

# Session 1 – Introduction and Building the Framework

September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Jai Swaminarayan! Sahajanand Swami Maharajni jai, Bapashreeni jai, Sadguruoshreeni jai, Swaminarayan Bhagwanani jai, tatha anant anadi muktoni jai!

A humble prayer in their lotus-feet and our Guru AMPP NarayanMama-LilaMasi's lotus-feet to augment this assembly with their divinity and grace. I humbly bow to their feet and pray to them, to shower their blessings on us now and forever for the bliss of the divine Moorti of Lord Swaminarayan. I also bow to my knowledge guru or gnan-guru PP JituKaka. I also request forgiveness from them, as well as from the divine Satsang to pardon my mistakes and shortcomings and ignorance.

We are all the blessed Satsangi's of Lord Swaminarayan who have utmost faith in the Lord, meditate upon His divine form and continuously strive to exemplify the principles, teachings and philosophy of Lord Swaminarayan! We are the torch-bearers carrying forward the light of Satsang in this generation and onwards. From that perspective it becomes important that we understand the principles, teachings and philosophy of Lord Swaminarayan through sharing of knowledge and insights that each one of us has gained through our own study and experience.

Talking about knowledge, I recently came across a very good explanation of difference between knowledge and information. Information is a set of disconnected dots. Each dot in itself contains some piece of information, which in itself is complete but does not paint the big picture. Knowledge is the ability to connect the dots. The dots can be connected in zillions of different ways, but knowledge is the ability to be able to connect them. To give an example In school we all have done exercise of connecting the dots to create pictures of animals, flowers, etc, and then fill them up with crayons. I am sure each one of us has done that. Some of us I am sure have also done the rangolis from 10x10 or 25x25 or 100x100 dot matrix, and creating patterns out of it, and filling them up brilliant colors. The dots by themselves do not mean anything, but when we connect them, when we fill them with colors, they show beautiful pictures. Likewise, while every incident from life of Lord Swaminarayan teaches us something, when we connect it together we learn about the personality of Lord Swaminarayan Himself; every teaching of Lord Swaminarayan shows us the direction, but putting it all together, we get the Swaminarayan philosophy. Connecting the dots is therefore important.

Secondly, how do we know and understand someone – be it spiritually or otherwise? If the person is physically present and accessible, then nothing compares to spending real time with the person. If we cannot meet the person ourselves, then we might know them through someone who knows him/her well. If the person is remote, these days we have the facility of tele-conference, video conference, etc., which we did not have in earlier days. In earlier days, it used to be documented conversations or documented life incidents that we had to rely on. So in a nutshell, to know a person, we should be able to personally meet the person, or meet someone who has a connection with the person, or rely on documented/recorded conversations and life-incidents. To really know Lord Swaminarayan, we can

either connect with Him through meditation, or connect with His Mukta or know Him through His documented life incidents and teachings. Now, luckily for us, there is a wealth of such documentation available – for life incidents, for teachings and for codes of conduct. Lord Swaminarayan’s life incidents are documented in Bhaktachintamani, Hari Charitrachintamani, Hari Lilamrutsukhsagar, etc. and so many kirtans. His teachings are available to us through Vachanamrutam and codes of conduct through Sikshaptri, Dharmamrut, etc. Apart from these scriptures, and based on the original scriptures, there are several books written about life incidents of Lord Swaminarayan.

Bringing these two thoughts together, about connecting the dots, and about knowing a person, we can understand the personality of Supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayan when He advented on this Earth, by connecting the dots of His life incidents, and we can understand the philosophy of Lord Swaminarayan by connecting the dots of His teachings. We already spend some time earlier this year understanding His philosophy. We will now spend time understanding His personality. The next question is how do we connect the dots and which dots to connect? How do we tie Lord Swaminarayan’s life-incidents and which life-incidents do we tie together? Even if we have just 2 dots, we can connect them in as many different ways as lines and curves and patterns we can draw in between them – which is infinite. There is so much to learn from life of Lord Swaminarayan, that an attempt to capture it all seems hubris. So for our purposes, we will build a framework. Actually, we will build 2 frameworks. One from the current contemporary thinking and one from ancient Hindu thought. The perspective of current contemporary thinking is a little away from normal Satsang conversations, and I beg pardon from Shreeji Maharaj and all the Mukto for taking a slightly different approach.

From current contemporary thinking perspective, more than religious books, there is a lot of emphasis in our daily lives on books for self-development, effectiveness, growth & leadership. Of these some have really stood out for me. Again, I am sharing my perspective. I am sure each one of has developed insights and perspective of our own. So kindly do not think of this as my hubris towards anything. I am simply sharing my perspective and approach. Following are the books that have made an impression on me:

1. Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Steven Covey
2. Jonathon Livingston Seagull by Richard Bach
3. Don’t Sweat the small stuff by Richard Carlson
4. Strengths based leadership, Who moved my Cheese, Multipliers, and these are the top the list books for me

We will use the concepts mentioned in these books to form basis of our contemporary framework. This framework will be just one sentence – “Lord Swaminarayan was a highly effective spiritual leader.” Let me repeat. Our framework is just one sentence – “Lord Swaminarayan was a highly effective spiritual leader.” During our conversations, we will first understand the concepts in these books at a high level. Later, we will map Lord Swaminarayan’s life incidents and see that He was effective, see that He was a Leader and see that He was a spiritual leader. We will most probably end up spending about 4-6 Satsangs for this.

From ancient Hindu & religious perspective, Lord Swaminarayan has mentioned in Vadataal Prakaran 10<sup>th</sup> Vachanamrutam that Supreme Lord should be understood through the 39 characteristics of Godhead

that manifests as King, and 32 characteristics of Godhead that manifests as a saint. In Gadhada Pratham Prakaran 62<sup>nd</sup> Vachanamrutam, Shree Abaji Bapashree has listed the 39 characteristics of God originally listed in Shreemad Bhagwat Canton 1. In Gadhada Pratham Prakaran 77<sup>th</sup> Vachanamrutam, Shree Abaji Bapashree has listed the 32 characteristics of Saint, originally listed in Canton 11 of Shreemad Bhagwat. During our conversations, we will understand the characteristics and take incidents from life of Lord Swaminarayan and map them to these characteristics. There is some overlap between these two sets of characteristics the 39 & the 32, and we will merge them together as necessary during our journey. We will try to walk through 3-6 characteristics during each Satsang.

One more thing before we begin our journey, unlike our journey earlier this year, where we walked together once a week, for this journey, we will walk together once a month or maybe once every 3-4 weeks. Let's embark on this journey with blessings of Anant Mukto and humble prayer to all of them and to Lord Swaminarayan to continuously guide us through this journey.

Looking at it from contemporary perspective, we mentioned three things – Effectiveness, Leadership and Spiritualism. We will use the concepts in Steven Covey's 7 habits of highly effective people, to show that Lord Swaminarayan was very effective. We will use concepts from Strengths based Leadership, Who moved my Cheese, and Multipliers to show that Lord Swaminarayan was a great leader. We will use concepts from Jonathon Livingston Seagull to show that Lord Swaminarayan was a Spiritual Leader.

For those who do not know who Steven Covey was, he was a renowned author and instructor, and coached many CEOs, and led many leadership classes and workshops at many corporations, to build an effective and holistically healthy company culture. In his most renowned book – “The seven habits of highly effective people” Steven has described how effective people are different. First of all, in interest of those who have not read the book and are not familiar with it, we will understand these concepts and the habits. We will stay at a very high level, since we only want to understand them for our purpose. Our goal is not to understand Steven Covey's book but to understand that Lord Swaminarayan was a highly effective spiritual leader. For those who are interested, there is hardcopy, as well as audio CDs available for all the books I mentioned, and find it at very good rates on Amazon. So anyone who wants to indulge in reading these books, they are readily available. Once we have understood the concepts and habits, we will then understand how Lord Swaminarayan had displayed these effectiveness characteristics and habits, 200+ years ago. The reason I emphasize on 200+ years ago, because the times were very different. The world and the perspective of the world has really changed in last 200 years. But the principles of effectiveness that the modern world talks about, Lord Swaminarayan had already displayed them so many years ago. And we will do this using life-incidents from Lord Swaminarayan's life. We will discuss incidents for each of these areas.

For the rest of our time today, and I will walk through this a little quickly, and pickup a pace a little. Because as I mentioned our goal is to just understand enough to follow the framework.

The book first talks about a few the concepts like:

1. Character ethic v/s Personality ethic
2. Paradigm shift
3. Principles v/s Values

#### 4. What is a habit

This is followed by the 7 habits which are:

1. Be Proactive
2. Begin with end in mind
3. Put first things first
4. Think win-win
5. Seek first to understand, then to be understood
6. Synergize
7. Sharpen the saw

Lets look a little bit into what these concepts and habits are. Once again, this is for the people who are not familiar with the book but want to follow our framework for understanding the personality of Lord Swaminarayan.

The concept of Character Ethic v/s Personality Ethic says that Character ethic, which is our inner strength, genuineness, integrity, modesty, love, compassion, empathy, etc., is the portion of the iceberg that is submerged in the water which is about 7/8<sup>th</sup> of the entire iceberg. The Personality ethic, the tip of the iceberg, which is visible outside the water, has evolved in last 70-80 years, and is about techniques to influence others, to show a positive attitude or to portray a positive attitude, and improve outward appearance. Personality ethic is how to influence others without dealing with our own character. Covey says the personality ethic is good, as far as it is based on character ethic. Personality ethic without character ethic is only a show or portrayal of good qualities, not real qualities. It results into conniving, back-stabbing, manipulating others, etc. Character ethic focuses on inner growth and real knowledge whereas personality ethic is about outward looks. Character ethic is far more important than personality ethic, for an effective person. At the center of it, is the fact that what we internally are has more effect on people than what we externally say or do. The 7 habits are not a quick-fix program or technique but something that we need to internalize and build within ourselves.

Paradigm is the way we see the world, universe, and our role in the world.... Paradigm isn't what happens to us, but our interpretation of what happens to us. Paradigm shift means to change our interpretation of what happens to us. Covey says that we need a paradigm shift to cultivate these habits. To explain paradigm shift, he gives an example. He was once waiting at a subway station and a man came in with his kids. The kids were messy and noisy and were creating a ruckus and the father, this man, was not doing anything about it. He was simply sitting there. This irritated Covey and he triggered a conversation with the father, trying to eventually arrive at telling him to control the kids. And the father says, "We are going back home from the hospital. Their mother just died. They don't know how to deal with it and I don't know how to deal with it." Immediately Covey's frustration and irritation changed into empathy and he said, "What can I do? How can I help?"

I have my own experience of paradigm shift. In my job I have to work several different functions and several organizational verticals. About five years ago, I had to work with one person named Adam in Massachusetts. I had never met him just talked on phone. He would never meet his deliverables, he would say something will get done and it will never get done. I would keep asking him. At one point, I

got frustrated and I was ready to escalate it to his manager. And I did. His manager told me that he has Stage 3 cancer, and just has a few months left, and that is impacting his work. My approach and attitude towards Adam changed right away. MY way of conversing with him, my of asking him about deliverables, everything changed. Gradually our conversations became philosophical, and I got to know Adam better in the last few months of his life. So that is paradigm shift.

The book says that principles hold true with time, they do not change with time. Values change with time but are usually based on principles. Principles remain constant. Values change. When we internalize the principles, they become a habit. A Habit is a combination of Desire(Want), Knowledge(what, why), Skill (how). So to form a habit, we need to have the desire, the knowledge and the skillset.

After these initial concepts, the book moves to the 7 habits. These habits are sequential and lead through a continuum of maturity. This continuum of maturity is moving from dependence to independence to interdependence. Dependency is “you”. You did not do this, you did not do that, you did not come through for me... If I use this “you” language, then I am a dependent person. Independence is “I” and self-reliance. I can do this, I will do that, it is my job, I will take care of it. Independence is better than dependence and the next level of maturity is Interdependence. Interdependence is “we”. We can do this, we will do that, let’s do it together. First 3 habits are character ethics and take from dependence to independence, and next 3 are about personality ethic built on top of the character ethic, and take from independence to inter-dependence.

Once again, I am trying to stay at a very high level, because I am simply trying to build a framework. Those who are interested in the details can refer to the book.

Let’s now spend some time in understanding the 7 habits very quickly because eventually we will show that Lord Swaminarayan had these 7 habits.

1. First habit is Be proactive –It is a habit of Personal Vision. It is more than taking initiative. It is about taking responsibility of our own life. What is responsibility? Responsibility is the ability to choose our response. Our behavior is a product of our own decisions based on values, rather than a product of conditions based on feelings. Say for example we decide to go on a picnic. We decide on where are we going to go, may be about 2-3 hours of drive. We pack our stuff, the food is all ready, we have loaded our games, tablets, phones, we have decided on which music we are going to play while driving, everything is set. And the weather turns bad. What do we do? A proactive person will say, “That’s ok. We are already set for a picnic, lets go to some other place where weather is good. Or lets for that matter, have a picnic in our backyard.” Opposite of proactive and reactive. Reactive will get frustrated and become negative, and blame situation and people, and curse God. A Proactive person does not blame people and circumstances for what happens to them. They choose not be miserable, not be controlled by the situation. Internal Liberty comes from this. This is freedom. The freedom of choice. In any given situation, we can choose our response. Being proactive is being true to human nature – to act and not be acted upon. Being proactive is moving away from Determinism. Psychology says that people think that their life is predetermined – that is the theory of determinism. There are 3 deterministic approaches. First is Genetic (family) – “I cannot help it if I am late. It is in my genes. Everyone in my family is always late. It is like that. It has been like that for generations.”

Second determinism is Psychic (my parents did this to me). I see a lot of that today. And the third determinism is Environmental (boss, spouse, teenager, economics, national policies, etc.). And all that is doing bad things to me. Being proactive is moving from Can't, Don't, & How frustrating... to ... I have to, I must.... And Take control of circumstances than being controlled by them - be it frustration with traffic, customer, or our child. We are taking responsibility for our own effectiveness and happiness. That is what being proactive means.

2. Second habit is Begin with the end in mind – It is a habit of Personal Leadership and it deals with direction. It is about always having the Image or picture of the end in mind. Covey says; think of our own funeral 3 years from now. Since Covey is a Christian, they have funeral, and at funeral, people who know the person, say nice things about the person, and how many lives the person touched. This speech is called Eulogy. So Covey says, think of our funeral 3 years from now. What will people say about us? Say there are 4 people who give eulogy – one family member, one friend, one co-worker, and one from our religious organization. What would we like them to say about us, our character, our contributions and our achievements? We should write it down. This will give us a definition of success that we never knew. We should write in our mind and heart our own value, philosophy, mission statement, and belief. We shouldn't tie ourselves to our history but to our potential. We should draw heavily upon our inner sense and conscience, distill our thoughts in form of a value or purpose statement. This purpose statement is written with the end in mind – what will we like people to say about us, when we are no more?
3. Third habit is First things first – It is a Personal Management habit – deals with speed, coordination, logistics to go in the direction set in habit 2. After we decide what the right things to do are, we must focus on efficiency and bottom-line. Put first things first. To achieve this, we must manage ourselves, not manage time. Time is already being managed – 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We must manage ourselves by seeing how things-to-do connect to our mission. The mission that we established in Habit 2. Let's take 2 parameters – Important and Urgent. Important means it attaches to habit 2. Urgent is that which is pressing, that which gives urgency. Like a ringing phone.... It wants to be answered and we can easily get side-tracked by it. Covey says that most of us manage wrong things in right ways. He says, think of 4 quadrants. 4 divisions of time – combination of importance and priority. Imagine the squares or quadrants. Q1 – Time that we spend on things that are Urgent & Imp; Q2 – Things that are Non-Urgent & Important, Q3 Things that are Urgent & Non-Important, Q4 – Things that are Non-Urgent & Non-Important. Think of one activity in personal and professional life, that will improve our lives by leaps and bounds. Which quadrant does it belong to? And Covey says invariably it is always Q2 - Things that are Non-Urgent & Important. Covey says all 7 habits fall in Q2. We all know the 80-20 rule. 20% activities are the key to the success of the project and Covey says invariably all of these 20% activities fall in Q2 - Things that are Non-Urgent & Important. So in order to manage ourselves, we need to say no Q3 & Q4 – non-important things. Pay attention to Q2, and by doing that, eventually diminish the time we spend in Q1 and in fire-fighting. We will get out of that fire-fighting mode that most of us are these days. We will have better prioritization of how we want to approach things in our life.

The first three habit – be proactive, begin with the end in mind & first things first. They form the character ethic and lead from dependence to independence. After achieving independence, an effective person moves to the next maturity level of inter-dependence. Next three habits are about interdependence.

4. The 4<sup>th</sup> habit is Think win-win. It is the abundance mentality. There is enough for everyone. No one needs to lose. Everyone can win. Win-win does not mean being nice – it is not lose-win, where we lose and others win. For win-win one has to be nice and courageous, Sensitive and brave, self-respect and respect for others. It is the fruit of Habits 1, 2, 3. Unless one has the character ethic, unless one is independent, one cannot think win-win. In most cases if we cannot arrive at win-win, Covey says go no deal. No deal, stops us from being manipulative. It stops us from moving away from three habits. It takes us away from hidden agenda. We do not need to fight with each other, because there is enough for everyone. That's the abundance mentality – the 4<sup>th</sup> habit – think win-win.
5. In order to communicate to arrive at win-win solutions, the 5<sup>th</sup> habit Seek first to understand, then to be understood, comes into picture. We need this to interact, and influence. This habit requires a very deep paradigm shift – because we by nature want to be understood. We do not want to listen. We want others to listen to us. We find it much harder to listen with empathy and depth than to speak. Both parties in any conversation, argument or discussion want to be understood first. Covey says First listen, make the other person feel understood, then express. He explains this beautifully with a Father-son example. Once a father came to Covey and said, “I don't think my son understands me. I don't think he gets it.” Covey asked him, “Do you understand your son?” Father responded, “I think I do. I have been through teen age years. I know what kind of things a teenager goes through. I can relate to it. I understand him.” To that, Covey says, “No. Have you had a conversation with your son, to understand him?” And the father then realizes that he has never really spent good time with his son to understand him and bridges the gap. Though we may have passed through different age groups, and have had different experiences in life, we cannot say that we are in a position to understand everything about what others are going through. I have another personal example with regards to this habit. About 3-4 years ago, I used to work for an SVP who I really respected. He was very smart and very mature. I was in a conflict with one of the peers as he was not delivering the things that I thought were necessary for the success of the project. So I went to my SVP and told him that I was having this problem. Instead of talking to me about how to solve the problem, he asked me if I had ready 7 Habits of Effective people and I said, “Yes I have. A few years ago.” To which he said, “Can you go back and read the 5<sup>th</sup> Habit and we will talk again tomorrow.” So the meeting ended. I did not get a solution, but because I respected him, I went home and listened to the Audio CD of 7 Habits. The next day, instead of a meeting with my SVP, I set up a meeting with my peer, and said, “I don't think I understand your problem statement. Why are you not bought into this vision that the whole team is bought into?” He then explained his perspective and we arrived at a win-win solution. Needless to say that I did not need to have a second meeting with my SVP. So this is my firsthand experience with 5<sup>th</sup> Habit. By the way, the peer later on became a very good friend of mine. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> habit. Seek first to understand then to be understood.
6. The 6<sup>th</sup> habit Synergize is about creative cooperation & collaboration, and it results from Habit 5. With this Habit, 2 people in dispute work together to come up with a solution better than individual solutions. It is not compromise. Compromise = 1+1 = 2-; Synergy = 1+1 = 2+. Whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Habit 6 is about very creative thinking to find new and better ways and solutions. Covey uses an example very frequently – He wanted to go for a vacation by a lakeside with his sons and his wife wanted to go visit her ailing mother. Covey could have said, “No way. We are going on a vacation.” Or gone the way of, “You always have your way. You always win. We will go see your mother.” Rather than doing that, they found a lake near their

mother's residence, that way they had a vacation and were able to see their ailing mother as well. The other example he gives is of window closed and open. One person wants fresh air and other person says the papers fly away because of the wind that comes through. Both of them work together and come up with synergetic win-win solution. Deal with respect and creativity. Synergy is the crowning achievement of all previous habits. The result is that a person strong on character ethic are able to synergize and come up solution better than individual solutions.

7. 7<sup>th</sup> Habit is about Self-renewal, self-maintenance – Sharpening the saw – Cover uses and example where a person is sawing down a tree. And a person walks up to him and says, "Hey! Don't you need to sharpen the saw so that you can cut the tree down faster?" And he responds, "Can't you see? I am busy cutting the tree." The other example Covey uses is are we ever too busy to fill up gas in our car? Too busy driving to get gas. Do we ever say that, "I was too busy driving that I did not have time fill gas in my car." We don't. For sharpening the saw there are 4 areas - Physical, mental, spiritual, social/emotional self-renewal. He says everyone should spend an hour at least every day on sharpening the saw. For Physical, one needs to exercise – stretching, aerobics, muscle toning, walking. Key to energy is oxygen. Spend 3 hours a week to exercise. Spiritual exercise – renew our commitment to our well-developed value system. Our own philosophy – reading, meditation, pray, deep thinking – related to habit 2. Mental planning and resolve and doing and staying with that – related to habit 2 & 3. Social emotional relates to 4,5,6. Better psychological agreement.

So this in a nutshell a quick framework for us to work through to show that Supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayan was an Effective Person is what we built today. An effective leader, helps and makes others more effective. So will also establish along the way through life incidents of Lord Swaminarayan that He was an effective leader.

We took some time today establish a framework to connect the dots. Using this framework, starting next Satsang, we will look at personality of Supreme Lord Shree Swaminarayan, in light of contemporary thoughts. Once again, I would like to emphasize that, it is not the only way to understand Lord Swaminarayan's personality. And this way does not guarantee an all-encompassing view of Lord Swaminarayan's personality either. I would request the sabha to look at this as "a way" rather than "the way". It is just one rangoli made from dot-matrix, and many more such rangolis can be made.

From an overall perspective, we did not talk much about Lord Swaminarayan's personality today. We spent time in building the framework, but starting next Satsang, we will talk more about Lord Swaminarayan's personality.

With that, let's rest here in the first leg of our journey. We will continue forward in another 3-4 weeks. My humble, charan-sparsh-sah Jai Swaminarayan to all the Muktos. Sahajanand Swami Maharajni Jai, Bapashreeni Jai, Sadguroo Shreeni Jai, Swaminarayan Bhagwanani Jai.