For him, to appear in many forms is very easy. Furthermore, in spite of being present in Akshardham, he takes human forms at the same time in infinite universes to liberate all.



5. TAMING A LION

At **age 11**, Ghanshyam **left home** to start off on an amazing pilgrimage of India to liberate countless souls. From then onwards he came to be known as **Nilkanth Varni**.

During his travels he came to a small village of **Shripur** in northern India. On its outskirts was an **ashram** called **Kamleshwar Math** in which

sannyasis lived. There was a thick jungle nearby. Nilkanth came to the ashram and decided to stay the night outside, beneath a giant tree.

The **Mahant** came out to meet Nilkanth. He invited him inside, "If you wish to spend the night then either come inside the ashram or go to the village. But don't stay in the open!" Varni asked, "Why not?" The Mahant explained, "Every night a ferocious **lion** roams this area. It preys upon any cattle or person it sees. So, I ask you to **come inside my ashram and save yourself!**"

Nilkanth argued, "Is it so that a person who comes inside your ashram is safe from death? **Can death not enter your ashram?**" The Mahant failed to convince Nilkanth. Varni said, "Then let death come here on this raised platform. I'll stay the night here!" The Mahant realized that Nilkanth was no ordinary boy. So, he did not insist further.

At **midnight**, the village was shaken from its deep slumber by the deafening roar of the lion. It came running towards the tree outside the

ashram. Nilkanth cast a glance and gestured to the **wild lion**. Instantly the lion became meek and **lay down beside him**. Varni gently patted the lion. The Mahant was amazed to see all this from his window. He called all the inmates of the ashram to witness the extraordinary scene. **Everyone was moved by what they saw.**

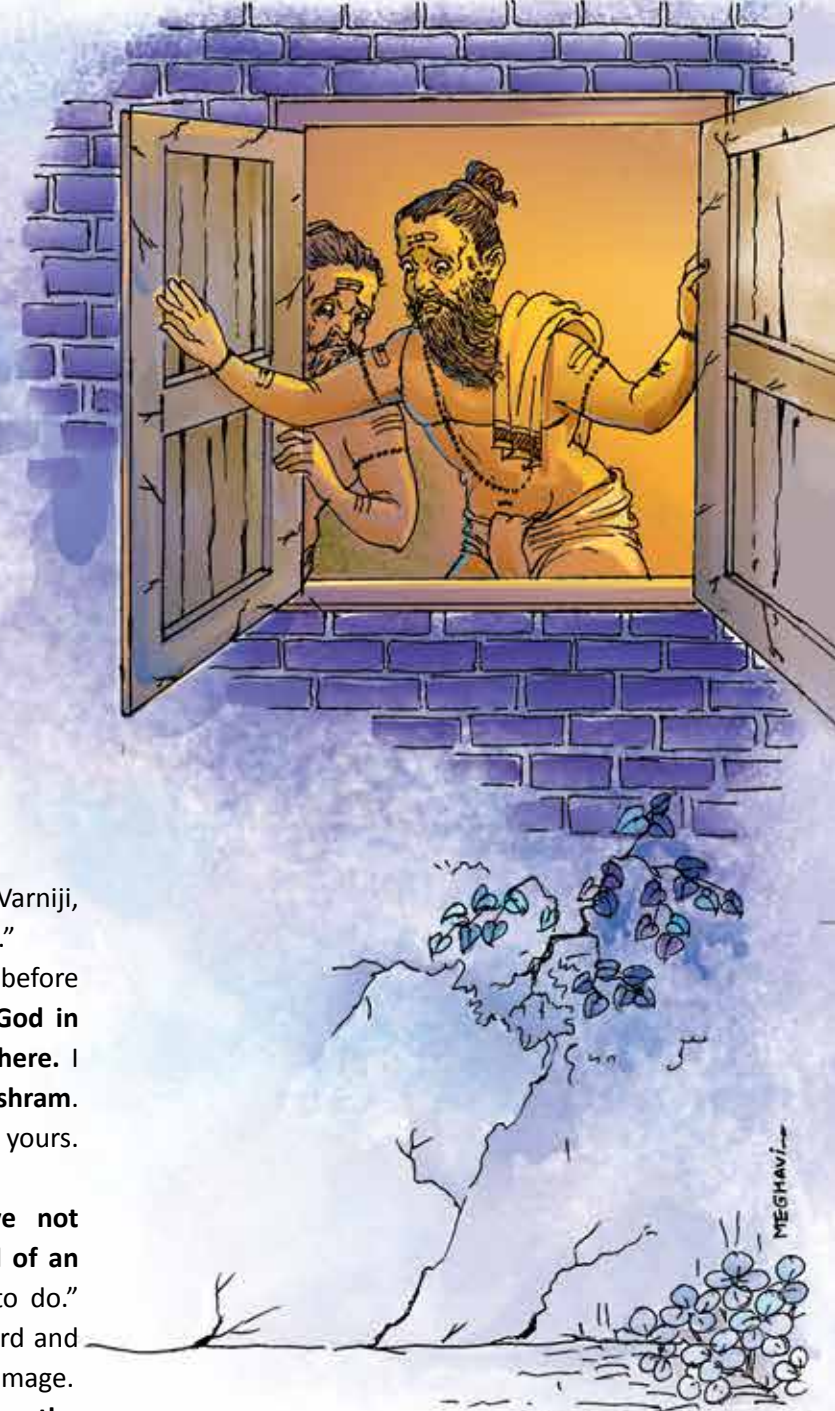
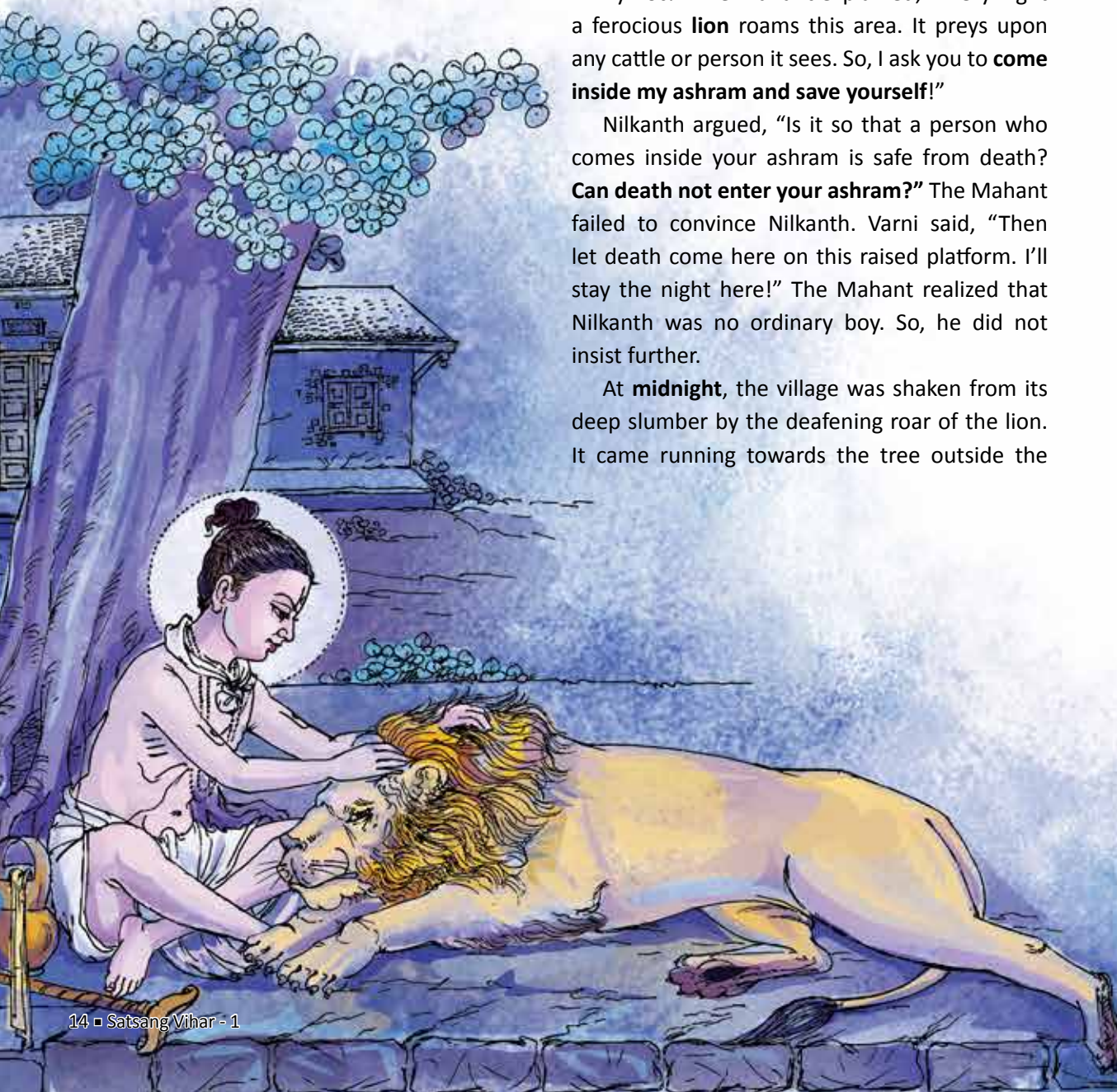
When morning came, Nilkanth told the lion, "Now you may return to your home. Today you will have to go back hungry." The lion got up and disappeared into the jungle.

The Mahant and the villagers came hurriedly and bowed to Nilkanth. Everyone was impressed and praised, "Wonderful Varniji, wonderful! You must be God himself."

The Mahant folded his hands before Nilkanth and requested, "**You are God in human form. Now you must stay here.** I offer you the **Mahantship** of my **ashram**. Its annual income of **Rs. 1 lakh** is all yours. Please accept my request."

Nilkanth Varni replied, "**I have not left my home to become the head of an ashram.** I still have a lot of work to do." Nilkanth picked up his staff and gourd and quietly left to continue with his pilgrimage.

Nilkanth was deeply detached from the material riches and positions of the world. He was selfless and thus sacrificed many things for our liberation. From his encounter with the lion it is evident that he was the all-controller. The same Nilkanth who tamed the wild lion, also, as Bhagwan Swaminarayan, transformed and tamed dangerous criminals like Joban Pagi, Shardul Khasiyo and others into peaceful persons.



6. TWO UNIQUE BLESSINGS

On 28 October 1800, Ramanand Swami gave the sadhu **diksha** to Nilkanth Varni in **Piplana** and named him Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni. He was 19 years old. Thereafter Ramanand Swami took him along wherever he travelled.

After twelve months Ramanand Swami thought, "Who should succeed me as the head of the Fellowship?" His senior-most sadhu, Muktanand Swami, and others said, "Sahajanand Swami should be appointed as the head." That was also Ramanand Swami's wish.

But there was one person who refused. Who could he be? Sahajanand Swami himself.

He replied with a firm "No!" Everyone was surprised and asked, "How could you reject such an offer?" Sahajanand Swami humbly replied to Ramanand Swami, "I am not suitable to become the head. I prefer the solitude of the forest instead of the company of crowds. So, bless

me and allow me to go to the forest!" Ramanand Swami asked, "You will not obey the commands of your guru?" Sahajanand Swami said, "I will obey them with absolute loyalty!" Then Ramanand Swami stated, "Understand this to be the guru's command and become the head."

Now, there was no alternative but to accept the guru's word. Sahajanand Swami agreed and showed that the guru's word should always be obeyed by the disciple.

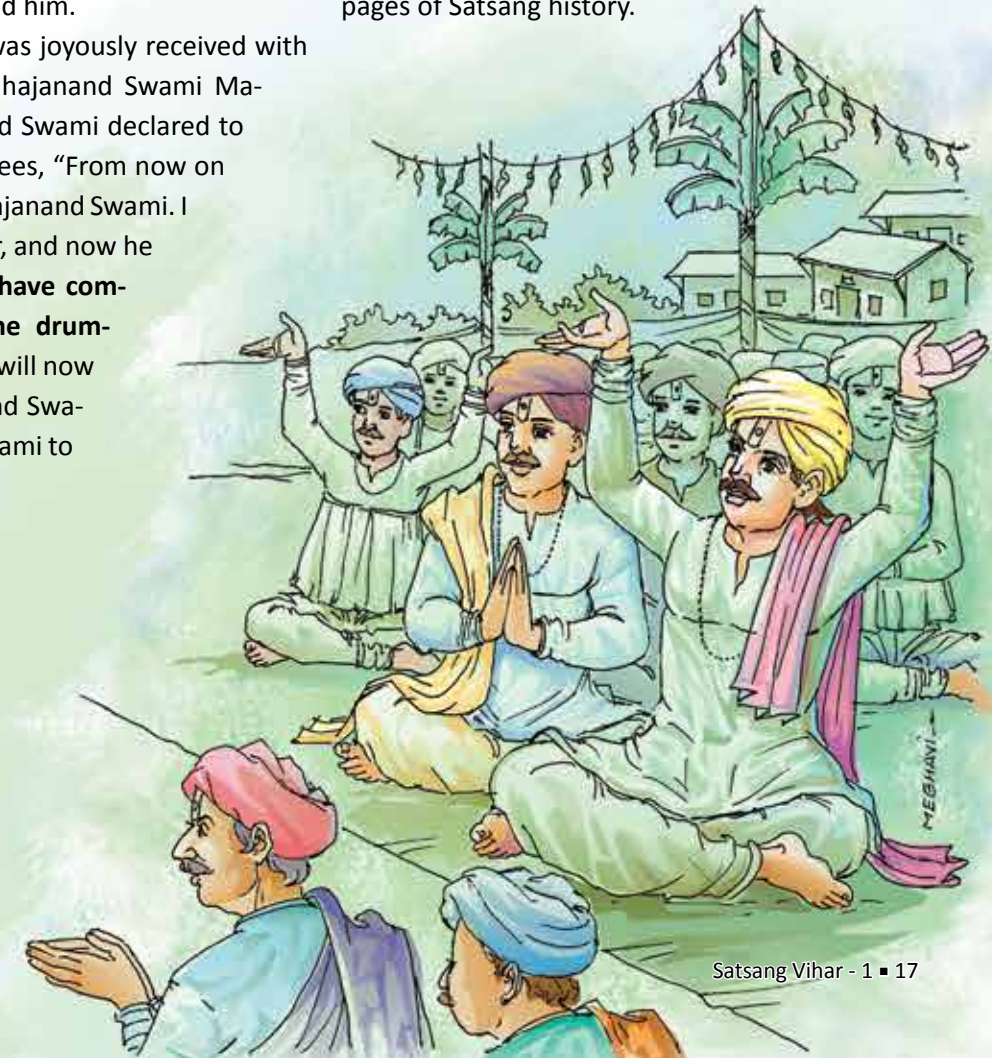
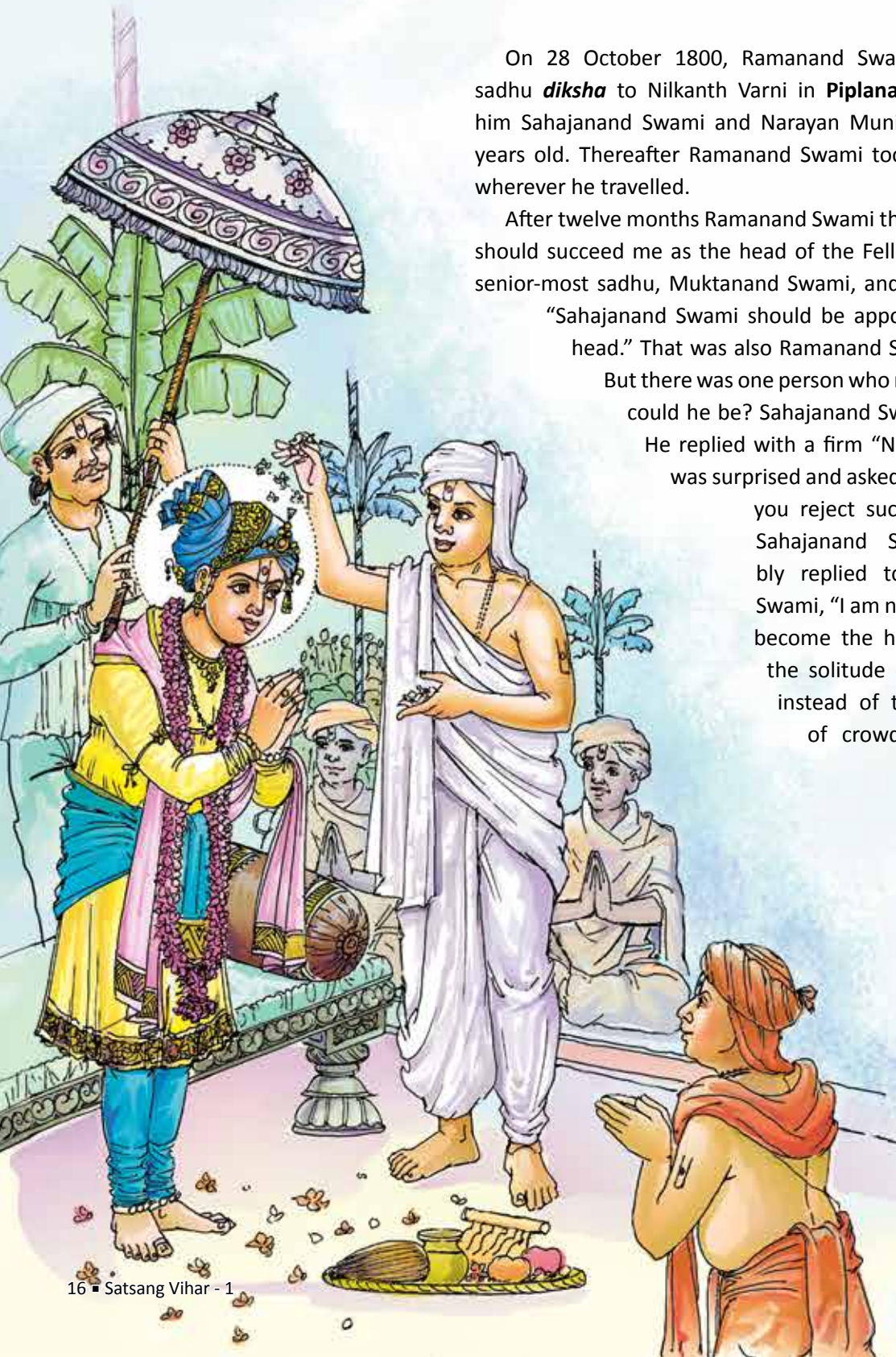
The ceremony of appointing a new successor is called **pattabhishek**. It was decided to hold this ceremony for Sahajanand Swami in **Jetpur**.

Finally the historic day arrived. **Ramanand Swami took the hand of Sahajanand Swami**, who was **20 years old**, and made him **sit on his seat**. Then he applied a vermilion mark on his forehead and garlanded him.

The appointment was joyously received with calls of jubilation, "Sahajanand Swami Maharaj *ni jai*." Ramanand Swami declared to the assembly of devotees, "From now on obey the words of Sahajanand Swami. I came as his announcer, and now he is the main person. **I have completed my role as the drum-beater**. The real show will now begin." Then Ramanand Swami told Sahajanand Swami to ask for two blessings.

Sahajanand Swami prayed with folded hands, "The **first boon** I ask is that if your **devotee were to suffer the pain of one scorpion bite** then let him not suffer, but may **I suffer millions of scorpion bites in every pore of my body**. And the **second boon** is that if the **begging bowl is the fate of your devotee** then let it **come to me** instead, but your **devotee should not be miserable due to lack of food and clothing**." Ramanand Swami was pleased and said, "So shall it be!" The entire assembly hall echoed with the chorus of "Sahajanand Swami *ni jai*".

Such was the great, divine personality of Shriji Maharaj! He took the sufferings and miseries of the devotees upon himself. Maharaj's prayer of compassion and deep love for his devotees is unique and famous in the pages of Satsang history.



7. KARMAS AND THEIR FRUITS

At the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan there lived a Brahmin called **Laldas Subo** in the town of **Visnagar**. Subo means an administrator – one who runs a town. He was evil and **opposed Shriji Maharaj openly**. He punished *satsangis* by making them stand in the hot summer sun. Day and night Laldas schemed to catch Swaminarayan and lock him in jail.

In the same town there lived a **Nagar Brahmin** called **Shobharam**. He was the wealthiest and the leading member of his community of Nagar Brahmins. He, too, **hated Shriji Maharaj**. Because of Laldas and Shobharam the devotees of Shriji Maharaj

had to suffer a lot. Shriji Maharaj was aware of this unfriendly and difficult situation in Visnagar.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was performing a grand **yagna** in **Dabhan**. At that time several Brahmins from Visnagar came to the *yagna*. Later, people generously praised the *yagna* performed by Shriji Maharaj. When Shobharam came to know of this he did not like it and uttered bitter words, “Someone should have jumped to his death into the *yagna kund*. Then Swaminarayan would have been known as one who kills during *yagnas*.” The other Brahmins gently checked him, “Do not say such bad things because Swaminarayan is God. By talking ill of him you will incur sin upon yourself.”

These words angered **Shobharam**. He **shouted**, “If Swaminarayan is really God then may I **turn blind in eight days**.” A devotee tried to stop him from making such an improper wish. He asked, “Why do you wish God to make you blind? Ask for

something that will be of use to you.” But Shobharam remained stubborn in his stupid demand. And so, instead of eight days he became **blind in four days!**

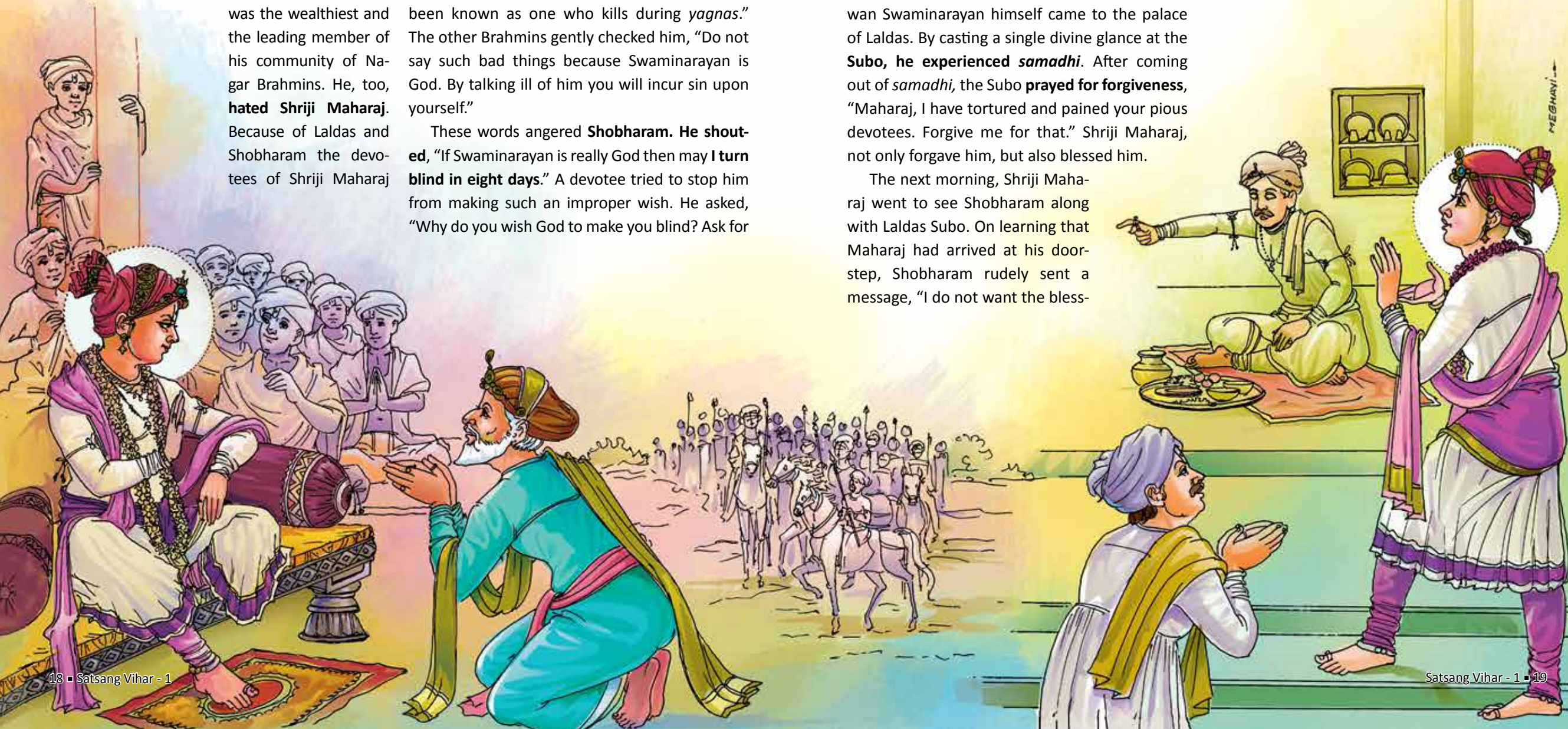
On the other hand, **Laldas made plans** to capture Shriji Maharaj. He ordered his **Arab officer** and **30 soldiers** to seize Maharaj. But the Arab officer, on seeing Bhagwan Swaminarayan, **experienced *samadhi* (divine trance)** and declared, “You are God incarnate. Forgive me.”

The Arab official then returned to his head, Laldas Subo, and described his divine experience. No sooner had he finished his narration, Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself came to the palace of Laldas. By casting a single divine glance at the **Subo**, he **experienced *samadhi***. After coming out of *samadhi*, the Subo **prayed for forgiveness**, “Maharaj, I have tortured and pained your pious devotees. Forgive me for that.” Shriji Maharaj, not only forgave him, but also blessed him.

The next morning, Shriji Maharaj went to see Shobharam along with Laldas Subo. On learning that Maharaj had arrived at his doorstep, Shobharam rudely sent a message, “I do not want the bless-

ings of Shriji Maharaj. Let him return the way he came.” Shriji Maharaj left the premises immediately and blessed him for a change of heart.

God gives us the fruits of our actions. Laldas Subo changed his actions and so he became blessed and happy. Whereas Shobharam became miserable because of his own hateful attitude for Maharaj. If you toss flowers at the sun you will be blessed with a shower of flowers, but if you throw dust at it your eyes will be filled with sand. It is the same way with God.



8. SAHAJANAND IS LIKE THE RISING SUN

Once, Shriji Maharaj celebrated the **Fuldol** festival in the village of **Panchala**. He played **ras** (traditional stick-dance) with the sadhus. Everyone was overjoyed by the celebration. Thereafter, the whole village was invited for a feast. People from neighbouring villages also came in good numbers. The food item served was called **shelan**. It is a special dish in the Kathiawad region containing ghee, gur and boiled rice.

Shriji Maharaj asked the host, “Did you feed everyone?”

The host replied, “Yes.”

At that time Shriji Maharaj saw some poor people on the other side of the river. Pointing to them, Maharaj asked, “Did those people eat?”

“Maharaj, they are **low-born people**. They kill goats, hens and rabbits for food. Why feed such **sinners**?” someone replied.

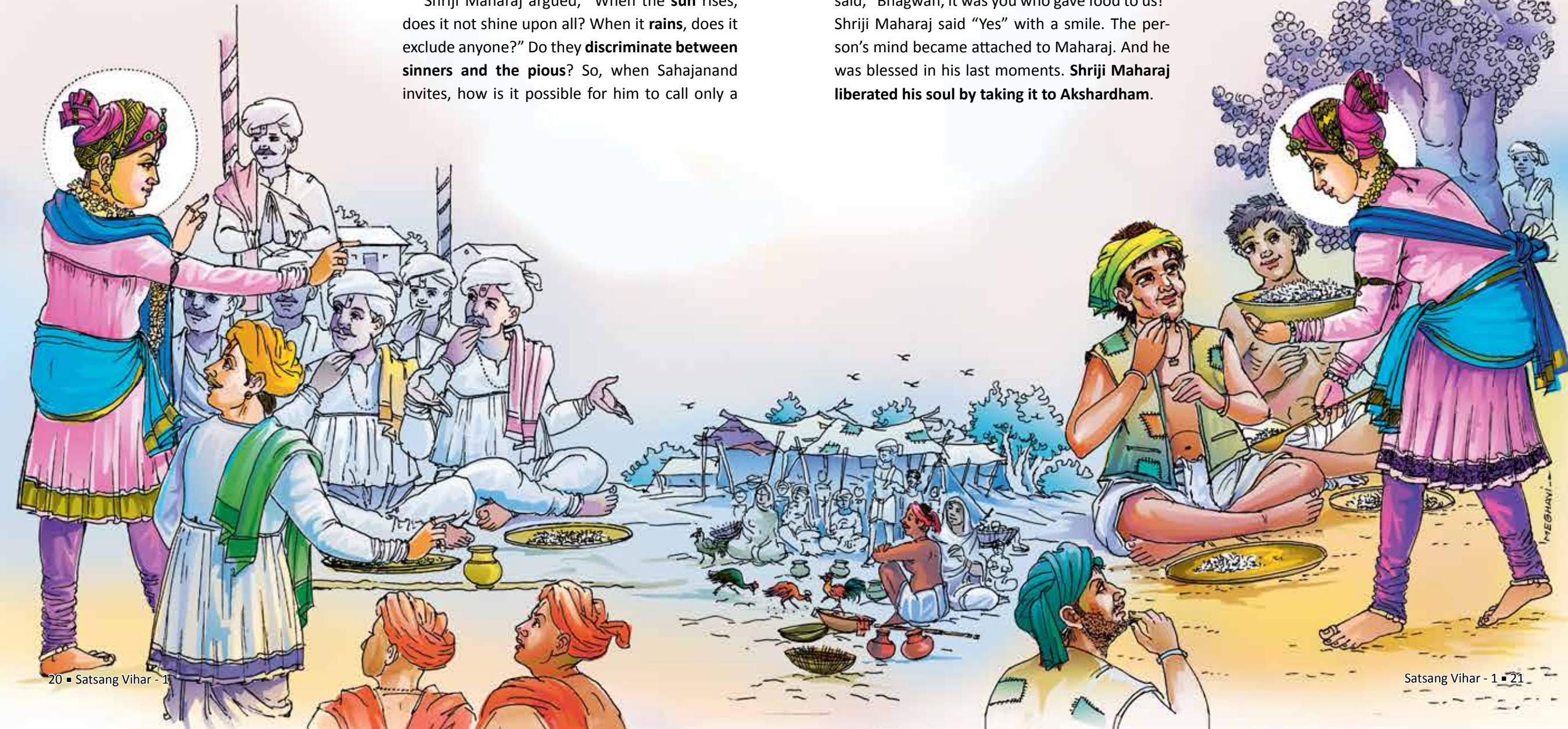
Shriji Maharaj argued, “When the **sun** rises, does it not shine upon all? When it **rains**, does it exclude anyone?” Do they **discriminate between sinners and the pious**? So, when Sahajanand invites, how is it possible for him to call only a

few? Call those people and serve them with love. **I wish to liberate all.**”

Immediately several devotees rushed to the river bank and called the poor folks. **Shriji Maharaj personally served them shelan. Many of them** were so touched by the hospitality that they **treasured the murti (form) of Shriji Maharaj in their hearts.**

Then, several years later, something amazing happened. **One of those poor persons was about to die.** He **recalled the murti** of Shriji Maharaj. And Maharaj appeared to him. The man said, “Bhagwan, it was you who gave food to us!” Shriji Maharaj said “Yes” with a smile. The person’s mind became attached to Maharaj. And he was blessed in his last moments. **Shriji Maharaj liberated his soul by taking it to Akshardham.**

Shriji Maharaj is the liberator of all. He liberates even sinners. Like the sun, he illumines the lives of all. Like the rains, he washes away the miseries of all. The supreme Bhagwan is the divine Mother and Father of everyone. For Him all are equal. When one gives up one’s bad habits and sins, one becomes a vessel of His divine grace.



9. SHRI HARI IS SUPREME

Agatrai is a small village near Junagadh in Gujarat. A devotee named **Parvatbhai** lived there. In spite of being a family man he was not interested or attached to the material world.

One day, while he was **ploughing his field** a **thought struck** him, “When Bhagwan appeared

in his **Varah avatar**, **how did he look?**” Then in a flash, he saw the Varah avatar in the sky. A few moments later he had the **darshan** of Kurma avatar, and then, one by one, of Nrusinh, Vaman, Ram, Krishna, Buddha – in fact **he saw all the 24 avatars**.

Parvatbhai was amazed and thought, “What is happening?” But Shriji Maharaj, through his all-knowing powers, realized his wish to see the Varah avatar. Then Maharaj also thought, “Today he has desired to see the Varah avatar. Tomorrow, he will wish to see the other avatars. So I might as well show him all the avatars of God.” In this way Shriji Maharaj fulfilled the wish of Parvatbhai.

Then a thought crossed Parvatbhai’s mind, “Who is the cause of the 24 avatars?” Instantly, Shriji Maharaj appeared before him. **All the 24 avatars appeared in the divine light radiating from Shriji Maharaj. Then all the avatars merged into Maharaj’s form.**

Parvatbhai became overjoyed and exclaimed, “Oh, look at the amazing divine powers of Shriji Maharaj!”

Parvatbhai realized: Only one who is supreme can absorb the avatars of God in himself. **Shriji Maharaj is the supreme Bhagwan.**

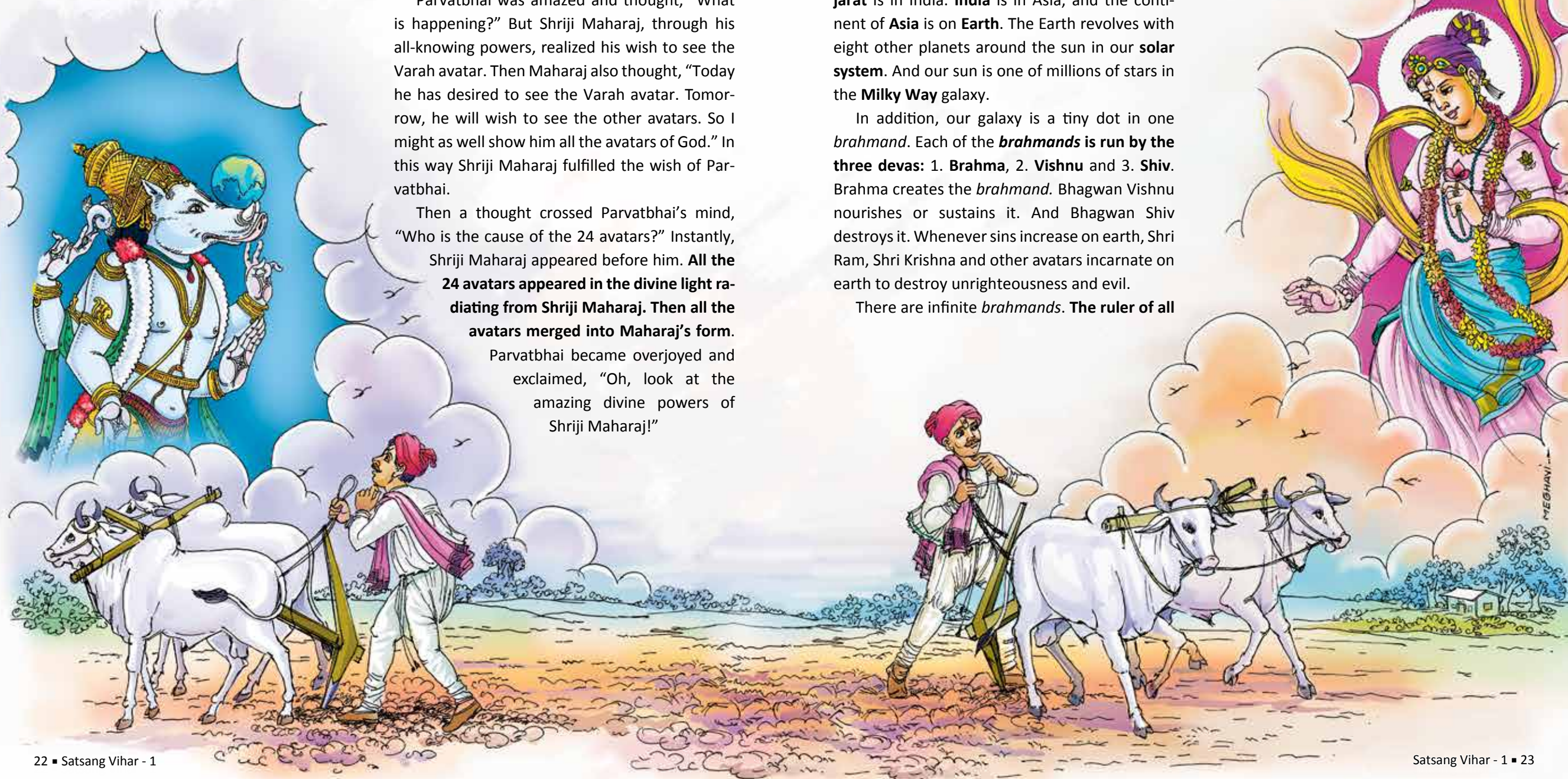
■ GOD’S SUPREMACY ACCORDING TO THE HINDU SHASTRAS

Just imagine that a satsang *bal sabha* is going on in the suburb of **Shahibaug** in Ahmedabad. Now let us think ahead. Shahibaug is a part of **Ahmedabad**. Ahmedabad is in Gujarat, and **Gujarat** is in India. **India** is in Asia, and the continent of **Asia** is on **Earth**. The Earth revolves with eight other planets around the sun in our **solar system**. And our sun is one of millions of stars in the **Milky Way** galaxy.

In addition, our galaxy is a tiny dot in one *brahmand*. Each of the *brahmands* is run by the **three devas**: 1. **Brahma**, 2. **Vishnu** and 3. **Shiv**. Brahma creates the *brahmand*. Bhagwan Vishnu nourishes or sustains it. And Bhagwan Shiv destroys it. Whenever sins increase on earth, Shri Ram, Shri Krishna and other avatars incarnate on earth to destroy unrighteousness and evil.

There are infinite *brahmands*. **The ruler of all**

these *brahmands* is Parabrahman, Paramatma or supreme Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj. The Brahma of our *brahmand* prayed for billions of human years (50 years and 1½ *pahors* of Brahma’s time) to the Supreme Bhagwan. It was only then that Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj came on earth.



10. SHRI HARI FULFILS LADUDANJI'S WISHES

His name was **Ladudanji**, born in the dusty **village of Khan** in the Shirohi district of Rajasthan. He was a *charan* (bard). Composing and singing poetry came as second nature to him. After graduating in Bhuj, his expertise in poetry and other arts was recognized by the royals of Bhuj, Dhrangadhra, Jamnagar, Dwarka, Junagadh and other places. He was hailed as the best poet and honoured with titles like Rajkaviratna, Pingal Vidyacharya, Maha Mahopadhyaya, **Mahakavishvar**, Shatavdhani and many more.

Once, Ladudanji visited **Bhavnagar**. He came to the royal court of **King Vajesinh**. There, he brilliantly sang verses in praise of the King. The King and his courtiers were impressed by his performance. Instantly, Vajesinh decided to honour him from head to toe with gold ornaments. The **King's goldsmith** was summoned to take measurements of Ladudanji and make the ornaments. On meeting the goldsmith, Ladudanji

was surprised to see a **tilak** of *chandan* and a round **chandlo** of kumkum on his forehead.

The bard asked what it was. **Vajesinh** explained, "That question keeps troubling me, too. A person called **Swaminarayan** has recently come to Gadhada. The Kathis say that he is Bhagwan. But I think he is a **fraud**. If you can go and **test him**, I am sure he will be exposed."

The bard was young, intelligent and famous. With all these qualities, who would not be arrogant and confident! Ladudanji accepted the challenge, and he left for Gadhada. On the way he said to himself, "Today, I shall expose Swaminarayan to be false."

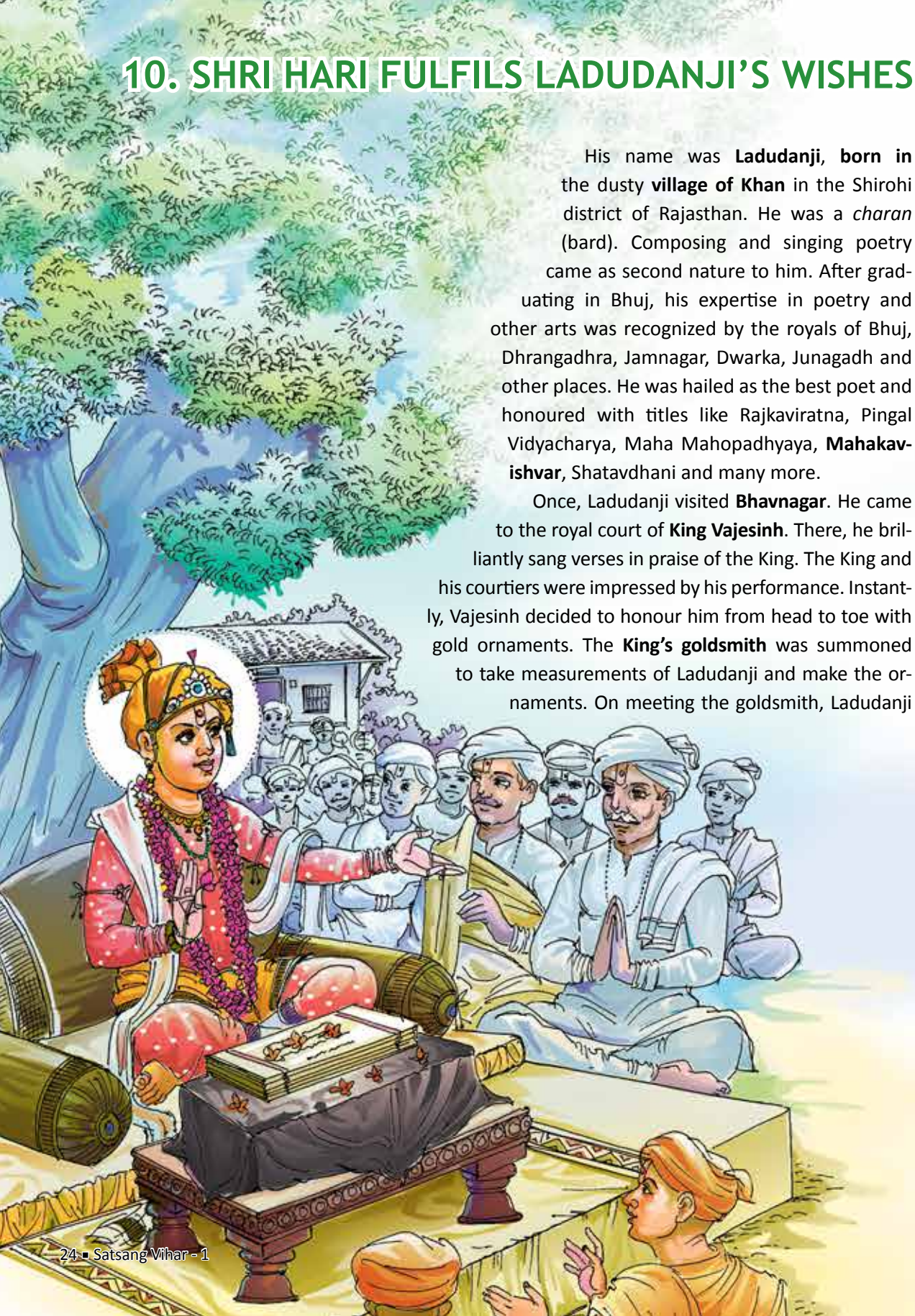
But, something amazing started to happen to Ladudanji as he came nearer to Gadhada. His mind became entangled in doubt, "Supposing if Swaminarayan is truly God!" Then the next thought that came to him was how to decide whether he was God. So, he made **four wishes**: "If Swaminarayan is God then: 1. May he **call me by my name**, 2. May he **remove the garland of roses from his neck and place it around mine**, 3. May he **reveal to me the 16 holy marks on his feet** and 4. May the **Shrimad Bhagavat** shastra be covered in **black cloth** and **be read** before an assembly."

The royal bard beamed with a sly smile because he knew that his four wishes were impossible to fulfil. When Ladudanji entered the village of Gadhada he experienced peace in his heart. Soon, he entered the courtyard of Dada Khachar. An assembly was in progress beneath the neem tree. Ladudanji observed that the Shrimad Bhagavat, covered in black cloth, was being read. Maharaj was wearing a rose garland around his neck. Before the poet could understand what he was seeing, Shriji Maharaj called him by name, "Come Ladudanji!" Then Maharaj introduced him to the assembly, giving details of his achievements and where he had come from. After that Maharaj put

the rose garland around Ladudanji's neck. Maharaj then stretched his feet and showed to him the 16 holy marks. **Thus, in no time, Maharaj fulfilled all the four wishes of Ladudanji. He felt happy and convinced that Sahajanand Swami was God.** He broke out singing, "*Ājni ghadi re dhanya ājni ghadi, me nirkhyā Sahajānand dhanya ājni ghadi.*" ("This moment is most fortunate and precious because I have seen Sahajanand Swami.")

The flood-gates of his heart opened up, gushing with love and respect for Shriji Maharaj. Like a salt-doll that dissolves while measuring the depths of an ocean, Ladudanji, too, became lost in Maharaj's divinity. He thus renounced all his riches and honours to become a **sadhu**. He was named **Shrirangdas Swami**. Later, he came to be known as **Brahmanand Swami**.

How glorious and great Shriji Maharaj is! He is all-knowing – aware of what everyone is thinking and doing!



11. GOD'S ACTIONS HAVE A PURPOSE

Bhagwan Swaminarayan is described by his devotees as: 1. Supreme, 2. Having a divine form, 3. The all-doer and 4. Always present on earth.

On many occasions he has shown these four aspects of his divine personality. In this chapter we

shall see a few incidents about his all-doership.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was in **Gadhpur**. An assembly was in session beneath the neem tree in Dada Khachar's *darbar*. It was summertime. Suddenly, a **dry twig** fell from the tree and landed in the lap of Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj took it in his hands and **broke it into two**. Muktanand Swami noticed this and asked, "Maharaj, what did you do by breaking the twig?" Shriji Maharaj replied, "**I destroyed one *brahmand* and created another.**"

Shriji Maharaj was seated in an assembly in **Gadhada** with his eyes closed. Suddenly, he opened them and hurriedly **looked from left to right**.

Muktanand Swami asked, "Maharaj, what did you do?" Shriji Maharaj answered, "Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh of one *brahmand* were not getting on well with its people. So, I **exchanged** them with the **Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh** of another *brahmand*." Everyone was amazed by Shriji Maharaj's divine powers.

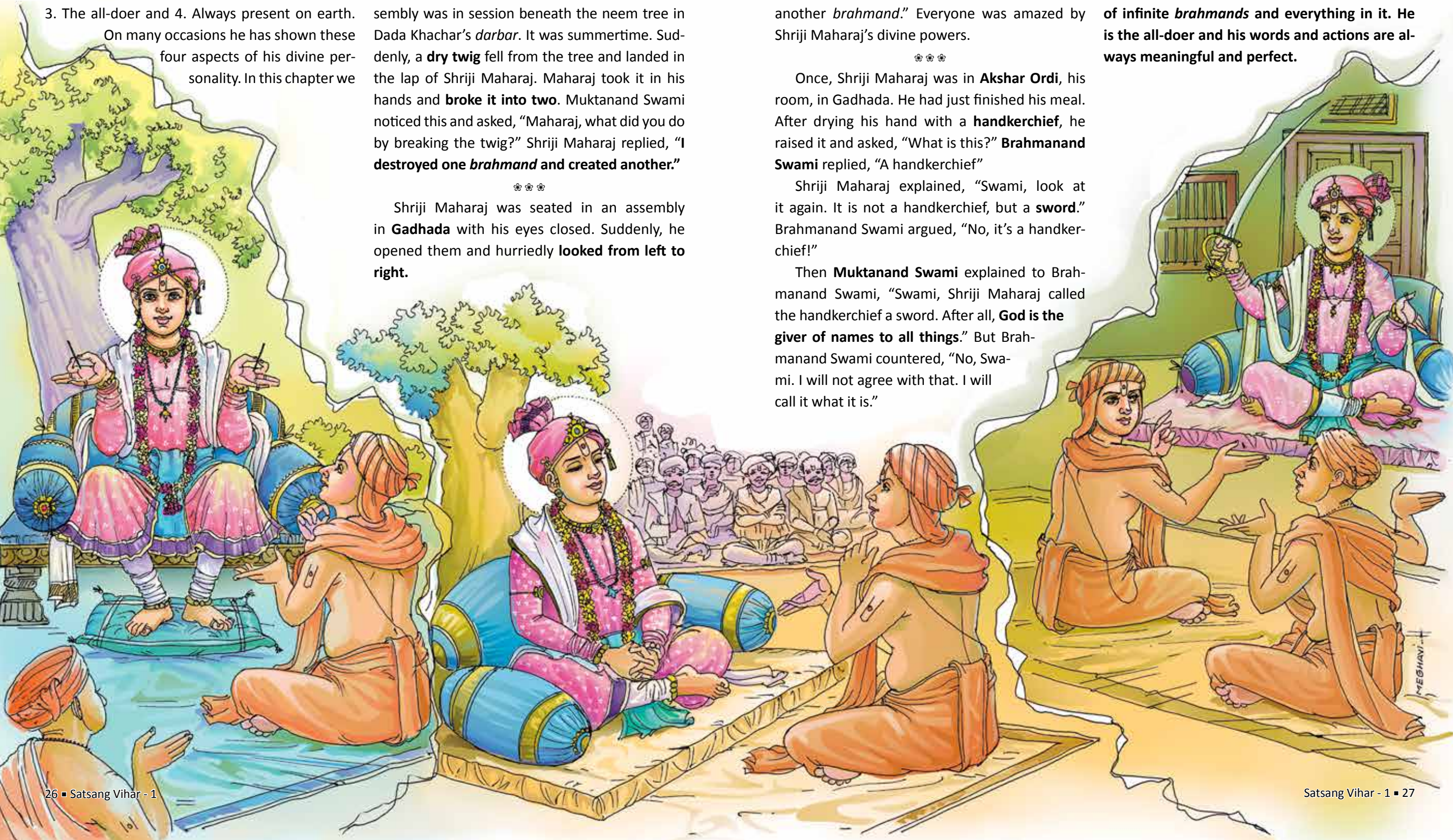
Once, Shriji Maharaj was in **Akshar Ordi**, his room, in Gadhadra. He had just finished his meal. After drying his hand with a **handkerchief**, he raised it and asked, "What is this?" **Brahmanand Swami** replied, "A handkerchief"

Shriji Maharaj explained, "Swami, look at it again. It is not a handkerchief, but a **sword**." Brahmanand Swami argued, "No, it's a handkerchief!"

Then **Muktanand Swami** explained to Brahmanand Swami, "Swami, Shriji Maharaj called the handkerchief a sword. After all, **God is the giver of names to all things**." But Brahmanand Swami countered, "No, Swami. I will not agree with that. I will call it what it is."

On hearing Brahmanand Swami's words **Shriji Maharaj upturned the handkerchief**. To the surprise of all they **saw a sword** instead of the handkerchief.

Dear children, **Shriji Maharaj is the creator of infinite *brahmands* and everything in it. He is the all-doer and his words and actions are always meaningful and perfect.**



12. EVER-PRESENT THROUGH THE GUNATIT SANT

A few days before **Shriji Maharaj** was to end his stay on earth he called his senior sadhus and devotees. He declared, “**Now my work is over.** I will soon return to my divine abode, Akshardham.”

News spread rapidly to the villages and towns of Gujarat that Shriji Maharaj was going to return to Akshardham shortly. So, devotees began to flock to Gadha-

da. Maharaj had given up eating and drinking water altogether. At that time Gunatitanand Swami was in Junagadh. Shriji Maharaj remembered him and said, “Call him here!”

Gunatitanand Swami hurriedly walked all the way to Gadhada. He did not even rest anywhere along the way. On reaching Gadhada he went straight to Shriji Maharaj for darshan. Maharaj, despite his final illness, embraced him lovingly. Maharaj talked to him with ease and sang, “*Mithā vhālā kem visaru māru tamthi bāndhāl tan ho.*” (“How can I forget one who is sweet and dear to me, and to whom I am bound!”)

A sadhu said, “Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami will not be able to bear your departure. It would be better to send him away elsewhere.” Shriji Maharaj smiled and replied, “Where can I send him? Wherever I am, he is always there. And wherever he is, I am always there. I am eternally bound to him with love. **He is my divine abode, Akshardham.**”

On 1 June 1830 Shriji Maharaj gave up his physical body. Everyone was overcome with deep grief. Gunatitanand Swami was also deeply saddened.

A few days later, Gunatitanand Swami was on his way to answer **nature’s call** at **Lakshmi Vadi** in Gadhada. There, he saw a channel of water flowing with fresh **green grass on both sides.** Instantly, a thought crossed his mind, “Water is the source of life for this green grass. I am like this green grass. Shriji Maharaj was my source of life. Now that he has gone, how will I survive?” **The thought pained him** a great deal. At once Swami **fainted** and fell down.

No sooner had this happened, a miracle took place. **Shriji Maharaj appeared** to Swami in his divine form. He took his hand and raising him from the ground said, “**Where have I gone! I forever reside in you,** reside in you, reside in you.”

This incident shows that Shriji Maharaj is always present on earth through Aksharbrahman or the Gunatit Sant.

Nishkulanand Swami has written, “Bandh kidhā bijā bāranā re, veheti kidhi askharvāt Purushottam pragati re.” (“All other doors [to

moksha] are closed, but the road to it [**moksha]** is open through Akshar.”) **Aksharvāt** means the Gunatit guru **parampara.** Shriji Maharaj is ever-present on earth through the Gunatit Sant. Today he is present through Mahant Swami Maharaj.



13. CHILDHOOD OF GUNATITANAND SWAMI

Radha is the main devotee of Bhagwan Krishna. Sita is the principal devotee of Bhagwan Ram. Likewise, Gunatitanand Swami is the foremost devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Shriji Maharaj is Parabrahman and Gunatitan-

and Swami is Aksharbrahman. So, **Brahman and Parabrahman** or Swami and Narayan or Akshar and Purushottam, are the **eternal pair** of Bhakta and Bhagwan in the **Swaminarayan Sampradaya**.

Gunatitanand Swami, who is Akshar or

Brahman, was born on 17 October 1785 (V.S. 1841, Aso *sud* 15) in **Bhadra**, Jamnagar district. His **father's** name was **Bholanath Sharma** and his **mother** was called **Sakarba**. As a child he was called Mulji. He was the incarnation of Mul Akshar, Akshardham, Aksharbrahman or Gunatit.

Mulji was a miraculous child. One day he asked Sakarba, "Mother, **give me milk** to drink." **Sakarba** replied, "Son, **let me first offer it to Thakorji and then I'll give it to you.**"

Mulji replied, "Mother, God eternally resides in me. **He eats and drinks with me.** He also sleeps with me and talks with me." Sakarba was surprised to hear such words from her little child and felt such words were usually uttered by great yogis. **She gave the bowl of milk to Mulji.** The child drank it. Then Sakarba found **a trace of milk on the lips of Thakorji's murti!** She was amazed and realized the truth in Mulji's words.

All day, Mulji was either engaged in doing bhajan or absorbed in meditation. Once, his father, **Bholanath**, told him, "Son, **one should do bhajan in old age.** At present you should play, eat and have fun."

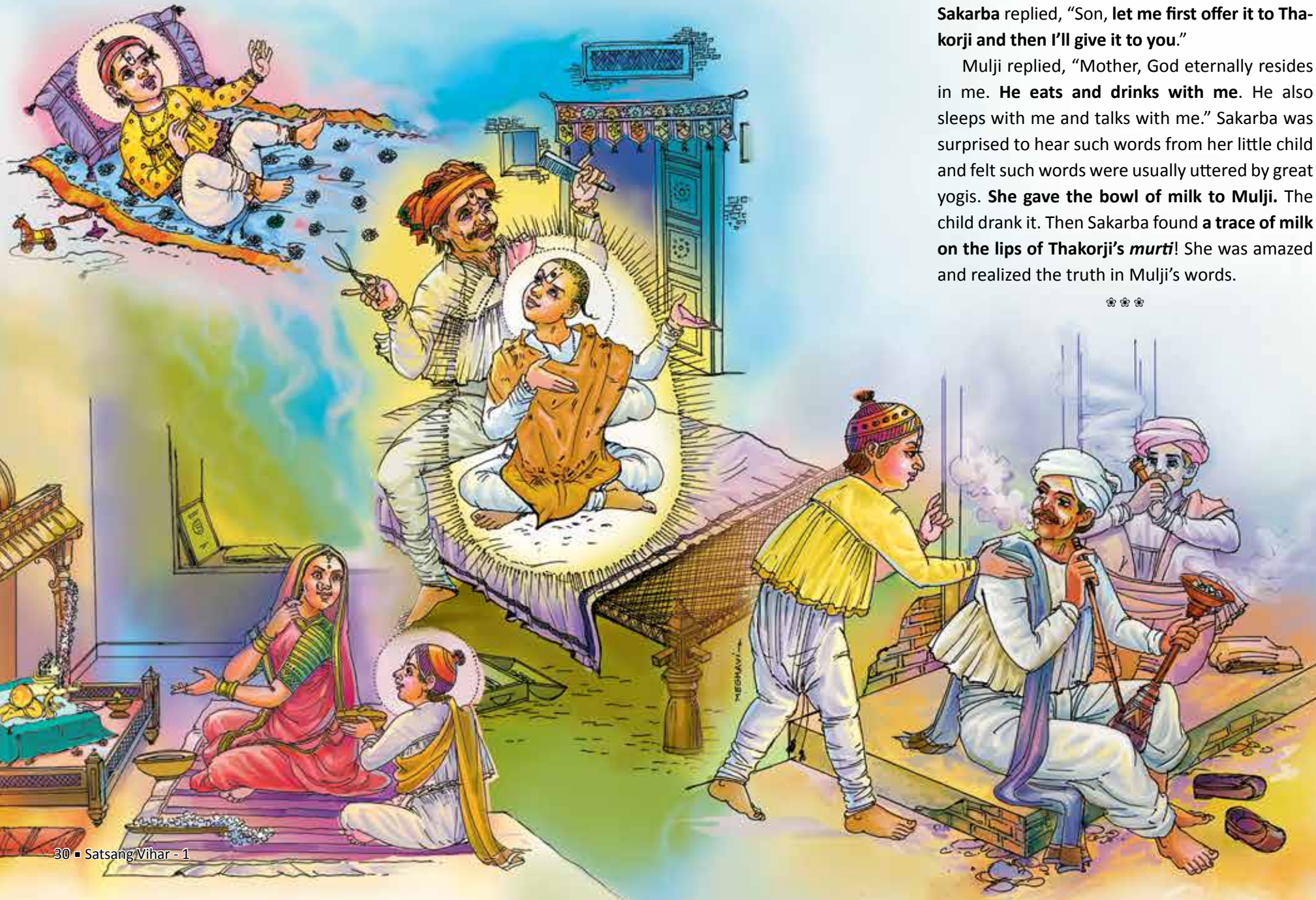
On hearing his father's words, **Mulji went for a stroll in the village.** When he returned home he described to Bholanath what he had seen, "Father, I walked through the village today. All the **senior folks were indulging in gossiping** and addictions. No one was remembering or doing bhajan of God. So, I believe that one should **do bhajan right from childhood.**"

Bholanath was amazed at Mulji's observation. From that day he never stopped his son from doing bhajan and worship.

Once, **Nathu, the barber**, was shaving Mulji's head. He was a devotee of Bhagwan Ram. He praised, "How great was **Bhagwan Ramchandra** that he took all the **citizens of Ayodhya to Vaikunth**, his divine abode." **Mulji** replied, "Nathu, if you wish **I can take all the people of Bhadra to Akshardham!**"

Nathu laughed jokingly. He thought Mulji was just pulling his leg. But then he was stunned at what he saw. A **cool light** came out of Mulji's body and spread all around. Everyone was blinded by the bright light. Soon, Mulji absorbed the light into his body. **Kanoji**, who was nearby, exclaimed, "Nathu, **Mulji is the incarnation of Akshar.**"

Gunatitanand Swami's childhood was inspiring and full of extraordinary incidents. Mulji used to repeatedly tell his mother and friends, "The supreme God has taken birth in north India. I see him always. He will definitely come to our village."



14. DECLARING THE GLORY OF AKSHARBRAHMAN

“Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar and Sahajanand is Parmeshwar.” These words are sung at all BAPS children’s assemblies. They summarize the principle of Akshar Purushottam *upasana* (beliefs and way of worship). The second half of the chant, “Sahajanand is Parmeshwar” was explained and spread in Satsang by Gunatitanand Swami. And the words “**Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar**” were initially revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and later widely spread by Bhagatji Maharaj.

Once, **Gunatitanand Swami** came to **Sarangpur**. The village chief, **Vagha Khachar**, was a *sat-sangi*. He prayed to Swami, “I get terrible dreams about war.” Swami replied, “**Come to Junagadh**.

By Shriji Maharaj’s grace your problem will be solved.”

At Swami’s com-

mand, **Bhagatji Maharaj attended to all the needs of Vagha Khachar** (Bapu). He also **talked about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami** as Mul Akshar. Bapu did not take this too well. In fact he **did not like it** at all. So, he told Bhagatji to stop serving him. But Bapu soon realized that he could not do without a servant. Thus Bhagatji was re-appointed as his attendant.

On arriving at **Junagadh**, Vagha Khachar noticed that all those who were **lovingly attached to Swami were happy and joyful**. Bapu thought, “Why am I not having such joy?” He talked about this to Dama Sheth of Mahuva. **Dama Sheth** replied, “Have faith in Bhagatji Maharaj’s words and **believe Gunatitanand Swami to be Mul Akshar**. Then you, too, will experience the same divine joy.”

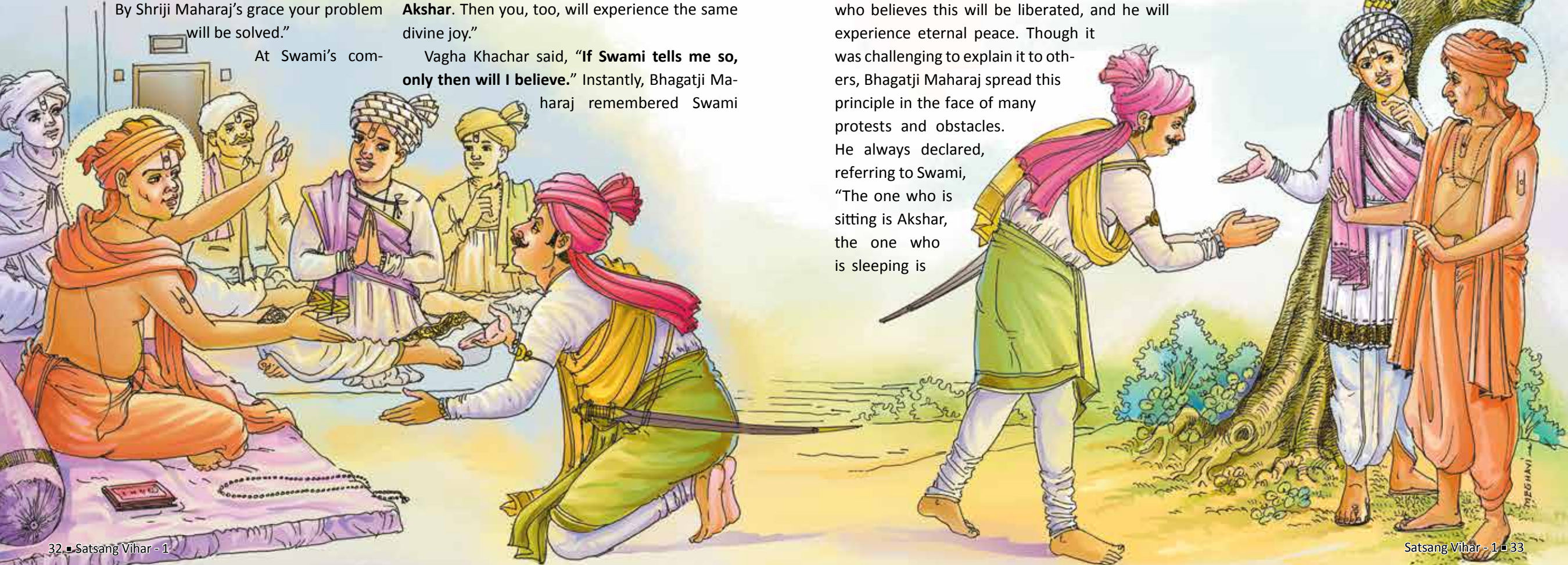
Vagha Khachar said, “**If Swami tells me so, only then will I believe.**” Instantly, Bhagatji Maharaj remembered Swami

and called him to the farm where they all were. At that time Swami was in the assembly hall in the mandir. Immediately he got up and came to the farm. Bhagatji Maharaj said, “Swami, Vagha Khachar wishes to ask you a question.” Swami looked at Bapu and replied, “What Bhagatji says is true.” But Vagha Khachar wanted to hear it from Swami’s mouth, “Are you Akshar?” he asked. **Gunatitanand Swami smiled** and replied, “**Yes.**” Vagha Khachar believed Swami’s words, and he at once **experienced inner peace**. All his material desires and faults dissolved. Even his terrifying dreams vanished and he was blessed with the *niravaran* state (no barriers like walls, wood, metal or distance could stop him from having darshan of Maharaj and Swami).

The belief that ‘**Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar**’ is the essence of the Vedas. A person who believes this will be liberated, and he will experience eternal peace. Though it was challenging to explain it to others, Bhagatji Maharaj spread this principle in the face of many protests and obstacles. He always declared, referring to Swami, “The one who is sitting is Akshar, the one who is sleeping is

Akshar and the one who is walking is Akshar.”

In the end, truth prevailed. Through Bhagatji Maharaj’s spiritual company many *paramhansas*, devotees, and high-ranking well-wishers began believing that “**Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar**”. For centuries to come everyone will remember Bhagatji Maharaj’s contribution in explaining and inspiring this pure *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam.



15. THE FOUNDATION OF BAPS

More than 100 years ago the *murti-pratishtha* (image installation) of the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj was to take place at the **Swaminarayan Mandir in Rampura, Surat**. Bhagatji Maharaj had come for the occasion. The 18-year-old **Yagnapurushdas** (Shastriji Maharaj) was busy with the *pratishtha* preparations. One day, he saw **Bhagatji Maharaj** in the assembly hall. He was **giving spiritual discourses to the devotees and sewing a cloth** – both at the same time. This amazed Yagnapurushdas immensely.

Bhagatji Maharaj also saw this young sadhu. He asked him, “**Have you developed absolute**

faith in Swaminarayan?” Yagnapurushdas replied, “I have firmly understood **Shriji Maharaj to be the supreme Bhagwan**.” Bhagatji stated, “You have faith only in Narayan. That means you have only **50 per cent faith**. As long as you do not understand and believe that Swami, that is, **Gunatanand Swami, is Akshar**, you have not achieved **full faith** in Swaminarayan.”

On hearing these words, Yagnapurushdas became lost in deep thought. He asked himself whether Bhagatji’s words were true or not. He wanted to hear what his **guru, Vignananand Swami**, had to say on this mat-

ter. His guru was a great **scholar in scriptural knowledge** and he had taken the **paramhansa diksha** from **Shriji Maharaj**. The guru agreed to what Bhagatji had told him. From that time on-

wards **Bhagatji Maharaj became his guru**, because he had clarified the true *upasana* of Swami and Narayan and Akshar and Purushottam.

Yagnapurushdas **Swami acquired the scriptural knowledge of the Vedas**, Upanishads and Gita through his studies in Sanskrit. He also **met many paramhansas and devotees**, all of whom verified the principle of Akshar and Purushottam. As a result Shastriji Maharaj **decided** that when the name of their mandirs was Swaminarayan, the mantra they chanted was Swaminarayan, and the sadhus were also known as Swaminarayan sadhus, therefore **the murtis of Swami and Narayan should also be consecrated in the main (middle) shrine of Swaminarayan Mandirs**.



But there were also some **who opposed** the principle of Swami and Narayan or Akshar and Purushottam. So they tried to **harass and get rid of** Shastriji Maharaj. They **poisoned his food (khichdi)** but Shastriji Maharaj digested the poison.

His opponents even planned to **throw him in a fire of logs**. But the devotees foiled their attempt.

In spite of these attempts on his life, Shastriji Maharaj did not want to leave the Vartal mandir. However, at the word of **Krishnaji Ada**, who stated the command of the **Shikshapatri** that **one should not stay where one’s life is in danger**, Shastriji Maharaj agreed to leave.

With only **five sadhus and a handful of devotees** Shastriji Maharaj **prayed** before the **murti of Harikrishna Maharaj** in Vartal, “O Maharaj, I do not want to leave and separate, but it is your wish. I am leaving to spread your glory and also that of Gunatanand Swami. May you **be with us forever**.”

Shastriji Maharaj thus departed from Vartal and built the first mandir in Bochasan in 1907. This milestone event saw the establishment of BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam



Swaminarayan Sanstha).

Shastriji Maharaj never opposed or was ever hostile towards the Vartal Mandir, and its sadhus and devotees. Thus, **BAPS was established on the foundations of our eternal Vedic principle and saintly virtues**.

16. YOGIJI MAHARAJ: HIS LIFE AND WORK



‘**Bhavan’s Journal**’ is a **magazine** published from **Mumbai**. Several decades ago, it carried a series of articles on the experiences of great spiritual personalities under the heading ‘**How God Came into My Life**’. Every issue covered **different spiritual heads, revealing how they came to realize God**.

Yogiji Maharaj was asked, “Tell us about your experience of God’s darshan so that we can send it to the magazine.” Instantaneously, Yogiji Maharaj replied, “**I have eternal darshan of God.**”

In this brief introduction to Yogiji Maharaj

we find that he was a God-realized sadhu who was deeply attached to his guru. He was **always in spiritual joy**. He was an idol of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya*, bhakti, *seva*, austerity, tolerance and glory for all. He was **an ideal sadhu**. He never saw or thought of others’ faults. He never got angry with anyone. And he **never took any occasion to be painful** or miserable.

Dear children, the **Bal Mandal was founded** by Yogiji Maharaj. Let us briefly learn about his life and work.

■ CHILDHOOD

- **Childhood Name:** Jhinabhai.
- **Date of Birth:** 23 May 1892 (Samvat 1948, Vaishakh vad 12).
- **Birthplace:** Dhari (District Amreli, Gujarat).
- **Mother’s Name:** Puriba.
- **Father’s Name:** Devchandbhai.

■ MAIN EVENTS OF LIFE

- 1892: Birth.
- 1908: Renounced home (at 16 years).
- 1908: *Parshad diksha* in Junagadh and named **Jhina Bhagat**.
- 1911: **Bhagavati diksha** (saffron *diksha*) given by Acharya Shri Patiprasadji Maharaj in Vartal and named **Sadhu Jnanjivandas**.
- 1911: Left Junagadh Mandir to join Shastriji Maharaj.
- 1934: Appointed as Mahant of Gondal Mandir.
- 1951: After Shastriji Maharaj’s departure he became guru.
- 1955, 1960 and 1970: **Three**

Satsang tours to Africa and England.

- 1971: Yogiji Maharaj left his mortal body in Mumbai.

■ WORKS

1. Initiated more than 100 youths as sadhus.
2. **Founded the Children (Bal), Youth (Yuvak) and Satsang Mandals.**
3. Started ‘Swaminarayan Patrika’.
4. Established **Satsang abroad**.
5. Consecrated two *shikharbaddh* mandirs

(Ahmedabad and Bhadra) and 54 *hari* mandirs.

6. Started a *gurukul* in Gondal, a youth hostel in Vidyanagar, **shibirs** (spiritual camps), music and Sanskrit *pathshalas* and **adhiveshans** (*mukhpath*, speech, kirtan and other competitions).
7. Conducted countless *parayans* (week-long discourses), made thousands of home visits (*padhramnis*), wrote innumerable letters, made pilgrimage tours and performed many grand *yagnas*.

■ HEARTFELT MESSAGES AND TEACHINGS

1. **May God do good to all. Worship God.**
2. There is no happiness without having harmony (*samp*), friendship (*suhрудay bhav*) and unity (*ekta*).
3. To become good one should **see good** in others. Do not look at others’ faults because it is like taking poison.
4. To have **nirdosh buddhi** (purity) for the guru is bhakti.
5. Speak the truth, speak courteously and for the benefit of all. Use your speech (preciously) like milk and ghee.
6. Learn to make do with things in any and whatever situations. **Learn to tolerate.**
7. **Obey the *niyams* fully** and strictly.

■ OPINIONS

1. “**O, there is no sadhu like Jogi in infinite brahmands.**”

- **Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj**

2. “He [Yogiji Maharaj] was the living mass of what is experienced in the Upanishads.”

- Pujya Swami Chinmayanand
(Chinmaya Mission)

17. ALL ARE PRESENT IN SWAMI BAPA



Bhagvatsingh was a **Punjabi bhagat**, who lived in a village near Amritsar, Punjab. He **owned a rice-mill** and was very rich. He had a good, happy family. God had blessed him with more than what he could wish for. But still he **thought**, “Now what next? What is the **purpose of human life**? Is it only money? Bungalows? Family? No. Of course not. Till one has not acquired *moksha* in life, then one has failed.”

Now, the question he faced was to seek someone who could give him *moksha*. So, Bhagvatsingh **left home**. He gave up everything – family and riches. He came to **Gujarat** and visited many mandirs and pilgrim places. But his mind was not satisfied. Then he came to **Bhalkatirtha** near Prabhas Patan. Here he experienced inner peace.

Bhagvatsingh was a genuine seeker, so he started his spiritual **sadhana** in Bhalkatirtha by remembering **Bhagwan Shiv**. Each day he would get up very early, have his bath and start chanting ‘Om Namah Shivaya’. He would also ritually pour milk and offer *bilva* leaves on a Shivalinga. Then he would sing verses in praise of Shiv (Shivamahima Stotra). Often, he fasted. All these he did with one single wish: that Shiv may give darshan to him and bless him with *moksha*.

He spent many years in devotion and sadhana. Finally, **Shivji was pleased** and gave him darshan. He asked Bhagvatsingh to ask for a boon. “I have left my home, family, wealth to get *moksha*.” Bhagvatsingh replied. “If you are pleased with me then **bless me with *moksha* only**.” Bhagwan Shiv smiled and said, “If you want *moksha* then go to **Pramukh Swami**. He is the living form of Bhagwan.” Then before he could ask anything else Shivji

disappeared.

Bhagvatsingh was happy with Shivji’s darshan, but he was a bit confused. He had never heard the name of **Pramukh Swami**, who he was and where he could find him. **He started his quest by asking people**. One person said, “Not far from here is a town called Gadhada. Go there and you may find **Pramukh Swami**.” Bhagvatsingh did not delay for a moment and he left for **Gadhada**. On the way he enquired at several places before reaching the river Ghela. There, he saw a glistening white mandir on a hill. He walked up there and did darshan of the deities. On asking the sadhus living there about Swamishri’s whereabouts, they told him that he was scheduled to come there in a few days. Bhagvatsingh felt at peace. He thought, “At long last my search will come to an end. I will meet God.”

A few days later, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Gadhada**. Bhagvatsinghji had personal **darshan** of Swamishri and he was convinced that his ***moksha* was confirmed**. Swamishri told him to stay in Gadhada and do *seva*. Bhagvatsinghji put on the **kanthi** and became a **satsangi**. **He stayed in Gadhada and did *seva* till his last breath in 1986**. Bhagvatsingh’s soul attained *moksha*.

Hundreds of devotees had darshan of their gurus and deities – be they **Ram, Krishna, Shiv, devas** or **devis** – in **Pramukh Swami Maharaj**. The divinity of Hindu **pilgrim places** and sacred **shastras** were also **manifest** in him.

Yes, all are present in the Gunatit Sant. Even today, Bhagwan in present through Mahant Swami Maharaj. One who is blessed and fortunate can recognize God’s form and become qualified for *moksha*.

18. COMPASSIONATE AND KIND

1987. The scene at the village of **Ratanpur**, near **Rajkot**, was heartbreaking. Five thousand **calves** were kept at a cattle sanctuary there. When **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** went there, all the calves started **running after** him. Swami asked the organizer the reason for their behaviour. The official replied, “Swami, because of the drought we have not been able to give them fodder. They **have not had anything to eat** for the last **two to**

three days. So, whoever comes here, they think that the person has brought something to eat. And that is why they are following you.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was greatly pained to hear this. His eyes became wet with tears. After that he came to Gondal. Here, he told

Kothari Swami, “I could not see the plight of the starving calves in Ratanpur who were running behind me. Tell the main sadhu in Rajkot to immediately send trucks of grass for the calves.

“There must be thousands of hungry calves in drought-stricken Gujarat. All of them must be suffering terribly!” Thereafter, Swami Bapa decided to set up **cattle camps**. Such was his compassion for the mute cattle that he said, “I will engage 300 sadhus in their service. I will also tell the devotees to serve them. This is not the time to sit and do nothing. **Look at the sufferings of countless animals. These animals have only people to help them as their last resort.**”

How profound was Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s compassion for everyone. **The BAPS spiritual and social services are a result of his compassion for humanity and all living beings.**

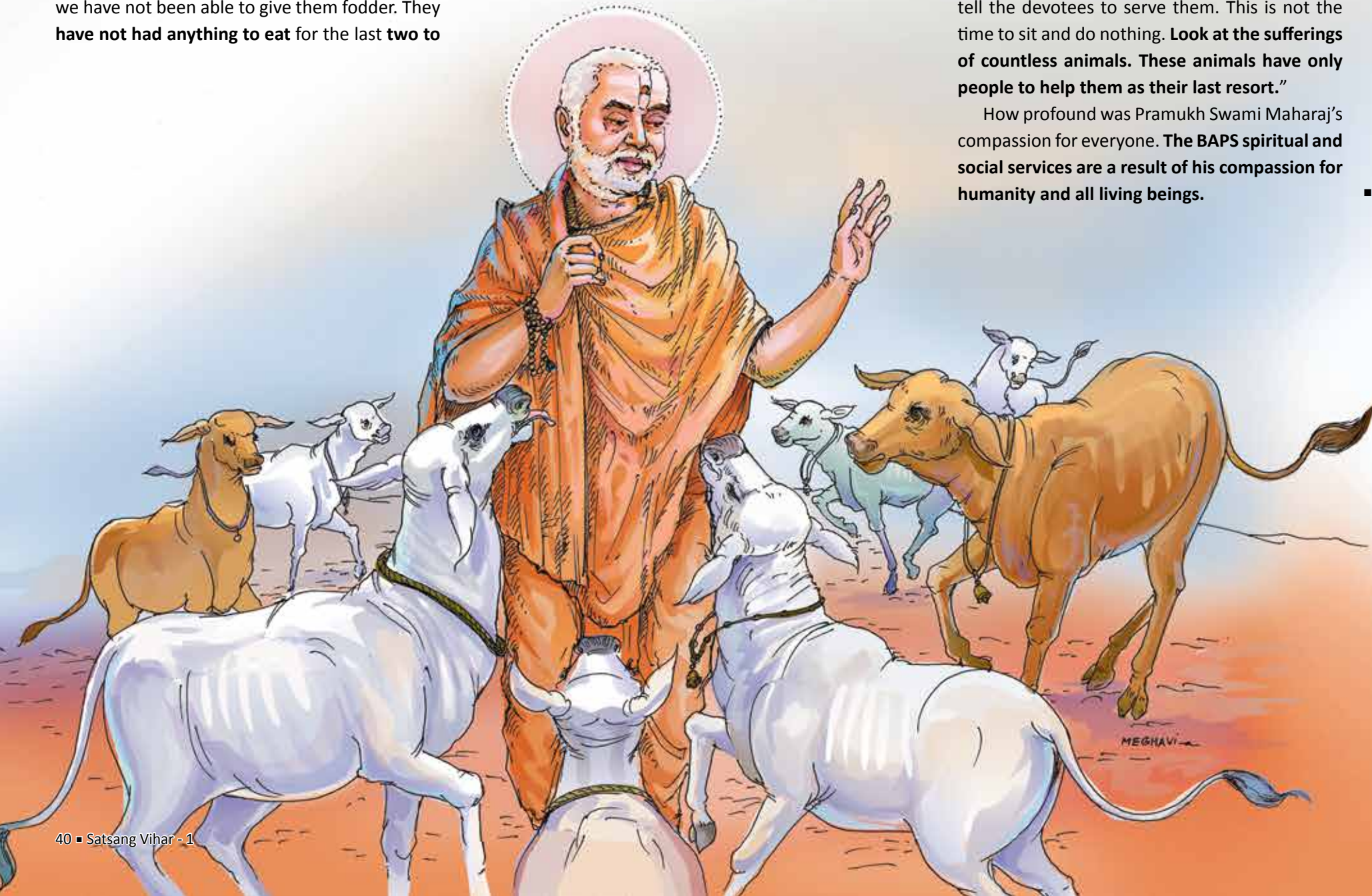
Pramukh Swami Maharaj was truly compassionate. He lived to serve others. It is not possible to repay the debt we owe to such a Sant.

■ SWAMISHRI’S SELFLESS WORKS

- Satsang in 52 countries.
- More than 1,000 **mandirs** and two **Akshardhams**.
- More than 1,000 **sadhus**.
- 3,850 centres around the world
- 16,000 national and international **Satsang assemblies for all ages**, including 6,500 **Children’s weekly sabhas**
- Over one million **devotees around the world**.

■ SANSTHA’S NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

- **Spiritual grooming** through satsang activities of children, youths, seniors and women devotees.
- **Health services** to thousands of patients through hospitals and mobile clinics.
- **Educational services** through schools, hostels and scholarships.
- **Relief work and services** to people affected by drought, floods and hurricanes.
- **Tribal uplift** services.
- Environment awareness, Parental guidance, Teachers’ programmes, Women’s uplift, Anti-addiction drives, Literacy programmes, Anti-dowry projects, Water harvesting programmes and others.
- **Recognized several times by Guinness World Records.** BAPS is an NGO affiliated to the UN.



19. WHO IS SWAMISHRI?

4 January 2017. **Ahmedabad.** A **shibir** was held in the presence of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Youths from America, Europe, Australia and Africa were taking part in the shibir. They all thought of capturing a memory of Swamishri that they would surely remember for the rest of their lives.

One morning, after having darshan at the mandir, Swamishri was making his way back to his residence. As he moved towards the **youths** taking part in the shibir, one of them stood up and said, "Swami! Jai Swaminarayan, I come from **America**." Another stood up, "Swami! I come from **Africa**." A third jumped up, "Swami! I come from **Australia**." As Swamishri came to the end of their line, the last youth asked, "Swami, we told you about us, now you tell us where you have come from."

Instantly, Swamishri raised his hand in a telling gesture towards the sky, "**All the way from Akshardham**." This one gesture was so grand, it became a lifetime memory for the youths. The sadhus and devotees present all began to applaud Swamishri's response.

How fortunate are we? Our guru has come all the way from Akshardham to grant us liberation and he has become just like one of us.

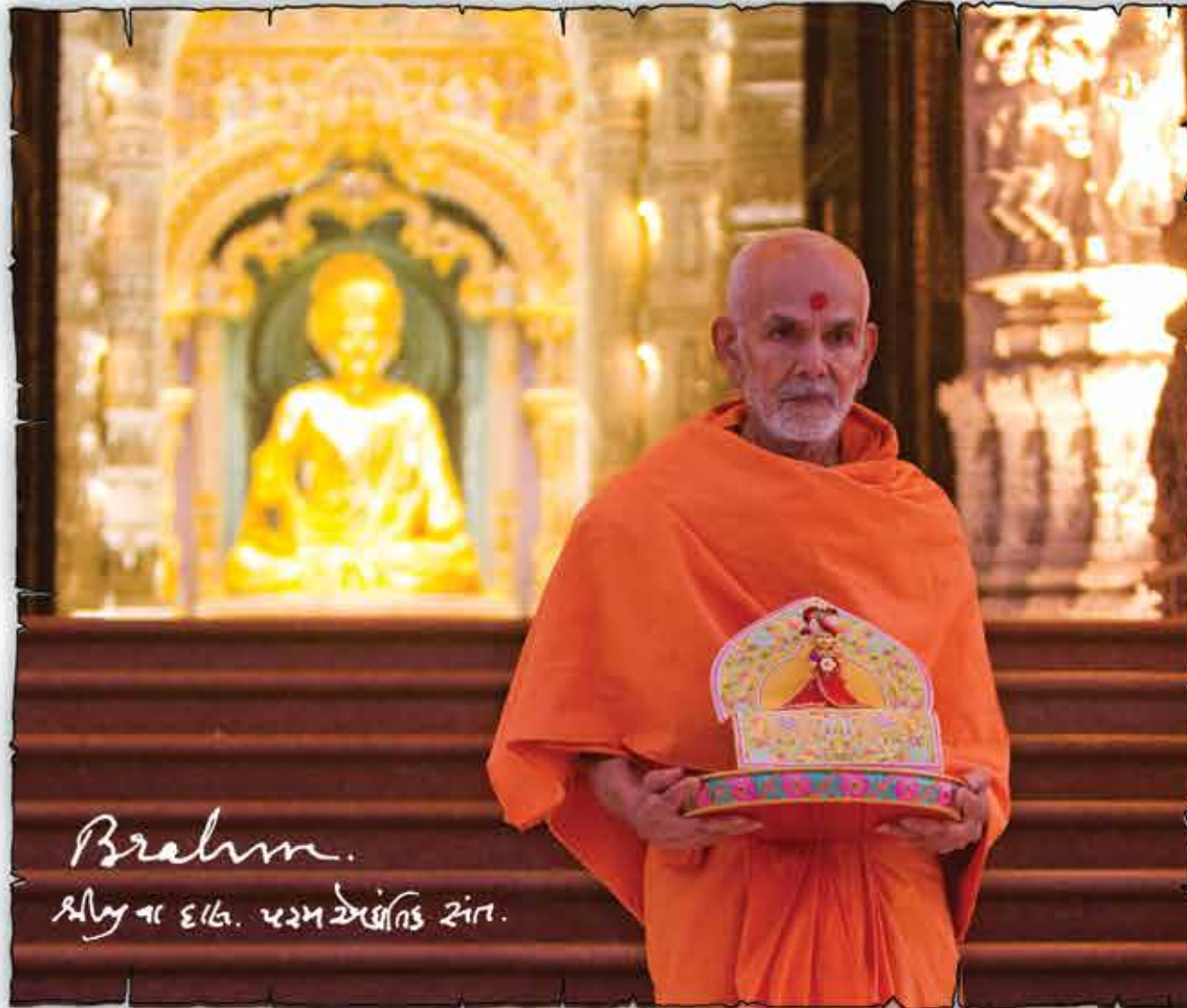
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28 September 2016. **Bochasan.** After his afternoon rest, Swamishri was answering letters. It had only been a month and a half since Pramukh Swami Maharaj had returned to Akshardham. Mahant Swami Maharaj was now guru and in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's place; however, because, from the outside, they seemed different, a devotee wrote a **letter** to Swamishri asking:

"My *dandvat* pranams and 'Jai Swaminarayan' at the lotus-feet of Param Pujya Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swami, what should I understand about your true form? I want *kalyan* for my soul. So please give me an answer that describes it as it truly is."

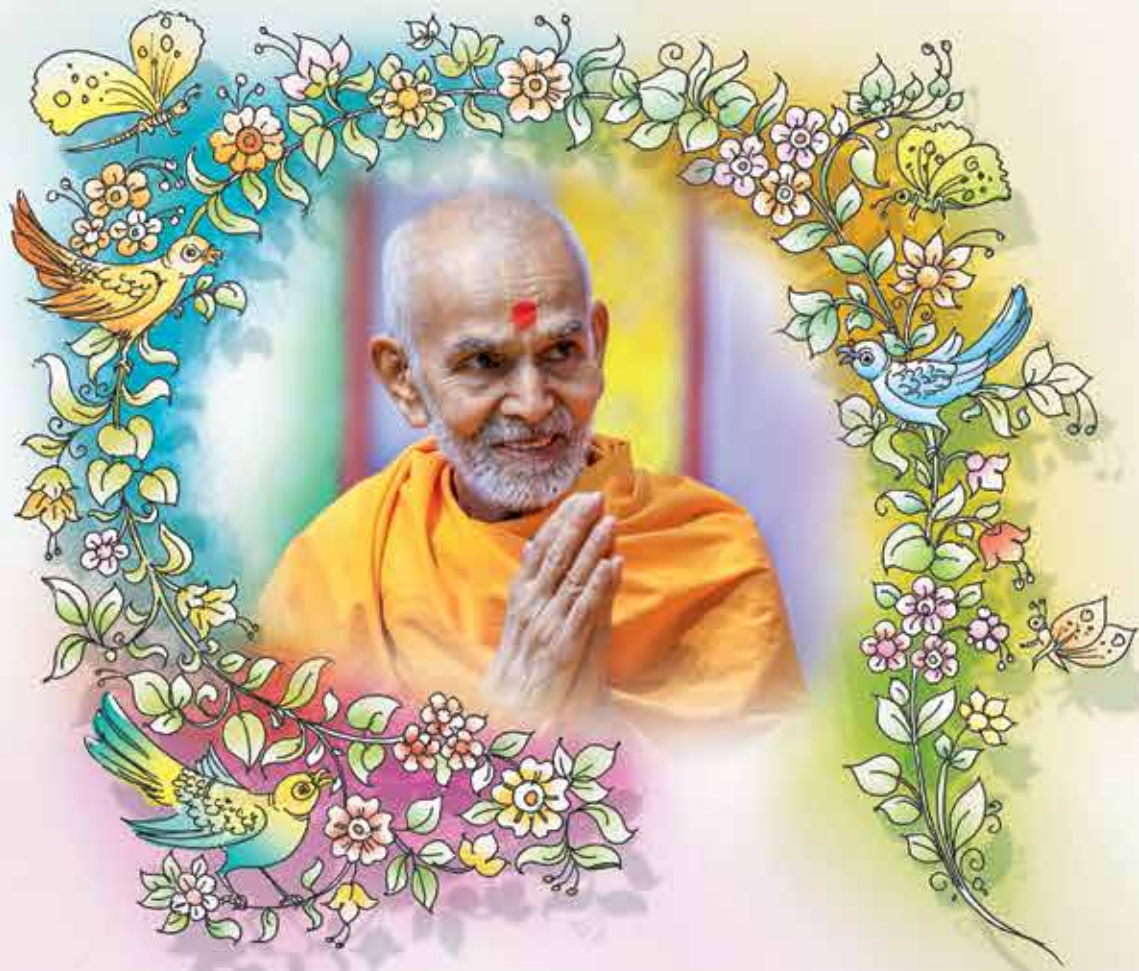
Swamishri answered firmly and precisely, "**Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj...look different from the outside, but inside they are the same essence (Aksharbrahman)**. The same Shriji Maharaj that was in Bhagatji Maharaj, the same was in Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj...that is who we are. **Ultimately, Shriji Maharaj is in all of them (the *gunatit* gurus)**. It is all the power of Shriji Maharaj."

This is our great fortune! **Our guru is Akshar, Brahman, Gunatit. Shriji Maharaj stays eternally in him.** Bhagwan gives us darshan through him. Through him, it is Bhagwan who speaks with us. Through him, it is Bhagwan who blesses us.



Brahm.
શ્રીજીના સેવા કરનાર સંત.

Asked to introduce himself, Swamishri replied, "Brahm. Shriji Maharaj's servant. Param Ekantik Sant."



20. SERVANT OF SERVANTS

In 1991, Mahant Swami Maharaj was visiting the boy's hostel in **Vidyanagar**. Once, at night, Swamishri was **writing letters** in his room, when **a group of students came to talk** with him. **These youths were going to become sadhus soon.**

As the group entered, **Swamishri** put down his letters. He stood up and walked towards the bathroom. Everyone thought Swamishri would go to the restroom and return but in fact, Swamishri was not going to the bathroom at all. He was looking for some space. As soon as he found enough space, he **began doing dandvats** to the youths.

This was unexpected for the youths. Such a senior saint prostrating to the youths! What should they do? Before they could really understand what was happening and what to do, Swamishri had already done two *dandvats*. It was as if Swamishri **could not tire of thinking of the greatness of these youths who were about to give up the world and become sadhus. Swamishri finished a third dandvat!**

How amazing? Despite being such a great sadhu, he did *dandvats* to the youths! Swamishri lives as a servant of servants and constantly understands everyone's greatness.

■ ■ ■

14 September 2016. **Mumbai**. Swamishri was seated in a sofa in his room. **A sadhu** was seated in front of him. This sadhu had had an **operation** on his left **foot** and so was sitting in a **wheelchair**. **Once the meeting was over**, the sadhu moved his wheelchair away with his hands to reach the door. But because of his operation, he could not get up to open the door. So with **his good right leg he pushed and opened the door** with some difficulty.

Then as he reached for the wheels to move out, he was surprised. **The wheelchair was moving on its own!** He looked back and saw **Swamishri pushing his wheelchair!** Before the sadhu could say anything, the wheelchair was out of the room. All the sadhus and devotees standing outside were surprised. When a sadhu tried to take the wheelchair from Swamishri, he

said no and **pushed the wheelchair out to the hallway** laughing.

Swamishri does not simply tell us to become the servant of servants. He lives as a servant of servants — working for others, taking on hardship for others. Though he is Aksharbrahman, though he is such a great guru, he lives as a servant! How amazing!

■ ■ ■

Swamishri introduces himself as a '*dasna das*' — 'servant of servants'. He says that **to live as a servant of servants** — to live with humility, constantly serving others, **is true satsang**. One who lives as a *dasna das* attains everything. Serving everyone is the masterkey of satsang; it is its medium. By living as a *dasna das*, one attains the innermost blessings.



21. WHO ARE WE?

If someone asks you, “Which **religion** do you follow?”

Right away, you will say, “**Hinduism**.”

But now, what if someone asks you which *sampradaya* you are part of? This lesson will help you answer that question.

Hinduism has many *sampradays*. Each one shows people its own way of reaching God. But our *sampradaya*, the **Swaminarayan Sampradaya**, is special.

The Vedas and the Upanishads speak of Brahman and Parabrahman, or Akshar and Purushottam. Shriji Maharaj came to Earth and spread this principle. And Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj gave shape to this principle by establishing the **BAPS Sanstha** in 1907 and by creating Akshar-Purushottam mandirs.

One last question – **when can a person be called a BAPS satsangi?** Well, he or she **must be firm in *agna* and *upasana***. *Agnā* and *upasana* are the two wings that take us to Akshardham.

■ UPASANA – FOUR THINGS WE MUST BELIEVE

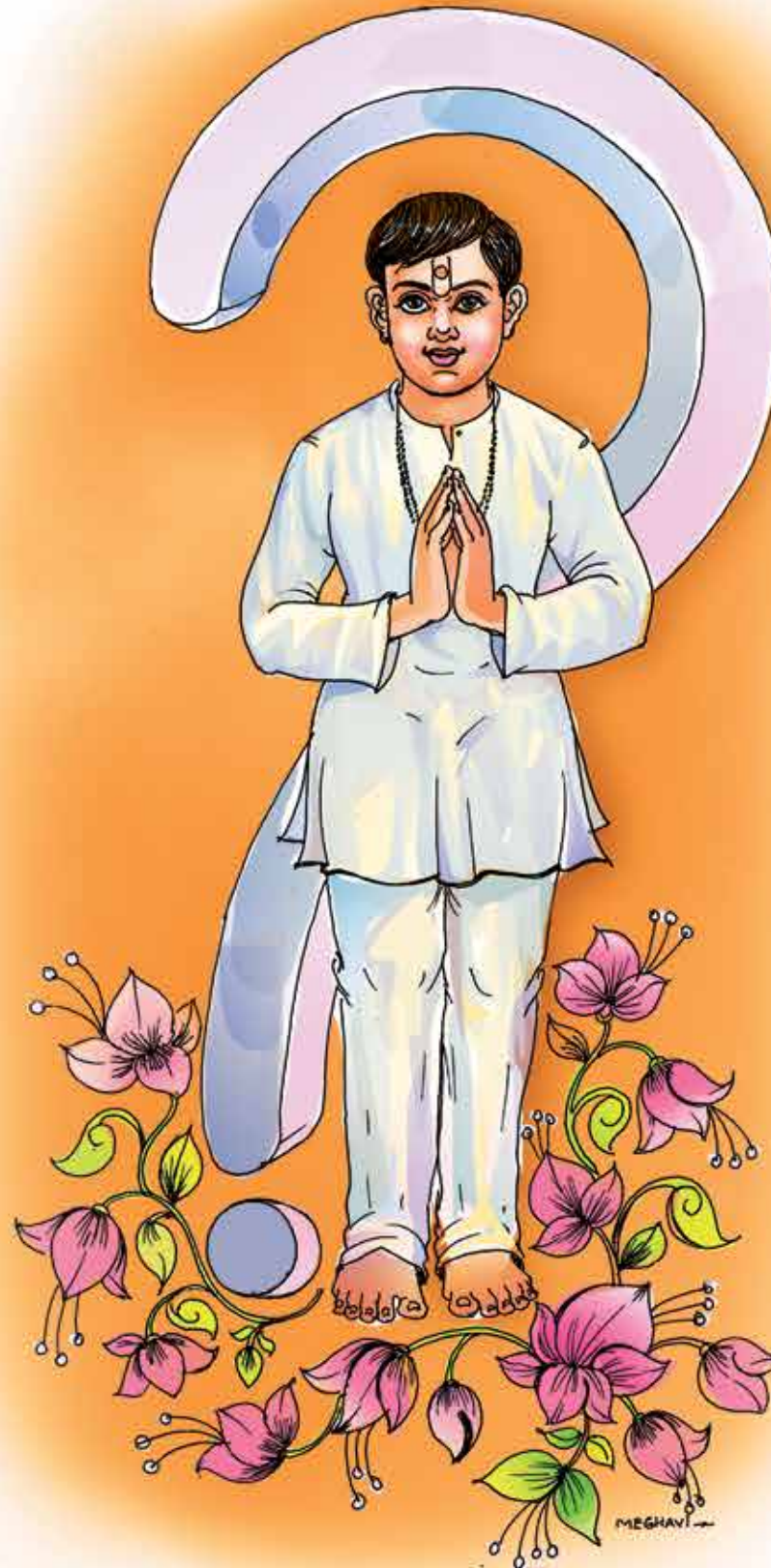
The Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, which sum up the Vedas and all other Hindu shastras, teach us four main principles:

1. **Sahajanand ek Parameshwar** – Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer, he has a divine form, he is supreme and he is present on Earth.
2. **Gunatitanand Mul Akshar** – Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman.
3. **Pragat Satpurush Mokshanu Dwar** – Pragat Aksharbrahman Mahant Swami Maharaj is the gateway to Akshardham.
4. **BAPS Pride** – The BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya’s principles, shastras and guru *parampara* are the greatest truth.

■ AGNA – EIGHT THINGS WE MUST DO

Shriji Maharaj has given us many *agnas* in the Shikshapatri. Below are the eight most important *agnas* for kids:

1. **Kanthi** – We should always wear a *kanthi* and accept Shriji Maharaj’s refuge.
2. **Puja & Panchang pranam** – Do *tilak-chandlo* and puja everyday. Also, do *panchang pranam* to your parents everyday.
3. **Bal sabha & Ghar sabha** – Go to *bal sabha* regularly and on time. Sit in *ghar sabha* as well.
4. **Arti & Ashtak** – Sing *arti* and *ashtak* twice a day, either in your *ghar* mandir or on your own.



5. **Ahar shuddhi** – Do not eat meat, eggs, onions, garlic or food cooked outside the home. Stay away from addictions. Fast on Ekadashi by doing either a *falahari* fast, *sajala* fast (only water) or a *nirjala* fast (no food or water).

6. **Satsang Reading & Satsang Exams** – Read ‘Prasang Mala 108’ or ‘Satsang Vihar’ everyday. Be sure to take the ‘Satsang Vihar’ test as well.

7. **Avoiding Kusang** – Always stay away from bad company, movies, television, and other forms of *kusang*.

8. **Study Well** – Study at least three hours a day.

■ What We Believe

Our beliefs are quite easy to understand. Just read the following songs...

■ THE PANCHTATTVA SONG

*Jiva, ishwar, māyā, Brahman ane Parabrahman,
Apyu Shriji Mahārāje, panchtattva-gnānam...
Jiva, ishwar māyāmā, anādithi atvāy,
Aksharbrahmano sang thātā, Parabrahman pamāy...*

■ THE UPASANA SONG

*Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane Purushottam...
Ātmā ne Parmātmā, Brahman ane Parabrahman...
Swāmi te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar-Purushottam upāsānā... (2)
Aksharrup thaine, Purushottamni,
Bhakti karvāni ā sādhanā...
Aksharrup thavu etle Akshar jevā thāvu,
Pragat Akshar Mahant Swāmi Mahārāj jevā thāvu...
Purushottamni bhakti etle prem Shrijimā karvo,
sarvopari sākhar Pragat kartāno nishchay karvo
Ādarsh bālak thaine, ekmanā rahi,
Akshardhāme javāni ārāadhanā...
Akshar-Purushottam upāsānā... (2)*

In conclusion, just remember this much – I am a Hindu. I am part of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya. I have faith in Shriji Maharaj. I am Mahant Swami Maharaj’s disciple.

22. REFUGE IN GOD DISSOLVES ALL SINS

Shriji Maharaj was conducting a big **yagna** in **Dabhan**. News about it had spread throughout Gujarat. At that time **Joban Pagi**, a **cruel dacoit** who lived in Vartal, decided to take advantage of the event. He **decided to steal Rojho Ghodo**, the wonderful horse of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Joban was feared almost throughout India. If someone carried his arrow with him while on his way to as far off as Calcutta (Kolkata), no one would dare trouble him. Such was the fear people had of Joban Pagi – the notorious dacoit.

Joban Pagi made **several plans** to steal the horse. He tried for three nights, but **every time he entered the barn**, he would **see many forms of Shriji Maharaj**, either feeding Rojho or patting it on the back.

After these **miracles**, Joban Pagi realized that Shriji Maharaj was none other than God. So, he decided to surrender to him and become his disciple. On the fourth day, Joban came to the assembly of Shriji Maharaj. He bowed at Maharaj's feet and pleaded, "Maharaj, **forgive me**. I have sinned before you who can make others sinless. I ask you to make me a **satsangi**." Shriji Maharaj asked his attendant, Mulji Brahmachari, to get some water. Maharaj then placed a few drops in Joban's right palm and was about to **recite the initiation mantra (vartman mantra)** when Joban interrupted, "Maharaj, think for a moment before initiating me. I have heard that **you take on a person's**

past sins whenever he or she accepts your refuge by putting on the **kanthi** and following the moral vows you give."

Shriji Maharaj replied, "Yes, that is true." Joban Pagi,

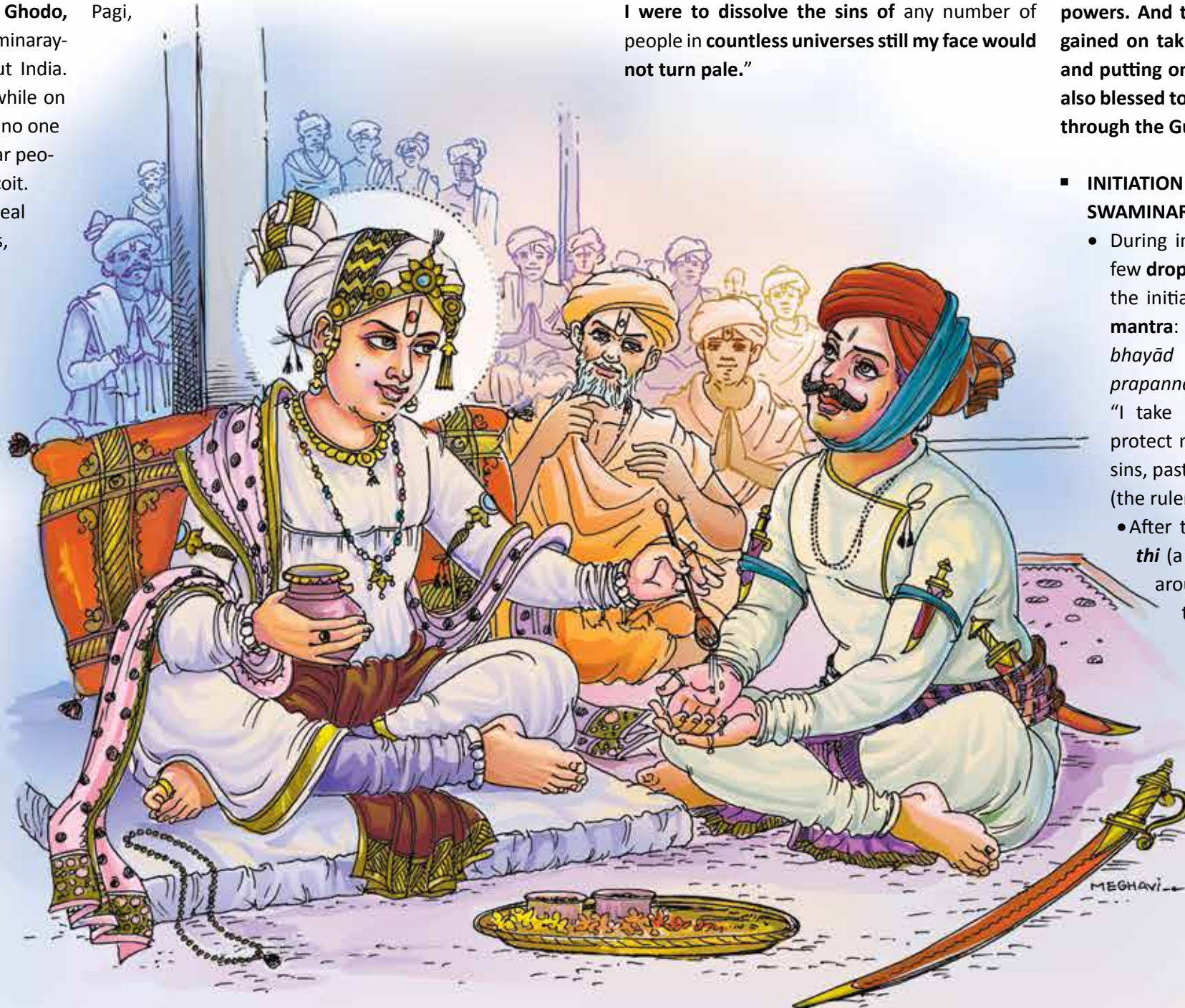
however, argued, "Maharaj, my case is different. I have committed so many sins that it is difficult even for you to dissolve all of them? Your face is shining like the sun now, but **the moment you dissolve my sins, your face will turn pale.**" Shriji Maharaj smiled at Joban's words. Maharaj assured him, "Joban, let alone your sins, but **if I were to dissolve the sins of any number of people in countless universes still my face would not turn pale.**"

Maharaj's words comforted Joban Pagi. Later, Shriji Maharaj often said, "If anyone were to take Joban's sins upon himself, then that person would be reduced to ashes. Such were the uncountable sins he had committed."

Yes friends, Shriji Maharaj was great. Because he was God, he had infinite spiritual powers. And that was why the benefit people gained on taking his refuge, obeying his vows and putting on his kanthi were unique. We are also blessed to have the refuge of Shriji Maharaj through the Gunatit guru.

■ INITIATION RITUAL IN THE SWAMINARAYAN SAMPRADAYA

- During initiation or **diksha** one is given a few **drops of water** in the **right palm**. Then the initiate is told to repeat the **vartman mantra**: *Kāl, māyā, pāp, karma, Yamdut, bhayād aham; Swāminārāyan sharanam prapannosmi sa pātu mām.* It means: "I take refuge in Swaminarayan. Please protect me from the fear of death, *maya*, sins, past karmas and the servants of Yama (the ruler of hell)."
- After this ritual a **double-stringed kanthi** (a necklace of tiny beads) is placed around the person's neck. Thereafter, the devotee observes the five moral commands. **They are:**
 1. **Nottodrinkalcoholorliquor,**
 2. **Not to eat meat,**
 3. **Not to steal,**
 4. **Not to commit adultery and**
 5. **Avoid useless loitering and objectionable food.**
- Thereafter, the rules of daily puja, weekly assemblies, *ghar sabha*, etc. are given.



23. DAILY PUJA RITUAL

We live in a beautiful and amazing world. Look at the sky. It is so vast and wonderful. And so are all the flowers and birds. Everything simply astonishes our minds – air, water, food, trees, mountains,... Each one of these is beautiful and useful. God made them for you, me and the whole of humanity.

Then should we not express our **thanks to God** for these gifts? The best way of doing it is to do his **puja**. Doing puja every morning is the best way to start the day. Puja in fact is a **personal meeting with God**. Puja helps to keep our minds still, happy and peaceful. We also get God's blessings and become dear to him.

■ WAY TO DO PUJA

1. Pre-preparations

After your morning shower put on **washed clothes**. Then spread a cloth (*asan*) on a **clean spot** and sit down, facing either **north or east**. Then spread another cloth in front of you for the *murtis* of Thakorji and Guru Parampara. Do not arrange the *murtis* one by one at this stage. Place the other items of your puja properly on one side.

2. Tilak-Chandlo

Apply a *tilak* of sandalwood paste and a *chandlo* of kumkum on your **forehead**. Then apply *tilak* and *chandlo* of sandalwood paste to the **chest** and **forearms**. (married women should apply only a *chandlo* of kumkum on their forehead.)

3. Dhyān and Mansi

Do dhyān either seated in *padmasan* or *sukhasan* (cross-legged). Then **think about one's *atma* (*atma chintan*)**, **God (*Paramatma chintan*)** and **your ultimate goal in life (*dheya chintan*)**. Ask yourself and say, "Who am I? I am not the body. I am the *atma*. Paramatma is always present in my *atma*. Mahant Swami Maharaj is my *atma*. I want to please him under any circumstances and situations."

After thinking in this way, start doing **mansi**

puja. Close your eyes, and imagine: "It is day-break. The air is fragrant. Swami Bapa is sleeping in his bed. I gently awaken him and then press the soles of his feet. Thereafter, I help him get up to go to the bathroom. According to the season, I help him in taking a shower of cold or warm water. I offer him his clothes.

"Then, Swamishri arrives for his puja and starts meditating. Thereafter he applies the *tilak* and *chandlo* and does *mala*. He does *tapni mala*, *pradakshina*, and *dandvat*. Then *thal* is offered to Thakorji. Then he sanctifies a jugful of water and offers prayers to Thakorji. Finally, Swamishri reads the Shikshapatri and folds his palms to all, saying, 'Jai Swaminarayan'.

"Then, Swamishri goes to the mandir for Thakorji's darshan. Thereafter, I offer him a seat of gold to sit on. I apply a *chandlo* and honour him with a garland around his neck. I perform his *arti* and also offer him 32 varieties of food to eat. Fi-



nally, Swamishri embraces me and expresses his joy. I feel blessed.”

While doing *mansi* puja, one can think of different places and occasions. One can imagine different decorations and foods to offer according to the seasons of the year. One can lovingly serve according to one’s wishes. In *mansi* puja everyone can serve Swamishri. The only important requirement is devotion and true love. Doing *mansi* puja pleases God, and it fills us with joy. The fruits of sincerely doing *mansi* puja are equal to performing the actual puja.

(Shriji Maharaj is manifest through Swamishri, and thus doing his *mansi* puja is in accordance with the shastras.)

4. Invocation Mantra (Ahvan)

Say the following mantra to call Maharaj and Guru Parampara in your puja:

Uttishthottishtha he Nāth, Swāminārāyan Prabho; Dharmasuno Dayāsindho, sveshām shreya param kuru. Āgachchha Bhagwan Deva, svasthānāt Parmeshwar; Aham pujām karishyāmi, sadā twam sanmukho bhava.

“O Swaminarayan Bhagwan! Please awake and arise. O Son of Dharma! O Ocean of Compassion! Profoundly bless your devotees. O Parmeshwar come from your place, I will perform your puja. May you forever remain before me.”

Then arrange the *murtis* appropriately.

5. Chant Mala (Mantra Jap)

Tell **five or eleven** *malas* while chanting ‘Swaminarayan’.

6. One Mala Symbolizing Austerity (Tapni Mala)

Stand on one leg, raise both your hands up straight and do **one** *mala*.

7. Circumambulation (Pradakshina)

Do **five or eleven** *pradakshinas*.

8. Prostration (Dandvat)

Perform **six** *dandvats*. While doing the **sixth** *dandvat*, seek forgiveness for any insult or hurt done knowingly or unknowingly to a devotee. (Females should perform *panchang pranam*.)

While doing *dandvats* one can sing *Krupā karo muj upare ...*”

9. Prayer (Prarthana)

After sitting down on one’s *asan* (seat) offer a prayer, saying, “O Maharaj, O Swami! Bless me with inner strength and good intellect so that I can obey your **commands** and **please** you. **Protect me from kusang** (bad influence). Give me the company of good friends. May I **study** well, **serve my parents**, and become your ideal devotee.”

10. Concluding Mantra (Visarjan)

Say the mantra to allow Maharaj and Swami to leave.

Svasthānam gachchha devesha, pujāmādāya māmkim, Ishtakāmaprasidhyartham punarāgamanāya cha.

“O Lord of lords! Having accepted my puja, return to your rightful place; and please return again [tomorrow] to fulfil my wishes.”

11. Read the Shikshapatri

Read **five gems** daily from the Shikshapatri.

12. Darshan at Ghar Mandir and Performance of Panchang Pranam

Do darshan and offer *dandvats* and a prayer before the *ghar* mandir (home shrine). Thereafter perform *panchang pranam* to one’s parents and say ‘Jai Swaminarayan’ to all the members of the family. (If there is a *shikharbaddh* or *hari* mandir nearby go for darshan without fail.)

Performing one’s daily puja in this way takes about 20-25 minutes. By doing it, one obeys God’s command. And, God will be pleased in return. Dear friends, do not fail in obeying this **principle command** of Shriji Maharaj. Or you’ll miss a chance to please Bhagwan and become 100% *satsangi*.

24. ARTI RITUAL

Hinduism has hundreds of brief and long rituals. Rituals are an important part of worshipping God. Through personal actions in rituals, the devotee experiences a sense of involvement and connectivity with God. Rituals related to God take us nearer to him. They purify, strengthen and calm the senses and mind of the devotee.

■ WHAT IS ARTI?

Arti means **prayer** offered to Bhagwan with **deep feelings**. The word *arti* in Sanskrit means, ‘āsmantāt ratihi’. “O Bhagwan, may my love be entirely for you.” *Arti* includes divine sound, divine light and divine darshan.

Bhagwan accepts one’s heartfelt prayers while doing or saying *arti*. He relieves a devotee from misery. After the *arti* is over, verses in praise of God and Guru Parampara are sung. These verses help the devotee to experience inner peace.

■ HISTORY OF ARTI

For thousands of years there was **no electricity**. The sanctums of our mandirs used to be **poorly lit by oil lamps** or *divas* (*diyas*). For **darshan of the deity**, the *pujari* would **light another divo** and move it from head to toe of the *murti*. Over centuries this became a ritual along with prayer and singing. This was how the *arti* ritual was born.

■ WHY PERFORM ARTI?

Arti is a ritual **worship of God using the five elements, namely**, earth, water, light, air and space. Life depends on these elements. God has created them for the existence of human and other life forms. This is why devotees appreciate and respect God. The **worship of God through these five elements** is called *arti*.

According to Hindu tradition, the wick of the *divo* and the performance



of *dandvats* symbolize earth. After the *arti* is over, water in a spoon is circled around the flame thrice. This represents the element of water in the ritual. The burning wick stands for light. The smoke coming out of incense sticks stands for air. And the ringing of *ghantadi* and a big bell, blowing of conch shell, the beating of drums and singing of *arti* represents space.

■ THE ARTI RITUAL

1. Arti

During the act of performing *arti*, the flame should be circled slowly and clockwise around every part of God's *murti*, starting from his holy feet. The *arti* should be sung with devotion. One should believe that God is present. In the last verse the *arti* is circled to one's right and left to

pay respect to the devas or deities in charge of the four directions.

2. Circle Arti with Water

When the *arti* is ritually waved before God's *murti* it becomes charged with divinity. To preserve that divinity in the flame, water in a conch or a spoon is circled around it three times. The presiding deity of water is Varun deva, whose role is to protect or preserve.

3. Passing One's Palms Over Arti

The act of passing one's palms over the *arti* flame and then touching them to one's head, eyes and heart is called *ashka*. The reason for this gesture is to purify one's mind, sight and soul. (The *Vishnudharmottar* shastra says that this act of purification (with *arti*) is equal to gaining merits (*punya*) on taking a holy bath after performing thousands of *yagnas*.)

4. Donation

After taking the divinity of the *arti* flame with

one's palms, the devotee then makes a donation by placing currency coins or notes in the *arti* plate or into the donation box. It shows that a devotee is honouring and appreciating God.

■ OTHER ASPECTS OF ARTI

- The *arti* we sing daily was written by Muktanand Swami in Kalvani on 5 November 1802 (Samvat 1859, Kartak sud 10).
- After *arti* the verses "Anant Koti ...", the prayer "Nirvikalp uttam ati..." and the *ashtaks* "Krupā karo..." are sung.
- To please God, children should at least perform *arti* twice a day – one at 7.00 a.m. and the other at 7:00 p.m. Doing these two *artis* daily is important for spiritual nourishment and progress. (According to your convenience you can fix the time of the two *artis*.)
- The evening *arti* at the *ghar* mandir should be performed by the entire family. After that everyone should sing the *ashtaks* and

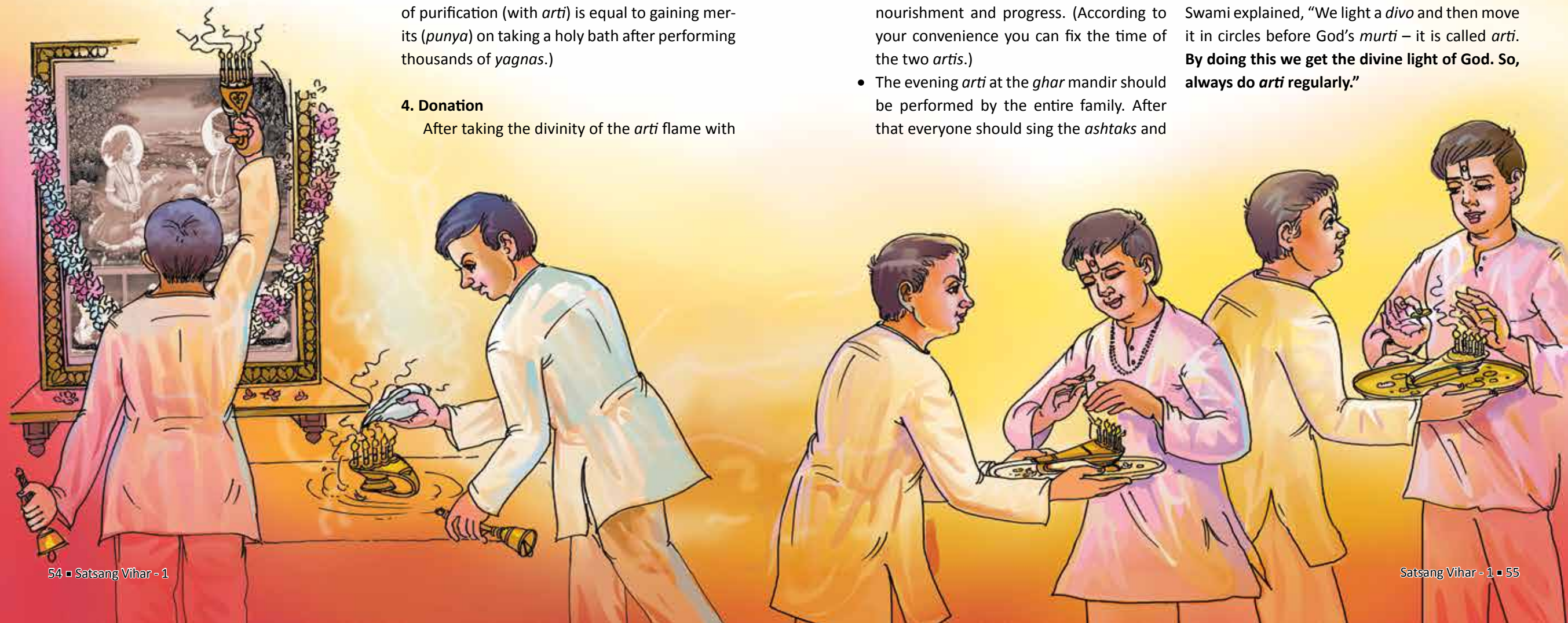
have darshan, perform *dandvats* and offer prayers with an attentive mind and with devotion.

- Keep the *ghar* mandir, *arti* vessels, *ghantdi* and incense stand clean.
- Two *artis* are done daily at all BAPS *hari* mandirs: 1. *Shangar* and 2. *Sandhya*. At *shikharbaddh* mandirs five *artis* are performed daily: 1. *Mangala*, 2. *Shangar*, 3. *Rajbhog*, 4. *Sandhya* and 5. *Shayan*.

■ PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ USED TO SAY

In 1988, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in London. While he was having breakfast, children gave various presentations. At the end, Swami asked them, "What is *arti*?"

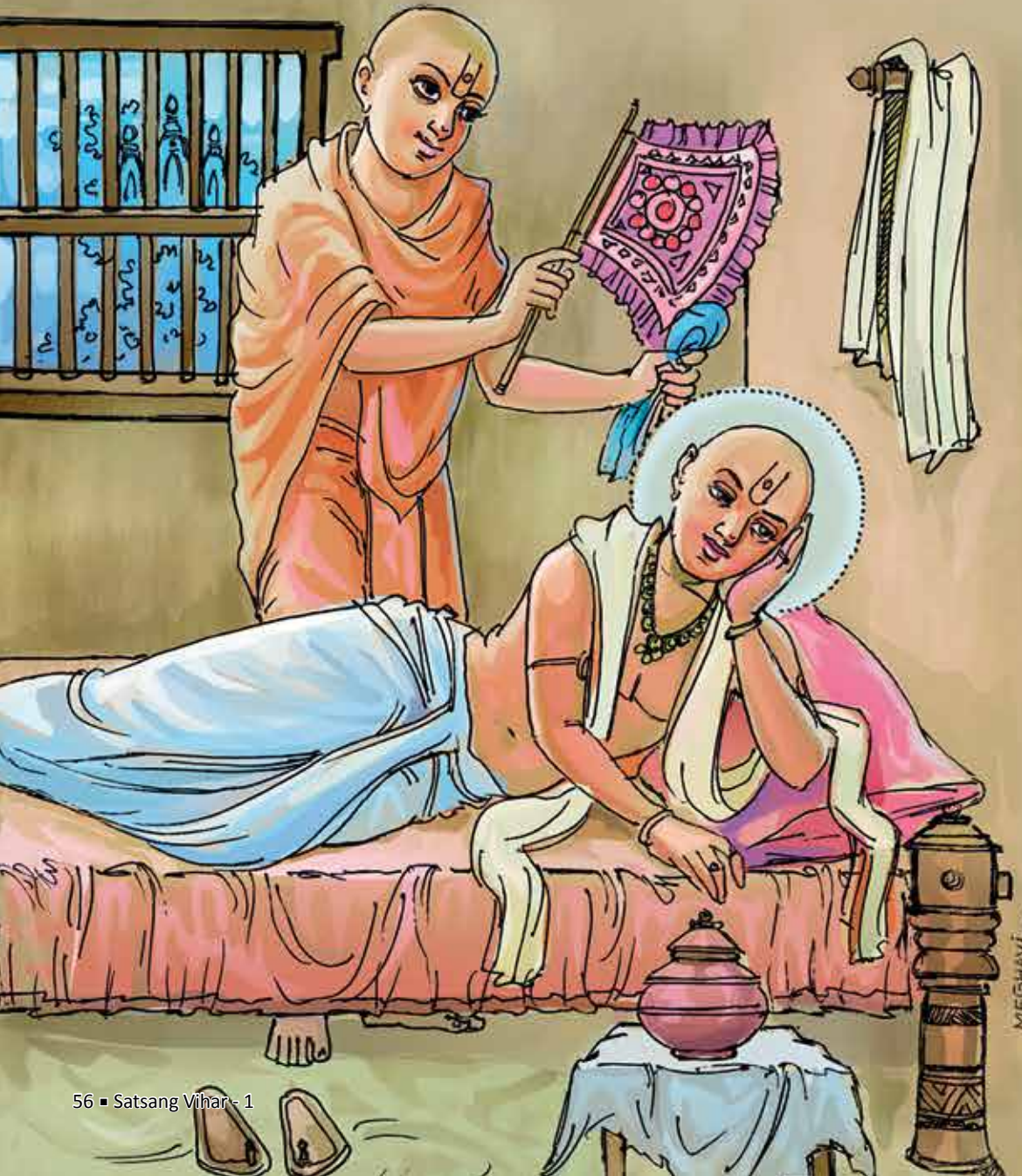
The children were not able to answer. Then Swami explained, "We light a *divo* and then move it in circles before God's *murti* – it is called *arti*. By doing this we get the divine light of God. So, always do *arti* regularly."



25. HOW TO LISTEN TO KATHA

Shriji Maharaj was in Sarangpur. He was discoursing at Jiva Khachar's *darbar* on the **four types of destruction**. The sadhus and devotees seated before him were listening attentively. After a while Shriji Maharaj's attention was drawn to a **child-devotee from Balol village**.

The child was absorbed in the darshan of Maharaj's *murti* and treasuring it in his heart. At the same time he was carefully listening to the discourse and retaining it in his mind. When the child returned to his **lodging that night** he repeated Maharaj's discourse to Gaja Gadhvi.



The boy and the guests were staying at Bava Khachar's house, which was **next to where Shriji Maharaj was staying**. While the boy was narrating to Gaja Gadhvi, **Shriji Maharaj could hear his voice clearly**. Maharaj stayed up late listening to the boy. The same routine continued for several days.

One morning, during an **assembly** at Jiva Khachar's *darbar*, Shriji Maharaj asked Gaja Gadhvi, "Who was talking to you late at night?" Gaja Gadhvi explained at length. The boy was also present in the assembly. **Shriji Maharaj showered his joy and blessings** upon the boy. He called the boy and hugged him.

Shriji Maharaj then addressed the assembly, "One should listen to **katha** like this boy. **Listen with attention**. One should also **remember** what is said, and **inform others with pride** and glory. Then one should also **try to put it into practice**. Only then is it truly called *shravan bhakti*."

Shriji Maharaj was **very pleased with the child**. To honour him, Maharaj had a **pagh** tied on his head, and pressed the soles of his **holy feet** on the boy's chest. In addition, Maharaj gave him **Rs. 5 as a gift**.

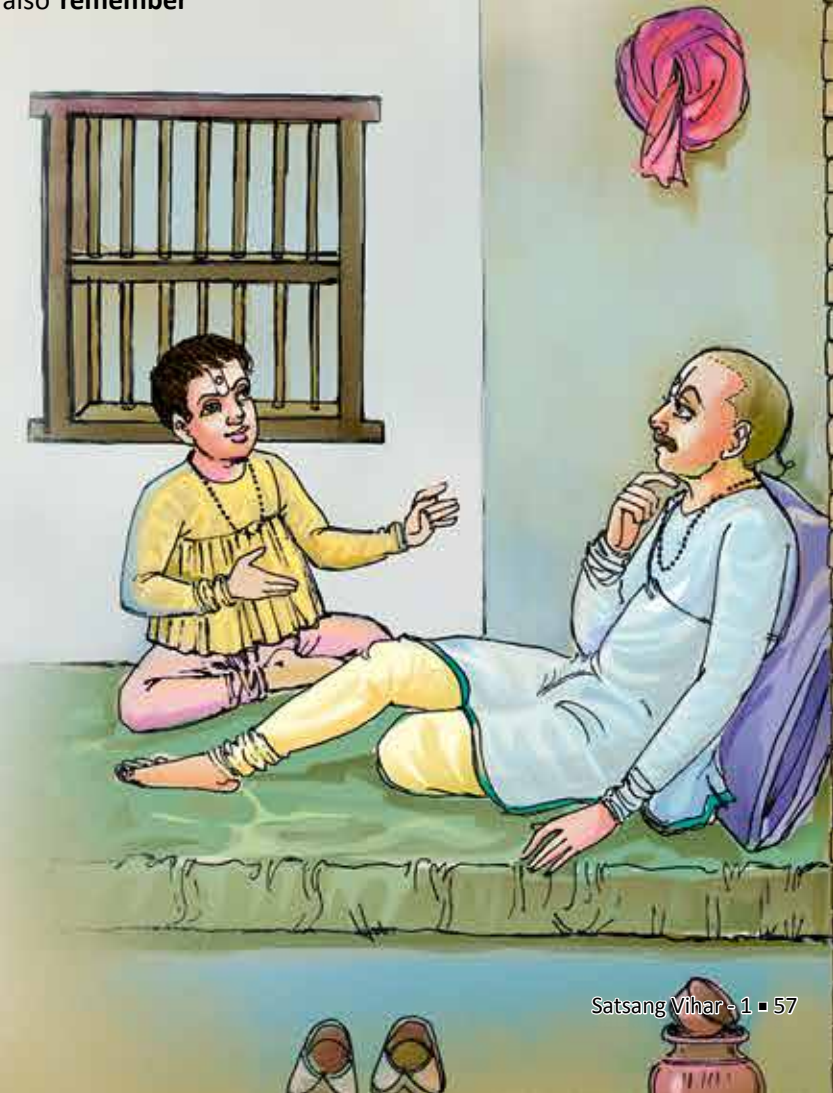
■ THE BENEFIT OF KATHA

Yogiji Maharaj often said, "Attend the **Sunday sabha** even if you have to **give up a profit of Rs. 25,000** (in your business)." What he meant was that by attending the *bal sabha* or *sat-sang* or *ghar sabha* you **gain more than earning thousands of rupees**. You also gradually come to understand *upasana*

and firmly observe the *niyams*. By doing this you please Maharaj and Swami.

In the *sabha* you **come to learn and get spiritual knowledge with fun and joy**. You are also inspired to practise these teachings in your life. In this way you experience inner peace and happiness, and are blessed with the bliss of **Akshardham**.

Therefore, **do not miss even one bal sabha**. Take the fullest benefit of *bal sabha* by attending it on time, obeying its disciplines and paying attention. And later, tell it to your parents and friends. When you get older, attend *yuvak sabha*. Then Shriji Maharaj will shower his blessings of joy upon you.



26. FIRM IN OBSERVING EKADASHI FAST

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's childhood name was **Shantilal**. He was born in the village of Chansad in Vadodara district. Shantilal spent his early years at **Rajnagar**, a village close to Chansad. Chhotubhai of Bhadrans lived there. He cared for little children and often made them happy by giving gifts on festive days. Sometimes he would give fire crackers, kites, clothes or toys. **Chhotubhai** was particularly fond of Shantilal. He favoured him the most.

Once, Chhotubhai cooked **food for all the children**. The menu included sweets like *jalebi*, *mesub* and *dudhpak*, fried items and many other varieties. When it was lunchtime, children came to his place with joy. They all sat down to eat. The sight and fragrance of food was mouth-watering and irresistible. When Chhotubhai started serving the boys he noticed that Shantilal was not present.

Chhotubhai enquired, "Where is Shantilal?" Someone pointed out, "Look, he is sitting in that corner." Chhotubhai went up to Shantilal and asked, "Has any one hit you or are you angry? Come and sit down to eat. The food is very tasty." Shantilal replied, "No, nothing of the sort has happened. But, I will not be able to eat any of these items today."

Chhotubhai asked, "Why?" Shantilal replied, "Because it is **ekadashi**. I'm fasting today. One should not eat food made of grains and flour today." Chhotubhai smiled, and he lovingly explained to Shantilal, "How can the rule of *ekadashi* apply for children! It is okay for them to eat everything on that day."

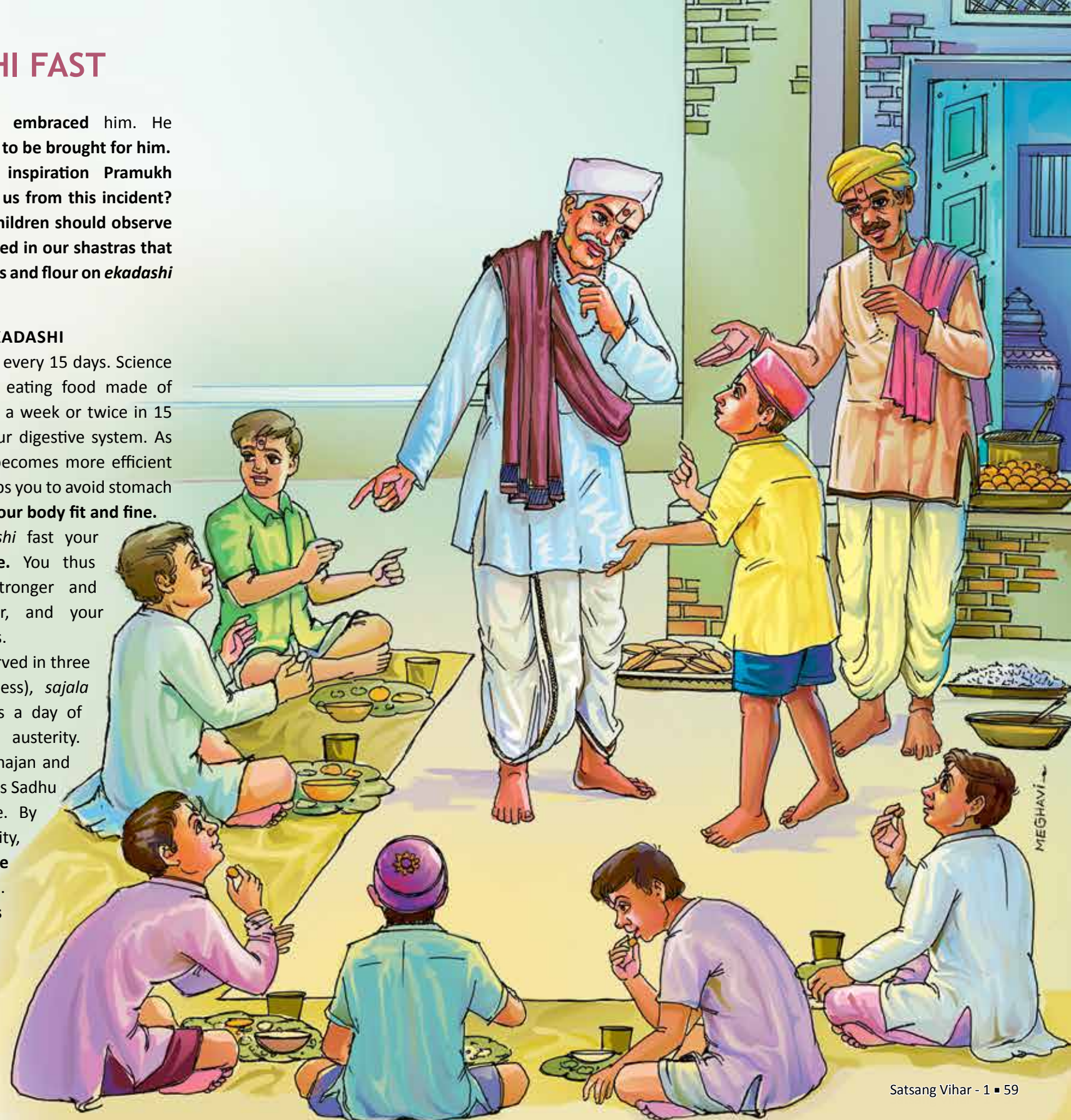
Chhotubhai **insisted** that Shantilal should eat. What could a little boy do before the pressure of a senior? How could he say no? With these thoughts in mind Shantilal **broke down crying**. Chhotubhai was pleased at Shantilal's

determination, and he **embraced** him. He **arranged for farari items to be brought for him**.

Now tell us what inspiration Pramukh Swami Maharaj gives to us from this incident? His message is that all children should observe *ekadashi* fast. It is believed in our shastras that to eat food made of grains and flour on *ekadashi* is like eating meat.

■ THE BENEFITS OF EKADASHI

- *Ekadashi* comes once every 15 days. Science teaches that by not eating food made of flour and grains once a week or twice in 15 days gives rest to your digestive system. As a result the system becomes more efficient and strong. It also helps you to avoid stomach diseases and makes **your body fit and fine**.
- By observing *ekadashi* fast your **mind becomes pure**. You thus become mentally stronger and intellectually sharper, and your confidence also grows.
- *Ekadashi* can be observed in three ways: *nirjala* (waterless), *sajala* (liquid) or *farar*. It is a day of physical and mental austerity. You should also do bhajan and remember God and his Sadhu as much as possible. By practicing austerity, you are **observing the command of God**. Austerity **pleases Shriji Maharaj and Swamishri**. So, you must always observe *ekadashi*.



27. GOD STAYS AWAY FROM ITS BAD ODOUR

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was visiting the homes of devotees (*padhramanis*) in **Junagadh** for the purpose of sanctifying them. He also took his meals at the homes of some devotees.

One day, **Gokaldas Bhatiya**, a devotee, invited Maharaj for lunch. Everyone was happy in the house, waiting for Maharaj to come. However, there was one person who disliked Maharaj. It was the **mother** of Gokaldas. She considered Maharaj to be a sorcerer. **She was also bitter with her son** for giving up their traditional Vaishnav faith to **become a Swaminarayan devotee**.

She often said disapprovingly, “My son has gone astray!” So, she had decided not to see the face of Swaminarayan when he came to her house.

Shriji Maharaj came. At that time the **old lady locked herself inside** another room. When Maharaj came to know of it, he smiled. The sadhus with him asked, “Why are you smiling?”

Shriji Maharaj answered, “Gokal’s mother does not want to see my face. So, she has hid herself. But she doesn’t know that in spite of her not seeing me, I can still enter her heart.”

Maharaj then washed his hands and feet, and sat down to have his meal.

While eating he appreciated the inner feelings and devotion of Gokaldas.

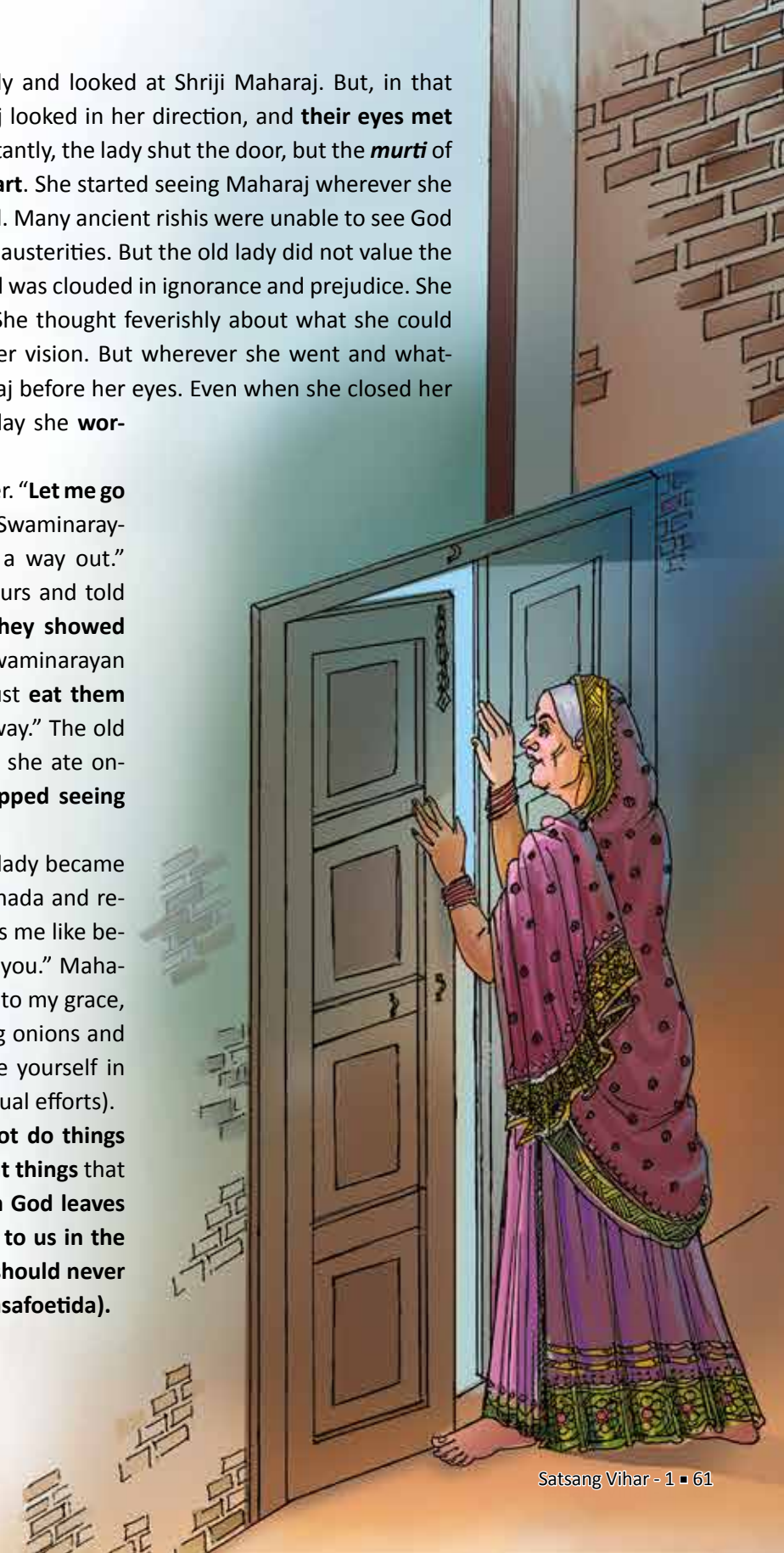
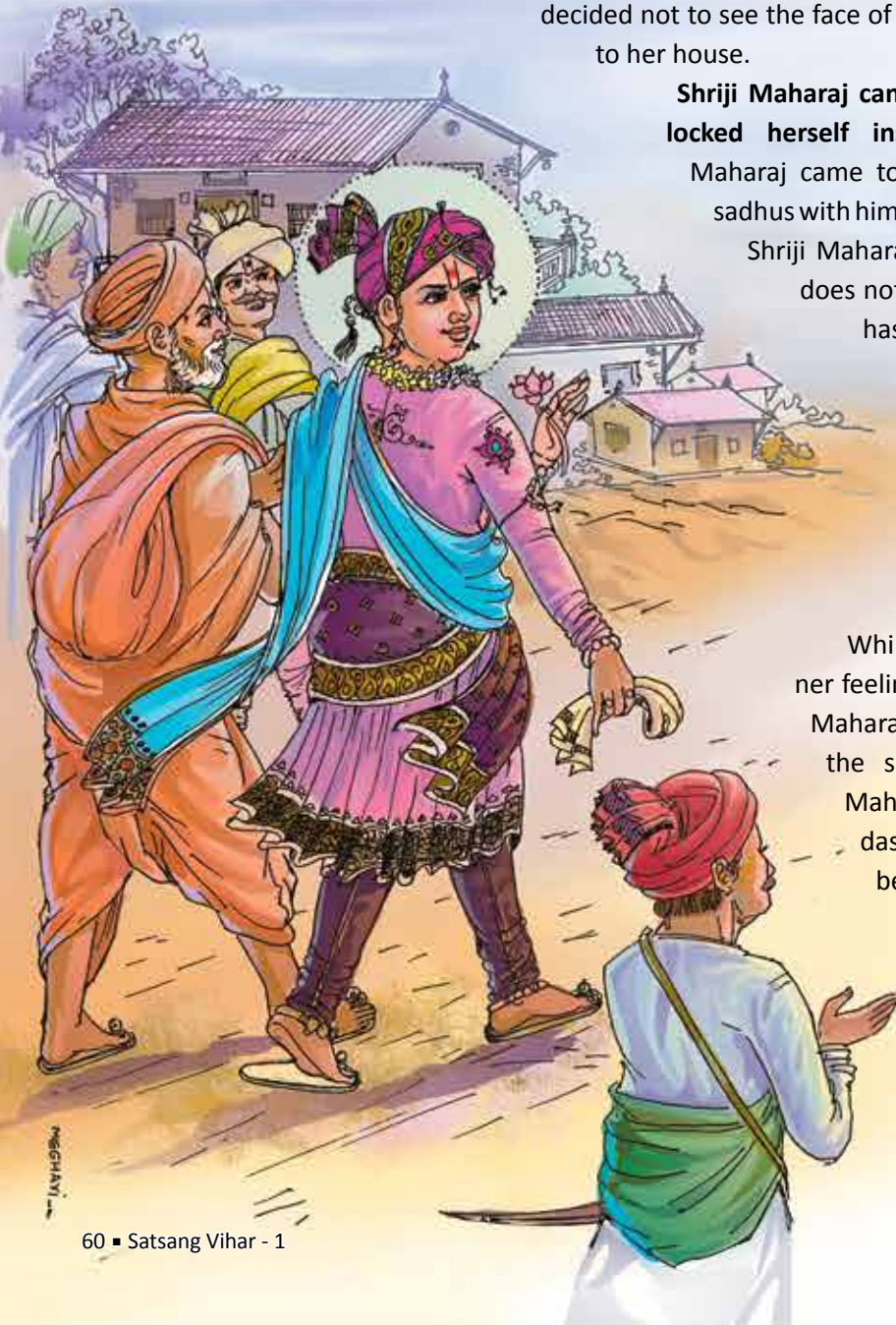
Maharaj gave *prasadi* to all. When the sadhus finished their meals, Maharaj got up to leave. Gokaldas’ mother became impatient because Maharaj had spent a lot of time in her house. She thought, “**Let me open the door a little and see what he looks like.** At least I’ll know what Swaminarayan is like! And there’s no chance of our eyes meeting.” The

lady opened the door slightly and looked at Shriji Maharaj. But, in that same moment Shriji Maharaj looked in her direction, and **their eyes met** for a fraction of a second. Instantly, the lady shut the door, but the ***murti* of Maharaj had entered her heart.** She started seeing Maharaj wherever she went and in whatever she did. Many ancient rishis were unable to see God in spite of performing severe austerities. But the old lady did not value the glory of seeing God. Her mind was clouded in ignorance and prejudice. She felt terribly uncomfortable. She thought feverishly about what she could do to erase Maharaj from her vision. But wherever she went and whatever she did, she saw Maharaj before her eyes. Even when she closed her eyes, she saw him. Day by day she **worried** more and more.

Finally, a thought struck her. “**Let me go to someone who opposes Swaminarayan.** Someone will show me a way out.” So, she went to her neighbours and told them about her problem. **They showed her a way out,** “Mother, Swaminarayan dislikes **onions and garlic.** Just **eat them** and Swaminarayan will go away.” The old lady felt happy. Immediately she ate onions and garlic, and she **stopped seeing Shriji Maharaj** instantly.

Many years later, the old lady became a *satsangi*. She went to Gadhada and requested Shriji Maharaj, “Bless me like before so that I can always see you.” Maharaj replied, “That was all due to my grace, but you dissolved it by eating onions and garlic. Now you must engage yourself in doing severe sadhanas (spiritual efforts).

Yes friends, we should not do things that displeases God. If we eat things that we are not suppose to, then God leaves us. In fact, he doesn’t come to us in the first place! As *satsangis* we should never eat onions, garlic and *hing* (asafoetida).



28. ABHAYSINH DARBAR'S PROMISE

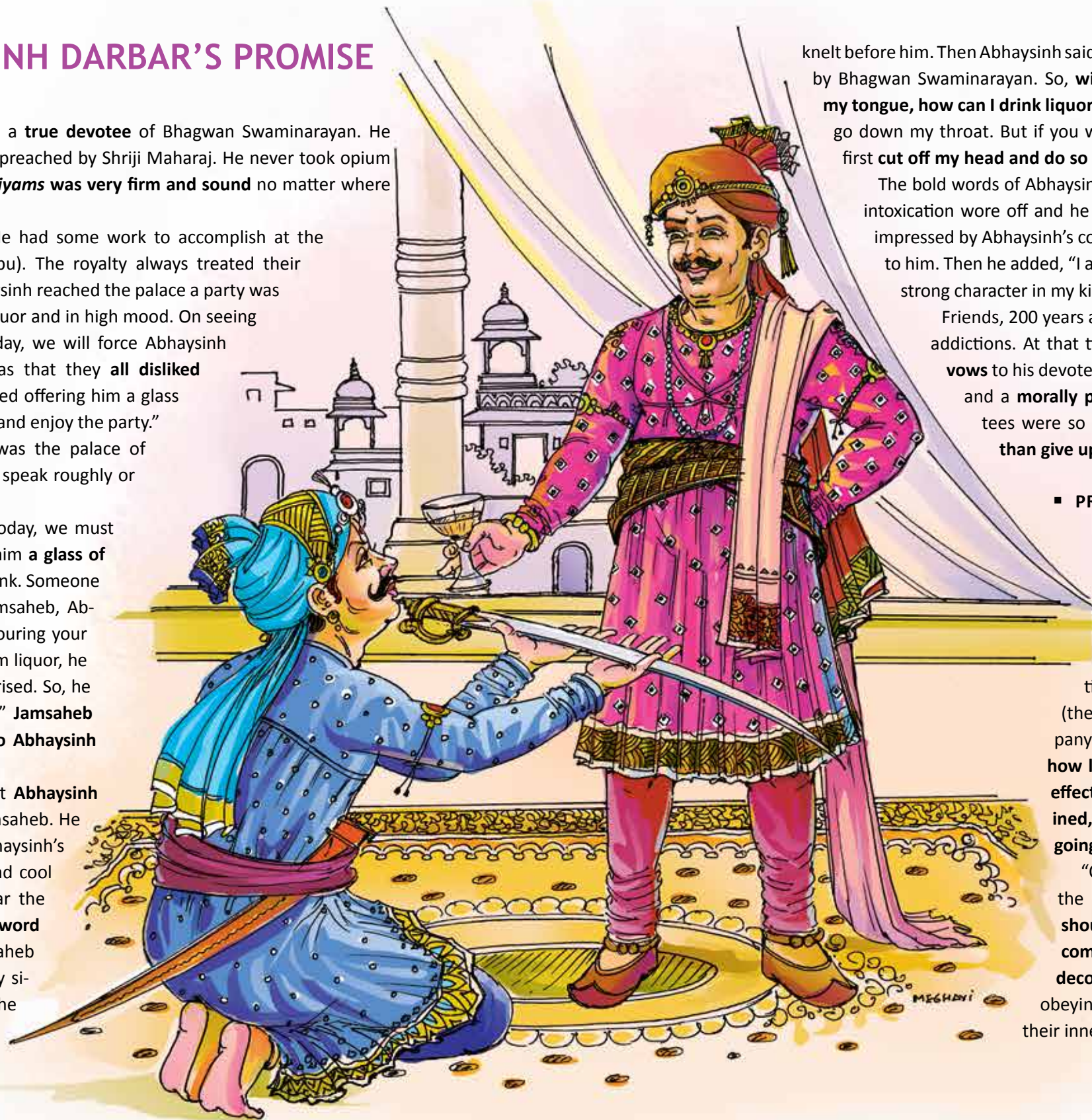
Abhaysinh Darbar of Lodhika was a **true devotee** of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He faithfully observed all the moral rules preached by Shriji Maharaj. He never took opium and liquor. His **pledge for observing *niyams* was very firm and sound** no matter where he went.

One day, he went to **Jamnagar**. He had some work to accomplish at the **palace of King Jamsaheb** (or Jambapu). The royalty always treated their guests by holding parties. When Abhaysinh reached the palace a party was in full swing. Everyone was drinking liquor and in high mood. On seeing Abhaysinh, the *darbars* thought, "Today, we will force Abhaysinh to break his pledge." The reason was that they **all disliked Swaminarayan**. One by one they started offering him a glass of liquor and said, "Bapu, have a drink and enjoy the party." Abhaysinh refused politely. Since it was the palace of Jamsaheb one could not shout loudly, speak roughly or create a fight.

The *darbars*, however, thought, "Today, we must succeed. Let us make Jamsaheb give him **a glass of liquor**." By that time Jamsaheb was drunk. Someone went up to him and complained, "Jamsaheb, Abhaysinh refuses to drink. He is dishonouring your party. He says that even if you offer him liquor, he will not accept it." Jamsaheb was surprised. So, he ordered, "Is that so! Give me a glass." **Jamsaheb filled it with liquor and walked up to Abhaysinh himself.**

Jamsaheb told him to drink it. But **Abhaysinh refused respectfully**. This angered Jamsaheb. He then raised the glass of liquor to Abhaysinh's lips. Abhaysinh had remained calm and cool till then, but he could no longer bear the King's pressure. He **at once pulled his sword** from the scabbard. This startled Jamsaheb and all the *darbars*. A tense but angry silence spread over the entire hall. The *darbars* too reached for their swords.

But, Abhaysinh had not drawn the sword to strike Jambapu. He placed his sword in the hands of the King and



knelt before him. Then Abhaysinh said, "I was given a vow of non-addiction by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. So, **with the name of Swaminarayan on my tongue, how can I drink liquor?** As long as I am alive, no liquor will go down my throat. But if you wish to pour it into my throat, then first **cut off my head and do so as much as you like.**"

The bold words of Abhaysinh touched Jambapu to the core. His intoxication wore off and he came to his senses. He was greatly impressed by Abhaysinh's commitment to his vow and said sorry to him. Then he added, "I am proud that I have a *darbar* of such strong character in my kingdom."

Friends, 200 years ago most people were habituated to addictions. At that time **Shriji Maharaj gave five moral vows** to his devotees and established an addiction-free and a **morally pure following in society**. His devotees were so faithful that **they would rather die than give up their vows.**

■ PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SAYS

"Never drink liquor. Never steal. Never eat meat. Never commit adultery. Most TV programmes, Internet, disco parties and modern fashions do not agree with our noble Hindu traditions and practices. These are all forms of Kaliyuga (the Dark Age) and *kusang* (bad company). **The poison of *kusang*, no matter how little one has, will have its harmful effect instantly. Not only is one's life ruined, but one loses the opportunity of going to Akshardham!**

"Obedience to the commands of the guru helps one to progress. **One should be pained at breaking a moral command. *Niyams* are one's true decoration and honour.** By strictly obeying *niyams*, God and his Sadhu shower their inner joy upon oneself."

29. DANDVATS TO THE READER

Many years ago something interesting happened in Gondal. Ghanshyam Bhagat was a 14-year-old *parshad*. He was very interested in reading satsang books. At that time our Sanstha had published the biography of Bhagatji Maharaj. He read the 500 page book in one stretch, spending a whole day and night.

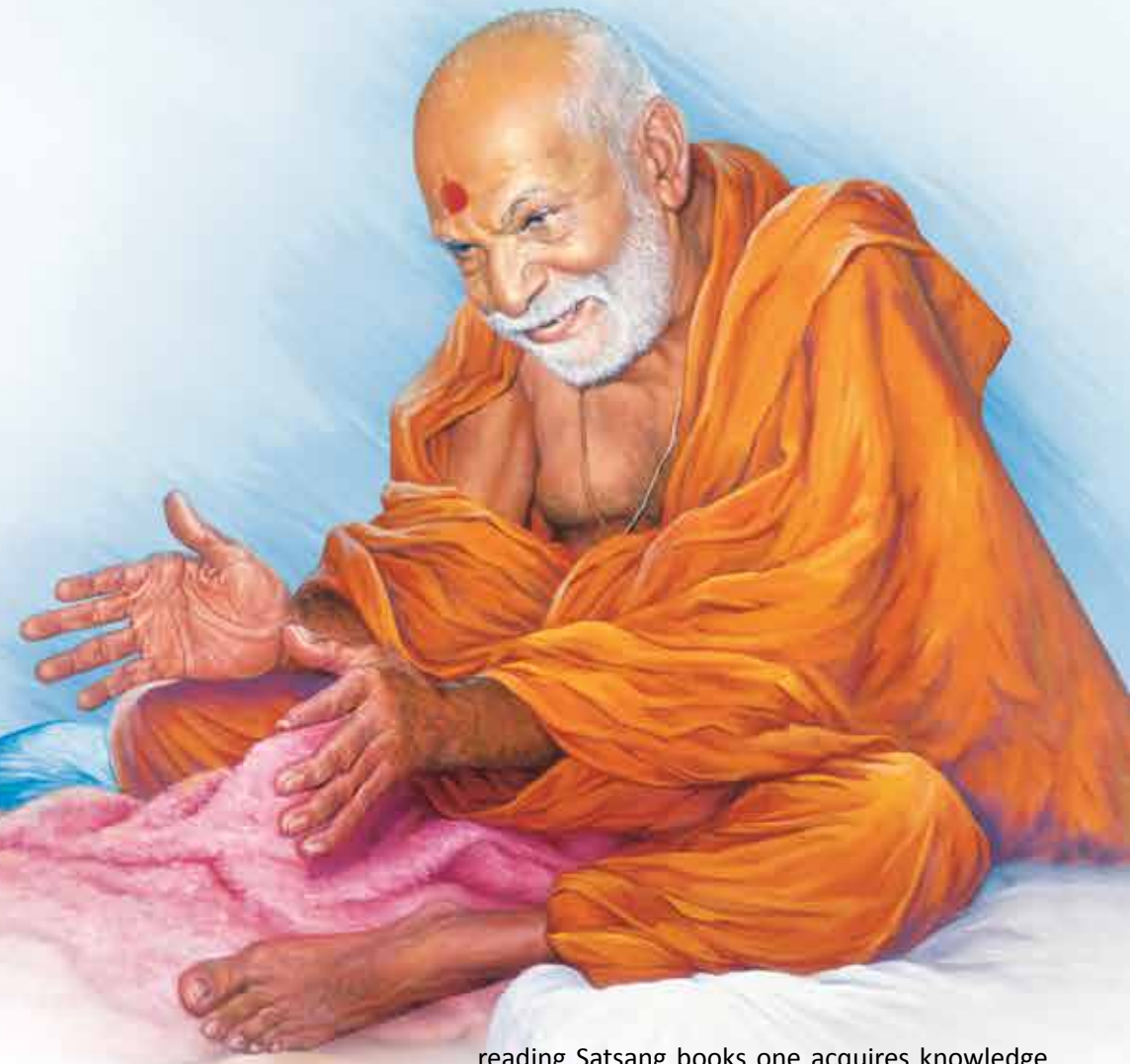
Yogiji Maharaj came to know of this. He saw Ghanshyam Bhagat while he was on his way for Thakorji's darshan. Immediately Yogiji Maharaj began doing *dandvats* to him. Ghanshyam Bhagat started running away, because he felt it

was not appropriate for him to remain standing while his guru was doing *dandvats* to him.

Yogiji Maharaj told Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj), "Catch the Bhagat and hold him still."

Vinubhai was confused about what to do. Should he stop Swamishri from doing *dandvats* or should he hold the Bhagat? Then he heard Yogiji Maharaj's words again, "Obey my command. Hold him!"

Vinubhai clasped the Bhagat while some other youths stopped Yogiji Maharaj from doing any further *dandvats*. However, by then he had



done three *dandvats*. Yogiji Maharaj praised Ghanshyam Bhagat, "Oh how wonderful! By reading the biography of Bhagatji Maharaj he has become the form of Bhagatji. What intense faith he has!"

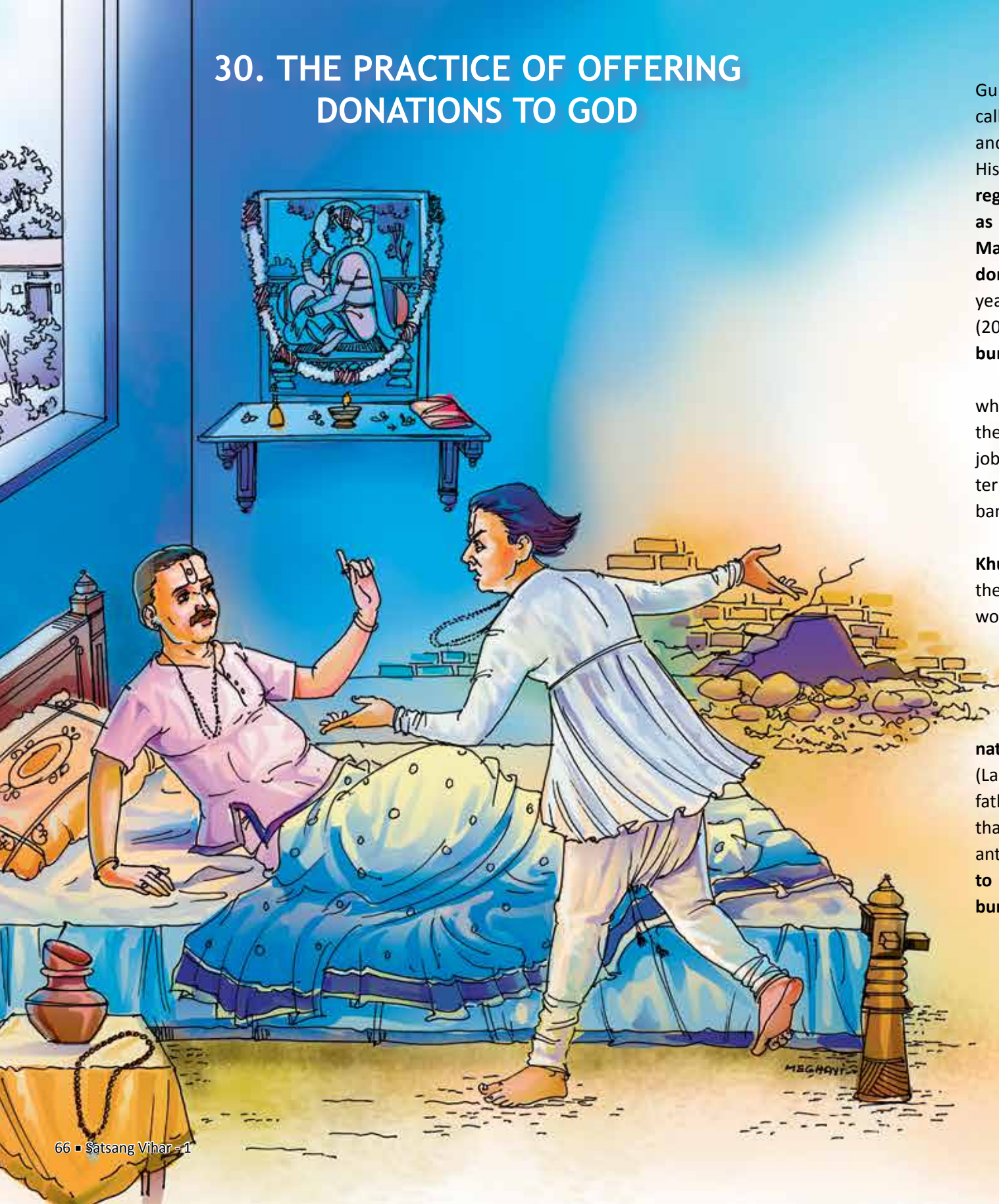
Yogiji Maharaj showered his blessings and expressed his joy upon those who read satsang books and memorized Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos and kirtans. He always honoured and praised those who read Satsang books. But do you know why? The reason is that in spite of having worldly things like money, cars, bungalows, intelligence, and power one experiences misery without the realization of spiritual knowledge. By

reading Satsang books one acquires knowledge and is inspired to practise it in life.

Shriji Maharaj says, "The shastra of one's own Sampradaya nourishes one's spiritual faith," Vachanamrut Gadhada II 58.

So friends, to know about and strengthen the knowledge of our Sampradaya you have to daily read the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, Shikshapatri and biographies of our gurus and devotees. By reading them, you are able to sincerely follow all the *agnas* and understand *upasana*. The Sampradaya also grows and becomes strong through reading Satsang books. Furthermore, God and his Sadhu are very pleased with you.

30. THE PRACTICE OF OFFERING DONATIONS TO GOD



About 200 years ago, in the time of Gunatitanand Swami, there was a devotee called **Manasiyo Khuman**. He was a *darbar* and belonged to the village of **Senjal**. His annual earnings were Rs. 10,000. He **regularly donated one-tenth of his income as tithe (*dharmado*) to the Swaminarayan Mandir**. The day he got Rs. 10,000, he would **donate Rs. 1000** to the mandir. After a few years he was able to **save up to Rs. 2 lakh** (200,000). He put his savings in a **pot** and **buried it in one of the rooms** of his house.

No one knew about it, except a **servant** who had **secretly seen** his master burying the pot. After some time the servant left his job. One night, he decided to steal his master's pot. So, he **dug a tunnel** from the river bank to Manasiyo's house.

The next **morning**, the *darbar's* son, **Jiva Khuman**, **discovered the tunnel** leading to their house. He got worried and immediately woke his father up and exclaimed, "Bapu, we've been robbed! A **thief** has done it." But Manasiyo Khuman calmly replied, "Jiva! **It cannot happen. I have been honestly donating God's share every year**. Our wealth (Lakshmi) is pure and divine." Then, both father and son checked the pot. They found that nothing was missing from it. The servant-thief had dug a **tunnel**, but it had **failed to reach the spot where the pot had been buried**.

■ DONATION TO THE MANDIR DEITY

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has instructed in the **Shikshapatri** that for the upkeep of mandirs and sadhus his **devotees should donate 10% or 5% of their earnings from their job or business**. In addition, donations or tithes are also given by devotees in appreciation of God for all the things he gives for our existence and joy. **Monetary donations to the mandir deity also purify one's earnings**.

■ IMPURE WEALTH CREATES MISERY

Shatanand Muni writes in his commentary or explanation to the **Shikshapatri**, "When a householder fails to donate 10% or 5% of his or her income the money earned is not purified."

To understand in brief, money earned or received in unrighteous ways may result in financial, physical and family problems and losses.

All devotees should donate regularly and thus sanctify their earnings. One must remember that 10% or 5% of our income belongs to God. By donating to God and for charity, God rewards us many times more with wealth and other things. After all, God has given us air, water, food and other things free. So in return we should repay our debt to Him through service, devotion, bhajan and donation.



31. THE GLORY OF MAHARAJ'S PARAMHANSAS

Hamir Khachar was the chief of Botad. One day, he and his household were mourning the **death** of their favourite **horse**. For the *darbars*, the death of a horse is like the death of a son. At that time **Vyapkanand Swami** came to their home. He came to know that the entire family was grieving the death of their horse. Vyapkanand Swami felt pity for Hamir Khachar and others. So, Swami came near the dead horse. He looked around for a while and saw a mosquito flying around. He chanted the sacred name of Swaminarayan, sprinkled a little water on the horse and **transferred the mosquito's soul into the horse**. Instantly the horse neighed and stood up. Every-

one in the *darbar* was amazed by the miracle and started rejoicing. Hamir Khachar fell at Swami's feet and praised him generously.

Dear friends, Shriji Maharaj possessed not only one or two *paramhansas* like Vyapkanand Swami but many more.

■ DIVINE POWERS OF PARAMHANSAS

Shriji Maharaj was in **Gadhpur**. The *paramhansas* were seated before him. Maharaj asked, "O *paramhansas*, today I wish you all to say what is so unique about yourselves. The *paramhansas* knew that it was not right to praise themselves, but because of Maharaj's command they replied frankly.

Muktanand Swami said, "Maharaj, no matter how **angry** a person may be, but when he comes before me he will **calm down** instantly. This is due to your grace."

Brahmanand Swami replied, "Due to your blessings, when I write a bhajan not a single word is repeated in it. In addition, I **don't have to search for words** when I am writ-

ing. And still the bhajan is always **so impressive** and vivid **that no other poet can not write like me.**"

Then **Nityanand Swami** explained, "By your grace all the **pundits of India cannot defeat me** in a scriptural debate."

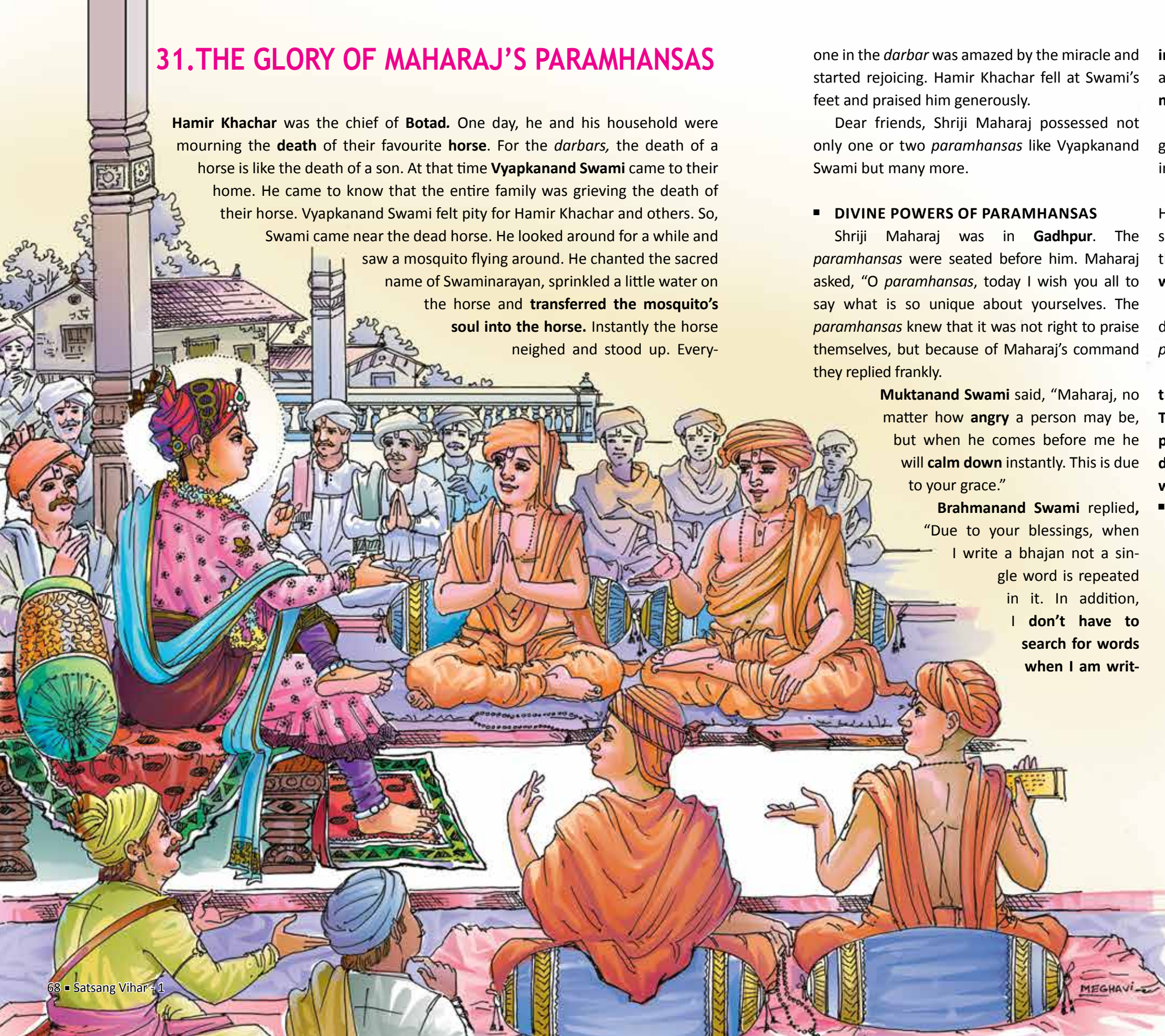
Lastly, Maharaj looked at **Gopalanand Swami**. He replied, "Without your doership not even a single leaf can move in the **infinite universes**. But through your grace **I can accomplish whatever I wish.**"

The devotees in the assembly were deeply impressed by the declarations of the *paramhansas*.

Friends, we have mentioned here the extraordinary qualities of only five *paramhansas*. They and many others were so powerful that people respected them like gods. Their extraordinary lives reflect the supreme glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

■ MIRACLES BY PARAMHANSAS

- **Sacchidanand Swami** made Indra shower rains during a drought.
- **Kanadanand Swami** rode on a lion.
- Aksharbrahman **Gunatitanand Swami** made the wooden pillars of a building tremble with his divine powers.
- **Swarupanand Swami** liberated souls suffering in *narak* (hell) by chanting the Swaminarayan mantra.
- The *paramhansas* had shown many other miracles. Through their blessings people were cured **of diseases**, and those who were childless were able to get children. They also **fulfilled the wishes and dreams** of devotees.
- In the Sampradaya, they are believed to have possessed divine powers, because the great **devas** and **avatars** had **come** to serve the supreme God in the form of *paramhansas*.



32. TOTAL SACRIFICE FOR MAHARAJ

Patalbhai was a devotee who lived in the village of **Muli**. His **sister's name** was **Rajuba**. The latter had great love and reverence for Shriji Maharaj. She even **remembered Maharaj while doing the housework**. Once, **six months** had passed and she **had not seen Shriji Maharaj**. As a result, Rajuba became sad and **started crying**. She even ate less because of that.

When devotees have such intense love, how can God not come to them! **Shriji Maharaj came to know** of this through his all-knowing powers. So, he **came to Muli** from Loya. Patalbhai took Maharaj to his home. When Rajuba saw Maharaj, she was overwhelmed with joy. She quickly **prepared a *thal* of *kansar* and *rotlis***.

Shriji Maharaj sat down for lunch. On seeing *kansar* on his plate, Maharaj said, "Rajuba, add **ghee** to the *kansar*." She returned with ghee and started pouring it in the *kansar*. While doing so, she mentally absorbed the divine form of Shriji Maharaj. After Shriji Maharaj finished eating, he **gave the *thal* to Rajuba**, who felt very blessed and happy.

In the evening, a wooden cot was laid for Maharaj in the verandah of the *darbar*. It was **very cold and windy**. Shriji Maharaj said, "Rajuba, I'm feeling cold. Prepare a **fire** for me." Once the fire was lit Maharaj said, "I still want more heat." Rajuba put all the **cow dung cakes** and **wood she had** into the fire. But Maharaj was still feeling cold. Then Rajuba placed her **wooden stool** and the **wooden cart wheel** into the fire. When that was not enough, she finally decided to break her **expensive cot** and put it into the fire. But Shriji Maharaj told her not to do so.

Rajuba **passed the test** carried out by Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj commented, "Now my shivers have gone. But Rajuba, why did you use so much wood for me?" Rajuba replied, "Maharaj, **you are my life**. You have blessed me with so much happiness that I wish to serve you as much as possible. **But I feel I have not been able to do anything for you. So Maharaj, whatever I have is all yours.**"

Shriji Maharaj told Rajuba, "I have troubled you a lot and put you under pressure today. But even I am under pressure today." Rajuba was puzzled and asked, "Maharaj, what troubles your mind?" Maharaj replied, "Brahmanand Swami is constructing a **mandir in Vartal**. The **labourers' wages** are yet to be paid. He has urgently asked for money, but where can I get it from?"

Instantly, Rajuba took out a **necklace** worth **Rs. 500** and gave it to Maharaj. She also gave **Rs. 200 in cash**. Shriji Maharaj was pleased by her sacrifice and said, "Rajuba, forgive me. I have **taken everything** from you." Rajuba bowed at Maharaj's feet, and with tears rolling from her eyes onto Maharaj's feet, she said, "Maharaj, **you mean everything to me!** You are my life. I ask you to bless me so that I can retain the spiritual wealth of your grace in my heart forever."

Shriji Maharaj's devotees were of such high spiritual ranking! For them, Maharaj was everything. They never hesitated in sacrificing everything for him. In fact, they eagerly waited for Maharaj to ask something from them as *seva*. When one becomes a devotee of such high calibre and virtues, only then one has lived worthily.



33. TRUE FAITH

Two hundred years ago some people opposed the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Those who joined the Sampradaya were sometimes thrown out of their family circles either by their hostile relatives or senior members of their community.

The story of **Himraj Shah** describes such a situation. Himraj Shah was a successful businessman who lived in the village of **Sundariyana**. He was also an expert in treating illnesses by feeling the pulse of a person. Himraj Shah practiced the **Vaishnav dharma**. He had **three sons: Vanasha, Jethasha and Pujasha**.

One day, one of his sons told him, “A Swaminarayan sadhu called **Gopalanand Swami** has arrived in our village. He is **ill**. So please come and examine his pulse and treat him.”

Himraj Shah came to see Gopalanand Swami. He held Swami’s wrist to check his **pulse**, but he **could not feel it**. He tried to find it in Swami’s arms and other parts of his body, but he failed. On the other hand, Gopalanand Swami was smiling! Himraj Shah was surprised and concluded that Swami was not an ordinary sadhu, but a mahayogi! **Such a feat of yogic powers were shown by Bhagwan Krishna**.

Then Himraj Shah thought **if Gopalanand Swami is such a mahayogi, then how great must his guru be**.

One day, Himrajbhai came for Shriji Maharaj’s darshan at Gadhada. He was highly impressed by him and he became a Swaminarayan **devotee**. Thereafter his entire family became devotees of Shriji Maharaj.

When his relatives came to know of this, they were shocked. First they tried to woo Himraj Shah back, but he was firm in his decision. They argued bitterly with him, “Why have you given up the faith of your ancestors?” Himraj Shah re-

plied, “I have not done anything wrong. When our **forefathers accepted the Vaishnav dharma they too must have given up their ancestral faith**.” Finally, Himraj Shah and his family were **expelled from their community**.

Some time later when Himraj Shah was on his deathbed he gave his final advice to his sons, “Shriji Maharaj is the supreme God. Therefore never give up your allegiance to him and the Satsang fellowship.” A few days later Himraj Shah passed away.

With the death of Himraj Shah his community became adamant and adopted a tough attitude towards his sons. **After the cremation rituals** were over, on the morning prior to the twelfth day something unusual happened. Those who were opposed to their new faith came to Himraj Shah’s sons. They strongly demanded, “**Break the Swaminarayan kanthis** and come back to your original faith. **Only then will the members of our community attend the ritual feast**.” Someone suggested, “At least remove your *kanthis* on the day of *karaj* (twelfth day on which people are invited to a feast). And, till everyone finishes their dinner, you can hide yourself in your house.” But Himraj Shah’s sons refused boldly, “**We will not give up Satsang even if the Sun were to rise in the west**.”

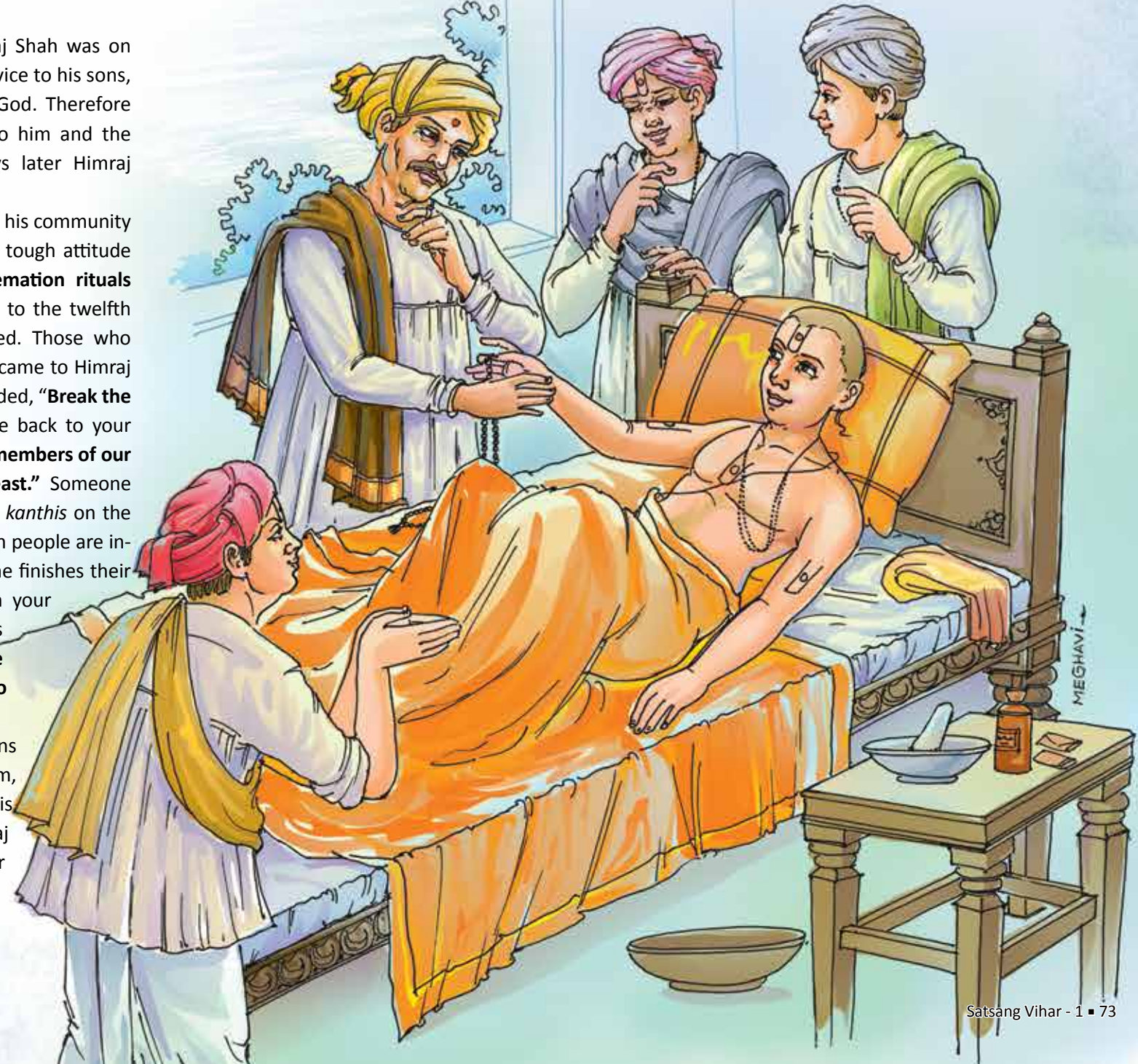
Then the senior-most persons of the community pressured them, “You will lose all prestige by this shameful act of yours.” Himraj Shah’s sons proudly replied, “For the fear of mosquitoes we will not give up a palace. **We belong to the Satsang community of Shriji Maharaj, his sadhus and**

devotees.”

Immediately thereafter, the chief of their community wrote letters to all the members asking them to **boycott** the feast. And if anyone attended it, they would be excommunicated. This **message also reached Shriji Maharaj in Gadhpur**. His eyes became moist with tears of joy and pride

for the family. He went to the ritual feast in **Sundariyana** alongwith his sadhus and devotees. Maharaj stayed for five days at Himraj Shah’s home and blessed his sons for their firm devotion and faith.

Like Himaraj Shah and his sons there were hundreds of devotees who were firmly devoted to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.



34. SHRAVAN'S IDEAL PARENTAL DEVOTION

The story of **Shravan's devotion to his blind parents** is well-known in Indian culture. He **served** them with great care and love. Each day, he used to get up early. After bathing he would do puja of God. He **prayed** to him, "O God, bless me so that I never forget my parents. Give me the company of sadhus. And may I be able to please you. I ask you to grant me such wisdom."

After his prayers Shravan would serve his parents all day. At sunrise he would bow down at his parents' feet, and gently **wake** them up. Then he would lightly massage their feet and give each of them a babul stick to **brush their teeth**. Thereafter Shravan would **bathe them** in warm water. He washed their clothes daily and gave them fresh ones to wear. Then he would go to a nearby village to beg for alms, and **cook food** for them. He would offer the food to God and lovingly **feed** his mother and father. He always ate last.

One day, Shravan heard his parents' talking, "We are blind. So, it is not possible for us to do darshan of God or holy sadhus. But if we can go on a **pilgrimage** we will receive the blessings of holy sadhus and attain *moksha*. But alas, who will take us?"

Shravan heard his parents wish. He told them, "Don't worry. I'll take you on a pilgrimage." So he made a carrier (*kavad*) of bamboo for his parents to sit in. Shravan balanced the *ka-*

vad on his shoulder, and began the pilgrimage.

Along the way he passed through narrow, thorny pathways, thick jungles and bushes, mountains and valleys, and roaring rivers and streams. Whenever his parents were hungry, Shravan would feed them ripe fruits. Sometimes, while passing by a village or town, he would **beg for alms**. When his parents ate, Shravan smiled and rejoiced. He would filter drinking water from a river and quench his parents' **thirst**.

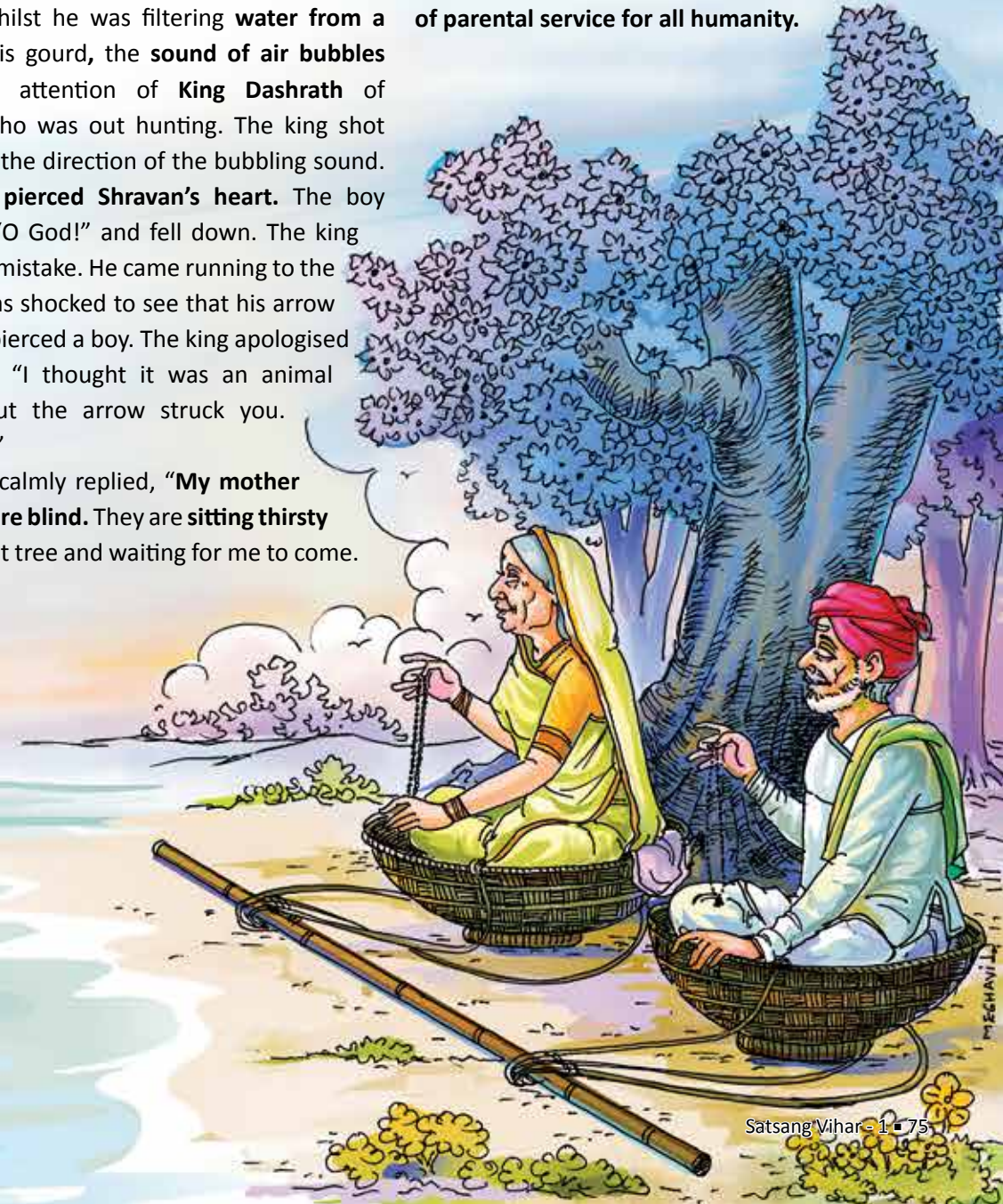
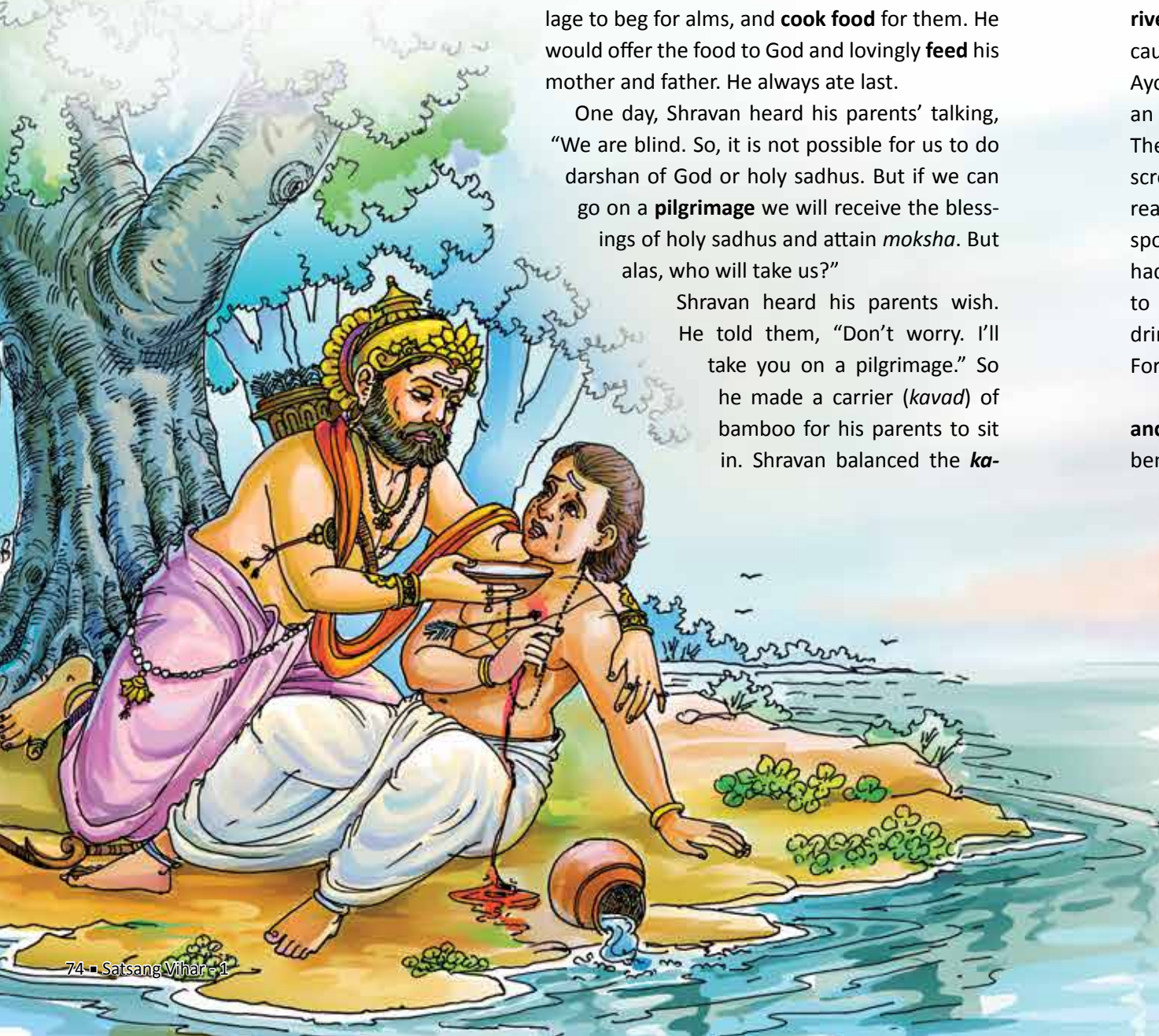
Once, whilst he was filtering **water from a river** into his gourd, the **sound of air bubbles** caught the attention of **King Dashrath** of Ayodhya, who was out hunting. The king shot an arrow in the direction of the bubbling sound. The **arrow pierced Shravan's heart**. The boy screamed, "O God!" and fell down. The king realized his mistake. He came running to the spot and was shocked to see that his arrow had fatally pierced a boy. The king apologised to Shravan, "I thought it was an animal drinking. But the arrow struck you. Forgive me."

Shravan calmly replied, "**My mother and father are blind**. They are **sitting thirsty** beneath that tree and waiting for me to come.

Quickly take this water to them and **quench their thirst**." And so saying, Shravan breathed his last.

King Dashrath took the water to Shravan's parents with a heavy heart. He told them what had happened. The news of their son's death was so painful that their souls left their bodies and they died.

Dear friends, Shravan served his parents till his last breath. We too, should serve our parents till we live. Shravan is an ideal example of parental service for all humanity.



35. SHIKSHAPATRI – ESSENCE OF THE DHARMA SHASTRAS



Shriji Maharaj once came to the village of **Khokhra**. Devotees flocked to him for darshan. Among them were **Kana Patel** and **Vasta Patel**. They performed *pujan* of Maharaj, and offered donations at his feet. But both of them looked sad.

Shriji Maharaj enquired, “Why do you both look unhappy? Is there a problem?” Kana Patel replied, “Maharaj, **there is no Brahmin pundit** in our village. This means that there is no one who knows the shastras. Every year, when we want to know the **auspicious day and time to begin farming**, who do we ask?”

Shriji Maharaj replied, “Oh, it’s not something to be worried about. When it’s time to sow the seeds **chant, ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’** and **yolk your plough to the oxen**. By doing so, you will reap a good crop. You won’t face any obstacles or problems. I give you my blessings.”

Then Vasta Patel asked, “Maharaj, I am building a new home. Tell me how should I get the **vastu** puja done.” Shriji Maharaj revealed, “**Install the Shikshapatri** in your new home. Then **light a lamp fuelled with ghee** before it and **chant ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...’** for a little while. By doing this your *vastu* puja is done. The Shikshapatri is my form. If you have it, then everything will turn out favourable.”

Yes, friends. The glory of the Shikshapatri is truly great. It is not an ordinary shastra because it was **written by the supreme God, Shriji Maharaj**. It is not only a **spiritual shastra**, but the **divine form of Shriji Maharaj**. The Shikshapatri says, “**Those who follow the Shikshapatri will become happy in this world and the world hereafter. Those who violate the path of righteousness and behave wilfully will suffer intense pain in this life and the next.**”

■ HISTORY AND GLORY OF THE SHIKSHAPATRI

1. Shriji Maharaj **started** writing the Shikshapatri in **Narayan Mahol, Vartal**. He **completed** it on 12 February 1826 (V.S. 1882, Maha *sud* 5) at the **Hari Mandap** in Vartal.
2. The Shikshapatri is like the vast **ocean contained in a small vessel**. In its 212 *shloks* one finds the essence of all the Hindu Dharma Shastras. It has **3,814 references from 346 shastras**.
3. The Shikshapatri is a shastra **for the good of all jivas**. It contains the duties of and moral rules for sadhus, men and women devotees, kings and others. Its contents range from civic matters like where not to spit and where to answer nature’s call to how to **become brahmarup**.
4. By following the Shikshapatri one attains the **four goals of life**, namely, dharma, *arth*, *kam* and *moksha*.
5. The Shikshapatri also provides **answers**, directly or indirectly, **to all human problems** concerning education, health, finance, family, society, spirituality and others.
6. **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**, the deputy Prime Minister of India, said if the people of India obeyed the Shikshapatri then the need for **police and courts would be diminished**.

So, let us try and shape our lives according to the Shikshapatri, and make ourselves happy and peaceful.

(Note: ‘**Gems from Shikshapatri**’ is the essence and classified version of the Shikshapatri with 212 *shloks*.)

36. SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S DREAM

This incident happened when there were no Swaminarayan Mandirs in the Sampradaya. Even Maharaj's Akshar Ordi (residence) had not yet been built.

Once, **Shriji Maharaj was sleeping in Abhel Khachar's darbar in Gadhada**. He **woke up** in the **middle of the night** and told his attendant,

"Bring my *mojadi* (shoes). I want to go and meet Muktanand Swami."

Muktanand Swami was staying at **Jiva Khachar's darbar**, a few furlongs away. Shriji Maharaj went there in the middle of the night. **Muktanand Swami was meditating**. Maharaj woke him up. He was surprised to see Maharaj so late at night. He offered him a seat.

Shriji Maharaj began, "Tonight I had a **dream**. I have come to tell you about it."

Muktanand Swami said, "Maharaj you are the supreme God. So, **your dream will come true**."

Maharaj described what had happened in his dream, "All the **avatars** of God appeared in my dream. They told me, 'We have come to stay with you. When you make mandirs **consecrate our murtis** in the shrines. So, I said 'Yes' to them. Then the **tirthas** (sacred places) appeared and said, 'O Maharaj, we want to stay with you because there is **adharma** in other places.' So, I told them to **stay in the river Ghela**."

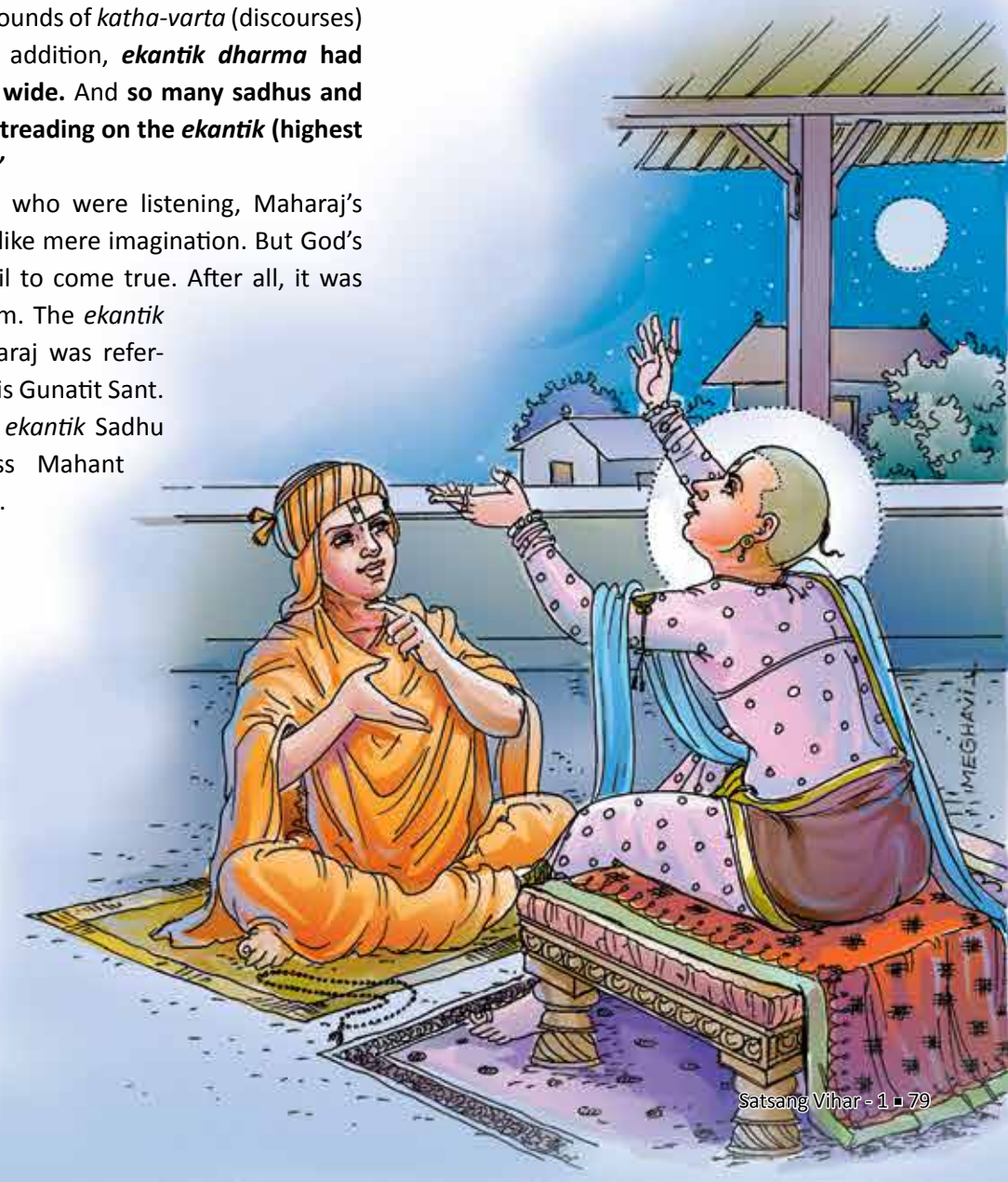
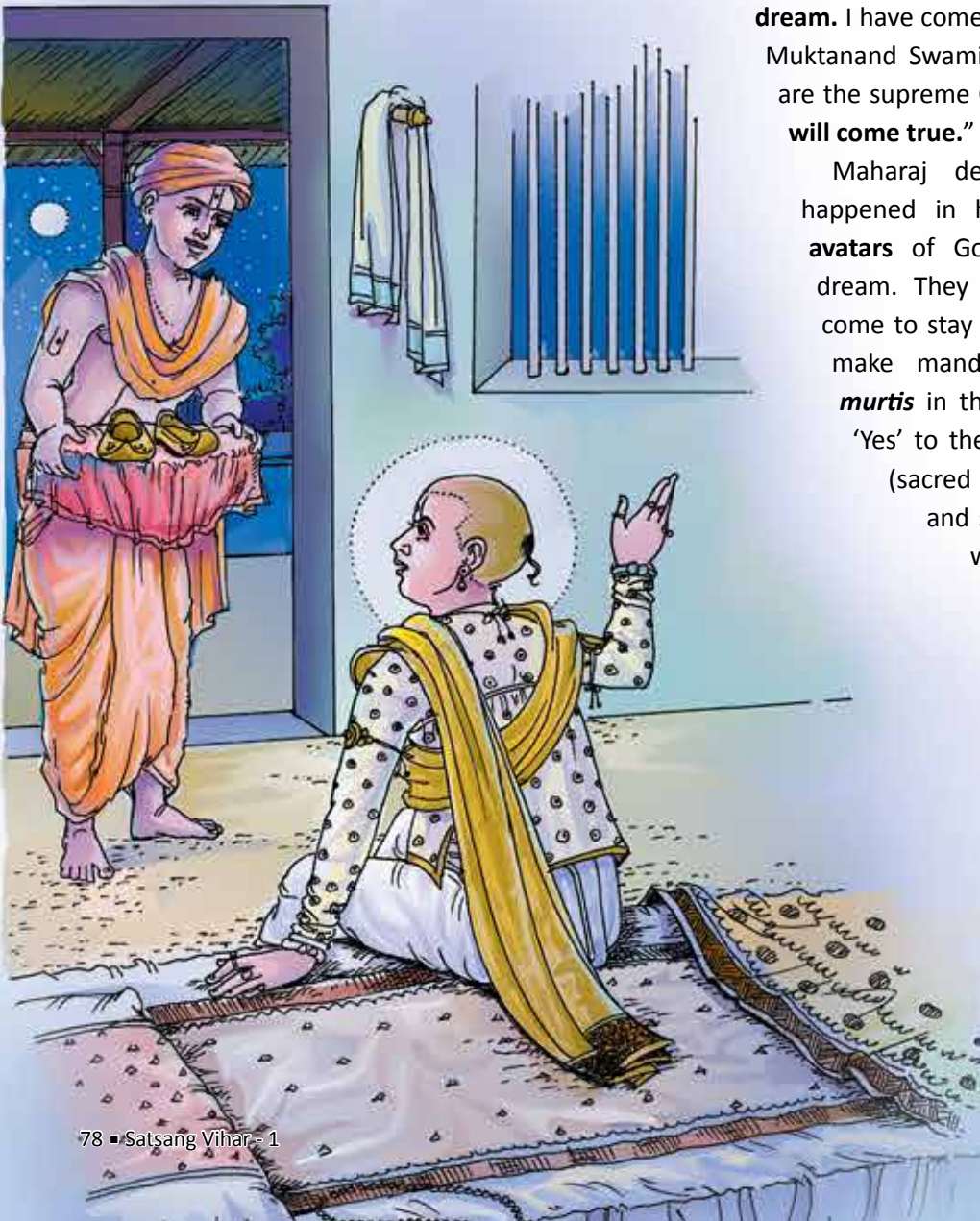
Every word of Shriji Maharaj was amazing. Then Maharaj continued, "Then I saw a huge *shikharbaddh* (pinnacled) mandir in the *darbar* of Abhel Khachar. There was a giant entrance gate. Later, Gadhada developed into a town and everyone was doing bhajan of Swaminarayan."

By that time many *paramhansas* had got up from their sleep and gathered before Maharaj. And lastly, Maharaj made an amazing forecast, "O sadhus, I saw in my dream that I had **built huge mandirs**. There were **residences (dharmashalas)** for sadhus in **many villages**. And in them resonated the sounds of *katha-varta* (discourses) and kirtans. In addition, **ekantik dharma** had **spread far and wide**. And **so many sadhus and devotees were treading on the ekantik (highest spiritual) path**."

To all those who were listening, Maharaj's words seemed like mere imagination. But God's words never fail to come true. After all, it was Maharaj's dream. The *ekantik* path that Maharaj was referring to meant his Gunatit Sant. Today, such an *ekantik* Sadhu is His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

■ LET US BECOME HIS INSTRUMENT

- Shriji Maharaj wished to liberate *jivas* that would fill up **100 crores manvars (ships)**.
- Gunatitanand Swami wished for the **spread of Satsang to every leaf of every tree in the world**. One should believe Satsang to be established when 100,000 people follow each sadhu.
- Let us become true *satsangis* and inspire others. **Guiding one soul to Satsang** gives us the **merits of saving an entire universe**.



37. DAILY RECITATIONS

■ JAYNAAD

Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwanni Jay,
Akshar Purushottam Maharajni Jay,
Gumatitanand Swami Maharajni Jay,
Bhagatji Maharajni Jay,
Shastriji Maharajni Jay,
Yogiji Maharajni Jay,
Pramukh Swami Maharajni Jay,
Mahant Swami Maharajni Jay.

■ ARTI

Jay Sadguru Swāmi,
(Prabhu) jay Sadguru Swāmi;
Sahajānand dayālu (2),
balvant Bahunāmi...**Jay 1**
Charan-saroj tamārā vandū kar jodi (2),
Charane chitt dharyāthi (2),
dukh nākhyā todī...**Jay 2**
Nārāyan sukh dātā, dwij-kul tanu dhāri (2),
Pāmar patit uddhāryā (2),
aganit narnāri...**Jay 3**
Nitya nitya nautam lilā kartā Avināshi (2),
Adsath tirath charane (2),
koti Gayā Kāshi...**Jay 4**
Purushottam pragat nu je darshan karshe (2),
Kāl karma thi chhuti (2),
kutumb sahit tarshe...**Jay 5**
Ā avsar karunā nidhi, karunā bahu kidhi (2),
Muktānand kahe mukti (2),
sugam kari sidhi...**Jay 6**
(The *arti* was written by Muktanand Swami in
Samvat 1859, Kartik *sud* 10 (5 November 1802
CE) in Kalvani. Shriji Maharaj was 22 years old at
the time. Muktanand Swami's age was 45.)

■ SHLOKAS FOR PUJA

Invocation Mantra

*Uttishthotishtha he Nāth,
Swāminārāyana prabho,
Dharmasuno dayāsindho
sveshām shreyaha param kuru.*

"Oh Swaminarayan Prabhu! Oh Lord (Nath)
awaken, awaken. Oh son of Dharma! Oh ocean
of compassion! Please grant *kalyan* to all those
who have surrendered to you."

*Āgachchha Bhagwan deva,
svasthānāt Parameshwar,
Aham pujām karishyāmi sadā tvam
sammukho bhava.*

"He Bhagwan! He Parameshwar! He Deva!
Please come here from your abode. I will worship
you. Please stay present before me."

Concluding Mantra

*Svasthānam gachchha devesh
pujāmādāya māmakim,
Ishtakāmprasiddhyartham
punarāgamanāya chha.*

"Oh Deva of devas! After accepting the puja
I have done, please return to your abode, and
come back here again (tomorrow) to fulfil my
wishes."

■ SHLOKA TO BE SAID BEFORE MEALS

*Shrimadsadguna shālinam chidachidi,
vyāptam cha divyākṛutim,
Jiveshākshar muktakoti sukhadam,
naikāvatārādhipam,
Gneyam Shri Purushottamam munivarair,
Vedādi kirtyam vibhum,
Tam-mulākshar-yuktameva Sahajānandam,
cha vande sadā.*

"I forever bow to Shri Purushottam
Sahajanand, who, has Mul Akshar with him, is
attractive, is with all good qualities, pervades all
things animate and inanimate (*jad* and *chetan*),
has a divine form, gives happiness to millions
of *jivas*, *ishwars*, and *aksharmuktas*, is the king
of all avatars, is the pursuit of all rishis, worthy
of Vedic praises, and is more powerful than all
others.

*Aum sahanāvavatu,
saha nou bhunaktu,
sahaveeryam karavāvahai,
Tejasvināvadheetamastu,
mā vidvishāvahai.*

Aum Shāntihi! Shāntihi! Shāntihi!

The Guru and *Shishya* pray together: "He
Paramatma! Protect us both! Nourish us both!
Strengthen us both! Let our studies be bright
and let us never hate each other." AUM. Peace.
Peace. Peace.

■ PRAYER FOR MORNING PUJA

*He Mahārāj, He Swāmi!
He Mahant Swāmi Mahārāj!*

*Hu humeshā āpni āgnā pālu, kharāb kārya
na karu, āpne rāji kari shaku tevā bal-buddhi
āpajo. Kusang thaki rakshā karjo ane sārāno
sang āpjo. Mātāpitāni sevā karu ane abhyās
barābar karu ane āpno ādarsh bhakta banu evi
shakti āpjo.*

"O Maharaj! O Swami! O Mahant Swami
Maharaj! Please give me wisdom and strength so
that I may always follow your wishes, never do
any wrong deeds, and always please you. Please
protect me from bad company and always give
me good company. Please give me strength so
that I may serve my parents, study well, and
become your ideal devotee."

■ NIGHTTIME PRAYER

*He Mahārāj, He Swāmi!
He Mahant Swāmi Mahārāj!*

*Ākhā divasmā jāne ajāne mārāthi bhul thai
hoi to māf karjo. Fari bhul na thāy tevi prernā
āpajo ane savāre mane vehalo uthādjo. Āvti
kāle āpne vishesh rāji kari shaku tevi shakti
āpjo.*

"O Maharaj! O Swami! O Mahant Swami Ma-
haraj!

"Please forgive any mistakes I have knowingly
or unknowingly made today. Please inspire me
so that I may never make those mistakes again.
Please enable me to get up early tomorrow
morning and give me the strength to please you
even more."

38. ADDITIONAL RECITATIONS

■ STUTI

**1. Vandu Shri Harine sadā hrudaythi,
Gunātītānandne,
Vandu Prāgji Bhaktane valī namu,
Shāstri Mahārājne,
Vandu Shri Guru Yogiji, Pramukhji,
dhāryā Parabrahmane,
Vandu sant Mahant Swāmi gurune,
kalyāndātā tame.**

“I bow with my heart to Shri Hari (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) and Gunatitanand Swami. I bow to Pragji Bhakta (Bhagatji Maharaj) and also bow to Shastriji Maharaj. I bow to guru Yogiji Maharaj and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj who held Parabrahman in them. I bow to Mahant Swami Maharaj – the giver of *kalyan* (liberation).”

**2. Gunātītoksharam Brahma,
Bhagwān Purushottamaha,
Jano jānannidam satyam,
muchyate bhavbandhanāt.**

“Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman and Bhagwan Swaminarayan is Purushottam. Whoever knows this truth is freed from the bondage of this world.”

**3. Gurur Brahmā Gurur Vishnur
Gururdevo Maheshwar,
Guruḥ sākshāt Parambrahma,
tasmai shri gurave namaha.**

“The Guru is Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh (Shiv). He is the visible form of Parabrahman. I bow to such a Guru.”

**4. Tvameva mātā cha pitā tvameva
Tvameva bandhushcha sakḥā tvameva,
Tvameva vidyā dravinam tvameva
Tvameva sarvam mam dev deva.**

“Oh Bhagwan! You alone are my (true) mother, father, brother, friend, knowledge, and wealth. You are my everything.”

**5. Aum sahanāvavatu, saha nou bhunaktu,
sahaveeryam karavāvahai,
Tejasvināvadheetamastu,
mā vidvishāvahai.
Aum Shāntihi! Shāntihi! Shāntihi!**

The Guru and *Shishya* pray together: “He Paramatma! Protect us both! Nourish us both! Strengthen us both! Let our studies be bright and let us never hate each other.” AUM. Peace. Peace. Peace.

■ DHYEY (GOAL) AND PURNAHUTI (CONCLUDING) SHLOKAS

**Gunātītam gurum prāpya
Brahmarupam nijātmanaha,
Vibhāvya dāsbhāvena
Swāminārāyanam bhaje.**

“Having attained the Gunatit Guru and believing my *atma* to be *brahmarup*, I worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan with servitude.”

**Shriharim sāksharam sarvadeveshvaram,
Bhakti-Dharmātmajam divyarupam param;
Shāntidam muktidam kāmādam kāranam,
Swāminārāyanam Nilkantham bhaje.**

“I worship Swaminarayan, who is Shri Hari, with Aksharbrahman. He is the Deva of all devas, the child of Bhakti and Dharma, has a divine form, is supreme, the giver of peace, the granter of liberation, the fulfiller of wishes, the cause of all, and is also known as Nilkanth.”

■ SWAMINI VATO

At the beginning of every Swamini Vat say, “**Swāminārāyan Hare, Swāmi e vāt kari je...**” Also read the Vatos according to the punctuation given – pause at every comma and period.

Swāminārāyan hare, Swāmie vāt kari je,

1. Āpne to Akshardhāmmā jāvu chhe, Evo ek sankalp rākhvo.

“Our sole wish should be that we want to go to Akshardham.” (1/301)

2. Āpne Bhagwānnā chhiye, Pan māyā nā nathi em mānvu.

“Believe that we belong to God and not *maya*.” (1/230)

3. Mujhvan āve to kem karvu? E prashna poochhyo. Teno uttar karyo je, Swāminārāyan, Swāminārāyan bhajan karvu tethi mujhvan tali jāy.

“What should one do when in worry? The answer, chant ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’, so that the worry is resolved.” (1/272)

4. Karod kām bagādine pana ek moksha sudhārvo, Ne kadāpi karod kām sudhāryā ne ek moksha bagādiyo, to temā shu karyo?

“Even by spoiling ten million tasks improve your *moksha*. In case ten million tasks are improved, but *moksha* is spoilt, what is achieved?” (1/14)

5. Satya, hit ne priya evu vachan bolvu. Ne upekshā rahit bolvu, pana āgrah thi vachan kahevu nahi.

“Speak truthful, beneficial and affectionate words, and speak without contempt, but do not speak with insistence.” (5/164)

6. “Bhagwān bhajvā hoi, tenāthi badhāyni marji rākhi shakāy nahi, tenāthi to Bhagwānni marji sachvāy.

“One who wants to worship God cannot

please everybody. He can only fulfil the wishes of God.” (5/59)

7. Nirantar sarva kriyā mā pāchhu valine jovu je, Māre Bhagwān bhajvā chhe, ne hu shu karu chhu? Em joyā karvu.

“Always introspect during every task and ask yourself, ‘I want to worship God, and what am I doing?’ Keep thinking like this.” (2/35)

8. Koti tapa karine, koti jap karine, koti vrat karine, Koti dāna karine, ne koti yagna karine pana je Bhagwāne ne sādhu ne pāmvā hatā te āj āpanne malyā chhe.

“That God and Sadhu we wanted to attain through endless austerities, chanting of God’s name, observances, donations and sacrifices, we have attained today.” (1/294)

9. Sevā to potāni shraddhā pramāne thāy te karvi, Pana asevā to na j karvi. Te asevā te shu? Je avagun levo.

“Serve according to one’s own faith, but never do disservice. What is that disservice? To perceive faults in others.” (2/133)

10. Ek upāsānā, biji āgnā, trijo samāgam, ne chothu satshāstranu vyasan, a chār dradh karine rākhvā.

“One, *upasana*; two, commands of Shriji Maharaj; three, company of the great Sadhu; and four, addiction to the shastras – these four should be firmly kept.” (4/22)



39. THINGS TO KNOW

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

1. **Identity:** Parabrahman, Purna Purushottam Narayan, Supreme Bhagwan.
2. **Birth:** 3 April, 1781, Chaitra *sud* 9, Samvat 1837 (Ram Navmi), Chhapaiya, Uttar Pradesh. **Mother:** Bhaktimata. **Father:** Dharmadev. **Childhood Name:** Ghanshyam. **Other Names:** Nilkanth Varni, Sarjudas, Shri Hari, Narayan Muni, Sahajanand Swami, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shriji Maharaj, Harikrishna Maharaj, etc.
3. **Purpose of Avatar:** *Dusarā jo avatār hai so to kāryakāran avatār he, kintu merā jo avatār hai so to jivo ku ātyāntik mukti dene ke vāste Purushottam jesā jo mai vo manushya ke jesā banyā hu.* “The other avatars come to accomplish certain necessary acts (destroying *adharma*, etc.) However, my avatar is to grant liberation to *jivas*. For that, I, who am Purushottam, have become like man (have taken human birth on Earth).”
4. **Divine Childhood:** Performed many miracles. Mastered the major Hindu shastras by the age of seven.
5. **Pilgrimage of Liberation:** At the age of 11, he left home and performed intense austerities. He travelled throughout India for 7 years, 1 month and 11 days. He granted liberation to countless souls.
6. **Established the Swaminarayan Sampradaya at age 21.**
7. **Mandirs:** To establish the worship of God with his ideal devotee, he built six mandirs – Ahmedabad, Bhuj, Vartal, Dholera, Junagadh and Gadhada.
8. **Shastras:** Gave the Vachanamrut and Shikshapatri.

9. **Paramhansas:** Initiated more than 3,000 sadhus.
10. **Two Boons:** 1. “If a devotee is to suffer the sting of a scorpion let me suffer that pain in his place.” 2. “If it is a devotee’s fate to beg for food and clothes, let me receive that misfortune but may that devotee never suffer from lack of food or clothing.”
11. **Gave the ‘Swaminarayan’ mahamantra.**
12. **Influenced Thousands of People:** Thousands of sadhus and hundreds of thousands of devotees obeyed his moral instructions and commands.
13. **Samadhi and Brahmasthiti:** Graced many with samadhi without attaining ashtanga yoga. Blessed countless with *brahmisthiti* (state of being *brahmarup* or God-realized).
14. **Akshardham:** Promised to give darshan to devotees at the time of death and take them to Akshardham.
15. **Social Services:** Stopped the practice of widow burning and female infanticide, freed people from superstitions, uplifted the outcast and lower castes, performed non-violent *yagnas*, opened almshouses, dug wells and built reservoirs, transformed many lives, preached about purity, freed people from addictions, inspired literacy, etc.
16. **Left for His divine Abode (Akshardham):** 1 June 1830 (Samvat 1886, Jeth *sud* 10), in Gadhada, at 49 years of age.
17. **Ever-present through the Gunatit Parampara:** Currently present on Earth through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

1. **Identity:** Aksharbrahman, Gunatit Satpuruush (Guru), Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s sixth spiritual successor, the present form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and

the gateway to liberation (*moksha*).

2. **Birth:** 19 September 1933 (Samvat 1989, Bhadarva *vad* 9) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.
3. **Mother’s Name:** Dahibahen **Father’s Name:** Manibhai **Childhood Name:** Vinubhai. As a child, he had darshan of Shastriji Maharaj.
4. **Diksha (Initiation):**
 - On Yogiji Maharaj’s word, took *parshad diksha* at age 23 after completing his Bachelors degrees in Agriculture. (1957, Gondal)
 - **Parshad Name:** Vinu Bhagat.
 - At the age of 28, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj initiated him as a sadhu. (1961, Gadhada)
 - **Sadhu Name:** Sadhu Keshavjivandas
5. **Studies and Mahant:** After *diksha*, he stayed in Mumbai and studied Sanskrit. Yogiji Maharaj made him the head of 50 sadhus in Mumbai. Since then he has been known as ‘Mahant Swami’.
6. **Life and Saintliness:**
 - The first formally educated sadhu in the Sanstha.
 - Strictly observes the five principle vows of sadhus given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
 - Possesses all the qualities of an ideal sadhu mentioned in the Hindu shastras.
 - Devotion to God and guru: In every task he gives all the honour to God and his gurus.
7. **Work:**
 - The leader of BAPS international social, cultural, educational, value-based, and spiritual activities.
 - Has helped plan Akshardham and other international projects.
 - As a young sadhu, he used to look over the decoration and management of major festivals.

8. **Guru:** At age 83, He succeeded Pramukh Swami Maharaj as guru of BAPS.
9. **Principles:** to serve everyone and give *kalyan* to everyone without keeping any divisions of status, wealth, race or creed; unity and fraternity (*samp, suhradbhav and ekta*); to see all as divine (*divyabhav*); to see all others as great and to live as a servant.

Miscellaneous:

- Everyone experiences profound peace in his presence. On meeting him people of all backgrounds – children, youth, adults, elderly, educated and uneducated, Indians and Non-Indians – experience the joy of having met God himself.
- Everyone attains spiritual progress in his presence.

BAPS SANSTHA

1. **Name:** Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).
2. **Introduction:** A socio-spiritual organization that selflessly works for the betterment of everyone and follows the eternal Hindu, Vedic philosophy and tradition.
3. **Founded:** In 1907, Bochasan.
4. **Founder:** Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.
5. **Guru:** His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.
6. **Principle:** To become *aksharrup* and offer *upasana* (worship) to Purushottam as a servant serves his master.
7. **Foundational Beliefs:** Shriji Maharaj is supreme God. Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Aksharbrahman. The present guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, is the gateway to *moksha* (liberation).
8. **Purpose:** To inform about the Vedic Akshar Purushottam *upasana* as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and to strive for the all-round

progress of society. Also, to protect and nourish the values of traditional Indian culture.

9. **Main Shastras:** Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri and Swamini Vato.
10. **Centres:** 3,850 Children, Youth, Adult and Women.
11. **Satsang Assembly:** 16,000 assemblies including 6,500 Children's assemblies.
12. One million **devotees** in India and abroad.
13. More than 1,000 **sadhus**.
14. More than 1,100 mandirs including Gandhi-nagar and Delhi **Akshardhams**.
15. Various International **Services:**
 - Medical service to hundreds of thousands through medical clinics and hospitals.
 - Educational service to hundreds of thousands of students through schools, hostels and scholarships.
 - Disaster relief during natural and man-made disasters.
 - Uplift of tribal people.
 - Awareness programmes and projects on environment, parenting, education, women's development, anti-addiction, literacy, anti-dowry, water management, etc.
16. **Spiritual Activities:** Inspiring spirituality in children, youth, adult and women.
17. Recognized by the **United Nations** and acclaimed in the **Guinness Book of World Records**.

SPEECH: WORSHIP GOD

Once, a teacher was travelling by boat on the River Ganga. He asked the boatman, "Do you know anything about science or politics?" The boatman said, "No." So the teacher said in a harsh tone, "You are living in the 21st century and you don't know what science is? Half of your life has gone down this river (meaning wasted)." The boatman was ashamed of himself.

Suddenly, they were hit by a terrible storm. Their boat began to sway dangerously back and forth. The boatman asked, "Sir! Do you know how to swim?" The teacher said, "No!" The boatman said, "Then your whole life will go down the river. I might not know about science, about politics, or sports, but I do know how to swim. My final good bye to you." The boatman then jumped into the river to save himself.

Friends! This story teaches us a very important lesson. We may know a lot about the world, but if we don't have the knowledge of Bhagwan – the main goal of our life – then like the teacher, our life will be 'lost in water'.

Veda Vyasji, who classified the Vedas, wrote the Brahmasutras and the 18 Puranas, and is considered as an avatar of Bhagwan, said:

*Ālodya sarvashāstrāni,
vichārya cha punah punah,
Idam ekam sunishpannam,
dhyeyo Nārāyano Harihi.*

This means that the essence of all the shastras is to realize Bhagwan as the ultimate goal of life. That is why, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj used to often say, "Worship Bhagwan." Yes Friends! This is absolutely true. This expression is derived from experience. Just study the history of the world.

Napoleon, the ruler of half the known world, said, "I have not seen six happy days in my life." The great artist Michelangelo said, "I regret that

I have not done enough for the salvation of my soul." In contrast to this, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, 500 *paramhansas*, Guru Parampara and others did not have wealth or power, yet they were extremely happy.

This does not mean that we should not earn money for a living. We can do anything as long as it is in accordance with the rules prescribed by the shastras. Always remember that doing anything without keeping Bhagwan in our thoughts, is like having a bunch of zeros.

So friends! Start worshipping God the moment this knowledge dawns on you. At the end of life none of us should have any regrets. We should worship Bhagwan and become happy in this life and in the afterlife. In conclusion, let us remember Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words, "Make *shradha* and *bhakti* firm in life..."

Jai Swaminarayan

40. MANDIRS: AN IDENTITY OF HINDU CULTURE

1998, Westchester, USA. One evening, the world renowned heart specialist, **Dr. Subramaniam**, was to be honoured at a public satsang assembly. When he came on the stage to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj he **prostrated before** him in the presence of a packed audience. There was no hesitation in his act of paying respects. The entire assembly was amazed and clapped in appreciation.

In 1988 Swami Bapa went to the **West Indies**. A meeting was arranged with the **Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Hon. Vasudev Pande**. As soon as the garlanding ceremony was over, the Prime Minister **touched the feet of Pramukh Swami Maharaj** and bowed to him. Those who were watching were impressed.

When both the dignitaries were asked from where they had learnt this, **they replied: "The mandir has taught us all this."**

Yes friends, our mandirs are one of the three pillars of Hindu civilization. As long as **our mandirs are present and vibrant with spiritual activity, our culture and values will remain alive**. Foreign invaders in India had tried to destroy our culture by demolishing our mandirs. They knew well that Hinduism was alive and flourishing because of its mandirs.

Let us try to understand some details about our mandirs.

■ HOW MANDIRS CAME INTO EXISTENCE

India is a spiritual country. Here, people have always

been eager to realize the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma. During Vedic times our rishis thought deeply and meditated either **in the jungles, caves or on mountains**. There, they **experienced inner peace**.

With time some thought, "Why can't we do spiritual sadhana at home or in our village?" So, a small *murti* of God was placed on a seat and **sugarcane sticks** were planted in the ground **around it to form a canopy**. **Gradually, this was replaced by stones and bricks**. Later, **books were written about stone architecture and *murti-puja***.

In ancient Indian culture the mandir tradition was born and developed through the rishis. Today, **there are more than 3.5 million mandirs in India**. One cannot imagine India without its mandirs. In fact **these mandirs have become the face of Hindu culture**. They play an invaluable role in protecting and sustaining our culture.

■ MANDIRS BUILT BY SHRIJI MAHARAJ

For the nourishment of *upasana* (worship) in his devotees Shriji Maharaj built **six mandirs: 1. Ahmedabad, 2. Bhuj, 3. Vartal, 4. Dholera, 5. Junagadh and 6. Gadhada**. Renowned poet Shri Nanhalal wrote about the mandirs built by Shriji Maharaj, "Sit beneath the dome of mandirs in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and you will feel a



Sarangpur (India)



Nairobi (Africa)



Chicago (USA)



Auckland (New Zealand)



London (UK)

shower of coolness from the sky. One's *atma* becomes calm. One's inner being becomes cool. And the heat in one's heart and other parts of the body subsides."

Swaminarayan mandirs help one experience inner peace and joy.

■ MANDIRS BUILT BY SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

The philosophy of Brahman and Parabrahman has been mentioned in the Hindu shastras. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Brahman and Parabrahman or Akshar and Purushottam in the middle sanctum of five mandirs. The **five mandirs** he built were **1. Bochasan, 2. Sarangpur, 3. Gondal, 4. Atladra and 5. Gadhada**. He used to say, "I have been born to build mandirs."

■ BAPS MANDIRS WORLDWIDE

Following in the footsteps of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj have built mandirs in India, North America, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Today, countless **Hindus experience the glory and joy of their spiritual heritage and *moksha*** by praying and worshipping at these mandirs. They have also become centres for character-building and service to society.



Akshardham (Gandhinagar)

■ MANDIRS BUILT BY PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had built the most number of mandirs in the world. He had built and consecrated more than 1100 BAPS mandirs. The Guinness Book of World Records has taken note of this. **Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi is one of the world's famous Hindu mandirs** built by Swami. Indeed, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had enhanced the glory and pride of India's culture through the mandirs he has built.

• Pramukh Swami Maharaj Had Said:

"We find that materialism is increasing rapidly. As a result we are forgetting our original values, which is the root cause of our growing problems and miseries. Our values will be fortified through our mandirs, thus giving us inner peace."

Swami's divine words are worth remembering in our minds.

■ WHY MANDIRS?

- The three pillars of Hindu Dharma are **1. Mandir, 2. Shastra, and 3. Sant**. The mandir plays a very important role in achieving the **four goals of life: 1. Dharma, 2. Arth, 3. Kam and 4. Moksha**.
- Mandirs Enable One To...

1. Strengthen *upasana* and 2. Bhakti, 3. Experience peace of mind, 4. Understand the path to *moksha*, 5. Mould one's character, 6. Increase joy and unity through festivals, 7. Protect our culture, 8. Inspire social service, promote education and health, uplift children and women, create environment awareness and family harmony, and provide other benefits.

The mandir tradition is a priceless gift from our ancient rishis and spiritual masters.

Charles Steinmetz, a renowned mathematician and electrical engineer, said, "I think the greatest discoveries will be made along spiritual lines. Then scientists of the world will turn their laboratories to the study of God and prayer. When that day comes the world will see more advancement in one generation than it has seen in the last four."

■ MANDIRS ARE NOT A WASTE OF MONEY

- Every year **millions of rupees are spent** in kites, fire-crackers, sports events, films and other things.
- When we spend so much **on temporary entertainment and joy**, the money spent for building mandirs, which provide **eternal inner peace**, is well worth it.

Akshardham
(New Delhi)

■ **WON'T BUILDING SMALL MANDIRS DO?**

- There is a **tradition** in Hinduism from ancient times to build grand mandirs for Bhagwan.
- In countries having a monarchy, the **king or queen** lives in a **grand palace**. Similarly, God, who is the sovereign of infinite universes, is installed with love and devotion in grand and ornate mandirs by his devotees.



■ **DON'T WE NEED MORE HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS IN SOCIETY?**

- Yes, it is true that we need hospitals and schools, but that doesn't mean we don't need more mandirs.

Schools and colleges provide worldly knowledge and education, but **education without values is the cause of many problems and conflicts in society**. Mandirs fulfil the need for moral and spiritual education.

Science declares that **one of the reasons for ill health is our mind**. If our mind is calm, stress-free and pure, then it is believed that we remain healthy. So, the need for doctors and medicines is decreased.

BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs conduct many social services for the benefit of society.

In short, mandirs are a necessity. They make a person into a true human being.

■ **MY MANDIR AND ME**

Dear friends, as children of Hindu Dharma we should take the following vows:

- I will **regularly** go for **darshan** of my *ghar-mandir* and *shikharbaddh* or *hari* mandir. I will have darshan, perform *dandvat* (prostration) and *pradakshina* (circumambulation), and offer prayers and donation (*daan*).
- I will attend the spiritual **assembly** and do *seva* in the mandir.
- I will **explain the meaning and glory of mandirs to my friends** and inspire them to visit them.



GLOSSARY

A

adharma	unrighteousness
aksharmukta	liberated soul in Akshardham
aksharrup	form of Akshar. One who has qualities similar to those of Akshar. Used to describe the spiritual state of <i>akshar-muktas</i> . Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become <i>aksharrup</i> and worship Purushottam
annakut	offering of many food items to the <i>murti</i> of God
arth	one of the four endeavours or goals of life, namely, of acquiring worldly objects
arti	Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the <i>murti</i> of God as an act of worship
ashtak	prayer verses sung after <i>arti</i>
atma	soul
atmarup	behaving as <i>atma</i>

B

babul	stick used for brushing teeth
bal sabha	children assembly
bhagat	a pious person
bhakta	devotee of God
bilva	leaves of tree sacred to Shiva
brahmand	individual 'cosmos' comprising of a system of 14 realms, of which there are countless millions on various planes

C

chandan	sandalwood
chandlo	round mark of kumkum powder on the forehead

D

dandvat	prostration
darbar	court of residence belonging to a king or feudal ruler, traditionally with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms with verandas. Person of Kshatriya class
datan	a babul stick. A thin stick plucked from certain trees and used for cleaning teeth, by chewing, because of its medicinal properties
diksha	initiation
divo	a lighted wick in an earthen or metal crucible filled with ghee
dudhpak	rich item of food made of sweetened milk and rice, garnished with aromatic spices and nuts

F

farali	foods edible on day of Ekadashi e.g. tubers such as potatoes, cassava, <i>suran</i> , dairy products, fruits, nuts, tomatoes, cabbage, <i>dudhi</i> (gourd), and some forms of grain – <i>morio</i> , <i>rajagro</i>
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G

ghantadi	small bell with handle, rung during <i>arti</i>
gurukul	residential school

H

hari mandir	mandir in which <i>arti</i> is performed twice daily and daily worship
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	of deities is performed by a householder pujari	mukhpath	memorizing Vachanamrut, Swami-ni Vato, etc.	R	Rajbhog	lunch offered to God; third <i>arti</i> of the day in <i>shikharbaddh</i> mandir	U	upasana	worship of God, with special emphasis on his greatness and glory
J		murti	sacred image of God that is revered and worshipped		rotli	chapatti			
jalebi	a sweet delicacy			S			V		
jiva	soul	N		Sandhya	fourth <i>arti</i> of the day, performed at sunset		vad	dark half of lunar month	
jnan	spiritual knowledge	niyam	moral and spiritual disciplines	satsangi	member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practises satsang		vairagya	detachment from material objects and pursuits	
K		P		seva	spiritual service		vastu	sanctification of a new home	
kam	lust. Desires for worldly sense pleasures	pahor	a period of three hours	Shangar	second <i>arti</i> of the day, performed after breakfast has been offered		Y		
kansar	a sweet delicacy	panchang	a gesture of offering respect to God, guru, parents, etc. in which		and the <i>murtis</i> have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands		yagna	a ceremonial ritual performed as worship to earn the blessings of God	
kanthi	double-threaded necklace of beads received by <i>satsangis</i> on initiation into the Satsang Fellowship, and worn as a sign of their allegiance to Bhagwan Swaminarayan	pranam	five parts of the body touch the ground, namely, head, hands, feet, mind and speech	Shayan	fifth and final <i>arti</i> of the day		yagna kund	square mouthed pit or container used for a <i>yagna</i> ritual	
katha	spiritual talks or discourses	paramhansas	‘supreme swan’. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterized by his ability to discriminate between truth and untruth – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to separate milk from water	shikharbaddh	mandir in which five <i>artis</i> are performed daily and daily worship is performed by sadhus				
khichdi	spicy boiled rice			shishya	disciple				
M				shlok	Sanskrit verse				
mala	rosary			shradha	faith				
Mangala	first <i>arti</i> of the day, performed at sunrise	parampara	tradition of succession, usually of spiritual gurus	sud	bright half of the lunar month				
mansi	mental worship. Form of worship in which one devoutly performs puja, offers <i>arti</i> , <i>thal</i> , etc., to God mentally	parshad	first stage of initiation into the ascetic life in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya; a renunciate wearing white clothing—with names ending in ‘Bhagat’	T					
maya	ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities. Anything that deviates one from the worship of God	diksha		tamas	one of the three <i>gunas</i> responsible for indolence, sleep and evil				
mesub	a sweet item – regarded as the king of sweets	pathshala	traditional school for learning Sanskrit	tamasik	person or thing which contains <i>tamas</i>				
moksha	liberation. Deliverance of the <i>jiva</i> from recurring births and deaths and experience of God’s divine bliss	pradakshina	circumambulation	thal	food devotionally offered to <i>murti</i> of God				
		prasadi	sanctified food	tilak	U-shaped holy mark of <i>chandan</i> applied on forehead				
		pujan	respectful worship of God, guru or senior person						

