

GOD'S DIVINE MANIFESTATION : OUR OWN SAHEBDADA !

~ Saheli Sheth (Peoria, USA)

Tick, tock, tick... I rolled over in bed and glanced over at the time. 1:17 am, and sleep and I were playing a game of tag where it was far ahead of me. I wondered what to think about to feel a sense of ease and comfort.

A painting gradually emerged in my mind: Ghanshyam Maharaj, our beloved Lord Swaminarayan in His child form, gleefully running in His birthplace of Chhapaiya, India. I imagined Him playfully dancing near the Narayan Sarovar, the water pool where He bathed. I could hear His laughter, His lightheartedness, in the carefree days of His childhood. I could smell the delicacies He ate in His hometown, adorned by various trees and greenery. A soft smile spread across my face as this vivid movie played in my mind, and before I knew it, I peacefully drifted off to sleep...

When visiting Chhapaiya during the 2023-2024 International Youth Retreat, we learned the remarkable value of recalling Ghanshyam Maharaj's divine *leela*. Visiting such sacred sites helps to fill our minds with the positive images of His life, cleansing us of any lingering negativity. Sadguru Sant Param Pujya Ashvindada emphasized the significance of reading about these divine experiences from the *Ghanshyam Charitra*.

When asked about feeling vibrations, Ashvindada shared the simple definition of vibrations: the joy we feel by being in a place. Spending time in holy places binds us to lasting memories and positive thoughts, leaving less room for unwelcome ones. The magnificent Anoopam Mission "*shikhar baddh*" temple we see in Mogri today was born from a thought, a *sankalp*, inspired by devotees during their visit to Chhapaiya several years ago. Such is the incredible power of Chhapaiya's divine ambiance.

For years, Swaminarayan devotees have eagerly visited Lord Swaminarayan's birthplace. As with any building, over time the older residence halls showed their age. Yet still, with Chhapaiya described as "Akshardham for Swaminarayan devotees," devotees fell in love with the tranquility no matter what.

In 2023, Chhapaiya unveiled its newly designed residence hall – a grand hall with a modern look and luxurious amenities. Our youth group had the privilege of being one of the first to reside in this building. Although devotees would visit regardless of the condition, what a blessing it is to think: *God is doing so much for us, just so we can have the benefit of His birthplace's darshan!*

Walking through the campus of Chhapaiya, one could easily sense devotees' deep love for their God. This love, however, is a two-way street. Through how God preserves these sacred sites for devotees' comfort, I also witnessed the deep care God has for His beloved devotees.

In addition to Chhapaiya, Sant Bhagwant Sahebada shares a special connection with Dhari, his guru Yogiji Mararaj's birthplace. While each *sthan* holds its own significance, Sahebada especially reveres Chhapaiya and Dhari. His attention is focused on God and his guru.

In Dhari, our understanding of Sahebada's glory blossomed when we saw his legacy: a women's Arts and Commerce College created in honor of his guru, providing the village girls with access to higher education opportunities that had never existed before.

When we arrived at Dhari, the girls expressed their heartfelt devotion through dance, showcasing their unmistakable love for Sahebada. But once again, I realized that Sahebada had loved them first. He had etched their names into his heart long before building a school just for them. Visiting Chhapaiya and Dhari revealed this truth: while our love for God may be like a water droplet – pristine and meaningful – God's love for us is the vast ocean.

May we all strive to honor the sacred sites of our guru and our God, the way Sahebada has exemplified for us. Let us remember Ashvindada's profound remark: Chhapaiya is Lord Swaminarayan's **birthplace**; but His true **home** is the sant through whom He resides. May we dedicate our lives to glorifying Lord Swaminarayan's home – our very own Sahebada. ◆