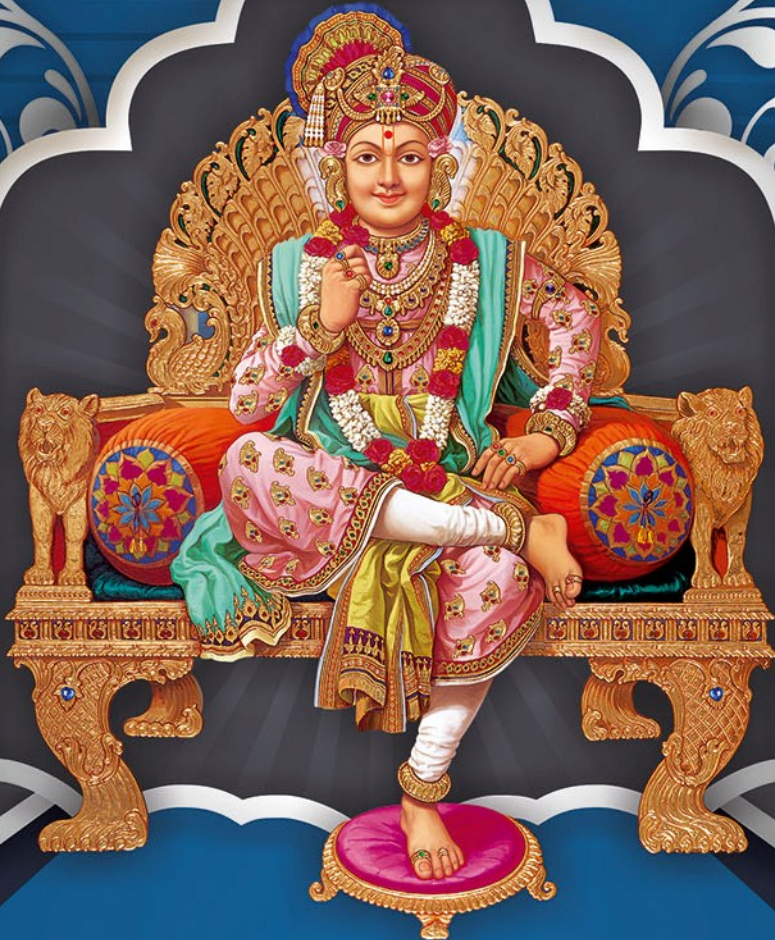




SARVOPARI BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

THE ONE & ONLY



Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Loyadham

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The completion of this undertaking could have not been possible without the grace of Supreme Almighty Bhagwan Swaminarayan, whose divine presence was felt every moment of the way. I revere the patronage and moral support extended with inspiration by my Pujya Guruji, whose sentimental support and passionate encouragement made it possible for me to complete this project.

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Loyadham Parivar Sevak

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This book is dedicated to . . .

The one who has given me a purpose in life . . .

Who gifted me the opportunity and strength to serve . . .

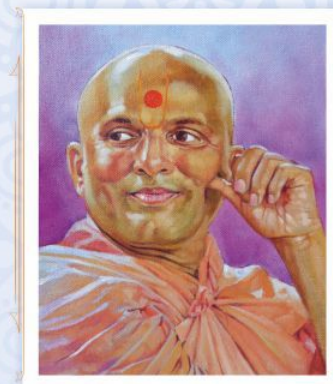
Whose mother like affection casts a light on my soul . . .

Who held on no matter how hard I tried to shake free . . .

Whose enlightening life motivates me every day to keep moving . . .

The one who is protecting, nurturing and inspiring my life . . .

This one's for you Pujya Guruji.



Contents

Preface

Spiritual Lineage

In Memory of ...

Inspiration

Blessings

Acknowledgments

1. Early Period	01
1.1. Manifestation	04
1.2. Naming Ceremony	04
1.3. The True Test	05
1.4. Kalidatta Meets His End	06
1.5. Reviving Dead Fish	08
1.6. Shifting to Ayodhya	09
1.7. Ghanshyam Everywhere	10
1.8. Impressive Debate in Kashi	12
1.9. Liberating His Parents	14
1.10. Historic Departure	15
2. Nilkanth's Kalyan Yatra	17
2.1. Encounter with a Demon	18
2.2. Northward Bound	19
2.3. The Roar of a Lion	20
2.4. Sanctifying Tirths	23
2.5. Nilkanth In Badrikashram	25
2.6. At Mansarovar	27
2.7. A Royal Visitor	28

2.8. Nilkanth Visits Vanshipur	30
2.9. Towards Kala Parvat (Black Mountain)	33
2.10. Severe Penance at Pulhashram-Muktinath	35
2.11. Nilkanth's Understanding	38
2.12. Yoga with Gopal Yogi	39
2.13. One King after Another	41
2.14. Defeats Superstition	42
2.15. On the Way to Jagannath Puri	45
2.16. In Jagannath Puri	46
2.17. The Ungrateful Sevakram	49
2.18. In South India	51
2.19. Entering the Sacred Soils of Gujarat	53
2.20. Unique Sojourn	56
2.21. Sadguru Ramanand Swami's Briefing	58
3. Arrival at Loj	61
3.1. The End of An Epic Journey, Yet Another Begins!	62
3.2. Meeting Muktanand Swami	64
3.3. Changes Around the Ashram	68
3.4. An Ideal Aspirant Is an Ideal Sevak	71
3.5. The Letter to Ramanand Swami	72
3.6. Nilkanth Becomes Sarjudas	73
3.7. Meeting His Guru	74
3.8. Bhagvati Diksha: Sahajanand Swami	77
4. Head of the Holy Fellowship	80
4.1. Unanimous Decision	81
4.2. Sahajanand's Two Boons	83
4.3. Handing Over the Reins	85
4.4. Ramanand Swami's Departure	87

5. Divine Chapters of Samadhi	89
5.1. The Swaminarayan Mahamantra	91
5.2. One Saga After Another	94
5.3. Emptying Yamalok	95
5.4. The Nawab's Question	96
5.5. The Ever-present Murti	98
5.6. Magniram's Transformation	99
5.7. Muktanand Swami Convinced	104
6. Service to Mankind	108
6.1. Selfless Service	109
6.2. Alms Distribution Activities	110
7. Social Reform	113
7.1. Eradication of Sati Custom	114
7.2. Abolition of Female Infanticide	116
7.3. Eradication of Superstitions	117
7.4. The Anti-Addiction Campaign	119
7.5. Reformation of Festivals	121
7.6. Upliftment of the Downtrodden Caste	123
7.7. Transforming the Cruel and Wicked	128
8. Religious - Spiritual Reform	133
8.1. Unprecedented Yagnas	134
8.2. The Message of Non-Violence	138
8.3. Revolutionizing Brahmins	139
8.4. Established Ekantik Dharma	140
8.5. Respect to All	140
9. Moral Disciplines: The Five Basic Vows	142
9.1. Moral Disciplines Briefing	143
9.2. The Five Basic Vows for Householders	144

9.3. The Five Basic Vows for Saints	149
10. The Philosophy of Swaminarayanism	151
10.1. Philosophy Briefing	152
10.2. Jiva	152
10.3. Ishwar	153
10.4. Maya	154
10.5. Brahma	154
10.6. Parabrahma	155
10.7. Concept of Moksha	155
11. The Six Pillars of Satsang	157
12. Saints of the Holy Fellowship	160
12.1. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vision	161
12.2. Tolerance and Forgiveness	162
12.3. Munivar Muktanand Swami	164
12.4. Yogiraj Gopalanand Swami	166
12.5. Panditraj Nityanand Swami	168
12.6. Kaviraj Brahmanand Swami	170
12.7. Vairagyamurti Nishkulanand Swami	172
12.8. Remarkable Feats	174
13. Devotees of the Holy Fellowship	176
13.1. A Source of Inspiration	177
13.2. Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar	177
13.3. The Great Companion: Sura Khachar	179
13.4. The Enlightened: Govardhanbhai	180
13.5. The Idol of Loyalty: Jhinabhai	181
13.6. The Elite Eighteen Plus One	185
13.7. Ardent Women disciples	187
13.8. The Devoted Jivuba and Laduba	188

13.9.	The Idol of Celibacy: Rajba -----	190
13.10.	The Zealous: Gangama -----	191
13.11.	The Resilient: Jamkuba -----	191
13.12.	The Allegiant: Kushal Kunvarba -----	193
13.13.	Diverse Devotees of the Sampraday -----	195
13.14.	English Devotees -----	195
13.15.	Muslim Devotees -----	199
13.16.	Parsi Devotees -----	202
14.	Acharya -----	204
14.1.	The History of Acharya Tradition -----	205
14.2.	Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj -----	207
14.3.	Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj -----	209
15.	Holy Scriptures -----	211
15.1.	The Base -----	212
15.2.	The Shikshapatri -----	213
15.3.	The Vachanamrut -----	214
15.4.	The Satsangjivan -----	217
15.5.	Other Notable Scriptures -----	218
16.	Mandir-Murti -----	221
16.1.	The Importance of Mandir-Murti -----	222
16.2.	Ahmedabad Mandir: Nar-Narayan Dev -----	225
16.3.	Bhuj Mandir: Nar-Narayan Dev -----	228
16.4.	Vadtal Mandir: Laxminarayan Dev -----	229
16.5.	Dholera Mandir: Madanmohanji Maharaj -----	231
16.6.	Junagadh Mandir: Radharaman Dev -----	232
16.7.	Gadhada Mandir: Gopinathji Maharaj -----	234
17.	Unique Festivals -----	236
17.1.	The Importance of Festivals -----	237

17.2.	Maha-Raas Lila in Panchala -----	239
17.3.	The Divine Shakotsav of Loya -----	241
17.4.	The Memorable Rangotsav of Vadtal -----	244
17.5.	Annakut Festival of 1821 -----	247
18.	Supreme Almighty -----	251
18.1.	True Identity -----	252
18.2.	Distinctive Qualities of Bhagwan Swaminarayan -----	253
18.3.	Unique Promise -----	254
18.4.	Supreme Power of Samadhi -----	258
18.5.	Omniscience Beyond Comprehension -----	262
18.6.	Destroying Evil by Mere Sight -----	266
18.7.	Harikrushna Maharaj Ni Jay -----	267
18.8.	Merging Avatars into One's Form -----	267
18.9.	Forecast Within the Vedic Scriptures -----	267
19.	Purposes for Incarnating -----	270
20.	Charming Divine Physique -----	273
20.1.	Divine Description -----	274
20.2.	Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Lotus Feet -----	278
21.	The Swaminarayan Mahamantra -----	282
21.1.	Background -----	283
21.2.	Glory of The Mahamantra -----	283
21.3.	Reviving the Dead -----	284
21.4.	The Act of Purification -----	285
21.5.	Venom Removed -----	287
21.6.	Cured Blindness -----	289
21.7.	Legal Issues Resolved -----	290
22.	The Concept of Moksha -----	292
23.	Inclination for Fine Arts and Music -----	294

24. Miraculous Feats -----299

- 24.1. Darshan In Two Forms -----300
- 24.2. A Dumb Recites the Vedas -----301
- 24.3. Gift of Vision -----302
- 24.4. The Fakir's Allah -----303
- 24.5. Divine Light -----304
- 24.6. Breaking a Twig -----304
- 24.7. By Mere Touch -----304
- 24.8. Walking on Water -----305
- 24.9. Curing Smallpox -----306
- 24.10. Breaking a Leg in Agatrai -----307

25. Divine Farewell -----309

- 25.1. Satisfaction -----310
- 25.2. Brahmanand Swami Sent Away -----311
- 25.3. Final Assembly - Vows Taken -----312
- 25.4. Returns to Akshardham -----314
- 25.5. Shri Hari's Ever Presence -----316
- 25.6. The End -----317

Priceless Teachings -----319

In Their Eyes... -----328

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Profile -----335

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Timeline -----339

Glossary -----340

References -----360



Preface

There is much to appreciate from Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life story. His life is the ultimate guide to understand how to live as an ideal human. Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated on Earth in the latter half of the eighteenth century, a time that is aptly considered one of the darkest periods in history. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's achievement in religion, society and education were absolutely herculean in nature, considering his short life span of 49 years and the acute anarchy that afflicted India at the time.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in the Vachanamrut Kariyani 5th Chapter, "God assumes an avatar for only one reason: Having surrendered Himself to the bhakti of those devotees who have intense love for Him, God assumes whichever form the devotees are corporeal, assumes a physical body and showers affection upon those devotees. In addition to this, He suppresses His powers and behaves with the devotees as a son, an intimate companion, a friend, or as a relative. Thus, the only reason God assumes an avatar is to fulfil the desires of His beloved devotees. Along with this, He grants liberation to innumerable other jivas and also establishes dharma."

The indefinable, absolutely divine sportive acts of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and His benevolent social and spiritual activities aimed at the well-being of all living beings are powerful enough to instill in us the highest virtues of humanity, selfless service, social upliftment and devout worship blended with love.

Supreme almighty, Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated on Earth in 1781 in the remote village of Chhapaiya, Uttar Pradesh, India. He spent eleven years at home performing various lila charitras, while giving joy to His family and friends. Shortly after liberating His parents, He left home to travel throughout the subcontinent of India to liberate countless souls awaiting the arrival of divinity in the dark age. After traveling for seven years and performing severe austerities, He finally settled in Loj at Ramanand Swami's ashram. Ramanand Swami recognized the teen ascetic as the Supreme Lord Himself and implored Him to continue liberating souls by becoming His successor. Shortly after initiating Nilkanth, Ramanand swami handed over the Sampraday to His most elite disciple, Sahajanand Swami.

After introducing the Swaminarayan mantra in the village of Faneni, Bhagwan Swaminarayan launched His ministry in Gujarat for the establishment of Ekantik Dharma. Bhagwan Swaminarayan changed the social, spiritual and moral landscape of Gujarat. As Bhagwan, He ushered in a moral and spiritual renaissance in Gujarat and resuscitated the pristine bhakti tradition. In those forty-nine years, He transformed the lives of over two million individuals and initiated over 2000 ascetics. He freed society from all vices, additions, fake beliefs, superstitions, and all sorts of corruptions, making it full of ideal human beings and ideal devotees of God. His redemptive principles, endurance, mercy, non-violence, forgiveness, luminous personality, divine glory, endearing preaching and deep effect on the public are testaments of His greatness. Beyond His reputation as a social reformer, Bhagwan Swaminarayan rekindled the dwindling flame of bhakti and

faith in the early modern era. Many intellectuals, after recognizing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's achievements in the fields of society and religion, have established him as a grand reformer. Some go one step further and identify Him as a divine personage. Moreover, a large number of people consider Him as incarnation of Bhagwan Ram and Bhagwan Krishna. In actuality, He is supreme, matchless and beyond all. He is the Lord of Lords.

This book is a humble attempt to delve into the glory and greatness of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It depicts Bhagwan Swaminarayan's biography and His unparalleled work as a reformer in social, religious, educational and economic fields. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life, action, vision and personality are unique, unparalleled, limitless, incomprehensible, charming and thoughtful that it is impossible to provide a complete account, but this book is a humble effort to present his glory. The sole intention of this book is to help the 21st Century kids, youths, and adults understand the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and to please Maharaj, my beloved Pujya Guruji, Santo, and Bhakto.

Loyadham Parivar Sevak



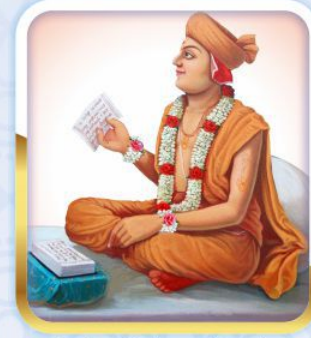
Spiritual Lineage

The paramhansas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were the noblest sadhus the world would ever see. Their spiritual purity, sacrifice, selflessness, devotion and zeal to uphold righteousness in society was incomparable. Their life was their message. Sadguru Shri Muktanand Swami's line of successors upheld and are upholding Ekantik Dharma for the betterment of society.

H.D.H. Shastriji Shri Ghanshyamprakashdasji Swami continues the bhakti tradition and philosophy propagated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan through his resolute determination.



Bhagwan Shree Swaminarayan



Sadguru Muktanand Swami



Sadguru Adharanand Swami



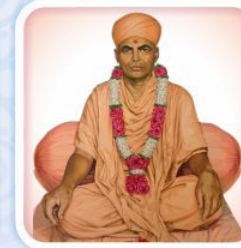
Sadguru Haripriyadasji Swami



Sadguru Vaikunthcharandasji Swami



Sadguru Narayanswarupdasji Swami



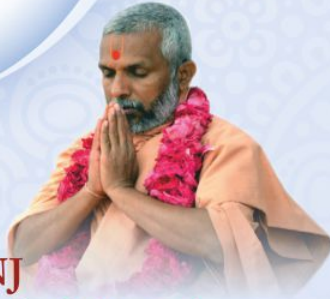
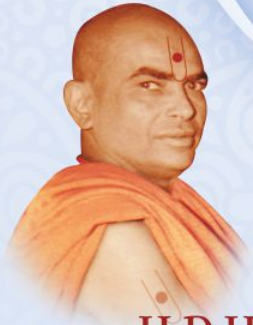
Sadguru Nandkishordasji Swami



Sadguru Ghanshyamprakashdasji Swami

In Memory of . . .

This book is in memory of Pujya Dada Guruji, a pious and highly spiritualized Ekantik Satpurush. Through his inspirational life, thousands became encouraged to walk on the path of God.



Loyadham - NJ
H.D.H. Shri Nandkishordasji Swami

Inspiration

A Guru plays a role as the guiding light in the lives of those who seek his discipleship. Furthermore, without expectations from anyone, a Sadguru is one who works tirelessly, day and night, for the upliftment of all human-kind. This book was published by the divine inspiration of my Pujya Guruji - H.D.H. Shastriji Shri Ghanshyamprakashdasji Swami.

According to Vachanamrut G.P.27, it can be said that without a doubt, Lord Swaminarayan resides in His Ekantik Sadhu and does unimaginable work. Pujya Guruji's authentic appeal, with the presence of God within him, is the very reason that his life is such an inspiration to saints and devotees in the Swaminarayan Sect. Today, his image as an ideal Satpurush and as an Ekantik Sadhu continues to inspire, positively change, and rejuvenate the lives of thousands of individuals across the world.



Pujya Guruji's Divine Blessings

Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested from His divine abode Akshardham on this Earth – and opened the door to His divine abode for all jivas. While on this Earth, Bhagwan Shri Hari performed numerous supernatural(divine) works through His matchless divine powers. The establishment of Ekantik Dharma comprises of dharma, gnan, bhakti, and vairagya. Along with him, He brought anadi mukto from His divine abode. Later, these anadi mukto wrote eye-witness accounts of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life in the form of scriptures.

Many Nand-Santo have written the biographical sketch of Shriji Maharaj including the stories of before his birth, his childhood, his journey through the forests, episodes of his story in Satsang, up to his disappearance from this Earth. By reading and listening to these scriptures, faith is established in everyone's heart regarding Shri Hari's form – "There is no God beside this Maharaj."

But these scriptures are mostly written in Sanskrit, which is why they are very difficult to study for those who only know the language of English. There are thousands in our Satsang who only know English. To provide them a tool to understand the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj, a sadhu from our Sant-mandal has written this book with my blessings. He has written this book in English while maintaining the original essence of Shriji Maharaj's charitras. The book is

given the title 'Sarvopari Bhagwan Swaminarayan: The One & Only' to make it more meaningful to its contents.

I am sure that this book will become very useful for large numbers of spiritual aspirants to comprehend the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj. I am happy to know that this book is published during the grand celebration of "Panchabdi Mahotsav" and "Sadguru Smruti Mahotsav - 3" which is the celebration of the 5th anniversary of Piyuda Ghanshyam Maharaj, and in the memory of my Guruji, Param Pujya Sadguru Kothari Shri Nandkishordasji Swami.

I bless the author of this book by praying to Shriji Maharaj and all the Sadgurus of our Guruparampara that may such progressive and creative work be done by Sadhu Dhyanvasallabhdas and may he receive the grace and favor of Loyadham Parivar.

Shastri Ghanshyamprakashdasji (Loyadham)

શ્રી ગાંધી ઇન્સ્ટિટ્યુટ ઓફ ટેકનોલોજી
ગાંધી ઇન્સ્ટિટ્યુટ ઓફ ટેકનોલોજી





Early Period



*“Whenever righteousness is overpowered by evil, I manifest
Myself on Earth to uphold righteousness.”*

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the land of India was morally deteriorated in every respect. It was the darkest period in history for mother India. The purity of saints was lost due to their passion for wealth and women. Rulers acted as tyrants, treating the public like slaves. Unethical activities like theft, dacoities, murder, etc. were rampantly taking place due to there being no law and order. Robbers strangled unwary travelers and armies plundered villages. Notorious criminal tribes looted innocent people and murdered anyone who opposed them. Obscenity was prominent amongst religion as temples were defiled by meat, wine, and adultery. There was no safety for life or property for the public.

India is a country with vast religions and beliefs. The very foundation was based on morality upheld through such religions and beliefs. However, in the late eighteenth century, this foundation suffered from critical damage wherein hope for repair was not evident. Religion was observed pretentiously. Fake saints, monks, and chiefs of religious sects lived lives full of vices and addictions. They misinterpreted the principles mentioned in the Hindu scriptures and in result, misguided the naive. Over time, threats of evil spirits, spells, charms, hypnotism, and black magic, etc. became instrumental in exerting dominance on the public. Being impressed by such kind of sorcery the skeptical public understood the Sadhus to be indicative of God. This perspective led the public to serve

and worship the fake Sadhus. Unfortunately, the Sadhus used this to their advantage and continued their immoral lives without any fear.

The noble virtues of truthfulness, compassion, forgiveness, non-violence, politeness, righteous conduct, morality and humanity had completely disappeared from society. Instead, vicious qualities like lust, ego, pride, greed, jealousy, adultery, hypocrisy, and violence had spread like wildfire. Society had sunk into ignorance, darkness, blind beliefs and superstitions. Epidemics and calamities were viewed superstitiously as the wrath of deities. Instead of taking medical treatment, people resorted to ‘spell charms’ of evil spirits and offered wine, liquor, and living oblations to please them. The orthodox way of worship was forgotten.

Evidently, the moral fiber was deteriorated and the public was left hopeless. People were yearning for physical and mental peace and were anxiously waiting for some divine savior. The Bhagavad Gita depicts an eternal truth in one of its verses.

**“Yada Yada Hi Dharmasya Glanirbhavati Bharata.
Abhythanamadharmasya Tadatmana Srujamyaham.”**

Bhagavad Gita 4-7

*“Whenever righteousness is overpowered by evil, I manifest
Myself on Earth to uphold righteousness.”*

1.1 Manifestation

During this time of need, the ultimate savior manifested on planet Earth. Word quickly spread. Divinity graced the small village of Chhapaiya. The townspeople felt a serene, calm spell envelope the atmosphere. The *devas* appeared in the sky showering flowers and singing words of praise and prayer. This savior was none other than the Supreme Lord himself. Villagers gathered for a glimpse of the divine child. His innocence wooed the hearts of men, women, and children of the village. The villagers rejoiced through the streets, to celebrate the birth of the Lord.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested Himself in Chhapaiya, in Uttar Pradesh, India. He was born on Chaitra Sud Nom of Samvat year 1837 (April 2nd, 1781) at 10:10 p.m. He was born to a devout *Brahmin* couple, Hariprasad Pande and Bala *Devi*. His father, Hariprasad, was known as Dharmadev because of his extensive religious practice of adhering to codes of conduct. His mother Bala *Devi* was similarly known as Bhaktimata due to her profound devotion for God in her life. Due to the dark complexion of his skin, the female villagers of Chhapaiya named the Lord, Ghanshyam. Ghanshyam had an older brother named Rampratap. He was married to Suvasinibai.

1.2 Naming Ceremony

Three months and twelve days had passed since the birth

of the divine child. The sage Markandeya Muni was touring the region and happened to stop at the home of Dharmadev while asking for his daily ration of alms. Dharmadev knew that Markandeya was a great astrologer and thus, humbly requested him to perform the naming ritual of their newborn. Upon having the *darshan* of the blissful child, Markandeya felt lost for words. After some time, he looked towards Dharmadev and remarked, “Dharmadev you are very fortunate to have this child born as your own. He is no ordinary child, he is *Parabrahma* - the supreme lord of lords. Since he is born in the zodiac sign of Cancer, he shall be called ‘Hari’. Since his complexion is dark like the clouds in the monsoon season and has an attractive personality, he shall be called ‘Krishna’. He shall also be called ‘HariKrishna’. He has come on Earth to establish *dharma* and to free countless souls from the shackles of *maya*. He is endowed with wondrous divinity and virtues. He has sixteen sacred marks on his divine feet proving that he is God Himself. Millions of people will worship him.” Both Dharmadev and Bhaktimata were delighted to hear such a forecast from the renowned sage regarding their son. Dharmadev arranged a delicious meal for the sage and offered *dakshina* as a token of appreciation.

1.3 The True Test

As a child, Ghanshyam exhibited many divine virtues. As a result, Dharmadev decided to test his instincts and intellect. He placed a gold coin, a small dagger and a sacred

book on a wooden bench. He then brought Ghanshyam into the room and placed him in the direction of the bench with the thought in his mind that, “If Ghanshyam chooses the dagger he will become a great monarch. If he chooses the gold coin, he will become a smart businessman and finally, if he chooses the sacred book, he will become a great scholar.” Ghanshyam started crawling towards the objects. As he neared the wooden bench, his eyes beamed with joy and he immediately reached out for the sacred book. It seemed as if His eyes were indifferent to the other two objects. With much delight, the parents embraced their son knowing that one day he would become a great scholar.

1.4 Kalidatta Meets His End

Once Ghanshyam and his friends snuck away from home towards the outskirts of the village to play in the forest. They went to a lake called Narayan Sarovar nearby where they began to play in the mango grove. Coincidentally, Kalidatta the demon lived in the same part of the forest. Envious of Ghanshyam, Kalidatta waited for the children to leave Ghanshyam alone under a tree. As soon as he got the opportunity, He attempted to grab Ghanshyam. But, merely a glance from Ghanshyam left Kalidatta in pain with his insides burning. In result, Kalidatta whirled up a storm with his sorcery. The sky darkened, and the winds uprooted everything in its way. Ghanshyam’s friends became terrified. Kalidatta rushed to Ghanshyam only to find him smiling. At that time,

a miracle took place as in one instant Kalidatta would see Ghanshyam under a tree and in the next, he would see him atop the very same tree. A storm whirled inside of Kalidatta’s head. His mental state became delirious. Thereafter, making use of his sorcery, Kalidatta transformed himself into a giant with his dark magic powers. He smashed the tree under which Ghanshyam resided. He let out a roar of laughter believing Ghanshyam to be crushed under the heap. With the desire to witness Ghanshyam’s end, Kalidatta lifted the branches. To his surprise, he found Ghanshyam smiling. Kalidatta’s anger knew no bounds. As the baffled Kalidatta planned his next attack, Ghanshyam shot a sharp glance in his direction leading him to lose his sight. Kalidatta went into a frenzy and crashed into an enormous tree. Blood spewed from his nose and eyes. He started to vomit. Ear deafening loud shrieks spurred from his mouth as he witnessed the proximity of his last breaths. Then in a matter of seconds, Kalidatta succumbed to death.

As one storm subsided in the forest, another emerged in the home of Dharmadev. Bhaktimata, with tears in her eyes, grumbled to Dharmadev about the fact that Ghanshyam was now missing for a considerable amount of time. They looked everywhere but the child was nowhere to be found. Searching further, they headed to the outskirts of the village where their eyes fell on the serene appearance of Ghanshyam, who was sitting under the tree beholding a divine smile that illuminated his face. Bhaktimata rushed towards Ghanshyam and after

picking him up, swayed him in her arms. The villagers also followed and all were overjoyed to see Kalidatta dead and no longer a hindrance. As the night grew dark, they all returned home while their minds immersed upon reflecting that Ghanshyam was no ordinary child.

1.5 Reviving Dead Fish

Once Ghanshyam and His friends went to Meen Sarovar to play. There, they noticed a pompous fisherman repeatedly casting his net in the lake. Each time he threw his net into the water, he pulled out a hefty catch of fish and threw them into his bucket. The poor fishes flipped and gasped for air and finally died. Seeing this, Ghanshyam was filled with disgust for the fisherman and felt compassion for the dead fish. As a result, Ghanshyam mercifully glanced at the bucket full of the dead fish. To everyone's surprise, the dead fish became revived back to life and they merrily jumped back into the water. Seeing his efforts gone to waste, the fisherman became furious. Just when he was looking for the culprit his eyes fell on Ghanshyam and his friends. Ghanshyam walked over and tried to reason with him. "All of creation is made and sustained by God. Only he has the right to give and take life. Instead of killing innocent creatures, there are many other ways to earn a living. Please listen to what I have to say as it is for your own good." On hearing these preaching's from a child, the fisherman ignored the advice and laughed rudely. When he could not listen to the advice any longer, he threatened to

beat up Ghanshyam. Ghanshyam stood fearlessly. This further irritated the fisherman. He rushed at Ghanshyam with his net. Ghanshyam snapped his fingers and sent the fisherman into a trance. He was blinded by a sudden flow of light and next, he saw *Yamraja*! *Yamraja* appeared to him in his humongous terrifying form. The fisherman froze by the sight of *Yamraja*. He was shown the distress in *Yamloka* where *Yamraja* ordered his *Yamduts* to give the fisherman a sound thrashing. The cruel fisherman realized his mistake and begged for mercy and prostrated at Ghanshyam's feet. Instantly, *Yamraja* disappeared. He implored Ghanshyam for forgiveness and vowed to change his occupation. Ghanshyam forgave the fisherman and blessed him with a message of cultivating kindness and care towards all living beings.

1.6 Shifting to Ayodhya

As time went by, harassment from evil people became a customary thing for Dharmadev and his family. Due to this, the family left Chhapaiya and moved to the nearby city of Ayodhya. At the time, Ghanshyam was five years old. Even at such a tender age, Ghanshyam had an inclination to visit mandirs, listen to spiritual discourses, meditate, and visit sacred places around the grand city. He exhibited the characteristics of an ideal disciple of God. Whenever Ghanshyam walked through the streets of Ayodhya, people's minds would become attracted towards the divine child.

Soon after, Dharmadev and Bhaktimata had their third child. He was named Ichharam. At the age of eight, Ghanshyam's Yagnopavit Sanskar, the sacred thread ceremony was to be performed. Dharmadev hosted grand festivities for the ceremony. Family and friends from nearby villages were invited to witness this historic moment. The ritual was completed and Ghanshyam was ready to start his mission. He wanted to leave his home when the sacred thread ceremony was completed. However, due to the old age of his parents, he postponed his decision and continued to serve his parents with absolute affection and reverence.

At the age of eight on March 31st, 1786 Ghanshyam commenced his Sanskrit studies under the guidelines of his father, Dharmadev. Due to his sharp intellect, Ghanshyam mastered the *Vedic* scriptures before reaching the age of ten. During his studies, Ghanshyam compiled a small text with the essence of four important *Shastras*. He included the fifth and tenth cantos of the Shrimad Bhagavat Purana, Shri Vasudeva Mahatmya from the Skanda Purana, Vishnu Sahasranama, Vidura Niti and Bhagavad Gita from the Mahabharata, and the Yagnavalkya Smruti from the *Dharma* Shastra collection. The incredible knowledge found in this diary convinced Dharmadev that his son was indeed God Himself.

1.7 Ghanshyam Everywhere

While residing in Ayodhya, Ghanshyam had a routine

to visit the *mandirs*, to have *darshan* of deities, and listen to spiritual discourses. Ghanshyam was acquainted with mostly all of the *mandirs* in Ayodhya, but his favorite was the Kanak Bhavan *Mandir* and Hanuman Gadhi *Mandir*.

Once, Ghanshyam went to the Hanuman Gadhi *Mandir* and sat down to listen to the discourse of the Ramayana. Soon it was mid-afternoon but Ghanshyam's mind was engrossed in listening to *katha*. At home, his family members were worried about that fact that Ghanshyam had not returned yet. His eldest brother, Rampratapbhai, came looking for him at the Hanuman Gadhi *Mandir*. On seeing Ghanshyam, he called out with a hint of curiosity on his face, "let's go home!" Ghanshyam replied, "Brother, the *katha* is about to end. Why don't you come back after having *darshan* at Radha-Krishna *Mandir*? Then we shall go home together."

Rampratapbhai went to the Radha-Krishna *Mandir*. To his amazement, he saw Ghanshyam listening to the *katha* here as well. Ghanshyam told his brother, "Brother, go and come back after having *darshan* at Kanak Bhavan *Mandir*, then we shall go back together." But remarkably the same thing happened at the Kanak Bhavan *Mandir*. Rampratapbhai was left awestruck. He thought, "There must be some mistake on my part, how can there be three Ghanshyams'?" With a frenzied mind, he went closer to make sure. As soon as he came nearby, Ghanshyam looked towards him and said, "Brother! Go and visit the Hanuman Gadhi *Mandir*, then we

will return home.” Rampratapbhai returned to the Hanuman Gadhi *Mandir* and saw that Ghanshyam was seated here in the very position he was before. As the *katha* ended, they headed back home.

Rampratapbhai was puzzled after seeing Ghanshyam in all three *mandirs*. In conclusion, witnessing the revelations shown to him by Ghanshyam, he understood his younger brother to be miraculous and divine.

1.8 Impressive Debate in Kashi

The great city of Kashi is well-known for its education and its scholars. One day, Dharmadev decided to travel to Kashi for the traditional post-eclipse bathing ritual. It was a place of pilgrimage for thousands of people. When Ghanshyam found out that Dharmadev will be traveling to Kashi, he also expressed a desire to join him on the trip. Dharmadev agreed and took Ghanshyam with him. Upon arrival, they arranged to live outside the city in Gomath. The generous king of Kashi arranged for a grand feast for the *Brahmins* and scholars that were in the city for the bathing ritual. Nonetheless, he had also organized an academic debate at his palace.

The debate needed a judge to mediate such a diverse group of scholars. Unanimously, the king’s advisors voted for Dharmadev to fill the position. Dharmadev accepted the king’s invitation and arrived at the royal palace on the day of

the debate. Amongst the hundreds who had gathered, the foremost scholar came forth and sat on either side of the hall. Dharmadev took his seat with Ghanshyam beside him. The scholars debated intellectual positions concisely. The debate seemed to continue endlessly. As the judge of the debate, Dharmadev was well aware that he was obligated to bring the debate to a meaningful conclusion. As he was about to conclude the debate, Ghanshyam intervened and asked if he could have the opportunity to bring the debate to an end. With great confidence in his son, Dharmadev agreed.

Many of the scholars felt insulted at the notion of a child bringing their intellectual arguments to an end. Calm and steady with his commanding voice, Ghanshyam got all of the scholars’ attention. He began by saying: “Every philosophical argument is correct from a certain perspective. However, it is not wise to assume that each argument is correct. We fail to measure the greatness of God with our intellect. When one gets rid of one’s pride and confidence, one will begin to comprehend the true form of God. In order to understand God, one should learn to rely on faith and not one’s intellect.”

Ten-year-old Ghanshyam stunned all of the scholars present in the palace courtyard. They were all left speechless. Then, Ghanshyam summarized his philosophical system of the five eternal entities; *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *brahma*, and *Parabrahma*. Ghanshyam used various modes of logic and analogies to assert his point to the scholars. Before concluding

his remarks, Ghanshyam glanced at the scholars, sending them into *samadhi*. They experienced divine bliss and realized that the philosophy expressed by the child is the one favored by God Himself. The scholars prostrated before Ghanshyam soon after waking from *samadhi*. Shortly after, Dharmadev and Ghanshyam departed from Kashi to go back home.

1.9 Liberating His Parents

Ghanshyam obediently and affectionately served his parents until their last moments. When Ghanshyam was ten years old, Bhaktimata became very ill. As per her request, Ghanshyam expounded her with profound spiritual knowledge for ultimate redemption. Ghanshyam narrated the *Hari-Gita* in which he comprehensively explained the elements of *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan*, and *vairagya*. Finally, Ghanshyam gave her the divine *darshan* of his form and nursed her until she left the mortal body and went to *Akshardham*.

As months passed, Dharmadev also became ill with a raging fever. Ghanshyam understood that in order to take Dharmadev to *Akshardham*, he would have to reveal to Dharmadev that he is *Parabrahma*. He glanced at Dharmadev and sent him into *samadhi*. Soon after, experiencing various worlds and abodes, Dharmadev realized that Ghanshyam was none other than the Supreme Lord Himself. After awakening from the *samadhi*, Dharmadev held Ghanshyam's hand and became pleased to be liberated from his mundane body and the mundane world. Seeing that Dharmadev had developed

firm conviction in his form, Ghanshyam liberated Dharmadev's soul and sent it to *Akshardham*. After the passing away of both parents, proper rites and rituals were performed and Rampratapbhai along with the family fed *Brahmins* and generously donated alms to the needy in remembrance of Dharmadev and Bhaktimata.

1.10 Historic Departure

Rampratap and Suvasini observed Ghanshyam's odd behavior after the Dharmadev's demise. Ghanshyam stopped playing with his friends, withdrew interest in food, and spent his days being engrossed in meditation. He was preparing for the next stage of his journey on this Earth. After liberating his parents, he sought to liberate countless souls through his travels in the subcontinent of India. Ghanshyam was waiting for the appropriate time to leave his family and friends in Ayodhya for the betterment of mankind. It was June 29th, 1792, the historic day of departure for the child *yogi*.

Ghanshyam got up at 4 a.m., picked up his belongings - a *shaligram*, a staff, a deerskin mat, a mala, a piece of cloth to filter water, a small gourd, and a miniature sized self-edited compilation of the *Shastras*. He was clad in a white loincloth. The atmosphere was gloomy with a steady downpour interspersed by claps of thunder and flashes of lightning. He walked out of the courtyard. There was swiftness in his steps and joy on his face as he embarked upon his mission to uplift mankind. He had no regrets in renouncing his brothers,

relatives, and friends. Ghanshyam cast a last look at the home which had provided the setting for his Earthly sojourn all these years and offered it a parting bow. He never looked back, thereafter.

He added a new chapter in the history of religion at that auspicious moment of departure. He proved beyond doubt that God incarnates Himself on Earth in a human form and is easily accessible to his devotees. The route to *Akshardham* which had been obstructed and shrouded in darkness due to mankind's ignorance was opened on that day, to remain open forever. Ghanshyam faded out of existence and in his place 'Nilkanth Varni', the embodiment of renunciation was born on that day. It was going to be a long journey.



Nilkanth's Kalyan Yatra



*As a first step towards establishing ekantik dharma,
Nilkanth Varni undertook an enterprising ordeal unheard in
the annals of human history.*

2.1 Encounter with a Demon

At the banks of the Saryu River, Nilkanth intently stared at the stormy waves bashing against the banks, as if they are requesting him not to forsake his childhood home. Nilkanth was firm with his decision. There was nothing that could alter the *yogi*'s resolution. The morning was fast approaching; if he did not cross the river now, Rampratap would catch up with him. Therefore, he needed to put a barrier between them.

Kaushik, a cousin of the late Kalidatta, lived in the woods near the banks of the river. He had been waiting for the perfect chance to avenge his cousin's death. So, he approached Nilkanth stealthily; however, Nilkanth felt the presence of evil around him. He spotted the demon approaching him and remarked, "How deep is the river? I want to cross it."

Kaushik seized the opportunity and offered assistance with the intention to drown Nilkanth. "I can help you. Why don't you just climb onto my shoulders? I will take you across." Nilkanth suspected Kaushik's cruel intention. He politely declined with his eyes. Sensing his plan had failed, Kaushik madly rushed at Nilkanth, picked him up, and flung him into the river. Ayodhya heard the echo of the demon's boisterous laughter. Immediately Nilkanth descended underwater. The demon turned back in wild excitement. He was running helter-skelter, beside himself with joy. In the frenzy of excitement, he hit a tree which fell with a crashing

noise and the demon breathed his last. After resurfacing, the Saryu River raised Nilkanth to the crest of its waves, carefully carrying him to the other end of its waters. Nilkanth safely reached a spot to the North of Ayodhya, about 18 miles away from the village. Nilkanth dried Himself and sat down to meditate under a tree.

2.2 Northward Bound

As a first step towards establishing *ekantik dharma*, Nilkanth Varni undertook an enterprising ordeal unheard in the annals of human history. Some of the places were untrodden, except by a few ascetics. The perils of the forest held no terror for the child *yogi*. Nilkanth traveled day and night to reach his goal: the Himalayas. He lived on fruits and water, and even then, he would only have a small amount after offering to the *shaligram* he carried with him at all times. All this with the sole intention to redeem countless souls.

Nilkanth stopped at the ancient Shiva *mandir* in Lodheshwar, Uttar-Pradesh. There, he did *darshan* and spoke to pilgrims who had gathered to learn about the qualities of a true Sadhu. He passed through Jetpur, Pethapur, and Kherilapur, arriving at Naimisharanya Lake. It was a vast lake where great sages performed their ablutions. Nilkanth was pleased with their endeavors. As a result, he showered his divine blessings upon all the sages. Thereafter, Nilkanth made his way towards Naradvan. Due to Nilkanth's divine persona, the forest animals gathered around Nilkanth and sat peacefully,

forgetting their natural tendencies to hunt and gather.

More so, upon seeing the child *yogi*, the *rushi munis* who lived in Naradvan undertaking austerities approached Nilkanth reverentially with fruits and flowers. Nilkanth was greatly pleased by their devotion. *Bhagwan*'s love is universal – it graces humans and beasts alike. Nilkanth stayed in Naradvan for ten days. From there, he came upon the banks of the Ganges in Bahadurpur. After sanctifying the Ganges by bathing in it, Nilkanth took a boat to Haridwar.

Haridwar is located at the foot of the Himalayas. Nilkanth bathed at the famous *ghat* of the Ganges called 'Har ki Paudi'. A discrete *Brahmin* grabbed Nilkanth by the arm and took him to the Shiv *Mandir* located nearby. The *Brahmin* prostrated at the child *yogi*'s feet and prayed humbly. Nilkanth silently accepted the *Brahmin*'s reverence. The *Brahmin* had received the divine *darshan* of the child *yogi* and realized that he was none other than the Supreme Lord Himself. Nilkanth was greatly pleased by his devotion and stayed there for five days.

Nilkanth's next stop was Tapovan followed by Lakshman Jhula. After staying the night in Lakshmanji's *Mandir*, the next morning, he crossed a bridge taking the route towards Badrinath. A two-day trek brought him to Shripur.

2.3 The Roar of a Lion

Nilkanth took up the road towards Kedarnath. By the

time Varni reached Shripur, the sun had already set. Nilkanth stationed under a large tree and closed his eyes to meditate. Soon, mothers carried their children into their homes and shut the doors and windows. Traders and businessmen carted their goods inside the city walls. The *mahant* of the *mandir* saw the child *yogi* sitting outside the village walls in meditation. Upon seeing Nilkanth, he realized that he was no ordinary child. He ran outside with his attendants and respectfully bowed to Nilkanth. The *mahant* touched Nilkanth's feet to wake him from meditation. Nilkanth opened his eyes and looked at the aged *mahant*. The *mahant* urged Nilkanth to come inside the village walls, "Young celibate you are too young to die. A fierce feline beast roams these jungles. He devours not only animals but humans as well. Please join us and secure your safety. You will not live to see dawn if you spend the night here."

Nilkanth was fully aware of the *mahant*'s sentiments and his concern for his safety but he did not say anything. The *mahant* again pleaded to the child *yogi*. Then Nilkanth assured, "I do not fear death. I am aware of the dangers posed by wild animals, yet I leave my well-being up to *Bhagwan*. My *atma* is immortal. What will the beast do to my *atma*, so why worry? Besides, I do not prefer to live in villages or cities. I prefer solitude on the banks of a river or in the woods. I will be fine, please don't worry for my sake."

Reading Nilkanth's firmness in his resolution on his

face, the *mahant* realized that it was no use arguing with the young *Brahmachari*. He regarded the refusal of Varni to come inside the *ashram* as obstinacy of a *yogi*. He walked back inside the walls to secure his own safety while Nilkanth returned to indulge in the joy of his own *atma*. The young *Brahmachari* projected a picture of undeterred self-confidence. The *mahant* could not sleep that night and would periodically peep out of his window to check on Nilkanth. Around midnight, the *mahant* heard the roar of the lion. He rushed to the window to have one last look at the young *yogi*. He started to worry about the safety of the young celibate. The lion moved closer and closer to where Nilkanth was stationed. The lion opened its jaws, started to lash its tail and assumed a menacing posture. Its eyes were glowing in the dark. It came and stood before Nilkanth. On hearing the ferocious lion, a chill of terror ran down the *mahant* and his disciples' spine.

The *mahant* looked away, unable to watch the child *yogi*'s fate. To his surprise, he did not hear the child scream or shriek. The young ascetic casted a glance of compassion at the lion, and to everyone's amazement a miracle took place. The lion was preparing to attack Nilkanth, but in mere seconds it started to behave meek as a kitten. The *mahant* was shocked to find Nilkanth still sitting under the tree untouched, both physically and mentally. The docile beast circled Nilkanth and then sat down by the feet of Nilkanth Varni. Nilkanth

lovingly smiled at the beast. Sensing Nilkanth's love, the lion nestled closer to him. Nilkanth affectionately petted the beast. The child *yogi* completely gained control over it.

The night passed quite uneventfully. The lion stood up shortly before dawn, bowed to Nilkanth, and slipped back into the jungle. Having witnessed such miracles, the *mahant* could no longer restrain himself. Along with his disciples he ran out in the morning and humbly bowed at Nilkanth's feet. The *mahant* begged Nilkanth to forgive him. "You are *Bhagwan*. Please pardon me for doubting you. Please stay here. I offer my position as the *mahant* of this *ashram* to you. I, along with all my followers will become your disciples. The ashrams annual income is 100,000 rupees. All of the income is at your disposal."

Nilkanth smiled and said, "*Mahantji*, I have come on this Earth to liberate souls. How then can I let myself be tied down by wealth or power? I cannot accept your offer; please excuse me." He stood up and walked into the nearby bushes. To everyone's dismay, Nilkanth made his way towards the opposite side of village as the *mahant* and his disciples looked on in bewilderment.

2.4 Sanctifying Tirths

Nilkanth arrived in Kedarnath after passing through Guptkashi, Triyuginarayan and bathing in the warm springs of Gaurikund. Kedarnath hosts a beautiful *mandir* and is also

the origin of the holy Mandakini River. Kedarnath completely shuts down in the winter season due to snow, wind and bone-chilling cold temperatures. During this time of closure, the *pujari* of the *mandir* would make his way down to Gaurikund. When the *pujari* found out Nilkanth wanted to stay, he tried to convince Varni to come down with him. Nilkanth remained adamant. “Why would I come down if I want to continue on towards Badrinath?”

The *pujari* explained that the arctic like winds and heavy snowfall made it practically impossible for humans to survive in such conditions. Nilkanth replied, “I will spend the night at the origin of the river.” His resolve was firm. He bid the *pujari* farewell and walked towards the river. Nilkanth spent eight nights in Kedarnath. Thereafter he decided to take the western mountainous terrain route to Badrinath. Again, the *pujari* tried to dissuade Nilkanth: “Child *yogi*, Badrinath can only be reached by returning to Gaurikund and going around the mountains. There are no roads, trails or trees on these mountains. You won’t find any water to drink. Can you handle all of this? If so, please proceed. If not, please listen to me and turn back.” Nilkanth nodded his head in acceptance of the challenge and set out for Badrinath. After nine straight days of traveling in the harsh conditions without food or water, Nilkanth reached Badrinath. He was welcomed by the *pujari* and stayed at the *ashram* where he celebrated the festival of Deepotsav.

Then on the twenty-second day, Nilkanth told the *pujari* that he wanted to travel to *Badrikashram*. The *pujari* was stunned because no one has ever dared to travel there. The *pujari* explained, “The land is reserved for divinity. No human has the capacity to go there. Nar-Narayan Dev resides there.” Nilkanth smiled and said, “Yes, I know. That is why I want to go there. Humans may be restricted there, but am I human?”

The *pujari* understood Nilkanth’s implicit message. He humbly bowed at Nilkanth’s feet and thereafter, Nilkanth departed en-route to *Badrikashram*.

2.5 Nilkanth In Badrikashram

Nilkanth yearned to travel to *Badrikashram* irrespective of the obstacles en-route. He wanted to offer *darshan* to the countless sages and ascetics who had been performing penance for thousands of years. Most importantly, he wanted to give *darshan* to Nar-Narayan Dev. Crossing countless ice peaks, Nilkanth finally made it to the outskirts of *Badrikashram*. Nar and Narayan were delighted to find out that the Supreme Lord Himself was coming to sanctify their *ashram* in the form of a child *yogi* to confer blessings to all. Narayan was overjoyed and ordered Nar rushi to go forward and welcome Nilkanth. “Tell the *devas* that *Parabrahma* has incarnated on Earth. They should adjust the climate and environment to ease the difficulties of his travels,” said Narayan while his excitement knew no bounds.

The Himalaya mountain presented itself as a celestial being and bowed to the twelve-year-old celibate. Nilkanth walked twenty-five miles daily for twenty-four days. On the twenty-fourth day, Nilkanth reached Nar-Narayan's *ashram*. Upon arrival, Nar and Narayan held Nilkanth's hands and took him into the *ashram*. Varni sanctified the *ashram* on November 7th, 1792. Narayan rushi offered Varni a beautiful, elevated seat. Then, Nar-Narayan started to perform prostration to Nilkanth. All the other ascetics wondered, "Why the controller and maintainer of the entire Earth was prostrating to this child *yogi*. Who was this young celibate?" Narayan Dev read their minds and clarified, "This entire universe, with all its worlds, is governed by *Parabrahma*. Nilkanth Varni is *Parabrahma* incarnate in human form!"

All the sages bowed their head and said, "Oh Lord, we have been waiting for your *darshan* for thousands of years. Please grant us *moksha* so that we may enjoy your bliss in your abode above *maya*." Nilkanth gave all of them his divine blessings. Nilkanth, bound by Nar-Narayan Dev's *bhakti*, stayed in *Badrikashram* for three months. When it was time to continue his *moksha-yatra*, Nar-Narayan Dev and the sages walked with Nilkanth to the edge of Badrivan to see him off. Nilkanth obliged their love and devotion with gratitude and granted them *moksha*.

While departing, he thought as to how *dharma* had deteriorated due to the corrupting effect of age after age. But

it was because of Nilkanth that evil had become exposed and that was the reason why times had become adverse. But Nilkanth had come with a mission to establish *ekantik dharma* and destroy evil. With determination, he walked ahead to fulfil his mission.

2.6 At Mansarovar

Nilkanth started on the path to Mansarovar, the mystical lake in the Himalayas. Lake Mansarovar is the highest body of freshwater in the world that sits at an elevation of 14,947 feet. On his journey to Mansarovar, Nilkanth was alone as every human and animal had migrated down to the foothills due to the extreme winter chills.

After thirty-four days, Nilkanth arrived on the shores of Mansarovar. Nilkanth was delighted by the vast expanse of Mansarovar's placid waters. Nilkanth bathed the *shaligram* in the lake and then took a bath in the freezing waters himself. Himalaya took the form of a celestial being and brought fruits and flowers to offer to Nilkanth. Nilkanth performed *puja* of the *shaligram* with the flowers and then offered food. Nilkanth had not eaten anything in over three months. He distributed it as *prasad* to Himalaya and ate a little himself. He spent five days on the shores under open winter skies. He played with swans which were called Raj-hansas (Royal swans) because of their snow-white plumage. Upon seeing the swans, Nilkanth desired to create *Paramhansas* who would be like the white swans. It is said that a swan can separate milk from water.

Similarly, a *Paramhansa* is one who can remove mundane desires from the soul and unveil the presence of God within. It was his intention to set up and propagate *ekantik dharma* through such *Paramhansas*. Thinking thus, he bowed to Mount Kailash and left the shores of Lake Mansarovar on the sixth day.

The return path was as treacherous as the path to reach Mansarovar. Nilkanth returned to Badrinath six months after his first visit. The *mandir* priest recognized him immediately and prostrated before him. The *pujari*'s eyes brimmed with tears upon seeing Nilkanth's body reduced to merely skin and bones. The *pujari* offered a cooked meal to the frail child-*yogi*. It had been six months since Nilkanth had eaten a cooked meal. Nilkanth related the experiences of his journey to the *pujari*. Nilkanth spoke at length about his pilgrimage to *Badrikashram* and Lake Mansarovar. The *pujari* listened attentively, all the while thinking to himself that the child *yogi* is an incarnate of the Supreme Lord Himself.

2.7 A Royal Visitor

King Ranjit Singh of Punjab was on a pilgrimage at the same time when Nilkanth was in Badrinath. The king spotted the child *yogi* from afar seated in a meditative posture. He became greatly drawn by his personality and experienced divine bliss. The king could not take another step to go to the *mandir* as he had intended going there for *darshan*. Instead, he took steps towards where Nilkanth was seated. After some

time, Nilkanth opened his eyes to see the king seated with his head bowed. The king was moved by the young *yogi*'s beauty, articulation, and character. The king of Punjab said, "I am very attracted to your divine idol. Please keep me with you. If not, come back with me to my kingdom." Nilkanth took note of his sentiments. But a mere look at the king's dress left Nilkanth with the impression that the king is steeped in worldly pleasures. He realized that the king and he were at the two opposite ends of the spectrum. With a smile, Nilkanth replied, "King, we are two different types of people. You enjoy materialistic pleasures of this world. I care for nothing but the bliss of *Bhagwan* and my *atma*. It would be an askew decision to spend the rest of our time in this world together. You have been given a responsibility. You must rule justly and fairly. Visualize *Bhagwan* inside all of your subjects. Treat them with respect and love. If you do this, I will always be at your side." The king was touched by such wisdom flowing from the mouth of a thirteen-year-old child. The king was eager to attain salvation. With folded hands, he addressed Nilkanth, "Maharaj, I shall carry out any command of yours but please grace my kingdom with your divine presence." Varni was convinced of the king's sincerity and said, "I must leave for Gangotri as of now, but I shall meet you afterwards." The king felt distressed upon hearing such words. Nilkanth departed towards Gangotri. Similar to his previous treks, there were no roads. The trails were hard to identify and were nearly

deserted. Nilkanth though was not one for turning back. He arrived in Gangotri and bathed in the frigid waters. He then headed for Haridwar to keep his promise to king Ranjit Singh. In Haridwar, the king spent a few days in the young *yogi*'s service. He listened attentively to the spiritual discourses Nilkanth shared. The king experienced peace within his soul. He had decided to give up all worldly pleasures and live a simple life. The pomp and pageantry that coexisted with royalty now appeared fake and meaningless to the king. Nilkanth became pleased. Nilkanth placed his hand on the king's head. At once, king Ranjit Singh experienced a calm feeling that stilled all the agitations that were troubling his mind. After satisfying the king's desire to serve him, Nilkanth took leave and set out for Muktinath. The path to Muktinath followed the flow of the Saryu River. Nilkanth stopped for an hour outside of Ayodhya. He wished to visit Kala Parvat (Black Mountain). The route from there was easier. He bathed in the holy waters of the Saryu River and meditated. He left for Muktinath without inquiring about his family and before anyone recognized him as Bhaktimata's little Ghanshyam.

2.8 Nilkanth Visits Vanshipur

Nilkanth passed through Haraiyas and stopped to rest in Vanshipur. He laid out his deer skin under the pipal tree and sat in deep meditation. The king of Vanshipur happened to pass by the tree and was mesmerized by the young celibate's figure. He gazed at Nilkanth as his horse circled around the

tree. Being a true spiritual aspirant, the king was delighted to see the child *yogi* and, in a few seconds, recalled the knowledge from his previous births. The king managed to stop his horse as he slowly dismounted. He fell at the feet of Nilkanth. Nilkanth opened his eyes and saw the king and smiled. The king petitioned, "Oh God! Please grace us with your presence by coming to my palace." Recognizing the king to be a true *bhakta* with heartfelt sentiment, he agreed to go with the king. The king seated Nilkanth on his own horse and led him through the town square of the palace. The townspeople and the king's attendants were surprised to see such a sight. The king escorted him to his court. The king, his queen, and their two daughters, Ila and Sushila warmly received Nilkanth in their palace. The queen realized that the *Brahmachari* was no *yogi*, but Supreme Lord Himself. The royal couple had no son. The queen felt as if Varni had arrived to fulfill their desire of becoming their heir.

The king ordered various delicacies to be brought for Nilkanth. Nilkanth offered them to his *shaligram* before having just one or two pieces. He gave the rest to the king and his family as *prasad*. The royal couple felt greatly blessed; however, the queen began to devour selfish thoughts as she wanted to detain Varni in Vanshipur by handing over the kingdom to him and to making him her son-in-law. This appeared to be a very splendid idea to her. Nilkanth was well aware of the queen's thoughts, so soon after, Nilkanth preached

to the queen, “I know what you’re thinking. I respect your intentions, but I cannot accept your offer. I have come from *Akshardham* to liberate *jivas* from their attachment to *maya* and worldly possessions. My life is meant to set an example of true *vairagya*, *bhakti*, and *dharma*.”

As days passed by, the queen started to become restless. One day, she addressed the child *yogi* regarding handing over the kingdom and getting him married to her daughters. Therefore, Varni smiled and replied, “Mother, I wish to roam in the forest so that I can redeem fortunate souls like you. I have no interest in your kingdom or daughters.” The queen became agitated upon hearing this. She was so enamored of his personality that she had forgotten his divine self. She told him, “Oh, *Brahmachari*, think carefully. When you become a youth, you will not be able to live without a woman. Great ascetics have yielded to *Kamdev*. Do you think that he will spare you? Whatever pleasures God has created, are for enjoyment.” This reasoning fell flat on Varni’s ears. His stay at the palace was only a part of his goodwill journey. The young *Brahmachari* felt pity for the queen. He told her that, “True pleasure lies in roaming in the forests, mountains, rivers and in the thinking of God. Mother, I am the Supreme Lord. I have reverted myself to redeem people from the web of *maya* and to transport my devotees to my blissful *Akshardham*. I have not come here to be bound by your kingdom or by your daughters. You’ve shown affection for me and have served

me with devotion. Therefore, I give you my word that I will take all of you to my divine abode.”

The queen, who until then was engulfed by *maya*, saw the guiding light at last. Varni thought that the royal family was truly spiritually inclined but they were bound to worldly attachments. Despite that, he wished to redeem them. Acquiring the perfect chance, Nilkanth picked up the few items he usually carried with him and left to resume his unfinished journey.

2.9 Towards Kala Parvat (Black Mountain)

Nilkanth traveled hastily towards Kala Parvat. This was a feat that had never been accomplished by any human. The vegetation was so thick that sunlight didn’t touch the forest floor. Nilkanth walked for a month before he reached the base of the mountain. During his travel, Nilkanth had not come across any body of freshwater. His body was weak and dehydrated. To make matters worse, Nilkanth had lost his way for three days and made no progress. On the third day, he fainted and fell to the ground. However, a few hours later, he regained consciousness; while fighting his fatigue, he mustered all his strength and dragged himself a little further to a freshwater stream. Nilkanth filtered the water, bathed his *shaligram*, and offered it water before finally taking a sip. He wanted to continue but was too weak. He remembered Hanumanji, and within seconds, Hanumanji appeared with folded hands.

Nilkanth instructed, “Hanumanji, please stay with me as I climb the mountain. I am going to need your help.” It was certain to Hanumanji that this was merely a test. *Bhagwan* was asking for help! Hanumanji folded his hands and said, “Tell me how I may serve you.” Hanumanji immediately set out to gather fresh juicy fruits. He offered it to Nilkanth. Nilkanth first served it to his *shaligram* and then consumed more than usual.

In the middle of the night, Hanumanji felt a storm approaching. Hanumanji suspected this to be the doing of evil, and he was right. Just moments later, he noticed that the demon Kalbhairav was approaching with a hoard of witches, demonesses and demonic soldiers. Hanumanji struck the evil spirits before they could counter his attack. He bashed them furiously, and in result, they started begging for mercy. Kalbhairav was not fazed by seeing the strength of Hanuman and attempted to attack him. Hanumanji retaliated with a single blow of his mace. The demon shrieked with pain as he lost his life in the short battle with the powerful servant.

When Hanumanji returned to Nilkanth, he noticed that the young celibate was engrossed in meditation. Nilkanth opened his eyes and praised Hanumanji’s efforts. Hanumanji knew that the credit was due elsewhere as it was Nilkanth’s strength that conferred him the victory. Nilkanth was merely accepting Hanumanji’s *seva*. Finally, Nilkanth bid Hanumanji farewell and resumed his trek in the middle of the night.

2.10 Severe Penance at Pulhashram-Muktinath

Nilkanth’s austerity in Pulhashram has been praised as one of the most significant undertakings of his journey. However, the journey to Pulhashram was no less than one worthy of being deemed as an accomplishment. Nilkanth traveled through Nepal’s mountainous terrain. Crossing Black Mountain had taken a toll on Nilkanth’s body, but he was not one to waver from his goal. Nilkanth started to follow the Kali Gandaki River in the hope that it would lead him to Pulhashram. Nilkanth’s excellent navigation skills helped him cut through tough vegetation. He had to surpass dense forests and cross paths precariously perched atop deep valleys; so deep that the eye could not reach them. But these aspects of nature did not frighten Varni. He went on and crossed the place called Tatopani and then lost his way. Nilkanth was lost in the deepest gorge in the world. It is located between two mountains Kala Parvat and Shvethgiri. There was no other way to reach Muktinath-Pulhashram. That day, Himalaya appeared again in the form of a celestial being. Himalaya said humbly, “Maharaj, the torrent which is flowing between the two mountains will lead you to the place you want to go. But the river is full of poisonous snakes, crabs, turtles, and fishes. On its banks, crocodiles await their victims. So do not go by that route. Even if you find the cave and manage to cut through it to the other side of the mountain, it is almost impossible to reach the Kali Gandaki River. Please do not be stubborn and give me the chance to help you.”

As soon as Himalaya finished his sentence, Nilkanth plunged into the torrential waters of the river without even giving a reply. He swam against the current looking for the opening of the cave on the other side of the mountain. After several hours, Nilkanth found the opening and came ashore. Varni went to a cliff after walking quite a distance. He saw the Kali Gandaki River flowing deep below. Fearlessly, he started climbing down from the cliff. When he got close, he plunged into it. He swam against the swift current until he reached the mountain range. Then he started climbing again. The terrain was inhospitable. Nilkanth was a twelve-year-old boy when he undertook the Himalayan odyssey. He wore only a loincloth and had no other protection against the nerve-numbing cold. He walked barefooted. At last, he walked for four days and found the Kali Gandaki River. He rested on the banks of the river before heading towards Pulhashram. He started back by diving into the river and letting it navigate him through the forest. He came out of the river and spotted Shvethgiri (White Mountain). He knew that Pulhashram lay on the other side of the White Mountain on the peak of a mountain called Thorang. Climbing the snow-covered White Mountain was as tricky as spanning the Black Mountain. White Mountain is approximately 26,800 feet tall, and Thorang stands about 17,770 feet high. Nilkanth crossed the White Mountain and followed the Kali Gandaki River all the way to Pulhashram-Muktinath.

Nilkanth finally arrived in Pulhashram. Nilkanth performed *darshan* of Vishnu flanked by Bhudevi and Sridevi at the Muktinath *Mandir*. Nilkanth had decided to perform austerities at Bharat Kund, an area near Muktinath *Mandir*. As it was the rainy season, there were incessant downpours and at times even blizzards. It was a perilous place to visit. It was this inhospitable spot that Nilkanth chose as his place for austerity with the sole intention to redeem souls. He would get up at 4:30 a.m., bathe in the Gandaki and go for the *darshan* of Muktinath.

Then, wearing only a loincloth, he would stand on one leg to perform austerities. He would keep his gaze fixed on the tip of his nose, and his arms stretched upwards as if invoking the sun. His body was emaciated because of his ceaseless travels and austerities. Nilkanth's mat of hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and back were covered in a thick sheet of ice. He would recite *mantras* in praise of Suryadev (Sun-God). The child *yogi*'s rigorous austerities caused restlessness amongst the sages and Gods alike. Dharmadev and Bhaktimata divinely came to protect their son. This was a daily routine for Varni. Nilkanth was the Supreme Lord Himself, but He was undertaking austerities for the salvation of humanity. He was steady in his attitude and was immersed in his own bliss. The surroundings did not affect him.

Nilkanth intended to re-establish *dharma* which had gradually deteriorated since *satyayug*. The sole way to do it

was to promote austerity along with *bhakti*. He aimed to help others realize the futility of indulging in worldly pleasures and set an example to others towards the notion of renunciation. On the night of Prabodhini *Ekadashi*, Suryadev presented Himself as a celestial being. The four months of *Chaturmas* were over. Soon after, the sun-god bowed in reverence and returned to his abode. Nilkanth's austerities came to an end. Nilkanth returned to Muktinath *Mandir*, did *darshan* of deities and started strolling towards Nepal. His body had diminished to the point where one could see his veins and count his ribs. His stomach cavity curved inwards. Nevertheless, Nilkanth continued onwards.

2.11 Nilkanth's Understanding

Traveling through the dense jungles on the way to Nepal, Nilkanth came across Mohandas, a saint who had lost his way. Mohandas was not only attracted to Nilkanth's divine persona but was also attracted toward the shining gourd that he possessed. Finding out his desire, Nilkanth purposefully smashed and broke the gourd against a boulder as Mohandas lamented at the loss of the gourd. Nilkanth laughed and said, "Here you are, alone in the woods. You left your family and don't care for wealth, women and fame. You want to worship *Bhagwan*, yet you find yourself attached to a gourd? Don't you find that unsettling? I broke that gourd for your own good. Learn to enjoy that which is around you by sacrificing it." Mohandas gained true understanding from the child *yogi* and

regained his composure. Later on, after a couple of days, Nilkanth asked Mohandas to leave ensuring that they will meet again in the future. Despite feeling sorrowful about Nilkanth's departure, Mohandas eagerly anticipated being in his presence again.

Nilkanth Varni then visited Butolnagar, where the kingdom was ruled by king Mahadatt and his sister Mayarani. They were virtuous and ardent devotees. Due to their profound devotion, Nilkanth stayed at the garden near their palace. One day, Mayarani offered Nilkanth the kingdom and asked him to marry her two daughters. However, Nilkanth did not accept the offer, saying that he needed to continue his quest to redeem countless souls. Sensing danger, one night, without informing anyone, Nilkanth left the city, demonstrating that the allure of wealth and power were futile and had no effect on him.

2.12 Yoga with Gopal Yogi

In the woods surrounding the city of Pokhara lived an aged ascetic named Gopal *yogi*. Gopal *yogi* had mastered *ashtang-yoga*, the highest integrated form of yoga for the mind, body, and soul. Nilkanth had heard of the revered sage in the nearby woods and decided to visit his hermitage. Nilkanth walked into the hermitage and humbly bowed at the *yogic* master's feet. As soon as Gopal *yogi* had the *darshan* of Nilkanth, his mind was involuntarily attracted towards him. Suddenly a thought flashed in the mind of the *yogi*, "I have been performing yoga for a long time and I have attained

non-attachment. However, why is my mind attracted to this small boy?” Thinking further, he instantly realized that God Himself had come as a fruit of his austerities. They embraced each other for several minutes. They talked for many hours as Nilkanth shared his experiences from the Himalayas and beyond. The next morning, Nilkanth asked the *yogic* master to teach him *ashtang-yoga*.

Gopal *yogi* chuckled and replied, “Nilkanth, do not mock me. I know that you are the Supreme Lord. You do not need me to teach you anything. However, if you would like to give me the service of teaching you to liberate me, I will accept you as my disciple.”

Nilkanth was an exemplary student. Gopal *yogi* would only demonstrate once and Varni would learn immediately. Nilkanth Varni mastered *ashtang-yoga* on October 24th, 1794 only nine months, a feat that would require many years, albeit lives of constant effort from anyone else. Both developed profound respect for each other and they shared a liking for austerity. They would take meals together. Nilkanth also set an ideal example of a true disciple. In fact, he treated his *guru* with respect and reverence. Nilkanth stayed for one year with Gopal *yogi* - His most prolonged stay at a place during the pilgrimage. The time came for Nilkanth to take his *guru*'s leave. Whatsoever, before his departure, Nilkanth liberated Gopal *yogi*'s *atma* from his body.

2.13 One King after Another

When Nilkanth proceeded his way to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, people warned him against visiting it because of king Rana Bahadur Shah. The king had been ill for an extremely long period. Also, the illness had also influenced his mental health. He would round up all of the ascetics and mendicants in the capital and invite them to his palace. He would ask them to heal him. If they failed, he would imprison them. Fearless Nilkanth entered Kathmandu and broke the king's ignorance by preaching about a Sadhu's role. Soon after, the king realized that Nilkanth was God Himself. Nilkanth asked for a gourd of water. He offered it to his *shaligram* and then asked the king to sip the water. The king had only taken three or four sips when his mental and physical health began to recover. He felt rejuvenated as if he was a decade younger. The king prostrated at Nilkanth's feet and thanked him. Nilkanth instructed the king to free all of the imprisoned Sadhus, and surprisingly, the king obliged instantly. Nilkanth spent 30 days in Kathmandu and preached to the royal family daily. Soon after, he left the great city in search of those inclined towards God. He desired to mold *yogis* untouched by worldly desires and ties. As a result, He constantly remained in search of Sadhus.

Upon reaching the town of Sirpur in Eastern India, Nilkanth visited the kingdom ruled by Siddhavallabh. He was a spiritually minded soul who enjoyed being a philanthropist

and was genuinely caring towards Sadhus in his kingdom. In his royal gardens, He had built a special Dharamshala for the Sadhus to reside in. Also, Nilkanth resided in the garden with the other ascetics. King Siddhavallabh recognized that the child *yogi* differed from the others. He was always engrossed in the meditation of God. Due to Nilkanth's divine persona, the king and queen became fond of him, resulting in the other fake ascetics becoming jealous. They started to instigate trouble. They repeatedly performed sorcery, trying to intimidate Nilkanth. Nilkanth remained calm and fearless and completely shut down all the enchantment with a mere glance. The king witnessed these events. He prostrated at Nilkanth's feet and asked the young *yogi* to stay and teach him about *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan*, and *vairagya*. Nilkanth agreed to the king's request. Nilkanth stayed in Sirpur for four months and after that, asked the king if he can take his leave. The royal couple humbly bowed at Nilkanth's feet and begged him not to depart. Nilkanth sent them into *samadhi* and gave them His *darshan* in *Akshardham*. They awoke from the *samadhi* and agreed to let Nilkanth leave, for he had to liberate countless souls in the southern and western parts of the subcontinent.

2.14 Defeats Superstition

Nilkanth proceeded towards the East and came to the Kamakshi *Devi Mandir* in Assam. The mendicants that lived there had ruined the ambiance of this historic center meant for pilgrimage. They would extort money from pilgrims by

scaring them with threats of misfortune and death through sorcery and tantra. Nilkanth's arrival changed the mood and temper of the atmosphere; the pilgrims and local devotees became attracted towards the child *yogi*'s sermons. As a result, they paid less attention to the other ascetics. Nilkanth spoke to them about overcoming blind faith and superstitious beliefs.

The fake ascetics became enraged, about how much attention Nilkanth was receiving. So, in result, they approached Pibek, the notorious tantric of the area. He was a master of black magic who was ever ready with his spells and charms. The ascetics encouraged Pibek to take on Nilkanth, whose preaching was harming their common interests. Formerly, Pibek was a *Brahmin* who practiced the tenets of the *Vaishnav Sampraday*. He was a pious devotee, but things changed when he came under the influence of corrupted people.

One afternoon, Nilkanth was speaking to an assembly of pilgrims when the notorious tantric, barged into the middle of the assembly and interrupted the discourse. When Nilkanth saw the hideous features and dress of Pibek, he despised him. His companions were no less despicable. On seeing Pibek, the Sadhus who were with Nilkanth became mortally afraid. When Pibek saw Nilkanth, he exploded with wild laughter. He felt he would easily defeat the lean 16-year-old boy. The young *Brahmachari*'s utterly fearless attitude and calm exterior came as a great surprise to Pibek. He took this to be

a mockery of his powers. In result, Pibek took a handful of grains, uttered some spells and hurled them at a tree. The tree dried up into a feeble hedge. Its leaves crumbled into dust, and its trunk shrunk to a fifth of its original size. However, Nilkanth was unmoved. He challenged, “Excellent performance of your powers, but if you really want me to believe that you are an accomplished tantric, bring the tree back to life. Prove to us that you can give back what you can take away.” Pibek became livid with rage as a result of the challenge of his powers. Pibek chanted a few *mantras* and called upon several demons to attack Nilkanth. The demons raced towards Nilkanth, but instead of attacking him, they prostrated at his feet. Pibek remained steadfast. He chanted more *mantras* and called upon Kalbhairav and his horde of evil spirits. Again, the evil spirits bowed to Nilkanth. However, this time they attacked Pibek. In a matter of minutes, Pibek was bleeding from every limb. He begged for mercy. Nilkanth glanced at the evil spirits and they disappeared.

Nilkanth’s compassionate heart could not bear to see Pibek suffering. He walked over to the dying tantric and blessed Pibek. Pibek was forced to admit defeat for the moment, but his ego would not let him rest. Later that night, he summoned Batukbhairav, an even more powerful evil spirit. Pibek commanded the spirit to kill the child *yogi*.

Batukbhairav laughed and said, “Fool! Don’t you know that Nilkanth is Purna *Purushottam* Narayan? He is *Bhagwan*.

No one can touch him. Regain your senses. Prostrate at his feet and beg for forgiveness. He is compassionate. He will forget all of your sins and forgive you.” Pibek came to understand the true form of Nilkanth. The next morning, he went to Nilkanth and humbly bowed at his feet. He vowed to help Nilkanth convince other tantrics to discontinue their use of sorcery to control innocent pilgrims. The defeat of Pibek echoed all over Bengal. This inspired people to fight against superstitions and turn to God for refuge.

2.15 On the Way to Jagannath Puri

Nilkanth traveled South from Assam. He stopped to rest at the base of Nav-Lakha Mountain. The mountain was named after the 900,000 ascetics that lived on its peak. The 900,000 ascetics were awaiting the *darshan* of *Bhagwan*. Nilkanth climbed to the top to give *darshan* to the ascetics. Each hermit stood with a garland of flowers to welcome Nilkanth. Nilkanth assumed 900,000 forms so he could embrace each one. Nilkanth spent three days on the mountain and liberated all of the ascetics.

Nilkanth passed through many cities and villages. He was determined to make it to Jagannath Puri before the Rath *Yatra* festival. Along the way, Nilkanth met a devout soul by the name of Jayramdas. Nilkanth showed his divine personality to Jayramdas when he tamed a wild bear in the forest. The bear was none other than Jambuvan. He confronted the bear and granted him liberation in his next birth where he

would be born as one of Nilkanth's devotees. News spread of Nilkanth's interaction with the sloth bear. The entire village came to understand the young *yogi* to be none other than God Himself. This is how Nilkanth liberated numerous souls while on this Earth. He finally left to reach the great city of Jagannath Puri.

2.16 In Jagannath Puri

Nilkanth was overjoyed to finally be in the city of Jagannath Puri. He did *darshan* of the *Murti* and walked over to the Garuda Stambha. Nilkanth would sit and meditate, do mala and listen to *katha* daily. As the days passed, the chief *pujari* of the *mandir* observed that Nilkanth spent his days without eating or drinking and in meditation. The *pujari* brought *prasad* from the *mandir* deity's *thal* to Nilkanth. Nilkanth accepted the *pujari*'s offering.

The king of Jagannath Puri – king Divyasinhddev noticed Nilkanth performing yoga and felt a divine attraction towards his *Murti*. The king was kind, generous and fair. Due to the king's zeal to become Nilkanth's disciple, he sent the king into *samadhi* where he experienced the divine bliss of *Akshardham*. Then Nilkanth moved to the shores of the Indradyumna Sarovar. Every year during the monsoon season, large hordes of ascetics would come to live in the forests surrounding the Sarovar. They would rob pilgrims and wrest money from the king through intimidation. They were always fighting amongst themselves over wine, women, and food.

They were a menace to saintly conduct. The fake ascetics felt that the child *yogi* was a threat because of his ever-growing popularity in Jagannath Puri. They thought that Nilkanth had to be taught a lesson. Otherwise, he would harm their interests.

It was Nilkanth's mission to change their ways. As people came flocking to Nilkanth, the fear increased in the minds of these fake Sadhus that Varni's reformist preaching would put an end to their malpractices. The king, his subjects, and pilgrims were drawn towards Varni. They considered him to be a thorn and wanted to remove him. The wicked ascetics would disturb and shake him while Varni was meditating. But this would have no effect on the child *yogi*.

Nilkanth celebrated the Rath *Yatra* festival in Jagannath Puri in 1797. The king invited Nilkanth to sit on the central chariot. Nilkanth's *Murti* enthralled the hearts of thousands of pilgrims who had gathered to celebrate the festival in the ancient city. Nilkanth's presence evoked the feeling that *Bhagwan* Jagannath himself had emerged from the *Murti* to give *darshan* in human form. Though thousands felt blessed to have this memorable *darshan* of the child *yogi*, many burned with envy. The king increasingly spent more time at Nilkanth's place on the shores of the lake. The fake ascetics thought the king and his people were giving undue importance to Nilkanth. Finally, the Rath *Yatra* ended at Gandia *Mandir*.

Afterward, Nilkanth went back to the lake to not only bathe but with a specific purpose in mind. He wanted to draw

attention to the king and his subjects to the lawless, licentious behavior of the fake Sadhus. He preached about the qualities of a genuine Sadhu. The king and his people saw the objectionable action of the ascetics by the lake. Both the king and his people realized that they had made a mistake in harboring the ascetics whom they believed to be genuine Sadhus. They became averse to their misconduct and felt that these imposters were mere parasites living off society. The king felt the need to punish them physically, but Varni instead kept courage and patience. Nilkanth never used physical force, arms, or violence to assert a point.

Nilkanth had to defeat the elements that subsided on *maya* by practicing witchcraft and other black arts. After performing his morning ablutions, he would bathe and sit in meditation. If nobody offered him alms, he would subsist on air. To harass him, the ascetics would make him run errands. He would cheerfully do any task that was not objectionable. Some of the ascetics did not like the meaningless harassment towards Varni. In this way, two groups of ascetics were formed – one group would harass the young *Brahmachari*, and the other group would spring to his defense. In a short period of time, thousands of fake ascetics formed opposing sides, threatening to kill each other. The two teams eventually battled with spears, maces, and swords. The king sent his men to maintain peace, but the ascetics were difficult to control. The king's men carried Nilkanth to safety inside the palace walls.

The ascetic forces settled equally which eventually led to their natural destruction. Nilkanth merely exercised his intellect; he did not do anything to bring about their destruction. He felt that his work at Jagannath Puri was over as the fake Sadhus had been blighted. After spending ten months in Jagannath Puri, Nilkanth transitioned to the Southern lands of India.

Nilkanth Varni then arrived in the town of Manaspur in Orissa. The king of Manaspur, Satradharma welcomed Nilkanth to his royal palace, but Nilkanth preferred to stay on the outskirts of the royal garden. The wicked ascetics that escaped from the fighting in Jagannath Puri came to know that Nilkanth was in Manaspur. Considering Nilkanth to be the root cause of their fight in Jagannath Puri, they all gathered to plan for how they could exterminate Nilkanth. One night, they all went to where Nilkanth was resting and started to throw stones on him. To their surprise, not a single stone harmed or came near the young *yogi*. When the king found out what the fake ascetics had tried to plot, the king along with his army slaughtered all the ascetics. Nilkanth showed the king his divine form and left Manaspur.

Moving further southwards, He reached Tirumala – Tirupati and had *darshan* of *Bhagwan* Balaji. He stayed there for two days before leaving for Rameshwar.

2.17 The Ungrateful Sevakram

On the way from Venkatadri to Setubandh Rameshwar,

Nilkanth came across a recluse named Sevakram, who had studied Shrimad Bhagvat. Nilkanth was attracted to his knowledge in shlok recital. Nilkanth decided to travel with Sevakram. Despite possessing knowledge of the scriptures, Sevakram's character was poor. He was greedy, selfish, and tyrannical. He had nearly twenty kilograms of personal belongings and approximately one thousand gold coins in his possession. However, Nilkanth was not interested in any of his assets. He only cared for Sevakram's *gnan* and *bhakti*. A few days had passed on their journey when Sevakram suddenly fell ill with severe diarrhea. By noon, Sevakram was passing a substantial amount of blood in his stool. He fell to the floor, unable to continue. He started to cry in worry that no one will take care of him. Nilkanth felt sorrow for him and consoled him that he would serve him. There was a banana grove which had a banyan tree on the outskirts of the village. Nilkanth carried Sevakram to the grove and set him down. For the next two months, Nilkanth prepared a bed of banana leaves one and a half feet high under that banyan tree. He would clean the ground under the tree, lay a fresh layer of banana leaves to make a soft bed and change these leaves several times a day. Even though the closest river was a kilometer away, Nilkanth would carry all of Sevakram's old clothes to the riverbank and wash them twice a day. Slowly but surely, due to Nilkanth's *seva* efforts, Sevakram started to recover. Sevakram was still weak and still required aid to help him continue his journey. He took out a gold coin and handed

it to Nilkanth. He then commanded Nilkanth, "Go to the village and get me ghee, flour, sugar, and rice. Make me some tasty food. I need to put on weight and increase my stamina." As a *sevak*, Nilkanth would get all the supplies and cook Sevakram a warm meal. Sevakram would mostly finish all the food and whatever was leftover, he would tell Nilkanth to store it until the next time he ate. Soon after, Sevakram became healthy enough to digest several kilograms of *ghee*. Yet, he did not ask or offer food to Nilkanth even once. Nilkanth would walk back to the village and beg for alms. The days he didn't receive anything, he would fast. The days he went hungry started to outnumber the days he was given food. Sevakram was the pinnacle of ungratefulness. He never bothered to ask if Nilkanth had eaten. He made Nilkanth carry all of his belongings while he walked with a rosary in his hand. Nilkanth had a nature of not even carrying a handkerchief in His hand, yet respecting him as a Sadhu, He carried his belongings. Realizing that Sevakram was exploiting his spirit of service, Nilkanth left him and continued his journey onward.

2.18 In South India

Nilkanth performed *darshan* in Vishnu Kanchi and Shiv Kanchi, the two largest ancient *mandirs* in Kanchipuram. After that he left quickly for Srirangam Kshetra. He did *darshan* of the murtis and stayed in Srirangam for two months. He met with senior scholars to understand the *Vishishtadvaita*

school of thought. Nilkanth traveled at a steady pace and reached Setubadh Rameshwar. From there he went to Sunderras. While speaking to the *pujari*, Nilkanth realized that he missed Bhutpuri, Shri Ramanujacharya's birthplace. Nilkanth was content about traveling to Bhutpuri, so he set off immediately. On his long trek, he did not find food or water for five days straight. Surprisingly, Shivji and Parvati came on a bull and prepared a small meal for Nilkanth. Nilkanth offered that to his *shaligram*. He also ate a small portion and gave the rest back to Shivji as *prasad*. They took the *prasad* and disappeared. Nilkanth walked another ten days to Bhutpuri. He traveled more than three hundred miles off track to do *darshan* at this particular pilgrimage center. After having *darshan*, he left Bhutpuri and walked back for twelve days to a small town called Totadri. Upon witnessing the flawed *brahmacharya* of the *mahant*, he left immediately, passing pilgrimage centers in Kanyakumari, Jamardan, Adikeshav, and Guruvayor. He moved towards the state of Maharashtra passing Kishkindha, the famous city of the king of the monkeys, king Sugreeva. After visiting Pandharpur and Pune, he arrived in Burhanpur. Upon witnessing the unethical behavior of men and women, he came to the conclusion that not a single place had the essence of sincere devotion. He bathed in the River Tapi and left. Nilkanth crossed the hilly terrain of Maharashtra and arrived in Nasik where He bathed in the Godavari River and did *darshan* of renowned Tryambakeshwar Shiva *Mandir*.

2.19 Entering the Sacred Soils of Gujarat

Nilkanth crossed through the dense jungles in between present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat and arrived in Surat, Gujarat. Nilkanth Varni had set out from Chhapaiya to redeem countless souls. His final destination was Western India because he knew that spiritually inclined souls were waiting to be redeemed by him. Still, Nilkanth traveled throughout the length and breadth of India. From the North, he traveled towards the Eastern and Southern parts of the country. En route, He visited many places of pilgrimages, observed the practices of Sadhus and heads of *mandirs*, destroyed evil forces, and liberated the spiritually inclined. Even then, he did not find a single place to settle down to start his mission to spread *bhagwat dharma* and liberate countless souls from the cycle of birth and death. Nilkanth Varni chose this land to establish his *sampraday*. He was still to meet numerous god-loving people through whom he would spread his work. But that meeting place was still far away.

Nilkanth had not eaten in five days. The *mahant* of Gaudiya Vaishnava *Mandir* got an opportunity to feed the great *yogi*. Nilkanth blessed the *mahant* and moved towards Bharuch and visited all the places of pilgrimage on the banks of the Narmada River. He passed through several towns before arriving in Vadodara.

Nilkanth spent the night near the 16 pillared Mandvi gate. Nilkanth then met Amichand, a merchant who developed

affection for Varni. Nilkanth blessed him and his wife by partaking in the meal they had prepared for him and destroyed their vices. Before leaving, he told him that he will send his Sadhus in the future to retrieve the murtis of Lakshmi and Narayan buried underneath his home.

Nilkanth had finally arrived in the heart of Gujarat-Charottar. The people, climate, language, and environment had changed, but Nilkanth's routine was unaltered. He crossed the Mahi River and arrived in Bamangam. After blessing the devout *bhakta* Khoda Pandya, Nilkanth went to Dakor and Umreth, finally arriving in Vadtal.

Magnetically drawn to Nilkanth's divine *Murti*, Joban Pagi - the famous warrior and thief, graced him to his home and family. Nilkanth cooked for himself and offered to his *shaligram* and gave *prasad* to the Pagis. Then, Varni went to Bochasan and blessed Kashidas and moved on to Budhej. Nilkanth did *darshan* at several pilgrimage spots near the Gulf of Khambhat and later arrived at the delta of the Arabian Sea, the Sabarmati River, and the Mahi River. Moving on, Nilkanth passed through Vallabhipur and Bhavnagar and arrived in Kukad.

Moving on, He traveled to Gopinath *Mandir* which is located off the coast of the Arabian Sea on the Saurashtra peninsula. Nilkanth's arrival seemed to change the atmosphere of the *mandir*. The *mahant* was attracted towards the divine luster that Varni possessed. After showing the *mahant* his

phenomenal power, he gave him *divya darshan* and blessed him that he would come to take his *atma* to *Akshardham* when he breathed his last. Next, Nilkanth moved on to Kalsar and then the ancient port city of Mahuva. From there, he left for Lodhva where he met Lakhubai. Lakhubai spoke briefly of Ramanand Swami and Atmanand Swami. After finding out that Lakhubai believed God to be formless, Nilkanth decided to stay for three months to educate Lakhubai about God possessing a divine form. Lakhubai was persuaded by Nilkanth's arguments. Nilkanth blessed the aged woman and left for Somnath *Mandir*.

After having the *darshan* of the Shivalinga at Somnath *Mandir*, he traveled to Junagadh and climbed the Girnar Mountain. After descending, he traveled around a few other villages and reached Vanthali. Here, he bathed in the Suryakund. He accepted alms from the almshouse and spent the night there. A few hours before the break of dawn, he set out and reached Piplana. He reached the home of Narsinh Mehta, where a warm meal was offered to him. Then, Mehtaji spoke of his *guru*, Ramanand Swami. Nilkanth listened patiently and then sent Mehtaji into *samadhi*. Mehtaji woke up knowing that Nilkanth is *Bhagwan*. Soon after, Nilkanth departed and sped towards Mangrol.

Nilkanth arrived in Mangrol and rested under a tree. Govardhan, a *bhakta* of Ramanand Swami noticed the *yogi*. After consuming a sweet offered by Govardhan, Nilkanth

came to find out that Govardhan's aunt had passed away. With his *yogic* powers, Nilkanth found out that she is in *Yamloka* suffering the pains and punishments of stealing from Ramanand Swami. Govardhan prostrated at Nilkanth's feet and begged for forgiveness on behalf of his aunt. Nilkanth's heart filled with compassion. The aunt was redeemed from *Yamloka* and was sent to *Badrikashram* to repent for her sins. Govardhan was touched by Nilkanth's prowess, honesty, and sympathy. As the sunset, Nilkanth left Mangrol for the final destination of his pilgrimage and *kalyan-yatra* across the Indian subcontinent.

2.20 Unique Sojourn

Throughout his pilgrimage, Nilkanth visited four countries (India, Nepal, China, and Tibet), twelve states, one hundred seventy places and traveled over 12,000 km in 7 years, 1 month and 11 days. Seven years of pilgrimage without a regular diet and sleep had reduced Nilkanth to almost a skeleton. One could see and count his bones, ribs, and veins. Nevertheless, his spiritual strength sparkled through his emerald like eyes that were full of love and compassion for all.

The seven-year-long pilgrimage was a unique example of his will-power. He headed North from Ayodhya towards the Himalayas, through Nepal, and then moved East. He passed through Bengal, Orissa, and Assam before turning South. He touched the southernmost tip of the subcontinent at Kanyakumari and headed Northwest up the shore of the

Arabian Sea to Maharashtra and then finally Gujarat. The pain endured by Nilkanth was beyond human capacity or description. A teenage boy, wearing nothing but a loincloth and barefoot, ventured into the forest without any guide, map, money or any form of protection. He was regularly exposed to heat and cold and was always in danger of wild animals, such as lions, tigers, snakes, scorpions, etc.

Nevertheless, numerous varieties of enticements were offered to the child - teenage *yogi*. Near Haridwar, king Ranjit Singh requested his permanent company. The head of the Shripur *Mandir* offered his position and an annual income of 100,000 rupees. The Nepalese king's sister, Mayarani, urged him to marry her two daughters. The king of Sripur offered riches. In Jagannath Puri, the king offered his palace. However, all of these enticements failed to allure, or contain him.

Nilkanth never worried about getting enough food to eat. At times, he underwent fasts for 4-5 consecutive days. He did severe austerities, many of which were too difficult for any human being to perform. Thousands of people were attracted towards the teenage *yogi*.

Nilkanth's pilgrimage did not consist of random wandering, but he followed a set plan. During Nilkanth's *kalyan yatra* he accomplished the following:

- Bestowed grace and *darshan* to spiritual aspirants who had been offering devotion and performing austerities

to receive God's grace.

- Eradicated immoral ethics from people through non-violent tactics.
- Visited the holy places of pilgrimages and observed the prevailing level of *dharma*.

2.21 Sadguru Ramanand Swami's Briefing

While departing from this planet, Lord Shri Krishna give his spiritual knowledge to Uddhavji, his private secretary as well as an ardent disciple. He asked him to propagate this particular knowledge in *Badrikashram*. Due to anarchy, atrocity, and low-morality pervading the lands of India, Uddhavji incarnated himself from the pious Rigvedi *Brahmin* family of Ajay Sharma and Sumati Devi in Ayodhya in Vikram Samvat year 1795. He was named Ram Sharma. Due to his heartfelt desire to study and go on a pilgrimage, Ram received permission from his parents to engage in studies at the delicate age of eight years old. He had a burning desire to have *darshan* of the personified form of God. During this pilgrimage, he reached Talaja in Gujarat, India, and studied Sanskrit in the vicinity of the Gopnath Mahadev *Mandir*. While traveling further, Ram Sharma met a great Sadhu by the name of Atmanand. Swami Atmanand initiated Ram Sharma and renamed him as 'Ramanand Swami'. Ramanand Swami learned *ashtang-yoga* from his *guru* in a short period of time. As a result, Ramanand Swami attained '*samadhi*' in which

he got the vision of divine formless light because his *guru* believed in 'Nirakar Brahman'; (i.e. God to be formless). Yet, Ramanand Swami had the burning desire for the *darshan* of 'Sakar Brahman' that is the personified form of God, so Ramanand Swami left the company of Atmanand Swami and traveled to Southern India, reaching Srirangam Kshetra. He studied scriptures composed by Ramanujacharya, a renowned exponent of the *Vishishtadvaita* philosophy. As a result of his profound devotion, Ramanujacharya appeared in his dreams and initiated Ramanand Swami. After some time, due to the harassment of evil people, Ramanand Swami left South India.

Later on, Ramanand Swami reached Vrindavan and offered deep devotion to *Bhagwan* Shri Krishna. In result, *Bhagwan* Krishna gave Ramanand his divine *darshan* and instructed him to establish the 'Uddhav *Sampraday*'. The main reason behind establishing this sect was to perform the *bhakti* of God with the observance of *dharma*.

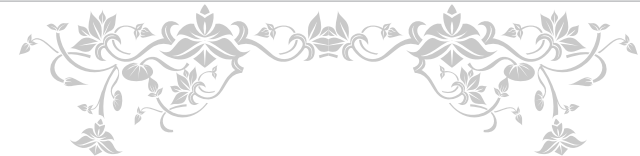
Then after, Ramanand Swami went to where Atmanand Swami was and convinced him regarding God to have a divine form. Atmanand Swami accepted and appreciated Ramanand Swami's knowledge and he asked his disciples to follow Ramanand Swami as he left this world. Ramanand Swami started his fellowship by moving restlessly in Saurashtra, *Kutch* and all over Gujarat to give to the public the distinct and detailed knowledge of the welfare of the present life and the life after. Thousands of people followed him, discarded

all of their vices, and started to live virtuous devotional lives. He also established almshouses at various places; there he would give food and other aids to the poor. There were about fifty ideal saints in his fellowship who helped him in his mission.

He established a monastery at Loj near Mangrol in Saurashtra. Keeping in mind that Ramanand Swami who started the *sampraday* was an incarnation of Uddhavji, the disciple of Shri Krishna. Thus, it was known as the Uddhav *Sampraday*.



Arrival at Loj



Ramanand Swami praised Sahajanand Swami and told everyone, “I have been saying I am only a drum-beater, the director of the play will come later. I have sounded the drum and collected all of you together. Now, this Narayan Muni will help you attain ekantik dharma.”

3.1 The End of An Epic Journey, Yet Another Begins!

Loj, a village in the corner of Saurashtra which does not even appear like a dot on the map of this vast country is the very same sacred land which the Supreme Lord sanctified. He decided to fulfill his divine mission from this holy place. Nilkanth had not stayed for long in any of the places he had visited in the course of his travels. But this land attracted him. He rejected the offers of becoming the *mahant* of ashrams and offers made by kings to accept their kingdoms and their daughters in marriage. He chose Loj to be his focal point for spreading *bhagwat dharma*. That was why he wished to come to Loj. The place was inhabited by souls who were simple, but pure by heart. Everything he was looking for was present in Loj. Varni was delighted on entering the lands.

Nilkanth set foot on the soil of Loj on August 21st, 1799, dawn was spreading its wings. The village women were going to the stepwell to fill their clay pots with drinking water. Nilkanth had already finished his ablutions by the time the women had arrived. He was sitting in deep meditation on a slab stone beneath a tree by the bank of the well. Nilkanth's divine *Murti* enchanted all those who came to the village well. In fact, in a short period of time, Nilkanth had become the talk of the town. Amidst this commotion, a Sadhu by the name of Sukhanand Swami came to fetch water from the step well. As he filled the water pots for use at the village *ashram*, he started to climb the steps making his way back to the *ashram*.

His eyes casually caught sight of the emaciated frame of the young celibate's *Murti* lost in meditation under the tree. Sukhanand Swami found it impossible to retract his eyes and the rest of his senses from the young celibate's *Murti*.

Sukhanand Swami walked over and waited until Nilkanth's meditation had ended. Then, he bowed humbly and a series of questions spurt forth. "Who are you? Where are you from? Where are you traveling to? Who are your parents? Where are you staying in Loj? If it is not too much to ask, would you be kind enough to grace our *ashram*?"

Nilkanth answered Sukhanand Swami's questions in the order in which they were asked, "I am from a land beyond the clasp of *maya*. *Akshardham* is where I live. I travel to liberate *jivas*. I only choose to stay with my true *bhaktas*."

Sukhanand Swami was bewildered by the young *yogi*'s answers. As a result, Nilkanth decided to speak in terms familiar to the Sadhu. Nilkanth gently said, "If you are asking of my birth and identity of this world, I was born in a small village near Ayodhya called Chhapaiya. My parents were Hariprasad Pande and Bala *Devi*. I traveled across the subcontinent by navigating through forests, wading rivers, and meditating under trees. They call me Nilkanth Varni. Wherever I go, I ask the wise to answer a single question. I wish to stay for a long period of time in a place where my question regarding the five eternal elements is answered. My question is: What is *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *brahma*, and

Parabrahma? I have yet to find anyone capable of answering my question.”

Therefore, Sukhanand Swami replied, “I am not sure that I can answer your question, Nilkanth. Though my *guru* Ramanand Swami is in *Kutch*, his senior disciple Muktanand Swami will be able to answer your question. Please grace our *ashram*.”

Nilkanth was pleased with Sukhanand Swami’s honesty and genuine reverence. He gestured for Sukhanand Swami to lead the way.

3.2 Meeting Muktanand Swami

Nilkanth and Sukhanand Swami arrived at the *ashram*. Sukhanand Swami’s joy knew no bounds while he introduced Muktanand Swami to Nilkanth. His enthusiasm was seen in his stride. At the gate of the *ashram*, Varni saw a Sadhu who was the personification of gentleness. Nilkanth saw in his eyes the love that could fill the entire universe. His personality proclaimed austerity and renunciation of the highest order. The glow on Swami’s face reflected his observance of *brahmacharya*. Muktanand Swami held Varni’s hand with affection and brought him inside. Varni saw true saintliness which he had never seen in any of the Sadhus he had come across during his travels. Then, Sukhanand Swami told Muktanand Swami, “Swamiji, I met this Nilkanth at the well. His divine glow attracted me. All my worldly desires

dissolved. My senses started drawing inwards. I experienced great bliss, so I brought him here.”

“It is our duty to honor our guests, but this Varni is not a mere guest. He is one endowed with great spiritual powers. Today, our *ashram* has been sanctified!” Muktanand Swami replied.

After that, Nilkanth spoke briefly about his wanderings and of the absence of saintly virtues among most of the Sadhus He had met. Meanwhile, the other Sadhus of the *ashram* started arriving there for Nilkanth’s *darshan*. They were all attracted by the divinity of the young *Brahmachari*. Nilkanth said, “Swamiji! After seeing your *ashram* and the Sadhus, my mind experience great peace.” Muktanand Swami said, “Varni! Please do not hesitate. Say whatever is in your mind.”

Nilkanth said, “Wherever I have gone I have asked questions about spiritual knowledge and its principles. But I have not met anybody who has true knowledge of philosophy.” My questions are not difficult, but they are essential for the understanding of the principles of philosophical knowledge and implementing them in life to attain *moksha*. Swami! What is *jiva*? What is *ishwar*? What is *maya*? What is *brahma*? And finally, what is *Parabrahma*?”

After hearing the questions, Muktanand Swami was lost in thought. The questions appeared to be very profound. But he had discussed these questions with Ramanand Swami on

several occasions. “The fact that at such a young age you can ask such deep questions shows your greatness. If my answers satisfy you, I shall consider it my good fortune,” replied Muktanand Swami.

“The *jiva* is subtle like an atom, eternal, indestructible, has no parts, is formless, and enters a physical body that is gross, subtle, and causal. It is the embodiment and receptacle of knowledge. It pervades the gross body by its ordinary power. It is in bondage because of mundane desires due to past impressions *jivas* are innumerable.”

“*Ishwar* has a subtle, gross, and causal body. It has the powers of creation, sustenance, and destruction in its designated universe. They are higher than the *jivas* in the metaphysical hierarchy but are still bound by *maya*. These *ishwars*, through the powers manifested in them by *brahma* and *Parabrahma*, help govern the universe and the forces of creation. There are numerous *ishwars*.”

“*Maya* is the power of *Paramatma*. It is responsible for creating in *jivas*, the links of I-ness and My-ness with its body and bodily relations. It has modes of *sattvagun*, *rajogun*, and *tamogun*. It is eternal. *Paramatma*, through his power of *maya*, creates, sustains and destroys worlds and universes.”

“*Brahma* is Purna *Purushottam*’s divine abode. It is the cause and controller of the three elements mentioned above through the power vested in it by *Parabrahma*. *Brahma* is

above *maya*. *Brahma* forever remains humble and obedient to *Parabrahma*. Infinite liberated souls (*Mukto*) reside in *Brahma*. It has both a form and is also formless. With a form, it is so colossal that countless universes float in every pore of its body. When it is formless, it is subtler than the atom. It has an eternal and undivided bond with *Parabrahma*.”

“*Parabrahma* or *Purushottam* is the Lord of *Akshardham*. He is the soul of *Aksharbrahma*, the cause of all causes, including that of *Aksharbrahma*, and is one that eternally possesses a form. He is one and unique. He is worthy of being worshipped with the highest form of devotion. Knowing Him, one can rid the constant cycle of birth and death and attain ultimate liberation.”

With great joy, Nilkanth commented, “Splendid Muktanandji! You have given the exact description of the natures of *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *brahma* and *Parabrahma*. I had asked these questions to many, but they did not believe that *jiva* and *ishwar* are different entities. They also believed that *brahma* and *Parabrahma* are one and the same. Some said that God is formless. Everyone found it difficult to answer these subtle questions. This knowledge you have realized reflects the grace of your *guru* Ramanand Swami upon you.”

Muktanand Swami added, “What I have explained to you is what my *guru* Ramanand Swami has taught me.” After this, Nilkanth appeared to be slightly uneasy. Muktanand Swami queried why Nilkanth had become restless. Nilkanth

said, “I am eager to meet Ramanand Swami who is such a great *guru*.” He said, “Varni knowing your eagerness to meet him, Ramanand Swami will return soon.” Nilkanth was very eager and wanted to travel to *Kutch*. Hearing these words saddened Muktanand Swami. Swami wanted to retain the divine *yogi* as much as possible in the *ashram*. Understanding Muktanand Swami’s sentiments, Nilkanth decided to wait for Ramanand Swami’s arrival.

Then Nilkanth remarked, “Swamiji! My mind is attracted to none other than God.” On hearing this, Muktanand Swami replied, “Nilkanth, there is no difference between Ramanand Swami and God. They have a keen oneness with one another. God has manifested through Ramanand Swami to redeem souls.” Nilkanth saw Muktanand Swami’s true *guru bhakti* for Ramanand Swami. Humbly respecting Muktanand Swami, Nilkanth commented, “Always shower your grace upon me. Whenever you feel it is appropriate to tell me, teach me and treat me accordingly.”

After this, Nilkanth requested Muktanand Swami to describe to him the glory of Ramanand Swami. Muktanand Swami shared the background and greatness of *guru* Ramanand Swami for an extended period.

3.3 Changes Around the Ashram

On the third day after Nilkanth’s arrival, the entire village gathered to celebrate Janmashtami, the birth of Shri

Krishna. Amidst the sounds of the festivities, everyone’s eyes were fixed on the small cradle in which Shri Krishna’s *Murti* swayed back and forth. To everyone’s surprise, in the place of the *Murti* everyone saw Nilkanth’s form! The Sadhus and devotees were astonished upon seeing such a sight. Muktanand Swami’s eyes shifted to where Nilkanth was seated. He realized only *Bhagwan* could give *darshan* in two forms at once.

The next day, Nilkanth walked around the *ashram* making mental notes of the changes he wished to propose. Most of the recommendations were related to the ideals of male-female interaction for the lay devotees and eight-fold *brahmacharya* for the ascetics. Nilkanth was *Parabrahma*, and he saw no difference between genders. But, to establish the purest form of *bhakti* and *ekantik dharma*. He wanted to set clear the parameters for worship in the religious space. Nilkanth noticed that men and women prayed and participated in rituals together in the *ashram*’s maunder. According to Nilkanth, this was unacceptable. As was his practice, Muktanand Swami would go to Jivraj Sheth’s compound adjacent to the maunder to deliver his daily discourses. Upon going to the assembly, the young *Brahmachari* felt ill on seeing an assembly in which men and women sat together. He stood up to leave when the discourse was about to reach its climax. Muktanand Swami inquired to Varni what had happened. Nilkanth explained, “After renouncing the world,

sitting with women, to discourse to them or to listen with them creates a lapse in a renunciant's character. The practice of eight-fold brahmacharya is hindered by the contact of women. Sadhus should not touch, see, or speak to women. This has been ordained by the *Shastras*." Everybody lost their power of concentration in the assembly. Muktanand Swami was greatly surprised.

Later on, Nilkanth used examples cited in the Upanishads and Puranas to continue proposing to Muktanand Swami the need for separation of genders inside the *ashram*. Though Muktanand Swami was reluctant at first, he immediately agreed after noticing that the other Sadhus and devotees understood Nilkanth's prerogative. Nilkanth separated and instructed males and females to sit differently in their respects.

While visiting the different parts of the *ashram*, Nilkanth came upon the *ashram*'s kitchen. There, he spotted a small outlet in the wall and inquired what it was for. One of the Sadhus explained, "Often when the fire dwindles out in our kitchen, we borrow embers from the ladies next door to save time when relighting the fire. They are kind and generous. They oblige our requests for burning coal or embers immediately." This distracted the young *Brahmachari*. He sent for Muktanand Swami and said, "The hole in the wall will one day breach the Sadhu's *dharma*. It is not proper for Sadhus to have such contact with women." Saying this, Nilkanth did not wait for Muktanand Swami's order, but he got some bricks

and lime and covered the outlet himself. Nilkanth's resolve for *brahmacharya* pleased Muktanand Swami and the other Sadhus. The *ashram* residents started to appreciate Nilkanth and his ways. Nilkanth was inclined towards doing physical services. No work was too small for him.

3.4 An Ideal Aspirant Is an Ideal Sevak

Nilkanth settled into a routine at the *ashram*; a routine filled with *bhakti* and *seva*. Even though Nilkanth was the Supreme Lord Himself, he spent his days demonstrating the life of an ideal aspirant. He would wake up before everyone else and finish his *puja* and meditate. Besides, he would also fetch water from the well and carry the heavy vessels on his head. He washed the Sadhus' clothes and helped the elderly bathe. He swept the entire campus, sprinkled water on the dirt paths, and picked flowers for the deity's garlands. The energy and meticulous care he infused in every *seva* changed the *ashram*'s atmosphere in a few days. Nilkanth's work ethic set an example for other Sadhus. He picked *sevas* that other Sadhus were quick to avoid: collecting cow dung patties from the village paths, washing the cooking vessels and gathering dry firewood for cooking meals. The Sadhus were amazed by Nilkanth's dedication and passion for doing *seva*. Along with physical *seva*, Nilkanth spent time teaching the Sadhus various *yogic* postures and perfecting their methods of meditation.

In just six short months, Nilkanth transformed the social and spiritual climate of the *ashram* in Loj. He earned the

affection and respect of the Sadhus with his humility and miraculous *lila charitras*. It was clear to the entire village that this young celibate was *Parabrahma*.

3.5 The Letter to Ramanand Swami

Nilkanth Varni and Muktanand Swami had developed a deep friendship based on mutual respect in the short time they had spent together. Nilkanth had become eager to have *darshan* of Ramanand Swami. Nilkanth often begged Muktanand Swami to let him set out to find Ramanand Swami. Muktanand Swami would appease by saying, “Swami will come soon, be patient. The fruit of *darshan* will be sweeter if you follow Ramanand Swami’s command and wait for him at the *ashram*.” Seven months passed. Nilkanth became restless. He felt parched by the separation from his *guru*. Muktanand Swami resolved to write a letter to his *guru*. The letter urged Ramanand Swami to return to the *ashram*. It described young Nilkanth’s traits and deeds from the moment he set foot in the *ashram*. Muktanand Swami also recommended to Nilkanth to write his own letter to Ramanand Swami. Nilkanth obliged and wrote a letter to *guru* Ramanand Swami describing his trip across the Indian subcontinent. He listed the various pilgrimage places he visited along with the ascetics he met. Nilkanth implored for Ramanand Swami to return and help him to have the *darshan* of *Bhagwan*. He concluded by asking for a reply back after reading the letter.

When Mayaram Bhatt delivered the letter to Ramanand

Swami in *Kutch*, he read the letter and closed his eyes to have Nilkanth’s *darshan*. He then addressed the assembly, “I have been waiting for the arrival of this young *yogi* for many years. Though most of you believe me to be God, the reality is that I am merely the prologue. Nilkanth is *Bhagwan* Himself.” Ramanand Swami spent the rest of the day extolling Nilkanth’s virtues. When Mayaram was about to leave for Loj, Ramanand Swami commanded him to tell young Nilkanth, “If he is eager to stay in *satsang* then he should be prepared to embrace a pillar.”

After a few days, Mayaram Bhatt arrived at Loj with Ramanand Swami’s message. After paying respects to Nilkanth Varni, Mayaram Bhatt delivered the message. Nilkanth immediately rushed towards the pillar in the *ashram mandir* and embraced it dearly. Mayaram smiled and retorted, “Nilkanth Varni, Ramanand Swami is speaking of a pillar-like idol within our *satsang*. Muktanand Swami’s maturity and saintliness suggest such pillar-like stability.” Hearing such, Nilkanth let goad of the pillar and prostrated to Muktanand Swami. Swami stopped Nilkanth and tightly embraced the young *yogi*.

3.6 Nilkanth Becomes Sarjudas

Nilkanth’s stay at the *ashram* led a distinct improvement in the level of moral and spiritual observance amongst the Sadhus. To make him stay with them, Muktanand Swami told him one day, “Varni! Since you are staying with us in the

ashram, by order of *guru* Ramanand Swami, you should dress like us.”

Nilkanth at once said, “I will do whatever pleases you.” The next day Varni was given two garments to cover his upper body and a long garment for his lower body. Muktanand Swami told him, “From today you will be called Sarjudas as you have come from a place where the Saryu River flows!” Now the villagers and Sadhus began to call Nilkanth as Sarjudas. He soon became the favorite of the crowd. Sarjudas displayed miraculous feats, which proved his greatness. At once he carried 360kg of cucumbers four inches above his head in a big bundle from the village Shil to Loj. All were amazed and wonderstruck by this feat as the distance between the two neighboring villages is six miles. Sarjudas also displayed his compassionate nature by feeding the needy by serving in almshouses. Nevertheless, his inclination to please and serve *Brahmins* was one of a kind. Sarjudas set an example for saints and devotees through His pure character.

3.7 Meeting His Guru

Sarjudas had a strong desire for Ramanand Swami’s *darshan*. He had already spent seven months at the *ashram* and was getting restive. Muktanand Swami believed Sarjudas’ personality to be so divine that the *jivas* who would come in contact with him would be redeemed. Therefore, he must be retained at the *ashram* in any manner. His words and his conduct would revive the noble virtues in the Sadhus which

were wane. Nine months had passed since Sarjudas had arrived in Loj. Muktanand Swami could see traces of sadness on Sarjudas’ face. Muktanand Swami knew Ramanand Swami would take some more time in coming to Sorath and thus he felt helpless. After thinking for some time, he said, “Sarjudas! The *guru* is not bound by time or place. He might have stayed somewhere to fulfill a devotee’s wish or he might be putting your eagerness to the test.” As time went by, one evening, Kurji Dave brought a message from Piplana. The mood in the *ashram* at that time was contemplative and serene. Kurji headed straight for Muktanand Swami’s quarters. Kurji bowed to Muktanand Swami and tried to contain his excitement as he delivered the joyous news that Ramanand Swami has finally returned from *Kutch*. He is in the neighboring village of Piplana. He has given everybody permission to come to Piplana for his *darshan*. Kurji looked at Sarjudas and said, “He is especially eager to see you.” The news spread across the *ashram* quickly. The forthcoming trip to Piplana was a jubilant occasion. The entire *ashram* began preparing for the journey. Muktanand Swami and Sarjudas set out for Piplana with the *ashram*’s Sadhus. Sarjudas was weak and thus lagged behind the rest of the group, which worried Muktanand Swami. Muktanand Swami had Sarjudas carried by a broadly built Sadhu, but he also became tired.

Sarjudas displayed his *yogic* powers by adding more weight to his body. Muktanand Swami noticed and told

Sarjudas to become serious due to the distance they had to cover. Hearing this, in result, Sarjudas shed his fatigue and employed his *yogic* powers and shot on his way as speedily as an arrow discharged from a bow. The band continued towards Piplana with Sarjudas now in front. Sarjudas soon arrived on the banks of the Ojat River, followed by the group not too far behind. The water was highly unpredictable, and the only way to get across was with the help of a boat. The boat driver told Sarjudas that he will not be able to take the boat right now due to turbulent waters. He will have to wait until morning. Sarjudas was in no mood to wait. He plunged into the waters and started swimming. Using His supernatural powers, He swam across the turbulent river with ease. The remaining members of the group spent the night at the river bank and waited for the waters to calm. The next morning, they crossed the river and came to the outskirts of the village. There they found Sarjudas meditating under a tree patiently waiting for them. Together they walked at Narsinh Mehta's home in Piplana. From that moment onwards, June 18th, 1800 became an auspicious and memorable day to be marked in the calendar. Sarjudas, whom *guru* Ramanand Swami considered as God and as the vital element in *satsang* had arrived in Piplana. At the moment, Ramanand Swami was seated in a congregation with many devotees.

Someone gave news that the group of Sadhus had entered Piplana. Ramanand Swami came down from his seat and was

eager to meet them. Soon, the group came into view. Sarjudas was in the head of the group. On seeing Ramanand Swami standing by his seat, Sarjudas started prostrating from a distance. Ramanand Swami came running towards him, lifted him lovingly and embraced him. The great love and sentiment he had for Sarjudas were evident from his eyes. He could not remove his gaze from the young *yogi's* *Murti*. Soon after, he received the salutations of Muktanand Swami and other Sadhus and put his hands on their heads in a sign of benediction. Then, Ramanand Swami asked about Sarjudas' travels and experiences. After nine long months of separation, the *guru* and his disciple finally met. Ramanand Swami ordered the other Sadhus to return to Loj but allowed young Sarjudas to join him while he traveled through the neighboring villages.

3.8 Bhagvati Diksha: Sahajanand Swami

Prabodhini *Ekadashi* (October 28th, 1800) was not far off. During his travels, throughout mother India, Sarjudas did not find a single place to settle down, until now. Here, there was *dharma*, saintliness, and attributes required for liberation. The Sadhus here were ever desirous of seeking the true path. The devotees were genuinely eager to attain *moksha*. Everybody's moral conduct was within limits prescribed by the *Shastras*. Elsewhere, Sarjudas had seen fake *dharma* and fraudulent practices. He witnessed true religion being practiced by the Sadhus of Ramanand Swami and thus,

Sarjudas decided to take *Bhagvati Diksha* from guru Ramanand Swami.

It was a glorious morning on the auspicious day of Kartik Shukla Prabodhini *Ekadashi*. Ramanand Swami was ready to give Sarjudas what he desired. The ceremony took place in Piplana by the accords of Narsinh Mehta. Hundreds of devotees came to attend the grand event from all over Gujarat. Ramanand Swami supervised the preparations and made sure that all went according to plan. Ramanand Swami soon started the procedure to administer *Bhagvati Diksha* to Sarjudas. He first gave the young *Brahmachari* white clothes. Ramanand Swami sat next to Sarjudas as the *Brahmins* chanted verses from all four *Vedas*. He applied a *tilak* on Sarjudas's forehead and whispered the *guru mantra* into his ear. In this way, after administering *Bhagvati Diksha*, Ramanand Swami completed the name – giving ceremony. He gave two names to Sarjudas, 'Sahajanand Swami' and 'Narayan Muni'.

After the ceremony was over Sarjudas got up, prostrated before Ramanand Swami and touched his feet. He also touched the feet of Muktanand Swami and the other Sadhus. Ramanand Swami and Sahajanand Swami spent the next few months in Loj. Ramanand Swami was worried about his disciple's health. Sahajanand Swami was merely skin and bones. In result, Ramanand Swami ordered the Sadhus to prepare nutritious meals and to feed Sahajanand Swami three times a day. Often, Ramanand Swami would feed his dear

disciple with his own hands.

In assemblies, Ramanand Swami praised Sahajanand Swami to the skies. He told everyone, "I have been saying I am only a drum-beater, the director of the play will come later. I have sounded the drum and collected all of you together. Now, this Narayan Muni will help you attain *ekantik dharma*."

However, Raghunathdas, one of Ramanand Swami's disciples, was envious of the young Sadhu. He started to insult and speak poorly about his *guru* and Sahajanand Swami. Raghunathdas thought, "What has Sahajanand done to deserve so much attention? Ramanand Swami is old and senile, has he lost all sense of his *dharma*. We don't even know where this boy is from. It's possible he may have run away from home after committing some major crime."

When word reached Ramanand Swami, he laughed off Raghunathdas' foolishness and said, "This Sahajanand Swami is *Bhagwan*."

The other Sadhus came to realize the place Sahajanand Swami had secured in his *guru*'s heart in just a few short months. Ramanand Swami took Sahajanand Swami with him as he toured Saurashtra for the next twelve months.



Head of the Holy Fellowship



Ramanand Swami looked towards Sahajanand Swami and said, “In the eyes of the world I am your guru. I have established this Uddhav Sampraday. However, today I have handed over the reins of the fellowship to you. So, protect it, preserve it, and inspire dharma, bhakti, gnan and vairagya in everyone’s hearts.”

4.1 Unanimous Decision

The day after Sharad Purnima celebrations, Ramanand Swami organized a meeting with all of his senior disciples. In this meeting, Ramanand Swami expressed his desire to transfer the leadership of the *sampraday* to one of his disciples. He posed the question to the group, “Who do you think is worthy of assuming the responsibility as the successor after myself?”

Muktanand Swami and the rest of the disciples answered unanimously, “Swami! only Sahajanand Swami is worthy of becoming our successor as the *guru* for all of us.” Ramanand Swami was overjoyed because his disciples accepted his proposal before he had even presented it. Ramanand Swami observed all the virtues necessary for a spiritual leader in Sahajanand Swami.

Sahajanand Swami posed the traits of trust, purity, compassion, forgiveness, austerity, and humility. However, there was one significant person who needed to be convinced: Sahajanand Swami Himself. Ramanand Swami entrusted Muktanand Swami with this task. Later that afternoon, Muktanand Swami approached Sahajanand Swami. As usual, Muktanand Swami had the inclination to talk about *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan*, and *vairagya*; however, today the look on Muktanand Swami’s face displayed a different topic of conversation. Muktanand Swami started off slowly and tactfully, “Sarjudas, I knew from the day you set foot in our *ashram* that you came with a purpose. You are not an ordinary

Sadhu. You are our *guru*'s preeminent and favored disciple. Today, my prophecy comes true. Ramanand Swami has selected you as his heir. You will be given the responsibility of maintaining and nurturing the *satsang* community. You will become a *guru*."

Sahajanand Swami was devastated, "Swami, you know that I have not come here to become a *guru*. You promised me that we would leave for the forest once I received *diksha* from Ramanand Swami. What are we waiting for? Let's go! I do not want to be a *guru*."

Muktanand Swami talked to Sahajanand Swami for several hours and finally brought the young heir apparent to Ramanand Swami. Ramanand Swami was overjoyed to see them together. Sahajanand Swami prostrated at his *guru*'s feet and pleaded, "I have not come here to be a *guru*. I know that power corrupts one's heart and mind. I do not want to fall prey of it. Please spare me. Allow me to retire to the forest and resume my life as a wandering ascetic."

After many attempts, Ramanand Swami finally folded his hands and started to beg. He pleaded, "Oh *Parabrahma*, nothing can taint your character. You are above *maya*. You should stop acting as if you are a human. The time has come to show the world your true greatness."

Seeing his *guru* perform such an act, Sahajanand immediately complied with the *agna*. Sahajanand Swami's

acceptance of becoming a *guru* was a joyous and momentous occasion, worthy of a grand celebration. On the auspicious day of November 16th, 1801, Sahajanand Swami was handed the reins of the holy fellowship by Ramanand Swami, in Jetpur. A special *abhishek* ritual was performed in the Bhadra River by Ramanand Swami to ensure his successor. Sahajanand was brought back to the village where an enormous tent housed thousands of devotees and villagers in attendance. Sahajanand Swami and Ramanand Swami sat before the *yagna* kund. The *Brahmins* performed the preliminary rites. After the ritual was over, Ramanand Swami sat on the throne, the whole atmosphere reverberated to the shouts of 'Sahajanand Swami Maharaj ni Jay.'

4.2 Sahajanand's Two Boons

After that, Ramanand Swami performed the *aarti* of Sahajanand Swami and turned to address the audience, "Sadhus and devotees, today is a blessed day for me. He, whom I had been waiting for, and at whose order I had taken up this responsibility, that *Purushottam* Narayan, Lord of *Akshardham*, has personally come here. That is why I have decided to give back his work to him. I have told you all repeatedly that, 'I am only a drum-beater and the chief player will come later.' Today, He has come to establish *bhagwat dharma* on this Earth, and to redeem countless souls and entitle them to *Akshardham*. In the form of Sahajanand Swami, the lord of *Akshardham* is seated resplendently before us. You

should recognize his true form and develop staunch faith in him.”

After saying this, Ramanand Swami looked towards Sahajanand Swami and said, “Today in the eyes of the world I am your *guru*. I have established this Uddhav *Sampraday*. However, today I have handed over the reins of the fellowship to you. So, protect it, preserve it, and inspire *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan*, and *vairagya* in everyone’s hearts. Whoever comes into contact with you, do good to him, regardless of whether he is knowledgeable or ignorant, deserving or undeserving.”

After the oration, Ramanand Swami returned to his seat. He once again addressed Sahajanand Swami, “I feel greatly pleased because you have accepted this position at my request. You followed my *agna* against your own will. There is nothing in this world which I can offer to you. Yet, I feel I should give you something on this occasion. Ask and you shall receive.” Sahajanand Swami folded his hands and bowed his head in reverence to his *guru* and all those seated in the assembly. He asked for two boons which exemplified his selflessness and set an example for all spiritual leaders to come. He requested, “If my devotee is to suffer from a misery that is comparable to the sting of a scorpion, please give me the boon that I may suffer the misery of millions of scorpion stings in each of my pores whereas your disciples remain unaffected. Moreover, if the begging bowl is written in the fate of your disciple, may that begging bowl come to me; but

on no account should your disciple suffer for want of food or clothing.”

Sahajanand Swami petitioned responsibly. As his first step as a leader, he placed his disciples’ needs before his own. Sahajanand Swami asked for the security of all those who sought refuge in him. Ramanand Swami’s eyes welled up with tears of joy. He had made the right choice, Ramanand Swami and the newly appointed *guru* walked to the edge of the stage and sat down so that devotees could offer their respects and *dakshina* to Sahajanand Swami. Each devotee passed by donating land, grains, cattle, or gold to their newly appointed leader.

Ramanand Swami was content on handing over the reins of the *sampraday* to Sahajanand Swami. Thereafter, he displayed disinterest in staying on Earth. His last wish had been fulfilled on that day and in commemoration of that, a grand procession had been organized to express the joy of one and all.

4.3 Handing Over the Reins

Ramanand Swami’s mind was at peace. He had completed his task of introducing *Parabrahma* to his devotees. Ramanand Swami was convinced of the divinity and glory of Sahajanand Swami, but the same could not be said of his senior disciples. What appeared certain to the *guru* was doubted by the disciples. But, Ramanand Swami felt that all doubts about

Sahajanand Swami would be resolved over time.

He summoned Muktanand Swami to his room to ask him for a favor. “Muktmuni, I am getting old. My body will not go like this for much longer. Now that I have handed over the reins of the spiritual empire to Sahajanand Swami, I wish to leave this body. I need you to promise that you will look after Sahajanand Swami. Try to understand his likes and dislikes. Always act accordingly. Remember, he may look like you and I, but he is not a mere *jiva* or *ishwar*. Take care of him for the *sampraday*’s sake.” Muktanand Swami nodded his head in compliance. He promised his *guru* that he would forever remain unwavering in his service to Sahajanand Swami. Then, he called upon Mukund *Brahmachari*. As a senior disciple of Ramanand Swami, Mukund *Brahmachari* was commanded to serve Sahajanand Swami’s every need and be his shadow. Mukund *Brahmachari* also accepted his *guru*’s final command.

After everything had settled down, Ramanand Swami decided to go to the village of Faneni for his last journey. Ramanand Swami’s decision to depart was unalterable. He told Sahajanand Swami to accompany him. Muktanand Swami and other saints also joined. The devotees of Jetpur came to bid them farewell till the outskirts of the village. Little did they realize that it was to be their last *darshan* of Ramanand Swami.

4.4 Ramanand Swami’s Departure

In Faneni, Ramanand Swami called a final assembly before his departure. The mood was solemn, and everyone paid close attention to their *guru*’s last wishes. “All of you have served me dearly. From this day onwards, follow Sahajanand Swami’s commands as if they are my own. He will bless you dearly. His blessings will yield more than mine ever have. You are a few of the handpicked *jivas* that will have the fortune of serving the manifest form of God. Take advantage of this opportunity. He will establish *ekantik dharma*. His fame will spread far and wide.

Furthermore, nobody stays on this Earth forever. This world we live in, death is certain. I too have to shed my body. I am leaving Sahajanand to protect you all.” These words of Ramanand Swami struck everyone like a lightning bolt. Ramanand Swami had once again announced his resolve to leave this mortal world.

The next day, Ramanand Swami caught a fever. Despite the medicines given to him, the fever did not subside. In the next few days, he lost his appetite. This weakened him further. Everyone prayed for his recovery, but his condition deteriorated day by day. On December 17th, 1801, Ramanand Swami got up in the morning and completed his ablutions. It was to be his last day on Earth. Before the time of his Earthly departure, Ramanand Swami got down from his seat and sat on the floor. He crossed his legs in *padmasana*, and he

prepared to leave his mortal body. Ramanand Swami retracted his breath, stopped his pulse, and independently left his mortal body for *Akshardham*. The room was filled with divine light. Upon realizing what had happened, everyone deeply mourned for Ramanand Swami's demise.

Sahajanand Swami performed Ramanand Swami's cremation rites and comforted the *satsang* community. Though there was a sense of loss surrounding Ramanand Swami's departure, the feeling was alleviated by Sahajanand Swami's presence which assured the Sadhus and devotees of the bright days that laid ahead.



Divine Chapters of Samadhi



“From this moment onwards, you will only recite the ‘Swaminarayan’ mahamantra during all spiritual and daily activities. Sahajanand Swami closed his eyes and loudly chanted; engaging the sabha to do the same, Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's incarnation on Earth is remembered today through His work to eradicate the base desires and worldly attachments of his followers. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan destroyed the layer of ignorance that enveloped the *jiva*; and released from the clutches of *maya* and sent it to *Akshardham*. After Sadguru Ramanand Swami's demise, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan used *samadhi*. These *samadhis* helped the *jivas* understand the reality of the *atma*, *Akshardham* and *Parabrahma*. *Samadhi* helps a spiritual aspirant recognize the truths concerning one's own and *Bhagwan*'s form in a matter of seconds, a task which can take a lifetime or even more. *Samadhi* is the last step of *ashtang-yoga*. There a total of eight-step to complete this yoga and become a master at it. Under ordinary circumstances, it is impossible for an aspirant to enter *samadhi* without passing through the other seven stages. However, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's grace, the aspirant may immediately experience *samadhi*, allowing him to relish in the bliss of *Parabrahma* in *Akshardham*. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan viewed *samadhi* as the best medium to spread knowledge of the *atma* and *Paramatma* to a large number of aspirants in a short period. It was a blessing granted by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan to his devotees. Spreading *ekantik dharma* through *samadhi* by chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* was one of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's redemptive *lila charitras*.

5.1 The Swaminarayan Mahamantra

After completing the 13th-day rituals commemorating Ramanand Swami's life on Earth, Sahajanand Swami organized the first official *sabha* after his *guru*'s return to *Akshardham*. Thousands of devotees sat spellbound by Maharaj's *Murti*, waiting patiently for him to share his first words of blessing. It was December 31st, 1801 in the village of Faneni. Sahajanand Swami spoke with a confident yet gentle demeanor, "Whosoever wishes to earn the merit of my blessings should follow the *dharma* prescribed in the *Shastras*. It is therefore essential to follow *Bhagwan*'s *agna* and adhere to the path of *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan*, and *vairagya*. Today I want to introduce you all to a new *mantra*. It is a *mantra* that contains the essence of all other *mantras*. Therefore, it is not just a *mantra*, understand it to be a *mahamantra*.

By chanting this *mahamantra*, one will be able to overcome any sort of physical, mental or environmental calamity. It will ward away evil spirits, remove superstitious beliefs, and give all who chant the courage to face difficulties in their life. It possesses the power to liberate souls from the cycle of life and death. It is the only *mantra* which can fulfill all your mind's wishes and desires. From this moment onwards, you will only recite the 'Swaminarayan' *mahamantra* during all spiritual and daily activities. Sahajanand Swami closed his eyes and loudly chanted; engaging the *sabha* to do the same, "Swaminarayan,

Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...”

The devotees followed his cue and started to recite the *mahamantra* in a rhythmic pattern. All those present in the assembly were drawn towards Sahajanand Swami. They soon overcame their grief. They performed his *pujan* and placed many gifts at his feet. From that day onwards, people started calling Sahajanand Swami by the beloved name of Shriji Maharaj, and Shri Hari.

Seated amidst the assembly was a *Brahmin* pilgrim named Shitaldas. He was disappointed to see that his aged *guru*, Ramanand Swami, had passed away. He started lamenting his fate. He was debating whether to stay with Shriji Maharaj or to continue on his pilgrimage. Shriji Maharaj lovingly called him out and said, “Stay here for today. I will arrange for the *darshan* of Ramanand Swami. If you wish, you can leave tomorrow.”

Shitaldas agreed to stay. That day Shriji Maharaj asked him to chant the Swaminarayan *mantra*. After a brief moment of chanting, he entered into *samadhi*. The entire *sabha* watched Shitaldas close his eyes as his body tipped over on its side. They speculated about what may have caused him to lose consciousness. Shitaldas had the vision of *Akshardham*. In fact, he witnessed the brilliance of millions of suns, yet it felt cool. He saw Ramanand Swami on the side offering prayers to a central figure. As he moved closer, he realized that the idol being worshipped was none other than Shriji

Maharaj. He had an urge to perform the *pujan* of Shriji Maharaj and all the *Mukto*, but he was caught in a dilemma. How was he to offer *pujan* of Shriji Maharaj and all the countless *Mukto*. Shriji Maharaj read his mind and said, “Shitaldas, why don’t you select any one of these *avatars* and believe them to be *Parabrahma*. If your belief is true, you will be able to manifest in infinite forms and offer *pujan* to all of us.”

Shitaldas immediately closed his eyes and prayed to each of the *avatars* and Ramanand Swami considering them as *Parabrahma*. However, nothing happened. As a consequence, Shitaldas became disappointed. Shriji Maharaj smiled and suggested, “Now believe me to be *Parabrahma* and let us see what happens.”

Shitaldas obliged, and as he prayed with the consideration that Shriji Maharaj is *Parabrahma*, he manifested into infinite forms and seizing the opportunity, he offered *pujan* to Shriji Maharaj, Ramanand Swami, the *avatars*, and to all the countless *Mukto* at the same time. Ramanand Swami turned to Shitaldas and advised him, “All the *avatars* are present within this Sahajanand Swami. He is the *avatari* of all *avatars* and the cause of all. He is the supreme lord of lords. Always follow his commands. I, too, follow his orders. When you return from *samadhi*, be sure to share your experiences with the assembly.”

Shitaldas returned to his mortal body to find everyone

leaning over him. He stood up and described what he saw in *Akshardham*. The assembly was startled. The assembly started to chant the *mahamantra*, and in mere moments, Shriji Maharaj compassionately sent the entire assembly into *samadhi*. For several minutes, all of the followers enjoyed the same bliss and joy that Shitaldas had experienced in *Akshardham*. Shriji Maharaj gently snapped his fingers and brought everyone back to consciousness.

Shitaldas was captivated by this experience. He asked Shriji Maharaj to initiate him as a Sadhu. Shriji Maharaj agreed and Shitaldas became the very first initiated Sadhu in the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. He was named Vyapakanand Swami.

5.2 One Saga After Another

Upon returning to Piplana, Shri Hari continued to bless devotees and villagers with various types of *darshan* in *samadhi*. One morning, while bathing in the Ojat River, Shri Hari glanced at Narsinh Mehta's son, Raghunath. With the glance, Raghunath fell over on his side. The villagers gathered around him and tried to revive him, but Raghunath lay on the floor. When Shri Hari revived him, he begged to be sent back to *Akshardham*. He was not interested in spending another second on Earth. Shri Hari smiled and said, "The time will come when you will be able to stay there forever. As of now perform devotion while serving saints and devotees. Make them happy in order to make me happy.

Once, Shri Hari arrived in Agatrai to spend some time at Parvatbhai's house. Parvatbhai was one of Ramanand Swami's senior disciples. He had the inclination of meditation and would do so for hours at a time. Even though he believed Shri Hari to be the rightful successor to Ramanand Swami and he understood Shri Hari to be *Bhagwan*, Parvatbhai often wondered about the forms of other *avatars*. One afternoon, he was speculating about what the Nrusinh *avatar* looked like. As Parvatbhai doodled in his imagination, he slipped into *samadhi* and had *darshan* of all twenty-four *avatars* offering their prayers to Shriji Maharaj. Parvatbhai was overjoyed because Shri Hari had granted his wish.

5.3 Emptying Yamalok

Shriji Maharaj arrived in Kalvani from Agatrai. An assembly of various saints and devotees was present. Within the assembly, Bhimbhai stood up and presented a question to Maharaj, "Maharaj this is the first time you have incarnated on Earth. It is as if a new reign has begun under a new ruler. Even when a worldly ruler takes over the throne, he pardons the criminals and empties the prisons. You are *Bhagwan*, all compassionate, so why not free all of the *jivas* suffering in Yamalok?" Hearing Bhimbhai's plea, Shriji Maharaj called for Swarupanand Swami. Maharaj instructed Swami, "Go to Yamalok and chant the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*, grant salvation to all *jivas* languishing as ghosts and spirits and direct them all to the realm of *Bhumapurush*. Swarupanand

Swami accepted Shri Hari's *agna* and entered into *samadhi*. Swami was moved deeply by the sight of souls suffering in the various pits in hell. As soon as he chanted 'Swaminarayan' all the suffering spirits came out of their existence in hell, attained a divine body and went directly to the realm of *Bhumapurush*. The entire netherworld was transformed into an oasis of tranquility. The *jivas* were freed from its bounds and the cruel attendants of *Yamraja*, the caretaker of Yamalok. *Yamraja* was amazed at this sight. He conveyed his prostrations to Swarupanand Swami and said, "Swamiji, I have never witnessed the liberation of so many *jivas* from Yamalok in such a short time. *Parabrahma* is the only entity capable of changing the fruits of *jiva*'s karma. With his powers, you have accomplished the impossible."

As time passed by, Swarupanand Swami awakened from *samadhi* and narrated everything in detail to the assembly. Hearing this incident, Maharaj commented, "I want to grant salvation to all those who come in contact with Myself, my Sadhus and my devotees." Bhimbhai was amazed to see Maharaj's generosity and desire to grant salvation to all.

5.4 The Nawab's Question

The Muslim Nawab of Mangrol, Vajuruddin Shah, had heard of Shriji Maharaj's *samadhis*. The nawab knew Shriji Maharaj was not an ordinary human being. When he learned that Shri Hari was in the neighboring village of Kalvani, he sent a royal emissary with correspondence, "Grace me by

blessing my royal palace. I would be honored if you celebrated a festival with all of your devotees in my kingdom." Shriji Maharaj, just twenty-two years old, set out for Mangrol with Muktanand Swami and other saints.

Shriji Maharaj's reception in Mangrol was a beautiful sight. Many lavish ornaments, music, horses, elephants, and thousands of people welcomed Maharaj. Shri Hari and the Sadhus settled down in the royal gardens. Anyone that came for Shri Hari's *darshan* would experience *samadhi*. They would lie there for many days until their family members came to take them. Shriji Maharaj would wake them up with a snap of his fingers. The whole village of Mangrol was mesmerized by this feat.

One afternoon, the Nawab invited Shri Hari to his royal palace. He had a series of questions, "Swaminarayan, what is *samadhi*? What is the experience like? Is there any way I can experience it?" As soon as the Nawab finished asking his questions, Shri Hari sent him into *samadhi* where he saw countless *Mukto* and *devas* offering *puja* to Shri Hari's feet. The euphoria of *Akshardham* felt by the Nawab was indescribable. He woke up from *samadhi* and prostrated at Shri Hari's feet. He begged him to stay in Mangrol. "You are *Bhagwan*. There is no other *Bhagwan* but you. Please bless me so that I too may attain *Akshardham*." Shriji Maharaj promised the Nawab to spend more time in Mangrol. He stayed in the town for a month. He celebrated the first Fuldol

celebration in the town's garden. The festival was celebrated with strict adherence to the prohibition of male-female interaction as revived by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

5.5 The Ever-present Murti

After some time, the misconceptions about Shri Hari's *samadhis* had spread. During a certain time period, whenever Shri Hari passed through Mangrol to bathe at the banks of the Tapi River, the townspeople would close their doors and windows. They wanted to avoid being sent into *samadhi* or being blessed with the constant *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj's beautiful *Murti*. Rumors around the city had spread that whosoever saw the figure of Shri Hari once, it would stick to one's eyes and would never leave. The everyday townspeople assumed that it would disrupt their daily schedule. How would they cook? How would they fetch water from the village well? How would they spend time with their loved ones? One such middle-aged woman was careful to lock herself inside her home every morning when she heard the beating of drums and loud chants of 'Sahajanand Swami Maharaj ni Jay' as Maharaj and his entourage passed through the town center. As the sounds faded, she would open her doors and windows and go back to her routine schedule. One morning, as the sounds started to fade, she cracked open one of her windows to get a glimpse at Maharaj. She peeked at Shri Hari who glanced back from the corners of his eyes. She slammed the shutter close, but it was too late. Shri Hari's *Murti* was etched

into her eyes and heart forever. No matter what she did or where she looked, the *Murti* would not go away from her eyes. The lady shared the news with her friends and family, but whoever she told, they thought this to be a curse more than a blessing. They convinced her to plead to Shri Hari to release her from his alleged misery. She went to Shri Hari and begged for mercy. Shri Hari questioned, "Mother are you sure you want this?" The lady nodded in acceptance. Shri Hari advised her to follow the *niyam-dharma* prescribed for Swaminarayan followers and the *Murti* would disappear. The lady started doing *puja* every morning, attending *satsang* assemblies, stopped eating food prohibited for devotees, etc. In a matter of days, the *Murti* disappeared. A few months later, after listening to *katha-varta* and comprehending the greatness of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, she cried with remorse about her foolish request.

5.6 Magniram's Transformation

Magniram was a *Brahmin* from Southern India who had traveled to Bengal in search of a *guru*. There, he heard that a king named Pipa had pleased Goddess Sharda and she had helped him realize God. With the same goal in mind, Magniram set forth on his journey. Although, due to his misfortune, he met a tantric *yogi* that taught him ways of sorcery and pleasing the lower deities to obtain materialistic wealth and destructive power. One day, the tantric commanded Magniram to accept his daughter as a bribe. Magniram was

not interested and wanted to remain a Bramhachari his whole life. He ran away that night to Jagannath Puri leaving his *guru* and the young maiden behind. At Jagannath Puri, he started to display his tantric powers to subdue ascetics, *yogis* and *mahants*. After that, Magniram traveled west from Bengal and arrived in the coastal town of Porbandar where he went to a nearby *ashram* and beat up the *mahant* named Gusaiji. With tears in his eyes, Gusaiji told him, “At present the *Jivanmukta*, Swaminarayan is present on Earth. Thousands of people in Saurashtra believe him to be *Bhagwan*. If you are confident in your powers, try to subdue Sahajanand Swami. If you can conquer him, I will accept your leadership and turn over the assets of the *ashram* to you and your band of mendicants.”

More than his desire for the *ashram*’s assets, Magniram was driven by his ego and enticed by the challenge. He had yet to find someone who proved to be a worthy adversary. He rushed towards Mangrol, where Shriji Maharaj was currently residing. As he reached Mangrol, he camped on the outskirts of the village. He sent one of his followers to the king of Mangrol, Gajefarkhan, and conveyed, “Send me five thousand rupees or else I shall shower stones on your town and burn it down by reciting merely one *mantra*.” King Gajefarkhan replied, “Bawaji, I am prepared to pay ten thousand if you win over *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan with your powers.” The disciple returned empty-handed and told Magniram the whole

story. Blinded by his rage and ego, he came to Shriji Maharaj accompanied by his followers. He roared, “*Jivanmukta*! You are a hoax. If you are actually the real deal, let me see your divine powers. You think you are greater than me? Come face me. Your deception will not work anymore.”

Shriji Maharaj smiled and responded calmly, “I teach my devotees to live a life that is moral and spiritual. I do not exhibit divine powers. I impart knowledge to help lost souls attain *moksha* and teach them to offer devotion to God.”

Upon listening to Shriji Maharaj, Magniram concluded that he was merely an ordinary Sadhu. Threatening Maharaj he asked, “Have you heard of my name? I am the very Magniram that commands Goddesses. Great emperors bow before me. I have mastered tantric powers and have the ability to kill, hypnotize, and paralyze. So, give me ten thousand rupees, or I shall have the entire town drowned in the sea.”

Shriji Maharaj nonchalantly replied, “We have no money. If you want food, we are prepared to serve you with food. If you want to send your Goddesses, you can do so. You can try your powers and black magic. We do not fear anything.”

Magniram, with his blood boiling, returned to the outskirts of the village. He invoked Goddess Sharda, who told him, “With what aim had you left home? Didn’t you wish to attain God? Swaminarayan is superior to *Indra*, Chandra,

Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, and he is the master of all the Gods. He is the acceptor of my worship too. No one can defeat him. Therefore, be humble and seek his patronage. Even I pray to him to liberate me.”

Regardless of being notified by Sharda *Devi*, Magniram grabbed a few grains, muttered a hymn and threw the grains on a large tree. The tree shriveled up into a pile of charred twigs and leaves. The devotees became frightened and turned to Shri Hari expecting a reply. Shri Hari replied, “I will only acknowledge your tantric powers if you can bring the tree back to life.” Magniram’s eyes reddened, and his nostrils flared. Again, Magniram grabbed a handful of grains, muttered some hymns, and this time targeted Shriji Maharaj. To his surprise, Shri Hari was untouched. Shri Hari smiled and taunted, “Is there anything else you would like to try?”

Magniram realized the grave sin he had committed: he was trying to challenge the ruler of the entire universe. He fell to Maharaj’s feet. After prostrating to Maharaj, he asked for forgiveness. Shri Hari assured him, “We all make mistakes. I know you left home in search of God. You have found him. Go home and follow the commands that I have prescribed to the other devotees. I will liberate you when the time comes.”

Magniram did not want to leave. He said, “Sharda *Devi* has acknowledged me with your greatness. You are the Supreme Lord amongst all the *avatars*. Please be merciful and accept me. Initiate me into your Sadhu-fold.”

Shri Hari tested Magniram’s resolve, “Magniram, you won’t be able to live amongst my Sadhus. You will have to sleep on the floor, eat meagerly from alms, and wash your own clothes and utensils. You won’t be allowed to control any of the Sadhus or haribhaktos. Your arrogance must completely dissolve before I initiate you. As a prerequisite, I would like for you to shave off your beard, mustache, and thick matted hair. Then I will have my Sadhus walk over it.

Magniram replied, “Maharaj! It will be my great fortune” One of the devotees remarked, “Maharaj, this man is a bawa. It is challenging for a bawa to overcome his ego. He must be pretending to deceive others.”

Therefore, Maharaj decided to test him one last time. Maharaj commanded, “Magniram, I would like for you to take the footwear of all the Sadhus, tie them in a bundle, and circumnavigate around the entire village.”

Magniram immediately agreed. He circled around the village numerous times. Shri Hari was pleased with Magniram’s resolve and initiated him with the name, Advaitanand Swami. Many of Magniram’s followers also became followers of Shriji Maharaj, but the less fortunate ones turned back towards Bengal. The news spread from Gujarat that the invincible Magniram had accepted Swaminarayan as his *guru*. Increasingly, many people flocked to Gujarat to have the divine *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj.

5.7 Muktanand Swami Convinced

The *samadhi* prakran in Mangrol received mixed reactions. Never before were so many different incidents of *samadhi* experienced and recorded within the *satsang* community. News of the *samadhies* reached Muktanand Swami in *Kutch*. He was infuriated and decided to leave for Saurashtra at once. He had heard how by the mere *darshan* of Maharaj, the heart of devotees ceased to beat. He could not readily accept these stories about such easily attained *samadhies*. Muktanand Swami arrived in Meghpur and headed straight for Shri Hari's quarters. Shri Hari greeted Muktanand Swami. Swami told Maharaj, "Give up this pretense! Do not allow it to spread in *satsang*. Ramanand Swami would never approve of this. How do you raise an aspirant past all seven steps of *ashtang-yoga* and grant the ability to go into *samadhi* without any endeavors? *Satsang* is not spread in this way."

Shri Hari listened to Muktanand Swami patiently before replying, "Swamiji, I am not trying to deceive anyone. I encourage devotees to chant the *mahamantra* Swaminarayan, and somehow, they are immediately sent into *samadhi*. It is the power of the *mahamantra*."

Then Maharaj asked Santdasji, a disciple of Muktanand Swami to meditate. Instantly, he attained *samadhi*. Maharaj then told Muktanand Swami to check the pulse of Santdasji and try to wake him. Swamiji tried but Santdasji's body just laid there. Then, Shriji Maharaj whispered the *mahamantra*

in Santdasji's ear and to Muktanand Swami's surprise, he woke up immediately.

Then Maharaj requested Santdasji to describe the experience he had during *samadhi*. Santdasji explained, "I went to *Akshardham*. There, I saw Maharaj seated. I saw *guru* Ramanand Swami serving and praying to Maharaj. I saw many deities and *avatars* worshipping the divine idol of Maharaj. Then Ramanand Swami turned towards me and asked "Why doesn't Muktmuni believe in what I have stated? A fact will remain a fact. Nevertheless, all will be convinced in the end." Muktanand Swami listened, but he was not satisfied. He did not feel peace.

Then Shriji Maharaj went to Kalvani with all the saints. Together, they all went to bathe near the outskirts of the village whereas Muktanand Swami went to answer the call of nature within the forest. Alone in the woods, he wondered what would happen to the *sampraday*. He thought "Would this young *guru* defile the *sampraday*'s purity and destroy everything my *guru* created?" His mental trepidations were interrupted by Ramanand Swami's divine *darshan*. Ramanand Swami appeared in white robes with a smile that pitied Muktanand Swami's confusion. With tear-filled eyes, Swami narrated his situation to Ramanand Swami. Ramanand Swami encouragingly consoled him saying, "I have told you many times that I am just a drumbeater. The real performer is this Shri Hari. He is *Parabrahma*. Was I not clear enough? Believe

me, this Sahajanand Swami is the ruler of countless *avatars* and universes. Serve him without any doubts. Develop unflinching faith in him.”

This was enough to convince Muktanand Swami as his *guru*’s word meant a lot to him. A fountain of divine joy spontaneously sprouted in his heart. As he was returning to the village, he described the divine experience he had to Parvatbhai. When Muktanand Swami returned to the village, he wove a beautiful flower garland. Then, he laid it out on the *asana* and pillow Ramanand Swami used. He asked for the wooden slippers of Ramanand Swami. He also prepared the *aarti* and put it on the side. When Shri Hari arrived, Muktanand Swami grabbed him by the hands and forced him to sit on Ramanand Swami’s *asana*. He applied sandalwood paste to Shri Hari’s forehead and placed the garland around his neck. With tears streaming down his eyes, Muktanand Swami lovingly composed and performed the *aarti* of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan for the very first time in Kalvani on November 5th, 1802.

“*Jay Sadguru Swami, Prabhu Jay Sadguru Swami
Sahajanand Dayaalu, Balvant Bahunami... Jay*”

In this *aarti*, Muktanand Swami sings the glory of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan as the manifest form of *Parabrahma*. Thereafter, Muktanand Swami described the divine *darshan* of Ramanand Swami and then respectfully paid his obeisances

to Shriji Maharaj. Sadguru Shri Muktanand Swami, an anadi-mukt of *Akshardham* indubitably had no doubts whatsoever in his faith towards Shriji Maharaj. However, this pretense was carried out to imprint Swami’s *Guru Nishtha* as well as the supremacy of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in the minds of all.



Service to Mankind



A critical step in measuring a person's purity is monitoring selflessness. Moreover, Maharaj spent a considerable amount of time cultivating satsang and services amongst the poor. A selfish person always focuses on taking, whereas Maharaj's life was centered on giving.

6.1 Selfless Service

The purpose of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's incarnation was not only to give perpetual bliss but to selflessly serve those in need. In pursuit of this goal, he commenced an operation to fulfill the basic necessities of human beings, namely food, water, and shelter. A critical step in measuring a person's purity is monitoring selflessness. The more significant part of Shriji Maharaj's devotees was from the middle to lower-middle class families. Moreover, Maharaj spent a considerable amount of time cultivating *satsang* and services amongst the poor. A selfish person always focuses on taking, whereas Maharaj's life was centered on giving. His complete sacrifice for the devotees of God shows to find people who are not driven by selfish motives of collecting wealth. It is difficult nowadays to find those who do not desire for popularity and followers.

During the time that Gujarat experienced a major drought, women had to go a long way to get water. Therefore, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan inspired others to dig wells and ponds in many parts of Gujarat which allowed for easy access to water. Under the supervision of Shriji Maharaj, a well was built in the remote village of Mangrol by saints and devotees. Nonetheless, a large pond was dug and made by five hundred saints and thousands of devotees in the village of Kariyani. Many times, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan carried stones, baskets of sand and tools and himself and participated in the *seva*

efforts. These gestures inspired saints and devotees immensely, as they considered him to be the Supreme Godhead. At many times, he would embrace saints and devotees for their services even though their clothes were dirty. As a matter of fact, there were big ponds constructed in Vadtal, Meghpur, and Budhej that were inspired by Shriji Maharaj. However, another major problem, scarcity of food was still eminent among society.

As a solution, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan set up almshouses all over Gujarat to serve pilgrims, the poor, and other needy people. Under the stewardship of saints, alms were given to the needy. Such almshouses were situated at places like Loj, Piplana, Mangrol, Manavadar, Dhoraji, Navanagar, Faneni, Agatrai, Jamnagar, Jetpur, Sardhar, Kariyani, Gadhada, Bhuj, Ahmedabad, and other such places around Gujarat.

6.2 Alms Distribution Activities

Many took refuge under these almshouses and ultimately, in the divine lotus feet of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. For the most part, food grains were collected and cooked into a warm meal and distributed along with raw food grains. During that time Maharaj stayed in Meghpur for two months, he started an almshouse here as many pilgrims, Sadhus, sannyasis, *bawas*, and householder devotees passed by this village on their way to Dwarka. Regularly, many people collected alms from these centers and were filled with a sense

of gratitude. The recipients used to inquire, “Who runs the almshouse?”

Upon learning that these centers were being run by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, many would go for his *darshan* out of curiosity and would become *satsangis* due to the divine attraction of Maharaj. As a result, numerous Sadhus, *bawas*, *vairagis*, and their followers became attracted towards the magnetic personality of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

However, the rapidly spreading fame of Maharaj and his Sadhus invited trouble from several notorious elements of society. Some *bawas*, *vairagis*, and *mahants* who felt robbed of their glory and attention harassed Maharaj’s Sadhus verbally and at times, even physically. They attacked lone Sadhus who ran the almshouses. Many of the almshouses were located in remote areas and dense jungles. Taking advantage of the isolation, the *bawas* even made attempts on the Swaminarayan Sadhus’ lives. Often, they were successful in their evil plots, and many Sadhus were killed during such calamities. When Maharaj learned of this harassment to his Sadhus, he wrote letters to his Sadhus encouraging them to retaliate with only their saintliness. He wrote: “Even if they beat, abuse, insult, plunder, or make you fast, continue the almshouses. A true Sadhu must learn to tolerate in all situations and circumstances. You must retaliate with a dagger sharpened with forgiveness, a shield made of patience, and a sword crafted from detachment. Show your opponents that

saintliness can and will prevail in the long run. Run the almshouses while remembering God.” In this way, he encouraged the Sadhus and injected great vigor through such letters. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s Sadhus confronted such attacks, as instructed, with an abundance of forgiveness and patience.



Social Reform



The aim of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s manifestation on Earth was to establish ‘ekantik dharma’ and to redeem countless souls irrespective of their gender, caste, wealth status, social status or karma.

7.1 Eradication of Sati Custom

There was a prevailing custom of *Sati* in society before and during *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's time. Most pious women would sit with their husbands' dead bodies on their pyres and would leave their bodies through sheer will power by lighting themselves on fire. They were known as *Satis* or chaste women. As time went by, it became a custom for women to express their chastity when their husband passed away. Some women used to burn themselves for modesty. At some places, people used to forcibly burn them with their husbands' dead bodies. This inhumane custom was practiced in the areas of Bengal and Bihar. In Kathiawad, this custom was being practiced in certain *Rajput* communities.

In most cases, women did not want to partake in this tragic and inhumane custom. However, women were forced to submit to this custom even if they were pregnant or mothers of small children. Society believed that if any woman participated in this event, she would receive salvation.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan knew that human life is very scarce. One cannot buy human life at any cost. The custom of *Sati* was mostly suicide or homicide, depending on the circumstances. Both are unforgivable sins. Shriji Maharaj fought against this inhumane custom which was thrust upon helpless and illiterate women. Maharaj not only preached against it among the *Kshatriya* devotees but through firm persuasion, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan stopped the shameful

custom completely. As a result, this evil custom gradually disappeared from society. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan brought about this social reform not by any coercion or threats, but with love, understanding and logical arguments. He built up public opinion against this evil custom by citing references from the scriptures. He made the people realize that the *Sati* custom was simply unjust, cruel, and inhumane.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan knew very well that mere prohibition would not work. An alternative was necessary to give the widow's a better choice as the widow was considered inauspicious and were humiliated everywhere. Widows had to remain dependent on their relatives as there was no other source of earning for them. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan introduced *Sankhya-Yogi* initiation to bestow a new meaningful life for widows. Within this *Sankhya-Yogi* initiation, widows lived in separate places. Usually residing in a *mandir* to avoid the company of men, these *Sankhya-Yogi* women would offer devotion to God, practice austerities, and preach to female disciples. For widows who did not want to join this initiation, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave many instructions in the *Shikshapatri* to make their lives happy and secure. In this way, Maharaj eradicated the *Sati* custom from society and uplifted the societal status of women.

Shriji Maharaj also instructed his Sadhus to spread this message as they traveled the length and breadth of Gujarat and other parts of India. Though these practices seem

irrelevant in today's society, historians and scholars of gender studies have credited *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan for bringing about a wave of gender equality and eradicating these barbaric practices that would have otherwise destroyed the community.

7.2 Abolition of Female Infanticide

In the late 1700s due to economic hardship, ignorance, and superstitious beliefs, many improper customs were prevalent. One such practice was female infanticide. It was referred to as 'dudh piti'. The name literally means 'the drinking of milk'. A newborn daughter was drowned in a pot of milk, as this was viewed as a means to alleviate the financial burden of a daughter's expected future wedding dowry. Shriji Maharaj explained to his devotees that such practice, according to the *dharma Shastras*, would subject a person to four different sins: the killing of a child, a female, an innocent person, and a helpless being. The dangerous part of this custom was it was done secretly. The serious magnitude of this custom is revealed from the estimation that during that time, out of 125,000 *Rajput* caste families, more than 20,000 females committed infanticide every year.

Maharaj was in Bandhiya. Several *Kathis* and *Rajputs* came for his *darshan*. Some questions were troubling their mind. They wanted to complain against the eradication of the old practice of dudh piti. One of them questioned, "Maharaj, once our daughters grow up, we cannot find worthy suitors.

The average man cannot afford the dowry for worthy suitors. What about all these problems?" Shriji Maharaj lovingly explained, "I will gather the funds from the holy fellowship for the marriage of your daughters, but you must stop female infanticide right away. Also, I am working to raise a society in which men respect women. People are adopting lives free of addition and vices. By the time your daughter is ready for marriage, I assure you that there will be several worthy suitors available. I have also instructed all of you to avoid charging dowries in marital customs. Lastly, I will organize mass wedding ceremonies. This will ensure that even the disadvantaged can afford to have their daughters married. But please, I urge you to stop accruing the sin of killing your innocent daughters." *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan also warned them in a prophecy that if they did not abandon this practice voluntarily, then they would have to do so by force when a powerful political ruler arrives in the future. This indirectly referred to the British who later banned female infanticide.

7.3 Eradication of Superstitions

The worship of imaginary and evil Gods and Goddesses was prevalent. Innocent people were caught in the clutches of *bawas*, *vairagis*, cheats, exorcists, and *Brahmins* who gave talismans and magical threads. People always lived under the fear of superstitions, good and bad omens, and the wrath of Gods and Goddesses. *Bawas* deceived people in the name of tantra - black magic.

Seeing such a disturbing situation within the society, Maharaj resolved to bring an end to these superstitious beliefs. Firstly, he inspired faith in God and moral living in his devotees. To free people from the fear of imaginary Gods and Goddesses, black magic, and talismans, He addressed a letter to all the *satsangis*. He wrote: “Everyone undergoes happiness and misery according to their deeds. Imaginary Gods and Goddesses cannot overrule these deeds to give pain or grant happiness or determine life or death. Only the wish of the Supreme Lord will prevail. We are devotees of the Supreme Lord. Thus, we should not fear anything. If black magic and medicines could revive people, we would have certainly come across someone immortal. But we have not seen anyone like that. Also, if black magic can help one attain their desired fruits, why do people spend abundant money on arms and armies?

Therefore, be fearless and chant the name of God. Ponder over the contents of this letter with utmost concentration. In this manner, he taught people to gain strength by holding onto firm refuge of God along with leading a pure religious life. This letter proved to be very effective in arousing bravery among devotees. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had openly expressed in public that whosoever believes in such kind of superstitions should not be considered a devotee. In this way, one of the biggest contributions of the Swaminarayan fellowship was the freeing of people from the entrapment of superstitions.

7.4 The Anti-Addiction Campaign

The Swaminarayan Sect had earned a great name in society. The Sadhus and the *satsangis* had impressed civilians by their pure actions and character. They helped people become free of many harmful habits, vices, and addictions. It is noteworthy that they accomplished such work in a friendly manner without any type of pressure.

Moral behavior is the base of one’s religious life. Until one starts living as a good human being, spiritual progress remains merely a dream. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had prohibited all kinds of addictions ranging from liquor to the use of tobacco. Shri Hari also diminished common practices of gambling and the consumption of meat. In the time of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, anybody who wanted to join the holy fellowship had to first take an oath to give up all of their addictions. Only then they were deemed capable and allowed to join. In a short period of time, due to the anti-addiction campaign, the reputation of the holy fellowship was boasted in such a big way that the society was left with no other choice but to give respect to the fellowship. Those who gave up their addiction, donated their savings to the holy fellowship. In result, the acquired funds were used in organizing festivals, setting up almshouses, constructing wells and ponds, and building temples. The inspiration behind all this was the fantastic farsightedness of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. There are many incidences where *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had freed

numerous people from the shackles of addictions.

Once, Mulu Khachar of Kambhala came for the *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj. He was attracted by the luminous personality of Maharaj. When Maharaj asked him to become a *satsangi*, he replied, “Maharaj I am an opium and tobacco addict. I cannot give them up so I cannot become your follower.” Maharaj replied, “Don’t worry, make an effort. Even if you do not succeed, you should accept the *vartmaan*. If you cannot do anything, at least follow the five *vartmaans*. Mulu Khachar agreed and stayed with Maharaj in Gadhada. Although, whenever he found some free time from listening to spiritual discourses, he would retire to smoke his hookah. After a couple days passed, Maharaj told Mulu Khachar, “Join the devotees to celebrate the festival in Vadtal. You must experience the hospitality of Gujarat.” Mulu Khachar readily joined the group. The group would take breaks at certain villages where Mulu Khachar would light his hookah and take a few puffs. Upon seeing Mulu Khachar’s behavior, the locals criticized him by saying, “All these people belong to the Swaminarayan sect, but that man smoking does not seem to be a part of the group!” Upon hearing these remarks, Mulu Khachar became irritated. He threw his hookah on the ground and in result, it broke into pieces. He shouted, “No more hookah from today onwards!” In this way, he gave up smoking.

However, secretly Mulu Khachar continued his

consumption of tobacco and opium. Finally, the entire group reached Vadtal. The devotees of Gujarat had arranged the lodging of all the devotees from different places at one location. There, Mulu Khachar, becoming subject to this addiction, would chew tobacco. All the *satsangis* would see him perform such vial acts regularly. One day, Maharaj started to introduce *satsangis* from the Kathiawad region to those who resided in Gujarat. All of them embraced each other. But they avoided Mulu Khachar, saying, “The one who chews tobacco and opium does not seem to be a *satsangi*!” These words pierced Mulu Khachar’s heart and he decided then and there to give up his addiction. After four days when Maharaj found out that Mulu Khachar had given up his addiction, he inquired, “On whose advice did you give up your addiction?” Mulu Khachar replied humbly, “Maharaj! Living with your devotees and seeing their pure lives left my heart with no choice other than to commence living such an addiction-free life. Also, my desire to become your *satsangi* also insisted me in giving up my bad habits to please you. Saying this Mulu Khachar fell at the feet of Shriji Maharaj.

These were the methods and measures that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan took to promote anti-addiction throughout the vast lands of India.

7.5 Reformation of Festivals

The degradation of sacred festivals was another form of *adharma* prevailing in contemporary society. Under the guise

of propitiating deities, the custodians of *dharma* - the Sadhus and *Brahmins* misled society. They had introduced false modes of devotion in the form of immoral and evil rituals, such as adultery and the partaking of meat and liquor as *prasad* - sanctified offerings. Gambling and licentious behavior also prevailed during festivals. In reality, festivals became a way for the gratification of the senses. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had exhorted people not to celebrate festivals in this way. However, he knew that merely denouncing them would not prove useful. So, he decided to celebrate festivals in accordance with the religious tenets on a grand scale and set examples for society. In this way, he elucidated the import of the festivals and the specific rituals and rites to be performed. For instance, he was the first to advocate ahimsic *yagnas* - a non-violent ritual of the sacred fire - to prevent the slaughter of animals such as goats.

Another example of his edification of festivals was Janmashtami, the birth of Shri Krishna, celebrated all over India by people who just whiled away the day in gambling. Shriji Maharaj advocated reading of the *Shastras*, singing devotional kirtans extolling the glory of Shri Krishna and fasting to uplift the senses onto a more sublime plane. He formulated a similar solution to abolish ribald songs, known as *fatana*, sung during marriage ceremonies. He instructed his elite saint-poets to compose hymns glorifying *Tulsi Vivah* and the divine lila of Krishna and his consort Rukmini, to be

sung during marriages. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had celebrated all festivals like Diwali, Makar Sankranti, *Vasant Panchami*, Holi, Dhuleti, Ramnavmi, Janmashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra, Sharad Purnima, and others, by inviting thousands of devotees from all over the land. Festivals were the perfect time for him to give sermons emphasizing the purity of devotion. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan explained the purpose and glory of each festival. In this way, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave extreme delight to all devotees.

Most of the time, two places were chosen for celebrating festivals. One was Gadhada and the other, Vadtal. In 1816, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan celebrated Dhuleti, the festival of color in Vadtal. In that festival, a total of 2,000kg of *gulal* were used. One can easily imagine the giant scale of the celebration from this figure. Through his sublime love and teachings, he also convinced the *kathi* and other pugnacious clans to renounce their lawless ways of living and turn to trade or agriculture instead.

7.6 Upliftment of the Downtrodden Caste

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's incarnation aimed to establish '*ekantik dharma*' and to redeem countless souls irrespective of their gender, caste, wealth status, social status or karma. Through his *darshan* and company, contact and words, Maharaj completely uproots the weeds of *vasana* from any *jiva* who sincerely threads the path of *sadhana*. He eradicates any traces of evil desires and melts away their

mountains of sin. He assists thousands in reaching the highest elevated state of spiritual experience possible. This proves that Maharaj possesses power - not the typical power used to control others, but the rare power required to purify others.

However, at that time, some people propagated that salvation is possible only for males of the upper caste. In contrast, Shriji Maharaj propagated that the soul is neither male or female and is distinct from the body. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was the first to raise the spiritual level of the lower castes in Gujarat - Kathiawad. Rather he uplifted the lower-class people namely carpenters, tailors, farmers and such others by inculcating within them, the values of the higher castes and inspiring them to live like pure *Brahmins*. Abstinence from additions, meat, intoxicants, garlic, not to eat food without daily worship of God, and not drinking unfiltered water or milk were noticeable and inspirational living traits of the followers of the Swaminarayan fellowship.

Ghela Koli of Limdi village was a true devotee of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Though he was born in a lower caste, he was noble and towering by character. The severe famine of 1813 had spread its tentacle of suffering and death on the land of Kathiawad. Many migrated to south Gujarat to survive. Ghela Koli and his wife too were heading optimistically towards the city of Surat. On the way, Ghela *Bhakta*'s eyes fell upon a shiny ornament. It was an expensive anklet that someone had lost. Despite his poverty, he had no

desire to take it, but he thought of his wife who was a few furlongs behind him. Being a woman, she would be enticed to take it, and it would amount to a transgression of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's words. Thus, Ghela *bhakta* covered the anklet with dirt. After a while, when his wife caught up with him, she asked, "What were you doing sitting down a little while back?"

Ghela *bhakta* explained what he was doing and why he did it. "Why did you cover it up? I see all other possessions equal to dirt!" Ghela *Bhakta*'s wife notably responded. Ghela *bhakta* was surprised and fascinated by his wife's resolve. Despite experiencing a difficult time, Ghela *bhakta* remained steadfast to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan rules and regulations. This was only due to Shriji Maharaj's unique way of transforming the lower class into noble devotees.

Shri Hari's efforts to initiate social and religious reform are evidenced by the action and spiritual heights of his devotees. The caste system; which was initially designed as a means of organization and functionality for the prosperous growth of society had become an oppressive tool used by members of the higher class to maintain their affluence and prominence over the others. Shriji Maharaj instituted sweeping reforms to negate the effects of the oppressive influence from the public domain. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan paid attention to devotees' belongings to the lower classes. He kept them in his *seva*, graced their homes, and shared meals with them.

Ultimately, Maharaj provided all members of society a platform through which they can achieve equality.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's wave of social reform is exemplified by an incident from the life of Teja *Bhakta*, a *Vankar* belonging to a lower caste. Chhani, a village near the city of Vadodara was ruled by a *Brahmin* administrator. The administrator was preparing to celebrate the wedding of his only daughter. A full meal for hundreds of invited guests was already cooked. Unfortunately, the sudden death of a close family member had resulted in canceling of the wedding ceremonies. As a result, the administrator decided to give all the food away to the members of the Shudra caste in the village. Teja *Bhakta*, however, refused to accept the feast. Enraged by the lowly laborers' disrespectful behavior, the administrator called Teja *bhakta* to his residence. "How dare you refuse to accept the meals prepared for my daughter's wedding? You are a Shudra. You are supposed to eat my leftovers."

Teja *bhakta* responded politely, "That may be true! But I have a *niyam* given to me by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. We are only supposed to eat meals prepared with filtered oil, water, and ghee. The grains must be sifted and cleaned before consumption. I am unsure if your men diligently followed this practice. This is why I must refuse your offer."

The *Brahmin* was left speechless. Soon it became known in the region that Teja *Bhakta*'s *nyams* and knowledge

surpassed that of rulers, *Brahmins*, and scholars. Through the efforts of Teja Bhagat, *Vankars* and untouchables had also become *satsangis*. They bathed daily, applied *tilak-chandlo*, performed personal *puja*, held discourses, and sang devotional songs. On one occasion, Maharaj was on his way to Vadodara. He reached the village of Chhani where he saw devotees waiting to pay their respects. Maharaj then took a seat and addressed the untouchables and *Vankars* present in the assembly: "All of you shall attain the scholarship and culture of the *Brahmins*. Your actions will be so pure that even *Brahmins* will appear small before you."

Maharaj talked to the untouchables about ethical conduct, and the power one gets by surrendering oneself to God. And it so happened that these devotees of Chhani became such ideal devotees with pure thoughts and actions that the *Brahmins* of the village felt inferior in their presence. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's compassionate nature touched the lives of those he encountered. On one incident, *Bhagwan* himself changed the life of a low caste dog catcher by visiting and purifying his home.

Sagram was a *Vaghri* by caste. One-night Shriji Maharaj knocked on the door of Sagram's straw hut. Agitated by the noise, Sagram came to the door with a stick in his hand. He threw open the door and was completely startled. He rubbed his eyes to confirm what his eyes were seeing. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was standing outside of his straw hut. Maharaj

went in and sat on a worn-out cot. He asked Sagram's wife, "Sister, I am hungry. Do you have anything to eat?" Sagram rushed to the well, drew a bucket of water and then filtered it. His wife prepared millet rotlo and served it with yogurt. Maharaj ate to his heart's satisfaction and then drank some water. Despite the social stigma of the time, Maharaj had food prepared by the hands of an 'untouchable.' This *charitra* itself was enough to satisfy all of Sagram's spiritual endeavors. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's selfless love for his devotees trumped all societal barriers and overcame any obstacles of prejudice.

7.7 Transforming the Cruel and Wicked

Due to the compassionate nature of Shriji Maharaj, through his *darshan* and company, contact and words, He uprooted *vasana* and any traces of evil desires and melted away the cruelest and wicked people's mountain of sins. He assists thousands of devotees in reaching the highest elevated state of spiritual experience possible. Thousands of vicious, immoral, addicted, corrupted brutal hearts were changed into virtuous, pious, moral, and devotional ones. This was all due to the profound greatness of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. At times *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan operated via his prominent saints to carry out the task of turning the cruelest into the purest devotees. Through *satsang*, blessings and proper guidance of ideal saints, the wicked of men were transformed and converted into dominant *ekantik* devotees of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

During that time, the mere mention of the name, Joban Pagi, struck fear in the heart of every citizen of Gujarat. News of his notorious looting sprees spread across the country as if a wildfire. He had robbed the treasury of Maharaja Gaikwad (king of Vadodara City, Gujarat) twice, regardless of it being guarded by an army. In 1810, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan performed a grand Vishnu *Yagna* in Dabhan. Many *Kathis* came to pay homage with their mares that were famous and spirited. Shriji Maharaj's mare was very renowned in every respect and was believed to be divine. Though Joban Pagi was a follower of a demigod, he thought to test the divinity of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan by stealing his mare, Manki. So, one night, he made the plan to go to the horse stable. Slowly, he crept into the horse stable where to his surprise, with each horse he saw Maharaj feeding, patting, or watering them. Joban Pagi tried this for three days and nights, but everywhere he looked he saw Maharaj's divine form. A single fleeting glance from Maharaj, was enough to capture Joban's mind for life, transforming his cyclone of sin into a peaceful pond. After his experience, Joban realized that Shriji Maharaj was none other than God. So, he decided to surrender to him and became his disciple.

On the fourth day, Joban came to the assembly of Shriji Maharaj, bowed at His feet and pleaded, "Maharaj, please forgive me. I have sinned before you. I ask you to make me

into a *satsangi*.” Shriji Maharaj asked his attendant, Mulji *Brahmachari* to get some water. Maharaj then placed a few drops in Joban’s right palm and was about to recite the initiation *mantra* (*vartmaan mantra*) when Joban interrupted, “Maharaj think for a moment before initiating me. I have heard that you dissolve a person’s past sins whenever he or she accepts your refuge by putting on the *kanthi* and following the moral vows you give.” Shriji Maharaj replied, “Yes, that is true.” However, Joban Pagi argued, “Maharaj, my case is different. I have committed so many sins that it is difficult even for you to dissolve all of them. Your face is shining like the sun now, but the moment you dissolve my sins, your face will turn pale.” Shriji Maharaj smiled at Joban’s words. Maharaj assured him, “Joban, let alone your sins, but if I were to dissolve the sins of countless people in countless universes, my face would still not turn pale.” Maharaj’s words comforted Joban Pagi. Later, Shriji Maharaj often said, “If anyone were to take Joban’s sins upon their self, then that person would be reduced to ashes. Such were the uncountable sins he had committed.” Maharaj changed him from a dangerous thief into an ideal devotee. After the transformation, Joban Pagi was only engrossed in *sadhana* and *seva*, wanting to please Shriji Maharaj.

Verabhai of Upleta was a notorious bandit. Once he had sharpened his sword. For testing its sharpness, he sliced through eight innocent people. This is how cruel he was by

nature. By the association of Brahmanand Swami, he became an ardent staunch devotee of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. At an *annakut* festival at Kariyani, numerous saints and devotees were assembled. Verabhai, took a piece of a babul tree branch from Vasta Khachar’s home to brush his teeth without permission. The truth was that the tree was kept for public use. Since Verabhai had taken the branch without the owner’s permission, he went to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and asked for atonement to expiate his sin. Maharaj asked him to bow down ten times to all five hundred saints and to bow down to all twenty-five thousand devotees assembled here. Without any doubt or hesitation, he started bowing down to everyone. After about one hundred *dandvats*, Maharaj held him up and embraced him and said, “Your atonement is over.” He requested the Lord to initiate him as a saint. Maharaj said, “No need for initiation now. Without initiation, you are already a high-rank saint.” Such was the vast change in Verabhai’s behavior simply due to the association of Brahmanand Swami.

Kayabhai Sandhi of Kamadhiyala village was alone a notorious bandit who also became a disciple of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Once Kayabhai went to Gadhada to have the *darshan* of Maharaj. While returning home, he kept his face towards Maharaj, as one is not supposed to show their back to *Bhagwan*. Due to the observance of this protocol, he mistakenly stepped on a dog which was sitting nearby. Instantly, Kayabhai prostrated before the dog. Later, when

somebody asked why he had so, Kayabhai replied that the dog is very fortunate as it has the opportunity to live with *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his saints. Thus, as he mistakenly hurt the dog, he prostrated before it.

All of these transformations made by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his saints were through love and without the help of the law, making it a remarkable chapter in the history of Gujarat and the holy fellowship.



Religious- Spiritual Reform



The final step for attaining ekantik dharma, Shriji Maharaj stipulates that it can only be attained by following the commands of a Satpurush who is free from worldly desires and who has already attained the state of ekantik dharma.

8.1 Unprecedented Yagnas

Next to spreading humanity within society, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's foremost concern was regarding spiritual reform. At that time, through the misinterpretation of scriptures, corrupt *Brahmin* priests desecrated many rites and rituals. One of the most affected area was ceremonial sacrifice, more commonly referred to as *yagnas*. The *Brahmins* killed innocent animals as offerings in *yagnas* and after that, relished the meat. Such *yagnas* were organized on a massive scale in many parts of Gujarat. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was determined to wipe out this evil practice. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had declared that the *Vedas* don't condone violence. He explained to the people that "The *Vedas* are for the benefit and salvation of all. So, wherever violence is condoned in the *Vedas*, it is for the sake of restriction towards prevailing rampant violence. However, the ultimate aim of the *Vedas* is the total eradication of violence." He urged people not to perform such *yagnas* in which innocent animals were killed. Openly refuting such violent *yagnas*, and was determined to put this into effect immediately. He arranged this first large scale *yagna* on December 25th, 1809 at Jetalpur, near Ahmedabad, the chief city of Gujarat. This location was strategically selected towards the achievement of His purpose. He planned to organize a Maha Vishnu *Yagna*, one that would forever remain etched in the annals of Gujarat's history. Shriji Maharaj decided to perform the *yagna* for eighteen days.

Maharaj had also agreed to arrange a *chaurasi* - ceremonial dinner for all *Brahmins*. At this dinner, He had invited approximately 100,000 *Brahmins* from all over Gujarat, *Kutch*, and Saurashtra. To cook for this dinner, five hundred *maunds* of ghee were ordered, one hundred cartloads of jaggery were brought, and required flour was sent in every home of the town for milling. At the time of the *yagna*, Shri Hari conducted religious discussions opposing the animal sacrifices made by some in *yagnas* and convinced people that this such violence is not sanctioned by the *Shastras*. Shri Hari interpreted the *Vedas* in their true spirit and preached against violence in *yagnas*. For eighteen days, pious and scholarly *Brahmins* sang their *Vedic* verses and performed the rituals of the Maharudra *Yagna*.

Nonetheless, the grand feast nurtured more than 100,000 *Brahmins* every day. The devotees served selflessly, and the Sadhus supervised the cooking. However, with such noble acts, problems arise without an invitation.

Some of the food preparation and rituals were being performed by Shakta *Brahmins*. A few of them were resentful of Shriji Maharaj's successful organization of the *yagna* and thus, they decided to impede the *yagna*'s progress. The *Brahmins* performing the *yagna* rituals poured countless gallons of ghee in the sacrificial altar. On the other hand, the *Brahmins* in the kitchen stole hundreds of kilograms of ghee and distributed it to their relatives. Due to jealousy, they even

managed to throw several thousand *ladus* in the river. As a result, food was running out and the ingredients were nearly exhausted. The most precious item for the *yagna*, ghee, was running out and was near to exhaustion. Worried, the supervising Sadhus came to Maharaj and prayed to bring an end to such meaningless behavior of the *Brahmins*. Shriji Maharaj was moved by their prayers, so he went to the storage area of the *yagna*. Taking His silver staff, he tapped the large clay pots that stored the ghee. Instantly they were once again filled! All the Sadhus became wonder-struck.

Walking away from the storage area, Shriji Maharaj told His Sadhus, “You can feed all of the souls in the universe with this ghee and it still won’t run out.” The Shakta *Brahmins* used the ghee to their hearts’ desire, but they could not deplete the supply of ghee. They finally lost hope in trying to discredit Shriji Maharaj. In the end, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s glory spread across the region like wildfire. The envious *Brahmins* left the premises bellowing the calls of ‘Sahajanand Swami Maharaj ni Jay.’ On the eighteenth day, the *yagna* and the feast ended with great fanfare. Till date, many historians have cited this *yagna* as the largest ‘ahimsic *yagna*’ in the history of Gujarat.

Dabhan is a small town in the Kheda district of Gujarat. Shriji Maharaj sent his most senior saints to prepare for the *yagna* that would be taking place in Dabhan. Jasamsinh Bapu, the king of Ghodasar, offered 100,000 tribal guards in the

service of Shriji Maharaj due to suspicion of conspirators waiting for a chance to hurt Maharaj’s Sadhus and devotees. Shri Hari instructed the king to bring 1500 guards to Dabhan. Thousands of devotees gathered in Dabhan, each bringing an item to present to Maharaj. During the *yagna*, thousands of *Brahmins* were fed *ladus* as part of the *chaurasi* feast ritual. As the festival progressed, Shriji Maharaj changed the lives of hundreds of individuals and drew them towards *bhakti*, *seva*, and *satsang*. Foremost amongst them was Joban Pagi. Maharaj transformed the dacoit into a genuine devotee through compassion. *Sampradayik* texts note that several Sadhus and devotees were able to witness the festivities in Dabhan in outlying villages due to Maharaj’s grace. At the end of the *yagna* ceremony, Maharaj was taken out in a procession on a saffron-colored horse. He had put on golden cloths wrought in threads of gold and silver and had ornaments of gold. This *darshan* was so beautiful that all those who witnessed experienced immense bliss and the *Murti* of Maharaj was forever etched in their hearts.

Before conducting such grandeur *yagnas*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had also performed *yagnas* in different places of Gujarat like Mangrol, Kariyani, Akha, and Piplana. Such kinds of *yagnas* gave a special status to the Swaminarayan movement, and they served as an occasion to preach and propagate its principles to large bodies of people.

8.2 The Message of Non-Violence

Bhagwan Swaminarayan observed that there was rampant violence prevailing at the time. More dangerously, people indulged in this act in the name of their deity and clearly perverted religious belief. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan prohibited such violence, even down to killing a small insect. He also prohibited homicide even for the sake of women, wealth, and kingdom. Nonetheless, he stopped the animal slaughter and introduced non-violent *yagnas*, asserting the relationship with one's *atma* and God Himself. He convinced the people that violence had no place in any human activity; much less in the religious observations. Through sheer compassion, he gave to the world the supreme gift of non-violence. He talked to Sir John Malcolm, the Governor of Bombay at that time, and convinced him to put a ban on cow-slaughter and thus protected animals as well.

More so, at that time, there was also an epidemic of suicide in various religious places. Lost people believed that they would receive salvation by performing the act of suicide. However, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan propagated that such people would never attain salvation. In fact, upon writing the *Shikshapatri*, he commanded his disciples to not commit suicide under any circumstances, even out of remorse after committing a sinful act. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan also commanded that when some untoward action is committed either by oneself or by others, his disciples should never

mutilate one's limbs or the limbs of others under the spell of rage. In short, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan propagated that non-violence is the highest *dharma*.

8.3 Revolutionizing Brahmins

The Hindu caste system consists of four categories: *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras*. Out of the four, *Brahmins* are considered to be the highest of rank. In the time of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, *Brahmins* had immense control over the lives of the common folks. People used to take their advice on every matter. However, due to unfortunate circumstances, the *Brahmins* became corrupt. They had misinterpreted the scriptures, and in result, they started to perform violent sacrifices where animal slaughter became common. Observing such evil ways of the *Brahmins*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan decided to make a change.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan arranged a *chaurasi* wherein he invited thousands of *Brahmins*. Maharaj even provided them boarding and lodging. The *chaurasi* lasted for six months, during which *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave sermons regarding true *dharma*. Shriji Maharaj not only provided them with food but also money. The *Brahmins* no longer needed to depend on others for their livelihood. One profound effect was that after realizing the notion of true *dharma*, the *Brahmins* started preaching true *dharma* to every corner of the country, fulfilling their obligation for the propagation of both knowledge and education.

8.4 Established Ekantik Dharma

Of the six reasons why *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan incarnated on this Earth, one of his prime objectives was to establish *ekantik dharma*. *Ekantik dharma* consists of 4 key concepts namely: *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan*, and *vairagya*. Precisely defining each aspect, *Dharma* is righteousness or moral conduct; *Bhakti* is devotion to God; *Gnan* is clear comprehension of the nature of the *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *brahma*, and Parabrahm; lastly, *vairagya* is detachment from all worldly objects except God. Before the *Vachanamrut*, *ekantik dharma* was not concisely explained in the ancient *Shastras*. However, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan beautifully incorporated these four factors in the six *mandirs* he built. At the *mandirs*, he also established a standard *katha* by Sadhus who expounded the principles of worship found within the *Shastras*. However, as the final step for attaining *ekantik dharma*, Shriji Maharaj stipulates that it can only be attained by following the commands of a *Satpurush* who is free from worldly desires and who has already attained the state of *ekantik dharma*. In short, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan removed the rigidity from *dharma*, dryness from *gnan*, inaction from *vairagya*, and corruption from *bhakti*.

8.5 Respect to All

200 years ago, the notion of religion was not a universal concept but rather restricted towards some. Different religions often failed to respect others. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan not

only made sure that his followers did not indulge in such practices, but also attempted to spread religious harmony amongst all. Shriji Maharaj consecrated various idols in his established *mandirs*. Nonetheless, He also commanded in the *Shikshapatri* to celebrate the birthdays of *Bhagwan* Krishna and *Bhagwan* Shiva devotionally. In this way, he took practical steps in alleviating the ongoing quarrel between the various religions. Regardless, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was firm towards his propagation of monotheism. He taught all of his devotees to give regards to other Gods and deities. Nonetheless, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave respect to ancient philosophical *Acharyas* and favored *Bhagwan* Kapilji, *Bhagwan* Rishabhdev, and particularly, *Bhagwan* Shri Krishna. Shriji Maharaj set ideals for his devotees regarding particular virtues of Sitaji, Rukhminiji, Shukji, Uddhavji, king Janak, Gopis, Prahladji, and such others.

Being compassionate towards all, Shriji Maharaj was perhaps the first religious leader to enroll non-Hindus into his holy fellowship. Muslims such as Miyaji of Kundla, Dosatai of Ahmedabad; Parsi Ardesharji and Pirojshah of Surat; Jains like Bhaga Doshi, Shivrul Sheth of Botad, and Hemraj Shah of Sundariyana were few of the first-ranked disciples of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Through this, one can understand that Shriji Maharaj not only propagated his philosophy but gave respect to all other religions and philosophies which in turn led to harmony amongst all.



Moral Disciplines: The Five Basic Vows



The Swaminarayan Sampraday is well-known for its purity and ability to uphold strict spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are not simply confined to its scriptures, but are also followed by the devotees, inclusive of even the very young. These disciplines protect and spiritually nourish the lives of people in this progressive and permissive world.

9.1 Moral Disciplines Briefing

The Swaminarayan *Sampraday* is well-known for its purity and ability to uphold strict spiritual disciplines. These disciplines are not merely confined to its scriptures but are also followed by the devotees, inclusive of even the very young. These disciplines protect and spiritually nourish the lives of people in this progressive and permissive world. For the sake of salvation, only devotion and worship are not enough. Alongside, a virtuous, moral, and a devotional human life is also necessary.

Panch vartmaan - The five fundamental vows were given by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in terms of regulating proper code to live a genuine human life. These vows are very simple and accurate to be understood even by a common man. However, their simplicity does not negate their spiritual significance. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has given separate *panch vartmaans* for householder followers and separate ones for Sadhus. After accepting and understanding these five basic vows, a spiritual seeker is responsible for obeying them throughout their lives. A spiritual seeker becomes eligible to transcend spiritually only by following them correctly. These five basic vows are fundamental laws leading towards the superior quality of life for the evolvement of human life, which is the best step on the ladder of spiritual evolution of the living organisms of the world. By following these moral codes, even an animal can be transformed into a human, and a human can be transformed

into a *Mukta*, i.e. attain virtuous qualities. At first glance, the five basic vows seem very simple, but when looked at in depth, they are very refined and subtle. Proper observance of the vows with appropriate understanding is as essential as breathing oxygen to survive. By proper observance of the five basic vows, impurities of a spiritual seeker in the form of various weaknesses are removed, and one's life becomes transparent and pure. When one follows these vows properly, key spiritual virtues manifest within that person. Through these virtues, a spiritual seeker can attain great spiritual heights and also become capable of helping others walk on the path to attaining God.

These five basic vows are not restricted only for the devotees of the Swaminarayan sect. Instead, they are omnibeneficial. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has established a systematic organization and prepared a constitution which is known as the Swaminarayan sect to channelize and guide humans on the best path leading towards the highest spiritual goal: *moksha*. By following the vows, a spiritual seeker can mold his life to attain the *rajipo* of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his *ekantik Satpurush*. The basic vows are very vital and should not be ignored in any way. It is crucial for a spiritual seeker desirous of salvation to attain the grace of God and his *ekantik Satpurush* to properly observe the five basic vows.

9.2 The Five Basic Vows for Householders

All Swaminarayan devotees are initiated in the

sampraday by the *vartmaan* ceremony. During this ceremony, one takes an oath to abide by all the spiritual disciplines laid forth by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. As a result, all past actions are forgiven in the presence of God and an opportunity to begin a new spiritual life. When *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was manifest on Earth 238 years ago, He Himself use to initiate new members into the *satsang* fellowship by giving them *vartmaan*. Currently, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan lives through his *ekantik* Sant and gives *vartmaans*. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's practicality made liberation easy for householder by instilling such kinds of moral codes. There are five basic vows for household devotees namely: Not to drink wine, liquor or any intoxicating drugs, not to eat meat, abstain from adultery, not to steal, and not to take food or drinks from improper persons or from by improper sources.

The first basic vow is to not consume wine, liquor or any intoxicating drugs. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had the vision to keep his followers safe and focused on the path to ultimate salvation. In this time, the number of alcoholic addicts has increased manifolds. People consume alcohol just to show-off, to enjoy sexual pleasures, or to relieve physical pain and mental agony. After experiencing the inebriating effects of alcohol, people become repeatedly tempted towards such drinks to experience the stimulating effect, and eventually they became addicted. Once addicted to such vices, they cannot control their urge to consume alcohol. In spite of

knowing the adverse impact of alcohol, an addict cannot escape from its grip. Due to this very factor, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan established the vow of not to consume wine, liquor or any such intoxicating drugs.

The second vow of conduct is to not to eat meat in any form or any case. Meat shouldn't be consumed even if it is an offering to deities or medicine to save one's own life. The holy scriptures have forbidden the consumption of flesh and blood of any living being. All those who commit, instigate, inspire, encourage or support the act of violence or cruelty are all in turn, bound by the sinful karma of violence. The more advanced interpretation of this vow is not to engage in violence in any way possible. A non-vegetarian diet causes mental aberrations such as lust, anger, enmity, jealousy, envy, hatred, etc. Additionally, it destroys the purity of the mind. Today, violence, terrorism, hatred, disharmony, corruption, etc. are all prevalent in the world on a large scale due to the harmful addiction towards a non-vegetarian diet. Nonetheless, medicines mixed with meat or alcohol given by inexperienced or unknown doctors should not be taken. Consumption of such medicines is equivalent to eating meat. They may improve physical health, but it damages mental health, to the extent where worship of God or discerning between right or wrong cannot be appropriately performed.

The third vow instructed by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is to abstain from adultery. Adultery is a great sin under any

circumstance for all followers. Devotees of God, may they be male or female, shall never look at the opposite gender with passion. They shall never keep close contact with any person of the opposite gender other than their nearest relatives. This practice should not only be done physically but also through mind and speech. A person can divert one's passionate feelings of love, attachment, cravings, fondness, lust, anger, impulsiveness, frenzy, fascination, resentment, etc. by restraining them through following *niyams* laid down by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The unique quality of human consciousness is that if a person wishes he/she can experience divine everlasting bliss and eternal peace by becoming united with the divine form of God. One can attain spiritual evolvment by using one's discretion to restrain one's senses and divert one's sexual energy towards the spiritual path to transform it into prowess and splendor. By following celibacy in gross and subtle ways, sexual energy, which is very powerful creative energy is sublimated and transformed into spiritual energy. The spiritual aspirant attains continence. By attaining continence, one becomes eligible for God-realization.

The fourth vow instilled by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is to never indulge in theft or stealing even of the smallest item under any circumstances, even if it is for offerings to a deity, without the permission of the owner. Stealing means to snatch, swindle, possess or use any objects like money, grains,

ornaments, jewels, clothes, vehicle, land, wealth, fruits, or anything against the will of the owner. A person who steals and all those people who inspire encourage, consent, support, compel, help, defend or concede the act of stealing and utilize the object acquired through stealing are culprits and all of them will have to suffer.

The fifth and final vow for householder devotees is not to take food or drinks from improper people or by any improper sources. The spiritual seeker should retain purity and should not attempt to impurify others. Thus, a person should maintain inner and outer purity and also be helpful to others in maintaining purity. One should always try to keep one's speech, behavior, and thoughts, pure in a way that they can serve as an example for others to follow.

Followers who abide by these five basic vows will be happy throughout their lifetime and even in the life beyond. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan will bless them with the ultimate goal of reaching *Akshardham*. Proper observance of the five basic vows requires blessings from God and his *ekantik Satpurush* as they are the ones who can eradicate all weaknesses and obstacles from the path of spiritual progress and help one attain salvation.

In the life of a devotee, there is a possibility of favorable and unfavorable experiences due to time and place. There is a possibility of purification and contamination of consciousness as well. In spite of all this, a devotee of God should never

give up. One should remain brave and fight against the weaknesses and drawbacks and proceed on the path of spirituality with complete and total awareness.

9.3 The Five Basic Vows for Saints

Bhagwan Swaminarayan not only wanted to keep his devotees untainted by the forces of *maya*, but more so desired to administer strict vows for his saints as well. Not only do they have to observe the five basic vows for household devotees, but they also have to abide by another additional five vows. Every Sadhu has the ideals of 'panch *vartmaan*' which means 'to observe the five vows by thought, word, and deed.' The five vows for saints are non-lust, non-greed, non-attachment, non-taste, and non-ego.

The vow of non-lust is to possess lifelong celibacy; never to get married or keep any contact with females. The saint should strictly follow the observance of *Naisthik Brahmacharya*.

The vow of non-greed is to not possess or have any desire for possessions. In fact, a Sadhu should not physically touch money, or ask anyone to hoard money on their behalf.

The third vow is non-attachment/non-affection to any place, person or object. Also, to not have any affection for one's body or its relatives is also a fundamental part of this vow. A Sadhu should only develop attachment for God and his devotees.

The fourth vow is non-taste. A Sadhu should not be allured or tempted towards any taste. A Sadhu should mix all food items in a wooden bowl and add water before consuming them. By controlling the sense of taste, all the other senses are controlled.

The fifth vow is non-ego. A Sadhu should not be egoistic. He should not have any sort of pride of renouncement, penance, knowledge, religious austerity, devotion, etc. Nonetheless, a Sadhu should be humble and remain a servant of all. Even if anybody beats, abuses, or insults a Sadhu, he should endure it patiently, and should always be forgiving. Moreover, he shall never hold any grudges or ill feelings for the ill-minded, but rather to wish good for him and to pity his ignorance.

Once, Shri Hari sent a letter to his Sadhus living in far distances. He wrote, “Observe the *vartmaans* prescribed by Myself. Avoid eight-fold contact with women. Dwell in the forest on the village outskirts. Never stay at a stranger’s place where you can see or hear a woman. Never discuss affairs of the town and always shun money. Never talk about one’s own birthplace, native place, community or relatives. Always discourage those who try to discuss town politics and gossip regarding others. Denounce the association of Sadhus who keep wealth with them. All of you should observe these rules never defy them.”



The Philosophy of Swaminarayanism



By associating with the ekantik Satpurush the gateway of moksha opens for the jiva.

10.1 Philosophy Briefing

Bhagwan Swaminarayan effectively assailed the roots of instincts in a lawless society by eradicating the base instincts of ego, lust, greed, hate, and anger from their hearts. He gave them a new direction; one involving devotion to God. Ultimately, he showed that a *jiva* is capable of being freed of sins, attaining *moksha* and experiencing God's bliss. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's basic philosophy stresses that the *atma* is separate from the three bodies viz. gross, subtle, and causal. It is also unaffected by the three gunas, namely *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. When the *atma* develops a oneness with *Aksharbrahma* and offers devotion to *Parabrahma*, then it should be understood that one has attained *moksha*.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has approved Ramanujacharya's *Vishishtadvaita* philosophy and confirmed it to be His preferred philosophy. According to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *brahma*, and *Parabrahma* are the five eternal entities. Among these, the first four elements are entirely dependent on the fifth element, *Parabrahma*.

10.2 Jiva

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has defined the *jiva* in *Shikshapatri* verse 105 as: "The *jiva* is tiny as an atom and dwells in the heart. It is all-conscious, the knower and pervades the body from head to toe by the power of its knowledge. The

soul possesses the characteristics: indivisible, impenetrable, immutable, and immortal." The *jiva*, in its purest form, is blissful, eternal, and full of consciousness. Yet, because it is ensnared by *maya*, it fails to recognize its true form and its true objective in life. It wanders from body to body, passing from one species to another, completing its cycle through the 8.4 million life forms. There are countless *jivas*.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan clearly differentiated the body and soul. Both possess characteristics completely opposite of each other. Just how the soul is distinct from the body, similarly, *Parabrahma* is also distinct from the soul. Just how the soul resides within the body, God resides in the soul as an observer through His omniscient powers God resides in each soul. He is the dispenser of the fruits of the deeds of all the souls. The soul is incapable to do or enjoy anything without God's will.

10.3 Ishwar

Ishwar transcends *jiva*. Each *ishwar* is a conscious spiritual being, possessing greater power than the *jivas*. *Ishwars* are involved in the creation, sustenance and destruction of the universe. Like *jivas*, they are also infinite in number and bound by *maya*. Just as the gross, subtle and causal are the three bodies of *jiva*; *virat*, *sutratma* and *avyakrut* are the three bodies of *ishwar*. The inner ruler and controller of both *jiva* and *ishwar* is *Parabrahma*.

10.4 Maya

Maya is *trigunatmika* - consisting of the three gunas - sattva, rajas and tamas. Its nature consists of ignorance and darkness, and is also the instrument - *shakti* of God. It is non-sentient primordial matter (*Jad*), out of which the whole universe is evolved. Being the cause of attachment of the *jivas* and *ishwars* to their bodies and bodily relations, it is difficult to transcend with one's own forces. However, ultimately, *maya*'s force is tamed by *Parabrahma*.

10.5 Brahma

Brahma is Purna *Purushottam Parabrahma*'s divine abode. It is the cause and controller of the aforementioned elements through the power vested in it by *Parabrahma*. As *brahma* is above *maya*, liberated *jivas* reside within *brahma*. *Brahma* forever remains humble and in constant service of *Parabrahma*. *Brahma* is also known as *Akshar*, or *Aksharbrahma*.

Akshar has two forms. One, which is formless and pure *chaitanya*, is known as *Chidakash* or *Brahmamahol*. In its other form, that *Akshar* remains in the service of *Purushottam Narayan*. A devotee who has reached *Akshardham* attains qualities similar to those of *Akshar* and forever remains in the service of God. *Purushottam Narayan* forever resides in that *Akshardham*. The countless millions of *Muktos*, who have attained qualities similar to those of *Akshar*, reside in that

Akshardham and all of them behave as servants of *Purushottam Narayan*.

10.6 Parabrahma

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has mentioned five eternal elements in which *Parabrahma* is ultimate. All the other elements are dependent on *Parabrahma* for their existence and powers. *Parabrahma* is uniquely indescribable and incomparable. The end goal for all those bound by *maya* is to become *brahmarup* and reside in *Parabrahma*'s service in *Akshardham*. *Parabrahma* possesses an infinite number of *kalyankari* attributes. *Parabrahma* is absolutely independent and is the cause, controller, sustainer, redeemer, and support of all and dispenser of the fruits of all karmas. He is eternally full of divine bliss and eternally has a divine form. He is the ultimate goal for performing *upasana* by all, including *Aksharbrahma*. *Parabrahma* is one and unparalleled and is commonly known as *Paramatma*, or Purna *Purushottam Narayan*.

10.7 Concept of Moksha

Bhagwan Swaminarayan elaborates *moksha* or final emancipation, known as *atyantik mukti* within the *Swaminarayan Sampraday*. Rendering service to Supreme Lord *Swaminarayan* by becoming *brahmarup* is the concept of *moksha*. The *jiva* is bound by *maya* and this is considered to be ignorance. Therefore, in order to remove that ignorance,

the *jiva* has to develop *atmanishtha*. Although, to transcend *maya*, primary level of *atmanishtha* is not sufficient. Advanced *atmanishtha* needs to be realized - in which the *atma*, identifies itself with Aksharbrahama. This is known as *gnan*. Only then does the soul become eligible to worship *Parabrahma*.

To realize *brahma* and Parabrahma, the *jiva* has to associate with an *ekantik Satpurush*. The *ekantik Satpurush* is the beholder of *ekantik dharma* and has realized oneself as *brahma* and is also God-realized. By associating with the *ekantik Satpurush* the gateway of *moksha* opens for the *jiva*.



The Six Pillars of Satsang



There are six pillars of satsang, namely: Murti, Acharya, Saints, Scriptures, Temples, and Devotees. Through the six pillars, the satsang fellowship flourishes day by day.

Upon incarnating on Earth 238 years ago, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan proved his supremacy through his various works. Through such works, countless souls benefitted, are benefiting and will benefit in the future to come. There are six pillars of *satsang*, namely: *Murti*, *Acharya*, Saints, Scriptures, Temples, and Devotees. Through the six pillars, the *satsang* fellowship flourishes day by day.

The *Murti* is the divine image/idol of God. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has installed his own personified form in Vadtal by the name of Harikrushna Maharaj. Upon instruction by Shriji Maharaj, one should meditate and worship this idol. Nonetheless, various other idols like Ghanshyam Maharaj, Nilkanth Varni, Sahajanand Swami, etc. are all suitable forms of worship in the Swaminarayan fellowship.

The *Acharya* is the chief of the Swaminarayan sect authorized by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. The sect was divided into two parts, the Northern Division and the Southern division. The Northern division is referred to as the Vadtal Gadi and the Southern division is known as the Ahmedabad Gadi. The *Acharya* has two key roles he adheres to 1) Installing the *Murti* of God in temples with proper rites and rituals. 2) Initiating spiritual seekers into the Sadhu-fold.

Saints are considered to be the soul of the Swaminarayan sect. They are trained spiritual teachers of the religion. They educate, preach, and propagate the *agna* and

upasana of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and the overall fellowship. Without the efforts of saints, there would be no scope for *satsang* to flourish throughout the world.

Scriptures are considered to be the holy books of the Swaminarayan sect. These scriptures give knowledge of the true nature of God and the soul and enable one to grasp the power of discrimination between right and wrong. Some of the fundamental scriptures of the Swaminarayan religion are the *Shikshapatri*, *Vachanamrut*, and *Satsangijivan*.

For the promotion of *upasana* and *bhakti*, Shri Hari built six *mandirs* in Gujarat, India. The six temples were constructed in the following locations: Vadtal, Ahmedabad, Bhuj, Dholera, Junagadh, and Gadhada. He installed *Murti* in these six temples. It is noteworthy that no other incarnation of God has completed such a feat during their presence on this planet.

Devotees are householder followers of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Devotees come to the temples to pray and obtain knowledge from saints. They serve the Swaminarayan sect through their monetary service. Due to the dedication of such devotees, to this day, the Swaminarayan sect is ever-growing.



Saints of the Holy Fellowship



Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired his Sadhus by writing dynamic letters, elaborating and glorifying the vows. The Sadhus upheld each word as sacred, to be obeyed zealously, thus elevating them spiritually.

12.1 Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vision

Upon accepting the reins of the fellowship, to aid his work, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan began to initiate the highest order of ascetics known as *paramhansas* -supreme swans. At the young age of twenty-three, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan initiated five hundred *paramhansas* in a single day. Shriji Maharaj's divinity attracted laymen and *sanyasis* throughout the land. Some *sanyasis* were heads of monasteries and religious orders outside of Gujarat. The saints of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan were a collective group of poets, scholars, authors, *yogis*, accomplished achievers, and heads of institutions who assembled from the nooks and corners of the country. They were excellent examples of asceticism and non-attachment, living legends of knowledge, and centers of profound devotion.

Shriji Maharaj demanded strict spiritual discipline and the highest principles of asceticism in Hinduism. To put this into effect, He gave his saints their very own five *vartmaans* to follow. The panch *vartmaan* for saints are: Nishkam – eightfold *Brahmacharya*, Nirlobh – non-greed, Nirman – egoless, Niswad – to overcome the sense of taste, and Nissneh – to remain detached from one's body, relatives, and material possessions. In the role of a *guru*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's personal care and spiritual grooming to elevate the *Paramhansas* was unique. Renunciates in India usually preferred to seclude themselves in mountains, forests, or

monasteries for their own spiritual endeavors. This is known as *Nivrutti Marg*. For His *Paramhansas*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan prescribed the tougher, *Pravrutti Marg*. This path involved the saints in traveling within society, removing misunderstandings from the hearts of people and transform them into the most elite devotees, while remaining totally detached. During their invariable trials and tribulations, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan inspired his Sadhus by writing dynamic letters, elaborating and glorifying the vows and detailing eternal truths. The Sadhus upheld each and every word as sacred, to be obeyed zealously, thus elevating them spiritually. In total, from the beginning of His ministry, from the age of 21 to 49, Shriji Maharaj initiated over two thousand men as *Sadhus*.

12.2 Tolerance and Forgiveness

Due to the emergence of Swaminarayan Sadhus in society, the existing *vairagis* and *bawas* became filled with jealousy and fury. As people increasingly began to respect and follow the Swaminarayan ascetics, these renunciants feared their doom in losing their daily bread. Thus, in return, these *bawas* abused them mercilessly and tortured the innocent saints. In such cases, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan molded his Sadhus like none other. Shriji Maharaj had ordered all of his Sadhus to wish good fortune to those who insulted them or inflicted physical pain. None of the Sadhus were allowed to retaliate. The willingness of the Sadhus to implicitly obey the

rigorous vows, to undergo self – abnegation, to bravely tolerate the pain and insults flung by antagonists, even to die for the Lord, is something to note of Swaminarayan saints who ultimately, stand different from others.

Nonetheless, wicked people began to spoil food given to saints in alms, and at times, they even poisoned the food. Nevertheless, saints enthusiastically continued their noble duties. Frustrated wicked minded people adopted more cruel ways as saints did not take their food without offering to the idol of God. The wicked began to snatch the idol and break it or take it with them. In these tough times, saints had to undergo continuous fasts for many days.

Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami and Krupanand Swami and other saints went to a village named Savarkundla. As the saints were about to take lunch, Uga Khuman, the king of the village came there. He had a malicious attitude towards *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his devotees. Uga Khuman did not allow the saints to take their lunch and in return, beat them mercilessly away from the village. The saints had to undergo a fast for the day. The townspeople had informed the saints that Uga Khuman had been harassing all the saints who came into the village and due to this, he does not have a child. Upon hearing such news, Gunatitanand Swami immediately told all the saints that they had obeyed one command of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan of not retaliating but forgot to wish well for Uga Khuman. Swami instructed all the saints to pray

so that Uga Khuman can receive a son by the grace of God. All of the saints prayed and within a year, a son was born. At an old age, Uga Khuman fathered a baby boy. Eight years later, when Gunatitanand Swami was passing through the village, Uga Khuman's eight-year-old boy Jivno Khuman, brought Swami and the Sadhus home. The son was very fond of Sadhus. Ultimately, both father and son became staunch *satsangis*.

12.3 Munivar Muktanand Swami

Muktanand Swami, whom *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan always respected like a *guru*, known as 'The mother of *Satsang*' was born in 1758 in the village of Amreli, Gujarat. He was named Mukundas, and with a natural aptitude for learning, he studied the holy scriptures in depth. He also loved music and poetry. As custom, he was married at a young age even though he yearned to remain a *Brahmachari* and attain God-realization. This led him to renounce family life at the age of 16 and he set out in search of a *guru* who would guide him to master *brahmacharya*.

After meeting two different brahmacharis who could not fulfill his endeavor, his search finally led him to Ramanand Swami, a Sadhu of high reputation and discipline.

Sadguru Ramanand Swami initiated Mukundas on *Vasant Panchami* in 1786 and named him Muktanand Swami. After completing his studies, Ramanand Swami appointed

him as the head of fifty Sadhus living in the *ashram* at Loj. After some time, the teenage *yogi*, 'Nilkanth Varni' arrived at the *ashram* of Loj. The saintliness of Muktanand Swami and his satisfactory answer to Nilkanth's question was a significant factor in Nilkanth's decision to stay at Loj. When Ramanand Swami appointed twenty-year-old Sahajanand Swami as the head of the fellowship, Muktanand Swami readily accepted the decision without feeling insulted or belittled even though this effectively made Sahajanand Swami the *guru*, and Muktanand Swami his disciple! This reflected Swami's great humility.

Muktanand Swami possessed numerable virtues. Even when evil and cruel people came to kill Muktanand Swami, they showered him with praise after experiencing his saintly nature and personality. He possessed unflinching faith and high regard for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. He presented the doctrines and precepts of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in a loud, graceful voice and matchless effective style that all the doubts of the listeners would become clear. *Pujya* Swami was also an exceptional scholar, poet, an accomplished classical dancer, a singer, versatile in playing instruments, and a proficient ayurvedic physician. Even though Muktanand Swami was 23 years older than *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, he used to sing and dance in front of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan to please him. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave him the title: 'The Mother of *satsang*' because of his motherly love, tolerance, and caring

nature. He won the great debate in Vadodara by successfully proving that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is God incarnate from the base of the *Vedas*.

He was one of the four saints who compiled the *Vachanamrut*, the leading scripture of the fellowship. In the *Vachanamrut*, he posed most of the questions ninety-one on behalf of the spiritual seekers thirsting for spiritual enlightenment. The *aarti*: ‘Jay Sadguru Guru Swami’ was composed by Muktanand Swami in praise of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in the village of Kalvani in 1802. Nonetheless, *Pujya* Swami’s literacy contribution includes seven works in Sanskrit and twenty-three in regional dialect, such as *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, *Satsangijivan Mahatmya*, and Muktanand Kavya - containing 20 smaller works. He also composed hundreds of kirtans of various *ragas*. By Maharaj’s wish, he composed special kirtans to be sung during weddings, instead of the ‘*fatana*’ which were very prevalent at the time. He continued eulogizing Maharaj’s glory, despite failing health, till the age of seventy-two, when he passed away in 1830 just a month after Shriji Maharaj in Gadhada.

12.4 Yogiraj Gopalanand Swami

Gopalanand Swami was born in a *Brahmin* family in the village of Todala in 1781. He was named Khushal. At the tender age of four, Khushal learned Sanskrit from his father. Then, he studied the *Vedas*, Astrology, Astronomy, Nyaya and Vyakran from a *pandit*. Precocious Khushal mastered *ashtang-*

yoga and often meditated in a Shiv *Mandir* nearby. Later, after completing his own studies, he set up a school in Todala and taught the children of the village. Khushal displayed many miracles as a child, which proved he was a divine child. After hearing the glory of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, Khushal became impatient to meet him. Sometime later, when he met him, it felt like a divine reunion, and he yearned to become a Sadhu. However, Shriji Maharaj first sent him to Vadodara to teach in a school as well as give sermons to the students there. Finally, in 1808, Maharaj initiated him in Gadhada and named him Gopalanand Swami.

Gopalanand Swami was a master of *ashtang-yoga* as well as a great *Nadi Vaidya*. Being, a stalwart saint of the holy fellowship, before departing for *Akshardham*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan left the responsibility of the whole fellowship to Gopalanand Swami and instructed everyone to obey him. The *yogic* master remained at the helm of the holy fellowship for twenty-two years after the departure of Shriji Maharaj. Under his guidance and direction, the fellowship continued to strengthen and spread. He prepared guidelines, so activities related to deities, acharyas, saints, devotees, and scriptures continued to happen per the command of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

Gopalanand Swami was a great spiritually powered saint with extraordinary and miraculous powers. Despite this, he used his skills solely in service to the holy fellowship while

remaining humble and free from conceitedness. During his lifetime, Gopalanand Swami wrote nineteen books in Sanskrit and seven other books in other languages. Swami wrote commentaries on the *Vedas*, Upanishads, *Brahma* Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, and Ishavashyopanishada in Sanskrit based on Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy. He was also one of the four saints who compiled the *Vachanamrut*. One of the major contributions to *satsang* was his commentary of Shriji Maharaj as a *Parabrahma Purushottam* Narayan-The Supreme Lord of Lords. His discourses were compiled into a book called: 'Gopalanand Swami Ni Vato' which revealed the glory of Maharaj and moral tales filled with wit and wisdom. At the age of seventy-one, Gopalanand Swami left this Earth in 1852 at Vadtal.

12.5 Panditraj Nityanand Swami

Nityanand Swami was born in a *Brahmin* family in Datiya, a village near Lucknow in Northern India in 1793. He was named Dinmani Sharma. Dinmani was intelligent and interested in studies from childhood. At a young age, he went to Kashi to study Sanskrit. During his studies, he realized that mere learning would not lead to God-realization. For this, he must seek a true Sadhu: a *Satpurush*. Completing his studies, he set out to visit the holiest places of India in search of a God-realized saint. His quest brought him to Visnagar, in Northern Gujarat where he came to know of Maharaj's manifestation. Dinmani subsequently met Maharaj in the

village Unjha. Upon having *darshan* of Maharaj, he immediately prostrated and took refuge of Maharaj. Maharaj embraced him and initiated him in Meghpur and named him Nityanand Swami.

Maharaj then sent him to a *pandit* to study Nyaya, Mimansa, and other *Shastras*. He soon became an invincible scholar of profound erudition amongst the *Paramhansas*. Maharaj once asked four senior *Paramhansas* about their greatness. Being one of them, Nityanand Swami replied, "By your grace Maharaj, I can defeat even the greatest *pandit* on this planet in a scriptural debate." Maharaj agreed with Swami's statement.

Even though he was born in a wealthy and aristocratic family, Nityanand Swami lived a life of detachment and modesty. Based on the *Vedic* scriptures, Nityanand Swami upheld the Swaminarayan movement. When a section on *upasana* was to be written in the *Satsangijivan*, Nityanand Swami insisted that Bhagwan Swaminarayan must be described as the Supreme Godhead. To test his understanding, Bhagwan Swaminarayan excommunicated him for seven days. Regardless, Nityanand Swami remained steadfast in his belief. Later, Bhagwan Swaminarayan praised him in the whole assembly and much appreciated his understanding.

Through his life, Nityanand Swami contributed immensely to winning debates over Bhagwan Swaminarayan as an incarnation and the *Vedic* base of the holy fellowship.

Many scholars in Gujarat spited Swami's scholarly fame. On one occasion, the *pandits* of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad of Vadodara arranged a debate with Swami out of jealousy. But he trounced them, convincing them of the consonance of the Swaminarayan philosophy with the *Vedic Shastras*.

Nityanand Swami was one of the four saints who compiled the *Vachanamrut*, the leading scripture of the holy fellowship. Nityanand Swami wrote the following Sanskrit texts: Haridigvijay, Hari Kavach, and Shandilya Sutra Bhashya. Nonetheless, Nityanand Swami also translated the original *Shikshapatri* from Sanskrit to Gujarati. After serving the divine fellowship for 54 years, Nityanand Swami left his mortal body at the age of 76 years in 1847 at Vadtal.

12.6 Kaviraj Brahmanand Swami

Brahmanand Swami was born as Ladudan Barot on the auspicious day of *Vasant Panchami* in the village of Khan, Rajasthan in 1772. Born as a *Charan*, his father's name was Shambhudanji, and his mother was Laluba. Due to Ladudan being a poetic genius, he was sent to Bhuj, where he learned Pingal and other scriptures until the age of 28, at the royal expense of the king. He was a master poet and could spontaneously develop poems and hymns. Due to his poetry, highly respected kings admired his talent. Ladudan earned fame and wealth by visiting various courts of great cities. Everyone invited him to become their main bard with great perks and benefits.

The king of Bhavnagar, Vakhatsinhji, actually sent Ladudanji to put an end to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan whom he believed to be an organized deception. Ladudanji set out to expose Swaminarayan and prove that He is a big shame. But, upon arriving in the assembly in Gadhada, one mere glance at Maharaj was enough to dissolve Ladudanji's skepticism. On Maharaj's request, Ladudanji, then went to advise Jivuba and Laduba to live according to the customs of society. Yet, Laduba's words rooted in detachment melted away Ladudanji's vanity, inspiring him to surrender the rest of his life to spirituality. He immediately became Shriji Maharaj's follower. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan soon after initiated Ladudanji and named him Brahmanand Swami. At one point in time, whose whole body was covered with golden ornaments, that very same Brahmanand Swami was now in simple saffron robes. This transformation was all due to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's glory and power.

Brahmanand Swami was a versatile genius. Apart from music and poetry, he was a master sculptor and architecture. The magnificent *mandirs* of Vadtal, Junagadh, and Muli were all constructed under his guidance and supervision.

Brahmanand Swami was able to instantaneously make kirtans, and composed more than 12,000 over his lifetime. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan promised that if one recited 100 of Brahmanand Swami's kirtans daily with ardent devotion, He would give divine *darshan* to the devotee. Brahmanand Swami

was an ever laughing, jolly, playful saint. Due to his devotion and love for Maharaj, Brahmanand Swami was widely known as the dear friend of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Even if he had a friend-like relationship with Shriji Maharaj, he was imbued with God-like qualities. He possessed deep affection for Maharaj, so much so that when Maharaj decided to depart from the world, he ordered Brahmanand Swami to go to Junagadh because Maharaj knew that Swami had the power to bring him back to Earth if he left his physical body in his presence! Brahmanand Swami departed from this world in Muli *Mandir* at the age of 60 in 1832.

12.7 Vairagyamurti Nishkulanand Swami

Nishkulanand Swami was born in the village of Shekhat, Gujarat in 1766 and was named Lalji Suthar. Due to his family traditions, he learned and mastered the skill of carpentry very quickly. He was a disciple of Ramanand Swami before he met *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and was married and had two children. Before the departure of Ramanand Swami, Lalji Suthar was instructed to become and remain a disciple of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan by Swamiji himself. As per Ramanand Swami's directions, Lalji Suthar fulfilled his *guru's* wish and remained an ideal disciple his whole life. Soon after, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan initiated him as a saint and named him Nishkulanand Swami.

Later, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan commanded Swami to write the 'Yamdand' in 1804, which described the pain and

sufferings of a sinful person after death in hell. It was the first scripture of the holy fellowship. Nishkulanand Swami also composed twenty-two other impressive scriptures on various subjects which were compiled into a single book called 'Nishkulanand Kavya.' In this book, Swami covered many topics wherein a Sadhu and a householder can gain spiritual strength. Nishkulanand Swami's most prominent scripture is the 'Bhaktachintamani.' This book narrates the life-long episodes of Maharaj, His Santo, and Bhakto. It is one of the most authentic biographies of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, which was written in his very presence and proofread and verified by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan Himself. Nishkulanand Swami was considered as the idol of non-attachment; many aspirants gained spiritual strength through Swami's saintliness character and personality which he portrays in his writings compiled as the Nishkulanand Kavya.

Nonetheless, Nishkulanand Swami strengthened the heritage of the holy fellowship with his art and religious literature. The twelve-door swing, handcrafted palanquin and artistic wooden threshold in the inner *mandir* of Dholera are a few of the treasures of his art. Due to his natural inclination for non-attachment, Nishkulanand Swami spent most of his time in Dholera after the departure of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Even though Dholera was a drought-prone region and was underdeveloped, not many saints and devotees chose to live there. Yet, for Nishkulanand Swami, it was the

perfect place to seclude himself from the world and attach to the supreme almighty.

12.8 Remarkable Feats

Bhagwan Swaminarayan trained his saints to the utmost caliber. There were many extraordinary spiritually powered saints in the holy fellowship. They lived and displayed such virtues that each one of them could have been worshipped as God if they desired. Nevertheless, they observed every command of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in spirit. This displays the remarkable hold *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had over them. This was all due to the saints realizing the glory of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Their unprecedented modesty and humble spirit allowed them to perform the *kalyan* of countless. Numerous saints had extensive talents such as mastery in Sanskrit and other languages, singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, composing kirtans, writing books, etc. Thousands of kirtans were written by these saints in various languages regarding the glory and activities of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

As a last measure to restrain the remarkable growth of the holy fellowship, malicious people propagated that the holy fellowship is non-*Vedic* and that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is not an incarnation of God. On the basis of the holy scriptures of Hinduism, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's most elite saints proved with evidence in great detail that not only is *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan a God, but he is the supreme Lord of Lords.

Sadguru Muktanand Swami and Nityanand Swami were specially selected by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan to engage in these scriptural debates. By the grace of Shriji Maharaj and his wit, Muktanand Swami proved the supremacy of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in Vadodara, Gujarat. The debate was hosted by the king of Vadodara, named Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad. Many scholars had gathered there amongst thousands of spectators in the assembly of the king's courtyard. The debate between the great educated scholars and Muktanand Swami commenced. The scholars passed numerous questions to Muktanand Swami, interrogating the existence of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan as God. After several hours of intense debate, Muktanand Swami successfully answered all the queries of the pundits and convinced them of the *Vedic* base of the holy fellowship and that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is the supreme almighty Lord. All the pundits accepted defeat and Muktanand Swami was hailed victorious. Due to the victory, the king of Vadodara and other prominent scholars became devotees of Shriji Maharaj. This was a critical victory in the history of the holy fellowship which led to positive consequences.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan Himself won many debates and transformed arrogant scholars into humble and virtuous devotees. Such kinds of feats were performed by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's disciples, then what is to say about the power, greatness, and character of Shriji Maharaj Himself.



Devotees of the Holy Fellowship



Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the only avatar in the history of Hindu Sanatan dharma to have been accepted as God by more than 2 million people while he was present on Earth.

These devotees grew into one united family following the moral disciplines prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

13.1 A Source of Inspiration

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the only avatar in the history of Hindu Sanatan dharma to have been accepted as God by more than 2 million people while present on Earth. These devotees were from all over India and were from different walks of life: Brahmins, Shudras, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Muslims, and Parsis. Just as iron is naturally attracted to a powerful magnet, spiritual aspirants from the lands of India and beyond were attracted towards Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his virtuous followers. These devotees grew into one united family following the moral disciplines prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri.

But, the devotees of Shriji Maharaj had to suffer and tolerate from many to uphold the holy fellowship. They were excommunicated and sometimes even forced to leave their home villages and towns. Some of them even sacrificed their lives for this holy fellowship. Their loyalty towards Bhagwan Swaminarayan was unparalleled. Many spent their entire lives in the service of the fellowship. Their lives serve as a source of inspiration for householder devotees today. Even though these stories are from 200 years ago, the lessons to be gleaned from their remarkable lives are timeless.

13.2 Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar

Dada Khachar was born in the year of 1800 to father Abhel Khachar and mother Soma Devi. He was named

Uttamsinh. He had four sisters: Jaya, Lalita, Panchali, and Nanu. At the age of 12, after the passing of his father, Dada Khachar became the king of Gadhada estate comprising of twelve villages.

Dada Khachar was the most prominent Kathi disciple of the holy fellowship. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan stayed at Dada Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada for approximately 30 years. Dada Khachar offered his entire estate and wealth at the feet of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Dada Khachar's unflinching faith and trust in Shriji Maharaj peaked at the highest and thus, he never questioned *Bhagwan*'s decisions or actions.

There was never a time when the home of Dada Khachar was void of saints and devotees. He utilized all his wealth in favor of service to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and the holy fellowship. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan wanted to build a *mandir* on a hill in the village of Gadhada. Half of the land was owned by Dada Khachar and the other half by his uncle, Jiva Khachar. Dada Khachar offered his share, but Jiva Khachar was reluctant. In the end, realizing that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan wanted to build a *mandir* in Gadhada, Dada Khachar donated his entire *darbar* to build a *mandir*. As a result, a monumental temple was constructed in the courtyard of Dada Khachar.

Many times, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan tested Dada Khachar's nature. Once, Muktanand Swami requested to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan that he should not test Dada Khachar

as he was the king of Gadhada. Shriji Maharaj replied, Swami! My nature is such that I would not stay in any place for a long period of time. However, I continue to stay here as it is my own home for more than 25 years because of Dada Khachar and his family's absolute trust and unalloyed devotion towards me."

Once *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan ordered Dada Khachar to transfer his estate to his sister's name, a practiced considered highly unorthodox at the time. Immediately, Dada Khachar did this without having any other thoughts. Just a few hours later, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan ordered him to take it back and Dada Khachar did so with a smile.

When *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan left for *Akshardham*, the grief-stricken Dada Khachar could not bear the separation and tried to plunge into the funeral pyre. However, he was held back by Sadguru Gopalanand Swami who told Dada Khachar to go to Laxmi Vadi (an assembly ground in Gadhada). There, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave divine *darshan* to Dada Khachar and said to him that He had not left *satsang* and that He will always be present. Dada Khachar passed away in Gadhada in 1852 at the age of 52 years.

13.3 The Great Companion: Sura Khachar

Sura Khachar was the chieftain of the remote village of Loya. Sura Khachar was known for his sense of humor and close relationship with *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Through his

sense of humor, he kept the holy fellowship vibrant and full of joy. Sura Khachar was a jolly person who was able to lighten the mood when *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was solemn. His comical nature and sharp sense of humor were not to be mistaken for a childish attitude. Instead, he was spiritually mature and was one of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's *ekantik* bhaktos. Regardless of being married, He was a celibate and was thus praised on numerous occasions by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan for his control over the senses.

His wife Shantiba possessed even more devotion for Shriji Maharaj than Sura Khachar himself. On many occasions, they invited Shriji Maharaj along with more than five hundred saints and many disciples to their royal estates. The most famous among them was the first ever *shakotsav* at Loya which lasted for more than 2 months. Nonetheless, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan spoke 18 *Vachanamruts* in the courtyard of Sura Khachar due to his noble devotion.

13.4 The Enlightened: Govardhanbhai

Govardhanbhai was an *ekantik* bhagat from the village of Mangrol. He was a *Bania* by caste and was a business owner by profession. He was a disciple of Ramanand Swami. Govardhanbhai's mind was singularly focused on the divine form of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. He had attained the state of enlightenment in which he could constantly experience the divine form of God.

Once when he was going to wash his clothes on the banks of the river, the townspeople started shouting at him to stop. Only after reaching the river did he realize that he was carrying his son instead of picking up his laundry. Once, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan said that for Govardhanbhai both sugar and salt are the same. However, the Kathi disciples were not convinced. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan asked to put two bowls—one filled with sugar and one filled with salt in front of Govardhanbhai and told him to take it, as it was *prasad*. To everyone's surprise, Govardhanbhai finished both of the bowls. This proved that due to the highly spiritual state of Govardhanbhai, he saw both substances to be equal. Due to the grace of Shriji Maharaj even though he was submerged in his business and affairs, he was more submerged in the idol of Shriji Maharaj.

13.5 The Idol of Loyalty: Jhinabhai

Jhinabhai was the *darbar* of Panchala in the Southern part of Saurashtra. Nonetheless, he was a private secretary of the Nawab of Junagadh and a disciple of Ramanand Swami. He was a clever businessman and an administrator. Therefore, he amassed great wealth from his agricultural initiatives. He spent most of it in the service of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his devotees. He was proficient in handling affairs. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan often instructed him to manage the organization of *yagnas* and congregations, etc. During the famine of 1812, Jhinabhai distributed grains to hundreds of

families affected by the famine. He was zealous about spending time with *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Thus, he set up a residence in Gadhada to listen to the divine discourses of Shriji Maharaj and His saints. He also hosted the Maha Raas Lila in Panchala in 1812. He sponsored the entire festival and fed thousands of devotees, ultimately pleasing *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan by serving him with his body, mind, and soul. A very renowned incident of how Jhinabhai displayed his loyalty to a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is something to reflect upon.

Once, Jhinabhai came to Mangrol. Here, he came to know that Kamalshi Vanjha had fallen very ill and that nobody was looking after him. Kamalshibhai was a poor basket weaver, yet a great devotee. Hearing the news that Kamalshibhai was sick, Jhinabhai went to see him. Upon seeing Jhinabhai, Kamalshi began crying, for it seemed as if none of Kamalshi's relatives cared for him. Jhinabhai was pained to see Kamalshi's predicament. He wished to take him home with him, yet Kamalshi was too weak to walk. So, Jhinabhai went into town and called some laborers to lift his entire cot. He was able to find only three laborers', and so he acted as the fourth laborer. He lifted the fourth leg of the cot himself and with his free hand, held his horse's reins. As Jhinabhai and the laborers came out of Kamalshibhai's home, they ran into one of the village leaders. Seeing Jhinabhai, a highly respected *darbar*, lifting the cot himself, he quickly

called another laborer from the village to relieve Jhinabhai. After that, Jhinabhai sat on his horse and led the laborers to his home. Upon arriving in Panchala, Jhinabhai asked his sister, Adiba, where to place Kamalshi's cot. Adiba did not respond, as she was repulsed at the thought of having to care for such a poor devotee. Ignoring his sister, Jhinabhai had Kamalshi's cot placed in his own room. He served him day and night, washing his clothes, feeding him and serving him with greater care than he took of even himself. Once, Kamalshibhai had a severe headache, and so Jhinabhai asked his sister for some black pepper powder which was used as a remedy for headaches. "We don't have any in the house" Adiba said, brushing aside Jhinabhai's request. A few days later when Jhinabhai had a headache, Adiba brought some black pepper powder for him. "Where did this pepper come from?" Jhinabhai asked. "There was some left in the home," Adiba replied. "There was no pepper available when it was needed for Kamalshibhai, and today it suddenly appears!" Jhinabhai spoke sternly. Furious, Jhinabhai tossed the bottle of pepper and stopped speaking to his sister. When Maharaj came to know that Jhinabhai had lifted poor Kamalshibhai's cot and had served him with such love, he came to Panchala and hugged Jhinabhai seven times. Maharaj was very pleased, for Jhinabhai had served a poor, yet true devotee. After some time went by, Adiba asked for Maharaj's forgiveness and prayed that he convinces Jhinabhai to begin speaking to her

again. Maharaj spoke to Jhinabhai, who accepted Maharaj's wish and started speaking to his sister again.

Once, Jhinabhai fell gravely ill in Junagadh. Maharaj was in Gadhada when he heard news of his illness. He mounted his horse and left for Junagadh immediately, arriving in the middle of the night. The sound of his horse's hooves awakened everyone in the *darbar* as he entered. News soon spread that Maharaj had arrived. Maharaj went straight into the main bedroom and sat on Jhinabhai's cot, next to his pillow. Seeing Maharaj, Jhinabhai was overjoyed. It seemed as if Jhinabhai was nearing his end. Maharaj asked him whether he wished to ask for anything for his son, Hathisinh. "If he becomes your devotee, you will look after him, whether I ask you to or not," Jhinabhai replied. "And if he does not become your devotee, you will not look after him even if I ask you." Maharaj listened patiently. "Do you wish for anything for yourself?" he then asked. "Please make a *mandir* here for the devotees of the Sorath region," Jhinabhai replied. Maharaj agreed to Jhinabhai's request, promising him to build a *mandir* in Junagadh. Maharaj asked, "Which *dham* do you wish to go to?" *Badrikashram*, *Shvetdvip*, *Vaikunth*, *Golok* or *Akshardham*?" Jhinabhai replied, "Maharaj! Please keep me forever in your service, just as you have kept Bhaguji, Miyaji, and Mulji *Brahmachari*." Gangaba, Jhinabhai's mother, was saddened on hearing her son's words, for it dawned upon her that he was nearing his end. Maharaj comforted her, "Oh,

mother! What if I were to give your Jhina the kingdom of Junagadh?" Gangaba replied, "That would be great, Maharaj." Maharaj asked again, "And what if I give him the kingdom of Vadodara? Or that of *Indra*? How about that of *Brahma* or *Prakruti Purush*?" Gangaba was pleased with the prospects Maharaj was making. "I wish to give him the kingdom of *Akshardham*," Maharaj then said. With these last words of Maharaj ringing in his ears, Jhinabhai closed his eyes, forever taking his seat in *Akshardham*. The date was December 16th, 1828.

13.6 The Elite Eighteen Plus One

An integral aspect of *bhakti* involves the commands of the Lord's implicitly. The unquestioning obedience *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan won from his followers was phenomenal. Once, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan wrote a letter to eighteen disciples stating:

"Oh great jewels of *satsang*: Mulubhai of Bandhiya; Macha Khachar of Kariyani; Alaiya Khachar of Jhinjhavadar; Sura Khachar of Loya; Somla Khachar of Botad; Hathiya Patgar, Mamaiya Patgar, and Amra Patgar of Kundal; Matra Dhadhal of Sarangpur; Naja Jogiya of Lakhamka; Aja Patel, Kala Patel, Vira Patel, Verabhai, Jivrajbhai, and Kamalshibhai of Methan; Dosabhai and Ladha Sheth of Bandhiya; and others: Jay Swaminarayan, I am writing this letter to ask all of you to renounce your families and livelihoods. Proceed to Jetalpur. There Bhayiramdas Swami will initiate you into the

Sadhu fold. Then, proceed on a pilgrimage to Kashi and then return for my *darshan* in *Kutch*. Remember, leave whatever you are doing once you read this letter. Do not go anywhere. Follow my *agna* and proceed to Jetalpur.” Shri Hari sent a messenger from village to village with this letter.

All of the devotees listed in the letter were ranked eminently in society; *Kathis* chiefs, landlords, and great businessman. When Aja Patel of Methan got the letter, he immediately announced his departure. At the moment, he was in the middle of his nephew, Kalyandas’ wedding. Kalyandas asked to see the letter. Expecting resistance from Kalyandas, Ajabhai started to explain the importance of Maharaj’s *agna* and that it would not be wise to interfere. Kalyandas silently read the letter and proclaimed, “Uncle, I must come too. Maharaj has ordered me to leave my home as well.” Ajabhai was surprised by Kalyandas’ response. He snatched the letter and carefully reread it. There were only eighteen names, and his nephews was not amongst them. So, he asked, “Where do you see your name?”

Kalyandas replied, “Uncle, do you not see the end of the salutation? It says: ‘and others.’ Am I not that ‘other’?” Ajabhai was speechless. Ajabhai insisted that Kalyandas seek approval from his mother, his in-laws, and his wife. Kalyandas received permission from all three of them right there on the spot. As the wedding drums beat to the rhythm of sacrifice and flutes hummed to the tune of detachment, both uncle and

nephew left for Jetalpur together. In Jetalpur, Bhayiramdas Swami initiated the devotees and told them to go to *Kutch* to receive Maharaj’s blessings. Shriji Maharaj waited for the saints on the city’s main street. As soon as the nineteen saints were insight, Shriji Maharaj started doing *dandvats*. They all rushed to stop him. Shriji Maharaj embraced all nineteen Sadhus. When Kalyandas approached Maharaj, the others narrated his story. Shriji Maharaj uttered words of exclamation, “*Adbhut...Adbhut...Adbhut...*” and fittingly named him Adbhutanand Swami. Maharaj spoke to the Sadhus with love and admiration in his tone, “You have followed my *agna* without a second’s delay. This is no small achievement. Your names will be praised forever.” Pleased with the whole group, he kept them with him for a few days and then commanded them to return home to resume a normal life.

This was the spiritual level of household devotees of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. They were ever ready to follow the commands of Maharaj.

13.7 Ardent Women Disciples

Apart from saints and male disciples, the unforgettable contribution given in spreading the holy fellowship was from female disciples. Even after persecution, they carried on their duties. At that time, females were considered to be inferior to men. Women were not allowed to follow the path of renunciation. However, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan introduced *Sankhya-Yogi* initiation, and as a result, hundreds of women

were able to follow that path. The Sankhya-Yogis would live in special areas in *mandir* precincts, avoid the company of males, offer devotion to God, practice austerities, and preach to women. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan played a significant role to raise the status of women in India. For the female devotees, He took a bold and revolutionary step. In fact, in the recent history of Indian culture, He was the first to liberate women in true sense of word. Many female devotees attained an exalted spiritual state due to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's efforts.

13.8 The Devoted Jivuba and Laduba

Jivuba was the elder of Dada Khachar's two sisters. She was the first of Abhel Khachar's children and was aptly named Jivu or 'alive'. When Jivuba was old enough to get married, Abhel Khachar searched for a worthy groom, but she refused. Despite her refusal, Abhel Khachar decided to get her married to Hathiya Patgar of Kundal. After their marriage, she sought his permission to remain a celibate, return home, and worship God for the rest of her life, He obliged. Upon returning, Jivuba spent her time in service of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and the large number of devotees that came to Dada's *darbar*. Along with her devotion to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, Jivuba was spiritually enlightened as well.

Laduba was the younger of Dada Khachar's sisters. She was married to Khoda Dhadhar of Botad, but was allowed to return home and worship God for the rest of her life. She was extremely passionate and competitive with her sister Jivuba

in regards to her level of *bhakti*. They often competed in celebrating festivals and feeding *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan various delicacies. Her devotion and unwavering faith in *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan classified her one of the greatest female devotees of the *sampraday*.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan stayed in Gadhada because of the devotional insistence of their father, Abhel Khachar. Once *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan requested the royal poet, Ladudanji who came to Gadhada, to talk to both the sisters. Maharaj asked Ladudanji to go and persuade the sisters to go to their husbands' homes and live as ordinary householders. Ladudanji, with all of his wit, attempted to convince them. Instead, Laduba and Jivuba, through their preaching, instilled *vairagya* in the heart of Ladudanji. They transformed Ladudan Barot into the great versatile saint - Brahmanand Swami.

Many times, they used to accompany Shriji Maharaj when he went outside of Gadhada. Once Shriji Maharaj proceeded to Vadtal without taking them. Maharaj mounted on his Manki and set off with some disciples. However, Manki refused to leave the royal courtyard of Dada Khachar understanding the love of the two sisters. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan commented, "These women disciples are influencing the mare." Only when Shriji Maharaj requested permission from the sisters did Manki leave Gadhada for Vadtal. Premanand Swami composed a kirtan: 'Mankiye Chadya Re Mohan Vanmali...'

Once both the sisters, along with Rajba were coming to Gadhada from Kariyani. On their way, they saw an elder saint by the name of Akhandanand Swami at the bank of a small pond. He had been suffering from dysentery and was passing blood. As a result, he was unable to walk. The two sisters got off their cart and told the cart driver, “We will walk, but put Akhandanand Swami in the cart and take him to Gadhada.” They walked barefoot on the rocky road under the hot scorching sun. They had blisters on their feet. When they had reached Gadhada, they had devotees care for *Pujya* Swami’s health. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan found out what had happened and what the two sisters had done for *Pujya* Swami. Maharaj became extremely pleased and he remarked, “This cannot be done by anyone else! Ask for whatever you want!” Both of the sisters asked that He forever remains at their home in Gadhada. It was due to their dedication and devotion that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan not only stayed there for the majority of his life but also constructed a beautiful temple there.

13.9 The Idol of Celibacy: Rajba

Rajba was a true celibate. She was married against her wish. When her husband approached her on their wedding night, he saw a lioness before he could even touch her. He immediately realized that she was a celibate and gave her permission to go to Gadhada to worship God. In Gadhada, she would stay ten yards away from men and wear thick clothes. She spent her days sitting in meditation and helping

with chores. Rajba adhered to the vow of *brahmacharya* to such an extent that even after her soul left the mortal body, Agnidev, the deity of fire, was apprehensive about touching her body with his flames. Only after Gopalanand Swami ensured Agnidev that her soul has left her body, did her body begin to burn.

13.10 The Zealous: Gangama

A *Brahmin* woman named Gangama lived in the small village of Jetalpur, Gujarat. She possessed deep affection for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and always invited Maharaj to her home to have a meal made by her own hands. *Bhagwan* would come to her home and accept her devotion. Shriji Maharaj would affectionately refer to her as ‘Mother’. Whenever Maharaj went out to celebrate festivals, she would follow close behind and wait for a chance to make and serve Maharaj a meal. She would serve warm meals without any form of selfish motive, out of competition or jealousy. Her sole intention was to please Maharaj and His santo-bhakto. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was much pleased by her love, devotion, and loyalty.

13.11 The Resilient: Jamkuba

Jamkuba was the queen of Udaipur in Rajasthan, India. Once, from her palace, she heard the divine chanting, ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...’ and felt peace. She found that two *Brahmins* were chanting the *mantra* while taking a

bath. The queen asked who they were, where they came from, and what they were chanting. They replied, “We come from Gujarat and we are chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*.”

The *Brahmins* described the life of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and mentioned that he was present in Gadhada, Gujarat currently. Upon listening to the divine episodes of Maharaj, an intense desire to meet Him arose in her heart. But she knew that the king would not let her go. Thus, she made a plan to flee. One night, she escaped the palace and ran off into the dark forest. The next morning, the king ordered his soldiers to track her. When she heard the horses’ steps, she hid in a filthy skeleton of a camel for three days without any food or water. When the soldiers gave up their search efforts, she crawled out and started back on her path, but she was lost and confused. She met a *Brahmin* who agreed to help her. On the way, the *Brahmin* offered her food and water and soon after partaking, she fell asleep. The next morning when she woke up, she found herself on the bank of a river where some women were chanting, “Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...” When she inquired what village she was in, one of the women replied, “Gadhada of Swaminarayan!” She took a bath, wore new clothes, and went to where Shriji Maharaj was residing in Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. She was very much delighted upon having the *darshan* of her beloved Maharaj who then revealed to her that it was Him in the form of the *Brahmin*. She became overjoyed and her happiness

knew no bounds. Maharaj instructed Jamkuba to stay in Gadhada under the command of Jivuba.

Unaware of the fact that she was a queen, Jivuba assigned Jamkuba menial tasks such as collecting cow dung, cleaning cooking utensils, and sweeping the grounds. Nonetheless, she was only given rotlas to eat. Seeing this kind of treatment, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan informed Jivuba that Jamkuba was the queen of Udaipur with many servants but left everything to devote her life to God. Thus, she should not be given such tasks. After that, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan asked Jamkuba to wear simple white garments and named her ‘Mataji’. Later, she was asked to stay in Bhuj with Ladhibai. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan praised Jamkuba for her immovable faith and devotion.

13.12 The Allegiant: Kushal Kunvarba

Kushal Kunvarba was the queen of Dharampur near Surat, Gujarat. There were five hundred villages under the governance of Dharampur state at the time. After the untimely death of her husband and son, she made suitable arrangements and appointed her grandson Vijaydev to administer the state. Vijaydev was very kind and generous and always welcomed Sadhus to the royal palace and fed them lovingly. Kushal Kunvarba came to know of the glory of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan through the association of Paramchaitanyanand Swami. Soon after, she became firmly devoted to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. She repeatedly sent invitations

to Shriji Maharaj adorned with gifts, inviting him to Dharampur. Seeing her sincere devotion, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan left with five hundred *Paramhansas* for Dharampur.

Vijaydev brought a whole procession to the kingdom with great pomp and glory. Maharaj was mounted on a decorative elephant. The Sadhus were accommodated in chariots and palanquins. Kushal Kunvarba ran down to have the *darshan* of Maharaj. Her excitement and zeal to welcome Maharaj had no bounds. Many years after this incident, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan praised her in the *Vachanamrut* Sarangpur 2nd chapter, stating, “In Dharampur, Kushal Kunvarba did my *darshan*, and at the same time, closed her eyes and internalized the form in her heart.” Similarly, a person should perform *darshan* with an attentive mind and a fixed gaze.”

Kushal Kunvarba once invited Shriji Maharaj to Dharampur to celebrate *Vasant Panchami*, the festival of colors. It was celebrated on a grand scale with various colors, all at the expense of the queen. There, Kushal Kunvarba requested Maharaj to accept all of her states to govern along with her fortune on her behalf and that she would remain as a servant. But *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan refused and explained, “I have not come to rule but to liberate countless souls. I advise you to not become attached to the kingdom; otherwise, you’ll have to take another birth.”

Shriji Maharaj only intended to stay for a few days, but due to the devotional insistence of Kushal Kunvarba, Maharaj stayed for one month. After fulfilling all of the queen’s wishes, Maharaj left for Gadhada. Soon after Maharaj left, she decided to pass everything onto Vijaydev. She spent days in devotion, and due to the lack of presence of Shriji Maharaj, she stopped taking food and water and solely sat in meditation. Fifteen days after Maharaj’s departure, Kushal Kunvarba left her mortal body and went to *Akshardham*.

13.13 Diverse Devotees of the Sampraday

Bhagwan Swaminarayan strove to maintain good relations and make devotees of other races. His biography is full of constructive encounters with prominent leaders of all traditions. His followers cut across religious boundaries, including Muslim, Parsi, and even English backgrounds. The Britishers at the time considered *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan as a Hindu reformer and were very impressed with the impact that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan made in Gujarat.

13.14 English Devotees

Bhagwan Swaminarayan improved the lives of *Kathis*, *Kolis*, thieves, robbers, bandits, the cruelest and sinful, those who were full of vices, addictions, immortality, etc., through love and endearing sermons. He made them virtuous, moral, and loyal devotees. Looking at this, the English administrators, Sir Andrews; Anderson; Sir Dunlop; Sir Eran; William Tomas;

Governor of Bombay Sir John Malcolm; Lord Bishop Heber, etc. appreciated and warmly welcomed *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan to Ahmedabad, Surat, Kheda, Rajkot, etc. Many of them had become ardent followers of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. As an example, Sir Autram, the resident of Gaikwad of the state of Vadodara, used to go to a Swaminarayan *mandir* located in Vadodara and used to chant the glorious name of Maharaj with a rosary while standing on one leg.

At one time, the chief of the Christian Missions, Rev. Bishop Heber was touring Northern India and the areas near Calcutta to spread Christianity. He then came to Gujarat. The collector of Vadodara, Mr. Williamson informed the Bishop about the social reforms and religious reforms brought by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. After hearing a great deal about Shriji Maharaj, Heber became very eager to meet him. He sent a message to Maharaj and sought an interview with him, in Nadiad. When Maharaj sent baskets of sweets and garlands via six devotees, Heber was surprised. It was beyond his imagination on seeing such a diverse group of devotees in one religion under one leader. He was convinced that Maharaj's activities must be really great. A man who could infuse the noble principle of fraternity or brotherhood among the people who could never live together in peace and harmony has to be divine. In March 1825, Maharaj with his entourage of five hundred followers met and impressed Bishop Heber.

During the meeting, Bishop Heber observes the humble behavior and pure character of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's followers and developed a keen and fond feel for Shriji Maharaj. Then, upon request, Shriji Maharaj explained the principles of the Swaminarayan sect, etching forever in the mind of Bishop Heber the greatness of Maharaj and his holy fellowship. Thus, Bishop Heber had the *darshan* of Maharaj. It was the result of his good deeds and noble actions.

Sir John Malcolm, was the British Governor of Bombay during the 1830s. He had learned about Maharaj's greatness from Bishop Heber and other British officials. He was informed about the social and religious reforms brought about by Maharaj and was very eager to meet him. During his visit to Gujarat, he sent two letters through Rajkot's political agent Mr. Blane to Gadhada to express his desires to meet him. However, at the time, Shriji Maharaj was very ill. Yet, realizing the real eagerness of the Governor, Shriji Maharaj went to Rajkot along with his elite saints and devotees. On February 26th, 1830, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his followers received a royal welcome with a gunfire salute and music played by a band. The soldiers and sepoy presented a guard of honor to Maharaj. Sir Malcolm personally came to receive *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan with great respect. The meeting was attended by the Governor Sir John Malcolm, his secretary, Mr. Thomas Williamson, the political agent, Mr. Blane, and three other officials. Maharaj was accompanied by Mukund

Brahmachari, Muktanand Swami, Shukanand Swami, Dada Khachar, Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar, Ladha Thakkar, Hirji Thakkar, Deva Bhagat, and Bhimbhai.

During the meeting, the Governor asked Maharaj to explain to him the principles of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. He inquired, “I hope you haven’t faced any obstruction in your religious activities in our regime?” Maharaj replied, “Not much, but I strongly encourage you to protect *Brahmins* and cows. Your rule shall last for a long period.” Then the Governor said to him, “Our government has decided to ban the *Sati* custom and infanticide. What is your viewpoint on these issues?” Maharaj replied, “One should never commit suicide. After the death of one’s husband, one should accept the Lord as her husband but never commit suicide. Also, one should never be allowed to commit infanticide.” The Governor was pleased to hear this. He said, “Swaminarayan, you have given very precious advice.” The Governor requested Maharaj to give him a book explaining the principles of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday* and said, “Please protect our opponents and us.” Maharaj happily blessed him and gave him a copy of the *Shikshapatri*. Sir Malcolm, with very great respect, gave a very warm farewell to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. The historical *Shikshapatri* presented to Sir Malcolm can be seen even today at the Bodleian Library of Oxford University, England.

13.15 Muslim Devotees

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also influenced the lives of Muslims. Even though after many converted to the Swaminarayan religion, they had to face opposition. Yet, due to the mother like nature of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his saints, the newly converted followers remained grounded and stable. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s divine personality and divine aura attracted and kept the devotees well set in the holy fellowship.

The disciples included: Hari Thakkar and Ladha Thakkar, the managing personnel of the estate of Dada Khachar, Premji, Karim, Hayaji, Rayaji, Sheikhji, Amad, Makan, Hassan, Miyaji, Kesarmiya, Sheikh Mohammed, Vali Mohammed, Dosatai, Nawab of Junagadh, Nawab of Mangrol - Badruddin, Nawab of Manavadar - Gajefarkhan, and many other Muslims became faithful and ardent followers of the holy fellowship. They gave up their bad habits of meat-eating, drinking alcohol, etc. and worshipped *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan with a pure heart.

Kesarmiya was a Muslim *satsangi* of the Vadhwan village. He was a tall, strong man whose eyes radiated with conviction. His tremendous conviction in Shri Hari was his identifying feature. He was the chief police officer of the Vadhwan police department. He was honest, sincere and dedicated in his work. Many times, his relatives would approach him and try to persuade him to leave the *satsang*

fellowship. They told him that Swaminarayan was just a fraud and the only true faith is the Muslim religion. He used to explain to them that due to Swaminarayan, I have become free from my bad habits. It has made me happy and increased my prestige.” Once, he was assigned with a task under Bhanji Mehta’s supervision at Dhrangadhra. Bhanji was not a *satsangi* and would do anything to get rid of Maharaj. While Kesarmiya had unshakable faith in Shriji Maharaj, Bhanji Mehta, the administrator of Vadhwan was a shrewd, cunning and short-tempered man whose heart burnt with hatred for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and the sect. When they arrived in Dhrangadhra, they met a *Brahmin* who had applied the *tilak-chandlo* and appeared to be a *satsangi*. He had run out of money and wanted to earn money desperately. Bhanji bribed the *Brahmin* to hurl insults to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan by swearing in front of Kesarmiya. Kesarmiya’s blood boiled with anger. He shouted at the *Brahmin*, “Stop, Stop! Or else...” And without further warning, Kesarmiya drew his sword and swiping above the *Brahmin*’s head, he displaced his cap. Bhanji intervened and said, “Kesarmiya is this the way you behave? Go! From today onwards your employment is terminated. The king does not need you. I’m dismissing you permanently from your post.” Immediately, Kesarmiya left and returned to Vadhwan. He went to meet the queen one last time. When he explained what had happened, the queen understood his situation and spoke to Bhanji. From that day onwards, Bhanji never harbored any ill feelings for *Bhagwan*

Swaminarayan. Kesarmiya returned to his post and served the king and queen for the rest of his life. Kesarmiya’s loyalty for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was renowned throughout the holy fellowship.

Shriji Maharaj celebrated the Fuldol festival in Ahmedabad in 1825. A beautiful procession, with Maharaj riding at its center accompanied by singing and dancing Sadhus traveled through the city. Dosatai, a Muslim was watering his fields when Shriji Maharaj’s procession passed by his farm. He could not shift his eyes from the charming *Murti* riding on the mare Manki. He immediately realized that this was ‘Swaminarayan’ whom he had heard others praising. He followed the procession back to the *mandir* and humbly pleaded to Maharaj to initiate him in the holy fellowship. Shriji Maharaj went to test Dosatai’s faith and instructed him to go home and told him, “You will not be able to follow all of our *niyams*. Go back home and chant the ‘Swaminarayan’ *mantra*.”

Dosatai went home and started to chant the *mantra* and meditate upon Maharaj’s *Murti*. Dosatai’s family was upset by this sudden change of behavior. They beat him harshly multiple times yet, he was unaffected by such persecution. They locked him up, starved him, tied him to a wooden beam inside the home, and even hit him with a rod and still, Dosatai’s lips uttered the Swaminarayan *mantra* with even more conviction. Maharaj was deeply disturbed by the torment

inflicted upon his devotee. He gave *darshan* to Dosatai and said, “Dosa, your plight brings tears to my eyes. Starting today, you will not feel pain or suffering from physical torture. Your body will rise above all sensations.” Soon after, feeling desperate, Dosa’s family decided to bury Dosa alive. They dug a hole, threw Dosa into the pit and covered him with dirt. After three days, Dosatai was still alive. To their surprise, when they found him to be alive, they accepted this as a sign of his unflinching faith. They took Dosatai to Gadhada and left him in Shriji Maharaj’s care. Dosatai spent rest of his life in Maharaj’s *seva* and *bhakti*.

13.16 Parsi Devotees

In the Parsi custom, meat-eating is common, but those who became the followers of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave up meat-eating, drinking alcohol, other bad vices and worshipped Shriji Maharaj ardently.

In November of 1824, Shriji Maharaj traveled to Surat with a large group of Sadhus and devotees. Maharaj was greeted by a Parsi named Ardeshar Kotwal, his brother Pirusha Kotwal, and many other leading citizens and devotees with an English band. Ardeshar Kotwal was the city’s administrator. He was a charismatic public servant who had earned the title of Kotwal at the tender age of twenty-two. He was both well-respected and feared in the city among the circuit of British officers. At one time, in a meeting, Ardeshar Kotwal asked many questions to Maharaj and Maharaj satisfied him and

convinced him about His divinity by giving him appropriate answers. He had unflinching faith in Shriji Maharaj and his divine *charitras*. Ardesharji made arrangements for Maharaj to stay in Surat for as long as He desired. He organized a grand procession down the city’s main street. Shriji Maharaj graced Ardesharji’s home. Maharaj spent fifteen days in Surat. Ardesharji and the other devotees arranged scrumptious meals for the Sadhus and devotees each day. When Maharaj was leaving Surat for Gadhada, he gifted Ardesharji his turban and promised to take him to *Akshardham* in his final days. The turban is still relished by devotees even today in Surat, Gujarat.



Acharya



By the grace of Shriji Maharaj, both of the Acharyas had virtuous redemptive qualities through which they maintained the holy fellowship and retained the divinity even after the departure of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

14.1 The History of Acharya Tradition

By the time *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was ready to return to his divine abode *Akshardham*, He had already built six magnificent temples. The devotees numbered in millions and Sadhus, *Parshads* and *Sankhya Yogis* numbered in the thousands. It was clear that to manage the growing Swaminarayan *sampraday*, it would require a personality of immense power of administration and persuasion, a task beyond any mortal being as per the treats of the *sampraday*. Thus, after consulting with senior leading saints and devotees, for the sake of better management of the holy fellowship, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan designated two adopted sons from his family as the leaders of the *sampraday*. In 1826 at Vadtal, *Acharya* Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj, the son of Rampratapbhai was appointed as the head of Ahmedabad diocese, and *Acharya* Raghuvirji Maharaj, son of Ichchharambhai was appointed as the head of Vadtal diocese. The Acharyas are the sole representatives of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and possess the responsibility of managing the entire Swaminarayan sect. In establishing the dual *Acharya*-ship in the Swaminarayan *sampraday*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan divided the followers geographically into two, for the ease of administration. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan handed the 'Uttar Desh' (North Zone) to Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj. The 'Dakshin Desh' (South Zone) was given to Raghuvirji Maharaj. The zones were divided by temples and land in

separate but equal portions accordingly.

The constitution of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday* is laid out in the 'Desh Vibhag Lekh' which describes in detail the functions of the *Acharyas*. The rules of managing the *sampraday* are enshrined in this document which *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan Himself dictated and had it written by Sadguru Shukanand Swami. It lays out the boundary of demarcation between the two administrative zones. The protocol required between the *Acharyas* is also documented. Nonetheless, the procedures for appointing future *Acharyas* are also laid down in the *Desh Vibhag Lekh*. Thus, the *Desh Vibhag Lekh* being a will of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, no one has the authority to alter or make any kind of changes. In the times of legal challenges in the *sampraday*, the *Desh Vibhag Lekh* has proved to be the basis upon which most judicial rulings are made. Two copies of the *Desh Vibhag Lekh* were prepared and were signed by each *Acharya* of the respective *desh* (zone) saints and devotees. The copies were signed and exchanged with one another.

The *Acharyas* of the *sampraday* are not only mere administrative heads; they are spiritual leaders who possess certain important responsibilities. They are responsible for initiating male followers into the *sampraday* by giving basic initiation via *guru mantra*. Also, they are the only figures allowed to initiate Sadhus into the holy fellowship by giving them *Bhagvati Diksha*. They perform a spiritual ritual called

'*Murti-pratishtha*' in which they install deities in temples for worship. They also authenticate scriptures of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. Their respective wife, the 'Gadiwala', is the initiator of all female followers and *Sankhya Yogis* in their respective jurisdiction, with the consent of their husband - the *Acharya*. Despite being householders, both the *Acharya* and Gadiwala live as per the direction and tenets of the *Shikshapatri* and *sampraday*.

Simultaneously, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has made it clear that the post of the *Acharya* is not hereditary. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has instructed that only the fittest member of the *Dharmakul* family should be selected for the post by the *Acharya* in consultation with leading saints and disciples of the holy fellowship.

The faith displayed by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan on both *Acharyas* was more than justified by both *Acharyas* by rendering their unforgettable contribution to the growth of the holy fellowship for many decades with their vision and most importantly their flawless behaviors. It would be most appropriate to delve into the lives of both of the first *Acharyas* of the Swaminarayan fellowship.

14.2 Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj

Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj was born in the village of Chhapaiya in 1809. His father Rampratap Pande was the elder brother of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. He was very polite and

humble by nature. Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj was appointed as the first *Acharya* of the Ahmedabad diocese by *Bhagwan* in 1826, at Vadtal. Even though eminent Sadgurus were under his command, he never behaved as their superior. He rigorously observed the code of conducts of the *satsang* fellowship.

Moreover, he was a scholar and encouraged the spread of divine wisdom. He had the *Tattvarthadipika*, a commentary on the *Satsangijivan*, prepared and published. Nonetheless, he was very fond of architecture and was the chief inspiration behind the construction of the *haveli* in Ahmedabad. He had *mandirs* built at Dungarpur, Idar, Jetalpur, Siddhpur, Mandvi, *Kutch*, Chhapaiya and other places. He was also a great poet and composed many hymns and possessed mastery over the language of Sanskrit.

By the grace of Shriji Maharaj, he had virtuous redemptive qualities through which he maintained the holy fellowship and retained the divinity even after the departure of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. By the grace of Maharaj, he had especially attained the quality of *atmanishta*. This is evident from an incident in his life.

Once *Acharya* Maharaj was performing *mansi puja*. He was engrossed in the divine *Murti* of Shriji Maharaj. All of a sudden, a scorpion crawled on his back and stung him. Surprisingly he did not waver in his meditation and continued to do *mansi puja*. After finishing his *mansi puja*, he called

one of his attendants and inquired to check his back. He told him that it was burning a little. When the attendant observed his back, he concluded to *Acharya* Maharaj that he had been stung by a scorpion. After looking around, they spotted the scorpion in the corner of the room. After that, *Acharya* Maharaj continued his regular routine.

Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj appointed his son, Shri Keshavprasadji Maharaj, as the *Acharya* and then passed away soon after in 1868.

14.3 Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj

Raghuvirji Maharaj was born in Amalia village in Uttar Pradesh, India. His father, Ichharam Pande was the younger brother of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Raghuvirji Maharaj was appointed as the first *Acharya* of the Vadtal diocese by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in 1826 at Vadtal. He had an egoless nature and served everyone in the fellowship. He liked to be in the company of saints and had great respect for them. He used to seek advice from Sadguru Gopalanand Swami in regards to all religious matters. His compassionate nature was visible in his day to day life. At once, a saint had become very ill. For five days, the fever in his body tormented him. When the fever went away, the saint felt very hungry at midnight. The kitchen doors were locked so other fellow saints went to Raghuvirji Maharaj and explained the situation and requested for some millet flour. Raghuvirji Maharaj opened the kitchen and started to cook, Himself. The saints were surprised by

such an act. Then, Raghuvirji Maharaj Himself fed the sick Sadhu. Such was his kind nature. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan became greatly pleased by the act and complimented him the next day in the assembly. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan used to say, “No one in the *Dharmakul* can match Raghuvirji. He is unique, and an ideal role model.”

Throughout his life, Raghuvirji Maharaj encouraged publication of religious scriptures. He also installed deities in the *mandirs* of Dholera, Junagadh, and Gadhada. Nevertheless, he built many temples during his period in the regions of Mumbai, Surat, Bharuch, Manavadar, Una, Burhanpur, etc. His spiritual state and way of life were unparalleled, and his style of renunciation resembled that of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. He became a widower and had no son, so many devotees tried to persuade him to marry again. But he resolved to observe total celibacy. Many years later, he adopted Bhagwatprasadji, who was the son of his younger brother Badrinath, and made him heir to the *Acharya* tradition. He left his world in 1868. The *Acharya* tradition continues even today in the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*.



Holy Scriptures



It is noteworthy that the progress of any religion largely depends on its scriptures that communicate its founder's objective, principles, philosophy, and rules for the members of the holy fellowship.

15.1 The Base

Bhagwan Swaminarayan bequeathed a legacy of *mandirs*, scriptures, and Sadhus to his followers for their continued guidance on the spiritual path. Alongside, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's teachings immortalized His own lifetime in scriptures and reinforced the principles of *ekantik dharma*.

Since the dawn of time, scriptures have been considered to be the base of Hindu faith. Due to the *Vedas* and other scriptures, Hindu civilization thrived and continues to thrive. It is noteworthy that the progress of any religion largely depends on its scriptures that communicate its founder's objective, principles, philosophy, and rules of the members of the holy fellowship. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's prime purpose was to redeem innumerable souls and to show them the way to 'Akshardham'. Thus, out of sheer compassion for mankind, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan commanded his elite scholarly saints to compose scriptures so that members of the holy fellowship and people at a large scale could benefit for centuries to come. Hundreds of scriptures were composed in the holy fellowship during the time of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Three scriptures are unique and central to the Swaminarayan faith. They are the *Shikshapatri*, the *Vachanamrut*, and the *Satsangijivan*. All three scriptures are considered to be the most authentic, as they were composed either by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan or under his direct supervision.

15.2 The Shikshapatri

Having observed the decline in morality and social harmony, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan wrote the *Shikshapatri* to help improve the current state of society over 200 years ago. The *Shikshapatri*, personally dictated by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, is a unique source of code of conducts aimed at a more transparent society. It is the only scripture to be written by God Himself as other *avatars* have never written any scriptures in the past. It is one of the primary scriptures of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday* and provides a sound framework on which moral, social, and spiritual integration of society can be achieved. Blending contemporary social morals with a strong spiritual ideal, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan condensed the standards for behavior in just 212 verses. The 212 verses provide a summary of duties for one and all, and are both rational and progressive. The *Shikshapatri* was written in Vadtal, Gujarat on February 12th, 1826 (Maha Sud 5, Vasant Panchmi, Samvat Year 1882). The *Shikshapatri* reveals that devotion to God, righteous living, detachment from worldly pleasures, and the knowledge of one's true form as the *atma* is vital for spiritual progress. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has instructed his devotees on matters of health, hygiene, dress, diet, etiquette, diplomacy, finance, education, friendships, morality, habits, penance, religious duties, celebrations, and other areas. The codes apply to devotees of all stages and walks of life-young or old, men or

women, married, unmarried, and widow, householders or Sadhus, etc. So that devotees continuously remain aware of their respective duties, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has instructed them to read it daily. Thus, even today, millions throughout the world sincerely live by the injunctions of the *Shikshapatri*. The *Shikshapatri* has been published in more than 30 languages. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan presented a copy of the *Shikshapatri* to Governor Sir John Malcolm when they met in Rajkot, Gujarat on February 26th, 1830. That original copy is preserved today in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, United Kingdom.

15.3 The Vachanamrut

The *Vachanamrut* or ‘collection of the nectarine discourses of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’ is the most sacred and foundational scripture of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. The *Vachanamrut* is a collection of 262 discourses delivered by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan during the last ten years of his life, between 1819 and 1829. The word ‘*Vachanamrut*’ in Sanskrit means ‘divine nectar (amrut) in the form of words (vachan)’. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has described the *Vachanamrut* as being the quintessence of all scriptures. The divine discourses were compiled by four of his pious and scholarly renunciants: Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Shukanand Swami. The scripture encapsulates the very essence of the principles and philosophy of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. It is filled with sound logic, simple metaphors,

analogies, and divine revelations that provide philosophical and practical answers to questions about spiritual living.

The scripture is divided into 9 sections; based on the various villages in which discourses were delivered. The sections are in chronological order and are named as follows: Gadhada I, Sarangpur, Kariyani, Loya, Panchala, Gadhada II, Vadtal, Ahmedabad, and Gadhada III. Within each section, individual *Vachanamruts* are arranged in chronological order and are numbered sequentially. One of the main factors confirming the authenticity of the *Vachanamrut* is its attention to detail concerning its date, setting, people present, and lastly, its endorsement by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. At the beginning of each *Vachanamrut*, the place, time of day, and date are given. The compilers then describe what *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was wearing from head to toe, what he was holding in his hand, what he was sitting on, what village and where in the courtyard he was seated, and who was sitting in the assembly before him. Instead of opting for a monologue preaching style, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan delivered his discourses in the form of a dialogue. At times, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan would pose a question to the members of the assembly. On the other occasions, members of the assembly would ask a question directly.

The *Vachanamrut* contains the profound wisdom of the *Vedas*, Upanishads, Brahmasutras, Bhagavad Gita, Vidurniti, and epics like the Ramayan and Mahabharat. In

fact, every statement of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is packed with and based on its in-depth religious knowledge, spiritual insights, and practical experience. It contains practical and philosophical answers to the sincere enquires of all types of aspirants regarding life in the world and the life hereafter. The issues raised in the *Vachanamrut* are quite varied, ranging from profoundly philosophical and theological subjects, such as the nature of God, the creation of the cosmos, clarifications of the classical Hindu philosophies of *Acharyas*; to more spiritually practical subjects such as the means of attaining external happiness. Regardless of how deep a subject is, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had the gift of lucidly and elegantly explaining complex concepts through the simple day to day examples. In fact, even the villagers sitting in the assembly were able to grasp profound philosophical concepts due to his simple language and meaningful examples. The *Vachanamrut* is also an authoritative scripture as it was spoken by God Himself and written down at the same time. As a matter of fact, it was even reviewed and approved by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan during its compilation, a fact evident in *Vachanamrut* Gadhada Last Chapter 39, “I deliver these discourses to you not from any imagination of my mind nor to display any sort of aptitude. I have experienced all that I have spoken about. In fact, I speak in accordance to what I practice.” This scripture is a generous gift to all of mankind by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

15.4 The Satsangijivan

To sing and listen to the divine incidences of God is the sure, straight, and shortest path for salvation (*moksha*) in this age of *Kaliyug*. Moreover, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan states in *Vachanamrut* Gadhada Middle Chapter 58, “A *Sampraday* is fostered by the scriptures which narrate its *Ishtadev*’s divine incidents from his birth up until his final moments.”

Once upon a time in Gadhada, Shatanand Swami composed some verses in praise of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, and upon hearing such praises, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan became pleased with Swami and requested that he ask for a boon. Shatanand Swami asked for permission to compose a work depicting *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s divine exploits on this Earth, to which *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan agreed. The writing of the *Satsangijivan* commenced on Magshar Sud 6 Vikram Samvat year, 1885.

The person who associates and keeps the company of the following three; God, His scriptures and His saints is called a ‘*Satsangi*’. This scripture depicts how a *satsangi* should live his life (*Jivan*); therefore, it is aptly named the ‘*Satsangijivan*.’ Shatanand Swami wrote the *Satsangijivan* comprising of 5 volumes and 17,627 verses in the language of Sanskrit. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan blessed Shatanand Swami with divine vision and intelligence to help him compile this massive scripture. During its composition, Shatanand Swami continually verified its content with senior Sadhus

and *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, establishing its authenticity. Sadguru Muktanand Swami had stated in a section of the *Satsangjivan*, “The *Satsangjivan* will continue to guide, present and future generations of devotees towards salvation.”

The *Satsangjivan* incorporates the constitution and a brief history of the *sampraday*; details of festivals and rituals, vows of disciples, modes of worshipping God, and the expiation of sins, and *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s philosophical principles such as *Vishishtadvaita* alongside *dharma*, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti*. Along with the divine episodes of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, it also included the vows and penances for Sadhus that is known as the Dharmamrut and Nishkam Shuddhi. Shatanand Swami states in the *Satsangjivan* that, “This scripture is like a life-support machine for devotees. Just as water is the life force for fish, the *Satsangjivan* is the life force for devotees. Singing the paeans for this scripture, he says that whoever studies this scripture is saved by the poison of this world.” He adds that “The merits of reading even a small portion of this scripture is greater than performing many *yagnas* and numerous donations. But only if one develops a keen interest in reading these incidences.”

15.5 Other Notable Scriptures

The *Bhaktachintamani* is a scripture detailing the divine exploits of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. *Bhaktachintamani* literally means ‘the wish-fulfilling gem of devotees’, as those

devotees who wish to ponder upon the divine actions of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan may look upon this book as a wish-fulfilling gem. Nishkulanand Swami is the author of this enlightening scripture. The scripture was written in the simple language of Gujarati. Although Nishkulanand Swami was illiterate, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave him the ability to compose verses and stanzas, highlighting the greatness of Shriji Maharaj. This work is comprised of 164 chapters. In addition to depicting the divine occurrences of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, Nishkulanand Swami vividly describes various celebrations performed by Maharaj and his Santo/bhaktos. The authenticity of his work is seen in great detail provided about the places visited by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and the list of eminent devotees belonging to respective towns and villages. Millions of devotees worldwide read this scripture and gain spiritual strength and insight.

Haricharitamrut Sagar literally means ‘the ocean of the nectar episodes of Hari’. Considered as an authoritative biography of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, and an eye-witness account, its staggering length of 102,551 shlokas renders this an epic in its own right, making it the largest Hindi scripture in the world. The history of the creation of this masterpiece is as intriguing as its contents. On several occasions, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan revealed his life from birth until arrival in Loj to Sadguru Shri Muktanand Swami. In 1825, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan bestowed upon Muktanand Swami, the

opportunity to offer *bhakti* by writing his life episodes until his last breath. Muktanand Swami performed this task diligently, writing details in a rough format. He continued writing and dictating his work prolifically until *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan went back to *Akshardham* in 1830. Grief-stricken by his departure, Muktanand Swami poor health deteriorated rapidly, and he passed away one and a half months later. In 1858, Sadguru Adharanand Swami commenced the mammoth verification of the Haricharitamrut Sagar from Muktanand Swami's work.

The work is comprised of 29 chapters, beautifully named as purs, or waves, each divided into tarangs, or ripples, in consonance with the sagar's (ocean) imagery. Each of the 'purs' is imbued with solid literature containing various elements on ethics, knowledge, renouncement from the worldly pleasures, devotion towards the almighty *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, divinity, love, positive attitude, as well as *satsang*'s highest authority. Shree Haricharitamrut Sagar emphasizes Shree Hari's unmatched and insurmountable capabilities. This scripture is the best medicine for curing worldly diseases disguised in society. The readers, listeners or thinkers of this scripture would be able to relieve the heat of these evils and would be able to develop deep affection for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. It took Sadguru Adharnand Swami a total of 13 years, 5 months and 14 days to complete this colossal scripture.



Mandir-Murti



“I have had mandirs built to preserve God's upasana forever. If upasana is preserved, many jivas will benefit and attain liberation.”

16.1 The Importance of Mandir-Murti

As an adjunct to the *Shastras* in establishing *ekantik dharma* and consolidating the framework of *satsang*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan also constructed magnificent stone *mandirs*. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's primary aim of incarnating was to redeem innumerable souls. Therefore, He felt it would be necessary to build *mandirs* so people can take refuge and worship God for centuries to come. Shriji Maharaj explained His aim of constructing temples in the *Vachanamrut* Gadhada Middle Chapter 27th: "I have had *mandirs* built to preserve God's *upasana* forever. If *upasana* is preserved, many *jivas* will attain liberation."

The *mandir* serve five important purposes:

1. As a building for offering worship.
2. As a place suffused with divinity; to celebrate sacred festivals occurring during the Hindu calendar year and offering *bhakti* rituals to deities, prescribed by great sages.
3. As a locus for spiritual gatherings and instruction.
4. As a center for studying Sanskrit, the *Shastras*, and devotional music.
5. As a center of pious services where alms, medicines, and clothes are made available to the poor and needy.

At a time when the land was steeped in penury and

finances scant, the construction of such grand *mandirs* attested to his innate divinity. *Mandirs* were constructed to serve as spiritual centers that rejuvenate the spirituality of devotees.

In an astonishingly short span of six years, from 1822 to 1828, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan consecrated six *mandirs* of exquisite beauty and architectural grandeur in Gujarat, namely Ahmedabad, Bhuj, Vadtal, Dholera, Junagadh and Gadhada. By Shriji Maharaj's inspiration and His genius, He procured land, finance, stone, labor, and relieved tax duties in addition to designing the *mandirs*. The spiritual atmosphere in the *mandirs*, the saintliness, and detachment of Maharaj's Sadhus, the purity of the disciples, the enthusiasm of celebrating festivals, the enlightening sermons and the open-mindedness for other faiths attracted many newcomers to join the Swaminarayan faith via *mandirs*. These *mandirs* were more than mere stone wonders. These *mandirs* breathed the spirit of *bhakti* through the activities it hosted and emotions it evoked. A continuous course of rituals, *katha*, bhajan and *seva* made these *mandirs* different from the average pilgrimage place. These *mandirs* were epicenters of social and spiritual reform within local communities.

All six *mandirs* were constructed under the able supervision of saints and remarkable co-operation between disciples. The saints and devotees provided the labor and considered it to be *seva*-devotional service. Along with *mandirs*, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan also constructed big

assembly halls for spiritual sermons in the vicinity of the *mandir*. Highly spiritualized saints would discourse to humble saints and devotees in these halls through which they gained true insight on the principles of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

It is precisely to accept the humble and devotional service of His *bhakta* and to grace him, *Paramatma* either personally manifests Himself on Earth or through a *Murti* in a dwelling referred to as a *mandir*. To facilitate *bhakti*, *Paramatma* manifests in the *Murti*. By focusing the mind and the senses on this *Murti*, worldly desires are easily subdued. The uniqueness of *Paramatma's Murti puja* is that through this medium, the *bhakta* experiences bliss resulting from *bhakti*. Once the *bhakta's* mind stills on God, he is liberated from the vitiating influences of his baser instincts. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan consecrated various idols in the 6 *mandirs* namely: Nar-Narayan Dev, Radha-Krishna, Laxminarayan-Dev, Ranchod-Trikamarai, Parvati-Shivji, Madan Mohanji Maharaj, Radharaman Dev, and Gopinathji Maharaj.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan Himself consecrated His idol, Shri Harikrushna Maharaj in Vadtal *Mandir* in 1824. This was an unprecedented step that was quite impossible for any social or religious reformer in the nineteenth century. This was perhaps the first event in the history of religion when the idol of a religious founder (God) was consecrated during His lifetime. From this event, one can easily predict the marvelous stage that the holy fellowship had reached. After completing

the *Murti-pratishtha* of Harikrushna Maharaj, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan said that, “This form which is manifest in front of your eyes, the form in *Akshardham* and this idol of Harikrushna Maharaj - there is not even the slightest difference between the three. They are all one.” Nonetheless, in *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's presence, hundreds and thousands of devotees worshipped Him as the Supreme Godhead.

No	City Name	Date of Inauguration	Main Deity	Under Whom Consecrated	First Head of Mandir
1	Ahmedabad	Monday February 24, 1822	Nar-Narayan Dev	Anandanand Swami	Sarvagnanand Swami
2	Bhuj	Friday May 15, 1823	Nar-Narayan Dev	Vaishnavanand Swami	Vaishnavanand Swami
3	Vadtal	Thursday November 3, 1824	Laxminarayan Dev	Brahmanand swami and Aksharanand swami	Aksharanand Swami
4	Dholera	Saturday May 19, 1826	Madanmohanji Maharaj	Nishkulanand Swami and Adbutanand Swami	Adbutanand Swami
5	Junagadh	Friday May 1, 1828	Radharaman Dev	Brahmanand Swami	Gunatitanand Swami
6	Gadhada	Saturday October 9, 1828	Gopinathji Maharaj	Viraktanand Swami	Viraktanand Swami

16.2 Ahmedabad Mandir: Nar–Narayan Dev

Shriji Maharaj arrived in Ahmedabad via Vadtal in the year of 1819. Hearing the praise and peaceful nature of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's devotees in the city of Ahmedabad, the collector, John Andrews Dunlop wanted to bring law and order in the city. He sought that it would be the perfect opportunity to make changes in the city by establishing righteousness by meeting *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Upon meeting *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, Mr. Dunlop asked Maharaj, "Swaminarayan! How is it that you haven't established a center in a big city like Ahmedabad? Please construct a center in this city. Build a temple here so that your Saints and devotees can stay here comfortably, and celebrate festivals. Ask for as much land as you need and wherever you want in Ahmedabad." Maharaj chose a place called Pathakvadi. He said, "If we get this land, we will build a *mandir* here." In those days, the British used to give land on a lease of 99 years. But in this case, Mr. Dunlop gave it permanently and made a deed on a copper plate. Shriji Maharaj sent a large group of saints under the leadership of Anandanand Swami to Ahmedabad. Following Maharaj's wish, Anandanand Swami supervised the construction of a one-domed stone *mandir*. When the *mandir* was completed, he wrote a letter to Maharaj, who sent invitation letters to the devotees in numerous towns and villages and invited them to Ahmedabad. A large procession and great fanfare, surrounded by thousands of Sadhus and devotees, lined up along the road and on rooftops to catch a glimpse of Shriji Maharaj. 108 *Brahmins* administered the *yagna* ritual at 108 separate *Vedikas* on the

day before the *Murti-pratishtha*. That night, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan came inside the *garbhagruha* to examine the placement of the murtis. He took particular interest in the direction, angle, and height at which the murtis were to be installed.

The next morning, on February 24th, 1822, Ahmedabad rose to the sound of bellowing horns and beating drums. Thousands of devotees from Saurashtra and Gujarat gathered at the *mandir* grounds. Shriji Maharaj performed *abhishek* and *puja* of the murtis of Nar-Narayan Dev. The *Murti-pratishtha* ceremony concluded with the *aarti*. Maharaj consecrated the murtis of Nar-Narayan Dev with much fanfare and according to the *Vedic* traditions. In the history of the Swaminarayan *Sampradaya*, the first *shikharbaddh mandir* was inaugurated in Ahmedabad. After the inauguration of the murtis, Shriji Maharaj performed *dandvats* to the murtis. Then he called his most senior Santo and told them, "Don't be fooled, I have installed these idols for the progress and benefit of numerous *jivas*. But in *Badrikashram*, Nar-Narayan Dev is meditating upon my form."

Having consecrated the murtis of Nar-Narayan Dev, Maharaj decided to arrange a feast for the *Brahmins*. The following day, Shriji Maharaj officiated the *chaurasi* feast in the forest-gardens surrounding Kankaria Lake. Thousands of *Brahmins* drank bowls full of ghee, while also enjoying the ghee-soaked *ladus* specially prepared for the feast. Maharaj

served all of them with love and generosity. He gave each of them befitting *dakshina* and saw them off to their respective villages.

16.3 Bhuj Mandir: Nar-Narayan Dev

After the *Murti-pratishtha* ceremony of Nar-Narayan Dev in Ahmedabad, Maharaj returned to Gadhada. At that time a group of devotees from the *Kutch* region of Gujarat had come. They prayed, “Maharaj! Please come and construct a big *mandir* in *Kutch* like you have in Ahmedabad. We will provide our services to the best of our abilities.” Observing their keen enthusiasm, Maharaj said, “All of you start to build a *mandir* in Bhuj. I will send Vaishnavanand Swami to supervise the construction work. He will give you all the necessary assistance.” The *Kutch* devotees worked with great zeal, and in no time, a beautiful *mandir* was constructed. They informed Maharaj and invited him for the *Murti-pratishtha* ceremony. Maharaj, alongside a large group of devotees from Gujarat and Kathiawad, proceeded towards *Kutch*. Shriji Maharaj was returning to *Kutch* after a long absence. Devotees from villages throughout the *Kutch* gathered to relish in Shri Hari’s *darshan*. His return brought tears to the eyes of His devotees. Maharaj embraced and spoke to each devotee, alleviating the pain felt from so many years of separation.

The devotees carried Shri Hari onto a palanquin and took Him around the city in a magnificent procession. On May 15th, 1823 *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan completed the *Murti-*

pratishtha of Nar-Narayan Dev in the *mandir* followed by a *yagna*. All of *Kutch* sang in praise of Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj expressed His desire to feed the *Brahmins* in a customary *chaurasi* feast. Sundarji and the devotees sprang into action to prepare for the feast. Hundreds of *Brahmins* were fed the following day. After the festivals were completed in Bhuj, the devotees invited Maharaj to their villages around *Kutch*. Maharaj visited their homes and farms with genuine interest and appreciation. He stayed in *Kutch* for nearly fifteen days. Soon after, Maharaj departed for Gadhada.

16.4 Vadtal Mandir: Laxminarayan Dev

The *mandir* construction at Vadtal was completed under the supervision of Brahmanand Swami and Aksharanand Swami. The *Murti-pratishtha* of the nine-shikhar *mandir* in Vadtal was planned for November 3rd, 1824. Brahmanand Swami wrote a letter to Maharaj as an invitation. Maharaj informed Aksharanand Swami accordingly and gave him certain necessary instructions for the ceremony. Aksharanand Swami sent invitations on behalf of Maharaj to the devotees of different towns and villages. Shriji Maharaj had decided to install the murtis of Laxminarayan Dev buried in Amichand Sheth’s courtyard in Vadodara. When Maharaj was traveling as Nilkanth Varni, he had promised Amichand that he would install these murtis in a majestic *mandir* in the heart of Gujarat. The time had come to fulfil that promise.

However, Shriji Maharaj had one more objective in mind for the *mandir* in Vadtal. He wanted to install His own *Murti* in the first shrine. Sadguru Muktanand Swami was not comfortable with this idea. He worried about the public criticism of the bold move and the ramifications on the *sampraday's* growth. After all, none of the *avatars* previously had ever tried to install their own idol. However, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was not an *avatar*. He was the manifest form of Purna *Purushottam* Narayan, the *avatari*. Shriji Maharaj and Muktanand Swami rode towards Vadtal together. Muktanand Swami wanted to stay with Maharaj through the *Murti-pratishtha* ritual ceremony so that he could dissuade him from installing His own *Murti*. However, on the way there, Muktanand Swami fell off his horse and broke his leg. He was forced to stay behind and miss the *Murti-pratishtha* festival. Upon arrival, Shriji Maharaj conducted a *Vedic yagna* for five days. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan performed the *Murti-pratishtha* in Vadtal on November 3rd, 1824. He installed the *Murti* of Laxminarayan Dev in the central shrine along with other deities. He also installed the *Murti* of Himself and named it Harikrushna Maharaj. After the *Murti-pratishtha*, the devotees of Vadtal pleaded to Shri Hari, “Hey Maharaj! You have lived in Gadhada for a long period of time. Please accept our service and make Vadtal your home.” Shriji Maharaj responded by saying, “I have installed my swarup in the form of the Harikrushna Maharaj. I will forever live here through this *Murti*. Serve it as if you are serving me. I will accept

your *bhakti* and *seva* through this *panch dhatu Murti*.”

During the construction phase of the grand *mandir*, Brahmanand Swami used 900,000 bricks! Along with the dedicated Santo and bhakto, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan Himself performed physical *seva* as He carried thirty-seven bricks during the construction of the *mandir*. Brahmanand Swami constructed the *mandir* fused with architectural splendor and his *bhakti* for Maharaj. The foundation of the *mandir* was designed in the form of a lotus. After the three-day inauguration festival, Maharaj appointed Aksharanand Swami as the *mahant* of Vadtal *Mandir*. Maharaj then departed for Surat taking Brahmanand Swami with him.

16.5 Dholera Mandir: Madanmohanji Maharaj

In the year of 1825, Pujabhai of Dholera approached Shriji Maharaj to build a *mandir* on his land in Dholera. Becoming pleased by his genuine plea and humility, Maharaj agreed and sent Nishkulanand Swami and Adbhutanand Swami to begin the construction project in Dholera. It took approximately one year to construct the *mandir*. Soon after, Adbhutanand Swami and Pujabhai humbly invited Maharaj for the grand *Murti-pratishtha* festival. Shri Hari arrived in Dholera a few days before the festival. In Dholera, he consulted Narayan Joshi and fixed May 19th, 1826 as the day for the auspicious ceremony. Invitations were sent to all towns and villages and devotees were invited to participate in the ceremony.

Nishkulanand Swami and Atmanand Swami supervised the project. Adbhutanand Swami and Dharmaprasadanand Swami had been stationed in Dholera since the beginning of the construction. After observing the work, Maharaj became pleased with the quality of the construction. He blessed all four saints. Maharaj sent for the murtis of Radha-Krishna from Gadhada and consecrated them, renaming them as Madanmohanji. On May 19th, 1826, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan performed the *Murti-pratishtha* of the *mandir* of Dholera. Hundreds of *Brahmins* officiated the *yagna* ritual. With the chanting of verses from the *Vedas* and the Swaminarayan *dhun* resonating in the background, Shriji Maharaj completed the *Murti-pratishtha* ritual of the murtis of Madanmohanji Maharaj. Soon after, the *Brahmins* were given *dakshina*. Then, Maharaj made Adbhutanand Swami the *mahant* and departed towards Gadhada.

16.6 Junagadh Mandir: Radharaman Dev

The *satsang* community in the Sorath region was growing at a steady pace. The devotees urged Jhinabhai to ask Shri Hari to build a *mandir* on his property in Junagadh. He transferred ownership of the property to the *mandir*. Shriji Maharaj sent Brahmanand Swami to Junagadh to better understand the social and political climate of the Nawab governed state. After examining the situation, Brahmanand Swami started the construction for Junagadh *Mandir*. Maharaj had appointed capable *mahants* for his four *mandirs*. Now it

was time to appoint the *mahant* for Junagadh *Mandir*. By doing so, Maharaj wanted to secure the spiritual progress of the *satsang* community in the Sorath region. Shriji Maharaj appointed Gunatitanand Swami as the *mahant*. Swami accepted Maharaj's *agna* and assumed the leadership of the *mandir* of Junagadh.

Shriji Maharaj celebrated the Prabodhini *Ekadashi* festival of 1827 in Ahmedabad. He traveled to Gadhada to observe the Fuldol festival of 1828. Between these two festivals, Maharaj traveled at Brahmanand Swami's request to Junagadh. He inspected the *mandir*'s construction and helped collect funds for its completion.

The *Murti-pratishtha* in Junagadh was set for May 1st, 1828. Brahmanand Swami met with Nawab Bahadur Khan of Junagadh to organize a grand procession down the city's main street. The Nawab pledged the full support of his men. Unfortunately, the Nawab's *diwan* created obstacles throughout the event. Despite repeated efforts to spoil the procession, the *diwan*'s schemes proved futile. The entire *satsang* community was pleased with the attendance and reception in the city. On the day of the *Murti-pratishtha*, according to true *Vedic* rituals, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan consecrated the murtis of Radharaman Dev, Ranchhod-Trikamrai and Siddheshwar Mahadev with much pomp. The beautiful five shikhar *mandir* radiated in the heart of the city. Loud chants of 'Shri Radharaman Dev ni Jay' echoed throughout the city.

Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami preached the glory and greatness of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and various other subjects in the assembly hall of Junagadh *Mandir*. Later, his talks were compiled into a book called, ‘Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami ni Vato’. He was the *mahant* of Junagadh *Mandir* for 40 years.

16.7 Gadhada Mandir: Gopinathji Maharaj

Bhagwan Swaminarayan paid special attention during the construction process of Gadhada *Mandir*. His physical presence provided the necessary motivation to accelerate the construction of the *mandir* at Dada Khachar’s residence. Shriji Maharaj helped the Sadhus carry stones from the Ghela River to the *mandir* construction site. Maharaj Himself fed the Sadhus and sat near the construction site while they worked through the scorching afternoon sun and late into the dark night.

Just in a couple of years, the construction work for Gadhada *Mandir* was nearly coming to an end. In preparation for the *Murti-pratishtha* in Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj consulted with Narayan Suthar of Junagadh to model a *Murti* based on the exact dimensions of his own physique. Narayanjibhai requested to Maharaj to stay before him while the sculpting process was occurring. Maharaj agreed. He would sit in the light on a cot in the *veranda* to the East of the Vasudev-Narayan room. Due to Narayanjibhai’s extraordinary skills, Shriji Maharaj would often show his pleasure by giving him

prasad. Soon after, the *mandir* in Gadhada was ready.

Nishkulanand Swami approached Maharaj and said, “Maharaj the *mandir* is ready. The murtis are also ready. So, the sooner we install the murtis, the better it will be.” Maharaj consulted Gopalanand Swami regarding the auspicious day and hour for the *Murti-pratishtha* ceremony. Gopalanand Swami replied, “Maharaj, Aso Sud 12 (October 9th, 1829) is the most suitable and auspicious day for the installation of the murtis.” Maharaj agreed to his suggestion and sent invitation cards to the devotees in different towns and villages. He invited *Vedic* scholars from the village of Umreth. On October 9th, 1829, according to the *Vedic* traditions, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan consecrated the murtis of Gopinathji Maharaj and Radhikaji in the *mandir* of Gadhada. The sounds of ‘Shri Gopinathji Maharaj ni Jay’ reached the outskirts of the village. A beautiful stone *mandir*, the last of Shri Hari’s six *mandirs*, adorned Shri Hari’s adopted hometown.

Maharaj asked the devotees to see him in the *Murti* of Gopinathji and told Dada Khachar, “I am dwelling in these murtis. While living in these murtis, I shall accept your service.” With these words, Maharaj embraced the *Murti* and touched its head with both of his hands. In the western sanctuary, the murtis of *Dharma–Bhakti* were installed, and in the Eastern sanctuary, the *Murti* of Surya, Krishna, Baldev and Revtiji were installed. Dada Khachar’s dream of building a *mandir* had finally become a reality.



Unique Festivals



Bhagwan Swaminarayan's festivals provided a beautiful and joyful mosaic of color, pageantry, beauty, music, dance, and rituals. Shriji Maharaj placed special emphasis on the celebration of festivals.

17.1 The Importance of Festivals

The Swaminarayan *Sampraday* is a holy fellowship that held grand festivals and celebrations that rejuvenated and relieved followers from the monotony of daily life and its burdens. Its social and predominantly spiritual content made followers vibrant and more God-centered. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's festivals provided a beautiful and joyful mosaic of color, pageantry, beauty, music, dance, and rituals. Shriji Maharaj placed particular emphasis on the celebration of festivals. As the *satsang* fellowship grew, there was a need for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan to stay in touch with one another. Therefore, Maharaj celebrated festivals on a grand scale which allowed for the meeting of devotees from all around. The venue and date were decided months in advance. Invitations were sent to hundreds and thousands of followers across the country as far as East India. As soon as they received the message, communities prepared for the trip to have Shriji Maharaj's *darshan*. Without modern transportation facilities, it sometimes took months for disciples to attend such festivals, but once they visited, they forgot their pain and enjoyed the bliss of *darshan* and listening to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and His pious saints. These festivals provided a forum for the community to meet and appreciate each other. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan stressed the need for followers to empathize with one another and their commitment to *satsang*. This would speed up *divyabhav* and cultivate *satsang* in distant and remote

communities. Lastly, Shriji Maharaj organized such celebrations as He knew that they permitted devotees to have remembrance of his divine incidences.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Gadhada First Chapter 3rd *Vachanamrut*, “Even one who can constantly see the form of God in his heart should recall the divine actions and incidents of God performed in his various *avatars* in various places. If at the time of death, he forgets God’s form but remembers the divine actions and incidents performed by Him at various places then by that association, God’s form will be remembered. That is why I perform grand Vishnu–Yags; annually celebrate Janmashtami, *Ekadashi*, and other observances; and gather brahmacharis, Sadhus and *satsangis* on these occasions. After all, even if a sinner remembers these occasions at the time of death, he will also attain the abode of God.” Even a brief recollection of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s glance, smile, walk, or hand gesture at the time of one’s death is enough to grant *moksha*. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan’s festivals fulfilled the following objectives:

1. Disciples became aware that they were not alone in their devotion to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan but rather members of a vast family irrespective of their differences in caste, religion, language or region.
2. Disciples had a platform to strengthen their faith in *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, meet saints and other disciples and learn spiritual values from one another.

3. As it was the beginning of the holy fellowship, disciples were faced with problems for being a member of the holy fellowship. Such issues could further be discussed, and solutions could be formulated.
4. Festivals were training centers for mass education and for giving inspiration to people to become free from addictions and worldly attachments.

Due to the presence of Supreme Almighty *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, a person who attended a festival never saw any anarchy or disorganization. Few of the referenced festivals in the holy fellowship are presented here:

17.2 Maha–Raas Lila in Panchala

Bhagwan Swaminarayan often played raas - a collective circular dance accompanied by kirtans with His santo and bhakto. One such unparalleled raas festival was celebrated in the courtyard of Jhinabhai in Panchala on February 25th, 1823.

It was the night of a full moon (Sharad Purnima). Hundreds of saints and thousands of invited devotees across the land came to Panchala for the festival. During the evening, Maharaj was seated to take his meal. While Maharaj was having His meal, Brahmanand Swami came for *darshan* and humbly plead, “Just as *Bhagwan* Shri Krishna played raas with the gopis on the night of Sharad Punam, we wish that You play raas with us today.” Maharaj smiled and replied, “I

will fulfill your wish, but only on one condition. You'll have to compose and sing new kirtans during the raas. Only then will everyone enjoy the maha – raas.”

Brahmanand Swami agreed. Shri Hari said, “Arrange the maha-raas on the open ground by the hill in the westerly direction. The Sabli River flows nearby and the light of the full moon and sweet aroma of flowers of the spring season will be ideal. After the preparations, everyone headed towards the banks of the river. By 9 p.m. the large flat ground was teeming with santo and bhakto. Upon His arrival, Maharaj instructed Brahmanand Swami to arrange the numerous Sadhus in nine concentric circles. Maharaj affirmed that everyone's presence inspired divine joy like that of *Akshardham*. After that, Maharaj announced for the maha-raas to commence. One of the Sadhus started beating a pair of sticks on the drums followed by other various Indian instruments, and Brahmanand Swami commenced singing, “Sakhi Gokul Gamna Chokma re...” The Sadhus started taking the raas steps in unison with the beats of the percussion instruments. When Maharaj saw His Sadhus dancing in circles with fervent devotion, He got down from the dais and weaved through the circles to reach the senior Sadhus. Shri Hari moved around in the circles clapping the hands of the senior Sadhus. With Shri Hari's participation, the raas indeed turned into a maha-raas. The other Sadhus in the outer circles wished that Maharaj would play raas with them too. Instantly, they saw

Shri Hari standing before them, ready to play raas. Maharaj had taken the same number of forms as the number of Sadhus present in the raas. The maha-raas commenced. Shriji Maharaj wished to make the maha-raas memorable for all of His Sadhus. Everyone was enjoying so much, that no one was aware of the time. Everyone wanted to continue, but Brahmanand Swami and some senior saints did not want to tire out Maharaj. So, to conclude the maha-raas, Brahmanand Swami played a smart trick by gesturing to a devotee to ignite a heap of dry grass at a distance. Upon doing so, everyone saw the fire and brought an abrupt halt to the maha-raas. When the maha-raas came to an end, the full moon night was on the verge of breaking in dawn. The Sadhus gathered around Maharaj. Brahmanand Swami opined, “Maharaj, the night seemed as if it was six months long.” Maharaj replied, “Because the night wanted to prolong itself, I allowed it to prevail. The maha-raas would not have ended tonight.” In this manner, Maharaj gave bliss to his Sadhus and devotees by playing in the maha-raas with them.

17.3 The Divine Shakotsav of Loya

Shriji Maharaj had commanded his Sadhus that after giving up the paramhansa *diksha* and accepting the *Vaishnav* Sadhu *diksha*, they should prepare meals with their own hands, offer it to *Thakorji*, and then partake it. So, in the year of 1821, Shriji Maharaj's saints were stationed in the remote village of Loya along with Maharaj's presence. At the time,

Nishkulanand Swami was cooking khichdi, Nityanand Swami and Vaishnavanand Swami were preparing chapattis, and the remaining Sadhus were making other items. Once, Shriji Maharaj observed their efforts and enthusiasm and said, “Since all of you are making food items, I also want to make something for all of you and serve it as well.” Sura Khachar avidly asked, “Maharaj, which food item will you prepare?” Shriji Maharaj replied, “Order brinjals from Gadhada and I will cook them in ghee. I’ll add curd, gram flour, coriander, turmeric, and other condiments to make it taste extraordinary.”

Within a short period of time, the provisions had arrived in Loya. The next day a cartload of brinjals were bought by Laduba and Jivuba from Gadhada. Maharaj had them washed and stuffed with spices. Then, Maharaj mixed gram flour with curd and added it to the pots containing brinjals. In each pot, He added plenty of ghee and cooked them. The other food items like chapattis and khichdi were prepared by Sadhus. Once everything was ready, Shri Hari sat down for His meal. While He ate the cooked brinjals and the other food items, Maharaj occasionally drank water, moved his hand over his stomach, and praised the brinjals. Sura Khachar joked, “Maharaj, we will only know after you finish your meal and serve it to us, to see how good it really is.” After eating, Maharaj first served His Sadhus and then devotees. Everyone relished the meal and praised it numerous times.

Two to three days later, some devotees arrived from

the village of Kholadiyad for Maharaj’s *darshan*. They wanted to sponsor a meal for Maharaj, santo, and bhakto. They had brought with them 18 *maunds* (360 kg) of fresh ghee which they offered to Maharaj. Maharaj became pleased and replied, “The devotees here will make the other food items, but you order brinjals; I will cook them myself.” The devotees inquired regarding how much brinjals will be needed. Maharaj stated, “60 *maunds* (1200kg) will be needed.” Shriji Maharaj told Sura Khachar to order the brinjals. He ordered them from the village of Chuda and Ranpur. In no time, cartloads of brinjals were being unloaded in Loya. Many pits were dug to be used as cooking stoves. The pits were filled with firewood and covered with huge pots. The Sadhus were standing by each stove waiting on Shriji Maharaj’s cue to throw the brinjals into the pots. Maharaj moved with speed and agility from one stove to the next. The turmeric powder had stained His hands and clothes yellow. The heat from the stoves caused sweat to form on His forehead and gather on the tip of his nose. However, when combined with the splendor of His *Murti*, the glow from his face resembled the beauty of a pearl. Maharaj’s enchanting *Murti* attracted the *devas* and the *devis* in the sky for His *darshan*. Premanand Swami wrote a *bhakti* pad capturing the lila of this divine Shakotsav: “Vali Vakhanu Shakotsav Lila Kari, Nayane Nirkhya Karta Sundar Shak Jo.”

After cooking all 1200kg of the brinjals, Shri Hari generously served the stew to the Sadhus, *Parshads*, and

devotees. No one took any other food item except the stew that Maharaj made. Shriji Maharaj performed this divine lila for more than two months continuously.

17.4 The Memorable Rangotsav of Vadtal

In 1816, Maharaj decided to celebrate the festival of colors in Vadtal on a large scale. Invitations were sent out to far and wide distances. Shriji Maharaj instructed his saints to create two tanks for holding colored water to be used for playing with the plunger. It was arranged in a way that water could be drawn into the tanks from a nearby well so *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and his devotees could play together. Joban Pagi and other disciples had brought carts full of *gulal* to celebrate on a large scale. Also, *pichkaris*, flowers, perfumes, drums, cymbals, and a stage was prepared. Soon, in the morning, everyone was waiting for Maharaj's arrival. Maharaj performed his morning duties. Then he wore the most beautiful attire with flower garlands around his neck and wrists. He arrived at the festival stage and seeing everyone eager to let the colors fly, He said, "Everyone split into two teams. Only then we will play." After that, Shriji Maharaj commanded, "The Sadhus should make one team and the devotees, and I will make the second team. Let's see who will win!"

Everyone was ready with their *gulal* and water cannons. As soon as Maharaj let the first stream of color into the air, the festival of colors began. Everyone was coloring each other and the competition was in full swing. Sura Khachar took a

whole vessel of color and emptied it on Nityanand Swami's head. Brahmanand Swami saw this and returned the favor with an added fist of color in Sura Khachar's face. Somla Khachar saw this and drenched Brahmanand Swami with colored water. Nityanand Swami ran up to Somla Khachar and filled his eyes with color as well. In this way, the game of coloring each other continued amongst the Sadhus and devotees.

Simultaneously, the saints sang devotional kirtans accompanied by musical instruments. Then, it was now Maharaj's turn. All of the Sadhus filled their *pichkaris* and took a fist full of color in their hands. At once, they all emptied their arsenal onto Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj retreated to the stage and put up a shield in front of him. However, this encouraged the jesting Sadhus to come forward with even more strength. Maharaj now tried to get on top of his seat. As he jumped from one edge to the other, the seat broke! Shriji Maharaj called out Nana Khachar, "Quickly! Bring my horse!" But Nityanand Swami heard this and squirted color in the horse's eyes. The horse ran off scared. "The Sadhus win! The Sadhus win!" Maharaj yelled with his arms raised. This amazing celebration lasted for hours. Finally, it ended and Maharaj along with the devotees, went to a nearby river and bathed. The whole environment became so enthralling and electrifying that devotees remembered it vividly until their last moments. All the Sadhus and devotees etched the *Murti* of Maharaj into their

hearts and felt at peace. Maharaj's love and affection for his saints and devotees was remarkable and unseen.

In the same year of 1816, Nishkulanand Swami, a great poet, and carpenter, had prepared an artistic swing of twelve openings in Vadtal. In the evening, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was honorably seated in the swing. This twelve-door hindolo was very beautiful and had been encrusted with small bells, pearls, and jewels to enhance its beauty. In the evening, Maharaj was requested to sit in the hindolo. Maharaj had donned rich gold-embroidered robes and was wearing the diamond-encrusted crown gifted by Kushalkunvarba of Dharampur, and also ornaments of gold. Muktanand Swami started to swing the hindolo with the help of a silk cord. Then, a unique event took place. Maharaj assumed twelve forms and appeared on each of the twelve doors. There, Shriji Maharaj accepted garlands of flowers; however, as there were innumerable devotees, Shriji Maharaj, from his swing, lengthened his stick so that he could accept garlands from even the farthest devotees. This divine and blissful lila of Maharaj thrilled all of the followers amazingly.

The *Paramhansas* made bhajans of this divine deed and sang them. Then, all the forms merged into the original form of Maharaj. Maharaj descended from the hindolo and all the Sadhus and devotees performed *pujan* of Maharaj. They gave gifts and performed *aarti*. Everyone was blessed with the sight of these divine deeds.

17.5 Annakut Festival of 1821

Once, Shriji Maharaj had put Laduba and Jivuba in charge of organizing festivals in the courtyard of Dada Khachar. After celebrating the festival of Dassehra lavishly, Laduba and Jivuba were looking forward to hosting the festival of *annakut* on a grand scale. They called their brother Dada Khachar, to seek the permission of Shriji Maharaj to start preparations for the upcoming *annakut* festival. Dada Khachar approached Maharaj and humbly asked Him for permission. Maharaj replied strictly, "You have just spent a lot of money in celebrating Janmashtami, Dassehra, and Dwadashi. Furthermore, the festival of Prabodhini *Ekadashi* is not very far off. I am aware of how much wealth you have. However, celebrating festivals requires a lot of funds. My devotees must celebrate festivals or serve me with whatever wealth they have without taking the recourse of borrowing. Therefore, you must celebrate the *annakut* festival within your financial means." Dada Khachar agreed to abide by Maharaj's decree and went ahead with the preparations of the festival. Due to the fulfillment of their heartfelt desire to celebrate the *annakut* festival, Laduba and Jivuba's eyes welled up with tears of joy. The next morning, the air ranted with kirtans as female devotees of the village sang while preparing the provisions under the guidance of Jivuba and Laduba. It was celebration time for the whole village of Gadhada as every household was busy preparing for the

festival. Many *Brahmin* female devotees, who were experts in cooking were invited to do *seva* under the direct supervision of Laduba. They were engaged in making spiced food items such as *vada*, *papads*, noodles, etc. from moong and urad flour. Though outwardly they were preparing the food items; their minds were totally engrossed in Maharaj's divine *Murti*, so much so that some of them saw Maharaj's *Murti* benignly smiling at them in the middle of the *papad*. They would just freeze with the rolling pin held high in their hands unable to do anything for a while. Some of the female devotees completed their regular quota of *jaap* by reciting the *mahamantra* 'Swaminarayan' as they arranged the rows of *vada* to dry. Some were astonished to see his smiling face while rolling the noodles as well. Indeed, they saw Shri Hari everywhere and in everything. While straining the flour, some women would giggle aloud reminiscing some moments of Maharaj's life. The chaste devotees had Shri Hari's *darshan* according to their perception of Him in their mind which was on par with the best of *yogis*. Their only aim was to please Maharaj to the best of their abilities. Even though many women had become frail due to observing various *vratas* and austerities, they still brought pots of fresh water from the Unmatt Ganga on their heads. Shriji Maharaj sent several messengers to various places to invite saints traveling to and from various places to spread his message. The messengers relayed Shri Hari's message

requesting the saints to come to Gadhada two days before Diwali.

The saints were very eager for Shri Hari's *darshan* and thus, they left for Gadhada from wherever they were at the time. They stopped all works and started out for Gadhada. They would seek alms during their travels and eat whatever was offered to them. When devotees heard the news of the forthcoming *annakut* festival from the saints, they joined the saints on their way to Gadhada. All roads leading to Gadhada were teeming with saints and devotees. Disregarding their exhaustion, they walked at a faster pace as they got close to Gadhada. Their fatigue disappeared in expectation of Maharaj's imminent, divine *darshan*. The imagination of Shriji Maharaj astride his mare Manki, traveling slightly ahead of them made the saints forget about their fatigue. Upon arriving in Gadhada and entering Dada Khachar's *darbar*, their joy had no bounds. Upon having the *darshan* of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, everyone became enlightened and absorbed in divine bliss. After meeting and greeting everyone, Maharaj was ready to celebrate the *annakut utsav*. Everything was prepared. All the various food items were organized and arranged in front of the *Murti* of Vasudev Narayan. It was time for the *annakut aarti*. Shri Hari performed *aarti* of Vasudev Narayan and then, He performed *pujan*. Devotion and divinity permeated Dada Khachar's *darbar* and the village of Gadhada as well. Everyone was absorbed in divine joy.

Afterwards, Maharaj took his meal while saints, male devotees, and female devotees performed the *darshan* of Maharaj. Then after, Maharaj served everyone with great joy. This event was etched forever in the history of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*.



Supreme Almighty



Directly through his divine charming personality and grand works, it can be proven that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the Supreme Almighty Lord of Lords.

18.1 True Identity

Due to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's magnificent personality and works, he had become revered by scholars. Without taking the help of any ruler or any wealthy person, He released thousands of people from all sorts of vices and unrighteousness and led them to moral, pious, virtuous, and righteous lives. Many intellectuals, after recognizing *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's achievement in the field of society and religion, established him as a social and religious reformer. Some went a step further and attributed him as a divine figure. More importantly, quite a large number of people considered him as an incarnation that is equal to Krishna and Ram. However, in reality, He is the Supreme Almighty Lord of Lords. He is the source of all incarnations and the cause of all incarnations. How so? He lived on this Earth merely for forty-nine years. Eleven in his hometown, approximately seven in the forest, and another thirty in Gadhada, a small village in Southeastern Gujarat. Compared to the number of years he lived on this Earth, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan initiated 500 *Paramhansas*, and during his entire life, he gave *diksha* to more than 2,000 Sadhus, established a following of more than two million devotees, built six grand *mandirs*, and changed the social, cultural, political, and religious landscape of India. He revitalized *bhakti* in modern India by reviving the rites, traditions, and sacraments prescribed in the Shruti and Smruti *Shastras*.

His social and spiritual reform was noted by many great individuals in society.

Directly through his divine charming personality and grand works, it can be proven that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is the Supreme Almighty Lord of Lords. Besides, no other *avatar* has accomplished what *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan accomplished, proving and making him matchless. Various points listed below will help one understand this fact clearly.

18.2 Distinctive Qualities of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Of all the spiritual leaders, incarnations, deities, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has been the most dynamic, most vibrant, most radiant, and most redeeming. For the spread of *ekantik dharma*, He constantly traveled across the length and breadth of the country either on foot or horseback. He visited thousands of towns and villages, transforming people into ardent devotees. Nonetheless, He did not keep anybody left out of His divine grace. Hindus, Parsis, Muslims, Khojas, Jains, Britishers and even those who did not believe in the *Vedas*, directly or indirectly, experienced His divine bliss.

His life was His mission. Therefore, for spiritual education and redemption of thousands of people, He projected Himself as a practitioner. His entire life itself was a living book of theology and metaphysics. Subsequently, He could explain the abstract and most explicable philosophical concepts in the language of the masses. His interpretations

were so simple that even a layman could understand Him without any difficulty. His discourses were marked by a simple, colloquial, epigrammatic, and conversational style. Even in His attempts at correcting the morals and manners of the people, His approach was always constructive and corrective.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan possessed *yogic* powers and spiritual magnetism that attracted everyone. His absolutely transparent spiritual life guided people on the path of righteousness. He provided inspiration, moral strength, and support. These divine attributes illuminated his whole being and warmed those around him with divine joy.

18.3 Unique Promise

Bhagwan Swaminarayan promised His devotees that He would come, give *darshan*, and take them with Him to His divine abode ‘*Akshardham*’ during their last moments. The holy fellowship works of literature have mentioned innumerable such incidents with exact day along with time, place, and person’s name. Such miracles are observed even today where *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gives divine *darshan* and relieves the pain of the person and takes the soul to *Akshardham*. No religion of the world or previous incarnations have displayed such unique phenomena. Some incidences will provide concrete evidence of these occurrences:

In the village of Panvi, there was a *Rajput* devotee by

the name of Punja Dodia. Once, Punja bhagat was going to Gadhada with a fresh load of grass in his bullock cart. On that very day, Shriji Maharaj had departed to *Akshardham*. Bhaguji and Ratanji were going to town to make the necessary arrangements for the funeral rites. They met Punjabhai on the way. Bhaguji asked, “Punjabhai, where are you going?” Punjabhai replied, “I have brought fresh grass for Manki. I am going to deliver it, and then I am going to have *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj.”

Bhaguji informed Punja *bhakta* that the rider of Manki, Shriji Maharaj had just departed to *Akshardham*. On hearing such tragic news, Punja bhagat immediately became unconscious. He regained consciousness after three hours, but he had a foreboding that his death was near. He stopped taking food and water. He came to Gadhada and met Gopalanand Swami and started mourning. Gopalanand Swami offered him food, but he refused and said, “How can I eat after my beloved has departed.”

He had lost his appetite due to such tragic and depressing news that he had heard. Swami requested him not give up food and water. Punjabhai replied, “I do not want to starve, but I do not relish food any more. If I am knowingly trying to starve, then I will take an oath on the *Paramhansas*. If this has happened by the grace of Shriji Maharaj, then He will take me to His abode on the thirteenth day.”

On the thirteenth day after the departure of Shriji

Maharaj, Punja *bhakta* was performing his daily duties. As soon as his duties were completed, all of a sudden, he fell on the floor. His soul departed from his mortal body. Everyone saw *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan come to take his soul to *Akshardham*.

Golida is a village in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat. Four *Brahmin* brothers, named Bhima, Vashram, Raghav, and Rana lived there. Their father had also met Ramanand Swami, who had once visited Golida. On that occasion, Swami had explained to him, “Ultimate redemption cannot be attained without the contact of God in human form.”

The old *Brahmin* had questioned, “Where can one find the manifest form of God in this wicked age of *Kaliyug*?” Ramanand Swami blessed him and said, “Your four sons will be fortunate enough to come in contact with God.” Years later, Shriji Maharaj went from Sardhar to Golida. At the very first *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj, the four sons were overjoyed and felt as if they knew Maharaj from the beginning. They became staunch devotees of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Much pleased with them, Shriji Maharaj asked, “*Yamduts* should never enter our village or its outskirts to fetch any soul.”

Slowly and steadily, their whole village was drawn into *satsang*. However, there was one man who had malicious feelings towards *satsang*. At the time of his death, the servants of *Yamraja* came to take him to hell. But, on reaching the outskirts of the village, they began to experience a burning

sensation. Some of the *Yamduts* warned, “The divine influence of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan prevails in the village; we will not be able to enter the village.” But others said, “There is nothing wrong in taking away an evil man.” The four brothers took turns in guarding the village. On that particular day, it was Bhima and Rana’s turn. They saw the *Yamduts* and told them to turn back. But the *Yamduts* did not heed their warning. So, the brothers chased the *Yamduts* out with sticks. The *Yamduts* ran away fearing they would get beaten by the brothers. Such was the strength of the brothers’ faith and confidence in *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

Raghav and Vashram wanted to become Sadhus, but their mother refused. Rana then explained to his mother, “Please permit my brothers to become Sadhus. Do not worry, I will serve you.” His mother finally consented, and both the brothers were initiated as Sadhus. They were renamed as Raghavanand Swami and Vishvatmanand Swami. Sometime later, Rana fell ill and was on his deathbed. His mother asked, “Who will look after me now?” Rana replied, “I will come to take you to *Akshardham* twelve days from now.”

Shriji Maharaj came with a *viman* to take Rana to his abode. Rana asked everyone, “Those who want to come to *Akshardham* with me get ready.” His son got ready and went to *Akshardham* with him. On the twelfth day, Rana came with Maharaj to take his mother to *Akshardham*. Many saw this divine sight and were amazed.

Pranvallabh, a *Brahmin* from Ahmedabad was traveling to Nasik. Unfortunately, Nasik was overcome with the cholera epidemic, and soon Pranvallabh too became its victim. He left his body, and Maharaj sat him on a divine chariot to take him to *Akshardham*. However, before they departed, Maharaj asked, “Do you have any final wishes?”

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

Maharaj said, “Of course, let me bring you back to life.” His body was on the funeral pyre. The only thing left to do was to apply the flame. Just then, Pranvallabh sat up! “I’ve come to tell you that *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan has come to take me to his divine abode. Currently, death is running rampant. Chant the Swaminarayan name and you will live. Surrender to Him and he will come to take you at your end time as well.” Then Pranvallabh began clapping and taught everyone how to chant the ‘Swaminarayan’ *mantra*. Everyone present was amazed and started singing the Swaminarayan *dhun*. It was as if the crematory had become a *mandir*. After that, when the *dhun* ended, the *Brahmin*’s soul left his body, and He went to *Akshardham*.

18.4 Supreme Power of Samadhi

According to the *yogic* theory of *ashtang-yoga*, one must

successfully pass seven stages in order to achieve the final stage, ‘*samadhi*.’ However, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan effortlessly gave this experience to anyone, without distinction of age, gender, creed, caste, or religion. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had bestowed *samadhi*, not only to animals, birds, and creatures but also to those who came to trick or kill him. He granted *samadhi* without touching or seeing, but merely by thought. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan bestowed *samadhi* to anyone who heard even the sound of his *chakhadis*. When *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan bestowed *samadhi* to people of different faiths, they saw the God they revered merge into the divine form of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Only one who is supreme has the capability to perform such an act. Some incidences reveal the truth regarding *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan granting *samadhi*.

Taragam is a village near Chhapaiya. On its outskirts was a field belonging to Dharmadev. One day, Dharmadev said, “Ghanshyam the rice in our field is now ripe. But the sparrows are spoiling the crops. Besides, today we are going to the neighboring village for some urgent work. So, can you go and look after the field?” Ghanshyam readily said, “Yes.” So, Bhaktimata gave him a long stick and sent him out to guard the field. Playing with his stick, Ghanshyam soon reached the field. He climbed a jambu tree and saw hundreds of sparrows in the field. Ghanshyam thought, “I do not want to harm the sparrows. What shall I do?” Suddenly, an idea

occurred to him. He made a loud sound. All of a sudden, all of the sparrows went into *samadhi*. All of the sparrows became still and silent at once. While the sparrows were in *samadhi*, Ghanshyam went to another nearby field to play with his friends. Dharmadev and Rampratapbhai came to the field to fetch Ghanshyam. However, to their surprise, Ghanshyam was not there. They searched and searched, and at last, they found him playing in the neighboring field. Dharmadev called out, “What were you told? Weren’t you not sent to look at the crops?” Ghanshyam calmly replied, “Father let us go to the field and see how things are.” When they went to the field, they saw the sparrows transfixed in their places. Some were lying on the ground, some were sitting on the trees, and some had rice in their beaks. But all the sparrows were hushed and motionless. Dharmadev was greatly surprised and figured at first that all of the sparrows had died. He stood speechless for some time. Ghanshyam then gave a loud call and all of the sparrows flew away instantly. Dharmadev and Rampratapji thought, “Ghanshyam is the Supreme Lord and this is His doing. The lives of all living beings are in His hands.” *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan showed this miraculous feat at the age of seven!

News of Shriji Maharaj’s *samadhis* spread across the Indian Subcontinent. An ascetic named Ramdasji from Northern India came to Piplana to complain about Shriji Maharaj’s extensive use of *samadhi*. He approached Maharaj

discontentedly, “*Jivanmukta*, this is too much. People like me, have been doing austerities our whole lives with the hopes of having a glimpse *Bhagwan*, and you are blessing ordinary peasants, farmers, children, and women with the experience of *samadhi*. Please explain your reasoning for such kind of acts.” Shri Hari replied politely, “Everyone that we bless with such an experience has accrued merits through previous births. These *samadhis* are a result of the austerities and other good deeds they have performed with the wish to attain *Bhagwan*.” Immediately, after Shriji Maharaj finished, Ramdasji was sent into *samadhi*. He saw the divine abode and form of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. He woke up with his head placed at the feet of Shriji Maharaj.

Maharaj granted *samadhi* to many people in Mangrol and Kalvani. Some attained *samadhi* by his mere look or touch. By Maharaj’s grace, some people attained *samadhi* by merely touching his walking stick, flower, garland, or garments worn by him. Not only humans, but at times, even monkeys, sparrows, pigeons, peacocks, fish, and other animals also attained *samadhi*. At times by merely hearing a word from Maharaj or by getting a glimpse of his divine *Murti* or by merely entertaining a thought about him, people attained *samadhi*. Sometimes even his disciples-Sadhus and devotees, both male and female by His divine grace, helped people attain *samadhi*. Seekers belonging to different faiths had *darshan* of their chosen deities and their divine dwelling places. In the

state of *samadhi*, followers of Ram saw Ram, *Vaishnavs* saw Radha-Krishna, Muslims saw Pegamber, Jains saw Tirthankars, Shaivites had *darshan* of Lord Shiva, *Devi* devotees had the vision of *Devi*, and some people had a rare glimpse of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan Himself in *Akshardham*. Certain seekers saw all of the twenty-four *avatars* emerging from and merging into the divine form of Maharaj. Some people remained in *samadhi* for an hour and some for two hours. Some people remained in that state for a day. There were instances of people remaining in that state of *samadhi* for one, two, or even six months. Such people in *samadhi* were placed in a pile. Whenever someone came to call a person in *samadhi*, Maharaj would revive them by calling out their personal names.

18.5 Omniscience Beyond Comprehension

Bhagwan Swaminarayan displayed his power of omniscience in multiple incidents. In the year of 1811, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan prophesied a great famine striking the land the following year. During 1811 and 1812, he traveled incessantly throughout *Kutch*, Saurashtra, and Gujarat, to alert the devotees. He commanded them to sell most of their property, jewelry, and cattle to buy and store grains. Those who obeyed escaped its hideous effect. He sent the majority of the *Paramhansas* to Surat in South Gujarat, where the effect was less severe, and the devotees were efficient enough to support them for the duration of the famine. He bestowed

such power on many disciples like Ravji Sutar, Sheikhji- a Muslim, Alaiya Khachar, and many others. He also took them back at his will. The commander of the Gaekwad army in Vadodara came to Vadtal for Shriji Maharaj's *darshan*. Sheikh Ahmadkhan Pathan stood fixed for several minutes staring at Maharaj's *Murti* and was shook by his splendor. The commander asked Shri Hari to initiate him as a devotee. Maharaj did so and introduced him to the *niyams* of the *sampraday*. Maharaj then convinced Sheikhji to resign from his post if he wanted to stay in his service. Sheikhji did so with the permission of the king. After that, Sheikhji went to Gadhada and traveled with Maharaj from village to village. One afternoon, Shriji Maharaj participated in a *charitra* in front of His devotees. He exclaimed, "I am tired of being *Bhagwan*. If I were to find a capable person to handle my responsibilities, I would gladly give the person my powers and retire to a life of peace and meditation." Sura Khachar decided to play along. He said, "Maharaj, our Sheikhji is the suitable replacement. He knows how to carry himself in public and is also well-spoken. Sheikhji was waiting for someone to nominate him. He chimed in saying, "Shri Hari, Sura Khachar makes a valid point. I would be able to wield your powers with ease. Why not let me assume them?" Shri Hari smiled and agreed with a nod. He said, "Sheikhji, this sounds like a good idea. I am going to give you five simple *niyams*. As long as you follow them, you will not have a single problem

with wielding my powers. If you lapse in following even one of them, you will regret your decision for the rest of your life.” Then, Sheikhji listened attentively. “First, never engage in useless bounty or private conversations with women. Follow *brahmacharya* fit for a householder. Secondly, only use these powers in the Sindh region. Thirdly, never dress in silk or gold-threaded cloth. Fourthly, never eat an excessive amount of ghee, sweets, and sugars. Fifthly, do not look inside the hearts and minds of other people. If you must, then never look at the faults of other individuals, and do not gossip about them with other individuals. This will cause you to wander from your own spiritual path.” Sheikhji agreed to all of the conditions and asked, “*Bhagwan*, how do I send other individuals into *samadhi*? I want to be able to perform miracles too.” Maharaj replied, “Ask those that you would like to send into *samadhi* to meditate on your beard. Your beard will send dozens of people into *samadhi*.” Sheikhji was eager to test his new powers. Devotees soon swarmed to Sheikhji. He decided to postpone his trip to Sindh. He traveled in villages, nearby Gadhada, and quickly gained popularity both within and outside of the *satsang* community. After a few months, Sheikhji returned to Gadhada. Instead of coming to Dada Khachar’s courtyard for Maharaj’s *darshan*, Sheikhji went into the Ahir colony and sent many of its members into *samadhi*. He gathered large crowds of individuals and blessed them with promises of children and wealth. Soon after,

Maharaj learned about Sheikhji’s behavior. Upon further investigation, Shriji Maharaj also learned that Sheikhji never went to Sindh. In fact, he was using his omniscient powers and sharing secrets from people’s minds with others. He was allowing women to massage his limbs and to serve him delicacies in his private quarters after nightfall. Deeply disturbed by Sheikhji’s behavior, Maharaj sent Brahmanand Swami to convince Sheikhji to come for his *darshan*. Brahmanand Swami convinced him by indulging his ego.

The next morning, Sheikhji entered the courtyard with several disciples. He stood in front of Shriji Maharaj to flaunt his beard. Maharaj inquired, “Why did you decide not to follow the *niyams* I gave you? You have caused much unrest and disturbance in the *satsang* community. Most importantly, you have betrayed my trust.” Filled with embarrassment, Sheikhji could not face Maharaj’s heat. He looked down in shame. Maharaj convinced Sheikhji to look into His eyes. Suddenly, Sheikhji’s body began to tremble. His eyes turned red, and his limbs ached. Feeling as if his body had been drained of life, Sheikhji’s face turned pale. His body quivered as he came to realize the reason for this supernatural experience - Maharaj had withdrawn and taken back his powers.

Thus, not only did *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan possess great powers, but He could give and take away at his will. No previous incarnations have displayed such kind of attributes.

18.6 Destroying Evil by Mere Sight

There was an evil demon by the name of Kalidatt, who was the foremost among sinners. He became distraught and agitated when he learned that God had taken birth in the home of Dharmadev. One early morning, he ordered all of his evil women accomplices, “Go to Dharmadev’s home and kill the child-God.” The demonesses were all extremely dark in color, with blood-red eyes, big pointed teeth, ugly faces, and frightful voices. As they looked around and found Ghanshyam, they grabbed Him from Bhaktimata and ran for the mango groves. Fortunately, Hanumanji was there in service of Ghanshyam, so he beat up all the demonesses and returned Ghanshyam back to Bhaktimata.

The evil accomplices returned to Kalidatt and gave a report of what had happened. Then they declared with one voice, “We shall never again go to Chhapaiya to bring the child-God. Hanuman, His servant, nearly beat us to death. On hearing this, Kalidatta became furious and sent his most senior demoness, Kotra, with instructions to kill the child-God. Kotra came and stood before Dharmadev’s home. She waited for the Child-God to be left alone. But the Lord is all-knowing. He looked at Kotra from the corner of his eyes and instantly, she started to burn. “I am burning, I am dying,” she screamed. Shrieking and struggling to douse the flames, she died on the spot. Thus, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, even as a child, defeated demons with a mere glance.

18.7 Harikrushna Maharaj Ni Jay

Bhagwan Swaminarayan Himself consecrated his *Murti*, Shri Harikrushna Maharaj in Vadtal *Mandir* in 1824 and declared that “I am the Supreme Godhead Myself and this *Murti* is my everlasting form on Earth through which infinite souls will get ultimate salvation from the cycle of birth and death and attain *Akshardham*.” No other incarnation has established their own idol for the worship of others in the past.

Nonetheless, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan stays constantly present via his *ekantik Satpurush* according to Gadhada First Chapter 68th *Vachanamrut*, “The murtis which God has given for worship by his command of eight types; God Himself personally enters those murtis and resides within them. A devotee of God who worships those murtis should maintain the same respect for them as he does the manifest form of God. In the same way, God also resides in the heart of the Sant. Therefore, the Sant should also be respected.”

18.8 Merging Avatars into One’s Form

Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the only God to portray the 24 incarnations of God from His own form and then merge them back into His own form, proving that He is supreme and above all. This event occurred to Parvatbhai. (See Chapter 5)

18.9 Forecast Within the Vedic Scriptures

Hindu theology is based on the *Vedas* and Hindu philosophy has been clarified in the *Prasthantrayi*. The *Vedas*

are revered as the oldest scriptures in the world and contain spiritual and philosophical knowledge. The four *Vedas* - Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Veda, Atharva Veda - are supplemented by the Upanishads, the Shrimad Bhagvat Gita and the *Brahma* Sutras as pillars of Hindu philosophy. Hindu philosophies are derived from the Prasthantrayi, which is the collective name for the Upanishads, the Bhagwad Gita and the *Brahma* Sutras. These have been accepted as treasures of wisdom for centuries in India. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan placed emphasis on studying the *Vedas* and the historic Hindu scriptures of the Prasthanatrayi.

Verses from Hindu *Vedic* scriptures asserting the manifestation of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and His supremacy are stated below.

‘Lord Dattatreya will manifest Himself in *Satyayug*, Lord Ram in *Tretayug*, Lord Krishna in *Dwaparyug* and the son of *Dharma*, Lord Swaminarayan will arrive in *Kaliyug*.’
(Brahmanda Puran)

‘In this world of heretics, Shri Hari Himself shall manifest as the one known to the people as Swami and shall deliver the world from the mire of miseries and sin.’
(Padma Puran)

‘The Lord of Lords, by the name of Sahajanand will incarnate on this planet and have all the souls attain his divine abode.’ **(Vishvaksena Samhita)**

‘One whose name (Swaminarayan) destroys vices, such Shri Hari will Himself take birth at the home of Hariprasad the *Brahmin*.’ **(Vishnu Dharmottara)**

‘All the *asurs* killed in battle will be born again. When they come and spread *adharma* on this Earth, then, I will be born as Badripati Narayanamuni, in Kaushal-Desh (referring to Uttar Pradesh, India), as the son of Dharmadev and *Murti Devi* in a Samvedi *Brahmin* family.’

(Skand Puran – Vasudev Mahatmya)



Purposes for Incarnating



Bhagwan Swaminarayan arrived from Akshardham to bestow bliss to his ekantik devotees who have love for Him, to fulfill their devotional aspirations, and shower love.

In November 1820, Maharaj was in Kariyani with His Santo and bhakto. Sadguru Gopalanand Swami came from Vadodara with Santo and bhakto to have His *darshan*. Nishkulanand Swami was also present in Kariyani with Maharaj. After everyone had *darshan* of Maharaj, everyone was asked to leave the quarters except Gopalanand Swami. Once everyone left, Maharaj bolted the door and revealed His reasons for incarnating on this Earth to Gopalanand Swami. But Nishkulanand Swami knew Maharaj was going to disclose extraordinary facts and thus, Swami eavesdropped on this secret conversation. As he listened through the crack of the door, he became overjoyed. His joy had no bounds. So, to reveal Maharaj's purposes, he wrote the book, '*Purushottam Prakash*,' which is a part of '*Nishkulanand Kavya*.' Through Nishkulanand Swami, we know why Maharaj came to this Earth. There are six reasons, namely:

- 1) *Bhagwan Swaminarayan* arrived from *Akshardham* to bestow bliss on his *ekantik* devotees who have love for Him, to fulfill their devotional aspirations, and shower love on them.
- 2) He incarnated at Dharmadev's home in Chhapaiya in Koshaldesh to rid Bhaktimata(mother) and Dharmadev(father) from harassment by *asurs* and *adharma*, and to establish his work on Earth.
- 3) *Avatari Bhagwan Swaminarayan* who eternally dwells in *Akshardham*, descended on this Earth to

propagate two things: His supreme knowledge and supreme *upasana*.

- 4) *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan arrived with the wish to impart His *upasana* to his *avatars* and their devotees, the knowledge of his own self by his teachings and to take them to *Akshardham*.
- 5) *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan arrived to establish *ekantik dharma* which had been wiped away since many eons, and to protect his saints.
- 6) He came to take *mumukshus* of previous births to *Akshardham* by imparting His *upasana* and knowledge to them, and to create new *mumukshus* arising from associating with Him and His devotees.



Charming Divine Physique



*Maharaj's eyes possessed extreme beauty and attracted all.
Bhagwan Swaminarayan's eyes flowed with pure divine
love and compassion for all beings.*

20.1 Divine Description

In the scriptures of the holy fellowship, there are numerous references to the physical characteristics and description of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's form. Saints have mentioned the height of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan being approximately 5 feet 4 inches (*sava chosatha tasu*). A magnificent record of the physique of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is the *Murti* of Gopinathji Maharaj in Gadhada. This idol was consecrated by Maharaj Himself in 1829. All of the body part measurements of the *Murti* are exact replicas of Maharaj. The sculpting of this idol was done in the very presence of Shriji Maharaj Himself.

Each body part had its own splendor. Maharaj's eyes possessed extreme beauty and attracted all. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's eyes flowed with pure divine love and compassion for all beings. An indescribable element was present in his eyes. Whoever saw *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had one definite opinion that there was a stunning indescribable charm in his eyes.

There was such sweetness in *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's speech that everyone understood it clearly. Aside from verbal modes of expression, Shriji Maharaj's voice profoundly affected listeners. His speech was so immensely sweet that it effortlessly penetrated the hearts of listeners. His sonorous voice and its resounding nature deeply moved all such that they could not forget it for the rest of their lives. When he

was only eight years old, the famed Gujarati poet, Kavishvar Dalpatram saw Shriji Maharaj dismount Manki and heard only one phrase, "Bhaguji, place some hay for the mare." In Dalpatram's biography, his son Nanalal cites his father's sentiments uttered at the age of seventy. "That sentence and that gesture are stuck to my heart that even today; I have not forgotten them." Such was the sublime resonance and divinely enduring nature of Shriji Maharaj's speech.

Nityanand Swami, a great scholar of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*, became *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's disciple merely after seeing His teeth in Meghapur in 1802. Purnanand Swami decided to dedicate his life to *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan by merely looking at how He walked.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had 63 tils(moles) and 52 chinhas(marks) on His entire form in various locations. Premanand Swami and other *Nand Santo* have narrated these marks in their kirtans. Meditating upon the idol of God by perceiving these marks and moles is considered to be the highest form of *dhyan*.

Sanatan *dharma* of Hinduism is a goldmine of sublime spiritual symbolism. The *charnarvind* (holy feet) of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan is a symbol that carries the most profound significance. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan gave *darshan* of the sixteen holy signs of his feet to *Paramhansas* and devotees innumerable times, thus convincing everyone that He was the manifest form of Purna *Purushottam* Narayan.

In the *Vedic* scripture - Samudrik, sages have described the physical attributes of the Supreme Godhead. One of the characteristics mentioned is that the Supreme Lord's divine feet has sixteen marks. Those sixteen marks were present in *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's divine feet. Seven marks on the sole of his left foot, and nine on the sole of his right. Many were convinced of His supreme divinity just by seeing the marks. No other *avatar* or incarnation has displayed sixteen marks on their feet.

His name was Ladudanji, born in the dusty village of Khan in the state of Rajasthan. He was a bard. Composing and singing poetry was second nature to him. After graduating in Bhuj, his expertise in poetry and other arts was recognized by the royals of Bhuj, Dhrangadhra, Jamnagar, Dwarka, Junagadh, and other places. He was hailed as the best poet and honored with titles like Rajkaviratna, Pingal Vidyacharya, Mahopadhyaya, Mahakavishvar, Shatavdhani, and many more. Once Ladudanji visited Bhavnagar. He came to the royal court of king Vajesinh. There, he brilliantly sang verses in praise of the king. The king and his couriers were impressed by his performance. Instantly, Vajesinh decided to honor him from head to toe with golden ornaments. The king's goldsmith was summoned to take measurements of Ladudanji and make the ornaments. On meeting the goldsmith, Ladudanji was surprised to see a *tilak* of *chandan* and a round *chandlo* of *kum-kum* on his forehead. The bard asked what it was, and

Vajesinh explained, "That question keeps troubling me too. A person named Swaminarayan has recently come to Gadhada. The *Kathis* say that He is *Bhagwan*. But I think He is a fraud. If you can go and test Him, I am sure He will be exposed."

The bard was young, intelligent, and famous. With all these qualities, who would not be arrogant and confident. Ladudanji accepted the challenge and left for Gadhada. On the way, he was thinking, "Today, I shall expose Swaminarayan to be false." But something amazing started to happen to Ladudanji as he got closer to Gadhada. His mind became entangled in doubt that what if Swaminarayan is indeed God! Then the next thought that came to him was to decide whether he was God. So, he made four wishes: "If Swaminarayan is God, then: 1. May He call me by my name. 2. May He remove the garland of roses from His neck and place it around mine. 3. May the Shrimad Bhagvat be covered in black cloth and be read before the assembly. 4. May He reveal to me the sixteen holy marks on the sole of His feet."

The royal bard beamed with a sly smile because he knew his four wishes were impossible to fulfill. When Ladudanji entered the village of Gadhada, he experienced peace in his heart. Soon, he entered the courtyard of Dada Khachar. An assembly was in progress beneath the neem tree. Ladudanji observed that the Shrimad Bhagvat covered in black cloth, was being read. Maharaj was wearing a rose garland around His neck. Before the poet could come to terms with

what he was seeing, Shriji Maharaj called him by his name, “Come Ladudanji!” Then Maharaj introduced him to the assembly, giving details of his achievements and where he had come from.

After that, Maharaj put the rose garland around Ladudanji’s neck. Maharaj then stretched his feet out to show Ladudanji the sixteen holy marks on the soles of his divine lotus feet. Thus, in no time, Maharaj fulfilled all the four wishes of Ladudanji. He felt happy and convinced that Sahajanand Swami was God. He broke out singing, ‘Ajni Ghadi Re Dhanya Ajni Gadi, Me Nirkhya Sahajanand Dhanya Ajni Gadi.’ (This moment is most fortunate and precious because I have seen Sahajanand Swami). Ladudanji became lost in Maharaj’s divinity and charm. Thereafter, he renounced all his riches and honors to become a Sadhu. He was named Brahmanand Swami.

20.2 Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Lotus Feet

The holy footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan carry a deep spiritual significance in the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. The Lord has sixteen symbolic icons on His lotus Feet. These holy marks are unique to Almighty God and no other incarnation possesses such features. One can recognize Bhagwan Swaminarayan by observing his divine lotus Feet. One gains guidance and help to the path of righteousness and salvation through meditating and focusing upon the lotus feet of the Lord.

Right foot – Nine holy marks

1. **Swastika (Sacred Cross)** – The symbol of auspiciousness, welfare, and richness.
2. **Ashtakon (Octagon)** – Refers to Maharaj’s divine compassion is constantly flowing in all eight directions. North, South, East, West, South-East, North-East, South-West and North-West.
3. **Urdhvarekha (Ascendant Line)** – Indicates continuous progress of souls by the divine grace of Maharaj.
4. **Ankush (Spur)** – *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*, the cause of all causes, controls everything and it also suggests that one must restrain-control the inner enemies (lust, anger, greed, ego, jealousy, etc.).
5. **Ketu (Flag)** - Indicates the spiritual victory of God, the absolute form of truth.
6. **Vajra (Bolt)** – Stands for the powers of God which destroys the weaknesses of souls and frees them from the fear of time, actions and delusions.
7. **Padma (Lotus)** – Symbolizes the tenderness and compassion of God which helps the devotee to attain detachment from the mundane life, the way a lotus remains unaffected by water.
8. **Jambu (Rose Apple)** – Symbolizes the sap of divine

joy attained from communion with God.

9. **Jav (Barley)** – Confirms that God takes care of the crops and the needs of those devotees who are in communion with Him.

Left Foot – Seven Holy Marks

1. **Meen (Fish)** – Guided through life with the principles of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the same way wind guides the sway and direction of a flag.
2. **Trikon (Triangle)** – Symbolizes liberation of the soul from the mental, physical and mundane problems, and difficulties. It also stands for the need to free oneself from the trial of *ishwar*, *maya* and *brahma* and to remain steadfast in *Parabrahma* – the ultimate reality.
3. **Dhanush (Bow)** – Inner enemies in the form of lust, anger, greed, ego, etc. are overcome.
4. **Gopad (Cow's footprint)** – Easily able to break away from the cycle of birth and death, in the same way that one is easily able to stride over the footprint of a cow.
5. **Vyoma (Space)** – Signifies the infinite and detached all-pervasiveness of God.
6. **Ardhachandra (Moon Crescent)** – Shows that the way the moon increases slowly and gradually, one

can attain perfection through patient meditation of God. State of calmness attained in the heart at all times, similar to how the moon always appears calm and at peace.

7. **Kalash (Pot)** – Stands for the supremacy and absoluteness of God.

These sixteen holy marks are only on the lotus feet of *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*, proving His supremacy compared to other incarnations.





The Swaminarayan Mahamantra



Chanting any other mantra more than a thousand times is still incomparable to reciting the mahamantra 'Swaminarayan' just once. Chanting this mahamantra averts all misery in any devastating or difficult situations.

21.1 Background

On December 31st, 1801 Shriji Maharaj introduced the *mahamantra* 'Swaminarayan' from His own mouth in the village of Faneni. He instructed all His followers to chant this *mahamantra*. Through such chanting, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan displayed various miracles like putting others into *samadhi*, curing diseases, removing ghosts and evil spirits, reviving the dead, etc. These were just some feats displayed by chanting the *mahamantra*.

21.2 Glory of The Mahamantra

Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Gadhada First Chapter 56th *Vachanamrut*, "However grave a sinner a person may be, if at the end of his life he utters, 'Swaminarayan', he will be redeemed of all sins and will reside in *Brahmamahol*. How then, can there be any doubt about a devotee who has taken refuge in that God attaining the abode of God?"

Additionally, in *Vachanamrut* Loya 6th *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan states, "When such vicious thoughts arise, one should stop meditation, and should clap and chant 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan' aloud, without shame. One should pray to God, 'O, Lord! You are a friend of the meek! You are an ocean of mercy!' Also, one should remember a great Sadhu of God, like Muktanand Swami, and pray to him too. As a result of this, all disturbing thoughts will be eradicated, and peace will prevail. Apart from this, there is no

other method to eradicate such thoughts.”

Chanting any other *mantra* more than a thousand times is still incomparable to reciting the *mahamantra* ‘Swaminarayan’ just once. Chanting this *mahamantra* averts all misery in any devastating or difficult situations. Moreover, when there is any calamitous grip of an evil spirit, one should resort to chanting this Swaminarayan *mahamantra*. It wields powers to burn all evil elements. All of one’s sins burn away by chanting the *mahamantra*. There are many names of God, but this is the most unique of them all. If someone says ‘Swaminarayan’ just once it is equivalent to the recital of thousand names of other Gods.

By chanting the *mahamantra*, all hardships in life are removed, and one receives peace of heart. Also, *Yamduts* cannot come into close proximity of a person who chants the *mantra*. One can chant this *mahamantra* all the time (day and night) regardless of what action one is performing. It helps one get by the struggles of life and grants eternal bliss. The *mahamantra* can be chanted by anyone, whether one is pious or impious. Nonetheless, it helps purify the soul and grants salvation.

21.3 Reviving the Dead

Once during his travels, Vyapakanand Swami visited Hamir Khachar’s home in Botad. As Vyapakanand Swami entered, he heard grief-stricken cries. There was something

wrong. Someone informed Swami that Hamir Khachar’s horse had died and he was unable to bear the loss. He was weeping as if he had lost his son. Vyapakanand Swami felt sorry for him.

He took some water in his palm and chanting the Swaminarayan *mantra*, sprinkled it on the dead horse. Then, he took the soul of a nearby mosquito and transferred it into the dead horse. Immediately, the horse came back to life. Hamir Khachar was overjoyed and fell at Vyapakanand Swami’s feet in gratitude.

21.4 The Act of Purification

Shriji Maharaj was passing through the streets of Jetalpur with a cart loaded with wheat. He wanted to perform a grand *yagna* ceremony in Jetalpur and had desired to feed hundreds of *Brahmins*. He would stop at every house and give two measures of wheat with a request to grind it into flour. All the devotees readily offered their service and prepared the flour. As Shriji Maharaj wanted to redeem innumerable *jivas*, He would not give more than two measures of wheat to any of the devotees, even though many people desired to grind more. While passing through the streets of Jetalpur, Maharaj arrived at a spot where a prostitute lived. Her name was Laxmibai. She was taking rest on her cot when Maharaj reached her house. As soon as she heard Maharaj talking to the people, she came out of her home. As soon as she beheld the luminous figure of Maharaj, her mind became drawn towards Him. She

felt some strange power pulling her towards Maharaj. While remaining on her doorstep, she spoke to Maharaj who was seated on the cart, “O Lord! Are you giving this wheat to the people to grind it into flour?” Maharaj replied, “Yes.” She asked, “How much will you pay for this work?” Maharaj replied, “I don’t pay in cash. I bless those people who help us in our work and bestow upon them my divine bliss.” She asked, “Will you bless me if I grind the wheat?” Maharaj replied, “Certainly, provided you do it yourself” She remarked, “Then please give me my share.” Shriji Maharaj gave her two measures of wheat, weighing about 20kg. She bathed and cleaned the hand-operated mill herself. Her servants requested her to allow them to do the work for her. They told her, “Let us grind the wheat. You are not used to this type of work, so you will become tired and get blisters on your palms.” But she was determined to earn Shriji Maharaj’s blessings. She firmly told them, “I will do it myself. God has commanded me to do it myself.” She chanted the *mahamantra* Swaminarayan while grinding the wheat. The hard work made her tired. She began to sweat, but she had resolved to complete the work by the next morning. As the grinding of the wheat proceeded, all the impurities from her heart began to disappear. This fallen prostitute of Jetalpur had become worthy of receiving redemption from Maharaj. Without taking food or water and without pausing for rest, she went on milling the wheat throughout the night. Next morning, when she finished

her *seva*, she took a bath, put on simple clothes, and carrying the basket of wheat flour on her head she went to see Maharaj. She laid the basket of wheat flour at Maharaj’s feet and stood with folded hands. Shriji Maharaj was much pleased with her. The prostitute asked Maharaj, “Shall I be worthy of your blessings?” The assembly started grumbling, “She is a prostitute. She is a fallen woman leading an unholy life. She couldn’t have ground the wheat herself. She must have made one of her servants do it for her. How can she be blessed?” But Maharaj wanted the assembly to have a glimpse of her clean conscience and pure heart. Therefore, he asked her, “Did you grind the wheat yourself?” She replied, “Yes, my Lord.” Maharaj said, “Show me your palms.” There were blisters on her palms stained with blood. Everyone in the assembly was convinced of her sincerity and devotion. Blessing her, Maharaj said, “You will be liberated the same way Muktanand Swami is liberated.” People were amazed to see the transformation of the fallen prostitute. They all realized the glory of seeking communion to Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj accepted her invitation and went to her home with Sadhus and devotees and dined there. When such a spontaneous and powerful fountain of devotion sprouts in one’s heart, one doesn’t need any other means to please God.

21.5 Venom Removed

A staunch devotee of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan by the name of Kesarbhai lived in a village called Dahisara in the

region of *Kutch*, Gujarat. One day, early in the morning, Kesarbhai went to his farm to work the *kosh*. While he was taking out the *kosh* in the darkness, a black cobra was hidden in the bucket. As he pulled it up, upon seeing its target, the cobra instantly bit Kesarbhai. Kesarbhai quickly realized that he was bitten by a venomous snake. He mustered courage and went to the village's *mandir* and began uttering 'Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...' Several villagers gathered at the *mandir* and started to give him advice. Many suggested going to a *bhuva* in a nearby village, who had the capability of removing the snake venom by tying a charmed thread around his arm. Others suggested trying other means of treatment.

However, Kesarbhai did not listen to anyone's advice. He firmly believed that whatever happens or whatever will happen in the infinite cosmos is solely caused by the will of his beloved *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan, so how could he agree to such advice? Therefore, Kesarbhai instructed everyone not to worry for him and to start chanting the *mahamantra*, Swaminarayan with him.

Kesarbhai and the villagers started chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* loudly. To everyone's surprise, continuous chanting of the *mahamantra* worked as an antidote from the venomous effect of the snake as it gradually started decreasing. Eventually, by the power of chanting the *mahamantra*, the venom was utterly removed from his body.

21.6 Cured Blindness

This is a story of Dadbha Darbar, the king of Gondal state. Dadbha Darbar suddenly lost his vision at the age of 40. He became totally blind. Dadbha Darbar was very much saddened by this miserable condition at such a young age because of dependence on other people. In the meantime, he came to know that Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami, from Junagadh, had come to Gondal *Mandir*. He sent a friend to invite Swami to his home for a visit. When Swami arrived at his home, he explained his situation regarding his miserable condition.

Dadbha Darbar humbly prayed to Swami. Swami was very kind and had a compassionate nature. So, he told Darbar, "Do not worry, the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* given to us by our *Ishtadev* is very powerful. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan showers his blessings upon those who chant this *mahamantra* with faith, courage, and patience. So, from now onwards, take a vow of celibacy and chant the *mahamantra*, before the *Murti* of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Maharaj will shower mercy upon you." Dadbha Darbar strictly obeyed Swami's instructions and started chanting the *mahamantra* day and night. Several days went by, but he continued chanting. As time passed, his vision began to improve gradually with *Pujya* Swami's blessings due to chanting the *mahamantra*. Eventually, in seven days, his eyesight became completely healthy by the grace of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

21.7 Legal Issues Resolved

In the village of Mansa, there was a village chief by the name of Mamiya Varu. He had a son named Valero. Valero's mother had passed away when he was only a child. Hence, Mamiya Varu got married again. When Valero grew up, his stepmother refused to give his share of his father's property to him. Thus, Valero decided to become an outlaw with the cooperation of his friends. He took a pledge to live a life of plunder and illegal acts until he would receive his share of the property. Valero created an atmosphere of terror among the people of nearby villages. During that period, Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami was traveling with Santo in the particular region. Swami was informed about Valero's dacoity and terror.

Coincidentally, at that time Valero Varu and his associates were approaching towards where Swami was stationed. When they met one another, devoid of fear, Gunatitanand Swami told Valero, "If you continue to terrorize the innocent public with your loot and plunder, you will have to suffer excruciating pains in hell and you will have to go through the cycle of birth and death in 8.4 million different life forms. Hence give up your sinful acts."

These simple words of *Pujya* Swami touched Valero's heart. Valero immediately fell at Swami's feet. He explained the situation to Swami. *Pujya* Swami, instead of showing tactical or political ways to resolve his issue, he handed his

sacred rosary to Valero and remarked, "Valero, take this rosary home and start chanting the supreme *mahamantra* – 'Swaminarayan'. Within eight days of chanting, your father will call you and give you your rightful share from the family property. If this happens, then you must come to Junagadh and become a devotee of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan." Valero was delighted to hear Swami's blessings, but he had one query. He said, "Swami, I am illiterate. I do not know how to count. So, how will I know when eight days have gone by?" To resolve Valero's issue, Gunatitanand Swami tied eight knots on a string and said, "Untie one knot from this string every day. As you continue to untie these knots one by one, knots in your father's heart will also start dissolving one by one. This Swaminarayan *mantra* is mighty; it will surely kindle good sense in your father." Valero went home, sat in solitude with full faith and concentration started chanting Swaminarayan...Swaminarayan...Swaminarayan. As a result, on the other side, Mamiya Varu and his wife began to repent on the injustice done to their son. Precisely on the eighth day, Mamiya told his servant to find Valero and call him back to his *darbar*. Thus, Valero and Mamiya Varu united, and Mamiya gave the full share of the property dispute and sat together to take a meal. Valero immediately went to Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh and became a devotee along with his family.



The Concept of Moksha



To become Aksharrup, the jiva has to associate with the ekantik Satpurush. Such a Satpurush is the living embodiment of ekantik dharma. The gateway of liberation opens for the jiva when it associates with the Satpurush.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan elaborates moksha or final emancipation, known as atyantik mukti in the sampraday in the following manner:

The *jiva* is bound by *maya*. This is ignorance, a delusion of the *jiva*. Therefore, to be rid of this ignorance, the *jiva* has to develop *atmanishtha* – the knowledge that he is not the body, but rather the *atma*. However, to transcend *maya*, this type of mere *atmanishtha* is not enough. A higher level of *atmanishtha* needs to be realized – in which the *atma* identifies itself with *aksharbrahma* to become *aksharrup*. This is known as true *gnan* and true *atmanishtha*. The liberated soul then becomes eligible to worship *Parabrahma* – *Purushottam* in *Akshardham*. ‘Attaining’ *Parabrahma* does not mean merging into him as the servitor - master relationship also known as Swami-sevak bhav always prevails. To become *aksharrup*, the *jiva* has to associate with the *ekantik Satpurush*. Such a *Satpurush* is the living embodiment of *ekantik dharma*. The gateway of liberation opens for the *jiva* when it associates with the *Satpurush*.



Inclination for Fine Arts and Music



In the Swaminarayan sampraday, there were many strict standards and disciplines; however, the prime thread was devotion along with knowledge. So, the environment of the holy fellowship was infused with various talents.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan encouraged and promoted learning of scriptures, architecture, music, drawing, carving, sculpture, sewing, dress-designing, wood-work, furniture, and other fine arts. In the Swaminarayan sampraday, there were many strict standards and disciplines; however, the prime thread was devotion along with knowledge. So, the environment of the holy fellowship was infused with various talents.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan infused these various talents in his Paramhansas so they can make an impact on society not only through their spirituality but also with their unique expertise. Adharanand Swami was an expert painter of the holy fellowship. Nishkulanand Swami and Narayan Suthar were expert artisans. Shriji Maharaj took great interest in such works and encouraged His Santo and bhakto to give society something to remember. Nonetheless, through the inspiration of Maharaj, numerous temples were constructed, and creative sculptings were integrated by his elite and talented santo-bhakto. Their arts are outstandingly displayed even today! Even various festivals like the Hindola utsav provided opportunities to create unique swings of different types, colors, and shapes using variety of materials. From small to adept, craftsmen prepared various artifacts such as garments, ornaments, wooden sandals, rosaries, carpets, decorative cushions, cots, carts, and paintings which were presented to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Shriji Maharaj complimented the

artful objects, and in return, blessed those who had thoughtfully made them. Everything the disciples made was centered around pleasing *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

Correspondingly, Shriji Maharaj had a particular liking for music. Maharaj would send His saints to study the art of music in big cities so they would become well learned. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had eight music maestros namely: Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Devanand Swami, Bhumanand Swami, Dayanand Swami, Manjukeshanand Swami, and Purnanand Swami. Each saint had mastery in playing one or more Indian classical musical instruments. Kirtan-bhakti programs were held in assemblies as a daily regiment.

In the time of Shriji Maharaj, word had spread about reputable talents of the musically masterful saints *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had in his fellowship. Many professional musicians came to defeat and discredit the reputation of the holy fellowship but all failed.

Once, some musicians from Gwalior came to Gadhada to compete with the saints of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and demanded a big prize if they won. After listening to their request, Shriji Maharaj agreed. Shriji Maharaj invited them in the evening assembly and gave them a befitting welcome at a well-decorated venue. Shriji Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami to perform. Swami tied *ghungharas* around his ankles, took a pair of kartals and bowed to Shriji Maharaj before

singing. Swami lifted his one leg from the floor and with one toe of the other leg, he started slipping backward while singing on the stroke of his kartals. He was in sync with the music, singing, and dancing. All who were present experienced great joy as their minds became engrossed in *Pujya* Swami's versatility. He finished the session in half an hour. The musicians of Gwalior were astonished and were left speechless. Then, Shriji Maharaj drew their attention towards the dancing grounds. The musicians arose and saw for themselves that an artistic picture of an elephant was depicted by Swami's feet as if drawn by an artist. Swami drew this elephant while in reverse motion. The musicians of Gwalior bowed down to Maharaj and said, "It is our great fortune that we had a chance to witness such a marvelous combination of song, music, dance, and artistic drawing in one session." Finally, before leaving, they remarked, "Hey Swaminarayan! this saint is the treasure of arts. We are nothing before him."

Another incident in the life of Premanand Swami proved the versatility of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan's *Paramhansas*. Once, the Nawab of Junagadh heard the sweet voice of Premanand Swami while he was visiting Junagadh *Mandir*. He felt that such kind of singing was not possible anywhere on this Earth. Sometime later, several musicians from Gwalior came to sing the drupad *raga* before the Nawab. The Nawab told them, "After listening to Premanand Swami, a Sadhu of Swaminarayan, I no longer listen to any other voice. His skill

is matchless.” So, the musicians went to Gadhada to see Maharaj. It was noon when they arrived at Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. Even though it was time for the assembly to separate of, the musicians expressed their earnest desire to listen to Premanand Swami. Maharaj obliged and asked Premanand Swami to sing the bhairavi *raga*. The musicians were amused to hear the request to sing at noon a *raga* which was traditionally sung at dawn. But, surprisingly, the moment Premanand Swami began to sing, the surrounding mood changed and everyone experienced the atmosphere of morning. The musical notes of the bhairavi *raga* flowing through his voice turned noon into a cool refreshing dawn. The musicians became oblivious of everything upon hearing Premanand Swami’s melodious voice. However, the striking difference between these professional musicians and saints was that while professional musicians used to sing for their livelihood and credit, the saints’ pure intention behind singing was to please *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.



Miraculous Feats



Shuk Muni remarked, “Maharaj, without light, I will not be able to complete writing the letter.” At once, Shriji Maharaj illuminated the room by emanating light from his toe. Maharaj provided light until Shuk Muni finished writing.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan is described in the *Shastras* as
1. Supreme 2. Having a divine form 3. All-doer 4. Always present. On many occasions, He has shown these four aspects of His divine personality. Some of these incidences are mentioned below:

24.1 Darshan In Two Forms

Maharaj celebrated *Ekadashi* and Punam in Kariyani. There, Narayan Dave and his son, Narsinh, from the village Akha prayed to Maharaj, “Maharaj, please do visit our village.” Narsinh Mehta from Piplana also requested Maharaj to visit his town. Maharaj promised both of the bhaktos that He would come. Maharaj went to Agatrai. He stayed there for a day and then left. He then arrived at a spot where roads to Akha and Piplana split. Devotees from both villages had come there to receive Maharaj. Both groups guarded Maharaj and stood on either side of him. The devotees from Akha said, “Maharaj, we have made all the preparations, including food. Please grace our village by paying a visit.” The Piplana group also urged, “No Maharaj, please come to our village. We too have prepared food for all.” Maharaj then called Muktanand Swami and consulted with him in regards to what to do.

Swami said, “Maharaj, you are capable of taking infinite forms. Therefore, do not displease anyone. Please satisfy both the groups.” Then Maharaj approached the devotees of Piplana and said, “You go back to your village. We will come there soon.” The devotees joyously started back for their village.

Then, Maharaj along with three hundred Sadhus and devotees accompanied the devotees of Akha.

Maharaj, with his *yogic* abilities, created a second form of Himself and the three hundred Sadhus and devotees with him and soon after He reached Piplana. In this way, He visited Akha and Piplana at the same time and accepted the devotional service of devotees in both places. In the evening, when some devotees from Piplana arrived at Akha for work, they were amazed to find Maharaj there. They told the villagers, “Maharaj, the Sadhus and devotees are also camping at our place.” Thus, from morning to evening, out of sheer curiosity, the devotees went between Akha and Piplana for the *darshan* of Maharaj. Everyone was amazed. In such a way, Maharaj gave *darshan* in two forms for several days. Then, He left both villages and merged back into one form on the bank of the Ozat River.

24.2 A Dumb Recites the Vedas

At one time, Maharaj went to the Charotar region for *satsang* vicharan. He visited many villages before arriving at Umreth. Out of curiosity, many *Brahmins* came for *darshan*. When they saw Maharaj, they thought, “Let’s test the divinity of Swaminarayan.” They bowed to Maharaj and said, “We are followers of Shankaracharya. At once the great Shankaracharya had made a buffalo recite the *Vedas*. If you can show a miracle like that, we will believe you to be God.” Maharaj replied, “Well, a buffalo is an animal. If you can

bring a *Brahmin*, who from birth is dumb and illiterate like a buffalo, I will make him recite the *Vedas*.” The *Brahmins* summoned a *Brahmin* boy named Harishankar who was dumb and illiterate. He sat in front of Maharaj. As soon as Maharaj glanced at the boy, instantly he started to recite the verses from the *Vedas* without any mistakes and with proper pronunciation. The *Brahmins* were convinced that Maharaj was God. All the *Brahmins* became Maharaj’s followers.

24.3 Gift of Vision

Maharaj was once in the village of Limbdi at the home of Mulji Sheth. At that time, a blind woman was seen entering Mulji Sheth’s home, feeling the wall while walking. Maharaj inquired to Mulji Sheth who the woman was. Mulji Sheth hesitantly replied, “Maharaj she is my wife.” Maharaj said, “It must be very troublesome to be blind; specially to accomplish all the obligations around the home. She has to forever depend on someone else for anything and everything.” Mulji Sheth replied, “Yes, but we are helpless. That’s our destiny. Maharaj observed, “It would be a great help if your wife had a vision.” Mulji Sheth replied, “Of course it would be the greatest.” The next morning upon waking, Mulji Sheth’s wife regained her vision by the grace of Maharaj. She remarked, “Maharaj has done us a great favor. Look, I can see everything. I am sighted. Maharaj looks dazzling in his beautiful white surval and pagh!”

Mulji Sheth’s joy knew no bounds. He fell to the feet of Maharaj and said, “Maharaj, you have changed my wife and my life forever. She had been craving for your *darshan* for a long time. You have illuminated her life. You truly are *Satya Sankalp*.”

24.4 The Fakir’s Allah

When Maharaj was in Meghpar, a *fakir* came to visit. He had heard of Maharaj’s spiritual powers, influence, and divine presence. He thought, “People know Swaminarayan as God. Only if He shows a miracle will I believe him as *Allah* and sing his praise.” With this thought, he went to have the *darshan* of Shriji Maharaj. The all-knowing Maharaj called Karsanji Bhatt and stood him by his side. He said to him, “Start reciting the Quran.” Bhatt replied, “Maharaj, I don’t even know what the Quran is.”

Maharaj said, “Concentrate on my *Murti* and start reciting whatever comes to your mind. And *fakir* Baba, you take out the Quran from your bag and begin comparing the verses. If Bhatt makes a mistake, please do correct him.” Then Maharaj cast a divine glance at Bhatt. Karsanji Bhatt began to recite the verses of the Quran. He recited each and every verse precisely as it is written in the Quran. The *fakir* was greatly amazed. He started to offer *namaz* at Maharaj’s feet. He was convinced that Shriji Maharaj was *Allah* himself. He became a devotee of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan.

24.5 Divine Light

Once Maharaj was residing in Gadhada. Shriji Maharaj was dictating letters to Shuk Muni in *Akshar Ordi*. All of a sudden, due to a gust of wind, the lamp became extinguished. Shuk Muni remarked, “Maharaj, without light, I will not be able to complete writing the letter.” At once, Shriji Maharaj illuminated the room by emanating light from his toe. Maharaj provided light until Shuk Muni had finished writing.

24.6 Breaking a Twig

Once Maharaj was sitting in the courtyard of Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. There was a small twig of a neem tree beside him. Maharaj picked up the twig and snapped it in half. Muktanand Swami was sitting nearby, observing Maharaj’s every action. The small gesture seemed quite uncommon, perhaps there was a deeper meaning behind it. Muktanand Swami approached Maharaj and inquired, “Was there a reason for snapping the twig?” Maharaj replied with a smile, “One universe was destroyed, and another was created.”

24.7 By Mere Touch

Once, Maharaj was residing in the village of Mangrol. Maharaj decided to go for a bath in a nearby lake named Dudh Talavdi. Maharaj was accompanied by many saints and devotees. As they were bathing, a fellow by the name of Ramchandra Sheth came for a bath. He looked around for a slab of stone to wash his clothes on, but none were in sight.

At a distance, he saw a large slab of stone weighing several tons. It was a great distance away. He knew that people believed Swaminarayan to be God, but today he wanted to test if it was true. He approached Shriji Maharaj and said, “Everyone considers You to be God, but today I want to challenge if this statement is true or false. Lord Krishna lifted Mount Govardhan with one finger, proving that he is God. So, if you are truly God, lift that gigantic slab of stone and bring it by the bank of the pond.”

Hearing this, Shriji Maharaj said, “Go and touch the stone. Individuals like yourself who are associated with me shall make the stone fly to the position you desire by merely touching it. See for yourself if you do not believe Me.” Ramchandra Sheth, smirking and smiling, walked to where the slab of stone was. Upon touching it, the slab of stone weighing several tons simply flew to the desired position. Everyone was astonished at what they had just seen. Ramchandra Sheth was star-gazed. Ramchandra Sheth’s faith was established in Shriji Maharaj.

24.8 Walking on Water

One afternoon in Chhapaiya, Ghanshyam accompanied by his younger brother, Ichharam, and some friends went to a place on the outskirts of the village. There they had a bath in the Meen Lake and began to play under a banyan tree. The game went on until the evening when suddenly it started to

rain. It rained heavily and continuously. Thunder and lightning rent the sky. All the kids started to cry. The lake began to flood rapidly. Frightened, Ichharam asked Ghanshyam, “What will happen now?” Ghanshyam told Ichharam, “Don’t be afraid. Hold my shoulder and tell everyone to make a single line while holding each other’s shoulders.” When they came to the water’s edge, they were lifted above the ground by some unseen power. So, they walked across the water without even getting their feet wet. Even the falling raindrops did not touch them. Dharmadev and Bhaktimata came searching for Ghanshyam and the boys. They were astonished to see the boys walking on water. There was a brilliant light emanating from Ghanshyam. Seeing this, they all bowed to Ghanshyam understanding Him to be God.

24.9 Curing Smallpox

It was the summertime, and the heat was excessive. Ghanshyam had a fever, and was not eating anything. When news reached his aunt Chanda, she came to inquire about him. When she saw Ghanshyam, she realized that He had smallpox. So, she advised her sister Bhaktimata, “Ghanshyam has smallpox so put him in a secluded place to rest.” Bhaktimata at once put Ghanshyam to sleep and started to pray. Then her sister-in-law, Lakshmibai, came to see Ghanshyam. Realizing that He had smallpox, she said, “It will be advisable not to allow him to go out, or to wash, or to even touch water for twenty days.”

When Ghanshyam heard this, he said, “How can I go without my usual bath? We are *Brahmins*, and so we must take a bath every day. So please bring some cold water. When I will take a cold-water bath, smallpox and fever will disappear.” Bhaktimata believed His words. She took him to the well and drew out cold water for Him. After pouring several buckets of water on Him, she felt His body and found that the fever had subsided. Nonetheless, smallpox had disappeared. Seeing the miraculous recovery, both Chandamasi and Lakshmibai concluded that Ghanshyam must be God.

24.10 Breaking a Leg In Agatrai

Shriji Maharaj went to Agatrai and traveled from house to house pleasing his devotees. On one such *padhramani*, a devotee offered Maharaj a well-bred mare. Maharaj mounted the mare but with a latent intention. At the times, *Bhagwan* tested his devotees by participating in certain human-like acts. Maharaj started to ride the mare with speed and agility. Suddenly, Maharaj let goad of the reins and fell crashing down to the ground. The devotees rushed to his side and tried to help him stand. However, Maharaj was unable to rise due to a broken bone in his right leg. The devotees carried Maharaj back home. The village healer arrived to treat Maharaj’s fracture. After setting Maharaj’s bone, the healer instructed Maharaj to keep off the leg and refrain from eating yogurt until the bone healed. Maharaj nodded in agreement.

The next day when the healer came to check on his patient's recovery, he noticed that Maharaj was eating sour yogurt. He angrily exclaimed, "I told you not to eat yogurt. If you do not listen to my advice, your leg will never heal properly. Then how will everyone consider You to be *Bhagwan*?" Saying this, he went to open Maharaj's bandaged leg to check on the healing progress. To the healer's surprise, it was as if Maharaj's bone had never been fractured. He checked numerous times for the crack but was unable to find it. He looked up at Maharaj who was staring back at him with a mischievous smile, a smile that sent the healer into *samadhi*. Upon waking, the healer fell at the feet of Shriji Maharaj and understood Him to be God.



Divine Farewell



Dada ran to touch Maharaj's feet. Maharaj embraced Dada and said, "Dada why are you crying? I have not gone anywhere. I am ever present and will always be here." Saying this, Shri Hari placed a garland of red roses around Dada Khachar's neck and disappeared.

25.1 Satisfaction

After introducing the Swaminarayan *mantra* in Faneni, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan launched his ministry in Gujarat for the establishment of *ekantik dharma*. He initiated over 2,000 Sadhus and *Paramhansas* of the highest caliber. He laid a strict moral code for the Sadhus and instructed them to uplift society, socially, morally, and spiritually. For times of famine and catastrophes, He opened almshouses and dug wells to provide succor to the afflicted. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan and His Sadhus uplifted the downtrodden classes, unshackling them from vices and addictions. He campaigned and abolished the heinous customs of *Sati* and female infanticide prevalent in Gujarat, and also eradicated violent *yagnas* in which animals were sacrificed. He educated the masses to take refuge in God and give up corrupt practices and superstitions. He reformed lawless men into God-loving devotees. They abided by the moral code of conduct, abstaining from liquor, meat, stealing, adultery, and other vices. He uplifted the female gender in society and inspired the women devotees to conduct discourses among themselves and thus promoted literacy. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan preached the loftiest wisdom of the Hindu *Shastras* in the most down-to-earth manner. His discourses were compiled into the *Vachanamrut*. He wrote a moral code of conduct called the *Shikshapatri* for the good of mankind. For the promotion of *upasana* and *bhakti*, He built six *mandirs* in Gujarat. Through constant effort for three

decades, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan changed the era remarkably. Now, the holy fellowship had reached a stage where Maharaj was satisfied. Residing in Gadhada, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan had established a strong *sampraday*. He had achieved all He had come to Earth for and therefore decided that it was now right for Him to return to *Akshardham*.

25.2 Brahmanand Swami Sent Away

Bhagwan Swaminarayan knew that saints and devotees would suffer indescribable pain on His departure. Maharaj was well aware that many would plead him to stay and prevent him from leaving. Amongst them, Brahmanand Swami's will power to keep Maharaj on this Earth was irreversible.

For the past few weeks, Shri Hari shared mild laughs and *prasad* with Brahmanand Swami in Gadhada. Unbeknownst to Brahmanand Swami, such memories came at a steep price. Maharaj finally told Brahmanand Swami to go to Junagadh and oversee the completion of *mandir* construction. Brahmanand Swami instinctively realized that Maharaj was planning to leave His mortal body. He could not argue, for He was in Shri Hari's debt from *prasad* that Maharaj had shared with Him. So, keeping the virtue of obedience primary in His life, Brahmanand Swami left for Junagadh *Mandir*. Before leaving, Brahmanand Swami told Gopalanand Swami not to cremate Maharaj's body if He departs this world. Brahmanand Swami said this because he had the power and

bhakti to bring Maharaj back to this Earth if his mortal body had not been cremated yet.

25.3 Final Assembly - Vows Taken

Shriji Maharaj asked Gopalanand Swami to organize an assembly on May 31st, 1830. All the Sadhus and devotees in Gadhada and neighboring villages were told to attend. The assembly was filled in capacity. Everyone was looking at Maharaj, waiting for his message. Maharaj was seated on a cot supported by pillows. His body was weak but His voice powerful.

Shriji Maharaj then addressed the assembly, “You all recognize me as Purna *Purushottam*. All of you are making efforts to please me in one way or another. Therefore, listen to what I am saying. By my own will, I assumed a human body on this Earth. I have fulfilled my intentions for coming here. All of the previous *avatars* manifested on Earth for a particular cause or event. I manifested on Earth to eradicate the illusion that envelops countless *jivas*. I manifested on Earth to liberate these countless souls and take them to *Akshardham*. I have finished all my work. I have found this pure *sampraday*, built *mandirs*, written *Shastras* and initiated Sadhus. Nothing interests me anymore. It is my earnest desire to return to My abode. This body is subject to death and decay; therefore, I have decided to return to *Akshardham*.”

Upon hearing the piercing words of Shri Hari, the

assembly felt as if a bolt had come down upon them. Most of them started shaking with sorrow at the idea of Maharaj’s return to *Akshardham*. Some of them fainted and some began shedding tears. Maharaj bestowed upon them His divine mercy. He inspired them and consoled them. But in His mind, He had firmly resolved to return to *Akshardham*. He would not take any food or water. Under great pressure, at times, He would accept millet or rice. He looked as thin as He appeared when He came in the form of Nilkanth Varni. Bhayatmanand Swami approached Maharaj and said, “Why are you staging this drama of death. Eat, drink, and be merry. If you are returning to *Akshardham*, then we too shall leave our bodies and follow you. Therefore, give up your thought of returning.” Maharaj replied, “If I am the Supreme Lord, then I will see to it that not a single living creature takes their life. Even if one’s time has come, I will extend and lengthen his life.” Maharaj paused for a while and then said, “Nobody should die after me. No one shall commit suicide by swallowing poison or strangling oneself. Whoever commits suicide will not attain my abode and will be guilty of maligning the *guru* and disobeying my *agna*. Whoever has resolved to die after me should hold my feet and take a vow that one will not die after me.” With these words, He made the Sadhus and devotees hold his feet and take a vow accordingly.

Then, after some time, the assembly dispersed. Later, Maharaj called His senior Sadhus and devotees to sit nearby.

He instructed the Sadhus and devotees to remain under the command of Gopalanand Swami. Gopalanand Swami was given the overall responsibility of the *sampraday*, and Maharaj specifically told him not to inform Brahmanand Swami until his mortal body had been cremated. Here, Maharaj held the hand of both Acharyas and instructed Gopalanand Swami to take care of them.

25.4 Returns to Akshardham

On June 1st, 1830, the morning sun rose lacking its usual luster. The chants of Swaminarayan *dhun* emanating from different quarters of Dada Khachar's residence wore a blanket of tranquility, claiming the tension in the air. Maharaj awoke that morning to Premanand Swami's sarangi wailing morning *ragas* of sorrow. Shriji Maharaj rose from his cot with the help of the attendants and completed His morning routine. He was calm and unaffected by the dismay that enveloped the rest of creation. He smiled at the Sadhus and *Parshads* with whom His eyes met. Then, Mulji *Brahmachari* came to Maharaj to offer his last meal on Earth. Maharaj ate a little to satisfy *Brahmachari*. After his meal, He called for Gopalanand Swami and expressed his desire to return to *Akshardham* on that very day. Maharaj then stepped outside of *Akshar Ordi* and gave *darshan* to hundreds of Sadhus and thousands of devotees who had gathered in Dada Khachar's courtyard. Maharaj came out and blessed everyone.

Maharaj then returned to *Akshar Ordi*. He looked

around the room and realized that many Sadhus would lose their composure the moment He breathed his last. Maharaj calmed their minds and hearts with His divine prowess. The mood in the room lightened and assumed an eerie peacefulness. Maharaj stood up with the help of two attendants. He folded His hands and looked around the room one last time and said "Jay Swaminarayan."

With the sun overhead in the noon, Shriji Maharaj sat facing north on a grass mat to meditate in a lotus posture. It was then, in the presence of the Sadhus and devotees assembled in Gadhada and, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan withdrew all his senses and left his mortal body on His own accord and returned to *Akshardham*. Thousands of saints and devotees in Dada Khachar's courtyard echoed the cry with their own wails. Gadhada shook from the sound of these sobs. The entire village was devastated. Gopalanand Swami consoled all of them. Then, Swami started to make arrangements for Maharaj's last rites. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan peacefully left to return back to *Akshardham* on June 1st, 1830 at the age of 49 years 2 months and 1 day.

As for the final rites and rituals, the Sadhus and devotees bathed Maharaj with the holy waters of the Ghela River. After having dried Maharaj's body, *Brahmachariji* dressed Maharaj for the last time in white garments. Then, He was garlanded, given ornaments, and *aarti* and *pujan* were performed. A *tilak* of kesar *chandan* with a *kum-kum chandlo* in the center was

applied. Shri Hari was brought out on specially made palanquin by Nishkulanand Swami, to grace the streets of Gadhada for the last time. Thousands of devotees gathered for Maharaj's last *darshan*. The procession passed through the village and came to an end at Lakshmi Vadi. Gopalanand Swami took charge and placed Maharaj's body on the pyre. He held Raghuvirji and Ayodhyaprasadji's hands and set fire to the pyre. In just a few moments, Shri Hari's mortal body was engulfed in flames.

25.5 Shri Hari's Ever Presence

The *satsang* community was shattered. Reality had settled in that Shri Hari's mortal body was no more. Somla Khachar and Sura Khachar held onto Dada Khachar shoulders. Dada's eyes were red and his face flushed. Dada could not tolerate it any longer. He shook free from the devotees' grip and made a crazed dash towards the blazing pyre. Just as he was about to plunge into the flames, Gopalanand Swami grabbed Dada's torso. Swami held onto Dada with all of his strength. Dada finally relented and fell into Gopalanand Swami's arms. Swami caressed the crying *kshatriya*'s head. He consoled him, "Maharaj is waiting for you under the mango tree in Laxmi Vadi" Dada rushed to the tree and to his surprise, Shriji Maharaj was smiling at him from under the tree. Dada ran to touch Maharaj's feet. Maharaj embraced Dada and said, "Dada why are you crying? I have not gone anywhere. I am ever present and will always be here." Saying this, Shri Hari

placed a garland of red roses around Dada Khachar's neck and disappeared.

Later, Brahmanand Swami found out that Maharaj had departed to *Akshardham*, so he returned to Gadhada from Junagadh. Brahmanand Swami asked Gopalanand Swami, "Why did you cremate Maharaj's body before I returned to Gadhada?" Gopalanand Swami replied, "It was Maharaj's wish that I call you after he had been cremated since Maharaj knew you would bring him back to Earth." In great distress, Brahmanand Swami went to pray to Gopinathji Maharaj at Gadhada *Mandir*. As Swami reached the *mandir*, Shriji Maharaj gave Brahmanand Swami divine *darshan* and told him, "I have not left, I am still here."

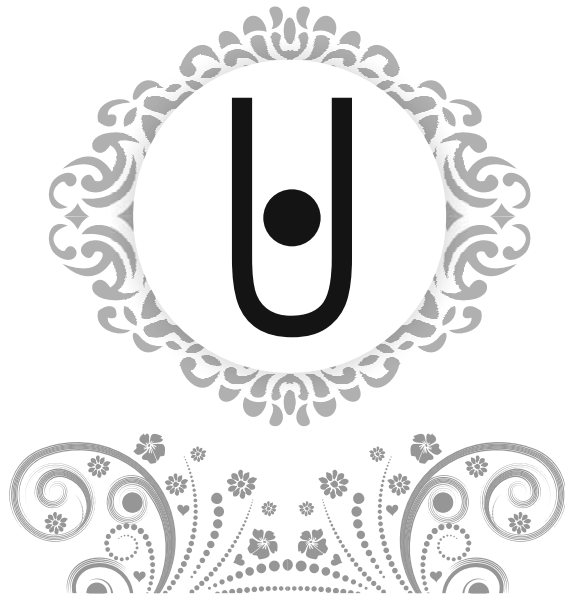
25.6 The End

In just forty-nine years, of which only thirty were spent in Gujarat, *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan established *ekantik dharma* through the construction of *mandirs*, the creation of scriptures, and establishment *sarovari upasana*. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan brought about a wave of spiritual and social reform that would be celebrated and appreciated for centuries to come. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan manifested on Earth for a mere forty-nine years; however, his legacy of *dharma*, *bhakti*, *gnan* and *vairagya* would live on for eternity.

Since his departure, the Swaminarayan fellowship has spread all over the world at a phenomenal rate. The fellowship

has made and is making contributions in religious, social, and cultural fronts.

As a token of appreciation for coming on this Earth and tolerating various types of pains, we can follow his commands from the *Shikshapatri* and develop *sarvopari upasana* for *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*.



Priceless Teachings

The *Vachanamrut* is the quintessence of the *Vedas*, the Upanishads, the Vedant Sutras, the Bhagwat Geeta and other scriptures. It is the book of the nectarine words of *Bhagwan Swaminarayan*. It is a revealed text in as much as the words have come straight from the mouth of *Bhagwan Swaminarayan* who is the ultimate reality Himself. Read and imbibe some of the teachings of *Bhagwan Swaminarayan* below.

1. Universal suffering

‘Greed for wealth and other things, desires to associate with women, attachment of the tongue to various tastes, the belief that one is the body, affection for kusangis and attachment to one’s relatives - one who possesses these six characteristics will never become happy, either in this life or even after death.’ (**Gadhada III-38**)

2. Satsang

‘If, however, one is unable to contemplate upon God’s form, one should remain in the company of such a Sadhu who possesses *dharma*, *gnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*. As for Myself, I have only this desire within: When I abandon this body, although there will be no reason for Me to retake birth, I feel in My heart that I should make a reason and take birth

in the company of such a Sadhu. This is all I wish for.’
(Gadhada II-48)

3. Mundane Pleasures

‘Craving the sense pleasures for fulfillment by enjoying them is akin to pouring water into a fissure which has opened up in the ground and reaches into the depths of the Earth. It will never be filled. Similarly, the senses will never be satisfied even with the utmost enjoyment of the sense-objects’.
(Gadhada II-47)

4. Removal of Desires

‘If a person has perfectly imbibed the following four qualities, then his worldly desires would become uprooted: *gnan* in the form of knowledge of the *atma*, *vairagya* in the form of detachment from all things that have evolved out of *prakruti*, *dharma* in the form of *Brahmacharya*, etc., and *bhakti* coupled with the knowledge of God’s greatness.’
(Loya-16)

5. Kusang

‘Therefore, one should request from God: ‘May I never encounter the company of these four types of people (Kuda-Panthis, Shakti-Panthis, Shushka-Vedantis, Nastiks.)’ One should also pray: ‘O Maharaj! Please protect me from the inner enemies of lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, egotism, jealousy, the belief that I am the body, etc. Forever bestow upon me the company of your devotees.’ One should daily

pray to God in this manner and always be wary of such kusangis and one’s inner enemies.’ (Gadhada I-48)

6. Service of God and His Devotee

‘If the vrittis of the indriyas are engaged in the service of Shri Krishna *Bhagwan* and His *bhakta*, then the antahkaran is purified and the sins that have been attached to the *jiva* since time immemorial are destroyed.’ (Gadhada I-8)

7. Sakshatkar

‘To listen to a talk through one’s ears is known as ‘shravan’. Then, having heard the talk, to mentally ponder over the talk, and to discard that part of the talk which is fit to be discarded and to retain that part of the talk which is fit to be retained is known as ‘manan’. Then, having mentally retained the talk with conviction, the practice of continuously recalling the talk day and night is known as ‘nididhyas’. Finally, when one can recall that talk exactly as it was - as if it were manifest before one - with absolute clarity and spontaneity, that is known as ‘sakshatkar’.’ (Sarangpur-3)

8. Nature of the Bliss of God

‘Moreover, if one were to gather together all of the pleasures of the vishays of countless millions of brahmands, even then it would not equal even one millionth of a fraction of the bliss which is present in just one pore of God.’
(Sarangpur-1)

9. Moksha

‘In the four *Vedas*, the Purans and the Itihas scriptures, there is but one central principle, and that is that only God and His Sant can grant liberation.’ **(Gadhada II-59)**

10. Endeavors to Please God

‘I am not as pleased by *ashtang-yoga*, sankhya, renunciation, observances, sacrifices, austerities, donations, pilgrimages, etc., as I am pleased by *satsang*.’ **(Gadhada II-54)**

11. The Means for Attaining Moksha

‘*Bhagwat dharma* is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the *ekantik* Sant of God, who possesses the attributes of *swadharma*, *gnan*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti* coupled with knowledge of God’s greatness. Maintaining profound love towards such a Sant also opens the gateway to liberation.’ **(Gadhada I-54)**

12. The Ekantik Sadhu

‘Such a Sant suppresses the actions of *maya*’s *gunas* - the *indriyas*, the *antahkaran*, etc.; but he himself does not get suppressed by their actions. In addition to this, he only performs activities related to God; he is staunch in his observance of the five religious vows; and believing himself to be *brahmarup*, he worships *Purushottam Bhagwan*. Such a Sant should not be thought of as a human being, nor should

he be thought of as a deity, because such behavior is not possible for either humans or deities. Indeed, even though that Sant appears to be human, he is still worthy of being worshipped on par with God. Therefore, whoever desires to attain liberation should serve such a Sant.’ **(Gadhada III-26)**

13. Interpretation of Scriptures

‘However, such discourses regarding the nature of God cannot be understood by oneself even from the scriptures. Even though these facts may be in the scriptures, it is only when the *Satpurush* manifests on this Earth, and one hears them being narrated by him, that one understands them. They cannot, however, be understood by one’s intellect alone, even from the scriptures.’ **(Gadhada II-13)**

14. The Nature of God

‘He is one and unparalleled.’ **(Gadhada III-39)**

‘He is the all-doer.’ **(Gadhada II-21)**

‘God is eternally with divine form.’ **(Gadhada III-38)**

‘The form is dark, but due to the intensity of the light, it appears to be rather fair, not dark. The form has two arms and two legs, not four, eight or a thousand arms; and its appearance is very captivating. The form is very serene; it has a human form; and it appears young like a teenager’. **(Gadhada II-13)**

‘He is full of redemptive attributes and devoid of all the

inauspicious ephemeral attributes of *maya*.’ (**Gadhada I-66**)

‘He is the reservoir of all bliss.’ (**Gadhada I-66**)

15. Lord Swaminarayan

‘It is that same supreme *Purushottam* Bhagwan who manifests on this Earth out of compassion - to grant liberation to the *jivas*. He is presently visible before everyone; He is your *Ishtadev*; and He accepts your service. In fact, there is absolutely no difference between the manifest form of *Purushottam* Bhagwan visible before you and the form of God residing in *Akshardham*; i.e., both are one. Moreover, this manifest form of *Purushottam* Bhagwan is the controller of all, including *Akshar*. He is the lord of all of the *ishwars* and the cause of all causes. He reigns supreme, and He is the cause of all of the *avatars*. Moreover, He is worthy of being worshipped single-mindedly by all of you. The many previous *avatars* of this God are worthy of being bowed down to and worthy of reverence.’ (**Gadhada III-38**)

16. Bliss of God

‘One who has understood the greatness of God realizes that only God is all-blissful, whereas the pleasures derived from the panchvishays have only a slight fraction of the bliss of God; thus, he would never become attached to any object.’ (**Gadhada III-28**)

17. Greatness

‘Greatness is due to one’s faith in the manifest form of

God and the observance of His commands.’ (**Gadhada I-13**)

18. Maya

‘*Maya* is nothing but the sense of I-ness towards the body and my-ness towards anything related to the body. These should be eradicated.’ (**Gadhada III-39**)

19. Mind and Jiva

‘The *jiva* and the mind are close mutual friends. Their friendship is like a friendship between milk and water. When milk and water are mixed and heated on a fire, water settles below the milk and itself burns, but it does not allow the milk to burn. To save the water, the milk overflows and extinguishes the fire. Such is their friendship. The *jiva* and the mind have a similarly close friendship. So, the mind never entertains thoughts of things that the *jiva* does not like. Only when the *jiva* likes something does the mind attempt to persuade the *jiva*. How does it attempt to persuade it? Well, when the *jiva* is meditating on God, the mind suggests, ‘You should also meditate on some female devotee of God.’ The mind then makes the *jiva* contemplate on all of her features.’ (**Gadhada III-6**)

20. Inclination of the Mind

‘There is no spiritual endeavor more difficult than to continuously engage one’s mind on the form of God.’ (**Gadhada I-1**)

21. Vasana

‘The vruttis of the indriyas of one whose worldly desires have not become blunt cling to the vishays. In fact, they cannot be dislodged even by a thought process. In comparison, the vruttis of one whose worldly desires have become blunt do not enter the vishays immediately. If they were to enter the vishays, and he were to attempt to withdraw them, they would withdraw instantly - they would not remain attached to the vishays. However, a person whose worldly desires have become completely uprooted is oblivious to the vishays during the waking state, just as he is during the state of deep sleep. He would regard all pleasant and unpleasant vishays as equal and would behave as one who is gunatit.’ (Loya-16)

22. Finding Faults

‘One who regards himself as full of all virtues and finds faults with others, even though he is considered to be an outstanding devotee, he is sure to fall from the path of devotion.’ (Gadhada II-26)

23. Swabhav

‘If one has an enemy, and if that enemy were to ruin whatever work one is doing, or if he were to swear at one’s mother or sister, then one would bear an intense aversion for him and would employ any means whatsoever to harm him. If not that, one would at least be pleased if someone else were to harm him. In the very same way, if the inner enemies of

lust, anger, etc., hinder a person while he is striving to attain liberation, he would harbor the same sort of enmity towards them as well; moreover, that enmity would never diminish. Whoever applies such a thought can eradicate all swabhavs with that thought alone.’ (Gadhada II-15)

24. Ekantik Dharma

‘Such *ekantik dharma* can only be attained by following the commands of a purush who is free of worldly desires and who has attained the state of God-realization; it cannot be attained merely by reading books. Even if a person were to attempt to restate those talks exactly, having merely heard them, he would not be able to do so properly. Therefore, one can attain *ekantik dharma* only from someone who has already attained the state of *ekantik dharma*.’ (Gadhada I-60)

25. Grace of God

‘I become extremely pleased with one who menially serves the devotees of God.’ (Gadhada II-28)

In Their Eyes . . .

Many pioneer philosophers, spiritual scholars, and great prominent personalities have noted and appreciated the social and religious reforms of *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan. Some iconic figures heartfelt notions for *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan are mentioned below:

“The fragrance of high morality was spread up all over Gujarat by the effect of the pious and virtuous conduct of Shree Sahajanand Swami and his Sadhus. This *sampraday* has played a great deal in changing over the thousands of ordinary illiterate brutal hearts into highly moral led and cultured ones.”

Once Shree Sardar Patel declared in a huge public meeting, “If public adopts and acts according to the ‘*Shikshapatri*’ written by Shree Swaminarayan, the Police stations and the legal courts will have to be abandoned.”

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
First Deputy Prime Minister of India

“What I saw of their whole system convinced me that the Swaminarayan’s are an energetic body, and their sect an advancing one. Without a doubt, the tendency of their doctrine is towards purity of life, which is supposed to be affected by suppression of the passion and complete devotion to the Supreme Being. In an honest desire to purify the *Vaishnav*

faith, this sect has done and is doing much good.”

Sir Monier Williams
Boden Professor of Sanskrit, Oxford

“What did Swaminarayan do? The answer to this historical question in one line is: Shriji Maharaj cleansed Gujarat with the waters of the Saryu and soaked it with divinity. *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan was the dawning sun of a new era.”

Kavishwar Nanlal
19th century poet of Gujarat

“If Sahajanand Swami had not existed, then we would not have seen the pride of Gujarat that we speak of today. Instead of the morality that is in Gujarat, there would have been dirt. Instead of our hearts rejoicing on hearing the name of Gujarat, we would have been ashamed and would have had to hang our heads in shame if Sahajanand Swami had not been there. The contributions of Sahajanand to morality, nonviolence, and virtuousness in Gujarat cannot be said to be of the ordinary.”

Chandravadan Mehta
Gujarati Scholar

“Swaminarayan had unique super talent and personality. Even though he was living an austere life of an ascetic, he was always cheerful and humorous. He used to sing, play, wrestle arid cut jokes also. Such luminous wonderful

extraordinary personality did not vanish after leaving this world. He has manifested himself to many people at the time of leaving this world and even after it.”

“Yet His message had a revolutionary effect on the personal lives and character of thousands of people in a very lawless period. Members of martial and criminal tribes gave up meat and drink; they renounced the use of opium and tobacco, to both of which most of them were very much addicted.”

Pryns Hopkins
British Author

“In spite of his considerable indebtedness to western thought and method, Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps most influenced in his innermost being by the teachings and activities of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*. Most of his thought, activities and even methods of most of the institutions which he has been building up and serving, have the flavor of Swaminarayanism, more than that of any other sect of Hindu *Dharma*.”

N.A. Thoothi
Gujarati Author

“Sahajanand Swami arrested the irregularities of caste and *dharma* from society and propagated the precepts of knowledge and morality. He stopped sinful behavior and suffering. His efforts uplifted the lower classes of Gujarat.

Being a *Brahmin*, a versatile pundit, a staunch *Vaishnav*, and an ideal *Sanyasi*, by His life and work He consolidated the salient features of Gujarat’s culture.”

K.M. Munshi
Renowned Legislator, Historian, and Writer

“The genius of Sahajanand Swami was not confined simply to the rigid re-establishment of Hindu worship in virgin integrity – it was also directed against the irregularities of the age and the recovery of thousands of those unfortunate men to be found throughout Gujarat, whose means of subsistence hitherto were equally lawless and precarious: of His success in this latter respect there is abundant testimony, from the vast hordes who have been reclaimed to honest and industrious pursuits – while the present undisturbed state of the country compared to its condition previously, will speak volumes for Him...”

Henry George Briggs
British Observer

“The work accomplished by *Bhagwan* Swaminarayan in Gujarat could not and would never have been achieved by the law.” There are too many religious sects in India, but the Swaminarayan *Sampraday* is a very attractive and worthy to be praised. I have a great honor for it.”

Mahatma Gandhi
Indian Activist

“At a time when Gujarat-Kathiawad was steeped in darkness, with His power, Sahajanand Swami: enlightened infinite hearts, inspired thousands to sacrifice themselves on His commands, subjugated the looting instincts of scores of *Kathis* and *Kolis*, reestablished the extinct *brahmacharya ashram*, enlightened the ascetic order which had become uncontrolled and wanton, laid down the ideals of self-control for the *gurus* and Acharyas who had lapsed, gave women a well-defined status in society and the *Sampraday*, thus uplifting them He had undergone too many risks, obstructions, contrasts and difficulties and got ready thousands of highly spiritualized disciples. He was the pioneer amongst all the great personalities of his period.”

Kishorelal Mashruwala
A Great Philosopher

“In the 19th century India into which He was born, traditional and moral standards in many cases had been abandoned; crime and violence were common. His teaching was directed to the reversal of these trends. Today we live in a world where violence is all too prevalent and in which many are concerned by the prevailing modern standards. May we not have something to learn from the record of Shree Swaminarayan’s life and faith?”

Sir Charles Cunningham
British Historian

Lord Bishop Heber had a meeting with Shree Swaminarayan at Nadiad on 3-26-1825. He has written a book named “Narrative of a journey through the upper provinces of India.” He has noted his meeting with Shree Swaminarayan. He has compared his military with the bodyguards of Shree Swaminarayan on page 147-148 Vol. II as under.

“But moral grandeur, what a difference was there between his troops and mine! Mine neither knew me nor cared for me; they escorted me faithfully and would have defended me bravely, because they were ordered by their superiors to do so and as they would have done for any other stranger of sufficient worldly rank to make such an attendance usual. The guards of Swaminarayan were his own disciples and enthusiastic admirers, then who had voluntarily prepared to hear His lessons, who now took a pride in doing Him honor and who would cheerfully fight to the last drop of blood rather than suffer a fringe of His garment to be handled roughly” 1 bid. P 147-148.

Collector Williamson’s message noted by Lord Bishop Heber on page 143 in the same book:

‘His (Swaminarayan’s) morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from the *Shastras*. He preached a great degree of purity to his disciples so much as not to look on any woman whom they passed.’

‘He abolished theft and bloodshed, and those villages

and districts which had received Him from being among the worst were now among the best and most orderly in the provinces.’

Reginald Heber
Bishop of Calcutta

“Sahajanand Swami was a propitious prophet. Without taking help of any ruler or any rich man, he released thousands of people from all sort of vices and unrighteousness and made them to lead moral, pious, virtuous and righteous life. Sahajanand was worshipped equally right from the great Kings to the poorest in the society or from highly learned spiritual scholars to the illiterate and brute people. His humanity squeezed the wickedness of His enemies.”

James Burgess
Archaeologist

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Profile

Names:

- Ghanshyam (Given by Bhaktimata & female villagers)
- Hari, Krishna, Hari-Krishna (Given by Markandey Rushi in Chhapaiya)
- Nilkanth Varni (Given by *Rushi munis* in the forest)
- Sahajanand Swami, Narayan Muni (Given by Ramanand Swami in Piplana)
- Swaminarayan (Given by Himself in Faneni)
- Shriji Maharaj, Shri Hari (Given by His Followers)

Birth & Family:

- Birth Date: Chaitra Sud 9, VS 1837 (April 2nd, 1781)
- Birthplace: Chhapaiya, near Ayodhya in Kaushal-Desh (Uttar Pradesh, India)
- Father's Name: Dharmadev (Hariprasad Pande)
- Father's Birth Date: Kartik Sud 11, VS 1796
- Father's Birthplace: Itar
- Mother's Name: Bhaktimata (Bala Devi)
- Mother's Birth Date: Kartik Sud 15, VS 1798

- Mother's Birthplace: Chhapaiya
- Brothers: Rampratapji (married to Suvasinibai), Ichharamji (married to Variyaribai)
- Varna: Sarvariya *Brahmin*
- Family Ved: Sam Ved
- Guru: Sadguru Ramanand Swami

Van-Vicharan

- Start Date: June 29th, 1792
- Age Started: 11 years, 3 months, and 1 day
- Place Departed From: Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India
- Length of Van-Vicharan: 7 years, 1 month, and 11 days
- End Date: August 21st, 1799
- Age Ended: 18 years, 4 months, and 12 days
- Final Arrival Place: Loj, Gujarat, India

Bhagvati Diksha (Initiation)

- Age: 19 years, 7 months, and 2 days
- Date: October 28th, 1800
- Place: Piplana, Gujarat, India

Head of The Sampraday

- Age: 20 years, 7 months, and 2 days
- Date: November 16th, 1801
- Place: Jetpur, Gujarat, India

Satsang

- Years in satsang: 30 years, 9 months, and 19 days
- Time on Earth: 49 years, 2 months, and 1 day
- Date He left Earth: Jyeshth Sud 10, VS 1886 (June 1st, 1830)

Accomplishments on Earth

- Established *ekantik dharma* and destroyed *adharma*.
- Initiated over 2000 Sadhus, of which 500 were elite and prominent saints known as *Paramhansas*.
- Built 6 *mandirs*, and installed murtis for followers to worship and have *darshan* of.
- Established two seats of leadership (*gadi*), and two *Acharyas* to protect and promote the *sampraday*.
- Revealed the philosophy of the *Vedas* in simple words.
- Wrote *Shastras*, and authenticated ancient *Shastras*, and *Shastras* written by His Sadhus.
- Summarized the essence of all the *Shastras* in the *Shikshapatri*.
- Opened alms-houses for the poor.
- Organized food and water aid for people during times of drought.
- Stopped the practice of *sati* custom.

- Stopped female infanticide.
- Removed the ritual of animal sacrifice in *yagnas*.
- Allowed members from all varnas (castes) into the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*.
- Dispelled the myth that *moksha* is not attainable by everyone. He taught *mumukshu* bhaktos that the *jiva* is neither male nor female and that everyone is equal in the eyes of *Bhagwan*.
- Kept good relations with the British Imperial Government, in doing so many people benefitted.
- Maintained good relations with people of other religions.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Timeline

April 2nd, 1781 – Incarnates as Ghanshyam in Chhapaiya.

March 31st, 1786 – Begins the study of Sanskrit.

June 29th, 1792 – Leaves home to begin *Kalyan Yatra*.

October 24th, 1794 – Masters *ashtang-yoga*.

August 21st, 1799 – Arrives in Loj, meets Muktanand Swami.

October 28th, 1800 – Initiated into the Sadhu fold in Piplana by Ramanand Swami.

November 16th, 1801 – Appointed as head in Jetpur.

December 31st, 1801 – Reveals the Swaminarayan *mantra* in Faneni.

November 5th, 1802 – Muktanand Swami composes the *aarti* in Kalvani.

December 25th, 1808 – Performs ahimsic *yagna* in Jetalpur.

November 21st, 1819 – Begins the discourses recorded in the *Vachanamrut* in Gadhada.

November 1820 – Reveals the six reasons He incarnated on Earth to Gopalanand Swami in Kariyani.

February 12th, 1826 – The *Shikshapatri* is written in Vadtal.

July 25th, 1829 – The discourses recorded in the *Vachanamrut* are completed in Gadhada.

February 26th, 1830 – Meets with Sir John Malcolm, Lt. Governor of the British East India Company in Rajkot.

June 1st, 1830 – Returns to *Akshardham* in Gadhada.

Glossary

A

Aarti - Worship ritual of waving lighted wicks before the idol(s) of God.

Abhishek - Ritual of pouring water or milk on a Murti for worship.

Acharya - Leader of a diocese or sect within a sampraday.

Adbhut - Wondrous.

Adharma - 'Opposite of dharma'. That which transgresses dharma; Unrighteousness; Immorality.

Agnā - Instruction, order or command.

Akshar - 'Imperishable'. Second-highest of the five eternal entities; i.e., transcends everything except Purushottam. Also referred to as Aksharbrahma or Brahma.

Akshar Ordi - Shriji Maharaj's residential quarters in Gadhada.

Aksharbrahma - Second-highest of the five eternal entities; i.e., transcends everything except for Parabrahma; abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan; also referred to as: Akshar, Brahma.

Akshardham - The highest abode. The divine abode of Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He is forever seated before countless Muktos.

Aksharrup - 'Form of Akshar'. That which has qualities similar to those of Akshar. Used to describe the spiritual state

of akshar-muktos. Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become aksharrup and worship Purushottam.

Allah - God in Islam.

Annakut - Festival in which food items are prepared and offered to Bhagwan as a token of gratitude and a form of reverence.

Asana - 'Seat', Yogic sitting posture.

Ashram - Stage of life. Traditionally in Hinduism, there are four in total, each with their corresponding duties and responsibilities. Viz. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishyas, Shudras.

Ashtang Yoga - System of Yoga comprising eight progressive steps leading ultimately to yoga, i.e., union with God.

Asur - Demon.

Atma - The pure jiva, distinct from the physical, subtle and causal bodies – i.e., distinct from the indriyas, the antahkaran, worldly desires, or any other traces of maya.

Atmanishtha - Knowledge of the jiva. The conviction that one is the soul (atma).

Atyantik Mukti - Moksha or Ultimate Liberation.

Avatar - Incarnation of Bhagwan. There is a total of 24 avatars stated in Hindu scriptures.

Avatari – Supreme Bhagwan Swaminarayan who is the sole cause of all divine incarnations.

Avyakrut - Of the three bodies of virat-purush and other ishvars, the causal body.

B

Badrikashram - Celestial abode of Nar-Narayan Dev located in the Himalayas; where jivas are sent to cleanse their sins before proceeding to Akshardham.

Bania - Merchant.

Bawas - Wandering renunciant; often used in the pejorative sense.

Bhagvati Diksha - Initiation into a sampraday.

Bhagwan - God; literally, 'one who possesses divine prowess.'

Bhagwat Dharma - Dharma related to God'. Also called ekantik dharma.

Bhakta - Ideal devotee of God.

Bhaktaraj - Great Devotee.

Bhakti - Devotion to God. Noted to be of nine types.

Bhumapurush - The swarup of Bhagwan which resides in Avyakrut.

Bhuva - One who practices strange charms and black magic.

Brahma – (1) The ishwar responsible for the creation of the brahmand and the life forms within it. Part of the trinity of ishwar, along with Vishnu (the sustainer) and Shiv (the destroyer), responsible for the governance of one brahmand. (2) Second-highest of the five eternal entities, i.e., transcends everything except Parabrahma. Also called Akshar, Aksharbrahma or Brahman.

Brahmachari - Brahmin who has been initiated as a renunciant into the holy order of the Swaminarayan fellowship. Such Brahmacharis were invested with special priestly authority, i.e., appointed as personal attendants to the murtis within mandirs, and as the performers of other religious rites.

Brahmacharya - 'Divine conduct'. Celibacy. For renunciants brahmacharya has been prescribed as eight-fold abstinence from associating with the opposite gender.

Brahmamahol - 'Palace of God'. Abode of God. Akshardham.

Brahmarup - 'Form of Brahma'. Possessing qualities similar to those of Brahma. Same as aksharup.

Brahmin - Pious and learned persons traditionally assigned duties of worship, performing rites and rituals, teaching, etc. One of the four castes of the ancient Indian social system.

C

Chaitanya - 'Consciousness'. The substance of the atma. A higher consciousness that transcends the physical realm which is jad and mayik.

Chakhadis - Wooden slippers.

Chandan – Sandalwood.

Chandlo - Small, round mark – usually either of kum-kum or of sandalwood paste – applied in the center of the forehead indicating one's Hindu affiliation.

Charan - Member of a specific class of people, who were

employed by kings and rulers to compose and recite verses celebrating their exploits.

Charitra - A divine incident.

Charnarvind - Divine lotus feet of Bhagwan.

Chaturmas - A holy period of four months in the Hindu calendar, where people observe penance, austerities, fasting, bathing in holy rivers and various religious observances.

Chidakash - Formless and pure chaitanya form of Akshar.

Chaurasi - Grand feast in which the 84 types of Brahmins are fed delicacies.

D

Dakshina - Offering or gift given to Brahmins or sadhus after a feast or sacrificial ritual.

Dandvat - Prostration in which the devotee's entire body touches the ground, symbolizing total surrender.

Darbar - Court of residence belonging to a king or feudal ruler, traditionally with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms with verandas.

Darshan - 'Seeing'. To see with reverence and devotion. Term used specifically for beholding, with inner or outer vision, God, the Satpurush, Santo and bhakto.

Deva - A demi-god who is given powers and responsibilities in the universe, and who lives in a higher realm.

Devi - A demi-goddess; used in India as a title following the personal name of a married woman.

Dham – Abode or realm.

Dharma - Universal law or principle that 'sustains' or 'upholds' the entire world. Righteousness, morality, religion, responsibility, and duty.

Dharmakul - Refers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's family; family of Dharmadev.

Dhun - Reciting the name of God accompanied by musical instruments.

Dhyan - Meditation.

Diksha - Initiation into the Sadhu-fold or Brahmachari-fold.

Divya - Divine; divinity.

Divyabhav - To believe all actions of Bhagwan and his ekantik Sant to be divine and without flaws.

Diwan - A chief treasury official in a government or kingdom in ancient time.

Dwaparyug - Third of the four ages that mark the timescale of the world. Lasting 864,000 human years, it was an age when purity and righteousness diminished considerably, people lived to be 1,000 and the system of the four castes came into full operation.

E

Ekadashi - 11th day of the bright and dark halves of a lunar month. Special religious observance performed on this day which, among other things, also involves fasting.

Ekantik - One possessing an elevated spiritual state wherein one offers bhakti to God along with dharma, gnan and vairagya, i.e., all four of the attributes of ekantik dharma.

Ekantik Dharma - Collective term used for the four endeavors: dharma, bhakti, gnan, and vairagya, coupled with the knowledge of God's greatness.

F

Fakir - A Muslim religious ascetic who lives solely on alms.

Fatana - Vulgar wedding songs.

G

Garbhagruh - Innermost sanctum of a Hindu mandir where the Murti of Bhagwan resides.

Ghat - A stairway leading up from a river.

Ghungharas - Rattles that are tied around the anklets.

Gnan - Spiritual knowledge leading to enlightenment. In particular, the knowledge of one's atma and the form and greatness of Paramatma.

Gulal - Pink powder used in sacred Hindu rituals, particularly in the Holi festival.

Guru - A spiritual leader.

Guru Bhakti - Having, holding, and expressing devotion for one's Guru.

Guru Nishtha - Having, holding, and expressing faith in one's Guru.

H

Hari-Gita - Ghanshyam gave Bhaktimata the spiritual knowledge of salvation, which was then compiled into a book which is part of the Satsangijivan.

Haveli - Traditional mansion-like building, usually constructed of intricately carved woodwork.

I

Indra - The king of the devs. He resides in Svarg-Lok. He is the God of the heavens, lightning, thunder, storms, rains, river flows, and war.

Ishtadev - 'Favorable'. Beloved God.

Ishwar - Second of the five eternal entities. Infinite in number. Similar to jiva with respect to being bound by maya - i.e., composed of the 24 elements, having three bodies, three states, three gunas, desires, etc. - but involved in the processes and lordship of the brahmands, and thus endowed by God with greater powers.

J

Jaap - The act of chanting God's name.

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

Jiva - The soul in its state of ignorance, bound by maya and consequently undergoing the cycle of births and deaths. Infinite in number. First of the five eternal entities.

Jivanmukta - One who has attained liberation while living

in his mortal body; one who has inspired others to attain such liberation.

K

Kaliyug - ‘Age of Darkness’. Fourth and present of the four ages that mark the time-scale of the world. Lasting 432,000 human years – of which over 5,000 have already passed – it is when purity and righteousness have thoroughly diminished in comparison to what they were in Satyayug.

Kalyan - Liberation.

Kalyankari - Liberating. The cause of kalyan. The cause of moksha. That which causes a jiva to break free from the cycle of births and deaths.

Kamdev - The dev of lust and passion.

Kanthi - Double-threaded necklace, usually made of tulsi beads, received by satsangis upon initiation into the satsang fellowship, and worn as a sign of their affiliation to God.

Katha - Spiritual discourse; story or narrative.

Katha-Varta - Scriptural reading and listening to the exposition of scriptures related to God, Santo & Bhakto.

Kathis - Specific sub-caste of the Kshatriya caste traditionally strong and well-built.

Kaviraj - Master poet.

Kosh - A container made from wood or leather skin to draw water from a well.

Kshatriya - Term used to refer to the warrior or ruler caste in

the traditional Hindu societies of India and Nepal.

Kum-Kum - Vermilion powder– used by Hindus in rites and worship, applied on the forehead to form a chandlo.

Kutch - Region in Northern Gujarat.

L

Ladus - Sphere-shaped sweet originating from the India made principally of flour, ghee, and jaggery or sugar.

Lila Charitras - Divine actions of Bhagwan.

M

Mahamantra - Great verbal phrase.

Mahant - Head or chief of a mandir, ashram or group.

Mandir - Sacred Hindu place of worship, temple.

Mansi Puja - ‘Mental worship’. Form of worship in which one devoutly performs puja, offers aarti, thal, etc., to God mentally – exactly as one would physically.

Mantra - A sacred verbal phrase repeated in prayer, or meditation, such as Swaminarayan.

Maund - A unit of weight. 1 maund = 20kg

Maya - Anything that distracts one from the worship of Bhagwan; power of Bhagwan used as the fundamental substance of creation. By nature, it is composed of the three gunas, is both jad and chaitanya, eternal, nirvishesh, and in its dormant state – before the time of creation – houses all jivas and ishvars, and all elements.

Moksha - Liberation. Salvation. Breaking free from the cycle of births and deaths. To attain Akshardham.

Mukto - A liberated soul. A resident of any abode of God who has been freed from a lower plane of existence to a more spiritually elevated state.

Mumukshu - Spiritual aspirant.

Munivar - Head or chief of Saints.

Murti - Sacred idol of God used to offer worship.

Murti-pratishtha - Hindu ritual for consecrating a Murti of Bhagwan, after which the Murti is not just a statue but the actual form of Bhagwan.

N

Nadi Vaidya - A doctor who examines the nadi -vein; pulse.

Namaz - Islamic form of worship or prayer.

Nand Santo - Bhagwan Swaminarayan's most elite saints which names ended with 'nand'. Ex) Muktanand Swami.

Nivrutti Marg - 'Inactivity'. State of quietness and passivity, i.e., retirement from social duties and affairs. In this sense, often used to refer to the path of renunciation.

Niyam - Moral and spiritual disciplines, and religious codes of conduct prescribed by God, the Satpurush, or the scriptures to protect a devotee on the path to God.

P

Padmasana - Lotus posture, one of the eighty-four asanas of yoga.

Padhramani – A visit to a home or other place by God, Santo and or bhakto.

Panch dhatu - Five elements used to make murtis: gold, silver, copper, zinc, iron.

Panch vartmaans – An oath to follow certain niyams. There are panch vartmaans for householders and saints.

Pandit - Scholar.

Panditraj - Master Scholar.

Papad - A thin, crisp, disc-shaped food.

Parabrahma - God. Also called Paramatma or Parabrahma. Highest of the five eternal entities – transcending even Brahma.

Paramatma - 'Supreme Being', God. Also called Parabrahma or Purushottam.

Paramhansas - 'Supreme swan'. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterized by his ability to discriminate between sat and asat – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to distinguish between milk mixed with water.

Pichkaris - Hand-pumped water spray filled with colored water for use during the festival of Fuldol.

Prakruti Purush - The pair of Mul-Prakruti and Mul-Purush, from which countless pairs of Pradhans and Purushes are formed for the creation and sustenance of each brahmand.

Prasad - Sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God.

Pravrutti Marg - 'Activity'. Activity in the form of social duties and affairs. In this sense, often used to refer to the path of a householder.

Puja - A prayer ritual performed by Hindus of devotional worship.

Pujan - Offering worship with kum-kum, chandan, flowers, rice.

Pujari - Hindu mandir priest.

Pujya – Respected, revered.

Purushottam - 'Supreme Being', God. God, according to Shriji Maharaj, is: one and unparalleled, omnipotent and the all-doer, omniscient, omnipresent, the reservoir of all forms of bliss, devoid of any attributes of maya (i.e., divine), replete with all forms of redemptive attributes, always manifesting on Earth, and always with a human form. Also called Parabrahma or Paramatma.

R

Raga - Combination or pattern of notes, having characteristic intervals, movements and embellishments; one of the melodic modes used in Indian classical music. Different ragas are associated with different times of day, seasons, and festivals.

Rajogun - 'Rajas' - Quality of passion. Desire for the vishays.

Rajput - 'Son of the king'. Specific sub-caste of the Kshatriya caste descending originally from royal lineage, traditionally extremely strong and brave.

Rushi Muni - A sage. A tyagi who performs severe penance and meditation. The Veds were revealed by Brahma to rushi munis.

S

Sabha - Spiritual assembly.

Sadhana - Accomplishing something, performing spiritual endeavors.

Samadhi - 'Trance'. Transcendental experience, usually of God or His abode, in which consciousness of the body and surroundings is lost.

Sampraday - Fellowship. Body of devotees.

Sampradayik - Of or relating to sampraday; belonging to a specific religious community.

Sankhya-Yogi - 'Yogi who has renounced activities.' Term used for a devotee who has renounced his/her worldly duties – as opposed to a karma-yogi – and is sincerely striving for liberation. Refers to a renunciant who is totally dedicated and committed to satsang.

Sanyasis - Person who has renounced all worldly duties and is living as an ascetic.

Sarovari - Supreme, Paramount.

Sati - Widow who, out of her total dedication and commitment to her husband, voluntarily commits immolation by throwing herself on her dead husband's burning funeral pyre.

Satpurush - Guru for a spiritual aspirant. Through whom

God remains ever-manifest, passing on His divine energy and experience, love and guidance to all beings on Earth.

Satsang - ‘Sat’ means truth, ‘Sang’ means company. Satsang refers to keeping the company of pious and virtuous individuals (saints). Satsang is also used to describe the entire Swaminarayan Sampraday.

Satsangi - Member of the satsang fellowship. One who practices satsang.

Satsangijivan - A scripture written by Sadguru Satanand Swami which is comprised of 5 volumes and 17,627 verses, it incorporates: the constitution and brief history of the Sampraday; details of festivals and rituals; vows of disciples; modes of worshipping God and expiation of sins; Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s philosophical principles, and the divine episodes of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Sattvagun - ‘Sattva’ - Attribute of clarity and purity of thought, excellence, mental poise.

Satya Sankalp – An intention formed by the heart and mind which comes true by mere thought.

Satyayug - ‘Age of Goodness’. First of the four ages that mark the time-scale of the world. Lasting 1,728,000 human years, it is the purest and most righteous of the ages, when people lived to be 100,000, all were Brahmins, everyone’s wishes were fulfilled, and everyone worshipped God.

Seva - Selfless service.

Sevak - Humble servant.

Shakti - Power or energy.

Shaligram - Small sacred stone worshipped by Vaishnavs.

Shastras - Religious and sacred scriptures.

Shikharbaddh Mandir - Temples typically featuring architecture characterized by superstructures with towers pinnacles and domes and often built of carved marble, sandstone, or other stone.

Shikshapatri - Succinct scripture of 212 Sanskrit verses written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan for all of His followers. Serves as a concise, fundamental code of conduct encompassing everything from basic civic norms, i.e., from personal hygiene to social ethics, up to universal philosophy and spirituality.

Shiro - Sweet delicacy often served at feasts and festive occasions.

Shudras - Term used to refer to the worker or laborer caste in the traditional Hindu societies of India and Nepal.

Sutratma - Of the three bodies of Virat-Purush and other ishwaras, the subtle body. Analogous to the sukshma body of the jiva. Because it is evolved from the avyakrut (causal) body, it is also considered as the maya of ishwar.

T

Tamogun - ‘Tamas’ - Quality of darkness, sleep, anger, etc.

Thakorji - Vaishnav term used to refer to a small Murti of Bhagwan, believed to be the manifest form of Bhagwan; also

called Harikrishna Maharaj in the Swaminarayan Sampraday.

Thal - Food devotionally offered to God as a form of bhakti, which in turn consecrates the food – turning it into prasad.

Tilak - Holy mark in the shape of ‘U’ applied on the center of a male devotee’s forehead using sandalwood paste; sectarian mark associating a devotee with a sampraday.

Tretayug - Second of the four ages that mark the timescale of the world. Lasting 1,296,000 human years, it was when purity and righteousness diminished somewhat, the instincts of the Kshatriyas prevailed, people lived to be 10,000, and people’s wishes were not so readily fulfilled.

Trigunatmika – Consisting of three guns of Maya – sattva-gun, rajo-gun, tamo-gun.

Tulsi Vivah - The ceremonial marriage of the Tulsi plant to a Hindu God.

U

Upasana - Philosophical framework outlining the fundamental principles of a doctrine. Philosophical understanding of the nature of God as well as the mode of worship of God, i.e., how one understands God to be like, and how one worships Him.

Utsav - Festival.

V

Vachanamrut - ‘Amrut in the form of words.’ Compilation of 262 spiritual discourses delivered by Bhagwan

Swaminarayan, meticulously noted and collated by His senior paramhansas in His presence, and authenticated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan Himself. Central philosophical scripture of the Swaminarayan Fellowship encapsulating the essence of all Hindu scriptures.

Vada - A category of savory fried snacks from India.

Vaghri - One who does menial chores; pejorative term used to refer to laborers; referred to as ‘untouchables.’

Vairagis - Wandering renunciant; often used in the pejorative sense.

Vairagya - ‘Detachment’. An aversion or strong, persistent dislike, generally for the world and its mayik pleasures, i.e., the panchvishays. Characterized by remaining detached from the body and the brahmand, or from all things that are the products of Prakruti.

Vairagyamurti - Idol of non-attachment.

Vaishnav - Follower of Vishnu and/or his various incarnations, in particular Shri Krishna Bhagwan.

Vaishyas - ‘Merchant’. Businessman or employer traditionally dealing with financial and commercial matters in society. One of the four castes of the ancient Indian social system.

Vankar - Is a Hindu social group found in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan in India.

Vartmaan - A vow.

Vasana - Material desires.

Vasant Panchami - A festival that marks the preliminary preparations for the arrival of spring.

Vedas - Most sacred and authoritative set of Hindu scriptures, the oldest portions of which are also recognized as the most ancient writings in history. Collection of divine revelations imparting philosophical wisdom as revealed to the rishis after strict austerities and deep contemplation. Collated into four parts: The Rig Veda, Sam Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda, collectively known as the Vedas.

Vedic - Of or pertaining to the Vedas.

Vedikas - Platform or plinth on which Vedic sacrifices are performed; one who restores knowledge.

Veranda - A roofed, open-air gallery or porch, attached to the outside of a building.

Viman - A celestial chariot.

Virat - Of the three bodies of virat-purush and other ishwars, the physical body, i.e., the physical world itself – composed of the five mahabhuts – and which sustains the bodies of all jivas.

Vishishtadvaita - A non-dualistic school of Vedanta philosophy. One of the principal branches of Vedanta, a system (darshan) of Indian philosophy. Ramanujacharya is widely credited with spreading the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita.

Vratas - An observance, usually concerning diet.

Y

Yagna - ‘Sacrificial worship’. Ceremonial ritual performed as a form of worship to seek the good favor and receive the blessings of the deities. Oblations – ghee, grains, wood, spices, etc. – are offered into a sacred pit of fire in accordance with strict scriptural injunctions amid the chanting of definite mantras.

Yamduts - The terrifying servants of Yamraja, who punish those who have sinned.

Yamloka - Narak (Hell), the realm of Yamraja; the underworld, where jivas are sent to suffer the consequences of their sins.

Yamraja - Also known as Dharmaraja, is the king of Narak (Hell).

Yatra – Pilgrimage; Spiritual journey.

Yogi - One who performs yoga; also generally used to address an ascetic.

Yogic - Of or pertaining to yoga.

Yogiraj - Master of Yoga.

Reference

- The Shikshapatri - Bhagwan Swaminarayan
- The Vachanamrut - Narrated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan
- Satsangijivan - Sadguru Satanand Swami
- Haricharitamrut Sagar - Sadguru Adharanand Swami
- Bhaktachintamani - Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami
- Aksharanand Swami Ni Vato - Sadguru Aksharanand Swami
- Nishkulanand Kavya - Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami
- Ghanshyamlilamrut Sagar - Sadguru Bhumanand Swami
- Harililamrut - Acharya Shri Viharilalji Maharaj
- Harililakalptaru - Brahmachari Shri Achintynandji
- Nirgundas Swami Ni Vato – Sadguru Nirgundas Swami
- HaricharitraChintamani – Sadguru Rugnathcharandasji Swami
- Sadguru Muktanand Swami - Swaminarayan Mandir Loyadham
- Sahajanand Charitra - Swaminarayan Mandir Loyadham
- Satsangijivan Sagar Manthan - Swaminarayan Mandir Loyadham
- Gyan Sarita - Swaminarayan Mandir Loyadham
- World Wide Web



Shown here are malas used by
Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Shown here is a nail of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Shown here are the chakhadis
worn by Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Shown here are the hair threads of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Shown here is the imprint of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan's charnarvind (Lotus feet).



1) Dharmadev & Bhaktimata are depicted here delighted in the joy of parenthood with their divine child, Ghanshyam.



2) The holy site of the birthplace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
Chappaiya, Uttar Pradesh, India. (Pg. 4)





3) In Chappaiya, Ghanshyam regularly bathed in Narayan Sarovar; the very place where He liberated Kalidatta. (Shown above) (Pg. 6)



4) Ghanshyam resuscitated dead fish here at Meen Sarovar; Chappaiya, India. (Pg. 8)



5) Ghanshyam listened to katha daily at the renowned Kanak Bhavan Mandir in Ayodhya, India. (Shown above) (Pg. 11)



6) Ghanshyam listened to katha daily at the renowned Hanuman Gadhi Mandir in Ayodhya, India. (Pg. 11)

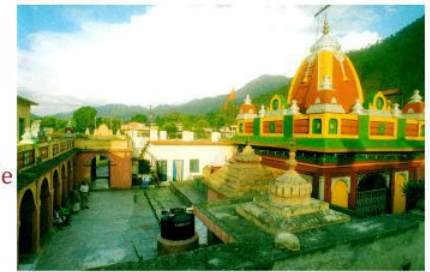


7) Ghanshyam visited the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir in Kashi with his father during the theological debate at Gomath Ashram in which he articulated His philosophical system for the first-time. (Pg. 12)

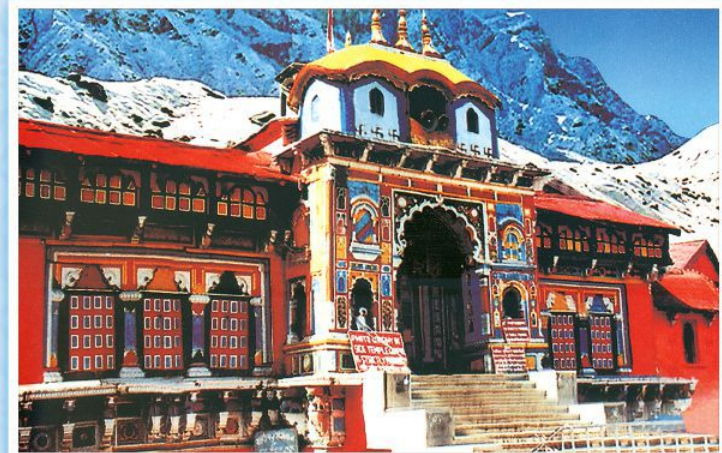


8) This map shows some of the cities and pilgrimage sites that Nilkanth Varni visited during his Kalyan yatra across the Indian subcontinent. (Pg. 17)

9) Nilkanth calmed the fierce, untamed lion with the gesture of his right hand in Shripur, Uttarakhand, India outside of the Kamleshwar Mahadev Math. (Pg. 22)



10) Traversing the frozen terrain by foot, Nilkanth visited Kedarnath Mandir, Nepal. (Shown above) (Pg. 23)



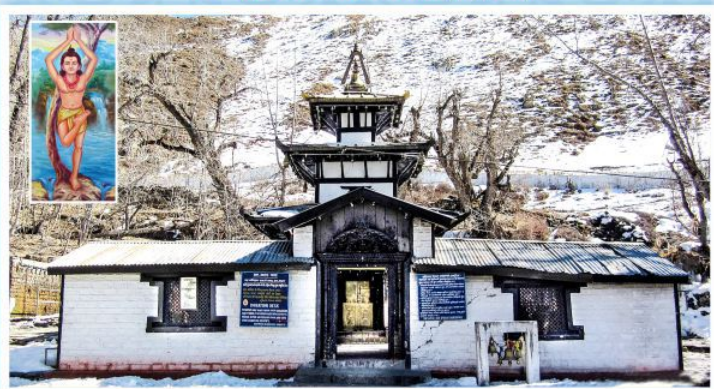
11) After traveling nine straight days from Kedarnath in the harsh conditions of the Himalayas, Nilkanth reached Badrinath Mandir. (Shown above) (Pg. 24)



12) The mystical Lake Mansarovar is the highest body of freshwater in the world that sits at the elevation of 14,947ft where Nilkanth spent five days on the shores and played with the Raj-hansas. (Pg. 27)



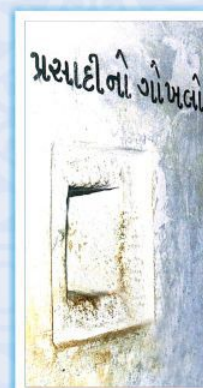
13) Nilkanth Varni bathed in the frigid waters of Gangotri shown above. (Pg. 30)



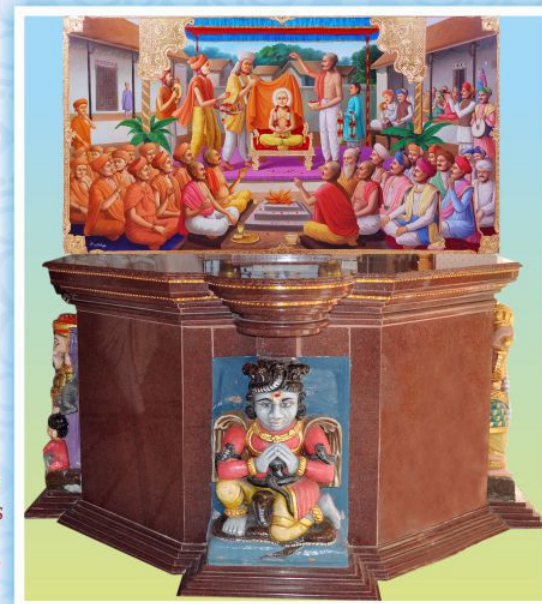
14) Nilkanth performed severe austerities for more than four months at Pulhashram, Muktinath and visited Muktinath Mandir (shown here) located in the Himalayas. (Pg. 37)



15) This is the step well in Loj, Gujarat, India where Nilkanth concluded his seven-year, 12,000km journey across the Indian subcontinent. (Pg. 62)



16) This opening in the kitchen wall in Ramanand Swami's ashram in Loj was sealed by Nilkanth in furtherance of the Sadhus' celibacy vows. (Pg. 70)



17) This shrine in Piplana, Gujarat memorializes the occasion of Nilkanth's initiation as a sadhu under the names of Sahajanand Swami and Narayan Muni by Sadguru Ramanand Swami. (Pg. 78)



18) This is the location where Ramanand Swami handed the reins of the holy fellowship to Sahajanand Swami in Jetpur, Gujarat. A mandir is built in its place. (Pg. 83)



19) Sahajanand Swami introduced the mahamantra 'Swaminarayan' for the very first time in Faneni, Gujarat. (Pg. 91)



20) Munivar Muktanand Swami composed and performed the very first aarti of Sahajanand Swami in Kalvani, Gujarat in this very location. (Pg. 106)



21) The location of the revered debate between Muktanand Swami and scholars took place in Vitthalnathji's Mandir located in Vadodara, Gujarat. (Pg. 166)



22) Bhagwan Swaminarayan often held katha-varta in this courtyard of Dada Khachar in Gadhada, Gujarat. (Pg. 178)



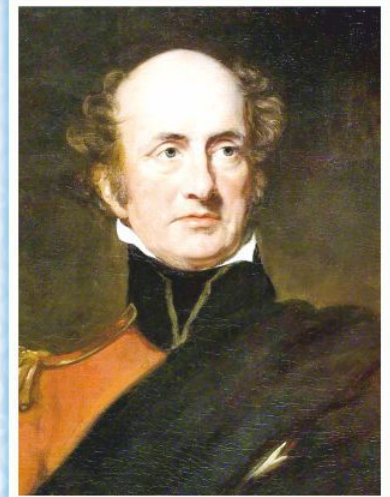
23) Akshar Ordi was the location of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's residential quarters in Gadhada, Gujarat. (Pg. 314)



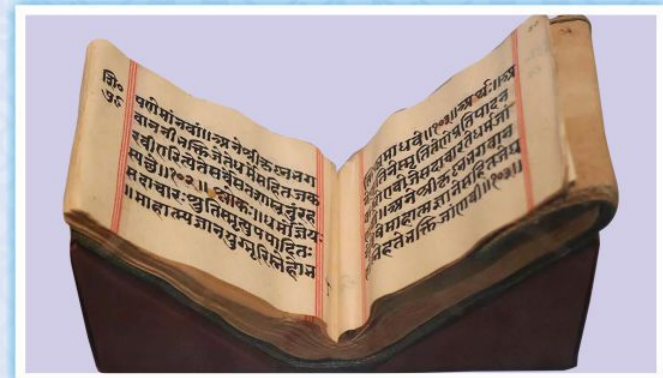
24) Bhagwan Swaminarayan spoke 18 Vachanamruts in this courtyard of Sura Khachar in Loya, Gujarat. (Pg. 180)



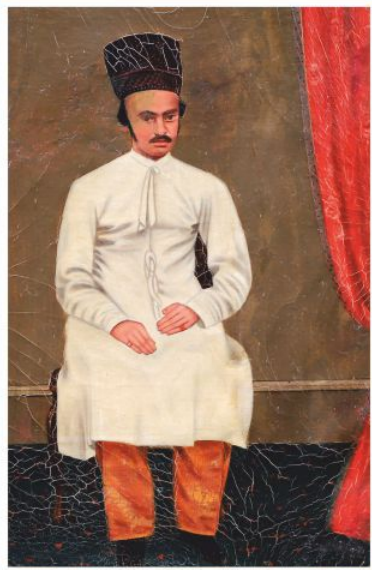
25) Bishop Reginald Heber (depicted here), Bishop of Calcutta and a Christian missionary, held a meeting with Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Nadiad, Gujarat in 1825. (Pg. 196)



26) Sir John Malcolm (depicted here), Governor of Mumbai (1827-1830), held a meeting with Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Rajkot, Gujarat in 1830. He was gifted a copy of the Shikshapatri by Bhagwan Swaminarayan shown below. (Pg. 197)



The Shikshapatri (Pg. 198)



27) Ardeshtar Kotwal (depicted here), Administrator of Surat city, held a meeting with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and became a devotee in 1824. Shriji Maharaj gifted Him his turban shown above.
(Pg. 202)



28) Ahmedabad Mandir was the first mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He installed the murtis of Nar-Narayan Dev on February 24th, 1822. (Pg. 227)



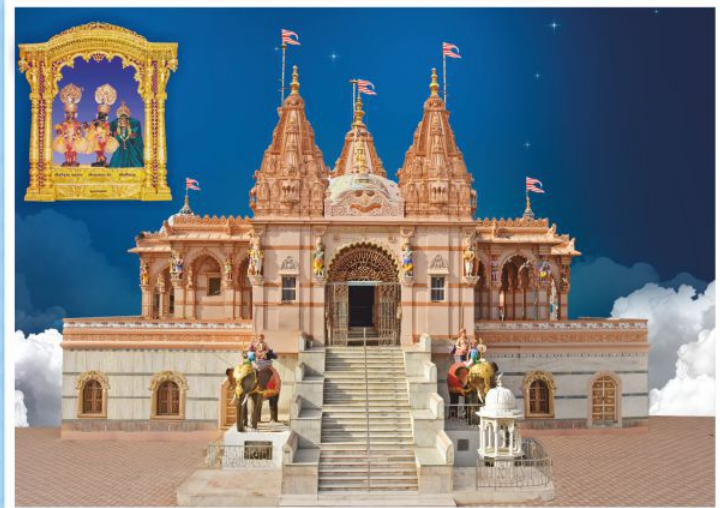
29) Bhuj Mandir was the second mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He installed the murtis of Nar-Narayan Dev on May 15th, 1823. (Pg. 228)



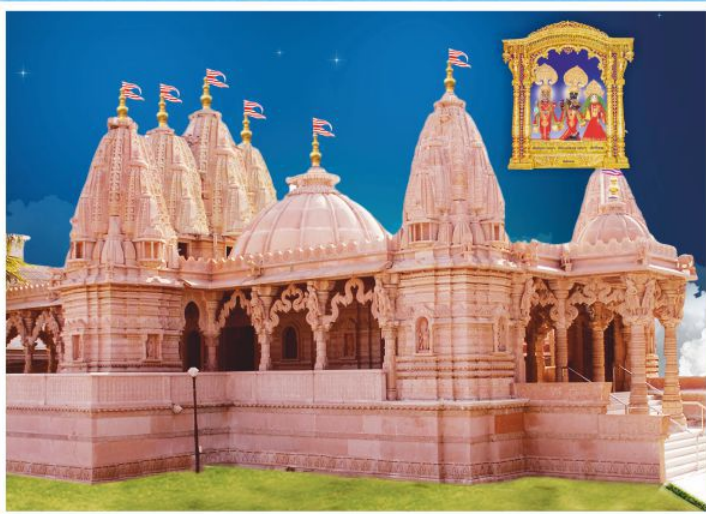
30) Vadtal Mandir was the third mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He installed the murtis of Laxminarayan Dev on November 3rd, 1824. (Pg. 230)



31) Bhagwan Swaminarayan installed this murti of Shri Harikrushna Maharaj in the first shrine of Vadtal Mandir; marking the first time Bhagwan Swaminarayan installed His own murti in a mandir for worship on November 3rd, 1824. (Pg. 230)



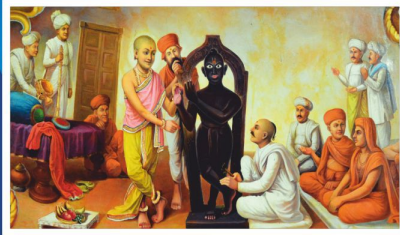
33) Junagadh Mandir was the fifth mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He installed the murtis of Radharaman Dev on May 1st, 1828. (Pg. 233)



32) Dholera Mandir was the fourth mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He installed the murtis of Madanmohanji Maharaj on May 19th, 1826. (Pg. 232)



34) Compelled by Dada Khachar's bhakti, Gadhada Mandir was the sixth mandir built by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, where He installed the murti of Gopinathji Maharaj on October 9th, 1828 in Dada's darbar in Gadhada. (Pg. 235)



35) The murti of Shri Gopinathji Maharaj is in the central shrine of Gadhada Mandir which has the exact dimensions of Bhagawan Swaminarayan's divine physique. (Pg. 235)



37) Shriji Maharaj cooked 1200kg of brinjals in 360kg ghee for His followers. This divine act was called the 'Shakotsav,' which was held in the village of Loya, Gujarat. (Pg. 243)



36) This is the very area where Shriji Maharaj played raas with His Santo by taking as many forms as there were Santo in Panchala, Gujarat. (Pg. 240)





Many intellectuals, after recognizing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's achievement in the field of society and religion, established him as a social and religious reformer. Some went a step further and attributed him as a divine figure. More importantly, quite a large number of people considered him as an incarnation that is equal to Krishna and Ram. However, in reality, He is the Supreme Almighty Lord of Lords. He is the source of all incarnations and the cause of all incarnations. This book will help one understand the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

