

Humble Offering

With the divine inspiration of our Guruhari Pramukh Swami, we have created a reference guide for Pragna Satsang Exam students in English. This effort has been made successful due to the efforts of BAPS National Karyalay leads, UK Satsang Mandal and fellow volunteers, who have offered their precious time to do translations.

Translations are done using reference of Swamini Vaato, Vachanamrut and other Satsang Exam syllabus books.

We sincerely wish that our compiled reading material is of significant help to Satsang Exam students; who will work hard to earn Param Pujya Swamishri's rajipo and strengthen their understanding of Bhagwan

Swaminarayan's, Swamishri's and the Sanstha's mahima. We kindly request feedback from Satsang Exam reference users to further improve the content. Please convey your feedback to the satsang exam lead in your center.

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Select correct options

Note: Correct answers in bold.

July 2014

1. Principle of Cause and effect
 1. **According to Shriji Maharaj, Prakruti is not independent tattva**
 2. Sant is the controller of Prakruti
 3. Potter *Upadan karan kehva*
 4. Clay is the cause of the pot
2. Loss due to perceiving Human traits in God
 1. If doubts arises in God, then one can't overcome the bhavsagar (ocean)
 2. **For one who has doubts in realizing God, attaining liberation would be very difficult**
 3. One who perceives any flaws in God will greatly suffer at the time of his death
 4. **If God is disliked in any way, the jiva of such a person becomes like the dark moon of Amas.**
3. Gunatitanand Swami says,
 1. **One who has resolute conviction in the nature and form of God has completed all endeavours.**
 2. God is above maya and endeavours represents zero.
 3. **If one has upasana and the highest level of conviction in the supreme form of God then all spiritual means will follow**
 4. Resolute faith in the manifest form of God and knowledge of God's greatness is like the bridegroom.

March 2014

1. Conviction in God's form to attain Akshardham
 1. **Understanding Parabrahman, i.e. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, as supreme and avatari, is absolutely imperative**
 2. Without knowing Maharaj as Purushottam, it is possible to go to Akshardham
 3. Understanding of Shri krishn's supreme form is essential to attain moksha and reach Akshardham.
 4. **Gunatitanand Swami instilled conviction of Maharaj's supremacy into the heart of Bhai Atmanand Swami**
2. Bhagwan Swaminarayan: Supreme: in terms of His purpose, divine powers and works
 1. *jivoko mukti dene ke vaste, Akshar banya hu*
 2. **The divine power of granting countless jivas the experience of samadhi established Shriji Maharaj's supremacy.**
 3. In Bhadra, countless ants assumed a divine four-armed form and went to the abode of Prakriti Purush
 4. **Age avatiire karee, karyii prikrām bhiiree; Bhakta dviire tevi kare, mite ii avatiiree**
3. Akshardham: as Sachidanand, luminous chidaksh
 1. **It sustains maya and all its evolutes-the countless millions of brahmans.**
 2. Aksharbhraman is the abode in which God resides
 3. Akshar is unchanging, eternal, a place where God resides
 4. Akshar has a state of contraction or expansion; it forever remains in the same state

July 2013

1. Darshan of His divine powers through sadhus and devotees
 1. Vyapakanand Swami emptied the pits of hell
 2. **Due to mere wish of Vishram Suthar countless ants went to the abode of Bhumapurush**
 3. Due to mere wish of Vishram Suthar countless ants a went to the abode of Golok
 4. Gunatitanand Swami prevented an eclipse
2. Mutual relationships between the tattvas
 1. God is the atma of Brahman
 2. **Jiv-ishwar bhokta che**
 3. Aksharbrahm totally unique and detached from all.
 4. **All tattvas like jiv-ishwar have relationship of sharir and shariri.**
3. Parabrahman: Sagun and Nirgun
 1. **Parabrahman Purushottan narayan is both sagun and nirgun**
 2. God as sagun refers to the fact that he does not possess infinite divine qualities and redemptive virtues.
 3. **God as nirgun refers to the fact that he does not possess a mayik (mundane) form or any mayik attributes.**
 4. Parabrahman possess the following six virtues: jnan, panch indriya, bal, aishvarya and virya

March 2013

1. Five *nitya* tattva
 1. **parabrahma**
 2. aksharbrahma
 3. **ishvar**
 4. **maya**
2. Jivas: infinite in number
 1. **Shriji Maharaj has stated that bound jivas are innumerable**
 2. Within each body residing jiva is not distinct
 3. **fundamental form of jiva is characterized by eternal existence (sat), consciousness (chitta) and bliss (anand)**
 4. **It can never be said that there is only one jiva**
3. Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman- scriptural references
 1. Shikshapatri
 2. **Shriharilila kalpataru**
 3. **Purushottam charitra**
 4. **Satsang-Sahitya Ratnamala**

July 2012

1. Parabrahma : ocean of bliss

1. **Before the bliss of the murti of God, the joys of the sense pleasures of this realm pale into insignificance.**
 2. The most blissful form is that of Sant only
 3. **God is the reservoir of all types of bliss**
 4. Source of all the resources.
2. Disadvantages of not understanding God as the all-doer
 1. Doesn't acquire any spiritual powers from Sant
 2. Commits a sin much graver than even the five grave sins
 3. **Is regarded as committing blasphemy against God**
 4. Creates benefit for himself on the path of liberation
 3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's insistence for conviction in God's Supreme form
 1. te a vat satsang ma karya jevi nathi pan satsang ma kariye chie
 2. **Nityanand Swami remained resolute in his conviction**
 3. **Prasadnee dakshin dishamay, murti Harikrishna tanee tahay**
 4. If you do not talk about me Supreme form then I will keep you in this body for 100 years.

March 2012

1. Necessity of understanding the form of Aksharbrahman: To attain true conviction in Parabrahman
 1. Scriptures may have various content, but one understands it only through Purushottam.
 2. **The cause of all things is Aksharbrahm, and that Aksharbrahm is the abode of Bhagwan.**
 3. **Bhagwan is beyond Akshard which is Prakrutipurush.**
 4. The one who knows Parabrahman, attains Brahman
2. Why should one believe that Parabrahman sakar?
 1. **It would be impossible for God to be the All-doer**
 2. **Without a Murti, there can be no Divine light**
 3. It's the crux of reading all the scriptures.
 4. **A Vyatirek nature would not be possible**
3. Jiva: unborn, ageless and immortal
 1. A jiv does not evolve but is destructed.
 2. **A jiv during creation attains a physical body per its karmic deeds as per Prarbrhman's wish.**
 3. **But a jiv always exists, its indestructible.**
 4. Jiv merges into brahman or parbrahman and looses its own identity.

July 2011

1. Swaminarayan Darshan
 1. Gunatitanand Swami's darshan *siddhant rahasya*
 2. **Indicates Bhakta with Bhagwan**
 3. Indicates Swami -Sevak
 4. **Shriji Maharaj darshan *siddhant rahasya***
2. Darshan of His Divine Powers through Sadhu and Devotees
 1. **Shekji invested with the ability to grant samadhi**
 2. **Due to mere wish of Vishram Suthar countless ants went to the abode of Bhumapurush**

3. Due to mere wish of Vishram Suthar countless ants a went to the abode of Golok
4. Miyaji invested with the ability to grant samadhi
3. Disadvantages of understanding Parabrahma as formless
 1. **Does not ever acquire spiritual powers from God**
 2. Creates a great obstacle for himself on the path of bhakti
 3. Does not ever acquire spiritual powers from Sant
 4. **Creates a great obstacle for himself on the path of liberation.**

Exercise

1. Parabrahman: Ocean of bliss
 1. The most blissful form is that of God only
 2. if one were gather together all the pleasures of countless millions of brahmands, then it would not equal even one millionth of a fraction of the bliss of God's darshan
 3. God is the king of the kings of countless villages in the form of brahmands
 4. God is the reservoir of all types of bliss
2. Darshan of His Divine Powers through Sadhu and Devotees
 1. Due to mere wish of Lalji Suthar countless ants went to the abode of Bhumapurush
 2. Gopalanand Swami prevented an eclipse
 3. Maharaj sent Vishnudas to Badrikashram and asked him to bring bors
 4. Vyapakanad Swami revived the dead horse
3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's complete manifestation through the sant
 1. One becomes totally flawless through realizing God and the great Sant to be absolutely flawless
 2. c
 3. Sant hu ne hu te valee Sant re, em Shrimukhe kahe Bhagwant re
 4. One attains liberation only through the manifest form of God
1. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's insistence for conviction in God's Supreme form
 1. I experience profound bliss only from the darshan of Sant's murti.
 2. I do not like one who does not believe God to forever possess a form
 3. I have read and heard many Vedanta shastras, my conviction dislodged
 4. I have delivered this discourse [regarding the form of God] having experienced it directly myself
2. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine work
 1. Established Swaminarayan sampraday
 2. Granted liberation to Jivas who took refuge in Him
 3. Remained manifested thorough Gunatit Satpurush
 4. Made everyone do His bhajan
3. Anvay and Vyatirek forms of Aksharbrahman
 1. In anvay form, countless millions of brahmands dwell like mere atoms in each and every pore of that Akshar
 2. In vyatirek form, he resides in countless millions of brahmands
 3. Anvay form is the nirakar chidakash form
 4. Vyatirek form of Aksharbrahman is Akshardhamrup
1. Prasthantrayi
 1. Gita
 2. Brahmasutras
 3. Bhagvad

4. Upanisad
2. Advantages of understanding God as the All-doer
 1. Means to pleasing God
 2. One develops love for God
 3. Means to attain redemptive virtues
 4. means to becoming dear to God
3. Forms of ishvars
 1. Body: Virat, Sutratma, Avyakrut
 2. State: Awake, dream, deep sleep
 3. Name: Vishwabhimani, taijasabhimani, pragnabhimani
 4. *Alpagnya*
1. Advantaged of Understanding God as all-doer
 1. For the ultimate liberation
 2. Means to pleasing God
 - 3.
 - 4.
2. Parabrahman: The all-powerful
 1. kartum, akartum and anyatha-kartum
 2. Divine power
 3. *vichitra shakti*
 4. aadhin shakti
3. Six reasons for Shriji Maharaj's manifestation on earth
 1. To grant previous avatars and their followers a human birth on this earth, preach to them the knowledge of my form and upasana, and send them to Akshardham
 2. To establish on this earth the tradition of the Param Ekantik Sadgu who will forever sustain ekantik dharma and keep the path of liberation to Akshardham open
 3. To give the fruits of the austerities to those ascetics and yogis in Bhadrakashram
 4. To revive and spread dharma, jnan, vairagya and bhakti for jivas to go to swetdhip
1. Aksharbrahman tattva distinct from other tattvas
 - 1.
 2. Maya is *Jad*, whereas Aksharbrahman is sat chit anand
 3. Jiv-ishwar are innumerable but Aksharbrahman is one and unique
 4. According to G I 10 and G III 7, because of being anadi, Aksharbrahman is distinct
2. Parabrahman's six divine attributes
 1. Jnan, shakti, bal, aishvarya, virya, tej
 2. sham, dam, titiksha, uparati, sukh, anand
 3. gambhira, madhura, chaturya, sthaira, shaurya, dhaira
 4. arjav, mardav, satya, audarya, vatsalya, saushilya
1. four types of Dissolution (pralay)
 1. atyantik
 2. nimitta
 3. prakrut
 4. nitya
2. Four forms of Aksharbhraman
 1. Prakruti-Purush form
 2. as Sadchidanand, luminous Chidakash form
 3. Dham form
 4. Manifest on earth as the Gunatit satpurush

1. The process of dissolution
 1. Maha pralay
 2. Nitya pralay
 3. Avyakrut pralay
 4. Nimitta pralay
2. Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman-Scriptural references
 1. Satsang-sahitya ratanmala
 2. Kavyakusumavali
 3. Kavyakusummanjli
 4. Kirtankusumavali
3. One who believes God to possess a form
 1. only he would go to Akshardham
 - 2.
 3. is not ruled by kal, karma and maya always remains happy

Short Q & A

Give one sentence answers to the below given questions:

March 2014

1) **What has Shreeji Maharaj said about eternal tattvas in Vach Gad III:10?**

Ans: Shreeji Maharaj said, “Vedas, Purans, Itihas, and Smrutis, I have formed the principle that jiva, maya, Ishwar, Brahman and Parabrahman are all eternal.

2) **What is the main meaning of atyantik mukti?**

Ans: The main meaning of atyantik mukti is to understand God as the all-doer

3) **What has been written in the old manuscripts of the Sampradaya which explains the reason for Shreeji Maharaj’s his pragat manifestation?**

Ans: Dusarii avatar hai so kiiryaa-kiiran avatar huii hai, aur merit yaha avatar hai, sau to jivoku brahmarup karke atyantik mukti dene ke vaste Aksharatit Purushottam jo ham vaha manushya jaisa banya hu.

4) **Give two names of mukti?**

Ans: The two names are Jivan mukti and Videha mukti

5) **What is created from the joined pair of Pradhan-Purush?**

Ans: A brahmand is created from the joined pair of Pradhan-Purush.

July 2013

1. **In writing of Satsangijivan which saint did Shreeji Maharaj excommunicated, but still remain firm in his conviction?**

Ans: it was Nityanand Swami to remain firm in conviction despite the fact Shreeji Maharaj didn’t sided with him and excommunicated him.

2. **When Shreeji Maharaj installed his own murti in Vartal, what name did he give?**

Ans: Shreeji Maharaj gave the name of “Hari Krishna Maharaj”, to the murti he installed in Vartal

3. **What is the third eternal entity in Shreeji Maharaj’s darshan?**

Ans: The third eternal entity is Ishwar in Shreeji Maharajs’ darshan

4. **What are the three states of Ishwar to know?**

Ans: The three states of Ishwar are: Sustenance; Creation and Dissolution.

5. **Give an example of how to do updaan?**

Ans: The clay from which a pot is created, that clay is called upadaan.

March 2013

1) In Swami ni vato 2.2 what is Maharaj asking to understanding?

Ans: One should understand Maharaj to be supreme, the source of all incarnations, the cause of all causes.

2) Understand four types of antahkarans?

Ans: The four types are: man, buddhi, chitta, and ahamkar

3) What are two Vach Shreeji Maharaj talked about Jivan Muktas?

Ans: the two Vachnamruts are S 9, and G III 7

4) List two divine works of Shreeji Maharaj?

Ans: he exhibited divine powers, such as granting samadhi, inspiring all to observe niyams, initiating power- ful paramhansas, and empowering sadhus and devotees with divine powers; he accomplished extraordinary works, such as inspiring his own worship, having shastras about him written, building mandirs, guiding devotees to attain the state of brahmarup and granting them moksha, and promising to remain manifest on earth through the Gunatit Satpurush.

5) List four names of Aksharbrahman?

Ans: sachchidanand, luminous chidakash, aksharbrahman: the abode (dham), aksharbrahman: as the eternal servant of parabrahman in akshardham, aksharbrahman: manifest on earth as the gunatit satpurush

July 2012

1) Give two meanings of nirgun swaroop of Parabrahman?

Ans: The two meanings are he does not possess a mayik (mundane) form or any mayik attributes.

2) Which way Swaminarayan maha mantra can be done by following the upasana bhakti?

Ans: In Swaminarayan maha mantra which Swami, along with Narayan. In this manner, the chanting of both Swami and Narayan serves as a perfect means to liberation.

3) What is the similarity between Bhagwan, brahma, Vishnu and Shiv in Vach P: 4?

Ans: In Vach P: 4 "God is the king of the kings of countless villages in the form of brahmands and the chiefs of those villages in the form of brahmands are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv.

4) What other moksha dhams are talked about in front of Bhagwan's Akshardham?

Ans: In front of Bhagwan's Akshardham, they are talking about the adobe's of other Gods.

5) What way can we understand Shreeji Maharaj's path of jnan?

Ans: We can understand Shreeji Maharaj's path of jnan in such a way that one does not malign the form of God in any way.

March 2012

1) What are three forms of Ishwar?

Ans: The three forms of Ishwar are virat, sutratma and avyakrut,

2) What are three main beliefs of Jiva?

Ans: The three forms of Jiva are atomic size, intermediate size, and omnipresent size

3) What talk did Gunatitanand Swami explained to Madha Suthar of Jetalpur while talking to him about his own principle?

Ans: While imparting his principle to a devotee named Madha Suthar of Jetalpur, Gunatitanand Swami explained: "Just as there is Narnarayan, Lakshminarayan and Radhakrishna, there is Swaminarayan. The understanding that I am always remembered alongside Shriji Maharaj encompasses our principle"

4) In which two Vachnamurats did Shreeji Maharaj talk about the five eternal tattvas?

Ans: The two Vachnamruts Shreeji Maharaj talked about are Vach Gad I 7 and Vach G III 10.

5) How to understand the difference between avatar and avatri by Gunatitanand Swami?

Ans: "The difference between the avatars and their source is not like that. The difference should be known to be like that between the king and a nobleman, an archer and the arrow, and the stars and the moon."

July 2011

1) What are five eternal tattvas in Shree Swaminarayan darshan?

Ans: In Shree Swaminarayan darshan the five eternal tattvas are Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman, Ishwar, Jiva and Maya.

2) Why is Parabrahman one and unique?

Ans: Parabrahman is one and unique because of nobody has the capacity to become like him, in terms of both his form or qualities.

3) In which shastras describes incidents of Shree Maharaj's samadhi?

Ans: Shreeji Maharaj samadhi incidents were described in Satsang Jivan, Shri hariLila Kalpataru , and Bhakta Chintamani

4) Shreeji Maharaj in presence of himself where and by what name did he installed his own murti?

Ans: Shreeji Maharaj installed his own murti in his presence at Vartal and under the name of 'Harikrishna Maharaj

5) What does Jivanmukti mean?

Ans: Jivanmukti means liberation while still having a body, i.e. to experience total absence of misery, become brahmarup, and experience the presence and bliss of Paramatma whilst alive.

Exercise

1. Shreeji Maharaj in presence of himself where and by what name did he installed his own murti?
2. What does Mukti mimansa means?
3. In the means of antaryami mukti Sadhana besides Parabrahman form which other form does Shreeji Maharaj trying to explain?
4. What is the fifth eternal tattva in Shree Swaminarayan darshan?
5. What tattva is Ishwar?
6. Which are the two most important reasons out of the six reasons of Pragat manifestation to be known?
7. Even though haribhakta found Pragat form of God, when do they still suffer great loss?
8. How to understand the difference of avatar and avatari for Gunatitanand Swami?
9. With whom you can get Parabrahman's perfect faith?
10. What kind of joined relationship does brahman and Parabrahman have due to their most loved anandi nitya?
11. According to Vach Karyani 10, by whose cause everything happens, and whose cause nothing happens?
12. Who is include in the word "Swaminarayan" in the form of maha mantra?
13. What are Shreeji Maharaj's extraordinary works?
14. According to Vach G 11-9 how to understand the form you have been?
15. According to Swami ni Vato 1.88 how to understand an person who is coming running towards us?
16. In which shastras did Shreeji Maharaj put all his incidents and his teachings in?
17. What can you gain from videha mukti?
18. What are the eight layers that brahmand is encircled by?
19. If one has firm conviction of sakar then what happens?
20. According to Vach Vartal 12 if one finds fault in Bhagwan what happens to the jiva?
21. Why Parabrahman always remains one and unique?
22. When Jivanmukta acquires brahmic state how do they remain?
23. What three extraordinary powers does Parabrahman possess?
24. Why Parabrahman always remains one and unique?
25. In the presence of Shreeji Maharaj which state and how several haribhaktos experienced happiness in their lives?
26. How are ishwaras after performing through their form and nature?
27. In way is Aksharbrahman sakar and in which way is nirakar?
28. When does the virtues of brahma comes about Jiva according to Vach G II 31?
29. What did Maharaj include in the Satsangjivan scriptures?
30. What are the five tanmatras?

Topic heading of the reference

Give the topic heading of the reference. (Total Marks: 5)

March 2014

- Q1 “The lokas of the other devas are like Narak when compared to the Akshardham of Bhagwan.” (16)
a. Parabrahma: Ocean of bliss
- Q2 “The abode of God is without a beginning and without an end; it is divine, infinite and indivisible; and it is characterised by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss.” (111)
a. Aksharbrahma: The abode
- Q3 “Although Purushottam Bhagvan is the Kshetragna of all kshetragnas, He is still not subject to change. Moreover, the disturbances of objects that cause disturbances, such as maya and other factors, do not influence Purushottam Bhagwan.” (92)
a. Divine through His all-pervasive Anvay form
- Q4 “The Sant is myself and I am the Sant. Thus says God Himself, The Sant is My very image without the slightest difference.” (84)
a. Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s complete manifestation through the Sant
- Q5 “When Bhagwan comes on earth for the welfare of the jiva, he brings along his Akshardham and chaitanyamurti parshads with him.” (112)
a. Aksharbrahma: In the form of a Gunatit Satpurush in this Lok

July 2013

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a. Aksharbrahma: In the form of a Gunatit Satpurush in this Lok

March 2013

- Q1 “Bhagwan. who possesses a definite murti, forever resides in his luminous Akshardham.” (31)
a. The Vyaterik form of Parabrahma in Akshardham
- Q2 “If one doubts God, then one cannot overcome maya.” (88)
a. Loss due to perceiving human traits in God
- Q3 “Therefore, that Sant is the sustainer of the world.” (84)
a. Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s complete manifestation through the Sant
- Q4 “Mulji sharmane diksham dadansya prajayate.” (114)

- a. Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahma: Scriptural references
- Q5 “Not a male or a female, but it is sattamatre chaitanya.”
- a. The swarup of the jiva and its virtues

July 2012

- Q1 “Tene jeeti karyo jejekar, ethi kon moto avatar.” (69)
- a. Granting his devotees the spiritual status of Brahman
- Q2 “Anant avatar hari ke hoi, hari marji vaarat savee.” (54)
- a. Shriji Maharaj Sarvopari: Scriptural references (Shri Haricharitamrutsagar)
- Q3 “His greatness is not because of seat. His greatness is eternal.” (120)
- a. Gunatitanand Swami Aksharbrahma: A Signed Letter
- Q4 “Bhagwan is the one and spiritual efforts are the zeros.” (12)
- a. The importance of understanding the form of Parabrahma
- Q5 “One attains atyantik kalyan from the pratyaksh form of God.” (78)
- a. The benefits of pragat

March 2012

- Q1 “Parabrahma possesses kartum, akartum, and anyathakartum strength.” (17)
- a. Parabrahma: The all-powerful
- Q2 “All types of happiness reside in Bhagwan’s swarup.” (16)
- a. Parabrahma: Ocean of bliss
- Q3 “This topic of convictions is extremely complex, I am afraid discussing it.” (73)
- a. Developing conviction in manifest God is most difficult
- Q4 “Eva Akshardham mul to Gunatitanand chhe.” (116-117)
- a. Kavya Kusumavali
- Q5 “Akshar takes on another form and is ever present to serve Purushottam Narayan.” (111)
- a. Aksharbrahma: As the eternal servant of Parabrahma in Akshardham

July 2011

- Q1 “The knowledge of Bhagwan’s swarup and the knowledge of Bhagwan’s greatness are the two most extraordinary means to attain moksha.” (11)
- a. The importance of understanding the form of Parabrahma
- Q2 “Aksharbrahma is the abode of Bhagwan.” (110)
- a. Aksharbrahma: The abode
- Q3 “Due to ignorance the jiva believes the indriyas, antakaran to be it’s swarup, but in reality it is separate from them.” (134)
- a. Jiva: A tattva distinct from the body, indriyas, and antakaran
- Q4 “A person should believe that the pratyaksha Bhagwan that he has attained possesses a divya svarup, and is the ‘avatari’ the cause of all the avatars.” (50)
- a. Difference between avatar and avatari
- Q5 “Mara janane anta kale, jarur tedva aavvu.” (70)
- a. Promising his devotees ultimate liberation

Exercise

1. “Understanding the pragat form of God is true gnan.”

2. "That extremely powerful Bhagwan, enters Akshar and assumes the swarup of Akshar."
3. "Jem so so shunia sara kara, pa ek na kar jo agada; Te sarvado sano malsa, ja kara chhe kadup kagda."
4. "Akshabrahma is the dham of Bhagwan."
5. "The entities evolved out of the three gunas of maya, namely the five bhuts, the indriyas, the antahkaran, and the presiding deities are never present in God at any time."
6. "In the jiva who has gnanta, karta and bhokta is not independent, but is by the wishes of Parmatma."
7. "Without understanding Maharaj to be Purushottam, one cannot go to Akshardham."
8. "This sadhu is Akshar, one must see the divyabhav and manushiya bhav as one."
9. "All types of happiness reside in Bhagwan's form."
10. "Aksharmuktas in Akshardham do not lose their uniqueness."
11. "Bhagwan resides in His Akshardham – which is full of chaitanya and full of divine light – and possesses an eternal and definite swarup."
12. "Bhagwan is the one and spiritual efforts are the zeros."
13. "Only one who is brahmarup has the right to offer bhakti to Purushottam."
14. "The relationship between the four taattvo and Parabrahma is that of sharir-shariri."
15. "Parabrahma is always present in the murtiman form in Akshardham."
16. "Samrath murti sukhhari, dhari na dharisa koi, Sarvopari chhe Shri Hari, Sahajanand Prabhu Soi."
17. "Understand the murti within the divine light to be this pratyaksh Maharaj."
18. "Jivanmukti means the jiva whilst in a human body attains the state of brahamrup."
19. "The abode of God is without a beginning and without an end; it is divine, infinite and indivisible; and it is characterised by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss."
20. "Those who do not understand Maharaj as he is and the sadhu as he is are eternally unfortunate."
21. "This clear description of Aksharbrahma tattva described by Bhagwan Swaminarayan is his unique gift to the Hindu philosophy."
22. "Jem so so sunia sara kara, pa ek na kar jo agada; Te sarvado sano malsa, ja kara chhe kadup kagda."
23. "One who understands Brahma attains Parabrahma."
24. "The most extraordinary spiritual endeavour for liberation is to understand God as eternally having a form."
25. "The difference should be known to be like that between a sovereign emperor and a subordinate chieftain, an archer and the arrow, and the stars and the moon."
26. "He understands Bhagwan to be nirlep even though he is the all-doer."
27. "Ava mota na darshan muki, avya cho kutch me chuki."
28. "There is no difference between the murti in Akshardham which is above the three gunas and this pratyaksh murti."
29. "However, a jiva cannot indulge in the fruits of its karmas according to its own will or as a direct consequence of its karmas."
30. "Without Shri Hari entering him in fact, without Shri Hari, Virat Purush is not even capable of standing up."

Main points of the topics

1. Swaminarayan Tattvagnan

- 1.1. Significance of the Word 'Tattvagnan'
- 1.2. Naming of 'Swaminarayan Darshan'
 - 1.2.1. Sri Swaminarayan Darshan
 - 1.2.2. Aksharbrahm-Parabrahm Darshan
- 1.3. Five Eternal Tattvas
 - 1.3.1. Forms of Tatva
 - 1.3.2. Inter-connections of the Tattvas

2. Parabrahman: Introduction

- 2.1. The Need to Understand the Form of Parabrahman
- 2.2. Parabrahman: A Real, Eternal and Distinct Tattva
- 2.3. Parabrahman: Both the Objective and the Means
- 2.4. Parabrahman: One and Unique
- 2.5. Parabrahman: Sagun and Nirgun
- 2.6. Parabrahman: Anvay and Vyatirek
- 2.7. Parabrahman: Ocean of Bliss
- 2.8. Parabrahman: Omniscient
- 2.9. Parabrahman: The All-Powerful.
- 2.10. Parabrahman: The Ruler and Controller of Infinite Universes
- 2.11. Parabrahman: The Giver of the Fruits of Karma and of Liberation
- 2.12. Parabrahman: All-Doer
 - 2.12.1. The necessity to understand Parabrahm as all door
 - Benefits of understanding God as all doer
 - Disadvantages of not understanding God as all-doer
- 2.13. Parabrahman: Forever Possesses a Divine Form
 - 2.13.1. The necessity to understand Parabrahman as sakaar
 - Benefits of understanding Parabrahman to have a form
 - Disadvantages of understanding Parabrahman as formless
 - 2.13.2. Bhagwan swaminarayan's inclination for the belief that god has a form
 - 2.13.3. Why should one believe that Parabrahman possesses a form
 - 2.13.4. How does Parabrahman possess a form?
 - Parabrahman has a form and is vyatirek in akshardham
 - What is the form of Parabrahman when He is vyatirek?
 - Antaryami form is like the sakar manifest form
- 2.14. Parabrahman: Supreme and the Avatari
 - 2.14.1. Necessity to understand Shreeji Maharaj as Supreme
 - Conviction in God's supreme form to attain Akshardham
 - Bhagwan Swaminarayan's insistence for conviction in God's supreme form
 - 2.14.2. Avtarvaad
 - The purpose for the manifestations of Avatars
 - The cause of all Avatars

- Significance of Avatarvad
- Difference between Avatars and Avatari

2.14.3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan: Supreme Cause of All Avatars

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan Supreme: As expressed in Shastras of the Sampradaya
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan Supreme: In terms of purpose, divine powers and works

2.14.4. Essence of Maharaj's discourse about His own form

- Various discourses regarding his own form
- Developing conviction in manifest God is most difficult
- A range of different audiences

2.15. Parabrahman: Forever Manifest- Pragat

2.15.1. The necessity of Parabrahman's manifest form

- Benefits of Attaining, Maintaining Conviction in and Worshipping Manifest God
- Disadvantages of Not Attaining Conviction in and Worshipping Manifest God

2.15.2. The significance of Parabrahman's manifestation

2.15.3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's complete manifestation through the Sant

- Aksharbrahman – The Sant through whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifests

2.16. Parabrahman: Forever Divine

2.16.1. The necessity of understanding Parabrahman as divine

- Benefits of understanding as divine and flawless
- Loss due to perceiving human traits in God

2.16.2. How is Parabrahman divine?

3. Aksharbrahman: Introduction

3.1. True Definition of the Aksharbrahman Tattva

3.2. Necessity of Understanding the Form of Aksharbrahman

3.2.1. To attain true conviction in Parabrahman

3.2.2. To become Brahmrup-Aksharup

- Shreeji Maharaj's command to become Brahmrup and offer upasna to Parabrahman
- Necessity of becoming Brahmrup
- Necessity of Aksharbrahm to help one become Aksharup

3.3. Aksharbrahman: Unique Among All Other Tattvas

3.4. The Form of Aksharbrahman

- The anvay and the vyatirek forms of Aksharbrahman
- The Sagun and Nirgun aspects of Aksharbrahman
- The sakar nirakar forms of Aksharbrahman

3.5. Aksharbrahman: Forms and Functions

3.5.1. Who is Aksharbrahman in the Form of the Satpurush on earth?

- Gunatitanand Swami aksharbrahman: Scriptural references.
- Gunatitanand Swami aksharbrahman: An authentic letter
- Gunatitanand Swami aksharbrahman: Other historical evidences

4. Ishwars

4.1. The form of ishvars

4.1.1. Ishwar's anvay-vyatirek form

4.2. Similarities and differences between ishvars and jivas

4.3. Who is included in the ishwar category?

5. **Jivas**

5.1. Form, characteristics and qualities of a jiva

5.1.1. Jiva: A tattva distinct from the body, indriyas and antahkaran

5.1.2. Jiva: Unborn, ageless and immortal

5.1.3. Jiva: The embodiment of knowledge and knower

5.1.4. Jiva: The knower, doer and enjoyer

5.1.5. Anvay and Vyatirek forms of a Jiva

5.1.6. Jiva: The size of an atom

5.2. Jivas: infinite in number

5.3. Karma and Reincarnation

6. **Maya**

6.1. Form and Qualities of Maya

6.2. Form of the universe

- Principle of cause and effect
- Process of creation
- Process of dissolution

7. **Form of the Universe**

7.1. Mukti Mimansa: Deep Reflection on Liberation

7.1.1. The forms of attachment

7.1.2. The forms of liberation

Brief note on the topic

Write the main points on **any one** the following. (In 15 lines.) (Total Marks: 10)

March 2015

- **Necessity of understanding the form of Parabrahman as sakar.**

- Bhagwan Swaminarayan has placed great emphasis on the understanding that God possesses a form. It is absolutely essential for every aspirant to understand the sakar form of Parabrahman.

Benefits of understanding parabrahman to have a form

- Understanding God to eternally have a form is the most extraordinary spiritual endeavour for liberation (G III 36).
- Only one who has conviction that God always reigns supreme and possesses a divine form will go to Akshardham (G II 9).
- If a person, who has conviction that God possesses a form, inadvertently commits a sin, by the grace of God, all those sins will be forgiven and he will ultimately be liberated (G II 39).
- Through firmly believing God to possess a form and thus doing his upasana, one is able to acquire spiritual powers and qualities from God (G I 64).
- Kal, karma and maya are unable to impose their power over one who has firm conviction that God has a form. After leaving his mortal body, such a person will go to the abode of God and forever remain in his service and in his presence (G I 37).

Disadvantages of understanding parabrahman as formless

One who does not have the firm conviction that Parabrahman possesses a form and believes him to be nirakar (formless):

- Does not ever acquire any spiritual powers from God (G I 64).
- Commits a sin much graver than even the five grave sins (G I 71, G II 39).
- Is regarded as committing blasphemy against God (G II 9, V 2).
- Will find that all his virtues become flaws (L 16).
- Creates a great obstacle for himself on the path of liberation (G III 36).
- Thus, in the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has explicitly and repeatedly stated the advantages of believing God to be sakar, and the disadvantages of believing him to be nirakar. He has also insistently commanded one to have firm conviction that God has a form, and not to believe him to be formless, as doing so is not only sinful (G I 71), but also blasphemous (G II 9).
- He says in Vachanamrut G II 39: "Therefore one should keep a firm conviction of the form of God and staunchly worship him. This is my message to you. So please imbibe these words firmly in your lives." Many of those who believe in God consider God to be formless. However, Shriji Maharaj has strongly refuted the belief that God is formless, and has extensively explained the fact that God has a form so that his disciples do not knowingly or unknowingly malign God's form and spoil their liberation.

OR

- **Aksharbrahman: Manifest on this earth in the form of the Gunatit Satpurush.**

- Swaminarayan tattvagnan teaches that Aksharbrahman also manifests upon earth in a human form.
- Shriji Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut G I 71: "When God incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the jivas, he is always accompanied by his Akshardham, his attendants -who are formed of chaitanya - and all of his divine powersTherefore, a devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others."

- Gunatitanand Swami has also narrated in his discourses that God incarnates from Akshardham, along with his Aksharbrahman, "Maharaj has come here (to earth) with his Akshardham, parshads and with all his powers" (SNV 1.1, 3.41, 4.57, 5.32).
 - Through his own resolve and divinity, just as Parabrahman can incarnate wherever he wishes without leaving his abode, Aksharbrahman, while serving Parabrahman in Akshardham, can simultaneously manifest in innumerable cosmoses to accompany Parabrahman as his servant. It is like the maya of a magician: like Purushottam, Akshar can assume, and appear in infinite different forms wherever necessary. On earth, Akshar appears to be an ordinary human or sadhu, but in fact he harbours immense divinity, strength and power. His birth and passing away, etc. are simply a figure of speech in worldly terms. His way of assuming and leaving the mortal body is divine rather than worldly, since he is not dependent upon kal, karma and maya. The phases of childhood, youth, old age, disease, deterioration and other states of being are perceived due to his yogic powers of creating an illusion. In reality, he remains untouched by these mayik qualities. He remains absolutely unchanged - he is exactly the same here on earth as he is in Akshardham. There is not the slightest difference between the two forms from a tattvik perspective.
 - **Even the antaryami form of Parabrahman is still sakar – has a form.**
 - The vyatirek form of Parabrahman is certainly divine and like that of a human being. Also, Shriji Maharaj has explained in the Vachanamrut that the all-pervasive antaryami (indweller) and anway aspects of Parabrahman should also be considered to possess a form:
 - G I 45: "Despite the fact that Purushottam Bhagwan's brahmarup light, which pervades all jivas and ishvars as their antaryami, is formless, it should be considered to possess a form. This is because it governs the granting of the deserved fruits of karmas to all jivas and ishvars according to their respective karmas. This power of governing makes it function as if it possesses a form. Thus, that divine light should be considered to possess a form as well."
 - K 4: "God possesses a definite form in his Akshardham, but through his antaryami powers, he pervades the jivas and functions as if he possesses a form. Therefore, even that antaryami form should be considered to possess a form."
 - Moreover, Shriji Maharaj has explained in several Vachanamruts that while an aspirant performs spiritual endeavours, he should understand God to be manifest with a definite form within his jivatma. Then, on attaining the state of sakshatkar (spiritual realization of God), the aspirant sees only God as manifest with a definite form within him and everywhere. This is explained in two Vachanamrut references:
 - G I 23: "[One] believes his own self to be chaitanya, transcending the influences of the three states - waking, dream and deep sleep, and the three bodies -sthul, sukshma and karan. This devotee worships God, while beholding God's form within his own self. As a result, he sees his own self, which transcends the three states and the three bodies, as being extremely full of divine light. Within that light, he sees the form of God, just as it is in its incarnate form, as being extremely luminous."
 - K 7: "One who has realized God through such a conviction experiences the following: Wherever he casts his eyes - among all the mobile and immobile forms - he sees the form of God as if it is before his eyes, the same form that constantly remains in Akshardham even after the dissolution of the body, the brahmand and Prakruti-Purush. He does not see even an atom without Parabrahman within it. These are the characteristics of one who has attained God-realization."
- Therefore, as per Shriji Maharaj's teachings, the antaryami form of God, which pervades the jivas, ishvars and every atom in the infinite universes, is also like definite form. For this reason, he states in Vachanamrut V 13: "Even though the shastras describe God as pervasive, he actually possesses a definite form. In those shastras, he is described as pervasive in the sense that, even though he possesses a definite form, by using his own powers, he gives darshan to all while residing in one place. But he is not pervasive in the sense of being formless like akash."

OR

- **The necessity for becoming aksharrup-brahmarup: To be able to offer devotion free of obstacles.**
- A devotee who strives to offer devotion to God may face countless obstacles. The main hurdles that cause difficulties are lust, anger, greed, taste, affection, ego, envy, calumny, jealousy, love and hate, attachment to family and relatives, attachment to the panchvishays, desires, and other shortcomings etc. Due to these shortcomings we are drawn to the panchvishays, and perceive human traits in God and the Satpurush such that our association with them is broken.
- In Vachanamrut L 6, Shriji Maharaj explains the root cause of our own faults, and how they create obstacles on our path of devotion, "All flaws reside in the flaw of identifying one's self with the body." Also, in Vachanamrut G III 39, in saying that identifying one's self as the body is maya itself, Shriji Maharaj explains, "Maya is nothing but the sense of I-ness towards the body and my-ness towards anything related to the body."
- He further explains in Vachanamrut G I 44, "Therefore, as long as a person believes the body to be his true self, his entire understanding is totally useless."
- By offering devotion while maintaining the belief that one is the body, the obstacles a devotee endures in his endeavours are explained by Shriji Maharaj:
G I 23: "As long as one has not attained this elevated spiritual state, one is subject to obstacles, even if one is a devotee of God. Shivji, for example, did not behave in such an elevated spiritual state and was therefore enticed by the beauty of Mohini. Brahma also did not behave in such a state and thus became infatuated on seeing Saraswati. Naradji also did not behave in such an elevated spiritual state and consequently harboured a desire to marry. More-over, because Indra, Chandra and others were not behaving in such a state, their reputations were also blemished due to their mistakes. "Furthermore, if a person has not developed this elevated spiritual state, he will perceive worldly attributes even in God, even if he himself is a devotee of God. King Parikshit, for example, was not such a devotee, and so he raised doubts about the divinity of Shri Krishna Bhagwan after hearing of the ras episode. On the other hand, because Shukji was such an elevated devotee, he had no doubts whatsoever."
- G III 1: "If the virtue of atma-realization is lacking, then when the body experiences pain or pleasure, that devotee's vruttis [state of mind] become disturbed. Then, one develops love for anything one considers pleasurable and an aversion for anything one considers to be full of misery. In this way, one's mind becomes vitiated." G III 21: "Indeed, the inner enemies of lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, subtle jealousy, etc., will certainly distress one who is unable to behave as the atma. Therefore, if one offers devotion without attaining atma-realization, one's true nature is sure to be exposed in this Satsang fellowship."
- By offering devotion and believing oneself to be atma, or brahman, and distinct from the body, one does not face obstacles of lust and other flaws. Therefore, in Vachanamrut G II 35, Shriji Maharaj explains the reason for developing resolute atma-realization: "The only reason why I deliver such talks about knowledge of the atma is that if one can realize one's atma to be distinct from the body, then one will no longer harbour any love for one's body or for one's relatives. Then, there would no longer be any hindrances in the bhakti of God. This is the only reason."
- Gunatitanand Swami also says: SNV 1.141: "In this universe there is no man who does not desire a woman and no woman who does not desire a man. To separate each from the other, Maharaj has written one shlok: 'Nijatanam brahmarupam ...' i.e. believe one's true self as Brahman, not the body. Just as there are no stones no matter how deep one digs into the soil of Gujarat deep down into the earth, similarly, there are no faults in one who is brahmarup."
- SNV 1.228: "Therefore, to believe oneself as brahmarup and that God resides within, is the state of spiritual wisdom; that is superior [to samadhi] and it is free of obstacles. Without that, even Sachchidanand Swami, who used to experience samadhi, suffered. Hence, one must become a spiritually wise devotee rather than an affectionate devotee."

July 2014

1. Means to attain redemptive virtues and one develops love for god.

- Explaining how devotees are able to attain the redemptive virtues of God, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in G I 62: "If a sadhu develops perfect conviction in God, then he will acquire those redemptive virtues of God. What is that conviction? Well, he realizes that God is not like kal, not like karma, not like swabhav, not like maya, and not like Purush. He realizes God to be distinct from everything, their controller and cause; yet, despite being their cause, he is beyond their influence. A person who has cultivated a conviction in the manifest form of God in this manner will never be deflected in any way. Even if he hears misleading shastras, or if he hears the talks of misleading philosophers, or even if his own antahkaran raises doubts within himself, his conviction of God never wavers in any way whatsoever.
- "A person with such a conviction in God is said to have a rapport with God.... one who has developed a rapport with God by having a firm conviction of him acquires the redemptive virtues of God. As a result, just as God is unattached in all aspects and is capable of doing as he chooses, such a devotee also becomes extremely capable and unattached."
- Such a profound and exceptional state is attained by a devotee through having a clear understanding of God as the all-doer.

One Develops Love for God

- Shriji Maharaj has said in several Vachanamruts, such as G I 56, S 15, G II 9, that nothing else remains to be done by one who develops unparalleled love, like that of the gopis, for God. Explaining the means of developing such profound love, Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut G I 59: "A person should have the following understanding: Firstly, conviction in God, i.e. 'He who I have attained is undoubtedly God himself.' He should also be a believer in God. Furthermore, he should realize the divine powers of God, i.e. 'This God is the master of Brahmamahol, Golok, Shwetedwip, and all the other abodes. He is the master of countless millions of brahmands and is the all-doer.' He should never believe Purush, kal, karma, maya, the three gunas, the 24 elements, or Brahma and the other deities to be the creators of this brahmand; instead, he should realize only Purushottam Bhagwan to be the creator and the antaryami of all. Such an understanding, along with faith in the manifest form of God, is the only means to develop unparalleled love for God."

OR

2. Difference Between the Avatars and Avatari

What needs to be clearly understood is that the avatars and the avatari are both different from one another in respect to their ontological forms and nature. That is, avatari, Parabrahman, does not himself take the form of the avatars, but pervades the various forms of Virat-Purush to infuse them with the necessary powers.

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami explains this with an analogy in his talks: SNV 6.33: "How should one understand the difference between an avatar and the source of the avatars?" Then someone said, "Like an actor and his role." The Swami said, "The difference between the avatars and their source is not like that. The difference should be known to be like that between the king and a nobleman, an archer and the arrow, and the stars and the moon."

In the same way, Gopalanand Swami, a master in ashtanga yoga, has also explained the difference between an avatar and the avatari in his talks:

"What is the difference between Purushottam and the other avatars? Just as there is a difference between an arrow and archer, an emperor and a regional ruler, and the sun and stars, there is also a difference between Purushottam and all the avatars" (Gopalanand Swamini Vato 1.152).

Shri Avinashanand Brahmachari has also described the tattvic difference between an avatar and the avatari in his poetry through several examples:

Avatar ne avatareeno, jene vivek thay;

Te jay Akshardhamma, mahamukta kevay ...1

Meaning: One who understands the difference between an avatar and avatari is known as a mahamukta and goes to Akshardham ...

Avataree avatarne, sarkha jeha jane;

Tene vivekee na janvo, kahu shastra pramane ...2

Meaning: As per the shastras, those who understand the avatari

and avatars to be alike cannot be called wise...
Chakravarti bhoopalne, kevo khandeeyo raja;
Te to viveki kahe nahi, kahe murkh samaja ...3

*Meaning: One who calls an emperor a regional king,
Such a person is not considered wise, and is called foolish by society...*

Samudra ne sarovarne, kem sarkhu Levay;
Avatar ne avatareene, tu/ ya nav kevay ...4

*Meaning: How can a lake (sarovar) and the sea (samudra) be regarded as the same.
Similarly, an avatar cannot be compared to the avatari.*

Tii-riina gan chhe nabhma, valee janyo tya chand;
Tene barobar lai kahe, kaiye matina mand...5

*Meaning: Those who see both the stars and moon in the sky
as equal are said to have low intellect...*

Vadvanal vali vahneene, kahe tu/ya masal;
Jane tern avatareene, hoi buddhina biil...6

*Meaning: One who equates an underwater volcano with a flame torch,
and one who equates the avatari [with the avatars] have a childish intellect ...*

Chintamane ne hiramane, tene ek je jane;
Tene mandmati janvo, kahu shastra pramane ...7

*Meaning: As per the shastras, a person who considers a
chinta- mani - a wish-fulfilling stone - the same as a diamond has a dull intellect ...*

Avatar ne avatareema, bhed anant apar;
Drashtant pramane jan jyo, khotu nathi /agar ...8

*Meaning: The differences between an avatar and the avatari are endless and vast.
Understand the differences as per the analogies given;
indeed nothing is wrong in this statement ... (Pad 252).*

Therefore, from an ontological perspective, there is a fundamental difference between the avatars and Parabrahman, the root cause of the avatars. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said in Vachanamrut G II 9 that understanding the avatars and avatari as the same is blasphemy against God:

"One should realize the manifest God that one has attained to forever possess a divine form and to be the 'avatari', the cause of all the avatars. If, however, one does not realize this, and instead realizes God to be formless or like the other avatars, then that is regarded as committing blasphemy against God."

Moreover, it is said in the Shrihari Charitramrut Sagar (27.5.13-14), the Shrihari Lila Kalpataru (2.49.8) and in the Avinashanand Kavya (Pad 252) that those who understand Parabrahman to be like other avatars have a dull intellect.

1. Granting His Devotees the Spiritual Status of Brahman

Shriji Maharaj had come on earth to destroy the base instincts, such as lust, anger, etc., and worldly desires of all jivas, and make them brahmarup. Even amid his various other activities, he never deviated from this aim. Through his association and teachings, he uprooted the material desires of his sadhus and householders, made them brahmarup and elevated their spiritual state to that of liberated souls. Great devotees such as King Ambrish, King Janak, Prahlad, Dhruv, Mira and Narsinh had taken birth in the past, however with the grace of Shriji Maharaj countless men and women, renunciates and householders attained jivanmukti (state of a liberated soul whilst still alive). By remaining detached from the world they were able to experience the divine bliss of atma and Paramatma.

Enabling countless sadhus and devotees to attain this spiritual state with such ease was one of Maharaj's great accomplishments. Due to this all sadhus and devotees were convinced of Maharaj's supremacy.

On one occasion, to examine the understanding of the sadhus and devotees, Shriji Maharaj commented that previous avatars had accomplished works like killing demons, whereas he had not. He then questioned them about why they still called him God. First, the sadhus replied with firm conviction, "We are not to be swayed by your divine actions, since we have firm conviction in who you are. If the

sun says it is not the sun, or the wind says it is not the wind, who would believe them? Therefore, no matter what you say, you are indeed God."

Then, the sadhus said, "Maharaj! It is true that previous avatars destroyed demons and you have not. However, those demons were prey to their many flaws, such as lust, etc., and it is these flaws which you have destroyed. Therefore, it is not the demons themselves, but the demonic nature within which you have destroyed. You are thus the avatari of all avatars."

Nishkulanand Swami has recorded this above reply in detail in chapter 105 of the Bhakta Chintamani:

Evii kiim lobh ne je krodh, mahii jabar chhe jaga jodh;
Tene jeetee karyo je jekiir, ethi kon moto avatiir...3
Evii sur asur baliyii, tene pan kiim krodhe galiyii;
Evii kiim krodh lobh bhiiree, suriisur mookyii jene miiree...5
Teno niish karyo niradhiir, tethee kon moto avatiir...6
Evii kiim krodh lobh moha, man indriya iidi je samoha;
Tene vash karyo chhe ii viir, ethee kon moto avatiir...16

In this manner, the paramhansas described how demons had fallen prey to these base instincts themselves and were killed, and since you have destroyed these base instincts from within people rather than killing them, you are the avatari of all avatars. All these flaws hinder one in attaining liberation. By destroying them, you have given us divine bliss, and have granted countless jivas ultimate liberation; thus, you are Parabrahman manifest.

Shriji Maharaj was very pleased with this understanding of his disciples.

OR

2. Gunatitanand Swami Aksharbrahm: Purushottam Charitra, Kirtan Kaustubhmala & Kirtanavali

Purushottam Charitra

At the behest of Darbar Abhaysinhji of Lodhika, Purushottam Charitra, a shastra in the Vraj (Hindi) language, was composed by the great poet Dalpatram. He has deeply praised Gunatitanand Swami:

Vandu Guniiteetiinand Swiimee, jehee par reejhe Antaryiimee;
Bhagvadviirtii satat karahee, dhyiin Dharmanandan ko dharahee.
Uttamkulmii dharee avatar, Shreehari kiiij tajyo sansiir;
Rakhe dharna puni dharna rakhiive, iidi hi Akshar iip kahiive.

Meaning: I bow to Gunatitanand Swami with whom the An- taryami (God) is extremely pleased. He (Gunatitanand Swami) con- tinually engages in spiritual discourses, and meditates on the sonof Dharma (Shriji Maharaj). Born in a noble family, he renounced the world for Shriji Maharaj. He observes dharna and makes others observe dharna also. He is known as Mui Akshar (2.19-20).

Kirtan Kaustubhmala

Acharya Shri Viharilalji Maharaj has himself written this text, in which he says:

Aksharmoorti Guniiteetiinand Swiimee,
tene iipyii vartmiin Pote piileene pachhi paliivyii, janane dai ghanu jniin .

Meaning: Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami initiated me and guided me to practice the religious vows. He followed them and inspired others to follow them; he imparted much [spiritual] knowl- edge to people (p. 13).

Kirtanavali

Jagdishanand Brahmachari was a very intelligent poet from Ju- nagadh, and a learned scholar of Sanskrit commentaries. He has written many kirtans describing Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Ak- sharbrahman. For example:

Akshar Moo/ hameshii Hari jemii rahe re,
Te to pote dharee manushya avatar re;

Jooniigadhmi jogee thai pote rahyii re,

Swiimee Guniiteetiinand udiir re.....

Meaning: Mul Akshar, in whom God always resides, He has manifested in human form; He resided in Junagadh as a yogi (sadhu), Swami Gunatitanand is generous... (Pad 1).

March 2014

1. AksharBrahm Parabrahm Darshan

As mentioned above, the word 'Swami' in the 'Swaminarayan' mahamantra refers to Gunatitanand Swami, the incarnate form of Aksharbrahman, who is Parabrahman's abode - Akshardham. 'Narayan' is Parabrahman, the cause of all incarnations, also known as Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Sahajanand Swami.

Therefore, this doctrine can also be termed 'Aksharbrahma-Parabrahma Darshan', which incorporates Bhagwan Swaminarayan's principle of becoming akshar and worshipping Parabrahman.

Shriji Maharaj elaborates on this maxim in the Vachanamrut:

L 7: "Only one who is brahmarup has the right to offer bhakti to Purushottam What constitutes bhakti? It is when one becomes brahmarup and performs the bhakti of the manifest form of God."

G II 3: "One should develop oneness with one's jivatma and with that of Brahman, and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him."

The Vedic principle of 'Aksharbrahman-Parabrahman' is indicated in the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagavad Gita (collectively known as the Prasthantrayi). A few references are given below:

Yenii'ksharam purusham veda satyam proviicha tam tattvato
brahmavidyaim .

Meaning: [The wise teacher teaches that true knowledge of both Akshar and Purushottam (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.13).

Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati."

Meaning: He who knows Brahman becomes brahmarup (Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.9).

Brahmavid iipnoti param.

Meaning: One who truly knows Brahman attains Parabrahman (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1).

Kim tad Brahman?

Meaning: What is that Brahman? (Gita 8.1).

Aksharam Brahma paramam.

Meaning: Aksharbrahman, is above jivas, ishvars, maya and muktas (Gita 8.3).

Kutasthokshara uchyate.

Meaning: Aksharbrahman is eternal (Gita 15.16).

Uttamaha purushastvanyaha paramiitmetudyihrataha.

Meaning: The one who transcends both kshar (perishable) and

Akshar is the supreme; he is known as Paramatma (Gita 15.17). Maharshi Vyas has explained the profound knowledge of the

Aksharbrahman-Parabrahman tattvas in the Brahmasutras by the first statement 'Athiito Brahmajignisii' .

Meaning: "And now an enquiry into Brahman (both Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman) is to be made" (Brahmasutras 1.1.1).

In this manner, the philosophical knowledge of Aksharbrahman- Parabrahman is indicated clearly as well as subtly in numerous verses and statements of the Prasthantrayi. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has very clearly explained this knowledge of Aksharbrahman-Parabrahman from the Prasthantrayi and its necessity on the path

of ultimate liberation. Moreover, he has identified and explained the manifest forms of both Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman on this earth. Therefore, from an ontological perspective, the darshan he propagated is appropriately known as 'Aksharbrahma-Parabrahma Darshan'.

OR

2. Developing Conviction in Manifest God Is Most Difficult

Whenever God manifests in human form on earth, it is very difficult to develop full conviction in him as God at that time. How many truly understood and recognized the full glory of Bhagwan Ram or Bhagwan Krishna, during their stay on earth? The Bhagvat narrates the great misfortune of the Yadavs for not understanding the true form of Shri Krishna as Bhagwan (Shrimad Bhagvat 3.2.8).

Shri Krishna Bhagwan also says in the Gita, that nobody is able to truly understand him (Bhagavad Gita 7.26, 9.21, 9.24).

Similarly, Maharaj says in Vachanamrut L 18, "To develop the conviction of God is more difficult than anything else. Moreover, because this topic is extremely complex, I am afraid of discussing it. I feel, 'Upon discussing this topic, what if someone were to misunderstand it? What if, due to this discussion, any inclination that one may have firmly cultivated were to be destroyed, or even be uprooted? Yet, there is no alternative but to reveal this fact. If one does not interpret it correctly, many problems can arise. Yet, until one has not understood this fact, much deficiency will remain in one's conviction. That is why I wish to deliver this discourse.'" Shriji Maharaj makes the above statement after having headed

the Satsang fellowship for approximately nineteen years. Despite so many years having elapsed, it seems he was still unsure about delivering this discourse to the sadhus and devotees who had personally witnessed and experienced his unearthly powers, and extraordinary and divine personality.

From this, we can understand that it is a difficult feat to develop conviction in the manifest form of God. In fact, to understand Maharaj as the supreme avatari of all avatars is as difficult as chewing chickpeas made of iron. Thousands worshipped Maharaj believing him to be God, and in accordance to his commands, completely surrendered their mind, body, and wealth to him. Yet, that they struggled to understand his supremacy is a fact. Some were hindered by the various scriptural descriptions, while others were afraid about such understanding being unacceptable to society. Analysis of the Sampradaya's history shows that even paramhansas such as Muktanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Bhai Atmanand Swami and Shukanand Swami found it difficult to understand Maharaj as the supreme God. In fact, it seems that they understood Maharaj's true form only after many years. 15

It is for this reason that Gunatitanand Swami has said, "One hundred thousand goats may bleat together yet nobody is afraid, and if one lion roars then the sound would pierce everyone internally, and even the forehead of an elephant would split open (out of fear); similarly, nobody falters in speaking of Maharaj to be like other avatars, however to say openly that the divine powers which all avatars, etc. possess are granted by Maharaj, and that they have attained their spiritual state through worshipping him is like the forehead of an elephant being torn by the roar of the lion" (SNV 5.197). Thus, to develop conviction in the supremacy of the manifest human form of God visible before all is extremely difficult. Without strong spiritual impressions (sanskars) from previous births, a worthy character and the association of a Gunatit Satpurush, any talks of Shriji Maharaj's supremacy cannot be grasped; and if they are grasped, they cannot be digested.

3. Divine in a Human Form on This Earth

Whenever God manifests with a human form to fulfil the wishes of his beloved devotees, liberate countless jivas, and establish ekan-tik dharma, he mostly conceals his powers and divinity (G I 63, G I 72, P .4).

God suppresses his divinity for the benefit of the jivas. However, those who do not understand this believe that God is only divine when he is in his abode; when present on this earth, he is not divine, but mayik. Furthermore, they maintain the belief that, as with ordinary jivas, God also has to suffer the fruits of his actions. Narsinh Mehta describes this understanding in a kirtan:

Potiinii sarkhee kareene jiine, Purushottamnee kiyyi re; Narsaiyiniii Swimeenee lee/ii, olya matiyii kahe chhe miyyi re.

Meaning: They believe the form of Purushottam to be like their own; They believe the divine actions of Narsinh's Lord to be maya.

Shriji Maharaj has not accepted such opinions and explains the divinity of God's manifest form by saying:

G I 71: "That God, also known as Parabrahman or Purushottam, himself manifests on earth out of compassion, for the liberation of the jivas. When he manifests, all entities that he enters become brahmarup.¹"

P 7: "Just as the form of God in Akshardham is resplendent with countless divine powers and divine light at the end of atyantik - pralay, one should realize exactly the same regarding the manifest God in human form. One who realizes this is said to have known God perfectly....

"The phases of childhood, youth and old age apparent in God, as well as his birth and death are all perceived due to his yogic powers of creating an illusion. In reality, God remains absolutely unchanged

"It is to liberate the jivas and to allow those jivas to offer the nine types of bhakti to him that God - who has a luminous and divine form - becomes like a human out of compassion, always doing so with all of his strength, divine powers and attendants. At that time, those who realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of God on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of God in Akshardham -they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and this form."

In this way, God remains divine and flawless despite manifesting on this earth in a human form. Anything he accepts also becomes divine; in fact, any object, person or place which has been graced with the contact of God can also be called nirgun and divine (G II 8, 13). The actions of God are all divine (G I 72, G II 10, P 4).

OR

4. Necessity of Becoming Brahmarup: Eligibility to Offer the Highest Level of Devotion to Parabrahman and to attain the highest level of Nirvikalp Faith

Eligibility to Offer the Highest Level of Devotion to Parabrahman:

For the reasons discussed below, to attain moksha, Shriji Maharaj has insisted on the necessity of becoming brahmarup, and offering bhakti and upasana to Parabrahman.

Only by cultivating the highest level of nirvikalp faith can we experience and develop complete conviction for the divine and supreme form of Parabrahman. Every evening, followers of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya request the highest level of nirvikalp faith in the form of a prayer after performing the evening arti of Shriji Maharaj uses the words 'atmarup', 'atmasattarup', 'atmanishtha', 'brahmarup' and 'aksharrup' synonymously, but this is not the general case in other Hindu shastras.

The murti of Shriji Maharaj:

Nirvikalp uttam ati nischay tav Ghanshyam.

Meaning: O Ghanshyam! May I develop the highest level of nirvikalp faith.

Shriji Maharaj explains the highest level of nirvikalp faith in Vachanamrut L 12: "One possessing the highest level of nirvikalp faith realizes that millions of brahmands, each encircled by the eight layers, appear like mere atoms before Akshar. Such is the greatness of Akshar, the abode of Parabrahman. One who worships Purushottam having become aksharrup can be said to possess the highest level of nirvikalp faith."

In accordance with Shriji Maharaj's words, to become Aksharrup and offer devotion to Purushottam is itself the highest level of nirvikalp faith.

Eligibility to Offer the Highest Level of Devotion to Parabrahman:

We all offer the nine types of devotion to Parabrahman, but that is sadhan bhakti. To offer that devotion according to the command of the Satpurush is the means to becoming brahmarup. After becoming brahmarup one is eligible to offer sadhya bhakti - the highest devotion. Therefore, it is obligatory to become brahmarup to become qualified and deserving of offering a truly higher and complete level of devotion to Parabrahman. Explaining this true principle, Shriji Maharaj reveals in Vachanamrut L 7, "Only one who is brahmarup has the right to offer bhakti to Purushottam."

To further emphasize this point, in the same Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj refers to a verse in the Gita:

Brahma-bhootaha prasannatma na shochati na kankshati, Samaha sarveshu bhooteshu mad-bhaktim labhate param.

Meaning: One who becomes brahmarup, whose mind is always content, who does not grieve in any way, who does not crave for any object, who observes equality towards all living creatures -that individual attains my supreme bhakti (Gita 18.54).

July 2013

1. The need to understand the form of parabrahman

Of the five eternal tattvas in Swaminarayan Darshan, the most important and highest tattva is Parabrahman. 1 It can be regarded as having the value of the digit '1' on the path of moksha (ultimate liberation), giving value to all other spiritual endeavours (sadhanas), which can be regarded as a string of subsequent zeros. Explaining

this understanding, Nishkulanand Swami writes:

Jem so so shunya sara kare, pan ekna kare jo ii.gale;
Te sarvalo shano me/she, je kare chhe kalap kagale.
Tern ek Harine parhare, bij i kare chaturay kot;

Te to mathafar chale marage, jem jem chiile tern khot.

Meaning: Just as hundreds of zeros may seem good, but if the digit 1 is not put in front; Of what value will the total be? Whatever is written is but black marks on paper. Similarly, one may forsake God, and skillfully do millions of other things; Some walk haughtily in the wrong direction, and the more they walk, the more they are at loss (Sarsiddhi 1).

Without a preceding digit '1', countless zeros have no value. Similarly, performing spiritual endeavours without understanding Parabrahman is futile. Spiritual endeavours alone do not result in ultimate liberation; therefore it is absolutely essential to understand the tattva of Parabrahman to practise these endeavours perfectly. The Vachanamrut, which is a treasure of tattvagnan, primarily encourages spiritual endeavours while keeping Parabrahman as the

focal point. The benefits of performing spiritual endeavours, while completely and faithfully understanding the nature and form of Parabrahman have been described in the Vachanamrut. In addition, seeking God's refuge, offering resolute and enduring upasana, engaging in devotion and service to him, continuously focusing one's mind on God and perceiving divinity in all of his actions have been extensively explained in the Vachanamrut. Additionally, the consequences and irrecoverable losses incurred by not following such a course are also clearly explained.

For a jiva to become free from its innate ignorance, swabhavs (base natures) and desires, and attain moksha, understanding the nature and form of Parabrahman is not only important, but imperative. In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has often explained that without knowledge of God's true nature and form, unflinching conviction, complete refuge, devotion coupled with upasana, and faith in God, a jiva, despite performing spiritual endeavours, will not become free from vasana (worldly desires) or rise above maya. Consequently, such a jiva will not be able to attain ultimate liberation. Hence, in the following chapters on Parabrahman, the absolute necessity of knowing Parabrahman as possessing a definite human form, and understanding him to be the all-doer, supreme, ever manifest and divine, will be analyzed from different perspectives. Also, the advantages of understanding and the drawbacks of not understanding Parabrahman will be considered.

Initially, through some references from the Vachanamrut and Gunatitanand Swami's Swamini Vato, we will try to clearly understand the central role of Parabrahman on the spiritual path. In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj says:

G I 56: "Some achieve supernatural powers, some become omniscient, some become deities, and thus attain countless types of greatness, including the highest state of enlightenment. All this is achieved through the power of the upasana of God. Without upasana, though, nothing can be accomplished."

G I 57: "The knowledge of God's form and the knowledge of God's greatness are the two extraordinary means to attain liberation."

G II 13: "Whoever realizes this [my] form will, like me, never be drawn towards the worldly pleasures. In fact, you also see this human form of God, but you do not comprehend it fully. However, when you come to comprehend this fact, you will not encounter any difficulty in subduing the desires for enjoying worldly objects and base instincts such as lust, anger, etc.; they will be subdued easily.... "One who

realizes God's form in this manner does not harbour any affection for the panchvishays, just like I do not. He becomes

independent

"When you thoroughly realize God as such, you will encounter no obstacles on the path to liberation. Without such firm understanding of the form of God, though, one will never be able to overcome one's faults, regardless of the extent of renunciation one maintains or the number of fasts one performs ..."If one has such a firm belief in God, then even if a slight flaw remains in the observance of the vows of non-egotism, non-avarice, non-lust, non-taste or non-attachment, there is still nothing to worry about. However if any deficiency remains in understanding the true nature of this God, then one's flaws will never be eradicated. Therefore, one should attempt to understand this principle by any means within this lifetime."

G II 14: "A person who has such conviction of God will not attain an ill fate - even if some small deficiency remains within him. In fact, ultimately, he will definitely attain the nirgun state [spiritual liberation]. But a person without such a conviction of God - even if he is a sincere renunciant and is vigilantly striving to eradicate lust, anger, avarice, etc. - will not be able to eradicate those vicious natures by his efforts alone. Ultimately, he will become evil and go to narak.

"Therefore, whoever realizes such jnan of God [understands the nature and essential form of God], even if he has only a feeble intellect, should still be regarded as possessing much intellect. On the other hand, if he has not realized such jnan of God, then even if he has much worldly intellect, he should still be known as having no intellect."

V 12: "The jiva that develops firm conviction in that eternal divine form of God by profoundly associating with the Sant progresses spiritually day by day, just like the waxing moon from the second day of the bright half of the lunar month onwards. As the sun's effect on the moon increases, the waxing moon continues increasing; finally, when Punam arrives, the moon becomes full. Similarly, before developing total faith in God, the jiva is as dim as the new moon of Amas - only as bright as a glow-worm. Then, as a person develops faith, coupled with the knowledge of God's greatness, his jivatma progresses and becomes like the full moon of Punam. Thereafter, even his own indriyas and antahkaran are no longer capable of dislodging him from his faith. Regardless of the type of action God performs, he does not perceive any fault in God. In addition, one who has faith in God coupled with the knowledge of his greatness becomes a fearless devotee."Gunatitanand Swami says:

SNV 1.123: "One who has resolute conviction in the nature and form of God has completed all endeavours. He has nothing more left to do."

SNV 5.191: "God represents the number '1' and endeavours represent zeros. There is no value [in zeros] without placing the number '1' in front."

SNV 1.298: "Resolute faith in the manifest form of God and knowledge of God's greatness is like the bridegroom, that is, it is the main thing. All other spiritual endeavours for moksha are like the bridegroom's entourage."

SNV 6.291: "One person asked Swami, 'In the Vachanamrut, in some places the strength of refuge in God is described, in some places that of dharma, in some places that of detachment, in some places that of atma-realization, and also in some places that of atma-realization has been excluded. In this way, many spiritual means have been described. Of these, please name one in which all these are included and by which ultimate moksha is attained.' So Swami said, 'If one has upasana and the highest level of conviction in the supreme form of God then all spiritual means will follow!' The above references from the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato clearly reveal the message Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami are trying to impart: the importance of understanding the tattva of Parabrahman while striving to practise the highest endeavours and attain ultimate liberation.

The shastras repeatedly describe that there is much to understand and do while persevering on the spiritual path. However, whatever is done or understood will not result in ultimate liberation if one does not understand Parabrahman's true form, understand divinity in all his actions, keep resolute faith in him coupled with the knowledge of his greatness, and uphold upasana with conviction in his true form. If one, however, understands the true form of Parabrahman, then there is nothing more left for such a person to do or understand on the path of spirituality.

Through his divine talks, Shriji Maharaj has emphasized this understanding. For example, in G I 63, he says: "He who realizes God perfectly in this way has nothing left to achieve...kal, karma and maya are

incapable of binding a person who has developed such firm faith coupled with an understanding of God's greatness in his heart. Therefore, he who realizes God perfectly in this way has nothing left to achieve."

March 2013

1. Bhagwan swaminarayan' s inclination for the belief that God has a form.

Shriji Maharaj does not like the view that God is only divine light, but he is firmly inclined towards the view that God has a form amid the light. He has said in the Vachanamrut:

L 14: "Despite being able to constantly see this mass of divine light, I am not attracted by it; I experience profound bliss only from the darshan of God's form."

G III 30: "I like one who is firmly convinced that there is a mass of divine light which is chaitanya (pure consciousness), and that the form of Shri Purushottam Bhagwan forever resides at the centre of that mass of light; and with that belief he worships and offers bhakti to God. On the other hand, I do not like one who believes in and worships only the chaitanya divine light; nor do I like one who does not believe God to forever possess a form"

The above words reveal that Shriji Maharaj had firm conviction in the form of God. He has stated this in Vachanamrut G II 39: "I have a very strong conviction that God possesses a form. That is, Shri Krishna Vasudev [i.e. I, Shriji Maharaj] resides in his Akshardham

- which is full of chaitanya and full of divine light - possessing an eternal and definite form. God, thus possessing a form, is also the all-doer, since that which is formless can accomplish nothing. In fact, so firm is my conviction that God possesses a form that even though I have read and heard many Vedanta shastras, my conviction has not been dislodged."

Shriji Maharaj's firm conviction that God has a form is not out of a mental or intellectual stubbornness, nor is it without evidence; it is because he can physically see the manifest and divine form of God with his eyes. He has stated in Vachanamrut G I 64: "I have delivered this discourse [regarding the form of God] having experienced it directly myself." Also, he has said in Vachanamruts G II 13 and L 14 that he himself sees this manifest murti.

In actual fact, Shriji Maharaj himself is Parabrahman, the Lord of Akshardham (P 7, G II 13, G III 38), therefore how can his conviction of his own form ever be questioned?

Despite this, if one does not believe that Shriji Maharaj himself is that God, but accepts that Maharaj can see that sakar form of God (G II 13), he can still also accept the principle that God has a form.

2. Benefits of Attaining, Maintaining Conviction in and Worshipping Manifest God.

Perfect knowledge is understanding manifest God (L7, P7).

Perfect worship is worshipping manifest God (G I 27).

It is only through listening, reading and contemplating upon the divine incidents of manifest God that spirituality flourishes (G II 58), worldly desires are eradicated (G I 38), peace is experienced (G II 35) and liberation is attained (G I 3, G II 35).

Only by realizing manifest God to be perfect and forever divine is maya eradicated (P 7) and does one become flawless (G I 24).

Through the contact of manifest God only, can one become nirgun (G II 8, 13).

It is only through maintaining faith in manifest God coupled with the true knowledge of his glory, that one becomes fulfilled and has nothing left to accomplish (G I 72, L 2, G II .13).

It is only through manifest God that ultimate liberation can be attained (K 7, G II 32).

The above reveals Shriji Maharaj's insistence that ultimate lib-

Pratyaksh means, literally, 'before the eyes'. It is often used synonymously with pragat liberation can only be attained through the manifest form of God. The following two examples further emphasize Shriji Maharaj's point of view:

G II 21: "If a person realizes the glory of manifest God and his Bhakta-Sant in exactly the same way as he realizes the glory of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc., as well as the glory of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanu- man, Uddhav, etc. - then nothing more remains to be understood on the path of liberation.

"Whether this principal is understood after being told once, or after being told a hundred thousand times; whether it is understood today, or after a hundred thousand years, there is no option but to understand it.

"A person who has such a firm conviction has grasped all the fundamental principles. What is more he will never fall from the path of liberation."

G II 32: "The sole cause behind the jiva attaining liberation, transcending maya and becoming brahmaswarup is its engagement in the jnan, meditation, devotional songs, spiritual discourses, etc., of the manifest form of Vasudev Bhagwan, who is Purushottam. It is due to these that the jiva transgresses maya, attains an extremely elevated state, and also attains God's Akshardham."

Explaining the necessity of the manifest form of God or the Sant, to attain ultimate liberation, Gunatitanand Swami says:

SNV 5.5: "Only when ultimate moksha is attained can it be described as (true) moksha. And if one attains other abodes then one will have to take re-birth. So, as long as one has to take re- birth, that cannot be called final moksha. Such ultimate moksha is attained by surrendering totally to the manifest form of God and God's enlightened Sadhu. Others cannot do it and that Sadhu is as capable as God."

SNV 5.85: "By taking the refuge of the manifest God and manifest Sadhu, one attains liberation."

Regarding the existence of manifest God, Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami writes:

Jem pragat ravi hoy jyare re, jay tam brahmandnu tyare re; 11

Jem pragat jalne pamee re, jay pyaseenee pyas te vamee re;

Jem pragat annane jame re, antar jatharii jhal virame re. 12

Tem pragat male Bhagwan re, tyare jananu kalyan nidan re;

Mate pragat charitra sambhalvu re, hoy pragat tyaaavee malvu re. 13

Tya hoy Prabhu pragat pramiin re, tiyii jananu sahaje kalyan re;...

Meaning: When the Sun is present, the darkness of the cosmos disappears...11

When real water is obtained, one's thirst is quenched; When real food is eaten, one's hunger subsides...12

Similarly, on attaining manifest God, one's liberation is assured;

For this reason, the divine incidents of manifest God should be heard; one should associate with that manifest form...13"

Where there is manifest God, one's liberation is easily attained;...

(Bhakta Chintamani 134).

Male Prabhu pragat praman re, ka to tena malele kalyan re;

Teh vina te koti upaye re, atyantik kalyiin na thaye re. 18

Meaning: Only when one has met the manifest form of God or one who has realized

(the manifest God) can one attain liberation;

Without this, millions of other ways will not lead to ultimate liberation (Kalyan Nirnay 2).

3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan - supreme: as expressed in Vachanamrut

Shriji Maharaj has explicitly stated in several Vachanamruts that he himself is Purushottam Narayan, Parabrahman, the Lord of Ak- shardham and the avatari of all avatars. For example:

G II 13: "It is this Purushottam, who transcends Akshar, who is the cause of all avatars. All avatars emanate from Purushottam, and they merge back into PurushottamRealize that the form amidst the divine light is this Maharaj visible before you."

G III 38: "It is that same supreme Purushottam Bhagwan who manifests on this earth out of compassion -for the purpose of grant- ing liberation to the jivas. He is presently visible before everyone; he is your

Ishtadev 7; 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 the ishvars and the cause of all causes. He reigns supreme,...and he is worthy of being worshipped single-mindedly by all of you."

Here, Ishtadev refers to the chosen deity of the devotees seated there, i.e. Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself.

Parabrahman: Supreme A 6: "All the avatars of God manifest from the very God that is present in this Satsang fellowship. That is to say, he is the cause of all the avatars and is the antaryami of all. It is he who is radiant in Akshardham, is full of countless powers and eternally has a form."

A 7: "I went alone to the abode of Shri Purushottam Narayan, which transcends everything. There, I saw that it was I who was Purushottam; I did not see anyone more eminent than myself. In this manner, I travelled to these places and finally returned to my body.

"Then, when I looked within again, I realized that I am the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all the brahmands. In those countless brahmands, it is by my divine light that countless Shivas, countless Brahmas, countless Kailases, countless Vaikunths, Goloks, Brahmapurs, as well as countless millions of others realms are radiant." In this manner, the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself instil the firm conviction that he is Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan, the supreme avatari of all the avatars.

4. Darshan of his divine powers through sadhus and devotees

1. Shriji Maharaj himself sometimes used his extraordinary divine powers, but he also similarly empowered some of his sadhus and devotees. The divine powers he had shown through them were on par with, and at times even excelled, those which previous avatars had exhibited. Shastras of the Sampradaya document many such incidents. For example:
2. Swarupanand Swami emptied the pits of hell.
3. Vyapkanand Swami revived a dead mare.
4. Gopalanand Swami prevented an eclipse.
5. Due to the mere wish of Vashram Suthar of Bhadra, countless ants assumed a divine four-armed form and went to the abode of Bhumapurush.
6. Shekhji, a Muslim disciple, was invested with the ability to grant samadhi.
7. In his talks, Adbhutanand Swami has noted many incidents in which Shriji Maharaj had revealed his divine powers through his sadhus. For example:
8. On Shriji Maharaj's command, Swarupanand Swami went to Jamnagar with a group of 250 sadhus. On arriving, they all rested by Lake Lakhota. One day, some merchants came from the city and asked Swarupanand Swami, "Are any of you like Krishna?" Swami replied, "Observe carefully, all are like Krishna." At that moment, they saw all 250 sadhus in the form of Shri Krishna. If such miracles could be performed by his sadhus, what can be said about the infinite types of miracles which the master, Sahajanand Swami, possesses? (Shriharini Adbhut Vartao, 44).
9. Shriji Maharaj had commanded three sadhus, Narnarayanan- and, Krushnanand and Purnanand to go to Buranpur. On hearing this, they inquired of what use they would be there as they had not studied anything. In response, Maharaj asked for a stick to be brought; he painted one end red and the other yellow, and told them that the red end of the stick would grant samadhi to anyone they touched, and the yellow end would wake them up from samadhi. The three sadhus left for Buranpur. There they conducted discourses, but the people of the town were not interested in their talks. So the three sadhus put them all into samadhi in which they had the darshan of both Yampuri and Akshardham. On waking up and seeing such divine powers, the people all declared the sadhus as gods. Hearing this, the sadhus corrected them saying that they were not gods, but the servants of God, and that the manifest Purushottam Narayan -the cause of all avatars -was their guru Sahajanand Swami (Shriharini Adbhut Vartao, 100).
10. Narrating the incident in which Maharaj sent Vishnudas to Badrikashram and asked him to bring some bors 14, Adbhutanand Swami writes, "In this manner, revealing his divine powers through his sadhus by enabling them to carry out the works of an avatar, who would not call him the avatari of all avatars? They most certainly would" (Shriharini Adbhut Vartao, 139).

11. In his poetry, Avinashanand Brahmachari consolidates this fact by writing:

Age avatiire karee, karyii priikram bhiiree;
Bhakta dviire tevii kare, miite ii avatiiree.

*Meaning: Previous incarnations had performed great miracles.
Such deeds he performs through his devotees, and therefore he is the avatari (Pad 251).*

July 2012

1. How is Parabrahman divine?

Parabrahman's form is forever divine, flawless, extraordinary, and above maya and the three gunas, whereas our indriyas and antahkarans are mayik (G I 51). Thus, he remains beyond the reach of the indriyas and the antahkaran of man (P 4). So, Parabrahman's divinity cannot be experienced until one overcomes maya. Nevertheless, the shastras can provide direction in understanding Parabrahman's divinity.

The Vachanamrut, the essence of all the shastras, contains the divine words of Parabrahman himself and is therefore helpful in understanding his divinity.

In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj thoroughly explains Parabrahman's divinity. He has said that not only is Parabrahman divine, but his divinity is eternal, all pervasive, constant and absolute in every aspect.

Whatever the form of Parabrahman - his vyatirek form in Akshardham, human form on earth or any form pervading all animate and inanimate objects - his form is constantly beyond maya, flawless, unaffected by material elements, extraordinary and totally divine. His form never has even the slightest mayik attribute, deterioration, bodily attachment or human trait of any sort. Nothing in him is the product of maya, indeed he is gunatit, and is the manifest, pure form of eternal existence, consciousness and bliss.

Parabrahman's divinity described by Shriji Maharaj in various Vachanamruts can be categorized in four ways.

Divine in His Vyatirek Form in Akshardham

Many believe that whatever has a form is eventually destroyed. For this reason, any object with a form can never be regarded as being unchanging, flawless and eternal. However, Shriji Maharaj contraverts this incorrect understanding, and has said:

G III 38: "The form of God in Akshardham and the form of the muktas -the attendants of God -are all permanent, divine and extremely luminous."

G I 45: "Someone may claim that the Shrutis [the Vedic scriptures] propound: 'God is all-pervasive and perfect, without hands, feet, etc.' But those Vedic verses that refute the hands, feet, etc., of God are actually refuting mayik hands, feet, etc. In reality, God's form is divine, not mayik."

P 7: "One should realize that the entities evolved out of the three gunas of maya, namely the panchbhuts, the indriyas, the antahkaran and their presiding devas are never in God's form at any time."

Divine in a Human Form on This Earth

Whenever God manifests with a human form to fulfil the wishes of his beloved devotees, liberate countless jivas, and establish ekanantik dharma, he mostly conceals his powers and divinity (G I 63, G I 72, P 4).

God suppresses his divinity for the benefit of the jivas. However, those who do not understand this believe that God is only divine when he is in his abode; when present on this earth, he is not divine, but mayik. Furthermore, they maintain the belief that, as with ordinary jivas, God also has to suffer the fruits of his actions. Narsinh Mehta describes this understanding in a kirtan:

Potiini sarkhee kareene jiine, Purushottamnee kiyyii re; Narsaiyini Swimeenee lee/ii, olya matiyii kahe chhe miyyii re.

Meaning: They believe the form of Purushottam to be like their own; They believe the divine actions of Narsinh's Lord to be maya.

Shriji Maharaj has not accepted such opinions and explains the divinity of God's manifest form by saying:

G I 71: "That God, also known as Parabrahman or Purushottam, himself manifests on earth out of compassion, for the liberation of the jivas. When he manifests, all entities that he enters become brahmarup.1"

P 7: "Just as the form of God in Akshardham is resplendent with countless divine powers and divine light at the end of atyantik - pralay, one should realize exactly the same regarding the manifest God in human form. One who realizes this is said to have known God perfectly....

"The phases of childhood, youth and old age apparent in God, as well as his birth and death are all perceived due to his yogic powers of creating an illusion. In reality, God remains absolutely unchanged

"It is to liberate the jivas and to allow those jivas to offer the nine types of bhakti to him that God - who has a luminous and divine form - becomes like a human out of compassion, always doing so with all of his strength, divine powers and attendants. At that time, those who realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of God on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of God in Akshardham - they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and this form."

In this way, God remains divine and flawless despite manifesting on this earth in a human form. Anything he accepts also becomes divine; in fact, any object, person or place which has been graced with the contact of God can also be called nirgun and divine (G II 8, 13). The actions of God are all divine (G I 72, G II 10, P 4).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan: Flawless and Divine

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the avatari of all avatars, himself describes his flawlessness and absolute detachment in the Vachanamrut:

K 6: "Not even the slightest bit of lust, anger, avarice, egotism, matsar or jealousy enters my heart. Also, in my heart, I experience a strong aversion for the panchvishays, namely sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch. In fact, I do not have even the slightest interest in any one of the panchvishays. "

G II 33: "I swear by the lives of these paramhansas that from the day I was born to this very day, I have never harboured an improper thought regarding women or wealth, either in the waking state or dream state. Thus, I am eternally flawless."

G II 39: "Firstly, it is my nature that regardless of how much physical contact of the panchvishays I encounter, I do not harbour any desire for them in my mind - not even in my dreams."

G III 31: "The same form that is in Akshardham - which is gunatit - is manifest. There is no difference between the two. Just as the form in the abode is gunatit, the human form is also gunatit."

The Manifest Gunatit Sant: Flawless and Divine

The Gunatit Sant, through whom Shriji Maharaj always remains manifest on earth, is also flawless and divine.

V 11: "The Satpurush, who is brahmaswarup, behaves above the three bodies [sthul, sukshma and karan] and the three states [jagrat, swapna and sushupti]; moreover, he does not believe any of the actions of the 14 indriyas to affect him."

G III 26 : "What are the characteristics of a Sant who is worthy of being worshipped on par with God? Well, such a Sant suppresses the actions of maya's gunas - the indriyas, the antah- karan, 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 deva, because such behaviour is not possible for either humans or devas. 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."

Divine Through His All-pervasive Anvay Form

Whilst eternally residing in Akshardham, Parabrahman pervades all the jad (non-sentient) and chaitanya (sentient) tattvas through his anvay form; despite this, he is completely untouched by their mayik (material) flaws. Just like akash, he remains eternally unaffected and unbound.

K 8: "Akash pervades the four bhuts -pruthvi, jal, etc. Moreover, it remains unaffected by those four bhuts, and the influences of those four bhuts do not affect akash. Infact, despite dwelling in those four bhuts, akash remains absolutely unaffected. In the same way, Purushottam Bhagwan dwells in all as their atma. Despite this, he is absolutely unchanged and untainted, and he maintains his own unique characteristics."

G II 17: "Although Purushottam Bhagwan is the kshetragna of all kshetragnas, he is still not -subject to change. Moreover, the disturbances of objects that cause disturbances - such as maya and other factors - do not influence Purushottam Bhagwan."

Divine Despite Being the All-doer

Considered in his vyatirek form in Akshardham, in his manifest human form on earth, or in his anvay form pervading everything, Parabrahman is still the all-doer, sustainer, controller, governor and destroyer of infinite universes. Whenever, wherever and whatever occurs in the countless millions of universes does so due to his wish, inspiration and power. No actions performed by anyone through his power and inspiration can affect him. Additionally, he does not become bound by any actions he performs or objects he experiences whilst manifest on this earth.

Thus, even though he is the all-doer, enjoyer and destroyer, he remains flawless. He is eternally unaffected, pure and untainted, and remains untouched by all the flaws and changes of karmas and vishays.

G I 62: "He [one who has perfect conviction in God] realizes God to be distinct from everything, their controller and cause; yet despite being their cause, he is beyond their influence."

G II 10: "God is unaffected in the same manner as akash, and despite being the doer of all actions, God still remains a non-doer. Although he is associated with all, he remains absolutely aloof."

In this way, in any form or state, Parabrahman is forever, in all respects, flawless and divine.

2. Antaryami Form Is Like the Sakar Manifest Form

The vyatirek form of Parabrahman is certainly divine and like that of a human being. Also, Shriji Maharaj has explained in the Vachanamrut that the all-pervasive antaryami (indweller) and anvay aspects of Parabrahman should also be considered to possess a form:

G I 45: "Despite the fact that Purushottam Bhagwan's brah- marup light, which pervades all jivas and ishvars as their antary - ami, is formless, it should be considered to possess a form. This is because it governs the granting of the deserved fruits of karmas to all jivas and ishvars according to their respective karmas. This power of governing makes it function as if it possesses a form. Thus, that divine light should be considered to possess a form as well."

K 4: "God possesses a definite form in his Akshardham, but through his antaryami powers, he pervades the jivas and functions as if he possesses a form. Therefore, even that antaryami form should be considered to possess a form."

Moreover, Shriji Maharaj has explained in several Vachanamruts that while an aspirant performs spiritual endeavours, he should understand God to be manifest with a definite form within his jivatma. Then, on attaining the state of sakshatkar (spiritual realization of God), the aspirant sees only God as manifest with a definite form within him and everywhere. This is explained in two Vachanamrut references:

G I 23: "[One] believes his own self to be chaitanya, transcend- ing the influences of the three states - waking, dream and deep sleep, and the three bodies -sthul, sukshma and karan. This devotee worships God, while beholding God's form within his own self. As a result, he sees his own self, which transcends the three states and the three bodies, as being extremely full of divine light. Within that light, he sees the form of God, just as it is in its incarnate form, as being extremely luminous."

K 7: "One who has realized God through such a conviction experiences the following: Wherever he casts his eyes - among all the mobile and immobile forms - he sees the form of God as if it is before his eyes, the same form that constantly remains in Akshardham even after the dissolution of the body, the brahmand and Prakruti-Purush. He does not see even an atom without Para- brahman within it. These are the characteristics of one who has attained God-realization."

Therefore, as per Shriji Maharaj's teachings, the antaryami form of God, which pervades the jivas, ishvars and every atom in the infinite universes, is also like definite form. For this reason, he states in Vachanamru t V 13: "Even though the shastras describe God as pervasive, he actually possesses a definite form. In those shastras, he is described as pervasive in the sense that, even though he possesses a definite form, by using his own powers, he gives darshan to all while residing in one place. But he is not pervasive in the sense of being formless like akash."

3. Form of the universe: Principle of cause and effect

According to Shriji Maharaj, jivas, ishvars and maya are true and eternal tattvas, just like Brahman and Parabrahman; further- more, the entire cosmos consists of products which are evolved from maya. As a result, this entire universe, which is comprised of both jad and chaitanya forms, is also true and real.

The Advait philosophy of Shankaracharya teaches that this universe, comprising of jad and chaitanya forms, is false and merely empirically or apparently true. This impression is eliminated by the knowledge of nirgun (attributeless) Brahman. Shriji Maharaj has refuted this Kevaladvait (pure non-dualist) belief of Shankaracharya, and has correctly described the true form of the universe (G I 39, 42).

Principle of cause and effect

Shriji Maharaj accepts the principle of satkaryavad, which states that the effect already exists in the cause.

From the perspective of satkaryavad, prior to their manifestation, the effects are already existent in a subtle form in the cause. In this state, the cause itself manifests as the effect. It is in this sense that creation is defined as an appearance or manifestation, and dissolution is defined as a disappearance. In the subtle form (causal state) and the physical form (effect state), matter is the same, i.e. the cause and effect are identical. The effect is actually just a different state of the cause. The effect is not a different type of matter than the cause. For example, when a potter makes a vessel out of clay, the actual cause or clay - takes the form of the effect, i.e. the vessel. In essence, this means that the clay is formed into a different shape. The initial lump of clay is the vessel's causal state, and the vessel is the clay's effect state - and so, ultimately, the clay is both the cause as well as the effect. This principle of cause and effect is termed satkaryavad. This principle is also to be seen in the creation of the universe.

Mulmaya is the fundamental cause, and the entire cosmos itself is the effect of maya. At the time of creation, mulmaya, which is subtle in form, consequently takes on a physical form, namely the universe. Hence, here, the cause and effect are not two distinct entities, but rather are both maya or prakruti.

The subsequent change in prakruti results in the universe; therefore, this principle of prakruti as the cause and effect is known as prakruti-parinamvad, i.e. the transformation of prakruti into the universe.

According to Shriji Maharaj, prakruti is not totally an independent tattva, but is completely dependent upon and is the sharir of Parabrahman. Parabrahman, thus, is the controller of prakruti. As a result, it is not possible for prakruti to undergo any transformation without the wish of Parabrahman. The above principle of cause and effect can also be termed 'Parabrahman controlled prakruti-parinamvad'.

Ordinarily, there are two possible causes of an effect:

Upadan (Material) Cause: When an object is created from a transformable substance, that substance is known as the upadan (material) cause. For example, the clay from which the vessel is made is the material cause of the vessel.

Nimitta (Efficient) Cause: The (animate) individual who transforms the substance of the material cause is known as the nimitta (efficient) cause. For example, the potter that changes a lump of clay into a vessel is the efficient cause.

Looking at the above analogy in simple terms, both the material cause (i.e. the clay), and the efficient cause (i.e. the potter) are different. However, when referring to the creation of the universe, the two causes are certainly not distinct from each other. Unlike anything else, the creator of the universe, Parabrahman, is extraordinary, omniscient, all-powerful and is one whose resolve never fails; he is therefore, simultaneously able to become both types of causes. Through his own wish, Parabrahman creates the universe (G I 51, L 17, A 7), and so is the efficient cause.

Moreover, Shriji Maharaj says that at the time of creation, God assumes the forms of the tattvas below him (G I 33, P 7), and is therefore also the material cause. However, Parabrahman is, in fact, unchanging, imperishable artd whole (P 2), and therefore does not actually become the universe. If that is the case, how should we understand the purported quality of Parabrahman as the material cause? Additionally, how should we understand the significance of Parabrahman acting as the 24 elements and the universe? In reality, Parabrahman does not become the universe made of the 24 elements. He is the atma and prakruti is his body. It is the subtle form of prakruti - from whom Parabrahman, the shariri, is inseparable which takes the physical form of the universe.

Parabrahman himself is the shariri of both the cause, prakruti, and its effect, the universe. Hence, it can be said that Parabrahman assumes the form of the universe. Nevertheless, there is absolutely no change or consequence to the chaitanya form of Parabrahman. From the perspective of the physical body, which is made up of the five elements, the transformation of a person through childhood, youth and old age is only a transformation in the body; the residing shariri, or jivatma of that body, remains unchanged. The bodily changes do not result in any type of deterioration in the form of the jiva. Nevertheless, when one is said to be a child, a youth or elderly, this is in connection with the body that the jiva has assumed, not

the jiva itself. Inseparable in all three stages of life of the body, the jivatma which has entered it does not deteriorate in any way.

Similarly, at the time of creation, Parabrahman enters as the atma of mahattattva and other evolutes of the universe. Shriji Maharaj describes this fact in Vachanamrut G I 63: "That extremely powerful God himself 'enters' Akshar and assumes the form of Akshar. Thereafter, he assumes the form of Mul-Prakruti-Purush, and then the form of Pradhan-Purush. Then he 'enters' the 24 elements produced from Pradhan and assumes that form. He then 'enters' Virat-Purush produced from those elements and assumes that form. Then he 'enters' Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv and assumes their forms."

The significance of the above is that in reality, prakruti is jad but Parabrahman is the shariri of that prakruti and its evolutes. That Parabrahman pervades them through his anway form, and hence it can be said that Parabrahman behaves as the evolutes. However, Parabrahman himself does not in any way become a jad entity.

To further help understand this, consider a spider. It creates a web from its own body without itself deteriorating in any way, similarly Parabrahman creates the physical universe from an element of his sharir -prakruti - but himself remains immutable.

In this way, it is prakruti -a part of Parabrahman's sharir - which is transformed from subtle to physical. Due to this transformation, the form of Parabrahman which resides within prakruti and all the atmas of this universe does not change. In no way does the deterioration experienced by prakruti or the universe, affect Parabrahman. In this manner, Parabrahman is -described as the material cause of the universe, since Parabrahman is inseparable (apruthaksiddha) from prakruti, which transforms into the physical universe.

Reflecting upon the creation of the universe from the perspective of its material and efficient causes, reveals that both causes are actually Parabrahman. Only Parabrahman can totally pervade prakruti - a part of his sharir - both inside and out, as its atma. Thus, through pervading prakruti in this manner, Parabrahman, with a mere thought, makes prakruti result in the universe (L 2).

In this way, through being both the material and efficient cause, Parabrahman is known as the abhinna-nimittopadan cause of the world - i.e. he is both nimitta (efficient) and upadan (material) causes of the universe.

4. Deep reflection on liberation: the form of bondage

- The Vachanamrut teaches us that by its essential nature and form, the jiva is pure (S 1, L 10), without any defects (G I 64, L 10), free from the influence of maya (S 9, G II 57), beyond the three gunas (S 9), and brahmarup (G I 77, L 10, G II 8). Yet, the jiva is innately bound to its causal body in the form of ignorance and maya, (S 11, K 12). In fact the fundamental reason for the jiva to be bound in this manner is its karan - causal -body. Since the karan body is real, the bondage of the jiva is also real.
- In reality, the essential form and nature of the jiva is totally distinct and detached from the sthul, sukshma and karan (gross, subtle and causal) bodies. Despite this, due to ignorance, the jiva believes that the traits, deficiencies and natures of these three bodies are a part of its essential original form. This ignorance is due to not having the knowledge of its own pure form, which is characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss (G I 20). Due to this lack of knowledge of its pure form, the jiva identifies itself with the nature of the karan body to which it becomes strongly attached and believes this to be its real form instead (G I 44, G II 2).
- 'Believing oneself to be the body', i.e. attachment towards one's body, is itself the root cause of all defects (L 6). Moreover, "Maya is nothing but 1-ness towards the body and my-ness towards anything related to the body" (G III 39).
- The karmas that the jiva has performed with such attachment during past lives have become assimilated with the jiva. Just as fire 'enters' iron and turns it into a fire-like entity, similarly those karmas have ripened and have become one with the jiva. It is this that are known as 'vasana', 'prakruti', or 'swabhav' of the jiva (G III 20).
- The vasana (desire) for enjoying panchvishay becomes the cause of repeated births and deaths for the jiva (A 3). Due to vasana born out of ignorance, the jiva roams in the cycle of 8.4 million life forms, and experiences sorrow and distress. As long as the maya that binds the jiva is not eradicated, the jiva has to take birth and die innumerable times. At the time of creation the jivas arise from within maya (G III 10),

and at the time of dissolution, the jivas are absorbed back into maya along with their karan body (G I 12). This is the attachment of the jiva.

March 2012

1. Jivan Mukti

Jivan mukti is liberation while still having a body, i.e. to experience total absence of misery, become brahmarup, and experience the presence and bliss of Paramatma whilst alive. In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has spoken of attaining the brahmic state, or attaining liberation or the highest state of enlightenment whilst still possessing a physical body (S 9, G III 7).

Once the karan body of an aspirant is destroyed he becomes a jivan mukta (one who has attained jivan mukti) and no form of maya, 1-ness or my-ness remains. Consequently, all love and hate, desires, swabhavs and attachment towards the body are also destroyed. At the same time, through offering devotion, service and upasana to Parabrahman and serving the manifest Satpurush, the sanchit karmas from previous lives are also destroyed. Now devoid of any 1-ness, my-ness and prejudices, such a jivan mukta does not under any circumstances perform any improper karmas which are against God's wishes (S 14, G II 13).

On God's command one performs pious karmas for the purpose of pleasing God, then those kriyaman karmas become a form of bhakti, and not a form of attachment (G II 11).

A jivan mukta has to experience the consequences of his prarabdha karmas. However, if so wished by God or the Gunatit Sant, if one were to face execution on a shuli, it can be reduced to the pain of a mere pinprick (G I 70). Regardless of how unfavourable a person's prarabdha may be, it becomes favourable (G I 58) and prarabdha of having to suffer miseries comparable to narak (hell) would be destroyed and one would instead attain the highest state of enlightenment (G II 45).

A jivan mukta does not become disturbed or miserable in any way due to experiencing the pain of his prarabdha karmas. Even if his prarabdha leads to misery or suffering, he understands it to be only due to the will of his beloved God (G III 13). He understands that even kal, karma and maya are incapable of troubling him without the express will of God (G I 63, K 8). He continues to experience the state of being a jivan mukta until his prarabdha karmas are exhausted.

A jivan mukta sees his own self, which transcends the three bodies, the three gunas and the three states, as being brahmarup, extremely pure and full of divine light. Amidst that light, he sees the sacred image of the manifest form of God (G I 23, G II 62). Thus, a jivan mukta who has attained the highest enlightened state has the continuous realization of Parabrahman within his brahmarup atma. On attaining this knowledge-based divine vision, he enjoys the constant darshan of Parabrahman everywhere (K 7).

In this manner, a jivan mukta attains the true realization of atma and Paramatma, and constantly experiences the highest form of bliss. He is no longer attracted to any worldly objects, and all his worldly desires are eradicated. Everywhere, always, and in all circumstances, he remains in a state of equanimity (L 10, G II 1).

Just like God, such a devotee also becomes independent, i.e. no mayik objects have the power to bind him (G I 62, S 11).

2. Jiva: the embodiment of knowledge and knower

Shriji Maharaj describes a jiva as both the embodiment of knowledge and the knower. This means that knowledge is the form of a jiva and also its virtue or dharma.

In Shikshapatri verse 105, by describing the jiva as sentient, it indicates that its form is the embodiment of knowledge. Also, it is described as knower, i.e. jnata, and one with jnatrutva dharma, i.e. one who has the virtue of knowing. This quality of acquiring knowledge is described as jnan shakti.

Also, Vachanamrut S 12 describes the jiva as the 'embodiment of knowledge'. Similarly, Vachanamruts K 4 and G III 39 describe the jiva as possessing awareness. This 'awareness' is the quality of jnan possessed by the jiva. It is through this quality of jnan that the jiva 'knows'. Hence, Vachanamruts G I 20, K 1, etc., state that 'the jiva is the knower'. In the same way, Vachanamruts G I 57, P 3, etc., describe the jiva as being 'kshetragna' (the knower of the 'kshetra' - i.e. the body). In this way, the jiva is described as the knower, i.e. one who has jnatrutva (the capacity to know) dharma.

The quality of jnatrutva dharma means that the jiva is the refuge of knowledge. In this way, the jiva is the form of knowledge and also has the virtue of knowing.

Moreover, the words chitta, chetna or chaitanya have been used numerous times in the Vachanamrut as synonyms for 'knowledge'. Hence, wherever the jiva has been described as chaitanya, the form of chaitanya, a chaitanya object, or the form of consciousness (S 1,P 3, V 4), it can be taken to be referring to only the jiva being the form of knowledge.

One that has the quality of chaitanya can be called chetan. In Vachanamruts P 3 and L 10 the jiva is referred to as chetan, implying that the jiva has the quality of chaitanya (knowledge).

The jiva is the size of an atom and it resides in the heart. However by its consciousness, it pervades the entire body (G III 4).

3. Bhagwan swaminarayan's complete manifestation through the sant.

On Jeth sud 10, Samvat 1886 (1 June 1830 CE), Shriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham. So, who could be called the manifest or pratyaksh form of God thereafter? Who does God manifest through when he is not present himself? The Vachanamrut reveals that God manifests through the Gunatit Sant. Shriji Maharaj has said:

V 19: "Whenever a jiva attains a human body in Bharat-khand, God's avatars or God's Sadhu will certainly be present on earth at that time. If that jiva can recognize him [either of the two, whoever is present], then he becomes a devotee of God."

V 10: "When God is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the Sant who has realized God -because the jiva can also attain liberation through him."

The two examples above highlight that when God is not present himself, he manifests through the God-realized Sadhu. Speaking extensively on this, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has said: "It is said in a Vachanamrut of the Panchala section, 'The greater the association with God, the greater the bliss experienced, but if

God is not manifest then how can this association be maintained?' It was then answered, 'Through spiritual discourses, kirtans, bhajans and meditation one can maintain the association. And more importantly the company of the great Sadhu is the company of manifest God himself, and thus through him God's bliss is also attained - this is because God resides totally within him. If one does not understand this form to be like that of God's when he was present on earth, then it cannot be said that association has been maintained. In fact, without understanding this fact, even if God is manifest, of what benefit is it! Similarly, if one recognizes the Sant in whom God resides in every way, then he [God] is manifest, and without this understanding he is not manifest.' A sadhu then asked, 'Is God not manifest in the murtis? Then Swami said, 'If one attributes human traits to the actions of God and his holy Sadhu then one's spiritual progress vanishes like the new moon; and if one attributes divine traits, then one progresses spiritually like the waxing moon of the second day of the bright half of the lunar month. And what actions do the murtis perform that one perceives flaws in them and thus regresses? Therefore, only the talking-walking form of God [i.e. human form as the God-realized Sadhu] is called manifest, and therefore only the great Gunatit Sadhu can instil divinity in the murti. But the three - murtis, shastras and pilgrim places - together do not equal such a God-realized Gunatit Sadhu. And such a great Sadhu is able to make all three - murtis, shastras and pilgrim places. Therefore, such a Sadhu, in whom God fully resides, is the manifest form of God'" (SNV 5.392).

Shriji Maharaj has also spoken of the pratyaksh form of God being present through the Sant:

G I 27: "Such a devotee...possesses countless noble virtues such as jnan, bhakti, vairagya, etc. God eternally resides in the heart of such a devotee.

"Consequently, by the grace of God, that devotee attains countless types of powers and liberates countless beings....

"The powers of such a person are such that since it is God who sees through his eyes, he empowers the eyes of all the beings in the brahmand; and since it is God who walks through his legs, he is also capable of endowing the strength to walk to all beings in the brahmand. Thus, since it is God who resides in all the indriyas of such a Sant, that Sant is able to empower the indriyas of all beings in the brahmand. Therefore, such a Sant is the sustainer of the world."

S 10: "When one has the darshan of such a Sant, one should realize, 'I have had the darshan of God himself'".

G III 35: "It should be known that God himself resides in the heart of a Sant who possesses these six qualities."

The above examples highlight that it is only through the Sant that God remains manifest. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami has noted Maharaj's words in the Purushottam Prakash:

Sarve reete Santmii rahu chhu re, ema rahee updeshe dau chhu re...5

Sant bole te bhelo hu bolu re, Sant na bhoole huye na bhoolu re;

Sant vat bhelee karu hu vat re, em Santma chhou siikshat re...6

Sant juve te bhelo hu jou re, Sant sutii pachhee hu sou re;

Sant jage te bhelo hu jagu re, Sant joi ati anuragu re...7

Sant jame te bhelo hu jamu re, Sant bhame te kedye hu bhamu re;

Sant dukhane hu dukhiino re, eha vat satya jan jano re...8

Sant hu ne hu te valee Sant re, em Shrimukhe kahe Bhagwant re;

Sant manajo maree murti re, ema fer nathi ek rati re...9

Meaning: I reside within the Sant in every manner, through him

I preach.

When the Sant speaks, I speak too, the Sant does not forget [me] and I do not forget [the Sant];

Whenever the Sant talks, I talk too, and am thus completely manifest in the Sant.

When the Sant sees, I see too, I sleep only after the Sant sleeps;

When the Sant awakes, I awake too, I become mesmerized when I see the Sant.

When the Sant eats, I eat too, and I travel with him wherever he travels;

If the Sant is hurt, I am hurt too, all should believe this to be the truth.

The Sant is me and I am the Sant, thus Maharaj himself has said;

Believe the Sant to be my form, there is not an iota of difference

(Purushottam Prakash 41).

In his talks, Gunatitanand Swami describes the greatness of such a Sant, through whom Shriji Maharaj manifests in totality:

"He is great, has realized God, lives according to the commands of God, tolerates hardships; God is under his control, God does as he says, God travels to wherever he says; he has won over God, he knows the opinions of God, he grants moksha, by his darshan one has the darshan of God, by worshipping him God is worshipped; he frees jivas from birth, hell, and the cycle of births and deaths and takes us to the immense Akshardham of God; he gives us virtues that make us blissful like God -that is how great he is. God cannot live without him and by his darshan the five grave sins are burnt away. By the actions of his senses the universe is enlivened, and kal, karma and maya tremble before him. Just as by worshipping the body, the jiva is worshipped, similarly, by worshipping this Sadhu, God is worshipped. He is the giver of life; the indweller, omniscient, all-doer, and he appears to be like a human but he is not. God continues to live through him; he helps one attain the eternal abode; he is the doer, yet is the non-doer; like a tree his body is for the benefit of others; he possesses the qualities of the genuine Sadhu which are described in the shastras; he is 'kamil, kabil sub hunnar tere hath'.³ One should understand the Sant's glory in this way" (SNV 4.139).

4. The necessity of understanding parabrahman as divine

Understanding Parabrahman, and the Gunatit Sant through whom he manifests, to be divine and flawless, is essential. Let us consider the essence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings from the Vachanamrut highlighting the advantages of knowing and disadvantages of not knowing them to be flawless:

Benefits of Understanding Them as Divine and Flawless

One becomes totally flawless through realizing God and the great Sant to be absolutely flawless (G I 24, 58).

•"To realize all of God's actions and incidents as redemptive is the very dharma of a devotee, and only one who understands this can be called a perfect devotee of God" (G I 72).

Only one who understands God to be flawless can transcend
maya (L 4, V 5).

Perceiving all worldly actions and incidents of God as being divine is bhakti, and only a person with such bhakti in his heart can be called a devotee, and it is only he who attains the highest state of enlightenment (G II 10).

There will be no difficulties in subduing the desires for the panchvishaya if one realizes the manifest form of God as identical with the one in Akshardham (G II 13).

Those who realize God to be ageless and deathless will become free from karmas and the cycles of births and deaths (A 4).

Gunatitanand Swami also says in his talks:

"When the divine and human characteristics [of the manifest form of God] are considered as equally divine, true bliss in worshipping God is attained" (SNV 5.101).

"On understanding this manifest God [Shriji Maharaj] to be free from all blemishes, there is nothing else left to do. By understanding God as fault-free, one also becomes fault-free" (SNV 5.125).

Loss Due to Perceiving Human Traits in God

In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj comments on the obstacles aspirants face while performing spiritual endeavours if they perceive human traits in God.

The person attributing flaws, such as lust, etc. to God and his Gunatitanand will never himself be freed of those flaws (G I 24, 58).

If doubts arise about the supremacy of God, then one cannot overcome maya (L 4).

If a person does not believe God to be completely divine, Parabrahman: Absolutely Divine then he repeatedly becomes upset and alternately perceives flaws and virtues in God. As a result, day by day, his heart becomes more and more despondent, and ultimately he falls from Satsang (L 18).

"For one who has doubts in realizing God, even if he is a staunch, celibate and a great renunciant, attaining liberation would still be very difficult" (P 7).

If any deficiency remains in understanding the true form of God, then one's flaws will never be eradicated (G II 13).

One who perceives any flaws in God will suffer from vicious thoughts. Moreover, he will also suffer greatly at the time of his death as well (G II 33).

If God is disliked in any way, then the jiva of such a person, which may have been like the full moon of Punam, becomes like the dark moon of Amas (V 12).

Those who consider God to be mortal like ordinary human beings, will themselves never transcend the cycle of births and deaths and the torments of Yampuri (Hell) (A 4).

July 2011

1. Benefits of Attaining, Maintaining Conviction in and Worshipping Manifest God.

Perfect knowledge is understanding manifest God (L7, P7).

Perfect worship is worshipping manifest God (G I 27).

It is only through listening, reading and contemplating upon the divine incidents of manifest God that spirituality flourishes (G II 58), worldly desires are eradicated (G I 38), peace is experienced (G II 35) and liberation is attained (G I 3, G II 35).

Only by realizing manifest God to be perfect and forever divine is maya eradicated (P 7) and does one become flawless (G I 24).

Through the contact of manifest God only, can one become nirgun (G II 8, 13).

It is only through maintaining faith in manifest God coupled with the true knowledge of his glory, that one becomes fulfilled and has nothing left to accomplish (G I 72, L 2, G II .13).

It is only through manifest God that ultimate liberation can be attained (K 7, G II 32).

The above reveals Shriji Maharaj's insistence that ultimate lib-

Pratyaksh means, literally, 'before the eyes'. It is often used synonymously with pragat liberation can only be attained through the manifest form of God. The following two examples further emphasize Shriji Maharaj's point of view:

G II 21: "If a person realizes the glory of manifest God and his Bhakta-Sant in exactly the same way as he realizes the glory of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc., as well as the glory of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanu- man, Uddhav, etc. - then nothing more remains to be understood on the path of liberation.

"Whether this principal is understood after being told once, or after being told a hundred thousand times; whether it is understood today, or after a hundred thousand years, there is no option but to understand it.

"A person who has such a firm conviction has grasped all the fundamental principles. What is more he will never fall from the path of liberation."

G II 32: "The sole cause behind the jiva attaining liberation, transcending maya and becoming brahmaswarup is its engagement in the jnan, meditation, devotional songs, spiritual discourses, etc., of the manifest form of Vasudev Bhagwan, who is Purushottam. It is due to these that the jiva transgresses maya, attains an extremely elevated state, and also attains God's Akshardham."

Explaining the necessity of the manifest form of God or the Sant, to attain ultimate liberation, Gunatitanand Swami says:

SNV 5.5: "Only when ultimate moksha is attained can it be described as (true) moksha. And if one attains other abodes then one will have to take re-birth. So, as long as one has to take rebirth, that cannot be called final moksha. Such ultimate moksha is attained by surrendering totally to the manifest form of God and God's enlightened Sadhu. Others cannot do it and that Sadhu is as capable as God."

SNV 5.85: "By taking the refuge of the manifest God and manifest Sadhu, one attains liberation."

Regarding the existence of manifest God, Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami writes:

Jem pragat ravi hoy jyare re, jay tam brahmandnu tyare re; 11

Jem pragat jalne pamee re, jay pyaseenee pyas te vamee re;

Jem pragat annane jame re, antar jatharii jhal virame re. 12

Tem pragat male Bhagwan re, tyare jananu kalyan nidan re;

Mate pragat charitra sambhalvu re, hoy pragat tyaavee malvu re. 13

Tya hoy Prabhu pragat pramiin re, tiyii jananu sahaje kalyan re;...

Meaning: When the Sun is present, the darkness of the cosmos disappears...11

When real water is obtained, one's thirst is quenched; When real food is eaten, one's hunger subsides...12

Similarly, on attaining manifest God, one's liberation is assured;

For this reason, the divine incidents of manifest God should be heard; one should associate with that manifest form...13"

Where there is manifest God, one's liberation is easily attained;...

(Bhakta Chintamani 134).

Male Prabhu pragat praman re, ka to tena malele kalyan re;

Teh vina te koti upaye re, atyantik kalyiin na thaye re. 18

Meaning: Only when one has met the manifest form of God or one who has realized (the manifest God) can one attain liberation;

Without this, millions of other ways will not lead to ultimate liberation (Kalyan Nirnay 2).

2. Means to please God, to attain redemptive virtues and one develops love for god.

Means to please god

The jiva is only able to break free from the cycle of births and deaths, attain ultimate liberation and therefore experience eternal bliss if it pleases God. It is for this reason that devotees perform various spiritual endeavours. Some may offer worship to God with sandalwood and flowers, while others may offer various clothes, ornaments and foods to God, continuously recite God's name, visit places of pilgrimage, donate to charities, and perform yagnas; however, Shriji Maharaj has stated that the best means to please God is by knowing him as having a form and as the all-doer.

In Vachanamrut V 2, Kandasji Patel of the village Buva asks Shriji Maharaj, "By what means does God become pleased?" Shriji Maharaj replied, "If we do not malign God, then God becomes pleased. Then you may ask, 'What does it mean to malign God?' Well, God is the all-doer of this world. However, if one does not understand him to be the all-doer and instead believes that it is kal that is the all-doer of this world, or that it is maya, or that it is karma, or that it is swabhav that is the all-doer, then one is maligning God. This is because God is actually the all-doer. To ignore this and to claim that only kal, karma, maya and swabhav are the all-doers of this world is serious slander against God.... Therefore, God is only pleased upon one who realizes God to possess a definite form and to be the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the cosmos."

To attain redemptive virtues

- Explaining how devotees are able to attain the redemptive virtues of God, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in G I 62: "If a sadhu develops perfect conviction in God, then he will acquire those redemptive virtues of God. What is that conviction? Well, he realizes that God is not like kal, not like karma, not like swabhav, not like maya, and not like Purush. He realizes God to be distinct from everything, their controller and cause; yet, despite being their cause, he is beyond their influence. A person who has cultivated a conviction in the manifest form of God in this manner will never be deflected in any way. Even if he hears misleading shastras, or if he hears the talks of misleading philosophers, or even if his own antahkaran raises doubts within himself, his conviction of God never wavers in any way whatsoever."
- "A person with such a conviction in God is said to have a rapport with God.... one who has developed a rapport with God by having a firm conviction of him acquires the redemptive virtues of God. As a result, just as God is unattached in all aspects and is capable of doing as he chooses, such a devotee also becomes extremely capable and unattached."
- Such a profound and exceptional state is attained by a devotee through having a clear understanding of God as the all-doer.

One Develops Love for God

- Shriji Maharaj has said in several Vachanamruts, such as G I 56, S 15, G II 9, that nothing else remains to be done by one who develops unparalleled love, like that of the gopis, for God. Explaining the means of developing such profound love, Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut G I 59: "A person should have the following understanding: Firstly, conviction in God, i.e. 'He who I have attained is undoubtedly God himself.' He should also be a believer in God. Furthermore, he should realize the divine powers of God, i.e. 'This God is the master of Brahmamahol, Golok, Shwetswip, and all the other abodes. He is the master of countless millions of brahmands and is the all-doer.' He should never believe Purush, kal, karma, maya, the three gunas, the 24 elements, or Brahma and the other deities to be the creators of this brahmand; instead, he should realize only Purushottam Bhagwan to be the creator and the antaryami of all. Such an understanding, along with faith in the manifest form of God, is the only means to develop unparalleled love for God."

3. Necessity of Becoming Brahmarup

For the reasons discussed below, to attain moksha, Shriji Maharaj has insisted on the necessity of becoming brahmarup, and offering bhakti and upasana to Parabrahman.

To Attain the Highest Level of Nirvikalp Faith

Only by cultivating the highest level of nirvikalp faith can we experience and develop complete conviction for the divine and supreme form of Parabrahman. Every evening, followers of the

Swaminarayan Sampradaya request the highest level of nirvikalp faith in the form of a prayer after performing the evening arti of the murti of Shriji Maharaj:

Nirvikalp uttam ati nischay tav Ghanshyam.

Meaning: O Ghanshyam! May I develop the highest level of nirvikalp faith.

Shriji Maharaj explains the highest level of nirvikalp faith in Vachanamrut L 12: "One possessing the highest level of nirvikalp faith realizes that millions of brahmands, each encircled by the eight layers, appear like mere atoms before Akshar. Such is the greatness of Akshar, the abode of Parabrahman. One who worships Purush- ottam having become akshar- rup can be said to possess the highest level of nirvikalp faith."

In accordance with Shriji Maharaj's words, to become akshar- rup and offer devotion to Purushottam is itself the highest level of nirvikalp faith.

Eligibility to Offer the Highest Level of Devotion to Parabrahman

We all offer the nine types of devotion to Parabrahman, but that is sadhan bhakti. To offer that devotion according to the command of the Satpurush is the means to becoming brahmarup. After becoming brahmarup one is eligible to offer sadhya bhakti - the highest devotion. Therefore, it is obligatory to become brahmarup to become qualified and deserving of offering a truly higher and complete level of devotion to Parabrahman. Explaining this true principle, Shriji Maharaj reveals in Vachanamrut L 7, "Only one who is brahmarup has the right to offer bhakti to Purushottam."

To further emphasize this point, in the same Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj refers to a verse in the Gita:

Brahma-bhootaha prasannatma na shochati na kankshati, Samaha sarveshu bhooteshu mad-bhaktim labhate param.

Meaning: One who becomes brahmarup, whose mind is always content, who does not grieve in any way, who does not crave for any object, who observes equality towards all living creatures -that individual attains my supreme bhakti (Gita 18.54).

To be Able to Offer Devotion Free of Obstacles

A devotee who strives to offer devotion to God may face countless obstacles. The main hurdles that cause difficulties are lust, anger, greed, taste, affection, ego, envy, calumny, jealousy, love and hate, attachment to family and relatives, attachment to the panchvishays, desires, and other shortcomings etc. Due to these shortcomings we are drawn to the panchvishays, and perceive human traits in God and the Satpurush such that our association with them is broken.

In Vachanamrut L 6, Shriji Maharaj explains the root cause of our own faults, and how they create obstacles on our path of devotion, "All flaws reside in the flaw of identifying one's self with the body." Also, in Vachanamrut G III 39, in saying that identifying one's self as the body is maya itself, Shriji Maharaj explains, "Maya is nothing but the sense of I-ness towards the body and my-ness towards anything related to the body."

He further explains in Vachanamrut G I 44, "Therefore, as long as a person believes the body to be his true self, his entire understanding is totally useless."

By offering devotion while maintaining the belief that one is the body, the obstacles a devotee endures in his endeavours are explained by Shriji Maharaj:

G I 23: "As long as one has not attained this elevated spiritual state, one is subject to obstacles, even if one is a devotee of God. Shivji, for example, did not behave in such an elevated spiritual state and was therefore enticed by the beauty of Mohini. Brahma also did not behave in such a state and thus became infatuated on seeing Saraswati. Naradji also did not behave in such an elevated spiritual state and consequently harboured a desire to marry. Moreover, because Indra, Chandra and others were not behaving in such a state, their reputations were also blemished due to their mistakes.

"Furthermore, if a person has not developed this elevated spiritual state, he will perceive worldly attributes even in God, even if he himself is a devotee of God. King Parikshit, for example, was not such a devotee, and so he raised doubts about the divinity of Shri Krishna Bhagwan after hearing of

the ras episode. On the other hand, because Shukji was such an elevated devotee, he had no doubts whatsoever."

G III 1: "If the virtue of atma-realization is lacking, then when the body experiences pain or pleasure, that devotee's vruttis [state of mind] become disturbed. Then, one develops love for anything one considers pleasurable and an aversion for anything one considers to be full of misery. In this way, one's mind becomes vitiated." G III 21: "Indeed, the inner enemies of lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, subtle jealousy, etc., will certainly distress one who is unable to behave as the atma. Therefore, if one offers devotion without attaining atma-realization, one's true nature is sure to be exposed in this Satsang fellowship."

By offering devotion and believing oneself to be atma, or brahman, and distinct from the body, one does not face obstacles of lust and other flaws. Therefore, in Vachanamrut G II 35, Shriji Maharaj explains the reason for developing resolute atma-realization: "The only reason why I deliver such talks about knowledge of the atma is that if one can realize one's atma to be distinct from the body, then one will no longer harbour any love for one's body or for one's relatives. Then, there would no longer be any hindrances in the bhakti of God. This is the only reason."

Gunatitanand Swami also says:

SNV 1.141: "In this universe there is no man who does not desire a woman and no woman who does not desire a man. To separate each from the other, Maharaj has written one shlok: 'Ni-jatmanam brahmarupam ...' i.e. believe one's true self as Brahman, not the body. Just as there are no stones no matter how deep one digs into the soil of Gujarat deep down into the earth, similarly, there are no faults in one who is brahmarup."

SNV 1.228: "Therefore, to believe oneself as brahmarup and that God resides within, is the state of spiritual wisdom; that is superior [to samadhi] and it is free of obstacles. Without that, even Sachchidanand Swami, who used to experience samadhi, suffered. Hence, one must become a spiritually wise devotee rather than an affectionate devotee."

For Ultimate Liberation

Shriji Maharaj has explained the necessity of becoming brahmarup to attain liberation. Defining mukti in the Shikshapatri, he says:

Tatra brahmatmana Krushnaseva muktischa gamyatam.

Meaning: Mukti is to become brahmarup and render service to Parabrahman there [in Akshardham] (Shikshapatri 121).

Furthermore, Shriji Maharaj describes this state of liberation after death (videha mukti³) in Vachanamrut G I 21, "After such an ekantik bhakta leaves his body and becomes free of all influences of maya, he attains Akshardham via the archimarg

"A devotee who has reached Akshardham attains qualities similar to those of Akshar and forever remains in the service of God." The state of becoming aksharup is not necessarily attained only after death, but can be attained while one is still alive, as described

by Shriji Maharaj in the Vachanamrut:

S 12: "Such a devotee with perfect jnan is conscious only of his atma. Also, he believes his atma to be brahmarup and that Purushottam Bhagwan - also known as Parabrahman - forever resides in his brahmarup atma. Also, his conviction of God remains forever steady."

G II 62: "Furthermore, when this thought meets the atma,

divine light is generated in the heart of the thinker, and he has the realization of himself as being brahmarup. And in that brahmarup atma he perceives Parabrahman Narayan."

In the above references, Maharaj clearly explains that a devotee of God can be brahmarup even when alive. Therefore, it is necessary to become brahmarup to attain jivan mukti or videha mukti. Shriji Maharaj's view is that if a devotee of God does not achieve this state, he is unable to attain ultimate liberation. This is recorded clearly in Vachanamrut L 7, "Thus, one who does not offer bhakti to Parabrahman after becoming brahmarup cannot be said to have attained ultimate liberation."

Exercise

1. 'The supreme cause of liberation' and 'The means to pleasing God'.
2. Parabrahman: 'The means and solution' and 'One and unique'.
3. Without a murti, there can be no divine light and the ability to reside in one location – a vyatirek nature – would not be possible.
4. 'The form of Aksharbrahman' and 'The anvay and vyatirek forms of Aksharbrahman'.
5. Bhagwan Swaminarayan Supreme: As expressed in Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato
6. The forms of attachment and the forms of liberation.
7. Necessity of Becoming Brahmarup
8. The form of ishwaras and who is included in the ishwar category?
9. Principle of Cause and Effect
10. The forms of liberation
11. Bhagwan Swaminarayan supreme: promising His devotees ultimate liberation and manifestation through Gunatit Satpurush.
12. Deep reflections on liberations: forms of bondage.
13. Bhagwan Swaminarayan supreme: based on incidents of Samadhi and powerful paramhansas obeyed Him.
14. Process of creation (description)
15. Aksharbrahman as divine abode.
16. Bhagwan Swaminarayan supreme: based on Durgapur mahatma and Sri Harililakalpataru.

Detailed note on the topic

Q.6 Write detailed notes on any ONE of the following topics. (In 25-30 lines.) (Total Marks: 10)

July 2015

1. Essence Of Maharaj' S Discourses About His Own Form: A Range of Different Audiences

Whenever Shriji Maharaj spoke about his form, he considered the differing levels of understanding of the audience, since knowledge given to the unprepared may have an unintended effect. There is a Gujarati saying, 'Kidine kan, ane hathine man', i.e. an ant needs only to be fed an amount equal to a grain of sand, whereas an elephant needs food weighing many kilos. Thus, when food is given according to one's capacity, it is enjoyable. Similarly, only when aspirants are given knowledge according to their suitability are they able to enjoy its bliss. If a sweet food is put on top of an ant, it will be crushed, and would certainly not be able to enjoy its taste. In the same way, if those who prefer to worship the paroksh (non-manifest) form of God are given the knowledge of God's manifest form prior to becoming suitable for it, then due to the misunderstandings and doubts which arise, their understanding of both the paroksh and pratyaksh forms of God becomes disturbed. For this reason, Shriji Maharaj has spoken according to the individual levels of spirituality and appropriateness of the aspirants.

As an aspirant gains a deeper insight, he develops greater understanding of the glory of manifest God and the God-realized Satpurush. As a result, his suitability to receive this knowledge increases and he develops greater conviction in the manifest form of Paramatma. Thus, Shriji Maharaj has talked to aspirants according to their suitability and spiritual status.

To fulfil the wishes of and grant bliss to his loving devotees, Shriji Maharaj often travelled from Gadhada to many villages and cities such as Sarangpur, Kariyani, Panchala, Loya, Vartal, Ahmedabad, Jetalpur, Ashlali, Vadodara, Surat, Junagadh and Kutch-Bhuj. Wherever Maharaj went, aspirants were attracted to his divine personality, and would join the group of sadhus and devotees to take the benefit of his darshan and company. Due to this, it was only natural that at various times and places, there would be a mixed audience of aspirants believing in different deities and avatars. During such times, Maharaj would speak in a manner enabling all to be inspired by what he said.

To help aspirants gain an understanding of esoteric spiritual endeavours and inspiration on how to perform them, Shriji Maharaj at times presented himself as an ideal sadhak and talked of his own spiritual endeavours. Further, to explain the attributes of an ideal ekantik bhakta, an ideal sadhu and an ideal worshipper, he would speak of himself as the ideal of all three.

At times, after speaking about the glory of other avatars, he would then direct the subject to his form by saying that the avatar is today 'present before you', 'manifest before you', 'visible to you all' and 'seated in this assembly'. In this way, devotees of the various avatars would feel that their ishtadev was manifest in the form of Shriji Maharaj. Once they had developed affection in this way, Maharaj would steadily correct their belief.

Shriji Maharaj never refuted any avatar or their devotees, but narrated the glory of their life and work in his discourses. It is due to this that devotees who worshipped the paroksh forms of God developed affection for him. They would often stay with him and by steadily experiencing his extraordinary powers and personality, they would eventually develop the conviction of him being God. It is due to the compassionate talks by Maharaj that thousands of aspirants sought his refuge and became his devotees during his presence on earth. Believing him to be God, they began to offer devout worship to him.

Thus, people developed conviction in his supremacy gradually over many years as a result of listening to the talks of Shriji Maharaj or his ekantik sadhus and devotees. If he had spoken openly about his supremacy without considering the varying levels of understanding of people seated in an assembly, then perhaps the true understanding would never have dawned upon them.

Gunatitanand Swami has explained this in a similar manner in his talks: "If it had been explained as it really is [that Shriji Maharaj is supreme] then it would not have been accepted, in fact the opposite would occur. And because Maharaj had spoken as it really is, many people stopped observing the codes of conduct. Maharaj then removed many Vachanamruts and said, 'We do not want to keep even a single Vachanamrut'. Thereafter Nityanand Swami prayed, 'We shall write what we find in accordance to the Dharmaamrut and other shastras.' It was then that Maharaj allowed for the current [number of Vachanamruts] to be retained. Therefore, if it is

explained as it really is, then the desired result is not achieved. So, it should be understood that whatever Maharaj did was for our benefit (SNV 5.236).

Thus, due to the different levels of understanding, Shriji Maharaj did not talk about his supreme form at every place and at every opportunity. This reflected his compassionate and beneficial motive for the liberation of countless jivas.

Clarifying such liberating intentions of Shriji Maharaj, Sadguru Nirgundas Swami has noted an incident in his talks:

"Once, in the Akshar Ordi in Gadhpur, Brahmanand Swami came to Maharaj. He put his head at Maharaj's holy feet and started crying. Maharaj questioned, 'Swami! Why are you crying?' Swami replied, 'You are the manifest Lord of Akshardham, yet we are compelled to discreetly sing about you. For this, we are internally pained.' Maharaj said in response, 'Swami, we have come to liberate countless jivas. Therefore, you should sing in a manner that is fitting to the countless jivas and which will grant them liberation'" (Vat 373). This incident shows that Shriji Maharaj spoke according to the circumstances wherever he went in order to help all accept his word, avoid misunderstanding and liberate all. The incident also reveals that many paramhansas understood Shriji Maharaj's supremacy, yet they spoke in a manner that all would understand and accept. Despite this, it is essential for one to understand Maharaj's form as it truly is in order to attain ultimate liberation.

So, even though Maharaj usually spoke in a simple and readily acceptable manner, he also delivered many unambiguous talks regarding his true supreme form in private conversations and public discourses to those who were of an appropriate level of understanding to accept. Such explicit talks are found in the Vachanamrut and various renowned shastras of the Sampradaya. Some examples have been given in section 2.2, 'Bhagwan Swaminarayan -Supreme: As Expressed in the Shastras of the Sampradaya' on p. 68.

2. True definition of the Aksharbrahman Tattva

In Swaminarayan Darshan, the Aksharbrahman tattva is second in importance to Parabrahman. In the texts of the Sampradaya, this tattva is referred to as Akshar, Brahman, Aksharbrahman, Mul Aksharmurti and by other names. Where this Aksharbrahman tattva has been described as the abode of Parabrahman, it is called Akshardham, Brahmanahol and Brahmapur.

One of the special features of Swaminarayan Darshan is the clear and detailed exposition of the Aksharbrahman tattva. In fact, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's clear description of the form and absolute necessity of understanding Akshar is not found anywhere else. Akshar, or Brahman, has been mentioned innumerable times in the Shrutis, Smrutis, Itihases, Purans and other Hindu shastras. However, it is an undisputed fact that the manner in which Shriji Maharaj has focused upon this concept and truly revealed the distinct nature of Akshar is unparalleled. A comparative study of the commentaries written by previous acharyas, as well as the many philosophical teachings written by learned scholars demonstrates this.

Analysis of the shastras and commentaries, which give interpretations of them, reveals that 'Brahman' and 'Parabrahman' are often used synonymously. Also, in some places jiva, prakruti and even Parabrahman have been termed Brahman. The shastras do certainly state that Brahman and Parabrahman are different tattvas, however, there is no fully comprehensive description lucidly detailing the differences in their form, nature and purpose. Due to this lack of clarity on the distinctness between Brahman and Parabrahman, many interpretations have been derived from only a single word or sentence by different scholars.

Many Vedic darshans and their commentaries regard Parabrahman as the highest, supreme tattva; however, the distinct natures of Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman, as described in the shastras, has not been made clear in the Vedant Darshans. It is evident upon reading their commentaries that scholars, in their attempt to establish consistency in their definition from different sources, have become confused.

By acquainting ourselves with the diverse, differing and sometimes opposing opinions on Aksharbrahman of the various acharyas, we realize the significance of the new light that Shriji Maharaj has shed on Aksharbrahman.

Shriji Maharaj has not concocted the talk of Aksharbrahman. In fact, in the Gita it is stated:

Yadaksharam veda-vido vadanti.

Meaning: That Akshar, which those who are learned in the Vedas speak about (Gita 8.11).

Shriji Maharaj has provided a clear and distinct understanding of the Akshar tattva. He has explained the necessity of Aksharbrahman on the path to ultimate liberation, described its form, and spoken of its limitless glory. Maharaj's true definition of the Aksharbrahman tattva is a priceless gift to Hindu theology and philosophy or the darshan shastras.

Not only has Shriji Maharaj clarified the form and nature of the Aksharbrahman tattva, but he also brought that Akshar tattva to earth along with him in a manifest (human) form (G I 71) and identified Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami as the manifest form of Aksharbrahman. Shriji Maharaj revealed that by attaining the state of Akshar, or Brahman, i.e. becoming brahmarup, through association with the manifest form of Aksharbrahman and then offering bhakti and upasana to Parabrahman, all could attain ultimate liberation. He kept the pathway to ultimate liberation open for countless jivas by remaining forever present on earth through Aksharbrahman, i.e. the Gunatit param para.

Shriji Maharaj has clarified the form and nature of the Aksharbrahman tattva, enabling even those who are less educated or not educated at all to understand it.

Let us now reflect on the various facets regarding the form of Aksharbrahman.

March 2015

1. The necessity of understanding the form of Aksharbrahman: To attain true conviction of Parabrahman.

It is extremely difficult to attain true conviction of the form of Parabrahman (L 18). Since our indriyas and antahkarans are mayik, whereas God is not mayik (G I 51, K 1), therefore, Parabrahman is imperceptible to our mayik indriyas and antahkaran (G I 78, P 4). Thus, in the Vachanamrut, Maharaj describes the need for shastras and the Sant to help one understand the form of Parabrahman.

Explaining the vital need for shastras, Maharaj states in Vachanamrut S 13, "Whosoever develops faith in God does so only through the shastras...only faith developed through the shastras remains staunch."

However, the shastras contain many kinds of statements. Therefore, no one is able to clearly understand the spiritual talks in the shastras; in fact, all are confused by them (G I 7). This is because the concepts of the shastras cannot be understood in their true context by anyone except an Ekantik Bhakta (G I 66). In fact, those who do not have devotion for God will understand God to be formless, even from reading the Shrimad Bhagvat (G II 10).

This is because conviction that God is forever divine and possesses a form can only be attained from a person who has such conviction. However, it can never be attained from others (G I 64). Therefore, no one can ever attain liberation by listening to the Gita or the Shrimad Bhagvat from a person who does not have faith in God coupled with the knowledge of his greatness. On the contrary, only great harm can come from it (V 12).

Thus, the message that Maharaj has imparted in the Vachanamrut, as seen above, it is that only possible to truly understand the form of Parabrahman from the Ekantik Satpurush.

In Vachanamrut G II 13, Shriji Maharaj has mentioned, "Such discourses regarding the nature of God cannot be understood by oneself even from the shastras. Even though these facts may be in the shastras, it is only when the Satpurush manifests on this earth, and one hears them being narrated by him, that one understands them. " Here, the Sant, or Satpurush, through whom the form of Parabrahman is understood, is none other than Aksharbrahman incarnate, the brahmaswarup Sant.

Thus, it is only possible to attain the true conviction of Parabrahman through Aksharbrahman. This is because Aksharbrahman is eternally beyond maya, and hence he is the closest of all to Parabrahman. Hence, no one can understand the glory of Parabrahman to the extent that Aksharbrahman can. Furthermore, as Parabrahman dwells in totality within Aksharbrahman, even the akshar-muktas do not possess the power that Aksharbrahman does. Thus, only Aksharbrahman is able to help one to establish true conviction in Parabrahman as it is. For that reason, in order to understand the true glory of Parabrahman, it is absolutely essential to profoundly associate with Aksharbrahman. Shriji Maharaj has emphasized this in Vachanamrut G II 42, "Aksharbrahman itself is like the sun in the sense that when the sun rises, all ten directions can be determined in relation to it.

Akshardham is like that."

Through this analogy, Maharaj illustrates that when the sun rises at dawn we are able to determine East and other directions. In the same way when we profoundly associate with the manifest Aksharbrahman, we can realize the true glory of Parabrahman. This is the key and the most fundamental teaching, which Maharaj wants us to understand.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize and understand the glory of Aksharbrahman and thus profoundly associates with him through thoughts, deeds and words in order to develop true conviction in the tattva of Parabrahman.

In fact, without understanding the true form of Aksharbrahman, it is impossible to develop conviction in Parabrahman and the nature of his entity because only after knowing Aksharbrahman can one know Parabrahman, since Parabrahman is beyond Aksharbrahman. How can it be possible to understand that which is above and beyond Akshar, if we haven't even understood Akshar?

In Vachanamrut G I 63, Maharaj describes the supreme tattva: "Jal, the cause of pruthvi, is larger than it and is subtler than it. In the same way, tej is the cause of jal, vayu is the cause of tej, akash is the cause of vayu, ahamkar is the cause of akash, mahattattva is the cause of ahamkar, Pradhan and Purush are the cause of mahat- tattva, and Mul-Prakruti and Brahman 1 are the causes of Pradhan and Purush. The cause of all these is Aksharbrahman, which is the abode of Purushottam Bhagwan."

Maharaj explains in Vachanamruts G I 64, 72, 73 and others that Parabrahman is above Akshar. The verse below from the Mundaka Upanishad also supports this fact:

Akshariit parataha paraha.

Meaning: Parabrahman is beyond even Akshar, who is above all [others] (Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.2).

Hence, it is natural that the more we understand the glory of each tattva, the more we can understand the glory of Akshar; and once we understand the glory of Akshar, only then can we understand the glory of Parabrahman. So, it is necessary to initially recognize Aksharbrahman in order to fully recognize the tattva of Parabrahman.

The Shrutis state:

Brahmavidipnoti param.

Meaning: One who realizes Brahman, attains Parabrahman (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1).

2. Extraordinary divinity and power: Command over capable Paramhansas

The history of the Sampradaya reveals that, in a single night, 500 paramhansas gave up their ingrained beliefs of caste and accepted initiation from Maharaj. These paramhansas delightfully and enthusiastically observed the 108 arduous trials, which Shriji Maharaj prescribed.

These included: begging for food and eating only after soaking it in water to make it tasteless such that even a dog would not eat it, wearing a cloth made of jute, tolerating cold and heat without seeking shelter from anything - a tree, house or wall, and others. In this way, they tolerated physical and mental hardships.

These paramhansas were not ordinary people. They were not poor, ignorant, naive or incapable people who had no other option than to become slaves to Shriji Maharaj and reside lifelong at his feet; rather, they were prosperous, energetic and highly intelligent, both in worldly and spiritual affairs. They excelled in saintliness, scriptural study, wisdom and many other sincere endeavours as aspirants. Among them were Muktanand Swami, a pious spiritual aspirant who staunchly observed the vows of renunciation and detachment; Brahmanand Swami, who was exceptionally intelligent, a shatavdhan¹³ and a royal poet; Nityanand Swami, a master of the shastras; Gopalanand Swami, a master of ashtanga yoga; Santdas Swami, who had mastered samadhi; Swarupanand Swami, who had the constant darshan of his atma; Vyapkanand Swami, who had the power to spontaneously revive a dead mare; Sachchidanand Swami, who had the ability to induce rainfall; Nishkulanand Swami, who was known as the embodiment of renunciation and detachment; Bhai Atmanand Swami, who was beyond the shackles of his body; Swayamprakashanand Swami, who was previously a leader of hundreds of disciples; and Advaitanand Swami (Magniram), who, prior to accepting the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, had pleased the Mother Goddess and had mastered the occult. Also among these great paramhansas was Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, who had the power to support countless millions of universes.

Each of these paramhansas had the ability to be worshipped as a god of this world. Despite this, they surrendered themselves fully to Shriji Maharaj due to his extraordinary powers and divine love, and, like puppets, obeyed his every command.

Once, on receiving the command of Shriji Maharaj by letter, 18 householders immediately renounced their worldly lives and became sadhus. Such was the power of his written word. In total, over 3,000 such sadhus, just as moths are attracted by light, were drawn by Shriji Maharaj's divine love and powers. They humbly surrendered their entire life to him observing his challenging, yet love-filled, commands.

July 2014

1. Mukti Mimansa: Jivan Mukti and Videha Mukti

The ultimate aim of human life is to transcend maya and attain mukti -freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. By leading a spiritually pure life based on the path revealed by Parabrahman Bhagwan Swaminarayan, such mukti or moksha is attained.

Mukti mimansa refers to deep reflection on or inquiry into liberation. This usually involves deep reflection on the forms of bondage and liberation, and the means to liberation.

Shriji Maharaj has accepted two types of liberation: jivan mukti and videha mukti. Let us look briefly at both types.

i. Jivan Mukti

Jivan mukti is liberation while still having a body, i.e. to experience total absence of misery, become brahmarup, and experience the presence and bliss of Paramatma whilst alive. In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has spoken of attaining the brahmic state, or attaining liberation or the highest state of enlightenment whilst still possessing a physical body (S 9, G III 7).

Once the karan body of an aspirant is destroyed he becomes a jivan mukta (one who has attained jivan mukti) and no form of maya, I-ness or my-ness remains. Consequently, all love and hate, desires, swabhavs and attachment towards the body are also destroyed. At the same time, through offering devotion, service and upasana to Parabrahman and serving the manifest Satpurush, the sanchit karmas from previous lives are also destroyed. Now devoid of any I-ness, my-ness and prejudices, such a jivan mukta does not under any circumstances perform any improper karmas, which are against God's wishes (S 14, G II 13).

When on God's command one performs pious karmas for the purpose of pleasing God, then those kriyaman karmas become a form of bhakti, and not a form of attachment (G II 11).

A jivan mukta has to experience the consequences of his prarabdha karmas. However, if so wished by God or the Gunatit Sant, if one were to face execution on a shuli, it can be reduced to the pain of a mere pinprick (G I 70). Regardless of how unfavourable a person's prarabdha may be, it becomes favourable (G I 58) and prarabdha of having to suffer miseries comparable to narak (hell) would be destroyed and one would instead attain the highest state of enlightenment (G II 45).

A jivan mukta does not become disturbed or miserable in any way due to experiencing the pain of his prarabdha karmas. Even if his prarabdha leads to misery or suffering, he understands it to be only due to the will of his beloved God (G III 13). He understands that even kal, karma and maya are incapable of troubling him without the express will of God (G I 63, K 8). He continues to experience the state of being a jivan mukta until his prarabdha karmas are exhausted.

A jivan mukta sees his own self, which transcends the three bodies, the three gunas and the three states, as being brahmarup, extremely pure and full of divine light. Amidst that light, he sees the sacred image of the manifest form of God (G I 23, G II 62). Thus, a jivan mukta who has attained the highest enlightened state has the continuous realization of Parabrahman within his brahmarup atma. On attaining this knowledge-based divine vision, he enjoys the constant darshan of Parabrahman everywhere (K 7).

In this manner, a jivan mukta attains the true realization of atma and Paramatma, and constantly experiences the highest form of bliss. He is no longer attracted to any worldly objects, and all his worldly desires are eradicated. Everywhere, always, and in all circumstances, he remains in a state of equanimity (L 10, G II 1).

Just like God, such a devotee also becomes independent, i.e. no mayik objects have the power to bind him (G I 62, S 11).

ii. Videha Mukti

Videha mukti is to attain the highest state of enlightenment after leaving the mortal body. Once all the prarabdha karmas of a jivan mukta have been experienced, his association with the sthul and sukshma bodies also ends, and he then goes to God's Akshardham (G I 1, 21). It is important to clarify here that if a devotee, due to some deficiency during his life, does not experience the state of jivan mukti, in his final moments, his deficiencies can still be removed by the grace of Parabrahman and the Gunatit Satpurush. Thus, that devotee is able to attain videha mukti and go to Akshardham. A mukta who goes to Akshardham attains a brahmic form (body)

(G I 1), has a divine form (G 112), becomes a chaitanya murti (G I 37, 71) and is granted a divine body only through the wish of God (S 14). Also, God gives him a chaitanya body (G II 66) such that he possesses a form like that of God (G III 37). Just like the form of God, the form of the muktas is two armed like that of a human being, is characterized by eternal existence, consciousness, bliss, truth, divinity, and is extremely luminous (G III 38).

The muktas who have reached Akshardham and attained qualities similar to those of Akshar, forever remain in the service of God (G I 21). However, in Akshardham, there is no other service to be performed; the darshan of God is itself the service. Hence, muktas continually enjoy the bliss of the darshan of God (L 14, G II 13).

In the above descriptions on the mukti mimansa (in-depth reflections on liberation) in Swaminarayan Darshan, it is important to draw attention to the clear fact that in Akshardham, the akshar muktas maintain a distinct, individual existence. Unlike light, which merges in light, or water, which merges with water, the akshar muktas do not merge into either Aksharbrahman or Parabrahman; they do not lose their own individuality (G II 38, G III 33).

Through being deeply and lovingly attached to the divine form of Parabrahman or Purushottam, the akshar muktas remain immersed within his murti. Despite having their own independent existence, they have no awareness of it, and are totally engrossed in the bliss of God's darshan.

There is one more unique characteristic of this concept of liberation in Swaminarayan Darshan. Although the akshar muktas in Akshardham attain qualities similar to those of Aksharbrahman, they do not become the Aksharbrahman tattva itself. Similarly, all the akshar-muktas have a form like that of Parabrahman, yet none of them become the Parabrahman tattva (K 8, L 4, G III 37). Many Vachanamruts (S 11, K 1, G III 37) describe that a devotee attains qualities similar to God; this simply means that the mukta becomes divine and independent like God. As a result, maya is incapable of defeating and binding the mukta.

In Akshardham, like God, the akshar muktas reside with a divine body and divine adornments. They also experience divine bliss like that of God, yet a master-disciple relationship (L 13, G II 67) is constantly maintained between Parabrahman and the akshar-muktas, as is the relationship of the worshipped and the worshipper (G III 37). In this deep reflection on liberation, the means of attaining liberation should also be considered. This will be discussed in the third book of this series, Royal Path of Brahavidya: Swaminarayan Sadhana.

2. The Necessity Of Parabrahman's Manifest Form

In Swaminarayan Darshan, particular emphasis is placed on understanding Parabrahman's pragat (manifest) form. All Vaishnav acharyas accept the existence of Parabrahman's anvay-vyatirek, sagun-nirgun, sakar, all-doer and supreme form. However, Shriji Maharaj has insisted that all these characteristics of Parabrahman's form should be understood in his manifest form as well.

Study of the Vachanamrut clearly shows that whenever Shriji Maharaj has spoken on how to understand Parabrahman's anvay- vyatirek and sagun-nirgun forms, seek his refuge, develop conviction in him, understand his glory, maintain the faith that he is forever divine and has a definite form, believe him to be the all-doer, or develop affection and devotion for God he has mentioned the need for the manifest form of God. Additionally, whenever he has elaborated on remembering the divine actions and incidents of God, continuously engaging one's mind on God, imbibing God within one's atma whilst performing spiritual endeavours, or attaining the sakshatkar state of a liberated jiva, he has, either explicitly or subtly, mentioned

the manifest or pratyaksh 1 form of Parabrahman. This demonstrates the importance he has placed on developing conviction, devotion, upasana, faith and refuge in the manifest form of God² whilst performing spiritual endeavours to attain ultimate liberation. The following are a selection of Maharaj's words regarding the benefits of developing such conviction, and the drawbacks of not doing so.

Benefits of Attaining, Maintaining Conviction in and Worshipping Manifest God

Perfect knowledge is understanding manifest God (L7, P7).

Perfect worship is worshipping manifest God (G I 27).

It is only through listening, reading and contemplating upon the divine incidents of manifest God that spirituality flourishes (G II 58), worldly desires are eradicated (G I 38), peace is experienced (G II 35) and liberation is attained (G I 3, G II 35).

Only by realizing manifest God to be perfect and forever divine is maya eradicated (P 7) and does one become flawless (G I 24).

Through the contact of manifest God only, can one become nirgun (G II 8, 13).

It is only through maintaining faith in manifest God coupled with the true knowledge of his glory, that one becomes fulfilled and has nothing left to accomplish (G I 72, L 2, G II .13).

It is only through manifest God that ultimate liberation can be attained (K 7, G II 32).

The above reveals Shriji Maharaj's insistence that ultimate liberation can only be attained through the manifest form of God. The following two examples further emphasize Shriji Maharaj's point of view:

G II 21: "If a person realizes the glory of manifest God and his Bhakta-Sant in exactly the same way as he realizes the glory of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc., as well as the glory of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanuman, Uddhav, etc. - then nothing more remains to be understood on the path of liberation.

"Whether this principal is understood after being told once, or after being told a hundred thousand times; whether it is understood today, or after a hundred thousand years, there is no option but to understand it.

"A person who has such a firm conviction has grasped all the fundamental principles. What is more he will never fall from the path of liberation."

G II 32: "The sole cause behind the jiva attaining liberation, transcending maya and becoming brahmaswarup is its engagement in the jnan, meditation, devotional songs, spiritual discourses, etc., of the manifest form of Vasudev Bhagwan, who is Purushottam. It is due to these that the jiva transgresses maya, attains an extremely elevated state, and also attains God's Akshardham."

Explaining the necessity of the manifest form of God or the Sant, to attain ultimate liberation, Gunatitanand Swami says:

SNV 5.5: "Only when ultimate moksha is attained can it be described as (true) moksha. And if one attains other abodes then one will have to take re-birth. So, as long as one has to take rebirth, that cannot be called final moksha. Such ultimate moksha is attained by surrendering totally to the manifest form of God and God's enlightened Sadhu. Others cannot do it and that Sadhu is as capable as God."

SNV 5.85: "By taking the refuge of the manifest God and manifest Sadhu, one attains liberation."

Regarding the existence of manifest God, Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami writes:

jem pragat ravi hoy jyare re, jay tam brahmandnu tyare re;

jem pragat jalne pamee re, jay pyaseenee pyas te vamee re;

jem pragat annane jame re, antar jathara jhal virame re.

Tem pragat male Bhagwan re, tyare jananu kalyan nidan re;

Mate pragat charitra sambhalvu re, hoy pragat tyaavee ma/vu re.

jya hoy Prabhu pragat praman re, tiyii jananu sahaje kalyan re;...

Meaning: When the Sun is present, the darkness of the cosmos disappears...

When real water is obtained, one's thirst is quenched; When real food is eaten, one's hunger subsides...

Similarly, on attaining manifest God, one's liberation is assured;

For this reason, the divine incidents of manifest God should be heard; one should associate with that manifest form...

Where there is manifest God, one's liberation is easily attained;...

(Bhakta Chintamani 134).

Male Prabhu pragat praman re,

ka to tena malele kalyan re;

Teh vina te koti upaye re,

atyantik kalyiin na thaye re.

Meaning: Only when one has met the manifest form of God or one who has realized (the manifest God) can one attain liberation; Without this, millions of other ways will not lead to ultimate liberation (Kalyan Nirnay 2).

March 2014

1. Principle Of Cause And Effect

Shriji Maharaj accepts the principle of satkaryavad, which states that the effect already exists in the cause. From the perspective of satkaryavad, prior to their manifestation, the effects are already existent in a subtle form in the cause. In this state, the cause itself manifests as the effect. It is in this sense that creation is defined as an appearance or manifestation, and dissolution is defined as a disappearance. In the subtle form (causal state) and the physical form (effect state), matter is the same, i.e. the cause and effect are identical. The effect is actually just a different state of the cause. The effect is not a different type of matter than the cause. For example, when a potter makes a vessel out of clay, the actual cause or clay - takes the form of the effect, i.e. the vessel. In essence, this means that the clay is formed into a different shape. The initial lump of clay is the vessel's causal state, and the vessel is the clay's effect state -and so, ultimately, the clay is both the cause as well as the effect. This principle of cause and effect is termed satkaryavad. This principle is also to be seen in the creation of the universe.

Mulmaya is the fundamental cause, and the entire cosmos itself is the effect of maya. At the time of creation, mulmaya, which is subtle in form, consequently takes on a physical form, namely the universe. Hence, here, the cause and effect are not two distinct entities, but rather are both maya or prakruti.

The subsequent change in prakruti results in the universe; therefore, this principle of prakruti as the cause and effect is known as prakruti-parinamvad, i.e. the transformation of prakruti into the universe.

According to Shriji Maharaj, prakruti is not totally an independent tattva, but is completely dependent upon and is the sharir of Parabrahman. Parabrahman, thus, is the controller of prakruti. As a result, it is not possible for prakruti to undergo any transformation without the wish of Parabrahman. The above principle of cause and effect can also be termed 'Parabrahman controlled prakruti-parinamvad'.

Ordinarily, there are two possible causes of an effect:

Upadan (Material) Cause: When an object is created from a transformable substance, that substance is known as the upadan (material) cause. For example, the clay from which the vessel is made is the material cause of the vessel.

Nimitta (Efficient) Cause: The (animate) individual who transforms the substance of the material cause is known as the nimitta (efficient) cause. For example, the potter that changes a lump of clay into a vessel is the efficient cause.

Looking at the above analogy in simple terms, both the material cause (i.e. the clay), and the efficient cause (i.e. the potter) are different. However, when referring to the creation of the universe, the two causes are certainly not distinct from each other. Unlike anything else, the creator of the universe, Parabrahman, is extraordinary, omniscient, all-powerful and is one whose resolve never fails; he is therefore, simultaneously able to become both types of causes. Through his own wish, Parabrahman creates the universe (G I 51, L 17, A 7), and so is the efficient cause.

Moreover, Shriji Maharaj says that at the time of creation, God assumes the forms of the tattvas below him (G I 33, P 7), and is therefore also the material cause. However, Parabrahman is, in fact, unchanging, imperishable artd whole (P 2), and therefore does not actually become the universe. If that is the case, how should we understand the purported quality of Parabrahman as the material cause? Additionally, how should

we understand the significance of Parabrahman acting as the 24 elements and the universe? In reality, Parabrahman does not become the universe made of the 24 elements. He is the atma and prakruti is his body. It is the subtle form of prakruti - from whom Parabrahman, the shariri, is inseparable which takes the physical form of the universe.

Parabrahman himself is the shariri of both the cause, prakruti, and its effect, the universe. Hence, it can be said that Parabrahman assumes the form of the universe. Nevertheless, there is absolutely no change or consequence to the chaitanya form of Parabrahman. From the perspective of the physical body, which is made up of the five elements, the transformation of a person through childhood, youth and old age is only a transformation in the body; the residing shariri, or jivatma of that body, remains unchanged. The bodily changes do not result in any type of deterioration in the form of the jiva. Nevertheless, when one is said to be a child, a youth or elderly, this is in connection with the body that the jiva has assumed, not the jiva itself. Inseparable in all three stages of life of the body, the jivatma which has entered it does not deteriorate in any way.

Similarly, at the time of creation, Parabrahman enters as the atma of mahattattva and other evolutes of the universe. Shriji Maharaj describes this fact in Vachanamrut G I 63: "That extremely powerful God himself 'enters' Akshar and assumes the form of Akshar. Thereafter, he assumes the form of Mul-Prakruti-Purush, and then the form of Pradhan-Purush. Then he 'enters' the 24 elements produced from Pradhan and assumes that form. He then 'enters' Virat-Purush produced from those elements and assumes that form. Then he 'enters' Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv and assumes their forms."

The significance of the above is that in reality, prakruti is jad but Parabrahman is the shariri of that prakruti and its evolutes. That Parabrahman pervades them through his anway form, and hence it can be said that Parabrahman behaves as the evolutes. However, Parabrahman himself does not in any way become a jad entity. To further help understand this, consider a spider. It creates a web from its own body without itself deteriorating in any way, similarly Parabrahman creates the physical universe from an element of his sharir - prakruti - but himself remains immutable.

In this way, it is prakruti - a part of Parabrahman's sharir - which is transformed from subtle to physical. Due to this transformation, the form of Parabrahman which resides within prakruti and all the atmas of this universe does not change. In no way does the deterioration experienced by prakruti or the universe, affect Parabrahman. In this manner, Parabrahman is -described as the material cause of the universe, since Parabrahman is inseparable (apruthaksiddha) from prakruti, which transforms into the physical universe.

Reflecting upon the creation of the universe from the perspective of its material and efficient causes, reveals that both causes are actually Parabrahman. Only Parabrahman can totally pervade prakruti - a part of his sharir - both inside and out, as its atma. Thus, through pervading prakruti in this manner, Parabrahman, with a mere thought, makes prakruti result in the universe (L 2).

In this way, through being both the material and efficient cause, Parabrahman is known as the abhinna-nimittopadan cause of the world - i.e. he is both nimitta (efficient) and upadan (material) causes of the universe.

2. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Complete Manifestation Through The Sant

On Jeth sud 10, Samvat 1886 (1 June 1830 CE), Shriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham. So, who could be called the manifest or pratyaksh form of God thereafter? Who does God manifest through when he is not present himself? The Vachanamrut reveals that God manifests through the Gunatit Sant. Shriji Maharaj has said:

V 19: "Whenever a jiva attains a human body in Bharat-khand, God's avatars or God's Sadhu will certainly be present on earth at that time. If that jiva can recognize him [either of the two, whoever is present], then he becomes a devotee of God."

V 10: "When God is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the Sant who has realized God -because the jiva can also attain liberation through him."

The two examples above highlight that when God is not present himself, he manifests through the God-realized Sadhu. Speaking extensively on this, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has said: "It is said in a Vachanamrut of the Panchala section, 'The greater the association with God, the greater the bliss experienced, but if God is not manifest then how can this association be maintained?' It was then answered, 'Through spiritual discourses, kirtans, bhajans and meditation one can maintain the association. And more importantly the company of the great Sadhu is the company of manifest God himself, and thus through him God's bliss is

also attained - this is because God resides totally within him. If one does not understand this form to be like that of God's when he was present on earth, then it cannot be said that association has been maintained. In fact, without understanding this fact, even if God is manifest, of what benefit is it! Similarly, if one recognizes the Sant in whom God resides in every way, then he [God] is manifest, and without this understanding he is not manifest.' A sadhu then asked, 'Is God not manifest in the murtis?' Then Swami said, 'If one attributes human traits to the actions of God and his holy Sadhu then one's spiritual progress vanishes like the new moon; and if one attributes divine traits, then one progresses spiritually like the waxing moon of the second day of the bright half of the lunar month. And what actions do the murtis perform that one perceives flaws in them and thus regresses? Therefore, only the talking-walking form of God [i.e. human form as the God-realized Sadhu] is called manifest, and therefore only the great Gunatit Sadhu can instil divinity in the murti. But the three - murtis, shastras and pilgrim places - together do not equal such a God-realized Gunatit Sadhu. And such a great Sadhu is able to make all three - murtis, shastras and pilgrim places. Therefore, such a Sadhu, in whom God fully resides, is the manifest form of God'" (SNV 5.392).

Shriji Maharaj has also spoken of the prat yaksh form of God being present through the Sant:

G I 27: "Such a devotee...possesses countless noble virtues such as jnan, bhakti, vairagya, etc. God eternally resides in the heart of such a devotee.

"Consequently, by the grace of God, that devotee attains countless types of powers and liberates countless beings....

"The powers of such a person are such that since it is God who sees through his eyes, he empowers the eyes of all the beings in the brahmand; and since it is God who walks through his legs, he is also capable of endowing the strength to walk to all beings in the brahmand. Thus, since it is God who resides in all the indriyas of such a Sant, that Sant is able to empower the indriyas of all beings in the brahmand. Therefore, such a Sant is the sustainer of the world."

S 10: "When one has the darshan of such a Sant, one should realize, 'I have had the darshan of God himself'."

G III 35: "It should be known that God himself resides in the heart of a Sant who possesses these six qualities."

The above examples highlight that it is only through the Sant that God remains manifest. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami has noted Maharaj's words in the Purushottam Prakash:

Sarve reete Santmii rahu chhu re, ema rahee upadesh dau chhu re...5

Sant bole te bhelo hu bolu re, Sant na bhoole huye na bhoolu re; Sant vat bhelee karu hu vat re, em Santma chhou siikshat re...6

Sant juve te bhelo hu jou re, Sant sutii pachhee hu sou re;

Sant jage te bhelo hu jagu re, Sant joi ati anuragu re...7

Sant jame te bhelo hu jamu re, Sant bhame te kedye hu bhamu re; Sant dukhane hu dukhiino re, eha vat satya jan jano re...8

Sant hu ne hu te valee Sant re, em Shrimukhe kahe Bhagwant re; Sant manajo maree murti re, ema fer nathi ek rati re...9

Meaning: I reside within the Sant in every manner, through him

I preach.

When the Sant speaks, I speak too, the Sant does not forget [me] and I do not forget [the Sant];

Whenever the Sant talks, I talk too, and am thus completely manifest in the Sant.

When the Sant sees, I see too, I sleep only after the Sant sleeps;

When the Sant awakes, I awake too, I become mesmerized when I see the Sant.

When the Sant eats, I eat too, and I travel with him wherever he travels;

If the Sant is hurt, I am hurt too, all should believe this to be the truth.

The Sant is me and I am the Sant, thus Maharaj himself has said;

Believe the Sant to be my form, there is not an iota of difference

(Purushottam Prakash 41).

In his talks, Gunatitanand Swami describes the greatness of such a Sant, through whom Shriji Maharaj manifests in totality:

"He is great, has realized God, lives according to the commands of God, tolerates hardships; God is under his control, God does as he says, God travels to wherever he says; he has won over God, he knows the opinions of God, he grants moksha, by his darshan one has the darshan of God, by worshipping him God is worshipped; he frees jivas from birth, hell, and the cycle of births and deaths and takes us to the immense Akshardham of God; he gives us virtues that make us blissful like God -that is how great he is. God cannot live without him and by his darshan the five grave sins are burnt away. By the actions of his senses the universe is enlivened, and kal, karma and maya tremble before him. Just as by worshipping the body, the jiva is worshipped, similarly, by worshipping this Sadhu, God is worshipped. He is the giver of life; the indweller, omni-scient, all-doer, and he appears to be like a human but he is not. God continues to live through him; he helps one attain the eternal abode; he is the doer, yet is the non-doer; like a tree his body is for the benefit of others; he possesses the qualities of the genuine Sadhu which are described in the shastras; he is 'kamil, kabil sub hunnar tere hath'.³ One should understand the Sam's glory in this way" (SNV 4.139).

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1. Form And Qualities Of Maya

In Swaminarayan Darshan, the maya tattva is that from which the astonishing and wonderful cosmos is created. Maya is also referred to as mulmaya and mahamaya. Maya opposes true knowledge, and so is also called avidya or ignorance. As the primary cause of Pradhan and other jad (non-sentient) entities, it is also known as prakruti and mul-prakruti. Words like maya, mulmaya, avidya, prakruti and mul-prakruti are synonyms used to refer to this one tattva.

Shriji Maharaj has described the features of this prakruti in Vachanamrut G I 12, "Prakruti is composed of the three gunas. She is both jad and chaitanya, eternal, nirvishesh, the kshetra of all jivas and all elements including mahattattva, and is the divine power of God."

We will now endeavour to understand the attributes and various qualities of prakruti.

Trigunatmak: Maya (karanrup maya) and the entities evolved from maya (karyarup maya) possess the three inherent qualities (gunas)

- Sattva, rajas and tamas. Hence maya is described as trigunatmak. Jadchidatmak: Mulmaya itself is inanimate (jad), however, immersed within mulmaya are infinite jivas and ishwaras who are sentient (chaitanya) by nature. For this reason maya is known as jadchidatmak - both animate and inanimate.

Nitya: Mulmaya or prakruti is without beginning and is eternal, and so it is not created nor is it ultimately destroyed. Hence, it is nitya and sanatan. Despite being an everlasting and eternal tattva, mulmaya, is subject to change and consequences. In this respect maya is not an unchangeable tattva in the manner that jiva, ishwar, Brahman and Parabrahman are. This maya tattva is a mutable entity, hence transformation is possible.

Thus, even though prakruti is subject to change, it is never completely destroyed. Mulmaya or mulprakruti is eternal, however its manifestations - mahattattva, etc. - are not eternal. They arise at the time of creation and are destroyed at the time of dissolution.

Nirvishesh: In the original form of maya, differences such as pruthvi, vayu, etc. are not present and so maya is called nirvishesh. It is subtle in form, and without a manifest form (avyakta). In this state of maya, infinite jivas and ishwaras, bearing their karan body, reside immersed in maya and are unmanifest (avyakta).

Kshetrarup: The infinite lower types of prakruti, known as pradhan, as well as mahattattva and all other evolutes, arise from mul-maya. This is why maya can be referred to as the kshetra -the field

-of all these entities. The jivas and ishwaras, representing unmanifest seeds (avyaktabij), reside within this kshetra (field) which is in the form of prakruti. At the time of creation, these seeds manifest (G III 10), meaning that they acquire distinct physical forms. Therefore, it is mulmaya, i.e. prakruti, which is the kshetra for the creation of the physical forms comprised of the 24 elements of the jivas and ishwaras.

God's Power: Maya, also known as God's power, or shakti, can be defined as the useful instrument which facilitates creation and other tasks relating to the universe. Similarly, along with maya (prakruti), akshar-mukta that joins with prakruti is also described as the power of God (G I 13), since they are instrumental in the process of creation and other tasks.

Vismaykarini: Through its characteristics of allurements, delusion, attachment and bondage, maya is also described as vismaykarini, i.e. mesmeric. Moreover, Mul-Prakruti produces countless Pradhan-Prakrutis, infinite brahmands, and infinite types of wondrous, illusory, delusionary and attractive objects of enjoyment. As a result, maya is compared to the enchanting net of Indra, miraculous and mesmeric (vismaykarini).

Form of Tamas (darkness): Darkness is a characteristic of maya. This darkness in the form of obstacles prevents jivas and ishwars from fully comprehending not only their own form, but even the manifest or non-manifest forms of Brahman and Parabrahman. In reality, the forms of the jivas and ishwars are characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss; however, the natural bliss of this knowledge is covered by maya in the form of Mul-Prakruti. In this way, maya is also referred to as ignorance, through its natural characteristic of opposing that which is true knowledge. This darkness -in the form of ignorance -is bound to the respective jivas and ishwars in the form of a karan or avyakrut body since time eternal. Thus, the fundamental cause of bondage, misery, and the cycle of births and deaths is maya in the form of this ignorance or darkness.

2. What Is the Form of Parabrahman When He Is Vyatirek?

Until now, we have learnt clearly that God definitely has a form. But what is this form? Only that which has a definite shape can be said to possess a form. In this context, a pillar can be said to have a form; likewise, a horse can also be said to have a form. All objects in this world have some type of shape, and can consequently be said to possess a form. Thus, the question arises, what is the form of God?

Many people say that although God has a form, there is nothing conclusive about the appearance of this form, i.e. God does not have a fixed form. At any given time, he can assume whatever shape or form he wishes. God has assumed many different forms such as that of Matsya (fish), Kachchha (tortoise), Varah (boar), Nrusinh (half lion-half man), Hayagriv (horse-headed man), Vaman (a dwarf), Parshuram, Ram and Krishna. Therefore, such people believe that God has no definite eternal form.

Maharaj believes that such understanding is completely flawed. God is the almighty and possesses all divine powers, and is therefore able to manifest as, or reside within whatever form he wishes at any given time. Nonetheless, his vyatirek, or transcendental form is certainly definite. God never forsakes this transcendental eternal form which he possesses in Akshardham. While residing in Akshardham with a vyatirek form, he assumes whichever other form is required elsewhere.

In the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has described what the form of God in Akshardham looks like.

G II 13: "Amidst that divine light [Akshardham] I see the extremely luminous form of God. 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 is a human form; and it appears young like a teenager.

V 2: "God is complete, with limbs, hands, feet, etc. There is not the slightest deformation in any of his limbs. He eternally possesses a definite form."

G III 38: "The form of God in Akshardham and the form of the muktas -the attendants of God -are all satya [eternal], divine and extremely luminous. Also, the form of that God and those muktas is two-armed like that of a human being, and it is characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss."

In this manner, Shriji Maharaj has explicitly described the form of God, i.e. his own transcendental form, explaining that it is forever like that of a human being, yet it is not mayik but is eternally divine and luminous. He has given a special description of this divine murti in Vachanamrut L 18: "What is that form of God like? Well, the answer is that God is characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss, and possesses a form full of divine light. In every single pore of his body, there is light equivalent to millions and millions of suns. Moreover, that God is so handsome that he puts even millions of Kamdevs [gods of love] to shame.... Before his bliss, the pleasure of seeing countless beautiful women pales into insignificance. In fact, before the bliss of that form of God, the pleasures of the sense-objects of this realm and the higher realms pale into insignificance. Such is the form of God. That form always has two arms, but by his wish, he may appear to have four arms, or sometimes to have eight arms, or he may even be seen as having a thousand arms."

Therefore, it can be ascertained by the clear, divine words of Shriji Maharaj himself, that the vyatirek form of God which resides in Akshardham is eternally divine and is like that of a human being.

1. Conviction in God's supreme form to attain Akshardham

Once Akshardham is attained, there is no worry of having to return to the miserable cycle of births and deaths. To attain Akshardham, understanding Parabrahman, i.e. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, as supreme and the avatari, is absolutely imperative.

Imparting his thoughts on this, Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut G II 9: "The path of jnan should be understood in such a way that one does not malign the form of God in any way. In fact, one should not worry if at sometime or other one has transgressed God's commands; but one should never malign the form of God. If one does disobey God's commands, then one can still be freed from that sin by praying to God; however, there are no means of release for one who has maligned the form of God. Therefore, one who is wise should certainly abide by God's commands to the best of one's ability. However, one should also intensely maintain the strength of conviction in God's form; i.e. 'I have attained the very form of God who reigns supreme, who forever possesses a divine form, and who is the avatari - the cause of all the avatars.' If a person realizes this, then even if he leaves the Satsang fellowship, his love for God's form will not diminish. In fact, even though he is out of Satsang at present, ultimately when he leaves his body, he will go to God's Akshardham and stay near God.

"On the other hand, a person may be in the Satsang fellowship at present, and he may even be abiding by the commands prescribed in the shastras, but if his conviction of God is not firm, then when he leaves his body, he will either go to the realm of Brahma, or to the realm of some other deva; but he will not go to the abode of Purushottam Bhagwan. Therefore, one should realize the manifest form of God that one has attained to forever possess a divine form and to be the 'avatari', the cause of all the avatars. If, however, one does not realize this, and instead realizes God to be formless or like the other avatars, then that is regarded as committing blasphemy against God."

How can one reach the abode of the God they worship if they malign him by understanding him to be like other avatars and thus not supreme? Having understood Maharaj's heartfelt view, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has reinforced the need to understand God as supreme in his talks:

SNV 3.12: "Without knowing Maharaj as Purushottam, it is not possible to go to Akshardham."

SNV 2.2: "Above all, the most important means to moksha lies in understanding upasana. And, among all means upasana is the most powerful. One should understand Maharaj to be supreme, the source of all incarnations, the cause of all causes. This is one thing to understand ...the glory of God is incorporated in understanding upasana and the manifest form of God....the essence of upasana is that one becomes as one understands Maharaj to be. If one understands Maharaj to be like Shri Krishna, then Golok is attained and if one understands Maharaj to be like Ramchandraji, then Vaikunth is attained, and if one understands Maharaj to be like Vasudev, then Shwetdwp is attained, and if one understands Maharaj to be like Nar-Narayan, then Badrikashram is attained; however Maharaj is understood, one becomes like that and attains that much power and strength. By understanding Maharaj as the source of all avatars and the Lord of Akshardham, one attains Akshardham. Also Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut, 'One becomes as one understands God to be, but God remains limitless.' Therefore, to understand this upasana clearly is the main endeavour."

SNV 5.304, 1.261: "After asking for Vachanamrut Gadhada II 9 to be read, Swami said, 'If one knows Maharaj as Purushottam, but, due to circumstances, even if one leaves Satsang, one still attains Akshardham. But, if one does not have this spiritual wisdom in recognizing Maharaj as Purushottam yet remains in Satsang and observes dharma and celibacy, then still he will attain another abode, but not Akshardham!'"

SNV 6.7: "Maintain pure and resolute faith in God's manifest form, otherwise obstacles will not be overcome - this has even been said by Maharaj. Therefore, this manifest Purushottam, Shriji Maharaj, Sahajanand Swami, is the source of Shri Krishna and other avatars, and is the cause and the controller of all - of this there is no doubt. Knowing this, one should remain absolutely faithful, as a person with fidelity would, then they will go straight to Akshardham."

Gopalanand Swami has also mentioned in his talks:

"Maharaj said to one devotee, 'Go to Akshardham.' Then, through samadhi, the devotee saw all abodes, and then arrived in Akshardham. There, Maharaj asked him, 'Which abodes did you see?' The devotee then replied, 'O Maharaj! I saw countless numbers of our sadhus, brahmacharis, parshads and satsangis in abodes such as Badrikashram, Shwetdwp, Vaikunth and Golok. Why have they not come here?' On hearing this, Shriji Maharaj replied, 'They all believed me to be the Lord of those respective abodes, and thus reside there. And those who are here believe me to be the source of all avatars, and moreover believe me to be the Lord of the highest abode, Brahmanahol [Akshardham]. Therefore, I have elevated their spiritual status to that like Akshar.

And those who believed me to be like the avatar of the abode they reside in, I have given them as much power as that avatar possesses; and so they reside in the abode where they understood me to be the sovereign. Even if I go and personally tell them [that their understanding is not correct], they would not believe me, and would reply saying, you are, misleading us and that we are not the type to misunderstand your form and glory. In saying so, they all reside in those respective abodes, and this talk cannot be understood without an ekantik Sadhu" (Gopalanand Swami Vato 1.108).

"When can that Akshardham be attained? When Purushottam Bhagwan manifests here with the wish that, 'As a result of having affection for my murti, I want to take all who have conviction in my form to Akshardham.' It is only when, on making such a wish, he manifests, and himself takes them, can aspirants go to Akshardham. Therefore, if other avatars are unable to take aspirants to Akshardham, then how can one go simply by performing spiritual endeavours?" (Gopalanand Swami Vato 1.52).

The understanding of Shriji Maharaj's supreme form is essential to attain moksha (ultimate liberation) and reach Akshardham. This is highlighted through the well-known incident of Bhai Atmanand Swami.

Bhai Atmanand Swami was considered to be the embodiment of Shriji Maharaj's commands, since he obeyed Maharaj's every word. He rooted out all attachment to his body and always lived as if he were the atma. At the age of 116, he asked Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, "Despite my not having vasana, why has Maharaj not come to take me to his Akshardham?" Gunatitanand Swami replied, "You still do not have firm conviction in Maharaj's supreme form. You are very dear to Shriji Maharaj, obey his every command at all times, and Maharaj is also very dear to you. You are very powerful, yet there is a flaw in your understanding of the true greatness of Maharaj's form. Maharaj therefore feels that since Bhai Atmanand Swami is very dear to me, and he is unable to live without my murti, if he were to live for a little longer and understand my greatness as it is, he would then be eternally able to stay with me and experience bliss thereafter. With such thoughts, Maharaj has kept you here, and has not come to take you to Akshardham. Therefore, I will talk to you about the true form of Shriji Maharaj; if you thoroughly imbibe this in your jiva, Shriji Maharaj will immediately free you from your body." Gunatitanand Swami then narrated various incidents where Maharaj had revealed his supremacy, and in doing so, instilled conviction into the heart of Bhai Atmanand Swami. Shortly after this event, Shriji Maharaj took him to Akshardham (Shriji Maharaj Pragatni Vato 193).

2. Various Discourses Regarding His Own Form

Throughout the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has spoken about his form in different ways: on different occasions he has referred to himself as a sadhak, a sadhu, an ekantik bhakta, an acharya, a guru or advisor and as the Ishtadev. Also, he has at times said that he is a devotee of Shri Nar Narayan and elsewhere stated he is Nar-Narayan himself. In some places he has referred to himself as a worshipper of Bhagwan Shri Krishna and in other places has even said he is Shri Krishna himself. At other times he has said he is the Ishtadev of all Purna Purushottam Narayan. He has also spoken of Nar Narayan or Shri Krishna Bhagwan, or himself as being the avatari of all avatars Parabrahman, the source of all avatars.

At times he has explained the Lord of Akshardham to be Shri Krishna, at other times Nar Narayan, and elsewhere as himself. He has spoken of Shri Krishna as being supreme, and has at other times stated that he himself is supreme.

Therefore, by reading the Vachanamrut and also the various shastras of the Sampradaya, questions may arise regarding Maharaj's actual form or status. For example, why has he spoken about his form in so many different ways? Why did he not talk about the supremacy of his own form consistently everywhere?

Moreover, not only did Shriji Maharaj describe his own form in various ways, but also the main deities he installed in the mandirs he built were different:

In Ahmedabad and Bhuj he installed Shri Nar Narayan Dev. In Vartal he installed Shri Lakshmi Narayan Dev. In Dholera he installed Shri Madan Mohan Dev.

In Junagadh he installed Shri Radha Raman Dev, Shri Ranchhodtrikamiji, Shri Siddheshwar Mahadev.

In Gadhada he installed Shri Gopinath Dev, Shri Suryanarayan Dev.

Based on this, one could question that in all these mandirs, instead of installing his own murti in the central shrine, why did he install the murtis of different deities?

We are aware that on the fourteenth day after Ramanand Swami passed away, Shriji Maharaj initiated the worship of 'Swaminarayan' in place of 'Radha Krishna'. Why establish worship of Swaminarayan yet install different deities in every mandir? Has anyone, anywhere, ever installed the murti of Sita Ram and worshipped

Radha Krishna, or installed the murti of Radha Krishna and then worshipped Sita Ram? So, why did Bhagwan Swaminarayan do this? Why did he speak in such a varied manner and install different deities in different mandirs?

It is necessary to understand Maharaj's intention behind declaring his own form with so much variance, and in consecrating so many different deities. For this, the explanations given below, including the life teachings of Shriji Maharaj and the Gunatit gurus, as well as studies on the historical texts of the Sampradaya, will be considered.

July 2012

1. Bhagwan Swaminarayan - Supreme: Intermis Of His Purpose, Divine Powers And Works

Let us now consider his supremacy on the basis of the special reasons for his manifestation, his extraordinary divine powers, and his extraordinary divine works.

Reasons for Bhagwan Swaminarayan's manifestation Previously, avatars had manifested to destroy demons and for various other reasons. However, Maharaj manifested to destroy the innate ignorance of countless jivas, make them brahmarup, and thus grant them ultimate liberation. In the old manuscripts of the Sampradaya, written during his lifetime, Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself explicitly reveals the reason for his incarnation on earth, "Dusara avatar hai so karya karan avatar hui hai, aur merit yaha avatar hai, sau to jivoku brahmarup karke atyantik mukti dene ke vaste Aksharatit Purushottam jo ham vaha manushya jaisa banya hu."

Meaning: "The earlier avatars manifested for a specific task. But my incarnation is to make the jivas brahmarup and grant them ultimate liberation. For that, I, Purushottam, transcending even Akshar, have assumed a human form" (Atyantik Kalyan p. 76).

Furthermore, in a letter addressed to the paramhansas and devotees, he revealed the purpose of his manifestation by writing:

"Kalyanke karne vaste mera avatar hai. Aj to mai avidyaurup jo maya hai, tiske nashke vaste pragat hua hu. Aj to mera prayo jan ehi hai. yo avidyaku nash karna, jivaku brahmarup karna. Is prayoan vaste me pragat huva hu. Jivuke mukti deneke vaste, manushya esa banya hu."

Meaning: "I have incarnated to grant liberation. Today, I have manifested to destroy ignorance in the form of maya. That is my sole purpose. It is to destroy ignorance and make jivas brahmarup. For this purpose I have manifested. To grant liberation to the jivas, I have become like a human" (Shrijina Prasadina Patro, Letter Number 7). In the two examples given above, the special purpose revealed for Shriji Maharaj's manifestation is sufficient to establish his supremacy. Maharaj was once in Kariyani. Here, he summoned Gopalanand Swami, who had just arrived from Vadodara, into his room, and explained the purpose of his manifestation. This incident has been noted by Sadguru Nirgundas Swami in his talks, and also by Sadguru

Rugnathcharandas Swami in the Shrihari Charitra Chintamani:

"Maharaj then said, 'Swami, do you know the reason for which I have manifested?' Gopalanand Swami said no. Maharaj then said, 'I, the Lord of Akshardham, Shri Purushottam, said in front of all the akshar-muktas that this universe was created a very long time ago. Despite this, why have no jivas become liberated and entered Akshardham? So saying, I commanded the Lord of Vaikunth to incarnate in this world to propagate ekantik dharma, liberate the jivas and send them to Akshardham. The Lord of Vaikunth thus incarnated on this earth and even though the lifespan of a human in Tretayug was 10,000 years, he lived for 11,000 years on this earth, yet was not able to propagate ekantik dharma. Thereafter, the Lord of Golok stayed on this earth for 125 years, more than the Kaliyug lifespan of 100 years, yet was not able to propagate ekantik dharma. "You then said, "O Maharaj! When the Lords of the respective abodes came onto this earth, whoever offered worship to them were taken to their respective abodes and therefore they did not make it to Akshardham. Therefore, if you, the Lord of Akshardham, manifest on earth, then through worshipping you and doing your upasana, the aspirants can reach Akshardham." For this reason, along with akshar-muktas like you, I have descended here'" (Vat 95).

On this occasion, Shriji Maharaj also revealed the six reasons for his manifestation on earth, which have been noted in the same sermon of the Shrihari Charitra Chintamani, as well as in other shastras of the Sampradaya. The six reasons are as follows:

To propagate the knowledge of my supreme form and upasana, and elevate the spiritual state of people to that of muktas.

To grant previous avatars and their followers a human birth on this earth, preach to them the knowledge of my form and upasana, and send them to Akshardham.

To liberate Bhaktidevi and Dharmadev from the harassment of evil people, and bless them with the bliss of my murti.

To revive and spread the long forgotten ekantik dharma, which comprises of dharma, jnan, vairagya and bhakti coupled with the understanding of God's glory.

To give the fruits of the austerities and devotion in the form of my darshan to those ascetics and yogis who have been worshipping God since eternity; to fulfil the wishes of those seekers who have great affection for God and also to shower them with love.

To initiate sadhus who embody ekantik dharma, build shi- kharbaddha mandirs for worship, and create shastras that narrate my divine incidents and expound ekantik dharma. To establish on this earth the tradition of the Param Ekantik Sadhu who will forever sustain ekantik dharma and keep the path of liberation to Akshardham open.

These six objectives demonstrate Shriji Maharaj's supremacy.

2. A Range of Different Audiences

Whenever Shriji Maharaj spoke about his form, he considered the differing levels of understanding of the audience, since knowledge given to the unprepared may have an unintended effect. There is a Gujarati saying, 'Kidine kan, ane hathine man', i.e. an ant needs only to be fed an amount equal to a grain of sand, whereas an elephant needs food weighing many kilos. Thus, when food is given according to one's capacity, it is enjoyable. Similarly, only when aspirants are given knowledge according to their suitability are they able to enjoy its bliss. If a sweet food is put on top of an ant, it will be crushed, and would certainly not be able to enjoy its taste. In the same way, if those who prefer to worship the paroksh (non-manifest) form of God are given the knowledge of God's manifest form prior to becoming suitable for it, then due to the misunderstandings and doubts which arise, their understanding of both the paroksh and pratyaksh forms of God becomes disturbed. For this reason, Shriji Maharaj has spoken according to the individual levels of spirituality and appropriateness of the aspirants.

As an aspirant gains a deeper insight, he develops greater understanding of the glory of manifest God and the God-realized Satpurush. As a result, his suitability to receive this knowledge increases and he develops greater conviction in the manifest form of Paramatma. Thus, Shriji Maharaj has talked to aspirants according to their suitability and spiritual status.

To fulfil the wishes of and grant bliss to his loving devotees, Shriji Maharaj often travelled from Gadhada to many villages and cities such as Sarangpur, Kariyani, Panchala, Loya, Vartal, Ahmedabad, Jetalpur, Ashlali, Vadodara, Surat, Junagadh and Kutch-Bhuj. Wherever Maharaj went, aspirants were attracted to his divine personality, and would join the group of sadhus and devotees to take the benefit of his darshan and company. Due to this, it was only natural that at various times and places, there would be a mixed audience of aspirants believing in different deities and avatars. During such times, Maharaj would speak in a manner enabling all to be inspired by what he said.

To help aspirants gain an understanding of esoteric spiritual endeavours and inspiration on how to perform them, Shriji Maharaj at times presented himself as an ideal sadhak and talked of his own spiritual endeavours. Further, to explain the attributes of an ideal ekantik bhakta, an ideal sadhu and an ideal worshipper, he would speak of himself as the ideal of all three.

At times, after speaking about the glory of other avatars, he would then direct the subject to his form by saying that the avatar is today 'present before you', 'manifest before you', 'visible to you all' and 'seated in this assembly'. In this way, devotees of the various avatars would feel that their ishtadev was manifest in the form of Shriji Maharaj. Once they had developed affection in this way, Maharaj would steadily correct their belief.

Shriji Maharaj never refuted any avatar or their devotees, but narrated the glory of their life and work in his discourses. It is due to this that devotees who worshipped the paroksh forms of God developed affection for him. They would often stay with him and by steadily experiencing his extraordinary powers and personality, they would eventually develop the conviction of him being God. It is due to the compassionate talks by Maharaj that thousands of aspirants sought his refuge and became his devotees during his presence on earth. Believing him to be God, they began to offer devout worship to him.

Thus, people developed conviction in his supremacy gradually over many years as a result of listening to the talks of Shriji Maharaj or his ekantik sadhus and devotees. If he had spoken openly about his supremacy without considering the varying levels of understanding of people seated in an assembly, then perhaps the true understanding would never have dawned upon them.

Gunatitanand Swami has explained this in a similar manner in his talks: "If it had been explained as it really is [that Shriji Maharaj is supreme] then it would not have been accepted, in fact the opposite would occur. And because Maharaj had spoken as it really is, many people stopped observing the codes of conduct. Maharaj then removed many Vachanamruts and said, 'We do not want to keep even a single Vachanamrut'. Thereafter Nityanand Swami prayed, 'We shall write what we find in accordance to the Dharmamrut and other shastras.' It was then that Maharaj allowed for the current [number of Vachanamruts] to be retained. Therefore, if it is explained as it really is, then the desired result is not achieved. So, it should be understood that whatever Maharaj did was for our benefit (SNV 5.236).

Thus, due to the different levels of understanding, Shriji Maharaj did not talk about his supreme form at every place and at every opportunity. This reflected his compassionate and beneficial motive for the liberation of countless jivas.

Clarifying such liberating intentions of Shriji Maharaj, Sadguru Nirgundas Swami has noted an incident in his talks:

"Once, in the Akshar Ordi in Gadhpur, Brahmanand Swami came to Maharaj. He put his head at Maharaj's holy feet and started crying. Maharaj questioned, 'Swami! Why are you crying?' Swami replied, 'You are the manifest Lord of Akshardham, yet we are compelled to discreetly sing about you. For this, we are internally pained.' Maharaj said in response, 'Swami, we have come to liberate countless jivas. Therefore, you should sing in a manner that is fitting to the countless jivas and which will grant them liberation'" (Vat 373). This incident shows that Shriji Maharaj spoke according to the circumstances wherever he went in order to help all accept his word, avoid misunderstanding and liberate all. The incident also reveals that many paramhansas understood Shriji Maharaj's supremacy, yet they spoke in a manner that all would understand and accept. Despite this, it is essential for one to understand Maharaj's form as it truly is in order to attain ultimate liberation.

So, even though Maharaj usually spoke in a simple and readily acceptable manner, he also delivered many unambiguous talks regarding his true supreme form in private conversations and public discourses to those who were of an appropriate level of understanding to accept. Such explicit talks are found in the Vachanamrut and various renowned shastras of the Sampradaya. Some examples have been given in section 2.2, 'Bhagwan Swaminarayan -Supreme: As Expressed in the Shastras of the Sampradaya' on p. 68.

March 2012

1. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Insistence for Conviction in God's Supreme Form

Shriji Maharaj manifested on this earth to rid countless jivas of their ignorance, and thus grant them ultimate liberation (moksha). Up to now, we have demonstrated that it is essential for an aspirant seeking redemption to understand Shriji Maharaj as Parabrahman, supreme, the source of all avatars and the Lord of Akshardham. This is Shriji Maharaj's inner wish and principle, and so he has insisted that all his sadhus and devotees understand and develop firm conviction in his supreme form.

The deep passion Maharaj has for all to understand his supremacy is reflected through the introduction he gives on this topic in Vachanamrut G II 13: "O Paramhansas! All of the seniors, along with those who are wise, please come to the front. Please listen very attentively to what I am about to say. What I am about to say to you, I say not out of any pretence, or out of any self-conceit, or to spread my own greatness. Rather, it is because I feel that amongst all of you sadhus and devotees, if someone can understand my message, it will tremendously benefit that person; that is my purpose in narrating it. Moreover, this discourse is based on what I have seen and realized through my own experience. In fact, it is also in agreement with the shastras. Although I feel that it is not appropriate to discuss this in public, I shall tell you nonetheless."

After giving such an introduction and subsequently explaining his true form, Maharaj concluded by insisting that this principle be constantly recalled: "Keep this principle constantly new and fresh in your minds; never forget it out of complacency. Remember it tomorrow just as it is today. Keep it vivid in your minds and remember it daily until the end of your lives. Whenever you talk about God, be sure to implant the seeds of

this principle. This is my command. Moreover, this principle is so vital that you should remember it daily for the rest of your lives, and even after you leave this body and attain a divine form, you should recall it."

Hence, it is Shriji Maharaj's earnest desire that his disciples regularly engage in manan and nidhidhyas of his supremacy, and thus develop firm conviction of it in their lives. To enable this, Maharaj reminded the paramhansas and devotees whenever this topic arose. The following incidents demonstrate this:

The dispute which occurred whilst Shatanand Muni, on Maharaj's command, was writing the Satsangijivan is described, with slight variations, in several shastras of the Sampradaya. The dispute was regarding how to describe Shriji Maharaj in the Satsangijivan, and lasted for 7-8 days. During this time, with the exception of Nityanand Swami, almost all other paramhansas strongly felt that in this shastra, Maharaj should be described as being similar to Shri Krishna Bhagwan. Nityanand Swami, however, firmly maintained that Shriji Maharaj, who is distinct, above all, the source of all avatars, and supreme God, should be described as greater than Shri Krishna. Each side engaged in lengthy discussions on this, but both remained resolute in their convictions.

So, everyone requested Maharaj to resolve the dispute. Shriji Maharaj sided with the other paramhansas and said, "I am just like Shri Krishna, therefore anything further cannot be written." In this way, instead of encouraging Nityanand Swami to remain steadfast in his understanding, Maharaj did not talk to him for seven days. He even excommunicated him, yet Nityanand Swami remained resolute in his conviction. Finally, Maharaj called Nityanand Swami, expressed his pleasure by garlanding him, and praised him by saying, 'O Paramhansas! I insulted Nityanand Swami so much, and even tried to change his understanding by explaining otherwise, yet he did not falter in his conviction. In fact, the understanding, which Nityanand Swami has, is the best. This is indeed how a true upasak should be; therefore you should all acquire the understanding he has."

Once, Shriji Maharaj sent Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and Chaitanyanand Swami to Vadhwani with 50 other sadhus. There, at the house of Muljibhai, Nityanand Swami daily taught the commentary on the Gita to Muktanand Swami. On one occasion, Nityanand Swami asked Muktanand Swami, "Swami!

Shastri Krishnaswarupdas of Vartal has written a brief life sketch of Sadguru Nityanand Swami at the beginning of the Shrihari Dig Vijay text on pages 16-17; Sad-guru Charitra, p. 71; SNV 6.32, 7.25; Gopalanand Swamini Vato 1.163, Shri Purushottam Mahatmya by Nityanand Swami, Vat 12; Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Part 5 p. 347.

How should we understand Shriji Maharaj?" Muktanand Swami replied, "Maharaj is Shri Krishna Vasudev who manifested in the lineage of the Vrushni Family, and presently, he has manifested in a Brahmin family just for us." Nityanand Swami reflected on hearing this, and then slowly said, "Swami! Maharaj is above all, including Akshar, and is the source of all avatars such as Shri Krishna, and he is Purushottam Narayan. This is how I understand him to be, and moreover, Maharaj has openly described himself in this manner several times, and has also implied it many times."

Muktanand Swami, however, did not accept this understanding. That evening, both of them went to Brahmanand Swami. Nityanand Swami asked him the same question, saying, "Muktanand Swami and I were discussing this earlier, however please could you now provide the answer." Brahmanand Swami gave a response, that tallied with both Nityanand Swami's and Muktanand Swami's thoughts. Therefore, Muktanand Swami did not feel there was anything conclusive in the answer, and decided to ask Shriji Maharaj when they met.

A few days later, these sadguru sadhus were able to pose the question to Shriji Maharaj when he reached Nagadka. Muktanand Swami asked him the initial question, and conveyed to him the answers of both Nityanand Swami and Brahmanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj then said, "From today, you, too, should imbibe the understanding that Nityanand Swami has." On hearing this, Muktanand Swami asked, "Maharaj! Can this matter be found in any of the shastras?" Maharaj smiled and replied, "The shastras were written by great people. You are saying that what the rishis and munis have previously written in the shastras is correct, and that what I am saying is not correct, is that right? In that case, believe me to be supreme whenever the shastras proclaim me as being so."

Muktanand Swami was stunned on hearing this and after a while, folded his hands and said to Maharaj, "Maharaj! What you say is true. I was bound by the shastras, therefore I had more trust in them rather than in your words that you are God manifest. However, from today, I will believe what you have said, that you are the supreme manifest God and the source of all incarnations. In this way, Maharaj corrected Muktanand Swami's misunderstanding (Nirgundas Swamini Vato 89).

Having performed the consecration ceremony of the Nar Narayan Dev murtis in Ahmedabad on Fagan sud 3, Samvat 1878 (22 February 1822), Shriji Maharaj held Anandanand Swami's hand and took him to the gate towards the east, where he often sat to deliver spiritual discourses. Maharaj stood there and said, "Swami, what have you understood?" Anandanand Swami had not understood anything, so he blankly looked back at Maharaj. Maharaj then said to him, "Infinite Nar Narayans, Krishna Narayans, Lakshmi Narayans and Vasudev-Narayans worship this manifest Swaminarayan. At present, everyone has forgotten this greatness of my [present] form. People naturally develop affection for a form which cannot be seen, but that is a vibhuti swarup (incarnation), and is the Lord of Bharatkhand. However, people have forgotten the cause [the source of all avatars i.e. Shriji Maharaj] and have become attached to the effect. Hearing this, Anandanand Swami felt the remorse reflected in Maharaj's words (Gopalanand Swamini Vato 1.154).

Maharaj also consecrated the murtis of Nar-Narayan Dev in Bhuj after having done so in Ahmedabad. Thereafter, he wished to consecrate his own murti in Vartal, as he knew that if the true upasana was not established from the outset through the consecration of his supreme murti, then the purpose of his manifestation on this earth would remain unfulfilled. However, very few people were actually able to understand this supreme concept and implement his wish.

The majority of people understood Shriji Maharaj and the other avatars to be the same entity, i.e. they felt that the same God had manifested in different forms at various times, and therefore Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan and Swaminarayan were all one and the same. They believed that the murti of Nar-Narayan in Ahmedabad represented Shriji Maharaj and, similarly, consecrating the murti of Lakshmi-Narayan in Vartal, would also represent Maharaj's murti. Thus, they felt there was no need to consecrate a different murti of Shriji Maharaj while he was manifest. Furthermore, the murtis of previous avatars had been consecrated long after their manifestation, when those avatars had returned to their respective abodes; therefore if Maharaj's murti was consecrated while he was still manifest, it would not be approved by society. Thus, to preserve social customs, Muktanand Swami, as well as other sadhus and devotees felt that Shriji Maharaj should not consecrate his own murti while he is still manifest on this earth in human form.

Shriji Maharaj arrived in Vartal with a group of sadhus and devotees. He had firmly decided that his murti should be consecrated in the central shrine, because he wanted all to understand that he was actually distinct from and above all other avatars, and therefore his murti could not be equated with those of Nar-Narayan or Lakshmi-Narayan. Only if a separate murti of himself were to be consecrated in the central shrine, would the highest and most pure upasana be established. Despite such a desire, Shriji Maharaj consecrated his murti in the southern shrine under the name of 'Harikrishna Maharaj' in order to preserve the affection that all had for him.

Once the consecration ceremony had been completed, Maharaj guided everyone to understand that this murti was supreme, and therefore everyone should worship it to attain ultimate liberation:

Prasadnee dakshin dishamay, murti Harikrishna tanee tahay;

Sthapeet thaine karshe nivas, evec thai vat badhe prakash.

Je murtinu dhyan dharee hamesh, satsangi sau chintavshe vishesh;

Sarvoparee ishta chhabee ganashe, preme pooja mansi to karashe.

Pratyaksh murti nahi prapta jene, te murti to jivandori tene;

Eno ja moto mahima manashe, kalyan to te thaki ja thashe.

[Meaning: The sanctified murti of Harikrishna Maharaj stands in the southern side of the mandir; The message has been spread everywhere that this murti has been consecrated and thus resides there...

Those who forever meditate on this murti [of Shriji Maharaj], will be able to recollect it all the more;

They will consider the murti to be the supreme and their primary deity, and will lovingly offer worship to it...

Those who do not attain the manifest murti, will consider this murti to be a lifeline;

Such greatness of this murti will be understood, and it is only through this understanding that liberation will be attained ... (Shrihari Lilamrut 8.27).]

On the day of Punam, after the murti-pratishtha ceremony of Vartal mandir on Kartik sud 12, Samvat 1881 (3 November 1824), Maharaj called all the senior sadhus and said to them, "I daily perform 108 pradakshinas of the murti of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev so that love and glory for God increases within everyone, and for you all to become matchless and loyal devotees." Upon hearing this, Brahmanand Swami asked, "Maharaj! Have we not become such matchless and loyal devotees?" Maharaj responded, "You have certainly become devotees,

but not matchless. Those who keep refuge in none other than me are matchless and loyal devotees" (Shriharini Adbhut Vato 176).

Understanding such words of Shriji Maharaj, Brahmanand Swami and other sadguru sadhus finally understood whose murti should have been consecrated in the main shrine; however, there was nothing that could be done then? Such incidents occurred several times.

Everyone was able to introspect through being reprimanded in such ways by Shriji Maharaj, and all were able to recognize their faults. However as time passed, the majority of the people would revert to their original understanding.

In this manner, Shriji Maharaj insisted that everyone should develop conviction in his supremacy and also encourage others to develop that same conviction.

Sadguru Gopalanand Swami certainly understood Shriji Maharaj to be supreme. However, fearing that those who listened to him would not accept such an understanding, and find it contradictory to what they believed, Gopalanand Swami was not able to speak boldly about Shriji Maharaj's supreme form in public. So, Maharaj gave him divine darshan and reprimanded him, saying that if he did not spread the knowledge of his supreme form, then he would have to remain in his body for 1000 years (SNV 6.32).

Sadguru Adbhutanand Swami has narrated his own incident in his book: "Having travelled to various places, I arrived with a group of twelve sadhus: Chaitanyanand Swami, Nishkamanand Swami, Udaranand Swami and others. After having Maharaj's darshan, I sat in the assembly, which was in progress. At that time, Maharaj asked me about what was happening at the places I had visited, and thereafter asked, 'When you speak about God with the devotees of these places, how do you describe me?' I then replied, 'I describe you to be a sadhu like Dattatreya, Kapildev and others.' Maharaj then said, 'If you describe me in such words, then what is the purpose of your travelling? Even if a person eats a radish worth half a paisa, and then eats seven rich delicacies, the aftertaste of the radish prevails. You have attained me, the source of all avatars, all-doer, manifest Purushottam Narayan Shri Krishna, so why do you not preach about developing this conviction among them?' I replied, 'Just as a potter's wheel spins fast, I also have the internal desire to preach this, however your command prevents us from doing so, and therefore I am not able to talk in this manner.' On hearing this, Maharaj said, 'From today, you should preach to all, from king to pauper, on the manifest Purushottam Narayan Shri Krishna.' Hearing such words of Maharaj, one sadhu thought that if they preached such knowledge to a king, he would either imprison them or tie them to the leg of an elephant. Through his antaryami powers, Maharaj knew what was in his mind, and reassured the sadhu by saying, 'Who is actually present within the person that would imprison or tie you to the leg of an elephant? It is ultimately me; therefore from now onwards, you should happily preach about my supreme form.' Maharaj thus said this to me [Adbhutanand Swami]" (Shriharini Adbhut Vartao 131).

The above examples indicate that Shriji Maharaj strongly encouraged all sadhus and devotees to develop conviction of his supreme form, and help others to do so. This is because ultimate liberation is only possible if his supreme form is understood. For this, Shriji Maharaj commanded all sadhus and devotees to go to Junagadh annually and stay there for one month in the company of Gunatitanand Swami. This was because Gunatitanand Swami, the manifest form of Aksharbrahman, was fully aware of Shriji Maharaj's heartfelt desire and principle. Moreover, he was not deterred by society or by the contents of the shastras when talking of the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Thus, everybody would go to Junagadh as commanded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and stay there for one month in the company of Gunatitanand Swami. By listening to his talks, many developed firm conviction in Shriji Maharaj's supremacy. At times, Gunatitanand Swami would even correct senior sadhus like Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Shukanand Swami and Bhai Atmanand Swami to consolidate their conviction in Bhagwan Swaminarayan's supreme form.

Like Gunatitanand Swami, recognizing Shriji Maharaj's earnest desire, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, and presently, Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj have instilled the conviction of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's supremacy in the hearts of thousands of devotees.

2. Necessity Of Understanding The Form Of Aksharbrahman: To Attain True Conviction In Parabrahman

Just as Shriji Maharaj has stressed the importance of truly understanding the form of Parabrahman in order to achieve ultimate liberation, he has also emphasized the necessity of truly understanding the form of Aksharbrahman.

He has described that knowledge of Aksharbrahman is necessary for aspirants to develop true conviction in Parabrahman, as well as attain the state of aksharup (brahmarup). Let us now understand these two facets: It is extremely difficult to attain true conviction of the form of Parabrahman (L 18). Since our indriyas and antahkarans are mayik, whereas God is not mayik (G I 51, K 1}, therefore, Parabrahman is imperceptible to our mayik indriyas and antahkaran (G I 78, P 4). Thus, in the Vachanamrut, Maharaj describes the need for shastras and the Sant to help one understand the form of Parabrahman.

Explaining the vital need for shastras, Maharaj states in Vachanamrut S 13, "Whosoever develops faith in God does so only through the shastras...only faith developed through the shastras remains staunch."

However, the shastras contain many kinds of statements. Therefore, no one is able to clearly understand the spiritual talks in the shastras; in fact, all are confused by them (G I 7). This is because the concepts of the shastras cannot be understood in their true context by anyone except an Ekantik Bhakta (G I 66). In fact, those who do not have devotion for God will understand God to be formless, even from reading the Shrimad Bhagvat (G II 10).

This is because conviction that God is forever divine and possesses a form can only be attained from a person who has such conviction. However, it can never be attained from others (G I 64). Therefore, no one can ever attain liberation by listening to the Gita or the Shrimad Bhagvat from a person who does not have faith in God coupled with the knowledge of his greatness. On the contrary, only, great harm can come from it (V 12).

Thus, the message that Maharaj has imparted in the Vachanamrut, as seen above, it is that only possible to truly understand the form of Parabrahman from the Ekantik Satpurush.

In Vachanamrut G II 13, Shriji Maharaj has mentioned, "Such discourses regarding the nature of God cannot be understood by oneself even from the shastras. Even though these facts may be in the shastras, it is only when the Satpurush manifests on this earth, and one hears them being narrated by him, that one understands them." Here, the Sant, or Satpurush, through whom the form of Parabrahman is understood, is none other than Aksharbrahman incarnate, the brahmaswarup Sant.

Thus, it is only possible to attain the true conviction of Parabrahman through Aksharbrahman. This is because Aksharbrahman is eternally beyond maya, and hence he is the closest of all to Parabrahman. Hence, no one can understand the glory of Parabrahman to the extent that Aksharbrahman can. Furthermore, as Parabrahman dwells in totality within Aksharbrahman, even the akshar-muktas do not possess the power that Aksharbrahman does. Thus, only Aksharbrahman is able to help one to establish true conviction in Parabrahman as it is. For that reason, in order to understand the true glory of Parabrahman, it is absolutely essential to profoundly associate with Aksharbrahman. Shriji Maharaj has emphasized this in Vachanamrut G II 42, "Aksharbrahman itself is like the sun in the sense that when the sun rises, all ten directions can be determined in relation to it.

Akshardham is like that."

Through this analogy, Maharaj illustrates that when the sun rises at dawn we are able to determine East and other directions. In the same way when we profoundly associate with the manifest Aksharbrahman, we can realize the true glory of Parabrahman. This is the key and the most fundamental teaching which Maharaj wants us to understand.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize and understand the glory of Aksharbrahman and thus profoundly associate with him through thoughts, deeds and words in order to develop true conviction in the tattva of Parabrahman.

In fact, without understanding the true form of Aksharbrahman, it is impossible to develop conviction in Parabrahman and the nature of his entity because only after knowing Aksharbrahman can one know Parabrahman, since Parabrahman is beyond Aksharbrahman. How can it be possible to understand that which is above and beyond Akshar, if we haven't even understood Akshar?

In Vachanamrut G I 63, Maharaj describes the supreme tattva: "Jal, the cause of pruthvi, is larger than it and is subtler than it. In the same way, tej is the cause of jal, vayu is the cause of tej, akash is the cause of vayu, ahamkar is the cause of akash, mahattattva is the cause of ahamkar, Pradhan and Purush are the cause of mahat-tattva, and Mul-Prakruti and Brahman 1 are the causes of Pradhan and Purush. The cause of all these is Aksharbrahman, which is the abode of Purushottam Bhagwan."

Maharaj explains in Vachanamruts G I 64, 72, 73 and others that Parabrahman is above Akshar. The verse below from the Mundaka Upanishad also supports this fact:

Akshariit parataha paraha.

Meaning :Parabrahman is beyond even Akshar, who is above all [others] (Mundaka Upanishad 2.1.2).

Hence, it is natural that the more we understand the glory of each tattva, the more we can understand the glory of Akshar; and once we understand the glory of Akshar, only then can we understand the glory of Parabrahman. So, it is necessary to initially recognize Aksharbrahman in order to fully recognize the tattva of Parabrahman.

The Shrutis state:

Brahmavidiiipnoti param.

Meaning: One who realizes Brahman, attains Parabrahman (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1)

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1. Essence Of Maharaj' S Discourses About His Own Form

Various Discourses Regarding His Own Form

Throughout the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has spoken about his form in different ways: on different occasions he has referred to himself as a sadhak, a sadhu, an ekantik bhakta, an acharya, a guru or advisor and as the Ishtadev. Also, he has at times said that he is a devotee of Shri Nar Narayan and elsewhere stated he is Nar-Narayan himself. In some places he has referred to himself as a worshipper of Bhagwan Shri Krishna and in other places has even said he is Shri Krishna himself. At other times he has said he is the Ishtadev of all Purna Purushottam Narayan. He has also spoken of Nar Narayan or Shri Krishna Bhagwan, or himself as being the avatari of all avatars Parabrahman, the source of all avatars.

At times he has explained the Lord of Akshardham to be Shri Krishna, at other times Nar Narayan, and elsewhere as himself. He has spoken of Shri Krishna as being supreme, and has at other times stated that he himself is supreme.

Therefore, by reading the Vachanamrut and also the various shastras of the Sampradaya, questions may arise regarding Maharaj's actual form or status. For example, why has he spoken about his form in so many different ways? Why did he not talk about the supremacy of his own form consistently everywhere?

Moreover, not only did Shriji Maharaj describe his own form in various ways, but also the main deities he installed in the mandirs he built were different:

In Ahmedabad and Bhuj he installed Shri Nar Narayan Dev. In Vartal he installed Shri Lakshmi Narayan Dev.

In Dholera he installed Shri Madan Mohan Dev.

In Junagadh he installed Shri Radha Raman Dev, Shri Ranchhodtrikamji, Shri Siddheshwar Mahadev.

In Gadhada he installed Shri Gopinath Dev, Shri Suryanarayan Dev.

Based on this, one could question that in all these mandirs, instead of installing his own murti in the central shrine, why did he install the murtis of different deities?

We are aware that on the fourteenth day after Ramanand Swami passed away, Shriji Maharaj initiated the worship of 'Swaminarayan' in place of 'Radha Krishna'. Why establish worship of Swaminarayan yet install different deities in every mandir? Has anyone, anywhere, ever installed the murti of Sita Ram and worshipped Radha Krishna, or installed the murti of Radha Krishna and then worshipped Sita Ram? So, why did Bhagwan Swaminarayan do this? Why did he speak in such a varied manner and install different deities in different mandirs?

It is necessary to understand Maharaj's intention behind declaring his own form with so much variance, and in consecrating so many different deities. For this, the explanations given below, including the life teachings of Shriji Maharaj and the Gunatit gurus, as well as studies on the historical texts of the Sampradaya, will be considered.

Developing Conviction in Manifest God Is Most Difficult

Whenever God manifests in human form on earth, it is very difficult to develop full conviction in him as God at that time. How many truly understood and recognized the full glory of Bhagwan Ram or Bhagwan Krishna, during their stay on earth? The Bhagvat narrates the great misfortune of the Yadavs for not understanding the true form of Shri Krishna as Bhagwan (Shrimad Bhagvat 3.2.8).

Shri Krishna Bhagwan also says in the Gita, that nobody is able to truly understand him (Bhagavad Gita 7.26, 9.21, 9.24).

Similarly, Maharaj says in Vachanamrut L 18, "To develop the conviction of God is more difficult than anything else. Moreover, because this topic is extremely complex, I am afraid of discussing it. I feel, 'Upon discussing this topic, what if someone were to misunderstand it? What if, due to this discussion, any inclination that one may have firmly cultivated were to be destroyed, or even be uprooted? Yet, there is no alternative but to reveal this fact. If one does not interpret it correctly, many problems can arise. Yet, until one has not understood this fact, much deficiency will remain in one's conviction. That is why I wish to deliver this discourse!'" Shriji Maharaj makes the above statement after having headed the Satsang fellowship for approximately nineteen years. Despite so many years having elapsed, it seems he was still unsure about delivering this discourse to the sadhus and devotees who had personally witnessed and experienced his unearthly powers, and extraordinary and divine personality.

From this, we can understand that it is a difficult feat to develop conviction in the manifest form of God. In fact, to understand Maharaj as the supreme avatari of all avatars is as difficult as chewing chickpeas made of iron. Thousands worshipped Maharaj believing him to be God, and in accordance to his commands, completely surrendered their mind, body, and wealth to him. Yet, that they struggled to understand his supremacy is a fact. Some were hindered by the various scriptural descriptions, while others were afraid about such understanding being unacceptable to society. Analysis of the Sampradaya's history shows that even paramhansas such as Muktanand Swami, Premanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Bhai Atmanand Swami and Shukanand Swami found it difficult to understand Maharaj as the supreme God. In fact, it seems that they understood Maharaj's true form only after many years.

It is for this reason that Gunatitanand Swami has said, "One hundred thousand goats may bleat together yet nobody is afraid, and if one lion roars then the sound would pierce everyone internally, and even the forehead of an elephant would split open (out of fear); similarly, nobody falters in speaking of Maharaj to be like other avatars, however to say openly that the divine powers which all avatars, etc. possess are granted by Maharaj, and that they have attained their spiritual state through worshipping him is like the forehead of an elephant being torn by the roar of the lion" (SNV 5.197). Thus, to develop conviction in the supremacy of the manifest human form of God visible before all is extremely difficult. Without strong spiritual impressions (sanskars) from previous births, a worthy character and the association of a Gunatit Satpurush, any talks of Shriji Maharaj's supremacy cannot be grasped; and if they are grasped, they cannot be digested.

A Range of Different Audiences

Whenever Shriji Maharaj spoke about his form, he considered the differing levels of understanding of the audience, since knowledge given to the unprepared may have an unintended effect. There is a Gujarati saying, 'Kidine kan, ane hathine man', i.e. an ant needs only to be fed an amount equal to a grain of sand, whereas an elephant needs food weighing many kilos. Thus, when food is given according to one's capacity, it is enjoyable. Similarly, only when aspirants are given knowledge according to their suitability are they able to enjoy its bliss. If a sweet food is put on top of an ant, it will be crushed, and would certainly not be able to enjoy its taste. In the same way, if those who prefer to worship the paroksh (non-manifest) form of God are given the knowledge of God's manifest form prior to becoming suitable for it, then due to the misunderstandings and doubts which arise, their understanding of both the paroksh and pratyaksh forms of God becomes disturbed. For this reason, Shriji Maharaj has spoken according to the individual levels of spirituality and appropriateness of the aspirants.

As an aspirant gains a deeper insight, he develops greater understanding of the glory of manifest God and the God-realized Satpurush. As a result, his suitability to receive this knowledge increases and he develops greater conviction in the manifest form of Paramatma. Thus, Shriji Maharaj has talked to aspirants according to their suitability and spiritual status.

To fulfil the wishes of and grant bliss to his loving devotees, Shriji Maharaj often travelled from Gadhada to many villages and cities such as Sarangpur, Kariyani, Panchala, Loya, Vartal, Ahmedabad, Jetalpur, Ashlali,

Vadodara, Surat, Junagadh and Kutch-Bhuj. Wherever Maharaj went, aspirants were attracted to his divine personality, and would join the group of sadhus and devotees to take the benefit of his darshan and company. Due to this, it was only natural that at various times and places, there would be a mixed audience of aspirants believing in different deities and avatars. During such times, Maharaj would speak in a manner enabling all to be inspired by what he said.

To help aspirants gain an understanding of esoteric spiritual endeavours and inspiration on how to perform them, Shriji Maharaj at times presented himself as an ideal sadhak and talked of his own spiritual endeavours. Further, to explain the attributes of an ideal ekantik bhakta, an ideal sadhu and an ideal worshipper, he would speak of himself as the ideal of all three.

At times, after speaking about the glory of other avatars, he would then direct the subject to his form by saying that the avatar is today 'present before you', 'manifest before you', 'visible to you all' and 'seated in this assembly'. In this way, devotees of the various avatars would feel that their ishtadev was manifest in the form of Shriji Maharaj. Once they had developed affection in this way, Maharaj would steadily correct their belief.

Shriji Maharaj never refuted any avatar or their devotees, but narrated the glory of their life and work in his discourses. It is due to this that devotees who worshipped the paroksh forms of God developed affection for him. They would often stay with him and by steadily experiencing his extraordinary powers and personality, they would eventually develop the conviction of him being God. It is due to the compassionate talks by Maharaj that thousands of aspirants sought his refuge and became his devotees during his presence on earth. Believing him to be God, they began to offer devout worship to him.

Thus, people developed conviction in his supremacy gradually over many years as a result of listening to the talks of Shriji Maharaj or his ekantik sadhus and devotees. If he had spoken openly about his supremacy without considering the varying levels of understanding of people seated in an assembly, then perhaps the true understanding would never have dawned upon them.

Gunatitanand Swami has explained this in a similar manner in his talks: "If it had been explained as it really is [that Shriji Maharaj is supreme] then it would not have been accepted, in fact the opposite would occur. And because Maharaj had spoken as it really is, many people stopped observing the codes of conduct. Maharaj then removed many Vachanamruts and said, 'We do not want to keep even a single Vachanamrut'. Thereafter Nityanand Swami prayed, 'We shall write what we find in accordance to the Dharmamrut and other shastras.' It was then that Maharaj allowed for the current [number of Vachanamruts] to be retained. Therefore, if it is explained as it really is, then the desired result is not achieved. So, it should be understood that whatever Maharaj did was for our benefit (SNV 5.236).

Thus, due to the different levels of understanding, Shriji Maharaj did not talk about his supreme form at every place and at every opportunity. This reflected his compassionate and beneficial motive for the liberation of countless jivas.

Clarifying such liberating intentions of Shriji Maharaj, Sadguru Nirgundas Swami has noted an incident in his talks:

"Once, in the Akshar Ordi in Gadhpur, Brahmanand Swami came to Maharaj. He put his head at Maharaj's holy feet and started crying. Maharaj questioned, 'Swami! Why are you crying?' Swami replied, 'You are the manifest Lord of Akshardham, yet we are compelled to discreetly sing about you. For this, we are internally pained.' Maharaj said in response, 'Swami, we have come to liberate countless jivas. Therefore, you should sing in a manner that is fitting to the countless jivas and which will grant them liberation'" (Vat 373). This incident shows that Shriji Maharaj spoke according to the circumstances wherever he went in order to help all accept his word, avoid misunderstanding and liberate all. The incident also reveals that many paramhansas understood Shriji Maharaj's supremacy, yet they spoke in a manner that all would understand and accept. Despite this, it is essential for one to understand Maharaj's form as it truly is in order to attain ultimate liberation.

So, even though Maharaj usually spoke in a simple and readily acceptable manner, he also delivered many unambiguous talks regarding his true supreme form in private conversations and public discourses to those who were of an appropriate level of understanding to accept. Such explicit talks are found in the Vachanamrut and various renowned shastras of the Sampradaya. Some examples have been given in section 2.2, 'Bhagwan Swaminarayan -Supreme: As Expressed in the Shastras of the Sampradaya' on p. 68.

2. Gunatitanand Swami Is Aksharbrahman - Scriptural References

In the shastras of the Sampradaya, there are many references describing Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman incarnate.

Shrihari Lila Kalpataru

At the behest of Adi Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj, Brahm-achari Achintyanand Varni wrote the Shrihari Lila Kalpataru. It contains passages that proclaim Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. For example:

Achintyanand Brahmachari begins this shastra with a prayer to Gunatitanand Swami and writes:

Yadrom-vivare leena andanam kotyaha pruthak; Tadaksharam gunateetam gunateetam namamyaham.

Meaning: I incessantly revere that Aksharmurti (Akshar in human form) Gunatitanand Swami, in whose every pore are millions of universes and who is above the three gunas -sattva, rajas and tamas.

In the 17th adhyay of the 7th skand, he describes Mulji Sharma's initiation into sainthood by Shriji Maharaj in Dabhan during the grand yagna on Posh sud Punam, V.S. 1866 (20 January 1810 CE). At that time, Maharaj revealed Mulji Sharma's greatness as Aksharbrahman:

Moolajee sharmane deeksham dadanasya pra jayate, Bhooyanmetra samanando yato dhamaksharam sa me. M uktairanantaihi sakam me yatra'khandata yoshyate,

Urdhavadhobhagarahitam tanmoolam dhama chaksharam.

Meaning: Today I am extremely happy to initiate Mulji Sharma, who is my divine abode -Akshardham. This Mui Akshar is infinite and endless and is my abode where I forever reside with my infinite muktas (49, 50).

Gunatitanand Swamini Vato

At the behest of Acharya Shripatiprasadji Maharaj, Sadguru Balmukund Swami of Junagadh arranged for the printing and publication of Gunatitanand Swami's Swamini Vato in V.S. 1975 (1819 CE). The book commences with a biographical sketch of Gunatitanand Swami, in which he is referred to as 'Mui Aksharbrahman' numerous times.

The Swamini Vato was first published as a five-chapter shastra by Shri Swaminarayan Gurukul, Rajkot, in V.S. 2022 (1966 CE) and the fifth edition was printed in V.S. 2049 (1993 CE). In all these editions, 'Anadi Mui Aksharmurti Sadguru Shri Gunatitanand Swamini Vato' is printed on the first page and Gunatitanand Swami's portrait is captioned, 'Aksharmurti Sadguru Shri Gunatitanand Swami'.

At the beginning, under the heading 'Anadi Mul Aksharmurti Sadguru Gunatitanand Swaminu Jivan Vruttant', is a brief summary of Gunatitanand Swami's life, in which, on several occasions (pages 3, 6, 8, 13), Gunatitanand Swami is referred to as 'Mul Aksharmurti'.

Furthermore, in this shastra, Gunatitanand Swami himself has clearly pointed out many times that he is Akshar. For example:

SNV 3.38: "There is nothing more to understand than this. All that needs to be understood is to know Maharaj as Purushot- tam (supreme God) and this Sadhu as Akshar. All these are akshar (akshar-muktas), but he is Mui Akshar - and he also has assumed a human body and incarnated here."

SNV 5.183: "This sadhu is Akshar. His divine and human traits should be considered as one. He is unborn and has never been in a mother's womb. Understand his ways to be like those of a magician. He is visible here due to Maharaj's wish."

SNV 6.208: "A devotee asked, 'Why can't the atma be seen?' Swami replied, 'It is seen, but not believed. After acquiring knowl- edge it will be believed that "this is Brahman and the departed is Parabrahman. "' Thus, Swami spoke words of essence."

Purushottam Charitra

At the behest of Darbar Abhaysinhji of Lodhika, Purushottam Charitra, a shastra in the Vraj (Hindi) language, was composed by the great poet Dalpatram. He has deeply praised Gunatitanand Swami:

Vandu Guniiteetinand Swiimee, jehee par reejhe Antaryiimee;

Bhagvadviirtii satat karahee, dhyiin Dharmanandan ko dharahee.

Uttamkulmii dharee avatar, Shreehari kii j tajyo sansiir;

Rakhe dharm puni dharm rakhiive, iid hi Akshar iip kahiive.

Meaning: I bow to Gunatitanand Swami with whom the An- taryami (God) is extremely pleased. He (Gunatitanand Swami) con- tinually engages in spiritual discourses, and meditates on the sonof Dharma (Shriji Maharaj). Born in a noble family, he renounced the world for Shriji Maharaj. He observes dharma and makes others observe dharma also. He is known as Mui Akshar (2.19-20).

Kirtan Kaustubhmala

Acharya Shri Viharilalji Maharaj has himself written this text, in which he says:

Aksharmoorti Gunatitanand Swami, tene apyii vartman

Pote padine pachhi padavya, janane dai ghanu gnan .

Meaning: Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami initiated me and guided me to practice the religious vows. He followed them and inspired others to follow them; he imparted much [spiritual] knowl- edge to people (p. 13).

Kirtanavali

Jagdishanand Brahmachari was a very intelligent poet from Junagadh, and a learned scholar of Sanskrit commentaries. He has written many kirtans describing Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Ak- sharbrahman. For example:

Akshar Moo/ hamesha Hari jema rahe re,

Te to pote dharee manushya avatar re;

Joonagadhma jogee thai pote rahya re,

Swami Gunatitanand udar re....

Meaning: Mul Akshar, in whom God always resides, He has manifested in human form;

He resided in Junagadh as a yogi (sadhu), Swami Gunatitanand is generous... (Pad 1).

Satsang-Sahitya Ratnamala

Sadguru Swami Bhaktipriyadasji, a sadguru and poet of Junagadh, composed the verse 'Shobhiiuo Juniigadh mandirni re' in his shastra, in which he describes Gunatitanand Swami as 'Mul Aksharmurti':

Moo/ Aksharmoorti je manbhavnee re,

Jenu Gunatitanand nam re;

Te Swami Joonagadhma rahi ghanu re,

Tene shobhavyu chhe ghanu dham re...Shobha.

Meaning: Mul Aksharmurti, who is well-liked and whose name is Gunatitanand; that Swami resided for a long time in Junagadh, and enhanced the splendour of this abode [Junagadh Mandir].

Kavyakusumavali (Shri Jetpur Murti-Pratishtha Description)

This text, composed by Swami Bhaktipriyadasji, a saint-poet, has eight verses in the shardulvikridit chhand (a Sanskrit poetic metre containing lines of 19 syllables) extolling the limitless glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. For example:

Jeno vipra sukulma janam chhe, Halar deshe sahee,

Jene dham rachaviyu ati badu, je Jeernadurge rahee;

Jene shuddha upasana Shreeji tanee, felavee je vrund chhe,

Eva Akshardham Swami Mool to Gunatitanand chhe...

Meaning: He who has taken birth in a good Brahmin family in the Halar region,

He who stayed in Junagadh and made a magnificent mandir flourish there;

He who spread the pure upasana of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, That Mul Aksharbrahman is Gunatitanand Swami.

In this way, various prose and poetic shastras of the Sampradaya clearly state that Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman. So, the fact that Gunatitanand Swami is Aksharbrahman is well known in the Sampradaya.

Exercise

- 1) True Definition Of The Aksharbrahman Tattva
- 2) Essence Of Maharaj' S Discourses About His Own Form
- 3) Various Discourses Regarding His Own Form
- 4) Gunatitanand Swami Is Aksharbrahman - Scriptural References
- 5) The Need To Understand The Form Of Parabrahman
- 6) True Definition Of The Aksharbrahman Tattva
- 7) A Range of Different Audiences
- 8) Aksharbrahman: Unique Among All Other Tattvas
- 9) Conviction in God's supreme form to attain Akshardham
- 10) Gunatitanand Swami As Aksharbrahman: An Authentic Letter
- 11) What Is the Form of Parabrahman When He Is Vyatirek?
- 12) Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Complete Manifestation Through The Sant
- 13) The Significance of Avatarvad
- 14) Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Insistence for Conviction in God's Supreme Form
- 15) The Necessity Of Parabrahman's Manifest Form