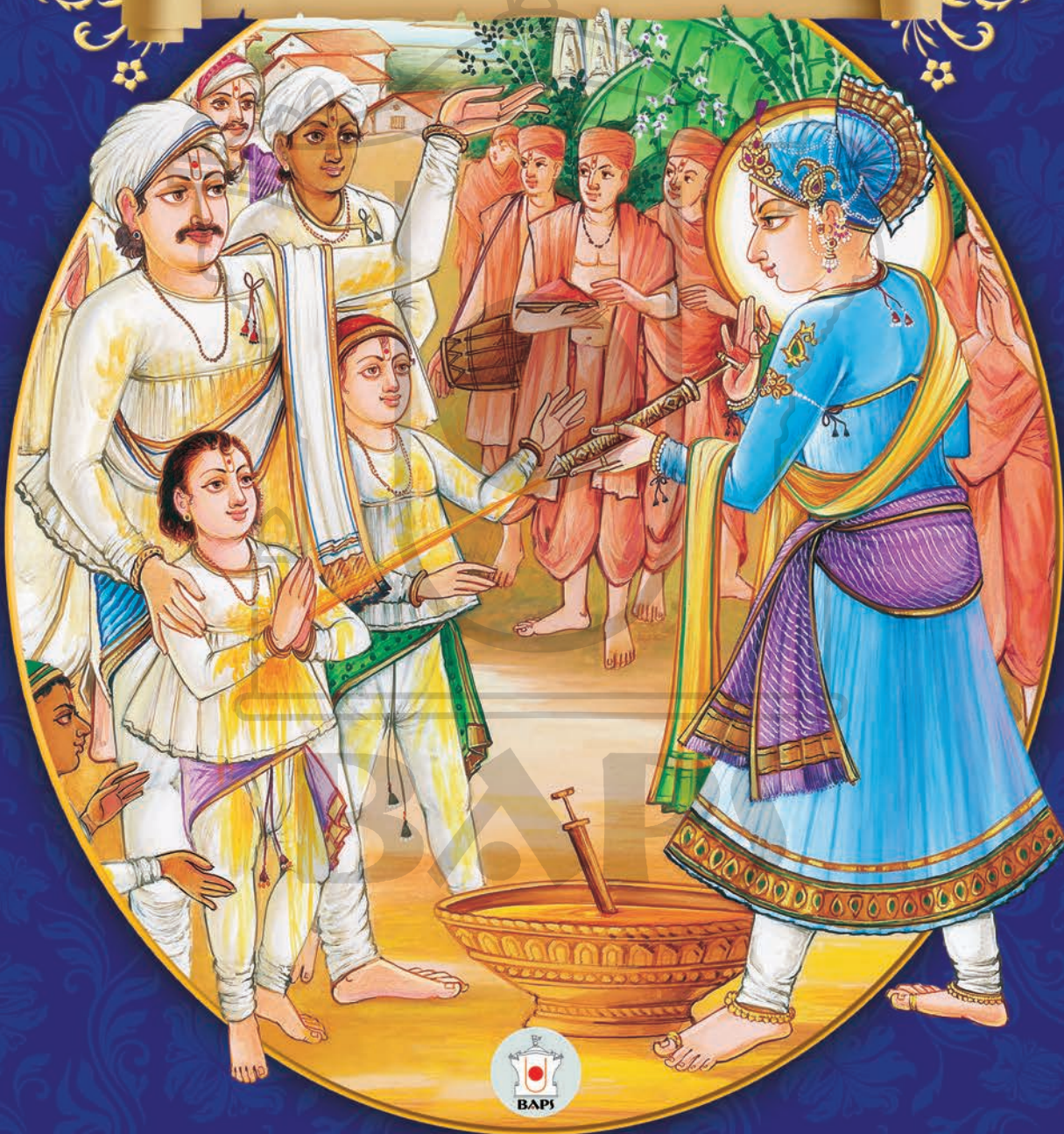


Bal Satsang Exam Book Series

Satsang Pihar

Part 3



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Parabrahma Shri Swaminarayan

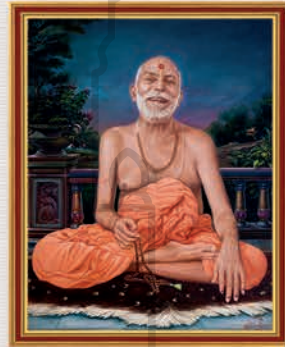
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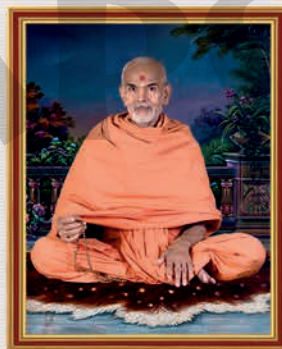
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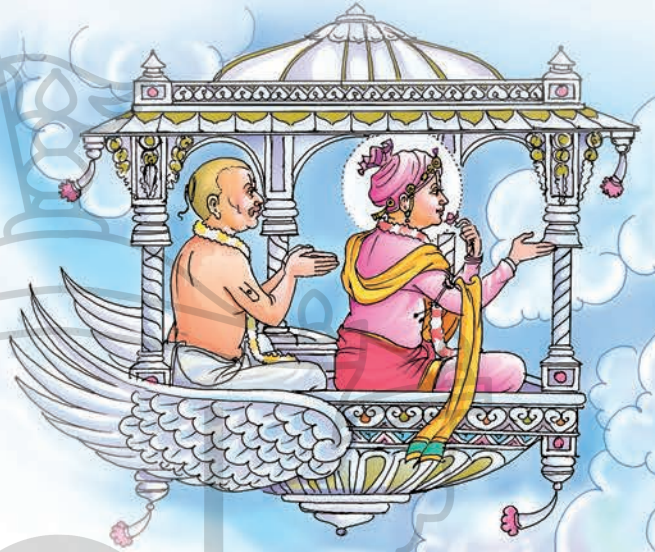


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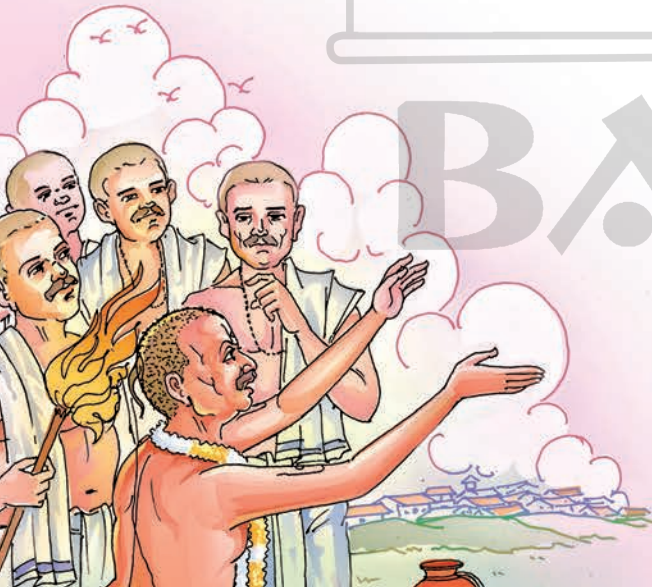
An Introductory Study Programme of
BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism for Children



Satsang Pihar

Part 3

BAPS



SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH
Ahmedabad

Satsang Vihar, Part-3 (English Edition)

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

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Inspirer: His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj

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Aksharbrahman
Shri Gunatitanand Swami



Parabrahman
Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan

SATSANG VIHAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1. THE GURU LEADS US TO GOD

(1) The law of karma, (2) rebirth, (3) *avatarvad*, and (4) *murti puja* – along with these four beliefs, the **guru-shishya relationship** is also an important part of Hinduism.

■ THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

The greatest scholar of Hinduism, Vyasji, has given Hinduism's answer to the question

of what is life's purpose. He has written:

*Ālodya sarva-shāstrāni,
vichārya cha punaha punaha;
Idam ekam sunishpannam,
dhyeyo Nārāyano Harihi.*

(I have thoroughly studied and thought upon all the scriptures; their essence is that **to attain God is the sole purpose of life.**)

■ HOW CAN ONE FIND GOD?

The answer to this question is given in the Upanishads, which are a part of the Vedas. The Mundaka Upanishad, in particular, states:

*Tad-vignānārtham sa
gurum-evābhigachhet samit-panihi
shrotriyaṃ Brahma nishtham.*

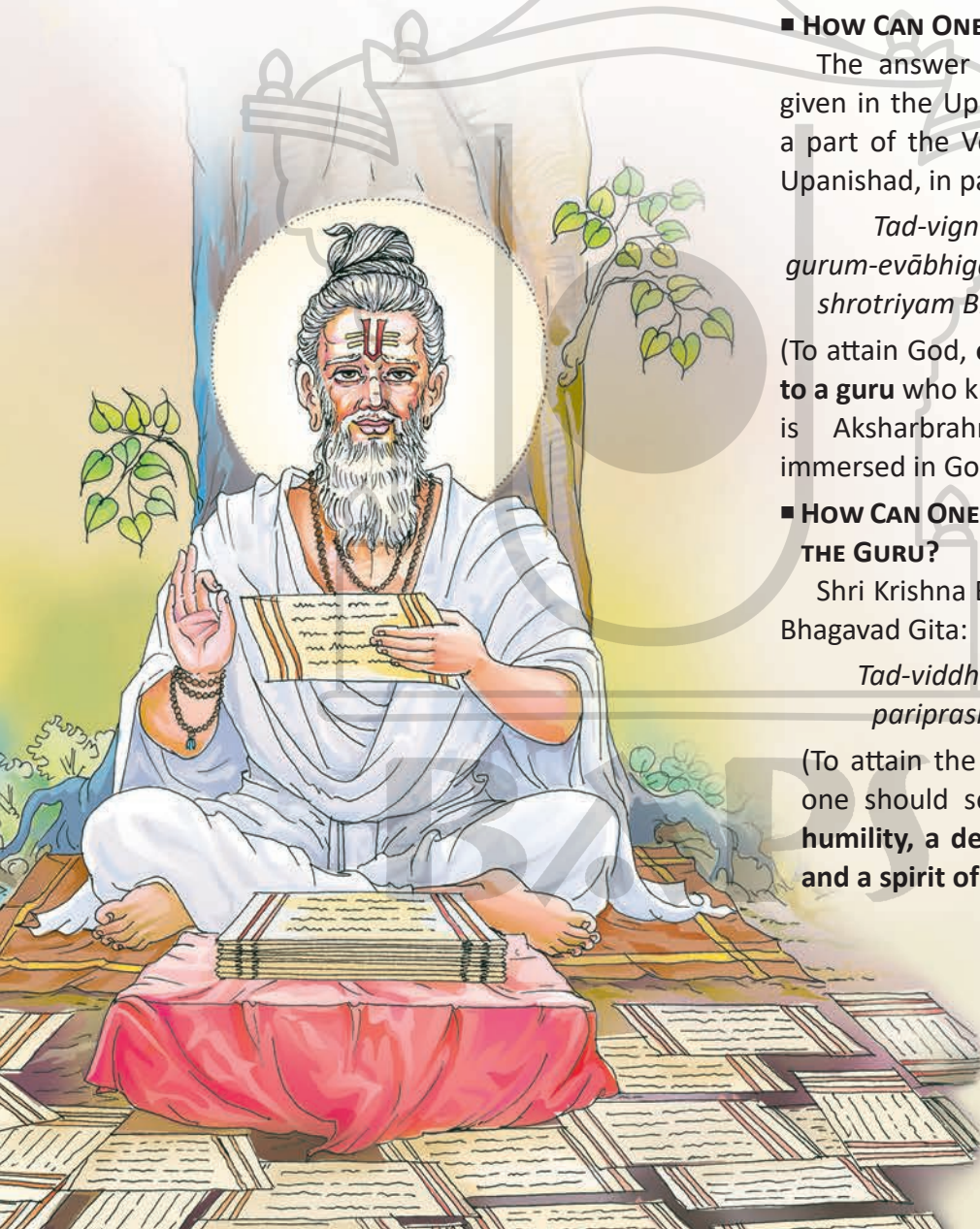
(To attain God, **one must surrender to a guru** who knows the scriptures, is Aksharbrahma and remains immersed in God.)

■ HOW CAN ONE FIND GOD THROUGH THE GURU?

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says in the Bhagavad Gita:

*Tad-viddhiḥ pranipāten,
pariprashnen sevayā.*

(To attain the knowledge of God, one should serve the guru with **humility, a desire to understand, and a spirit of service.**)



■ HOW SHOULD ONE FOLLOW THE GURU'S AGNAS?

Once, there was a **rishi named Gautam**. A **boy named Satyakam** came to his ashram. The boy bowed to the guru and said, "I wish to **learn *brahmagnan***." Seeing the boy's humility and his thirst for wisdom about Brahma and Parabrahma, Gautam accepted him as his *shishya* (disciple).

After a few days, Gautam Rishi took Satyakam to the ashram's 400 cows, "Child, take these to the forest. When **this herd of 400 becomes 1,000**, return to the ashram."

Satyakam accepted his guru's *agna*. Never did he question, "I'm too young. How will I do this?" or "I came for knowledge, and he is making me do these types of things?"

The boy soon found a place with grass and water for the cows. He made a hut for himself there. Just as his guru had told him, **Satyakam began serving the cows. He made sure they each had grass and water when they needed it. And he protected them from forest's wild animals. Regardless of the season and undeterred by cold, heat or rain, Satyakam worked day and night to fulfil his guru's *agna*.**

Not just a year or two, but **many years went by** as Satyakam continued in this way. Finally, **the herd had grown to 1,000 cows**. Satyakam Jabali was overjoyed. He gathered all the cows and herded them back **towards his guru's ashram**. By his guru's grace, **along his route** back, he met Vayudev, Agnidev, Suryadev and Pranadev in the forms of animals and birds. These **deities taught Satyakam different aspects of *brahmagnan***.

When Satyakam arrived at guru Gautam Rishi's ashram, his face glowed with the light of wisdom. The guru remarked, "Child, you look like one who has mastered

brahmagnan."

"The birds and animals have taught me much," Satyakam replied. "But I do not consider that important. Please give me wisdom yourself."

Gautam Rishi took Satyakam in his arms and **blessed him**, "The wisdom you have received is indeed *brahmagnan*. **You have nothing left to learn.**"

■ THE COMPANY OF A TRUE GURU MAKES LIFE A CELEBRATION

The guru described in the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and other scriptures

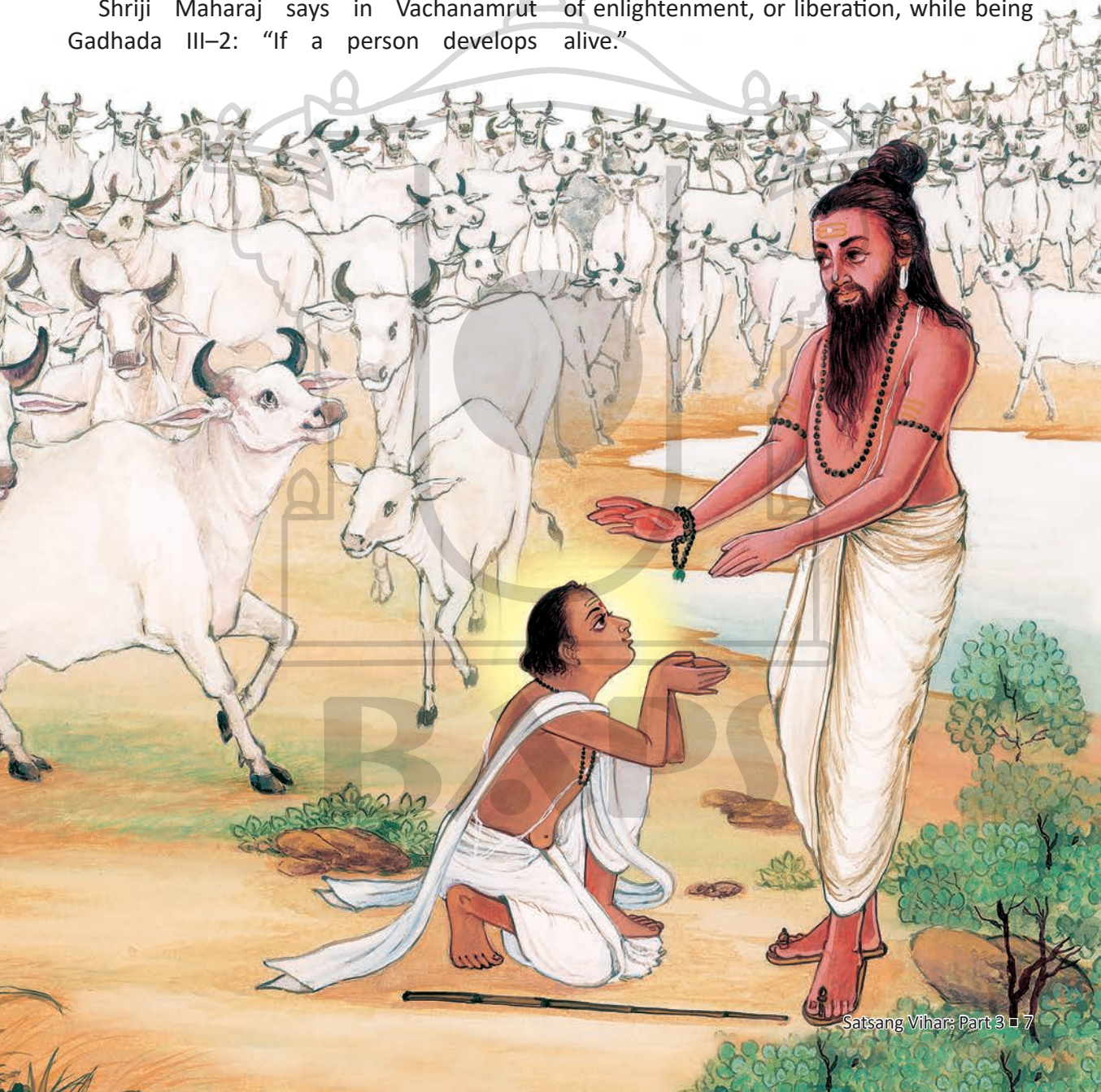


is the **gunatit guru**. Today, that *gunatit* guru is Pragat Brahmaswarup **Mahant Swami Maharaj**. If we live according to his wishes, if we always see him as divine and reflect upon him, our life will be filled with happiness, peace and joy. And after this life, **we will attain Akshardham** and the eternal bliss of Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

One who develops such a relationship with their guru is a true Hindu.

Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhada III-2: "If a person develops

conviction in the guru – who is the manifest form of God – in the same way that he has conviction in the non-manifest *devas*, then, as a result, he attains all of the *arthas* (dharma, *artha*, *kam* and *moksha*) which are described as attainable. In fact, when he attains the company of such a *sant*, he has, while still alive, attained he who was to be attained after death. That is to say, he has attained that which is called the highest state of enlightenment, or liberation, while being alive."





2. OTHER IMPORTANT BELIEFS OF HINDUS

■ VEDAS: THE ETERNAL SCRIPTURES

The Vedas are the main scriptures of Hinduism. In ancient times, **rishis** sat in meditation and **heard these mantras from God himself**. It is this eternal knowledge of the Vedas that is seen in different forms in the different Hindu religious groups.

● THE VALUE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Thousands of years ago, people from many nations came to study at **Nalanda and Takshashila Universities** in India. One of them was **China's Xuanzang** (Hsuan-tsang). Xuanzang came to India with his disciples to study Indian culture and philosophy. After **14 years** of travelling in India, Xuanzang was getting ready to return to China. The great **King Harsh** honoured the man and offered him **gold and gems**. But Xuanzang replied, **"No. I do not desire gems; I would like your scriptures."** And so, he took **657 religious manuscripts** with him.

However, on **his way back** to China, his **boat ran into trouble**. **"We need to lighten the ship's load!"** the captain cried. The disciples began **throwing all the extra weight overboard** – including Indian artwork and handicrafts. But it wasn't enough. The **storm grew worse** and the captain yelled, **"We need to be lighter still!"**

The boatmen **eyed the pile of scriptures**. **Xuanzang** stood up and **prepared to jump off** the ship. **"These scriptures are as valuable as 100 rulers like me.** Let me jump off instead." Hearing the value of the scriptures, Xuanzang's **disciples** stopped him and decided to **sacrifice themselves in his place**.

Like Xuanzang and his disciples, countless wise people from around the world have been awed by the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita,

Bhagavat, Ramayan, Mahabharat and other Hindu texts.

■ ONLY ONE GOD

Hindus do not believe there are many gods. They believe in **only one God**. It is **by his inspiration** that **countless avatars** come to be.

■ BECOMING AN IDEAL BHAKTA AND WORSHIPPING GOD

Hinduism teaches that we should work to become ideal devotees as we offer *upasana* to God. For instance, one should become like Sitaji and worship Bhagwan Ram; or like Radhaji and worship Krishna. Another example is to **become aksharrup and offer devotion to Purushottam**.

■ THE FOUR PURSUITS

When one achieves the four pursuits or goals of life, one's life can be considered fulfilled. These four are 1) **dharma** – following one's **niyams** or living by one's duties; 2) **artha** – to gain **wealth** and resources; 3) **kam** – to fulfil one's **worldly wishes**; and 4) **moksha** – to attain **liberation** by mastering dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti according to the guru's *agna*.

■ AHIMSA

God resides in every living thing – human, insect, animal or plant. Believing this, one should **never cause harm** to others **through one's actions, speech, or thought**.

Those who are Hindu accept the above principles.

Come, let us understand our tradition and spread its message throughout the world.

In his childhood, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's name was **Ghanshyam**. He was born in the village of **Chhapaiya** in North India. One day, his father **Dharmadev** **wondered**, "What will Ghanshyam be when he grows up? Will he be a king? A wealthy merchant? Or a great scholar? Let us test him to find out."

With that thought, Dharmadev set out a **low table** and placed three objects on it **to test** Ghanshyam: a **dagger**, a **gold coin** and, a **scripture**. The dagger stood for a king; the coins stood for a merchant; and the scripture stood for a scholar.

Dharmadev called **Ghanshyam** for the test. Bhaktimata placed him on the floor and Ghanshyam **crawled towards** the low table. He **picked up the scripture** and **sat** there **as if** he were **reading**. Dharmadev gazed at his son. He realised that Ghanshyam would **become a great scholar** in the future and **establish dharma**.



Kashi is known as the city of scholars. Once, Dharmadev arrived there to take part in the rituals of the **lunar eclipse**. Hearing of this, the scholars of the city arranged for him to stay at the Gaumatha and organised a **great debate**. They had **Dharmadev** act as the **debate's judge**. Ghanshyam joined Dharmadev in the assembly.

3. THE MEANINGS



OF GOD'S ACTIONS



“Are there many eternal entities or one?” “Is God formless or does he have form?” “Is devotion greater than knowledge?” The scholars were **divided in two**. Both sides argued and argued, but there was **no end to the debate**.

Just then, **Ghanshyam Maharaj stood**. He folded his hands and said, “If you will permit me, I will conclude the debate.”

Everyone smirked, “What will a little boy like him have to say?”

However, with his father’s permission, Ghanshyam spoke fluently and without any hesitation. Hearing him make his points **with backing from the scriptures**, the **scholars** were left **dumbfounded**.

Soon, all the scholars found themselves in **samadhi**. They each **saw their own ishtadevas** (the figures they worshipped as Bhagwan). Then, Ghanshyam Maharaj pulled back his miraculous powers and the scholars came to their senses. Each scholar **accepted** Ghanshyam’s **description of the five eternal entities without any doubts**.

Everyone was overjoyed and congratulated both father and son. Astonishingly, at the time of this incident, Ghanshyam was **only ten years old!**

Ghanshyam Maharaj was indeed great. His every act had deep meaning attached to it.

This very same Ghanshyam who picked up the scripture as an infant grew up as Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gifted us the Vachanamrut. This very same Ghanshyam who won the debate in Kashi later established the principle of Brahma and Parabrahma. Surely, even his actions as a small boy were deeply meaningful. For, they showed us the great things he would achieve later in life.

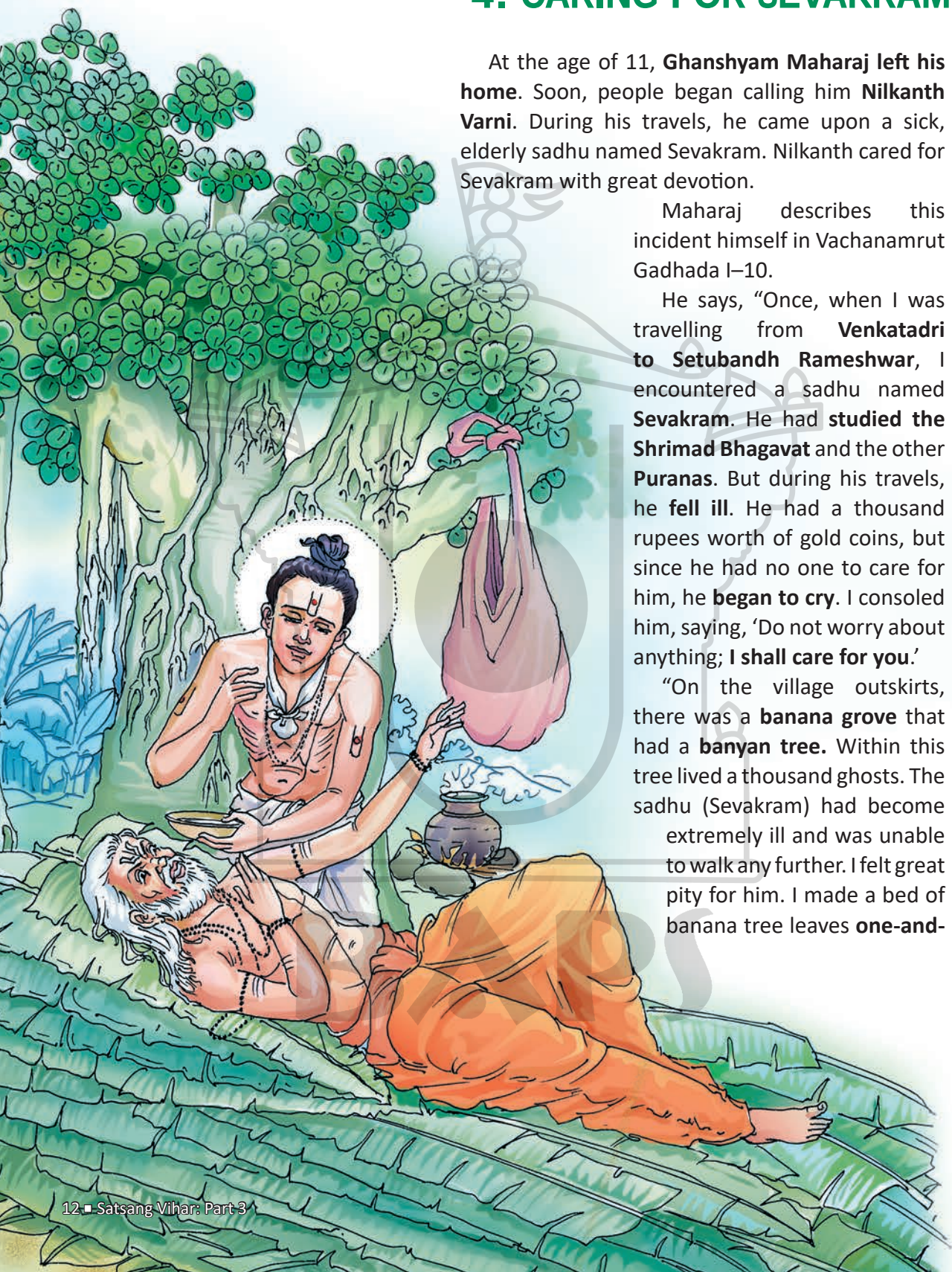
4. CARING FOR SEVAKRAM

At the age of 11, **Ghanshyam Maharaj** left his home. Soon, people began calling him **Nilkanth Varni**. During his travels, he came upon a sick, elderly sadhu named Sevakram. Nilkanth cared for Sevakram with great devotion.

Maharaj describes this incident himself in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-10.

He says, "Once, when I was travelling from **Venkatadri** to **Setubandh Rameshwar**, I encountered a sadhu named **Sevakram**. He had studied the **Shrimad Bhagavat** and the other **Puranas**. But during his travels, he **fell ill**. He had a thousand rupees worth of gold coins, but since he had no one to care for him, he **began to cry**. I consoled him, saying, 'Do not worry about anything; **I shall care for you.**'

"On the village outskirts, there was a **banana grove** that had a **banyan tree**. Within this tree lived a thousand ghosts. The sadhu (Sevakram) had become extremely ill and was unable to walk any further. I felt great pity for him. I made a bed of banana tree leaves **one-and-**



a-half feet high under that banyan tree. The sadhu was suffering from **diarrhoea**. I would help him stay tidy and **care for him**.

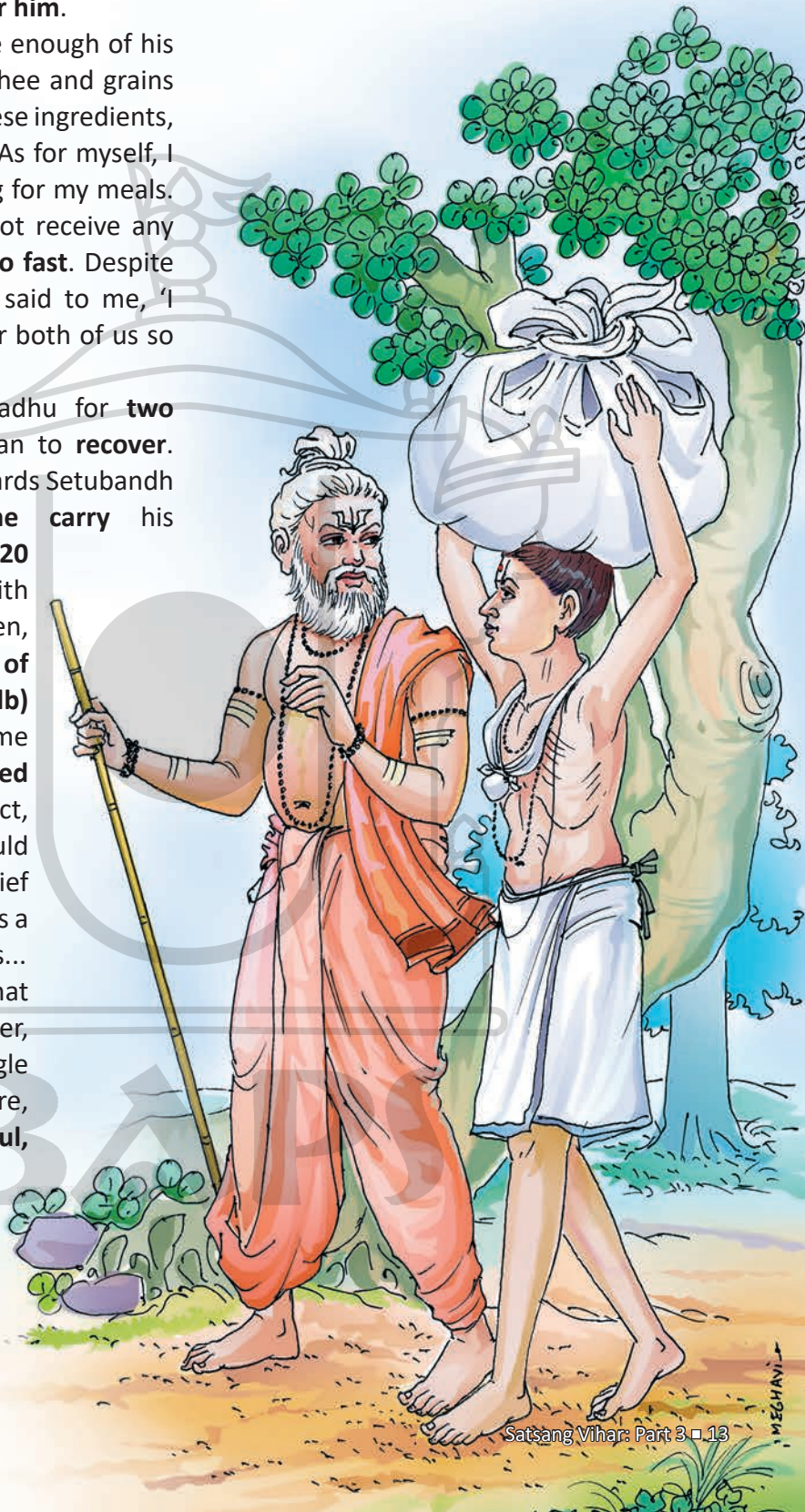
“The sadhu would give me enough of his money to buy sugar, *sakar*, ghee and grains for his meals. I would bring these ingredients, **cook for him, and feed him**. As for myself, I would go to the village to beg for my meals. On some days, when I did not receive any food from the village, **I had to fast**. Despite this, that sadhu never once said to me, ‘I have enough money. Cook for both of us so that you may dine with me.’

“After I cared for the sadhu for **two months** in this way, he began to **recover**. Thereafter, as we walked towards Setubandh Rameshwar, he **made me** carry his belongings, which weighed **20 kg (44 lbs)**. He would walk with only a rosary in his hand. By then, he was healthy and **capable of digesting half a kilogram (1 lb) of ghee**, yet he would make me carry his load while he **walked empty-handed**. In actual fact, my nature was such that I would not keep even a handkerchief with me. But respecting him as a sadhu, I carried his belongings...

“Although I attended to that sadhu and helped him recover, he did not offer me even a single cent worth of food. Therefore, **realising him to be ungrateful, I abandoned his company.**”

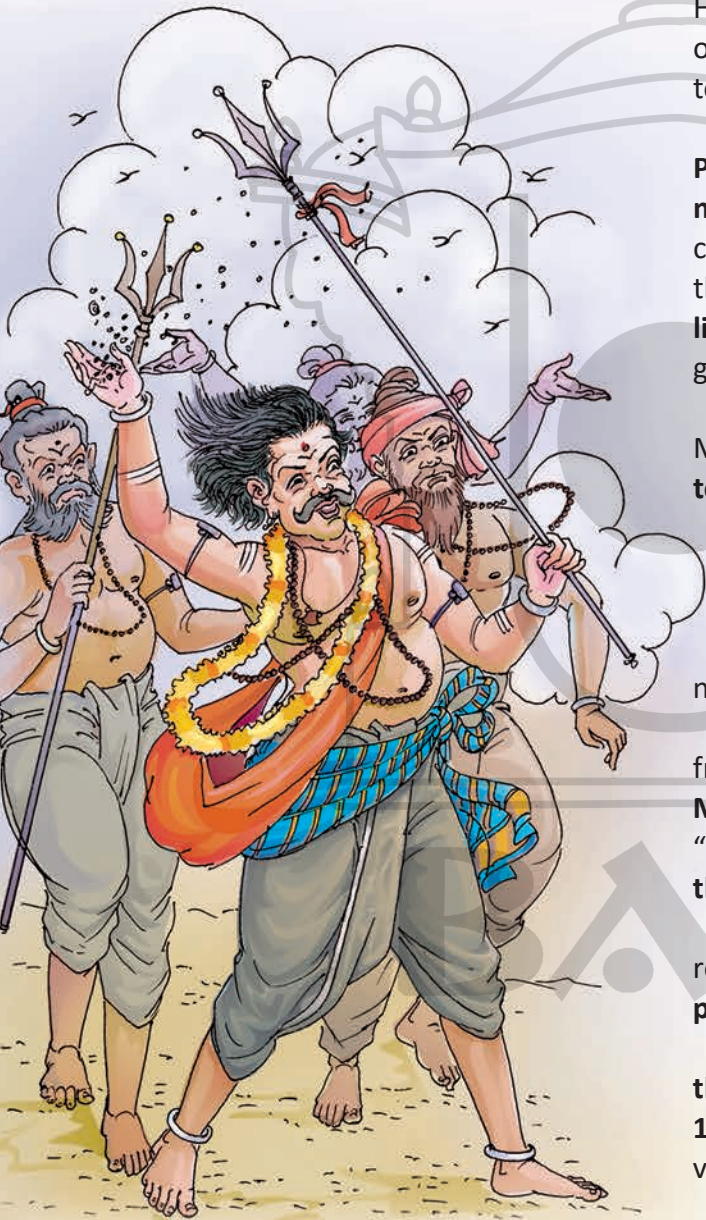
Such was our Bhagwan, Nilkanth. He was the ideal servant and could not bear to see anyone miserable.

He would selflessly serve a person until their misery was relieved.



5. FROM MAGNIRAM TO ADVAITANAND

There was a man from **South India** named **Magniram**. He had left his home in **search of God** and soon found a **guru in Bengal**. The guru was an expert in black magic. Magniram learned black magic from him and gained **extraordinary powers**.



While travelling, Magniram reached **Jagannath Puri**. There, he fell into the **company of some evil people**. He forgot his goal of finding God and instead gathered a **large following** by showing off his powers. With his band of disciples, he travelled from village to village, scaring kings and mahants. He would show **his evil magic** and rob people of their gold. Soon, just his name was enough to **make people cry for help**.

Magniram soon came to settle in **Porbandar, Gujarat**. There, he **hurt a leading mahant with his long metal tongs** and collected ransom from him. The **mahant**, though, challenged, “You’ve defeated many **little ones** like me. But, if you’re truly great, go to Mangrol and **defeat Swaminarayan**.”

The mahant’s words added fuel to Magniram’s rage. Magniram went stomping to **Mangrol**. There, he sent a message to King **Gajefar Khan**, “Give me 5,000 rupees, or I’ll destroy your whole city.”

Gajefar Khan replied, “Bawaji! **If you can win over Swaminarayan, I’ll give you not just 5,000 but 10,000 rupees.**”

Fury and ego were blinding Magniram from the truth. He made his way to **Shriji Maharaj**. Pounding his tongs, he yelled, “Hey! Jivanmukta! **Why are you preaching this false faith?**”

“We do not preach a false faith,” Maharaj replied. “**We preach true devotion and show people the path to liberation.**”

“Do you know who I am?” Magniram threatened. “I am Magniram. **Give me 10,000 rupees.** Or else, I’ll drown this whole village into the ocean.”

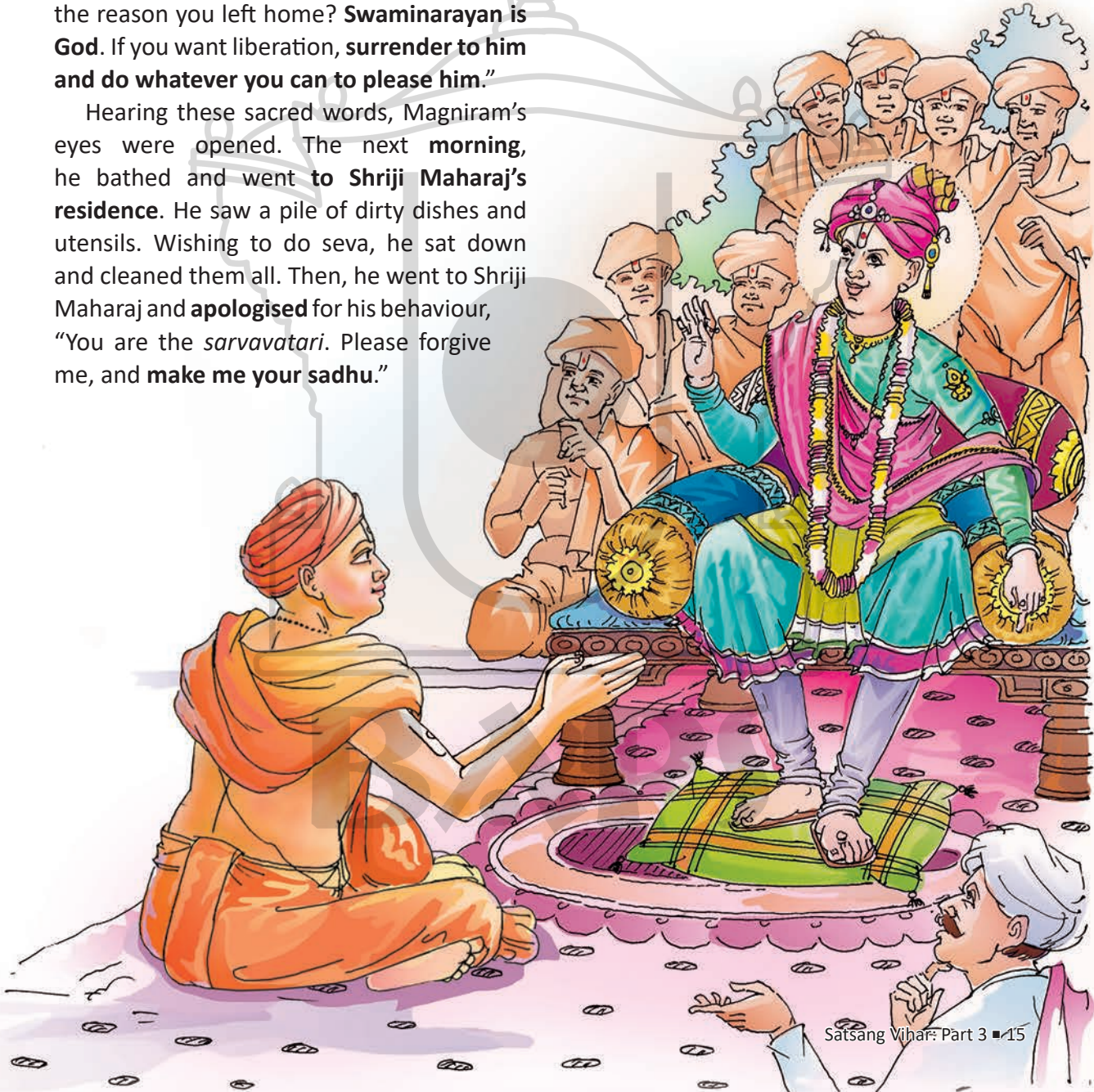
Maharaj calmly replied, "We have no rupees. If you need food, we can give you grains. But **we do not fear dark magic.**"

Hearing this, Magniram slammed his tongs to the ground and stormed off to where he was staying. He began chanting many of his evil mantras to hurt Bhagwan Swaminarayan. But none of them would work. Just then, he heard a divine voice, "Magniram! Have you forgotten? What was the reason you left home? **Swaminarayan is God. If you want liberation, surrender to him and do whatever you can to please him.**"

Hearing these sacred words, Magniram's eyes were opened. The next **morning**, he bathed and went to **Shriji Maharaj's residence**. He saw a pile of dirty dishes and utensils. Wishing to do seva, he sat down and cleaned them all. Then, he went to Shriji Maharaj and **apologised** for his behaviour, "You are the *sarvavatari*. Please forgive me, and **make me your sadhu.**"

With Maharaj's *agna*, Magniram shaved his head and moustache. He then collected all the sadhus' footwear in a pile and did *pradakshinas* of them. Pleased with his humility, Maharaj finally made him a sadhu and named him **Advaitanand**.

Indeed, Shriji Maharaj was all-powerful. No evil magic could work against him. Whoever tried to defeat him instead found themselves won over by Maharaj.



6. THE PUPPET MASTER

A devotee named **Sangha Patel** lived in the village of **Loya**. Once, Shriji Maharaj was **staying at his home**. A travelling troupe of puppeteers had come to the village. Shriji Maharaj asked them, 'Which types of shows can you do?'

The puppeteers answered, "All kinds of them. **We can perform** the stories of Nala and Damayanti, Rukmini, the Ramayan, the Mahabharat, and much more. And our shows are so engaging that even through the night, we keep people from sleeping a wink! We wish to present you a show today, as well. We hope our talent may be blessed in your presence."

Shriji Maharaj agreed to the puppeteers' request. Night soon fell. After dinner, everyone gathered at the village outskirts to watch the show. Maharaj, too, came with his sadhus and devotees. The troupe had **worked hard all afternoon**. As soon as Maharaj gave the sign, **the show began**.

But, wait. What's this? The troupe's puppets were all set up, yet none of them would move. Everyone thought they would surely stir soon. The performers **tried and tried**, but it was as if the puppets were **frozen**.

The performers realised they were losing face. They brought their puppets behind the curtain to fix them. But when they checked, they were working just fine! However, as soon as the puppets were placed back on stage, they froze again!



The children present enjoyed watching the frustrated performers. All the villagers were laughing, as well. Even Maharaj was chuckling at the scene. This back and forth – from backstage to out front – happened **three times**, but nothing changed.

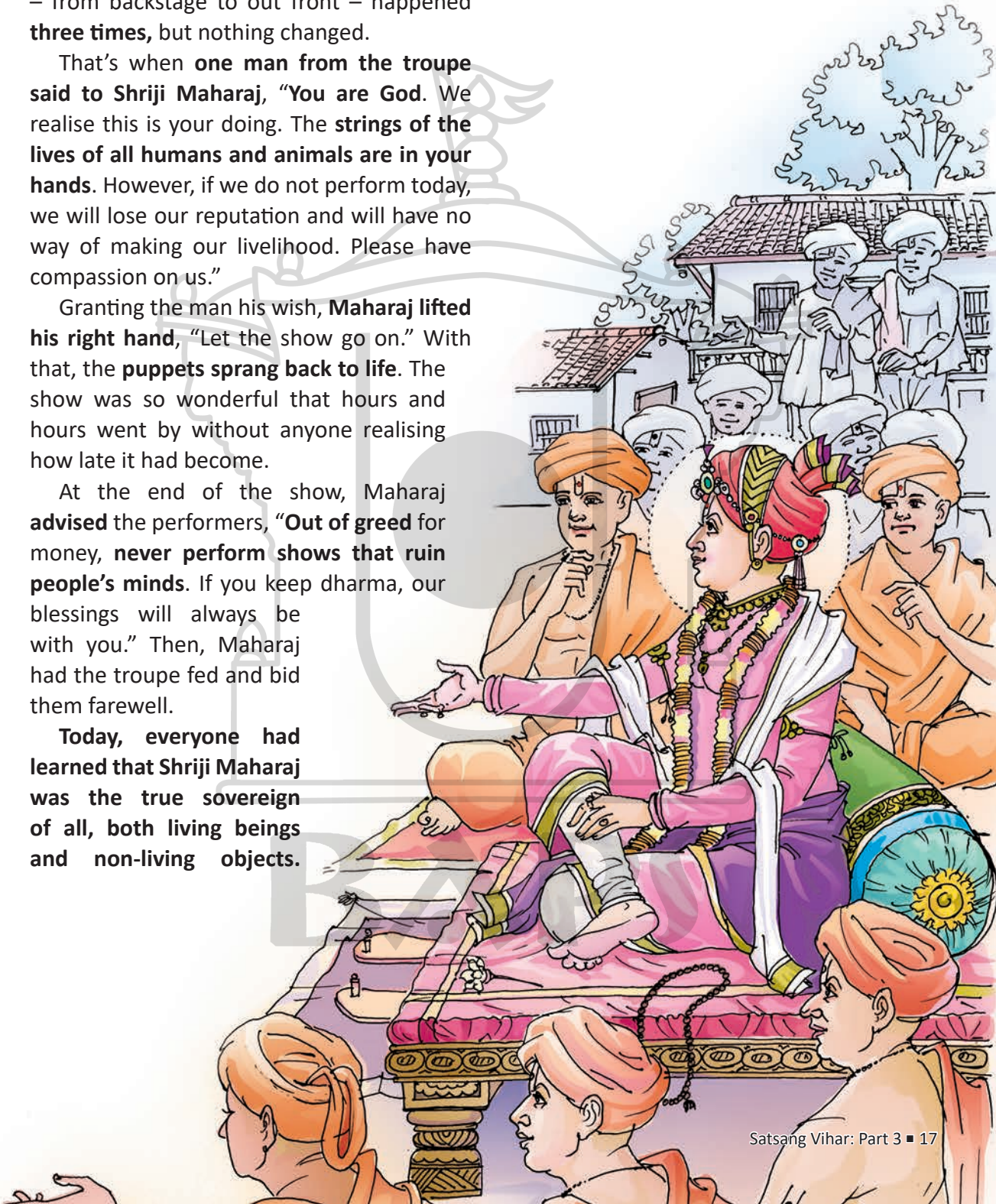
That's when **one man from the troupe** said to Shriji Maharaj, "You are God. We realise this is your doing. The **strings of the lives of all humans and animals are in your hands**. However, if we do not perform today, we will lose our reputation and will have no way of making our livelihood. Please have compassion on us."

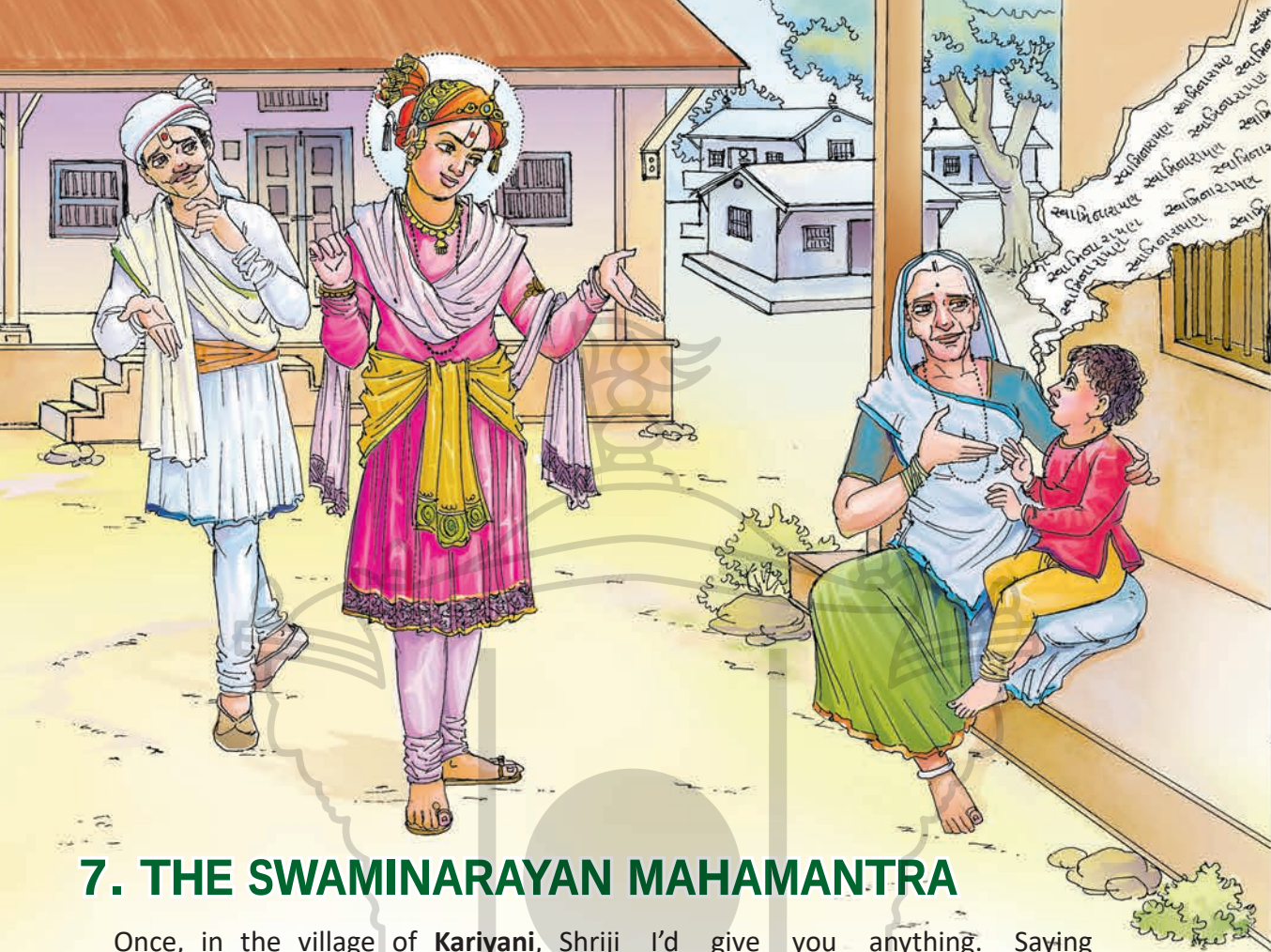
Granting the man his wish, **Maharaj lifted his right hand**, "Let the show go on." With that, the **puppets sprang back to life**. The show was so wonderful that hours and hours went by without anyone realising how late it had become.

At the end of the show, Maharaj **advised** the performers, "**Out of greed for money, never perform shows that ruin people's minds**. If you keep dharma, our blessings will always be with you." Then, Maharaj had the troupe fed and bid them farewell.

Today, everyone had learned that Shriji Maharaj was the true sovereign of all, both living beings and non-living objects.

Everything happens according to his wish. Without his wish, not even something as insignificant as a leaf can be moved.





7. THE SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

Once, in the village of **Kariyani**, Shriji Maharaj was going from his residence to Vasta Khachar's *darbar*. While walking, he saw a **grandmother teaching something to her grandson**. Shriji Maharaj stopped to listen.

"Son, say 'Swaminarayan'," the lady said.

The toddler followed, but he could not say it correctly. "Saminalayan," he uttered.

The grandmother repeated, "No, my child. Try again... 'Swami... narayan'."

The lady repeated it over and over, and the boy tried and tried. "Saminalayan..." the boy mustered.

"Not like that, dear child... 'Swami... Narayan...' Say it like that."

Finally, he said clearly, "Swaminarayan."

The grandmother was delighted! "Oh, my dearest! You said, 'Swaminarayan'!

I'd give you anything. Saying 'Swaminarayan' means **you've learned all the scriptures! From your own mouth, you've uttered the supreme mantra that frees us from life and death and gives us Akshardham! I love you so!**" With that, the woman hugged the boy like never before.

Maharaj saw the whole scene unfold. He turned to Vasta Khachar and said, "Do you see **how this woman understands the glory of my name? I will have to grant *kalyan* to both her and her grandson.**"

Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada I-56, "However grave a sinner one may be, if he utters 'Swaminarayan' at the end of his life, he will be freed of all sins and will take his place in Brahmanahol (Akshardham)."

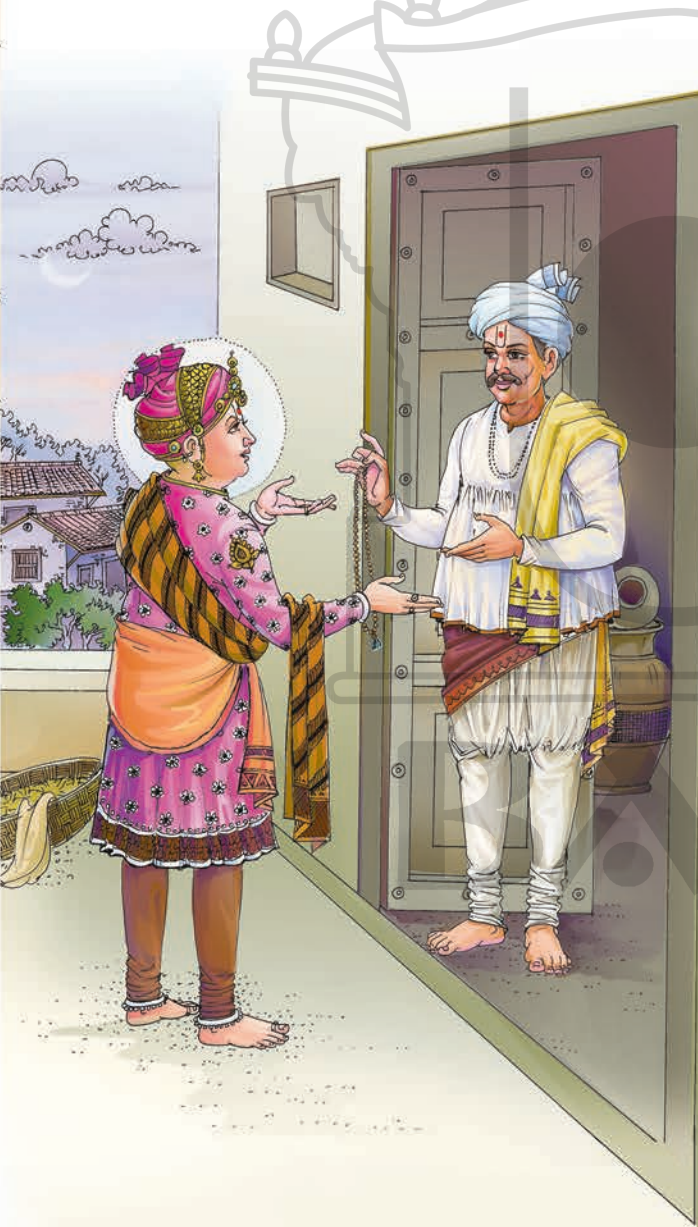


Vasur Khachar of **Bhoyra** was a **very cruel** leader. One of his subjects, **Naja Jogiya**, was a **devotee** of **Shriji Maharaj**. One day, Vasur Khachar called Naja. **“If your Swaminarayan is truly God, let him come here by tomorrow morning to grant you darshan. Or else, I’ll break your knees.”**

Naja Jogiya returned to his home. He sat with a *mala*. At the turn of every bead, he **chanted** the ‘Swaminarayan’ **mantra from his heart**. The mantra melted his fears. He continued chanting all night.

When the sun arose the next morning, Naja witnessed a miracle. **Shriji Maharaj** had come to grant him darshan! All the way from **Visnagar – 250 km (155 mi) away** – Maharaj had heard Naja’s prayer and had left to save his devotee. **In just one day, he walked this entire distance.** He suffered blisters and **thorns**. But, a true *bhakta* had remembered him, and so he came.

On that day, Naja Jogiya realised that if a devotee chants the ‘Swaminarayan’ mantra with true faith, Shriji Maharaj is always there to protect him or her.



■ THE GLORY OF THE SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

- Shriji Maharaj **gave** this mantra on Magshar vad 11, 1858 (31 December 1801) in the **village of Phaneni**.
- It is said in the Harililamrut:

*Je Swāminārāyan nām leshe,
tenā badhā pātak bāli deshe;
Chhe nām mārā shrutimā anek,
sarvopari ā ja ganāya eka.
Shadakshari **mantra mahā samartha,**
tethi thashe **siddha samasta artha.**
Sukhi kare sankat sarva kāpe,
ante vali Akshardhām āpe.*

- The message of the Swaminarayan mantra is to become like Swami and worship Narayan. ‘Swami’ refers to Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, and ‘Narayan’ refers to Purushottam Shriji Maharaj.
- Shriji Maharaj protects those who faithfully chant this name.
- It is also said in the Swamini Vato: What should one do when one is in trouble? Chant “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.” One’s troubles will be solved.

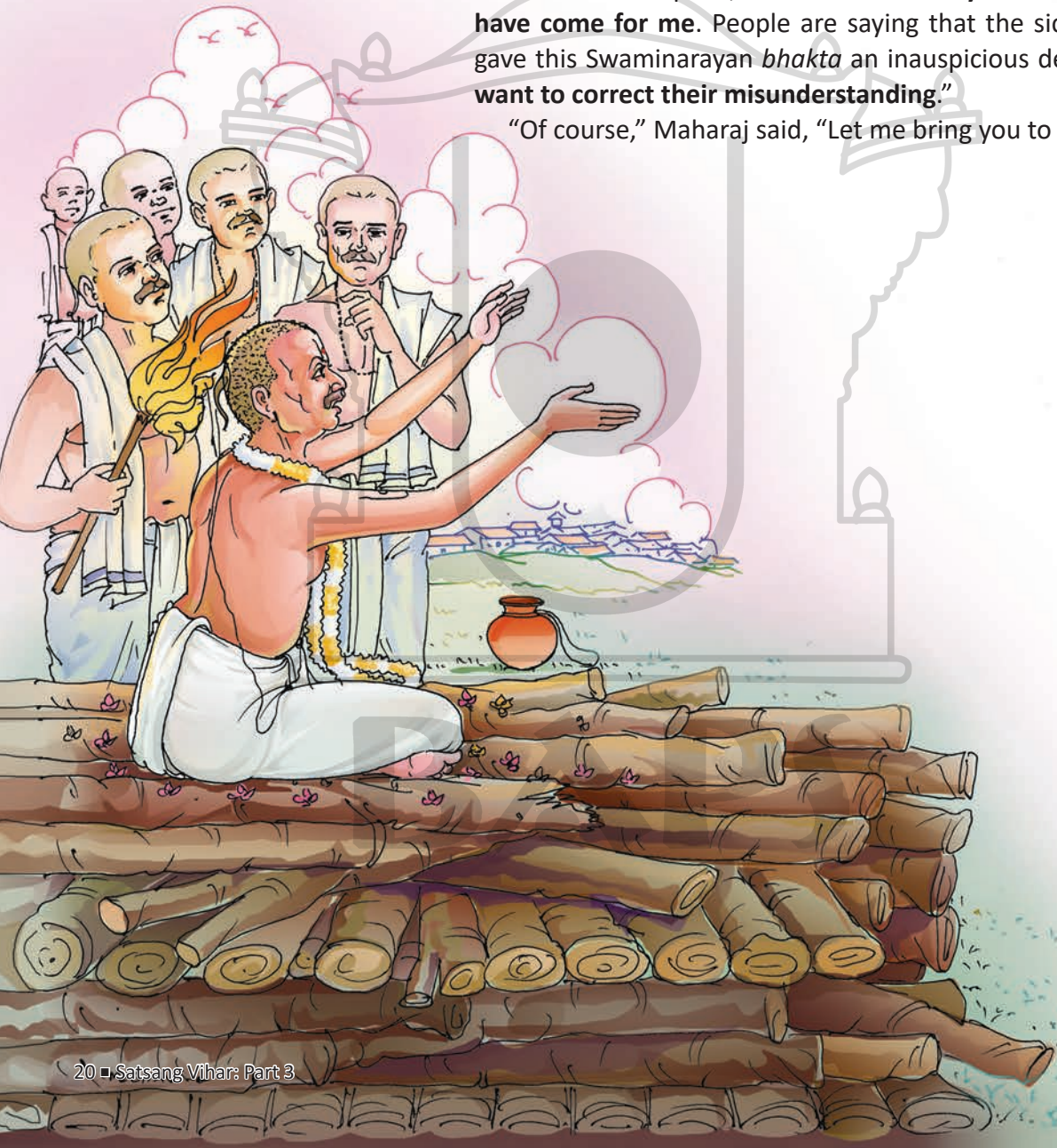
8. ALWAYS THERE AT THE END

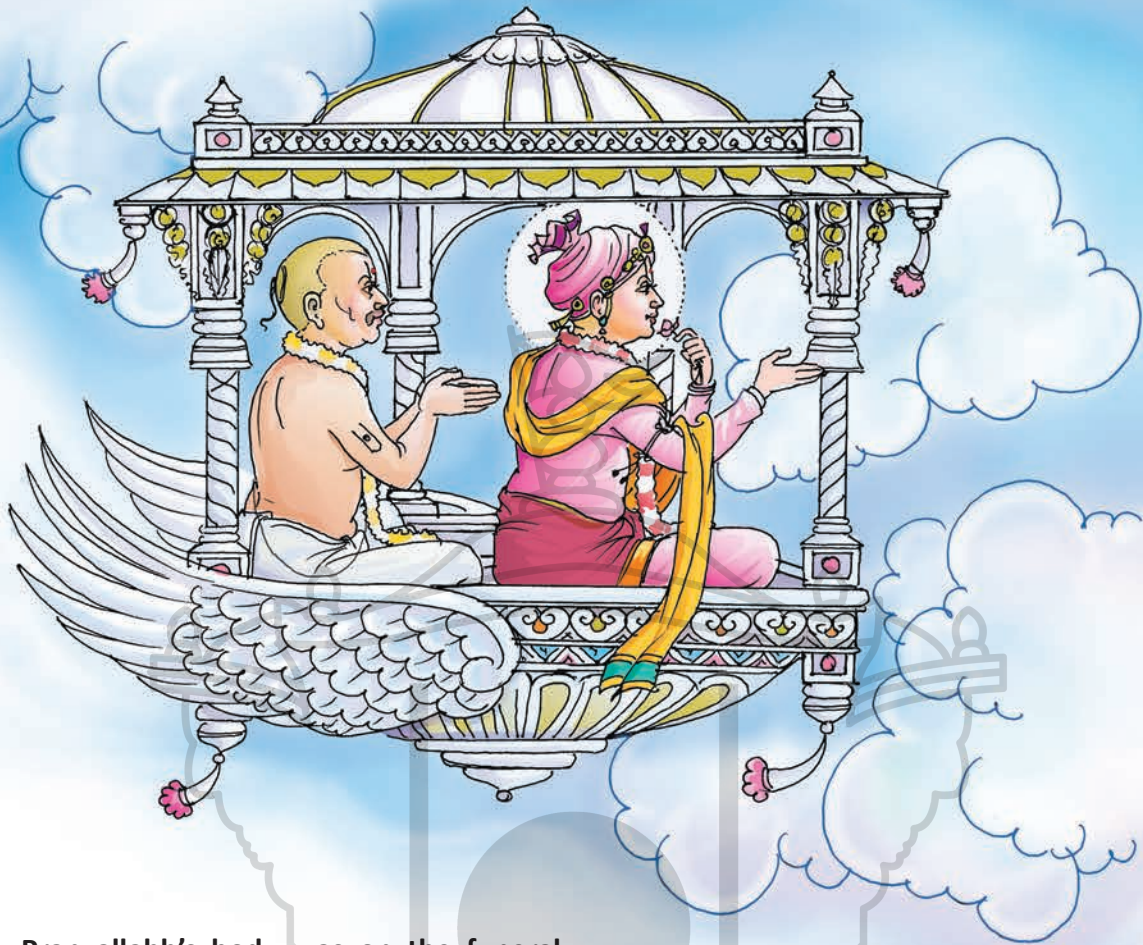
Pranvallabh was a *satsangi* from Ahmedabad. He was once travelling to the city of Nasik. At the time, Nasik had been overcome with an illness known as **cholera**.

Soon, Pranvallabh too became a **victim**. Sadly, he passed away from the illness. Maharaj sat him in a divine craft to take him to Akshardham. However, before they made their way, Maharaj asked, "Do you have **any final wishes?**"

Pranvallabh replied, "I want to tell everyone that **you have come for me**. People are saying that the sickness gave this Swaminarayan *bhakta* an inauspicious death. I want to correct their misunderstanding."

"Of course," Maharaj said, "Let me bring you to life."





Pranvallabh's body was on the funeral pyre. All that was left was to light the flame. **Just then, he sat up!** "I'm here to say that Bhagwan Swaminarayan has come to take me to his abode," he said. "Currently, death is running rampant. **Chant the 'Swaminarayan' mantra, and you will be protected. Surrender to him, and he will take you when your time comes.**"

Then, Pranvallabh began slightly clapping and taught everyone how to chant the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. **Everyone present was amazed** and began singing the Swaminarayan **dhun**. It was as if the crematory had become a mandir. When the **dhun** ended, Pranvallabh's soul left his body.

Such was Maharaj's grace on his devotees. He took care of them while they lived and personally came for them at their

end. Even if someone did the smallest thing for him, he would remember and come for them. He would place them in a special, divine craft and take them to Akshardham.

This is something that shows Maharaj to be Sarvopari Bhagwan.

Shriji Maharaj has promised:

'Mārā janane antakāle, jarura māre āvavu; birud māru e na badale, e sarave janane janāvavu.

(Let one and all know – it is my sincere promise that I will come to take away at their time of death all those who are mine.)

- Bhaktachintamani (65/80)

9. A DIVINE PLAY

Phuldol was Shriji Maharaj's favourite festival. He once decided to celebrate it in Vartal. Joban Pagi and other devotees brought carts of **gulal** and created **two tanks filled with coloured water**. **Pichkaris**, flowers, a stage, perfumes, swings, drums, cymbals – everything needed for a memorable festival was gathered.



Soon, the morning everyone was waiting for had arrived. **Maharaj** performed his morning routine. Then, he dressed in the handsomest attire. Flowers were garlanded around his neck and wrists. He came **onto the festival stage** and, seeing everyone eager to begin, he said, "Everyone form into **two teams**. Only then will we start."

"We will make teams as you say," the sadhus replied.

Shriji Maharaj offered, "The **sadhus** shall **make one team**, and the **devotees and I will make the second**. Let's see who wins!"

Everyone was ready with their *gulal* and water cannons. As soon as Maharaj let the first streams of colour into the air, the **festival of colours** began. Everyone was colouring each other, and the **competition** was in full swing. Sura Khachar took a whole **pot of colour** and emptied it on Nityanand Swami's head. Brahmanand Swami saw this and returned the favour with an added fist of colour to Sura Khachar's face. In return, Somla Khachar drenched Brahmanand Swami with coloured water. Then came Nityanand Swami, who ran up to Somla Khachar and **filled his eyes with coloured powder**. In this way, this game of colouring each other continued amongst the sadhus and devotees.

But now, it was Maharaj's turn. All the **sadhus** filled their *pichkaris* and took **fists full of colour**. At once they all emptied their colours onto Shriji Maharaj. **Maharaj** retreated to the stage and **put up a shield** in front of him. But this just encouraged the joyful sadhus to come forward with more strength. Maharaj now tried to **get on top his seat**. As he jumped from one edge to the other, **the seat broke in two!**

Shriji Maharaj called out to Nana Khachar, "Quickly! Bring my **mare!**"

But Nityanand Swami heard this and **squirted colour at the mare**. Seeing the colour, the mare dashed away. Someone brought her back, but then Adbhutanand Swami threw up some colour. So, she jumped away once more.

The devotee bringing the horse exclaimed, "Maharaj, this horse doesn't even get scared in battle, but she's being scared off by the colours coming from the sadhus."

"Then **cover her eyes with a cloth**, and bring her close to me" Maharaj said.

The devotee did so. Once the horse arrived, Maharaj climbed it. But the sadhus just continued to attack him with colour.

"**The sadhus win! The sadhus win!**" Maharaj shouted with raised arms. "Now, let the games end." And with that, Maharaj returned to his residence. All the sadhus and devotees stood down, having had etched Maharaj's *murti* into their hearts.

■ WHY DOES GOD PERFORM SUCH ACTS?

Shriji Maharaj explains, "Wherever I have organised festivals, when I have had devotional songs sung, when I have given discourses, when my puja has been performed – **all such actions and incidents** should be narrated, heard, and contemplated upon in the mind. If a person **remembers** these **during his last moments**, his *jiva* will **certainly attain the abode of God**. In this way, all of my divine actions and incidents, as well as the chanting of my name **grant people moksha**."

Shriji Maharaj performed many such divine acts – spraying colours, swimming, horse riding, feasting, laughing, falling ill, playing ras, and much more. This was all for the moksha of those who saw such acts, spoke about them, heard about them, wrote about them, read about them, or thought about them.

10. THE GUNATIT GURU PARAMPARA

After Shriji Maharaj's return to Akshardham, Gunatitanand Swami was **grief-stricken**. He fainted on just seeing the grass in a stream in Lakshmi Vadi. But Maharaj gave him **darshan** and told him three times, **"I haven't gone. I forever reside in you."**

In this way, Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given his word to forever reside in the *gunatit sant*.

Karunashankar was a faithful **devotee** from Dabhoi. After Maharaj's passing, he travelled to Vartal, Ahmedabad, Gadhada, Dholka, Dholera, Jetpur and other **holy places** and finally reached Junagadh. It was there that he saw true *upasana* in practice. He saw firm adherence to the rules that Maharaj had given. Everyone there was enthusiastic about *bhajan* and *bhakti*. And so, Karunashankar felt peace in his heart. He **said to Gunatitanand Swami**, **"I have travelled everywhere in satsang. Everywhere, satsang feels worn away. But here, by your grace, it is evergreen."**

Swami replied, "Here, **Shriji Maharaj is present**, and that is why the *satsang* is evergreen."

■ ■ ■

After staying in Junagadh for 40 years, four months and four days, **Gunatitanand Swami** decided to end his time on earth. At the age of 82, he **left Junagadh mandir** saying, "Now, I will travel in *satsang* and **stay in Mahuva**."

What did Swami mean by saying he would stay in Mahuva? He **meant to say** that in Mahuva resided his *gunatit successor*, **Bhagatji Maharaj**. From now on, he would be present through him.

■ ■ ■

Shastriji Maharaj was in Rajkot when the news of **Bhagatji Maharaj's passing** came. He was **saddened**. At that time, though, **Bhagatji Maharaj gave him darshan**, garlanded him, and said, "Why are you sad? **I forever reside in you.**"

A man named Ramji Bhatt was grieving alongside Shastriji Maharaj. He cried, "Now, all that was sacred on this earth is gone. Bhagatji was all that was sacred here."

Shastriji Maharaj, however, quickly replied, "The satpurush never leaves this earth."

■ ■ ■

Shastriji Maharaj often said, **"I am Jogi (Yogiji Maharaj) and Jogi is me."**

■ ■ ■

1971, Gondal. It was the time of **Yogiji Maharaj's final illness**. Harshadbhai Dave asked, "Now, who will take care of us?"

Yogiji Maharaj instantly replied, **"Pramukh Swami is here. He will give you joy that is even greater than that which I have given."**

Yogiji Maharaj often used to say, "Pramukh Swami is **my everything**."

■ ■ ■

On 20 July 2012, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Ahmedabad. There, he wrote a letter informing one and all, **"I appoint Pujya Mahant Swami, Sadhu Keshavjivandas, to be the guru after I am no more."**

■ ■ ■

2003, Ahmedabad. A sadhu asked **Pramukh Swami Maharaj**, "Will the *gunatit parampara* of gurus stay as long as the earth exists?"

Swamishri answered in an instant, **"Yes, it will stay. It will surely stay. It is the wish of**

Shriji Maharaj.”

■ **The Gunatit Guru Parampara**

- **Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan is forever present on earth through the *gunatit guru parampara*.**
- In the *gunatit parampara* of gurus, at any one time, only one guru grants liberation to the people of the world.
- Shriji Maharaj says in the Vachanamrut: “Whenever a *jiva* attains a human body

in Bharat-Khand, God’s avatars or God’s sadhus will certainly also be present on earth at that time. If that *jiva* can recognise them, then he becomes a devotee of God.” The sadhu that Shriji Maharaj speaks of here is the *gunatit guru*.

Mahant Swami Maharaj is the sixth and current guru in the line of *gunatit gurus* through which Maharaj is present on this earth. It is our greatest fortune that we have recognized him.



11. GUNATITANAND

In many **Vachanamruts**, Shriji Maharaj teaches of **five** eternal **entities**: (1) *jiva*, (2) *ishwar*, (3) *maya*, (4) *Aksharbrahma*, and (5) *Parabrahma*. When *jivas* and *ishwars* find *Aksharbrahma*'s company and become *aksharrup*, they cross *maya* and attain *Parabrahma*.

But **who is Aksharbrahma**? The answer is **Gunatitanand Swami**. Here, we will review some facts that support this.

■ THROUGH MAHARAJ'S WORDS

At **Rathod Dhadhal**'s home in **Sarangpur**, **Maharaj** was once playing *raas* with the *sadhus*. A *kirtan* by *Kabirji* was being sung:

'Jaha sadguru khele vasant...'

('Here, the sadguru plays the spring festival...')

Singing these words, Maharaj raised his *raas* stick and **tapped it three times to Gunatitanand Swami's chest**. Then, he asked, **"Who is the *sadguru* Kabirji speaks of in this verse?"**

Anandanand Swami and **Muktanand Swami** said, **"Maharaj! You are that *sadguru*."**

"No, Swami. I am **Purushottam Narayan**. That *sadguru* is **this here Gunatitanand Swami**; he is the **avatar of Aksharbrahma**."

Maharaj often used to explain, "Gunatitanand Swami is my abode, *Akshardham*. Only if you become like him (*aksharrup*), will you be worthy of worshipping me."

■ THROUGH THE PARAMHANSAS' WORDS

Gunatitanand Swami was once sitting in a **line of sadhus** in **Vartal**. **Malji Soni of Bhoyka** came to **Gopalanand Swami** and asked, "Swami, **who is that *sadguru*** over there?"

"I had told you once that I would show you *Akshardham*," **Gopalanand Swami** answered. "Gunatitanand Swami over here is the **avatar of Akshardham** itself. **Shriji Maharaj** has



identified him as Akshar many times. So, recognise him properly." **Malji Soni** later shared this incident with **Shastriji Maharaj** and many other devotees.

Vignananand Swami once told **Shastriji Maharaj**, **"I had heard many times from Shriji Maharaj** that **Gunatitanand Swami** is **Akshar**. However, how can people understand this when they are not even yet able to understand Maharaj to be the

MUL AKSHAR



supreme God? As such, this truth cannot be discussed. Yet, it is the truth. **But keep it buried within your soul."**

In this way, many *paramhansas* knew that Gunatitanand Swami was Akshar.

■ THROUGH THE SAMPRADAYA'S SHASTRAS

- Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj writes in his book, *Kirtan Kaustubh Mala*:

*Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami,
tene apya vartaman...*

*(Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami,
who initiated me...)*

This is just one of many references from the scriptures. In short, this fact is not made up. It is the absolute truth.

■ THROUGH HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

- In the **Sorath** region in Gujarat, more than **30 old hari mandirs** have *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami that still say '**Mul Aksharmurti**' before his name.
- **Shastriji Maharaj** has said in a letter: "I do not know how to arrange false statements and dupe others for my own benefit. So, if **you have trust in me**, if you believe that I am an honest and honourable man, then believe the above statements to be true; believe from within that '**Swami is Anadi Mul Akshar and Shriji Maharaj is Purushottam Bhagwan.**' Keep firm faith in this truth."
- **Gunatitanand Swami's life, sermons, explanation of Maharaj's form, and the *brahmarup*** state he helped his followers achieve is greatest among all *paramhansas*.

■ BY EXPERIENCE

- **Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami's lineage** is the *gunatit guru parampara*. Today, there is **no spiritual succession in the world that is so pure.**
- Today, in more than 1,000 mandirs and thousands of homes, the words '**Gunatitanand Mul Akshar**' are heard.
- **In the presence of the *gunatit satpurush*, Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj, countless people experience the presence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.**



Bhagatji Maharaj spent years in the company of Gopalanand Swami. After this, he worked extremely hard to please Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, which he accomplished in only three-and-a-half years. Then, despite severe hardships, he spread the message of 'Gunatitanand Mul Akshar' throughout the *sampradaya*. In this work, he had to suffer a lot of hardships and opposition. Yet, the joy on his face was never gone for even a second. This shows that he truly was enlightened.



Vartal mandir's Kothari Gordhanbhai had a nephew named Girdharbhai. Girdharbhai had firmly decided to become *brahmarup* while on this earth. Reading the Vachanamrut it became clear to him that if one finds the *satpurush*, one can become *brahmarup*. He began to search for such a *satpurush* in the *sampradaya*. He met many sadhus but his mind did not feel content.

Girdharbhai once came to Vartal. He would stand in front of Harikrishna Maharaj on one leg and turn the *mala* all day. After one month, Harikrishna Maharaj gave him *darshan*. "Bhagatji Maharaj is the *param ekantik satpurush*. I am present in *satsang* through him," Maharaj said.

Girdharbhai had doubts. "Bhagatji is a householder. He's going to make me *brahmarup*?" he thought. Again, he performed *tap* in front of the *murti*, and again, Harikrishna Maharaj came to him and

12. BHAGATJI MAHARAJ

Bhagatji Maharaj's childhood name was Pragji. He was born in the town of Mahuva. His mother's name was Maluba, and his father's name was Govindbhai. From childhood, Pragji used to remain engrossed in bhakti. He used to tell his friends, "I've already studied everything. I just want to worship God and help others worship God."



told him about Bhagatji Maharaj.

Now, Girdharbhai was **convinced**. He accepted Bhagatji Maharaj as his guru. Eventually, this Girdharbhai **took diksha** as a sadhu and became **Swami Vignandasji**.

■ ■ ■

Bechar Bhagat used to serve as an assistant to Kothari Gordhanbhai. He once asked Bhagatji Maharaj to sew him a new **kediyu** (a top similar to a tunic). **Without even taking measurements**, Bhagatji stitched him a **perfectly fitting kediyu**. Bechar Bhagat was **pleased**. Just then, **Bhagatji Maharaj commented**, “This was just a **kediyu** for your body. However, I know how to **sew a kediyu for your soul, as well.**”

A **kediyu** for the soul is the state of being **brahmarup**. By remaining firm in *agna* and *upasana*, one’s heart is cleansed, and one becomes *brahmarup*; and only then does one become truly worthy of offering devotion to God.

Hearing such wisdom, **Bechar Bhagat** began to regularly keep the company of Bhagatji Maharaj. Soon, he also took **diksha** and was named **Swami Mahapurushdasji**.

Bhagatji Maharaj was Akshar-brahma himself! The vessel of Parabrahma and someone who made countless people *brahmarup*.

■ PRAGJI BHAGAT’S TEACHINGS

- One should always honour the guru’s words; never let them be sullied by being unfulfilled.

- A true aspirant sleeps like a crow and remains vigilant like a deer, meaning that one is always self-aware. **In all of one’s actions, one should constantly remember God**. Then, the soul can achieve anything it wishes.
- **God can only be truly pleased through celibacy**. One should be as **brave as a tiger when facing worldly pleasures**; never be meek.
- Shriji Maharaj is the same here in human form in the *satpurush* as he is in Akshardham. When one truly believes this, all of one’s tasks are accomplished.
- **Atmabuddhi** (oneness) with the *satpurush* is the one extraordinarily powerful tool for achieving liberation.



13. HE LIVED FOR US

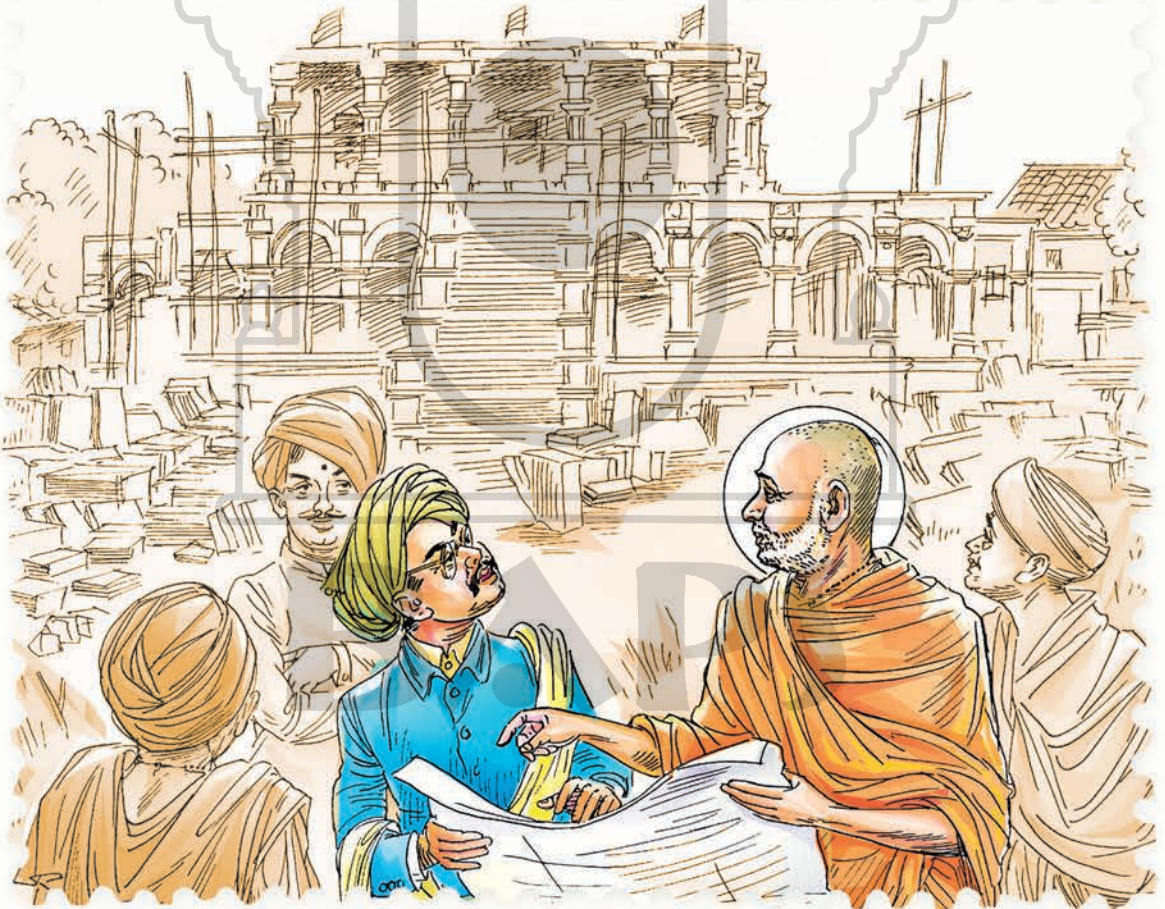
“Narayan Hare! Sachchidanand Prabho!” **Shastriji Maharaj** called these words as he asked for **alms** in the streets of **Jamrala**. There was not a single person in this village who belonged to the Akshar-Purushottam faith.

Soon, Swamishri needed to answer a **call of nature**. He went to the village outskirts and then returned for a bath. He approached a well in the courtyard of a **mandir** in the village. But just then, a person **started yelling**, “You scoundrels! Why do you come to our mandir? Get out right now!”

Swamishri was still **just half wet**. Yet, he had to get up and **leave**.

Motibhai’s house was near the mandir. He heard the commotion and came out. This was the first time in his life he had ever seen Shastriji Maharaj. Seeing Swami so calm in the face of such insult moved Motibhai. He invited Swami into his home and allowed him to finish bathing. Afterwards, he insisted, “**Please stay here. I’ll give you alms. Please offer a meal to Thakorji and eat here.**”

But **Shastriji Maharaj** refused. “Motibhai. We don’t have much time to stay. Only after



we carry this sack of **flour to Sarangpur will the *thal* be offered** to Thakorji, and only then will the hardworking **sadhus and devotees eat. All these mandirs run on alms."**

Swamishri got up to leave. Motibhai stopped him. He arranged for the flour to reach Sarangpur and then made sure Swamishri ate before leaving.

This was the burden Shastriji Maharaj tolerated for us. He begged for alms and suffered many such hardships. He truly lived for us.

■ **SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S TIMES**

- **There was not enough food.** Often, they ate dry flour and drank water to get through the day. For years, they cooked ***khichadi*** in **empty kerosene containers** because they could not afford vessels.
- There was **no place** for them **to stay** or sleep. After working on the mandirs all day, sadhus and devotees would sleep anywhere they found a spot – on a rock, under a tree, etc.
- **Each sadhu** or devotee had to handle **multiple responsibilities.**
- **No one paid heed to illness.** They just continued doing *seva*.
- They suffered **countless insults**. Opponents **even tried to hurt** Shastriji Maharaj!

In such difficult times, Shastriji Maharaj never lost hope. With Swamishri by their side, all the other sadhus did *seva* and bhakti joyfully, despite the insults and hardships.

All of this was done just so we could have these mandirs dedicated to true *upasana*; just so we could have **a chance at liberation. Truly, Shastriji Maharaj lived his life for us. We can never repay him for all that he has done for us.**



14. YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S DIVINE VISION

1959. **Yogiji Maharaj** was in **Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania**. Once, when he went to the **bathroom**, he saw a pile of clothes and realized that the **clothes of the youths** travelling with him were **still left to be washed**. Without saying a word, he locked himself in the bathroom and began to wash the clothes! He **had not had a chance to do seva like this in a long time**; he was overjoyed.

It was only after he came out that the *yuvaks* realized Yogiji Maharaj had **washed their clothes**. The youngsters felt sad. They fell at Yogiji Maharaj's feet, "Swami, we are supposed to be washing your clothes. Yet, you washed ours?"

"When would I have had the pleasure of doing the seva of such virtuous yuvaks like you?" Yogiji Maharaj replied. "So, I just took this opportunity." Hearing these words, the *yuvaks'* eyes and hearts filled with emotion.

■ ■ ■

In 1956, a pilgrimage was organized on a special train. The group eventually came to **Pondicherry**, which is a city in southern India. There, everyone went to visit a place called the **Aurobindo Ashram**. Yogiji Maharaj stayed back at the train station to rest. He, another sadhu, Jashbhai, and Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj) were the only four left on the train.

Suddenly, Yogiji Maharaj said, "Let's do *pradakshinas* of this sanctified train." And saying so, he did **one-and-a-half pradakshinas of the 18-car train**. Then, he started doing **dandvats**, as well!

Jashbhai said, "Bapa! **To whom are you doing dandvats?**"

Yogiji Maharaj replied, **"To the devotees."**

Jashbhai argued, "But, Bapa. They've gone to the ashram."

Yogiji Maharaj then said, "But their **luggage is here, is it not?**"

Indeed, Yogiji Maharaj's vision was filled with divinity. Even though he was the guru, he did the seva of his disciples – he did dandvats to them! He truly understood their greatness.

He taught us that everyone connected to Maharaj and Swami is divine. One should never look at their flaws; one should always look towards their virtues.

Yogiji Maharaj often said, "I treat everyone as *gunatit*, and see Maharaj within them. So, I feel overjoyed."



15. MAGIC IN THE KALI-YUGA

There was a man named **Haridasji**. He was the **Diwan (Royal Minister) of Junagadh**. Haridasji once decided to go on a **pilgrimage to the four great *tirths***. Before beginning his journey he **came to meet Gunatitanand Swami**. Upon seeing him, Swami said, “Diwan Saheb! As you’re going on such a pilgrimage, you’ll bring something back for your relatives, right?”

“Yes, Swami,” Haridas said. “It’s tradition.”

Swami answered, “Won’t you bring something back for us, also?” Seeing the





Diwan's confused silence, Swami continued, "Don't worry; we don't want anything else. Along your travels, if you find a **sadhu who has renounced wealth and is a complete celibate, please bring him back with you.**"

"Swami, I'll surely do that," Haridas replied confidently.

After his **four-month pilgrimage**, Haridas returned to Junagadh. Swami asked, "Did you **bring my gift?**"

"Swami!" the Diwan replied. "**Your gift can only be found here in your home. I travelled to the four great pilgrim places, but I did not find a single sadhu like you who has renounced wealth and practices complete celibacy.** Some gave great *kathas*, while others practiced yoga, but none had renounced wealth and practiced celibacy."

Sadhus who have renounced wealth and practice celibacy are a signature of our Swaminarayan sampradaya. This is a miracle in Kali Yuga. Today, while others race after worldly pleasures, **youngsters yet in their 20s** enthusiastically **become sadhus at the hands of the *gunatit satpurush*.** They give up worldly pleasures and career ambitions. Instead, they choose to walk the path to liberation and to help others walk that path.

Yogiji Maharaj had said that Pramukh Swami Maharaj would initiate 700 sadhus. Today, that wish has been fulfilled, and there are more than 1,000 sadhus in BAPS.

■ INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT OUR SADHUS

- Our sadhus follow the **five *vartmans*** given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan – *nishkam, nirlobh, nisswad, nissneh* and *nirman*. This means they practice complete celibacy; they do not keep or touch money; they **eat in a wooden bowl**; they do not keep contact with their relatives; and they humbly serve in the *seva* they are assigned by the fellowship.
- They **wear orange robes** and shave their **heads every month**.
- They are **well-educated**. Some have studied to be doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, MBAs, pilots, lawyers, PhDs, and teachers. Many also grew up in and are **citizens** of countries like America, England, New Zealand and Australia, and also many countries in Africa. Some sadhus are also the **only child** of their parents.
- Our sadhus first **train in Sarangpur**. Then, **they move to mandirs around the world, according to Swamishri's wish. There, they do bhakti and satsang, and they help others do the same. They also selflessly serve the community.**

Truly, such holy sadhus are Swamishri's unique miracles!



16. LIVED FOR HIS DEVOTEES

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was travelling in **Devgadh Bariya**, which is a village in the Panchmahal region of Gujarat. There was a **child about four years of age named Shambhu**. He had come to visit **from Malav**, a neighbouring village. **“Bapa! Will you come to my house? Please come,”** he prayed.

Swamishri placed his hand on Shambhu's head and said, “As soon as we have time, we'll surely come.”

Shambhu ran off, delighted. The next day, **Swamishri was in the village of Rabod**. He **saw Shambhu** there, as well. So, he told the sadhus, “Look, Shambhu has come! **We've given him our word that we'll visit his home.** So we must go.”

“But Swami,” pleaded a sadhu who travelled the region. **“You are not well, and the road to Malav is unpaved and very dusty.”**

Swamishri replied, “We are going to Ghoghamba anyway. And Malav is on the way. There's no trouble in going.”

The sadhus remained silent. **At 10 pm, Swamishri arrived in Malav. Shambhu** was waiting with his father, Ashwinbhai Mistry. Seeing the **happy** boy, Swamishri said, “Let's go to your home!”

So saying, Swamishri visited Shambhu's home.

Shambhu did **pujan and arti** of Thakorji and Swamishri. Everyone was touched by Swamishri's care for children.

■ ■ ■

In 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in **America**. While travelling in **Philadelphia**, he was once putting on his **slippers**. But his **feet got mixed up**. He put his right foot in his left slipper and his left foot in his right slipper.

The sadhus with him asked, “Swami, why did you do that?”

“For some time now, I have not been able to see properly,” Swami revealed.

Swamishri was **examined** at a special hospital in **Boston**. The doctor said, “He has **cataracts** in both his eyes. **If you had been just a little late, he may have gone blind.**” The doctor then **recommended immediate surgery**. However, **Swamishri refused**.

“We'll do the operation after returning to India,” Swamishri insisted.

The sadhus explained to him, “If the operation isn't done, you will no longer be able to see.”

“The devotees have taken days off and made preparations. If we don't go to their centres, their plans will be upset. **Whatever may happen to us, let's keep the devotees happy.**”

Yet, the devotees and sadhus insisted, and Swamishri finally relented. He agreed to the operation.

This was Pramukh Swami Maharaj! Devotees were his life. To please them, he ignored comforts and took on hardships. This is why satsang has grown. And this is why devotees are willing to sacrifice for Swamishri.



17. FIRM IN THE FIVE VARTMANS

■ NIRLOBHI VARTMAN – HAVING NO GREED

10 December 1993. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in a train going from Anand to Mumbai. The ticket checker looked at the sadhus' tickets and said, "Swamiji, the ₹50 for these ticket reservations are still left to be paid."

The sadhus explained, "We are sorry but we are sadhus and do not keep any money with us. We will have someone pay the amount when we reach Mumbai."

A gentleman from Ghatkopar was sitting across from Swami and the sadhus. He had heard Swami's name from his friends. "Let me have the honour of this seva," he offered. So saying, he paid the ₹50 for each ticket.

How amazing! Swami had built hundreds of mandirs; he was the president of an international organization like BAPS; he social service projects worth millions; yet, he did not have even ₹50 to his name!

■ NISHKAMI VARTMAN – HAVING NO LUST

1995. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in London for the Mandir Mahotsav. He had decided to take a look at work going on in the haveli. A British craftsman named Melvin had heard about our sadhus' niyams. And so, he asked a sadhu, "How long has Swamiji been practicing celibacy?"

The sadhu replied, "60 years." He had counted the years since Swami's initiation as a sadhu.

But Swami Bapa overheard his answer and replied, "Not 60 years. We've been practicing this vow for 75 years."

Why 75 years? Swami Bapa was then 75 years old. He was Aksharbrahma, the living form of God. He practiced complete celibacy.

Certainly, he was an eternally pure being.

■ NIRMANI VARTMAN – HAVING NO EGO

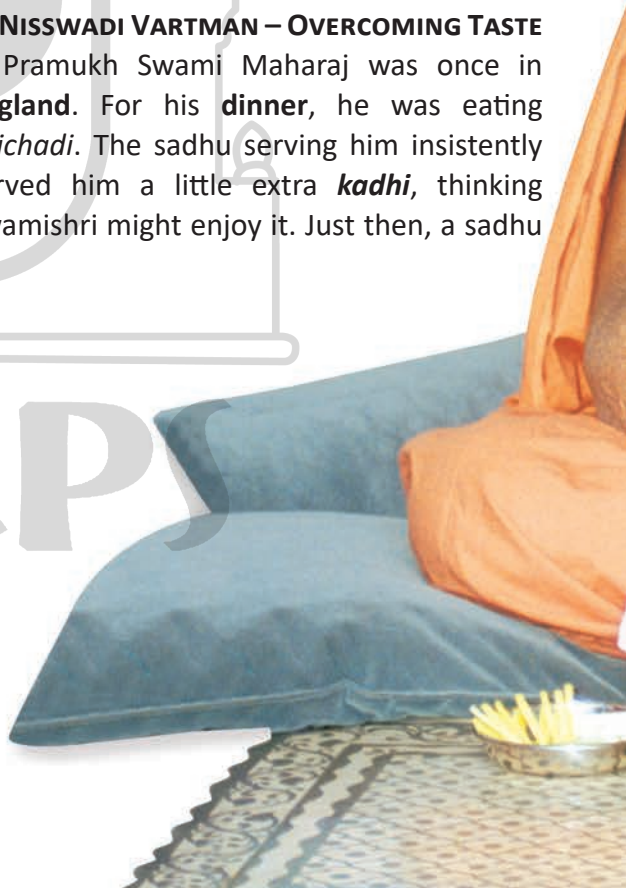
1985. A grand Suvarna Tula was held in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's honour at the QPR stadium in London. No one there had ever received an honour like this. The festival was celebrated with great fanfare.

The next day, in the afternoon, a man came to Swami. He had a great misunderstanding. So, he began speaking rudely to Swami. Yet, Swami tolerated the man's insults and kept the devotees and sadhus nearby calm. When the man had finished shouting, Swami told the sadhus, "Be sure to see that he eats before he leaves."

Whether you saw him on the day of the Suvarna Tula or on the day of such an insult, Swamishri's face was the same – he was not affected in any way.

■ NISSWADI VARTMAN – OVERCOMING TASTE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was once in England. For his dinner, he was eating khichadi. The sadhu serving him insistently served him a little extra kadhi, thinking Swamishri might enjoy it. Just then, a sadhu



cried out from the kitchen, “Don’t give Swami the *kadhi*! It’s gone off and **tastes really bad!**” On inspection, the sadhu realised that **instead of yogurt**, they had mistakenly **used spoiled cream** to make the *kadhi*. It tasted horrible! Still, **Swamishri hadn’t said a word**. When asked why, Swami said, “Thakorji had it, so how can we complain?”

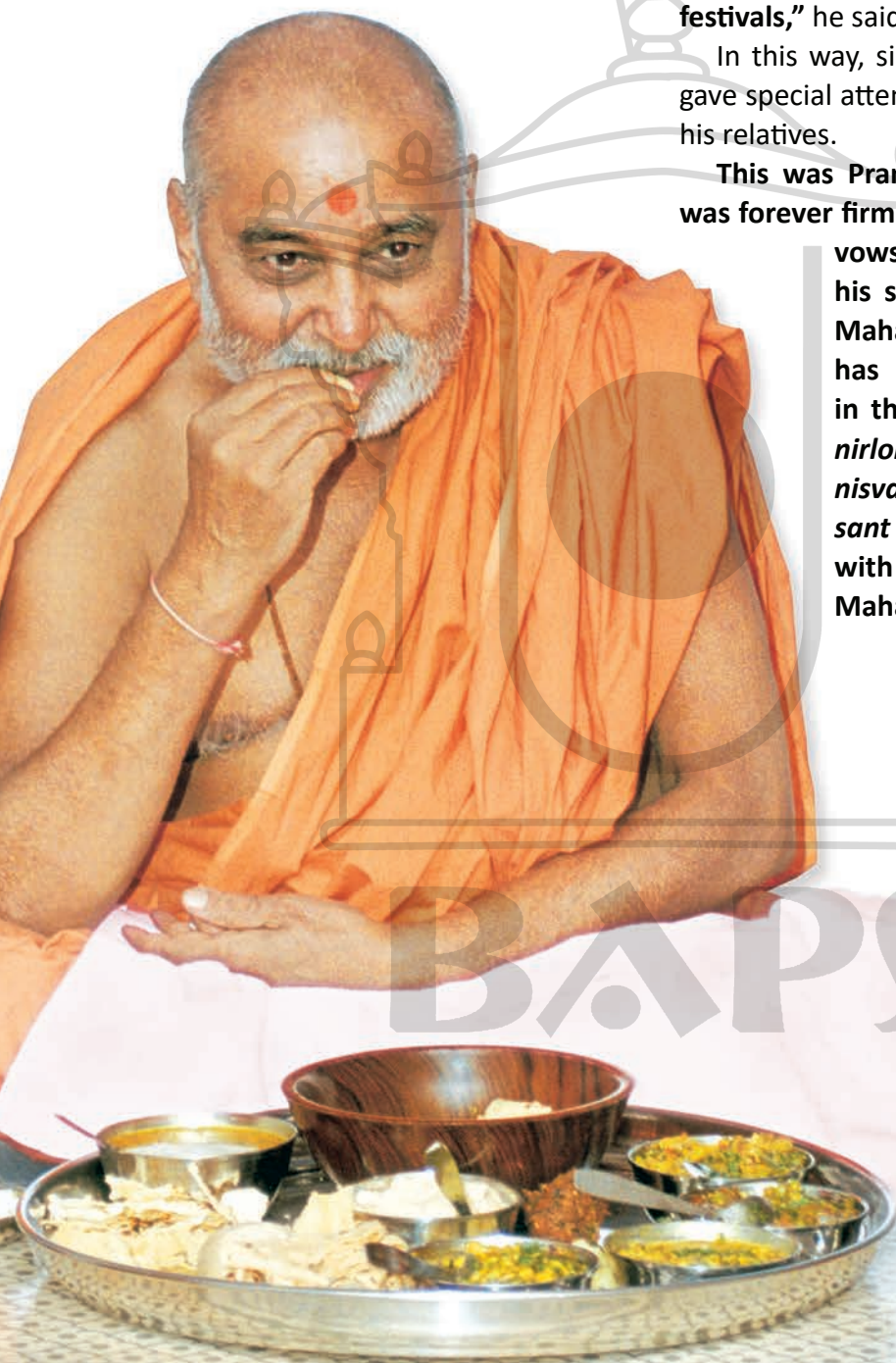
■ NISSNEHI VARTMAN – LEAVING ALL WORLDLY RELATIONS

Once, in **Gondal**, someone informed Pramukh Swami Maharaj during his lunch, “Your **mother** had come to the festival today and had to wait around for **one-and-a-half hours before** they gave her a **place to stay**.”

Swamishri did not give any attention to the report. “**That’s to be expected at large festivals,**” he said before changing the topic.

In this way, since his initiation, he never gave special attention to his native village or his relatives.

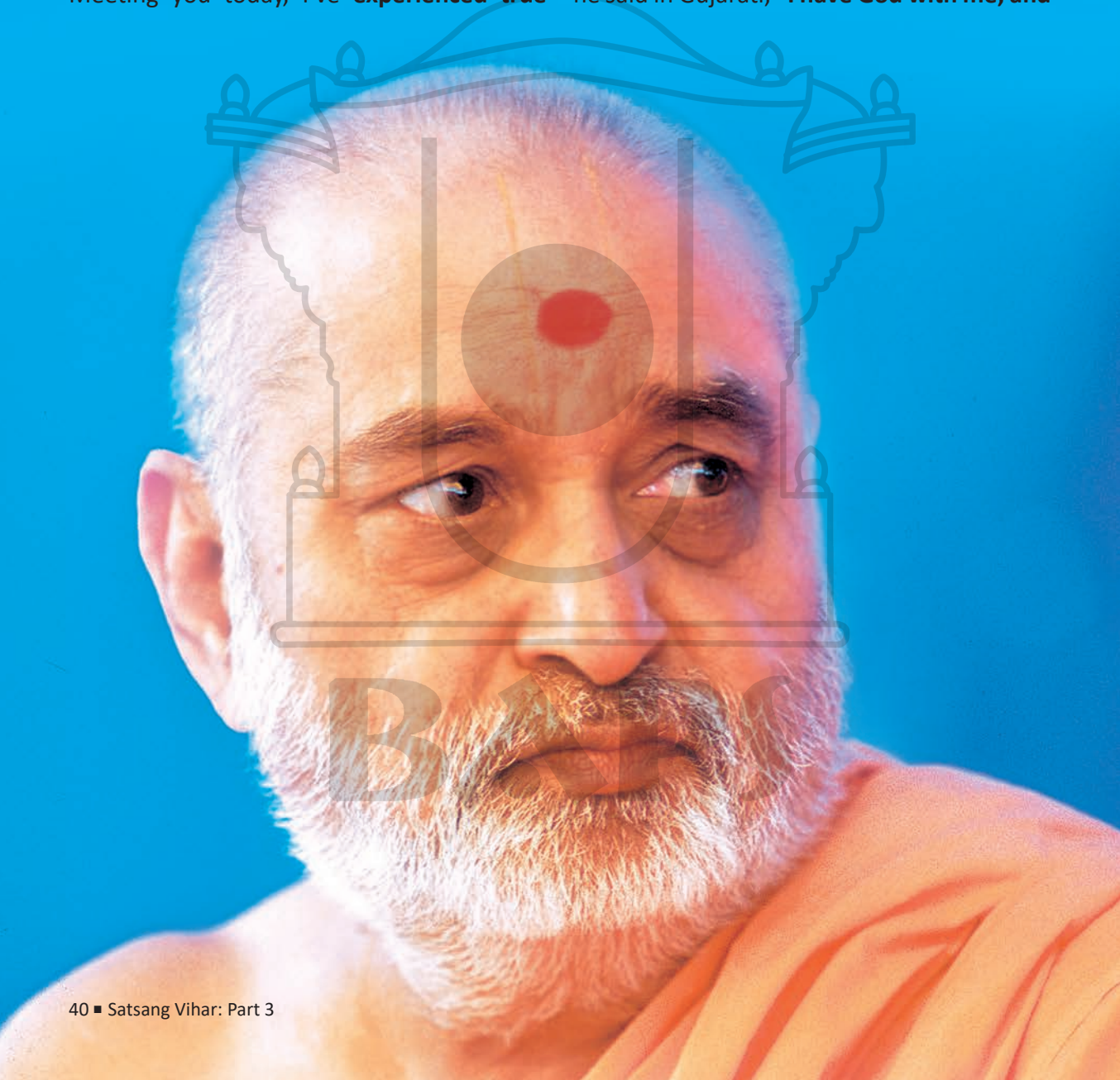
This was Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He was forever firm in practicing the five main vows that Maharaj has given his sadhus. In Gadhada III-27, Maharaj has said, “The sant who has the attributes described in the scriptures – one who is *nirlobhi*, *nishkami*, *nirmani*, *nivadi*, and *nisnehi*... Such a *sant* has a direct relationship with God.” Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a *sant*!



18. PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ: HIS LIFE AND WORK

The year was 01988. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in **Los Angeles**, California (USA). **Carlos Vega**, an **affluent** American, had come with a Hindu friend to meet Swami. In the few moments he spent with Swami, he experienced divinity. He said, "Swamiji! Meeting you today, I've **experienced true** **peace and calm for the first time.**" After a pause, he continued, "**I have** a mansion, cars, money, and fame. I have everything... **but I don't have peace.**"

Pramukh Swami Maharaj said in English, "I have God... No money; I have God." Then, he said in Gujarati, "**I have God with me, and**



in that I have everything.”

Truly, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** held **Bhagwan** within him. He was **Aksharbrahma**. He had come to earth from Akshardham to grant countless people liberation.

In this lesson, let's learn some facts about his life and work.

- **Childhood name:** Shantilal
- **Birth:** Magshar *sud* 8, Samvat 1978; 7 December 1921.
- **Birthplace:** Chansad (Vadodara District, Gujarat)
- **Mother's Name:** Diwaliba Patel
- **Father's Name:** Motibhai Patel

■ **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

- 1921: Birth
- 1939: Left his home (Age: 18)
- 1940: Initiated as a sadhu by Shastriji Maharaj in Gondal. Name: **Sadhu Narayanswarupdas**
- 1950: Shastriji Maharaj appoints him in Ahmedabad as the president of BAPS.
- 1971: After Yogiji Maharaj's passing, becomes guru.
- 2016: Pramukh Swami Maharaj passed away to Akshardham.

■ **LIFE'S WORK:**

- Built more than 1,100 **mandirs** and 2 **Akshardhams**
- Initiated over 1,000 learned **sadhus**
- **Travelled** to more than 17,500 villages
- **Visited** more than 250,000 **homes**
- Answered more than 700,000 **letters**
- Guided hundreds of thousands of people through **phone calls** and

personal **meetings**.

- **Spread the glory of BAPS and Hindu culture across the globe.**
- Leader of BAPS, an organisation **honoured by the United Nations** and in the **Guinness Book of World Records**.
- **Worked for the liberation and spiritual care of everyone, regardless of caste, social status, and other differences.**

■ **LIFE MESSAGE**

- In the joy of others lies our own.
- True religion is that which increases mutual love.
- **Make faith and devotion firm in one's life.**
- To grow in self-control is true progress. **However much one follows the *agnas* of the *satpurush* is how much one has truly progressed.**
- Intelligence is that which is used to know, understand, and please God and the sant.
- **OPINIONS**
- “You will find those who will grant you children, give you millions of rupees or rid you of your illnesses, but **you will not find a *sant* like Pramukh Swami who will hold your hand and lead you to God.**”

– Pujya Krishnashankar Shastri (Bhagavat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad)

- **“What Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given to society cannot be described in words. Not just a page in history, but a whole book will have to be reserved to record his good deeds.”**

– Pujya Satyamitranand Giriji (Samanvay Mandir, Haridwar)

19. WHO ARE YOU ?

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

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

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

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

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.

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

■ UPASANA – FOUR THINGS TO BELIEVE

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

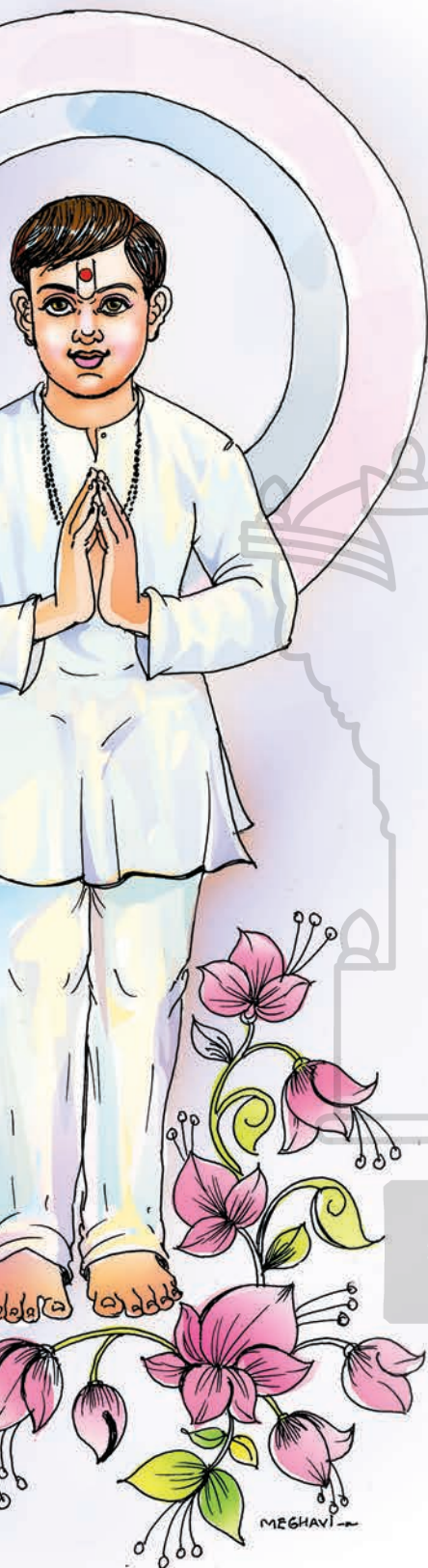
1. **Sahajanand Mama Parameshwar** – Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer, he has a divine form, he is *sarvopari* and he is present on earth.
2. **Gunatitanand Mul Akshar** – Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma.
3. **Pragat Satpurush Mokshanu Dwar** – *Pragat* Aksharbrahma Mahant Swami Maharaj is the gateway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

■ AGNA – EIGHT THINGS WE SHOULD DO

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

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. Participate 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. Avoid addictions. Fast on Ekadashi by doing either a *phalahari* fast, *sajala* fast (only water) or a *nirjala* fast (no food or water).
6. **Satsang Reading & Satsang Exams** – Read *Prasang Mala 108* or *Satsang Vihar* every day. Be sure to take the *Satsang Vihar* test, as well.
7. **Avoiding Kusang** – Always 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 read the following songs...

■ THE PANCH-TATTVA SONG

*Jiva, ishwar, māyā, Brahma ane Parabrahma,
Apyu Shriji Mahārāje, panch-tattva-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 Gunātīt Swāmi,
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar-Purushottam upāsānā... (2)
Aksharrup thaine, Purushottamni,
Bhakti karvāni ā sādhanā...
Aksharrup -thavu etle Akshar jevā thavu,
Pragat Akshar Mahant Swāmi Mahārāj jevā thāvu...
Purushottamni bhakti etle prem Shrijimā karvo,
sarvopari sākhar Pragat kartāno nishchay karvo
Ādarsh bālak thaine, ekmanā rahi,
Akshardhāme javāni ārāadhanā...
Akshar-Purushottam upāsānā... (2)*

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

20. LOYALTY LIKE NONE OTHER

Vajiba was a devotee from the village of **Vijapur** in North Gujarat. She would care for travelling sadhus who visited her village. Once, Maharaj's *paramhansa* Ramdas Swami visited Vijapur. Seeing his saintly lifestyle, she and her husband became **faithful satsangis**.

Back then, however, there were also other, ordinary men who would dress as sadhus. On looking closely, you would find that they had bad habits. For instance, they would smoke and keep female servants with them. This was not right because true sadhus are meant to live pure and detached lives.

If any such fake *bawas* came, Vajiba would not let them stay at her house. Maharaj heard of this and decided to test her faith. Dressed as a *brahmachari*, he visited Vajiba's house. "I am a pilgrim," he said. "Please let me stay here for a night."

"Move on," Vajiba answered. "There are many phonies like you. Serving them doesn't earn *kalyan*. If you want liberation, surrender yourself to Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

Maharaj said, "Lady, you have been fooled. Swaminarayan is not God. He is..."

"Hey! Mind your tongue!" Vajiba interrupted. "If you say another word, I'll throw you and all of your rubbish belongings out of here! I am a loyal devotee of Swaminarayan."

Even Maharaj was amazed at this woman's faith. Still, he continued softly, "Mother, I won't say a word nor ask for anything. Just let me stay a night."

Vajiba felt **compassion** for the man. So, she agreed and let him stay in the courtyard.

But just a little while later, Maharaj called out, "Mother, give me a cot."

"I don't have one," Vajiba replied.

"Please give me the coloured cot that's in that second room inside," Maharaj asked.

Vajiba was amazed. She thought, "How did this *bawa* know what is inside my home?" But then she thought, "There are countless like him, what do I care." She gave the *brahmachari* a bed, but thought nothing of him.

Maharaj called out again, "Give me a mattress." Vajiba again refused. So Maharaj said, "There's a stack of mattresses inside. Please give me the new one in the middle."

One after another, Maharaj showed miracles to Vajiba, but her faith did not budge. She gave him a mattress and went inside to sleep.

Just then, she saw a bright light. Hoping nothing had caught fire, she went out to check. She saw that Maharaj – dressed as the *brahmachari* – had stretched his foot out all the way until it touched a distant pipal tree! The bright light was coming from his toe! Something as miraculous as this would crumble anyone's faith. But Vajiba remained unaffected. She closed her doors and went to sleep as if nothing had happened.

The next morning, Maharaj took leave of Vijapur. Sometime later, Vajiba visited Gadhada. Maharaj saw her and said, "Was it these feet that had touched your pipal tree or someone else's?"

Vajiba was surprised. She began to ask for forgiveness, "Maharaj, that was you?"

"You are our true bhakta," Maharaj replied. "I showed you miracles to shake your faith, but you did not waver."

Such were Shriji Maharaj's devotees. They were forever loyal to him alone. No matter what miracles others showed, their faith never wavered. We, too, should become



devotees like them. The *kanthi* we wear is a symbol of such surrender to God.

■ QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE KANTHI

1. Why wear the *kanthi*?

The *kanthi* is a **symbol of surrender to God**. It symbolises, "I am God's and God is mine."

2. Why are there two strands in our *kanthi*?

The two strands of the *kanthi* represent **Akshar and Purushottam** and our belief that we must become *aksharrup* to offer true devotion to God.

3. By whom should we take the *kanthi* and be initiated?

Men can take initiation and receive the *kanthi* from Swamishri, *sadguru* sadhus or other sadhus. Women may take initiation and receive the *kanthi* from senior women devotees.

4. What should we do if our *kanthi* breaks?

We should take a new *kanthi*, sanctify it in our *ghar* mandir, and then wear it. We should keep a few extra *kanthis* in our *ghar* mandir for such emergencies.

21. BEHIND EVERY RITUAL THERE IS A PURPOSE

Our **Hindu religion** is **ancient** and **universal**. The traditions we follow today have been followed for thousands of years and were begun by great rishis. These **rishis** were often great **scientists**, as well as **spiritually accomplished** people. The **traditions** they have founded often **have** deep philosophical meaning as well as physical, mental and spiritual **benefits**. Let us try to understand the meanings behind our daily puja rituals.

1. WHY PERFORM PUJA IN THE MORNING?

Each morning is a new beginning. Remembering God and our guru in the morning inspires thoughts about dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and bhakti. Also, the scriptures praise the *brahma-muhurta* (or the first hours of the day). It is a time when the **mind is fresh and peaceful**. Therefore, doing puja in the morning makes our entire **day more positive**.



2. WHY DO PUJA FACING EAST OR NORTH?

The sun rises in the east, bringing new life to all living things. As such, **the east represents life and progress. The north stands for stability.** It is also the direction related to **liberation.**

3. WHY DO WE DO THE TILAK-CHANDALO?

The *tilak-chandalo* blesses our mind. The spot at the centre of our forehead is called the ***brahma-randhra***. Inside it is a pathway called the ***megha-nadi***. Placing ***prasadi chandan*** on this spot helps us think good thoughts.

Moreover, the *tilak-chandalo* is a **symbol of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya**. It is a holy mark that celebrates our attainment of God and the *satpurush*. A uniform does not increase the strength of a police officer, but it does **remind them of their duty**. In the same way, the *tilak-chandalo* is an ever-present reminder that we are Swaminarayan and we should not act inappropriately.

Sandalwood *tilak-chandalos* are also applied to the **two arms** – with the prayer of strength **to do good deeds** – and the **chest** – with the reminder that **God resides** within and that we should have only pure motives.

According to our *sanstha's* traditions, **women** should adorn their **foreheads** with only a ***kumkum chandlo***.

■ A TRUE STORY OF KEEPING FIRM IN THE VOW OF DOING TILAK-CHANDALO

A *satsangi balak* in **Jamnagar** used to do his *tilak-chandalo* to school every day. His **teacher instructed him to stop**, but the *balak* refused. The **principal** of the school also **told him to stop**. But the *balak* responded, “What if this was a birthmark?”

The principal said, “Then there wouldn’t be a problem.”

The boy replied, “Just believe it to be a

birthmark. If you ever see me without this birthmark, I’ll accept any punishment you give me.”

Seeing the boy’s firm resolve, the **principal gave him permission** to continue doing his *tilak-chandalo*.

4. WHY ARE THERE 108 BEADS ON A MALA?

It is estimated that we take 21,600 breaths a day. That’s **10,800 breaths** during the **12 hours** of daytime. A devotee wishes to chant God’s name every breath. However, that is not possible since we also have many other things to do. A scripture known as the **Manu Smruti** states that there is a chant called the ***upanshu jap***, wherein saying something once gives you **100 times the merits** of a normal chant. By that calculation, if one does **a proper mala of 108 beads, one gets the merits of saying the name 10,800 times** – or once for **every breath**. (An *upanshu jap* is when your lips move but the mantra is not heard by anyone else.) This is why 108 beads are kept in the rosary.

5. WHY CAN WE NOT TURN OVER THE LARGE BEAD ON THE MALA?

According to one tradition, the ***mala* is representative of the constellations** and the large bead or ***mer* represents the Sumeru Mountain**. The constellations are said to rotate around the Sumeru Mountain. So while the whole sky spins, **Sumeru remains unmoved**. In honour of this, when one reaches the *mer* (Sumeru) of the *mala*, one does not cross it. Instead, one flips the *mala* around.

6. WHY IS THE MALA ALWAYS TURNED ON THE SECOND FINGER?

Certain points in our body have connections and effects on other parts of our body. The **middle finger is said to have the most direct connection to one’s heart.**

As such, placing pressure on that finger by turning the bead there also connects the heart to the chant – mixing the physical and the spiritual into one rhythm.

7. WHY DO WE USE A GAUMUKHI?

Answer: The *gaumukhi* is used to keep the *mala* that we use to chant God's name clean. It is called a *gaumukhi* because its shape resembles the head of a cow.

8. WHY DO WE DO TAPNI MALA?

Answer: One does the *tapni mala* with the wish that 'I want to attain God at any cost.' While doing so, we also remember that Shriji Maharaj, as **Nilkanth Varni**, performed *tapni mala* in Pulhashram.

9. WHY DO WE DO PRADAKSHINAS?

Answer: A *pradakshina* reminds us that **God and our guru are the centre of our lives**. The *shastras* also state that the **merits of one *pradakshina* of God and his *sant* are greater than those of performing 100 *ashvamedha yagnas***.

10. WHY DO WE DO DANDVATS?

Answer: A *dandvat* symbolises giving up everything to God and living by his will. *Dandvats* and *panchang pranams* also provide the physical and psychological **benefits of many *yogasanas***.

11. WHY DO WE PRAY?

Answer: Prayer has many **spiritual benefits**. It helps us connect to Bhagwan and gives us the chance to speak to him. Today, **science also accepts** that prayer **decreases stress and increases our immunity to disease**.

In this way, our **Hindu rituals have benefits** for our whole being. They have physical and psychological benefits, as well as deep spiritual motives and meanings. **Both science and spirituality are enveloped into these different practices**. We are lucky to have inherited such a rich tradition. Let us regularly take part in these rituals with true faith and please Maharaj and Swami.



22. MAKING OUR HOME A MANDIR

Let us learn what an ideal *satsangi's* daily routine should be. In this chapter, we shall use the Shikshapatri as our base.

■ MORNING ROUTINE

- **Wake up** before sunrise and remember Maharaj and Swami.
- Use the **bathroom**, then **brush** your teeth and take a bath.
- Wear a clean, washed pair of clothes and perform **puja**.

■ MANDIR DARSHAN AND MEALS

- After puja, have **darshan** at your **ghar mandir**.
- Then, do **panchang pranam** to your **parents** and bid 'Jay Swaminarayan' to everyone in the house.
- Do **arti** and **thal** at your **ghar mandir** daily.
- Morning, noon, and night – whenever you partake of food, **eat** food offered to God and **say the shloka** before starting.

■ WORKING AND STUDYING

- There is a difference between how others work or study and how a *satsangi* should work or study. A *satsangi* acts according to Bhagwan and the sant's wishes and to please them.
- One should be **honest** and **regular** in one's work and studies.
- One should never take what one has not earned.
- One should always **work hard**.
- One should always be friendly to others.
- All of one's financial transactions

should be done in writing.

- Keep a **daily record** of all of one's **income and expenses**.
- Never spend more than one's income.
- One should work hard in one's studies. Also be regular, do the best you can, and never cheat.

■ EVENING ARTI

- Maharaj writes in the Shikshapatri, "My devotees should **go to the mandir every evening**." Therefore, if possible, one should go to one's nearest *hari* mandir or *shikharbaddha* mandir every evening.



There, one should attend *arti* and *ashtaks*, have darshan, perform *dandvats* or *panchang pranam*, do *pradakshinas*, offer prayers and make a small offering or donation.

- One should also perform *arti* in one's *ghar mandir* every evening.
- Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada II-62: "Even if a person has spent the whole day in activity, and regardless of whatever type of activities he may have been involved in, if, when he engages in the worship of God, his *indriyas*, *antahkaran* and *jiva* all unite and **become engrossed in worship**, then even if he does so for half an hour, or even for a few minutes, all of his **sins will be burnt to ashes.**"

■ GHAR SABHA

- All *satsangis* should do ***ghar sabha* every day – or at least twice a week.** This is to help one's family stay united and happy. And it is to help solve any issues that the family may face.
- In *ghar sabha*, one should sing *dhun* and *prarthana*, read from a *satsang* book, join in a group discussion or activity, and talk about each member's good or bad experiences throughout the day.

■ GENERAL

- *Satsangis* should live a virtuous life, imbibing virtues such as simplicity, cleanliness, discipline, respect, appropriate speech, compassion, never speaking ill of others, and addressing problems with patience and understanding.
- **One's life should be ideal and God-centred.** **Anyone who meets a *satsangi* should take away a positive view of *satsang* and feel inspired to live a similar life.**
- **A *satsangi's* speech, clothing, and eating habits should suit our faith's traditions.**

- Every family should try to have at least **one meal together every day.**
- Family members should respect one another.
- Our ***ghar mandir*** should be neat and **clean.**
- Our home should be filled with the sound of *kirtans* and ***katha*** as much as possible.

■ THE HONOUR OF YOUR HERD

In the Gir region of **Junagadh**, there was a cowherd known as **Khimo Taliyo**. His son told Gunatitanand Swami, "I want to give **two cows to the mandir**. Please send someone to pick them up."

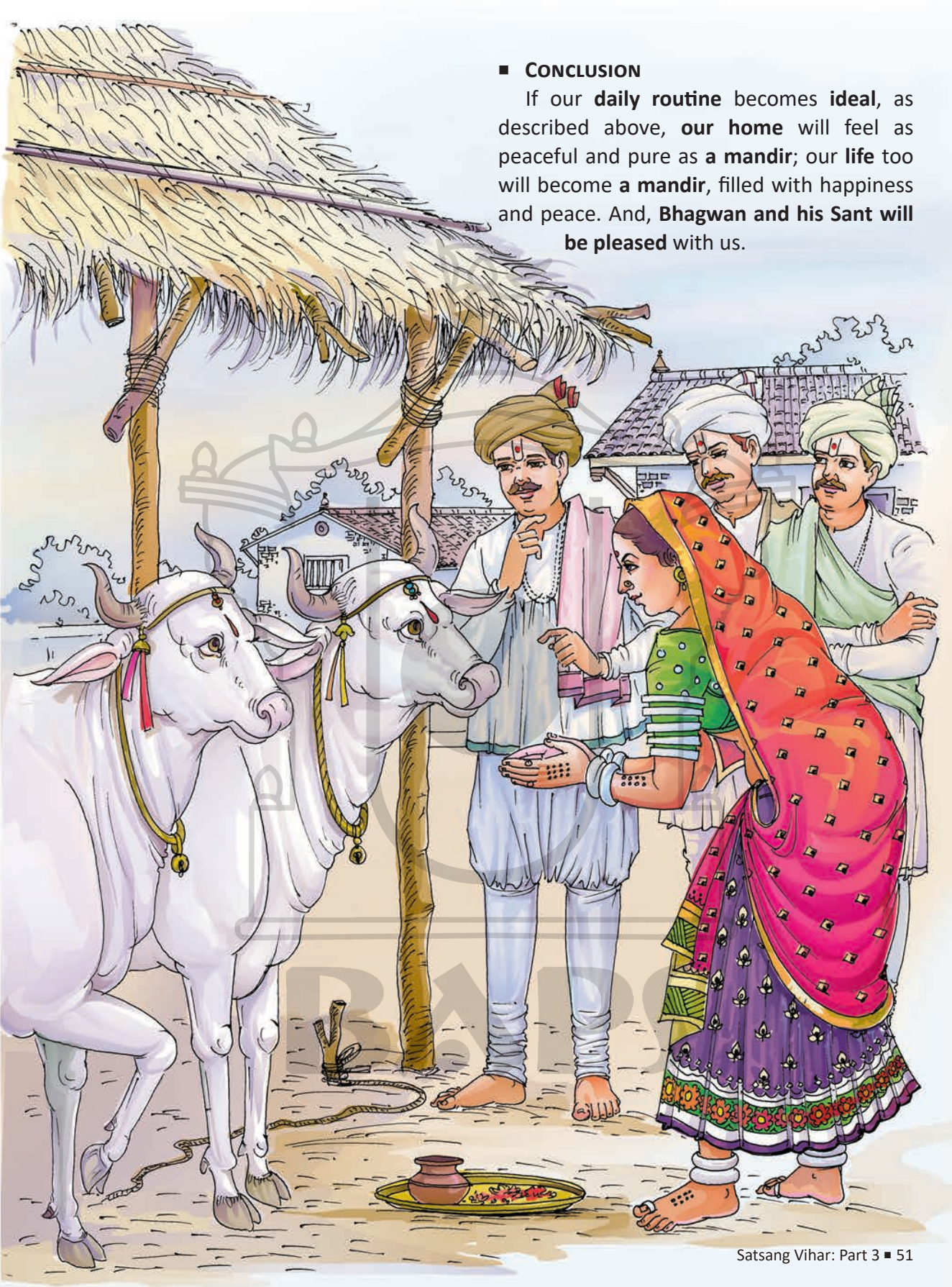
On Swami's instruction, **two devotees went to bring in the cows.** As they were about to leave the cowherd's home, the **cowherd's wife** called them back, "Sir! Please bring the **cows back to their shed.**"

Back at the cowshed, the lady did *pujan* of the cows and lovingly stroked the cows' heads and backs. Then bowing down to the cows, she said, "My dear cows, don't hurt anyone with your horns, tails or feet. Let your owners milk you whenever they need to. And **uphold the honour of your herd.**"

Both the devotees were surprised to see this. When they returned to the mandir, they told **Gunatitanand Swami** what they had seen. Gunatitanand Swami said to everyone sitting before him, "Everyone! Please listen. See how much care that woman has for the honour of her herd. **We are all of Swaminarayan's herd.** So, we too should care for the honour of our fellowship. If we do the *tilak-chandlo*, call ourselves Swaminarayan and still act in inappropriate ways, the honour of our fellowship is damaged. So, as Swaminarayan *satsangis*, **we should never act in a way which lessens the honour of our guru or our fellowship.**"

■ CONCLUSION

If our **daily routine** becomes **ideal**, as described above, **our home** will feel as peaceful and pure as a **mandir**; our **life** too will become a **mandir**, filled with happiness and peace. And, **Bhagwan** and his **Sant** will **be pleased** with us.



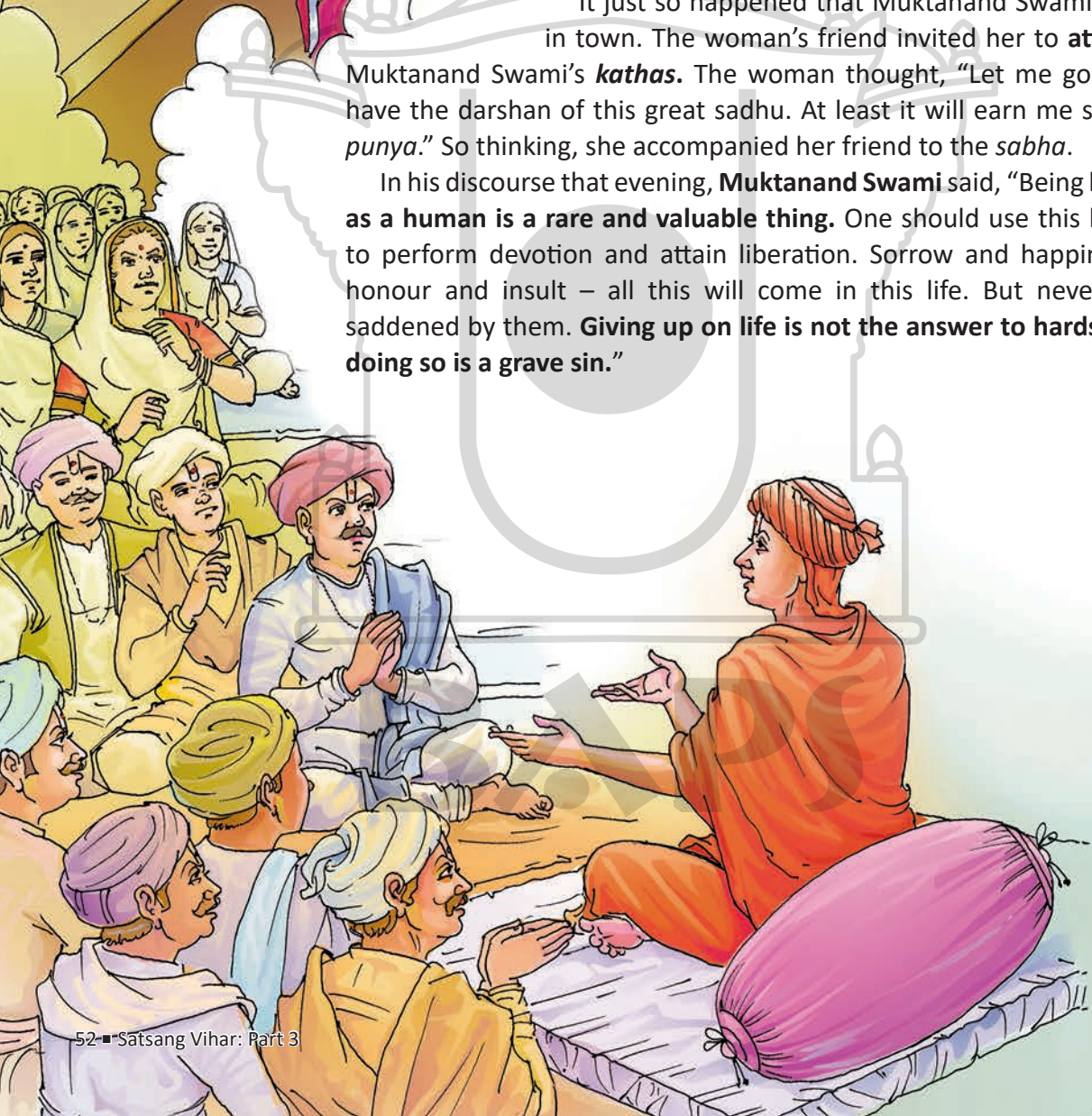
23. NEVER MISS SABHA

Once, there was a woman from the village of **Kankot**. She was the **daughter of a darbar**. Sadly, her husband passed away, and she became a **widow**. Since her husband was no more with her, she decided to return to her father's home.

But there, her **sisters-in-law** began to **speak meanly** to her. She grew tired of this poor treatment. She just could not go on living in this way. But just as these thoughts started to creep in, a true **friend** called out to her.

It just so happened that Muktanand Swami was in town. The woman's friend invited her to **attend** Muktanand Swami's **kathas**. The woman thought, "Let me go and have the darshan of this great sadhu. At least it will earn me some **punya**." So thinking, she accompanied her friend to the **sabha**.

In his discourse that evening, **Muktanand Swami** said, "Being **born as a human is a rare and valuable thing**. One should use this birth to perform devotion and attain liberation. Sorrow and happiness, honour and insult – all this will come in this life. But never be saddened by them. **Giving up on life is not the answer to hardship; doing so is a grave sin.**"



Hearing this, the woman thought, “He has read my innermost thoughts. This is a person worth listening to.”

With that, the woman **felt at peace, and she soon became a *satsangi*.**



Sadashivbhai of Khambhat was a wealthy man. He built a **seven-storeyed**, intricately-carved wooden ***haveli*** (mansion). When the work was done, he went to **Vartal**. **Gopalanand Swami** was in Vartal, as well. So, Sadashivbhai asked Gopalanand Swami to come and **bless his *haveli*.**

Gopalanand Swami knew the future. So he said, “Sadashivabhai, we’ll talk of your opening later. First, **stay here a few days and listen to our discourses.**”

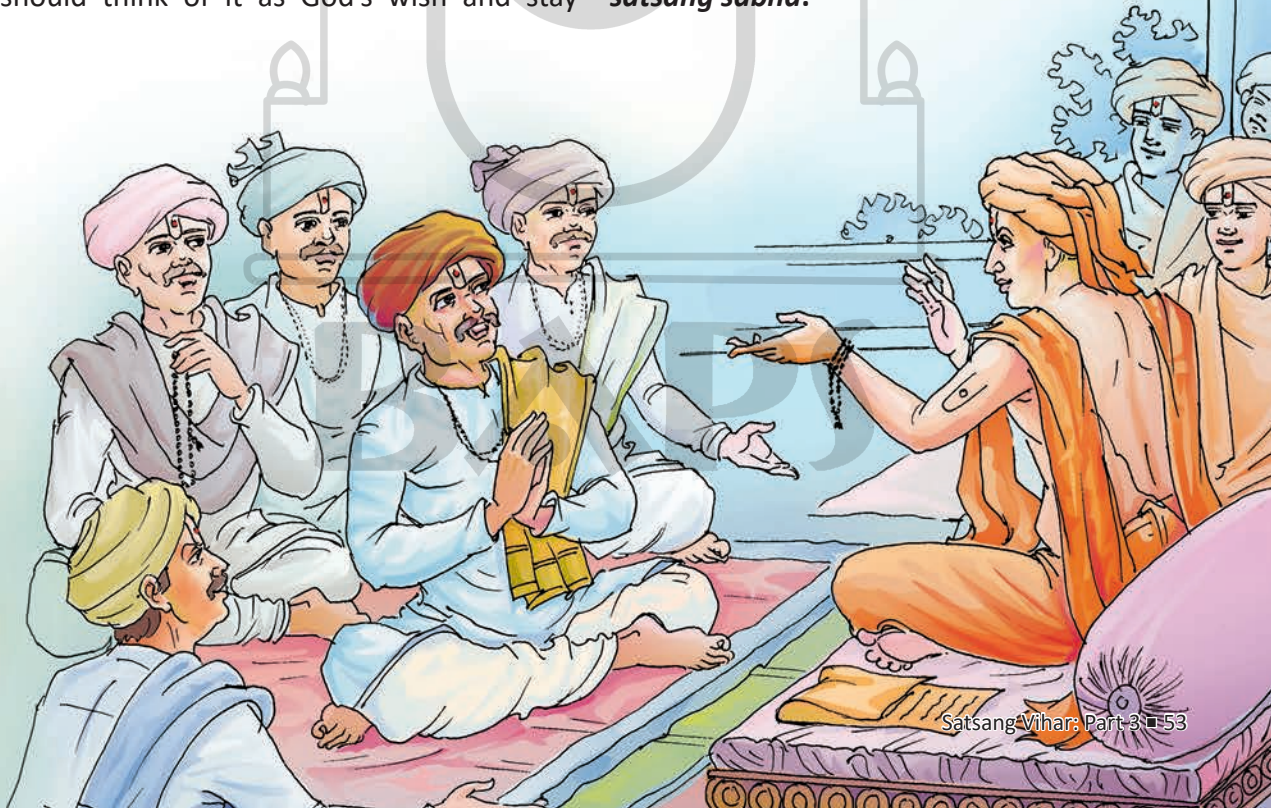
Sadashivbhai **honoured Swami’s wish.** Gopalanand Swami would **talk of *sankhya*** every day, “This **world itself is perishable.** We bring nothing to this world and take nothing when we leave. So no matter how much suffering or loss comes our way, we should think of it as God’s wish and stay

happy. Never be upset. **Whatever God does, he does for everyone’s benefit.”**

Listening to these talks for **seven days straight**, Sadashivbhai **became firm in his knowledge** that this world is temporary and that God is the all-doer. On the seventh day, Gopalanand Swami gave him **a note.** The note had come to Swami a few days ago. In it was the **news that Sadashivbhai’s *haveli* had been burnt to the ground.**

Sadashivbhai read the note, but he **did not feel the slightest bit of pain!** “Swami,” he said, “**Through your discourses, you had already burned the *haveli* in my heart.** If that had not happened, I would have burned with the *haveli*.”

This is the power of *katha*. The discourses that we hear in *sabha* strengthen our understanding. Due to this, we are able to stay happy in any circumstance. So, we should never skip any *bal-balika sabha* or *ghar sabha*. And when we grow up, we should always attend *yuva sabha* and *satsang sabha*.



24. EKADASHI OF THE INDRIYAS

When Shastriji Maharaj was a child, his name was **Dungar Bhakta**. Once, he visited **Karamsad** with his **family** for a **wedding**. While everyone was enjoying the wedding, **Dungar** made his way to a **mandir** on the village **outskirts**. There, he did *mala*, *pradakshina* and *dhyān*. When it was **time to eat**, **everyone** started **looking for Dungar**.

After searching for some time, they **found out** that he was **at the mandir**. **Many people** gathered there to bring him back. One said, “**Let’s go**. It’s **time to eat**. There are many delicious dishes there. You’ll have fun!”

Dungar replied, “Today is Ekadashi. I’ve learnt from the scriptures that **eating grains on the day of Ekadashi is like eating meat**. So, I won’t have anything.”

One after another, everyone tried to convince Dungar to eat. But Dungar **was firm in his decision**. Finally they gave in. They ordered special *phalahari* food appropriate for Ekadashi. Only then did Dungar have a little to **eat**. The news of his firm resolve spread throughout the village. Everyone came to have his *darshan*. At that time, Dungar Bhakta was only **six years old**.

In this way, Dungar Bhakta always observed Ekadashi, no matter if people tried to convince him otherwise. He would never give up on his vow.

We, too, should observe every Ekadashi by doing a waterless, liquid or *phalahar* fast. Maharaj and Swami will be very pleased.

■ EKADASHI OF THE INDRIYAS

- In Vachanamrut Gadhada II-8, Maharaj says, “When observing the fast of Ekadashi, the eleven *indriyas* should not be allowed their respective diets. Since

such an observance arrives once every fifteen days, one should definitely make a point of observing it. In return, God will become pleased upon one. Without this, however, merely fasting mindlessly does not please him.”

- Here **the eleven *indriyas* refer to our ten senses and the mind**. Fasting mindlessly means not having **control** over our senses.
- In fact, **we should observe Ekadashi in this way every day**. Meaning, we should not listen to vulgar songs or negative talks with our ears. We should not touch inappropriate things with our skin. We should not watch bad things with our eyes nor please our tongue by eating outside food or food that is against our *niyams*. We should not smell inappropriate things with our nose, behave inappropriately with our hands and feet, or speak inappropriately with our mouth. And, we should never think evil thoughts with our mind. Instead, **we should use all of our senses in the service of God. When we do that, we have truly observed the Ekadashi of the *indriyas*.**
- Fasting every fifteen days leads us further on the path towards observing this true Ekadashi – the Ekadashi of the *indriyas*.





25. NO ADDICTIONS, NO MEAT

Gunatitanand Swami arrived in the village of **Maliya** near Junagadh. A man named **Ramo Hati** was seated under a neem tree in the centre of the village. He was a man filled with every vice imaginable.

"Ramo!" Swami called out. "**Would a lion eat a *ladu* or a *jalebi*?**"

"No," Ramo replied.

"Why not?"

"Because **it's not his food.**"

"Then, **how strange is it that a man eats an animal's food?** And he drinks what should not to be drunk. Are these the characteristics of a man?" Swami asked.

Ramo understood Swami's point and said, "Swami, from today I'll **give up meat, alcohol** and my other addictions." So saying, he took the vows of **satsang** and became a *satsangi*.

■ WHY SHOULDN'T WE EAT MEAT?

- Killing animals for food is **cruel**, and it is a **great sin**.
- **A human body is not physically suited to consume meat.**
- **Science accepts** that eating meat increases the chances for illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, kidney and **liver dysfunction** and **digestive illnesses**.
- **It is a myth that one can only be strong if one eats meat.** Many vegetarian animals, like elephants, horses and rhinos, are **extremely strong**. Even in humans, many athletes and bodybuilders are vegetarians.

■ WHY CAN'T WE EAT EGGS?

- **Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said**, "Many parents and doctors feed children eggs in the belief that they will grow strong. However, who has said that strength is only gained from eggs? This is

just a false claim. Many people wrongly regard eggs as vegetarian. But **eggs do not grow on trees, do they? They come from hens, and they have life in them.**"

- Beans, fruits and grains contain many more essential nutrients than eggs.

■ ■ ■

Once, a *sabha* was taking place at a village square. **Gunatitanand Swami** said, "We will give **one cart full of millet** to whoever **gives up their addictions** to alcohol, hookah, opium, and tobacco and other vices." With the promise of receiving millet, many people took vows to become addiction-free.

A **year later, Swami returned** to the village. Someone asked, "Swami, where's our millet?"

"First, tell me," Swami enquired. "How much did you spend on your **addictions** before you gave them up?"

"At least **40 to 50 rupees a year**," the man replied.

"**How many carts of millet can you get** for that much?" Swami asked.

"Two carts," came the answer.

"So, we had promised one cart but we've basically given you two. Give us that extra one back." **Everyone was convinced by Swami's calculation. Even those who hadn't taken the vows before decided to take the vow of living addiction-free.**

■ WHY SHOULD ADDICTIONS BE AVOIDED?

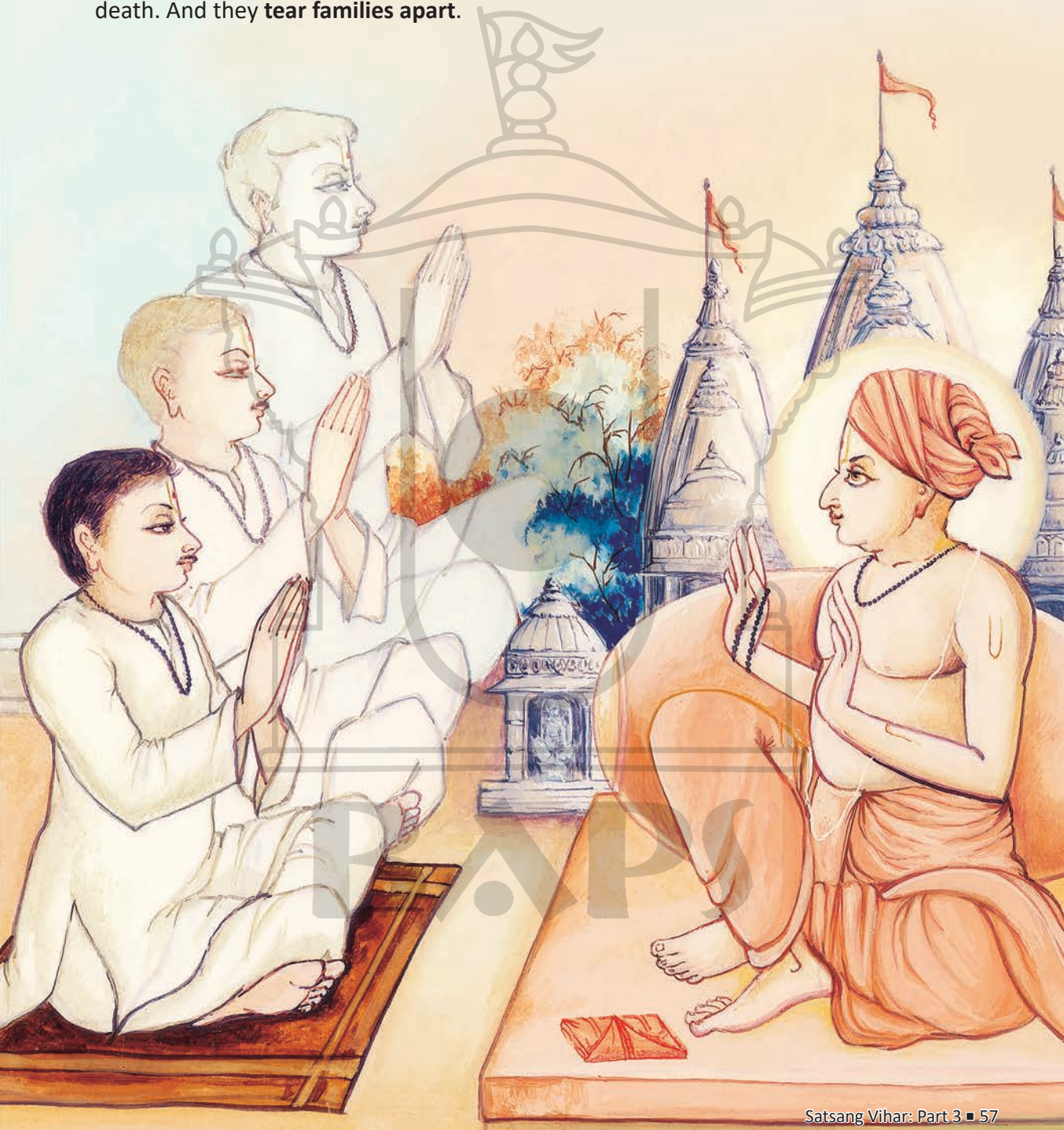
- There are many types of addictions, including tobacco, alcohol, *beedis*, cigarettes, drugs, and gambling.
- People get pulled into addictions because of tension, stress, peer pressure, image, or even the

blind imitation of famous people. Once they've started, they are not able to stop.

- Every **year 5,000,000** people in the world **die** from addiction to tobacco alone.
- **Every part of the body** is damaged by addictions. Also, addictions bring early death. And they **tear families apart**.

■ WHAT CAN WE DO?

- We should not be influenced by people who eat meat, have addictions or gamble.
- If possible, we should inspire such people to live pure lives without those vices.



26. HAVE MERCY ON US

Shriji Maharaj was once in the region of **Kutch-Bhuj**. Devotees from far-away villages had come for his **darshan**. One such group of devotees approached Shriji Maharaj at the end of their stay.

They asked for Maharaj's **leave to return home**. "Maharaj," they said, "We are returning home. **Please shower your mercy on us.**"

Maharaj instantly **replied**, "**You too should have mercy on me.**"

The devotees took Maharaj's leave and set off. However, on their way, they began to wonder, "Why did Shriji Maharaj ask us to have mercy on him?" Everyone discussed it amongst themselves. But **no one could figure it out**. So, they **went back** to meet Maharaj.

"Why have you returned?" Maharaj asked.

"Maharaj, why did you ask us to have mercy on you? It is you who are supposed to have mercy on us. You are God; we are just your disciples."

"Fine, then tell me: Where does God reside?"

The devotees put their hands on their chests and said, "Here, in the heart."

"That's it. That's what I want to tell you. I stay in your heart. **So, please keep your heart clean and pure**. If your heart is full of sin, I won't be able to stay there. I like to live in your heart when it is pure. So, have mercy on me, and keep your heart clean."

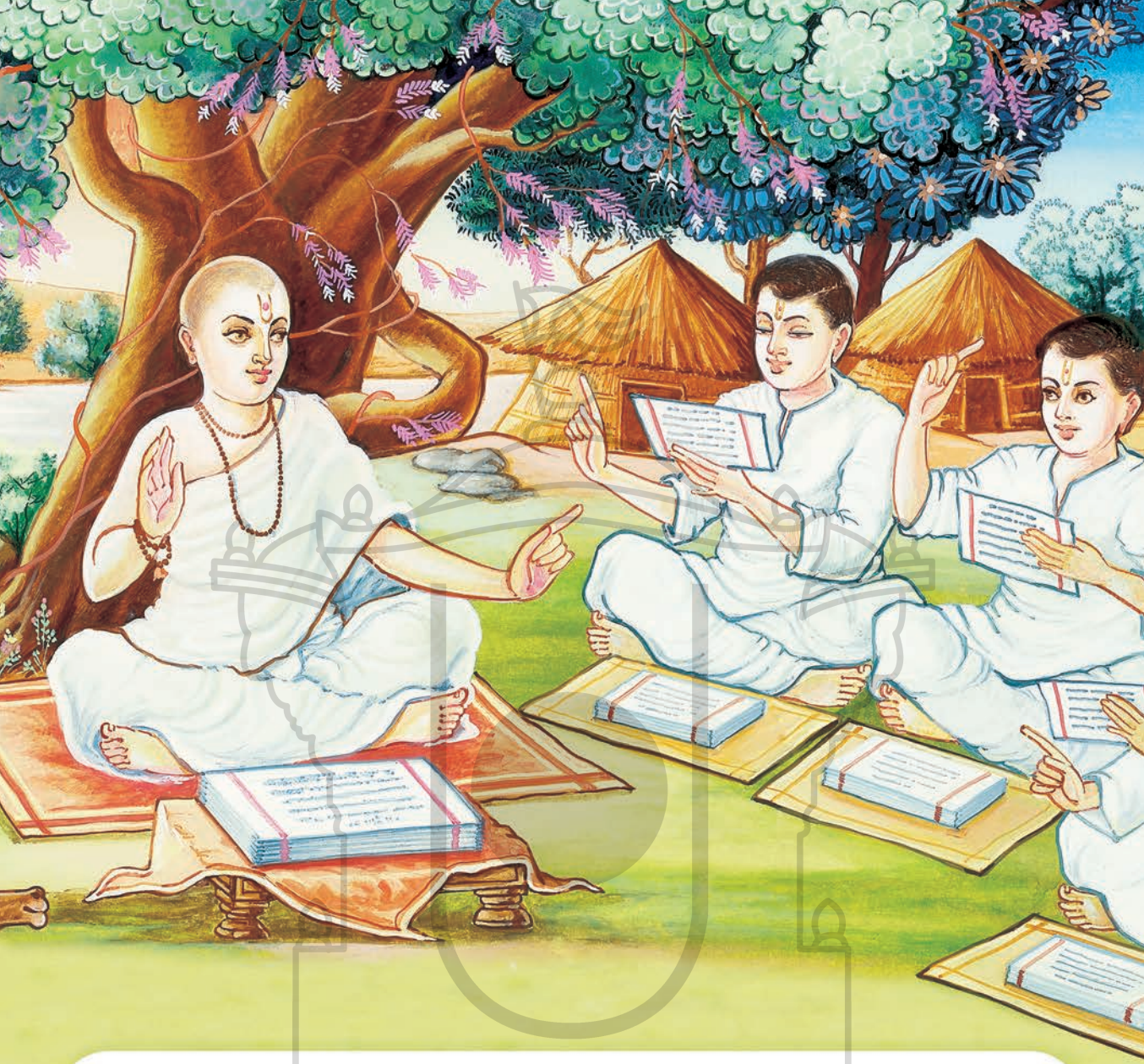
The devotees were taken aback. They all decided there and then, "We definitely want to keep our hearts clean."

■ TO KEEP OUR HEARTS CLEAN

1. Follow the **five vows** given by Maharaj for all devotees: **1. No alcohol. 2. No meat. 3. Never steal. 4. Never betray your husband or wife. 5. Never behave in a manner unworthy of a devotee.**
2. **Avoid bad company**, including bad friends and bad books.
3. **Avoid watching inappropriate TV shows and movies**. Never use the TV, internet or mobile devices in inappropriate ways.
4. **Never break the *stri-purush maryada***. *Balaks* should think of all girls and women as their sisters and mothers. And *balikas* should think of all boys and men as their brothers and fathers. Having boyfriends and girlfriends, dating, chatting, and going to dances with people of the opposite gender do not have a place in our traditions.
5. Avoid talking of **other people's flaws (*abhav-avgun*)** and **thoughts of bringing harm to others**.
6. **Do satsang regularly**. Attend satsang *sabha*. Do *ghar sabha*.







27. READ AND REAP RAJIPO

There was once a boy who lived in Anand. He learned from *bal sabha* that reading *satsang* books helps us gain depth in *satsang*. This message really struck a chord in his heart. He made it **his mission to read every single *satsang* book.**

After starting to read, he became **regular**

in going to sleep and waking up on time. He was focused at school, in tuition classes and while doing homework. Also, he ranked **first in his class.** As soon as he **got time** away from those activities, he would **continue reading.** He played a little each day, as well. But he always made time to read.



Sundays and holidays truly delighted him. He would **read for hours at a time**. Wherever he went, he kept a satsang book with him. And once he picked up a book, he couldn't rest until he had read it all. In this way, in the last **10 years**, he has **read more than 100 satsang books** – that's **more than 26,000 pages!**

When **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** found out about this, he was extremely pleased. He said, "Though the boy **is small**, he's **achieved a great task**. **Maharaj and Swami** will be **very pleased**. He will **feel peace** in his **heart** and **attain Akshardham**." The boy was overjoyed at receiving such blessings from Swamishri.

At the age of **16 today**, his **journey continues**. Because of his reading, his satsang knowledge is rich, and he also has the **ability to speak** well in front of others. His **memory, understanding** and **ability to make connections** have all **improved**.

■ **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SAID:**

- "Every **satsangi** should read one **Vachanamrut** and five **Swamini Vato** a day. We take many other *niyams*, but this is the best *niyam*."
- "If we **have satsang knowledge**, we will benefit in this world and in the afterworld. We will experience **eternal peace**. There will be unity in one's family. One's **depth in satsang** will increase. One will become a *satsangi* from the soul. And their **satsang will last for life**."
- Swami didn't just say these words. He lived them. Despite being in charge of our *sanstha*, he would make time to listen to or read *satsang* books while eating, during his walking routine, or during personal moments. In this way, he read or listened to almost all of our *satsang* literature, often many times over.

■ **LET'S DO THIS MUCH**

To please our guru, we can try doing the following:

1. Read one *Vachanamrut* and five *Swamini Vato* every day.
2. In *ghar sabha* or on our own, read at least one page of a *satsang* book of our choice.
3. When travelling or ill, we can **listen to satsang audiobooks**.
4. **Be sure to** take the *Satsang Vihar* exams. Also, we should learn and regularly revise the *mukhpath* given in the *Bal Sabha* booklet.

28. DON'T MISS THE HONOUR OF GIVING

There was once a certain devotee from Surat. He was not **well off**.

Yet, he and his wife **decided** that they wanted to give **10% of their income** for the *shikharbaddha mandir* being built in their city. The two made a small **piggy bank** and began their journey towards giving.

They had a **business that sold khaman**. They would wake up early to make the *khamans* for the day and then fill a large pot with all they had made. They would then put the pot on a cart and push it to all the local workshops to sell their *khamans*. In the evening, they would **come back home**, count out **10% of their earnings** for the day, and **place it** in their **piggy bank**. If one forgot, they would remind the other to make sure the money was put in the jar.

Slowly, they **began earning more money**. They were able to save up and buy a two-storey home just through their simple work of selling *khamans*. Today, they might not be millionaires, but in their **hearts and in their home**, there is a steady **flow of peace**.

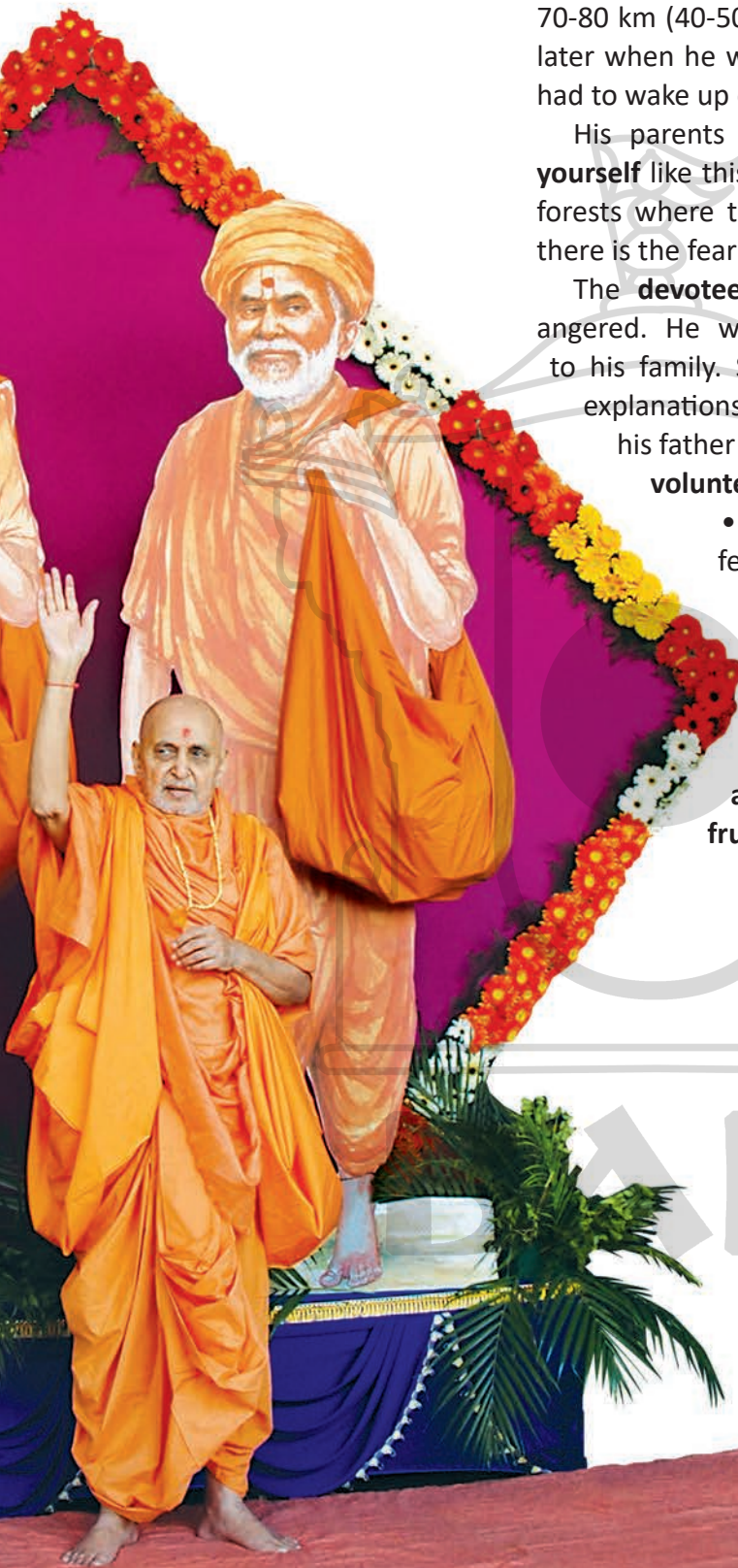
Once, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** arrived in **Surat**. **This devotee** was **honoured on stage**. As he came to Swami to **receive his blessings**, he prayed, “Bapa, **bless us** that we may regularly **give 10%** like this for the **rest of our lives**. And, may our future generations also continue to give their part.” Swami was moved by hearing this prayer. He happily gave them blessings for their sacrifice.

Dedicated devotees regularly give 5% or 10% of their earnings as **dharmado** according to Maharaj’s *agna* in the Shikshapatri. However, **some choose to give 25%, 50%**, or even more.

■ DHARMADO OF TIME

There was a **devotee** who lived in the **Dharampur** area of South Gujarat. He would travel 160 km (100 mi) every day **to work** in **Surat**. He would **return home at night tired** from his hard day’s work. Yet, he was a *karyakar*





responsible for *satsang sabhas*. So, 20 days out of every month, he would **visit the different *sabhas*** taking place in the Dharampur area. These visits had him travelling 70-80 km (40-50 mi) or more. It would be **midnight** or later when he would return **home**. And, of course, he had to wake up early the next morning for work.

His parents and **wife said** to him, “**Why strain yourself** like this? What’s the use? Plus, we live in the forests where there are dangerous animals out. And there is the fear of bandits.”

The **devotee** would listen quietly and never be angered. He would patiently **try to explain** things to his family. Seeing his faith, pure life, and loving explanations, his family began to understand. Soon, his father and his **wife** themselves became active **volunteers** as well.

- Today, **more than 25,000** male and female **volunteers** donate their time to run children’s, youth, *sanyukta*, and women’s *sabhas*. And more than 55,000 volunteers give their time for other services. **Pramukh Swami Maharaj has said**, “**These volunteers are like sadhus in ordinary clothes. The fruit of their service is Akshardham!**”

- Gunatitanand Swami has said that if one’s time was to be divided into 16 parts, “12 parts (75%) of one’s life should be used for the world and 4 parts (25%) should be used for satsang. And if there is a lot of pressure from the world, even then at least two parts should be used for satsang. If we can do this, God will be pleased.”

Our devotees never fall back in sacrificing their everything for satsang. We, too, should strive to be such dedicated devotees to please Maharaj and Swami.

29. ATTACHMENT TO GOD

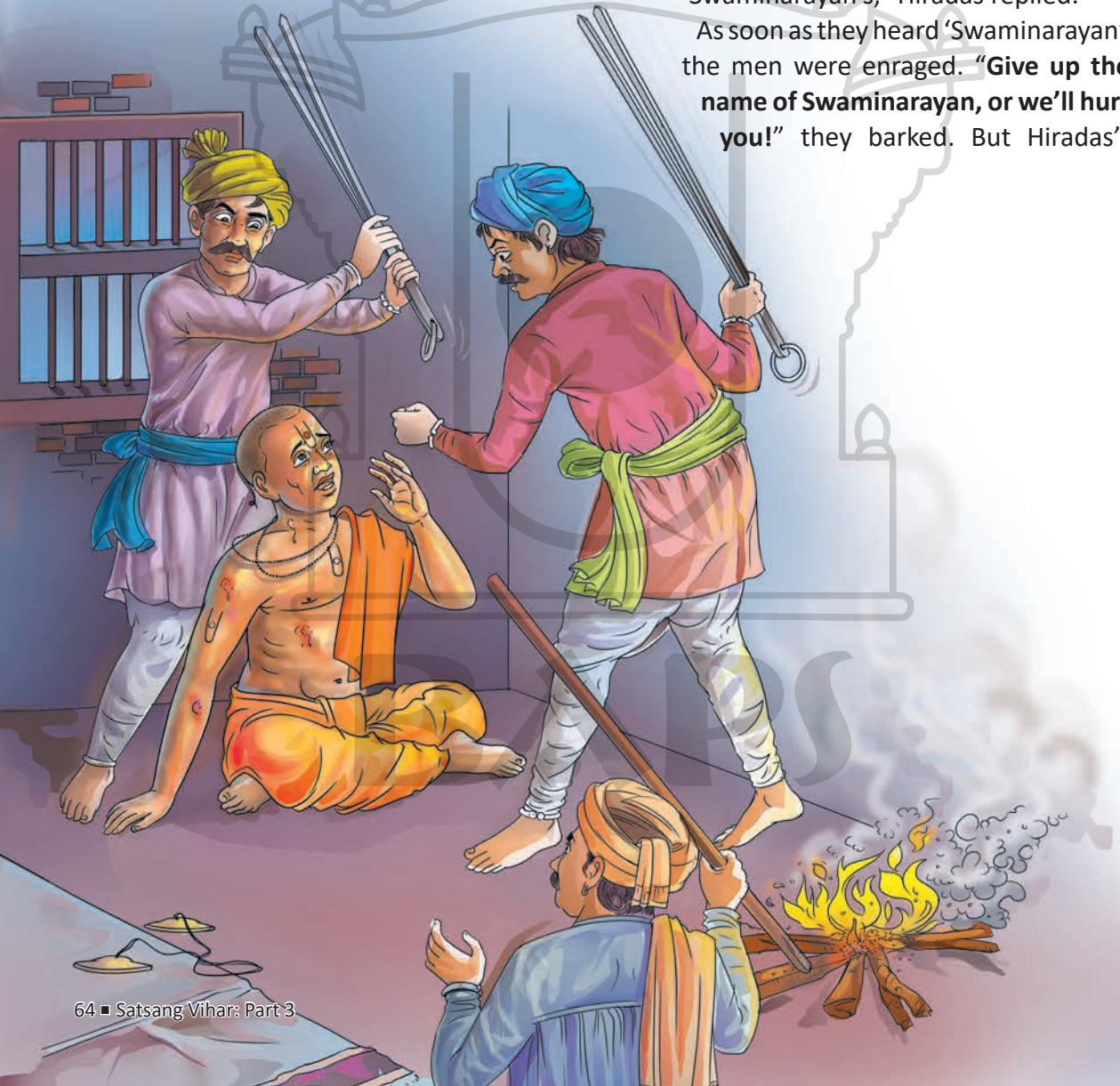
In Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj announced a difficult **new niyam** for all his *paramhansas* to follow. But there was one *paramhansa* named Hiradas. He feared he would not be able to follow the new niyam. He felt guilty about this. So, **Hiradas left the satsang fellowship to live** as a solitary sadhu, all on his own.

However, his faith in Shriji Maharaj was **firm in his soul**. He still followed all his other *nyams* as a sadhu, spent his time in devotion, and travelled the villages and towns to explain Maharaj's greatness.

One **night**, he **entered a village** at about 10 o'clock. He went to **sleep at the Ramji Mandir**. Some **other people** were also staying at the Ramji Mandir. Seeing Hiradas' clothes, they asked, "Whose sadhu are you?"

"Swaminarayan's," Hiradas replied.

As soon as they heard 'Swaminarayan', the men were enraged. "**Give up the name of Swaminarayan, or we'll hurt you!**" they barked. But Hiradas's



every breath was filled with Swaminarayan's name. He ignored the men and sat in a corner, chanting Maharaj's name.

Seeing this, one of the men was **angered** even more. He yelled out again, "Ay! Give up his name this instant, or you'll be sorry!" With that, he went to the fire nearby and pulled out some **burning hot tongs**. Hiradas was chanting Maharaj's name all along. The men **began hurting him**. **As the pain grew**, Hiradas' chanting of 'Swaminarayan' grew louder. So, they hurt him even more. **The men beat him until they were tired**. Yet, Hiradas **never stopped chanting**. When he was **no longer moving**, the men took him for dead and **went away**.

In a few days, **Hiradas** returned to **Gadhada**. A *sabha* was going on at that time. Hiradas fell at **Shriji Maharaj's feet**. "**Either remove my faith** in you, or **accept me back into satsang**," he pleaded with tears in his eyes.

Shriji Maharaj asked Hiradas what had happened, and Hiradas told him everything. Hearing his tale, Shriji Maharaj's eyes filled with emotion. He then held Hiradas by his arms and raised him. As he did so, Hiradas' **upper cloth (gatariyu) slid off**. The whole assembly saw Hiradas' **injured back and torso**. The compassionate **Shri Hari sat** Hiradas **next to him**. He gently patted him and said, "Have Hiradas's **bed** made near me



in the Akshar Ordi. I will care for him myself. These wounds are not on Hiradas's body, they are on my body. Even though his life was at stake, this sadhu never abandoned my name; I shall never abandon him either."

Such were Maharaj's paramhansas! Their faith was bound to their soul. They would rather die than give up their faith. This is true attachment (*jodan*). If we have such attachment to God and his sant, we can be said to have true *satsang*.

30. STAYING STRONG IN HARDSHIP

There was a devotee named **Viro Sheladiyo (Vira Bhagat)** who lived in the village of **Mitiyala**. In that same village lived a man named **Hada**. He was against **satsang**. Once, Vira Bhagat went to Gadhada with his family. Taking the opportunity, some evil people **burnt down Viro's house**.

When Viro returned from Gadhada, Hada smirked, "See, Vira! What did you gain by becoming Swaminarayan follower and going to Gadhada?"

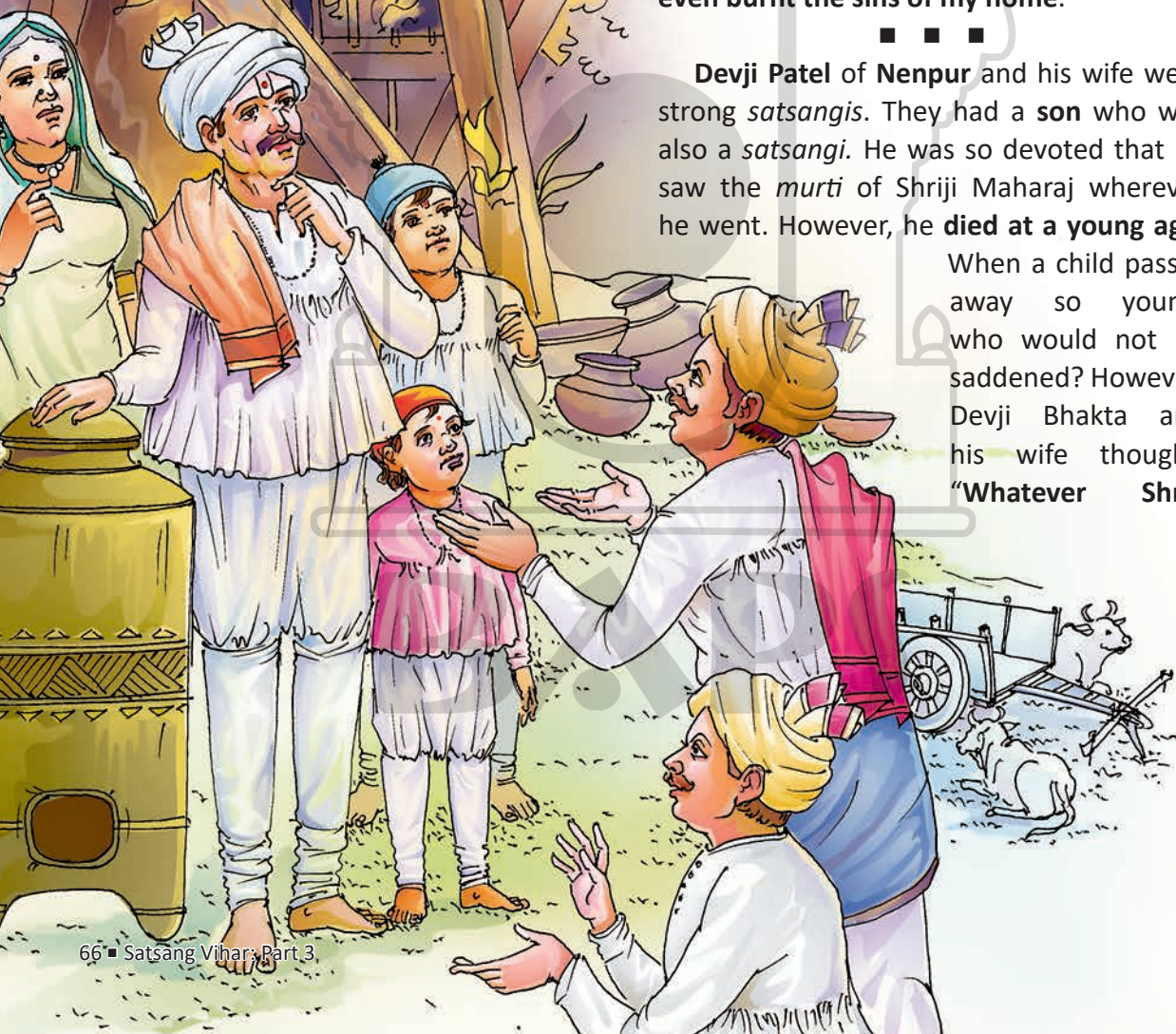
"Swaminarayan has done a lot for me," Viro smiled. "Because we went to Gadhada, me, my family, that bullock cart and these vessels of grain have been saved."

"And," Viro added, "**Swaminarayan has even burnt the sins of my home.**"

■ ■ ■

Devji Patel of Nenpur and his wife were strong **satsangis**. They had a **son** who was also a **satsangi**. He was so devoted that he saw the **murti** of Shriji Maharaj wherever he went. However, he **died at a young age**.

When a child passes away so young, who would not be saddened? However, Devji Bhakta and his wife thought, "**Whatever Shriji**



Maharaj wishes. If our son would have gotten married and fallen in love, he might have stopped seeing Shriji Maharaj's *murti*. Instead, Maharaj took him in his eternal service in Akshardham."

Hearing the news of the child's passing, relatives came to grieve and cry. Seeing this, **Devji Bhakta said to his wife**, "If we stay here, this will continue. Our relatives will come with false doubts and sad faces, and they will not let us worship in peace. So, I'm going to the farm, and you take this pot of ghee and go to Shriji Maharaj."

When the woman reached **Gadhada**, Maharaj was sitting on the patio. Devji Bhakta's wife placed the pot of ghee on the ground as a gift. She then bowed. **Shriji Maharaj** knew everything that had happened. Yet, he asked, referring to Devji Bhakta, "I hope **Patel is doing well?**"

She replied, "Maharaj! **Patel has always been well, but now he is even happier.** That's because you have taken our son to Akshardham. We are happy knowing that he is happy in Akshardham." She narrated all that had happened back at home.

Hearing her story, **Maharaj** said, "Look at **Devji Bhakta's understanding!** His young son died, yet he feels no grief." Those listening in the *sabha* were humbled by Devji Bhakta and his wife's deep wisdom.

■ ■ ■

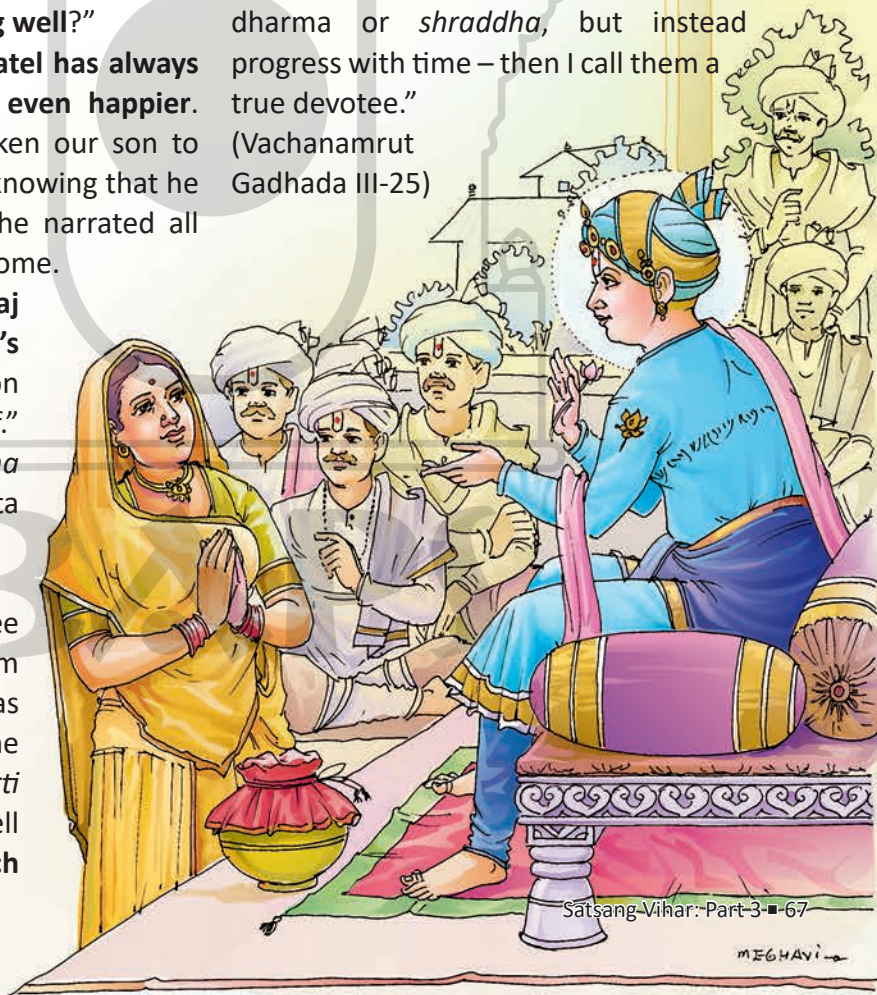
There was once a devotee named **Kadva Bhagat** from the village of **Gotheeb**. He was **blind from birth**. However, he used to always see the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. Once, he fell quite ill. He would get **stomach**

cramps that would **make him scream**. Yet, he would say, "Oh, Maharaj! **Test Kadvo** here as much as you like. Give me as much hardship as you wish. I know you are standing there watching me so, **Kadvo will never say, 'Save me from this hardship.'**"

Such were Shriji Maharaj's devotees. No matter what hardships came, their *satsang* was never affected. Whether they suffered in business, were stricken by illness, or had family pass away, they had just one thought, "All that happens is according to Shriji Maharaj's wish. Whatever he does is for our good."

Shriji Maharaj has said: "If someone falls gravely ill or if they receive neither food nor clothes – no matter how much pain comes their way, if they still do not fall back even slightly from the bhakti of God, *niyams*, dharma or *shraddha*, but instead progress with time – then I call them a true devotee."

(Vachanamrut
Gadhada III-25)



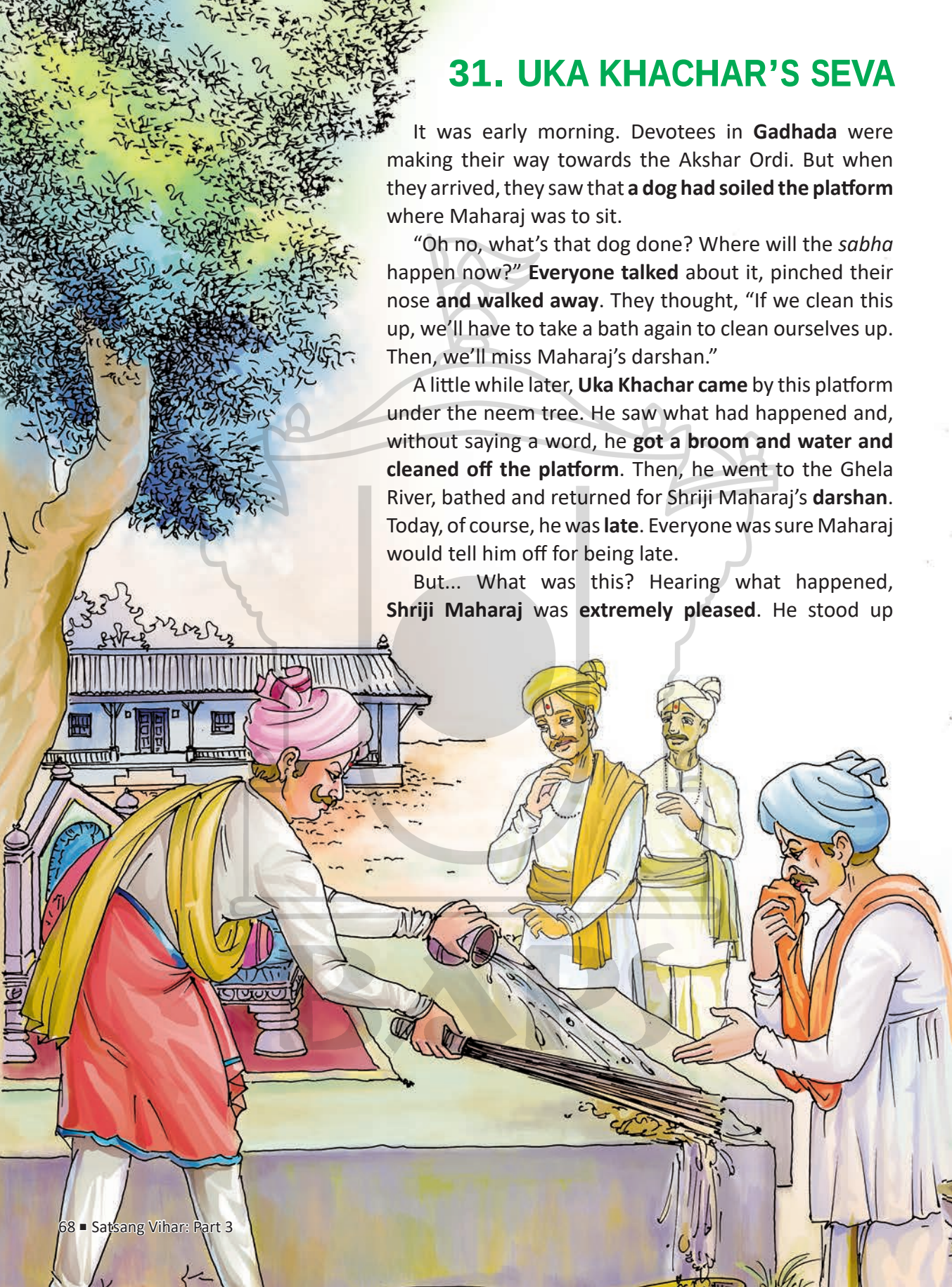
31. UKA KHACHAR'S SEVA

It was early morning. Devotees in **Gadhada** were making their way towards the Akshar Ordi. But when they arrived, they saw that **a dog had soiled the platform** where Maharaj was to sit.

"Oh no, what's that dog done? Where will the *sabha* happen now?" **Everyone** talked about it, pinched their nose **and walked away**. They thought, "If we clean this up, we'll have to take a bath again to clean ourselves up. Then, we'll miss Maharaj's darshan."

A little while later, **Uka Khachar** came by this platform under the neem tree. He saw what had happened and, without saying a word, he **got a broom and water and cleaned off the platform**. Then, he went to the Ghela River, bathed and returned for Shriji Maharaj's **darshan**. Today, of course, he was **late**. Everyone was sure Maharaj would tell him off for being late.

But... What was this? Hearing what happened, **Shriji Maharaj** was **extremely pleased**. He stood up



and **hugged** Uka Khachar! He even gave the imprints of his feet on Uka's chest.

"Seeing the dog's waste, you all just spoke," Maharaj said. "Nobody did the *seva*. Only one who **truly understands God's glory can do such a lowly seva**. Uka Khachar is a true servant of mine."

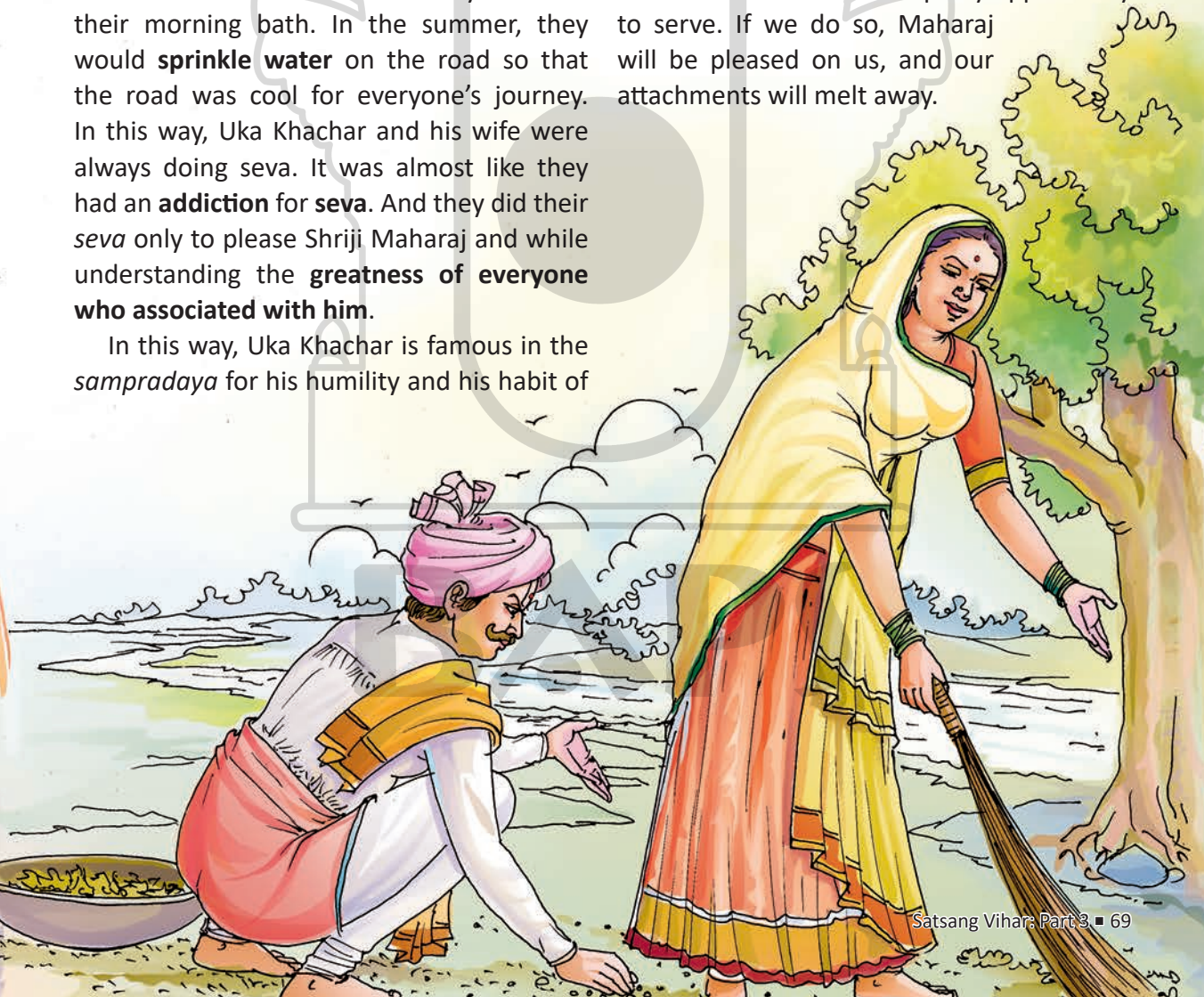
Uka Khachar's **enthusiasm and dedication** to service was **truly astonishing**. He and his wife would get ready very early every morning. Before the **sadhus** awoke at **4:00 am**, they would **sweep the entire road** from **Dada Khachar's darbar to the Ghela River**. They would even collect any pebbles on the road. This was so that Maharaj or the sadhus would not be hurt as they went for their morning bath. In the summer, they would **sprinkle water** on the road so that the road was cool for everyone's journey. In this way, Uka Khachar and his wife were always doing *seva*. It was almost like they had an **addiction for seva**. And they did their *seva* only to please Shriji Maharaj and while understanding the **greatness of everyone who associated with him**.

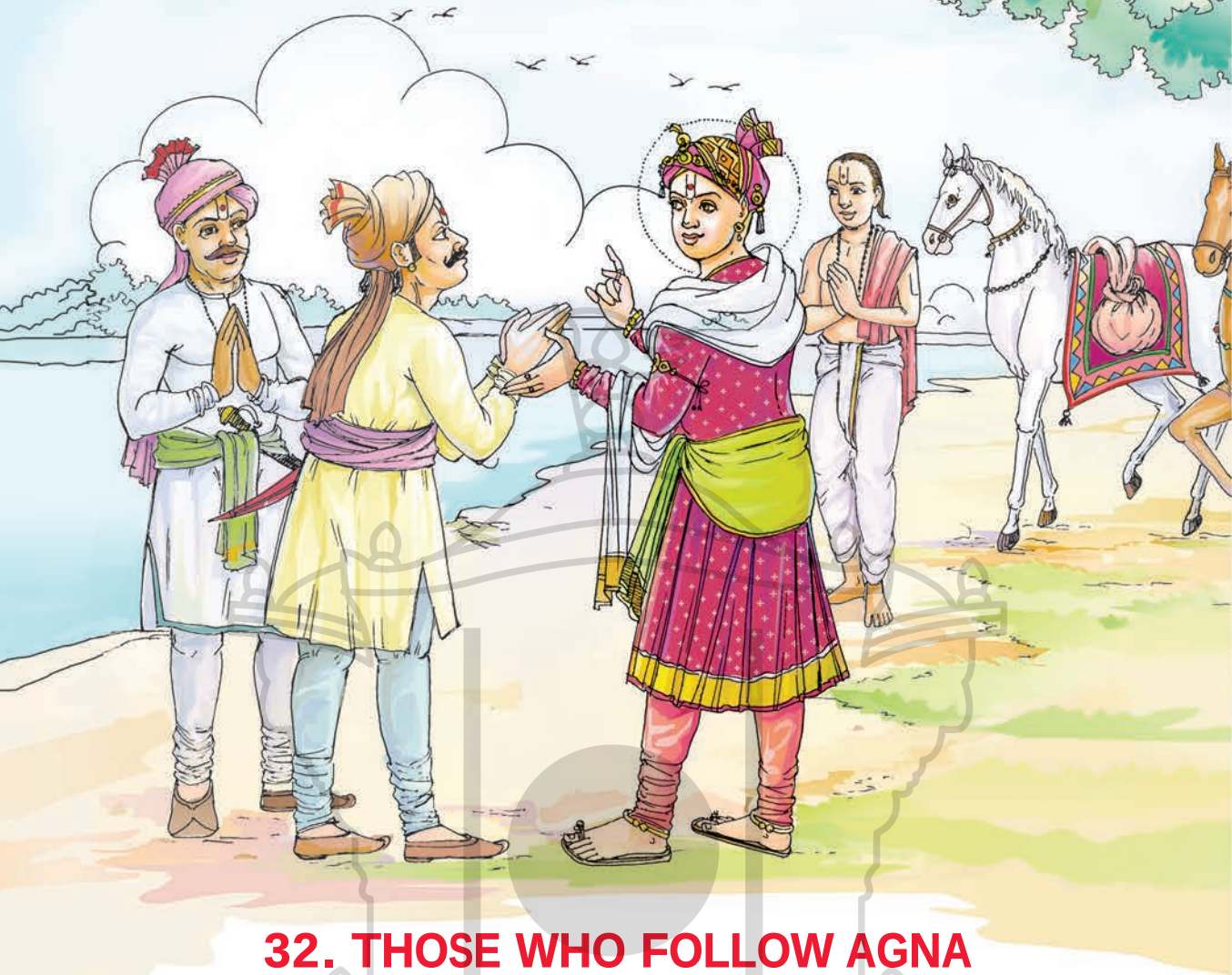
In this way, Uka Khachar is famous in the *sampradaya* for his humility and his habit of

performing *seva*. Maharaj too was so pleased with his service that Maharaj mentions him in Vachanamrut Gadhada II-25, saying, "**Just as Uka Khachar has become addicted to serving the sadhus**, if one becomes addicted to serving God and his sant... all of their **impure desires are destroyed**."

Such were Maharaj's devotees. *Seva* was their life, and they could not live without it. No matter how low or simple the *seva* was, they would do it enthusiastically, understanding its greatness.

There are plenty of ways for us to serve in our mandirs and centres. There are those who will only talk. But we should not be one of them. We should take up any opportunity to serve. If we do so, Maharaj will be pleased on us, and our attachments will melt away.





32. THOSE WHO FOLLOW AGNA ALWAYS BENEFIT

There were many *satsangis* who lived in the village of Bhadra. **Shriji Maharaj** once wrote a **letter** addressed to **eight** specific *satsangis* who lived there. The letter said, "As soon as this letter is received, these eight **devotees** should **come to Gadhpur**."

When the eight **devotees** **received** the **letter**, the grains in their farms were ready to be harvested. How could they just leave behind the fruits of the past two or three months of hard work?

Four of the **devotees** **thought**, "It is true that Maharaj has asked us to leave, but our work here is important, as well. Plus, there's

no telling how long Maharaj will keep us. So, let's **finish up** our **work** here, then **we'll go to Gadhada**."

On the other hand, the other **four devotees** **left for Gadhada as soon as they got the letter**. They did not even wait to think about their harvest. Trusting their crops to Shriji Maharaj, they went straight to Gadhada, where **Maharaj kept them for 15 days**. Each day, Maharaj sent them sanctified food (*prasadi*) from his own dish.

After enjoying these days of *katha*, darshan, and *prasadi*, the **four devotees returned to Bhadra**. On entering the outskirts

of the village, they were shocked! **All the farms along the way** had been **ruined**. The crops lay trampled in every direction. They worried that their farms, too, had met the same fate. They rushed to their farms to see what had happened.

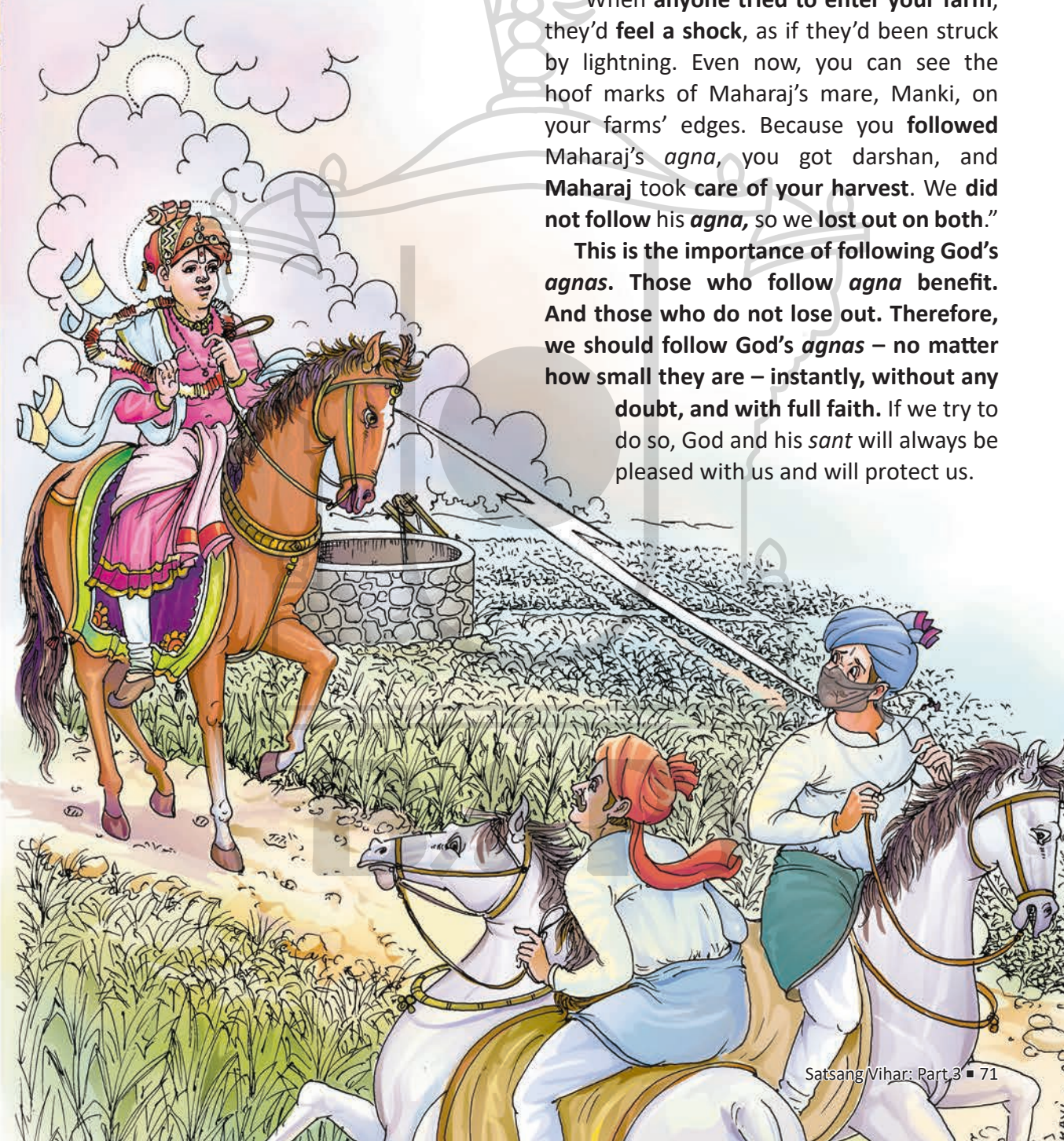
On the **way**, they ran into the **other four**

devotees who had stayed back. They were crying. "The day after you left, the evil **Baba Saheb's army brigade** came and **trampled** the whole village's farms with their horses. **Only your four farms were left** untouched."

The four who had gone to Gadhada wondered, "How could this be?"

"When **anyone tried to enter your farm**, they'd **feel a shock**, as if they'd been struck by lightning. Even now, you can see the hoof marks of Maharaj's mare, Manki, on your farms' edges. Because you **followed Maharaj's *agna***, you got darshan, and **Maharaj took care of your harvest**. We **did not follow his *agna***, so we **lost out on both**."

This is the importance of following God's **agnas**. Those who follow ***agna*** benefit. And those who do not lose out. Therefore, we should follow God's ***agnas*** – no matter how small they are – instantly, without any doubt, and with full faith. If we try to do so, God and his ***sant*** will always be pleased with us and will protect us.



33. GOD'S ACTIONS ARE DIVINE



Shriji Maharaj once arrived at the **home of Hirabhai** in **Varjang Jaliya**. “I wish to fall ill,” **Maharaj** declared.

Hirabhai was a devotee who believed everything **Shriji Maharaj** did was divine; he enthusiastically replied, “It will be our honour to care for you during such a time.”

Hirabhai gave **Shriji Maharaj** a quiet room to stay in. **Overnight**, **Shriji Maharaj** came down with a blazing **fever**. This entire body turned red. Everyone was scared about how ill he had become. At **Shriji Maharaj's** request, his caretakers covered him with blankets, and he went to sleep.

The next morning, he awoke and **decided not to eat or drink** anything. In fact, he fasted in this way for **eleven days**. He was so weak that his caretakers would have to lift him just so he could take a bath.

Someone called **Muktanand Swami**. **Swami** urged **Shriji Maharaj** to eat something. But he replied, “I just don’t feel like eating anything.” And then, he **began to speak** of the **good or bad thoughts** that **each person** was having.

Now, it was the **13th day** of his fast. **Muktanand Swami** again dearly **pleaded** with him to eat. **Shriji Maharaj** replied, “Fine, let’s eat. Bring *penda*, *barfi* and *jalebi*. And if

you can’t find that, **bring soft barley.**”

Hirabhai said, “Where will we find *jalebi* in the middle of the night, **Maharaj**?”

Bhaguji said, “**Maharaj**! Where can we find barley in this season?”

Hearing this, **Shriji Maharaj** grew anxious. “You can get as many *jalebis* as you like from the market in **Bhuj**. And there is limitless millet crop standing in the farms right now. And you’ll deny me just a little?”

Hearing **Shriji Maharaj's** request, **Hirabhai** went to the town of **Bhayavadar** that night. He **awoke a confectioner** and had him prepare *jalebis* in the middle of the night. On the other hand, **Bhaguji** left in search of soft barley. But he only found some **soft millet to bring back**. **Maharaj** saw both the items. He was pleased and had a **little to eat**. Then he said, “I want to **bathe with 100 buckets of Ganga water**. And, the **runoff** should **reach the Venu River** (on the outskirts of the town).”

How can someone who is so ill bathe with so much cold water? So thinking, **Bhaguji** brought **ten pales of water** and **helped** **Shriji Maharaj** bathe with it. Then, he **filled** one small **bowl** from the bath and instructed someone nearby, “Take this water and pour it into the **Venu River**.” When the man returned, **Bhaguji** said, “**Maharaj**, the run off has reached the **Venu**!”

Seeing the care these loyal devotees were offering, **Maharaj** soon rid himself of the fever, had his meal, and went to sleep.

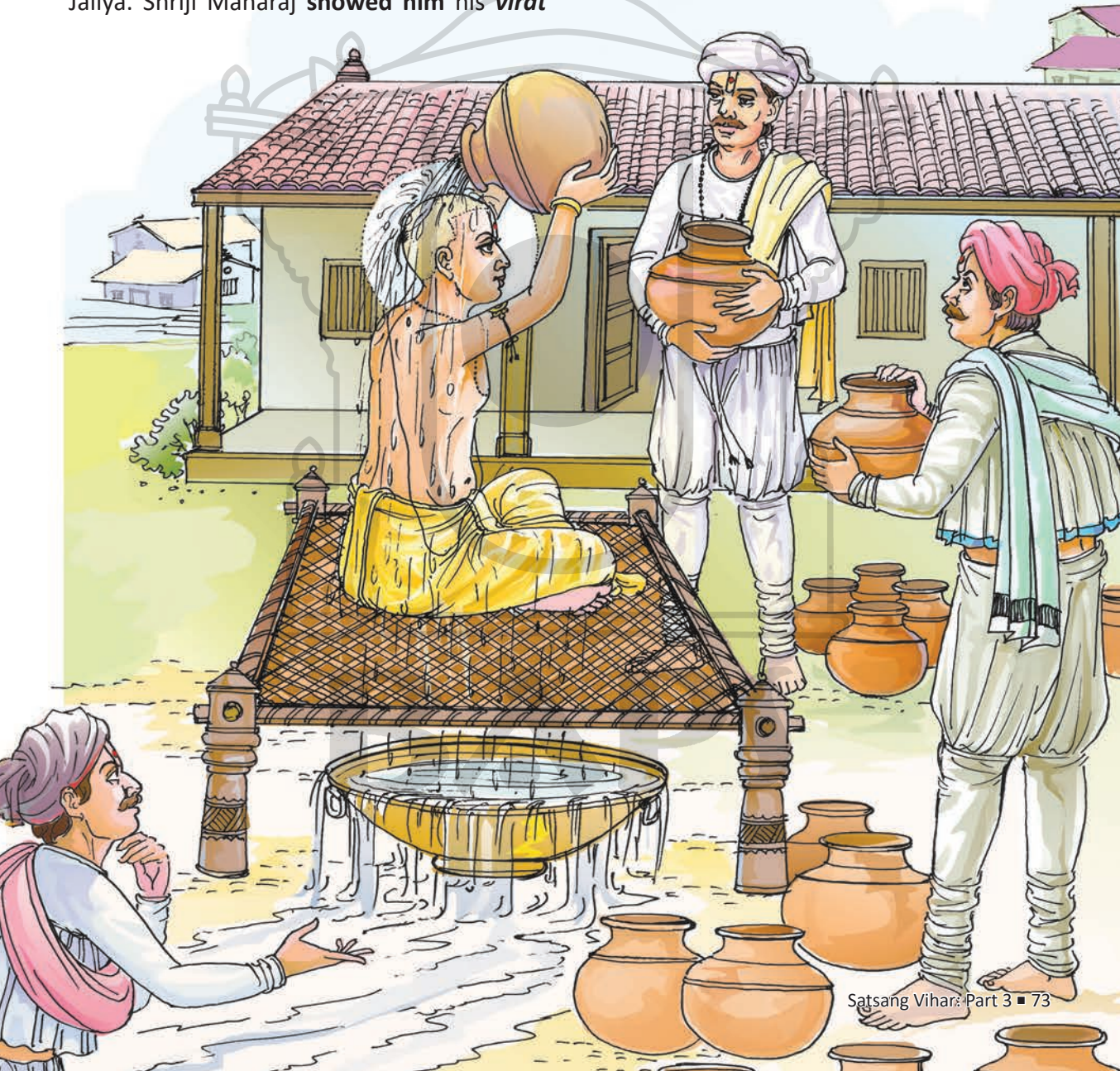
The next morning, **Maharaj** had a new play in mind, “**Bring the bullock cart now. I want to go to Gadhada.**” When the cart came, **Maharaj** lay down in it and said, “The **cart is too short. Pull it to make it**

longer.” Hearing this, his caretakers began to yank the cart. Just then, some of its **hinges creaked**, and Shriji Maharaj jumped off. “**Something is awry** with this cart,” he said.

Then, the devotees got a **palanquin** and Shriji Maharaj travelled in it until the village of **Upleta**. There, a **small wagon** came from Gadhada. Shriji Maharaj rode in it until he came to **Jhanjhmer**. There one devotee came for darshan. He had **doubts** after having seen Shriji Maharaj’s illness in Varjang Jaliya. Shriji Maharaj **showed him his virat**

form – the one which holds all of creation in itself. Then, Shriji Maharaj went to Kariyani and ultimately reached Gadhada, where he **ended his divine display** of illness.

Shriji Maharaj’s devotees were such that no matter how ordinary and human-like Maharaj behaved, they knew him to be extraordinary and divine. Only when one has such firm faith in God and his sant’s divinity is one a true devotee.



34. DHRUVJI

There was a **king** named **Uttanapad** who had **two queens**. His **favoured** queen was **Suruchi**, who had a **son** named **Uttam**. His other queen was **Suniti**, and her **son** was **Dhruv**. Both the boys were of the same age.

Once, **Uttam** was playing in his **father's lap**. **Dhruv** saw this and **ran to jump** onto his father's lap as well; he, too, wanted to enjoy his father's love. However, Queen **Suruchi**, Uttam's mother, **stopped** him and said, "If you **want the right to sit** in your father's lap, **pray to God** that you are born as my son!"

Dhruv went **crying** to his mother. Suniti was a **virtuous woman**. "Son," she consoled. "Don't be upset over this. If you want to be freed from this misery, **please God through penance**. Your ancestors Brahmaji and Svayambhu Manu, too, have attained greatness in this world and beyond through penance."

Dhruv was a proud, **princely boy**. The insults of his stepmother and the loving words of his mother both struck deep in his heart. He took his mother's blessings and **left for the forest**. **He was just five years old**. Along the way, **Naradji came to change his mind**, "Dhruv, you are very young. Even great yogis find it hard to attain God. Return home, son."

"I won't go home. I've left to find God; please guide me." Dhruv remained firm in his goal. **Seeing** the boy's **dedication**, **Naradji** taught him how to offer penance and **gave him a mantra to chant: Aum namo Bhagavate Vāsudevāya**.

Dhruv travelled to a place called **Madhuvan** on the **Yamuna River's bank**. There, **he stood** on **one foot** and performed **penance**. Every month, he consumed less and less food and focused on God. By the **fifth month**, he had mastered *pranayam*. And so, not only had he stopped food, but he even **stopped taking normal breaths**. **Ferocious animals made scary sounds** nearby and **snakes slithered over his body**. And even terrible storms came. But **nothing could distract** Dhruv from his **meditation**. **Bhagwan Vishnu** was **pleased** by the boy's difficult penance and gave him **darshan**.

Dhruv was astounded by God's darshan. He became speechless. Bhagwan blessed Dhruv by touching the boy's cheek with his conch shell. With Bhagwan's grace, Dhruv was able to speak. He **prayed deeply**, from the **bottom of his heart**.

Vishnu Bhagwan became pleased and gave him a **boon**, "You offered great penance at such a young age. According to your wish, I shall **grant you** an **unmoving place** in the sky, where the constellations and stars will perform your *pradakshina*." From that day Dhruv became the Dhruv Star, known in English as the North Star.

This is the story of Dhruv, a boy who was unwavering, dedicated to his goal, and performed great penance. Even today the North Star reminds us of the boy Dhruv and reminds us to offer penance and please God.



35. THE MIRACULOUS SWAMINI VATO



In year Samvat 1912, **Gunatitanand Swami** visited **Anand with Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj**. While sitting in a **carriage**, Raghuvirji Maharaj offered Swami a **pendo**. **Swami refused**.

Acharya Maharaj said, “We do not have such detachment. **What will happen to us?**”

“**Come** as a pilgrim to **Junagadh**,” came Swami’s reply. “If I do not **rid you** of your worldly wishes, I’m not Gunatit.”

Those words took hold in **Raghuvirji Maharaj’s** heart. In Samvat 1917, he gave his responsibilities as *acharya* to Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj. And in 1918, he left for **Junagadh**. In a snap, he gave up his honours, rich lifestyle and interests. And he lived as a simple pilgrim to enjoy Swami’s **satsang**. He would be ready before *mangala arti* every morning and then would listen to Swami’s discourses.

He was so drawn to Swami’s talks that **sleeping and eating became less important** to him. He would quickly fry lumps of flour to make *baati*. And, he would throw vegetables straight into the *khichadi* to save the time of having to make vegetables separately.

Once, he **asked Swami**, “**How can one feel peace in one’s heart?**”

Swami said, “A calf can only enjoy milk from a cow’s udders – not from anywhere else. In the same way, **satsang**, the *murtis*, scriptures, *acharya*, etc. are indeed **Shriji Maharaj’s form**. However, in the great **ekantik sant**, **God resides completely**. When one does his *satsang*, one becomes immersed in Shriji Maharaj’s bliss.”

In this way, Raghuvirji Maharaj heard Gunatitanand Swami’s sermons on Maharaj’s supremacy, becoming *brahmarup*, attaching oneself to the *satpurush*, and ridding oneself of worldly desires. As a result, Raghuvirji Maharaj’s **attachments melted away in just three-and-a-half months**.

This is the power of **Gunatitanand Swami’s sermons**. On hearing them one’s desire for worldly pleasures goes away. One becomes **brahmarup, ekantik** and attains **Akshardham**.

■ **SWAMINI VATO: HISTORY AND FACTS**

- Gunatitanand Swami stayed in **Junagadh** for **40 years**. His **talks** from those 40 years were **noted by** Jaga Bhakta, Naranpradhan Thakkar, Harishankar Raval, Sadguru Balmukund Swami, Sadashankar Amarji, Shamjibhai and other **sadhus and devotees**. Thus, the ‘Swamini Vato’ was born.

- **Swami himself** has seen these notes and **approved** them saying, “Not even a word is misplaced in these talks.”

- In the main text of the Swamini Vato, there are **seven chapters** and **1,489** talks. **Sermons other than this** are printed in a book titled ‘**Aksharamrut**’.

■ **THE GREATNESS OF THE SWAMINI VATO**

- It is the **greatest commentary** on the **Vachanamrut**. So, one must study the Swamini Vato to truly understand the Vachanamrut.

- It is filled with the **wisdom** of Shriji Maharaj’s **supremacy**. This is one of its greatest points.

- Swami’s talks are **small, easy and penetrating**. Using simple words, Swami explains the philosophy of becoming *brahmarup* and worshipping Parabrahma.

- Gunatitanand Swami himself has said, “These are **talks from Akshardham**. They are **magical**. Are these just talks? No, this is the **nectar** of immortality. These are the **talks of Purushottam Narayan**. These talks **will not let one be born again**.”

- The ‘Swamini Vato’ is a great scripture filled with guidance that can help not just *satsangis*, but any spiritually inclined soul on this planet.

36. 'SWAMINARAYAN' ON EVERY LEAF

In Gujarat's Junagadh district, there is a village called **Vanthali**. In that village lived a faithful devotee named **Kalyanbhai**. He was **always eager to introduce new people to satsang**. He owned a farm, and he would have workers come to help him. As they worked, he would **speak to them about satsang**. And he would **hire new workers** every year so he could speak to that many more people.

There were also **people** nearby who owned cattle. They would **go to distant farms to collect grass** for their animals. But Kalyanbhai would offer, "**Take the grass from my farm.**" Then, he would help them cut

grass. All the while, he would speak to them about *satsang*. If someone was in need, he would lend them money and then invite them to *satsang*. He had even inspired many **youths** to become **sadhus** in Junagadh.

The farmer who owned his **neighbouring farm** would never want to hear a word about *satsang*. But **Kalyanbhai decided** that he wanted to **introduce** him to *satsang*. So, he went to the farmer with an offer, "I've got a **crop of sugarcane ready**. It would be nice if **you partnered** with me to sell it."

The farmer **refused**. But **his wife** explained to him, she said, "There's **not much effort or cost**. It's a ready meal for us. **Why let it go?**"

The next day, the farmer came to Kalyanbhai and said, "I will **partner** with you, but I can't come and work here."

"**I'll do the work,**" Kalyanbhai replied. "Just come by once a day to check on it."

Kalyanbhai seemed like a kind person. In this way, the farmer **gained respect** for him.

Slowly, Kalyanbhai **began to tell** the farmer of Maharaj's greatness during his visits. The farmer became so absorbed by Kalyanbhai's words that he even started to remember the divine **marks on Shriji Maharaj's murti**.

Once, **Shriji Maharaj gave darshan** to the farmer and said, "**You are forgetting one mark** in your daily meditation." The next day, the farmer told this incident to Kalyanbhai.

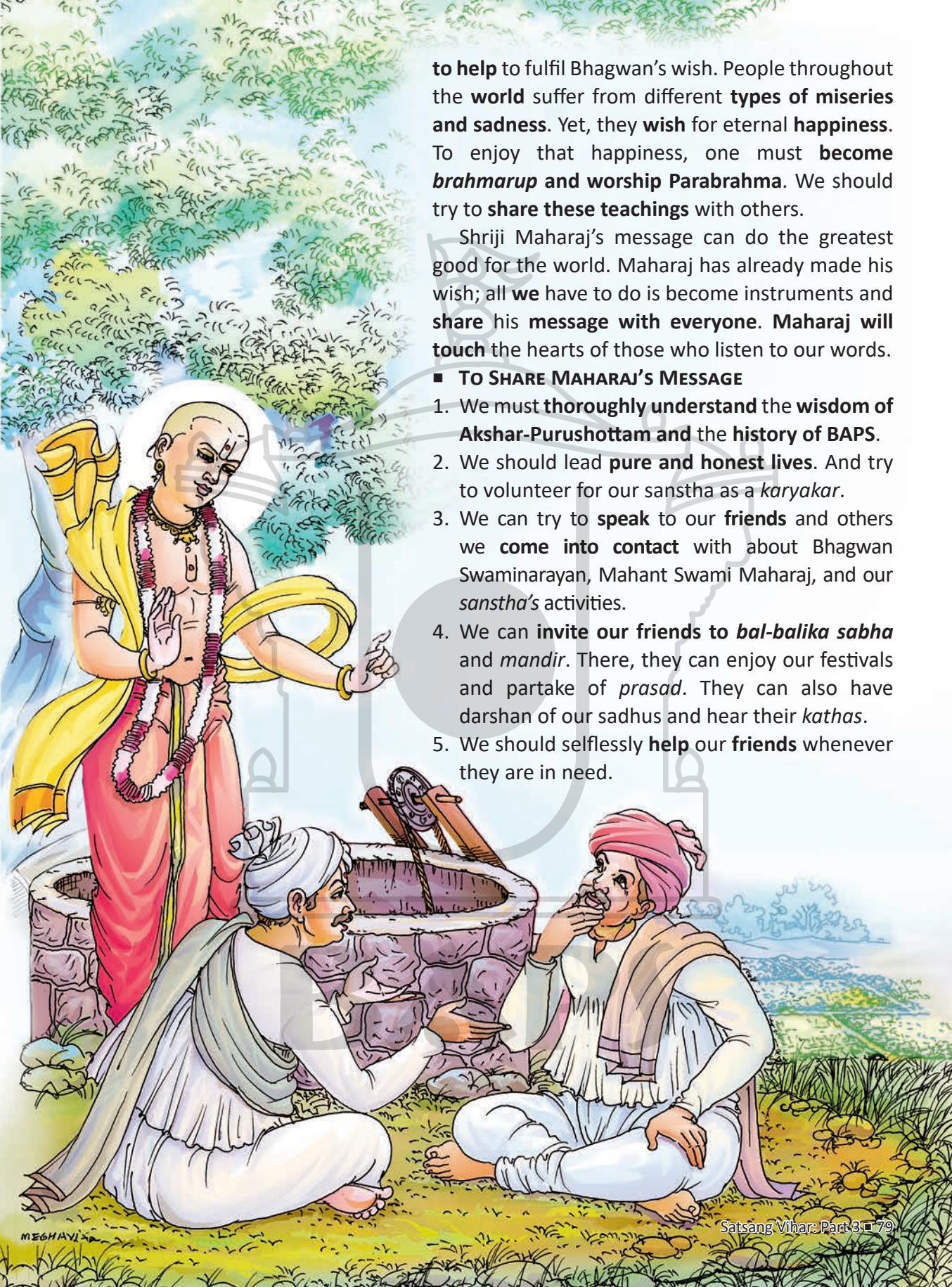
"Shriji Maharaj gave you darshan? **You** are so **fortunate!** It is **my mistake** that I forgot to tell you about one of Shriji Maharaj's marks."

In this way, Kalyanbhai helped the farmer become a faithful *satsangi*.

■ LET US JOIN IN SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S WISH

Shriji Maharaj wishes to liberate the souls of countless universes. **We should try**





to help to fulfil Bhagwan's wish. People throughout the world suffer from different types of miseries and sadness. Yet, they wish for eternal happiness. To enjoy that happiness, one must become **brahmarup** and worship Parabrahma. We should try to share these teachings with others.

Shriji Maharaj's message can do the greatest good for the world. Maharaj has already made his wish; all we have to do is become instruments and share his message with everyone. Maharaj will touch the hearts of those who listen to our words.

■ TO SHARE MAHARAJ'S MESSAGE

1. We must thoroughly understand the wisdom of Akshar-Purushottam and the history of BAPS.
2. We should lead pure and honest lives. And try to volunteer for our sanstha as a *karyakar*.
3. We can try to speak to our friends and others we come into contact with about Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Mahant Swami Maharaj, and our sanstha's activities.
4. We can invite our friends to *bal-balika sabha* and *mandir*. There, they can enjoy our festivals and partake of *prasad*. They can also have darshan of our sadhus and hear their *kathas*.
5. We should selflessly help our friends whenever they are in need.

37. DAILY MUKHPATH

■ JAYNAAD

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

■ ARTI

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

Jay Swāminārāyan...

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

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

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

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

Jay Swāminārāyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,
Jay Swāminārāyan...

■ SHLOKAS FOR PUJA

INVOCATION MANTRA

*Uttishtha Sahajānanda
Shri-Hare Purushottama |
Gunātītākshara 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 continue to grace my *atma* with your
presence.

■ SHLOKA TO BE SAID BEFORE MEALS

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

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

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

Aum Shāntihi! Shāntihi! Shāntihi!

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

■ PRAYER FOR MORNING PUJA

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

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

■ NIGHTTIME PRAYER

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

“O Maharaj! O Swami! O Mahant Swami Maharaj! Please forgive any mistakes I have knowingly or unknowingly made today. Please inspire me so I may never make those mistakes again. Please enable me to get up early tomorrow morning, and give me the strength to please you even more.”

38. ADDITIONAL MUKHPATH

■ VACHANAMRUT GADHADA I-16: WISDOM

On Magshar vadi 4, Samvat 1876 [5 December 1819], Shriji Maharaj was sitting in Dada Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. At that time, an assembly of sadhus as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him.

Thereupon Shriji Maharaj said, "A wise devotee of God who can discern between *sat* and *asat* identifies the flaws within himself and thoughtfully eradicates them. He also rejects any apparent flaws he perceives in the *sant* or a *satsangi* and imbibes only their virtues. Moreover, he never perceives any faults whatsoever in God. In addition, he accepts whatever words of advice God and the *sant* offer as the highest truth but does not doubt their words in any way. Thus, when the *sant* tells him, 'You are distinct from the mind, body, *indriyas* and *prāns*; you are *satya*; you are the knower of the body, *indriyas* and *prans*, which are all *asatya*' – he accepts this to be the truth. He then behaves as the *atma* – distinct from them all – but never follows the instincts of his own mind.

"Furthermore, such a person identifies those objects and evil company that may cause bondage or raise deficiencies in his *ekantik* dharma and shuns them; but he does not become bound by them. Also, he imbibes positive thoughts and avoids negative thoughts. One who behaves in this manner should be known to possess wisdom."

|| Vachanamrut, Gadhada I-16 ||

■ DHUN 1

Swāmi ane Nārāyan (2)
Swāmi te Gunātīt Swāmi.
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi.
Swāmi ane Nārāyan.
Akshar ane Purushottam (2)
Akshar te Gunātīt Swāmi.
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi.
Akshar ane Purushottam.
Ātmā ne Paramātmā (2)
Ātmā te Gunātīt Swāmi.
Paramātmā Sahajānand Swāmi.
Ātmā ne Paramātmā.
Brahma ane Parabrahma (2)
Brahma te Gunātīt Swāmi.
Parabrahma Sahajanand Swami.
Brahma ane Parabrahma.

■ PRARTHANA

He Akshar-Purushottam pyārā,
mangal karnārā;
Pāye padine vandan kartā,
bālak sau tārā...

Sarvopari sākār divya chho,
chho kartā hartā;
Sant swarupe pragat raho chho,
muktinā dātā...He Akshar...1

Niyam pālanni shakti deho,
kashto harnārā;
Samp, saiyam ne bhakti deho,
karunā dharnārā...He Akshar...2

Bhaniye ganiye, vinayi baniye,
thaiye ame sārā;
Mātā-pitā ne jan sevānā,
āshish do nyārā...He Akshar...3

■ KIRTAN

Swāminārāyan nāmni ho,
kanthi chhe dokmā,
Swāminārāyan nāmni ho,
mālā chhe hāthmā...

Juthu bolāy nahi, khotu levāy nahi;
Avlu chalāy nahi ho, kanthi chhe dokmā...1

Chori karāy nahi, koine marāy nahi;
Jyā tyā khavāy nahi ho, kanthi chhe
dokmā...2

Pujā mukāy nahi, niyam chhodāy nahi;
Satsang lajvāy nahi ho, kanthi chhe dokmā...3

Pramukh Swāmine, kyārey visrāy nahi;
Bhakti bhulāy nahi ho, kanthi chhe dokmā...4

■ DHYEY (GOAL) AND PURNAHUTI (CONCLUDING) SHLOKAS

Gunātītam gurum prāpya,
brahmarupam nijātmanaha;
Vibhāvya dāsbhāvena
Swāminārāyanam bhaje.

Having attained the Gunatit Guru and believing my *atma* to be *brahmarup*, I humbly worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

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

I worship Shri Hari (Bhagwan Swaminarayan), alongside whom is Aksharbrahma. He is the *sarvavatari*, the son of Bhakti and Dharma, *sarvopari*, the giver of peace, the giver of liberation, the fulfiller of wishes and the cause of all; his form is divine, and he is also known as Nilkanth.

BAPS



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 Sampradaya 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 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 from all backgrounds, performed non-violent *yagnas*, opened almshouses, dug wells and built reservoirs, transformed many lives, preached about purity, freed people from addictions, inspired literacy, etc.
16. **Left for His divine Abode (Akshardham):** 1 June 1830 (Samvat 1886, Jeth *sud* 10), in Gadhada, at 49 years of age.
17. **Ever-present through the Gunatit Parampara:** Currently present on Earth through Mahant Swami Maharaj.
2. **Birth:** 13 September 1933 (Samvat 1989, Bhadarva vad 9) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. (Native place - Anand).
3. **Mother:** Dahibahen
Father: Manibhai
Childhood Name: Vinubhai.
As a child, he received blessings of Shastriji Maharaj.
4. **Diksha (Initiation):**
 - On Yogiji Maharaj's word, took *parshadi diksha* in Gondal at age 25 after completing his bachelor's degrees 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 Mahant-hood:** 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 with higher education in the *sanstha*.
 - Strictly observes the five principle vows of sadhus given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
 - Possesses all the qualities of an ideal sadhu mentioned in the Hindu shastras.
 - Devotion to 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.

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).

- 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 status, wealth, race or creed; unity and fraternity (*samp*, *suhridaybhav* 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, elderly, educated and uneducated, Indians and people from around the world alike – experience the joy of having met Bhagwan himself.
- Everyone attains spiritual progress in his presence.

THE BAPS SANSTHA

1. **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. **Guru:** His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.
6. **Principle:** To become *aksharrup* and offer *upasana* (worship) to Purushottam as a servant serves his master.
7. **Foundational Beliefs:** 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 world over
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 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, 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’.

Veda 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 concluding, let us remember Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s words, “Do your best to strengthen *shraddha* and *bhakti* in your life...”

Jay Swaminarayan.

40. WHERE MOKSHA IS ASSURED



This is an incident from the time of British rule in India. **An English officer** was travelling in the villages of **Jamnagar** to collect yearly **taxes**. His schedule was set, and the dates were given to each village.

Once, at four in the morning, the officer came through the villages of **Holisang and Dhudkot**. On the road, he saw a few **farmers in clean clothes happily** leading their oxen. They had **tilak-chandlo** on their foreheads and were singing the **morning hymns** (known as *prabhatiyas*). Even the **oxen seemed clean** and were ornamented with bells. The **officer was pleased** at seeing such a scene. He stayed in these two villages for 15 days. He **saw the honest and God-centred lives** of these *satsangis* and was **impressed**.

Now, he was to go to a **different village**. When he arrived in the new village, he **saw nothing** of what he had seen in the *satsangi* villages. So, he said to his men, “Put out an order out for **everyone to become Swaminarayan**.”

Hearing this his secretaries said, “Sir! There is no policy here that everyone must follow only one religion.” The officer did not understand much of the local religions. But **as long as he stayed** in that area, he was always **impressed by those who had accepted the Swaminarayan faith**.

Truly, friends, our Swaminarayan *satsang* is something special. And, in that, our BAPS *satsang* is truly unique.

THE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN SATSANG

- We **understand the ultimate purpose of life**: God. Because of that, we are able to live peaceful, happy and content lives.
- Our *niyams* **protect** us from **bad company**,

keep us in good standing in the community and stop us from wasting money.

- *Bal-balika* centres and *kishore-kishori* centres help us **maintain our values** and help build and **preserve our character**.
- Avoiding addictions protects our **health** and helps us avoid unnecessary costs.
- *Satsang sabhas* and *ghar sabhas* help our minds and our **families enjoy peace** and increase our **maturity** and **understanding**.
- Doing *puja*, *pradakshina*, *dandvat*, *mala*, *prayer*, and *mansi puja* let us enjoy God’s devotion. They also have other **worldly and spiritual benefits**.
- Through our **attachment to the manifest satpurush**, we are able to experience living a **divine life** with God.
- Following the *Satsang Diksha* helps us overcome **harmful desires, addiction, and fear**. It decreases financial problems, as well.
- We constantly have the **guidance of our guru**, senior *sadhus*, and other *sadhus*. This provides us great support and never **lets us feel hopeless**.
- BAPS’s **social services** provide good **education**, health services, and **relief** in **times of natural** and human-made disasters.
- **Hindu culture** is **nurtured** and **propagated**. We are able to become true Hindus.
- Our **festivals, mandirs**, Akshardhams, services, etc. help us feel that ‘**BAPS is One Family**’. We feel **proud of** being **part of an international fellowship**.
- Attaining the grace of the *satpurush*, we



experience happiness on this earth and the bliss of God in Akshardham.

To be a member of our BAPS fellowship is a great honour. So even if we ever feel some hardship or have to suffer some insult, we should never leave the *satsang* of God and his sant.

So, let us take pledge to live for BAPS and to stay a *satsangi* for life.

TAKING US TO AKSHARDHAM

In 1987, in **Rajkot**, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** sat in a devotee's car. The devotee asked, "Swami, did you ever ride a bike?"

Swami said, "Yes, I've ridden a bike and driven a car."

The devotee replied, "**You should pilot a helicopter.**"



“You can operate all that,’ Swamishri said. “I know only to seat people in Akshardham’s helicopter to take them to God.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj **often** said in his **blessings**, “We have attained supreme God and the sant in whom God resides; we have attained Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj; so, **our liberation is guaranteed**. We do service and offer devotion, **we follow agna** and keep **upasana**, so we are sitting in Akshardham. Never have any doubts. This is **our last birth.**”

Truly, living in the company of Aksharbrahma, the sadhu in whom Parabrahma fully resides – our guru Mahant Swami Maharaj – we are **in Akshardham** even while we are **here on earth**. And when **we pass away**, he will come to **take us** to God’s abode, Akshardham.



GLOSSARY

A

avatarvad

Hinduism's teaching that God comes onto earth.

acharya

leader of a branch of the Swaminarayan faith

adharma

'opposite of dharma', unrighteousness, immorality

agna

instruction, order, command

aksharmukta

a jiva that has attained ultimate liberation

aksharrup

That which has qualities similar to Akshar. The highest level of faith or is to become aksharrup and worship Purushottam. See brahmarup

antahkaran

'Inner faculty'. The complete mind which comprises of four aspects: 1) the *man*, which generates thoughts and desires; 2) the *buddhi*, which consolidates thoughts, makes decisions, and forms convictions; 3) the *chitt*, which contemplates or focuses; 4) and the *ahamkar*, which forms a sense of being.

artha

One of the four *purusharths*, allowing for the fulfillment of desires for material objects

arthas

'Pursuits'. Collective term for Hinduism's four goals in life: *dharma* (duties), *artha* (material wealth), *kam* (wishes), and *moksha* (liberation).

arti

ritual of waving lighted wicks (*divas*) before the *murti*.

asat/asatya

1) 'Opposite of satya'. Perishable and changing, and bound by time. 2) False. Not true.

ashtak

group of eight shlokas or prayers.

ashvamedha yagna

a special sacrifice done by kings

atma

a pure soul

B

balak

a boy

balika

a girl

bati

a type of wheat bread

bawa

a type of renunciate

brahmagnan

spiritual knowledge

brahmarup

possessing qualities similar to those of Brahma

brahmisthiti

the state of being brahmarup

C

chetan

that which possesses *chaitanya*,
i.e., is full of consciousness

D

dandvat

to lie flat, with hands extended,
as a sign of surrender and
devotion to a greater being

darbar

a prince or king's residence;
also used to describe the chief
of a village.

deva

a god (as opposed to the
supreme God)

devi

goddess

dharmado

a portion of one's income given
in the service of one's religion.

dhun

chanting of God's name

dhyān

meditation

E

ekāntik

a person who has mastered
dharma (righteousness),
gnan (knowledge), *vairagya*
(renunciation), and *bhakti*
(devotion)

G

gatariyu

a sadhu's upper garment

gaumukhi

a cloth bag for holding a mala

ghar mandir

the mandir a devotee keeps at
home for personal worship

ghar sabha

family members assemble at
home for satsang

gnan

knowledge

gulal

fragrant reddish powder used
on joyous occasions

gunatit

above maya; used to describe
Aksharbrahma or souls that
have become brahmarup

H

hari mandir

a mandir that is not a
shikharabaddha mandir

haveli

mansion

I

indriyas

the senses

ishwar

a type of soul; like the *jiva*,
but more powerful; the soul
of devas and other powerful
cosmic beings

J

jad

Non-living', inanimate. Opposite
of chaitanya. That which is
without consciousness

jalebi

a sweet delicacy made from
gram flour, sugar and ghee

jiva

the soul

K

kadhi

Soup made of buttermilk, gram flour and spices

kalyan

liberation of the soul

katha

discourse; spiritual talks

khaman

a traditional Gujarati item made of gram flour; usually soft, fluffy and cut into squares. Served with a chutni and green chillis.

khichdi

seasoned, boiled rice and lentils; may also be spiced and made with vegetables

L

ladu

a round, sweet delicacy

M

mala

string of 108 beads used to chant God's name

mangala arti

first of the five artis performed in shikharbaddha mandirs

mansi

mansi puja; form of worship in which one mentally offers puja, arti, thal, etc., to God

maya

one of the five eternal entities; ignorance; the power of God responsible for attachment

mer

the largest bead of a mala

moksha

ultimate liberation

murti

sacred image of a deity

N

nirlobh

vow of non-covetousness

nirman

vow of humility

nishkam

vow of absolute celibacy

nissneh

vow of detachment

nisswad

vow of non-taste

niyams

firm vow or promise to regularly perform a certain act

P

panchang pranam

a form of bowing; touching the ground with five body parts (hands, feet and head); is a sign of respect and surrender

paramhansa

special order of ascetics initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan

parshad

a type of sadhu

pendo

a round, sweet delicacy

phalahar

diet of fruits and other foods, excluding grains and pulses, that may be eaten on ekadashi

pichkari

a squirter used during Phuldol

prabhatiya

devotional songs sung at dawn

pradakshina

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

pranayam

yogic breathing exercises

prans	life-breath	shikharbaddha	a traditional, stone mandir
prarthana	prayer	shishya	disciple
prasad	item blessed by God	shradha	faith
prasadi	item blessed by God	stri-purush maryada	rules describing how to behave with the opposite gender
pravrutti	activity	sud	first half of the lunar month
pujan	ritual of devotion	T	
punya	positive merits received from God for good deeds done	tap	austerity or penance
R		thal	offering of food
ras	an Indian folkdance	tilak-chandlo	the u-shaped mark of sandalwood paste applied on the forehead by <i>satsangis</i>
S		U	
sabha	gathering or assembly	upasana	the true understanding of God's form and glory which brings one closer to God
sadguru	a senior sadhu; the true guru	V	
sakar	rock sugar	vadi	the dark half of the lunar month
sat	see satya	vairagya	renunciation
satpurush	true guru	vartmans	rules relating to one's actions; a vow or discipline
satsangi	a member of the <i>satsang</i> fellowship	Y	
satya	1) 'Truth'. Permanent, i.e., imperishable and unchanging. Above time, and thus unbound by the past, the present and the future. 2) Real. True	yagnas	sacrifice
seva	service		◆◆◆

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

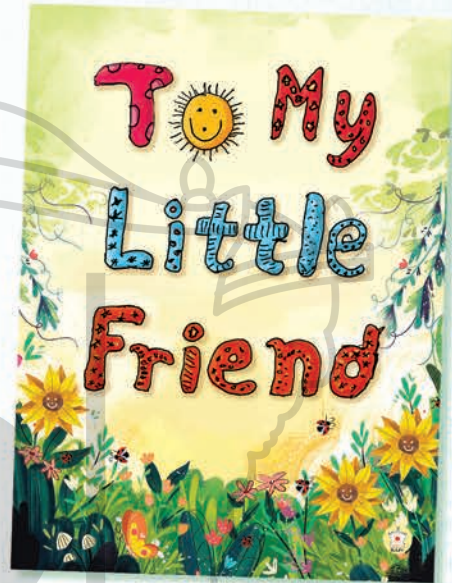
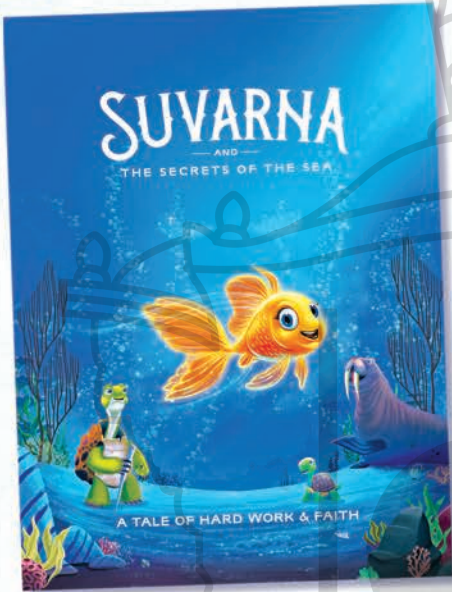
1. Kanthi
2. Puja and Panchang
3. Bal Sabha & Ghar Sabha
4. Arti and Ashtak
5. Purity of Diet
6. Satsang Reading and Satsang Exams
7. Avoid bad company
8. Study well

UPASANA

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**

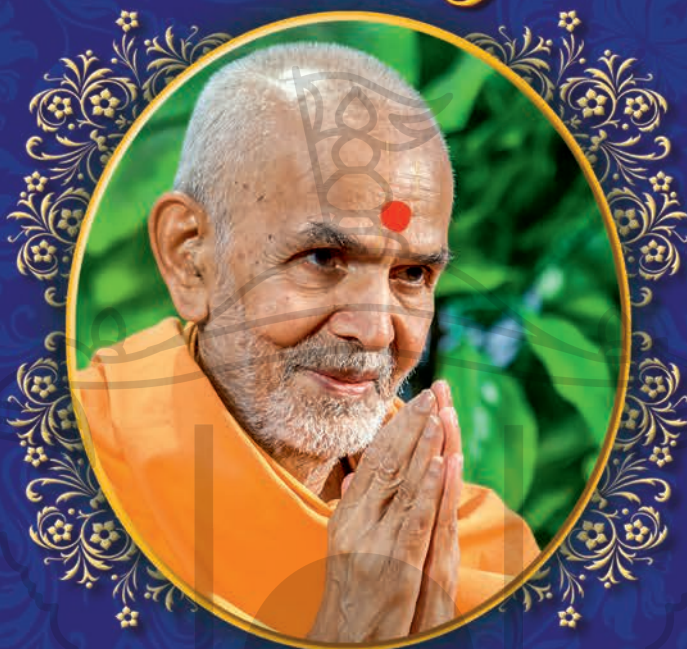
STAY CONNECTED



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

Blessings



॥ Lifetime Satsang ॥

સત્સંગ, ધર્મશાસ્ત્રના સંસ્કારના સ્તંભ બની શકે છે. સત્સંગ ૩૧ માર્ચ ૨૦૨૧ રોજ
નિર્ધારિત થશે. આ દિવસે બાળકોના સત્સંગમાં ભાગ લેવાનો.

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

શ્રી. સ્વામીનારાયણ શાસ્ત્રી નારાયણસ્વારૂપદાસ
જી સ્વામીનારાયણ

(Jay Swaminarayan from Shastri Narayanswarupdas,
Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

The fruit of Satsang Exams is Akshardham

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(Jay Swaminarayan from Sadhu Keshavjivandas,
Mahant Swami Maharaj)

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