

A Spiritual Journey : Akshar Purushottam Upasna - Master Key to Life Divine

My experiences with Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj and
Sadguru Sant Ashwindada on the Saurashtra and Chhapaiya Yatra

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I am delighted and thankful to share my reflections on the recent Yatra (International Youth Retreat), a spiritual adventure that has transformed the hearts of all who joined this sacred pilgrimage. We travelled the holy lands of Saurashtra, Ayodhya, Chhapaiya, and Delhi in the divine presence of Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj and Sadguru Sant Ashwindada, experiencing the spiritual vibrations that filled every temple, every chant, and every moment. The Yatra, titled “**Akshar Purushottam Upasana - Master Key to Life Divine**” was a divine mix of experiences, blending the core of our beloved Swaminarayan tradition with the cultural heritage of Bharat.

Yatra : A “Yatra” refers to a pilgrimage or spiritual journey, often undertaken with the intention of seeking divine blessings, spiritual growth, or a deeper connection with one's faith. Yatras can vary in scale and purpose, ranging from individual journeys to group pilgrimages. They are integral to many religious traditions around the world and are seen as a means of self-discovery, reflection, and devotion.

In the context of my experience, the Yatra to Saurashtra and Chhapaiya was not just a physical journey but a

spiritual expedition involving participants from different parts of the world. The collective nature of this Yatra fostered a sense of community and shared spiritual purpose, making it a unique and enriching experience.

Akshar Purushottam Upasana : “Akshar Purushottam Upasana” is a spiritual practice rooted in the Swaminarayan tradition. Swaminarayan is a sect within Hinduism, and Akshar Purushottam Upasana is centred around devotion to the divine, emphasising the worship of God in the form of Akshar and Purushottam.

- **Akshar**: In this context, Akshar represents the eternal divine abode and is considered the spiritual guide or guru.
- **Purushottam**: This term refers to the supreme divine being or God.
- **Upasana**: Upasana is the practice of worship or devotion.

The combination of these elements suggests a path of devotion and meditation aimed at realising the divine within and establishing a connection with the ultimate reality. Akshar Purushottam Upasana often involves scriptural study, prayer, and moral living under the guidance of a spiritual mentor.

The connection among more than 200 plus devotees from all corners of the globe truly embodied the essence of Samp Suhradbhav and Ekta – the values of peace and unity that Bhagwan Swaminarayan not only preached but lived. We weren't just fellow travellers; we formed a sacred family bound by our shared love for Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj.

Every chat, every smile, and every prayer turned into a celebration of our unity, transcending the physical and touching the very core of our souls. In the sacred precincts



Sahebji showering blessings and satisfying curiosity of youth

of Swaminarayan Mandirs, the air resonated with the universal language of love as we sang praises for Swaminarayan Bhagwan and his revered Gurus.

Regardless of our origins, a profound sense of togetherness enveloped us during collective chants. This unity extended beyond the Mandir boundaries, infusing our interactions, shared meals, and moments of reflection, a constant reminder that we are all integral parts of the divine love for Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj.

Sadguru Sant Ashwindada, a beacon of wisdom and guidance throughout the Yatra, played a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual contours of our journey. His presence, like a steady hand, guided us through the intricacies of devotion, making every interaction a lesson in spiritual wisdom.

Samp Suhradbhav can be translated as "equality of all hearts" or "harmony of minds." In the spiritual context, it emphasises the idea of treating everyone with equanimity, recognising the divine presence in all beings. It encourages individuals to transcend social, cultural, and economic differences, fostering an atmosphere of unity and mutual respect.

During our Yatra, the camaraderie among participants, reflecting Samp Suhradbhav, created a sense of oneness and brotherhood/sisterhood regardless of individual backgrounds.

Ekta translates to "oneness" or "unity." It signifies the understanding that at a fundamental level, all souls are interconnected and share a common divine origin. The practice of Ekta involves recognising this underlying unity and fostering a sense of interconnectedness with the divine and with fellow beings.

During our Yatra, the spirit of Ekta contributed to the strong sense of community and shared purpose among the participants, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

Samp Suhradbhav and **Ekta** align with the broader philosophy of Akshar Purushottam Upasana, promoting the idea that true spirituality involves not only devotion to the divine but also the recognition and respect for the divinity present in all.

The spiritual journey unfolded organically; each Mandir visited becoming a sacred portal into the rich heritage of the Swaminarayan tradition. Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj's vision manifested not just in the physicality of the Yatra but in the profound spiritual experiences etched into our consciousness. His foresight in providing the youth in the West with a firsthand encounter with Bharat's spiritual tapestry delivered a journey that went beyond the superficial to the sublime.

As we delved into the roots of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, the sacred spaces echoed with the dreams of Yogiji Maharaj, the tireless efforts of Pramukswami Maharaj, and the ongoing legacy steered by Mahant Swami Maharaj. The Mandirs held unprecedented historic Sabhas for the participants of the Yatra (Anoopam Mission devotees), unveiling a history of devotion, seva, and spiritual evolution. The Kothari's and Mahants, custodians of these sacred spaces, opened their hearts to express unprecedented love and respect for Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj.

A visit to the Birthplace of Gurudev Yogiji Maharaj another profound moment of the Yatra was our pilgrimage to Dhari, the birthplace of Gurudev Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth spiritual successor of Lord Swaminarayan and the guru of Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj was born as Jina Vasani in this small town in Gujarat, and he was a manifestation of Aksharbrahman, the ideal devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was a



Honouring seva of santo and youth leaders of India for organizing retreat

saint of joy, humility, and service, who inspired countless souls to join the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and spread the message of Akshar Purushottam Upasana. He was the Guru of our beloved Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj, which was a sign of his spiritual destiny. By visiting Dhari, we were able to connect with the source of Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj's spiritual journey.

Chhapaiya was another moving moment of the Yatra, where we followed the footsteps of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who was born as Ghanshyam Maharaj in this holy village. In the holy lands of Chhapaiya, the divine aura wrapped us as we retraced the steps of our spiritual leader, who performed many miracles and leelas in his childhood. It was not just a historical journey; it was a spiritual connection, linking us directly to the divine legacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who revealed himself as the supreme God, Purushottam, and established the Akshar Purushottam Upasana, the path of worshipping him in the company of his ideal devotee, Akshar. As we engaged in Dhun/Chanting in Chhapaiya, the vibrations echoed through our beings, creating a powerful atmosphere of devotion and unity. It was a moment where time seemed to pause, and our collective prayers resonated for the welfare of humanity, echoing the very essence of Akshar Purushottam Upasana, which is to serve Swaminarayan Bhagwan, Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj and his devotees with love and humility.

Our Yatra also embraced Ayodhya, the sacred city of Lord Ram, who is revered as the ideal king and the seventh avatar of Vishnu. We visited the Ram Mandir, which is under construction, the Pran Pratistha ceremony took place on 22 January 2024, which was a historic moment for all Hindus. We also paid tribute to Hanuman Garhi Mandir, where we offered our respects to Hanuman, the faithful devotee of Lord Ram. Ayodhya is one of the seven holy cities of Hinduism, and the birthplace of Lord Ram, whose life and deeds are narrated in the epic Ramayana.

Appreciating the Unsung Heroes: In a heartfelt Sabha on our final day of the Yatra, the unsung heroes behind the

scenes, the organisers, transport coordinators, and the entire committee were lauded. Their meticulous planning and unwavering dedication showcased the power of Ekta and Samp Suhradbhav in action. Their efforts allowed the Yatra to unfold seamlessly, a testament to the collective spirit of service and devotion.

A Legacy in Motion: Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj's vision manifested in every sacred moment of the Yatra. His foresight in bringing the youth closer to Bharat's spiritual roots became a reality. The Yatra wasn't just a physical journey; it was a profound acknowledgment of the spiritual leadership that has shaped the Swaminarayan tradition.

Continuation of a Spiritual Journey, Beyond Borders and Time: As we disperse, the impact of the Yatra lingers - a continuum of spiritual evolution. The collective chanting, the footsteps retraced in sacred lands, and the spiritual insights gained are not mere memories but foundational elements shaping our ongoing spiritual journey. The Master Key to Life Divine, the Akshar Purushottam Upasna, remains not just a practice but a guiding philosophy, unlocking new realms of understanding in our perpetual journey towards divinity.

In the tapestry of our spiritual evolution, the Yatra stands as a vibrant thread, woven with the collective energy of Samp Suradbhav and Ekta, the timeless wisdom of Akshar Purushottam Upasna, and the guiding light of Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj. May these reflections resonate in every devotee's heart, inspiring a deeper connection with the divine and a renewed commitment to the path of Akshar Purushottam Upasna.

I am immensely grateful to Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj for giving us this rare opportunity to join the Yatra, which was a life-changing experience for all of us. I pray that we may always remain faithful to the Akshar Purushottam Upasana and serve Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Guruhari Sant Bhagwant Sahebji Maharaj and his devotees with love and humility.

Jai Shree Swaminarayan!

