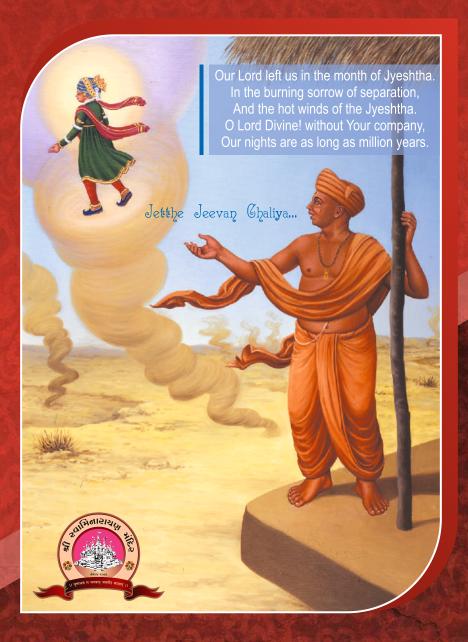
॥ श्री स्वामिनारायणो विजयतेतराम् ॥

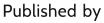


sahajANAND

The Eternal Bliss

CONTENT

No.	Subject	Author
01	Prelude	H.H. Acharya Shri
		Rakeshprasadji Maharaj
02	Bhakti	Yogi Trivedi
05	Vadtal	Prof. Madhusudan Vyas
06	Shikshapatri	Shantikumar Bhatt
07	The Purpose	Swami Bhanuprakashdasji
08	The First	Harendra P. Bhatt
09	The Third Eye	Harendra P. Bhatt
10	Bhanji Mehta's Spite	Prof. Gordhanbhai Patel
12	Thankless Sevakram	Dharmedrabhai (Artist)
14	Inspiration	
15	Ras Darshan	Lalji Bhagat
16	Milestones	Purshottambhai Kacha
18	Evedom	Prof. Dyuti Yajnik
20	Satsang	Rameshbhai B. Soni
22	Whats & Whys	Lalji Bhagat
24	Get Motivated	
	Prasadi	



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PRELUDE





H. H. Acharya Shri Rakeshprasadji Maharaj

Harikrishna Charan Nakhchandra Chhata bin, Sab jag manhi andhera re; Harikrishna Ghanshyam Narayan re, Tu ratt le mun mera re.

Premanand Swami sings the glory of Harikrishna Maharaj in this couplet. The Nand-saints worshipped Shree Purnapurshottam Narayan from close quarters. And these saints sang about whatever they experienced during their worship. We realize their experience in this couplet. Purna Purushotamnarayan manifested as a human being on this earth as Lord Swaminarayan. He graces the divine throne in Akshardham, illuminating with the divine light of countless suns and moons. As a symbol of the unity of these two forms, Lord Swaminarayan, out of Sheer compassion for all the aspirants, consecrated His own swaroop viz Shree Harikrishna Maharaj at Vadtal and made all His followers happy (nyaal) and sanaath (having the protector).

Whenever the Lord roams around the world and performs human sports, He aims to carry all beings to His abode. The Lord takes birth on this earth to redeem all. Once a devotee from Bhadran (a town in Anand district of central Gujarat) Mr. Bhagu Patidar asked Shri Hari, "Maharaj! how can a person achieve his salvation"? Shri Hari replied, when the Lord is alive on this earth, then as a result of His association and Darshan, one meets to salvation. And when the Lord is not present on this earth in person, one should seek the shelter of saints who had realised God in person and if such saint is not present, then the icon (Moorti) consecrated by the Lord can lead one to his salvation.

We are fortunate that we are sanaath, having a protector. Premanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and the nand saints praised Harikrishna Maharaj in their literary creations. The above mentioned couplet of Premanand Swami is the finest example. We are the followers of Lord Swaminarayan and it becomes our duty to abide by his dictates. We can pass the whole life singing and listening the glory of Shree Harikrishna Maharaj and yet we cannot grasp it properly. The sakshat (real) swarup of Purna Purushottamnarayan i.e. Harikrishna Maharaj resides here. This swarup has fulfilled the desires of innumerable followers. Here in Vadtal Lord swaminarayan resides in the image of Harikrishna Maharaj and it is his oneness with Him. So it is the need of the hour that we remain in association with this swarup. If we meditate upon this form of Harikrishna Maharaj, we will be blessed with His divine Bliss!

We strongly recommend all our devotees that if we keep Harikrishna Maharaj in our heart and meditate upon him, Our salvation (Kalyan) is assured.

Yogi Trivedi, Columbia University @thelifeofayogi



Introduction:

Articulating Bhakti in the Middle East

My hands were trembling and my voice shaking as I stood up to speak in front of the devout in a mosque in Amman, Jordan.

It was the first time that I was going to address a primarily Islamic audience about Bhakti and Hinduism outside of a University setting. What would they think? How would they react? Would I be able to wear all my hats with dignity and transparency as the scholar, the believer, the practitioner, the journalist, the struggling-to-be-better-human? Would I be able to connect with my audience? The audience sensed my hesitation and vulnerability. I tried to pray, but I was having trouble tweeting my Beloved. I closed my eyes and gathered my thoughts. I realized that this was the true test of my academic journey, my spiritual progress and my humaneness. This was the test of my Bhakti.

Connecting with and relating to people is an exceptionally simple and at once most misunderstood task. We usually hide behind excuse of language barriers, social awkwardness, lack of courage, anxiety and timidity. These, for the most part, are excusesconnecting with people has little to do with skill or tact. Connecting with people requires pure intentions, a bright smile and the willingness to try.

Connecting with people requires finding the lowest common denominator between you and

other humans-humanity and divinity. It is about being human and seeing the divine in others. Connecting with people is about being the best version of yourself: confident, transparent, selfless and humble. It is taking a lesson from Bhakti's past and applying it in the present.

Bhakti's Past and Why it Matters

Like many of the religious terms that have gained currency in mainstream spirituality circles, Bhakti is a term that is used by millions but understood and engaged with by only a handful! What is Bhakti and why does it matter to us? As followers of the Swaminarayan Holy Fellowship, Bhakti is critical to our understanding of religious identity. Bhagwan Swaminarayan reminds His followers in Vachanamrut Gadhada Section I - 33 that the tradition belongs to a long lineage of Bhakti communities. In the Shikshapatri, Bhagwan Swaminarayan reminds His followers to adhere closely to the ritual prescribed by Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya's son Goswami Vithalnathji and the theology prescribed by Ramanujacharya. The founding Acharyas and Gurus also followed Bhagwan Swaminarayan's queue during the formative years of the community, often adopting and adapting earlier Bhakti ritual, theology, and textual corpus to shape their own identity. Though there are many interpretations of the injunction, it is indisputable that the community and its early followers and shapers looked to the earlier Bhakti communities for direction-that Bhakti and its past is central to our identity and journey as aspirants belonging to the Swaminarayan Fellowship.

Bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root bhaj. The word suggests an act of sharing, participating, serving and forming. Built into this concept of devotion or subservience then is this idea of bonding, giving, loving, networking of connecting. Bhakti at its core is love for the divine and all of its creation. The idea of Bhakti can be credited for building bridges and encouraging interaction between diverse

communities over the last 1500 years on the Indian subcontinent. How, one asks?

Bhakti communities attempted to take a step away from caste-based ritual, a hierarchical ritual order and towards a more egalitarian form of worship that allowed all members of society to participate.

Bhakti poetry allowed for members of various castes and sectarian communities to speak to each other and articulate their own versions of theology and in vernacular languages. It gave voice to anyone who reflected on life and religion within a broad Indic frame. For the first time, non-Brahmins were creating a theological corpus that was reaching and influencing more members of society than their predecessors. The vernacular was replacing the classical. Poetry and performance were complementing texts and manuscripts.

Bhakti sites brought together members of different religious communities-Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Jains for worship and conversation. These same sites were giving notable access to Dalits and women for ritual and interaction in an unprecedented manner.

Bhakti traditions in general were preaching a message of integration and syncretism that was accepting of different castes, creeds and nationalities. The Bhakti traditions were the first to engage with Christian missionaries and theologians in ways that affected both actors. In Gujarat, the Swaminarayan Fellowship was one of the communities leading the charge.

Bhakti practice and beliefs encouraged Moghul, Rajput and colonial rulers to engage with their subjects and offer patronage for minority religious communities to build houses of worship and set up networks of pilgrimage in their kingdoms. Vrindavan, the seat of Krishna-Bhakti in the North, is a prime example. The site formed with the help of the Mughal Emperor's Rajput vassals and with the addition of cultural

influence of non-Hindu elements-linguistic, poetic and musical.

Bhakti became a means for religious communities to form defined sectarian circuits and at once create larger webs that allowed for an open exchange of ideas and identities through rather porous boundaries. The Bhakti Movement was all about connecting.

Bhakti then did not wander too far from the etymology of its Sanskrit root. It was finding ways to build bridges, connect human beings and level the playing field for diverse actors.

If this is Bhakti's past, what is its present? How do these lessons apply to the world in which we live? Bhakti was relevant then and I argue that it is as relevant now. How does the essence of Bhakti help us bridge the divide today-to connect with others?

Bhakti's Essence:

Connecting with People through Divinity

The essence of Bhakti's spirit is connecting with the divine through its creation. If the Divine is all-pervading or sarvavyapak, then He is the common-thread that connects all of us-all of creation. The presence of Bhakti allows for the absence of hatred. Every being around us is part of the same world, the same canvas that is painted by the world's creator. That same form of divinity that you pray to each morning or night, is manifest through its many creations including your pestering neighbor, that difficult employee and a nagging landlord. A practical example would be thinking of some of the greatest painters of our time and their masterpieces. Though you are never to meet Picasso, you are sure to stare, revere and admire his masterpiece, the Guernica, simply because it is his creation. Picasso's creativity and ingenuity are manifest through his masterpieces. God's divinity is manifest through his creation.

What are the practical advantages of seeing the Divine in its creation? It is easier to get over

rifts, insults and relationship drama. Forgiveness comes naturally. How can you hold a tiff with someone who is the manifestation of the same Divine? And finally, it becomes easier to respect and appreciate someone who is extremely different from you. That person is like you since you share a divine essence—though you may exhibit different lifestyle preferences, aesthetic appearances, ideologies, you are one and the same at the core. Bhakti helps overcome difference and appreciate variety. It helps us connect with unlikely partners. Bhakti's essence is knowing that connecting and relating is not a chore or a task, not a skill or a trade, not a job or a profession-it is a natural way of being for those live and love.

Bhakti's Takeaway:

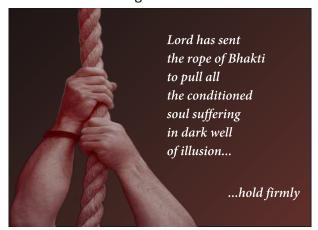
Application and Rewards

Bhakti's themes and lessons were practical and relevant then and they are now. The key to actualizing them is looking toward the past and reflecting on the present. How did Bhakti help others? How can it help me now? How will it help me inspire others in the future? Bhakti is not merely a religious concept, or a trendy spiritual mode, but it is a yoga or a discipline for living and interacting that pervades all aspects of life.

Bhakti brings a sense of inclusivity, selflessness, humility and genuineness and urgency to human interactions. You have nothing to ask for, nothing to want in return, you must only interact because you want to do so. You keep in touch because it provides a real joy to interact with those who belong to your fraternity of existence. The other person too feels this sense of honesty and sense of belonging. There aren't any formalities or reciprocities.

Most importantly, Bhakti prepares you to transcend expectations. You do not expect warmth or appreciation in return. You are not worried about how people will come to understand your words or whether they will bother to respond or smile back. Reaching out through Bhakti warrants satisfaction just in the joy of performing the act. The response becomes secondary, almost negligent. You do not give to receive in Bhakti; you give so that you may cease to exist. It is this foundational principle of Bhakti that allows for one to connect without expecting in return, for others to connect without fear or guard.

I opened my eyes and looked at the crowd in the Jordanian mosque. It seemed like a lifetime, but the lessons had flashed in front of my eyes in mere moments. I admired my Beloved in their eyes, in their hijabs and groomed beards. I noticed that Lord Swaminarayan was present in all their beings. I was not going to speak to them, but to Him. It must have been a similar moment when Premanand Swami sang, "Wherever my eyes turn, Swaminarayan appears. His love binds me with existence." I knew exactly where to begin. I closed my eyes again and sang one of Swami Premanand's pads in Urdu. The bridge had been built. The audience listened, asked for translations, and inquired about Hindu beliefs of creation, karma and reincarnation. I had connected with and related to what the world might consider an unlikely partner, an uninterested partner. Bhakti is conversing and connecting across ideologies, religious boundaries, linguistic barriers, cultural fault lines and sectarian divides. Bhakti is seeing no difference at all. And this is where it all begins.



Govind - Lord Swaminarayan has always shown a special liking for Vadtal village. Because it is rich with water resources, shady trees, fruits and flowers and it is considered unique in Gujarat state for its richness of land, trade, commerce and culture!

Govind ne gamatu sada, Gaam Vadtal vishesh; Jal chhay phal phool kari, Gunvant Gurjar desh.

(Nishkulanand Swami)

The above lines express the significance of Vadtal as an outstanding pilgrim-spot. In the

receiving the special attachment of God, Vadtal has become most sacred religious pilgrim-spot. As it is blessed by the Lord, it has received special blessings of Nature. The Nature has enriched this holy land by offering profuse fertility - 'Jala chhay phal phool kari'. It is a land of beautiful small lakes, green fields and orchards. This region has been called "Charutar" which means the place having extremely charming beauty and grace. On this beautiful land of Charutar, Vadtal enjoys a very ancient historical importance. In ancient time





entire universe India enjoys a unique significance for her Vedic culture and rich heritage of art and music. It is the land where God prefers to incarnate again and again. In this unique country there are many states with multiplicity of culture, religion and language.

Among all these states, Gujarat occupies a very important place for its outstanding trade, commerce, social traditions and religious beliefs. Therefore Nishkulanand Swami says "Gunvant Gurjar desh" He further says that in this unique state of Gujarat, Vadtal is the only place for which Govind - Lord Swaminarayan always shows a special attachment. By

this place was known as Vruttalaya. With the passing of time when people found a huge and beautiful Banyan trees near a lake, they combined the two words: Vad (Banyan tree) and Tal (small lake) which came to be called Vadtal in the local language.

These four lines by devotional lyricist reflect the importance and the sacredness of Vadtal which has been enriched by Dharu lake, Gomati lake, Gopi lake etc. A very gorgeous and majestic temple with the sacred idols consecrated at the hands of Shri Hari Himself!

- Prof. Madhusudan Vyas, Vadodara



SHIKSHAPATRI

THE GOSPEL OF LIFE DIVINE



Shantikumar Bhatt

Cosmos within an Atom

The two opposite banks of the river are apparently separated but under the current of water they are united both at the bottom and also by bridges over them. Similarly God appears to be away from us but we all have an unseen link with Him. So, all our religious books and temples are our connecting links with God. Saints are our guides who lead us on the path to God's abode.

Shikshapatri is the only divine gospel written by God Himself, unlike most of the gospels which appeared at various stages of human evolution.

Shikshapatri is originally written in Sanskrit, the language of gods. It is written in such a simple style that it can be understood easily even by an illiterate person.

Shikshapatri is the essence of all scriptures written so far.

Shikshapatri shows the way of life, which any person of any reasonable age, living in any country, holding any faith or belief, literate or illiterate, having any vocation or activity; can easily follow.

Shikshapatri promises not only eternal bliss after death but it is also the science and art of happiness in this very life.

Shikshapatri has the shortest but the most logical definition of religion which was for the past, which is for the present and which will be for the future in all parts of the world and for all times.

Religion in the west is defined as a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature and purpose of the universe especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies usually involving devotional and ritual observances and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

This is a jumble of definitions of theosophy, philosophy, cosmology, metaphysics, evolution and ethics.

Shikshapatri gives the most scientific and logical definition of Religion as the right conducts. In any logical definition we must have a generic term and a specific term. Here conduct is a generic term because conduct can be right or wrong, good or bad. So Religion is right or good conduct, because right conduct is the root of ideal life.

Holding certain ideas, beliefs, concepts, fads and complexes means holding abstract notions. Religion has to be concretized idealism based on right, good, constructive, positive and scientific thinking.

Mark Twain was asked : Have you given up smoking?

He said: Yes, a thousand times!

So mere determination to follow right conduct is never sufficient.

Act well your part. And therein your duty lies.

Behaviour is the integral part of human personality. It is one's actions and reactions under specified circumstances. Modern science has developed psychophysics and behavioural science. Even the psychological school of behaviour is developed.

But all modern psychology studies human behaviour which, when repeated, becomes a habit and when crystallized, becomes the nature of man.

Shikshapatri has the most logical classification of the teachings of our Lord. It starts with the code to be followed by all. Then



The Purpose

Shastri Swami Shri Bhanuprakashdasji (Porbandar)

Once Shreeji Maharaj organised a Vishnuyag sacrifice at Jetalpur near Amdavad. He personally looked after the management of the event. One day He distributed the wheat for grinding among the village women. A woman with a low character of that village asked for seva from Shreeji Maharaj. People present there scorned at her presence and even informed the Maharaj about her character. The compassionate Shreeji Maharaj willingly gave her the seva. Shreeji Maharaj asked her to do the work herself. She agreed. She worked herself the whole night and appeared before the Maharaj next day. Shreeji Maharaj, pleased with her work, asked if she had done the work herself. She willingly replied that she did the work herself. She even showed blisters she suffered on her hands to Shreeji Maharaj. That woman had not done any physical work in her life and she spinned the hand-mill, the local machine - instrument for flouring food-grains. That had taken a toll on her palms. Shreeji Maharaj promised for her redemption like his sants.

What Shreeji Maharaj did at Jetalpur was not a fringe incident. He repeated such compassion on many occasions and at many places. Kishorilal Mashruvala, the follower of Lord Swaminarayan, a Gandhian and a noted philosopher, compared the life and work of Lord Swaminarayan and Lord Buddha and opined that there existed similarities between the Panchsheel of Lord Buddha and Panch Vratman of Lord Swaminarayan, Bhikshu sangh of Lord Buddha and Paramhans mandal of Lord Swaminarayan, Sangithi of Lord Buddha and Samaiya of Lord Swaminarayan. Both worked for the upliftment of the women. Though there are some differences in their philosophy and ideology but both were pure puritanists in their approach. They accepted, welcomed and embraced the people from all walks of life. Shree Vallabhacharyji talks of Dalitam Madhuram in Madhurashtkam. For him, dalitam is a seed which is not flowered yet and has all the possibilities of flowering. Shvetasvataropanishad says Isham twam jnanatva amruta bhavanti Knowing Him the common man achieves the immortality. The Geeta says: Complete surrender redeems a person.

there is code for religious heads (Acharyas) followed by the code for house-holders, code for government officers, code for married women without husbands, general code for all females, code for Brahmacharies and code for saints etc.

Shikshapatri thus lays down commandments which can lead to ideal physical and mental development, can keep a person away from all the evils corroding the whole humanity.

Shikshapatri was studied before about 200 years by British officers.

They admired it greatly for its content and which is now preserved in the library of Oxford University. This scene of presentation of this holy Book is painted and displayed inside many Swaminarayan Temples.

the FIRST Harendra P. Bhatt

Whatever happened for the first time during the lifetime of Lord Shree Swaminarayan or in the Swaminarayan Holy Fellowship, is mentioned in "the First" series. Topics covered in this series are of two types: one, related to Lord Shree Swaminarayan and second, related to Swaminarayan Holy Fellowship. Yet, everything is centred around Lord Shree Swaminarayan. The topics, having religious as well as sociological impact, are historical milestones of the Swaminarayan Holy Fellowship. Like them, this is also the first attempt of the author.

10. Harbai & Valbai : the first vimukh (ladies) of the Holy Fellowship.

At Kalvani, Lord Sahajanand Swami removed Harbai and Valbai from the primary membership of the following. They were first disciples of Atmanand Swami and had travelled with him to Kashi. Afterwards, they accepted the leadership of Ramanand Swami. They thought themselves superior, more experienced and knowledgeable than Ramanand Swami. They had their own mandals (group of followers) and lived together. They did not like the appointment of Sahajanand Swami and were in no mood to obey his dictates. Yet, they went to Kalvani to attend the Samaiya on Prabodhini Ekadashi, Sahajanand Swami had asked them to sit with ladies in the meeting held on the 14th day after the demise of Ramanand Swami. They bore the grudge about it and wanted to take revenge. So, at Kalvani they entered the meeting and set very near to the male followers and their followers sat wherever they liked. Almost all disliked their rude behavior. They said to Sahajanand Swami, "Swami Maharaj, we are Atmanand Brahminani. We do not differentiate between men and women. Thus how can you new entrants teach us difference between men and women?" Even they scolded Ramdasji Swami & Muktanand Swami for keeping

silence before the new head. Every senior saint criticized them for their ignorance. Yet, they were admanant. They opined that the Atma was same in both men and women. Sahajanand Swami explained, the atma is gender-less but men and women have different bodies. The relationship between men and women are bondage. Women are for family and its maintenance. For moksha, renunciation with bhakti is essential. There should not be any family relation; no father, no mother, no wife, no sister, no brother. They did not listen to the advice of Sahajanand Swami and started saying all non-sense views. Sahajanand Swami could not tolerate their irresponsible behavior and indiscipline and immediately declared them Vimukh, removed them from the primary membership of the Satsang. They were also drawn out of the congregation. On that day, Harbai and Valbai became the first Vimukh of the Holy Fellowship.

Shree Ramchandra Thakur opines that Valbai and Harbai were not anti-Satsang, they disobeyed Sahajananand Swami; hence they were removed from the Satsang. While Raghunathdas was the real first Vimukh of the Satsang. In an assembly at Ahmedabad, attended by leading saints lke Bhai Ramdasji Swami, Muktanand Swami, Atrnanandji along with other saints and Satsangis, Sahajanand

Swami made Raghunath stand up before them, asked him to remove his cloths and declared him a vimukh. People forgot him and the followers deserted him. He died a miserable death.

11. Shree Swaminarayano Vijaytetram : the epithet first used by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad II of Baroda.

'Shree Swaminarayano Vijaytetram' is a Sanskrit epithet and now is written in Gujarati, Hindi and English also. In fact, it is an acceptance of the fact that Shree Swaminarayan is an incarnation of God and His Sampraday is in accordance with the Hindu scriptures. The Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekvad II of Baroda coined this epithet for the first time and used it in flags at Baroda when Muktanand Swami won the Shashtrath (spiritual debate) at Baroda. The Maharaja asked his artists to make two big flags (Vavta) of red cloth and write on them this epithet. He also got prepared two golden Kalash (round pot) and installed them, one on top of his own temple at the palace and one on top of Mandvi darwaja. Above them, the Maharaja hoisted these two vavtas. Not only had the people of Baroda but the whole Gujarat accepted what the Maharaja of Baroda wrote in praise of Lord Swaminarayan. Since then, people started the use of this epithet to express their loyalty and worship of Lord Swaminarayan.

(Contd.)

Moorkhasya panch chinhani, garvo durvachanam tatha. Krodhashch draddh vaadashch, paravakyeshyanaadarah.

Five characteristics of the Fool: Pride, Derogatory words, Anger, Hath and Disrespect for other's talk.



Several Swaminarayan temples prominently display pictures depicting the meeting of the founder Sahajanand Swami, with Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay. In the stylized paintings Sahajanand Swami, in elaborate dress and with a light shining around his head, is seated on a formal chair surrounded by his prominent ascetic disciple. Governor Malcolm stands before him in black official dress in an attitude of respect along with a few British and Indian officials. The two leaders met in Rajkot at the residence of the acting political agent for Kathiyavad on 26 February, 1830. The meeting has a prominent place in the iconography and literature of the group because it occurred during Sahajanand Swami's final illness and was one of his last public acts. He died later in that year. It was also near the end of Sir John Malcolm's long and distinguished career in India. He resigned from his position on 1 December, 1830 and returned to England. No doubt he would have been astounded to learn that pictures of him now appear in Swaminarayn temples in London as well as India to mark the event, but he would have understood that their existence signifies more than the accidental meeting. They remain as silent witness to the fact that the popularity of the religious teachings and reforms of Sahajanand Swami and the growth of British political power in Gujarat developed at about the same time in the first half of the nineteenth century and to the fact that the two men shared a common interest in social order and harmony.

(An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism, Raymond Brady Williams, P. 5)



Prof. Gordhanbhai Patel - Bharuch

Some saints of Swaminarayan Holy Fellowship went to the state of Vadhawan with a mission to spread the message of Bhagawan Swaminarayan. They moved from village to village, meeting people, preaching them a code of conduct prescribed by Shriji Maharaj. People found these saints to be good models who kept themselves away from ill effects of women and wealth. So they became their followers. Swaminarayan Satsang was acknowledged by almost all. Followers began to increase day by day. They vowed to speak the truth, to refrain from theft, to abstain from addiction, to keep away from bad company and never to quarrel among themselves. A sort of peaceful harmony was created in the society. All were very happy to be in the company of true saints. In some villages temples were built according to the advice of saints. Thus people began to tread the path of virtues - the path leading them to the ultimate happiness, ultimate salvation. Never there was such a happy time for them!

Hence the King of the state was highly delighted with such circumstances during his reign. But alas! There was one spiteful man who was not pleased with such a good change in the state. It was none other than the state administrator, namely, Bhanji Mehta. He was roguish and jealous of the first order. He envied Swaminarayan Fellowship and its sadhus and followers. He found that after the arrival of the sadhus people bettered their lives in the state and stopped giving or taking

bribes. His tricks of the trade of exploiting people and money-minting gradually came to a grinding halt. Hence he started abusing Satsangis, insulting them by turns, back-biting them every now and then. But to his surprise nobody paid any attention to his wickedness. People showed indifference to him. Just as an elephant remains nonchalant at barking dogs, people remained calm and cool at Bhanji Mehta's abuses and insults. He was very crooked but was deeply and strongly rooted in his position in the state since long. Even the king could not do away with him. He was really an unavoidable evil. So evil-minded and stubborn administrator he was!

Once it so happened that he received a state-order to go to Dhangadhra for some special work. He was given a special bodyguard whose name was Kesarmiyan, a very loyal person, Muslim by faith. Both of them reached Dhangadhra, finished their task and were sitting to take rest for a while at a place. At this time a stranger approached Bhanji Mehta and earnestly started asking for two rupees which he needed to meet the expenses for his pilgrimage. Bhanji, finding an opportunity at hand, to disgrace Lord Swaminarayan, showed his readiness to give that pilgrim a handful of rupees but on condition that he should abuse Lord Swaminarayan. The pilgrim was quite enticed by this offer from Bhanji Mehta. He was ready to use abusive terms for Lord Swaminarayan. But before he opened his mouth, Kesarmiyan strictly warned him against doing so. Yet at the instigation of Bhanji the pilgrim uttered an abusive word and instantly Kesarmiyan seized his sword and strongly struck him on the head. With that sudden blow the pilgrim fell down, reeling on the ground. Good that the sword was sheathed and did not cause his death, otherwise Bhanji would have been responsible for this murder.

Thereafter Bhanji and Kesarmiyan returned

to Vadhawan. But Bhanji's wickedness was even more ignited by Kesarmiyan's act. He dismissed Kesarmiyan from service. The poor, honest guy that he was, Kesarmiyan accepted the dismissal and collecting all his luggage, putting it in his cart decided to leave Vadhawan forever. Before leaving the place, he paid a courtesy visit to the king's mother. Miyanji with folded hands stood before her. made his bow and unfolded the whole incident that occurred the previous day at Dhangadhra. Rajmata, the King's mother, knew Kesarmiyan's character very well. Miyanji's loyalty to the state was beyond question. He was thoroughly honest and a good follower of Lord Swaminarayan. Despite being a Muslim, he was a staunch disciple of Swaminarayan's Holy Fellowship. He always wore a Kanthi - a double threaded necklace of Tulsi beads round his neck and made a red circular mark of kumkum on his forehead. Keeping in view all these good qualities of Kesarmiyan, Rajmata did not allow him to leave Vadhawan. She insisted on his stay. All his luggage was taken down from the cart. He went home and the next day he was promoted to a higher position in the state. He was duly honoured and was made to stay in Vadhawan forever.

But Bhanji was annoyed and nonplussed at this favour from Rajmata. He could not bear the situation. He argued: "Her Highness! I feel offended very much. I am your loyal administrator of long standing. I don't understand why have you given promotion to Kesarmiyan? How would you look after the state?"

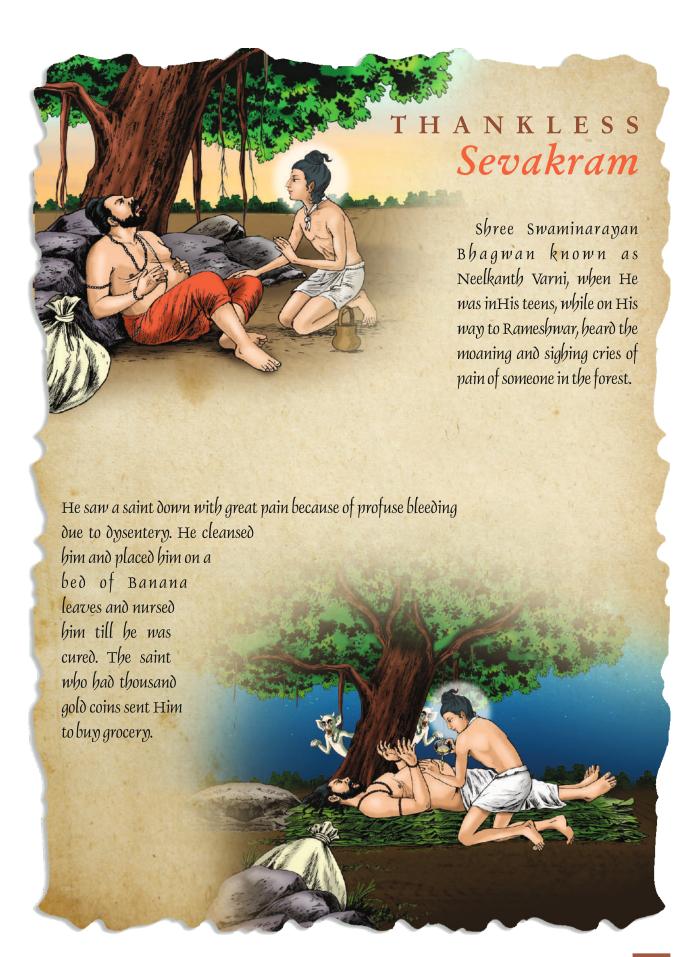
Rajmata immediately retorted: "Mehtaji, how dare you insult anyone without proper reason? Miyanji has become a Satsangi. What wrong has he done in following Bhagawan Swaminarayan? We ourselves have become Satsangis. Our Prince is also going to wear a Kanthi. There is nothing wrong in joining the

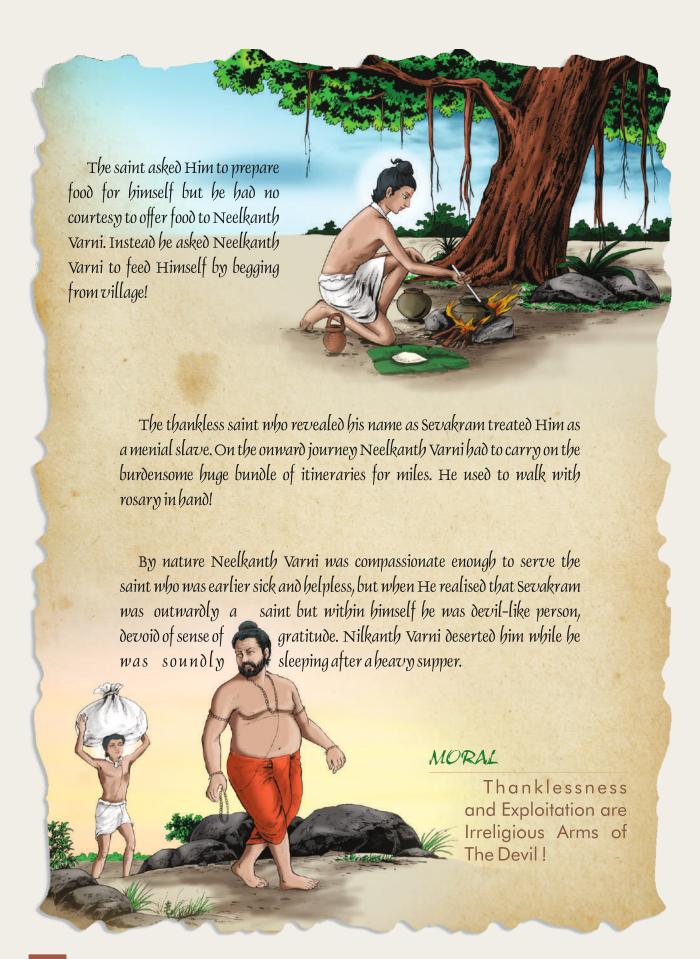
Holy Fellowship of Lord Swaminarayan. Mehtaji, if you want to retain your post, do behave properly, otherwise you may leave our state."

There was no option for Bhanji Mehta but to resign from his position. He left Vadhawan fretting and fuming within, reaping the fruit of his spite against Satsang.

As time went by, all his wealth was ill-spent as it was ill-gotten. He miserably witnessed his own family quite ruined in quarrels. Various diseases attacked him and made him their sole victim. At last he met with an untimely, miserable death. What a tragic end! On the other hand, Kesarmiyan's ardent love for Holy Fellowship saved him from the crookedness of Bhanji Mehta. Satsang indeed yields good fruit, it yields innate joy!

જો રાજય કેરો મદ હોય જેને, सु हे नहिंधर्म अधर्म भेने; કરે સદા તે ન કર્યાનું કામ, प्रस्तारों। यास तरे तमाम. જો ઉપજે દ્વેષ દિલે લગાર, તો જીવ લેતાં ન કરે જ વાર: गरीज है विप्र सुसंत होय, ते ઉपरे बेश हथा न तीय. (हरि सीसामृत) He who has the pride of his state, may not discriminate Dharma-Adharma. Will always indulge in all nonsense acts and never mind all godly punishment. If ill-will springs in his heart, he will not hesitate to take life of poor, Brahmin and holy saint. He may not have mercy on them!







Dr. Mark, a well-known cancer specialist, was once on his way to an important conference in another city where he was going to be granted an award in the field of medical research.

He had worked long and hard on his research and felt his efforts deserved the award he was about to obtain.

However, two hours after the plane took off, the plane made an emergency landing at the nearest airport due to some technical snag. Afraid, that he wouldn't make it in time for the conference, Dr. Mark immediately went to the reception and found that the next flight to the destination was after ten hours. The receptionist suggested him, to rent a car and drive himself down to the conference city which was only four hours away.

Dr. Mark rented a car and started his journey. However, the weather suddenly changed and a heavy storm began. The pouring rain made it very difficult for him to see and he missed a turn he was supposed to take. After two hours of driving, he was convinced he was lost. Driving in the heavy rain on a deserted road, feeling hungry and tired, he frantically began to look for any sign of civilization. After some time, he finally came across a small tattered house. Desperate, he got out of the car and knocked on the door. A beautiful lady opened the door. He explained the matter and asked her if he could use her telephone.

However, the lady told him that she doesn't have a phone or any electronic gadget but told the doctor to come inside and wait till the weather improved.

Hungry, wet and exhausted, the doctor accepted her kind offer and walked in. The lady gave him hot tea and something to eat. The lady told him that he could join her for prayer. But, Dr. Mark smiled and said that he believed in hard work only and told her to continue with her prayers.

Sitting on the table and sipping the tea, the doctor watched the woman in the dim light of candles as she prayed next to what appeared to be a small baby crib. Every time she finished a prayer, she would start another one. Feeling that the woman might be in need of help, the doctor seized the opportunity to speak as soon as she finished her prayers. The doctor asked her what exactly she wanted from the God and enquired if she thought God would ever listen to her prayers. He further asked about the small child in the crib for whom she was apparently praying. The lady gave a sad smile and said that the child in the crib was her son who was suffering from a rare type of cancer and there was only one doctor Mark who could cure him but she didn't have money to afford his fee and moreover Dr Mark lived in another far off town. She said that God had not answered her prayer so far but said that God would create some way out one day and added that she would not allow her fears to overcome her faith.

Stunned and speechless Dr. Mark was in tears which were rolling down his cheeks. He whispered, God is great and recollected the sequence of events. there was malfunction in the plane, a thunderstorm hit, and he lost his way; and all of this happened because God did not just answer her prayer but also gave him a chance to come out of materialistic world and give some time to the poor helpless people who have nothing but rich prayers.

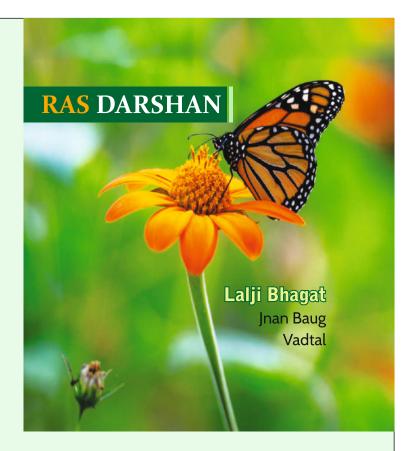
HARI HAIYA NA HAAR CHHO

Hari haiya na haar chho jire tame, Sej tana Shanagaar chho jire tame. You are the garland of my heart, And the beauty of my bed. Mukhthi shu ghanu kahiye Mohan re, Pran tana Adhar chho jire tame. What more to say in words, O Lord, You are the sanctum of my soul. Vahalpanama atishe vahala re, Natavar Nandkumar chho jire tame. Dear than all love, O Lord, Best at dance and prince of bliss. Durijaniyane door Ghana chho re, Premi te jana na pran chho jire tame. Far from the wicked, far away, But life of those who love. Muktanand kahe naranatak dhari re, Sharanaagatna saar chho jire tame. The hero on the earthly stage, Help of the helpless: says Muktanand.

Garland has the great significance among the ornaments. The garland is worn round the neck but kept on the heart. The Sanskrit word for a garland is Haar, which means to remove or to defeat. One is garlanded on the neck to express the wish that the neck may bring out sweet speech. The garland is worn on the heart to express the wish that the devotion in the heart may be strengthened and that the wearer may defeat all evil tendencies and remove all the undesirable inclinations. Again, Bhagwan Shree Swaminarayan is called Hari which means one who takes away all sins. So, Shree Hari is called the Haar of the heart.

He is called the beauty of the bed. A golden cot studded with jewels, having a soft bed with silken and embroidered bed sheet and costly pillows would be like a stone slab to a woman if her husband is not there.

The goodness of God is beyond all words of appreciation. He is the life of all lives, the motive power of the spirit, the consciousness.



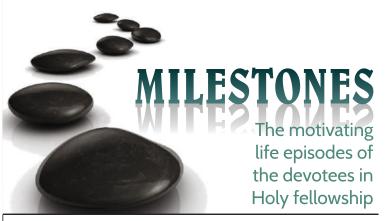
We are loved by many in our life but except God none loves us from birth to death with the same exuberance.

God has human form (He created man after his own image) but He reveals His Godhood despite looking like an average human being. Only the best actor can do that. He is the Prince Divine of joy.

God is all goodness which is a contrast of wickedness. So, God keeps the wicked away from Him. But God always approaches those blessed ones who love Him. He is the heart and soul of the devotees.

Sadguru Muktanand Swami says that God upon the earth acted like a hero on the stage of the world but unlike on the ordinary stage, He appeared on the stage of the world in the same form and figure as He is in His Akshardham. His eternal abode.

People give shelter for some selfish motive or for securing Punya but God gives shelter to all, out of selfless love. What else can a true devotee of God do but to glorify God with the garland of words expressing his warm sentiment of love for Him!



Purshottambhai Kacha - Dhoraji

Sadashivbhai of Khambhat

Everyone in this mediocre world talks about 'knowledge'. Generally speaking 'knowledge' means theoretical understanding of any subject and no more. A person gets hold of such 'knowledge' through learning, discovering or hearing from others.

Having information does not mean knowledge. Information may be statistical in form. It is always external. It directs only. It does not guide; it takes up the person in hand and leads with love. In other words; it is a guide which lovingly leads the person to conduct/behaviour etc. Thus, 'information' and 'knowledge' can be differed with each other in many ways.

Shri Hari has completely clarified the meaning of Jnan. It is knowledge indeed to know the forms of Jiva, Maya and Ishwar as they are.

Even after reading a great number of volumes 'On Knowledge', 'Knowledge' cannot be achieved as it is. Only one can render 'Knowledge' who has achieved and experienced. It can be obtained from him only. And one has to associate oneself with him. And that 'Him' is 'the saintly persons of Shriji Maharaj.' Therefore; Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami has rightly said in his gospels, "The givers of liberation are God and Sadhu only." Moreover, Sadhu is also the giver

of knowledge.

When God is pleased with any salvation aspirant; He associates Jiva (the salvation aspirant) with a good Sadhu. The Jiva gets rid of all obstacles of ignorance due to his association with the Sadhu and the path to true knowledge is opened for him. The association with such a sadhu is 'Satsang'.

Sadashivbhai of Khambhat (Cambay) had erected a grand Haveli (a cosy mansion) at an expenditure of sixty thousand rupees in those days. He repeatedly talked over this mansion to every body. After five months he went to Vadtal to have Satsang with Gopalanand Swami. Having much attachment for the mansion, he frequently talked of it before the swami. The Swami decided to make Sadashivbhai free from such mad-like attachment for the Haveli. Therefore the Swami began to talk over the state of futility of all worldly things to uproot his complex of attachment for the mansion. The swami said, "One must strengthen Sankhya vichar (the ideology that everything created out of Maya is perishable), if one wants to worship God. The Swami delivered such gospels for fifteen days continuously.

On the 16th day a messenger arrived from Khambhat and said, "Sir, your mansion has burnt to ashes." On the spot the Swami asked, "Sadashivbhai! Did you feel anything at heart on hearing the news of the mansion?" Sadashivbhai said, "Swami, you had already burnt half of the mansion by imparting knowledge full of wisdom and the news of burning away of the remaining half has just reached. Had I been present at Khambhat, instead of being here for your communion; I might also have got burnt myself due to my attachment for the mansion. Recognizing my

mental state have favoured me greatly through your gracious gospels from the very day I came

here." Thus Sadashivbhai felt no sorrow for his new but perishable mansion as an outcome of the knowledge. It happened so because he had listened to the talks of Gopalanand Swami and comprehended and digested it too.

In the 20th Vachanamrut of Gadhada First section, Shriji Maharaj has asked the assembly, "Who is the most ignorant of all ignorant fellows?" Shriji Maharaj Himself has made the answer. "The Jiva residing in the body perceives beauty and ugliness, also perceives the stages of childhood, youth and old age, and infinites things of such kind but does not look at himself (does not perceive his own self). He is the most ignorant of all ignorant fellows. One who does not discern his own form, is the most ignorant of all." Therefore, Shriji Maharaj has defined 'knowledge' as knowing the form of Jiva and eternal aspects.

Moreover, explaining the status created through knowledge; Shriji Maharaj has said in the 24th Vachanamrut of Gadhada First Section, "How is that knowledge?" It is above Prakritipurush and when one has achieved such status through knowledge, Prakritipurush and any of his acts is paid attention to. And that is the annihilation of knowledge." It is the status of annihilation of knowledge when to a devotee; all the matters other than the Idol of God (Murti) extinct because of his knowledge obtained through experience.

Thus, the knowledge regarding Murti of the Lord, information of the form of Jiva, the state of annihilation of five sensual objects that are created from Maya and awareness of that state of annihilation of the sensual objects is

true knowledge. Gunatitanand Swami has compared the affection of the knower (Gnani) with the water of Patal (the nether region). According to the swami God and Sadhu have to take care of the loving devotee while no care is needed for a devotee with knowledge. The swami also says, "This knowledge is as strong as the cannon balls of the Portuguese. And other type of knowledge is like simple crackers."

There are innumerable instances regarding climax of 'True Knowledge'. Let's pray Shri Hari to give us true understanding like that of these Haribhaktas.

JAY SHRI SWAMINARAYAN.....

Meditation vs Education

Education transforms superficially and makes one civilized.

Meditation transforms deeply and makes one realized.

Education gives one gold medals.

Meditation gives one golden moments.

Education sharpens ones intelligence. Meditation deepens ones awareness.

Education stimulates your passion.

Meditation motivates your compassion.

Education pushes one outward.

Meditation pulls one inward.

Education makes you who you are. Meditation shows you who you are.

Educate to Meditate!





A thought provoking article

Women in the Language and Literature of Swaminarayanism

To analyze Swaminarayan literature with a view to second generation feminists, Irigare and Lacanian approach to language, it is the fact that, may be very few theological literature will be there in history which can give separate dignity to women like Lord Swaminarayan did.

Generally, in religious books or scriptures, the instructions or commandments for general people, the word 'Purush'(Man) is being used. But Lord Swaminarayan took care of even word and used 'Jiva', Mumukshu', 'Manushya', 'Shishya', 'Satsangi', 'Bhakta' etc. for the commandment, meant for both men and women. (S. P. 7-11, 55,56)

Lord Swaminarayan gave separate instruction in 'Shikshaparti' to His followers according to their station. The duties of different categories of people are shown to be different. But according to Lord Swaminarayan, as a Sadhak or a devotee, male and female are equal. And therefore, while giving general instructions or enlisting common Dharma, he talked about both men and women equally. Just as in S. P. 5, "And let those women, whether wives or widows, who have become my disciple ..." and in S.. P. 18, "Let no male or female followers of mine..." and further, in S. P. 40, "the males that come

to Lord Krishna's temple should not touch females and the females that come to Krishna's temple should not touch males..."

Though, he took care of using the proper language in the verses, he specifies in S. P. 122 that, "These that have been specifies are general duties, applicable to all My followers, whether male or female."

Lord Swaminarayan gave special instruction to His followers in S. P. 21 that, "Never use nor listen to profane language against the gods, sacred places, Brahmins, holywomen, Sadhus and the Vedas."

From this verse we can see how He honoured women and gave dignity to women, by treating 'holy women' and 'Sadhus' as equal.

Gender - Neutral Concept of God

Not only language, but as Sumati says, the very concept of God as male has led to misogynism. She says that "the conceptualization of god as a male in Judaic Christian tradition is the greatest theological blunder of all times." (Isvaradevan S. D., p. 182) As Borrowdale also says, "If God in his heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then, it is in the nature of things and according to divine plan that society be male-dominated. (Borrowdale A. 1989)

Metaphysically Lord Swaminarayan describes God as Parabrahman and the basic identity of individual soul as Aksharabrahman which is neither male nor female.

According to Lord Swaminarayan God or Parabrahman is unique. Parabrahaman is Parabrhman only. There is no other reality which can have the relation of identity with him. (V.L.S.13) The relationship between Aksharabrahman and Parabrhman, i.e. between soul and God is that of the Master and His loyal servant (Sevak) (V.G.F.S.21) which constitutes an ideal for the seeker of both the

sexes. Thus, Lord Swaminarayan had avoided all the terms like male God and female consort. He had used totally gender-neutral language of Parabrhman and Aksharbrahman in His metaphysics, ontology and in His philosophy in general. Such a language which the feminists expect is called "Inclusive" God language. As Smithy says, "This term inclusive can be defined as a language that is free from exclusive male or female sexist connotations. It can either be a non-sexist language or a language which balances both male and female images and concepts." (Isvaradevan S.. D., op.cit., p.185)

Thus, Lord Swaminarayan used the same non-sexist 'inclusive' God language which modern feminist aspire. Not only God language, Lord Swaminarayan used this 'inclusive' language throughout His preaching as we have already seen. (see for examples verses in Shikshapatri 7, 11, 55, 56)

Thus, Lord Swaminarayan very naturally, probably, absolutely unconsciously, used gender-neutral terms in His preaching. This shows His genuine and equal respect for both the sexes. However, sometimes, if needed to use a word for male. He invariably followed His utterance with female parallel. Thus, either he has used gender-neutral language or He has used the language with absolutely equal representation. One can verify this contention through analysis of His two basic books, namely, Shikshapatri and Vachanamrit, which is thoroughly in such an 'inclusive' feminist language and that also without any conscious effort, is really not at all a small achievement of Lord Swaminarayan

Criticisms of His two Verses in Shikshapatri

One may criticize that in S. P. 34, there is a commandment to males not to hear any discourse from the mouth of females and didn't gave inverse instruction. But we can see that He has instructed for separate discourse

at other places and that female-guru should initiate female and she should teach spirituality to female.... these facts show that in verse-34 it is applicable to females also.

In S. P. 159, Lord Swaminarayan has instructed the wives that "Wives should honour their husbands... though they be diseased, indigent or impotent." This is also not against feminist spirit. This doesn't say anything against the status of woman. It is very necessary for female or male disciple or devotee to be considerate towards diseased persons. So if the husband is diseased, the wives should not speak bitter words to her husband. She should honour him. So, this instruction is not to just a wife, but to a real Sadhak (seeker), who want to remove the negative and false nature of personality and to develop spiritual qualities.

Shikshapatri and Vachanamrit are the basic scriptures of Swaminarayanism. In that, Lord Swaminarayan gave actually not only equal status to both the sexes, but also gave something more than just equal status. That is, He also gave female independent status of their own.

Though Swaminarayanism regarded religion as soul – centric, it does not forget the fact that the souls reside either in male or in female body. And therefore, all talks about religion in Swaminarayanist literature refer to both men and women equally. We have seen this with reference to Shikshapatri and Vachanamrit.

(Contd.)





A DIVINE PHENOMENON

- Rameshbhai B. Soni (Vadodara)

The utmost subtle spiritual understanding of Swaminarayan Fellowship is mostly known by the deeply meaningful word : Satsang. The word Satsang is also utilized for other different references as an association of religious people for common interest, assembly of spiritual uplifted persons, exchange of religious and spiritual knowledge between master and disciples, holy fellowship etc. Practically it is well found that all these references are easily applying with the very word Satsang. Even though brooding over philosophical point of view, the true definition of Satsang is derived as : Satsang is a rare divine phenomenon occurred on our inner self with the help of intimate assimilation of Lord Swaminarayan, His Muktas and His holy scriptures not only on physical or mental ground but also on spiritual plane by which our consciousness totally transforms into His divine consciousness and thus it unites an individual soul to the supreme authority - The God Almighty. And whoever experiences such a fantastic phenomenon on his/her inner plane is called a true Satsangi.

It is very obvious that just like the phenomenon of Satsang which occurs with the close assimilation of Lord, His saints and His holy scriptures, we may lose all our divine attributes attained by Satsang with the mere association of evil sources like ego, lust, jealousy. Hence we should be aware of the evil sources that are spread all over on our spiritual path. The phenomenon of Satsang decreases our body consciousness and at the same time it manifests our soul-consciousness. Soul consciousness is also known as 'Divyabhav' according to the terminology of Swaminarayan

Fellowship. Due to the phenomenon of Satsang, it usually happens that our insight is automatically developed by disappearing our outward inclination towards our senses and outer world.

Now to understand and realize this definition of Satsang, let us go through one of the most thought-provoking incidents of Shivlal Seth of Botad. He was the son of Bhaga Doshi. Due to his closest association with saints of Lord Swaminarayan he became enlightened. He used to practice meditation daily for five hours and enjoy the bliss of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is not myth but the fact that when Shivlal Seth was sitting for morning worship, Lord Swaminarayan Himself always used to be present there in divine form to accept his offerings. Shivlal Seth's dedication and servitude in Satsang was unique.

In Samvat 1916, Shivlal Seth had contributed Rs. 22000/- in the celebration of Pranpratishtha of Harikrishna Maharaj beside Gopinathji Maharaj in the temple at Gadhda by the inspiration of Jivuba. Consequently Shivlal Seth was started to be flattered everywhere in Satsang and the festive celebrations held in the temples. After that Shivlal Seth had come to Junagadh along with Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. Shivlal Seth had arranged by dint of his political influence to have the respectful invitation from the king of Bhavnagar for Archarya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami to have their presence in the palace. So next day, Seth came to Bhavnagar along with Acharya Shri and Swamiji. The king of Bhavnagar had arranged a grand procession to welcome Acharyaji with due respect and took them to his palace. Due to this incident, the fame of Satsang was spread out all over in the Bhavnagar region. All these happened only because of Shivlal Seth's tremendous efforts and practical wisdom. So it was most obvious that all the credit was offered to him by Acharya and all the saints and Satsangis. But it is fact that praises are considered to be a great obstacle on the path of spiritual practice.

While returning from Bhavnagar, Gunatitanand Swami had insisted Shivlal Seth to sit in the cart with him and then asked him boldly: 'Shivlal, do you believe yourself to be responsible for the installation of the idol of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj?' Shivlal said: 'Yes Swami, I do.' Again Swamiji asked him in the sense of taunt: 'Shiva, you have got triumph to spread the fame of Swaminarayan Sampraday all over Bhavnagar by the respectful welcome of Archarya from the royal family. Isn't it?' Shivlalbhai nodded his head and said: 'Yes, Swamiji!'

After listening to Shivlalbhai's such reply, Swami told with serious tone: 'Shivlal, do you seriously believe that all these have been done by you? Have you forgotten that the sole creator and destroyer of everything is only and only Shri Hari? Why are you so arrogant when Shriji Maharaj has made you a mere efficient cause of these magnificent works? Shiva! It is total stupidity to believe ourselves the sole creator of such prestigious works! It is not that you have committed any offence and these two works done by the God Almighty through yourself are unbeatable. But as result when you are admired for these works, you are puffed up. Consequently Rajogun entered in your mind and your half Satsang has been destroyed.

Don't forget that you are the Mukta having the status of Nirviklap Samadhi. Even if the poison of praises had disturbed your inner status. Do keep the spirit of servitude while serving in the temples. Keep doing prayer with melting heart and have constant watch on your perceptions. Alaiya Khachar, Faiba of Machhayav and Gadadha's Jeeva Khachar had served not less than any one, even though their whole Satsang had been disarrayed due to the arrogance of their servitude. Shivlal! All have spoiled the fineness of your insight by praising and praising you all the time. Now you are at no status of mind to merge with the divine form of Shriji Maharaj.'

Gunatitanand Swami's harsh speech pierced into the mind of Shivlal like an arrow. He immediately said with tears in the eyes and putting his head on the feet of Swamiji: 'Yes, Swamiji! I do confess that I have committed a mistake. Please forgive me and let me have your grace! I am totally surrendered at your feet.'

Putting his merciful hand on his head, Swamiji told him with fondling: 'Come along with me, I want you to take to Junagadh. You will be brought to your original status of perfect Satsangi by listening to the glory of Shriji Maharaj.'

And it so happened. Shivlal Seth had become perfect Satsangi after returning from Junagadh!

A rain drop from the sky: if it is caught by clean hands, is pure enough for drinking. If it falls in the gutter, it can't be used even for washing your feet. If it falls on a lotus leaf, it shines like a pearl and finally, if it falls on an oyster, it becomes a pearl... The drop is the same, but its existence and worth depends on whom it is associated with. Always be associated with people who are good at heart... You will experience your own inner transformation.

- Swami Vivekanand



Whats & Whys

Answers to the questions of curious seekers

Charan Sparsh (Touching the holy feet)

Benevolent, peerless,
O manifested Lord Sahajanand,
I salute over and again,
and love to put on head the dust of Your feet.

This Mangalacharan (an auspicious opening stanza) by Muktanand Swami, puts these lines at the opening of his volume entitled 'Dharmakhyan' which refers, not to the idol, but to the lotus feet of Shriji Maharaj and with full faith sings the praise of the holy dust of His feet.

Nowadays the lotus foot-print of Shriji Maharaj has become rare. Some people have been fortunate to get them from their forefathers. So people either say We have got it from our forefathers or some one says We have purchased the same by paying a huge amount of money! In this way, people take pride but some of them do not have time even to clean the dust deposited on the frame of foot-prints. It should be a matter of grave concern that the person taking pride does not show even awareness as to "Whose foot-prints are these?"

In fact, we should cultivate the feeling of reverance believing that these are the foot-prints which are loved and worshiped by great ascetics and liberated souls. When we close our eyes and touch the foot-prints, we should imagine about the real feet and imagine that Shriji Maharaj is literally standing before us! I am touching the divine feet which toured many places and changed them into pilgrim places. The feet of Shriji Maharaj were worshipped with kumkum, sandalwood-

paste. One should have a realization that "Sacred spiritual vibrations are flowing from them and entering into my consciousness each time I touch them. This touch gives the experience of power, enlightenment and happiness in my soul."

The process of touching the foot-print image brings the quality of humbleness. In Hindu culture, there is a tradition of touching the feet of elders. When we touch their feet they bless us with the words Be happy, have a long life and be successful. The vibrations of their words create positive inspirations and energy within us and it benefits us in life. Touching the feet of saints is still more important because their feet have traveled at many sacred pilgrim spots and have received sacred dust from those places. Their feet are charged with sacred energy and when we touch them the same vibrations enter our consciousness and we come in direct relation with the sacred pilgrim places.

In our Holy Fellowship also, we touch the feet of devotees, saints and other great persons. But 90% of feet-touching is done without proper awareness. When this process is done unconsciously or mechanically or as a routine, it does not become meaningful or fruitful. If it is done with mind, heart and conscience all together in **Here and now** stage of our mind, then it becomes fruitful. When you touch the feet of any man of God with mental involvement to convey your prayer effectively, only then it will get proper response. Micro energy flows from the fingers

of the feet of a holy saint or a virtuous person. So by touching the feet of a saint, you get the benefit of the spiritual energy. Like a water tank may be full with water, but if the water tap does not open, then water cannot come out from the water tank. And even if the water tap opens and there is no bucket underneath, the water flows away on the surface of the land.

Similarly, if we have deep attachment with the holy saint, and if we bow our head at his divine feet, then in the centre of our forehead lies 'AjnaChakra' which works as a receiver and the fingers of the saint's feet acts as a transmitter. Transmitter is in place of the water tap and receiver is in the place of the bucket. When a worshipper bows his head at the divine feet of the saint and prays, then the saint, to show compassion, takes the state of here and now to bless the worshipper, who has deep attachment with the saint in his mind and heart, and the worshipper gets connected to Lord Swaminarayan's divine idol and the divine vital energy flows. And when the worshipper attains the here and now state, and touches his forehead at the holy fingers. then the energy generated, passes through the Ainachakra to his vital breath, through the medium of which, it enters the consciousness of the worshipper and an additional power of energy is achieved.

So when a saint comes in the position or state of here and now and meditates, then Lord Swaminarayan's comprehensive energy through the medium of the fingers of the saint's feet flows out and the strength of the spiritual energy gets transmitted into the body, mind, heart and breath of the worshipper and proves beneficial to the worshipper. So at the central point resides Lord Swaminarayan, the saint remains as merely the medium. This act of touching the feet at first sight looks superficial but as explained here, if it flows in the described state from both sides, and then the lotus-feet

of the saint is touched, then it becomes significantly important and extremely beneficial.

Whenever we visit religious places, we should be in a state of total awareness and worship the divine Lord. All such sacred places have Shriji Maharaj's 16 holy marks of His lotus-feet carved in marble adorned under the stone monument. At such places, touch the divine feet taking deep breaths and remember all those places where Shri Hari performed Leela Charitras (holy life-sports), get deeper and deeper into the Leela Charitra of the Lord and with utmost faith in the divine, pray with Mala and do Pradakshina, so that through the divine idol, you establish a divine bond with Shriji Maharaj.

So while touching the feet of the virtuous person, we should reminisce the Lord and establish a divine bond with Shriji Maharaj. When we touch the feet of the saint, the spiritual energy of the saint flows through our breath into our soul, innermost senses. With such pure feelings, if we bow to a saint, it can prove to be very beneficial indeed.

If Charan-Sparsh i.e. feet-touching is done with such frame of mind, it will surely become fruitful and effective.

Lalji Bhagat Inan Baug, Vadtal

If a person is degraded through association with a wicked person, his intellect would be sublimated if he puts the dust of the holy feet of a great saint on his head.

(Vachanamrut Gadhada First 18)



PRICELESS STONES

A story with significance

One day a young boy asked his father, "What is the value of my life?" Instead of answering, the father told his son to take the rock and go to sell it at the market. If anybody asks the price, raise two fingers and don't say anything. The boy then went to the market and a woman asked, "How much is this rock? I want to put it in my garden." The boy didn't say anything and raised up two fingers. And the woman said, "Two dollars? I will take it."

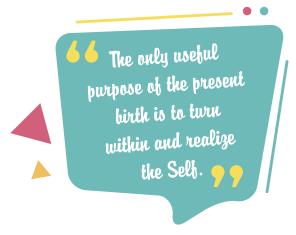
The boy went home and told his father, "A woman wants to buy this rock for two dollars." The father then said, "Son, I want you to take this rock to a museum if anybody wants to buy it, don't say a word, and just put up two fingers." The boy then went to the museum and a man wanted to buy the rock. The boy didn't say a word and put up two fingers and the man said, "Two hundred dollars. I will take it."

The boy was shocked and went running home and told his father. "A man wants to buy this rock for two hundred dollars." His father then said, "Son, the last place I want you to take this rock is to a precious stone store. Show it to the owner and don't say a word and if he asks the price, just put up two fingers." The son then went to a precious stone store. He showed the rock to the owner. "Where did you find this stone? It is one of the rarest stones in the world. I must have it! How much would you sell it for? The boy put up two fingers and the man said, "I'll take it for two hundred thousand dollars."

The boy, not knowing what to say ran home to his father. "Father, there is a man who wants to buy the stone for two hundred thousand dollars." His father then said, "Son! do you know the value of your life now?

You see, it doesn't matter where you come from, where you were born, the color of your skin or how much money you were born into. It matters where you decide to place yourself, the people you surround yourself with and how you choose to carry yourself. You may have lived your whole life thinking that you were a two dollar stone, you may have lived your whole life surrounded by people who saw your worth for only two dollars. But everybody has a diamond inside them. And we can choose to surround ourself with people that see our value and see the diamond inside us. We can choose to put our self in a market or put our self in a precious stone store. And you can also choose to see the value in other people. You can help other people see the diamond inside of them.

Choose the people you surround yourself wisely. That can make all the difference in your life. You can be surrounded by people that only see your value of two dollars or you can choose to be around people that see your value at two hundred thousand dollars. And some people will see you as priceless.



Prasadi

The Articles graced by Shri Hari



Lord Swaminarayan sojourned on this earth of ours for 49 years, 2 months and 1 day! During his short life-span, He won the allegiance of many a soul by His Divine form, His spiritual prowess and His theological wisdom.

His followers were so enamoured of Him that they partook of His divinity. He solemnly took promise from His devout followers that they should not sacrifice their life by suicide after His departure.

Shree Hari left His mortal coil on Jyeshtha shukla dashami of the V.S. 1886. This is the piece of that very same mud-floor on which He left for His divine Abode Akshardham, in the Yogic posture of Padmasan.



Janmangal Yaag

Vadtal Dham

Vadtal Dham, the Southern diocese of the Swaminarayan Holy Fellowship, celebrated the Adhik Maas by organising the Janmangal Yaag (Yajna) from 16 May, 2018 to 13 June, 2018.



H. H. 1008 Acharyashri Rakeshprasadji Maharajshri performed the opening ceremony of the Janmangal Yaag.

Where as other saints and devotees, performed the concluding ceremony of the Yaag. Under the leadership of Dhirenbhai Bhatt, twelve Brahmin priests offered aahuti reciting Janmangal Stotra throughout the month-long ceremony in which more than 300 devotees participated as yajmaan. At the end of the Yaag, the Avabhruth Snan ceremony was held at the Gomti lake. Thousands of followers attended the Adhik Maas celebration to worship Lord Swaminarayan by offering donations, observing Vrats and performing the Yaag.