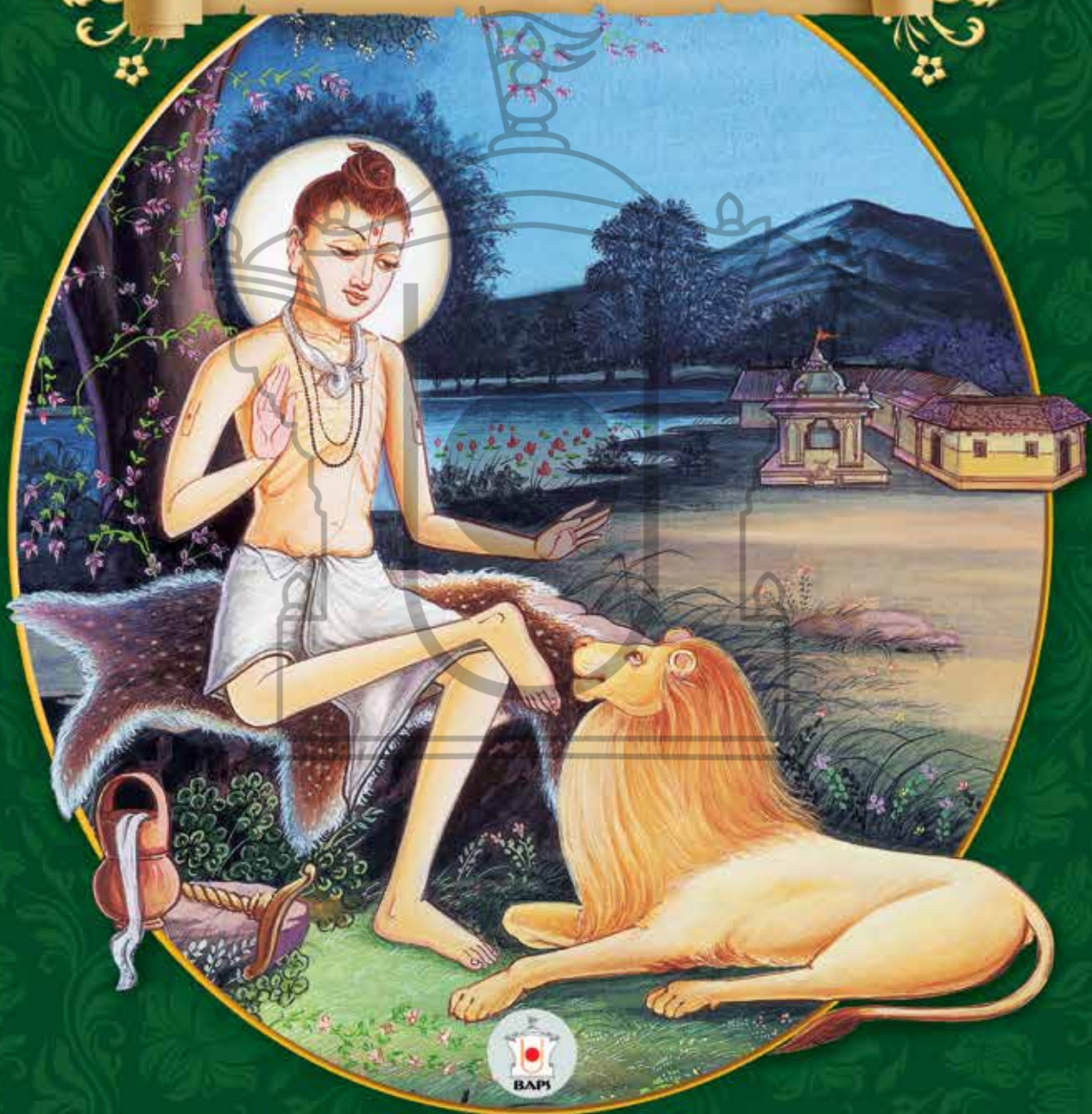


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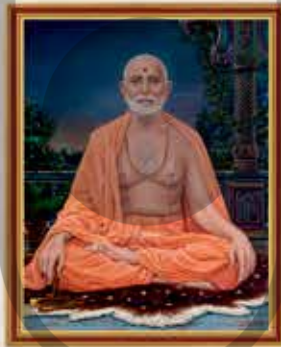
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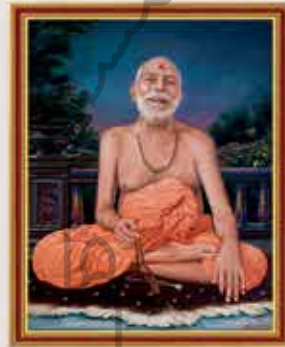
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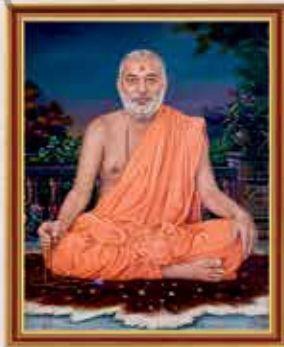
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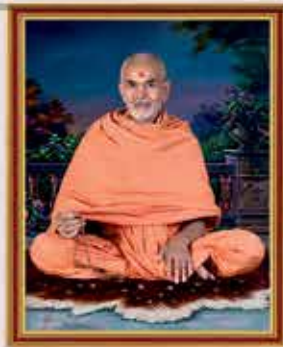
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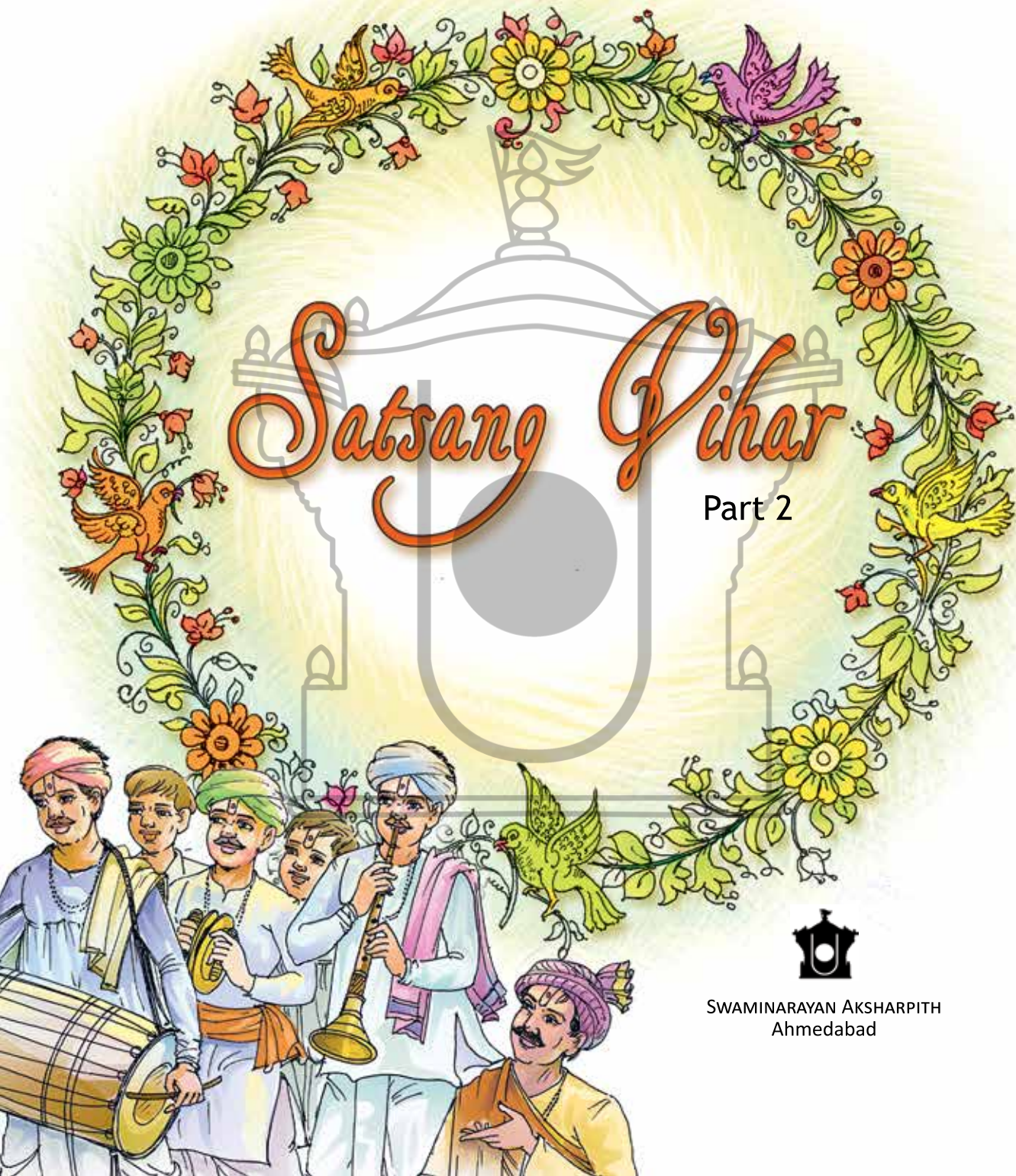


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Part 2



SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARPITH
Ahmedabad

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(An Introductory Study Programme of
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LET US CAPTURE GOD'S LOVE



Imagine trying to catch the rain with a broken cup. You could stand there for hours, but the cup would never fill, right?

Our Bhagwan and Guru love us a ton! When we walk and talk, when we eat and sleep, when we study and play, when we're in the mandir and even when we're not, they are constantly raining their love on us.

Well, then why don't we always feel their love? It's simple. We are standing there with broken cups.

But don't worry, there is a solution. If we become true *bhaktas*, with no cracks or holes in our faith or bhakti, then we will be able to capture the love of our Bhagwan and Guru.

So, come on, let's do it! Let's become ideal *bhaktas*. This entire book, *Satsang Vihar*, has been made to help you. If you read it attentively, try to understand it, and put its teachings into practice, you will be an ideal *bal bhakta* before you know it.

Note: Important words and lessons in each chapter are in **bold**. Give them special attention.

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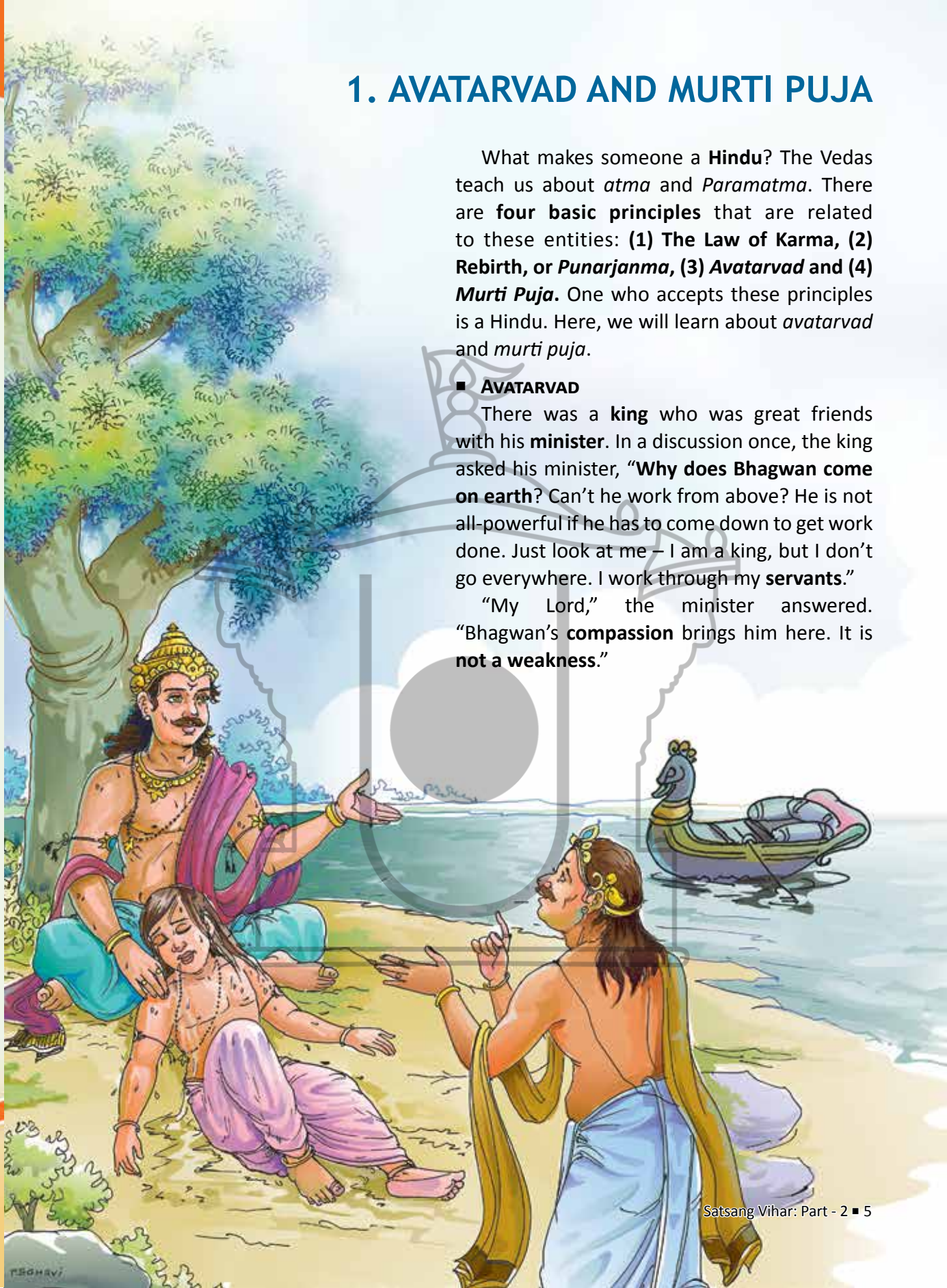
1. AVATARVAD AND MURTI PUJA

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

■ AVATARVAD

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

“My Lord,” the minister answered. “Bhagwan’s **compassion** brings him here. It is **not a weakness**.”



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

A few days later, the royal family went to **sail on the river**. The king and his minister were seated at the front of the boat. The queen and the prince were at the back,

behind a curtain. Everyone was enjoying the scenery. All of a sudden, **the minister got up and tossed the prince into the river**.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

This principle is known as *avatarvad*. According to this principle, **Shri Ram, Shri Krishna, Nrusingha and other avatars** came upon Earth. The *avatari* (cause of all avatars), **Shriji Maharaj**, also came to Earth according to this principle.

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

■ MURTI PUJA

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

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

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

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

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

Bhagwan and his Sant reside in the *murtis*. They accept the devotion of devotees. This incident made everyone realize this truth.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 68, Shriji Maharaj says, "Bhagwan himself has said, 'I forever reside in the eight types of *murtis* and in the Sant.'"

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

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

2. REAP WHAT YOU SOW

This incident is from the **Mahabharat**. King **Dhritrashtra** had **100 sons**. Duryodhan and Dushasan were the leaders of these Kauravas. Greedy for power, they waged war against the Pandavas (Yudhishtir and his four brothers). Since Shri Krishna Bhagwan was on the Pandavas' side, they won the war. The Kauravas all died during the war.

Dhritrashtra was very sad that **all his sons had died**. Nobody could ease his **pain**. Shri Krishna came to meet him. "Prabhu!"

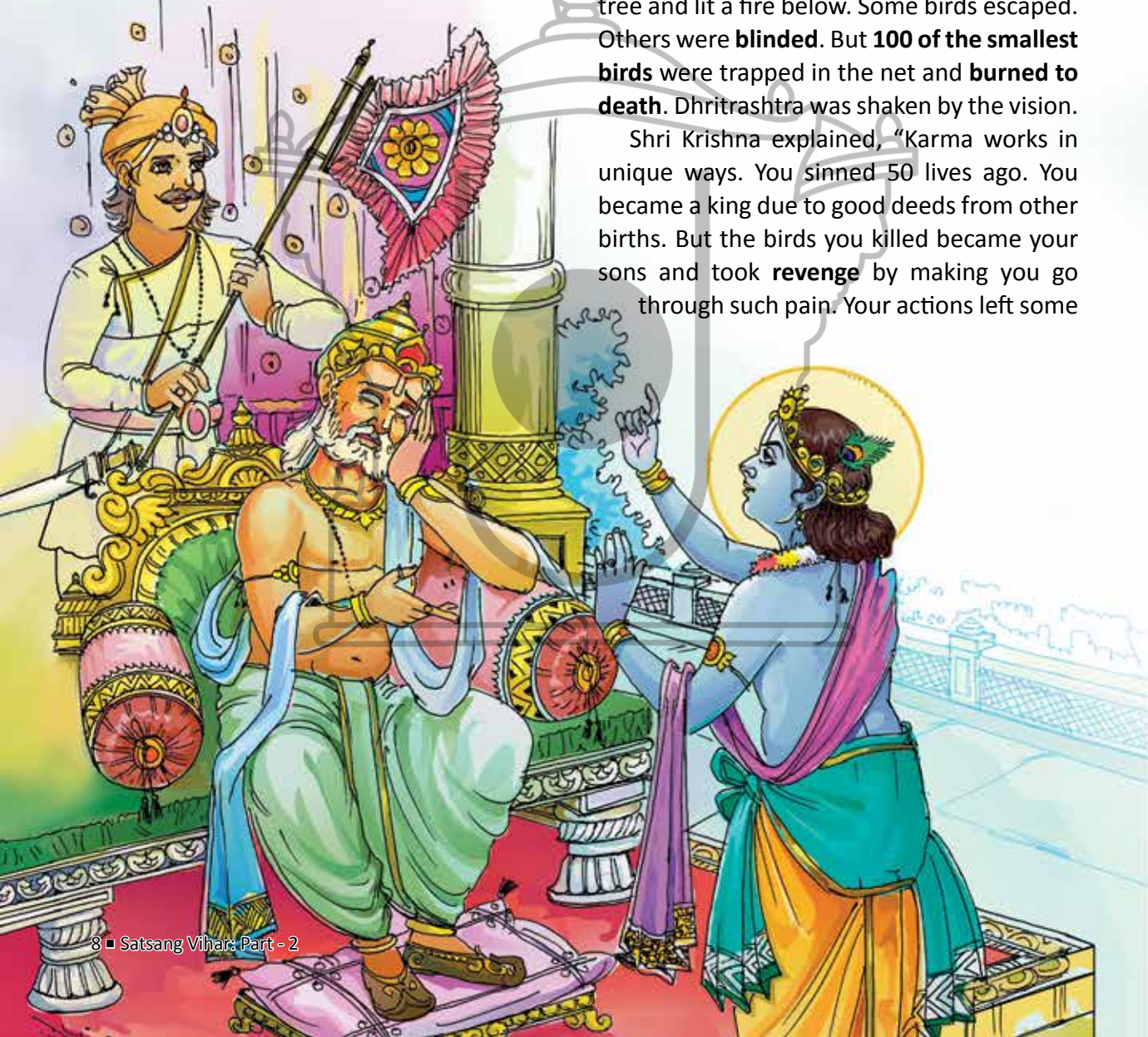
Dhritrashtra asked. "Why were my 100 sons killed at once?"

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

"Which sin do you speak of?" Dhritrashtra asked.

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

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





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

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

■ THE THREE TYPES OF KARMA

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

Consider the example of a **storage container for grains** (see illustration above).

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

It is up to the owner what type of grains

are put in from above. In the same way, ***kriyaman* karmas are in our hands.** We can decide whether we do good or bad karmas.

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

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

One who believes in the law of Karma is a Hindu.

3. THE EVIL KALIDATTA MEETS HIS END

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

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

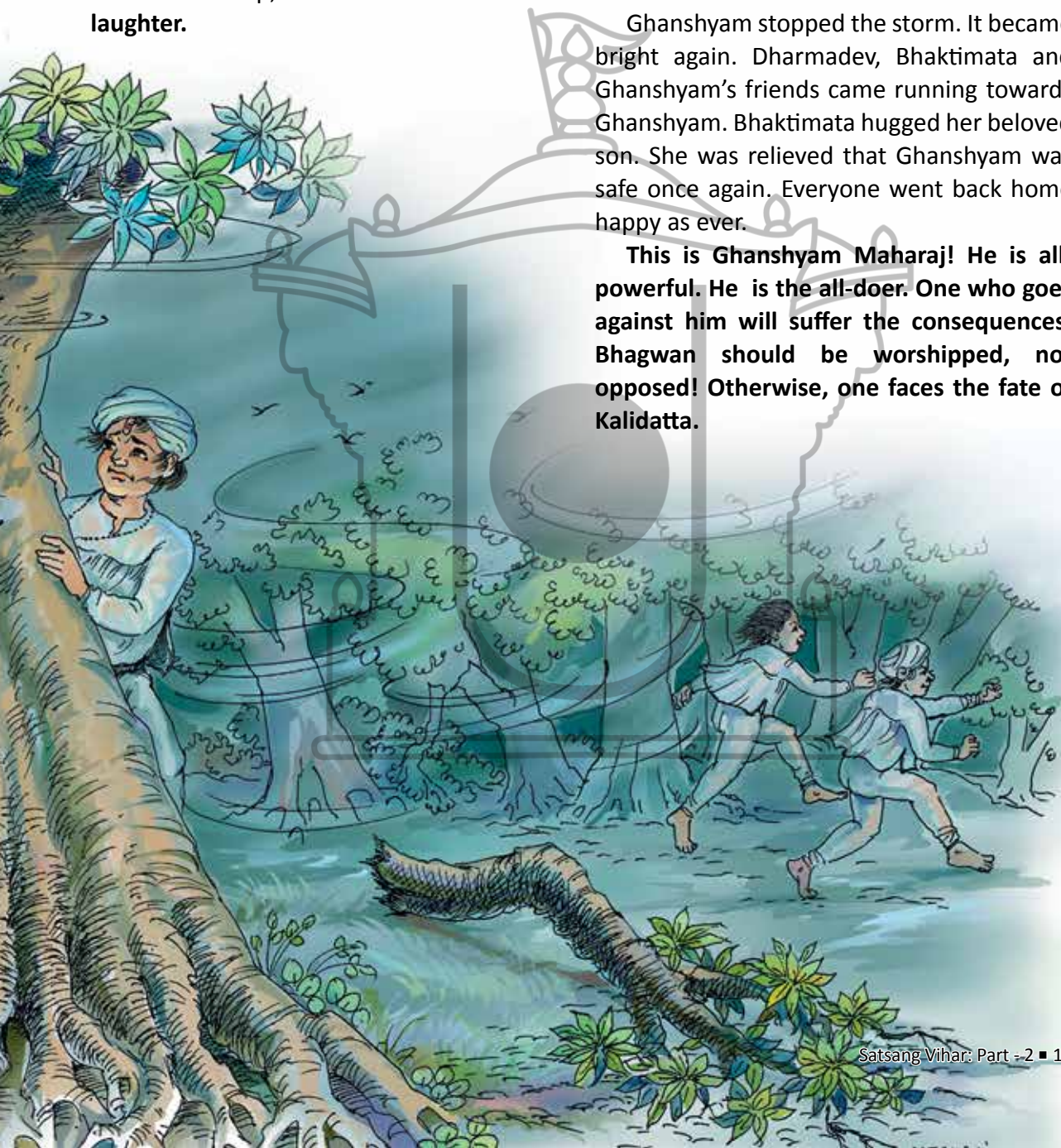


But Ghanshyam was calm. Kalidatta charged towards him, shouting. Just then, something happened. In one instant, Kalidatta would see Ghanshyam under a tree; in the next, he would see him atop the tree. Had he gone crazy? Kalidatta quickly thought of an idea. He **transformed into a giant** and **fell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

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

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

This is Ghanshyam Maharaj! He is all-powerful. He is the all-doer. One who goes against him will suffer the consequences. Bhagwan should be worshipped, not opposed! Otherwise, one faces the fate of Kalidatta.



4. NILKANTH'S KALYAN YATRA

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

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

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

1. FEARLESSNESS

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

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

(Gadhada II 55)

2. TAPA

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

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

3. TYAG

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

4. KALYAN

Devas, **avatars**, **sadhus**, **mahants**, **ascetics**, **sanyasis**, **kings**, **ghosts** and **even birds and animals...** Nilkanth Varni granted **kalyan** to **all** who met him. He had left home to liberate everyone and **sanctify all of India**.

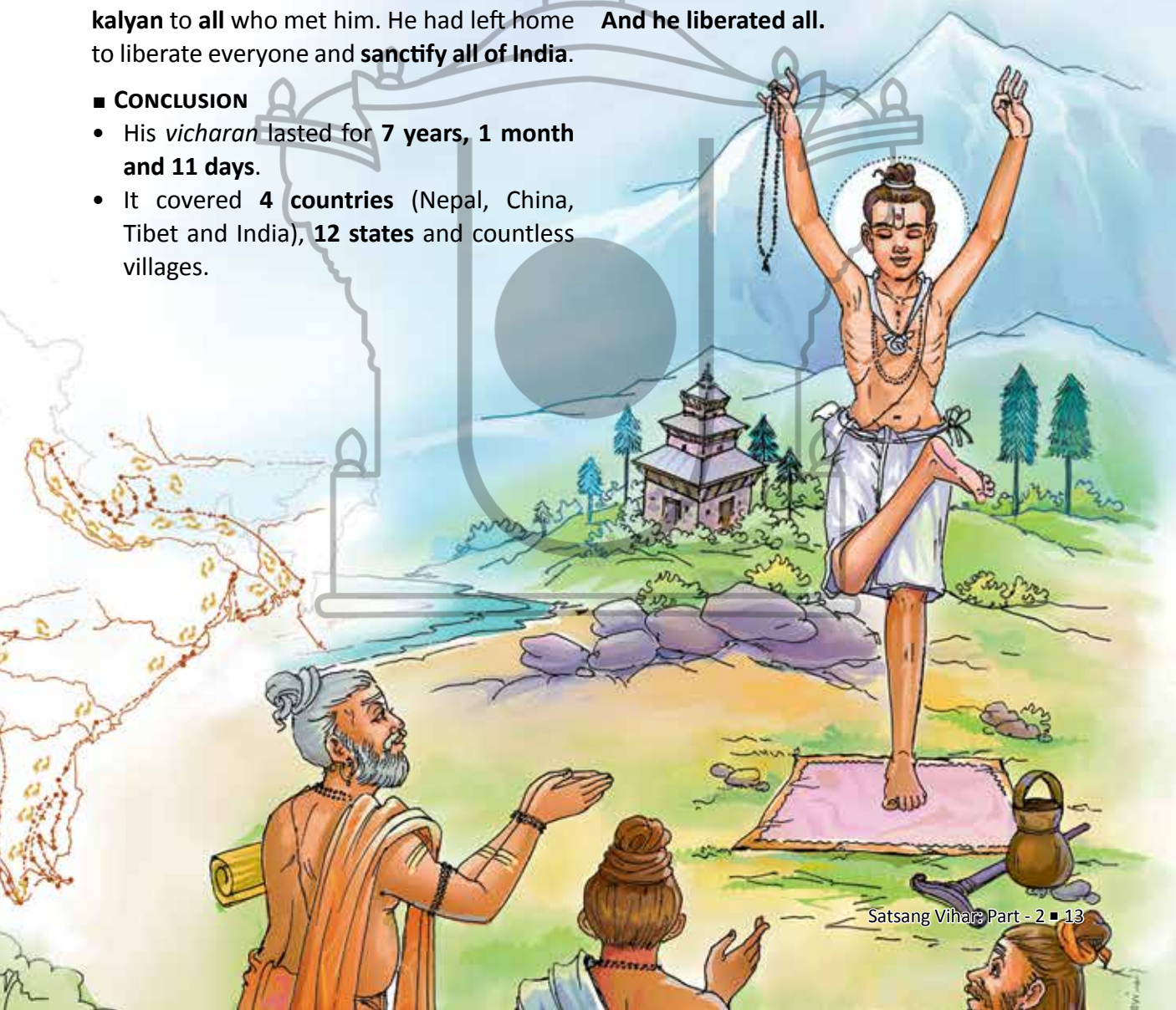
■ CONCLUSION

- His *vicharan* lasted for **7 years, 1 month and 11 days**.
- It covered **4 countries** (Nepal, China, Tibet and India), **12 states** and countless villages.

- It was **12,000 kilometres** long. His **journey ended** on Shravan vad 6, Samvat 1856 (21 August 1799 CE) in **Loj**.

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

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

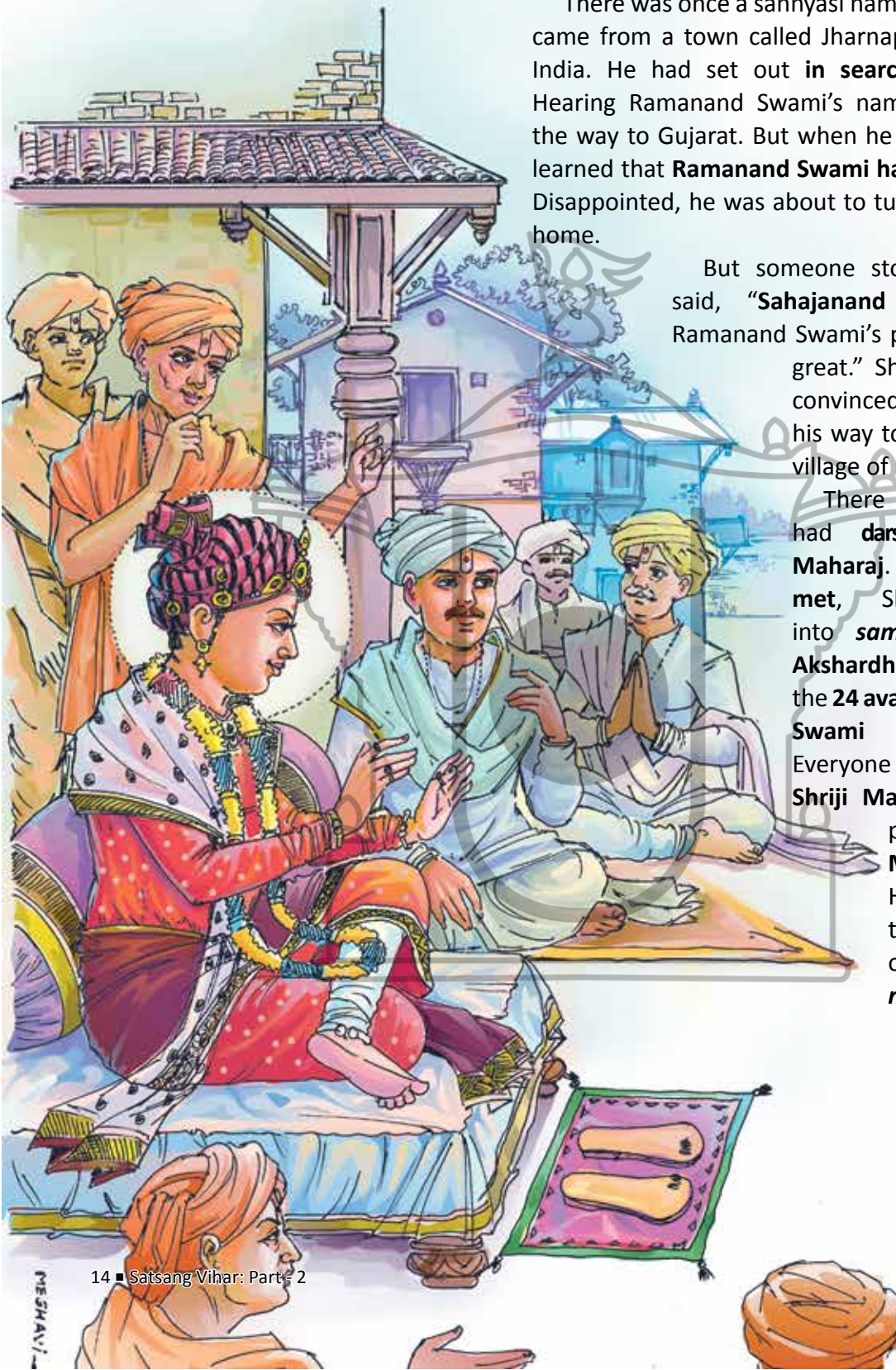


5. SARVOPARI BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

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

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

There Shitaldas had **darshan of Shriji Maharaj**. As their **eyes met**, Shitaldas went into **samadhi**. He saw **Akshardham**. In it were the **24 avatars, Ramanand Swami** and others. Everyone was **praying to Shriji Maharaj**. Shitaldas performed **Shriji Maharaj's puja**. He also **wanted to do puja** of the **infinite muktas**.



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

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

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

Shitaldas awoke from *samadhi*. He was **convinced** of Shriji Maharaj's greatness. He told everyone of his experience, "Shriji Maharaj is the *avatari* – the cause of all the avatars. He is Supreme, *Sarvopari* Bhagwan."

■ AN ERA OF SAMADHI

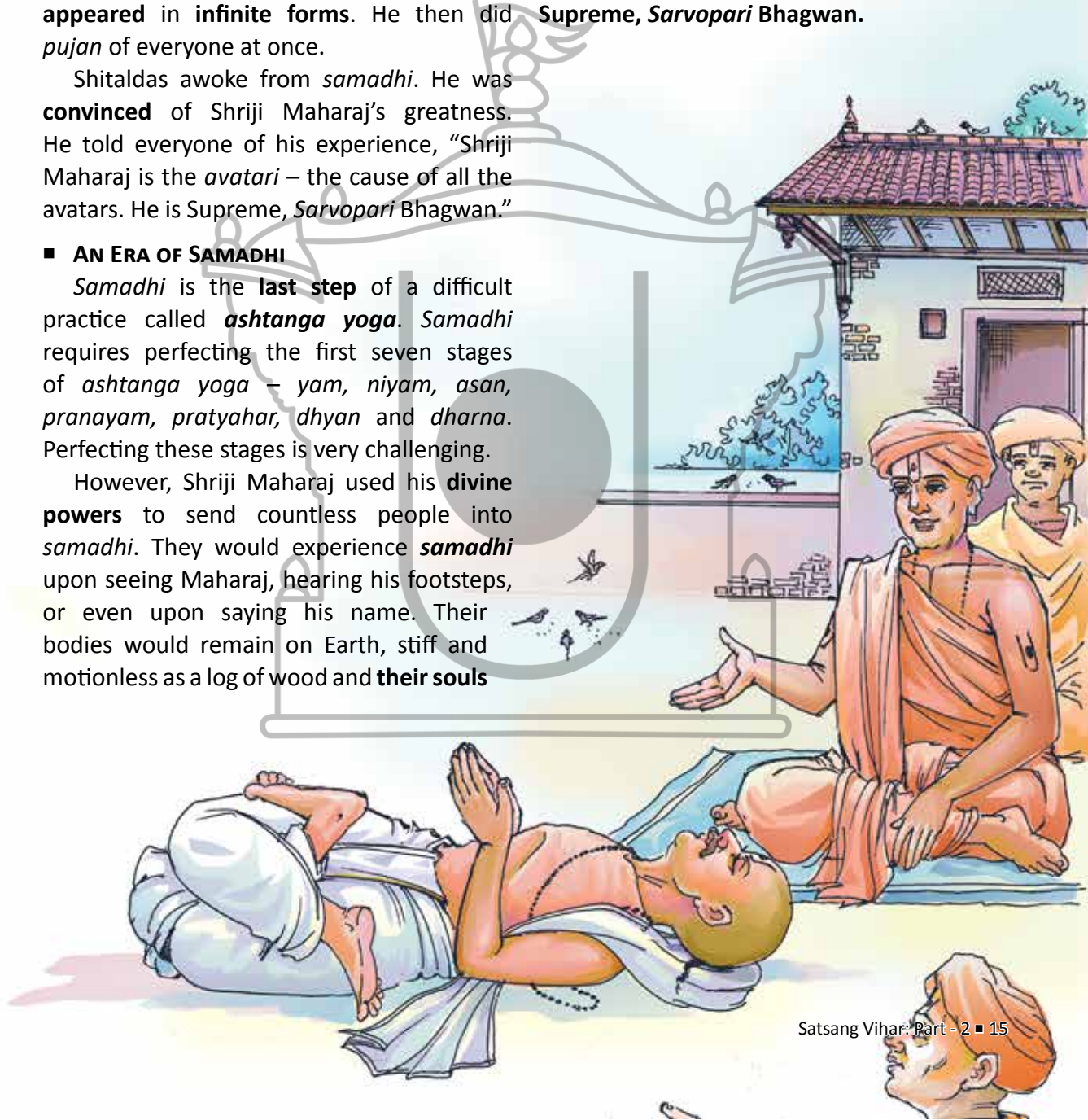
Samadhi is the **last step** of a difficult practice called *ashtanga yoga*. *Samadhi* requires perfecting the first seven stages of *ashtanga yoga* – *yam*, *niyam*, *asan*, *pranayam*, *pratyahar*, *dhyana* and *dharna*. Perfecting these stages is very challenging.

However, Shriji Maharaj used his **divine powers** to send countless people into *samadhi*. They would experience ***samadhi*** upon seeing Maharaj, hearing his footsteps, or even upon saying his name. Their bodies would remain on Earth, stiff and motionless as a log of wood and **their souls**

would travel to Akshardham. Those who went into *samadhi* would see the gods they worshipped. They would also see **all devas and avatars worshipping Shriji Maharaj**.

No avatar has ever displayed such spiritual power. This is one of the many proofs that Shriji Maharaj is *sarvopari* bhagwan.

Such is Shriji Maharaj's greatness! He is the *avatari* – the cause of all the avatars. He forever possesses a divine form. And he is Supreme, *Sarvopari* Bhagwan.



6. BHAGWAN IS THE ALL-DOER

There was a staunch devotee named **Jagrup Barot** in the village of **Sinjivada**. He once brought Shriji Maharaj to his home to bless his **newborn son**. When Maharaj arrived, the boy was sleeping on a small bed but he **had no hands or legs**. Flies buzzed about him. **Shriji Maharaj felt sorry** for the boy. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "Why do these flies pester him?"

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

"Really?" Shriji Maharaj asked.

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

Smiling at the woman's words, Maharaj went to the small bed.

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

Prabhudas grew up to be a good devotee.



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

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

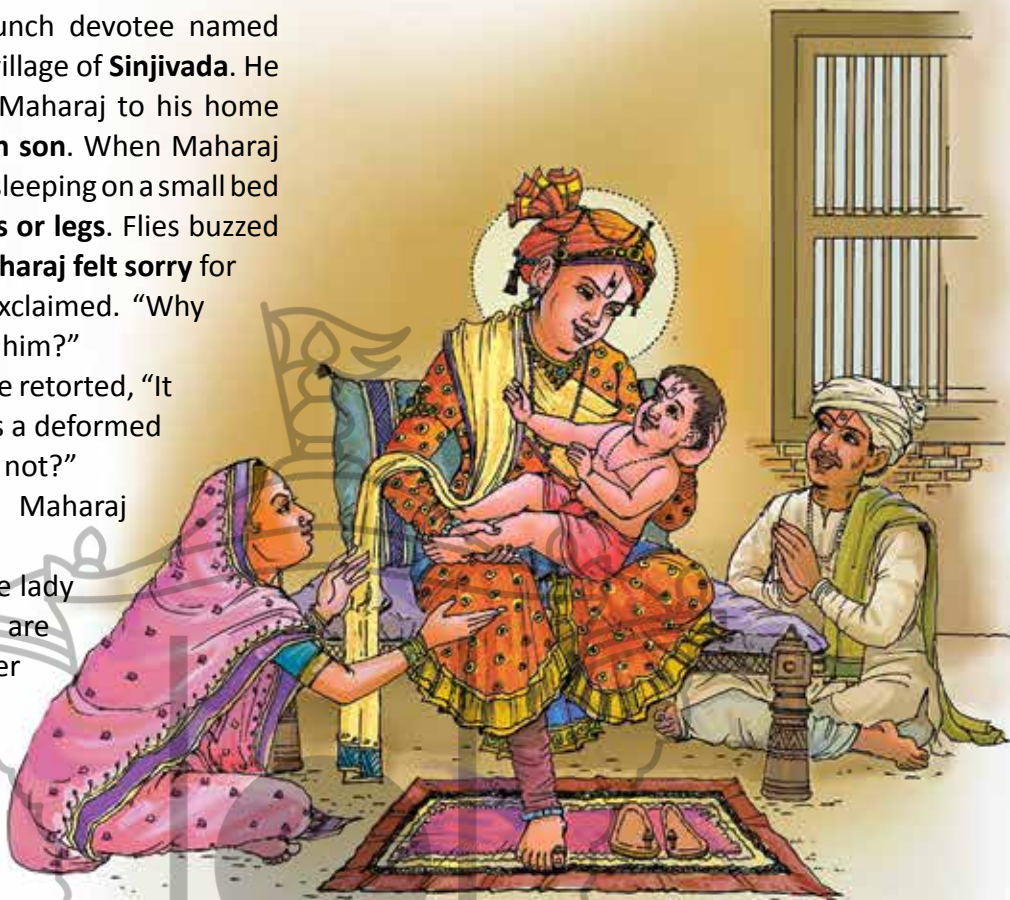
"Maharaj!" **Sura Khachar** began. "This is the rainy season, but **it has not yet rained**. If it doesn't rain soon, our crops will dry up and..."

"How much rain is needed?" Maharaj asked.

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

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

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

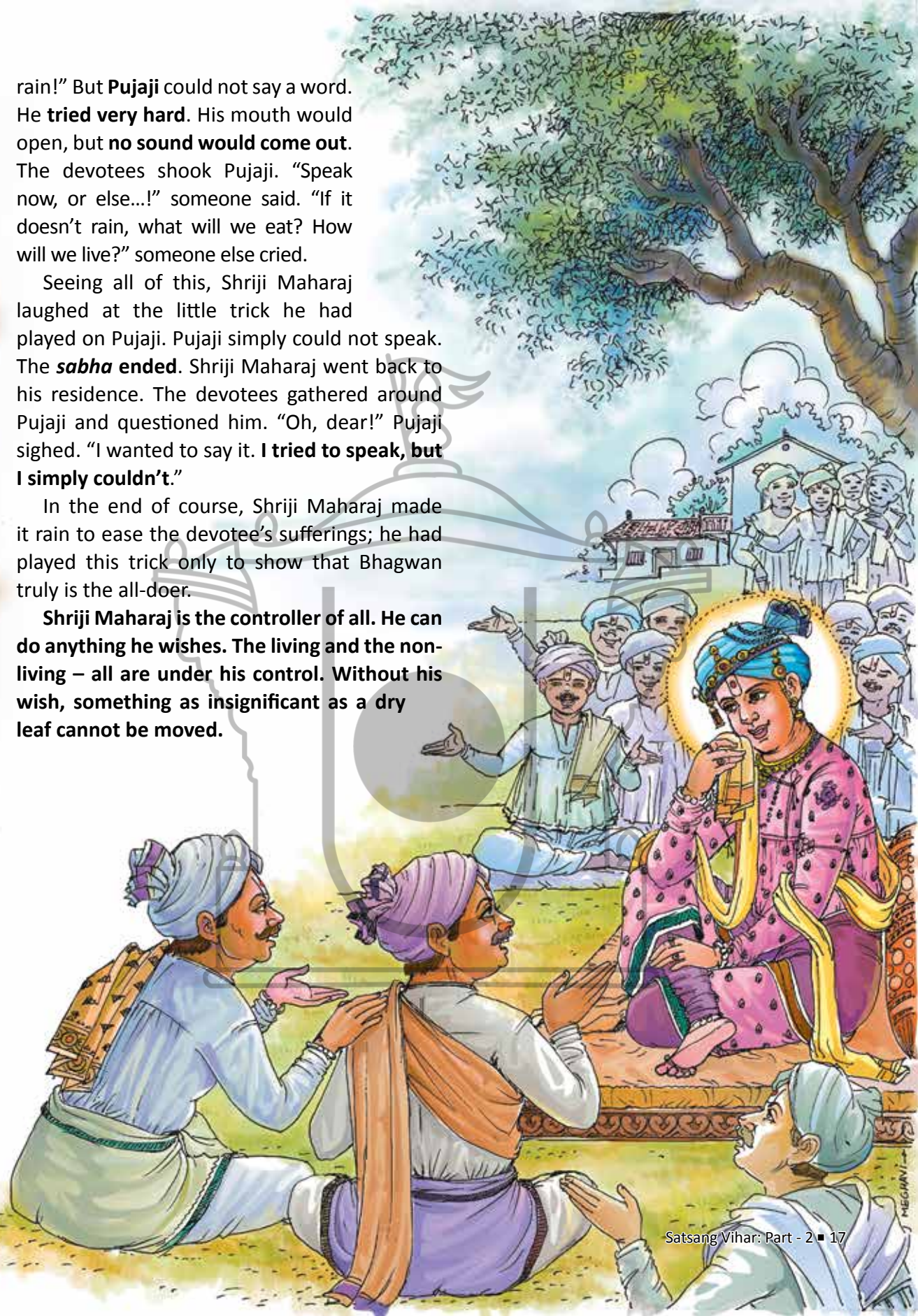


rain!" But **Pujaji** could not say a word. He **tried very hard**. His mouth would open, but **no sound would come out**. The devotees shook Pujaji. "Speak now, or else...!" someone said. "If it doesn't rain, what will we eat? How will we live?" someone else cried.

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

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

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



7. BHAGWAN'S WORDS ALWAYS COME TRUE

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

Kashidas's mother, Naniba, was overwhelmed with joy upon seeing Nilkanth. Seeing her love, Nilkanth requested, "Mother, please bring me some *ladus*." Naniba **went to get the *ladus*** from some Brahmins. But the **Brahmins refused** and said, "The *ladus* have

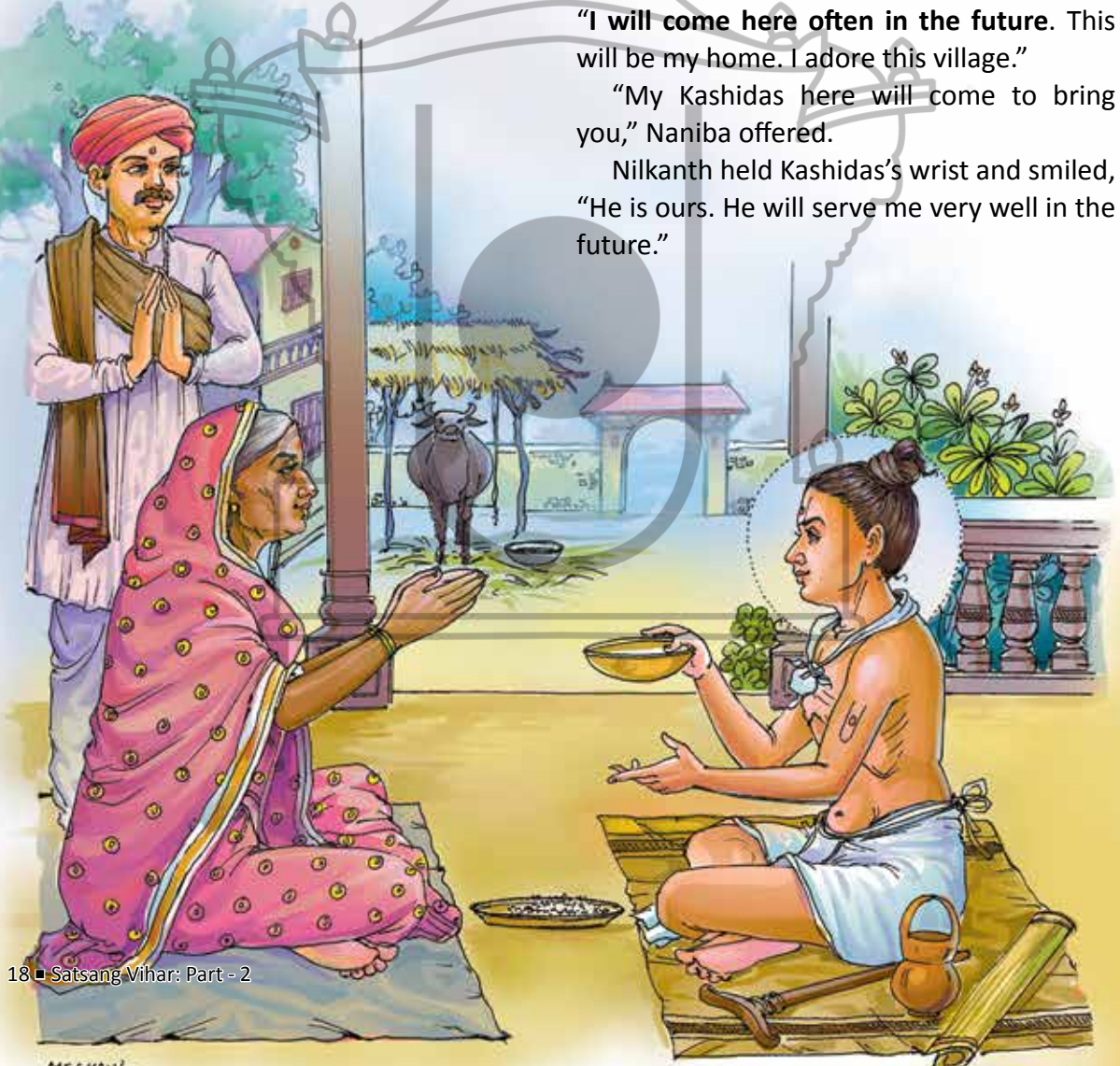
not yet been offered to Bhagwan." Naniba was unsure of what to do. So Nilkanth said, "If not *ladus*, bring **milk and rice**."

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



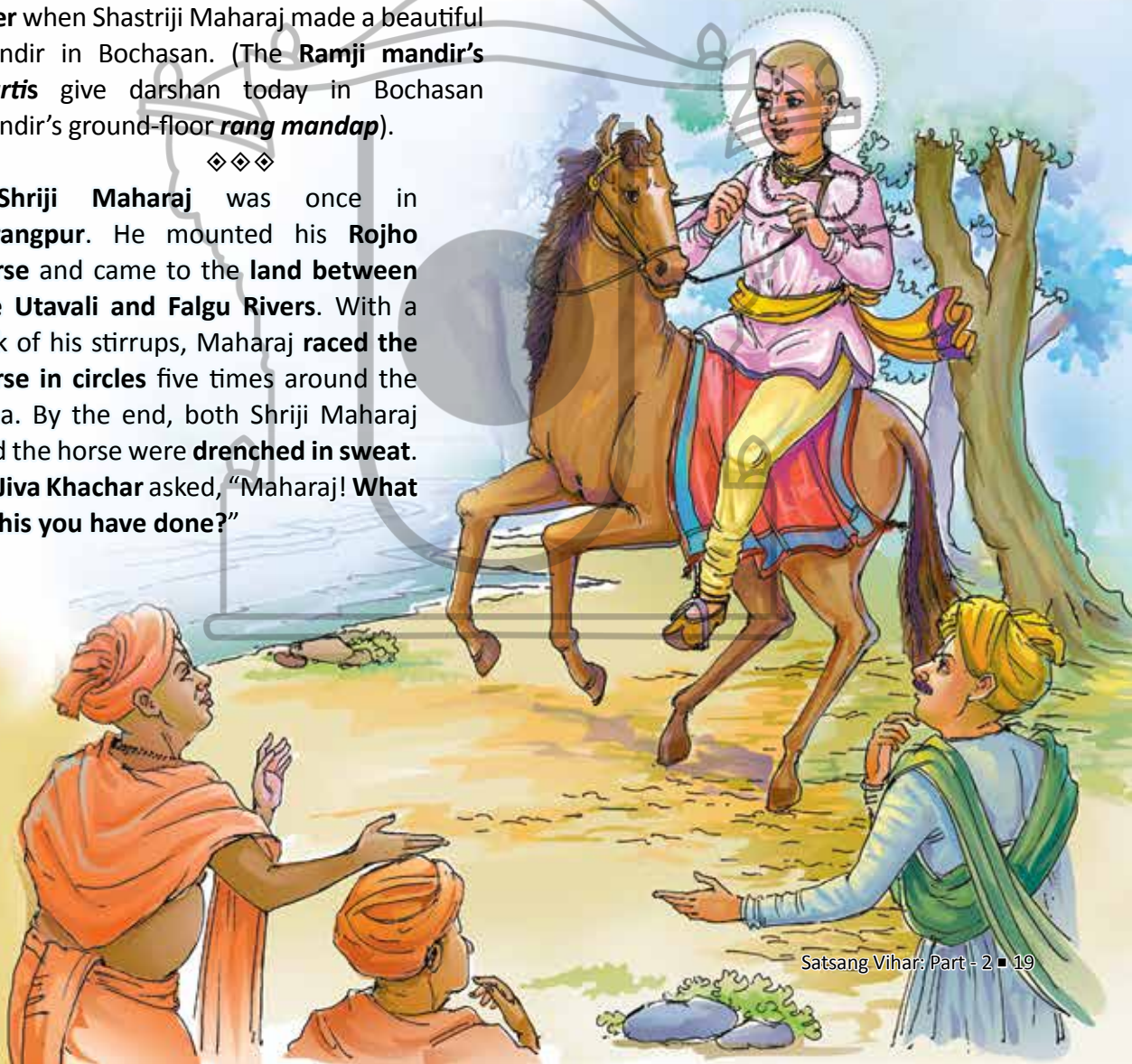
Shriji Maharaj was once in **Sarangpur**. He mounted his **Rojho horse** and came to the land between the **Utavali and Falgu Rivers**. With a kick of his stirrups, Maharaj **raced the horse in circles** five times around the area. By the end, both Shriji Maharaj and the horse were **drenched in sweat**.

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

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

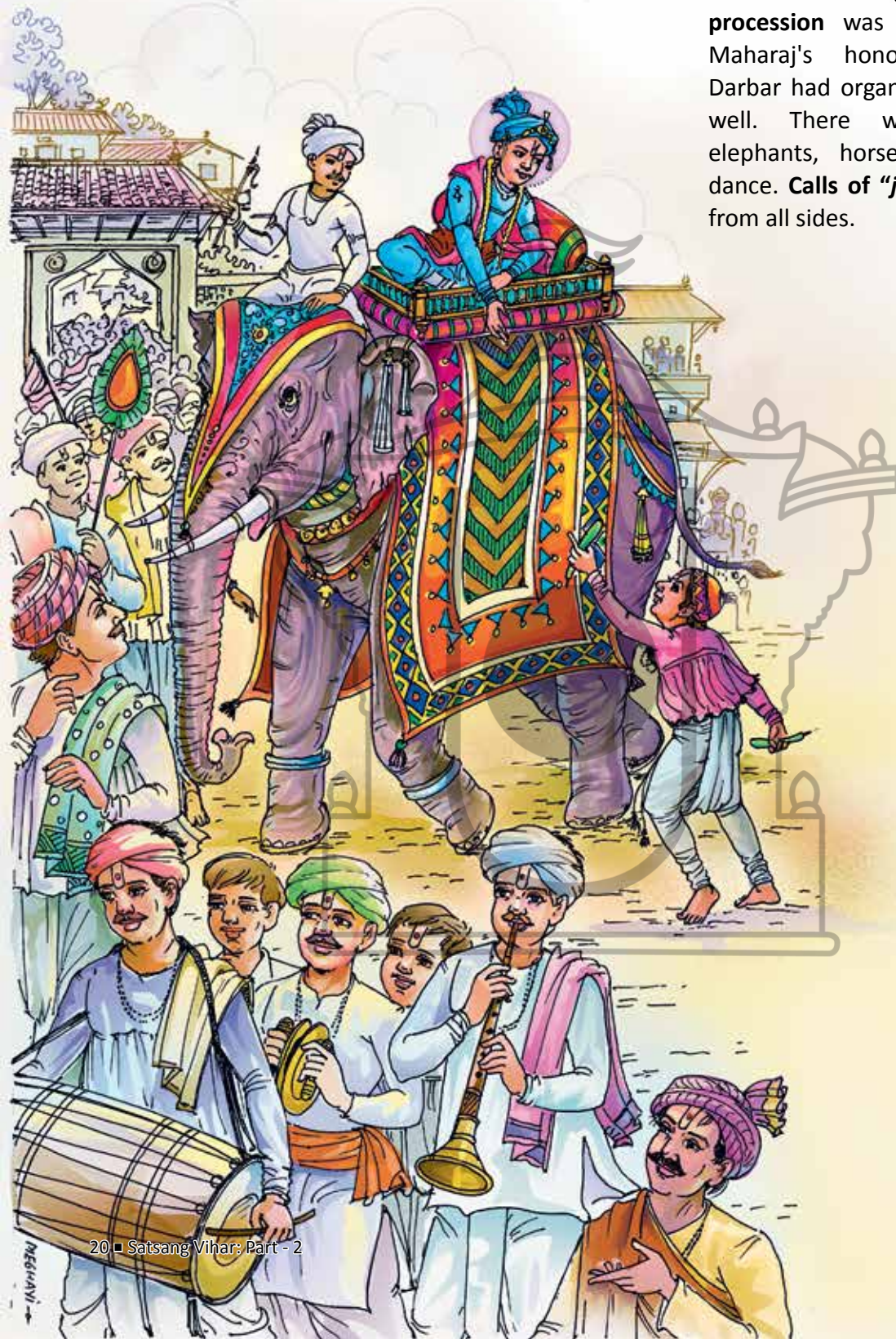
Nobody understood Shriji Maharaj’s words at the time. But his words came true ten decades later when Shastriji Maharaj built a three-story mandir dedicated to Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on that exact location.

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



8. SHRI HARI'S LOVE FOR CHILDREN

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

The boy danced in delight.

Everyone was pleased to see Shriji Maharaj's compassion – everyone except for **Mangalji Diwan**, who was watching from the palace balcony with **Nawab Hamid Khan**. Mangalji had a great dislike for Maharaj.

"Ha!" he said, **trying to turn the Nawab against Maharaj**. "That's Swaminarayan for you... eating a cucumber in the middle of a

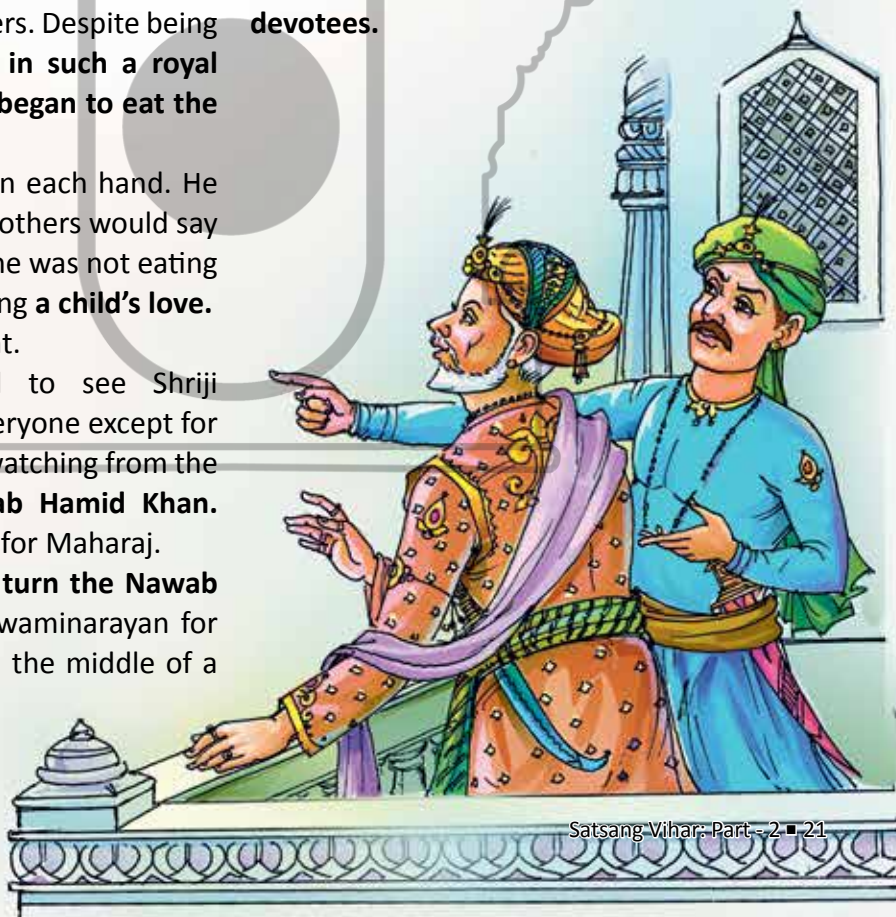
procession organized just for him! Has he no shame? **Has he no manners? I wouldn't even consider him human!** What do you say?"

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

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

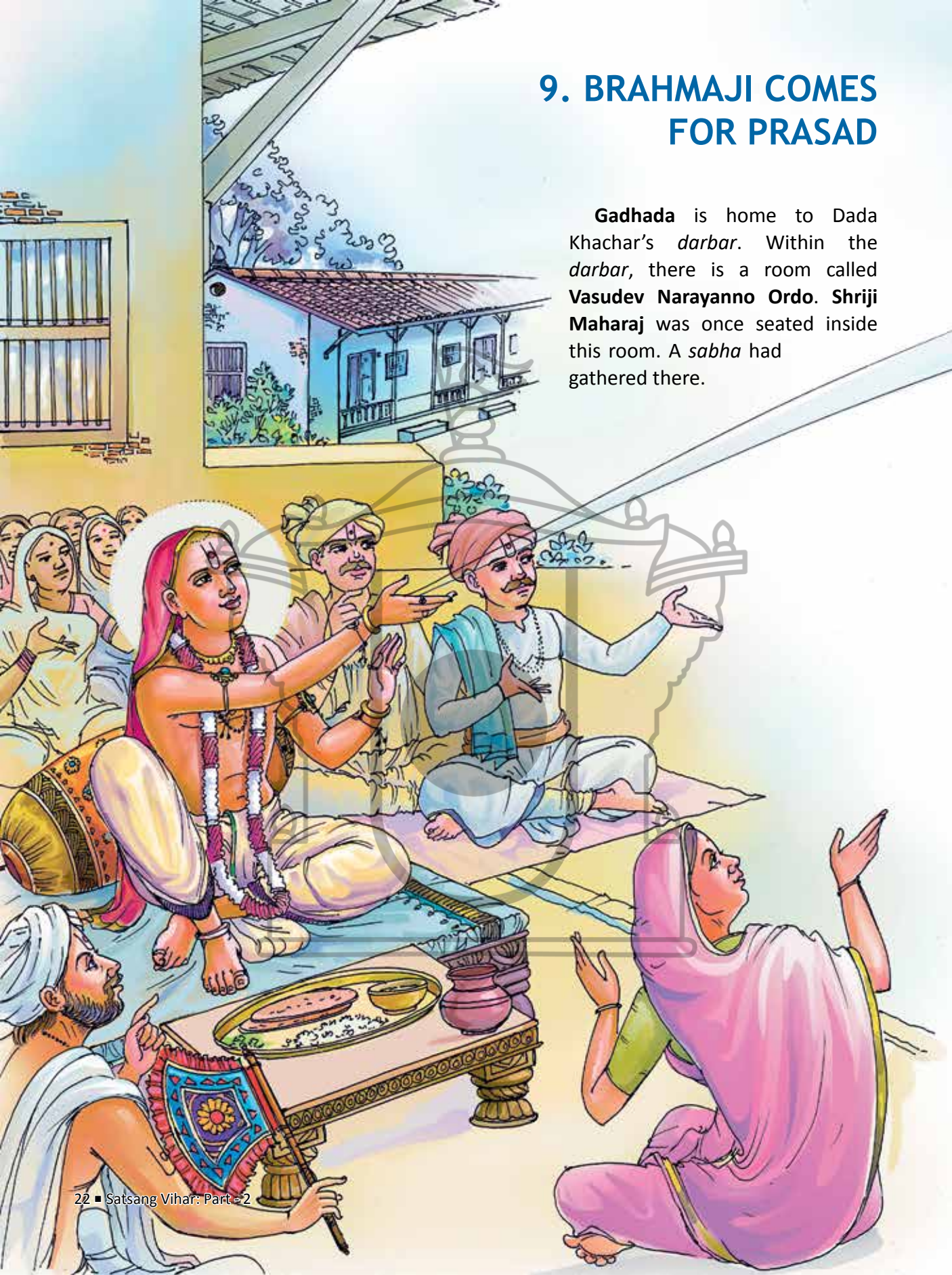
Such was Shriji Maharaj's greatness!

When it comes to his devotees, even if it is a small child from a simple village, and has brought an ordinary cucumber as a gift, and wishes that He would eat it during a parade, Maharaj would fulfil his wish. All Bhagwan asks for is devotion. Bhagwan truly loves his devotees.



9. BRAHMAJI COMES FOR PRASAD

Gadhada is home to Dada Khachar's *darbar*. Within the *darbar*, there is a room called **Vasudev Narayanno Ordo**. **Shriji Maharaj** was once seated inside this room. A *sabha* had gathered there.





Shriji Maharaj turned to **Mulji Brahmachari** and said, “Tell **Laduba** to **make** me a **nice rotlo**. Tell her to add a good amount of ghee on it.”

Never before had Shriji Maharaj asked for a specific food. Mulji Brahmachari was surprised. Yet, he followed Shriji Maharaj’s command.

The **rotlo** was soon ready – perfectly cooked, hot, and covered with tasty ghee. Laduba put it on a dish with some other items and brought it to **Akshar Ordi**.

It was **afternoon**. Shriji Maharaj had a bath, put on a yellow dhoti, and came for lunch. He covered his head with a long cloth before he started eating, but left his ears open. Some women were sitting in the distance, doing darshan. In front of him was a dish full of delicious food. But his eyes fell upon the **rotlo**. He was pleased with how it was made. He smiled but ate very little of it. Instead, as he ate, he frequently looked up at the tree **opposite** him.

Brahmachari asked, “Maharaj! What are you doing? Why do you look at that tree? Is someone there?”

Just then, a **crow** **seated** on the tree took flight. “**Kaaa... kaaa!**” it screeched. It

swooped down towards Shriji Maharaj. Brahmachari tried to drive it away, but Shriji Maharaj stopped him. “Stop, stop... don’t drive it away!”

Brahmachari asked, “But why not?”

Shriji Maharaj did not answer. He looked at the crow, **took the rotlo in hand**, and **tossed it**. The **rotlo** soared towards the crow, spinning like a Frisbee. It was just what **the crow** had been waiting for!

The crow **opened its beak** and swiftly **grasped** the **rotlo**. Before anyone could speak, it **flew off** into the distance.

Laduba exclaimed, “Oh, Maharaj! **What have you done?** You gave the **rotlo** to a crow!”

Shriji Maharaj smiled, “Laduba, it was not just a crow. It was **Brahmaji** in disguise. He had come here **to take prasad** from me. He had been waiting eagerly for years. But I allowed him to come only today.”

Such is Shriji Maharaj’s greatness!

He is Sarvopari Bhagwan. He is difficult to attain even for devas like Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Even they wish for his prasad. Through his prasad they are granted moksha.

10. BHAGWAN IS DIVINE

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

Shriji Maharaj soon arrived to prepare the **stir-fry mix**. Once the **vegetables** were put in, he **mixed** them with an enormous ladle. He began to **sweat** due to the heat coming from

the wooden stove. He was wearing a **short dhoti**, which he used to wipe the **spices** off of his **hands**.

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

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

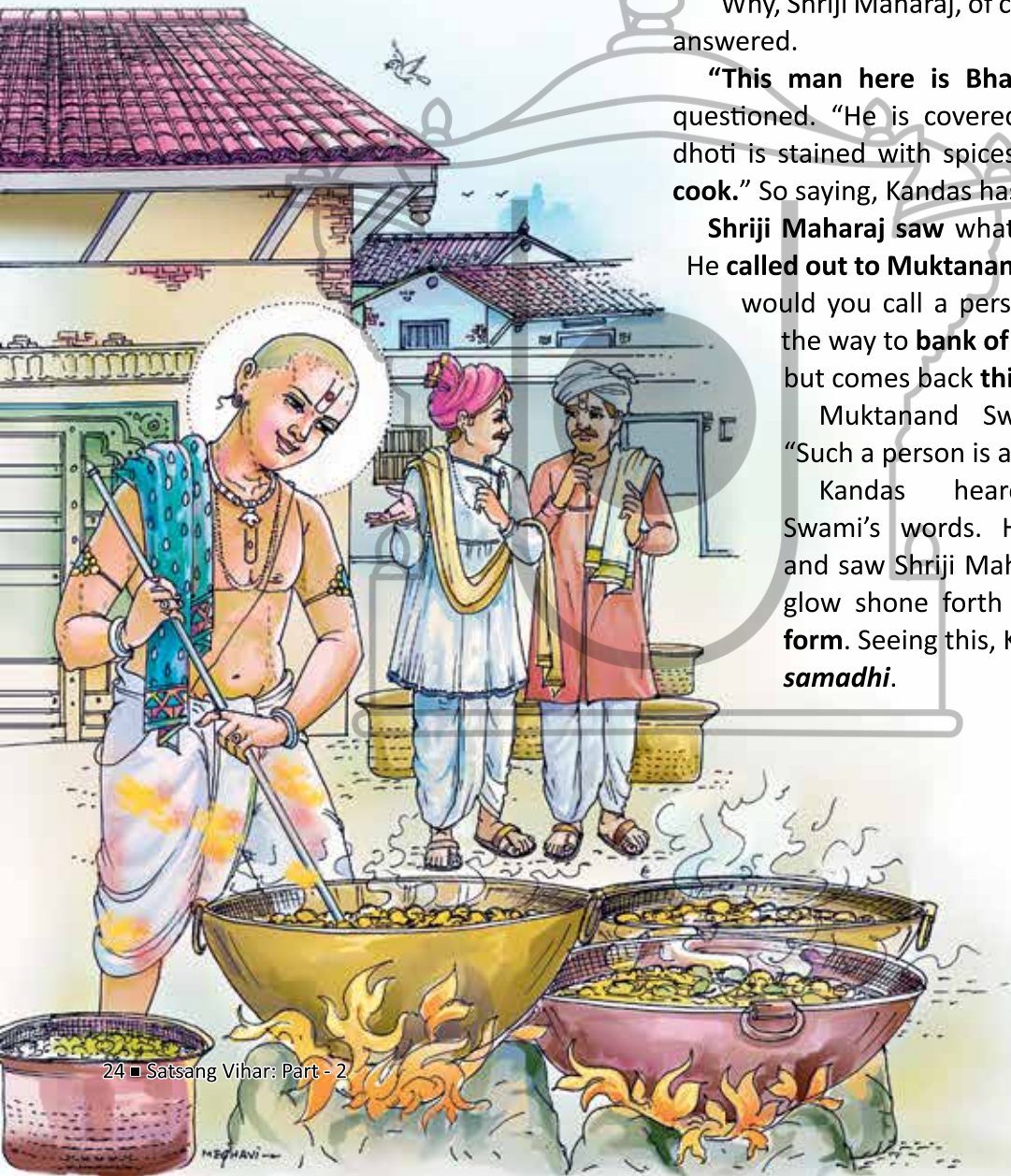
"Why, Shriji Maharaj, of course!" Kashidas answered.

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

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

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

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



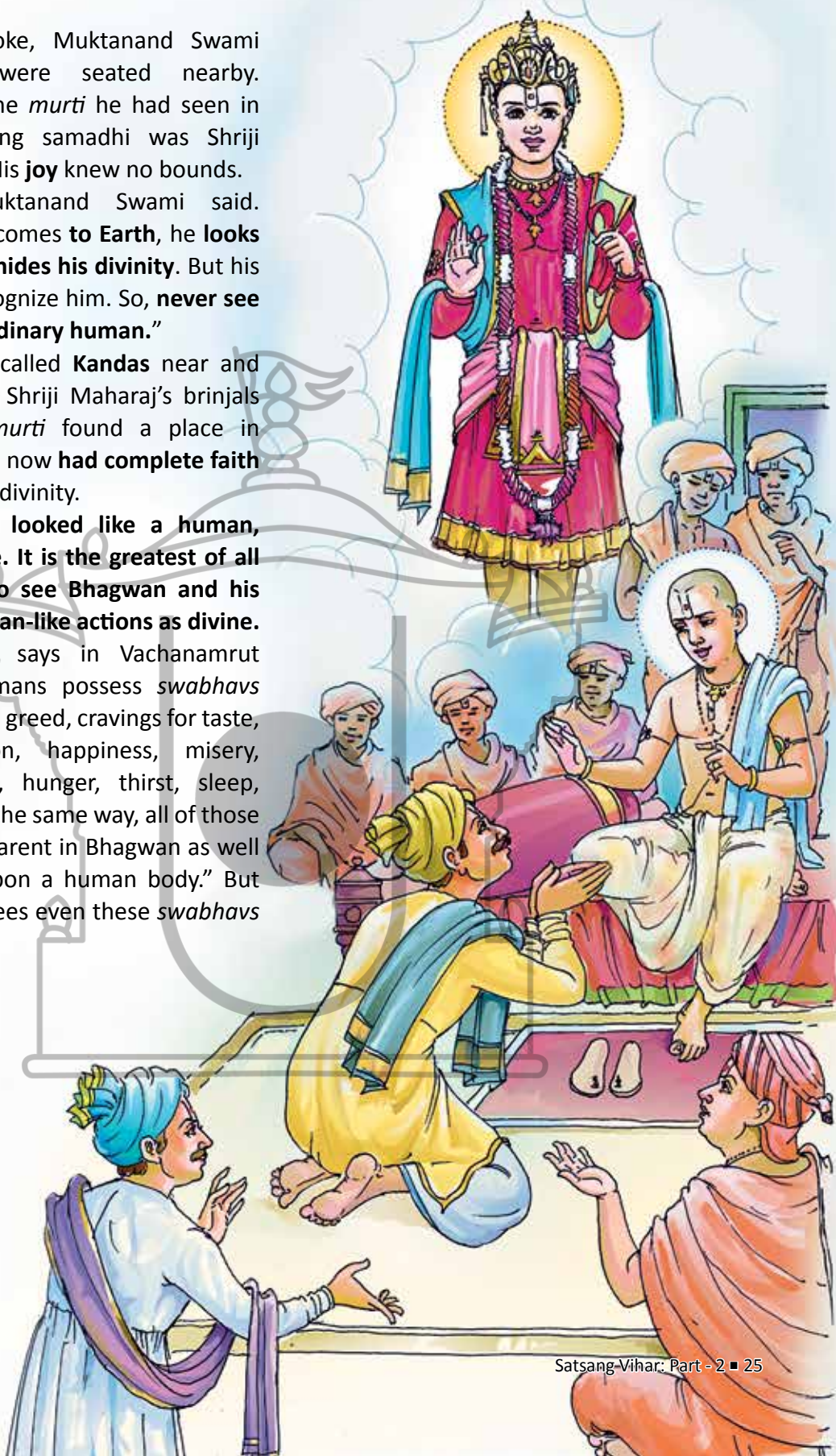
When he awoke, Muktanand Swami and Kashidas were seated nearby. Kandas realized the *murti* he had seen in Akshardham during samadhi was Shriji Maharaj himself. His **joy** knew no bounds.

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

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

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

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



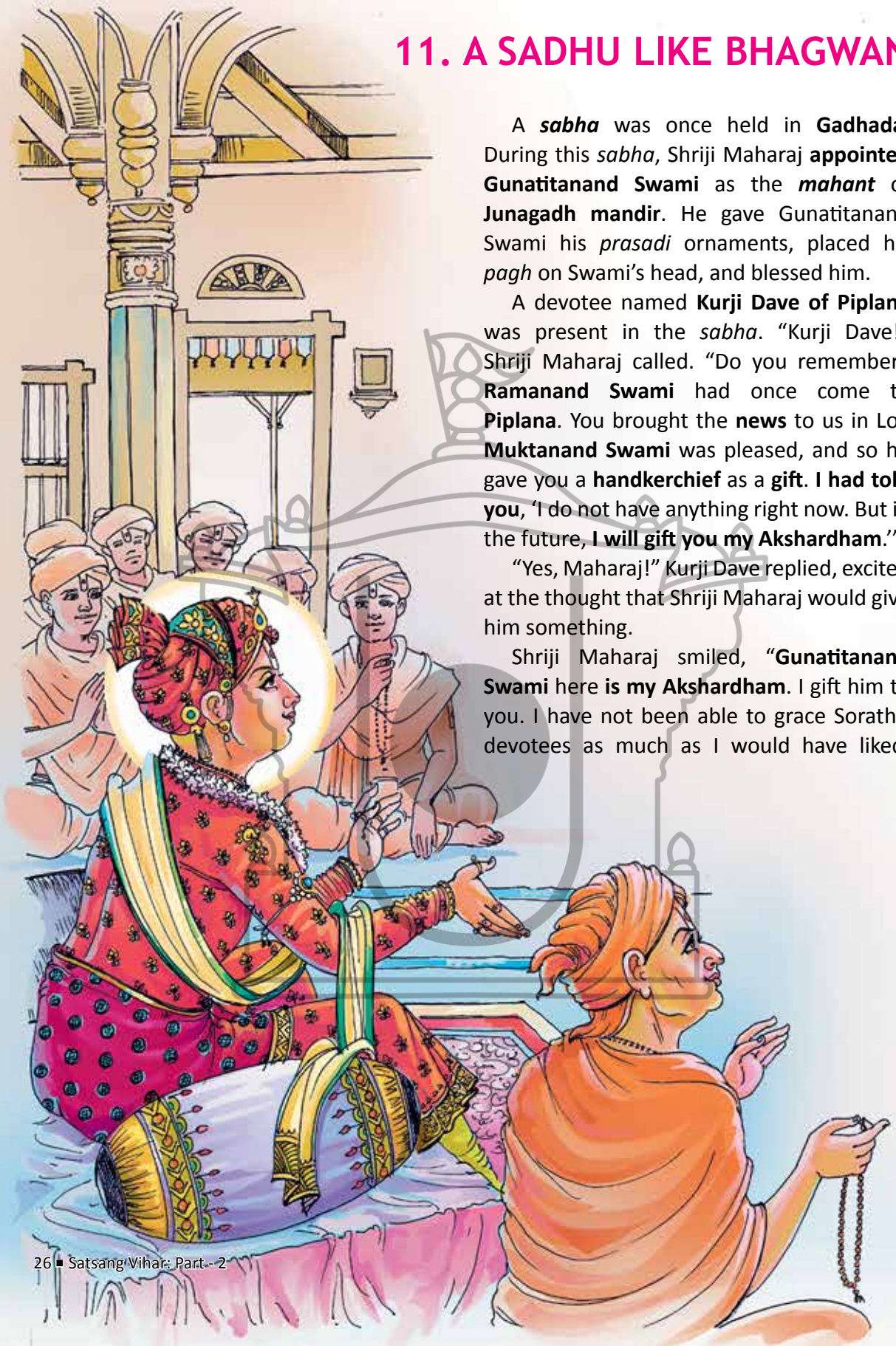
11. A SADHU LIKE BHAGWAN

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

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

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

Shriji Maharaj smiled, "**Gunatitanand Swami** here is my **Akshardham**. I gift him to you. I have not been able to grace Sorath's devotees as much as I would have liked.



Therefore, **I am giving you** this sadhu, who is my everything, my Akshardham."

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



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

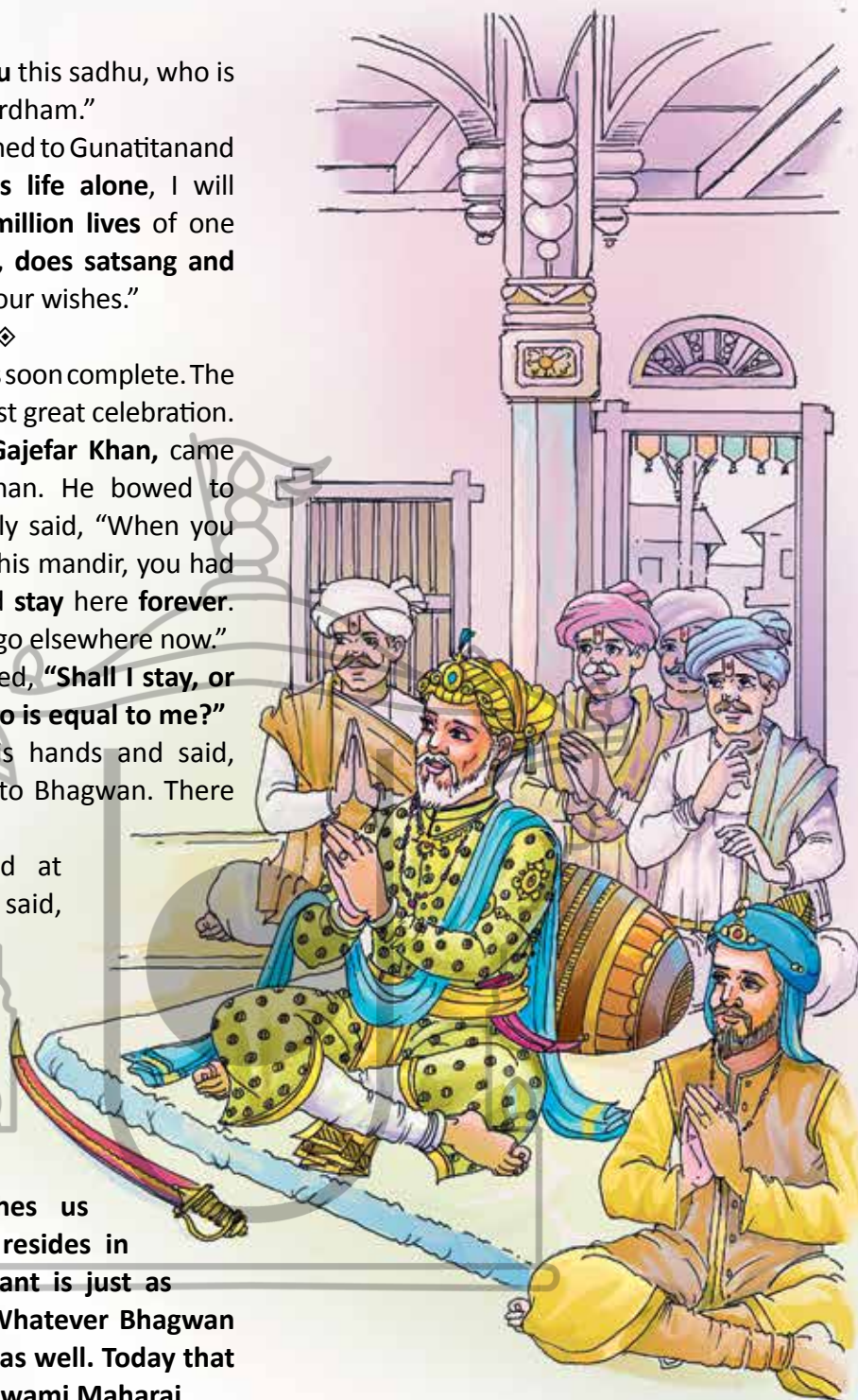
Shriji Maharaj answered, "**Shall I stay, or shall I keep someone who is equal to me?**"

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

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

"Very well, Maharaj!" the Nawab exclaimed.

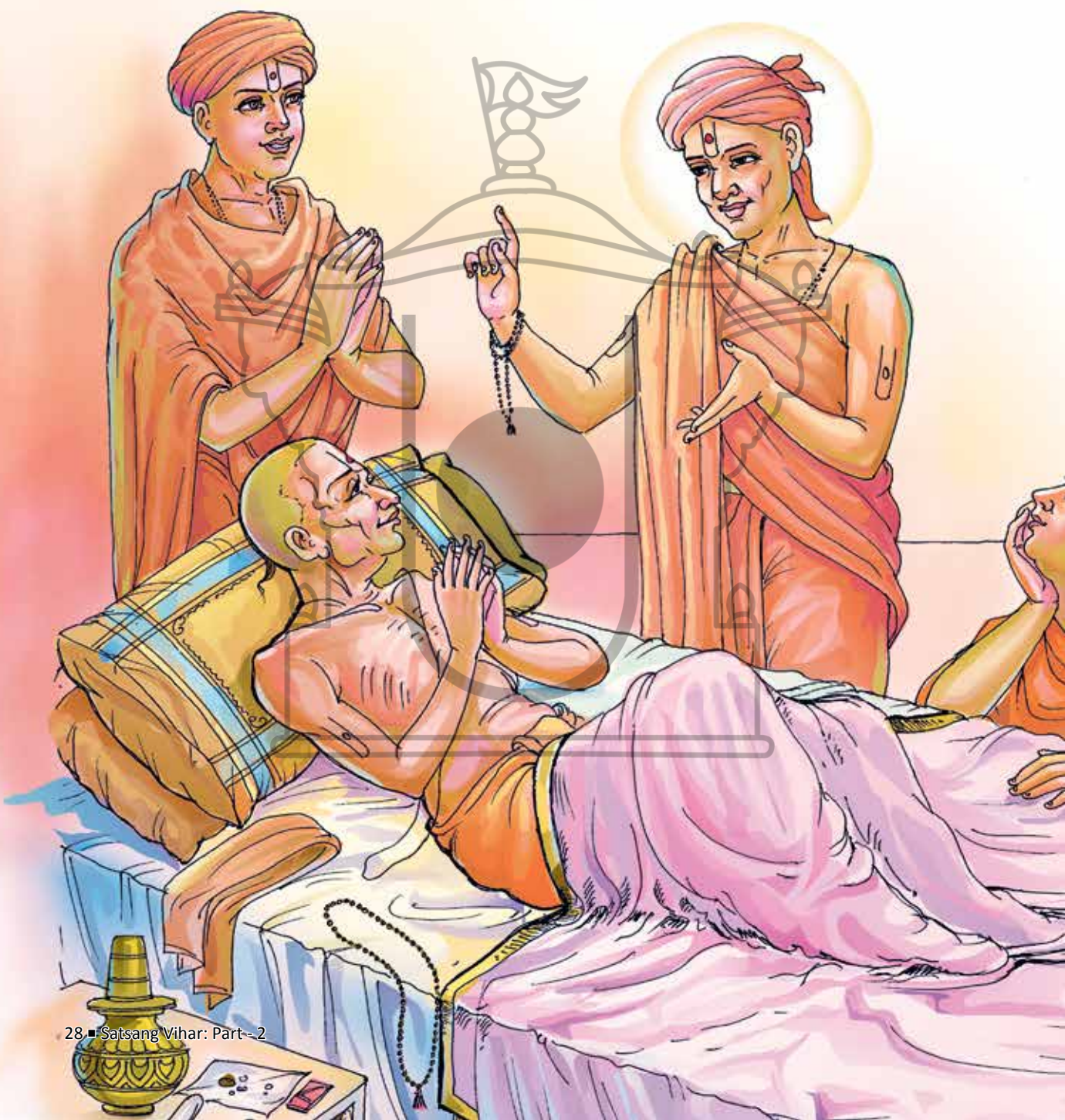
Shriji Maharaj teaches us that because Bhagwan resides in the Gunatit Sant, the Sant is just as powerful as Bhagwan. Whatever Bhagwan can do, the Guru can do as well. Today that Gunatit Sant is Mahant Swami Maharaj.



12. AKSHAR REVEALS THE GLORY OF PURUSHOTTAM

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

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



■ EXPLAINING MAHARAJ'S GREATNESS TO THE PARAMHANSAS

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

Gunatitanand Swami once came to meet him. Bhai Atmanand Swami expressed his **concern**. **Gunatitanand Swami answered**, "There is **nothing wrong with your character**. But you must be **lacking in understanding**." So saying, he explained to him **Shriji Maharaj's supreme greatness**. He also explained that only one who is *brahmarup* is worthy of offering bhakti to Bhagwan. He thus clarified the basics of *upasana*. His words were **according to the Vachanamrut**. Bhai Atmanand Swami was convinced. "**Shriji Maharaj has kept me**

here to strengthen my *upasana*. If it were not for Gunatitanand Swami, I would have had to take another birth."

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

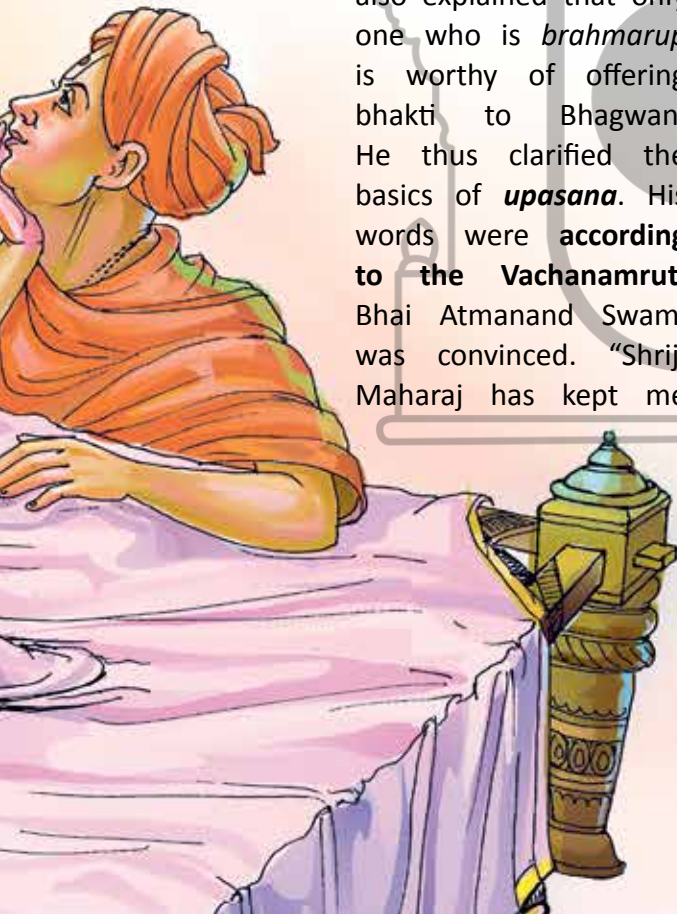
Gunatitanand Swami had explained Shriji Maharaj's supreme greatness to countless devotees and paramhansas. Moreover, he had made countless people brahmarup, worthy of a place in Akshardham.

■ UPASANA IN A NUTSHELL

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

In short, only when one does satsang of the Gunatit Guru does one become brahmarup and worthy of offering bhakti to Purushottam.

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



13. ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH SADHANA

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

■ SACRIFICING HIMSELF FOR SWAMI

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

even cause **blindness**.

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

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

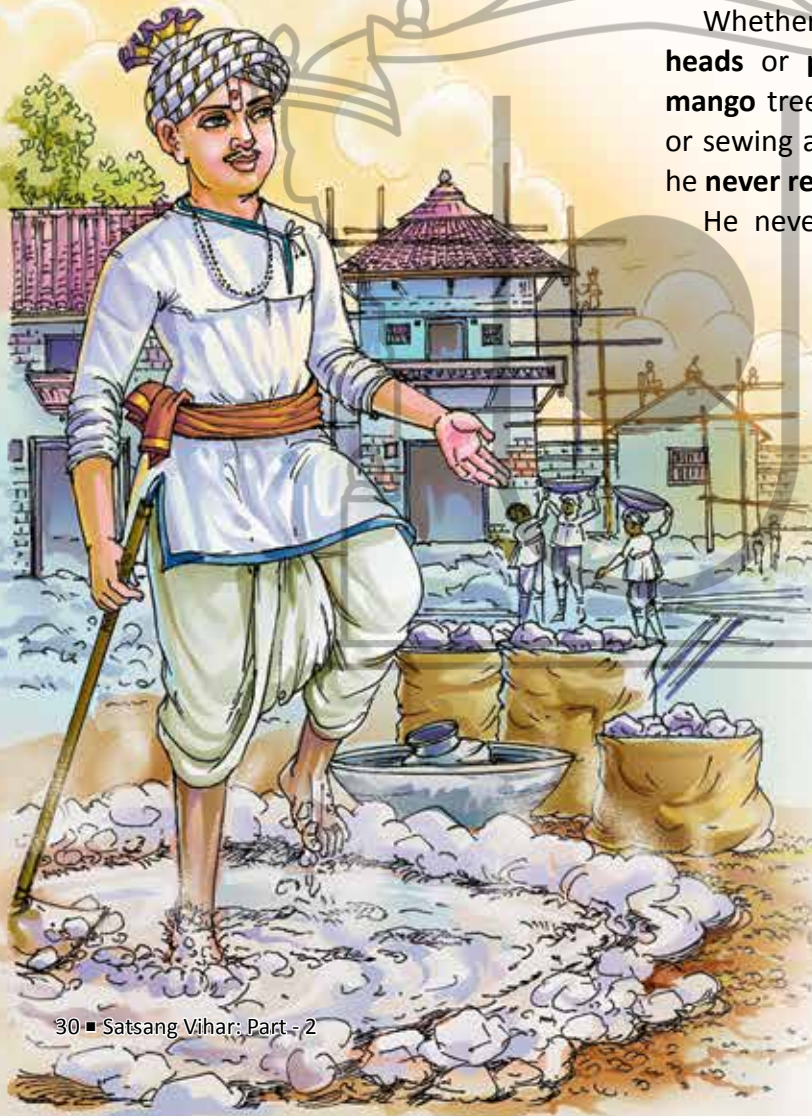
Pragji Bhakta would answer, "I have **sacrificed myself for Gunatitanand Swami**. I wish **only to please him**."

■ SEVA WAS HIS LIFE

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

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

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



■ GUNATIT, WAKE UP!

Once, **Gunatitanand Swami** asked **Balmukunddas Swami**, “Go and call Bhagatji.”

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

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

Swami chuckled and said, “Go back and

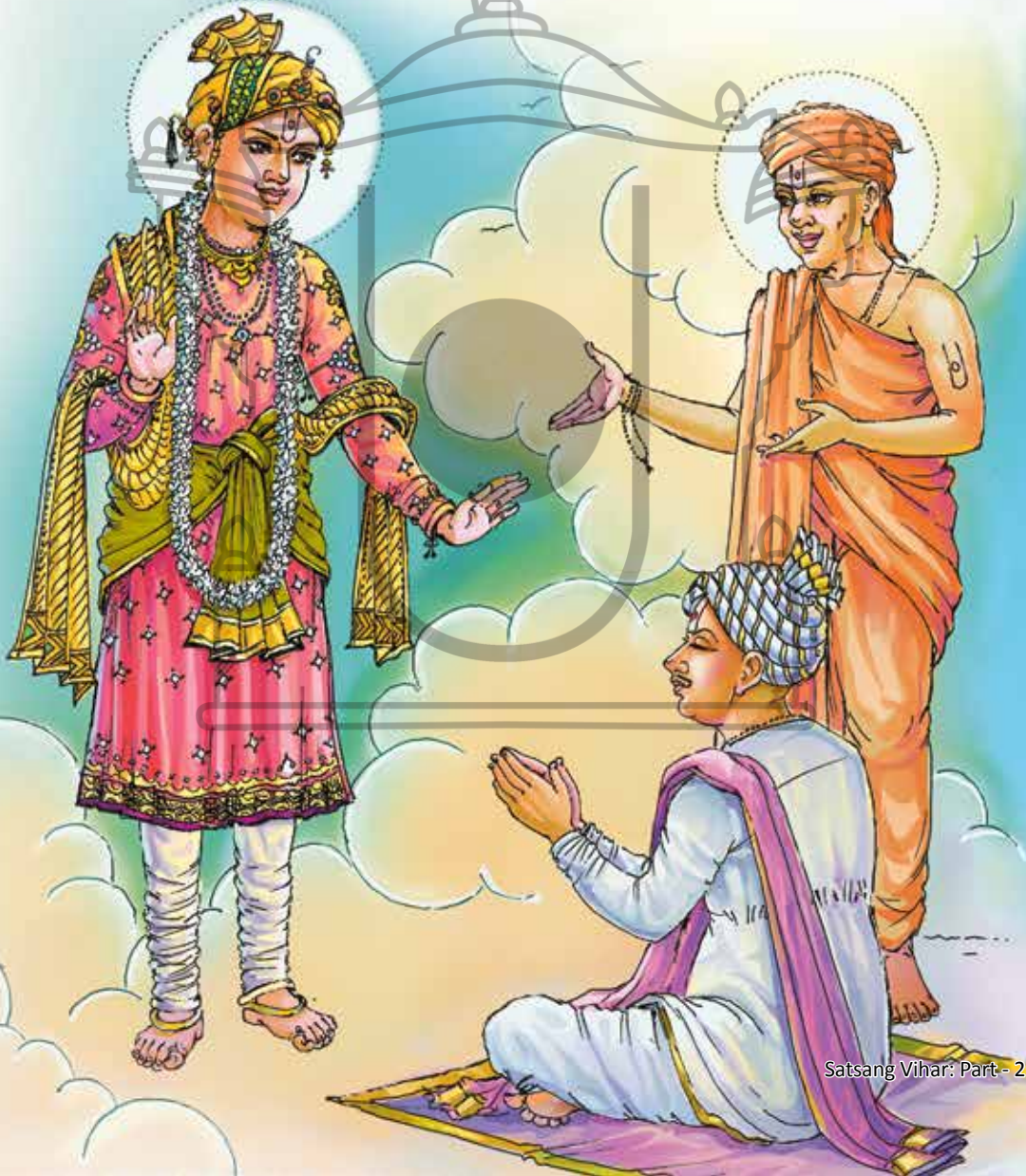
say, ‘**Gunatit, wake up!**’”

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

When Gunatitanand Swami came to know of this, he said, “**Pragji** has died. He **has become Gunatit.**”

Such was Bhagatji Maharaj’s greatness!

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



14. SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S LIFE AND WORK

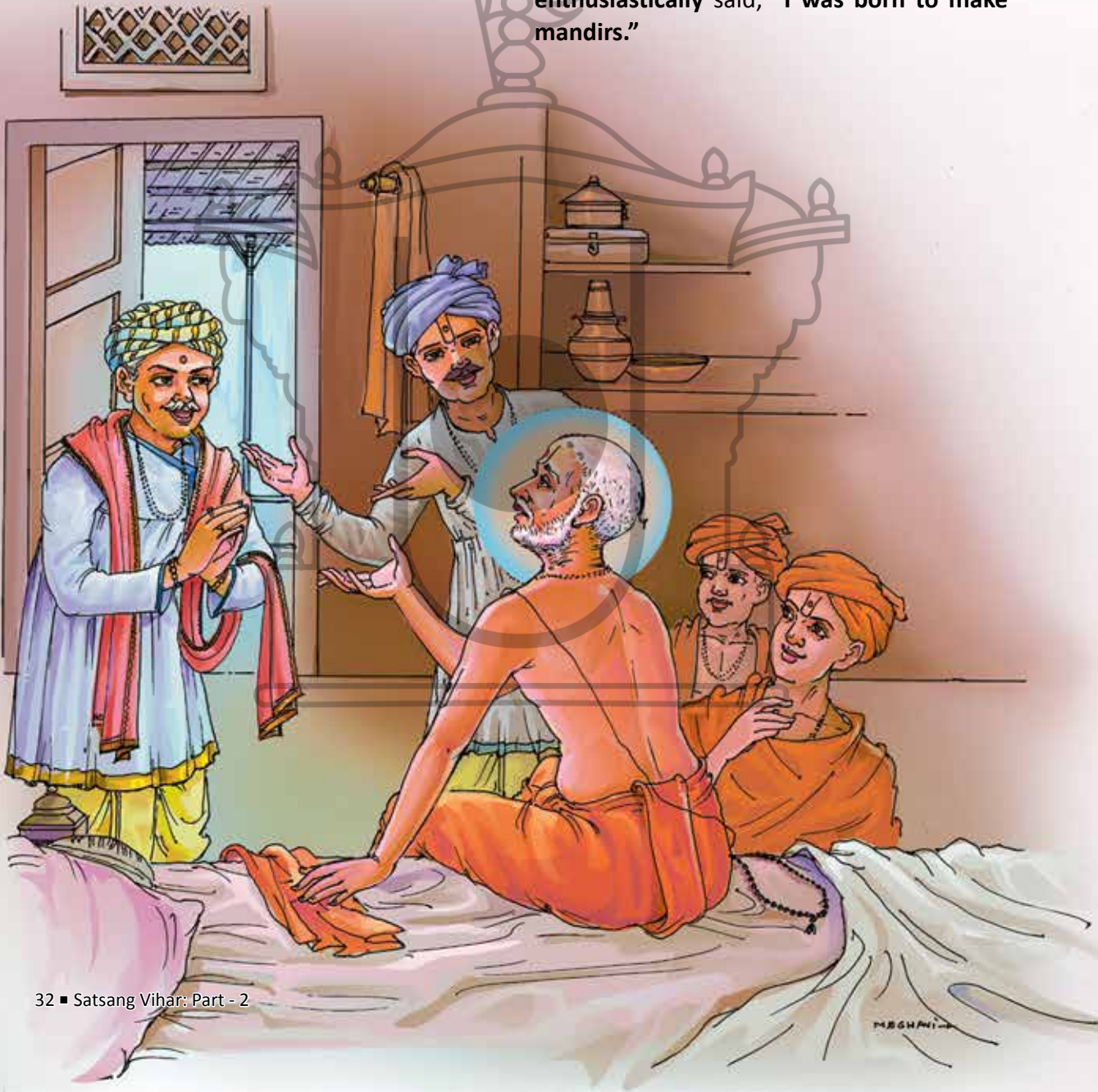
There was once a **merchant** named **Narsinhdas** of **Mahuva**. He had built a beautiful mandir. He was **in search of a great sadhu** to do the **pratishta** ceremony.

Someone suggested the name of Shastriji Maharaj. The merchant thus came to **Sarangpur**. But **Shastriji Maharaj** was **very ill**. The merchant waited for a few days, but

Shastriji Maharaj did not get any better.

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

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



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

Childhood Name: Dungar Bhagat

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

Birthplace: Mahelav (Dist. Anand, Gujarat)

Mother's Name: Hetba

Father's Name: Dhoribhai

■ IMPORTANT EVENTS:

1865 CE : Birth

1881 CE : Left home at age 17

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

1882 CE : Met Bhagatji Maharaj for the first time.

1905 CE : Left Vartal.

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

1911 CE : Met Yogiji Maharaj for the first time.

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

1951 CE : Passed away in Sarangpur at age 86.

■ HIS LIFE WORK

1. Gave the eternal Vedic *upasana* of Akshar Purushottam a **physical form** by installing their *murtis*.

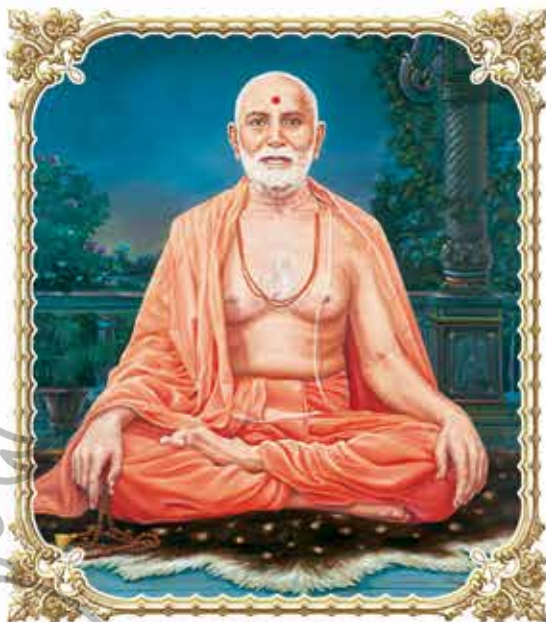
2. **Established** the BAPS Sanstha.

3. Built **five shikharbaddha mandirs** – Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara and Gadhadra.

4. Initiated more than **50 sadhus**.

5. Suffered countless **hardships** to spread *upasana*.

6. **Gifted us Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj**.



■ HIS TEACHINGS

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

■ OPINIONS

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

- Pramukh Swami Maharaj

15. YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S CHILDHOOD

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

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

But he would never tell.

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

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

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



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

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

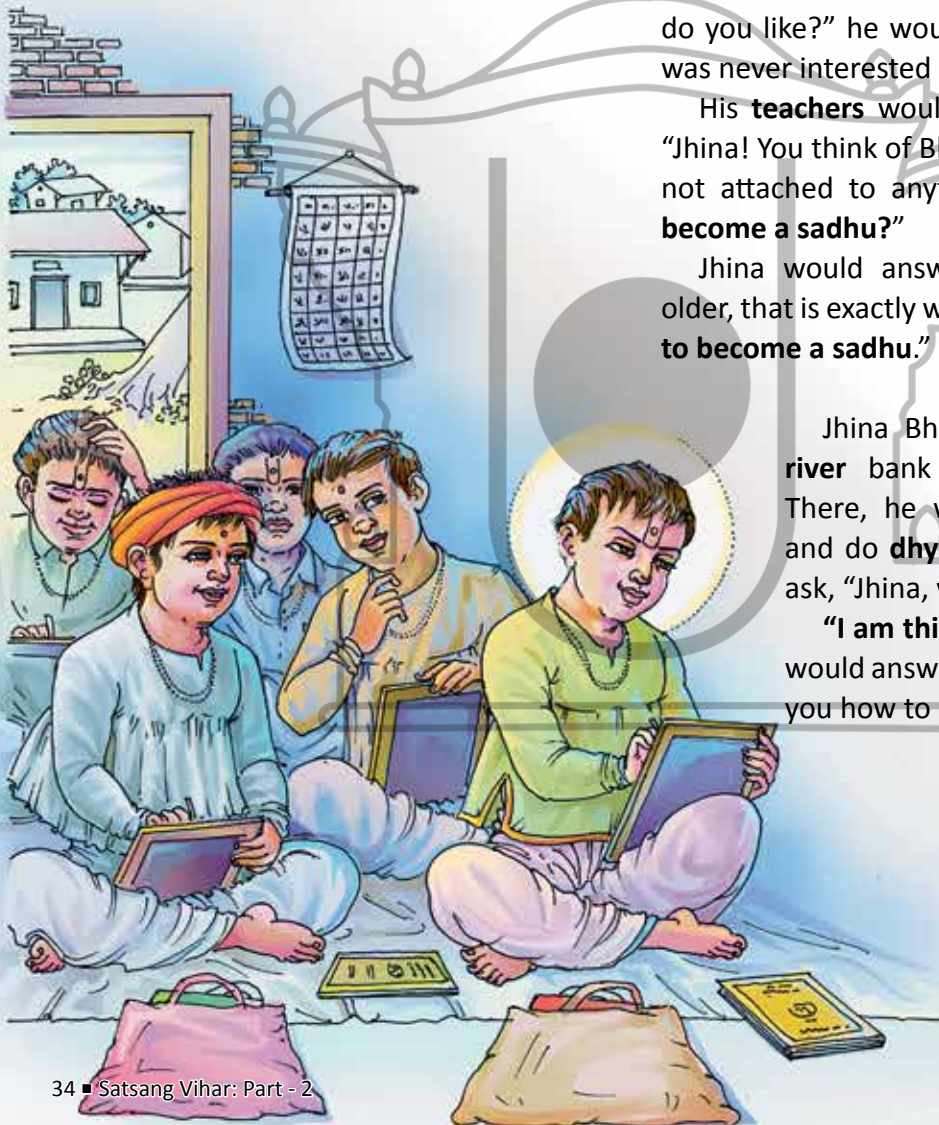
His **teachers** would sometimes tell him, "Jhina! You think of Bhagwan all day. You are not attached to anything. **Why don't you become a sadhu?**"

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



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

"I am thinking of Bhagwan," he would answer. "Sit here. I will teach you how to do dhyana, too."



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

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

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

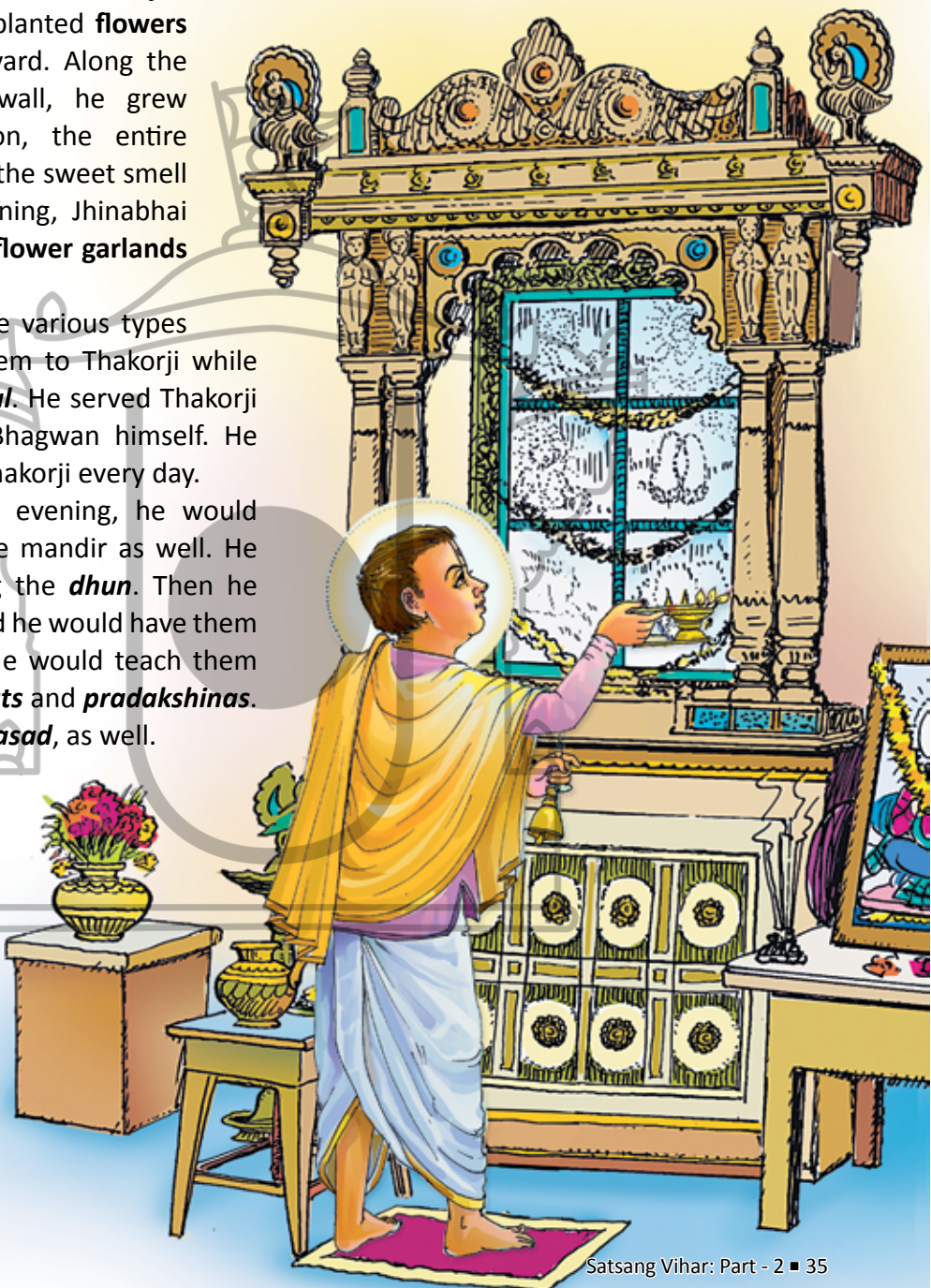
He would also make various types of foods and serve them to Thakorji while lovingly singing the **thal**. He served Thakorji as one would serve Bhagwan himself. He would even speak to Thakorji every day.

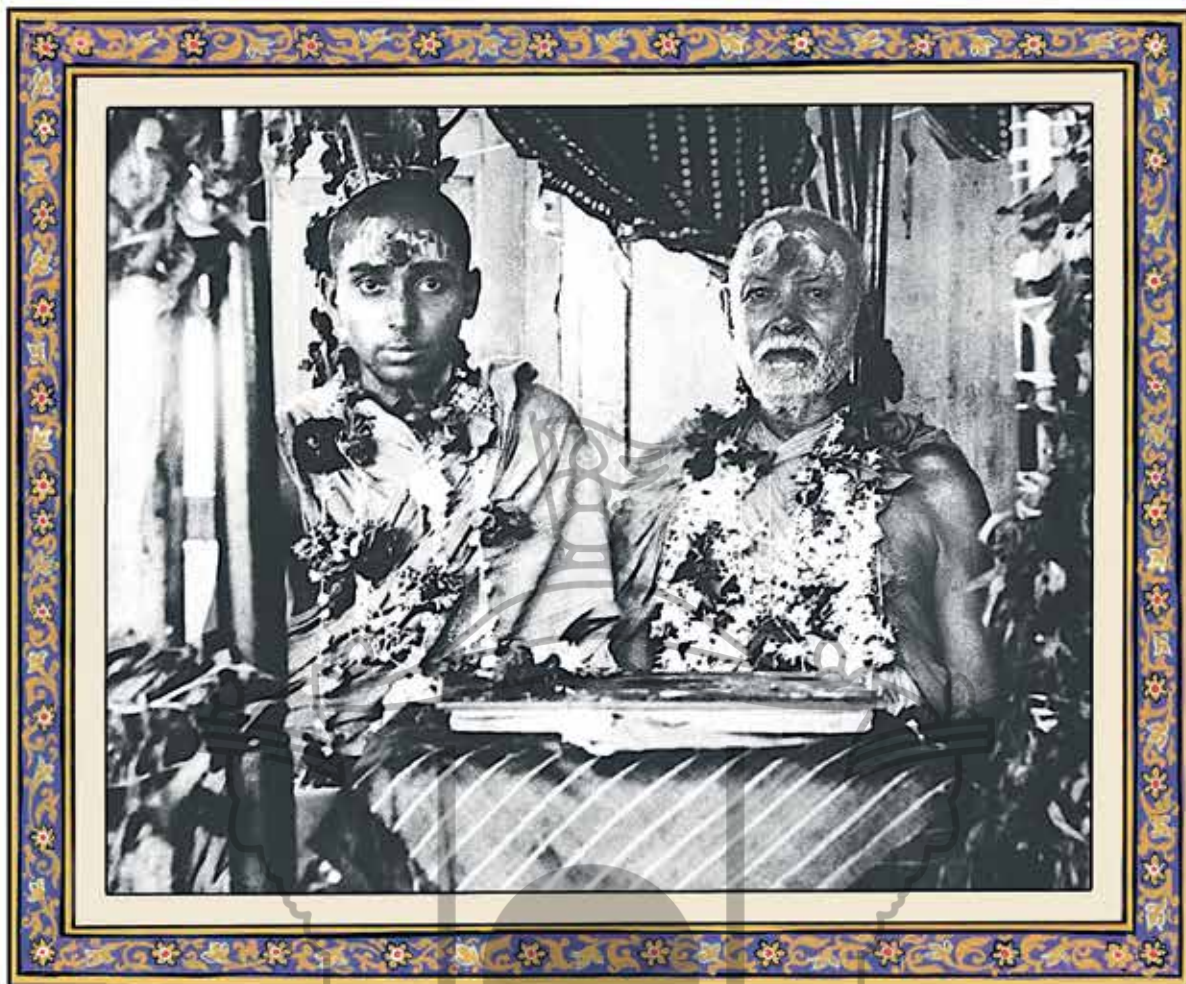
Every morning and evening, he would bring his friends to the mandir as well. He would have them sing the **dhun**. Then he would sing bhajans, and he would have them sing along with him. He would teach them how to do **arti**, **dandvats** and **pradakshinas**. He would give them **prasad**, as well.

Such was Jhina Bhagat's devotion and greatness!

He was interested only in two things – studying and worshipping Bhagwan. He would never fall behind in offering bhakti, and he was

always first in school. He never fought with others or misbehaved. He was never stubborn. He was regular in all that he did. And he was humble. His childhood was ideal. A person who has such qualities as a child can grow up to be great.





16. LOVE FOR THE GURU

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

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Atladara at the time. Seeing Tulsibhai, Shastriji Maharaj remarked, "If **Naran'da (Pramukh Swami Maharaj)** comes and sings the Bhaktachintamani for me, **I will get better.**"

Receiving the **news** in Atladara, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** instantly **left** for Sarangpur with another *sant*. It was **3 a.m.** and it was **raining** hard. The **Saurashtra Mail** train came

to **Vadodara Railway Station**. The **doors** were **closed**. But Swami did not wait for another train. Instead, he jumped onto a **footboard** and hung there holding a **railing** for support.

Cold winds whipped through the air. Swami was drenched. His entire **body** **shivered**. The **charcoal powder** flying from the engine was simply unbearable. And he could not even wipe his eyes as he held the railing with one hand and his belongings in the other. But he was not bothered. All that was in his heart was a strong desire to meet his guru.

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

Finally, he reached **Botad**, a town 10 km away from Sarangpur. Now the real test was to begin! Because of the rain, there were **no vehicles** for Sarangpur. And there was **water** everywhere. In places, it was **chest-deep**. The roads could not even be seen. But Swami **bravely walked** through the dangerous waters, the streams and the mud.

Eventually, he reached **Sarangpur**. Soaked, he went straight to **Shastriji Maharaj's room**.

Shastriji Maharaj was overjoyed. He got up and **hugged him**. "Naran'da!" he exclaimed. "You are here? Wonderful!"

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

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

(Pramukh Swami Maharaj's sadhu name was Narayanswarupdas Swami. Hence, Shastriji Maharaj often lovingly called him Naran'da.)



17. LIVING MANDIRS

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has built the most mandirs in this world. He has also created the world's largest Hindu mandir – Akshardham. But he has not only created mandirs made of stone, bricks and cement, he has **also created living mandirs**.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's living mandirs are his devotees. Through his contact, even the worst of sinners were transformed. One such person came from a village named **Odarka** in the **Bhavnagar** district. His name

was **Ramsang Bapu**. Let us hear his story in his own words...

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

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

"I once met a man named **Temubha**. The **police were after him** because he had **killed** someone. I told him, '**Come and join me**. The police are nothing more than small mosquitoes to me.'"

"Another dacoit named **Harubhai** **joined** us as well. We formed an infamous **trio**. People **trembled just upon hearing our names**. However much money we asked for, people paid it right away."

"Once, a tough shepherd had taken someone's daughter away. The father came and told us. We beat that shepherd so badly, he vowed to never touch another woman."

"Once there was this *bawo* who had no character. He would steal from people and harass women. We found out about him so we silenced him for good."

"Another time, we were looting a home. The woman in the house grabbed a gun and aimed at me. Without any thought, I just shot her straight in the head."



"The **great bandit Bhupat** had heard of me. He asked me to join him. But **I refused**. I was fine on my own. I didn't need his help."

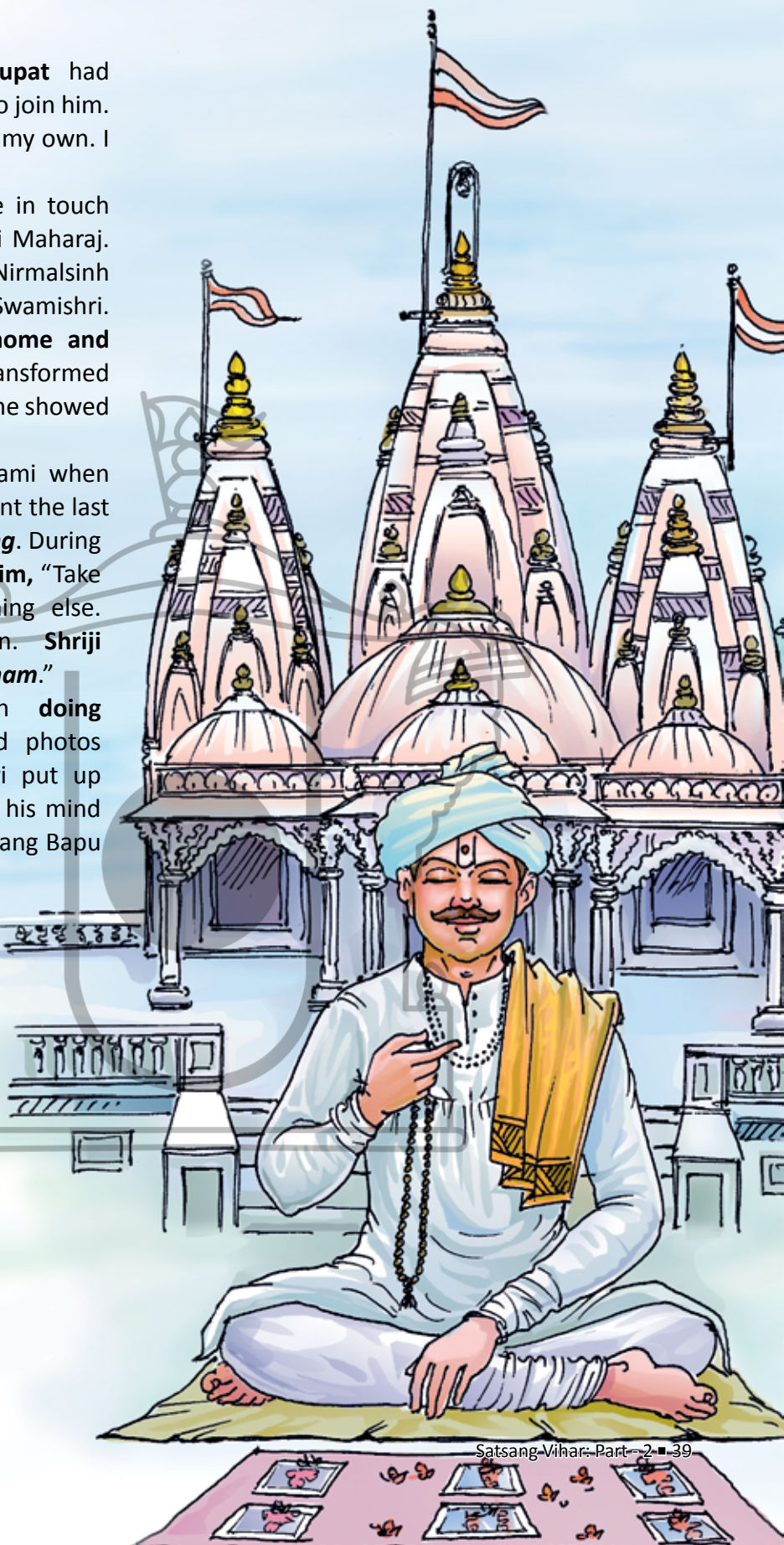
"At such a time, I came in touch with Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. My brother-in-law, Nirmalsinh Jadeja, introduced me to Swamishri. **Swamishri came to my home and washed my sins away**. I transformed as a person due to the love he showed me."

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

Ramsang Bapu began **doing malas constantly**. He had photos of Maharaj and Swamishri put up all around his room. With his mind focused on Bhagwan, Ramsang Bapu went to **Akshardham** at the **age of 76**.

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

Even sinners become great devotees through Pramukh Swami Maharaj's touch. Creating such living mandirs is one of most important tasks of Gunatit Sant.



18. LOOKING AFTER THAKORJI

10 September 2016. Mahant Swami Maharaj was heading from **Delhi to Mumbai** today. At 3:55 p.m., he lovingly had darshan of Thakorji in the mandir. At 5:20, he reached the airport. Wherever Swamishri goes, he always keeps Thakorji (Shri Harikrishna Maharaj) at the forefront. Thus, Swamishri **ensured that Thakorji boarded the plane first**. Only then did he himself board.

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

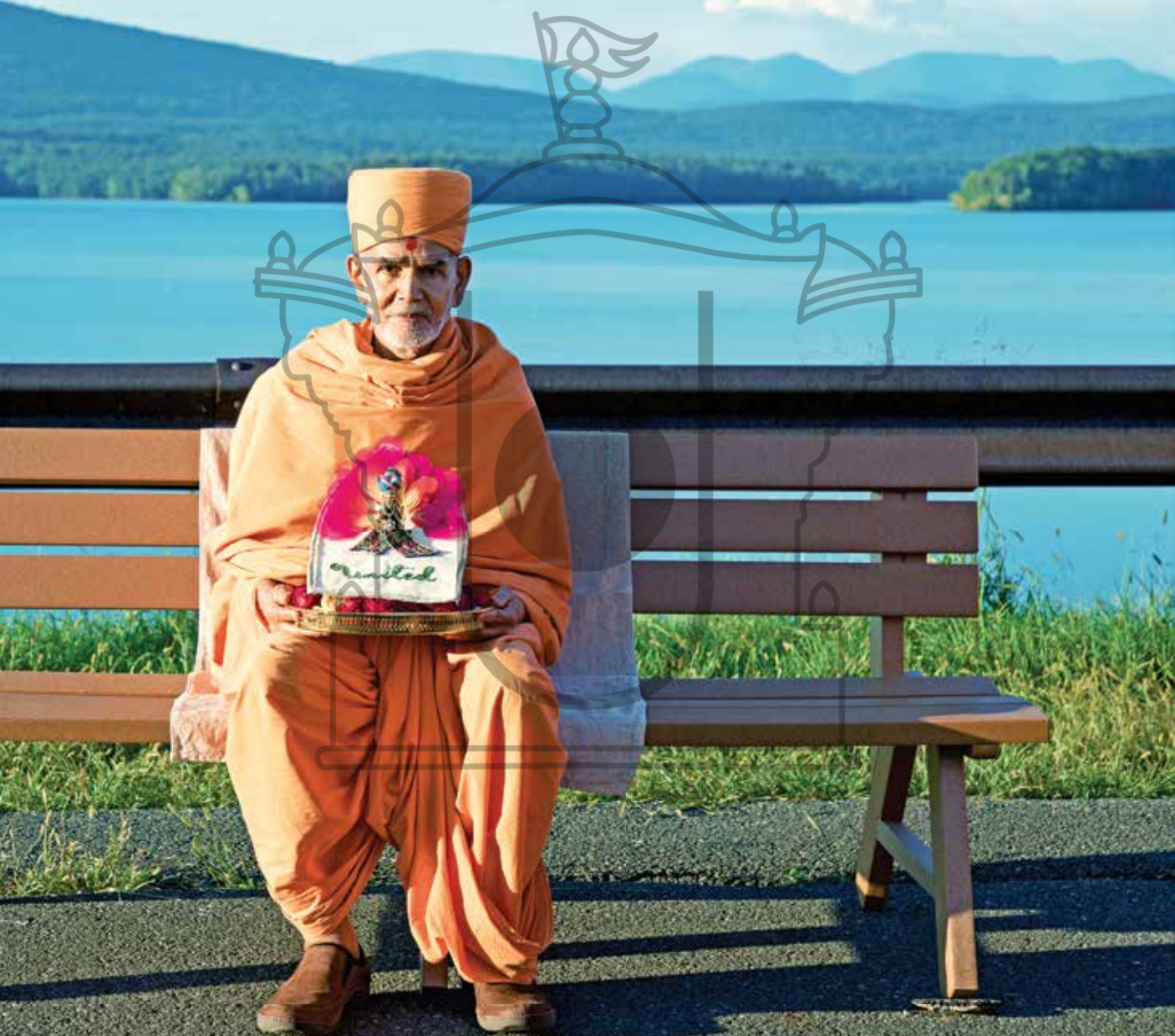
Soon after, the plane veered into a direction that brought **sunlight through the window** on both Swamishri and Thakorji. The sadhus protected Swamishri from the sunlight by putting up makeshift curtains using their upper garments. Swamishri hurriedly instructed, **"No! First shade Thakorji from the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

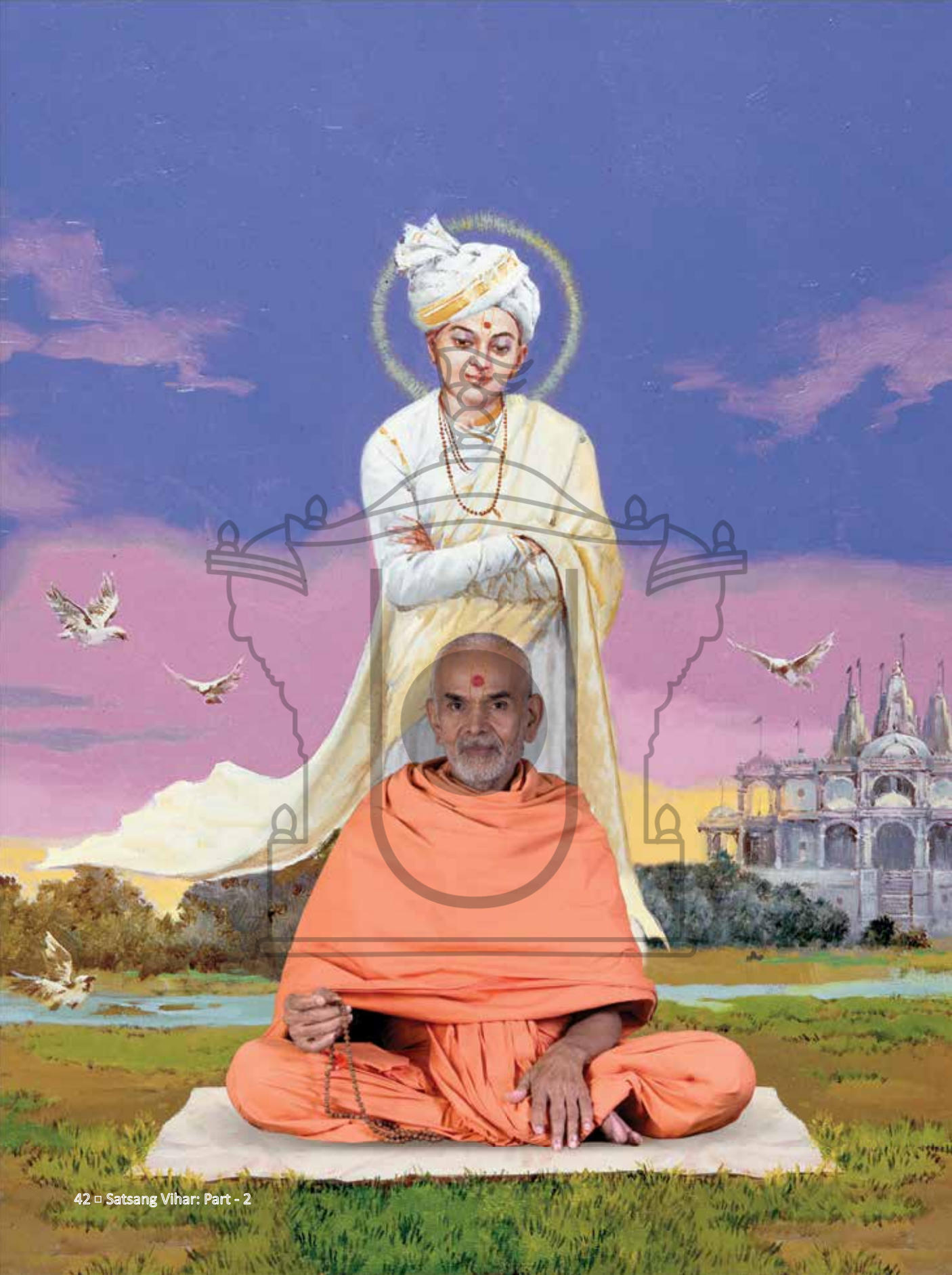
One **sadhu** later began reciting **mukhpath**. But Swamishri could not hear properly because of the noise of the aeroplane. The sadhu thus leaned forward so that Swamishri could hear clearly. Swamishri saw, however, that his **upper garment** was **brushing against Thakorji's face** because he was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

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

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

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





19. THE SANT IS THE FORM OF BHAGWAN

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

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

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

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



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

Swamishri answered, "What gift would you like?"

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

Hearing the sadhu's request, Swamishri remained silent.

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

Swamishri immediately replied, "**Yes.**" The sadhus and devotees rejoiced upon hearing

his answer. It was a birthday present that they would never forget.

Mahant Swami Maharaj's true greatness is that he is the Aksharbrahman Gunatit Satpurush. We have attained both Brahman and Parabrahman in the form of the Sant. There is no limit to our good fortune!



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

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

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

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

"Wow!" the sadhus exclaimed.

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

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

Everyone clapped in joy upon hearing Swamishri's response.

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

20. 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 *sampradays*. Each one shows people its own way of reaching Bhagwan. But our *sampradaya*, the **Swaminarayan Sampradaya**, is special.

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

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

■ UPASANA – FOUR THINGS WE MUST BELIEVE

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

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

■ AGNA – EIGHT THINGS WE MUST DO

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

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





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

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

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

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

■ **What We Believe**

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

■ **THE PANCHTATTVA SONG**

*Jiva, ishwar, māyā, Brahma ane Parabrahma,
Apyu Shriji Mahārāje, panchtattva-gñānam...
Jiva, ishwar māyāmā, anādithi atvāy,
Aksharbrahmano sang thātā, Parabrahma pamāy...*

■ **THE UPASANA SONG**

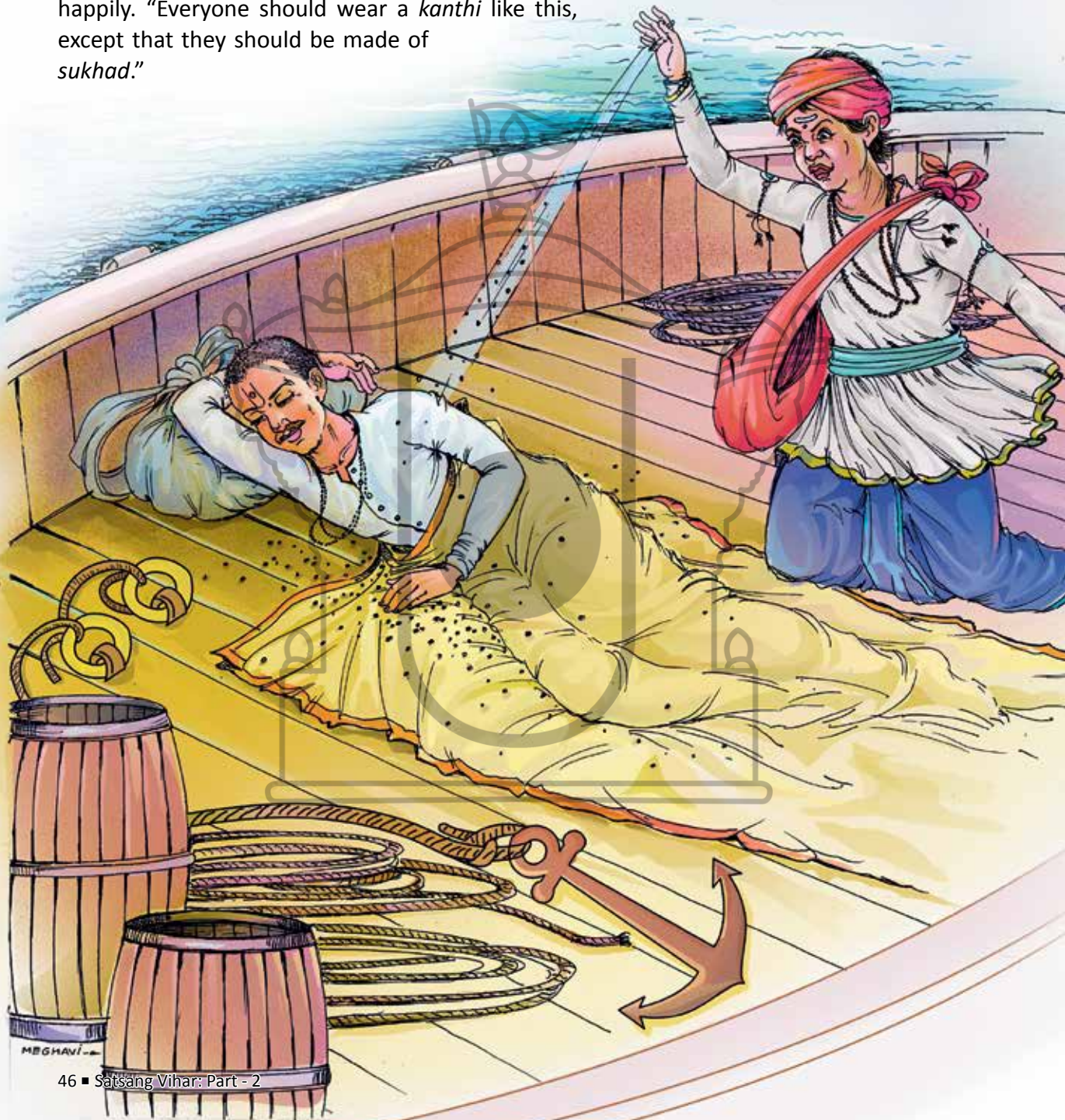
*Swāmi ane Nārāyan, Akshar ane Purushottam...
Ātmā ne Parmātmā, Brahma ane Parabrahma...
Swāmi te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar te Gunātīt Swāmi,
Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi...
Akshar-Purushottam upāsānā... (2)
Aksharrup thaine, Purushottamni,
Bhakti karvāni ā sādhanā...
Aksharrup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

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

21. FAITH IN ONLY ONE

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

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



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

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

The boat soon reached Surat. Khima Suthar gathered the grains, tied them in a handkerchief and went along his way. He took a bath and did his puja at a nearby lodge. He then **cooked the enchanted grains and ate them** for breakfast.

The Brahmin had followed Khima the whole way. When he saw him eat the grains, he was terrified by his courage. "This man must be an even greater tantric than me!" he thought as he bowed to Khima Suthar.

"Look, brother," Khima Suthar said. "I know nothing of black magic. I just have faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He is *sarvopari* Bhagwan. A person who has faith in him cannot be touched by black magic, nor even by *kal*, *karma* or *maya*."

The Brahmin decided to **change** his life. He became one of Maharaj's sadhus. He was named **Shunyatitanand Swami**.



In Maharaj's time, people were very superstitious. If someone fell sick, they would think, "Someone must have bewitched him with a mantra." If someone had other trouble, people would say, "He must be possessed by a ghost. The goddess Mataji must be upset with him."

People would call witchdoctors to solve their problems. These witchdoctors would act as if they were possessed by Bhagwan, and they would make their customers wear all types of strings, beads and necklaces.

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

Shriji Maharaj came near Karsanbhai. **His eyes fell upon the bed post**, which had a **black thread** tied to it! He understood right away – a witchdoctor had been here.

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

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

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

22. DOING PUJA EVERYDAY

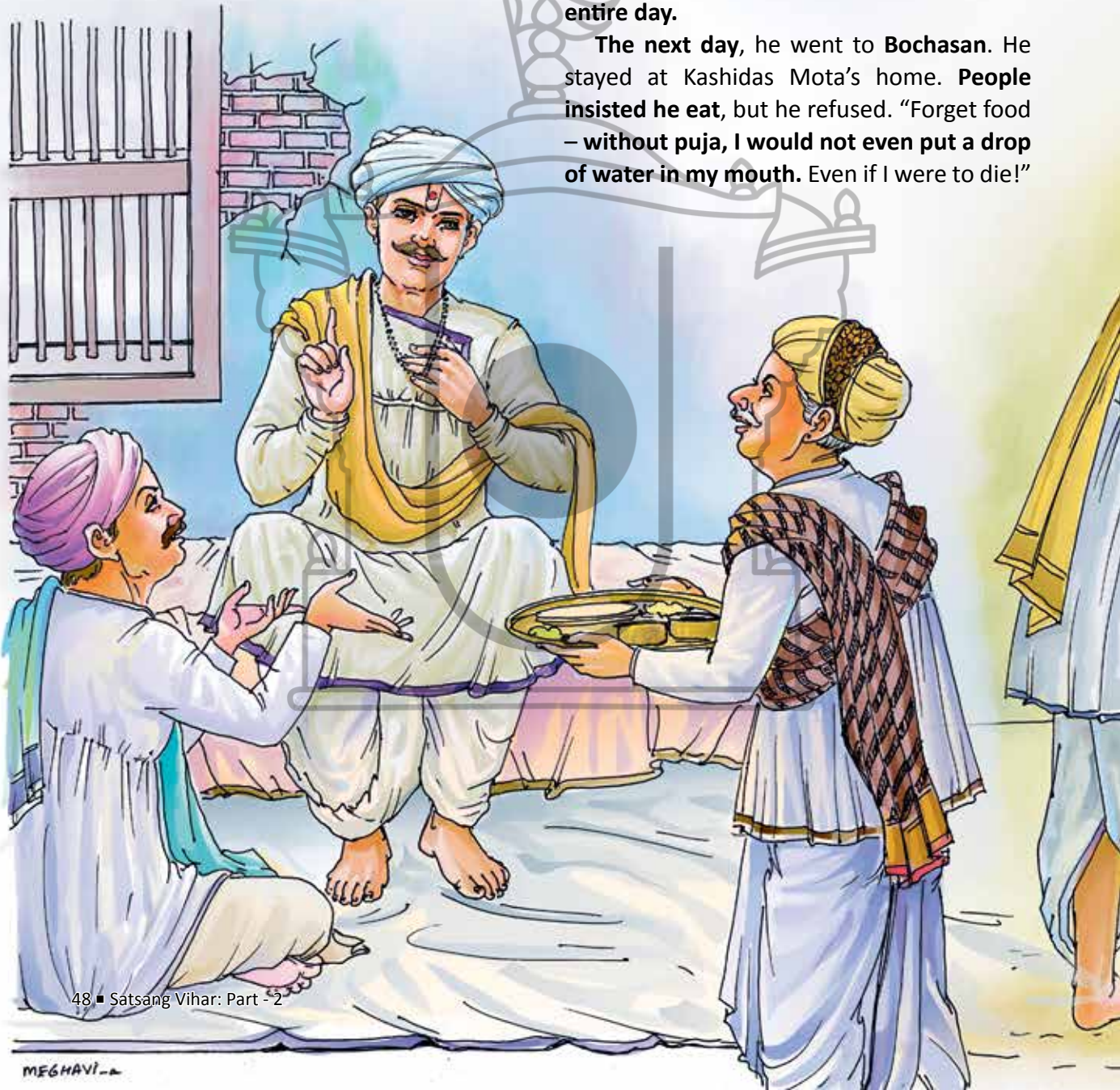
There was once a terrible **bandit** named **Joban Pagi** of Vartal. People all the way from Gujarat to Kolkata trembled at merely hearing his name.

But his life was changed when he met Shriji Maharaj during the *yagna* in Dabhan. He became a strong **satsangi**. The sword in his hand was replaced by a *mala*. Once

he was in Satsang, the **courage** he had as a bandit helped him **hold strong to his *niyams***.

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

The next day, he went to **Bochasan**. He stayed at Kashidas Mota's home. **People insisted he eat**, but he refused. "Forget food – **without puja, I would not even put a drop of water in my mouth.** Even if I were to die!"



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



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

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

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

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

Pramukh Swami Maharaj said...

"Every *satsangi* should do puja everyday. The day we stop doing our puja, we will stop getting Bhagwan's blessings."

23. THE ART OF DOING DARSHAN

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

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

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

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

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

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





queen offered Maharaj her entire kingdom. But Maharaj refused, "The king of all kings, the ruler of infinite universes, is Mul Purush. Above him is Aksharbrahman. I am even greater than Aksharbrahman. Your kingdom of 500 towns is meagre. Of what use is it

to me? You keep the **kingdom** for yourself. Look after it. But **do not become attached to it. Attach yourself to my murti alone.** Otherwise, you will have to be born again."

"Bless me so that I may always remember the great joy you have given me,"

Kushalkuvarba prayed. "And please come to take me at the time of my death."

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

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

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

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

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

■ HOW TO DO DARSHAN

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

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

1. **Concentrate.**
2. Keep Bhagwan's ***mahima*** (glory) in mind.

3. Look at **each part of the *murti*** and take note of its ***vaghas*** (clothes) and ornaments.

4. **Settle the *murti* in your heart.**

5. See the *murti* with **more and more love every time.**

■ THE PARTS OF BHAGWAN'S MURTI

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

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

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

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

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

24. GHAR SABHA – THE BEST MEDICINE

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

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

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

Pramukh Swami Maharaj took a deep breath and set his pen and letter pad aside. He took his glasses off and said, “Of course there is a solution. If the whole family gets

together every night and does **ghar sabha**, no problems will remain.”

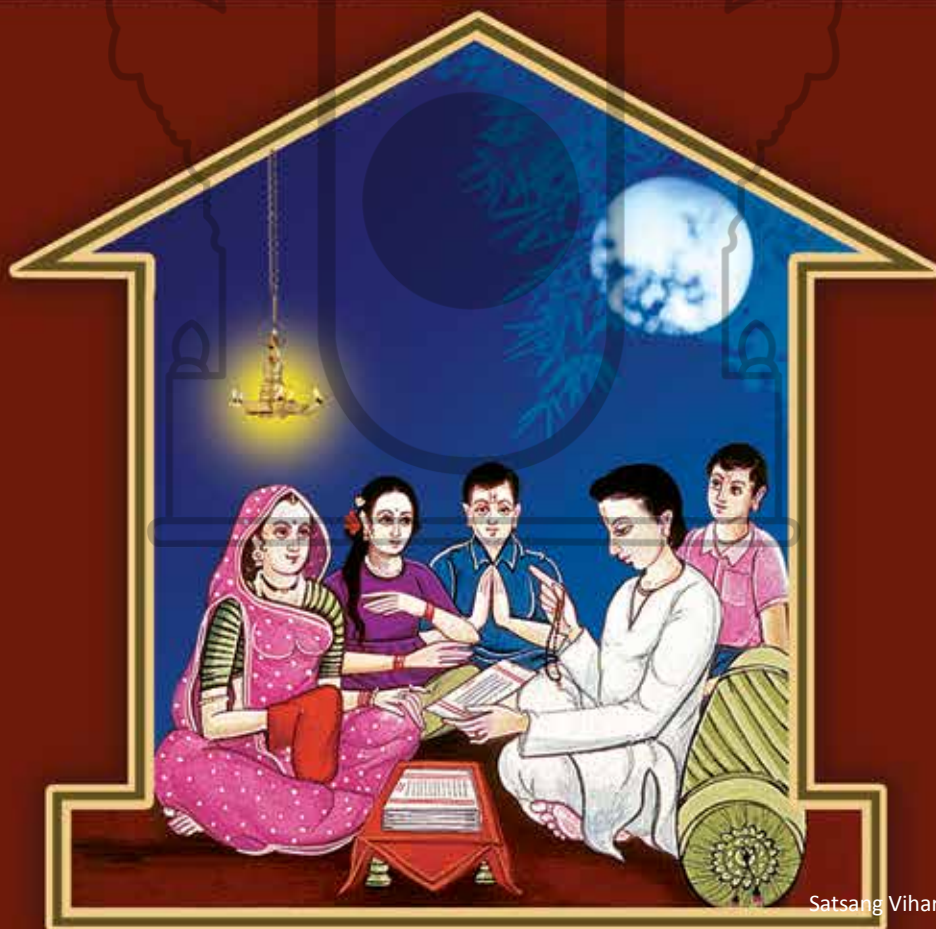
Pramukh Swami Maharaj showed **ghar sabha** as **the solution to all problems**.

■ **One Agna – Many Benefits**

There was once a devotee from the town of Mandvi. He was a very **angry** person. His son once went to watch a movie. He got so angry at his son that he chased him with a burning piece of wood!

Another time, his son **went out shopping**. He came back late. The boy's father was enraged. He **wildly beat his son with** a pair of **sandals**.

The family **started doing ghar sabha**. The father felt bad for all he had done. His



anger **was calmed**. Sometime later, his son met with an accident while driving his new scooter. He was scared stiff at what his father would do to him. But the father forgave him right away. "It must be Maharaj's wish," he calmly said.

• **Ghar sabha helps us change bad parts of our personality.**

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

Madhavjibhai **started doing ghar sabha**. At first, his wife would not come. But then she started, by sitting far off on the patio. As time went on, she came closer. And in just a

few months, **she took charge of ghar sabha** on her own! The family's arguments quickly came to an end.

• **Ghar sabha stops quarrels in the home.**

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

The family soon **started doing ghar sabha**. In just four months, a miracle happened! The quarrels stopped. Mohitbhai's mother and his wife **began getting along perfectly fine**.

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



There was a devotee named Agarsangbhai of Kamiyala. His **children** were addicted to watching **television** and **would never study**.

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

- ***Ghar sabha* helps us concentrate on our studies. It inspires us to do away with *kusang*.**

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

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

- ***Ghar sabha* teaches children to be well-behaved.**

Nilesh Dhanani is a devotee who lives in Surat. He and his wife were in distress. His **wife** even **tried to kill herself**. Luckily, she failed. Nileshbhai **started *ghar sabha***. The family's problems were solved and everyone experienced **peace**.

- ***Ghar sabha* makes our home a mandir.**

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

started *ghar sabha* in his home.

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

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

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

■ PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SAYS

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

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

■ CHILDREN AND GHAR SABHA

A person who does not follow Guruhari's *agna* is not a good *satsangi*. And so...

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

25. FASTING ON EKADASHI

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

Once, he went to **Hanuman Gadhi**. **Mohandas**, the **mahant**, was reading **katha**,

"Doing one **ekadashi** fast earns a person the **punya** of doing **1,000 ashvamedh yagnas**."

Ghanshyam asked, "Mahantji! If **ekadashi** is so important, **why**

do people not observe it?"

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

Ghanshyam Maharaj showed the **mahant** his mistake. But the **mahant** would not understand. So Ghanshyam thought, "This **bawo** is teaching people the **wrong thing**. He will have to be taught a lesson." He sent the **bawa** into **samadhi**. The **bawa** saw **Yampuri! Yamraja's servants** grabbed hold of him, **beat** him and slammed him to the ground. The **bawa's** bones were aching.

When he awoke from **samadhi**, he bowed and asked for **forgiveness**, "From this day forth, I will observe **ekadashi**, and I will teach people the **truth**."

Everyone in the **sabha** vowed to observe **ekadashi** as well.

Ghanshyam always did **ekadashi** and insisted that others observe it as well. He also taught people the real meaning of the **shastras** and showed them the path of **dharma**.

■ AUSTERITIES FOR KIDS

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

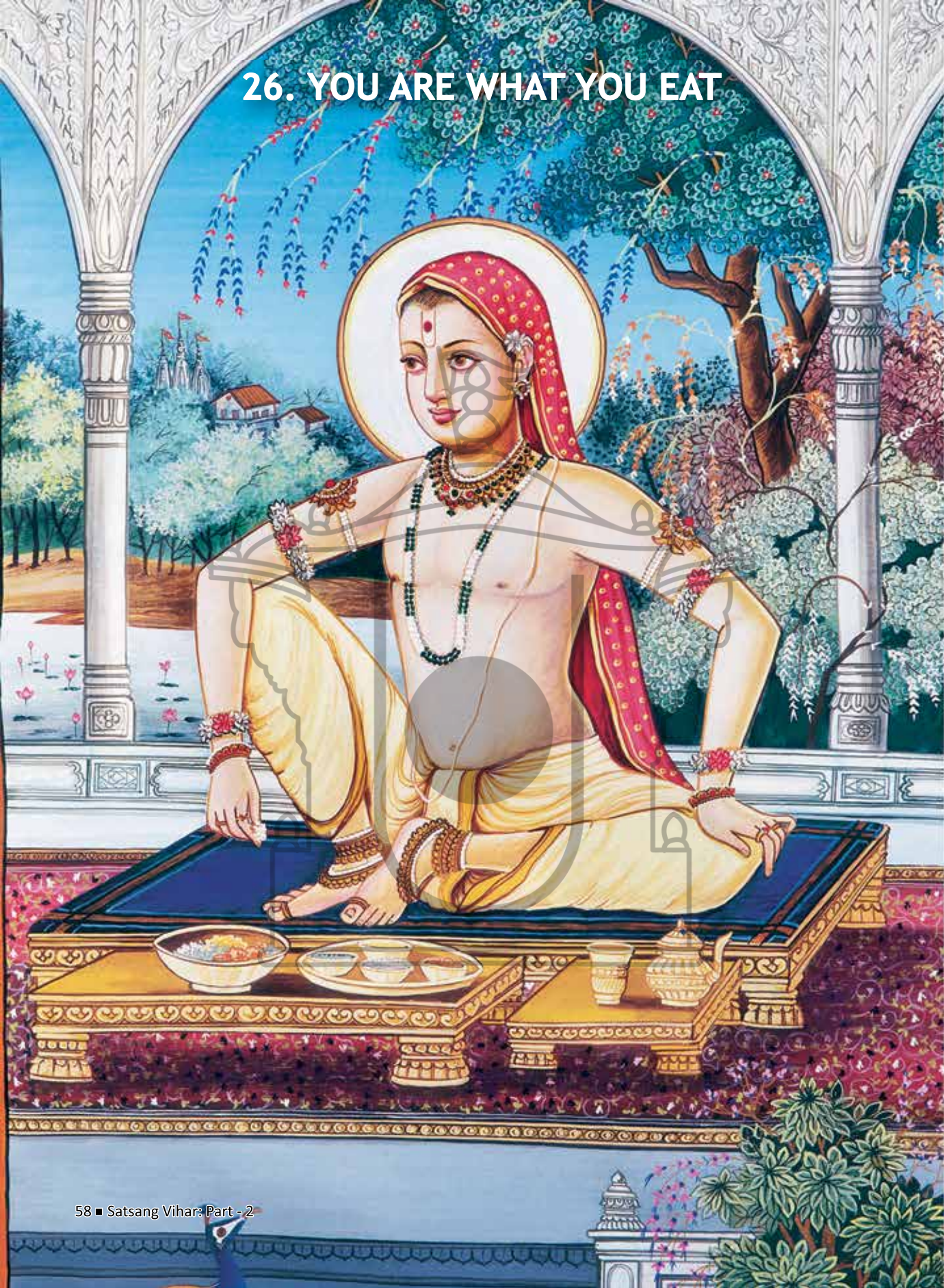
Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Kariyani 10 that one should resolve, "I wish to please Bhagwan by performing austerities." Thus, we should all perform austerities in order to please Maharaj and Swami.

For children, austerities can include:

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



26. YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT



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

After two months, the outcome was disastrous. All the prisoners became more violent. Even the **staff members became angrier**. They asked experts to find out the cause for this. Finally it was decided that the prisoners should stop making the meals.

The food we eat thus affects our thoughts.

The thoughts of the person cooking influences the food. This is why *satsang* teaches us **ahar shudhhi**, or purity of diet. Let's take a look at a few *prasangs*...

■ **NEVER EAT OUTSIDE FOOD**

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

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

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

But Swami did not give up. "You're the king of fools! If you have to go without food for a day or two, it's **not as if you are going to die.**"

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

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

Swami is thus never pleased when *satsangis* eat out. Indeed, it pains him.

In 1980, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** once said in London, "It truly **hurts me when you eat out, for I consider you all to be mine.**"

■ **NEVER EAT EGGS OR MEAT**

In 1980, **Pramukh Swami Maharaj** was in **Boston**. One *yuvak* had fallen back in his *niyams*. "I am saddened to hear about this,"

Pramukh Swami Maharaj told him.

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

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

The *yuvak* asked for Swami's forgiveness.

■ **OTHER THINGS WE SHOULD NOT EAT OR DRINK**

1. **No addictions** like alcohol, tobacco and cigarettes.
2. Chocolate, cake, cookies and other such **outside foods** are often not vegetarian. Always read the ingredients before eating.
3. Also do not eat **onions, garlic or hing** (asafoetida).

■ **WHAT SHOULD WE EAT?**

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

■ **HOW SHOULD WE EAT?**

First, **say the shloka**. Chew your food well as you eat. Also, don't forget to think of Bhagwan as you eat.

■ **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SAID...**

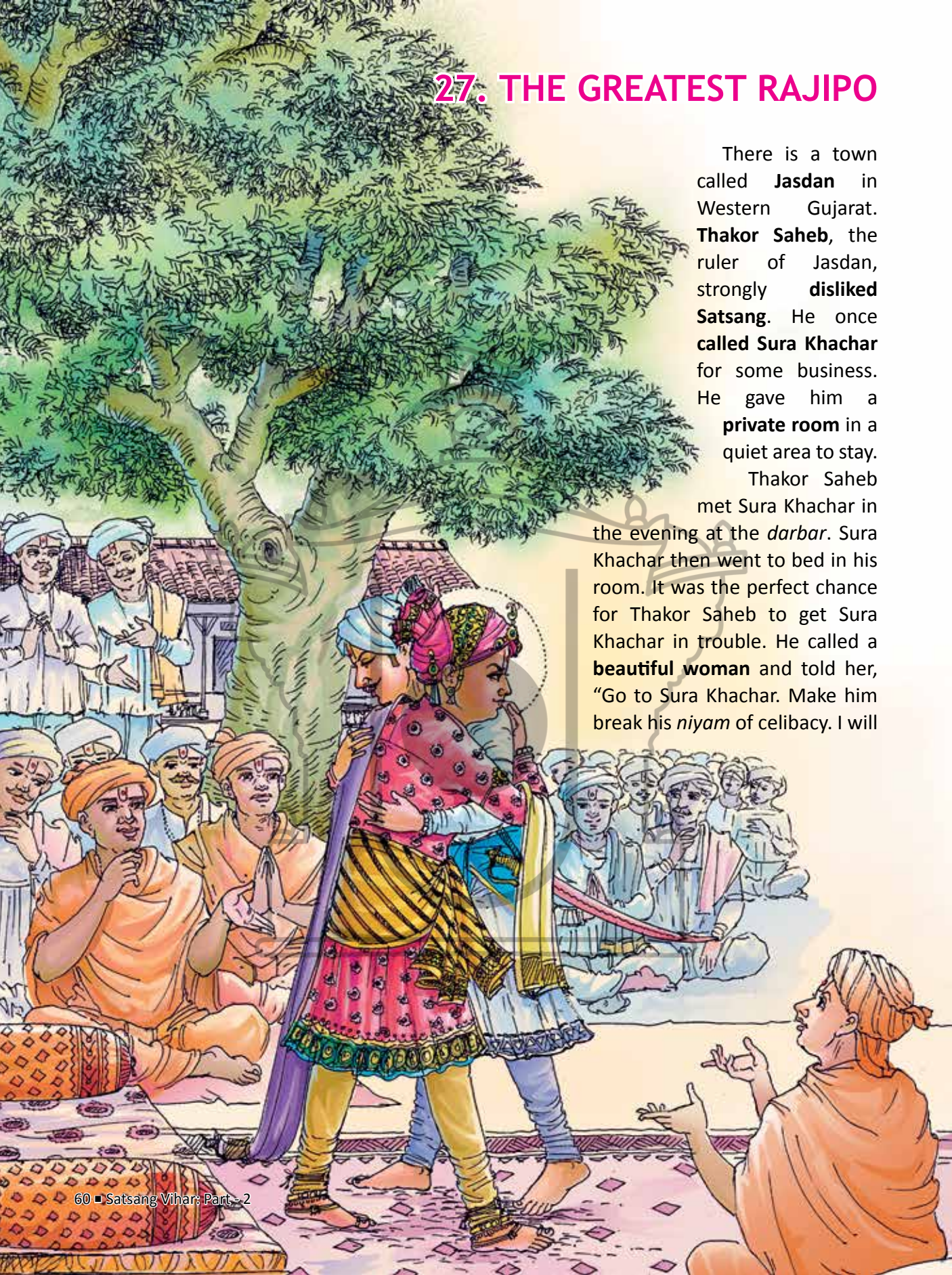
"Always keep control. **Too much food leads to pain and disease. Eating simple food gives us good health. It lets us do bhajan and seva.** Eating heavy food, on the other hand, keeps us thinking about food, makes us sleepy, and invites illness."

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

27. THE GREATEST RAJIPO

There is a town called **Jasdan** in Western Gujarat. **Thakor Saheb**, the ruler of Jasdan, strongly **disliked Satsang**. He once called **Sura Khachar** for some business. He gave him a **private room** in a quiet area to stay.

Thakor Saheb met Sura Khachar in the evening at the *darbar*. Sura Khachar then went to bed in his room. It was the perfect chance for Thakor Saheb to get Sura Khachar in trouble. He called a **beautiful woman** and told her, "Go to Sura Khachar. Make him break his *niyam* of celibacy. I will



give you as much money as you ask.”

At **midnight**, the woman came to Sura Khachar’s room. She **wailed** from outside, “Oh, Darbar! This is my home. Please let me in. My child is ill and his medicine is inside. Please, **open the door.**”

Sura Khachar opened the door. The **woman came in** and acted as if she was searching for the medicine. She walked around a bit. Then, all of a sudden, she started **flirting** with Sura Khachar.

Sura Khachar knew right away that the woman was up to no good. He yanked his **sword** out, “Woman! Leave here right now! Or else, my sword won’t be kind to you!”

The woman was scared, “Forgive me, oh Darbar. It was Thakor Saheb who sent me here.”

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

From far off, Thakor Saheb’s men saw everything that had transpired. They gave **Thakor Saheb** the news. He was filled with **awe**. “Swaminarayan *satsangis* are very strong in their *niyams*,” he thought. “Their Bhagwan should be praised.”

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

“Who is this *bhakta*?” someone asked.

“He’ll be here soon,” **Shriji Maharaj** answered.

Sura Khachar soon arrived. He dismounted his horse and did *dandvats*. Shriji Maharaj ran and stopped him. “**Here is my yati,**” he said as he lovingly **hugged** him. Everyone realized that Shriji Maharaj’s *rajipo* today was special.

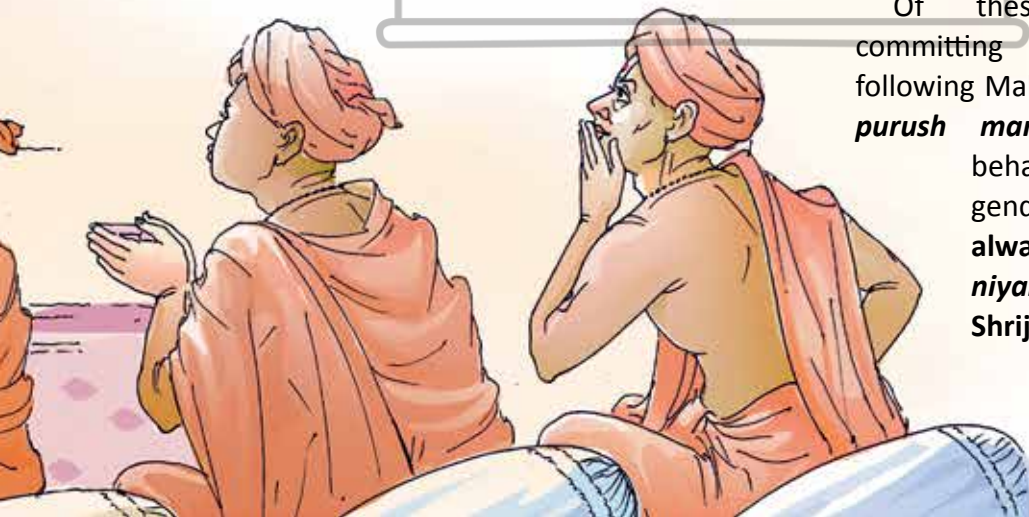
Shriji Maharaj says in the Vachanamrut, “If a person firmly follows the vow of celibacy, he is never far from Bhagwan – whether he is in this world or beyond. Moreover, my affection for such a person never diminishes...If a person strictly follows that vow, then even if I were a thousand miles away from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

■ THE FIVE VARTMANS (PANCH-VARTMAN)

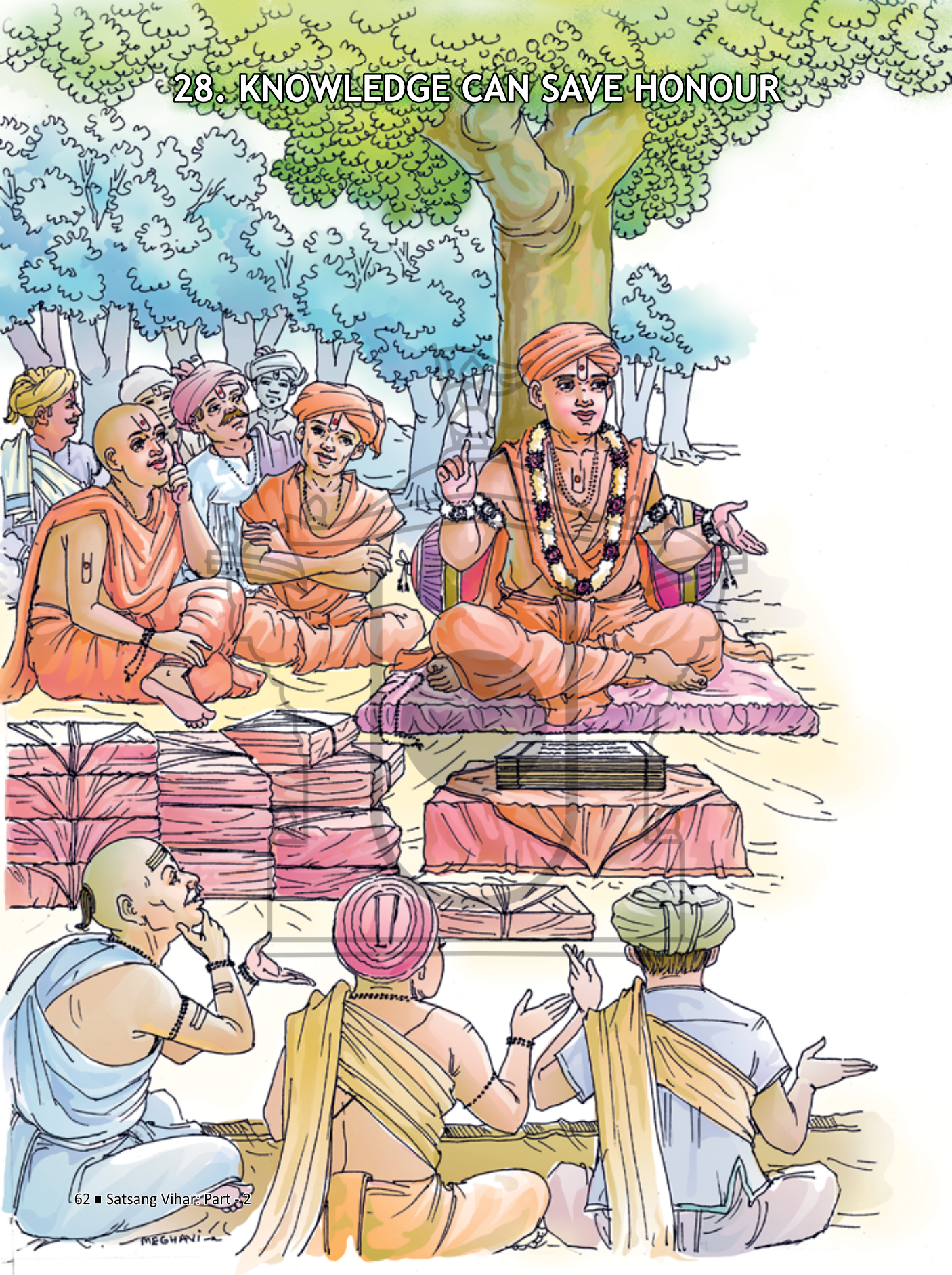
Maharaj has given **five basic vartmans** for *satsangis*:

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

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



28. KNOWLEDGE CAN SAVE HONOUR



Nityanand Swami was one of Shriji Maharaj's leading *paramhansas*. He was very **learned**. There wasn't a scholar in all of India who could defeat him in a debate. No matter how difficult a question was, he could answer it in a snap. His logic was so sharp that even great pundits shied away from challenging him.

Cities such as Ahmedabad, Junagadh, Jamnagar, Khambhat, Vadodara and Umreth were famous for their pundits. Nityanand Swami's name carried weight in all of these cities. Whenever scholars opposed Satsang, Maharaj would send Nityanand Swami. And everytime, Nityanand Swami **would return having defeated the scholars**. He would take **seven ox carts** with him. He would **sit in one**. The other **six would be full of books**. Many pundits would be frightened just by seeing this parade of shastras.

There was a **great pundit in Umreth**, who always **opposed** Maharaj. Nityanand Swami came to Umreth to challenge him. Word spread throughout the town. A **debate** was held, and the pundit was **quickly defeated**. The pundit's reputation was hurt. Meanwhile, Satsang began to spread in Umreth.

The pundit decided to take revenge. He **invited** to Umreth a great scholar named **Siddhanand Sarasvati** of **Vijaynagar**, a town in South India. **Siddhanandji** came and stayed in a grand haveli. He used to wear a headpiece full of diamonds and made a big show of his own greatness.

Opposition to Maharaj grew with Siddhanandji's backing. The **Brahmins** in the town **started harassing Maharaj's devotees again**. Word spread to Vartal. Nityanand Swami came to Umreth once again. He challenged Siddhanandji to a **debate**. Siddhanandji agreed. The debate

was **arranged** on a plot of **land** belonging to the town's **Brahmins**.

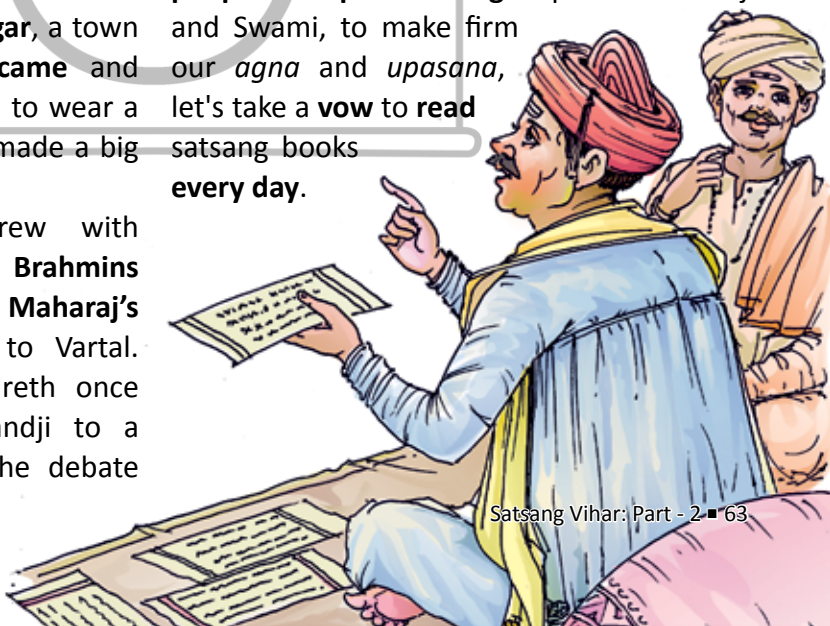
Nityanand Swami first sent his **students one after another** – Bhagवानand Swami, Shunyatitanand Swami, Shivanand Swami, etc. – to debate the scholar. These sadhus swiftly defeated Siddhanand. But the **Brahmins would cheat**. They would bring up irrelevant points just to stall the decision. So **Nityanand Swami declared, "I will come tomorrow."**

Siddhanandji was scared and **ran away to Dakor that very night**. He told the Brahmins of Dakor to pass a message to Umreth: "Nityanand Swami is the avatar of Vyasji. I can never defeat him."

When he heard this, **Nityanand Swami laughed**, "It is alright that he left. But I wish to go and meet him."

Swami thus **came to Dakor**. **Siddhanandji admitted** his defeat **in writing**. "The Swaminarayan Sampradaya is eternal and it is based on the Vedas. I have no issues with it. **I forever accept my defeat before you.**"

Maharaj's sadhus knew the shastras so well that nobody could defeat them. If we read the shastras, we too will become knowledgeable. Reading will help us answer questions about our beliefs and help inspire people to respect Satsang. To please Maharaj and Swami, to make firm our *agna* and *upasana*, let's take a **vow to read satsang books every day.**



29. ONE WHO GIVES, GETS

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

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

Swami asked, "How are you, *bhagat*?"

Jasa Bhakta sadly replied, "Swami! What can I say? I can **barely make a**

living here. Gopalanand Swami told me not to leave this village because it is on a route that our sadhus often travel. He told me to give them grains and pulses as they passed. He said that if I served them in such a way, they would bless me. But Swami! I have served them, yet I am simply miserable!"

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

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

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

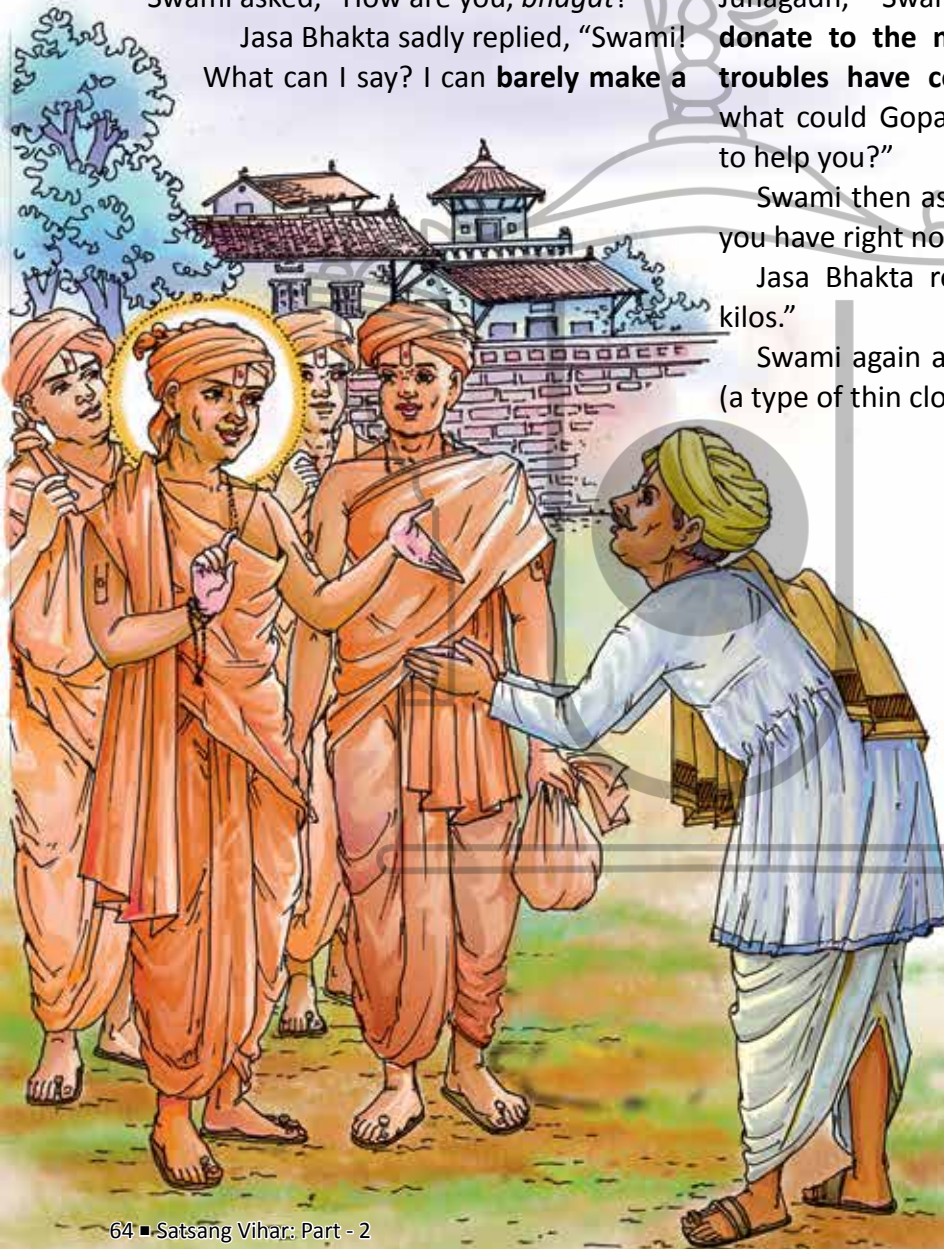
Swami again asked, "How much *pankoru* (a type of thin cloth) do you have?"

"Two arms length, Swami," came the reply.

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

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

Swami then mounted a horse and went to



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

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

Jasa Bhakta followed Swami's *agna* 100%. He began going to the festivals in Junagadh and giving one-twentieth (5%) of his earnings to the mandir. **He became well off in just a short time.**

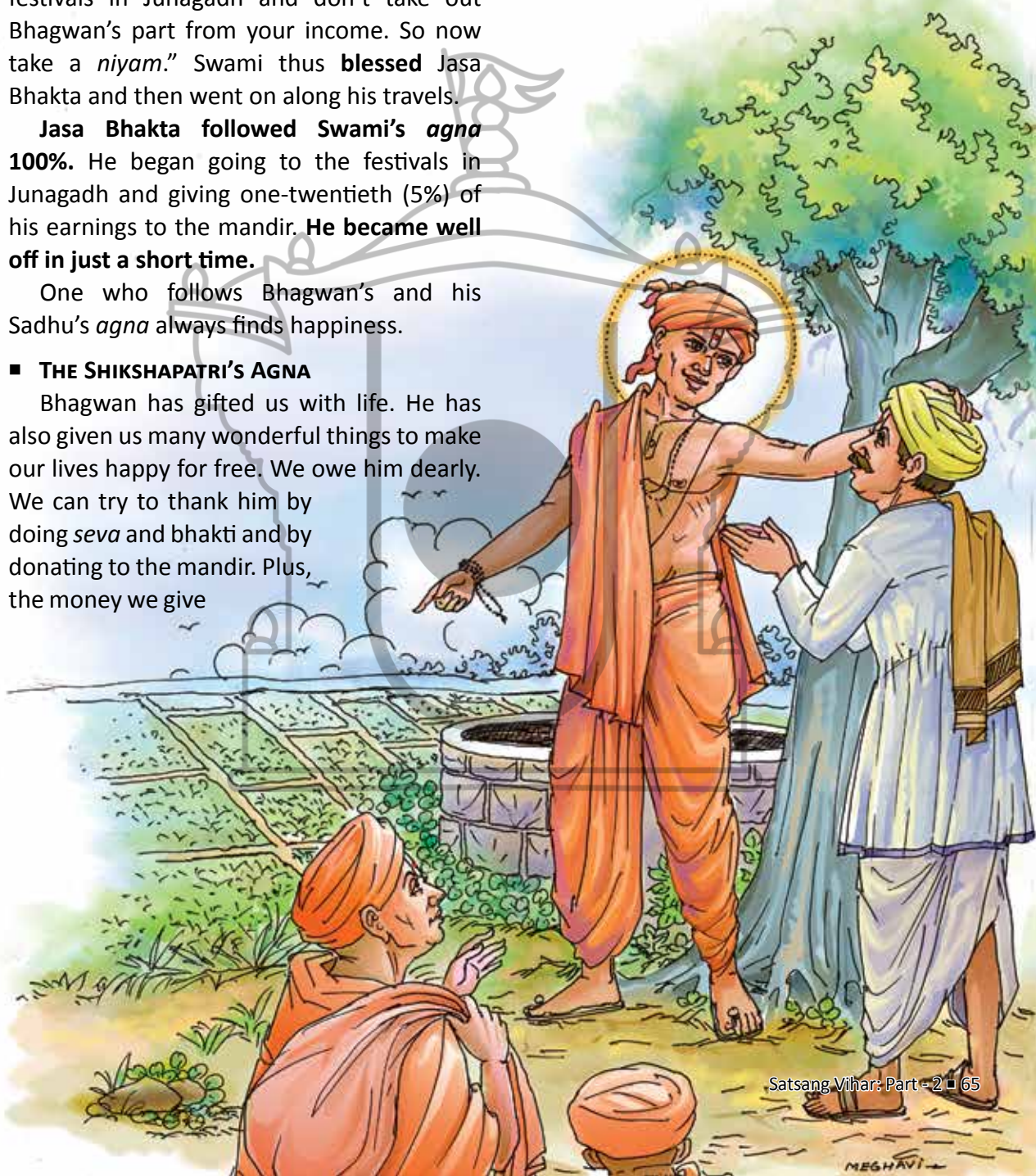
One who follows Bhagwan's and his Sadhu's *agna* always finds happiness.

■ THE SHIKSHAPATRI'S AGNA

Bhagwan has gifted us with life. He has also given us many wonderful things to make our lives happy for free. We owe him dearly. We can try to thank him by doing *seva* and *bhakti* and by donating to the mandir. Plus, the money we give

to the mandir is used for good causes. And in comparison to what we give, Bhagwan graces us back with countless more.

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

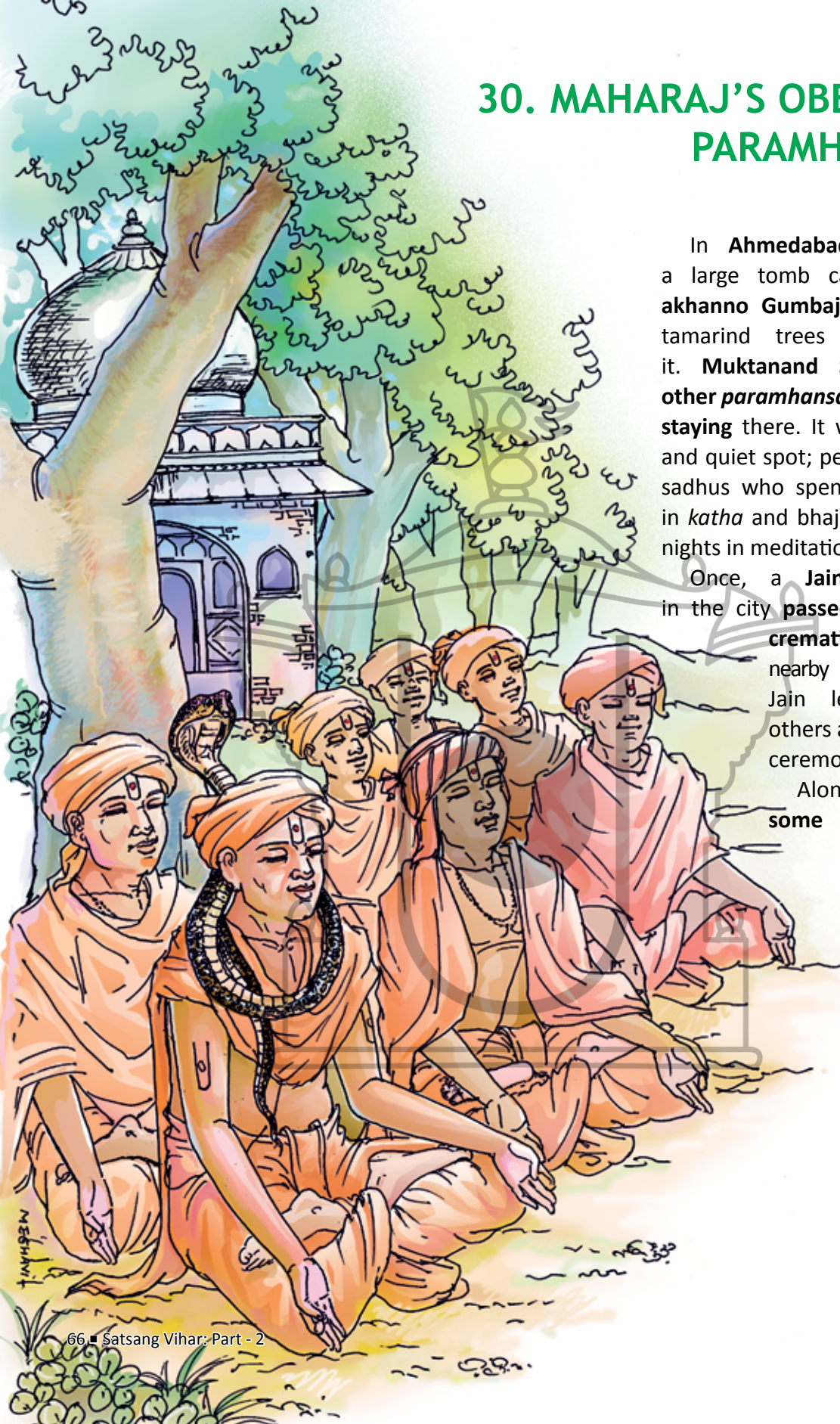


30. MAHARAJ'S OBEDIENT PARAMHANSAS

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

Once, a **Jain merchant** in the city **passed away**. His **cremation** was held nearby and many Jain leaders and others attended the ceremony.

Along the way, **some people** saw



the *paramhansas* in devotion. They were amazed and asked the *paramhansas*, “**Are you kevaliks (enlightened masters)?**”

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

Some of the people **mocked** the *paramhansas*. Poking fun, one of them said, “Look at us! We are the true *kevaliks*!” And he and a few others sat cross-legged in *padmasan* and acted like they were **meditating**.

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

The **snake** slithered forth – over someone’s **hand**, across a **foot**, on another’s **back** and atop another’s **head**. But none of the sadhus let their meditation be disturbed.

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

Then, the snake slithered away.

The **Jain devotees** were astonished and **fell at the sadhus’ feet**. “Swami! **You are true kevaliks.**”

“No,” Muktanand Swami said. “**The true kevalik is our Bhagwan, Bhagwan Swaminarayan**. We are his servants.”

The **Jains** were pleased. “**Come** to our homes tomorrow **for bhiksha**,” they said.

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

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

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



31. DADA KHACHAR'S FAITH

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

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

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

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

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

care of such things."

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

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



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

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

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

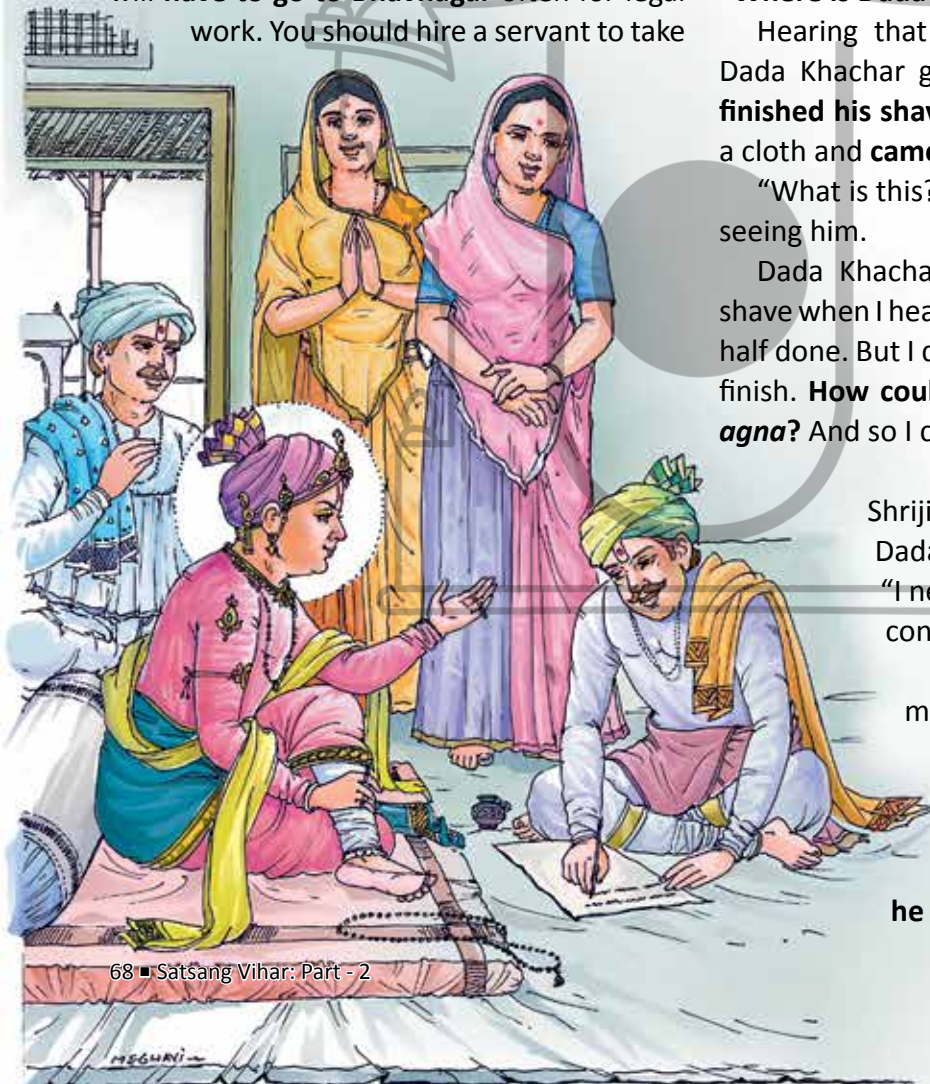
Dada Khachar replied, "I was getting a shave when I heard you were calling me. I was half done. But I did not wait for the barber to finish. **How could I delay in following your agna?** And so I came right away."



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

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

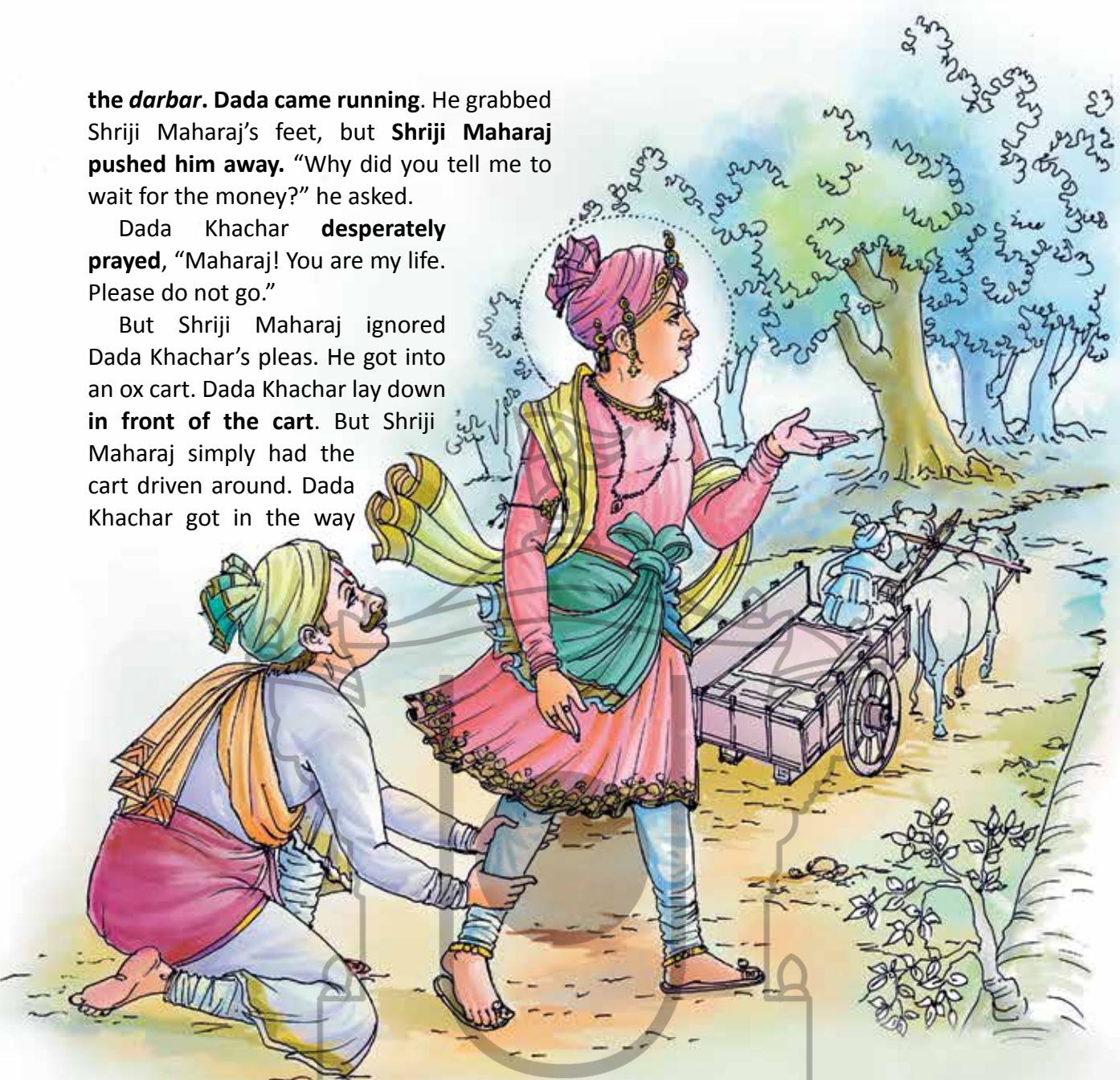
Shriji Maharaj decided to **test** Dada Khachar. Early the next morning, he **readied himself to leave**



the *darbar*. Dada came running. He grabbed Shriji Maharaj's feet, but **Shriji Maharaj pushed him away**. "Why did you tell me to wait for the money?" he asked.

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

But Shriji Maharaj ignored Dada Khachar's pleas. He got into an ox cart. Dada Khachar lay down **in front of the cart**. But Shriji Maharaj simply had the cart driven around. Dada Khachar got in the way



again. And so Shriji Maharaj got down and began walking. **Dada Khachar** followed, his hands shaking in anguish and **his eyes filled with tears**. He **grabbed Shriji Maharaj's feet**. **Shriji Maharaj jerked them away**. Yet, he grabbed them once again.

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

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

32. NEVER LET GO OF SATSANG

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

Parvatbhai and his wife had once come to **Gadhada**. Parvatbhai would do *satsang* all day. **Shriji Maharaj** once thought, “Where

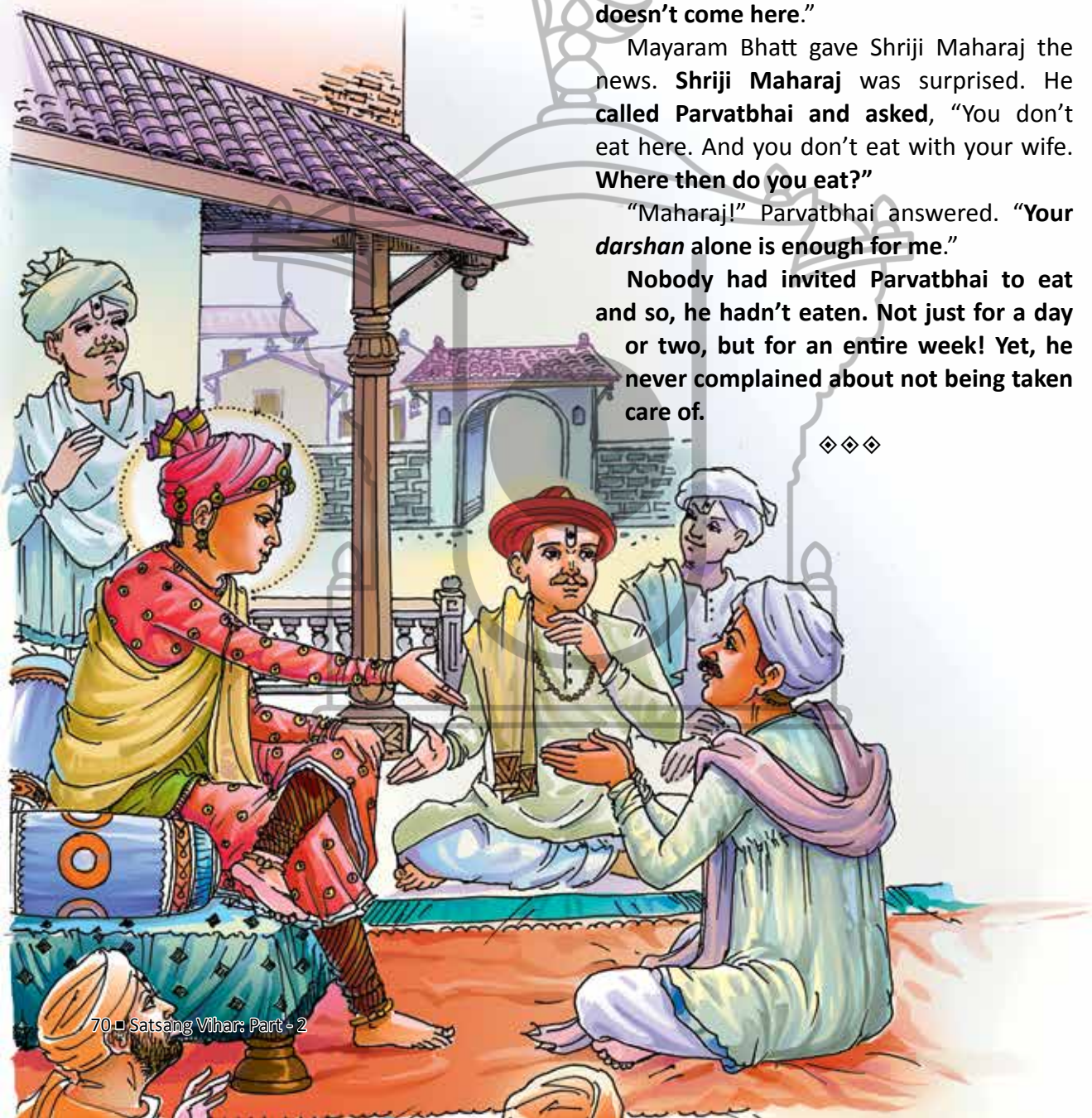
must Parvatbhai be going for his meals? He probably eats where he stays.” Several days later, Shriji Maharaj told Mayaram Bhatt, “Go find out where Parvatbhai goes to eat every day.”

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

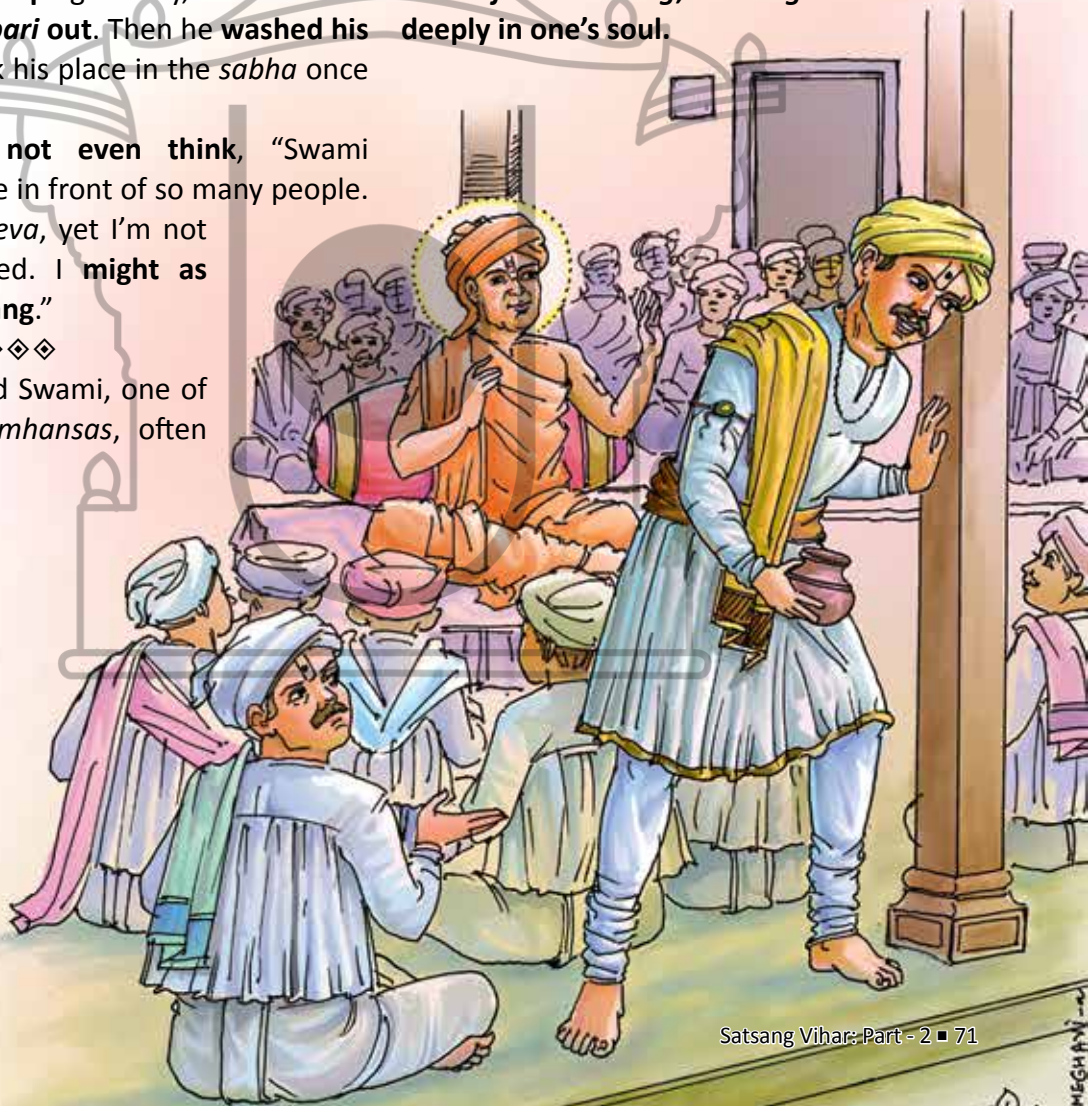
Shivlal **did not even think**, "Swami **dishonoured** me in front of so many people. I do so much *seva*, yet I'm not even appreciated. I **might as well leave Satsang**."



Sacchidanand Swami, one of Maharaj's *paramhansas*, often

said that one should never leave Satsang, no matter what the consequences: "Even if someone were to break my knees or ankles, I would not let go of Satsang. I would drag myself to where the sadhus stay and I would say, 'O Dear Sadhus! Please give me alms in my *jholi*.' In this way, I would beg for food. But I would never leave Satsang. I am forever indebted to Satsang, as it is the cause for all that I am."

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



33. ALL OF SATSANG IS ONE FAMILY

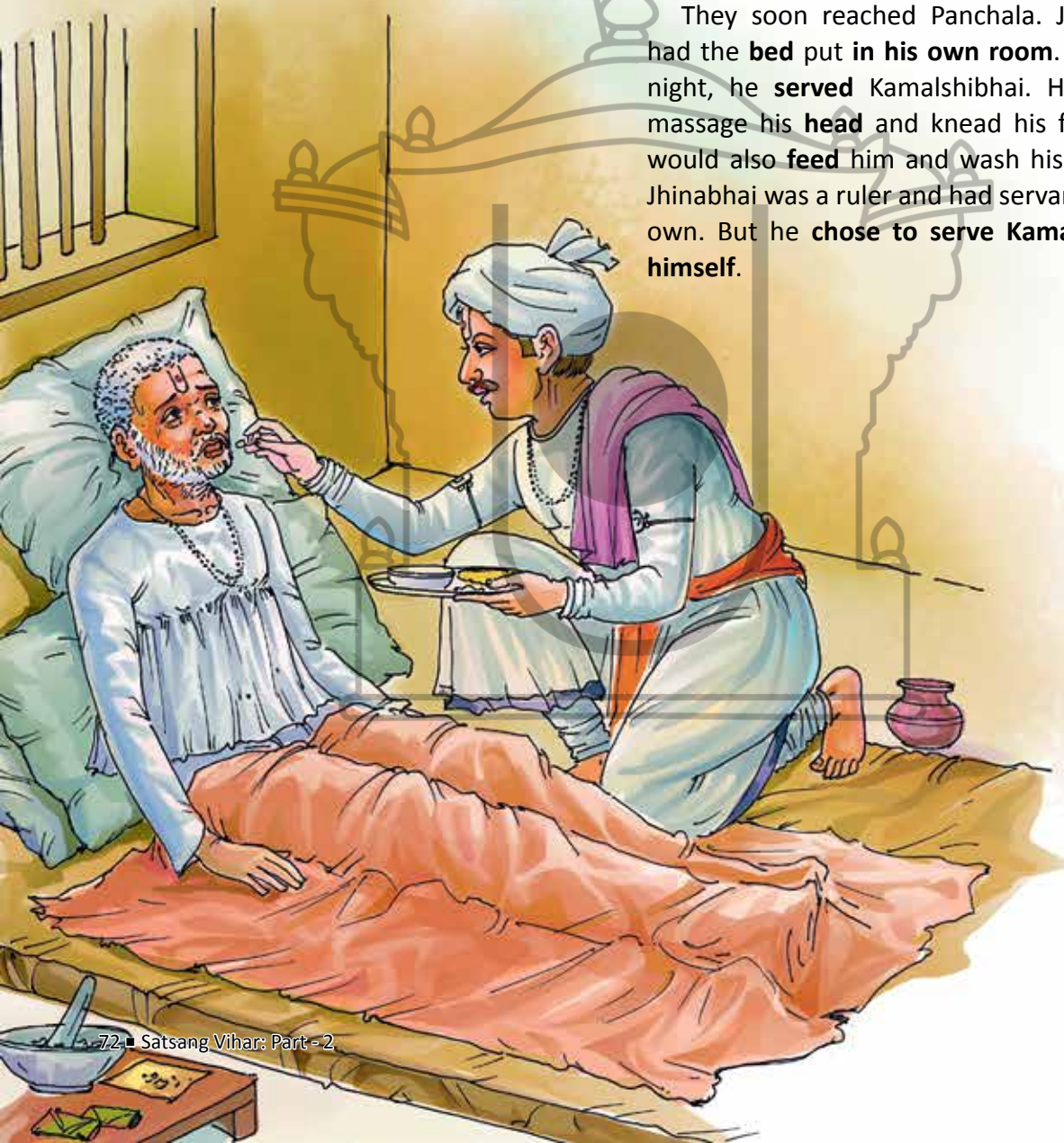
There was once a devotee named **Kamalshi Vanjha** of **Mangrol**. He had fallen very ill. Everyone, even his relatives had turned their backs on him. He was **poor** and he came from a low caste. Nobody was willing to serve him.

Jhinabhai, the ruling **Darbar** of **Panchala**, came to know of this. He was hurt. He remembered **Shriji Maharaj's** words, "Always be the **servant of a servant** of my *satsangis*."

Immediately, he decided "**I must serve Kamalshibhai myself**. I will bring him to my home and take good care of him."

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

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



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

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

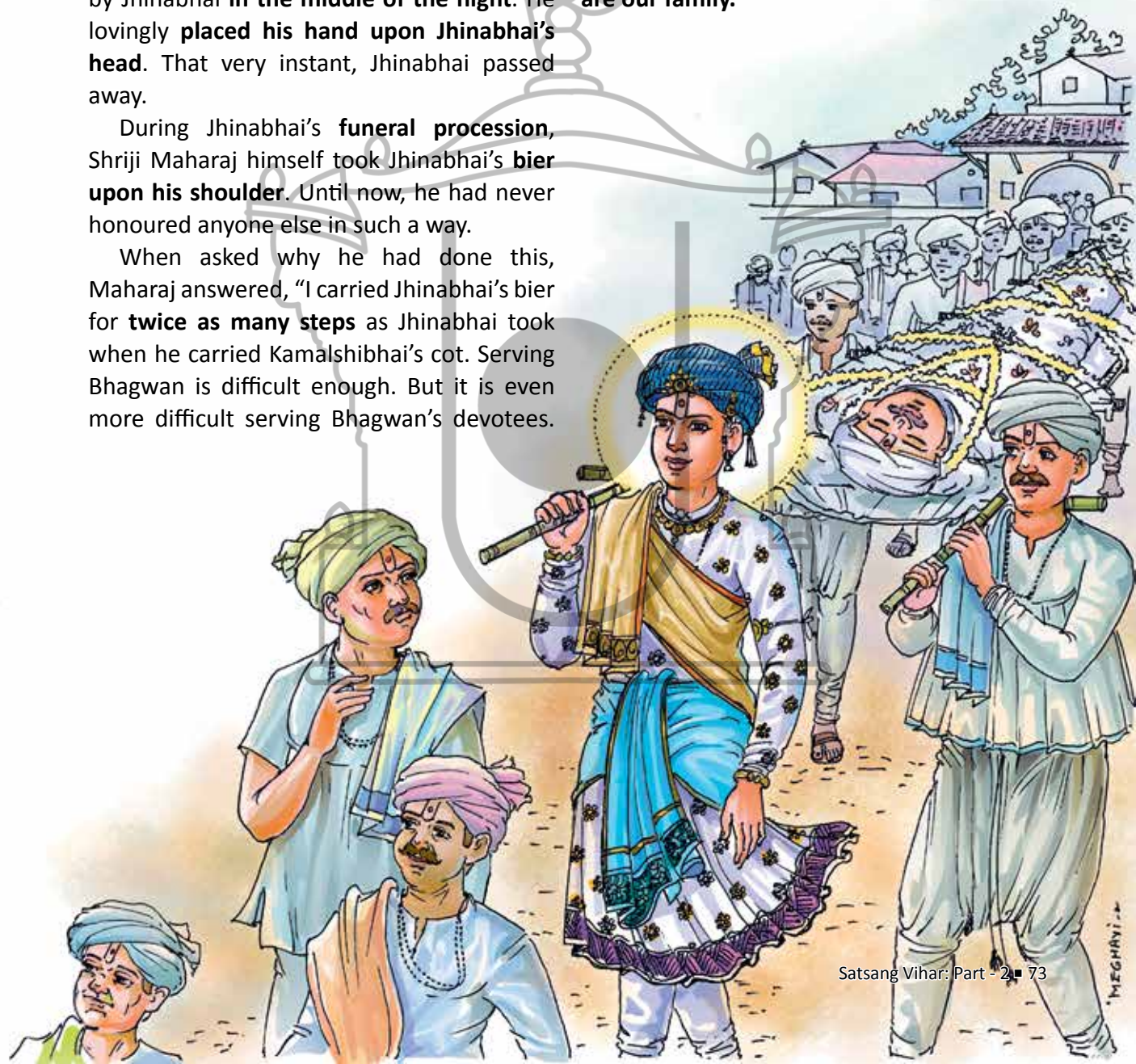
During Jhinabhai's **funeral procession**, Shriji Maharaj himself took Jhinabhai's **bier upon his shoulder**. Until now, he had never honoured anyone else in such a way.

When asked why he had done this, Maharaj answered, "I carried Jhinabhai's bier for **twice as many steps** as Jhinabhai took when he carried Kamalshibhai's cot. Serving Bhagwan is difficult enough. But it is even more difficult serving Bhagwan's devotees.

This is what Jhinabhai has done. That is why I am so pleased with him."

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

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



34. PRAHLAD'S DEVOTION

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

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

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

"There is no such thing as Bhagwan," he said.

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

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

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

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

Hiranyakashipu became filled with rage. "Soldiers!" he boomed. "Finish off this foolish boy!"

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

Hiranyakashipu called his sister, **Holika**, who had a boon that she would never be

burned by fire. She sat in a roaring fire with Prahlad in her lap. But miraculously, **Holika burned to death and Prahlad was saved**. It was from this very incident that the tradition of Holi began, which celebrates the victory of good over evil.

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

"He is everywhere."

"Is he in this pillar as well?"

"Of course," Prahlad bravely said.

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

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

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

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

"O Bhagwan," **Prahlad answered**. "You saved my



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

"So be it," Bhagwan Nrusinh said.

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



35. THE VACHANAMRUT

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

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

“What shall I bring?” he asked Swami.

“*Amrut*. Bring me *amrut*.”

“But Swami, where can I get *amrut* from?”

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

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

■ AN INTRODUCTION TO THE VACHANAMRUT

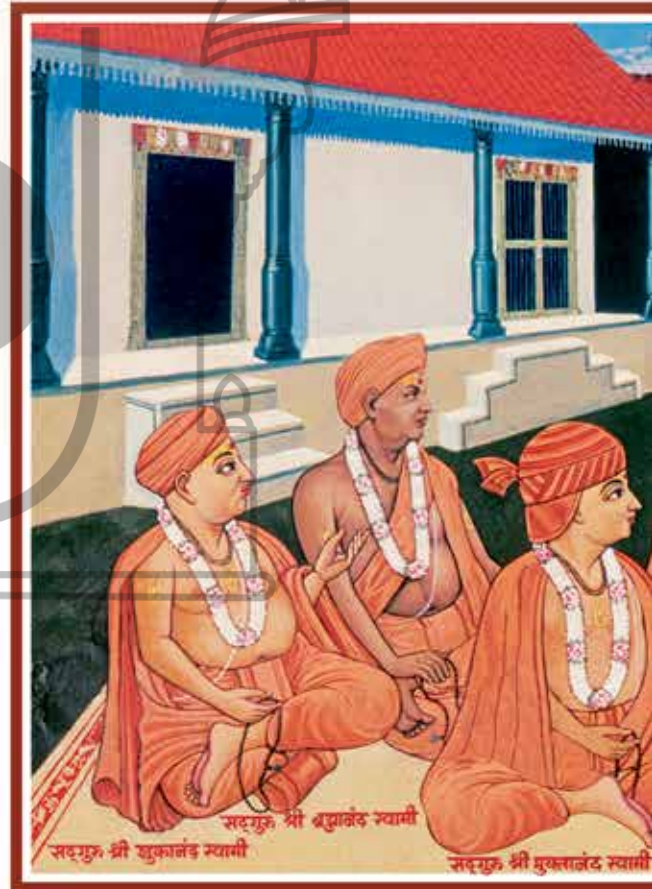
- A compilation of Maharaj’s **talks** in **7 places**: Gadhada, Sarangpur, Kariyani, Loya, Panchala, Vartal and Ahmedabad, **written in *sabhas*** by the *paramhansas* as Maharaj spoke.
- Compiled by **four *paramhansas***: **1. Gopalanand Swami** **2. Nityanand Swami** **3. Muktanand Swami** and **4. Shukanand Swami**.
- The first **Vachanamrut** occurs on 21 November 1819; the last occurs on 25 July 1829. The **Vachanamrut** thus includes **10 years of Maharaj’s discourses**.
- Each **Vachanamrut** starts with the place and date of its occurrence. It also describes how Shriji Maharaj looked on that day. This shows the *paramhansas’* eye for historical authenticity.
- The **Vachanamrut** contains **questions**

and answers. Sometimes the *sadhus* and devotees ask questions and Maharaj answers. Other times, Maharaj asks questions and answers himself. This style matches that of the *Upanishads*.

- There are **262** **Vachanamruts**. If we include the extra 11 **Vachanamruts** in the appendix, there are 273.

■ THE VACHANAMRUT’S GREATNESS

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



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

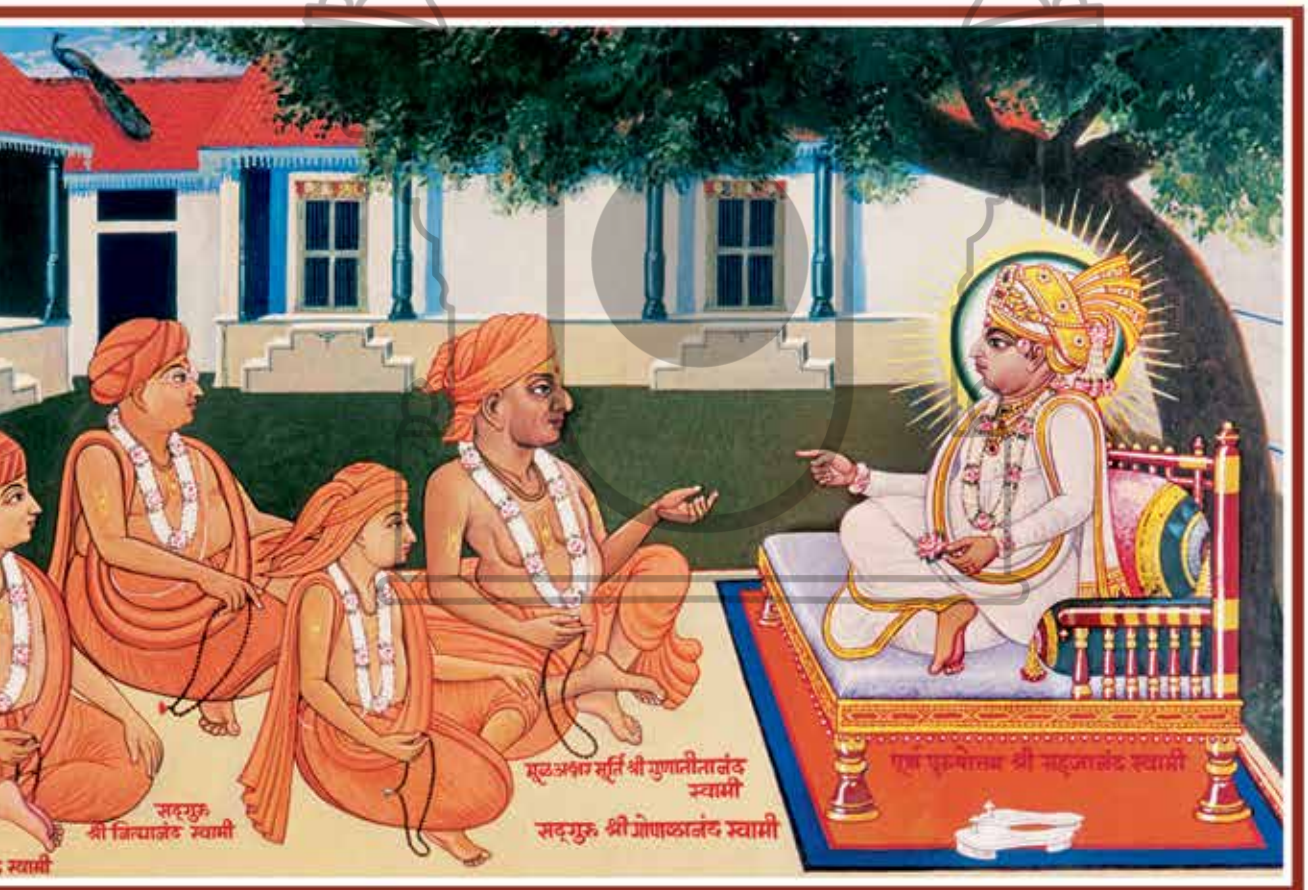
- **Yogiji Maharaj** says, "Shriji Maharaj will seat a person who reads the Vachanamrut right next to him. Great *sadgurus* often said that **Shriji Maharaj** would grant **darshan** to a person who reads the Vachanamrut **108 times.**"
- The Vachanamrut **answers all of**

life's problems. One who reads the Vachanamrut has read all the scriptures in the world.


■ **TAKING A VOW TO READ THE VACHANAMRUT**

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

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



36. A MESSENGER FOR UPASANA



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

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

Around this time, Maganbhai **met** a *satsangi* named **Harmanbhai**, who **told** him of **Shastriji Maharaj’s greatness** and of the **Akshar-Purushottam upasana**. Maganbhai became curious about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and **read the entire Vachanamrut 10 times**.

As soon as he got a **holiday** from work, Maganbhai came to **India**. He had Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan in **Anand**. “We want to spread Satsang in Africa through you,” Shastriji Maharaj told him.

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

Shastriji Maharaj blessed him, “**Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, will speak through you.**”

Once Maganbhai returned to Africa, he and other devotees wrote a letter

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

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

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

In **Jinja**, **station masters** usually only **release goods** after taking bribes. **Maganbhai**, however, would say, "If I took a bribe, it would dishonour my *tilak-chandlo*. My guru's name would be blemished. Take your money back. Just **come to *katha*** from 5:30 to 6 p.m."

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

Maganbhai spent his last years in **Tororo**. Work would end at 6 p.m. Then, he would go into town. **Africans** and **Indians** would gather to **drink, smoke** and **gamble**. **Maganbhai** would sit at a distance and read the **Vachanamrut** aloud. Yet, nobody would listen to him. **Four months** passed in this way.

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

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

But Maganbhai did not give up. He **continued his talks**. C.M. Patel and many other Gujaratis and Punjabis became

interested in Satsang over time.

Once or twice a month, festivals would be held. Maganbhai would **himself sponsor the festival** in Tororo. Moreover, he would keep only **150 shillings of his earnings** and **donate the rest** to Shastriji Maharaj.

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

Shastriji Maharaj sent a letter to the devotees of Africa during his **final illness**. Calling them all to **Sarangpur**. They came by **boat**. It **took them nine days**. All through the journey, Maganbhai did *katha* to the devotees for **12 to 18 hours** everyday!

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

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

Through his contact, people such as CM Kaka and CT Kaka **joined Satsang**. Through them, Satsang **spread to Europe and America**.

All it takes is one person to make a difference and spread Satsang. Maganbhai is an ideal example of this. We too should spread Satsang to please Maharaj and Swami.

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 Sadguru Swāmi,
(Prabhu) jay Sadguru Swāmi;
Sahajānand dayālu (2),
balvant Bahunāmi...**Jay 1**
Charan-saroj tamārā vandū kar jodi (2),
Charane chitt dharyāthi (2),
dukh nākhyā todī...**Jay 2**
Nārāyan sukh dātā, dwij-kul tanu dhāri (2),
Pāmar patit uddhāryā (2),
aganit narnāri...**Jay 3**
Nitya nitya nautam lilā kartā Avināshi (2),
Adsath tirath charane (2),
koti Gayā Kāshi...**Jay 4**
Purushottam pragat nu je darshan karshe (2),
Kāl karma thi chhuti (2),
kutumb sahit tarshe...**Jay 5**
Ā avsar karunā nidhi, karunā bahu kidhi (2),
Muktānand kahe mukti (2),
sugam kari sidhi...**Jay 6**

(The *arti* was written by Muktanand Swami in Samvat 1859, Kartik *sud* 10 (5 November 1802 CE) in Kalvani. Shriji Maharaj was 22 years old at the time. Muktanand Swami's age was 45.)

■ SHLOKAS FOR PUJA

Invocation Mantra

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

“O Swaminarayan Prabhu! O Lord (Nath) awaken, awaken. O Son of Dharma! O 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.*

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

Concluding Mantra

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

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

■ SHLOKA TO BE SAID BEFORE MEALS

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

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

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

Aum Shāntihi! Shāntihi! Shāntihi!

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

■ PRAYER FOR MORNING PUJA

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

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

■ NIGHTIME PRAYER

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

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

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

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

38. ADDITIONAL RECITATIONS

■ ASHTAK

Krupā karo muj upare, sukhnidhi Sahajānand,
Gun tamārā gāvvā, buddhi āpjo Sukhkand;
Akshar Purushottam ahi, pruthavi upar padhāriyā;
Anek jiva uddhārvā, manushyatan dhāri rahyā...1

Āvyā Akshardhāmthi avnimā, aishvarya mukto lai,
Shobhe Akshar sāth sundar chhabi, lāvanya tejomayi;
Kartā divya sadā rahe pragat je, sākār sarvopari,
Sahajānand krupālune nit namu, sarvāvatāri Hari...2

Je chhe Akshardhām divya Harinu, mukto-Hari jyā vase,
Māyāpār kare anant jivane, je moksh nu dwār chhe;
Brahmāndo anutulya rom disatā, seve Parabrahmane,
E Mulākshar murtine namu sadā, Gunātītānandne...3

Shrimannirgun-murti sundar tanu, je jñānvārtā kathe,
Je sarvagna, samast sād hugun chhe, māyā thaki mukta chhe;
Sarvaishvaryathi purna ashritajanonā dosh tāle sadā,
Evā Prāgji Bhaktarāj gurune, preme namu sarvadā...4

Jenu nām ratyā thaki malin, sankalpo samulā gayā,
Jene sharan thayā pachhi bhavatanā ferā virāmi gayā;
Jenu gān dasho dishe harijano, gāye ati harshathi,
Evā Yagnapurushdās tamane, pāye namu pritthi...5

Vāni amrutthi bhari madhusami, sanjivni lokmā,
drashtimā bhari divyatā nirakhatā, sudivya bhakto badhā;
Haiye heta bharyu mithu janani, ne hāsya mukhe vasyu,
Te Shri Jñānji Yogirāj gurune, nitye namu bhāvshu...6

Shobho sād hugune sadā saral ne, jakte anāsakt chho,
Shāstriji guru Yogiji ubhayni, krupātanu pātra chho;
Dhāri dharmadhurā samudra sarakhā, gambhir jñāne ja chho,
Nārāyānswarupdās gunine, snehe ja vandu aho...7

Shobhe somya mukhārvinda hasatu, nene ami varshtā,
Vāni chhe mahimābhari mrudu vali, haiye Hari dhāratā,
Yogirāj Pramukhji hrudayathi, jenā gunee reeztā,
Vandu sant Mahant Swāmi gurune, kalyānkāri sadā...8

Brahmarupe Shriharinā charanmā anurāgie,
Evi ja āshish dās bhāve hast jodi māgie.

■ THAL

Māre gher āvjo Chhogalādhāri,
māre gher āvjo Chhogalādhāri,
Lādu jalebi ne sev suvāli,
hu to bhāve kari lāvi chhu ghāri... Māre gher-1

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

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

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

■ DHYEY (GOAL) AND PURNAHUTI (CONCLUDING) SHLOKAS

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



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 māi 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.

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

liberation (moksha).

2. **Birth:** 19 September 1933 (Samvat 1989, Bhadarva vad 9) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.

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.

- 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 (sarp, 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. BAPS: A UNIQUE ORGANIZATION

Our BAPS Sanstha's full name is 'Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha'. This **international organization** creates miracles in every field that it works in.

■ UNIQUE TRAITS OF BAPS

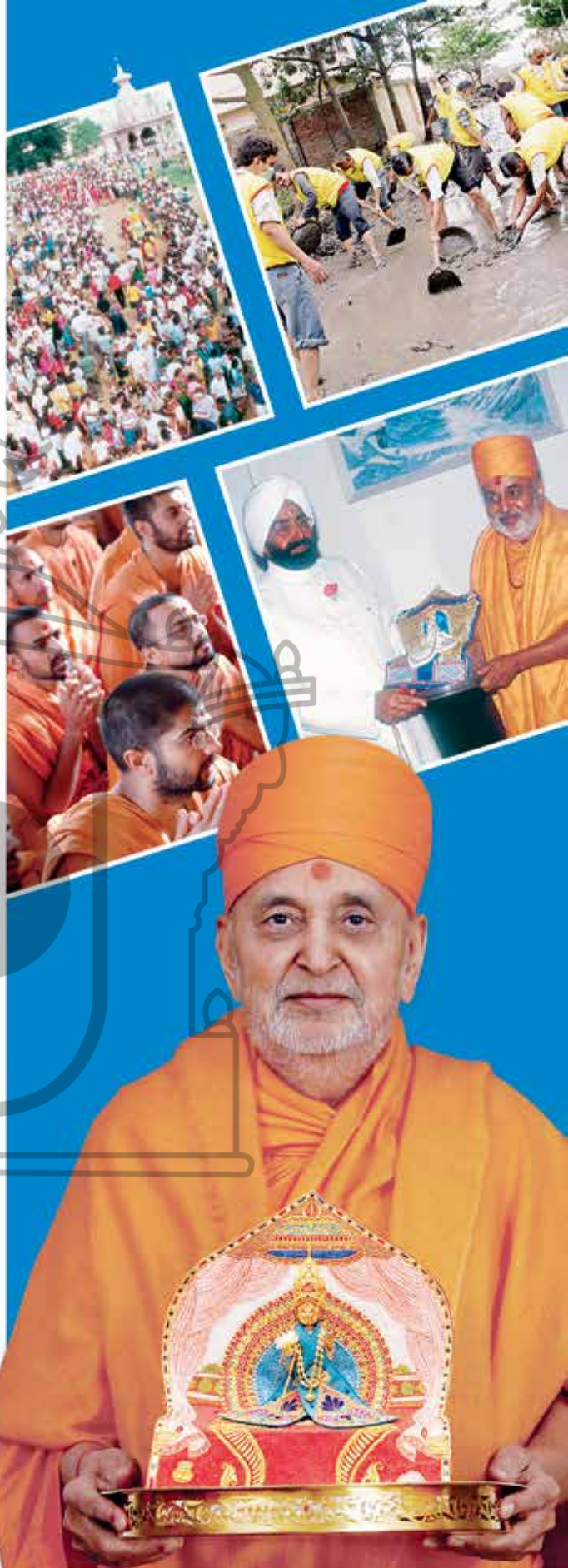
- **Recognised by the United Nations**
- **Recognised 6 times in the Guinness Book of World Records:** 1. The Largest Active Temple Complex - Delhi Akshardham, 2. and 3. The Builder of the Most Temples in the World - Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 4. The World's Largest Annakut – London Mandir, 5. The Largest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

■ THE SECRET TO OUR SUCCESS

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

■ THE GREATEST CAUSE OF OUR SUCCESS

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



BAPS AROUND THE WORLD

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had said that Satsang would spread to every leaf in the world – meaning the Swaminarayan Satsang would spread in the whole world. This vision is coming true today. Let's have a look at our main mandirs and centres around the world.



Chicago Mandir



**New Jersey
BAPS Centenary Festival**



Health Services



Nairobi Mandir



Educational Services



Environmental Services



Social Services

BAPS At A Glance

- 52 countries
- 3,850 centres around the world
- 16,000 weekly assemblies for men and women of all ages
- More than 1,100 mandirs and 2 Akshardhams
- More than 1,000 learned sadhus
- 55,000 volunteers
- Over a million followers
- 8,000 Children's weekly *sabhas*



**Akshardham,
Gandhinagar**

Auckland Mandir



Cultural Services



Spiritual Service

Friends, our Bhagwan is supreme, our principles are the best, our Guru is the greatest, and our Sanstha too is a leader in every field!

GLOSSARY

A

adharma	'opposite of dharma', unrighteousness, immorality
adhiveshan	a convention which also often includes tests of basic spiritual knowledge
agna	instruction, order, command
ahar shuddhi	purity of diet
Akshar	one of the five eternal realities. It is greater than <i>jiva</i> , <i>ishwar</i> , and <i>maya</i> and second only to Bhagwan Swaminarayan (Purushottam). He is the home and ideal servant of Bhagwan and the guru of BAPS
Aksharbrahman	See Akshar
amrut	a divine elixir that makes a person immortal
arti	the ritual of waving lighted wicks (<i>divas</i>) before the deity to worship and express love
asana	third of the eight steps of ashtanga yoga, entailing physical exercises of postures for soundness of body, which promotes concentration
ashtak	a group of eight <i>shlokas</i> or prayers. In our Sampradaya, a famous <i>ashtak</i> , 'Ananta kotindu' is sung after <i>arti</i>

ashvamedh yagna	a 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
atma	a pure soul
avatar	an incarnation of Bhagwan
avatari	cause of all the avatars – Bhagwan, Purna Purushottam, Bhagwan Swaminarayan
avatarvad	the belief that Bhagwan comes onto Earth; one of the fundamental beliefs of Hinduism

B

bati	wheat bread made by taking a dollop of wheat dough and frying it in ghee
bawa/bawo	low order of renunciate
bhagvati diksha	initiation into orange robes – the sadhu order
Bhagwan	one who possesses divine powers - most often used for Paramatma or Supreme God
bhajiya	an Indian food item made by frying battered vegetables
bhakta	devotee; one who has bhakti (love) for Bhagwan
bhakti	love; devotion
bhiksha	to ask for alms; to give as alms

Brahma	the deva assigned to create each brahmand (universe) and everything in it.	ekantik	a person who has mastered dharma (righteousness), <i>jnan</i> (knowledge), <i>vairagya</i> (detachment), and <i>bhakti</i> (devotion)
Brahman	see Akshar.		
brahmarup	possessing qualities similar to those of Brahman	F	
Brahmaswarup	the form of Aksharbrahman; the guru of BAPS	falahar	a diet of fruits and a variety of foods, excluding grains and pulses, that may be eaten on ekadashi and other fasts.
C			
charanarvind	holy feet	G	
D		ghar sabha	a gathering in which family members assemble at home for satsang
dal	pulses; a curry made of boiled pulses	ghee	purified butter
dandvat	prostration; to lie flat, with hands extended, as a sign of surrender and devotion to a greater being.	gaushala	a stable for cattle
darbar	the residence of a prince or king.	gunatit	above <i>maya</i> ; most often used to describe Aksharbrahman or souls that have become <i>brahmarup</i>
das	a servant	I	
dham	an abode or a home	ishwar	a soul, like the <i>jiva</i> but more powerful; the soul of devas and other powerful cosmic beings
dharna	concentration – sixth of the eight steps of ashtanga yoga, entailing focusing of the mind to guide the flow of consciousness	J	
dhun	the chanting of Bhagwan's name	jata	long hair, often wrapped into a bun, of a yogi
divyabhav	the firm belief that Bhagwan and His Sadhu are fully divine and without any flaw	jholi	a large cloth bundle used to gather and carry grains or belongings.
E		jiva	the soul bound by maya
ekadashi	a special religious observance of fasting performed on the 11th day of the bright and dark halves of a lunar month	jodan	attachment; deep love

K		moksha	liberation; emancipation; freedom from <i>maya</i> and the cycle of life and death; the eternal experience of Bhagwan's bliss
kal	time; often also used to refer to death		
kalyan	liberation of the soul	mukhpath	to memorize; particularly, the memorization of spiritual texts
kanthi	a necklace; in the Swaminarayan Sampraday, devotees wear a necklace usually made of wood and of two strands	mukta	a pure soul; one who is free from maya
karyakar	volunteer	murti	the sacred image of a deity
katha	discourse; spiritual talks; reading of shastra	murti puja	worship of a deity's image
kevalik	a Jain spiritual master	N	
kriyaman	active	niyam	a firm vow or promise to regularly perform a certain act
kusang	bad company	P	
L		padmasan	the lotus posture; one of many yogic asanas/postures
ladus	an Indian sweet	pagh	a turban
lila	divine action	palash danda	a type of staff
M		panch tattva	the five eternal entities
mahant	the head of an ashram, mandir, or monastery	panchang pranam	kneeling and bowing down; called 'panchang' because it has five parts of one's body (both hands, feet and one's head) touching the ground as a sign of respect and surrender
mahima	glory or greatness		
mala	a rosary; a string of 108 beads used for chanting Bhagwan's name	Parabrahman	he who is above Brahman; Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan
maya	one of the five eternal entities; ignorance; the power of Bhagwan responsible for creating attachment towards the body and its relations	Paramatma	the ultimate spirit; Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan

paramhansa	a special order of ascetics initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan	samadhi	forward on the spiritual path a divine trance; the final step or attainment in asthanga yoga
parampara	succession	sampradaya	a religious movement which is led by a succession of gurus
pativrata	a woman who is loyal to her husband; a bhakta who is loyal to only one deity	sanchit	actions whose results are stored and not yet activated
pochi	an ornament worn on one's hand	sanstha	an organization
pradakshina	to walk around the object of one's respect or devotion	sant	a pure, spiritual person; a renunciate or sadhu; also used to refer to the Satpurush or true guru
pragat	present	sarvopari	above all else; ultimate
prarabdha	deeds whose consequences are already set in motion	satpurush	a true, Gunatit Guru
prasad(i)	an item blessed or sanctified by Bhagwan	satsang	<i>sat</i> = truth or good, <i>sang</i> = company or group. Satsang refers to keeping the company of pious and virtuous people (especially the <i>Satpurush</i>) and shastras. Satsang is also used to describe the entire Swaminarayan fellowship
pratishtha	installation	satsangi	a member of the Satsang fellowship
pratyahar	withdrawing the senses	seva	service
puja(n)	a ritual of devotion	shikharbaddha	pinnacled – a mandir built with spires in which five <i>artis</i> are done.
punarjanma	rebirth	sopari	betel nut
punya	positive merits received from Bhagwan for good deeds done	stri-purush maryada	rules that describe the appropriate way to behave with people of the opposite gender
Purushottam	the ultimate being; Supreme God, Bhagwan Swaminarayan	sukhad	sandalwood
R			
rajipo	profuse blessings of joy		
rotlo	a type of unleavened, round, cooked bread		
S			
sabha	gathering or assembly		
sadhana	practices taken on to move		

swabhav

a person's nature or personality; usually used to refer to negative traits of one's personality which must be removed in order to progress on the spiritual path

V

vagha

special clothing; attire

varni

a yogi

vartman

rules relating to one's actions; a vow or discipline

T

tapa

austerity or penance

vicharan

travels

thal

offering of food

Y

til

a birthmark

yagna

a fire ritual

tilak-chandalo

a U-shaped mark of sandalwood paste with a round mark of vermillion (*kumkum*) at its centre applied on forehead by *satsangis*.

yam

self control; the first step of ashtanga yoga

Yampuri

the kingdom of the god of Death

tyag

renunciation

yati

a celibate

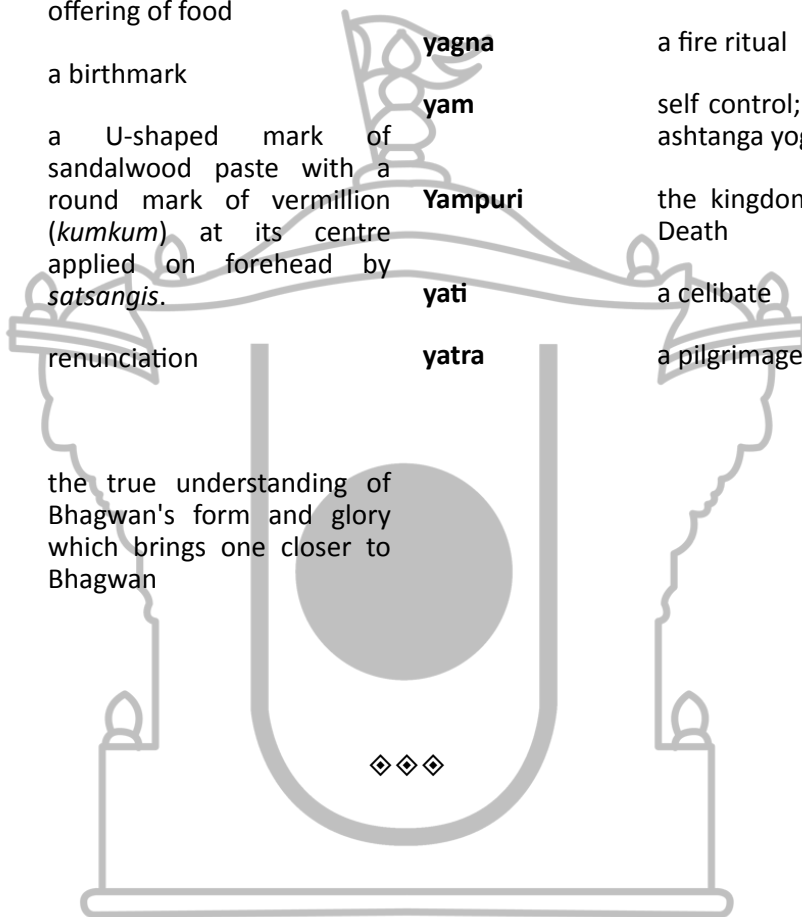
U

upasana

the true understanding of Bhagwan's form and glory which brings one closer to Bhagwan

yatra

a pilgrimage



An Ideal Child's DAILY ROUTINE

Dear Children! We are the ideal children of Maharaj and Swami. We have been born to please Maharaj and Swami. So, our daily routine should be such that everyone would praise and say, 'O Wonderful! How cultured are the *satsangi* children of the Swaminarayan faith!' Try to make your daily routine in accordance with the routine shown below.



Prayer on awakening



Bath and puja



Panchang pranam



Prayer before meals



School and tuition



Bal sabha



Arti and ashtak



Satsang reading and ghar sabha



AGNA

(Moral Commands)

1. Kanthi
2. Puja and Panchang
3. Bal sabha – Gharsabha
4. Arti and Ashtak
5. Purity of Diet
6. Reading and Exams
7. Avoid bad company
8. Study well

UPASANA

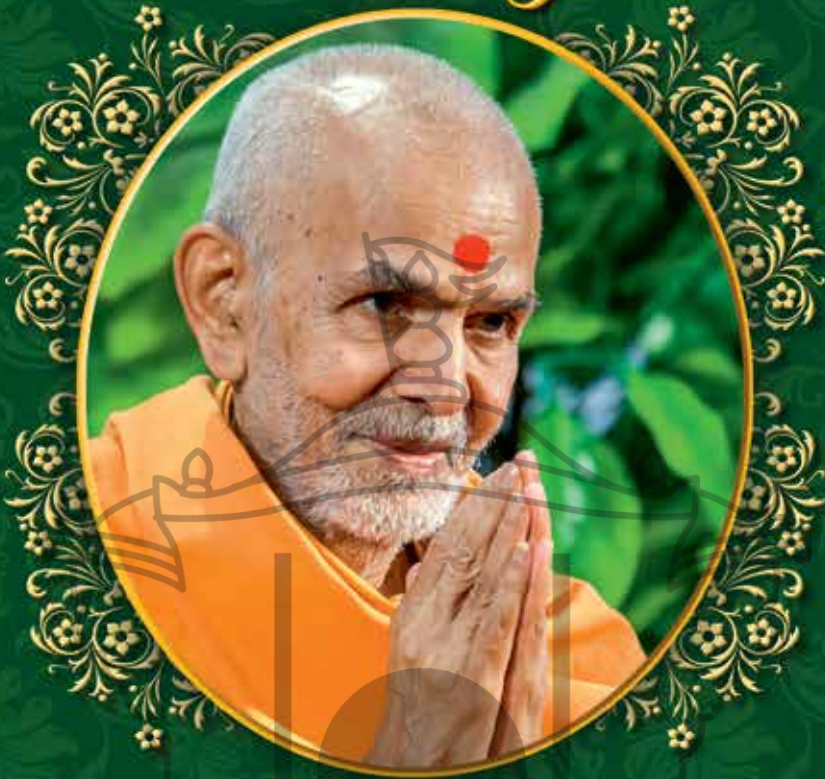
(Belief and Worship)

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

**Lifetime
Satsang**

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

Blessings



॥ Lifetime Satsang ॥

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નહોય (પાશોદ્ધરણ). મને તમે બાલકોના સત્સંગ (મન તરો).

Satsang exams will make you strong and firm in Satsang. They will strengthen your foundation for remaining steadfast in Satsang. So, all children should appear for them.

સત્સંગ પરીક્ષાના સત્સંગમાં દૃઢતા મળે.
સત્સંગ કોમલ રહે નહોય (પાશોદ્ધરણ).

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The fruit of Satsang Exams is Alkhardham

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(Mahant Swami Maharaj)