



## Happy Birthday to dear Dadu !

~ Asha Mayur Karia (Vadodara)



**The** year 2004-05 was truly a significant year in my life in many ways: one of them was to pursue B. Ed. from M. B. Patel College of Education, Vallabh Vidyanagar where I happened to meet Prof. Bharat Pandya. A college teacher always in a particular dress code and a *tilak* on his forehead would stand out from the rest of us! One day a class fellow and dear friend led a few students (including me) to Prof. Pandya's religious and spiritual abode... The *Anoopam Mission* – such a unique place – just 'incredible' as the name '*Anoopam*' itself denotes its meaning!

We had one of the most cherished *darshan* of Lord swaminarayan at an utterly neat and clean temple. We were highly amazed with the hospitality by Dr. Pandya and his team. Then we happened to have one more cherished *darshan* of a great saint – the most revered and loved P. Shantidada – a divine soul, a serene face with a charismatic smile one can never forget! His pure love and affection inspired me to visit *Anoopam Mission* very often. And this is how I got to know more about the temple, the people, their notable activities, celebration of festivals as well as rituals and everything related to it. The way in which every small or mega event used to be organized at the *Anoopam Mission*, would absolutely amaze me. That helped me critically evaluate my own managerial skills and find out the scope for improvement.

When in 2006, I was recruited as a lecturer by Charutar Vidya Mandal, Vallabh Vidyanagar, I desired to share one of the most significant news with P. Shantidada. And to my utter surprise, He was more thrilled than I was! He was far more excited to see me as a college teacher. I bowed down to his feet and as always he generously showered his blessings on me,

offered yummy candies and chocolates and made me do Pooja of *Thakorji* (Lord Swaminarayan). He would repeat this practice every time I would meet him for sharing the most cherishing moments in my life. One day I informed him, "Dadu, by God's grace and with your blessings I purchased a 2BHK apartment in Vallabh Vidyanagar!" His joy found no bounds!! Then onwards he would introduce me to everyone saying, "Maro dikro professor chhe and Vidyanagar ma potanu ghar lidhu chhe!" Such a sense of pride can be seen and felt only in the eyes of your near and dear ones! Yes, these words by him remained always heart-winning and in the long run motivated me to achieve more and more in life.

One fine morning he very ardently said, "tara nava ghar ma aapne pooja rakhiye to kevu raheshe?" I could not believe my ears because it was a miracle. This was something I desired to tell him! He read my mind and expressed what I felt. I straight away and heartily accepted his proposal. Though I had a little confusion about hosting this sort of *Pooja* as there was no male member in the family then, Dadu made it very clear. He asked me and my sister to sit for the *Pooja*. He wished both the sisters to conduct the *Pooja* and be blessed by Thakorji. Not only this, he also ensured every arrangement to be done by the *Anoopam Mission* team and we were just to concentrate on the ritual at ease. He himself came to the house and recited the ritual-shlokas with his divine voice which there on has brought all the positive vibes to the place. Since then, 'a house' turned into 'a home' – a special home. It truly became an auspicious place where in a number of successful accomplishments took place such as my M. Phil



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completion, Ph.D. Registration, my visit to the UK, submission of Ph.D. thesis as well as Ph. D. Completion, my sister's engagement followed by wedding, my engagement and wedding so on. This is because of Dada's most wondrous blessings on me!

Many such mesmerizing moments shared with Dadu are tuned in my life. Among them I choose to mention here the last one.

Due to Covid-19, unfortunately we could not meet Dadu for a couple of years. One day post the second wave of the pandemic, we had happened to visit Vallabh Vidyanagar to see a family friend who was ailing then. I had an intense desire to step down at the Anoopam Mission and meet Dadu BUT we thought since we had travelled across Southern part of India before approaching Vallabh Vidyanagar, we should better avoid meeting people personally to keep them safe from the new variant. Hence, unwillingly we decided not to go to the *Anoopam Mission*. During our return trip to Baroda, our son Madhav insisted on having a tender coconut. And he saw a coconut vendor precisely outside the main gate of *Anoopam Mission*. On his request we stopped the car there itself and bought the tender coconuts. As soon as we started drinking them, my cell phone rang. And to my absolute astonishment, the call was from 'Shantidada'. Isn't it a miracle? I looked around just to confirm if Dadu was watching us but no... he was very much inside the premises. He in His sonorous tone said, "Jay Swaminarayan Asha beta! Kya chhe tu?" I responded, "Jay Swaminarayan, Dadu! We are outside the Anoopam Mission gate, had come to see a friend and now going back home! I am extremely sorry not to let you know because of the infection probability!"

"No problem, dikara! Pan have Thakorji ni ichcha chhe tu, Mayur ane Madhav andar aavo ane nava

mandir ma darshn karo... hu raah jovu chhu!" He affectionately exclaimed.

"Sure, Dadu!", I immediately captured the moment to see Him after a long time.

We entered the temple and there He was... warmly welcoming us with the same radiant smile and affectionate eyes one can ever forget! He was more contented to see Madhav doing *Sashtang*. He requested Seemadidi to accompany us to the newly built up temple. We followed His words. He waited for us to bless us before the departure. Now I realize whose departure it was! I never knew that would be our last meeting!! But He could foresee that...

March 06, this year when I visited the Anoopam Mission, I visualized Him everywhere – I imagined Him taking me to the Yogi Prasad, making me sit beside Him on the same table, persuading me to eat everything till my hunger (both material and spiritual) is gratified. What a motherly concern! I could not hold back my tears. I constantly looked for that unsurpassed elegance, benign grace, that chaste smile, the untainted affection and wonderful warmth!

Every year March 07, Dadu was the first (even before my parents) to wish me and bless me on my birthday. I had been indeed very fortunate to receive this bliss for almost two decades! This year I truly miss that care, concern and compassion. He showered His love without expecting any reciprocation. How unconcerned of me to never wish Him on His birthday! Like a saint in its true sense He never expected anything in return!

But this time I, without missing it further, express my gratitude to Him by bowing down to His holy feet, wish Him "A very Happy Birthday, Dadu! I am sure God is with you and is relishing your nectar like smile and serenity!" Jay Swaminarayan

