

Session 2 – Concepts of Effectiveness

October 12th, 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 request forgiveness from them, as well as from the divine Satsang to pardon my mistakes and shortcomings and ignorance.

Last month, we talked about difference between knowledge and information. Information is like dots, and knowledge is a way to connect those dots. We also talked about how do we know someone – either directly (in person or remote), or indirectly either through someone who knows them, or through documentation of life and times. We then went ahead and built 2 frameworks – one from current contemporary thinking, and one from ancient Hindu thought. For current contemporary thinking, we took a little different approach using the basis of management and self-development books of this era. I shared the names of those books via email as well. We also defined our framework in one sentence, which is – “Lord Swaminarayan was a highly effective spiritual leader.” We then started our journey, with quickly understanding the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” by Steven Covey, in order to establish that Lord Swaminarayan was Highly Effective.

As part of that, we discussed concepts like:

1. Character ethic v/s Personality ethic
2. Paradigm shift
3. Principles v/s Values
4. What is a habit?

And then followed it by a quick understanding of 7 habits:

1. Be Proactive
2. Begin with the 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

Let's continue our journey forward. At a high level, we can categorize life of Lord Swaminarayan into three phases. Phase 1 – Birth and childhood in Chhapaiya, which is about 40 kms from Ayodhya, and Ayodhya, till age of 11. During this time, Lord Swaminarayan was popularly known as Ghanshyam Maharaj. So whenever we are referring to incidents from this phase of life, we will use the name Ghanshyambhai. Phase 2 – Life of a Yogi when He left home at the age of 11, and travelled across India

for 7 years, finally arriving in present day Gujarat at the age of 18. He got His Diksha at the age of 19. Diksha is spiritual initiation. He got that from Ramanand Swami at the age of 19, and assumed the duties of the leader of the Satsang at the age of 21. As a Yogi, Lord Swaminarayan was known as Neelkanthvarni. So for any life incidents related to this phase of life, we will use the name Neelkanthvarni most of the time. Phase 3 – Life of a Spiritual head when He moved from village-to-village and city-to-city in the present day Gujarat and established a solid foundation of what we now know as The Swaminarayan religion, He did that in just 28 years! He left His body at the age of 49. During this phase of life, He was popularly known as Sahajanand Swami or Lord Swaminarayan.

Our Guru AMPP NarayanMama has written a very good comprehensive booklet about Lord Swaminarayan – the very first publication from Shree Swaminarayan Divine Mission. AMPP NarayanMama wrote that book in just one hour! I am sure we have all read it, since it is available in English as well.

Coming to the concepts of High effectiveness we talked last month about character ethic – building of real character than an outwardly appearance. Lord Swaminarayan, always put a lot of emphasis on Character Ethic than personality ethic; on building the inner strength than an outward appearance. He showed it through His own lifestyle, as well as by making others realize the importance of Character Ethic. Though He was the Supreme Lord, and did not need any formal education, in the early part of His life, Lord Swaminarayan learnt all the scriptures from His father Dharmpita. He used to get up very early in the morning 3:00 – 4:00 AM, to study. We continue that tradition in Dhanurmas even today. He had no reason to study, since He is all-knowing, but He still studied. The example of how well He studied goes back to one incident. In Hindu religion, Pundit is a title given to only those who have acquired a certain level of Spiritual knowledge. In other words, it is one of the highest spiritual knowledge degrees one can get. At the age of 8, Lord Swaminarayan, then called Ghanshyambhai, went to Kashi with His father. There He happened to attend a debate amongst the Pundits of Kashi. He was a young boy of 8 years age at that time. At that young age He defeated the most learned Pundits of Kashi in a spiritual debate. So that is character ethic! Building that firm and strong foundation or the basis of the personality very early on in life!

Think about how much stuff we gather when we go for an outing for a day. Food, sodas, juices, snacks, music, games, Tablets, Chargers, DVDs, Sunglasses, caps, sun-screen, change of clothes.... The list goes on. When Ghanshyambhai left home at the age of 11, His outwardly appearance was as simple as it could be – a cotton rope to draw water from well, a piece of cloth to strain the water, a kamandal for filling up water, a kanthi, a mala or a rosary, a tilak, a booklet of gist of scriptures, the gutako as we know it, shaligram- a form of God to worship, a vessel to eat food, and a cloth to cover His body. That's it! No other worldly external augmentation of clothes, or shoes, or jewelry, or condiments, or beverages, or iPads, or iPhone6.... Nothing..... Just these handful of things – and He travelled with these minimal things for 7 full years! Why? To teach us to build the character. To teach us that the inner strength, resolve, qualities, are all that matter and are all that stay with us. To teach us that one does not need a whole lot to survive. To teach us that there is a difference between “Necessity” and “Luxury”. Anything other than bare minimum needs to survive, is not a necessity but a luxury. These days the definition of necessity has taken a completely different meaning. The latest cell phone, a laptop, a

desktop and a tablet are all necessities, television and cable is a necessity, telephone is a necessity, being connected to the internet all the time is a necessity, having a car is a necessity. The list can go on. Are these really necessities? This is not to say one should not keep up with latest trends and technology, but to point out how skewed our definition of necessity is. Lord Swaminarayan explained this to us by leading a very simple life, no belongings, no attachments, simplicity incarnate....

During His 7 years journey, He learnt and practiced 8-fold Yog. These days, definition of Yog or Yoga as it is called, has been limited to only one fold – Asan. That’s what Yog has been limited to now. But there are 8 folds to Yog – Yam, Niyam, Asan, Pranayam, Pratyahar, Dharana, Dhyan & Samadhi. Neelkanthvarni practiced 8-fold yog to show the path to liberation. At the end of His 7 year journey, He reached the step-well of Loj. After reaching Loj, and meeting with Muktanand Swami and his sant-mandal or group of saints, but before meeting Ramanand Swami, Lord Swaminarayan, then named Sarajudas by Muktanand Swami, lived in the same ashram with other saints. Though He was the Supreme Lord, He had accepted the day-to-day responsibilities within the ashram. Not only did He take on these responsibilities, but He also made them enjoyable! One such responsibility was to collect cow-dung, to fuel the cooking stoves. There was no electricity, no kerosene, no coal, no gas, no bio-gas. The only source for cooking food was to burn natural sources. Some civilizations cut down trees, whereas societies like Indian society at that time knew about recycling cow-dung to fuel cooking stoves. Since the saints would not go close to women who were also there to collect the fuel, saints would many-a-times return empty-handed. So Sarajudas, our own Lord Swaminarayan, would put the women in Samadhi, and have them visit the divine abode Akshardham. When they were in Samadhi, He and the saints would pick-up cow-dung. The saints were happy that their problem was solved. The women were also happy that at the cost of one day’s collection, they enjoyed the divine bliss of Akshardham, and Lord Swaminarayan was also happy – for having resolved His saints problems and for also having given His divine bliss to the women of the village. Talk about a win-win solution to the problem 😊. While this incident in itself teaches us that no work is small, it tells us about the character ethic based personality of Lord Swaminarayan. No pompous attitude or arrogance – but teamwork, simplicity, humility, kindness, fun, joy, and hope.....

During His stay in Loj, before meeting Ramanand Swami, once a devotee came to the Ashram saying he had a lot of cucumber (or squash. One of the two, I do not recall), in his field and wanted to donate those. So Sarajudas and a couple of other saints went to collect cucumber. They picked up all the cucumbers and collected them in a large piece of cloth. Once they were done, they tied up the 4 ends of the cloth, to conveniently carry it. However, they realized that the package was too heavy to carry back. Everyone started wondering what to do next. Cucumbers were already picked, so they had to be carried back and used. There were no refrigerators at that time for long-term storage. So anything that was picked, had to be used in a day or so. The package was too heavy for even 2-3 people to carry. Lord Swaminarayan stepped in and said He will carry it. Everybody else was skeptical, but thought, “If He wants to do it, let Him try.” Sarajudas picked-up the package, put it on His head and started walking. He walked so fast that others could not keep pace with Him, and within no time they reached the Ashram. These days in our work places and outside of work, in our social groups, we find so many people in the position of power and authority make those under their control, do all the work, and without any

remorse or hesitation take all the credit of their work. They portray to be leaders, but are actually not. Lord Swaminarayan on the contrary took on the most difficult and undoable tasks upon Himself, went that extra mile, or may be extra miles, making the lives of those associated with Him much more easier. Now THAT is character ethic!

After meeting with Ramanand Swami and getting Diksha in Piplana, Sarajudas was named Sahajanand Swami, Narayan Muni, and also eventually Lord Swaminarayan. After the initiation or Diksha, Sahajanand Swami, together with Vyapakanand Swami and Swaroopanand Swami, ran a Sadavrat in Mangrol. Sadavrat is a place for saints, mendicants, and travelers to get food, water and rest, at no cost. Sadavrat is primarily run on donations. In those days, there were no restaurants or hotels or other such places to dine or relax. So sadavrats used to be a blessing for everyone. What was simultaneously happening during this time, was that the fame of Lord Swaminarayan had started traveling across the country and many mendicants used to travel long distances to meet or see Him. One such mendicant, who was the head of a group of mendicants, arrived in Mangrol. Since he was a head of his group, he had developed this habit of enjoying more privileges like better food, better bed, etc., than his fellow-mates or followers. He just simply assumed that Sahajanand Swami must also be doing the same. We always perceive others to be like us. The mendicant also did the same and assumed. So when he was asked to take his meal, he said "Hum Mahaant ke saath khaayega." Meaning I will eat with the head of the group – Sahajanand Swami. At that time Sahajanand Swami used to eat a ladu. A ladu is a round ball-shaped food, which is usually sweet, but not always (as in this case). So at that time, Sahajanand Swami used to eat a ladu made of chillies and mindhiaval. Mindhiaval is a known laxative in Ayurveda. When it came time to eat, the mendicant and Sahajanand Swami sat down together for the meal. The mendicant was very hungry and his mouth was watering in anticipation of good food. When the Ladus were served, he went on to take a big bite, and was taken aback! He could not bear the spice and started screaming. Sahajanand Swami then arranged to get him a lot of ghee to sooth him down. These days, in the era of personality ethic, people long to associate with successful and rich people in powerful and leadership positions. This incident teaches us that for real leaders, with strong character ethic, title and position are not important. These things do not mean anything to them. AMPP NarayanMama used to give an example of Einstein, that Einstein said, "What all do these degrees and certificates and papers mean. They mean nothing. What matters is the truth." So title and position are not important to people with character ethic. Inner strength is important. The mendicant also learnt the same lesson in this case, and realized the importance of character ethic, and became a Satsangi.

Once in Ayodhya, Lord Swaminarayan, then known as Ghanshyambhai, was playing with His friends. Wrestling was a big thing in and around Ayodhya in those days. One such wrestler had climbed up a Jamun tree that belonged to the village. Jamun is a kind of a berry. The wrestler had climbed up the tree and was throwing down jamuns for his kids. Jamuns that had naturally fallen down were also lying there. Ghanshyambhai also started collecting some jamuns. The wrestler yelled at Ghanshyambhai saying those jamuns were only for his kids. Lord Swaminarayan had this characteristic of making people learn or see the right thing by making them realize what they were doing wrong, in a very subtle way. This is one such example. Ghanshyambhai wanted to challenge the arrogance of the wrestler. When the wrestler asked Ghanshyambhai not to pickup Jamuns, Ghanshyambhai continued picking jamuns.

Wrestler got very angry upon that, climbed down, held Ghanshyambhai's hand firmly and started dragging Him home to complain to His parents – Dharpita and Bhaktimata. Imagine a 5 year old kid being dragged by a well-known wrestler in the streets of Ayodhya, merely for picking up some fruit! Everybody just stood there watching and no one came to rescue Ghanshyambhai. After letting the wrestler have his way for sometime, Ghanshyambhai stopped walking. When the wrestler tried to pull Him forward, He pulled wrestler's hand and freed His wrist. Wrestler's entire arm got dislocated from the shoulder because of that pull. The moral of the story is that one should not under-estimate or humiliate anyone, no matter how small. However, when we look at it from a broad perspective, this life incident of Lord Swaminarayan tells us that He believed in character ethic. He did not have those powerful external looks when compared to the wrestler, but had the inner strength to overcome him. The inner strength of character ethic gives us the ability to overcome any fear or adversities. It was a lesson learnt for the wrestler too, that simply building muscles and having a good physique is not enough, there should be that inner strength as well, otherwise even a 5 year old can defeat him. He then had an immediate paradigm shift, and apologized and gave Jamuns to Ghanshyambhai, and said He could have them all by Himself.

The mention of paradigm shift now brings us to the next concept that is observed in Highly Effective people – the paradigm shift. To recap what we discussed last time, 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. Lord Swaminarayan has Himself displayed paradigm shift and has also enabled those associated with Him, undergo a paradigm shift.

As we discussed a few minutes back, in the form of Neelkanthvarni, Lord Swaminarayan was simplicity, austerity and penance incarnate. He did not like to stay in villages or homes. He preferred the quiet of the forests and untouched serene places. He never took anything from anyone. Any services rendered, any offerings made, He would calmly refuse it all. Throughout His journey, He was offered leadership of many spiritual institutions, many kings wanted to give Him their kingdoms, some even wanted to marry their daughters to him, but He refused it all. After He took over the reigns of Satsang at the age of 21, all the saints and devotees requested Him to change His outlook towards offerings, worships, etc. They convinced Lord Swaminarayan that if He did not accept services, worships and offerings, it would close any and all doors for souls to clean their past deeds and become eligible for His mercy and liberation. So gradually, Lord Swaminarayan changed His paradigm. He moved away from not liking homes and villages, to staying in them and being available to people all the time. So much so that He only slept 2-3 hours a day in Yogic sleep. Rest of the time, He devoted to the well-being of the Satsangis. He also started accepting services like flowers, garlands, clothes, worships, Artis, etc. from the devotees who wanted to render services. Thus opening up more and more avenues for souls to render services and wash their past deeds and become eligible for liberation. It is huge paradigm shift that Lord Swaminarayan displayed in His own life.

Talking about paradigm shift, there are three other incidents that come to mind. One of Ghanshyambhai and His Bhabhi –wife of elder brother, or sister-in-law; One of Joban Pagi, the infamous bandit of Charotar; and one of Muktanand Swami.

Once, when in Ayodhya, Ghanshyambhai was very hungry and went to His elder brother Rampratapbhai's wife – Suvasinibhabhi asking for food. Bhabhi told Him that there was no ready-to-eat food, and that He needs to learn to control His hunger. Soon after Bhabhi was engaged in household work, and had put her gold ring on the side. Ghanshyambhai took that ring and went to a sweet shop. He asked the owner, how much sweet can He get for the ring. Looking at the young boy, the owner thought, "How much is this kid going to eat, anyways. Let me tell Him that He can eat all that He wants, in return for the gold ring." Ghanshyambhai, though a kid, was quite smart and kept a soldier as a witness to the agreement, and started eating sweets. He finished all 2000 kgs (50 man 20 kgs or 40 kgs?) of sweets in the shop, and said, "I am still hungry." The owner, then got sweets from his other shop, which also Ghanshyambhai finished and said, "I am still hungry. Give me something to eat. That was the deal." Then the owner gave 200 kgs of ghee in his shop. Ghanshyambhai finished that too, and still claimed to be hungry. With his shop now completely empty, he tired of serving all that sweet to Ghanshyambhai, the owner begged the soldier and Ghanshyambhai to consider the deal fulfilled. Ghanshyambhai agreed and came home. When He returned home, His mother Bhaktimata asked Him if He had seen Bhabhi's ring. First, you know Lord also plays the child-like character. So first He says, "No. I don't know. I have not taken it. I have no idea." So first Ghanshyambhai denied any knowledge, but then He confessed, "Yes. I took it. But the owner to sweet shop took it away from me." So everyone, including Suvasinibhabhi went to the sweet shop. Ghanshyambhai asked the owner to return the ring, at which of course the owner got furious and said he will not, since Ghanshyambhai emptied his entire shop for a meagre ring. Ghanshyambhai then asked the owner to check his shop. To the owner's surprise, everything was miraculously filled back up as it was earlier. So the owner returned the ring. With this incident, Suvasinibhabhi had a paradigm shift and prayed to Ghanshyambhai that He should make sure she never perceives Him as a normal human being, and always remembers that He is the Supreme Lord. After that day, Suvasinibhabhi always made sure Ghanshyambhai ate before anybody else in the house. Even if her own son came and asked for food, she would tell him to first find his uncle Ghanshyambhai, and bring Him home for food. That's a paradigm shift.

Jobanpagi was infamous for the thefts that he had managed in his lifetime. He and his group of bandits were feared in the entire area of Charotar. He resided where there is Gnan Baug today in Vadatal. As the fame of Lord Swaminarayan spread and His influence on the strong clan of Kathis became renowned, so was the knowledge that Lord Swaminarayan and His group of Kathis had the best breed of horses and mares in the land. So Jobanpagi decided to steal their horses and mares. With that intent, Jobanpagi came to where Lord Swaminarayan and the Satsangis and Saints were staying the night during one of their journeys. Lord Swaminarayan's mare was called "Maanaki". Jopanpagi decided to steal Maanaki. When he went there, he saw Lord Swaminarayan feeding grass to Maanaki. So he decided to steal other horses first, and then come back to Maanaki. Jobanpagi went from horse-to-horse, and with every horse, he found Lord Swaminarayan taking care of the horse in one way or another – either feeding them grass, or brushing their hair or giving them water. This continued through the late hours of the night. Tired, Jopanpagi decided to come again the next night. The same thing happened the next night. Wherever Jobanpagi went, he saw Lord Swaminarayan caring for the horses. Not only that, with his fellow-mates he realized that Lord Swaminarayan was not moving from one horse to another, but was caring for all the horses at once, taking as many forms as there were horses. Amazed, speechless and

tired, Jobanpaji went back home empty handed for the first time. He then underwent a paradigm shift. He thought through the night, and next day in the morning he came to the assembly of Lord Swaminarayan. He confessed to his failed attempts at theft. He also confessed to all the crimes he had committed in the past. Gave up the life of stealing and became a staunch devotee of Lord Swaminarayan. He donated all the wealth, land, accessories, riches that he had acquired to the Satsang and led an extremely simple, pure, humble and devoted life.

There is a third incident I mentioned in paradigm shift. We will talk about Muktanand Swami's paradigm shift some other time in association with some other element in our framework. For today, we will wrap up our conversation today with a quick note on the remaining concept of Principles v/s Values.

Covey says that Principles hold the test of time, and values change with time. Principles are constant. Values change. Lord Swaminarayan has actually taken us one step forward. He gave us principle in terms of Panch-Vartman or 5 Codes of Conduct – Do not partake alcohol, Do not partake non-vegetarian food; Do not steal; Do not indulge in adultery; Do not get polluted and do not pollute others. Additionally, He gave us Shikshapatri with values associated to those principles, such that values also stand the test of time. For example, Shikshapatri's verses on non-violence, clean water and food can be directly associated with the principle of not partaking non-vegetarian food. So we not only have Principles, but also values associated with those principles that stand the test of time. The verses of Shikshapatri are so easy to follow in any time and era and they are true in any time and era. And guess what? If we do just that – follow Shikshapatri, Lord Swaminarayan has promised liberation and the bliss of His Moorti!

So today we talked a little bit about the incidents from life of Lord Swaminarayan that relate to the basic concepts around highly effective people. Next month we will delve further into the 7 habits. With that, let's rest here in 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, Sadguruo Shreeni Jai, Swaminarayan Bhagwanani Jai.