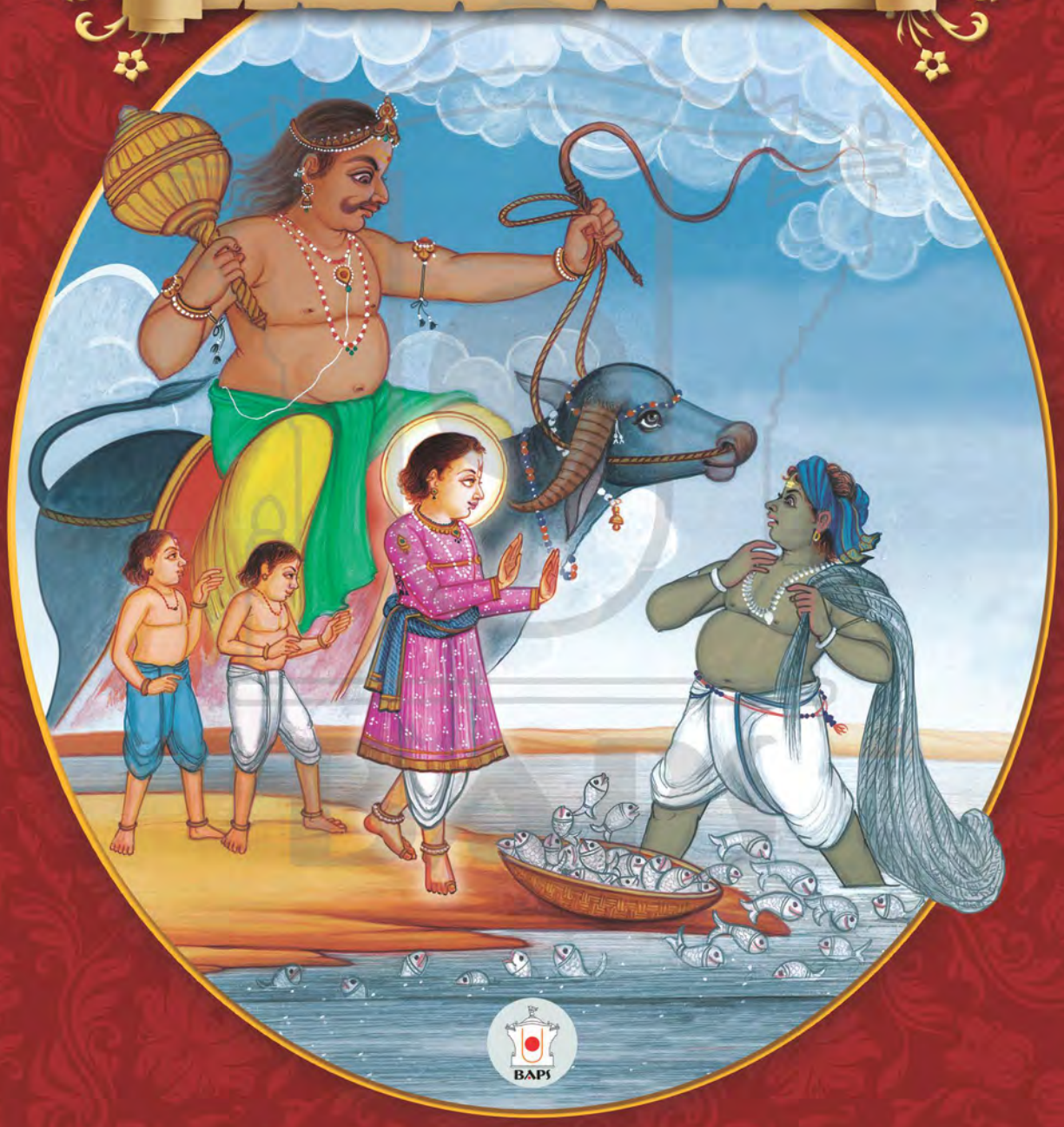
Bal Satsang Exam Book Series

Satsang Vihar

Part 1



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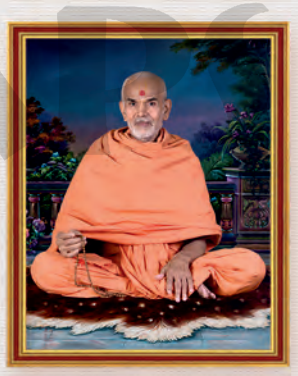
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An Introductory Study Programme of
BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism for Children



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Part 1

Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Ahmedabad

Satsang Vihar, Part-1 (English Edition)

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

Blessing: His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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)

5th Edition: January 2026

Copies: 2,000 (Total: 22,000)

Price: ₹ 100/- (reduced from ₹ 120/- courtesy of Swaminarayan Aksharpith)

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 | http://kids.baps.org | YouTube: @BAPSKidsWorld





Aksharbrahma
Shri Gunatitanand Swami



Parabrahma
Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan

SATSANG VIHAR

A BOOK SERIES INTRODUCING THE CHILDREN OF BAPS TO THE BASIC VALUES OF OUR SATSANG FELLOWSHIP

Dear friends! Have you ever seen a bird soaring through the air? Have you ever felt that it would be wonderful if you could have wings to fly, as well? You could move so gracefully and see such amazing sights!

Bhagwan hasn't given wings to us humans, though. Has he? In fact, he has! The wings Bhagwan has given us are called *agna* and *upasana*. If your wings of *agna* and *upasana* are strong, you can fly very, very high... not only around the world but all the way to Akshardham!

This book series, *Satsang Vihar*, is meant particularly for that. It's to help us strengthen our wings of *agna* and *upasana*. Let's all try our best to study, understand, and apply all that's taught here. Doing so will certainly earn us Bhagwan's blessings. And it will help us become good *satsangis*.

Get ready, then, to strengthen your wings of *agna* and *upasana* so you can fly off... all the way to Akshardham!

Note: Important words and lessons in each chapter of this book appear in **bold letters**. Give them special attention.



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1. WHO IS A HINDU?

A **boy** was once playing on his own. Seeing him, someone asked out of curiosity, "Are you a Hindu?"

The child replied, "Indeed, I am!"

The person asked again, "Then, please explain: **What does it mean to be Hindu?"**

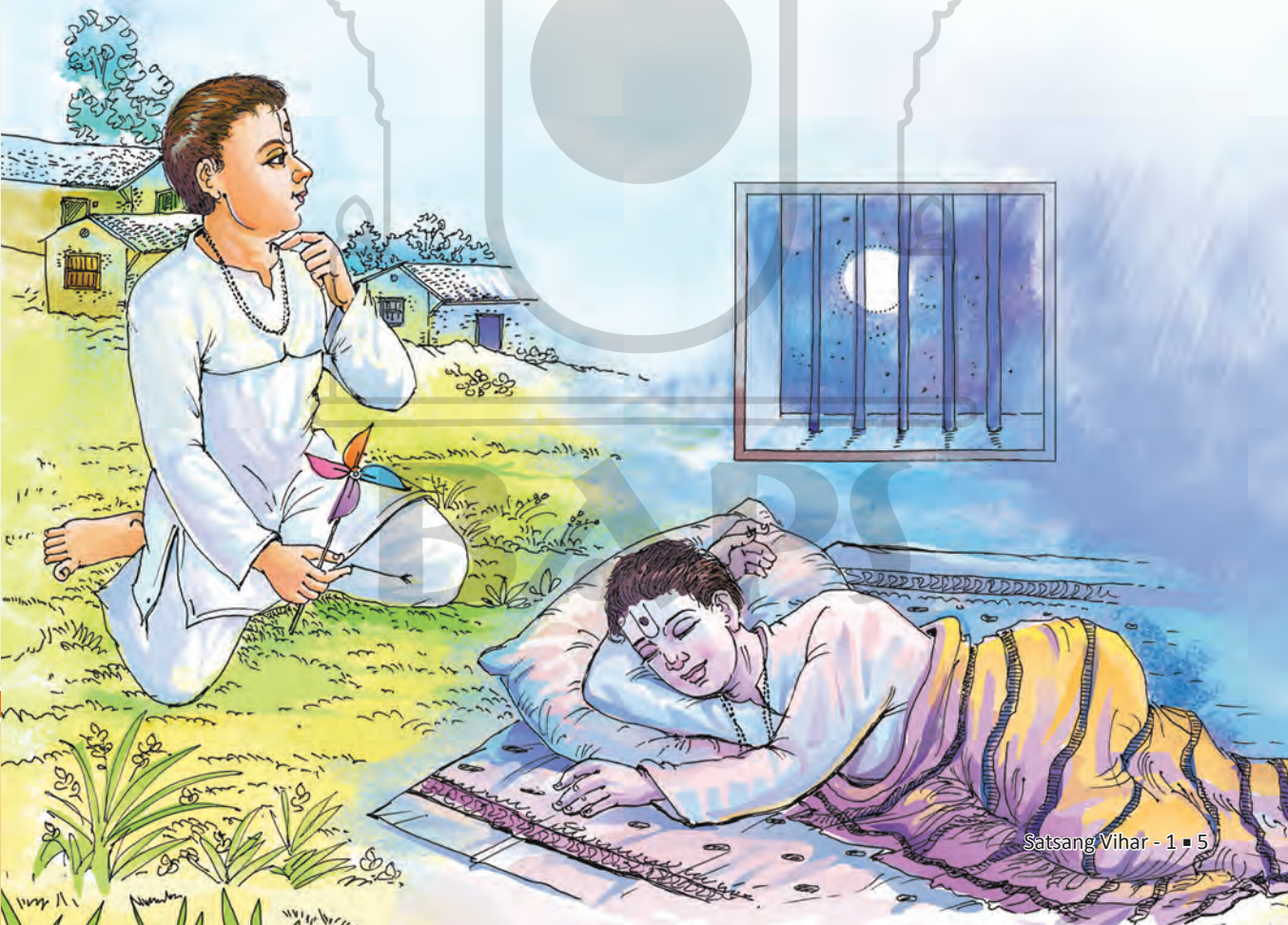
The boy was lost for words. He simply didn't know. He was saddened that he couldn't answer, and he lost interest in playing. That evening, he did not enjoy his meal. His mind spun with the man's questions. Soon, he felt tired. As he lay in bed, he prayed for Bhagwan to help him. With that, his eyes closed, and he fell asleep.

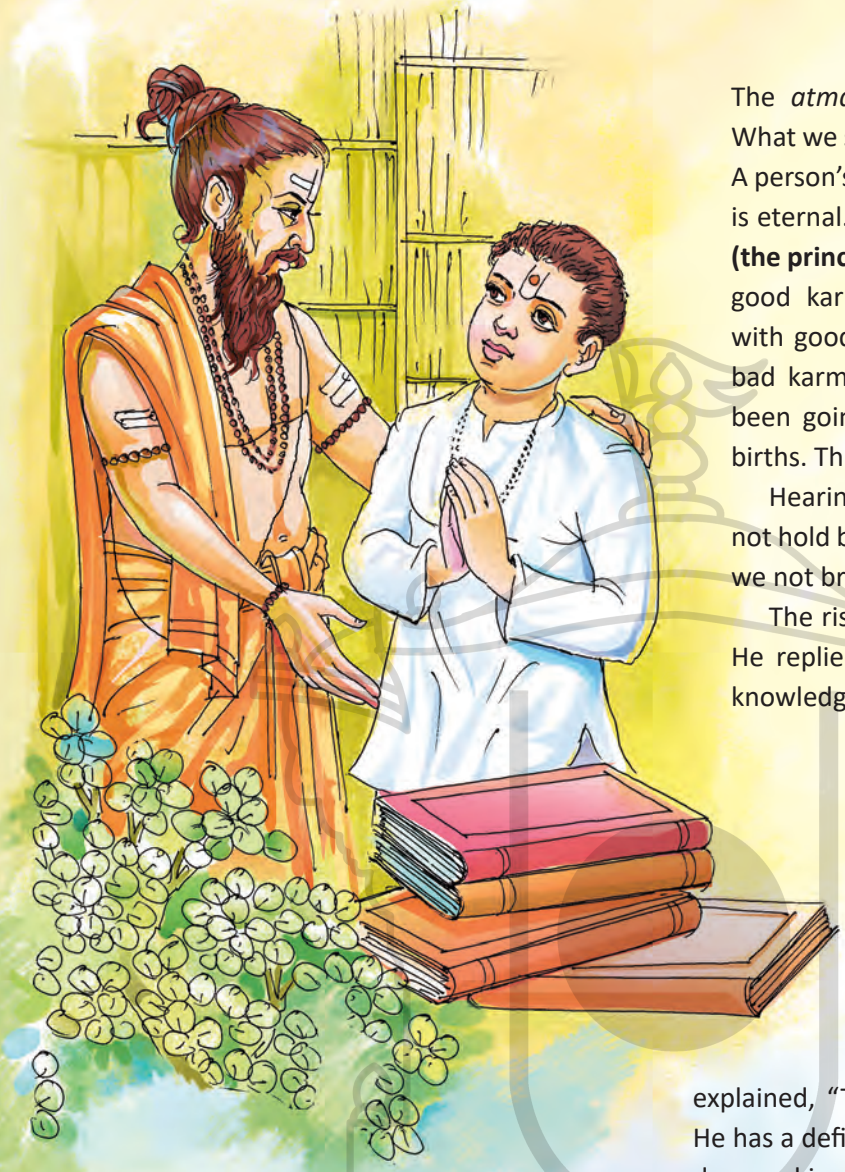
It was soon past midnight. The child had a beautiful **dream**. He found himself thousands of years back in time. He heard sweet chants of 'aum'. In front of him, he saw an enormous tree. Beneath it sat a **rishi** who was meditating. Seeing him, the child smiled and thought: *God has heard my prayer. Now, I'll get the answer to my question!* The boy then greeted the sage, "Jay ho Rishi Maharaj, Jay ho!"

The child then walked towards the rishi. He respectfully bowed and sat before him. After a while, the rishi opened his eyes.

The boy asked, "Rishi Maharaj, what does 'Hindu' mean? And who can be called a Hindu?"

The rishi gently took hold of the boy's hand and led him to his hut. There, he showed him the **four Vedas:** the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda. The rishi then said, "One who believes in the Vedas is a Hindu.





These are the most ancient of all sacred texts."

The child then asked the rishi, 'Please, tell me what the Vedas are all about.'

The rishi offered the child a seat and said, "The Vedas hold the knowledge of the *atma* and Paramatma. This knowledge is very clear and unique."

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

"Listen, dear child," the rishi answered. "Knowledge of the *atma* is the knowledge of oneself. All living things, such as insects, animals, birds, humans, and plants have *atmas*. The *atma* is their true form and identity. What we see on the outside is just their body. A person's body perishes, whereas their *atma* is eternal. According to the ***karma siddhanta* (the principle of karma),** if a person performs good karmas (actions), they are rewarded with good results. And if a person performs bad karmas, they get bad results. We have been going through this cycle for countless births. This is called **punarjanma (rebirth)."**

Hearing the rishi's words, the child could not hold back his curiosity. He asked, "But can we not bring an end to this cycle of rebirth?"

The rishi was pleased with the child's wit. He replied, "That's why we must learn the knowledge of Paramatma."

The child asked again, "Sorry, but I didn't catch that. What do you mean by the knowledge of Paramatma?"

Hearing this, the rishi took the child to a small shrine inside his hut. There was a ***murti*** of Bhagwan there. They both bowed to it. The rishi then explained, "This is Paramatma. He is supreme. He has a definite form. He is divine. He is the all-doer and is always present on earth through the *gunatit sant*. He lives in his divine home called Akshardham. At the same time, he **takes birth** in our world. This that I have shared with you is the knowledge of Paramatma."

The child stopped the rishi and expressed, "Hmm... this is getting confusing! Can you just tell me in short what 'Hindu' means?"

The rishi smiled and replied patiently, "Listen carefully. **To state it through a single point: A person who believes in the four Vedas is a Hindu. And to state it through two points: A person who believes in the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma described in the Vedas**

is a Hindu. Lastly, to state it in four points: A Hindu is someone who believes in (1) The *karma siddhanta* (the principle of karma), (2) *Punarjanma* (rebirth), (3) *Murti* puja, and (4) *Avatarvad* (God coming to earth)."

The rishi then asked the child, "Son, do you know how the word 'Hindu' was born?"

The child scratched his head and replied, "Rishi Maharaj! I don't know. Please tell me!"

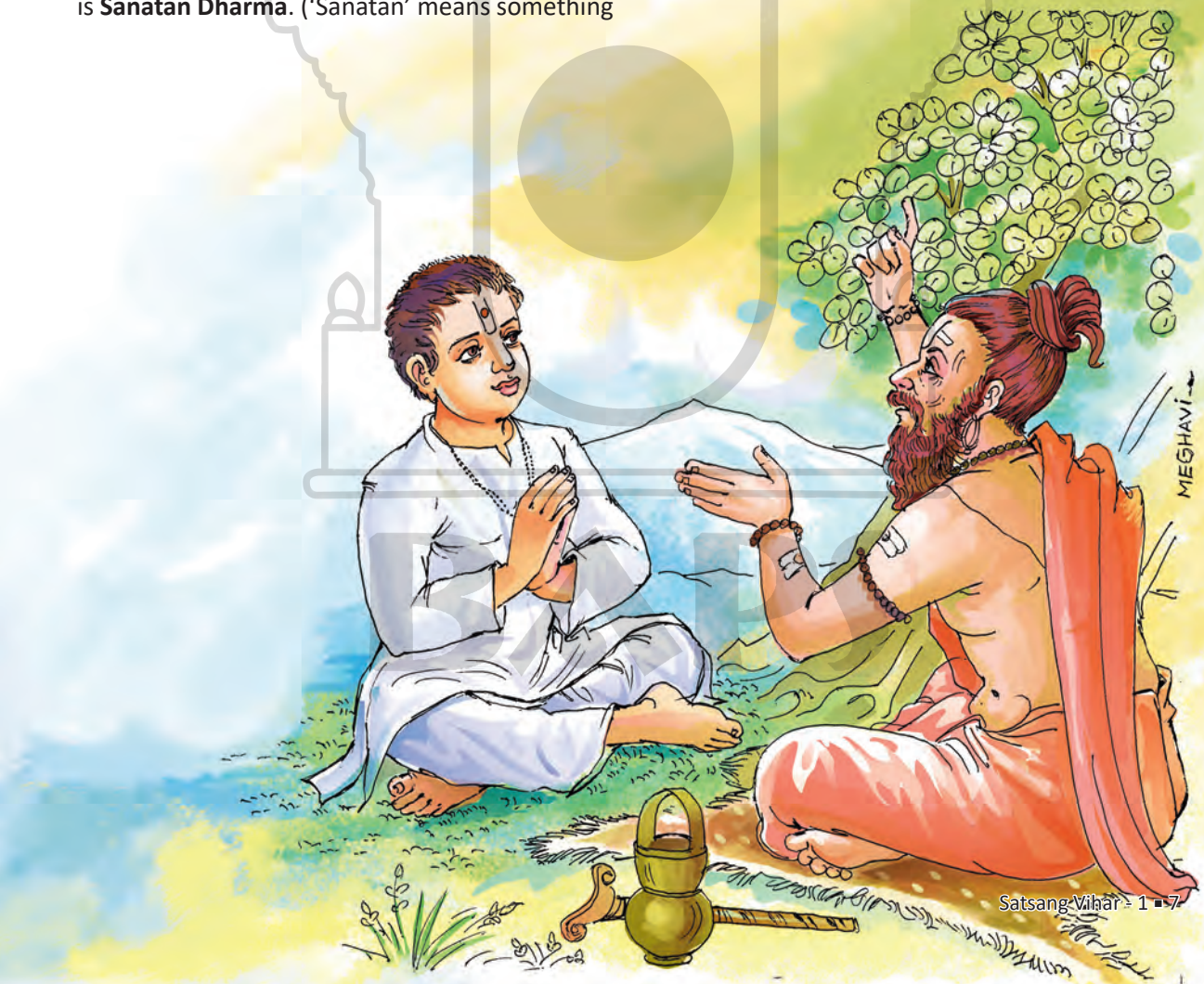
The rishi took the boy to a nearby river. This was the sacred Sindhu River. There, the child saw many rishis their families by the riverbank. The boy was touched by the divine atmosphere.

The rishis at the river explained, "We are your ancestors. We are known as Aryas. It was from this Sindhu River's bank that the knowledge of the Vedas spread. The original name of our religion is **Sanatan Dharma**. ('Sanatan' means something with no beginning or end.) But foreigners began to refer to us as Hindus. That was the way they pronounced 'Sindhu'. In short, Hindus are those who believe in the Vedic knowledge that flourished on the banks of the Sindhu River."

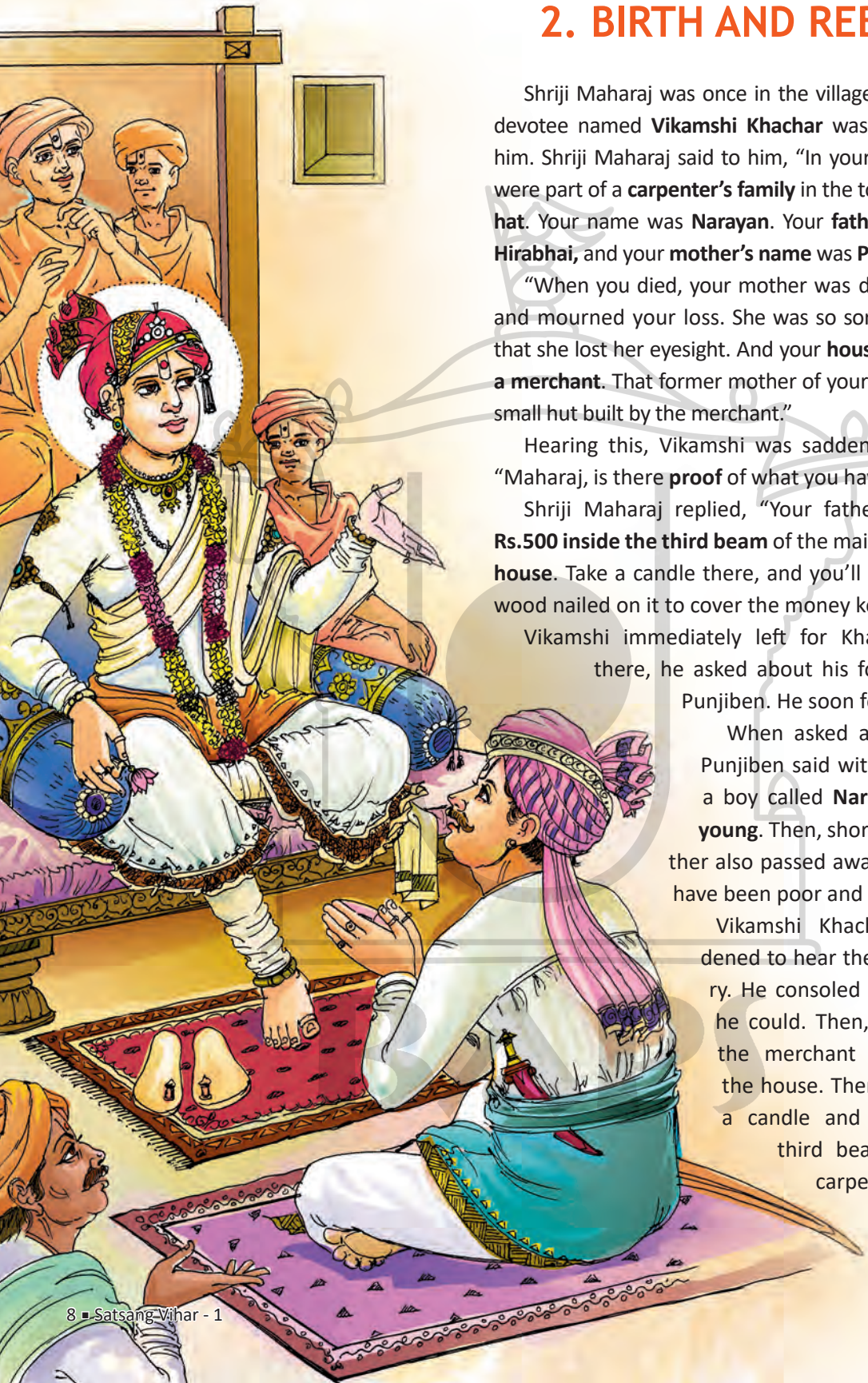
The child now felt satisfied. Now, he knew all about the word 'Hindu'.

But the rishi continued, "Son, we believe our Hindu culture to be the greatest. 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 opened, and he was soon wide awake. He saw his mother nearby. She was there to wake him. The child got out of bed and uttered, "Jay Sanatana Dharma!"



2. BIRTH AND REBIRTH



Shriji Maharaj was once in the village of **Kariyani**. A devotee named **Vikamshi Khachar** was seated before him. Shriji Maharaj said to him, "In your last birth, you were part of a **carpenter's family** in the town of **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. She was so sorrowful, in fact, that she lost her eyesight. And your **house was given to a merchant**. That former mother of yours now lives in a small hut built by the merchant."

Hearing this, Vikamshi was saddened. He asked, "Maharaj, is there **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 candle there, and you'll find a piece of wood nailed on it to cover the money kept inside."

Vikamshi immediately left for Khambhat. Once there, he asked about his former mother, Punjiben. He soon found her.

When asked about her son, Punjiben said with tears, "I had a boy called **Narayan. He died young**. Then, shortly after, his father also passed away. Ever since, I have been poor and in pain."

Vikamshi Khachar was saddened to hear the woman's story. He consoled her as best as he could. Then, he requested the merchant to show him the house. There, he grabbed a candle and came to the third beam. He had a carpenter remove the piece of

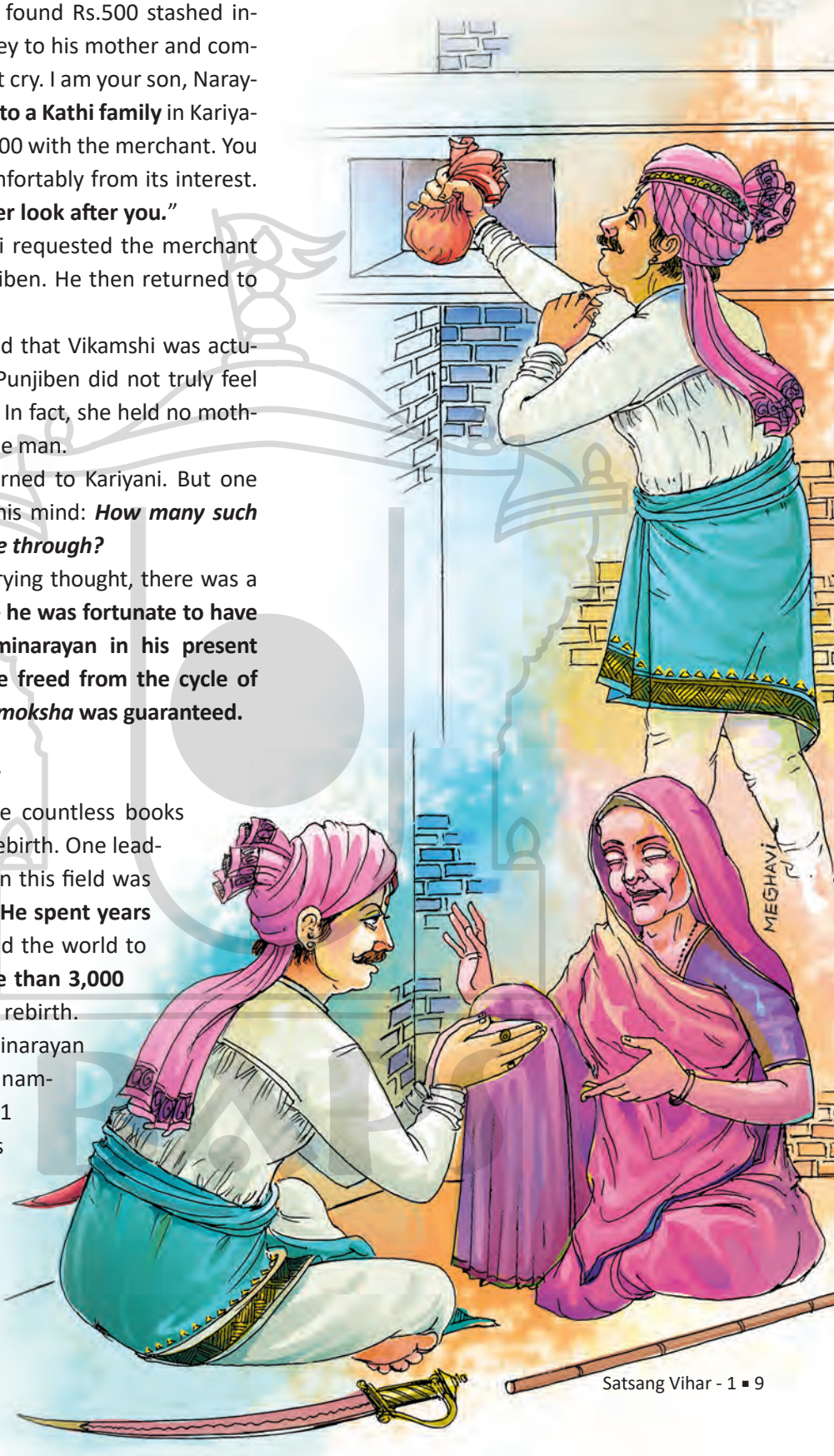
wood there. Vikamshi found Rs.500 stashed inside. He gave the money to his mother and comforted her, "Look, don't cry. I am your son, Narayan. **I've been reborn into a Kathi family** in Kariyani. I shall keep the Rs.500 with the merchant. You will be able to live comfortably from its interest. I'll also have **a caretaker look after you.**"

So saying, Vikamshi requested the merchant to also look after Punjiben. He then returned to Kariyani.

Even after being told that Vikamshi was actually her son Narayan, Punjiben did not truly feel like Vikamshi's mother. In fact, she held no motherly feelings towards the man.

Vikamshi soon returned to Kariyani. But one idea would not leave his mind: ***How many such births must I have gone through?***

In spite of this worrying thought, there was a ray of joy in his heart – **he was fortunate to have found Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his present birth. So, he would be freed from the cycle of births and deaths. His *moksha* was guaranteed.**



▪ THINGS TO KNOW

- Today, there are countless books written about rebirth. One leading researcher in this field was **Ian Stevenson**. **He spent years** travelling around the world to document **more than 3,000 known cases** of rebirth.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan tells us in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-21 that the *jiva* has taken birth in each of the **8,400,000 different life forms**.

3. REVIVING MEEN SAROVAR'S FISH

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was born in Chhapaiya. As a child, he was known as Ghanshyam. His mother's name was Bhaktimata. And his father's name was Dharmadev. His childhood was quite miraculous.

There is a lake in Chhapaiya known as **Meen Sarovar**. Ghanshyam loved it here. He and his friends would play along the bank. Then, they would swim in its cool waters.

Once, as they were getting ready for a **swim**, Ghanshyam spotted a **fisherman.** He looked scary and quite strong. Each time the fisherman threw his net into the water, he pulled out a hefty catch of **fish.** The poor creatures would gasp for air and finally **die**.

Ghanshyam was deeply saddened. He also felt **compassion** for the dead fish. He thought, *Such is the fate of these poor, innocent fish?*

Ghanshyam decided to do something about it. He waded through the water and challenged the fisherman, "Hey! Why are you killing these fish? What right does any person have to kill an animal? **God resides in every soul.** Don't you know that killing is a grave sin?"

On hearing Ghanshyam, the fisherman laughed rudely, "I may do anything I wish! What concern is it to you?"

Ghanshyam then **thought**, "I must teach this man a lesson!" With that, he looked at the creatures and made a wish. To everyone's surprise, the dead **fish came to life** and jumped back into the water.

The **fisherman** became furious. He roared, "Argh! You have ruined my catch for the entire day!" So saying, he **rushed to grab Ghanshyam.** But he was blinded by a sudden **flood of light coming from Ghanshyam**.

Next, **he saw Yamaraj**, the Lord of Death! Yamaraj looked terrifying. He had a long moustache. Razor-sharp teeth. Bulging eyes. An enormous, dangling tongue. And he had weapons in his hands – a mace, sword, trident, spear...

The fisherman froze in his tracks. He began to shake and sweat like never before. **Yamaraj showed him the punishments and sufferings of Yampuri (the place where sinners go).** And he ordered his servants to beat the fisherman. Under the servants' incredible blows, the fisherman screamed, "Help me! Help!"

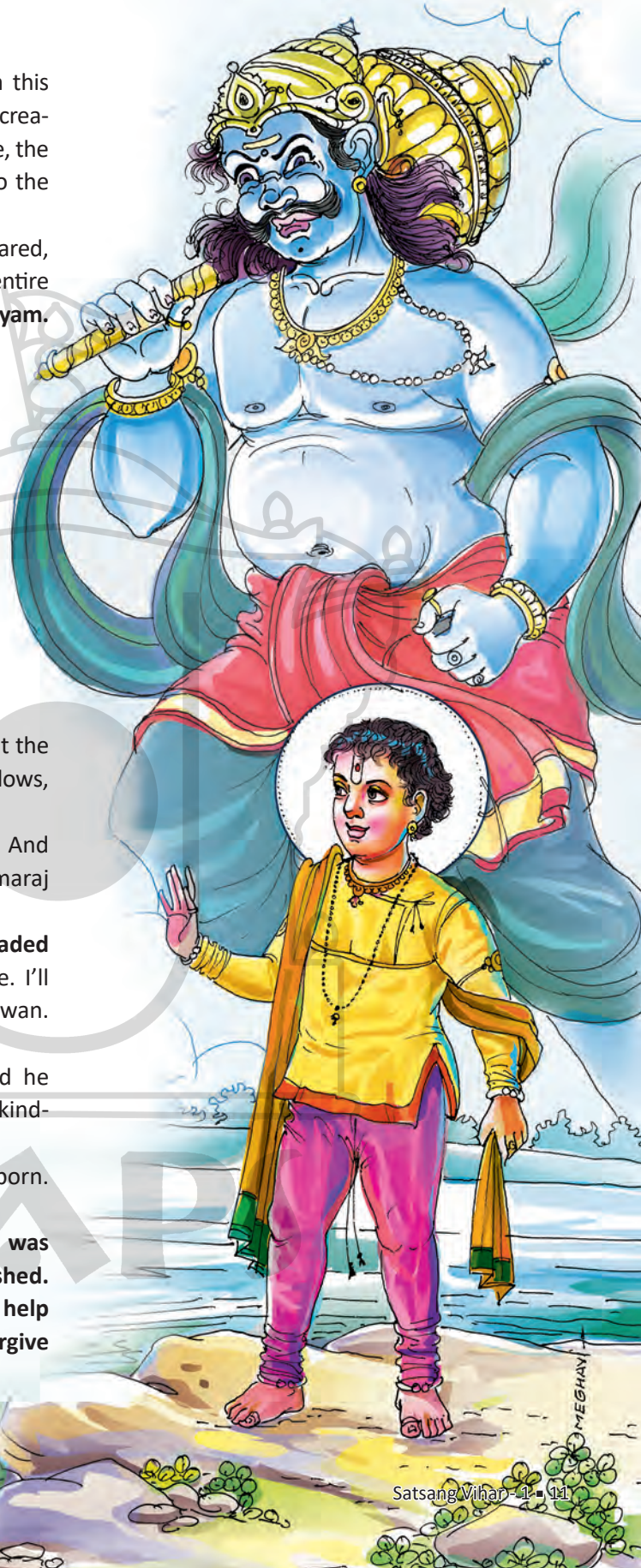
The cruel fisherman realised his mistake. And he fell at Ghanshyam's feet. Instantly, Yamaraj disappeared.

The fisherman saw Ghanshyam and **pleaded for forgiveness**, "O Lord, please forgive me. I'll never commit such sins again. You are Bhagwan. I ask that you wash away my sins."

Ghanshyam blessed the fisherman. And he taught him why it is important to practice kindness towards all living beings.

The fisherman felt as if he had been reborn. The fish, too, were relieved once and for all.

This was our Ghanshyam Maharaj. He was all-powerful. He could do anything he wished. Yet, he was so compassionate. He would help those who had sinned. And he would forgive them. Through such incidents, he also taught us all powerful lessons about peace and non-violence.



4. GHANSHYAM IS EVERYWHERE

This is a story from when Ghanshyam lived in **Ayodhya**. He was five years old at the time.

Ghanshyam was home-schooled. His father Dharmadev was his teacher. Ghanshyam would listen to Dharmadev carefully. Hearing something even just once was enough for him. He would fix everything he learned into his memory.

One day, Ghanshyam watched his father doing his daily puja. After seeing it just once, he learned all of the steps of puja. Then, he himself also started doing puja daily. Indeed, Ghanshyam was a keen observer.

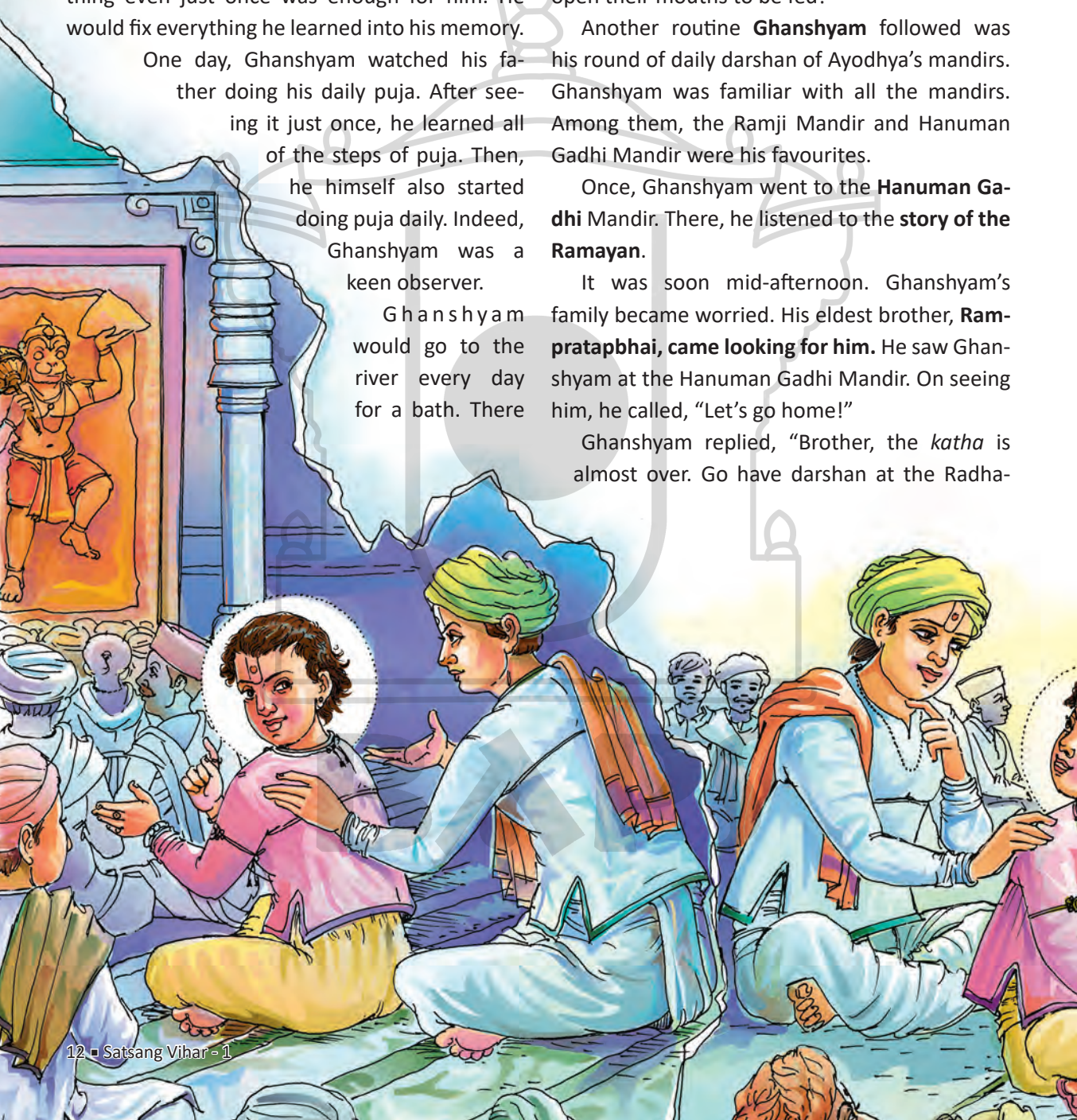
Ghanshyam would go to the river every day for a bath. There were turtles there. Ghanshyam would take puffed rice grains and roasted grams from home to feed them. He even gave each of them different names. When he called them by their names, they would come to the surface. And they would open their mouths to be fed!

Another routine **Ghanshyam** followed was his round of daily darshan of Ayodhya's mandirs. Ghanshyam was familiar with all the mandirs. Among them, the Ramji Mandir and Hanuman Gadhi Mandir were his favourites.

Once, Ghanshyam went to the **Hanuman Gadhi** Mandir. There, he listened to the **story of the Ramayan**.

It was soon mid-afternoon. Ghanshyam's family became worried. His eldest brother, **Rampratapbhai, came looking for him.** He saw Ghanshyam at the Hanuman Gadhi Mandir. On seeing him, he called, "Let's go home!"

Ghanshyam replied, "Brother, the *katha* is almost over. Go have darshan at the Radha-



Krishna Mandir. We will leave together afterwards."

With these words, Rampratapbhai went to the **Radha-Krishna Mandir**. To his amazement, he saw Ghanshyam listening to the *katha* there, also! Ghanshyam told him, "Brother, go have darshan at the Ramji Mandir. We will leave together afterwards."

The same thing happened at the **Ramji Mandir**. Rampratapbhai thought, "I must be mistaken. This can't be Ghanshyam!" To check, Rampratapbhai went closer.

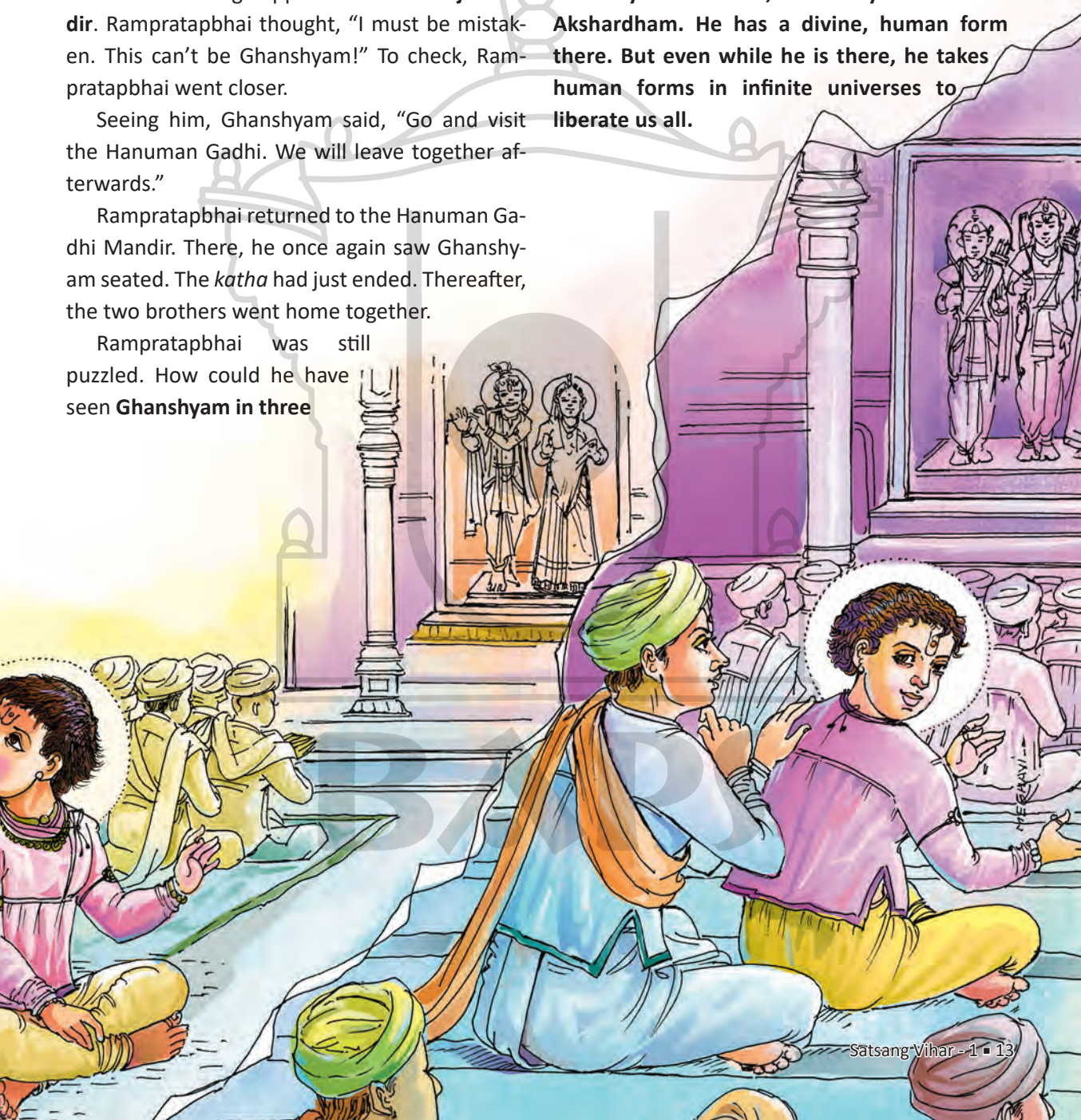
Seeing him, Ghanshyam said, "Go and visit the Hanuman Gadhi. We will leave together afterwards."

Rampratapbhai returned to the Hanuman Gadhi Mandir. There, he once again saw Ghanshyam seated. The *katha* had just ended. Thereafter, the two brothers went home together.

Rampratapbhai was still puzzled. How could he have seen **Ghanshyam in three mandirs at once**? Ghanshyam must be a miracle child, he thought.

Rampratapbhai's doubts were resolved 35 years later. This was when he came to Gujarat and saw Ghanshyam in the form of Sahajanand Swami. It was there that he understood these were **the divine actions of *sarvopari* Bhagwan**.

Appearing in many forms was easy for Ghanshyam. Indeed, Ghanshyam lives in Akshardham. He has a divine, human form there. But even while he is there, he takes human forms in infinite universes to liberate us all.



5. TAMING A LION

At **age 11**, Ghanshyam **left home** to start off on an amazing pilgrimage. He would travel across India to liberate countless souls. From then on, he was known as **Nilkanth Varni**.

During his travels, Nilkanth came to the town of **Shripur** in northern India. On the town's outskirts, there was an **ashram** called the **Kamleshwar** Mattha. There was a thick jungle nearby. Nilkanth came to the ashram and decided to stay the night outside, beneath a giant tree.

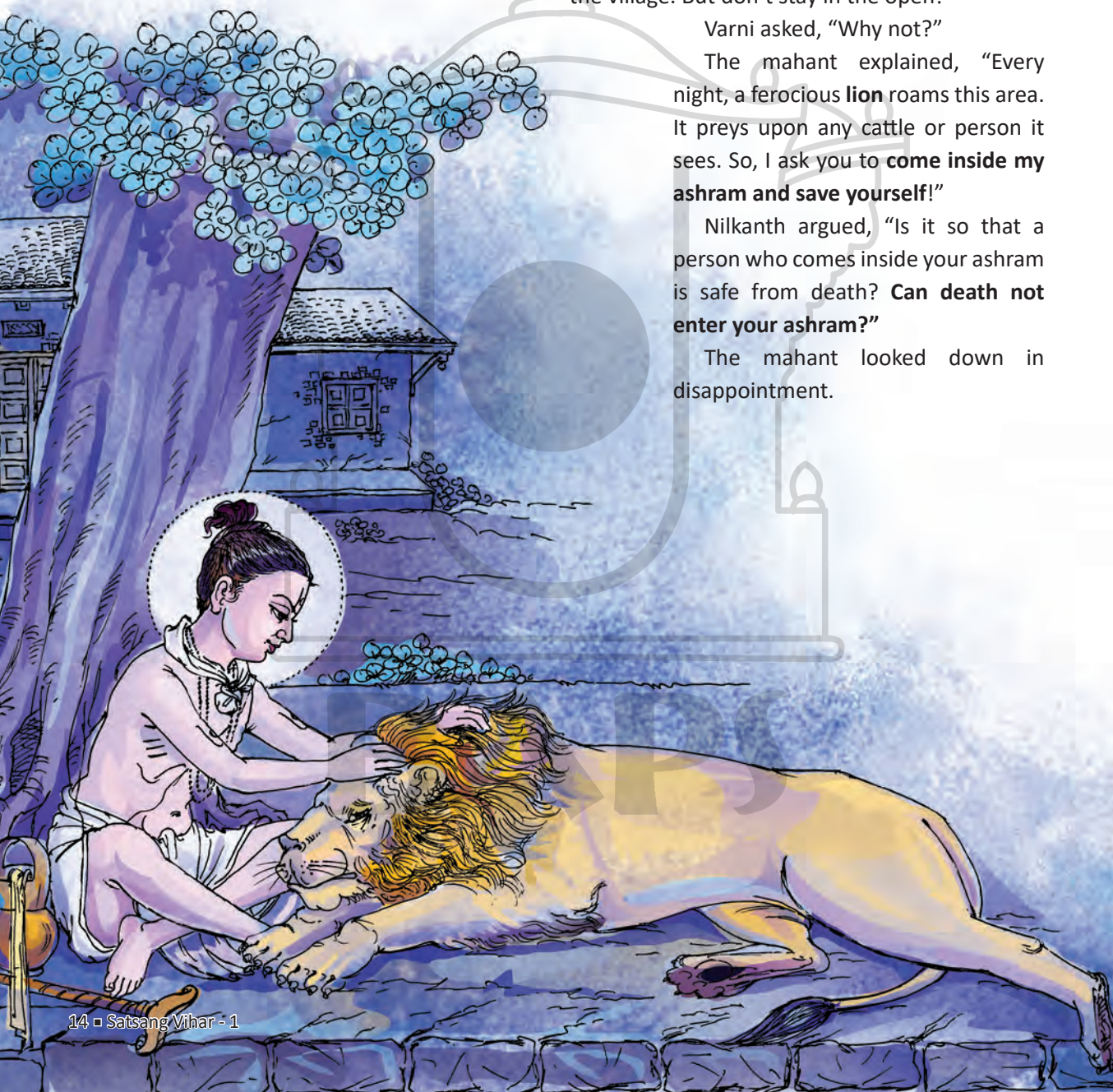
The **mahant** came out to meet Nilkanth. He invited him inside, saying, "If you wish to spend the night, either come inside the ashram or go to the village. But don't stay in the open!"

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 looked down in disappointment.



Nilkanth continued, "Let death come to me here on this platform. I'll stay the night here!"

The mahant realised that Nilkanth was no ordinary boy. So, he did not insist further.

At **midnight**, the village was shaken from its deep slumber by the roar of the lion. Quickly, the lion came running towards the tree outside the ashram. Nilkanth cast a glance and gestured to the **wild lion.** Instantly, the creature became meek and **lay down beside Nilkanth**. Varni gently patted the lion. The mahant was amazed to see all this from his window. He called the others who lived in 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. Forgive me that you will have to go back hungry today." The lion got up and disappeared into the jungle.

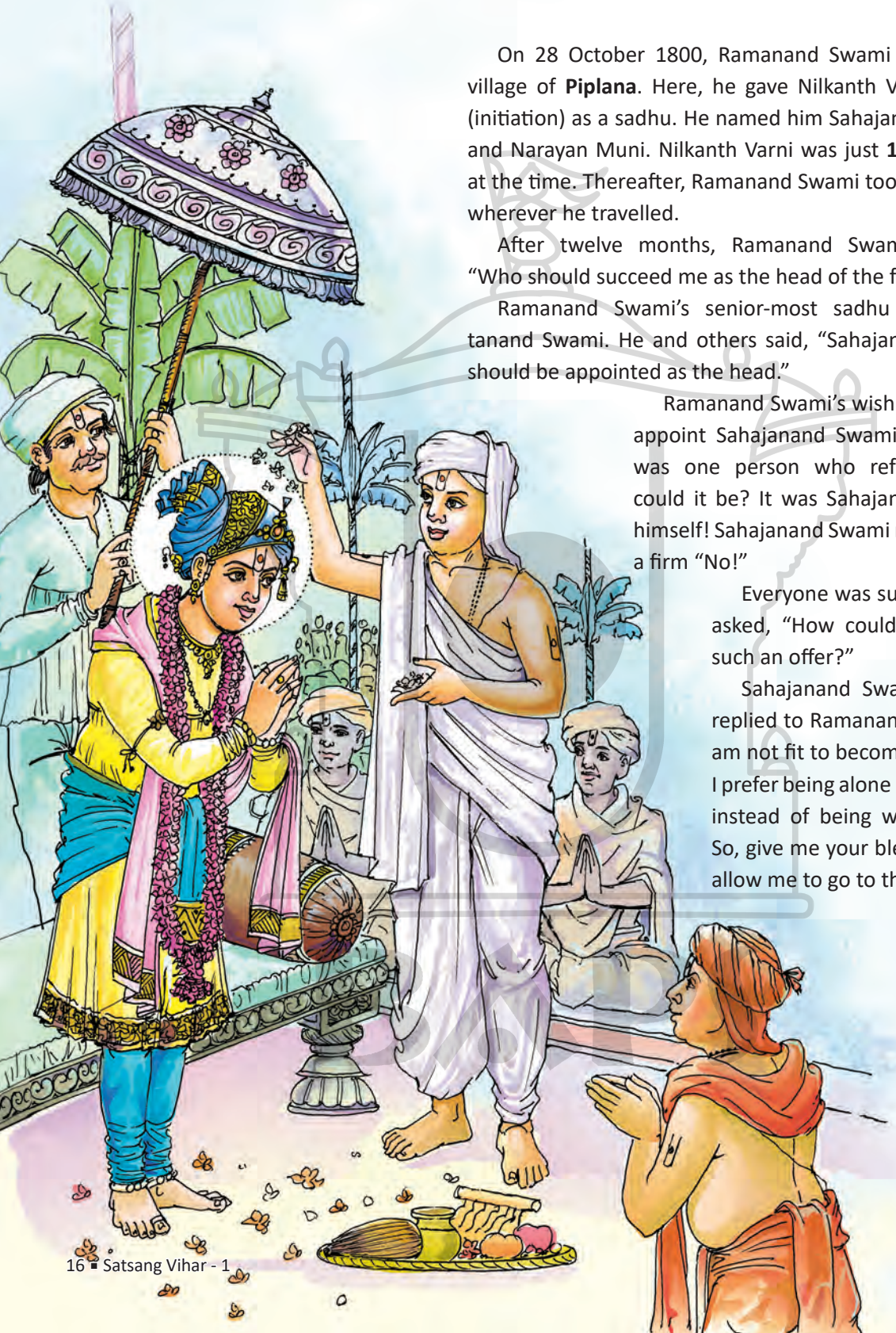
The mahant and the villagers came hurriedly and bowed to Nilkanth. Everyone was impressed and praised, "Wonderful, Varniji! Wonderful! You must be God himself."

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**. **The ashram's 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 much work to do." So saying, Nilkanth picked up his staff and gourd and quietly left to continue with his pilgrimage.

Indeed, Nilkanth was the controller of all. He could even tame a wild lion! As Bhagwan Swaminarayan, he also tamed wayward people like Joban Pagi, Shardul Khasiyo and many others and helped them become peaceful souls.

6. TWO UNIQUE BLESSINGS



On 28 October 1800, Ramanand Swami was in the village of **Piplana**. Here, he gave Nilkanth Varni ***diksha*** (initiation) as a sadhu. He named him Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni. Nilkanth Varni was just **19 years old** at the time. 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?"

Ramanand Swami's senior-most sadhu was Muktanand Swami. He and others said, "Sahajanand Swami should be appointed as the head."

Ramanand Swami's wish was also to appoint Sahajanand Swami. But there was one person who refused. Who could it be? It was Sahajanand Swami himself! Sahajanand Swami 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 fit to become the head. I prefer being alone in the forest instead of being with crowds. So, give me your blessings, and allow me to go to the forest!"

Ramanand Swami asked, "Will you not obey your guru's *agna*?"

Sahajanand Swami answered, "I will obey *agna* with absolute loyalty!"

Then, Ramanand Swami stated, "Understand it to be your guru's *agna.* You must become the head of our fellowship."

Now, there was no alternative but to accept his guru's word. So, Sahajanand Swami agreed. By doing so, he demonstrated that a disciple should always obey the guru's word.

The ceremony of appointing a new guru 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 the 20-year-old Sahajanand Swami** and led him to **sit on his seat**. Then, he applied a *kumkum* mark on his forehead and garlanded him.

The appointment was joyously received with calls of jubilation, "Sahajanand Swami Maharaj *ni jay*!"

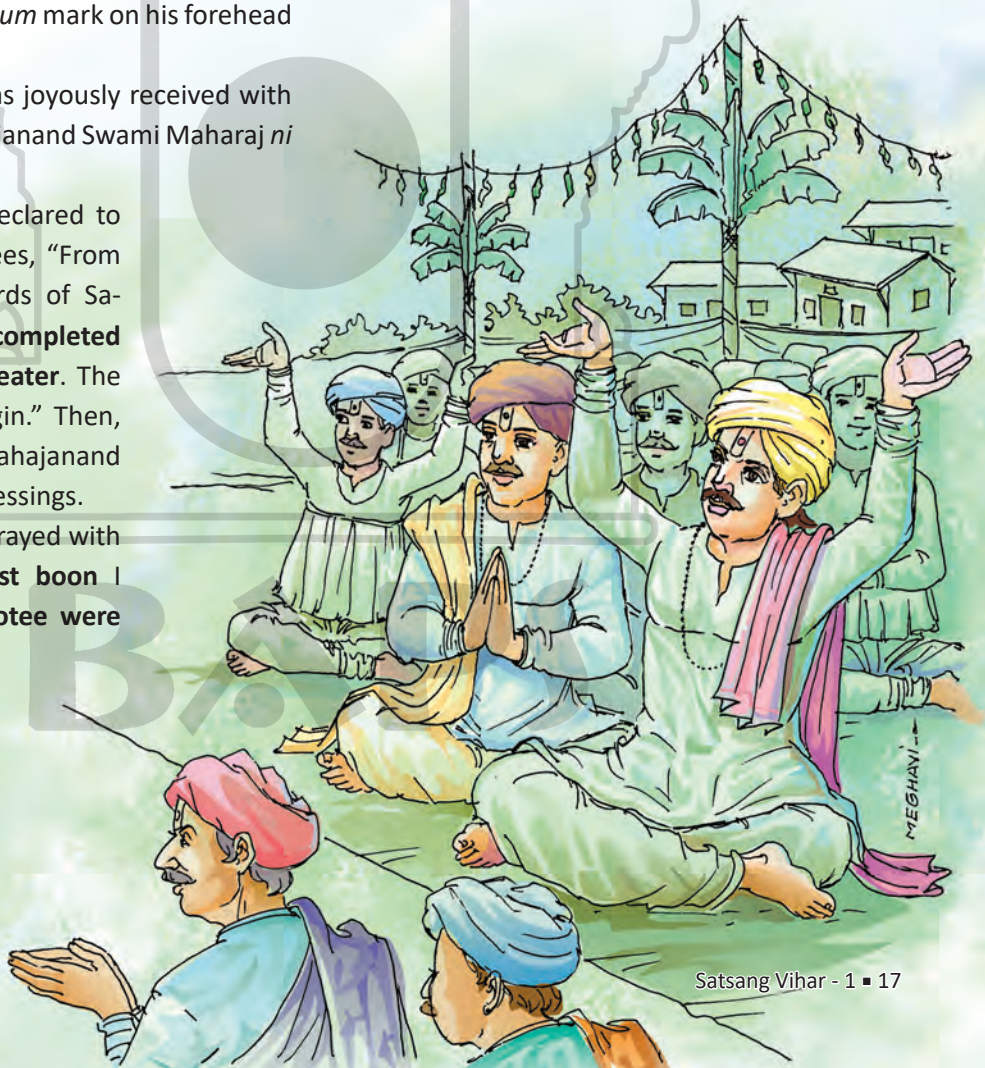
Ramanand Swami declared to the assembly of devotees, "From now on, obey the words of Sahajanand Swami. **I have completed my role as the drum-beater**. The real show will now begin." Then, Ramanand Swami told Sahajanand Swami to ask for two blessings.

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 **allow me to suffer millions of scorpion bites in every pore of my body instead.** 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 a lack of food or clothing."**

Ramanand Swami was pleased and said, "So shall it be!"

The entire assembly hall echoed with the chorus of "Sahajanand Swami *ni jay!"*

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 history.



7. KARMAS AND THEIR FRUITS

In the town of **Visnagar,** there lived a man named **Laldas Subo**. (A subo is an administrator who runs a town.) Laldas was a lost man. And he **opposed Shriji Maharaj**. He punished *satsangis* by making them stand outisde in the hot summer sun. Day and night, Laldas schemed, "Let me catch Swaminarayan and lock him in jail."

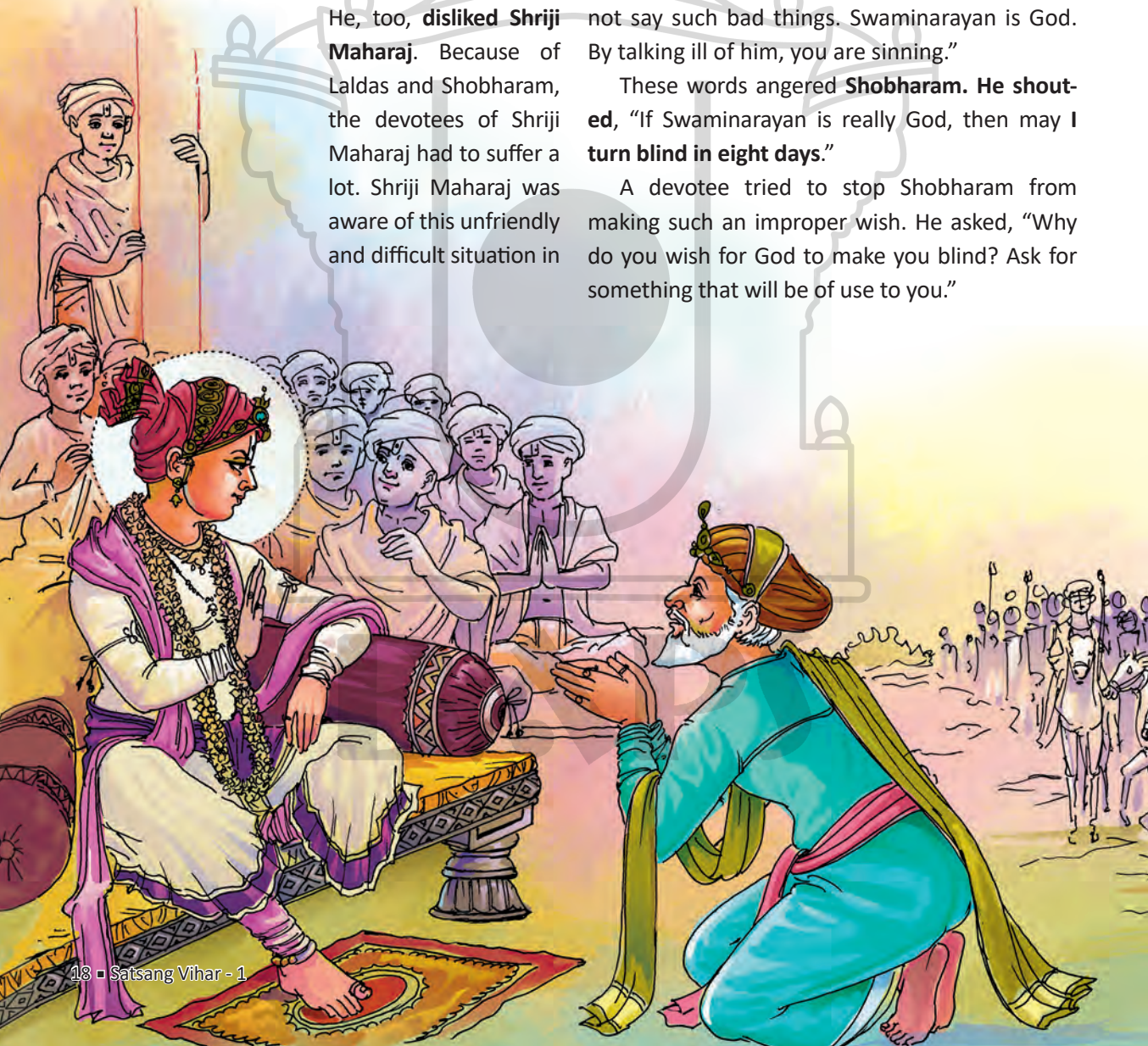
In this same town, there lived a man named **Shobharam**. He was wealthy and was one of the leading townspeople. He, too, **disliked Shriji Maharaj**. Because of Laldas and Shobharam, the devotees of Shriji Maharaj had to suffer a lot. Shriji Maharaj was aware of this unfriendly and difficult situation in Visnagar. It deeply saddened him.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was performing a grand ***yagna*** in **Dabhan**. Several people from Visnagar had come to the *yagna*. They generously praised Shriji Maharaj after the event. When Shobharam came to know of this, he did not like it. He uttered bitter words, "Someone should have jumped into the *yagna-kund*. Then, Swaminarayan's *yagna* would have been ruined."

But some devotees gently checked him, "Do not say such bad things. Swaminarayan is God. By talking ill of him, you are sinning."

These words angered **Shobharam. He shouted**, "If Swaminarayan is really God, then may **I turn blind in eight days**."

A devotee tried to stop Shobharam from making such an improper wish. He asked, "Why do you wish for God to make you blind? Ask for something that will be of use to you."



But Shobharam was stubborn. 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 **army sergeant** and **thirty soldiers** to seize Shriji Maharaj. But the sergeant, on seeing Shriji Maharaj, **experienced *samadhi.*** He fell at Shriji Maharaj's feet and declared, "You are God incarnate. Please forgive me."

The Arab sergeant then returned to Laldas Subo and described his divine experience. Soon, Shriji Maharaj himself came to Laldas' palace. At a single glance from Shriji Maharaj, the **Subo went into *samadhi***.

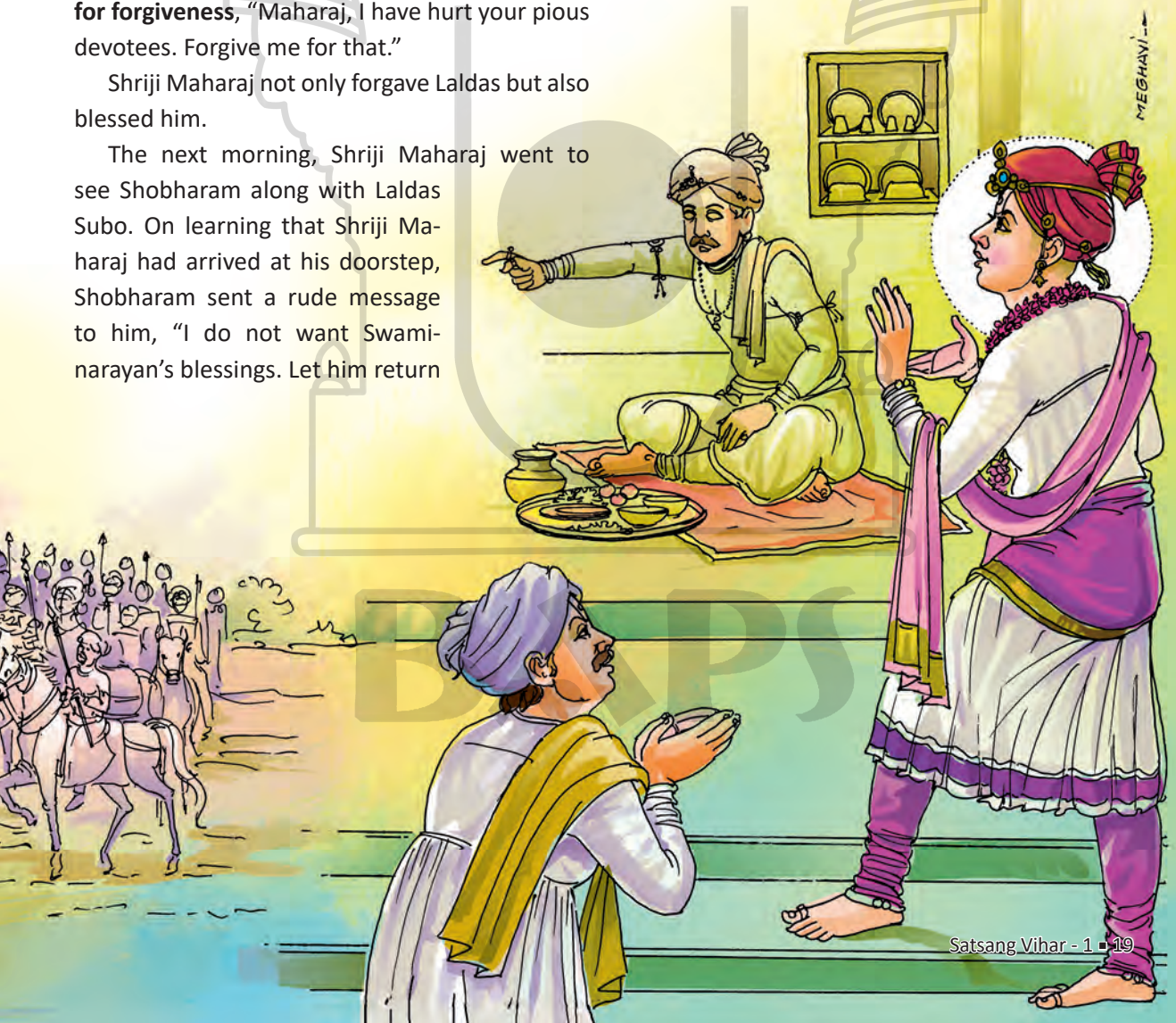
After coming out of *samadhi,* the Subo **prayed for forgiveness**, "Maharaj, I have hurt your pious devotees. Forgive me for that."

Shriji Maharaj not only forgave Laldas but also blessed him.

The next morning, Shriji Maharaj went to see Shobharam along with Laldas Subo. On learning that Shriji Maharaj had arrived at his doorstep, Shobharam sent a rude message to him, "I do not want Swaminarayan's blessings. Let him return the way he came."

Shriji Maharaj turned back. He was saddened. But, from far, he offered blessings that Shobharam would one day turn towards *satsang*.

Shriji Maharaj gave people whatever they wished for. Laldas wished well by asking for forgiveness. So, he became a better person. On the other hand, Shobharam wished ill, so he remained unhappy.



8. SAHAJANAND IS LIKE THE RISING SUN

Once, Shriji Maharaj celebrated the **Phuldol** festival in the village of **Panchala**. During the celebration, he played ***ras*** with the sadhus. Everyone was overjoyed.

Thereafter, the whole village was invited for a feast. People from neighbouring villages also came in good numbers. The main food item served was called ***shelan.*** This is a special dish made of *ghee*, *gol* and boiled rice.

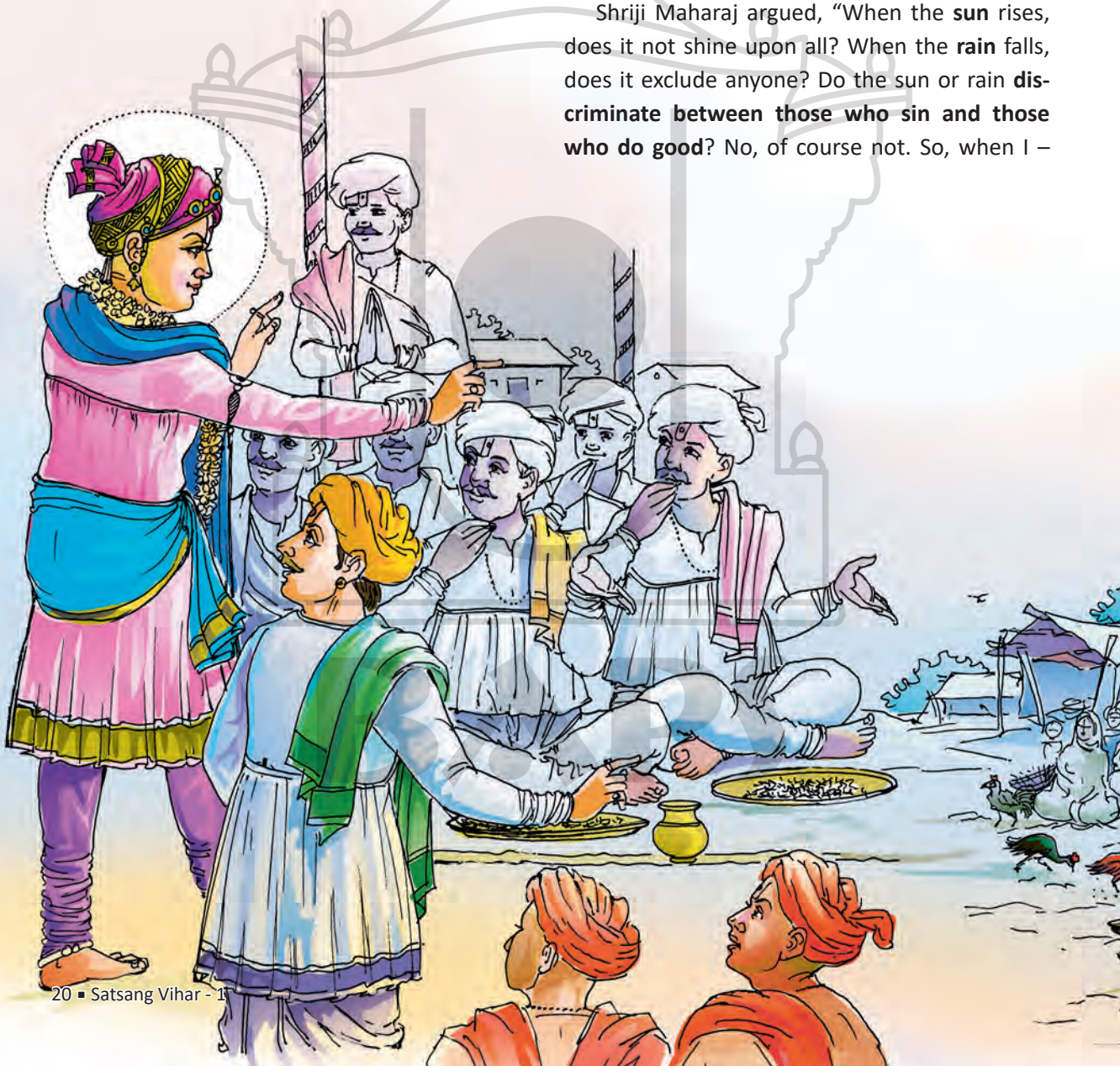
As the feast wound down, Shriji Maharaj asked the host, "Has everyone eaten?"

The host replied, "Yes."

At that time, Shriji Maharaj saw some people on the other side of the river. They were dressed in shabby clothes. Pointing to them, Maharaj asked, "Did those people eat?"

"Maharaj, 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 the **rain** falls, does it exclude anyone? Do the sun or rain **discriminate between those who sin and those who do good**? No, of course not. So, when I –



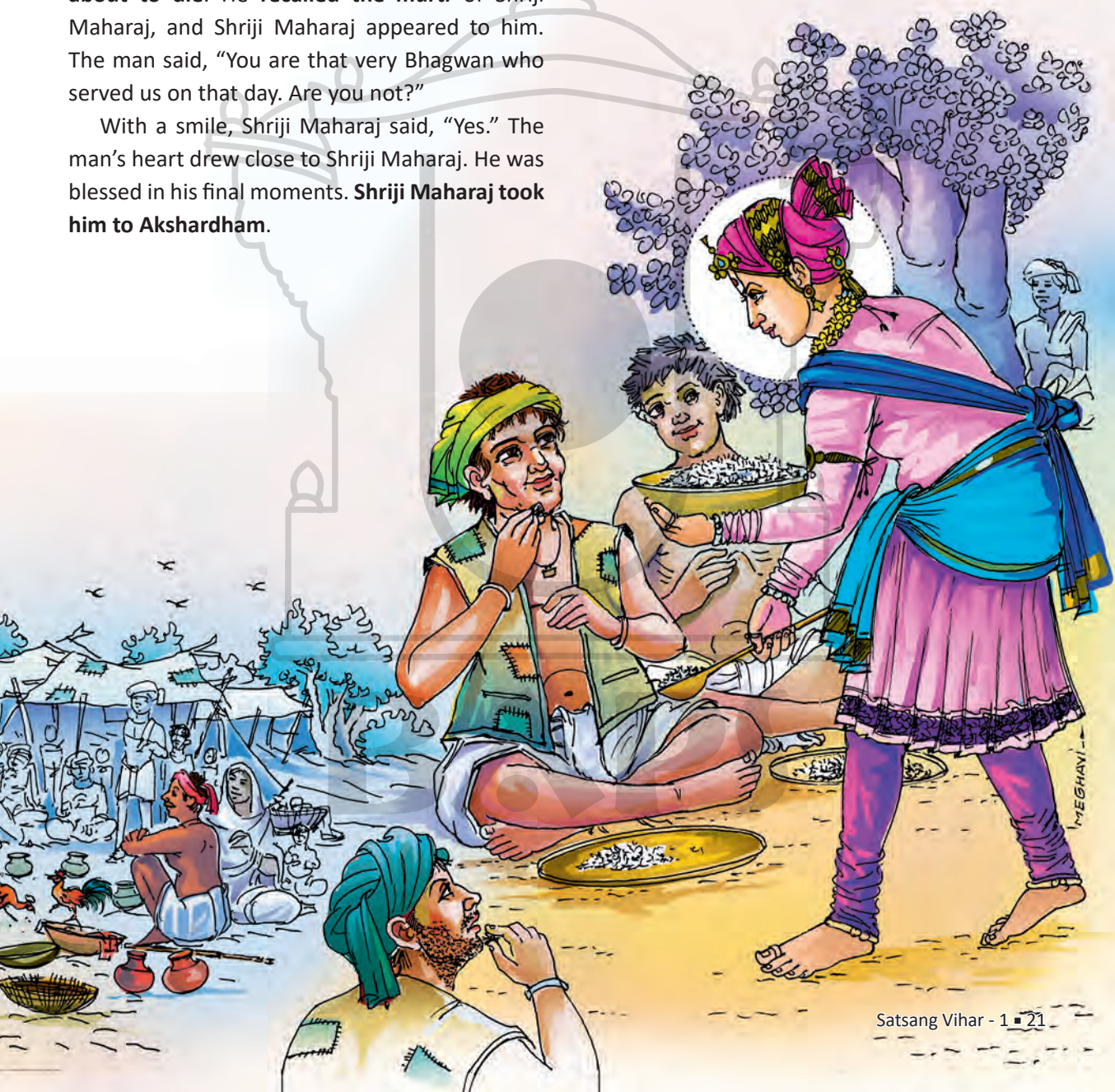
Sahajanand – invite people over, how can anyone to be left out? Please call those people and serve them with love. **I wish to liberate all**."

Several devotees rushed to the riverbank and called the poor folks. **Shriji Maharaj personally served them**. **Many of them** were so touched by the hospitality that they **treasured Shriji Maharaj's *murti* 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 Shriji Maharaj appeared to him. The man said, "You are that very Bhagwan who served us on that day. Are you not?"

With a smile, Shriji Maharaj said, "Yes." The man's heart drew close to Shriji Maharaj. He was blessed in his final moments. **Shriji Maharaj took him to Akshardham**.

Indeed, Shriji Maharaj liberated all. In fact, he was so compassionate that he liberated even those who sinned.



9. IF YOU ARE SARVOPARI BHAGWAN, THEN...

"Binda... Binda... You've become so spoiled! You've become a *bhakta*."

Binda was a man who lived in **Dhuva**. That is **a town in the state of Madhya Pradesh**. Today, Binda's aunt was taunting him. This was because she didn't like him practising *satsang*.

It was just recently that Binda had joined *satsang*. In fact, some of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's sadhus came to him while he was at work. The pious Binda touched the sadhus' feet. In turn, the sadhus inspired him to lead a pure life and do *satsang*. Binda had never seen such pure and holy sadhus. He heard their teachings and decided to become a *satsangi*. Indeed, he ***took vartman* and** started doing puja every day. And he started to follow *niyams*.

But **Binda's aunt** was not a good person. She did not believe in bhakti, niyams, or *sant samagam*. And she would speak down to anyone who did bhakti. So, she **was quite upset by the change she saw in her nephew.**

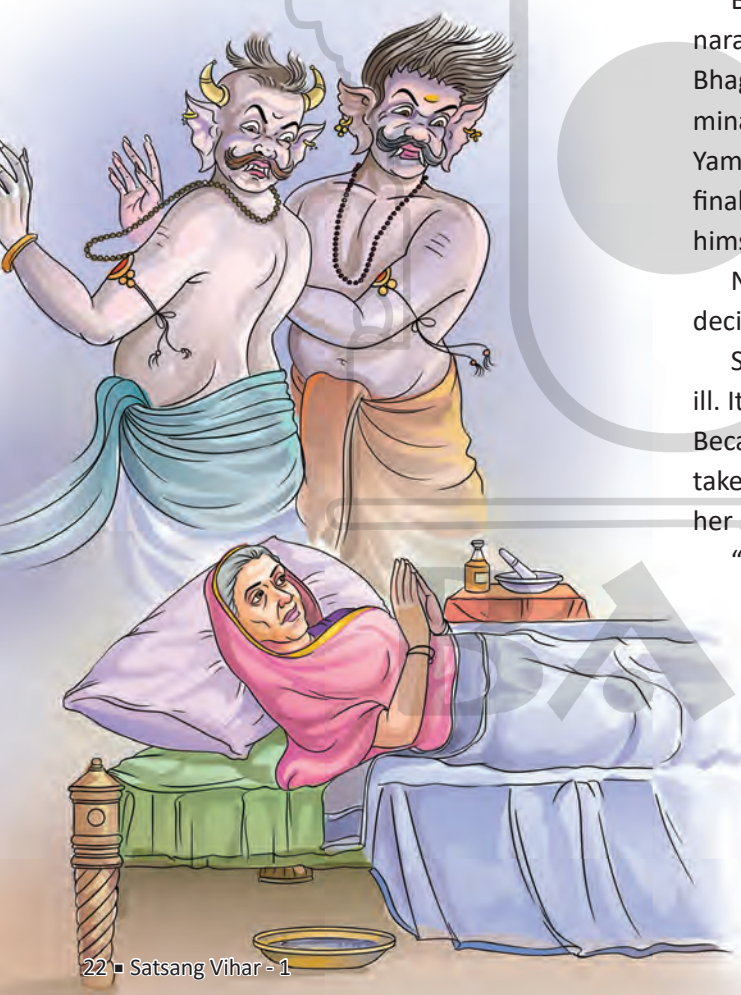
Whenever Binda would do *satsang*, she would shout, "Look... Look... How crazy he has gotten over *satsang*! He is so spoiled that all day he chants Swaminarayan's name."

On this day, as well, Binda's aunt challenged, "You chant 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' all day. What good will he do for you in return?"

Binda answered strongly, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan will give me liberation. He is *sarvopari* Bhagwan. You too should take refuge under Swaminarayan and offer devotion to him. If you do, Yamraj's servants will not come to get you in your final moments. Instead, Swaminarayan Bhagwan himself will come and take you to Akshardham."

No matter how much Binda tried, the woman decided not to listen.

Sometime thereafter, **Binda's aunt** fell terribly ill. It seemed that these would be **her final days**. Because of her sins, **Yamraj's servants** came to take her. Coming to know that her end was near, her stomach lurched.



"Come, old woman!" Yamraj's servants exclaimed. "It is time for you to go to Yampuri."

The woman grew terrified. She bowed to Yamraj's servants and pleaded, "I don't want to suffer the pains of Yampuri. From now on, I will worship Bhagwan. Please, let me go."

But Yamraj's servants did not relent. Instead, they reached out to grab her. The



poor woman had nowhere to go.

Just then, however, **she remembered her nephew Binda's dear Bhagwan**. She prayed to Shriji Maharaj, "O Swaminarayan Bhagwan! **If you are indeed *sarvopari* Bhagwan, please save me from these servants of Yamraj.**"

Shriji Maharaj liberates anyone who chants 'Swaminarayan' either knowingly or unknowingly. This is his promise. So, a miracle occurred as soon as Binda's aunt said her prayer. The servants of Yamraj disappeared. Then, a beautiful chariot appeared from the sky. The aunt saw Shriji Maharaj seated inside it.

The woman prayed, "Oh, Shriji Maharaj! You are so compassionate. You did not look towards my flaws, and you saved me. You are indeed *sarvopari* Bhagwan. Please forgive me. And please take me to Akshardham." Tears of regret welled in her eyes as she spoke.

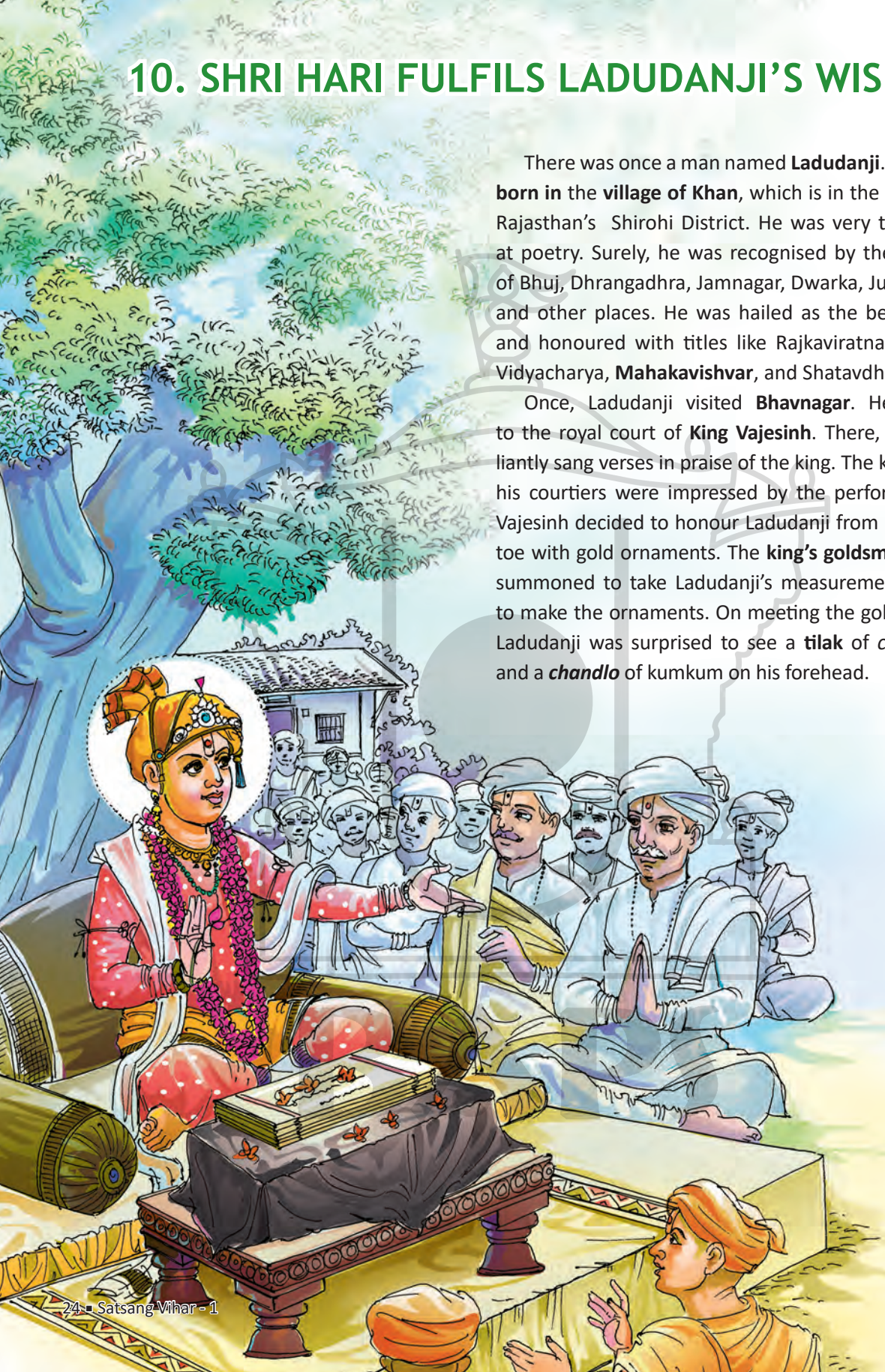
Shriji Maharaj then **sat the woman in his chariot.** The townspeople saw this all happen. Binda was pleased to see Shriji Maharaj grace his aunt in this way. All those present came to realise that Shriji Maharaj was indeed *sarvopari* Bhagwan.



10. SHRI HARI FULFILS LADUDANJI'S WISHES

There was once a man named **Ladudanji**. He was **born in** the **village of Khan**, which is in the state of Rajasthan's Shirohi District. He was very talented at poetry. Surely, he was recognised 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, **Mahakavishvar**, and Shatavdhani.

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 the performance. Vajesinh decided to honour Ladudanji from head to toe with gold ornaments. The **king's goldsmith** was summoned to take Ladudanji's measurements and to make the ornaments. On meeting the goldsmith, Ladudanji was surprised to see a **tilak** of *chandan* and a ***chandlo*** of kumkum on his forehead.



Ladudanji asked the king what this mark on the goldsmith's forehead stood for. **Vajesinh** explained, "That question keeps troubling me, too. A person called **Swaminarayan** has recently come to Gadhada. The *kathis* say he is Bhagwan. But I think he is a **phony**. If you can go and **test him**, I am sure he will be exposed."

Ladudanji was young, intelligent and renowned. With this, he had grown arrogant. He thus accepted the king's challenge and left for Gadhada. On the way, he said to himself, "Today, I shall expose Swaminarayan to be a fake."

But something amazing started happening to Ladudanji as he came nearer to Gadhada. His mind became clouded in doubt: *What if Swaminarayan is truly God!*

The next thought that came to him was how to deal with this doubt. So, he made **four wishes**: "If Swaminarayan is God then: 1. May he **call me by my name**; 2. May he **remove a garland of roses from his neck and place it on me**, 3. May he **reveal** to me the **sixteen holy marks on his feet;** and 4. May the **Shrimad Bhagavat** shastra **be read** before him, and the shastra should be wrapped in a **black cloth**."

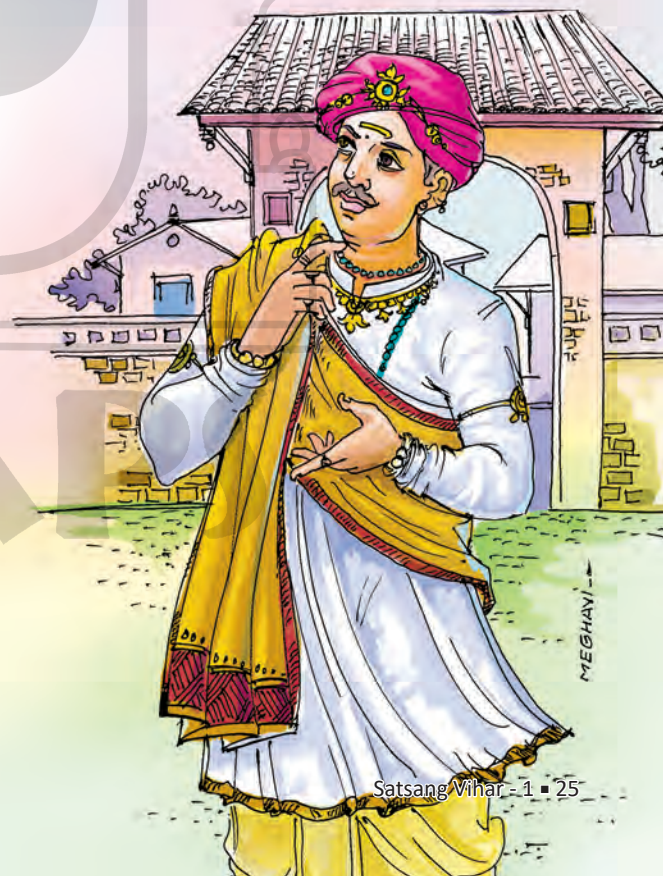
With this thought, a sly smile grew on Ladudanji's face. For he knew that his wishes were impossible to fulfil. Yet, when Ladudanji entered Gadhada, he experienced peace in his heart.

Soon, he entered Dada Khachar's courtyard. An assembly was in progress beneath the neem tree. Ladudanji observed that the Shrimad Bhagavat, covered in a black cloth, was being read. Shriji 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!" he said. Then, Shriji Maharaj introduced him to the assembly, giving details of his achievements and where he had come from. After that, he took off his garland of roses and placed it around Ladudanji's neck. He then stretched his feet and showed Ladudanji the sixteen holy marks.

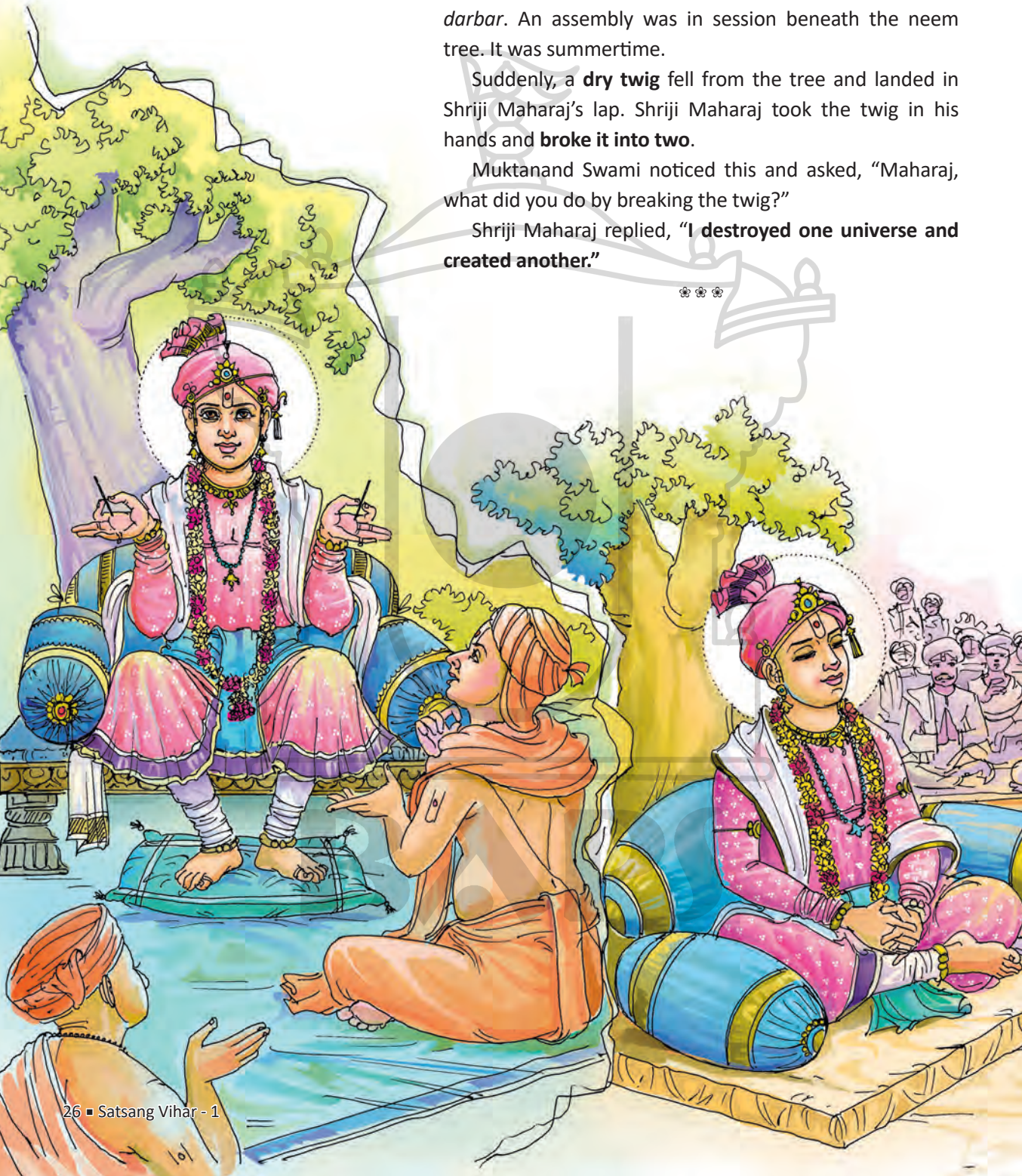
All four of Ladudanji's wishes had been fulfiled. His joy knew no bounds. He had found in *sarvopari* Shriji Maharaj something he had found nowhere else. Thus, he sang, "*Ājni ghadi re dhanya ājni ghadi, me nirkhyā Sahajānand dhanya ājni ghadi." ("This moment is most fortunate and precious because I have seen Sahajanand.")*

His heart's floodgates opened up, gushing with love and respect for Shriji Maharaj. It was as if he were a doll made of salt that had set out to measure the depths of the ocean. Of course, as soon as it sets foot in the water, it would dissolve. Similarly, Ladudanji too became lost in Maharaj's divinity. He left all his riches and honours and decided 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! Indeed, he is all-knowing – aware of what everyone is thinking and doing!



11. GOD'S ACTIONS HAVE A PURPOSE



Once, Shriji Maharaj was in **Gadhada** in Dada Khachar's *darbar*. An assembly was in session beneath the neem tree. It was summertime.

Suddenly, a **dry twig** fell from the tree and landed in Shriji Maharaj's lap. Shriji Maharaj took the twig 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 universe and created another."**

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On another occasion, Shriji Maharaj was in the **Akshar Ordi**. This was the name of his room in Gadhada. He had just finished his meal. He dried his hands with a handkerchief. Then, he raised the **handkerchief** and asked, "What is this I have here?"

Brahmanand Swami replied, "It's a handkerchief."

Shriji Maharaj explained, "Swami, look at it again. It is not a handkerchief, but a **sword**."

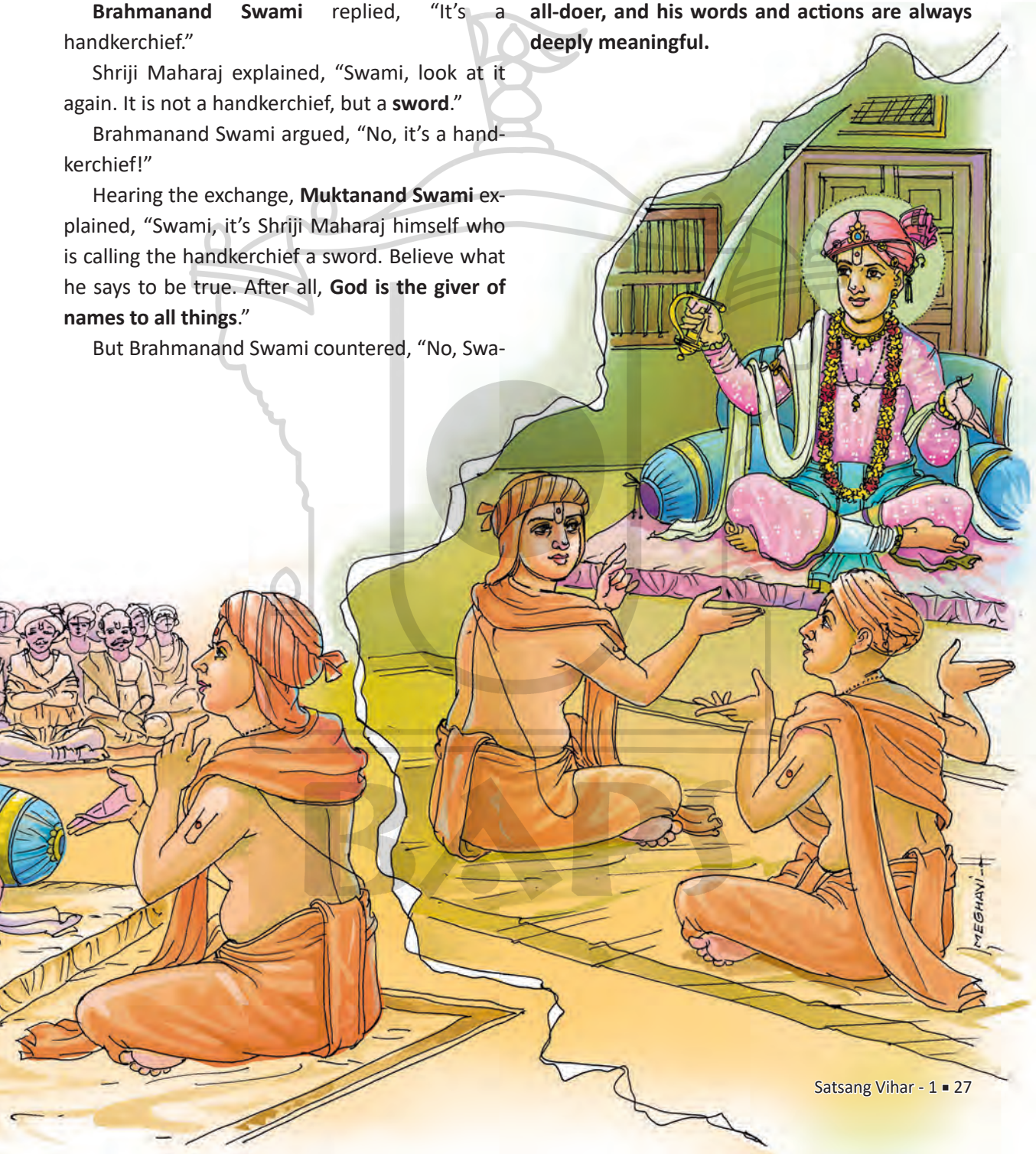
Brahmanand Swami argued, "No, it's a handkerchief!"

Hearing the exchange, **Muktanand Swami** explained, "Swami, it's Shriji Maharaj himself who is calling the handkerchief a sword. Believe what he says to be true. After all, **God is the giver of names to all things**."

But Brahmanand Swami countered, "No, Swami. I do not agree with that. I will call it what it is."

On hearing this, **Shriji Maharaj upturned the handkerchief**. To everyone's surprise, they **saw a sword** in place of the handkerchief.

Certainly, **Shriji Maharaj is the creator of infinite universes and everything in them. He is the all-doer, and his words and actions are always deeply meaningful.**



12. EVER-PRESENT THROUGH THE GUNATIT SANT

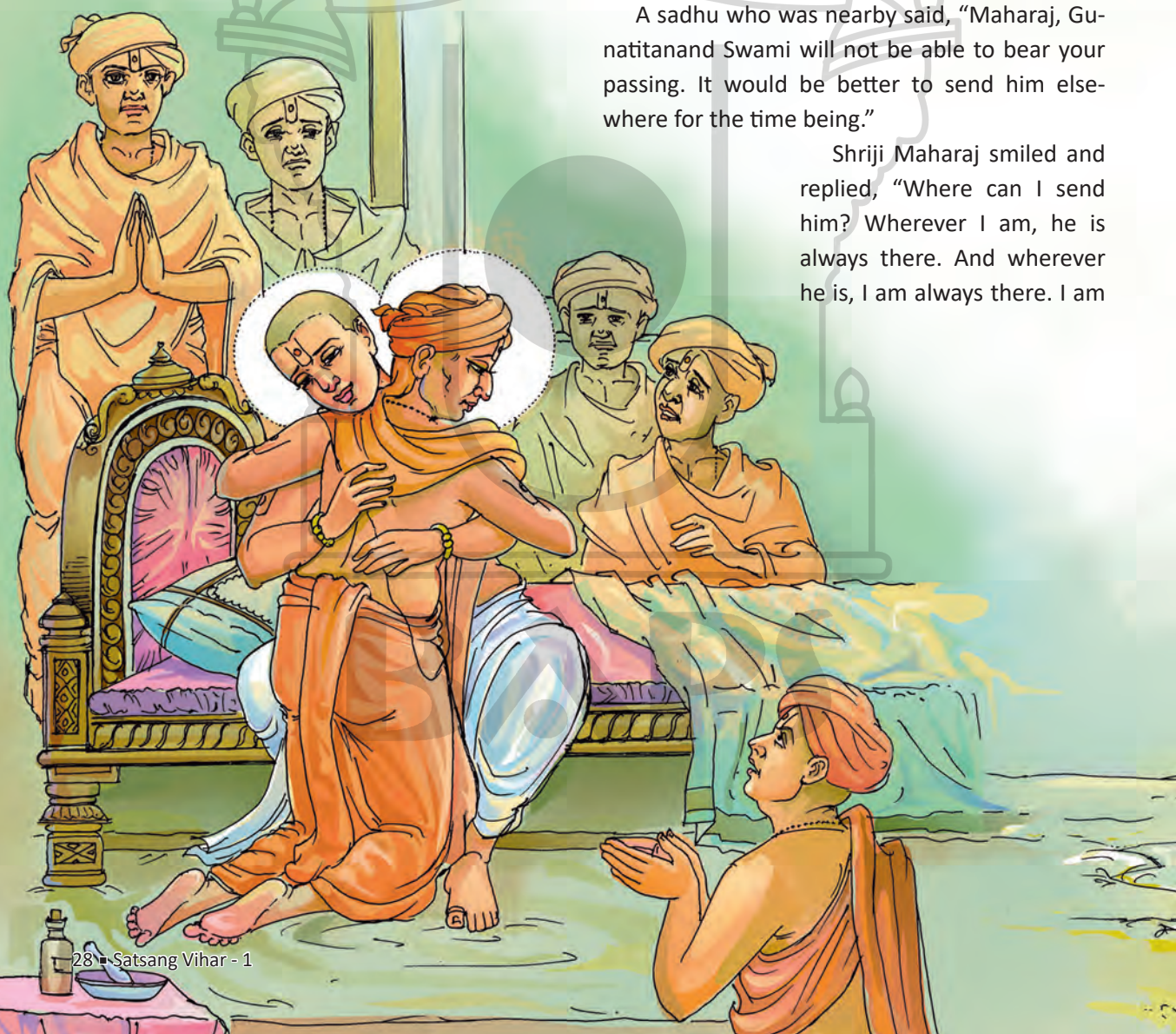
Shriji Maharaj once called the sadhus and devotees close to him. He said to them, "**Now, my work is over.** I will soon return to Akshardham."

News spread rapidly to the villages and towns that Shriji Maharaj would return to Akshardham shortly. So, devotees began to flock to Gadhada for his darshan. Maharaj had stopped eating and drinking altogether. At that time, Gunatitanand Swami was in Junagadh. Shriji Maharaj remembered him and asked, "Please call him here!"

Upon receiving this news, **Gunatitanand Swami hurriedly left for Gadhada**. He did not even rest anywhere along the way. On reaching, he went straight for Shriji Maharaj's darshan. Though Shriji Maharaj was ill and weak, he embraced Gunatitanand Swami lovingly. He then spoke to Swami endearingly. And he even began to sing, ***"Mithā vhālā kem visaru māru tamthi bāndhāl tan ho."*** *("How can I forget one who is so dear to me and to whom I am bound!")*

A sadhu who was nearby said, "Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami will not be able to bear your passing. It would be better to send him elsewhere for the time being."

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 by love. **He is my divine abode, Akshardham.**"

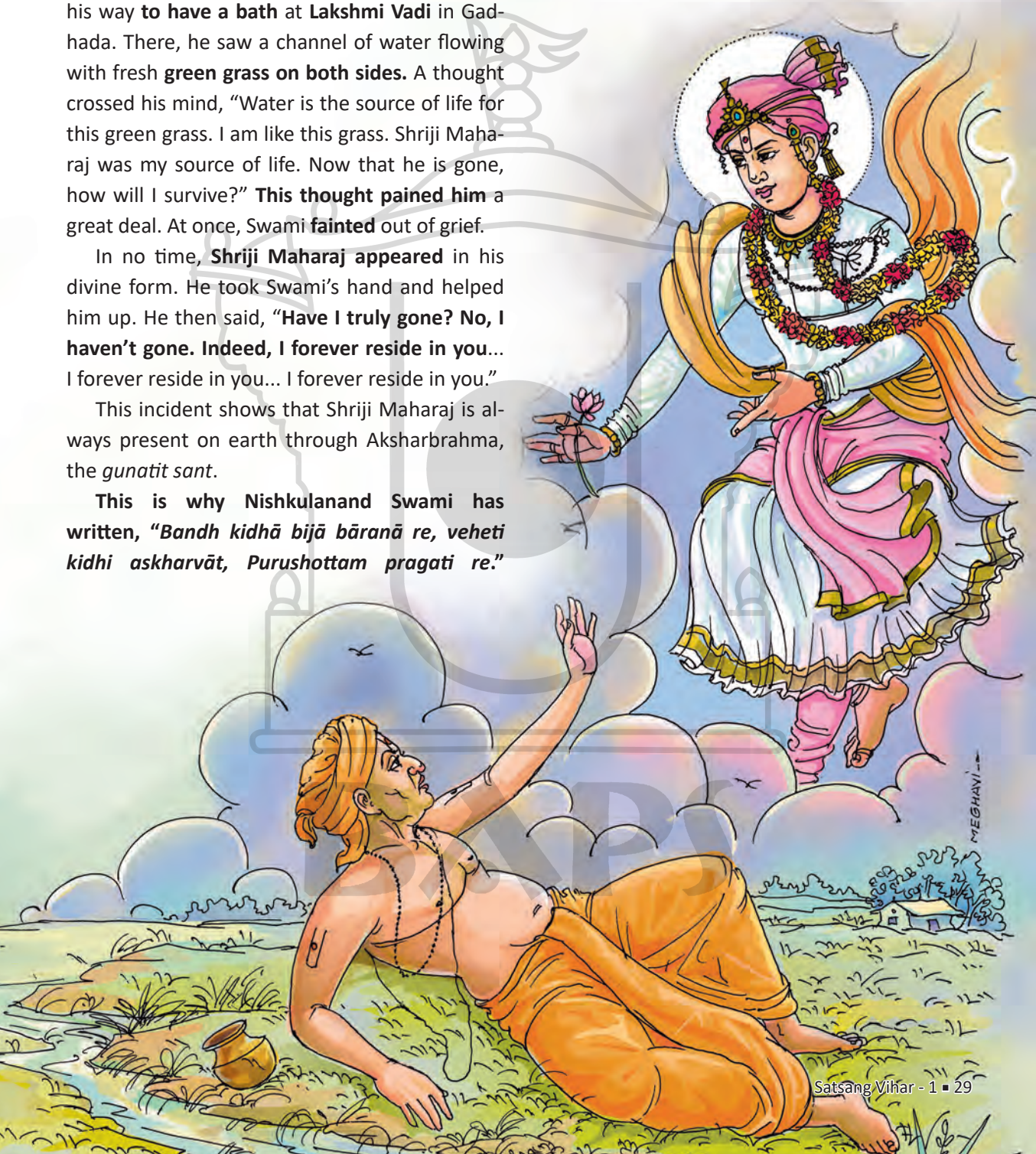
Shriji Maharaj passed away on 1 June 1830. Everyone was overcome with grief. Gunatitanand Swami was also deeply saddened.

A few days later, Gunatitanand Swami was on his way **to have a bath** at **Lakshmi Vadi** in Gadhada. There, he saw a channel of water flowing with fresh **green grass on both sides.** A thought crossed his mind, "Water is the source of life for this green grass. I am like this grass. Shriji Maharaj was my source of life. Now that he is gone, how will I survive?" **This thought pained him** a great deal. At once, Swami **fainted** out of grief.

In no time, **Shriji Maharaj appeared** in his divine form. He took Swami's hand and helped him up. He then said, "**Have I truly gone? No, I haven't gone. Indeed, I forever reside in you**... I forever reside in you... I forever reside in you."

This incident shows that Shriji Maharaj is always present on earth through Aksharbrahma, the *gunatit sant*.

This is why 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 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. GUNATITANAND SWAMI'S CHILDHOOD

Gunatitanand Swami is Bhagwan Swaminarayan's foremost devotee. Shriji Maharaj is Parabrahma, and Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma. They are also known as **Brahma and Parabrahma,** Swami and Narayan, Akshar and Purushottam. They are the **eternal pair** of bhakta and Bhagwan in the **Swaminarayan Sampradaya**.

Gunatitanand Swami was born on 17 October 1785 (V.S. 1841, Aso *sud* 15) in **Bhadra**, which



is a village in the Jamnagar district. His **father's** name was **Bholanath Sharma,** and his **mother's name** was **Sakarba**. As a child, he was called Mulji. 'Mulji' refers to Mul Akshar, Akshardham, Aksharbrahma or *gunatit*.

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Mulji was a miraculous child. One day, he asked Sakarba, "Mother, **give me some milk**."

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 near me and talks with me." Sakarba was surprised to hear such words from her little child. These were words that perhaps only great yogis could utter.

Lost in thought, **Sakarba gave the bowl of milk to Mulji.** He quickly emptied it. After he drank the milk, Sakarba found **a trace of milk on the lips of Thakorji's *murti***! She was amazed and realised the truth in Mulji's words.



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All day, Mulji was either engaged in *bhajan* or 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 saw. "Father," he said. "I walked through the village today. All the **senior folk were gossiping** and partaking of their addictions. No one was doing *bhajan*. That's why I think we should **do *bhajan* right from childhood**."

Bholanath was touched by Mulji's observation. From that day, he never stopped his son from worshipping Bhagwan.

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Once, **a barber named Nathu** was giving Mulji a haircut. Nathu was a devotee of Bhagwan Ram. He praised Bhagwan by saying, "**Bhagwan Ramchandra** was so great that he took all the **citizens of Ayodhya to** his divine abode, **Vaikunth**."

Mulji replied, "Nathu, if you wish, **I can take all the people of Bhadra to Akshardham!**"

Nathu laughed because he thought Mulji was pulling his leg. But soon, he was stunned. A **cool light** came from Mulji's body and spread all around him. Everyone was blinded by the light. Soon, Mulji absorbed the light back into himself.

A man named **Kanoji** was nearby. He exclaimed, "Nathu, **Mulji is the incarnation of Akshar**."

Gunatitanand Swami's childhood was full of such extraordinary incidents. Mulji would also repeatedly tell his mother and friends, "*Sarvopari* Bhagwan has been born on the northern side of the country. I see him always. He will surely come to our village one day."

14. DECLARING AKSHARBRAHMA'S GREATNESS

"Gunatitanand Mul Akshar, Sahajanand mama Parameshwar." As you may know, there are two teachings in this statement. Both are important for our *upasana*. Of them, Gunatitanand Swami explained to us the meaning of the first teaching: "Sahajanand mama Parmeshwar". **Bhagatji Maharaj**, on the other hand, **explained** to us the meaning of the second teaching: "**Gunatitanand Swami Mul Akshar**".

Once, **Gunatitanand Swami** came to **Sarangpur**. A man named **Vagha Khachar** lived there. He was a good *satsangi*. Seeing Swami, he prayed, "Dear Swami! I get **terrible dreams at night**. **They are dreams about fighting.**"

Swami replied, "**Come to Junagadh**. By Shriji Maharaj's grace, your problem will be solved."

Vagha Khachar agreed to come, but he needed someone to look after him. So, Gunatitanand Swami asked **Bhagatji Maharaj** to care for his needs.

Bhagatji Maharaj surely attended to Vagha Khachar's needs. But he also **spoke to the man about Gunatitanand Swami's greatness.** He would tell him that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar. But Vagha Khachar **did not like this**. So, he told Bhagatji to stop coming to help. But he soon realised that he **could not do without an attendant.** So, he asked Bhagatji to return.

Vagha Khachar soon arrived in **Junagadh**. There, he noticed that those who were **attached to Swami were joyful**. He thought, "Why do I not experience such joy?" He expressed his thoughts to a man named Dama Sheth of Mahuva.

Dama Sheth replied, "Have faith in Bhagatji Maharaj's words. B**elieve Gunatitanand Swami to be Mul Akshar**. Then, you too will experience the same joy."



Vagha Khachar replied, **"I will only believe it if Swami tells me it is true."**

At that time, Bhagatji Maharaj thought of Swami. And he wished that Swami would come to the farm where they were. At that time, Swami was in the assembly hall in the mandir. But he soon got up and came to the farm, as he sensed that Bhagatji Maharaj was calling him.

Once Swami arrived, Bhagatji Maharaj said, "Swami, Vagha Khachar wants to ask a question."

Swami looked at Vagha Khachar and uttered, "What Bhagatji says is true."

But Vagha Khachar wanted to hear it from Swami. So, he asked, "Are you yourself Akshar?"

Gunatitanand Swami smiled and **said**, "**Yes**."

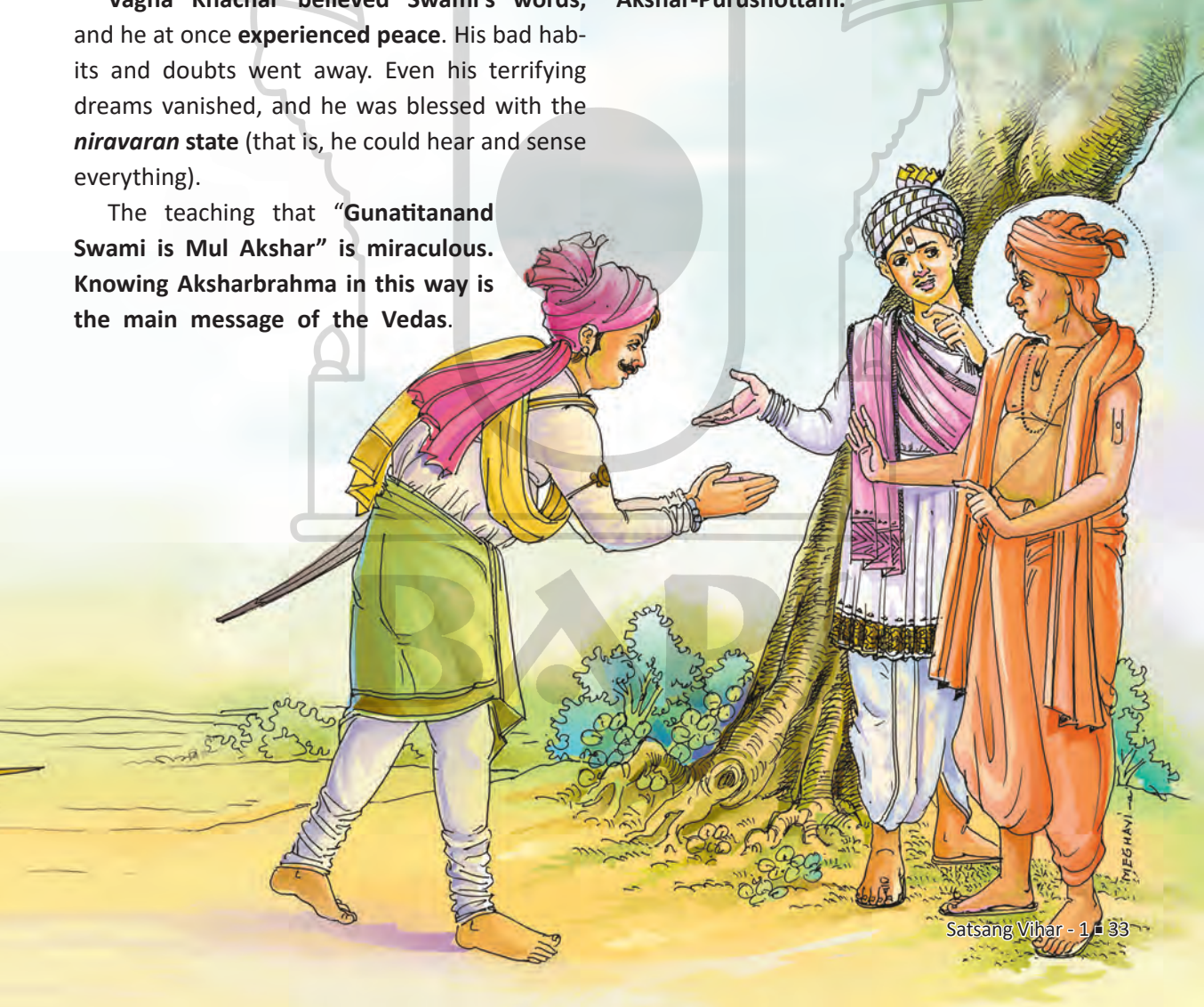
Vagha Khachar believed Swami's words, and he at once **experienced peace**. His bad habits and doubts went away. Even his terrifying dreams vanished, and he was blessed with the ***niravaran* state** (that is, he could hear and sense everything).

The teaching that "**Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar" is miraculous. Knowing Aksharbrahma in this way is the main message of the Vedas**.

Anyone who honestly believes this will feel peace inside forever. They will also be liberated.

However, this was difficult for people to accept at first. Yet, Bhagatji Maharaj worked hard to explain it. Referring to Swami, he often declared, "The one sitting here is Akshar... The one you see sleeping here is Akshar... The one walking here is Akshar."

Bhagatji Maharaj faced many obstacles. In the end, though, truth prevailed. **Through Bhagatji Maharaj's company, many *paramhansas*, devotees, and other important people began to believe, "Gunatitanand Mul Akshar". For centuries to come, all will remember Bhagatji Maharaj's contribution to explaining this pure *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam.**



15. THE FOUNDATION OF BAPS

The *murti-pratishtha* of Ghanshyam Maharaj was taking place at the **Swaminarayan Mandir** in **Rampura, Surat.** Bhagatji Maharaj had come to attend this joyful event.

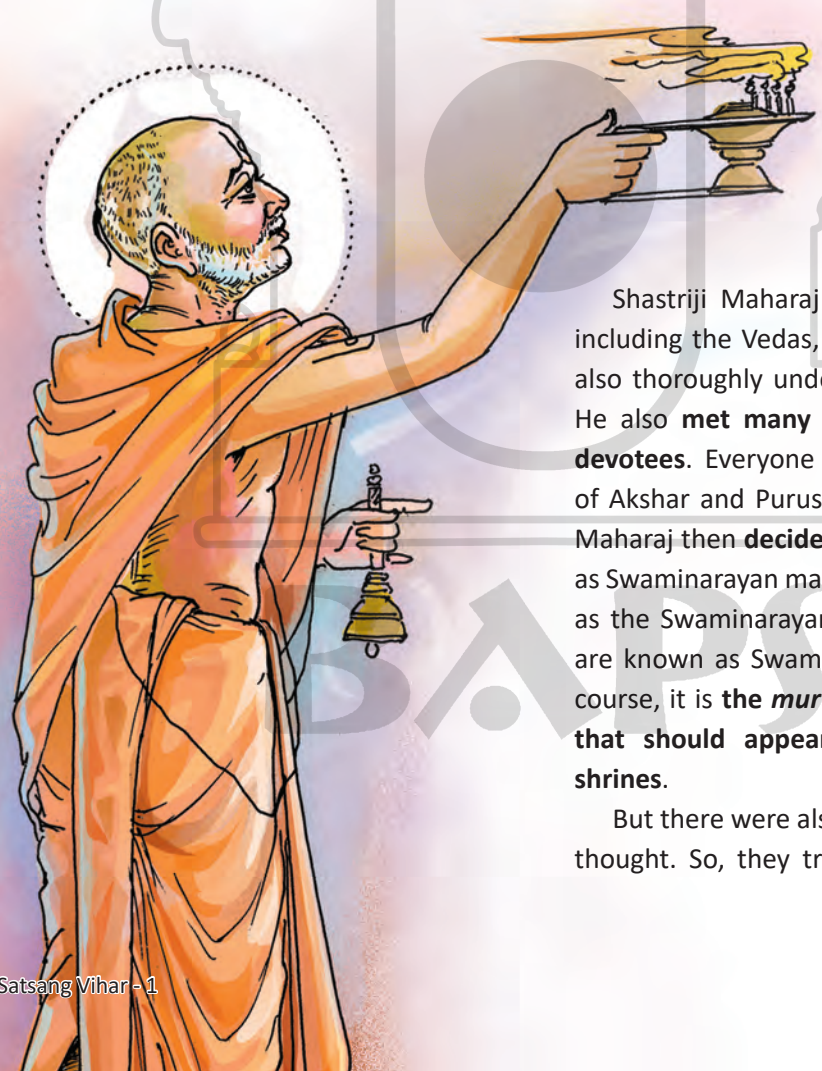
Yagnapurushdas (Shastriji Maharaj) was about 18 years old at the time. He was busy with the *pratishtha* preparations. But one day, he saw **Bhagatji Maharaj** in the assembly hall. Bhagatji Maharaj was **doing *katha* and sewing a cloth** – both at the same time. He wasn't even looking down at the cloth! This startled Yagnapurushdas.

Bhagatji Maharaj saw the young sadhu standing nearby. He asked him, "**Have you developed absolute faith in Swaminarayan?**"

Shastriji Maharaj replied, "I have firmly understood **Shriji Maharaj to be *sarvopari* Bhagwan.**"

Bhagatji stated, "This is only your faith in Narayan. That means you have only **50 per cent faith**. As long as you don't understand that Swami – **Gunatitanand Swami** – **is Akshar,** you have not achieved **full faith** in Swaminarayan."

On hearing these words, Shastriji Maharaj became lost in thought. He went to a *sant* named Vignananand Swami to ask if Bhagatji's words were true. Vignananand Swami was a senior *sadguru* sant and a great **scholar.** He had taken ***diksha* from Shriji Maharaj himself. He told Shastriji Maharaj that what Bhagatji said was true.** It was then that Shastriji Maharaj **accepted Bhagatji Maharaj as his guru**.



Shastriji Maharaj **knew the shastras well**, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and Gita. He also thoroughly understood the Vachanamrut. He also **met many senior *paramhansas* and devotees**. Everyone agreed that the principle of Akshar and Purushottam was true. Shastriji Maharaj then **decided**: Our mandirs are known as Swaminarayan mandirs, our mantra is known as the Swaminarayan mantra, and our sadhus are known as Swaminarayan sadhus. Then, of course, it is **the *murtis* of Swami and Narayan that should appear in our mandirs' main shrines**.

But there were also some **who opposed** this thought. So, they tried to **get rid of** Shastriji

Maharaj. They even once **poisoned his *khichadi.*** But none of this affected Shastriji Maharaj.

Another time, people planned to **throw Shastriji Maharaj into a log fire**. But the devotees quickly foiled this attempt.

In spite of all this, Shastriji Maharaj did not want to leave Vartal. However, a senior devotee named **Krishnaji Ada** encouraged him that leaving was the safe thing to do. He also explained that Shriji Maharaj says in the **Shikshapatri** that **one should not stay in a place where one's life is in danger**. Finally, Shastriji Maharaj agreed to leave.

Shastriji Maharaj had with him only **five sadhus and a handful of devotees.** He **prayed** before the ***murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj**, "Dear Maharaj! I do not wish to leave. But it seems to be your wish that I do so. Therefore, I am leaving here today only to spread your glory and also that of Gunatitanand Swami. May you **be with us forever**."

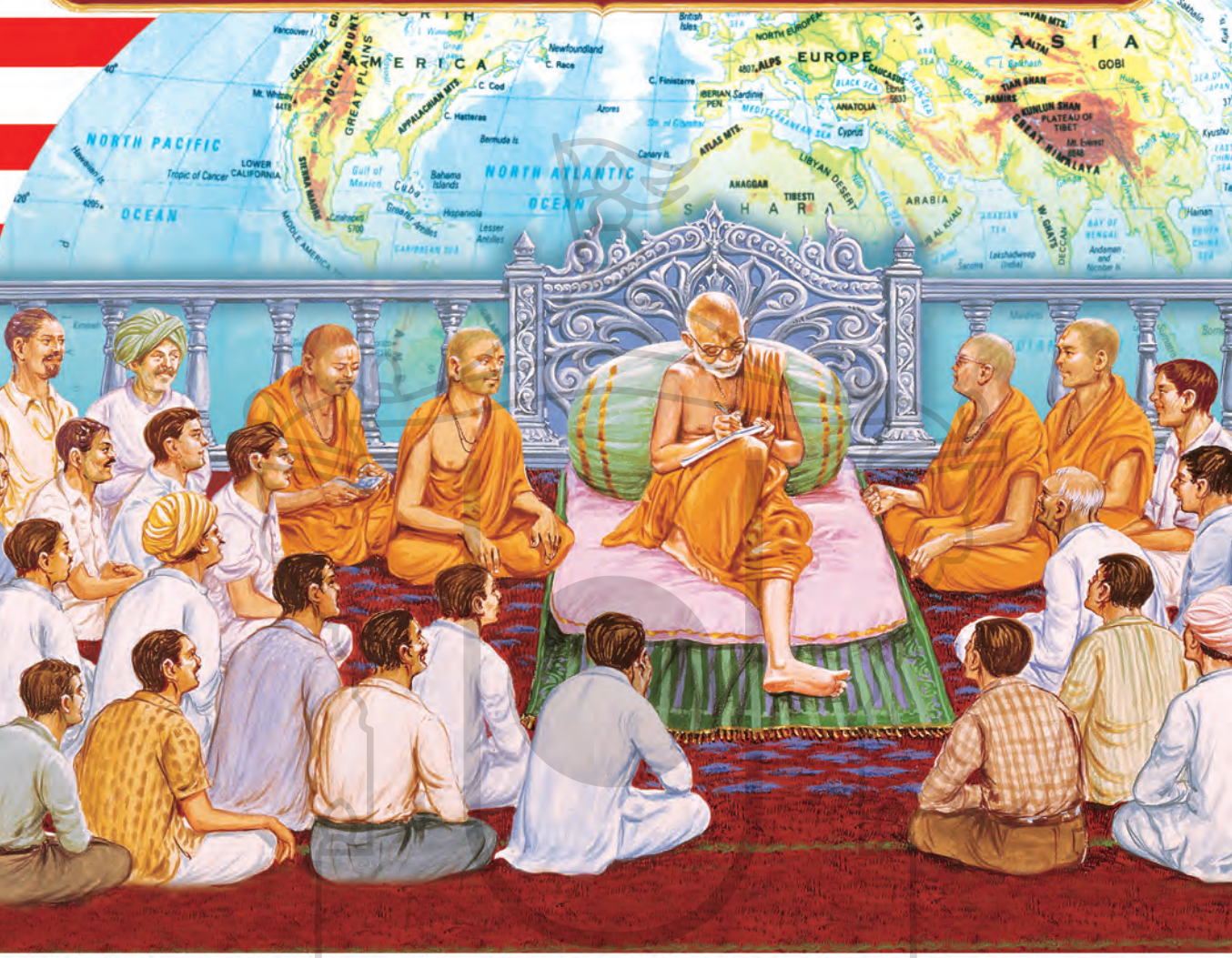


In this way, Shastriji Maharaj departed from Vartal. Thereafter he built his first mandir in Bochasan. The year was 1907. Along with this, he also established BAPS (the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha).

Even after leaving Vartal, Shastriji Maharaj never opposed anyone. And he never competed with anyone.

In this way, we see that **our sanstha was established on** the foundation of two things: (1) **eternal Vedic principles, and (2) saintly virtues**.

16. YOGIJI MAHARAJ: HIS LIFE AND WORK



There is **a magazine** published in **Mumbai.** It is called **Bhavan's Journal.** This magazine once carried an article series on the experiences of great spiritual leaders. Its heading was "**How God Came into My Life".** Each issue covered a different spiritual figure, revealing how they found God.

Yogiji Maharaj was asked, "Tell us about your experience of God's darshan. We wish to send it to the magazine."

But Yogiji Maharaj replied, "**I have always had God's darshan. It is eternal.**"

This is a brief introduction to Yogiji Maharaj. From this story, we find that he was a God-realised sadhu. Yogiji Maharaj was also attached to his guru. And he was **always joyful**. He was an idol of dharma, *gnan, vairagya,* bhakti, *seva*, austerity, tolerance, and *divyabhav*. He was **an ideal sadhu**. He never thought of others' faults. He never got angry with anyone. Also, he **never took any situation to be painful**.



Our **bal-balika mandals were also started** by Yogiji Maharaj. Let us briefly learn about Yogiji Maharaj's life and work.

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

- **MAIN EVENTS OF His LIFE**
  - 1892: Birth.
  - 1908: Left home at the age of sixteen.
  - 1908: *Parshadi diksha* in Junagadh; was given the name **Jhina Bhagat.**
  - 1911: ***Bhagavati*** *diksha* (saffron *diksha*) given by Acharya Shripatiprasadji Maharaj in Vartal; was given the name **Sadhu Gnanjivandas**.
  - 1911: Left Junagadh Mandir to be with Shastriji Maharaj.
  - 1934: Appointed as the mahant of Gondal Mandir.
  - 1951: Became our guru after Shastriji Maharaj's passing.
  - 1955, 1960, and 1970: **Three foreign tours** (to Africa and England).
  - 1971: While in Mumbai, he passed away to Akshardham.

- **WORK**
  1. Initiated more than 100 formally educated **youths as sadhus**.
  2. **Founded the children's *mandals*, youth *mandals,* and *satsang mandals*.**
  3. Started *Swaminarayan Patrika*.
  4. Established **satsang outside India.**
  5. Inaugurated two *shikharbaddha* mandirs (Ahmedabad and Bhadra) and fifty-four *hari* mandirs.
  6. Started a *gurukul* (residential school) in Gondal, a youth **hostel** in Vidyanagar, music and Sanskrit *schools*, ***shibirs*** (spiritual camps), and ***adhiveshans*** (*mukhpath,* speech, *kirtan,* and other competitions).
  7. Conducted countless *parayans* (discourse series) and thousands of *padharamanis* (home visits), wrote innumerable letters, made pilgrimage tours, and held many grand *yagnas.*

- **HEARTFELT MESSAGES AND TEACHINGS**
  1. **May God do good for all. Let us always worship God.**
  2. There is no happiness without harmony (*samp*), friendship (*suhruday bhav*), and unity (*ekta*).
  3. To become good, one should **see good** in others. Do not look at others' faults. Doing so is like taking poison.
  4. Offering bhakti towards one's guru means having ***nirdoshbuddhi*** (seeing him as pure).
  5. Speak the truth, speak courteously, and speak that which benefits all. Use your words preciously, as you would use milk and ghee.
  6. Learn to make do with things the way they are. **Learn to tolerate.**
  7. **Obey *niyams* fully**.

- **OPINIONS**
  1. "**Oh! There is no sadhu like Jogi in infinite *brahmands*.**"

     – Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

  2. "Yogiji Maharaj is the sacred entity of Brahman described in the Upanishads."

     – Pujya Swami Chinmayanand
     (Chinmaya Mission)

17. AS FIRM AS A MOUNTAIN



It was 13 June 1988. Today, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj was being honoured in the Parliament of Canada.**

On the Parliament floor, an **announcement** was made, "The great Indian religious leader Pramukh Swami Maharaj is with us today. Let us recognise him."

Everyone looked up into the gallery to see Pramukh Swami Maharaj. But there, they saw something peculiar...

Instead of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, **another swami was standing.** Everyone wondered, "Why hasn't Pramukh Swami Maharaj stood?"

Little did they know, however, that it was Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself who had asked the other swami to rise. **That is because that other swami had Harikrishna Maharaj in his hands.** Harikrishna Maharaj is the name of the *murti* that Pramukh Swami Maharaj always kept. **Pramukh Swami Maharaj always kept Bhagwan ahead of himself wherever he went.** He did this so that people would always see Bhagwan first. Such was his devotion towards Bhagwan.

Moreover, he believed Bhagwan's *murti* (also known as Thakorji) to be Bhagwan himself.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was given a **new frame for his glasses**. But he only made use of it after having offered it to Thakorji. Another time, someone accidentally served Thakorji a sweet dish called ***shiro* that was extra hot**. Upon coming to know, Pramukh Swami Maharaj **had the *shiro* cooled**. He then offered it to Thakorji himself and prayed, "Maharaj! Please forgive us. You must have felt it to be too hot."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was also quite sincere about having Bhagwan's *darshan*, doing *dandvats*, and taking part in *arti*, *katha*, and other devotional activities.

On 16 August 1989, he was staying in the town of Nadiad. **He was ill** at the time. It is only normal for people to rest when they are ill. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj told the swamis who were with him, "I want to go for Thakorji's *darshan*."

The swamis answered, "Bapa! You are not feeling well. You should rest."

Despite their requests, Pramukh Swami Maharaj reached the mandir and **had Thakorji's darshan**. While returning, he noticed that there was a ***sabha*** going on. So, he turned to go in that direction.

But the swamis stopped him, saying, "Bapa! It is okay if you do not go to *sabha*."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was upset to hear the swamis insist. He answered, "You ask me not to meet devotees. **You ask me not to have Thakorji's *darshan*. How can I live in such a way?"**

On 15 September 2000, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in San Jose (USA). He came for *darshan* at the mandir. Just the day before, he **had surgery on his toe**. And so, his toe was hurting quite badly. But after *darshan*, Pramukh Swami Maharaj **started to do *dandvats***. His toe would touch the ground while he was doing *dandvats,* and this would make it hurt even more. But he still wished to continue. To help him, one of the swamis held his foot up a bit so it would not touch the ground.

Such was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's devotion. Indeed, his devotion was as firm as a mountain!

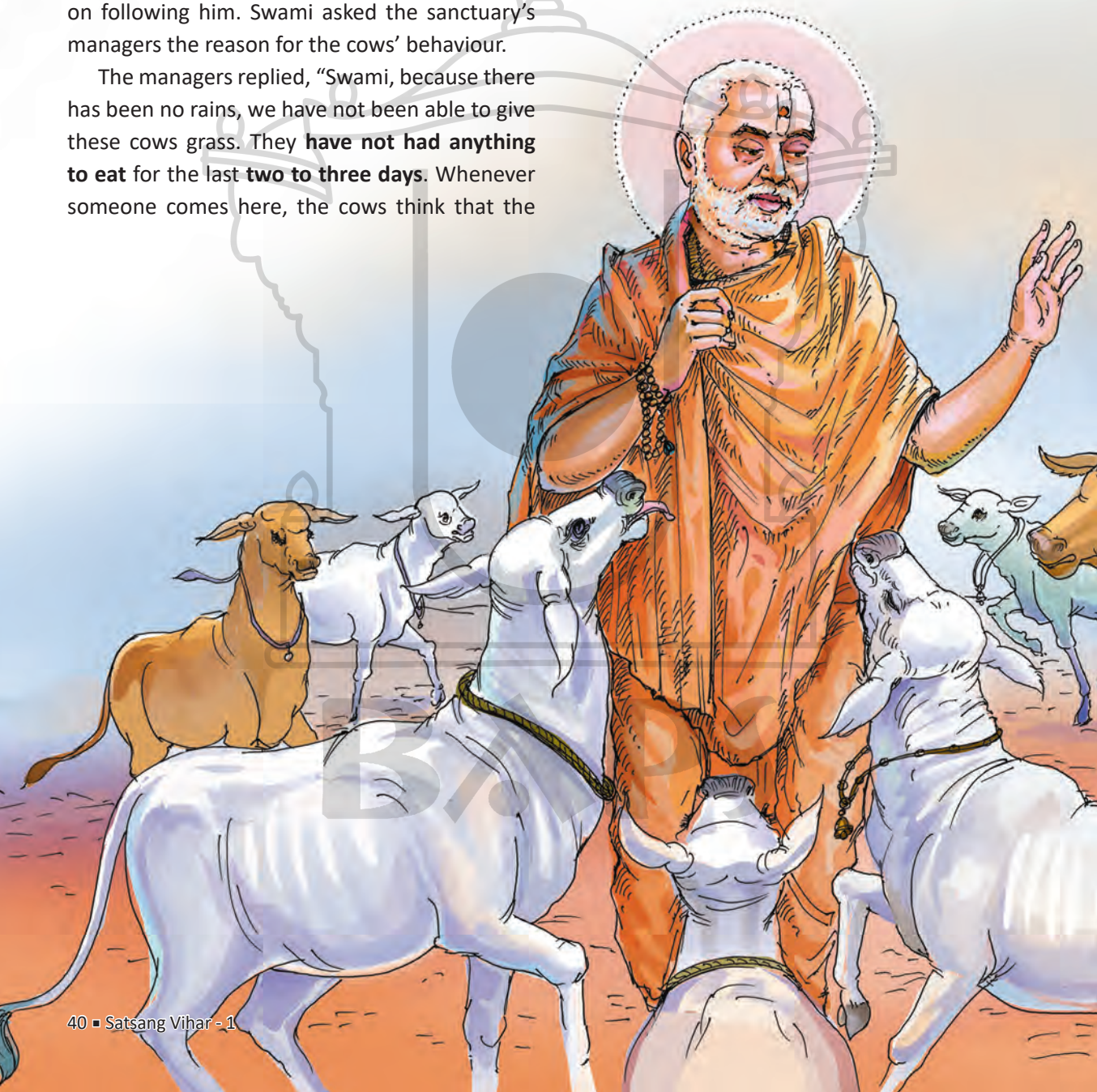


18. COMPASSIONATE AND KIND

The year was 1987. There is a village named Ratanpur near the city of Rajkot. The scene there was heartbreaking. Five thousand **calves** were being kept at a sanctuary there. **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** soon arrived to visit the sanctuary. As he came, the calves started **running after** him. They went over to where he was, and they kept on following him. Swami asked the sanctuary's managers the reason for the cows' behaviour.

The managers replied, "Swami, because there has been no rains, we have not been able to give these cows grass. They **have not had anything to eat** for the last **two to three days**. Whenever someone comes here, the cows think that the person has brought food. That is why they are following you."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was pained to hear this. His eyes filled with emotion. As soon as he reached Gondal, he approached Kothari Swami and said, "The starving calves in Ratanpur were

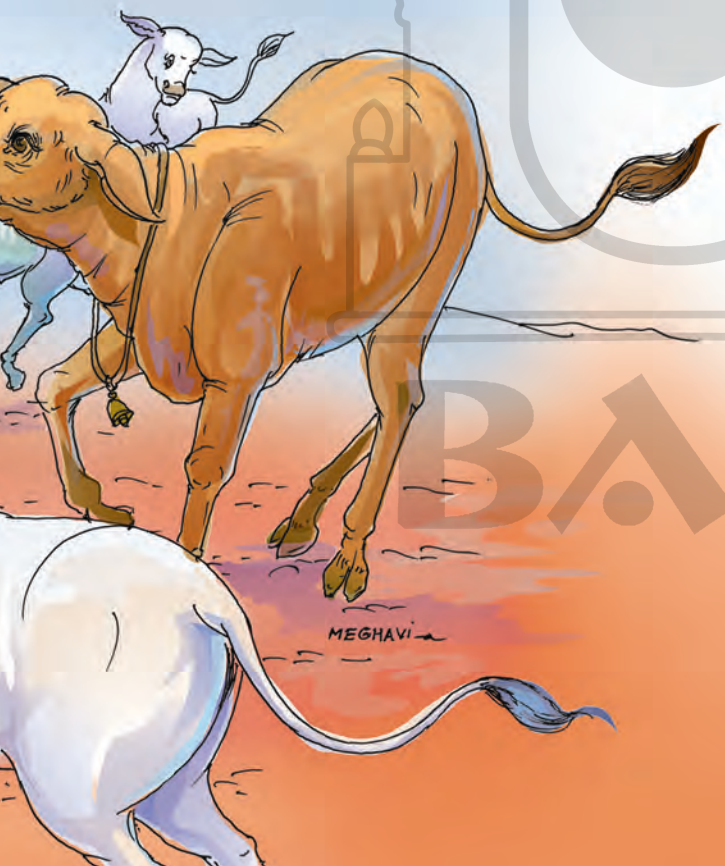


running after me. I could not bear to see their pain. Tell the swamis in Rajkot to send trucks of grass for those calves. There must be thousands of hungry calves all across Gujarat. They must be suffering terribly!"

Thinking so, Pramukh Swami Maharaj decided to set up **cattle camps** to take care of the animals. He once even said, "I will send 300 sadhus for this seva. I will also ask the devotees to join. This is not the time to sit around and do nothing. **Just look at the suffering of these poor creatures! These animals only have us to help them.**"

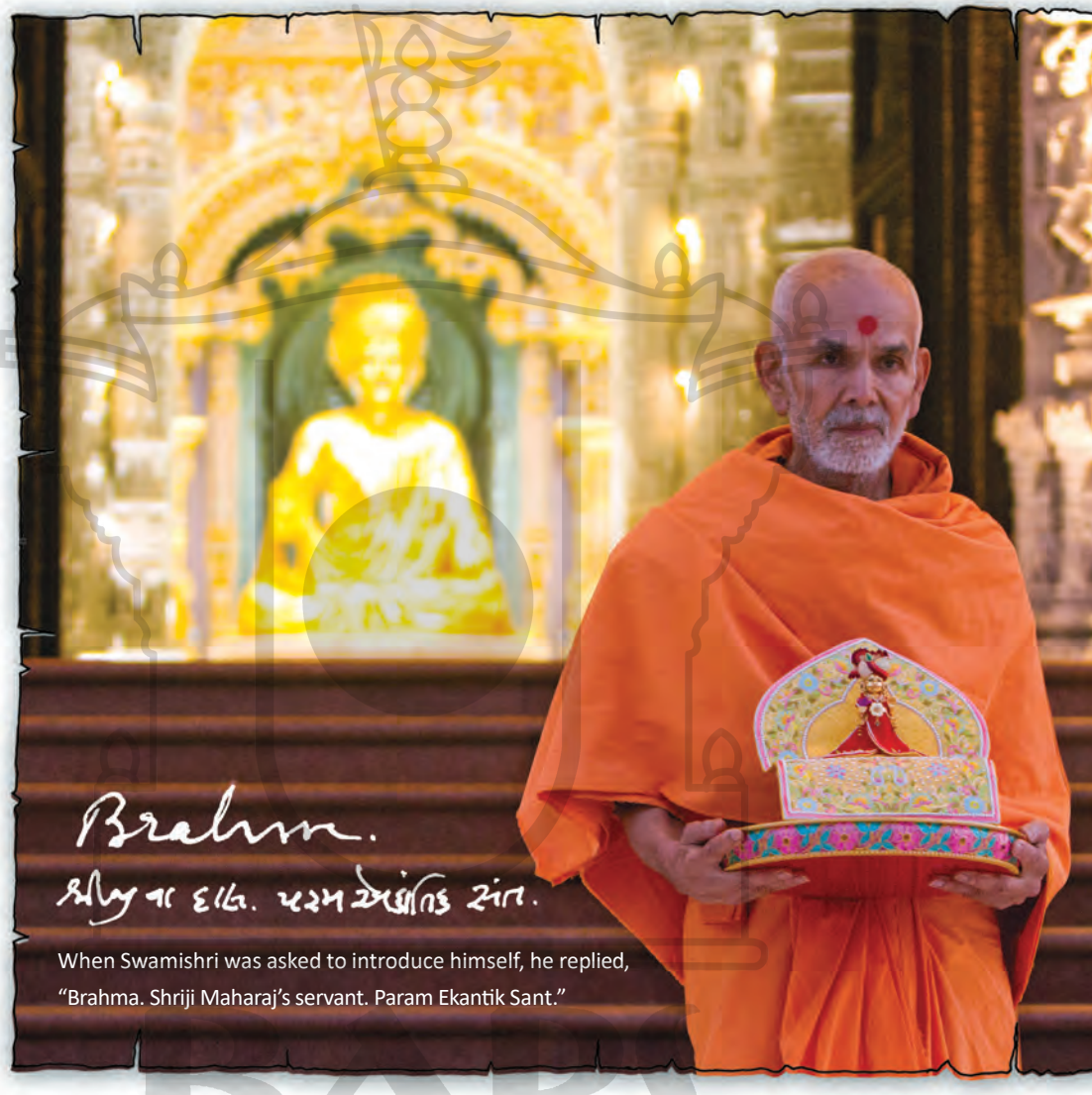
Pramukh Swami Maharaj's compassion for everyone was so deep. **The spiritual and social services of BAPS today come from his compassion for humanity and all living beings.**

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



- **SWAMISHRI'S SELFLESS WORK**
  - Took *satsang* to 52 countries.
  - Created more than 1,000 **mandirs** and two **Akshardhams.**
  - Initiated more than 1,000 formally educated **sadhus.**
  - Established 3,850 satsang centres around the world.
  - Started 16,000 ***satsang* assemblies for people of all ages.**
  - Inspired more than one million **devotees around the world.**

- **THE SANSTHA'S NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICES**
  - **Spiritual nourishment** through special *satsang* activities for children, youth, seniors and women.
  - **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 empowerment** services.
  - Environmental awareness, parental guidance, teachers' programmes, women's empowerment, anti-addiction drives, literacy programmes, anti-dowry projects, water harvesting programmes and others.
  - **Recognised several times by Guinness World Records.**
  - **BAPS is recognised by the United Nations.**



When Swamishri was asked to introduce himself, he replied, "Brahma. Shriji Maharaj's servant. Param Ekantik Sant."



19. WHO IS SWAMISHRI?

It was 4 January 2017. A **shibir** was being held in **Ahmedabad** in Mahant Swami Maharaj's presence. Youths from America, Europe, Australia and Africa were taking part in this shibir. They wished to capture a memory of Swamishri that they would remember forever.

One morning, Swamishri had darshan at the mandir. He was then going back to his residence. The youths were sitting in a line. As Swamishri moved towards the **youths**, one of them said, "Swami, Jay Swaminarayan! I come from **America**."

Another stood up and said, "I come from **Africa**."

A third jumped in and announced, "I come from **Australia**."

As Swamishri came to the end of the line, a fourth young person asked, "Swami, we told you about ourselves. Now, you tell us about yourself. Where do you come from?"

Swamishri waved his hand and said, "**All the way from Akshardham**!" This one gesture was so meaningful. The youths would remember it for their entire lives. The sadhus and devotees present all began to applaud Swamishri's response.

We are so fortunate! Our guru has come all the way from Akshardham. And he has become one of us. He has done all of this just to liberate us.

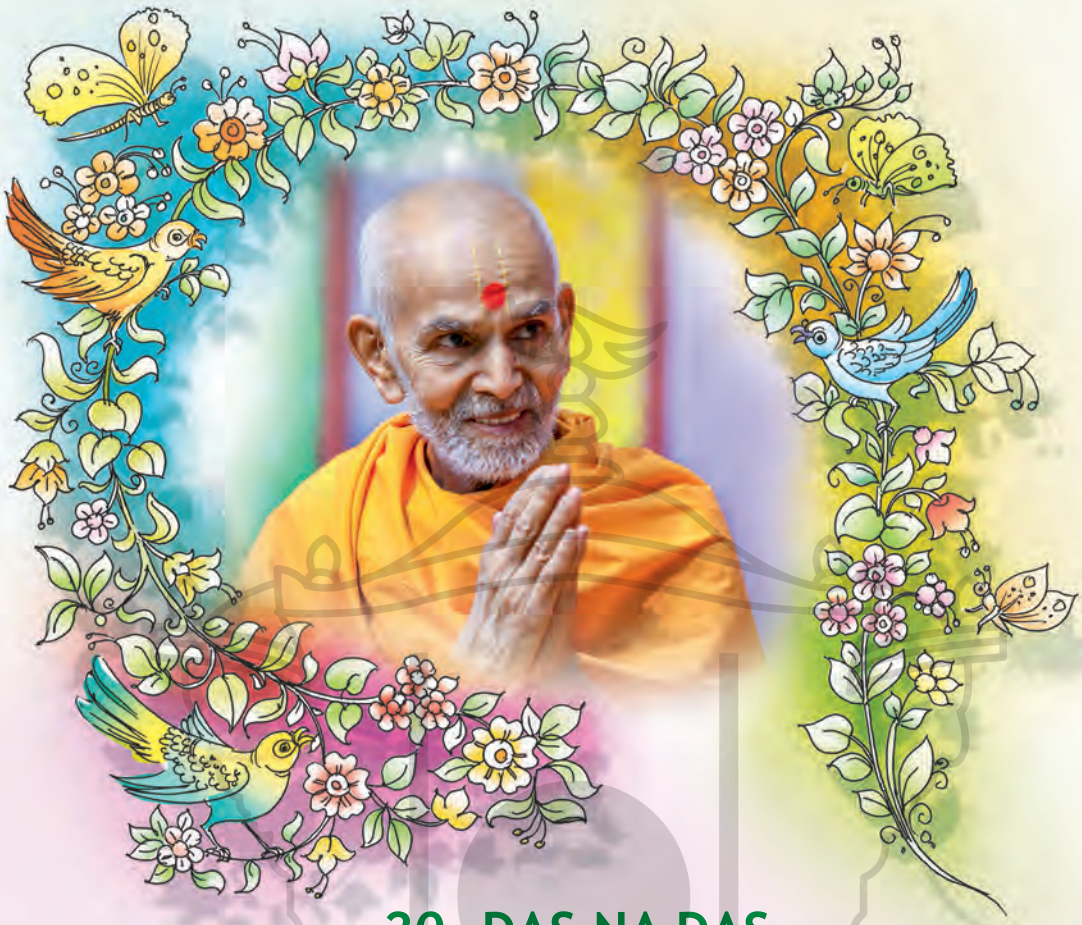
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On another occasion, Swamishri was in **Bochasan.** The date was 28 September 2016. Swamishri was answering some letters. It had only been a month and a half since Pramukh Swami Maharaj had passed away. Mahant Swami Maharaj was now in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's place as our guru. But to one devotee, Mahant Swami Maharaj just seemed so different from Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The devotee decided to write a **letter** to Swamishri. In it, he wrote: "My *dandvat pranams* and 'Jay Swaminarayan' at the feet of Param Pujya Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swami, **what should I understand you to be?** I want *kalyan* for my soul. So please give me an answer that states it as it truly is."

Swamishri answered precisely, "**Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj... they all look different from the outside. But inside, they are the same entity (Aksharbrahma).** The same Shriji Maharaj that was in Bhagatji Maharaj was also in Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj... and the same with us. **Shriji Maharaj is in all of them (the *gunatit* gurus).** It is all Shriji Maharaj's power."

We are so fortunate! **Our guru is Akshar, Brahma, *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.



20. DAS NA DAS

Have you ever heard the word *'das'*? This is a very important word. In *satsang*, a *das* is someone who humbly serves Bhagwan. In a way, each of us counts as a *das* because we all serve Bhagwan in different ways.

But there's also another important word: *das na das.* It's actually not a word. It's a phrase!

As we just learned, a *das* is someone who serves Bhagwan. But a *das na das* is a person who serves those people who serve Bhagwan.

We often use the phrase *'das na das'* to describe Mahant Swami Maharaj. That's because he makes it a point to be humble towards Bhagwan's devotees. And he takes every opportunity he gets to help them.

In 1991, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited our *sanstha's* student hostel (residence) in the town of **Vidyanagar**. One night, Swamishri was **writing letters** in his room. Just then, **a group of students came to talk** to him. **These youths were going to become sadhus soon**.

As the group entered, **Swamishri** put down his letters. He then 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 just looking for some space. As soon as he found enough room, he **began doing *dandvats*** to the youths.

This was unexpected for the students. Such a senior sant doing *dandvats* to them! What should they do? Before they could react, Swamishri had already done two *dandvats.* It was as if he **could not help but think well of these**

youths who were about to give up the world and **become sadhus**. Thinking so, **Swamishri even finished a third *dandvat***!

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

■ ■ ■

On 14 September 2016, Swamishri was in **Mumbai**. He was seated on a sofa, and he was meeting **a sadhu**. The sadhu had recently undergone **surgery on** his left **foot.** So, he was **in a wheelchair**. **Once the meeting was over**, the sadhu moved his wheelchair away with his hands. But he could not stand to open the door. So, he **pushed the door open with his good leg.**

Then, he reached for the wheels to move out. But **the wheelchair began moving on its own.** He looked back and saw **Swamishri pushing his wheelchair**! Before the sadhu could say anything, he was out of the room. Those standing outside were surprised. One sadhu tried to take the wheelchair from Swamishri. But Swamishri said no and **pushed the wheelchair into the hallway** with a big smile on his face!

Swamishri does not simply tell us to care for others. He himself serves others. He lives as a *das na das*. **Though he is Aksharbrahma and such a great guru, he lives as a servant!**

■ ■ ■

When Swamishri is asked to state his identity, he says, *'Das na das'.* And, indeed, he teaches us that **true satsang means being a *das na das*.** One who lives as a *das na das* achieves everything. Having such *dasbhav* is the **master key** of *satsang*. It is *satsang's* medium. By living as a *das na das,* one attains the *satpurush's* **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* (fellowships). Each one shows people its own way of reaching Bhagwan. But our *sampradaya*, **the Swaminarayan Sampradaya**, is particularly special.

The Vedas and the Upanishads speak of Brahma and Parabrahma, 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.

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



■ Upasana – Four Things We Should Believe

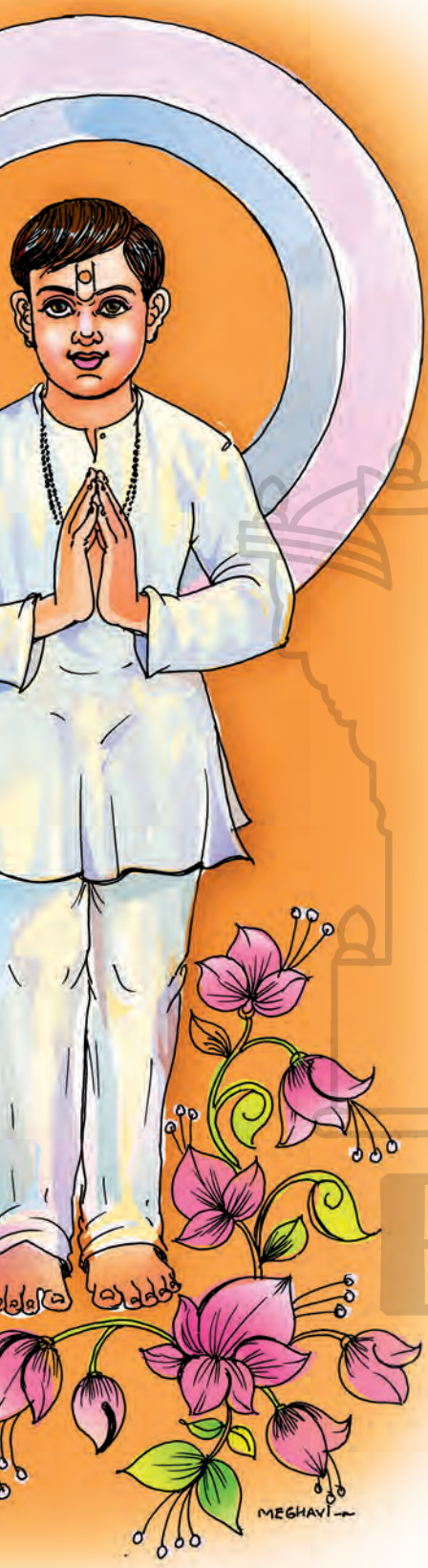
The Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, which sum up the Vedas and all other Hindu shastras, teach us four main principles:

1. **Sahajanand mama Parameshwar** – Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer, he has a divine form, he is supreme, and he is always present on earth.
2. **Gunatitanand Mul Akshar** – Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma.
3. **Pragat Satpurush Mokshanu Dwar** – *Pragat* Aksharbrahma Mahant Swami Maharaj is the gateway to Akshardham.
4. **BAPS Pride** – The BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya's principles, shastras and guru *parampara* represent 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 every day. Also, do *panchang pranam* to your parents every day.
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 *phalahari* fast (only fruits and certain vegetables), *sajala* fast (only water) or a *nirjala* fast (no food or water).
6. **Satsang Reading & Satsang Exams** – Read *Prasang Mala 108* or *Satsang Vihar* every day. Be sure to take the *Satsang Vihar* test, as well.
7. **Avoiding Kusang** – Stay away from bad company, bad movies, bad television, and other forms of *kusang*.
8. **Study Well** – Study at least two hours a day.

What We Believe

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

The Panchtattva Song

Jiva, ishwar, māyā, Brahma ane Parabrahma,
Apyu Shriji Mahārāje, panchtattva-gnānam…
Jiva, ishwar māyāmā, anādithi atvāy,
Aksharbrahmano sang thātā, Parabrahma pamāy…

The Upasana Song

Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane Purushottam…
Ātmā ne Parmātmā, Brahma ane Parabrahma…
Swāmi te Gunātit Swāmi,
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi…
Akshar te Gunātit Swāmi,
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi…
Akshar-Purushottam upāsanā… (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 sākar pragat kartāno nishchay karvo
Ādarsh bālak thaine, ekmanā rahi,
Akshardhāme javāni ārādhanā…
Akshar-Purushottam upāsanā… (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; and I am Mahant Swami Maharaj's disciple.

22. REFUGE IN GOD DISSOLVES ALL SINS

Shriji Maharaj was holding a grand **yagna** in the village of **Dabhan.** News about the yagna had spread throughout Gujarat. At the time, there was **a cruel bandit** who lived in Vartal. People across all of India were afraid of this bandit. His name created fear even all the way to Kolkata, which is a city near India's eastern shore!

The bandit's name was **Joban Pagi**. He thought to himself, "Let me **steal Rojho,** the wonderful horse of Bhagwan Swaminarayan." Joban Pagi was an expert thief. He could swipe anything he wished, and nobody could catch him.

Over the next few days, Joban Pagi **tried several times** to steal the horse. But **each time he entered the barn**, he would see a miracle. Shriji Maharaj would appear to him in many forms! He would be feeding Rojho, giving him water, or petting him or the other horses in the barn.

After seeing these **miracles,** Joban Pagi realised that Shriji Maharaj was none other than God. So, he decided to confess to Shriji Maharaj. He had been trying to steal the horse for three nights now. But on the fourth day, he came to Shriji Maharaj's assembly. He bowed at Shriji Maharaj's feet and pleaded, "Maharaj, **forgive me**. You are the one who frees people from their sins. But I have sinned against you. Today, I request you to make me a *satsangi*."

Shriji Maharaj asked his attendant, Mulji Brahmachari, to get some water. Once it came, Shriji Maharaj placed a few drops in Joban's right palm. He was about to **recite the initiation (*vartman*) mantra.** But just then, Joban interrupted, "Maharaj, think for a moment before initiating me. I have heard that when someone accepts your refuge, **you take their past sins upon yourself...**"



Shriji Maharaj replied, “Yes, that is true.”

But Joban Pagi argued, “My case is different. I have committed so many sins. Right now, your face is as bright as the sun. But the moment you take my sins, **your face will turn pale**.”

Shriji Maharaj smiled at Joban’s words. He then assured, “Joban, forget your sins – My face would not turn pale even if I took upon myself **the sins of** people in **countless universes.**”

Often, Shriji Maharaj would say, “If anyone were to take Joban’s sins upon themselves, that person would be reduced to ashes. Such were the uncountable sins he committed.”



Despite this, Shriji Maharaj took Joban Pagi under his shelter today. His words indeed comforted Joban Pagi.

Shriji Maharaj was truly great. The power of his refuge, his initiation and his kanthi is something different altogether. We are fortunate to be blessed with something so powerful.

▪ INITIATION RITUAL IN THE SWAMINARAYAN SAMPRADAYA

- During initiation (*vartman diksha*) a person is given a few **drops of water** in their **right palm.** Then, they are asked to repeat a **mantra:**
  Dhanyo’smi purnakāmo’smi, nishpāpo nirbhayah sukhi;
  Akshara-guru-yogena, swāminārāyan āshrayat.
  (*Having taken refuge in Swaminarayan Bhagwan through the association of the Aksharbrahma guru, I am blessed, I am fulfilled, I am without sins, I am fearless, and I am blissful.*)
  - After this ritual, a **double-stringed *kanthi*** (a necklace of tiny beads) is placed around the person’s neck. Thereafter, the devotee follows the five important pledges:

1. **Not to drink alcohol or liquor;**
2. **Not to eat meat; 3. Not to steal; 4. Not to be unfaithful to their life partner; and 5. To avoid objectionable behaviour and food.**

  - Thereafter, they also pledge to do daily puja, attend weekly assemblies, and do ghar sabha.

23. DAILY PUJA

We live in a beautiful world. Just see the sky. It is so vast and wonderful. Also, look at the flowers and birds. And think about the air, water, trees, grains... Everything is simply astonishing! God has made all of this for you, me, and all of us.

Should we not express our thanks for all these gifts? The best way to **say 'thank you' to Bhagwan** is by doing **puja.** Doing puja every morning is also the best way to start our day. In fact, puja is a **personal meeting with God.** It helps to keep our minds still, happy and peaceful. It also helps us earn God's blessings and become dear to him.

▪ HOW TO DO PUJA

1. Preparations

Take a shower in the morning. Then, wear some **clean clothes.** Find a **neat spot** and place a cloth (*asan*) on the ground there. Take a seat on the cloth. Make sure you are facing **north** or **east.**

Then, place another cloth in front of you for the *murtis* of Thakorji and the guru *parampara.* For now, leave the *murtis* stacked together. Place the other items of your puja properly to the side.

2. Chandalo & Tilak-Chandalo

Girls should apply a *kumkum chandalo* on their forehead. Boys should apply a *kumkum chandalo* and a tilak of sandalwood paste on their forehead; then, they should apply a *tilak* and *chandalo* of sandalwood paste on their **chest** and **forearms.**

3. Dhyan & Mansi

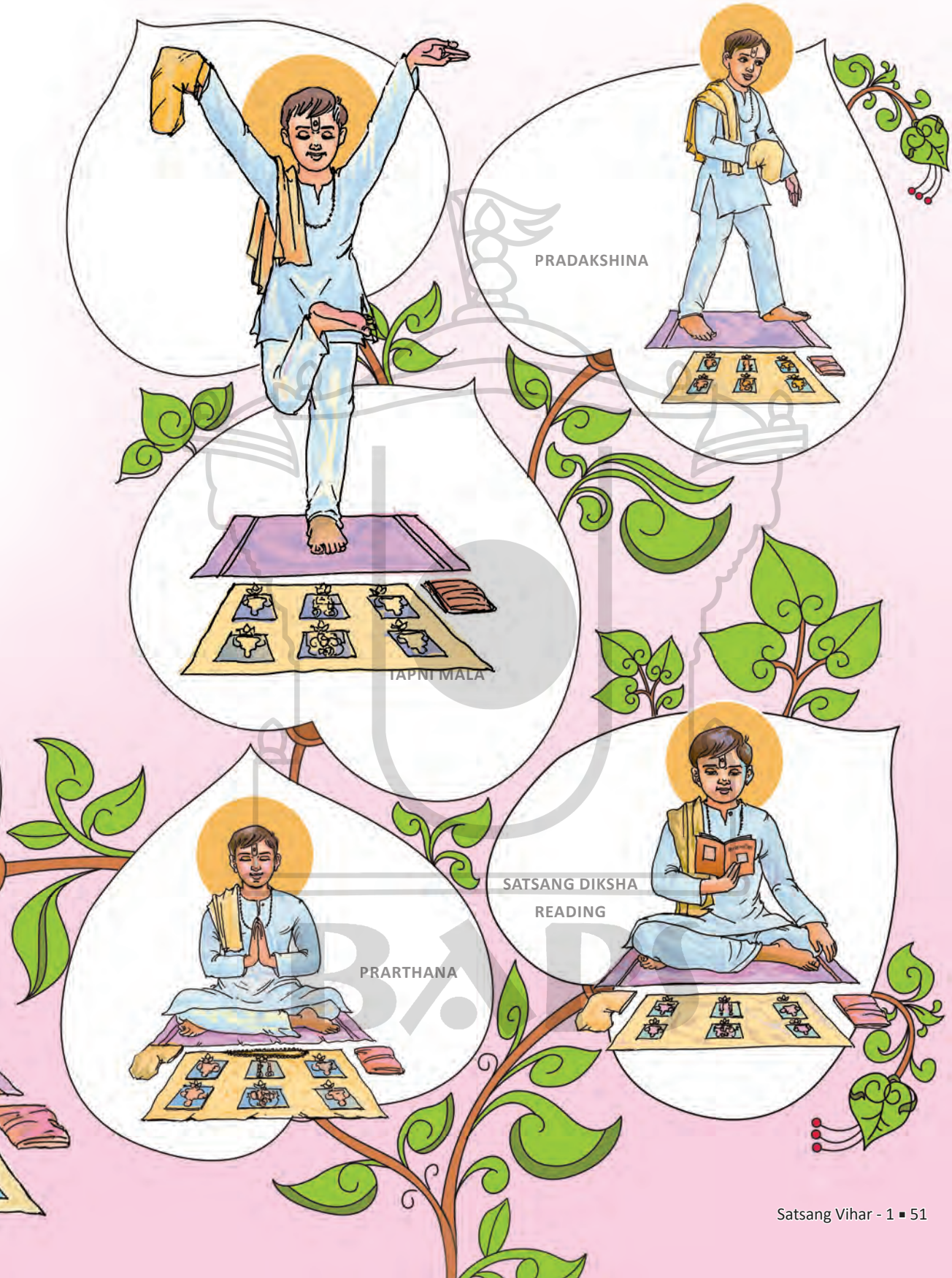
Do *dhyan* either seated in *padmasan* or sitting cross-legged. **Think about your *atma*** as follows: Who am I? I am not this body. I am the atma. I am Brahma. I am Akshar. Paramatma Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan is always present in my *atma.* Mahant Swami Maharaj is my *atma.* I wish to please him, no matter what.

Thereafter, begin ***mansi* puja.** Close your eyes, and imagine: It is daybreak. The air is fresh. Swamishri is asleep. I gently touch his feet and awaken him. Thereafter, I help him through his morning routine. We then go to a beautiful stream with a group of *haribhaktas.* I take Swamishri's hand, and I lead him into the water. We all then take turns pouring water over Swamishri's head.

Thereafter, Swamishri arrives for puja. He first meditates. He then does *tilak-chandalo* and *mala.* He does t*apni mala, pradakshina,* and *dandvat.* Then, *thal* is offered to Thakorji. Afterwards, Swamishri sanctifies a jug of water and offers prayers to Thakorji. Finally, he reads the Shikshapatri and Satsang Diksha. He then folds his palms towards all and says, 'Jay Swaminarayan.'

Swamishri then goes to the mandir for darshan. Thereafter, I offer him a golden seat. I apply a *chandalo* and honour him with a garland. I perform his *arti* and also offer him my favourite snacks and dishes to eat. Finally, Swamishri embraces me and expresses his joy. I feel blessed."




PRADAKSHINA
JAPNI MALA
SATSANG DIKSHA
READING
PRARTHANA

While doing *mansi puja,* we can think of different places and occasions. We can also imagine different decorations and foods according to the seasons. We can serve Bhagwan as per our wishes. In *mansi puja,* everyone can care for Swamishri, including girls and boys. All you need 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 that of performing puja in person. (Shriji Maharaj lives through Swamishri. So, doing *mansi puja* of Swamishri is in agreement with the shastras.)

4. Invocation Mantra (Ahvan)

Say the following mantra to call Shriji Maharaj and the guru parampara into your puja:

Uttishtha Sahajānanda
Shri-Hare Purushottama;
Gunātitā'kshara brahmann
uttishtha krupayā guro.

(O Sahajanand Shri Hari! O Purushottam! O Aksharbrahma gunatit gurus! Please shower compassion upon me and awaken.)

Āgamyatām hi pujārtham
āgamyatām mad-ātmataha;
Sānnidhyād darshanād divyāt
saubhāgyam vardhate mama.

(Please come forth from my atma to accept my puja. I become more blessed due to your divine presence and darshan.)

Then, arrange the *murtis* appropriately.

5. Mantra Jap

Complete **five** *malas* while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra.

6. Tapni Mala

We should then do *tapni mala.* Girls should do *tapni mala* by standing on two feet and holding the *mala* at their chest. Boys should do *tapni mala* by standing on one leg and raising both their hands up. During our puja, we should do **one *tapni mala*** in this way.

7. Pradakshina

Do **five** *pradakshinas* (walk in circles around Bhagwan while doing *malas*).

8. Dandvat

Perform **six** *dandvats.* While doing the **sixth *dandvat,* seek forgiveness** for any wrong done knowingly or unknowingly to any devotee of Bhagwan. (Girls should perform *panchang pranams* to Bhagwan instead of *dandvats.*)

9. Prayer (Prarthana)

Sit back on your *asan.* Then, offer a prayer. Here is a prayer that you can say, "O Maharaj, O Swami! Bless me with the courage and will to follow your **wishes** and **please** you. **Protect me from *kusang.*** Give me the company of good friends. May I **study** well, **care for my parents,** and become your ideal bhakta."

10. Visarjan

Say the mantra below to conclude your puja.

Bhaktyaiva divya-bhāvena
pujā te sam-anushthitā,
Gachchhā'tha tvam mad-ātmānam
Akshara-Purushottama.

(O Purushottam Narayan, together with Aksharbrahma! I have performed your puja with devotion and divyabhav. Now, please reside within my atma.)

11. Reading the Satsang Diksha

Read ***five shlokas*** from the Satsang Diksha.

12. Having Darshan at the Ghar Mandir & Performing Panchang Pranam

Do darshan and offer *dandvats* and a prayer at your *ghar mandir.* Then, do *panchang pranam* to your parents and say 'Jay Swaminarayan' to all the members of your family.

Our puja takes just 20 or 25 minutes. But by doing puja in this way, we are following Bhagwan's ***agna.*** God is pleased with us in return.

So, dear friends, do not fail in obeying this **important *agna*** of Shriji Maharaj. Otherwise, you'll miss a great chance to please Bhagwan and to become a good satsangi.

24. THE ARTI RITUAL

■ **WHAT IS ARTI?**

Arti means **prayer offered to Bhagwan with deep feelings.** The word *arti* in Sanskrit is split up as follows: *āsmantāt ratihi* (O Bhagwan, may my love be entirely for you). The *arti* brings together three elements: sacred sound, sacred light and sacred darshan.

Bhagwan accepts our heartfelt prayers during the *arti*. He relieves us of sadness. After the *arti, ashtaks* are sung. These are verses in praise of Bhagwan and the *sant.* These verses help us experience inner peace.

■ **HISTORY OF THE ARTI**

Long ago, there was **no electricity. The sanctums of our mandirs used to be dimly lit by** oil lamps (*divos or diyas*). **For** Bhagwan's **darshan, the *pujari* would light a separate *divo*** and move it around the *murti.* Over the years, this became a ritual. Specific times were set for it, and words and sounds were added. This was how the *arti* ritual was born.

■ **WHY PERFORM ARTI?**

Arti is the ritual worship of God using the five elements – earth, water, light, air and space. Life depends on these five elements. God has created them for us. During the *arti,* **we appreciate God by offering worship through these five elements.**

According to our tradition, the wick of the lamp and the performance of *dandvats* symbolise earth. After the *arti* is over, water in a spoon



is circled around the flame three times. This represents the element of water. The burning wick stands for light. The smoke coming from the incense sticks stands for air. And ringing the *ghantadi* and *ghant,* blowing the *shankh,* beating the drums and singing the *arti* represent space.

■ THE STEPS TO DOING ARTI

1. Waving the Flame

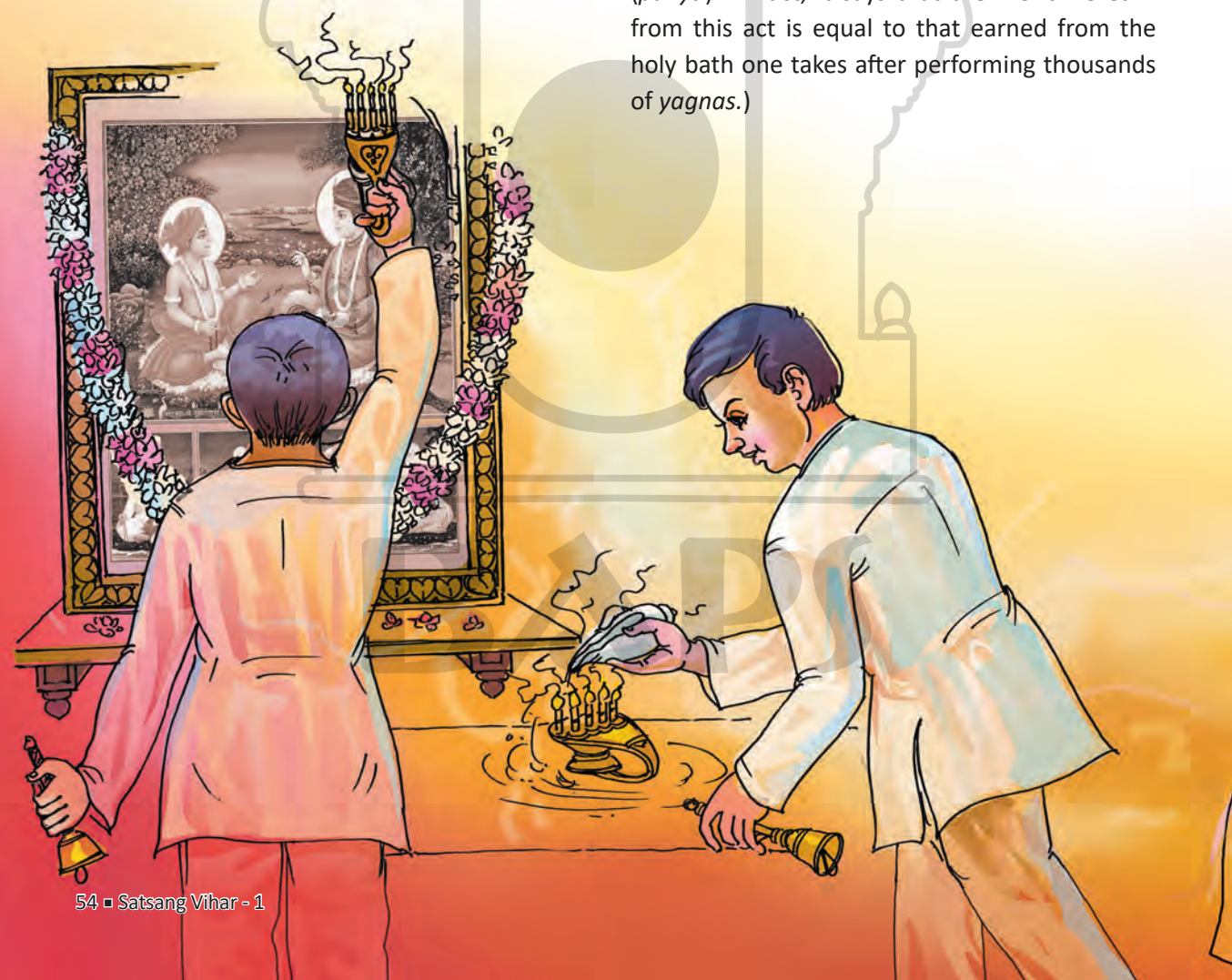
During the *arti,* the **flame** should be circled slowly **around every part of Bhagwan's *murti.*** The flame should be turned clockwise. While doing the *arti,* we should believe that God is present in front of us. **In the final verse, we circle the arti to our right and left to pay respect to the devas living in the four directions.**

2. Circling the Arti with Water

When the *arti* is waved before God's *murti,* it becomes c**harged with divinity.** To preserve this divinity in the flame, water in a *shankh* or spoon is circled clockwise around the flame three times. This is because **the presiding *deva* of water is Varun. Varun is known as one who protects and preserves.**

3. Passing Our Palms Over the Flame

After the *arti* is over, the flame is taken around to everyone present. We pass our palms over the flame. Then, we touch our hands to our head, eyes, and heart. This act is called taking *ashka*. This gesture is to **purify our mind, sight and soul.** (A scripture known as the Vishnu-Dharmottara Shastra says that taking *ashka* gives us great merit (*punya*). In fact, it says that the merit we earn from this act is equal to that earned from the holy bath one takes after performing thousands of *yagnas.*)



4. Donation

After taking the *arti,* devotees make an offering of money into the *arti's* dish. This is because the *arti's* flame is considered a form of God. **Making an offering to the flame is a way of honouring Bhagwan.**

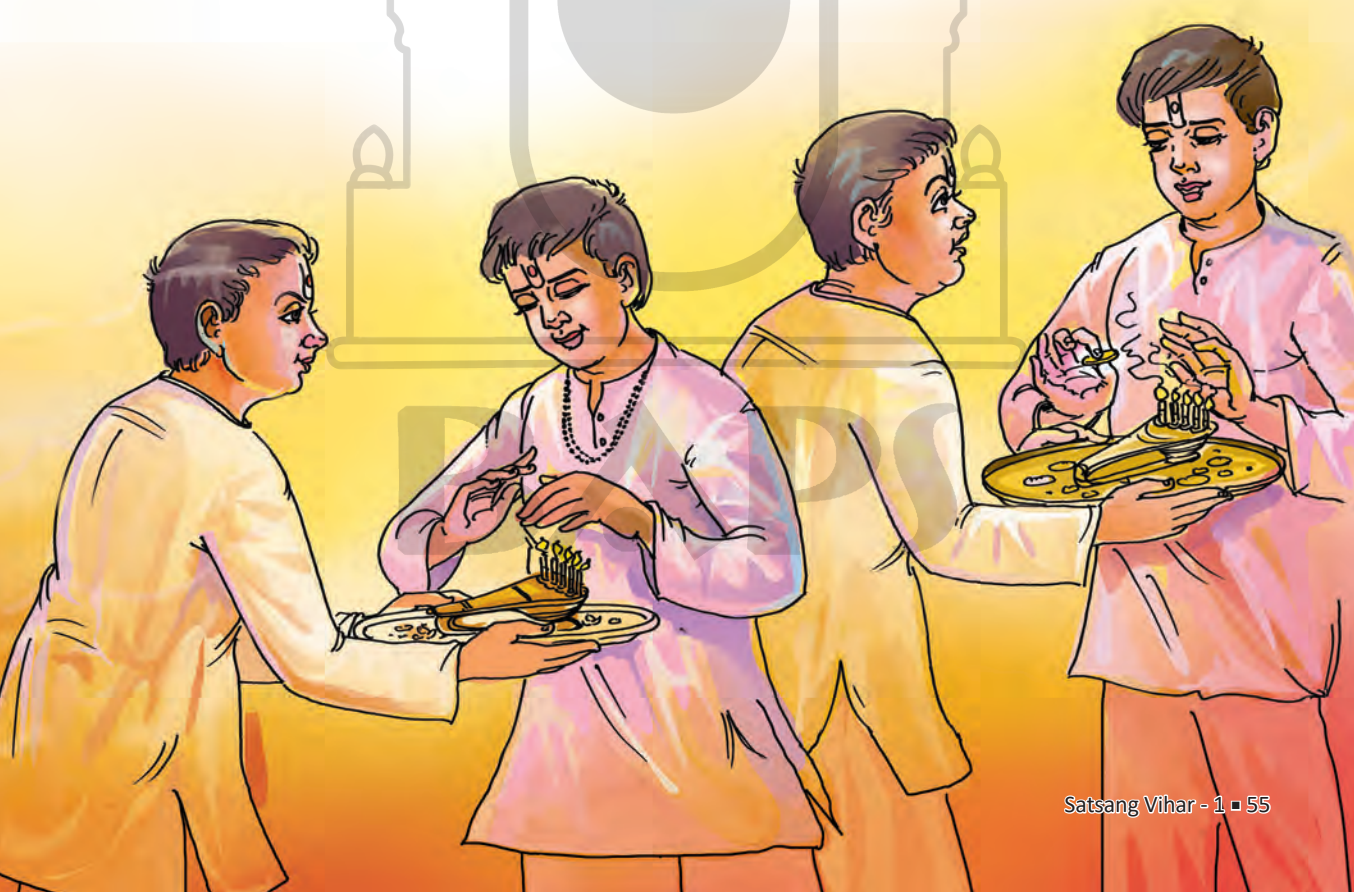
■ **OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ARTI**

- After singing the *arti,* we sing the *ashtak "Ananta-koti…", the prayer "Nirvikalp uttam ati…", and the guru parampara stuti.*
- Children should attend *arti* **twice a day** – one at 7:00 a.m. and the other at 7:00 p.m. (The times can be adjusted, but we should surely do two artis a day.)
- The evening *arti* at the *ghar* mandir should be attended by the entire family. After the *arti,* everyone should sing the *ashtaks.* They should also attentively do darshan, *dandvats* and prayer.
- Keep your *ghar* mandir clean. Also, regularly clean your arti utensils, ghantadi and incense stand.
- **Two *artis*** are done daily at all of our sanstha's ***hari* mandirs:** (1) *shangar* and (2) *sandhya.* At **shikharbaddha mandirs, five *artis*** are performed daily: (1) *mangala,* (2) *shangar,* (3) *rajbhog,* (4) *sandhya* and (5) *shayan.*

■ **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ HAS SAID...**

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

The children were not able to answer. Swami explained, quite simply, "Arti is when we light a lamp and move it in circles around God's *murti.* **By doing *arti,* Bhagwan's divine light comes to us. So, we should always do *arti* regularly."**



25. HOW TO LISTEN TO KATHA

Shriji Maharaj was once in **Sarangpur.** He was doing *katha* at Jiva Khachar's *darbar. (Katha* is when someone gives a speech about a *satsang* topic.) Today, Shriji Maharaj was speaking about the **four types of destruction**. The sadhus and devotees were listening attentively. But Shriji Maharaj's attention was drawn to a **child devotee from the village of Balol.**

The child was having darshan of Shriji Maharaj's *murti.* He was treasuring this *murti* in his heart. At the same time, he was carefully listening to the *katha* and remembering it in his mind. When the child returned to his **residence that night,** he **shared Shriji Maharaj's teachings with a devotee named Gaja Gadhvi**.

The boy and Gaja Gadhvi were staying at



Bava Khachar's home. This was right **next to where Shriji Maharaj was staying.** So, in the quiet of the night, **Shriji Maharaj** could hear their voices clearly. Shriji Maharaj stayed up late **listening to the boy**. This continued for several days.

One morning, there was another ***sabha*** at Jiva Khachar's *darbar*. Gaja Gadhvi was seated in the *sabha*. Shriji Maharaj asked him, "Who was talking to you late at night?"

Gaja Gadhvi explained what was happening. The boy was also present in this assembly. **Shriji Maharaj was very pleased with him**. He called the boy forth and embraced him.

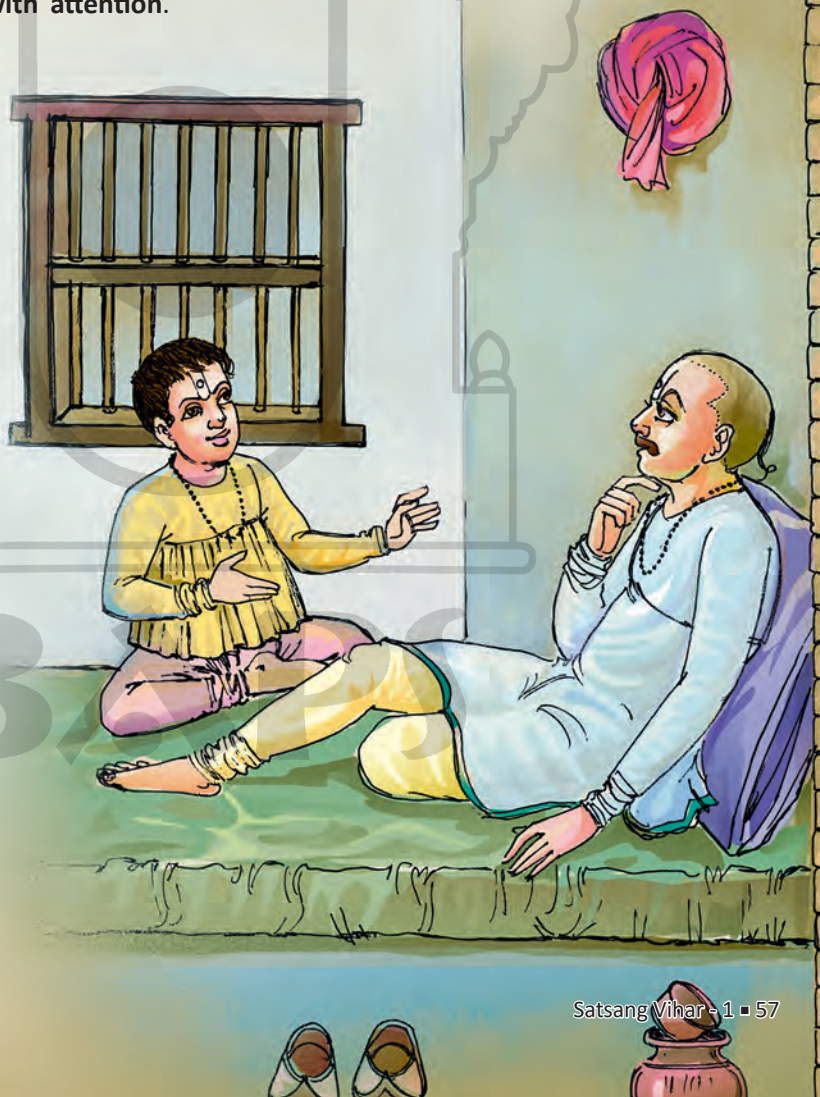
Shriji Maharaj then addressed the assembly, saying, "When we sit in ***katha***, we should listen like this boy. We should **listen with attention**. And we should **remember** what is said. We should also **joyfully tell others** what we learned. And we should **put into practice what we learn**. Only then can our listening be called true *shravan bhakti."*

Shriji Maharaj was very pleased with the child. He honoured the child by having a ***pagh*** tied on his head. And – as a gesture of his grace – he gently 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**." What he meant was that by attending *bal sabha*, *satsang sabha*, or *ghar sabha* **we gain far more than if we were to earn lots of money**. This is because *sabha* helps us understand *upasana* and *agna*. We learn values and gain **spiritual knowledge – all while having lots of fun.** We become wise. And because of this, we experience inner peace and happiness. In the end, we are also blessed with **Akshardham**.

Therefore, try not to miss even one *bal sabha* or *balika sabha*. Take the fullest benefit of *bal-balika sabha* by attending on time, obeying its disciplines, and paying attention. Later, tell your parents and friends about the great things you learned. When you are older, be sure to attend kishore-kishori sabha and yuvak-yuvati sabha as well. Shriji Maharaj will surely be pleased.



26. FIRM IN OBSERVING EKADASHI

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's childhood name was **Shantilal.** He was born in the village of Chansad in the district of Vadodara.

Shantilal spent his early years at **Rajnagar**, a village close to Chansad. A kind man named Chhotubhai from Bhadran lived there. He cared for little children and often gave them gifts on festive days. Sometimes, he would bring fire-crackers, kites, clothes or toys. **Chhotubhai** was particularly fond of Shantilal. Out of everyone, Chhotubhai favoured Shantilal the most.

Once, Chhotubhai cooked **food for all the children.** There were sweets like *jalebi, mesub* and *dudhpak*, fried snacks, and many other varieties. When it was lunchtime, the children came over to his home. They all sat down to eat. The sight and smell of the food were mouth-watering and irresistible. But when Chhotubhai started serving, he noticed that Shantilal was not present.

He enquired, "Where is Shantilal?"

Someone pointed out, "Look, he is sitting over there in the corner."

Chhotubhai went to Shantilal and asked, "Has someone hurt you? Or are you sad? Come and eat. The food is very tasty."

Shantilal replied, "No, nothing of the sort has happened. But I do not wish to eat."

Chhotubhai asked, "Why not?"

Shantilal replied, "Because it is ***Ekadashi*. I'm fasting today**. **We are not to eat food made of grains or beans on this day**."

Chhotubhai smiled, and he kindly explained to Shantilal, "How can *Ekadashi* apply to children? It is okay for them not to follow it." So saying, Chhotubhai **insisted** that Shantilal should eat.

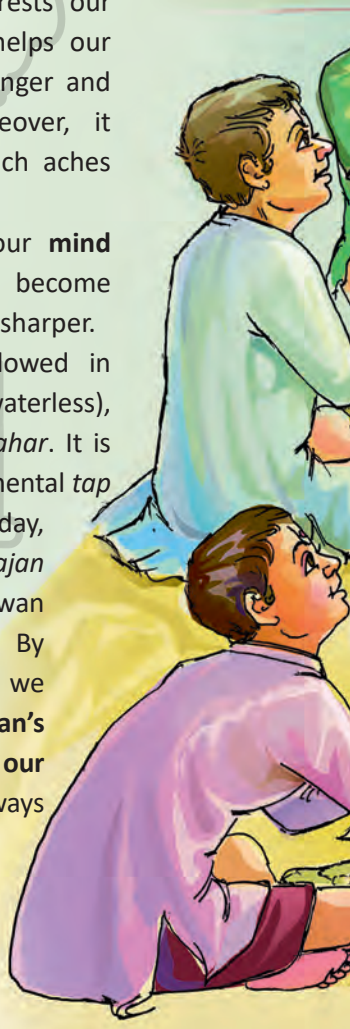
Little Shantilal didn't know how to keep saying no. Not sure what to do, **he began to cry**.

Chhotubhai felt bad for insisting. And he was pleased at seeing Shantilal's courage. He **embraced** Shantilal. He then **arranged for *phalahari* items to be brought for him.**

Now, just think: What inspiration do you think Pramukh Swami Maharaj gives us through this incident? Surely, his message is that all of us children should do *Ekadashi*. Our shastras say that eating food made of grains or beans on *ekadashi* is like eating meat.

▪ THE BENEFITS OF EKADASHI

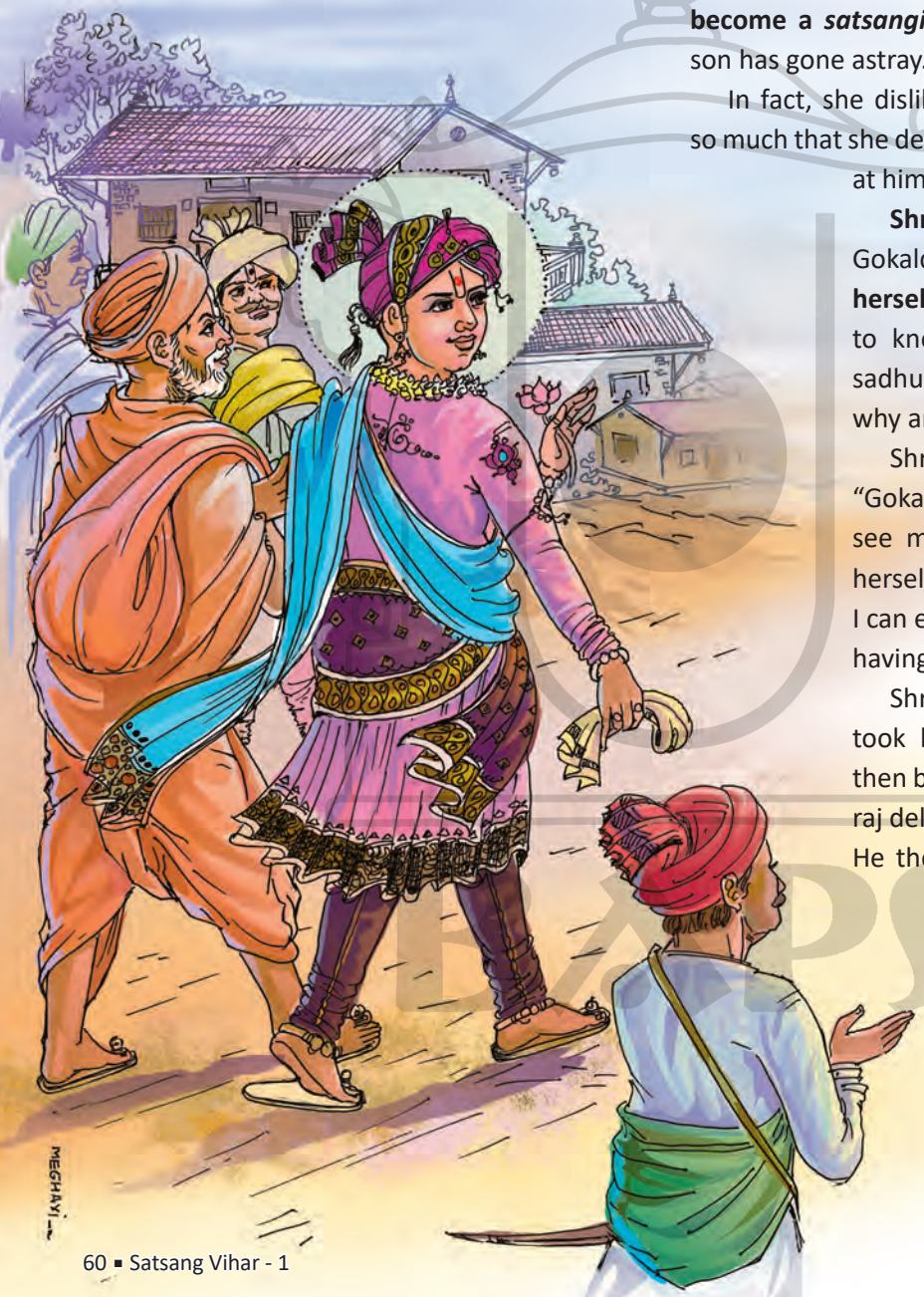
- *Ekadashi* comes once every 15 days. Research shows that not eating flour or beans once every week or two rests our digestive system. It helps our stomach become stronger and more efficient. Moreover, it helps us avoid stomach aches and **helps us stay fit.**
- By doing *Ekadashi*, our **mind becomes pure.** We become mentally stronger and sharper.
- *Ekadashi* can be followed in three ways: *nirjala* (waterless), *sajala* (liquid) or *phalahar*. It is a day of physical and mental *tap* (discipline). On this day, we should also do *bhajan* and remember Bhagwan as much as possible. By practicing such *tap*, we are **observing Bhagwan's *agna***. *Tap* **pleases our guru**. So, we should always observe *Ekadashi*.




MEGHAVI

27. GOD STAYS AWAY FROM ITS BAD ODOUR

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was once in **Junagadh**. He was visiting devotees' homes. Sometimes, he would also have a meal at their homes. One day, a devotee named **Gokaldas Bhatiya** thought of inviting Shriji Maharaj over for lunch. A fitting date was selected, and the food was prepared.



But there was one person in the house who wasn't pleased about Shriji Maharaj's visit. It was Gokaldas' **mother**. She did not believe Shriji Maharaj to be Bhagwan. Instead, she saw him as a phony who used fake magic tricks to attract people. **She also did not like that her son had become a *satsangi*.** She would often say, "My son has gone astray."

In fact, she disliked Bhagwan Swaminarayan so much that she decided she wouldn't even look at him when he came to her home.

Shriji Maharaj soon arrived. Gokaldas' **mother quickly hid herself**. When Shriji Maharaj came to know of this, he smiled. The sadhus with him asked, "Maharaj, why are you smiling?"

Shriji Maharaj answered, "Gokal's mother does not want to see my face. So, she has hidden herself. But she doesn't know that I can enter people's hearts without having to lock eyes with them."

Shriji Maharaj washed up and took his seat. Mulji Brahmachari then brought his meal. Shriji Maharaj delightfully partook of the food. He then gave *prasad* to everyone there. The sadhus had their meal, and everyone got up to leave. The visit had lasted quite long, and Gokaldas' mother became impatient. She thought, "**Let me open the door just a little. Let me at least see how Swaminarayan**

looks." So thinking, the lady opened the door just a bit. In that moment, Shriji Maharaj looked her way.

Frightened, the woman quickly slammed the door. "Oh no!" she thought. "Our eyes have met!" But even just that much was enough. It was too late – Shriji Maharaj's ***murti* had entered her heart**.

Many rishis in the past have performed difficult forms of *tap* to see Bhagwan's *murti*. But they have not been able to see it. Here, Gokaldas' mother was able to see that very same *murti* of Bhagwan. But she didn't understand its importance. That is because her mind was full of doubts.

Soon, **she grew frustrated.** What could she do to erase Shriji Maharaj from her sight? Wherever she went and whatever she did, she would see Shriji Maharaj before her eyes. Even when she closed her eyes, she would see him. Day by day, she grew more and more **worried**.

Finally, a thought struck her. **"Let me go to someone like me who opposes** Swaminarayan. They will surely show me a solution." So thinking, she went to her neighbour and confessed her problem.

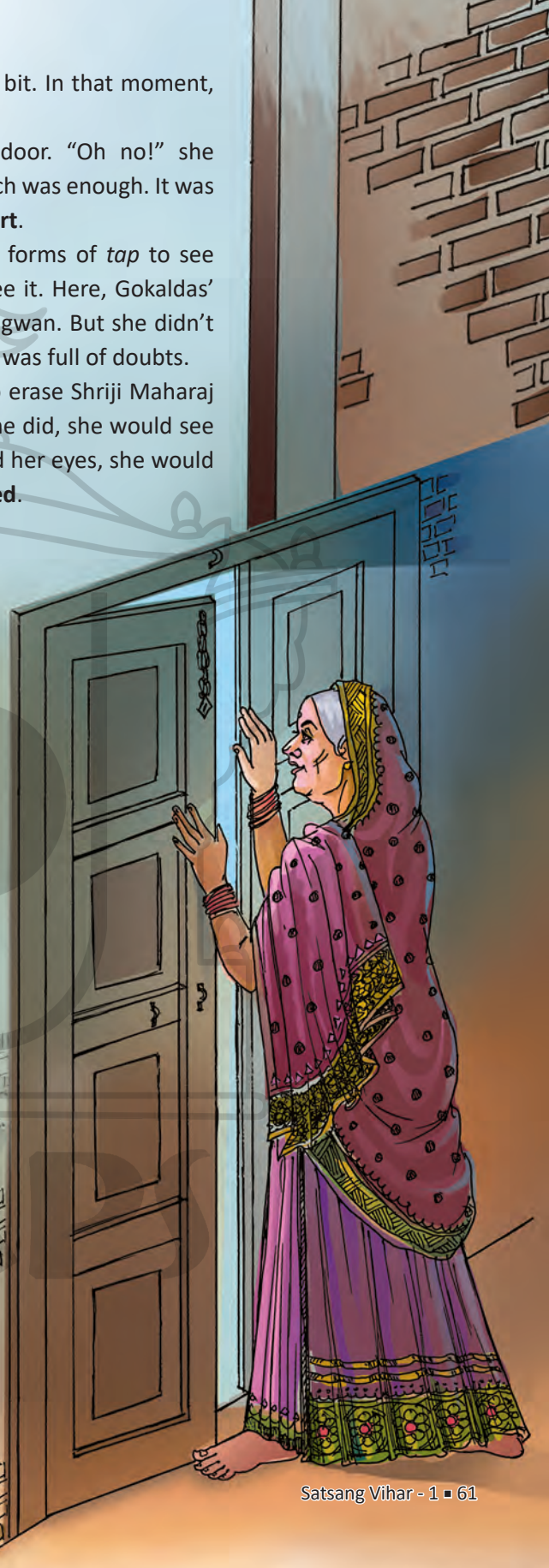
The neighbour showed her **a way out**, saying, "Mother, Swaminarayan dislikes **onions** and **garlic**. **Eat them,** and Swaminarayan will disappear from your sight."

The woman felt happy. She went home and did as her neighbour said. Immediately, she **stopped seeing Shriji Maharaj**.

Years later, the lady became a *satsangi*. She went to Gadhada and asked Shriji Maharaj, "Please bless me so that I can see you like before."

Shriji Maharaj replied, "That was grace. But it all went away when you ate onions and garlic. Now, you'll have to do it the regular way – through spiritual efforts.

Friends, how can we ever like things that Bhagwan dislikes? If we eat things we are not supposed to, God goes away from us. In fact, he would never even like to come close! As *satsangis,* we should not eat onions, garlic or *hing*. Bhagwan stays away from the smell of such things!



28. ABHESINH DARBAR'S PROMISE

There was once a ***satsangi*** named **Abhesinh** Darbar **of Lodhika**. He faithfully observed all of Shriji Maharaj's niyams. He had no addictions, and he did not drink alcohol. His **pledge to observe *niyams* was very firm.**

One day, he went to the city of **Jamnagar**. There, he had some work to take care of at the **palace of King Jamsaheb.** But when he arrived, the men in the king's court were drinking alcohol. On seeing Abhesinh, they thought, "Today, we will force Abhesinh to break his pledge." The reason they wanted to do this was that they **disliked Swaminarayan.**

One by one, they each started offering Abhesinh a drink. "Bapu, take a sip," they would say. "Enjoy the party!"

Abhesinh had to respect Jamsaheb's court. Here, it would not be right for him to speak out loudly or fight back. But he still politely refused the men's offers.

"Today, we must succeed," the men thought. "Let us make Jamsaheb himself give Abhesinh **a glass of liquor**. How will he say no to the king?"

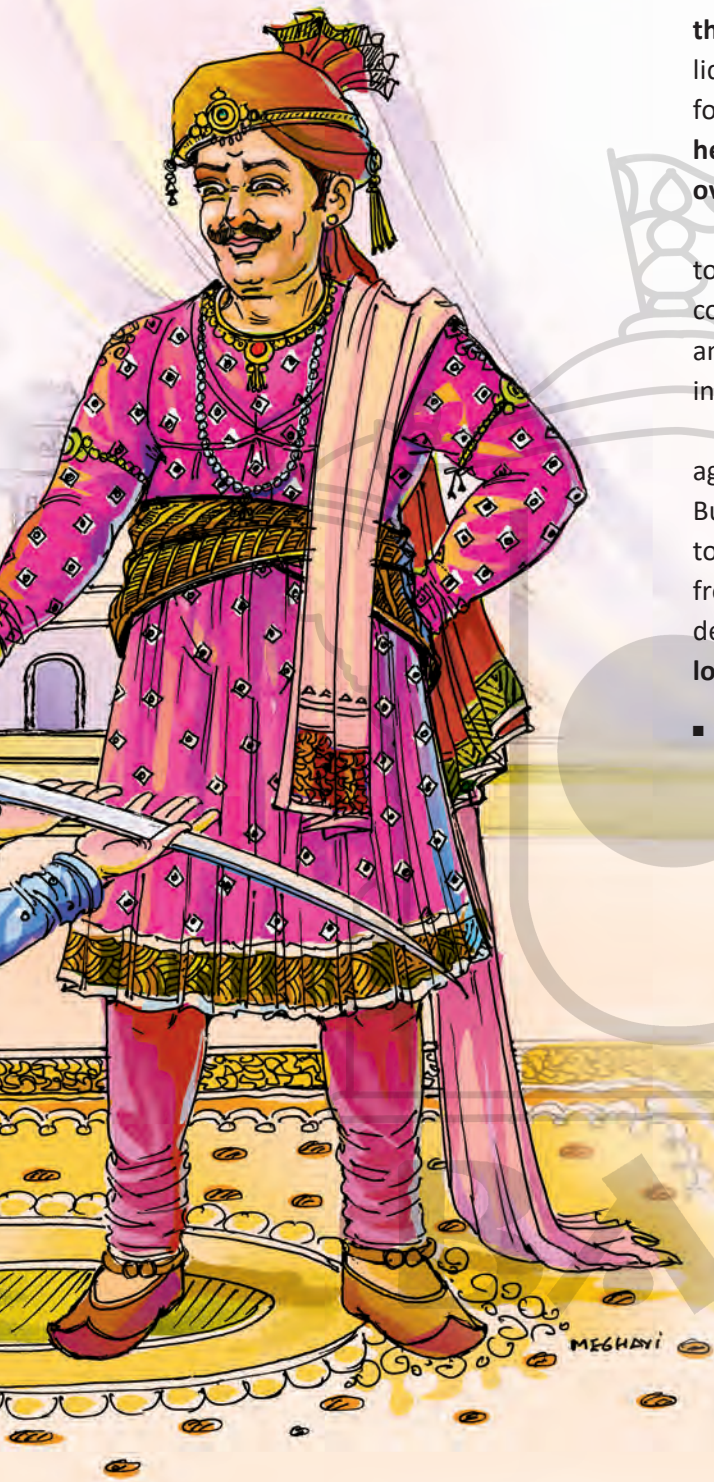
Someone came to Jamsaheb and said, "Jamsaheb, Abhesinh refuses to drink. He is dishonouring your party. He says that even if you offer him liquor yourself, he still won't accept it."

Jamsaheb was surprised. He ordered, "Is that so? Here, give me an empty glass." **Jamsaheb took hold of a glass and filled it with liquor himself. He then walked up to Abhesinh.** And he insisted that Abhesinh drink.

Abhesinh refused respectfully. This angered Jamsaheb. The king raised the glass of liquor to Abhesinh's lips. Abhesinh had remained calm and cool till then. But he could no longer bear the king's pressure. He **at once pulled his sword** out. This startled Jamsaheb. The entire court fell silent. All the men, too, reached for their swords. They feared that Abhesinh would attack the king!

But Abhesinh had not drawn his sword to strike Jamsaheb. Instead, he had drawn it to place it in the hands of Jamsaheb. Certainly, he offered the sword to the king and knelt before him. He then said, "Take this sword. I was given *niyams* by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.





My mouth has uttered the name of 'Swaminarayan'. How can I drink liquor with that same mouth? As long as I am alive, no liquor will go down my throat. But if you wish to force liquor into me, then you must first **slice my head away. Then, you may pour as much liquor over me as you like."**

Abhesinh's bold words touched Jamsaheb to the core. He was moved by Abhesinh's commitment. He asked forgiveness and said, "I am proud to have *darbars* of such strong character in my kingdom."

This incident occurred more than 200 years ago. At the time, addictions were quite common. But **Shriji Maharaj gave five important *niyams*** to his devotees. And he established an addiction-free and **morally pure following in society.** His devotees were so faithful that **they would rather lose their heads than give up their vows!**

- **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SAYS**

  "We should not drink alcohol. We should never steal. We should not eat meat. And we should never betray our husband or wife. TV programmes, the internet, disco parties, modern fashions, and gambling – these do not reflect our noble Hindu traditions and practices. These are all forms of Kali Yuga (the Dark Age) and *kusang* (bad company)**. The poison of *kusang,* no matter how little we have, affects us instantly. Not only does it ruin a person's life, but it also causes them to lose the opportunity to go to Akshardham."**

  "Progress is measured by how much *agna* we follow. **One should be pained at breaking *niyams*. Our true honour is our *niyams*.** When we strictly follow our *niyams*, God and his sadhu shower their blessings upon us."

29. DANDVATS TO THE READER

This is an interesting story that took place in **Gondal.** There was a young *parshad* named **Ghanshyam Bhagat.** He was just **14 years old.** He was very interested in reading *satsang* books. At the time, our *sanstha* had published a new book. It was the ***jivan charitra*** (sacred biography) **of Bhagatji Maharaj.** Ghanshyam Bhagat **read** the entire **500-page book** in one stretch. It took him **one whole day and night.**

Yogiji Maharaj came to know of this. While he was once on his way for Thakorji's darshan, Yogiji Maharaj saw Ghanshyam Bhagat. Immediately, Yogiji Maharaj began doing ***dandvats*** to him. Ghanshyam Bhagat started to run away. Of course, he felt it wasn't appropriate for him to stand while his guru did *dandvats* to him.

So, Yogiji Maharaj asked Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj), "Catch that *bhagat*! Hold him still!"

Vinubhai was confused. Should he stop Swamishri from doing *dandvats*? Or should he hold the *parshad* still? What should he do? Just then,





he heard Yogiji Maharaj's words again, "Obey my *agna*. Hold him!"

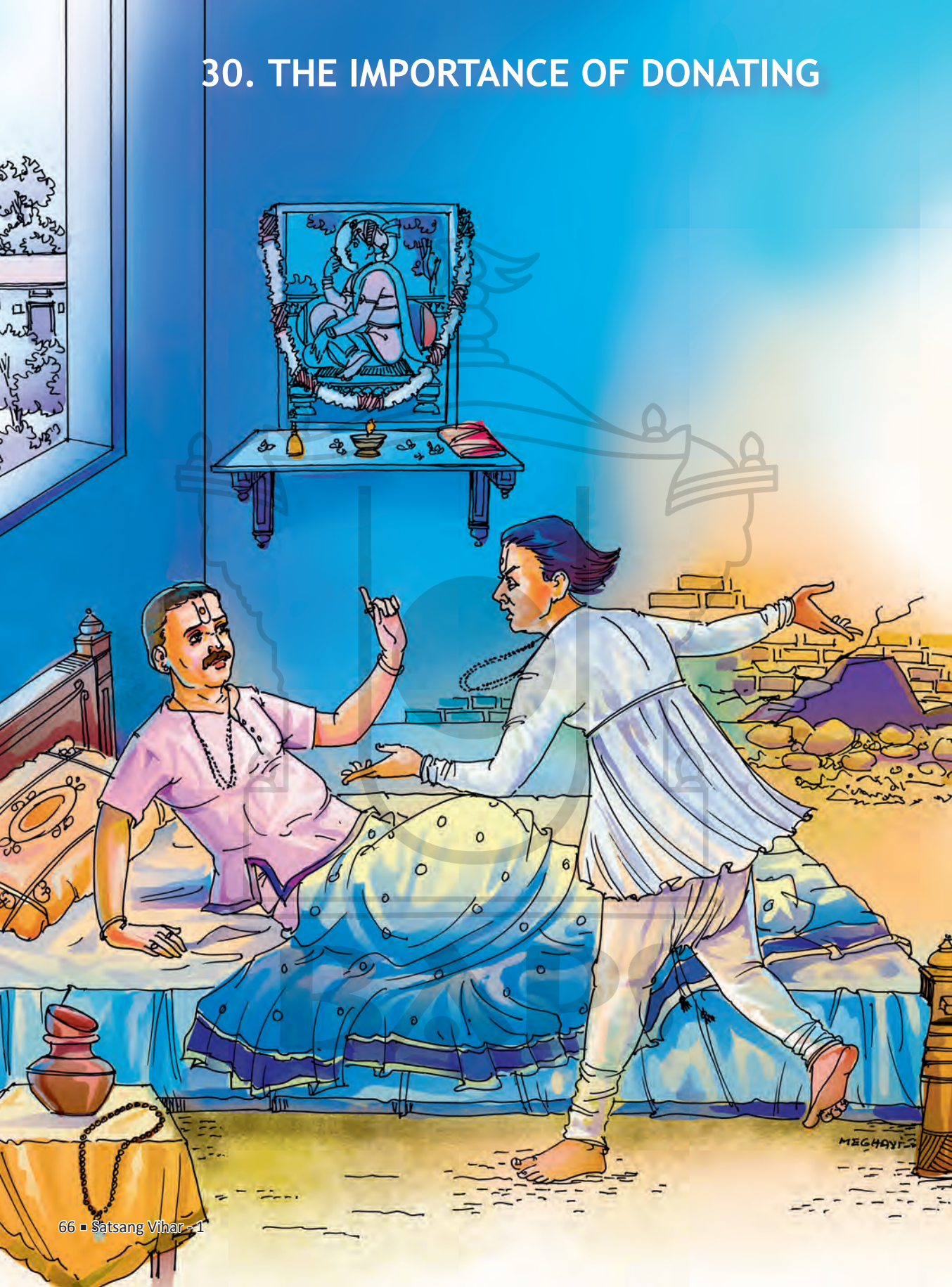
Vinubhai clasped the *parshad*. Meanwhile, some other youths stopped Yogiji Maharaj from doing any more *dandvats*. However, by then, Yogiji Maharaj had already completed **three** *dandvats*. He then praised Ghanshyam Bhagat, saying, "Oh, how wonderful! **By reading the *jivan charitra* of Bhagatji Maharaj, he has become like Bhagatji.** What intense faith he has!"

Yogiji Maharaj was always pleased when people read *satsang* books or did *mukhpath*. He always honoured those who took part in such activities. But do you know why? It is because we cannot be happy without spiritual wisdom, even if we have worldly things like money, cars, mansions, intelligence, or power. Reading *satsang* books gives us spiritual wisdom.

Shriji Maharaj says, "The shastras of one's own *sampradaya* nourish one's spiritual faith." (Vachanamrut Gadhada II-58)

So friends, to know about our *sampradaya*, we should daily read the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, Satsang Diksha and *jivan charitras*. Such reading helps us follow *agna* and understand *upasana*. It also helps our *sampradaya* grow. Furthermore, if we read *satsang* books, God and his sadhu are truly pleased with us.

30. THE IMPORTANCE OF DONATING



Back in Gunatitanand Swami's time, there was a devotee named **Manasiyo Khuman.** He belonged to the village of **Senjal**. He worked very hard and earned Rs.10,000 a year in wages. He **regularly donated one-tenth of his earnings as *dharmado*** (an offering to Bhagwan). In fact, the same day that he **would receive his Rs.10,000 of wages,** he would donate Rs.1000 of it to the mandir.

Over the years, Manasiyo Khuman was able to **save up Rs.200,000** in earnings. There were no banks back then. So, he stored his savings in a pot. And he **buried the pot in one of the rooms in his house.**

No one knew about Manasiyo Khuman's buried riches. That is, no one knew except for **the house servant.** The servant had **secretly seen** his master burying the pot. After some time, the house servant left his job. One night, he decided to steal the pot. For this, he **dug a tunnel** from the river bank all the way to Manasiyo's house.



The next **morning,** Manasiyo Khuman's **son Jiva Khuman discovered the tunnel.** He woke his father up and exclaimed, "Father, we've been robbed! A **thief** has looted us!"

But Manasiyo Khuman calmly replied, "Jiva! **That cannot happen. I have been honestly donating God's share of my earnings.** Therefore, our wealth is sacred and honest." Then, both father and son checked the pot. Nothing was missing from it! The thief had indeed dug a tunnel. But he **failed to reach the spot where the pot was buried.**

■ ■ ■

Mahant Swami Maharaj writes in the Satsang Diksha that we should set aside a portion of our earnings for Bhagwan. Specifically, he says **we should donate to the mandir 10% of what we earn. If we are not able to donate 10%, he says we can give 5% instead.** There are two reasons for this:

1. GIVING IS A WAY OF THANKING BHAGWAN

The first reason is that **donating is a way to thank Bhagwan** for the food and other wonderful things he has given us. We are only able to earn money because of everything God has provided us. Donating to the mandir is a way of **giving back** to Bhagwan and **supporting a good cause.**

2. GIVING PURIFIES OUR WEALTH

The second reason is that giving a portion of our earnings to Bhagwan **purifies our wealth.**

But what does it mean for money to be impure? You see, our parents work hard to earn money. We may also do the same when we grow up. Still, we cannot always know where our money has come from before it reaches us. Along the way, it may have been connected to dishonesty or unfairness, even if we ourselves did nothing wrong. Keeping such impure wealth can harm us.

By donating a portion of our earnings to the mandir, we ask Bhagwan to remove any impurity that may exist in our wealth. This helps keep our money pure and our dharma forever strong.

This is why Shriji Maharaj instructs us as satsangis to donate regularly to the mandir. Following Bhagwan's agna will surely earn us his grace.



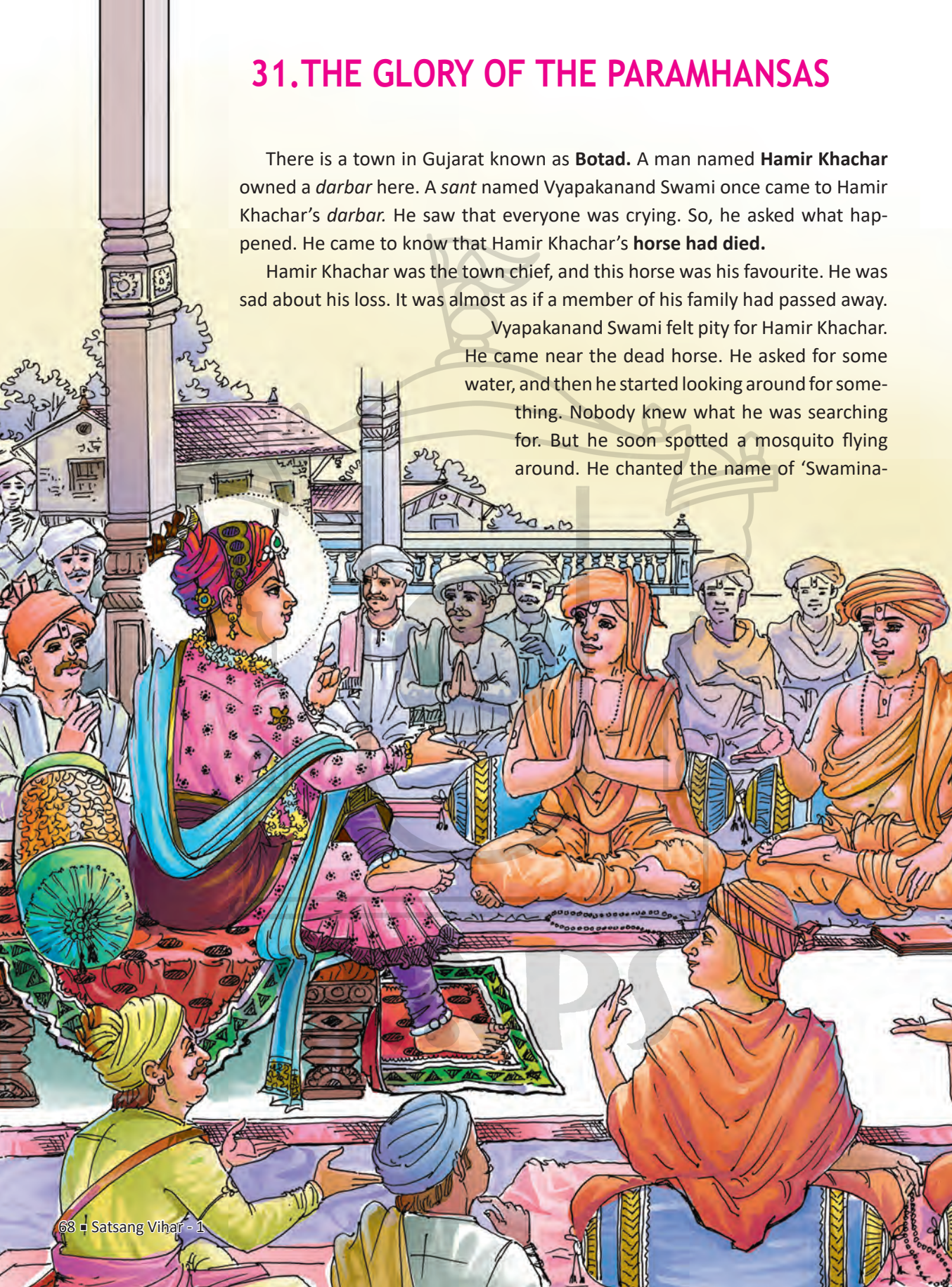


31. THE GLORY OF THE PARAMHANSAS

There is a town in Gujarat known as **Botad.** A man named **Hamir Khachar** owned a *darbar* here. A *sant* named Vyapakanand Swami once came to Hamir Khachar's *darbar.* He saw that everyone was crying. So, he asked what happened. He came to know that Hamir Khachar's **horse had died.**

Hamir Khachar was the town chief, and this horse was his favourite. He was sad about his loss. It was almost as if a member of his family had passed away.

Vyapakanand Swami felt pity for Hamir Khachar. He came near the dead horse. He asked for some water, and then he started looking around for something. Nobody knew what he was searching for. But he soon spotted a mosquito flying around. He chanted the name of 'Swamina-



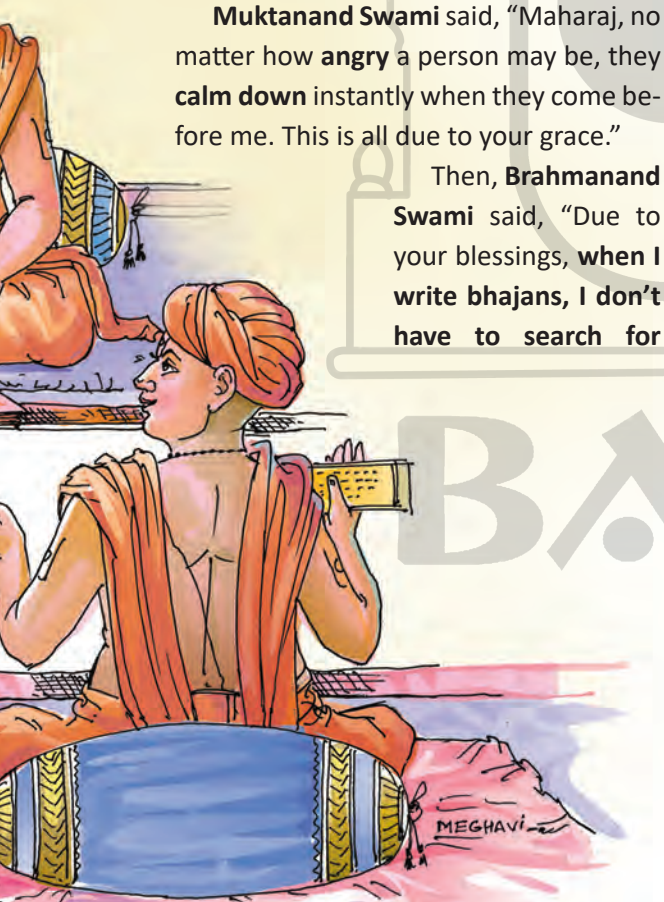
rayan' and sprinkled water onto the horse. With that, **the mosquito's soul was shifted into the horse's body.** The horse stood up and neighed. Everyone in the *darbar* rejoiced. Hamir Khachar fell at Swami's feet and thanked him.

Vyapakanand Swami was indeed a great sant who could make people's wishes come true. However, he wasn't the only *paramhansa* who was great in this way. In fact, there were many more great *paramhansas* like Vyapakanand Swami who faithfully worshipped Shriji Maharaj.

▪ THE PARAMHANSAS' DIVINE POWERS

Shriji Maharaj was once in **Gadhada.** The paramhansas were seated before him. Shriji Maharaj asked, "O *paramhansas*, I wish you all to say what is so unique about yourselves. This is so that I can ask you to help in certain *sevas* if it is ever needed."

The *paramhansas* knew it was not right to praise themselves. But they replied frankly because it was Shriji Maharaj's agna to do so.



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

Then, **Brahmanand Swami** said, "Due to your blessings, **when I write bhajans, I don't have to search for words.** And I never have to repeat words. **The *bhajans* that flow** from here are **so impressive that no other poet can create such work."**

Then, **Nityanand Swami** spoke. He said, "By your grace, all the **pundits of India together could not defeat me** in a scriptural debate."

Lastly, Shriji Maharaj looked at **Gopalanand Swami**, who replied, "I shall answer your question because you insist. Nobody **in the infinite universes** can move even a single leaf without your will. But, through your grace, **I can accomplish anything."**

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

Friends, we have mentioned here the extraordinary qualities of only five *paramhansas.* These *paramhansas* and all the other *paramhansas* were so holy that they could affect their surroundings. And they were so respected that people from all over were drawn to them. Yet, they humbly worshipped Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Their extraordinary lives reflect the supreme glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

▪ MIRACLES BY THE PARAMHANSAS

- **Sacchidanand Swami prayed for Indra Dev to shower rains** during a drought. Indra Dev listened to his prayer, and it soon rained.
- **Kanadanand Swami once tamed a lion.**
- Aksharbrahma **Gunatitanand Swami made a building's wooden pillars tremble.**
- **Swarupanand Swami liberated souls suffering in Yampuri** by chanting the Swaminarayan mantra.
- The *paramhansas* had shown many other such miracles. Through their blessings, people were cured of illnesses. Those who were childless and wanted children of their own were granted their wish. In this way, the *paramhansas* **fulfilled** the **dreams of** those who came their way.

32. MAHARAJ IS MY EVERYTHING

There was a devotee named **Patalbhai** who lived in the village of **Muli**. His **sister's name** was **Rajuba**. She loved Shriji Maharaj. While working around the house, **she would always think of Shriji Maharaj**. Once, it had been **six months** since she **had seen Shriji Maharaj**. Because it had been so long, she became sad and **started crying**. She even lost her appetite.

Bhagwan surely knows how dearly his devotees love him. Indeed, **Shriji Maharaj** was *antaryami* (all-knowing). He **came to know** of Rajuba's sadness. So, he left Loya and **came to Muli**. Patalbhai received Shriji Maharaj at his home. When Rajuba saw Shriji Maharaj, she was overwhelmed with joy. She quickly **prepared a meal of *kansar* and *rotlis*** for him.

Shriji Maharaj soon sat for lunch. On seeing the food on his plate, he said, "Please add some **ghee** to the *kansar*." Rajuba was ready to bring Shriji Maharaj anything he needed. She came with a pot of ghee and started pouring it into the *kansar*. While doing so, she went along capturing Shriji Maharaj's murti in her heart.

After Shriji Maharaj finished eating, he **gave Rajuba some *prasad*.** Rajuba was delighted.

Evening soon fell. A wooden cot was laid for Shriji Maharaj in the *darbar's* verandah. But it was **quite chilly** and **windy**. Shriji Maharaj said, "Rajuba, I'm feeling cold. **Light a fire** for me."

Rajuba started a fire as quickly as she could. She wanted Shriji Maharaj to feel comfortable. But once the fire was lit, Maharaj said, "I still need more heat. Turn it up, would you?"

Rajuba put all her **fuel and wood** into the fire. She had no more logs to spare. But Shriji Maharaj still felt cold. So, she placed her **wooden stool** into the fire. She also added a **wheel from the family's cart**. But that still was not enough. Finally, she decided to break a **colourful cot** she had. She would add its wood to the fire. This would surely help keep the fire going, she thought.



But Shriji Maharaj asked her not to do this. She had **passed Shriji Maharaj's test**. And so, he 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 joy. **Everything I have is yours. I've only offered so little to you."**

Shriji Maharaj replied, "I troubled you today. But even I'm having rough times."

Rajuba asked. "Maharaj, what troubles you?"

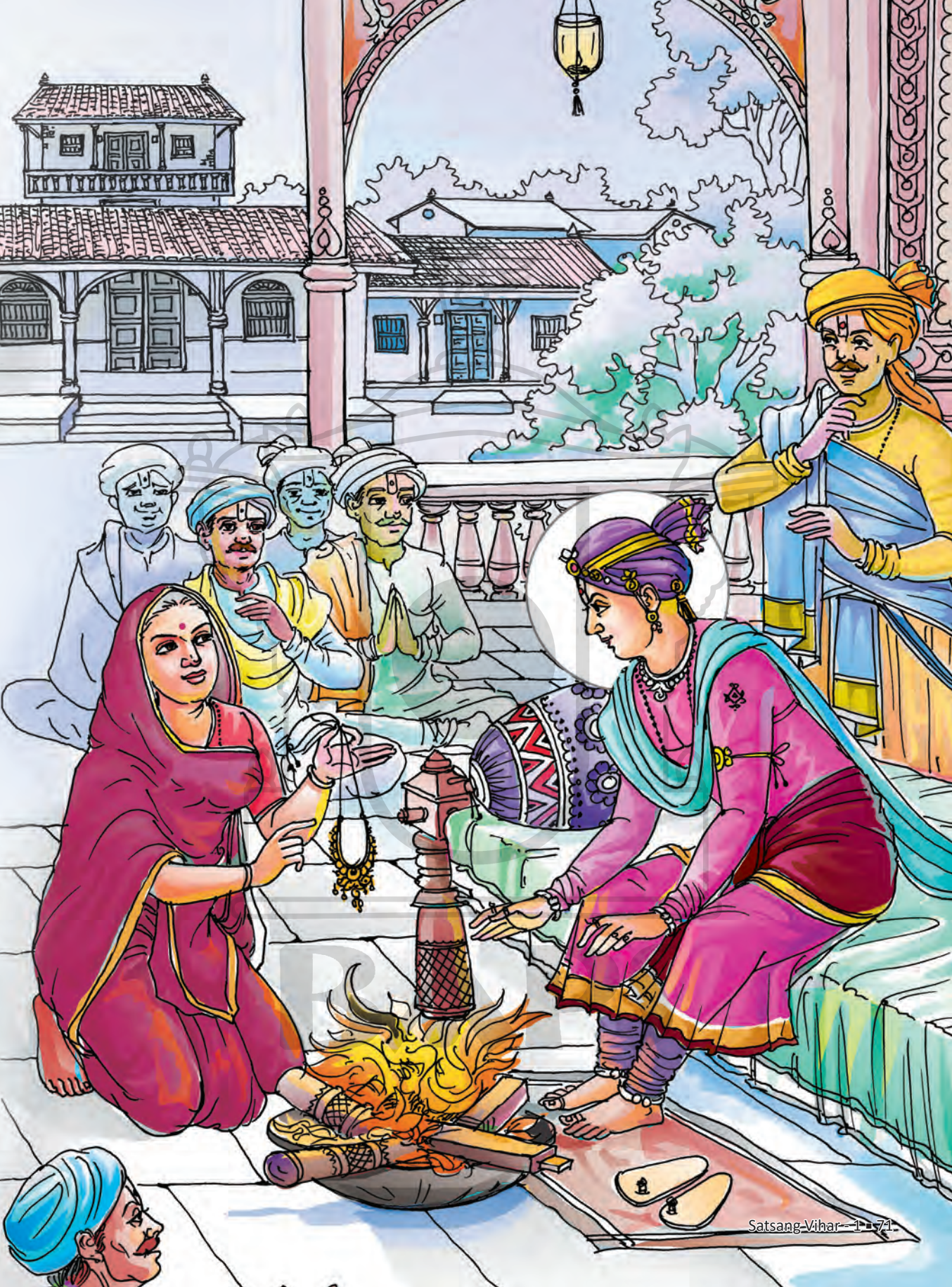
Shriji Maharaj replied, "Brahmanand Swami is building a **mandir in Vartal**. We don't have enough money at present to **pay the workers**. Brahmanand Swami has asked for money urgently. But where can I find what he needs?"

Hearing Shriji Maharaj's words, Rajuba took off her **necklace** and offered it to Shriji Maharaj. **It was worth Rs.500.** She also gave Shriji Maharaj another **Rs.200 in cash**.

Shriji Maharaj was pleased by the woman's sacrifice. He said, "Rajuba, forgive me. **I have taken everything from you**."

Rajuba bowed to Shriji Maharaj. Tears rolled from her eyes and onto Maharaj's feet. She said, "Maharaj, actually, my everything is you. And you are ingrained in my heart. Please bless me so I may always hold your grace in my heart. Bless me also so I become worthy of your grace."

Shriji Maharaj's devotees were faithful. He was everything they had. They never hesitated to sacrifice for him. In fact, they were eager for Shriji Maharaj to bless them with *seva*. A life dedicated to Bhagwan in such a way is truly a life worth living.



33. TRUE FAITH

Two hundred years ago, some people opposed our *satsang* fellowship. Those who joined *satsang* were often made to leave their community circles. This meant nobody would eat with them, speak to them, work alongside them, marry them, or visit their homes. Even those who used to like them treated them like outsiders.

The story of **Himraj Shah** describes how difficult it was for *satsangis* back then. Himraj Shah was a businessman who lived in **Sundariyana**. He practiced the **Vaishnav** faith. Himraj Shah had three sons: **Vanasha, Jethasha, and Pujasha**.

Himraj Shah was also an expert in Ayurveda. That's a type of medicine where people are treated with herbs. One day, one of his sons told him, "A Swaminarayan sadhu called **Gopalanand Swami** has come. **He is ill**. It would be nice if you could check him up and give him some medicine."

Himraj Shah came to see Gopalanand Swami. He checked Swami's **pulse** but **could not feel it.** A person cannot live without a pulse. Yet, Swami was smiling! Himrajbhai was confused. He checked again, but there was still no pulse. Swami must be a great yogi, Himrajbhai thought!

Then, Himraj Shah had another thought: **If Gopalanand Swami is such a great yogi, how great must his guru be?** With this thought, Himrajbhai came for Shriji Maharaj's darshan. Upon just seeing Shriji Maharaj, Himrajbhai became a Swaminarayan ***satsangi***. Thereafter, his entire family became devotees of Shriji Maharaj.

When his relatives came to know, they could not stand it. In response, they cast him away from the family circle. And they began to say, "Why have you left the religion of your ancestors?"

Himraj Shah would reply firmly, "I have taken the refuge of *sarvopari* Bhagwan. I have done nothing wrong."

Sometime thereafter, Himraj Shah fell terribly ill. His final days had come. Knowing this, he offered some final words of advice to his sons. "Shriji Maharaj is *sarvopari* Bhagwan," he said. "Never give up your loyalty to *satsang*." A few days later, Himraj Shah passed away.

With Himraj Shah gone, the family's opponents became even more strict. **After the funeral rituals** had finished, something concerning happened. It is tradition for the community to gather for a feast after a person dies. This is a way to offer respects and prayers for the person who passed away. But that day, opponents came to Himraj Shah's sons and demanded, "**Break your Swaminarayan *kanthis*. Only then will we attend the feast."**

As a compromise, someone suggested to Himraj Shah's sons, "At least remove your *kanthis* on the day of the feast. And hide yourselves till everyone finishes eating."

But the men refused, **"We wouldn't give up *satsang* even if the world turned upside down and the sun rose in the west."**

The elders pressured them in response, "You'll lose everyone's respect."

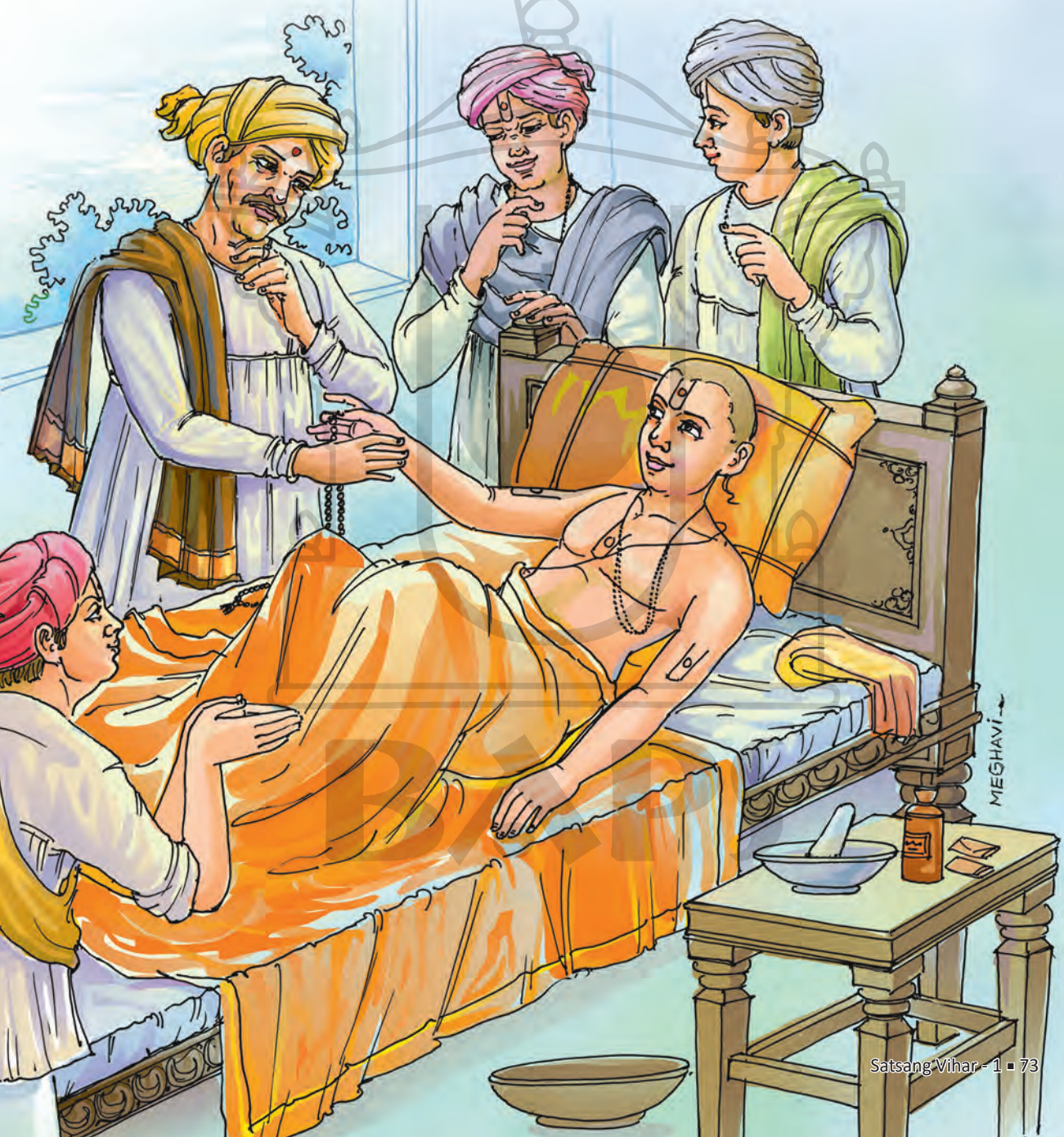
However, Himraj Shah's sons proudly replied, "For the fear of some pesky mosquitoes, one cannot give up a beautiful palace. **We belong to the *satsang* community of Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus and devotees. We will never hide our faith."**

Thereafter, the community chief wrote letters asking everyone to **boycott** the feast. He



said if anyone attended, they too would be cast away. This **message also reached Shriji Maharaj in Gadhada**. Hearing the news, his eyes welled with tears of pride for the family. They had stood tall even when everyone refused to attend their father's feast. Shriji Maharaj himself decided to attend the feast in **Sundariyana** along with his sadhus and devotees. Maharaj stayed for five days at Himraj Shah's home and blessed his sons for their firm devotion and faith.

There were hundreds of devotees like Himraj Shah and his sons. Shriji Maharaj was their palace, and those who opposed *satsang* were their mosquitoes. They weren't so foolish as to leave their palace due to some bothersome mosquitoes! In those days, there were many such devotees who were strongly dedicated to their faith in this way.



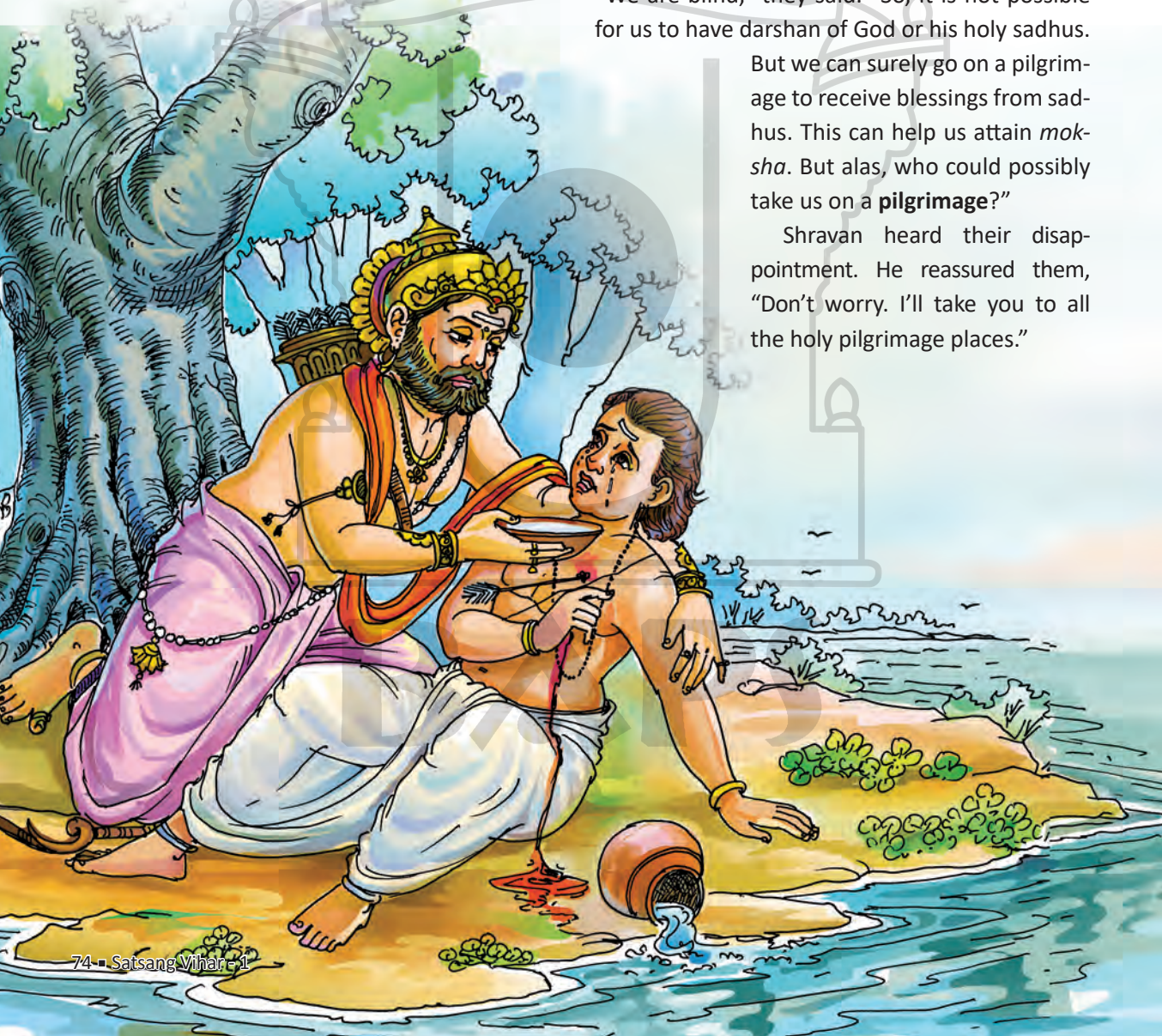
34. SHRAVAN'S DEVOTION TO HIS PARENTS

Shravan's name is well-known in history. Shravan's **mother and father were blind**. The boy **cared for his parents** with so much love. He would wake up early, take a bath, then do puja. And he would **pray** to Bhagwan, "O God, bless me so I never forget my parents. Give me the company of your sadhus. And may I be able to please you. I ask you to grant me such wisdom."

After his puja and prayers, Shravan would start helping his parents. At sunrise, he would bow to them and **awaken** them. He would rub their feet and **help them clean their teeth with a *datan* stick.** Thereafter, he would get warm water and **help them bathe**. He would wash their clothes and give them fresh ones to wear each day. Then, he would go to a nearby village to beg for alms, and he would **cook food**. 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," they said. "So, it is not possible for us to have darshan of God or his holy sadhus. But we can surely go on a pilgrimage to receive blessings from sadhus. This can help us attain *moksha*. But alas, who could possibly take us on a **pilgrimage**?"

Shravan heard their disappointment. He reassured them, "Don't worry. I'll take you to all the holy pilgrimage places."



So saying, Shravan went to the forest and returned with bamboo sticks. From them, he crafted two baskets. And he tied them to a pole using strong ropes. The tool he made was called a *kavad*. He then spread a blanket in each of the *kavad's* baskets. He had his father sit in one basket and his mother in the other. He then balanced the *kavad* on his shoulder and set out for the pilgrimage.

Shravan passed through narrow, thorny pathways, thick jungles and bushes, mountains and valleys, and roaring rivers and streams. When his parents were hungry, he would bring ripe fruits. If they were near a village or town, he would **beg for alms**. Shravan was delighted when his parents accepted what he brought.

Shravan would also bring water from the river for his parents. He would filter it and then offer it to them to quench their **thirst.** In this way, he was once gathering **water from a river** into his gourd (a type of cup). As the water seeped into his gourd, it created a **gurgling sound.**

At this time, **King Dashrath** of Ayodhya was out hunting. He shot an **arrow** towards the gurgling sound. Sadly, it **hit Shravan in the chest.**

"O God!" the boy screamed, hitting the ground.

The king ran to Shravan. "I shot the arrow thinking it was the sound of an animal drinking. But I struck you. Please forgive me."

Shravan calmly replied, "**My mother and father are blind.** I have set out to take them on a pilgrimage. They are **thirsty and are sitting** beneath that tree, waiting for me to come. Quickly **take this water for them to drink."** So saying, Shravan breathed his last.

With a heavy heart, King Dashrath took the water to Shravan's parents. He told them what had happened. They were so grief-stricken that their souls left their bodies, and they passed away.

Dear friends, Shravan cared for his parents till his last breath. We, too, should care for our parents till the end. This is an important lesson we can learn from Shravan.



35. THE SATSANG DIKSHA

It has been said that there is no better friend than a book. This is indeed true. That's because books teach us several things.

However, not all books are the same. There have been tens of millions of books written in the history of the world. And many more books are still being written. Some of them just contain information. Others cover current events. Some are written for entertainment. Others are there for our studies.

But how many books are there that can help us live better lives? How many books must there be that can help us make wise decisions about what to do and what not to do? And, out of all these books, do you think it is possible to find just the right guidance we need to become better human beings? Sounds tough, doesn't it?

But what if we found just such a book that could help us make wise decisions and be happy? And what if that book was short so we could read it again and again? It would be like a sea of knowledge packed into a small pot you can carry! Things would be so much easier, right?

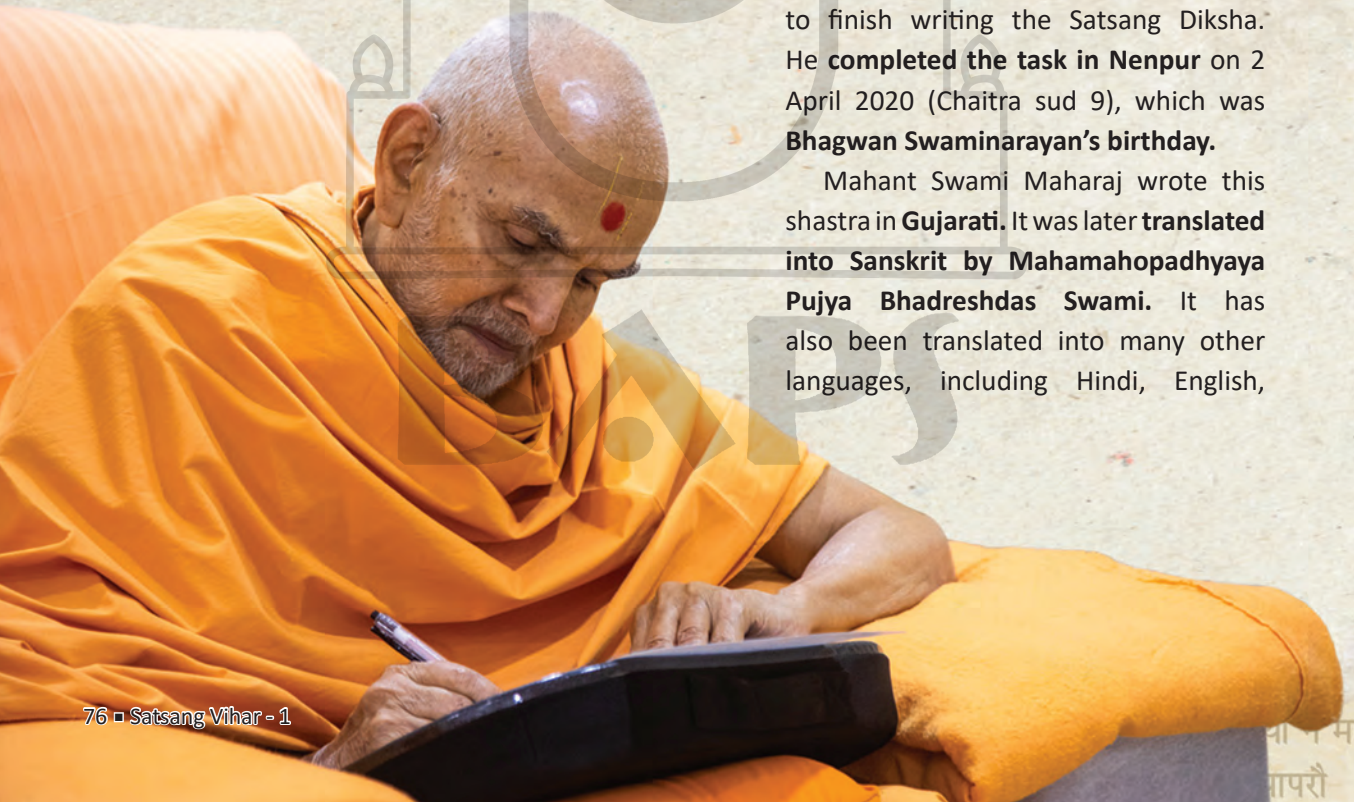
Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj has written just such a text. It is a great work that summarises countless books and shastras.

This concise text includes everything we need to guide our lives. This text is a scripture, and its name is the Satsang Diksha.

The Satsang Diksha is a wonderful gift given to us by Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri **started writing it on** 30 January 2020. That was the sacred day of **Vasant Panchami.** He was **in Navsari** at the time. Once he started, he would write for two hours per day.

It took Swamishri a **total of 64 days** to finish writing the Satsang Diksha. He **completed the task in Nenpur** on 2 April 2020 (Chaitra sud 9), which was **Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday.**

Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote this shastra in **Gujarati.** It was later **translated into Sanskrit by Mahamahopadhyaya Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami.** It has also been translated into many other languages, including Hindi, English,





Punjabi, Bengali, Chinese, Russian, and French.

The Satsang Diksha contains **315 *shlokas.*** These verses include our guru *parampara's* teachings about ***agna and upasana.*** They also include teachings such as not to steal, not to hurt others, what is the purpose of life, how to offer bhakti to our guru, how to do *satsang* and follow *agnas,* choosing our words wisely, being careful about how we use screens, and the importance of staying away from *kusang.*

In shlokas 209 through 212, Mahant Swami Maharaj addresses children in particular.

Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj has said for this shastra:

- What is written in the Satsang Diksha captures everything that Shriji Maharaj and the guru parampara had in mind.
- The Satsang Diksha shastra itself is the very form of Shriji Maharaj.
- It would not be a fitting honour for the Satsang Diksha even if we were to do thousands of *tulas* of this shastra.

Along with saying the Satsang Diksha's importance, Mahant Swami Maharaj has also given ***agna*** for *bal-balikas, kishore-kishoris,* and *yuvak-yuvatis* to do ***mukhpath*** of the shastra. He has said, for instance:

- Whoever reads and does mukhpath of the Satsang Diksha will progress on the path to moksha.
- Satsang Diksha Mukhpath = Akshardham.

Let's all pledge to do mukhpath of the Satsang Diksha so we can earn Swamishri's blessings!

36. SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S DREAM

This incident occurred long ago. It was a time when our *satsang* fellowship had no mandirs. There was no mandir even in Gadhada, which was where Bhagwan Swaminarayan lived. Shriji Maharaj's home, the Akshar Ordi, also had not yet been built.

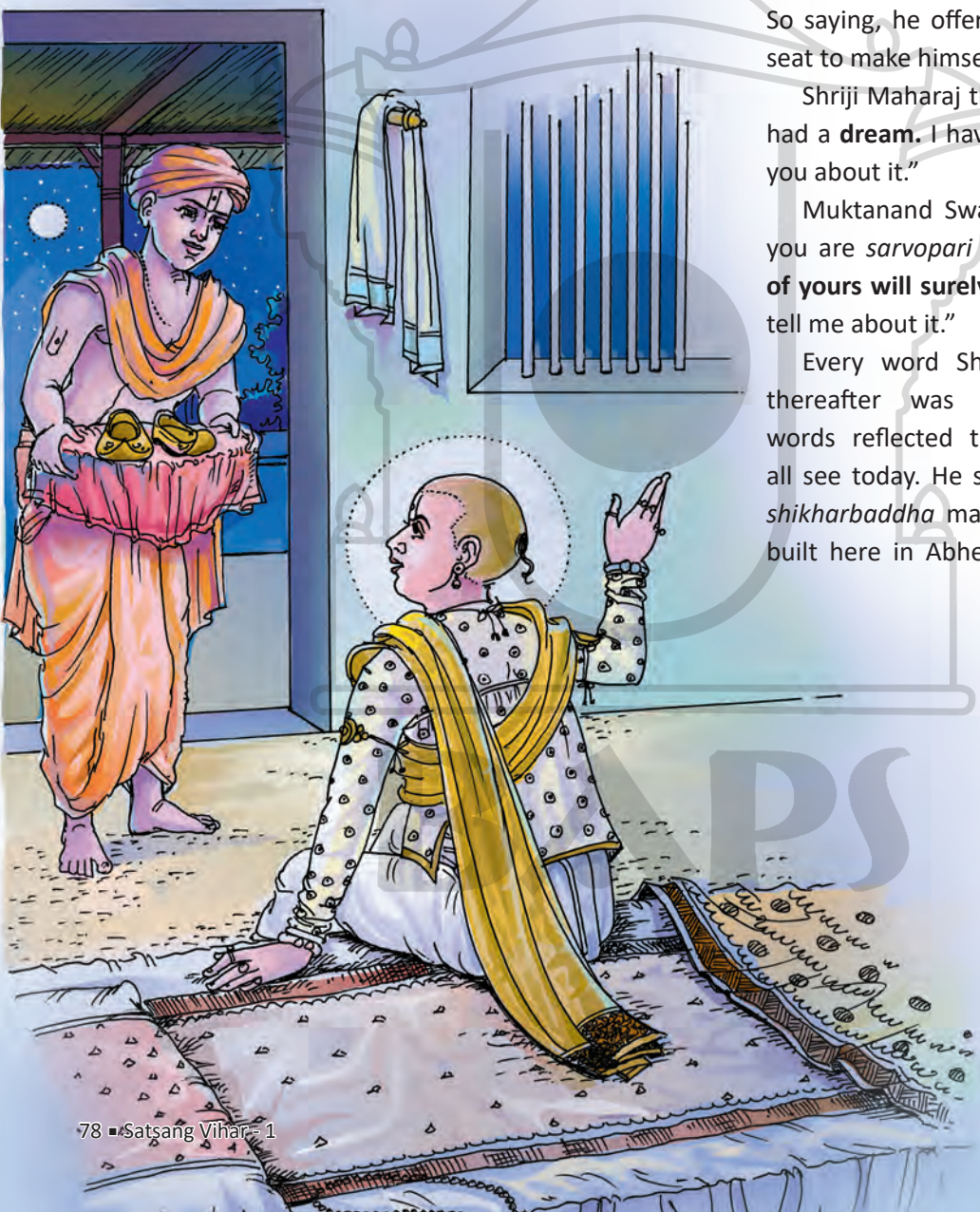
One night, Shriji Maharaj was resting in **Abhel Khachar's *darbar*.** It was the **middle of the night,** and Shriji Maharaj **awoke**. He asked his attendant, "Bring my *mojadi*, please. I want to go and meet Muktanand Swami. Where is he?"

Muktanand Swami was in **Jiva Khachar's *darbar*** at the time**.** Though it was night, **Muktanand Swami was** awake. He was **meditating.** Seeing Shriji Maharaj, he asked, "Maharaj! Why are you here so late?" So saying, he offered Shriji Maharaj a seat to make himself comfortable.

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

Muktanand Swami said, "Maharaj, you are *sarvopari* Bhagwan. **A dream of yours will surely come true.** Please tell me about it."

Every word Shriji Maharaj spoke thereafter was so inspiring! His words reflected the future that we all see today. He said, "I saw a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir that had been built here in Abhel Khachar's *darbar*.



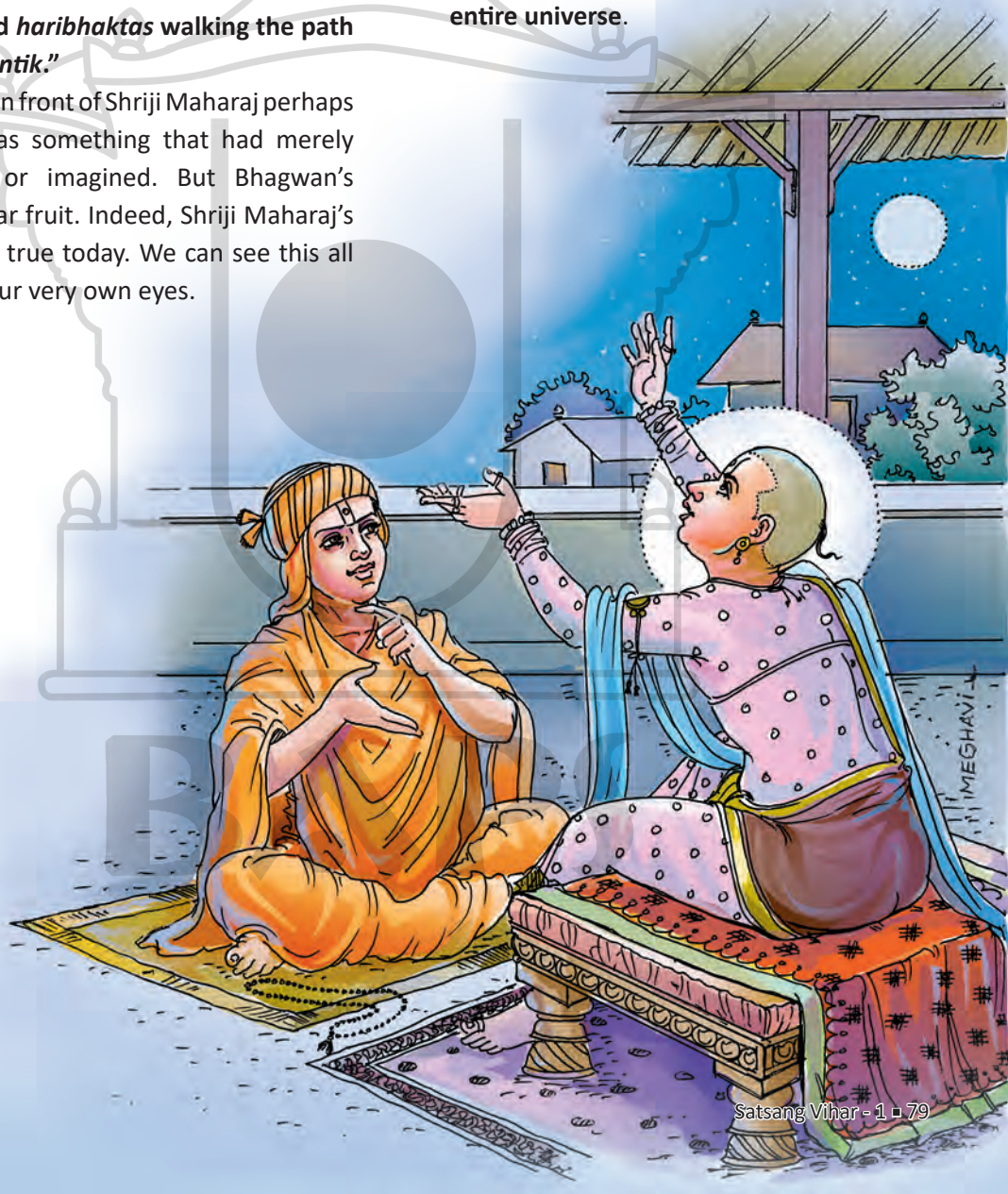
There was a majestic gate leading to it. Gadhada had become a large city. And everyone was worshipping the name of Swaminarayan."

Seeing that Shriji Maharaj had come, other *paramhansas* also woke up and arrived to where he was seated. Shriji Maharaj continued to speak, "Dear sadhus! In my dream, I saw that **I had built many grand mandirs.** There were also **ashrams** for our sadhus **in each and every town.** In them, there was always *katha-varta* happening and kirtans being sung. ***Ekantik* dharma had spread throughout the entire world.** And **there were many sadhus and *haribhaktas* walking the path to becoming *ekantik*."**

Those seated in front of Shriji Maharaj perhaps saw this vision as something that had merely been dreamed or imagined. But Bhagwan's words always bear fruit. Indeed, Shriji Maharaj's dream has come true today. We can see this all around us with our very own eyes.

▪ LET US BECOME HIS INSTRUMENT

- Shriji Maharaj wished to liberate enough *jivas* to fill **one billion large ships.**
- Gunatitanand Swami wished for *satsang* to **spread to every leaf of every tree in the world**. He said that *satsang* should be considered fully established only when each sadhu is followed by 100,000 people.
- Let us become true *satsangis* and inspire others to practise *satsang*. Certainly, **guiding even just one soul towards *satsang*** gives us the **merit of saving an entire universe**.



37. DAILY RECITATIONS

▪ Jay Naad

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

▪ Arti

Jay Swãminārãyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,
Akshar-Purushottam jay (2), darshan sarvottam...
Jay Swãminārãyan...

Mukta anant supujit,
sundar sākāram, (Jay) (2)
Sarvopari karunākar (2),
mānav tanudhāram...**Jay 1**

Purushottam Parabrahma,
Shri Hari Sahajānand, (Jay) (2)
Aksharbrahma anādi (2),
Gunātitānand...**Jay 2**

Prakat sadā sarvakartā,
param muktidātā, (Jay) (2)
Dharma ekāntik sthāpak (2),
bhakti paritrātā...**Jay 3**

Dāsbhāv divyatā saha,
brahmarupe priti, (Ho) (2)
Suhradbhāv alaukik (2),
sthāpit shubh riti...**Jay 4**

Dhanya dhanya mama jivan,
tav sharane sufalam, (Ho) (2)
Yagnapurush pravartita (2),
siddhāntam sukhadam...**Jay 5**

Jay Swãminārãyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,
Akshar-Purushottam jay (2), darshan sarvottam...
Jay Swãminārãyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,
Jay Swãminārãyan...

■ Shlokas For Puja

Invocation Mantra

Uttishtha Sahajānanda
Shri-Hare Purushottama|
Gunātitākshara Brahman
uttishtha krupayā Guro||
Āgamyatam hi pujārtham
āgamyatām mad-ātmatah|
Sānnidhyād darshanād divyāt
sau-bhāgyam vardhate mama.

"Oh Shajanand Shri-Hari! Oh Purushottam! Oh Aksharbrahma Gunatit Guru! Please have compassion upon me and arise. Please come forth from my atma, grace my puja with your presence and accept my devotion. I become more blessed due to your divine presence and darshan. "

Concluding Mantra

Bhaktyaiva divya-bhāvena
pujā te sam-anushthitā |
Gachchhātha tvam mad-ātmānam
Akshara-purushottama ||

"Oh Purushottam Narayan along with Aksharbrahma! I have performed your puja with devotion and divyabhav. Now, please grace my atma with your presence."

■ Shloka to Be Said Before Meals

Shrimadsadguna-shālinam chidachidi,
vyāptam cha divyākrutim,
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!

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. Let there be peace. Let there be peace. Let there be 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."

■ Nightime 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 Maharaj!

"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

Vandu Shri Hari ne sadā hrudayathi,
Gunātitānand ne,
Vandu Prāgji Bhakta ne vali namu,
Shāstri Mahārāj ne,
Vandu Shri Guru Yogiji, Pramukhji,
dharya Parabrahma ne,
Vandu sant Mahant Swāmi charane,
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 hold Parabrahma in themselves. And I bow to Mahant Swami Maharaj, the giver of kalyan (liberation)."

2. ***Gunātitoksharam Brahma,***
Bhagwān Purushottamaha,
Jano jānan-nidam satyam,
muchyate bhav-bandhanāt.

"Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma and Bhagwan Swaminarayan is Purushottam. Whoever knows this truth is freed from the bondage of this world."

3. ***Gurur Brahmā Gurur Vishnur***
Gurur Devo Maheshwaraha,
Guruhu sākshāt Parambrahma,
tasmai shri gurave namaha.

"The guru is Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh (Shiv). He is the very form of Parabrahma. I bow to such a guru."

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

"O Bhagwan! You alone are my (true) mother, father, brother, friend, wisdom, and wealth. You are my everything."

5. Aum sahanāvavatu, saha nou bhunaktu,
sahaveeryam karavāvahai,
Tejasvināvadheetam astu,
mā vidvishāvahai.
Aum shāntihi! shāntihi! shāntihi!

"O Paramatma! Protect us! Nourish us! Strengthen us! Let our studies be bright, and let us never hate each other. May peace forever resound."

▪ DHYEY AND PURNAHUTI SHLOKAS

Gunātitam gurum prāpya
Brahmarupam nijātmanaha,
Vibhāvya dāsbhāvena
Swāminārāyanam bhaje.

"Having attained the *gunatit* guru and believing my *atma* to be *brahmarup,* I humbly worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

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

"I worship Shri Hari Swaminarayan, who is with Aksharbrahma. He is also known as Nilkanth. He is the sarvavatari, the child of Bhakti and Dharma, possesses a divine form, is supreme, the giver of peace, the granter of liberation, the fulfiller of wishes, and the cause of all."

▪ SWAMINI VATO

At the beginning of every Swamini Vat we are supposed to say, **"Swāmināràyan Hare, Swāmi e vāt kari je..."** Then only do we start reciting the vat. Also, read the vat according to the punctuation given (pause at every comma and period).

Swāmināràyan hare, Swāmie vāt kari je...1. *Āpane to Akshardhāmmā jāvu chhe, evo ek sankalp rākhvo.*
Our sole wish should be that we want to go to Akshardham. (1/301)

2. *Āpane Bhagwānnā chhiye, pan māyā nā nathi, em mānvu.*
We should believe that we belong to God and not to maya. (1/230)

3. *Mujhvan āve to kem karvu? E prashna puchhyo. Teno uttar karyo je, 'Swāmināràyan, Swāmināràyan' bhajan karvu tethi mujhvan tali jāy.*
What should one do when in worry? The answer is to chant "Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan". By doing this, your worries shall be resolved. (1/272)

4. *Karod kām bagādine pan ek moksha sudhārvo, ne kadāpi karod kām sudhāryā ne ek moksha bagādyo, to temā shu karyu?*
Look after your moksha, even if it means that you have to spoil ten million other tasks. If you were to complete ten million tasks while spoiling your moksha, what have you truly achieved? (1/14)

5. *Satya, hit ne priya evu vachan bolavu. Ne upekshā rahit bolvu, pana āgrah thi vachan kahevu nahi.*
Speak words that are truthful, beneficial and affectionate. And speak without contempt. Never speak with insistence. (5/164)

6. *Bhagwān bhajvā hoi, tenāthi badhāyni marji rākhi shakāy nahi, tenāthi to Bhagwānni marji sachavāy.*
One who wants to worship God cannot please everybody. Such a person can fulfil God's wishes alone. (5/59)

7. *Nirantar sarva kriyā mā pāchhu valine jovu je, Māre Bhagwān bhajvā chhe, ne hu shu karu chhu? Em joyā karavu.*
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 Bhagwānne 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, pan asevā to naj karvi. Te asevā te shu? Je avagun levo.
One serve according to their level of faith, but one should never do disservice. What counts as disservice? It is seeing faults in others. (2/133)

10. *Ek upāsanā, biji āgnā, trijo samāgam, ne chothu satshāstranu vyasan, a chār dradh karine rākhvā.*
One, upasana; two, Shriji Maharaj's agnas; three, the company of the great sadhu; and four, a habit of reading the shastras – these four should be firmly kept. (4/22)



39. THINGS TO KNOW

Bhagwan Swaminarayan

1. **Identity:** Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan, Sarvopari 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:** *Merā jo avatār hai so to jivo ku ātyāntik mukti dene ke vāste Purushottam jesā jo mai vo manushya ke jesā banyā hu.* (My avatar is to grant liberation to *jivas*. For that, I, who am Purushottam, have taken upon a human form.)
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 Sampraday at age 21.**
7. **Mandirs:** To establish the worship of Bhagwan with his ideal devotee, he built six mandirs – Ahmedabad, Bhuj, Vartal, Dholera, Junagadh and Gadhada.
8. **Shastras:** Gave us 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 instead. 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 a lack of food or clothing."

11. **Gave us the 'Swaminarayan' mahamantra.**
12. **Inspired Countless People:** Thousands of sadhus and hundreds of thousands of devotees obeyed his moral instructions and commands.
13. **Samadhi and Brahmi Sthiti:** Graced many with samadhi without ashtanga yoga. Blessed countless with *brahmi sthiti* (the state of being *brahmarup* or God-realised).
14. **Akshardham:** Promised to give darshan to devotees at the time of their death and take them to Akshardham.
15. **Social Services:** Stopped the practice of widow burning and female infanticide, freed people from superstitions, uplifted people of all backgrounds, held 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 among us through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Mahant Swami Maharaj

1. **Identity:** Aksharbrahma, Gunatit Satpurush (Guru), Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan's sixth spiritual successor, the present form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the gateway to liberation (moksha).
2. **Birth:** 13 September 1933 (Samvat 1989, Bhadarva vad 9) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh (lived in Anand, Gujarat).
3. **Mother:** Dahiben

   Father: Manibhai

   Childhood Name: Vinubhai.

   As a child, he received the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj.
4. **Diksha (Initiation):**

- On Yogiji Maharaj's word, he took *parshadi diksha* in Gondal at the age of 25 after completing his bachelor's degree in agriculture.
- **Parshad Name:** Vinu Bhagat.
- At the age of 28, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj initiated him as a sadhu in Gadhada.
- **Sadhu Name:** Sadhu Keshavjivandas

5. **Studies and Service as 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 sadhu in the sanstha with higher education.
- 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 Bhagwan and guru: In every task, he gives all the honour to Bhagwan and his gurus.

7. **Work:**

- The leader of BAPS' international social,

cultural, educational, value-based, and spiritual activities.

- 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 the guru of BAPS.
9. **Principles:** To serve everyone and give *kalyan* to everyone without regard to 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 (*mahima*) and to live as a servant of all (*dasbhav*).

Miscellaneous:

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

The BAPS Sanstha

1. **Full Name:** Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).
2. **Introduction:** A socio-spiritual organisation that selflessly works for the betterment of everyone and follows the eternal Hindu, Vedic philosophy and tradition.
3. **Founded:** 1907, Bochasan, Gujarat.
4. **Founder:** Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.
5. **Leader:** His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.
6. **Main Principle:** To become *aksharrup* and offer *upasana* (worship) to Purushottam as a servant serves his master.
7. **Foundational Beliefs:** Bhagwan Swaminarayan is *sarvopari* Bhagwan. Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Aksharbrahma. The present guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj, is the gateway to *moksha* (liberation).
8. **Purpose:** To inspire people to live according to the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and to strive for the overall progress of society. Also, to protect and nourish the values of traditional Indian culture.
9. **Main Shastras:** The Vachanamrut, the Shikshapatri and the Swamini Vato.
10. **Centres:** 3,850 centres around the world. **Satsang Assemblies:** 16,000 children, youth, adult and women's assemblies
11. More than a million **devotees** in India and abroad.
12. More than 1,000 **sadhus.**
13. More than 1,100 mandirs, including Swaminarayan **Akshardham** in Gandhinagar, Delhi, and Robbinsville (United States)
14. 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 (boarding houses) and scholarships.
    - Disaster relief.
    - Tribal empowerment.
    - Awareness programmes and projects on environment, parenting, education, women's development, anti-addiction,

literacy, anti-dowry, water management, etc.

15. **Spiritual Activities:** Inspiring spirituality in children, youths, and adults.
16. Recognised by the **United Nations** and acclaimed in the **Guinness Book of World Records**.

Speech: Let Us Worship Bhagwan

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, "Not really."

The teacher said in a harsh tone, "You are living in the 21st century and you don't know anything about science? Half your life has gone down the drain!"

Hearing this, the boatman grew ashamed of himself.

But, suddenly, they were hit by a terrible storm. The boat began to sway dangerously back and forth. The boatman asked, "Sir! Do you know how to swim?"

The teacher hesitantly replied, "No!"

The boatman said, "Then your whole life has gone down the drain. Or, better yet, down the river! I might not know about science, politics, or sports, but I do know how to swim. My final good bye to you." So saying, the boatman jumped into the water and swam to safety.

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

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

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

This means that the essence of all the shastras is to realise Bhagwan as the ultimate goal of life. That is why Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj used to often say, "Bhagwan bhaji leva," which means, "Let us worship Bhagwan." Yes, Friends! This is absolutely true. This expression is derived from experience. Just study the history of the world and you'll realise the truth in these words.

Napoleon, who ruled nearly half the world, once said, "I have not seen six happy days in my life." The great artist Michelangelo, too, once said, "I regret that I have not done enough for the salvation of my soul."

In contrast to this, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, the 500 *paramhansas*, our *gunatit gurus* 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 we wish, as long as it is in agreement with the rules of the shastras. But doing anything without Bhagwan in our thoughts is like having a bunch of zeros.

So, friends! Start worshipping Bhagwan 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, "Do your best to strengthen *shraddha* and bhakti in your life..."

Jay Swaminarayan

40. MANDIRS: A REFLECTION OF HINDU CULTURE



It was 1998. In the town of **Westchester (USA)**, an assembly was being held. The world-renowned heart specialist **Dr Subramaniam** was to be honoured in this gathering. Dr Subramaniam offered *dandvats* to Swamishri. He did not hesitate one bit in offering this gesture to Swamishri. The assembly clapped in appreciation for his respect.

On another occasion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled to the **West Indies Islands**. The year was 1988. A meeting had been arranged with **Prime Minister Vasudev Pande**. During the meeting, there was a garlanding ceremony. Then, the Prime Minister **touched Pramukh Swami Maharaj's feet** and bowed.

Dr Subramanium and Vasudev Pande were asked where they had learnt to bow in such a way. **They both replied, "The mandir has taught us this."**

Certainly, mandirs are one of the three pillars of Hindu culture. As long **as our mandirs exist, our culture and values will remain alive**. In history, there were some people who tried to harm our mandirs. This is because they knew well that Hinduism was alive and well because of its mandirs.

Let us try to understand more about our amazing mandirs.

▪ HOW MANDIRS CAME INTO EXISTENCE

India is a spiritual country. Here, people have always been eager to understand the

wisdom of *atma* and Paramatma. During ancient Vedic times, people went into the **forests, caves or mountains** to think deeply and meditate on Bhagwan. There, they **experienced inner peace**.

With time, some began to think, "Why can't we do spiritual *sadhana* at home or in our towns and villages?" So, people began placing *murtis* of God nearby on small platforms. **Sugarcane sticks** were used to create canopies **around them**. **Gradually, the canopies were replaced by stone and brick buildings**. Later, **shastras were written about how to build stone mandirs and perform *murti-puja*.**

In this way, the tradition of building mandirs stems from the efforts of our sacred rishis. Today, **there are more than 3.5 million mandirs in India**. One cannot even imagine India without its mandirs. In fact, **these mandirs have become our Hindu culture's very identity**. Indeed, they play an important role in protecting and sustaining our culture.



Sarangpur (India)



Nairobi (Africa)

▪ SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S MANDIRS

Shriji Maharaj built **six mandirs** to nourish *upasana*: **(1) Ahmedabad, (2) Bhuj, (3) Vartal, (4) Dholera, (5) Junagadh and (6) Gadhada. The** renowned Gujarati poet Nhanalal wrote about these three-spired mandirs built by Shriji Maharaj, "Just sit beneath the dome of mandirs in the



Chicago (USA)



Auckland (New Zealand)



London (UK)

Swaminarayan Sampradaya. You will feel peace showering down upon you from the sky. One's *atma* becomes calm. One's inner being becomes cool. And the pains in one's heart and in one's being all go away."

Even today, people can experience this in any of our mandirs.



Akshardham
(Gandhinagar, India)

▪ SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S MANDIRS

The philosophy of Brahma and Parabrahma is stated clearly in the shastras. To represent this eternal, Vedic wisdom, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj consecrated *murtis* of Brahma and Parabrahma. He did so in the central shrine of **five mandirs,** including: **(1) Bochasan, (2) Sarangpur, (3) Gondal, (4) Atladara and (5) Gadhada**. He often used to say, "I have been born to build mandirs."

▪ MANDIRS AROUND THE WORLD

After Shastriji Maharaj built mandirs, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and Mahant Swami Maharaj did the same. They opened mandirs in countries such as India, North America, Europe, Africa, and Australia. By doing so, they have brought glory to Hindu culture all across the world. Today, countless Hindus are **proud of their heritage** due to these mandirs. People come here to work towards the

Akshardham
(New Delhi)

betterment of themselves and the world.

▪ PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S MANDIRS

Do you know who built the largest number of mandirs in the world? It's Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He built more than 1,100 mandirs. The Guinness Book of World Records has taken note of this achievement. **One of the world's greatest Hindu mandirs is Akshardham in New Delhi.** This mandir was also built by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Indeed, Pramukh Swami Maharaj enhanced the glory and pride of our heritage through the mandirs he built.

- **Pramukh Swami Maharaj Has Said:**

"Materialism has increased rapidly. As a result, we are forgetting our original values. This is the cause of our growing problems and miseries. Our values are strengthened through mandirs. Values alone will bring us inner peace."

Swamishri's divine words are worth remembering every day.

▪ WHY MANDIRS?

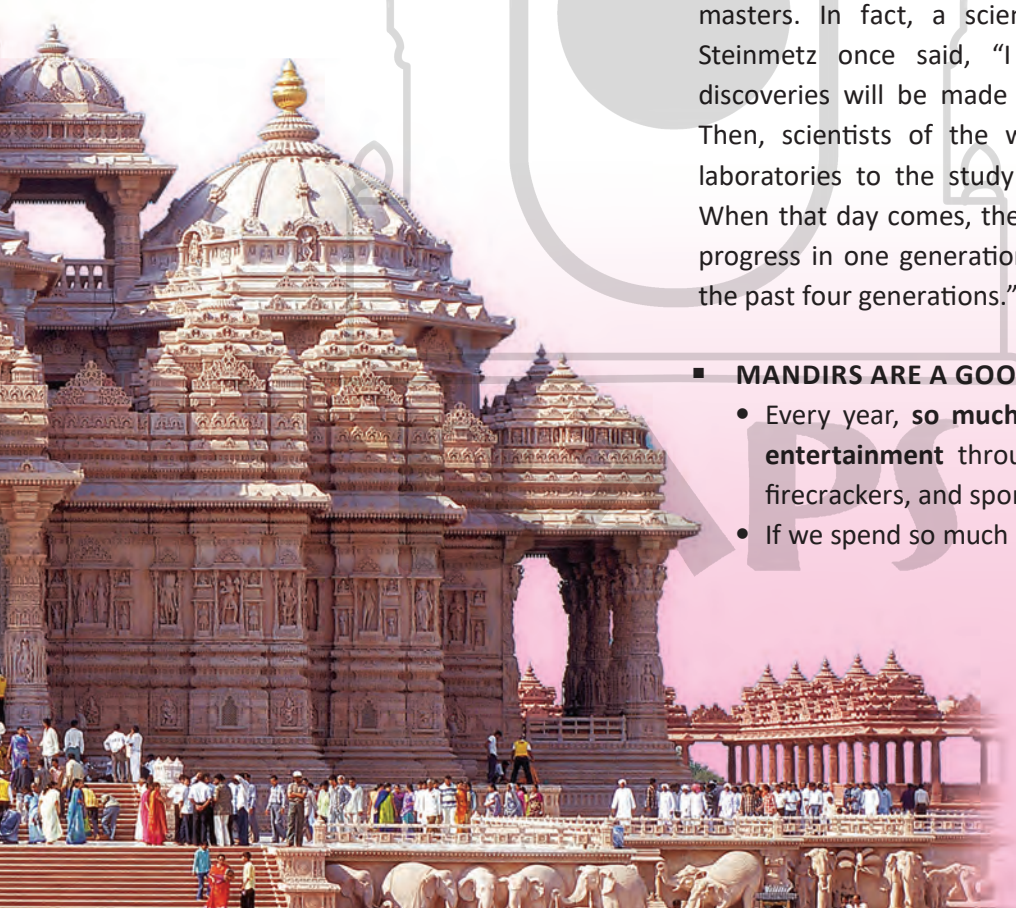
- **The three pillars of the Hindu Dharma** are **(1) Mandir, (2) Shastra, and (3) Sant**. A very important part of this is mandirs. Indeed, mandirs help us achieve the **four goals of life: (1) Dharma, (2) *Arth*, (3) *Kam* and (4) *Moksha.***
- **Mandirs Do All of the Following...**

(1) Strengthen *upasana,* (2) Offer bhakti, (3) Experience calm and peace of mind, (4) Understand the path to *moksha*, (5) Mould our character, (6) Experience joy and oneness through festivals, (7) Protect our values, (8) Inspire social service, promote education and health, empower children and women, help the environment, and encourage family harmony.

The tradition of building mandirs is thus a priceless gift from our ancient rishis and spiritual masters. In fact, a scientist named Charles Steinmetz once 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 progress in one generation than it has seen in the past four generations."

▪ MANDIRS ARE A GOOD USE OF MONEY

- Every year, **so much money is spent on entertainment** through things like kites, firecrackers, and sporting events.
- If we spend so much money **on temporary**



joys and delights, the money spent on building mandirs is also worth it. That's because mandirs provide us with **lasting, inner peace**.





- **CAN'T WE JUST SMALLER MANDIRS?**
  - There is a **tradition** in Hinduism from ancient times to build grand mandirs for Bhagwan.
  - **Kings and queens have grand palaces** for themselves. God is the sovereign of infinite universes. Therefore, his devotees lovingly sacrifice to build grand mandirs for him.



- **DON'T WE NEED MORE HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS INSTEAD OF MANDIRS?**
  - Yes, it is true that we need hospitals and schools. But that doesn't mean we don't need mandirs.
  - Schools and colleges provide worldly knowledge and education. But **education without values causes many problems in the world**. Mandirs fulfil the need for moral and spiritual education. Mandirs help us learn to be better human beings.
  - Research shows that **one reason for ill health is our mind and emotions**. If we are calm, stress-free and pure, we can better fight illness. Mandirs help us be calm, focused, and healthy.
  - BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs conduct many social services to benefit the community.



- **MY MANDIR AND ME**

  As children of the Hindu faith we should pledge the following:
  - I will **regularly** go for the **darshan** of my *ghar-mandir* and nearby *shikharbaddh* or *hari* mandir. There, I will have darshan, do *dandvats* and *pradak-shinas*, and offer prayers and a small donation.
  - I will attend the ***sabha*** and do ***seva*** in the mandir.
  - I will **explain the importance of mandirs to my friends** and inspire them to visit.



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 *akshar-muktas*. Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam
annakut	offering of many food items to the *murti* 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 *murti* of God as an act of worship
ashtak	prayer verses sung after *arti*
atma	soul
atmarup	behaving as *atma*

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, *suran*, dairy products, fruits, nuts, tomatoes, cabbage, *dudhi* (gourd), and some forms of grain – *morio, rajagro*

G

ghantadi	small bell with handle, rung during *arti*
gurukul	residential school

H

hari mandir	mandir in which *arti* is performed twice daily and daily worship of deities is performed by a householder pujari

J

jalebi	a sweet delicacy
jiva	soul
jnan	spiritual knowledge

K

kam	lust. Desires for worldly sense pleasures
kansar	a sweet delicacy
kanthi	double-threaded necklace of beads received by *satsangis* on initiation into the Satsang Fellowship, and worn as a sign of their allegiance to Bhagwan Swaminarayan
katha	spiritual talks or discourses
khichdi	spicy boiled rice

M

mala	rosary
Mangala	first *arti* of the day, performed at sunrise
mansi	mental worship. Form of worship in which one devoutly performs puja, offers *arti, thal,* etc., to God mentally
maya	ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities. Anything that deviates one from the worship of God
mesub	a sweet item – regarded as the king of sweets
moksha	liberation. Deliverance of the *jiva* from recurring births and deaths and experience of God's divine bliss
mukhpath	memorizing Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, etc.
murti	sacred image of God that is revered and worshipped

N

niyam	moral and spiritual disciplines

P

pahor	a period of three hours
panchang pranam	a gesture of offering respect to God, guru, parents, etc. in which five parts of the body touch the ground, namely, head, hands, feet, mind and speech
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
parampara	tradition of succession, usually of spiritual gurus
parshad diksha	first stage of initiation into the ascetic life in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya; a renunciate wearing white clothing – with names ending in 'Bhagat'
pathshala	traditional school for learning Sanskrit
pradakshina	circumambulation
prasadi	sanctified food
pujan	respectful worship of God, guru or senior person

R

Rajbhog	lunch offered to God; third *arti* of the day in *shikharbaddh* mandir
rotli	chapati

S

Sandhya	fourth *arti* of the day, performed at sunset
satsangi	member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practises satsang
seva	spiritual service
Shangar	second *arti* of the day, performed after breakfast has been offered and the *murtis* have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands
Shayan	fifth and final *arti* of the day
shikharbaddh	mandir in which five *artis* are performed daily and daily worship is performed by sadhus
shishya	disciple
shlok	Sanskrit verse
shradha	faith
sud	bright half of the lunar month

T

tamas	one of the three *gunas* responsible for indolence, sleep and evil
tamasik	person or thing which contains *tamas*
thal	food devotionally offered to *murti* of God
tilak	U-shaped holy mark of *chandan* applied on forehead

U

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

V

vad	dark half of lunar month
vairagya	detachment from material objects and pursuits
vastu	sanctification of a new home

Y

yagna	a ceremonial ritual performed as worship to earn the blessings of God
yagna kund	square mouthed pit or container used for a *yagna* ritual

A Good Child's
DAILY ROUTINE

Dear Children! We are the boys and girls of Maharaj and Swami. We have been born to earn their blessings. So, we should lead our daily routine according to their guidance. This includes the following...


Prayer on awakening


Bath and puja


Panchang pranam


Prayer before meals


School and homework


Bal sabha


Arti and ashtak


Satsang reading & ghar sabha



AGNA
(Moral Commands)

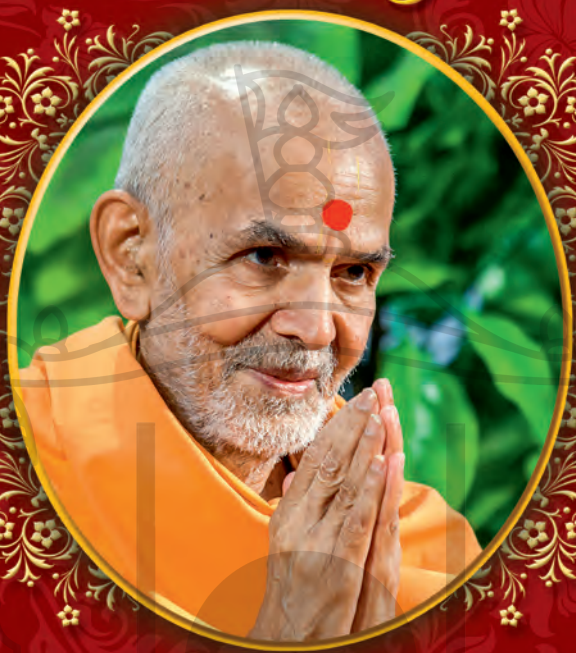
1. Kanthi
2. Puja and Panchang
3. Bal Sabha & Ghar Sabha
4. Arti and Ashtak
5. Purity of Diet
6. Satsang Reading and Satsang Exams
7. Avoid bad company
8. Study well

UPASANA
(Belief and Worship)

1. Gunatitanand is Mul Akshar
2. Sahajanand is Parmeshwar
3. The Pragat Satpurush is the gateway to moksha
4. Pride for BAPS

Let's Promise to Practice Satsang Forever

Blessings



Lifetime Satsang

સત્સંગ પરીક્ષાઓ સત્સંગમાં દૃઢતા કરશે. સત્સંગ કાયમ રહી શકે
તેવો પાયો કરશે. માટે સર્વે બાળકોએ અવશ્ય આપવી.

(Satsang exams will make you strong in satsang. They will strengthen your foundation. So, all children should appear for satsang exams.)

જય સ્વામિનારાયણ શાસ્ત્રી નારાયણસ્વરૂપદાસ
પ્રમુખ સ્વામી મહારાજ

(Jay Swaminarayan from Shastri Narayanswarupdas, Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

The fruit of Satsang Exams is Akshardham

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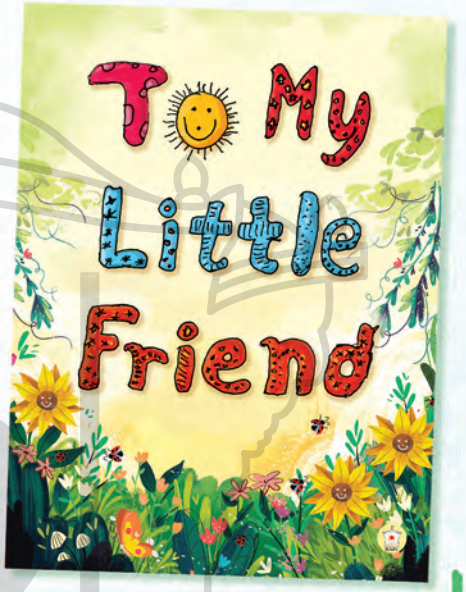
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ISBN: 978-81-7526-358-1

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STAY CONNECTED







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