Shreejibapa Swamibapa

Victory to Lord Shree Swaminarayan

Jeevan Pushpa
The Blossoming of My Life

Translation and Collation
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Introduction

A flower is a truly splendid creation of God. It has fragrance, softness, beauty and colour. Imagine a flower that has all of these virtues other than one – imagine a flower without fragrance. If it did have an attractive scent, people would smell it again and again and derive pleasure from it. Even God could be adorned with garlands and robes made of such beautiful flowers.

The same is true of our Jeevan Pushpa – the flower that exists in the form of our life. A person may have charisma, charm and beauty, but if he does not have good virtues, he will not be liked by others. More importantly, he will not be liked by God. The value of such a flower, i.e. a life without decency, morality, ethics and spirituality, is infinitesimal. Children who do not develop and blossom with these virtues will be a burden, rather than an asset to their family, society and nation. They cannot flourish into upstanding, honourable, trustworthy individuals without imbibing good qualities into their lives. Such virtues are developed by closely associating with spirituality, and abiding by the teachings of Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree. Implicitly adhering to their divine words of advice will not only yield true happiness in this world, but also thereafter.

This short publication has been compiled by Sadguru Shastri Shree Sarveshwardsj Swami, with the inspirational guidance and divine blessings of His Divine Holiness Acharya Swamishree Purushottampriyadasji Maharaj. It contains the pledges that a child of God should make in order to please the merciful supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree, and blossom his life to become just like a beautiful, fragrant flower.

Publishers
1 **My Morning**

Each morning is the start of a new day. It marks a start of a new opportunity to please the Lord. If I wake up late, I will not have used that time of quiet contemplation wisely. There is a commonly known ode, 'early to bed, early to rise, makes a person healthy, wealthy and wise'. Therefore, I promise to wake up early each day. As soon as I awaken, I will sit in my bed and meditate on the supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayan’s divine Murti. The quiet time of the early hours are when it is best to concentrate and focus on the Lord. Not only that, but I will have been physically and mentally rested after my night's sleep. All these factors will ensure that I am able to meditate on the Lord's Murti properly, with undisturbed love and devotion.

2 **My Prayer**

I will pray, “Oh almighty Lord! Oh supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa. You have protected me throughout the night and gifted me with another day. May Your divine blessings remain with me throughout the day. Give me the strength to conduct myself in accordance with Your commandments. Bless me so that I can progress well in my studies and my work. May I develop true devotion so that I can please Acharya Swamishree, through whom You are present today upon the Earth. Grant me the wisdom to remain adherent to His will and be able to appreciate my great fortune for being able to live under His guidance. May I serve the Faith with true dedication. Give me the intelligence to respect my elders and take care of my parents.” If I live each day of my life in this way, I will be able to develop good, virtuous qualities, by which Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree will become pleased with me, and remain with me always.
3 My Bathing

Everyone eats and sleeps each day according to their individual routines; no-one tires from performing these. In the same manner, it is important for me to wash myself properly every morning. After brushing my teeth and rinsing out my mouth thoroughly, I will bathe in clean water. However, when performing all these tasks, I will not waste the water needlessly. I will remain vigilant that water is a valuable resource, which must not be used frivolously. Whilst I bathe, I will recite the sacred name of God, ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa, Om Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa Bhagwate Namaha’. The ancient sages say that if I do not chant the name of God, my bathing is akin to washing myself in blood. This is because the process of bathing kills bacteria and other microscopic organisms. Without reciting God's name, rather than becoming cleaner, I would actually be soiling myself when washing. To become alleviated from that sin of destroying life, it is important for me to utter the sacred name of God. The process of bathing is medically and spiritually a very important process to perform each morning. Therefore, I will never start a day without this ritual bathing. I will never eat or drink anything without first bathing and then performing my pooja.
Just as food provides sustenance for the body, pooja gives sustenance to the soul. Without fail, I will perform pooja early every morning. God provides us with so many vital resources; fresh air, clean water, nourishing food etc. My pooja will be my gratitude to the Lord for giving me all that I need. Pooja will be a pious start to each day. If my day starts in this special manner, the rest of the day will also remain auspicious. Pooja is my daily appointment with God. He will come and accept my worship; what better than the supreme Lord's arrival to start each day! Pooja will be an opportunity for me to embrace God and enjoy the bliss of performing adoration to Him. This will be my opportunity to converse with the Lord. Acknowledging the sanctity of the ceremony that I am about to perform, I will wear appropriate, clean clothing. Whilst performing pooja, I will not talk to anyone else or be distracted by other things. I will perform pooja calmly, without rushing. I will offer my worship to the merciful Lord with true love and devotion. I will sit crossed legged on a clean mat in a Northerly or Easterly direction.
5 Tilak Chandlo

As part of performing my pooja ceremony, I will apply a tilak and chandlo on my forehead. As stated by the Lord in the Shikshapatri, females should apply a chandlo only. Adorning a tilak chandlo is my way of announcing to the world that I have formed an unbreakable union with the supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa. Why should I be embarrassed of that? I should be proud of this fact and not be concerned about what others may say or think.

The sphere of thought and wisdom, sometimes referred to as the third eye, exists in the region of the forehead between the eyebrows. Therefore, by applying the consecrated sandalwood paste and kanku on this region each morning, my thoughts will remain pious and my infatuations with sensualities and irreligion will reduce. The red circle of the chandlo is like a signal to the world. It will signal to the world, 'I am a disciple of Lord Shree Swaminarayan. Therefore, I will not consume tobacco, alcohol or meat'. Just as a married woman applies a chandlo on her hairline to symbolise her bond with her husband, my tilak chandlo is the sacred symbol that represents my ever-lasting bond with God. A wedding ring is worn on the left ring finger because the vein in the left ring finger, the vena amoris, is said to be directly connected to the heart. This symbol represents the worldly love between couples. Similarly, my tilak chandlo is symbolic of my resolute union with God. If I do not apply that symbol, it would be like severing my bond with God.

Therefore, wherever I go, I will proudly display my tilak chandlo. I will never be embarrassed of broadcasting to the world that I have a close, unyielding tie with the almighty Lord Shree Swaminarayan.

I will then carefully arrange the Murtis on a separate piece of cloth in front of me. I will remain conscious that the Murtis are not mere paintings, but the supreme Lord Himself. I will wipe the Murtis with a small, clean cloth, and pray to the Lord to come and accept my worship. Sitting down, I will pray with a rosary (mala) whilst focussing on the Lord’s Murtis.
When my supreme Lord was present in a human form upon this Earth, He embarked on a forest expedition during which He performed numerous austerities. Assuming the name Nilkanthvarni, the Lord left His home when he was merely eleven and went into the wilderness. For many days, Shree Nilkanthvarni stood on one foot with arms raised, in the bitter cold of the Himalayan Mountains. During the forest expedition, lasting over seven years, He travelled over 12,000 kilometres on foot, all around India. In this manner, He has demonstrated the importance of performing such austerities in order to please God. Therefore, during my pooja, I too will stand on one foot and concentrate on the Lord’s Murti, whilst praying with a rosary. I will stand on my left leg, with my right ankle placed on my left shin. I will raise both arms straight into the air, which symbolises my complete surrendering to God. If a small child stretches his arms towards his parents, they will undoubtedly lift up their child and lovingly embrace him. In the same manner, if I call out to the Lord with my arms stretched out in this way, my beloved Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa will embrace me and give me His divine love.

6 Tap Mala

When my supreme Lord was present in a human form upon this Earth, He embarked on a forest expedition during which He performed numerous austerities. Assuming the name Nilkanthvarni, the Lord left His home when he was merely eleven and went into the wilderness. For many days, Shree Nilkanthvarni stood on one foot with arms raised, in the bitter cold of the Himalayan Mountains. During the forest expedition, lasting over seven years, He travelled over 12,000 kilometres on foot, all around India. In this manner, He has demonstrated the importance of performing such austerities in order to please God. Therefore, during my pooja, I too will stand on one foot and concentrate on the Lord’s Murti, whilst praying with a rosary. I will stand on my left leg, with my right ankle placed on my left shin. I will raise both arms straight into the air, which symbolises my complete surrendering to God. If a small child stretches his arms towards his parents, they will undoubtedly lift up their child and lovingly embrace him. In the same manner, if I call out to the Lord with my arms stretched out in this way, my beloved Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa will embrace me and give me His divine love.
Performing pradakshina, i.e. encircling the Lord in a clockwise direction, whilst praying with a rosary, symbolises that the Lord is the centre of my life. If God remains with me always, my thoughts will remain pure and moral. The more pradakshina that I perform, the more peace I will experience within my heart and the sins of my previous births will be destroyed. The merits of performing great ceremonies are also attained by performing pradakshina with true sincerity. Performing the pradakshina constitutes my continuous and endless devotion unto the Lord.

When Shree Ganesh performed pradakshina around a cow, representing the Earth, he was rewarded with the merits of performing pradakshina around the entire universe, and the deities called Ridhhi and Sidhhi were wedded to him. In the same manner, if I perform pradakshina with love and dedication around my beloved Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa, I will gain unsurpassed spiritual bliss. I will become closer and closer to the Lord, and by this intimacy with Him, my thoughts and actions will remain virtuous. The greatest reward, i.e. absolute salvation, will be granted if I perform pradakshina in my Pooja each morning. Whilst performing the pradakshina, I will recite at least one religious song.
Performing the eight-fold prostrations (sashtang-dandvat-pranam) before the Lord is representative of completely surrendering to Him. It shows complete subservience and total dedication unto the Lord. When I perform such a prostration, I will perform it properly; I will lay down flat in front of the Lord with my arms stretched out. My head (1), chest (2), hands (3), knees (4) and legs (5) will be touching the ground. I will focus my eyes (6) so that I visualise only the Murti of the Lord. With my speech (7), I will utter only prayers to the Lord. With my mind (8), I will contemplate only about the Lord. In this manner, I will humbly offer these eight parts of me to the Lord. Females should perform the five-fold prostrations (panchang-pranam), in which the head (1) and hands (2) remain touching the ground, and their eyes (3), speech (4) and mind (5), remain focussed on the Lord. In Gadhada Middle Section Chapter 40 of the Vachanamrut, Lord Shree Swaminarayan states that in order to become relieved of the sins committed through one’s mind, deeds or words during the previous day, one should perform one additional prostration before the Lord during pooja. Performing such prostrations with love and dedication before the Lord has great spiritual benefit.

In addition, performing these prostrations stretches the back and other muscles in the body. Several yoga postures are made whilst performing prostrations. The stomach muscles are also massaged by the weight of one’s own body, and this aids digestion. Therefore, it has health benefits as well.
After performing my prostrations to the Lord, I will offer naivedya (dried fruit or sugar) to the Lord. I will sing the religious song, ‘Jamo thaal jeevan jaavu vaari’ as I offer the naivedya to each Murti. The Lord will accept my offering but due to His extraordinary prowess, He will not allow any of the food to become less – He will return the offering for me to enjoy. Such is His great mercy. And furthermore, becoming pleased by this small offering, the gracious Lord will reward me with much more, i.e. He will become pleased with me and bless me. I will eat the consecrated food, and experience the divine peace of the supreme Lord. How fortunate am I that the first thing I place into my mouth each day is the sacred, consecrated food of the supreme Lord.
**10 Darshan – Prayer**

Having mercy on me, the Lord will accept my adoration. After offering the naivedya, I will pray, ‘Oh Lord! Protect me from all the different kinds of irreligious people in the world. Give me the strength to remain afar from all kinds of immorality. Grant me the wisdom and spiritual strength to behave as You command. Bless me with the intellect such that I never perceive human traits in Acharya Swamishree, through whom You preside upon the Earth today, and I may continue to respect all the Sants and elder disciples.’

The merciful Lord will acknowledge my true sincerity, accept my innocent prayers and fulfil my spiritual desires.
In verse 209 of the Shikshapatri, Lord Shree Swaminarayan states that His words are His own form and therefore, they should be revered and respected. Furthermore, in Gadhada Last Section Chapter 1 of the Vachanamrut, Lord Shree Swaminarayan has given a command that the Shikshapatri should be worshipped, read or listened to each day; and if this does not happen on any particular day, the disciple must fast in repentance. Accordingly, I will read at least 5 verses from the Shikshapatri each day. This will ensure that I remain aware of the commandments of the Lord, which He has decreed for a disciple to remain happy in this life, and thereafter. I will think about the verses that I have read and contemplate about them throughout the day. I will keep vigilant about conducting myself in accordance with the directives that the Lord has given. In this way, I will be able to keep my life moral, pious and virtuous. I will endeavour to memorise the Shikshapatri and understand its importance because I realise that this is the greatest rule book for perfectly forming my life in accordance with the will of God.
12 Exercise

If my body is healthy, I will be able to please the Lord through my various forms of devotion. For that reason, I will perform some kind of exercise every day. Through my prayers and exercise, I will keep my spirit, mind and body, fit, healthy and strong. Remaining physically active and agile is just as important for the body as providing it with appropriate nutrition. If a person has a sedentary lifestyle, he is sure to become ill and age prematurely. It is said that such a sedentary lifestyle contributes to the onset of many preventable diseases. A physically active person is more likely to have an active and agile mind. Therefore, I will keep up my stamina through regular physical exercise. If nothing else, I will walk for around 30 minutes each day. And as I walk, I will smile at everyone that I meet, and be grateful to the almighty Lord for giving me such good health. The ultimate purpose for my sport and exercise will always remain that I remain fit and healthy so that I can worship God more and more.
13 My Parents – Akin to My Deities

In the Taittiriya Upanishad (Vedas), it is stated:

Matru devo bhava, Pitru devo bhava (revere your mother and father as deities)

There is a famous Gujarati poem:
‘Bhulo bhale beeju badhu, ma bap ne bhulosho nahi’
You may forget everything else, but do not ever forget your parents
‘Aganeet chhe upkar ena, eh kadi visarsho nahi’
Their favours are countless, never forget those

I will always remember the infinitely many favours that my parents have done for me and the sacrifices that they have made for me. They gave birth to me and took great care of me as I grew up. They provided me with comfortable clothing and took me to see many interesting places. Even when I soiled my clothes, they cleaned me, but never became angry with me. They comforted me when I was sad and they protected me from all kinds of dangers. I must dedicate myself to them. I must serve them with all my heart. That is why the scriptures have said that they are equivalent to deities. With such admiration for them, I will respectfully bow down to them each morning.
14 Respect for Elders

Applying sandalwood to one's forehead gives a cooling, calming sensation. Similarly, bowing down to others and remaining humble creates a calmness and peacefulness within one's heart. Humility and having respect for elders is the most important trait that a person can have.

Therefore, I will always listen to what the elders of my family and my community say. Just as my parents are worthy of my utmost respect, the elders of the community must also be respected. When elders are talking, I will never interrupt them. I will vigilantly respect what they say. Whether they are telling me off or advising me, I will carefully listen and will never argue back. I will do as they say because they have more experience about life than I do, and they know what is right and wrong. They know the kinds of behaviours that would please God. Therefore, I will do as they say. Whatever they tell me will be for my benefit and in my best interests. Their advice will be best for my life to flourish. I will always keep the company of such virtuous people, who will make me closer to God. If I only keep the company of those who are equal to me, how will I progress?

I will never try to assert my authority before others, regardless of whether they are older or younger than me. I will never consider myself to be always right and everyone else wrong. That would be immensely arrogant and extremely disrespectful of me.
There is an old English proverb, ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness’, which means that except for worshipping God, the most important thing in life is to be clean. From a worldly perspective, being clean is very important for maintaining one’s health. The merciful Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa presides in my home and so it is my responsibility to ensure that there is no rubbish or filth there. I will keep my home in a state that is fit for such a great Lord to live in. I will not litter or make others clean up after me. I will immediately clear away any untidiness that I see. I will keep my house clean, tidy and orderly. I will help my parents with the chores of cleaning my home. I will not create mess and needless work for them. If I maintain my house in this way, I will also be able to keep my mind clean, tidy and orderly. Spiritual cleanliness is just as important as keeping my environment clean. Ensuring that my mind does not become polluted is my sacred duty.
16 Help with Domestic Chores

There are many tasks that must be performed in order to keep the home running smoothly and efficiently. Everyone living in a household has a responsibility to do their share of the work. It is not right for the elders to do everything. If we all join in and share out the tasks, the work will be completed quickly and efficiently. Everyone should willingly complete their work; never begrudgingly. Everyone should keep the mental attitude, ‘we will help one another always’. This will promote a true fraternity amongst the family. Disorder promotes dispute and friction, which ultimately leads to unrest. God does not like such discord and will not remain in such an environment. I promise to Lord Shree Swaminarayan that I will do my utmost to behave with my family and my temple community in a friendly, helpful manner, so that the Lord always remains with me.
17 Filtering Water and Milk

In verse 30 of the Shikshapatri, Lord Shree Swaminarayan states that water and milk that has not been properly filtered must not be consumed. To reinforce this, Lord Shree Swaminarayan says in the Satsangi Jeevan scripture that it is a grave sin to drink unfiltered water or milk. Historically, the water drunk from wells and rivers was untreated and so it was vital to filter the water before drinking it. The process removes minute particles and small organisms, larvae etc., which may not be visible to the naked eye, but which could be present in the water. Today, even the health authorities promote the use of filters to remove toxins and organisms, some of which could be harmful to one’s health. Therefore, the Lord has given this command for the protection of my health and I will abide by it. Just as water and food sustain my body, my thoughts sustain my mind. Therefore, I will always filter what I see, hear, do and think; all the impious aspects will be removed before they reach my mind. I will allow only pious sentiments to enter my mind.
18 Water – waste not, want not

Water is unanimously accepted around the world as being the very basic requirement of all life. The early settlements were always located where a source of water was readily available. That is why it is often seen that cities are situated on the banks of rivers. Water is a gift from God. Such an essential component of life must be used wisely, and never wasted. I will make sure that when I am washing, cleaning, etc, I will use only what I need. I will not be careless and waste that important gift from God. If I did, God would not be pleased with me. I will never leave any taps needlessly running. Furthermore, I will make sure that I do my own cleaning chores. I will not be lazy when it comes to maintaining my own cleanliness and that of my home or temple.
19 Obedient Child

My parents have taken care of me more than anyone else has. When I did not have teeth, they gave me the kind of food that I could eat. Whenever I was ill, they stayed up all night to care for me, and worried about me. They introduced me to the Faith and explained the glory of our beloved Lord. They taught me manners and the way to live respectfully. My parents provided me with the provisions to learn and be educated. My mother and father always know what is best for me. Therefore, I must listen to what they say and abide by the advice that they give. If I want something, I will respectfully ask, but will not become angry and demand it. I will not create a fuss or become angry if I do not get what I ask for. I will get their permission before I leave the house, and will always return at the time that I tell them. I will not stay out late at night, because that will only make my parents worry about my safety.

I realise that a happy family is not necessarily one that is rich, with a large house and lots of things. Instead, a family that respects one another, live in harmony with each other, and who join together for regular worship of God, are the truly happy and contented ones.
20 My Food will be the Prasad of God

Anything that I eat or drink will first be offered to God, and only then will I consume that prasad, His consecrated food. By giving my body only such sanctified food, I will ensure that my mind remains free from immoral thoughts. Having placed the plate of food before the Lord, I will perform mansi pooja, the mental worship of the Lord. In this, I will contemplate about offering that food to the Lord; and as I place each morsel of food into the Lord’s mouth, I will recite the name of God. The scriptures state that a person’s diet has a considerable influence on his behaviour. Therefore, I will remain vigilant about first offering all that I eat to God. Modern diets comprise of fast foods and convenience foods. These are not only harmful to one’s health, but also, those ready meals cannot be offered to God. How can I eat such foods, if they have not been offered to God? Therefore, I will remain firm about not eating in cafes and restaurants. Not only is there a risk of contamination from items that are inappropriate for me, but also, I would be consuming food that is not prasad. After dining, I will clear and wash the plates myself, but not leave it to someone else to clean up after me.
21 The Vow of Ekadashi

In the Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri and Satsangi Jeevan scriptures, Lord Shree Swaminarayan has given a special significance to the eleventh day of each half of the lunar month, which is called Ekadashi (literally translated as 11). Anyone who observes a fast on this auspicious day will be relieved of sins. A person who diligently observes the vow of Ekadashi gains the same kind of merit as a sage does from performing austerities for thousands of years.

The fasting does not refer just to food but also restrictions on the five senses, their organs and also the mind. These eleven (i.e. the five senses, the five organs of the senses and the mind) are deprived of worldly pleasures and are instead concentrated on the Lord. Therefore, in order to please Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree, I will always properly observe Ekadashi. I will perform either a complete fast, or consume only fruits. I will be vigilant about giving my mind only virtuous and sacrosanct thoughts.
The Shikshapatri and Satsangi Jeevan scriptures specifically forbid the consumption of food containing onions, garlic or asafoetida. Current medical opinion differs about whether such foods are beneficial or detrimental to one’s physical health. Regardless, the scriptures have stated that they are harmful to one’s mental stability. When the mind has been agitated with such foodstuffs, how can one perform meditation properly? Eating them leads to bodily odours, which are both unsociable and disrespectful to others. They will inevitably cause bad breath. How can I go to the Lord or His Sants when I am in such a malodorous state?

The scriptures describe food as being either satvik, rajsik or tamsik. Satvik foods promote mental tranquillity, restraint, purity and peace. Rajsik and tamsik foods lead one to become angry, resentful, arrogant and destructive. Onions, garlic and such foods are categorised as being tamsik. The Lord says that all food is rajsik and tamsik if it has not been offered to the Lord. The ancient wise sages have narrated the repentance for consuming such foods to be the same as for drinking alcohol. Therefore, I must never allow such forbidden foods to enter my body. I will consume only satvik food that has been first offered to God. If it is not appropriate to offer that food to God, how can I eat it?
23 Family Meal

All cultures regard having family meals to be extremely important to maintain unity and accord amongst each other. It is a vital part of a strong, stable family. Eating together is the time when everyone can gather after a hard day at work or school, to share experiences and stories. The family meal helps to develop a deep sense of security, establish a routine and is a wonderful place for parents and children to listen to one another and demonstrate mutual respect.

Therefore, I will make sure that I sit with the rest of my family and eat with them at least once in each day. I will help with the preparation of the food, and before sitting down to eat, I will wash my hands properly. I will remember the Lord whilst I dine, and thank Him for providing us with the meal. I will take only as much as I can eat, but never waste any food. I will help with the clearing up after the family meal.
24 My Study Room

I will keep a Murti of Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree on the desk where I study, so that their merciful gaze remains on me as I read and write. Their presence will sanctify this important place of learning. Before starting my studies, I will pray for strength, so that my restless mind remains calm and focussed on my work. I will pray that the Lord remains with me, and with His blessings, I can read, understand and remember what I am studying. My aim is not only to pass my exams, but to gain knowledge. I want to study and become a true scholar, so that my parents become proud of me. I want to study our religious scriptures and gain an appreciation of the supremacy of our beloved Lord Shree Swaminarayan and the magnificence of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi. I want to appreciate what our forefathers have done for our Nation and remain proud of our heritage. I want to learn good behaviours from historical figures and instil those virtues into my life. I will never consider learning to be a chore. Keeping an inquisitive mind, I will willingly study and further myself. Never will I cheat or copy during my studies; otherwise, I would be letting myself and everyone else down.
25 Neatness and Tidiness in Handwriting

I will always strive to write clearly, unambiguously and concisely, using neat handwriting. That way, others will not misread my thoughts and ideas. When I see pages of text written in sloppy handwriting, I fail to concentrate on it and instead focus on trying to distinguish individual words. If I write in that way, how will I be able to convey my thoughts to others? I would be embarrassed to show my work to anyone else. It is often said that a person’s handwriting says a lot about his personality, because it is a reflection of his mind and psychological state. Therefore, I will improve my writing and always write clearly. Just as I keep my writing and mind clear and uncluttered, I will ensure that my room and everything in it are always kept properly organised and orderly.
My Habit of Reading Good Books

A good book is said to be a person’s best friend. It provides sustenance for the mind and is a guide for life improvement. It enables a person to think about topics of interest and make analysed and informed decisions. The person’s intellect is given the means to probe and interrogate situations that he has not yet been exposed to in life. One does not always have control over what happens in life, but does have control about what to do with that experience. Such acumen is gained from reading good books. The Rig-ved scripture states a prayer to the almighty Lord, ‘from everything in the world, may we assimilate only good, auspicious and beneficial thoughts and ideas’. Books represent knowledge and learning and so they must not be mishandled, kicked or thrown about; they should always be respected and handled with care. The greatest means to attain such virtuous knowledge is through the reading of good, moral books. Russian philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, says that reading immoral books is akin to consuming poison. India’s reformer, Lokmanya Tilak, says that a good book has the ability to transport a person from this Earth all the way to the heavens. Such is the power of good literature. Therefore, I will foster a habit of reading such beneficial literature and imbibe the teachings contained in them into my own life and behaviour. I wish to progress and develop my life in a way that will please my beloved Lord. I will strive to learn something new each day.
27 Taking Care of the Eyes

A person’s eyes constitute his most splendid gift from God. English poet, William Blake describes the eyes to be the ‘windows of the soul’; meaning, the eyes are the windows through which one views the world. Great emphasis is placed on the importance of one’s eyes. In fact, surveys of people around the world have shown that sight is the sense that they fear losing the most. Therefore, it is important to give them the best possible care and attention. A few simple things can be beneficial to maintaining the health of the eyes. I will endeavour to follow these basic rules.

I will not strain my eyes by reading in poor lighting, or by keeping the book too close or too far for comfort. I will adjust the lighting so that there is no glare from the page. When appropriate, I will wear protective goggles to prevent eye injury. I will keep my eyes clean and refreshed by washing them with clean, cool water. I will not rub them excessively. I will not frequently touch my eyes with my fingers as this could increase the chances of dirt or infections entering them and causing irritations. By taking care of my eyesight, I will be able to enjoy the ecstasy of the Lord’s darshan.
Modern fashions continue to change with each day. Youngsters try to emulate film actors, sports and pop stars in their appearance and behaviours. However, what they do not realise is that those so-called heroes are merely trying to be different in order to stand out and appear unique to earn a living. In reality, they are just the same as others. Following those fads leads to harm, both in physical and monetary terms.

Such crazes include keeping long nails, and males having long hair styles. Inevitably, dirt becomes trapped underneath the nails, which is difficult to wash away thoroughly. So when the person eats, there is a high chance that the potentially harmful dirt is ingested. The long nails could also easily hurt someone else. Long hair may cause the head to overheat and is always more difficult to control and keep clean. Why are demons always portrayed to have long nails and long, frizzy hair? I must think, ‘do I want to appear like a demon to others?’ If I did, who would trust me, or take me seriously? Therefore, I will conform to keeping a simple, respectable appearance, which is conducive to a healthy life.
29 Taking Permission before Leaving the House

Parents are akin to guardian angels, who disregard themselves to take care of their children. They impart guidance, education, manners and morals. I will not forget the immense efforts they go to in order to make me a successful adult. Acknowledging all that they do for me, I will ensure that I remain obedient to them. Whenever I need to leave the house, even before going to school, I will take their permission. I will say, ‘Jay Swaminarayan’ to them and take their blessings. I will not argue with them or insult them. I will spend money carefully, buying only things that I need. That way, I will not cause undue strain on the family finances, but will endeavour to help in whichever way that I can. When I go out, I will interact with friends who will be a good influence to me, not lead me onto wrongful paths. That way, I will not cause unnecessary worry to my parents. And when I return home, I will greet everyone, with a respectful, ‘Jay Swaminarayan’.
30 Punctuality

Punctuality is a key indicator of reliability. If someone couldn’t get to a place on time, was he actually bothered about being there at all? It is an important gauge of an individual’s character. Punctuality is key to a successful life. Tardiness is an indication of idleness. A lazy person cannot truly progress; by wasting valuable time, his life is being dwindled away. Therefore, a person should grasp opportunities fully and utilise time efficiently. Accordingly, I will not squander my valuable time with idle gossip. I will always remain organised and disciplined. It is said that laziness is a living person’s grave. Life is so short, yet there is so much to do. It is vitally important to spend it in the best possible manner. American philosopher Benjamin Franklin said that if you love life, don’t waste time, because time is what life is made of. I will make sure that I reach school on time every day. If I do not, I will get a bad mark against my name, and also, I could miss some vital information that could result in poor marks in my tests.
31 Listening to Sir

Education provides the foundation to life. My teachers give me that vital education. Therefore, I will listen to their advice with a will to living my life accordingly. I will learn from them, both willingly and efficiently. A good, upstanding student will maintain respect for his teachers and fellow students. All tasks will be completed in a timely manner, keenly and with enthusiasm; never begrudgingly. I will go home and think about whatever has been learnt in school, and try to further my understanding. I will try to learn by comprehension, not merely by learning facts. That way, when it comes to exams, I will not have to stay up long nights to cram the syllabus into my mind, which would not be good for my health. A teacher is a guru to me as he teaches me knowledge. I will behave with politeness and humility towards him at all times. He gives me so much help and support. I will never mock him or make fun of him. If there is something that I do not understand, I will ask with respect, because my teacher is my life-guide.
There is a time and place for everything. But lesson time, when the teacher is talking, is definitely the wrong time for talking to my fellow students. It disturbs everyone else, and no-one can listen to the teacher properly. How will I learn and how will my friends learn? I will always listen quietly and diligently to the teacher’s lecture. If I need to ask a question, I will raise my hand, and ask only when prompted to do so. I will never fool around in class, tease or bully other students. I will remain focussed on trying to learn whatever the teacher is explaining. Keeping a concentrated and engaged mind is key to efficient learning and understanding; and ultimately, to progression in life.
33 My School

I will never litter in my school or in the streets. If I see anyone littering, I will politely explain that they should not, as it is disrespectful to others, unsightly, and can sometimes pose hazards. I will endeavour to keep my school building clean and tidy, just as I would my own home. Causing mess and disorder is not a trait of a cultured person. Such an individual will have a similarly confused and unruly mind. If I cannot think in a systematic manner, I will not be able to learn efficiently. Good decorum is a vital aspect of a righteous person’s character. A school is akin to a temple in that a person learns there. I will therefore strive to maintain its sanctity. Learning in such an environment will enable my mind to remain pious and moral.
34 Break Times

When there are break times between my school periods, I will use that free time wisely, but not waste it causing havoc in the playground, making noise, shouting at others or teasing other students. I will spend that time with good friends, who will not coerce me to do wrongful things. I will discuss relevant issues and interesting topics with them, but never talk vulgarities or spread gossip. There is no purpose in idle chitchat. It is a complete waste of the valuable time that God has given. Each day, God gifts 86,400 seconds to each person. It is up to each individual how they spend that gift; either improving and benefitting his life, or wasting it away. There is a phrase, ‘time is money’. If time is not used effectively, it is akin to throwing money down the drain. I will remember that ideology and spend my time in a useful manner.
35 Never Fight During Play

Exercise, yoga and playing games and sport are an important part of maintaining good health. Such team sports require team spirit and working with one another. You must learn to win and lose; in both situations, you should remain poised but not lose composure. I will make sure that I never become angry and fight with my opponents during play. I will be a good friend to my team mates and help them develop their skills. I will accept defeat and learn from such situations. If I accidently hurt another player or do something wrong, I will apologise immediately. If I need to borrow someone else’s equipment, I will ask the owner first, or else it would constitute me stealing.
36 Not to Consume - Where-ever, Whose-ever, What-ever

My insatiable taste buds may yearn for cheap food bought from stalls, cafes and restaurants, but I know that I would be putting myself at risk if I eat snacks bought from such places. How would I know the quality of the ingredients that have been used, or whether everything has been washed or kept hygienic? So many stories are reported in the media about health inspectors closing down food establishments due to their poor hygiene standards. Furthermore, those places would undoubtedly be preparing food that is inappropriate for me to eat. There is a high possibility that my food would be contaminated by such items. I would be a fool to eat from such places. Therefore, I will ensure that I eat only satvik food; by which I will protect my health and also please God.
37 Remaining in Harmony with All

I will maintain good relations with all the other students in my school. I want everyone to consider me a trustworthy, selfless, harmonious, greedless, true friend and companion. I want others to feel that they can confide in me if they have difficulties. When they need help or advice, I will be there for them and assist as best I can. I will not become angry if I find out that someone else has been talking badly about me behind my back. I will be aware of others’ good qualities and help them succeed in their endeavours. I will never be spiteful or jealous of their successes, but will strive to imbibe their virtues into my life. If another person helps me in any way, I will be grateful and thankful. I will never be ungrateful or unappreciative for any kindness shown to me. Most importantly, I will never think or speak badly of the holy persons of my Faith, or of other religions, and will have respect for them. I will not say something that could harm or offend another individual, even if it is the truth. There is a commonly used phrase, ‘it was the truth, so I said it’. That is not the correct manner of thinking that promotes harmony and unity amongst a community.
38 My Humility

The scriptures have described good manners and humility to be one of the ten great virtues of mankind. A person who does not have such virtues is described as being beastly. When in school, with my friends, family or elders, I will maintain the utmost respect and humility towards them and not interrupt when they are speaking. I will speak to them with appropriate, polite language and tone. I will behave with civility and consideration for others. Good manners and decorum are essential to progress in every field of life. I will remain conscious of that fact. My behaviour will be conducive to forging greater friendships, not creating rifts. In addition, I will remain aware that not everyone has the same intentions, and there will be individuals whose thoughts and conduct is immoral and indecent; engaging with such people will lead me astray and create a rift between me and God. I must remain distant from such immorality. I will not quarrel with others, because such meaningless bickering never leads to a harmonious outcome. The animosity always increases, but never decreases. I will never slander others. I will use my words with due care and consideration; if they are likely to cause animosity, they must not be uttered. My statements will be helpful, not disruptive. If it doesn’t need to be said, I will not say it. I will not be stubborn or inflexible with my ideas or thoughts, but will willingly listen to the opinions of others. It is not a crime to have differing points of views when issues arise, so why should I think that my viewpoint must be sold to everyone else? Why should I need to justify my views to everyone else and persuade them to have my own manner of thinking? Such obstinacy is a sign of arrogance, which I must remove from my psyche. I will never swear or use abusive language. I will remain humble towards all.
39 Exam Time

On the day of any exam, before leaving my home I will go to the temple or shrine in my home and pray to the merciful Lord to remain with me. With the Lord’s blessings, I will pass my tests in accordance with His will.

Before starting the examination, I will close my eyes and contemplate about Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree, and pray for strength and wisdom. I will mentally chant Their holy name. Before starting to write anything, I will calmly read the questions. By rushing to write down anything that comes to mind, I may misread the instructions.

I will write the answers clearly, using legible handwriting. If there are some questions that I find easier than others, I will answer them first, so that I can spend the remaining time concentrating on those that require more thought.

To avoid confusion, I will ensure that the number of each question is clearly written with the corresponding answer. I will not waste excess paper, nor will I waste time by waffling or writing superfluous wording in my answers. Remaining concise and precise is important when writing answers.

I will never cheat or plagiarise because those are the traits of cowards.

By dividing the examination time properly amongst each part of the paper, I will ensure that I do not run out of time and have to rush at the end to answer everything in time. I will make sure that I remain aware of the time elapsed and more importantly, how much remains.

Finally, I will not forget to write my name and candidate number clearly at the top of each answer sheet.
40 Using Travel Time Constructively

During my journeys to and from school, I will use that available time reading religious and educational books, as they are my best friends. Mahatma Gandhi said that the value of such enlightening texts is greater than the most valuable gems. A diamond shows external shimmer and brilliance, whereas a spiritual scripture confers internal enlightenment. Sacred scriptures, associating with pious people of the Faith, and praying to God – these are the three rungs that elevate a soul to becoming the master of the three worlds, i.e. he becomes worthy to attain the mercy of God. They are the source of true education in the modern era.

Today, such scriptures and devotional songs that narrate the glory and extraordinary prowess of the supreme Lord, are available in printed and digital formats. I will occupy my free time by reading, watching and listening to them, but will not frivolously waste my valuable time watching television, cinema or playing games, or saturate my mind with obscenities. Such media is like the poison in a snake’s venom; the outcomes are always detrimental.
41 Regular Temple Attendance

Time is valuable and must be spent wisely and efficiently. No-one is able to halt time; it continues its course consistently and relentlessly. The day is not longer for some people and shorter for others. For that reason, it is essential that the time for worshipping and attending the temple for darshan and discourses should be occupied for that purpose only. For me to develop good qualities, it is important that I adhere to a routine of regular worship at the temple. During my journey to the temple, I will chant the sacred name of God, ‘Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa’, and recite devotional songs. The scriptures have said that with each footstep taken during the journey to a temple, the disciple attains the merit equivalent to a grand, spiritual ceremony. God becomes extremely pleased if a disciple maintains a regular routine of attending the temple. It shows his diligence and dedication to progressing and pleasing God. I want to behave in a manner whereby I remain beloved to God, because He is most beloved to me. I want God to see my fervour for attaining His mercy and divine blessings. That way, He will remain with me in everything that I do, and protect me both physically and spiritually.

Just as the people living in my home are my family, the other people of my temple are also my family; they are all the children of my eternal father, Lord Shree Swaminarayan. Therefore, even in my temple, I will help in all the duties and help my fellow disciples, both young and old; just as I do in my house. In this manner, I will promote a sense of fraternity amongst my temple community.

During my return journey from the temple to home, I will carefully contemplate about the religious discourse and learning, and strive to adopt the teachings into my own life.
42 The Lord’s Darshan

Having entered the temple, I will look straight at the Murti of God, but not be distracted by anything or anyone else. I will refrain from talking to others first, as my primary purpose for attending the temple is to seek the Lord’s darshan and blessings. Therefore, His darshan must remain the first thing that I do. The Murtis of Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa, who preside in the temple, are not mere idols, but the Lord Himself. If I have true faith and devotion, those Murtis will fulfil my spiritual desires. If I fix my eyes on His divine Murti and lovingly stare at Him, the Lord will become pleased with me, call me to Him and smile at me. It will displease God if I allow my attention to be diverted away from Him and onto someone else, or start talking to a friend or relative. I will remain vigilant that I do not do anything that would be offensive to God. If I started to chat to a friend, would I be considering the friend above God? Do I have more affection for the friend than I do for God? Do I consider another task to be more important than sitting in the discourse and enjoying the darshan of God’s Murti?
43 Prostrations before the Lord

Whilst performing the darshan of God, I will fall onto the ground at His lotus feet, like a worthless stick lying on the ground. I will stretch out both arms straight ahead, to symbolise my complete subservience to Him. Such a symbol of my humility before God diminishes my ego and arrogance. Therefore, with a vision and mind focused solely on God, I will prostrate before Him. Whilst performing such prostrations, I will be careful that I do not accidently hurt other Sants or disciples with my hands or feet. I will contemplate that due to my devotional prostrations, the Lord has become pleased with me and has come down from His regal throne towards me, and lifted me up towards Him; I will bow down and gently touch His divine, lotus feet with my eyes and fingers; I will caress His lotus feet and lovingly kiss them; with His sweet, enchanting voice, He will ask me, ‘son, how are you?’ as He places His hand on my head and shoulders. The Lord’s caress is gentle, soothing and comforting. I will remember that darshan, even in my dreams. I wish to enjoy such divine joy and ecstasy everyday.
Initiation into the Swaminarayan Faith comprises of the Vartman ceremony being performed for the new disciple. The Acharya of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi holds the person’s hand and places a few drops of water into his palm. He then wills, ‘may this disciple’s previous sins, deeds and merits, all be placed at the lotus feet of Lord Shree Swaminarayan’. Only the Lord and His spiritual heirs have the power and authority to burn away the sins and free a soul from them all. Having become cleansed from the sins of all his previous misdemeanours, the disciple is given a new start and a clean slate. With this Vartman ceremony, a disciple takes a solemn oath to abide by the five sacred vows, called the Vartmans. These are: (1) not to steal, (2) not to commit adultery, (3) not to consume alcohol, (4) not to consume meat, (5) maintaining control about what, where and whose food and drink is consumed, so as not to sin or make others sin.

I will strictly adhere to the five Vartmans from childhood, so that I have the moral foundations to grow up into a decent, moral, upstanding citizen of my Nation, and a true disciple of God.
The two stranded wooden-beaded necklace that I wear around my neck, the Kanthi, is the sacred symbol of my union with God. It represents the divine grace bestowed to me by the Acharya of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi by making me a disciple. By wearing the Kanthi, I will remain conscious and vigilant about adhering to the commandments of God. When a couple are married, the husband places a matrimonial garland around his bride's neck. Similarly, the Kanthi is akin to that matrimonial garland, representing the love between disciple and God. The Padma Puran scripture describes a person who does not wear a Kanthi to be like a beast. Consuming food from such a person is akin to eating meat, and his water is equivalent to alcohol. Lord Shree Swaminarayan has blessed those who wear Kanthis such that they cannot be afflicted by ghosts, spirits, phantoms or apparitions. The Kanthi comprises of two strands, one representing Lord Shree Swaminarayan and the other strand representing His divine Muktas who preside within the Lord's Murti in Akshardham. Just as the two strands of the Kanthi are identical, and appear as one necklace, the Lord and His Muktas are identical, and appear as One. However, there remains a distinction between the two strands, just as their remains the distinction of Master and servant between Lord Shree Swaminarayan and His Anadi-muktas. In this manner, the Kanthi represents the Vishishtadwait philosophy advocated by Lord Shree Swaminarayan.
The importance of one’s Guru in life is paramount. A true Guru saves a soul from self-centredness and teaches the essentials of humanity. A Guru provides the wisdom to detach a soul from considering his physical body to be his true form and instead, the soul to be his real, eternal identity. With such appreciation, a soul has the knowledge to traverse the material world and join the path of salvation. Our beloved Acharya Swamishree is such a true, enlightening spiritual Guru. I will go for Acharya Swamishree’s darshan every day. His divine darshan has the power to calm the mind. Immoral thoughts and desires are eliminated by His merciful, sweet smile and divine touch. I will maintain the utmost reverence and decorum when I go for Acharya Swamishree’s darshan. I will queue up quietly and respectfully, and go to Acharya Swamishree when it is my turn. With folded hands, I will look into His lotus eyes and say ‘Jay Swaminarayan’, and then bow down to touch His lotus feet. From that gracious touch, I will gain His divine strength. It is said that there exist 68 sacred pilgrimage sites. All the pilgrimage sites reside at Acharya Swamishree’s divine, lotus feet. Therefore, by touching His feet, I gain the benefits of visiting all these sacred sites of pilgrimage. Spiritual knowledge, divinity, strength, wisdom and morality are gained through Acharya Swamishree. I will revere Him with the utmost of respect and keep Him foremost in my life, because through Him, I have the fortune of meeting the supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayan Himself.
47 Having Genuine Respect for Sants

Sants are closer to God and are of a higher category than ordinary gruhastha disciples and therefore, it is appropriate to maintain respect and reverence for them. Unsurpassed spiritual merit is gained from serving Sants and gaining their blessings. A person is said to have three types of miseries in this world; mental (aadhi), physical (vyādhi) and emotional (upadhi). These are relieved by faithfully honouring Sants. One’s life is transformed by the advice given by a Sant, and the examples demonstrated by them. I must remember that the Sants have given up their own material pleasures for my benefit. They pray to God on my behalf. Therefore, when I go to a Sant, I will have respect and carefully touch his feet with my right hand, and say ‘Jay Swaminarayan’. I will not lean on his shoulders, or otherwise treat him like I would my friends. That would be disrespectful.

In Jetalpur Section Chapter 4 of the Vachanamrut scripture, Lord Shree Swaminarayan states that through the touch of a Sant’s feet, a person’s sins accrued from his millions of previous births are annihilated. Consequently, the soul attains supreme bliss. By fostering genuine regard and respect for Sants, I will please God and progress towards Him.
If a house is not regularly cleaned, it will become messy and dirty. In the same manner, if a person does not associate with venerable Sants each day, his mind will become soiled. Corruption of a person’s mind will lead him to perform wrongful deeds and make him stray from the path of God. For that reason, I will associate with Sants every day, just as Lord Shree Swaminarayan has advised us to do. I will take heed of their words of advice and change my life and behaviour according to their guidance. A Sant’s prerogative is to bestow true welfare to souls; whatever they say is for the benefit of souls. They enable a soul to develop love and devotion to God. They show the value of the opportunity that has been given by having attained a human birth in the supreme Swaminarayan Faith, from where absolute salvation can be attained. I must cultivate a spirit of appreciation and gratitude for what I have been given in life and the opportunity that I have to please God. Sants say that the true riches of a person are not his assets, gems, jewellery, or lavish clothing; his true treasure comprises of his moral worth and the selfless donations that he gives for the benefit of others.
49 Physical Body - A Gift from God

It is often said that the body is a gift from God. Accordingly, that most valuable gift should remain dedicated to God. Philosophers have valued a human body in monetary terms to cost in excess of 6000 trillion US dollars. I will ensure that such a priceless gift is kept clean and furthermore, it is used wisely and usefully to serve my home and temple. I will offer my physical services for helping out in temple cleaning and other such activities. I will maintain the environment in which I live, so that it too remains clean and tidy. I will encourage my friends and associates to also use their valuable bodies for the maintenance of the temple and environment. By actively helping with the physical services required in a temple, the adverse traits of my mind will gradually recede. In all that I do, I will have energy, enthusiasm and empathy.

In Gadhpur Middle Section, Chapter 25 of the Vachanamrut scripture, Lord Shree Swaminarayan explains, ‘in the same way that Uka Khachar has become obsessed about serving Sants and the temple, if a person becomes obsessed about serving God, His temple and His Sants, and cannot remain for even a fraction of a moment without performing such deeds, then, all the vile passions within his mind and heart are destroyed, and consequently, God comes to reside within that person’s heart.’ I will ensure that I serve the Faith assiduously, so that the almighty Lord does reside within me.
50 Helping the Elderly and Needy

During His Forest Expedition, Lord Shree Swaminarayan demonstrated the importance of helping the sick, by serving the sadhu named Sevakram. This expression of selfless humanitarian service is an example for everyone. There are many different kinds of services. Helping other people, society, the poor; taking care of animals and wildlife; performing acts of conservation, and many such charitable deeds are noteworthy. Even the psychologists of the modern era advocate performing selfless services for others to be an important way of relieving mental stress and tension, and gaining self-worth. Assisting when required is one way of promoting community cohesion. Such deeds are rewarded with ones immoral traits being relieved. Instead, decency develops within him, and his devotion becomes affirmed. His soul and mind are purified by such altruistic, noble acts of charity, and God becomes pleased with him. Jeevanpran Shree Muktajeevan Swamibapa says that a person who does not physically exert to help himself and others is living a life of thieving; meaning, he is stealing the hard work of others for his own gain. Offering services is rewarded with unimaginable riches. But it must be remembered that true service is that where there is no expectance of gratitude, praise or reward. For that reason, as advised by Lord Shree Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri, I will perform selfless services throughout my life, in the best manner that I can. My deeds will be solely to please the Lord, not to gain worldly importance or show-off to others.
There is a famous Sanskrit phrase, ‘Atithi Devo Bhava’, meaning, a guest is akin to a deity. The sentiment behind this expression is that a person should be hospitable and friendly to visitors to their home, and show kindness to their guests. Food and a place to rest should be offered. As stated in verse 138 of the Shikshapatri, when guests arrive at my home, I will warmly welcome them and offer food etc. in accordance with my means. I will never forget that being kind-hearted and thoughtful is an essential component of morality.

The Russian philosopher, Leo Tolstoy once went to visit a friend. The friend’s young child was playing in the forecourt. Leo Tolstoy asked, “Which house do you like better, yours or mine?” The child replied, “Mine!” Leo Tolstoy enquired, “Why do you say that?” The child explained, “You have come to my house today, so the grandeur of this home has been augmented by your presence.” I will always remember that teaching, and give appropriate respect to my visitors.
52 Maintaining Politeness in Language

The kind of vocabulary that a person uses reflects his true, inner nature. Use of gentle, kind, considerate words form a person’s embellishment, whereas, harsh, offensive language causes agitation to one’s soul. In the same way that hot water burns your hand, roughness in one’s speech causes the heart to become scalded. I am a beloved child of God and so I must behave in a manner that would befit God’s child. I will talk with sweet, jovial, considerate words with everyone. If I were to use insensitive words, my Lord would become displeased with me. I will have a smiling face at all times, even though I may be distracted or stressed. Such a nature will benefit me as well as all those around me. Having a grumpy face is reflective of a person’s arrogance and self-importance. As a humble child of the Lord, I must not have such a temperament. It is said that laughing is a free and potent tonic for maintaining one’s good mental and physical health. Therefore, I will maintain relationships with friends and others that make me smile and laugh. I will stay away from grumpy, unhelpful, ungrateful individuals because those temperaments could rub off onto me, which would make my own life miserable. Furthermore, I will endeavour to make at least three people smile every day through my actions or words. Use of rough, foul language and swearing are not the traits of a moral, educated person; they are those seen in immoral people. Therefore, I will never utter such words. I will use my words like I spend my own money; with care and appropriateness. I will never have a grumpy face, but will smile, join my hands, and say, ‘Jay Swaminarayan’ to my acquaintances. Furthermore, my words and manner of speaking will be respectful and appropriate for the person who I am talking to.
53 Home Discourses

Holding regular religious discourses at home for the entire family are a way of building strong relationships with one another and at the same time, pleasing God. Through such informal discussions, the older generations can share their experiences and knowledge with the younger ones, who can ask questions to further their own understanding. Any distressful issues that may have arisen that day can be resolved through the family discussions held during the home assemblies. Respect for one another can be strengthened. Behaviours and characters are improved through forging such united family units. Disputes are less likely to occur and more easily resolved if they do arise. Therefore, I will ensure that I attend and take a keen interest in the religious discourses that are held with the rest of my family each day. That way, I will be able to develop my self-esteem and strengthen my family bond.
54 Servings One’s Parents

Taking care of one’s mother and father is the highest category of religious austerity that a person can observe. Their contribution to a person’s life is greater than anyone else’s, and this must never be forgotten. Therefore, at times of illness or during their old age, if I do not serve them and look after their welfare, what kind of an abhorrent, ungrateful person would I be? When I was young and helpless, they gave me all the help that I needed. When my parents become helpless due to their advancing years, it remains my foremost duty to look after them. I would be committing a grave sin if I abandoned them when they needed help. God would become displeased with me if I disregarded my duty as my parent’s child. I must offer financial, emotional and physical help to them so that they do not suffer due to my neglect. If I abandon them, my fate will be the same when I get old.

Just as they did for me, I should sacrifice my own wellbeing for their sake. Due to their advancing years or mental condition, they may be erratic in their behaviours; they may utter inappropriate things or get annoyed about trivial things. I will remain calm when any such situation arises, and help them in the best manner that I can. I will also help the poor, sick and unfortunate people in the community. Serving others in need is the best way of pleasing elders of the family and the society.
**55 Never Live with Untidiness**

Cleanliness is essential for advancing oneself spiritually. Cleanliness, tidiness and orderliness in one’s environment reflect the existence of similar traits in one’s mind and thoughts. I will endeavour to keep my home, garden, village, town, city, country and body clean and tidy. Eminent scholar and mother to the Faith, Sadguru Shree Muktanand Swami, says in his religious songs, ‘consider it your big fortune when the opportunity arises to perform seemingly menial tasks’. Accordingly, I will not allow my ego to stop me from cleaning and tidying the environment where I live, and I will consider it a deed for pleasing the Lord. I will never litter in the street or throw rubbish on the floor of public places, such as parks, buses, trains, schools, temples etc. Instead, I will find a refuse bin to throw it in, or take it home to dispose of. I will not create a mess and leave it for someone else to clear up after me. I will strive to preserve and protect the environment, for everyone else to enjoy for years to come. Just as I keep my external environment tidy, I will keep my external appearance orderly, neat and tidy. I will comb my hair properly, and wear appropriate kinds of clothing, in a manner that does not make me look like a ruffian. Why? Because I am a child of God, and my appearance should reflect this most fortunate position.
The battles of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharat are said to have commenced due to a game of dice. Yudhishtir not only gambled away all his wealth, but also his brothers, himself, and finally his wife, into servitude. The consequence was the public disrobing of Draupadi, and then their exile from the kingdom for 13 years. Gambling is a dire, evil habit that results in squandering away one’s own life, and causing detriment and suffering to the entire family. That is why our beloved Lord Shree Swaminarayan has said in the Shikshapatri that His disciples are prohibited from performing vices such as gambling and the consumption of intoxicants, such as hemp. Gambling is as intoxicating and mind-altering as alcohol and drugs. Modern society has created many different ways of gambling. All these give false hope to individuals for becoming incredibly rich through little effort. Enticed by such temptations, they forget the reality of life. Wealth amassed without sweat is easily whittled away. Only that which is accumulated through sheer hard work is valued and appreciated, and spent wisely. For all these very good reasons, I will ensure that I do not gamble and become lured by such false temptations.
57 Not Drinking Alcohol

My God tells me that I must not consume alcohol. For me, it is akin to drinking poison. This has been stated in many religious scriptures of many different faiths. For example, the Hindu Ashtanghruday scripture equates drinking alcohol to drinking deadly venom; the Koran of the Islam faith categorises alcohol as being the same as an evil demon. Only if I refrain from drinking alcohol will I be able to instil the virtues of the supreme Lord into my life and develop my life in the way that He would want me to. The consumption of alcohol is related to ill health and linked to numerous diseases. How many motoring accidents are related to alcohol use? How many accidental deaths have occurred due to use of this dreadful substance? The prime message of Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, in his first book, Immaturity, is the condemnation of alcohol-induced behaviours. This indicates the widespread denigration of consuming the substance amongst people of all races. How can I let such a harmful substance touch my lips and enter my body? I must never drink alcohol. I would be committing physical and mental suicide if I did. My body and soul would be harmed as a result. Oh merciful Lord! Give me the strength and wisdom, so that I never contravene this vow that I make at Your lotus feet.
Television, cinema, theatre, internet etc. all have their uses, but it is very easy to misuse them. Instead of these modes of communication being educational and character-forming, they are the cause of a person’s deformation. Watching material that contains illicit behaviours, sensualities, thieving, corruption, violence, suppression etc. will result in those same kinds of thoughts and images forming in one’s mind. These scenes would resurface in dreams. Not only does he waste his time and money, but he also wastes away his life. Sitting in front of a screen for extended periods is detrimental to one’s eyesight. Such a sedentary lifestyle is the cause of many modern day diseases. Therefore, I will spend my free time in a useful manner, and watch programs that are educational, ethical and moral.

A young child, named Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, watched a moving drama production called Harishchandra. This true story about the 36th king of the Surya dynasty, and his virtue of always speaking the truth, deeply influenced Mohandas Gandhi. That young child grew up to become the great Mahatma Gandhi. Such kinds of productions should be watched and learnt from. I will ensure that my life is not television-centric, but instead remains God-centric.
Isn’t it up to individuals to choose the kind of people they are friends with and associate with? Just as there are people who have good habits and behaviours, there are also those with undesirable tendencies and traits. Some people use bad language all the time, and it seems that they cannot utter a single sentence without using a swear word. They become angry and stressed about minor things. They are disruptive and domineering. They spread hate and envy. They steal, smoke tobacco and other drugs, drink alcohol, and eat forbidden foods. Keeping the company of such persons would be harmful influences on me. The kinds of friends that I will have will be those who have good, moral behaviours. My friends will regularly go to school and maintain a keen interest in learning. They will have respect for their parents and elders. They will regularly worship at the temple and remain involved in the work required for its running. They will maintain sincere respect for the Sants, and associate with the Sants in order to progress closer and closer to the Lord. Those are the virtues that my friends and associates will have. I will advise all others to maintain the company of such honourable individuals. I want to be with people who will take me closer to God, not lead me onto the slippery slope of immorality. Oh Lord! Have mercy and save me from such illicit influences.
60 My Bedtime

Just before going to sleep, I will pray to my beloved Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree. This is the time when I can quietly think about what I have achieved during the past 24 hours. I can recall how much of the Lord’s will and commandments I have adhered to, and how much I have disobeyed. This is the time to be open and honest, and frankly confess my misdemeanours. By praying for spiritual strength and guidance, and concentrating on the beautiful Murti of Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree, my mind will become calm and still. Consequently, my sleep will be peaceful and undisturbed. My dreams will be happy and my night’s sleep will give me a renewed energy for performing devotion to the Lord for another day.

I pray: Oh supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree, You have bestowed Your divine grace upon me and made me your child. May I never forget that mercy and remain progressing closer and closer to You. May I forge my thoughts and behaviours in a manner that pleases You and makes You proud of me. May I remain humbly devoted to serving You and the Faith, and offering my services to Sants and disciples. May I foster the wisdom to live in harmony will all my fellow brothers and sisters, i.e. the other disciples of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi. Give me the acumen to recognise the immorality within the community and within myself, and the courage to become segregated from all such irreligion. And my dear Lord, instil into me the divine strength, wisdom and passion to please You continuously, more and more with each day...because, it is my sincere wish to blossom my life to become just like a beautiful, fragrant flower.
My Abilities
A lamp glows as a result of the electricity that flows through it; it does not
have any intrinsic lustre. Similarly, the skills and abilities that I possess are not
due to me, but are the divine gifts of God that He has instilled into me. I may
have a good memory, handwriting, or a spectacular singing voice; I may be
able to dance eloquently, play musical instruments, or play sports skilfully; I
may be expert in public speaking or organising events. All this is due to the
gifts that I have obtained from God. If I forget that fact, and think that I am
intelligent, proficient and knowledgeable because of my own abilities, I would
be grossly mistaken, and furthermore, I would be displeasing God.

If I borrowed some lavish jewellery from a rich person to wear on a special
occasion after which I considered that jewellery to be my own, would the owner
be happy with me? In the same way, all that I have is given by God. It is His
skills and abilities that I am using during my life. I must remain forever grateful to
the merciful Lord Shree Swaminarayanbapa Swamibapa and Acharya Swamishree
for granting me such gifts. I must never consider them to be mine.

Never Become Despondent
It is generally considered that those who are clever are those who achieve
high marks at school or college, whilst those who may work extremely hard
in their studies but still attain low marks, are unintelligent. However, no-one
should become despondent in life, whatever their circumstances. If they have
worked hard to the best of their abilities, they will be rewarded in some way.

Bill Gates has become famous around the world as being one of the richest
people on Earth. In his childhood however, his parents were deeply concerned
about his learning abilities. His psychologist said that he would never make
anything of his life. However, due to his deep interest in computing, Bill Gates
eventually chaired Microsoft.

Abraham Lincoln met numerous setbacks in his life. Regardless of them all,
he rose to become the 16th President of the United States of America.

In the field of cricket, Sachin Tendulkar; in the business world, Dhirubhai
Ambani (Founder Chairman, Reliance Industries Limited), and many others in
various fields have achieved much in their lives. This is due to their continued
determination and perseverance. Never did they become despondent at their
respective setbacks and give up. Neither should I.
Always Remember
People consider their own body to be special and unique. But they forget that they are wholly dependent on numerous others, without whom, they would not be able to exist. For example, the clothes that they wear were not made with their own hands. The food that they eat was not grown by them. The house that they live in was not built with their own physical efforts. Countless people worked hard to clothe, feed and house them. Therefore, I must not forget that I am just one part of the community unit. It is up to me to ensure that my behaviours are not contributing to unrest and division, and instead are promoting cohesion and harmony. Division in the community leads to its destruction, and I would never want to be a factor that contributed to such detriment.
Always Aim for High Standards and Values

“It is important in life to remain fit and healthy, and to make your body strong. Allowing your body to become frail is a defeatist attitude. You must endeavour to keep yourself healthy and strong. You must become strong, not only physically, but also mentally. If you want to be successful in life, your body and mind need to be righteous and reputable. You should aim high in life, in whatever you do. Missing your high aim can be forgiven, but having a low standard cannot be excused. From childhood, you should keep your standards and ambitions high, because this will keep you enthused to progress.”

“Do not live a life of helplessness. That itself is an illness. Shake off such frailty from your mind. At this time, you are at the right age for working hard. Your aspirations will be fulfilled through such concerted efforts. If a lion remains sleeping, his prey will not come and fall into his mouth. Laziness is a demon. Idleness is degenerative. You are in the prime of your life. Work extremely hard. Aim high. Associate with good, virtuous people of the Faith. Through your association with the Faith, you will obtain the encouragement to remain on the true path of God. Remain afar from all addictions. It is not the religious restrictions that will impede your progression in life but actually, it is your addiction to such wrongful habits that will control and restrict you. They will ensnare the freedom of your mind and body. These vices will make you worthless and useless. Take heed of the examples given through the lives of our great leaders. How inspirational are the stories of King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi? You too must learn from them and aim for such great conduct.”

*His Divine Holiness Acharya Swamishree Purushottampriyadasji Maharaj*

Jay Shree Swaminarayan
Publications of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan

Sanskrit Publications
- Vachanamrut Rahasyarth-pradeepika-tika-sahitani
- Shikshapatri
- Shreeji-sammat-vishistadwait-siddhant-sagar
- Bharamutra Bhaya Ratna
- Raghuvas Dvitiya Sarg
- Shree Swaminarayan Stotravali
- Subhashit Padyavali

English Publications
- Vachanamrut Rahasyarth Pradeepika Tika Parts 1-5
- Shree Swaminarayan Gadi
- Shikshapatri
- Lord Shree Ghanshyam’s Childhood Episodes Parts 1-3
- Sadachar Sandesh
- Sanskar Deepika Part 1
- Jeevan Pushpa

Photographic Books
- Visualisation of the Supreme
- My Beloved Gurudev

Hindi Publications
- Vachanamarut Rahasyarth Pradeepika Tika
- Shree Abji Bapashree ki Vartaye Parts 1 & 2
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Gujarati Publications Prose Section
- Vachanamarut Rahasyarth Pradeepika Tika
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- Shree Vrudavandasji Swami ni Vato
- Shree Muktajeevan Swaminarayan Bapashree Lilamrut Sukhsagar - Pratham Pravah, Madhav Pravah, Uttam Pravah
- Shree Swaminarayan Gadi
- Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Gaurav Gatha
- Shasthipurti Prasasti Granth
- Aa Che Amara Jeevanpran
- Shree Swaminarayan Bhagwan Sarvopari
- Sanskar Deepika Parts 1-7
- Kartasya nu Kamal

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- Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Kadi Gaurav Katha
- Dhyan-upyogi Avarano
- Shree Swaminarayan Sampraday ni Visheshao
- Panchmahal na Nyalkaran
- Shree Harignaprapti Rasaswad
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- Shree Harililamrut Parts 1-4

Publications for Children
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- Sanskar Deepika Parts 1-7
- Chintan na Chamkara
- Shree Muktajeevan Prasasti
- Jeevan Pushpa
- Shree Swaminarayan Charitra Chitra Darshan

General Publications
- Sardar Patel - Ek Sinh-purush (Gujarati & Hindi)
- Flash Back - Collection of Photo Stories by the Journalist Zaverilal Mehta

All these publications are available at Temples of Shree Swaminarayan Gadi Sansthan, and also from its website: SwaminarayanGadi.com/Publications
Remember that you are in charge of your own destiny....
The kind of company you keep will determine the life that you live....

**Your Formative Years**

- **Bad company**: Time and money is wasted through addictions and bad habits
- **Good company**: Time and opportunity to learn is used wisely

**Student Life**

**Remainder of your Life**

- **Tough, troubled, strenuous existence**: Comfortable, peaceful, worthwhile life