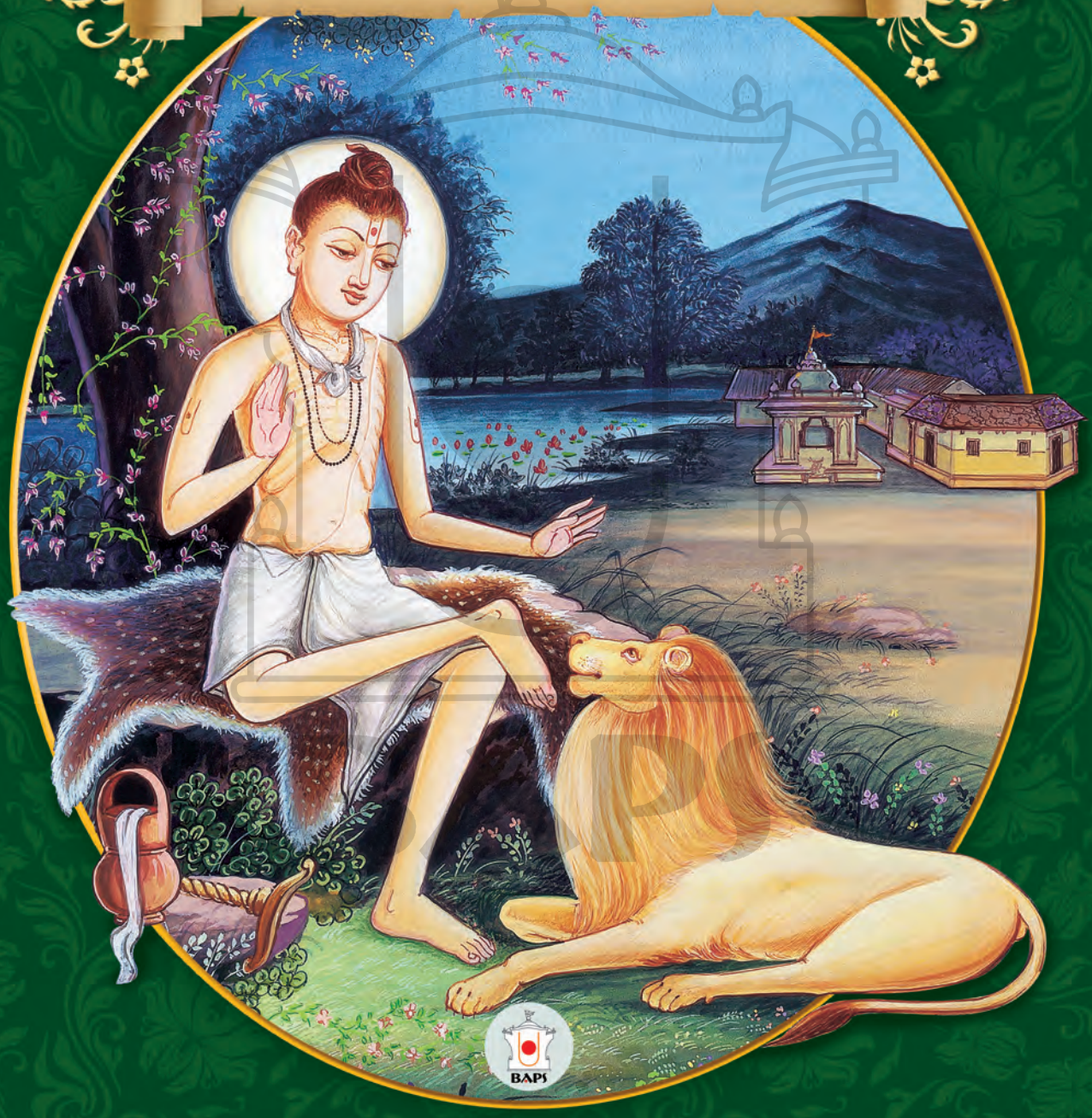
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**Shri Akshar Purushottam Maharaj**



Brahmaswarup
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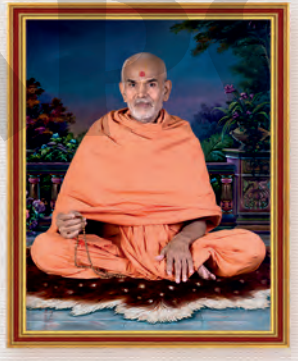
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An Introductory Study Programme of
BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism for Children

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Part 2



Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Ahmedabad

**Satsang Vihar, Part-2 (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)

**4th Edition:** December 2025

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

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

**ISBN:** 978-81-988674-8-3



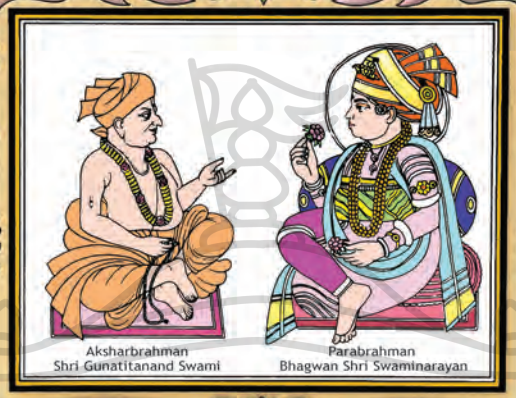
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**Published & Printed by**

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

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




# 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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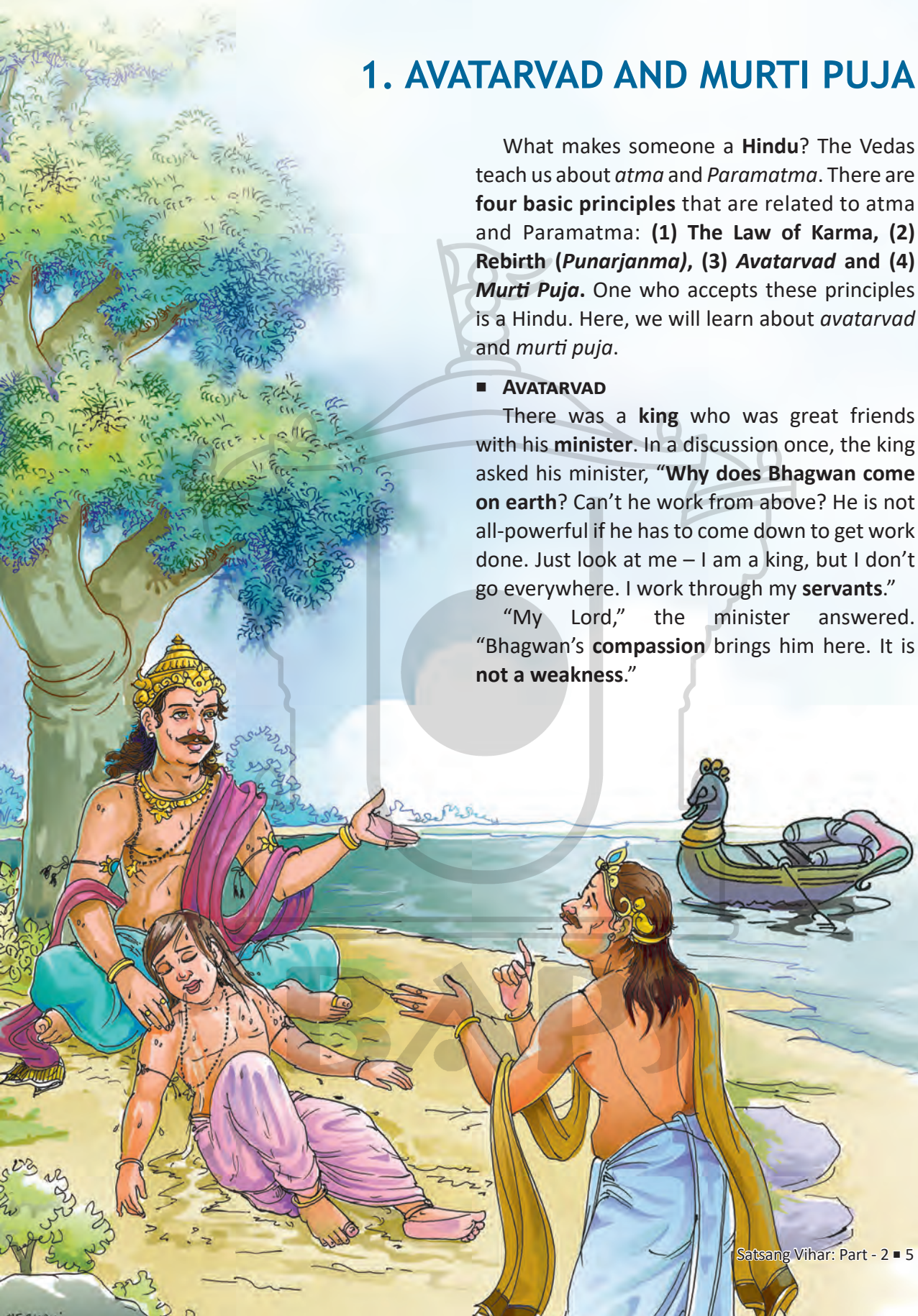
# 1. AVATARVAD AND MURTI PUJA

What makes someone a **Hindu**? The Vedas teach us about *atma* and *Paramatma*. There are **four basic principles** that are related to atma and Paramatma: **(1) The Law of Karma, (2) Rebirth (*Punarjanma)*, (3) *Avatarvad* and (4) *Murti Puja*.** One who accepts these principles is a Hindu. Here, we will learn about *avatarvad* and *murti puja*.

## ■ AVATARVAD

There was a **king** who was great friends with his **minister**. In a discussion once, the king asked his minister, **"Why does Bhagwan come on earth**? Can't he work from above? He is not all-powerful if he has to come down to get work done. Just look at me – I am a king, but I don't go everywhere. I work through my **servants**."

"My Lord," the minister answered. "Bhagwan's **compassion** brings him here. It is **not a weakness**."



The debate continued for some time and even got heated. The minister suggested, "Let's stop for now. I'll explain my answer when the time comes."

A few days later, the royal family went to **sail on the river**. The king and his minister were seated at the front of the boat. The queen and the prince were at the back, behind a curtain. Everyone was enjoying the scenery. All of a sudden, **the minister got up** and **tossed the prince into the river**.

The **king** was **furious**; yet, he pushed aside his anger and jumped into the river to save his son. But to his surprise, it was not his son in the water. It was a **wax statue**. Now, the king's rage was beyond control. He jumped



into the boat and roared at the minister, "You fool! How dare you trick me?"

The minister bowed and calmly replied, "Forgive me, Your Highness. It was not a trick. It was my answer to your question. First, tell me – why did you jump into the river yourself when you saw your son drowning? Why didn't you just send me or any of your servants?"

"He is my son!" the king responded. "How can I sit back when my own son is in trouble?"

"That's exactly what I am saying," the minister said. "**Bhagwan holds his devotees dear.** How can he bear to see **his loved ones drown in suffering**? **He himself comes to Earth** to protect them. He becomes like a human. He does all types of *lila* (divine actions) and grants his devotees happiness. He establishes dharma, destroys *adharma*, and liberates all. This is why I say – Bhagwan is not weak. He is compassionate. He loves his devotees."

The king understood the minister's words of wisdom and never again asked such a question.

In Vachanamrut Kariyani 5, Shriji Maharaj says, "The only reason Bhagwan assumes an **avatar** is to fulfil the wishes of his beloved devotees. He also grants liberation to countless *jivas* and establishes dharma."

This principle is known as *avatarvad*. According to this principle, **Shri Ram, Shri Krishna, Nrusinh and other avatars** came upon Earth. **Sarvavatari Shriji Maharaj** also came to earth according to this principle.

Hindus thus believe in the avatars and worship them. **One who believes in *avatarvad* is a Hindu**.

## ■ Murti Puja

**Yogiji Maharaj** was once in **Bhavnagar**. A devotee named Prabhudas had invited the sadhus to eat at his home.

Soon, the food was ready and it was time for ***thal***. The murti of Bhagwan was offered **ten *ladus***, *dal*, rice, vegetables, *bhajiya* and much more. Two glasses of water were also offered. The devotees asked Yogiji Maharaj, "Swami! Please pray that Maharaj and Swami accept the *thal* today."

Yogiji Maharaj smiled, "Sure. We will pray to Maharaj."

The curtains were closed. *"Āvajo Chhogalā Dhāri…, Jamo Thāl Jivan…, Jamone Jamādu…"* Yogiji Maharaj lovingly sang three *thals*. Thirty minutes passed.

When the curtains were opened, everyone was shocked. **Only five *ladus* were left!** Some of the *dal*, rice, vegetables and *bhajiya* were gone, too! And the water was completely gone!

**Bhagwan and his sant reside in the *murti*s.** They accept the devotion of devotees. This incident made everyone realise this truth.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I-68, Shriji Maharaj teaches, "Bhagwan himself has said, 'I forever reside in the eight types of *murti*s and in the sant.'"

The ***murti* of Shamalaji often came to play with Khushal Bhatt** (Gopalanand Swami). In Gadhada, **Lalji drank milk offered by Jivuba**. Countless such incidents prove ***murti puja*** to be true.

**One who believes in *murti puja* is a Hindu.**

# 2. WE REAP WHAT WE SOW

This incident is from the **Mahabharat**. King **Dhritrashtra** had **100 sons**. Duryodhan and Dushasan were the leaders of this group, which was known as the Kaurava clan. Greedy for power, the Kauravas waged war against the Pandavas (Yudhishthir and his four brothers). Since Shri Krishna Bhagwan was on the Pandavas' side, the Pandavas won the war. The Kauravas all were killed.

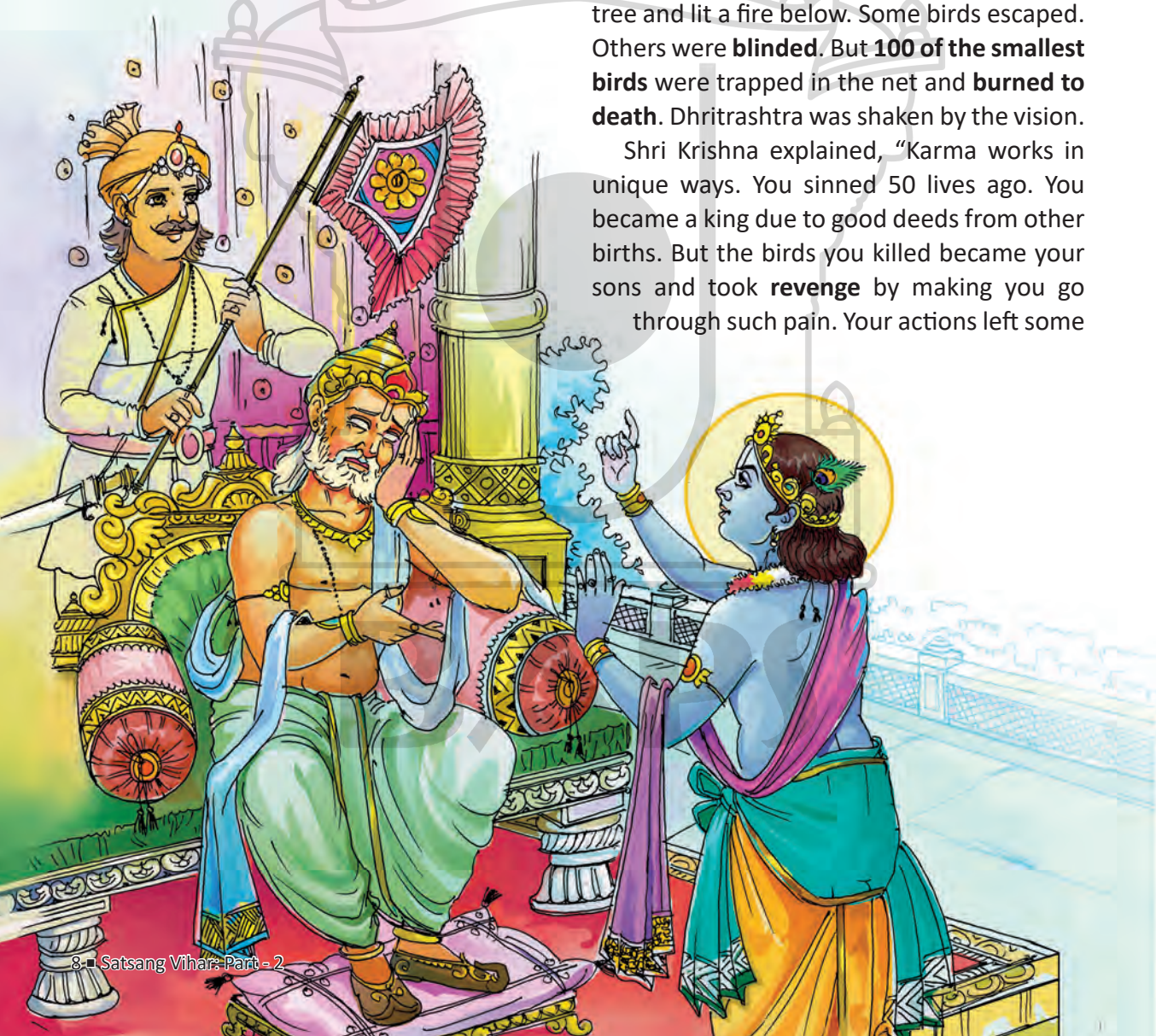
Dhritrashtra was very sad that **all his sons had died**. Nobody could ease his **pain**. Shri Krishna once came to meet him. "Prabhu!" Dhritrashtra asked. "Why were my 100 sons killed at once?"

"It is not because of anything you have done in this life," **Shri Krishna answered**. "It is the **fruit of sins committed** about **50 lives ago**."

"Which sin?" Dhritrashtra asked.

Shri Krishna gave Dhritrashtra a **vision** of the past. He saw himself as a **hunter** 50 lives ago. There were many **birds** seated atop a nearby **tree**. He threw a **net** on the tree and lit a fire below. Some birds escaped. Others were **blinded**. But **100 of the smallest birds** were trapped in the net and **burned to death**. Dhritrashtra was shaken by the vision.

Shri Krishna explained, "Karma works in unique ways. You sinned 50 lives ago. You became a king due to good deeds from other births. But the birds you killed became your sons and took **revenge** by making you go through such pain. Your actions left some





of the birds blind, as well. And so, you were born blind in this birth."

Dhritrashtra now understood **the Law of Karma – reap that which you sow, and earn according to your actions.**

## ■ The Three Types of Karma

There are three types of karma: (1) ***Kriyaman*** (Active) Karma (2) ***Sanchit*** (Stored) Karma (3) ***Prarabdha*** (Due) Karma.

Consider the example of a **storage container for grains** (see illustration in left-side corner above).

Just imagine that the grains represent a person's karmas. **The grains put in from the top represent *kriyaman* karma. The grains inside represent *sanchit* karma. And the grains that come out of the slot represent *prarabdha* karma.**

It is up to the owner what type of grains are put in from above. In the same way, ***kriyaman* karmas** are **in our hands**. We can decide whether we do good or bad karmas.

Once karmas are done, they are stored as *sanchit* karma. They come back to us as ***prarabdha* karma** when the time comes, just as the grains deposited eventually come out of the slot at the bottom. Whatever comes out as *prarabdha* karma **has to be accepted** and cannot be changed.

So, because of karma from previous lives, bad things can happen to good people. Bhagwan is the one who gives the fruits of karma. Bhagwan and the *Gunatit Sant* have no *prarabdha*, and they are not bound by karma. They can even change other people's *prarabdha* if they wish.

**One who believes in the law of karma is a Hindu.**

# 3. THE EVIL KALIDATTA MEETS HIS END

**Ghanshyam Maharaj** was born in Chhapaiya. His mother was Bhaktimata. His father was Dharmadev. Dharmadev and Bhaktimata were once busy with housework. Ghanshyam's **friends** came running over to play. They took Ghanshyam to a lake called Narayan Sarovar. They began playing in a **mango grove** east of the lake.

The boys were engrossed in playing a game of chase called ***ambli-pipli***. Just then, a ***rakshas* (demon)** named **Kalidatta** came. He grabbed for Ghanshyam. But with a glance from Ghanshyam, Kalidatta felt his insides burning. Furious, Kalidatta stepped back. He used **black magic** to create a ferocious **storm**. The sky grew **dark** and it began **raining**. The children shivered in the **cold** and screamed in fear.



But Ghanshyam was calm. Kalidatta charged towards him, shouting. Just then, something happened. In one instant, Kalidatta would see Ghanshyam under a tree; in the next, he would see him atop the tree. Had he gone crazy? Kalidatta quickly thought of an idea. He **transformed into a giant** and **fell on top of the tree**. The **tree was smashed** into a heap. Believing Ghanshyam to be crushed under that heap, Kalidatta let out a **roar of laughter.**

But when he lifted the branches, he saw Ghanshyam looking at him, smiling. It was as if the **branches** had **shielded** Ghanshyam! Kalidatta's anger knew no bounds. He did not realize that no one can defeat Bhagwan! Ghanshyam gave him a **stern glance. Kalidatta** felt a force pull him back. He got **stuck in his own wind storm**. He was slammed again and again, from one tree to another, and he soon **died**.

Ghanshyam stopped the storm. It became bright again. Dharmadev, Bhaktimata and Ghanshyam's friends came running forth. Bhaktimata hugged her beloved son. She was relieved that Ghanshyam was safe once again. Everyone went back home, happy as ever.

**This is Ghanshyam Maharaj! He is all-powerful. He is the all-doer. One who goes against him suffers the consequences. Indeed, Bhagwan should be worshipped, not opposed!**



# 4. NILKANTH'S KALYAN YATRA

It was **4 am** on Ashadh sud 10, Samvat 1849 (29 June 1792 CE). It was raining heavily in **Ayodhya**. The entire city was asleep. That is, all except for one small child – **Ghanshyam**.

Ghanshyam was about to take a historic step. He had liberated his parents. Now, he bowed to his sleeping family one last time and **left home**. And thus began his ***kalyan yatra***, his journey to liberate the world.



He dressed as a *varni*, or a yogi, and became known as **Nilkanth Varni**. He had a *jata* atop his head, a chandlo on his forehead and a *shaligram* tied around his neck. In one hand, he had a gourd and a cloth to filter water. In the other, he had a *mala* and a *palash dand*. He walked **barefoot**, all alone, and with no map to guide him. His heart was filled with only one desire – a wish to liberate everyone.

### 1. Fearlessness

The forest was dark. It was filled with dangerous animals. But Nilkanth was brave. Shriji Maharaj talks about his journey in the Vachanamrut:

"I liked to stay only in the forest. I was **not the least bit afraid**. Even when I came across large snakes, lions, elephants, and **countless other animals** I **always** remained **fearless** in the dense forest."

(Gadhada II–55)

### 2. Tapa

Nilkanth Varni did extreme ***tapa*** in **Pulhashram** for **four months** standing on **one leg**. There was snow everywhere, and the cold was bone-chilling.

Yet, Nilkanth was firm. He undertook many such observances. **Fasting**, too, was natural to him.

### 3. Tyag

Sadhus and *mahant*s told him, "Stay in our mandir. We will make you the ***mahant***." Kings told him, "Stay in my kingdom. I will make you the **king** and give you my **daughters** as your queens." But Nilkanth always **left those offers behind**.

### 4. Kalyan

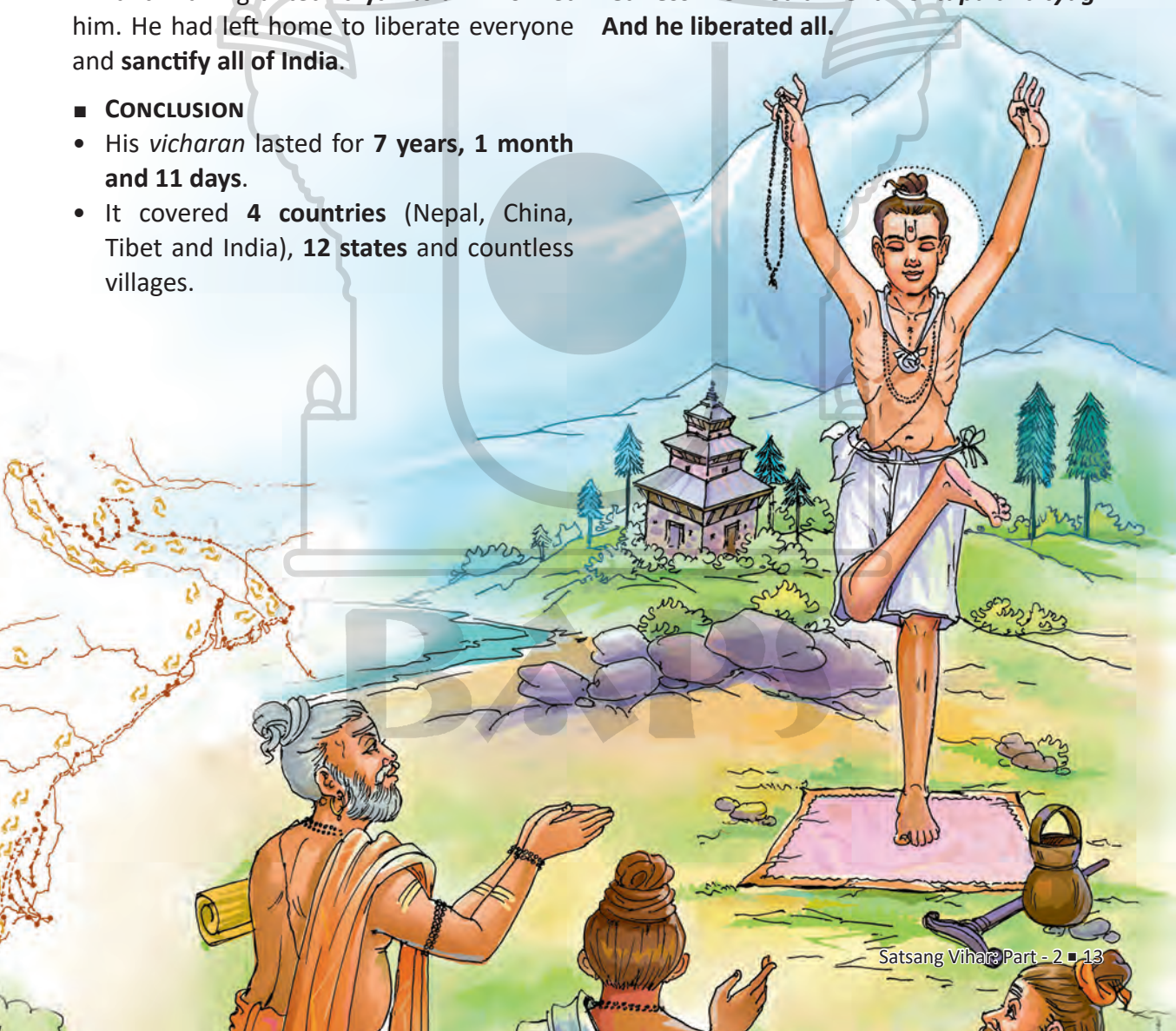
**Sadhus, *mahant*s, ascetics**, sannyasis, **kings,** spirits **and even birds and animals…** Nilkanth Varni granted **kalyan** to **all** who met him. He had left home to liberate everyone and **sanctify all of India**.

### ■ Conclusion

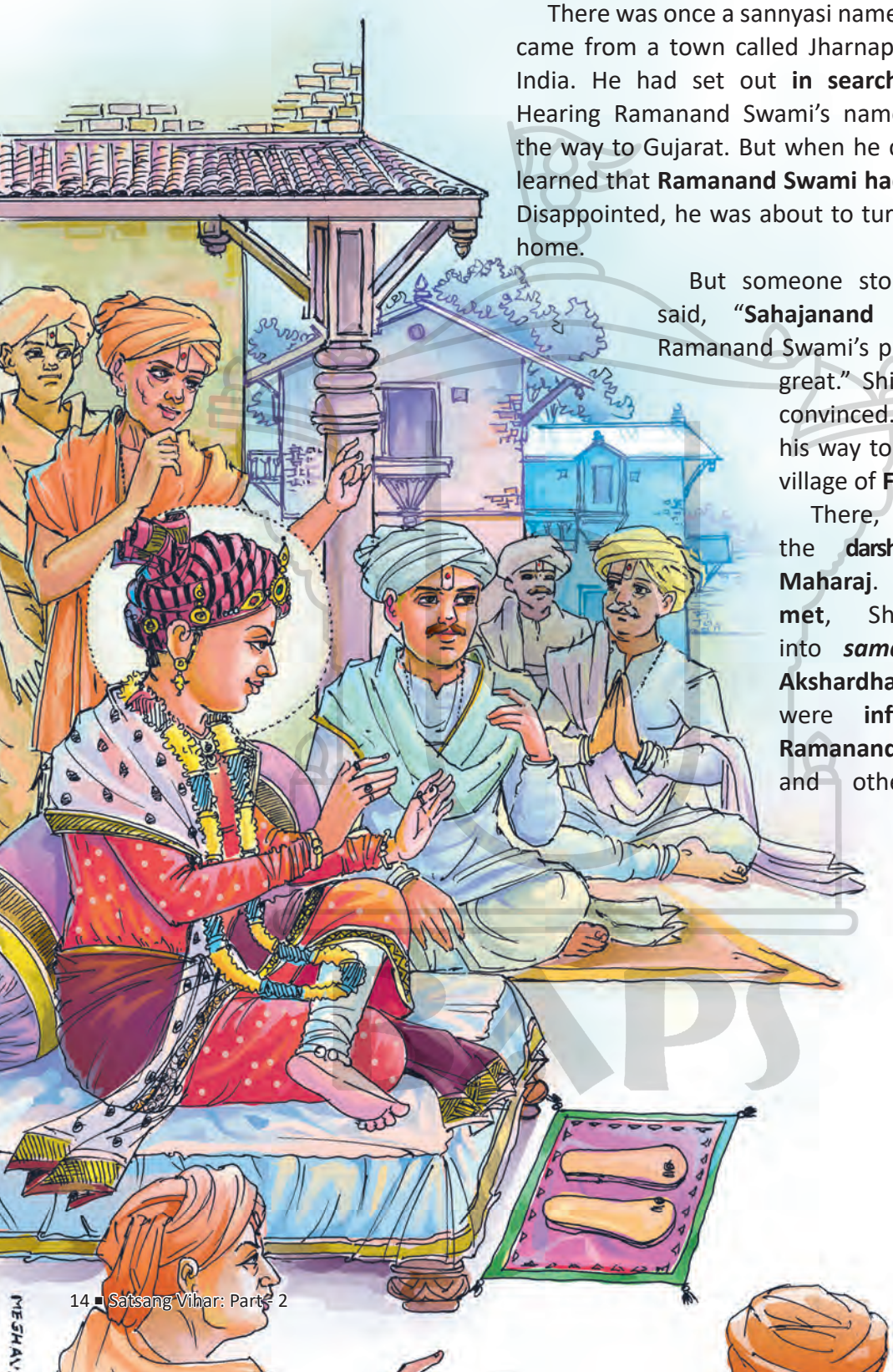
- His *vicharan* lasted for **7 years, 1 month and 11 days**.
- It covered **4 countries** (Nepal, China, Tibet and India), **12 states** and countless villages.
- It was **12,000 kilometres** long. His **journey ended** on Shravan vad 6, Samvat 1856 (21 August 1799 CE) in **Loj**.

Why did it end in Loj? Well, wherever Varni went, he **asked about the** nature of **five eternal realities** – *jiva, ishwar, maya,* Brahma and Parabrahma. Nobody could answer correctly. But in Ramanand Swami's ashram in Loj, **Muktanand Swami** gave a satisfactory **explanation**. He also saw that people in this ashram followed dharma. His journey thus came to an end.

**Nilkanth Varni was truly great. He was fearless. He lived a life full of *tapa* and *tyag*. And he liberated all.**



# 5. SARVOPARI BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN



There was once a sannyasi named **Shitaldas**. He came from a town called Jharnaparna in Central India. He had set out **in search of Bhagwan**. Hearing Ramanand Swami's name, he came all the way to Gujarat. But when he came to **Loj**, he learned that **Ramanand Swami had passed away**. Disappointed, he was about to turn back towards home.

But someone stopped him and said, "**Sahajanand Swami** is in Ramanand Swami's place. He is very great." Shitaldas was not convinced. Yet, he made his way to a ***sabha*** in the village of **Faneni**.

There, Shitaldas had the **darshan of Shriji Maharaj**. As their **eyes met**, Shitaldas went into ***samadhi*.** He saw **Akshardham**. In it were **infinite *muktas***, **Ramanand Swami,** and others. Everyone

was **praying to Shriji Maharaj**. Shitaldas performed **Shriji Maharaj's *pujan***. He also **wanted** to do ***pujan*** of the **infinite *muktas***.

Knowing his desire, Shriji Maharaj told him, "Make a **wish** that if these **muktas** or Ramanand Swami are Purushottam (***sarvopari*** bhagwan), let me have infinite forms."

Shitaldas did accordingly, but **nothing happened**. Then, Shriji Maharaj told him, "**Wish again** that if **I (Shriji Maharaj)** am ***sarvopari***, let me have infinite forms."

As soon as Shitaldas thought this, he indeed **appeared** in **infinite forms**. He then did *pujan* of everyone at once.

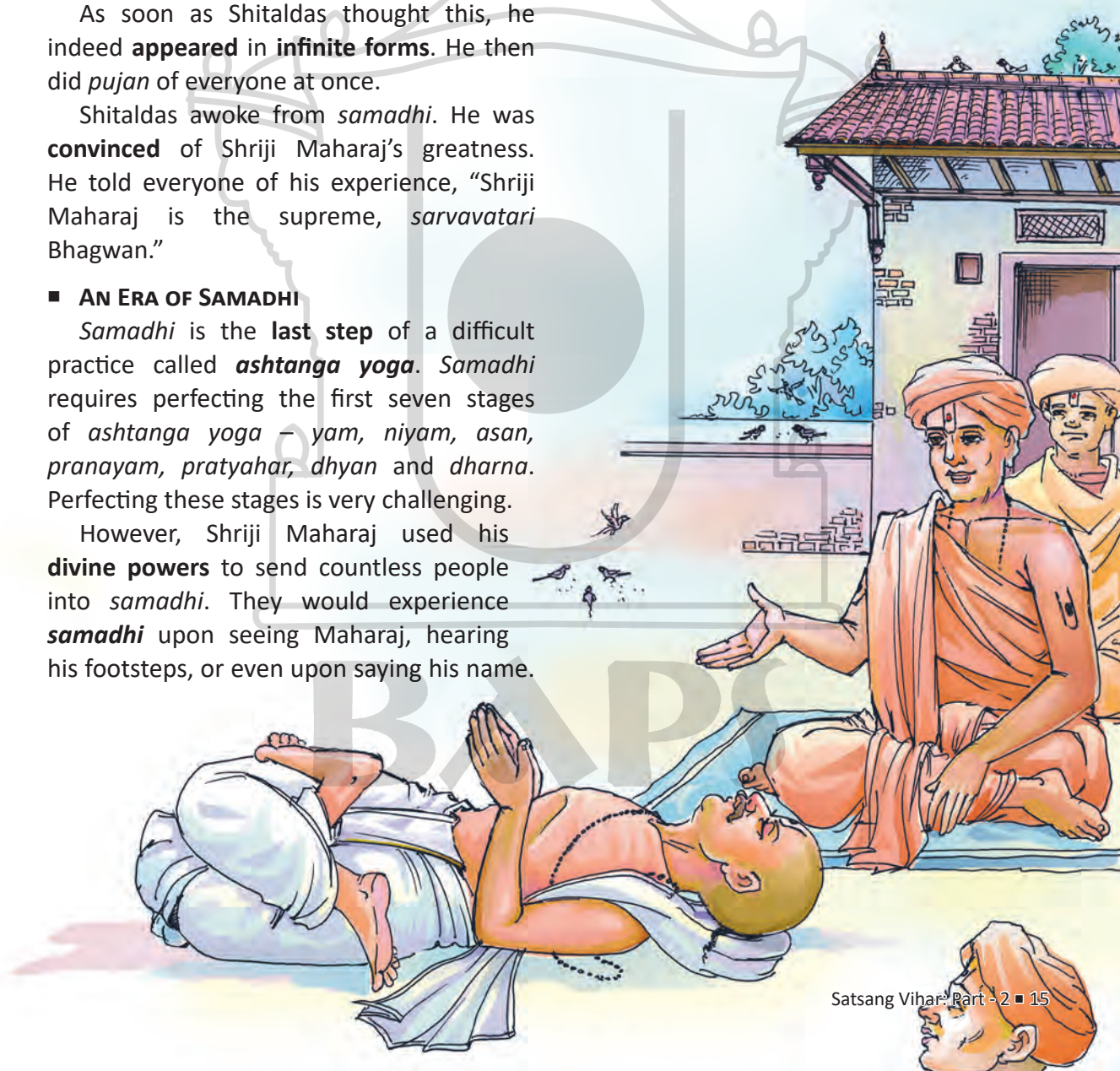
Shitaldas awoke from *samadhi*. He was **convinced** of Shriji Maharaj's greatness. He told everyone of his experience, "Shriji Maharaj is the supreme, *sarvavatari* Bhagwan."

### ■ An Era of Samadhi

*Samadhi* is the **last step** of a difficult practice called ***ashtanga yoga***. *Samadhi* requires perfecting the first seven stages of *ashtanga yoga – yam, niyam, asan, pranayam, pratyahar, dhyan* and *dharna*. Perfecting these stages is very challenging.

However, Shriji Maharaj used his **divine powers** to send countless people into *samadhi*. They would experience ***samadhi*** upon seeing Maharaj, hearing his footsteps, or even upon saying his name. Their bodies would remain on earth, stiff and motionless as a log of wood. And **their souls would travel to Akshardham** to be with Bhagwan. Those who went into *samadhi* would see infinite muktas **worshipping Shriji Maharaj**. Nobody had ever experienced *samadhi* so easily before. This is one of the many ways by which we can know that Shriji Maharaj is *sarvopari* bhagwan.

**Such is Shriji Maharaj's greatness! He is the *sarvavatari.* He forever possesses a divine form. And he is *sarvopari* Bhagwan.**



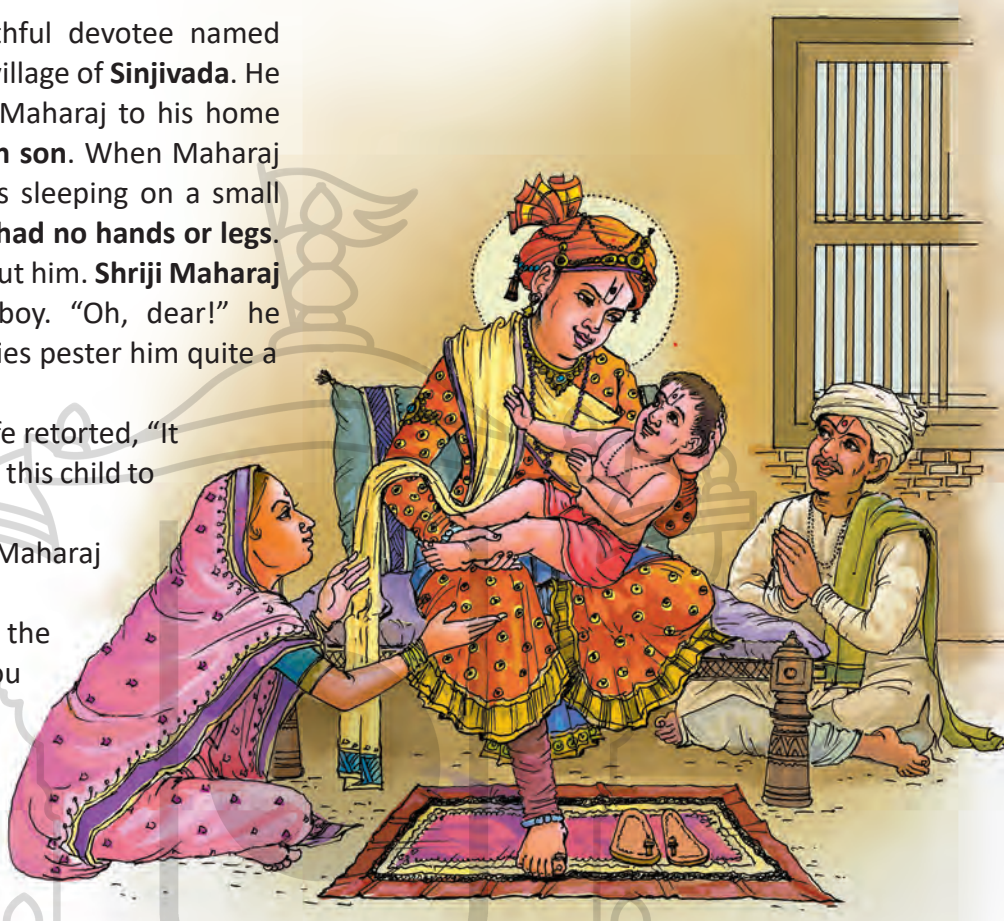
# 6. BHAGWAN IS THE ALL-DOER

There was a faithful devotee named **Jagrup Barot** in the village of **Sinjivada**. He once brought Shriji Maharaj to his home to bless his **newborn son**. When Maharaj arrived, the boy was sleeping on a small bed. The poor child **had no hands or legs**. And flies buzzed about him. **Shriji Maharaj felt sorry** for the boy. "Oh, dear!" he exclaimed. "These flies pester him quite a bit, it seems."

Jagrup Barot's wife retorted, "It was you who gave us this child to serve, was it not?"

"Really?" Shriji Maharaj asked.

"Why of course!" the lady replied. "You alone are Bhagwan. Who other than you could it be?"



Smiling at the woman's words, Maharaj went to the boy's bed. Shriji Maharaj took the child in his lap. Miraculously, he **tugged two arms** and **two legs out** of the boy's torso! The child began laughing and playing like an ordinary child! Everyone was awestruck and pleased. Shriji Maharaj handed the child to Jagrupbhai and said, "This is the child that I have given you. **Name** him **Prabhudas**."

Prabhudas grew up to be a good devotee.

◈◈◈

A *sabha* was once held in **Gadhada**. A discussion was going on amongst the devotees.

"What are you all whispering about?" Shriji Maharaj asked.

"Maharaj!" **Sura Khachar** began. "This is the rainy season, but **it has not yet rained**. If it doesn't rain soon, our crops will dry up and..."

"How much rain is needed?" Maharaj asked.

"At least enough to fill the lake," someone answered.

Maharaj looked around the assembly. He spotted a devotee named **Pujaji** from the village of **Methan**. "**If Pujaji says so, it will surely rain**," **Maharaj offered**. "You have my blessings."

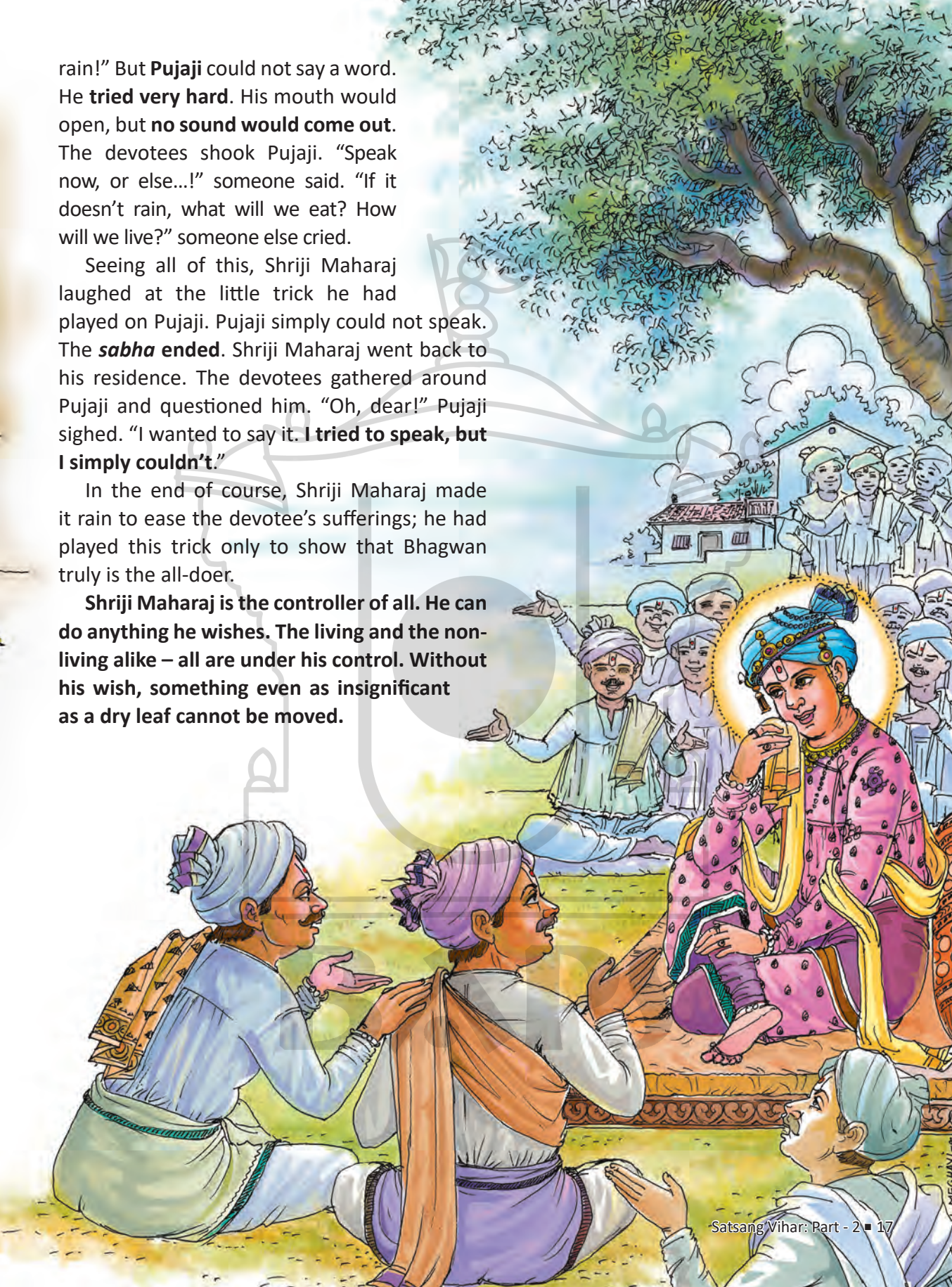
The devotees were overjoyed. They exclaimed, "Quickly, Pujaji! Say that it will

rain!" But **Pujaji** could not say a word. He **tried very hard**. His mouth would open, but **no sound would come out**. The devotees shook Pujaji. "Speak now, or else…!" someone said. "If it doesn't rain, what will we eat? How will we live?" someone else cried.

Seeing all of this, Shriji Maharaj laughed at the little trick he had played on Pujaji. Pujaji simply could not speak. The ***sabha* ended**. Shriji Maharaj went back to his residence. The devotees gathered around Pujaji and questioned him. "Oh, dear!" Pujaji sighed. "I wanted to say it. **I tried to speak, but I simply couldn't**."

In the end of course, Shriji Maharaj made it rain to ease the devotee's sufferings; he had played this trick only to show that Bhagwan truly is the all-doer.

**Shriji Maharaj is the controller of all. He can do anything he wishes. The living and the non-living alike – all are under his control. Without his wish, something even as insignificant as a dry leaf cannot be moved.**



# 7. BHAGWAN'S WORDS ALWAYS COME TRUE

In **Bochasan**, there is a small Ramji mandir. **Nilkanth Varni** once came there. A man named Kandas heard of Nilkanth's divinity. He told his son, Kashidas, "Go and call this Varni here." Kashidas did as his father said. Nilkanth accepted the invitation and soon came to Kashidas's home.

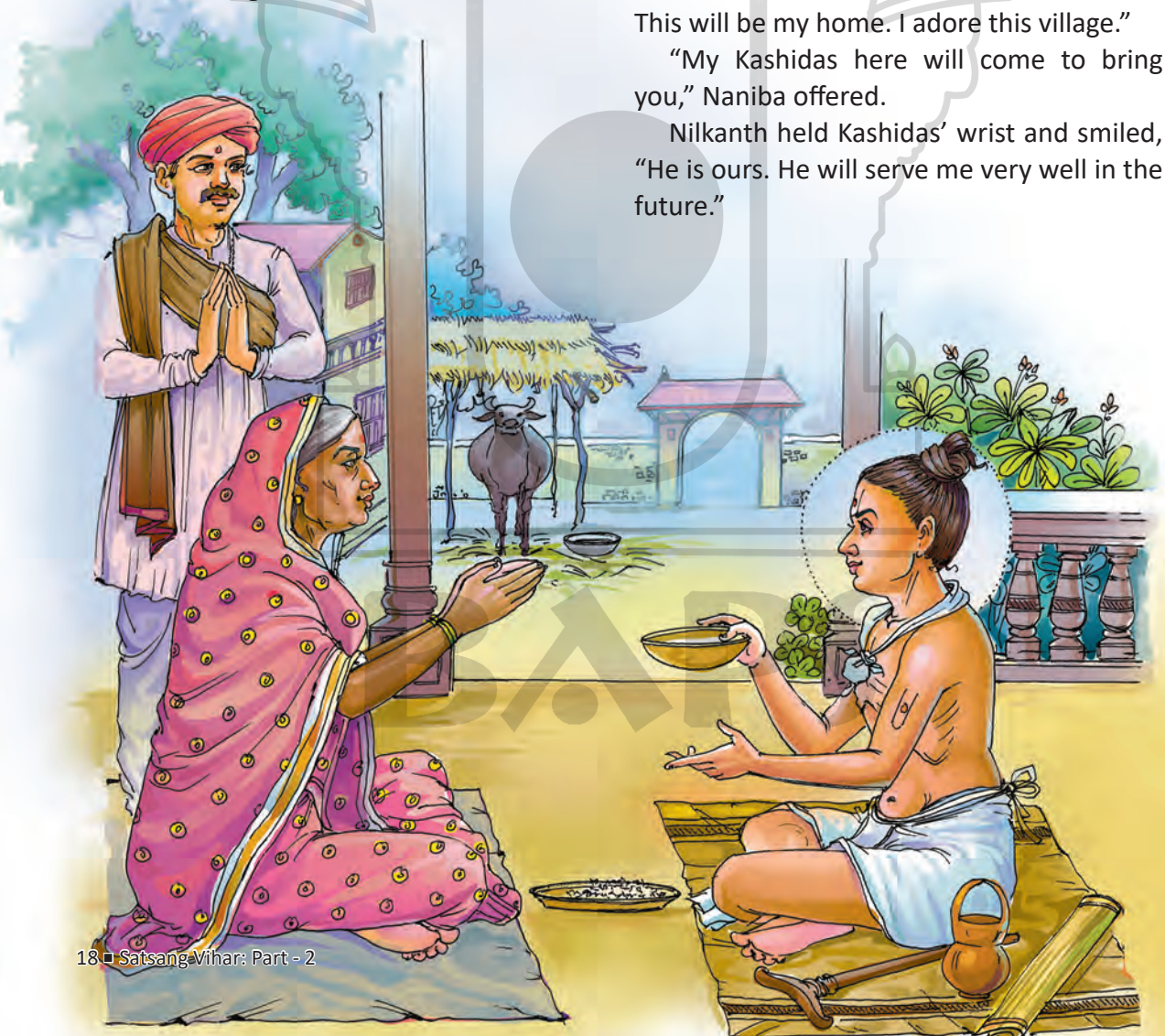
**Kashidas' mother**, **Naniba**, was overwhelmed with joy upon seeing Nilkanth. Seeing her love, Nilkanth requested, "Mother, please bring me some *ladus*." Naniba **went to get the *ladus***. But they had not yet been offered to Bhagwan. And so, she was unsure of what to do. So, Nilkanth said, "If not *ladus*, bring **milk and rice**."

Naniba was worried again. It was not time yet for her buffalo to give milk. From where could she get milk at such a time? But, just then, her **buffalo came running forth** and allowed Naniba to milk her. Naniba thus made **rice and milk** and **served** it to Nilkanth. "Brahmachari!" she said. "Please come tomorrow as well. I have yet to serve you *ladus*."

"Mother, not tomorrow," Nilkanth replied. "But **I will come here often in the future**. This will be my home. I adore this village."

"My Kashidas here will come to bring you," Naniba offered.

Nilkanth held Kashidas' wrist and smiled, "He is ours. He will serve me very well in the future."



**Varni** then went back to the **Ramji mandir**. He performed *arti* there. And he told the ***mahant***, "**These *murti*s will reside in the majestic mandir that will stand here in the future.**"

The townspeople were smitten by Nilkanth. "Varni, please stay with us!" they exclaimed.

But the *mahant* did not like this idea. "What will this child do here?" he cried. "He is not needed!"

Nilkanth smiled, "I am not one to stay in such a small mandir. **A glorious abode will be made for me here in the future.**"

Shriji Maharaj's **words came true 108 years later** when Shastriji Maharaj made a beautiful mandir in Bochasan. (The **Ramji mandir's *murti*s** give darshan today in Bochasan mandir's ground-floor ***rang mandap***).

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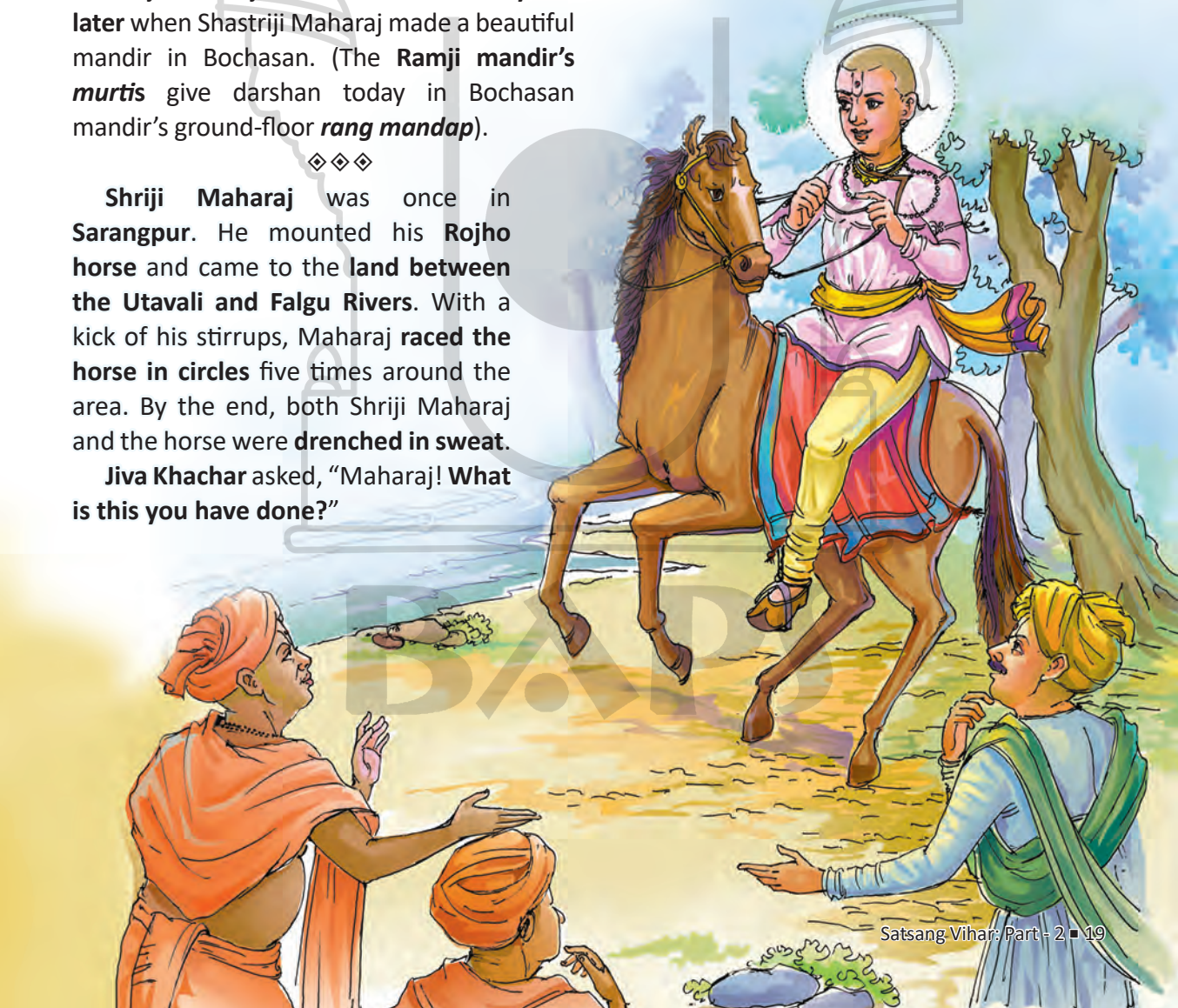
**Shriji Maharaj** was once in **Sarangpur**. He mounted his **Rojho horse** and came to the **land between the Utavali and Falgu Rivers**. With a kick of his stirrups, Maharaj **raced the horse in circles** five times around the area. By the end, both Shriji Maharaj and the horse were **drenched in sweat**.

**Jiva Khachar** asked, "Maharaj! **What is this you have done?**"

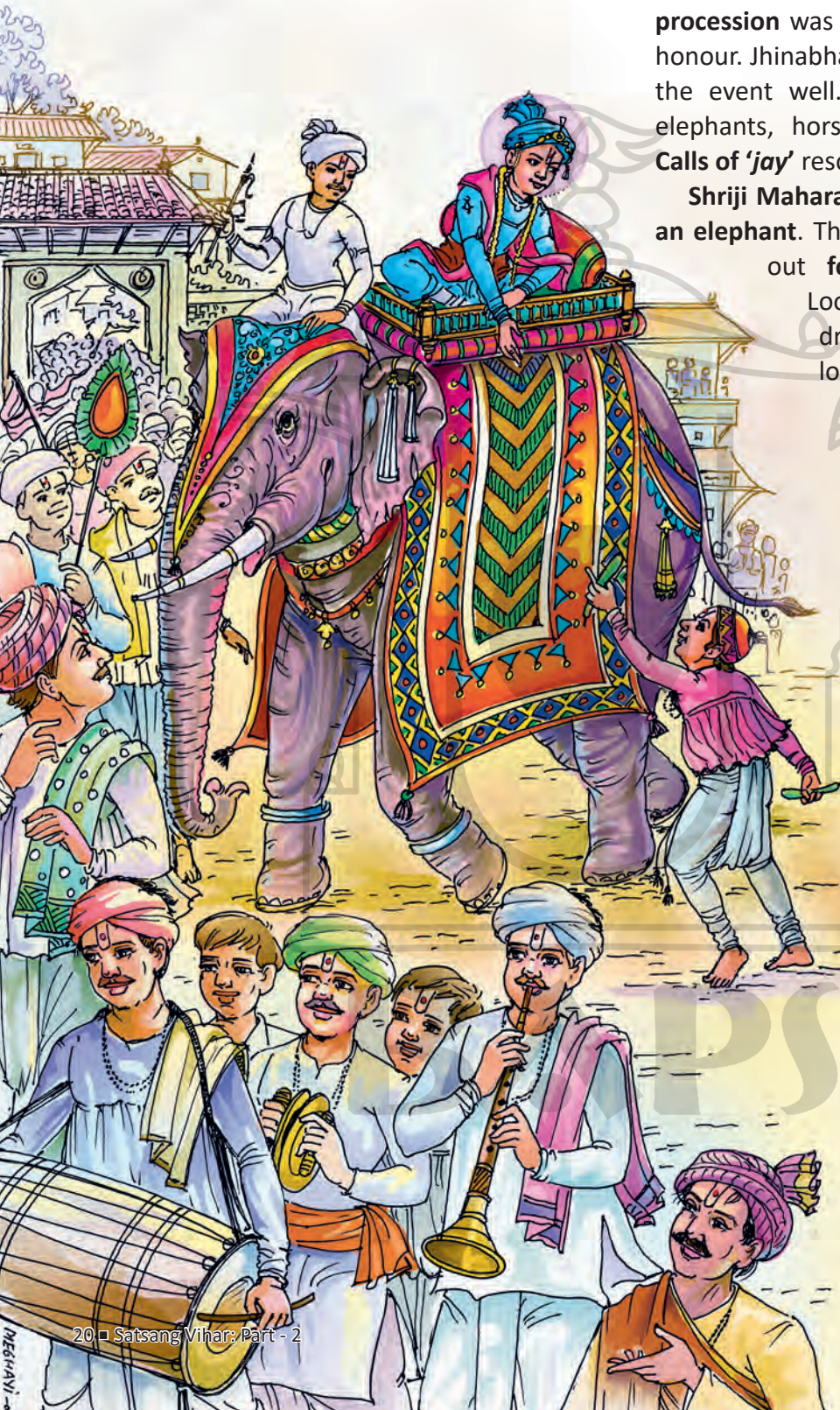
Maharaj answered, "I **have just completed the ground-breaking ceremony for a large mandir** that will be built 100 years from now on the land where I rode this horse. I will **stay in this mandir along with my Akshardham.**"

Nobody understood Shriji Maharaj's words at the time. But his words came true ten decades later when Shastriji Maharaj built a three-story mandir dedicated to Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on that exact location.

**Shriji Maharaj was truly great! His words about the future were never wrong. Whatever he said always came true.**



# 8. SHRI HARI'S LOVE FOR CHILDREN



Once in **Junagadh**, a grand **procession** was held in Shriji Maharaj's honour. Jhinabhai Darbar had organised the event well. There were chariots, elephants, horses, music and dance. **Calls of '*jay*'** resounded from all sides.

**Shriji Maharaj** was seated **on top of an elephant**. The **entire city had come** out **for his darshan**. "Oh! Look how beautifully he is dressed! How graceful he looks!" people praised.

The procession came to **Diwan Chowk**, where the Nawab (King)'s palace was. A small **child** had come from a **village** far away to see Shriji Maharaj that day. In his hands were sweet, **soft cucumbers**. He had grown them himself.

"How great it would be if Shriji Maharaj were to eat my cucumbers!" he thought.

Shriji Maharaj sensed the child's wish. Nothing is unknown to Bhagwan. With a glance, **Shriji Maharaj** called him close and **signalled** him to **toss the cucumbers** up to where he was seated on the elephant.

The child did as he was told. One... two... three! Shriji Maharaj nicely caught all three cucumbers. Now, the child signalled for Shriji Maharaj to eat the cucumbers. Despite being at the centre of attention **in such a royal and formal procession, Shriji Maharaj began to eat the cucumbers**!

He held one cucumber in each hand. He had no worries about what others would say and felt no shame. To him, he was not just eating a cucumber; more important was that he accepting **a child's love.**

The boy danced in delight.

Everyone was pleased to see Shriji Maharaj's compassion. That is, everyone except for **Mangalji Diwan**, who was watching from the palace balcony alongside **Nawab Hamid Khan.** Mangalji was the nawab's minister. He had a great dislike for Maharaj.

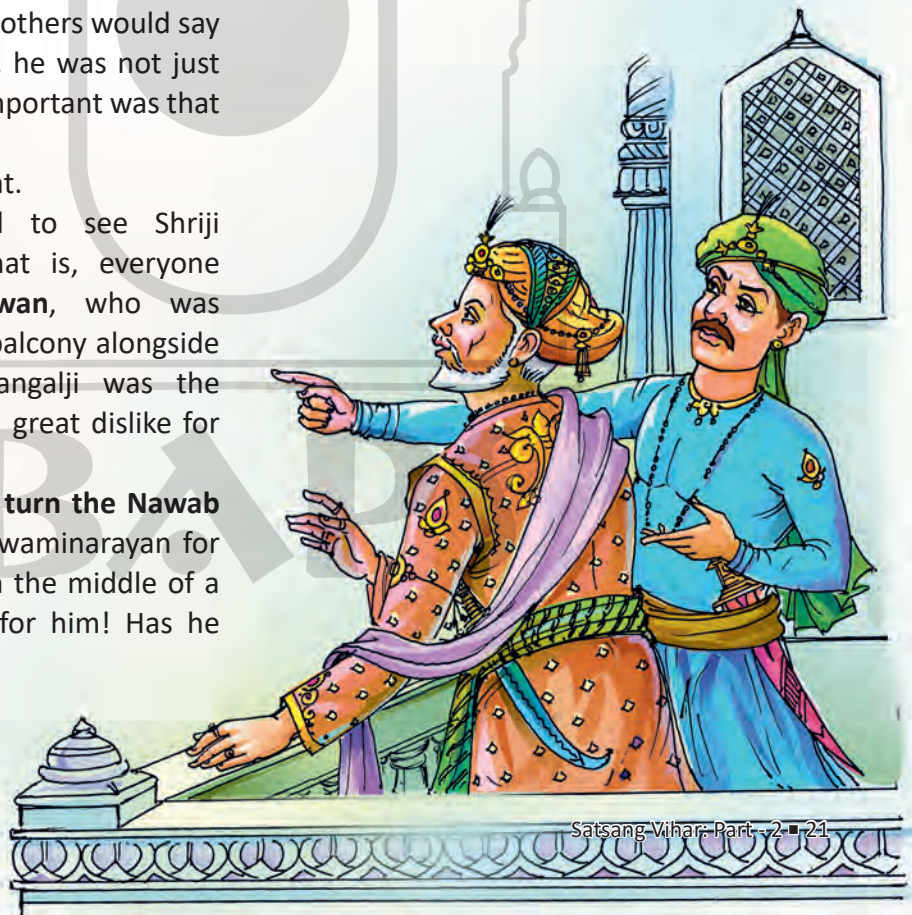
"Ha!" he said, **trying to turn the Nawab against Maharaj**. "That's Swaminarayan for you... eating a cucumber in the middle of a procession organised just for him! Has he no shame? **Has he no manners? I wouldn't even consider him human!** What do you say?"

The **Nawab** answered, "I agree. He is not human. **He is Bhagwan! Who does Bhagwan have to fear?** No one other than him could eat a cucumber while being paraded on an elephant!"

Mangalji was taken aback. Shriji Maharaj blessed the Nawab from afar. **His beautiful *murti* found a place in the Nawab's heart.** Just **before passing away**, the Nawab **remembered Shriji Maharaj**. Shriji Maharaj gave him darshan and granted him **peace**.

**Such was Shriji Maharaj's greatness!**

**Even if it's just a small child from a simple village who has brought an ordinary gift... Even if the child wished for something as unbecoming as for Maharaj to eat the present during a parade, Maharaj would fulfil his wish. All Bhagwan asks for is devotion. Certainly, Bhagwan truly loves his devotees.**




MEGHAVI

# 9. TODAY, MY HEART BRIMS WITH JOY!

"Oh! Where have all these pieces of jute come from?" Devji asked, surprised.

Mohanbhai answered, "Shriji Maharaj has ordered them. But no one knows what for."

As the jute continued to arrive, it was organised in neat piles. Seeing it coming in, the devotees' and sadhus' curiosity grew.

"Must all these pieces of jute have been ordered to build a tent?" Ravji asked.

"But there are no *utsavs* coming up," Shamji reasoned. "Maybe they've been ordered to store grains?!"

Hearing these words, Joravar Bapu offered, "We'll only know once Shriji Maharaj comes."

Just as they were speaking, Shriji Maharaj arrived. He called all the *paramhansas* close and said, "Today, I shall ask you to follow a new *niyam*."

The *paramhansas* grew anxious to follow Shriji Maharaj's words.

Shriji Maharaj then pronounced his *agna*, "From today, every *paramhansa* shall wear this here jute. Each person shall receive three arm lengths of material."

The *paramhansas* took up Shriji Maharaj's *agna* straight away. One by one, they came to him to receive their cloth.

It was soon Brahmanand Swami's turn. According to the rule, Shriji Maharaj gave Brahmanand Swami three arm lengths of jute.

Seeing it, Brahmanand Swami requested, "Maharaj! I'm large. For someone my size, this much won't do. Please give me a bit more."

"Rules are rules," Maharaj replied firmly. "They can't be changed."

Brahmanand Swami wittily pleaded, "But with just this much jute, if I try to cover one side of myself, the other side of me will remain bare!"

Maharaj replied just as playfully, "Then shrink yourself by doing some fasting."

Brahmanand Swami answered, "Maharaj! How can I shrink myself so quickly?"

So saying, Brahmanand Swami had a clever idea. He began peering off into the distance – up, down, and all around.

"What are you seeking?" Maharaj asked.

Brahmanand responded, "Not on any one inch of this earth's land do I see anyone other than you who is Bhagwan. Nowhere else does such fortune exist. So, I have no option but to stay here with you."

Shriji Maharaj was greatly pleased to see Brahmanand Swami's faith. With that, he granted Brahmanand Swami a larger-sized piece of jute to wear.

Friends, Shriji Maharaj's *paramhansas* had such strong faith. They had met *sarvopari* Bhagwan, the *sarvavatari* himself. And they were always joyful because of this. They believed themselves to be extremely fortunate.

It was for this very reason that Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami wrote,

*"Aj anand mara urama, mali mane maha monghi vat re..."*

*(Today, my heart brims with joy, for what I have obtained is invaluable...)*

*"Koti kashta kare Hari nava male, te to mane maliya sakshata re..."*

*(Even if we go through countless hardships, we cannot meet Bhagwan. But this very Bhagwan himself we have met today.)*

# 10. BHAGWAN IS DIVINE

The **Shakotsav** of **Loya** is famous in *satsang*. Forty large furnaces had been created in **Sura Khachar's *darbar,*** and big pots had been placed atop them. Stir-fried, stuffed eggplant was on the menu. All of the vegetables and spices needed were ready.

**Shriji Maharaj** soon arrived to prepare the **stir-fry mix**. Once the **vegetables** were put in, he **mixed** them with an enormous ladle. He began to **sweat** due to the heat coming from the wooden stove. He was wearing a **short dhoti**, which he used to wipe the **spices** from his **hands**.

Just then, a **group** of 150 **devotees** came. Amongst them were **Kandas of Buva** and **Kashidas of Bochasan**. As soon as Kashidas had Maharaj's **darshan,** he began doing *dandvats*.

"Kashidas!" Kandas was curious. "Who are you doing *dandvats* to?"

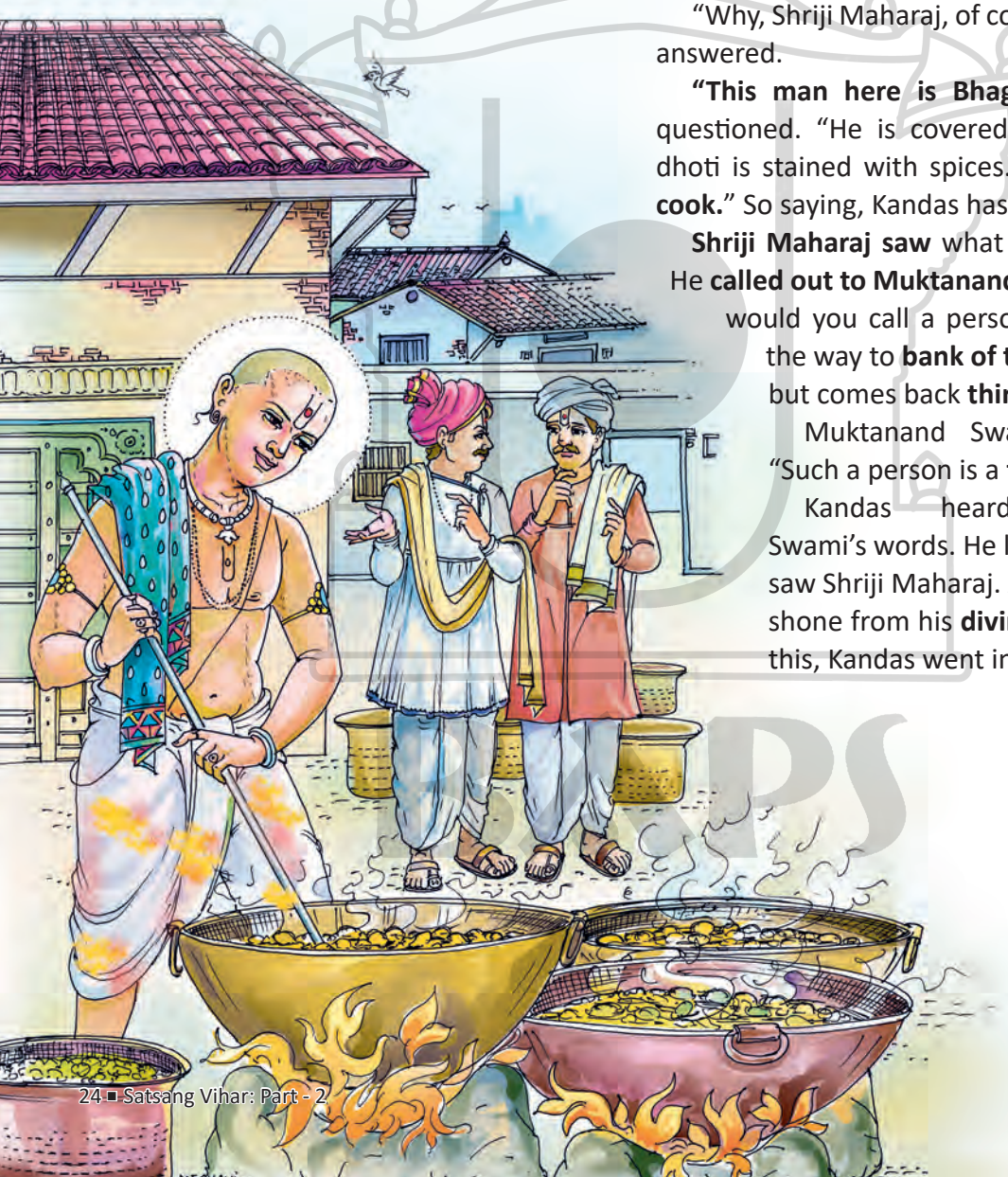
"Why, Shriji Maharaj, of course!" Kashidas answered.

**"This man here is Bhagwan?" Kandas** questioned. "He is covered in sweat... his dhoti is stained with spices... **he is a mere cook.**" So saying, Kandas hastily walked off.

**Shriji Maharaj saw** what had happened. He **called out to Muktanand Swami**, "What would you call a person who goes all the way to **bank of the Ganga River** but comes back **thirsty**?"

Muktanand Swami answered, "Such a person is a **fool**!"

Kandas heard Muktanand Swami's words. He looked back and saw Shriji Maharaj. A peaceful glow shone from his **divine form**. Seeing this, Kandas went into ***samadhi***.



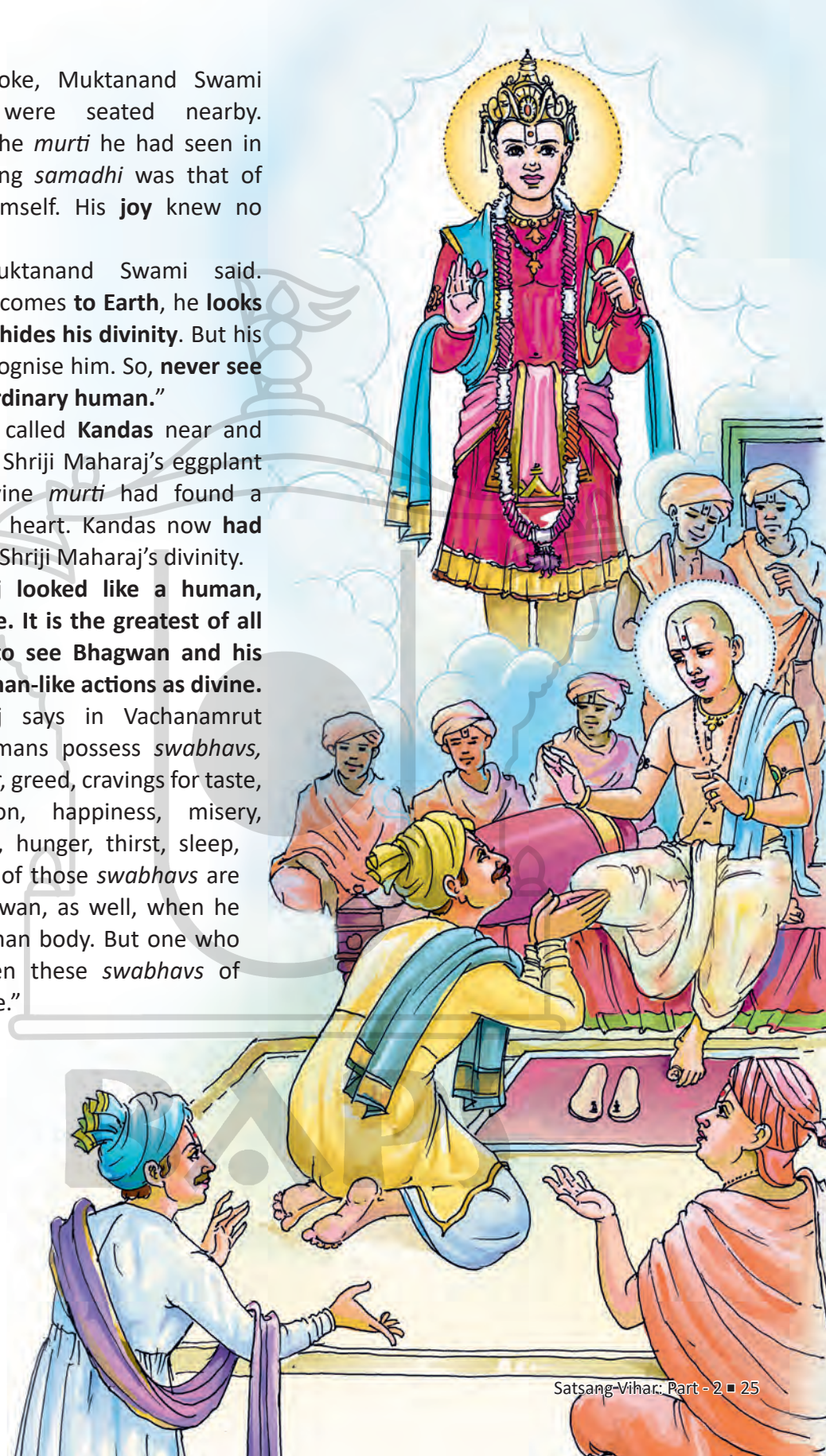
When he awoke, Muktanand Swami and Kashidas were seated nearby. Kandas realised the *murti* he had seen in Akshardham during *samadhi* was that of Shriji Maharaj himself. His **joy** knew no bounds.

"Kandas!" Muktanand Swami said. "When **Bhagwan** comes **to Earth**, he **looks like a human**. He **hides his divinity**. But his true devotees recognise him. So, **never see Bhagwan as an ordinary human.**"

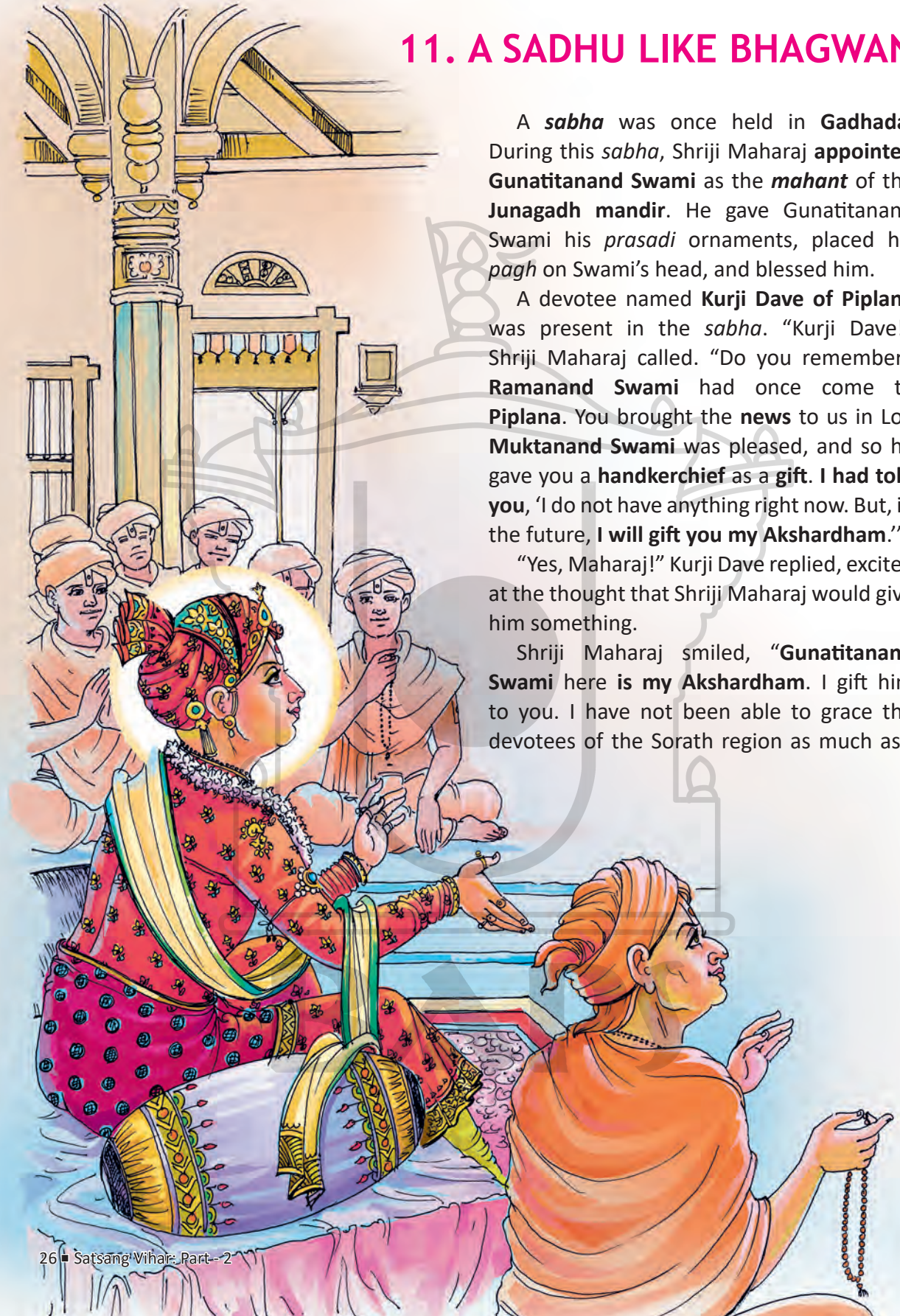
Shriji Maharaj called **Kandas** near and gave him *prasad*. Shriji Maharaj's eggplant dish and his divine *murti* had found a place in Kandas's heart. Kandas now **had complete faith** in Shriji Maharaj's divinity.

**Shriji Maharaj looked like a human, but he was divine. It is the greatest of all spiritual efforts to see Bhagwan and his ideal sadhu's human-like actions as divine.**

Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Panchala 4, "Humans possess *swabhavs,* such as lust, anger, greed, cravings for taste, egotism, affection, happiness, misery, fear, fearlessness, hunger, thirst, sleep, and partiality; all of those *swabhavs* are apparent in Bhagwan, as well, when he takes upon a human body. But one who is wise sees even these *swabhavs* of Bhagwan as divine."



# 11. A SADHU LIKE BHAGWAN



A ***sabha*** was once held in **Gadhada**. During this *sabha*, Shriji Maharaj **appointed Gunatitanand Swami** as the ***mahant*** of the **Junagadh mandir**. He gave Gunatitanand Swami his *prasadi* ornaments, placed his *pagh* on Swami's head, and blessed him.

A devotee named **Kurji Dave of Piplana** was present in the *sabha*. "Kurji Dave!" Shriji Maharaj called. "Do you remember? **Ramanand Swami** had once come to **Piplana**. You brought the **news** to us in Loj. **Muktanand Swami** was pleased, and so he gave you a **handkerchief** as a **gift**. **I had told you**, 'I do not have anything right now. But, in the future, **I will gift you my Akshardham**.'"

"Yes, Maharaj!" Kurji Dave replied, excited at the thought that Shriji Maharaj would give him something.

Shriji Maharaj smiled, "**Gunatitanand Swami** here **is my Akshardham**. I gift him to you. I have not been able to grace the devotees of the Sorath region as much as I

would have liked. Therefore, **I am giving you** this sadhu. He is my everything. He is my Akshardham."

Shriji Maharaj then turned to Gunatitanand Swami and said, "**In this life alone**, I will destroy the sins of **ten million lives** of one who comes to **Junagadh, does satsang and serves** according to your wishes."

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**Junagadh's mandir** was soon complete. The ***pratishtha*** was held amidst great celebration. The city's ruler, **Nawab Gajefar Khan,** came to the mandir for darshan. He bowed to Shriji Maharaj and humbly said, "When you were **given the land** for this mandir, you had **promised** that you would **stay** here **forever**. Please, therefore, do not go elsewhere now."

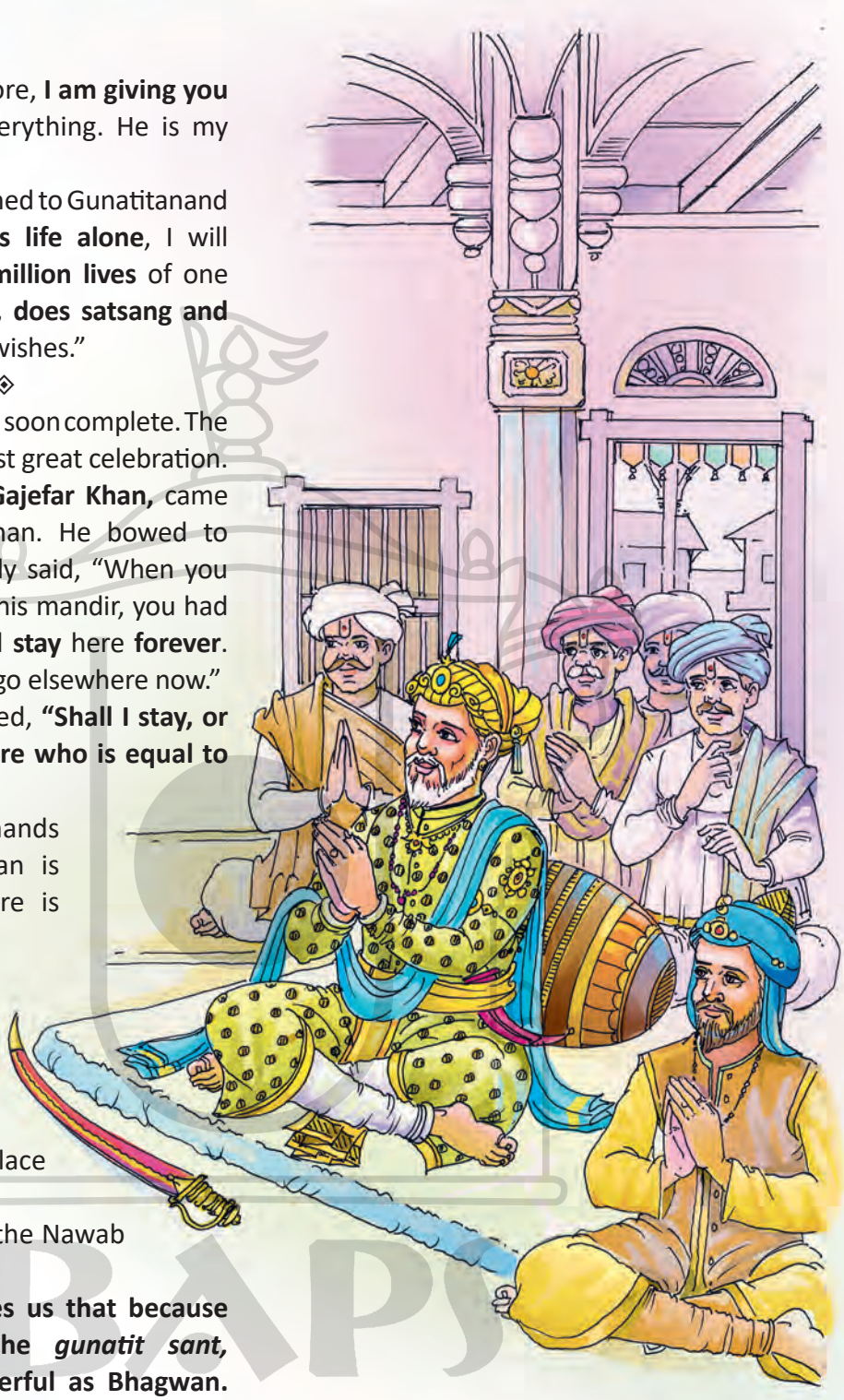
Shriji Maharaj answered, **"Shall I stay, or shall I keep someone here who is equal to me?"**

The Nawab folded his hands and said, "Only Bhagwan is equal to Bhagwan. There is nobody else like him."

Shriji Maharaj looked at Gunatitanand Swami and said, "**This sadhu is like me**. He is just as great as I. And so, I am placing him here in my place as the mandir's *mahant*."

"Very well, Maharaj!" the Nawab exclaimed.

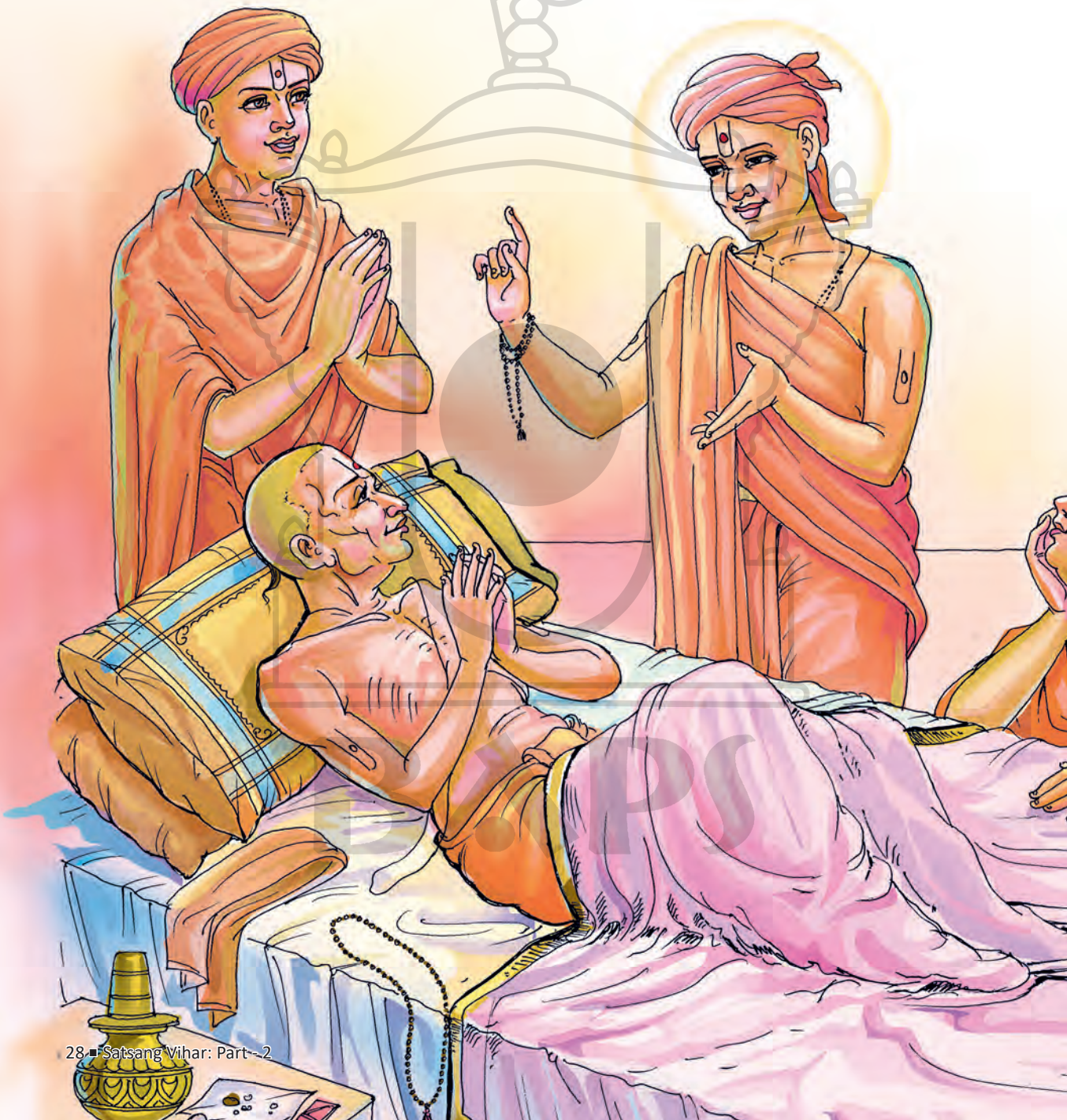
**Shriji Maharaj teaches us that because Bhagwan resides in the *gunatit sant*, the *sant* is just as powerful as Bhagwan. Whatever Bhagwan can do, the guru can do, as well. Today, the *gunatit sant* is Mahant Swami Maharaj.**



# 12. AKSHAR REVEALS THE GLORY OF PURUSHOTTAM

Who can explain to us what it means when we say that Shriji Maharaj is *sarvopari* Bhagwan? Only someone who has truly understood Shriji Maharaj's greatness, right?

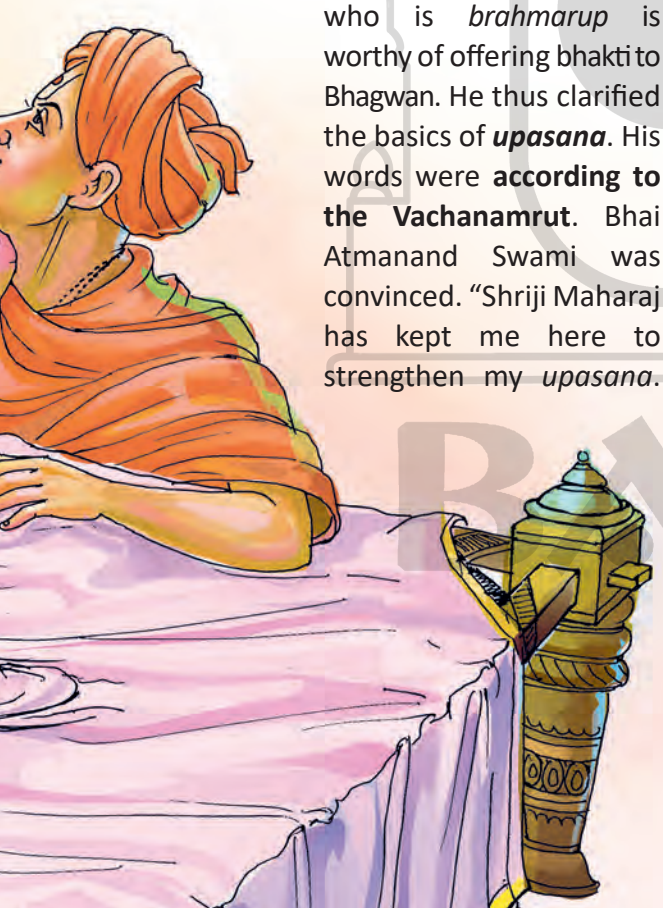
Gunatitanand Swami was such a person. His most important work was to strengthen people's faith that Shriji Maharaj is *sarvopari* Bhagwan.



## ■ Explaining Maharaj's Greatness to the Paramhansas

There was once a great *paramhansa* named **Atmanand Swami**. He had been in *satsang* since Ramanand Swami's time. He was advanced in spiritual knowledge, and he strictly followed all his *niyams*. People called him 'Bhai Atmanand Swami'. During his later days, he lived in a village called **Aniyali**. He was **quite aged – 116 years old**, in fact! A thought had been bothering him, **"Maharaj is not taking me to Akshardham. What must be wrong with me?"**

Gunatitanand Swami once came to meet him. Bhai Atmanand Swami expressed his **concern**. **Gunatitanand Swami answered**, "There is **nothing wrong with** your **actions**. But you must be **lacking in understanding**." So saying, he explained to him **Shriji Maharaj's supreme greatness**. He also explained that only one who is *brahmarup* is worthy of offering bhakti to Bhagwan. He thus clarified the basics of ***upasana***. His words were **according to the Vachanamrut**. Bhai Atmanand Swami was convinced. "Shriji Maharaj has kept me here to strengthen my *upasana*. If it were not for Gunatitanand Swami, I would have never realised this and would have had to take another birth."



Through Gunatitanand Swami's *satsang*, Bhai Atmanand Swami now had **firm faith** in Shriji Maharaj's greatness. He also understood Swami's greatness. A few days later, he **passed away to Akshardham**.

**Gunatitanand Swami had explained Shriji Maharaj's supreme greatness to countless devotees and *paramhansas*. Moreover, he had made countless people *brahmarup*, or worthy of a place in Akshardham.**

## ■ Upasana in a Nutshell

What is Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*? To become *brahmarup* and offer bhakti to Parabrahma. How does a person become *brahmarup*? By associating with Aksharbrahma (Vachanamrut Gadhada–II 31). Further, only when a person becomes *brahmarup* does he or she become qualified to offer bhakti to Purushottam (Vachanamrut Loya 7).

**In short, only when one does *satsang* of the *gunatit guru* does one become *brahmarup* and worthy of offering bhakti to Purushottam.**

We are very fortunate to have found Mahant Swami Maharaj as our guru. He is the *gunatit sant*. He is the present form of Aksharbrahma. If we associate with him through mind, word and deed, we are sure to reach Akshardham.

# 13. ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH SADHANA

*Sadhana* is anything a person does to please the guru. **Bhagatji Maharaj** ranked first when it came to ***sadhana***. In just **three and a half years**, he **earned Gunatitanand Swami's *rajipo***. His effort is **an example** for us all.

### ■ Sacrificing Himself for Swami

A **new *haveli*** was being built as part of the **Junagadh** mandir. The **foundation** had been dug. Now, **mortar** had to be prepared. But everyone was **afraid** to take up the task because its chemicals could **damage** a person's **skin** and even cause **blindness**.

But **Pragji Bhakta** (Bhagatji Maharaj) was **ready**. He realised that it was **Gunatitanand Swami's *agna*** and wish. And so, he began. He would bring sacks of limestone powder, empty them in a large trough, add water, and then happily pound the solution with his feet.

**People would say**, "Pragji, **mortar** is dangerous! **Its heat will make you blind!**"

Pragji Bhakta would answer, "I have **sacrificed myself for Gunatitanand Swami**. I wish **only to please him**."



### ■ Seva Was His Life

Whether it was **shaving the sadhus' heads** or **picking up garbage**, giving **300 mango** trees four containers of **water** each or sewing an **enormous decorative canopy**, he **never refused any kind of *seva***.

He never complained, argued or made excuses. He just continued to do *seva*, **worshipping Bhagwan** at the same time. He would do ***seva* for 23 hours a day** and would sleep only for one hour. He would **fast without water** for two days straight and would eat only once on the third day. To find another person who has done such sadhana would be impossible.

Gunatitanand Swami became extremely pleased from within by Bhagatji's *sadhana*. Bhagatji Maharaj was thus granted **God-realisation** – a state in which one constantly sees and fully understands Bhagwan.

## ■ Gunatit, Wake up!

Once, **Gunatitanand Swami** asked a sadhu named **Balmukunddas Swami**, "Go and call Bhagatji."

Bhagatji Maharaj was fast asleep. Balmukunddas Swami called to him a few times, "**Bhagatji! Wake up!** Swami is calling you."

But **Bhagatji did not stir**. And so, Balmukunddas Swami told Gunatitanand Swami, "I repeatedly called him by his name, but he did not wake up."

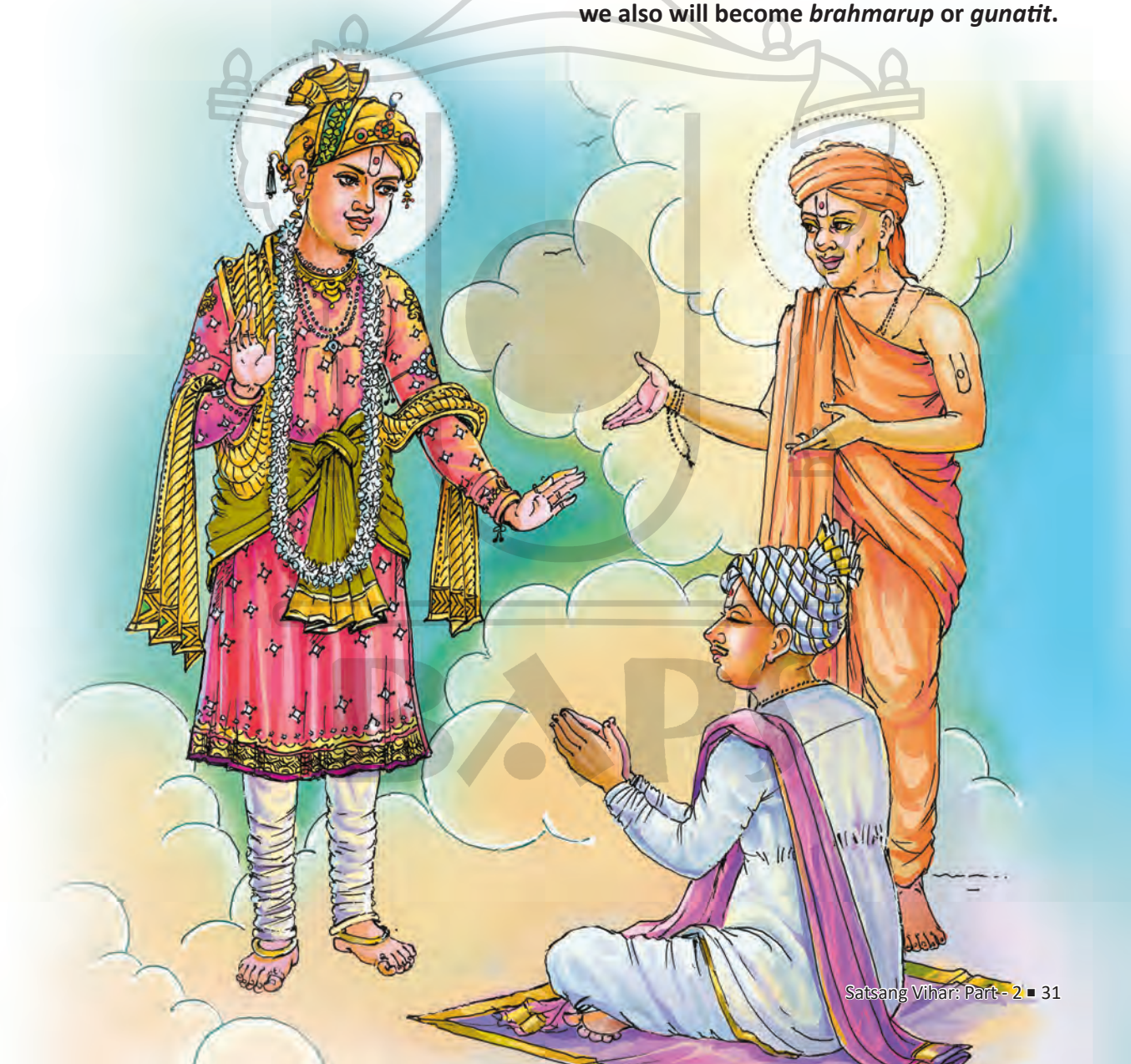
Swami chuckled and said, "Go back and say, **'Gunatit, wake up!'**"

Balmukunddas Swami did as Gunatitanand Swami instructed. "Gunatit, wake up!" he cried. Bhagatji Maharaj **awoke** immediately.

When Gunatitanand Swami came to know of this, he said, "**Pragji** has died. He **has become one with Gunatit."**

**Such was Bhagatji Maharaj's greatness!**

**He set an ideal for us in *seva*, *tapa*, *agna*, constant worship of Bhagwan, and *divyabhav*. If we too live our lives like this, we also will become *brahmarup* or *gunatit*.**



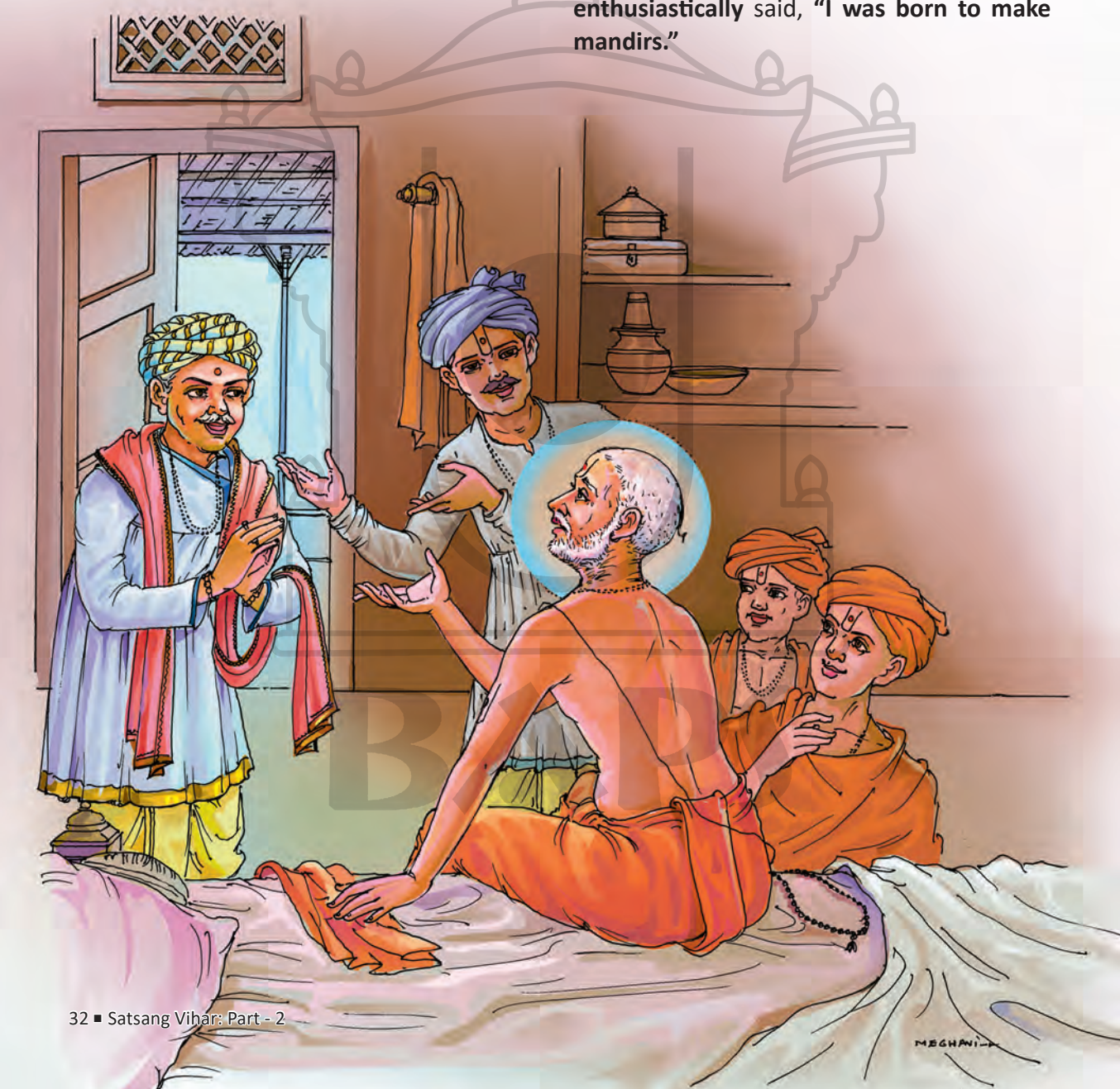
# 14. SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S LIFE AND WORK

There was once a **merchant** named **Narsinhdas** of **Mahuva**. He had built a beautiful mandir. He was **in search of a great sadhu** to do the ***pratishtha*** ceremony.

Someone suggested the name of Shastriji Maharaj. The merchant thus came to **Sarangpur**. But **Shastriji Maharaj** was **very ill**. The merchant waited for a few days, but Shastriji Maharaj did not get any better.

Shastriji Maharaj **found out** through someone that Narsinhdas had come for something related to mandirs. He called him and said, "Have you come to take me for a mandir opening? Come, let's go." The merchant was overjoyed.

Shastriji Maharaj then **sat up** and **enthusiastically** said, **"I was born to make mandirs."**



Indeed, Shastriji Maharaj's very purpose for living was to build mandirs for the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Let us learn some basic facts about his life.

**Childhood Name:** Dungar Bhagat

**Birth Date:** Samvat 1921, Maha sud 5 (Vasant Panchami) (31 January 1865 CE).

**Birthplace:** Mahelav (Dist. Anand, Gujarat)

**Mother's Name:** Hetba

**Father's Name:** Dhoribhai

## ■ Important Events:

1865 CE : Birth

1881 CE : Left home at age 17

1882 CE : Took *bhagvati diksha* from Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj in Vartal; was named **Sadhu Yagnapurushdas**.

1882 CE : Met Bhagatji Maharaj for the first time.

1905 CE : Left Vartal.

**1907 CE** : Built the *sanstha's* first mandir in Bochasan; **established the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha**.

1911 CE : Met Yogiji Maharaj for the first time.

1950 CE : Made Pramukh Swami Maharaj the *sanstha's* president.

1951 CE : Passed away in Sarangpur at age 86.

## ■ His Life Work

1. Gave the eternal, Vedic ***upasana*** of Akshar-Purushottam **a physical form** by consecrating their *murtis*.
2. **Established** the BAPS **Sanstha**.
3. Built **five** *shikharbaddha* **mandirs** – Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara and Gadhada.
4. Initiated more than **50 sadhus**.
5. Suffered countless **hardships** to spread *upasana*.
6. **Gifted us Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.**



## ■ His Teachings

1. We are the **oxen** of Akshar-Purushottam. (Just as oxen work hard all day with no expectations, we too should work for Akshar-Purushottam.)
2. We have **shaved our heads** (given everything up) for Akshar-Purushottam. For the sake of Akshar-Purushottam, even if we sell ourselves, it would not be enough.
3. If a person **helps** in **spreading *upasana*** and building mandirs, even if by **giving just one dokdo** (a cent or a pence), Shriji Maharaj will **take that person to Akshardham.**

## ■ Opinions

1. ***"Asmin sampradāye ekameva"*** (There is nobody like Shastriji Maharaj in the entire fellowship.)
   - Rangacharyaji (A great Sanskrit scholar)
2. "Shastriji Maharaj's physical form was made up of only **a mere fistful of bones** (he was small in stature). But he was filled with **Bhagwan's power**."
   - Pramukh Swami Maharaj

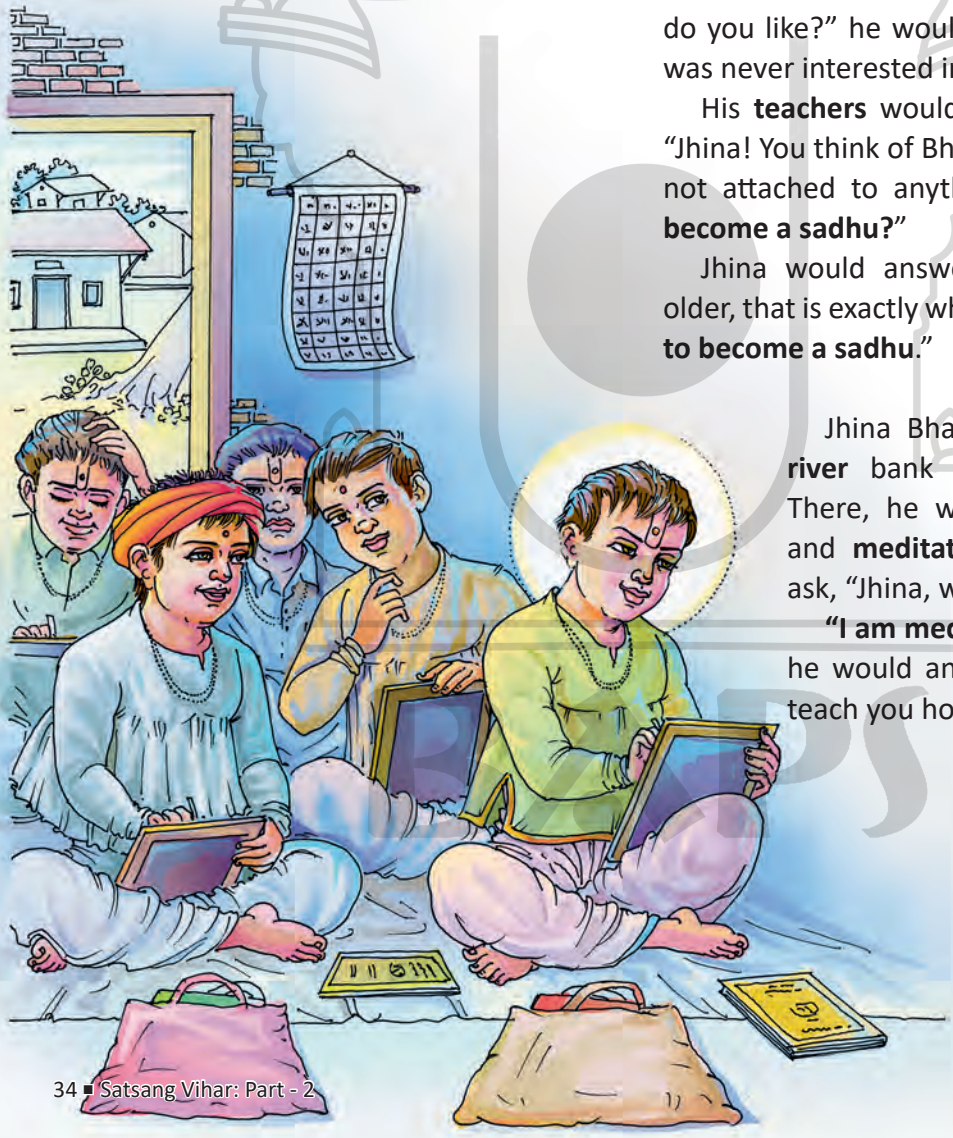
# 15. YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S CHILDHOOD

**Yogiji Maharaj's childhood name** was **Jhinabhai**. He was very intelligent in his studies. He was always **first in class**. He used to win many prizes as well. When his teacher would give **math problems**, he would finish quickly. Then, he would turn his **slate upside down**.

**Other students** would ask him, "What did you get for the answer?"

But he would never tell.

"**Show us, or else we'll hurt you!**" they would **threaten** him.



Jhinabhai would answer fearlessly, "Solve the problem for yourselves. If I am wrong, you will be wrong, as well. It is not right to cheat. **A person who cheats is actually cheating Bhagwan.**"

In this way, Jhinabhai would teach others not to cheat but to succeed by working hard.

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During **recess**, children would play all types of games. But Jhina Bhagat would sit under a tree and **think of Bhagwan**.

If someone would ask, "Jhina, which girl do you like?" he would become sad, for he was never interested in such things.

His **teachers** would sometimes tell him, "Jhina! You think of Bhagwan all day. You are not attached to anything. **Why don't you become a sadhu?**"

Jhina would answer, "When I become older, that is exactly what I wish to do; **I want to become a sadhu**."

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Jhina Bhagat would go to the **river** bank at **Dhari's outskirts**. There, he would sit cross-legged and **meditate**. His friends would ask, "Jhina, what are you doing?"

**"I am meditating on Bhagwan,"** he would answer. "Sit here. I will teach you how to meditate, too."

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Jhinabhai's **uncle**, **Mohanbhai**, **served** at the **mandir in Dhari**. But he **often fell ill** due to his old age. And so, he was not able to serve Bhagwan properly. He asked Jhina Bhagat to serve in his place.

Jhina Bhagat loved serving Bhagwan. He was as pleased as ever. "Mohan Kaka, do not worry," he said. "**I will serve Thakorji.**"

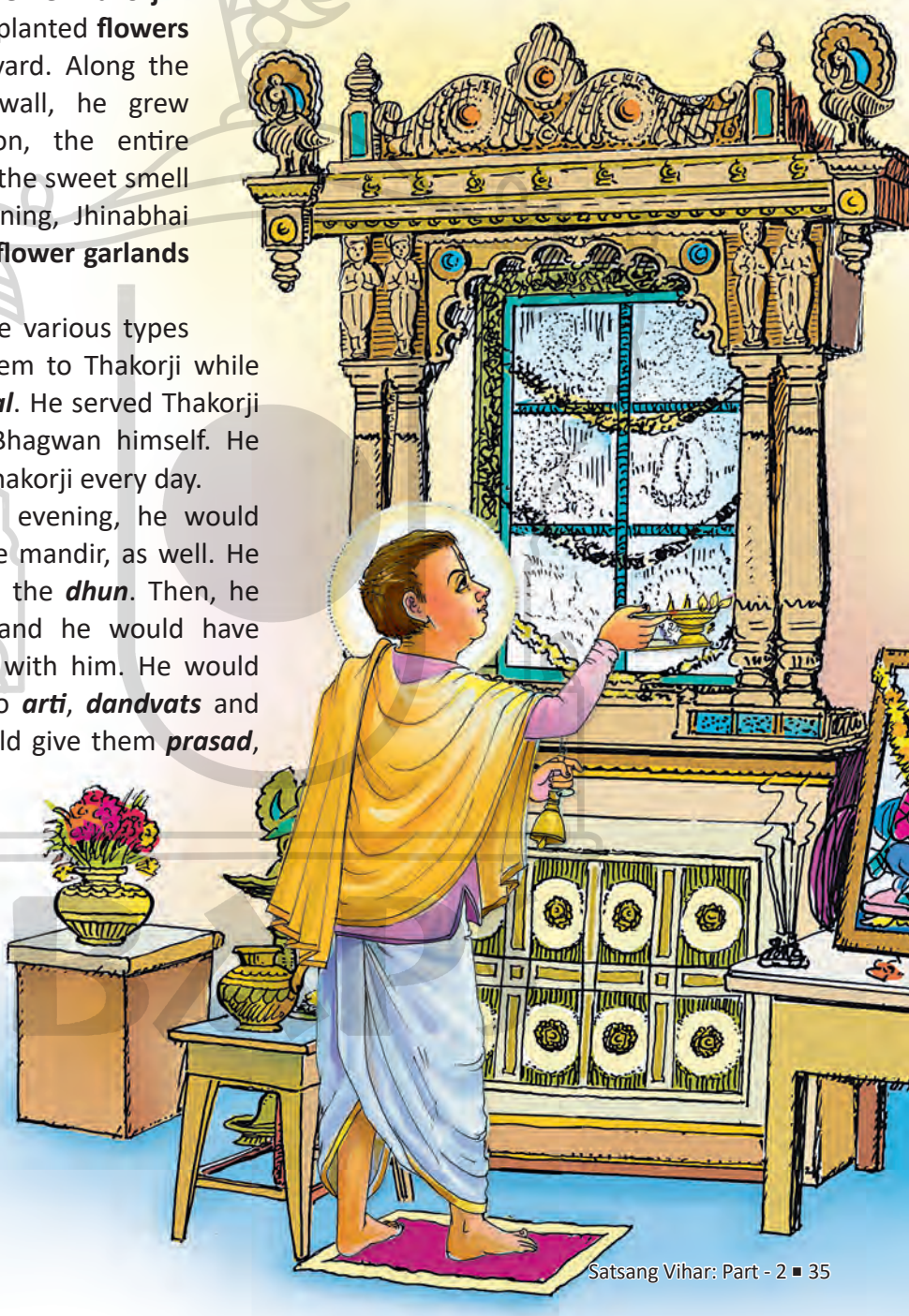
Then, Jhina Bhagat planted **flowers** in the mandir's courtyard. Along the mandir's compound wall, he grew decorative vines. Soon, the entire mandir was filled with the sweet smell of flowers. Every morning, Jhinabhai would make colourful **flower garlands** for Thakorji.

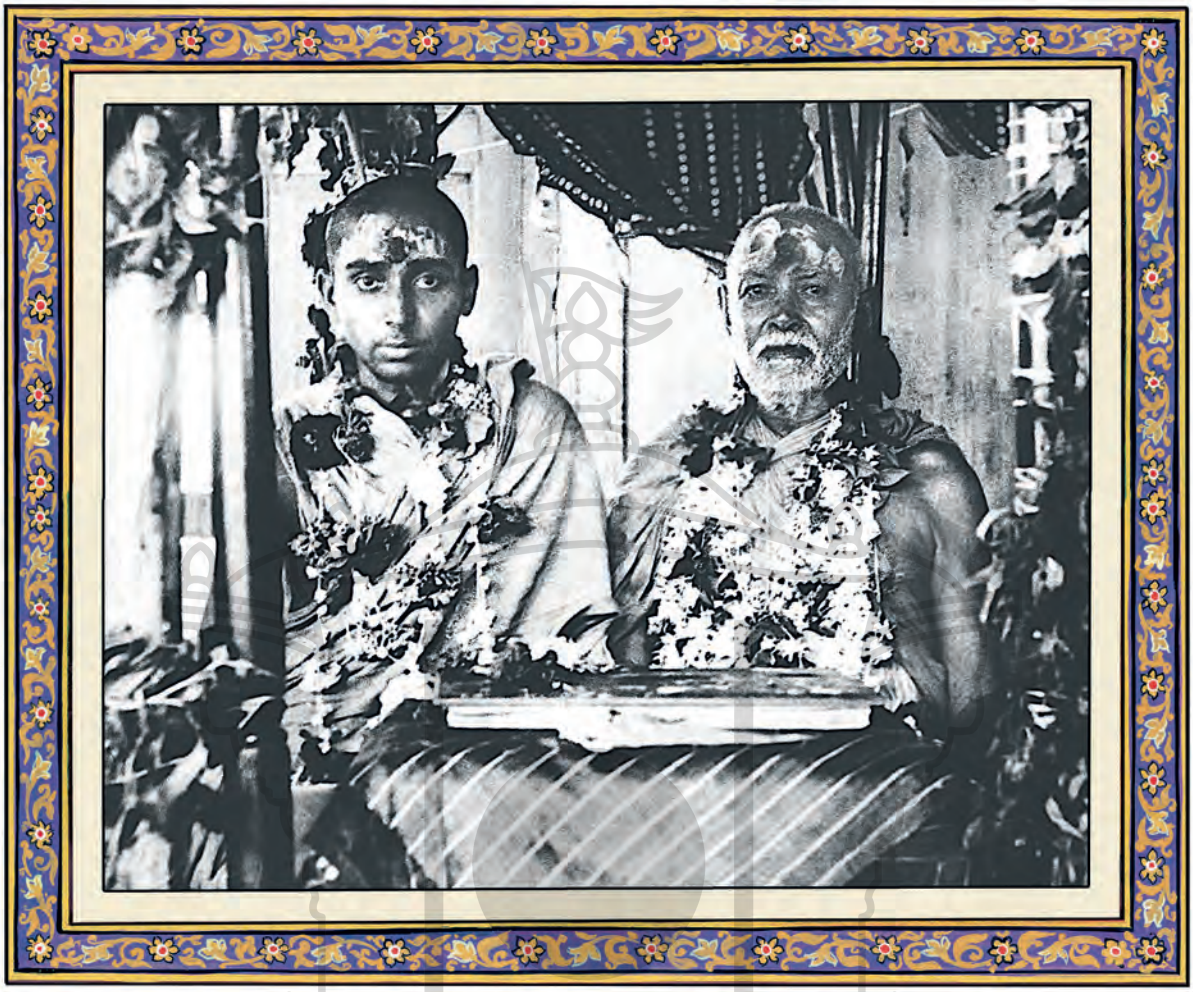
He would also make various types of foods and serve them to Thakorji while lovingly singing the ***thal***. He served Thakorji as one would serve Bhagwan himself. He would even speak to Thakorji every day.

Every morning and evening, he would bring his friends to the mandir, as well. He would have them sing the ***dhun***. Then, he would sing bhajans, and he would have his friends sing along with him. He would teach them how to do ***arti***, ***dandvats*** and ***pradakshinas***. He would give them ***prasad***, as well.

**Such was Jhina Bhagat's devotion and greatness!**

**He was interested only in two things – studying and worshipping Bhagwan. He would never fall behind in offering bhakti, and he was always first in school. He never fought with others or misbehaved. He was never stubborn. He was regular in all that he did. And he was humble. His childhood was ideal. A person who has such qualities as a child can surely grow up to be great.**





# 16. LOVE FOR ONE'S GURU

**Shastriji Maharaj** was once ill in **Sarangpur**. Devotees from all around had come to check on his health. One such devotee was **Tulsibhai of Atladara**.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Atladara at the time. Seeing Tulsibhai, Shastriji Maharaj remarked, "If **Naran'da (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) comes** and sings the Bhaktachintamani for me, **I will get better**." (Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sadhu name was Narayanswarupdas Swami; Shastriji Maharaj often called him 'Naran'da' in short.)

Receiving the **news** in Atladara, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** instantly **left** for Sarangpur with another *sant*. It was **3 am**, and it was **raining** hard. The **Saurashtra Mail** train arrived at the **Vadodara railway station**. The **doors** were **closed**. But Swami did not wait for another train. Instead, he jumped onto a **footboard and hung there** by **holding a railing** for support.

**Cold winds** whipped through the air. Swami was drenched. His entire **body shivered**. The **charcoal powder** from the engine was unbearable. And he could not even wipe his eyes, as he had to hold the

railing with one hand and his belongings with the other. But he was not bothered. All he wanted was to meet his guru.

The train reached **Amdavad** in a few hours. **Dhandhuka Mail**, the next train, was **cancelled** due to the heavy rain. Swami thus took an **alternate train travelling through** a town called **Viramgam**.

Finally, he reached **Botad**, a town 12 km (7 mi) away from Sarangpur. Now, the real test was to begin! Because of the rain, there were **no vehicles** for Sarangpur. And there was **water** everywhere. In places, it was **chest-deep**. The roads could not even be seen. But Swami **bravely walked** through the dangerous waters, the streams and the mud.

Eventually, he reached **Sarangpur**. Soaked, he went straight to **Shastriji Maharaj's room**. Shastriji Maharaj was overjoyed. He got up and **embraced him**. "Naran'da!" he exclaimed. "You are here? Wonderful!"

Swami's **tiring journey** had lasted **15 hours**. But on just hearing Shastriji Maharaj's words, his tiredness was gone.

**Shastriji Maharaj's *agna* was dearer to Swami than his own life. He forever saw his guru as divine. He saw him to be like Bhagwan. This is what is called *jodan*. If we love our guru in such a way, we will earn his grace and with it a place in Akshardham.**



# 17. LIVING MANDIRS

**Pramukh Swami Maharaj built more mandirs** than anyone else ever had. He also created the world's largest Hindu mandir – Akshardham. But he not only created mandirs made of stone, bricks and cement. He **also created living mandirs**.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's living mandirs are his devotees. Through his contact, even the worst of sinners were transformed. One such person came from a village named **Odarka** in the **Bhavnagar** district. His name was **Ramsang Bapu**. Let us hear his story in his own words…



"I was once **as evil as Ravan and Kansa**. For food and money, there is nothing I haven't done.

"I remember, when I was **11 years old**, I used to prowl the streets at night. I would lurk around the **funeral grounds**, riverbanks, and caves. I had become vicious and cruel. I began **to rob people of their money**. If they did not give me what I wanted, I would **beat them** with a stick. This had become my line of work.

"I would eat animals, drink alcohol, and threaten and beat people left and right. I was afraid of nobody. And I came across two others who were just like me.

"The three of us struck fear into everyone in the entire region. People would shake even upon just hearing our names. And they would immediately pay up any ransom we ever demanded.

"At such a time, I came in touch with Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. My brother-in-law, Nirmalsinh Jadeja, introduced me to Swamishri. **Swamishri came to my home and washed my sins away.** I transformed as a person due to the love he showed me."

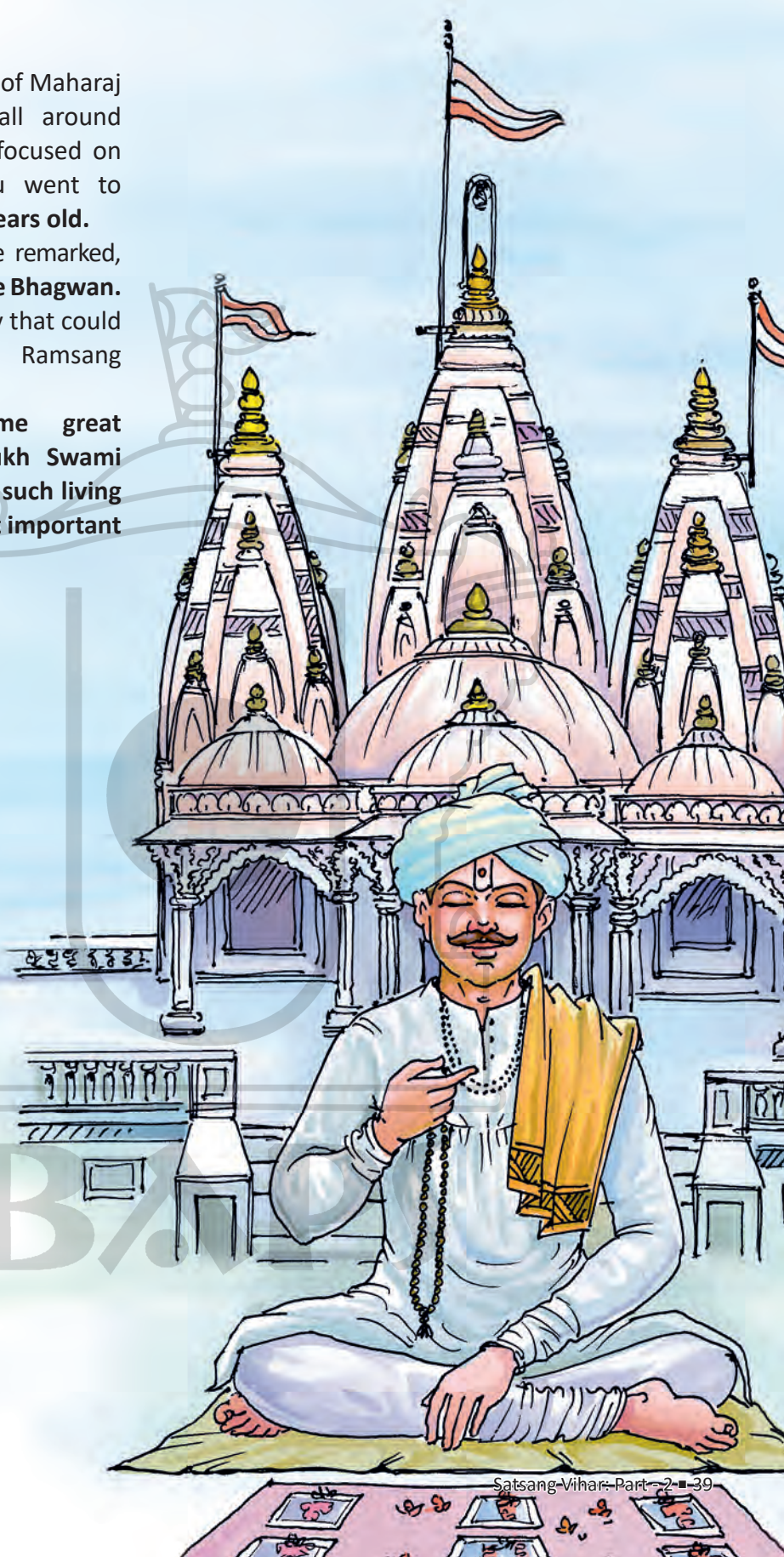
Ramsang Bapu met Swami when he was 56 years old. He spent the last **20 years** of his life **in *satsang***. During his final days, **Swami told him,** "Take your mind off of everything else. Concentrate on Bhagwan. **Shriji Maharaj will take you to *dham***."

Ramsang Bapu began **doing *malas***

**constantly**. He had photos of Maharaj and Swamishri put up all around his room. With his mind focused on Bhagwan, Ramsang Bapu went to **Akshardham. He was 76 years old.**

One of his friends once remarked, "**Pramukh Swami is truly like Bhagwan.** Otherwise, there is nobody that could transform someone like Ramsang Bapu."

**Even sinners become great devotees through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's touch. Creating such living mandirs is one of the most important tasks of the *gunatit sant*.**



# 18. LOOKING AFTER THAKORJI

It was 10 September 2016. On this day, Mahant Swami Maharaj was heading from **Delhi to Mumbai**. At 3:55 pm, he had darshan of Thakorji in the mandir. Then, at 5:20, he reached the airport. Wherever Swamishri goes, he always keeps Thakorji (Harikrishna Maharaj) at the forefront. Today, as well, Swamishri **ensured that Thakorji boarded** the plane **first**. Only then did he himself board.

The plane was quite small, so it quickly became **warm**. The sadhus turned the air-conditioning ducts towards Swamishri, worried for his comfort. However, **Swamishri** was worried about Thakorji. Right away, he reached over and **turned** the **ducts towards Thakorji**, who was seated across from him. Swamishri was satisfied upon seeing Thakorji's garments fluttering in the cool air.

Soon after, the plane veered into a direction that brought **sunlight through the window** on both Swamishri and Thakorji. The sadhus protected Swamishri from the sunlight by putting up makeshift curtains using their upper garments. Swamishri hurriedly instructed, **"No! First shade Thakorji from the sunlight!"** Swamishri was content only when the arrangements he requested were made for Thakorji.

One **sadhu** later began reciting ***mukhpath***. But Swamishri could not hear properly because of the noise of the aeroplane. The sadhu thus leaned forward so that Swamishri could hear clearly. Swamishri saw, however, that the sadhu's **upper garment** was **brushing against Thakorji's face** because he was **leaning forward**. So, he stopped him and said, **"Move Thakorji over to the next seat."**

In this way, throughout the entire journey, Swamishri's mind was focused only on Thakorji. During the **evening *arti***, Swamishri looked at Thakorji with **utmost concentration**, almost as if he were **lost in Thakorji!** As soon as the *ashtaks* finished, the **lights of Mumbai** could be seen below. Everyone said 'Jay Swaminarayan' to each other and then rushed to the windows to see the lights. Swamishri, on the other hand, took **Thakorji** in hands and raised him **to the window so that he could bless the city.**

The plane landed at 7:37 pm. The sadhus in Mumbai welcomed Swamishri. Even here, Swamishri kept Thakorji in front. At the **mandir**, the **sadhus and devotees** greeted him with enthusiastic calls of the ***jaynaad***. However, **Swamishri's mind** was **engaged** in **Thakorji**, thinking, **"This grand welcome is not for me, but it is for Thakorji."**

**For Swamishri, Thakorji is everything. He does not view Thakorji to be just a metal statue. He truly believes Thakorji to be Bhagwan himself.** In times of honour, he keeps Thakorji at the front to accept the praises. And in times of sorrow, he keeps Thakorji at the front to accept his prayers. **We, too, should learn from Swamishri and offer such bhakti to Thakorji.**

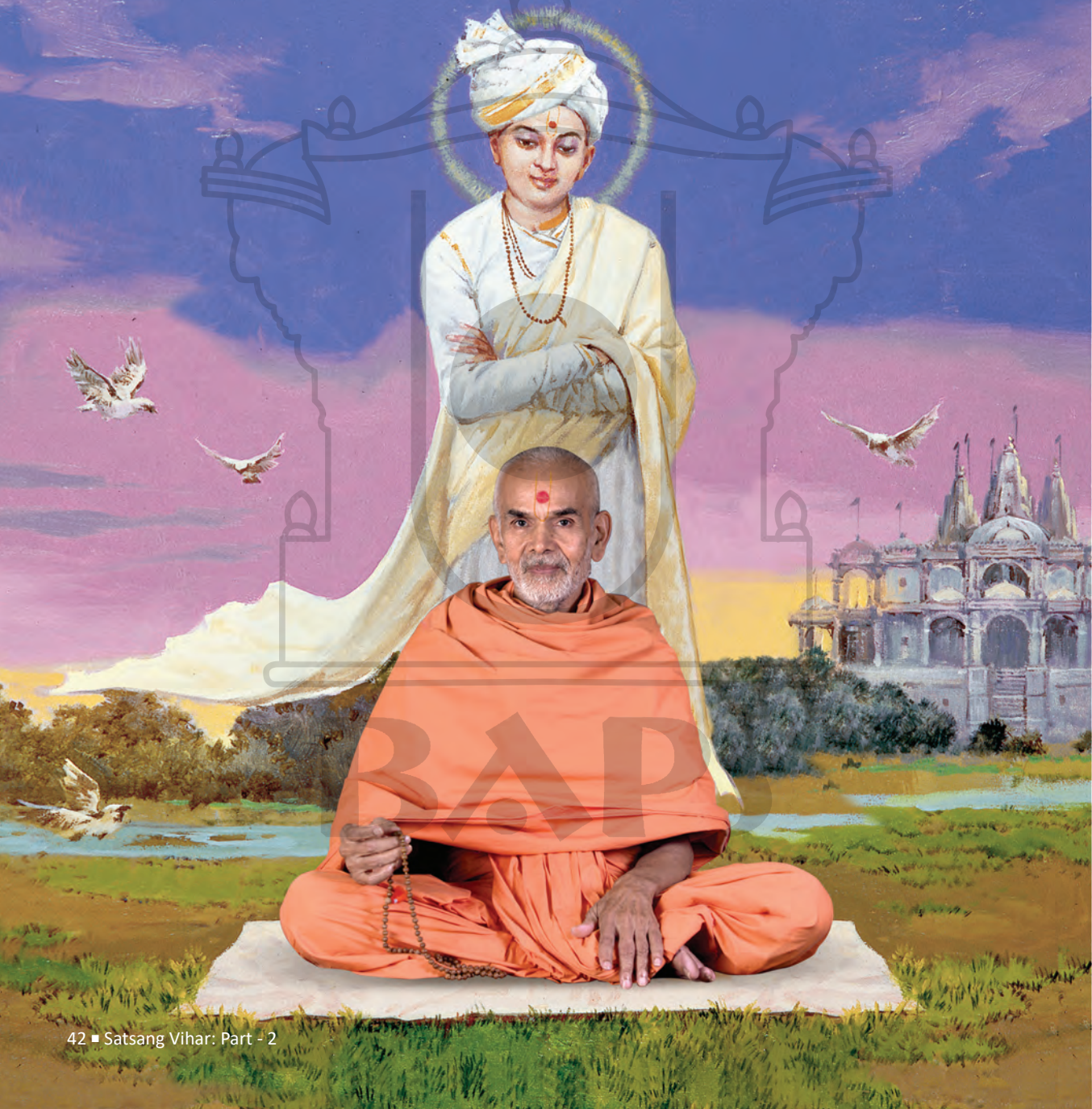


# 19. THE SANT IS THE FORM OF BHAGWAN

Friends! The Hindu faith speaks much about the greatness of the guru. There is a shloka we often sing. You may know it...

*Gurur Brahma gurur Vishnur gurur Devo Maheshvaraha;*
*guruhu sakshat Parabrahma tasmai Shri Gurave namaha.*

Hinduism thus explains that the guru is the very form of Bhagwan himself. Today, Bhagwan Swaminarayan stays among us here on earth through our guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj.



The day was 17 March 2017. On the **plane** journey from **Ahmedabad to Nairobi,** Mahant Swami Maharaj was reading the book ***Purushottam Bolya Prite***. In it, the following text appeared, "Mava Bhakta of Galol performed Shri Hari's *pujan* and then asked, 'You are Bhagwan and have manifest here in person, but others do not believe this to be true.'"

Taking the opportunity, **one devotee** pointed to Mahant Swami Maharaj and said, **"This is the very form of Bhagwan."**

Swamishri instantly replied, **"But in the form of the *sant*."**

**This is Mahant Swami Maharaj's true greatness. He is the very form of Shriji Maharaj.**

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24 September 2016. **Bochasan**. Today was Swamishri's **83rd birthday**. Devotees had come to Swamishri with all sorts of gifts. Accepting everyone's bhakti, Swamishri came to Bhagatji Maharaj's shrine behind the mandir. There, one sadhu asked, "Today is your **birthday**. On this occasion, we request that you, too, **give *us* a gift**."

Swamishri answered, "What gift would you like?"

The sadhu said, "Reveal to us your true form."

Hearing the sadhu's request, Swamishri remained silent.

The sadhu then said, "The **eternal Aksharbrahma** was **Gunatitanand Swami**. That very same entity was Bhagatji Maharaj. And also Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. **That eternal Aksharbrahma today is you, is it not?**"

Swamishri immediately replied, **"Yes."** The sadhus and devotees rejoiced upon hearing his answer. It was a birthday present that they would never forget.

**Mahant Swami Maharaj's true greatness is that he is the Aksharbrahma *gunatit satpurush*.** Indeed, we have attained both Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma in the form of the *sant*. There is no limit to our good fortune!

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21 February 2017. **Delhi.** Swamishri went for darshan at Akshardham in the morning. Two sadhus stood on either side of him, each offering their arm for support. Swamishri climbed five or six steps with their support.

But then, suddenly, he **let go of their arms** and **quickly climbed** the remaining **steps**. One sadhu remarked, "In reality, Swamishri does not need anyone's support. Nonetheless, he graciously allows us the opportunity to serve him."

Another sadhu recalled, "Sadhus would sometimes sit Pramukh Swami Maharaj on their interlocked arms and carry him up flights of stairs. We can carry you in this way, too, if you need it."

Swamishri replied, "Shall I carry *you* up?"

"Wow!" the sadhus exclaimed.

One sadhu requested, **"In this same way, hold our hands and take us to Akshardham – both this Akshardham and the other."**

Swamishri said, confidently, **"I will carry each of you on top of my head to Akshardham."**

Everyone clapped in joy upon hearing Swamishri's response.

**This is Mahant Swami Maharaj's glory. He has come to earth in order to take all of us to Akshardham**, and he graciously offers us the opportunity to serve.

# 20. 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

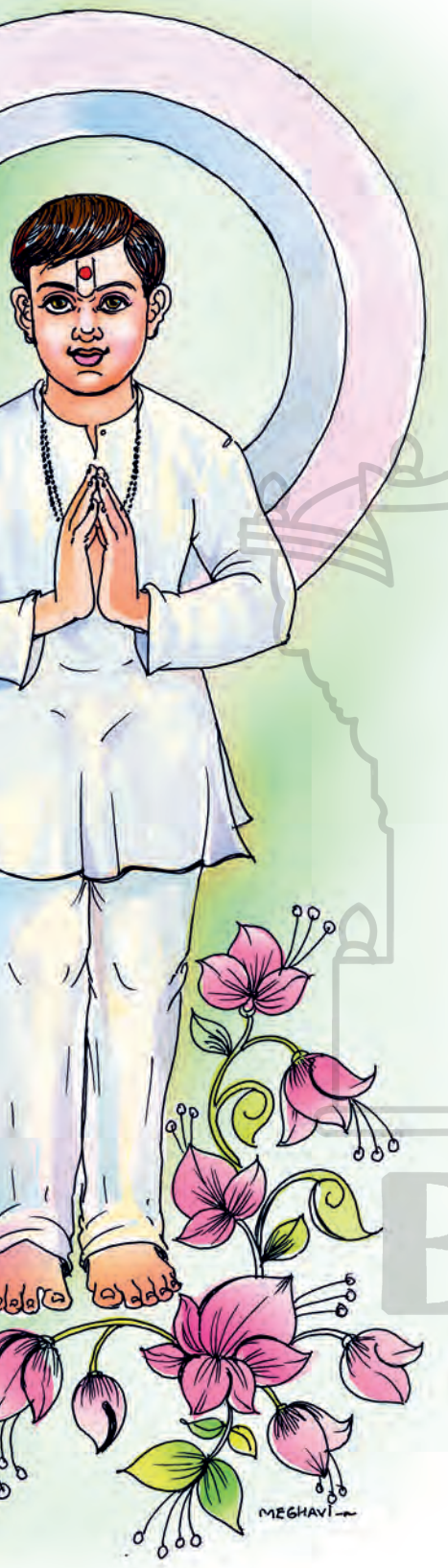
The Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, which sum up the Vedas and all other Hindu shastras, teach us four main principles:

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**

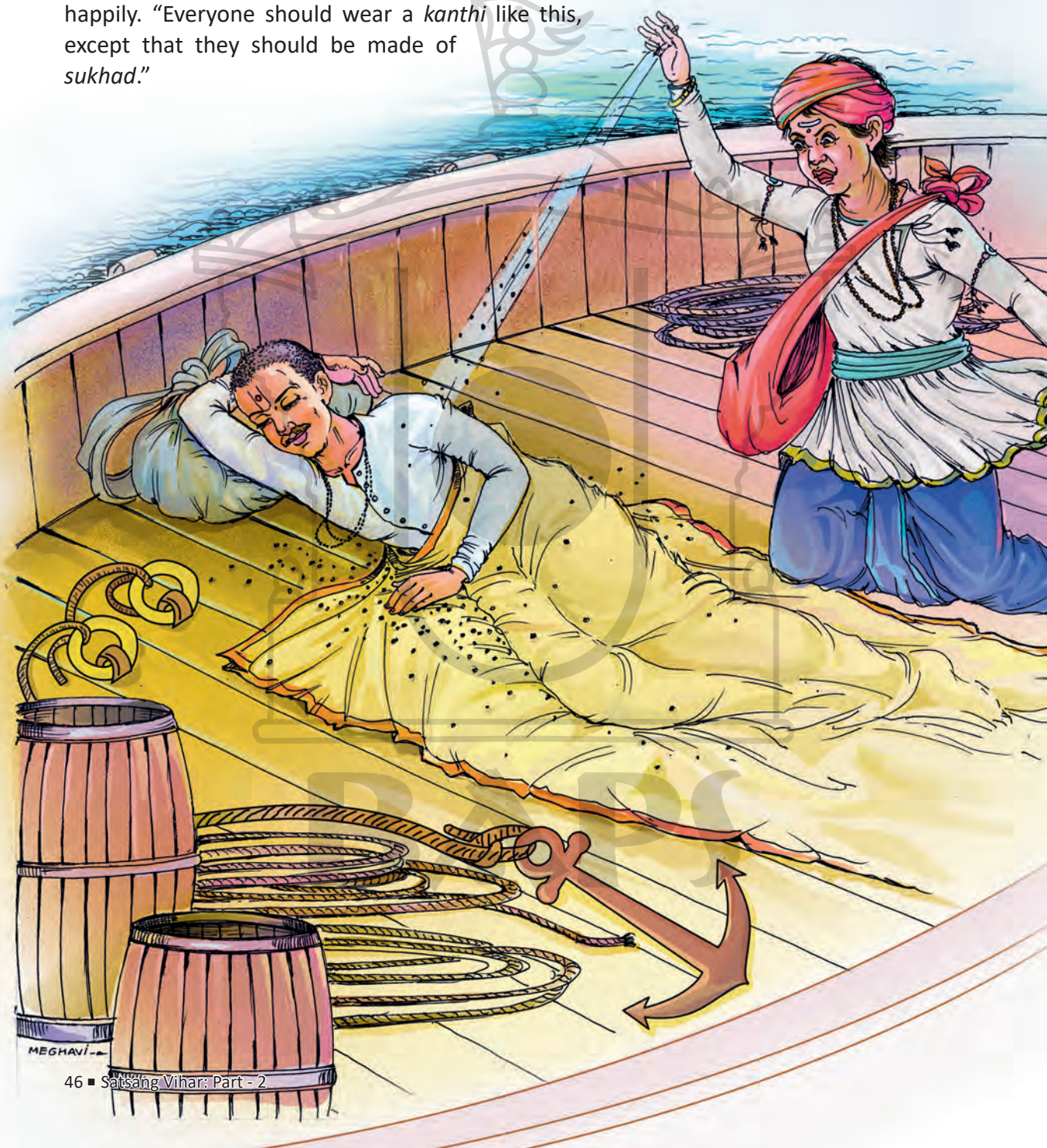
*Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane Purushottam…*
*Ātmā ne Parmātmā, Brahma ane Parabrahma…*
*Swāmi te Gunātit Swāmi,*
*Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi…*
*Akshar te Gunātit Swāmi,*
*Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi…*
*Akshar-Purushottam upāsanā… (2)*
*Aksharrup thaine, Purushottamni,*
*Bhakti karvāni ā sādhanā…*
*Aksharrup 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.**

# 21. FAITH IN ONLY ONE

Shriji Maharaj was once seated in a *sabha* in **Gadhada**. A devotee named **Khima Suthar** gifted him a ***kanthi*** that he had made out of coconut shells.

"We should make this a tradition," Maharaj said happily. "Everyone should wear a *kanthi* like this, except that they should be made of *sukhad*."



Hearing Maharaj's words, Khima Suthar set off by boat for **Surat to buy *sukhad***. Sailing in the boat was a **fellow who was an expert in black magic**. He thought, "This man is travelling to buy something. He must have lots of money with him. Let me use my powers to rob him of all he's got…"

The man took a handful of **black beans** out of his sack. He chanted a **mantra** and threw them at Khima Suthar. But nothing happened. So he tried again and again all night, and still nothing happened. He **failed** miserably.



It was soon morning. As the boat arrived in Surat, Khima Suthar gathered the grains that were scattered around him, tied them in a handkerchief, and went along his way. He took a bath and did his puja at a nearby lodge. He then **cooked the enchanted grains and ate them** for breakfast.

The man had followed Khima the whole way. When he saw him eat the grains, he was terrified by his courage. "This man must know even more than me about dark spells!" he thought as he bowed to Khima Suthar.

"Look, brother," Khima Suthar said. "I know nothing of dark magic. I just have faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He is *sarvopari* Bhagwan. A person who has faith in him cannot be touched by *kal, karma,* or *maya*."

Hearing Khima Suthar's words, the **man decided to change his life**. He became one of Maharaj's sadhus. He was named **Shunyatitanand Swami.**

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In Maharaj's time, people were very superstitious. If someone fell sick, they would think, "Someone must have bewitched him with a mantra." If someone had other trouble, people would say, "He must be possessed." And they would resort to spells and charms to solve their problems.

A man named **Karsan Bhavsar had once fallen sick in Gadhada**. His relatives brought Shriji Maharaj to heal him with his blessings.

The compassionate **Shriji Maharaj came** near Karsanbhai. **His eyes fell upon the bed post,** which had an **enchanted thread** tied to it! He quickly realised someone must have come and tied it there.

Without saying a word, Shriji Maharaj **turned back**. As he left, he said, "**Where there is superstition, Bhagwan is not**. And where there is Bhagwan, there is no superstition."

Karsanbhai felt bad for having hurt Shriji Maharaj. He gave up his belief in superstition. Only then did Shriji Maharaj come back to bless him. With Shriji Maharaj's blessings, Karsan Bhavsar's illness disappeared.

**Shriji Maharaj never liked superstition. He always liked people to have faith only in Bhagwan. We have a *kanthi* around our neck, and we have faith in *sarvopari* Bhagwan. Why then should we be afraid of anyone or anything? Happiness and sorrow come to us by Bhagwan's wish. We should remember him during such times. We should pray to him and him alone. This is called *pativratani* bhakti – having faith in and devotion for only Bhagwan.**

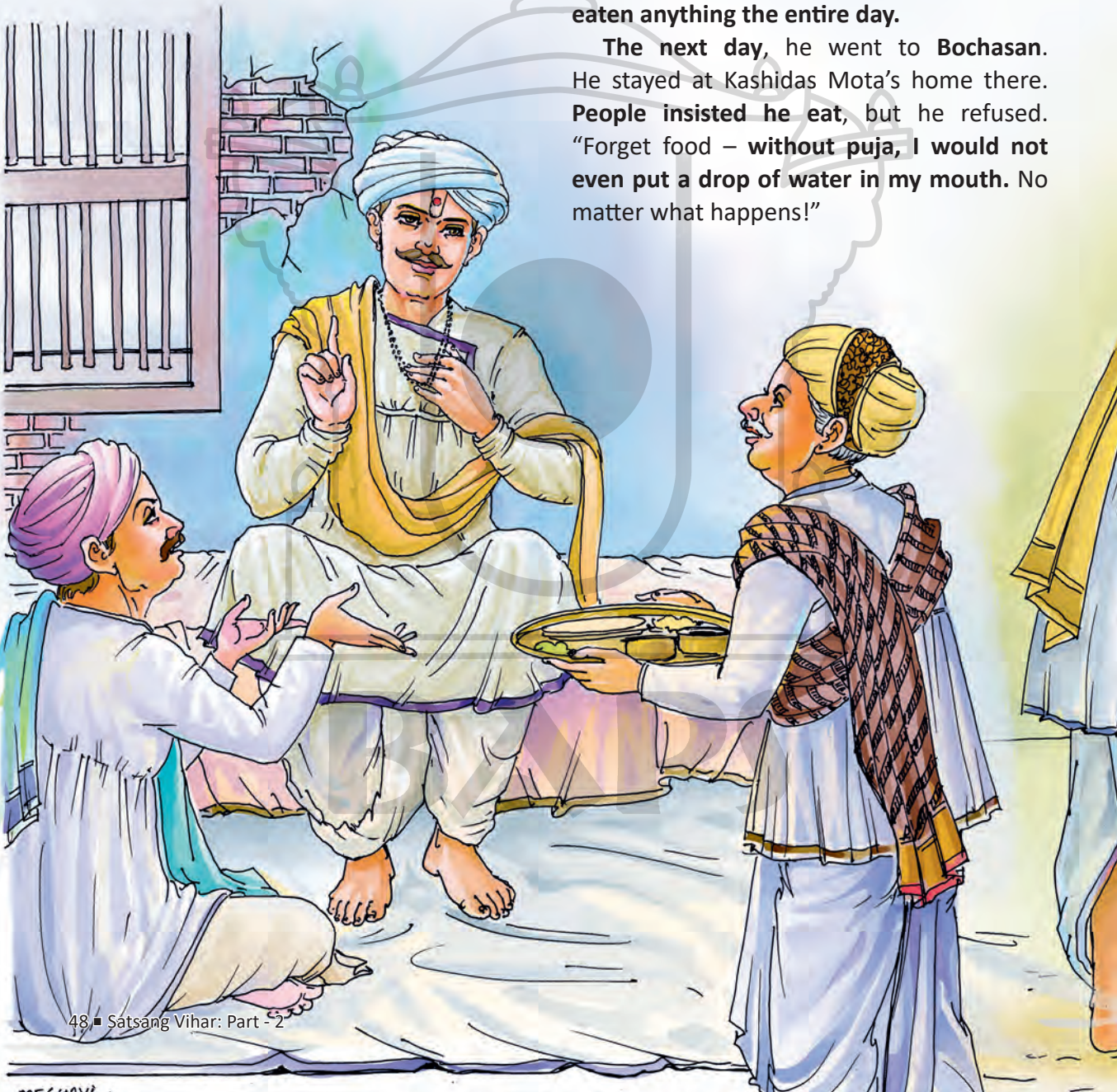
# 22. DOING PUJA EVERY DAY

There was once a terrible **bandit** named **Joban Pagi** of Vartal. People all the way from Gujarat to Kolkata (from one end of India to the other) trembled at hearing his name.

But Joban's life changed when he met Shriji Maharaj during the *yagna* in Dabhan. He became a strong ***satsangi***. The sword in his hand was replaced by a *mala*. Once he was in *satsang*, the **courage** he had as a bandit helped him **hold strong to his *niyams***.

Joban Pagi had once gone to the nearby town of **Petlad**. He figured he would be back by night, and so he did not take his puja with him. But his business lasted longer than expected, and so he had to spend the night in Petlad. Lost in his work, **he had barely eaten anything the entire day.**

**The next day**, he went to **Bochasan**. He stayed at Kashidas Mota's home there. **People insisted he eat**, but he refused. "Forget food – **without puja, I would not even put a drop of water in my mouth.** No matter what happens!"



That **afternoon**, Joban Pagi went to **Anand**. There, he put up with his **relatives**. Someone there, too, **insisted** that he eat. But he politely replied, "Doing puja every day is Shriji Maharaj's first *agna* for Swaminarayan *satsangi*s. **How can I disrespect Shriji Maharaj's words?** It's not okay to be relaxed when it comes to following *agna*."



Joban Pagi reached **Vartal** that **evening**. He took a bath and did his puja. Meanwhile, news came that **Shriji Maharaj, too,** had come to **Vartal.** Joban went straight to Maharaj and cried, "Maharaj! Why did you not send news that you were coming! What brings you here suddenly?"

Shriji Maharaj **pleasantly** replied, "**You followed my *niyam***. I am very pleased with you. I came here **from Dabhan** especially **to grant you darshan**." So saying, Shriji Maharaj **hugged** Joban Pagi. He also placed his ***charanarvind* on Joban's chest** as a way of blessing him.

Joban was so excited that he forgot about his hunger and thirst. Why so? Because Bhagwan's blessings cannot be earned even by someone who does difficult *tapa* for countless lives. But here, he had pleased *sarvopari* Bhagwan with his mere *niyam* of daily puja.

**Shriji Maharaj's devotees were truly great. They would not put so much as a drop of water in their mouths without having done puja. Doing puja every day is one of the Shikshapatri's main *agna*s. We can never go without following such an important *agna*.**

**In fact, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said,** "Every *satsangi* should do puja every day. The day we stop doing our puja, we stop getting Bhagwan's blessings."

# 23. THE ART OF DOING DARSHAN

In **South Gujarat**, there is a town called **Dharampur**. This town was once the capital of a **large kingdom** made up of **500 towns.** The **Queen** of Dharampur was named **Kushalkuvarba**.

After coming in touch with ***satsang***, Kushalkuvarba **invited Shriji Maharaj to Dharampur**. Shriji Maharaj accepted the invitation. He stayed in Dharampur for **a month and a half** with his devotees and sadhus. He celebrated many festivals there.

When it was time for him to **leave**, Kushalkuvarba **grew very sad**. "Maharaj!" she cried. "What will become of us when you are gone?"

Shriji Maharaj saw that the queen was ready and willing to strengthen her faith in him. So, he began telling her of his divinity. **The queen looked at Shriji Maharaj all the while, not even stopping to blink**! She would look at **each part of him** separately. After seeing each part, she would **close her eyes and see it in her heart**. Then she would look at that part again and settle it within herself.

By the time Maharaj finished speaking, Kushalkuvarba had **absorbed** his entire ***murti* in her heart.** Shriji Maharaj was now hers forever. She fell at Maharaj's feet.

As Shriji Maharaj was leaving, he gave the queen a pair of *charanarvind*, or holy footprints, as a memory of his visit.






The queen offered Maharaj her kingdom in return. But Maharaj refused, saying, "Your kingdom of 500 towns is meagre compared to that of the infinite universes. Of what use is it to me? You keep the **kingdom** for yourself. Look after it, indeed. But **do not become attached to it. Attach yourself to my *murti* alone.** Otherwise, you will have to be born again."

"Bless me so that I always remember the great joy you have given me," Kushalkuvarba prayed. "And please come to take me to

Akshardham at the time of my death."

Shriji Maharaj blessed the queen and then **left**. Kushalkuvarba began spending her time **thinking of Maharaj's *murti***. Then, **15 days later, Shriji Maharaj took her to Akshardham.**

News of her death soon reached Gadhada. "She was full of devotion and love," Maharaj said. "My *murti* was her life. She was a great spiritual seeker from past lives. She only had a bit of work left to achieve *moksha*. She completed whatever was left through her association with me."

In Vachanamrut Sarangpur 2, Shriji Maharaj recalls Kushalkuvarba's bhakti. He says, "In Dharampur, while Kushalkuvarba did my darshan she would close her eyes and capture my *murti* in her heart. One should do darshan in this way, keeping a concentrated mind and a fixed gaze."

Shriji Maharaj has also mentioned Kushalkuvarba in Vachanamrut Loya 3 while remembering the names of devotees with extraordinary faith.

Blessed is Kushalkuvarba, who engrossed herself in Maharaj's *murti*.

### ■ How to Do Darshan

Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Sarangpur 2, "When a devotee does darshan of Bhagwan, he should do so with an attentive mind and concentrated vision. While doing darshan, if he looks to and fro or up and down at the sight of people, a dog, or other birds or animals, know him to have wandering eyesight. Bhagwan and his sadhu are never pleased upon such a person."

Therefore, while doing Bhagwan's darshan, we should always remember to:

1. **Concentrate.**
2. Keep Bhagwan's ***mahima*** (glory) in mind.
3. Look at **each part of the *murti*** and take note of its ***vaghas*** (clothes) and ornaments.
4. **Settle the *murti* in your heart**.
5. See the *murti* with **more and more love every time**.

### ■ The Parts of Bhagwan's Murti

To help you remember Maharaj's *murti* better, try doing darshan of Thakorji in the following order:

1. What is Bhagwan wearing on his **head**? (Is it a *mughat*? A *safo*? A *pagh*?)
2. Look at his *tilak-chandlo*, **eyes**, **nose**, **cheeks,** and beauty marks (*til)*
3. What is he wearing to decorate his **ears**?
4. What type of garland does he have around his **neck**? (It could be made of flowers, pearls, silver or even gold.)
5. What type of ***vaghas*** (clothes) is he wearing?
6. What does he have in his **hands**? (A handkerchief, a staff, a jewel, a *pochi*, a thumb ring, a ring, an armlet, a wristlet, etc.)
7. What does he have on his **feet**? (*Mojadi*, anklets, golden sandals, etc.)
8. Aside from this, look at his **eyes** and **lips** and the **position of his hands**.

By doing darshan in this way, a person can capture Bhagwan's *murti* in his or her heart.

Shriji Maharaj says in Gadhada I–1, "Bhagwan's *murti* is like a *chintamani*."

**Friends, have you any idea what a *chintamani* is? It's a magical stone! And it gives its owner anything he or she wishes for. If we do *darshan* properly and capture Bhagwan's *murti* within, the *chintamani* is ours. Happiness will be forever with us.**

# 24. GHAR SABHA – THE BEST MEDICINE

The year was 1977. **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** was in **Mumbai**. He was in his room **writing letters**. **A devotee** was sitting nearby. Seeing the stack of letters next to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he asked, **"What is in all these letters?"**

"People write of their **pains** – their work problems, family problems, legal problems, health problems..."

The devotee again asked, "Swami! Is there any **one solution that can solve all problems**?"

Pramukh Swami Maharaj took a deep breath and set his pen and letter pad aside. He then took his glasses off and said, "Of course there is a solution. If the whole family gets together every night and does ***ghar sabha***, no problems will remain."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj showed *ghar sabha* as **the solution to all problems**.

■ **One *Agna* – Many Benefits**

A devotee named Vinodbhai Dhanani from America took a niyam in 1994 **to do *ghar sabha* regularly**. Because of this, his two sons and daughter **never picked up bad habits, such as watching too much TV.** His daughter went away for college. She **lived in a dorm, yet she did puja regularly** and stuck



to a **vegetarian diet**. She also **started holding sabha in her dorm** and inspired others to lead more wholesome lives.

Vinodbhai's two sons have given all of the satsang exams and they, too, **follow all of satsang's niyams**, despite living in America. The reason they have been able to hold on to their values is regular *ghar sabha*.

***Ghar sabha* helps us learn values.**

***

Madhavjibhai of Surat was a *satsangi*. But his **wife** did not approve of this. She would **oppose** him when he would try to do *satsang*. And so, they would get into **arguments** all the time. For a week at a time, they would not speak to each other.

Madhavjibhai **started doing *ghar sabha***. At first, his wife would not come. But then, she started by sitting far off on the patio. As time went on, she came closer. And in just a few months, **she took charge of *ghar sabha*** on her own! The family's arguments quickly came to an end.

***Ghar sabha* turns our home into a mandir.**

***

Mohitbhai from Vadodara lived a good life, but he had one problem. His **wife** and **mother** just could not get along. Every day, they would **quarrel** with each other. If Mohitbhai took his wife's side, his mother would get upset. And if he took his mother's side, his wife would get upset.

The family soon **started doing *ghar sabha***. In just four months, a miracle happened!



The quarrels stopped. Mohitbhai's mother and wife **began getting along perfectly fine**.

***Ghar sabha* helps the family unite.**

***

There was a devotee named Agarsangbhai of Kamiyala. His **children** would watch too much **television** and **would never study**.

Recalling Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *agna,* Agarsangbhai **started *ghar sabha***. Soon, his children took a ***niyam* not to watch television**. And they began **studying three hours a day**! They also began doing puja, *mukhpath*, and *panchang pranam* to their parents.

***Ghar sabha* helps us concentrate on our studies. And it inspires us to stay away from *kusang*.**

***

Harikrishnabhai Chauhan of Vadodara had a **daughter** who was very **stubborn**. She would **never do what her parents said,** even if it meant being punished.

In *ghar sabha*, the Yogi Gita was once being read. It is said in the Yogi Gita, "If someone asks you to change, **always be flexible**." The stubborn young girl was touched. She took a *niyam* to never be stubborn again. From then on, she always did whatever her parents said.

***Ghar sabha* helps children learn to be well-behaved.**

***

Dineshbhai of Ahmedabad had been **doing *satsang* for years**. But he did **not** have **much *satsang* knowledge**. He would come to mandir and do *seva*. But if someone asked him about *satsang*, he could never answer. Yet, he began coming to *sabha* regularly and **started *ghar sabha*** in his home.

He did not have a good memory. But, as he began listening, he began understanding everything. Today, he can **confidently give speeches on** topics like **Akshar-Purushottam *upasana***, the lives of Shriji Maharaj and the guru *parampara*, and the purpose of life.

***Ghar sabha* helps us gain satsang knowledge.**

(Note: The incidents above are all true stories. However, the names and places have been changed.)

***

### ■ Pramukh Swami Maharaj says

"Years ago, **grandparents** would speak to children about the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. They would tell them stories that taught **values**. In **school**, too, children were given **religious values**. **Television** has now entered the home and is ruining people's lives. To be saved from this, the entire family should gather **every night** and do ***ghar sabha***. **Only then will there be peace in the home.** Only then will we be able to stay safe from the poison of *kusang*. *Ghar sabha* will make our home a mandir."

Doing *ghar sabha* is **Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *agna***. It will earn us Swami's ***rajipo***. Every *satsangi* should thus do *ghar sabha*. Attending *satsang sabhas* is just as important. We should always be sure to attend these *sabhas* as well.

### ■ Children and Ghar Sabha

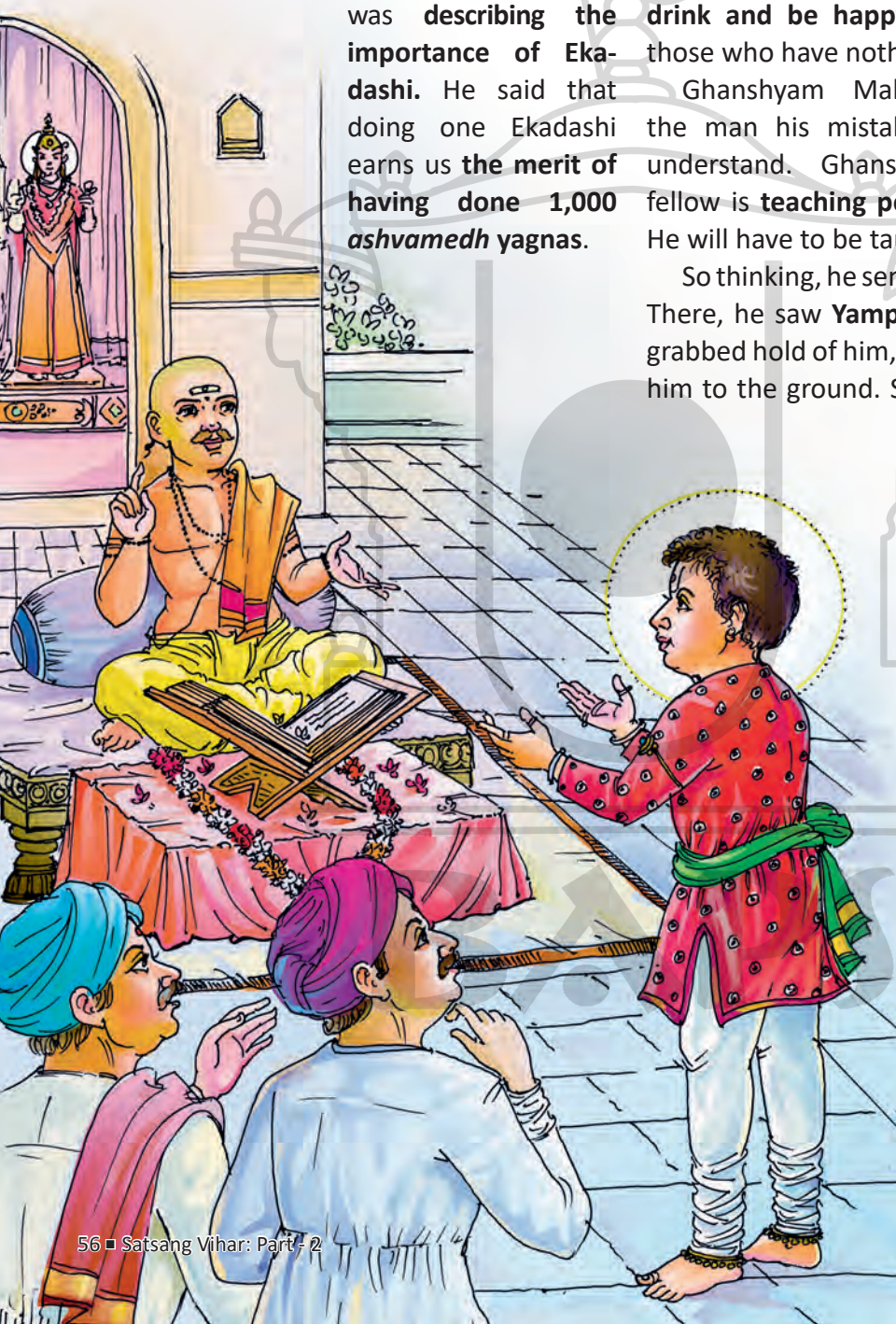
A person who follows Guruhari's *agna* is a good *satsangi*. And so…

1. *Ghar sabha* should happen in our home every day or at least twice a week. Be sure to **sit in every *sabha*.**
2. If *ghar sabha* does not occur in your home, try to **start it yourself.**

# 25. FASTING ON EKADASHI

**Ghanshyam Maharaj** would wake up early every morning. He would then take a bath, do puja and go for **darshan** at different **mandirs around Ayodhya**.

Once, there was a *katha* going on at one of the mandirs he had visited. The speaker was **describing the importance of Ekadashi.** He said that doing one Ekadashi earns us **the merit of having done 1,000 *ashvamedh* yagnas**.



Hearing this, **Ghanshyam** asked, "If Ekadashi is so important, **why do people not observe it**?"

The man reciting the *katha* answered, "Bhagwan has given us this **priceless human body**. **Why strain** it by doing Ekadashi? **Eat, drink and be happy.** Ekadashi is only for those who have nothing to eat."

Ghanshyam Maharaj tried to show the man his mistake. But he would not understand. Ghanshyam thought, "This fellow is **teaching people the wrong thing**. He will have to be taught a lesson."

So thinking, he sent the man into **samadhi**. There, he saw **Yampuri**! **Yamraja's servants** grabbed hold of him, **beat** him, and slammed him to the ground. Soon enough, his bones were aching. A short time later, he awoke from samadhi.

The man quickly bowed, asked **forgiveness**, and said, "From this day forth, I will observe Ekadashi, **and I will teach people the truth.**"

Hearing the man's words, everyone in the *sabha* also vowed to observe Ekadashi.

**Ghanshyam always did Ekadashi and insisted that others observe it, as well. He**

**also taught people the real meaning of the shastras and showed them the path of dharma.**

## ■ Austerities for Kids

Austerity (*tapa*) includes things like fasting, putting up with heat and cold, and giving up foods you like.

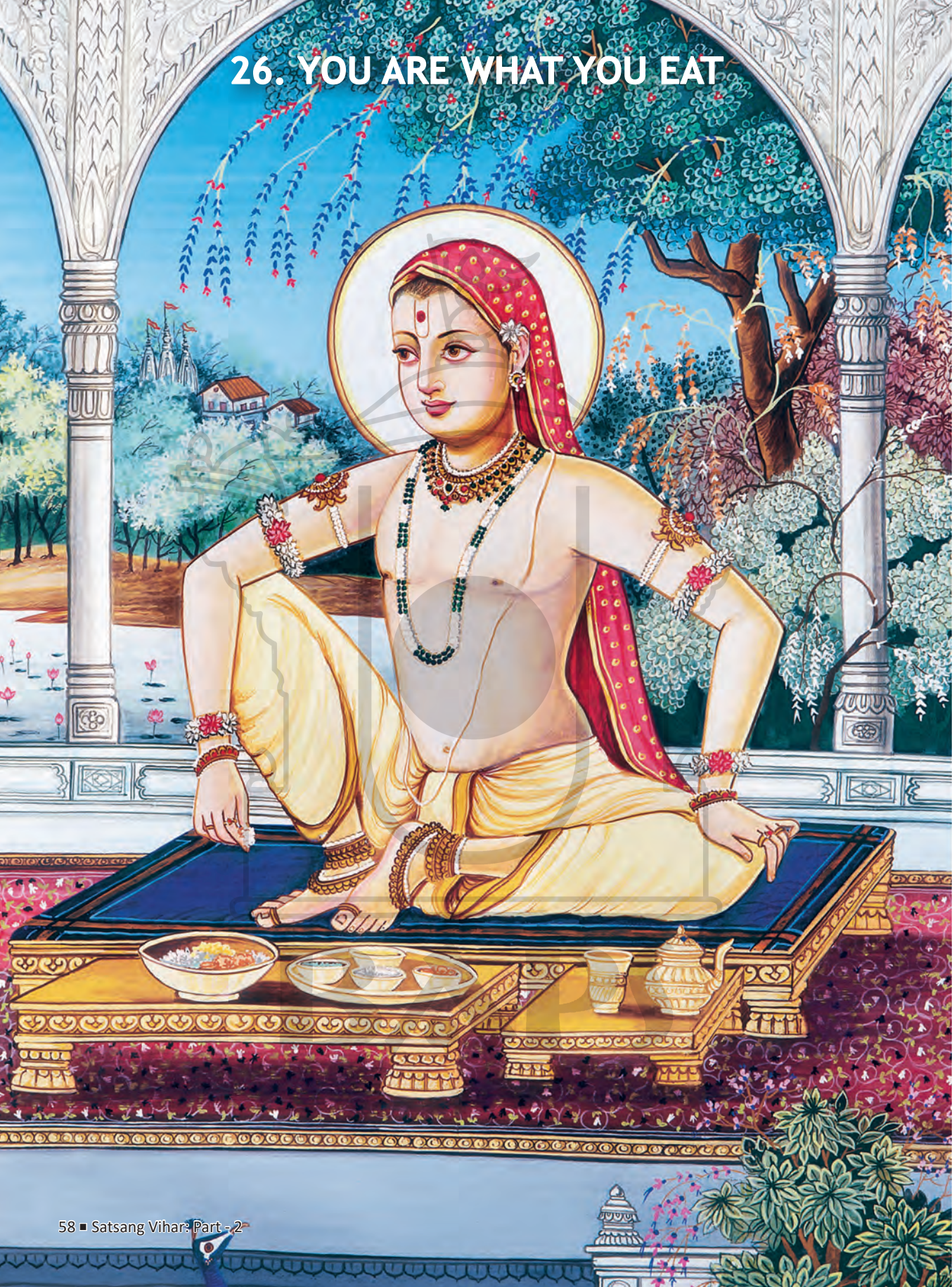
Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Kariyani 10 that one should resolve, "I wish to please Bhagwan by performing austerities." Thus, we should all perform austerities in order to please Maharaj and Swami.

For children, austerities can include:

1. Observing **every Ekadashi** by doing a *nirjala* (waterless), *sajala* (only water), or *phalahari* fast.
2. Doing the **five *nirjala* fasts that Shastriji Maharaj has given us**:
   a. Dev Uthi Ekadashi (Kartik sud 11)
   b. Swaminarayan Jayanti (Chaitra sud 9, Ramnavmi)
   c. Dev Podhi Ekadashi (Ashadh sud 11)
   d. Janmashtami (Shravan vad 8)
   e. Jal Jhilani Ekadashi (Bhadarva sud 11)
3. **Eating only once** a day for 7 or 15 days during the **holy month of Shravan**. Fasting during the special Adhik month that comes every few years, as well, according to your ability.
4. Other **bonus *niyams*** can include – not eating sweets; bathing or showering with cold or normal water; never complaining about your food; never asking that specific food be made; and, giving up your favourite food.



# 26. YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT



There was once a **jail** with many **prisoners**. Some of them could cook well. The officers in charge decided that these prisoners would **cook** for everyone living in the jail.

After two months, the outcome was disastrous. The prisoners became more violent. Even the **staff had become angrier**. Authorities asked experts to find the cause. The experts pointed to the food. It was made by violent criminals, so it was negatively affecting people's emotions.

**The food we eat affects our thoughts**. This is because the thoughts of the cook influence the food. Therefore, *satsang* teaches us of ***ahar shuddhi***, or purity of diet. Let's hear a few *prasangs*…

■ **Never Eat Outside Food**

In 2002, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** was in **Ahmedabad**. **A *karyakar*** was standing near the *sant* ashram. A *sant* pointed to him and said, "**This *karyakar* eats outside food**."

"Do you **ever feel like eating poison**?" Swami asked, sternly.

The *karyakar* replied, "I have to eat out sometimes."

But Swami did not give up. "That's foolish! If you have to go without a meal for a day or two, it's **not as if you are going to die**."

The *sant* stepped in, "He says eating out does not stop him from being a *satsangi*."

**"It *does* stop him from being *satsangi*,"** Swamishri answered. "A real *satsangi* would never eat out."

Swami is thus never pleased when we eat out. In 1980, while in London, Swamishri said, "It truly **hurts** me **when you eat out**, for **I consider you all to be mine**."

■ **Never Eat Eggs or Meat**

On another occasion in 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in **Boston**. One ***yuvak*** had fallen back in his *niyams*. "I am saddened to hear this," Swamishri told him.

"I fell ill with tuberculosis," the *yuvak* answered. "My doctor told me I would have to eat **eggs** to get better."

Swamishri answered with confidence, "Whether it is tuberculosis or anything else – no matter how serious – it is **Shriji Maharaj who cures us.** And even if he doesn't, if we follow our *niyams*, **he will take us to *dham***."

The *yuvak* asked for Swami's forgiveness.

■ **Other Things We Should Not Consume**

1. **Addictive substances** like alcohol, tobacco, *gutka,* or cigarettes, *beedi*, and *sopari*.
2. Sometimes, **food made outside the home** (like chocolate, cake, biscuits, or cheese) can have eggs or other non-vegetarian ingredients. Be sure to check the ingredients on any such products.
3. Also do not eat **onions, garlic or *hing*** (asafoetida).

■ **What Should We Eat?**

**Vegetarian food** that is **made in the home** or at mandir and has been **offered to Bhagwan**.

■ **How Should We Eat?**

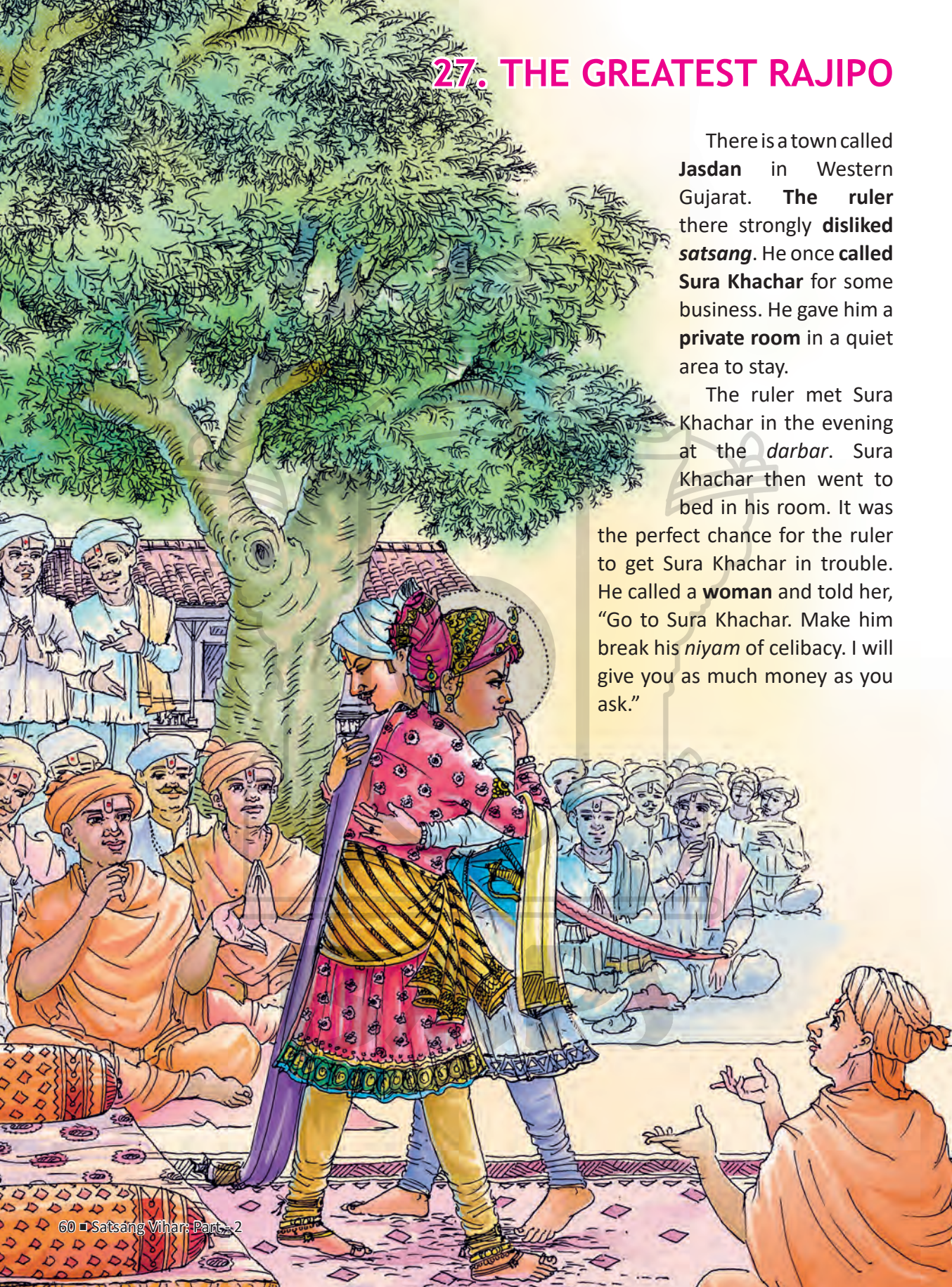
First, **say the *shloka***. Chew your food well. And think of Bhagwan as you eat.

■ **Pramukh Swami Maharaj Has Said…**

"Always keep control. **Too much food brings illness. Eating simple gives us good health. It lets us do *bhajan* and *seva*.** Eating heavily, though, keeps us thinking about food, makes us sleepy, and invites illness."

There are countless *satsangi*s around the world who are firm in their *niyams* of *ahar-shuddhi*. If they are on a trip, they take food from home. Otherwise, they eat fruits and snacks. Even at weddings, relatives' houses or social events, they do not break their *niyams*. Maharaj and Swami are always pleased with such devotees.

# 27. THE GREATEST RAJIPO



There is a town called **Jasdan** in Western Gujarat. **The ruler** there strongly **disliked *satsang***. He once **called Sura Khachar** for some business. He gave him a **private room** in a quiet area to stay.

The ruler met Sura Khachar in the evening at the *darbar*. Sura Khachar then went to bed in his room. It was the perfect chance for the ruler to get Sura Khachar in trouble. He called a **woman** and told her, "Go to Sura Khachar. Make him break his *niyam* of celibacy. I will give you as much money as you ask."

The woman agreed. At **midnight,** she came to Sura Khachar's room. She **wailed** from outside, "Dear Gentleman! This is my home. Please let me in. My child is ill, and his medicine is inside. Please, **open the door**."

Sura Khachar came to the door. The **woman entered** and acted as if she was searching for the medicine. She walked around a bit. Then, all of a sudden, she started **acting strange**.

**Sura Khachar** knew right away that the woman was up to no good. He yanked his **sword** and threatened, "Sister! Leave immediately! Or else, my sword will not spare you!"

The woman was scared. "Forgive me... It was the ruler who sent me here."

It was **late at night**, yet Sura Khachar mounted his horse and **left for Gadhada**.

From far off, two or three of the ruler's men saw everything that happened. They gave **the ruler** the news. He was filled with **awe**. "Swaminarayan *satsangi*s are very strong in their *niyams*," he thought. "Their Bhagwan should be praised."

In **Gadhada**, Shriji Maharaj too had seen what had happened in Jasdan. He told everyone in the *sabha*, "Today I want to show you a *bhakta* who did not break the *stri-purush maryada* even in private."

"Who is this *bhakta*?" someone asked.

"He'll be here soon," **Shriji Maharaj** answered.

Sura Khachar soon arrived. He dismounted his horse and did *dandvats*. Shriji Maharaj hurried to stop him. **"Here is my *yati*,"** he said as he lovingly **embraced** Sura Khachar. Everyone realised that Shriji Maharaj's ***rajipo*** today was special.

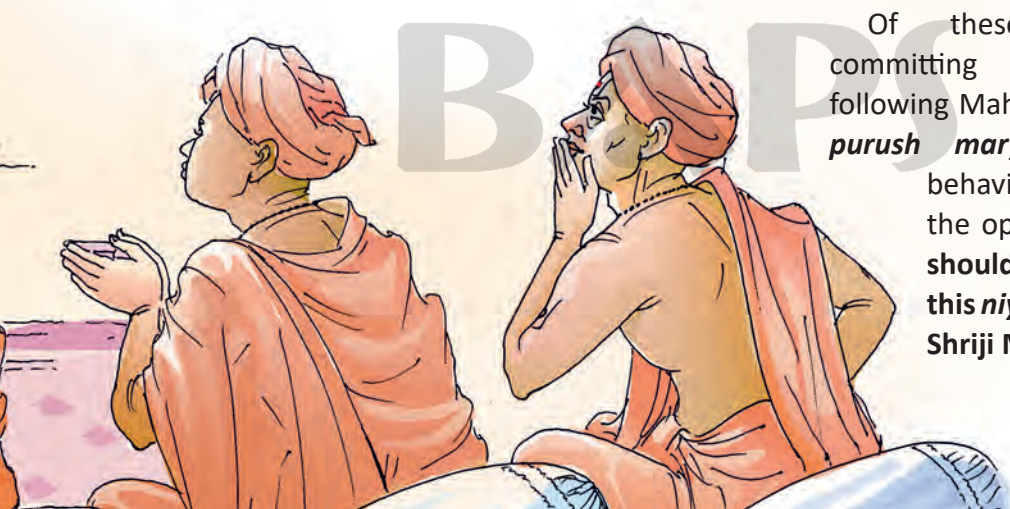
**Shriji Maharaj says in the Vachanamrut, "If a person firmly follows the vow of celibacy, he is never far from Bhagwan – whether he is in this world or beyond. Moreover, my affection for such a person never diminishes… If a person strictly follows that vow, then even if I were a thousand miles away from him, I would still be close to him. On the other hand, if a person is slack in the vow of celibacy, then even if he is beside me, he is as good as a hundred thousand miles away. And I only like the services offered by a devotee who is free of lust." (Gadhada II–33)**

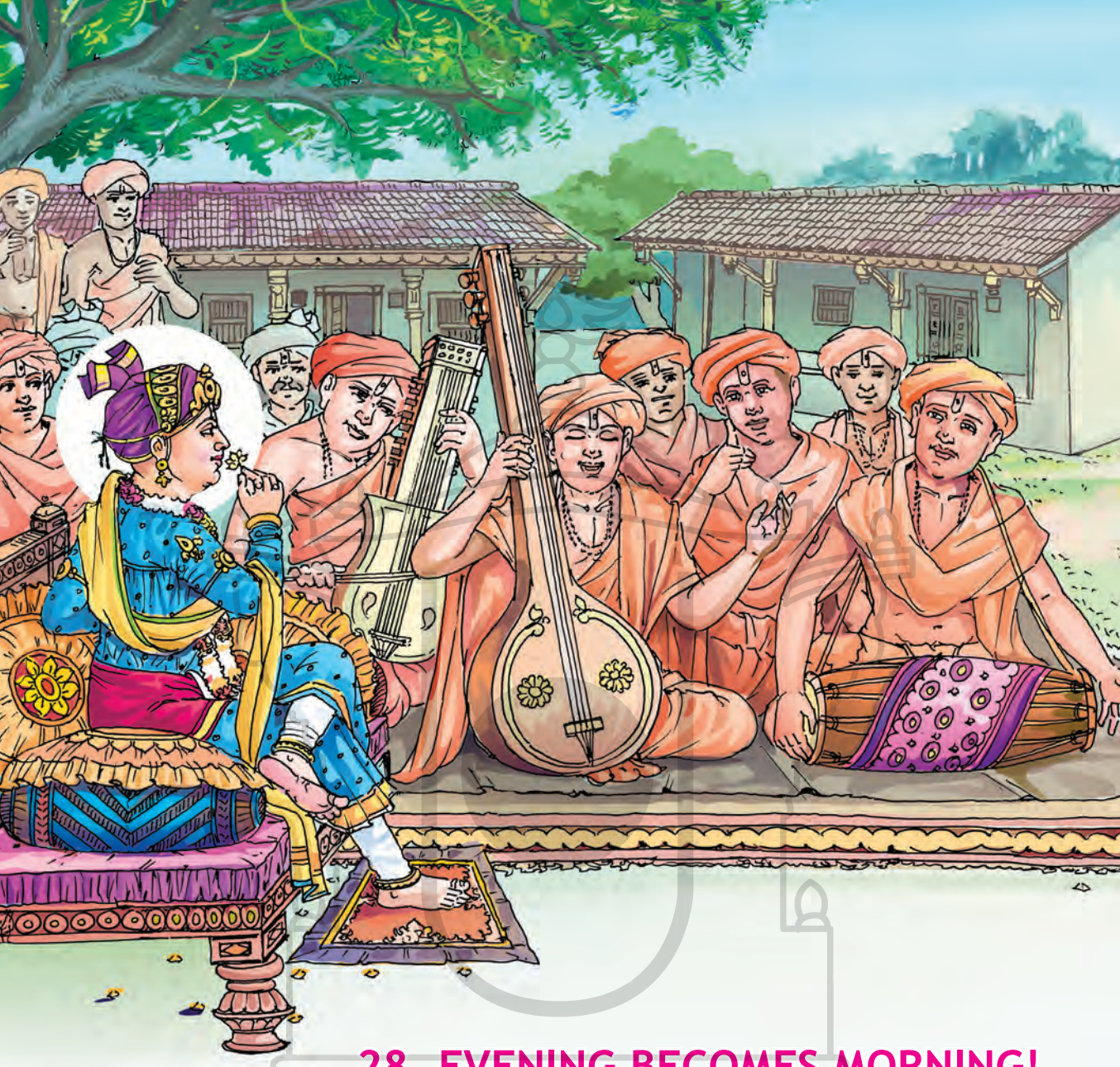
### ■ The Five Vartmans (Panch-vartman)

Maharaj has given **five basic *vartmans*** for *satsangi*s:

1. **Not to drink alcohol.**
2. **Not to eat meat.**
3. **Not to steal.**
4. **Not to commit adultery.**
5. **To avoid impure food and company.**

Of these *niyams*, not committing adultery means following Maharaj's **rules for *stri-purush maryada*** (appropriate behaviour with people of the opposite gender)**. We should always stay firm in this *niyam* in order to earn Shriji Maharaj's *rajipo*.**





# 28. EVENING BECOMES MORNING!

Once, Shriji Maharaj was seated under the neem tree in Dada Khachar's *darbar* in **Gadhada**. It was **evening**. A **renowned troupe of singers from** the city of **Gwalior** had come on this day. They heard many great things about Shriji Maharaj's *paramhansas* and their abilities as musicians. So, they requested Shriji Maharaj, "We have heard your *paramhansas* are skilled at music. We wish to hear them perform."

Shriji Maharaj called **Premanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Muktanand Swami** and others. The *paramhansas* soon arrived with their instruments. They bowed to Shriji Maharaj and took their seats.



Maharaj instructed the sadhus, "Present your music to these singers."

Premanand Swami asked, "Which melody should we sing, O Lord?"

**"Sing the *bhairava* melody,"** Maharaj suggested.

The singers were both amused and surprised. "The *bhairava* melody at evening time? ***Bhairava* is supposed to be sung in the morning.** But it's evening right now. It seems these *paramhansas* aren't learned. They don't even know when to sing which melody. We've wasted our time coming out here..."

So thinking, the singers waited to see what would happen next.

The *paramhansas*, on the other hand, **concentrated on Maharaj's *murti* and began to sing,** describing what they saw...

*Chandana charchita neela kalevera,*
*Sundara katitaka kasyo pata pita.*

*(His figure is dark, and he is decorated with sandalwood paste. He has a beautiful, yellow cloth tied to his waist.)*

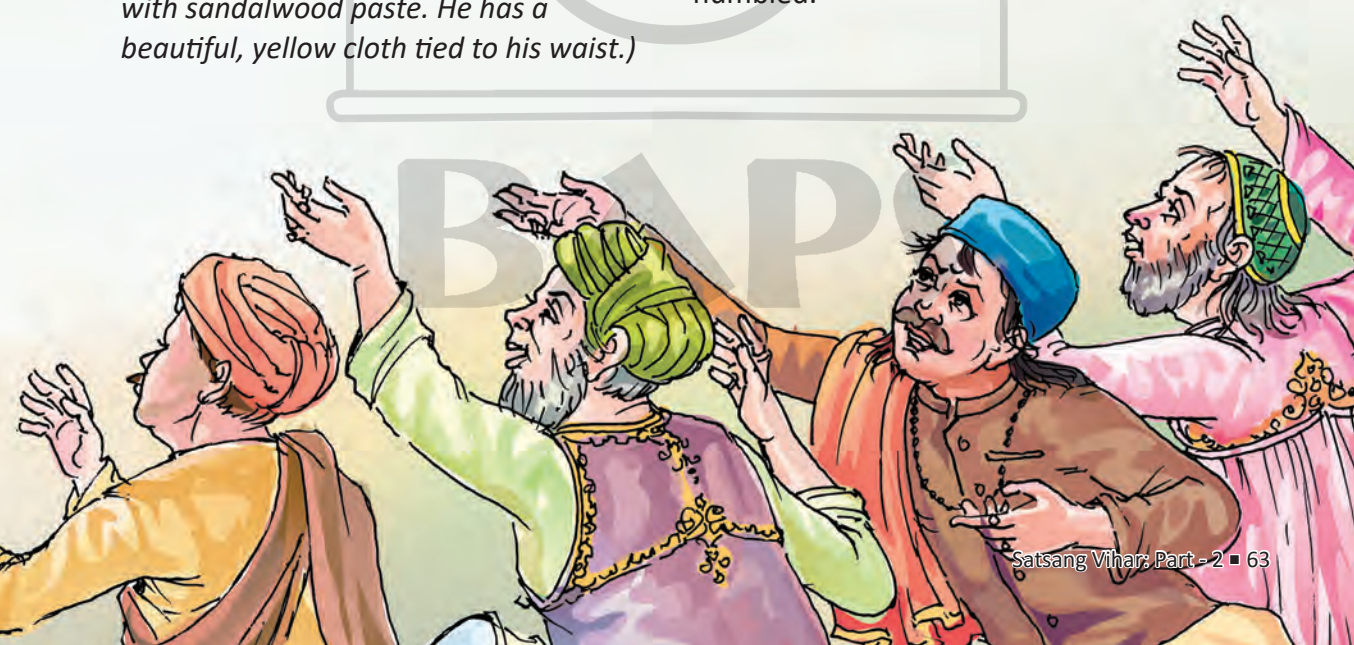
Premanand Swami and the other sadhu-musicians thus sang, accompanied by musical instruments. In just a few moments, their singing filled the air. Their performance was so powerful that it seemed as if the **evening had transformed into morning.** The sun was about to set, yet everyone felt as if the sun was just rising. Roosters began to crow. Birds set out to forage.

**The singers**, too, **began to sway**. Pleased with Maharaj's *paramhansas*, they sat up on their knees and cried, "Praise be to the Lord! Praise be to the Lord!"

When the music finally stopped, everyone felt as if they had awakened from some type of **divine samadhi**.

Shriji Maharaj then said, "Now that you've heard my *paramhansas* perform, let me share something with you. Their only greatness isn't that they can change evening into morning. **These *paramhansas* also change people's lives. They travel to people's homes and speak to them about giving up harmful desires, addictions, and superstitions. And they help them walk the path of God. This is their true greatness."**

Learning of this, the singers were quite humbled.



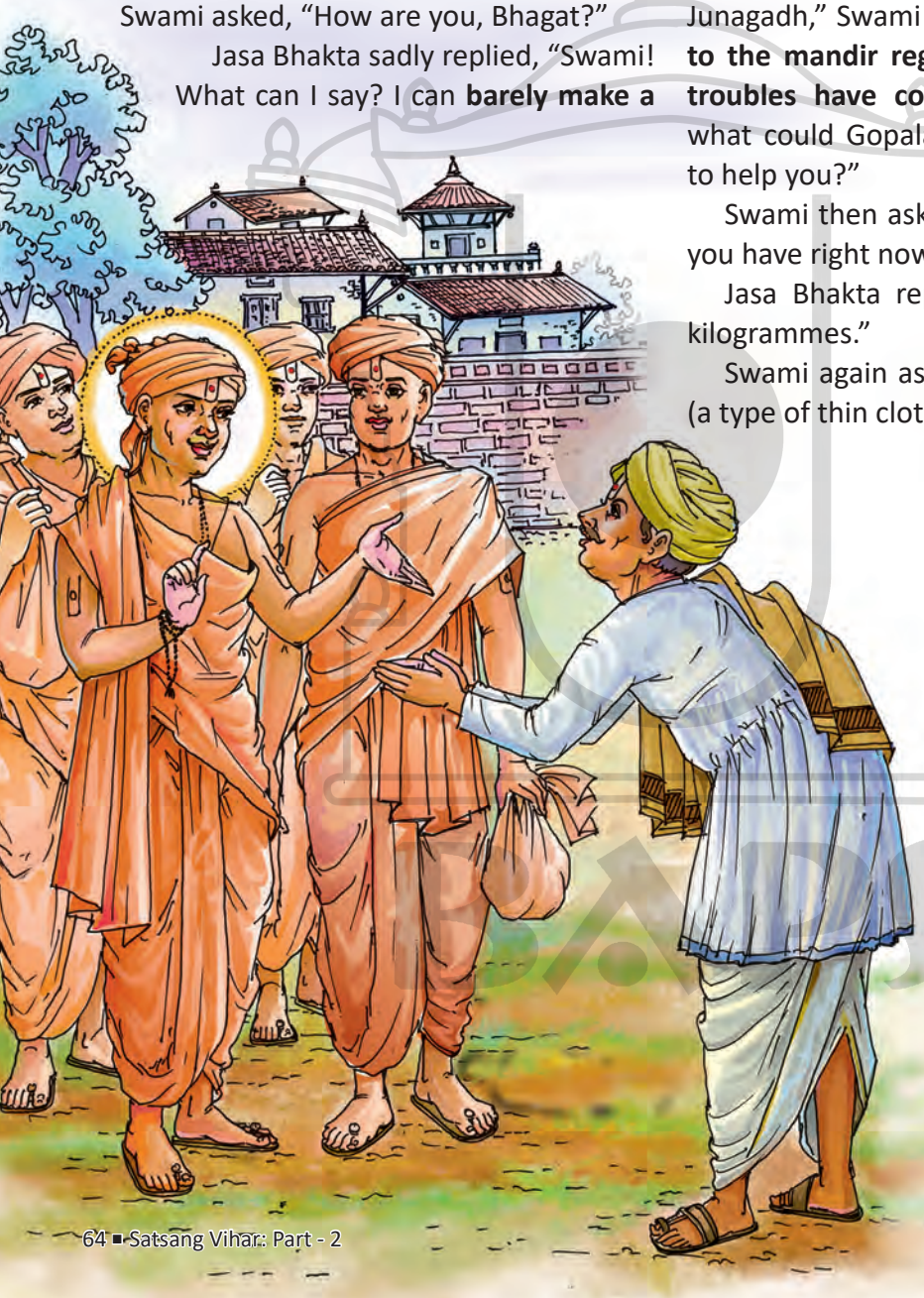
# 29. ONE WHO GIVES INDEED GETS

In Gujarat's Saurashtra region, there is a village named **Thanagalol**. **Gunatitanand Swami** once came there. Standing at the village outskirts, he said, "**Jasa Bhakta** lives here. Please call him."

Several *parshads* quickly went off and called. Jasa Bhakta soon arrived. He did *dandvats* to Swami and then bowed.

Swami asked, "How are you, Bhagat?"

Jasa Bhakta sadly replied, "Swami! What can I say? I can **barely make a living** here. Gopalanand Swami told me not to leave this village because it is on a route that our sadhus often travel. He told me to give them flour and pulses as they passed. He said if I cared for them in such a way, they would bless me. But, Swami! I have helped, yet I am simply miserable!"



"You don't come to the festivals in Junagadh," Swami said. "And **you don't give to the mandir regularly**. **That is why such troubles have come upon you.** As such, what could Gopalanand Swami possibly do to help you?"

Swami then asked, "How many grains do you have right now?"

Jasa Bhakta replied, "Swami, I have 40 kilogrammes."

Swami again asked, "How much *pankoru* (a type of thin cloth) do you have?"

"Two arm lengths, Swami," came the reply.

"Give us **ten kilos of grains** from your forty," Swami said. "We will **serve your grains to Thakorji.** Bring the ***pankoru,*** as well. We will make **sieves** out of it **to sift flour**."

Jasa Bhakta quickly did as Swami said. The sadhus made *dal* and *bati* using everything he brought. They then sat beneath a banyan tree and served Thakorji. Afterwards, they ate.

Swami then mounted his horse and went to

Jasa Bhakta's **farm**. Seeing the soil, he said, "**This land is a goldmine**. Work hard, keeping Bhagwan in mind. And be sure to take out **one-twentieth of your income for Thakorji.** Keenly follow this *agna* of Shriji Maharaj."

Then placing his hand on Jasa Bhakta's head, he said again, "Look, this hardship has come because you don't come to the festivals in Junagadh and don't take out Bhagwan's part from your income. So, now take a *niyam* that you will always do so." Swami thus **blessed** Jasa Bhakta then went on along his travels.

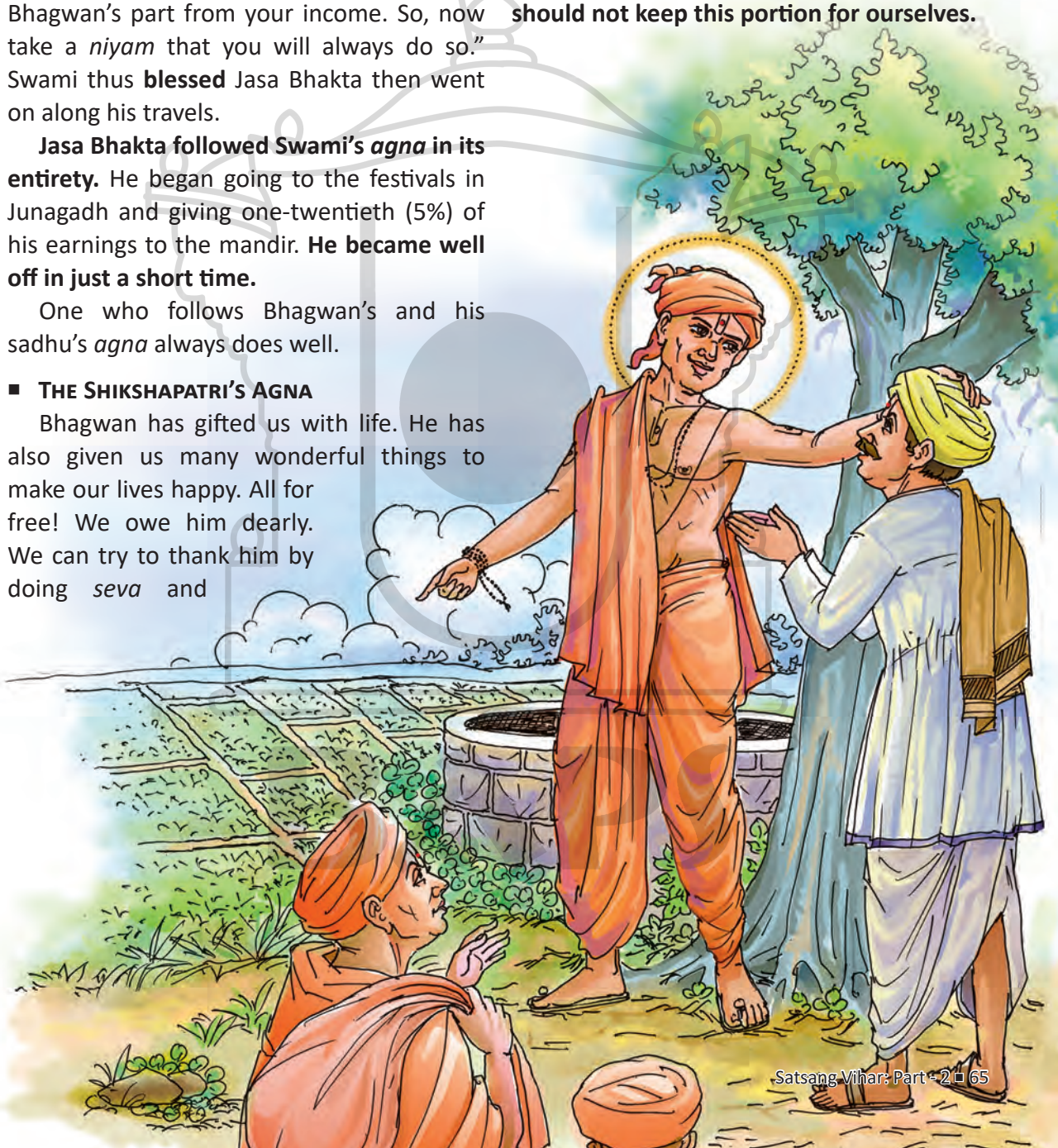
**Jasa Bhakta followed Swami's *agna* in its entirety.** He began going to the festivals in Junagadh and giving one-twentieth (5%) of his earnings to the mandir. **He became well off in just a short time.**

One who follows Bhagwan's and his sadhu's *agna* always does well.

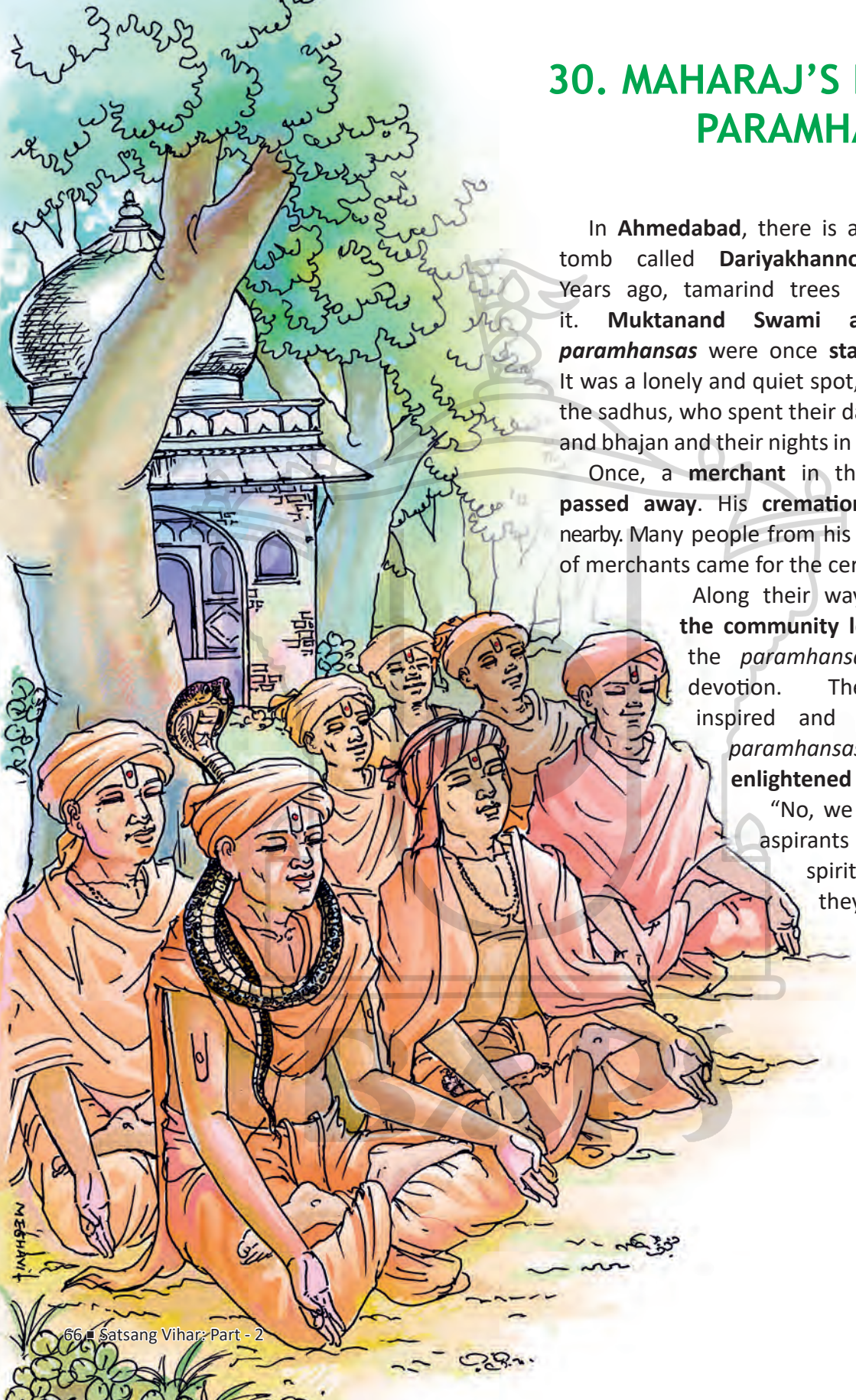
### ■ The Shikshapatri's Agna

Bhagwan has gifted us with life. He has also given us many wonderful things to make our lives happy. All for free! We owe him dearly. We can try to thank him by doing *seva* and bhakti and by donating to the mandir. Plus, the money we give to the mandir is used for good causes. And in comparison to what we give, Bhagwan graces us back with countless more.

**Shriji Maharaj has given *agna* in the Shikshapatri that we should give 5% or 10% of our income to the mandir. This portion of our earnings belongs to Bhagwan. We should not keep this portion for ourselves.**



# 30. MAHARAJ'S LOYAL PARAMHANSAS



In **Ahmedabad**, there is a very large tomb called **Dariyakhanno Gumbaj**. Years ago, tamarind trees surrounded it. **Muktanand Swami and other *paramhansas*** were once **staying** there. It was a lonely and quiet spot, perfect for the sadhus, who spent their days in *katha* and bhajan and their nights in meditation.

Once, a **merchant** in the city had **passed away**. His **cremation** was held nearby. Many people from his community of merchants came for the ceremony.

Along their way, **some of the community leaders** saw the *paramhansas* offering devotion. They were inspired and asked the *paramhansas*, **"Are you enlightened masters**?"

"No, we are merely aspirants on the spiritual path," they answered.

Some of the leaders, though, **mocked** the *paramhansas*. Poking fun, one of them said, "Look at us! We are the true enlightened ones!" So saying, he and a few others sat cross-legged in ***padmasan*** and acted like they were **meditating**.

Suddenly, from atop a nearby tree, a **snake fell to the ground**. The **imposters** got up and **ran**. Meanwhile, our **sadhus did not budge!** It was Maharaj's *agna* for the sadhus not to move while meditating – even if insects, scorpions or snakes crawled all over them. What a difficult *agna*! Nonetheless, the *paramhansas* followed it with determination.

The **snake** slithered forth – over one *paramhansa's* **hand**, across another's **foot**, on another's **back** and atop another's **head**. But none of the sadhus left their meditation.

The snake even wrapped itself around **Sachchidanand Swami's** neck and spread its **hood** like an **umbrella** above his **head**. Yet, **Swami did not move**.

Then, the snake slithered away.

The **community leaders** present were astonished and fell **at the sadhus' feet**. "Swami! **You are true enlightened masters**."

"No," Muktanand Swami said. "**The real master is our God, Bhagwan Swaminarayan.** We are his servants."

The **community leaders** were pleased. "**Come** to our homes tomorrow **for *bhiksha***," they said.

But the sadhus had another ***agna*** from Maharaj: **to never ask for *bhiksha* at a place where they were invited**. And so, for two or three days, the leaders brought *bhiksha* to the sadhus where they were staying.

But the *paramhansas* were also not to stay where they were honoured. Thus, **on the third day, they left** for Sarangpur. Maharaj was very pleased. He had given them **108** such *niyams*. The *paramhansas* passed through each of these **tests** with flying colours.

**No matter what hardships they faced, the *paramhansas* never failed to follow Maharaj's commands. Each of them could have been worshipped as gods themselves, yet they lived as humble servants of Shriji Maharaj.**



# 31. DADA KHACHAR'S FAITH

**Dada Khachar, the ruler of Gadhada,** was Shriji Maharaj's **beloved devotee**. Once, **Shriji Maharaj** called him and **said**, "Dada, why do you need your **property**? **Sign it over to your sisters**."

Without a moment's hesitation, Dada Khachar **completed** the **paperwork** and transferred everything to his sisters.

"What will you do now?" Shriji Maharaj asked.

"I will get a government job in Bhavnagar," Dada answered.

Shriji Maharaj called **Laduba and Jivuba** and said, "Now that the land is yours, you will **have to go to Bhavnagar** often for legal work. You should hire someone to take care of such things."

Shriji Maharaj then told Dada Khachar, "Why go looking for a **job** elsewhere? **Stay here and take care of your sisters' administrative work.**"

Dada Khachar readily agreed to be a servant in his own home for his own sisters. And it was not just for a day or two. He **followed Maharaj's *agna* for an entire year**! Shriji Maharaj later had his property returned. Dada Khachar had **passed Maharaj's test**.

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Dada Khachar was once getting **shaved**. **Shriji Maharaj** was in a *sabha* at the time, **"Where is Dada Khachar?" he asked.**

Hearing that Shriji Maharaj had called, Dada Khachar got up even **before he had finished his shave.** He covered his face with a piece of cloth and **came** to the *sabha*.

"What is this?" Shriji Maharaj asked upon seeing him.

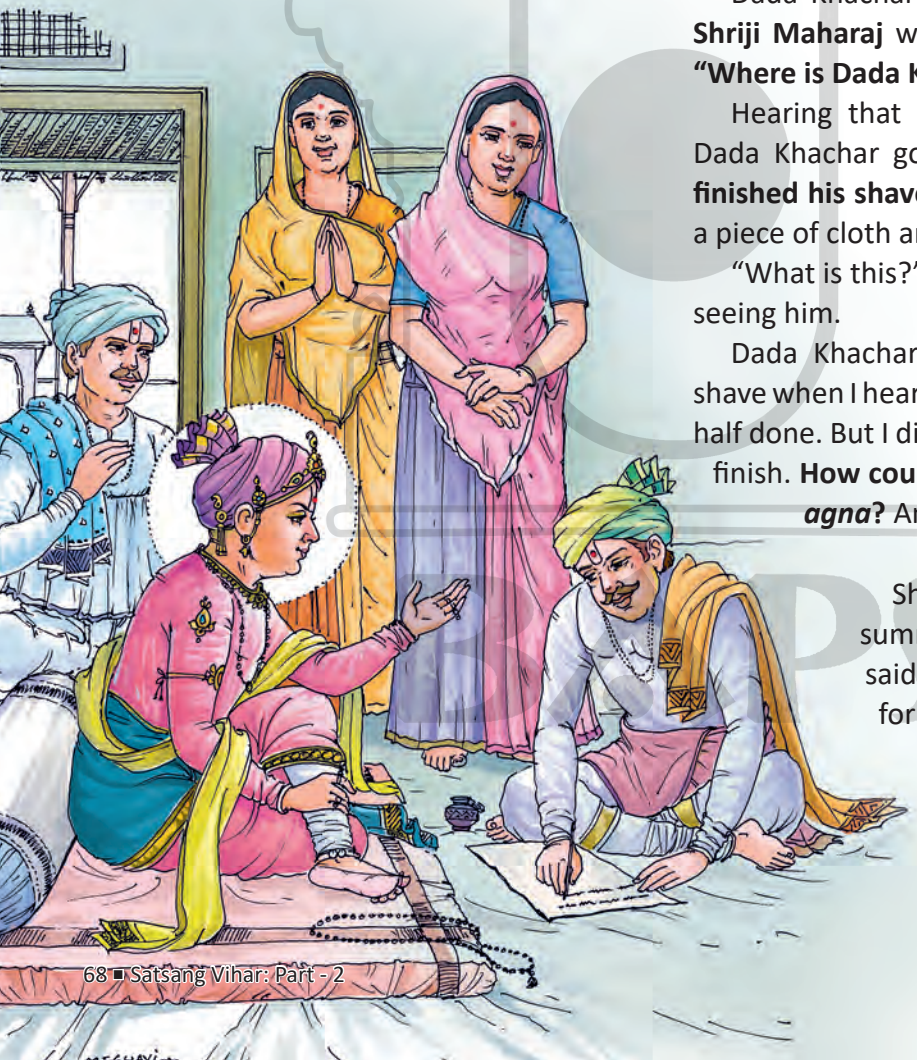
Dada Khachar replied, "I was getting a shave when I heard you were calling me. I was half done. But I did not wait for the barber to finish. **How could I delay in following your *agna*?** And so, I came right away."

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Shriji Maharaj once summoned Dada Khachar and said, "Dada! I need **2,000 rupees** for mandir construction."

"I will bring it **tomorrow** morning," Dada Khachar answered.

Shriji Maharaj decided to **test** Dada Khachar.





Early the next morning, **he readied himself to leave the *darbar*. Dada came running**. He grabbed Shriji Maharaj's feet, but **Shriji Maharaj** lightly **pushed him away.** "Why did you tell me to wait?" he asked.

Dada Khachar **desperately prayed**, "Maharaj! You are my life. Please do not go."

But Shriji Maharaj ignored Dada Khachar's pleas. He got into an ox cart. Dada Khachar lay down **in front of the cart**. But Shriji Maharaj simply had the cart driven around. But Dada Khachar got in the way again. And so, Shriji Maharaj got down and began walking. **Dada Khachar** followed, his hands shaking in anguish and **his eyes filled with tears**. He **grabbed Shriji Maharaj's feet**. **But Shriji Maharaj jerked his feet away**. Dada Khachar then grabbed them once again.

Finally, it was too much for Shriji Maharaj to handle. He turned back and **embraced** Dada Khachar. "I will **stay here forever**," he said, won over by Dada Khachar's faith.

**Such was Dada Khachar's greatness! He was the first bead in Shriji Maharaj's *mala*. He passed every test. He never even thought, "Why is Maharaj doing this?" He saw Maharaj and his devotees as divine. His devotion, *seva*, and sacrifice were such that Shriji Maharaj stayed in Gadhada for 25 years!** If we learn to be devoted like Dada Khachar, Shriji Maharaj will forever reside with us, as well, in our hearts.

# 32. NEVER LET GO OF SATSANG

There was once a devotee named **Parvatbhai** from **Agatrai**. He was quite strong in *agna* and *upasana*. He had **sacrificed** a lot, as well. In fact, he had given **6,400 kilogrammes of grains** for the almshouse Maharaj had opened in Loj.

Parvatbhai and his wife had once come to **Gadhada**. Parvatbhai would do *satsang* all day. **Shriji Maharaj** once **thought**, "**Where must Parvatbhai be going for his meals?** He probably eats where he stays."

Several days later, Shriji Maharaj told Mayaram Bhatt, "Go find out where Parvatbhai eats every day."

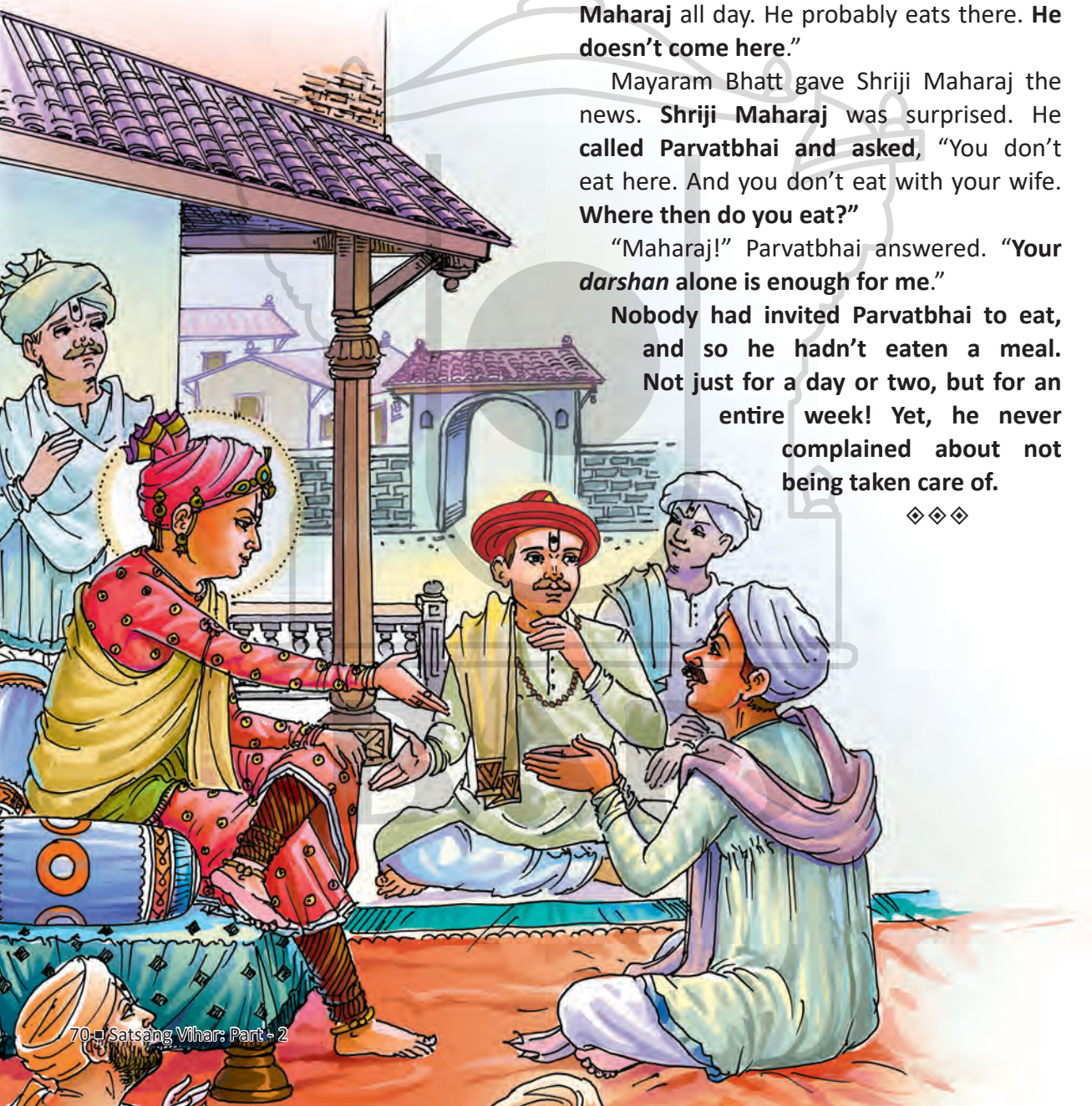
Mayaram Bhatt asked Parvatbhai's **wife**. "Oh!" she remarked. "He is **with Shriji Maharaj** all day. He probably eats there. **He doesn't come here**."

Mayaram Bhatt gave Shriji Maharaj the news. **Shriji Maharaj** was surprised. He **called Parvatbhai and asked**, "You don't eat here. And you don't eat with your wife. **Where then do you eat?"**

"Maharaj!" Parvatbhai answered. "**Your *darshan* alone is enough for me**."

**Nobody had invited Parvatbhai to eat, and so he hadn't eaten a meal. Not just for a day or two, but for an entire week! Yet, he never complained about not being taken care of.**

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There was a wealthy businessman from Botad named **Shivlal Sheth**. He possessed assets worth 900,000 rupees, which was a fortune at the time. He was also a great devotee. Through Gunatitanand Swami's *satsang*, he had become *ekantik*.

Shivlal Sheth would often come to **Junagadh**. Once, after having his meal, he slipped a **betel nut** in his mouth. Chewing the nut, he came into the ***sabha***. **Gunatitanand Swami was doing *katha*** at the time.

Hearing a cracking **noise**, Gunatitanand Swami asked, slightly annoyed, **"Who is chewing a bone in this *sabha*?"**

Everyone turned towards Shivlal Sheth. **Shivlal Sheth got up** right away, left the *sabha* and **spit the betel nut out**. Then, he **washed his mouth** and took his place in the *sabha* once again.

Shivlal **did not even think**, "Swami **dishonoured** me in front of so many people. I do so much *seva*, yet I'm not even appreciated. I **might as well leave *satsang***."

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Sachchidanand Swami, one of Maharaj's *paramhansas*, often said that one should never leave *satsang*, no matter what the consequences: "No matter how much pain someone were to give me, I would go to where the sadhus stay, and I would say, 'Dear sadhus! Please give me alms in my *jholi*.' In this way, I would beg for food. But I would never leave *satsang*. I am forever indebted to *satsang*, as it is the cause for all that I am."

**Such were Maharaj's sadhus and devotees. They had sacrificed everything for *satsang*. Yet, even if they were ever disrespected or not taken care of properly, they never gave up *satsang*. This is what is called *jivno satsang*, or *satsang* that is held deeply in one's soul.**



# 33. ALL OF SATSANG IS ONE FAMILY

In the town of **Mangrol**, there lived a poor devotee. His name was Kamalshi Vanjha. He had **fallen very ill**. Nobody was willing to take care of him. Even his relatives had turned their backs on him.

**Jhinabhai, the ruler of Panchala,** came to know of this. He was hurt. He remembered Shriji Maharaj's words, "We should act as **the servant of a servant** of my *satsangis*." Immediately, he decided **"I must care for Kamalshibhai myself**. I will bring him to my home and take good care of him."

Some **workers** were called to carry Kamalshi's bed. But only **three** were found. Jhinabhai jumped at the opportunity. "**I'll be the fourth**! Lift away!" So saying, he lifted the cot with the workers. He walked a bit. After some time, a fourth worker came and took over.

They soon reached Panchala. Jhinabhai had the **bed** put **in his own room**. Day and night, he **cared for** Kamalshibhai. He would press his **head** and knead his feet. He would also **feed** him and wash his **clothes**. Jhinabhai was a ruler and had servants of his own. But he **chose to help Kamalshibhai himself**.



**Shriji Maharaj** came to know of Jhinabhai's *seva*. **Pleased**, he came to **Panchala** right away. He **embraced** Jhinabhai. Not once or twice, but **seven** times! Maharaj was pleased because Jhinabhai had kept **unity** and brotherhood and had **stood by one of his devotees**.

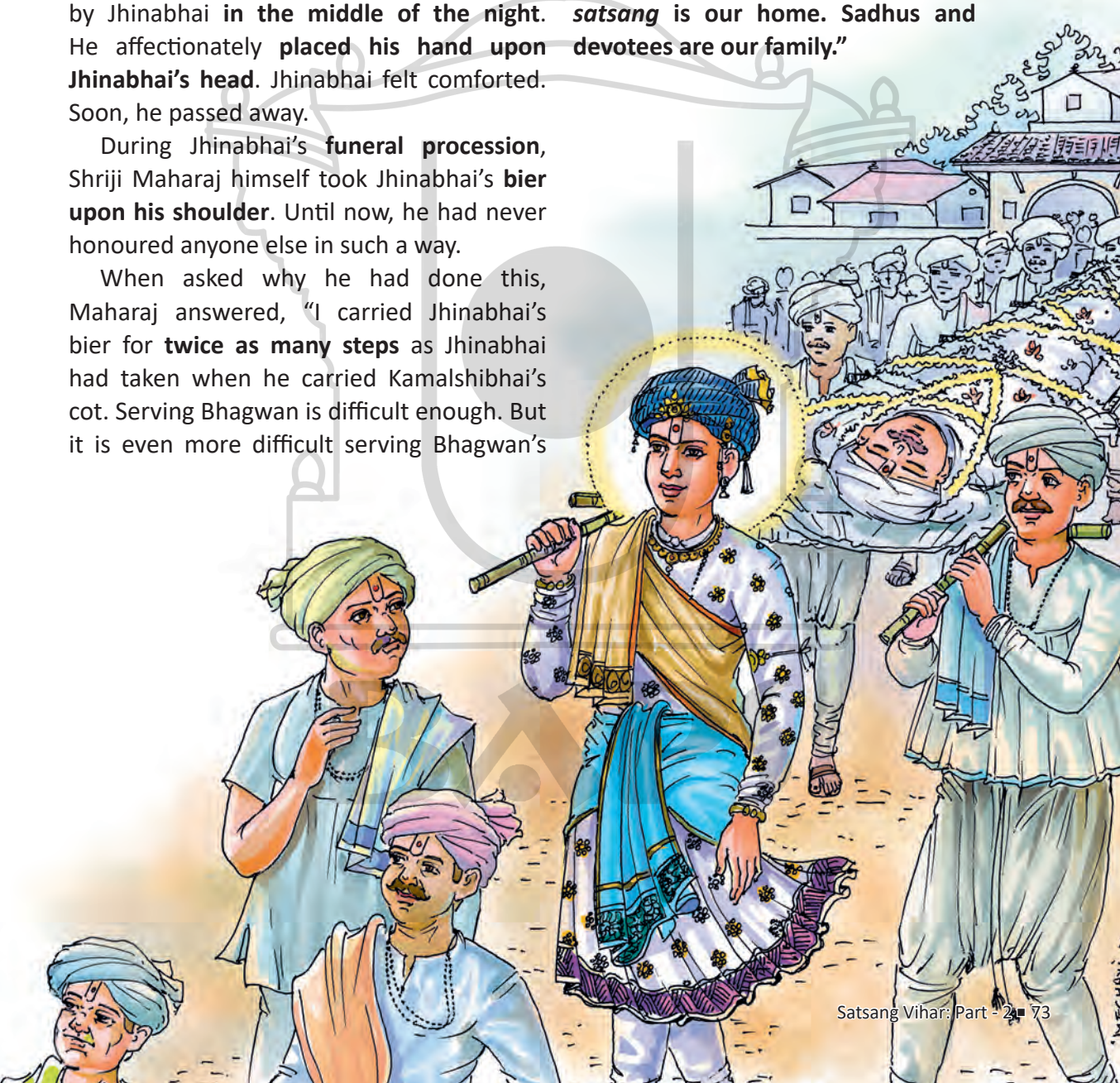
**A few years later**, **Jhinabhai** himself fell terribly ill. His **life** was coming to an **end**. **Shriji Maharaj was informed,** and so he came to **Panchala** immediately and stood by Jhinabhai **in the middle of the night**. He affectionately **placed his hand upon Jhinabhai's head**. Jhinabhai felt comforted. Soon, he passed away.

During Jhinabhai's **funeral procession**, Shriji Maharaj himself took Jhinabhai's **bier upon his shoulder**. Until now, he had never honoured anyone else in such a way.

When asked why he had done this, Maharaj answered, "I carried Jhinabhai's bier for **twice as many steps** as Jhinabhai had taken when he carried Kamalshibhai's cot. Serving Bhagwan is difficult enough. But it is even more difficult serving Bhagwan's devotees. This is what Jhinabhai has done. That is why I am so pleased with him."

**Shriji Maharaj's devotees believed *satsang* to be a divine family. They always kept unity, brotherhood and oneness (*samp, suhradaybhav* and *ekta*) among each other. And they always stood up for their fellow devotees. By doing so, they earned Shriji Maharaj's *rajipo*.**

**Yogiji Maharaj often said, "Akshar and Purushottam are our mother and father. *satsang* is our home. Sadhus and devotees are our family."**



# 34. PRAHLAD'S DEVOTION

There was once an **evil** man named **Hiranyakashipu**. His **brother**, **Hiranyaksha**, was just as evil. To save the world, **Bhagwan Vishnu had slayed Hiranyaksha**.

Hiranyakashipu was furious. He began doing ***tapa*** to earn special powers so he could **defeat Bhagwan Vishnu**. Eventually, **Brahmaji granted him a boon** that **he could never be killed** during day or night, inside or outside his home, by a human or a beast, or by weapons that could be thrown or held.

Hiranyakashipu had a **son** named **Prahlad**. From a young age, Prahlad was fond of doing bhakti. His father did not like this one bit.

"There is no Bhagwan," he said.

"Then who made the world?" Prahlad asked. "Who made us?"

"There is no Bhagwan other than me," **Hiranyakashipu** threatened. "**If you continue to chant Bhagwan's name, I'll kill you!"**

"Do whatever you wish," **Prahlad** said bravely. "But **I will never stop doing bhakti.**"

**Hiranyakashipu** was very **angry**. He sent his son off to a **boarding school.** There, his evil teachers tried their best, but **Prahlad simply would not set his bhakti aside.** Rather, he began to teach the other kids at school to worship!

Hiranyakashipu was filled with rage. He boomed, "Soldiers! Finish this foolish boy!"

The soldiers tied Prahlad up. They took him and **pushed him off a cliff**. But Bhagwan protected him. Then they **tried crushing him under elephants**. But it was as if Bhagwan had cast his body in iron! Prahlad just smiled and continued doing bhakti.

Hiranyakashipu called his sister, **Holika**, who had a boon that she could never be burned. She sat in a roaring fire with Prahlad in her lap. But miraculously, **Holika was burned to death, while Prahlad was saved.** It was from this very incident that the tradition of Holi began as a way to celebrate the victory of good over evil.

Now, day and night, all Prahlad's father could think about was how to kill his boy. At last, he created an **iron pillar** and **heated it red hot**. "Where is your Bhagwan?" he spitefully asked.

"He is everywhere."

"Is he in this pillar, as well?"

"Of course," Prahlad bravely said.

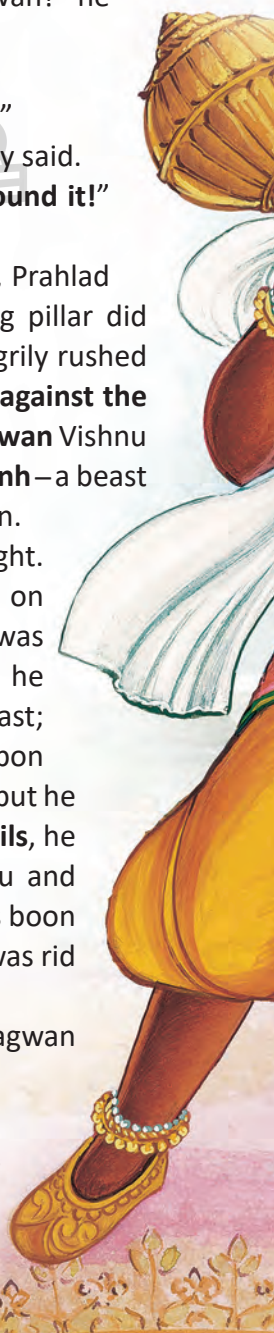
"Then **wrap your arms around it!**" Hiranyakashipu challenged.

Chanting Bhagwan's name, Prahlad hugged the pillar. The blazing pillar did nothing to him. His **father** angrily rushed forth and **slammed his mace against the pillar**. It **broke to pieces. Bhagwan** Vishnu **emerged** from within as **Nrusinh** – a beast that was half man and half lion.

It was neither day nor night. It was dusk. Bhagwan sat on the palace's porch. So, he was neither inside nor outside; he was neither a man nor a beast; and he did not have a weapon that could be thrown or held, but he only had his nails. **With his nails**, he dug deep into Hiranyakashipu and **tore him to pieces.** Brahmaji's boon was upheld, while the world was rid of an evil man.

"Prahlad!" Nrusinh Bhagwan said. "Ask for a **boon**."

"O Bhagwan," **Prahlad answered**. "You saved my life. But I also ask that you **save**



**me from maya**. Grace me with *satsang*. And please bless me that I may forever worship you and be your servant."

"So be it," Bhagwan Nrusinh said.

**Bhakta Prahlad never set aside his bhakti, despite the life-threatening circumstances. If we too offer such bhakti, Bhagwan will forever stay with us, and we will always be victorious.**



# 35. THE VACHANAMRUT

**Gunatitanand Swami** was in a ***sabha*** in **Junagadh**. **"Bring me *amrut*,"** Swami said.

A **sadhu** standing next to him thought, "Swami must be mistaken. *Amrut* is an elixir of eternal life. How can there be such a thing here on earth in this day and age?"

**"What shall I bring?"** he asked Swami.

"*Amrut*. Bring me *amrut*."

"But, Swami. From where?"

Swami smiled, "By *amrut*, I mean the Vachanamrut. **Vachanamrut is *amrut* here on earth**. Drinking *amrut* makes one a *deva* in *swarga*. In the same way, reading the Vachanamrut makes a person an *akshar mukta* and sends him to Akshardham."

Through Swami's words, everyone came to understand the Vachanamrut's greatness.

### ■ An Introduction to the Vachanamrut

- A compilation of Maharaj's **talks** in **7 places:** Gadhada, Sarangpur, Kariyani, Loya, Panchala, Vartal and Ahmedabad, **written in sabhas** by the *paramhansas* as Maharaj spoke.
- Compiled by **four *paramhansas***: **1. Gopalanand Swami, 2. Nityanand Swami, 3. Muktanand Swami** and **4. Shukanand Swami.**
- The first Vachanamrut occurs on 21 November 1819; the last occurs on 25 July 1829. The Vachanamrut thus includes **10 years of Maharaj's discourses.**
- Each Vachanamrut starts with the place and date of its occurrence. It also describes how Shriji Maharaj looked on that day. This shows the *paramhansas*' eye for historical authenticity.
- The Vachanamrut contains **questions and answers.** Sometimes, the sadhus and devotees ask questions and Maharaj answers. Other times, Maharaj asks questions and answers himself. This style matches that of the Upanishads.
- There are **262** Vachanamruts. If we include the extra 11 Vachanamruts in the appendix, there are a total of 273.

### ■ The Vachanamrut's Greatness

- Shriji Maharaj says, "What are these talks that I have delivered before you like? Well, I have spoken having heard and having taken the **essence** from the Vedas, the shastras, the Purans and **all other**



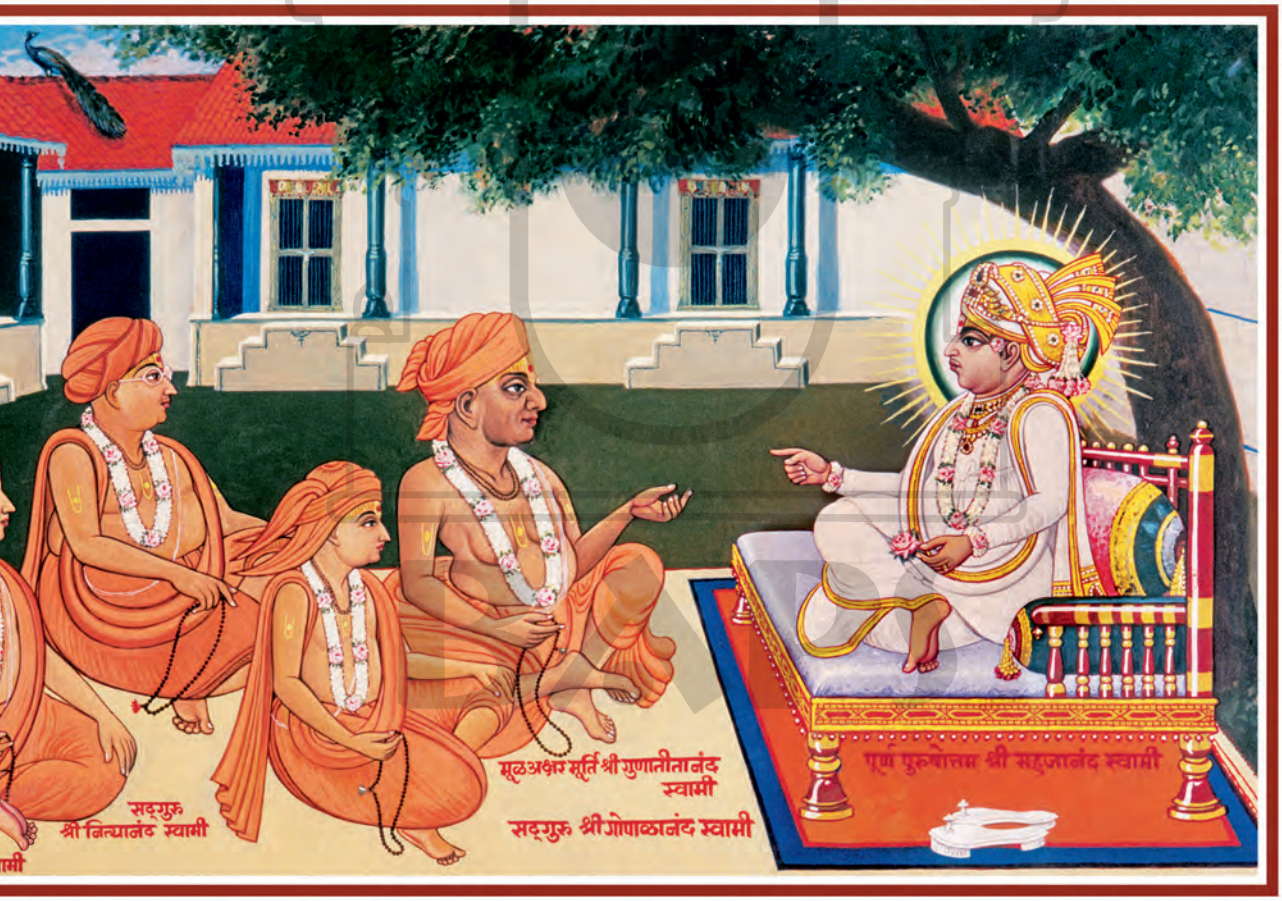
**words on this earth having to do with liberation.** This is the most profound and fundamental principle; it is the **essence of all essences.** For **all** those who have previously attained liberation, for all those who will attain it in the future and for all those who are presently walking the path of liberation, these talks are **like a lifeline**." (Vachanamrut Gadhada II-28)

- **Yogiji Maharaj** says, "Shriji Maharaj will seat a person who reads the Vachanamrut right next to him. Great *sadgurus* often said that **Shriji Maharaj** would grant **darshan** to a person who reads the Vachanamrut **108 times**."
- The Vachanamrut **answers all of life's problems.** One who reads the Vachanamrut has read all the scriptures in the world.

## ■ Taking a Vow to Read the Vachanamrut

- **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** has said, "Every *satsangi* should **read one Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vato every day**."
- Gunatitanand Swami also has said, "The **Vachanamrut** is difficult to understand. But a person who **studies it over and again** will begin to understand it **on his own**. Such is Maharaj's boon upon us." (Swamini Vato, 5/221)

Let us take a *niyam* today to earn Maharaj and Swami's ***rajipo*** by reading and thinking about the Vachanamrut every day.



# 36. A MESSENGER OF UPASANA



There was a devotee named **Maganbhai** from Vaso, a town near Bochasan. He was born in 1901. He was not very educated – he had studied only up to the 11th grade. He had migrated to **Africa** in 1919, where he **worked as a station master** for East African Railways. Far away from home, he slowly lost touch with his values.

But his life took a turn in 1929. He was in the town of **Kibwezi**. Every day, he would play **volleyball** after work. Among the players were Africans, Europeans and Indians. In the evening, the **Christians** would leave for **church**; the **Muslims** would go to **mosques**. The only ones left would be two or three Hindus. Maganbhai thought, "How sad is it that **we Hindus have nowhere to go?**"

Around this time, Maganbhai **met** a *satsangi* named **Harmanbhai,** who **told** him of **Shastriji Maharaj** and the **Akshar-Purushottam *upasana***. Maganbhai became curious about this ***upasana*** and **read the entire Vachanamrut 10 times**. As soon as he got a **holiday** from work, he came to **India**. He had Shastriji Maharaj's darshan in **Anand**. "We want to spread *satsang* in Africa through you," Shastriji Maharaj said.

**Maganbhai** answered, "**I do not believe in Bhagwan. I know nothing about the shastras. And I do not know how to do *katha*.**"

**Shastriji Maharaj blessed him**, "**Maganbhai! Bhagwan will speak through you.**"

Once Maganbhai returned to Africa, he and other devotees wrote

a letter to Nirgundas Swami asking for the **names** and **addresses** of *satsangis* in East Africa. Nirgun Swami sent him the addresses he had. Maganbhai and the devotees began to meet everyone on Nirgun Swami's list.

***Adhiveshans* and festivals** soon began taking place, as well. Maganbhai would start his *katha* after dinner, at around 9 o'clock, and would go on till 2 am or sometimes even 5 am! He would explain the Vachanamrut so well that nobody would tire. In this way, he sowed seeds of faith through his ***katha***.

"I cannot go without *katha*," he would say. He even did *katha* at his daughter's wedding. The wedding lasted for just 30 minutes. Then, Maganbhai spoke for three days!

In **Jinja** back then, **station masters would often** only **release goods upon receiving bribes**. But **Maganbhai** would say, "**If I took a bribe, it would dishonour my *tilak-chandlo***. My guru's name would be blemished. Take your money back. But try to **come to *katha*** from 5:30 to 6 pm."

In this way, Maganbhai **brought people into *satsang*** in Makindu, Gilgil, Kisumu, Namasagali, and wherever he worked.

Maganbhai spent his last years in **Tororo**. Work would end at 6 pm. Then, he would go into town. **Africans** and **Indians** there would gather to **drink**, **smoke** and **gamble**. **Maganbhai**, meanwhile, would sit at a distance and read the **Vachanamrut** aloud. Nobody listened to him, yet he continued. **Four months** passed in this way.

One day, Maganbhai asked the people, "Why don't you set aside your bad habits and worship Bhagwan instead?"

A man named **CM Patel** answered, "**We do not care** about what you have to say."

But Maganbhai did not give up. He **continued speaking about Bhagwan**. CM Patel and other Gujaratis and Punjabis became **interested in *satsang*** over time.

Once or twice a month, festivals were held. Maganbhai **sponsored the festivals** in Tororo. He kept only **150 shillings of his earnings** and **donated the rest**.

Maganbhai would **dance with delight** alone in his room, thinking about how **fortunate he was to have** found Bhagwan, the *satpurush*, and ***satsang***. When doing **arti**, he would think, "I am doing arti of Purna Purushottam Narayan, Bhagwan himself!" Thinking thus, he would **happily** sway so much that two people **would have to hold him** so he would not fall. During festivals, he would **roll** on the ground where devotees had eaten. He would even do ***dandvats*** to devotees. This was because he understood the greatness of everyone who was associated with Maharaj and Swami.

**Shastriji Maharaj** had sent a letter to the devotees of Africa during his **final illness**. He was calling them to meet him in **Sarangpur**. They came by **boat**. It **took** them **nine days**. All through the journey, Maganbhai did ***katha*** for **12 to 18 hours** a day!

With Shastriji Maharaj's blessings, many **miracles** happened in Maganbhai's presence. Yet, Maganbhai never let people honour him. He forever stayed as a ***das***, or servant, in satsang.

**Even though he was a householder**, **he lived his life as if he were a sadhu.**

**Through his contact**, people like CM Kaka and CT Kaka **joined *satsang***. Through them, *satsang* **spread to Europe and America**.

**Indeed, all it takes is one person to make a difference and spread *satsang*. Maganbhai is an ideal example of this. Like Maganbhai, we too should try to spread *satsang* to please Maharaj and Swami.**

# 37. DAILY RECITATIONS

## ■ Jaynaad

Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan ni jay...
Akshar Purushottam Maharaj ni jay...
Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj ni jay...
Bhagatji Maharaj ni jay...
Shastriji Maharaj ni jay...
Yogiji Maharaj ni jay...
Pramukh Swami Maharaj ni jay...
Mahant Swami Maharaj ni jay...

## ■ Arti

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

## ■ 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.***

O Sahajanand Shri-Hari! O Purushottam! O 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.***

O Purushottam Narayan along with your dear 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 Sahajā-***
***nandam cha vande sadā.***

I forever bow to the beautiful Shri Purushottam Sahajanand, who has Mul Akshar with him. He possesses every virtue, is present in all living and non-living things, has a divine form, gives happiness to millions of jivas, ishwars, and aksharmuktas, is the sarvavatari, is the pursuit of all rishis, is worthy of being praised through the Vedas, and is more powerful than all others.

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

A guru and shishya pray together: O Paramatma! Protect us both! Nourish us both! Strengthen us both! Let our studies be bright, and let us never hate each other. 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.

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

## ■ Night-Time Prayer

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

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

Dear Maharaj! Dear Swami! Dear 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 awaken me early tomorrow morning and give me the strength to please you ever more.

# 38. ADDITIONAL RECITATIONS

## ■ Ashtak

Antaryāmi parātparam hita-karam, sarvopari Shri-Hari,
Sākāram Parabrahma sarva-sharanam kartā dayā-sāgaram.
Ārādhyam mama ishtadeva prakatam, sarvāvatāri Prabhu,
Vande dukha-haram sadā sukha-karam, Shri Swāminārāyanam... 1

Sākshad Aksharadhāma divya paramam, sevāratam murtimān,
Sarvadhāra sadā svaroma-vivare, brahmānda-koti-dharam.
Bhakti dhyāna kathā sadaiva karanam, brahma-sthiti-dāyakam,
Vande Aksharabrahma pāda-kamalam, Gunātitānandanam... 2

Shriman nirguna murti sundara tanu, adhyātma-vārtā-ratam,
Dehātita dashā akhanda-bhajanam, shāntam kshamā-sāgaram.
Āgnā-pālana-tatparam guna-grahi, nirdosha-murti swayam,
Vande Prāgaji-Bhakta-pāda-kamalam, brahmaswarupam gurum... 3

Shuddhopāsana mandiram surachanam, siddhānta-rakshāparam,
Sansthā-sthāpana divya-kārya-karanam, sevā-mayam jivanam.
Nishthā nirbhayatā sukashta-sahanam, dhairyam kshamā-dhāranam,
Shāstri Yagnapurushadāsa-charanam, vande pratāpi gurum... 4

Vāni amruta-purna harsha-karani, sanjivani mādhuri,
Divyam drushti-pradāna divya hasanam, divyam shubham kirtanam.
Brahmānanda prasanna sneha-rasitam, divyam krupā-varshanam,
Yogiji guru Gnānajivana pade, bhāve sadā vandanam... 5

Vishve vaidika dharma marma mahimā, satsanga vistārakam,
Vātsalyam karunā aho jana-jane, ākarshanam adbhutam.
Dāsatvam guru-bhakti nitya bhajanam, samvāditā sādhutā,
Nārāyanaswarupa Swāmi Pramukham, vande gurum muktidam... 6

Divyam saumya-mukhāravinda saralam, netre ami-varshanam,
Nirdosham mahimā-mayam suhrudayam, shāntam samam nishchalam.
Nirmānam mrudu divyabhāva satatam, vāni shubhā nirmalā,
Vande Keshavajivanam mama gurum, Swāmi Mahantam sadā... 7

Swāminārāyan... Swāminārāyan... Swāminārāyan...

## ■ Thal

Māre gher āvajo Chhogalādhāri,
māre gher āvajo Chhogalādhāri,
Lādu jalebi ne sev suvāli,
hu to bhāve kari lāvi chhu ghāri... Māre gher... (1)

Suran puran ne bhāji kārelā,
pāpad vadi vaghāri;
Vantāk vālodnā shāk karyā,
me to chorā fali chhamkāri... Māre gher... (2)

Kāju kamodanā bhāt karyā,
me to dāl kari bahu sāri;
Limbu kākdi nā lejo athānā,
kadhi kari chhe Kāthiyāvādi... Māre gher... (3)

Laving sopāri ne pān bidi vāli,
taj elchi jāvantari sāri;
Nishdin āvo to bhāve kari bhetu,
em māge Jerām Brahmachāri... Māre gher... (4)

## ■ Dhyey (Goal) and Purnahuti (Concluding) 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 Swaminarayan, who is Shri Hari, with Aksharbrahma. He is the *sarvavatari*, the child of Bhakti and Dharma, has a divine form, and is supreme, the giver of peace, the granter of liberation, the fulfiller of wishes, the cause of all. He is also known by the name 'Nilkanth'.



# 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:** Dahibahen

   **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. BAPS: A UNIQUE ORGANISATION

Our BAPS Sanstha's full name is the 'Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha'. This **international organisation** does excellent work in many fields.

■ **Unique Traits of BAPS**

- **Recognised by the United Nations**
- **Recognised 6 times in the Guinness Book of World Records**: 1. The Largest Active Temple Complex – Delhi Akshardham; 2. & 3. The Builder of the Most Temples in the World – Pramukh Swami Maharaj; 4. The World's Largest Annakut – London Mandir; 5. The Largest Hindu Temple Outside of India – London Mandir; 6. Pramukh Swami Maharaj as one of the 20 Most Influential People of the Century.
- More than 700,000 people contacted by **children** to **quit addictions**
- **Children's Activities** received Best Children's Activities **Award** from the Indian and Gujarat State governments, as well as the Queen's Award for activities in the UK.
- **Extraordinary relief work** during the Bhuj earthquake, Odisha cyclone, Indian tsunami, droughts and other disasters. This work has been recognised by the Indian, British and American governments.
- A leader in **educational and health** services.
- The organisation's ***gaushalas*** and **farms** have received national awards in India.
- Great success in organising **Cultural Festivals of India** around the world.
- Noteworthy contributions in tribal development, women's empowerment, environmental awareness, parental awareness, teachers' development, literacy campaigns, anti-dowry campaigns, water harvesting projects and many other developmental activities.

## ■ The Secret to our Success

- In 1995, during the opening of the **London Mandir**, industrialist **Shreechand Hinduja** visited. Showing the **haveli**, a sadhu mentioned, "This entire hall is **pillarless**." Hinduja replied, "No. You can't see the pillars, but **the 25,000 devotees** who have sacrificed to make this haveli are its **invisible pillars**."
- The **secret behind** the organisation's **success** is its **living, human mandirs – the sadhus and devotees**.
- More than 1,000 sadhus, 55,000 volunteers, and 1 million followers selflessly serve the *sanstha*.
- Knowledge of atma and Paramatma, integrity, staying steadfast in *niyams*, unity, self-restraint and other **values** instilled through our spiritual activities **help people become better human beings.**
- **The sadhus and the devotees are dedicated to the Vedic principle of Akshar and Purushottam** and have **firm faith in Bhagwan and the guru**. Hence, even **ordinary people** are able to make **extraordinary contributions.**

## ■ The Greatest Cause of Our Success

- In 1985, Indian **President Giani Zail Singh** visited the Gunatitanand Swami Bi-Centennary Festival and was very impressed by it. When Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "All of this has been **done by the sadhus and devotees**," President Zail Singh replied, "No. **The sadhus and devotees are the bulb, you are the current**."
- The **soul of BAPS** is Bhagwan's eternal home, the *gunatit satpurush*. **Mahant Swami Maharaj** is the *pragat gunatit satpurush*.
- **Bhagwan works through him today**.
- BAPS is truly a unique spiritual organization that does great service to society. Being a member and *bhakta* of this *sanstha* is **our greatest honour and biggest attainment**.



# BAPS AROUND THE WORLD

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami once said that *satsang* would spread to every leaf in the world – that is, the Swaminarayan *satsang* will reach every corner of the world. This vision is coming true today. Let's take a look at our main mandirs and centres around the world...



Chicago Mandir



New Jersey
BAPS Centenary Festival




Health Services



Nairobi Mandir



Educational Services



Environmental Services



Social Services

## BAPS at a Glance

- 52 countries
- 3,850 centres around the world
- 16,000 weekly assemblies for men and women of all ages
- More than 1,100 mandirs and 3 Akshardhams
- More than 1,000 learned sadhus
- 55,000 volunteers
- Over a million followers
- 8,000 children's weekly *sabhas*






Auckland Mandir



Akshardham, Gandhinagar



Cultural Services



Spiritual Services

Friends, our Bhagwan is *sarvopari*, our principles are true, our guru is great, and our *sanstha* is a leader in so many fields.

# GLOSSARY

## A

**adharma** 'the opposite of dharma'; unrighteousness, immorality.

**adhiveshan** a convention that includes tests of satsang knowledge.

**agna** instruction, order, command.

**ahar shuddhi** purity of diet.

**Akshar** one of the five eternal realities. It is greater than *jiva*, *ishwar*, and *maya* and second only to Purushottam. Akshar is the home and ideal servant of Bhagwan and the guru of BAPS.

**Aksharbrahma** See Akshar.

**amrut** a divine elixir that makes a person immortal.

**arti** the ritual of waving lighted wicks (*divas*) before the deity to worship and express love.

**asana** third of the eight steps of *ashtanga* yoga, entailing physical exercises of postures for soundness of body, which promotes concentration

**ashtak** a group of eight *shlokas*.

**ashvamedh yagna** a sacrifice done by kings in which a horse is released to travel. If it is captured, the king must fight for it to be set free. When the horse returns free to the kingdom, the sacrifice is concluded.

**atma** a pure soul.

**avatar** an incarnation of Bhagwan.

**avatarvad** the belief that Bhagwan comes onto earth; one of the core beliefs of Hinduism.

## B

**bati** wheat bread made by frying wheat dough in ghee.

**bhagvati diksha** initiation into orange robes – the sadhu order.

**Bhagwan** one who possesses divine powers – most often used for Paramatma or Supreme God.

**bhajiya** an Indian food item made by frying battered vegetables.

**bhakta** devotee; one who has bhakti (love) for Bhagwan.

**bhakti** love or devotion.

**bhiksha** to ask for or to give alms.

**Brahma** the deva assigned to create each brahmand (universe) and everything in it.

**Brahma** see Akshar.

**brahmarup** possessing qualities similar to those of Aksharbrahma.

**Brahmaswarup** the form of Aksharbrahma; the guru of BAPS.

## C

**charanarvind** holy feet.

## D

**dal** pulses; a curry made of boiled pulses.

**dandvat** prostration; to lie flat, with hands extended, as a sign of surrender and devotion.

**darbar** the home of a prince or king.

**das** a servant.

**dham** an abode or a home.

**dharna** concentration – sixth of the eight steps of *ashtanga* yoga.

**dhun** the chanting of Bhagwan's name.

**divyabhav** the firm belief that Bhagwan and his sadhu are fully divine and without any flaw.

## E

**ekadashi** a special religious observance of fasting performed on the 11th day of the bright and dark halves of a lunar month.

**ekantik** a person who has mastered dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and bhakti.

## G

**ghar sabha** a gathering where a family does *satsang*

**ghee** purified butter

**gaushala** a stable for cattle

**gunatit** above *maya*; often describes Aksharbrahma or souls that have become *brahmarup*

## I

**ishwar** cosmic beings Bhagwan entrusts to run the universe.

## J

**jata** the long hair of a yogi.

**jholi** a cloth bundle used to carry grains or belongings.

**jiva** the soul bound by maya.

**jodan** attachment; deep love.

## K

**kal** time; also can refer to death.

**kalyan** liberation of the soul.

**kanthi** a sacred necklace.

**karyakar** volunteer.

**katha** discourse; spiritual talks; the reading of a shastra.

**kriyaman** active.

**kusang** bad company.

## L

**ladus** an Indian sweet.

**lila** divine action.

## M

**mahant** the head of an ashram or mandir.

**mahima** glory or greatness.

**mala** a string of 108 beads used to chant Bhagwan's name.

**maya** one of the five eternal entities; ignorance; it is responsible for creating attachment.

**moksha** liberation; freedom from maya and life and death; the eternal experience of Bhagwan's bliss.

**mukhpath** to memorise something.

**mukta** a pure soul; one who is free from maya.

**murti** the sacred image of a deity.

**murti puja** worship of a deity's image.

## N

**niyam** a vow or promise to regularly perform a certain act.

## P

**padmasan** the lotus posture; one of many yogic *asanas*/postures.

**pagh** a turban.

**palash danda** a type of staff.

**panch tattva** the five eternal entities.

**panchang pranam** kneeling and bowing down; includes having five parts of one's body (both hands, feet and one's head) touching the ground.

**Parabrahma** that which is above Brahma; Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

**Paramatma** the ultimate spirit; Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

**paramhansa** an order of ascetics initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

**parampara** succession.

**pativrata** a woman who is loyal to her husband; a bhakta who is loyal to only one deity.

**phalahar** a diet of fruits and other foods that may be eaten on ekadashi and other fasts.

**pochi** an ornament worn on one's hand.

**pradakshina** to walk around the object of one's respect or devotion.

**pragat** present among us.

**prarabdha** deeds whose consequences are already set in motion.

**prasad(i)** an item blessed or sanctified by Bhagwan.

**pratishtha** consecration.

**pratyahar** withdrawing the senses.

**puja(n)** a ritual of devotion.

**punarjanma** rebirth.

**punya** positive merits received from Bhagwan for good deeds.

**Purushottam** the ultimate being; the supreme God, Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

## R

**rajipo** profuse blessings of joy.

**rotlo** a type of unleavened, round, cooked bread.

## S

**sabha** a gathering or assembly.

**sadhana** practices taken on to move forward on the spiritual path.

**samadhi** — a divine state; the final step or attainment in *asthanga* yoga

**sampradaya** — a religious movement that is led by a succession of gurus.

**sanchit** — actions whose results are stored and not yet activated.

**sanstha** — an organisation.

**sant** — a renunciate or sadhu; also used to refer to the *satpurush* or true guru.

**sarvopari** — above all else; ultimate.

**satpurush** — a true, *gunatit* guru.

**satsang** — *sat* = truth or good, *sang* = company or group. *Satsang* refers to keeping the company of pious and virtuous people (especially the *satpurush*) and shastras. *Satsang* is also used to describe the entire Swaminarayan fellowship.

**satsangi** — a member of the *satsang* fellowship.

**seva** — service.

**shikharbaddha** — pinnacled – a mandir built with spires and in which five *artis* are done.

**sopari** — betel nut.

**stri-purush maryada** — rules that describe the how to behave with people of the opposite gender.

**sukhad** — sandalwood.

**swabhav** — a person's nature or personality; usually used to refer to negative traits that must be overcome for spiritual progress.

## T

**tapa** — austerity or penance.

**thal** — offering of food.

**til** — a birthmark.

**tilak-chandalo** — a U-shaped mark of sandalwood paste with a round mark of vermillion (*kumkum*) at its centre.

**tyag** — renunciation.

## U

**upasana** — the true understanding of Bhagwan's form and glory, which brings one closer to Bhagwan.

## V

**vagha** — special clothing; attire.

**varni** — a yogi.

**vartman** — rules relating to one's actions; a vow or discipline.

**vicharan** — travels.

## Y

**yagna** — a fire ritual.

**yam** — self-control; the first step of *ashtanga* yoga.

**Yampuri** — the kingdom of the god of Death.

**yati** — a celibate.

**yatra** — a pilgrimage.

◈◈◈

## 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

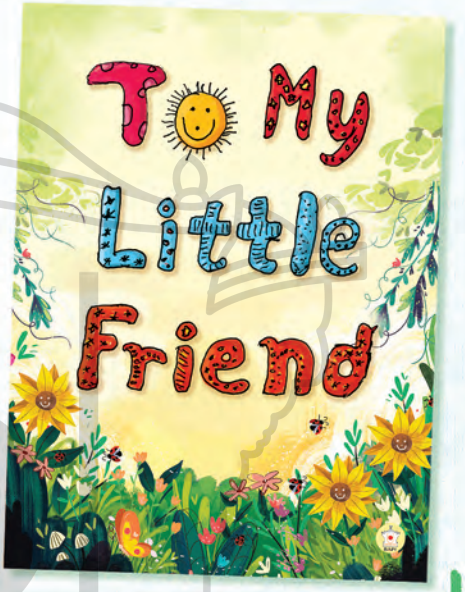
## UPASANA
(Belief and Worship)

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**

# STAY CONNECTED





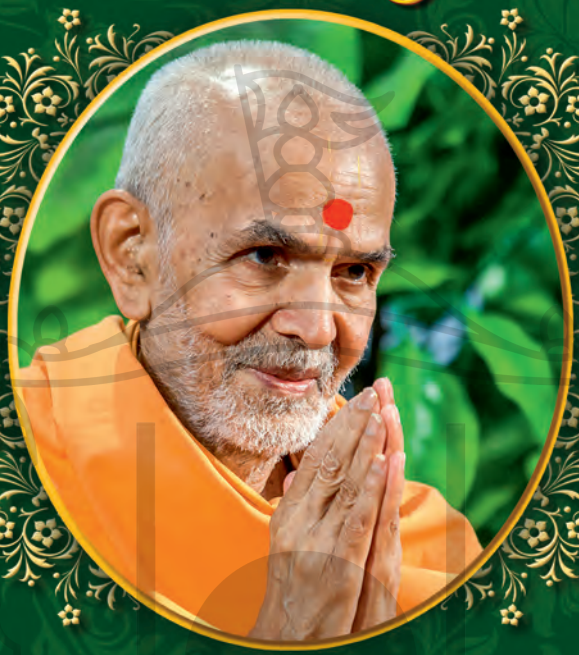


**SCAN HERE**

for more content that helps children learn the values of the Sanatan Hindu faith.

Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's

# Blessings



## Lifetime Satsang

[illegible]

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

[illegible]

*(Jay Swaminarayan from Shastri Narayanswarupdas, Pramukh Swami Maharaj)*

The fruit of Satsang Exams is Akshardham

[illegible]

*(Jay Swaminarayan from Sadhu Keshavjivandas, Mahant Swami Maharaj)*

ISBN: 978-81-988674-8-3

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