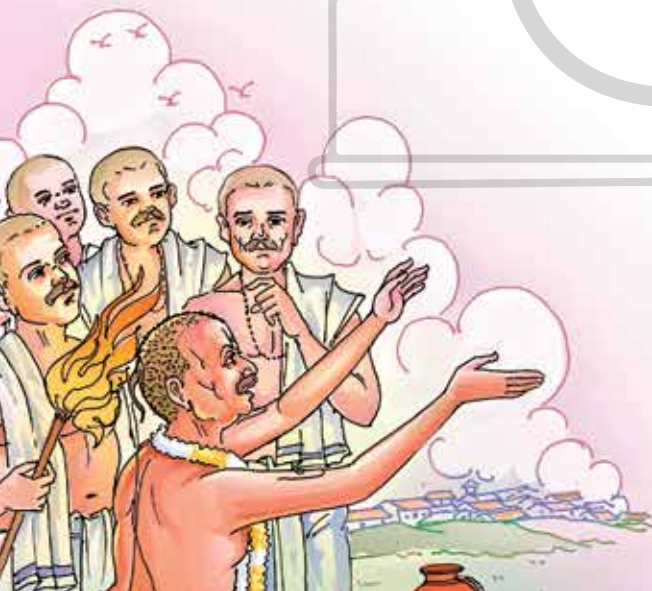


An Introductory Study Programme of
BAPS Swaminarayan Hinduism for Children



Satsang Pihar

Part 3



SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH
Ahmedabad

Satsang Vihar, Part-3 (English Edition)

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

Blessing: His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Inspirer: His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj

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Aksharbrahman
Shri Gunatitanand Swami



Parabrahman
Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan

LET US FLY TO AKSHARDHAM

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

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

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

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1. THE GURU LEADS US TO GOD

(1) The law of karma, (2) rebirth, (3) *avatarvad*, and (4) *murthi 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:

What is the purpose of life?

*Ālodya sarvashāstrāni,
vichārya cha punaha punaha |
Idam ekam sunishpannam,
dhyeyo Nārāyano Harihi ||*

I 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 – a part of the Vedas. The Mundak Upanishad states:

*Tadvignānārtham sa
gurumevābhigachhet |
Shrotriyam Brahma nishtham ||*

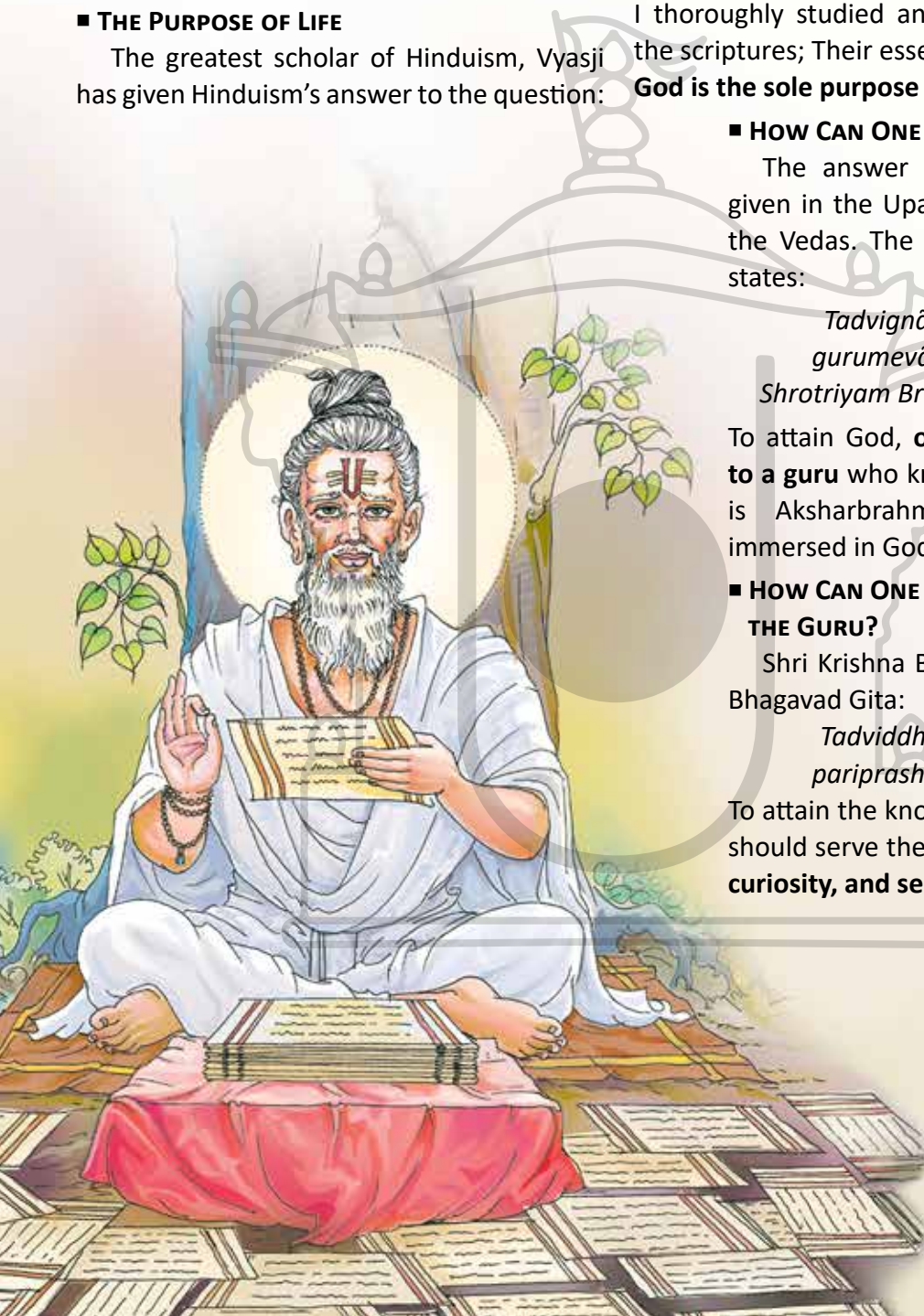
To attain God, **one must surrender to a guru** who knows the scriptures, is Aksharbrahman and remains immersed in God.

■ HOW CAN ONE FIND GOD THROUGH THE GURU?

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says in the Bhagavad Gita:

*Tadviddhi pranipāten
pariprashnen sevayā ||*

To attain the knowledge of God, one should serve the guru with **humility, curiosity, and service.**



■ HOW SHOULD ONE FOLLOW THE GURU'S COMMANDS?

Once there was a **rishi named Gautam**. A small **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 true thirst to attain knowledge about Brahman and Parabrahman, Gautam accepted Satyakam as his *shishya* (pupil).

After a few days, Gautam rishi took Satyakam to the ashram's 400 cows, "Child, take these to the forest. When **these 400 have become 1000 cows**, return to the ashram." Satyakam accepted his guru's command. Satyakam did not question, "I'm too young. How will I do this? I came for knowledge and he is making me do this?"

He found a place where he could find grass and water for the cows and made a hut for himself. 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**. He **protected them** from the wild animals of the forest. Regardless of the season and undeterred by cold, heat or rain, Satyakam **worked day and night** to fulfil his guru's command.

Years went by – not just one or two – as Satyakam continued in the same way. Finally, **there were 1,000 cows**. Satyakam Jabali was overjoyed. He gathered all the cows and herded them back **towards his guru's ashram**. By the grace of his guru, **along his route** back, he met Vayudev, Agnidev, Suryadev and Prandev 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 knowledge. 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 knowledge yourself."

Gautam rishi took Satyakam in his arms and **blessed him**, "The knowledge you have received is *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 Prगत Brahmaswarup **Mahant Swami Maharaj**. If our life is lived according to his wishes, if we always see him as divine and always think of him, then every moment of our life will be filled with happiness, peace and joy. And after this life, we will attain Akshardham and the eternal bliss of Parabrahman Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan.

One who imbibes a relationship like this with a guru is a Hindu.

Shriji Maharaj has said 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 will replace 100 people like me. I'll jump off instead."** Hearing the value of the Hindu scriptures, Xuanzang's **disciples stopped him and jumped off in his place**.

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

Bhagvat, Ramayan, Mahabharat and other Hindu texts.

■ ONLY ONE GOD

Hindus believe in **only one supreme God** – not many gods. That God is **Parabrahman** Shri Swaminarayan. It is **by his decision to enter and work through them that the avatars come to be**. The **devas and devis** also gain their **strength from Parabrahman** and also worship him.

■ ONE MUST BECOME AN IDEAL BHAKTA AND WORSHIP GOD

It is an important Hindu belief that one must become an ideal devotee and lovingly worship God. As an example, **one must become aksharrup and offer pure devotion to Purushottam**. In the same way, the *upasanas* of Sita-Ram, Radha-Krishna, Nar-Narayan are also well known.

■ 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**, living by one's duties; 2. **Arth** – to gain **wealth** and resources; 3. **Kam** – To fulfil one's **worldly desires**; 4. **Moksha** – to attain **liberation** by mastering dharma, *gnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti according to one's guru's commands.

■ AHIMSA

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

Those who accept the above principles are Hindu. Let us understand our culture 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**, began to **wonder**, "What will Ghanshyam do when he grows up? Will he be a king? A wealthy merchant? Or a great scholar? Let us test him." And with that thought, Dharmadev set up a **low table** and placed three things 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 sat staring at his son. He realized that Ghanshyam would **become a great scholar** in the future and **establish dharma** in the world.

■ ■ ■

Kashi (Varanasi) is the city of scholars. Once, Dharmadev arrived there to observe the **lunar eclipse**. Hearing of this, the scholars of the city arranged for him to stay at the Gaumath and organized a **great debate**. They asked **Dharmadev** to sit as the **judge of the debate** to decide the victor. Ghanshyam joined Dharmadev in the assembly as well.

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 up**. 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 say." However, with his father's permission, Ghanshyam spoke fluently 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 Ghanshyam in the form of **the being they believed to be God**. They worshipped him in their trance until 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** (*jiva, ishwar, maya, Brahman, Parabrahman*) **without a doubt**. Everyone was overjoyed and congratulated both father and son. Astonishingly, at the time of this incident, Ghanshyam was **only ten years old!**

This was our Ghanshyam Maharaj. His every act had meaning.

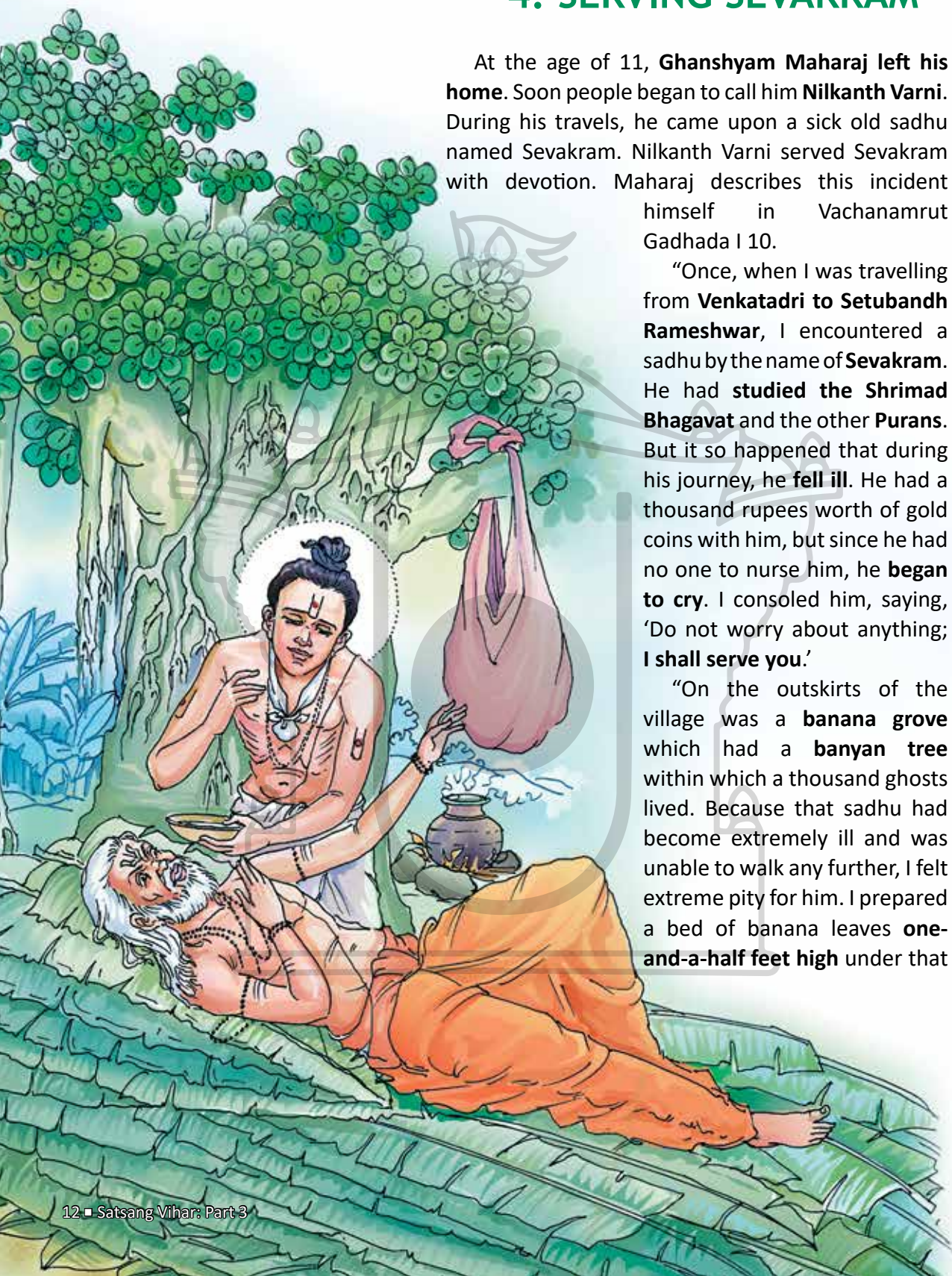
The same Ghanshyam that picked the scripture while an infant, won the debate in Kashi, and later, as Bhagwan Swaminarayan, gave us the Vachanamrut. Even his seemingly childish actions as a small boy were meaningful – they showed us the great things he would achieve later in life.

4. SERVING SEVAKRAM

At the age of 11, **Ghanshyam Maharaj** left his home. Soon people began to call him **Nilkanth Varni**. During his travels, he came upon a sick old sadhu named **Sevakram**. Nilkanth Varni served **Sevakram** with devotion. Maharaj describes this incident himself in *Vachanamrut Gadhada* I 10.

“Once, when I was travelling from **Venkatadri** to **Setubandh Rameshwar**, I encountered a sadhu by the name of **Sevakram**. He had **studied the Shrimad Bhagavat** and the other **Purans**. But it so happened that during his journey, he **fell ill**. He had a thousand rupees worth of gold coins with him, but since he had no one to nurse him, he **began to cry**. I consoled him, saying, ‘Do not worry about anything; **I shall serve you.**’

“On the outskirts of the village was a **banana grove** which had a **banyan tree** within which a thousand ghosts lived. Because that sadhu had become extremely ill and was unable to walk any further, I felt extreme pity for him. I prepared a bed of banana leaves **one-and-a-half feet high** under that



banyan tree. As the sadhu was suffering from **dysentery** and was passing blood, I would wash him and **attend to him**.

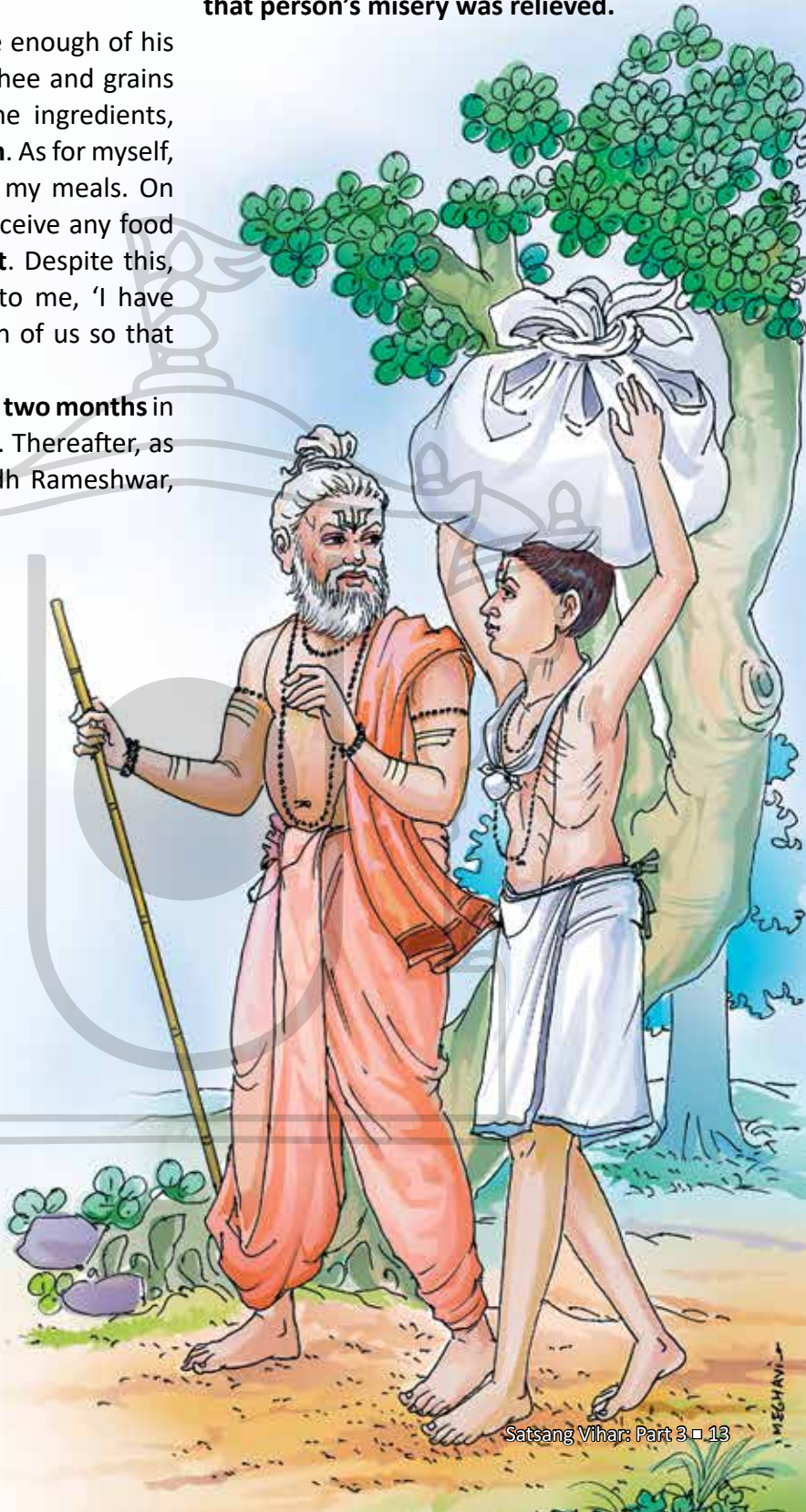
“The sadhu would give me enough of his money to buy sugar, *sakar*, ghee and grains for himself. I would bring the ingredients, **cook them, and then feed him**. As for myself, I would go to the village for my meals. On some days, when I did not receive any food from the village, **I had to fast**. Despite 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 serving 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 **weighing one maund (20kg)**, whereas he would walk with only a rosary in his hand. By then, he was healthy and **capable of digesting half a kilogram 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 walked carrying his belongings weighing 20 kg.

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

Such was our Lord Nilkanth. He was the ideal

servant and could not bear to see anyone miserable. He would selflessly serve until that person’s misery was relieved.



5. FROM MAGNIRAM TO ADVAITANAND

There was a **Brahmin** from **South India** named **Magniram**. He left his home in **search of God** and soon found a **guru in Bengal**. The guru had earned the grace of **Sharda Devi**. Magniram, too, soon **earned Sharda Devi's grace** and became blessed with **extraordinary powers**.

Travelling, Magniram reached, **Jagannath Puri**. There he fell into the **company of some**

evil bawas. He soon forgot his goal of finding God and instead gathered a **large following** of his own by showing off his powers. With his band of disciples at his side, Magniram travelled from village to village scaring kings and mahants. He would demonstrate **his evil arts** and take their gold. Soon, just his name was enough to **make people cry for help**.

Now Magniram arrived in **Porbandar, Gujarat**. **With his long metal tongs**, he **beat a leading mahant, Gosaiji**, and collected his ransom. The Gosai gave Magniram the money, but said, "You've beaten many little people like us, if you're truly great go to Mangrol and **defeat Swaminarayan**."

The Gosai's words added fuel to Magniram's rage. He went stomping to **Mangrol** and there he demanded from King **Gajefarkhan**, "Give me 5,000 rupees or I'll destroy the whole city." Gajefarkhan sent back a reply, "Bawaji! **If you can win over Swaminarayan, I'll give you**, not just 5, but **10,000 rupees**."

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

"We are not preaching 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 **Deviwalo Magniram**. **Give me 10,000 rupees** or else I'll throw this whole village into the ocean."

Maharaj calmly replied, "I have no rupees. If you need food, I can give you



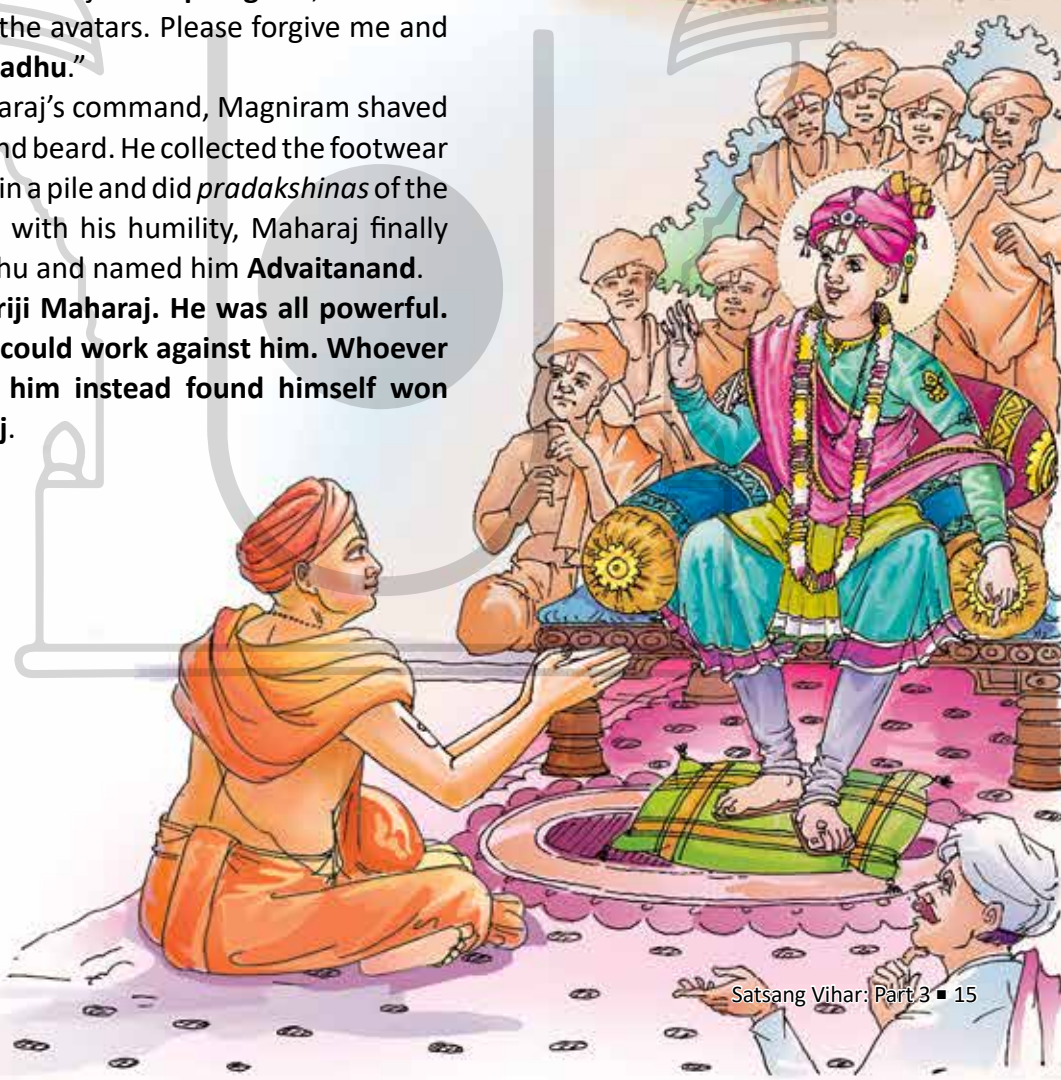
grains. And, by the way, **we are not afraid of dark magic.**"

Still in a rage, Magniram went off to where he was staying and began performing **Devi puja**. He tried many mysterious mantras but none worked. So he decided to please the Devi and call her to fulfil his wishes. Soon, **Sharda Devi** appeared before him. "Magniram! Have you forgotten? What was the reason you left your home? **Swaminarayan is God**. He is the lord of all the devas and *devis*. **We too worship him**. So if you want liberation, **surrender yourself to him and please him.**"

Hearing the Devi's words, Magniram's eyes were opened. The next **morning**, he bathed and went to **Shriji Maharaj's residence**. He saw used dishes and utensils and sat down to clean them. Then he went to Shriji Maharaj and **apologized**, "You are the cause of all the avatars. Please forgive me and **make me your sadhu.**"

Then by Maharaj's command, Magniram shaved his moustache and beard. He collected the footwear of all the sadhus in a pile and did *pradakshinas* of the bundle. Pleased with his humility, Maharaj finally made him a sadhu and named him **Advaitanand**.

Such was Shriji Maharaj. He was all powerful. No black magic could work against him. Whoever tried to defeat him instead found himself won over by Maharaj.



6. THE PUPPET MASTER

A devotee named **Sangha Patel** lived in the village of **Loya**. Once, while Shriji Maharaj was **staying at his home**, a travelling **troupe of performers** came to **complain** to Maharaj: "Because these **Patels have become satsangis**, **our business has declined**."

They were right. Maharaj has said in the **Shikshapatri** that **none** of his followers **should attend plays and minstrel shows**.

Maharaj asked, "What are your talents?"

The **performers replied**, "We can play all kinds of roles. And in **plays**, **we can perform** the acts of Nal-Damyanti, Rukmini, Ramayan and Mahabharat. And we'll engross the audience so well that no one will nod off all night."

"**You won't perform any women roles will you?**"

"**No, Maharaj,**" they gave their word.

Accepting their request, Maharaj agreed to watch their performance.

Night fell and the whole town gathered at the outskirts to watch the show. Maharaj too came with his sadhus and devotees to watch the performance. The troupe had **worked hard all afternoon**. As soon as Maharaj gave the sign, **the show began**.

The troupe had decided to perform a marionette show with puppets. But, the puppets would not move. The puppet masters **tried and tried** but it was as if the **puppets were frozen**. The



performers realized they were losing face. They brought the puppets behind the curtains to fix them – but they were working just fine! However, as soon as they were placed back on stage, the puppets froze again!

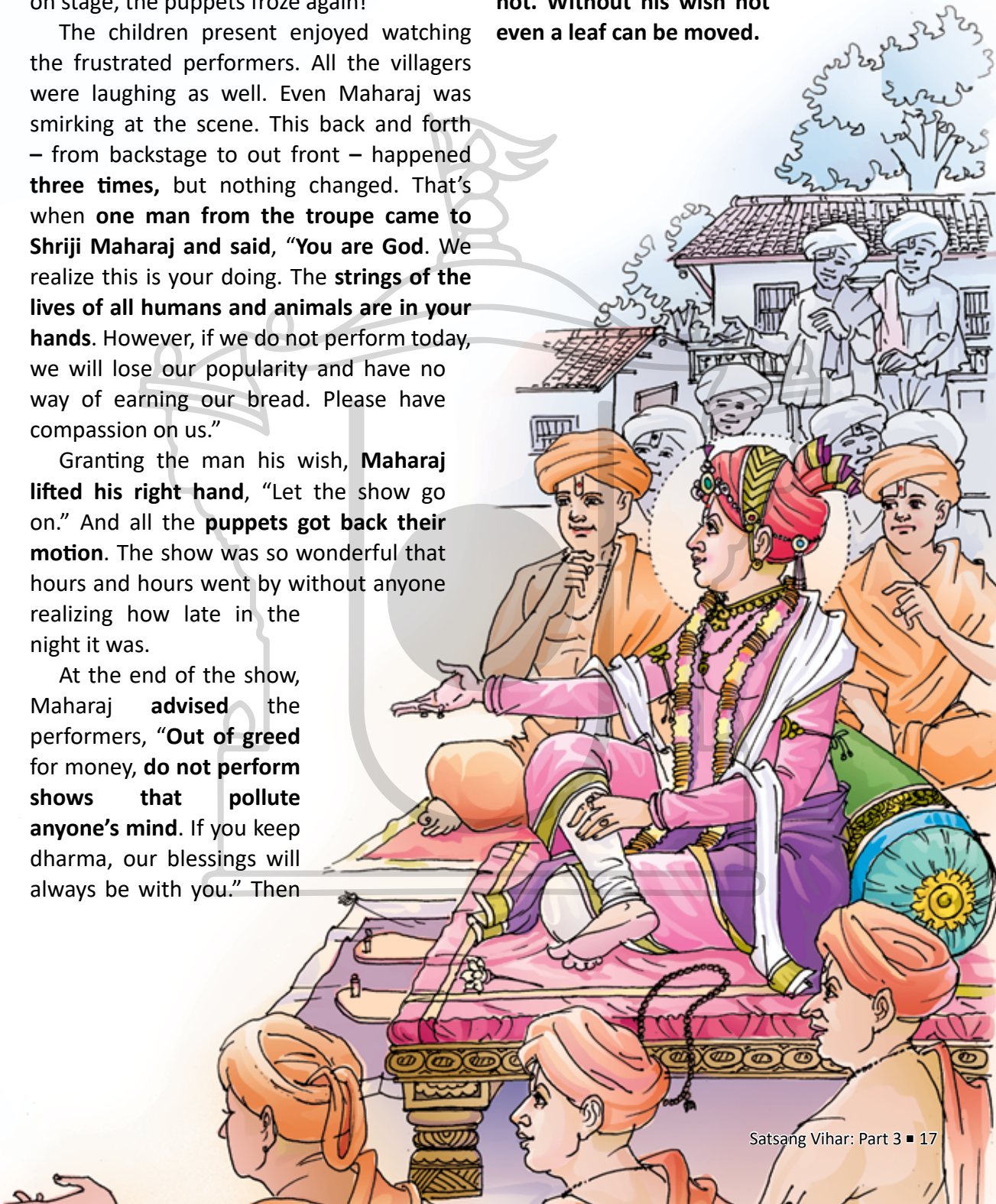
The children present enjoyed watching the frustrated performers. All the villagers were laughing as well. Even Maharaj was smirking at the scene. This back and forth – from backstage to out front – happened **three times**, but nothing changed. That's when **one man from the troupe came to Shriji Maharaj and said, "You are God. We realize 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 popularity and have no way of earning our bread. Please have compassion on us."

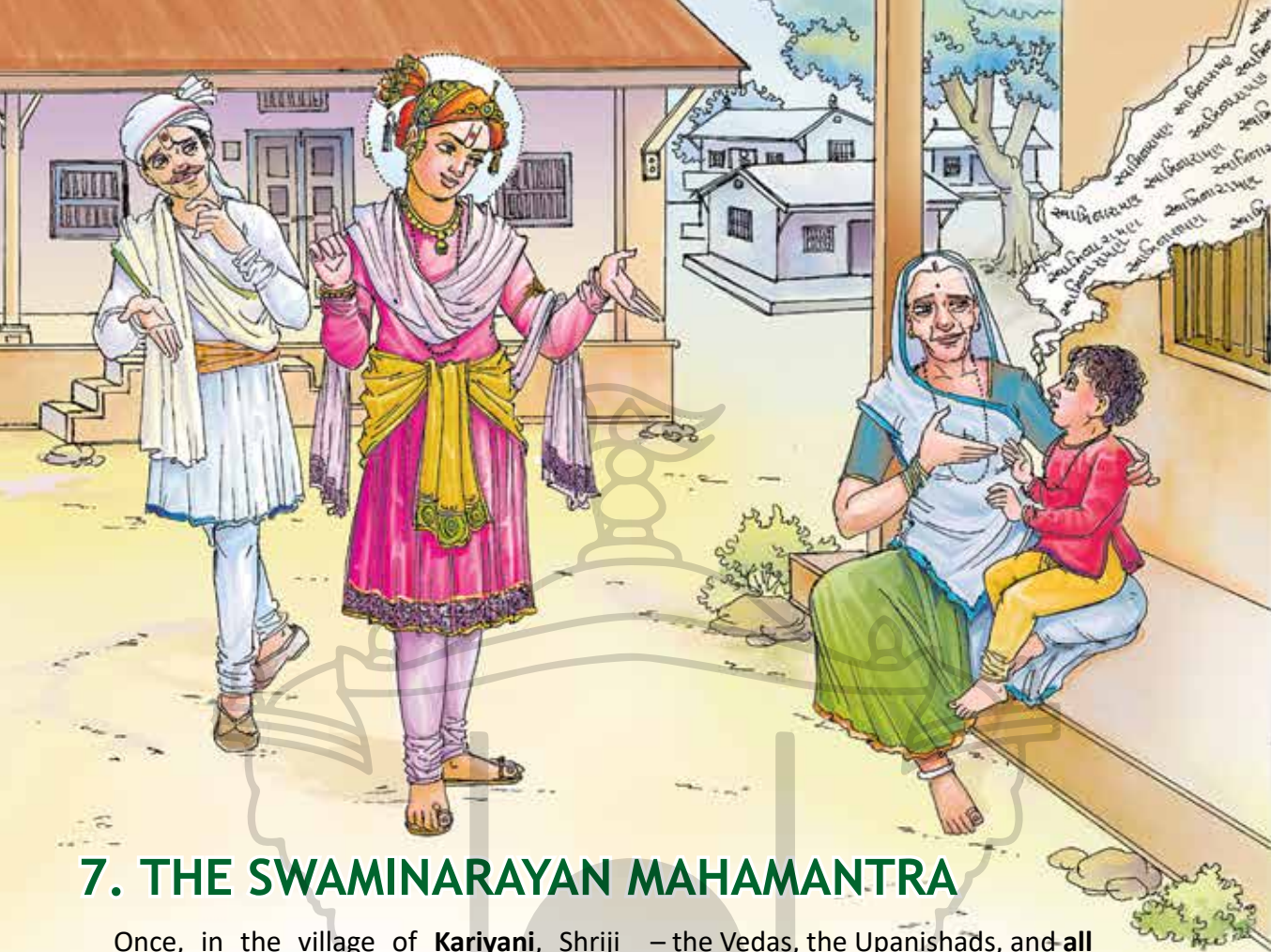
Granting the man his wish, **Maharaj lifted his right hand**, "Let the show go on." And all the **puppets got back their motion**. The show was so wonderful that hours and hours went by without anyone realizing how late in the night it was.

At the end of the show, Maharaj **advised** the performers, "**Out of greed for money, do not perform shows that pollute anyone's mind.** If you keep dharma, our blessings will always be with you." Then

Maharaj had the troupe fed and bid them farewell.

Maharaj was and is the true puppet master. He controls everything – living or not. Without his wish not even a leaf can be moved.





7. THE SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

Once, in the village of **Kariyani**, Shriji Maharaj was making his way from his residence to the durbar of Vasta Khachar. As he was walking he saw an old **grandmother teaching something to her grandson**. Shriji Maharaj stopped to hear the old lady's lesson.

"Son, say 'Swaminarayan'," the old lady coaxed her grandson. The toddler said it in a babyish way, "Saminalayan". The grandmother repeated, "No baby boy, try again. 'Swami – narayan'." The lady repeated it over and over and the boy tried and tried and **soon he said, "Swaminarayan."** The grandmother was overjoyed! "Oh my dearest, you said, 'Swaminarayan'! I'd give you anything. That you said 'Swaminarayan' means **you know everything there is to know**

– the Vedas, the Upanishads, and **all the scriptures! You said the mantra which frees one from life and death and gives Akshardham! I love you!**" And saying so, the old woman hugged her grandson like never before.

Maharaj had been standing watching the whole scene. Even Vasta Khachar had made his way there. Maharaj said, "Do you see **how much that woman understands the glory of my name? I will have to grant both her and her grandson *kalyan*.**"

Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 56: "However grave a sinner a person may be, if at the end of his life, he utters, 'Swaminarayan', he will be redeemed of all sins and will reside in Brahmanahol."



Vasur Khachar of **Bhoyra** was a **cruel** leader. One of his subjects, **Naja Jogia**, 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 Jogia returned to his home. He sat down with a *mala*. At the turn of every bead he chanted the ‘Swaminarayan’ **mantra with his heart**. The mantra melted away his fear and he continued chanting all night.

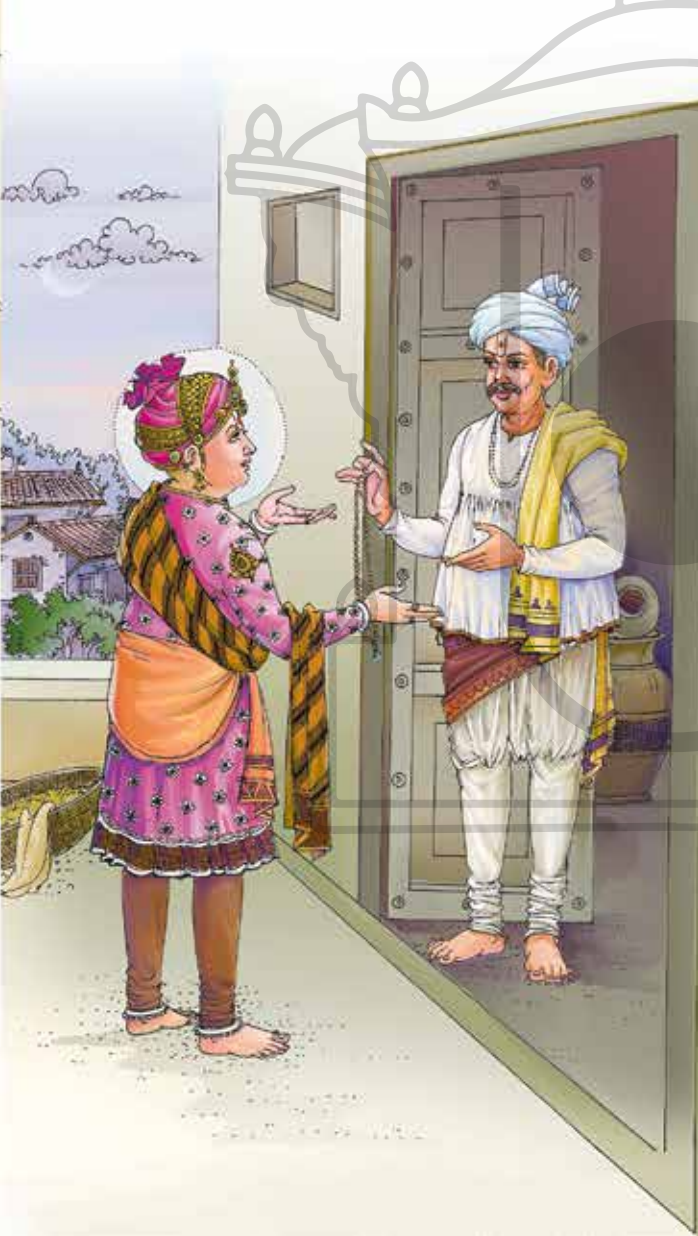
When the sun arose the next morning,

a miracle stood at Naja’s door. He opened his door to see **Shriji Maharaj** giving him darshan. From **250 km away in Visnagar**, Maharaj had heard Naja’s prayer and left to save his devotee. **In one day he walked the whole distance** and suffered blisters and **thorns**. But, a true bhakta had remembered him and so he came.

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

■ THE GLORY OF THE SWAMINARAYAN MAHAMANTRA

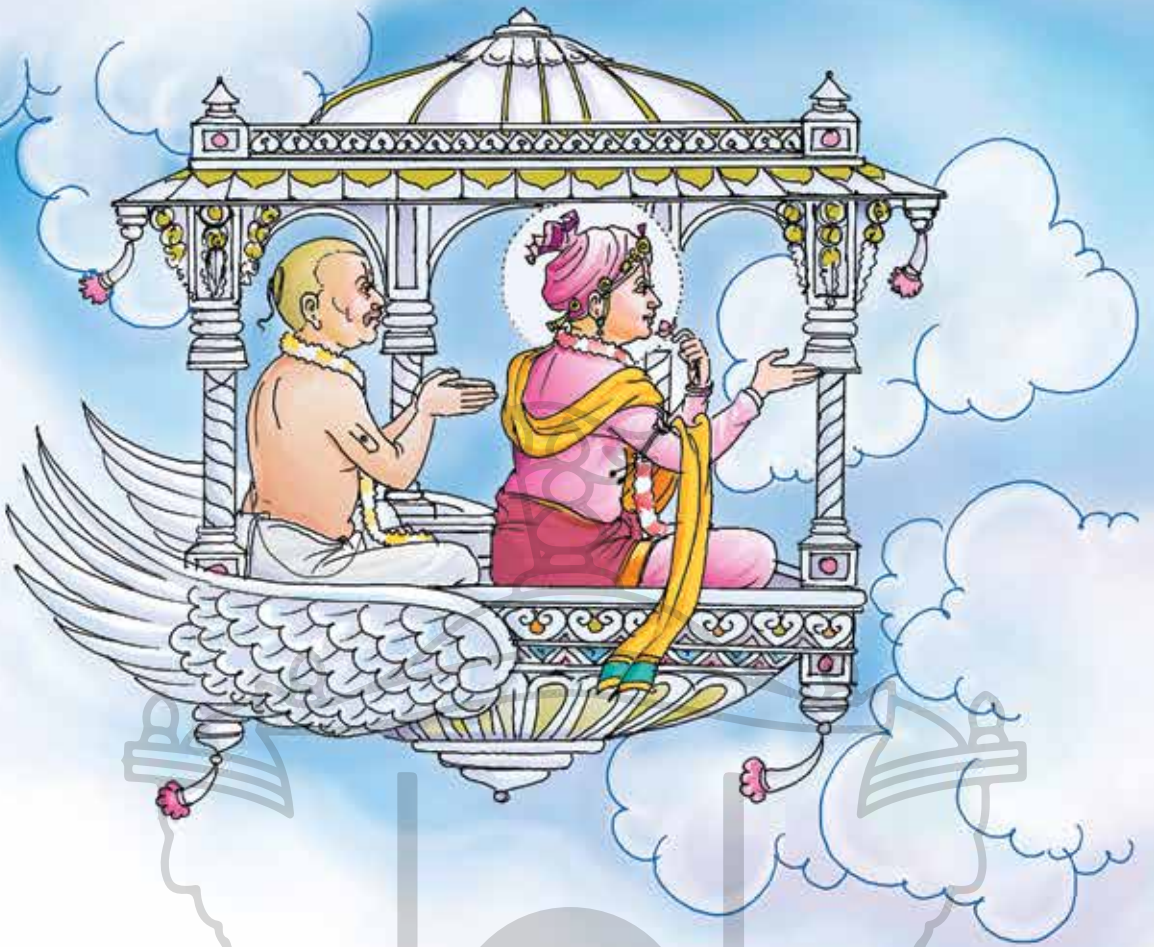
- Shriji Maharaj gave this mantra on Magshar vad 11, 1858 (31 December 1801) in the **village of Faneni**.
- It is said in the Harililamrut: *Je Swāminārāyan nām leshe, tenā badhā pātak bādi deshe; Chhe nām mārā shrutimā anek sarvopari ā ja ganāi ek. Shadakshari mantra mahā samartha, tethi thashe siddha samasta artha. Sukhi kare sankat sarva kāpe, ante vali Akshardhām āpe.*
- In the Swaminarayan mantra, the message is to become like Swami and worship Narayan. Swami means Akshar or Gunatitanand Swami and Narayan means Purna Purshottam Shriji Maharaj.
- Shriji Maharaj protects all those who chant the name with wholehearted faith.
- Swamini Vato: What should one do when one is in trouble? Chant “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan.” The troubles will be solved.



8. ALWAYS THERE AT THE END

Pranvallabh, a Brahmin from **Ahmedabad**, was travelling to **Nasik**. Unfortunately, Nasik was overcome with a **cholera** epidemic and soon Pranvallabh too became its **victim**. He left his body and **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 back to life.”

His body was on the funeral pyre. All that was left was to apply the flame. Just then, **Pranvallabh sat up!** “I’ve come to tell you,” Pranvallabh started, “that Bhagwan Swaminarayan has come to take me to his abode. Currently, Death is running rampant. **Chant the ‘Swaminarayan’ name and you will live. Surrender to him and he will come to take you at your time as well.**”

Then, Pranvallabh began clapping and taught everyone how to chant

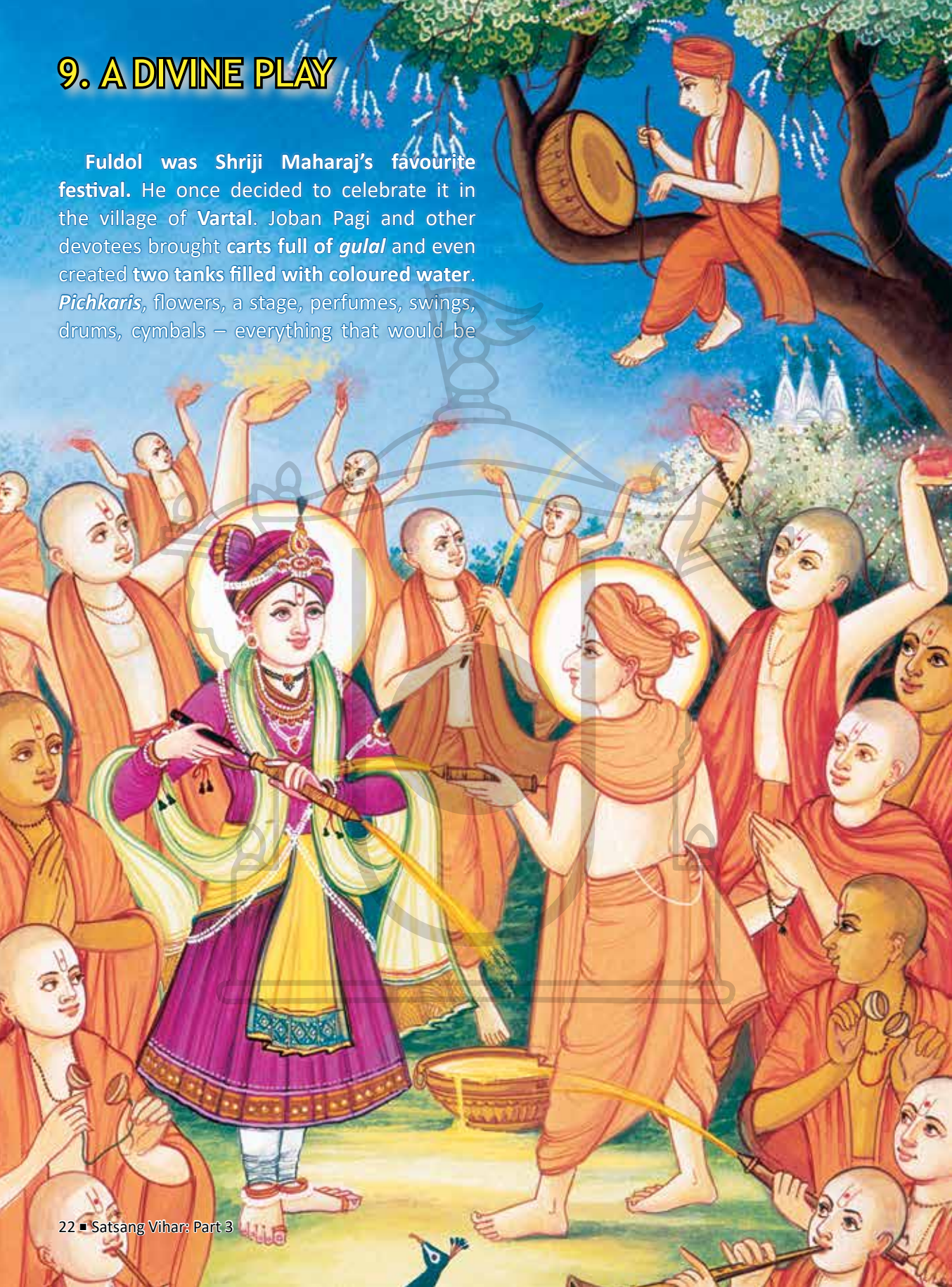
the ‘Swaminarayan’ mantra. **Everyone present was amazed** and began singing the Swaminarayan **dhun**. It was as if the crematory had become a mandir. When the **dhun** ended, the Brahmin’s soul left his body.

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 him – to place him in a special divine craft and take him to Akshardham. No other avatar has shown such powers. **This is something that shows Maharaj to be the Supreme God.**

This promise of Shriji Maharaj is noted in the Bhaktachintamani (65/80): *‘Mārā janane antakāde, jarura tedavā āvavu, birud mārū e na badale, te sarve janane janāvavu.’*

9. A DIVINE PLAY

Fuldol was Shriji Maharaj's favourite festival. He once decided to celebrate it in the village of Vartal. Joban Pagi and other devotees brought carts full of *gula* and even created two tanks filled with coloured water. *Pichkaris*, flowers, a stage, perfumes, swings, drums, cymbals – everything that would be



required for a most memorable festival was gathered.

Soon, the **morning** everyone was waiting for arrived. **Maharaj** awoke and performed his morning routine. Then he was clothed in the handsomest attire, with flowers garlanded around his neck and wrists. He came **onto the festival stage** and, seeing everyone eager to let the colours fly, he said, "Everyone form into **two teams**. Only then will we play." "We will make teams as you say," the sadhus replied. So Shriji Maharaj commanded, "The **sadhus** should **make one team** and the **devotees and I will make the second**. Let's see who wins!"

Everyone was ready with their *gula* 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 **vessel 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 eyes. Somla Khachar saw this and drenched Brahmanand Swami with coloured water. Nityanand Swami ran up to Somla Khachar and **filled his eyes with coloured powder**. In this way, the 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 arsenal onto Shriji Maharaj. **Maharaj** retreated to the stage and **put up a shield** in front of him. But this just encouraged the jesting 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!** Shriji Maharaj

called out to Nana Khachar, "Quickly! Bring my **horse!**" But Nityanand Swami heard this and **squirted colour at the horse's eyes**. The horse ran off scared. When she was brought back, Adbhutanand Swami threw up some colour and the mare ran off once again. The devotee bringing the horse exclaimed, "Maharaj, this horse doesn't even scare in battle but she's being scared off by these sadhus." "Then **cover her eyes with a cloth** and bring her." Maharaj said. The devotee did so. As soon as the horse arrived, Maharaj jumped on top of it. Still the sadhus were playfully attacking him with colour.

"The sadhus win! The sadhus win!" Maharaj yelled with raised arms. "Now let the games end." And with that Maharaj returned to his residence. All the sadhus and devotees had etched the *murti* of Maharaj into their hearts and felt at peace.

■ WHY DOES GOD PERFORM SUCH ACTS?

Shriji Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 35: "Wherever I have organized festivals;... when I have had devotional songs sung; when I have delivered discourses; when my puja has been performed; etc – **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, are **redemptive**."

So that anyone who sees, speaks of, listens to, writes, reads or thinks about his actions receives liberation, Maharaj performed all these acts of playing, bathing, riding horses, eating, serving, laughing, falling ill, playing ras, being upset, etc. His entire life was a play for us to enjoy, remember and reach Akshardham.

10. GUNATIT SUCCESSION OF GURUS

After Shriji Maharaj's return to Akshardham, Gunatitanand Swami was grief-stricken. He fainted on just seeing the grass in a stream in Lakshmivadi. Maharaj gave him **darshan** and told him thrice, **"Where have I gone? I forever reside in you."**

In this way, Parabrahman 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. There he saw the true *upasana*. He saw firm adherence to the rules that Maharaj had given. There was an enthusiasm for bhajan and bhakti in everyone. And so, Karunashankar felt peace in his heart. He said to Gunatitanand Swami, "Swami I have travelled everywhere in Satsang. Everywhere Satsang feels old and worn away. But here, by your grace, it is still evergreen." Swami replied, "Here, Shriji Maharaj is present and so the Satsang is evergreen."

■ ■ ■

After staying in Junagadh for 40 years, 4 month and 4 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." Swami never made it to stay in Mahuva. What he had told his followers was that he would reside forever in Mahuva's Bhagatji Maharaj – his spiritual successor.

■ ■ ■

Shastriji Maharaj was in Rajkot when the news of Bhagatji Maharaj's passing came.

He was saddened. At that time, Bhagatji Maharaj gave him darshan, garlanded him, and said, "Why are you sitting so sad? I forever reside in you."

Ramji Bhatt, who was also grieving with Shastriji Maharaj, said, "Now all that was auspicious on this earth is gone. Bhagatji was all that was auspicious here." Shastriji Maharaj replied, "The Satpurush never leaves this Earth."

■ ■ ■

Shastriji Maharaj often said, "I am Yogi and Yogi is me," in reference to Yogiji Maharaj.

■ ■ ■

1971, Gondal. It was Yogiji Maharaj's final illness, his last days on Earth. Harshadbhai Dave asked, "Now who is here for us?" Yogiji Maharaj instantly replied, "Pramukh Swami is here. He will give you joy even greater than we have." Yogiji Maharaj often used to say, "Pramukh Swami is my everything."

■ ■ ■

2012, Ahmedabad. Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote, "I would like to inform all the sadhus and householder devotees... that I appoint with happiness and joy... Pujya Mahant Swami... as the President of BAPS, that is, as the guru, after my physical departure."

■ Gunatit Gurus

- Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan is forever present on this earth through Aksharbrahman, the *gunatit* succession of gurus.
- In the *gunatit* succession of gurus, at any one time, only one guru is enough to grant liberation to the people of the whole world.

- In Vachanamrut Vartal 18 Shriji Maharaj says: “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 recognize them, then he becomes a devotee of God.” That sadhu 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. That we have recognized him is our greatest fortune.



In many **Vachanamruts**, Shriji Maharaj has taught that the following **five elements** are eternal: *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman, and Parabrahman. Only when the *jivas* and *ishwars* attain the association of Brahman and become *brahmarup* do they overcome *maya* and attain Parabrahman.

But the question is: **Who is that Brahman?** In Maharaj's own time it was **Gunatitanand Swami**. Below we will review the facts which support this truth.

■ BY MAHARAJ'S WORDS

At the home of **Rathod Dhadhal** in **Sarangpur**, Maharaj was playing *ras* with the sadhus. A kirtan by Kabirji was being sung: *Koti Krishna jode hāth, koti Vishnu name māth...Sadguru khele Vasant*.

Singing these words, Maharaj took the stick in his hand and **tapped it thrice on Gunatitanand Swami's chest**. Then he asked, **"Who is this sadguru?"**

Anandanand Swami and **Muktanand Swami** both replied, **"Maharaj! You are such a sadguru."**

"No, Swami, I am **Purna Purushottam Narayan** himself. Such a **sadguru** is this **Gunatitanand Swami**; he is the **avatar of Aksharbrahman**."

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

■ BY THE WORD OF THE PARAMHANSAS

Gunatitanand Swami was sitting in a **line of sadhus** in **Vartal**. **Malji Soni of Bhojka** came to **Gopalanand Swami**, "Swami, **who is that sadguru?**"

"I had told you once that I would show you Akshardham," Gopalanand Swami said to him. "This Gunatitanand Swami is the



avatar of Akshardham itself. Shriji Maharaj has **identified him** as 'Akshar' **many times**. So recognize him properly." Malji Soni shared his incident with Shastriji Maharaj and many other devotees.

Vignananand Swami told **Shastriji Maharaj**, "I had heard many times from **Shriji Maharaj** that Gunatitanand Swami

MUL AKSHAR



is Akshar. However, when everyone is not yet able to understand Maharaj to be supreme God, how will they understand this? As such, this truth is not able to be talked about. But, it is the truth. So **believe it to be true with your soul.**"

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

■ BY THE SCRIPTURES OF THE SAMPRADAYA

An example of the many scriptural references: Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj writes in his *Kirtan Kaustubhmala*: "**Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami, tene āpya vartamān.**" Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami, who initiated [me].

■ BY HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

In the **Sorath region** in Gujarat, **30 hari mandirs** of the Vartal Sampradaya have **murtis** of Gunatitanand Swami which 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 with your whole heart that '**Swami is Anadi Mul Akshar and Shriji Maharaj is Purna Purushottam Bhagwan.**' Keep firm faith in this truth."

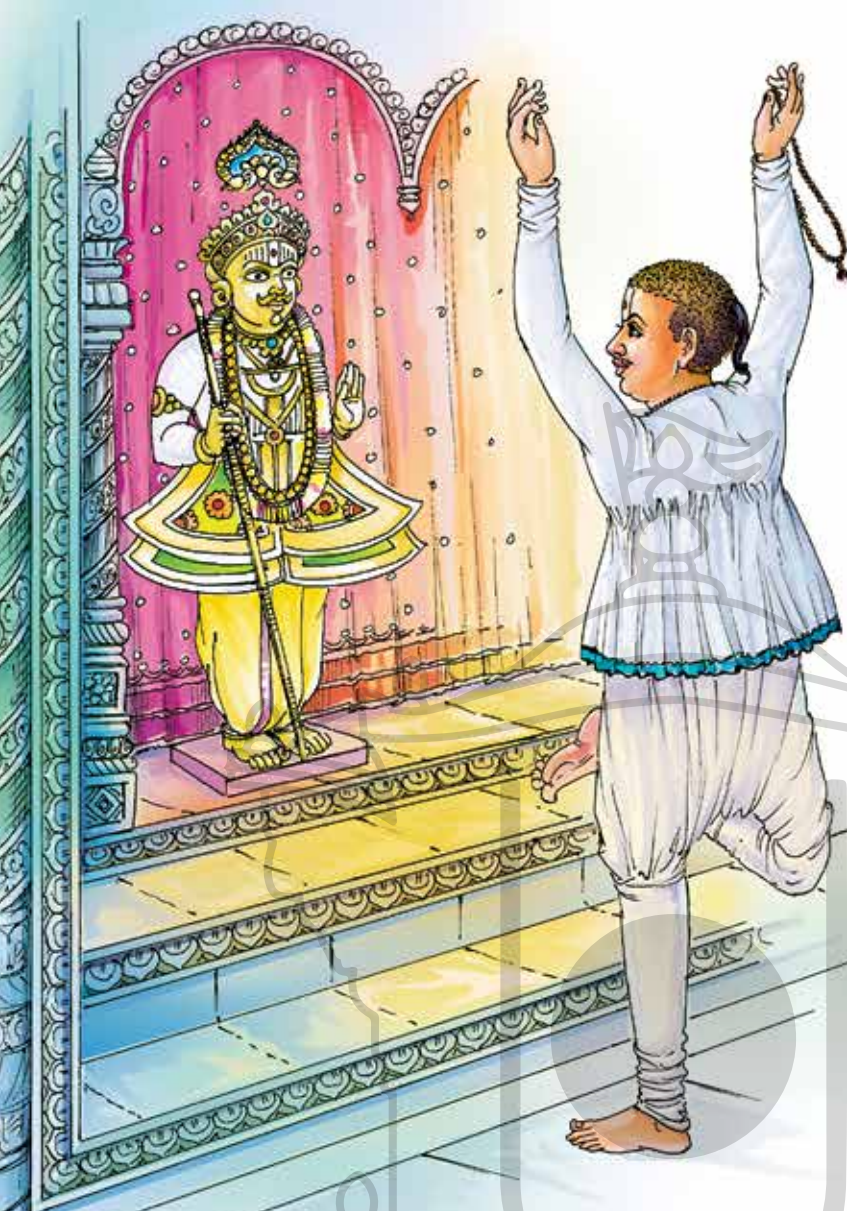
Gunatitanand Swami's life, sermons, his explanation of Maharaj's true form, and the *brahmarup* state that he had his followers attain is greater than any other *paramhansa*.

■ BY EXPERIENCE

Gunatitanand Swami's lineage of disciples is the *gunatit* succession of gurus. Today, there is **no spiritual succession in the world which is as pure**.

Today, in more than a thousand mandirs and thousands of homes, the words 'Gunatitanand Mul Akshar' can be heard.

In the presence of the *gunatit satpurush*, **guru hari Mahant Swami Maharaj**, countless people experience the presence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.



pany of Gopalanand Swami. After which, he worked extremely hard to please **Aksharbrahman 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 abuse and insult, yet the joy on his face was never gone for even a second. This shows that he truly was **Brahmaswarup**.



Vartal'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 returned 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 tailor. He’s going to make me brahmarup?**” he thought. **Again he performed tap** in front of the *murti* and **again Harikrishna Maharaj**

12. BHAGATJI MAHARAJ

Bhagatji Maharaj’s childhood name was Pragji. Born in **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.”**



Bhagatji Maharaj spent years in the com-

came to him and **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 traditional top similar to a tunic). **Without even taking any measurements**, Bhagatji stitched him a **perfectly fitting *kediyu***. Bechar Bhagat was **very pleased**. Just then **Bhagatji Maharaj commented**, “This was just a tunic for your body. However, I know how to **sew a tunic for your soul as well.**”

A tunic for the soul is the state of being *brahmarup*. By remaining firm in *agna* and *upasana*, one’s heart is cleansed, 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-braham himself! The vessel of Parabrahman and someone who made countless *brahmarup*.

■ PRAGJI BHAGAT’S TEACHINGS

- One should always honour the guru’s words, never let them be sullied by remaining unfollowed.

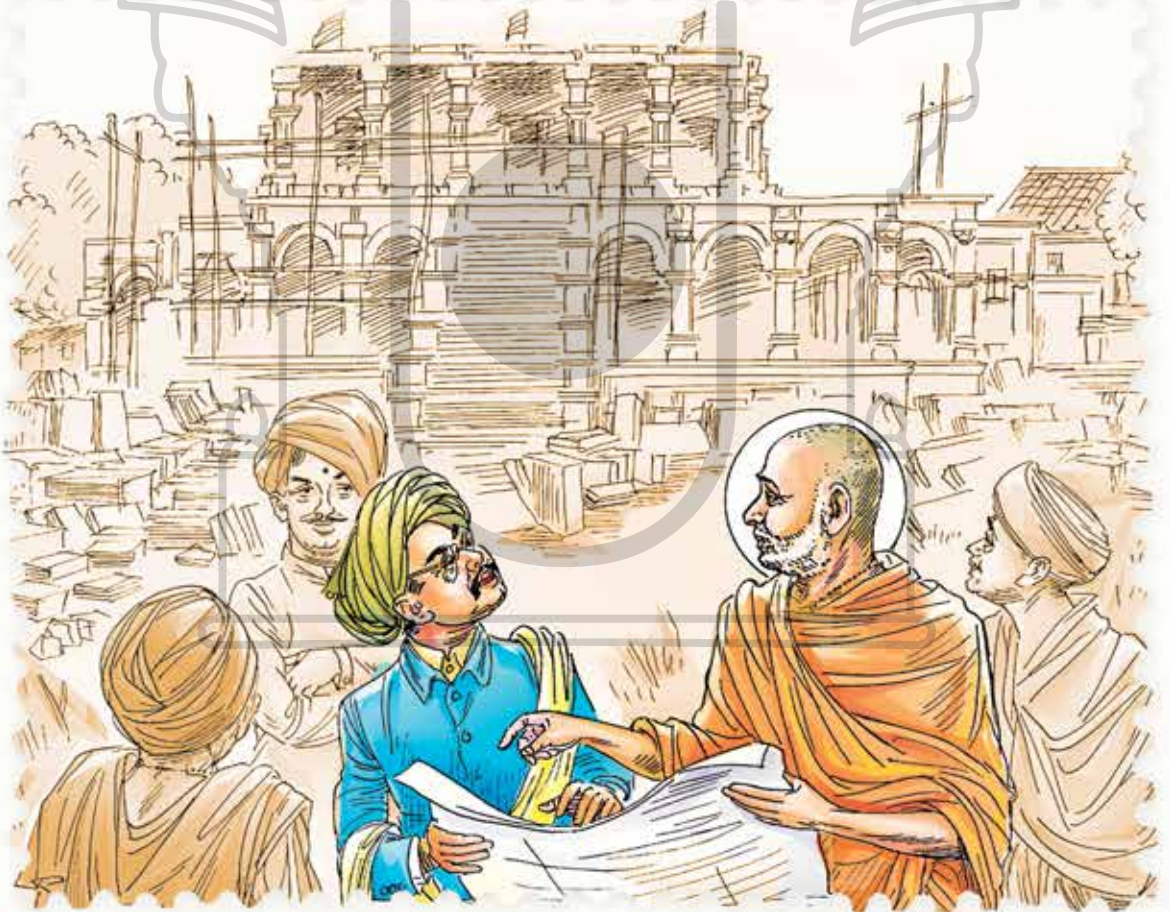
- A true aspirant sleeps like a crow and remains vigilant like a deer – meaning one is always self-aware. **In all of one’s actions, one should constantly remember God**. Then, the soul can achieve anything it wishes.
- **God can only be truly pleased through celibacy**. One should be as **brave as a 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 will be accomplished.
- ***Atmabuddhi*** – a sense of identity – **with the Satpurush is the one extraordinarily powerful tool of attaining 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**. In between, Swamishri needed to answer **a call of nature**. He went to the village outskirts and then returned to bathe. With no Akshar Purushottam mandir in the village, Swamishri went to bathe at a small well at the **other Swaminarayan mandir** in the village. He wasn't even half **bathed** when the **head** of the mandir came **yelling**, “You rebels! Why did you come to our mandir? Get out right now!” Swamishri got up and **left, half-bathed**.

Motibhai's house was near the mandir. He heard the commotion and came out. For the first time in his life he saw 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 that be offered** to Thakorji and only then will the hardworking **sadhus and devotees be able**



to 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 Swami Shastriji Maharaj carried for us. He truly lived for us.

■ **SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ’S TIMES**

- **There was not enough food.** Many times they would have to eat dry flour and drink water to get through the day. For years they cooked *khichdi* in **empty kerosene containers**.
- 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 attention to their own illnesses.** They just continued doing *seva*.
- They suffered **countless insults**. Opponents **even tried to kill** Shastriji Maharaj!

In such difficult circumstances, Shastriji Maharaj never lost determination. By his company, all the other sadhus did *seva* and bhakti with joy, despite the insults and hardships.

All of this was done just so we could have these mandirs dedicated to the true *upasana*; just so we could have **a chance at liberation**. Truly, Shastriji Maharaj lived his life for us. May we also live our life for BAPS and try to honour 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 the bathroom door 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, Yogibapa had **washed all their clothes**. The youngsters felt horrible. They fell at Yogibapa's feet, "Swami, we are supposed to wash your clothes. And you washed ours?"

"When would I have had the pleasure of doing the seva of such virtuous yuvaks like you," Yogibapa 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 pilgrimage eventually made its way to **Pondicherry**. There, everyone went to visit the **Aurobindo Ashram**. Yogiji Maharaj was not able to go due to physical restrictions. He, another sadhu, Vinubhai (now, Pujya Mahant Swami) and Jashbhai 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 circumambulations of the 18-car train**. Then, he started performing **prostrations** before it as well!

Jashbhai said, "Bapa! **To whom are you doing dandvats?**" Yogiji Maharaj replied, "**To the devotees.**" "But Bapa, they've gone to the ashram." "But there luggage is here, right?"

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

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

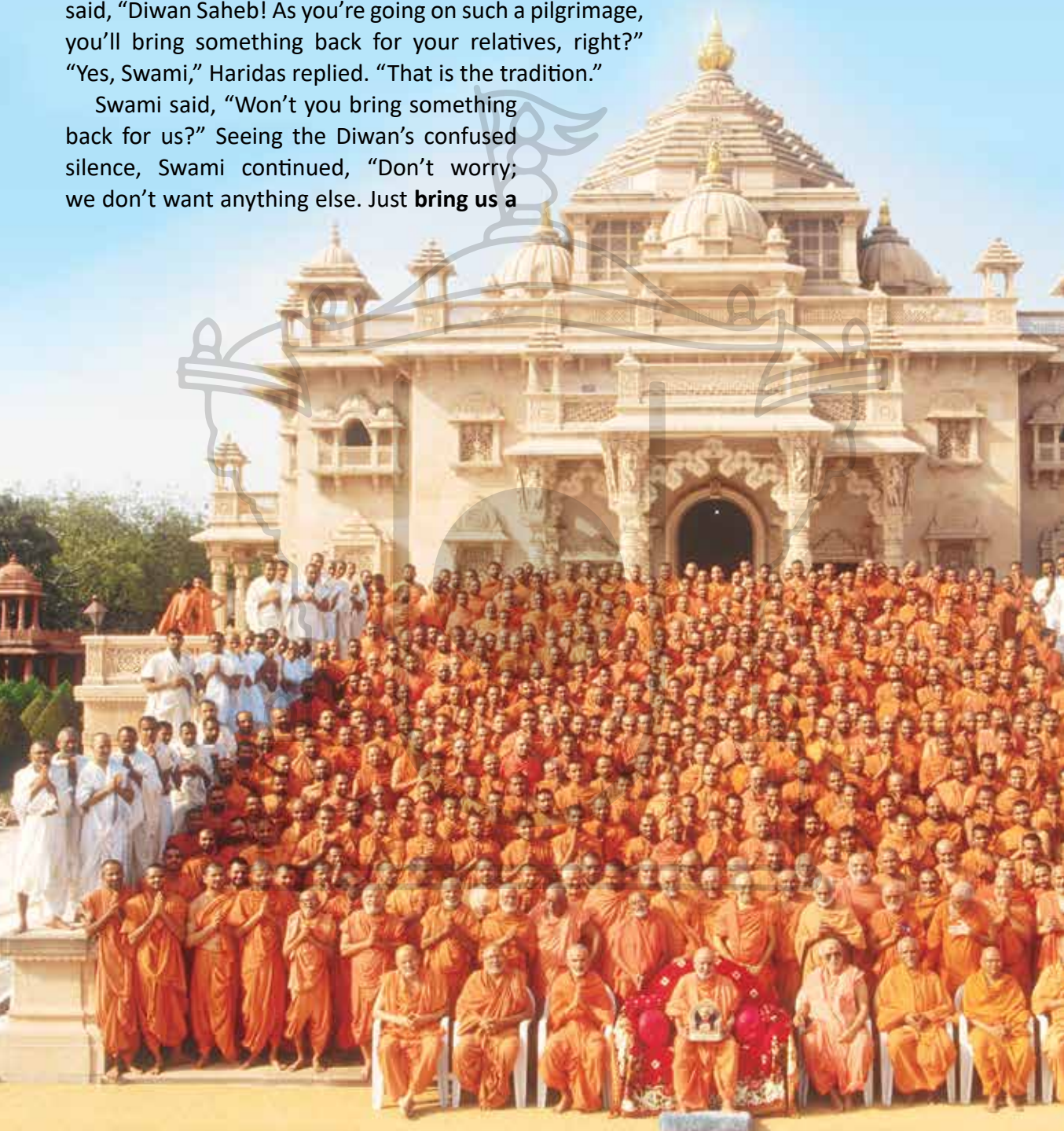
Yogiji Maharaj often said, "I treat everyone as *gunatit* and see Maharaj within them. So I feel overjoyed."



15. MAGIC IN KALI YUGA

Haridasji, Diwan of Junagadh, went on a pilgrimage to the four great *tirths* of Hinduism. Before beginning his pilgrimage he came to meet Gunatitanand Swami. Swami said, “Diwan Saheb! As you’re going on such a pilgrimage, you’ll bring something back for your relatives, right?” “Yes, Swami,” Haridas replied. “That is the tradition.”

Swami said, “Won’t you bring something back for us?” Seeing the Diwan’s confused silence, Swami continued, “Don’t worry; we don’t want anything else. Just bring us a





sadhu who has renounced wealth and women.”

“Swami, I’ll surely do that,” Haridas replied confidently.

After the **four month pilgrimage**, Haridas returned to Junagadh. Swami asked him, “Did you **bring our parcel?**”

“Swami! **Your gift is only found here in your home,**” the Diwan replied. “**I travelled to the four great pilgrim places, but I did not find a single sadhu who has completely renounced wealth and women.** Some gave amazing discourses, others practiced yoga, but none had renounced wealth and women.”

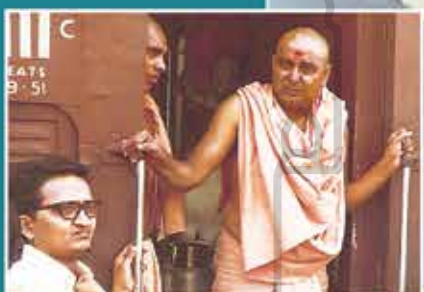
Sadhus who have completely renounced wealth and women are truly a signature of our Swaminarayan Sampradaya. This is **a miracle in Kali Yuga.** Today, when everyone is racing after worldly pleasures, **men in their 20’s**, the prime of their youth, are enthusiastically **becoming sadhus at the hands of the Gunatit Satpurush.** They give up their desires for worldly pleasure and ambitions for great careers. Instead, they choose the path to liberation and help others walk that path as well.

Yogiji Maharaj had said that Pramukh Swami Maharaj would initiate 700 sadhus. Today that wish has been fulfilled and there are more than 1000 sadhus in the BAPS.

■ INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT OUR SADHUS

- Our sadhus follow the **five vartmans** given to them by Bhagwan Swaminarayan – *nishkam*, *nirlobh*, *nisswad*, *nissneh* and *nirman*. This means they do not keep any type of contact with women. 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.
- Our sadhus always **wear orange robes** and shave their **heads once a month**.
- Many of our sadhus are **well-educated**. Some have studied to be doctors, engineers, chartered accountants, MBAs, pilots, lawyers, PhDs, teachers, etc. Many sadhus are **citizens** and residents of countries like America, England, Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Some sadhus are also the **only child** of their parents.
- Our sadhus are first given **training in Sarangpur**. After which **they selflessly serve God and the community in different mandirs according to the wish of Swamishri.**

Truly, such sadhus, who have renounced wealth and women, are one of Swamishri’s unique miracles!



16. LIVED FOR HIS DEVOTEES

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was travelling in **Devgadh Bariya** a village in the Panchmahal region of Gujarat. A **child of about four years named Shambhu** had come to visit from **Malav**, a neighbouring village. **"Bapa! Will you come to my house? Please come,"** he prayed to Swami. Swami placed his hand on Shambhu's head and said, "As soon as we have time, we'll come."

Shambhu was ecstatic and ran off. The next day, **Swamishri was in Rabod** village. Swami **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."

A sadhu who travelled that region said, "But Swami, **your health is not good** right now and the **road to Malav is very dusty and not paved.**"

Swami 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 o'clock** at night, **Swamishri's car arrived in Malav.** Shambhu was waiting there with this father Ashwinbhai Mistry. Seeing the **happy** boy, Swami said, "Let's go to your home!" Swami visited Shambhu's home.

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

■ ■ ■

In 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in **America**. Once, while putting on his **slippers** in **Philadelphia**, Swamishri's **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.

Swami 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.**" He **recommended that surgery be performed immediately.** However, **Swamishri refused.**

"We'll do the operation after returning to India," Swami 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.**"

In the end, the devotees and sadhus insisted and Swami relented. He agreed to the operation.

This was Pramukh Swami Maharaj! He made the devotees his life. To keep them happy, he ignored his body and any hardships. This is why our Satsang has flourished so much and devotees willingly gave their everything for him.



17. FIRM IN THE FIVE VARTMANS

■ NIRLOBH VARTMAN – HAVING NO GREED

10 December 1993. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in a train going from Anand to Mumbai. The ticketchecker checked 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."

Sitting across from Swami and the sadhus was a gentleman from Ghatkopar. He had heard Swami's name from his friends. "Let me have the honour of this seva," he said and 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 lead millions of dollars worth of social service projects; yet, he did not have even ₹50!

■ NISHKAM 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 English craftsman named Melvin had heard about our sadhus' rules 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 overheard his answer and said to the sadhu in Gujarati, "Not 60 years. We've been practicing this vow for 75 years." Why 75 years? Swami was then 75 years old. He was Aksharbrahman. The living form of God. He would have no desires for women in the past, present, or future. He was a pure being.

■ NIRMAN VARTMAN – HAVING NO EGO

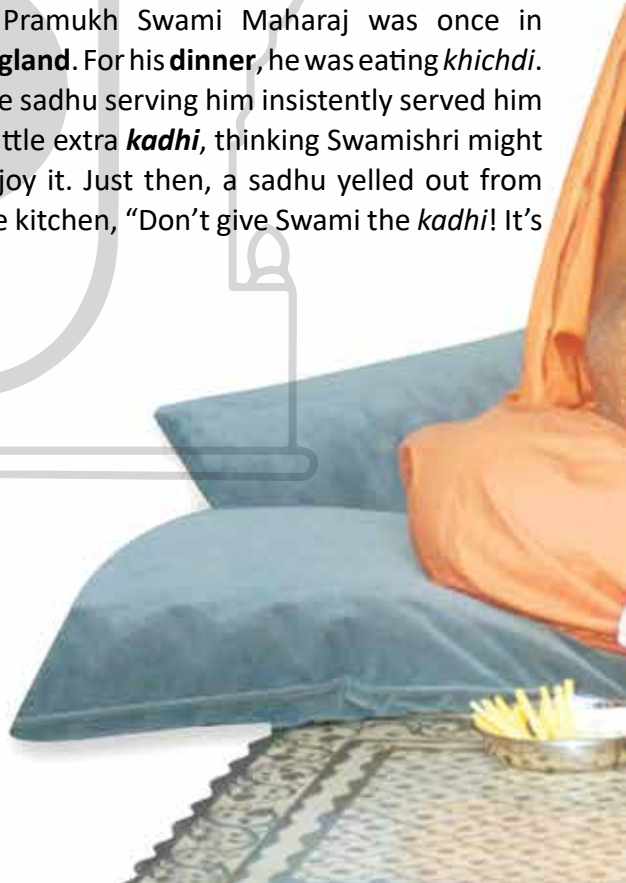
1985. A grand Suvarna Tula was held in Pramukh Swami Maharaj honour at QPR stadium in London. No guru in history had received an honour like this. The festival was celebrated with great fanfare.

The next day, in the afternoon, a man came to Swami. He had misunderstood something and so he began speaking rudely to Swami. Swami tolerated the man's insults and kept the devotees and sadhus nearby calm. When he 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 you saw him on the day of such an insult, Swamishri's face was exactly the same – he was not effected in any way.

■ NISSWAD VARTMAN – OVERCOMING TASTE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was once in England. For his dinner, he was eating *khichdi*. The sadhu serving him insistently served him a little extra *kadhi*, thinking Swamishri might enjoy it. Just then, a sadhu yelled out from the kitchen, "Don't give Swami the *kadhi*! It's



gone off and really **stinks!**" On inspection, the sadhu realized that **instead of yogurt**, they had mistakenly **used cream** to make the *kadhi*. It tasted horrible! Still **Swami hadn't said a word**. When asked why, Swami said, "Thakorji had already had it, so how could we complain?"

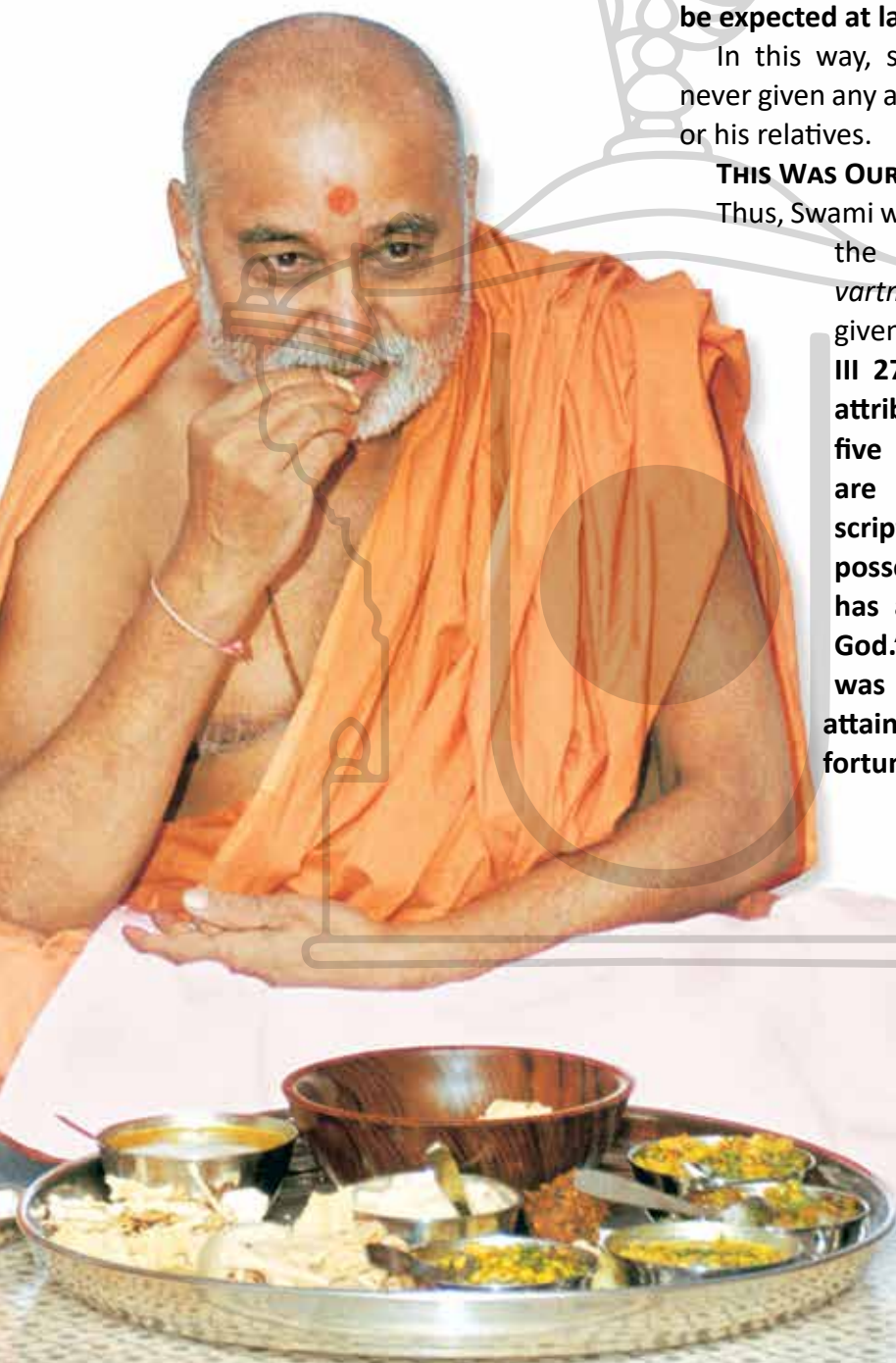
■ NISSNEH VARTMAN – LEAVING ALL WORLDLY RELATIONS

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. Changing the topic he said, "**That's to be expected at large festivals.**"

In this way, since his initiation, he had never given any attention to his native village or his relatives.

THIS WAS OUR SWAMI BAPA

Thus, Swami was forever firm in practicing the five principle vows or *vartmans* that Maharaj has given his sadhus. In **Gadhada III 27**, Maharaj has said, "The attributes of the Sant – [the five principle *vartmans*] – are also described in the scriptures. The Sant who possesses these attributes has a direct relationship with God." Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a Sant. That we had attained his satsang is our great fortune.

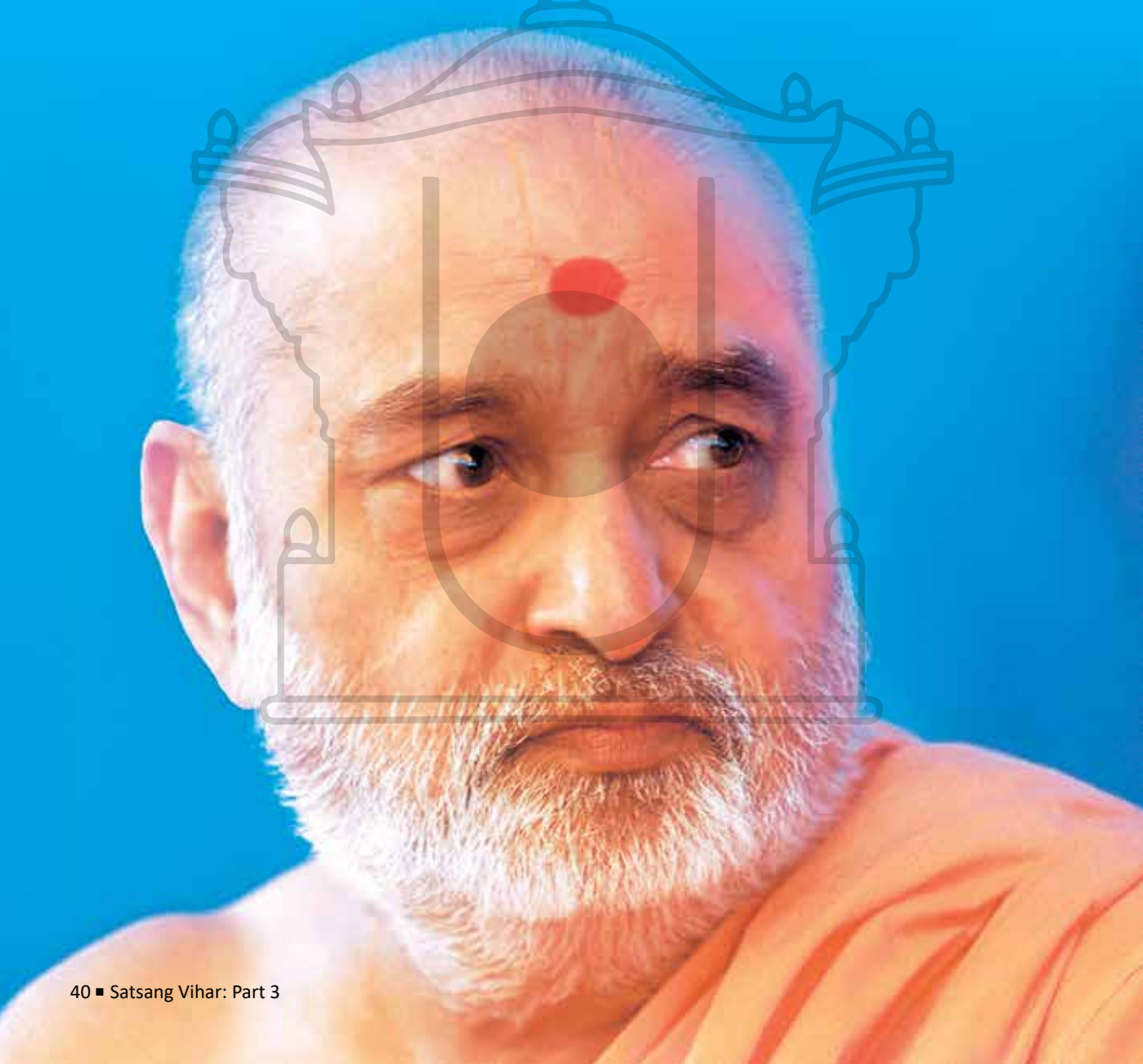


18. PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ: HIS LIFE AND WORK

1988. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in **Los Angeles, CA. Carlos Vega**, an **affluent** American, had come with a Hindu friend to meet Swami. In the few moments he spent with Swami he experienced profound divinity. He said, “Swamiji! Meeting you today, I’ve experienced **peace and calm for the first**

time.” After a pause, he continued, “**I have** a mansion, cars, money, fame, **everything – but peace.”**

Pramukh Swami Maharaj said in English, “I have God...No money; I have God.” Then in Gujarati, “**I have God with me and in that I have everything.”**



Truly, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** held **Bhagwan** within him. He was **Aksharbrahman**. He had **come to Earth** from Akshardham just to **grant us 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

■ **IMPORTANT DATES:**

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

■ **WORK. SWAMISHRI HAS:**

- 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 organization **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 good of others, lies our own.
- That which increases mutual love is religion.
- **Make faith and devotion firm in one's life.**
- To grow in self-control is true progress. **However much one follows the commands 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
(Bhagvat 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 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 now, what if someone asks you which *sampradaya* 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 special.

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

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

■ UPASANA – FOUR THINGS WE MUST BELIEVE

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

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

■ AGNA – EIGHT THINGS WE MUST DO

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

1. **Kanthi** – We should always wear a *kanthi* and accept Shriji Maharaj’s refuge.
2. **Puja & Panchang pranam** – Do *tilak-chandlo* and puja every day. Also, do *panchang pranam* to your parents every day.
3. **Bal sabha & Ghar sabha** – Go to *bal sabha* regularly and on time. Sit and 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. Stay away from addictions. Fast on Ekadashi by doing either a *falahari* fast, *sajala* fast (only water) or a *nirjala* fast (no food or water).

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

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

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

■ **What We Believe**

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

■ **THE PANCHTATTVA SONG**

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

■ **THE UPASANA SONG**

*Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane Purushottam...
Ātmā ne Parmātmā, Brahman ane Parabrahman...
Swāmi te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar-Purushottam upāsānā... (2)
Aksharrup thaine, Purushottamni,
Bhakti karvāni ā sādhanā...
Aksharrup -thavu etle Akshar jevā thavu,
Pragat Akshar Mahant Swāmi Mahārāj jevā thāvu...
Purushottamni bhakti etle prem Shrijimā karvo,
sarvopari sākār 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. ABSOLUTE LOYALTY

Vajiba was a devotee from the village of **Vijapur** in North Gujarat. She would always serve any travelling *bawas* or sadhus who visited the village. Once, *paramhansa* Ramdas Swami visited Vijapur. Seeing his saintly lifestyle, Vajiba and her husband became **staunch devotees** of Swaminarayan.

Now, if any *bawas* who smoked bidis or used opium or kept women **came**, Vajiba **would not let them stay** at her house. **Maharaj heard of this and decided to test her resolve. Dressed as a *brahmachari***, Maharaj visited Vajiba's house. "I am a pilgrim. Please **let me stay here for a night.**"

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

Maharaj said, "My lady, it seems that you have been fooled by someone. Swaminarayan is not God. He is..."

"Hey! Mind your tongue!" Vajiba interrupted. "If you say another word, I'll kick you and all of our rubbish to the middle of nowhere! **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 some **compassion** for the man. She went inside and let him stay on her porch.

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 was 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 refused. So Maharaj said, "There's a stack of mattresses **inside**. Please **give me the new one** in the middle."

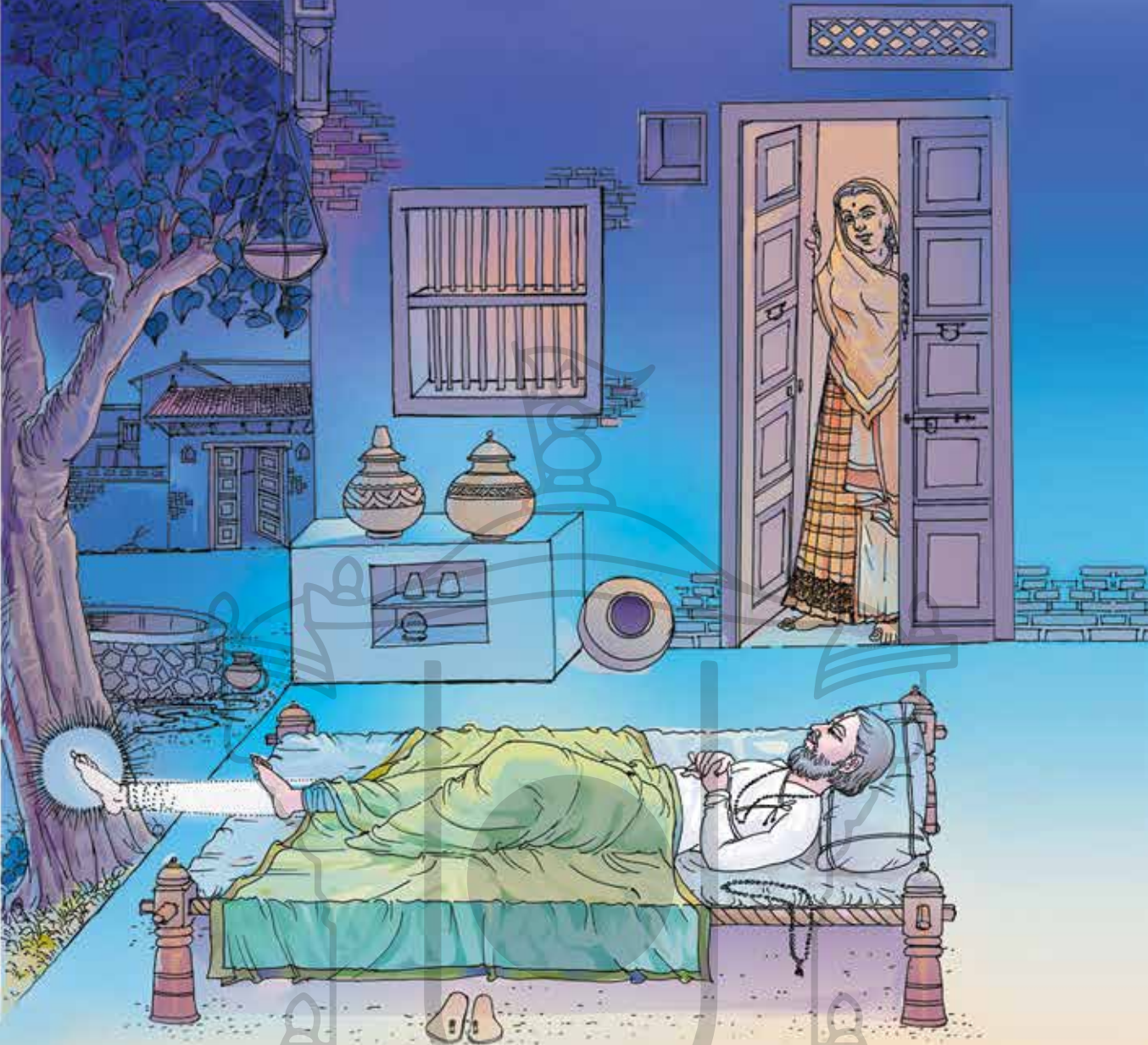
One after another, Maharaj, in the dress of a *brahmachari*, was showing **miracles** to Vajiba, **but her faith did not budge**. She gave him a mattress and went inside to sleep. Just then she saw a bright light. Hoping nothing had caught fire, she went out to check. She saw that the *brahmachari* (**Maharaj**) **had stretched his foot out all the way until it touched a distant pipal tree!** And there the bright light was coming from his toe! Now something as miraculous as this would attract 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 just such surrenderance



to God.

■ QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE KANTHI

1. Why wear the *kanthi*?

The *kanthi* is a **symbol of surrendering to God**. It symbolizes, "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 *brahmamuhurt*** (or first hours of the day) for it is a time when the **mind is fresh and peaceful**. Therefore, doing puja in the morning makes our **day more positive**.



2. WHY DO WE PERFORM PUJA FACING EAST OR NORTH?

The sun rises in the east bringing new life to all living things. As such, **the east** has come to **stand for life and progress**. **The north** is the reference direction for everything so it **stands for stability**. It is also the direction related to **liberation**.

3. WHY DO WE DO THE TILAK-CHANDLO?

Placing a **sandalwood** or **kumkum mark** in the centre of one's head (which is referred to as the **brahmarandhra**) is a way of respecting the knowledge and abilities God has given us.

Moreover, the *tilak-chandlo* is a **symbol of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya**. It is an auspicious mark which celebrates our attainment of God and the Satpurush. A uniform does not increase the strength of a police officer, but it does **remind him of his duty**. In the same way, the *tilak-chandlo* too is an ever-present reminder that we are Swaminarayan and we should not act inappropriately.

Sandalwood *tilak-chandlos* 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** there and that may we have only pure motives.

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

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

A *satsangi balak* in Jamnagar used to do his *tilak-chandlo* to school every day. His **teacher commanded** him **to stop**, but the *balak* did not stop. The **principal** of the school also **told him to stop**. The *balak* asked, "What if this mark was a birthmark?" The principal said, "Then there wouldn't be

a problem."

The boy replied, "Just believe this mark 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-chandlo*.

4. WHY ARE THERE 108 BEADS ON A MALA?

It is estimated that we take 21,600 breaths a day or **10,800 breaths** during the **12 hours** of daytime. A devotee wishes to chant God's name every breath. However, that is not possible amid all the work that one must also do. The **Manu Smriti** (a scripture on moral behaviour) states that doing one **upanshu jap** 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?

By 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 fact, when one reaches the **mer** (Sumeru) of one's *mala*, one does not cross but turns around and tells the *mala* again.

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

It is believed that different points in our body have connections and effects on other parts of our body. Compared to the other fingers, 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 THE GAUMUKHI?

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

8. TAPNI MALA

One **does the *tapni mala* with the sentiment: 'I want to attain God at any cost.'** We also remember that God, too, as **Nilkanth Varni**, performed **austerities (*tap*)** in Pulhashram for our benefit.

9. CIRCUMABULATIONS (PRADAKSHINAS)

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. PROSTRATIONS (DANDVATS)

A *dandvat* symbolizes **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. PRAYER

It **connects us with God** and is our chance to speak with him. It is **scientifically proven to decrease stress** and even **increase 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 join ourselves in these rituals with true faith and please Maharaj and Swami.



22. MAKING OUR HOMES MANDIRS

Using the Shikshapatri as our base, let us learn what an ideal *satsangi's* daily routine should be.

■ MORNING ROUTINE

- **Wake up** before sunrise and remember Maharaj and Swami.
- Use the **bathroom**, then **brush** one's 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 'Jai Swaminarayan' to everyone in the house.
- Offer **arti** and **thal** at your **ghar mandir** daily.
- Morning, noon, and night – whenever you eat, **eat** food offered to God and **say the shloka** first.

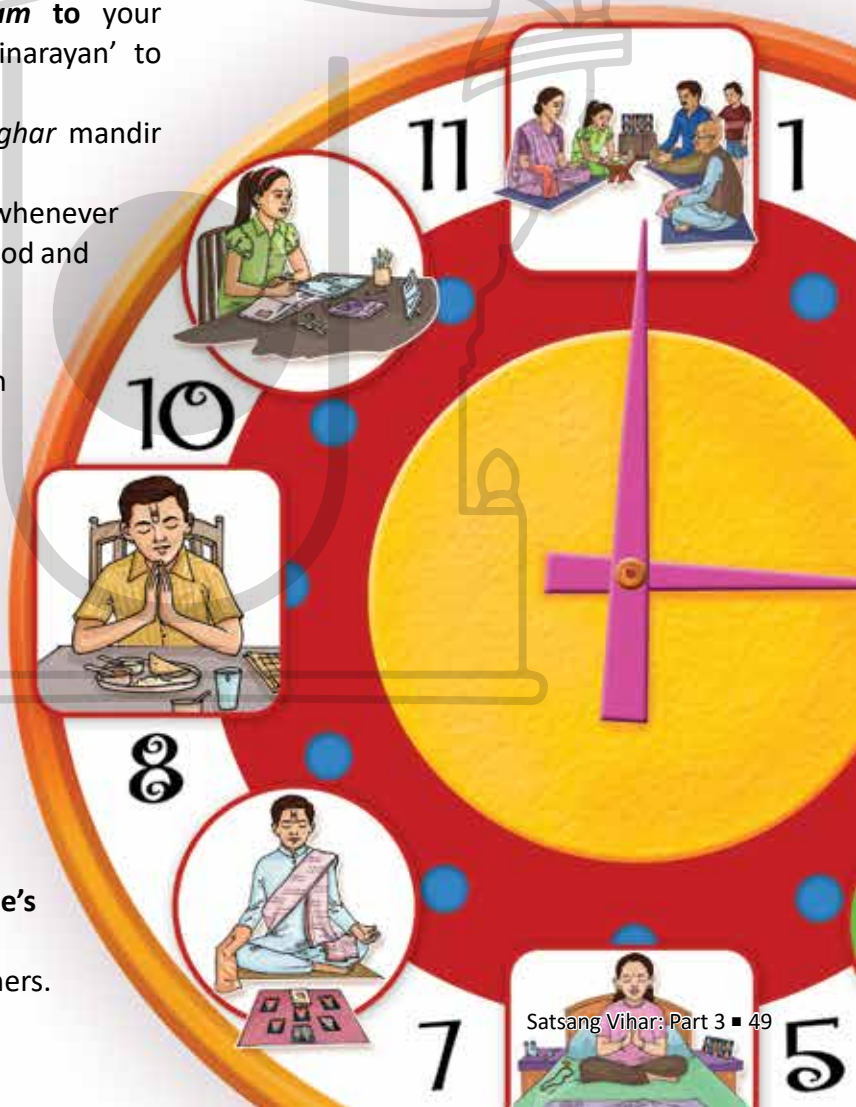
■ WORKING AND STUDYING

- There is a difference between how others work or study and how a *satsangi* should work or study. A *satsangi* **works and studies according to Maharaj and Swami'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 **work hard in one's life.**
- Always live amicably with 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 commands 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 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 *pravrutti*, 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

- To help one's family stay united and happy, to help solve any issues that the family may face, all *satsangis* should do ***ghar sabha* every day – or at least twice a week.**
- 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 every issue 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 be dedicated to having at least **one meal together every day.**
- One should respect each other in one's family.
- The ***ghar mandir*** should be neat and **clean.**
- The house 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 the Bald**. 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, "Brothers, bring the **cows back to their cowshed.**"

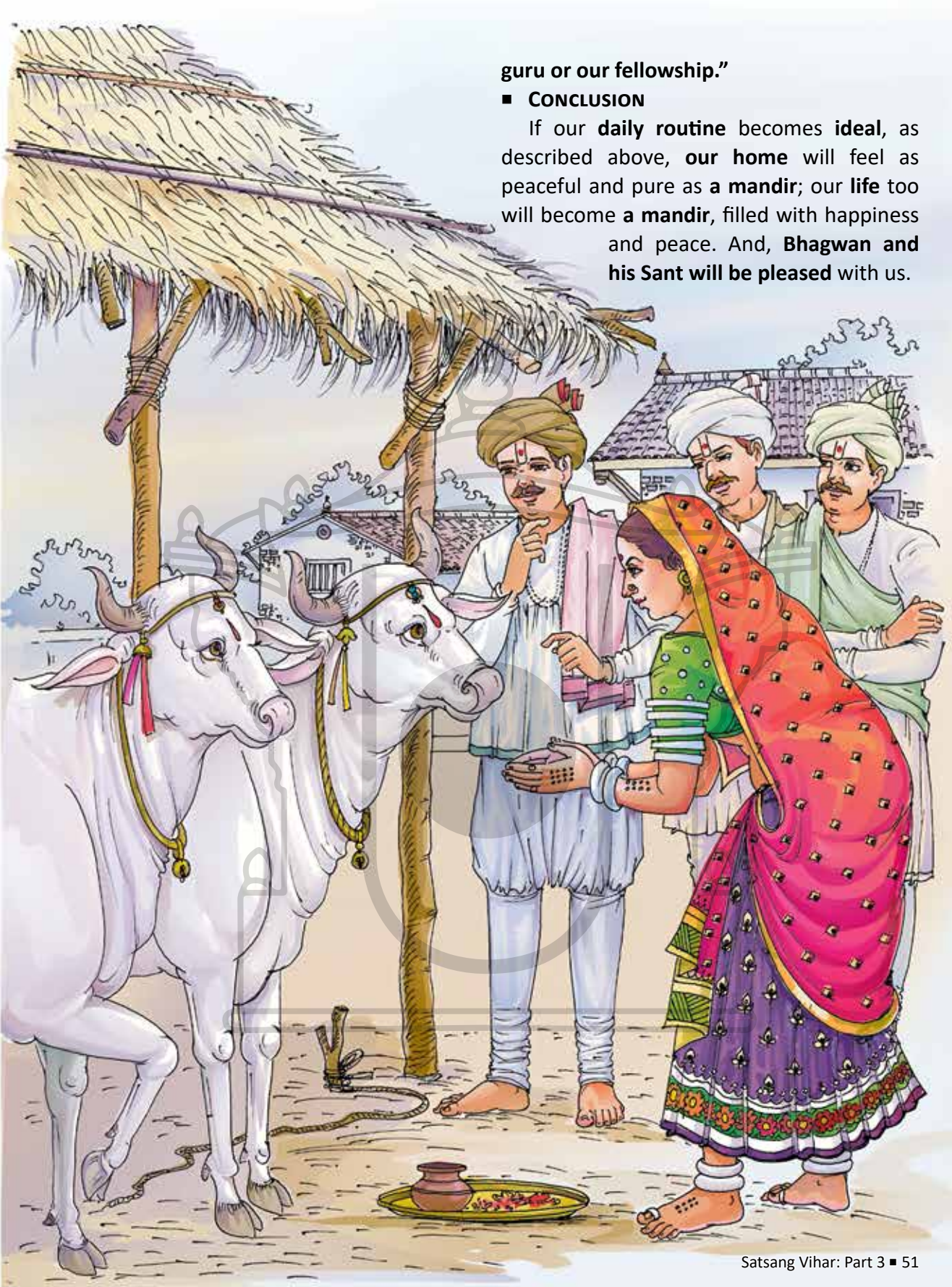
Back at the cowshed, the lady did *pujan* of the cows and lovingly stroked the cows' heads and backs. Then bowing down to the cows, she said, "My dear cows, don't hurt anyone with your horns, tails or feet. Let your owners milk you at their time. And keep the honour of your herd."

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 A SINGLE SABHA

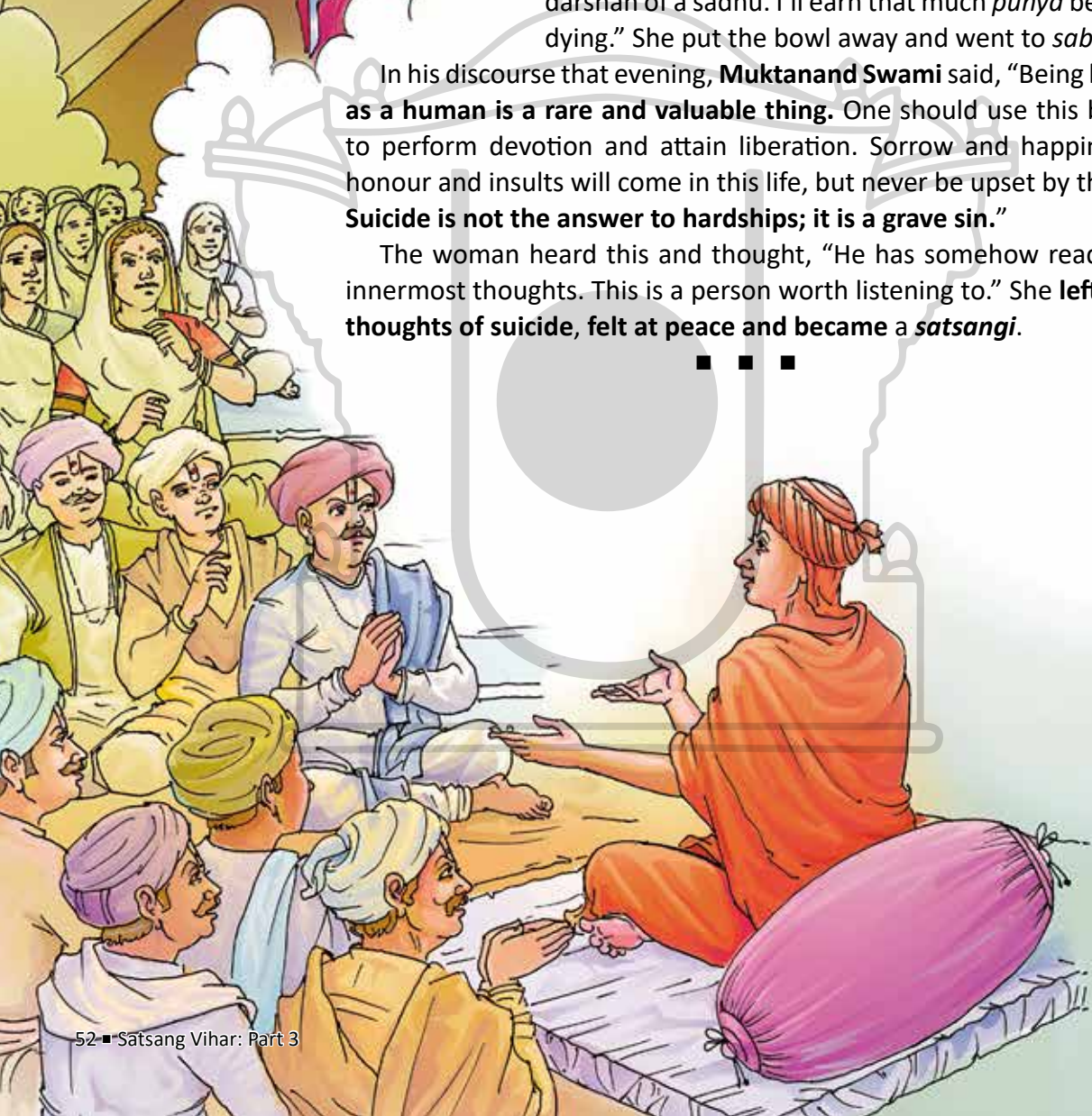
The **daughter of a *darbar*** from **Kankot** became a **widow**. When she returned to her father's home, her **sisters-in-law** constantly **insulted** her. Tired of having to hear the abuse, the woman **decided to commit suicide**. She prepared a shallow bowl full of opium to take at once. But just as she was about to drink it, she heard **her friend call out for her**.

Muktanand Swami was in town giving discourses and her friend wanted her to **join her for the *katha***. The woman thought, "Let me go and have the darshan of a sadhu. I'll earn that much *punya* before dying." She put the bowl away and went to *sabha*.

In his discourse that evening, **Muktanand Swami** said, "Being **born as a human is a rare and valuable thing**. One should use this body to perform devotion and attain liberation. Sorrow and happiness, honour and insults will come in this life, but never be upset by them. **Suicide is not the answer to hardships; it is a grave sin.**"

The woman heard this and thought, "He has somehow read my innermost thoughts. This is a person worth listening to." She **left her thoughts of suicide, felt at peace and became a *satsangi***.

■ ■ ■



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

Gopalanand Swami knew what was to happen in 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** of this world's temporariness and of God being the all-doer. On the seventh day, Gopalanand Swami gave him **a note**. The note had come to Swami a few days ago. In the note 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 down the *haveli*** in my heart. If that had not happened, I would have burned to death with that *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 sabha* or *ghar sabha***. And when we grow up we should always attend ***yuva sabha* and *satsang sabha***.



24. EKADASHI OF THE INDRIYAS

Dungar Bhakta (young Shastriji Maharaj) was visiting **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 quite 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 eat.” One after another everyone tried to convince Dungar to eat but Dungar **was firm in his decision**.

Finally the adults gave in. They ordered special *farali* 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**.

No matter the occasion, no matter the pressure, Ekadashi must be observed. He would never give up on his vow.

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

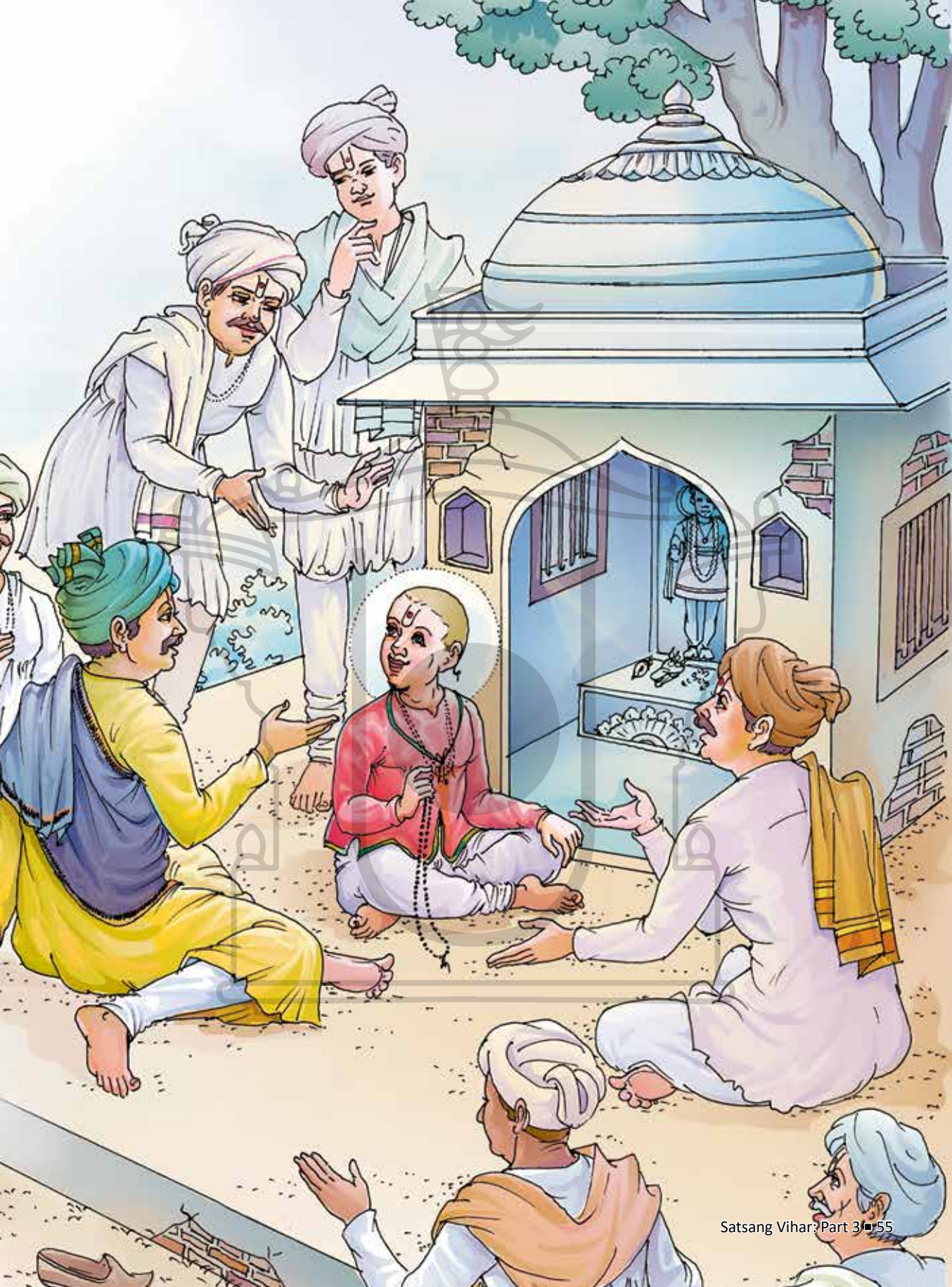
■ EKADASHI OF THE INDRIYAS

- 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 does not please him.”

- Here the ‘eleven *indriyas*’ refer to our senses and the mind. In the Vachanamrut, Maharaj believes that lacking **control** over our senses and mind is equal to living like an animal.
- 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 against our vows. We should not smell inappropriate things with our nose and should not act or speak inappropriately with our hands, feet or 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*.**
- Thus, 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. Sitting in the centre of the town, under a neem tree, was a man named **Ramo Hati** – a man filled with every vice.

“Ramo!” Swami called out. “**Will 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 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.” He took the vows of **Satsang** and became a *satsangi*.

■ WHY SHOULDN’T WE EAT MEAT?

- It is **cruel** and also a **sin** to kill animals.
- **A human body is not physically suited to consuming meat.**
- **Science accepts** that a carnivorous lifestyle increases the chances for many diseases – including certain types of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, kidney and **liver issues** and **digestive illnesses**.
- **It is a myth that one can only be strong if one eats meat.** Many herbivore 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 had said**, “Many parents and doctors feed children eggs in the belief that the children 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; they too have life in them.**

- Beans, fruits and grains contain much more protein and essential nutrients.

■ ■ ■

Once, a *sabha* was in **progress at a village square**. **Gunatitanand Swami** said, “We will give **one cart full of millet** to whoever **gives up their addiction** 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 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, bidis, cigarretes, other drugs, etc.
- People get pulled into addictions because of tension, stress, peer pressure, social status, or even

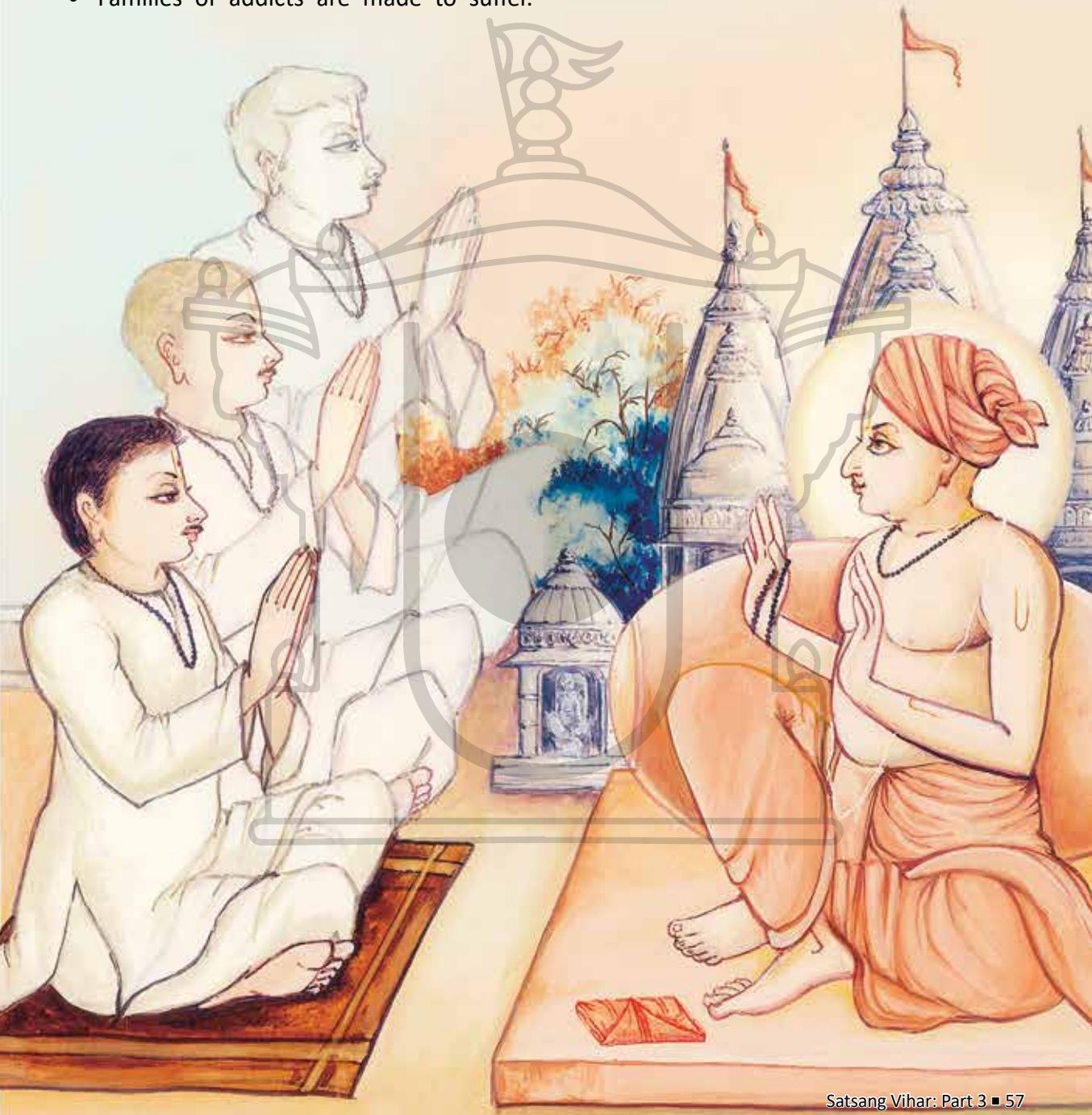
the blind imitation of famous people. Once they've started, they are not able to stop.

- Every **year 5,000,000** people in the world **die** from addiction to tobacco alone.
- **Every part of the body is affected** or damaged by addictions.
- Families of addicts are made to suffer.

Women are left as **widows**; **children** become **orphans**; **families are torn apart**.

■ **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- **We should avoid the company of people who eat meat, have addictions or gamble.**
- **If possible, we should inspire them to live pure lives without those vices.**



26. HAVE MERCY ON US

While **Shriji Maharaj** was in **Kutch-Bhuj**, devotees from faraway villages still came for **darshan**. One such group of devotees came to ask 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, please, have mercy on me.**"

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

"Why have you returned?" Maharaj asked them.

"Maharaj, why did you ask us to have mercy on you? You are supposed to have compassion 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. We stay in your hearts. **So please keep your hearts clean and pure**. If your hearts are full of vices, we won't be able to stay there. We like to live in your pure hearts. So, have mercy on us and keep your hearts clean."

The devotees were stunned as they heard Maharaj's explanation. 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 commit adultery. 5. Never stray from righteousness and never lead others to stray from righteousness.**
2. **Stay away from bad company** – bad books, bad friends, etc.
3. **Abstain from watching TV and movies.** Never use the TV, internet or your mobile phone in inappropriate ways.
4. **Never break the male-female etiquette (*stri-purush maryada*)** given by Maharaj and Swami. All *balaks* should think of all women as their mothers and sisters. All *balikas* should think of all men as their fathers and brothers. Having boyfriends and girlfriends, dating, chatting, and dancing with the opposite gender do not have a place in our culture.
5. Avoid **negative talks**, talks of other people's flaws and **thoughts of doing harm to others.**
6. **Do satsang regularly.** Attend satsang *sabha*. Do *ghar sabha*.







27. READ AND REAP RAJIPO

There was a small *balak* who lived in Anand. He learned from *bal sabha* that to gain depth in Satsang one must read Satsang books. This message really struck a chord in his heart. He made it **his mission to read all the Satsang books**.

Now, he became **regular** in going to

sleep and waking up on time. He was focused at school, in tuition classes and in his homework, and continued to be **first in his class**. But, as soon as he **got time** away from those activities, he would **begin to read** Satsang books. He played a little each day as well. But he always made time to



read. On **Sundays and vacation days**, he was ecstatic. He would **read for hours at a time**. Wherever he went, he always 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 **16 today**, his **journey of reading still continues**. Because of his reading, his Satsang knowledge has increased and so has his **ability to speak** well in front of others. His **memory, analysis and comprehension** have all **improved**.

■ **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ HAD SAID:**

- "Each **satsangi** must read one **Vachanamrut** and five **Swamini Vatos** every day. We take many other vows, but this is the ultimate vow."
- "If **we are on a stretcher** and not able to even get up, **still** we should give the **Satsang Exams**."
- "If **we have Satsang knowledge**, then 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 **stay satsangi for life**."
- Swami didn't just say these words. He lived them. Despite being our guru and in charge of such a large organization, during his meals, during his walking, or on his own, he read or listened to countless Satsang books, many times over.

■ **LET'S DO THIS MUCH**

To please our guru, we must do the following:

1. Read one Vachanamrut and five Swamini Vatos 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 should **listen to Satsang audiobooks**.
4. **We should** study the 'Satsang Vihar' books and **give** the Bal Satsang **exams**, and we should **memorize** and regularly revise the 'Bal Sabha' booklet.

28. DON'T MISS THE HONOUR OF GIVING

A devotee of Surat was not financially very well off. However, he **decided** with his wife that they wanted to give **10% of their income** for the **construction of the shikharbadha mandir** in Surat. The two made a small **donation jar** and began their adventure of giving.

They had a **business of selling khamans** to different workshops. Every day they would wake up early to make the *khamans* for the day and then fill a large vessel with all they had made. Then they would push the cart with their *khamans* to all the local workshops to sell the *khamans*. At the end of the day they would **come back home** and they would count out **10% of their earnings** for the day and **place it** in their **donation jar**. If one of them forgot, the other would remind him/her to make sure the money was put in the jar.

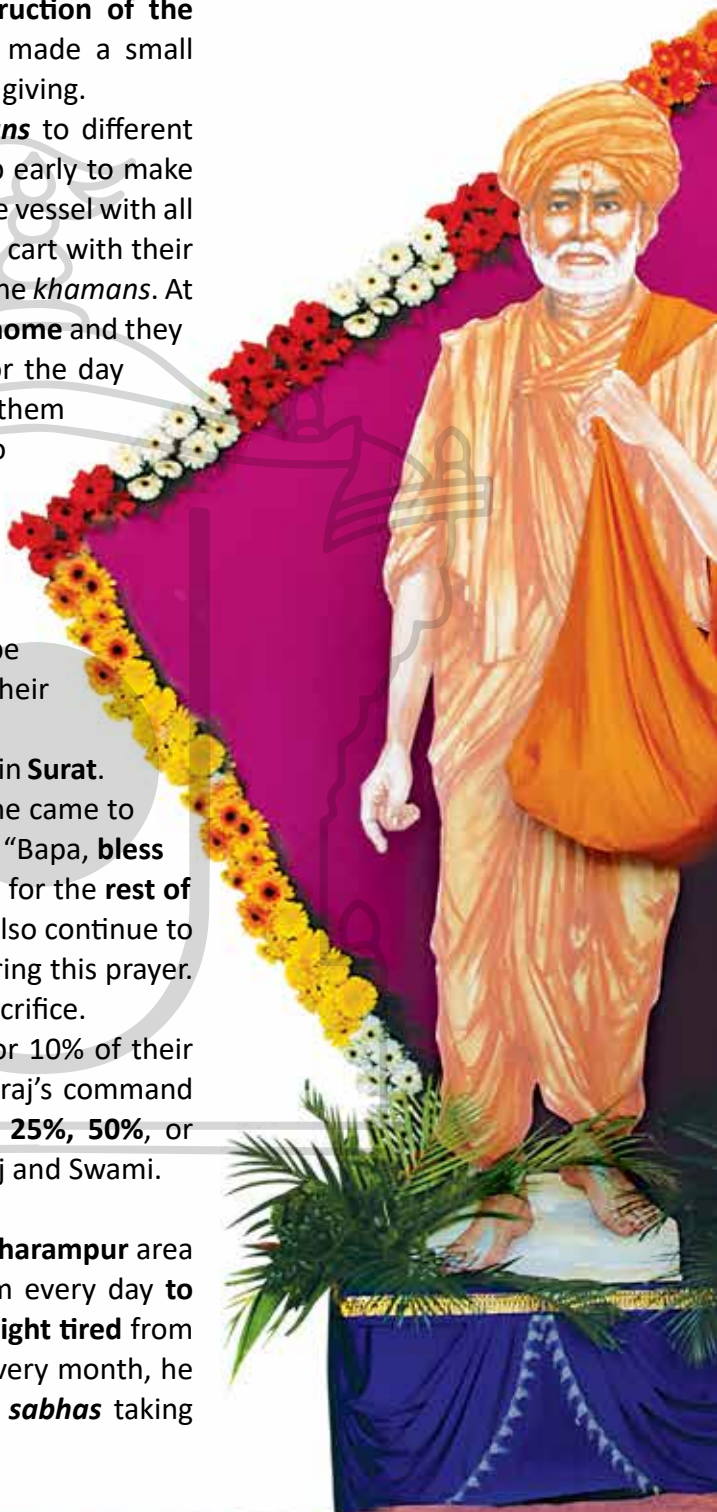
Slowly, their **financial status improved**. They were able to buy a two-storey home just from their business of selling *khamans*. Today, they might not be millionaires, but in their **hearts and in their home**, there is a steady **flow of peace**.

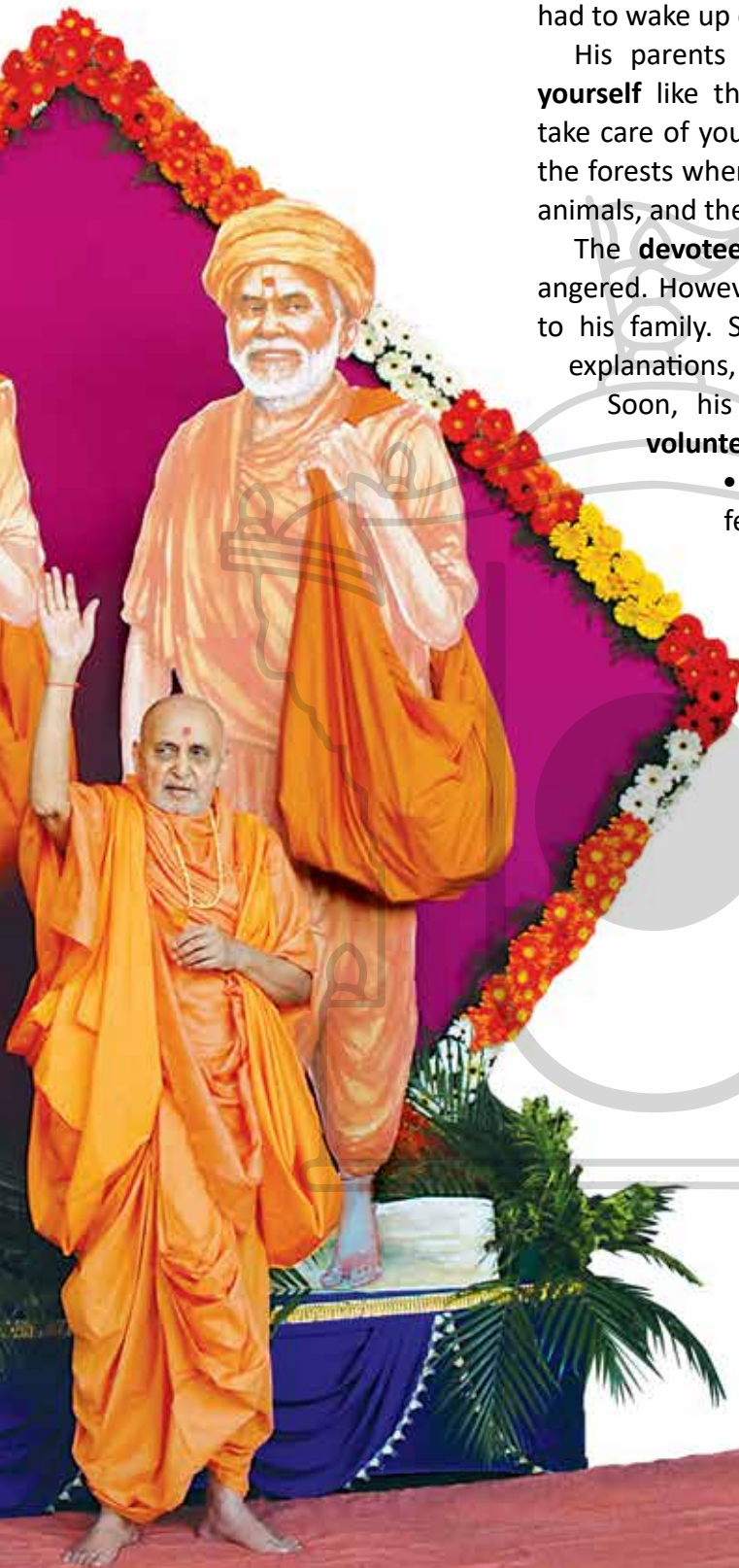
Once, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** arrived in **Surat**. **This devotee was honoured on stage**. As he came to Swami to **receive his blessings**, he prayed, “Bapa, **bless us** that we may regularly **give 10%** like this for the **rest of our lives** and may our future generations also continue to give 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 incomes as **dharmado** according to Maharaj's command in the Shikshapatri. However, **some give 25%, 50%**, or even more to gain the blessings of Maharaj and Swami.

■ DHARMADO OF TIME

There was a **devotee** who lived in the **Dharampur** area of South Gujarat. He would travel 160 km every day **to work in Surat**. He would **return home at night tired** from his hard day's work. Still, 20 days out of every month, he would go to make **visits to the different sabhas** taking





place in the Dharampur region. These visits would have him travelling 70-80 km 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? You should also take care of your body and our family. Plus, we live in the forests where there are leopards, other dangerous animals, and there is the fear of bandits.”

The **devotee** would listen quietly and never be angered. However, he did slowly **try to explain** things to his family. Seeing his faith, pure life, and loving explanations, his family slowly began to understand.

Soon, his father and his **wife** became active **volunteers** as well.

- Today, **more than 25,000** male and female **volunteers** donate their time to the children’s, youth, *satsang*, and women’s *sabhas*. And more than 55,000 volunteers give their times to service. **Pramukh Swami Maharaj had said**, “**These volunteers are sadhus in white clothes. The fruit of this 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 in Satang. Then, God will be pleased.”

Our devotees never fall back in sacrificing body, mind and wealth for Satsang. We, too, should strive to be such dedicated devotees and please Maharaj and Swami.

29. ATTACHMENT TO GOD

In Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj announced the beginning of a **new vow** for all his sadhus to follow. Fearing he would not be able to follow the vow, a **paramhansa** named **Hiradas left Satsang to live** as a solitary sadhu.

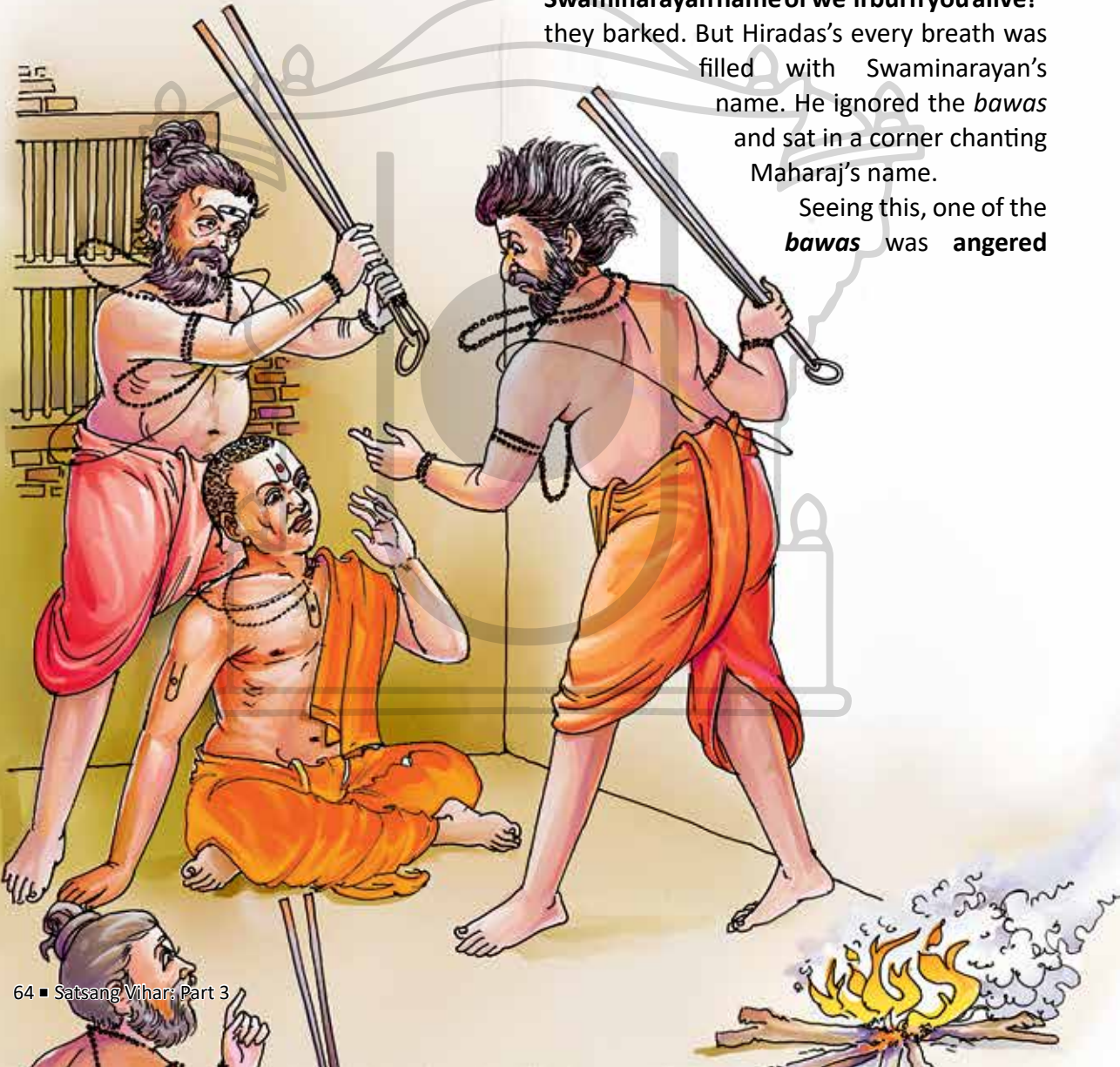
However, his faith in Shriji Maharaj was **firm in his soul**. Though he had left Satsang, he followed the rules of celibacy, spent his time in devotion, and travelled the villages

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** of the village. Other **bawas** were staying at the Ramji Mandir as well. Seeing Hiradas's orange clothes, they asked, "Hey, whose sadhu are you?" "Swaminarayan's," Hiradas replied.

As soon as they heard 'Swaminarayan', the **bawas** were enraged. "**Give up the Swaminarayan name or we'll burn you alive!**" they barked. But Hiradas's every breath was filled with Swaminarayan's name. He ignored the **bawas** and sat in a corner chanting Maharaj's name.

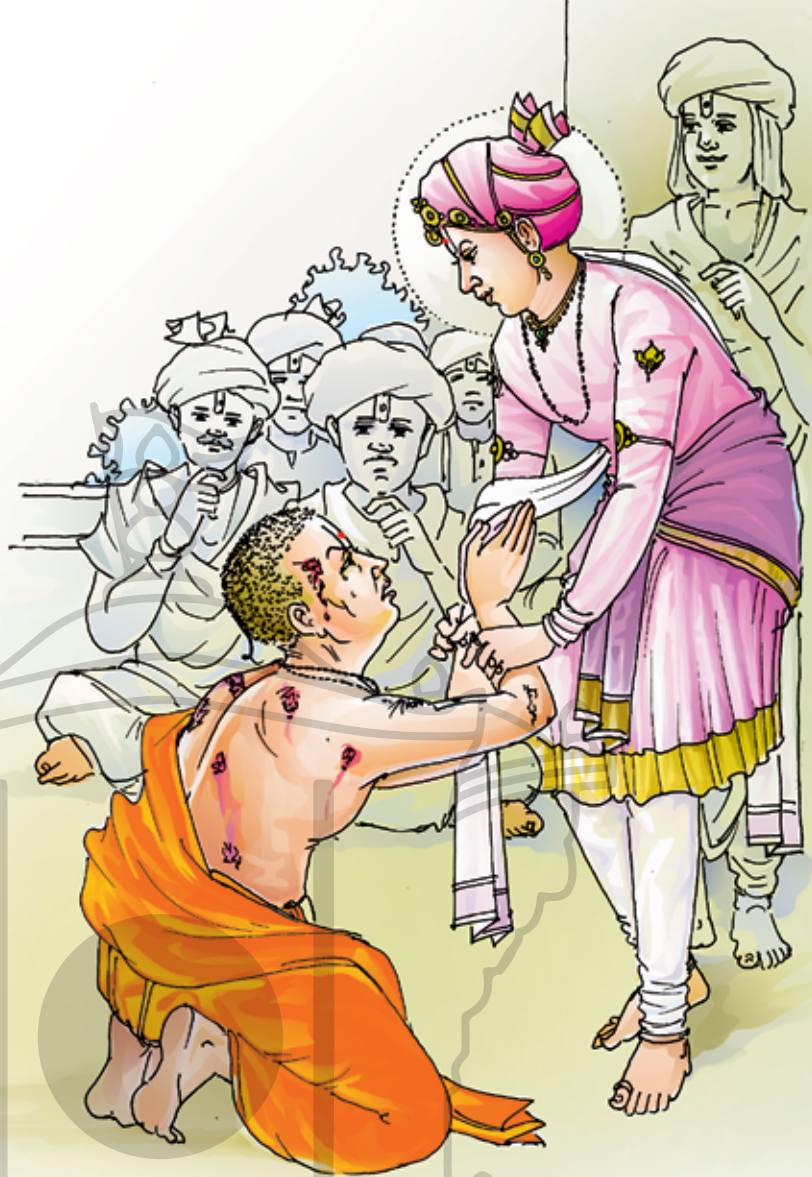
Seeing this, one of the **bawas** was **angered**



even more. He yelled out again, "Ay! Give up his name or I'll burn you this instant!" And with that he went to the fire nearby and pulled out scalding hot tongs. Hiradas was still chanting Maharaj's name. The *bawas* began burning and beating Hiradas with red hot tongs. As the pain increased, Hiradas's chanting grew louder and the beatings those *bawas* gave him increased as well. The *bawas* beat Hiradas until they were tired. Then, seeing his bloody and unconscious body, they took him for dead and went away.

In a few days, Hiradas returned to Gadhada. A *sabha* was going on. Hiradas went and fell at Maharaj's feet. "Either remove my faith in you or accept me back into Satsang," he pleaded with tears in his eyes. Maharaj asked Hiradas what had happened and he told Maharaj everything. Hearing his tale, Maharaj's eyes filled with emotion.

Holding him by his arms, Maharaj raised Hiradas and Hiradas's upper cloth (*gatariyu*) slid off. The whole assembly saw Hiradas's bloodied back and torso. In some places, pieces of flesh had been torn out. Compassionate Shri Hari sat next to him. He gently moved his hand over Hiradas's body, blessing him. "Have Hiradas's bed made next to mine in the Akshar Ordhi. I, myself, will serve him. These wounds are not on Hiradas's body, they are on my body.



Even though his life was at stake, this sadhu did not abandon my name; now we will not abandon him."

Such were Maharaj's paramhansas! Their faith was bound to their soul. They would die but they would not give up their faith. This is called attachment to God. If we have such attachment to God and his Sant, then we can be said to have true satsang.

30. UNWAVERING IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP

A devotee named **Viro Sheladiyo** lived in the village of **Mitiyala**. The **Darbar of the village, Hado Khuman**, was **against Satsang**. Once, when Viro went to Gadhada with his family, the Darbar had a few men **burn down Viro's house**. When Viro returned from Gadhada, Hado Khuman smirked, "See Vira! What did you gain becoming Swaminarayan 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."

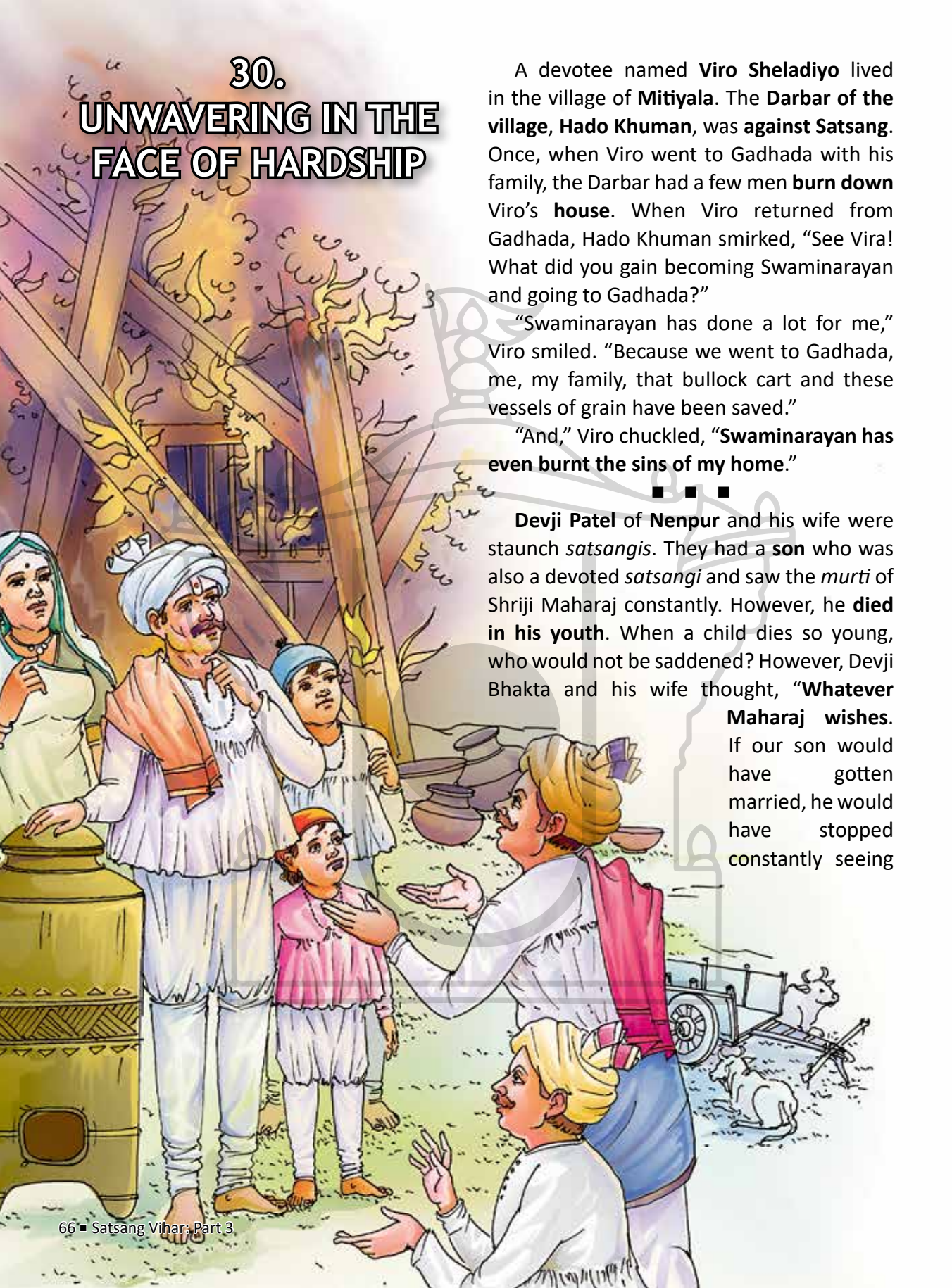
"And," Viro chuckled, "**Swaminarayan has even burnt the sins of my home.**"

■ ■ ■

Devji Patel of **Nenpur** and his wife were staunch *satsangis*. They had a **son** who was also a devoted *satsangi* and saw the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj constantly. However, he **died in his youth**. When a child dies so young, who would not be saddened? However, Devji Bhakta and his wife thought, "**Whatever**

Maharaj wishes.

If our son would have gotten married, he would have stopped constantly seeing



Maharaj's *murti*. Instead, Maharaj took him in his eternal service in Akshardham."

Hearing the news of their son's passing, their relatives came to grieve and cry. **Devji Bhakta said to his wife**, "If we stay here, our relatives will come here and cry and not let us worship God in peace. So, **I'm going to the farm and you take this pot of ghee and go to Shriji Maharaj.**"

When she reached **Gadhada**, Maharaj was sitting on the patio. Devji Bhakta's wife placed the pot of ghee on the ground and bowed down to Maharaj. Omniscient **Maharaj** knew everything, yet he asked her, "I hope **Patel is doing well.**" She replied enthusiastically, "Maharaj! **Patel has always been well, but now he is even happier.**" And then she narrated all that had happened in their home.

Hearing her story, **Maharaj** said, "**Look at Devji Bhakta's understanding!** His youthful son has passed away and yet he feels no grief." Everyone listening in the *sabha* mentally bowed to Devji Bhakta and his wife for their deep understanding of Satsang.

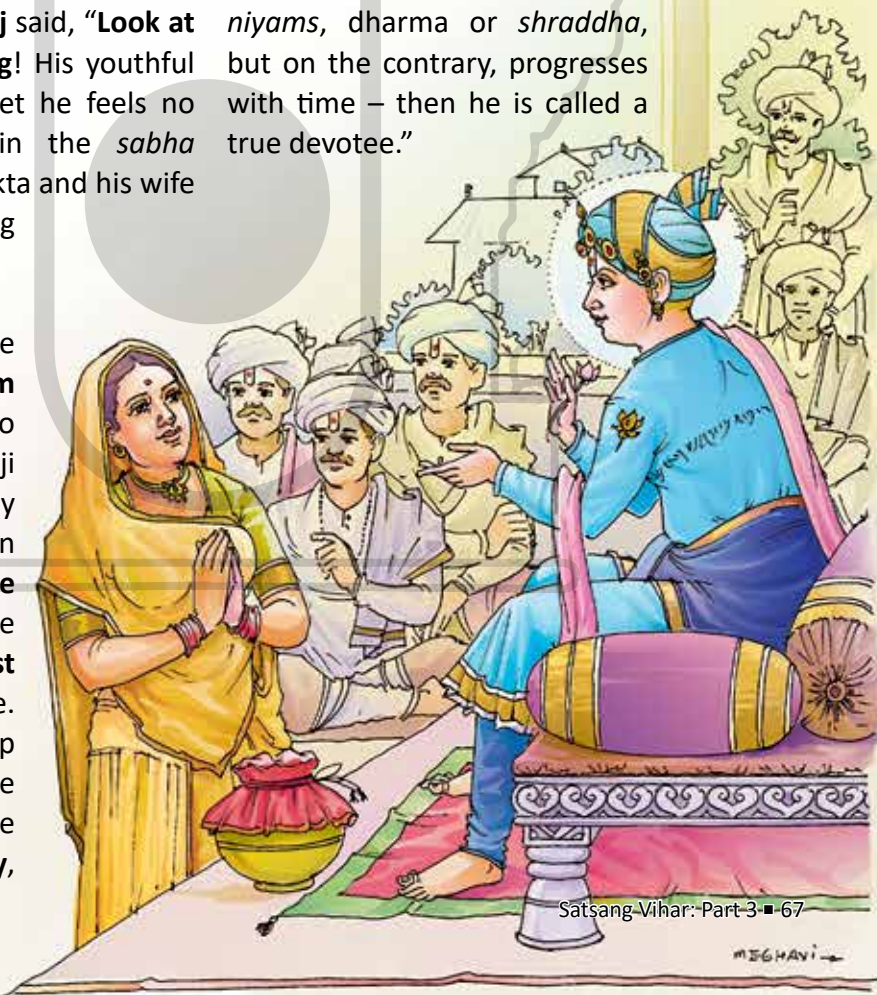
■ ■ ■

A **Kadva Patel** devotee of **Gotheeb** was **blind from birth**. However, he used to always see the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. Once he fell severely ill. He would get **cramps** in his **stomach** that would **make him scream**. Yet, the devotee used to say, "Oh Maharaj! **Test this Kadvo** as much as you like. Give me as much hardship as you wish. I know you are standing there watching me so this **Kadvo** will **never say**,

'Save me from this hardship.'"

Such were the devotees of Shriji Maharaj. No matter what hardships came there way, they never let it affect their satsang. Whether they suffered in business, were stricken by illness, or had members of their family pass away. They had just one thought, "Whatever Maharaj wishes. Whatever he does is for our betterment." If we have such understanding, our satsang will remain firm throughout our lives.

Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 25: "If some prolonged illness were to overtake a person's body, or if he receives neither food to eat nor any clothes to wear; in fact, regardless of the extent of pain or pleasure that come his way, if he still does not regress even slightly from the worship and bhakti of God, *niyams*, dharma or *shraddha*, but on the contrary, progresses with time – then he is called a true devotee."

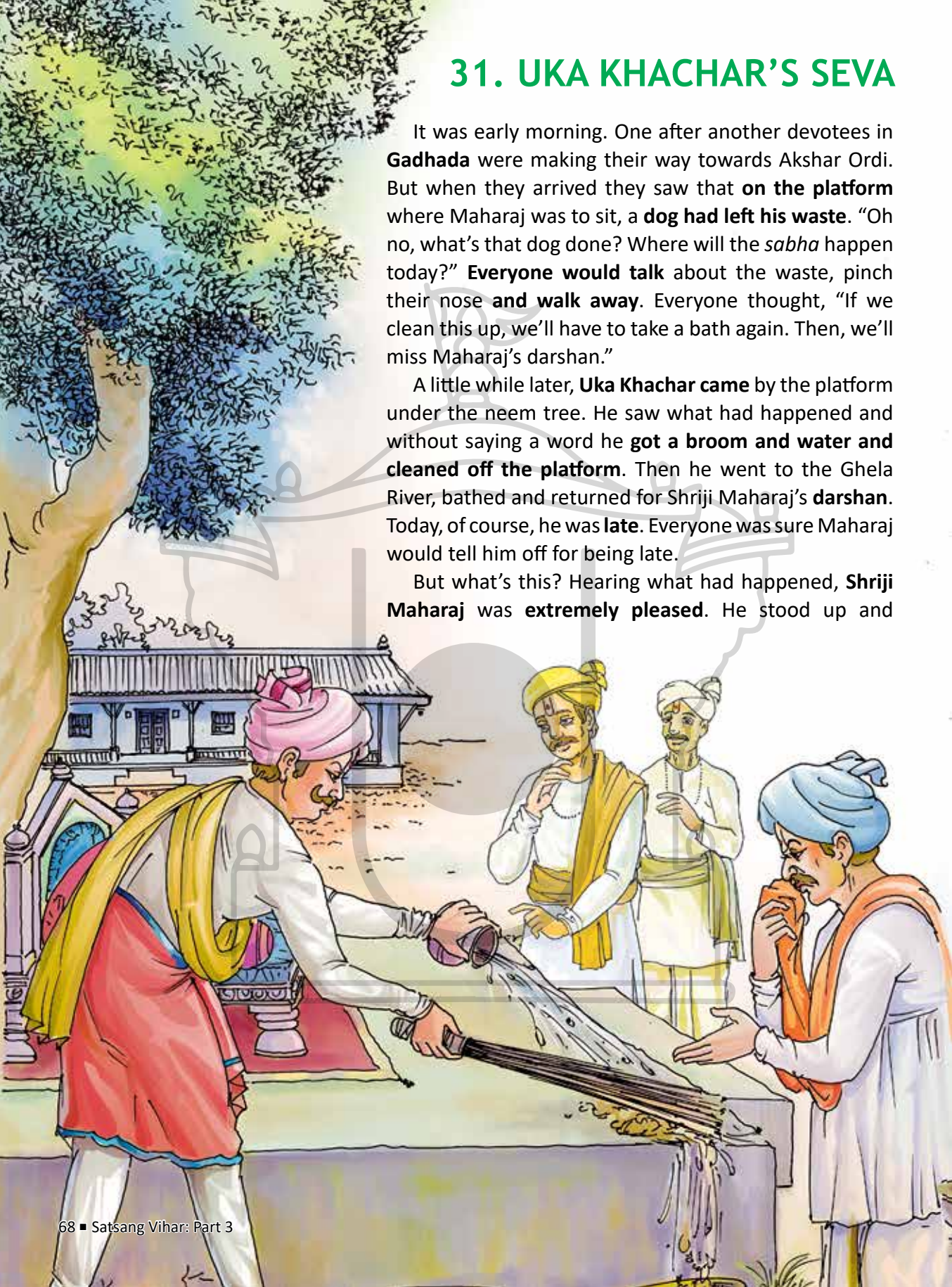


31. UKA KHACHAR'S SEVA

It was early morning. One after another devotees in **Gadhada** were making their way towards Akshar Ordi. But when they arrived they saw that **on the platform** where Maharaj was to sit, a **dog had left his waste**. "Oh no, what's that dog done? Where will the *sabha* happen today?" **Everyone would talk** about the waste, pinch their nose **and walk away**. Everyone thought, "If we clean this up, we'll have to take a bath again. Then, we'll miss Maharaj's darshan."

A little while later, **Uka Khachar came** by the 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's this? Hearing what had 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. "You did not do the *seva*. However, only one who **truly understands God's glory can do such a lowly service**. Uka Khachar is our true servant."

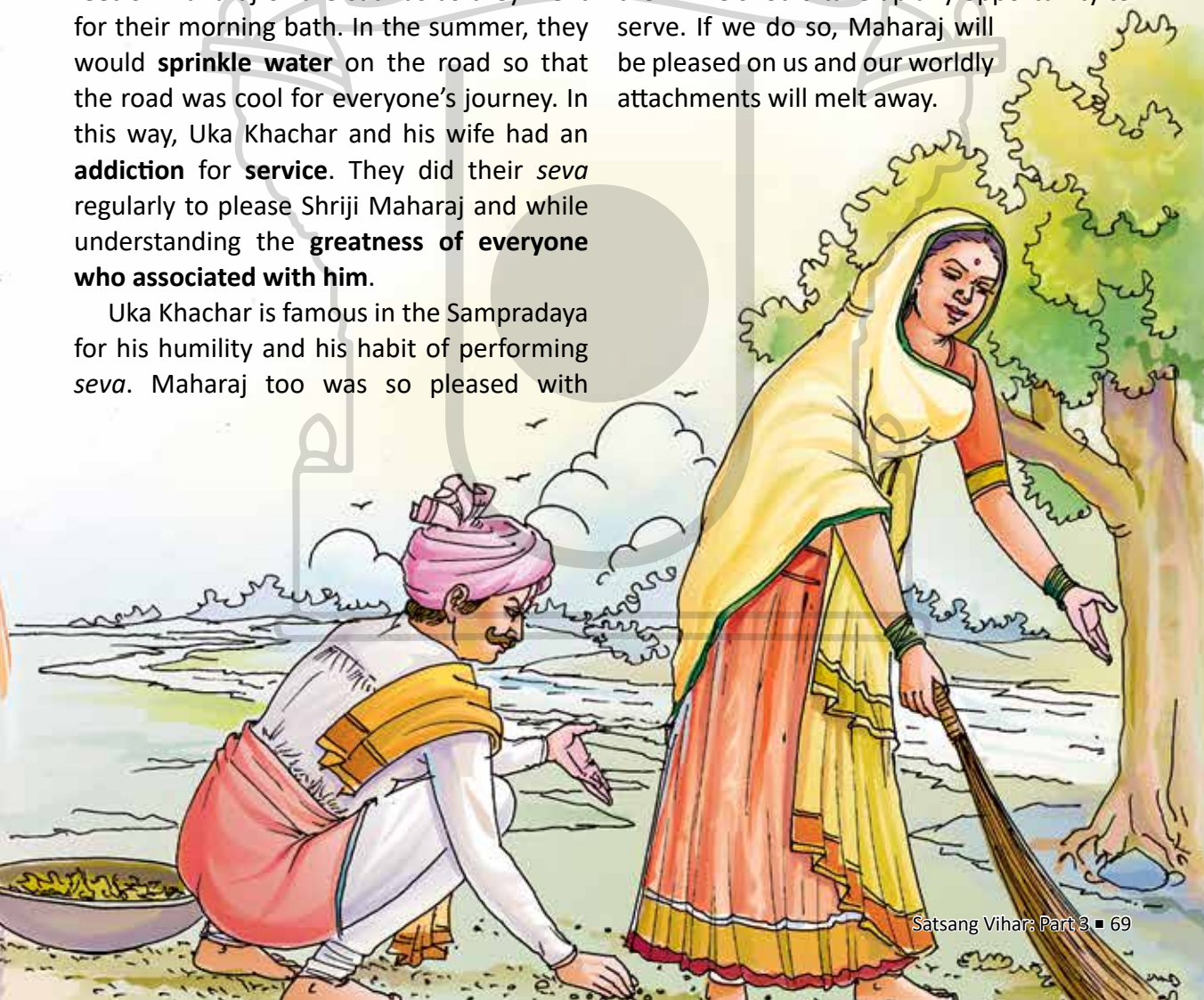
Uka Khachar's **enthusiasm and dedication** to service was **truly astonishing**. He and his wife used to get ready very early every morning. Before the **sadhus** awoke at **4:00 a.m.**, they would **sweep the entire road** from **Dada Khachar's durbar to the river Ghela**. They would even collect any pebbles on the road so that they wouldn't hurt the feet of Maharaj or the sadhus 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 had an **addiction for service**. They did their *seva* regularly to please Shriji Maharaj and while understanding the **greatness of everyone who associated with him**.

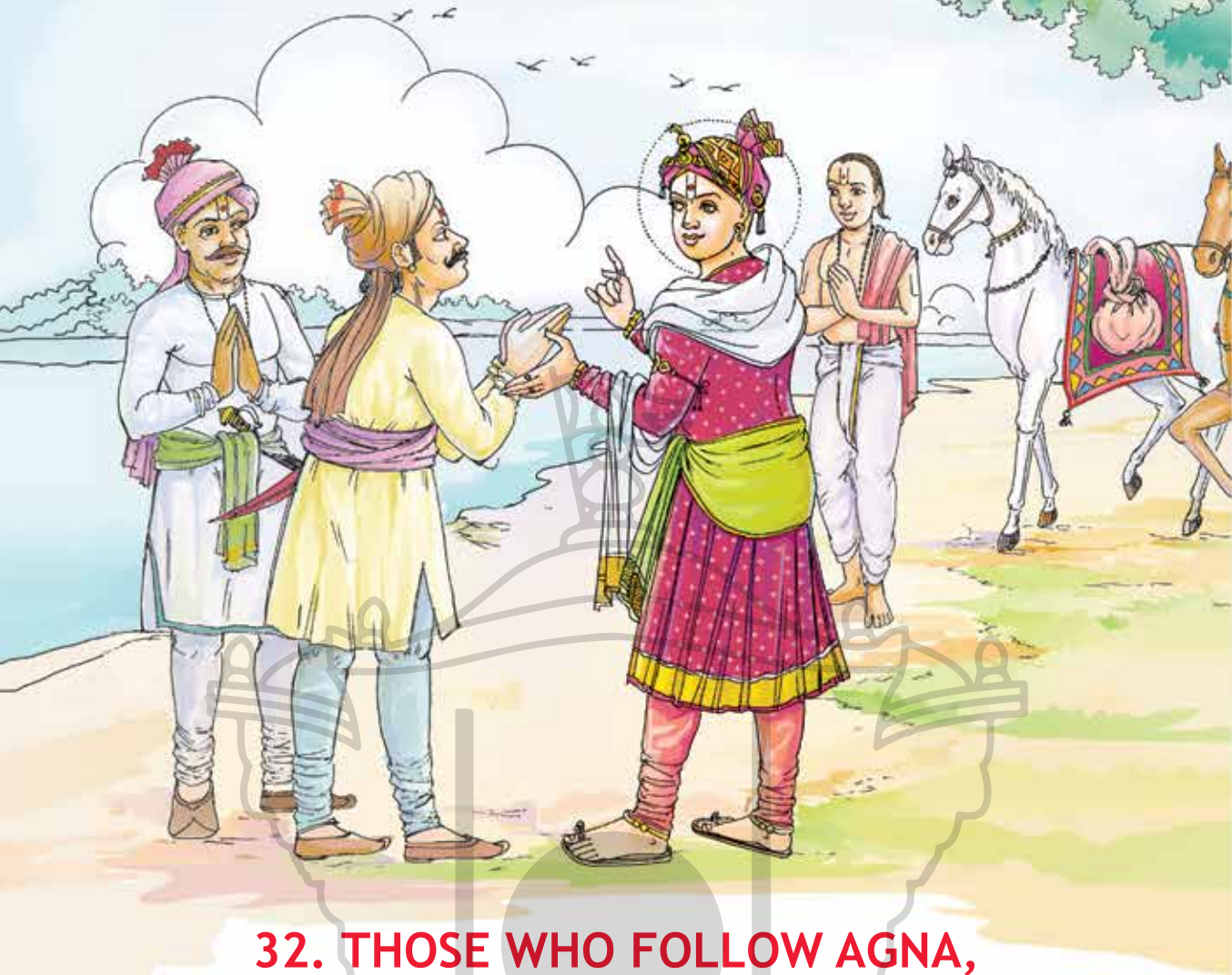
Uka Khachar is famous in the Sampradaya for his humility and his habit of performing *seva*. Maharaj too was so pleased with

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 the **impure desires** in one's *antahkaran* will be **destroyed**."

Such were Maharaj's devotees. They could not live without performing *seva*. 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 also plenty of talkers. 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 worldly attachments will melt away.





32. THOSE WHO FOLLOW AGNA, ALWAYS BENEFIT

Once, **Shriji Maharaj** wrote a **letter**, addressed to **eight** specific Kanbi Patels in Bhadra. 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 2-3 months of hard work?

Four of the **devotees** thought, “That Maharaj has commanded us to leave is true, 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 what would happen to their harvest. Trusting their harvest to Shriji Maharaj, they went straight to Gadhada, where **Maharaj** kept them for **15 days**. And, every day for 15 days, Maharaj sent them sanctified food (*prasadi*) from his own dish.

After enjoying the bliss of *katha*, darshan, and *prasadi*, the **four devotees** returned to Bhadra. On entering the outskirts of the village, the four 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. Straight away they made their way to their farms to see what had happened.

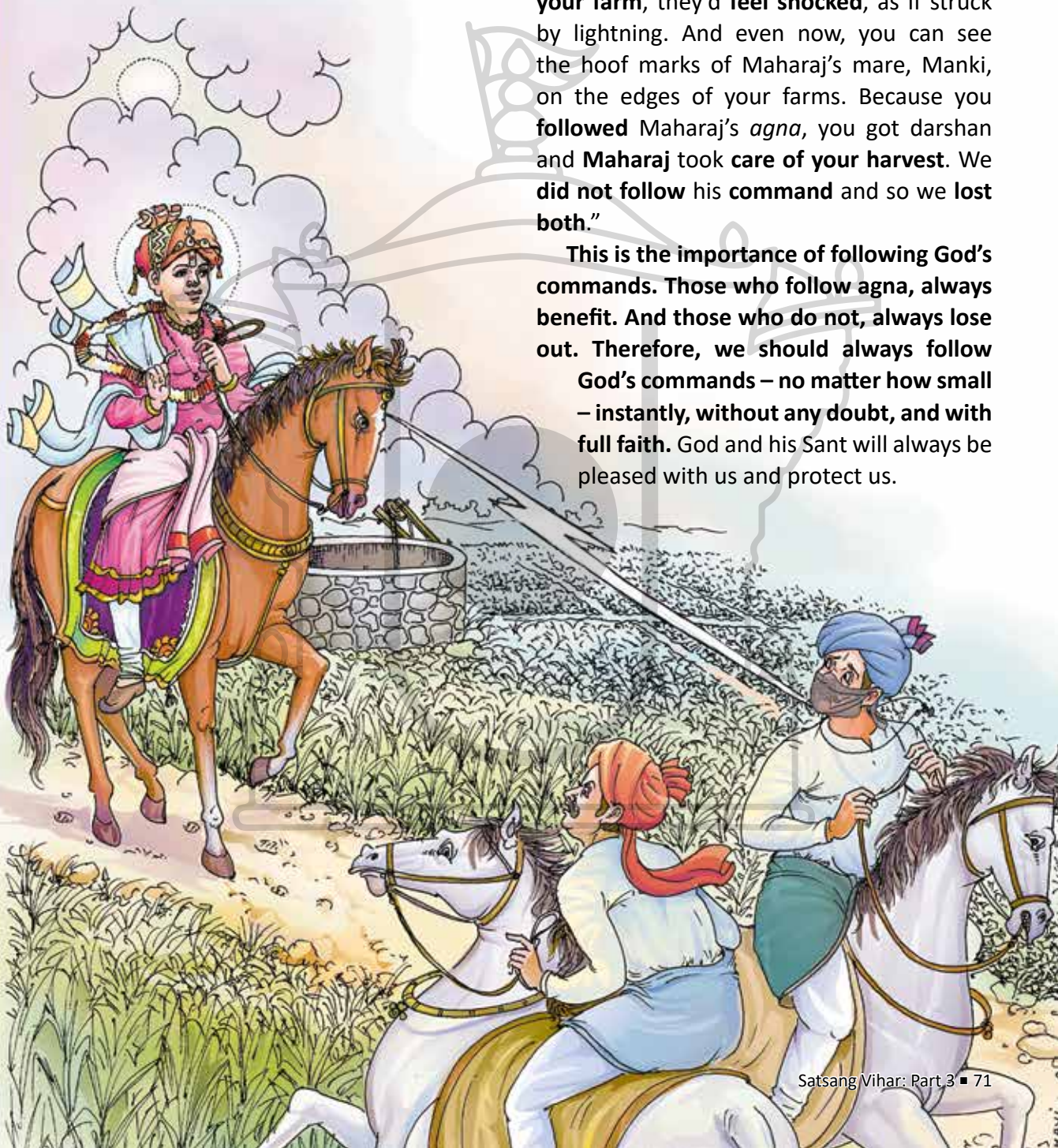
On the way, they ran into the other four devotees who had stayed back. They were

crying. “The day after you left, **Baba Saheb’s brigade** came and **trampled** the whole village’s farms. **Only your four farms were left** untouched.”

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

“As soon as **someone tried to enter your farm**, they’d **feel shocked**, as if struck by lightning. And even now, you can see the hoof marks of Maharaj’s mare, Manki, on the edges of your farms. Because you **followed Maharaj’s agna**, you got darshan and **Maharaj took care of your harvest**. We **did not follow his command** and so we **lost both**.”

This is the importance of following God’s commands. Those who follow agna, always benefit. And those who do not, always lose out. Therefore, we should always follow God’s commands – no matter how small – instantly, without any doubt, and with full faith. God and his Sant will always be pleased with us and protect us.



33. WHATEVER GOD DOES IS DIVINE



✓ **Maharaj** arrived at the **home of Hirabhai** in **Varjangadia**. “I wish to fall ill,” Maharaj declared. Hirabhai was a devotee who believed everything Maharaj did was divine; he enthusiastically replied, “It will be our honour to serve you.”

Hirabhai gave Maharaj a solitary room to stay in. **Overnight**, Maharaj took on a blazing

fever. Everyone was scared at how ill Maharaj had become. At Maharaj’s word, his servants covered him with blankets and Maharaj went to sleep.

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

Someone called Muktanand Swami. Swami urged Maharaj to eat something. But Maharaj replied, “I just don’t feel like eating anything.” And then he started saying things no one could understand. Randomly, he **began to speak of the good or bad thoughts that each person was having**.

One day he stood on top of his bed and **began acting** as if he were in a **sword fight**. When his servants asked him to stop, he replied, “I am destroying demons.”

Now it was the **13th day of his fast**.

Muktanand Swami pleaded with Maharaj to eat. 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 will we find barley in this season?”

Hearing this Maharaj grew upset. “You can get as many *jalebis* as you like from the market in Bhuj. And lakhs of maunds of millet crop is standing right now. And you’ll deny me just a little?”

Hirabhai went to **Bhayavadar** the **same night**. He **awoke a confectioner** and had him prepare *jalebis* in the middle of the night. **Bhaguji** left in search of soft barley, but found some **soft millet to bring back**. Maharaj saw both the items, became pleased, and had a **little to eat**. Then he said, “I want to **bathe with 100 buckets of Ganga water**. And, the **run off** should **reach the Venu River** (on the outskirts of the town).”

How can someone who is sick bathe with so much cold water? So Bhaguji brought **ten pales of water** and **bathed** Maharaj with it. Then, **filling** one small **bowl** from the bath, he 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 service of these loyal devotees – who saw his every action as divine – Maharaj rid himself of the fever, ate properly and then went to sleep.

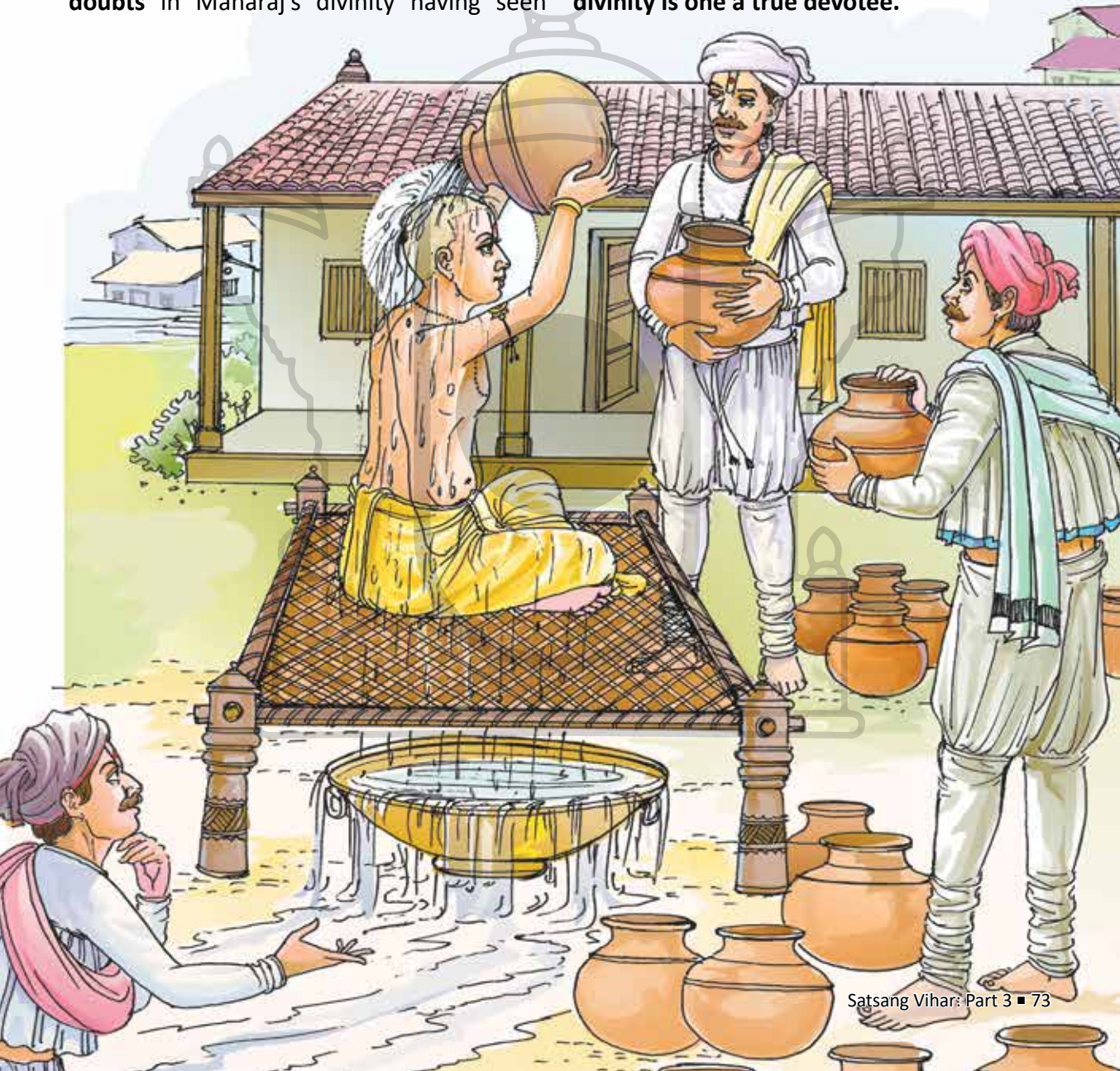
The next morning, Maharaj had a new play in mind, “**Bring the bullock cart now**. I want to go to **Gadhada**.” When the cart came, Maharaj lay down in it and

said, “The **cart is too short. Pull it to make it longer.**” Hearing this, his servants began to pull the cart to please him. Just then some of the **hinges** on the cart **creaked** and Maharaj jumped off. “**Something is awry** with this cart,” he said.

Then the devotees got a **palanquin** and Maharaj travelled in it until **Upleta**. There, a **small wagon** came from Gadhada. Maharaj rode in it until **Jhanjmer**. There **N'go Babariyo** came for darshan. He had had **doubts** in Maharaj's divinity having seen

Maharaj's actions in Varjangjadia. Maharaj **showed him** his **virat** form – the one which holds all of creation in itself. Then Maharaj went to Kariyani and ultimately reached Gadhada, where he **ended his divine display** of illness.

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 once a king named **Uttanapad** who had **two queens**. His **favoured** queen was **Suruchi**, who had a **son** named **Uttam**. His other queen was named **Suniti** and her **son** was named **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."

Ultimately, **Dhruv** was a **royal boy**. The insults of his stepmother and the lovingly shared wisdom of his mother both struck deep in his heart. He took his mother's blessings and **left for the forest**; his **age was just five**. 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 will not go home. I've left to meet God; please give me guidance." Dhruv remained firm in his goal. **Seeing** the boy's **dedication**, **Naradji** taught him how to offer penance and **gave him**

the mantra "*Aum namo Bhagavate Vāsudevāya*".

Now, Dhruv made his way to **Madhuvan** on the **banks of the Yamuna**. There, he **stood on one foot** and began performing **penance**. Every month he consumed less and less food and became more and more 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**. His mind was completely focused on God. The **sounds of ferocious animals**, the slithering of **snakes on his body**, even horrible storms could **not distract** Dhruv from his **meditation**. **Bhagwan Vishnu** was **pleased** by the boy's difficult penance and gave him **darshan**.

Dhruv was so astounded by God's darshan, he became speechless. Vishnu Bhagwan touched Dhruv's cheek with his conch shell and 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 such great penance at such a young age. I **give you an unmoving place** in the sky, where the constellations and stars will perform your *pradakshinas*." 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, the Dhruv Star, reminds us of the boy Dhruv and reminds us to offer penance and please God.



35. THE MIRACULOUS SWAMINI VATO



In Samvat 1912, **Gunatitanand Swami** was visiting **Anand with Acharyashri Raghuvirji Maharaj**. While they sat in a **carriage**, Raghuvirji Maharaj offered Swami a **pendo**. **Swami refused**. **Acharya Maharaj** said, “Swami, we do not have the quality of renunciation that you do. **What will happen to us?**”

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

Those words took hold in **Raghuvirji Maharaj’s** heart. In Samvat 1917, he made Bhagvatprasadj Maharaj the *acharya* and in 1918, he left for **Junagadh**. In one quick move, he gave up the honours he used to receive, his rich lifestyle and all his interests to stay as a pilgrim and enjoy Swami’s **satsang**. He would get ready before *mangala arti* every day and then listen to Swami’s discourses. He was so drawn to the talks that **sleeping and eating became unimportant** to him. He would quickly fry lumps of flour to make *bati*. And, he would throw vegetables straight into the *khichdi* to avoid the time of making a separate item.

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 **God’s body too**. However, in the great **ekantik sant**, **God resides completely**. When one does his *satsang*, one becomes immersed in Shriji Maharaj’s bliss.”

Hearing Gunatitanand Swami’s sermons on Maharaj’s supremacy, becoming *brahmarup*, attaching oneself to the *satpurush*, and ridding oneself of worldly desires, in just **three-and-a-half months**, Raghuvirji Maharaj’s **worldly tethers melted away**.

This is the power of Gunatitanand Swami’s sermons. On hearing them one’s desire

for worldly pleasures is blown 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 down by** Jaga Bhakta, Naranpradhan Thakkar, Harishankar Raval, Sadguru Balmukund Swami, Sadashankar Amarji, Shamjibhai and other **sadhush and devotees**. Thus, the ‘Swamini Vato’ was born.

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

- In the main text of the Swamini Vato, there are **7 chapters** and **1489** 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, to truly understand the Vachanamrut, one must study the Swamini Vato.

- Its greatest point is that it is packed with the **knowledge of Maharaj’s supremacy**.

- Swami’s talks are **small, easy and penetrating**. Using simple words, he has effectively explained the philosophy of becoming *brahmarup* and worshipping Parabrahman.

- 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 the Junagadh district of Gujarat, there is a village called **Vanthali**. In that village, lived **Kalayanbhai**, a faithful devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was **always eager to bring new people to Satsang**. Every year he would hire **new labourers** and **make** them **satsangis** through his talks. He stopped **people** from **going to** distant farms to **collect grass** for their animals. **"Take the grass from my farm,"** Kalyanbhai would offer. Then he would sit with them to cut grass and speak to them about Satsang. If someone was in need, he would lend them money and invite

them to Satsang. He had even inspired many **youths** to become **sadhus** in Junagadh!

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

However, when the Patel spoke to his wife, the **wife** said, "There's **not much effort or cost**. It's a ready meal on our table, **so why let it go?**" The next day, the Patel came up to Kalyanbhai, "I will **partner** with you but I will not be able to come and work here."

"We'll do the work," Kalyanbhai replied. "Just come by once a day to check on it." Hearing this the Patel **gained respect** for Kalyanbhai.

Slowly, Kalyanbhai **began to tell** the Patel of Maharaj's greatness during those daily visits. The Patel became so absorbed by the talks he started to remember the different, unique **marks on Maharaj's murti**.

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

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

In this way, Kalayanbhai made the Patel a staunch devotee of Shriji Maharaj.

■ LET US JOIN IN MAHARAJ'S WISH

Shriji Maharaj has expressed his **desire** to liberate the souls of countless universes.

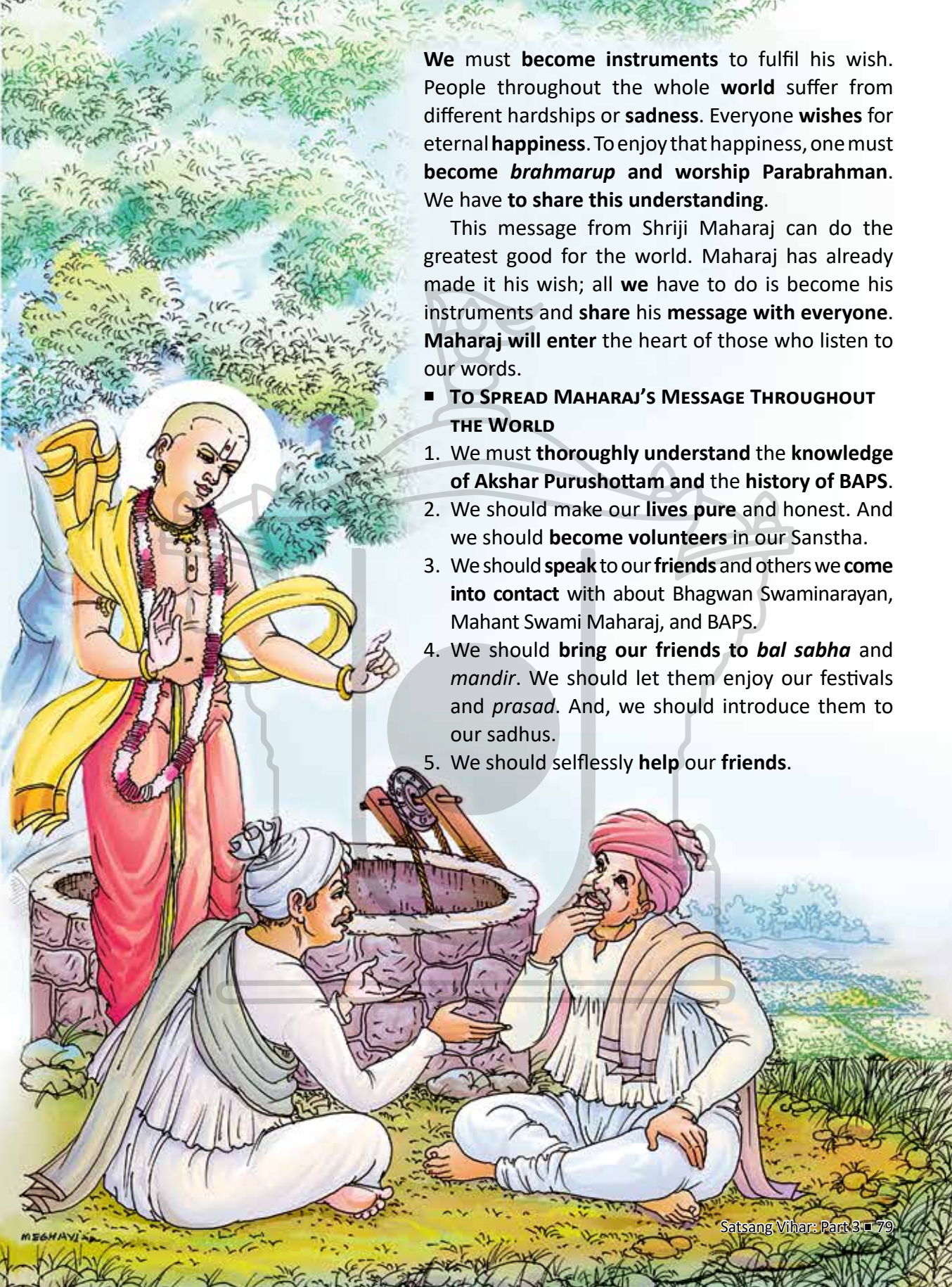


We must **become instruments** to fulfil his wish. People throughout the whole **world** suffer from different hardships or **sadness**. Everyone **wishes** for eternal **happiness**. To enjoy that happiness, one must **become *brahmarup*** and **worship Parabrahman**. We have to **share this understanding**.

This message from Shriji Maharaj can do the greatest good for the world. Maharaj has already made it his wish; all **we** have to do is become his instruments and **share his message with everyone**. **Maharaj will enter** the heart of those who listen to our words.

■ **TO SPREAD MAHARAJ'S MESSAGE THROUGHOUT THE WORLD**

1. We must **thoroughly understand** the **knowledge of Akshar Purushottam** and the **history of BAPS**.
2. We should make our **lives pure** and honest. And we should **become volunteers** in our Sanstha.
3. We should **speak** to our **friends** and others we **come into contact** with about Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Mahant Swami Maharaj, and BAPS.
4. We should **bring our friends to *bal sabha*** and **mandir**. We should let them enjoy our festivals and **prasad**. And, we should introduce them to our sadhus.
5. We should selflessly **help** our **friends**.



37. DAILY RECITATIONS

■ JAY NAAD

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

■ ARTI

Jay 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**

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

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

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

■ SHLOKAS FOR PUJA

Invocation Mantra

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

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

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

“Dear Bhagwan! Oh Parameshwar! Oh Deva! Please come here from your abode. I will worship you. Please stay present before me.”

Concluding Mantra

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

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

■ SHLOKA TO BE SAID BEFORE MEALS

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

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

*Aum sahanāvavatu,
saha 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 that I may always follow your wishes, never do any wrong deeds, and always please you. Please protect me from bad company and always give me good company. Please give me strength so that I may serve my parents, study well, and become your ideal devotee.”

■ NIGHTIME PRAYER

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

“O Maharaj! O Swami! O Mahant Swami Maharaj!

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

38. ADDITIONAL RECITATIONS

■ VACHANAMRUT GADHADĀ I 16: WISDOM

On Māgshar *vadi* 4, Samvat 1876 [5 December 1819], Shriji Mahārāj was sitting in Dādā Khāchar's *darbār* in Gadhadā. 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 Mahārāj 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 *prāns*, which are all *asatya*’ – he accepts this to be the truth. He then behaves as the *ātmā* – 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 *ekāntik* 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.”

|| Vachanāmrut, Gadhadā I 16 ||

■ DHUN 1

Swāmi ane Nārāyan (2)
Swāmi te Gunātit Swāmi.
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi.
Swāmi ane Nārāyan.
Akshar ane Purushottam (2)
Akshar te Gunātit Swāmi.
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi.
Akshar ane Purushottam.
Ātmā ne Paramātmā (2)
Ātmā te Gunātit Swāmi.
Paramātmā Sahajānand Swāmi.
Ātmā ne Paramātmā.
Brahman ane Parabrahman (2)
Brahman te Gunātit Swāmi.
Parabrahman Sahajanand Swami.
Brahman ane Parabrahman.

■ PRATHANA

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 worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan with servitude.

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

I worship Shri Hari (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) who is with Aksharbrahman. He is the Deva of all *devas*, the son of Bhakti and Dharma, supreme, the giver of peace, the giver of liberation, the fulfiller of wishes and the cause of all; he has a divine form and is also known as Nilkanth.



39. THINGS TO KNOW

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

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

9. **Paramhansas:** Initiated more than 3,000 sadhus.
 10. **Two Boons:** 1. "If a devotee is to suffer the sting of a scorpion let me suffer that pain instead." 2. "If it is a devotee's fate to beg for food and clothes, let me receive that misfortune but may that devotee never suffer from lack of food or clothing."
 11. **Gave the 'Swaminarayan' mahamantra.**
 12. **Influenced Thousands of People:** Thousands of sadhus and hundreds of thousands of devotees obeyed his moral instructions and commands.
 13. **Samadhi and Brahmisthiti:** Graced many with samadhi without ashtanga yoga. Blessed countless with *brahmi sthiti* (state of being *brahmarup* or God-realized).
 14. **Akshardham:** Promised to give darshan to devotees at the time of death and take them to Akshardham.
 15. **Social Services:** Stopped the practice of widow burning and female infanticide, freed people from superstitions, uplifted the out-cast and lower castes, performed non-violent *yagnas*, opened almhouses, 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.
- liberation (moksha).
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 parshad diksha at age 23 after completing his Bachelors degrees in Agriculture. (1957, Gondal)
 - **Parshad Name:** Vinu Bhagat.
 - At the age of 28, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj initiated him as a sadhu. (1961, Gadhada)
 - **Sadhu Name:** Sadhu Keshavjivandas
 5. **Studies and Mahant-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 formally educated sadhu in the Sanstha.
 - Strictly observes the five principle vows of sadhus given by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
 - Possesses all the qualities of an ideal sadhu mentioned in the Hindu shastras.
 - Devotion to 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.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

1. **Identity:** Aksharbrahman, Gunatit Satpurush (Guru), Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan's sixth spiritual successor, the present form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the gateway to

- Has helped plan Akshardham and other international projects.
 - As a young sadhu, he used to look over the decoration and management of major festivals.
- 8. Guru:** At age 83, he succeeded Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the guru of BAPS.
 - 9. Principles:** To serve everyone and give kalyan to everyone without keeping any divisions of status, wealth, race or creed; unity and fraternity (samp, suhradbhav and ekta); to see all as divine (divyabhav); to see all others as great (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 Non-Indians – experience the joy of having met Bhagwan himself.
- Everyone attains spiritual progress in his presence.

BAPS SANSTHA

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

hant 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 Assembly: 16,000 children, youth, adult and women assemblies
- 11.** More than a million **devotees** in India and abroad.
- 13.** More than 1,000 **sadhus**.
- 14.** More than 1,100 mandirs including Gandhi-nagar and Delhi **Akshardhams**.
- 15. Various international Services:**
 - Medical service to hundreds of thousands through medical clinics and hospitals.
 - Educational service to hundreds of thousands of students through schools, hostels and scholarships.
 - Disaster relief.
 - Tribal Upliftment
 - Awareness programmes and projects on environment, parenting, education, women's development, anti-addiction, literacy, anti-dowry, water management, etc.
- 16. Spiritual Activities:** Inspiring spirituality in children, youths, adults.
- 17.** Recognized by the **United Nations** and acclaimed in the **Guinness Book of World Records**.

SPEECH: 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, “No.”

The teacher said in a harsh tone, “You are living in the 21st century and you don’t know what science is? Half of your life has gone down this river (meaning wasted).” The boatman was ashamed of himself.

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

The teacher said, “No!”

The boatman said, “Then your whole life will go down the river. I might not know about science, about politics, or sports, but I do know how to swim. My final good bye to you.” So saying, the boatman jumped into the river to save himself.

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

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

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

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

Napoleon, who once ruled nearly half the world, said, “I have not seen six happy days in my life.” The great artist Michelangelo said, “I regret that I have not done enough for the salvation of my soul.” In contrast to this, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, the 500 *paramhansas*, the Gunatit Guru Parampara and others did not have wealth or power, yet they were extremely happy.

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

So friends! Start worshipping 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, “Make *shradha* and bhakti firm in life...”

Jay Swaminarayan

40. IN BAPS, LIBERATION IS GUARANTEED



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

Once, at four in the morning, the officer came through **Holisang and Dhudkot**. On the road he saw a few **farmers in clean clothes happily** leading their oxen. They had **tilak-chandlos** on their heads 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 those *satsangi* villages. So he said to his men, “Put out an order 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 BAPS 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 Shikshapatri **removes worldly attachments, addictions, and superstitions**. 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 hopelessness**.
- BAPS’s **social services** provide good **education**, health services, and **relief in times of natural** and man-made disasters.
- **Hindu culture is nurtured and propagated**. We are able to become true Hindus.
- Our **festivals, mandirs**, Akshardhams, service, etc. help us feel that ‘**BAPS is One Family**’. We feel **proud of being part of an international fellowship**.
- Attaining the pleasure of the *satpurush*, we get happiness on this earth and bliss of



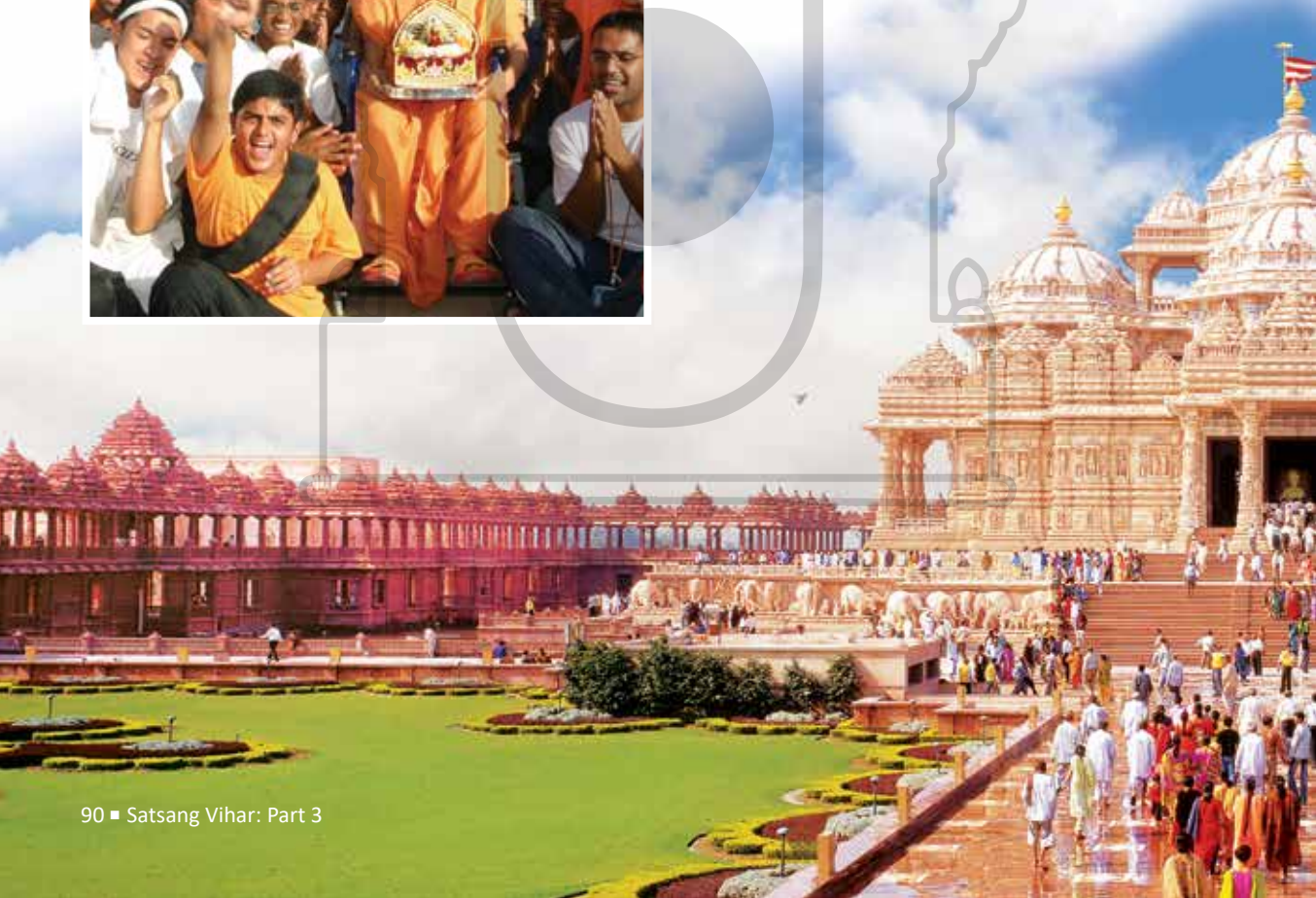
God in **Akshardham** after death.

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 a vow: 'Live for BAPS' I will live for BAPS and stay a satsangi for life.

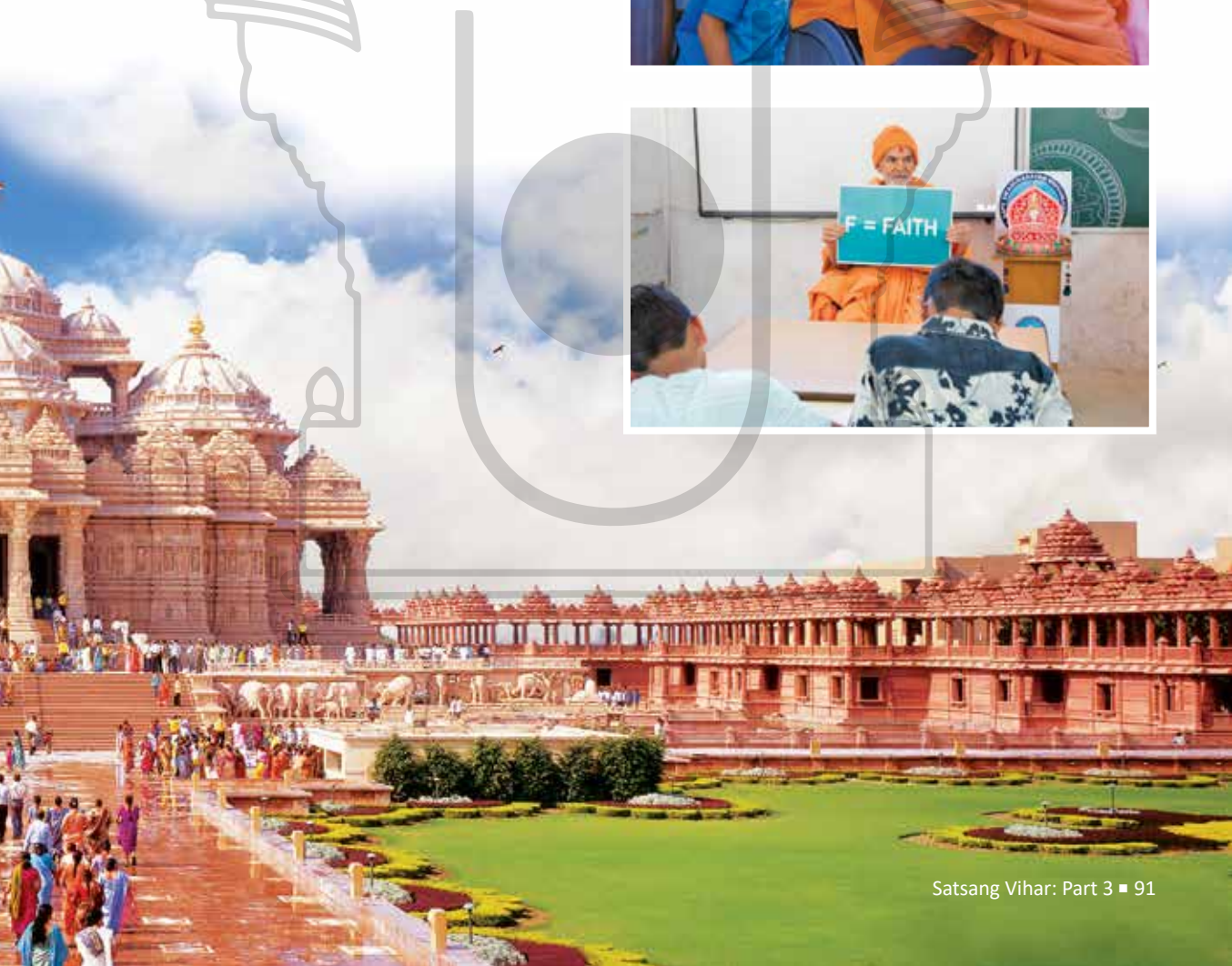
TO TAKE US TO AKSHARDHAM

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 returned, "You should pilot a helicopter." "You can drive all that. We know how to seat people in Akshardham's helicopter and take them to God."



Pramukh Swami Maharaj **often** said in his **blessings**, “We have attained supreme God and the Sant in whom he 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 Aksharbrahman, the sadhu in whom Parabrahmam fully resides—our guru Mahant Swami Maharaj – we are **in Akshardham** even while we **here on earth**. And when we **pass away**, he will come to **take** us to God’s abode, Akshardham.



GLOSSARY

A

avatarvad

one of the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism that God comes onto Earth.

acharya

leader of a diocese of the Swaminarayan faith

adharma

‘opposite of dharma’, unrighteousness, immorality

agna

instruction, order, command

aksharmukta

a jiva that has attained ultimate liberation and resides forever in Akshardhām with a divine body

aksharrup

form of Akshar. That which has qualities similar to those of Akshar. Used to describe the spiritual state of akshar muktas. Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become aksharrup and worship Purushottam. See brahmarup

antahkaran

‘Inner faculty’. The complete mind which comprises of four aspects, each characterised by its individual functions: called the man when generating thoughts and desires; the buddhi when consolidating thoughts, making decisions and resolutions, forming convictions, or discriminating; the chitt when repeatedly

contemplating or focusing; and the ahamkār when forming a sense of being. Normally used in the singular since all four are aspects of the one antahkaran, but also often referred to as being four different antahkarans

One of the four purusharthas, allowing for the fulfillment of desires for material objects, in particular wealth

‘Pursuits’. Collective term for the four goals legitimately pursued by all Hindus, namely: dharma (duties), artha (material wealth), kam (desires), and ultimately, moksha (liberation).

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

See asatya

1) ‘Opposite of satya’. Transient, i.e., perishable and changing, and bound by the constraints of Time. 2) False. Not true 3) ‘Imaginary’ or ‘illusory’ according to the Advait doctrine.

group of eight shlokas or prayers. In our Sampradaya, a famous ashtak, ‘Ananta koti indu’ is sung after arti

artha

arthas

arti

asat

asatya

ashtak

ashvamedha yagna	special sacrifice done by kings in which a horse is released to travel the lands. If captured, the king must fight for it to be set free. When the horse returns free to the kingdom, the sacrifice is concluded	durbar	the residence of a prince or king.
		darbar	the chief of a village
		deva	god (as opposed to supreme God)
atma	pure soul	devi	goddess
B		dharmado	a portion of one's income given in service of one's religion; similar to tithe
balak	male child		
balika	female child	dhun	chanting of God's name
bati	wheat bread made by taking a dollop of wheat dough and frying it in ghee	dhyan	meditation
bawa	low order of renunciate	E	
brahmagnan	spiritual knowledge; knowledge of atma and Paramatma	ekāntik	to do everything only for God; person who has mastered dharma (righteousness), jnan (knowledge), vairagya (renunciation), and bhakti (devotion)
brahmarup	possessing qualities similar to those of Brahman	F	
brahmisthiti	state of being brahmarup	falahaar (faral)	diet of fruits and a variety of foods, excluding grains and pulses, that may be eaten on ekadashi and other fasts.
C		farali	a special diet of fruits and certain foods sanctioned for Ekadashi fasts
chetan	that which possesses chaitanya, i.e., is full of consciousness		
D			
dandvat	prostration; to lie flat, with hands extended, as a sign of surrender and devotion to a greater being	G	
		gatariyu	Upper garment worn by a sadhu or parshad

gaumukhi	Cloth bag for holding and doing a mala	J	jad	Non-living', inanimate. Opposite of chaitanya. That which is without consciousness
ghar mandir	the mandir each devotee keeps in one's home for personal worship		jalebi	a sweet delicacy, kind of sweet made from gram flour, sugar, ghee, etc
ghar sabha	family members assemble at home for satsang		jiva	soul
gnan	knowledge	K	kadhi	Soup made of buttermilk, gram flour and spices
gulal	fragrant reddish powder used on joyous occasions		kalyan	liberation of the soul
gunatit	above maya; most often used to describe Aksharbrahman or souls that have become brahmarup		katha	discourse; spiritual talks; reading of shastra
H			khaman	a traditional Gujarati item made of gram flour; usually soft, fluffy and cut into squares. Served with a chutni and green chillis.
hari mandir	a mandir that is not a shikharbaddha mandir		khichdi	seasoned, boiled rice and lentils; may also be spiced and made with vegetables
haveli	mansion	L	ladu	a sweet delicacy in the form of a ball
I				
indriyas	the senses; five of physical action - hands, feet, mouth, anus, and genitals and five of perception - eyes, nose, ears, skin and tongue			
ishwar	a type of soul, like the jiva but more powerful; the soul of devas and other powerful cosmic beings	M	mala	string of 108 beads used for chanting 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	(both hands, feet and one's head) touching the ground as a sign of respect and surrender
maya	one of the five eternal entities; ignorance; the power of God responsible for creating attachment towards the body and its relations	paramhansa special order of ascetics initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan
mer	the largest bead at start of a mala	parshad In Bhagwan Swaminarayan's time, parshads were men who dedicated their lives to the fellowship and followed celibacy but were allowed to speak with women and touch money. They were all white clothes similar to the farmers of that time. Today, in BAPS, parshads follow all the same rules as sadhus and where a white upper garment and white dhotiyu.
moksha	liberation; emancipation; freedom from maya and the cycle of life and death; the eternal experience of God's bliss	pendo round-shaped sweet delicacy made from milk
murti	sacred image of a deity	pichkari water squirter used during Fuldol utsav
N		prabhatiya devotional songs sung at dawn
nirlobh	vow of non-covetousness	pradakshina to walk around the object of one's respect or devotion
nirman	vow of humility	pranayam yogic breathing exercises
nishkam	vow of absolute celibacy	prans life-breath
nissneh	vow of detachment	prarthana prayer
nisswad	vow of non-taste	prasad item blessed by God
niyams	firm vow or promise to regularly perform a certain act	prasadi item blessed by God
P		
panchang pranam	kneeling and bowing down; called 'panchang' because it has five parts of one's body	

pravrutti		shishya	
	activity		disciple
pujan		shradha	
	ritual of devotion		faith
punya		stri-purush maryada	
	positive merits received from God for good deeds done		rules that describe the appropriate way to behave with people of the opposite gender
R			
ras		sud	
	a Indian folkdance performed in a circle with sticks		first half of the lunar month
S		T	
sabha		tap	
	gathering or assembly		austerity or penance
sadguru		thal	
	a senior sadhu; the true guru		offering of food
sakar		tilak-chandlo	
	rock sugar		U-shaped mark of sandalwood paste with a round mark of vermillion (kumkum) at its centre applied on forehead by satsangis
sat			
	see satya		
satpurush		U	
	true guru		upasana
satsangi			
	a member of the Satsang fellowship		the true understanding of God's form and glory which brings one closer to God
satya		V	
	1) 'Truth'. Permanent, i.e., imperishable and unchanging. Transcending time, and thus unbound by the past, the present and the future. 2) Real. True		vadi
			the dark half of the lunar month
		vairagya	
			renunciation
seva		vartmans	
	service		rules relating to one's actions; a vow or discipline
shastras		Y	
	scriptures		yagnas
shikharbaddha			sacrifice
	a mandir built with spires in which five arts are done		