

Shikshapatri

“The Epistle of Precepts”

(based on Shatanand’s Shikshapatri Arthadipika)

Introduction

Warmest Jay Shree Swaminarayan to fellow readers!

It gives me great pleasure to publish this commentary upon Lord Swaminarayan's *Shikshapatri*, entitled: 'Shikshapatri - The Epistle of Precepts'.

This English work is based very closely to Shatanand's **Shikshapatri Arthadipika Tikya Samhita** Shastra. It is not however a word for word translation. I have added to the original work as well as omitted other parts that I felt were too deep in context for the laymen to explore. I have where possible, provided original Sanskrit verses and words so that we can become familiar with these Sanskrit terms in the event that it does not become lost in our younger generation. I did not want to produce a work which was one hundred percent English as often there is no one word translation from Sanskrit to Vernacular languages. Translation from Sanskrit to Gujarati loses some validity, not to mention a translation then from Gujarati to English.

"In 1826, Lord Swaminarayan summarised his ethical teachings in a book entitled 'Shikshapatri' or 'Code of Discipline' - It is one of the best spiritual and ethical codes of the nineteenth century in Hinduism and remains an inspiring handbook of conduct", says *Stephen Fuchs 'Religious Prophets', P.213*. The Shikshapatri is veritably the fountainhead of inspiration for the spiritual aspirant. It contains in its bosom the fragrant elements of ethical and religious life. Its precepts include everything and exclude nothing to beautify the life of the spirit. Its appeal is universal, its message is global and it's impact deep and penetrating. The Shikshapatri represents the heart of Hinduism in its pristine purity.

Lord Swaminarayan wrote the Shikshapatri towards the end of his lifetime over one hundred and seventy five years ago. However, the underlying principles apply to mankind even today and will undoubtedly apply to all for eternity. The reason being is that the fundamental precepts are consistent with the *Vedas* and other orthodox scriptures of **Hindu Sanatan Dharma**.

The Lord wrote the Shikshapatri for the benefit of mankind - so that all could read and understand the basic fundamental commandments applying to all Hindus. The contents of the Shikshapatri have been sieved from numerous Dharma Shastras (treatise upon Dharma) from the likes of Manusmriti, Yagnavalkya Smriti, Parashar Smriti etc. as well as other texts such as Mahabharat, Shrimad Bhagwat, the Puranas etc.

Due to the confusion that reading the many can cause, Lord Swaminarayan wrote the Shikshapatri to provide a list of the more relevant Dharmas. This is not to say that one need not study other Shastras as the Lord has specifically said in Shlok 203 - "I have thus described, the general and special Dharmas of all my disciples. They shall refer to Shastras of our Sampraday to learn them in detail."

When working through this Shikshapatri, I was marvelled by the work that must have gone into this Shikshapatri. To say so much in so few lines is of credit to our Master. The contents are very basic, yet the inner meanings have so much depth. To just read the Shikshapatri without trying to understand the inner meanings is just a waste of the Shikshapatri.

When reading through with conviction, one really begins to understand the insight that Lord Swaminarayan had and the sheer compassion and love for his Satsangis is equally evident. This is not a mere book which one reads and keeps in one's *Pooja*, (which may or may not be used) but is a Shastra just as important as the Bhagwat Gita. I can't emphasise the greatness of the Shikshapatri enough.

Having worked on it for so long with so much depth, I feel that study and practice of the Shikshapatri alone will truly attain all that one requires. Sir Monier Williams therefore says, "The Shikshapatri is of very pure and lofty character."

One thing that I have noticed in the younger generation in this day and age is the unwillingness of youngsters to want to learn about their religion. This is really a general problem and excuses such as "We don't understand - it's too difficult - It's not necessary in this day and age" simply do not hold. As far as I'm concerned, if a person is able to educate to A-Level or Degree level then he should have no problem understanding our Shastras - many of which are translated to English now. Those who are less educated can still understand the basic issues of Hinduism that many seem to lack.

If one is not able to answer simple questions such as why we are Vegetarians, why we wear the red mark upon the forehead etc. then I feel that as Hindus, we have a lot to be ashamed of. We simply have failed to live up to our expectations. I sincerely hope that this English work helps to clarify the essential teachings of our Sampraday and indeed *Hindu Sanatan Dharma*. May it be a means to a more educated and civilised society.

Lord Swaminarayan, His Life and Work

He was a spiritual colossus who travelled, bare-footed, the length and breadth of India in seven short years. Hailed as an unremitting champion of peace and purity, he crusaded against the crippling evils in society.

Thousands admired him, obeyed him and above all held him in highest reverence.

His name was Lord Swaminarayan. He was born on 2nd April 1781 in the village of *Chhapaiya*, near *Ayodhya*. He was called *Ghanshyam* in his childhood years.

His birth was a blessed light that had dawned on Earth. At the age of eight, Ghanshyam was given 'Yagnopavita', (the sacred thread). Extra-ordinarily brilliant and intelligent as he was, he completed the study of Sanskrit Grammar, the *Vedas*, the 'Dharma-Shastras', the *Puranas*, the 'Prasthantrayi', the 'Shad-Darshanas' and *Vedanta* within three years.

At the tender age of eleven, Ghanshyam, left his home - renouncing the world on July 18th 1793. Known now as Neelkanth Varni, he went to the forests of the Himalayas, and reached *Pulashram*. There he engaged himself in severe austerities and extreme forms of penance for six months. In the course of his Himalayan pilgrimage he met **Gopal Yogi** from whom he studied and mastered *Yoga*. For seven years he travelled barefooted in the vast country of India visiting the various holy shrines.

He finally arrived at *Loj*, in *Saurashtra*, (Gujarat), where there was a monastery of **Ramanand Swami** - an incarnation of *Uddhava* (foremost disciple of Lord Krishna). There, Neelkanth met **Muktanand Swami**, the chief disciple of Ramanand Swami. After a short stay there, he met Ramanand Swami and saw in him his spiritual Guru, the one he had been searching for. He acceded to Ramanand's request and decided to stay with him in the monastery for he had accepted his preceptorship.

Ramanand Swami initiated him and named him **Sahajanand Swami**. He was popularly known by the name of **Swaminarayan**. Though there were many scholars and senior disciples, Ramanand Swami soon found Swaminarayan, just twenty-one years of age, as the only disciple outstandingly suited, and hence, he named him his spiritual successor and placed him in charge of the monastery. On that occasion, Sahajanand Swami begged, "O, Gurudev Ramanand! If your devotee is to suffer a single scorpion bite then let me, instead, suffer the pain of millions of scorpion bites in every pore. And if your devotee is destined to have the begging bowl then let the begging bowl be my fate, but your devotee should not suffer the misery of hunger and lack of clothing." "So be it!" replied Ramanand Swami. Shortly thereafter Ramanand Swami passed away. Swaminarayan's following gradually grew by leaps and bounds.

Thousands witnessed his supernatural powers and miracles. By his divine splendour and spiritual powers, he graced many with 'Samadhi' (spiritual-trance), enabling them to have direct mystic experience of the deity they adored. Many of them saw Swaminarayan in his highest abode during such Samadhi experience.

He organised and ran alms-houses for mendicants, the needy and the poverty stricken during famine. And he also brought back countless men and women to the path of morality and religion. "He created a band of five hundred Paramhansas the founding saints of his continuing order of monks. They gave themselves up to a life of total austerity, yet at the same time managed to go outward to the needy, building alms-houses, digging wells and doing charitable work." (*Peter Brent: 'Godmen of India', Page 200*)

These Paramhansas reflected a very high moral character through their unique life of celibacy. This indicates the dynamic personality stupendous moral and spiritual force Lord Swaminarayan possessed. He and his disciple-saints started the missionary work of moral and spiritual elevation of society through their untainted character, comprehensive teaching and humble service of humanity. He gave five observances the fundamental prerequisites to his saints. These were, control of carnal desire (*Nishkam*), non-avarice (*Nirlobh*), humbleness (*Nirman*), non-attachment (*Nishneh*) and indifference to taste (*Niswad*). However, for all followers in general, it was compulsory to abstain from wine, flesh eating, adultery and stealing. In addition to these, truthfulness, non-violence and celibacy were regarded as common conditions for all followers. All those who accepted these vows were given refuge and accepted as followers by him.

Lord Swaminarayan uplifted the backward classes - the scheduled castes and tribes. He changed the hearts of thieves, traducers and dacoits, and converted them into real devotees free from vices. "Yet his message had a revolutionary effect on the personal lives and characters of thousands of people in a very lawless period. Members of martial and criminal tribes gave up meat and drink; they renounced the use of opium and tobacco, to both of which most of them were very much addicted". (*Pryns Hopkins: 'Character and Personality' Vol-XIII No. 1. Sept 1937. Page 77*)

He liberated the masses from poverty and idleness, illiteracy and ignorance, false beliefs and superstitions, vicious activities and bad habits, addiction and alcoholism and the fear of evil forces. He kindled in them the flame of hope, love, faith and devotion. He lived with them in their low roofed houses, mingled with them, became part of them and uplifted them to the level of virtuous devotees leading a life of moral and spiritual pursuits. Such a change aroused great veneration and love for him in the minds of people. They saw that the supreme Lord was manifest in the person of the young Sahajanand Swami.

He was the very embodiment of love and compassion. He beheld the Brahmin and the low-born, the rich and the poor, the donor and the beggar, the King and the layman, the pious monk and the prostitute in the same measure of love. "Sahajanand was loved beyond belief by his disciples - comprising men of talent, of station, and of wealth, the poor, the ignorant, the rude who would have sacrificed life itself for their preceptor." He brought about a great awakening in the path of morality (*Dharma*), religion and devotion (*Bhakti*).

He educated society, especially the womenfolk, and removed the practice of female infanticide and the practice of *Sati* (where the widow followed her husband into the funeral pyre.) He preached non-violence. He stopped the practice of animal and human sacrifices in *Yagnas* and in places of worship. He was an advocate of moral and religious respect. He therefore, asked his followers to respect equally the five deities, viz. *Vishnu, Shiva, Ganapati, Parvati and Surya*. He eradicated evil by non-violent means, such as love, goodness, service, sacrifice, etc. He uplifted the tribal people, backward classes and the neglected sections of society.

To keep his religious institutions free from corruption, he made separate arrangements for women to worship and receive religious education exclusively through lady preachers. Separate temples were built for them. He remedied the misery and loneliness of widows by diverting their minds to the Supreme Lord as their real solace, saviour and final refuge, through the promotion of single-minded devotion to him. By the prescription of virtuous conduct and morality, he purified overt behaviour and with education, knowledge and devotion, he purified the hearts of people.

"Swaminarayan welcomed and accepted everyone for discipleship, with the same rights and privileges, be they Muslim, Parsees, Christians or of other faiths. He was the first sincere campaigner for undertaking

the reconversion in Hinduism of the convert non-Hindus.” (*Cities of Gurjarastra*’ by Henry George Briggs)

He taught people to live simple pious and virtuous lives. He preached non-violence and love for mankind. He taught them to indulge only in honest and moral pursuits. He himself lived an ascetic life of detachment, renunciation, dedication and sacrifice. He preached the gospel of devotion. He saw nothing but good in all. To love, to help, to lift, and to liberate all were his munificent desires.

For regular daily study, he gave the Shikshapatri to his followers. The Shikshapatri was written by him to maintain order and morality in the individual and in society. It is a small treatise consisting of 212 verses for men and women from every walk of life. And he assures *Dharma* (virtues), *Arth* (wealth), *Kama* (fulfilment of desires) and *Moksh* (emancipation) to all those who follow it.

After working incessantly for his mission for 30 years, Lord Swaminarayan left this mortal world and returned to his abode at the age of 49, on June 1st, 1830; “And as the announcement of his death was winged, one wail, loud and piercing and bitter, rang throughout Gujarat upon the single calamity which was believed to have befallen the country.” (*Cities of Gurjarastra*’ by Henry Briggs Page 242)

“Swaminarayan although often called one of the last great saints of traditional Hinduism, showed many characteristics of what is named Neo-Hinduism.” (*Francoise Mallison*)

Shikshapatri

PART I

Introduction

Mangalacharan

Brahmnishta Sadguru Shree **Shatanand Muni**, before beginning his commentary on the Shikshapatri, first performs 'Manglacharan'.

Great Rishis of the past, such as Shree Vyaasdeva and Valmiki have through their literary works, provided a format for which Scriptures should be written in. They show us that ***Manglacharan*** should be performed first and foremost. Manglacharan is used to praise God. It describes the nature of God, his ability and his form. Thus it is presented at the start of a scripture, by the author, to invoke the Lord for his grace and favour. It is always customary in Hinduism to praise and glorify the Lord when initiating a new task.

Shatanand Muni's Manglacharan spans three Shloks. In the first, he comments upon the nature of Dharma, in the second he mentions the abilities of Shree Sahajanand and in the third he describes the greatness of the Shikshapatri and thus the eminence of its author - Shree Sahajanand.

***Dharma Priyam Dharmabhuvam Dharmastham Dharmaposhkam
Dharmaridvanantarum Shri Khrushram Prarmamyaham*** //1//

'*Dharma Priyam* - He who relishes Dharma, *Dharmabhuvam* - who is indeed a manifestation of Dharma, the defender of the faith and destroyer of the antagonist of Dharma - such is Lord Shree Krishna, who I offer my praise to'.

***Yo Bhumarudariyat Shamahasa Vatyava Tulam Suramasa
Pramayopadharmabhiktaha Karshram Vransham Poshyan
Svayasvayam Sampiprathalgn Nruram Svantarurodhadvarau
Shrisvami Jaytisvaraha Sa Sahajanando Mamandadaha*** //2//

'Eradicator of vile or pagan faiths which condone the use of meat, alcohol etc. The strengthener of the mind and soul of ordinary folk and who spreads his divinity - illuminating all. Such is Shree Sahajanand Swami who gives me peace of mind and to thee may victory prevail'.

***Tasya Pradat Kriyate Satpramavachanvita
Sadvarmabhaktimashitya Shikshapatreyarthadipika*** //3//

'He who shelters Dharma and Bhakti for the purpose of benevolence of mankind. He who brought forth the Shikshapatri from the vast scriptures of Hinduism, I Shatanand Muni write this Arthadipika to please Shree Hari'.

Now Shatanand begins his commentary of Lord Swaminarayan's Shikshapatri.

TEXT 1

I meditate, in my heart, upon Lord Shree Krishna, on whose left stands Radhikaji, on whose bosom resides Laxmiji and who sports in Vrindavan.

Lord Swaminarayan, in his first Shlok performs *Manglacharan* of **Lord Shree Krishna**. He meditates on the very form of Shree Krishna. Thus, Lord Swaminarayan extols his deep devotion, faith and worship for Lord Shree Krishna.

Lord Swaminarayan in his first ten Shloks, introduces the Shikshapatri and therefore is the very essence of what the Shikshapatri is and its objective.

Shatanand Muni gives us a fuller '*Darshan*' of **Radha-Krishna** beyond the physical aspect. He explains the deeper meanings of the words 'Radha Krishna', which are of great importance: Radha is the consort of Krishna who is famed in the childhood years of Krishna. She however represents a great deal more. **Brahmanvaivrata Purana** says, '*Ra* represents that which destroys sin and immoral conduct. Furthermore, the *a* of *Ra* represents deliverance from the cycle of births, deaths and from mundane desires.'

Shatanand explains that by uttering '*Radha*' or even listening to it being chanted, man automatically becomes free from repeated births and deaths. Hence the divinity of Shree Radhika who is the very representation of salvation.

The '*dha*' in '*Radha*' represents the breakdown of barriers in life that lend itself to a successful and peaceful life. Shatanand adds that '*Ra*' also represents devotion to God and service to his lotus feet. It is also a symbol of a person's quest for happiness that is derived through service to God. In addition, '*dha*' epitomizes the wish to attain God and it delivers supreme knowledge (*Brahman Vidhya*) and eternal gratification. '*a*' of '*dha*' symbolizes the great luminosity of God, the will to give (*Dana Shakti*), the awakening of the mind (*Yoga Shakti*) and intellect (*Buddhi*) and it also instills allegiance and eternal devotion to God.

Indeed Radha epitomizes the '*Bhakt*' – the devotee within all. Radha represents all these qualities discussed and so is of vital importance. She is the embodiment of betterment and salvation and so is at the side of the Lord - **Vamay Yasya Sthita Radha**.

Laxmi is then remembered - **Shreescha Yasyasti Vakshasi** - as residing in the heart of Krishna. **Rukshmani** is the very incarnation of Goddess Laxmi (Shree), the consort of *Vishnu* or *Narayan*. She is as a result given a place at the Lord's heart. She is non other than *Sita*, consort of **Shree Rama** who is famed in the *Ramayan*.

Rukshmani is the foremost of the '*Asta-Patrani*' - the eight prominent wives of Krishna. Thus she is dearly respected. In **Rasmanjari** it is written: 'Laxmi represents shelter or protection. Residing in the Lord's heart, she is always considered to be with the Lord, forever serving him.'

Our Shastras add that no one should find difference in either Radha or Rukshmani as both are worthy of equal praise. Shatanand instructs that one should refer to the relevant Shastras to further realize the greatness of Radha and the various *Avatars* of Laxmi.

Shatanand now briefly describes the greatness of Lord Shree Krishna. Krishna is reputed in many of our Shastras, of which the *Bhagwat Purana's* tenth chapter is most prominent. Our Shastras say that *Katha* (pastimes) of Shree Krishna are very difficult to resist, as they are so attractive and absorbing.

Shree Krishna is depicted with a peacock feather upon his '*Mugat*', dark skinned, with a flute in hand, wearing a brilliant golden coloured cloth around his lower body and is the cowherd who sports with his friends and herding cows in '*Gokul*'.

'*Krush*' represents the Earth and '*ana*' represents joy and peace. Thus *Krushna* or Krishna is the very representation and source of joy and peace upon this Earth.

Krushastu Bhagwan Swayam proclaim our Shastras - 'Krishna is God Supreme' thus bestowing Godhead to Shree Krishna. Krishna is considered as ***Satchitananda Rupaia***, which reveals the highest nature of Godhead: '*Sat*' - of existence, '*Chit*' - of consciousness and '*Anand*' - of bliss. Therefore Krishna is the highest form of God alone worthy of meditation.

Jaydeva in **Gita Govind** says:

Vedanudharte Jaganivahate Bhugolmudribrate Daiyam /
Daryate Balim Chalyate Kshatrakshrayam Kurvate //
Paulastyam Jayate Halam Kalayate Karunyamatanvate Miechan /
Murchayate Dushaksuti Drute Krushaya Tumyam Namaha //

'The uplifter of the Vedas, the supporter of the universe, the saviour of the Earth, the slayer of Hiranyakashipu (as Narsinha), the fooler of Bali (as Vamana), the destroyer of evil Kshatriyas (as Parsurama), the promoter of compassion and the annihilator of Barbarians; such is thee, my Lord Shree Krishna, I humbly bow down before thy greatness.'

Shree Krishna sports in *Vrindavan - Vrindavana Vihaaram Tam*. *Vrinda* is also considered as *Tulsi* who is ever dear to the Lord and therefore is also remembered here. In this way, Lord Swaminarayan meditates upon Shree Krishna having the above form with all his heart - ***Shree Krushnam Hridaye Chintaye*** - in the hope that he may forever shower his blessings upon us all.

TEXT 2

I Sahajanand Swami, write this Shikshapatri from Vadtal, to all my disciples who reside in different parts of the world.

Lord Swaminarayan is clear in pointing out that he himself is writing or has written this Shikshapatri. The contents of this Shikshapatri are from the Lord Himself. Thus it is comparable with the *Bhagwad Gita* as the Gita was sung by Shree Krishna himself.

Therefore the Shikshapatri is truly divine with wisdom which is beyond this realm. It is unsurpassed; indeed it is the very manifestation of God, whose sole purpose is to benefit and uplift mankind.

The Lord uses the name '*Sahajanand Swami*' instead of any other name. Shatanand explains the significance of the use of this name. Sahajanand was the name given to the Lord by his Guru - *Shree Ramanand* at the time of *Bhagwadi Diksha* - initiation as a Sadhu. '*Sahaj*' is understood as natural or consequently is lead to mean - to be born with no specific reason. '*Anand*' is bliss, therefore, Sahajanand is bliss or happiness that is brought about unintentionally - it is natural bliss. Thus Sahajanand is the deliverer of such natural and pure happiness.

This is really how happiness should come. People look for happiness in material objects. All too often they look for it in the wrong place. People become obsessed in their quest to derive such bliss. However, their quest fails miserably as they find refuge in materialistic objects that provide only temporal bliss.

Those who don't necessarily look for bliss derive it through their spiritual faith. This is the prosperity and goodwill that is bestowed upon them by God himself. This happiness is permanent. By worshipping the Lord, having faith in him and by seeking refuge at his feet through pure and good conduct, man becomes a repository for untold riches. Thus, this should be the aim of all - to please the Lord via worship unto him.

Also, personal happiness can only be derived through another's happiness. Ultimately we should aim for, and wish for the Lord's happiness first and foremost. As the Lord resides in all creatures we should strive to provide for all beings: shelter the unsheltered, feed the starving, cloth the unclothed etc. Through such action we please and win the favour of God.

Shatanand finally says that '*Sahajanand*' is he who gives happiness to mankind. Such was Lord Swaminarayan who during his time upon this Earth uplifted the masses. Through this Shikshapatri he continues to provide a means to a greater end. This Shikshapatri is a letter (*Patri*) which teaches knowledge (*Shiksha*) for the betterment of mankind, showing the path to spirituality, peace and ultimately the heavens.

TEXT 3

Rampratapji and Icharamji, both born of Shree Dharmadev, are my brothers. Rampratapji's son, Ayodhyaprasad and Icharamji's son, Raghuvir - both of whom I have adopted as my sons (and established as the Acharyas of my disciples);

In the next four Shloks, Lord Swaminarayan accords his blessings upon the two Acharyas and also upon four categories of people. These are, (i) *Naishtik Brahmcharis* - Brahmins who take a *Naishtik Vrat* of celibacy, (ii) *Grihastas* - householders, (iii) *Sarva Stree* - all women (married, unmarried and widowed) and (iv) *Sadhus* - ascetics or saints who have renounced worldly life.

Lord Swaminarayan, by mentioning these classes of people, is highlighting who this Shikshapatri is for - the classes who are to follow the Shikshapatri. These four Shloks partition society and in doing so, Lord Swaminarayan is then able to write specific Dharmas for these classes of people in the second half of the Shikshapatri.

Also, he provides a name of a person for each class. Such person is mentioned as they have excelled so greatly in that particular class and so are considered as the ideal devotee in that class. Thus the Lord has praised such exemplarity. It is our duty to study the example set by these great persons and try to replicate these examples ourselves.

Lord Swaminarayan first bestows his blessings upon the two *Adi Acharyas* (first Acharyas) of the Sampraday. Lord Swaminarayan towards the end of his stay upon this Earth decided to establish two Acharyas - for the Northern and Southern regions of India. These Heads or Acharyas were later decided to be his nephews who would be adopted as his own. Thus the Sampraday was left in their hands only and successive Acharyas from the '*Dharma Kul*' - ancestry of Dharmadev.

Only these Acharyas are to be considered and revered as Heads of the Swaminarayan Sampraday, as per Lord Swaminarayan's explicit wish which is documented in the '*Desh Vibhag Lekh*' - authorised by the Lord.

Only those who pledge allegiance to an Acharya are true members of the Sampraday and so the Lord in this Shlok propounds association with the Acharyas and thus glorifies the Acharya heritage in this fellowship.

TEXT 4

The Naishtik Brahmarshis (Brahmin celibates), headed by Mukundanand and the devoted Grihastis (householders) headed by Mayaram Bhatt and others;

Mukundanandji is here considered as an ideal *Naishtik Brahmarshi*. But what exactly is a Naishtik Brahmarshi? Shatanand explains: *Naishtikaha Nistamantam Nayantiti Naishtika*: 'One who to all ends and purposes follows *Nishta* (faith and devotion in God)'. Furthermore a Naishtik Brahmarshi is he who studies and obeys the Vedas, performs *Tapas* (austerities) and who seeks the supreme knowledge. A Naishtik Brahmarshi also teaches such supreme knowledge to others.

A Brahmarshi is one who observes the *Vrat* of *Brahmarshya*, which is loosely defined as the vow of celibacy. There are four '*Ashrams*' in life that everybody passes through. The first is '*Brahmarshyashram*' where they are encouraged to study the various Shastras as well as the arts, sciences and philosophies. During this time, they are to stay strict celibates, refraining from all contact with the opposite sex.

The second is '*Grihastashram*' where they are married and are encouraged to live an independent, pious family life. This Ashram inspires one to work for a living and the raising of progeny to live righteous lives.

The third is '*Vanprastashram*' where they retire from their work, transfer their responsibility to their children and prepare for the next and final ashram of absolute renunciation.

The final Ashram is '*Sanyasashram*' where they are to renounce all worldly comforts and ties, and are to lead a life of self-absorption performing severe austerities in order to attain the Lord. This Ashram involves leaving the home and taking up residence in the jungle to be totally free from external influences.

Therefore a Brahmarshi is a person of the first Ashram of life. This Ashram, being the first, is integral to the development of a person and so strict celibacy is encouraged as even the sight of a woman can have detrimental effects on man. This can leave him susceptible to the weakening of his Brahmarshya Vrat.

The opposite sex can have adverse effects on a person leaving them deluded and without focus. It can drive a person to bewilderment causing the person to do unrighteous things and forget his true purpose in life.

Mahabharat's Mokshdharma commands for all people (not just Brahmarshis): 'Man should not listen to religious discourses given by women. Indeed, he should not even repeatedly look at another woman for no apparent reason'. Thus refraining from all contact with women (a person of opposite sex) will keep a person focused and so earn him a place at the Lord's heart.

Uddhavji explains that *Bhakti* (devotion) is an important factor for renunciation (and so refraining from contact with the opposite sex): 'Incompetent men find renunciation difficult but a man who observes *Bhakti* is able to follow the path of renunciation with ease'.

God has explained: 'Bhakti is the best and easiest means to attain me and so it is the first path followed by them. I reside within the hearts of such people where I destroy the evil enemies such as lust, anger, avarice and delusion. I protect such Bhakts unreservedly; therefore they should fear nothing'.

God has said, *Na Vikiyante Mayi Badhsauhrudaha* - 'Those who have deep love for me never face downfall or misery'. Thus these *Naishtik Brahmcharis*, who have developed love for God, and who are attached to the Lord alone, have nothing to fear as they are forever protected by God. Therefore Gods and Rishis alike fame the *Naishtik Vrat*.

Such a *Naishtik Brahmchari* or Brahmin Celibate was Shree Mukundanand Brahmchari who was more formally known as *Mulji Brahmchari*. From an early age his wish was to observe absolute celibacy and worship God. His service to Shree Sahajanand is impeccable and his devotion for God is unreserved.

The second half of this Shlok is devoted to **Shree Mayaram Bhatt** - famed as an ideal Grihastha (householder) by Shree Hari. At the time of Lord Swaminarayan's stay upon this Earth there were many great householders who were extremely spiritually developed - so why glorify Mayaram Bhatt?

Mayaram, a Saurashtra Brahmin, was a dedicated servant of the Lord who served this Satsang quite remarkably, often at the sacrifice of his family duties. He was forever working to fulfil the Lord's mission, giving both his mind and body fully. He aided greatly during the openings of temples.

It is important to give a fuller definition of a Grihastha here. A Grihastha is a married individual who lives a pious and righteous life by observing the laws of Dharma. As a Grihastha, he must realise his responsibility as a householder, provider, family member, community member as well as a devotee of God. He must lead a proper life, providing for his family. He should be versed in how to lead such a life in accordance with Shastric laws, which endorses Dharma and Bhakti as an integral part of Grihasthasthram.

Manu says, 'A Grihastha who is void of Dharma and Bhakti can never find peace of mind even though he may be wealthy etc.' Thus Grihasthasthram is not just about making money, raising a family and being successful in work; it is more about fusing the elements of Dharma and Bhakti in everyday working life.

Shatanand explains a little about the differences of Dharma at this point. He explains that *Prayaschit* or intonement of sins prescribed for Grihasthas should be adopted and enforced two-fold by Brahmcharis, three-fold by Vanprastas and four-fold by Sanyasis. Therefore Grihasthas are fortunate to derive only minimal sin and so are required to perform minimal Prayaschit.

Vishnu Smruti further explains, 'Brahmins should perform the full Prayaschit for sins. Kshatriyas should perform three-quarters of a Brahmin's Prayaschit, Vaishyas a half and Shudras should perform only a quarter'. Thus there are differences in sins derived for different class and caste members that should be considered by individuals.

Grihasthas, especially those who have newly entering this class should study the Grihastha Dharmas. They will aid them to live a fuller, more constructive and peaceful life. Those who do not have this knowledge are blind to the supreme cause and they struggle through life lost, unsuccessful and cursed.

My devotees such as married women and widows. Also Sadhus such as *Muktanand* and others; all of which are my disciples.

Lord Swaminarayan here addresses all the female devotees. However, He does not name a specific person, as he has previously for other classes of people. Many staunch female devotees existed at the time of Lord Swaminarayan's stay, such as Laduba, Jivuba, Kushal Kunver-Baa etc. So why did he not mention a name of an ideal devotee?

The reason for this is that the Lord lived his life as an ascetic - a saint. Therefore in order to protect his renunciation and his Dharma he has not mentioned a particular person. A Sadhu's Dharma is to refrain from all contact with women. They should not envisage women mentally let alone utter words about women.

Shatanand defines the two types of women here mentioned: A *Sadhya Stree* is a female devotee of God who acts in accordance with Shastras and who observes *Pativrata* Dharma (duties for married women to be devoted to their husbands). A *Vidhya Stree* is a woman whose husband has died - a widowed woman and who spends the remainder of her life in service to God. Thus the Lord speaks of the women in general terms addressing all women and therefore glorifying all women as ideal devotees and not just mentioning a specific person.

Finally the Lord addresses the *Tyagis* (renounced individuals). Foremost of the Sadhus is **Shree Muktanand Swami**. Shatanand firstly explains a Sadhu as: One who obeys Dharma and who acts for the betterment of another. He strives for the well being of others.

In **Shrimad Bhagwat Purana**, Shree Krishna outlines the desirable qualities and thus characteristics of a Sadhu to his friend Shree Udhavji:

1. ***Krupaluha Pardukhasahishrud*** - One who cannot accept the pain of others, who themselves harbour the pain of others and so endeavours to aid them of such misery.
2. ***Sarvadehinam Keshagadapi Acrudroha*** - One who does not harm any living creature (human, animal etc.) either mentally or physically, and so upholds the Law of Ahimsa (non-violence).
3. ***Titikshuha Kshamavan*** - Is always forgiving and so does not begrudge people for their actions.
4. ***Satyam Saraha Sthiratvam Balam Va Yasya Saha*** - One who is honest, steady or firm minded and who is both physically and mentally strong.
5. ***Anvadhātma Asuyadirahitam*** - Who is not envious of another and does not get angry - is cool minded.
6. ***Sukh Dukhyoha Samaha*** - Who is unaffected by happiness and misery. Who does not elate during the 'good times' nor lament during the 'bad times'. He is always complacent.
7. ***Yathashakti Sarveshamupkarakoha*** - One who helps others - is benevolent.
8. ***Kamairakshu Bhitachitaha*** - He has no desires of his own and does not become agitated.
9. ***Dantaha Sanyathahyendriyaha*** - A 'Yogi' who has controlled his senses. He does not act in order to satisfy sensual demands.
10. ***Mruduha Akthinchitaha*** - Who is tender and compassionate. He is always kind natured.
11. ***Suchiha Sadacharaha*** - Whose conduct is exemplary and ethical.
12. ***Akigchanaha Aparigraha*** - Who is not one to accumulate wealth and possessions for himself only. Thus he parts with his wealth, helping the needy, donating it to causes and gratifying those dearest to him.
13. ***Anihaha Dashtiktayashunyaha*** - He does not want anything. He is satisfied with what he has and does not dwell upon things he doesn't have.
14. ***Mitabhug Ladhvharaha*** - He eats with restraint only to maintain the body. He does not eat excessively in order to satisfy his palate.
15. ***Santaha Niyantaha Karanaha*** - He has full control of his Antakarana (mind, consciousness, intellect and ego).

16. *Sthira Swadharme* - Who obeys personal duty (Swadharna). He acts in accordance with his duties as a Sadhu.
17. *Machoraraha Madekash Reyaha* - He protects all, offering shelter and alms to those who need it.
18. *Muniha Mananshilaha* - Who has sound temperament and is deep thinking. He is like a Muni (a revered saint).
19. *Apramataha Swadharmapalane Savdhanaha* - Who stays true and honest to Dharma. He is always pure and pious in conduct.
20. *Gambhiratma Nirvikaraha* - He is cool and steady minded.
21. *Dhrutiman Vipgapyakruparaha* - He is patient always.
22. *Jit Shanguraha Ksuptipase Shoka Mohau Jara Mrutyu Sharurmayaha* - He has overcome the likes of hunger, thirst, desire, delusion, old age and death. He is thus unperturbed by the effect of these.
23. *Amani Na Manakshin* - Who does not wish for fame or popularity. His actions are not driven by the quest for acknowledgement.
24. *Anyebhyo Mandaha* - A person who always has time for others. He isn't engrossed in things that keep him busy away from people/community. Thus he is available to help others.
25. *Kalyaha Parabodhane Dakshaha* - He is wise and skilful and so is able to use these attributes to deliver people onto the right path - to salvation.
26. *Maitraha Avagachakaha* - He is a friend to all - he has no enemies. Also, he accepts these friends as equal and so does not favour one person more than another.
27. *Karurirnikaha Karurnyaiva Vartamano No Dushlobhen* - He empathises with others, he has feelings for them. He observes Vratas (religious vows) and is never envious of others.
28. *Kaviha Samyag Gnaniti* - He is a poet who writes and sings about praise to God.

These qualities constitute a Sadhu. However it is important to note that many of these characteristics apply to all types of people. Therefore we should all aspire to integrate these qualities within ourselves and so become 'saint-like' in nature.

Let us finally consider why Lord Swaminarayan mentioned Muktanand Swami as the ideal Sadhu. Muktanand was a very great saint who possessed all of the previous twenty-eight characteristics outlined. He was the most prominent saint in the Ashram of Ramanand's and therefore he was very much respected by all fellow saints.

He was a brilliant intellectual, who had firm and deep devotion for God. Although he was elder and in a greater position, he never was affected by it and so had great respect for his fellow Sadhus - young and old alike.

Muktanand Swami had no objection when Ramanand invested the status of 'Ashram Guru' to the youthful personage of Sahajanand who was only twenty years old at the time. Muktanand had full rights to that title but he himself suggested that Sahajanand should be given such honour.

This was the greatness of Muktanand who after realising the grandeur and ultimately the Godliness of Shree Sahajanand Swami sang '*Jay Sadguru Swami, Sahajanand Dayaru...*' as he performed *Arti* of the Lord. There was mutual affection between Sahajanand and Muktanand. These are the reasons why the Lord praised Muktanand Swami.

TEXT 6

May they all read and accept my ennobling blessings (which are there to protect their religious duty) prescribed by the happy remembrance of Shreeman Narayan.

Lord Swaminarayan conveys the fact that he hopes that all his devotees everywhere follow the examples set by the ‘ambassadors’ of each class here mentioned. Through these blessed persons, this Satsang of Lord Swaminarayan flourishes and gains strength. Through pure conduct of devotees of every class as prescribed by God Almighty **Shreeman Narayan**, the masses continue to live in accordance with Dharma.

The blessed Lord thus gives an invitation to all, to read and follow his treatise upon Dharma and righteous conduct. He invites all to be part of this Satsang and obey the Laws therein. Through this Shikshapatri, people derive happiness in life, good fortune and ultimately God Shreeman Narayan showers his choicest blessings upon them. Therefore may all choose to take refuge at the shelter of Narayan, Laxminarayan and Radhakrishna. May we all observe and protect *Swadharma* (one’s religious duty) and thus win the favour of God.

TEXT 7

All my devotees should realise that the purpose of writing this Shikshapatri is for the spiritual welfare of every soul.

Lord Swaminarayan focuses here upon the very essence of what the Shikshapatri is and its objective: *Sarvajivahitavaha* - this Shikshapatri is for the benefit of mankind. It is to save innumerable souls from the bondage of *Karma* and hence to free the many from repeated births and deaths. It is an instrument through which we derive eternal happiness and which can provide success in this life. For these reasons we are urged to take note of the contents of the Shikshapatri and to follow it implicitly.

Whenever we buy a device or machine of some sort, we are provided with an instruction or operation manual. This gives us all the information we need to get the most out of that machine and to ensure its proper use. The Shikshapatri is an instruction manual for life. For proper use of this body, for correct living procedure, for a successful life and to get the most out of life, we must study this Shikshapatri and follow all the instructions therein.

It is imperative that we all understand clearly the message in the Shikshapatri so that we can reach a stage where we are willing to follow the Shikshapatri fully without question. Only if we understand the Shikshapatri by really digesting and analysing the Shikshapatri and not just reading it half-heartedly, will we ever truly appreciate the great message of this Shikshapatri, its specific aim and its greatness.

The contents of this Shikshapatri are such to make the mind strong and immovable by external influences such as those associated with living in the West. It is important that we in the West are able to discover our true identity, our heritage and our culture. We must not forget our Indian and Hindu background and therefore we must identify with our Hindu beliefs and laws of conduct. Only by adopting these higher disciplines passed down to us by our great Rishis, will we ever be sheltered by God’s favour in this life and hence consolidate a pleasant after life.

We all have been fortunate to be born in this life as Satsangis under the guiding hand of Lord Swaminarayan. We have been introduced to the fundamentals of Hinduism and of righteous conduct. This provides us with a great chance to be released from the enslavement of repeated births and deaths which brings nothing but suffering. Such a rare opportunity may not be acquired ever again and so we must make the most of it.

All that is asked of us is that we live in accordance with the Shikshapatri. Such action will promote us to the heavens and derive an eternity of peace and happiness. Who but a fool would give up such an offer and an opportunity?

TEXT 8-9

Those who observe the Rules of Ethics as prescribed by the Holy Scriptures shall derive happiness in this world and the next.

Those who violate the Rules of Ethics and behave wilfully are evil minded and shall suffer great distress in this world and the next.

I cannot stress enough the gravity and importance of these two Shloks. Readers should pay great attention to these Shloks. The Lord uses a simple If-Then-Else statement to clarify this point: IF they observe the rules of conduct (*Sadachar*) THEN they will derive bliss ELSE they will face eternal misery.

Readers should read and re-read this message until it is firmly imprinted upon their minds. I believe that if people fully understood the message here, they would certainly change their ways.

Shatanand here explains that those who have observed the famed Sadachars from Shastras have derived great happiness in this world and others. He explains that this happiness is beyond even the likes of Brahma and others. *Sadacharan Sada Teyatra Paratra Cha Mahasukhaha* - Observance of *Sadachar* derives great happiness writes the Lord, but what exactly is Sadachar? Shatanand explains: Sadachars are good qualities or conduct which are famed in *Shastras* (scriptures) and *Lok* (society). **Mahabharat's Mokshdharma** says, 'One should fully understand Dharma and Sadachar. Sadhus or saints are attributed with Sadachar', thus Sadachar is Dharma (duty) and one should seek the company of saints to realise and observe what Sadachar is.

Skanda Purana's Kashi Khanda outlines Sadachar further, 'Sadachar is that (conduct) which is void of *Raag* (attachment or passion) and *Dvesha* (malice). Such action is displayed by Munis (saints). Our elders and the wise say that Sadachar is the very essence or root of Dharma (righteousness). Those who desire Dharma (and thus salvation) should concentrate upon the *Yamas* (self control) and *Niyamas* (moral practices) which are stipulated for the derivation of Dharma.'

Shrimad Bhagwad Purana explains these *Yamas* and *Niyamas* for the betterment of oneself. There is twelve of each:

The twelve *Yamas* (self-controls) are:

1. *Ahimsa* - Non-violence to all living things, non-cruelty to all.
2. *Satyam* - Truth - honesty in action and speech.
3. *Asteyam* - Refraining from all criminal activity.
4. *Asagno* - Disassociation, non-attachment.
5. *Hrir* - Modesty, humbleness or unpretentiousness.
6. *Asarchaiyaha* - Does not accumulate wealth.
7. *Astikyam* - Deep faith and belief in God.
8. *Brahmcharya* - Control of senses or celibacy.
9. *Maunam* - Vow of silence.
10. *Sthairyam* - Stability and firmness of oneself.
11. *Kshama* - Forgiving, not begrudging.
12. *Abheyam* - Non-fearing.

The twelve *Niyams* (moral practices) are:

1. **Saucham** - Cleanliness and purity of mind, body and action.
2. **Japa** - Prayer, chanting of God's name.
3. **Tapo** - Penance, physical austerities.
4. **Homaha** - Performance of ceremonial offerings - Yagna.
5. **Shraddha** - Faith in God.
6. **Atithyam** - Hospitable, welcoming all.
7. **Madarchanam** - Devotion and worship of God.
8. **Tirthatanam** - Performing pilgrimages.
9. **Parathey** - Desire for salvation.
10. **Tushtira** - Satisfaction, contentment.
11. **Svadyaya** - Study of Vedas, Shastras.
12. **Acharyasevanam** - Service to a Guru.

By following these Yamas and Niyams a person is considered a Sadachari and thus he attains a desirable path to fulfilment. Prosperity in this life and the next will only occur through righteous conduct outlined by the Shastras. Through such refined behaviour, a person becomes satisfied and derives happiness. Only a fool would believe that material wealth is the root of true happiness.

The great **Gita** explains, 'Those who reject the teachings of the Shastras and who act as they wish, are never fulfilled in life, never derive happiness and certainly do not propel towards salvation (*Moksh*).' Thus those who follow Adharma, disobeying the Shastras are forever in the cycle of births and deaths.

Rishi Yagnavalkya writes, 'Those who do not obey the Dharmas laid down, following the path of Adharma and who do not keep their senses under control face ruin and downfall.'

So saying, all should bear this eternal message in mind. We as humans must think beyond this physical plane. We have a lot to do in this lifetime to ensure a place in the Lord's Heaven. We must conform to Vedic Laws and customs if we are ever to be saved. This mortal frame is restrictive - we have less than a hundred years to work towards banking a place in the Heavens. We must make the most of it.

Living in the age of *Kali* (darkness) we may consider ourselves unfortunate, but this is, in actual fact, a blessing in disguise. The different *Yugas* (epochs of time) hold different Dharmas and indeed life expectancy differs. In *Satya Yuga*, people live for a hundred thousand years, in *Treta* - ten thousand years, in *Dwapur* - a thousand years and in *Kali* a hundred years. In Satya Yuga, man is expected to perform great austerities and to develop great control of the senses to be promoted to the Heavens. But in Kali, they need only chant Gods name.

It is said that in Satya, a person faces a thousand years of sickness and a hundred years of fatal illness in the lead up to their death. With this in mind, consider yourselves lucky that you are not forced to live upon this Earth for more than a hundred years. Thus you are saved from the misery of a prolonged life and you are able to escape this cycle of births and deaths by simply chanting Gods name!

The blessed Lord, Shree Swaminarayan incarnated upon this Earth to show people the right path and thus offer them a means of escape to eternal bliss. He created from the numerous Shastras, a concise list of precepts to benefit mankind and in so doing, pave the way to salvation.

He saved us from extensively studying all the Shastras by outlining the Science of Behaviour quite succinctly which is easy to understand. We may never have this opportunity again and so must 'snap-up' this chance. Never relax saying that there is plenty of time ahead to consider such things as we have wasted enough time already. We must change our way today!

Lord Swaminarayan has said that each Shlok (verse) of the Shikshapatri has the protective capability of *Sudarshan Chakra* - the great weapon of Lord Vishnu, therefore we must all take refuge at the protection of this Shikshapatri by observing the precepts laid down therein.

TEXT 10

Hence, all my disciples shall love and follow the commandments of this Shikshapatri vigilantly and shall never violate them.

They should follow the Shikshapatri vigilantly and never idly or sluggishly. **Sanatsujat** explains:

Pramadam Yai Mrutyumaham Bravimitathapramadamrutvam Bravimi /
Pramadadvo Hrasuraha Parabhavanpramadadvai Brahman Bhutahi Devahaha //

'I declare that neglect or disregard (*Pramad*) is a means to death (*Mrutyumaham*). Consequently vigilance or high regard (*Apramad*) is a means to immortality (*Amrutvam*). From *Pramad*, a demon (*Asura*) derives his wicked or evil nature (*Parabhav*) and from *Apramad*, Devas (gods) derive their godlike nature (*Brahmanbhav*).' Therefore, man through *Pramad* becomes an *Asura* with evil qualities and through *Apramad* becomes a *Deva* with godly qualities.

Lord Farnindeya has said, 'Those who adopt faith and devotion towards me are enveloped with the supreme knowledge and are thus propelled towards spirituality and salvation.' **Shatanand** adds, *Mahasukhapraptusahena* - enthusiasm and unshaken chivalry reward a person with great happiness. Therefore we must all, with dedication consider and obey the laws of conduct in this Shikshapatri.

This Shlok concludes the introduction to the Shikshapatri. In this final Shlok, He asks that all his disciples love and cherish the Shikshapatri and to follow the commandments with great regard. We should all follow the Shikshapatri with the intention of pleasing the Lord and do so because we genuinely want to. All too often, this sort of mentality is not adopted. They may do such things as they feel obliged to do so - it is considered '*the norm*' or it is expected of them. We are often brought up to do certain things and to even think a certain way by parents. Although I do not disagree with this philosophy, I do feel that certain changes need to be made. We are almost programmed to act a certain way that may not be voluntary which I believe to be due to a lack of knowledge. If proper knowledge was given and absorbed, then I think all of us would become better Satsangis.

This knowledge will awaken love for God that is almost certainly deficient in our newer generations. Love for God and love of performing actions (Pooja, Seva etc.) as sanctioned by our Rishis will derive spiritual pleasure and the grace of the Almighty. Love is very strong and assuredly it will strengthen our devotion and invigorate our duty to the Sampraday. This should inevitably consolidate our adherence to the commandments of the Shikshapatri.

Finally, we must never violate any of the commandments of the Shikshapatri. This I feel is of importance. We must do our very best to uphold every single commandment. Many people pick and choose out of the Shikshapatri (as if it's some sort of Pick 'n' Mix), commandments which they feel are necessary for them. Well, I'm afraid all are necessary!

This Shikshapatri is the very incarnation of Lord Swaminarayan. To violate or disregard any one Shlok is to disregard Lord Swaminarayan himself. We must not walk such a path of disrespect and dishonor.

Now Lord Swaminarayan begins the main body of the Shikshapatri. The first part of which is directed to all Satsangis of all classes and castes. He begins *Samanya* (ordinary) *Dharma* duties by first and foremost glorifying the great Dharma of *Ahimsa* (non-violence).

Shikshapatri

PART II

Samanya Dharmas (Ordinary Duties)

TEXT 11

My disciples shall never kill intentionally any living creature, not even small insects such as lice or bugs.

In the first six Shloks of *Samanya Dharma*, Lord Swaminarayan affirms his stance upon the Law of **Ahimsa** (non-violence or non-injury). This is indeed a great pillar of our *Sanatan Hindu Dharma* that should be accepted by all.

Shatanand Muni informs us that man plunges in this ‘sea’ of worldly life, performing a variety of actions in order to secure salvation (*Moksh*), the fourth *Purusharth*, as this is understood to be man’s only reason or aim of living. The fulfilment of such a quest is derived through observance of Ahimsa Dharma.

Ahimsa Dharma is as big and majestic as Sanatan Dharma (the eternal law) which is common for all. It is the very root of Hindu Dharma. It is the basis of humanity and it’s deep message of compassion for all of God’s creatures is the essence of the teachings of our great Rishis (enlightened saints). Therefore a good grasp or understanding of the underlying principles of Ahimsa is an important factor for all.

The **Smrutis** say, *Na Himsyat Sarvabhutani* - ‘Never kill any living creature,’ which is exactly the message that Lord Swaminarayan delivers in this first Shlok. Therefore Ahimsa is accepted in all popular Shastras and is to be accepted by all in every rank of Hinduism. Indeed it is a common Dharma which spreads to all people of all religion’s as most religions endorse such a law of compassion.

The Shlok addresses the non-killing of all creatures no matter how great or small they are from whales to fleas. No animal, bird, fish, insect or human whatsoever should be killed or even harmed in anyway. This is the prime directive for humans.

It is written that we commit sin by intentionally or even unintentionally killing or harming a creature just as we are scolded by fire if we intentionally or unintentionally go too close to it. However **Apdurdhadharma** explains, ‘A person who conforms to doing *Prayaschit* (intoning sins - righteous actions to redeem sins) after unintentionally harming a creature will result in the sin being lifted from such person.’ However no such redemption is written for intentionally killing. **Yagnavalkya Muni** writes, ‘Sin without knowledge (unintentional) can be lifted through Prayaschit, but Prayaschit performed for intentional sin will lead to at most nothing more than of social acceptance.’ Therefore you will then be accepted by society for the committing of this intentional sin, after Prayaschit, but as **Mitakshar** says, ‘Prayaschit will never eradicate sins committed intentionally.’

It is said that two-fold Prayaschit should be observed for the committal of intentional sin compared to committal of unintentional sin. Thus the sin for committing intentional sin is far greater.

The great **Shrimad Bhagwad** further adds: ‘Those who inflict pain upon God’s creatures are firmly consigned to *Andhakupa Narak* (a specific infernal region). There, he is forced to endure great pain from various animals, birds, snakes etc. as they bite and torment him.’ Shatanand concludes by urging us to keep this in mind and to never harm any creature. Only such course of action will offer us a place in the Heavens!

In this Shlok there has been a lot of discussion of Prayaschit (nullification) of sins. Therefore let us study this aspect further. Our Puranas endorse five methods of Prayaschit - the **Panch Mahayagnas**:

- (1) **Bhuta Yagna** - Refers to religious practices such as Pooja, Dandvat, Seva, fasting etc. as a means of nullifying the sin.
- (2) **Atithi Yagna** - This is service to a stranger or guest. To welcome others, offer them food etc.
- (3) **Matru/Pithru Yagna** - Service to ones parents or elders. Our ancient scriptures speak of 'Matru Devo Bhava - Pitru Deva Bhava.' Thus one should serve one's parents as they would serve God.
- (4) **Brahman Yagna** - The study of Vedas and other religious scriptures.
- (5) **Deva Yagna** - Involves Daan - donation of wealth to God (via temples etc.) and Brahmins.

This is a brief outline of the various Prayaschits. However for correct and suitable performance of Prayaschit, one should seek the advice of a Sadhu or elder who will specify which course of action to take.

Lord Swaminarayan has adopted this great Dharma of Ahimsa that has been propounded by our great Rishis. It is our duty to follow suite and forever be true to its teachings and never violate it

TEXT 12

They shall never kill any living creature as sacrifice for the Yagna of deities and ancestors, as non-violence is declared by scriptures to be the highest of Dharmas.

Many religions condone a ritual of animal sacrifice as a way of *pleasing the Gods!* Although such actions are prevalent in cults, some ranks of 'Hinduism' which themselves should be considered as cults condone ritual animal sacrifice. Lord Swaminarayan here stipulates the greatness of Ahimsa outlined in the previous Shlok by saying that even sacrifices to Gods (Himsa Yagna) is wholly unacceptable – deriving untold sin.

It is ludicrous to even think that God would be pleased by killing a creature made by himself. Only a fool would think that someone would be made happy by destroying that which he creates.

Shatanand Muni here suggests that we should not physically kill, speak to kill, nor even think to kill another creature (of God). Such is the Great Dharma of Ahimsa.

Our respected Maharishis of the past have established Ahimsa as **Mahaan Parama Dharma** the highest of Dharmas. It is a Dharma that is mentioned in many of the prominent Hindu scriptures including the great **Mahabharat**. 'Satya Vrata Raja performed Himsa Yagna (violent) thinking that he would attain the Heavens – instead it was the cause of his destruction as the fruits of his austerities were destroyed.'

'The foolish have interpreted the Vedas incorrectly. They have preached what they perceive to be the truth that is instead false. In this way, these ignoramuses, without intellect, have preached the Adharma of Himsa (violence) as acceptable.'

Narad Pancharatra adds, 'The Shruti (revealed scriptures) are considered as the Mother of the Earth. They preach only compassion towards all and strive for betterment for all. This is indeed the message of God, which does not even utter a single word of violence towards others.'

God in all instances has preached love towards all. This universal love stems from the fact that all creatures have a commonality, an *Atma* – the soul which is simply a spark of the *Param Atma* – God Supreme. Indeed all that exists is God in one form or another. Therefore to harm another is to

inadvertently harm God and so the Dharma of Ahimsa should always and everywhere be cherished. **Narad** has explained to **Prachinbharish Raja** – ‘Behold O King! The thousands of *Jivs* (souls) which have met their death at your hands through sacrificial Yagnas wait eagerly for your death in order to reap their revenge upon you. They angrily wait to inflict the same pain upon you by hacking at your body with axes.’

Shree Bhishma has explained, ‘Of all acts Ahimsa is the greatest says Manu (*Sarvakarma Svahimsa Hi Dharmatma Manurbhravit*). Towards all creatures, the Dharma of Ahimsa is considered to be the best (*Ahimsa Sarvabhutebhya Dharmebhyo Tyayasimata*). There is no other better Dharma than that of Ahimsa towards all beings, it is beyond comparison.’

Shatanand asserts: *Ahimsadharmasya Mahatvantu Sakalshastraprasidhyam* – The Dharma of Ahimsa is famed in all Shastras.

The use of flesh in *Pitru Yagna* such as *Shraaddh* is strictly forbidden also. **Parashar Muni** writes, ‘Shraddha involving lament and repentance will certainly bring liberation, but never one which involves the use of flesh.’

Vasudev Mahatmaya of Skanda Purana says ‘One should never use meat in Shraddha. Only *Muni-anna* (Samo, Namar etc) milk, Ghee etc should be used as use of such things will have the desired effect – liberation for ancestors.’

Vyaas has written: *Sarvatha Sarvada Sarvabhutanaamnabhidrohaha Ahimsa* – ‘Ahimsa is refraining from violence always, everywhere and towards all.’ Such a Vrata is considered as *Sarvabhaumi Mahavrata* and is equivalent to the great Vrats such as *Satya* (truth) and *Brahmcharya* (celibacy). In a discussion between the *Devas* and *Maharishis* in the **Mahabharat** it is said, ‘The killing of calves is despicable. Killing of any animal is not the Dharma of Man.’

It is important to clarify what exactly Yagnas are. Yagnas are a way of pleasing the Gods. Offerings are placed into *Agni* (fire) and thus given to the God of Fire who distributes these offerings to all other *Devas*. In return all the *Devas* shower their blessings upon you and effectively you derive their favour and support. The Shastras say *Ajaina Yajeta* that is only *Aja* - which are such things as rice should be offered in Yagnas. *Aj* is not animals as many people have concocted.

It is written in **Narad Pancharatra**, ‘So called *Shastras* which prescribe *Himsa* are not true Shastras and should not be accepted by man.’ Our true Shastras teach compassion to all creatures, for they are all part of God. We must accept that all creatures are equal and never do unto them that which we would not want done to us.

Mahabharat says, ‘Those who perform Ahimsa Yagna will surely attain *Brahman* (the heavens). However *Himsa* Yagnas will only consign a person to hell.’ Therefore we must never partake in *Himsa* Yagnas by accepting *Prasad* (remnant) of such a Yagna. Indeed we must never partake in any kind of meat in any situation for **Parashar Muni** has said, ‘Eating meat will never lead a person to salvation.’

Narad similarly says, ‘Partaking of vegetarian foods will attain salvation (*Moksh*).’ **Mundak Upanishad** narrates a story where a King who performs *Himsa* Yagnas is visited by *Narad Muni* and is put into *Samadhi* (deep trance) where he visits *Narak* (Hell). The shocked King, reawakening from *Samadhi* is then told by *Narad* that the consequence of *Himsa* is an eternity in that same Hell. Thus the *Adharma* of *Himsa* is strictly prohibited in all ranks of true Hinduism.

TEXT 13

One shall never commit homicide, even in order to acquire women, wealth or political power and sovereignty.

We have looked at the prohibition of Himsa generally. Now Lord Swaminarayan looks at the specific types and reasons of violence. In this Shlok we discuss homicide. Murder or even harming another human being for any reason will lead to difficulty in this world and turmoil in others.

None should ever hurt or even think to hurt another person. Never should a person in a state of anger inflict harm. Shatanand explains that this body is sacred, as through it we are able to obtain the four **Purushasthas**: *Dharma* (duty), *Arth* (wealth), *Kaam* (desire) and *Moksh* (salvation). To destroy a body would be to destroy your everything. For such reason *Manushya Himsa* is prohibited.

Man has no right to destroy any of God's creatures. More often than not, he may kill or harm another person through jealousy that causes anger within himself. This jealousy is brought about through reasons of women, wealth and Kingdom. These are the great causes of dispute between man in the past, present and probably the future. For this reason the **Shrimad Bhagwat** has taught 'This human body gives a person all that he requires, it is the source of all. To destroy such a body is to destroy all the benefits that are due to a person. Therefore one should never kill another person in order to gain a woman, wealth or a kingdom.'

Man in this dreaded age of Kali is becoming hateful. This hate remains in a person for many reasons. Families, friends and groups of people fall apart through personal differences. Man becomes competitive and cannot stand to see others advance in life. As the age of Kali progresses this hatred will thicken with more and more fragmentation of families and society in general. There will be gross committing of all kinds of sin. Who is to say that someday even we may commit the act of murder for personal gain? We all have the potential to do so as we all are falling servant to carnal desire and material well being.

For this reason Lord Swaminarayan calls for restraint. He awakens us to the fact that we should stay calm and patient always and never let neither our desire for personal gain nor our anger get the better of us. We should learn to accept that which we have and never commit unscrupulous sin for personal gain.

TEXT 14

One shall never commit suicide even in a place of pilgrimage, or through anger or on account of some untoward action by taking poison, strangulation, jumping into a well or from a hill top or by any other means.

Himsa is of two kinds explains Shatanand: **Parahimsa** (injury towards others) has already been discussed in its various forms and in this Shlok we look at **Swahimsa** (injury to oneself.)

Never should we commit the act of suicide as our **Smrutis** say: **Sarvat Evatmanam Gopoyed** – 'Secure thyself', thus strive to always keep the body and soul intact and never cause either harm.

Human sacrifices are strictly forbidden also. Killing oneself at a place of pilgrimage will never bring salvation as anticipated. **God** himself has said, 'Through righteous action, austerities, knowledge, renunciation, Yoga (control of mind), charitable acts and ultimately through Bhakti (devotion), my devotees attain the pleasure of My **Dhaam** (heaven) and My favour. But never does one attain me through the sacrifice of their bodies.'

We have already quite extensively discussed how sacred the body is considered and for that reason one must never purposely cause injury to oneself or kill oneself.

Mitakshara Smruti adds, 'One should not purposely kill oneself in order to reach the heavens,' thus they should wait for nature to take its cause.

There are often ridiculous stories, for example it is said that those who kill themselves in Kashi attain Moksh. But if this was so wouldn't everyone just live a life of self-indulgence and then at the end of ones life, go to Kashi and commit suicide? These stories are preposterous and should never be accepted.

It is blatantly written that one will never benefit from suicide. Indeed such a person is considered a great sinner and so should not be contemplated even if you are shamed in society for some act committed by oneself.

It should similarly not be undertaken in times of hardship or depression. One may think that they can't cope in life and so commit suicide as an 'easy way out'. However by doing so, you are committing yourself to numerous births and deaths in the animal kingdom, through which you will endure endless pain and distress. Human life is the only means to the heavens. If we waste this life we will have to wait an awful long time before we may again have the chance to secure a place at the Lord's blessed feet. Therefore we must never waste this precious life that we are given.

Shatanand asks that we do not take the easy way out and that we persist onwards by finding refuge in Bhakti for only it can lead man to a better life. We must all learn to be satisfied with what we are given in this life. It is a lesson in life to be accepting. To neither elate in times of happiness nor lament in times of sadness.

Sukh (happiness, prosperity) and *Dukh* (poverty, illness) come and go just as night and day. We must never forget God in times of both hardship and prosperity. We must never become attached to happiness and thus lead oneself away from God. Think of pain as a blessing in disguise for it is a time when we draw closer to God. It makes us realise that true wealth lies in the knowledge of God, in the favour of God and thus God alone is the source of all that is desirable in life. Therefore never become obsessed in material happiness. Become impartial and unaffected in favourable times as well as the unfavourable times. Wealth and prosperity often destroy a person if they are not careful. They feel that they have earned such wealth and that they are therefore somehow above others. Such ego leads to all the enemies of man such as desire, anger, selfishness, intoxication and so on. This is extremely detrimental to the human character.

Attachment or obsession to this wealth and prosperity will make it difficult to adapt to times of hardship. As a result they may feel that suicide is their only option. Therefore it is crucial that people are able to stay level-headed through both times so that the thought of suicide is far from their minds. The act of suicide is totally selfish and despicable as often the person committing the act is leaving a wife and children, which are dependent on that person.

TEXT 15

One shall never eat meat even in a moment of extreme necessity, be it the remains of a sacrifice. Nor should they drink liquor, wine or intoxicating beverages even though it may be an offering to a deity.

There are many important messages in this Shlok, firstly: ***Na Bhakshyam Sarvatha Mamsam*** – Never eat meat under any circumstance. Eating meat is a beastly act for those who do not understand what they are doing. As humans, we are able to understand and know what is right and wrong. As humans we are able to understand the sacredness of life and so can make the choice of not killing and eating animals when there is plenty of food such as fruits, vegetables, and grains.

Such foods are highly nutritious and provide man with all the vitamins and minerals. Only such food is healthy with the ability to give man good health, fitness and long life. Such arguments are only the tip of the iceberg. Many other arguments will be given later as the matter of meat eating needs to be addressed in full. For such reasons meat eating in all avenues of Hinduism is strictly prohibited.

Manu in his **Smruti** writes:

Anumanta Virasita Vihanta Kayavikrayi /
Sanskarta Choparta cha Svadkascheyti Gatakaha //

‘One who offers meat, who cuts it, who kills, who sells, who purchases, who cooks/prepares, who brings and who cuts meat, all such people are slayers.’ Hence it is not a requirement to abstain from eating meat only, but also to refrain from all of the above acts. **Manu** goes on further to say that meat eaters will never enjoy the peace and tranquillity of heaven – instead they will suffer terribly in the cycle of births and deaths.

The great **Bhishma** has said to **Yudhishtira** in **Dana Dharma** of **Mahabharat**, ‘He who performs monthly, the great **Ashwamedha Yagna** and who abstains from intoxicants and meat; both of these derive equal fruits for their actions,’ hence the greatness of such a Vrat of non-consumption of meat and alcohol. **Bhishma** adds, ‘Great Saints (**Rishis**) such as Marichi (son of Brahma) and Saptarshis (seven great saints mentioned in Shastras) praise whole heartedly those who refrain from meat and alcohol.’

Shatanand Muni proclaims that abstinence of meat should be three-fold – (1) Not to even think of eating meat – no such wish should even enter the mind; (2) Not to speak of eating meat; and (3) Not to physically eat meat. Such three-fold abstinence of meat will always keep a person pure and in control of himself. Only such people are promoted to the Heavens.

Once our great Rishis asked **Vasu Raja**, ‘Is meat eating acceptable or not?’ The Kings reply was, ‘Yes it is’. Saying this he fell from his throne to the ground. The persistent answer of the King to the Rishis question then caused the King to be forced to the nether regions.

Smrutis say, ‘He who partakes in intoxicants, who eats meat and who intentionally kills (commits Himsa) is considered an **Asura** (demon).’ In **Anushasan Parva** of **Mahabharat** the discussion between Brahma and Indra reveals, ‘Those who abstain from eating meat reach the greatest of God’s Heavens – Golok,’ therefore such a great Vrat is worthy of praise and attention.

Shatanand adds that those who conform to Dharma, who are devoted to their parents, are truthful, praise Brahmins and is good natured, are perpetually reserved a place in **Golok Dhaam**. Thus Lord Swaminarayan here affirms the Great Dharma of Ahimsa mentioned by the great Shastras, Rishis and scholars alike of the past in this brilliant epistle of precepts.

Vegetarianism and non-cruelty are the foundations of Ahimsa Dharma. It is pleasing to say that this preaching is becoming increasingly popular ‘ways of life’ for many in the West. It is heart warming to find that people are changing their ways, as they become to realise that Himsa is blatantly inhuman. As a

result they take note of what they eat and what they are purchasing – making sure they are both animal-free and cruelty-free.

Great intellects of the past – Pythagoras, Socrates, Da Vinci, Newton and Einstein could not condone the eating of animals. They could not accept that they should fill their bellies by slaughtering innocent animals. We must follow these great intellects of all fields – philosophy, science and the arts in their realisation of the truth.

There are many reasons why man should not eat meat. One argument is for Health reasons. Medical researches have reported that a **vegetarian diet is much healthier than a meat based diet**. They have linked a meat diet to such killers as Heart disease and Cancer. The *Journal of American Medical Association* reported, ‘Ninety to ninety seven percent (90% - 97%) of heart disease can be prevented by a vegetarian diet.’ There is also a link to high cholesterol, high blood pressure and even strokes. The report notes on the causation of Cancer providing a strong correlation between Cancer and meat-eating.

Another argument is that the **human body is not designed to consume meat**. The intestinal tracks are different for different animals. They are shorter in relation to body size for carnivores and longer for herbivores. A human has a comparatively longer intestinal track comparable to that of herbivores and so it can be logically inferred that humans should be herbivores.

Vegetarian food is the best source of nutrition providing all essential vitamins and minerals. *Dr Irving Fisher of Yale University* concluded that vegetarian’s perform twice as well as meat eaters after his studies for fitness.

There is also a very convincing economical argument. **It is far more expensive to produce meat**. Extensive data shows that the cost of producing one pound in weight (1lb) of meat is equivalent to producing sixteen pounds in weight (16 lbs.) of grain. Thus the meat industry is wasteful of natural resources. The amount of food, grains etc used to ‘fatten’ animals for meat production is huge compared to the actual amount of meat derived. This wastage could be employed better elsewhere.

There is also a **huge wastage of water**. To grow one pound of wheat, sixty pounds of water is required but the production of one pound of meat requires anywhere between two and half thousand to six thousand pounds of water (2,500 lbs. – 6000 lbs.)

Another argument is the **Ethical reason why animals should not be killed**. This is by far the most important argument or reason why people become vegetarians. It is based on the fact that animals have feelings just as we do, and to deprive them of their God given right to live is utterly wrong on our side. Have we humans become so superior that we out rank even God? This is an argument of compassion that cannot condone the suffering of any form of life.

Meat is produced by slaughtering animals in an unscrupulous way such as hammer blows, electric shocks and concussion guns. Such sick and demented ill treatment of animals is wholly unacceptable. Such thoughts of ill treatment and their inevitable death are disgusting to us and that is why we choose to be vegetarians.

Pultarch wrote, ‘For the sake of a little meat we deprive them (animals) of Sun, the light and duration of life that they are entitled to by birth and being.’

Let it be understood that all major religions speak of compassion and non-injury. It is not just Hinduism that has this belief of Ahimsa, but it is only Hinduism that truly enforces all aspects of Ahimsa Dharma. The saying, ‘Thou Shalt not Kill’ is familiar to all and similar saying in different languages are echoed in

every religion across the world, so why aren't people staying true to such a commandment? Sadly it is through ignorance and misinterpretation.

We must never forget that this human body is a temple for the Lord himself has said that He resides in all bodies through the soul. We must not insult this temple by making it a burial ground for dead animals. Through this body we are to perform penance, offer service to saints and to praise the Lord. We must never perceive it to be an instrument of personal satisfaction.

One may feel that I have gone into too much depth here and that such emphasis is irrelevant as most Satsangis are vegetarian anyway. However there is still a very big problem. We are not striving to become *Pure Vegetarians*. Most people outside Satsang who become vegetarians automatically become pure-vegetarians for they make a conscious decision in their life through realisation of the truth. But as Satsangis we are born vegetarians and so are not always able to bridge this gap to pure vegetarianism.

It is my opinion that today's youth are not fully in touch with the essence of Ahimsa Dharma. Sure they understand the overlying facts, but they are unfortunately not aware of the deep meaning and significance of Ahimsa Dharma. They have lived as vegetarians their whole life but have not bothered to find out why there is this emphasis on not eating meat.

I feel that not questioning the Dharma and improper or incomplete knowledge is where the problem lies. They thus live ignorantly not bothering to read ingredients of food's that come into a house and also not bothering to find out whether these products have been tested on animals, for the industry of testing on animals is also a sickening one where animals are subject to all sorts of painful tests so that humans can 'smell nicer' or 'look nicer'.

They then begin to lapse in the strictness in their vegetarianism that they should always uphold. They don't bother about the purity of foods and thus eat what they want and where they like, thinking that it is vegetarian, but not realising that it isn't pure vegetarian. They are uneducated of exactly what purity entails and they feel that so long as they do not eat meat in it's blatant form, they are doing their bit as vegetarians.

I have added a great deal to the commentary by Shatanand Muni for this Shlok in the hope that youngsters have a better understanding of what our great Dharma of Ahimsa is, in the hope that they make a conscious decision today to change their eating habits.

Now the second important commandment: *Na Payam Cha Suramadhampi* – to refrain from the use of liquor. **Manu** first and foremost defines what liquor is:

Sura Vai Malmananam Papma Cha Malmuvyate /
Tasmad Brahman Rajanyau Vaisyacha Na Suram Pibet //

'Liquor is the dirt or filth extracted from fruit and vegetables. Such filth is considered as a means of sin and therefore members of all four castes should refrain from consuming alcohol.'

Shatanand Muni explains what the three types of *Sura* or alcohol are: *Gauri Madvi Tatha Paishti Vigneya Trividha Sura* – Firstly, it can be made from raw sugar (*Gor*), secondly, from a kind of fruit called *Mahudi* and thirdly from flour.

The eleven types of *Madh* or intoxicants are: *Panasam Drakshamadhukam Karjuram Talmaikshavam / Madhutham Sairmarishtam Mairayam Nalikerjam* // – (1) a type of fruit called *Farnas*, (2) grapes, (3)

Mahudi, (4) dates, (5) fruits off a palm tree, (6) sugar cane, (7) honey, (8) coconut, (9) berries, (10) raw sugar and (11) a fruit called *Mairaya*.

Shatanand says '*Surapaanam Mahapaatakameva*' – consumption of alcohol or liquor is a great sin, for **Rishi Manu** has explained 'the acts of killing a Brahmin, drinking alcohol, stealing and association with a Guru's wife are great sins (*Mahapaps*).' He further adds 'Even those who associate with these types of people are great sinners.'

Prayaschit for drinking alcohol is extensive, explains **Prachetus Muni**: 'Those who drink liquor or who associate with a Guru's wife should for twelve years practice the Prayaschit Vrat for committing the murder of a Brahmin.' Even to consume a small amount of alcohol is considered sinful.

Prayaschit for consumption of intoxicants is now given. **Brihaspati** writes, 'The twice born who unintentionally partake in intoxicants should perform *Atikruchra Vrat* (special Vrat involving fasting), perform a ceremony of purifying Kings (*Raja Sanskar*) and they should feed Brahmins.'

Our Shastras have not differentiated between *Sura* (alcohol) and *Madh* (intoxicants) and so **Mitakshara** has said: *Brahmanasya Suramadhey Kshatriyavaishyoha Sura Sarvakaalam Sarvathaiva Nishidhvani* – 'Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are prohibited from partaking in alcohol and intoxicants always and in all forms.'

It was commonly thought that Kshatriyas or Kings can partake in such vices, but this is completely untrue. In the **Vidurniti** it is written, 'Kings should stay refrain from contact with other women, gambling, hunting, intoxicants (alcohol), speaking harshly, punishing harshly and spending unwisely.' He explains further, 'Kings should always refrain from these seven vices for such vices destroy even the Gods.'

Manu Raja has explained eighteen bad habits or addictions of Man, of which addiction to intoxicants he has noted as amongst the worst. Ten of these are evolved from *Kama* (lust): (1) hunting, (2) gambling, (3) sleeping during the day, (4) slandering of others, (5) relations with other women, (6) intoxicants, (7-9) three types of desire for musical instruments and (10) donating in vain.

Eight of these are evolved from *Krodh* (anger): (11) wickedness, (12) rash thoughtless actions, (13) maliciousness, (14) begrudging, (15) envy, (16) spending wastefully, (17) speaking harshly and (18) judging harshly. **Mitakshara** explains the various Prayaschit for these eighteen addictions. The Vrats last three months and are often intense, thus we should all refrain from such addictions without question.

Even to touch such vices is sinful and destructive to a person says **Manu**: *Madhasya Sparshayapi Doshamaha* - 'Those who touch (or come into contact) with intoxicants (or alcohol) should perform a 3 day fast, one day fast or have a bath as a way of Prayaschit if touched above the navel, between navel and knees or below the knees respectfully, in order to cleanse themselves of such impurity.' **Harit Muni** goes further, forbidding us from drinking water from a vessel or container that has been previously used for storage of alcohol.

Shatanand then forbids all ages from drinking alcohol and the like, and then he explains the effect of sin on different people and thus what Prayaschit is to be performed by various persons. **Angira Muni** says, 'Those who are eighty and over, sixteen and under, women and those who are ill should perform half the Prayaschit mentioned in Shastras (thus they receive half the sin). The Prayaschit of those who are between the age of five and eleven should be performed by their parents and other family members. Those below the age of five do not receive any sin for their actions and therefore need not perform Prayaschit on their behalf.' (Although some sort of disciplinary action should be practised).

The use of alcohol and intoxicants has been strictly and especially prohibited in this age of Kali for the nature of such vices are damaging to a person. For such reason its use and even its touch are forbidden. **Mitakshara** explains, 'Meat and alcohol are the food and drink of *Asuras* and *Rakshas*' (demons) and so should never be consumed by humans.'

Mahabharat's Mokshdharma (ninety second verse) reads, 'This supposed tendency of eating flesh is disgusting and unpraiseworthy. Alcohol, fish, intoxicants, meat and wine have all been famed and accepted to be consumable by those who are deceitful shrewd and wrong. Under no circumstance have the *Vedas* endorsed this act.'

It is written that those who drink liquor are consigned to Hell where they are forced to drink burning hot liquor. They are then reborn upon the earth as an animal. **Bhaarat's Anushasan Parva** explains, 'Those who go on pilgrimage to Holy places with liquor or meat in their body never derive any fruits for their pilgrimage.' Thus all should accept that those who perform *Vrats*, *Tapa*, *Pooja*, *Seva* etc. but have meat or alcohol in their body (in any shape or form) do not receive the desired fruits of their action.

Finally, offerings of alcohol and meat should never be made to God or received by Satsangis. The reason for this is that the Gods are *Sattva* (pure), man is *Rajas* (worldly) and the Asuras are *Tamas* (impure): **Devaha Satvika Rajasa Manusyastamasa Asura** – and so offering meat and alcohol which are Tamsik, food and drink of Asuras can never be offered to the Gods, who are always Satvik - pure.

The great *Vaishnavacharya Vallabhacharya* has said: **Yagno Vai Vishnuriti** – explaining that Satvik foods such as fruit, vegetables etc, offered to Lord Vasudev and then consumed as Prasad is pure enough to destroy the sins of man.

Anushasan Parva adds, 'A *Yagna* (fire sacrifice) is accepted as Lord Vishnu incarnate, by Brahmins. Only by offering milk, rice preparation and flowers, does one please God.' Swami Shatanand concludes his Bhasya by saying: **Tasmadeviveditmapi Suramadham Na Peyamiti Shri Swamicharanam Sidhantaha** – 'Thus not accepting alcohol or intoxicants even if they're offerings to Gods is a firm teaching of Lord Swaminarayan.'

It is displeasing to have to announce that man in this age of Kali has fallen servant to alcohol and other intoxicants. Most youngsters today are taking to drink as a way of making themselves more socially acceptable. Many youngsters drink without their parents realising.

In the West there is a very strong pressure to act a certain way. There are pleasures of being in the right crowd. Pressures to go certain places and in order to enjoy these pleasures many are beginning to drink – these social circles outline a way to behave, a way to look, a way of being and ultimately it is a way out from parental pressures.

Alcohol is a drug. It is addictive and we must find a way of pulling our children from the clutches of these addictions and find another focus for them. This is a widespread problem that has hit society in general. We have already looked at the religious problems of Alcohol. I would like to give a number of arguments that are more 'meaningful' to man today.

Alcohol is Unhealthy - health risk from alcohol consumption include damage to the liver and brain, stomach disorders, high blood pressures, strokes, cancer of the mouth and throat, breast cancer, pancreatitis and ulcers. Indeed the long-term problems are widespread with various health risks involved.

Alcohol and the Brain - there is a slowing down of certain brain functions. Since the Brain is very important it isn't wise to subject the brain to such lapses. Changes in concentration and co-ordination are apparent which raise the chances of an accident especially when driving. It also affects speech, memory and judgement. As a result you may take risks or act in a way you might not have otherwise done.

Alcohol and your moods - alcohol sometimes makes you relaxed and happy but sometimes makes you feel miserable, argumentative, tired or low since alcohol is a depressant. Thus mental health problems include anxiety, tension, depression and paranoia.

Alcohol and your weight - alcohol can be high in calories leading to weight problems. Alcohol dependency leads to malnutrition as alcohol is substituted for food.

Alcohol and the family - this is by far the strongest argument. The effects of drinking alcohol have repercussions on others around you – especially your family. Financial problems are involved; arguments and relationships between people suffer as a result. It can make a person violent and uneasy, which family members have to endure. Thus this irrational behaviour affects all the people around you.

It can leave a person staggering with double-vision, unbalanced and sometimes unconsciousness. The fact is that alcohol has great adverse effects on the system as a whole. It is an object that leaves the mind in tangles for such reason it doesn't suit a person. A drunken person or a person who drinks has no place in society. He is undependable and untrustworthy. His conduct is poor.

Only a person who is alert at all times is worthy of praise. He can only promise such behaviour if he never drinks. All must realise that our ultimate aim is to reach the Heavens, where we will be able to find the true pleasure of serving the Lord. We will not be deriving pleasure through consumption of alcohol there and so we must focus our mind in finding pleasure in devotion upon this Earth, if we are ever going to secure a place in the Heavens. We must learn to leave these addictions of drugs and alcohol and become addicted to Bhakti – devotion.

It is very important that we reject those social circles which are based on drinking, going to pubs, night clubs, who eat and do what they please, disregarding true Vedic teachings. Even a drop of alcohol in the system affects the body adversely according to the teachings of our saints and Shastras and therefore to say that sensible drinking is acceptable is utterly wrong.

In peoples quest to become socially 'with-it' they lose sight of who they are, their heritage and their true purpose of life. We must counter act this propensity for people, to fall in this vortex of drink and other vices. Parents must wake up to themselves and be able to spot whether their child is on the right path or not. If not, they must have the necessary ability to pull back their children from ultimately the clutches of Hell.

It is even more saddening to have to say that girls are also taking to drink. Women are the very representation of Moksh or salvation. They are praised for their motherhood and they are depended upon for the very upbringing of society. For nine months they bear a child within such time they are asked to live such pure lives so that the child in the womb isn't subject to impurities, which can ultimately affect the foetus.

Mothers who drink alcohol, whose womb is impure with alcohol, can never house such luminous, pure, great children. As a result, from such a mother are born disrespectful, wicked children. For this reason women must never fall servant to such bad vices for once in the blood it will surround the whole body and subject a child to such defective blood and hardship.

Drinking alcohol serves no advantage. It brings misery to those around you. It causes a person to lose control of their mind, body and speech resulting in foolish behaviour. It can be dangerous to you and to those around you. There is a 'feel-good' factor associated with drinking but it is false and temporary. Only devotion to God can bring happiness that is permanent. In the long run it does more harm than good.

For these reasons all must make a conscious decision to never drink, or to stop today if you do drink.

TEXT 16

Even in a state of excitement, one shall never mutilate any part of one's body or that of others with a weapon or by any other means in order to punish oneself or others for any unworthy deed either by oneself or by others.

This is getting back to the Dharma of Ahimsa, the great duty of non-violence or non-injury. Often somebody may as an act of penance or as a way of nullifying sins (Prayaschit) committed, cut off or mutilate a part of their body. For example, in a state of anger and frustration somebody may decide to cut off their hands because they may have been the cause of some great sin such as murder. In such circumstance they should perform Prayaschit as suggested by Shastras or learned saints but never mutilate their body in this manner.

Lord Swaminarayan strictly forbids the action of mutilating oneself or others in any circumstance for it is the cause of sin and never a means of dissolving sin. It is written that to even think of harming or hurting another or to speak of such action is unacceptable, for the Dharma of Himsa should be obeyed in thought, speech and action always.

Shrimad Bhagwat says, 'The Lord becomes greatly impressed and pleased by those who show compassion to all creatures. Those who perform great austerities do not derive such pleasure. Therefore shed the demonic nature which you possess and show compassion for all creatures. Doing so not only delights Lord Hari, but it comforts the whole world (bringing peace and harmony in the Universe).'

Never in a state of anger should Himsa be practised for anger is very destructive and losing control of oneself in this way can lead to foolish and arrogant behaviour. Even to say something threatening in a state of anger that you don't really mean is unacceptable and so control of the tongue is imperative. Swami explains: *Krodhasya Swakrutakhil Purnayanashitutvaditi Bhavaha* - anger is the cause of destruction of all fruits of one's labour (*Punya*). **Madanratna** explains, '*Daan* (devotion), *Vrat* (religious vows), *Niyam* (resolution), *Gnaan* (knowledge), *Dhyaan* (meditation), *Hom* (sacrificial offerings) and *Jap* (chanting) are all futile and without fruits, if anger is present in a person.'

Lord Swaminarayan here gives the message that violence isn't a means to an end. It solves nothing and that other solutions to resolve situations should be sought in all such case.

TEXT 17

One shall not commit theft, even for the sake of performing an act of Dharma. No article, even firewood, flowers etc., owned by others shall ever be taken without their owner's permission.

The Lord forbids the act of stealing: *Stainkarma Na Kartavyam* – even to the extent of forbidding taking something for religious or ‘*Dharmic*’ reasons – *Dharmarthampi Kenachit*.

Shatanand here explains the unacceptability of use of articles or wealth earned dishonestly in the name of Dharma (such as donations). Such use is without merit and even sinful. **Daandharma of Mahabharat** explains, ‘Only wealth gathered through hard worked, through honest means is meriteous and proper. Only such worthy wealth should be employed in righteous activities. By donating such pure wealth to Brahmins and the poor, one removes sin.’

Mokshdharma says: *Na Kartavyam Paradhanmiti Dharmaha Sanatanaha* – ‘To not steal is considered as Sanatan Dharma – the eternal law.’ It further adds, ‘Those who steal from others definitely attain hell.’

Danakhanda of Skanda Purana and Yama Smruti say, ‘Those who steal lose all their Punya (benediction) to those who they steal from.’

Linga Purana for such reasons of undesirability of stealing writes, ‘One should control such urge to steal by removing it from mind, speech and action.’ Shatanand instructs that even in times of financial difficulties, one should never fall servant to urges of stealing.

None, including a Guru or Acharya should steal says Shatanand. None should take even flowers etc. without the owner’s consent, for that is considered as stealing also. **Smruti** defines what stealing is: *Tat Stayam Yadupadanamnagnaprapratyoha* – ‘Stealing is to take without permission or consent.’

Gautam Muni goes so far as to say, ‘The hands of a person who take grass, wood, flowers and fruits without the owners permission are fit to be cut off.’ Furthermore **Vishnu Smruti** explains, ‘Killing of insects or birds, partaking of intoxicants and stealing food, wood, flower results in a sin called *Malinkarma*.’ Hence stealing is considered to be equivalent to killing insects and birds and consumption of intoxicants. For this reason one should always refrain from stealing.

Shankar in Mahabharat explains, ‘Those who do not even think of taking something that belongs to someone else will definitely reach the Heavens.’

There are various exceptions to the rule of stealing or taking without permission: **Yagnavalkya** and **Shankha Muni** write, ‘Brahmins may take flowers and grain for offering in a Yagna. Similarly to take grass for a cow would not be considered as stealing.’ **Manu** says, ‘Poverty stricken Brahmins who take two sugar canes or two radishes (*Mura*) should never be punished. Similarly to take a handful of grain that seemingly does not belong to anybody would not be considered as stealing. Also to take a handful of food on the fourth day after being without food for three days would not be considered as stealing.’ Shatanand concludes by saying that in every case, the permission from the owner should always be taken if in any doubt.

Stealing is a great sin regardless of what others say. Ten pounds earned honestly will be shadowed by the fact that you have earned one pound dishonestly. The problem needs to be put into context for it has become somewhat an epidemic. It has to some extent, become a bad habit. Stealing has many forms, many of which may not always be obvious. We may even pass off these ‘steals’ as little and negligible. ‘Fiddling’ is often a cover word for stealing. Fiddling the tax, falsifying information or lying for personal gain, all constitute stealing.

We must all realise that God is the very embodiment of truth – ‘*Sat*’. He is not interested in any wealth offered to him which is earned dishonestly and so to use such wealth in *Dharma Karys* is futile and sinful. Therefore it is imperative that our wealth is earned honestly.

Stealing is taking that which is not rightfully theirs to begin with. We should learn to accept that which is ours and not have this urge to further our wealth through dishonest means. Many commit all sorts of sin to increase their wealth, further their standard of living and to enjoy the luxury and happiness derived from this. Only through truth (*Sat*) will we gain a level of consciousness (*Chit*) which derive eternal bliss (*Anand*). Thus devotion to Satchitanand God and obeying the truth will derive eternal happiness. Wealth is never a means to eternal happiness.

Such sinful wealth for personal pleasure will linger in the family for generations and ultimately the generations will suffer great pain as a consequence. The West worship wealth, it is what all strive for. However Eastern tradition and precepts are to the contrary, for they teach that God is the highest pleasure and wealth is often something which leads a person away from God. We must learn to be satisfied with what we have because only then, will we be able to put everything else aside and worship the Lord unreservedly.

TEXT 18

My male and female disciples shall never commit adultery nor indulge in gambling and other such vices. They shall abstain from inhaling and drinking intoxicating substances such as bhang, tobacco, snuff and the like.

Vyabhicharo Na Kartavyaha – Neither sex should ever behave adulterously says the Lord. Males should not hanker after women and women should not hanker after men. Thus, there should not be even needless association between the two sexes.

Manu explains the consequence of such acts. ‘Adulterous women in this world are defamed and slandered. She is endowed in sin and great sickness befalls her. She is then reborn upon this Earth after death as a fox or a jackal. Similar consequence befalls a man who is adulterous also.’

Vidura explains how association with another woman is the root of total destruction – *Paradaryasya Sarvaksheyahetutvahaha*. **Mahabharat’s Anushasan Parva** concurs, ‘To steal another’s wealth, to commit adultery and to renounce loved ones (break contact with) are the cause of great destruction. For this reason such acts should be refrained from mind, body and speech.’

All castes should refrain from adultery because the act of adultery leads to a reduction in life expectancy, which is sinful as well as undesirable. It is also written that, ‘Those fools who look upon other women with lustful intent are reborn blind upon this Earth. Endowed with wicked qualities they then face great suffering and sickness upon the Earth.’

In **Vasudev Mahatmya** (of **Skanda Purana**) it explains, ‘One should never look at another woman with lustful intent. On days of Shraaddh, Vrat and other religious days, man should stay aloof from his own wife. Similarly one should not even talk to another woman jokingly or otherwise.’

Deval Smruti pays attention to the reverse as women should not commit adultery also. ‘Those women who lustfully associate with other men are subject to being reborn upon the Earth a further seven times as a donkey between which she is tortured in the Hells.’

Shrimad Bhagwat explains these tortures of Hell, ‘Adulterous women go to a Hell called *Taptasurmi*. There she is beaten with clubs and then forced to embrace a burning hot statue of a man repeatedly. A similar consequence awaits an adulterous man. Therefore one should not even dream of or fantasise of

adulterous acts.’ Shatanand writes here that the veto of adulterous behaviour and association with another woman is considered as a basic Dharma to be followed by all – it is a fundamental directive.

He then explains that lustful association with the wife of one’s Guru is considered as a great sin (*Mahapaap*). Similarly such association with a sister etc. is also a great sin. Prayaschit for such acts are therefore greater. Thus **Mitakshara** has explained, ‘One should not even associate with those women who have lustful relations with their *Guru* (teacher) or *Shisya* (disciple), those who take another’s husband and those who associate with people who drink alcohol.’

Many believe that it is acceptable to have relations with a prostitute, as she is not considered as *another’s* woman. However Shatanand Muni explains that this statement is completely inappropriate. He explains further that such women are termed as ‘*Vrushli*’ and that association with such women are worse, with even greater sin attached to it. **Mitakshara** and other **Smrutis** explain the five types of *Vrushli* as: (1) **Chandali** – a low born (2) **Bandhki** – the imprisoned (3) **Veshya** – a prostitute (4) **Raja Kanya** – a woman during her period of menses (5) **Sagotra Kanya** – a woman who is related to you. Prayaschit for such association according to **Manu** is, ‘To leave your home for three years chanting the Lord’s name and surviving on foods which have been begged for, for such time.’ This Prayaschit is for only one night of passion!

Shatanand explains that Brahmins have a greater responsibility to never fall servant to lust for such actions have greater consequence. **Harit Muni** writes, ‘Adulterous Brahmins disgrace themselves greatly. If by such action pregnancy results, then there is no question in the fact that great ruin will befall such person. For that reason, all should refrain from sexual relations with other women. Only relations with one’s own wife, sanctified through holy matrimony, witnessed by Agni (fire) and Brahmins should be sought.’

Yagnavalkya forbids even crossing the shadow of a woman: ‘One should never pass – disregarding a God, a sacrificial priest (Brahmin), a learned person, an Acharya, a King or even the shadow of another woman. Similarly they should never cross over excrement, urine, or mucus.’

Angira does not allow even passing across an area where there is a group of females: ‘One should never pass between a Brahmin and Agni, two Brahmins, two Agnis, Vishnu and Garuda (*Bhakta & Bhagwan*), a *Guru and Shishya*, a husband and wife, two women or between Lord Shiva and Nandi, his vehicle.’ **Shankha Muni** explains the Prayaschit for doing so as the performance of *Shantpan Krutchra Vrata*.

Although Shatanand has not explained the reasons why we must not pass such places, it is for reasons of disrespect and disturbance that these laws are written. Also specifically for crossing the shadow of a woman or between a group of women, we can see that the Rishis imply that even the shadow of a woman is destructive and lust enticing.

‘*Kama*’ – lust or desire is very destructive. It can in an instance drive a person away from the truth and righteousness, towards dishonesty and corruptness. It is extremely attractive and seductive to all. It is beyond reasoning and common sense. We all can quite easily fall servant to desire, disregarding everything else in a pursuit to satisfy our desires.

Equipped with intelligence, cool mind and even the truth, we are still not able to conquer desire. Lust for the opposite sex is that much more seductive and enticing. Even the God’s and Rishis have fallen servant to it and the results have been extremely damaging. Lord Swaminarayan here forbids any adulterous behaviour. Indeed Shastras forbid man from even socialising with other women. Man may often say that ‘she is a friend’ and that ‘I do not have any lustful intent with her’ and thus try and approve such contact

with the opposite sex. However, as explained, few have conquered lust and though you may feel that lust does not come into question, you never can tell and relax in such situations.

We must be very careful in socialising situations and never let such thoughts enter the mind. By staying away from such situations as prescribed by Shastras we are able to overcome such desires and only then are we able to affirm our mind in the Lord.

Recent studies have shown people are waiting longer to get married. They are also divorcing more rapidly and that the lengths of marriages are falling. Research shows that Adultery did play a part in marriage divorces: 23 per cent of divorces were awarded to women for his adultery and 39 per cent to men for her adultery. Thus we can see that in the West, marriage is seriously at threat. We must all be very careful that we do not become a statistic through lustful behaviour by never even letting the thought of Adultery enter our minds.

This fundamental fact should be instilled in our younger generation by teaching them that marriage is a sacred event and that we should wait for marriage in order to have a relationship with the member of the opposite sex. Before that time we must stay pure and free from the clutches of lust.

Many may think that the Lord here forbids adultery that applies only to the married, and so the younger generations are free to have relations with the other sex, but this is completely untrue. Before *Grihastashram* (married life) we are all bound by living in *Brahmcharyashram* (student life). In this ashram, *Brahmcharya Vrata* (vow of celibacy) must be taken and thus we are led to live a life of segregation – away from the opposite sex. We are just as vulnerable to lust in our younger/teenage years as we are to it in our marriage years.

Indeed these younger years are very important for they build and affect a person greatly. They mould a person preparing them for their later years and therefore it is imperative that they do not fall servant to desire and lust that could seriously compromise their marriage. This can only be done by following the teachings of Shastras that prescribe a strict rule of conduct of segregation of the sexes. In this day and age of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and other killers, it is extremely important to refrain from acts of adultery.

The second message in this Shlok is: *Gutadi Vyasanam Tyajyam* – to refrain from various bad habits such as gambling. Swami Shatanand gives a greater explanation to the meaning of 'Vyasan' here :

Visheshesyati Chyavayati Shreyomargat /
Vyasyate Parityajyate Iti Va Vyasanam //

'That which sends a person astray from the path of righteousness and salvation (*Shreya Marga*) is termed as *Vyasan* – a bad habit or addiction.'

Lord Swaminarayan writes – *Gutadi Vyasanam*. The 'adi' succeeding 'Guta' is elaborated upon by **Daksha Prajapati** who explains ten such bad habits: (1) *Stree* – women, (2) *Gutam* – gambling, (3) *Mrugya* – hunting, (4) *Madham* – intoxicating substances, (5) *Nrutyam* – dancing, (6) *Gitam* – singing (other than that of God's praise), (7) *Vrathatanam* – tendency to frequently 'go out', (8) *Vadyam* – playing of musical instruments, (9) *Ninda* – slandering and (10) *Diva Svapo* – sleeping during the day.

In addition, Shatanand explains that speaking too much needlessly, speaking rudely or offensively, sitting in the market place, too much affection or attachment towards one's children and study of Shastras devoid of the greatness of Dharma and Bhakti, are all things to be avoided as well.

Kapil Dev writes, ‘One should never play the gambling game of dice, nor should they ever take another’s wealth (steal).’ **Yama Raja** has said, ‘Those who gamble, who are fond of Himsa (code of violence) and who disrepute their family, suffer miserably in the Hells.’

Shatanand explains that gambling leads to deception, dishonesty and treachery that are extremely undesirable and for that reason gambling is unacceptable. **Manu** outlines the punishment suitable for persons committing such acts in **Mitakshara**. ‘Kings should administer the death penalty to those who commit the act of gambling and other such vices. Those who indulge in such vices should immediately stop the act and perform ‘Vrata’ for three months to cleanse oneself of sin and to ultimately free themselves from the clutches of these vices.’

The final message in this Shlok is to never partake in the likes of Bhang, tobacco and various other drugs or intoxicants such as opium, heroin etc. Shatanand explains, ‘Those fools who intoxicate themselves with these drugs are narcotic – *Madak*, and as a result become weak, useless and irresponsible. They should therefore never use such substances for they are similar to alcohol in effect.’

Naradiya Purana extols: *Na Bhakshyam Madakam Kigchichtivibramkrudhi Tad* – ‘One should never partake in Madak substances which paralyse a person’s consciousness.’

Only those who refrain from these bad habits or addictions can be called a *Bhakta*. A Bhakta is he, whose sole addiction is God Himself and nothing else. Dependency should be upon the Lord and not upon material substances. It is the duty of parents to make their children addicts of Bhakti and not let them wander allowing them to become drug addicts. The younger generation must realise the greatness of Bhakti and to forgo these other addictive vices which bring nothing but hardship to the abused and those around them.

The only requirements of this body are the necessities of life such as water, air, shelter, food etc. All other things should be cut off. These are the things a body is dependant on and so anything else which you may become dependant on or which you feel you cannot live without (but can) should be considered bad for you – a vice, and should be renounced. Many people are addicted to tea, for example. They feel they cannot live without their daily *cup ‘a’ Cha*. They have a headache if they do not get their tea. This is the addictive nature of tea which should be counteracted.

Vices are deadly in any form. They turn you away from God. They indeed make your body unliveable for God, as it is polluted with this filth. This body that we are given by God is to be kept clean and pure so that the Lord can reside within it and thus support us. Those who indulge in such vices are never given the support of God!

Our younger generation is forever falling in this vortex of vices as they strive to ‘become something or somebody’. They take to cigarettes, alcohol (as already discussed) and other stronger more deadly drugs. We must uplift these lost souls who are drunk in desire and arrogance. We must instil control into the youths; get them off this retched path and onto the path of piousness. Smoking is quite a big problem in this Sampraday and those who do smoke bring nothing but shame to themselves, their families and ultimately this Sampraday.

Tobacco should be rooted out in all forms. Many have a tendency to chew tobacco or substances such as betel nut mixed with tobacco. Even youngsters seem to get a thrill from such substances. I believe a popular brand of such substance is ‘*Tulsi*’, which to a Vaishnav is auspicious but in reality is quite the opposite as such substances are known to be injurious to health causing diseases such as mouth cancer. Many say that Tulsi is just some harmless fun which they use in place of chewing gum or sweets and that

it isn't an addiction, but beware, smaller evils leads to bigger evils and by condoning use of such substances will inevitably lead to use of stronger addictive substances.

Gambling was mentioned as a vice in this Shlok as well, however it is necessary to grasp a fuller understanding of what Gambling is. Gambling money, wealth, assets etc. on a dice game, card game, fruit machines etc are obvious aspects of gambling, but there are aspects less obvious.

Gambling should really be understood to mean any action which employs one's wealth in any form and which does not guarantee the fixed or minimum return equivalent to the value employed. Therefore to 'invest' in stocks or shares is a gamble and should be avoided. Indeed any investment that does not guarantee the return of amount invested is a gamble and so should be refrained from. Lottery fever has hit the UK. This again is a gamble that a true Satsangi should not waste their money on. Our Shastras are very clear in declaring the fact that there is no happiness derived from these actions. Though we may feel compelled to play the Lottery in the event that we may win millions of pounds someday, which seems to be the dream to eternal happiness for all, it is not a means to the desired pleasure. Lottery builds false hope and there are indeed many consequences to winning the Lottery such as selfishness that can break the family unit.

Our great Rishis have despised this pastime of gambling calling it the root of great evils. Let us never forget the great consequence of gambling that played such a startling role in the **Mahabharat**. These episodes in Shastras are there to teach us things and to learn from these episodes a better way of living. We must forever have faith in these Shastras and the powerful *Sanatan Dharma* and never fall servant to pressures which are in fact wrongdoing.

TEXT 19

One shall never consume food or drink prepared by a person from whom one is prohibited by holy scriptures, at any place, even if it is the Prasad from the offerings to Lord Shree Krishna, except the Prasad at Jaganathpuri.

Shastras forbid the consumption of food and water given by certain persons. The categories of these persons are documented in scriptures and include prohibition through caste, country, community and family. Such food and water should not be taken even though it may be Prasad of the Lord.

However, Lord Swaminarayan says that those prohibitions do not apply at **Purushotampuri (Jaganathpuri)**. To take such food or water anywhere else results in a sin called '*Sankarikarana*' says **Vishnumruti**. Such sin results through killing an animal as well and thus we can realise how important this directive is. Prayaschit for this sin involves living off water only, for a period of one month.

It is written that, 'To obey one's caste laws results in the strengthening of one's *Bhakti, Dharma and Gnaan.*' Thus it is extremely important to obey these laws that apply to a person through his caste. These laws are here for man's own benefit, so much so that even 'Prasad' is not always pure generally. Those who disregard these laws can never derive Bhakti, Dharma, and Gnaan.

The question here arises – 'Why is Jaganathpuri free from these laws?' To answer this question we must realise the greatness of Jaganathpuri and the greatness of Prasad of Jaganathpuri.

During the installation ceremony of Lord Jaganath, the main thirty-three God's came to witness the ceremony. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva were present. During the ceremony, cooked rice was offered as Prasad to the congregation. However, in the hustle and bustle of things, much of the Prasad fell to the

floor, not reaching many of the Gods, saints and people. Though the Prasad was on the floor and crushed by the feet of those present, many picked the cooked rice from the floor and ate the Prasad.

Lord Shiva also picked some Prasad from the floor and ate it. Lord Brahma who began to ridicule Shiva, refusing to eat it himself witnessed this. Brahma then looked towards the idol of Jaganath but could not see it – it had become invisible to him. He began to question “Where has Lord Jaganath gone?” Shiva then spoke, “We can all have Darshan (sight of) the Lord, why is it that you cannot?” Brahma deluded, then came to the conclusion that, “Maybe it is because I did not partake in Prasad, I did not have faith in the Prasad.” So saying he picked up some rice from the floor and ate it. Instantly the vision of Lord Jaganath came to him and so he was finally able to have Darshan of the Lord.

The Prasad seemed unacceptable to Brahma for the greatness of such Prasad deluded him. For this reason the Prasad at Jaganathpuri is considered to be prominent and great and so Rishis have praised it adequately by allowing such Prasad to be taken regardless of restrictions otherwise. Taking of such Prasad has great benefit and results in great Punya.

Indeed any Prasad (sanctified food) in accordance with Shastras have great benefits to those who partake in it. Such blessed food leads to the person who eats Prasad to be also blessed. Many say that the power of Prasad is beyond comprehension, deriving Punya equivalent to numerous fasts (*Upvaas*). Prasad is said to contain spiritual powers or even miraculous powers and hence the greatness of Prasad can never be fully praised. It is food or drink that is first offered to God and then consumed by us and so it is divine food, pure food or sanctified food. Thus Prasad should never be under estimated as ‘just ordinary food or drink.’ For such reasons it should be a point for all households, that they always make offerings to God before they themselves eat in the home as a family.

I write this because many are unappreciative of Prasad. Many fail to see greatness and so end up not taking Prasad or even throwing it away and ridiculing it sometimes. There is a saying, ‘*Jevu Ann Tevu Mana*’ – The mind is affected by what you eat. Thus by eating such Prasad, the mind also becomes pure and healthy.

TEXT 20

One shall never make false accusations or abuse anyone verbally even if it serves one’s self-interest.

Lord Swaminarayan now describes the various sins committed by man verbally, through impure and uncontrolled speech. Note that sin is accumulated through physical (bodily) action, through speech and through impure thought. Lord Shree Hari, in this Shikshapatri has made a point to address all such methods of committing sin.

Mithyapavadaha – false accusation; thus one should never falsely accuse somebody of something, especially in order to acquire money. It is said that to falsely accuse results in sin that is greater than even the five deadly sins. So much so, that Prayaschit for the five great sins is given in Shastras, but no such information is given for false accusations.

Yagnavalkya writes, ‘If a great sin is committed and somebody is falsely accused of such crime, then the accuser receives double the sin of actually committing the crime. He also receives the sin of lying and for falsely accusing. Additionally the accuser inherits other sins committed by the accuser.’ Hence it is quite striking that such an act can have such mammoth consequence and so one must never falsely accuse anyone, adopting the philosophy of ‘*innocent until proven guilty*’.

The **Mahabharat** explains, ‘Those who speak harshly, who slander others, who are cruel and who speak without thinking are reborn upon this Earth as a deer or a bird.’

There is a great Gujarati saying, ‘*Vani ane pani gari neja vaparvu*’ – Water and speech should be sieved first and then used, it should always be cleansed. Speaking without thinking causes great sin. The consequence of such action could be devastating to a person. Indeed, our Shastras forbid broadcasting an embarrassing truth. Thus, it is unacceptable to glorify the fact that a person has committed sin, even if the sin has been committed by the person. Instead, you should have a one-to-one discussion with the person in order to put him back on the right track and resolve the situation by suggesting a course of action to dissolve the sin. One should never use the situation as a means of generating money through bribery.

Now let us consider the second part of this Shlok – never to hurt, abuse or swear at anyone. There is a saying, ‘The lash of a sword can be cured often, but the lash of abuse can never be cured.’ Thus, what we say to another person can often leave deep scars and so must always be controlled.

Through inappropriate speech, swearing etc, it is said that one’s *Punya* is washed away. Therefore, never even in a state of anger, should you hurl abuse at anyone. One must always maintain absolute control over their speech. Swearing and abusive language is undesirable in a person – indeed it defames a person.

Many have a habit of swearing. Even though this habitual swearing may not be in order to verbally abuse anyone, it is none the less wholly undesirable and such tendencies should be reversed. This habitual swearing is developed to the stage where every sentence spoken contains a swear word.

We all know of Shishupal’s consequence of hurling abuse and insults at Shree Krishna – THE DEATH PENALTY! Therefore one must realise that to speak in such inappropriate manner directly, indirectly, intentionally, or unintentionally is a great sin with grave consequences.

The voice is a powerful tool and must be used with care and consideration. Effective communication in society, groups and committees should always be practiced, because only then can there be stability and unification. To speak blatantly without regard can lead to a break down in a community. People must be willing to listen to each other and we must all learn to use the power of speech effectively for the betterment of society.

Arguments often start because communication has broken down or because somebody has said something which is offensive to another, and for that reason it is very necessary that we master the art of speaking.

TEXT 21

One shall never slander deities, places of pilgrimage, Brahmins, devout wives, priests or the Holy Scriptures, nor listen to such slander.

This is a very important Shlok with a lot of information within it. Primarily it refutes slander in all forms. Here Sahajanand Swami specifies six types of people or things:

Devatirithavipranaam Sadhvinaam Cha Sataamapi /
Vedanaam Cha Na Kartavya Ninda Shravya Na Cha Kachit //

- (1) **Devta** – slander of any God. Therefore devotees of Lord Rama should not slander Lord Krishna or even devotees of Lord Shiva. Similarly devotees of Lord Swaminarayan should never slander any other deity, be it Rama, Krishna, Shiva etc.

- (2) **Tirth** – no place of pilgrimage should ever be slandered. Any famed ‘holy place’ of Shree Krishna, Rama, Swaminarayan or any other deity.
- (3) **Vipranaam** – Brahmins. No Brahmin who is faithful to his duty should ever be slandered. Indeed even those Brahmins who are not faithful to their Dharma should not be slandered. Brahmins are always praised and famed in Shastras, as the very form of God.
- (4) **Sadhvinaam** – devout or chaste women, these *Pativrata* women should never be slandered.
- (5) **Sataamapi** – any renounced devotee of God. *Sadhus* should always be praised and never slandered.
- (6) **Vedanaam Cha** – The *Vedas*, Holy Scriptures. Here the ‘*cha*’ is used to specify ‘the like’, and so all Holy Scriptures with their root in the Vedas, is included. Therefore the *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagwat*, *Ramayan*, *Gita*, *Shikshapatri*, *Satsangi Jivan*, *Vachnamrit* etc. are all worthy of praise and are never to be slandered.

Shree Hari’s Shlok reveals ‘**Na Kartavya Ninda**’ – never should such things be slandered and ‘**Shravya Na Cha Kachit**’ – slander of such things should never be listened to. Such a directive is very important and is prominent in many Shastras.

Markandeya Puran explains, ‘*Deva, Veda, Dwijati* (Brahmins), *Sadhu, Tirtha, Mahatma* (great men), *Guru, Pativrata, Yajvi* (those who perform Yagnas) and *Tapasvi* (those who perform penance) such things should never be slandered even jokingly – **Parivaadam Na Kurvit Parihaasepi**. Similarly such slander should never be listened to.

Nor should such persons be physically beaten. Shatanand explains here that it is acceptable or appropriate to hit (i.e. punish) one’s own child or disciple in the lower part of their body. But never to punish in such a way involving the upper part of the body – the head or the chest.

Sumantu Smruti explains how slandering even once, such great men or women has great consequences. ‘Those who slander a *Devarshi* (great saint – God like), *Brahmin, Acharya*, parents, King, *Sadhu* and *Sati* (devout women), should have their tongues burned and should be severely punished.’

Skanda Puran says, ‘Those who slander (those mentioned) become childless and destroy their family.’ **Yogeshwar Yagnavalkya** explains the slander of the *Vedas* and others is comparable to committing the murder of a Brahmin – **Vedadinindayastu Brahmanhatyasamatvamapyuktam**.

The **Mahabharat** says, **Guruninda Dahatyayurmanushyaram Na Sansheyaha** – ‘To slander one’s Guru leads to a shorter duration of life’ – so saying Shatanand concludes his Bhasya of this Shlok.

Much has been covered in this Shlok. It is a very important Shlok. *Ninda* or slander is something I feel many do not mean to do but something that happens. Often they may not know what they are saying is slanderous and so it is important to broaden our understanding of this Shlok.

What does ‘*Deva Ninda*’ mean? In broader terms to slander any one of the 330 million Gods that Shastras speak of is *Deva Ninda*. To utter even a word which in anyway defames the greatness of any God is *Deva Ninda*.

Much of this slander is often through a superiority complex that their God is greater than any other. There seems to be too much talk of one God being greater or better than another. Instead, we need to change this ideology to the fact that a specific God is better for me and say – ‘Rama is best for me,’ or ‘Swaminarayan is best for me.’

There is only one God. The various incarnations are mere instruments of that one supreme Lord. To slander any one of these God’s is to slander the supreme Lord, their own ‘*Ishwar*’. Those who cannot accept the greatness of the various God’s – Rama, Krishna, Swaminarayan, Shiva, Ganpati, Surya, Parvati etc. have not yet understood the Sanatan Dharma.

A person should believe his own personal God – Ishwar, to be the greatest and in this way strengthen his devotion to his personal God. However he has absolutely no right to slander any other deity and their devotees.

Sometimes slander of deities takes place as a result of some irreligious practice. For example *Maa Parvati* and her forms have often in the past and present been associated with animal sacrifices and the like. In such situations Goddess Parvati should never be slandered, for she is not to blame. These practices take place because people neglect the true meaning of Shastras and follow the wrong principles.

Places of pilgrimage should also never be slandered. They praise only those places associated with their own God. Other places are disregarded. *Chappaiya, Dwarika, Ayodhya* and other such places are all holy places. Those who cannot see this and who on their *Tirth* start slandering various places do not reap the desired fruits of their pilgrimage. Many often complain about the places they went to saying something like ‘the living facilities were not good’ - as if they are on holiday to that place! They thus fail to grasp the essence of performing a Tirth.

Brahmins should never be slandered. The superiority complex again arises here where people are obsessed with the greatness of their own caste or ‘Jat’. Brahmins are famed in all Shastras as the very essence of truth and purity. They are the very form of God and so worthy of praise and respect.

The God’s have placed the Sanatan Dharma in their hands and these true, pure Brahmins will continue their duties as Brahmins to uplift the Dharma. It is inevitable that some Brahmins may go astray, just as any caste member may go astray from their duty, but again to slander any Brahmin is unacceptable.

Many great Brahmins in our society exist who are continuing in Vedic tradition and are also trying to rebuild the Brahmin caste to its former glory. It is our duty to help in this cause and never to slander them as their blessing in a wedding, Yagna and other Vedic rituals are necessary.

It is said that Brahmins are the face of God, Kshatriyas the arms, Vaishyas the thighs and Shudras the feet. Therefore to slander any caste is absolutely unacceptable; as to do so would be to slander the Lord himself.

Chaste women, who live in the shadow of their husband, who follow the rules of conduct prescribed for a wife to the fullest, should never be slandered. She may be often slandered by their Western counterparts, who do not fully understand what it means to be a true Hindu wife. They have totally different views about being a wife, not at all based in accordance with our scriptures. Only such Pativrata women are worthy of praise and are famed in this world. They are to be respected, but never to be slandered.

A Sadhu, Acharya, or Guru should never be slandered. Those who renounce all worldly pleasures and desires, who live a life of absolute celibacy, whose only reason for living is to serve the Lord are worthy of praise and never to be slandered. Sure, some Sadhus are better than others, but to glorify this fact and to slander those who are less developed is unacceptable. All Sadhus cannot be the same and we cannot expect all Sadhus to be the epitome of sainthood – they do what they can, just as we do what we can as householders.

There is a saying that saints do not keep their *Punya* (benediction) or *Papas* (sins). Instead it is distributed to those who he comes into contact with. Those who slander a saint take away with them the saint's sins. Those who praise a saint inherit the saint's *Punya*.

Lastly to slander any of the Holy Scriptures is also unadmirable. The Vedas are the most prominent Hindu scriptures of Sanatan Dharma. The great knowledge of Vedas has been expanded upon in various Shastras. The works of Vyaas – Upanishads, Mahabharat, Puranas, of which Bhagwat Puran is prominent, are all great Shastras which have given mankind the Vedic knowledge in simple form and so should never be slandered.

The works of prominent Rishis including various *Smritis*, *Srutis*, *Darshans*, *Itihases* and so on are also very great. Lord Swaminarayan's specific aim was to have scriptures written by prominent saints, who covered all aspects of Hindu Vedic philosophy and so all such Shastras are with merit.

All these scriptures are equally important and so should be studied to get a better understanding of our Dharma if capable. To disregard any such scriptures and to even slander a specific scripture is sinful and against all Vedic teachings.

In Mahabharat it is said that those who do not slander receive *Punya* equivalent to a tenth part of performing a Yagna. Those who do slander receive the sins of those persons he slanders. Thus, slandering is wholly undesirable. It is one of the eleven prohibitions in our Sampraday and therefore we must make it a point to fully obey this directive and to never slander anybody.

TEXT 22

One shall never accept the remnant part of an offering made to any deity to whom wine and flesh are offered and before whom goats and such other animals are scarified.

Devatayai Bhavetasya Surama Snivedanam

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We have already spoken much about the subject of *Ahimsa* and so Shatanand has not gone into too much further detail.

Shree Hari asks us not to partake in offerings of alcohol or flesh - *Suramaasnivedanam*. **Vishnudharma** explains, 'One must never partake in foods from those who are intent on *Himsa* and who themselves partake in meat and intoxicants. Vaishnavas are forbidden especially as such foods destroy one's *Satva Gunn* (righteous qualities). **Shrimad Bhagwat** further explains, 'Impure (Aetho) foods, non-vegetarian foods, food prepared by somebody in an angry mood, food from a low born and food even seen by a woman during her menses, should never be consumed,' as such food is considered impure and destructive physically and mentally.

Therefore foods such as alcohol and meat are considered extremely foul and should never be accepted even if it is a part of an offering to a deity.

TEXT 23

When passing by temples of Lord Shiva and other deities, one shall bow to them and pay due reverence to the deities therein.

Na Cha Kasya Api Devtaya Apamanana Na Karyetyha - the reason for this commandment is to prevent an insult to such deities from being committed. Shatanand explains that it is an insult to the Gods if we pass by a *Dev Mandir* and do not pay due respects to the deity. He insists that when passing temples (*Dev-Mandirs*) of *Shiva*, *Devi*, *Ganesh* etc. we must pay our respects - *Shivalai Deviganeshadidevmandirani Syuaha*.

Vashista Smruti explains, 'Those who do not pay humble respects to a *Dev Murti*, a *Sanyaas* or a *Yogi* after passing are destined for *Prayaschit*.' Therefore to prevent insult to the Gods and invoke their wrath, we must pay our respects through *Darshan*, *Namaskar*, *Daan* etc.

This Shlok shows the true greatness of the Lord. A truly brilliant Acharya of Sanatan Dharma, who accepted the fellowship of all major deities. He himself worshipped many of these deities through *Pooja*. We must follow this example set by the Lord and offer equal praise to such deities. We must never walk the path of disregarding any accepted deity.

TEXT 24

One shall never abandon one's own duties as ordained by one's own Varna and Ashram nor follow a course of conduct prescribed for others nor follow any faith which is pretentious or fictitious.

It is forbidden to abandon duties pertaining to *Varna* - code of conduct according to caste viz. *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* or *Shudras*. As well as duties pertaining to *Ashrams* - code of conduct according to station in life viz. *Brahmcharis*, *Grihastramis*, *Vanaprastas* or *Sanyasis*. Thus one should always obey *Varna* and *Ashram Dharmas*. Those who abandon such *Dharmas* are destined for sorrow in this world and in others. Following such laws are the tools for attaining *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Mukti* (salvation).

Narad Muni explains - *Svabhavivito Dharmaha Kasya Neshtaha Prashantaye* - 'Ordinary duties (those not in accordance with Vedic laws) will never derive peace.' Thus only the *Dharmas* outlined in *Shastras* will derive peace. Only by following personal *Dharma* - *Svadharm*, does man achieve *Bhakti*

and *Gnaan* (knowledge). God himself has said, 'Those in this world who obey Svadharma, who are free from sin and who are pure can acquire true knowledge and devotion with the blessings of the Gods.'

Akrur has said, 'Those who abandon their Dharma fall to the nether worlds.' **Manu** also explains, 'Those who live beyond their duties live in darkness, shadowed by sin. For such reason, one must never even think to abandon their Dharma under any circumstance.'

Similarly one must never forego one's own personal Dharma in favour of somebody else's Dharma. All have their own specific Dharmas to follow dependent on Varna, Ashram etc. To follow one's own specific Dharma is the best way to *derive Bhakti, Gnaan* and *Moksh*, never by following another's Dharma. **Manu** explains, 'One's own Dharma is the best, even though it may seem to be devoid of qualities. Another's Dharma can never be considered the best, as such Dharma, if adopted will cause a person to be shunned within his community.'

Also, we must never follow Dharmas that are *Pakhanda* or *Kalpita*. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains these two Dharmas: '*Pakhanda* is the very sign of sin. *Pa* represents protection or salvation. That which causes destruction - *Khanda* of salvation is considered as *Pakhanda Dharma*. Those Dharmas that cause a furtherance in sin is *Pakhanda*. *Pakhanda* is a Dharma that is contrary to Vedic law. Such Dharma is *Kalpita* or made-up and so such Dharmas should never be followed. Both of these are *Adharmic* - contrary to true Vedic law.'

Shrimad Bhagwat further explains - '(1) *Vidharma* - Dharma which hinders one's personal Dharma, (2) *Pardharma* - another's Dharma, (3) *Updharma* - Dharma contrary to Vedic laws, (4) *Chaldharma* - Dharma which is deceptive and (5) *Abhasadharmas* - illusive or desireful Dharmas; these five are *Adharmic* and should never be adopted.' Such Dharmas are unpraiseworthy and incur sin. They will invariably lead to one's downfall.

It is very important that people follow the right Dharma. They must always follow the Dharma that is in accordance with their Caste and Ashram. They must always initiate into a Dharma that is in accordance with true Vedic laws and precepts.

There are many *Kalpita* or made-up Dharmas in this age of *Kali* which teach the wrong disciplines. They enjoy and fulfil their desires, often lustful desires. **Shrimad Bhagwat** has explained that in *Kali Yuga*, such *Updharmas* will be many in number. Many may bestow God-hood in a Guru or Acharya. For this reason we must not fall into such fellowships. We must understand our Sanatan Dharma, the eternal law based on Vedic laws and so follow only those Dharmas that are enlightened by Sanatan Dharma.

The *Swaminarayan-Udhavi Sampraday* is one such Dharma. Lord Swaminarayan's message of true Vedic principles continues to flourish in this Sampraday headed by the true Gurus of the Sampraday - the two Acharayas as established by Lord Swaminarayan himself. Only by living and being initiated into the Sampraday by either *Laxmi-Narayan* or *Nar-Narayan Gadi*, can we ever devote ourselves to Lord Swaminarayan and then enjoy the bliss of *Satsang* and ultimately *Akshardhaam*.

This great Shikshapatri is Dharma personified. It is the best Dharma, the essence of Vedic Law that has been bestowed upon mankind. To follow such Dharma implicitly will derive eternal rewards; the greatest reward of promotion to the heavens is without question. It is important that we are able to understand each principle or precept so that our dedication to these Dharmas is strengthened.

This *Doctrine of Dharma* as stipulated by Lord Swaminarayan is above all else. It promotes the very limbs of Dharma outlined by *Sat-Shastras* namely, *Satya* - truth, *Tap* - penance, *Pavitrata* -purity and *Daya* - Compassion.

Dharma is beyond everything - time, place and situation. It is something that can never be abandoned as to do so would be to abandon God himself. For this reason, to translate this great wealth of knowledge of Sat-Shastras, in the form of the Shikshapatri was very necessary.

TEXT 25

One shall never listen to any religious discourses from a person whose preaching might lead one away from the devotion to Lord Shree Krishna and personal Dharma.

Shatanand explains that discourses upon the *Sat-Shastras*, by those who refute the nine forms of *Bhakti* or the Caste system, should never be listened to.

Shrimad Bhagwat explains, 'Those who do not listen to *Katha* (religious discourse) of God which is likely to destroy sin, but instead listen to *Varts* (talks) of desires which destroy intellect, can never reach the heavens. Such persons who can never find shelter of God are forever enveloped in darkness.' Therefore we must listen to discourses from those who are *Krishna-Bhaktas* - devotees of Shree Krishna, who are ever faithful to their Dharma.

We must always listen to *Katha* from those who have a true understanding of Shastras and who know the nature of God. We must listen to only the Sat-Shastras - true Vedic Shastras such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagwat Gita*, *Satsangi Jivan* etc. but never those which have no Vedic foundation, which lead one away from Shree Krishna and Dharma.

Vishnu Rahasya says, 'Never listen to discourses from those who do not accept and respect Brahmins, Sat-Shastras and saints.' **Sanat Kumar Samhita** explains the nature of those who should be listened to: 'Those who follow *Swadharna*, who are not sinful, a staunch devotee of God, one who speaks of true Vedic knowledge, who is well learned in the Shastras and who has overcome his senses; such a person is a true *Purani* or *Vakta* (deliverer of *Katha*).'

Therefore it is very important that we listen to the right person who displays all such qualities, so that we are never led astray through imperfect knowledge.

It was vitally important for Lord Swaminarayan to write upon this subject as *Vaktas* of such calibre are few and far between. Lord Swaminarayan incarnated upon this Earth to clean up the Vedic knowledge being imparted. He had pious virtuous saints initiated into the Sampraday. Such saints of the highest calibre were asked to write and lecture upon true Vedic philosophy and so paved the way for future generations.

Other great Brahmins and Shastra-Kars exist in society (outside the Swaminarayan Sampraday) - who are great devotees of Shree Krishna. Only such persons should be listened to. There are many, who teach the wrong knowledge, who teach contrary to true Vedic law, whose purpose is to build a fellowship for themselves. These are the persons to be beware of.

Often it is difficult to know what true Vedic philosophy is. In such situations it is important to study Shastras ourselves. This knowledge will help to keep us on the right path and help us to spot right from wrong. Study of the major Shastras mentioned in the Shikshapatri and this Shikshapatri Bhashya itself will help us in the future to make the right decisions.

The right knowledge derived will act as a tool and strengthen us to keep away from that which is false. All sorts of philosophies and views will be forced upon you, but with true knowledge on your side you will then be in a position to reject that which is false. This Vedic knowledge will benefit you in life generally and so it is imperative that a keen interest in learning is adopted.

TEXT 26

One shall never speak such truth which might bring about harm to oneself or others, nor keep the company of ungrateful people, nor take any bribe from anyone in social affairs.

Svaparahajanam Satyam Bhashyam Na Karahichit /

Honesty is almost certainly the best policy; however there are some exceptions to this rule. Lord Swaminarayan explains that one shall not speak the truth, if such truth results in harm to oneself or others. It is said that there is absolutely no benefit in causing harm to oneself or to others. One cannot attain *Punya* through such action. In this way, the consolidation of *Ahimsa Dharma* is foremost.

Shastras write: *Svadrohat Tav Kopaha Parasampindya Cha Tathadharmam* - harm to oneself will simply invoke rage and harm to others is Adharmic (unrighteous).

Honesty is cherished in Hinduism. Truth (*Satya*) is one of the foundations of Dharma. But why is this so? **Yajur Veda's Brahmana** explains, 'Those who speak the truth are compared to feeding *Ghee* to *Agni* (fire). By so doing the fire burns brightly, thus an honest person exudes brilliance in much the same way. They are endowed with qualities of goodness which are representative of bliss and external salvation. However, those who lie are compared to putting water into the fire, thus extinguishing such brilliance. Such people have no brilliance and are forever endowed in sinful acts. Therefore one must always speak the truth.'

The **Bhagwat** adds, 'There is no bigger *Adharma* than that of falsehood.' Mother Earth - **Pruthvi** has said, 'I am competent and strong enough to bear all. But I cannot bear and support an untruthful person.'

Mokshdharma stipulates, 'Falsehood is *Tamo Guni* (bad nature or darkness). From such *Tamo Gunn* is born corruption. Falsehood is Adharmic, which is *Tamo Gunn* incarnate. From *Tamo Gunn* is born external pain and suffering.' Therefore we must always speak the truth.

Having said this, we are told to lie in certain situations. In **Brahucha Brahmana Grantha** it explains, 'We must never speak falsely. By speaking falsely, one disgraces oneself. However, if by speaking the truth, one causes harm to oneself and others, then in such situation one must lie in order to save oneself and others from harm.'

Shrimad Bhagwat offers other situations where it is acceptable (and without sin) to lie, 'One should never speak falsely. Those who do not become renowned. Such persons are considered dead, though they are alive. However, if necessary, one may speak falsely in the following situations: (1) in front of a woman (2) jokingly (3) at a wedding (4) to maintain oneself or provide for oneself (5) to save oneself or others from harm or even death (6) for a cow or Brahmin/Guru and (7) for non-violent purposes.'

Note, that there is emphasis of lying **if necessary** here. Some of the situations seem a little questionable. To lie in front of a woman is acceptable - this to many women may seem offensive but there is a good reason for this - women can't keep a secret! This isn't my personal opinion but is fact. The reason for this is that **Maharaja Yudhishtira** set forth a curse to all women, that they will never be able to keep a

secret as Mother Kunta did not tell the Pandavas that Karna (Radheya) was their elder brother. Therefore, if something is to be kept a secret, then you may lie to women.

You may lie in order to get married say our saints. To slightly bend the truth or praise yourself more than what is true in order to secure a marriage, or praise a son/daughter in such a way, is without sin.

You may lie to maintain yourself, cows and Brahmins. Therefore you may lie to get some food or to get a job say. However, in all such causes you must have a limit. To wilfully and blatantly lie in such situations is undesirable.

Mokshdharma says, ‘One should speak the truth which is not likely to harm anybody, which does not accuse anybody, is not deceitful, harsh or cruel and is not slanderous.’

Narad Muni has explained, ‘The voice of truth is a means of morality and righteousness. It is a means to eternal bliss. The knowledge of the truth is difficult. However, Satya is that which acts for the welfare of all beings.’ Hence Satya (truth) is Ahimsa (non-violence).

It is not always obvious what the truth is and so **Linga Puran** specifies what should be accepted as the truth. ‘What is seen and heard, what is supposed (conclusive through knowledge), what has been experienced and what doesn’t harm others; such is the truth.’

Yagnavalkya explains, ‘After speaking falsely one should rectify the consequence of speaking false and then perform *Prayaschit*.’ **Kalidasa Raghuvamsa Kavya** even forbids the use of lies jokingly, ‘The great Dasaratha never spoke falsely. Even jokingly, with his close friend Indra he would never lie. Not only that, but he would not speak harshly against even his enemy.’ Thus Dasharatha is praised for absolute control over his speech.

Now let us consider Lord Swaminarayan’s further message:

Krutagnasangastyaktavyo Luccha Grahya Na Kasyachit //

One shall never keep the company of ‘**Krutagnas**’ the ungrateful that take bribes from other. Those who do not appreciate the help given to them are *Krutagnis*. Shatanand explains: ***Krutagnasyatipatakitvat - Krutagnis*** are sinful degenerates and so should never be associated with. Those who do not appreciate others especially for their help are the worst types of people and are not worthy of existence. **Deval Muni** says, ‘Prayaschit for various other great sins are given but no such Prayaschit is given for a Krutagni.’

Mahabharat explains, ‘Krutagnis who do not appreciate the value of friendship are the worst types of people.’ **Vidurji** explains the consequence of these Krutagnis after death, ‘Even Rakshases (devils) are not prepared to eat the flesh of these Krutagnis.’ Therefore it is imperative that all contact with such people is broken. Those who speak to such people become party to the sins of that person.

Mitakshara explains, ‘By speaking to, touching, breathing near, sitting with, staying with, eating with, performing a Yagna with, learning from, associating in weddings and otherwise with such sinful people leads to the sins of such people being absorbed by oneself.’

Also one must never accept bribes - ‘**Luccha**’. **Kashikhand** explains, ‘Bribery money and money from a gamble should never be accepted.’ **Virat Parva** (of *Mahabharat*) explains firmly, ‘Those who take bribery money should be killed.’ **Yagnavalkya** in **Rajadharma** says, ‘Those who live off bribed wealth should be stripped of their wealth and thrown out of the city.’ **Manu** in his **Smruti** explains, ‘Those who

take bribery money should be severely beaten.’ **Virat Parva** adds, ‘Those who accept bribes are made to suffer. Their families also suffer and indeed their future generations suffer as a result.’

Therefore it is important that money is acquired through honest means and never bribed out of a person. Similarly we must always watch whose company we take. These messages are for the benefit of man. By obeying these we surely will live a pleasant and fruitful life. Those who break these commandments are eternally made to suffer.

TEXT 27

One shall never associate with thieves, sinners, drug addicts, hypocrites, licentious and such other deceitful persons.

Markandeya Puran gives us an extensive list of people, places and situations to stay away from:

1. Those supposed ‘*Pundits*’ who teach the wrong things and who behave inappropriately (contrary to *Vedic* laws).
2. Those people who have pride and who are intoxicated with themselves through the progress they have achieved.
3. Those who preach incorrectly, such as fictitious philosophies which are against Vedic laws.
4. Those who are discourteous and immodest.
5. Those of bad conduct.
6. Those who steal.
7. Those who question everything.
8. Those who spend too much.
9. Those who are selfish.
10. Those who hold a grudge and seek revenge.
11. Those who speak lies.
12. Those who are cruel.
13. Those who are strong and powerful.
14. Those who are poor.
15. Those who are slanderous.
16. Those who rely too much on destiny - attitude of being born as a sinner.

Those who associate with these types of people adopt the bad qualities of these persons. Thus all of these qualities are undesirable and so one should never associate with such people. **Hansa Gita** has explained, ‘Those who associate with or serve a saint adopt the saintly qualities of the saint. Those who serve an unsaintly person (a person with bad and sinful conduct) adopt his unsaintly qualities. Similarly those who serve a *Tapasvi* (performer of penance) receive the fruits of the *Tapasvi* and himself exudes the brilliance of the *Tapasvi*. In this way, man becomes coloured by the nature he associates with.’ The last message in the previous quote amplifies the Gujarati saying - ‘*jevu sung tevu rung*’.

Vanaparva of **Mahabharat** says, ‘Association with inferior people lead to one’s mind also becoming inferior, association with mediocre people leads to oneself becoming mediocre and association with superior people leads to one’s own mind, intellect and self becoming superior.’

Skanda Puran’s Vasudev Mahatmya explains, ‘One’s actions are contrived from one’s association with various Shastras and types of people. Therefore one must never associate with immoral people.’

Manu explains, 'Those who associate with sinful people must perform the *Prayaschit* of the sinful person who commits such sin in order to nullify his sin of association.' Disassociation must be nine-fold, as outlined by **Brihaspati**: (1) to sleep with, (2) to sit with, (3) to sit in line with (*Pankti*), (4) to drink with, (5) to eat with in a line, (6) to perform a *Yagna* with, (7) to learn with, (8) to marry with and (9) to eat with generally. **Vidurji** explains, 'Those who do not associate with these various sinful persons are eternally happy and comfortable in life.' Shatanand also adds that one should not associate with the very ill, as such consequence is also imminent.

Therefore Lord Swaminarayan writes this Shlok to save all his disciples from such consequence of misfortune, sin and misery. He specifies six types of people which he feels are the worst kinds of persons and which cover all undesirable persons. He mentions thieves (*Chor*), sinners (*Papi*) and addicts (*Vyasanis*) which includes all eighteen Vyasanas mentioned by Manu, as well as the drugs such as tobacco, heroin etc. He also mentions people who are unrighteous (*Pakhandi*) who are bent on worldly and lustful desires (*Kaami*) and who are deceitful (*Kimiya*).

All such persons have no place in society and so it would be ridiculous for us, devotees of God to associate with them. They are an insult to mankind and we must never associate with these people and become party to their sinful ways.

TEXT 28

One shall never associate with those people who under the pretext of preaching religion or devotion to God, seek wealth, women or worldly pleasures and commit sin.

Lord Swaminarayan, in this Shikshapatri has emphasised the importance of disassociation. He has put much effort in pointing out that association with various types of people, often sinners, is just as bad as committing the sins themselves. For this reason to associate with these sinners is undesirable.

The Lord in this Shlok brings up a point that is very relevant today. There exists many pseudo *Bhaktas* and *Gnaanis* who use their knowledge and cunning nature unscrupulously, to act wilfully for personal gain. Those who act in this way insult the Gods, says Shatanand.

Padma Puran explains, 'Those who use their strengths (of knowledge and devotion) corruptly and thereby commit sin, can never redeem their sins, by any penance.' **Goswami Shree** explains, 'Those who act in such a way are guilty of sin. Such people, who are otherwise destined for salvation, are made to repeatedly endure the bondage of births and deaths.' Therefore such acts destroy righteous actions.

Similarly one should never act as though they are God. They should never impersonate God. Those who do are made to suffer in hell. They are great sinners and so association with such people is also unacceptable.

Hankering after women and wealth are great sins alone. However those who use their Bhakti and Gnaan to aid these acts are the worst of sinners. Those who promote their 'divinity' can never be trusted. Association with such persons or groups will never attain *Mukti*.

TEXT 29

One shall never hear or believe those scriptures in which the existence of Lord Shree Krishna and his incarnations have been skilfully and deceitfully denied or degraded.

Those Shastras that do not accept the various incarnations of Shree Krishna - *Krushnakrushnavatararam* - thus any of the twenty-four incarnations such as *Varaha, Kurma, Buddha, Rama* etc., should never be believed - *Shastraari Na Manyani Kadachana*. Such Shastras are not true Vedic scriptures and so are not worthy of any respect.

There are so many Shastras that argue the various forms of God - *Sakaar* (of form) and *Nirakaar* (formless). Those Shastras which preach the *Nirakaar* form, explaining that God is never *Sakaar*, should also be disregarded. Such books are considered as inconsistent with the true Vedic beliefs.

In the Bhashya upon the 29th Shlok, we look deeply at the greatness of God Shree Krishna and the various qualities of God. In **Shrimad Bhagwat** it is written: 'Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, the Upanishads, Sankhya Shastra, Yoga Shastra and Shastras which sing the greatness of 'Bhakta', were accepted by Mother Yashoda to be incarnate in her son.' Krishna is the knower of the Vedas, whose beautiful pastimes are sung by those with knowledge. He is the one who creates, sustains and destroys the universe. By beckoning him through Vedic Shloks, one becomes enveloped in happiness.

Shruti explains: *Sarve Veda Yatpadmamanti* - 'The Vedas are his lotus feet.' **Smruti** further explains: *Vedaischa Sarvairhameva Vega* - 'Only I alone, through the Vedas, should be understood and studied.' Also - *Vasudevpara Vedaha Narayanapara Vedaha* - 'The Vedas are Vasudev and Narayan incarnate.' Therefore those Shastras which deny the greatness of God, Shree Krishna and the Vedas are to be disregarded as they instil falsehood.

Shree Shankracharya has said, 'God is to be recognised and meditated upon as the Vedas incarnate. The Vedanta, Adhyatmic Shastras, Puranas and Satvat Tantras (Shiva-Parvati discourses) all glorify the fact that God is the cause of supreme consciousness and the destroyer of darkness.' Therefore these Shastras should be studied.

In **Vishnu Sahastranaam Bhashya**, it is explained that Krishna is the Vedas incarnate: *Satchitanand Rupaiya Krushnaklishtakarirni Namu Vedantavedaiya Guruve Buddhishakshire* - 'He is Satchitanand Rupaiya (of truth, existence and bliss), through which he uplifts his followers. He is Vedanta embodied and the Guru. He is the witness of intellect. To him, Shree Krishna, I humbly pay homage to by bowing before.' Thus only Krishna and his incarnations, the Vedas and other such Holy Scriptures are worthy of praise and study. Those who follow other untruthful Shastras receive sin for their actions, explains **Yagnavalkya**.

Now Shatanand goes into in-depth detail about the nature of God. Specifically he refutes the arguments by pseudo-Vedantins, who claim that God is always and everywhere formless (*Nirakaar*).

He explains the various attributes as outlined by Shrutis. Firstly the *Nirakaar* aspects of *Parabrahman* are: without lustre, without action, peaceful, without error, without beatitude, without qualities and without senses. Along with this are the *Nirakaar* aspects of *Brahman*: without vital breath, without mind, white, without hands or feet.

The *Sakaar* qualities of God are now given: *Gnaha* - the knower, *Guni* - with qualities, *Sarvavidaha* - master of knowledge, *Dharmavaham* - upholder of Dharma, *Papnudam* - destroyer of sins, *Bhavesham* -

regulator of qualities, *Gnaatvatmasthanamrutvam* - the eternal indweller of Atma, *Vishvadam* - the light of the universe, *Devatanam Paramcha Daivatam* - the greatest of Devas, *Patim Paatinam* - the husband of husbands, *Parmam Parastad* - higher than the highest, *Vidaam Devam Buvaneshamiyam* - the regulator of the universe, *Taamisvararam Param Maheshvaram* - the greatest of Ishwaras.

He then gives the nature of *Atma*: without fault, without old age, without death, without desire, without thirst or hunger, the indweller, the master of qualities, with good motives, true thinking, with all desires, with all smells and with all tastes.

Shatanand explains that words such as *Nirgun* etc. are imprecise in definition and so should be disregarded. God's form is *Divya* (divine). It is beyond specific notions of form and formless categorisation.

Vayu Puran has explained that God has six limbs: (1) *Sarvagnaata* - omniscient or all-knower, (2) *Truptira* - satiated or satisfied, (3) *Anaadibodhaha* - with endless knowledge, (4) *Svatantrata* - independent or free, (5) *Nityamaluptadastiha* - forever with fair vision or outlook and (6) *Ananta Shaktischa* - with eternal strength.

Vishnu Puran explains, 'God is beyond the qualities of the three modes of nature (*Satva, Raja and Tama*). He is beyond the ordinary and is extraordinary.' **Padma Puran** adds, 'Mention of God as *Nirgun* (devoid of qualities) is termed as ordinary and so should be rejected.'

Ramanujacharya has propounded in his *Vishishtadvait* philosophy: 'God's nature of offering salvation typifies his *Sagun* (with qualities and form) nature. He is therefore beyond the ordinary nature of *Nirgun*.' Thus God does have a form which is divine and personable. None should think that God is without body. Such questions arise because we are not able to realise the true nature of God due to the incapacity of the human senses. God has form, which can be seen by those who have divine vision as explained in Shastras.

Shatanand explains how to have such Darshan of God. **Sanatsujaat** and **Yagnavalkya** explain, 'Yogis who meditate upon God, which resides within the Atma, are able to have vision of the eternal God Supreme.'

Shankracharya explains, 'Those who through renunciation, study, strictness, devotion and absolute meditation understand the nature of God are freed from the darkness of worldly life.' **Smrutis** further explain the realisation of God as Sakaar, 'Yogis control their senses and steady them within the mind. They then steady the mind within the Atma (soul). After which, they are able to have Darshan of God Supreme. He is without smoke, but burns like the fire. He is with lustre like the sun; he is like a flash of lightning. Such is he, who is seen by Muktas and Yogis (realised souls) within their hearts. Those who eat less, have a pure mind and who are great intellectuals are able to see God in his greatest of forms.'

Now Shatanand explains the difference between *Atma* and *Paramatma*: *Atma* is a *Jivatma*'s speech. *Jivatma* is the body of the *Paramatma*. *Jivatma* is that which is within the body, which through delusion enjoys worldly pleasures. Only when he is able to realise that he is separate and distinct from *Paramatma*, which resides within him, is he freed from desire and sin and thus enters the path of God Realisation. Therefore Shrutis preach the distinct nature of *Atma* and *Paramatma*. Those that view God in any way other than that described in Sat-Shastras are destined for the hells.

God, who is beyond *Maya* (illusion) and who is real, must therefore have a place of residence. Thus Shatanand explains the Lord's heaven - *Akshardhaam*. **Chandogyopanishad** explains, 'The Lord's abode *Brahmpur* is true and real (*Etat Satyam Brahmpuram*). This *Brahmlok* is free from undesirable

qualities.’ **Mundak Upanishad** explains, ‘The divine Brahmpur is the abode of Parabrahman.’ Thus God is real and he has a place to reside, which is also real. It is also written that the universe resides within God’s Dhaam.

Shrimad Bhagwat Gita explains, ‘Those *Brahmnishtas* who go to the heavens are able to attain God. The Sun, Moon nor the Fire need illuminate it. Once there, they never have to return. Such is my great *Dhaam*.’ **Mokshdharma** explains, ‘After reaching the eternal heaven, I became fully satiated.’ **Bhagwat** explains, ‘God, who is beyond the darkness of Maya, showed his heaven to the *Govarias* (cowherds). Genuine, knowledge, eternal, full of lustre and endless is such *Brahman Dhaam*. *Munis* (saints), free from the three modes of nature are forever meditating upon God’s Dhaam. This great *Dhaam* called *Akshardhaam*, is where the supreme Lord Vishnu resides.’

Shatanand now explains the types of people that are promoted to the heaven: ‘O Uddhava - Those who act in accordance with the path ordained by myself, who are beyond Kala (time) and Maya (illusion), blissfully attain my *Akshardhaam*.’ Similarly **Shastras** explain, ‘Those with a controlled mind, peace and who have overcome their senses are promoted to the greatest of heavens.’

Shastras have explained this great Dhaam of God as *Vaikunth* or *Golok*. **Chandogya Upanishad** has explained that *Brahmcharya* (celibacy) is a means to *Brahmlok*. Similarly **Gita** says: *Yadichanto Brahmcharyam Charanti* - ‘They follow the code of Brahmcharya in order to attain the heavens.’

Lord Vyaas has explained that all other heavens are like hell compared to the great Brahmloka. **Mahabharat** explains, ‘Brihaspati’s, Vayu’s, Vishvadeva’s, Sadhyadeva’s, Ashvinikumara’s, Rudra’s, Aditya’s, Vasu’s and all other Devta’s Lokas (heavens) seem like *Narak* (hell) compared to Paramatma’s abode.’ Thus the Dhaam of Lord Hari is the greatest and best.

Now Shatanand explains the fact that God is one, but at the same time exists everywhere - he is omnipresent. To say that the Sakaar Lord (having form) cannot exist in this way everywhere is completely false. The Sun, which is real and with form (as a planetary body) is able to be omnipresent through his rays. Thus the sunlight is able to enlighten the world around us. In this way, the Lord is one in the heaven, but is omnipresent throughout the whole universe. This is explained in **Svetasvatar Upanishad** also.

God can exist in numerous forms just as the moon can have many reflections of it in the river. In this way, God, in his numerous forms, is able to reside within everything and everyone. He is able to take multiple forms and exist separately everywhere. Existing in this way, he gives the fruits of their actions to individuals, as he is witness to their actions. God is within everything and everything is within God. And so God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent - the all power, the all knower and the all pervader. The Lord is all of these whilst maintaining his Sakaar (with form) nature.

Now Shatanand glorifies Paramatma as none other than Shree Krishna. In the earlier Shrutis, the name Shree Krishna does not appear. However, none should question the supreme Godhead of Krishna thinking that it is somebody else. **Vasudev Mahatmya** succinctly states: *Shreekrushnaha Param Brahman* - ‘Shree Krishna is Parambrahman - the supreme Lord.’

Great Munis and saints such as Vyaas and Shreedhar Swami as well as various Shastras such as the Bhagwat, Puranas etc. have all spoken of Shree Krishna as Parabrahman. In **Shrimad Bhagwat**, God was often referred to as Shree Krishna even before his Avatar, i.e. Krishna was born in Dwapara Yuga but reference to Shree Krishna as God is given much earlier in Satya Yuga: **Pruthu Raja’s** story reveals - *Ariradhiyishuha Krushnamcharatap Uttamam* - ‘Devotion to Lord Shree Krishna is the greatest of penance.’ **Ajamil’s** story also reveals: *Ajamilopyathakarya Dutanam Yamakrushnayoha* - ‘Ajamil

listened to the servants of Yama and Krishna.’ **Bharat’s** story also reveals: *Sa Mam Smrutirmrugdehepi Vir Krushnarchanprabhava No Jahati* - ‘Even in the body of a deer, I am not able to forget my devotion to Shree Krishna.’

Indeed Shatanand continues to state quotations from Prahlad Charitra, Dhruvakhyan, Puranjan Akhyan, Yayati Charitra, Vrutasura Katha, Vyaas-Narad Samvada, Rudra Gita, Prachetas Akhyan, Nimijayante Samvad, Punsavan Vrat, Janmaprakarn, Shree Goswami and Shree Vallabhacharya Samavad, who have all spoken of Shree Krishna as being God Supreme and the highest aim. Shatanand adds that **Ramanuja in Gitabhasya, Shankracharya in Vishnu Sahastranaam Bhashya** and **Shreedhar Swami in Bhagwat Tika** have all spoken of Shree Krishna as Parabrahman.

Shree Madhusudan Saraswati in his **Gita Bhashya** writes, ‘Radiant with flute in hand, who moves like the rain, with yellow clothing, with beautiful lips (like ripen fruits), with a face like the full moon, like the petal of a lotus flower and who is with beautiful pointed eyes, such is Shree Krishna who is incomparable and unique. None other has such qualities.’ ‘Those who do not accept Krishna as Parabrahman are *Asuras* (demons).’

Shree Krishna is Parabrahman for he himself has said in the **Gita**, ‘Those who know of my divine birth and actions are never again born upon this earth after leaving the body. O Arjun, such persons attain me.’ Therefore one must understand the manifestive form of God (*Avirbhav*), the divine form (*Bhagwat Roop*), the eternal form (*Nityaparnu*) and the supreme form (*Satchitanand*) of God.

Through *Gnaan* (knowledge) one must understand the nature of God and never to believe those Shastras which are contrary to true Vedic beliefs. The great **Baadrayan** (Lord Vyaas), the greatest amongst the knowers of the Supreme commands, ‘Truthful, the knower, eternal, blissful, with attractive form, whose greatness cannot be fully comprehended, yet is visible through the Upanishads, who exists in his numerous forms (*Amayikparnu*) and who is supreme (*Satchitanand Roop*), such is God Supreme as explained in **Vaishnavtoshirni**.

Those Shastras which are contrary to this, which destroy such greatness of God, should never be believed.’ **Varaha Puran** forbids the study of these Shastras, ‘Those who reject My true Shastras and read other scriptures are born again and again.’ Those who write these refutable Shastras are considered an enemy to true Vedic beliefs. **Mahabharat’s Mokshdharma** (96 *Adhyay*) explains, ‘Those who do not understand the true nature of Shastras are foes of true Shastras. They are considered as thieves. Followers of such refutable philosophies are hypocrites and are deluded into Nirgun (formless) aspects. They are never able to realise the true nature of God. They, with Tamoguni (impure) body, forever stay defiled.’

Shatanand now introduces the concept of *Maya*. Firstly he explains that Maya is without effect in the heavens. Indeed all such backward forces have no effect there. Maya is described as darkness but is also the cause of creation of the universe, according to the Bhagwat. Maya is the cause of disgrace. **Vaishnavtosharni** explains, ‘Maya is ignorance and an obstacle of unsteadiness. Such Maya (known as *Apar*) is never associated with God.’

Now is introduced a second type of Maya. The first type, which results in illusion and arrogance, has been already termed as *Apar Maya*. The second type is termed *Para Maya*. This Maya is described as the very consciousness of Paramatma - his animate life force. **Shrutis** explain that it is his strength, his active force. They further explain - *Mayagach Prakrutim Vidhyad* - ‘Understand Maya to be Prakruti (nature, cause of creation, fundamental quality)’.

Shree Vishnu Swami writes, 'The skilful disposition of Lord Satchitanand's power is Maya'. Such Maya is often called *Yoga Maya* and is his divine sport. Yoga Maya is considered an integral part of God - it is not separate, as it obeys the Lord's wishes always.'

Shree Vishnu's Bhagwati Maya has deluded this world (as it is difficult to understand). Such Maya, through instruction from God, incarnates upon this earth to fulfil the Lord's cause (just as she aided the Lord during Krishna Janma).

Vishvaprakash Kosh explains: *Maya Dambhe Krupayam Cha* - 'Maya is hipocracy and favour.' Similarly Maya has been explained as intellect, compassion and illusion also. Those who are privileged to obtain the heavens become free from Maya inherent in the physical body. God is always beyond Maya as he is supreme and eternal. He is great and beyond ordinary mortal influence. He is the cause of the creation, the maintenance and destruction of this universe and there is nothing beyond his power. Therefore one must understand the nature of God as outlines by Sat-Shastras and never be led astray by those false Shastras which teach the wrong Vedantic philosophy.

Swami Shatanand, in this Shlok has gone to great depth and length to clarify the true nature of God. Such subject is difficult to comprehend and indeed comment on in such a small space and so one should refer to the other scriptures relevant to this subject. The commentary of this Shlok is by far the longest in the whole Bhashya of Shatanand's covering wide ranging issues which are interesting and at the same time difficult to grasp. I therefore hope that readers can understand the underlying principles. I hope that this has been an accurate translation and the various omissions (due to its length) have not caused any loss of information.

TEXT 30

One shall never drink unfiltered water or milk nor bathe with water which contains many organisms.

Agalitam Na Patavyam Paniyam Cha Payastatha /

One shall never drink (*Patavyam*) water (*Paniyam*) or milk (*Payastatha*) unfiltered (*Agalitam*). Shatanand writes that filtration must take place using a piece of cloth - *Galitam Vastraputam*. Something used other than a cloth is considered unfiltered and so should be taken note of.

The **Smrutis** explain, 'Water from a leather pail and water unfiltered are like meat. (*Charmavari Bhavenmaisam Maisam Toyamgalitam*). Also, *Gavya* (milk, yoghurt, lassi, butter and Ghee) kept in a metallic pot (*Tamba*) is like liquor.' Therefore Shatanand says that to drink unfiltered water results in the sin of eating meat.

Shatanand here clarifies the point of *Gavya* kept in *Tamba Patra*. He explains that *Gavya* other than Ghee is like liquor. Also milk and other such substances, kept in a *Tamba* for purposes of *Deva Pooja*, *Yagna*, milking, serving or for use by an ascetic is acceptable. Similarly milk kept in a *Tamba* pot, whose skin has not been removed is acceptable also.

Shatanand explains that unfiltered milk should never be drunk. Sometimes such milk may contain tiny hairs from the body of the cow. For such instance of drinking milk containing hairs, *Prayaschit* is written by **Prachet**: 'Those who inadvertently partake of a nail, hair, mud, metal or clay etc. even once, should fast for an entire day to cleanse themselves of such sin.' Also *Ghee* (or butter) bought should always be

cleansed by filtering. Often such things purchased may contain hair, insects etc. and so careful use of these is required.

Harit Muni in **Mitakshara** explains, 'Those who eat insects, worms, dirt or water containing these should live off *Govmutar* (cow urine) and *Govchaarn* (cow excrement) for three days as Prayaschit, to nullify such sin.' **Smurtis** further explain that filtered water will stay pure for six hours and after such time has elapsed it should be re-filtered. Also, it is written that one who drinks without filtering, just once accumulates the sin accumulated by a fisherman in six months.

Snaanadi Naiva Kartavyam Sukshmajantumayambhasa ||

One should never bathe in water that contains small organisms. Such water should never be used to wash hands or feet, wash clothes or cutlery. Those who ignore this commandment are the cause of death to many such organisms and so break the great *Dharma* of *Ahimsa*. Those who act contrary to the Lord's words are born again and again upon the earth as insects and the like.

TEXT 31

One shall never take medicine which contains alcohol or meat, nor take medicine from an unknown physician.

Manusmriti explains a course of action for such sin: 'Those who partake of medicines which contain liquor even accidentally should perform the ritual of purification - *Sanskar*.' **Marichi Smruti** says, 'Those who partake of medicines containing flesh (animal extracts) should perform *Taptakruchravrat* in order to redeem one's sins.' *Taptakruchravrat* is a very strict course of fasting involving numerous days of consecutive fasting amongst other purification rituals.

The Lord instructs that we go only to those doctors who are reputed, who have complete knowledge in the field of medicine and pharmacy. Only such *Ayur Vedic* doctors who are versed in herbal remedies should be consulted and not those who are likely to prescribe alternatives containing liquor or animal contents.

As mentioned, there is a science of Medicine in Vedic terms. Our great Hindu Sanatan Dharma has many subjects of study all stemming from the Vedas. Shastras speak of sixty-four such sciences and arts which Lord Shree Krishna is famed to have mastered in merely sixty-four days. Many of these sciences have western equivalents and indeed these western equivalents are often based on our Hindu teachings: **Ayur Shastra** (study of medicine), **Jyotisha Shastra** (Astronomy), **Shilpa Shastra** (Architecture), **Gandharva Shastra** (music and dance), **Dhanur Shastra** (military strategic science), **Niti Shastra** (politics) etc.

Ayur Veda is much more than just Medicine, it is the '*Art and Science*' of healthy living, which utilises foods, spices, herbs, colours, metals, gems and sound to overcome illnesses, promoting health of the body, clarity of the mind and tranquillity of the spirit. It is believed to be the oldest system of medicine in the world. It is also believed that our Ayur Veda influenced the Chinese system of medicine. Indeed its influence can be recognised all over the world.

Ayur Veda Shastra in its true sense is brilliant as it does not promote the use of alcohol or flesh as a means of curing illnesses. For this reason the Lord forbids the use of such medicines when vegetarian and non-alcoholic substitutes exist. Those who are knowledgeable in our old Ayur Veda system of medicine can only provide such alternatives though. Therefore only these Doctors should be referred to; who are able to prescribe alternatives.

TEXT 32

One shall never excrete, urinate or spit in places which have been prohibited by religious scriptures and society (dilapidated temples, banks of rivers or ponds, main roads, fields sown with seeds, shades of trees, orchards, gardens).

Sthaneshu Lokashastrabhyam Nishidveshu Kadachana /
Malmutrotsarjanam Cha Na Karyam Stivanam Tatha //

Those places (*Sthaneshu*) forbidden (*Nishidveshu*) by society (*Lok*) and scriptures (*Shastras*) should never (*Kadachana*) be excreted (*Mal*), urinated (*Mutram*) in nor spitted (*Stivanam*) upon.

Shatanand forbids the pass of nose mucus in such places as well. He further adds to the list of places which should not be violated in this way: firstly the places prohibited by society are as follows - near somebody else's house, in a king's place of residence and near the place of an armed warrior. Secondly the places prohibited by Shastras are: where cows are kept, near a burrow, in water (pond etc.), in a pile of ashes, an estuary where animals live, standing in a path, in front of or in close proximity of either a cow, Brahmin, sun, moon, fire, Guru, women and God, a ploughed field, banks of a river, in sand, an old ruin, in a temple of God, in a road. a cleansed area and without covering your head.

Thus these places as ordained by **Skanda Puran** and so shall never be excreted or urinated in. Hence all places other than those mentioned may be used for excretion purposes. The twelve forms of excretion (*Mal*) are given in **Sharirik Samgraha**: (i) tallow (ii) semen (iii) blood (iv) the marrow of a bone (v) urine (vi) excrement (dung) (vii) ear and skin dirt (wax) (viii) nails (ix) nose mucus (x) tears (xi) eye mucus and (xii) perspiration. The Lord has mentioned only two forms of excretion (*Mal*) in the original text but all such forms of *Mal* should not be passed in such places.

This Shlok seems blatantly obvious but it had to be included in the Shikshapatri as often we may pass such excretion without thought. In essence we really should perform calls of nature in one's home - the bathroom/toilet as such place is designated for such action. Never should we perform such act outside in the open air.

Lord Swaminarayan calls for hygiene and social decorum here. Passing bodily filth in various places mentioned is uncivilised, impure and an insult. Purity and cleanliness are human directives. Nature and the world around us are to be kept pure and clean and never to be made filthy by passing of bodily waste. Nature is home to many creatures and so we should respect it by keeping it clean just as we keep our own homes clean. We have absolutely no right to pass filth in such places. One must always, even in times of desperation, be civilised and never to violate the world around us.

Many diseases are caused by such dirt being exposed to the land and air. An improper sewage system causes great illness to those in close proximity and therefore it is vital that we have respect for nature and the world we live in.

TEXT 33

One shall never enter or exit through a secret way and shall not occupy even temporarily any private property without the permission of its owner.

Adhvarera Na Nirgamyam Praveshtavyam /

The Lord forbids entry through an 'Adhvara'. Shatanand explains: *Advarereti Alpam Dhvaramdvaram* - an Adhvara is a small (or secret) way. The Lord forbids the use of such undisclosed or secretive pathways to and from a house. Such pathways are not for public use and so by using such paths, one commits the crime of trespassing.

Yagnavalkya says, 'One should never look at a cow feeding her young. Nor enter a town or house through an Adhvara.' This may also be interpreted for safety reasons as using such passageways, which are poorly lighted, can be a danger to oneself.

Manusmruti maintains that the owner's permission should always be sought before entering a bounded house or town. **Kashi Khanda** forbids entering intrusively as well as to lodge in a school for even one night without permission. Those who lodge without permission can cause the owner to become enraged, resulting in them being thrown out. This will brew anger within those thrown out which will lead to tragic consequences, explains Shatanand. For this reason, the owners' permission should be taken always.

Yogeshvara explains, 'One should renounce (stay away from) another's bed, another's seat, another's garden (or farm), another's house and another's vehicle. Only if they are offered, should they be used. Also, one must never partake in any food (except *Prasad* - remnants of a Yagna) without the consent of its owner.

'*Stthane Saswamike*' is used to indicate places that have owners. Therefore it is logically deferred that there must exist places which do not have owners and so may be entered without permission. **Vashista Muni** explains these: 'The jungle, a river, mountains, caves, religious places and holy ground. These places are without an owner.'

TEXT 34

My male disciples shall never listen to the religious discourses given by females, nor enter into arguments with female rulers and courtiers.

Gnaanvartashrutirnarya Mukhat Karya Na Purushauha /

Men (*Purushauha*) shall never (*Karya*) listen to religious discourses of Shastras (*Gnaan-Varta-Shruti*) from the face (*Mukhat*) of women (*Narya*). Thus knowledge of *Atma-Paramatma* as well as the supreme knowledge outlined in **Bhagwat Gita** should never be listened to.

Shatanand here explains that religious discourses (*Varta*) and supreme knowledge (*Gnaan*) are the very form of God - that is, they are tools through which the very form and nature of God can be understood. Here '*Varta*' includes '*Katha*' as well as singing of God's praise and so *Varta* should be understood in this wider context.

Our Shastras have gone into great depth to segregate the sexes as the association of the two can lead to the mind to wander and thus become weak. **Dharma Sangrah** goes further to say, 'Males should not sing with women, sleep with women, walk with women nor ever listen to discourses by women.'

Shrimad Bhagwat provides a reason for this segregation, 'Man becomes deluded, weak and obsessed at times of association with women. Such behaviour is not evident in other situations. The over powering nature of *Maya* (illusion) becomes overwhelming and difficult to control and so he is left bewildered

unable to subdue his urges for the woman. This results in a man's foundation of Dharma to become fragmented and thus destroyed.'

'How can a man be undisturbed by a woman's charming face which is like that of the lustrous *Sharad Rutu* (the season marking the end of monsoon season)? How can he be unaffected by her nectar-like voice so sweet and gay to the ears? How can he be safe when her heart is like that of a sharp razor? Who can fully understand such a woman and her gestures? She is able to entice even the purest and wilful of men and reduce them to foolishness.' Thus none can escape the hypnotic nature of a woman.

Rasgandhar explains, 'Puranas, Shastras and Smritis have been created through pure thought and therefore it's teaching of purity of culture and livelihood will stay pure only whilst the mind and thought is pure, which will exist only if the lustful thoughts of women are not able to enter a man's mind.'

Bhartruhari says, 'Even those who understand Shastras, their teachings upon and who have knowledge of Atma, find it difficult to reach the heavens. The reason being that one's eyes may fall upon a woman, which will open the doorway to *Narak* (hell).'

Prabodh Chandroday Natak teaches, 'The disciplines in Shastras that exists within the minds of Great men will stay just as long as the sight of that woman with lotus like eyes does not befall upon him.' **Vidurji** has explained, 'Just as a stone sinks when thrown into a river, a man is sure to sink into ruin in the company of women.' In this way, Shastras have explained the weakness of men in the company of women. Therefore it is forbidden to associate even at times of *Dharma Karyas* such as *Katha Varta*, *Sabhas* etc. and so even sitting together in Sabhas is forbidden as the mind and self are just as vulnerable at these times as they are at others.

Na Vivaadaha Streeya Karyo Na Rajna Na Cha Tajjanaiha //

The Lord forbids '*Vivaada*' with women. Vivaada can be interpreted as either a discussion of controversy or a dispute/quarrel. Similarly Shatanand forbids '*Virudhvaada*' that is, unnecessary talks or discussions. Swami explains that a woman is burdened by a foolish nature - *Murkhaparnu* and those men that needlessly associate with women falling into discussions with them are also cursed with such foolishness.

Indeed **Lord Mahadev** points out seven bad qualities that women possess, which man can acquire through needless association with such women:

*Anrutam Sahasam Maya Murkhatvamati Lobhita /
Asaucham Nirdaitvam Cha Strirameitat Svabhavajam //*

(i) *Anrutam* - untruthfulness (ii) *Sahasam* - rashness (iii) *Maya* - illusory (iv) *Murkhatvamati* - foolishness (v) *Lobhitam* - selfishness (vi) *Asaucham* - impure and (vii) *Nirdaitvam*.

Similarly one should never fall into needless arguments or talks with Kings and Courtiers and persons associated with the King. Shatanand explains that '*Cha*' is used by the Lord to suggest that needless arguments with one's parents be similarly forbidden. **Brahanmanu** has written, 'One should not even speak unnecessarily in a fit of anger with a woman, a King, a King's associate, a sustainer such as an employer, a *Satsangi*, an elder, a child, the ill, a *Guru*, an *Acharya* and those who are learned such as doctors.' These persons are to be always respected and never to be insulted by falling into useless unnecessary arguments or discussions with.

Note that much of what has been said may be offensive to women. These aren't repressive words to down cast women but what Shastras say are the absolute truth and the fact is that minds are weak leading to all sorts of behaviour in the company of the opposite sex.

The Lord has not forbid women from becoming educated and the learning of *Vedantic Gnaan*, nor from preaching about God. In the Swaminarayan Sampraday, these qualities are encouraged in women, with the proviso that their knowledge be directed to only other women in the Sampraday - that is, they preach never to men.

Lord Swaminarayan initiated women into the Sampraday via the Acharya's wives, some of which were *Sankha Yogis* who renounced all in order to serve God. Their whole purpose was to preach to women and to perform Katha Varta upon Shastras to women. In India, where temples are separate for men and women, women look after the entire temple affairs performing Katha Varta, Pooja etc. Thus, in no way are women looked upon as secondary in this Sampraday.

The directives here are for the benefit of mankind. It is fact that lapses can be caused through association with women and indeed can change a devout, pious man into one that disregards God totally and for this reason; this directive is enforced fully so that man is never led astray to unrighteousness. Gods and Great Rishi's have faltered in the midst of an alluring woman, what chance then have the likes of mere man in such instance?

TEXT 35

One shall never insult a Guru, a person who is great, dignified, learned or armed.

Apamano Na Kartavyo Gururaam Cha Variyasaam /
Loke Pratischtitaanaam Cha Vidushaam Shastradhariraam //35//

The Lord here forbids insulting (*Apamaan*) of five types of persons. The first - a **Guru** or Preceptor is a very sacred institution in Hinduism. Indeed great respect is given to a Guru such that they are considered the form of God. 'Gu' means ignorance or darkness and 'ru' means destroy, explains Sanskrit Kars, and so a Guru is one who destroys such ignorance and darkness, delivering knowledge and enlightenment. **Deval Rishi** explains ten people that should be accepted as one's Guru: (1) **Acharyaascha** - an Acharya/spiritual leader (2) **Pitaa** - one's father (3) **Jyeshtho Bhraataa** - one's elder brother (4) **Chaiva Mahimatih** - a king (5) **Matulaha** - a maternal uncle (6) **Shvashura** - father-in-law (7) **Shtrata** - a learned Brahmin (8/9) **Maataamaha-Pitaamahau** - maternal and paternal grandfathers (10) **Varnashreshthaha** - the best or highest in a community and (11) **Pitruvyascha** - a paternal uncle.

Guru Mahima (the greatness of a Guru) has been sang highly of by saints and poets alike. All Sat-Shastras have markedly made an effort to glorify the great institution in Hinduism of *Guru-Shisya* relationship and *Parampara*. For such reason they are given pride of place at the heart of Hinduism. They are thus respected immensely and so should never be insulted or slandered in any way.

Secondly, **Variyasam** - a renowned great person who has good qualities should never be insulted. In **Shrimad Bhagwat**, **Bhagwan Rishabhdeva** explains, 'Those who serve great men - *Satpurush*, open themselves a doorway to the heavens. Those who associate with women or even associate with men who have a tendency to associate with women open themselves a doorway to hell.'

'These men (*Satpurush*) are distinguished. They are with level mind, devoid of anger and a friend to all. Such saintly men are indeed celebrated. Never should these saints who project compassion and other

such great qualities as well as dignified persons of a community, a King, a King's administrators, those great in a family or community with excellent discipline of behaviour, who are bestowed with great qualities, who are wealthy, those who are wise and learned with Vedantic knowledge of Puranas and Shastras; such Brahmins as well as those who are armed should never be insulted nor should they be disrespected or ridiculed. Those who do insult destroy themselves as all that they have is lost - ***Tatkaraya Hi Svasya Sarvasva Nashapateha.***

Yagnavalkya Smruti explains, 'Brahmins and Kshatriyas should never be insulted. Also learned persons (educated highly), members of one's family, the wealthy and renowned people should always be respected and never insulted. Even elderly Shudra caste members should be duly respected if they are educated.'

Shrimad Bhagwat says, 'Those who insult great men who are elder, wealthy, famed or *Dharmic* (follow their duties or religious) fall to destruction and perish. Those who do not respect others who are eminent through their birth, penance, knowledge, behaviour and caste are considered to be dead. After death they suffer terrible pains in the hells, as they are repeatedly tortured.' **Skanda Puran** explains, 'By insulting a Satpurush, even a righteous person is destroyed through the destruction of a long fruitful life and the eradication of all his righteous qualities.'

'*Apamaan*' - insults can be directed with the aim to demote another person. However insults can be indirect and committed without knowledge or intent. **Mahabharat's Anushaasan Parva** explains, 'Even in extreme circumstances he should never speak in *Tu-Kar* with great men.' Furthermore it explains: ***Tvamkaro Va Vadho Veti Vidvatsu Na Vishishyate*** - 'To use Tu-Kar (*Tvamkaro*) with such people is indifferent to killing (*Vadko*) of such person.' Finally the Parva explains: ***Tvamkaram Namadheyam Cha Jyestanam Parivarjyed*** - 'One should refrain (*Parivarjyed*) from speaking in Tu-Kar and addressing by name (*Namadheyam*), such elders (*Jyestanam*).' Thus this final statement suggests that calling elders by name is equivalent to calling them by the disrespectful and insulting Tu-Kar which ultimately is compared to the killing of that person.

For these reasons it is tradition in India for husbands and wives not to utter the name of their partners. Also, Satsangi Jivan explains that by doing so the *Ayushya* (duration of life) of their partner falls. Similarly it is unacceptable to call elders by name such as elder brother or sisters and other family members as well as elders in a community.

Anushaasan Parva explains, 'Those who wish for a long life should never consider a Brahmin, Kshatriya and a serpent as powerless as all are poisonous.' Therefore to insult any, can be the cause of one's own death, such is the power of Brahmins and Kshatriyas.

Guru Gita then explains, 'Students (*Shishyas*) with good manner should never speak egotistically with pride - *Hu-Kar*. Similarly they should never speak untruthfully with their Guru. Those Shishyas who disrespectfully use *Hu-Kar* and *Tu-Kar* with their Guru are born as demons in a land without water.'

Brihaspati explains, 'Those who speak wrathfully with A *Tapasvi*, snake, armed person or *Pativrata* immediately invite death. Therefore one should never cause insult by speaking angrily with these people.' Shatanand adds that these people should always be given the right of way.

Anushaasan Parva says, 'Brahmins, cows, a king, the elderly (*Vrudh*), the tired, women and the weak should always be given the right of way.' **Vrudh** here should be understood as **Vayovrudh** - elderly by age, **Tapovrudh** - elderly by penance, **Vidhyavrudh** - elderly through knowledge, **Gunavrudh** - elderly through good qualities and **Dhanvrudh** - elderly through wealth.

Yagnavalkya further says, 'The Vrudh, those fatigued, kings, Brahmins, women, the ill, a Groom (*Vara*) and a person driving a carriage should always be given way.' **Mitakshara** expands upon this saying that '*Cha*' is used and therefore includes a drunk, a lunatic and a Sanyasi.

In this Shlok, Lord Swaminarayan points out the universality of the Shikshapatri. Shikshapatri isn't just a means to a religious life. It is a means to a virtuous life. The essence of this Shlok isn't difficult to grasp, it is something that all are in one way or another brought up to become and do. This Shlok is about human courtesy and respect for one another. It teaches that we accept and praise those superior to us as such mentality can bring only moral conduct and discipline.

Indeed, this is what living is all about. It is about respect for the elders and respect for one another. Those who slander and insult others have no place in society they have not yet understood the science of living and being. These mentioned people, who are to be bowed before (*Vandaniya*), to be respected and to be idolised should never be insulted as those who insult such great personage insult only themselves. They bring shame to themselves, their families and their being. Those who insult in this way are not human - they are inhuman comparable to beasts and therefore those who have no respect for others can never be worthy of respect to themselves. By serving and respecting these great people such as the elderly, saints and Brahmins, we are serving the Lord Himself. There is no doubt that for such acts, Lord Shree Swaminarayan will look upon us with kind heart and eternally shower his choicest and most sincere blessings. Respect for others breeds humility in oneself that brings kind-heartedness and sincerity; therefore it is very important to have such mentality that is becoming almost certainly deficient in this day and age.

TEXT 36

One shall never perform duties pertaining to one's social affairs without careful consideration, where as duties pertaining to Dharma shall be performed immediately. Those who are learned shall impart their knowledge to others and shall always associate with saintly persons.

Shatanand elaborates, saying that social actions or affairs should be thought about clearly using one's intellect. Such actions should be carried out only after discussing the subject with one that understands the truth - a *Satpurush*. The poet **Bharvi** has said, 'No action should be undertaken without due consideration, as great misery and misfortune can befall such people. Those who always consider carefully their actions become wealthy in all aspects of life.' Thus such a person achieves happiness and prosperity even without applied effort. **Bhartru Hari** adds, 'Actions without thought are likely to cause suffering, just like forcing an arrow through your heart.'

Only those actions that are properly thought out can be considered as positive and constructive useful acts. Much of today's problems are due to actions without thought or consultation. Problems in family, society and communities all too often exist because due care wasn't taken in thinking through their actions and the consequences. Such consideration is vital to acquire a best solution, which is acceptable to all. Such constructive actions build a community to strength whereas irresponsible thoughtless actions fragment and weaken a community. For these reasons Lord Swaminarayan points out a directive which is very important in this day and age.

Lord Swaminarayan further says *Karyo Dharma Satvaram* - actions pertaining to Dharma should be performed immediately without consideration. Why is this so? **Smruti** explains - *Dharma Eva Sahayi Syata Paraloke Na Chetara* - 'Dharma is the only cause of promotion to the heavens.' Furthermore:

Dharmasya Tvarita Gatiha - 'Dharma is a quicker motive force (to the heavens).' Thus Dharma is a strong force, which drives a person faster to the heavens and hence its action need not be questioned.

Dharma makes a person. It builds the great qualities within him. Without Dharma a person is lost forever, it is his link to the heavens. The Greatness of Dharma has been ever glorified in this translation. Saints and Shastras all praise its greatness and righteous people abide by it so that they can attain the heavens. This is why Dharmic actions should be performed immediately. **Mokshdharma** says, 'Actions (Dharmic) to be undertaken tomorrow should be undertaken today, as death does not wait for a person to perform righteous deeds.' Thus one should never put off or postpone their duties as we can never say when death will strike. Death will not wait for a person to successfully complete his/her duties and so it is important that we do as much as we can for Dharma - now!

Shree Hari says - **Pathniyadhithavidhya** the imparting of one's own knowledge to others. A Guru or learned person should pass on his wealth of knowledge and education to a promising and virtuous student (*Shishya*). Shatanand says, **Vishyadaansyatidaantvaditi Bhavaha** - *Vidhya Daan* or giving away of knowledge is the best of all donations. **Smruti** explains, 'The three donations of cows (*Gavaha*), land (*Pruthvi*) and knowledge (*Sarasvati*) are the greatest of donations.' The passing of knowledge is the greatest of acts and so it is praised here.

Daankhand of **Vishnudharmotar** says, 'Those who teach others obtain the greatest of heavens. The greatest penance (*Tapp*) is that performed by one who offers the donation of knowledge to others. In this world, the greatest donation and penance - *Vidhyadaan* will fulfil all desires.'

Nandi Puran then explains the fourteen great studies or subjects (*Chaturdas Vidhya*): 'The six studies of physical nature, *four Vedas*, the *Dharmashastra* (treatise of Dharma), *Puranas*, *Mimamsa* (Vedantic philosophy) and *Tarka* (logic).' From these, thousands of studies have come into being. However three are considered the greatest of studies - (i) **Atma Vidhya** - study into the nature of the soul (ii) **Puran Vidhya** - study of the works of Vyaas - the eighteen Puranas and (iii) **Dharmashastra Vidhya** - study upon Dharma (includes Shrutis and Smrutis). Shatanand says, **Tistra Eta Mata Mukhyaha Sarvadaankriyafalauha** - these three are the greatest of studies and will derive the fruits of performing numerous donations. Thus education is held high in Hinduism, but we must be careful that we study the right subjects - those pertaining to Vedas and Shastras. **Garuda Puran** specifies a Vidhya which is held greater than even these three; hence it is the greatest Vidhya of all: **Vidhyanascha Para Vidhya Brahmvidhya Samirita** - 'The greatest Vidhya of all is *Brahmvidhya* - the knowledge of the supreme (which is the study into the nature of God).' Those who offer such Vidhya to others are showered with the fruits of donating everything - *Sarvadaan*,

In this way Shatanand explains the various Vidhyas, their greatness and the fruits of teaching others the great Vidhyas. Now, Shatanand explains the worthy teachers and worthy students of such Brahmvidhya. **Manusmruti** explains the best type of teacher: 'One should study under the guidance of either an Acharya's son, a servant of God, one who is knowledgeable, one who obeys Dharma, who is pure, trustworthy, able, competent, who donates their wealth to good causes and a Sadhu.'

Yagnavalkya further adds, 'Those who are not faithless nor treacherous, who are compassionate, understand the Shastras, who has a good memory, who are of great intellect, who is level minded, who looks upon the positive qualities always and does not have a tendency to find fault with others, who promotes the truth as taught by Shastras, who is always ready to serve others and who is a friend to all, these are qualities of a worthy teacher.'

Not all are worthy of the knowledge of the supreme though, and so Shatanand now explains who should be taught such knowledge. First and foremost, a Naishtik Brahmchari is worthy of such knowledge and

so should be taught, as explained by **Bhavisya Puran's Daanakhand**. Secondly, only those who are virtuous and disciplined should be taught. Rigorous testing should take place initially to find out whether the student has the ability and is mentally competent. **Shruti and Smruti** explain a situation where Vidhya (in form) went to Brahmins for shelter and said, 'Save me! I (Vidhya) am your very form and therefore I plead that you do not abuse me. Please do not give me away to those who envy and anger, nor to those who are undisciplined and who do not adhere to Vrats (penance). Only then shall I become strong and powerful.'

Vrudh Chanakya says, 'How can those who teach to unfaithful and bad disciples ever achieve satisfaction and bliss.' **Lagu Charnakya** says, 'It is better to die with such knowledge than to teach it to some bad natured fool of a disciple, as such a person is an enemy to all.' Therefore by teaching Vedic knowledge to a corrupt and unrighteous person, is destructive. A student who displays the right manner, temperament, discipline, faith, ability etc. should be sought and taught the knowledge of the Vedas. Such knowledge in the hands of others is futile and unproductive.

Now Shatanand sings '*Sant Mahima*' and concludes this Shlok of Sahajanand Swami. **Sangoanvahan Sataam** – to associate always (or daily as implied by *Anvahan*) with a *Sant* or Sadhu. **Vishnu Dharmotar** explains the qualities of such a saint, 'Who follows *Svadharm* (personal duty), a Bhakta (disciple) of Lord Vishnu, who controls his sense objects and who is absorbed within his soul (*Atmanishtha*), and such a person is considered a *Sant*.' Shatanand says that one should associate with such saints, performing *Darshan* of (touching their feet), *Vandana* of (bowing before), *Poojan* of (to revere through respect) and *Vakyodhaaran* of (seek their blessings by obeying their command). Such *Samagam* (company of) saints should be sought.

Vashisht says, *Nityam Santoabhigantavya* – 'One should daily seek the company of a saint.' Shatanand then explains the greatness of Satsang and says that such Satsang is merely devotion to God – *Satsangsyauva Bhagvadbhaktihetutvaditi Bhaavaha*, as explained by **Shrimad Bhagwat**: 'O Lord! Whenever there is destruction of morality and faith in mankind, people seek the company of a realised soul for the upliftment of the self. The company of such a saint instils Bhakti in mankind, rejuvenating purity and morality in the hearts of many. He is thus uplifted and freed from the bondages of *Sansaar* (worldly life).

'Those who listen with their hearts and ears to the spiritual discourses from the mouth of a Sant, open themselves a path to salvation through their faith and devotion to God. Such is the greatness of Satsang. What are wealth and a kingdom in comparison to the company of a Satpurush? Such company is simply salvation for thee. If company of a Sant is enough to purify one's household, then what can be said about the Darshan, touch, the water used to cleanse the feet of such a Satpurush, or even offerings of a place to reside?'

Shatanand explains the Murtis of the Lord are divine as they are worshipped by an Ekantik Sant. The *Abhishek* (bathing), *Poojan* and *Pratishtha* (installation) by a Satpurusha of a Murti made from Stone or Clay make's it divine. Similarly, places of pilgrimage are divine as saints have walked upon such land (often barefoot) or bathed in such waters. For these reasons, Satsang, which is often practised in temples, in the proximity of God's Murti and at places of pilgrimage, should be performed daily. Satsang is for everybody and is a basic necessity (*Saadharan Dharma*). However for *Grihastas* (householders) it is extremely important and relevant: Narad explains, 'Those householders going about their daily work should make time to serve an Ekantik Bhakta (devotee) or Muni (saint). Renouncing the company of their family, they should awaken themselves to serve such saints. They should renounce the company of those with a sinful nature and seek the company of intellectual Satpurushs. The company of a saint and the obeying of their every command destroy the incapacities of the mind and free them from repeated births and deaths, bringing salvation to the masses.

‘Just as food nourishes and maintains a person, God alone is the deliver of salvation to those in pain. Dharma is the only means to wealth after death. Similarly, the only means of refuge is a Sant. Just as the sunlight gives vision to the eyes, a Sant gives the vision of supreme knowledge.’ For this reason - ***Devta Bandhavaha Santaha Santa Atmahameva Cha*** - a Sant is a God, a friend and a great soul/being.

‘O my Lord! Those who seek the company of selfish and cruel people are forgotten in this world. They are uncelebrated by even their children, friends, wife etc. Those who have never been fortunate enough to be cleansed by the dust from the feet of a Sadhu-Purusha have never been able to truly realise God and serve thee.’

Nitishatak’s Bhartruhari says, ‘That which demolishes the barriers of intellect, which instils truth in speech, teaches a path of respect, destroys sin, brings about super consciousness and that which brings fame and renown everywhere; such is Satsang. What can’t such Satsang achieve?’ Similar message is given by **Jaganath Pandit in Rasgandhar**, adding that a Sant brings auspiciousness to all.

Shatanand finally explains that the commandment is to be always obeyed, as such faith and respect brings peace to all, overcoming all difficulties. ‘Those who wish for peace and tranquillity should listen to the sweet nectar words of a Satpurush. By following implicitly the teachings and bearing them whole heartedly, one is never again troubled by misery and misfortune.’

Shankracharya in his **Prashnotarmala** explains: ***Prarnadapi Ko Rakshyaha Sviyo Dharmascha Sadhusangascha*** - ‘What are the only things worth saving in life? - Dharma and association with Sadhupurusha.’ In this way Shatanand Muni has with great effort and length explained ***Sant Mahima***. Such a subject is so wide that a book could be written solely on that topic but Swami here has done extremely well to sing such glory in a short space.

Note that this Shlok, as well as many in this Shikshapatri are not necessarily religious. They are to guide a person so that they may enjoy a better trouble free life. Indeed this is what religion is truly all about, but it is through our ignorance that we have not been able to recognise this. Sant Mahima is further glorified in the ***Vishesh Dharmas***.

TEXT 37

One shall never go empty handed to a Guru, a deity or a king. One shall never commit a breach of trust and shall never praise oneself.

Gurudevyanrupekshaartham - A ***Guru*** is one who offers Shree Krishna Mantra (initiation). A ***Deva*** is one’s ***Ishtadev*** (personal God) and a ***Nrupa*** is a King. ***Na Gamyam Riktaparibhiha*** - should never be visited empty handed without a gift.

Just as we go to temple for ***Darshan*** and put money in the money box, take flowers, fruits etc. as an offering, in the same way when going to a Guru or King we should make similar offerings.

Shruti explains, ‘Disciples should go to their most learned and spiritual master (Guru), taking with them wood for sacrifice (Yagna).’ **Smruti** says, ‘One must never go empty handed to a king, one who delivers

religious sermons or a Guru.’ Indeed Shastras explain that those who go empty handed are disrespectful and so should not even bother going as you are causing insult.

By taking a gift you are proclaiming your faith, devotion, allegiance and duty to such persons. You are displaying your love in a gesture of thanks. We certainly have a lot to thank God, a Guru and a righteous King for, and so a gift is a way of repaying your debt. It is not what you give, but with what love and devotion you give which is of importance. Bhakta Sudama was poor but gave a handful of rice with so much love that Krishna was awe struck.

Vishvasgaato No Karyaha - One should never commit a breach or trust (*Vishvasgaat*). Saying that you will commit yourself to some act for another and then betraying such trust is *Visvasgaata* and should never be committed. **Smruti** explains: **Sa Mahapaataki Bhumau Yo Visvasyanyamardayed** - ‘Those who breach a trust are great sinners.’ It is humane to keep your word and fulfil a promise. It is important to stay true to yourself and others. By so doing one becomes trustworthy and desirable. By breaching a trust, we often hurt others and put them in an awkward position. Building their hopes with your promises, only to be broken can lead to shattering consequences. One who is always true to his word is always famed and adored in this world.

Finally - **Svashtadhaasvamukhena Cha** - to never praise oneself. **Vyaas** explains: **Nindanyasyatmanaha Shladha Dvayam Sukrutnashkrud** - ‘Those who slander others and who praise themselves destroy their *Punya*.’ **Bhishma** adds, ‘Those who never slander nor praise themselves attain great qualities achieving everlasting fame and respect.’

Shatanand endorses the fact that one should unreservedly praise others - **Parshladha Tu Yathochitam Karya**. One should readily praise great saints who are ‘mountains of spirituality’. By crediting such people, you yourself attain credit and fame. Such people should be highly acclaimed.

Self-praise, using ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ is very much undesirable. They make a person repulsive. It is always better and indeed proper to praise God rather than oneself as it is only through God’s support and will that we achieve these results and so the ‘I’ in such instances is always inappropriate. God is the ultimate cause and effect. He is capable of making the impoverished - wealthy and the wealthy - impoverished in an instance. Therefore we must never become egotistical, self-centred and big-headed so as to lose track of the truth that the Almighty is the true ‘giver’.

These Shloks are truly great as they advise on drawing the better qualities from within, which build a person towards strength of character and good nature. It is these Shloks which really make a person desirable and give fame and so it is important that we obey Lord Swaminarayan’s wishes in order to become better people.

TEXT 38

My disciples shall never wear clothes, which are likely to cause any indecent exposure of the body.

One must not wear clothing that is revealing as it degrades a person. Wearing such clothes can bring lustful thoughts to an onlooker. It brings unnecessary and inappropriate attention to oneself and shame to oneself.

Shatanand explains that clothing is primarily to cover the body and so those clothes worn, which reveal the body, do not serve their purpose. Indeed by wearing such clothes, one is considered naked.

Sadachardipika explains, 'Clothing which is small (or short), torn so that it reveals the body, faint or see-through or even clothing which is dirty should never be worn.' Similarly, it is written that clothing which is too expensive or too cheap should not be used, as their respective qualities will surely change a person.

Clothing has a lot to answer for with regards to impressions. Those who wear clothing that is revealing, dirty etc. give the wrong impression. Therefore it is always important to maintain a sensible dressing habit which is respectful.

It has to be said though that many youths born in the west do feel pressure to dress in such a way, which is sometimes more revealing than appropriate.

TEXT 39

One shall never practice devotion to Lord Shree Krishna without observance of Dharma and shall never give up devotion to Shree Krishna for fear of being criticised by ignorant persons.

Dharmera Rahita Krushnabhaktiha Karya Na Sarvatha /

The famed duties as prescribed by the *Sat-Shastras* should never be rejected. **Shree Krishna Bhakti**, which is nine-fold (*Navadha Bhakti*) should be practised together with the adherence to *Dharma*.

Shree Hari here stresses the importance of both Dharma and Bhakti as an integral part for the derivation of salvation. Bhakti alone is not the sole means to salvation, as Bhakti void of duty is rendered useless. Shatanand therefore explains the various Dharmas of man.

Smruti explains, '*Vaishnavs* should observe the *Vrat* of *Ekadashi* (both halves of the lunar month) by fasting.' Therefore for *Vaishnavs*, fasting on *Ekadashi* is a *Samanya Dharma* - a duty that should ordinarily be practised. **Smruti** also explains, 'The fruits derived from six months of fasting (*Upvaas*) are derived by partaking in just one mouthful of *Prasad* offered to Lord Vishnu in this age of *Kali*.' In this way the greatness of *Prashad* and the partaking of *Prashad* is stressed. However, reading this, one should never think to themselves that it is then not necessary to perform *Upvaas*, as such mentality is devoid of *Bhakti* and *Dharma*. Such persons have not truly understood *Bhakti*, *Dharma* and the teachings of *Shastras*.

Prashad is considered great as even the 'Pitrus (ancestors) and the *Devatas* (Gods) eat only foods offered to Shree Vishnu,' explains the **Shruti**. Hearing this, *Vaishnavas* should readily eat *Prashaad* of Vishnu, which questions again the necessity of *Upvaas*. However *Shatanand* explains that to observe a fast on *Ekadashi* is to attain sustenance for oneself by forever receiving the *Prashad* from God. Therefore by offering to God, one receives an abundance of food (and indeed wealth and support) from God and so *Ekadashi Vrat* fast should never be rejected.

Similarly **Shruti** explains, 'Those great men who chant the Lord's name have performed *Tapp* (penance), *Yagna* (sacrifice) and have bathed purifying themselves.' In this way the chanting of the Lord's name is held great in Hinduism. Hearing this though, one should not abandon their morning *Snaan-Sandhya* rituals (bathing and morning praise) as these are their *Svadharmas* (personal duties) which can never be substituted by the chanting of God's name.

Shruti explains further, 'Brahmins should daily perform *Sandhya*.' 'Those that fail to do so are considered as *Sutaki* (impure as a result of death in the family)', explains **Smruti**.

Shreedhar Swami in his commentary upon **Eleventh Skanda** explains the daily morning rituals: ‘In order to purify the mouth, one should perform *Datan* - brushing of one’s teeth. Then they should purify the body by bathing using mud etc. and chanting Vedic Mantras. After which they should perform morning worship as outlined by the Vedas in order to please me. The rituals should be practised as specified by the Vedas - they should never be rejected. They should perform Pooja with enthusiasm, which will endeavour to purify one’s acts and thus the Poojan.’

Now are explained the duties of segregation - the duty of a man to stay aloof of a woman and vice-versa. *Vakyas* of **Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagad** - ‘Everything is of Vishnu’ should never be used for personal gain in order to look at or keep company with other women. Even to speak thus jokingly is undesirable. **Harit Muni** explains, ‘Those who at temples of Lord Vishnu, look upon a woman with lustful intent, are reborn as insects upon this earth.’ Therefore at temples, one should always keep their senses under control and never forsake their personal duty.

Bhaktiha Sidhyati Dharmera - ‘Through Dharma, one’s Bhakti is strengthened.’ **Dharmo Bhagwadbhakti Krutproktaha** - ‘Those who have always obeyed Dharma have performed Bhakti.’ Thus the two are considered hand-in-hand. **Parashar Muni** explains in his **Gita**, ‘Even those acts that are likely to derive fruits should be refrained from by the wise, should they be devoid of Dharma. As only those acts in conjunction with Dharma derive the desirable merits.’ In this way Dharma has been glorified. Personal duty or Dharma is a means of spiritual, mental and physical bliss. It is a structure for living that promotes the well being of the body and self. One should refer to other literature in order to acquire more comprehensive knowledge of the various aspects of Dharma and it’s benefits.

Agnaanindabhayanaiva Tyajyam Shrikrushnasevanam //

One should never forsake (*Tyajyam*) their service to Shree Krishna (*Shreekrushnasevanam*) through fear (*Bhay*) of being criticised (*Ninda*) by the ignorant (*Agnaan*). **Vyaas** in **Bharat Savitri** explains, ‘None should forsake their duties due to *Kama* (lust), *Bhay* (fear), *Lobh* (selfishness) nor even for life.’

Narad says, ‘Grihastas should never forsake their duties for personal gratification; Brahmarshis their Vrat; and Tapasvis their service to the land, as such an act will surely lead to their demise.’ **Panchamas Skanda** of **Bhagwat** explains man’s consequences through forsaking of one’s own Dharma: ‘Those who in this world forsake their duties, which are famed in the Vedas and who embark upon duties which are defamed, are beaten severely in the hells and are tortured using sharp blades.’

Shatanand explains: **Dharma Satyadayopeto** - and so Dharma should always be observed with honesty and compassion. However, such Dharma as well as Vidhya derived through perseverance can never be achieved or fruitful without Bhakti. Therefore the Lord explains, ‘The Dharma or Varna (caste) is most desirable. Such Dharma, which is accompanied by Bhakti, is a means to Moksh.’

Narad Pancharatra explains the fundamental requirements of a person: ‘One should be initiated by a Guru and follow their *Varnashram Dharma*. He should renounce his attachments to his sense organs and become a devotee of God.’

Shree Krishna is the very foundation of Dharma and so those who denounce Dharma following some other course of action can never please the Lord. In **Bhagwat Gita**, he proclaims:

Yada Yada Hi Dharmasya Glanir Bhavati Bharat /
Abhusthanamdharmaasya Tadatmanam Srujamyaham //
Paritranyam Sadhunaam Vinashaiya Cha Dushkrutaam /

Dharma Sanstharpanarthaiya Sambhavami Yuge Yuge //

‘O mother earth! Whenever there is disobedience of Dharma and prevalence of Adharma (immoral duty), I incarnate upon this earth. I manifest to save *Sadhu Purushs*, destroy the sinful and to establish Dharma. I incarnate in all epochs of time (Yugas).’

Bhagwat Puran similarly explains other instances when the Lord incarnates, ‘When unrighteous Kings inflict pain on mankind, God manifests upon this earth to uplift man by offering truth, compassion and fame.’ ‘Thou incarnates to save thy famed Dharma.’ ‘For the benefit of mankind, thou incarnates to uphold the teachings of the Vedas whenever they are contested.’ ‘Thou incarnates to destroy the evil forces which exist.’ ‘To save and protect *Maryada* (the limitations of man) thou incarnates and shows us the way, through thy Leela (divine episodes).’ ‘Through thy incarnations, thou saves Sanatan Dharma.’ ‘O glorious one! Thou came to protect Dharma and to offer salvation to mankind.’ ‘I am the one who preaches Dharma, obeys Dharma and who is the support of Dharma. To teach and test mankind, I incarnate upon this earth.’

‘To save Dharma, I, at the request of Brahma, incarnated in the Yadav clan as the son of Vasudeva.’ ***Satvam Hi Me Hruyam Yatra Dharmaha*** - ‘Wherever Dharma resides, there too resides my heart.’ Thus in this way God is extremely fond of Dharma. Shatanand then explains the greatness of *Grihastha Dharma* (householder duties).

Lagu Harit Muni explains, ‘Those who renounce their Dharma should be considered as enemies of the Lord, even though they may chant the blessed Lord’s name. This is due to the fact that Dharma is the reason for the Lord’s descent.’ **Vishnu Puran** says, ‘A true Vishnu devotee is one who never wavers from Varna-Ashram Dharma, who see both friend and foe alike, who never takes from anybody, who never hurts anybody, who never raises his voice to another and who has a peaceful disciplined mind.’

Varaha Puran explains, ‘The Shruti and Smruti are my conditions. Those who break such terms are my enemy and can never be my Bhakt.’ **Shree Vallabhacharya** adds, ‘Following with all might one’s Dharma, keeping a distance from those Dharmas which are unacceptable and keeping control of one’s senses, should always be practised.’ Such is the Dharma, which should be practised always and everywhere. Never should such Dharma be rejected in favour of personal pleasure and satisfaction of one’s senses.

Agnaani - the ignorant or foolish should be considered as one who has not fully understood or recognised Shree Krishna, his devotees and his Dharma. Thus one should never renounce one’s service to Krishna through fear of being criticised by the ignorant. Similarly slander or **Ninda** of Shree Krishna, his devotees and his Dharma is a means to destruction (This also includes the beating of such people).

Parashar Muni explains, ‘Those who do not have knowledge of his own essence or his being (*Tatva Gnaan*), slander others. However, those who are accomplished in such knowledge never slander others.’ The **Bhagwat** explains, ‘Those atrocious people insult the beloved saints of the Lord.’

Shatanand even forbids the slander of those who are rogue; saying that such people cannot achieve anything. They are powerless against the almighty Lord and therefore to fear such person is futile. In such situation, one should never renounce his dedication to God and faith in Dharma.

The great Bhakt of God **Prahlad** has said, ‘I never for a moment renounced my devotion to God, even through fear of my own father.’ Thus, He never lost faith in God, who as a result incarnated himself to save his most dearest of Bhakts. Therefore fearless devotion to God has been stipulated.

Much has been examined in the Bhashya of this Shlok. However the essence of the Shlok is to praise Dharma and Bhakti primarily. Never should these practices be renounced. This Shikshapatri of Lord Swaminarayan is an outline of Dharma (duties) and so all devotees of God are to cherish it. Dharma is how we should behave in various situations, not just duties pertaining to religion. It is a social code of conduct also. We must uphold duty at all costs and never follow a course of duty for personal gratification. We must never give up our duty through fear, as we have only God to fear and nothing else in this world is worthy of fear. If we stay faithful to God, then he will ultimately take care of any other problems that we may face. Indeed let these other fears and complications stand as a test of our unshaken faith in the Lord.

TEXT 40

All those who come to the temples of Lord Shree Krishna either daily or on festival days, shall keep themselves away from the opposite sex, by not even touching.

Shatanand here clarifies that men should not touch women i.e. married women, as touching a widow is prohibited ordinarily. However this code of conduct should really be obeyed to a much wider context to prohibit the touch of any woman or even girl. Similarly a woman should not touch a man.

Smrutis explains, 'At a place of pilgrimage, at a wedding, in a battle or war, at a time of destruction, during a journey or during a great catastrophe such as a fire, the sin of touching somebody of the opposite sex is relieved.' Shatanand adds that this Smruti is only for an emergency and should not be read in any other way.

The reason for this prohibition is that such contact leads to confusion of the mind causing a person to act in a manner unpraiseworthy. **Narad Muni** therefore adds, 'Those who in a temple of God touch another woman or who even look regularly at women, face destruction.'

The reason for saying both '*daily*' and '*festival days*' is to clarify that festival days are not exempt from such rule as many may think. Indeed on such days we must be that much more careful. Shatanand also says that talking to women should also be understood as unacceptable. Yagnavalkya says, 'The use of speech, hands and feet should be restricted and controlled. Also eating excessively should also be renounced.'

Manu says, 'Hands and feet should always be controlled. Similarly sight should be restricted. One should never behave in a manner not befitting to oneself. They should control what they say and should not act in a way that causes pain to others.'

These statements here should be understood to refrain from actions of pleasure and personal gratification derived through a woman or otherwise. One should understand festival days as *Janmashtmi*, *Ramanavmi*, *Patotsav* days etc.

It is a fact that mutual attraction exists between man and woman. It is very much abundant and often very difficult to control. Through the sight of women, it is unquestionable that man's decency and self-control are jeopardised. Indeed he can in such situations act foolishly without thought. The sight of an attractive woman affects even the best of us. What then can be said about the touch of such a woman?

There is a saying that the touch of a woman is like the sting of a scorpion and so this prohibition exists to prevent imminent destruction of oneself, one's faith and self-control.

Lust is a great tool for destruction that weakens a man. We must learn not to become hypnotised and subdued by lust for a woman, especially in a temple. Lust for a woman destroys our faith in God and Religion and therefore its control is vital. For such reasons this code of conduct is fully practised in temples of Lord Swaminarayan by segregating the sexes by sitting separately during Sabhas.

This Shlok gives the basis for how people should behave when going to temple. However I feel that it is necessary to give a fuller list of things to be observed when going to temple, as it seems clear that many of the younger generation lack such knowledge. Indeed many older people also display a lack of this basic knowledge.

Firstly it is important that before coming to temple and performing Darshan that you answer the call of nature so that there is no need to go during Sabha. This will also prevent the need to pass wind, which so many seem 'prone' to do during Sabha! Similarly one should not eat just before coming to temple as they then feel the urge to 'burp' as well. Joking aside, these statements are important, as it is a gross insult to the deities if one has to visit the toilet in the middle of Sabha. Such action is very much impure.

Before entering the temple, one should leave all other thoughts at the temple door. We come to temple to please and serve the Lord. We should therefore leave all other thoughts such as work, family etc. at the door and clear the mind so that only the thought of God is in one's mind. All other emotions of anger etc. should be rejected.

In such frame of mind, we should enter the temple and wash our hands so that we can perform Darshan of God. We should always go and perform Darshan first and foremost and never see to other duties first. Nor should we get caught up talking to others as we pass by them on the way. To acknowledge them by saying 'Jay Swaminarayan' is sufficient.

Before entering the Sabha Hall we should remove our shoes without touching them with the hands (ensuring that we have washed them) and enter the temple with the mind focused on God. From that moment on we should observe '*Moun Vrat*' - the vow of silence. Men should perform *Shashtaang Danadavat Pranaam* and women should perform *Panchaang Pranaam* with their eyes and mind focused on the Murtis of God. Darshan should be performed calmly as all too often they are performed hurriedly and at least about seven Dandavats should be performed.

After so doing, one should walk forward calmly to the front and offer the Lord a gift, usually money, fruits, flowers etc. It should be offered with great love and affection. They should then bring their hands together in front of the Lord and praise the Lord Performing Darshan of his lustrous face, his divine body and his beautiful clothes and ornaments and then bow before the Lord respectfully.

Pradikshana (circum-abulation) should then be performed. This should really only be performed though if the Sinhasan is different for males and females. This is because it is disturbing to women if a male is repeatedly going across the Murtis whilst they are there performing Darshan of God. Furthermore if any lustful thoughts enter the mind of a woman doing Darshan then this can be sinful for both the male and female. Pradikshana should be performed before Arti in such situation and with the mind focussed on the Lord. They should thereafter or during Pradikshana pay their respects to the deities Hanumaan and Ganapati. They should then bow before the Holy Scriptures.

It is beyond me how people perform the Darshan ritual. Some do it hurriedly as if they are in some rush. Many people perform as little as two Dandavats. Others don't even bother to look ahead at the Lord's Murtis whilst performing Darshan.

After Darshan they should find a place to sit and not head straight for the door! They should sit in a place undisturbing to others and as close as possible to the front of the Sabha, in close proximity to the Murtis. They should not head straight for the back of the Sabha or where there is a backrest. I don't think God is too impressed when you sit somewhere far away from him. Many sit in a 'Gang' as though they have come to see a football match! They are there to focus their mind on God and for such purposes 'Ekant' or being alone is the best, not by sitting and chatting with a group of friends.

We should sit with a 'Mala' in hand and inwardly chant 'Swaminarayan' slowly with the mind absorbed in the Murtis of God. We should listen attentively to the Shastras being read or the saints performing religious discourse. We should not talk unnecessarily or eat/chew anything whilst sitting in Sabha. When Prashad is distributed it should be accepted with love and never slandered in anyway or even refused which is what many youngsters seem to do. Prashad Mahatmya has been already explained.

We should try to stay until the end of the 'Chesta Padd' and with affection see the Lord off to sleep. Only after that should one talk with the other Satsangis there. One should refrain from swearing in temples. The use of foul language is highly undesirable in a house of God. We should continue our duty of staying aloof of the opposite sex. It is inevitable that some contact or interaction due to being a common temple for both sexes will exist and so in such situations we must stay firm and in control of our actions and thoughts.

I hope that people will take note of the common pitfalls of people and rectify their faults when attending temples.

TEXT 41

Those of my Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya disciples who have been initiated into the devotion of Shree Krishna by their Guru shall always wear around their neck a double Kanthi prepared from Tulsi wood and shall mark their forehead, chest and both arms with a Tilak.

Shatanand explains: *Krushnadikshamiti Guroha Gurupadsthadharmavamshyabrahmanta* - Diksha or initiation should be given by the *Brahmin Guru* established from the family of Dharma (*Dharma Vamsa*). *Krushna Diksha* is - initiation via Mantra, marking the body, discipline and instruction - *Krushnasya Diksha Mantrarchaniyamopadeshadilakshana* - thus initiation into a Sampraday is much more than one realises.

After initiation, one should follow the code of conduct as stipulated by the *Acharya* and one should pay homage to their *Acharya* by offering worship to such great personage. Shatanand says that one has the right to worship God, only after initiation.

Vignaan Upanishad explains the qualities of a worthy Guru, 'One who has control over his senses, who is pure and pious, of high intellect or wisdom, full bodied, who himself follows Dharma, and whose mind, speech and body is employed to protect and comfort those in need.'

Shatanand adds that even though he may be a *Dharma Vansi*, if he is not a true *Vishnu Bhakt*, he can never be considered a Guru. Thus, one does not have automatic *Acharya/Guru* status through birth into Dharma family. **Narad Panchratra** explains, 'Even if a person is born in an illustrious family of devotees, has performed many Yagnas and has deep knowledge of the Vedas, he can never be considered a Guru if he is termed an *Avaishnava* (against Vaishnav beliefs - religious devotion to Vishnu). Initiation by an *Avaishnav* will never lead one to salvation or Mukti. Therefore it is extremely important that we initiate into a worthy Sampraday, headed by a worthy Guru/Acharya.'

Now Shatanand explains the greatness of Shree Krishna Mantra and therefore it's use in the initiation ceremony. **Gautamiya Tantra's** very first chapter explains, 'Of the many Mantras, Ganapati, Shiva and Devi, Vaishnav (Vishnu) Mantras are the best. Of the many Vaishnav mantras, Shree Krishna Mantra is supreme and will derive the greatest of fruits.'

Diksha illuminates one's knowledge and washes away delusion and uncertainty. Such is the power of Diksha explains saints. Therefore Diksha should always be Vaishnavi. **Abhidhanchintamani** explains: **Diksha Tu Vratsangaha** - 'Diksha is the acceptance of *Vrata* (religious and moral vows).'

Shatanand explains that *Dwijas* (twice born) should all obtain Diksha. *Dwijas* here are Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas as they are all 'twice-born', once through birth (via their mother) and secondly through the acceptance of *Yagnopavit* (sacred thread) via their Guru.

Now Shatanand explains in detail what Diksha is and what it entails. Firstly, it is devotion for God; 'Those who develop Bhakti Yoga for Vasudeva Narayan find no other better path for salvation.' 'Brahma, pondering over the Vedas three times, came to the conclusion that there is no other better path than that of Bhakti.'

All have the right to Bhakti of God and all should do so, as it is one's duty to do so. **Padma Puran's Uttar Khanda** explains, 'Without Diksha everything is useless. Those without Diksha face death and are reborn as an animal.' 'Those who obtain Vaishnavi Diksha and devote themselves to Vishnu are satiated. Others without Diksha just burden the Earth.'

Brahmins alike should devote themselves to Shree Krishna. Seeing the Gopis devotion for Shree Krishna, they said in the **Bhagwat**, 'Shame on us, our knowledge, our birth, our vows, our dynasty and our action, because we have lived away from Paramatma. These women do not have the family heritage of a Dwija, they have lived without a Guru, they do not have penance, nor knowledge of the soul, they do not possess purity and do not have merit of action, however they do possess unswerving devotion for Yogeshwar Paramatma Shree Krishna. We (Brahmins) possess all of the above qualities, yet are devoid of such Bhakti for God. Even a low born Shudra or sinful person/Chandal with such Bhakti is superior than a Brahmin devoid of Bhakti as such a Chandal is able to purify his whole family.' Therefore all should derive Diksha into the Bhakti for Shree Krishna. **Yuktamevoktamityalam Vistarera** - What more needs to be said?

To clarify, Diksha or initiation is of two types. First *Samanya Diksha* - ordinary, which is given to all Satsangis. All should receive this Diksha by their respective Acharya. At such time the Acharya will give the *Shree Krishna Ashtakshar (Guru) Mantra* - **Shree Krushnam Tvam Gatirmama**, which should be chanted daily to signify one's devotion and service to God and your allegiance to a Guru. During the initiation ceremony the Acharya will place around your neck a double *Kanathi* (rosary beads) and mark your forehead.

Secondly, *Bhagwati Diksha* is given to those who wish to live a life of sainthood. It is for those who have unswerving faith and dedication for God and who are willing to follow the path of renunciation where they renounce all worldly pleasures and attachments to singularly serve the Lord and his Satsang. The Mantra - **Brahmaham Krushna Daasoami** is given to such aspirants.

Diksha is very important as already mentioned. It is a mark of belonging to a sect or Sampraday. It shows faith, dedication and allegiance for one Guru and devotion to God. It is something that is often taken lightly but all should realise its significance and should act in accordance with the Acharya's and Sat-Shastra's commandments once initiated.

Now, *Praaptaustulsimalike Gale* - One should wear a *Tulsi Mala* around one's neck. It should be a double Kanthi to signify *Jugal Upaasna* or the *Bhakt-Bhagwan* relationship. A Mala made from Tulsi is used, as it is sacred in all ranks of Hinduism for its purity and auspiciousness. Shatanand explains that Vaishnavas should specifically make sure that they wear the Mala to show their love and affection for God - *Vaishavena Visheshera Bhagvatprativardvani*.

Padma Puran explains the consequence of not wearing a Mala, 'Such persons are consumed by fire and fall to the Hells.' Even the **Vedas** command the wearing of Kanthi - 'One should, like Yagnopavit wear a Tulsi Mala always.' Padma Purana explains the consequence of not wearing the Kanthi:

Na Cha Yasya Pashoha Karashte Tulsimalika Bhavet /
Tasyanam Maissasham Jalam Cha Madirasaman //

'The food and water of those who do not wear a Tulsi rosary is considered as meat and liquor.'

The Tulsi Mala should be worn always and never taken off for any reason. In some instances it is forbidden to wear the Mala during eating, sleeping and answering the call of nature, but Shatanand explains that this is for Malas which have not been offered to Shree Vishnu. **Padma Puran** explains, 'During Pooja, Dhyaana (meditation), Sandhya (morning rituals) and during all daily activities, the Tulsi Mala should be worn. The Lord adores those who do.' The same Shastra also explains that the Mala should not be renounced even when answering the call of nature as, 'By so doing the Mala does not become impure for it is *Brahmrupirni* - the form of God,' explains the **Garud Puran**.

Also, 'One should not wear a Mala which is made out of unfragranced wood or plants except for Gold.' Now Shatanand explains the significance of a double rosary: *Radhakrushnavya Jugalsvarupopas* - thus it personifies the Jugal or twin devotion for Radha and Krishna. It shows the bond between Radha and Krishna, of Bhakta and Bhagwan, Swami and Sevak or Jiva and Shiva. The Mantra chanted when adorning the Tulsi Mala is given in **Vishnu Puran**:

Tulsikashtasambhutemale Vishnujanapriye /
Bibharmi Tvamaham Karashte Kuru Mam Krushnavallabham //

'O rosary made of Tulsi, which is adored by all Vaishnavas! I place thee around my neck. Grant that I be fond of Krishna as I wear thee.'

The Kanthi is indeed another sign of initiation into a Sampraday. During the initiation ceremony the Acharya will place a Kanthi around one's neck, thus making the aspirant a fully-fledged Bhakta.

Note that Diksha and wearing a Kanthi doesn't mean that a person is a true Bhakta. We have to prove our worthiness. Such things merely are a step towards Bhakta Bhava as they allow one to become a repository for Punya through pious acts. Indeed those that do not adorn such signs are not worthy of any benefits of such action. Together with Diksha, we must obey the commandments given by the Acharya to follow the path of Bhakti, never to renounce Dharma and to observe always the '*Panchavratamaan*' - the five eternal vows of abstinence of liquor, flesh, thieving, adultery, and intoxicants.

The Kanthi is in itself a destroyer of sin. It is said that the Yama Dootas (servants of the God of Death) do not even come close to those who wear a Kanthi. It is considered so great that it is forbidden to eat or drink without the Tulsi Mala as to do so would be to partake in flesh and liquor.

Many site the analogy of a dog without a dog collar. Such a dog is considered a stray and without an owner. Such dogs are rounded up by dogcatchers, locked up and eventually put to death. In the same way, a person without a Kanthi is a stray, who will inevitably be rounded up by the Yama Dootas, and sent to Hell where they will be subject to torture for their sinful acts. Indeed by simply wearing a Kanthi, a person absorbs the pious qualities of the Kanthi which causes a person to act in a more righteous way. The Mala and Tilak also act as limitations to prevent a person from acting sinfully. For example, once adorning the Kanthi, a Satsangi should think to himself that he is a Bhakta and so should not eat anything contrary to our Vedic teachings, thus nothing inedible should be passed through the Kanthi which is worn around the neck etc.

Finally let us consider in detail the Tilak: *Dharye Nityam Chordhvapundram Lalatadau Dvijatibhiha* - one is to daily mark the forehead and other parts of the body (both arms and chest) with the Urdvapundra Tilak (an erect marking). Shatanand explains that those who do not mark their body in this way have no rights to the fruits of their actions. **Nirnyasindhu of Bruhannaradiya Puran** explains, 'Yagnas (sacrifices), Dana (donations), Japa (praise), Homa (offerings), Svadhyaya (Vedic study) and Shraadh (offerings to dead ancestors) all bear no fruits, if performed without the Urdvapundra marking.'

Padma Puran explains, 'Those who wear the Urdvapundra and perform Shraadh ceremony receive the fruits of performing ten million such Shraadh ceremonies over millions of years gone by.'

Here Shatanand explains that the Urdvapundra is accepted as the best. He explains that other markings such as Tripundra can be somewhat frightening. **Vrudh Parashara** writes, 'The Urdva should be worn but not the Tripundra as the ancestors become uneasy by the sight of it.'

Brahmand Puran explains:

Urdhvapundram Dvijaha Kuryat Kshatriyastu Tripundrakam /
Ardhachandram Tu Vaishyanam Vartulam Shudrajatishu //

'Brahmins should wear the Urdvapundra, Kshatriyas the Tripundra, Vaishyas the Ardhachandra and Shudras, a circular Tilak.'

Thus a Tilak should be worn by all. Due to the greatness of Urdvapundra, **Padmotar Khand** explains, 'The Urdhvapundra is not prohibited for anybody and so even Vishnu devotees who are Kshatriya should wear the Urdhvapundra.' In this manner, all Vaishnavas regardless of caste have a right to wear the Urdhvapundra. However, Shatanand explains that devotees of Lord Shiva should mark the Tripundra on their forehead with white ash. Thus by no means should a devotee of Shiva abandon their Tripundra.

Lord Swaminarayan says, '*Lalatadau*' - thus implying that the forehead and others (i.e. arms and chest) should be marked. Brahmcharis should additionally mark their neck.

Urdhvapundra Dharanvada explains: *Urdvapundradharanadikam Vaishnavanamsadharanalingam* - 'The Urdvapundra and others are the prominent signs of a Vishnu Bhakta.' Therefore all should wear such signs and never be afraid to show their devotion to God. It is written, 'Urdvapundra Tilak, Tulsi Mala and worship of Shaligraam are the signs of a true Vaishnav.'

It is necessary to clarify exactly what an Urdvapundra Tilak is and what it represents. It is, like the Tulsi Mala, a sign of Vishnu Bhakti. It is the very form or 'foot print' of God. It also is 'Jugal Upaasna' representing both Radha and Krishna or Laxmi and Narayan. By wearing the mark we are advertising our faith and devotion in the Lord and also as it is his 'foot print' on the forehead, it shows that we are eternally his servant.

The Tilak mark is to be worn by all and not exclusively for followers of Lord Swaminarayan. It should be worn daily and in all four parts of the body during Pooja Vidhi. The Tilak mark which is U-shaped made from Gopichandan shall be made on the forehead whilst chanting the Mantra *Ohm Namah Vasudevaiya*. Then the centre of the chest shall be marked whilst chanting *Ohm Namah Shankarshaniya*, the right arm whilst saying *Ohm Namah Pradyumnaiya* and finally the right arm whilst saying *Ohm Namah Annirudhaiya*. After which the Kum-Kum Chandlo should be marked in the centre of the Tilak on the forehead by chanting *Ohm Shree Laxmine Namah*.

These markings serve a double purpose in that the forehead mark also provides a basis for development of the mind and intellect. It purifies the mind and brings strength of intellect. The mark on the chest brings health and vitality. The marks on the arms save oneself from acting unscrupulously as sins are often committed by one's hands. Hence purity of action is derived. The Mantras above represent the various aspects of Godhead, by chanting them we are invoking all such forms to reside within us.

The Tilak-Chandlo and double Kanthi are the essence of true Vaishnavism. They are the essence of Jugal Upasna of Bhakta and Bhagwan. They represent the bond between God and oneself. To renounce either would be to renounce the bond between God and oneself and for such reason it is important that these Vaishnav signs are continued and not renounced through fear, criticism or any other supposed obstacle.

I have recently observed what I feel to be bad practices. The first is with regard to some of the Kanthis I have seen. People have begun to accessorise the Kanthi as if it is a fashion accessory. Many wear only a single Kanthi like a 'choker', whilst others wear a three stringed Kanthi which is platted together. These may look very good but are contradictory to our Vedic teachings. Indeed any aim to make the Kanthi somehow decorative is usually incorrect.

Another style is to mount the Kanthi on Gold. This may be arguably correct as the use of Gold has been ordained but I feel that it somehow takes away the humbleness and simplicity of a Kanthi. Often they look like a fashionable necklace rather than a Kanthi anyway. I really do feel that the traditional double Kanthi is unique and looks much better than any of these gimmicks to make it fashionable anyway.

The second fashion accessory is the Chandlo. This is particularly the case for women who use 'stick-on' Chandlas. They come in many different shapes, sizes, designs and colours to match their dress.

Our Shastras give precise instructions to how these markings should look and what they should be made with. Indeed I feel that to call them '*Chandlo*' would be wrong. I do not mean to attack women in any way but I felt it necessary to clarify this point, as it is desirable to confirm to the teachings of our Shastras and Rishis. In the true sense, the Chandlo should be made with Kum-Kum and nothing else.

These markings of God - the visible signs of a devotee of God are significant and important and so it is the duty of all to raise themselves beyond all obstacles, and adorn these signs. Not only is it dutiful but there is great benefit in doing so. One can almost feel the presence of the Lord when one wears such markings. It seems to me that a forehead without a Tilak is somewhat dim. It gives no lustre to a face, whereas those with a Tilak look so much livelier. It brings beauty to a face. It complements a forehead so well. It seems as though the forehead was designed in this way so that it could be used to adorn this great sign of God.

Shatanand now elaborates further upon the Tilak Chandlo:

TEXT 42

The Tilak shall be made with *Gopichandan* stick or with consecrated sandal paste mixed with *Kum-Kum* (saffron or red powder) duly offered to Lord Krishna.

Tatu Gopichandanena Chandanenathva Hareha /

Shatanand explains that *Gopichandan* is a special type of mud, which is famed in *Dwarika*. Legend has it that after the demise of Shree Krishna, his wives stricken with grief, fell to the earth and became one with the earth. This area is known as '*Gopi Tarav*' and this is where *Gopichandan* can be found. Alternatively any other purified mud or paste can be used which has been offered to God. This could be sandalwood paste etc.

Shatanand says, *Atra Gopichandaneneti Tirthamruda Upalaksharnam* - *Gopichandan* can be taken to mean the mud or paste from a place of pilgrimage. **Acharamadhava of Brahmand Puran** explains, 'The mud from the pinnacle of a mountain, the banks of a river, a place of pilgrimage renowned by Vaishnavas, the banks of an ocean or sea, an ant hill or serpent's burrow and the paste of a Tulsi plant should always be favoured for marking the Tilak.'

Vyaas adds, 'Those who use the mud from the banks of the *River Ganges* on their forehead destroy darkness by being endowed with the form of lustre of the sun.' **Satyapa** says 'Those who use on their foreheads, the mud from the banks of the *River Gomati*, made from the bodies of Gopis, are freed from all sin.'

Padma Puran explains, 'The mud from places of pilgrimage should be used to mark the *Urdvapundra* on the forehead.' **Skand Puran** explains. 'Paste of the Tulsi plant, *Gopichandan* or the paste of sandalwood duly offered to God, should be used by Vaishnavas to mark the *Urdvapundra*.'

In some instances the use of *Gopichandan* is forbidden. **Dharma Pravarti of Smrutisarasmuchai** explains, '*Gopichandan* should never be used for purposes of perfuming the body, during *Sutak* period (ten days succeeding a birth or death), during a wedding, when a child is born and other such occasions.' At such times other pastes should be used, as *Chandan* offered to God in *Pooja* is never forbidden for use.

Uddhav explains, 'O Lord! Those who first offer thee flower garlands paste (*Chandan*), clothing and ornaments such as jewellery and only then use such things for personal use can overcome the clutches of *Maya* (illusion).' 'After bathing, one should mark the Tilak using paste. After '*Hom*' - sacrificial offering, one should mark the Tilak using the ash from the sacrifice, to destroy all sins.' Thus in this way the *Tilak-Chandlo* is glorified in *Shastras* such as **Padma Purana** and **Urdvapundra Dharamvada**. Only those substances mentioned in *Shastras* should be used to mark the forehead. In this way, *Tilak-Chandlas* made using pastes offered to Shree Krishna are able to destroy the sins of man.

TEXT 43

In the centre of the Tilak, one shall make a Chandlo (round mark) of *Gopichandan* or *Kum-Kum*, which has been offered to Radha or Lakshmi.

Tanmadhya Eva Kartavyata Pundradravyyera Chandarkaha /

The centre (*Madhya*) of the *Tilak (Pundra)* is stipulated here. Thus it should be neither too high nor too low. *Pundradravvera* - that which is used to mark the Tilak should be used to mark the *Chandlo (Chandrakaha)*

Sarsamgraha's Vishnu Dharmotara explains, 'O King! Vaishnavas in order to please Lakshmi and earn her favour should wear a *Chandlo* made from *Kum-Kum* in the centre of the *Urdvapundra Tilak*, daily.' By doing so, we are showered with wealth, as Lakshmi is the Goddess of Wealth. Kum-Kum has been glorified here and so it should be used in preference to others substances ideally.

Kumkumenathava Vruto Radhalaksmiprasadapi - The Kum-Kum offered to Radha or Lakshmi is considered the greatest. Kum-Kum that is offered to Radha-Lakshmi is above all else and will surely provide all that one requires.

This Shlok is really for men (as explained later) and commands them to wear a Tilak (U - shaped mark) using Gopichandan (yellow or orange paste) with a round circle of red powder - Kum-Kum in the middle of the Tilak. This sign is somewhat specific to members of the Swaminarayan sect, but as we can see, it is in actual fact the mark for all Vaishnavas. All Vaishnavas should mark their foreheads in exactly this way. There are many sects that wear different markings - some mark only the U - shape Tilak and not the Chandlo. The Chandlo in some sects is too far down. Sometimes women wear the Tilak and not the Chandlo. The Tilak may be too long or too short. It may be too wide or too narrow. The Chandlo may be too small or too big. In all such cases the sizes should be proportionate and should complement each other.

Jugal Upasna should always be practised - the worship of Radha and Krishna or Lakshmi and Narayan and therefore both the Tilak and Chandlo should be worn by men to signify both *Bhakta* and *Bhagwan*. Those who do not act in this way can never fully fulfil their devotion to God. ***Shrischa Yasyasti Vakshasi*** - Lakshmi resides in the heart of God and therefore the Chandlo must reside within the heart of the Tilak.

TEXT 44

My Sat-Shudra disciples, who are devotees of Shree Krishna and observing their Dharma, shall wear a Tulsi Kanthi and shall mark the Tilak similar to those of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.

***Sachudraha Krushnabhaktaa Ye Taistu Malordhvapundrake /
Dwijativadvariye Nijadhasmeshu Sansthitaiha //44//***

Shatanand explains that there are two types of *Shudras* - *Sachudra* (or *Sat-Shudra*) and *Asachudra*. Shree Hari has defined a *Sachudra* as a *Krushnabhakta* and *Nijadhasmeshu Sansthitaiha* - one who is a faithful Krishna devotee and who is true to his duty. **Smrutis** further explain:

***Vishudhvanvayasamjato Nivruto Madhmaisataha /
Dwijabhakto Varigvrutiha Sachudraha Samprakirtitaha //***

'Those who are born in a righteous family, who refrain from meat and alcohol, who are devoted to Brahmins and who serve Vaishyas are considered as *Sachudra*.' Those who do not live according to this code of ethics are considered as *Asachudra*. A *Shudra* should be understood as a person of the fourth caste.

Shatanand explains a Shudra as any 'low born' and therefore is not exclusively a member of the fourth caste and as such a child born out of an affair is considered a Shudra. However there are two types of children born - *Anulomaja* and *Pratilomaja*. The following explains the various Shudras or low born. The first are born out of *Anuloma* or true marriage and therefore are Sachudras.

Murdhavshakti - a child from a Kshatriya mother and a Brahmin father. *Ambashta* - Vaishya mother and Brahmin father, *Nishad or Parshav* - Shudra mother and Brahmin father, *Mahishya* - Vaishya mother Kshatriya father, *Ugra* - Shudra mother and Kshatriya father. *Karana* - Shudra mother and Vaishya father.

Now are explained those born from a *Pratiloma* marriage - Asachudras:

Suta - Brahmin mother and Kshatriya father, *Vaidehic* - Brahmin mother and Vaishya father, *Chandal* - Brahmin mother and Shudra father (such a Chandal is considered as lowest type), *Magadh* - Kshatriya mother and Vaishya father, *Kshata* - Kshatriya mother and Shudra father, *Ayogav* - Vaishya mother and Shudra father. Further more, the child of a Mahishyo father and Karana mother is a *Rathkar*. In this way are defined Sachudras and Asachudras. Those Sachudras who are Krishna devotees, who wish for salvation, who serve the upper three castes and who obey their personal duty have the right to *Diksha*, *Tulsi Mala* and *Urdvapundra*.

Therefore **Narad Pancharatra** explains, 'Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras who desire salvation (Mumukshu) should wear the Tulsi Mala, Urdvapundra Tilak and the Vaishnav Mantra (Diksha Mantra).'

It was the aim of Lord Swaminarayan to return to the true Vedic teachings and therefore he taught the true Dharmas for Shudras, giving them back their rightful place in society.

TEXT 45

My disciples who belong to the substrata of society shall wear a sanctified double rosary of sandalwood around their neck and shall place only a round mark on their forehead but not a Tilak.

This Shlok is in reference to *Asachudras* and others. They too have the right to serve God but in their case they should not mark the vertical Tilak. They should wear only the *Chandlo*. All, regardless of their birth have a right to serve and worship the Lord. Even the worst of sinners are cleansed through the worship of God. *Asachudras* do not have the right of Poojan of Murtis, but do have the right of *Darshan* and *Naamasankirtan* and therefore need not wear the vertical Tilak.

Brahmand Puran explains, 'Yagna, donation, penance, offerings, study and ancestral rites performed without the Urdvapundra bear no fruits.' Shudras do not have the right to perform any of these acts therefore it is not necessary for them to wear the Urdvapundra.

The Lord in this way gives the true Vedic teachings for Shudras explaining their rights and duties. A Shudra can never be called an 'untouchable' if he is a faithful devotee of God. Those, regardless of caste who act wilfully, breaking the '*Panchvratmans*' are considered the true untouchables.

Now the Lord explains *Shiva Mahima*:

TEXT 46

Brahmins and others who have for generations marked their foreheads with Tripundra (a three-fold horizontal mark) and worn a necklace of Rudraksha beads on account of family traditions and customs, shall continue to do so even after becoming my devotee.

Tripundrarudrakshadrutiryesham Syat Svakulagta /
Taistuvipradibhiha Kapi Na Tyajya Sa Madashritauha //46//

This Shlok really extols the greatness of Lord Swaminarayan, who accepted the two great *Sampradays* - **Vaishnavism** and **Shaivism**. He himself preached that both are of significance and equal. No one Sampraday should be slandered in any way. The Lord accepted the worship of **Lord Shiva** as a means to salvation. He taught the greatness of Lord Mahadev and himself often performed *Poojan* of *Shiva-Linga*. Therefore none should criticise Lord Shiva or the Shaiva Sampraday.

Shatanand explains that the *Tripundra* and *Rudraksha* are worn in order to receive the fruits of worship of Lord Shiva. **Ling Puran** explains, ‘The *Tripundra* on a forehead and the *Rudraksha Mala* should never be renounced. Those that do, lose their fruits of worship (Pooja) of Lord Mahadev.’ Shatanand Muni says, *Vaishnavrajashrishankaralingatvacheti Bhavaha*: ‘This is the sign of King of Vaishnavas - Lord Shankara.’ (In reference to the Tripundra and Rudraksha). Therefore to renounce these signs in effect causes the diminishment and insult of a *Vaishnav Bhakta*, which can never be tolerated by Lord Shree Hari. The Lord has often said that he can tolerate an insult to himself, but never an insult to his faithful devotee. The pains of his devotee are far greater than even his own pains and sufferings.

The **Bhagwat** accepts that Shiva is the best amongst Vaishnavas: *Vaishnavanam Yatha Sambhuha*. In **Garud Puran’s Second Adhyaya**, **Lord Shiva** himself says to Lord Brahma:

Aham Dhyayami Tam Vishnum Parmatma Namischaram /
Sarvadam Sarvagam Sarvam Sarvaprani Hrudi Stitam //

‘I meditate upon Lord Vishnu Paramatma. He is the all-giver (*Sarvadam*), the source of all (*Sarvagam*) and the in-dweller of all hearts.’

Bhasmodhmulitdehastu Jatarudrakshamaridataha /
Vishnoraradhanartham Mae Vratmetat Pitamaha //

‘O Grandfather! Marking the body with ash or dust, adorning a matted lock of hair (Jata) and Rudraksha are merely a ritual for worshipping Lord Vishnu.’ Shiva is therefore respected as the greatest of Vaishnavas - *Vaishnavshreshatva*. To serve and worship Shiva is to serve and worship Vishnu. Shiva is one of only a few who fully understand *Vaishnav Dharma* and for such reason he is truly great. **Yama Raja** explains:

Swayambhurnarada Shambhuha Kumaraha Kapilo Manuha /
Prahlado Janako Bhishmo Balirvaiyaskirvayam //

‘Brahma, Narad, Shankar, Sanakadik Rishis, Kapil, Manu, Prahlad, Janak, Bhishma, Baliraj, Sukdevji and Yamaraja understand Bhagwat Dharma. Such Dharma is reticent, pure and understood only through plight. By understanding this Dharma, one can attain Paramatma.’ Thus these are the twelve *Bhagwad-Acharyas* worthy of praise as they are a means to attaining God Supreme.

Rudraksha and *Bhasm* (ash) are a means of purifying oneself and are a great source of *Punya*. In the discussion between **Shiva** and **Kartik Swami** it is said, ‘Those who perform fruitful acts, wearing a Mala of twenty-seven Rudraksha receive endless more *Punya*.’

It is also possible to become one with Shiva - '*Shankar-Roop*': **Bopadev** explains, 'Those who wear thirty-two Rudraksha around their neck, forty around the head, twelve around each arm, sixteen around each upper arm, one in the middle of each eye, one on the pigtail or '*Chotli*' and one hundred and eight in their heart; are themselves *Shivarupa*.'

In this way the greatest of Lord Shree Shiva-Shankar is glorified and therefore by praising him and wearing the Rudraksha which has been worn for years is desirable. There seems to be a great boundary between Vaishnavas and Shaivites that needs to be broken. The two Sampradays are often thought of as totally distinct and even apposing. Lord Swaminarayan here however has made a move to bring these two great Sampradays together and has proved that the two are not distinct. Both have a place and both are to be equally respected.

A question arises – If Shiva is the greatest of Vaishnavas - then why is it necessary as Vaishnavas, to give praise to Shiva? Note the greatness of Shiva as a devotee: his Lord lives in a great palace of luxury therefore he chooses to live in a cemetery (*Shamshaan*); his Lord wears kingly dress therefore he chooses to wear tiger skin and ash; his Lord wears a necklace of gold so he chooses to wear a necklace of snakes. Thus he is truly a great devotee, indeed the best. He is forever performing penance of Lord Vishnu and as a result He should never be slandered but should always be praised by all for his dedication and greatness. The Lord further says:

TEXT 47

**No distinction shall be made between Narayan and Shiva, as they are both proclaimed as
Brahmanswarupa by the Vedas.**

Ekatmyameva Vigneyam Narayanamaheshyoha /
Ubhyorbrahmanrupera Vedeshu Pratipadanat //47//

Those who think of God differently to this, where *Narayan* or *Shiva* are defamed in some way are insulting God. Shatanand says that such people should have their eyes removed. Such a person is blind to the truth and can never be enlightened to that truth.

Many Shastras speak of the oneness of Narayan and Shiva. Our ancient Shastras in some instances speak of Narayan as supreme and in other instances speak of Shiva as supreme. Both views should be accepted as correct, hence they should be accepted as the one and the same. The following Veda scriptures are Shaiva in context as they speak of Shiva as Brahman: *Atharvashikha*, *Atharvashisha*, *Shetasvataria*, *Mantropanishad*, *Kaivalyopanishad*. The following speak of Vishnu as the supreme Brahman: *Mahanarayanopanishad*, *Narayaropanishad*, *Mahopanishad*, *Shubhalopanishad*. Thus the four Vedas sing only the oneness of Shiva and Narayan.

Shrimad Bhagwat's Fourth Chapter explains, 'Those who find indifference in Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and recognise the oneness in them obtain eternal peace.' The **Eighth Chapter** adds, 'Shiva Brahma and Vishnu are thy manifested forms, which create, maintain and destroy the universe at thy will. Thou is Ishwara who delivers Moksh (Salvation). Thou is Parabrahman (the Supreme Lord).'

Narad Pancharatra succinctly states:

Shivo Harirhariha Shakshatchiva Eva Nirupitaha /
Shivadveshi Haridrohi Vishnum Nityam Bhajanapi //

‘Shiva is Hari and Hari is none other than Shiva. An enemy of Shiva is an enemy of Hari, even though he may daily worship Vishnu.’

Bhattacharya has said, ‘I have looked in the Puranas, Upapuranas, Vedas, Smrutis and all other such Shastras, but have not come across anything to suggest a difference in Shiva and Vishnu.’ **God** himself has said, ‘Those who find difference in the two of us fall to the Hells.’ **Shree Dhar Swami** prays, ‘I humbly bow before Vishnu and Shankar who are one, who revere one another and who provide for all.’ **Vallabhacharya**, a famed Vaishnava, in similar fashion says, ‘Glory to thee, who is honoured as Brahman in the Vedanta - Lord of the three worlds - Mahadev.’

Lord Swaminarayan has gone out of his way to glorify both Vaishnav and Shaiva Sampradays in order to get back to the true Vedic teachings. We must conform to this dream of Lord Swaminarayan’s by never uttering a word contrary to the Lord’s standpoint. We must always, with love, observe the Vratas of Lord Shiva and bow respectfully to the icons of Shiva. It does not in anyway fault our devotion to Lord Vishnu by doing so - indeed it strengthens devotion for Vishnu. Narayan and Shiva are one and the same. They are, if you like, two sides of the same coin. That coin being *the Supreme Godhead*.

TEXT 48

My disciples shall never practice the relaxations, permitted by scriptures for extreme calamities, as the principal rules in the event of temporary adverse conditions.

Shree Hari informs us that in the event of extreme calamities (*Apatkaar*), one should never use excuses to work their way around the directives of the Shastras. Often Shastras will be a little lenient upon those ill, young etc., but these leniencies should never be used inappropriately. One should always be sensible when observing *Vratas*. Those who are able to keep Vratas such as *Upavaas* (fasting) etc. should observe such Vratas and should never make excuses to diverge from their duties.

Some people use some really pitiful excuses to ‘get out’ of performing Vratas. Sometimes Ekadashi Vratas may be ignored because they feel that their body isn’t getting the necessary nutrients and making the body weak on a diet of *Samo* etc. These ‘nutritional experts’ come out with all sorts of excuses. Some get out of Vratas by classing themselves as ill when the illness is something small such as a headache.

Shastras should never be interpreted in this way in order to make it easier on oneself. It is also unacceptable to forcefully carry out a Vrata when clearly you do suffer from a serious illness. To cause further irreparable harm to the body serves no purpose and so sensible decisions based on advice should be made always.

TEXT 49

All my disciples shall get up daily before sunrise, offer prayers to Lord Shree Krishna and then go to answer the call of nature.

Lord Swaminarayan now begins his teachings upon ‘*Nitya-Karma*’ - those duties observed daily - *Pratyaham*. They span the next six Shloks. Shatanand explains that the period of 55 *Gadis* (one Gadi = 24 minutes) after sunrise is called *Ushakala*. Thereafter, 57 *Gadis* is *Arunadeyakala* and 58 *Gadis* after that is *Praatahakala*. The remaining time (for sunrise) is called *Suryodeyakala*. The time before sunrise

is called **Brahmuhurta**. It is this Brahmuhurta Kala which is of significance and is precisely the time when we are to wake up and perform prayers to Shree Krishna.

Acharmayukh explains, 'Night time's last Gadi and daytime's first Gadi (2 Gadis in total) is known as *Brahman*.' **Prayogparijat** explains, 'Night time's lasts *Prahar* (one Prahar = 3 hours) is called *Brahmuhurta*. Such time is for study of the Vedas and so one should remain awake for this duration of time.' **Smrutiratnavali** explains the consequence of sleeping during Brahmuhurta - 'By sleeping during Brahmuhurta, one destroys their *Punya* (fruits of righteous actions). Those who unintentionally sleep during such time should perform *Pada-Kruchra Vrat* (involving severe fasting). Brahmuhurta is for purpose of study of Vedas and devotion to God. It is the most purest and pious part of the day. It is said that those who tackle a problem during such time will surely succeed in finding a solution to their problem. Those who perform worship during this time receive endless more fruits for their action. Such is the greatness of Brahmuhurta Kala and for such reason; one should not sleep during this time of day and thus waste it in this way. After which one should meditate upon Shree Krishna, his *Bhaktas* and his *Tirtha Sthans* - performing *Shree Krishna Smaranam*.

Shatanand says that those who have woken early should perform Smarana for one Gadi. Those awoken late shall perform Smarana for two Gadis and then go to answer the call of nature. It is ironic that we work opposite to this philosophy by reducing the time spent on Smarana/Pooja, the later we wake up!

Manu explains the cleansing procedure after answering the call of nature: 'Using sand or mud (and water) one must cleanse their genitalia once, their knees thrice, their left hand ten times, both hands together seven times and their feet three times.' Only after such rigorous procedure does one become truly cleansed. It is surprising that many people don't even bother to wash their hands when going to answer the call of nature, never mind the rigorous procedure above. Shatanand forbids the use of various types of sand or mud - there are five in all: (1) that from a river etc., (2) from temples and other holy places, (3) from an underground burrow of a snake or anthill, (4) from a mouse's burrow, (5) mud used by somebody else for the same purpose.

Shatanand explains that those who do not properly cleanse themselves after answering the call of nature are degenerates. Therefore all should make sure that they follow these principles. Not only is it a religious thing but it is also for purpose of personal hygiene and the prevention of disease.

Shatatap Muni explains, 'Those who answer the call of nature in circumstances where there is no water to cleanse themselves should bathe once they have water, perform a special offering and drink a preparation of water and Ghee, purified with Gold. After which **Bhaskacharya** suggests further purification through fasting.

It is desirable that Bhaktas wake before sunrise and perform Pooja. This is rarely done these days. However this should not be used as an excuse to not perform Pooja or to in some way ridicule those who do perform Pooja. There are people in this world who will say to those who perform Pooja - 'Your Pooja is futile as you perform it after sunrise - it will bear no fruits'. Fools who do not understand the greatness of Pooja speak such words. Yes, those performing Pooja before sunrise will receive endless more *Punya* for their act. Those who perform Pooja after sunrise may not receive as much *Punya*, but will still receive something for their labour and so such people should never give up their devotion.

TEXT 50

Thereafter, sitting in one place, they shall brush their teeth, bathe with clean water and then wear one washed cloth around the waist and one around the upper part of the body.

One must perform *Datan* (brushing their teeth) sitting in one place. **Smruti** strictly forbids any other way of brushing: *Na Tishtam Brajan Kuryan Na Svapan Dantdhavan* - 'One should never brush their teeth while standing, walking or lying down.' One must also perform *Datana* whilst observing '*Moun Vrata*' - vow of silence. *Datana* should be performed using water and the famed sticks of wood. **Vishnu** explains such famed piece of wood: 'A stick of wood which has thaws and milk-like juice should be used. It should be twelve finger widths in length and one finger in width. One end should be made into free bristles at a depth of half a finger.'

Skanda Puran explains, 'According to their caste, all should perform *Datana* with a stick of wood which is shorter by one finger length.' Thus Shudras should use a twelve finger-width length *Datana*, Vaishyas an eleven length *Datana* etc. **Vashishta** writes, 'One should not perform *Datana* on days of *Upavaas* (fasting) and *Shraadh* (ancestral offering).' This is forbidden due to the use of wood. **Vyaas** explains, 'On days of *Upavaas* or days on which *Datana* cannot be found, one should wash their mouth with water twelve times.' **Krutiyachinamani** explains, 'Samavedis (Brahmins) should use *Datana* of eight finger-widths.'

After *Datana* one should bath using pure water. **Padma Puran** explains what '*pure*' water means: 'Bathing daily in the cold water of a sea, river, stream or a well is considered the best.' Bathing in cold water is considered to be better but obviously those who cannot through old age or illness may bathe using warm water. **Manu** strictly forbid the use of hot water for bathing in many instances: 'One should not bathe using hot water when there is a death in a family, a birth, period of astrological transition (*Sankranti*), during *Shraadh* - the time of ancestral offerings, one's own birthday and after an eclipse of the sun or moon.'

Katyayan informs us of the way in which bathing is to be performed: *Praataha Shankshepataha Snaanam Madhyena Tu Savistaram* - 'One should bathe in short (*Shankshep*) at daybreak (*Praatahakal*) and then in full (extensively) at noon. Those who do not act in this way, never receive the intended fruits of acts of sacrifices (*Yagnas*) etc.'

In **Mitakshara**, **Shatatap Muni** explains the consequences of not bathing at daybreak: *Praataha Snaanam Vini Nityan Dwijo Bhavati Sutaki* - they are forever *Sutaki* - an untouchable and impure. **Skand Puran** explains the merits of bathing at daybreak: 'Those who bathe at daybreak satiate their ancestors and the Gods. Their actions become pure and worthwhile.' Therefore it is important that '*Snaan Vidhi*' is carried out properly and a level of cleanliness is maintained which is acceptable.

After bathing, one should wear a piece of cloth around the waist (usually a *Dhoti* for men) and one around the upper body (*Saal*). These articles of clothing should be washed and clean. **Dharma Pradeep** explains that such articles of clothing are not considered to be pure and clean if washed by a woman, hence such clothings for this purpose must be washed by the individuals themselves. **Smruti Sangrah** explains the deeper meaning of '*pure*' clothes and hence, that which is considered as unclean, 'A cotton garment worn around the waist, a silk cloth worn whilst eating and any dirty garments are all ready to be washed.'

The specifications regarding size etc. of the garment to be worn are now given: The cloth for the lower part of the body should be seven or eight arm lengths long and a quarter of that wide. The garment should be relatively new made from white linen. The upper body cloth should be half that of the lower in length.

In this way two garments should be used: *Vasasi Paridhaniyamutriyam Cheti Dve Vastre Paridharye* - one which is worn and one which is used to cover says **Hari Harkarikama**. To use only one cloth is

unacceptable as such use is considered to be comparable to being naked. In addition Brahmcharis, Brahmins etc. should wear a loin cloth and *Janoi* (sacred thread).

In **Kruttyachintamani**, **Jatukarnya Muni** explains: ‘Those who wear dirty clothes, a loin cloth on its own, does not wear a loin cloth, does not wear an upper cloth, who wears the red Bhagwa clothing, a wet garment, sticky clothing and a sewn garment, are considered as naked.’

Jatukarnya Muni forbids eating with only one clothing worn. Similarly acts such as Japp, Daan and Yagnas do not provide the fruits which one expects if only one garment is worn.

These Shloks are for the good of man. The *Nitya Karmas* are there for personal purification and so it is important that from the time we wake up in the morning, we keep our mind focused for the act of purification. It should be concentrated upon God. Many have a habit of waking up first thing in the morning and watching television. He then casually goes into the bathroom whenever he feels up to it. Many sing songs in the bath.

We must realise that the morning is to be dedicated to God and these other things should be far from one’s mind. When waking, we should meditate upon God for few minutes and then go to the bathroom to see to morning duties. Whilst bathing, we should sing the Lord’s name, chant his glorious name or sing Kirtans and remember and chant the great rivers of India. Surely these acts will be more beneficial than singing other songs.

If you need to listen to something in the morning then listen to Katha of God or Bhajans and not Hindi film songs. It is important that the morning ritual, involving remembrance of the Lord is taught to the young so that they can practice it from an early age. Those children who follow such an ethical code become virtuous and respected throughout their lives. Those who do not have any discipline like this are defamed and inevitably face difficulties in their life. Only those who remember God daily in this way are themselves remembered by God and ultimately his choicest blessings are showered upon such pure devotees of God. Lord Swaminarayan now explains the *Pooja Vidhi*.

TEXT 51

Then they shall sit in a clean place, on a clean and suitable cloth, untouched by others and facing north or east shall perform Achaman.

Apavishya Tataha Shudha Asane Suchibhutale - Thus a pure and cleansed ‘Aasan’, which is placed in a clean environment, which does not come into contact with impure things, is to be used. The Aasan is then sat on for purposes of performing Pooja.

Asankirna Ashprushyam Prahmukham Votaramukham - ‘Sankirna’ Aasan is explained in **Vishnu Dharmotar**, ‘An Aasan that is in contact with another Aasan, too long, too big, one common Aasan for both God’s Murtis and oneself and a king’s Aasan.’ Therefore the Lord commands that an ‘Asankirna’ Aasan should be used which is opposite to that above. Also, an Aasan that does not touch anything impure should be used.

Padma Puran explains what the Aasan should be made from: ‘An Aasan of wool will attain and fulfil all desires; an Aasan of deer skin will derive salvation; an Aasan of tiger skin will derive fruits of penance and wealth; an Aasan made of grass or leaves will derive good health’. Therefore only such materials should be used for an Aasan.

Ananata Bhatt explains which Aasans should never be used ‘An Aasan of stone will bring suffering, one of wood (not used for Yagnas) will bring illness, one of cloth (which is not washed daily) will bring poverty and not using an Aasan at all will never derive any of the fruits of such penance.’

Vyaas further explains, ‘One should sit on an Aasan made of either silk, wool, deer skin, washed cloth, wood, leaf or grass; face north or east, and then perform Achaman (sipping of water).’ **Karnav Muni** explains the Vidhi for Achaman: ‘One should extend their arms towards the east with their hand shaped in a form of a cow’s ear. With the thumb and smallest finger touching, they should perform Achaman as they separate these fingers.’ ‘Dwijas should perform Achaman three times’, explains **Yagnavalkya**. Enough water should be used so that an ‘*Aradh Daal*’ will sink. Achaman should always be performed using the right hand such that the left hand does not ever touch the right hand (This is the case for all acts of eating and drinking - the left hand should never be used). Achaman should be performed using *Brahmtirtha* - the thumb is called Brahmirtirtha as the smallest finger, the index finger, the root of the thumb and the front of the hand are Prajapati, Pitru, Brahman and Deva Tirthas respectfully. Shudras should perform Achaman only once.

Three ‘*Shuddis*’ - purifications are to be performed daily. The first is *Snaan* - bathing for purpose of exterior or bodily purification - ‘*Shararik Shuddhi*’. The second is Achman, which is for the inner body purification - ‘*Antara Shuddhi*’, and the third is Pooja, which is for purification of the mind - ‘*Manas Shuddhi*’. All devotees of God must perform these three purifications daily, those who do not, can never be considered as pure and clean and hence worthy of being called a devotee of God.

Achaman is performed to purify the three bodies - *Sihul*, *Shukshma* and *Karana* - gross or physical body, subtle (which the soul resides within) and the causal body. Achaman is to be performed whilst chanting the Mantras:

Ohm Shree Narayanaya Namah
Ohm Shree Vasudevaya Namah
Ohm Shree Vishnavaya Namah

Shreeji Maharaj now further details Pooja Vidhi:

TEXT 52

All males shall mark their foreheads with a Tilak having a Chandlo in the centre of it. All married women shall make only a Chandlo of Kum-Kum on their forehead.

Kartavyamurdhvapundra Cha Pumbhireva Sachandrakam /

All male devotees are to mark their foreheads in this way - the Urdvapundra Tilak with the round Chandlo in the centre. Lord Swaminarayan in the next few Shloks clarifies the Tilak Chandlo Vidhi for all types of people.

In this Shlok he first explains the Tilak Chandlo to be marked by male devotees: *Urdvapundrarni Cha Grihastrauha Sadhubhischa Lalateya Hruudi Bahoscheti Chatvari Vasudevashankarshanpradyumnanimiruddhanamamantraurdharyarnityuktam*: ‘Urdvapundra should be marked by householders (*Grihastas*) and saints (*Sadhus*). It should be marked on the forehead (*Lalata*), chest/heart (*Hruudi*) and both arms (*Baho*) whilst chanting the Mantras: *Vasudeva*, *Shankarsharna*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*.’

Brahmcharis and *Vanaprasthas* are to mark five places - the four as above and additionally the neck. They should chant the *Vishnu Gayatri Mantra: Ohm Narayana Vidmahe Vasudevai Dhimahi Teno Vishnu Prachodayat*. Incidentally, *Grihastas* and the like should chant the Gayatri Mantra - *Ohm Bhura Ohm Bhuva Ohm Svaha Tatsaviturvarernyam Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayaata*. *Tyagis* and *Brahmcharis* may alternatively chant any five names of Shree Krishna and other incarnations.

Acharamdhav of **Brahmand Puran** explains that even the colours of the Chandlo are significant: ‘A black Tilak will derive peace; a red Tilak will bring obedience and control; a yellow one will bring wealth; one which is white will deliver devotion to Vishnu; a Tilak of correct size, marked using one’s fingers will offer the Lord’s support and blessing; a Tilak in the centre of the forehead will bring youth and long life; the Chandlo made using the third finger (*Anamika*) will deliver joy; and a bounded Tilak will ultimately bring salvation’. Thus one should mark the Tilak with the correct finger making sure that the nail of the finger does not come into use when marking.

Acharmayukh provides the specification for the Tilak: ‘The *Urdhva* should be absolutely straight (vertical) at a thickness of the little finger - *Urdhvapundramrujum Saumyam Kanishtangulivat Smrutam*. It should extend from the top of the nose to the hairline.’

Santaralam Prakurvanti Pundra Haripadakruti - ‘One which has space in the middle (is not full bodied but is hollow) and is marked like the Lord’s lotus feet.’ The Tilak made using the finger should also be sized like a finger. Shatanand then explains the two types of Tilaks – *Haripadakruti*, which is slightly wider at the top and *Dandakruti* which is parallel. It is further explained that *Dandakruti* Tilak is to be marked upon the forehead, a lotus shaped Tilak upon the chest, and bamboo shaped Tilaks on both arms and ‘*Divo*’ - naked flame shaped Tilak elsewhere.

Skand Puran explains that the Tilak should be made using a mirror or by looking at one’s reflection in the water. The Tilak should be made using mud or paste with space in the middle so that the Tilak or ‘U’ shape is distinct from the round Chandlo.

Shatanand then explains those Tilaks marked by people which are considered unacceptable and even despicable: A circular Tilak (not vertical), unstraight - leaning to one side, without space in the middle i.e. not hollow, too small, broken - i.e. the ‘U’ must be complete, without a base - i.e. just two vertical lines, too big, dirty - not of a pure or brilliant colour, made without the use of water, too red, made without the fingers and made using substances with a bad odour.

Kasyaha Sadhvanaribhirmalaye Kumkumchandrakaha //

Finally, married women should wear a Kum-Kum Chandlo upon the forehead. *Bhrigu Muni* explains:

*Lalataye Kumkumam Nasabhushanam Karkankaram /
Karashtasutram Cha Sadhva Durayena Kadachana* //

‘A married woman should never renounce the Kum-Kum Chandlo on her forehead, the nose stud or ring, bangles of ivory on the wrist and the black necklace (*Mangal Sutra*)’.

TEXT 53

Widows shall not mark their foreheads with either a Tilak or a Chandlo. All my disciples shall then meditate upon Shree Krishna and mentally offer sandalwood, flowers etc.

A *Chandlo* is considered to be an ornament. **Bhrighu Rishi** says: *Vidhava Dharyeneva Shukshmastramalkrutim* - 'Widowed women should never wear revealing clothing nor any ornaments'. Therefore, since a *Chandlo* is considered an ornament, widowed women should not wear the *Chandlo*. The Kum-Kum *Chandlo* is also famed as one of the signs of *married* women.

After *Tilak-Chandlo* has been marked, one should prepare for '*Maansi Pooja*': *Maanasa Poojanam Karyam Tataha Krushanasya Chaakhilauha* - they should meditate upon Shree Krishna, his form and his pastimes. One should always perform '*Dhyana*' or meditation first and then perform *Poojan*.

God himself has explained the ways in which one should perform *Maansi Pooja*: 'Men sitting alone in a peaceful place and without laziness should meditate upon me.'

One should understand the use of 'Krishna' to mean his consort *Radhikaji* as well and so meditation upon the *Jugal* (twin) *Murti* is propounded. *Radha* is the servant and wherever *Krishna* is, *Radha* is always there in his service. They are both of one form and therefore *Krishna*, though alone, is always with *Radha*.

Shatanand then explains that *Brahmins* and others should perform '*Sandhya Vandan*' - praise in welcoming of the morning. This is explained in more detail in the *Vishesha Dharmas* later on.

The Lord himself has explained the *Samanya Dharmas* to be observed by all: '*Sauch* - cleanliness, *Achaman* - sipping of water, *Snaan* - bathing, *Sandhya* - morning praise, *Sararta* - simple heartedness, *Tirtha Seva* - serving places of pilgrimage, *Japp* - chanting of Mantras, *Asprushya* - staying aloof of the opposite sex by never touching, *Abhakshya* - observing the code of clean eating and drinking by not consuming those things such as meat, alcohol etc. and *Asambhaashya Tyage* - purity and control of speech; these are the *Samanya* (basic) *Dharmas* of all. All should have affection for me and focus their mind, body and speech upon me.'

The Lord asks that we strive to uplift our actions, mental thinking and mastery of speech. These can be achieved only if we perform the daily morning rituals as mentioned. Physical *Pooja* and other good deeds will purify our actions. *Maansi Pooja* will make us mentally strong and *Japp*, *Kirtan* or *Hari Nam Dhoon* will cleanse our speech.

In these *Shloks* the Lord puts emphasis upon the elevation of the mind. Firstly we are to mark the forehead with a *Tilak/Chandlo* which itself strengthens the mind and then we are to perform *Maansi Pooja*. *Maansi Pooja* can be considered as a form of '*Yoga*' for concentration of the mind. The mind is a very powerful tool that creates a virtual reality allowing us to do things that may be physically impossible in real life. It can take you to places where you otherwise would never encounter.

Maansi Pooja is very difficult but it is very necessary. One can show true devotion to God by mentally imaging that we are performing every service to God, in the presence of God. It is the best thing in terms of getting close and intimate with the Lord.

One should perform *Maansi Pooja* five times during the day - in the early morning, the afternoon, around four 'o' clock, evening time and at night time, just before going to sleep. One should serve the Lord mentally in whatever way appropriate at that time of day.

For example, one may perform morning *Maansi Pooja* in the following manner: Gently wake the Lord by singing *Prabhatiyas* (morning *Bhajans*). Escort him to the bathroom and allow him to answer the call of nature and perform '*Datan*'. Then prepare him for bathing. Visualise that you are performing

'Panchamruta Snaan' by bathing him using milk, yoghurt, Ghee etc., chanting the appropriate Mantras as you do so. Wipe his body gently and dress him in rich silkier clothing. Sit the Lord down upon his 'Aasan', perform Achaman and mark the body with Tilak/Chandlo. After which begin to perform Poojan of the Lord. Chant the Lord's glorious name as you perform 'Japp Mala'. Perform *Tappni Mala* (standing on one leg), *Pradikshana* (circumambulations) and *Sashtang Dandavat Pranaam* (prostration). Then read from various scriptures asking the Lord to comment upon what has been read, thereby receiving the Lord's *Vachanamrut*. Perform *Arti* of God, after which ask the Lord for forgiveness for any faults committed unintentionally in the Pooja and hence conclude the Pooja. Then take the Lord for 'Bhojan' and offer the Lord the fifty-six types of foods. Visualise the Lord then offering you Prasad and thank the Lord for his favour. Ask the Lord for his favour throughout the day and always and praise the Lord's greatness.

Such Mansi Pooja shows intense love and devotion for God at an interpersonal level. It keeps the mind free from impure thoughts. It builds the mind and hence, one's intellect. It keeps the mind focused throughout the day. For these reasons, Maansi Pooja is considered great and all are urged to perform it, as well as performing the normal physical *Bahya* Pooja.

TEXT 54

Then they shall, with due respect, bow down before the images of Shree Radha Krishna and recite the eight syllabled holy Mantra of Shree Krishna according to their capacity and then attend to there daily routines.

After *Maansi Pooja* one should perform *Bahya Poojan* of their *Ishtadev* - Shree Radha-Krishna's idols given to them by their *Guru/Acharya*. Poojan inclusive of *Shastang Namakar* is to be performed, where eight parts of the body are surrendered to the Lord:

Paadbhyam Karabhyam Janubhyamurasa Shirsa Dasha /
Maanasa Vaachasa Cheti Praramoashanga Iritaha //

'Surrender of one's legs (*Paadbhyam*), hands (*Karabhyam*), knees (*Janubhyam*), chest (*Murasa*), head (*Shirasa*), sight (*Dasha*), mind (*Manasa*) and speech (*Vachasa*) is called Shashtang Namaskar.'

One should perform Poojan depending upon the type of Murti one is worshipping, as taught by Shastras. One should then perform *Shree Krishna Ashtakshar Mantra Japa* (eight – syllabled) or alternatively *Sharana Mantra Japp*.

Only after this, should you go about your daily routines of going to work etc. Pooja Vidhi is different for different types of people and therefore one is advised to approach a Sadhu for a detailed Vidhi. They will be able to show you in detail exactly how Pooja is to be performed.

Pooja can be as detailed as you want to make it. Many reject performing Pooja because they feel it takes up too much time. This however is inappropriate as to start with one may perform two or three Japa Malas and a few Shikshapatri Shloks. This can be done in about five to ten minutes and so will not be in any way time consuming. What I'm trying to get at is that we should do something everyday, however little. The benefits are there and it is our duty to take out a little time in the day for worship of God. God continues to give endlessly to us - should we not repay this huge debt that we owe?

Although Pooja Vidhi is different for different people (i.e. Brahmins should perform a fire-sacrifice during Pooja), there is somewhat a common format which can be followed by most and is as follows:

Firstly there is a need for cleanliness and purity before performing Pooja: *Devam Bhutva Devam Yajeta* - those performing Deva Pooja should themselves become Deva-like and so bathing is required for purity of the external body and Achaman for purity of the inner body as already described. Tilak-Chandlo should then be marked.

After which the mind is to be purified by concentrating it upon the Lord. Only after the body and mind are pure, can we begin to perform Pooja. Note that those who perform Pooja must observe the Panchavrataman of refraining from alcohol, meat, thieving, adultery and refraining from those food and drink which are unacceptable (one should not offer such foods and drinks to others also). Only then can the Pooja derive the desired fruits. Before Pooja we should chant the '*Avahana Mantra*' in order to invoke the Lord:

Ootishta Ootishta Hey Nath Swaminarayana Prabho /
Dharmasuno Dayasindho Svesham Shreyaha Param Kuru //
Agacha Bhagwan Deva Svasthanaat Parameshwara /
Aham Poojam Karishyami Sada Tvam Sanmukho Bhava //

'O Lord! O Swaminarayan! O Prabhu! Awake my Lord. O son of Dharma! O river of compassion! Bestow thy favour upon me, your humble servant who has come to thee for thy shelter. O Parameshvara! O Bhagwan! O Deva! who resides within my heart and soul as well as within Akshardhaam, I ask you to come from such abode and to reside within these Murtis before me so that I may perform Pooja of thee.' Then one should offer flowers, fruits etc. to the Lord.

After which one should perform *Mantra Japa* - both *Diksha Mantra* and the *Ishtanaama Mantra* of '*Swaminarayana*' as we rotate the Mala, should be chanted. *Tapani Mala*, *Pradikshana* and *Dandawat Pranama* can then be performed. Finally we should then read a number of Shloks from the *Shikshapatri* and chant *Janmangaladi Stotras* (108 names of God etc.).

Then the Pooja should be concluded by chanting the following Mantras with hands together:

Aparaadha Sahastrari Kriyanteharanisham Maya /
Daasoahamiti Mam Matva Kshamasva Parameshvara //

This is the '*Kshama-Yachna Mantra*' which is asking for forgiveness of mistakes committed in the performance of the Pooja. Then the '*Visarjan Mantra*' is chanted to conclude the Pooja:

Svasthanam Gacha Devesha Pujamadaya Mamakim /
Istakama Prasidyartham Punaragamanaiya Cha //
Atmesha Parameshwar Visarjayami Hrudi Me /
Swaminarayana Prabho Sada Vastu Hrudi Me //

'O Lord! After accepting my Pooja may thee return to thy place of residence. Continue to bless me by daily coming to receive my Pooja. O Swaminarayan! May you reside always within my heart.'

This is simply a rough guideline to how Pooja should be performed. One should bear in mind though that it is not what you do or how long your Pooja lasts, but with what devotion you perform Pooja with, which is of importance.

TEXT 55

Even those of my devotees who are Atmanivedi (who have entirely dedicated their lives to the service of God) like king Ambarish, shall also perform the sequence of rituals as described above, up to the meditation upon Lord Shree Krishna.

Lord Swaminarayan distinguishes his two types of disciples - *Vaishnav Satsangis* and *Vaishavottam Atmanivedis*. The first are considered as ordinary devotees of Vishnu whereas the second kind are much more advanced and dedicated in their devotion. The next six Shloks discuss the duties of these great persons.

Shree Hari mentions **Raja Ambarish**, one of the great kings of the illustrious *Surya Vamsa* (solar dynasty) as an example of an Atmanivedi Bhakta. An Atmanivedi Bhakta is one who surrenders his all unto God. He lives in accordance with God's wishes and never strays from the path of devotion. He is never self-absorbed and so always strives to better the lives of others. Such was Ambarish Raja's devotion and faith. His greatness is sung in Shrimad Bhagwat's 9th Skanda.

'Ambarish renounced all riches. He found livelihood to be a means to darkness and so lived like an ascetic in the jungle - renouncing all worldly pleasure. He uplifted his mind, speech and action by meditating upon God, singing his glorious name and serving him devoutly.'

Raja Ambarish would use his eyes for Darshan of God, his arms to embrace the Lord's devotees, his nose to smell the sandalwood or Tulsi smeared on the Lord's lotus feet, his tongue to partake only in Prashaad offered to God, his feet to wander through places of pilgrimage and his head to bow before the Lord's feet. Such was the devotion of Ambarish whose desire was merely to serve other Bhaktas of the Lord. In this way he had no desires of his own.

Ambarish would live in accordance with the wishes of Brahmins, residing at the banks of the River Saraswati. There, he would perform Yagnas, inviting great Rishis such as Gautam, Vashisht and others. He would sing and listen to God's glory. He had no desire for heavenly bliss - he simply wished to serve the Lord and his Bhaktas in any way possible.

He lived renouncing his kingdom, wealth and family - his all, in order that his devotion would stay pure and firm. It is this example set by Ambarish that we must aspire to. This is the purest of devotion and it is this Bhakti Yoga that pleased the Lord and earned him pride of place in the Lord's heart.

TEXT 56

My Atmanivedi devotees shall worship Saligram or the images of Lord Shree Krishna made from stone or metal, with offerings of sandalwood, flowers, fruits etc. which are available at the time according to their capacity. They shall then recite the eight syllable holy Mantra of Lord Shree Krishna.

Note here that these Shloks are not for only *Atmanivedi Bhaktas* - they apply to all of us. We may not be Atmanivedi Bhaktas yet, but we should live in such a way as to aspire to become Atmanivedi. This should be our goal and so these Shloks should be noted equally.

Poojan of a Murti of Shree Krishna is here mentioned. **Kshira Swami** states the eight *Lohas* (metals): *Survaram* - gold, *Rajatam* - silver, *Taabhram* - copper, *Ritiha* - Brass, *Kansyam* - bronze, *Trapu* - tin,

Sisum - lead and *Chimaram* - iron. Out of these, gold, silver, copper and brass should be used for making a Murti.

Atmanivedi Bhaktas are to perform Poojan of the said *Murtis*, *Pratimas* (pictorial forms of God) or *Saligram* (special sacred stone, considered to be the natural form of Vishnu), using sandalwood, flowers etc., as they chant Mantras. Note that Saligram Pooja is specifically mentioned for Brahmins and not for others caste members as well as women as explained by **Skand Puran** and others. The reason for this is due to the prohibition of touch of Shaligram for others. **Varaha Puran** explains further: 'Lower caste members and women should not touch Saligram as their touch is even more powerful than the *Vajra* (weapon of Indra).' Therefore they should perform Pratima Pooja – worshipping a pictorial for of God.

Vaishnavacharya goes further distinguishing between those who are *Dikshit* (initiated into the sect) and those who are *Adikshit*: 'Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sat-Shudras have the right to perform worship of Shaligram. Those who are Avaishnav (irreligious) do not have that right.'

Bhargavachan Dipika and **Bhavishyotar Puran** explain further: 'The idol of God for worship should be as big as the thumb.' **Vashisht** says: 'One should worship a Murti made from stone, which is no bigger than four fingers-widths. A Murti made from a mineral substance should always be used by those desirous of spiritual bliss.' It is explained that one should never worship a Murti that is broken or damaged in some way.

Now Shatanand goes on to explain Poojan using flowers: flowers which are dried out, from the ground, without a sweet fragrance, of bad odour, from a burial ground, which have already been offered to another deity, those that are impure, those containing mustard seeds and those that are unpleasant or old, should not be used for worshipping purposes. The best flowers are those that are grown and brought by the individual themselves. Those that are bought are inferior.

Tulsi and *Bilvi* leaves are sacred and so should be used for worship. Such leaves, though old, can still be used for worship during the various time periods other than those explained in **Vishnu Dharmotar**: during a period of transition of the stars (*Sankranti*), at the end of the dark or bright half of the lunar month, at night time, early morning, late evening and at a time of an inauspicious astrological period.

One should always take the *Tulsi Patra* for worship by chanting the following Mantra:

Tulasyamrutajanmasi Sada Tvam Keshavapriya /
Keshavarthe Vichinvami Varda Bhava Shobhane //

'O Tulsi! Born of divine nectar, which is forever beloved to Keshava. I take thee for Keshava therefore fulfil all desires.'

Those who perform Poojan must always be careful that they do not offend or insult God through various unacceptable acts. Our Shastras explain: 'It is offensive to go to temple in a vehicle, to go to temple wearing footwear, to not joyously celebrate a festival day, to not bow before the deities therein, to sit upon a seat higher than others, to company with women for even a small time at the temple, to touch God or perform Darshan of God with dirty hands after going to the toilet, to salute (perform *Namaskar*) God with one hand, to use foul language in temples or in the presence of the Lord, to sit with one's legs outstretched, to sit with one's legs tied together, to sleep or lie, to eat in a temple during Sabha, to speak falsely, to cry out loudly, to test somebody, to quarrel or argue in temples (reader should take particular note of this!), to look repeatedly at women or to touch them, to speak harshly, to not perform Upavaas (fasting) even though one is capable, to eat that which has not been offered to the Lord first, to pass wind in the presence of the Lord, to sit with one leg over the other, to say things which are unacceptable, to

speaking highly of oneself, and to sit with one's back facing the Lord.' All these acts are offensive and an insult to God.

Those with love for God, who commit such an offensive act (unintentionally or otherwise) can nullify their sins by performing an *Upvaas*, performing *Dandvat* (prostration) and chanting the *Kshamayachan Mantra* (as given earlier) - 'O Lord! I may have committed thousands of insults during the day and night. Please forgive me, accepting me as thy servant.' These are the insults, big and small that man may commit. It is our duty to make sure we have an understanding of these and thereby prevent further future insults.

Shatanand then explains that *Shree Krushnam Ashtakshar Mantra* should be chanted. **Parashar Muni** explains the *Vidhi* for chanting the Mantra: 'After bathing, one should sit on an *Aasan* which is clean and with a steady focused mind, observing *Moun Vrata* (vow of silence) they shall inwardly chant the Mantra as they meditate upon the Mantra in their heart. Mantra Japa, where the lips move (outward chanting) is called *Upanshum* and where the lips do not move (inward chanting) is *Maanasam*. *Maanas Japp* is considered the best. One should not perform Mantra Japa walking, laughing, looking around (the head should be still), talking, with the head uncovered, with one leg over the other and with their hand not still. They should chant with a Mala, and both their hand and Mala covered or in a *Gomukhi*. Their fore-finger (*Tarjani*) should not touch the Mala and they should circulate the Mala with their thumb (*Angushta*).'

Padma Puran explains the various types of Malas: 'The use of *Darbha* (special sacred wood) Mala will derive *Atma Gnaan* (knowledge of the self). A *Rudraksh Mala* will lead to the fulfilment of all desires.' 'Vaishnavas should always use a *Tulsi Mala* as it will ultimately bring Moksh,' explains **Gautamiya Tantra**.

In **Acharamadhava, Prajapati** further explains, 'A Mala with 108 beads is *Uttam*- the best; one with 54 beads is *Madhyam* - mediocre; and one with 27 beads is *Kanisht* - worst.' If in some exceptional circumstance a Mala cannot be found, one should chant using the sections of one's fingers.'

Now Shatanand explains the greatness of Shree Krishna Mantra. He firstly disputes the sayings where Krishna Mantra has no value, as it has no foundation in the Vedas. Shree Krishna Mantra is the very breath of the Vedas. The Puranas, whose roots lie with the Vedas glorify the Krishna Mantra without dispute. For this reason, such statement has no validity.

Other Mantras are comparatively weak explains Shatanand. Furthermore - *Ithihaasapurani Panchamam Vedamisharaha* - 'The Itihaases and Puranas are the fifth Veda.' Thus the oneness of the Vedas and Puranas is glorified. In this way the Krishna Mantra is related to the Vedas. **Manusmriti** and **Mahabharat** explain: *Ithihaasapuranaabhyaam Vedam Samupabrunhayeda* - 'The Itihaases and Puranas glorify the greatness of the Vedas.' One should never find difference in the Vedas and Puranas for they are considered as one. The Mantras in the Puranas are therefore to be considered as the Mantras of the Vedas.

Naradiya Puran goes on further to say, 'I find the explanations of the Puranas to be superior than the Vedas. O Devi! The purport of the Vedas is in this way to be found in the Puranas. Those who do not understand this greatness of the Puranas are forever reborn in the wombs of beasts and birds, even though they may display sensual control and righteous qualities. Indeed, Shree Krishna Mantra will derive greater fruits than chanting Vedic Mantras.'

Vishnudharmotar explains, 'Those who have chanted the blessed name Vishnu and who understand fully what it means to chant as thus, have acquired the knowledge of the Vedas - including its *Anga-Upangas* (associated parts).' 'Those who have even spoken the two syllable word Hari have studied the

Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. **Padma Puran** explains: *Vishnoraykauknamapi Sarvavedadhikam Matam* - 'Vishnu's one name is considered greater than even all the Vedas.'

Kapil Gita says, 'Those who have spoken God's name have performed *Tapa* (penance), *Homa* (sacrificial offerings) and *Snaan* (bathing).' **Shreemad Bhagwat** and **Skand Puran** explain, 'Any difficulties faced can be immediately overcome by chanting the name of God and singing his praise.'

In **Haribhaktavilasa**, **Yama Raja** explains, 'Those who chant the names of God are never visited by difficulties and my servants of death.' **Vishnu Puran** explains, 'By chanting the name of Lord Vasudeva, one attains the riches of *Swarga Loka*, from where they never have to return.' **Brahmand Puran** adds, 'The fruits derived from chanting a thousand names of God can be derived from chanting Shree Krishna's name just once.'

Vishnudharmotar says:

Krushneti Mangalam Nama Yasya Vachi Pravartate /
Bhasmibhavanti Tasyashu Mahapatakkotayaha //

'Those whose speech resound the auspicious name Shree Krishna, immediately burn a million great sins.'

Narsinha Puran explains, 'Those who daily chant Krishna thrice are freed from Narak.' Similarly **Garud Puran** and **Padma Puran** explain, 'By chanting Krishna Mantra, one becomes free from *Sansara* (worldly life).' **Skand Puran** explains: *Naamanam Mukhyatamam Nama Krushnakhyam Mae Paramtapa* - 'My name Krishna is the greatest of names. Those who chant this name of mine become free from sin. To do so is the greatest of penance.' **Vishnu Rahasya** explains, 'Shree Krishna Mantra is the best way to save oneself from death. Therefore *Sanjivani Nama Krushnakhyamavadharya* - chant the immortal name of Krishna.' **Vaishnavchintamani** explains, 'Even if Shree Krishna is uttered once jokingly, one is saved.'

Shatanand Muni then explains that those who dispute the greatness of God's name are great sinners who are destined for the hells. Such people can never attain Mukti.

Hari-Nama-Stotra or *Hari-Nama-Sankirtan* are the best and easiest ways to Moksh. Shree Sahajanand Swami, whose purpose was to offer salvation to the masses believed greatly in Kirtan Bhakti. He himself gave us the greatest Mantra of all the *Maha Mantra* - for ultimate redemption of mankind: *Ohm Nama Swaminarayana*. Using this Mantra or by just chanting or singing 'Swaminarayan' one becomes free from sins accumulated through thousands of births. Just as many achieved the state of Samadhi (highest Yogic State) by chanting Swaminarayan, we too can achieve such state through chanting *Swaminarayana*.

TEXT 57

They shall then read hymns or the religious scriptures about Lord Shree Krishna according to their ability. Those who do not know Sanskrit shall sing songs in praise of Shree Krishna and chant his name.

They should after chanting Shree Krishna, read hymns (*Prathna*) or read from scriptures, such as the *Purans* and *Stotras* of the excellencies of Shree Krishna. In this way, they should perform *Stuti*. They should then perform *Dandvat Pranams* (prostrations) as they chant *Prasidh Bhagavaniti!* 'O Lord! Shower thy blessings upon me. May thee be content in my actions.'

TEXT 58

They shall offer food to Lord Shree Krishna and then shall eat this sanctified food as His Prashaad. They shall thus always remain in the service of Shree Krishna with dedication and supreme love.

The food offered to God should be either made by oneself or prepared by an acceptable person (according to caste etc.) such that one can partake in the *Prashad* afterwards. I have previously explained the significance of Prashad. Shatanand explains here that any other food that is taken will lead to sin and misery. **Gautam in Padma Puran** explains, 'Those who eat foods other than Prashaad offered to God and which is prepared in one's home are entrapped in the hells for seven lifetimes.' Thus, those who eat Prashaad receive a great wealth of benediction through their act. Indeed, it is written that by partaking in such Prashaad, one receives the *Punya* (fruits) of performing a hundred thousand million Yagnas.

God has said, 'Offerings of water, please me immensely - what then needs to be said about offerings of sandalwood, incense, flowers, Divo and various foods?' **Shree Krishna in Bhagwad Gita** explains:

Patram Pushpam Falam Toyam Yo Mae Bhaktya Prayachati /
Tadaham Bhaktyupahrutmashrami Prayatatmanaha //

'Whomsoever offers Me with true devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or some water, I accept this offering made with devotion by him who is pure of heart.'

God is easily pleased. We only have to make a little effort. He is immensely gratified through offerings of water and therefore it is not necessary that we offer riches - he is simply after our devotion and dedication. He is pleased when one performs Pooja and serves in his temples. He is not after our money, or other material substances - he is merely after our hearts and minds. He does not ask for much, but is willing to give a multitude of wealth and happiness in return. Therefore it is necessary that we display firm faith and devotion in God.

Shatanand then explains the duties of an *Atmanivedi Bhakt*, as given by God himself: 'One who has faith in the nectar-like *Kathas* (religious discourses), who is always chanting my name and singing my praise, who is dedicated in performing *Pooja*, who is always in my service, who salutes (*Vandana*) me with all parts of his body (thus showing total surrender), who sees me in all living creatures, who uses all parts of his body in such a way as to please me, whose voice sings only my greatness, who is in the service of my *Bhakts*, whose mind is forever dwelling upon me, who is free from all desires or lust, whose wealth is used to please me (through donation) and who is free from mundane happiness; O Uddhav! Such *Atmanivedi Bhakts* have nothing more to accomplish - they have achieved all.'

Such people are considered great - comparative to God himself explains the Lord! The **Gita** further explains: 'Those who dedicate all actions to me, hold me as their supreme goal, intent on me, worshipping me and meditating upon me; of these whose minds are focused upon me, I become soon their saviour from the ocean of mortal life.' Also - *Tasmat Sarveshu Kaleshu Mamanusmara Yudhya Cha* - 'Therefore, always praise me and fight for me!'

Vishnu Rahasya explains, 'Even the shortest moment passed devoid of remembrance of Lord Vasudeva is the greatest ruin, the greatest misery and the greatest delusion.' **Narad Puran** adds, 'Those who chant *Narayan-Vasudeva* definitely reach the heavens.' Shatanand then explains that God's name is worthy of chanting in any place (country etc.) and at any time. All have the right to chant regardless of age, purity or level of development. Gods name should be chanted always and everywhere as those who do, never face misery and indeed all their problems or difficulties are overcome instantly.

Offering to God is a sign of love. Just as a mother breast-feeds her young with utmost love and affection, we too can show our fondness and devotion by offering unto the Lord. Offering to God is also a way of saying 'thank you' for giving us his support today and all days. It is an appreciation of the fact that God is the true eternal giver and provider for all, without whose support we can be rendered impoverished in an instance. To give is the greatest duty and shows great morality.

In India it is common practice to offer foods to God and to the cows first. The remaining food is then taken by the householders and what is then leftover is given to animals such as dogs etc. roaming the streets and to the poor. This is the greatness of our heritage, which ensures that the less fortunate are always provided for. The cow is most sacred in Hinduism - indeed she is worshipped as she is home to 330 million Devas. Therefore by offering to the cow we are physically offering to all the Gods and so is comparative to performing a Yagna.

Offering to the poor and needy shows great compassion and is the basis of Dana Dharma. Giving to those less fortunate shows humanity and results in great Punya. Those that forever give are famed like Rantideva and Baliraj, whose kindness and compassion were unsurpassed. By offering to others, we offer to God as the **Upanishads** say: *Atithi Devo Bhava* - 'Thy stranger is God.'

By offering to God, we also help keep one's eating habits clean. Most of us have the sense that not all things can be offered to God - such as meat, alcohol, onion etc. Therefore by making it a habit of offering to God and then eating, will lead to keeping and preparing only suitable foods in the house such that they can be offered to God. By partaking in God's Prashaad we are partaking in Punya - another good reason to offer to God first. Indeed, in some Shastras it is written that partaking in Prashaad is better than Upavaas (fasting).

Sahajanand Swami now explains the three modes of nature and their relation to Atmanivedi Bhaktas:

TEXT 59

These Atmanivedi devotees are considered as Nirgun (free from the three qualities of Maya) because all their deeds are purified by their continuous and devout contact to Shree Krishna who is forever Nirgun.

Harati Svashritaanam Kalamayamabhayaniti Hariha - 'Hari is he who removes the fears of time, illusion and death from devotees.' **Vishnu Dharmotar** explains, 'Devotees of Shree Krishna do not fear time, illusion or death,' therefore, though they may seem to be with qualities (*Gunamai*), they are in actual fact without qualities (*Gunatit*).

Their actions are based on merely pleasing and attaining God's favour as the **Bhagwat Gita** explains, 'Focus your mind upon me. Be my worshipper. Prostrate before me. You shall come to me alone. I promise you truly; for you are dear to me.' 'The Vedas have the three Gunas for their sphere, O Arjun. You must be free from the three Gunns.' The **Bhagwat Puran** explains the three Gunas in further detail: 'Satva Gunn leads to attainment of the heavens; Rajo Gunn attains the earth; and Tamo Gunn attains the hells.'

Only those who are free from these three Gunns and who are unaffected by their influences are true devotees of God. Indeed Shatanand explains that one of the factors of *Bhakti* is *Nirgun*. Thus one is urged to become Nirgun before becoming eligible for Bhakti of God. The greatness of the Nirgun state is

given in the following analogy by qualifying various things (in the left most column) with their level or type of attainment via the Gunas:

<u>Quality</u>	<u>Nirguna</u>	<u>Satva</u>	<u>Raja</u>	<u>Tama</u>
Knowledge	supreme	correct	uncertain	incorrect
Faith	God's service	spiritual	active	unrighteous
Foods	offerings	pure	tasteful	impure
Happiness	God realised	self realised	sensual	deluded
Places	temple	jungle	town	place for gambling

Furthermore, **Panchratra** explains, 'Those people who are faithful to personal duty, who have unreserved Bhakti and who bear knowledge and renunciation are classed as *Ekantik Sants* or *Ekantik Bhakts*.' Just as a beautiful woman has no charm without her ornaments, clothing etc., Bhakti that is devoid of *Dharma*, *Gnaan* and *Vairagya* are without charm and attraction. Bhakti devoid of Dharma disappears in a flash, whereas Bhakti, supported with Dharma is eternal - even at times of great strain. Such Bhakti is a mountain of strength.

In this Shlok, Lord Swaminarayan introduces the three modes of nature - *Trigun*. The knowledge of these three Gunas is very important. It is something we should all know of as they are fundamental to changes in nature and hence people.

The three Gunns are qualities that affect the course of nature. The Bhagwat documents that in the beginning of time, these three Gunns initiated the process of creation. From these were born the twenty-four *Tatvas* (entities). *Satva Gunn* is considered the best quality. It is pure and illuminating. It is greatly desirable and from it is born goodness and so is progressive in nature. Devotion is an example of Satva Gunn.

Rajo Gunn is activity. It causes things to happen and so working is considered an example of Rajo Gunn. Finally *Tamo Gunn* - it is all that is negative and undesirable. It is darkness and ignorance and therefore is very much regressive. Sleeping is therefore considered an example of Tamo Gunn.

These three Gunns affect and influence the course of nature and people's habits. A good-natured person is so called as he has accumulated an abundance of Satva Gunn through his acts. In the same way a bad or sinful person is so because he has a predominance of Tamo Gunn. These Gunns enter and influence a person in a number of ways. By looking, eating, hearing, drinking, touching, smelling, being with or associating with different things will all lead to a gain in that particular quality. For example, by drinking water, one adopts Satva Gunn. By drinking tea, one develops Rajo Gunn and by drinking alcohol, one attains Tamo Gunn. By drinking water that is offered to God, one becomes Nirgun - free from the influence of any Guna.

As a person comes into contact with these various types of Gunns, he becomes good or bad natured and for this precise reason it is necessary to obey one's duty of eating, drinking and associating with those things that derive benefit. Only those who understand this and strive to become free from the influence of the Gunns (Gunas) attain greatness in this world and the next. Such are the *Atmanivedins* who have attained such Nirguna state.

TEXT 60

These Atmanivedi devotees shall never drink water or eat roots, fruits, leaves etc. without first offering to Lord Shree Krishna.

Na Payam Naiva Bhakshyacha Patrakandafaladhyapi /

All edible foods including water, milk, fruits, vedgetables etc. should always be offered to God first. This subject has already been discussed. Shatanand adds that even new clothes, jewellery and the like should also be offered to God before use. This Shlok concludes the duties of an *Atmanivedi Bhakt*.

TEXT 61

My disciples who have become disabled by old age or by some adversity shall give their idols of Shree Krishna, which they have worshipped, to some other disciple. The disabled disciple shall thereafter serve God to the best of their ability.

Illness, war and old age are some of the calamities or adversities here mentioned. In such case, their idol of worship - Shaligram or Murti should be passed onto some other Vaishnav devotee. In such situation, they should continue their devotion through *Maansi Pooja*.

TEXT 62

They shall worship only those idols of Shree Krishna, which have been given to them by the Acharya (of Dharma Kul) or installed by Him. Other idols shall be respectfully bowed before, but not worshipped.

*Acharyereva Datam Yadach Tena Pratishtitam /
Krushnaswarupam Tatsevyam Vandyamevetaratu Yat //*

Acharya - One's Guru of Dharma Vansi - family of Dharma Dev, who shows one the path of Bhakti. It is specifically this Acharya or Guru and not the Acharyas who are learned in Veda-Vadant Acharyas, which are glorified here.

The great Acharya lineage ordained by Lord Swaminarayan, from the illustrious family of the Lord is praised here. **Ling Puran** explains exactly what an Acharya is:

*Swayamacharate Yasmadaacharye Sthapayatyapi /
Achinoti Cha Shastrarthanacharyasthena Chochyate //*

‘One who follows righteous duty (Achaara), teaching others to follow righteous duty and who is learned in Shastras is considered an Acharya.’

Therefore devotees of Lord Swaminarayan must perform Poojan and serve only those Murtis given to them or installed by them. Only by accepting the guidance of either of the Acharyas, Nar-Narayan Gadi or Laxmi-Narayan Gadi, are we fulfilling the wishes of Lord Swaminarayan. Only then will our devotion and service to the Murtis be fruitful.

Shatanand then says: ‘Murtis given or installed by other Acharyas of other Sampradays are worthy of respect and should be humbly bowed before with great reverence (*Tatu Vandyam Bhagwadbhavena*) but

should not be daily worshipped.’ - Why? - *Vaishnavsampradayamarija-dabhagaditi Bhavaha* - ‘it destroys one’s faith and devotion to their Vaishnav Sampraday.’ It is important to belong to a Sampraday, a Guru etc. A Sampraday will bring community, focus, identity, direction and a sense of belonging, which will help to improve one’s faith and service. It will avoid confusion and firmly set the path to realisation.

One should never envisage a Murti as just a lump of stone and in this way degrade its significance and greatness. **Pancharatna Shastra** explains ‘Those who think of Murtis as mere stone, a Guru as mere man and a Vaishnav as a mere race, are committing insult.’

It is imperative that we do not worship idols installed or given to us by a low-born or indeed some other supposed great person or ‘Guru’. Those who do are not cleansed of such sin even by performing ten thousand Prayaschits. Similarly, idols given by women, or served by them should also not be worshipped as those who do are destined for and eternity in hell. This is specifically aimed at males, as by going to such places where women are serving the idols can cause their mind to wander causing it to be deluded and think of that which is unworthy to be thought of in such situation.

Note that there are so many leaders in Hinduism of which many are worthy of such stature and others that are not. Lord Swaminarayan has provided for us the Acharya heritage of Dharma Kul and it is these that are the true worthy Gurus of the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It is these Gurus which we must pledge our allegiance to. Worship of Murtis installed by him and given by him will derive fruits. No other supposed fictitious Guru of the Swaminarayan Sampraday has such right or power and so allegiance to either the Acharya of Ahmedabad or Vadtal, as per the explicit wishes of the Lord himself, will gain us a place in the heavens. Never will following a supposed fictitious Guru reap the same benefits.

TEXT 63

All my disciples shall go to temple everyday in the evening and there, they shall sing loudly, songs in praise of Lord Shree Krishna.

Bhagawanmandiram Sarvauha Saayam Gantavyamanvaham - All devotees should go to Mandir (temple of God) in the evening for Darshan. There he should: *Namasankirtanam Karyam Tatrochau Radhikapateha* - sing aloud and chant in praise of Radha’s Lord - Shree Krishna. They should sing loudly with the mind affixed upon the Lord for duration of two Gadis (48 minutes).

Shatanand in this Shlok pays particular emphasis on *Namasankirtan*. He explains: *Kalau Bhagavanamasankirtansyaiva Paramuktisadhanatvain Vidhanaditi Bhavaha* - In Kali Yuga, Namasankirtan is the source of the greatest of Muktis (salvation). Indeed it is the best and easiest way to salvation.

Shrimad Bhagwat explains:

Krute Yad Dyayato Vishnum Tretayam Yajto Makhauha /
Dvapare Paricharyayam Kalau Tadrikirtanaat //

‘That which is obtainable in Satya Yuga by meditation upon God Vishnu, in Treta Yuga by performance of Yagnas and in Dwapara Yuga by service to God, is obtainable in Kali Yuga by merely chanting and singing God’s name and praise.’ Thus it is written: *Kalau Keshava Kirtana* - ‘God Keshava can be attained in Kali Yuga through Kirtan.’

‘Kali is the age full of sin and immorality, however Kali has one great advantage in that Krishna Kirtan will lead to freedom from the bondage of the material world and achievement of greatness.’

In this way, Kali Yuga is famed for such quality. **Varaha Puran** says, ‘Those who sing my name in the age of Kali achieve greatness. They have fulfilled all duty and performed great meritorious deeds.’ **Skand Puran** adds, ‘The fearful black snaked form of Kali is powerless against the resilient fire which roars the name - Govind!’ Thus the effects of Kali Yuga all falter at the bellow of God’s name.

In this way **Bruhanaradiya Puran, Padma Puran** and **Vishnu Dharmotara** all resound the fact that those who chant the names of Hari have nothing to fear from Kali’s miseries and hardships. Such people are elevated from mundane life and become free from the sins of life.’

Garud Puran even says, ‘Those who say “Narayan” once are destined for the path to greatness, what then needs to be said about those who daily chant his name.’

Finally, **Narad Panchratra** adds, ‘Women should sit in their separate assembly and chant the name Shree Krishna daily. They should not sit together, with males and sing the Lord’s name.’

What more needs to be said about Bhajan, Kirtan and Nama Dhuna! Those that have no interest in these are lost and would find the path to salvation very difficult. Those who find no enjoyment in singing God’s name are pitiful, as they will never be able to enjoy the favour of God. God is immensely pleased when a devotee sings his praise. By singing, one forgets all his worries and stresses - it is a great tonic to make one feel happy. God will always hear your prayers and therefore such act will never fail.

Strict segregation of the sexes must be observed in temples to aid such objective though. This is because the mind can otherwise wander causing lapses in concentration and focus, regardless of who the person is. The sight of a woman is an obstacle when praying to God and therefore such situations must be avoided in their entirety.

TEXT 64

They shall read and listen to, with deep reverence, the narration from the life of Shree Krishna, and shall celebrate all festivals with His songs, in accompaniment of musical instruments.

*Karyastasya Katha Vartaha Shravyascha Parmadarata /
Vaditrasahitam Karyam Krushnakirtanmutave ||64||*

After Namasankirtan, one should read from the tenth chapter of Shrimad Bhagwat and then discuss it’s content. Those who cannot read should eagerly listen to the Shastra.

BhagwatkathashravankirtanaderMokshhetutva - Katha of the Lord and Kirtan are simply a passage to Moksh explains Shatanand. Shrimad Bhagwat explains, ‘O Krishna! Those who listen to thy name and remember thy form, who speak about thee and think about thee, and whose mind is forever at thy lotus feet, are never again born upon this material world.’

Those who listen to the nectar of God’s Katha (*Kathamrut*) from great men purify their mind, consciousness and ego. They become free from the effects of the senses and attain a place at the Lord’s divine feet. They obtain supreme knowledge, renunciation, and conciseness, the path to salvation and intense devotion to God. Therefore, who in their right mind does not have love for Katha of God? Katha

destroys all obstacles; those who have no interest in Katha are mere fools with their ears as mere caves for snakes to reside within.

Secondly, on days of celebration such as *Janmashtmi*, *Ekadashi* etc., one should sing in praise of Shree Krishna using instruments such as *Veena*, *Mrudang* *Kanshijoda*. On such days, *Mahapooja* of the Lord should be performed: 'On these days, one should purify themselves by bathing, put on perfumes, perform *Abhishekh* of God, prepare tasty offerings for God and sing and dance in rejoice.'

A temple is divine, as the very ground that it stands upon is sanctified. Merely standing in a temple will purify one from sin. What then needs to be said about those who perform Japa Mala, meditation, scriptural recitation etc? It is said that the ground where a Yagna takes place is sacred for a whole year. But a temple is an institution where sacrifices continue to take place. Great saints and Acharyas sanctify the temple and the Murtis therein, Utsavas continually take place with great pomp and pleasure, intense devotion by great devotees take place, Mahapooja, Mangal Kirtan Dhuna, Katha are all performed. Such is a temple and therefore there is no question that a temple is continually sacred and sanctified. In such a sacred temple, one receives a magnitude of Punya (fruits) for acts performed there and more so the favour of God.

The Gita says, *Yagnanaam Japa Yagnosmi* - 'The best Yagna is where great penance and devotion takes place' - such place is a temple of God. Those that serve and worship in a temple are always happy and will definitely reach the heavens. Those that fall into useless arguments there and do not serve there will only face misery. Such a person who serves and worships in a temple need not perform Yagna nor Tirths. Performance of Daan and other great acts are all satisfied through worship and dedication in a temple.

For such reasons, a temple should never be reduced to a place of argument, difference and discontent. By doing so we insult the institution of a temple, which is a place of peace and tranquillity. We indeed offend the deities therein by such act. By acting in this way we will wash away any righteous acts we have performed there.

TEXT 65

All my disciples shall always behave as mentioned above and shall study the religious scriptures in Sanskrit and vernacular to the best of their abilities.

Sanskuta Devabhasha Prakruta Lokikbhasha - Shatanand explains that Sanskrit is the language of the Gods and Prakrit is the language of man. Prakrit should be understood as Gujarati, Hindi, and English etc. Study of Shastras in these texts should be readily performed daily. Why? - *Tasyauvo Dharma Adharmaswarupagnaamulatvaditi Bhavaha* - one understands Dharma and Adharma through the study of such Shastras.

Padma Puran explains: *Pashutulyo Naro Gneyaha SchastrabhyAasanm Vina* - 'Those without the knowledge and study of Shastras are mere animals.' **Vidurji** has explained, 'Those who have no knowledge are forever deluded in the vortex of material objects.'

Study of Shastras destroys ignorance and uncertainty. There are many people who lack the relevant knowledge and so they are sometimes pulled into falsity through cults that teach contrary to Vedic teachings.

Knowledge is wealth, without which we are lost. The great teachings of Rishis passed down from generation to generation are still relevant today. I personally have found great peace by finding answers

to questions by studying our Shastras. It goes without saying that the study of our Shastras is very important - this is more so for our younger generation who will undoubtedly go astray if they are not equipped with suitable knowledge.

Many say that Shastras are too difficult to understand or are outdated. This is utter nonsense. Nearly all of us are educated to a sufficient higher level and therefore we all have the capability and capacity to understand such knowledge. Sure, it may be difficult to grasp at first but by reading and re-reading, there is no doubt that we can all understand the principles.

One can delve as deep as they like and so it is not necessary to have full Vedantic knowledge. However all should have a grasp of the basic fundamental principals of Hinduism and our Sampraday. Simple knowledge about the various Gods and their representations, duties, scriptures etc. is a must. Through Knowledge (*Gnaan*), one is able to secure *Dharma, Bhakti and Vairagya*.

Those who have an adequate understanding are blessed. Knowledge is the food of the mind and Vedantic knowledge is indeed the nectar which rejuvenates the mind.

TEXT 66

A person should be assigned work after carefully considering his suitability, but not otherwise.

This is for the benefit of both employer and employee. Those who possess the necessary skills, qualities and intellect to complete a specific task should be used for such purposes. **Yagnavalkya** explains, 'Those that understand Dharma should be used for tasks requiring such knowledge. A knowledgeable accountant should be sought for jobs pertaining to money matters. Scrupulous people should be utilised for scrupulous acts.'

Vidurji has also explained, 'There are three types of persons - *Uttam* (best), *Madhyam* (middle) and *Adham* (lowest). Such persons should be used to perform Uttam, Madhyam and Adham tasks.' Thus only a suitable candidate should be considered for a specific job as to act contrary will not only have and undesired affect but will also put a person into unnecessary difficulty.

TEXT 67

My disciples shall take care of their servants with regards to food and clothing to the best of their abilities.

Shatanand explains additionally that although servants are specifically mentioned here, in actual fact the Shlok is aimed at all that are under your care or shelter. Those it is your duty to support should be cared for to the best of one's ability. These are explained in **Kashi Khand**:

Mata Pita Guruha Patni Chapatyani Samashritaha /
Abhyagataha Prapanogniha Poshyavargaa Ami Nava //

'Mother, father, Guru, wife, children, those that are under your care or shelter, those that are under your protection, a guest or visitor and fire; these are the nine Poshya-Vargas.' They are to be supported in every way and taken care of with one's wealth; providing for them food, clothing, shelter etc. They should be satiated daily and never made to suffer - **Na Tu Keshaniyaha**.

Skand Puran explains, ‘One should always take care of the *Posya-Vargas*. Those who do not are sinners.’ Similarly, ‘Those who feed and support others are truly alive and conscious. However those that think only of themselves by filling only their own stomach are considered as mere corpses.’

‘Speaking the truth, giving to others, forgiving, being compassionate, having children from one’s own wife only, cleanliness, not offending, tenderness, supporting one’s servants and refraining from anger; these are the ten basic duties for all.’

The fundamental principle of goodness and kindness to all is once again put in the spotlight here. It is one’s duty to properly look after and care for one’s servants, family members etc. Servants should never be exploited or over worked, and they should always be treated fairly and with respect. We briefly touched on service to one’s parents that will be discussed in full later.

TEXT 68

A person should be addressed according to their status, taking into consideration the time and place, but not otherwise.

Those that are of great qualities and of a nature beyond comparison, who are learned and from a reputable family and who are renowned for their penance and Yoga, should always be respected, duly addressed and given seat without thought.

Shatanand explains that even one’s student (Shishya) should be given such honour if he displays such qualities (just as Swami Ramanand did with Swami Sahajanand).

Smruti explains, ‘Those with defect (blind, disabled, ill, unattractive) should never be ridiculed and called names which are inappropriate.’

Shatanand further explains that the way in which a person is addressed in private should never be used in public. If one calls another by a nickname in private then it should not be used in public as this is degrading. He should always be called in a proper manner.

Indeed all should be respected regardless of background, qualities; education etc for this is a great quality in man. They should never be verbally trodden upon as this could unintentionally hurt the person on the receiving end. It will also reflect on your own qualities as a person, undoubtedly leading to your unpopularity.

TEXT 69

My courteous disciples shall, on the arrival of their Guru, a ruler, a very old person, a renounced person, a scholar and an ascetic, accord a warm welcome by rising up from their seat, bowing down, offering a seat and saying pleasant words.

Gurubhupalvarshishtatyagividhvatapasvinaam /

Six specific types of people are here mentioned, who are worthy of respect and honour: (1) **Guru** - one who offers *Mantra Diksha* as well as a teacher who imparts knowledge, father etc; (2) **Bhupal** or King; (3) **Varshishta** - one who is elderly (*Vrudh*); (4) **Tyagi** - one who has renounced the material world, indeed everything in order to serve God - such as Sadhus who have chosen to serve the Lord instead of a *Grihastrashrami* - who have chosen to serve a wife!!; (5) **Vidhvaan** - those who are scholars -

knowledgeable in the *Vedas, Puranas* and other *Shastras*; and (6) *Tapasvinaam* - those who perform great austerities and Vratas such as *Kruchra, Chandrayana* etc. in order to please the Lord. Thus these six are to be respected always, warmly welcomed and given seat.

Abhuthaanadina Karyaha Sanmaano Vinayanvitaiha //

One should arise from their seat, humbly bow before such persons (*Vinaya Purvak*) and accord a warm welcome (*Sanmaana*) by offering seat - ***Tena Sanmaana Adaraha Kaaryaha.***

Shatanand explains that we should physically go to them to welcome them and take a seat only after the respected person has been seated. Those who do not accord a warm welcome cause great tyranny from such misdeed. They cause great insult to such decorated persons.

Shrimad Bhagwat's 6th Chapter explains, 'Indra did not properly welcome Guru Brihaspati and as a result the Devas faced defeat at the hands of the Asuras.' The **8th Chapter** also adds, 'The King Indradymna was cursed to bear the reproductive organ of an elephant for failing to properly welcome Agastya Rishi.' Not to forget our Lord Nar-Narayan, whom did Durvasa curse for the same reason that brought about the Lord's supreme incarnation of Swaminarayan?

Shatanand explains that even if a person himself is elderly and his Guru is younger than he is, a courteous welcome should ensue. **Vayu Puran** exclaims: ***Atithyam Chaadareva Shaktya Kurvan Sukhi Bhaveda*** - 'Welcome and respect others and enjoy bliss!'

This is again the beauty of our great Sanatan Dharma that extols respect of all beings. Those great people who display revered qualities are worthy of respect regardless of age, caste etc. I'm sure that if all were to obey this command we would all become better people. Shree Hari continues on this matter:

TEXT 70

One shall not sit with one leg over the other or knees bound with a cloth strap, in the presence of a Guru, a Deity, a King or in a congregation.

Gurudevantarupantike - Guru, God and King are here mentioned but one should include the *Vrudh, Tyagi, Vidhvaan* and *Tapasvi* as previously mentioned.

One should not sit in the said manner, as it is discourteous and disrespectful. Shatanand clarifies that one leg upon the other thigh is prohibited here and not both legs upon opposite thighs (as this is a form of *Yogasan*).

Similarly one should not sit in a stropy manner with legs outstretched etc. as this also displays disrespect. Thus one should assume a posture of sitting with the legs crossed with the back straight (mind you, not too straight, so as to look proud or egotistical!)

TEXT 71

My disciples shall never enter into arguments with their Acharya, but shall honour and serve him by offering food, money, clothing etc., according to their abilities.

One should never argue or fall out with their Acharya/Guru. They should not contest their Acharya using harsh words. They should never be insulted or slandered in any way.

Palaniyam Gurorvakyam Sarvatha Paramadarad - their command should always be respected and obeyed. One should pledge allegiance to their Guru and follow their every command. **Sanak Kumar** explains the consequence of contrary actions: 'Those who slander their Guru or revered Shastras attain only the hells.' **Agastya Rishi** explains the consequences befalling such a person in this lifetime: 'Those disciples who insult their Guru become childless, friendless, without wife and without wealth. Such people never become free from misery.' For such reasons they should worship their Guru with gifts of fruits, money, clothing, jewellery etc. Those who act in this way, enjoy the wealth of happiness.

A Guru is to be worshipped as God: **Sarvadevamayo Guruha**, explains **Vishnu Rahasya**. Therefore he is worthy of utmost respect. *Guru Mahima* and *Guru Bhakti* are a foundation on which the Hindu Sanatan Dharma stands. The *Guru-Shishya* tradition of India is even preserved today. Thus their greatness is unarguable and as such to fall into useless arguments with their Acharya or to speak in such a way as to defame them is undesirable. Ultimately a Guru acts for the benefit of mankind and therefore his words should be obeyed implicitly.

Lord Swaminarayan himself initiated the *Dharmakul Acharya Parampara* and those who disregard this great heritage in our Sampradai, disregard the greatness of Dharmakul and hence Lord Swaminarayan, for he also is a descendant of that very same Dharmakul dynasty. Without a Guru a person is lost with no identity or sense of belonging. It is a Guru that ties a Bhakta to Bhagwan and shows him the path to Moksha. Gu is darkness and ignorance; Ru is light and knowledge. Thus a Guru is one who illuminates a person to the supreme knowledge and dispells the darkness of ignorance.

TEXT 72

On hearing the news of the arrival of the Acharya, my disciples shall go forthwith to the outskirts of the village or town to welcome him with honour and respect, and on his departure shall accompany him up to the outskirts of the village or town to bid him farewell.

Shatanand explains - **Adarata Vaditradisahitmitiyarthaha** - one should immediately go and welcome the Acharya with the sound of musical instruments. This is in accordance with the teachings of **Parashar**.

Also one should offer gifts to the Acharya on his arrival. Those that accord such a welcome receive the fruits of a pilgrimage. Those that go to bid him farewell are freed from sin.

TEXT 73

One shall never undertake any activities that are devoid of Dharma, irrespective of its benefits, as Dharma alone can fulfil all human efforts; therefore one shall not give up Dharma in the hope of some benefits.

One shall always stay faithful to Dharma, as Dharma is the deliverer of all required wealth and happiness. There is nothing unachievable if one is faithful to Dharma. Therefore one should never act unrighteously, contrary to Dharmic law even if such act will derive great benefits and prosperity. One should always stay true to Dharma. Even in unfavourable times, one should never renounce their Dharma.

This again is as per the teachings of **Parashar**. Dharma as detailed in this Shikshapatri and other Dharma Shastras and is the only worthy science of behaviour. It is the only source of a fruitful life. **Smruti**

explains: 'Dharma is the only deliverer of basic or worldly (*Aihik*) and greater (*Parlaukik*) happiness.' Consequently, *Dharmabhrashto Vinashyati* - 'Those that live contrary to Dharma face destruction.'

TEXT 74

One shall never adopt any of the unethical deed of the great people of the past but shall follow their ethical deeds only.

In the past, those who have performed great penance, who are learned in Yoga, who are famed for their divine nature, who are considered the best amongst mankind, but who have used somewhat unethical deeds, should not be imitated. Only the ethical deeds should be adopted.

These actions of such people were for a purpose. Just because they acted unethically does not give us the right to also act in such way. 'Undesirable acts should be renounced from even the mind. Those who foolishly commit such acts face destruction, just as an ordinary man would surely face destruction if he was to try to imitate the act of Lord Shiva drinking poison from the river.'

A question here arises: **Smruti** explains: *Shrotaha Smartastatha Shishtacharaprpto Vrusho Hitaha* - 'Dharma arising from *Shruti*, *Smruti* and actions (of men) will always benefit mankind.' If the actions of the great men are the root of Dharma, then why is it that we should reject the unrighteous acts of the saints of the past? The answer to this is simply that the Vedas, which are beyond *Lok-Vyavahar* (business and social thoughts), explain that unrighteous acts are the means of attaining knowledge. Therefore the incidents of the past are there to be learnt from and not imitated. Specifically we can learn of the consequences that brew from the performance of such unrighteous act.

Shishtachara or righteous acts are detailed in **Matsya Puran**:

Daanam Satyam Tapoalobho Vidhyeja Poojanam Damaha /
Ashto Tani Charitrani Shishtachasya Lakshanam //

'Charity, truth, penance, unselfishness, knowledge, sacrifice (Yagna), worship and control of the senses are the eight attributes of *Shishtachara*.' Furthermore, the acts of Manu, Saptarshi and other great people of the past, in accordance with Dharma are considered as *Shishtacharas*. Only these *Shishtacharas* are worthy of imitation. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, 'The unrighteous acts of *Shishta-Jans* are contemptible and so should not be imitated by illustrious men. These acts were performed for the good of Mankind.'

Those acts pertaining to Dharma, penance, Yoga, truth, compassion etc. should be accepted as *Sadachar*. Only such acts will teach us the desired lessons for life. In **Moksh Dharma**, **Bhishma** says, 'The actions by *Devtas* (Gods) and *Rishis* that are contemptible should not be followed. Nor should such acts be slandered. Those who always think wisely about an act before hand always face prosperity.'

Many stories in Puranas exist which question one's faith. Acts of *Devas* and *Rishis* committing *Adharmic* unethical acts such as breaking the rule of *Ahimsa* or acts of lust sometimes make you think and question them. However these acts are for the benefit of mankind, as this is revealed often after the episode. They help us to understand more closely the consequences of some of the sins committed. Sometimes the reasons for such act may not be clear and so in such situation one should never question the integrity of such acts.

One should never use these episodes as an excuse to act their *Adharmic* fantasies also. In the **Ramayan**, *Indra* enjoyed sexual bliss with *Gautama Patni* - **Ahaliya**. This episode should never be used for personal

satisfaction to somehow support a claim that adultery is acceptable. Both Indra and Ahalya paid a great price for their lapse - by being cursed! This is the lesson to be learnt from this episode - which adulterous behavior will always lead to downfall and shame. These episodes are there to teach us a deeper meaning which sadly we all too often choose to ignore and take the episode at face value.

Similarly to say 'Mahadeva ate tobacco and so why can't we?' is ludicrous. Mahadeva also drank poison - why don't you try drinking that?

Another great saying is from those who wish to indulge in mixed *Dandia-Raas* - 'Krishna played Raas with the Gopis - so why shouldn't we?' This again is unacceptable. Krishna is God Supreme and the Gopis were Bhakts. The Raas played was not between mere man and woman, but was Raas played between Bhakt and Bhagwan. Indeed Krishna told the Gopis of their unfaithfulness to their husbands first and foremost, when the Gopis came late that night - abandoning their husband and children. It was only their intense love and devotion for Krishna who was clearly God that brought about the inevitable Raas Lila.

The Raas was strictly between the Gopis and Krishna - the other Govarias played no part and therefore to reduce the Divya Raas Lila to some lustful enactment is simply slanderous.

Raas should always be played with such *Bhav*, which is to please God. It should never be played for some lustful personal agenda. Raas is indeed a form of Bhakti - devotion to God. It is played whilst *Pradikshana* (circumambulation) is performed and the divine pastimes of God are sung and remembered.

It seems that the Raas-Garbas of today has no such '*Bhav*'. For a start, they play in the opposite direction to Pradikshana where God (who is in the centre) is always to your right. Some Raas-Garbas are played to popular Indian film songs and not to Kirtans. There is often a 'Disco' feel to the music. All in all many of the Youngsters do not go to the Raas-Garbas for the religious aspect but for the social aspect.

If one can honestly say that he is undisturbed by the presence of a person of the opposite sex then I surrender my argument but I'm sure that all are affected by their presence. During Raas one's senses should be under strict control and this simply cannot be secured with the presence of the opposite sex - the mind will always wander. This sort of mixed Raas-Garba can be reduced to a social event such as 'night-clubbing' as far as I'm concerned. It can never be called a Religious event.

Raja Parikshit, listening to the amorous acts of Shree Krishna in **Raasa-Panchadyaya** said in bewilderment, 'Krishna, the Lord of Yadus, is a spiritually awakened person without any unfulfilled desires in him. How did he then indulge in this most heinous sin of indulgence in sexual relationships with other people's wives! Please clear this doubt of mine?' **Shree Sukhdevji** replied 'Super men have been found to transgress the moral code and indulge in aggressive actions. But just like fire, which can consume anything, and yet can remain pure and unaffected, these powerful ones cannot be contaminated by any evil. But insignificant man should not imitate them in this respect even mentally. If he behaves like this stupidly, it would be like one who is without the power of Rudra but drinks poison. Death is sure to befall him. The intelligent man should follow only such actions that are consistent with their teachings.' (Sk 10, Ch 33, 27-32)

Thus one should always stick to what has been said by Shastras rather than what has been done in Shastras. In our great Sanatan Dharma there are three great Avatars, viz. Rama, Krishna, and Swaminarayan. Following the examples set by Ram can attain Mukti. Following what Krishna in the Bagwat Gita and other Shastras has said can also attain it. Finally it can be attained by following the examples set by Purnapurushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan and also by obeying his commandments in Shikshapatri and other Shastras. If we follow this, we are sure to attain God's Dhaam.

TEXT 75

One shall never disclose the secrets of others to anyone else and shall give due respect to deserving persons, but under no circumstances shall the bounds of courtesy be violated for observing a false decorum of equality.

Guhyavarta Tu Kasyapi Prakashya Naiva Kutrachit. **Yagnavalkya** explains, ‘One should not reveal any information that should be kept quiet or not worthy of being disclosed. Such information should not be spoken or revealed in public.’

Narad has glorified such quality by saying to the Rishis Nar-Narayana: ‘I have never revealed any information worthy to be kept quiet or secretive.’ This directly attacks the repulsive nature of people to gossip.

Some people’s tendency to gossip can often bring about information that really should not be revealed in that way. Often such talk may hurt people or indeed be simply false. Nobody likes to be talked about in public and so we should all use a bit more care when speaking in public.

The second directive in this Shlok looks at giving respect to those who are worthy of respect. Shatanand explains the hierarchy in living beings and the fact that those who are higher in status should always be given due respect.

Kapil Muni has explained this hierarchy in nature of living beings (starting at the lowest level):

1. Those inanimate lifeless objects such as dried grass.
2. Animate objects with vital breath such as green grass.
3. Those with knowledge and sense of touch such as a tree.
4. Those with a sense of taste such as fish.
5. Those with a sense of smell such as wasps.
6. Those that understand sound such as snakes.
7. Those that understand and find distinction through their sense of sight such as birds.
8. Those with a proper set of teeth (upper and lower teeth).
9. Those with many legs.
10. Those with four legs.
11. Those with two legs.
12. A member of the four castes.
13. A Brahmin.
14. Those learned in the Vedas.
15. Those with political or economic status.
16. Those that remove doubt and instil faith.
17. Those that act in accordance to Dharma.
18. Those that renounce desire for worldly objects.
19. Those that devote their mind, wealth and resources to God.
20. Those with full devotion to God, who are always in his service.
21. Those that see God in everything, in all forms in nature and so meditate upon God in this way.

Thus, we can realise the development of nature’s entities as they progress one-by-one. God is in every form mentioned above. Those that recognise this and praise all - plants and creatures great and small, who duly practice the great Dharma of Ahimsa for this reason and who in every act are in the service of

God and God's creatures, are considered to be of the highest status in nature. They are fully developed and the best amongst living beings.

TEXT 76

All my disciples shall perform additional religious duties during the four months of monsoon (*Chaturmaas*). Those who are incapable shall perform them during the month of *Shraavan*.

Shreeji Maharaj now explains the various *Vrats* or religious disciplines to be practised. For three *Shlokas*, he explains the various duties to be practised during *Chaturmaas*:

Visheshaniyamo Dharyaschaturmaasyeakhlilaurapi /
Ekasmichravane Maasi Sa Tvashaktaustu Minavau //

Chaturmaas (four months) *Vrats* from *Asadh Sud Ekadashi* (11) to *Kartak Sud Dwadashi* (12) are to be observed.

All - men and women, should keep additional *Niyams* or *Vrats* during *Chaturmaas*. Shatanand Muni here makes a point of assumption - he assumes that we observe the basic *Niyams* anyway. As this is often not the case, we should really make more of an effort to observe the basic *Niyams* in *Chaturmaas* as well as performing additional *Niyams*.

Those who are not capable of four months of *Vrat* should do so for just the one-month of *Shraavan*. One should begin their *Chaturmaas Vrats* by observing a full day fast (*Upvaas*) on the first day *Asadh Sud Ekadashi*. Those who do not observe such *Vrat* are destined to suffer the sins of a full year. Hence those who observe such *Vrat* become free of such sin.

It is said that *Shraavan Maas Vrat* should be kept for duration of six weeks, from the beginning of *Chaturmaas* up to the end of *Shraavana Maas*.

Chaturmaas (rainy season) is considered as *Satva Guni*. The four months of *Unaro* (hot season) are *Tamo Guni* and the four months of *Siyaro* (cold season) are *Rajo Guni*. *Devtas* also keep the *Vrat* of *Chaturmaas* performing great penance to please God.

Shree Nilkanth Varni performed great penance at Phoolashram during *Chaturmaas*, thus setting an example for all to do the same. *Chaturmaas* are the four months when, God's *Bhakts* should stay 'awake' in their devotion and faith in God by performing such *Vrats* and *Niyams*.

From all the various *Niyams* the Lord chooses eight which he himself considers as the best:

TEXT 77/78

The following are the best methods of observance of additional religious duties to be observed:-

- 1. Reading religious scriptures**
- 2. Listening to religious scriptures**
- 3. Reciting songs in praise of his divine qualities**
- 4. Performing Mahapuja of the Lord's images**

5. Chanting his Mantra
6. Reciting his hymns
7. Performing Pradikshana
8. Prostrating before God's image.

I highly value these eight practices, so all my disciples shall observe any one of these devoutly during Chaturmaas.

*Vishnoha Kathayaha Shravanam Vachanam Gunakirtanam /
Mahapuja Mantrajapaha Stotrapathaha Pradakshinaha //77//*

Vishnu Katha or Shree Krishna Katha, such as Shrimad Bhagwat should be listened to (*Shravanam*). Indeed any such revered texts such as *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Vachanamrut* are all worthy texts. Bhagwat explains the qualities of a *Vakta* (one who recites the scripture) and the *Shrota* (the listeners).

The desirable qualities of a *Vakta* are:

- Yatharthavakta* - speaks the absolute truth
- Shrutishastrasutraveta* - who fully understands the teaching of the Vedas
- Suvaagh* - who has a pleasant style of speaking
- Bodhandaksha* - enlightening, perfect spiritual knowledge
- Aryaha* - renowned behavioral qualities
- Shreekrushnabhakto* - A devotee of Shree Krishna
- Nijadharmanishto* - follower of personal Dharma
- Jatya Dwijanmasya* - born of the three upper castes

The desirable qualities of a *Shrota* are:

- Swadharmannishta* - follower of personal Dharma
- Suchirekachito* - with sound pure mind
- Bhaktaschatuvarnaja* - A devotee of one of the four castes
- Adatscha* - who is respectful
- Pugadhyacharvan* - does not have a tendency to chew betel nut
- Vanita Na Pashyannu* - does not look at women (lustfully)
- Shranishahino* - without headwear (Pagri etc.)
- Nalsascha* - is not lazy
- Mouni* - observes the vow of silence
- Na Praudhpado Na Cha Chagachloadhrim Pade* - does not sit with leg over leg
- Dadhnaamsukveshtitadhrim* - hands still and does not sit using a cloth to bind his legs
- Pujitvaktruvanirduragraham* - who praises the Vakhtas style of speaking
- Krodhampi Tyajohmscha* - who does not anger

One should build a habit of reading from Shastras and understand the qualities of God. Songs in praise of God should be sung in addition to reading. Sanskrit or Prakrit (Gujarati etc.) texts should be read. Such acts should be performed daily.

Mahapooja of God should be performed with *Panchamrut Snaan* (bathing the idol of God with milk, yoghurt, clarified butter, sugar and honey), *Mahabhishek* (sprinkling of water) and Mahanaived (offerings).

Ashtakshara Mantra Japa (chanting of the eight-syllabled Mantra), *Vishnu Stotra* or *Vishnusahasrarama* (thousand names of Vishnu) etc. should be chanted according to one's ability, daily.

Pradikishana (circum-abulation) of the magnitude of 108 etc. should be performed.

*Shastangpranascheti Niyama Uttamamataha /
Etesvekatmo Bhaktya Dhararniyo Visheshtaha ||78||*

Shastang Pranaam - Astabhirangauha Sahita Shastang Pranatiha Pranamaha - Abulation by surrendering eight parts of one's body (as explained before) should be performed.

In this way, God considers these eight Niyams great for Chaturmaas. They will derive fruits exceeding even those wished for.

Also the use of 'Cha' in the Sanskrit text suggests that other such famed Niyams are also worthy of practise: **Narad and Brahma in Skanda Puran** explains, 'One's mind and senses should be concentrated upon God. Such time should be used for devotion and meditation. One should renounce all egos as it is like poison to the body. During this time when God sleeps, man should always speak the truth as to do so please God. They should perform praise to Lord Vishnu and act to please him only. Chanting of his name derives salvation and so Chaturmaas should be used for remembrance of God. *Brahmcharya* (vow of celibacy) fuels *Swadharma* (duty) and therefore there is no other greater tool for such act. Anger, lust, selfishness and mundane desire are great enemies and so should be rejected during these months. One Niyam should be adopted to please God as a Bhakti-Niyam (such as one of the eight here mentioned over these two Shlokas).

The Niyams are of two types *Samanya* (ordinary to be practised without question by all) and *Vishesh* (additional as mentioned in these two Shlokas). Shatanand further explains the Samanya Niyamas to be observed over Chaturmaas. These Niyams are basic expectations of all devotees and so should be observed first and foremost. **Bavishyotar Puran** explains: 'In *Shraavan Maas*, one should refrain from all *Shaks* (especially prepared vegetables or beans/lentils); in *Badarva*, yoghurt; milk in *Ashwin*; and in *Kartik* month *Dwidal* (beans/lentils which can be split in two).' In this way, the food types should be refrained from in the first, second, third and final months of Chaturmaas.

Skand Puran further says, 'In *Varsha Ritu*, when God sleeps, devotees of God should not sleep (in the sense that they should be spiritually awake in devotion to God). They should not sleep in a bed during such time (thus they should sleep upon the ground). Also they should refrain from aubergines (*Ringra*), watermelon (*Kalingra*) and radishes (*Mura*). Inedible substances such as garlic and the like should be renounced with greater effort. For one month, one should refrain from contact with one's own wife - living as a Brahmachari (celibate). One should overcome the senses and perform charitable acts.'

Achardip explains, 'God distances himself from those who partake in *Ringra*, *Kalingra*, food of the sacred *Bila* tree and rose extract (*Gular*).' **Aparark** explains, '*Brahmcharaya* (celibacy), *Sauch* (cleanliness), *Satya* (truth) and refraining from meat are four of the greatest Niyams to be kept by all during Chaturmaas.'

Parashar Muni explains that the following are understood to be *Mamsa* (meat). 'Animal hair, water extracted using a leather pail, fruit containing many seeds, a kind of pulse called *Masur*, cooked or prepared foods/vegetables obtained from a Brahmin, ready food which has salt added to it (in the sense that food is tasted to contain less salt and then salt is added), food not offered to God, unfiltered water, milk drank with sweets and milk obtained from animals other than cows, goats and buffaloes. These are comparable to meat in addition to the understood flesh definition of meat derived from animals. Sensible men renounce such things always and during Chaturmaas renounce such things more so.' Other Vrats are defined in **Vratahemadri**.

Chaturmaas is a time of self-discipline to please the Lord Almighty. It is a time of spiritual awakenings and of Devotion to God over and above what we perform normally. It is a time of Vrat and Upvaas (fasting). We should all make an effort to do that much more to please God during these months. Such time is considered the greatest in the year and so penance during Chaturmaas will result in greater fruits.

TEXT 79

They shall observe self-discipline on Ekadashi, Janmashtmi and other birth anniversaries such as Shivratri etc. and celebrate them with great reverence.

Just as Chaturmaas Vrat is considered great, Ekadashi Vrat is also famed:

Ekadaashinaam Sarvasaam Kartavyam Vratamaadarat /

All Ekadashis - of both halves of the month - *Sukla Paksh* and *Krushna Paksh* (bright and dark halves of the month) are equally great and so should be observed with due respect. Shatanand explains: ***Ekadashinaam Vratam Upavaaspoojajagaranadilakshano Niyamaha*** - Ekadashi Vrat observing Niyams (practices) of *Upvaas* (fasting), *Pooja* (worship) and *Jagran* (renouncing sleep) should be practised.

Such Vrat should never be stopped through fear of effect to the physical body. That is, sometimes we fear that a full day fast may somehow cause the body to deteriorate, when it is completely untrue. Sure, if a person is truly ill, it would be advised not to perform extensive Vrats, but many use excuses like these when really, they don't wish to perform such Vrat through their difficulty.

In **Nirnyasindhu**, **Narad** explains, 'Those who are daily devoted to Vishnu should fortnightly observe the Ekadashi Upvaas (Fast).' **Katyayan** in **Kalamadhava** says, 'All between the ages of eight and eighty should observe Ekadashi Upvaas of both halves.' **Hemadri** and **Lagunaradiya** explain, 'Those who eat *Ana* (food containing pulses, lentils, beans etc) on Ekadashi are sinners and will undoubtedly suffer the consequences of Hell.'

It is imperative that both Ekadashis are observed. Only such people can truly be called Vaishnavas. **Deval Rishi** explains ways which the Vrat can be broken, 'By drinking water too often, chewing a paan even once, sleeping during the day and by indulging in sexual intercourse, one destroys the Vrat. Vrat observed without faith, with anger or without Brahmcharya (absolute celibacy) derive no fruits of action.'

'Brahmcharya is defined, as absolute celibacy involving not looking at women, touching women or talking to them. Even the company of one's wife dissolves Brahmcharya Vrat. The Vrat is also destroyed when a tear is shed, if one becomes angered or if one quarrels with somebody.'

Similarly - devotion, Vrat, knowledge, meditation, sacrifice and chanting, all bear no fruits if anger is present. **Katyayan** and **Vashist** fully explain 'Upvaas':

Upavrutasya Papebhyo Yastu Vaso Gunoha Suha /
Upavasaha Sa Vigneyaha Sarvabhogvivarjitaha /
Upavaskrutabhete Gunashranye Dayadayaha //

'To turn back from sin (*Paap*), to renounce objects of enjoyment (*Bhog*) and to dwell in virtuosity (*Gunn*) is Upvaas.'

Guna or virtuous-meritous acts are *Japp, Dhyan, Katha Shravan, Daya* etc. In this Shlok, Upvaas is meant to include *Nirahaar* or fasting. On such day, performance of '*Datan*' or brushing of the teeth with a wooden object is also forbidden (as explained earlier). The tongue should be cleansed using a leaf on such day and the mouth should be cleansed twelve times with water, as explained by **Narad**.

Vratakarma forbids even looking at cooked food on such day, 'Looking at food, smelling food, dwelling upon food, and preparation of food for others is forbidden for those who perform Upvaas.'

Those who are less spiritually developed and are unable to keep a full proper Upvaas may partake in *Farari Ahaar* - eating of fruit and other such thing (nuts etc.), explains **Nirnyasindhu's Naradiya Puran**, 'Those who are not fully developed may partake in vegetables, fruits, milk and water even though on such days, eating is forbidden.'

Three Ekadashis in the year are so special that on these days, one should strictly refrain from consumption of all foods. **Naradiya Puran** explains, '*Shayani (Asadh-Sud-11), Prabhohini (Kartik-Sud-11)* and *Parivartini (Shravana-Sud-11)*; those that eat on these Ekadashis cause me (God) the great pain of piercing an arrow through my heart.' Those that are ill and therefore eat fruit on such days do not commit sin. Those that are very young or very old are similarly blameless.

Langurnadiya Puran explains further about *Ekadashi Vrat*, 'From the tenth day of the half (*Dashmi*) and for a subsequent three days one should refrain from chewing betel leaf, association with one's wife, and sleeping during the day. Vrat without Jagaran (staying awake during the day/night) and without Vishnu Pooja deserves only half the fruits of action.' Therefore Ekadashi Vrat should be kept such that it obeys the said commands.

Shatanand Muni in his Bhashya does not explain why we should observe the Vrat - the history behind it, which I feel is important and so have added:

Once, long ago, Vishnu engaged in a long battle with the Asura Murdanav, son of Nadijang. Murdanav, fearless, strong and mighty had become invincible. During the battle, Lord Vishnu became tiresome and ran for shelter in Badrikashram. He entered a hidden cave - Sinhavti, and rested there. Falling fast asleep, a woman, with immense beauty emerged from the body of the Lord. At this time, the Asura Murdanav came to the cave, intending to kill Vishnu. The woman emerged from the caves with a hidden sword in hand. Seeing the beauty of the woman, he became overwhelmed and strived to make her his mate. The woman, listening to Murdanav's plight decided to grant his wish on the condition that they have a battle, if Murdanav wins then she will surrender herself to him. So deciding, just as Murdanav was getting ready, the woman raised her concealed sword and severed Murdanav's head, killing him. She was able to do with her charm which all had failed to do.

Vishnu awoke at that point and emerged from the cave. Seeing Murdanav dead and a woman beside the body, he enquired as to who she was. She explained, 'I was born from your eleven Indriyas (parts of the body), and hence my name is Ekadashi, my Lord.' Realising what service Ekadashi had done, Vishnu became overjoyed and granted Ekadashi a boon. She replied, 'With this sword in my hand, I am now ready to destroy the innumerable sins of all of mankind.' Vishnu replied, 'From today, all my devotees shall observe the Ekadashi Vrat whose sins you may destroy.'

For this reason all should readily observe the Ekadashi Vrat, not only to wash away sin but also to fulfil the boon given to Ekadashi by Vishnu.

It amazes me, what sorts of Vrat people keep these days. Obviously we should strive to observe a full day fast. Those who cannot should modify their Vrat accordingly. For example they should eat fruit once a

day or abstain from cooked food for the day or eat once Falahar such as *Samo, Shaka* etc. But eat as less as possible on such day. This it seems is totally ignored. Many on Ekadashi prepare huge feasts making a great variety of foods - Samos, Shakas, chips, Fahrari Bhajya, Fahrari Chevdo etc.

Ekadashi is a day of control of senses. It is a special day in the fortnight to desist from eating with pleasure.

An Upvaas is the best way to observe the Vrat, and is also good for the body as it will burn out all impure residual substances in the body accrued over the two weeks and so there is also a physical advantage.

Finally:

Krushnajanmadinanagacha Shivratescha Sotsavam //

One should observe the birthdays of *Krishna, Rama* etc. that are famed in Puranas, as well as the Vrat day of *Shivratri*. Such occasions should be celebrated with great festivity with the sonorous sounds of instruments bellowing.

One should perform *Mahapooja, Pooja* of Brahmins and Sadhus, songs and praise of Shree Krishna and *Jagran* (staying awake for the whole day and night). One should not engage themselves in work on such day (but observe devotional praise).

It is imperative that Upvaas is observed if possible on such days. These make believe Vrats such as eating after Arti at seven 'o' clock in the evening are all fallacies, especially the belief that eating non-Farari (such as *Rotli and Shaka*) foods after seven o'clock are not acceptable.

Katyayan in Parashar Madhav explains, 'Those who eat on Ekadashi days should perform the Vrat of *Chandrayana* (as Prayaschit).' Chandraya Vrat lasts for a whole month and involves intensive fasting. **Bhavishya Puran** says, 'Those who do not observe the Vrat days of the Lord's birthdays are banished to Hell, enduring great torture.' **Skanda Puran** says further about **Shivratri Vrat**: 'Those who do not observe the greatest of all Vrats - Shivratri, endure a further thousand lifetimes.'

Narad Pancharatra explains the Birthday Vrat days as follows:

Vratani Vishnubhaktanaam Nitganimani Sanjaguha /
Ekadashyoakhilaha Sudha Dvadashi Vamanashya Cha //
Shriramdevsajanmanavmi Divyasidhida /
Krushnajanamashtmi Chatha Nrusinhasya Chaturdashi //
Shivaratricheti Mukhyavratanutkani Tatvatata /

'All faithful devotees of Vishnu should always observe the following Vrats: All Ekadashis, Vaman Dvadashi, Ramanavmi, Krishna Janmashtmi, Nrusinha Chaturdashi and Shivratri.'

All such Vrats are important and should be observed. *Narsinha Jayanti, Shivratri* and *Vaman Jayanti* should be observed with care as these are often not observed. On these Jayanti days a full day fast must be observed if possible. If not then Falahar should be observed. Never should 'Ana' or normal food be eaten on these days, as it will surely destroy the Vrat.

Shivratri Vrat, as we have heard, is considered the greatest of all Vrats and so bears immense fruits. It is kept in praise of Lord Shiva the greatest Vaishnav. Those who do not observe such Vrat, disobeying

Lord Swaminarayan's command, cannot be called true Vaishnavas. In essence we insult Lord Shiva, the devotee of God which in turn leads to hurting our own Ishtadeva.

TEXT 80

On days of fasting, one shall make every effort to avoid sleeping during the day as by doing so nullifies the fast, just as sexual indulgence does.

Upavaasadine Tyajya Diva Nindra Prayatrataha /
Upavaasstaya Nashyenmaithuneneva Yanruram //80//

A day spent sleeping destroys the Vrat. By sleeping, the day is wasted away, which should really be used in praise of God. When sleeping, the fast becomes easier to keep and for these reasons, such days should not be passed by sleeping.

Upavassya Dine Ekadashyadau Praischitharthopavasdivase /
Cha Diva Nidra Prayatnataha Sarvaprakarera Tyaja Na Kartavyetyarthaha //

'One should not sleep during days of Upvaas for Ekadashi etc. and on days of Upvaas for Prayaschit.' Such days spent sleeping, destroys the Vrat of Upvaas which is similar to that of sexual indulgence. **Deval Smuriti** explains: *Upavaasaha Pranasyeta Diva Swapacha Maithunad* - 'Sleeping during the day and sexual indulgence destroys the fruits of Upvaas.' Thus both are considered equivalent.

During all Vrats, *Brahmcharya* (celibacy) is considered to be important. Those Vrats performed without Brahmcharya are fruitless. **Puranas and Dharma Shastras** explain that Brahmcharya is destroyed through the ejaculation of semen from the body. Ejaculation is caused through the association of a woman or by dreaming, say Rishis. For such reasons, on such days, one should stay aloof of the company of women and also prevent themselves from dreaming of situations involving the company of women in this way. Thus, one should spend the day with their senses focussed away from such desires. If by accident, one does release semen on such a Vrat day, one should perform *Avakirni* Prayaschit, as explained later.

One should understand that sleeping during the day is prohibited ordinarily for all days (as explained earlier (Sh.15)). Sleeping on Ekadashi and other Vrat days is more so prohibited. Many believe that the Lord here forbids sleeping if Upvaas is performed on Vrat days and so if *Ektanu* (eating just once) is performed then there is no problem in sleeping. This is absolutely incorrect. One should not sleep during the day nor indulge in sexual activities if the Vrat is kept, regardless of whether Upvaas or part Upvaas was performed, as these will surely destroy the Vrat. Now Lord Swaminarayan explains which Vrat days are worthy of praise and observance.

TEXT 81

The days of Vrat (self-discipline) and festivals shall be as prescribed by Shree Vithalnathji, the son of Shri Vallabhacharya, a king among Vaishnavas.

Sarvavaishnavrajshreevallabhacharyanandanaha /
Shreevithaleshaha Krutvan Yam Vratotsavnirnyam //81//

Pushtimarga's great *Vaishnavacharya*, **Shree Vallabhacharya** exponent of *Suddhadvaita* philosophy and great propounder of *Bhakti* is here remembered. Vallabhacharya's knowledge regarding *Vrats* and

Utsavas should be accepted and practiced. The Vaishnav Raja, famed as the incarnation of Lord Agni (fire), Vallabhacharya's son **Shri Vithalnathji's** treatise upon Vrat days should be accepted. His astrological fixings on Ekadashi, Ankoot and all other important days in the Hindu calendar should be accepted.

TEXT 82

My disciples shall observe these Vrats and festivals and shall adopt the mode of worship of Shree Krishna explained by Shree Vithalnath

Vithalnath has explained that if the tenth day (*Dasham*) is one with a duration of a 54 *Gadis* and 59 *Paras* (1 Gadi = 24 mins, 1 Para = 24 seconds) hence 24 hours and 42 minutes then the *Dasham* is said to be without *Vegh*. If however the *Dasham* is 55 *Gadis* hence 22 hours then the *Dasham* is said to be with *Vegh*. For those *Dashams* with *Vegh*, the eleventh day should not be taken for Ekadashi Vrat Upvaas. The twelfth day should be taken instead. If the half-month contains two Ekadashis or two Dvadashis (twelfth days) then the second of the two days should be taken for performing Upvaas Vrat in such situation.

If Janamastmi is said to occur during sunrise then that day should be used for Janamastmi Vrat. If the seventh day is with *Vegh* or if the eighth day is with *Vegh* or if the eighth day is with ***Kshaya*** (decaying) then the ninth day should be taken for the Vrat. If two Ashtamis (eighth days) occur then the first of the two should be taken.

Only that Vaman Jayanti, whose previous day has ***Vishnushrunkhla Yoga*** should be used. For Ramanavmi, the ninth day without *Vegh* of the eighth day should be taken. If the ninth day is with *Vegh* or if it is with *Kshaya* then that day should still be taken. If there are two ninth days then the first should be taken. If there is ***Chandra Darshan*** on the first day of Kartika then Ankoot Utsava should be celebrated the day before (*Amavasya*). Vithalnath has not outlined Shivaratri and so Shatanand explains that ***Samayamayukh*** and others should be used. If Shivaratri spreads over after twelve o'clock at night then the first day should be taken. If Shivaratri spreads over two nights then the second day should be taken. Thus in this way the important Vrats are explained. I am not sure how much of this anyone out there understands, but I have to my limited knowledge translated as best I can. This Shlok really stems into Jyotisha Shastra - Science of Astrology and so one needs to have an understanding of such subject to fully understand the influence of time, planets and stars upon Vrat days.

Also, Vithalnath's teachings upon service to Lord Krishna (***Sevaritisha Krishnasya***) involving what clothing, ornaments and food to offer to God at different times should be accepted. The path of service, devotion (*Seva-Bhakti*) as explained in ***Varshika Vratotsav Vidhi*** should be thus accepted.

TEXT 83

All my disciples shall make a pilgrimage with due rites to the holy places like Dwarika and shall always be charitable and compassionate towards the poor.

Shatanand says that Dwarika is the best amongst holy places. By going to such holy places - *Tirthas*, one swims across the ocean of life (*Sansar Samudra*). The Tirtha is a *Punya Kshetra* a place of fruits or benediction. One should go to such places, perform *Mahapooja* of the Lord, be charitable towards

Sadhus and Brahmins and celebrate such places. Shatanand explains that a Tirtha is a form of Bhakti or devotion and for such reason it is thus glorified.

Ugrashrava has said, 'O Brahmins! Visiting Tirthas makes a person more faithful (to religion) and makes him more eager to listen to the Lord's Katha'. Those who cannot perform an extensive Yatra of all holy places should visit *Dwarika*. Dwarika is famed here, as it is the home of Lord Shree Krishna who is said to have resided there for a hundred years. Dwarika, the 'City of Gold' is thus famed as the greatest of Tirthas. The **Eleventh Canto of Bhagwat** says 'Remembrance of the holy city of Dwarika destroys all evil and spreads auspiciousness'.

The Yatra Vidhi is explained in **Kashikhanda**: 'Before leaving for Yatra, an Upvaas should be performed and Poojan of Ganapati. Forefathers, Brahmins, Sadhus and Elders should be worshipped. Additional religious practices should be adopted, only then should one begin their Yatra. When one returns from Yatra, they should again perform Poojan of ancestors and elders.' 'One should never test Brahmins during Yatra. They should openly give food to the needy and they themselves should perform Upvaas. They should shave their heads and perform ancestral offerings (Shraadh). They should never look upon another woman with lustful intent. They should never lust or kill another living being or speak the untruth. Those who have control of their hands, feet and mind and who are blessed with learning, penance and fame, obtain the fruits of the pilgrimage.'

'Those who do not anger, who has level mind and intelligence, an ally of trust, who performs Vrats (self discipline), who is not egotistical, who has good intentions and who looks upon others as he does himself, attains the desired fruits of the pilgrimage; such person is never again reborn in the womb of an animal or bird, nor is he reborn in a country to face hardship. Such a person attains the heavens, as he understands the path to Moksha. In such Tirtha Kshetras are destroyed his sins - *Anyasthane Krutam Papam Punyakshetre Vinashyati*.

Those who are capable should not eat twice, explains **Skand Puran**: 'Those that eat twice receive a third of the *Punya*. Those that profit from a Tirtha in some way also receive a third of the *Punya*. Those that only aim to make money at such places receive no fruits. Those that perform Yatra in some vehicle receive half the fruits and those who perform the Yatra with the aid of an umbrella or shoes receive a quarter of the fruits.

If a Brahmin, severely poverty stricken, makes money for his well being and then donates a tenth of what he makes to God then he does not receive any sin.

Nirnyasidhu explains further about the act of shaving one's head at Tirthas. **Deval Muni** explains, 'One should shave their heads and perform Upvaas at all holy Tirtha places except for *Kurukshetra, Badrinath, Lornatirtha and Gayaji*'. If one performs Tirtha again after 10-12 months then one should again shave their heads and perform Upvaas accordingly.

Visiting the Tirtha, one should respectfully pay homage to the presiding deity therein by performing *Mahapooja, Alpapooja* (ordinary) or at the least offering fruits. They should offer food or *Dakshina* (money) to Brahmins. They should perform Poojan of Vaishnavas (devotees of Vishnu) and donate cows. They should display affection for all of Gods creatures as they would friends and family. They should never mistreat anybody.

Vyaas explains, 'One should always be compassionate towards the poor, those with physical defect, those women who are poor or ill and the misfortunate. Those Brahmins that insult or disregard a poor person face destruction of knowledge just as water is lost from a broken vessel.'

TEXT 84

My disciples shall reverently worship the five deities Vishnu, Shiva, Ganpati, Parvati and Surya.

*Vishnuha Shivo Ganapatiha Parvati Cha Divakaraha /
Etaha Pujiyatya Manya Devtaha Pancha Mamakauha //84//*

Worship of the five deities is here glorified. **Ganpati Khanda of Brahmanvaivartak** explains, '*Ganpati* is considered as an *Avatar* of Shree Krishna and is the first of all Devas to be worshipped', therefore is worthy of high honour and worship.

Parvati is considered as the '*half-body*' or *Ardhanga* of Shankar and is worshipped as the 'Eternal Power' - *Adi Shakti* and is therefore honoured here. *Shree Shankar* is worshipped as he is considered as one with Shree Vishnu and is also famed as *Vaishnavaraja* (king amongst Vaishnavas) and as the promoter of *Vaishnav Dharma*. For such reason he has been honoured with great respect. *Surya-Narayan* is the saviour of all twice-born beings (Dwijas - upper three castes). He is the principal of the *Gayatri Mantra* and is *Bhagwatswarup* (form of God), *Veda Swarup* (form of the Vedas) and is the main cause of Dharma. For such reasons, he is worshipped with high honour. In this way, all five deities are respected equally. Out of these five, one deity should be considered as one's *Ishtadev* or personal God.

Narad Pancharathra explains, 'All *Grihastas* (householders) with devotion should worship the *Panchayatan* (five deities). Vaishnavas should place Vishnu in the centre (of the *Altar*) and thus consider him as the greater. If Vishnu is in the centre, then Shankar, Ganapati, Surya and Parvati should be placed around Vishnu in that order starting from the Northeast and working your way round clockwise. If Shiva is in the centre, then Vishnu should be placed in the Northeast (*Ushaan*), Surya in the Southeast (*Agni*), Ganapati in the Southwest (*Nairutya*) and Devi in the Northwest (*Vayavya*). Similarly if Surya is placed in the centre, then Shiva, Ganapati, Vishnu and Devi are placed in similar order. If Devi is placed in the centre, then Vishnu, Shiva, Ganapati and Surya are placed accordingly. If Ganapati is in the centre, then Vishnu, Shiva, Surya and Devi are placed accordingly. Placing the deities in this way will derive great happiness and bliss. However, if the deities are placed incorrectly then great tyranny can befall'.

It is said that the Gopis, Vasudev and Ruksmini looked upon Shree Krishna in different ways (as a lover, son and husband) – however, in the end, all attained Shree Krishna the embodiment of Vishnu. Therefore it is not incorrect or unworthy for people to worship a deity other than Vishnu for all will by doing so attain Mahavishnu - the Supreme Being.

Ishtadev worship is the greatness of Hinduism, which allows a person to dedicate himself or herself to any one deity, but in the end all attain the same ultimate goal. In this way, only one Ishtadeva should be ultimately worshipped but all other Devas are worthy of respect, praise and worship. Under no circumstances should any deity be slandered, as to do so would inadvertently be to slander your own Ishtadeva.

Lord Swaminarayan has therefore commanded that the Vrats of other deities such as Shiva should be observed for such reason. All should sing the glories of other deities as appropriate; this is the greatness of our Lord who instilled equality and respect for all gods in our Sampradai.

TEXT 85

In the event of afflictions caused by any evil spirits, they shall chant the Stotram of 'Narayan Kavach' or 'Hanuman Stotram', but shall never chant the Mantras of any other deity

Sometimes for reasons of impurity, sin etc. one can become subject to afflictions caused by Ghosts (*Bhoot*) and other paranormal phenomena such as evil spirits (*Pret, Pisach, Shaakini, Brahman Rakshash etc*). In such circumstances one should chant the *Narayan Kavacha*, as stated in the **Sixth Skand of Shrimad Bhagwat**.

One should wash their hands and feet, perform *Achmana* for purification, sit facing north, perform *Nyaas* using their fingers and body as they chant Mantras (this invokes the Gods to protect various parts of the body) observe *Moun* (silence) and then they should chant the Narayan Kavach - the 'Armour of Narayan'.

Alternatively one may chant various famed Mantras of **Vira Shree Hanumaan**. One should never invoke any other God apart from Shree Krishna or his Bhakts as to do so leads to a sin of *Anyashraya*. Invoking Hanumaan does not lead to sin as in the **Ramayana, Raghunaath** explains, 'Whosoever calls for my dearest Hanuman for shelter has called for me'.

Bhagwat's Sixth Skand tells the story of Indra's insult to the Deva's Guru, *Brihaspati* and Indra's subsequent defeat. At the advice of Brahma, he approaches Vishvarup to take the place of Brihaspati on his departure. It was Vishvarup who imparted the Narayan Kavach (the armour of psychic potency relating to Narayan). Protected by it, Indra was able to easily overcome the armies of Asuras. The **Narayan Kavacha** in **Sk 6, Ad 8, 12-34** invokes all the 24 incarnations of God and asks each to protect them from various undesirable influences and acts. It invokes Lord Hari, using his many names to protect them throughout the day. It invokes the various weapons of God to destroy evil. In this way the Narayan Kavach is truly a great Mantra worthy of study and chant.

Similarly Hanuman's greatness is equally renowned in the Ramayan. His devotion to Shree Ram was clearly glorified. Hanuman is a Deva of astonishing attributes. His strength, knowledge, skills and total mastery of all arts makes him worthy of being invoked.

Shree Ram, at the end of the Lanka episode, pleased with his dedication to him offered Hanuman a boon. Hanuman asked not for any material happiness, but asked that he stay upon the Earth as long as people sing the Great story of Shree Ram, so that he may be fulfilled by listening to the stories of Shree Ram and also that if any pains befall any devotees of the Lord then he should be capable of destroying such pains.

In this way Hanuman became immortal and indeed, no Vaishnav temple is considered a temple without the Idol of Shree Ram's favourite devotee, Shree Hanuman. Hanumanji was the Kul Deva or family deity of the Dharma Kul. He has on numerous occasions, come to the saviour of Dharma and Bhakti, by freeing them from the tyranny of Evil Spirits. This was as per the instruction of Dharma Dev's father, who commanded that Hanuman should be invoked in such situations.

In this way, we too can afford protection always by chanting and invoking the Narayan Kavach or Hanuman Stotra. Even today, many find solitude and peace of mind by chanting the great 'Hanuman Chalisa' of the seventeenth century saint-poet Tulsidas.

TEXT 86

Whenever an eclipse of the Sun or the Moon takes place, all my disciples shall immediately suspend all work and after purifying themselves shall chant the Mantra of Shree Krishna.

Shatanand has not explained the reason for an eclipse, as documented in the Puranas but I feel it necessary to include. During the *legendary churning of the Milky Ocean* to obtain *Amrit* (Excelsior), God took the form of **Mohini** to get back the Amrit that was taken by the Asuras. Fooling the Asuras, she returned with the Amrit and began to offer the Amrit to all the Devas, as they sat in a line.

One Asura by the name of **Rahu**, realising that they had been fooled, sat in the line in the guise of a Deva, also to partake in the Amrit. As Mohini was about to approach Rahu, the Sun deity and the Moon deity, who were sat next to Rahu, revealed the true identity of Rahu and thus Mohini lifted her sword and severed Rahu's head.

The head continued to live but swore that it would avenge the outburst of the Sun and the Moon. For this reason Rahu is periodically engaged in battle with the Sun and Moon. Hence the eclipse to Hindus is considered as the time when Rahu 'gobbles up' either the Sun or the Moon and the subsequent fight of the Sun or Moon to free themselves from Rahu's jaws. During such time various acts and duties have to be observed.

Shatanand explains that just before the start of an eclipse (when the prohibition of touch is enforced - *Sparsh Kal*), one should suspend all work, purify themselves by bathing and begin to chant *Shree Krishna's Astakshar Mantra* or *Naam Mantra*. Shatanand says that one should not stay without bathing during such times, nor should they engage in any household duties.

Vashisht Muni explains 'All caste members, when having sight of Rahu (eclipse) are affected by Satak (period of untouchability see Shlok 88). Therefore when an eclipse begins, one should bath and during the eclipse they shall chant Gods names, perform *Hom* (offerings) etc'. **Purascharan Chandriko** explains, 'During the eclipse of the Sun or Moon, one should with pure mind, chants the Mantra of God, the Lord of the Universe'.

Markandeya Muni explains further about bathing water, 'Bathing in cold water instead of warm water is better, deriving more Punya. One's own water rather than somebody else's, water from a small lake or pond (*Tarav*) rather than that from a well, running or flowing water rather than water from a Tarav, water from a large lake (*Sarovar*), water from a river (*Nadi*), water from the Ganges (*Ghanga Jal*) and the water from an Ocean or Sea (*Samundra*) are incrementally superior and *Punya-Karak*'.

Vashisht in Parashar Madhav explains that the *Grahan* or eclipse should be observed even if a person is observing Satak (untouchability due to birth or death in the family). **Brahmansiddhant** restricts viewing the eclipse, 'One should look at an eclipse through a cloth or a reflection of it. A pregnant woman should never look directly at an eclipse'.

Gautam in Parashar Madhav explains the fasts to be observed, 'All except the young, the old and the ill should stop eating four *Prahars* (12 hours) before a solar eclipse commences and three *Prahars* (9 hours) before a lunar eclipse commences. The young, the old and the ill should stop eating one *Prahar* (3 hours) before an eclipse.'

Nirnya Sindhu further explains, 'If the sun sets whilst the solar eclipse is still in progress then one should fast the whole of that day and the rest of the night. Similarly if the Moon disappears (day breaks) whilst the eclipse is still in progress, then one should not eat until the next day.'

The eclipse Vrat should be observed if any part of the eclipse is visible from the country that you are residing in. During the eclipse all cooked food becomes impure and not fit to be eaten afterwards. Clothes which are unclean or have been worn or touched are impure and to be washed after the eclipse.

The strict eating restrictions here mentioned is in accordance with Shastras and properly documented. There is no 'phantom' four-hour eating restriction before an eclipse that I know of. I presume that this is a misunderstanding in that people assume that a Prahara is the same as an hour when this is clearly not the case. This four hours problem is so wide spread that attention needs to be directed to rectify this and to get back to principles outlined by Shastras. Certainly in temples the true principle should be enforced and announced accordingly.

These restrictions are important and should be observed correctly if able. Loose attitudes in this regard will not yield the desired objectives of observing such a Vrat.

TEXT 87

When the eclipse is over, they shall take a bath with clothes worn at that time. Householders shall give alms to the poor according to their means and ascetics shall worship God.

After performing Japa, once the eclipse is over, one should bathe with all their clothes on their body. Grihastas (householders) shall donate gold and other such things. **Hemadri** says:

Grasyamane Bhavet Snaanam Graste Homajapadikam /
Muchyamane Bhaved Daanam Mukte Snaanam Vidhiyate //

'One should bath just before an eclipse. He should chant God's names during the eclipse or perform offerings (*Hom*) and after the eclipse he should perform *Daan* (donation) and *Snaan* (bath).

Those that do not bathe after the eclipse has completed, are considered as *Sutaki* (untouchable) until such time of the next eclipse,' explains **Bhargavachan Chandrika**. 'One should bathe without chanting Mantras,' explains **Smrutiratnavali**.

Saints should perform Pooja, as they have no capacity to perform Daan. **Vishnu Dharma** explains, 'Those who are not Grihastas, who have nothing to give, shall perform Pooja of Lord Vishnu, as by doing so they receive the fruits of donation.' Similarly, 'One can derive the fruit of donation, sacrifices and of penance by merely performing Pooja of God.'

Note that all clothes that are worn or touched during the time of an eclipse are fit to be washed. No allowance is made here for specific materials e.g. the fallacy that cotton clothing (such as a jacket) does not need to be washed is untrue.

TEXT 88

My disciples of the four castes shall observe Sutaka (a period following a birth or death in the family, during which all religious rites are prohibited) immediately after a birth or death of a relative, according to the closeness of the relationship, as prescribed by the scriptures.

All people of the four castes are to observe *Sutak*. Sutak for births is different to Sutak of deaths. The length of the Sutak varies depending on how close you are to the person and who has been born or died.

Angira Smruti explains, 'One becomes cleansed or purified after performing ten days of Sutak following a birth or death in the family' (Thus Sutak is to purify oneself as one becomes impure or inauspicious

following a birth or death). **Agni** explains ‘*Sodako*’s (a relationship of 7-14 generation in distance) are purified by performing three days of Sutak’.

During the birth of a boy, *Sapindo*’s (a relationship of less than seven generations in distance) are purified by a ten day Sutak. *Sodako*’s are purified by three days Sutak. During the birth of a girl, performing a three-day Sutak purifies *Sapindo*’s and *Sodako*’s.

Angira Muni explains the untouchability of those observing Sutak of birth. ‘During a birth Sutak, one may touch other members of the family except the Sutaki (mother who gave birth). If the Sutaki is touched, then one can purify themselves by bathing.’

Pracheta in Haralta explains, ‘The mother should practice untouchability for ten nights in order to purify herself. She should refrain from religious and ancestral rites for a longer period.’ **Paithensi Rishi** explains further: ‘The mother that gives birth to a son should perform religious rites only after 20 days following the Sutak (thus, 30 days in total). In the case of a birth to a son, she should perform religious rites only after 30 days (thus, 40 days in total).

Also, in the case of the birth of a son, the first, sixth and tenth days of Sutak are free from Sutak.

Now Shatanand explains the Sutak following the death of a family member. **Brihaspati** explains:

Dashahena Sapindastu Sudhyanti Pretasutake /
Sodakastu Triratrena Snaanatva Shudhyanti Gotrinaha //

‘Family members of seven generations (*Sapindo*) are purified by observing a Sutak of ten days, fourteen generations (*Sodako*) by observing three days and twenty-one generations (*Sagotro*) by merely bathing.’

Yagnavalkya and Parashar say, ‘If a child dies before they grow teeth then they can cleanse themselves by bathing. If the child dies before the ceremonial removing of the hair then one day of Sutak is observed and if it dies before *Yagnopavit* (wearing of sacred thread), then three-day Sutak needs to be observed. Else the full ten days must be observed’.

Kshatriyas, twelve days; Vaishyas, fifteen days; Shudras thirty days and Sat-Shudras, fifteen days of Sutak should be observed.’ **Nirnyasindhu Trisachloki** explains further, ‘Three days and three nights of Sutak should be performed at the death of an Acharya, mother/father, daughter/son, pious Brahmin, Brahmin who perform Yagnas, the patron of a sacrifice and a sister’s son.’

‘A *Pakshini* (one and a half days or two days & one night) of Sutak should be performed, on the death of a Pious Brahmin, daughter’s son, a colleague, three types of relatives - mother’s and father’s *Foi*’s (father’s sister) son, *Mashi*’s (mother’s sister) son and *Mama*’s (mother’s brother) son, student or *Shishya*, *Sasu* (mother-in-law), a close friend, *Sasra* (father-in-law), sister and sister’s son’

If death occurs during the day, *Pakshini* Sutak is to be observed, i.e. until the stars can be seen the following day. If death occurs at night then Sutak should be observed until sunset the following day.

‘On the death of one’s mother’s mother, *Foi*, *Mashi*, *Mama*, *Mami* (mother’s-brother’s-wife), one who teaches the Vedas, a country’s king or a town mayor, the *Pakshini* Sutak should be observed.’

‘On the death of a disciple (*Sishya*), *Upadhyaya* or teacher, a friend, son of one’s Guru, wife of one’s Guru, wife of one’s Acharya, relative of fourteen generations, one who lectures upon the six philosophies of the Vedas, one who teaches the Vedas and one’s *Mama*, one night of Sutak should be observed.’

'Death of a person of the same Guru or a person one has contact with need only bathe with their clothes to free themselves of Satak.'

'If a daughter's son or sister's son dies before Yagnopavit (wearing of sacred thread) then three day Satak is observed, else Pakshini Satak is observed. If the child is with family such as a Mama then Pakshini is observed. If child is far away then one day is observed.'

'If a pious Brahmin dies at one's own house then three night of Satak are observed. If he dies in the town then one night is observed.' In this way Satak is to be observed according to country, time and ability.' Shatanand explains that the duration of Satak is also dependent on the age of the person who dies.

Untouchability is now outlined. One should not touch those who are observing the Satak of Death. Also if the birth of a child is found out after ten days then Satak need not be observed. In **Parashar Madhav, Deval** explains, 'In birth Satak, once the days of Satak have passed, one need not observe Satak.' This is not the case with Satak of death though. **Vrudh Vaishist** explains, 'If one finds out about the death after six months, then Pakshini should be observed. If after nine months then one day and if more, then one needs only to bathe to purify themselves.'

The above applies if death occurs in the same country. For death overseas, one need only bathe. **Brihaspati** clarifies 'overseas': '*Deshantara* (overseas) applies if there is a large river in the middle, if there is a range of mountains in between or if the language changes between the areas.'

However, this does not apply to the death of one's mother or father: **Smrutyarthasar** explains, 'Even if the death of one's mother or father occurs in some distant country and one hears about it after a year, their sons should still observe the Satak for the full ten days. Similarly husbands and wives should also perform the full ten-day Satak in the event of death of their partner.' **Hemadri and Linga Puran** explains, 'Vairagis and Yogis need not observe Satak. In the event of death of their mother, father or Guru, they should bathe only.' Sadhus should also in this way observe Satak.

Now is explained the situation where another Satak strikes when one Satak is being performed. **Yama in Parashar Madhav** explains, 'If a birth Satak strikes when another birth Satak is being observed then the first Satak purifies the second Satak (therefore need not be observed). Similarly a death Satak during a death Satak can be resolved. However a death Satak during a birth Satak cannot be resolved in this way and so the full death Satak needs to be observed. Similarly if a three-day Satak comes during a ten-day Satak then the three-day Satak is resolved but if a ten day Satak comes during a three day Satak then the ten-day Satak has to be observed fully.'

Kurma Puran explains exemptions to Satak, '*Naistiks* (the devoted), *Vaanprasts* (retired), *Yatis* (ascetics), *Brahmancharis* (celibates) and *Satpurushs* (men of truthful qualities) have no Satak outlined for them. Similarly the degenerated (*Patit*) have no Satak. There is also no Satak for those that die in a battle.' 'In times of *Dukal* (famine), one need only bathe to resolve Satak.' **Daksha in Sudhiratnakar** explains, 'These Sutaks are for times of *Svasth Kaal* (able, fortunate). During *Apatkaal* (calamity) Satak is void.'

Trinsachloki explains, 'If Satak strikes for those with Satra (a period of 2-14 weeks when a Yagna is performed), those observing a Vrat, a king, a minister, a sacrificial priest (Brahmin), one with excelled learning, a doctor, a professional, an architect, an ill person, a poet, a washer and one who makes mats, then one needs to only bathe.'

'If Sutak occurs whilst one performs *Daan* (donation), *Upanayan* (wearing of sacred thread), *Yagna* (sacrific), *Pratishtha Vidhi* (installation ceremony), *Chaul* (removing of hair), *Tirtha Yatra* (pilgrimage), goes overseas to earn money, *Japp* (chanting), *Lagna* (wedding) or Utsav (celebrations), then one needs to only bathe to purify themselves.'

In this way Sutak has been described. It is important that we use this information and make sure we observe the Sutak appropriately. I'm sure we've all questioned whether we need to observe Sutak or bathe in the event of a death of a relative in the past. Here Shatanand has given us specific information and so it is our duty to understand this and observe the Sutak. All too often we disregard the mother's side of the family and do not observe Sutak when clearly we should. There is a lot of information in this Shlok and a lot of it may be confusing, as it is not clear what we should observe. In such situation you should consult with a Sadhu or someone who is well versed in these issues. If in doubt the 10-day Sutak should be observed as initially stated by Lord Swaminarayan. Shatanand explains that he will explain prohibitions of *Sandhya Vandan* etc. during Sutak later.

TEXT 89

Brahmins shall have virtues such as tranquillity, self-restraint, forgiveness, contentment etc, and my Kstatriya devotees (warrior caste) shall adorn bravery, patience and similar virtues.

Bhavyam shamdamakshantisantoshadigunanvitaiha /
Brahmanaiha Shauryadhairyadidunopetaischa Bahujaiha //89//

Over the next two Shlokas are explained *Varna Dharma* - the duties pertaining to caste. Brahmins are to display qualities of *Shamascha* (tranquillity, control of sense), *Damascha* (self-restraint, control of mind), *Kshamascha* (forgiveness) and *Santoshcha* (contentment). *Shama* or tranquillity is for purposes of control of the mind; it is the source of all happiness and therefore is spoken of first and foremost. **Smruti** explains - *Ashantasya Krutaha Sukham* – posing the question 'How can there be happiness for those who are not tranquil'.

Dama or self-restraint is the control of senses - *Damastitvanidriyanigraha*. **Apadharna** explains, 'Knowledgeable elders have explained that Dama is the tool to *Moksha* (Salvation). For Brahmins, Dama is considered to be the Sanatan (eternal) Dharma.'

Kshanti is the ability to forgive other people - *Kshantiha Paraparadhasahishrnutvam*, such quality is said to please God. **Jamdagni Muni** explains, 'O Father! We Brahmins are worshipped, as we are forgiving. The father, Brahma has attained the greatest of rank because of his forgiving nature. Brahmins are illustrious like the rays of the sun because of their forgiving nature. Those who forgive are said to immediately please Lord Hari.'

Santosh is contentment with food, clothes, etc. Thus, they are without excessive need or want - *Santoshooanayasalabdhananvastradinalambuddhiha*. Those devoid of content fall to the hells. **Narad** explains 'O King! Even those who are highly knowledgeable, who are beyond doubt and are Pandits regularly sitting in Sabhas, but who are without content are fit for the underworld (hell). Discontent Brahmins loose their *Tej* (luster) *Vidhya* (knowledge), *Tapp* (penance), *Kirti* (fame) and levelness of sense. **God** has said, 'Those Brahmins who by the grace of god, never veer from Dharma and who are always content attain all that is desired. Discontentment of wealth and desired objects are the cause of worldly life of births and deaths. Contentment of things derived by the grace of god is the cause of *Mukti* or liberation. Such Brahmins attain lustre. A Brahmin who is discontent looses his lustre, just as a fire looses its brilliance at the hands of water.' Similarly a Brahmin is to always show penance compassion etc.

God has said, 'The body of a Brahmin is not for mere satiation of desire but is for performing severe austerities and hence for the bliss enjoyed in the other worlds.' In the **Bhagwad Gita**, the **Lord** explains control of sense and mind, penance, purity, forbearance, uprightness, knowledge, special knowledge and faith, all constitute the duties of a Brahmin, and hence of his inherent nature.'

Mokshadharma explains, 'The Devas considers Brahmins to be those who are not jubilant or angered through attention (*Maan*) or slander (*Apmaan*) and who offer protection to all.'

Sanatsujata explains the twelve desirable and undesirable qualities of a Brahmin, which **Nilkant Pandit** has further explained:

12 Desirable qualities:

- i) **Dharma** - Righteous duties or acts according to *Varna* (caste) and *Ashram* (divisions of life) such as *Sandyavandana*.
- ii) **Satya** - Truth. To speak honestly devoid of violence.
- iii) **Dama** - Overcome sense organs such as the tongue (sense of taste).
- iv) **Tapa** - Undergo intense austerities such as *Kruchra* and *Chandrayana Vrats*.
- v) **Amatsarya** - Accepts the greatness of others, is not proud.
- vi) **Hri** - Ashamed of acting unrighteously.
- vii) **Titiksha** - Never angered even in times when anger is uncontrollable, is always cool and collected.
- viii) **Ansuya** - Does not look at the bad qualities of others.
- ix) **Yagna** - Performance of Brahman Yagna. Sacrifices (non-violent) to the Gods.
- x) **Daan** - Charitable to those deserving.
- xi) **Dhruvi** - Patient - who never renounces Vrats, even in times of calamity.
- xii) **Shruti** - Study of Vedas and other Shastras

12 Undesirable Qualities

- i) **Krodha** - Anger due to unfulfilled desire. To raise one's voice or to hurt somebody physically due to distress of the mind.
- ii) **Kaama** - Desire for a woman.
- iii) **Lobha** - Selfishness or greed.
- iv) **Moha** - Delusion through not knowing what to do and what not to do.
- v) **Vidhita** - Those who regularly derive benefits, yet are discontent.
- vi) **Akrupa** - not compassionate or cruel.
- vii) **Asuya** - Those who find fault in others.
- viii) **Maan** - Arrogance of thinking of oneself as great.
- ix) **Shoka** - Sadness or separation caused by loosing something fond.
- x) **Spruha** - Respect for objects of pleasure.
- xi) **Irsha** - Envy of other people's success, not able to accept their success.
- xii) **Jugupsa** - Slandering of others or use of foul language.

Skand Puran explains the regular duties, 'Brahmins should regularly perform the following nine acts: **Snaanam** - bathing, **Sandhya** - morning/evening worship, **Japo** - chanting of god's name, **Homaha** - sacrificial offering, **Svadhya** - study of Vedas, **Devatarchanam** - worship of the Gods, **Vaishvadevam** - worship of fire God, **Atithyam** - welcoming of strangers and **Pitru tarpana** - ceremonial offering to forefathers.

Now the *Kshatriyas*, born of the arms of *Virat Purush* (God Almighty). They are to display qualities of *Saurya* - valor on the battlefield and *Dhairya* - endurance. The use of 'adi' suggests qualities of benevolence, generosity and being liberal. **Eleventh Skanda of Bhagwat** explains, '*Teja* - brilliance, *Bala* - strength, *Dhairya* - patient, *Shaurya* - valor, *Titiksha* - cool and collected, *Audarya* - liberality, *Udhyam* - well informed of current events, *Sthir* - steady and firm / adores Brahmins, *Aisvarya* - God like or great qualities; these are the attributes of a Kshatriya.'

The Lord now continues with the qualities of a Vaishya (trading class) and the Shudras (serving class).

TEXT 90

The Vaishya caste shall practice farming, trading, money lending etc, and the Shudra caste shall serve the above mentioned three castes.

The third caste Vaishyas, should practice farming (*Krushhi*) in accordance with **Parashar's** laws. They should also practice money lending (*Kushid*) with the collection of interest in accordance with **Vyavaharadyaya**. **Vanaparva of Mahabharat** explains, 'Those who have to live off cooked vegetables every five or six days but who are still not in debt and who do not go overseas for livelihood are happy.'

Shudras, the fourth caste, are to serve the other caste members. **Anushasan Parva** explains: *Dwajsushrushaya Shudraha Param Shreyoadigachati* - 'Service of the Dwijas by a Shudra leads to prosperity and greatness.' *Dwijasevadi* - the use of 'adi' includes service to one's parents. 'Cha' includes the practice or Dharma such as Ahimsa (non-violence) etc.

Yagnavalkya explains the ordinary or basic Dharmas for all four castes, '*Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Satya* (truth), *Asteyam* (refraining from thievery), *Saucha* (purity), *Indriya Nigraha* (withdrawal of senses), *Daan* (charity), *Dama* (control of the mind), *Daya* (compassion) and *Kshanti* (forgiveness) are the essence of Dharma.'

Shatanand concludes by saying that he has not gone into further detail here. However one should derive the deeper meaning of Dharma from other Dharma-Shastras.

The West often looks at the *Indian Caste System* as unfair and unjust. They bring up arguments of 'freedom of action' and 'equal rights'. However these arguments in my opinion are accrued from the ignorance of understanding the true nature and purpose of the caste system.

The caste system isn't a way of separating or restricting people. The Caste system was designed for effective organisation and management of society. It provides a distribution of manpower for various necessary jobs. Do we not have a White collar/Blue collar separation of the work force in the West? This is simple basis of the Caste system, except it is enforced by birth in India's Caste system.

'Enforced by birth' serves two purposes here which are dominant (i) as a result of one's past Karmas, he is born to endure the miseries or pleasures arising from a particular caste and (ii) being born a particular caste and performing actions accordingly will lead to greater effectiveness (it is believed for example that the learning capacity of a Brahmin is greater than that of another caste), hence the caste system is designed to make an organisation of people more productive.

The caste system is a means of integration of society. It aims to provide for each other. In any society teachers, government officers, workers and traders are needed for effective running of a society - the caste system is simply that. The specific roles make for a brilliant formula to the organisation of society. If the

caste system and the duties for each caste were followed then there is no doubt that we could return to the former glory of 'Ram Rajya'.

The caste system is in no way a burden and needs to be preserved. The system does not aim to outcast any group. There is no mention of untouchability etc. of Shudras - they are *Harijans* (Devotees of god) and so can in no way be considered as outcasts.

TEXT 91

The Dwijas (twice born) shall perform the due rites following the conception of a child and perform daily rituals and Shraaddh (obsequies) at the appropriate time according to the capacity of individuals.

Sanskaraschahnikam Shraadham Yathakaalam Yathadhanam /
Swasvagruihanusarerna Kartavyam Cha Dwijanmabhiha //

The upper three castes (*Dwijatis*) should perform the various *Sanskars* (rituals) during their lifetime. These Sanskars are forty in number as explained by **Gautam Muni in Krutyachintamani**:

(1) *Garbhadhaan* - ritual of conception (2) *Punsavan* - to protect the foetus and ensure a baby boy (3) *Simantonayana* - performed during the last month of pregnancy for mental formation (4) *Jatkarma* - preparation of astrological charts after birth (5) *Namakarana* - naming of the child (6) *Annpraashana* - first feeding of rice (usually done in temple, in front of God) (7) *Chaul* - removing of the hair for the first time (8) *Upanayana* - wearing of the sacred thread (9-12) *Veda Vrat* - the four Vedic Vrats (study of Vedas) (13) *Samavartan* - bathing ceremony following the return from Vedic studies (14) *Sahadharma Charini Sanyoga* - the wedding ceremony (15-19) *Panch Mahayagna* - the five great Yagnas (sacrifices) (20) *Ashtaka* (21) *Parvarna Sthalipak* (22) *Shraadh* - offerings to dead ancestors (23) *Shravarni* - ritual for full moon day of month Shravana (24) *Agrahayarni* - offering of new corn and fruit (full moon day - Magshira) (25) *Chaitri* - ceremony on the full-moon day of Chaitra (26) *Ashvayuji* - ceremony for the full-moon day of Aaso (27) *Agniyadheya* (28) *Agnihotra* - ceremony of fire sacrifice (29) *Darsha Purnamaas* - to mark the end of the month (30) *Chaturmaasya* - four months of observing Vrats (31) *Agrayarnesthi* - ceremonious offering - sacrifice (32) *Nirudhpasubandha* (33) *Sautramarni* (34) *Agnistoma* - fire ritual (35) *Atyagnistoma* (36) *Ukthya* (37) *Shodshi* (38) *Vajpeya* (39) *Atiratra* (40) *Aptoryaam*. Of these, 20-26 are Karmas or acts for 'Paak Sanstha', 27-33 are for 'Haviha Sanstha' and 34-40 are for 'Soma Sanshta.'

There are also eight qualities which all should have - *Atma Gunas*: (1) *Daya Sarvabhuteshu* - compassion for all living things (2) *Kshanti* - forgiving (3) *Ansuya* - non envy (4) *Saucha* - purity (5) *Anayaasa* - to not dwell in misery (6) *Mangalya* - auspiciousness (7) *Makarparnya* - non-greed and (8) *Aspruheti* - non-desire or passion for possession. Those that have the forty Sanskars and the eight Atma Gunas attain *Sayujya Mukti* - a special form of salvation to become one with God - merging of the soul with Brahman (God Supreme).

Shatanand now explains the *Ahanika* or daily duties: **Parashar** says, '*Snaan* - bathing, *Sandhya* - morning worship, *Japp* - chanting, *Hom* - offerings, *Svadhayaya* - study of the Vedas, *Pitratarpana* - offerings to forefathers and *Devta Pooja* - worship of Gods are six acts to be performed daily.'

Now *Shraadh* is clarified. *Shraddhastyasminniti Shraadham Shraadhakhyam* - 'Acts performed with faith for one's forefathers is *Shraadh*.' **Marichi** explains, '*Shraadh* is offerings of the best of foods to one's ancestors, with great faith and devotion (*Shraddha*).'

Nirnyasindh explains that ninety-six such *Shraadh*s are to be performed always. Of these, 12 are *Amavasya* (end of the month), 14 are of *Manavadi Tithi*, 4 are *Yugadi Tithi*, 12 are *Sankranti Tithi*, 13 are *Vaidhati*, 16 are *Vyatipata*, 16 are *Mahalaya Shraadh*, 4 are *Ashtaka*, 4 are *Anvastaka* and 4 are for the first day. In this way *Shraadh* is performed on special days according to the astrological positions.

The Lord writes *Swasvagrūhyanusarerna* - thus the above said rites are to be performed in accordance with '*Grahyasutra*'. Therefore the purificatory rights as outlined by Acharyas and documented in '*Grahyasutras*' should be taken into account.

Shruti explains: *Puravarhyo Vai Devanama Madhyadino Manushyaramparahraha Pituram* - 'In the first part of the day, acts pertaining to worship of God; in the middle part, pertaining to man (work); and in the final part, acts pertaining to ancestors should be practised.'

Yathadhanam - such acts should be performed in accordance with one's financial ability - one should not be greedy in such acts. Shatanand explains that performance of the Sanskars, in accordance with *Grahyasutra* leads to the fulfilment of all righteous acts documented in *Shastras* and will ultimately lead to great wealth.

Those who are unable to perform this multitude of Sanskars may perform the sixteen Sanskars of *Garbhadaan* etc. Similarly they may perform more than one Sanskar at a time - at the time of 'Chaul' or 'Upanayan.' Those who cannot perform *Snaan-Sandhya-Vandana* at three times during the day should perform so once in the morning. Those who cannot fully perform *Sandhya Vandana Karmas* may perform *Achamana* (sipping of water for purification of the body), *Pranayam* (concentrated breathing), *Argyadaan* (worship with offerings) and *Gayatri Japa* (chanting of the Gayatri Mantra) ten-times.

Similarly, those unable to perform the ninety-six *Shraadh*s may perform *Mahalaya* and *Samvatsarika Shraadh*s only. If the full *Shraadh* ritual is not possible (due to financial difficulty or unavailability of a Brahmin) then offerings of a bowl of rice or flour will suffice; or on such a day, an *Upvaas* fast may be observed.

If *Shraadh* day falls on a day of one's fasting, then offerings should still be made to the ancestors (this opposes the commonly thought fact that *Shraadh* should be performed on another day when it is not one's fast day). *Shruti* also explains the importance of performing various rites in various directions: *Praachim Deva Dakshinam Pitaraha Praticim Manushya Udichim Rudrasha* - 'Deva worship facing east, ancestral worship facing south, social acts facing west and worship of Shiva facing north should be performed.'

Swami Sahajanand uses '*Dwijanmabhiha*' to specify that these directives are for the upper three castes. *Shudras*, due to their restriction in study of *Vedas*, are not to perform all the Sanskars. 'Brahmins were created from the *Gayatri Mantra*, *Kshatriyas* from *Trishtumbha*, *Vaishyas* from *Jagti*, but *Shudras* were not created from any *Mantra*' (thus, they also have no right to study the *Vedas*).

Shudras should perform the Sanskars according to **Vyaas** in **Sanskarmayukh**, '(1) *Garbhadaan* (2) *Punsavan* (3) *Simantonayan* (4) *Jatkarma* (5) *Namakaran* (6) *Nishkramana* (7) *Annprashan* (8) *Chaul* (9) *Karnavedh* (10) *Vratadesh* (11) *Vedarambha* (12) *Keshanta* (13) *Snaan* (14) *Udhavaha* (15) *Agniparigraha* and (16) *Tretagnisangraha*. Women should perform up to *Karnavegh*. In addition *Vivaha* (wedding) Sanskar using *Mantras* should be performed. *Shudras*, like women should also perform the nine Sanskars and *Vivaha* Sanskars, but without the use of *Mantras* though.'

TEXT 92

If my disciples have committed any sins, small or big, knowingly or unknowingly, they shall expiate their sins according to their capacity.

*Agnaanajnanato Vepi Guru Va Lagu Paatakam /
Kvapi Syattarhi Tatprayaschitam Karyam Svashaktiha ||92||*

Sins (*Paataka*) performed knowingly (*Gnaan*) or unknowingly (*Agnaan*), whether big (*Guru*) or small (*Lagu*), should be expiated for (*Prayaschit*) according to their capacity (*Svashaki*). Sins committed due to associating with the unrighteous or due to one's unfavourable qualities should be accounted for.

Paatakam - that which causes one's degeneration or ruin (*Patan*). A question here arises that a Guru - big sin such as killing a Brahmin could be in this way classed as Paatak, but why a Lagu - small sin? Shatanand explains that a small sin is classed here as sinful since the frequent committal of big sins can cause one's downfall.

Thus, sins large or small must be expiated (*Prayaschit*) through performance of righteous acts (*Satkarma*), to cleanse such sin according to one's capacity. **Yogishwar Yagnavalkya** writes, 'By performing acts unworthy, failing to perform acts which are worthy and not controlling one's sense objects, man faces ruin. For this reason they should expiate, through Prayaschit, in this world to purify themselves, and for the pleasure of the *Antaratma* (self) and indeed for the pleasure of all.'

Vignaaneshvar says, 'It is accepted that Prayaschit is for the destruction of sins, according to the *laws of Karma*.' 'Those that do not perform Prayaschit for their sins or who have a tendency of committing sin, face great obstacles and ultimately are terror stricken through their admission to the hells', explains **Smruti**.

Mahabharat forbids the secrecy or concealment of sin, 'One should not conceal a sin, as such act is comparable to slaughtering. Those that expiate their sins relieve themselves of such sin.'

Also, for sins committed knowingly, one should perform double the Prayaschit of the same sin committed unknowingly. Some sins are such that if committed knowingly then that sin can never be washed away, such as killing a Brahmin (*Brahmhatya*).

Katyayan explains the five classifications of sin as (i) *Mahapaap* (ii) *Atipsap* (iii) *Paap* (iv) *Prakirnapaap* and (v) *Upapaatak*, ranging from the greatest sin to the smallest sin. These are further explained in the following manner:

Five **Mahapaaps** are:

1. *Brahmhatya* - killing a Brahmin
2. *Surapaan* - drinking of alcohol
3. Stealing gold and other things from a Brahmin
4. *Gurustrigaman* - Lustful association with certain women
5. Association with those who commit the above four sins

Furthermore, lustful association with one's mother, sister or daughter-in-law (*Putra-Vadhu*) is also a Mahapaapa. The above sins are explained further:

The following are equivalent to **Brahmhatya**:

1. Slandering of one's Guru
2. Slander of the Vedas
3. Killing a friend (except Brahmin friend)
4. To forget the taught teachings of the Vedas through laziness

The following are equivalent to **Surapaan**:

1. Partaking of onion, garlic and the like
2. Fraudulent behaviour against a Guru
3. Speaking the untruth during legalities
4. To kiss a woman when she is on her period of menses

The following are equivalent to stealing of gold:

1. Stealing of a Brahmin's cow, houses, land, jewellery etc.
2. Failure to pay off a debt

The following are equivalent to **Gurustrigaman**:

1. Desire for a friend's wife
2. Desire for a student's (Shishya's) wife
3. Desire for some youthful (Kunvari) woman
4. Desire for a woman of one's family (Gotra)

In this way, all of the above amount to the same sin – a *Mahapaap*.

Prakirnapaap is described as of the following:

1. To not follow one's own personal Dharma
2. Sexual interaction with a woman during the daytime
3. To bathe without any clothes
4. Sitting upon a donkey or a camel

Upapaatakas are described as:

1. The killing of a cow
2. Not performing Upanayan (wearing of the holy thread) before the proper time
3. Stealing from others (other than Brahmins) the likes of gold
4. Not accept Agnihotra (Fire sacrifice), even though one has rights to it
5. Getting married or taking Agnihotra without the blessing or consent of one's elder brother, if he exists
6. Sexual relations with other women
7. Killing of one's wife
8. Atheism - non-belief in God
9. Abandon or throw out one's parents
10. Study Shastras which degrade God
11. Breaking a vow - Vrat
12. Inflict suffering upon animals
13. Gambling
14. Sleeping during the day

Manu has further categorised the sins mentioned before. He has explained the sins of type: *Jatibranshkarana*, *Shankarikaarana*, *Apatrikarana* and *Malinikaarana*.

Jatibransh sins are described as (i) sexual communion with a man and (ii) smelling of intoxicants. **Shankari** sin is harming animals such as a horse or donkey. **Apatri** sins are (i) service to Shudras and (ii)

speaking falsehood. **Malini** sins are (i) killing of creatures that are small (ii) partaking of alcohol with one's meal.

Now are explained Prayaschit for the committal of these various sins. For 'Mahapapas', Prayaschit of a Vrat lasting twelve years is written. For an ordinary 'Papa', half the Prayaschit of a Mahapapa is written. For Prakirna Papas, the fasting Vrat of *Pradakrucha* is written. Similarly *Taptakrucha* is written for Apatrikarana and Malinikarana. Those that urge such sinful acts should perform a third of the Prayaschit mentioned.

Those that are very young or very old, who commit a sin themselves, should perform only half the Prayaschit said. **Angira** explains, 'Those that are over eighty years old, the sick and women, should perform half the said Prayaschit.'

Furthermore, Prayaschit for those children aged five to eleven who commit a sin, should be performed by their brother, father or another family member. Children under the age of five are faultless and so receive no sins for their acts. Therefore they should not be punished nor should Prayaschit be performed. It is also said that a sixth of a husband's *Punya* (righteous acts) goes to his wife and a sixth of a wife's Papas goes to her husband.

Vashisht explains, 'Those that perform Japa, Homa, meditation upon Vishnu, service of places of pilgrimage and student with *Shirovrata*, do not remain in sin' (Their sins are dissolved due to their righteous acts).

Yagnavalkya explains, 'A sin committed in the open should be nullified by performing a Vrat advised by others. Other sins committed secretly should be nullified by performing Homa or Japa Prayaschit.'

A sin should never be disregarded, as all sins should be accounted for and nullified. One should immediately nullify all sins through fear of the God of death - **Yamaraja**. Yamaraja is all knowing and so knows of our every act. **Bhagwat** explains, 'The sun, fire, sky, wind, cow, moon, morning, night, day, space, water, earth, time and Dharma are the witnesses to a Jiva.' **Mahabharat**, **Brihaspati** and **Manu** have added additionally that the heart, Yama Raja, mind, intellect and Atma are also witnesses, therefore sin can never be concealed and so even small, unknown sins should be nullified through Prayaschit.

Those that are learned in Dharmashastras should appropriately perform Prayaschit (without the need to consult others). Others should consult a Brahmin learned in Dharmashastras and who is of pious behaviour. Prayaschit should be advised to others according to the country and times: 'When advising upon Prayaschit to others, the country, the time, the age, the ability and the effort required should all be taken into account. In this way, the person advising is faultless.'

Prayaschit should be performed immediately as this body is only momentary. **Sukhdevji** has said, 'Those that do not perform Prayaschit to nullify sins committed by the mind, speech and body face Hell after Death. There, they are subjected to great pain and torture. Therefore such people should expiate their sins big and small, just as a doctor diagnoses a cure for an illness.'

Prayaschit should be performed with Bhakti in mind. It should not be performed as simply a means for expiating sin. **Sukhdevji** adds, 'O King! Just as a container for alcohol cannot be purified by the water from a river, Prayaschit performed by those not devoted to Narayan can never face purification.'

Angira explains the method by which sins committed in public should be atoned: 'One should bathe with their clothes, observe the vow of silence and in wet clothes accept the Vrat given to them by a *Pershad* as true. After which they should again bathe and then commence such Vrat.'

Pershad is explained differently by different Rishis - **Parashar** says, 'A Pershad is a group of three or four Brahmins learned profoundly in the *Vedas* and *Vedangas*.' **Yagnavalkya** adds, 'A Pershad is a group of four Brahmins learned in *Vedas* and *Dharma*. Similarly a Pershad is a group of three Brahmins learned in the three studies and knowledgeable in the essence of *Dharmashastra*.'

Mitakshar explains that even one Brahmin, fully knowledgeable in the spiritual knowledge of Dharmashastras, can be considered a Pershad. 'Such Pershad should advise upon *Prayaschit* in accordance with Dharmashastras as well as the country and times,' explains Vashishta. Those that incorrectly advise upon Prayaschit (not in accordance with Dharmashastras) receive the sins of the act, and the performer of the Prayaschit is purified of such sin. **Manu** explains this, 'Those that advise upon Prayaschit, diagnosis for illness, astrological charts and Dharma; without the benefit of Shastric knowledge are *Brahmanhatyaras* (murderers of Brahmins).'

TEXT 93

The four Vedas, Vyaas-Sutras, Shrimad Bhagwat Puran and Vishnusahastranama of Mahabharat.

In the next three Shlokas, the orthodox *Shastras* of our Sampradai are explained, as they are accepted by Lord Swaminarayan to contain the essence of our *Hindu Sanatan Dharma*. Shastras are many in numbers, each of which propounds Dharma and Gnaan. Lord Swaminarayan, because of this, has chosen eight of these which are his favourite (*Ista*). Indeed it is these Shastras which will bring about the greatest devotion to God.

The first and foremost Shastra mentioned are the **Four Vedas** (here specified as one of the eight Shastras). The Vedas are our most important Scriptures, said to have originated from the four faces of Brahma. They are considered to be the oldest Hindu teachings. The word 'Veda' literally means 'knowledge' or that which is known. It is the knowledge of truth, revealed to *Rishis* by God and so the knowledge is of a divine nature. The Vedas are therefore also referred to as the *Shruti* - the revealed Shastras.

The four Vedas are as follows: (1) **Rigved** - taught by **Palita**, mainly deals with Gnaan (knowledge) (2) **Samaved** - taught by **Jaimini**, mainly deals with 'Upasana' or worship (3) **Yajurved** - taught by **Vaisampayana** mainly deals with Karma or Action and is in two parts *Krishna Yajurved* and *Sukla Yajurved*, finally (4) **Atharvaved** - taught by **Sumanta**, is a miscellaneous composition. Note that each Veda is split up into four parts - *Mantra* or *Samhita*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads* or *Vedanta*.

Shatanand explains that with the listing of 'Vedas' here, one should accept also the authority of the **Vedangas**. **Shruti** explains, 'Brahmins should eagerly study the Vedas along with their six limbs (*Angas*) and have a full understanding of them.'

These six auxiliaries of the Vedas are as follows (1) **Shiksha** - phonetics, the science of proper pronunciation and articulation, (2) **Chanda** - prosody science of compiling poetry (3) **Vyakarana** - grammar (4) **Nirukta** - etymology, explanations of Vedic words (5) **Jyotisha** - astronomy and (6) **Kalpa** - rituals.

The second Shastra is the **Vyaas Sutra**, otherwise known as **Brahmansutra**. This scripture is written by **Lord Vyaas** and discusses the essence of the Upanishads in the first chapter, the Vedantic systems in the second, and the spiritual pathway to the supreme goal of life in the third and the nature of God in the fourth. The qualities of a *Sutra* are given here: 'with few words, containing *Tatva* (original or real form),

with great knowledge or explanations, cannot be refuted and without fault; such are the characteristics of Sutra.’

The third Shastra mentioned is *Shrimad Bhagwat Puran*, written by **Vyaas** again. Vyaas had produced the Vedas, written the Mahabharat, written the eighteen Puranas, and yet was not content with his literary works. By the instruction of Narad, he then took to writing the Shrimad Bhagwat Puran, which expounded *Bhakti* as the greatest means of attaining God. In this way, the Puran was written which finally dissolved the unrest that Vyaas was feeling.

Bhavarthadipika explains the Bhagwat as, ‘A scripture with 18,000 Shlokas, twelve chapters, containing the Brahmanvidhya (divine knowledge) as explained by Hayagriva and containing the story of the destruction of Vrutasura. Beginning with the Gayatri Mantra, it is called the Bhagwat.’

Sut Purani explains the characteristic contents of a Puran - ‘(1) *Sarga* - first stage of creation of the universe (2) *Visarga* - second stage of creation (3) *Vruti* - science of behaviour (4) *Raksha* – protection, personal well being (5) *Manavantar* - knowledge of time and space (6) *Vansha* - Katha or stories of God (7) *Vansanucharit* - stories of Great Kings (8) *Mukti* - ways of salvation (9) *Hetu* - desires to support the Jiva and (10) *Apashreya*.’ An *Alpapurana* is that which has Sarga, Visarga, Vansa, Vansanucharit and Manvantara. The Bhagwat Mahapurana contains the *Avatar Lilas* of the twenty-four incarnations of God, of which the story of Shree Krishna is wonderfully documented in the largest of the twelve Skandas, the tenth Skanda.

The fourth Shastra is *Shree Vishnusahastranaan*. It is taken from **Anushasanik Parva** of the **Mahabharat**, written by **Vyaas**. This Vishnusahastranaan should be taken as different to that which is in Padma Puran. The ‘thousand names of the Lord’ were composed by Sanaka - one of the *Kumaras* and was recited by Bhishma as the response to the question that Yudhishtira asked - ‘who is that being who is the supreme Lord of all, who is the sole refuge of all and by praising and worshipping whom man gains what is good and attains salvation?’

TEXT 94

Shrimad Bhagwad Gita, the code of ethics enunciated by Vidura and Vasudeva Mahatmya of Skanda Puran’s Vaishnav Khanda.

Tatha Shreebhagwadgita Nitischa Vidurodita /
Shreevasudevamahatmyaham Skandavaishnavkhandagam //

‘*Tatha*’ links the previous Shlok and so the *Bhagwad Gita* from Mahabharat is the fifth Shastra. The Bhagwad Gita is from **Mahabharat’s Bhishmaparva** and spans eighteen Adhyayas (chapters). (It is indeed the most famous of Hindu Shastras - it is to Hindus what the Bible is to Christians.)

The ‘*song of Shree Krishna*’ is the teaching of Krishna to his foremost friend and disciple Arjuna. At the eve of the great Mahabharat war between the Pandavas and Kaurava dynasties, Arjuna was overcome

with grief at the fact that he was about to kill his kinsmen. Feeling this way that war was futile and undesirable, and with its victory also undesirable, he threw aside his arrows and refused to fight.

Krishna then begins his argument as to why Arjuna should fight. He covers all manner of subjects inciting *Karma Yoga*, *Yoga*, *Sankhya*, supreme knowledge, *Dharma*, *Bhakti Yoga*, nature of body and self, etc. to persuade Arjuna that his duty is to fight!

The sixth Shastra is again from the Mahabharat and is the *Vidura Niti* - a code of ethics enunciated by **Vidura** to Dhritashtra in Mahabharat's **Udhyoga Parva**. It spans nine Adhyayas (chapters). This is a code of conduct for Kings.

The seventh Shastra is *Vasudev Mahatmya* from Skand Puran, written by Kartikeya Swami (son of Lord Shiva). The Puran spans seven 'Khandas' - *Valkilya*, *Brahmotar*, *Kashi*, *Reva*, *Kedar*, *Prabhas* and *Vishnu*. Vasudev Mahatmya is from Vishnu Khanda, spanning 32 Adhyayas of teachings by Rishis **Nar-Narayan** upon the greatness of Shree Krishna. Lord Swaminarayan, in Vachanamrut GADHADA I - 28, glorifies Vasudev Mahatmya as unequalled in greatness, shadowing even the Bhagwat Puran as it propounds Dharma, Gnaan, Vairagya and Bhakti as well as Ahimsa, like no other Shastra.

TEXT 95

**And of the Dharmashastras, the Smruti by Yagnavalkya Rishi.
These eight Shastras are dear to me.**

From the many *Dharma Shastras* (treatise on duty), Lord Swaminarayan has chosen the **Smruti** of **Yagnavalkya** (son of **Brahmarshi Yagnavalka** or **Devraata**) as the eighth and final Shastra - *Yagnavalkya Smruti*.

Thus, these are the eight *Sat-Shastras*. They extol the true form and nature of Ishwara and for that reason, Lord Swaminarayan favours them. He cherishes them as they are for the betterment of man. These Shastras are foremost and the best of Hindu scriptures, as a result they are a great benefit to man for deriving eternal bliss:

TEXT 96

All my disciples desirous of salvation shall listen to these eight scriptures and my Brahmin devotees shall study, teach and preach them to the others.

All my devotees, of the four castes, who desire salvation, should listen to these *Sat-Shastras*. Members of the upper three castes, *Dwijas*, should study and teach the Shastras. They should preach the contents through '*Katha*'.

Shatanand explains that although listening to Shastras are endorsed here, Shudras should listen to all Shastras except for the Vedas. Shudras do not have the right to listen to even the *Mantras* defined in the Vedas. Therefore none should disobey the duties pertaining to *Varna* (caste) and *Ashram* (stage of life).

Skand Puran forbids Shudras from listening to the Vedas: 'Shudras do not have the right to listen to Puranas in the company of Brahmins or God. The fourth caste Shudras, have the right to all acts except study of Vedas and Veda Mantras, offering to the sacrificial fire, Vashatkar etc'.

Smruti confers that such act leads to dismissal from such caste (*Jatihbrashta*): 'Shudras who drink milk from a *Kapil* cow (single coloured), has sexual connections with a *Brahmini* or who contemplates upon the contents of the Vedas, is demoted to the lowest form - a *Chandal*.' Therefore **Parashar Puran** forbids the teaching of Vedas to Shudras.

Listening to Puranas is not forbidden and therefore to listen to Veda Mantras that are contained in Puranas is accepted, according to **Kamalakarbhata**. However, study or chanting of the contents of Puranas etc. is still forbidden as Puranas, Itihases etc. are often compared to the Vedas and indeed are often called the 'fifth Veda'. For such reason they are restricted to only listening to these Shastras. In this way 'Shudras will face happiness' - *Shudraha Sukhamvapnuyad* - explains **Shankracharya** in his *Bhashya* of **Vishnusahasranama**.

Mahabharat explains, 'Shudras should not study the Vedas nor perform Yagnas.' In this way they are given the right to listen to Shastras, but not study of Shastras. 'By listening (to Shastras), Shudras move towards bettering their *Jaat* (caste/race)', explains **Harivamsa**. Thus, 'Brahmins, Vaishyas and Kshatriyas should study such Shastras and Shudras should listen to them, but never study them.' 'Shudras should always listen to the Shastras in the company of a Brahmin. Indeed all Dwijas should listen to Shastras in the presence of a Brahmin or God's Murti,' explains **Nirnyasindhu**.

Arsharamayana explains, 'By performing '*Paath*' (study/chanting of Shastras), a Brahmin develops mastery of speech, a Kshatriya obtains sovereignty, a Vaishya attains fruits of action (*Punya*) and a Shudra develops greatness.'

Shudras should perform 'Paath' (recital) of literary works written in '*Prakrut*' (a language other than Sanskrit) and similarly sing the glories of God Shree Krishna written by poets of present time in Prakrut. Shudras should not feel dismayed thinking that the recital of a Prakrut scripture will derive less fruits as Shrimad Bhagwat indicates that the *Stotras* of Puranas and Stuti of Prakrut texts amount to the same - *Paurarairaha Prakrutairapi*.

TEXT 97

Amongst the eight scriptures mentioned, My disciples shall consider the Mitakshara commentary on Yagnavalkya Smruti as the guiding authority to take decisions on matters of daily routines, rites and rituals, secular business affairs and code of expiation.

*Tatracharyavahyatiniskrutanaam Cha Nirnye |
Grahya Mitaksharopeta Yagnavalkyasya Tu Smrutih ||97||*

Achara - Righteous acts (*Sadachar*) or rituals carried out daily, **Vyavahyati** - business affair of borrowing and lending and **Niskruti** - *Prayaschit* for sins large or small commit knowingly or unknowingly as well as *Prayaschit* for sins of the body used for *Sankhya Gnaan*. For such acts one should use the

Dharmashastra of **Yagnavalkya** as authority when confusion arises from the contradictory sayings or commandments of different Rishis.

The commentary by **Pandit Vignaaneshwar** called **Mitakshar** should be taken. Shatanand says that the **Mitakshar Tika** should be used together with **Yagnavalkya Smruti**; hence Yagnavalkya Smruti upon its own or another commentary should not be used. The scripture is named Mitakshar as it has few words, but has a great wealth of knowledge. Therefore, one should not question whether the Shastra has full knowledge, says Shatanand.

He furthermore explains that the word '*Mit*' means to expound the necessary meanings or knowledge. Thus the twelve thousand Shloks of Mitakshara expound the essence of the teachings of all Dharmashastras.

Mitakshar says, 'No elder or learned person is able to sufficiently comment or interpret Yagnavalkya's Shastra. It is a Shastra with sufficient words describing the essence of meanings and teaches the greater morals and aims. It is like a sprinkle of nectar to the listener's ear. Full of messages for the good and yet called Mitakshar, I Vignaaneshwar Pandit write this commentary which is full of meaning, though it has few words.'

TEXT 98

The fifth and tenth Skandas of Shrimad Bhagwat Puran shall be regarded as the best amongst these scriptures for clear understanding of the greatness and glory of Lord Shree Krishna.

Shatanand depicts the Shrimad Bhagwat as a tree, of which the trunk (clearly most important) is the fifth and tenth Skandas. Indeed the Bhagwat is here compared as the *Kalpavruksha* - the legendary tree that is said to fulfil all the desires of those who chose to shelter beneath it.

The two Skandas are best for understanding *Krishna Mahatmya*. Mahatma is defined as that which is *Atma Swaroop* or the best of all. Its nature or glory is thus defined as *Mahatmya*. He who is beyond *Akshar* (divine abode of God), the regulator of time and *Maya*, who is unique and divine, the best amongst all - *Purushottam*, the Supreme and who is powerful enough to free all from the bondages of *Karma* (action), such *Mahatmya* should be sought from Shrimad Bhagwat, as it is the best amongst Shastras - *Sakalsachastramukhyau*. One is able to obtain such supreme knowledge from the two Skandas effortlessly.

In the tenth Skand, upliftment of man and freedom from the bondages of *Karma* is explained. In the fifth Skand we learn about the many ways of devotion to God. Devotion to Shree Krishna is extolled by Shatanand even though it is not succinctly stated in the Fifth Skanda.

TEXT 99

The tenth Skanda shall be esteemed as my Bhakti Shastra, the fifth Skanda as Yoga Shastra and Yagnavalkya Smruti as Dharma Shastra.

Yagnavalkya Dharma Shastra contains all of the characteristics of Dharma Smrutis, namely *Achara* - behaviour, *Vyavahar* - business affairs, *Prayaschit* - code of expiation, *Kala* - time and *Karma* - code of action and its results.

The tenth Skand of Bhagwat displays *Bhakti*. The intense love and devotion that the *Gopikas* had for Shree Krishna is evident here. A question is raised though - how did the Gopis, without the true knowledge of the form of God, devote themselves to him? Shatanand answers, 'Bhakti, even devoid of knowledge, derives fruits'. 'What I am like? What I am? What my nature is? - Whether a person has such knowledge or not, and yet worships me with all intent, is my greatest devotee.'

Brahma has said, 'One should put less effort into acquiring knowledge and just bow (before God).' Furthermore it is explained that *Gnaan* and *Vairagya* (renunciation) are not the means to salvation but *Bhakti* towards the Lord is the greatest goal.

Parikshit asked the question: 'The Gopis saw Krishna as merely a handsome man and were drawn to this feature. How then did they attain the state of *Sayujya Mukti* (state of being one with God)?' **Sukhdevji** answers: 'God's incarnations are for the salvation of mankind. He is both free from qualities (*Nirgun*) and with qualities (*Sagun*) and as such, it is difficult to understand his true nature. Those who lust for God, have anger, fear, affection, friendship or unity for God all redeem themselves and attain him.'

The tenth chapter of Bhagwat displays the essence of Bhakti. Shatanand identifies four places where love for God Krishna was the greatest and thus provides evidence of such love: *Vraj*, *Mathura*, *Dwarika* and *Hastinapur*.

The love of the people of Vraj: 'O Nanda! We the people of Vraj have unrenouncable affection for your son.'

The love of the people of Mathura: 'Just as one becomes elated after the return of stolen possessions, the people (of Mathura), after many days of separation, became overjoyed at the sight of Balaram and Krishna'

The love of the people of Dwarika: 'O lotus eyed one! Whenever thou go to the land of Kuru or Madhu, to meet thy friends, the slightest moment seems to last aeons.'

The love of the Pandavas in Hastinapur: 'Just as a body arises once, endowed with an *Atma*, the Pandavas on seeing the Lord of the universe - Mukunda arose together at once.'

The Pandava's Bhakti was based upon affection for God explains **Narad**: 'The Gopis with lust, Kansa with fear, Shishupal and other kings with envy, Yadavas with association, you the Pandavas with affection and we (the Munis) with devotion, see God in our different ways.'

In this way the Pandavas decided to renounce their kingly duties and retreated to the forest immediately on hearing of Lord Krishna's demise. Shatanand concludes that because of the documented immense love displayed in these four places, the tenth Skanda is adopted as ***Bhakti Shastra***, as briefly explained here.

Secondly, Lord Swaminarayan accepted Shrimad Bhagwat's fifth Skanda as his **Yoga Shastra**. Hiranyagarbha (Brahma) is the first Acharya of Yogashastras. He has explained Yoga to be the concentration of the mind (*Chitta*) upon Lord Shree Narayan.

At the time of death, it is commanded that one should concentrate the mind upon God with great concentration. Therefore it is important that we practice such concentration or Yoga before the time of death, so that when the time comes, we are able to fulfil such task. It is said: ***Vishayavishtachittanaam Vishnavaveshaha Sudoorlabhaha*** - 'Those that have their mind engrossed in the senses find it difficult to concentrate the mind.'

Prahlad states: ‘Who can renounce the various attractions and attachments of life if he is a slave to his senses? Who can renounce their attachments to other people? Who can renounce their attraction to the opposite sex, to their friends, to the ‘sweet talk’ of others? All are attached and bound to their children, their brothers and sisters, their parents and the need for having the best out of life. Who is able to renounce the luxuries of life and overcome their taste for the finer things in life? Nobody!’

For such reason, the Upanishads, Gita and Bhagwat explain that those Yogis who overcome their senses, desires and attachments are truly great. By singing God’s name, listening to the pastimes of the Lord and by association and service to Yogis, one’s mind becomes firm. Those that meditate upon the lotus feet of God are able to concentrate their mind upon God at the time of death, such that they have unshakeable devotion.

Bhagwat Patanjali has been here mentioned as the teacher of various forms of Yoga. The fifth Skand of Bhagwat explains stories of great Yogis of the past and for this reason it has been adopted as Yogashastra. The examples set by these Yogis should be used for personal improvement. The first story in the 5th Skanda is of **King Priyavrat**, who developed great concentration for Lord Vasudeva and who’s every action was focused upon God. It is then explained how worship of other Devas, other than God Supreme, will derive only ordinary fruits, even though the person may be adept in **Ashtang Yoga** (Eight fold Yoga), through the story of **Agnidhranu**, son of Priyavrat.

From there, the story of **Nabhi Raja**, Agnindra’s son is explained, who used **Samadhi-Yoga** (the highest Yogic state) to engross himself in God. Nabhi’s son **Bhagwan Rishabdev** was then born. He like his forefathers also displayed great Yogic control. Indeed, he is said to have mastered fully, all of the Yogic practices.

Rishabdev then gave birth to the great **Bharat**. Bhagwat fully documents the life of Bharat and his Yogic disciplines. He is explained as the greatest of Yogis, who was endowed with the greatest qualities. For such reasons he has been termed as **Yogeshwar**. His story is such that it will remove all obstacles.

After the story of Bharat, Yoga and its nature is explained. Yoga is endorsed in the Shastras, as through such intense concentration of the mind, one establishes God firmly in their hearts. By so doing one can then perform Bhakti-Yoga or devotion to God.

Then are given details regarding the nature of hell by **Shree Sheshnaag**. **Patanjali** is explained as an incarnation of Shesha, who is himself a **Yogeshwar**. He is glorified as a great devotee of Lord Vasudeva and is fully explained in the third Skanda. Shatanand explains other great **Yogis** as **Maye**, **Bali** and **Prahlad**.

This is whole-heartedly the endorsement of Lord Swaminarayan. Others have not accepted these Skands as Bhakti and Yoga Shastras and so it is unique to our Sampraday and our master whose insight into these matters continues to benefit us today.

TEXT 100

They shall acknowledge the Bhashya (commentaries) on Vyaas-Sutra and Shree Bhagwat Geeta by Shree Ramanujacharya, as My Vedantic Philosophy.

The works of **Ramanujacharya** (Laxmanacharya) - *Shribhashya* or *Mahabhashya* upon the **Vyaas Sutras** (*Shariika Sutra*) and *Geetabhashya* are accepted here by Lord Swaminarayan as his Vedantic philosophy. They are considered as his *Adhyatmika Shastra* as they glorify the greatness of Gods 'Sakar' (with form) nature. For this reason they should be studied and heard.

Other Acharyas including **Shankaracharya** have also written *Bhashyas* upon these works. However Shatanand points out that Ramanuja's Bhashyas should always be considered as the greater.

Ramanujacharya was born in 1017 in Perumbudur (south India). He is the founder of the Vedantic Philosophy known as **Vishishtadvaita** (Qualified Non - dualism). He displayed the signs of Laxman (Ram's younger brother) and hence was named *Laxmanacharya* and *Ramanujacharya*. (Ramanuja meaning the younger of Rama).

From a young age he began his studies from his father and later under the guidance of **Shri Yadavacharya** (an *Avaita* teacher). Through difference in views, Ramanuja was driven out of the Ashram and began study on his own. He then received Diksha from Yamunacharya and was then able to nurture his philosophy.

At the death-bed of Yamunacharya, an enigma was present. Yamunacharya's three fingers were curved shut and would not open. However Ramanuja solved the enigma by saying 'Yamunacharya desires that (i) somebody should write a commentary upon the Brahman Sutras, (ii) bring back the idol of Lord Vishnu from the emperor of India and (iii) spread the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita. So saying all three fingers of Yamunacharya straightened.

Ramanuja then fulfilled his three obligations and became famed as **Ramanujacharya** - the founders of **Vishishtadvaita** philosophy.

Note that Swami Ramananda received Diksha from the very same Ramanuja in dream, after leaving Atmananda Swami's Ashram due to disbelief in the 'Advaita' philosophy of Shankaracharya.

TEXT 101

Those texts in these scriptures which speak the greatness of divinity of Shree Krishna, Dharma, Bhakti and Vairagya shall be considered to be of greater value.

Texts propounding the divinity of Shree Krishna - as above the three qualities, of divine form/body and texts that are based upon Bhakti (devotion) are dear to Lord Swaminarayan. Those texts speaking greatly of *Dharma* (duty), *Bhakti* (devotion with affection) and *Vairagya* (renunciation) are desired by the Lord.

TEXT 102

The message of these scriptures is that the devotion of Lord Shree Krishna is inseparable from Dharma.

Shatanand explains that *Bhakti* is the very cause of *Mukti* (salvation) and is a part of *Gnaan* (knowledge). Also Dharma is the support of Bhakti and therefore Bhakti should always be practised with the aid of

Dharma. In Shrimad Bhagwat, it is often explained that Bhakti and Dharma are always together and thus inseparable.

Those that live in accordance with *Swadharma* (personal duty) and who perform Bhakti or devotion to God, develop peace of mind and inevitably attain salvation. Such people achieve the greatest goal.

Lord Swaminarayan here points out a very important aspect of Bhakti. Although Bhakti is devotion and love for God, it is however not the greatest path to God, if practised alone. Bhakti must be practised with Dharma, as its base. Often we may consider ourselves to be 'Bhakts' content in our devotion to God. However we may lack the essential basis of duty in our lives and care not for the laws governing what we can and cannot do. We must live a *Dharmic Jivan* as well as a *Bhaktatmic Jivan*.

TEXT 103

Dharma is the right conduct as authenticated by Shruti and Smruti. Bhakti is profound love for God coupled with knowledge of the majesty and magnificence of Lord Shree Krishna.

The next few Shlokas are very important as they define the various entities and categories which make up a *Vedantic Philosophy*, and therefore in these Shlokas Lord Swaminarayan define his Vedantic belief to a certain degree.

Firstly he defines ***Dharma***: *Dharma Gneyaha Sadacharaha Shrutismrutyupapaditaha* - Dharma is explained as the duties or right conduct as explained by *Shruti* (Vedas) and *Smruti* (Yagnavalkya's Dharma Samhita). **Manusmriti** explains - *Shrutistu Vedo Vigneyo Dharmashastram Tu Vai Smrutiha* 'The Vedas are the *Shruti* and the Dharmashastras the *Smruti*.'

Sadachar is explained as good conduct that is supported by the ideals of *Loka* (community) and *Shastra* (scriptures). Such *Sadachar* is simply ***Dharma*** and worthy of practice. Dharma has been explained as the support of the whole universe. **Jaymini Muni** has explained it as quite simply, 'Dharma is action upon permission,' (permission of elders, saints, Shastras etc. should be understood here).

Madhavacharya has explained, 'That which is duty and encouraged is Dharma.' **Smruti** further explains 'The acts glorified by those who have an understanding of the Vedas are *Dharma*. Similarly those acts slandered by such folk should be considered as *Adharma*.' **Shrimad Bhagwat** says, 'That which is enforced by the Vedas is *Dharma* and that contradicting them is *Adharma*.'

Manu explains the advantages of living in accordance with Dharma: 'Those who obey the Dharma prescribed by Shruti and Smruti achieve fame and after death attain heavenly bliss.' **Mokshadharm** explains, '*Sadachar, Smruti* and the *Vedas* are the three properties of *Dharma*.'

Mitakshara gives the six types of *Dharma*: '(i) *Varna* - caste (ii) *Ashram* - stages i.e. householders etc., (iii) *Varnashram* - pertaining to both Varna and Ashram, (iv) *Gunn* - meritorious acts, (v) *Nimitta* - purposeful and (vi) *Saadharana* - ordinary or common.' Shatanand gives examples of these: *Varnadharm* - Brahmins should always refrain from alcohol and other intoxicants; *Ashramdharm* - Service to Agni (fire) and begging for food (Bhiksha); *Varnashram Dharma* - Brahmins accepting the punishment of *Khakhara*; *Gunn Dharma* - Kings, endowed with various qualities should serve and protect the people (*Praja Palana*); *Nimitta Dharma* - is performance of *Prayaschit* to intone for sins; *Sadharan Dharma* - duty of *Ahimsa* (non - violence) etc.

Bhakti is now explained: *Mahatmyagnanyugbhirisneho Bhaktischa Madhave* - love for God Shree Krishna (Madhav), together with supreme knowledge is *Bhakti*. Supreme knowledge is knowledge of the greatness of God as explained by *Shastras* and *Satpurusha* (great/holy men). Shatanand here equates *Bhakti* with chanting of Gods holy name; thus explaining that such chanting bears great fruits.

Bhakti is surrender to God. The **Puranas** explains, ‘Those who go to God for shelter even once and say, ‘I am yours’’ are uplifted to a state of fearlessness (*Nirbhay*), this is Lord Hari’s custom.’

Maya Lakshmya Dhavaha Swami Madhavaha Shrikrushnastusmin - *Ma* is Lakshmi, *Dhava* is husband or Lord and thus **Madhav** is the husband or Lord of Lakshmi - Shri Krishna. Great love or affection for Shri Krishna is therefore *Bhakti*. **Shandilya Sutra** explains, ‘*Bhakti* is great love for God (Ishwar). Only those who have such love for God derive *Moksh* (Salvation).’ Similarly **Shri Vallabhacharya** has explained, ‘*Bhakti* is intense love for God along with supreme knowledge. Through such *Bhakti* one can achieve *Mukti*, but not by other means.’

Bhakti has two major types - *Sadhanroopa* and *Falaroopa*. *Falroop Bhakti* is extensively explained by the Gopis in **Shrimad Bhagwat** - ‘The Gopis seeing Govinda were overwhelmed with joy. Such Gopis, away from Krishna for even a fraction of a second, seemed like they had been apart from him for a hundred *Yugas*.’ (1 *Yuga* is equivalent to between 932,000 and 1,728,000 earth years.) ‘The Gopi’s mind would follow Krishna into the forest singing His divine excellencies as she spent the day in sorrow.’ ‘These Gopis, dedicated to me, are deluded to their body and this world.’

The second type of *Bhakti* is *Sadhanroopa*. *Sadhanroopa Bhakti* is again split up into nine types - more formally known as *Navadha Bhakti*:

Shravanam Kirtanam Vishnoha Smaranam Padasevanam /
Archanam Vandanam Dasyam Sakhyamatmanivedanam //

These are further explained:

- (i) **Shravanam** - *Shravana* or ‘hearing’ is essentially listening to the talks upon the excellencies of God by holy men and so in the true sense is possible only in holy company.
- (ii) **Kirtanam** - *Kirtan* is singing aloud and chanting God’s name and compositions on his deeds. It is often in the company of several other devotees. Music or dance may accompany it.
- (iii) **Vishnoha Smaranam** - is the remembrance of Vishnu. The earlier two disciplines are often done in company where as *Smaranam* is performed alone. It is performed silently in meditation.
- (iv) **Padasevanam** - literally means ‘Service of His feet.’ The feet or ‘*Pada*’ here are symbolic of other manifest things. For example the earth is considered his feet and so service of all beings is propounded. Any work done as an offering to God is *Padaseva* - such as helping in temples in some way.
- (v) **Archanam** - this is ‘idol’ worship or more popularly known as ‘*Pooja*’. It is in a way unique to Hinduism as it accepts image worship - extolling God’s *Sakar* (with form) nature.
- (vi) **Vandanam** - literally means ‘salutation’ and takes the form of full prostration before the image signifying complete surrender at the feet of God. It means honouring the presence of a deity, person or thing.
- (vii) **Dasyam** - is serving God as his most obedient servant.
- (viii) **Sakhyam** - is love for God.
- (ix) **Atmanivedanam** - complete surrender of the self to God.

The final three disciplines cultivate the attitude of service and surrender to God. They are there to remove all sense of ego and worldly life.

Shatanand then explains the fact that it is not what you give or do, but with what love and devotion you give or do that is of importance. God is not after your money - he is after your mind, heart and dedication. An impoverished person is just as dear to God as a multi-millionaire, if both are equal in devotion. Indeed, he who is poor, but devout, is much dearer to God than somebody who may be rich but less devout.

Patram Pushpam Falam Toyam Yo Mae Bhaktya Prayachati /
Tadaham Bhaktyupahrutamshnami Prayatatanaha //

Gita explains, 'A leaf, flower, fruits or water is gladly accepted by me if offered with devotion and level mind.'

Note: that Narada Muni the Acharya of Bhakti has written that Bhakti is the fifth and best 'Purushartha' or goal of life. Thus it is beyond *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and even *Moksha*. Narada maintains that salvation is possible only through Bhakti.

TEXT 104

Vairagya is non-attachment to everything except Lord Shree Krishna. Gnaan is comprehensive understanding of Jiva (soul), Maya (illusion) and Ishwara (God).

Vairagyam Gneyamapritiha Shreekrushnetaravastushu - Vairagya is explained in the first half of this Shlok. Vairagya is non-attachment or displeasure in things other than Lord Shree Krishna. Vairagya is renouncing all material things that give pleasure and finding pleasure in devotion to God.

Gnaanam Cha Jivamayesharupanaam Sushtu Vedanan - The second half of the Shlok discusses the nature of *Gnaan* - supreme knowledge. Such *Gnaan* is the understanding of the entities *Jiv*, *Ishwar* and *Maya*.

Jiv is the in-dweller of the body. It is the life force of the body which makes it active - able to walk etc. He is the owner of the body (thus the soul is separate from the body.)

Maya is *Prakriti* or nature and *Ishwar* is *Paramatma* or God Supreme. Knowledge of these is *Gnaan*. The **Gita** explains 'Knowledge of *Kshetra* (body) and *Kshetrajna* (soul) is *Gnaan*.' *Jiv*, *Maya* and *Ishwar* are briefly explained over the next three Shloks.

TEXT 105

The Jiva dwells in the heart and is as minute as an atom. It is conscious and knowledgeable. By the virtue of subjectivity, it pervades the whole body. It is impenetrable, invisible, indivisible, indestructible and eternal.

Hrutsthoanushukshmaschidhrupo Gnaata Vyapyakhilaam Tanum /
Gnaanashaktya Sthito Jivo Gneyoachedhyadilakshanam //105//

Hrutstha - that which dwells in the heart. **Shruti** explains, 'This *Atma* (soul) resides in the heart and is the life spirit (*Chetan Swaroop*).'

Anushukshma - is as small as an atom such that it is not visible to the naked eye. It is smaller than even the point of a sharp tool. **Shruti** says, 'If you split a single hair length ways, the size of the soul is a hundredth part of one such split of hair. That *Jiv* is eternal in form.' In the **Gita**, **Krishna** explains, 'Of all minute things, I am the soul.'

Chit or **Chaitanya**- is consciousness or animate. It is the life spirit, which illuminates the body. God has said, 'Just as a single sun provides light for all planets, the *Jivatma* illuminates the whole body.' **Yagnavalkya** explains '72,000 nerves emanate from the heart, within which, glowing like the light, resides the *Atma*.' **Vallabhacharya** explains, 'He is luminous, animate and cannot be detected by the ordinary senses. He is conscious in this way through the power of *Yoga*.'

Gnaata - He is knowledgeable in the *Adhyatmika*, *Adhibautika* and *Adhidaivika* aspects.

Gnaanshaktya - pervades the whole body. Furthermore he pervades the gross, subtle and causal bodies. **Shruti** explains, 'He pervades the whole body, from the hair (of the head) to the nails (of the hands and feet).'

Acchedadilakshanam - Has various qualities such as not able to be pierced. **Bhagwat Gita** explains these: 'Weapons do not cleave it, fire does not burn it, water does not wet it and wind does not dry it. It cannot be cleft; it cannot be burnt; it cannot be wetted and it cannot be dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable immovable and primeval.'

TEXT 106

Maya is Trigunatmika. It is full of darkness and is the power of Shree Krishna. It is the source of creating ego and attachment towards the body and relations thereof.

Trigunatma Tamaha Krushnashaktirdehatadiyayoha /
Jivasya Chahamamataheturmayaavagamyataam //106//

Maya's form is now explained. **Maya** is *Trigunatmak* - i.e. it has the qualities (*Gunns*) of *Satva*, *Raja* and *Tama*. **Prakruti** (nature) is described as supporting these three qualities. **Bhagwat** explains, 'God, who is devoid of such *Gunns*, with the aid of **Maya** containing Good and Bad qualities, initiated the creation of the universe.'

The three *Gunns* are the driving force of nature causing it to change according to the dominance of a particular *Gunn*. These three *Gunns*, and their descriptive qualities are explained in **Mokshadharm**:

The ten qualities of **Satva Gunn** (purity) are:

(i) Bliss (ii) penance (iii) peace (iv) enlightenment (v) intoning (vi) faithful (vii) compassionate (viii) donating (ix) God like (x) contentment.

The nine qualities of **Rajo Gunn** (activity) are:

(i) Unsteadiness (ii) not compassionate (iii) affected by pleasure and pain (iv) finds difference (v) worldly aims of life (vi) lustful (vii) intoxicated (viii) vain (ix) talking too much.

The eight qualities of **Tamo Gunn** (impurity) are:

(i) Ignorance (ii) delusion (iii) great delusion (iv) anger (v) senselessness (vi) slander (vii) neglect (viii) laziness.

Shrutis explain, ‘Tamo Gunn has the form of darkness and in this way Maya, which is of Tama, can be experienced.’ Maya, which is God’s *Shakti* (power), is used as a tool for purposes of creation etc. Bhagwat explains, ‘Using his Shakti - Maya, He creates, destroys and sustains (the universe).’

Maya is the cause of ego and attachment, which forms within the body and that, which is associated with the body - wife, children, wealth etc. Association of ‘*T*’ with the body and ‘*Mine*’ with possessions of the body is Maya. ‘O Lord! In this world, people have become deluded through your Maya. They have fallen into acts associated with I and Mine.’ ‘Cut off the illusive string (Maya) which attaches a person to their children, wife, wealth, property, relations and body,’ explains the **Bhagwat**.

All are affected by God’s Maya including other Devas such as **Shankar**. **Bhagwat** says, ‘O Devi! You too, have experienced God’s Maya, because even I, an incarnation of that God have become deluded through Maya. How then can other beings, servant to their senses overcome such Maya.’ ‘Maya is very difficult to understand. Not even Brahma can comprehend it.’ ‘I, Narad and other great Munis are not able to comprehend Maya. How then can Vamedeva and other Devas understand,’ such is the incomprehensive nature of Maya.

Maya has been loosely translated into English as ‘illusion’; however it is much more than mere illusion. A proper understanding of Maya is essential as only then can we begin to overcome the effects of Maya on the self.

I have taken various notes from **Bhagwat’s Eleventh Skanda** to clarify: Maya is the power that offers enjoyment and suffering by virtue of their Karma. It is inherent in all through the mind and the senses providing the Jiv with objects of enjoyment. All have it as the body is made from Prakriti that has the three Gunns within it, which drive Maya. Maya works with the organs of action generating new tendencies, providing pleasures and pain. It is Illusive in nature causing that which is wrong seems to be right and vice versa.

In order to overcome Maya, one must live according to Bhagwat Dharma. They should aim to give up attachment to sense objects and cultivate attachment to holy company (Satsang). They should cultivate kindness, friendliness and humility to others. Observance of purity of mind and body, performing duties to please God, being patient and avoiding vain talks are some of the disciplines of Bhagwat Dharma.

Shrimad Bhagwat explains that the three Gunas enter the body through *scripture, water, man, place, time, action, initiation, meditation, Mantra, purificatory rites and practices*. They regulate the growth of the Gunas Satva, Raja and Tama in man according to the classification of each object. For example, partaking in pure water results in Satva, tasty juices results in Raja and liquor results in Tama. Partaking in pure water offered to God first will result in the nature of *Nirgun*. In this way, a Nirgun nature should be cultivated to overcome the effects of Maya.

TEXT 107

Ishwara (God) dwells in the Jiva by his indwelling and controlling power, just as Jiva dwells in the heart. He is supreme and sovereign and gives rewards to all according to their Karma.

Hrudaye Jivavajjive Yontaryamitaya Sthitaha /
Gneyaha Svatantra Irshoasau Sarvakarmafalapradaha //107//

The form of Parmatma is now given. **Hrudaya** - God resides in the heart, just like the *Jiv*. He is **Antaryami** - the indweller and observing. 'He resides in the *Atma* (soul), yet is separate from that soul.' 'I reside in the heart of all and am the cause of memory, knowledge and forgetfulness' 'God resides in *Atmas* and yet the *Atma* is unable to comprehend him,' explains **Bhagwat** and other *Shastras*. **Narad Pancharatra** explains, 'God resides within the *Jiv*. Through his protection, the *Jiv* attains peace.'

He is **Swatantra** - *Swa* is *Atma* and *Tantra* is chief. Hence **Swatantra** is the chief of the soul - God who is free, independent and above all. **Suta** has said, 'He resides within all and is **Swatantra**.' **Swatantra** also indicates that he is the regulator of *Kala* (time) and *Maya* (illusive power) etc. He is full of qualities and has full knowledge. The earth and *Maya* act in accordance with Parmatma.

Sarvakarmafalapradaha - gives fruits to all according to their acts or Karma. As the in-dweller and inner observer he offers fruits accordingly. 'O Lord! We accept the pain and pleasures accruing from our acts. It is thee who promotes us to the heavens and other worlds when we perform auspicious acts.' 'It is thee also who sends us to the fearful hells through inauspicious acts.'

Vasudev Mahatmya explains the form of Parmatma - 'The *Atma* of *Jiv*, *Ishwar* etc., the soul of *Akshar* (*Brahman*), pure and level like the sky, of great or divine form such that *Mukts* (realised souls) can see him, virtuous or good, always one, beyond ageing and deterioration and son of Vasudev. He has all the qualities pertaining to bliss, *Nirgun* (devoid of qualities) and he is the Lord of the Lords, such is Parmatma. He is understood through divine knowledge and is worthy of worship and service by those *Mukts* with divine realisation.'

Shatanand then explains the eternity of *Jiv* and *Ishwar*. He first incites **Bhagwat Gita**, 'There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these Kings or men. Nor will there be a time in the future when all shall cease to be.' In this way both *Jiv* and *Ishwar* are eternal and true.

Ishwar is said to be '**Sarvagna**' - all knowing or omniscient - **Yaha Sarvagnaha Sarvavit**. God explains, 'I know the past present and future of all beings, but none are able to understand me.'

TEXT 108

And that *Ishwar* is Lord Shree Krishna, who is Parbrahman Purushottam and our most cherished deity. He is worthy of worship by us all. He is the source of all incarnations.

Sa Shreekrushnaha Param Brahman Bhagawan Purushottomaha /
Upasya Ishtadevo Naha Sarvavirbhavakaranam //108//

Lord Swaminarayan explains that that *Ishwara* is none other than **Lord Krishna**. He is **Parbrahman** - **Purushottam** (the supreme God), who is the cause of creation of all. He is our *Upasya Deva* or God that is worthy of worship, service and devotion. He is '*Ishtadev*' personal or favoured God for worship.

He is worthy of devotion by all, as he is the best - **Parabrahman**. Shree Krishna is *Parmatma* - the highest form. 'There is none other, to my knowledge, greater than Shree Krishna.'

Gita explains, 'My womb is the *Mahad* (great) *Brahman* which is my *Prakriti* (*Prakriti* consists of earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego)'. In this way **Brahman** is defined. 'Those renounced ones with a steady nature attain the heaven called *Brahman*.'

Beyond this *Mahad-Brahman* is *Akshar-Brahman*. 'He is as brilliant as the sun and beyond all darkness.' 'He is beyond *Maya* and *Akshar*.' 'He is that which all the Vedas glorify.' In this way, *Parbrahman* is explained.

Bhagavaniti Bhagshabdavachya Ye Gunaste Sanatyasyeti Bhagavan - 'Bhagwan is he who is endowed with "*Bhag*" qualities.' Narad explains these qualities, 'The six qualities of *Bhag* are entirety, divine or godliness, dutiful, reputed, prosperity, knowledge and asceticism.' 'Bhagwan is he who knows of creation and dissolution, birth, death, knowledge and ignorance of people.'

He is *Purusha* - *Puru* meaning he who fulfils the desires of a Bhakta; *Sa* meaning He who suppresses the antagonists of Bhakts. Similarly he is Purush as he gives more than one desires or because he burns away one's sins. Consequently He is called Purusha because he has the form of Man.

The very best is *Uttama*. Similarly that which is without ignorance, discrimination and delusion is Uttama. Therefore ***Purushschasavutamascha Purushottama*** - *Purushottama* is the best *Purusha*. Also, Purushottam is He who is the best and who is beyond *Kshara* and *Akshara*.

Kshar - *Akshar* are explained in ***Bhagwat Gita***: 'There are two kinds of persons (*Purushs*) spoken of in Shastras - the perishable (*Kshar*) and the imperishable (*Akshar*). The perishable are all beings and the imperishable are called the unchanging (*Kutasth*).' 'Because I transcend the perishable person and am also higher than the imperishable person, therefore I am styled in the Smruti and the Vedas as the supreme person (*Purushottam*).'

Purushottam Parmatma is the cause of all other manifestations - Vasudev, Keshav and other *Vyuh*s as well as Varaha and other incarnations (*Avatars*). ***Dharmasansthapanarthaya Sambhavami Yuge Yuge*** - 'I manifest from time to time in order to establish Dharma.'

'He is Lord of the Universe and the protector of all.' 'All this is of his divine form.' That Lord is none other than *Parmeshwar* Shri Krishna - 'He who you see as your dear friend and cousin is none other than the source of all bliss - *Parbrahman*.' ***Krushnastu Bhagwan Swayam*** - 'Krishna is none other than God (Bhagwan).'

'That Krishna is the eternal being (*Sanatan Purush*). He is one without a second and resides in the soul of all.' **Lord Krishna** in ***Bhagwat Gita*** himself states this fact: 'He who thus knows the truth of My divine birth and actions is not reborn after leaving the body; he will come to me, O Arjun.'

Krishna further explains the consequence of those who do not accept or understand his greatness, 'Fools disregard Me, dwelling in a human form, not knowing my higher nature, as the supreme Lord of all beings. Senseless men entertain a nature that is deluding akin to that of *Rakshasas* (fiends) and *Asuras* (monsters). Their hopes are in vain, acts are in vain and knowledge is in vain.'

'Those haters, cruel, the vilest and the most inauspicious of mankind, I haul these forever into the cycle of births and deaths, into the wombs of demons. Fallen into demoniac wombs in birth after birth, these deluded men, not attaining Me, further sink down to the lowest level, O Arjun.'

For this reason, Krishna has been accepted by Lord Swaminarayan, as his '*Upasya Istadev*' - God worthy of worship.

Shatanand then concludes the commentary of this Shlok by stating the fact that the same Shri Krishna, here mentioned as beyond *Kshar-Akshar* is none other than Lord Shri Swaminarayan. He uses 'Shri

Krishna' here but that Shree Krishna should be understood without question as Himself. Lord Swaminarayan is the fountainhead of all other incarnations and should be accepted as our *Upasya Dev*.

Shree Swaminarayan, whose every action was divine stood out as Great through the various incidents of His lifetime and so suggest that he truly was God Supreme.

His nature, attitude, teachings and kindness are all worthy of praise and paramount in supporting the fact that he is God Supreme. This truly was a great incarnation that brought peace of mind and tranquillity to the masses. He continues to shower his blessings upon us even today, such is the greatness of Lord Swaminarayan.

TEXT 109

When Lord Shri Krishna is by the side of Radhikaji, He shall be known as Radha -Krishna. When He is beside of Laxmiji in the form of Rukshmini, he shall be known as Laxmi-Narayan.

Shri Krishna's various forms are described over the next four Shloks. Krishna by the side of Radha, daughter of Vrishbhanu, shall be known as Radha-Krishna.

Similarly, Krishna by the side of Rukshmani, daughter of King Bhishmaka, should be known as Laxmi-Narayan. **Vishnu Puran** explains, 'Laxmi took the form of Sita during Ram Avatar and as Rukshmani during Krishna Avatar.'

TEXT 110

When he is by the side of Arjun, he shall be known as Nar-Narayan, and in the same manner, when Balbhadra or other deities are by his side, he shall be known by such other appropriate names.

When Shree Krishna is with the 'middle' Pandava - **Arjun**, who is the incarnation of **Lord Nar**, they should be known as **Nar-Narayan**. **Bhaarat** explains: *Arjune Tu Naraveshaha Krushno Narayana Swayam* - 'Arjun is the incarnation of Nar and Krishna is Narayan.' Similarly the **Bhagwat** explains, 'The two of you are the Rishis Nar and Narayan.'

In the same way, he can be known as **Ram-Krishna**, **Satya-Krishna** etc. when accompanied by **Balbhadra** (Balarama), **Satyabhama** and others.

Just to clarify, Nar-Narayan are famed as '*Bharat Khand Na Raja*' - the Lords or Kings of the Earth, who are continuously performing penance in Badrikashram for the benefit of mankind. They were born of **Murti Devi** and **Dharma Prajapati**.

TEXT 111

At times, devotees such as Radhikaji and others are alongside Lord Krishna but at other times, they, with extreme devotion, dwell within Lord Shree Krishna, which at such times shall be considered as by Himself.

When the devotee is beside Shree Krishna, they shall be known as Radha-Krishna and other such names. At other times, the devotees may be within God, within his heart etc. At such times they are one with God and so Shree Krishna should be termed as alone in such case, even though God is never alone:

It is said that only God himself can bestow the favour of *Moksh* (salvation) on a person. Therefore devotion to him should be readily practised. **Lord Kapil** has said, ‘O Mother! He, whose lotus feet are forever worthy of service and devotion, should be worshipped with devotion in all ways (mind, voice and action).’

Those that are devout in this way are never punished. *Sarvath* worship with the mind, voice and action (*Man, Varni* and *Karma*) surrendered unto the Lord is explained here: ‘O Uddhav! May our minds stay steady in the lotus feet of Krishna; may our voices sing Krishna’s name and may our bodies salute Krishna through *Namaskar*.’

Vritrasur has said in his prayer, ‘O Lord! Please grant me the boon that I may have shelter of thy lotus feet. Make me a servant to serve thee and thy choicest devotees, in future births. Fix my mind upon thyself so that I may always praise thee and be engrossed in thy divine qualities. May my voice sing thy glory and my body perform service of thee.’

Great Bhakts have prayed, ‘O Hari! May my voice sing thy glory, my ears listen to praise of thee, my hands serve thee, my mind be fixed at thy lotus feet and my sight have Darshan of thy Murti and thoust choicest devotees.’

Due to the fact that this body is perishable and that death is unpredictable, one should renounce all other worldly things and perform Bhakti of God. ‘Actions pertaining to salvation should be performed immediately. Death does not ask the question - “has he performed the righteous act or not?” Who knows whether he will die today? Therefore one should master Dharma at a young age, as the man form is scarce.’ Therefore one should strive to perform acts to attain Moksh before death.

Prahlad has said, ‘O friends! In this world, human form is difficult to attain and yet is easily perished. It is the only path to derive the endless grace of God, therefore one should from an early age, with all might, observe Bhagwat Dharma.’

‘Those who do not strive to free themselves from the cycle of births and deaths eternally perish in that cycle taking the forms of plants and beasts.’

Furthermore, those that do not try to free themselves from this bondage are considered as sinners. By wasting such a precious life through enjoyment of worldly pleasures, one is classed as an *Atmahatyara* or murderer.

There is no other greater tool to salvation than Bhakti - ‘Charity, Vrat, penance, sacrifice, chanting, study, control of the senses and others are all achieved singularly through Bhakti of Shree Krishna.’ ‘O Sut! The ears of those who have not listened to pastimes of Krishna are mere caves.’ ‘Dharma with truth and compassion or knowledge with penance is not able to purify the soul if they are devoid of Bhakti.’ In this way Bhakti has been accepted as amongst the greatest tools to salvation.

TEXT 114

The righteousness of the virtuous persons such as the learned ones is only due to their devotion to Lord Shri Krishna and Satsang (association with the righteous), because without devotion and Satsang, even a learned person is bound to degenerate.

Here, two great fruits, *devotion to Shree Krishna* and the cause of *Bhakti - Satsang*, are explained to be the cause of the various desirable qualities in man such as knowledge etc. Indeed Bhakti and Satsang should be accepted as the benefits or fruits of those with righteous qualities. They are their own benefits.

This Shlok is an extension of the previous in some ways. In the previous Shlok, we discussed the greatness of Bhakti. In this Shlok, Satsang along with Bhakti is considered. It is argued that Bhakti (and Satsang) can bear fruits of Moksh, but here the Lord suggests that Bhakti and Satsang are in themselves the fruits of the action and so one can be content through such action.

Acrura in Shrimad Bhagwat explains that Satsang is the cause of Bhakti. Satsang is loosely explained as association with a saint or righteous person. Without Satsang, Bhakti cannot progress. 'Sat' means truth and 'Sang' means association, therefore Satsang should be understood as association with the truth, be it saints, Shastras, God, temples etc. Lord Swaminarayan has spoken wonderfully about Satsang in the Vachnamrut that is worthy of study.

TEXT 115

Lord Shree Krishna, his incarnations and his images are alone worthy of meditation, therefore they alone shall be meditated upon, but one shall never meditate upon a person, a deity or Jeev (a being) even though he may be a profound devotee of Lord Shree Krishna or a Brahmaveta.

Shree Krishna is himself God Supreme. His Avatars or incarnations are Rama etc. Meditation upon such incarnations or forms (either as picture form or statue) should be performed. However Bhakts with supreme knowledge, who claim they are *Brahmroop* (form of God), should never be meditated upon.

The reason for this is that they are *Jivaroop* - a being, whose body is made from the *Panchmahabhuts* (five elements), therefore, none, other than God himself, are worthy of meditation. Only God himself can bestow the grace of salvation and so ultimately he alone should be the only refuge. *Bhagawana Dhaaranashreyaha* - 'God alone is the only refuge or support.'

Even meditation upon Brahma, Sankadik etc is forbidden; never mind the impostors of today who claim to be God! Shatanand further explains that Murtis where Bhakts are pictured in the service of God may be meditated upon as such depictions show merely the *Bhakt-Bhagwan* relationship.

In this age of Kali, it seems that the Lord Swaminarayan spoke with prior knowledge of this act to deter people from falling into this vortex of ignorance and misdeed. It seems that in this age, many are that much more foolish as they are accepting the Godhead of others such as Gurus and holy men. Distinction between Bhakt and Bhagwan has to be preserved so that the true God is alone the source of our refuge. Only God can bestow the favour of salvation and so only he should be worshipped as God. There is no point worshipping other Gurus with such faith, as they cannot deliver the fruit of Moksh. Nor should such figures be meditated upon as God as it serves no purpose. Dhyaan should be performed of those who are *Purna* - complete with righteous qualities. Thus God is such as he is Purna with the greatest qualities. By performing Dhyaan of God we also adopt his supreme qualities. Thus one should not perform Dhyaan of others who are imperfect, as by doing so we will inherit the unrighteous qualities and imperfections of that person. Indeed our *Sinhasans* should be kept free of any other picture other than God's Murtis, as many have a tendency of putting pictures of their parents, Guru, saints etc.

A Guru can aid in helping a Jivatma to become God-Realised but such a Guru can never take the place of God and become the object of devotion. To do so is sinful to both the devotee and the devoted.

It seems ironic that Lord Swaminarayan wrote this Shlok blatantly forbidding worship of a Guru, Saint or Bhakt and yet two hundred years on, Satsangis continue to be fooled into worshipping a Guru etc through cults, thus disregarding Lord Swaminarayan's explicit wishes!

A saint or Guru, however much knowledgeable he is, or profound in devotion he may be, cannot and must not take the place of God or Leader. It is the explicit wish of Lord Swaminarayan that the Leaders of this Swaminarayan Sampraday are the two Acharyas of Ahmedabad and Vadtal. Yes, the saints or Gurus may be great souls but such greatness has to be put into context when reading about Rishis such as Saubhari and Chavan who performed great penance for sixty and twenty one thousand years respectively. Also Dhruv, who at the age of five, performed intense physical austerities and was able to have Darshan of God. They were great, yet they were never worshipped as God, nor did they claim to be God.

TEXT 116

One shall consider one's soul as distinct from the three forms of body – Sthool (gross), Shukshma (subtle) and Karan (causal) and identify the soul with Brahman and with the sublime form shall always worship Lord Shree Krishna.

Nijatmanam Brahmanrupam Dehatrayavilakshanam /

One's soul (*Nijatma*) is separate from the three bodies known as *Sthool, Shukshma and Karan*. These three bodies are associated with the soul therefore God, who is the enlightenment of the soul is also different from the soul. The soul is *Brahmroopam* - of God and not itself God.

God has said, 'Sthool and Shukshma bodies are distinct from the Atma, just as fire is distinct from the wood that it burns.' Just as the wood is endowed with qualities to allow it to burn, the Atma is endowed with qualities or aspects of the body. It is due to this link to the body that the Atma is prone to shifting tendencies.

For this reason the Lord writes:

Vibhavya Tena Kartavya Bhaktiha Krushnasya Sarvatha //

One shall always worship Shree Krishna identifying the soul as a part of God. Thus one should worship and meditate upon God by becoming *Brahmanroop*. **Gita** explains, 'Four types of men of good deeds worship me, O Arjun; these are the distressed, the seekers after knowledge, the wealth seekers and the men of knowledge. Of these, the men of knowledge, being ever with me in Yoga and devoted to the one and the only, is the foremost; for I am dear to the men of knowledge and he too is dear to me. I deem the man of knowledge to be my very self for he is devoted to me alone as the highest. He attains the highest stage of Bhakti.' In this way knowledge is considered very important in aiding Bhakti.

Shrimad Bhagwat adds, 'Endowed with knowledge, worship me through Bhakti and reject all else.' 'O Parikshit! Though I am learned in the supreme knowledge, I am drawn to God's Leela (pastimes) and therefore have studied the Bhagwat Puran.' 'Shree Krishna Leela is wonderful and so study of the Bhagwat Puran will derive eternal peace through salvation.' 'There is nothing else better to conquer desire and so Sanak and other Maharishis follow the same path of Bhagwat Dharma.'

TEXT 117

My disciples shall listen, with reverence, to the tenth Skand of Shreemad Bhagwat everyday or once a year. Those who are learned shall read it daily.

Shravya Shrimadbhagwatdashamaskanda Adarat - implies listening to the tenth Skand with great respect and faith (*Adarat*). Listening without such reverence will not derive the desired fruits. **God** explains, 'That which is offered devoid of faith in sacrifice, in charity or penance, is considered as *Asad*. Such acts will derive no fruits in this world or in others.'

If one is unable to listen to the scripture daily then it should be listened to at least once a year. Intellectual *Pandits*, knowledgeable in Sanskrit should read the scripture daily. Shatanand adds that those *Pandits*, who are unable to read daily, should do so once a year. Thus all should make an effort to read or listen to the scripture once a year.

It is said, '*Shravan* (listening) and *Kirtan* (singing God's praise) destroys all tyranny and becomes a means to attaining a place in God's heaven.' Here the *Leela Charitra* of Shree Krishna is held great such that they break down the bonds of worldly attachments and thus prepare a person for divine bliss. Those that wish for *Pad-Sevanam Bhakti* - service at the Lord's feet should also listen to the glories of God as they will help affirm such faith.

'Those that even once perform a *Parayan* (recital) of the tenth Skand of Bhagwat receive the fruits of performing a *Parayan* of the Vedas.' It is said that the Vedas are the roots, the Upanishads the trunk, the Purans the branches and amongst these, the Bhagwat is the fruit of the scriptural tree. Of this, the tenth Skand is the juice or nectar of the fruit. Also, the tenth Skand is considered as the heart of God when assimilating every Skand to a part of God's body. Just as the heart rejuvenates the body with pure and clean blood, the tenth Skand rejuvenates and nourishes the whole Universe.

What more needs to be said about such a great Shastra. I will however conclude by adding that if there was ever one Shastra that made me adopt a higher discipline in life, then it was the Bhagwat Puran. It was one of the first texts that I had read or listened to with deep love and for that reason it was for me, very important in bringing about changes in my life for the better and thus leading to a life of morality and dedication to the Lord. For such reason I would recommend its study, reading or its listening to anybody.

TEXT 118

They shall perform Purascharan of the tenth Skanda, Vishnusahastranaam and other Shastras. It should be performed in a holy place according to their abilities, as these performances help them to attain their desired fruits.

Punyasthana or holy place is such place that it is the cause of *Punya* or benediction. Thus God's temples and places of pilgrimage are such places. **Narad** has said: 'A suitable place which is pure, where God's divine Murti is present or where sacred rivers such as the Ganges flow, these places are *Punyasthanas*.'

Purascharan are the *Parayans* or recitals (which may be 108 etc. in number) by Brahmins, according to one's ability. If one is capable and learned enough to perform the recital themselves, then they should do so. *Purascharan of Dashamaskanda, Vishnusahastranaam, Shreemad Bhagwat, Bhagwat Gita* and *Shree Krishna Ashtakshara Mantra* are here glorified.

Purascharan involves organising a function such as a Parayan, Dhun or Mantra Japp. Feeding those present, donation to the poor, cows and Poojan of Brahmins should conclude it. On the final day, a Mahapooja and Yagna should be performed.

TEXT 119

In the event of a calamity, which has befallen naturally or through a person or an epidemic etc one shall always act in such a way that one can save one's own life and also that of others but shall never act otherwise.

This Shlok is for the benefit and best interest of mankind. Saving oneself from harm and calamity is the best and greatest duty so the Lord has stipulated that one must act in such situations to save themselves.

Mokshadharma explains, 'One's Dharma during easy (favourable) times is different to that of hard (unfavourable) times.' For such reason, one may even adopt another's Dharma, untruth or even break the code of untouchability (i.e. a Sadhu touching a woman) in order to save oneself or others from harm.'

A 'calamity' here should be understood as something that is the cause of great pain or misery. Thus, some great difficulty that has hit a village or town, the wealth of the kingdom has been looted or some great illness has struck all constitute a calamity. Similarly if one is personally suppressed or threatened with violence then one should act in such a way as to save oneself and others from such tyranny.

TEXT 120

The place, time, age, means, caste and ability shall be taken into consideration when deciding upon matters of daily rites and rituals, secular business affairs and the code of expiation.

Deshakalavayovittajaatishatyanusarataha /
Acharo Vyavahaarascha Nishkrutam Chavadharyataam //120//

Achara - duties such as bathing in the morning, **Vyavahaar** - secular business affairs such as money lending and **Nishkruta** - the code of expiation or Prayaschit. On such matters, the following should be taken into consideration: **Desha** - difficulties or oppression of the place in which they live; **Kala** - good or bad times; **Vaya** - age of the person, whether of young, youthful or old age; **Vitta** - wealth of a person; **Jaati** - caste, whether a Brahmin etc; and **Shakti** - bodily and mental strength.

In this way a little flexibility is given. However this is not a loophole for every single directive, to be used for personal gain. Decisions should be made wisely and to the best of their knowledge.

Shatanand uses an example to illustrate how the above can be used. He provides a hierarchy for the best methods of bathing. Some methods are very difficult and may not be able to be performed due to restrictions of Desh, Kal, Vaya etc. In such instances a lower method of bathing can be used:

- 1) **Varuna Snaan** - is the best way of bathing and involves bathing in holy rivers (This is however not always possible due to Desha, Vaya and Shakti).
- 2) **Agneya Snaan** - cleansing the body through rubbing of sacred ash over the whole body.
- 3) **Vayavya Snaan** - rubbing of dust from the hoof of a cow.
- 4) **Mantra Snaan** - use of wet grass upon the forehead as Mantras are chanted.
- 5) **Kapil Snaan** - using a wet cloth to wipe the body.
- 6) **Brahman Snaan** - bathing whilst chanting *Aphista Mantra*.

- 7) **Partheeva Snaan** - using the dust or mud from places of pilgrimage.
- 8) **Divya Snaan** - bathing outdoors in the rain whilst the sun is shining.
- 9) **Manasa Snaan** - bathing whilst chanting Mantras and singing God Vasudeva's praise.
- 10) **Vaishnava Snaan** - bathing by pouring Lord Vishnu's *Charanamrut* (sacred water) from a conch.

Hence one should bathe in the morning considering the factors of Desha etc.

Just as matters of 'Achar' are determined in consideration, one should also consider such issues when matters upon business arise. **Brihaspati** has explained, 'One shall not act solely upon the teachings of Shastras. Place, caste and family traditions, should all be considered.'

In **Prayaschitnirnyait** it is written: 'In the south, many Dwijas marry their maternal uncle's daughter. In the central states many eat meat and fish. In the east many women are adulterous. In the north, many drinks liquor and touch women during their period of menses. All these acts are not worthy of Prayaschit or punishment. However the same act performed in another area or country is worthy of Prayaschit or punishment.'

Parashar writes, 'Women, children, the elderly, the ill, those with a weak body and those incapable of performing fasts should be pitied and Munis should consider the place, time, age and ability when specifying a Prayaschit Vrat.'

'The Dharmas are different in various *Yugas*. In *Satya Yug*, Manu's teachings upon Dharma should be accepted. Similarly Gautam's in *Treta*, Shankha's and Likhite's in *Dwapar* and Parashar's in *Kali* should be accepted.'

Yagnavalkya writes, 'One should always consider the place, time, age and ability, together with the sin committed, when specifying a Prayaschit such that the person giving the Prayaschit does not incur sin.' It is important that the correct Prayaschit is given such that he does not commit sin by preaching a Prayaschit that is too intense - leading to somebody's death.

I have to reiterate though, that this Shlok cannot and must not be used for personal gain in order to somehow reduce the sin committed to insignificance. One must ask themselves truthfully whether they have adequately performed the Prayaschit in accordance with their capability.

Many use '*Desh*' as an excuse also. They say that it is not necessary to perform a specific Prayaschit Vrat, or it is difficult to perform such Vrat because they have moved away from India and so now these rules do not somehow apply to them. The youth of today say that they are British, UK born and therefore the old Indian traditions do not apply to them - they can do what they please and when they please. They seem to think that they are somehow immortal and these stories of hell and subsequent punishments are fictitious. This is utter rubbish and all should become realised to the truth that one day they are going to have to pay for their sins.

You may be British born but the blood that runs through your veins is one hundred percent Indian. Your whole history is based upon Indian culture and expectations. You must not abandon the very heritage on which you have been brought up. To abandon these precepts is sad to say the least. Our Indian culture and heritage is something that we should be proud of and it should be upheld without question. It is our identity and our means to greatness. It must not be abandoned.

My philosophy rests in the theory of Vishishtadvaita. Goloka Dhaama is my beloved abode. I believe Mukti (salvation) as being able to serve Lord Krishna as Brahmanrupa, in Goloka Dhaama.

Matam Vishishtadwaitam Mae Goloko Dhaama Chepsitaam /

Vishishtadvaita is accepted as the Lord's philosophy. From the various philosophies - *Advaita*, *Kevaladvaita*, *Shuddhadvaita*, *Vishishtadvaita* etc. the Lord accepts Ramanuja's philosophy of *Vishishtadvaita* (special theory of non-dualism) as accurate.

Shatanand explains Ramanuja's philosophy to include the fact that God is animate, endowed with redemptive qualities, devoid of ordinary qualities (he has supra-ordinary qualities) and he is with divine body. One should refer to Ramanuja's various works such as **Shree Bhashya** to get a better understanding of his philosophy. Thus our Uddhav Sampraday has its roots within the *Ramanuja Sampraday*.

From the various *Dhaamas* - *Vaikunth*, *Swetadweep* etc, the Lord has chosen Golok as his fondest of abodes. One should refer to **Brahmvaivata Puran** and **Vasudev Mahatmya** for a description of Golok Dhaam.

'*Go*' means light and '*Lok*' means heavenly abode. Therefore Golok is the enlightened heaven. It is said that Golok is illuminated with the brilliance of millions of suns. Lord Swaminarayan in **Vachanamrut** explains, 'In the centre of Golok lies *Akshardhaam*. From the other heavens, one is again reborn upon the Earth, but Golok is such that once there, one is never again sent back upon this Earth.'

Golok or Akshardhaam is the greatest of heavens, where one is in constant service to Shree Krishna. Thus once in Golok, attaining the state of Brahmanrup, we are able to serve the Lord with supreme consciousness - this is simply *Mukti*. Just the right or opportunity to serve God is considered as salvation.

Ekantika Bhaktas (realised souls) have asked only to serve God and not for *Salokya* and other types of Mukti. **Narsaiyo** wrote in Gujarati: '*Hari na janto mukti na mange, mange janmo janam avatar re*', because through birth as a man, one is able to worship and serve God.

Shreemad Bhagwat says, 'My non-desirous devotees have not asked for the four types of Mukti - *Salokya*, *Sarshiti*, *Saroopya* and *Sayujya*, which are devoid of service to Me.' 'Those that love to serve my feet and who perform acts for me only, do not wish for even *Sayujya Mukti*.' (*Sayujya Mukti* is the best of the four types of Mukti and involves 'merging' of the soul with God).

'Those with love for God find even Moksh insignificant.' **Indra** has also said, 'O Lord Narsinha! Thy devotees do not believe that much in Mukti, then how can the fact that they don't believe in heaven cause despondency.' Thus devotees do not care much for Mukti or for the bliss of heaven - they strive only to serve God in any way, shape or form.'

'Those who are dedicated to me do not wish for the heavens, political power, the post of Indra, emperorship, special Yogic powers nor for Moksh; they simply have love for me.' 'They please God and ask for nothing except Bhakti.'

The Lord only gives such blessing (to serve him) to those *Ekantik Bhakts* who are dedicated to him. **Sukhdevji** explains, 'Those that perform Bhakti of Shree Krishna are readily given Moksh, but very few are blessed with the fruits of Bhakti Yoga.' Such Bhakti Yoga is the state of *Brahman Roop* where one can have constant service to God at such a high or supreme level. To some degree, such a state is

becoming one with God. Such state is achievable only after man relinquishes all desires from his mind. That is the greatest of Mukti. Only then can we serve God at the supreme level devoid of all attachments.

God is one and the only. Brahman Roop does not imply that we become God but implies that we develop closeness or intimacy to God that is over and beyond the ordinary association. It is a state that is free from influences of *Maya* (illusion).

Earlier it was explained that the Lord's accepted philosophy is *Vishishtadvaita*. As a footnote, I have added briefly the other Vedantic Schools of thought of present time. These are five in number: **Advaita** of **Shankracharya** (sixth century AD.), **Vishishtadvaita** of **Ramanujacharya** (1027 AD.), **Shuddhadvaita** of **Vallabhacharya** (1401 AD.), **Dvaitadvaita** of **Nimbarkacharya** (eleventh century AD.) and **Dvaita** of **Madhavacharya** (1199 AD.).

Shankar's Advait is absolute monism and maintains that *Brahman* (aspect of God) is without parallel, has no form and exists as abstract consciousness or knowledge. *Maya* is the ignorance or an illusory principle responsible for the appearance of the universe and souls. Shankara explains that what is eternal is real and vice-versa and so the world which isn't eternal cannot be real. He proposed that an emanation of God - *Ishwar* or *Sagun Brahman* could be offered worship. Shankar's philosophy is confused as it accepts God as absolute abstraction - neither real nor unreal and thus rendering the existence of God as tangible.

Ramanuja's philosophy of qualified monism maintains that God is real and independent of the souls and the world, which are also real. God is one and unparalleled as in Advait. He exists in five forms: (i) **Para** - the highest reality with the body; (ii) **Vyuha** - *Vasudev, Shankarshan, Pradyumn and Anniruddh*, who are the form of worship, destroyer, sustainer and creator respectively; (iii) **Antaryami** - the in-dweller of the soul, witnessing all acts; (iv) **Archa** - dwelling within idols or images of worship; and (v) **Vibhavas** - incarnations upon the earth. Ramanuja claims that God is full of compassion for those Jivs who wish to be redeemed and so can become free from the cycle of births and deaths through devotion.

Vallabhacharya proposes pure Advait and claims that Brahman is both God and Jiv - thus God can be compared to fire and the Jiv a spark from the fire. Where Shankar claims the world to be an illusion, Vallabha believes that manifestation is divine will, and so is God's Lila or sport. He emphasises the divinity of Krishna. Those Jivs who serve him with intense devotion are liberated and sport with him in Golok.

Nimbarka propounded dualistic non-dualism, who claimed that *Jiv, Ishwar* and *Jagat* (the world) are distinct in attributes and nature, yet Jiv and Jagat are also identical with Brahman in as much as they could not exist independently. Thus Jiv is compared with Purushottam as the waves to the sea or the radiance to the sun. Nimbark also stresses that emancipation comes to the Jiv through dedicated devotion.

Madhavacharya propounded absolute dualism, the opposite point of view to Shankar's Advait. He stresses that the three eternal entities - Jiv, Ishwar and Jagat are different from each other, although Jiv and Jagat depend upon God. He also stressed that the distinct nature of Jiva and Brahman are real, which do not disappear even in the state of liberation.

In this way Lord Swaminarayan accepted the basic doctrine of Ramanuja's Vishishtadvait.

The Dharmas described so far are the ones applicable to all my male and female devotees, and shall be followed accordingly. I shall now describe the additional Dharmas applicable to specific groups.

This concludes the *Samanya* or ordinary duties applicable to all. From this point on are explained the *Vishesh* or additional duties applicable to specific groups. Thus all devotees, male and female should observe the *Saadhaaran* (common) Dharmas such as *Ahimsa*, *Daya* etc.

One hundred and twenty two Shloks have given the basis of Lord Swaminarayan's and indeed Sanatan Dharma's precepts. Now the Lord concentrates upon the various groups of people:

<u>Shlok</u>	<u>Type</u>
123-132	Special Dharmas of Acharyas
133-134	Acharya's wives
135-156	Grihastas (householders)
157-158	Kings or rulers of state
159-162	Married women
163-172	Widowed women
173-174	Common duties for all women
175-187	Naishtik Brahmacharis (Brahmin celibates)
188-196	Sadhus (ascetics)
197-202	Common duties for Sadhus and Naishtiks

Then from 203-212, Swaminarayan prepares the conclusion of the *Shikshapatri* - thus summing up this great epistle of precepts.

Shikshapatri

PART III

Visheshā Dharmas

(Additional Duties)

Special Dharmas of Acharyas(123-132)

TEXT 123

The Acharyas, sons of My elder and younger brothers and their successors, shall never initiate or preach to females who are not closely related to them.

The Lord first and foremost gives the special duties applicable to his *Acharyas* (spiritual heads of the sect) who have been given the seat of Gurus of the *Swaminarayana-Uddhavi Sampraday*. Lord Swaminarayan towards the end of his life decided that somebody should be selected, to be initiated as Guru to continue the work that he had begun. Discussing it with leading saints and devotees, it was decided that somebody from his own family (*Dharma Kula*) should be selected. Thus it was decided that two Acharya *Gadis* (seats) should be established governing the Northern and Southern regions of India.

Ayodhyaprasad, the son of elder brother **Ramapratap** and **Raghuvir**, the son of younger brother **Ichcharam** were selected. In an assembly at Vadtal, lots were drawn to decide who would be established as Acharya of the two regions. Ayodhyaprasad was thus given the Northern region, with **Ahmedabad** as the centre and so was crowned Acharya of *Nar-Narayan Dev Gadi* (after the presiding deities at Ahmedabad temple). Similarly, Raghuvir was given the Southern region, with **Vadtal** as the centre and so was crowned as the Acharya of *Laxmi-Narayan Dev Gadi* (after the presiding deities at Vadtal temple).

The *Desh-Vibhag-Lekh* was written and signed and witnessed by the two Acharyas and prominent saints. This Lekh outlines the duties of the Acharyas as well as providing proof, in living testament, that the Acharyas of Dharma Kul are the true heads of the Swaminarayan-Uddhavi Sampraday.

Over the years, the Acharya lineage has continued with the Ahmedabad Gadi being passed from Ayodhyaprasad to Keshavaprasad, Purushottamaprasad, Vasudevaprasad, Devendraprasad, Tejendraprasad and onto the present day Acharya, Koshlendraaprasad Pande.

Similarly the Vadtal Gadi has continued on from Raghuvir to Bhagwataprasad, Viharilal, Laxmiprasad, Shripatiprasad, Anandaprasad, Narendraprasad, Ajendraprasada and onto the present day Acharya, Rakeshprasad Pande.

Lord Swaminarayan commands that his Acharyas should not initiate (give *Diksha*) to women who are not their '*Pasa Sambandha*' or close relation. Pasa Sambandha is such person, on whose death, one has to observe *Sutak* (period of prohibited rites after a death).

Thus the Acharyas should not directly preach to women who are not their close relation. The Acharya should have his own wife, preach and initiate other women into the fellowship. The reason being - 'A woman initiated by a Guru may be overcome by his qualities and so develop lustful feelings which will send both the Guru and the woman to the hell called *Taptasurmi*'.

TEXT 124

They shall never touch or talk to females who are not closely related to them. They shall not be cruel to any living being nor accept any deposits from anyone.

The Acharyas should not touch any woman except those who are closely related to them. Similarly they should not talk with such women. He should avoid all situations or places where such a confrontation is unavoidable. **Vishnudharmotara** explains, 'Gurus, even though they are considered great, can face destruction swiftly in the company of women, by not controlling their senses and through selfishness of wealth.'

They should also never be cruel to anybody - *Gurvo Hi Dayalavaha* - 'A Guru is always compassionate,' explain **Smruti**. Furthermore, they should not accept any deposits (hold money for anybody else). Shatanand explains that such an act can lead to unnecessary arguments and fall-outs.

TEXT 125

They shall never stand as surety for others in social matters. In the event of hardship, they shall subsist on alms but never incur debts.

Acharyas should not get involved in other people's social and business affairs such as selling, buying, giving, property etc. Thus they should not act as surety or advisor in such matters. This is because unnecessary suffering can be caused as a result of such advice. Similarly in times of hardship, the Acharyas should subsist on alms but never incur debt through borrowing money from the wealthy. This again is due to the fact that such borrowing can result in great pain and suffering.

Skand Puran explains, 'There is no other greater pain for householders than that experienced through debt.' **Mahabharat** explains, 'Those who can live off cooked vegetables on the fifth or sixth day and yet do not incur debt nor move to another country, attain happiness and bliss.'

'Healthiness of the body, not being in debt, not immigrating to another country, association with the virtuous, a good job or business and security of living are the six ways to happiness in this world.' **Kruttyachintamani** explains further that a great misdeed can occur if one dies before a debt is repaid: 'Agnihotras (who perform sacrifices) and Tapasvis (who perform penance) who die without paying off a debt lose all their fruits accrued through sacrifice or penance, to that person who is owed.'

'Those who borrow, but do not resolve the debt before dying lose their Punya to the person owed.' Shatanand points out that this directive is a '*Sadharana*' or ordinary duty that applies to all. Thus in this way it is important to clarify that some of these Shloks are not merely for Acharyas to read and obey but are applicable to all. Therefore all should read and understand the precepts here and evaluate the inner messages, which may apply to other groups of people.

TEXT 126

They shall never sell food grains offered to them by their disciples. However the old grains may be exchanged for new as such exchange is not considered as selling.

They shall never sell land, paddy, barley, sheep, goats, horses, calves, cows or buffalo. **Rajadharma of Mahabharata** explains, 'To sell a goat is to sell *Agni* (fire). To sell a sheep is to sell *Varun* (water) and *Surya* (sun). To sell food is to sell *Prithvi* (Earth or land).' In this way by selling such things we sell away the presiding deities of the things mentioned.

Shatanand explains also that by selling away such things we may put ourselves into difficulties if poverty strikes and so be left with nothing to fend off. Also if one has excess grains then he should give away such grain to Sadhus, Brahmins, beggars and the poor. Thus they should never sell food grains, as that is the best duty.

Old grain may be exchanged for new as that is not considered as selling. Similarly the type of grain may be exchanged for another type (barter). In this way the Grihastha (householder) duty is upheld. Our **Smruti** explain, 'In business, buying and selling are necessary but one should never act to profit selfishly.'

TEXT 127

They shall perform worship of Shree Ganpati on the fourth day of the first half of the month of Bhadarva, and that of Hanuman on the fourteenth day of the second half of the month of Ashwin.

Badrashuklachaturthyaam Cha Karyam Vigneshapoojanam /

The fourth day of *Shuklapaksh* (bright half) of *Bhadarva* should be used to worship **Vignaraja Shree Ganapati** (the dispeller of obstacles). A clay idol of Ganpati should be made on that day for worship and offerings of vermilion powder and sweet balls (*Ladu*) should be made. Ganpati is the incarnation of Shree Krishna and so his worship is worthy.

Bhavishyotara explains the *Pooja-Vidhi* - 'On Bhadarva Sud Choth, one should perform Pooja with great devotion of an idol of Ganpati made from gold or clay. In the early morning, Ganpati should be bathed using white sesame seeds (Tal). In the afternoon, offerings of *Ladu* and *Durvani* (sacred grass) should be made according to one's ability. Those who worship Ganpati on such day overcome all obstacles in life and attain all required fruits of action.'

Ishakrushnachaturdashyaam Karyacha Cha Hanumataha //

The fourteenth day of *Krishnapaksha* (dark half) of month *Aso* - the day renowned for victory and therefore known as '*Isha*' is *Narakchaturdashi* or *Kali Chaudasha*. On such day they should worship **Vir Hanuman**, the great servant of Lord Shree Ram, the immortal and the best amongst the monkey clan who is the greatest of Ekantik Bhakts (pure devotees) of God. He should be worshipped with oil, *Sindhoor* (vermilion powder) and fragranced flowers.

Lord Shree Ramachandra has said, 'Those that perform your Poojan on the 14th day of Ashwini are never sent to hell and become ever so dear to me.' Shatanand concludes by explaining that this again is an ordinary precept, which is applicable to all.

TEXT 128

I have enthroned the two Acharyas as spiritual leaders in order to preserve the religion of all my disciples. They shall initiate to my faith, those male aspirants who are desirous of salvation.

Madashritanam Sarvesham Dharmarakshanhetave /
Gurutve Sthapitbhyaaam Cha Tabhyaam Dikshya Mumukshavaha //128//

Madashrita - my disciples - men and women. Swami Sahajanand has enthroned the Acharyas as Gurus of the Sampraday in order to preserve and protect Dharma. Only *Mumukshs* (desirous of salvation) shall be initiated into the sect. Thus Shree Krishna Mantra Diksha shall be given to those who come to the Acharyas for refuge. Lord Swaminarayan installed the Acharyas as our spiritual leaders, in order to uphold Dharma (righteousness).

All, regardless of caste, who are desirous of salvation, should be initiated into the sect. **Pancharatra** explains, 'Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Sat-Shudras and their wives as well as Sadhus or ascetics with love for Lord Vishnu should be initiated in accordance with rites, by the Guru.'

TEXT 129

They shall see that all disciples conform to their respective Dharmas. They shall treat all saintly persons with respect and study the Sat-Shastras with reverence.

Yathadhikaaram Santhapyaha Sve Sve Dharme Nijashritaha /

The Acharyas should ensure that his disciples stay true to their Dharma and to observe *Swadharm*a according to their individual rights (*Adhikaara*). If an Acharya is unable to do this then the sins of the disciple befall upon him. **Shankha Smruti** explains, 'If a King does not teach and uphold Dharma (in his kingdom) then the sins of his subjects fall upon the king. Similarly a Guru receives the sins of his disciples and a husband, the sins of his wife.' Therefore a Guru is held accountable and responsible for the actions of his disciples, just as a father is held accountable for the actions of his young children.

It is the duty of the Acharya to ensure that his disciples act in accordance with *Bhagwat Dharma* and therefore the responsibility of an Acharya is very great.

Manyaha Santascha Kartavyaha Satshastrabhyasa Adarat //129//

They should respect devotees of Shree Krishna - saints or men (*Sadhupurusha*). They should have firm faith in them and worship them accordingly - *Yathachitam Pujaniyaha*. To do so is the cause of eternal bliss - *Sadarchanasya Sakalsukhetutvaditi*.

Bhagwat explains, 'If they do not worship saints and holy men then they do not receive the full fruits of worship of God.' Other Shastras state simply that those who do not worship Satpurushas are mere animals. 'Therefore worship Brahmarshis (saints) and Satpurushas, for their worship is worship of Myself', explains **God**.

The Acharyas should study the *Vedas* and other *Satshastras* mentioned before. There are four types of study - *Adhyayana* (physical study - reading etc.), *Chintana* (deep thought), *Goshana* (proclamation) and *Pathan* (recitation).

Adhyayan can be mastered only through association with a Guru, but cannot be acquired alone. **Vidura** explains, 'Non-service (to a Guru), to hurry and self-praise are three enemies of learning.' **Manu** adds, 'Non-service to a Guru hinders learning. Just as a person can obtain water (which is inherent in the Earth) by digging, a person who serves a Guru is able to attain the knowledge and learning that a Guru possesses.'

Madhav explains, 'Without the blessing of a Guru, one can never attain knowledge and learning.' One should always learn with an open mind respecting others. Those that do not respect the elders etc. cannot acquire the required knowledge and so face difficulties in their studies and even destruction of their knowledge. **Smruti** adds, 'Laziness, arrogance, intoxication, delusion, impatience, talking, shock and arrogance are the seven enemies of a student.' Hence students should stay away from such things. Also students should not strive for material happiness as it hinders learning also.

Shatanand explains the best time for study is the latter period of nighttime. During such time, one's intellect is said to be at a stage of brilliance and so will excel one's learning ability. **Manu** adds, 'Sleeping during the day wastes intellect (becomes inanimate). Study during the last three hours of nighttime will excel one's learning ability. After studying during the late hours of nighttime, one should not go back to sleep.'

Also gambling, women, laziness and sleep are all obstacles to learning, and so students should stay away from such things. **Smruti** explains further with regards to sleep: 'One should not sleep during the first and last three hours of night time, at both *Sandhyas* (day break and night fall) nor during the daytime.' Thus, these times are forbidden for sleeping in though sleeping generally is not forbidden explains **Bhaskacharya**.

Narad also explains that women are a hindrance to a person's learning and so should stay aloof of women during studies. Indeed Brahmacharya Vrata (vow of celibacy) should be enforced. Also, one should not study during the middle six hours of nighttime.

Acharyas should study the Sat-Shastras as they are Brahmins. **Shruti** explains, 'Brahmins should study the Vedas along with the six annexes to the Vedas (*Vedangas*).' The reason being - 'A Brahmin's penance and learning are his tools to salvation', explains the **Bhagwat**.

Smruti explains, 'From young age, Brahmins should begin their study of Shastras in accordance with time and intellectual ability. Those that do not study face downfall.' **Daankhand** explains, 'Brahmins devoid of knowledge of Vedas and other Shastras are considered as blind.' 'A Brahmin's eyes are Smruti and Shruti. If he is devoid of any one of them then he is one-eyed. If devoid of both then he is totally blind.'

Kamandak explains, 'Cows see with their sense of smell, Brahmins with the Vedas, Kings with their spies and all others with their eyes.' **Bartruhari** explains a Brahmin is bound to degenerate without study or knowledge: 'A king with a wicked secretary, an ascetic through association with the wicked, a son through over fondness or protection, a Brahmin through not studying, a family through a wicked son, good qualities through association with the sinful, a woman through intoxication, a farm through not properly overlooking, love through over affection, friendship through lack of affection, prosperity through unlawfulness and wealth through excessive donation and laziness all face degeneration.'

Bairvi explains, 'Study of true Shastras results in attractiveness of the self. Study leads to peace and tranquillity producing heroism and chivalry and this in turn sustains morality and wise action.' **Vidurji** has said, 'Intellect, birth in a reputed family, control of the senses, knowledge of Shastras, heroism, restraint in speaking, donating according to one's ability and benevolence; these eight qualities suit a person.' **Subhashit Chintamani** explains that knowledge is wealth. **Kashikhand** states simply that a Brahmin is useless without knowledge.

The importance of knowledge is stressed here which really applies to all of us. We all go through *Brahmacharya Ashram* during which time we undergo an education program of some sort. We learn various arts and sciences. However I feel that we fail to satisfy the requirements of studying our Veda

Shastras. We even fail to learn to an acceptable degree our mother tongue language such that we are not able to read our Shastras translated to *Gujarati*. This fact needs to be addressed.

Just as a proper education is often important to secure a good job, study of our Shastras are necessary to build the mind and intellect and develop it so that we can truly understand and experience the nature of God and our purpose in life. All of us are capable of grasping this Vedic knowledge; it is simply a case of applying ourselves and making time for this task. In the end we will definitely benefit by having a better insight into life.

TEXT 130

They shall worship, with due rites, Laxmi-Narayan and other images of Lord Shree Krishna installed by me in the prominent temples.

The Acharyas should serve and worship the Murtis of God installed in the big *Sikhar-Bandh* temples as well as the smaller temples and *Havelis*, by Lord Swaminarayan himself. He mentions Laxmi-Narayan here simply because he wrote the *Shikshapatri* in Vadtal and so the idols of Laxmi-Narayan, who preside in Vadtal temple are remembered.

This does not however imply any superiority or inferiority of any of the forms of God installed by Lord Swaminarayan, and so all other forms – Nar-Narayan, Gopinathji etc. should all be equally worshipped. All such forms should be served with love as explained by Vithalnathji, in accordance with Vedic rites.

Shatanand explains that this precept applies to all as God has said, ‘Serve me with respect, bowing before me surrendering all parts of their body and serve in temples like a servant’, thus specifying the ideals of a Bhakt.

Lord Swaminarayan during his stay upon the Earth built six major temples, installing various forms of God in them. At *Ahmedabad* and *Bhuj* he installed Murtis of *Nar-Narayan*. At *Vadtal*, *Laxmi-Narayan* as well as an image of himself called *Hari-Krishna Maharaj* were installed. *Madan-Mohanji* at *Dholera*, *Radha-Raman* at *Junagadh* and *Gopinathji Maharaj* at *Gadhada* were installed by the Lord.

These are the presiding deities at each of the six temples. Along with these, Murtis of *Radha-Krishna*, *Dharma-Bhakti*, *Surya-Narayan*, *Siddheswar Mahadev* and others were also installed. Therefore service of such forms of God has been advocated here.

TEXT 131

They shall give food to those people who come to the temple in need of food and treat them with due hospitality according to their means.

If any poor or needy person comes into any of the God’s temples, then they should be given food and water and welcomed with respect. They should be given help, fruits, raw foods or cooked foods according to their ability.

Atri Smruti explains, ‘A guest or stranger should never be left without food’, hence in general terms anybody that comes to us for such help should be replenished and indeed any guest who comes to our house should be made welcome and offered such hospitality. ‘*Undaan*’ or donation of food is considered a great charity. One can refer to Anushasan Parva of Mahabharat for the benefits of such act.

Help should be offered indiscriminately especially in temples as all have the rights to Prasad (remanance of offerings).

TEXT 132

They shall establish educational institutions and appoint Brahmin scholars to impart true knowledge upon the Earth, as propagation of true knowledge is an act of great benediction.

They shall build schools, colleges and other such educational institutions, with living quarters for students. They should appoint Brahmins learned in poetry, grammar and the Sat-Shastras to impart this knowledge to them. These Brahmins should be looked after, giving them a place to dwell etc. In this way true *Vedantic* knowledge should be imparted to the students as such act results in great *Punya* (benediction).

Shatanand explains that to give knowledge to somebody is comparable to giving eyes to the blind - such is the *Punya* involved. **Hemadri** explains, 'Those who give food, oil for *Divo* (fire light) and clothing to a student receive the fruits of all good action.' **Agni Purana** explains that by helping a student through offering food, place to reside, etc. one receives the fruits of performing a *Yagna*. Similarly **Sahitya Satak** explains, 'Those who give their wealth, shelter, food, oil, clothing, place to reside and books to a student receive great fruits which one cannot attain even through difficult or painful actions.' In this way '*Vidhya Daan*' is considered great.

Special Dharmas of Wives of Acharyas (133-134)

TEXT 133

The wives of the Acharyas, with the permission of their husbands shall initiate, preach and give Shree Krishna Mantra to females only.

The wives of the Acharyas Ayodhyaprasad and Raghuvir - **Virja** and **Sunanda** (and similarly the wives of following Acharyas) should offer initiation and preach to women only, and not to men. They should do so with the permission of their husbands. They should preach the duties of married women (*Suvasini*) and widowed women (*Vidhva*).

They should never preach without the permission of their husbands. **Parashar** explains, 'Those who preach, donate, perform pilgrimage or perform a Vrat (religious vow) without the permission of their husband receives no fruits of action.'

Our Swaminarayan Sampraday is almost unique in the fact that we have a '*Female-Guru*' to preach to and initiate women. This is very rarely seen. The *Acharya-Patni* initiates *Tyagi-Stris* (female ascetics) just as the Acharya initiates *Sadhus* into the sect. By the permission of the Acharya-Patni, these ascetic women preach to all women of the Sampraday. This I feel shows the greatness of Lord Swaminarayan who realized the need for prominent women so that women, through association with such ascetic women can benefit also.

TEXT 134

They shall not touch, talk or even show their faces to males, except those who are closely related to them.

This is the final Shlok aimed at the Acharyas and their wives. The wives should stay aloof of men who are not closely related to them (Pasa Sambandhi). They should not even show their faces to males who are not closely related to them. Shatanand explains that this directive is to protect her Dharma. **Manusmriti** explains, 'A women, even though a *Pativrata* (devoted to her husband) or endowed with righteous qualities can degrade in the company of men.'

Having discussed this Shlok with saints, it is also the case that if a woman's looks or actions cause a man to develop lustful tendencies then the woman can be held to blame to some degree and therefore the directive of not showing her face to other men is also to save primarily the Acharya-Patni from downfall, but also to prevent men from such tendencies. The Acharya-Patni here is an example to us all, showing the strict segregation laws that apply in our Sampraday.

Special Dharmas of Grihastas (Householders) - (135-156)

TEXT 135

My disciples who are male householders shall not touch widows except those who are closely related to them.

Grihastha (householder) duties are additionally given now. Householder men should not touch *Vidhvas* (widowed women) who are not closely related to them - i.e. who are not *Pasa Sambandhi*, such that the death of whom does not result in observing *Sutak* (period of untouchability).

The reason for this is that a widow has been labeled as '*Amangal*' or inauspicious. **Satsangi Jivan** explains that they are Amangal as their husband has died who is *Ardhanga* (one half of the whole). Thus in this way, just as a person would be termed Amangal if he has a part of his body cut off, a widow is considered Amangal as she is without husband. **Skand Puran** explains, 'Out of all the things that are inauspicious, a widow is considered the most inauspicious. Therefore intelligent men should not touch widows who are not their close relative.' There it is also explained, 'The blessings of a widowed woman is considered a curse.' Shatanand also explains that looking at a widow is also inauspicious and to destroy the sins of looking at a widowed woman, one should meditate upon Lord Narayan.

Saints have also explained that widows have been called inauspicious in order to protect their Dharma of Brahmcharya (celibacy). As widows, they are considered as servants of God, who are to spend the rest of their lives dedicated in devotion to God. Therefore to prevent degradation through association with males, they have been called inauspicious to prevent other men from interacting with them and ultimately causing them to veer from their primary duty of service to God.

TEXT 136

They shall never remain in a secluded place even with their mother, sister or daughter who are of young age, except in unavoidable circumstances and shall never give away their wives to anybody.

Matra Svastra Duhitra Va Vijane Tu Vayahasthaya /
Anapadi Na Taiha Stheyam Karyam Danam Na Yoshitaha //136//

Shatanand explains that to look at a young woman in even an unsecluded place can develop lustful passions. Therefore in order to prevent such deterioration of the mind accruing from such situations, one should avoid such places and situations.

This is even so for women who are closely related to you. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, 'Women are like fire and men like *Ghee* (clarified butter often used to fuel fire - in the case of a *Divo*). Therefore men should never stay in a secluded place with their daughters. They should stay in the company of other women for only the time absolutely necessary.'

Skand Puran says, 'Men should not stay in a secluded place with their mother, daughter or sister as overwhelming sensual desires can lead even elders to delusion.' **Prabodhchandrodaya** and **Shrungar Satak** both explain, 'Lust can arise through the company of youthful women even in an unsecluded place.' For these reasons it is imperative that segregation applies.

This is why in temples of Lord Swaminarayan we sit separately and indeed where possible, separate temples exist for males and females. Even the strongest of us is likely to face downfall in the company of women and so these commandments are for our own benefit in order to preserve personal duty.

It is also written here that one should not give away their wife to anybody (this was often done in the past in order to raise money etc.). If he acts contrary to this commandment then man destroys the 'Pativrata' duty that a woman is supposed to uphold, which then results in a great sin for the husband. **Dana Mayukh of Skand Puran** explains, 'There are nine things which should never be given away (even in times of necessity): (1) All of ones possessions, if they have family to support still, (2) one's own wife, (3) those who come to you for help or support, (4) ones savings, (5) tendencies of the family, (6) your agony or afflictions, (7) something given to you by others for safe keeping, (8) one's wife's wealth and (9) one's own children. Those who give away such things are foolish and will have to intone for their sins.'

TEXT 137

They shall not associate with a woman who has contacts with rulers.

One should not associate (by talking or sitting) with a woman who has links with a King or ruler of some sort, either through business affairs or social affairs. **Mahabharat's Virat Parva** explains, 'Sensible people never keep friendship with a woman who has contact with a King. Those women who have access to a King's quarters, those who are an enemy of his and who do not support the King should never be associated with.' **Raj Dharma** explains, 'One should not associate with a Queen, a woman who has personal relations with a King or a female servant of a King.' The reason being that unnecessary complication can arise through such association.

TEXT 138

They shall welcome and entertain anyone who comes to their house as a guest with food, drink, etc., according to their means. They shall perform with due respect, sacrificial rites to deities and oblatinal rites to ancestors, according to their ability.

All should treat an **Atithi** (guest, stranger or anyone who comes to you for help or support) with due respect. The word Atithi simply means one who comes at an unspecified or unfixed time. Thus anyone who comes to you abruptly or comes for food or water should be welcomed. Here Shatanand explains that Atithi corresponds to a '*Bhikshuka*'.

Skand Puran explains, 'The following six are Dharma Bhikshukas: (1) one who crosses your path, (2) somebody who is weak, (3) a student, (4) one who looks after a Guru, (5) a Sanyasin (renounced person) and (6) a Brahmchari (celibate).' Thus such persons should be given food and water and welcomed according to one's ability.

Shatanand explains - **Abhyarchaha Abhivandanpurvakam Santoshariya Ityatha** - they should be made welcome by greeting such person with *Namaskar*. **Kashi Khand** explains, 'The Punya obtained by donating cows (*Godaan*) is obtained by merely according a warm welcome to a Bhikshuka and offering food, water, shelter and the like.'

Parashar Smruti explains, 'Those who have welcomed an Athithi with love have pleased God.' **Shrimad Bhagwat** also explains, 'Those houses, whose water, door mat, land, owner and servants have entertained righteous men - even though they are poor, are lucky as they are destined for fortune.' It is also said there, 'Houses that have never been blessed by the dust from the feet of God's Bhaktas are no more than mere trees for snakes to reside within, even though such houses may be prosperous with fortune.'

'Those houses that have never offered even water to Atithis are like houses frosted over by the cold season.' 'Those who do not welcome Atithis are consigned to *Paryavartan* hell, where they are subjected to such intense pains as having their eyes pierced by birds.' 'Those Atithi who leave without proper welcome take away with them the Punya accrued by that household.' **Shanti Parva** explains, 'Even one's enemy should be welcomed, should he come for shelter.'

Secondly, rites pertaining to Gods - **Deva Karma** should be performed to Brahma and other Gods. *Tarpan* (ceremonial offerings of water), *Vaishvadeva* and other such rituals should be performed. Similarly, rites pertaining to one's ancestors - **Pitru Karma** should be performed. These include *Tarpan* and *Shraadh*.

These Pitru Karmas should be performed according to whether ones father has passed away or is living and according to the health of their father. **Smruti** explains, 'Those with foolish intellect, who do not perform Dev and Pitru Karmas according to their wealth will without a doubt, end up in *Rairav Narak* (a particular type of hell).'

In general terms, Dev Karma includes Poojan and is performed in order to please God. Shraadh is derived from the word Shraddha (faith). Therefore it is the act of offering something with faith to one's ancestors. By so doing, the ancestors receive the fruits of such action and in return we receive their blessings.

Therefore by performing such rituals or by donating money in the name of parents/forefathers, the fruits of such action is reaped by the ancestor giving them a better future in the after world and we are given blessings by them which will benefit us in this world.

My disciples shall render life long services to their parents, Guru and ailing persons according to their ability.

Yavajjivam Cha Shushrusha Karya Matuha Piturguroha /
Rogartasya Manushasya Yathashakti Cha Mamkauha //139//

One should offer life long service to their mother - *Matuha* (who gives birth to them), their stepmother, their father - *Pitura* and their *Guru/Acharya*. **Manu** explains, 'The pains suffered by a mother and father through the birth of a child cannot be repaid in even a hundred years. Therefore service to one's parents and Acharya should be performed readily with affection. The happiness of these three persons fulfills all penance and austerities. Indeed service to them is the greatest of austerities. They are worthy of service, as they are *Veda-Rupa* and *Agni-Rupa*.'

Bhagwat Puran explains, 'Those who do not serve or look after their elders, parents, righteous women, young children, Guru, Brahmin and one who comes to them for shelter, though they have the wealth and ability to do so, are considered as corpses though they are living.'

The **Devas** have explained - *Putranaam Hi Paro Dharmaha Pitrushushrushanam Sataam* - 'A child's highest duty is to serve his mother, father and *Sat Purusha* (righteous people).' **Skand Puran** further explains the consequences of not serving, 'One should serve their mother, father and Guru daily with great faith according to their means. Those who do not are sent to *Rairav Narak* (a hell).'

One should also serve those who are ill or downtrodden. **Parashar Smruti** explains, 'One should always have compassion for those inflicted by pain through illness, fire or weapons. They should be served daily according to their ability by offering food, water, medicine etc.' **Yagnavalkya** adds, 'To serve the sick is equivalent to donating a cow (*Godana*)'. 'To massage the feet of the tired, to serve the sick, to worship the Devas, to wash the feet of Brahmins and to pick up the plate used by a Brahmin after he has eaten, results in the *Punya* derived from donating a cow.'

This is a very important Shlok of the *Shikshapatri*. It is one of the pillars of our *Hindu Sanatan Dharma*. To serve ones parents until that day when they breathe their last breath is one of the most important duties of man. This is the essence of our Hindu Dharma that preaches service and compassion.

Shastras explain that all righteous acts are rendered futile if one does not ultimately serve their parents. Serving one's parents is a way in which we can also serve God, as one of the nine types of *Bhakti* - '*Pada Sevanam*' is quite simply service to one's parents, elders, Guru and saints. It is said that service to one's parents is alone service to the 330 million *Devtas (Tentris Karore Devta)*. Furthermore it is written that God is unwilling to accept the worship offered by those who fail to worship their parents.

Lord Shree Krishna has said, 'This human body which is able to realize the four *Purusharthas*, who have been brought into this world, looked after, cherished and cared for by the love and devotion of their mother and father; such love by parents should never be forgotten. Those who have been blessed by their parents through service unto them receive the favour of God.' Therefore we should be ever grateful to such loving parents.

We only have to look at the life of Lord Shree Rama to understand the duties of a son, who was willing to leave the kingdom without question due to mother Kaikeyi's wishes. Not forgetting Lord Swaminarayan himself who was so eager to leave his home and take up asceticism but would not do so until he completed his service to his parents.

Lord Swaminarayan here specifically mentions parents, Guru and the ill. Why we should serve our parents is obvious but why service to one's Guru? A Guru is considered as our second mother. The first mother gives birth to our physical self, where as a Guru gives birth to our mental self. The Guru is the guiding hand that sees us through a spiritual and righteous life by developing the soul, mind and intellect. It is he who develops our true self and instills faith and devotion to God within us. For this reason, life long service to one's Guru is also necessary.

Similarly to serve the ill bears great fruits and is a sign of great compassion which suits a person – as the saying goes, *Daya Dharma Ka Mula Hai*. To serve somebody in need or suffering will undoubtedly bring peace and happiness to both the server and served.

I conclude by mentioning that very famous Shlok:

Matru Devo Bhava - Pitru Devo Bhava /
Acharya Devo Bhava - Atithi Devo Bhava //

- The **Upanishads** command, 'Mother, father, Acharya and stranger (or guest) should be served and honored as Gods.'

It is disheartening to see that many children do not serve their parents in this manner and often fall out into arguments resulting in children renouncing their parents or even being abusive towards their parents. The debt owed to parents is so great that it is cannot be repaid and so we should strive to serve them as much as we can - without question or excuse. The joy of one's parents is ultimately the joy of God.

TEXT 140

They shall take vocations suitable to their caste and class, according to their abilities. Farmers should never castrate their bulls.

One should act and take up work suitable to their *Varna* (caste) and *Ashram* (class). Thus householders in particular should work for a living finding a suitable job dependent upon their skills, strengths, weaknesses etc. Those that do not act this way face ridicule, disrespect and suffering as a result.

Yagnavalkya explains, 'Youth, age, intellect, wealth, speech, attire, study of Shastras, family and action; without hypocrisy or fraudulence should be used to maintain ones livelihood.' Thus such attributes can be used to improve their livelihood. **Vidurji** adds, 'Those who act in accordance with their strengths and do not wish for things they are incapable of attaining and who do not grieve for the dead or become deluded during times of hardship have the intellect of *Pandits*.'

Laghucharnakya has said, 'Starting an unsuitable task, dispute or separation from one's family, competing with those stronger than oneself and confidence or trust in women are four gateways to death.'

Shatanand explains that the use of the word '*Udhyam*' is used to suggest that righteous acts or work should be performed so that one can enjoy bliss in the after life. Therefore it could be interpreted that we should not overwork ourselves such that we do not have the time for devotion to God. Thus work is not simply a means to generate income for material happiness in this world. Instead one should work for a living such that it is not an obstacle to bliss in the after life. **Vidurniti** explains, 'One should do during the day that which brings peace at night. One should act in the eight months in such a way so that during the four months of *Chaturmaas*, one is untroubled and at peace. During youth, one should live such a life

that during old age one does not encounter difficulty. They should act in their lifetime such that in the after life they can enjoy bliss.' Thus lawful and righteous acts are stipulated here for ease of living.

This clearly states the necessity for living a lawful life and working for a living such that ones duty or Dharma is not overstepped. One should try to obey the rules of Ahimsa and from intoxicants that are the pillars of our Sampraday and so stay away from even the trade of such things. Manusmriti states clearly that one who sells meat is also considered a slayer and so it is unacceptable for a true Satsangi to generate his income and livelihood from such things (in my opinion the same can be said for the trade of alcohol and other such intoxicants). Not only is such an act sinful, but it will bring nothing but misery to the family. We may feel that the money is good but the consequence of such act is much greater.

This Shlok also suggests that we should not sit idle and lazy. We should work for a living and work to our capacity and not strive to work over and beyond that which we are capable of. Many are bent on expanding their business and making more money but are often incapable of providing the necessary service at the end of the day. In many cases, there striving to expand is at the consequence of fulfilling the needs of their family, social and religious duties.

Finally it is commanded that one should never castrate bulls and the like. **Parashar** says, 'Farmers should put to work bulls with steady and firm body, who are without disease and well fed; they should not be castrated, impotent nor weak, but should be strong with vitality.'

TEXT 141

They shall store food and accumulate wealth for their future requirements according to their circumstances and their abilities. Those who own cattle shall store sufficient stock of fodder.

Shatanand explains that they should store sufficient wealth and food according to the household's yearly requirements. Food here is understood as grains and the like and wealth (*Dhan*) is understood as money. Similarly sufficient fodder should be stored for animals under your care.

It is the responsibility of the householder to calculate his income/expenditure and to store the necessary reserves so that they do not encounter difficulties in the near future. Shatanand offers some financial advice saying that one should buy and store foodstuff when the price of food is low. Similarly wealth should be accumulated at favourable times.

A simple lesson in economics is taught by Lord Swaminarayan here. Many of the subsequent Shloks are similar in that they have very little to do with religious duty or ideals but are there for the benefit of man. They are there to prevent unnecessary hardships befalling us. They teach sensible and optimum living. They teach the importance of saving and not rash spending thus they are very much 'common sense' Shloks.

TEXT 142

They shall keep cows and other cattle only if they are capable of taking care of them with fodder, water etc. otherwise they shall not keep them.

Any animal, be it cattle (cows, bulls, buffalo, horse), parrot, dog etc should not be kept should you not have the means to look after them with fodder, water, or any other food stuff required by such animals. In

similar fashion one should have adequate facilities for keeping such animals – i.e. stables etc. Facilities should be such that the animals are comfortable and at peace.

If at any stage one is unable to maintain the level of standards for keeping the animals then they should be given away to those with adequate facilities. **Parashar** explains, 'Prosperity is destroyed where animals sigh through hunger, thirst, punishment, and through staying in a place which is unfit for living (mosquito infested etc). The Punya of a household is destroyed where animals are tied up and thirsty, a woman during her menses resides and where God is left unworshipped at evening time.' One should refer to Parashar Smruti for further information upon this.

Shatanand has clarified that any animal - be it cattle or a pet of some kind must be looked after properly. If one is unable to do this then they should not keep such animals. This really brings about the issue of animal cruelty to light. Questions of keeping a parrot locked up in a small cage for personal amusement when clearly it must be discomfoting for the bird are addressed. Some animals are often tortured. A recent study showed that *an overwhelming majority of pets were not given adequate care and a good proportion of which were given 'bad' care.* The report concluded that the reasons for this were overwhelmingly the fact that pet owners did not accurately know how to care for such animals.

TEXT 143

They shall not undertake any sort of dealings pertaining to land or money even with their sons or friends without a written document duly witnessed.

All transfer of farming land, land, house and wealth such as gold should always be done in a proper manner with proper solicited documentation - witnessed by other people. In all such business matters, an appropriate document should be written and signed before property etc is transferred to others. **Yagnavalkya** explains a suitable witness to be used for such actions, 'One who performs penance, is charitable, from a reputed family, honest, obeys Dharma, unbiased, who has children and is reasonably wealthy - such a person should be used as a witness. Those who obey the *Shruti-Smruti*, and live in accordance with their *Jat* and *Varna* (caste laws) should be accepted as a witness.'

Yagnavalkya further explains the structure of such a document to be used, 'First and foremost the name of the lender should be written. Then the date and details about the borrower (name, class, caste, family details, etc.) should be provided. At the end of the document, the receiver should sign the document along with the witnesses to the agreement (borrower and witness names should be signed inclusive of father's name).'

'Those who do not possess the necessary skills to write out such a document should have one written out by somebody else.' The body of the document should contain the terms and conditions of the transactions. **Lagucharankya** explains who should write such a document; 'He who is of good intellect, a good spokes person, patient, light handed, writes with clarity and who is conversant with legal affairs should be used to write the document.'

Thus those who obey these rules will never face complication in their business affairs. Lord Swaminarayan specifies that even in affairs with one's own son or friend, the proper legal process should be carried out. This is because such business affairs can often lead to arguments. This is evident today when a child may act unscrupulously for self gain against his own father in order to swindle money or wealth out of his father.

TEXT 144

One shall not rely merely on oral agreements with regards to amounts payable by either party in matrimonial affairs, but such agreements shall be in writing and duly witnessed.

In weddings, at the time of *Kanyadaan*, similar documentation should be written as outlined in the previous Shlok. Never should a verbal agreement be accepted. Shatanand explains that those who do not act in this manner face difficulty and often dispute between families.

TEXT 145

They shall spend money according to their income. Those who spend more than their income put themselves into severe difficulty.

Ayadravyanusarena Vyavaha Karyo Hi Sarvada /
Anyatha Tu Mahad Dukham Bhavedityavadharyataam ||145||

They should always (*Sarvada*) spend (*Karya*) money (*Dravya*) for the household (*Vyavaha*) according (*Anusara*) to their income (*Aya*). A simple but necessary Shloka. Thus Lord Swaminarayan forbids overspending and also according to Shatanand, under spending as well. Hence one should not be greedy with their money. Their excess income should be used in donation.

Those that overspend beyond their capacity (their income) face difficulties. **Vrudha Charankya** explains, 'The best wisdom (or advice) is to spend less than their income.' 'Those whose income is for four but who spend for five or six (in terms of providing for such number of people) become *Dharmabhrashta* (betrayers of their duty).' **Kamakhanda Niti** explains, 'Those who spend excessively and repay the shortfall by borrowing money from elsewhere are consuming poison.'

This is a straightforward lesson in Economics and personal accounting. Those who spend excessively have to live in debt leading to social costs of depression, unrest and general unwell. Such foolish spending makes the whole family suffer as a result. Similarly, those who are wealthy and have excess income should spend this excess income so that all can benefit from it. This can be done by donating to various good causes or organising religious festivals such as a '*Katha*' or '*Yagna*'. By so doing, one cleanses their wealth of impurities and also is replenished by receiving fruits of such righteous action.

TEXT 146

They shall keep daily records of their income and expenditure relating to social affairs in their own legible handwriting.

They should daily maintain an income-expenditure analysis of their business and social affairs. The daily accounts should be written (prepared) in their own handwriting to avoid deceit or fraud at the hands of others. **Rajadharma** explains, 'Those who do not keep daily accounts, or who maintain illegible accounts can be accused of wrong doing in financial matters by the deceitful. Such people can swindle money from you and thus cause your downfall.'

Proper accounts are vital, especially in businesses in this day and age. Those who do not keep a record in this manner put themselves at risk of ruin.

TEXT 147

They shall donate one tenth of their earnings, money or food grains, to Lord Shree Krishna. Those with insufficient income shall offer one twentieth.

Nijavruttyudyampraptadhanadhanyaditascha Taiha /
Arpyo Dashanshaha Krushnaya Vinshonashastivaha Durbalauha ||147||

From their earnings or their source of livelihood (*Vruti*), money or food grains (*Dhan - Dhaanya*) which has been obtained through work or business (*Udhyam*), should be donated to Shree Krishna according to their income (a tenth of their earnings if affordable or a twentieth).

Dhan should be understood as money, land etc and Dhaanya as grains of rice, cotton etc. Shatanand explains that donation of one's tenth or twentieth part of earnings literally means going to the temple one's Ishtadev (which you are comfortable with) and offering your wealth to Shree Krishna therein.

Shatanand clarifies that *Durbal* here is those who have greater costs in relation with their earnings. (E.g. In some places the cost of living may be quite high and the earnings of people may be minimal.) Therefore these people should in such circumstance donate a twentieth of their earnings. Shatanand Muni states clearly that donation of such wealth is for the purification of one's earnings and wealth.

Shrimad Bhagwat says, 'All who desire peace, well being and innumerable fruits of action (Punya) should donate.' **Yagnavalkya** explains Daan or donation as the very livelihood of man: 'To perform Yagnas, understand the Vedas and to donate are the livelihoods of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. Brahmins should aid in performing Yagnas, teaching the Vedas and advising upon donations. A Kshatriyas foremost duty is to maintain and protect his subjects. Similarly a Vaishya should farm, lend, buy, sell and maintain animals. Shudras should serve the *Dwijas* (upper three classes - the twice born). Those Shudras unable to maintain a living through such service should also work for a living by learning a new craft or buying and selling.'

Deval Smruti further explains the duties of a Shudra: 'A Shudra's duties are serving the *Dwijas*, refraining from sinful acts, growing grains, maintaining animals, lifting or carrying things, selling, drawing or other art work, dancing, singing or playing musical instruments (flute, Mrudanga etc) - they should live off such disciplines.'

Shreemad Bhagwat explains, 'Through time, land becomes purified. Similarly through bathing, the body; Sanskars, the feotus; penance, the senses; Yagnas, the mind; donation, ones wealth; and through study the soul is purified.' **Danakhand** explains, 'One should give charity to those who are worthy.' However the greatest beneficiary is none other than **Lord Shree Krishna**. **Narad** in **Bhagwat** has therefore said, 'The greatest of beneficiaries is God himself, O King! Decided by the wise, this Shree Krishna should be worshipped first and foremost in this *Rajasuyagna* (initiation of a King ceremony), whom through his omnipresence exists throughout this universe.'

Hemadri explains, 'One's earnings should be split into five parts. Three parts of which should be used for livelihood and two parts for Dharma (religion, donation etc).' **Mahabharat** explains, 'Somebody with ten cows should give away one cow. Similarly those with a hundred cows should give ten and those with a thousand cows should give one hundred cows. The fruits of each are the same.' Therefore it is not a case of quantity given but what proportion is given.

Parashar explains, 'A king should be given one-sixth, God one-twentieth and Brahmins one-thirty-third of one's income. By so doing one does not incur sin.' Those that do not donate in this way in order to

purify their wealth are considered as senseless fools with little intellect. As a result their Dharma, Bhakti and Gnaan are all reduced to nothingness and great pains befall them, says Shatanand.

Although Lord Swaminarayan wrote that a tenth or twentieth should be donated, other Rishis have written differently: **Deval** has explained, 'A quarter should be donated, a quarter saved and half used for daily expenditure needs.' **Mokshadharma** explains, 'Earnings should be split six ways. One part donated, one part saved, one part offered to God and the rest used for daily expenditure.' **Angir** says, 'God's share should always be taken out first and foremost, even if one may experience financial difficulty.'

None should take the attitude that they will donate some time in the future. They should always donate with love and dedication. It is not how much you donate but with what love you donate with, which is of importance. They should feel that it is their duty to donate and repay God the great debt that is owed. God has given infinitely and only a fool cannot see this and feel that he has nothing to repay God.

One should never donate with an ego in order to make them more popular. Nor should they donate with any expectation. By giving a tenth to God we should in real terms feel that God has given us ninety percent and kept ten percent for himself. More broadly a tenth of everything you do should be donated either to God or to those that are less fortunate than ourselves, as compassion for others is a great duty. Therefore ten percent of our *Vrata, Japp, Tapp, Yoga* etc should be offered.

TEXT 148

The concluding ceremonies of Vratas such as Ekadashi and others shall be performed and celebrated as prescribed in religious scriptures and according to their means. The concluding ceremonies, so performed, fulfil one's aspirations.

In conclusion to various *Vrats* (disciplines) such as *Ekadashi*, one hundred thousand *Pradikshan* (circumambulation), *Dandvat* (prostration), *Mantra Japp* or *Purascharan* (silent reading), one should perform *Udhyapan*. In *Udhyapan* one may donate cows, gold etc. They may feed Brahmins or perform Mahapooja of their *Ishtadev*.

They should perform *Udhyapan* according to their ability as outlined in *Shastras*. Those who do not perform this do not receive the complete fruits of their labour. **Nandi Purana** explains, 'One should perform *Udhyapan* at the beginning, middle or end of a *Vrat*. Without such *Udhyapan*, they do not receive the fruits from their *Vrat*. If *Udhyapan* is not specified for a particular *Vrat* then Mahapooja, Brahmin Bhojan or donation of cows or wealth to God should be performed to mark the end of their *Vrat*.'

TEXT 149

In the month of Shraavana, they shall worship with reverence Mahadeva, with Bilva-Patras and the like, or ask others to worship Mahadeva on their behalf.

Kartavyam Karaniyam Va Shraavane Masi Sarvatha /
Bilvapatradibhiha Pritya Shrimahadevapoojanam //149//

Shatanand explains that such worship to Lord Shiva should always be performed with the greatest of love and respect. If you are yourself incapable of such worship then worship through a Brahmin will suffice.

Shiv Puran explains, 'In the month of *Shraavan*, those who with deep devotion, worship Shiva through *Abhishek* (ceremonious bathing) or with *Bilva- Patra* (leaves), fulfil all aspirations. There is nothing in this world that they cannot achieve through such worship. Therefore one should never allow *Shraavan Maas* to pass without worship to Shiva.'

Padma Puran explains, 'In the month of *Kartik*, one should worship Lord Vishnu using *Tulsi-Patra* and in the month of *Shraavan* they should worship Lord Shiva with *Bilva-Patra*. Offering the leaves as they chant Gods name, they attain the highest level of devotion and worship.' **Upamanyu** explains a method for those incapable of such worship themselves, 'In the month of *Shraavan*, those who daily perform Darshan of Lord Shiva in the evening, receive the fruits of performing Poojan of Shiva.'

It is said that during *Shraavan Maas*, Lord Shiva performs great penance and meditation upon God Shree Hari attaining *Samadhi* state. By performing Poojan of *Sada Shiva*, we too are able to have Darshan of Paramatma as he himself enjoys in *Samadhi State*, through his favour. This is the reason for worship of Lord Mahadev, who is both the greatest of Vaishnavas as well as being one and the same as Narayan.

Worship of Shiva does not in any way hinder our worship to our Ishtadev but helps to strengthen our devotion for God Supreme. This is the greatness of worship of Shiva in *Shraavan Maas*.

TEXT 150

They shall never borrow money from their Acharyas or from the temples of Shree Krishna nor shall they borrow, for their social use utensils, ornaments, clothes and other articles owned by Acharyas or temples.

One should never incur debt with their Acharya or temple. In general terms, one should not take out a loan and thus incur debt. **Angir** explains, 'Never should one take out a loan unless circumstance such as death prevails. One should avoid the wealth of a Guru or Dev just like they would avoid poison.'

Similarly they should never borrow tools, utensils, raw materials, etc. for personal use in their home, business etc. Therefore cooking utensils, jewellery, clothing or money should never be borrowed from temples for personal use. **Yama in Prayaschit Mayukha** explains further, 'Householders, who take bricks, wood, stone or metals for personal use in their home, suffer great consequences. Householders, for their personal well being, should not accept clothing, utensils, wealth or grain from God, Guru, Brahmin or Tapasvi. They may however accept items if given in good faith for services rendered, as no sin is incurred in such circumstance.'

TEXT 151

When going to temples or visiting Gurus or saints for Darshan, they shall never eat anything given free of charge by others, either in temples or en-route, because such free food given by others takes away one's Punya. They shall eat food bought with their own money.

When going to visit Shree Krishna (at a temple), *Guru-Acharya* or a devotee of God with saintly qualities, one should never eat food given by others as such food destroys ones *Punya*. Here the word '*Paraan*' is used to indicate food from others except that which has been begged (*Bhiksha*). **Smruti** explains, 'By

eating the food from another person or source during the performance of a penance, *Yagna*, pilgrimage etc, the fruits of such labour are given away to that person.'

An interesting point is we should never abuse the use of a temple for personal gain. Benefits we receive from a temple should be compensated for accordingly - especially in '*Jamarvaar Beth*' when in many cases, people may not adequately give for what they receive.

TEXT 152

They shall pay the agreed remuneration, in cash or kind, to persons employed by them and under no circumstance pays less than the agreed amount. They shall not keep secret the matters related with repayments of debts and their *Kanyadaan* (gifts given at the time of marriage). They shall have no dealings with wicked persons.

Before agreeing on employment, the employer should sit with the employee and outline exactly how much he will be paid for such job (a job description outlining his duties should be provided). Employers should stick to the wages agreed and pay the exact amount on time. Those that do not act in this way face misery and their mind, intellect, etc, all face destruction.

Narad in Mitakshara explains, 'Servants or employees should always be paid the agreed remuneration. They should be paid either before, during or after the job is completed.' **Garud Puran** explains the consequences; 'Those who do not pay the agreed remuneration become endowed in sin and are never able to enjoy peace and happiness.'

Secondly, one should never keep secret the repayment of debts, their family background or *Kanyadaan*. **Parashar** states this fact succinctly also. **Kashikhand** explains further, 'A committed sin, a loan taken out, a loan repaid, ones ancestors, something purchased, something sold, *Kanyadaan* or a quality or promotion; these nine are worthy of broadcast. Other things should always be concealed.' **Yagnavalkya** additionally explains, 'After the repayment of a debt, the original document should be torn or a new document written confirming the repayment of the debt. This should be done in the presence of a witness.'

The final message is to refrain from business dealings with those who commit sin, who are not devotees of God and those with challenged intellect. **Subhashit Chintamani** explains, 'Who, after becoming wealthy does not become arrogant and egotistical? Who does not become miserable through the enjoyment of sensual pleasures? Upon this earth, whose mind can a woman not break? Who is dear to a King? Who, is not affected by time? Which beggar is respected or reversed from his ways? Who can be happy by listening to the wicked and sinful?' Therefore one should always renounce the company of those that are sinful and wicked. Even if such a person is endowed with qualities of knowledge etc, they should still refrain from the company of such people.

The reason for this is that the company of such people will result in our mind and actions becoming polluted with the unrighteousness of such sinful people. Business dealings with such people will never amount to happiness and success but will invariably result in misery.

TEXT 153

In the event of a natural disaster or harassment by a ruler or wicked persons, where one cannot uphold one's honour or protect one's life and possessions, one should leave such place.

One should leave the place that they reside within, if some natural disaster strikes, poverty or unfavourable times (*Duskalasya*) strike or if one is harassed (*Upadrav*) in such place due to a wicked ruler. Similarly they should leave such place if one loses their honour or reputation (*Laaj*), wealth (*Dhan*) or even their life (*Pran*). This is the best advice, to save oneself from such tyranny by leaving such place.

TEXT 154

Even if the place is their native land or inherited estate, my wise householder devotees should renounce such place immediately and reside elsewhere where they can live happily without harassment.

Even if the place they reside is where they and their ancestors have resided, they should leave such place. **Manusmriti** explains, 'One should never reside in a place where there is mass abandonment of Dharma, which is plagued, where there is harassment and which is full of unrighteous people.'

Charankya Niti Shastra explains, 'Lions, wise people, and elephants leave their place of habitation when suffering erupts. However crows, unwise people and deer never leave such place resulting in great misery.' Thus wise people change their place of habitation in such circumstances. *Sa Desho Yatra Jiviyate* - 'Desh is a place where one can live happily at peace.'

TEXT 155

My wealthy Satsangis shall perform non-violent Yagnas for propitiating Vishnu. They shall feed Brahmins and ascetics in places of pilgrimage and also on auspicious days.

Additional duties for the wealthy householders are given here over the final two Shloks of Grihastha Dharma. *Adhya* (wealthy) householders should perform *Ahimsa Yagnas* (non-violent sacrifices). The *Vaishnavas*, whose main deity is Lord Vishnu should perform *Vishnuyaga* (sacrificial offerings to propitiate Shree Vishnu), **Maharshis** have explained, 'The only path to bliss for wealthy householder's is to perform *Yagnas* using the wealth bestowed upon them by God.'

Such rites should be performed at *Tirths* (places of pilgrimage) where Maharshis have established temples of God. One should perform such rites at *Punyasthans* (place where one can obtain benediction), where rivers famed in Purans flow, on auspicious days such as *Parva* (end of the fortnight), *Surya Sankranti*, etc.

During such rites they should feed *Brahmins* and *Sadhus* who are endowed with righteous qualities. They should be satiated with various edible foods as to do so is the source of great fruits (Even more than the Yagna itself if offered lovingly). **Vishnu** himself has said, 'When desire less Brahmins offer their fruits of action to me and yet remain content; the gratification that I receive surpasses even that when a person offers unto me through Yagnakund as they satiate themselves through various foods.'

This is a very great Shlok to know that one receives immensely greater fruits through merely feeding Brahmins and saints than other relatively expensive rituals such as Yagnas. These Yagnas can often be very expensive and unaffordable by ordinary people who are not as wealthy. Therefore such people can enjoy the same fruits through inexpensive means. These are the fruits of '*Brahmin Bhojan*' and '*Santo Ni Rasoi*' something that all should make an effort to donate towards.

My wealthy Satsangis shall organise celebrations of great religious festivals in temples and shall give various kinds of alms to deserving Brahmins.

They shall hold great festivals with the festivity of song, music, dance, rites of *Abhishek* of deities (bathing of Gods Murtis) and offerings of *Mahanaivedya*. Festival days such as *Ekadashi*, *Janmashtmi* etc. should be celebrated through *Pooja* of Shree Krishna and feeding devotees of God. Deserving Brahmins should be given *Daan* (donation). Similarly *Sadhus* (ascetics) should be given various kinds of alms such as clothing.

Vrudha Parashar explains:

Tapaha Param Krutayuge Tretayam Gnanamuchate /
Dvapare Yagnamevahurdaanmeva Kalauyuge //

‘In *Satya Yuga - Tapp* (penance); in *Treta - Gnaan* (knowledge); in *Dwapar - Yagna* (sacrifice); and in *Kali - Daan* are considered the best.’ **Brihaspati** adds, ‘In *Kali, Daan, Daya* (compassion) and *Dama* (control of the senses) are the best Dharma.’ **Yagnavalkya** explains who should be given *Daan (Patrata)*: ‘*Supatrata* (deservingness) is not exclusively attributed to one who is only knowledgeable or only penanceful but is attributed to he who is both knowledgeable and penanceful along with having the quality of *Sadachar* (good conduct) within them.’

Yamaraja says, ‘He who studies the Vedas, has restraint, is penanceful, meditative, forgiving, has control of his senses and who speaks the truth, such a Brahmin is considered as deserving.’ ‘Cows, land, seeds and gold should be given to such deserving people. Those who wish for personal well being should never give donations to the undeserving.’ **Vishnudharmotara** explains that *Daan* given to somebody who is undeserving is *Tamoguni* by nature and as such the consequence of such donation is rebirth as an animal or bird: ‘The fruits derived through *Tamas* acts are enjoyed through life as an animal or bird.’

Kashikhanda explains, ‘Donation to the following nine: the deserving, a friend, the humble, the poor or helpless, the orphaned or unsupported, the benevolent, mother, father and Guru, will result in endless fruits. However donation to the following nine: a *Chata* (one who breaks trust by stealing from you), one belonging to a caste of panegyrist, a thief, a wicked doctor, a cheat or deceiver, a fraudulent person, a cunning person, a wrestler (athlete) or a minstrel are useless.’

Brihaspati Smruti says, ‘*Daan* offered which is then sold in a shop is considered fruitless. Similarly *Daan* offered to a sinful person or *Daan* given but acquired through dishonest means is also fruitless. Also *Daan* given to somebody other than a Brahmin, the sinful, a thief, one who troubles a Guru, the faithless, only in one’s village, only famed Brahmins, a Brahmin who marries a Shudra, one who profits from the Vedas, to a man who resides in one’s own house, one who is overcome by women, one who is cursed and to a servant are all fruitless.’

Bhavishya Purana explains *Daan* that is fruitful, ‘Things that are dear to oneself and have been acquired through honest or lawful means should be given to those who are deserving. Similarly **Mahabharat** explains, ‘O King! That, which is acquired lawfully by oneself and offered with faith to the deserving, derives endless fruits.’

Daan should be given only if one is financially capable. If you have excess income such that it is over and above that required for personal livelihood, then it should be donated. Hence food and clothes should be given only if you have excess amounts. **Vyaas** however stipulates an exception to the rule: 'A great Brahmin should be given food even at the cost of difficulties arising in one's own family.'

Daksha in Danakhanda explains items which should never be given away as donation: '(1) Ordinary items owned by many, (2) that which is asked for, for personal use, (3) to give something the owner of the house without first showing them, (4) something which is pawned, (5) one's wife, (6) one's wife's wealth, (7) something entrusted to you for giving to somebody else, (8) money which has been counted in the presence of the owner of the house or money given without being counted and (9) all of your wealth when you still have a family to support. These nine should never be donated by wise men, even in times of adversity.'

Similarly one should not give used items, unclean items, items given in vain, item derived from unlawful means, items not given freely or happily and items which are not much use to the person (a cow which is old for example) explain Shastras. Also one should not give precious metals or stones to Sanyasins as it could brew unrighteousness in such person. Such act is not only fruitless but is sinful and likely to consign a person to hell.

Thus concludes the additional duties of Grihastas. Additional duties of Kings are now given over the following two Shloks.

Special Dharmas of Rulers (157-158)

TEXT 157

My disciples who are rulers shall treat their subjects as they treat their own children in accordance with Dharmashastras, and shall establish a code of Dharma on the Earth.

Kings should look after their subjects as if they were his own children. They should establish Dharma upon the Earth, within their own Kingdom and instil *Sadachar* (righteous conduct) according to *Varnashram Dharma*. They should guide those who are on the path of unrighteousness. Those Kings who do not act in such a way acquire sin. **Bhagwat** explains this, 'Those Kings who do not maintain Dharma within his subjects and who receives tax from his subjects receives the sins of his subjects. Such Kings degrade themselves and loose any righteous qualities that they may possess.'

Bhrighu explains the fruits of establishing Dharma, 'Those Kings, whose subjects observe Dharma in accordance with Varna-Ashram, and as a result worship Yagnapurush, are ever dear to God'. Yagnavalkya explains the fundamental qualities a King should have: 'A King should be very eager, give benefits, keep an eye on the wealth, know what actions have been completed, serve the elderly, humble, pure and righteous, of a serious nature, of good ancestral background, speak the truth, pure and clean both internally and externally, does not spoil tasks undertaken, has a good memory, is not weak natured, does not speak harshly, adorns Dharma, is free from bad habits of intoxication, hunting etc., is deep thinking, fearless, understands the hidden meaning of things, overcomes his flaws, is versed in punishment and logic (*Anvikshiki*), knowledgeable in farming, business matters and keeping of animals and is also versed in the Vedas.' One should refer to **Mitakshar** as well as **Rajadharm** taught by **Bhishma** in **Mahabharat** for further information about this.

Yogishwar says, 'Kings should be forgiving toward Brahmins, affectionate towards his dear ones and raging towards his enemies. They should act as father to their subjects.' In this way, serving and maintaining his subjects lawfully, a King receives the a sixth of the *Punya* (benediction) of his subjects.' Service to his subjects in this way will derive the greatest of fruits (even greater than donations). It is written further, 'It is a King's duty to protect his subjects from the tyranny of thieves, sinners etc who may inflict misery upon them. Those Kings who do not protect his subjects in this way receive half of the sins of his subjects as that King is receiving tax from his subjects. Kings should gladly welcome saints and holy men and should exile thieves and sinners from his kingdom. They should welcome righteous Brahmins offering them *Daan*, praise them with respect and offer them a place to reside. Those who do not act in this way, inflicting misery and pain upon his subjects face destruction of wealth, family and self.'

Rajadharm says, 'Kings who wisely serve and protect their subjects receive a quarter of the fruits of those subjects.' **Bhagwat Purana** similarly explains, 'A King's salvation is simply through maintaining and protecting his subjects. By so doing, he receives a sixth of the *Punya* accrued by his subjects. Those kings who fail to serve and protect his subjects in this way and who continue to tax his subjects, loose all of their *Punya* to his subjects and become subject to the sins committed by his subjects. A King's greatest duty is to free his subjects from suffering.'

Shatanand explains that a death sentence should always be given cautiously. **Brahma** in **Mokshadharm** says, 'If a sinner, who is suitable for death, begs for forgiveness and shelter saying - O King! I shall sin no more, and then such a person should not be punished by death.' The King should be forgiving and compassionate in this way. The death sentence should be given only after all attempts of reform (through harsh words, punishment etc.) have failed. For the establishment of *Dharma*, the death penalty is necessary in order to punish the wicked explains **Shatanand**. **Nitishastra** explains, 'A King may even punish his brother, son, someone he worships, father-in-law or maternal uncle, should they fail to uphold *Dharma*.' In some circumstances, punishment is forbidden: It is explained that Brahmins, Gods devotees, *Sadhus*, the penanceful and the learned should not be punished.

Yagnavalkya explains about war: 'Those who surrender saying - "I am yours", eunuchs, those without arrows (arms), those fighting with others, those who have retreated from the battle field and onlookers should not be harmed or killed.' Similarly those without a horse or charioteer, with folded arms, with free hair, who is not a party to the battle, who is sat upon a tree, who is sat upon the ground, who is drinking water or eating, who is without an armour, one's son, a spy, a cow, a Brahmin, a female elephant, a horse, a charioteer and the King should not be killed by a King.

To summarise, **Mahabharat** explains, 'The vigour and discipline illuminating from a *Dharmanisht* King can prevent the furtherance of *Kali*.' 'A King is the cause of time.' Thus a King affects how time progresses and the effects upon nature. **Vrudha Charnakya** explains, 'If a King observes *Dharma* then his subjects will be *Dharmic* or disciplined; if the King is sinful then his subjects will also fall to sin; and if the King is proper in living then his subjects will also be proper. The subjects of a King will live and act according to the Kings actions.'

TEXT 158

They shall fully know the seven constituents to administer the state successfully, the four expedients to have a successful conquest, six diplomatic qualities and significant places to send spies to. Not only shall they know the characteristics of the persons well versed in worldly matters and social affairs, but also the qualities of persons who deserve to be punished and those who do not deserve to be punished.

Rajyango (Rajya Na Anga) - there are seven such limbs that deal with successful administration of the state. They refer to persons or things necessary for successful administration of state. **Mahabharat** explains these: (1) **Swami** - ruler or King, (2) **Amatya** - ministers or heads of departments, (3) **Suhrud** - friend or advisor, (4) **Kosh** - treasurer, (5) **Rashtra** - President, (6) **Durga** - castle or fortress and (7) **Sainya** - army. Thus the King should have these things to ensure successful administration.

A king should also have knowledge of the four **Upayas** (diplomatic means or strategies). These are: (1) **Sama** - persuasion through suave and convincing explanation, (2) **Daan** - through charitable means, (3) **Bheda** - creation of discord or disunity and (4) **Nigraha** - punishment. Shatanand also suggests a fifth Upaya of **Upeksha** - instilling content.

The six **Gunns** or diplomatic qualities are: (1) **Sandhi** - compromising, (2) **Vigraha** - a fighter, (3) **Yaan** - invasive, (4) **Dvaidhi Bhava** - dualistic accepting both points of view, (5) **Samashreya** - protective towards all and (6) **Sthaan** - firm.

There are eighteen **Tirthas** or significant places or persons to send spies to (for extortion of information): (1) **Mantri** - secretary, (2) **Purohit** - priest, (3) **Yuvaraja** - Prince, (4) **Senapati** - commander of the army, (5) **Rashtrapala** - the President, (6) **Antarvashikstatha** - neighbour, (7) **Karagaar** - one with status, (8) **Koshadhyaksha** - treasurer, (9) One who determines tasks to be undertaken, (10) **Nyayadhisha** - one with legal involvement, (11) **Nagaradyaksha** - one who is important in the city, (12) **Karyanirmala** - one who organises or assigns tasks, (13) **Dharmadhyaksha** - foremost in Dharma or religion, (14) **Sabhadhyaksha** - foremost in the community, (15) **Dandapaal** - who gives punishments, (16) **Durgapala** - who guards the fortress, (17) **Rashtrapaal** - the Kings body guards and (18) **Atvipaal** - one who lives in the forest with links to the city - outpost guard etc.

Thus a King should keep his spies secret and employ them to derive information. The spies may either be a person of his own kingdom or a person of another kingdom. In this way, they may be employed within his own kingdom to uncover wrongdoing. A secretary, priest or Prince should never be employed as a spy explains Shatanand.

There are eighteen business dealings/social matters - **Vyavahaar**, from which controversy can arise. For that reason Kings should have knowledge of such matters: (1) organisation of loans, (2) savings, (3) selling, (4) partnerships, (5) withdrawal of a donation, (6) break an agreement or arrangement, (7) arguments about land ownership, (8) to take something secretly in hiding, (9) an item purchased or sold which is returned or taken, (10) arguments arising from destruction of another persons crop by ones own pets/animals, (11) arguments arising from work which has been agreed, (12) severe punishment, (13) harsh words, (14) keeping of a woman in one's house, (15) not paying wages, (16) gambling, (17) at the time of reading of a will and (18) arguments between husband and wife. These are the eighteen sources of argument that a King should know of.

The qualities of a **Sabhasada** (one who knows of business matters) are given: 'Those who treat friend and foe alike, who is learned in the Vedas and Shastras, who understand Dharma, who speaks the truth, such a Sabhasadas should be employed by Kings.'

The punishable are explained: 'Those who abandon Dharma, who are deceitful, who insult or slander saints, who inflict pain or misery upon the poor and who overstep their limitations; such persons are worthy of punishment.' The unpunishable are also explained: 'Brahmins, the poor, **Tyagis** (renounced ones), **Tapasvi** (penanceful), mother, father and Guru should never be punished by the King even if they are guilty of a crime.' One should refer to **Nitishastras** for further information.

The use of 'Cha' in this Shlok - *Dandyadandyascha Lakshanaiha* - suggests that Kings should also have knowledge of people who should be taxed. **Mitakshar** explains, 'Those with a living such as an artist etc, a child, a servant and a renounced person (Sanyasin) should not be taxed. Similarly one should not tax upon things which have been received through begging, items left from a burglary and wealth from religious means (temples wealth, money from a Yagna etc.).'

These additional duties apply to Kings but in general terms many of the ideals should be adopted by people with any position of responsibility or leadership such as employers, community leaders, governments and religious leaders. Such people should use this '*Rajdharm*' in order to lead in such a way that it is of benefit to the majority. Our *Rajnitis* teach us exactly how to become effective leaders, which is of the best interest of the community. They teach us how to unite the community and get the best out of the community.

Special Dharmas of Married Women (159-162)

TEXT 159

Married women shall serve and worship their husbands in the manner in which they serve and worship God, even if they are either blind, ailing, poor or impotent and shall never utter harsh words to them.

Sabhartrukabhirnaribhiha Sevyaha Svapatirishavat /
Andho Rogi Daridro Va Shardho Vachyam Na Durvachaha //159//

Lord Swaminarayan over four Shloks gives the additional duties applying to married women. A *Sabhartrukabhirnari* is a woman who lives with her *Swami* (husband); such a *Suvasini* (whose husband is alive) should serve (*Seva*) their husbands (*Svapati*) in the manner they serve God, even if they are blind (*Andha*), ailing (*Rogi*), poor (*Daridra*) or impotent (*Shardho*).

Sabhartrusevanameva Tasaam Mukhyo Dharmaha - their foremost duty is to serve their husband explains Shatanand. **Narad in Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, 'Those women like Goddess Laxmi, who serve their husband with the affection that they are serving God enjoy great bliss with their husbands in *Vaikuntha Dhaam*.' **Lord Shri Krishna in Bhagwat** has also said, 'O Gopis! To serve one's husband without treachery is your highest duty (*Param Dharma*). To serve your husband's family and to raise progeny is your best duty (*Shreshta Dharma*). O Gopis! Even if your husband is of unfavourable qualities, of undesirable fate, old, foolish, ailing or poor, you should never leave your husbands for any reason other than if he commits a great sin such as murder (in which case he should be served from afar).' **Kashyapa** has said, 'A wife's greatest strength and lustre is her husband.'

Secondly, they should never utter harsh words towards their husband - *Vaachyam Na Durvachaha*. **Yagnavalkya** explains, 'Women should never speak harsh words. The husband should always act favourably and suitably. The wife should obey and respect the wishes of her husband - that is her greatest Dharma. Also if her husband is endowed with sinful qualities, then she should remain with him and wait for her husband to become cleansed of such sin.'

Narad summarises by saying, 'Wives should serve their husbands in the manner that they serve God. She should be favourable towards his wishes, affectionate towards his family and always acting in accordance with his wishes. She should maintain the house by seeing to household duties such as cleaning, dusting and making the house attractive. She should adorn clothes to make herself look attractive. She should always dress respectfully by wearing clothes and accessories that suitably cover her body.'

Women who do not serve their husbands in this manner are reborn upon this Earth for several lifetimes in poverty stricken households. Shatanand says that even if a woman's husband is hot tempered, lazy or careless, she should not renounce him. They should pray to Lord Shree Hari for his favour. In this way a *Pativrata Nari* is famed in this world and others.

The *Pati* (husband) should be considered as Vishnu and the *Patni* (wife) as Laxmi. In this way they should look upon each other and treat each other with respect. She should strive to make her husband happy and treat his family like her own. She should raise their children, instilling righteous qualities within them. She should never think to leave her husband in times of difficulty but stay at the side of her husband as *Shakti Roop* (strength and support) and work to resolve the situation and remain content in good times as well as bad.

TEXT 160

They shall never keep contact with any young man other than their husband even though the other man may be handsome and virtuous.

Shatanand explains that married women should not repeatedly look at other men, speak with them or stay/remain with them. **Shree Shankar in Anushasan Parva** explains, 'Young women who are *Pativrata* or of righteous qualities degenerate through association with other young men. Similarly a man also faces destruction through the association of women.' For this reason, one should refrain from contact with a person of the opposite sex. One should refer also to **Brahmvaivrata Purana** and others for *Pativrata Dharma*.

Shatanand explains that the use of '*Cha*' suggests that women should never be left alone or act independently. Thus she should be cherished, respected and cared for always. **Parashar Smruti** explains:

Pitarakshati Kaumare Bharta Rakshati Yauvane /
Bardvake Putrapautradhya Nasti Striraam Svatantrata //

'In young age, she should be protected (or cared for) by her father, in youthful age by her husband and in old age by her children or grandchildren. In this way she should never be left alone to fend for herself.'

Madhava explains the consequence of *Svatantrata* (living alone): 'Those *Sadhva* (married) or *Vidhva* (widowed) women who live alone face destruction of their Dharma.' A married woman should stay aloof of somebody of the opposite sex. In situations where she has to speak with men, she should remain ever ready and strong to root out any desires. She should always try to avoid such situations or places and never joke or fool with other men. This is in order to remain ever faithful to her husband and to protect her *Paativratya Dharma*. (As discussed earlier, it is very easy for a man or woman, however devoted or disciplined they may be, to fall servant to desires, especially sexual desires.)

TEXT 161

Devout wives shall never act in a manner that would expose their breasts, navel or thighs, and attract the attention of other males. They shall cover themselves with an upper garment. They shall never go to see vulgar shows nor associate with debauch women or courtesans.

The underlying message here is to dress respectfully and with decency such that one covers their body. **Yagnavalkya** explains, 'Wives who respect and serve their husbands with good conduct (*Sadachari*) and who has control over her senses is famed in this world and after death is promoted to greatness.'

In **Mitakshara**, **Shankha Muni** explains these *Sadachars* of devout women: 'Women should not leave their house without their husband's permission, they should always dress themselves covering their body nor leave their house in a hurry (lending to improper dress/appearance). They should not speak with another man, expose their navel to others and should always wear clothing which covers the whole body down to their ankles. They should never expose their breasts, laugh or giggle excessively or speak ill of their husband's family. They should never associate with women who are *Vaeshya* (prostitute), *Dhurtaa* (deceitful), *Duti* (go between - middle women), *Sanyassi* (renounced person), *Thagnari* (cheat), someone who jokes or insults or has bad qualities. By not obeying these commands, their *Charitra* (good moral conduct) is destroyed.'

Mahabharat also explains, '(1) partaking of alcohol, (2) association with the wicked, (3) separation from one's husband, (4) to wander alone, (5) sleeping during the day and (6) going to other peoples homes alone are the six enemies of a woman which will undoubtedly lead to her downfall.'

Sadhanoti Parlokamiti Sadhvi - 'A *Sadhvi* (chaste women) attains the heavens.' **Harit Muni** explains the nature of such a chaste women: 'One who suffers in her husband's suffering, whose happiness lies in her husband's happiness, who is always content with where she lives, who has an emaciated body and who becomes a *Sati* after the death of her husband is a *Pativrata*.' However it is to be noted here that the ritual of Sati (entering the funeral pyre) is only for those women who do not wish for eternal salvation and who refuse to observe *Brahmcharya Vrata* (celibacy) after her husband's death, wishing only to enjoy temporary insignificant bliss of the heavens.

Only such a woman should become Sati - who do not send three generations of their family into turmoil as a result of their adulterous and unrighteous acts. **Gargacharya** explains further, 'Those widows, who do not continue to observe *Brahmcharya*, send three generations of their family to hell. Therefore those women incapable of observing *Brahmcharya* should follow their husbands into the funeral pyre.' **Manu**, **Vishnu Smruti**, **Brahmanvaivrata Purana** and **Nirnyasindhu** all states the same fact. It is further explained, 'Those women who observe *Brahmcharya*, join their husbands again in the heavens and continue to enjoy bliss there.'

TEXT 162

When their husbands are far away from home, married women shall never wear attractive clothing or ornaments, neither visit other peoples' homes nor indulge in merriment.

Yagnavalkya Rishi explains, 'To play, decorate the body, to go to festivals, to laugh or to go to other peoples houses should all be renounced by a *Suvasini* (married women).' Other duties of a married woman (as extracted from *Shrimad Satsangi Jeevan*) are as follows: They should not slander anybody and waste time in idle gossip. They should adorn the red mark - *Chandlo* made from *Kumkum* as it represents the sign of her marriage as well as showing her enthusiasm, strength, grace and order. They should introduce their young (from the age of three) into Dharma and religion - instilling the necessary *Sanskars* into them. They should have a loving and kind nature towards all. They should themselves progress through education and never fall into useless arguments but resolve their differences.

A woman should aim to be *Pativrata*, who follows her husband and her duty impeccably. The qualities of such a *Pativrata* are given: (1) She always and everywhere conforms to the wishes of her husband (it is said that the husband of such a wife is ever faithful, never straying onto the wrong path). (2) She accepts her husband as being more important than even her own very breath - he is the focus of her attention. (3) She obeys her husband and Dharma implicitly without question. (4) She awakens in the morning before her husband and sees to his and other needs. She sleeps only after her husband (and other family members) has fallen asleep. (5) She always addresses her husband with respect (never by Tu-Kar or by name). (6) She always acts in such a way that the husband never has to raise his voice. She should be forgiving. (7) She never befriends anybody with unrighteous qualities or actions. (8) She covers her body suitably with respectable clothing. (9) She spends all her time in service to her husband, family and God.

A Pativrata brings greatness to her family and generations attain *Moksh* as a result. It is said that the dust from the feet of a Pativrata cleanses and purifies even a sinner. The Puranas speak of stories that say that the brilliance of the sun was once over shadowed by the brilliance emanating from a Pativrata. Where there is a Pativrata there is Pavitrata (purity).

Even the Gods respect a Pativrata as Vayu is said to blow gently in the presence of a Pativrata (through fear of being cursed by her if he blows strongly). So impressed were the Gods *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Mahesh*, by *Sati Ansuya*, that she was blessed by having sons who were the very forms of the three Gods - *Chandramukh*, *Datatrey* and *Durvasa*.

A Pativratas blessed feet are home to all the *Tirths* (places of pilgrimage) and her body is said to be home to the *Devas* and *Rishis*. Those women that speak harshly to their husbands are said to be reborn as dogs. Those that associate with other men are reborn as owls and those who are violent towards their husbands are reborn as cats.

Pativrata Naris are famed in the Shastras and greatly respected. They praise the parents of such a woman for raising a righteous child. A husband may possess numerous bad qualities and be a great sinner, but should he have a Pativrata by his side, then there is no doubt that the husband will be uplifted to piousness. Their very touch purifies and to have Darshan of such a woman is Punya in itself.

The wife is said to be *Laxmi Roop* - the source of wealth and happiness. She is *Shakti Roop* - the source of strength and fortitude and she is *Bhakti Roop* - leading one onto the path to salvation. In this way a married woman has a great responsibility, as she is also the mother of mankind.

Special Dharmas of Widows (163-172)

TEXT 163

The widowed disciples shall worship Lord Shree Krishna with the same fidelity as they would have worshipped their husbands. They shall always live under the commandment of their father, sons or other such relatives but never act independently.

Ten Shloks of additional duties of a *Vidhya Stree* (widowed women) are given. This first Shlok explains their primary duty - that is to simply worship Lord Shree Krishna in the manner they would their husband. 'They should worship God Vishnu as they would their husbands', explains **Skand Puran** and others. (Note - it is assumed that they served and worshipped their husbands with the utmost faith and respect!!).

They should never act or live independently: **Acharadhyaya** explains, ‘When she is young, her father should protect her; when married, her husband; and when of old age - her sons. If she has no sons, then her acquaintances should protect her, but she should never be left alone and independent.’ ‘A *Vidhva* should never become independent from her father, mother, son, brother, mother-in-law, father-in-law or maternal uncle. If she does then she becomes subject to slander.’

Smruti explains further that if there is nobody to protect her then the King should adopt such role and look after her. Also, ‘Women should not think of living independently away from their father, husband or son. Those that do subject both sides of the family to slander and ill repute.’ **Manu** explains, ‘Women, whether of young age or old, should never act independently in the home.’ Thus they should always act with the permission and advice of those closest to them.

TEXT 164

They shall never touch any male who is not closely related to them. Young widows shall never converse with any young man unless it is absolutely necessary.

After the death of their husband, such widows should observe the *Vrata of Brahmcharya* (strict celibacy). For this reason, the Lord has commanded here that widowed women should never touch or converse with other men who are not closely related to them. The Lord has advised in this way to protect their Brahmcharya as the Vrat of Brahmcharya is destroyed through touching, speaking or even looking at other men.

Smrutyarthasar explains, ‘A widow who is subdued by lust for another male consigns three generations of her family to hell.’ **Manu** also adds, ‘A widow may observe strict fasts and weaken her body but she should also never even utter the name of another man. She should thus observe strict Brahmcharya for the rest of her life.’

In situations of emergency etc, widows may touch or speak with other men to save themselves or others from harm. She should always act in a manner that protects her Dharma.

TEXT 165

Casually touching a suckling child is not an offence just as there is no offence in touching an animal. Also there is no offence in touching or conversing with an old man when it becomes necessary.

A widow may touch a child or animal, as both cases are innocent. Similarly she may speak with and elderly gentleman (forty years or over) if required. This is because the fact that the question of lustful tendencies that can arise through touch as explained by Shastras does not necessarily hold for a young child or elderly person explains Shatanand. ‘Lustful tendencies arise mostly during youthful age (*Yuva-Avastha*)’, explains **Skand Puran**. Thus, those aged between fifteen and forty are most susceptible to lust.

TEXT 166

They shall not receive education from a male person who is not closely related to them. They shall constantly control their body and senses by observing fasts.

The first part of this Shlok is an extension of previous Shloks in that it is there for the protection of their Brahmcharya. The second part of the Shlok explains: **Vratopavasauha Kartavyo Muhurdeha Dharmastatha** - They should constantly control their body through observance of frequent fasts and Vrats. Therefore they should observe *Ekadashi Upvaas* as well as other Vrats such as *Dharana Parna*. Similarly they should perform such Vrat-Upavaas as Prayaschit if they were to accidentally touch some other man. They should thus constantly perform these rituals in order to maintain control over their body.

Nirnyasindhu of **Skand Puran** explains, 'Vidhvas should not wear their hair in an *Amboro* (knot or platted hair at the back of the head) as it is a sign of binding to one's husband. Thus they should shave their head, keep their hair in the form of a *Jatta* or keep their hair without performing *Sanskars*. They should eat only once a day and observe frequent fasts for a month or observe the *Vrat of Chandrayana*. If she sleeps upon a bed then she condemns her husband to hell. She should not bathe with rich oils nor wear perfumes. She should not sit on an ox, wear a corset nor adorn herself with clothing and ornaments that are unacceptable in society.'

'She should observe additional *Vrats* and *Niyams* during the months of *Vaisakh, Kartik and Magh*. During *Chaturmaas and Adhikamaas*, women should observe additional Vrat-Niyams.'

Note, earlier in this quote from **Nirnyasindhu** - it stated the fact that a married woman should wear her hair in an *Amboro* as it represents her marriage and binding to her husband. It is for this reason that it is sometimes shunned in society for married women to cut their hair or wear her hair open (untied).

TEXT 167

Those who have just sufficient wealth for lifetime maintenance shall not offer it even for religious purposes; they may do so if they have surplus to their requirements.

Shatanand clearly stipulates that it is not one's Dharma to put themselves into difficulty like this. They should donate their wealth only if they have surplus wealth with sufficient savings. Thus to act contrary to this is breaking one's duty which is sinful.

Manu explains that a woman's wealth (*Stri-dhan*) consists of six types - **Katyayan** explains these in more detail: '(1) *Adhyagni* - money or gifts (jewellery etc.) given to her during the wedding ceremony. (2) *Adhyavanik* - money or gifts given to a woman at the time of leaving one's parental home and going to her in-law's/husband's home (*Sasare*). (3) *Prittidatta* - money given affectionately to a woman when she greets her in-laws by touching their feet. (4) *Bhratrudhan* - money or gifts given to the woman by her brothers (*Rakshabandan* etc.), (5) *Matrudhan* - by her mother and (6) *Pitrudhan* - given by her father.'

These things are what a woman's (wife's) wealth consists of. The only right a husband has to such wealth is the right to protect it. Thus he should never take her money but should strive to protect it. Therefore, such *Stri-dhan* should never be used by the husband for purposes of donation.

Yagnavalkya explains that such wealth is her's and should not be taken away by her husband's family members. Those men who do are thieves and so should be punished by Kings accordingly. Similarly, after the death of her husband, the men of the family should not take the woman's gifts and jewellery.

TEXT 168

They shall take a meal only once a day and sleep on the floor. They shall never deliberately look at any creature in the act of coition.

She should eat only once a day (except for days of *Upvaas* when she should observe a full day fast). She should never sleep on a raised platform, but should sleep on the floor. She should also never look at animals in the act of coition, as it will immediately cause turmoil in the mind, weakening it and thus destroying their *Brahmcharya Vrat*. *Shaubhari Rishi* saw two fishes in such act and immediately faced degradation.

TEXT 169

They shall never dress themselves like a married women, nun or female recluse, or dress in a manner which is contrary to the custom of the place and their family.

Thus a widowed woman should always dress in accordance with that which is conducive to her status etc. *Shatanand* has not gone into any greater depth here (as it is self-explanatory).

TEXT 170

They shall never associate with, nor even touch women who practice abortion, nor shall they indulge in or listen to amorous talks regarding males.

Touching somebody who practices abortion is prohibited due to the adulterous nature of that person which is sinful. Also association with such a person is inappropriate as the bad qualities of such a person can be passed on to a widow leading to her destruction and ill repute.

Nor should she listen to amorous talks about males. Such *Shringaar Ras* is of two types - (1) *Sanyoga* and (2) *Vipralambha*. The first is speaking of such lustful or amorous things in a crowd of people and the second is listening to such talks. Thus a widow should refrain from both activities as to act contrary to this again leads to a breakdown in their *Brahmcharya Vrat*.

TEXT 171

Except in emergency, young widows shall never stay in a secluded place with young men, even though they may be closely related.

Jaimini Smruti explains the fact that in youthful age, there is no other stronger destructive force than that of lust. For this reason even a mother and son should not remain in a secluded place together.

TEXT 172

They shall never play Holi or put on ornaments, nor dress themselves with transparent clothes interwoven with gold or similar metals.

Playful games during *Holi* of throwing coloured powder should be avoided by widows. Similarly they should never wear richly clothing or ornaments. She should not wear *Kumkum*, *Kajara* etc., which are appropriate for a married woman. Alternatively, rich clothing - either silken or golden nor bangles made from *Sankh* should not be worn by a widow as they too are appropriate for a *Suvasini Stree*. All such acts are stipulated in order to uphold her duty of renunciation and deep devotion for God.

Common Special Dharmas of all Women (173-174)

TEXT 173

No woman shall bathe without having clothes on and shall never conceal her periodical menses.

Sadhvavidhvabhisha Na Snatavyam Nirambharam /

Two Shloks conclude the additional duties for women, which apply to all women - married, widowed, and Acharya Patnis. Firstly they should never bathe naked (*Nagna Snaan*). To do so is disrespect for **Lord Varun** (God of rivers/water). **Krishna** said to the **Gopis**, when they bathed naked in the waters of Jamuna: 'You, who observe Vrats, have entered the water without clothing, and thus have insulted and shown disrespect for the God (Varun) therein'. In similar manner, men should also not bathe without clothing, explains Shatanand.

Suvrat Muni says: *Nagnasnaanam Nagnasaiyaa Manujanaam Vigarhitam* - 'Sleeping and bathing in the nude are slanderous acts.' **Vashishta Smruti** also says, 'One should never sit upon a camel, cow or donkey. Nor should man have associations (sexual) with a woman during the day, bath without clothes, walk or wander without clothes or sleep without clothing.' **Shankha Muni** explains, 'Coition during the day, bathing in the nude and looking at naked women are all atoned for by observing a full day fast (*Upavaas*).'

Svarajodarshanam Stribhiraopaniyam Na Sarvatha //

The '**Maasic Vrat**' - when a woman is upon her menstruation cycle should be observed. The reason being, during the period of menses, a woman receives a quarter the sin of *Brahmhatya* (killing a Brahmin) from **Indra**. During the period of menses, women should observe untouchability. Those who do not, and freely touch other people, also receive such sin of *Brahmhatya*. Also, even touching utensils of the house can cause adverse effects. For this reason, all should observe this period of untouchability during a woman's **Maasic Vrat**. This is explained further in **Rushi Panchmi Vrat Katha**.

Shrimad Bhagwat explains, 'In return for the blessing of always living with their husband, women accepted the fourth part of the sin of *Brahmhatya*.' Thus, this blessing was received by all women in return for acquiring the sin of *Brahmhatya* that is evident through their monthly **Maasic Vrat**. Only after observing the 3-day **Vrat**, does a woman become free from such sin. Those that do not observe the **Vrat** and keep it secret are reborn in the animal kingdom.

TEXT 174

No women shall touch anybody or any clothes etc. for three days during the period of menses, but can do so on the fourth day after taking a bath.

Such a '*Rajsvala Nari*' should not touch another person of their '*Jata*' for three days. They may however touch animals. Similarly, clothing and utensils made from clay/pottery should also not be touched for three days and nights. On the fourth day, after bathing (including washing her hair), she may touch the household utensils etc.

Bhavishyotara Puran explains, 'A *Rajsvala* on the first day is considered a *Chandali* (the lowest kind, despicable), on the second - a *Brahmgati* (murderer of Brahmins), on the third - a *Dhobarna* (a washer woman) and on the fourth day she is cleansed of such impurity after taking a bath.' The duties of a *Rajsvala* are given in **Vishnudharmotara**: 'A *Rajsvala*, for three days, should not partake in cow's milk,

yoghurt, Ghee etc. She should not decorate herself with flowers nor wear eye make-up (*Anjarn*). She should not use *Kumkum* or *Chandan*, nor sleep upon a bed. She should not touch (thus should stay away from) *Agni* (fire).’ **Daksha** adds, ‘A Rajsvala should not perfume her body with oils, brush her teeth with *Datan* nor wander around (i.e. go to other places or people’s houses). She should refrain from bathing, eating betel leaf and sleeping during the day.’

Shatanand then explains how to calculate the first day of Rajsvala dependant on when exactly *Rajodarshan* (time of menstrual cycle) takes place. **Mitakshara** explains, ‘If Rajodarshan occurs at night, then splitting the night-time into three equal parts, if Rajodarshan occurred in the first two parts of night-time then the previous day should be considered as the first day. If it occurred in the last third then the next day is considered the first day of Rajsvala Vrat.’ Other Smrutis explain that if Rajodarshan occurs before the middle of night-time then the previous day should be considered as the first day. **Nirnyasindhu** however explains that one should act in such cases in accordance with what is accepted in the village, town, country etc.

If Rajodarshan occurs again after a short space of time then it is explained: ‘If Rajodarshan occurs again after seventeen days then one is cleansed by merely bathing; after eighteen days, then one day of Rajsvala Vrat should be observed; after nineteen days, then two days should be observed; and if after twenty days or more then the full three days should be observed.’

Then is explained the prohibition of touch for a Rajsvala. It is even forbidden for a Rajsvala Stree to touch another Rajsvala: ‘If a Rajsvala accidentally touches another Rajsvala, then they are purified by bathing. If they touch intentionally, then they should perform Upavaas (full day fast) and partake in *Panchagavya* (five elements from a cow - including urine) for purification.’ Parashar adds, ‘If a Rajsvala Brahmin woman touches a Rajsvala Kshatriya woman, then the Brahmin woman should observe the complete *Ardhakrutch Vrat* and the Kshatriya woman should observe half of the same Vrat.’ Thus all women of all castes should observe the Rajsvala Dharma.

Gautam adds that if a Rajsvala touches any other woman (not Rajsvala) or man, then the man or woman should bathe with clothes for purification: ‘By touching the sinful, the lowest of persons (*Chandal*), a woman who has just delivered a child, a Rajsvala or a corpse; after cutting your hair or shaving, after sex or if one happens to smell the smoke from a burning corpse, then one should purify themselves by bathing with clothes and performing *Achman* (sipping of water).’

Parashar adds that if a Rajsvala has to attend a wedding, festival, Yagna etc., then she may purify herself by performing an Upvaas (full day fast), and thus become free from the Rajsvala Vrat. During Rajsvala Dharma, strict celibacy should be observed and she should refrain from going to other peoples houses etc. Every year, she should observe the ***Rushi Panchmi Vrat*** in order to dissolve the sins performed during her Rajsvala days and also makes up for any faults, short giving and discrepancies in performing her Rajsvala Dharma.

Thus concludes the Shloks for Grihasta men and women. Now are given the additional duties of members of the ***Tyagashram*** (those that have renounced all worldly life). These span twenty-eight Shlokas in total. Lord Swaminarayan first addresses *Naishtik Brahmcharis* and then *Sadhus*:

Special Dharmas for Naishtika Brahmaris (175-187)

TEXT 175

My Naishtik Brahmaris disciples shall never touch, talk nor deliberately look at any female.

*Naishtikvratvanto Ye Varnino Madupashrayaha /
Taiha Sprushya Na Striyo Bhashya Na Na Vikshyascha Ta Dhiya //*

Shatanand Muni first explains what a *Naishtika Vrat* is: *One who for the time that he is living, observes a great and demanding vow. A Brahmaris is then explained as one who observes the vow of Brahmaris (celibacy, control of senses). Thus a Naishtik Brahmaris is one who observes Brahmaris for the duration of his live (Ajivan Brahmaris).*

The word Brahmaris is often loosely translated to 'celibacy' - that is, refraining from sexual activity. However, it is much more than this. **Agni Puran** explains eight-fold Brahmaris: 'Refraining from (1) speaking about women, (2) listening to talks about women, (3) fooling or laughing with women, (4) looking at women, (5) having secret talks with women, (6) thinking or fantasising about women, (7) infatuation with women and (8) sexual intercourse with women.' In this way, '*Maithun*' or sexual companionship is considered to be only one of these eight types. Hence refraining from all of these eight actions is considered to be true Brahmaris.

Bharmaris should not touch, speak with or look at women intentionally. They should never think to look upon a woman with lustful intent, in order to uphold their primary directive of Brahmaris. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, '*Tyagis* (renounced individuals) should not look at, talk about or joke about women. They should not even look at animals in the act of coition. This they should renounce first and foremost.' **Kashi Khand of Skand Puran** explains further, '*Naishtika Brahmaris should not even touch the feet of the wife of their Guru.*'

The downfall of man through association with a woman is widely documented in our scriptures. This includes mere sight of another woman. One such incident is of Narad and Parvat, who were also Bharmaris, and who became servant to lustful desires by merely having seen the hands of Ambarish Raja's daughter. Hence it is greatly emphasised in the Swaminarayan Sampraday that men and women should remain aloof of each other so that they do not fall servant to these desires. For this reason, Lord Swaminarayan has commanded that *Bharmaris and Sadhus* should adopt a stricter life of not even looking at, touching or conversing with women by way of setting an example as well as protecting their Brahmaris Vrat. This is almost certainly unique to our Sampraday, making it worthy of praise.

TEXT 176

They shall never talk of females nor listen to talks about females and shall not go for bathing, washing etc. to places which are frequented by women.

They should not talk about females, commenting on their good and bad qualities etc. **Narad** has said, '*Tyagis who observe Brahmaris Vrat should never talk about women, as sense organs which are not kept under control (enjoying sensual pleasures) degrade even an ascetic.*' In this way they should not listen to such talks also.

It is further explained, '*Kama* (lust) is *Bandhan* (bondage). In this world there is no other bondage. Those that becomes free from the clutches of lust become eligible for attaining God. In this way, those

that know of the tendencies of lust and the bondage caused by lust become free from suffering.' Therefore they should not also bathe in places frequented by women (Nor should they go to such places for answering the call of nature). The reason being is that such places will cause the mind to wander upon women. Thus such places should always be avoided.

TEXT 177

They shall never touch nor purposely look at images of females, pictures or idols made from wood etc., except those of Goddesses.

'They should not even look at a painting of a woman with fondness or cupidity', says **Narad** in **Pancharatra**. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, 'Tyagis should not touch a picture or statue of a woman.' This again is to uphold their Brahmacharya Vrat and to prevent lustful desires from forming in their mind.

TEXT 178

**They shall never draw pictures of females nor touch clothes worn by females.
They shall never intentionally look at any creature in the act of coition.**

They may however paint pictures of Goddesses. They should not touch clothing worn by women. (This is clothing which is not washed, wet, dried or new). They should not look at animals or birds etc. in the act of coition.

TEXT 179

They shall never look at nor talk to a man who is disguised as a female. They shall not give religious discourses and sing devotional songs directed at females.

Shatanand explains that there is no difference in looking at a woman and a man in the disguise of a woman as the same emotions can arise. Similarly they should not touch such men.

Also they should not give religious discourses to women directly. Nor should they sing devotional songs aiming to get the attention of women, listening from afar as this also is contrary to Brahmacharya Vrat, leading to the mind developing thoughts upon women.

TEXT 180

They shall not obey a command that violates their vow of celibacy even if that command is given by their Guru. They shall always be patient, content and without pride.

Linga Puran explains, 'The non-existence of lustful or sexual tendencies in the mind, speech and action is *Brahmacharya Vrat*, observed by ascetics and Brahmarshis alike.' Such observance of the Vrat of Brahmacharya is the greatest tool for attaining God and the heavens - ***Brahmacharyasyeva Brahmapraptihetubhutsakalsadhaneshu Mukhyatmatvaditi Bhavaha.***

Brahmacharya is explained to be a *Yagna* (sacrifice) and is a means for realisation of *Brahmllok* (heaven). **Mokshadharma** explains, 'The form of Brahman is Brahmacharya. It is the greatest of Dharmas (duties) and observance of which will derive greatness (*Param Gati*).' **Sanatsujat** explains that God is attained only when intellect becomes one with the mind and through observance of *Ahimsa* (non-violence),

Brahmcharya and *Vidhya* (knowledge). **Bhagwat Gita** states: *Yadicchanta Brahmcharyam Charanti* - 'Those who desire the heavens observe Brahmcharya.'

Those that break this code of Brahmcharya, and associate with women are great sinners. Such sin is classed as '*Avakirni Paapa*' and the Prayaschit for committing such sin is extensive. **Yagnavalkya** explains, 'Brahmcharis who associate with women bring destruction upon themselves. They are reborn as mules and are cleansed of such sin only by performance of Yagna - *Niruti Devta Sambandhi*. The release of the greatest element *Virya* (sperm) from the body is considered as *Avakirna* and thus, those who do so are also committing the sin of *Avakirni*.' Shatanand further explains other Prayaschit for those that violate their code of Brahmcharya.

Therefore such Brahmcharis should never violate such duty, as Brahmcharya is their greatest and foremost duty. **Krutyaachintamani of Gobhilsutra** explains other duties of a Brahmchari: refraining from using oils and perfumes upon the body, respecting their Acharya, refraining from anger and falsehood, refraining from sexual activity, renouncing of sleeping upon a bed, shaving ones head, abstaining from meat and intoxicants and refraining from sitting in a cart pulled by an ox.

Manu and **Vishnu** explain what a Brahmchari should do if sperm is released accidentally (in dream state), 'If a Brahmchari ejaculates accidentally at night-time whilst dreaming, then he should have a bath, chant Gayatri *Mantra* and fast for a full day in order to purify himself. Those that ejaculate on purpose should fast for three complete days. This '*Nairutyaaag*' should also be observed by Grihastas if sperm is released on days that Brahmcharya Vrat should be observed i.e. *Ekadashi* and other fast days, during *Chandrayana Vrat*, during *Yagnas* etc. (*Ramanavmi, Janmastmi and Chaturmaas* should be understood here).

Brahmcharis should always be patient (*Dhairyaavaan*). Such a *Dhir* person is explained by **Kalidaas**, 'One who does not morally deteriorate in such times of adverse changes.' They should also be very content with what they have (what is given to them by God) and never develop tastes and desires for luxuries. **Niti Shastra** explains - *Asantushta Dwija Nashta* - 'Dwijas (upper three castes) degrade through non-contentment.' **Bhagwat Puran** explains that through contentment, a Brahmin emanates lustre.

They should also be devoid of *Abhimaan* or pride; as such '*Nirmani Parnu*' is a great tool for attaining God. **Bhagwat Gita** explains this:

Nirmanamoha Jitasangadosha Adhyatmanitya Vinivrutkamaha /
Dvandvairvimuktaha Sukhadukhasangnairgachantyamudaha Padmavyam Tat //

'Only those devoid of delusion and pride, victorious over attachment, ever dwelling upon the self, turned away from desires and liberated from pleasures and pain, such intelligent persons attain the imperishable heaven of God.' **Vidurniti** explains that such pride is the root of all: 'Old age destroys beauty; desire - patience; death - the soul; jealousy - duty; anger - wealth; uncivil - good conduct; lust - modesty; and pride - one's all.'

Driving out the enemy of pride or ego is very significant here. It is something that is a very great obstacle between people. Only when we are able to shed the 'I' from our nature, are we able to say 'You' and thus praise God and his *Hari-Bhaktas*. It is a very desirable quality to praise others and one that will undoubtedly reap fruits.

TEXT 181

They shall immediately stop a female who deliberately advances towards them, by talking to her or by showing contempt towards her.

If for some reason a female makes advances towards a Brahmachari then he may use words such as “*Go away from here - stay away from me!*” in order to prevent the woman from coming any closer. If such words fail then he may show contempt towards her by using harsh words or anger towards her. In this way he should prevent any direct confrontation and send her on her way.

This again is in order to uphold the Brahmacharis Vrat of Brahmacharya as this duty is his greatest. After showing contempt or speaking with her, the Brahmachari should perform Prayaschit in order to intone for his sin of speaking with a woman.

TEXT 182

In the case of an emergency, when the lives of females or their own lives are in imminent danger, they shall protect the female and themselves by talking to females or even by touching them.

The Lord commands that a Brahmachari may do whatever is necessary (at the risk of breaking their duty of Brahmacharya) in order to save the life of oneself or others. In times of emergency such as a house on fire, somebody drowning, someone being attacked or any other such situation where one’s own or another’s life is in danger, a Brahmachari must save his own life or the life of a woman by touching or talking to her. Thus the law of Ahimsa is above Brahmacharya.

Shatanand quotes an example of talking to a woman by saying that a Brahmachari may warn women by saying, “*The water is very deep here, do not enter the water*”, in order to save the woman from imminent danger. Similarly, he may touch a woman if he sees a woman drowning. After saving such a woman, he should perform the said Prayaschit (single day fast) in order to intone for his sin.

Shatanand explains that if a Brahmachari ignores the calls of a woman in danger, allowing her to die, then this sin of ignorance is a *Mahapaap* - a far greater sin than that of touching or talking to a woman to save her (which can be easily intoned for). For this reason, saving such a woman is his best duty.

Life and the maintenance of life are of great importance here. This is the message that is stressed here. Bhagwat explains that *Abhayadaan* (to give protection or shelter) is considered great. Therefore, all should act appropriately and to their means in order to fight the threat of death. **Yama Smruti** explains: *Dharmaha Paro Jivaraksha Hyadharmastadviparyayaha* - ‘The greatest duty is to save a life. To allow a life to perish is a great Adharma (sinful act).’

Through this body we are able to serve and realise God. We are able to observe duty and therefore it is vitally important that the body is preserved and protected, if necessary, at other costs. **Mahabharata** explains that the fruits from the performance of a Yagnas will perish after some time but the fruits from offering Abhayadaan are endless and will never perish.

TEXT 183

They shall never massage their body with oil, nor arm themselves, nor put on frightful clothes. They shall suppress their sense of taste.

A Brahmachari should not massage his body with oil. Similarly he should not arm himself as this gives a wrongful impression of a violent nature to others. **Manu and Yagnavalkya** have under some circumstances given permission to Brahmins to arm themselves - such as in adverse times (*Apatkara*): 'A *Dwij*a should arm himself when there is downfall of Dharma.' The use of 'Cha' suggests that Brahmacharis should also renounce the use of betel leaf and the like. **Prachetas Muni** explains, 'Sanyassins, Brahmacharis and Vidhvas (widows) should refrain from eating betel leaf, massaging their body with oils and eating from metallic objects/plates.'

Also, Brahmacharis should never wear frightful clothing, which is unacceptable according to Shastras, time and custom. They should wear only the said attire for them such as *Kaupin*, *Katisutra* etc. Those who do not act in this way should perform *Prayaschit*: 'Those who do not perform *Sauch* (cleansing/bathing), *Achmana* (sipping of water for purification), *Sandhyavandana* (prayer-morning/evening), *Agnikarya* (service to fire - offerings); those that touch a low born (*Shudra*), who does not wear clothing which fully covers the body, does not wear a *Kaupin* (loin cloth), *Katisutra* (string around the waist), *Janoi* (sacred thread), *Mekhla* (waist band), *Danda* (staff) and *Mrugcharma* (deer skin); who sleeps during the day or uses an umbrella for shade, wears a *Paduka* (open wood shoe) or flower garland; who massages the body with oils or *Chandan*, highlights his eye with *Anjali*, plays games dances, sings *Gitas* (other than devotional), plays musical instruments (in accompaniment to such songs); to have love for another and to associate with those that are unrighteous. All these sins should be cleansed by performing *Prayaschit* of a one day fast', explains **Kratu Muni**.

Finally, Brahmacharis should overcome their sense of taste. Shatanand explains that they should overcome all senses, but especially the sense of taste as all other senses can be overcome singularly through victory over the sense of taste. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, 'A person is classed *Jitendriya* (suppressor of senses) only when he has become victorious over the sense of taste. To overcome the sense of taste is to overcome all other senses, for that reason he should strive to overcome the sense of taste first and foremost.'

Rasa Indriya is one of the hardest sense objects to overcome. The simple message here is to feed the body what it wants and needs and not what the tongue or mind wants. It is because we listen to our mind and tongue, that we become unhealthy by filling our bodies with 'junk food' leading to all sorts of health problems. Thus by eating the right foods, observing stricter eating habits (eating less and less frequently) observing Vrats such as *Upvaas* and being active to exercise the body, can we live a much healthier life and at the same time become *Jitendriya*.

TEXT 184

They shall never go for alms to those Brahmin homes where food is served by a female but shall go elsewhere where food is served by a male.

In order to uphold their *Brahmcharya Vrat*, they should act in this manner. **Mitakshara** explains further, the types of houses they should go to for alms, 'They should go to those houses for alms other than where false accusations are likely to be given, where they are mischievous or cunning, where they are deceitful or fraudulent and where undesirable actions prevail. They should go to those houses where *Dharma* is upheld.'

Chandogya Upanishad explains, 'Purity of eating leads to *Satva Gunn*. *Satva Gunn* brings stability and steadiness of the mind. Such steadiness is the cause of salvation,' thus one should aim for *Ahaar Shudhi* first and foremost. **Mokshadharma** explains, 'Food (or alms) from *Dwij*as, who know of rites, is

considered the best. Through partaking of such alms, one destroys their *Rajo Guni* sins (sins arising through worldly desires) and their senses are withdrawn from worldly desires.'

Shastras explain that *Bhiksha* (alms) should be begged for from Brahmins. If one is not able to acquire such alms from Brahmins, then *Bhiksha* should be sought from Kshatriya or Vaishyas (in this order). In times of emergency, one may beg from any of the four castes. They may take raw foods from any of the four sources but prepared food should only be taken from the houses of Brahmins. They should not repeatedly beg alms from the same home except in unfavourable times. Nor should they take more than what is necessary.

Atri Muni explains, 'Those observing a Vrat should refrain from sleeping during the day, partaking of another's food (*Parku Anna*) and eating for a second time.' Therefore the question arises - why have those who observe Brahmacharya Vrat been commanded to beg for alms? (And thus accept *Parku Anna*). **Atri Muni** further clarifies, 'Bhiksha is like *Soma* (an intoxicating juice). Such *Bhiksha* is not *Parku Anna* and is the cause of destruction of all of one's sins.' 'One who partakes in *Bhiksha* is *Nirahari* (one who has not eaten).'

In this way, *Bhiksha* is considered to be even better than performing an *Upvaas* (full day fast). **Smruti** explains this: 'A full day fast is better than eating once. Eating foods that have not been asked for is better than a full day fast. Even better than this is *Bhiksha*. Therefore such persons should live off such alms.' **Vashist** further explains that *Bhiksha*, food from Brahmins and the remnant from a *Yagna* cleanses all of one's sins. In this way food which is begged is considered to be great and able to purify all of one's sins. For this reason, such people should continue to beg for alms. Those that do not act in this way should perform *Prayaschit* as explained by Manu and other.

TEXT 185

They shall study the Vedas and other Holy Scriptures, and serve their Guru. They shall never associate with effeminate males just as they

Brahmcharis should study the *Vedas - Rig Veda* and others. They should also learn the six extensions of the Vedas (the *Vedangas*), *Sankya Yoga*, *Uttar Mimamsa* and other such Shastras. These Shastras are *Sanatan* (eternal). They are Hinduism's orthodox scriptures, which are indisputable and therefore are worthy of study.

Along with these, the accepted Shastras by Lord Swaminarayan such as *Shrimad Bhagwat* should also be studied, as they are *Vedamulaka* (having their origin in the Vedas). The **Vedas** explain, 'Brahmins at the age of eight should be given *Upanayan* (sacred thread) and then sent for their studies. They should be taught the Vedas and the six *Vedangas*.' **Bhagwat** also explains that, 'Dwijas, after *Upanayan* becoming reborn, should master their senses, reside in a *Gurukul*, (school) and learn the Vedas.'

Secondly, just as a child is commanded to serve their parents, a Brahmachari is ordered to serve their Guru, as this is their *Mukhya* (greatest) Dharma:

***Bhikshortharmaha Kshamoahimsa Tapa Iksha Vanaukasaha* /**
***Gruhirno Bhutarkshejya Dwijasyacharyasevanam* //**

'A *Bhikshuk's* (beggars) Dharma are patience and non-violence; a *Vanprast's* are patience and meditation; a *Grihasta's* are giving protection to others and worship; and a *Brahmin's* duty is to serve his Acharya.'

Narad Muni explains, ‘Brahmcharis should join a Gurukul and learn to control their senses. Like a servant, they should worship the feet of their Guru and with such great love and affection, carry out all tasks. At the command of their Guru, dedicated, they should study the Vedas. At the beginning and end of the study session, they should bow before the feet of their master.’ This is the tradition of Gurukul where knowledge is passed from *Guru to Shishya*.

Thirdly, they should never associate with effeminate males. ‘Association with women and effeminate males causes delusion and bondage (Bandhan).’ Therefore they should not even listen to nor talk with such males. **Bhagwat’s Ailgita** explains, ‘A person’s knowledge, penance, charity, study of Shastras, renunciation and silence (*Maun*) are futile and destroyed when a persons mind becomes absorbed in a woman. Therefore one should not associate with women nor with effeminate males. Control of the senses is difficult for even those who are learned and elder, then what needs to be said for the likes of myself.’ In this way an effeminate male is classed as a woman and therefore contact is forbidden.

TEXT 186

Those who are Brahmins by caste shall never drink water, which has been passed through a leather vessel. They shall never consume foods like onion, garlic etc.

*Charmavari Na Vai Payam Jatya Viprerna Kenachit /
Palardulasunadyam Cha Tena Bhaksham Na Sarvatha || 186 ||*

First and foremost, Shatanand clarifies that this Shlok applies to all and not just Naishtik Brahmcharis. He explains that the use of ‘*Jatya*’ or *Jati* signifies the ordinality of this command. *Jati* in itself here means ‘That Dharma, though eternal, applying to all’, as explained by **Nyayamuktavali**. Thus none should question whether this Shlok applies to a specific group only, as it applies to all regardless of caste or *Ashram*.

Firstly one should not drink water or offer water that has been in contact with leather (such as a leather pail used to fetch water from a well). **Laghuharit Muni** explains, ‘Those that drink water from a public place, water used for bathing or water fetched using a leather pail should purify themselves by performing *Vastra Sahit Snaan* (bathing with all their clothes on) and then observe a full day fast.’ Water from a public place is considered impure as all persons of all types have access to that water lending to its impurity. In times of emergency, that water may be taken if it falls upon the ground. That water can then be collected from the ground in another vessel and drank as it is then considered to be pure.

Secondly, the items that are termed ‘*Durgandhi*’ (of bad odour) such as onion, garlic etc. should not be eaten. Note that this commandment applies to all Hindus and not just followers of the Swaminarayan faith, as it is widely documented in many of the mainstream Hindu scriptures. To partake in such things is a sin that is exonerated through Prayaschit. **Brihaspati in Prayaschit Kanda** explains this: ‘Those that eat Garlic, *Kavak* (a food termed *Rajo Guni*), *Grunjan* (a bulbous root similar to Garlic) and onion, even by accident, should perform *Taptakrucha Vrat* to cleanse themselves.’ (Note these Vrats are explained extensively in Satsangi Jivan Shastra).

Shatanand explains that the various forms of onion differ through smell, taste and appearance. **Sushruta** explains ten such forms of onion: ‘*Lasan* (garlic), *Dirga Patra*, *Pichgandha*, *Mahaushadh*, *Palandu* (standard onion), *Lava*, *Tarka*, *Apavarika*, *Grunjan* and *Yavaneshta*.’

Onion and garlic may however be taken for medicinal purposes, as it is not considered a sin to save oneself from illness. **Yagnavalkya** explains this, 'The use of onion/garlic is not forbidden when used as a cure for some illness. But if they partake such substances intentionally then they receive the great sin (Mahapaap) of partaking in alcohol.'

This is as much as Shatanand has written, but there are other reasons for why we should not eat such substances. Many people think that this abstinence is something invented by Lord Swaminarayan and so applies to Swaminarayan followers only - this is not the case.

Dhanvantari, the Acharya of *Ayurved* (study of medicine) as well as the **Shastra Nigantu** explain that eating such substances spoils the mouth making it susceptible to various diseases such as *mouth ulcers* and *syphilis*. It also causes the blood in the body to thin. This thinning of the blood can have various repercussions as the blood carries oxygen to all parts of the body and therefore the body becomes weak susceptible to illnesses like *thyroid*.

Also, those that eat onion tend to become hot tempered due to the nature of such foods. Even the smell is potent which can adversely affect the mind. This unpleasant smell remains in the body for some time making him undesirable to be around. The best reason however for not eating onions is the fact that they are **Tamasic** by nature. Food is categorised as *Satvic*, *Rasasic*, *Tamasic* or *Nirgun* (this is being devoid of any quality). *Satvic* foods may be taken, as they are still pure such as water, vegetables etc. *Rajasic* foods such as tea, coffee etc. should also not be taken as such foods make a person active and unstable. *Tamasic* foods such as onions, alcohol and meat should never be taken as they waste away the body and mind. *Nirgun* foods such as *Charanamrut* and other food offered to God is considered the best.

Devotees of God should strive to renounce all that is *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* and should aim to attain the state of *Nirgun* where one is able to serve the Lord without any obstacles. Therefore eating *Satvic* foods that have been offered to God first will instil the best in a person. Those that constantly partake in *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* foods will be *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* by nature making such a person undesirable, unfocused, unstable and indeed sinful.

I was shocked to hear one day that many people think that this enforcement of non-eating of onions is due to the supposed fact that Lord Swaminarayan was once dining with an onion in his plate. Through some miraculous will of the Gods, the Earth began to shake and the onion fell to the ground. And so, as the fallacy goes, from that day on, all members of the Swaminarayan Sampraday stopped eating onions! What utter rubbish!

The Swaminarayan Sampraday is not some fictitious cult. It is a true Vedic Sampraday that is consistent with the orthodox Sanatan Vedic beliefs. Stories like these are invented so that other people can feel at ease that their partaking of onions is acceptable. Therefore I iterate again that this commandment applies to all that are true Hindus. It is accepted by all true Acharyas, Gurus and leaders of Hinduism and it should be noted that no Hindu temple uses onions or garlic in either '*Jamarvaars*', '*Prasad*' or as God's '*Thaal*'.

TEXT 187

Brahmins shall never take meals without performing daily rituals viz. bathing, Sandhya (Morning Prayer), chanting of Gayatri Mantra, worship of Shree Vishnu and Vaishvadev (food offering) ceremony.

Snaanam Sandhyaam Cha Gayatrijapam Shrivishnupoojanam /

Brahmins should always bathe in the morning before eating. This is something that applies to all. Those that are capable should bathe in cold water; else they may bathe in warm water. They should bathe whilst chanting *Mantras* in propitiation of **Lord Varuna**, the God of Water. **Katyayan** explains, 'In the early morning, they should bathe in short (*Sankshepa*) i.e. quickly and then at midday they should bathe in full properly.' The method of bathing is given in **Nrusinha Puran**: 'In a steady flowing river, they should stand facing the sun against the current of the water and perform the act of bathing.'

Skand Puran explains the best time for bathing, 'They should bathe in the early morning, before the sky begins to redden at daybreak (*Arundeya*). In this way, such bathing is considered as *Prajopatya Snaan*, which destroys even the greatest of sins.' **Skand Puran** further explains the benefits of bathing in the early morning: 'Bathing early in the morning brings vitality, intellect, favour, beauty and wealth. It also brings comfort to the mind.' 'Sin does not enter those who bathe at the break of day.'

After bathing in this manner they should offer prayers to the deity *Sandhya*. **Shruti** explain, 'Brahmins should daily offer prayer to Sandhya', thus in this way Shrutis have considered Sandhya as a deity. Sandhya is more specifically explained as, 'To perform meditation upon the deity Sandhya at the time of Sandhya is considered as performing Sandhya.' The time of Sandhya is then explained: There are three such Sandhyas - *Sayankal* (night-time - the transition from day to night), *Pratahakal* (early morning - the transition from night to day) and *Madhyam* (midday - the transition between morning and evening). In this way, **Acharkhand of Skand Puran** explains, 'From the time of *Upanayan* (receiving of the holy thread), one should perform Sandhya at all three times, until death.'

Acharmayukh explains the best (*Uttam*), mediocre (*Madhyam*) and worst (*Kanisht*) times for performing Sandhya. For Pratahakal Sandhya, the Uttam time is when the stars are still visible, Madhyam when the stars are no longer visible and Kanisht is when the sun is visible. Similarly, for Sayankal Sandhya, the Uttam time is when the sun is still visible, Madhyam when the sun has set and Kanisht when the stars are visible. The duration of Sandhya is also explained and is different for different caste members. For Brahmins, two *Muhurtas* (forty-eight minutes) before sunset/sunrise is the period of Sandhya. Kshatriyas and Vaishyas have a period of half the time said for the higher caste member respectively.

The method of performing Sandhya is given: 'In the early morning, they should stand with their hands together facing the sun. In the afternoon they should stand with their arms extended and in the evening they should stand facing the sun with their hands cupped together (*Anjali*),' explains **Snaandipika**. **Vyaas** explains additionally about *Arghyadaan* (offerings): 'With water in his hands, chanting *Gayatri Mantra* and facing the sun, he should offer Anjali three times in Pratahakal and Sayankal. At Madhyam he should offer Anjali just once. *Samavedi* Brahmins should sit and perform Arghyadaan.' In this way 'Hom' should be performed. In the morning, they should offer the last two Anjalis with the Mantras *Surya* and *Prajapati* and in the evening should offer with Mantras *Agni* and *Prajapati*.

After these rites they should chant the *Gayatri Mantra* (***Ohm Bhura Bhuva Svaha Tat Savitura Variyo Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi Dhiyo Yo Na Prochodayaat***). Shatanand explains that one has the right to chant Gayatri Mantra after Upanayan just as one has the right to chant Ashtakshar Mantra after initiation. Harit Muni explains the method of chanting Gayatri Mantra, 'They should chant the Gayatri Mantra that begins with the *Pranava - Ohm*. They should according to their ability, chant either one thousand and eight times, one hundred and eight times or ten times. In the morning, with their hands positioned near the naval, in the afternoon - near their heart and in the evening - near their nose, they should chant the Gayatri Mantra.'

After that, they should offer worship to *Saligraam* (stone idol of Vishnu) or a Murti of God. They should perform the rites and chant the relevant Mantras. **Pancharatra** explains the different categories of Poojan: 'They should perform the Poojan according to their ability - either with sixty-four, thirty-eight, sixteen, twelve, ten or five rites.' In this way they should be consistent and stick to a specific category. **Harit Muni** further explains, 'One should, with dedication and faith offer worship to Vishnu either five times or three times in a day. If they are incapable of doing so then they should offer worship just once in the day.'

After this, one should perform *Vaishvadev*. Vaishvadeva is the performance of the five great Yagnas (rites) - *Pancha Mahayagna*. **Katyayan Muni** explains these: 'To teach others is *Brahman Yagna*; to offer *Tarpan* (to ancestors) is *Pitru Yagna*; to perform *Hom* (sacrificial offerings) is *Dev Yagna*; to offer donations is *Bhut Yagna*; and to welcome and be hospitable towards strangers is *Manushya Yagna*.' Brahman Yagna here should be understood as teaching to one's disciples the Vedas etc. Thus these acts should be performed as Vaishvadev.

In this way a Brahmchari should never partake in foods before performing these acts. That is not to say that those performing Upvaas (fast) need not perform such acts! **Varaha Puran** explains this clearly; as such acts are compulsory and should be performed always. **Parashar** is very adamant in stipulating that one should always perform these acts before eating - the consequence of which are: 'Those that eat without bathing, eat excrement; without performing Japp, partake in pus and blood; without performing Hom, dine insects; and without donation, partake in dung.' Furthermore, 'Those who have never understood Sandhya or who have understood so but never practised it; such people are endowed with great sin and are considered as Shudra (low born) and as such he should be rejected like an outcast.'

'Those Dwijas who do not worship God, never find happiness in this world or in others. They are then reborn in the lowest of forms.' **Skand Puran** adds, 'Those who eat before Vaishvadeva become poverty stricken and are reborn as crows.'

Shatanand adds that the use of '*Cha*' implies that they should always feed others before they themselves dine. The person who is foremost in the household should always feed his dependants (family members or even guests of the household) before they themselves dine. Otherwise they should always eat together. **Yagnavalkya** explains, 'Children, renounced persons, the elderly, a pregnant woman, the ill, a married woman, a guest and one's servants should always be fed first. After which, the man and woman of the household should accept whatever is left over.'

They should never prepare separately foods for different people. Thus there should be no discrimination. This is especially the case for householders and servants. **Mokshadharm** explains that those who do not discriminate are blessed with happiness and fortune. **Vyaas** adds that those who do discriminate face Hell.

Also, Shatanand explains that one should never eat too much (*Ati Bhojan*). **Kashikhand** explains the consequences of such act: 'Over eating generates illnesses, destroys livelihood (giving a shorter life span), leads to rejection from the heavens and brings about slander and ill repute upon this Earth. Therefore one should refrain from eating too much.'

Vidurji adds, 'Devotees should always eat less than what is given to them. They should sleep a little after doing lots of work. They should give even to their enemies if asked for. To such people, suffering never strikes. Those that always eat little are blessed with good health, long life, strength, happiness, purity and children. Those who eat excessively never attain such vitality.' Therefore we should always eat within reason for bodily maintenance. We should never eat excessively for personal satisfaction, nor eat too little such that the body suffers as a result. Although it is written here one should eat only after

performance of Vaishvadev, it is not however the case during the time of Satak (period of untouchability after a birth or death in the family). This is as such religious rites are prohibited during Satak. Shatanand explains that Vaishvadev should never be performed during Satak but Sandhya can be performed and Poojan can be performed mentally (*Mansi Pooja*). This concludes the additional duties of *Naishtik Brahmcharis*. Now the duties of *Sadhus* (ascetics) are given.

Special Dharmas of Sadhus (188-196)

TEXT 188

Just as Naishtik Brahmcharis, Sadhus shall avoid association with females and effeminate males, visually and verbally. They shall conquer inner enemies like lust, anger, greed, pride etc.

Nine Shloks span the additional duties of *Sadhus*. A Sadhu is one who renounces all worldly affairs and has attachment to God alone. Thus Sadhus are commanded to uphold *Brahmcharya Vrat* and live their lives as absolute celibates.

Lord Dattatreya explains that women are the very form of *Maya* (illusion). In the company of women, man becomes a fool facing destruction. Therefore he should not even touch a wooden figure of a woman with even his feet. **Jivanmuktiviveka** explains, 'He should never speak with a woman, think or dream of a woman seen previously, speak of a woman nor look at pictures of a woman.' Furthermore **Saubhari Muni** explains, 'They should refrain from contact with those men with sexual tendencies. They should control their senses, wander alone and thus merge their consciousness with God. They should associate only with other Sadhus with similar traits.'

Maniratnamala explains: *Dvaaram Kimekam Narakasya Nari* - 'What is the doorway to hell? - Women.' In this way strong words are used to explain the fact that women will ultimately consign a man to hell. Therefore a Sadhu should overcome the enemy of lust which can develop in the mind. **Bhagwat Gita** explains this further:

Trividham Narakasyaitadvaram Nashanamatmanaha /
Kamaha Krodhasthalobhstasmadetatrayam Tyajet //

'Desire, wrath and greed - this is the triple gateway to hell, ruinous to the self. Therefore one should abandon these three.' It explains further: 'It is desire, it is wrath, born of the *Gunn Raja*; it is a great devourer, an inspeller to sin. Know this to be the foe here. As a fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror is covered by dust, and as an embryo is encased in the membrane, so is this (world) enveloped by it (desire).'

'The knowledge of the intelligent self is enveloped by this constant enemy, O Arjun, which is of the nature of desire, and which is difficult to gratify and is insatiable. The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its instruments. By these it overpowers the embodied self after enveloping its knowledge.'

'Therefore, O Arjun, controlling the senses in the very beginning, slay this sinful thing that destroys both knowledge and discrimination. The senses are high, they say; the mind is higher than the senses; the intellect is higher than the mind; but what is greater than intellect is that (desire).'

'Thus, knowing that which is higher than the intellect and fixing the mind with the help of the intellect in *Karma Yoga*, O Arjun, slay this enemy which wears the form of desire, and which is difficult to overcome.' **Bhagwad Gita, Ch 3, 37-43.**

Shrimad Bhagwat further explains the importance of shedding *Krodh* (anger): ‘O King Dhruv! Learn to control anger always and thus may you attain salvation.’ Furthermore, those who wish for *Nirbhay* (fearlessness) should never become a servant to anger. Similarly, *Lobh* (greed) is also an enemy to be controlled, as it is the root cause of all other sins: ***Lobhasya Tu Sakalpamulatvadveyatvam***. *Lobh* is often referred to as the father of all sins - *Paap No Baap*. Thus the three evils - *Kaam*, *Krodh* and *Lobh* should be rooted out first and foremost. After which one become eligible for the heavens.

TEXT 189

They shall control all senses, especially the sense of taste, and shall not accumulate wealth or ask others to do so, on their behalf.

They should overcome all senses (or sense objects) - *Indriyas* - that is the five *Gnaan Indriyas* (ears, eyes, skin, tongue and nose), five *Karma Indriyas* (arms, legs, mouth, male/female genital organs) and the mind. Thus these eleven *Indriyas* should be controlled.

Shrimad Bhagwat explains, ‘Control your speech, mind, vital breath and senses such that one never again has to be reborn upon this Earth.’ **Vashista** adds, ‘Those who fail to overcome their senses fall from the path of Dharma.’ **Gita** adds, ‘Overcoming the senses, mind and intellect; renouncing desire, fear and anger - such a person has attained salvation. When one is able to draw his senses from the objects of sense on every side, just as a tortoise draws in it’s limbs, then their wisdom is firmly set.’

Therefore one should overcome the sense of taste first and foremost as ***Jitam Sarvam Jite Rase*** - ‘To overcome the sense of taste is to overcome all senses.’ **Arunya Smruti** adds, ‘One should perform *Bhojan* (dining) in the manner that they are taking medicine.’ Just as medicine is taken in small doses and often is unpleasant to the taste, one should not eat to satisfy their palate.

The consequences of not overcoming one’s senses are explained in **Bhagwat Gita**, ‘To a man thinking about sense objects, there arises attachment to them; from attachment arises desire, from desire arises anger; from anger there comes delusion; from delusion, the loss of memory, the destruction of discrimination - he is lost.’

Also, *Sadhus* should not amass wealth of their own and thus personal belongings such as new clothing, tools etc. They should similarly not have others amass wealth for them. In this way they should be free from any such self-interest. The reason for this is that such personal wealth is only for the gratification of the senses and so should be shed. Indeed, they should renounce all contact with such wealth just as they would renounce contact with women.

Our elders have explained, ‘Brahma has created two forms of illusion for the destruction of man - women and gold (wealth).’ Furthermore, **Shrimad Bhagwat** has explained *Suvarna* (gold or wealth) as the basis of *Kali*. Thus it is one of the factors which causes the destruction of *Satya* (truth) and brings the progression of *Kali* (sin and immorality). For this reason, **Paramhansa Upanishad** is firm in saying, ‘A *Bhikshuk* (mendicant) who looks upon gold with temptation is a *Brahmhatyara* (murderer of Brahmins), who touches with temptation is a *Chandala* (low born) and who accepts such Gold is an *Atmahatyara* (suicidal).’ **Jivanmuktiviveka** explains, ‘Those *Bhikshuks* who intentionally ejaculate or amass wealth will definitely face destruction.’

This Shlok gives us the essence of *Yoga Sadhana* - the ability to have absolute control over the mind and senses. Those who completely master these will definitely attain the heavens and will become free from difficulties in this life. Those who fall servant to sensual needs will undoubtedly fall. One should be unaffected by what they see, hear, taste etc., and nothing should be able to pull them from their path of *Dharma* and *Bhakti*. This applies equally to Grihastas alike as Lord Swaminarayan in the **Vachanamrut** has cited the example of **Janak Raja** as foremost for he was able to subdue his mind and senses, unaffected by them, even though he was a King of great stature.

TEXT 190

They shall never accept deposits from others, never loose patience and shall never allow a female to enter their place of residence.

Sadhus should not act as 'safe house' for others. This is because such a subject matter is the cause of distress, difference and argument, explains Shatanand. This is very true as we can see in practice that many fall-outs are often caused due to financial differences.

Secondly, they should always remain calm and patient. They should never get angry or agitated. This is especially the case in situations of begging for food. They should thus never loose control due to not receiving *Bhiksha*. Bodily needs or wants are strong but they should always be suppressed and patience demonstrated. Smrutis say: *Dhiro Dhairyam Na Hapyeda* - 'Steady or firm people should never loose their patience.'

Finally, they should not allow a female to enter the place or their residence as to do so is contrary to their vow of celibacy. This subject has been discussed in full earlier.

TEXT 191

Except in emergency, they should never go out alone during the night-time nor shall they go out without company at any other times.

Sadhus should never wander alone. They should always be in the company of other *Sadhus*. When travelling from one town to another, they should always go in a pair or a group. Similarly when going to somebody's house, they should never go alone. **Krutyachintamani** adds generally, 'After sunset, one should not wander alone. They should not wander with unrighteous people nor enter a village through some secret pathway.' These commandments can be interpreted to be in the context of our safety also. However it is also the case that one can achieve salvation more easily through the company of other saints or righteous people and therefore Shastras speak of 'Ekant' (residing alone) to be interpreted as living amongst those that are righteous.

Kapil Dev explains this: 'Elders have said that infatuation or attachment (*Ashakti*) is a means to bondage of the soul. However if such a person becomes attached to a *Sadhu-Purush* then the doorway to the heavens can open for him.' Thus our Shastras command that one should always associate with the righteous and renounce the company of the sinful.

One can achieve greatness through '*Satsang*' (association with the righteous). For this reason, Lord Swaminarayan himself considered *Satsang* to be a great tool for salvation and before departing from the Earth, he established *Sadhus*, *Shastras* and *Mandirs* such that *Satsang* could flourish through these tools. This effort continues today through initiation of new *Sadhus*, publishing of *Shastras* and the building of new temples throughout the world.

TEXT 192

They shall never put on clothes which are expensive, decorative, dyed with gaudy colours, shawls, or such other garments, even if they have been reverently given to them by others.

'Expensive clothing or garments with golden threads and colourful designs are for Kingly folk and other wealthy people and therefore are termed *Rajoguni*', explains **Dharmopradeep**. Therefore due to their Rajoguni nature and the fact that it does not befit a Tyagi to wear such clothes, ascetics are forbidden from wear such clothing. They should wear neutral basic clothing that serves the purpose of covering up the body.

TEXT 193

They shall never go to a householder's place except for religious gatherings or receiving alms. They shall always utilise their time in devotion to God instead of wasting their time idly.

Niti Shastras explain the circumstances when one may attend a function even without invitation: 'They should go to a *Yagna* even if they have not been invited.' Thus one may attend religious functions, Yagnas, Katha etc. even without an invitation.

They may go to such houses to beg for food and do so by standing outside and calling out to get the attention of the household. They may enter such houses for purpose of religious discourse, *Padhramani* etc. but not otherwise.

They should spend their time in devotion to God. Shatanand explains, 'Sadhus should not allow even the minutest of time to pass devoid of devotion to God through Kirtan etc.' They should not spend their time wastefully in other worldly things. In this way they should strive to become *Atmanivedi Bhakts* - the highest attainment in *Navadha Bhakti*.

TEXT 194

They shall go for meals to a householder's place where food is served by males, and where they have no contact with or sight of females.

This is to protect their *Brahmcharya Vrat*.

TEXT 195

If this facility is not available, they shall ask for uncooked food and offer it to Lord Shree Krishna before consuming it.

Shatanand adds that it is unsuitable for a *Tyagi* to prepare food - it should really be begged. However they may prepare such food for offering to God. God has said, 'Those (Tyagis) who prepare food for themselves prepare sin for themselves - and thus are consumed by sin.'

Lord Dattatreya has said, 'Munis should beg for food from *Grihastas*, without being troublesome to them. By eating such food, the sins of the Grihastha are destroyed.' Thus Grihasthas should readily offer Bhiksha to Sadhus.

TEXT 196

They shall behave like Bharatji (son of Rishabdeva) who in ancient times used to act as an insensate Brahmin.

The example set by **Rajarshi Bharat**, the son of **Rishabdev** is cited here. In his third birth upon this Earth, his behaviour as an illiterate Brahmin is glorified. In similar manner, ParamhansaSadhus too should live their lives as he did. Shatanand explains the meaning of **Paramhans**: '*Param* is understood to be those with extensive wealth. Alternatively, '*Par* is an enemy of Dharma, thus *Param* is one who annihilates such an enemy. Such a *Hans* (soul or spirit) is a *Paramhans*.'

In this way as a Paramhans is a *Vaishnav* (a devotee of Vishnu). He is the foremost amongst devotees. He is the source of great purity and is free from all sin and is always absorbed in God through penance. He is the Guru who has absolute control over his speech and senses.

Such was Jad Bharat, a great Paramhans who renounced all contact with his family, freeing himself from the bondage of Karma by devoting himself to God. Passing his time in praise and remembrance of the Lord, he would focus his mind upon the blessed feet of the Lord. This is extensively documented in Shrimad Bhagwat's fifth chapter.

There are two types of Paramhans - *Alinga* and *Avadhutalinga*. The first of these - Alinga are to be understood as the likes of Sukhdevji. **Jabalopanishad** explains the qualities of such a Paramhansa, 'Who like the day he was born takes a naked form, is unaffected by *Sukh* (happiness) and *Dukh* (misery), who is free from *Parigraha* (accepting things), is *Tatva Gnaani* (knowledge of the various elements), is ever ready to follow the path to God, with pure mind, who accepts Bhiksha in order to secure vital breath, is unaffected by opportunity or inopportunity, who has no fixed abode such as a house, temple, cave, bank of a river etc., has sharp consciousness, fearless, always meditating upon God, has hunger for knowledge, refrains from acting unrighteously or inappropriately, like a *Sanyas* is free from the associations with the body - such a person is a *Paramhans*.'

Similarly an Avadhutalinga Paramhans is famed as the likes of Jad Bharat and Shridama (Sudama). Such a Paramhans is described as poverty stricken, wearing torn clothing and slandered in society.

Lord Swaminarayan explains that Sadhus should live like Jad Bharat. As the story goes, the King of Shaibhari Desh, Rahugan met Jad Bharat when the King's men were searching for a person to carry the King's palanquin. Seeing the *Janoi* (sacred thread) upon the body of this figure he enquired about the identity of such person saying, "O Dev! You, like a Brahmin wear the sacred thread, therefore reveal to me your true identity, who chooses to wander discreetly. Your form is like that of an *Avadhut* and you present yourself like a great devotee of God. You secretly and contentedly worship God daily - praise to you - O great soul!'

In this way the King ordered his men to not make the naked Brahmin carry the palanquin. Thus, Sadhus should live their lives similar to that of Bharat - selflessly. They should adorn simple '*Valkal*' clothing and should worship God always. They should always observe Dharma and Bhakti.

This is the final Shloka of the additional duties for Sadhus. Shloks 197-202 sum up by offering common duties for Brahmcharis and Sadhus and thus wrap up the second part of the Shikshapatri of *Vishesh Dharma*.

Common Special Dharmas of Naishtik Brahmcharis and Sadhus (197-202)

TEXT 197

They shall strictly abstain from taking betel leaves, opium, tobacco and other similar intoxicating substances.

They should strictly refrain from taking *Paan - Tambul* (betel leaves), *Afirm* (opium), *Tamaku* (tobacco) as well as other drugs or intoxicating substances (*Majam Vigere Madak Vastu*). Such things are addictive, injurious to health and deteriorate the mind. You eat it - it eats you! This subject matter is already discussed in *Samanya Dharma* and so further detail has been omitted here.

TEXT 198

They shall never dine at ceremonies pertaining to conception etc. and obsequial rites of the eleventh day and the twelfth day or any other similar ceremonies.

Matsya Puran says. 'Those who observe a *Vrat* should not eat during *Sanskars* (rites during a lifetime) and *Pretashraadh* (obsequial rites).' Therefore a renounced person and widow, who observe the *Vrat of Brahmcharya* should not dine at such ceremonies even if they have been invited to do so. *Sanskars* here should be understood as any of the rites such as birth, death, marriage etc.

Similarly *Pretashraadh* is the eleventh or twelfth day following a person's death, on which special rites are performed. Thus in such situations, or invitations for lunch, *Brahmcharis* and *Sadhus* should never dine.

TEXT 199

**They shall never sleep during the daytime except when they are unwell.
They shall never intentionally indulge themselves in any gossip.**

Bhishma in **Mahabharat** explains, 'The sinless, who observe *Brahmcharya* should not sleep during the day due to the sins that can arise from dream-state.' These sins or undesirable qualities of dream state are explained: 'In dream state, one faces defeat at the hands of *Rajo Gunn* and *Tamo Gunn* and having attained a different body he acts undesirably.'

Shastras explain that poisonous medicine, a metal plate, release of sperm, white clothing, dining at night-time, sleeping during the day and gossiping lead to the destruction of a *Yati* (ascetic).

Vyaas in **Mahabharat's Grihasta Dharmas** adds that *Grihastas* should also refrain from sleeping during the day. They should not sleep during the first and final portions of night-time. Nor should they sleep during both *Sandhyas*. Similarly they should indulge in sexual activity with their wife only during the period of *Rutu* (sixteen days from the day of menstruation).

Narad explains, 'To wander at night, sleep during the day, laziness, to slander, to intoxicate oneself and eating excessively or fasting excessively should be avoided.' **Anushasan Parva** says, 'Sleeping during the day causes a person to have a short and troublesome life with lack of prosperity and progress.' **Skand Puran** adds, 'To sit upon a cow, to breath the smoke from a funeral pyre, to swim a large river, to absorb the rays of the sun whilst it is red in colour and to sleep during the day are all acts which should be avoided if one desires a fruitful life.'

Veidha Shastra explains the diseases caused by sleeping during the day: 'By sleeping during the day, one can develop illnesses such as **Pinas Rog** (cold or flu) which can cause **Kasa Rog** (coughing) which can eventually lead to such diseases as **Ksheya Rog** (tuberculosis) which wears the body away.' 'By not performing physical exercise (*Vyayaam*), sleeping during the day and eating that which is prohibited, a person develops abdominal tape worms (*Krami*).' Also, 'Excessive sexual activity, eating things too salty, eating things too sour and eating things too acrid or hot all cause a persons blood to become diseased and their skin to whiten.'

Finally, they should never involve themselves in *Gramya Vart* (vulgar talk or gossip) - either by speaking such gossip or listening to such gossip. This again really applies to all. **Shrimad Bhagwat** says, 'Those who choose to not listen to the pastimes of God, which is able to destroy sin and prefer to listen to vulgar talk destroy all their *Punya* and attain only the hells.' Through such idle gossip one is wasted away and their lives amount to nothing. It wastes away their mind as it is filled with such filth causing confusion and unsteadiness.

TEXT 200

They shall never sleep on a bed except when they are unwell. They shall always behave guilelessly with other saints.

Smrutis explain, 'By sleeping upon a bed, one breaks the vow of *Brahmcharya*.' Therefore as the Vrat of *Brahmcharya* is foremost for a Sadhu and *Brahmchari*, they should not indulge in such luxury.

Secondly, Sadhus should always behave according to their *Dharma* and thus display the qualities outlined in *Shastras*. Therefore they should always behave humbly and treat other saints with utmost respect. **Narad** explains: *Satsu Nishkapato Bhaved* - 'They should act guilelessly without deceit with those that are righteous.' **Sanat Kumar** also says, 'Subjects should always behave honestly and guilelessly towards their King. Similarly such qualities should be displayed by disciples with their Guru, wives with their husbands and all persons with those that are righteous.'

Thus Sadhus should never bear any hate, envy or anger towards other saints and indeed other people such as householders. They should display qualities of tranquillity, kind-heartedness etc.

TEXT 201

They shall not retaliate if misguided or if wicked persons abuse them or beat them, but shall instead, be tolerant and always wish them well.

Thus they should never get angry or speak abusively towards such people as to do so would be in direct contradiction to the Sadhus *Dharma*: *Kshamashila Hi Saadhavaha* - 'Forgiveness is a Sadhus quality'. To forgive in such circumstances is by no means easy. **Lord Shankar** explains, 'O Devi! The pains inflicted by the weapons of an enemy are minute compared to the afflictions caused through harsh words directed at oneself.'

God has said, 'An arrow through the heart is nothing compared to hurtful words directed at oneself. But still, in such circumstances, one should accept such harsh words using their intellect and self control (and never loose control by becoming angry).' 'O Uddhav! Upon this Earth, a Sadhu is not he who becomes agitated by others and is not able to cool his mind of such agitation.'

Only such Sadhus are considered the greatest amongst men. The lowest form of man is he who insults others, who bears hatred, begrudges others, beats others, imprisons, steals all their wealth or livelihood, who spits or urinates upon another etc.

Sukhdevji explains that such harsh words or beating amount to nothing - 'Just as the *Daityas* (demons) tried everything to be victorious over the *Devas* (Gods) and utterly failed, the abuse verbally or physically by the unrighteous upon the righteous has no effect.'

Examples of restraint are given in the **Shrimad Bhagwat**, 'The great and foremost devotee of God, Chitraketu, could quite easily have cursed Goddess Parvati but was suppressed by him. Such is a trait of a Sadhu.' 'O Parikshit! The great and best of saints, Shree Narad, gladly accepted the curse by Daksh by even praising him for his favour. In this way, all Sadhus should behave in this manner.'

Manusmruti explains that accepting insult is the source of personal happiness: 'Those who are insulted sleep in peace, awake in peace and live in peace. However, those who insult others only face destruction.' Thus those who are unaffected by slander are destined for greatness. For this reason, Sadhus should never show content for others and should think only of wishing them well. They should never think to hurt others either mentally or physically, even if they themselves are hurt.

TEXT 202

They shall never act as messenger, indulge in backbiting or spying. They shall avoid egotism and shall not have attachment towards their relatives.

They should not act as messenger - either literally or verbally to pass on a message for somebody (*Duta Karma*). Nor shall they backbite by revealing secretive information about a person to others (*Paishun*). Neither should they act as spy for others (*Char Karma*). Through such acts, one destroys their truthfulness or guileless (*Niskapatparnu*) as well as their contentment (*Nihasprihaparnu*). Also, the act of Paishun instils cruelty and insensitivity in a person (*Nirdeyaparnu*).

They should shed all ego and attachment to the body and become free from the thought that '*I am the body*'. Similarly they should shed all attachment to persons or material things. In this way they should be free of the qualities of I (*Ahamta*) and Mine (*Mamta*). They should therefore renounce all affections for family, friends, wealth etc. **Lord Svayambhu** explains: *Snehena Yuktasya Na Chasti Muktiriti* - 'Affection (for things/people) will never derive salvation.' **Mahabharat** explains, 'Those who have attachment to their family and friends are not worthy of receiving *Moksh*.' **Brighu** in his **Gita** says, 'Those who having obtained this human body and continue to bellow *I* and *Mine*, have their intellect enveloped in darkness and thus are forever wondering in such void.'

Yudhistira explains that *I* and *Mine* are the Dharmas of a beast: 'O supreme and singular Lord! *I* and *Mine*, *You* and *Yours*; such beastly qualities are not possessed by your choicest devotees.' **Manu** adds, 'It does not befit a Sadhu to think that his body is supreme like the soul. Such instincts are those of animals.'

Our Rishis have taught the distinct nature of the body and soul - they are separate and not the one and the same. They have taught the eternal nature of the soul and the perishable nature of the body. As **Sukhdevji** has explained, 'O King! Shed the beastly instinct that you shall die,' as the '*you*' here is really the soul which is eternal.

Prahlad adds, '*I* and *Mine* considerations of the body causes delusion, therefore one should renounce such evils.' **Sauti Ugrashrav** explains, 'Those who are free from *Ahamta* and *Mamta* are eligible to

dwell in God's heaven.' In **Tatvastuti** it is said, 'Even God keeps his distance from those who are absorbed in *Ahamta* and *Mamta*.' **Vashist** adds, 'As long as *Ahamta* and *Mamta* are rampant in a person, they are forever circling in the cycle of births and deaths.'

Lord Brahma says, 'Those who selflessly offer their all at God's feet (without ego etc.), are blessed and favoured by the Lord. Only such people are able to understand *Maya* (illusion) and conquer it. So doing, they never utter words of I and Mine which are present amongst the beastly kind.' Shatanand concludes by explaining that one should refer to the example set by Bharat upon shedding the evils of I and Mine.

Thus Lord Swaminarayan concludes the additional duties section of the Shikshapatri. In the next ten Shloks leading to the end of the Shikshapatri, the Lord provides a conclusion to the Shikshapatri.

Shikshapatri

PART IV

Conclusion

Yatatmabhirvartitvyam Na Tu Svairam Kadachana

//205//

For the very reason that this Shikshapatri is the essence of all other scriptures and derives endless fruits, it should be implicitly obeyed and practised. Each and every commandment should be followed always and never should one act contrary to these commandments for personal self-interest or material gain.

TEXT 206

By following this Shikshapatri, my male and female disciples shall attain the four desired objects (Dharma, Arth, Kaam and Moksh).

Vartishyante Ya Ittham Hi Purusha Yoshitstatha /
Te Dharmadichaturvargasidhvim Prapsyanti Nischitam //206//

The Lord offers a promise that those who obey as per the wish of the Lord will definitely obtain the four **Purusharthas** - *Dharma* (duty), *Arth* (wealth), *Kaam* (desire) and *Moksh* (Salvation). They will indeed acquire that which they aspire for.

TEXT 207

My male and female disciples shall understand that those who do not follow the precepts of this Shikshapatri shall be considered as excommunicated from our Sampraday.

Nettham Ya Acharishyanti Te Tvasmatsampradayat /
Bahirbhuta Iti Gneyam Stripunsaiha Sampradayikaiha //207//

The consequence of not obeying is given. Those who prefer to have a lifestyle that is contrary to the disciplines of this Shikshapatri should be considered as outcasts and not members of the *Swaminarayan-Udhavi Sampraday*. Thus all should strive to obey the commandments listed.

TEXT 208

My disciples shall read this Shikshapatri daily, and those who cannot read, shall listen to it with reverence.

Shikshapatrayaha Pratidinam Pathoasya Madupashritaiha /
Kartavyoanakhsharagnaistu Shravanam Karyamadarat //208//

All devotees should read the Shikshapatri daily and thus understand the precepts therein and obey them without question. Thus they should read the Shikshapatri during morning Pooja. Shatanand explains that all *Satsangis* of the three castes have the right to study and read the Shikshapatri.

TEXT 209

When there is no one to read this Shikshapatri to them, they shall worship it daily. All my disciples shall reverently honour my word as my divine self.

Vaktrabhava Tu Pujaiva Karyaasyayaha Prativasaram /
Madrupamiti Madvarni Manyeyam Paramadarat //209//

Svadhya: 'Study of the Vedas' is devotion to Vedic study with the conviction that all teachings of the Vedas deal with the Lord, with his glorious nature and with the mode of worshipping him.

Tapaha: 'Austerity' is the practice of penances like *Kuchra*, *Chandrayana*, and vow on the twelfth day of the lunar fortnight, etc., which foster capability for performing acts pleasing to the Lord.

Arjavam: 'Uprightness' consists of the oneness of thought, word and deed in one's dealings with others.

Ahimsa: 'Non-injury' is abstaining from injury to others.

Satyam: 'Truth' is communication by words of what one knows for certain and what is conducive to the good of others.

Akrodhaha: 'Freedom from anger' is the absence in oneself of the mental state which, if permitted, leads to the injury of others.

Tyagaha: 'Renunciation' is the abandonment of everything that is contrary to the injury of others.

Shantiha: 'Tranquillity' is the practice of controlling the senses from their prosperity towards sense objects.

Apaishunam: 'Not slandering others' means refraining oneself from speech that may cause evil to others.

Daya Bhuteshu: 'Compassion to all living beings' means one's incapacity to stand the suffering of others.

Aloluptvam: means freedom from desire for sense-objects.

Mardavam: 'Gentleness' means absence of harshness, and being worthy of association with the good.

Hriha: 'Sense of shame' is shrinking from doing what should not be done.

Achapalam: means being unattracted by objects enjoyable by the senses even when they are at hand.

Tejaha: 'Grandeur' is the quality by virtue of which one cannot be overpowered by the wicked.

Kshama: 'Forgiveness' is the freedom from feelings of antagonism towards others even when they cause injury to oneself.

Dhritiha: 'Fortitude' is the sense of determination to do one's own duty even under conditions of anger.

Saucham: 'Purity' is fitness of the body and the mind as prescribed in the scriptures for the performance of sacred deeds.

Adroha: 'Freedom from hatred' is the non-interference with others, viz. absence of interference in the actions of others according to their wish.

Natimanita: 'Over pride' is having unbridled self-esteem; freedom from misplaced pride is meant here.

These are the virtues that are found in one who is born for the 'divine destiny' - *Daivi Sampada*. Such persons are devoted to carrying out the commandments of the Lord.

Dambhaha: 'Pomposity' is the practice of Dharma for earning a reputation of righteousness.

Darpaha: 'Arrogance' is the elation caused by the pleasures of the sense-objects and the consequent inability to discriminate between what ought to be done.

Atimanaha: 'Self conceit' is the estimation of oneself in a measure not warranted by one's education and birth.

Krodhaha: 'Wrath' is the sense of antagonism causing injury to others.

Paushyam: 'Rudeness' is the nature of causing grief to *Sadhus*.

Agnanam: 'Ignorance' is the incapacity to discriminate between high and low forms of conduct and principles, and also between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done.

These are the qualities that are found in one born of a 'demoniac destiny' - *Asuri Sampada*. Asuras are those who rebel against the commandments of the Lord. Thus, this Shikshapatri should not be given to those who are unrighteous. By giving it to such a person, the Shikshapatri can often be abused and poorly looked after. The Shikshapatri is God's very form and so should be treated with such respect and therefore only given to those who can understand this and look after it properly.

TEXT 211

I write this Shikshapatri on the auspicious day of Vasant Panchmi (*Maha Sudh Panchmi*) of the Vikram Samvat Year 1882.

Vikramarkaskasyabde Netrashtavasubhumite /
Vasantadyodine Shikshapatriyam Likhita Shubhu //211//

Lord Swaminarayan here again states the fact that he himself has written the Shikshapatri in Sanskrit and gives the date on which he has completed it. And finally the conclusion of the Shikshapatri:

TEXT 212

May Lord Shree Krishna, reliever of all miseries of his disciples, protector of Bhakti with Dharma and bestower of all desired happiness, shower his blessings on us all.

Nijashritanaam Sakalartihanta Svadharmabhakteravanam Vidhata /
Data Sukhanaam Manasepsitanaam Tanotu Krushno Akhilmangalam Naha //212//

Mangaladini Mangalmadhyani Mangalantaani - Those Shastras with a *Manglacharan* at the beginning, middle and end are destined for fame. In this way, offering a *Manglacharan* in praise of Lord Shree Krishna, the Lord completes the Shikshapatri.

Shrimad Bhagwat explains, 'God is such that he will destroy the pains of births and deaths of even those who are not his choicest devotees.' 'We repeatedly bow before the feet of the Almighty, who through his kind and loving nature offers salvation and solitude to Satpurushas by destroying their misery.'

‘O Vidur, son of Vyaas! How can those who shelter with Lord Shree Hari, and whose mind and actions are ever focused upon the Lord, face misery?’ ‘We come to thee for shelter at thy feet. Thy blessed feet are like an umbrella providing shelter in the form of protection from sin and relief from the pains of repeated births and deaths.’ ‘O Lord! Shelter at thy lotus feet releases those swimming across the ocean of births and deaths (*Bhavasagar*). Praise to thee! Singing thy praise and listening to thy divine sport we save ourselves from repeated births. Through recitation of thy name we attain salvation. O eternal one! Those who come to thee for shelter are blessed by the removal of all misery.’

Therefore, those who never surrender to God can never enjoy such bliss. **Shrimad Bhagwat** explains, ‘There is no other form of shelter in this universe for attaining Moksh than that of thy lotus feet. Those who do not have such favour face fear.’ Thus, shelter at God’s feet should ultimately be the aim of all so that misery and suffering can be rooted out.

Secondly, God is the protector of *Dharma* and *Bhakti*. As the Vedas explain, ‘In order to save and protect Dharma, God manifests as the great incarnations.’

Finally, Shatanand comments upon the Lord’s ability to bestow eternal happiness. God alone is the source of happiness, the eternal giver and provider. ‘All that man desires and wishes for is provided by the Lord. All the praise offered to him results in the provision of fruits for their labour.’ ‘Those who dedicatedly devote themselves to God receive from him, supreme knowledge and fulfilment of all desires. Such persons are never again reborn upon this Earth.’

‘O eternal Lord! Men receive from thee, through thy favour a long and fruitful life, healthy body, wealth, the heavens, land, water, all aspects of *Yoga*, Dharma, desire and knowledge. Such person overcomes all enemies.’ Therefore one should in life, aim to derive God’s favour through devotion and dedication to God by following the Dharmas as prescribed in this Shikshapatri.

Ultimately, Lord Swaminarayan asks of Shree Krishna that he always and everywhere shower his blessings upon us all. ‘Blessed are those, in whose heart the auspicious form of God resides. They are indeed fortunate.’ Thus Lord Shree Swaminarayan, in his last words in the Shikshapatri, concludes by asking for the favour of Shree Krishna to be always with him and his disciples.

Maharishi Shree Shatanand Muni concludes this *Arthadipika* in sixteen verses. In the first twelve of these, he summarises the Shikshapatri providing statistics about the number and nature of the commandments in the whole Shikshapatri: there are 642 commandments in total!

In verse fourteen, Shatanand says, ‘I Shatanand Muni, using the knowledge of *Shruti*, *Smruti* and other Shastras, have provided this commentary of the Shikshapatri in *Sanskrit* entitled - **Shikshapatri Arthadipika**, according to my ability and intellect. For which O Lord, may thee be overjoyed and shower thy blessings upon me.’

In verse fifteen, Shatanand glorifies Lord Swaminarayan as the supreme, unparalleled Lord of the universe, who alone is the redeemer of souls: ‘Upon this Earth, the son of Dharmadev, Shree Hari, is ever propounding *Ekantik Dharma* and *Bhakti*. Therefore O Lord, the most benevolent, renounced, foremost master (*Anadi Guru*) and regulator of sins; continue to shower thy auspiciousness everywhere.’

In the final Shlok - sixteen, he says: ‘Thy divine body is the great *Akshar Brahman Dhaam*. Thou is the best of the best of Gods. Glory and victory to thee Lord Hari, the son of Dharma and the upholder of Dharma.’

Finally, Shatanand concludes the Arthadipika in traditional style:

*Iti Shrimadudhavasmapradaipravartak Shrisahajanadswamilikhitashiksha-
patrayastikarthadipikavyaya Tachischyashatanandmunivirachita Samapta //*

The Arthadipika was completed on *Ramnavmi day of Samvat Year 1890*.

In similar manner and devotion, I too, offer my humble respects and praise to Shatanand Muni and the glorious Murti of Purnapurushottam Bhagwan Shree Swaminarayan, as I conclude this work which is based on Shatanand's Arthadipika of the Shikshapatri. May the great knowledge of our scriptures, the fundamental teachings of our Master, Lord Swaminarayan and the disciplines of Dharma and Bhakti continue to flourish and progress well into the next millennia, especially in our younger generation. May Lord Swaminarayan and blessed saints shower their choicest blessings upon us all.